

Irish COUNTRY SPORTS and COUNTRY LIFE

ON SALE TO
7th SEPTEMBER

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Hallowed Water Grayling



Umpqua Steelhead Fishing



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I remember the time when I shot my first pheasant. Everything had pointed to a great day out over the fields not far away from home in the depths of County Tyrone. I'd been shooting occasionally for some years, sometimes with my father sometimes alone, with rabbits and an odd pigeon for the pot mainly in mind. An occasional spring of teal might feature on the day but generally these proved too far a way for my single barrel Greener. That's what I thought then anyway, but it was more than likely my inexperience of such opportunities and more likely still my skill then, or lack of it!

I was still many years away from a driven day. That was still to come, but I was glad that between that first pheasant and driven shoots there came an apprenticeship of wildfowling by way of membership of Strangford Lough Wildfowlers, odd estate vermin days (being told that I was on the team for a vermin day at an estate was definitely high on the wish-list).

Then came spaniel training for trials, and beating on well known shoots where Driven Days were experienced albeit without firing a shot. It was a great apprenticeship and one that drove home all too clearly the emphasis on safety.

But back to that first pheasant. To be truthful the actual event is a little cloudy as it was so long ago but I remember the bog, the wingbeats and the cock calling as it rose to my left just in front of a thorn bush and scrub. Usually birds like this got up too far away but not today. Up, bang, down and moments later I located the cock bird. And another thing is etched my memory, the single pellet that ended up on my plate when we enjoyed the bird for dinner. One pellet had been the birds downfall and I always wondered if it had died of fright when I shouted with joy as it tumble. I still have that very pellet tucked away in an old wallet as a memento of that day.

Now, many years and many pheasants and pheasant dinners later, I can state that there must have been more pellets in the

food and some probably did end up on my plate. Perhaps I was lucky not to have swallowed them, or maybe I did without noticing. Who knows? What I do know is that I have not succumbed to any lead-related medical condition, nor have I died of lead poisoning. Not yet anyway. My shooting friends speak of similar experiences with lead shot and food. But now we are in changed times, PC, Woke, and We Know Best. The demise of lead shot is for our own good of course, really. Isn't it? Or perhaps like Pink Floyd said: All in all it's just another brick in the wall.

All of this ramble brings me in a roundabout way to my point, which is this: years ago when there was a call to do away with lead ammo (who remembers the Lead Advisory Group, John Swift et al) the wagons of our organisations were quickly put in a circle (you see I'm still remembering my childhood movies of cowboys and Indians - or native Americans I suppose in PC-speak) and in time we just relaxed a little and carried on with restrictions on its use over wetlands etc.

But now a ban on lead shot appears to be inescapable. Most membership organisations appear pro lead shot alternatives, there is a time slot to see it banned, and the Daily Telegraph (who at one time boasted a shooting editor) reported along the following lines that 'the **government** is drawing up plans to **ban** poisonous **lead shot**, in the latest blow to field sports. ... The metal can pose a risk to people if ingested and studies have found that **lead** poisoning caused lowered immune systems in wild birds, potentially aiding the spread of diseases such as avian influenza.

Some might say that we are seeing yet another rushed example of virtue signalling. Some might say much worse. Perhaps those of us with a lifetime of shooting lead and eating what we shot have all been extremely lucky, given the dire consequences that we are now told about. Perhaps it's all like the move to cars etc driven by anything but petrol.

Electricity is a new option folks. Or hydrogen maybe? I've yet to see the cost benefit analysis of petrol driven compared to cost, pollution, social and other issues of generating electricity and the elements required from far off lands for the batteries. Oh, but there is always lower car tax. Well, perhaps there is right now. but I've no doubt this will rise to fill the coffers depleted by the decrease in petrol usage. Hey ho.....the price of 'progress' and some might say the latest policy to meet its sacrificial end on the altar of 'right on,' vocal green activists.

I'll turn now to something entirely different, hunting. Now I don't hunt but many do, and many more follow the hunt throughout the year, whether spectating in the field, puppy walking, or by way of their jobs like blacksmithing, or veterinarian.

However, hunt enthusiast or not, you may have spotted that Alliance Party MLA John Blair plans to table a Private Members Bill - 'Blair announces plans to bring Bill to outlaw hunting wild mammals with dogs.'

