

Irish COUNTRY SPORTS and COUNTRY LIFE



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Front Cover: Two Sporting Legends - 'Mick The Miller & Master McGrath' By Renowned Northern Ireland Artist - John R. Moore

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I had noticed the note reminding me to buy After Sun. It was next to the note reminding me to get a photograph taken to renew my Driving Licence. There was another note there as well, but I forget what that was about. I had forgotten about the other two anyway, another reminder of the ageing process perhaps, along with the Driver Licence reminder.



horizon of this particular fisherman or indeed in the sky. Even the winds failed to trouble the gossamer webs of bank-side spiders.

It has been blue skies, and Mediterranean conditions for weeks. Well, maybe that's an exaggeration, but hey — I'm a fisherman — that's what we do. Anyway, it's been 'some time' since I saw anything like the angling weather, and reports are coming in of the river down to

below summer height, down to its bones as we say. And just when I was having the best fly fishing for years too.

And that was when I had the cunning plan. My wife Jill has a habit of saying be careful what you wish for, which has indirectly put me wishing for some rain to fall and the temperatures to drop. Usually when I wish for a bit of seasonal weather for something like wildfowling, weather of Biblical proportions greets me at the shore. So I was not going to chance the wrath of sun worshippers (who after all have little enough to lounge below in this country) by hoping that temperature would drop and that we might have a little rain.

So, back to the plan and the sun lounge which is where we began this story anyway. So, reclining on the lounge carrying out 'essential research' for the magazine, I decided to write about my fishing, or rather the recent lack of it, especially after such a promising start. I thought that if I hinted on paper that I was a tad displeased at the Weather Gods (or Frank Mitchell if you watch UTV or Radio U105 if you listen to his programme coming again from Shanes Castle Fair this year) I could expect a little something of the damp variety.

So far, nothing has changed, but if you dear reader notice a slight shower or two shortly then clearly my strategy has worked. However, should you find a return to weather more accustomed by the people of Northern Ireland - torrential rain, gales, plunging temperature and unseasonable snow, well that will not be my fault. It will all be the work of the Weather Gods. Or, Frank Mitchell.

As I type this there are no clouds of any sort on the horizon. And I have remembered to buy the After Sun. So at least some people are happy at Pringle Towers.

Anyway, before I get totally carried away, may I remind you all of the fast approaching Shanes Castle Game Fair on 24/25 June. It's going to be a 'show of shows,' with so much to see and do for everyone, a real belter. As I mentioned earlier, even Frank Mitchell will be presenting a show from Shanes so there you are... even the Weather God himself is coming along so naturally the forecast will warm and sunny. Unless my wishes for better fishing weather are taken a bit too literally.

I really do look forward to seeing you at Shanes enjoying the Irish Game Fair & Fine Food festival (inc the NI Angling Show). Come along to the magazine stand for a chat too if you can tear yourself away from all the other entertainment on offer, as we'd simply love to say hello.

So there we were, my wife and I, on the sun loungers, soaking up the mid morning rays and wondering if the weather would break anytime soon. I was in full research mode for the magazine, while Jill, quite sensibly, had her mind on other things. It was after another beautiful day with a temperature that would certainly match if not exceed that of yesterday.

In full Western movie mode, the spaghetti westerns of the 70s that is, I nudged the Panama lower on my forehead against the glare of the sun and as I narrowed by eyes watched cicadas sleeping in the shade.

But this was Northern Ireland, not California, the month was May and the slumbering shapes were those of my Labradors and Bee 'the tiniest working cocker in the world.'

And what has this got to do with countrysports and this magazine, I hear you ask. What has this to do with an Editorial more given to taking wry looks the outpourings of some official statement or other, or relating and praising the real conservation work by clubs and individuals actively involved in countrysports?

Well, I'm coming to that right now in a slightly roundabout way. It's to do with fly fishing.

Every year, at the end of the season as rivers and flies and trout give way to pheasants and dogs and picking up I realise that, despite the best of intentions and self made promises, I have not done as much of that seasonal countrysport as I promised myself.

As shooting ended in January, I resolved as usual to get to the river whenever possible. And guess what - I was carrying out that promise weekly, even twice weekly since the season started for me in March. A week ago, the rises to flies were becoming increasingly an event to rely on at the river. I had begun with the usual wets, progress to spiders and nymphs and now — well last week anyway — it was really happening. I was catching on dry Large Dark Olives and dry or slightly sub surface midge. I tried an Iron Blue and was successful too. Hawthorne flies were hitting my hat as I passed the hedges on the way to the river and everything in my piscatorial world was dandy, or more dandy anyway than it had been at this time of year for quite some time.

Then, the weather started to improve, the sun made regular appearances, there was nary a cloud on the

**Paul Pringle,
Northern Editor**

Country Sports and Country Life RoI Comment

Every dog owner knows that dogs bring so much good into our lives and when they die it is like a family member has passed away. When our dog passed away a few years ago we were grief-stricken. There was now a gaping emotional hole in our lives which we realised we had to fill. We therefore contacted the Offaly Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the lady on the other end of the phone told us that she had a lurcher which might meet our needs. We were interested and she agreed to bring the dog to our home the next day.

The next day Luan entered our lives, an elegant, black and white greyhound / labrador mix. As we were chatting to the OSPCA lady in the sitting room Luan walked over to the Christmas tree and peed on it! A little bit of training would be needed!

We fell in love with this beautiful animal immediately and told the lady that we would take him. There was very little training required after that. Soon he had lost the penchant for peeing indoors and was perfect on the lead. As we walked with Luan in the countryside we were very impressed with his athleticism and speed. Our eyes were opened to the virtues of lurchers and greyhounds who combine gentleness and elegance with impressive physicality. We showed off Luan's physical prowess to friends and family by encouraging him to jump wide streams. The width of his jumps were way beyond any other dog I had owned.

As a result I now have a deep affection for lurchers and I love watching them at full tilt, tearing across fields at super-fast speeds. Therefore I am looking forward very much to seeing the lurchers in action at a new race in Birr Game Fair during the final Saturday of August. The race will be named after the famous greyhound Mick the Miller, a dog which was born and trained in Offaly and is generally recognised as the most successful greyhound ever. The Mick the Miller Traditional Lurcher Racing Final will be a prestigious event with a valuable prize fund. It will be a fine spectacle.

One of the best books written about this lovely breed of dog is Andrew Simpson's 1973 book 'Rebecca the Lurcher'. It is very well written and has won the hearts of countless dog lovers.

Simpson is fantastic at describing the beauty and athleticism of lurchers. He describes them as cantering with an 'easy, rhythmic, flowing action'. A good lurcher, he says has the speed of a greyhound, the nose of a foxhound and the eye of a hawk. As well as being super-fast they don't have a problem with thorns and thickets and barbed wire. Decent lurchers don't have an issue with heavy plough underfoot, nor with the cold of winter. They



make fantastic hunters but they can also be trained to not worry sheep. They growl but seldom bark (a trait which poachers liked because it was less likely that attention would be drawn to their illegal activities. Simpson says a lurcher is a 'hungry poacher's dog'.) They are intelligent and loyal.

Lurchers come in all shapes and sizes. This is because they are always a mixture of at least two breeds and sometimes more. The quest for the perfect lurcher leads to cross-breeding again and again with the aim of producing a dog with the many qualities which are desired. Lurchers are the offspring of sighthounds mated with working dogs. Popular breeds for cross-breeding include the greyhound, deerhound and the whippet. The greyhound possesses speed of course, but seldom the nose or the intelligence. The deerhound has the constitution but usually lacks the manoeuvrability. Whippets are fast and dexterous, but usually don't have the stamina required.

'Rebecca the Lurcher' contains many excellent passages about the author's hunting experiences with his lurchers. 'Few things,' he writes, 'emphasise man's lack of pace so much as a hare and a fast dog.' During one hunt, when he reaches the end of a ploughed field and a gate, his dog and the quarry reappear:

'The hare reappeared and hurtled towards me with Spider, three yards behind, head down, covering the ground in great liquid strides. They passed ten yards from me; the hare dived through a wire fence. Spider half checked in her stride, lifted her head, measured the obstacle, soared into the air, and landed galloping. She had lost two yards, but she made it up by the time they had flashed through the trees and reached the far side. The dog skidded around like a motorcycle broadsiding, not losing her legs or her balance and very little of her momentum.' Ten strides later the dog catches the quarry. It was a heavy hare and Simpson brought it home for jugging (which involves marinating in red wine and juniper berries).

This frustrating state of affairs lasts for a couple of months but then things take a turn for the better and the dog catches her first hare.

Derek Fanning
ROI Editor

European Snipe Championship for Irish Red Setters November 2017 sponsored by

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Tom Dunne reports that the European Snipe Championship has, historically, been run on the European mainland, in France and Italy when the cream of Continental Irish red setters gathers to contest this special event. The terrain has varied from bog-land to hilly ground in France to rice fields in Italy. This year, the Championship will be run in Ireland and dogs from many European countries as well as our own will compete. The event will be run under F.C.I. Rules which differ very slightly from our own and licensed by the Irish Kennel Club. F.C.I. stands for Federation Cynologique International.

October/November is the time when snipe migrate from the cold winters in Scandinavia and Russia to winter in climes where their food supply of worms and grubs are more easily accessible. Snipe arrive here in large wisps from October onwards and then scatter to rest and feed up for their long and arduous journey back to their summer breeding grounds. There is too a theory, but only that, that some of our own native snipe migrate to Spain. In any event the prevalence of snipe on our moors and bogs makes for great hunting and shooting over the winter months. Recognising this, the FEDERATION decided to hold the 2017 Championship in Ireland.

Precedent has already been set here for such events. Over the past two years or so very successful snipe trials, licensed by the Irish Kennel Club, have been run by some field trial clubs here and, indeed one dog-Joan McGillycuddy's IRSB Ballydavid Starjet of the Kingdom - has already been awarded the title of Snipe Champion. When approached, local Gun Clubs readily agreed to have their lands made available. Drum/Clounown, Moate, Doon/Castle Daly will host most of the

events, but not far away in Co. Galway, Peterswell and Kilchreest is also available, if required.

The event

In early November of this year, Irish red setter owners and handlers from many countries including our own will arrive in the midlands to compete. The event will be hosted by the Irish Red Setter Club whose President, Ray O' Dwyer, is also President of the International Irish Red Setter Club. The town of Athlone will be the general base of operations. Ample and suitable accommodation has already been reserved and the list of events is included hereunder. This area has been selected because of the suitability of the ground.

In this part of the Shannon basin there are vast flat raised bogs and Callows where snipe are plentiful. The Callows are the river flood-planes that are one of the last areas where the corncrake could be seen in this country and stretch for miles. Of necessity, these areas are only farmed lightly. The grass is cut and saved in summertime and some light grazing by cattle means that from autumn onwards the whole tract of land lies idle. There are huge areas of bog-land in the vicinity and the maze of roadways means that these are easily accessible by vehicles. These areas offer dogs the opportunity to stretch out and display their prowess. Slowly this unique ecology and biodiversity is being appreciated for its importance. A bog, though, is a bog and there are some bog-holes available to catch out the unwary — but no sneaky ones!

Programme planned to smallest detail

When the idea was first mooted, Bill

Connolly of RED MILLS readily agreed to sponsor the event. As can be imagined, there are high costs involved. First of all, a promotional video was made and drones were employed to film an overall view of the running ground. A small Sub-Committee of the Irish Red Setter Club planned the programme, down to the smallest detail.

As stated, the Championship will be run under rules and regulations of F.C.I. These rules differ, but only slightly, from our own. Irish dogs are well used to hunting and taking snipe so on Monday, 6th November visiting dogs and handlers will be afforded a free training day just for the dogs to settle after their long journeys and for handlers to get a feel for the terrain. The real action starts on the next day

I must admit not having ever seen these European field trials, but it goes something like this. While depending on the number of entries, dogs will be run in "Batteries" of 20 dogs. International Judges from Switzerland, France, Italy will be selected from a Jury of Judges and each battery will have two or three Judges. Each dog is run once and assessed on its performance. Again, a blank firing pistol will be used. The dogs placed first in each Battery will be granted a leg towards National Champion and will be run in a 'barrage,' the subsequent winner will be granted a leg towards International Champion.

This is a totally new concept in field trials to us, but the Championship should make for spectacular sport and a chance for us to see foreign dogs perform in what is, after all, the Irish red setter's natural environment. It is the fervent wish of the organising Committee that the event will be a resounding success which would mean another such an event in the future.

New Gunshop opens in County Kildare

The official opening of Cill Dara Hunting took place on the 13th May 2017. ICS&CL wish the team well on their new venture.

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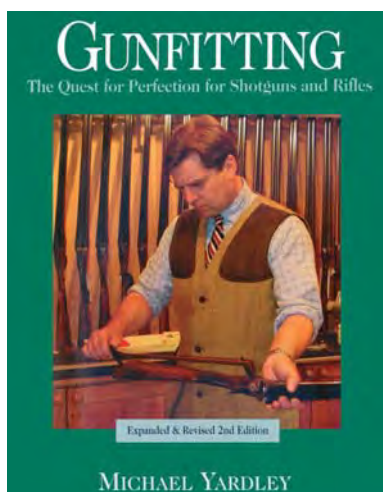
Modern takes on the classics such as the ladies Beadnell and men's new Utility wax jacket offer a contemporary silhouette with all of the features of the classics and guaranteed to keep the wearer protected against all the British weather has to offer. www.barbour.com

Gun Fitting at Shanes - get a personal consultation with Michael Yardley and improve your shooting

The Great Game Fairs of Ireland have just confirmed that Mike Yardley, one of really 'big guns' in the shooting world, would be present at Shanes Castle and Birr Castle Game Fairs.

Albert said: "A renowned broadcaster and writer, practical shooting coach and much more, Mike Yardley is one of the best known personalities in the shooting world. Along with gunsmith Chis Symonds, Mike will be fitting guns and testing eye dominance at the show, using the unique methods that have led him to write two books on the subject.

"Without doubt, a well fitted gun is essential to good shooting and may transform performance. Many struggle on for years with ill-fitting guns or eye-dominance issues not realising



just how much they are impeding themselves. And now there is a unique opportunity to sort out your gun fit before the season commences. Mike will also be available to discuss all matters related to guns, shooting and competition as well."

Mike Yardley has shot clays and game big and small all over the world. He writes on guns and shooting for The Field and has acted as a design consultant to some of the most famous gunmakers as well making films with various television companies. His documentaries on John F. Kennedy and the Red Baron - where his vast technical knowledge of shooting is applied forensically - will have been seen by many. He has also been the voice of shooting many times when the sport is attacked in the media.



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Two Great New Attractions for Children at the Game Fair

The Game Fair at Shanes Castle offers one of the best family and children's entertainment programmes in Ireland with action packed entertainment in three arenas including exciting medieval jousting; a Living History Village with costumed re-enactments; lots of have go activity including crafts, archery and angling; all sorts of animals including dogs, ferrets, falcons, rabbits and horses plus the normal children's games area with some great rides and now two new great attractions: Laser Clays and The Mini Pony World



Filled with fun for everyone.

The Mini Pony World at the Irish Game Fair on Saturday 24th and 25th June 2017.

Mini Pony World is a family run business based in Downpatrick, Co. Down that offers kids a fun filled experience of the equestrian world. We offer a range of services from kids pony parties and lessons to pony rides and promotional events. On the day, our services will include up to four ponies for riding and one horse and cart for rides. All safety equipment is provided for the children as our aim is to make the equestrian experience of playing and interacting with the tiny ponies an experience that your child and you will remember and cherish forever.

We also provide Pony Parties at your own party location and Pony Lessons at our stables just outside Downpatrick on a weekly basis for 3 to 6 year olds. Our lesson ponies are one of the world's most unique breeds with the tallest only reaching 34" high. The ponies have a great temperament and are perfectly suited for your little ones to learn the essential skills of horse riding.

To find out more information check out our Facebook page www.facebook.com/miniponyworld/ or visit our website www.miniponyworld.co.uk.

Looking forward to seeing you all at the Irish Game Fair this June!



A young knight having the time of his life!

The Great Game Fairs launch LASER SHOOTING a great new shooting experience for 'Young Shots' — safer than air rifle shooting and a lot more EXCITING!



Young Shots can have a 'clay pigeon' shooting experience in total safety.

With many campaigning to have young shooters have access to shotguns, the Great Game Fairs have taken the lead in giving young shooters at the Game Fair a chance to have a real clay pigeon shooting experience SAFELY!

They will not be on the main clay lines (we feel that these are not areas for people without FACs) — but we have done the next best thing!



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Working with LaserSport Ireland, who will have an area near to the main clay shooting area, children and adults can shoot clays with lasers from deactivated real shotguns, giving a very realistic shotgun clay shooting experience.

For just £5 anyone who can hold a shotgun can very safely shoot 30 shots at 15 clays with no risk to shooter or spectators. Shooters can see their scores come up on an electronic scoreboard and five shooters can shoot at a time to provide family or group shooting fun competition.

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TOP PLUMMER TERRIER AWARD FOR SHANES CASTLE GAME FAIR 2017

Irish Country Sports & Country Life Editor, Paul Pringle writes with news of a superb new trophy which he will present to the TOP PLUMMER TERRIER at the All Ireland Championship at Shanes Castle this June:

'Many years ago, the late Brian Plummer and I were good friends and indeed it was Brian who traveled from the far north of Scotland to stand as my Best Man at Gretna Green.

We had been drawn together though the world of countrysports, writing and a love of working dogs, and of course he had written a series of articles for Irish Country Sports & Country Life.

My primary interest lay in gundogs, while Brian's was lurchers and terriers, of which he had many, along with numerous breeding projects and programmes, about which he wrote countless books, most of which adorn my bookshelves.

That was where the similarity ended. My scribbles were never destined for books, I was only an amateur gundog trainer, never a dog breeder and, unlike Brian, I was not one for controversy, something that seemed to draw him like a moth to a flame.

He had views, strong ones, and seldom if ever shied away from stating them. I think it fair to say there were two different schools of opinion on Brian and his dogs and writings, and both groups held robustly to their positions — much like the man himself. I also think it fair to say that many who decried his arguments had never hunted with the man, or seen his dogs in action. I had that



The Award For Top Plummer Terrier at Shanes Castle 2017

privilege many times in Scotland, and ran a couple of his Lucas terriers and a lurcher bred down from Blue, one of his earlier dogs.

Something he will be much remembered for (amongst many things) is the creation of a very special dog which bears his name, the Plummer Terrier. This was no 'Kennel Club' creation, but the end product of a very selective breeding programme undertaken meticulously by Brian to produce a terrier with specific attributes.

The Plummer Terrier filled a niche slot in the working terrier world and was adopted by enthusiastic supporters of the dog, with resulting progeny to be seen today throughout the UK and farther afield.

I have long thought that it would be fitting for me to honour Brian and for me to

acknowledge our friendship in some way. Last year, Albert Titterington put up a prize for the Plummer Class and I thought that I would like to do similar for 2017.

I have the honour of presenting a fine cold cast bronze of a terrier (unfortunately not of a Plummer Terrier as I was unable to source one at this time) to the winner of the Plummer Class at 40th All Ireland Terrier Championships at Shanes Castle Game Fair which is on 24th & 25th June 2017.

The award is to be kept by the winner and therefore this is a once in a lifetime opportunity for an enthusiast to carry off this particular trophy and I hope to see as many Plummers as possible along for the event.'

Grey Partridge Programme In Offaly Parklands Enjoying Success

Derek Fanning reports that during the spring, RTE One broadcast an episode which focussed on Lough Boora Parklands in Offaly and its grey partridge conservation programme, which has been a big success, with the number of grey partridges in the parklands expanding from zero to several hundred.

The Zoo' is a much-loved series and the Lough Boora episode followed zookeeper and Portllington resident Garth de Jong as he left Dublin Zoo and travelled to Lough Boora to view the wildlife in the area. Dublin Zoo supports the grey partridge conservation project in Lough Boora which was established by the Irish Grey Partridge Conservation Trust and the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

The episode revealed that the establishment of the conservation area had had an unexpected, positive side effect because lapwings had moved in. During the show Garth was shown some lapwing nesting spots by Kieran Buckley of the National Parks and Wildlife Service and Kristina Abariute, a researcher from the Grey Partridge Trust.

Irish Country Sports & Country Life featured an extensive interview with Kieran Buckley a few years ago during which he spoke about his love of nature and his hard work on this conservation scheme.

Kieran said the Irish Grey Partridge Conservation Trust was established to promote the conservation of Ireland's native game birds so that they remain an intrinsic part of Ireland's Natural & Sporting heritage. Ireland's two native game birds, grey partridge and red grouse are now classified as red listed birds of conservation concern.

One of the Trust's objectives is to reverse the decline of our native game birds applying a mixture of science and action. Over the past decade the Trust has been instrumental in the recovery



A lapwing chick in Lough Boora Parklands from the RTE One programme 'The Zoo'.

of Ireland's naturally occurring grey partridge.

The courtship song of the grey partridge is rather harsh, to human ears at least. But its kierr-ik dialogue used to be as evocative of Irish summer nights on many Irish farms as the crex-crex of the corncrake, another almost vanished bird. Sadly today not many of us ever get to hear a partridge in the wild in Ireland.

A game bird, the partridge was once popular on the Irish rural table, but it vanished from most farms from the late 1960s, and is now reduced to a single viable breeding population, at Bord na Móna's Lough Boora Parklands. Its survival there requires a considerable amount of support from the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The bird's demise in the 1960s was caused by the introduction of new farming techniques which deprived it of food diversity and plant cover for its breeding habitat.

The bird has also made a return in north County Dublin thanks to an enlightened scheme between a number of local farmers, Fingal County Council, the Grey Partridge Conservation Trust and the National Association of Regional Game Councils. The scheme leaves untouched a three-metre margin between the hedgerows and the crops. This margin is 10kms in length and is a sanctuary for the partridges.

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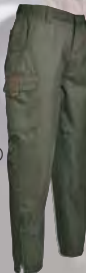
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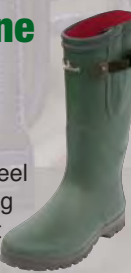
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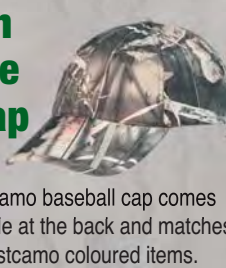
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Countryside Alliance



Politics in NI – What Next?

As I write this, it is difficult to predict exactly what will happen with NI's political situation given the forthcoming general election on 8 June and the extension of the talks' process to 29 June. The majority of NI vot-ers remain despondent; waiting to see if there will be another local election or will direct rule be imposed?

At the time of going to press very little progress has been made to reach a solution to resolve the current issues. We can only hope that this local impasse ends and our elected representatives get on with the job of running the country for the good of the people who elected them.

CAI at the Alliance Party Conference

Countryside Alliance Ireland (CAI) attended this year's Alliance Party Conference which was held in Belfast. This was Naomi Long's first Conference as leader and she did not disappoint her party members, who enthusiastically embraced their new leader's vision.

It is no secret that the Alliance Party's stance on country sports is that of 'anti,' but we felt it important to go along to reinforce our views and to fully engage with the party members. We were pleasantly surprised at the number of those in attendance who pledged their support for hunting; somewhat at odds with the party's current line. It was particularly noticeable that the Alliance Party have attracted a substantial number of the 'younger' voters, some of whom will undoubtedly be actively involved in the party's future.

Ms Long visited our stand and acknowledged that whilst her Party may have differing views to those of CAI, we do have some common goals. Our attendance at the Conference was infinitely worthwhile, as it is vital that we continue to emphasise our position to our political representatives and indeed, those of the future.

We do know that when the NI Assembly is back up and running there will be further attempts to ban hunting and curtail legitimate country sports activities; we are under no illusion - the threat has not gone away. CAI will remain vigilant and keep you fully advised.



Reinforcing our views at the Alliance Party Conference

CAI Prepares for This Year's Fairs

For us here at Countryside Alliance Ireland, summer mostly means the preparation for and attendance at various game and country sports fairs. These are events we always look forward to, as we relish the chance to meet our members face to face.

This year, the first fair we are attending is the NI Countrysports Fair which is again being held at Scarvagh House, Scarva, Co.

Down over the weekend of 27th and 28th May 2017. For more information please visit the NI Countrysports website at <http://www.countrysportsfairs.com/>

Our next event will be the Irish Game Fair & Fine Food Festival (including the NI Angling Show) at Shanes Castle on 24th and 25th June 2017. As always this promises to be a vibrant and fun packed weekend - see www.irishgamefair.com for all the latest information.

We will once again be in attendance at the Irish Game & Country Fair and Fine Food Festival at Birr Castle on 26th and 27th August 2017. Birr Castle is a spectacular venue and the crowds ensure that the CAI team is kept busy throughout the weekend - www.irishgameandcountryfair.com

Whatever fair you visit, please do call into the Countryside Alliance Ireland stand, say 'hello' and get up to date with all the latest news.

Tattersalls International Horse Trials and Country Fair 2017

Tattersalls International Horse Trials and Country Fair will run from the 31st May to 4th June 2017. Featuring the world's leading equestrian stars, in addition to the sporting side of things, Tatts 2017 hosts a traditional Country Fair and Artisan Market and is specifically tailored for families with children under 12 gaining free admission.

We are delighted to offer two tickets for the price of one for all Countryside Alliance Members. Tickets must be pre- booked by either calling +353 (1) 886 4300 or on line at www.tatts.ie and use the following Promo Code to avail of this offer. TATTSCAI17

For a full timetable of events, running order, maps etc please visit www.tatts.ie

Firearms Consultative Panel – R of I

Countryside Alliance Ireland has been an active member of the Firearms Consultative Panel (FCP) since its inception and CAI Board Member, Mark Maguire, represents our interests at the meetings.

One of the main issues under debate in recent months has been night time shooting and a working group was set up to look at the issue of shooting and hunting at night and the associated safety issues unlawful activity can cause. The FCP members agreed that the issue of unlawful shooting and hunting at night was a potential health and safety issue to the farming community, other rural dwellers and the general public.

The working group convened a number of meetings and agreed recommendations for consideration at the main meetings. As such, CAI and the other members of the FCP are now formulating best practice guidelines to present to the Department on an agreed way forward.

Countryside Alliance Launches Brexit Policies

The Countryside Alliance has launched a Brexit policy document setting out the issues that need to be addressed in order to sustain a living and working countryside outside of the EU.

The Countryside Alliance did not campaign during the EU referendum but the decision to leave the EU will have an impact on the countryside and the people who live and work there, which is why we have produced this policy document.

National and local government will have to address many important rural issues; such as tackling rural crime, increasing the provision of affordable rural housing and ensuring universal access to high speed broadband and mobile phone signal.



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Decisions that are made in relation to trade, regulations, agricultural and environmental policies, will shape the future of our countryside for many years to come. At the heart of these decisions are defining questions about the kind of landscapes we want to create, the food we want to eat, and the communities we want to develop.

A new relationship with Europe brings opportunities. We have the chance to consider which EU policies are working and which ones are not, and develop an agricultural policy that is more appropriate for farming in this country. However, there are challenges and Brexit will only be a success if the interests of rural communities are central to the decision making. This is not simply self interest. The countryside is vital for our food and farming industry, provides public goods and recreation for millions of people, and its landscapes are an important part of our cultural heritage and home to an astonishing range of wildlife and habitats. A success-ful living and working countryside is important for us all.

NI is unique to the rest of the UK in that we share a land border with another EU member. Whatever happens as we exit the EU, it is vital that our seamless land border continues, to allow free access and movement for people and trade. We cannot and must not allow ourselves to go backwards.

Countryside Alliance Ireland will focus on the issues that are important and relevant locally and we will continue to liaise with the political parties to ensure our members' interests are best represented.

Countryside Alliance Ireland DSC 1 Courses

Countryside Alliance Ireland (CAI) recently ran two courses in deer management in County Antrim. The Deer Stalking Qualification (DSC) Level 1 is a basic qualification aimed at the newcomer to deer stalking and is open to everyone over the age of 18.

The classroom sessions for the course were held in Cloughmills, with the shooting assessments carried out nearby at Altarichard Forest; a commercial forest property owned by Blakiston Houston Estates and managed by Scottish Woodlands Ltd. The instructor (Jamie Stewart) is Director for the Scottish Countryside Alliance who has over 25 years' experience stalking deer throughout the UK.