The media gave it coverage and I noted that one outlet carried the story along with a report that the 'League Against Cruel Sports was calling on politicians to create new legislation that would ban hunting with dogs,' giving polling figures which they said showed that '84% of people want 'the blood sport made illegal.'

Interestingly too, the Alliance Party website carried John Blair's plans directly above a LACS statement welcoming the move.

Among the many comments we received, since the news broke of the Bill, were claims that the media gave Mr Blair an easy ride.

Inside this issue we interview John by putting some of your points to him and asking questions which you felt right to be addressed along with some of our own.

Claims have been made that the proposals carry wide support. Please read the questions, answers and comments inside and see what you think.

Groundbreaking optical performance – packed into the smallest possible package SWAROVSKI OPTIK expands its NL Pure range

A huge, revolutionary field of view combines with groundbreaking design in these premium-class binoculars – the NL Pure from SWAROVSKI OPTIK opens up a whole new world for nature lovers.

With the NL Pure 32, the company is launching a smaller, lighter version of the binoculars in May 2021. It features the same superb optical system as its big brother, the NL Pure 42, within an extremely compact, precise mechanism. The new binoculars will be available in 8x32 and 10x32 versions from selected retailers.

Pure Nature Love – the NL Pure delivers viewing experiences of unprecedented intensity. The 32-mm version is ideal for keen birders and outdoor enthusiasts who want to feel one with nature – wherever they happen to be. With the NL Pure 32, outdoor enthusiasts can discover the beauty of their surroundings, any time, any place. The binoculars are distinguished by their use of the very finest materials and uncompromising quality. They also come in an eye-catching new colour. In addition to the traditional green, this compact masterpiece is also available in Burnt Orange.

ONE WITH THE MOMENT

Just like the NL Pure 42, one look through the 32-mm version reveals the technical masterpiece that lies within. Thanks to the

huge, revolutionary field of view (up to 69°) and the barely perceptible edges, you are completely immersed in the image, making it the most natural form of observation.

ONE WITH YOU

The incredibly compact optics are encased in a uniquely ergonomic housing, which ensures that the NL Pure 32 fits perfectly into your hand. With an oval recess between the thumb and index finger, the shape of the binoculars conforms to your natural grip. The forehead rest provides unbeatable comfort during prolonged use and ensures steady viewing.

ONE WITH PERFECTION

Pin-sharp contours and a high-contrast display with optimum colour fidelity – SWAROVISION technology guarantees breathtaking images. It is easy to make out the tiniest details and distinguish the most subtle nuances of colour. This absolute colour fidelity and high transmission is achieved thanks to an innovative lens coating.

ONE WITH NATURE

Thanks to the reliability and long life of SWAROVSKI OPTIK products over generations, their impact on the environment is reduced. The company works tirelessly to promote sustainability in every area of its operations.

Technical data on the product and prices are available at <http://swarovski.com/06-D>.



NL Pure 32 technology guarantees breathtaking images

VGF The Virtual Game Fair

Organised in association with
The Irish Country Sports & Country Life Magazine
& the Great Game Fairs of Ireland

A New Virtual Game Fair Art Competition

In 1984 we published *The Irish Fieldsports and Angling Handbook*. We liked the illustration that we used of the national fish and game bird of Ireland – the Salmon and Woodcock.

For a new project currently in development we were looking for a similar logo and thought we would open it up as a competition for budding or established artists to see their work taken to an international audience. To enter the competition simply provide a hi res image of a pencil or pen and ink illustration featuring the salmon and woodcock. The image will be used for reproduction in a range of mediums so shading should be kept to a minimum.

Entries should be mailed to Albert Titterton at countryandsportandcountrylife@btinternet.com.

The winner will win a stand for their work at the Game Fair or The Virtual Game Fair and a Barbour jacket. Runners up will be offered a choice of books sponsored by Paul Morgan of COCH Y BONDDU books www.anglebooks.com. The winner will assign reproduction rights to the Virtual Game Fair.



CL Pocket from SWAROVSKI OPTIK

Now SWAROVSKI OPTIK has given the popular CL Pocket a whole new look. The CL Pocket is a folding compact binocular with exceptional optical quality. It offers maximum viewing comfort, even for long periods, and fits perfectly in your hand. From February 15, 2021, this compact yet powerful all-rounder is available from specialist retailers.



K20 CL Pocket Binoculars

The new CL Pocket has so many potential uses – whether you're undertaking a gentle hike, a tough day in the mountains, or an adventurous journey. These compact binoculars are world leaders in the compact class and the ideal companion for all outdoor enthusiasts.

The high-precision optics guarantee that you can observe wildlife in a relaxed manner, without your eyes getting tired, while ensuring that you can still see every last detail. The binoculars have a huge field of view and are 100% suitable for eyeglass wearers. With outstanding edge-to-edge sharpness and high transmission, you are guaranteed high-contrast, sharp, colour-true images for unforgettable viewing experiences. The rugged design with improved double bridge and sturdy aluminium housing protect the finely adjusted optics, while the inert gas filling stops water and dust from getting in.

The CL Pocket is available in 8x25 or 10x25 magnification. It is supplied with a field bag, carrying strap, microfibre cloth, and eyepiece cover. The recommended retail price (RRP) starts at €780 euros.

EL Range with Tracking Assistant (TA) – ground-breaking precision



The News K20_EL Range TA 10x42

The EL Range has been the companion of choice for discerning hunters since 2011. Ten years after its launch, SWAROVSKI OPTIK now presents the EL Range with Tracking Assistant (TA), a new top-of-the-range binocular that seamlessly combines SWAROVISION technology with digital intelligence.

The EL Range TA delivers razor-sharp images with precise distance and angle measurement, with a measurement range of 10 to 2,000 meters (10.9 to 2,187 yds). The intelligent binoculars can be individually configured using a smartphone app and customised with the hunter's own ballistics data. Shot accuracy is ensured by factoring in atmospheric data such as air pressure and temperature, and by displaying the adjusted shooting distance and the clicks needed on the ballistic turret of a SWAROVSKI OPTIK rifle scope.

The new Tracking Assistant is a revolutionary new feature that helps hunters to locate the target area, particularly in difficult terrain. The EL Range TA will be available from February 1, 2021

dS 5-25x52 P Gen. II – smart and individual

With the dS 5-25x52 P Gen. II, SWAROVSKI OPTIK is launching a new rifle scope that, like its predecessor, combines the optical quality of conventional sighting-in optics with the key benefits of a digital scope to create an impressive whole. The scope calculates the correct aiming point at the touch of a button, taking into account the distance, air pressure, temperature, angle, magnification and personal ballistics data.

It is now possible to customise the hunting-related data on the high-resolution display using the dS Configurator app, for example the hunter can display six different digital reticles.



New K20 dS 25x52P Rifle Scope

Hunters can select which particular parameters (e.g. wind speed, bullet velocity, knock-down power) they want to see on the display, along with their position. Elements such as windage marks and the new alignment indicator can be switched on and off. The reticle illumination also has new features. To ensure the best possible visibility during use, the dS automatically selects between three brightness levels based on the ambient brightness.

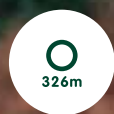
The design has also been enhanced, and the battery turret is now slimmer than its predecessor. The cockpit controls are more ergonomic and the bigger gap between the cockpit and the magnification adjustment ring makes it even easier to operate the rifle scope when aiming. The dS 5-25x52 P Gen. II will be available from March 30, 2021 at selected specialist retailers.



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EL RANGE GROUND-BREAKING PRECISION

WITH
TRACKING
ASSISTANT

SEE THE UNSEEN



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Barbour

Barbour's Spring Summer Countrywear range is a collection full of heritage and innovation, designed to present outdoor living enthusiasts with wardrobe essentials full of traditionally inspired pieces.



Barbour Alderton Wax Jacket featured with the Bankside Half Zip.

This season's Countrywear collection features functional and stylish pieces that are perfect for those long walks. Outerwear is influenced by the Barbour archive, made relevant for today with new versatile oversized fits in colourways of earthy olive and sand and a striking midnight navy. Performance shirts, heritage inspired tartan and casual rugged Tattersall shirts made with workwear fabrications complete the collection, offering the very best in practical country style.

This Spring, the Barbour women's Countrywear range includes new colourful baffle quilts, lightweight waterproof breathable jackets in casual and long-line shapes and classic wax styles with traditional tartan linings. Textured and soft knitwear styles are perfect for layering up or creating a more refined look with new spring floral printed shirts, dresses and tees, whilst checked and slim fit shirts add a contemporary touch to a collection designed to celebrate the British countryside.