One of the groups from a recent deer stalking course

The course was organised by CAI with the very able assistance of Derek Anderson from Blakiston Houston Estates and sponsorship was provided by Blakiston Houston Estates, Scottish Woodlands Ltd and Lavin Guns.

Given the success of the first two, it is hoped further courses will be run in the autumn. We shall keep you updated.

Open Labrador Retriever Working Test Alzheimer's Society NI Charity Event Saturday 8 July 2017 - Altarichard Road, Armoy, BT53 8XT

A Charity Labrador Retriever Working Test will be held at Altarichard Road, Armoy, BT53 8XT on Saturday 8 July 2017, by kind permission of Blakiston Houston Estates.

The event, in aid of Alzheimer's Society NI (sponsored by Connolly's Red Mills & Countryside Alliance Ireland) promises to be a highlight in this summer's sporting calendar. There are prelim, novice and open events, with great prizes to be won. Kennel Club Rules apply.

Registration for prelim and novice commences at 9.15am and registration for open at 12.45pm.

Prelim Dogs will have minimum of 3 retrieves; Novice Dogs will have minimum of 5 retrieves; Open Dogs will have minimum of 6 retrieves. Entries on the day – open to all.

The judges are Mr Joe Morrison, Mr Timmy Woods and Mr Uel Buchannan.

Prizes as follows: Open - Scottish Woodlands Perpetual Cup and a £50 voucher; Novice - Kingsmill Perpetual Cup, £50 voucher sponsored by Tom Lewis, Lavin Guns and free membership of Countryside Alliance Ireland for 1 year; Prelim - Glensfarm supplies Perpetual Cup, £50 Voucher sponsored by Pets at Home plus free membership of Countryside Alliance Ireland for 1 year.

1st, 2nd & 3rd prize winners in all events receive a bag of Redmills Engage Dogfood.

Additional prizes include Top Finishing Countryside Alliance Ireland Member Perpetual Trophy, Top Finishing BASC Member Perpetual Trophy, Novice and Open Winners, one day's walked up snipe shooting donated by Blakiston Houston Estates. There will be other special prizes on the day.

For further information, contact Derek Anderson – 07739 539441.

Discounted Entry to Shanes Castle and Birr Castle Game Fairs Exclusive Offer for CAI Members

Countryside Alliance Ireland is delighted to announce that we have procured tickets on behalf of our members to attend the Game Fairs at Shanes Castle (Saturday 24th and Sunday 25th June 2017) and Birr Castle (Saturday 26th and Sunday 27th August 2017).

As such, we are offering two adult entry tickets for the price of one. Two adult tickets for Shanes for £10 and two adult tickets for Birr for €15!

The Fairs gives CAI the ideal opportunity to showcase the organisation's work while engaging with members, potential members and the public in general.



Chief Executive Lyall Plant and all the CAI team look forward to chatting with members & supporters at this year's fairs

CAI Chief Executive, Lyall Plant, comments: "The Great Game Fairs of Ireland are the perfect forum for CAI to meet and chat with our members and supporters. The Fairs offer something for all of the family and we are once again delighted to have a significant presence at these events and to be playing such a vital part".

Discounted tickets must be ordered in advance through the CAI offices, they cannot be purchased at the Fairs.

To avail of this superb offer, please contact our NI office on +44 28 9263 9911 quoting your membership number and we can take payment by debit or credit card. Last date for ordering discounted tickets for Shanes Castle to ensure delivery is Tuesday 20th June 2017. No exceptions. (Birr Castle tickets will be available for order from July – we shall keep you updated.)

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The Last Call Of The Horn For The Balgarrett Beagles

Derek Fanning writes that the hunting horn has sounded for the last time for the Balgarrett Beagles following the retirement of its huntsman and an inability to find a replacement.

The pack's committee held an emergency meeting in April and hope sprung eternal when a local man said he would be interested in taking over the reins. However, at a subsequent meeting everyone was very disappointed to hear that this person had withdrawn his proposal. Therefore, the committee had no choice but to bring the pack's story to a close.

The Balgarretts were founded in 2000 and were based in Westmeath. The pack was registered in 2003 when country was given to it by the Westmeath Beagles. While beagling has sadly declined in popularity in Ireland, there is still a dedicated small cohort of followers in the midlands who were very glad of the Balgarretts' existence, particularly after the demise of the Curragh Foot Beagles in Kildare. They will now have to look elsewhere for their Sunday sport.

I enjoyed many days' hunting over the years with the Balgarretts and found them a very friendly bunch. As with most beagle packs in Ireland they hunted on Sundays. They met at 12.30 and usually hunted for three to four hours. The Westmeath landscape is a pleasure to hunt through.

Relatively speaking the Balgarretts were a popular hunt and



Huntsman Kieran Lambert (centre) leading out the Balgarrett Beagles.

families often attended. Sometimes as many as 20 to 30 foot followers were in attendance which is a considerable number for a beagle pack.

The huntsman Kieran Lambert was the founder of the club and throughout the years invested an immense amount of time and labour running the club. Unfortunately, at the closure of the 2016/17 season Kieran announced that he could no longer continue doing this as well as managing his busy professional and family life.

Packed programme at 29th Scottish Game Fair 30 June - 2 July 2017, Scone Palace Parklands, Perthshire

New for 2017, the Fair is proud to host the inaugural Four Nations International Gundog competition on Saturday 1 July. Teams from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales are set to compete on the island in front of the large Grandstand by the River Tay.

The newly revamped fishing area will include a dedicated area called The Bothy for panel discussions, presentations and Q&As with guest speakers and experts. European and World Fly Casting Champion Hywell Morgan will be demonstrating his winning technique in the Main Ring.

There will also be fishing demonstrations from industry experts and competitions on the banks of the majestic River Tay. The new Fly Fishing Mall will feature top traders from across the country and lots of opportunities to catch a bargain.

The popular shooting area offers a range of experiences and competitions for experts to those who have never picked up a gun before.

The fantastic Food Hall is back, sponsored by Macdonald Hotels, who will have their award-winning chefs on site.

The Cookery Theatre, sponsored by Perth Kitchen Centre, will be hosted by The Fair's very own Foodie in Residence Christopher Trotter who'll be rustling up lots of delicious recipes using the very best of local produce.

Traders offering unrivalled access to some of the country's finest crafts, clothing, equipment and sporting goods, the Fair is delighted to welcome over 450 traders.

Wee Beasties Marquee is set to be a hive of activity in the GWCT's Wee Beasties Marquee during the Fair. Visitors will learn all there is to know about honeybees and pollination.

Please visit www.scottishfair.com for more information and ticket prices:



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Today, Seyntex employs some 130 people at its headquarters in Belgium where it has administration offices, warehouses, a fabric laboratory, a shooting range and showrooms.

Manufacture of Seyntex products takes place in its own factories in Eastern Europe and in Asia. Seyntex is the leading European manufacturer of garments for the military, police and firefighters. The group acquired John Field in 1968 out of personal interest for riding clothing. In the 1980s the company started

producing the breathable, light and strong Aircoattflex range. Ten years later, the brand moved into the fishing, the shooting and the outdoor market focusing on producing high performance garments.

Maureen wanted to combine her passion for the countryside with her interest in technical and performing textiles and garments. The brand ethos is first and foremost to offer high quality at value for money prices. Furthermore every product is tested by the family which has a long history of involvement in shooting and fieldsports.

The John Field range is designed by Maureen and manufactured using Seyntex's own technical fabrics. Each product is designed for a specific purpose with materials being selected accordingly and eco-friendly materials used wherever possible. Manufacturing takes place in Europe. Quality is key combining performance, durability, comfort and inventive features with an elegant look. Design inspiration comes from the family's experiences in the field with yearly improvements being made based on customer feedback. The whole collection is under continuous development.

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New fishing and environmental programme delivered in Dublin's inner city

Transition year students from CBS James Street in Dublin are enjoying a new fishing and environmental programme developed and implemented as a joint initiative by Inland Fisheries Ireland and eir. The programme, which began in January and is running for 13 weeks, is attended by 15 participants from the school ranging from 16 to 18 years of age.

The initiative aims to enable students to become proficient at fly fishing with a view to introducing them to a lifelong hobby. It involves classroom lessons, fieldwork studies and practical exercises and sees participants take lessons on the art of fly fishing, fly tying and the local environment. The programme combines the contribution of staff expertise from Inland Fisheries Ireland, the state agency responsible for the inland fisheries and sea angling resource along with support from eir as part of its corporate social responsibility outreach.

Aside from classroom based lessons and outdoor exercises, students have also enjoyed field trips to Annamoe Trout Fishery, Wicklow and Courtlough Fishery, Balbriggan in recent weeks where they practised their rod skills and fished for rainbow trout using fly fishing methods. The programme culminated in a return trip to Annamoe Trout Fishery yesterday where the group once again put their lessons into practice on a fishing trip, after which they will be awarded with graduation certificates from the programme organisers.

The course syllabus covers a wide range of fisheries themes from practical fishing lessons to fisheries legislation, research and environment and has been designed to fit into criteria of the President's An Gaisce Award. It is hoped that the group will be eligible for the award as a result of their participation. The programme has received strong support from the angling community in recognition of the need to bring youngsters into the sport to secure the future of angling in Ireland.

Suzanne Campion, Head of Business Development said: "We would like to congratulate each of the participants on completion of this fisheries module as part of their transition year programme. We were delighted to work with eir in creating and delivering this innovative new initiative which introduces students to the fisheries resource and to the pursuit of angling."

Michelle Toner, Head of CSR, eir said: "Supporting and giving back to local communities is a key component of our CSR strategy. We are delighted to have played such a hands on role in this initiative and very proud of the fact that one of our employees, Ciaran Ward, was instrumental in getting the programme off the ground. It has been a pleasure to work with Inland Fisheries Ireland. "The feedback from the students who took part has been hugely positive. Initiatives like this are so important, not just because of the immediate benefits students learn but also for the lifelong skills they pick up." The pilot fisheries education programme will now be reviewed and assessed in terms of future potential roll out in other educational and community settings.



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HUGE CHEQUE PRESENTED TO CHARITY BY DOG SHOW

Our thanks go to Alan Crosbie for sending Irish Country Sports and Country Life magazine a photograph of the presentation of quite a magnificent cheque for €3,600 raised at his charity show to the local St Vincent de Paul.

This truly was a fantastic effort by ALL involved including helpers, sponsors, competitors etc and really good PR for the country sports community.

Alan and Tracy Crosbie would like to thank the following:

SPONSORS: John Kennedy, Keith Hutchinson / Jason Gaven, Noel Bailey, John Lambert, Brian and Charmain Grady, David Breen, Howard Buggy, Nuts about Pets, Brian Cousins Jim Dalton, and the Doyle family from Monaseed sponsored the field

HELP ON THE DAY: Eoin Barnes, Junior / Keith / Bradley and Cleo Crosbie, Geraldine and Johnny Foley, Roisin Leonard, Cormac Doyle



What a result! - the €3,600 cheque being presented for charity

JUDGES: Lurchers - John Moriarty and Paul Deasy; Terriers - Gary Healy; Whippets - Karen Cummins; Strong Dogs - Rod Hicks; Hounds - Derek O'Connor; Pets - Jade Dunphy; Ferrets - David Nolan; Irish breeds - Geraldine Foley.

Alan wrote the following on our Great Game Fairs of Ireland Facebook page:

"Hi guy's, I just want to thank everyone again who came and supported the Carnew charity dog show on the 23 of April we just went to say we raised €3,497

for our charity but we just want to thank Albert Titterington for sending us down a cheque for an extra €103 Euro to round it up to €3,600 and last but not least I want to say thank you to all who sponsored all the prizes and trophies for the show."

Albert Titterington confirmed: "We were sorry that we couldn't do more as our sponsorship budget is more than exhausted, but we will give this show maximum support when Alan next runs it."

Leica's first ever roebuck photography contest will see lucky winners earn place on exclusive hunting trip

Leadung sports optics manufacturer Leica Camera AG has just announced their inaugural roebuck photo competition for Europe, which starts on Wednesday 10 May and ends on Thursday 31 August 2017.

For the competition, Leica is asking hunters to send in their most eye-catching image of a living roebuck, which will be judged by a jury of experienced photographers and hunters at the Leica headquarters.

From the entries, Leica will choose the top three images and these finalists will win an exclusive, money-can't-buy roebuck hunt at its hunting ground in Altenberg, Germany during the rut of July 2018. The prize also includes hotel and travel expenses. Participation in the roebuck hunt is transferable and only possible with a valid hunting licence. The winning photo will also be used for Leica's 2018 advertising campaign.

The competition is free to enter, simply send your photos to sportoptics.hunting@leica-camera.com. They must be in a jpg format, with a minimum size of 720 pixels. Photos cannot be digitally manipulated but adjustment to the brightness, contrast and sharpness is

permitted. All photos submitted, may be used for future publication.

For further information about the competition, visit: www.leica-roebuck.com. Or contact Michael Agel: +49 6441 2080 406 / michael.agel@leica-camera.com.



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Game Management Training Day – 15th July Beltrim Estate, Gortin

Are you involved in the management of a gun club, shooting syndicate or DIY shoot? Want to get the very best return from your birds? Ever wondered what an ideal pheasant release pen looks like or what size it should be? What to feed birds, when or how? How to hold birds after release? How to make the best use of cover crops? Or how to manage partridges?

Country Sports Ireland has teamed up with one of Ireland's most experienced and knowledgeable gamekeepers and shoot managers – Ivan Wilson to deliver an outstanding Game Management Training Day on Saturday 15th July at Beltrim Estate, Gortin, Co. Tyrone.

Ivan Wilson has been gamekeeper at Beltrim Estate and also managed one of Ireland's leading private shoots in Gortin, Co. Tyrone for more than 30 years. He has substantial expertise in all aspects of game rearing, release and management, predator control and also runs a very successful partridge shoot.

The event is aimed specifically at helping gun clubs and shooting syndicates get the best sport from their birds and will include several hours 'in the field' experience visiting pheasant and partridge release pens, cover crops and looking at pest control techniques. There will also be an element of formal instruction and the opportunity to question leading experts.

Attendance will be limited and advanced booking is essential. For further information and booking forms please contact: Ronan Gorman on +44 7542 111542 or email: ronan@country-sportsireland.org

Country Sports Ireland Sponsors Children's Fishing Area at Shanes Castle Game Fair on 24th and 25th June

Country Sports Ireland was established to better protect the future of all local country sports. As part of this work we believe it is important to maintain a steady flow of responsible young

people entering our sport. We are delighted to be able to demonstrate our commitment to local country sports by sponsoring Children's Fishing Area at Shane's Castle Game Fair. This enables the organisers to provide young people with supervised 'put and take' angling free of charge.

Angling is frequently the entry level to other country sports and is also a particularly safe and enjoyable way to introduce young people to the joys of country sports and the countryside. We are therefore particularly pleased to be able to support this very worthy initiative.

Country Sports Ireland Adds More Member Benefits

Country Sports Ireland already has a reputation for providing outstanding insurance cover for all local country sports at exceptionally good value for money. However, we are continually striving to provide members with the very best value for money and are therefore delighted to announce the following additional benefits to our already great value membership offer.

• Discounted Ferry Crossing

Country Sports Ireland members can now avail of discounted ferry crossings from all 4 Irish Sea Ports with Stenaline. To take advantage of this offer simply get in touch and we will be happy to send you the special discount code which is used at the time of booking to secure discounts.

• Discounts on Pest Control Products and Game Rearing Equipment

We have teamed up with MacEoin General Merchants Ltd to offer members and member clubs throughout the country heavily discounted prices on a range of pest & predator control products and game rearing equipment. A special price list has been produced providing details of special offer prices across a range of products and includes delivery. For a copy of the specially discounted price list simply get in touch with us.

Contact Country Sports Ireland: Phone: +44 7542 111542 Email: ronan@country-sportsireland.org www.country-sportsireland.org



Make the most of your shooting with the Country Sports Ireland Game Management Days.

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Women cast for recovery at free fishing initiative in Ballina, Co. Mayo

Breast cancer survivors gathered in Mount Falcon, Ballina, Co. Mayo last weekend to attend a fishing retreat organised by breast cancer project Casting For Recovery and supported by Inland Fisheries Ireland.

In total, 13 women attended the free fishing retreat which also incorporated medical advice, education services, counselling and relaxation techniques. The retreat was delivered by trained professionals including a psycho-social therapist, a health care professional as well as qualified fly fishing instructors and fishing guides.

Casting for Recovery UK & Ireland is a flagship project of The Countryside Alliance Foundation, a charity dedicated to increasing access to the countryside and helping as many people appreciate the great outdoors in the UK and Ireland. Casting for Recovery provides an opportunity for women who gone through a breast cancer journey to attend a retreat at a spectacular venue to learn the art of fly fishing.

This was the eighth year which the initiative has been held in Mount Falcon in Ballina with participants receiving fly fishing coaching and advice from local volunteers. On completion of the course, they receive a certificate in fly casting acknowledging their new proficiency in the pursuit. Previous participants in the programme in Mount Falcon have taken up fly fishing as a hobby with one participant graduating to fish on the Irish Women's Team.

The event was supported by Inland Fisheries Ireland's Sponsorship Scheme which sponsors angling events and initiatives across the country. In 2017, the



Casting For Recovery at Ballina.

scheme will support 79 initiatives to the overall tune of €30,000 with a focus on those which help grow Ireland's angling tourism product and support novice anglers.

Suzanne Campion, Inland Fisheries Ireland said: "We are delighted to support Casting For Recovery's fantastic fishing initiative and to see 13 women try the sport of fly fishing for the first time. There are a number of health & wellbeing benefits experienced from outdoor recreational activities and fishing is no exception. It can be enjoyed at any age or ability in numerous locations across Ireland. Inland Fisheries Ireland is committed to supporting community groups nationwide who want to help increase the number of anglers and

recognise the huge economic and recreational benefits which angling offers rural areas."

Sue Shaw, Casting For Recovery said: This initiative provides an opportunity for breast cancer survivors to gather on retreat in a natural setting to learn the sport of fly fishing. Equally important however, the retreats offer an opportunity to exchange information and experiences around their breast cancer journey, make new friends and take some time out for themselves."

The women who took part in the 2017 initiative in Mount Falcon were from Belfast, Cork, Dublin, Fermanagh, Galway, Mayo as well as Cambridge. For more information visit www.castingforrecovery.org.uk

A rare cased gentleman's wristwatch by London gunmaker Holland & Holland

Holts Auctioneers' is selling a very unusual gentleman's wristwatch by the prominent London gunmaker Holland & Holland. True to form, the wristwatch is displayed in a unique presentation box, fashioned as a miniature shotgun case.

Holts Auctioneers' Gunroom Manager, Nick Bongers de Rath, commented: "The watch came in at our Caernarfon Valuation Day held at the Vaynol Estate near Bangor. The vendor bought it a few months ago in a local auction and wanted to try auctioning it through us."

The watch is a scarce cased gentleman's stainless steel automatic wristwatch, serial no. 61034, for 1995, with certified chronometer 21 jewel automatic movement, monometallic balance wheel, duotone silvered dial with black Roman numerals, applied dot hour and minute markers, blacked Breguet hour and minute hands with a baton second hand running on a central inner track with Arabic numerals, plain circular 35mm stainless-steel case with hinged engraved back opening to reveal a further crystal back showing the movement, onion winder at '3', dial and movement signed, complete with its oak and leather presentation case styled as a shotgun case with 'C.O.S.C.' certificate and instructions. Estimate: £1,500-£2,000. Holts Auctioneers' next auction in London is on Thursday 22nd June 2017.



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NWAI Woodcock Data



Larry Taaffe, Hon. Sec. of the National Woodcock Association of Ireland writes to say that the comments on distribution of woodcock over the season, was of average to low numbers. Although in some areas particularly in the north of the country large bags of woodcock were apparently taken. This may have been woodcock which had only arrived after their migration journey.

The wing returns were low, but the ratio of A/J indicated a very upsetting result with Adults making up 55.3% of the total and Juveniles accounting for 44.7%. This is not what we would expect to find.

We would like to thank all those who responded with wings and hunter report data, and also to those members who continue to contribute (€30).

Thank you all for maintaining your support and look at our Facebook page for information and updates.

Inland Fisheries Ireland launches youth outreach initiative for 2017

Inland Fisheries Ireland has launched the Dublin Angling Initiative for the 2017 angling season.

The initiative is focused on the Greater Dublin Area and aims to promote, develop and improve angling among young people in target communities. Young people can take part in the initiative through their school, youth groups or community projects.

Last year, over 500 children and young people from the Dublin area participated in the programme which saw them take fishing lessons, join fishing trips and competitions and enjoy family fishing days. They also received environmental talks and lessons around important issues such as conservation, water quality and fisheries protection.

Inland Fisheries Ireland are officially launching the Dublin Angling Initiative for the 2017 season and welcome enquiries from interested groups. They already have schools, scout troops and youth projects booked in for fishing lessons and practical field trips during the summer months.

The Dublin Angling Initiative caters for any young person interested in angling, from the complete novice to the more advanced angler with exposure given to each of the different types of fishing. Fishing presentations and tours provide an insight into fish, their habitat, conservation measures and education regarding local fishing areas.

For further information, contact Oisín Cahill, Dublin Angling Initiative Coordinator at Inland Fisheries Ireland E: oisin.cahill@fisheriesireland.ie



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The Honorable The Irish Society is a charity that owns and manages the game and coarse fishing in the 38 miles of the Lower Bann and neighbouring rivers. We offer premium salmon and trout fishing on private and non-private beats, together with competition-standard coarse fishing, all at a variety of prices to suit every taste.

Our team of private water bailiffs patrols the river daily for the good of everyone, and

all our angling income is reinvested into protecting, enhancing and managing the fisheries.

Carnroe saw 478 salmon taken and safely released alive in 2016, a 36% increase on the previous year and against a backdrop of a hugely improved run of salmon in the river, almost 16,000 in all. This is a most encouraging sign for the future.

Lower Bann private salmon angling beats with availability for season and day rods are:

Carnroe (pictured), Culiff Rock, Movanager and Portna. Register your interest with us NOW before syndicates are fully formed for the season.

Game and Coarse permits from as little as £10 per day are available for other parts

of the Lower Bann, including the beautiful Estuary.

Day rods are also available on the following rivers: Agivey, Macosquin, Ballymoney, Clady, Moyola, Roe, Faughan, Ballinderry, Dennett, Derg.

Salmon angling on the Lower Bann opens from 1st May, and will be 'Catch & Release' only, in order to help preserve fish stocks. Fly, Spinning (no trebles, and barbless hooks only), prawn and shrimp methods all permitted. Prices remain unchanged from last season.

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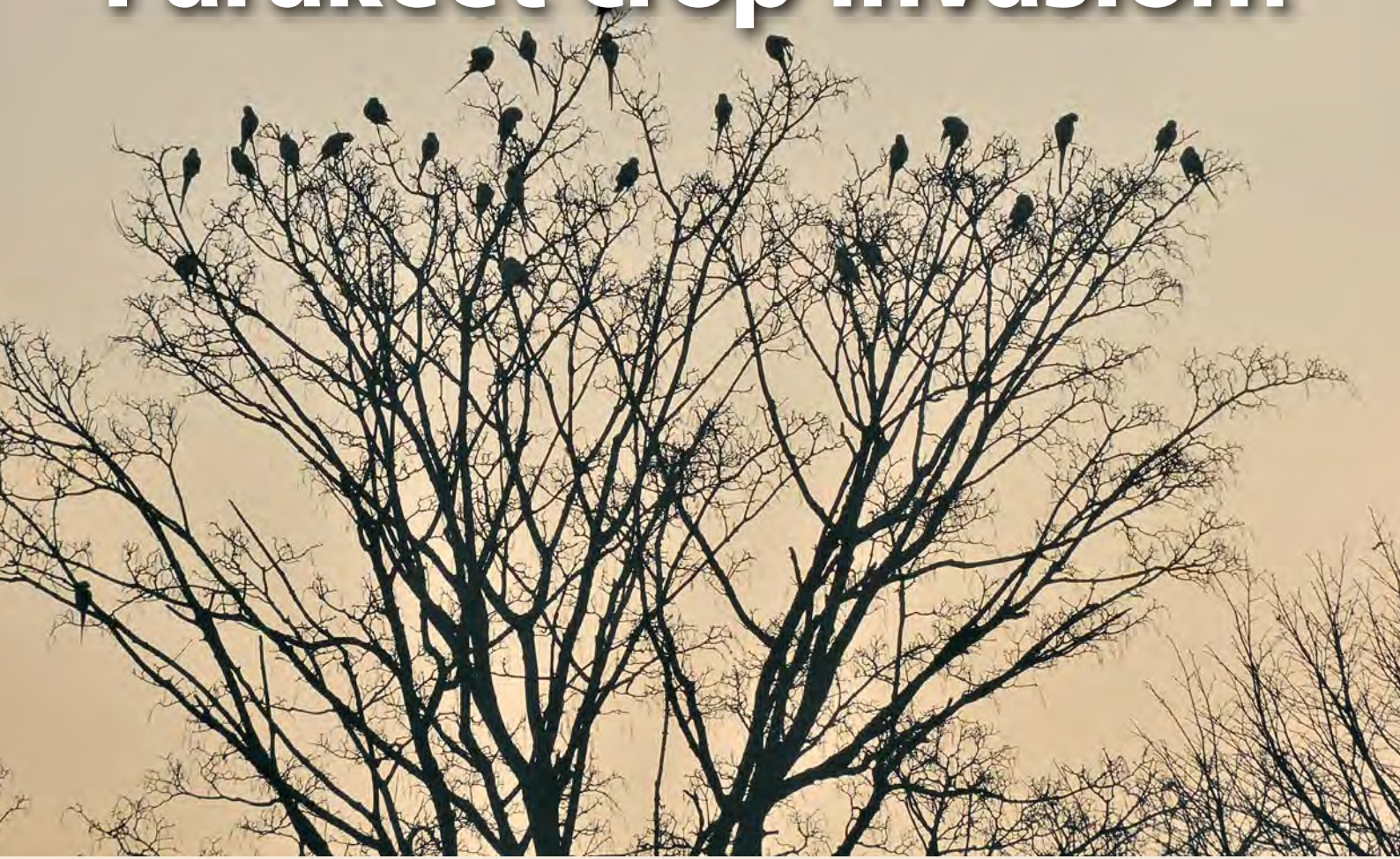
A man and a woman are standing outdoors in a grassy field with trees in the background. The man is on the left, wearing a dark navy blue Schöffel vest over a white and red checkered shirt and blue jeans. The woman is on the right, wearing a blue Schöffel vest over a white shirt and dark trousers. They are both smiling and looking at each other. The Schöffel logo is visible on the chest of both vests.

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Parakeet crop invasion!



As the sun rose the parakeets started to congregate.

Simon gets a call from a farmer to try and do something about a parakeet problem.

The Ring-neck parakeet and Monk parakeet problem has reached epidemic proportions in parts of the south east and other areas of the UK. The official estimate is around 60,000 parakeets at

large in the southeast of England alone.

From a small population living wild in the 1970s, the numbers have risen exponentially, Natural England estimate an increase of 30% year on year and

DEFRA recommend a reduction in the population of that order just to hold the numbers at their current level. For fruit farmers especially these brightly coloured pests pose a massive problem with some suffering an almost total loss of crop to the screeching masses.

I was given a call and asked if I would try to do something about a flock that was raiding one particular farm. It meant a very early start and I set the alarm for 02.30 so as to be on the road by no later than 03.00. I had a long drive ahead and I needed to be set up by dawn, when the birds congregate for a couple of hours in the trees along one particular hedgerow. Thankfully the farmer had already done the reconnaissance and was able to describe

I had the window down and the door open to give me more shooting angles - each situation demands a different approach specific to the property.



the birds' movements to me so I could set up in the best position.