Barbour Ashridge Quilt and the Barbour Newbury Shirt.

For further information, please visit your local stockist or barbour.com

Cadence, A New Name in Fly Fishing

A new name has joined the fly-fishing world, Cadence Fishing UK who have secured two of the world's best fly casters and anglers, Ian Gordon and Stevie Munn to head up the development of a new range of signature series fly rods.

With over a year in development the complete range features both double-handed and single-handed fly rods, as well as reels and lines.

Ian Gordon who specialises in double-handed rods, particularly in the field of Spey Casting, has combined three generations of salmon fishing knowledge with his keen interest in physics and biomechanics to develop a unique concept.

Stevie Munn, a lifelong fly angler and

CADENCE
GO FISHING. GIVE BACK.

one of the most qualified fly casters in the world has fused together his vast wealth of knowledge on all aspects of single-handed fly casting to develop a beautiful and comprehensive range of trout fishing rods.

Cadence have also worked hard to develop a range of fly lines that match each Cadence rod exactly, and Five reels complete the line-up, with sizes ranging from a 3/4 up to an 11/12.

Cadence Fishing UK are known for their bespoke packages in coarse fishing, and they will be bringing this concept to the fly market. Anglers will be able to choose the

material their handles are made from, either high quality AAA cork or hard EVA as well as rod tubes and other accessories. This allows anglers to build a package to their exact requirements.

Cadence will also be working closely with the wonderful Glenda Powell, who has joined Cadence as a Brand Ambassador. Glenda, one of the world's most qualified fly-casting instructors, operates a guiding and tuition service on the River Blackwater. Glenda has been extensively field testing the range of rods prior to their launch.

The Cadence Fly Fishing range will be launched in the Summer of 2021 and will be available to buy online via the Cadence Fishing website – www.cadencefishing.co.uk





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Homefield & Stream, 18 Church Street, Enniskillen BT74 7EJ N. Ireland
(+44) 02866322114

Sportsden, Trimgate Street, Navan, Co. Meath Ireland
(+353) 0469021130

Barbour

Report Highlights the Importance of Data Led and Best Practice Deer Management in Ireland

A report in the peer-reviewed scientific journal, *Microbial Genomics*, titled "Mycobacterium bovis genomics reveals transmission of infection between cattle and deer in Ireland" by Crispell et al..

Control of bovine tuberculosis (bTB), in the Republic of Ireland costs €84million each year and has significant financial consequences for farming families. The report evaluates if deer play a role in the spread of bTB to cattle.

Commenting on the report, a spokesperson for the Irish Deer Commission said "while deer like many other wildlife species are susceptible to TB at low levels, the report highlights that good deer management can help reduce the spread of potentially infected wild deer by carrying out informed data led culls annually to reduce wild deer numbers and maintain them at sustainable levels. Also, good deer management ensures we do not drive deer into new areas by over-culling or sustained increased hunting pressure."

It is understood deer can act as a spill over host for the infection where high deer densities are present, however there is no clear evidence to show deer are a source of infection for cattle.

The Microbial Genomics paper by Crispell et al. reports that the range and density of wild deer populations in Ireland is increasing. This statement is based on two published papers,

(i) A study on the 2008 national distributions and ranges of wild deer species present on the island of Ireland published in 2011 in the scientific peer-reviewed journal, *Mammal Review*, by Carden et al. . While new results based on 2019 wild deer data is currently being analysed by the Irish Deer Commission, the 2008 data is very much out of date and should not be used.

(ii) A different study published in the peer-reviewed *Scandinavian Journal of Forest Research*, by Liu et al. in 2018, titled "What factors affect national-scale deer population dynamics in the Republic of Ireland?", where the authors modelled deer population numbers based on the assumed the harvest rate data (NPWS cull returns from deer hunters) for each deer species reflected the changing deer populations for that species. They further assumed that the cull returns from deer hunters occur at an equal rate across all counties that is constant over time; in reality, this is not the case.

The NPWS cull returns has limitations, inherent issues and cannot be independently verified. In the absence of a deer census it is unknown if deer numbers are increasing or decreasing in Ireland.

In Ireland bTB is caused by the bacterium, *Mycobacterium*



bovis. The findings of a study undertaken by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) into the presence of bTB in wild deer and cattle in Co Wicklow, a hot spot for bTB, were published in 2018 and showed the presence of five strains of *Mycobacterium bovis* in the study area, which . Crispell et al.'s study also highlights cattle and deer share some of these strains of *Mycobacterium bovis*. James O'Keeffe, SVI, Head, DAFMs Wildlife Unit said regarding the DAFM study "this information does not inform us about the direction of spread of disease, and cannot be used to draw any conclusion about which species may be infecting which other species."

Other studies undertaken by DAFM in cattle bTB hotspots in Co Sligo and Co Kerry show no presence of bTB in deer tested. These findings suggest there is no correlation between the presence of bTB in cattle and the presence of deer. Similar findings can be taken from Scotland, despite an estimated deer population of over 800,000 wild deer, the country has been officially bTB free since September 2009.

A recommendation to the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht in 2015 by the Irish Deer Management Forum, Data Sub-committee (representatives of stakeholder interests nominated by their respective groupings and approved by the Minister for Agriculture, Food & the Marine and the Minister for Arts, Heritage, the Gaeltacht & Rural Affairs) confirmed "that there is no evidence to link Bovine TB incidence in deer in Ireland or the UK to Bovine TB outbreaks or persistence in cattle herds."

In 2018, Dr Eoin Ryan, Chief Veterinary Inspector at the DAFM said there is "no evidence of link between wild deer and the spread of TB." No study to date has showed the directionality of bTB transmission from wild deer to cattle (or badger) or vice-versa. Further research is required to elucidate transmission directionality within a potential multi-host system and certainly the integration of genomics into routine bTB surveillance, as Crispell et al. suggest, is a welcomed next step in further studies.

The many statements by academic and other experts in this area along with factual data available certainly call into question claims deer are a source of infection to cattle. While the Microbial Genomics journal report contains several short comings, the discussion the report creates is to be welcomed. It is clear more research and ongoing surveillance is required in conjunction with best practice data led deer management.

March stocking of Departmental waters

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) has stocked the following waters with takeable fish in March 2021:

- 1 March - North Woodburn, Rainbow Brown Trout, 1,000.
- 1 March - Lough Mourne, Brown Trout, 1,000.
- 2 March - Lough Money, Rainbow Brown Trout, 1,000.
- 2 March - Altnahinch, Brown Trout, 1,000.
- 3 March - Lough Brickland, Brown Trout, 1,000.
- 3 March - Killylane, Brown Trout, 1,000.
- 4 March - White Lough, Rainbow Brown Trout, 1,000.
- 4 March - Lower South, Rainbow Brown Trout, 1,000.
- 8 March - Branry, Brown Trout, 1,000.
- 8 March - Middle South, Brown Trout, 1,000.

- 9 March - Bellanaleck, Brown Trout, 1,000.
- 9 March - Moor Lough, Brown Trout, 1,000.
- 10 March - Meenameen, Brown Trout, 1,000.
- 10 March - Achork, Brown Trout, 500.
- 10 March - Glencrewan, Brown Trout, 500.
- 11 March - Keenaghan, Brown Trout, 1,000.
- 11 March - Craigavon, Rainbow Brown Trout, 600.

Details on recent fish stocking can be found on the nidirect website at: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/2021-fish-stocking-figures>.

NARGC SPRING REPORT FOR IRISH COUNTRY SPORTS & COUNTRY LIFE

The weather is certainly improving. The clocks having gone forward and there is the “grand stretch in the evenings”!

In the hedgerows, the blackthorn is in flower before even coming into leaf. A dawn chorus screams the joy of the new day from these same hedges and trees. The countryside and our gardens are coming back to life. My crab apple tree shows signs of early blossom; yes, spring has sprung.

I could focus in this report on the jobs that need doing such as pen building, equipment repair, game crop and cover crop planting and the big projects like duck pond construction that many of our NARGC clubs undertake.

We are the nation's practical conservationists. We don't just talk the talk, we walk the walk. This practical contribution extends from game rearing, to biodiversity, to the welfare of all bird species and for, the care of the countryside, something mostly ignored by the Government agencies tasked with these matters.

Funding comparison

Huge sums of State cash are inputted to the members of the environmental pillar, that pet project of the Green Party. In this fiscal year, we understand that the various members of the environmental network will between them receive over €1.7 million euro in funding. Nice! The NARGC is funded solely by its Member contributions.