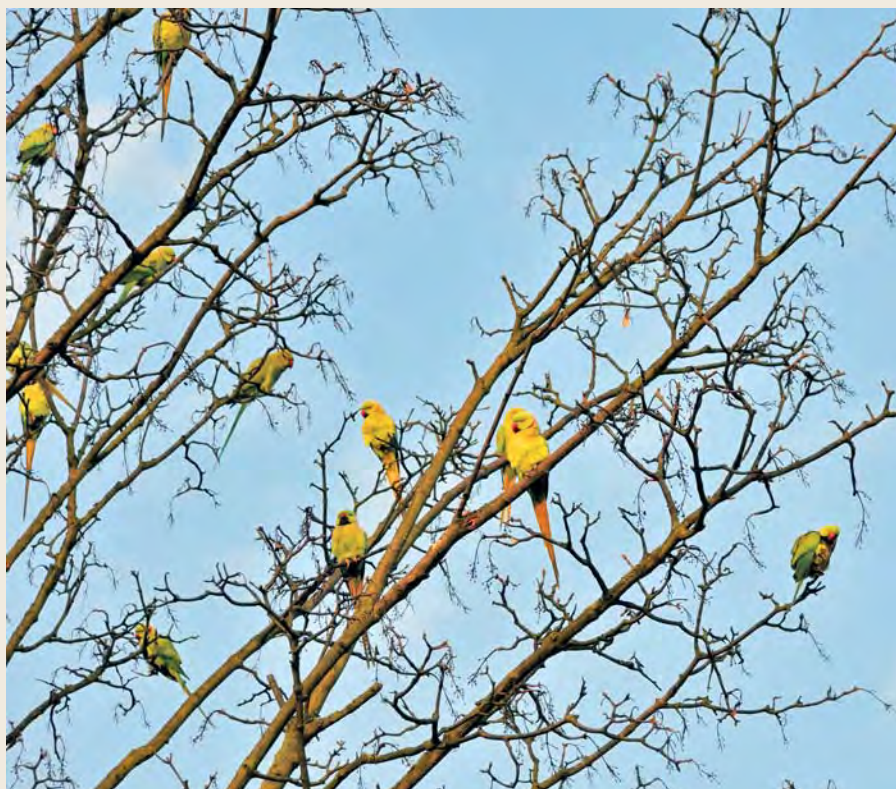
Being creatures of habit and not yet in fear of man, it was a simple matter to use the car as my hide for the operation. I simply parked about 30 yards from the main congregational tree and sat and waited for the first arrivals. I chose to use my Theoben Rapid air rifle for a couple of reasons. Parakeets are small birds, not much bigger than a blackbird, so an air rifle is a perfectly capable tool for humanely shooting them.

An air rifle, whilst they get a disproportionate amount of bad press through their misuse by a small minority, is a very discreet gun, they are virtually silent, plus the limited range and power makes them a much safer option and it is unlikely to do any damage to the trees. The Rapid 12/200 offers a huge shot count and as its name suggests a rapid rate of fire for an airgun with 12 shots in the magazine. The loud report from a shotgun would scatter the parakeets and limit the numbers achieved.

I aimed and squeezed the shot off

Just as the eastern sky began to lighten the 'kric, kric, kric' calls of the parakeets could be heard from their roost on a neighbouring holding. I didn't have long to wait and the first, a big male, fluttered into the outer branches of the tree. I aimed, squeezed the shot off and the parrot dropped stone dead to the impact. I left it where it fell because another flight of parakeets was already about to land in the tree. I picked the bird offering the best shot and dropped it beside the first. The remainder looked quizzically at their fallen comrades and with the rapid reloading facility I was onto the third before they could take wing. That one died so instantly it remained clasped to the branch, hanging upside down with its tail feathers spread for a few minutes before the muscles finally relaxed and the twig slipped through its claws.

With three on the ground I collected them and set them out in the field about



The birds were easy to spot with their neon-like plumage.



What a beak - imagine the damage it can do.



Setting out shot birds as decoys to draw more into the safe arc of fire.



All the parakeets were taken to be used for fly tying, haberdashery and feeding birds of prey.

20 yards from the tree as decoys, just using twigs to prop their heads up. The ruse worked and from then on parakeets flew straight into the tree and I could hardly keep my magazines loaded fast enough. No sooner had I shot a bird than more would flutter in, calling their friends over. I was trying to keep one magazine in readiness whilst using the other but every now and then I had to simply let the parakeets land while I loaded another magazine.

The carrion crow didn't notice me crouching

The first hour was frantic with constant action, birds landing in the trees around me constantly and even when I shot some remained, acting as confidence boosters for more to land in the tree I was set up for. The decoy pattern grew and grew until I had several dozen parakeets laid out in a circular pattern. Being gregarious birds

by nature, the new arrivals were either landing in the main perching tree, or landing amongst the decoys. At one point a carrion crow drifted over and, seeing one of the shot parakeets that had lodged in the fork of a bough as an easy

meal, landed in the tree. It was too preoccupied to notice me crouching beside the car and a well placed shot added him to the bag. I set the crow up on the fence about 20 yards the far side of the tree.

The farmer was also shooting, he was set up with his 4x4 overlooking one of his walnut trees that the parakeets were decimating. The flocks were flying between the two perches and having two of us shooting meant they were kept moving, not having somewhere to sit undisturbed. The tall walnut tree was already sprouting and the parakeets were taking the freshly sprouted buds making a significant impact on the future crop for this season.

The airgun proved to be the ideal tool for the job and by 09.30 I had amassed a total of over 60 of the green menaces; Titch had also had a successful morning with about 40 laid out from the walnut. The final tally was 107 parakeets between us and a brace of carrion crows each for good measure. It was a memorable morning shooting for me and well worth the 330 mile round trip. I shall be back again when the maize has been planted, because that is another crop that gets hit very hard by both the crows and the parakeets.

(Below) After the morning flight lasting no more than 2.5 hours we'd accounted for 107 parakeets and two carrion crows.





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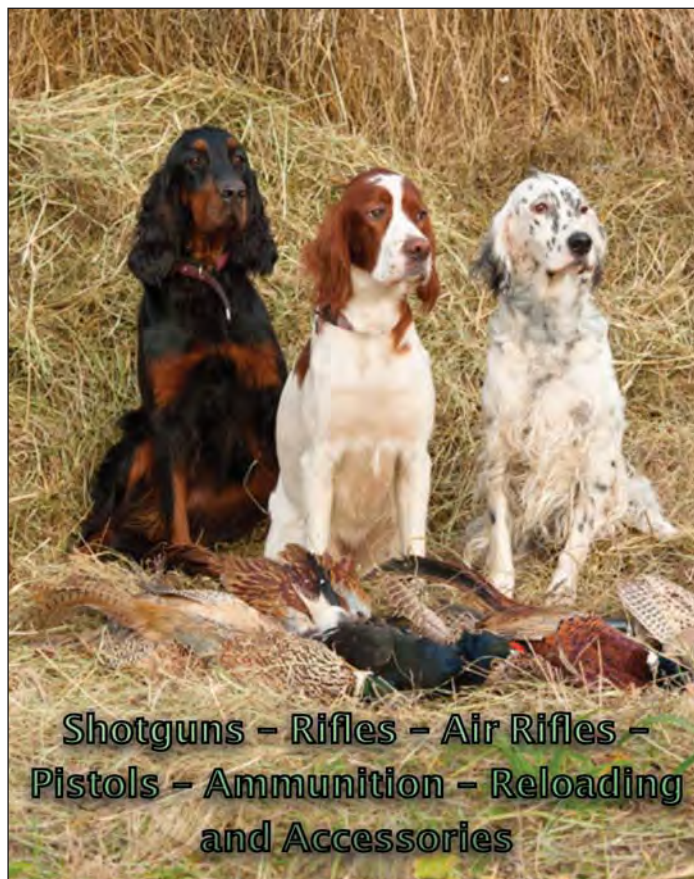
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Hind Culling on the Hebridean Isle of South Rona

Young Stags on Garb Eilean (Photo: Bill Cowie)

Rona lies between Skye and the Scottish mainland just north of its neighbouring island Rassay. It had lain neglected and derelict for many decades, when I first sailed into its magnificent natural harbour Acairseid Mhor, back in the seventies.

I revisited the island again in June last year and what a change I found. The old Rona Lodge had been fully restored and was occupied by Bill and Lorraine Cowie who are the custodians of the island. Rona had been purchased by a Danish family in the early nineties and they have revitalised the island, rebuilding the lodge and restoring a small number of the old cottages to encourage and accommodate visitors to the island.

Their ongoing habitat restoration programme managed and directed by Bill has improved the ecology and biodiversity of the island. The plan eradicated the rabbit population and using highland cattle, and some feral sheep rehabilitated the landscape. In 2003, a small herd of red deer, six hinds and two stags, were released to increase diversity to produce income from venison production and hunting. As the deer population increased they replaced

the cattle and have thrived on the plentiful grazing on Rona.

Commercial hunting of stags commenced 2008 while the hinds were allowed to increase and were sparingly culled to service the growing demand for venison from visitors staying on the island and the many yachts that call throughout the year.

By 2015, the annual cull was around 25 beasts, the majority being stags and in 2016 the deer count indicated a population of around 150 animals. This was considered the maximum sustainable herd for the island and it was decided that a hind cull should be undertaken to protect the islands flora and birch wood plantations. While on the island I met Bill and he extended an invitation to return in December to assist with a trial cull and to study the deer grazing impact on the island.

Travelling to the islands in the winter is always a gamble, but on this occasion

the weather could not have been better for the sailing to and from Rona on the 50 ton MV Aspire crewed by ex-lifeboat Coxswain Kevin and his wife Pam. They make the once weekly trip transporting guests and supplies from Portree on Skye.

On arrival Bill and Lorraine met the boat and delivered me to the islands well-appointed bunk house with its commanding view of the harbour and the Isle of Skye beyond. Bill advised me to get settled in and to be ready to check zero my rifle that afternoon. On Rona, most deer are taken within 100 metres, the requirement at the target is to fire two shots one at 50 metres and one at 80 metres to confirm ones marksmanship. I am pleased to report that I passed this test after which we took a drive to spot some deer and observed a number of groups sky lined on nearby hills, all were in excellent condition but Bill's cull would target the old, infirm and



Bill scanning for hinds north Rona.

late calves. Back at the lodge, Bill treated me to dram and agreed an afternoon to dusk hunt for the following day.

An old hind was selected and we closed in

The wind was blowing steadily from the south when Bill arrived to collect me for our first hunt and to give me the opportunity to appreciate the rugged Rona terrain with its many hollows and steep gullies. It wasn't long before we spotted a group of hinds on the east side of the island which gave us a challenging stalk over undulating rocky ground which required some back tracking to stay under cover during our approach. An old hind was selected and we closed in. They remained very alert as they paused only to take a few bites and then move off into the wind. On each occasion when we got into a shooting position we found the target hind wouldn't oblige us by presenting broadside before the group moved on, requiring us to follow on and find them again.

The light was fading when we moved in for the final approach but on getting into position we found her totally sky

lined with the sea behind her. We could only watch as she dropped from sight in a few steps. So, no shot on our first outing, but the excitement of the stalking and making multiple successful new approaches as the deer shifted position was reward enough.

Retracing our steps, we returned to the lodge in the dark where Lorraine was waiting with a gourmet dinner of Rona Lamb, followed by a dram from Bill's excellent collection of rare malt

whiskeys. A short torchlit trek brought me back to the bunk house to the brightly burning stove. I sat for a while to anticipate the hunt next day, before turning in to the sound of the wind buffeting the bunk house and the waves rushing onto the shingle beach just outside.

Next morning, the southwesterly wind required us to stalk to the southernmost tip of Rona. As we travelled by quad bike along Rona's narrow track with its spectacular views, hair raising turns and steep slopes, Bill stopped on spotting some deer, well uphill and determined that these were worth a second look.

Letting the quad roll back into cover, we were faced with a steep rocky climb to a point where Bill reckoned the deer should be within my comfort zone (as near as possible out to 200 metres). We found the group bunched on top of a knoll, but the quarry animal was overlapping another beast. I shifted position slightly but my movement was spotted and the group moved over the knoll as one. No shot, but being ever mindful of deer welfare, the risk of wounding the beast behind was avoided.

Challenging stalking indeed

We made our way further south to the start of our planned hunt. The island



Southern Rona stalking ground.



A stag visitor from Rassay
(Photo: Bill Cowie)

covers 2000 acres, is 8 Km long, less than a kilometre wide at its narrowest and just about 2 Kilometres at its widest making working with the wind very tricky. For me, Rona is as challenging as any highland stalking I have encountered albeit in miniature. Its many hollows and gullies need to be approached and assessed at 'stalking speed' in keeping with that old American Indian hunter's saying "walk little, look a lot."

We headed west to the coast, then south to an old village and some birch woods where there were likely places to inspect. We both constantly glassed the deep heather covered ground. I spotted a lone hind standing tail on to us in a small heather covered dip to our right. I softly indicated to Bill who dropped slowly to the ground. The deer was close, so Bill sent me forward alone to a good firing position and reminded me to be ready to take any calf that might appear after the shot. There was no calf apparent. I flat crawled into position and lined up on her. She was still, tail to me, quite undisturbed, head down and feeding. What to do? She was 50 metres away, head shot?...neck shot? Wait for her to present for a heart shot? While I contemplated the options she simply turned her head to the side to grab a mouthful of grass and presented the perfect opportunity for a side on neck shot.

She dropped instantly, but I reloaded and kept her in my sights, just in case. Suddenly, I became aware of movement to my left, a calf stood up only ten metres from her and bolted uphill. I went back onto the scope but was unable to pick it up before it disappeared over a knoll. My scope was set to its maximum 6 power magnification with a narrow field of view at close range. If only I had reduced the magnification being so close to the hind. I comforted myself that the orphaned calf was well-developed and should survive the winter: you can't get it right every time.

With the hind gralloched and moved to a high spot where we could retrieve it our way home, we moved on to the southern tip of the island without encountering any suitable hinds but were privileged to witness the rare sight of two red stags swimming across from the island of Rassay to land on Rona. They passed within 100 metres of us - the traffic of stags goes both ways and Bill said that one of the original Rona stags had been shot on Rassay and that up until this sighting he thought that stag immigration and emigration between the islands only took place during and after the rut. They were both 12 pointers and looked very regal as they passed us by with their heads held high and flaunting their antlers. As they picked their way through the tidal rocks to reach the grassy slopes that had tempted them across the sound, Bill pointed out that the cross fertilisation of

the two island deer populations was beneficial to the Rona's gene pool.

I knew that any movement would alert them

We returned to the quad, retrieved the hind and headed north to look for the group we had spotted in the morning. Within a few minutes, Bill was in full stalking mode having spotted a group of deer as we crested the hill. This group was rejected as they were all in superb condition. Staying under cover, we turned south again into the wind spotting two beasts which appeared suddenly but were unaware of us. We were in action! Moving to a firing position, I found myself very close to them and knew that any movement from me would alert them. Bill, sensing the situation, slipped uphill to assess the pair and in an instant whispered 'take the hind.' This is when I realised that I still had my scope protectors in place! "An ecstasy of fumbling" follows which is seen by the deer.

There is an instant report from Bill's .243, the calf drops and the hind bolts behind a knoll. I judged it would emerge uphill but it reappeared downhill and I lose it again, this time for good. My lapse of concentration in not removing the covers before getting to the firing position was not repeated for the rest of the trip! Back at the larder we soon had the carcasses hanging in the chiller before heading back to the Lodge for a night cap and to talk over the day's events and lessons learned.



Rona Lodge.

Next day at dawn, with the wind still blowing from the south west and a cloudless sky in prospect, Rona threw down another challenge to us to achieve a successful stalk. The plan was to make our way out to the east side of the island and head to its northernmost tip, accepting that the following wind would move the deer in front of us until we would be able to move to the west side and turn into the wind again. This brought another contrary element into play as we would be looking into the low winter sun making spying and possibly shooting problematic. But, as Bill said 'it is what it is' and we got on with it. We saw just under 40 deer throughout the day, we bumped some, most were too good to cull and some were in large groups, where we could not reliably identify the yield hinds. Such is the nature of culling!

Just as we approached the end of our beat, Bill whispered: "Oh! Oh!" He had spotted a hind lying down in the heather in front of a rock face some distance away. We both scanned the surrounding area about the hind and, sure enough, a calf appeared.

Bill waved me back from the observation point. We had to back track and lose height to make our approach undetected. This uncertainty arises in all hill stalking and you never know what the deer will do while you are out of sight and if they will be in the same place when you see them again.

Bill had noted a likely firing position and accurately navigated us down into a ravine and up to his selected spot where they were still there settled and judged suitable for culling. Bill told me to concentrate on the hind, he would shoot the calf but I was to be ready to engage it if necessary.

We waited for the hind to rise. When she did, I quickly acquired the sight picture but the hind now appeared agitated and about to bolt. Cross hairs just behind the fore leg and half way up the body, I was unaware of squeezing the trigger or the shot going off - but I heard the solid thud of my bullet strike her chest. The hind leaped forward,

head down and lunged away at top speed and out of sight. I knew that she would only run up to 100metres before falling dead. As I swung onto the calf which had immediately bolted after the hind, Bill fired just as the calf ran out of sight only to appear running back towards us. Bill beat me to the shot and the calf fell instantly. Leaving me to locate the beasts and gralloch both, Bill went off to fetch the quad and trailer.

The bullet had split in two

By good fortune as I made for the calf I found the hind lying in a hollow in front of it and both were within 20 metres of each other. The gralloch of the hind revealed that the shot had gone through both lungs and had severed the arteries of the heart, but there was also a small hole in the stomach. Back at the larder we found that were two exit holes, the bullet had split in two with a small fragment diverting to nick the stomach and exit further down the carcase illustrating that bullet behaviour after the strike can be unpredictable.

The beasts were quickly dealt with at the larder, as Bill had planned an evening stalk and deer damage assessment through some of the birch wood plantations which are dotted across the island. Our stalk, which took us past an ancient illicit whisky still site, led us into several deer but none were deemed cull beasts. One group of eight hinds and calves was spotted when we were in the woods, but they stood and

studied us and seemed to sense no threat, even though we were no more than 30 metres from them, and remained where they were as we moved off to check for deer damage to the trees.

Over the few days we had covered most of the island and observed very little evidence of significant deer damage due to over grazing and fraying. Bill and I both began to question if the hind cull was justified. Even in the middle of winter there was an abundance of good grazing and we had noted only a few instances of slight tree damage through fraying. We agreed from the excellent condition of the deer and lack of impact on the birch plantations that the herd could be allowed to grow for another season, or possibly two, before a regular cull programme would be required.

The week ended with a cull of three hinds and two calves all of which were delivered to the game dealer in first class condition. I found my week on Rona a great learning experience. It was a privilege to spend time with Bill and Lorraine learning about the history and restoration of Rona. Seeing their commitment to the project and the welfare of the islands flora and fauna, particularly the deer has left me confident in the future of Rona and its Deer.

Readers can follow Ronas progress on Bills blog at www.isleofronalog.com and the Rona web site, www.isleofrona.com



One of the cull hinds.

Beagling At Its Best In Cork Festival



Huntman Mike Smith with the Old Berkeley Beagles in North Cork.

I have written before about the sad decline in Ireland in the popularity of the noble sport of Beagling. As it has declined in popularity, foot harrier packs have seen a surge in numbers. These foot harrier packs may have a few harriers in their midst and a beagle or two, but they usually consist of foxhounds.

Whilst foot harrier hunting is great craic and heartily recommended, it's a real shame that people are missing out on the very special sport of Beagling. Beagles have their own unique music, their own special atmosphere, and it's a pleasure to hunt with them. If you want to see Beagling at its best then I would recommend you attend the festival of beagling in Cork and Limerick, which is organised annually by the Woodrock and Blackwater Valley Club and marked its 24th year in February.

Each year the Woodrock invites over a couple of English packs for nine days of hunting. This year's packs were the Taw Vale Beagles from Devon and the Old Berkeley Beagles from Buckinghamshire and about 50 people travelled over for the week, along with 60 hounds. I hunted every day during

the festival while staying in a hotel in Mallow. Every day, in hunting terms, was, without exception, a success all adding up to a very memorable holiday.

On the first day, a Saturday, the Woodrock and Blackwater Valley enjoyed a fine afternoon accompanied by about 50 foot followers. Steven McDonald once again showed what a good huntsman he is. A few of us tried to keep in touch on foot with Stevie and the hounds; wise people used cars to follow the action.

Huntsman Mike Pike and the Taw Vale Beagles were out on Sunday. We had a few drinks beforehand in the very friendly Rockforest Bar in Castletownroche and drove a few miles to the meet. Like Stevie, Mike was a very fit fellow and like Stevie his pack enjoyed excellent hunting. My limbs

were tired by evening's end. The high quality of the scent and the hunting didn't let up throughout the next seven days.

On Monday, Huntsman Mike Smith took his hounds to hilly country near Mitchelstown. The weather was very poor and the visibility reduced to forty or fifty metres, but despite the driving rain, the strong winds and the fog we still experienced a cracker. Some packs wouldn't do so well in such testing conditions. Not the Old Berkeley who won admiration all around.

A hare got up right at my feet

Tuesday was an early start. We met at a crossroads a few miles from Castletownroche at 8.30am. It was foggy and cool. It was atmospheric



The combined packs at Killeely Cork Festival 2017.

tramping the pastureland in the fog with figures, attired in tweed, green jackets and barbours, disappearing in the cloud and the beagles casting about. After an hour, the sun burned the fog away and a hare got up right at my feet. I let out a holloa and that was the start of two hours jogging across the countryside.

Wednesday's hunt was especially good, where the two English packs joined forces and all 60 hounds were used. It was a wonderful sight witnessing these 60 beagles in action, sometimes reminding me of a flock of birds in flight because of the way they moved en masse when temporarily slowing down and casting for the scent. As we stood on the side of a hill and enjoyed a top-notch view of the valley and the beagles in full pursuit while making fantastic music, someone turned to me and said, 'Hunting doesn't get better than this.'

The hunt was in Killeely, a village in East Limerick set in interesting hill country (the creation of volcanic activity) and it's a really fabulous place from a foothunter's point of view. Hares are always found here and there's a grandstand view from the side of a hill of the action in the wide valley below.

Our day started at 11.30 in driving rain and very strong winds. After a few minutes the beagles latched onto the

scent of a hare and the music these sixty hounds made was special indeed. As I had been hunting five days in a row and had done a lot of jogging through the Cork and Limerick countryside my limbs were a little weary. I therefore was content to stand on the side of the hill and watch the action. It was a beautiful sight and sound, which would thrill the heart of every lover of the chase.

For long periods the hounds resembled one single creature, focussed upon one purpose. Despite the strong winds they remained attached to the scent. For long periods they travelled very swiftly, resembling a hunter's arrow in flight. Along the length of the

went; then up the steep slope, over the top of the storm-buffed hilltop, then turning back and returning once more to the wide valley. They made this same circuit again and again.

The English packs impressed

Some local hunting people had come out to watch the English packs in operation, and it was obvious they were deeply impressed. When the day came to an end after five hours everyone went home with a glow of satisfaction. Hunting certainly doesn't get better than this, and over all the years I don't remember as good a beagle hunt. These small dogs covered the species of beagle in glory again and showed us



Beagling enthusiasts gather at 8.00 am for a hunt near Castletownroche, Cork wide valley they



Jack O'Connor addresses the troops at the beginning of the day.

what a great pleasure it is to follow this breed of dog in pursuit of the hare.

On Friday evening everyone enjoyed a great dinner dance in the Hibernian Hotel in Mallow, where 150 attended. The organisers sent out complimentary tickets for the dinner dance to the farmers who allow the hunt over their land.

The following day, we assembled at a farm near Castletownroche and set off walking across the large fields, many of which were recently seeded and therefore heavy going due to the softness of the soil and to the fact it clung to your boots. Today's pack was the Taw Vale and after half an hour's silence the hounds started speaking and

for the next three and a half hours there was barely a pause.

Afterwards I chatted to Geoffrey Cox, Master of the Taw Vale Beagles, over a few pints in the Castletown Inn in Castletownroche and Geoffrey said everyone had enjoyed a fantastic week's hunting. Geoffrey has been coming to the festival for many years. He's one of the leaders during the week, whom people turn to in order to find out what's happening next in the itinerary.

He said the welcome the English visitors were given by Jack and John O'Connor and the other members of the Woodrock and Blackwater Beagles was very special: "We were made to feel so

welcome by Jack and his great team of people.' He pointed out that English beagle packs have been invited each year to hunt in north Cork for about 40 years. Geoffrey is a seasoned veteran and he's been either a beagling huntsman or master for the last fifty years. The Taw Vale beagles are kennelled on his farm near South Malton in North Devon. Devon of course is a very scenic place and is a well hunted region. In the north of the county the Taw Vales share their country with two packs of staghounds and four or five packs of foxhounds. The Taw Vales take their name from the River Taw and Geoffrey is fond of the region.

"It's lovely country,' he said. "attractive, undulating pastureland." The Taw Vales are also connected with a local hare preservation society, which ensures that areas remain well stocked with the quarry.

"The Irish hare is difficult to hunt," Geoffrey added, "because it runs longer points than the hare in England, which is a different species. In England we hunt the brown hare, whereas the Irish hare is an arctic type hare. I have attended the festival several times over the years,' said Geoffrey, 'and it is such great craic. Everyone



The Taw Vales and Mike Pike in East Limerick on a cracking day.

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Blackwater Salmon Fishery Diary

'Ne'er cast a clout till May is oot,' was a familiar saying by my mother and father when we were growing up in Northern Ireland, as was: 'Would ye e'er go away, till I get my head sharr'd.' The translations are as follows: 'Never take off a piece of winter clothing until May is out' and 'Would you give me a break!'

The latter, as children, we well understood and to me it meant getting my fishing rod and going to the river. The first saying however I have misunderstood for most of my life. My mother thought it meant to keep all of your winter clothing on until the month

of May was finished and my father (the outdoors one) spent all of his married life trying to convince her that it meant keep all your winter clothes on until the May (Hawthorn tree) flowered at the end of April beginning of May. This year, I will agree with my father,

because if I had to keep on all of my winter clothes until the month of May was out I would have died of heat exhaustion by now.

On the 1st February the waiting was over for us on the River Blackwater, and with great excitement and enthusiasm 17 of us made our way to our meeting place - Upper Kilmurry. Tradition is very important in our sport and we toasted the river with a wee dram. We prayed for safety for all anglers fishing the river, that there would be many fish caught this season and of course that we would have fun on the river bank, which is our retreat away from the busyness of life.

The river was high yet coming down from a flood and it was very wet and windy. After our breakfast roll we ventured out into the wind for some casting practice and rod/line testing. After a short while we quickly took refuge by the fire in the hut, where many a fishing story and yarn were told. It was wonderful to have so many people turn up, despite the weather, to celebrate the opening day.

Getting into action

The Skagit course on 4th February was fully booked and the day was great. The wind and the rain stopped and it turned into a glorious day on the river. The course demystified the Skagit lines and grain weights. We discussed the differences between Skagit and Scandi lines, when and where to use them, advantages and disadvantages of each and there was lots of practice casting them using the various casts suitable for



Billy Moylan's excellent fish.



Pat and Anne Curran really enjoyed their time learning to fish.

Skagit fishing. This could also be the earliest I have ever barbecued.

Noel Fitzmaurice caught and released the first fish on February 13th. using a Skagit line and heavy tube fly. This beautiful, sea-liced fish was caught in very high water that years ago was classed as unsuitable for fly fishing.

February brought the dancing daffodils and a few salmon were caught. We don't really go out expecting to catch many fish in February. It is more about getting back out onto the river, clearing the cobwebs away, and seeing if we can remember how to cast.

I felt that I had not been in Ireland for much of February, as I was privileged to be invited to attend shows in Austria and France acting as a fly casting demonstrator. Noel, Anna and Ian attended the Angling Ireland Show in Dublin as it clashed with the Austrian show. It is a great privilege for us to attend these shows and fairs around the world.

It is truly wonderful to meet so many like-minded people. Only a small percentage of the world's population would understand why we enjoy being by a river or lake all day, watching and waiting for the perfect time to go fishing, or how we could have countless conversations about the hundreds of different ways to fish a fly, never mind

dress one.