National Association of Regional Game Councils

We are strong with 25,000 members in over 1,00 Clubs across all counties. The time has come to have our voices heard.

NPWS Review

The NPWS (the agency that issues our hunting licences, our foreshore wildfowling permits, that advises the Minister in charge on the European Bird's Directive and the Derogations from that Directive that allow control of Pigeon and corvids for crop protection and game bird breeding) is under review. I will say more on this towards the end of this article.

Lockdown activity

The NARGC has been active throughout the lockdowns. Our Chairman, Dan Curley, and his Officers have participated in many virtual conferences and meetings with Government Departments and international organisations.

Most recently, Dan Curley, Michael Fenlon, John Butler, Seamus Heraty and our Compensation Fund Administrator, Chris Gavan, have been active in the lockdowns.



NARGC at work in better times (l to r) Tom O Shay, Aine Feeney, Jim Brennan and Mick Fenlon.



Dan Curley -
discussing politics?

met with officials of the NPWS to progress various points on our agenda. Here is a short report from that meeting.

NPWS Meeting

1. Derogations for 2021/2022. We were told that the Minister (Green Minister Malcolm Noonan) had not yet determined on the Derogations but the officials indicated that details will be published before the end of April. (given last year's debacle, we will watch this closely).
2. The ban of lead shot over wetlands is now published law since February 21st last. Transposition into Irish law will occur within 24 months from that date. The NARGC reps requested that the NPWS clarify on many fronts – the true definition of a wetland, a national map of wetlands and boundaries, firearms proofing, wildlife safety, human safety and so forth.
3. It was agreed that the NARGC will assist the NPWS in creating a list of areas to be covered for public knowledge.
4. Deer hunting licences: The NPWS states that it is prepared for 2021 and the delays of last year should not be encountered re licence application packs. Hard copy licences will not be issued except on specific request and hunters requiring such copies should liaise directly with the NPWS by phone or email.
5. A new Wildlife Crime Unit is being set up during this year within the NPWS. The aim of this Unit is to monitor for such matters as poaching and unlawful activities otherwise as arise. The NPWS is engaging with An Garda Síochána to enhance co-operation and enforcement between both sections of State governance.
6. The NARGC and the NPWS agreed to continue a close liaison on all matters as arise in the period forward.

My thanks to Chris for the details in this report.

NARGC's activities and services

The Compensation Fund Office, under the capable hands of Chris Gavican and Margaret Cox, has remained open for business. The Office is dealing with claims and renewals as usual with enviable efficiency.

Our Mountmellick Office continues to answer queries and to

deal with membership issues. NARGC members can be assured of continuing service and support.

Government's Green Programme

The Green programme for Government continues apace. New legislation on carbon reduction is the most aggressive in Europe. Board Na Mona has ceased peat harvesting three years earlier than planned while briquette production is being phased out. All this while we now have to import peat fertiliser and lignite briquettes from Germany and the Baltic countries. Pure madness but it appeases the Green Party and that seems to be all that is important in Government these days.

Re-wetting the bogs

More worrying still are the plans as outlined to re-wet the bogs. This will have potentially disastrous results for our midlands. Re-wetting experts (and I use the term loosely) want to burst the drainage and without any structured plan, allow natural re-wilding. It has escaped their notice that we will end up with lakes and ponds but not bogs. The seeds that will be carried in will be modern plant types including invasive species. This is a disaster waiting to happen for farmers with lands adjacent to BnM bogs. Fail to plan is to plan to fail. The Ireland of ten thousand years ago, before humankind set foot here, is not to be retrieved. Let nature take charge they say! Nature has not been in charge these last ten thousand years. Are they planning human extinction? Re-wilding! We will resist.

A final look at the NPWS review

We have seen straws cast in the wind to have this agency recast as a Statutory Body. That move would increase the scope and powers of the NPWS while reducing its accountability and leaving it without Ministerial oversight. The key word for us is that currently this is a service. Were it to become an authority, we would not have a service but would rather become the recipients of dictates. That in our view would be a very retrograde step.