In April I was demonstrating at the EWF show near Munich in Germany. I am also looking forward to attending Shanes Castle at the end of June, Birr Castle Game and Country Fair in August and the Galway Fly Fair in November. Many thanks to the organisers of these shows, for their hard work and long evenings and early mornings that they endure, to make each one a success for all of us to enjoy.

Spring arrives

Saint Patrick's Day on 17th March brings the anglers out who simply do not think that it is worth fishing before this day. Spring salmon fishing in February and March is not for the people who need to catch a fish to stay motivated. It can be cold, wet, windy and most of the time does not produce a catch. Sometimes we are just happy to have seen a fish jump and this is worth noting and getting excited about. I like spring fishing and for me it is about getting out there again in any of the elements. I love the wind in my face and the cold air burning my cheeks. When I was a child fishing on the River Inler near Comber, my skin was brown before the end of March as I was doing so much trout fishing. Not from sun I must add, probably wind burn. Spring

fishing teaches us endurance and patience.

In April, the daffodils start to die back and the wonderful aromas of wild Garlic and Bluebells grace the river bank and hedgerows. The fish are in the river in better numbers during April and we would expect to see one or two jump while we are fishing and have high hopes of catching one. Salmon fishing and the fish itself, can teach us so much about life. Persistence, never give up, keep on going through good weather and bad, knowing and believing that you are one cast closer to your prize.

Over the years, I have found that it is the person who keeps on fishing, cast after cast, who will catch the fish. However, I have also found that salmon fishing is sometimes not fair. We sometimes 'will' that a salmon would take the fly or spinner for a friend that has been trying so hard with no success. We realise that life is also sometimes not fair and we must learn to deal with the disappointments as well as the successes.

This was the mindset of one of our fishery friends - Sergej Kapustin - who would not give up. He started fly



A real beauty for Vidias.



Teaching a group of women to fish Germany.



Iceland this time and the picture shows Himmi delighted with his catch.

fishing for salmon last year and didn't have any success. We first met Sergej when he came to the fishery in February of this year. Sergej had lost fish on his first visit to the fishery, and finally after a lot of hard work, 2 hour drives from Dublin, determination and skill, he has caught and released his first ever salmon. It was such a pleasure to see the smile on his face, enjoy the moment and have a well deserved cup of coffee after the event (in the photo above he looks shocked).

The weather in Ireland has been wonderful for the month of April and we certainly did not experience 'April Showers.' In fact the last rise in water in the river was on the 4th April when the river rose to 82 on the Ballyduff gauge. There were lots of fish showing in the pools and I have had another report of a 'long distance catch and release' fish which was hooked on a Stoats Tail, played and fell off at the net. It is time for floating lines, intermediate tips in places and small flies. If this doesn't tempt a fish it may be time also for the Collie Dog, Sunray Shadows and

Hitching Flies, possibly even a nymph.

Hitching flies

Last July I had the pleasure of going to Iceland with a client who, over the years, has become a very good friend. My job was to coach Arthur with his casting skills, help him grasp the techniques that we needed to catch fish in Iceland and to take over fishing his rod when his arm was too tired to fish any more. Yes, I do have the best job in the world!

One of these techniques was hitching micro flies. These flies make a tiny V shape when they are skated across the surface and when you see a salmon come after it, well no words can describe the excitement. To me it is like dry fly fishing for salmon, so visual and oh so knee-trembling exciting.

We also had the pleasure and company of two Icelandic Guides - Himmi Jons (whom I have known for a few years) and Sigbor Olafsson. Now, I had hitched for salmon before in Ireland with a bit of success, but my catches and confidence were a bit hit and miss. I

admit that I wasn't totally sure and confident with my technique. To watch these two guides in operation and to learn from them was a revelation to me and I couldn't wait to get back to the Blackwater in low water. They explained so well what they were doing and how to hitch with success.

I came home to Ireland at the beginning of August. The Blackwater was very low and nobody was catching fish so I took out my hitching box and the fun began. It is a great pleasure to have these two guides joining us in Ireland this May for our two hitching courses. These courses were fully booked before last Christmas, however a couple of spaces have become available on each of the days.

Children at Blackwater Salmon Fishery

The photograph shows our wonderful day out with the Bandon Scouts on Kilmurry on 22nd April. It is so important that our children have an opportunity to learn to fish. This day was organised by the Bandon Angling Association, Glenda Powell of Blackwater Salmon Fishery and was sponsored by Inland Fisheries Ireland. The children learned about safety around water, why clean water is important, how to fly fish for trout and — most of all — had a fun day out. Thank you Inland Fisheries Ireland who sponsored this event and many more around the country and also thanks to the members of the Bandon Angling Association who came to help on the day.

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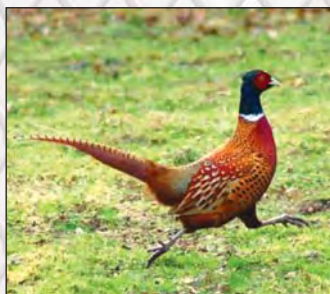
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Southwick House

Site of the historic D-Day decision in 1944

Having explored invasion beaches and most of Europe's WW2 battlefields down the years, some colleagues and I decided that a visit to Southwick House in Hampshire was long overdue. This stately house was the setting for the momentous decision taken by General Dwight D Eisenhower in 1944 to "go" – thereby launching the D-Day Allied invasion of Europe the following morning, June 6th.



Historic Southwick House (photo by Patrick Conran).

The Map Room in Southwick House is preserved exactly as it was in those far-off days when Eisenhower and the Allied High Command were planning and implementing their strategies. Visiting the historic building is not a simple case of turning up at the gates – Southwick House is situated within an operational military establishment where advance consent and security clearance are required.

With the necessary documentation in place we headed off by ferry from Rosslare Harbour last February and on arrival in Pembroke Dock, driving directly to a farm in Surrey. We had received an invitation to call there and see some privately owned WW2

equipment including three Russian tanks.

One particular tank, a T34 is reputed to have been used in the battle for Berlin in 1945 and has a few dings to show for it. The same machine was used in the 1990's Balkan Wars and some of the scars may well be from that conflict. With all its systems still in full running order, the engine was fired by farm owner John in the driver's seat and while it was possible to shunt around the farmyard, recent heavy rains militated against moving out into nearby fields. A T34's wide tracks would have destroyed the soggy meadows.

A second T34 was awaiting a replacement engine – apparently a

simple operation to literally hoist, drop into place and connect, while the third tank, a T54 was in the process of being overhauled. The latter model dates from the 1950's and is similar to those used by Soviet forces in Budapest during that city's 1956 uprising.

The turret was capable of amputating unwary arms

Tanks of that vintage were not designed for driver/passenger comfort - quite evident from the Spartan interior. Even as minor a luxury as a wire basket fixed to collect fired shells didn't feature. The gunner and commander would have had to contend with hazardous empty cases rolling about,



The Author in The Map Room which was largely unchanged since wartime.

unlike their counterparts in Allied armour. Crew members also needed to be careful of the turning turret which is capable of amputating unwary fingers or arms. Notwithstanding the miseries that may have been endured by the earlier occupants, we fully explored the tanks from top to bottom.

The farm also boasts a Bofors anti-aircraft gun, a 4" naval battery plus

various WW2 vehicles including the famous Deuce-and-a-Half truck, Willys Jeeps and a Despatch-Rider's motor cycle. Farmer John who runs the busy working farm took an entire morning off from his schedule to demonstrate his collection – he also organises the annual Capel Military Vehicle Show. All of his military hardware, other privately owned units, visits by military

helicopters, re-enactors in German WW2 regalia and lots more will be in operation on July 1st and 2nd at his Aldhurst Farm which is a mere 4 miles from Gatwick Airport. John will feature driving the Russian T34 in an exciting display. See www.capel-military-vehicle-show.com.

After an overnight stay, the next stage of our journey brought us to



Patrick with a T34 tank.



Richard, Mark, Pat, Jamie and the Author atop a T34 tank.

Portsmouth where we viewed HMS Victory in the Naval Dockyard and the city's D-Day museum, leaving the following day free for our visit to Southwick House. The guided tour of Nelson's old warship was revealing and a number of interesting facts emerged including origins of the expression

"square meal." Food was served on square wooden plates and if someone took too much it precipitated a complaint from other sailors not receiving a "square meal."

The following morning we arrived at Southwick House where we were met by the retired naval officer who was to

be our tour guide. When seated in the Map Room we received a fascinating insight into the events leading up to the evening of June 5th 1944. Being in such atmospheric surroundings was a complete departure from the usual portrayals in old newsreels on history TV channels. The room has remained



The tank's engine firing-up.



Victor with a Soviet PPSH-41 sub-machine gun.

unchanged since those tumultuous days except for the addition of a framed photograph of Eisenhower being interviewed there in 1964 by CBS TV News Anchor Walter Cronkite. A huge plywood map featuring the coasts of Southern England and Northern France covers an entire wall. All shipping lanes, invasion beaches and air landing zones are still clearly marked. Our guide assured us that the toy company which had manufactured the map was tasked with producing timber land-masses from both countries stretching far beyond the actual departure and landing sites, designed to prevent any of the invasion areas being accidentally identified. We also visited the library which too is relatively unchanged, the room now functions as an Officers' Mess.

An Irish 'Weather Forecast' Connection

In the course of our Guide's discourse on the events of June 5 1944, I wondered if he was aware of whence the decisive weather forecast emanated – a major factor in making any "go" decision. History records that a Group Captain Stagg advised Eisenhower of a forthcoming gap in the foul weather – a benign front on the way from the Atlantic Ocean. What's not generally known is that this forecast came from an Irish Weather Station at Blacksod in County Mayo. The Forecaster had

instructions from Dublin to telephone his data to a specific number in England on a daily basis.

On June 5th 1944 that same man received an unprecedented call from England asking him to re-check his earlier forecast. This he did and returned confirmation that his data was correct, not having the foggiest notion of its importance. Decades later the facts emerged - and a commemorative ceremony attended by the British Ambassador to Ireland was held at Blacksod in 2014. Sadly Blacksod is in the news again following the recent tragic Coastguard Helicopter crash at Blackrock Lighthouse.

Southwick House was definitely of huge interest to all the lads on our brief trip. We were courteously looked after

by the military personnel there – some had Irish roots and spoke to us about them. A friend in London, Lee Graham, organised the visit to Aldhurst Farm in Surrey and took the trouble to travel down that morning to introduce us to Farmer John. Our last port of call was the Golden Lion Pub in Southwick village. Ike and other high-ranking personnel were occasional visitors there for a relaxing beer or two. Those casual strolls must have caused his security detail major headaches. Wall to wall memorabilia abounds and the Landlord kindly spent considerable time with us relating facts and fables surrounding the premises since the 1940's. Finally, all that remained was the long drive to Wales to catch a 3am ferry home.



Farm-owner John with Richard and Alan.

Art & Antiques

Quite recently we have been getting programmes both on radio and television about people who have become compulsive hoarders. And to listen to those presenting such programmes one could be forgiven for believing all hoarders were suffering from some form of terminal illness and were to be pitied for their afflictions. In my book that is far, far from the truth.



Kenneth Webb's painting of Donaghadee Harbour really caught the eye (sold by WHYTE's for €7,400)

Such people who scour the country's car boot sales, house auctions, sales houses and other sources of material are not suffering in any way. In fact most, if not all, are getting immense satisfaction from their endeavours. So what if they

are cluttering up their two-car garages, their living rooms, sitting room, even bedrooms. It is their space and their right to fill it with whatever they want. While they may appear to be bringing together a lot of unnecessary junk they

are doing nothing of the sort. In fact, what many hoarders are doing, while not recognising it at the time, is they are really building up a stockpile to grace some future auction room. And when such a tight gathering of items gets a



Percy French's 'Bog lake in summer' (sold by WHYTE's for €4,200)

wide dispersal on a sale's day, think of the enjoyment so many others will have on being able to procure things they may have been seeking for many years. No, hoarding is not a sin. True it may be a compulsion, but it shouldn't do anyone any harm.

So keep producing the radio and the television programmes about hoarders but a little less condemnation or psycho-analysing about what they are doing. And always remember that trite old catch-phrase from the real world we all live in, 'one man's trash can be another man's treasure.' And how true that age old adage can be. Never throw anything away before assessing if it has another use. That rickety old armchair which sat in the corner since grand-dad was a boy may look like nothing and only fit for the skip. With a bit of TLC, by someone who knows how to give it, it could become a valuable item, and a little money maker when it eventually comes under an auctioneer's gavel.

I know how lucky one can be in such things. Once when leaving a car boot sale with little to show for my day's efforts I was passing a table where a vendor was loading his unsold items into the back of his car. Just as I passed he dropped a painting, smashing the glass and doing some damage to the frame. I stopped to commiserate with the unfortunate chap who told me he had had a bad day and one of the lots he had hoped to sell for £25 was the painting. Exercising pity rather than opportunity I offered him £20 for his painting and he almost took my hand off to get the notes. My framer took a look at it later, replaced the glass and frame and told me it was still worth only about £25.

Some months later when bringing a few lots to sale, I

took the painting with me and let it run without any reserve as I was only looking for my money back. Sad to say, I had little profit from the other lots but the painting to my surprise found two willing bidders and only one of them was successful and when he paid his commission he had little change out of £400. The lesson I learned wasn't about selling. It was about buying and the serendipity that can surround the purchase of some items.

Stiff competition for the 'sleeper'

Now that is a bit different of course than going looking for a 'sleeper.' Any dealer, collector or casual buyer worth his salt knows that a 'sleeper' can be

found in the most unusual of places.

Most people look for one in an auction room. And while they can be found there, competition can be stiff with maybe a dozen people looking for that elusive item during a single viewing.

Widen your search. Go to every house auction viewing you can manage to attend. Drop in on as many car boot sales as are held in your immediate area, and scour the Internet as well. Remember you may see a new value in something which has been picked up and discarded by dozens of other people. And that value may be translated into hard cash when the item is sold in another place.

It is good to consider too that some fads come and go. What was popular



Portrait of a military officer, an oil attributed to Jonathan Richardson (sold by MEALY's for €6,200)



A scene from Falcarragh, Donegal 1908 also by Percy French (sold by WHYTE's for €5,000)

yesterday may be old hat tomorrow. But, just like fashion, other things come round as well. The worlds of retro and reproduction bear witness to that.

The summer is a good time for putting much of what I've just said into practise. Never really buy beyond your means. Just like making a bet, don't lose more than you can afford to forgo. But in the world of collecting there is much out there worth chasing, securing and selling on for a profit. Go look for it!

AROUND THE SALES

There is no doubting the continuing popularity of Jack Butler Yeats paintings. This was well evidenced at **ADAM'S**, the Dublin based auction house's Irish Art Sale in late March. For it was there that "The Talent," a Yeats oil on canvas sold for an €80,000 hammer price which was spot on its high estimate. A Patrick Swift, oil, "Girl in a garden," exceeded its high estimate to sell at €32,000. Works by Irish artist Roderic O'Connor also continue to attract fine prices and an oil on panel,

"Woman Reading" sold well at €30,000. An oil by Norah McGuinness, "The Startled Bird" made €28,000, a Basil Blackshaw oil, "Clint Eastwood," €22,000 and another Yeats' oil, "Kerry Landscape," €14,000.

An interesting collection of 11 portraits of writers, poets and actors associated with the Abbey Theatre by Harry Kernoff, an artist for whom I have a lot of respect, sold for €12,500, again exceeding their top estimate. And the top ten in the sale rounded off with another Basil Blackshaw, a seated nude, realising €11,000 which was well above its high estimate.

Sculpture, the poorer cousin to painted art, has its own following and a John Behan bronze of Cu Chulainn went at €13,000 which was well above its top estimate.

ADAM'S At Home Sale sold a Cecil Kennedy still life oil, for €14,000 followed by a James Malton set of 25 views of Dublin for €13,000. A fine Irish George IV giltwood console table attracted a price of €11,000 while an

Adam Hulk oil, "Fishermen and Ships" made a similar hammer price.

An Irish mahogany and marble top side table went at €8,000 followed by a vintage Louis Vuitton steam trunk at €7,500 and a large Irish George III fuel bucket at a similar price. A breakfront bookcase commanded a hammer price of €8,000 while a Regency Cumberland-action dining table sold for €4,600.

MEALY'S Two Day Spring Sale in Kilkenny certainly brought in the goods with 76 pc of lots sold for a total of €275,000. One lot a set of 14 Victorian dining chair by Eadon & Sons went at €6,500 while a portrait of a military officer, an oil attributed to Jonathan Richardson made €6,200 and a solid silver lobster form caviar dish cover by Comyns, London 1995 made €3,100.

WHYTE'S sold a Percy French, 'Bog lake in summer' for €4,200 and a scene of Falcarragh, Donegal 1908 for €5,000, but it was a Kenneth Webb - he celebrates his 90th birthday soon - of Donaghadee Harbour which sold for €7,400 which really caught the eye.

No 'Brexit' for Pointing Breeds Training Days

I always look forward to the beginning of warmer weather which means daffodils blooming along the lane, white drifts of blackthorn blossom in the hedgerows and the first primroses peeking through in the ditches. Most of all, it means we can get back onto the moors with the pointers and setters and begin spring counts on paired grouse.



Genevieve Pine, Zoe Dicker, Kathy Gill, Trainer Julie Organ and Iain Grant.

This year there was the added pleasure of attending a couple of Pointing Breeds Training Weekends: one run by the Kennel Club at Reeth and one by Terry Harris near Stanhope. Georgina has a pointer puppy – Maybelle or more formally, Koram Heather – and the training weekends were the chance to get some expert advice on Maybelle's education as well as meeting up with some old friends and hopefully making a few new ones while getting back onto the hill for the first time in months.

Both weekends were open to all the

pointing breeds and to handlers regardless of their level of experience. Some dogs were from straight working lines and others were purely show bred. Some were old hands at grouse work while others had never been on a grouse moor before much less seen or scented grouse. These widely differing levels of experience and ability presented an interesting problem for the trainers with some trainees needing to learn the absolute basics of pointer work while others were looking for advice on a much more advanced level.

For the Kennel Club weekend we met at the Bridge Inn in Grinton where Peter O'Driscoll welcomed the forty-five trainees and introduced them to their Trainers: Phil Pearson, Mick Canham, Colin Organ, Julie Organ, David Hall, Godfrey Card, Lester Anderson, David Wisner, Maureen Nixon and Rory Major. The actual training was to take place a mile or so from the village on Grinton moor by permission of owner Lord Peel and Headkeeper Des Coates. It was a bright and blessedly dry morning with a good breeze as we started out in five groups with fourteen different breeds of pointing dogs all eager for the off.

There were Irish setters, Gordon setters and pointers to keep the home flag flying. Germany was well represented with German Shorthaired Pointers, German Wirehaired Pointers, German Longhaired Pointers, Weimaraners, Longhaired Weimaraners and Large Munsterlanders. There were Hungarian Vizslas, Hungarian Wirehaired Vizslas, Italian Spinones, Bracco Italianos and a Braque Francais. Obviously Brexit doesn't apply to the gundog world.

Each trainer took four or five pupils representing a mixture of breeds, experience and ability. I tagged along initially with Colin Organ and his group of two Vizslas, one Wirehaired Vizsla and Irish setter and Maybelle the pointer. The five dogs represented a good cross section between show and work with the Vizslas at the show end, Maybelle very much in the working corner and the setter and the wirehaired Vizsla somewhere in between.

Keith Wain's Italian Spinone Dita getting the hang of working on a grouse moor.





Handlers and dogs at a training day near Stanhope on a fine Spring morning.

Scent of grouse acted as a powerful stimulant

Over the two days I spent time with four of the groups and the divide between show lines and work lines was evident in all four. The show dogs generally needed to be encouraged to get out and hunt, while the younger working dogs were only too keen to race across the heather. Hunting wasn't a problem: what was required here was finding a way to control the drive and the urgency without discouraging the dogs' basic instincts. Without exception, among the twenty or so dogs that I watched, the scent of grouse acted as a powerful stimulant. A dog that had been paddling about fairly aimlessly would stumble over a pair of grouse and it would be as if a light had been switched on in its brain. A circuit would connect and suddenly the dog would begin to hunt with a sense of purpose.

Okay, most of the show dogs didn't begin to match the working strains for pace and drive, but they did begin to hunt, to stretch out over a wider beat and to react with alacrity when they next hit grouse scent. With the trainees split into small groups there was ample scope for each individual to get the specific help and advice they required and when we ended on Sunday afternoon it was clear that everyone felt they had benefitted enormously from the weekend.

counting later, we were on the moors near Stanhope in Weardale for another training weekend, this time organised by Terry Harris and Maria Jacques. The twelve pupils were all from the 'native' breeds including a couple of Irish Red and White setters, but again, there was a mixture of show and working bred dogs and a wide range of experience among both dogs and handlers. Terry started us off with a fascinating insight into his own training methods based around research done in America with their Seeing Eye Dogs, then it was a short drive round to where the morning's training was to take place.

The workers needed to learn about hunting for their handlers

The weather was close to perfect: chilly certainly but bright and sunny with a steady breeze. We went out as a single group with Terry taking one dog/handler combination at a time and doing some individual training, then

coming back to the group for a quick discussion on what we had seen and what work needed to be done to bring dog and handler up to scratch. Again, the show bred dogs generally had to be encouraged to get out and hunt while the workers needed to learn the discipline that would see them hunting for their handlers rather than for themselves.

One of the pupils was a big, strong young pointer who spent his first session doing not very much at a gentle amble. In the afternoon though he looked a little livelier. Then he found a rabbit and suddenly looked a whole lot livelier. It was a very sporting rabbit in hard condition and the pointer went from an amble to a full gallop in a couple of strides. The rabbit did its best to outrun the dog rather than diving into a hole — a fatal mistake as it turned out. Next day though there was no more ambling about when it was the pointer's turn to run: he got out and hunted like a proper birddog should.

As at the Kennel Club event a few weeks earlier it was fascinating to see the difference between dogs bred over many years for work and those bred primarily for show or pets. Although it may be many generations since litters were bred on the basis of the working ability of the dam and sire all the dogs showed that the basic instinct to hunt and to point is still there and only needs exposure to the hill and the grouse to bring it back to the fore. I don't know how many, if any, new converts to shooting and trialling may have been made over the two weekends but I am sure that everyone who attended will have gone away with something useful to ponder.

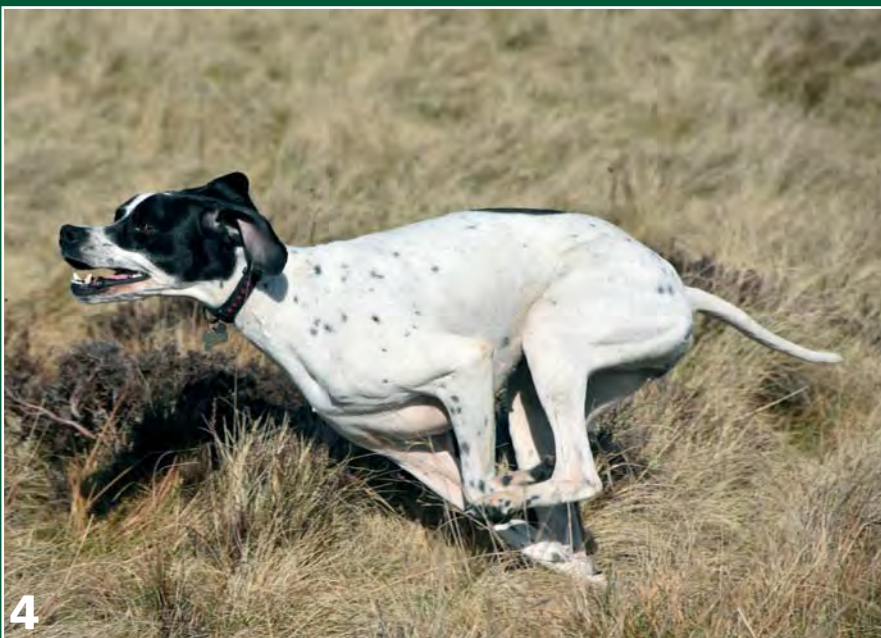


David Wittrick's black pointer showing his pace across the heather.



1. The Trainers: Mick Canham, Lester Anderson, Maureen Nixon, David Hall, Godfrey Card, Julie Organ, Colin Organ, David Winser and Rory Major.
2. Zoe Dicker's Hungarian Wirehaired Vizsla getting out in great style.
3. Nicola Green's Irish red and white setter showed a lot of promise.
4. Jo Blowers pointer Smurf on grouse.
5. The trainees on the moors near Stanhope.





1. Michelle Brady's Gordon setter had no problems getting out and hunting.
2. Georgina Hudson and pointer puppy Maybelle at the Kennel Club training weekend.
3. Working out a point.
4. Sam Anderson-Rowell's Wispa showing a great turn of speed.

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Moose by moonlight



The sound of a moose bashing its way through the forest, heading straight for you is unforgettable.

For four nights, we'd kept our vigil, and though this moose had made plenty of noise while we were waiting, he'd had a cow with him, and had kept to the thick, shrubby woods, though on two or three occasions, he'd come close enough for me to put the rifle to my shoulder.

As the bull's progress brought him

towards us, I slowly knelt down and settled the rifle into my shoulder, my forefinger poised on the safety catch. Judging by the snapping branches and the grunts, he'd emerge very close to our position, which wouldn't give me much time to line up the sights and take my shot.

The Madona region of Latvia, like

the rest of the country, relies heavily on timber, which is the lifeblood of this Baltic state. The region's rolling countryside contains Latvia's highest hill – or mountain, as they call it – though at 360 metres, it's more of a bump. Forestry is interspersed with poor pasture, used to make rough hay. Subsistence farming thrives here: a few

Scouting for animals.





Walking along the edges of woodland while there was still enough light.

milk cows, chickens and pigs are what most families survive on, and jobs in rural areas are hard to come by. Many people head to western Europe in search of employment, and many are enterprising – Uldis Laimiņš, one of the guides, exports second-hand tyres to Africa, produces moonshine to sell and runs a fishing business in Sweden when he's not taking out hunters. Hunting is in his blood, – his father and grandfather both hunted, and according to Uldis, there are few hunters in Latvia who weren't brought up with it.

The European Moose, or elk, (*Alces*

means elk in Latin), is smaller than its American cousin, though still the largest of the European deer species.

Interestingly, the word moose comes from the Algonquin *moosu*, meaning "twig biter" or "he strips off young tree bark." Moose can have two distinctive antler types: palmate or "cervina". The former is probably the more familiar, while the latter have long tines and spike-like architecture. We spotted a couple of moose with the more palmate type of antlers in our Latvian travels, but judging by the trophies in the lodge, the cervina type is common in the

Madona region. The bull I shot was of this type. There are an estimated 21,000 moose in Latvia in 2015 and the species is listed as of Least Concern by The International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Young moose cause the most damage

The hunting in Latvia is entirely controlled by hunting clubs, and is carefully licensed. Every year, between February and April, the 10,000 hectares managed by the club is scouted to perform counts, using tracks and excrement, that will determine the number of tags for moose bulls, cows and calves. As Uldis explained: "The normal amount is for 30% of the population, but if there is a lot of damage, it can be 50%." Young moose cause the most damage – unsurprisingly, a growing animal is going to eat more. The hunting club targets a certain number of immature animals every year to ensure that damage to plantations are kept to a minimum.

We'd spent the first few nights scouting for animals, walking along the edges of woodland while there was still enough light, calling, and listening, then waiting by an area of clear fell. The same procedure was followed in reverse in the mornings, waiting for the light to allow us to move silently over the rough ditches and tree stumps. We'd set out at 17:00 in the evening, returning from a tower at 01:00 to sleep for an hour or two before rising at 04:00 to head out again.

In one of the areas of clearfell, a few large aspen lay uncollected. According to Uldis, Aspen bark is a particular favourite among moose, so a few are left when a block of forestry is felled to tempt in the animals. Low towers were in abundance, most of which were used for driven boar hunting, though currently this area of Latvia is blighted by African swine flu, and driven boar hunting is forbidden. Other quarry in the area includes red stags, roe deer, beaver and lynx, all of which come under the tag system, and the money that is raised



The call starts with a high tone, with each consecutive call a lower tone.

from guiding goes towards the management of the forestry.

The sun was about to rise, but the moon still gave us the full benefit of her light. Silver birch glowed dimly at the edge of the forest, and for once we were lucky with the weather – barely a breath of wind, and though there was a certain amount of cloud, no rain. Uldis gave another series of calls.

Calling and listening

The guides use several methods of calling the moose in closer – Uldis's favourite is certainly not hi-tech – pinching his forefingers over his nose, and cupping his hands over his mouth, he starts with a high tone, with each consecutive call a lower tone. This is one that he uses when he is scouting, but also when he knows there is a bull nearby. The second, which is used for more long-distance calling, is a tin can filled with moss. In the base of the can a hole is drilled and a shoelace is threaded through the hole. The shoelace is made damp, and by running forefinger and thumb along the shoelace, a pretty good



I could see an outline and the greyish legs of the moose.



Uldis and Ivo Švēders, another hunting guide, who helped with the gralloch.



There, not five metres from where he'd been standing, lay the moose.

impression of a moose is created, though, as Uldis explained: "It's not good when they are close. They can tell it isn't real." The final method is simplicity itself. A few dry branches are kept close to hand, and if a moose is nearby, they are snapped over the knee. The moose assumes a rival or a cow is near at hand and comes to investigate.

The bull answered, once, and the snapping sound of branches drew ever closer. From my kneeling position in the low tower, I had enough movement to swivel my rifle should I need to, and as we listened to the bull's approach, I shifted myself to the right and the rifle to the left. The woods from which the bull would emerge were cast in the darkest shadow, and nothing was visible. Then, without warning, I could see an outline, and the greyish legs of the moose against the blackness of the trees. He stood quartering towards me, not more than 75m away. "Wait, wait," Uldis whispered, as he tried to ascertain if this was a moose that could be culled.

"Well? Shall I shoot?" By now we could make out that it was a young animal, with two spikes, and he'd turned broadside.

"Yes. You can shoot," was the whispered reply.

I took a deep breath, slipped the safety over and lined the illuminated reticle up. The rifle barked, and I cycled the bolt, watching the moose move away. I was sure I had found my mark, but as a cloud passed over the moon, we both lost sight of the animal. Before we could despair, however, we heard a crash, followed by a couple of seconds of thrashing. Then all was still.

Not five metres from where he'd been standing, lay the moose

I could see Uldis' smile in the darkness, and he clapped me on the shoulder. "We wait ten minutes. Then we look," he said. Those ten minutes felt like an eternity, but wait we did, and when the time was up, daylight had broken. We headed to the other side of a small brook, 20 or so metres from

where I'd taken the shot. There was no sign of the beast, and no trail. So, back to the point of the shot we went. Scanning the long thick grass, it was hard to make out much, until I walked back towards the low tower. There, not five metres from where he'd been standing, lay the moose. With just two tines, Uldis estimated his age at two years old. He was the ideal cull animal – not only of the age at which they are very destructive to forestry, but his antlers were unlikely to ever become to the full palmated type so typical of moose.

Uldis called Ivo Švēders, another hunting guide, who arrived within 10 minutes to help him with the gralloch – it's a job made infinitely easier with two. The shot had taken off the top of the heart. Of the lungs, there was next to nothing left. The guides propped the carcass up on its back, using sticks, so that it could lose heat quickly, and we waited for the truck to arrive and collect the animal.

Arriving back at the lodge, a toast was obligatory. "It was a good hunt,"

Uldis said, raising a glass of his potent moonshine. "We chased this bull for three days, and then you shot him. It's good."

This hunt was organised directly with the Madona region hunting club, which also arranged accommodation in a basic but comfortable hunting lodge, and meals at the local restaurant. For five days of guided hunting for a cull animal (moose or red stag), full-board accommodation, permit and transfers from Riga airport, the cost €2,000 per person. Medal-class moose bull and red stags cost €400 extra for each medal class, so ranging from €400 for a bronze up to €1,200 for a gold. For more information, contact ivo.sveders@gmail.com.

Kate supports sustainable and ethical hunting worldwide but is opposed to all illegal hunting and condemns any form of hunting that threatens a species or habitat. Before embarking on a hunting expedition, Kate conducts thorough research to ensure that the hunt is fair chase, there is a proper wildlife

management plan in place, the carcass is fully utilised and the local community benefit from the hunt.

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High and low tech equipment - the tin of moss was used by my guide for long distance calling.

Terrier, Lurcher and Whippet Show Roundup

The Sporting Whippet Club NI Dog Show and Race Day, Held at Dunsilly Kennels, Co Antrim Sunday 9th April

With the exception of a cold wind, the rain kept away, and we even had a little sunshine off and on through out the day. From early morning, cars and trailers arrived with families and dogs in tow. I can honestly say this show was one of the biggest and best Whippet Club NI shows I have attended at Dunsilly for many years.

No matter how many shows I go to over the years and there have been many, I still meet and make new friends. That's why I adore this most rewarding job. This first show of the year was the biggest turnout of whippets at Dunsilly I have seen in years.

Show Results:

The Show was a qualifier for the 5 Nations Whippet Champion of Champions at Shanes Castle in June and our first qualifier was Davey Best and his winning Whippet Buddy.

Children's Handling Cody Fyffe with Barney; Eden Douglas with Flynt

Baby Puppy (under 6 months) Michael Quinn with Mick; Gladys Savage with Murphy; Barry Chambers with Alfie

Puppy (6 – 12 months) Janet

Duke with Levi; Tracy Gill with Florence; Dean McStraw with Paps Whippet Dog Davy Best with Buddy; Rea Wilson with Otis; Chontelle McMeekin with Benson Whippet Bitch Ryan Hunter with Dusk; Davy Best with Kelly; Lisa Wilkinson with Sky

Working Whippet Alec Savage with Billy Bob; Bolt Graham Fyffe with Bolt; Finn Michael Quinn with Finn

Veteran Whippet (over 6 years old) Pamela Hunter with Folly; John McStay with Reilly; John Shaw with Blue

Whippet Pairs Finn & Briar handled by Michael Quinn; Ash & Oscar handled by Janet Duke

Best in Show Davy Best with Buddy; Reserve Janet Duke with Levi

Member's Class Winner Colin Tucker with Tia

Racing Results:

K.C. Registered Pups Janet Duke with Levi; Tracy Gill with Florence; Janet Duke with Jack

Grade (A) K.C. Registered Adults Graham Fyffe with Bolt; Pat McGovern with Oli; Janet Duke with Oscar; 4th Susan McCann with Seabass

Grade (B) K.C. Registered Adults Kirsty Fyffe with Flynt; Pat McGovern with Charley; Michael Quinn with Finn

Grade (C) K.C. Registered Adults Tracy Gill with Ash; Roy

Hill with Linnet; Paul Morrison with Sonny

K.C. Registered Veterans (6 years +) David Campbell with Bobby; Janet Duke with Finlay; Tracy Gill with Flash

Non Registered Pups Dean Spence with Rinty

Grade (A) Non Registered Adults Alec Savage with Billy Bob; Gabriele Frank with Dash

Grade (B) Non Registered Adults David Fyffe with Roxy; Barry Chambers with Joey

Grade (C) Non Registered Adults Kirsty Fyffe with Ollie; Sam White with Willie; Keith with Jade

Non Registered Veterans (6 years +) Graham Fyffe with Kela

Many thanks to Mr Pat McGovern, who travelled from Scotland to judge at this event. Thanks are also due to our Chairman Kirsty Fyffe, Vice Chairman John Mc Stay, Racing Manager David Campbell, Secretary Janet Duke, Treasurer Chontelle Mc Meekan and our hard working committee. Without all your teamwork, drive and dedication this day would not of been possible.

Tommy Cullen's Dog Show and Race Day, Baltinglass, Co Wicklow Sunday 2nd April

Another record crowd this year

Sporting Whippet Club NI



(Left) Baby Puppy under 6 month - Michael Quinn with Mick; Murphy Gladys Savage; Barry Chambers with Alfie.



Best in Show - Davy Best with Buddy; Reserve Best in Show; Janet Duke with Levi.



Whippet Dog - Davy Best with Buddy; Rea Wilson with Otis; Chontelle McMeekan with Benson.



(Right) Veteran Whippet over 6 years old - Pamela Hunter with Folly; John McStay with Reilly; John Shaw with Blue.

and by midday the field was full to capacity. It was evident a lot of hard work and muscle went into this show and show ground, as the field was in mint condition. New all weather entrance paths were laid since last year, show rings well spaced out, and the racetrack was in immaculate condition.

In the show ring there were 20 to 25 dogs in each class. This year I noticed a great mix of top quality dogs in all categories. It was nice to see the strong dogs included this year, and hopefully next year they might have a ring of their own.

Show results:

Children's Handling Class Chloe Crosby with Tipsy

Ferretts Michael Quinn with Fred; Michael Quinn with Sandy

Gain Irish Open Overall Show Champion Whippet Karen Cummins with Maisie; Reserve Champion Whippet John Shaw with Buggy; Barry Chambers with Ruby

Gain Irish Open Overall Show Champion Lurcher Lisa Beggs with Joker; Reserve Champion Lurcher, Tracy Crosbie with Poacher; Maurice McDowell

Gain Irish Open Overall Show Champion Terrier Gary Healy with

Bart; Reserve Dessie Mackin; Gerry Maxwell

Overall Strong Dog Champion Paddy Elliman with Toro

Overall Show Champion and Best in Show Gary Healy with Bart; Reserve Best in Show

Lisa Beggs with Joker; Karen Cummins with Maisie

Racing Results:

Bull Cross Peter Jones with Zara Sean Mc Gee with Razor; Chris McCabe with Bow

Under 23" Working Charlene Rafferty with Pixie; Johnny Connors with Merle; Shane Ennis

Carnew Show



Reserve Champion Terrier Shane Gilmartin with Treacle.



Overall Champion Whippet Jonter Campbell with Bobby Reserve Kirsty Fyffe with Flynt.



Overall Champion Terrier and Overall Best in Show Brian McCullough

with Sam

Under 23" Elite Steven Mc Grath with Meg; Corey Byrne with Lexy; Jamie Moore with Cissy

Hairy Lurcher Eddie Kane with Scooter; Fran Kenny with Coors Light; Fran Kenny with Puncture

Over 23" Elite Michael Mc Grath with Tucker; Nicole Smith



Overall Champion Lurcher Lisa Beggs with Joker.

with Prince; David Nolan with Missy

Under 21" 1st Deirdre Mc Coy with Taylor; John O' Connor with Jess; Brian Grady with Socks

Whippet Racing Gladys and Alec Savage with Billy Bob; Charlene Rafferty with Zio; Charlene Rafferty with Roxy

Congratulations to all the worthy winners and many thanks to the judges on the day: Ferrets Bradley Crosby; Children's Handling Class Margaret Mc Stay; Lurchers Sean O' Keefe and Mark Delaney; Terriers and Strong Dogs Keith Murphy; Whippets Jim Dalton. I must not forget the man at the helm of this brilliant show day Tommy Cullen, who with his family and brilliant band of helpers made everybody so welcome.

Carnew Charity Dog Show and Race Day, Sunday 23rd April

Carnew is a market town situated in the extreme south of County Wicklow, hugging the borders of the beautiful Slaney Valley. This was the venue for Carnew Charity Dog Show and Race Day. By 12.30 the cars were three deep in the field, signalling the popularity of this well organized Charity Show. The weather was kind to us, although it got cloudy and a little cold late on in the afternoon.

Show Results:

Overall Champion Ferret Craig Murphy with Neddy; Reserve Rose Mc Coy with Sansa

Lurchers Overall Champion Lurcher Lisa Beggs with Joker; Reserve John Sheen

Whippets Overall Champion Whippet Jonter Campbell with Bobby; Reserve Kirsty Fyffe with Flynt

Overall Champion Terrier Brian McCullough; Reserve Shane Gilmartin with Treacle

Irish Breed Champion Jenny O Meara with Yeats; Reserve Jenny O Meara with Clara.

Strong Dog Champion Gerard Crotty; Reserve Gerard Crotty

Champion Hound Johnny Dicker Overall Best in Show and Show

Champion Brian Mc Cullough;
Reserve Lisa Beggs with Joker

Racing Results:

Prior to the showing, the Master McGrath and Mick the Millar qualifiers were run. The buzz around that race course was just and a treat to listen too. As the qualifiers came home to the finishing line, the roar of excitement echoed among the Wicklow Hills. Some fine dogs were entered and the qualifiers were announced as follows:

Master McGrath Gary Smith with Fergie

Mick the Miller Fran Kenny Eddie Kane

Terrier Racing Jenny O Meara with Peanut

Elites Charlene Rafferty

Non Elites Under 23" 1st Rose Mc Coy with Kyro Star

Under 21" 1st Deirdre McCoy with Taylor; Charlene Rafferty

Hairy dogs Fran Kenny; Paddy McGrath

Whippet Alec Savage with Billy Bob; Charlene Rafferty with Zio Bull Cross Tommy Cullen; Jed Donagh

Many thanks the judges for a job well done: Whippets Karen Cummins; Terriers Gary Healey; Pets Jade Dunphy; Lurchers John Moriarty; Lurchers Paul Deasey; Hounds Derek O Connor; Strong Dogs Rob Hicks; and Ferrets David Nolan. Many thanks as well to Tracy and Alan Crosbie who made us all so welcome to the show.

AMAZING AMOUNT OF €3497 RAISED FOR CHARITY BY SHOW

The icing on the cake was the news that €3497 was made for charity from the proceeds of the show and will be presented to the St Vincent De Paul very shortly. Absolutely brilliant.

Tommy Cullen's Show



Overall Champion Whippet - Karen Cummins with Maisie.



Mickey Quinn with his winning Lurcher Hoss.



Overall Champion Lurcher - Lisa Beggs with Joker.



Paul McPartland showing Stephen Wilson's winning Terrier at Tommy Cullen's Show.



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NOW STOCKING





Country Chat

Sally and Heidi on point.

This time, a friendly guard dog comes home, there's an X-rated pigeon flapper and Billy's team get a 'hamburger moment' on the coast.

As I have often said before in previous articles, I believe intelligent folk have a tendency to listen more than they talk and, at the risk of stating the obvious, I could easily waffle from breakfast time to bed time, but only a small fraction of it actually makes any sense.

Many years ago my friend John and I were sitting in his estate car, sharing a pair of 'binos.' We were watching a wheat stubble field that was grey with pigeons. There appeared to be two flight lines to the field, some were flying straight into the field to join their mates, while others were lighting into a long belt of ash trees that ran along the bottom of the field. Now there were three pluses and two negatives to our situation. We were on the go early that day, we had plenty of cartridges and we had pigeon decoys with us. But we didn't know who owned the field and even if we found out who owned it, would they gave us permission to shoot pigeons on it, especially as the grain had already been harvested from it?

As we sat pondering the problem, a green estate car was making its way down the lane towards the field.

"Right away you go" says I, with all the authority of a troop commander.

"Go where?" replied John, as he

trained the glasses on the car rumbling down the lane.

"Down the lane, after the car," says I, putting on my seat belt and at the same time pushing my body towards the windscreen.

"To do what?" asks John, who didn't require a lot of intellect to be thinking ahead of me.

"I will think of something when we get there," said I.

Now that he did believe!

The green estate car stopped at the entrance to the field gate and the sole body behind the steering wheel had his eyes fixed on his rear view mirror, watching us coming down the lane after him. "Go and see who he is" demands John, putting down his window.

I hopped out with all the enthusiasm of a kid in a sweet shop, the driver was engrossed with a load of papers on his lap. Grinning, I bent down and tapped the drivers window, he looked at me for what seemed like ages, then he put the ignition on and put the window down.

"Yes, can I help you"?

"Sorry for disturbing you, but my friend and myself were looking to know who owned the field."

"I do and no you can't shoot the pigeons, they are doing no harm" he replied.

Out of the corner of my eye I could see John hanging out of the window, trying to catch a snippet of the conversation. Ten minutes later I hopped back into my friends car.

"Well"?

"He is a Vet, and he owns the field and he said no," said I, milking the situation.

"It took you ten minutes to find that out" replied John looking annoyed.

"Yes, thats what he said at first, but I waffled on and finally I told him, that if we are back in the field tomorrow we will be trespassing, so he laughed, and said ok."

We waited until the car in front reversed back into another open field. "Right lets go" said John switching on the engine.

Our pigeon flapper was like something from the Exorcist

We chose the far corner of the field, where the two hedge lines met, I built a hide that the late Archie Coates would have been proud of, John put out a huge array of decoys, including lofters and some sort of battery operated contraption that resembled a pigeon, it flapped its wings in a very slow motion, so slow in fact, that its purpose escaped me, it could also rotate its head right



Heidi on point backed by Jack and Jill. around, like something out of the 'Exorcist.'

"Is it supposed to do that" I asked later, as we sat on our little drums peeping through the vegetation, "I think its head is broken," whispered John.

We sat until twelve noon and not a pigeon came near us let alone the field.

"If I am on this field tomorrow you can shoot me," grumbled John as we lifted the decoys.

A good friend from up the country, also called John, was on the phone the other day. Many years ago he had brought me a six month old German Shepherd to train for him. At the time he was waxing lyrical about the young dog and there was barely a week went by that he didn't ring and ask about Max.

But on the week that Max was due to go home, I couldn't get him on the house phone or the mobile phone. Then a week or two later his wife phoned and asked me to re-home the dog, just like that.

I waited another few weeks, wondering what to do, when out of the blue John rang me, he had hurt his back and may have difficulty walking again hence the re-homing request. I didn't pursue the matter, as it must have been a very difficult decision, not to mention an emotional one, for him to make.

A year or so later, John contacted me again and asked me if I would look out for a young German Shepherd for him and as luck would have it, a young friend living up the road from me, asked me a few days previously if I could re-home his dog for him, as working long hours meant that he didn't have the time to look after him properly. That dog was

Max and John was ecstatic when I told him, and just couldn't believe it. I told Gary who was looking for Max to be rehomed and he too was delighted at the outcome. I told him that John would be up some evening to pick Max up, but John in his enthusiasm turned up at my door the very next day and who could blame the cratur.

When we went around to Gary's home a short distance away, Max was running free in an enclosed garden. I shouted to Max through the high wire fence, and of course he did what it says on the tin, (well the fence really where the notice read 'Beware of the Guard dog') and started barking.

"Even if we were able to get him out John, he may not be easy to approach anyway, tell you what, why don't you shout over to him", I said. John went over to the fence and spoke to Max, who dropped his ears and started to wag his tail. I was completely dumbfounded, this was well over a year from leaving John at six months. John climbed the fence, lifted the young dog, who must have weighed at least 35kg, scrambled to the top of the fence and pushed him back over to me. Fifteen minutes later, it was a happy family that left my

premises with John in the back seat along with Max.

The coastal burger count drops

Finally, one fine evening last year, during the summer months, I took my eight dogs to Murlough beach, which lies between Dundrum and Newcastle, County Down. As there were many people out that evening I decided instead to walk the lane that runs along the back of the bay and avoid the beach altogether. The last time I walked the lane, there was no more than a few houses scattered along it, but now big houses with well kept gardens ran along the best part of it, and it seemed on that particular evening that most of the occupants were having barbecues. If I couldn't see them I could most certainly smell them! Trying to avoid staring in any one direction, I ploughed on trying to keep the team focused, which was a task in itself as I was also on the phone to a friend at the same time.

When I got to a bend in the lane I stopped to do a head count. Not one, and I repeat, not one of the team were present, having no doubt sneaked off at various stages along the lane to check out several of the barbecues. I had no choice but to turn back, blowing recall on the whistle as I went back up the lane, picking up the absentees as I went along. And there was Heidi sitting between two young ladies having a private chat, outside a summer house enjoying a bit of sausage no less. Goodness only knows what the rest got up to on that wee walk. But I believe the burger count may have dropped just a little for that part of the coast.



Tia enjoying retirement.

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F.I.S.S.T.A.

WILD SALMON AND SEATROUT NEED HELP TO MULTIPLY NOW

As the season livens up, FISSTA is in close consultation with our international NGO colleagues as we set out our plans and strategy for the annual June NASCO conference where the nineteen salmon countries discuss the future of the wild Atlantic salmon. The Department of Natural Resources have submitted their Annual Progress Report which updates their Implementation Plan and it is interesting to note the omissions as well as what was

included in the new document.

Protection against illegal fishing is a high priority in Ireland and the state invests a considerable amount of resources on these activities (Fishery Inspectors, Navy, Garda etc). More outreach to local communities is planned to bring the problems of poaching as a major impediment to stock recovery into focus.

IFI claim that 188,404 fishery staff man hours were spent on protecting

Ireland's fishing resource in 2016.

31,180 protection patrols were carried out using different methods on lakes, rivers, estuaries and at sea. This protection was largely related to salmon but fishery patrols were also targeted at other fish species. In total, 301 nets were seized measuring 14,782 metres and 160 Fixed Charge Notices were issued for Fishery Offences in 2016. There were 66 prosecutions in 2016, but it is acknowledged that much more can be done to eradicate the increase in poaching that is on the increase.

URGENT CRISIS - Withdrawal of 2010 Fisheries Act

In spring 2017, Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) were informed by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCAE) that, following legal advice received by the Department, IFI does not have explicit powers to prosecute offences under the Fisheries Acts. It became apparent that the powers of the predecessors to IFI (the Central and Regional Fisheries Boards) to prosecute fisheries offences were not



FISSTA continue to campaign for the removal of man made barriers to fish migration such as the cement construction in this picture on a salmonid river.

transferred into the 2010 Fisheries Act that established IFI. The DCCAE has commenced drafting amending legislation to urgently rectify this issue. Judgements stand in all cases which have already gone through the courts and are outside the appeal period. However, initiated cases, cases currently under appeal and those awaiting sentencing will likely be withdrawn and this may affect a currently unknown number of the prosecutions as reported above for 2016. It is important to note, that all current provisions and offences of the Inland Fisheries Acts continue to be in full force and effect and those found in contravention of the acts in the interim period can be prosecuted once the amending legislation is in place.

POSSIBLE MOVE TO E-LICENSING

Since FISSTA is responsible for a high degree of convictions in the courts from our reports and observations it would be normal for IFI to consult and discuss new plans for an e-license before one was introduced. Sadly, the Irish anglers apparently do not figure in the grand scheme of the IFI plans.

Extract from the APR: "IFI is

actively promoting the returns of accurate information from anglers through the national carcass tagging and logbook scheme. This scheme facilitates the identification of inaccurate information and allows some follow-up to redress the issue. Move towards electronic Salmon licences."

WATER QUALITY

Ireland faces major challenges to achieve water quality targets set for 2021 and 2027 as required by the WFD. The WFD target for 2015 has not been met. In advance of publishing the official Water Quality in Ireland report, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have reported preliminary water quality results in Ireland for the period 2013-2015 in their latest State of the Environment report. These results indicate that there has been "no overall improvement in water quality over the first river basin cycle (2009-2015). The target of a 13.6% improvement in the ecological status of surface waters (from the 2009 baseline) by 2015 was not achieved. Water quality improvements are required at approximately 50% of rivers, lakes and estuaries that are impacted by pollution or other

pressures." The main suspected cause of pollution in rivers is from agricultural sources, accounting for 53% of cases.

SALMON FARM MANAGEMENT

Transfer and increases in incidence of diseases Early harvesting of farmed salmon where gill damage has been recorded is effective in preventing further outbreaks. See section 4.7 – improved treatments and investment in R&D will result in greater control of gill related disorders in 2013. All aquaculture operators in Ireland comply with Council Directive 2006/88/EC on animal health requirements for aquaculture animals and products thereof, and on the prevention and control of certain diseases in aquatic animals.

Under this legislation, each farm is required to put in place appropriate biosecurity measures to prevent disease incursion and disease spread. They are also required to investigate all increased mortality with their private veterinarian and to notify the Competent Authority where the presence of a listed disease is suspected or confirmed. Compliance with this legislation is assessed during an annual audit carried out by the official services. In addition to these mandatory measures, all farms in Ireland voluntarily comply with a Fish Health Code of Practice and the Farmed Salmonid Health Handbook, in order to minimise and control the number outbreaks of non-listed diseases on Irish farms.

There were no outbreaks of listed diseases in Ireland in 2016. All salmon farms were inspected under Council Directive 2006/88/EC and only minor non-compliances were observed. A combination of good biosecurity measures, vaccination, early veterinary intervention and expedient treatments, ensured that outbreaks of non-listed diseases were kept to a minimum during 2016. Mortalities caused by environmental



Aodh Mac Ruairi leads a community protest of over 400 people on the beaches of Carrickfinn and Ranafast in the Upper Rosses in Donegal against the oyster licenses that will lead to destruction not development.

changes such as phytoplankton blooms or jellyfish swarms did however, cause problems on certain sites during the year.

NO INFORMATION ON MINISTERIAL REVIEW - ONLY INTERNAL ONE.

The serious omission uncovered by FISSTA have learned of an internal IFI review is underway to examine salmon policy. The CEO of IFI assures us 'a Board committee is conducting the review is at the early stages of this process and so it is an internal matter for now but when /if we do widen the scope of involvement I would anticipate that we would be consulting with key stakeholders, seeking inputs.' This means that there are two reviews underway, one on Catch and Release instigated by the Minister of State, Sean Kyne TD and another by the CEO of IFI into salmon policy.

'Minister Orders review of Catch and Release Element of Fisheries Management Policy.'

The Minister has directed that Inland Fisheries Ireland IFI carry out a full review of the Catch and Release element of fisheries management policy ahead of the 2018 season. He said, "Ireland has been managing fisheries in accordance with the scientific advice

since 2006 and that will continue. However, I am keen that after 10 years, the catch and release element of the policy is examined to explore whether changes might actually benefit the management of our fisheries.'

We did contact Minister Kyne directly in mid February and we gathered that IFI were to contribute to the review and that is why we sought your advice and direction this week.

It would have been relevant that this new review (and also the new IFI internal review) would have been included in the Annual Progress Report of the Implementation Plan CN(17)37 to NASCO as a "major new initiative". The failure to transfer powers into the 2010 Fisheries Act was cited and rightly so on page 4 and 5 as a new factor impacting on the IP which Nasco will consider and review in June.

Our National Executive Council awaits further information and clarification so that the 2018 season will hopefully see more rivers open, albeit catch and release in certain circumstances.

END OF OPEN SEA SALMON FARMS IN NORWAY AND IRELAND?

FISSTA is long founding members

and long serving supporters of the NASF or North Atlantic Salmon Fund under the Icelandic Chairman Orri Vigfusson. This International GROUP of NASF members have along with completing agreements on the buyout of netting deals

have been working towards sustainability of salmon farming for many years.

Their most recent meeting took place in Norway in early May to review the world's status of salmon farming. This influential lobbying and campaigning group studies salmon farming practices around the world and ways to make the industry greener, safer and sustainable. During its existence the group has explored innovations in production methods, feed and where merited, have promoted our approved model of land-based fish farms and closed containment practices.

Between 15 and 20 closed containment systems in the sea are in operation in various fjords in Norway. Some have been operating for up to three years, some are well into development and some are in their initial developments. All have the same objective, which is to make sure there is no waste material or contaminants polluting the environment, there are no parasites endangering the pristine waters and there is no spreading of disease, medicine or pathogens. Lastly, closed containment facilities ensure there are no escapee salmon to cause genetic damage to wild salmon in rivers.

The NASF group attended the 10th annual Hardangersfjord seminar on fish farming where Mr. Stein Lier-Hansen, CEO of Norsk Industry, delivered the keynote address. His principal message was to announce a stop to all further open-sea salmon farming in Norway as that industry is now outdated because it has not been able to resolve the main negative effects it has on the environment.

Mr Alf-Helga Aarskog, CEO of Marine Harvest said his company was the world leading producer of farmed salmon in 24 countries and selling to over 100 markets acknowledged and are cooperating with the many changes underway as announced by Norsk Industry for a



Making a point - Orri Vigfusson, Chairman, North Atlantic Salmon Fund and undisputed Leader of Wild Atlantic Salmon, with Alf Arne Aarskog, Chief Executive Officer Marine Harvest, at Bergen Salmon Conference.

cleaner industry (sealice free by 2027) and marine environment.

Norsk Industry - The Federation of Norwegian Industries - is Norway's largest and most influential NN institution and covers 2,400 member companies with approximately 126,500 employees and an annual turnover of NOK 600 billion, means it influences and develops national government policies. Their industries cover oil, gas, aluminium, aquaculture, biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, chemical, electricity, machine and hardware to name just a few. Among individual members are Norsk Hydro, Aker, Statoil and Marine Harvest. Norsk Industry aims to continue the development of the aquaculture industry but only in a completely safe and sustainable way.

NASF outlined their clean up campaigns at their meetings with the main drivers of the salmon farming industry and gave them a very constructive and clear message to speed the change from open netcage to closed containment for to protect our wild Atlantic salmon immediately. How exactly this translates into action in Ireland is not known as yet, but each country will be demanding the same standards as laid down by the parent company in Norway. So, we live in hope that our marine environment will become cleaner and sealice free for our wild migrating smolts to avoid infestation in the future.

'Irish Salmon - Lost at Sea' by Andrew McDonnell

Andrew Mc Donnell is a Transition Year Student from County Louth. He is a keen salmon and seatrout angler and has fished many Irish rivers to date. He hopes to pursue a career in fishery management and FISSTA felt that readers would be interested in his views.

I read in this magazine about an e-booklet on angling catches, authored by fellow County Louth angler



This fine salmon was caught by Andrew Mc Donnell on the Errigal stretch of the Glen River, Donegal.

Ronan Gormley, who has been a scientist all his life. It summarised the content of an angling diary for more than 60 years starting in 1952. His decision to publish this ebooklet was twofold. Firstly, to inspire young anglers like me to keep a diary of record to remind us of the special days, and secondly, to record the decline in fish size and numbers with a view of halting the decline. It makes for fascinating reading which I would highly recommend and inspired me to write this short article so others of my age can take up angling with a view to improving the future stocks and habitat.

I caught my first salmon when I was six years old, or you could say it caught me as I have been longing to catch more ever since. I am now fifteen, so I now have nine years salmon fishing under my belt. However, little did I realise that when I landed my first salmon, I was fishing in the end of the era of the great salmon runs of the River Finn

on the Loughs Agency waters of County Donegal.

The salmon numbers in our rivers have dropped dramatically in recent years. Many of Ireland's greatest salmon rivers have gone catch and release or even closed altogether as a result of this decline in numbers. An example being the same River Finn, which went catch and release in the 2010 season due to the steep decline of numbers of fish running. Many other rivers in Ireland have felt the effects of this demise of salmon runs. There are different factors affecting different rivers, but they all have one thing in common, even the smallest of changes in the ecosystem could be enough to push fish population over the edge.

A great example of a change of ecosystem having disastrous effects on salmon runs is my local River Fane in County Louth. This river was the jewel of the crown for rivers because it had one of the most prolific stocks of salmon on the entire

east coast of Ireland. It was not uncommon to see exceptional runs as recent as a decade ago. I recall my uncle telling me that while he was working in a field along the river bank in mid-November, he could not believe his eyes when he saw big salmon jumping every time he looked down at the water.

During last year's season, I fished on the river from the beginning of July to the middle of October and not once did I see a single salmon nor did I hear of one being caught. I believe this is the result of a simple change of the ecosystem because at the source of the river, which is lough Muckno, there is a small dam holding the water back so it then can be pumped into the Dundalk water system. So while all other rivers in the country are in flood after rain the flood water of the Fane is held back, making the water flow much slower. Salmon smolts cannot survive in these conditions, leading to very disappointing runs of salmon returning to the river.

On the west coast of Ireland, a different type of problem has emerged. This problem is the siting of numerous salmon cages situated just outside the estuaries of rivers on the migratory route of the salmon smolts, travelling to the large feeding grounds of Greenland. This is a major issue because of the fact that these salmon farms produce millions of sea lice that will latch on and infest any

unsuspecting salmon smolt passing by.

Since the salmon smolts are so small it only takes a handful of sea lice to kill an infested smolt. So a large percentage of the smolts who manage to make it to sea are just ending up being picked off by these sea lice. Our east coast fish are also being hit with these problems, not because of Irish fish farms, but fish farms in their migratory channel on the west coast of Scotland. This very issue is affecting the smolts of the West Coast Scottish Rivers as their salmon smolts are also being infested by these sea lice. This is contrary to the east coast Rivers of Scotland which are still holding strong because of the lack of salmon farms on the east coast, the river Thurso for example, which exit to sea at the very north of Scotland. It's getting better catch returns every year; in fact, according to reports; catches in the last year have been the best on record on the river. This is because the salmon smolts of the Thurso river have a direct path to the feeding grounds in Norway and are unaffected by the sea lice of salmon farms because there are very few salmon farms on the East coast of Scotland and this is the same with other west coast Scottish rivers.

This has raised the question, what can be done to eradicate this problem? Some have proposed that the salmon farms be put on land and simply pump water from the sea into

the tanks. I think this is a great idea because it will get rid of the threat of sea lice and give the fish a chance to migrate and return to the rivers in good health. I hope action will be taken to stop this problem very soon because if things keep going the way they are, we fishermen, will have to find a new hobby like golf, and that is a depressing thought.

However, it is not all doom and gloom as there is a brighter side to the story because water quality has never been as good in our Irish rivers and our sea trout are making a comeback like on the river Glen in County Donegal. Fortunately, the river has been getting runs of thousands of sea trout in the past couple of years ranging anywhere from half a pound to 2 pounds and sea trout of even 3 pounds are being caught.

Our East Coast Rivers are getting better and better, so I believe that, if something is done about the salmon farms at sea, like having them put on land, this could stop the decline of salmon runs and might even return them to being as good as they were just 20 years ago when Professor Ronan Gormley recorded 62 fish of four species for 1997. For the best free angling read click on the link below - then email Ronan on what you think. [http://researchrepository.ucd.ie/bitstream/handle/10197/6550/ANGLING%20DIARY%20%20RONA N.pdf?sequence=2](http://researchrepository.ucd.ie/bitstream/handle/10197/6550/ANGLING%20DIARY%20%20RONA%20N.pdf?sequence=2)



This Group of Donegal Anglers were jubilant on April 1st opening day on the Gweebarra River when their protest at a takeover of their river was given an encouraging support when over 150 court summonses were dismissed.

Inland Fisheries



Angling Sponsorship Scheme

Inland Fisheries Ireland has announced the recipients of its 2017 Sponsorship Scheme which supports angling events and initiatives across the country. The scheme will support 79 initiatives to the overall tune of €30,000 with a focus on those which help grow Ireland's angling tourism product and support novice anglers.

This year, Inland Fisheries Ireland Sponsorship Scheme will support:

- 19 international angling events which will be held in Ireland
- 15 Irish angling teams travelling overseas to international angling events
- 28 Coaching/ Juvenile events aimed at novice and young anglers
- 16 national angling events held in Ireland for domestic participants
- 1 seminar which will help the exchange of information, ideas and practical experiences on fisheries management

The angling groups, located in 19 counties across the country, will be supported through financial aid and where possible, through resource support from Inland Fisheries Ireland staff members. The Sponsorship Scheme was announced in December with applications invited from anglers, angling clubs and organisations nationwide. In total, there were over 100 applications to this year's fund.

Suzanne Campion of Inland Fisheries Ireland said: "We have a unique opportunity in Ireland when it comes to angling as a result of our beautiful landscapes and wild fish populations. This is coupled with a large number of engaged angling groups across the country. We are committed to supporting those groups in helping to increase participation in angling and to position Ireland as a premier national and international angling destination. This will grow the recreational availability and contribution of angling

to communities across Ireland and will also support businesses and jobs in rural communities. "

Inland Fisheries Ireland's National Strategy for Angling Development aims to increase overseas angling visits from 163,000 in 2015 to 173,000 and increase domestic participation of 273,000 anglers annually by 0.5%. Angling in Ireland is currently worth €836 million to Ireland's economy annually, supporting upwards of 11,000 jobs. If increase in participation is realised, angling could bring in an additional €53 million annually and support 18,000 jobs. For more info : www.fisheriesireland.ie/Angling-Information/sponsorship-programme.html

Follow Ireland's juvenile salmon numbers through new online tool

Inland Fisheries Ireland has launched the SMOLTRACK project in Ireland which gives the public the opportunity to follow the numbers of juvenile salmon making their journey down the River Erriff - the National Salmonid Index Catchment (NSIC).

The project is running in five other locations in Europe and will help determine the survival of young salmon during their migration.

The EU funded NASCO project will see Inland Fisheries Ireland work alongside partners in Northern Ireland (River Bush), England (River Tamar), Spain (River Ulla and River Tea) and Denmark (River Skjern) in rolling out a counting, tagging and tracking system. Traps are used to catch migrating salmon smolts for tagging before releasing them to continue their migration journey. In order to provide stakeholders with the opportunity to follow and compare the migration timing of smolts in several countries, the daily numbers of salmon smolts counted in each system is uploaded for

online viewing.

In Ireland, tagging is being carried out on salmon smolts from the Black River, a tributary of the River Erriff (NSIC), which flows through County Mayo. The Erriff is one of the premier salmon fishing rivers in Ireland and its smolt run typically occurs over six weeks during April and May. This year, the smolt run commenced on the river in April with 289 salmon smolts counted on the system to date.

The salmon smolts are tagged with miniature acoustic transmitters and their subsequent migration is followed via acoustic listening stations situated at various locations. This information will help scientists to understand the survival rates of salmon smolts during their migration through the lower parts of rivers, estuaries and coastal areas, in addition to providing data on smolt run timing and migration behavior. The project will provide new data which will inform future salmon management and conservation work.

Inland Fisheries Ireland said that this is an exciting project which will allow us to gather new information around the survival and timing of salmon smolts journeying seaward through the River Erriff, and into and through inshore coastal waters. Daily smolt counts will be uploaded onto an online monitoring tool which is available to all for viewing. Ultimately, this information will inform our work in the area of salmon conservation which will prove invaluable to Ireland's fisheries resource in the long term."



A salmon smolt.

To view the online smolt tool for the River Erriff and for more information about Inland Fisheries Ireland, visit: <http://www.fisheriesireland.ie/Fisheries-Research/smoltrack-project.html>

New study finds that sea lice from salmon farms can cause a 50% reduction in runs of wild Atlantic salmon.

A new study used 30 years of data from the Erriff river (National Salmonid Index Catchment) in the West of Ireland to evaluate the effect of sea lice from salmon aquaculture on wild Atlantic salmon.

Juvenile salmon migrating to sea can become infected with sea lice from salmon farms and suffer increased mortality soon after leaving the coast.

“Quantifying the contribution of sea lice from aquaculture to declining annual returns in a wild Atlantic salmon population” examined sea lice production from salmon farming in Killary Harbour and its effect on the

return of wild salmon to the Erriff river, at the head of the harbour, the following year. Results indicate that returns of wild adult salmon can be reduced by more than 50% in years following high lice levels on nearby salmon farms during the smolt out-migration.

Sea lice from salmon farming have long been implicated in the collapse of sea trout stocks along the west coast of Ireland. However, this new study, by Dr Samuel Shephard and Dr Paddy Gargan from IFI is the first to clearly demonstrate significant losses of wild Atlantic salmon due to infestation with sea lice from salmon farms.

Dr Shephard stated: “There has been a lot of discussion as to the importance of the sea lice impact in the context of environmental variation and changing ocean conditions. We find that the predicted 50% reduction in 1SW salmon returns following a high lice year is greater than the average year-to-year variation attributable to environmental effects.”

Results suggest that Erriff salmon returns could now be twice as large as without observed anthropogenic lice impacts, but would probably show a similar long-term decline. Increased mortality of wild salmon due to the impact of sea lice from salmon farming can result in salmon stocks not reaching spawning targets or not being at favourable conservation status as required under the EU Habitats Directive. It is critical therefore that sea lice levels are maintained at a very low level on farmed salmon in spring and where this has not been achieved that farmed fish are harvested before the wild salmon smolt migration period.

The authors conclude that many Atlantic salmon populations are already under pressure from (possibly climate-mediated) reductions in marine survival. The addition of significant lice-related mortality during the coastal stage of smolt out-migration could be critical. Full report: <http://www.int-res.com/abstracts/aei/v9/p181-192/>.

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The Dance of the Mayfly



Spent Gnat flyfishing is an exciting time for anglers.

The glowing embers of the birch wood spark and crackle as juices from Cavan's finest sirloin fizzle through the griddle, sending little plumes of smoke up through the leafy glade.

Wines of a certain vintage are produced to complement the fine fare and this trip has an air of celebration about it. We are gathered on the shore of Lough Sheelin to celebrate the return of the Mayfly once again. There are tall stories and great banter, a meeting of old friends and some new acquaintances. The mood is good, for this is a special time, anticipated through the long dark days of winter. Anglers have come from far and wide to gather on the shores of Ireland's great loughs to ply their craft on the water and enjoy this unique occasion.

As we sit around the fire our spirits are raised even higher because peering through eyes stinging from the wood smoke there are clouds of Mayfly above us in the clearing, their wings glittering in the shafts of sunlight breaking through the branches, as they rise and fall in their nuptial dancing ritual, a sight to gladden the heart of any angler.

The morning had dawned damp and breezy, a south westerly pushing banks of cloud across the lough, good

conditions for the wet fly and we didn't linger over breakfast in Innyside Lodge in Finea. In these conditions it pays to be out on the water to make the best of it as the weather can change so quickly.

There was much hustle and bustle on the little wooden pier and soon the boats were chugging up the river to the huge expanse of the lough, passing the nesting pair of swans, patient herons and colourful kingfishers. As we break through the veil of rushes at the head of the river we can see a nice rolling wave across the lough, grand conditions for a wet fly.

The Mayfly hatch starts up the lough's northern end, so it's full throttle past Watty's Rock and through Kelly's Bay, eyes scouring the water for signs of hatching Mayfly. In the distance I spot the gulls and swallows working the shore just off a reed bed. They've already found the fly and we make our way over but cut the engine well short of the activity and pull closer on the oars to see what's happening.

Pulling up quietly against lee of the

reed bed, we scan the water below us. One final check on the tackle, knots tested — no tangles — we set off on a drift to take us over the shallows and out along the ledge that drops off into deeper water, a contour where past experience tells me that trout often patrol.

A wild commotion in front of the boat

As we near the area there are signs of feeding trout, a little splash, a bulge or flat in the trough of a wave, a golden glint in the side of a wave or the glimpse of a tail or fin cutting through the water. It never ceases to amaze me how quietly a trout can intercept a fly from the surface in a wave, especially the larger specimens and that's exactly how the first fish came. My boat partner's retrieve had almost finished and, as he lifted the flies from the water to recast, a bulge appeared in the water in front of the boat and his line stopped solid. Then there was a wild commotion in front of the boat as a lovely trout



Mayfly time provides opportunities to catch quality trout.

thrashed about before throwing the hook and disappearing into the depths. There had been no chance to strike or set the hook and we just had to watch as the thick dark back and spotted tail cruised away.

We pulled back up to the top of the drift to regroup and check the casts again and then set off, this time drifting slightly further out and the duns (green fly or emergent Mayfly) were coming off in numbers now, struggling on the water, sailing past us on the breeze. We picked up some lovely Irish brown trout by pulling our traditional wet flies through that rolling wave. There were slashing rises, quiet takes, abortive pulls and even some of those lovely moments when a beautiful golden flank, sprinkled with dark spots appears in the side of a wave to take the golden olive bumble on the dropper, twisting and turning on feeling the hook, slashing on the surface then diving for the bottom, before being subdued by pressure from the bent rod. This went on for several hours but the time passed too quickly and suddenly we became aware of a warm front coming, the cloud lifted, the sun appeared, our rolling wave gradually faded and the trout went down, sure it was time for a rest anyway and we had agreed to meet for tea in sheltered bay over a mile away, so the outboard was

fired up and the boat cuts across the calm surface.

Each year Irish anglers assemble on the shores of Ireland's great limestone loughs for the Mayfly festival. Anglers follow the hatch of fly because the emergence is staggered, for example Carra and Derg would be earlier than Conn or Sheelin. Many an acquaintance is made and old friends reunited on the lough and in the pub as surrounding towns and villages fill with visiting anglers and there's a fantastic festival atmosphere. All the talk is of hatches and wet and dry flies; 'secret' patterns change hands and information whispered in hushed tones, the bush

telegraph is buzzing now as 'the fly is up' message goes out and anglers rush to the Erne, Ree, Arrow, Mask the mighty Corrib and so on. Guest houses, hotels, restaurants, pubs, boat hire, etc., get a massive boost at this time of year and angling has certainly helped these establishments through the recession.

We are gathered in a little bay on Lough Sheelin, steaks on the griddle, glass in hand, toasting yet another season as the smoke from the open fire rises through the leafy glade. The whitethorn blossom is well established, a sure sign that the Mayfly hatch will be underway. All those emerged duns, resting beneath the leaves, transform



There is a huge bounty for the lough's inhabitants.



We gather on the lough shore to celebrate the Mayfly again.

into the spinner stage of their life cycle, the beautiful white bodied stage with clear wings and long black tails. As the sun gets stronger the heat energises the fly and they rise into the air in their ritual mating dance, forming great columns above the trees and when mated, the females, the spinners, can return to the trees and await the perfect conditions to fly out over the loughs surface to lay her eggs and finally falling on the surface to die, the so called Spent Gnat.

A splash from an oar, or a bad cast, will be enough to make fish vanish

Soon, it's time to go afloat once more to see what the evening may bring. The spinners are already streaming out from the shore, it's an amazing sight watching these fragile insects fly out over open water, in the final act of their lives to distribute their eggs and die, thus completing their life cycle.

Angling tactics will change from the morning, dry fly tactics will prevail, this will be a game of skill and precision to try to

outwit the wily trout in calm conditions. A splash from an oar or bad cast will be enough to make the fish vanish into the depths, so extra care must be taken in the approach.

A faint breeze puts a tiny ripple on the surface and in certain areas there are 'slicks,' lanes of calm water on the rippled surface, fly and debris accumulates here providing a natural

larder for the feeding fish. We scan the slicks for signs of feeding trout and try to ambush them, requiring accuracy and skill, both from the boatman and the angler and it's a tense, exciting time.

Soon, we are out in the middle of the lough. The Mayflies are streaming out, their wings reflecting pink in the red haze of the sunset and the lough is beautiful. Dead and dying flies lie all



The Mayfly Duns (Greenfly) shelter under the Hawthorne leaves and moult into the Spinner (Spent Gnat) stage, ready for mating and egg laying.



Irish Brown Trout caught on a wet fly.

along the slick and suddenly a loud sucking noise betrays a feeding trout cruising up toward us. I steady the boat as my partner gets ready to make the cast, pulling line from the reel in readiness.

The fly line cuts through the surface as the strike sets the hook

There's another suck and a large back and fin break the surface below us. The cast goes out three yards ahead of the trout, two dry flies ride the surface, until a big nose appears and the fly is gone. There's a pause. The fly line cuts through the surface as the strike sets the hook and the fish slashes on the surface, then bores into the depths in the first unstoppable run. Line streams from the reel only regained as the fish turns toward us. This goes on for some minutes before he's ready for the net. Taking great care, we admire his golden flanks and leopard spots with red flecks, as I unhook him, taking a quick photo before releasing him.

So, the evening goes on as the golden red sunset fades into darkness. It's a

truly magical and unique occasion and there's nowhere else on earth I'd rather be. We pause for one last moment to take in the atmosphere, then turn the boat back down the lough to catch last orders at Watty's Rock pub to exchange stories of the fish caught and hear the about 'the one that got away' again over a pint of Guinness.

Mayfly fishing is part of Ireland's angling heritage and culture, it's a

special and unique occasion, and a great reason to protect our natural habitats from pollution, development and exploitation. Our natural heritage is a precious resource, we should do all we can to protect it and to protect fish stocks and spawning habitat so we can carry on our tradition of gathering on the shores of our iconic limestone loughs, so future generations to come may witness 'the Dance of the Mayfly'.



The fly lie dying on the surface.

Celebration of Sport 2017



Celebration of Sport 2017 was aimed at younger people and recognised those involved in sport including volunteers, community groups, schools, sport Governing Bodies and local sports clubs. It was an excellent opportunity for people of all ages and abilities to try different sports and recreational activities.

Held at Lisburn Leisureplex on 31st March, the event saw 1,600+ primary school children participate in various sporting activities, including Taekwondo, rock climbing, basketball, gymnastics and a chance to discover angling thanks to the attendance of DAERA Inland Fisheries.

The DAERA Inland Fisheries Community Outreach Team occupied a large marquee, within the main outdoor arena and were inundated from the start of the day to the finish with young potential anglers.

A major talking point of the day was the new DAERA Angling Simulator. The Simulator combines rare underwater film footage of the strike and fight of popular game fish with an advanced computer system to create sensational, extremely realistic fishing adventures. The kids loved it, as did the teachers and the adults who fancied a go!



The Outreach Team were please to see so many children at the event

Another major attraction was the touch tank filled with Rainbow Trout, which allowed the kids to net a fish and return it back to the water unharmed. Fisheries technical staff were present at all times to ensure the safety and welfare of the fish. Oxygen levels of the tank were monitored throughout the day and fish were changed over to allow them to rest and not become stressed.

Fisheries staff were on hand to dish

out goodie bags and fun facts to the children and they relished the challenge of managing these freebies, whilst faced with hundreds of amazed faces eager to receive their pens, pencils, wristbands and key rings and ask questions about the sport!

Frank McMullan provided a little oasis of calm in a somewhat manic environment when he showed the children how to tie and dress flies, an intricate process which still appealed to the young visitors. There were also casting demonstrations and testers available courtesy of the Association of Professional Game Anglers Instructors (APGAI).

Everyone involved agreed that this was an excellent event which showcased a wide range of sporting activities and a platform to showcase angling as a healthy, affordable and accessible sport for all age groups.



Some very attentive children watching DAERA'S Tracey Adams release a Rainbow Trout back into the touch tank.



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Catch & Release & Game Angling Etiquette

Lately, I was asked to give some input to a local authority about fly fishing and I highlighted important elements of our sport, which are catch & release and fishing etiquette. I thought that this would be useful for all anglers to read, as those elements are there to help us all enjoy our terrific pastime, while looking after our countryside and our quarry. It is also common sense to follow the 'rules' and I hope these guidelines help you.

Advice on Catch & Release

Tackle: Use a barbless hook (or flatten the barbs with pliers)

Playing the fish:

- Bring the fish in firmly and quickly to reduce the likelihood of severe exhaustion.
- Use a heavy breaking strain of line or cast that will permit this.

- Move the fish out of fast currents if possible.

Handling the fish:

- Handle the fish as little as may be absolutely necessary.
- Keep the fish in the water if possible; fish should not be brought out of the water on to the bank if at all possible.

- If a landing net is used, it must be knotless. Avoid abrasion of the scales — NEVER beach the fish. You must wet your hands before touching the fish.
- Be gentle, do not grip the fish tightly and take extra care with fish during warm weather, when they are most vulnerable.



Always be aware of good angling manners whether or not other anglers are nearby



Remember to take great care when handling and returning fish.

- Remove the hook gently forceps can help (always take a pair of long nosed forceps with you when you go salmon or trout fishing)
- If the fish is deep hooked, cut the line as close to the hook as possible and leave it in the fish, better to lose a fly than a fish.
- Never hold up by the tail or hold up by the wrist, I see this often on big fish when anglers are trying to get it out of a landing net.

Reviving and releasing the fish

Do not weigh the fish, estimate the weight. The weight of a fish can be calculated from an estimate of the length of the fish, tip of nose to centre of tail. Details of length/weight relationships are available from a variety of websites on the Internet.

For photography

Stand in the water if not too deep and

gently cradle the fish using both hands and just lift the fish above the water surface for a few seconds. Support the fish gently and steadily in a current, facing upstream. Do not hold the fish too firmly. Be patient, and wait for the fish to recover. Let it swim away on its own when it is ready.

Will the fish live? Radio tracking of fish in parts of the world of released fish has shown that over 90% of salmon and trout, if carefully handled, survive to spawn successfully, and 10% could have been taken by the fish natural predators. So, if handled properly the fish have a great chance.

Angling Etiquette

This is something that we all need to be aware of. Etiquette that is at the root of fishing basics is respecting the environment and being courteous to others. Thus, you will find most other anglers to be a great source of

information and friendship. This adds up to a more enjoyable day on the water.

The purpose of observing fishing etiquette when fishing comes from the accepted rules of behaviour when accessing and fishing waters. These are based on consideration for other anglers and for the land owners who permit access through or to their land. Observing these rules will also ensure you stay within the law, avoid conflict, and help maintain the good reputation of anglers generally. It is especially important that you are aware of good angling manners when fishing heavily fished rivers, such as the Six Mile Water.

Most rivers cross private land and the rights of the land-owner must be respected. If possible, ask the owner permission before crossing their land or the fishing club's (and use this opportunity to check if there are any dangers to be aware of). Very rarely is

permission denied when asked for. Respect the landowner's property, this can be farmer's land or even a home owner's garden. Leave everything as you found it. If a gate is open leave it that way. Likewise, if it is closed. Our ability to continue to have access to cross land is dependent on farmers and other landowners being able to trust that we, as anglers and guests on their land, will behave responsibly.

A fisherman on a river will not appreciate the trout being scared off by a disturbance. Especially on a small stream, give other anglers room of undisturbed river. It may be better to find another part. If you need to approach someone who is fishing, do so quietly, keeping well back from the water so not to scare fish, and signal your intentions. Even your reflection on the water may spook the trout.

It is really quite simple to have good manners on river and streams if you remember these simple rules.

- Respect other anglers already on the water.
- Enquire politely about their plans.
- If fishing downstream for Dollaghan or Salmon, join a line of anglers at the end unless there is a very large gap.
- Ask if it's in order to join an already occupied pool.
- If a pool is full, wait on the bank or move somewhere else.
- If you join others fishing a pool, don't fish the water someone is just about to fish.

- Do not monopolise a stretch of water, even if you're catching fish there.
- Move upstream or downstream with every few casts unless you are alone.
- When sharing a pool for Dollaghan or Salmon, accepted practice is to take a step every time you make a few casts.
- Leave plenty of room for your neighbour to cast, and to play and reel in a hooked fish.
- Do not fill a gap left by an angler landing a fish — let them return.
- If other anglers offend through inexperience, have a gentle word with them.

Upstream and downstream fishing:

- Always enter a pool behind any angler already there.
- If a pool is being fished downstream by wet fly anglers, start upstream of them.
- If a pool is being fished upstream by nymph anglers or dry fly anglers, start downstream of them.
- Start your angling in the opposite direction if possible.
- Don't start fishing a river downstream when someone else is fishing it upstream
- Don't start fishing a river upstream when someone else is fishing it downstream
- If in doubt, ask where to fish so as not to cause a disturbance.

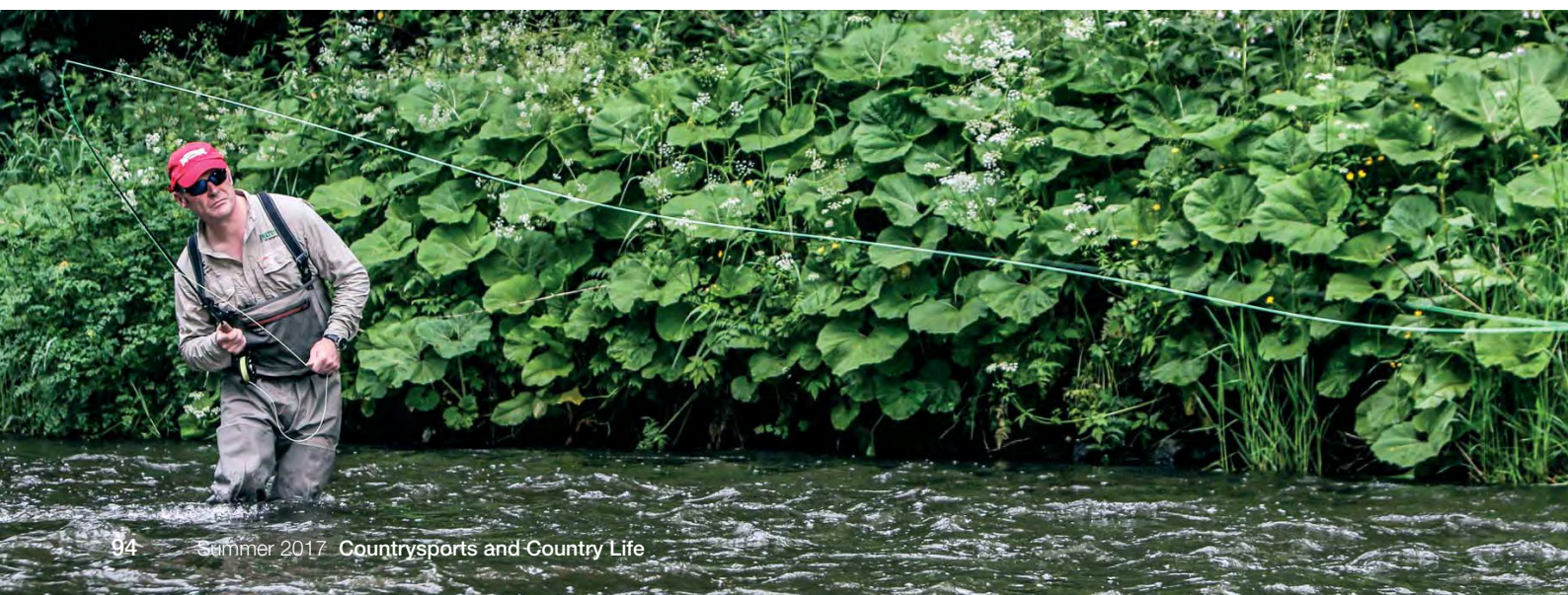
Access etiquette:

- These rules apply to accessing fishing waters via private land.

- No dogs.
- No camping without permission.
- Request permission to cross private land.
- Offer thanks on leaving.
- Leave gates as you find them (open or shut)
- Stay within the river margins.
- Do not litter.
- Respect private property.
- Avoid disturbing stock or damaging crops.
- Do not park vehicles in gate ways.
- Be courteous to local landowners and others.
- Please take all litter away with you. No matter what it is.

*Fishing Matters PRO-Staff,
Partridge Pro Team and Marryat Fly Rods Pro Team, Game Angling Consultant, Stevie Munn is a fully insured and qualified fishing guide, writer and qualified game angling instructor in fly casting and fly tying. He has appeared in many angling books, magazines and DVDs and gives casting demonstrations at angling events all over the world. He has grown up fishing on rivers and loughs of Ireland where he often guides. He runs teaching courses in Ireland and hosts groups to fish in Norway, Argentina and other countries. Email anglingclassics@aol.com or visit www.anglingclassics.co.uk for more information.*

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The Rag Tree

There was a time, and not so very long ago, when every English village worthy of the name had its own parson. Shared parishes and travelling ministers were matters for the distant future, as in the time of our grandfathers, 'The Parsonage' was home to the village minister and not the weekend retreat of some corpulent London stockbroker.

The village of Little Markham, however, was something of an ecclesiastical oddity, for at best, its parsonage had been only sporadically occupied, since its construction in 1840. Some eight miles south east of The Wash, in the county of Norfolk, 'Markham' had been without a minister of religion, since the disappearance of its last incumbent, the Reverend William Salthouse, in October 1862.

Strange to relate, but the Reverend Salthouse had left without explanation, forwarding address, or even removing his belongings from Little Markham parsonage. Perhaps because of this, the diocese of Lynn, had had great difficulty in finding a local minister to take on the 'living', (as the 'Occupancy' was referred to at that time) of Little Markham, even though its 13th century church was one of the finest in all the county.

Having made further enquiries however, the Bishop of Lynn was greatly relieved when eventually he received word that a young curate from Ely in Cambridgeshire was seeking his first parish. After further communication, the

Rev. Daniel Harper stated that he would indeed be keen to accept the post, and become the new spiritual guardian of Little Markham.

Broad shouldered and of striking appearance, 'Dan' Harper was in his thirtieth year of life, and with a shock of thick black hair and luxuriant sideburns, suited well his new ecclesiastical garb. Filled with all the certainties of youth, Harper felt himself ideally suited to life in a rural parish, for he was himself the son of a country parson, and so familiar with the duties requisite to the post.

After receiving a letter of confirmation from the Bishop of Lynn and much packing, planning and organisation, the young curate found himself atop a horse and cart, on a raw, grey, January day. Wood pigeons clattered away at the cart's approach, as slowly, interminably, the new parson and his belongings were transported along a rutted track, hemmed in by high blackthorn hedges.

The journey from the nearby railway halt, (for it could hardly be described as a station) seemed to have transported Daniel into the Middle Ages, for even by

the standards of his old home in rural Cambridgeshire, Little Markham was indeed a backwater. The carter, motionless and silent, sucking only occasionally on the stem of his clay pipe, held the reins to no obvious purpose, as his Shire mare seemed to navigate by memory rather than instruction.

After what seemed an eternity of travel, the chimney pots of Markham parsonage came into view; the building itself being quite obscured by tall surrounding trees. The old Shire mare finally delivered her burden to the front of the property and, hoping that he hadn't entirely lost the circulation in his legs, the young parson jumped down from the cart and onto a neat path of broken flints.

Crossing the threshold, the chill of the neglected house drew Harper's breath away

Swinging wide the rusting iron garden gate, Dan Harper instructed the carter to unload the wagon, and to transfer the furniture, tea chests and leather bound trunks, into the property's ill lit hallway. Turning the key with effort against the resistance of a corroded lock, Daniel put his shoulder to the front door of the parsonage, and with considerable force, pushed it open. Pieces of woodwork fell away, so badly was the paint-blistered doorframe swollen by damp. Crossing the threshold, the chill of the neglected house drew Harper's breath away, as one plunging into a pool of ice-water. His nostrils filled with the scent damp and decay, as the parsonage hallway put the young curate in mind of an ancient crypt. A scurrying sound drew the young man's attention, as unaccustomed to daylight, a startled rodent sought sanctuary in the house's many shadows.

Those first short days of winter, the



The young man crossed the churchyard and passing through a gap in the thick holly hedge, dropped into the sunken lane.

Reverend Harper spent in unpacking his belongings, and trying to make the parsonage feel like home. His predecessor's possessions had either been moved to the nearby church hall, or placed rather unceremoniously onto a bonfire. The task of settling in was, it must be admitted, something of a challenge, for no matter how many fires he lit in the parsonages' numerous hearths, Harper simply couldn't rid the building of its all-pervading chill. Strangely, this unpleasant feeling of cold, wasn't the only unfortunate feature the house possessed.

With a south facing aspect, bright frosty mornings illuminated the parsonage well enough, affording it at least a small degree of cheer; but with the coming of late afternoon, and the gradual dying of the light, the Reverend Harper had become aware of a rather disturbing phenomenon. Although extensive for a small property, the front garden of the parsonage had, in decades past, been over-planted with yew trees. So numerous and overgrown had these sprawling evergreens now become, that they merged before the property like a living wall.

But, what was this 'trick of the light'?

A rather sinister effect and most unsettling to the new resident, was that as the winter dusk steadily advanced, so it appeared, did the trees. This was quite irrational the reverend Harper knew, for trees cannot simply move. Nonetheless, as the darkness intensified, so the yews seemed to close in around the parsonage. This 'trick of the light' — for such it could only be — imbued the young Parson with a sense that something yet undefined, resented not only his presence, but even that of the very house he stood in. Had the Reverend Salthouse also been aware of this, he wondered?

Fortunately, Daniel's preparation of his sermon for that coming Sunday acted as a

distraction from disturbing thoughts for, above all, he wished to make a good impression on his parishioners. Just what would face him from the pews, he knew not, for with the exception of the carter and the parsonage gardener, he had yet to encountered any of his flock. Dan's only sight of his horny handed parishioners so far, had been fleeting glimpses as they made their way to and from agricultural tasks.

A week to the day since his arrival, the morning dawned bright and clear, so in an attempt to become better acquainted with the village and its inhabitants, the Reverend Harper strode out with walking stick in hand. The air was crisp, and the midwinter sky untroubled by cloud, as the young man crossed the churchyard of St. Lawrence the Martyr, and passing through a gap in the thick holly hedge, dropped into the sunken lane at the rear of the nave.

Crossing this lane, he picked up a footpath where it entered a narrow wood of ash and beech, as overhead, flocks of Fieldfares in undulating flight filled the sky. Thickly planted as it was with an understory of holly and rhododendron, Daniel was unable to see much about

him. On hearing a voice, the young man stopped and looked around, but could see no more than a few feet either side of the footpath, and thought it unseemly to call out. Again, he heard the murmur of a human voice, as low, hushed tones came from somewhere close by.

Moving along, the young clergyman followed the twists and turns of the path, carefully avoiding roots that ran over the surface of the ground like the rungs of a worn wooden ladder. After some minutes, Reverend Harper emerged from the labyrinth of undergrowth, to step out into a wide clearing and full sunlight. The sight that greeted him there, would challenge not only his youthful certainties, but even the very foundation of his religious belief.

There before him in the clearing, stood a gigantic and ancient yew tree. Its girth was truly enormous, and far greater than any tree he had yet seen. The trunk, riven with fissures and splits, was almost entirely hollow, the heartwood of the yew having long ago rotted away. Gnarled branches issued from the trunk like arthritic limbs; twisted into grotesque and tortured shapes by uncountable centuries.

Exactly how old the yew was Harper couldn't say, but he had read that specimens of *Taxus baccata* could exceed three thousand years of life. Surely this tree was more than a millennium old?

What in the name of the almighty was this?

A myriad questions flooded the young parson's mind; but foremost did not concern the yew's age. What puzzled Harper above all else was not the vintage of the giant tree, but that its many branches were festooned with uncountable thousands of brightly coloured cloths and ribbons. Every available inch seemed to be bedecked, and in addition, coins of copper, silver, and gold, had been hammered into the cracks in the tree's trunk, lending it a reptilian appearance. Harper



Those first short days of winter, the Reverend Harper spent in unpacking his belongings.

stood open mouthed and dumbstruck. What in the name of the almighty was this?

The murmur of a voice drew Daniel's attention away from the spectacle, as he turned to see an old man standing where wood edge met pasture. Dressed in the heavy corduroy trousers of a warrener, the man cradled a dark eyed ferret in one hand, whilst in the other, he carried a lifeless rabbit. By his side, and with a coat the colour of weathered slate, stood a small, sharp eyed lurcher.

"You there", shouted the clergyman. "You there," getting the old man's attention, "What is this?", demanded Harper, pointing towards the ancient yew. With little hurry, the warrener placed the ferret into its carrying box and draped the rabbit over the hedge. Then, wiping his nose on the sleeve of his fustian jacket, answered in a heavy burr, "Tha's the Rag Tree." "Rag Tree?" questioned the clergyman. "What is the Rag Tree?" Pausing for a moment — possibly to dwell on the stupidity of the educated classes — the old man gestured with a wizened hand and answered, "Well, that is."

Still no wiser, Reverend Harper pressed his interrogation further and, speaking more slowly, questioned "Why, my good man, are pieces of cloth tied to the tree's branches, and why is its trunk hammered full of coins?" The old warrener looked upon Daniel Harper with dispassionate eyes, and answered, slowly, "They're entreaties." Despite being a man of above average intelligence, the parson stood dumfounded. "What are you talking about. Entreaties. Entreaties to what, exactly?"

"Well.... entreaties to the tree, o' course," replied the warrener.

Standing amid a wave of incredulity, Harper repeated the old man's words 'to the tree,' as slowly, the light of comprehension dawned. Instructing his dog to lie down', whilst propping an old spade against the hedge, the warrener went on. "Well, local people done this for generations here. When they are in need, or in troubled times, they tie a piece o' rag to one o' those old branches there, or

hammers a coin into the bark, and makes a request to the tree. Tha's like a prayer to intervene on their behalf, or p'raps to bring better luck in hard times. They say a few words like, or maybe even an old rhyme."

A close observer of this unfolding scene, would have noticed little by the way of change in the Reverend Harper's countenance until the warrener uttered the word 'prayer.' At this, the parson's jaw began to descend in the manner of a feeding carp, as slowly, he repeated, 'prayer.' Seconds ticked by as the parson's brow darkened and he repeated with exclamation. "Do...you... mean.... to tell me.... that people in my parish...my parishioners... are praying to a tree?"

The old man didn't answer, for the question required none.

Harper continued, each word being ejected as though bitter to the taste, and steadily rising in volume. "In my parish, in Little Markham, in the year 1864, people are worshipping a tree. A graven image! I will not have it! I will not have it, do you hear me?" As the parson's indignation rang out, the warrener uttered not a word, nor did he show any emotion. He simply shouldered his ferret box, picked up the spade and cooling rabbit and, calling up his dog, set out across the meadow toward the village.

So great was Harper's fury, and so great his sense of horror, that it is even doubtful he was aware of the old man's exit. The clergyman seethed with righteous anger before the ancient yew, as his mind attempted to process the fact that he, the Reverend Daniel Harper, was parson of a village, where heathen idolatry was practiced on a daily basis. Dear God, he would not have it!

Storming back to the parsonage, the clergyman burst into his study and taking pen, paper and ink, placed himself before his writing desk. The Sunday morning sermon was going to take a very different vein indeed to that originally intended, for what these people needed was the fear of God putting into them! Not a kind, forgiving God, but the judgemental, punishing Jehovah of the old testament.

Clearly, Harper's predecessor had let things slide, and utterly failed to drag these ignorant, benighted peasants, into the truth and the light. He, however, was going to do exactly that! The candle burned low before Reverend Harper had completed his sermon and a handful of bent nibs scattered across the desk top bore testament to the zeal with which this ecclesiastical thunderbolt had been written.

Sunday morning was overcast and, as the bell of St. Lawrence the Martyr called the faithful to worship, a raw north easterly wind wove its way between uneven headstones. Snow too was beginning to fall, as shepherds, ploughmen, labourers, and their farm owning masters, steadily filed through the church's weathered north door.

As pews gradually filled and the shuffling of nailed boots died away, the reverend Daniel Harper rose, and for the first time ascended the age worn steps of St. Lawrence's pulpit. Placing the sermon upon the lectern, Harper cast an eye over his bucolic flock and observed a people bowed by lives of hard physical work. Round shoulders and stooped backs were ubiquitous, as were faces wind weathered to the texture of harness leather. As to the ages of his congregation he could not guess, for most there appeared far older than their years. Here and there were young couples with children, landed farmers being only distinguishable from their workers, by the superior quality of their clothing. Also present, was the warrener whom the young parson had questioned regarding the gigantic yew tree, that spurred Harper on to grasp this ecclesiastical nettle.

Horror at having discovered a living, growing, graven image, within his own parish

After introducing himself to the congregation and stating how honoured he felt to be parson of Little Markham, Harper moved swiftly to what he referred to as a grave matter. His seated audience showed no emotion, as he explained the route of his walk two mornings earlier, and how, after following an overgrown

pathway, he had come into a clearing to face a, ghastly and heathen prospect. The young clergyman gripped firmly the oak lectern as he expressed his horror at having discovered a living, growing, graven image, within his own parish. His voice rising, Harper explained that idolatry was expressly against the word of God, and an affront to the Lord; where upon, opening the leather bound bible before him, he quoted from Exodus 20: 4-6, "And the Lord said, Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them, for I am the Lord thy God." As his words died away, so, oddly, did the wind heaving at St. Lawrence's ancient flint walls, and an unnatural hush fell upon the building.

"Does anyone present know anything about this so called Rag Tree?" the parson demanded. If Harper had expected explanation and contrition, he was to be disappointed, for the silence within the church was absolute. One might have expected the congregation to be shamefaced. But they were not. The eyes that met Harper's own were far from abashed or ashamed, but matched his gaze with collective defiance, shaking the young man's confidence more than he cared to admit.

A parson's social rank, he had imagined, would command deference from his flock, but mute obstinacy both surprised and unnerved him. Had his predecessor also encountered such defiance he wondered? Was this the reason for his leaving the parish suddenly and without explanation? Perhaps.

Stammering slightly, whilst trying to muster courage, Harper announced that he would leave this matter to his congregation's Christian conscience and that he expected an immediate end to all heathen practices within the parish. In addition, any cloths, ribbons or rags, were to be removed forthwith from all branches of the ancient yew. Failure to do so, he said, would lead to dire consequences, although in truth, the young man had no idea what action to take.

The congregation appeared singularly

unmoved by this threat, and as the wind outside resumed its elemental assault, the temperature within the church grew distinctly chilly. The service ended, Daniel Harper was relieved to stand within the church porch and observe his parishioners filing by, for he felt more a sheep amongst wolves than the 'Shepherd of his Flock.'

Allowing the villagers time to absorb both his sermon and demands regarding the Rag Tree, Harper remained for the next week within the confines of the parsonage. The building's chill, in spite of hearths heaped with hardwood logs, never truly left it, and the young man was troubled nightly, by disturbing dreams of surrounding, darkening yews.

Not a single cloth 'entreaty' had been touched or removed

In need of air and light, the young parson took his courage in both hands and, on Saturday morning early, strode out to inspect the said tree. The walk, although along the same route as before, seemed somehow shorter, as in little more than five minutes Harper stood within the woodland clearing. It is hard to say which emotion possessed the young man more deeply: anger at being treated with disdain by the labouring classes, or cold fear at their refusal to bow to his social position and acquiesce to his demands. Regardless, the Rag Tree stood before him exactly as before, with not a single cloth 'entreaty' touched or removed.

Turning on his heel the parson strode away with purpose, for his course of action was clear. Having some days earlier, cleared an outhouse that accompanied the parsonage, Daniel Harper had discovered a number of rusting garden tools, long neglected, together with an old but sturdy ladder and an assortment of hemp ropes. These he believed, would spell the end for the ancient woodland idol.

An observer, standing in the churchyard of Saint Lawrence the Martyr, might have been surprised to see a young country parson striding between the gravestones under the weight of a twelve foot ash ladder. They may also have

wondered, why the clergyman carried a coil of hemp rope over one shoulder, whilst in his right hand he gripped a recently sharpened felling axe.

Having arrived back in the woodland clearing, Harper allowed the coil of rope to slip from his shoulder and placed the ladder upon the ground at its side. He stared up at the ancient yew whilst sweeping sweat from his brow with a large pocket handkerchief, and gripped the haft of the axe more tightly.

Striding toward the tree, he surveyed the trunk for any obvious fissure or weakness and in a finger-wide crack found his point of aim. Drawing back the axe he paused for a moment, before bringing its gleaming bit into contact with the yew trunk with all the force he could muster. Upon impact, the ancient trunk emitted an almost vitreous ring, the axehead skittering off at a dangerous angle to embed itself in the surrounding leaf mould.

Harper's second and third attempts to cut the trunk met with similar results, as the timber, hardened by a thousand summers, easily repelled the edge of Sheffield steel. Again and again the parson struck the trunk in vain, and although the axe bit succeeded in removing bark, the living wood beneath remained unscarred. Thwarted and perspiring the clergyman threw his weapon to the ground, and took up the wooden ladder. If he could not fell the ancient idol he would certainly strip it of its heathen offerings.

Leaning the ladder against the gnarled trunk, Harper quickly ascended on creaking rungs, to tear at coloured cloths and ribbons hanging like a ripening crop from every branch. Higher he climbed, stripping away years of pagan belief with a single sweep of a grasping hand. Perched near the top of the ladder, the young parson could, for the first time, look down inside the ancient tree's hollow trunk. Amazed by just how cavernous this space was, Harper saw that it resembled a circular room, with steep inner walls some twelve feet high. The floor of this living chamber was illuminated by early afternoon sunlight,

and as the clergyman surveyed the carpet of broken twigs and faded yew needles, a glimmer of something white caught his eye.

Leaning over the rim of the hollowed trunk, Harper tried to identify exactly what he was looking at, but could not. Curiosity awakened, and digressing from his intended task, the parson descended the ladder, took up the neatly coiled hemp rope and in a matter of minutes was teetering upon the upper rim of the hollow trunk. With one foot resting on the ladder's uppermost rung, the parson tied the rope to a weight bearing branch, and then swinging out into space, lowered himself down inside that ancient yew. Surprised by how difficult it was to find a foothold against the marble smooth inner walls of the tree, he carefully lowered himself down, hand over hand, until he stood on the floor of the living cavern, amongst countless centuries of arboreal decay.

Here, without doubt, lay the earthly remains of the late, Reverend William Salthouse

Releasing the rope from his grasp, Harper knelt down, and with the back of his hand, swept from the floor decades of fallen yew needles. There, exposed, and still clearly identifiable, lay a yellowing ecclesiastical 'dog' collar. This discovery alone would have been sufficient to disturb the young man, but the fact that it encompassed a skeletal neck caused fear's ice-water hand to crawl up the parson's spine, as a terror previously unknown possessed him. Here, without doubt, lay the earthly remains of the late, Reverend William Salthouse.

Frantically, Harper dug at the floor of the chamber with scooped hands, and to his growing horror, realised that he was standing on layer upon layer of skeletal remains, as human bones blackened by age were exposed to daylight. Just who these people were, and how they had come to be there, he knew not, but that pagan rites were involved, he had no doubt.

Hearing a low rasping sound Dan Harper spun around, to see his only form

of escape, the length of hemp rope, rapidly ascending the inside of the tree. He watched in disbelief as, pulled by unseen hands, the rope's knotted end quickly vanished from view over the upper rim of the hollow trunk. The wooden ladder, the top of which had projected against the circle of sky above, also disappeared from view, and Harper's bellowing that it be returned immediately, solicited no reply. Certain that he could hear footfalls, as though from one wearing heavy nailed boots, Harper called again for the return of the ladder and rope. No one answered. The only sound audible being that of someone calling up a dog, in low, hushed tones.

Time and again Harper tried to climb the inner walls of his tomb, but always fell back, thwarted by a marble smoothness bereft of either foot or handhold. Finally, in desperation, he threw himself against the walls of his wooden prison, until exhausted, he collapsed sobbing to the floor, amongst those whose fate he must surely share. The Reverend Daniel Harper was trapped, like an insect in a jam jar, within the trunk of the ancient yew.

All living things require nutrients,

especially if they are to span many centuries and grow to huge proportions. Trees are no exception of course; a fact that the villagers of Little Markham had learned, long before Christianity attempted to replace the old religion. It was blood the Rag Tree required, and blood the Rag Tree would have. A small price to pay, surely, for answering the entreaties of an entire community?

The sudden and mysterious disappearance of Little Markham's new parson, was mentioned in all the local newspapers and caused considerable surprise to the Bishop of Lynn. Police enquiries as to the young man's whereabouts proved fruitless, as the questioning of village locals was met with passive silence. Admittedly, several constables did report hearing an inhuman screaming carried on the wind, but this they all agreed, must have been the dying agonies of some trapped or wounded animal. After all, no human could have produced a sound so steeped in pain and hopeless misery.

To those who may be interested; the 'Living' of Little Markham parish is again available. All enquiries to the Bishop of Lynn.



Harper simply couldn't rid the building of its all-pervading chill, which wasn't the only unfortunate feature the house possessed.



All in a winter's season!

Closer and closer they got, the dog on the slip lead hadn't a clue what was going on: this was his first lamping foray, his first venture into the world of twilight pursuits.

The lamp lit up a rabbit, squatting, ears folded over his head and he wriggled tighter into the grass as the light moved in the wind. I gave the slip lead to David and whispered not to release the dog until the rabbit ran and the dog could see it. James and I stood still, I held the beam on the rabbit and David approached carefully.

David whispered to him all the way up, encouraging him and letting him know something was on. The rabbit seemed to go almost totally flat as I held the light on him. By now both David & Reggie were almost on top of the rabbit and for what seemed like minutes he sat tight and they looked on, edging ever closer until, just as they got right on top of him, he sprang right up out of the grass. Reggie reared up on his back legs and as the rabbit made some distance the slip lead cracked as it slid through his collar and caught itself on the end.

For me the whole thing went in slow motion — the rabbit came straight towards James and me, David's voice

could be heard 100yards away in the black dark cheering Reggie on! The rabbit passed us, turned and came back while Reggie turned like a boat on the wet grass. He attempted a strike as they passed once more and I heard his teeth snap like a crocodile before he put in a second strike and almost lost his footing, before trying for a third which didn't connect — but he certainly got a mouthful of fur! We were all holding our breath. The rabbit turned again and jinked against a fence and back out into the field and with one final attempt young Reggie scooped the rabbit up almost right at my feet. I breathed a sigh of relief and my two comrades cheered.

With all his retrieving training since a pup, I hoped he would retrieve the rabbit back to me and he didn't have far to go. He did retrieve it, but back to David! Either way it was a success and it was nice to see the other lads as genuinely pleased as I was that Reggie had got off to a good start.

A likeable dog and a pleasure to train,

Reggie is the result of a mating twixt my bitch Fudge and an Irish Terrier Lurcher named Rocky who came from a line of working Irish Terrier Lurchers, going all the way back to an imported American greyhound bitch bred to a working Irish terrier.

The longer I have Lurchers the more I like them

Fudge, my own bitch now 7 years old, was the result of a mating between my old bitch Ruby and Darren Connelly's Paco who was bred by Fiona Devlin. Unfortunately, both Ruby and Paco are now deceased. As you will have gathered, there is much mish mash in the breeding of Reggie. Collie, Whippet, Greyhound, Irish terrier and whatever else! Does it matter? Not really to me, he is a Lurcher and that's what Lurchers are. The longer I have Lurchers the more I like them, they are a wonderful dog and I feel can be taught to do most anything, from lamping to retrieving shot birds off the water.



Oscar out trapping.

Indeed lurcher aficionado Jonathan Darcy published a photo of a well-known dog he owned, 'Scooby,' retrieving a goose, squirrels, wood pigeons and even an egg which he cracked on camera to prove it was raw! My own very good friend John Rooney once owned a bitch called Roxy who retrieved several geese to us one morning out shooting and the same bitch would have dispatched foxes and retrieved rabbits live to hand.

In my last article, I wrote of a young bitch Bella, a litter mate of Reggie and a lovely bitch which I had chosen to keep for myself. I have always preferred female Lurchers and she was my choice from a litter of 7 in which there were three bitches. Bella was in no hurry to be born and is in fact a full day younger than her litter mates. Fudge gave birth to 5 puppies on a Saturday evening with another born on Sunday morning and, just after, my daughter and I counted 6 in the whelping box that evening and

I put her to bed just after 7pm I returned to find 7 puppies, number 7 being a little Irish terrier coloured bitch which I decided then and there was going to be mine. Five were already accounted

for and would be off to their new homes in 7 weeks to good genuine homes where I knew the pups would be well cared for and worked to the best of their ability. I won't make any secret that I was choosy where they went, not because they are anything special but because I prefer that they go to a sensible and permanent home. There are enough dogs in rescue homes and on the merry-go-round of being swapped and sold every two weeks without me adding to the problem. With 6 out of the 7 accounted that left a rather large fawn coloured dog pup. I offered

him to a good friend, but he declined as he might not give him enough work, already owning a dog. My wife had strangely taken a liking to the pup and we decided to keep him, so he stayed and I named him Reggie. A strange name for a Lurcher I agree, but it stuck.

One wet evening in late September, I was exercising all the dogs on a local field and as usual they were getting excited and fired up and began chasing each other on the grass. They were just coming up to 6 months old at the time and as Bella passed me on a small hill she turned very sharply and slid onto her back and let out a yelp. She got to her feet and held her rear left leg up tight below her. I thought she had perhaps twisted it in some way and she limped back to the van and I lifted her in.

He simply looked down and said: "Broken hock" as my heart sank

A day or two later she was no better and with the greyhound vet on holidays I let the local vet look at it. It was X-rayed but they could find no problem and said to return in 14 days should it not improve. I wasn't totally convinced and when the greyhound vet returned I made the 2.5 hour journey to see him. I walked into his surgery with the young bitch on a lead and he simply looked down and said: "Broken hock." My heart sank, I asked him could he do anything with it and his reply was to suck his teeth and raise his eyebrows. My heart sank further as he X rayed it to confirm. "I can try"



Bella & Mum - no leg problem now at all.



Oscar getting on a scent.



The McGonigal Gang out ratting. was his reply "But I can't promise you anything."

At this stage, her leg had broken and re healed incorrectly and it would be a job and a half to repair it, it was close to the joint and could be a problem with running should it not heal precisely as he hoped it would. I returned a week later and dropped her off. She was in the surgery for two days and it was a wet,

cold and windy night when I returned again to collect her. I took her from her cage and carried her to the van, setting her on the front seat and she gave an appreciative but short wag of her tail & was feeling very sorry for herself. The veterinary nurse also had a large coursing bitch who belonged to a man who was on my route home and asked if I would take her too, I didn't mind and she was no

trouble in the back. Ironically the coursing bitch had broken her left hock as Bella had – The vet had never fixed a left hock as track dogs generally break their right one and he done two in one day!

The weeks went by and each Wednesday we would travel to the vet, get the dressings changed and get an x ray and a check over the joint. Each week that went by the vet seemed happy with it but overall wasn't totally sure if Bella would run again with the nature of the injury & all I could do was hope. She had her dressings waterproofed by way of a drip bag as she found it difficult to adjust in the house and seemed to prefer to be outside, the arrangement worked well and she spent her days in the kennel and I fed her inside in the evenings, all while hoping the leg work come good in the end. As Christmas came and went the dressing and splint was removed and it was a strict no exercise programme for another 6 weeks until we would see finally how the leg had healed.

Jumping was the only problem

I took every opportunity to work with Reggie, taking him out ferreting and occasionally when I was lamping with Fudge I would give him a run. The situation worked well in many ways as it gave me a lot of time with him when he needed it most. The only problem I had with him was jumping, for all my efforts I could not get him to jump until I found a small sheep dog training pen on the hill behind the house. This was simply a little enclosure made of sheep netting about 8ft square that a farmer who trains sheep dogs uses, and he was happy for me to use it too.

One day, I jumped Fudge in and out of it and then lifted Reggie in and left him in it and kept on walking down the hill with Fudge and the Teckels. He howled, barked and protested and eventually tumbled his way over and reached us. I did this every day for a week and any trouble he had jumping is now far behind him! Having a Lurcher jump is handy, maybe not totally essential but handy. For a small dog you can lift over the fence it

isn't a huge problem, but did I really want to carry a lamp, rabbits and lift a 6 stone dog over a fence on wet windy night? Definitely not! My grandmother always said good things come in pairs, so having one Teckel wasn't going to be much use. I acquired my first Teckel a little over two years ago and have had great fun with him since he arrived.

I find their scenting power exceptional and a few weeks ago I passed a clump of whin bushes well over 100 yards in diameter. The Lurchers didn't pay any attention but as Archie passed behind them, stopped and looked in. Then he slipped between two bushes and I could hear him rustling about inside further and further away until it went quiet for a few seconds. Then just as a pair of Bavarian lungs opened up simultaneously a pair of pheasants exploded from the centre of the whins!

Back in June last year, he did sort of the same thing with a Red hind and calf which he drove out in my direction, baying at it while getting kicked several times as I tried my best to get him out of the way without getting the same. The deer and the calf then took off with him in pursuit and that was the last I saw of him for over half a day. I returned to the area that evening to find him curled up below a road sign, soaking wet and absolutely covered in goose grass with a large cut to his forehead but otherwise fine.

His antics are non-stop and at times I've considered keeping a diary for him alone as he gets into so much mischief. They are known to be a multipurpose dog and it is true that you could pretty much use one for anything: shooting, beating, blood tracking, underground work or hunting with hounds very easily. Archie hunted a year or so ago for a full day with the Sunnyland Beagles like he had done it all his life, even walking off the bog with the pack at the end of the day and looking like he fitted right in. The night we arrived at the house before the hunt he stayed in the van although he was no trouble he didn't sleep much. However, after a full day on the bogs of Galway keeping up with the hounds I put

him back in the van that evening and we actually had to wake him on Sunday morning and he rolled out looking like he had a night on the tiles!

So, what about the pair I mentioned? Well, after all that sport with one Teckel it was time to add another. Another to run off after things and not return, another to hold me up and make me late, have me out searching for him at night and another to bark at the ferrets and sleep between the bins on a warm day.

Oscar was born among great working Teckels

In June last year, a small pup was whelped and I picked up young Oscar in late September after an 8-hour drive. I arrived with his breeder to find a very well reared and extremely well socialised and confident pup, who was very pleased to see me. When I scooped him up from his little run and tucked him under my arm to admire him, He knew full well he was going with me and he didn't seem to mind at all. Oscar was born among great working Teckels, Basset Hounds and a lurcher or two and he run with them and got to know them every day.

When I brought him home and placed him in the yard with my four other dogs he simply looked up, wagged his tail and went about his business. Like a brick in a wall he slotted in and to this day he sleeps between all the Lurchers and they all get along like very well. At the time of

writing he is just 10 months old and still very young. He has been out and about with the big dogs and Archie, but still has a long way to go — it is for him and me only the beginning. He has so far enjoyed a spot of ratting with Archie, the Lurchers and some German Smooth Haired pointer friends, which was a great day out.

I have also been busy trapping squirrels recently and he and I have thoroughly enjoyed checking the traps each morning and in only two weeks we managed 79 squirrels with cage traps on only a small area of ground. Our rabbit jobs, although plentiful, have been mostly shooting related and although I don't do much shooting (it is taken on by the other lads) I work the lamp and take Archie along as 'finder.' The rabbits sometimes run into the cover and due to its thickness, only a small Bavarian Bush Buster can fit in and he seldom leaves a rabbit behind.

You may be wondering about Bella's leg and how it turned out? Have a look the photos and they will tell you all need to know. I have no doubt the great work carried out by the vet was a resounding success and she may even be along for the craic at Irelands largest Game Fair at Shanes Castle on the 24th & 25th June. From entering dog pups to bitches with broken hocks, rabbit shooting, squirrel trapping and deer hunting with Teckels, it's all in a winter's season.



Reggie listening and watching for a sign of movement.

Shanes Castle and Birr Fairs to host Ireland's Largest International Working Dog Events



Brownlow House, Lurgan was the location for the All Ireland Launch of the 2017 Great Game Fairs of Ireland - Shanes Castle, Antrim 24/25 June & Birr Castle, Co Offaly 26/27 August.

Brownlow House attracts worldwide interest with its links to the legendary Master McGrath, so its historical location was entirely appropriate to launch the Great Game Fairs International Gundog and Working Dog Events.

Announced at Brownlow House, Great Game Fairs All Ireland Lurcher 2017 Challenges will honour the 'Master' along with another legendary County Offaly greyhound, Mick The Miller.

Two races named after these two world famous sporting icons from North & South, with qualifying heats throughout the UK and Ireland, will again underline the fairs' All Ireland and International focus.

To celebrate the memory of these two great Irish greyhounds, a painting of Master McGrath outside Brownlow House by Louise Barrett was shown, and a specially commissioned painting by John R. Moore, featured on the front cover was also unveiled.

A message of support for the new race at Birr from Brendan Berry, Chairman/Secretary of the Mick The Miller

Commemoration Committee from Killeigh, was read by Albert Titterington which publicly thanked the Great Game Fairs, and ROI editor Derek Fanning, for their help and assistance with the launch of the **Great Game Fairs of Ireland Mick The Miller Challenge**.

The Committee said: *"The Mick The Miller Commemoration Committee would like to say a huge thank you to Albert Titterington, Derek Fanning and everybody involved in the Game Fairs Ireland Committee for what you are doing for Mick The Miller. It means an awful lot to us in Killeigh, Co Offaly to see Mick being honoured in such fashion, with a painting unveiled today and a race in his name at Birr Castle in August. We are taken aback really, at the appreciation your committee has shown for our own work in Killeigh and we have no doubt your efforts will increase Mick's profile many times over. It is a pity none of us can attend the ceremony today but we most certainly look forward to partaking in the events to be held in Offaly in the coming months. Brendan Berry, Chairman"*



Game Fair Director Steen McGonigal with the Lurcher & Whippet owners who created a great sporting ambiance

*They added that, obviously with such famous dogs, other tributes have been made to them with statues erected and songs written about them, but they feel that **the Great Game fairs tribute** is 'a unique living tribute to these sporting icons.'*

Derek Fanning, with assistance from Brendan Berry of The Mick The Miller Commemoration Committee, has put to together a very fine tribute to the dog and its statue in Killeigh, County Offaly. We have covered the Master McGrath story at least twice in the magazine, but I am certain that everyone at the launch was delighted to see the home of his owner Lord Lurgan, together with memorabilia associated with the great dog. This included the pillar erected in memory of the 'Master,' several paintings and lithographs of dog and owner and even the three preserved masks of the hares which Master McGrath won on his way to winning the Waterloo Cup in 1868, 1869 and 1871 and by doing so winning fame and fortune for his owner.

A description of the dog by an eyewitness conveys the power and speed of the chase. 'His eyes were like to living balls of fire. The muscles on his back sprung and twitched like whalebone. The dog looked as if he were supercharged with electricity. I knew at once the hare had no chance. McGrath swept round her when she broke and crashed into his game as if shot from a gun. I can never forget it.'

A great sporting atmosphere for the day was enhanced by a team of lurcher, whippet and greyhound owners bringing their dogs, including two fine animals who reprised the roles of Master McGrath and Mick the Miller.

This was enhanced by the presence of George Logan and

Ingrid Houwers taking on the role of Lord and Lady Lurgan attended by others in costume of the period. Ingrid, resident taxidermist to the Great Game Fairs of Ireland, appeared to be taking a professional interest in the hare masks!

The Great Game Fairs of Ireland have always led the way in terms of international canine events and along with these two International Lurcher Challenges, they also host the Five Nations Lurcher, Terrier & Whippet Championships; the ROI Terrier, Whippet and Lurcher Racing and Show Championships at Birr Castle Fair and the 30th Annual All Ireland Championships at Shanes Castle.



Game Fair Directors Albert Titterington & Steven McConigal with the Red Mills International Team

International Gundogs In Focus

For several years the Fairs have also hosted the largest international gundog events on two spectacular grounds at both Shanes and Birr Castles. At Brownlow House details



Deputy Mayor Councillor Noreen McClelland launched the 2017 fair in company with 'Lord Lurgan' and 'Master McGrath.'

were given of the international team and individual retriever tests at Shanes Castle sponsored by FEEDWELL and the international spaniel tests at Shanes Castle and the overall Gundog tests sponsored by RED MILLS at Birr Castle.

A new international link between the major fair in Ireland and the Scottish Game Fair was announced with Willie Megaughan, captain of the Irish International Gundog Team paying tribute to the sponsorship of the team by RED MILLS and the Great Game Fairs of Ireland. The international team will be carrying out a demonstration in the main arena at Shanes Castle on Sunday 25 June at 1.00pm

An International Hunting, Shooting & Fishing Experience

Councillor Noreen McClelland, Deputy Mayor, of Antrim

and Newtownabbey Borough Council announced an international Diaspora initiative; all Ireland angling initiatives; international Gundog events, with a special link between the Irish and Scottish Game Fairs; clay pigeon shooting with fantastic prizes; action packed arena programmes sponsored by SuperValu and the NARGC; two fabulous Fine Food Festivals within two huge tented shopping villages packed with country lifestyle products.

The Game Fair at Shanes Castle with its close proximity to the Maine and Six Mile Water Rivers has always been a mecca for anglers. Now, in partnership with DAERA Fisheries Division, licence holders can qualify for half price admission to the Fair. DAERA's John Blair paid tribute to the success of the partnership, not least the face to face contact



Some of the Angling Team behind the DAERA Fisheries 'Put and Take' fishery for children at Shanes Castle.



The Great Game Fairs of Ireland host the largest international working dog events in Ireland.

the Department make with the huge numbers of people attending the fair. He announced that DAERA Fisheries Division would have an even larger presence at Shanes Castle 2017, with an enhanced stand, an angling simulator and support for the 'Salmon & Woodcock' Pavilion which features APGAI Ireland, the Ulster Angling Federation and the Six Mile WaterTrust. DAERA also announced support for the Children's 'Put and Take' fishery for children. Operated by Mark Tierney and his team from NSN, this year also supported by AM Angling and Countrysports Ireland.

Extra special fun for children this year

A huge range of activities for children was unveiled, including non stop action with Three Arena Programmes, lots

of 'have a go' and hands on learning activities, including children's fair ground rides; archery; angling; craft classes; the chance to see animals of all sorts including snakes and spiders, falcons, ferrets, rabbits and horses. Even the Big Kids (parents to you and me) are sure to enjoy the Living History Villages, Medieval Jousting and Battle Re-enactments.

Even more exciting news for children comes with news announced of two new amazing Game Fair attractions — there's fantastic Laser Clay Pigeon Shooting and the exciting Mini Pony World Equestrian Experience.

The Fairs are supported by TourismNI, Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council and Failte Ireland.

Great Game Fairs 2017. Launch video is available at <https://player.vimeo.com/video/218453432>



Just some of the team involved in putting on the Great Game Fairs of Ireland.



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MICK THE MILLER SPECIAL FEATURE AND NEWS PLUS

'THE GREAT GAME FAIRS OF IRELAND MICK THE MILLER CHALLENGE' FINAL AT BIRR CASTLE GAME FAIR SATURDAY 26th AUGUST 2017

Mick The Miller - An Offaly Sporting Icon Of The Depression

Motorists passing through the small Offaly village of Killeigh often have their attention drawn to a beautifully executed sculpture of a greyhound. This is a lifesize sculpture of Mick the Miller, probably the most famous greyhound of all time. It's a lifesize depiction of the famous dog and sits on top of a stone plinth which came from his nearby birthplace, Millbrook House. The impressive work of art was created by Elizabeth O'Kane, who was commissioned by the Mick the Miller Commemoration Committee, and was erected on the village green in January 2011. As an Offaly person I know that many people from the county take considerable pride in the fact that such a magnificent racing dog was raised and trained here. We take great pleasure in

telling his story to those who are willing to listen.

It is appropriate therefore that a new Lurcher race in Birr Game Fair has been named after the county's most illustrious dog. These Lurcher races are very popular with enthusiasts at fair gatherings throughout Britain and Ireland, and the Birr Game Fair organisers feel their event will be no different, and it will be a major attraction for enthusiasts.

One of the nice things about the The Great Game Fairs of Ireland Mick the Miller Challenge for non elite Traditional lurchers is that it will cater for less elite and more traditional dogs in this wonderful breed. Qualifiers are taking place all over Ireland and the UK for the Final which will be staged at

Birr Game Fair on Saturday, the 26th August.

A brief history

Mick the Miller was born in Millbrook House in 1926. His owner was a curate, Fr Martin Brophy, who adored greyhounds and loved the thrill of greyhound racing. At the time this was a pastime which was sometimes frowned upon by the morally superior, therefore Fr Brophy tried to deflect attention from himself by registering his name, for greyhound racing purposes, as Mr B Murphy. Newspaper reporters were aware of this deception, but didn't know the priest's name. One newspaper report referred to 'Mr Murphy' as being 'the assumed name of an Irish priest'.

Fr Brophy is looked upon as being one of the finest greyhound breeders in the history of the sport. He had bred a couple of successful dogs prior to Mick the Miller. When he was a curate in Wicklow his bitch Crom Abu came first in a number of coursing meets. Another successful bitch, Na Bac Lei, was the Dam of Mick the Miller.

When he moved to Killeigh the village's parochial house became known locally as Millbrook Kennels. Greyhound enthusiasts were regular visitors there and the curate sold his dogs to breeders from all over Ireland, the UK and America. He liked using the letter M in his dogs' names. Therefore, some of his other dogs included Macoma, Musty Miller, Merry Miller, Metalligon, Metalloid, Meconic,



A photograph of the time of Mick the Miller.



Fr Brophy and Michael Greene (who reared Mick) are pictured with Mick the Miller and litter brother Macoma.

Millbrook, Mitella and Magical Maud. Macoma, who was a brother of Mick the Miller, is regarded as one of the greatest hurdlers of all time.

At his birth Mick was the smallest and weakest of the litter, but local man Michael Greene could see something special in the puppy. Michael said he believed the pup had the makings of an excellent dog and asked to rear him. Michael fed the pup milk from a bottle and sometimes brought him to his bed. As the dog grew Michael walked with him for many miles around Killeigh building up his muscles and stamina.

Training sessions proved that Michael was right in his initial hunch about the dog's potential and Mick and



The statue raised to commemorate the famous dog was initiated by the local Mick the Miller Commemoration Committee. (Photo Paula Nolan)

his brother Macoma both demonstrated promise in the coursing field. However track greyhound racing had opened up at Celtic Park in the North and Shelbourne Park in the south and Father Brophy took the decision to target Mick at the track. The licensed trainer he chose was Michael Horan based at Shelbourne Park and the two brothers went to him in March 1928. On the 18th April Mick won his first race.

He went on to survive a bout of distemper and to win 15 of his first 20 track races. When he was three Fr Brophy entered him in the English Greyhound Derby at White City, London. In his first heat Mick broke the world record, becoming the first greyhound in history to run 525 yards in under 30 seconds. Following this dramatic race Fr Brophy received many offers to buy the dog. He eventually sold him to Albert Williams. Under his new owner but still trained by Horan he went on to win the 1929 Derby. He won the same race a year later, but under a different owner, Arundel H Kempton, who moved the dog from his first English trainer Stan Bliss to Sidney Orton.

Mick's triumphs mark an incredible career

During an incredible career in Britain, Mick triumphed in 36 of his 48 races, including the Welsh Derby, the St Leger, the Cesarewitch and the Derby. He set two new track records and six world records. He was the first greyhound to win 19 races in a row. He won about 10,000 pounds in prizemoney, several of his records were not beaten for over four decades, and he became a household name.

Mick's huge fame attracted thousands of newcomers to the sport. He was a massive shot in the arm for greyhound racing, with some believing he saved the sport. His celebrity status continued after his retirement and he was called upon countless times to open shops and attend big races. He starred in a film about his life, called 'Wild Boy' (1934), and he attended a number of charity

events at which King George V and other royalty were also present.

When he retired from racing and stud work he spent his remaining years with his trainer Sidney Orton, at Burhill Kennels in Hersham in Surrey and when Mick died in 1939 aged 12 his body was donated to the British Natural History Museum in London where he remained on display until 2005. He was then moved to the Natural History Museum's sister museum in Tring, just outside London. In 1981 he was inducted into the American Hall of Fame (International Section) and in 1990 a book was published about his life - 'Sporting Icon of the Depression.'

A tremendous local feeling expressed in verse

A poem by local man Danny Coughlan expresses the strength of feeling which Killeigh people felt at the time when Mick was winning on the tracks in Britain:

'While the Killeigh folk were overjoyed
when they heard of Mick's great win;
They went and told each other
that a party would begin.
They all assembled on the green
and a bonfire they did light.
They gave a twilight procession
and a welcome home that night.
Let's sing the praises of this dog,
Sing them low and high.
Let's give three cheers to good old
Mick
As he goes flying by!'

(Below) Michael Greene whose father reared Mick The Miller.



Mick the Miller Commemoration Committee

The Mick The Miller Commemoration Committee was formed in 2008, with the aim of erecting a monument to Mick in Killeigh, to highlight the fact that he was born and raised in the village.

At the earliest meetings it was decided that only the best would suffice and the most appropriate monument would be a lifesize bronze statue. The next step was to try and get funding.

Over the course of the next three years donations were received from local businesses and local people and even from a fan in the USA. We also received fantastic support from the Irish Greyhound Board (Bord na gCon) who

contributed €7,000 to the fund.

In November 2009 the committee commissioned artist Elizabeth O' Kane to produce the sculpture. Elizabeth is renowned for her incredible lifelike sculptures of people and animals. One of her most famous pieces is her bronze of Count John McCormack which stands in the Iveagh Gardens in Dublin. Elizabeth also happens to have a particular interest in greyhounds as her father and grandfather owned Priceless Border who won the English Greyhound Derby in 1948!

You can see more of Elizabeth's work on her website www.elizabethokane.com.

Elizabeth spent a lot of time researching greyhounds to help create an accurate likeness of Mick The Miller. She began by visiting the Natural History Museum in Tring near London to examine and measure the real Mick on display there, she consulted with a veterinary surgeon on greyhound anatomy, she visited Shelbourne Park regularly and even brought a live greyhound into her studio to model from.

The committee supplied her with every available photo of Mick, as well as newspaper cuttings, memorabilia and even some video footage.

The job of casting the sculpture went to Leo Higgins of CAST Bronze Foundry, South Brown Street, Dublin. Leo also advised on the monument plinth and installed the sculpture in Killeigh. See CAST's website www.cast.ie.

To give a very fitting and poignant link with Mick The Miller's birthplace, the plinth was made from stone from the ruins of Millbrook House where Mick was born. It was built by local man, Paddy Guilfoyle who also designed and laid out the paving area.

The sculpture was finally unveiled at a lovely ceremony on the village green on 29th January 2011 by An Taoiseach, Mr Brian Cowen. A crowd of over 400 people from Killeigh and all over Ireland attended. Dick O'Sullivan (Chairman of IGB) was guest speaker and many descendants of those involved in Mick The Miller's upbringing were also present.

ICS&CL would like to pay tribute to Derek Fanning for his research and short history of the dog and the Mick the Miller Commemoration Committee especially chairman, Brendan Berry, for allowing access to their material including providing some excellent photographs of the monument by Paula Nolan. We would also like to thank Brendan and the committee for their support for our own tribute to the great dog with our Mick the Miller Challenge



A view of Mick the Miller seldom seen by other racing dogs.

(photo: Paula Nolan)

race at the Game Fair at Birr Castle. It is fitting that the committee will be there to present the awards in the inaugural year of the race.

More details of the dog and the monument can be found on the committee's very informative web site www.mickthemiller.com. But why not

pay your own tribute to the dog when visiting the game fair by visiting his birthplace and monument at Killeigh, Co Offaly.



Members of the Mick the Miller Commemoration Committee and friends. Elizabeth O'Kane's mother and father brought the English Greyhound Derby Trophy (won by her Dad's dog Priceless Border in 1948) with them. It is the old type trophy which was the same as the one Mick The Miller won. It was the first time the trophy had been back in Killeigh since 1929.



Nick Bliss, the grandson of Mick's first English trainer.
(photo: courtesy Jill Bliss)



Michael Tanner, author of the book on Mick entitled: 'The Legend of Mick the Miller: Sporting Icon of the Depression'.
(photo: courtesy Michael Tanner)

Mick the Miller – another Sporting Legend brought to life by the Great Game Fairs of Ireland

Over the years, as part of the Great Game Fairs of Ireland and the old Irish Hunting, Shooting and Fishing magazine, now the Irish Country Sports and Country Life magazine, we have brought several sporting and animal legends with Irish connections 'to life.' The background and life of the subject has been rigorously researched, including original photographs or earlier paintings being accessed as part of a magazine feature which includes a true historical record. We also commission a new painting of the subject which is displayed at our press receptions and on the artist's stand at the Fairs.

The subjects featured have included the Byerley Turk – a horse which fought at the Battle of the Boyne and won the first race to be staged at Downpatrick; David of Westley – the only golden retriever to become an international Dual (Field Trial & Show) Champion (owned by a great friend of mine and a doyen of the Ulster Golden Retriever Club which runs the gundog events at the fair); The Massereene Hound -the wolfhound which legend has it saved Antrim Castle; and the Great Master McGrath which won the Waterloo Cup three times for Lord Lurgan, from the Brownlow family in Lurgan. Now it is the turn of Mick the Miller, the great Co Offaly greyhound who became sporting legend throughout the world.

The Master McGrath Challenge has been a huge success and enthusiasts all over Ireland and the UK have a chance to qualify their dogs to run against the fastest dogs in Ireland at Shanes Castle for some valuable prizes. The Master McGrath name has a connection with the fair as one of the co-founders of the Fair was the late Major William Brownlow who was a relative of Lord Lurgan, of Brownlow House in Lurgan, the owner of the great dog.

Mick the Miller's connection with Birr, Co Offaly

It was suggested that the Fair at Birr, Co Offaly

should have a similar prestigious international lurcher race and one of our ROI correspondents came up with the idea of using the name of Mick the Miller - a dog with a great connection to County Offaly having been born 'just down the road' from Birr Castle at Millbrook House, Killeigh, County Offaly.

However, many thought that this championship should not be for 'elite dogs' as these are catered for by the Master McGrath Challenge. So the concept of a race for 'traditional lurchers' was born and a trial for this was staged at Ballynahinch with two fine traditional lurchers 1st & 2nd.

A painting of Master McGrath and Mick the Miller has been commissioned from John R. Moore and we are delighted to have acquired an original Mick the Miller limited edition Royal Doulton figurine from 1993 for the winner.

UK & Ireland Qualifiers to compete in grand final at Birr

Qualifiers for the race to be run at the Birr Fair are being staged all over Ireland and the UK. The prize fund for the winners is:

Winner : £250 plus Trophy plus Barbour Coat ; winners cap & Racing Coat Runner Up £100, runners up cap and a watch plus racing coat. All qualifiers

attending the fair get a limited edition qualifiers cap and a year's subscription to the Irish Country Sports and Country Life magazine.

Mick the Miller Commemoration Committee Support

We are delighted to have the support for this race of the official Mick The Miller Commemoration Committee from the birthplace of the great dog in Killeigh, Co Offaly . As mentioned earlier the committee raised the finance to erect a fine statue of the dog on the village green and as can be seen from the various photographs virtually everyone with an interest in the dog's memory has visited this tribute to him. The Mick the Miller committee has also brought together a huge amount of valuable historical material on the dog which can be accessed at <http://mickthemiller.com/>

The final of the GREAT GAME FAIRS OF IRELAND MICK THE MILLER CHALLENGE will be run at the BIRR CASTLE GAME FAIR on Saturday 26th August 2017.

An original Mick the Miller limited edition Royal Doulton figurine.





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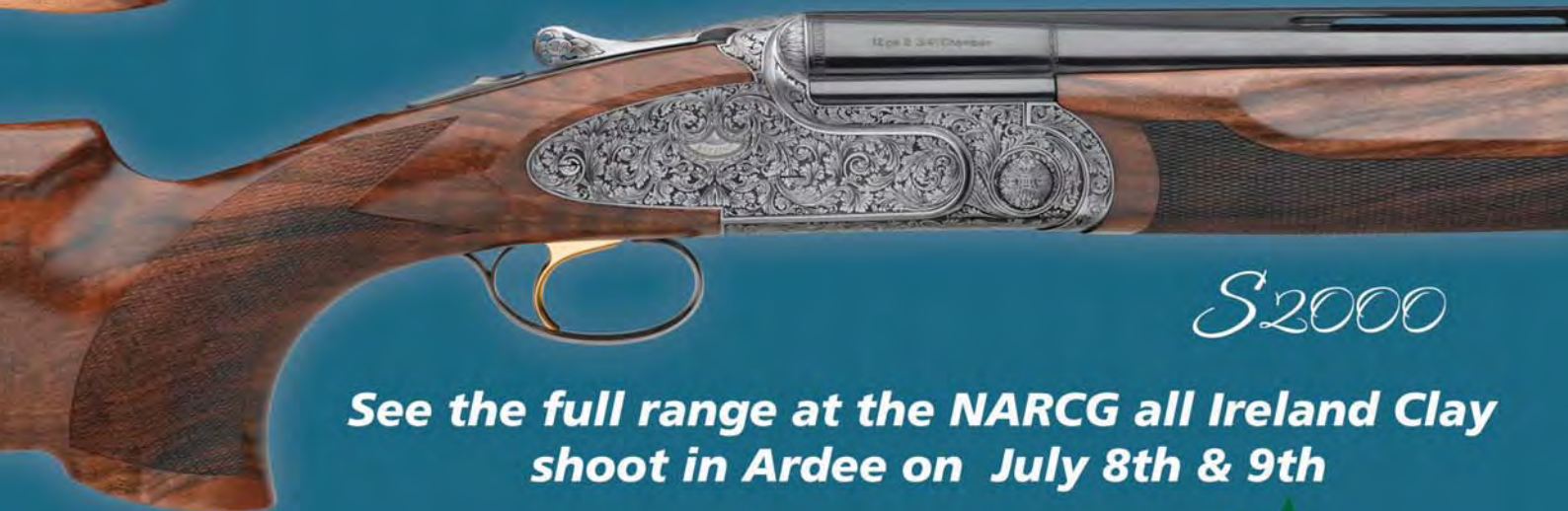
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