John Toal, PRO, NARGC



The N.A.R.G.C. Members' Compensation Fund

Members' Compensation Fund for Hunters, Clay Shooters, Target Shooters and others who are Members of our affiliated Clubs

The National Association of Regional Game Councils encourages game shooters and clay/target shooters to support the Shooting Lobby by joining a Gun/Game Club, Clay Pigeon Club or Target Sports Club affiliated to the NARGC. With 24,000 Members, you will be joining the most authoritative voice for the sport of shooting in Ireland. You will also enjoy the benefits of your Compensation Fund, which pools the cash contributions of its members. Only Fund Members can benefit from the Compensation Fund. Protection is available for Fund Members up to a ceiling of €10m per incident. The Fund is administered by the Association in the best interests of the Association and its Associate Members.

The Association welcomes the affiliation of new Clubs through its RGC structure.



In addition, with the NARGC you have:

- Full-time staff dedicated to working for shooting interests
- A say in the running of the Association - elections/resolutions
- A Members' Magazine posted free to your home at least once annually
- Habitat and other Grants for your Club - €350,000 granted annually
- Special Funding for Grouse Projects
- Grants for the purchase of Predator Control equipment by Clubs
- Mallard/Pheasant Release subsidies for Clubs and RGC's - currently €4.37 per bird
- Research into Game and other species
- Club of the Year Award

- Game Meat Handling Courses
- Representation otherwise at EU level
- A good working relationship with Farmers
- An Association Shop - books, badges, stickers, ties etc
- Monitoring and input into the drafting of legislation affecting shooting sports
- Inter-Club & Inter-County Annual Clay Shoots - biggest Clay Shoot in Ireland
- Members' access to information/advice on all issues every day
- Proficiency Courses and Safety Seminars for Associate Members
- Constant Government lobbying in Ireland and at EU level

We now offer
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For information on the Compensation Fund, call our Fund Office on FREEPHONE: 1800 222 444 or telephone our full-time National Fund Administrator on 086 788 8411 (office hours only please)

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Countryside Alliance



The future of country sports

In response to John Blair's proposed Private Members Bill to ban hunting with dogs, a number of organisations have been working together to counter the proposal (including, Countryside Alliance Ireland, the Northern Ireland Master of Hounds Association, the Hunting Association of Northern Ireland, the Irish Working Terrier Federation, the Irish Master of Foxhounds Association, the Hunting Association Ireland and the Irish Masters of Harriers Association). We have organised a powerful response to Mr Blair's consultation, we have lobbied the Speaker and MLAs directly about the consultation failings and instituted a direct lobby of MLAs by hunt and country sports supporters.

This is undoubtedly the first shot in a long battle over the future of hunting, not only in Northern Ireland but possibly across the entire Island. Shooting and angling are also under pressure from those who oppose country sports and our way of life, as demonstrated by the recent letter to the Northern Ireland Environment Agency by Wild Justice and a recent report into angling.

We should, however, use this to strengthen the ties across our chosen activities and challenge ourselves to understand how an argument against one activity can also be used against another.

We should look at these challenges not as negatives but as opportunities to stretch ourselves and to redouble our efforts at a grass roots level to promote country sports, encouraging friends to come along and take part, helping to dispel the misinformation that is being spread.

Generating positive PR is key. CAI must highlight and commend the hard work of Eugene Lynn and the wildfowling community as a great example. By installing 100 nesting tubes along the Bann, including Lough Beg and Lough Neagh it shows the contribution to conservation which the country sports community undertake throughout the year.

Politically, our MLAs will soon be moving into election mode and it won't be long until they are knocking on our doors once more.

While Health, Housing and Jobs are always the best way for MLAs to gain votes, CAI would encourage members to ask their local MLAs their stance on all country sports and to remind them of the many health benefits and jobs it creates and supports.

Public urged to take all steps possible to prevent wildfires as lockdown eases

From 1st April, people were able to meet for exercise in groups of 10 from two households. This is most welcome news and no doubt many people will be heading out into the countryside to celebrate being reunited with friends and family after a considerable time apart. However, Countryside Alliance Ireland would like to remind members of the public of the dangers of wildfires and the important part they can play in their prevention.

Wildfires have the capability to devastate farmland, wildlife and protected habitats, as well as the lives of people living and working in rural communities. The risk at springtime is particularly prevalent, as dead vegetation left over from the winter, higher temperatures and lower humidity levels can come together with deadly effect. We have only to look back to last year when by June fire crews had tackled more than 500 wildfires. At one stage the Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) had to deal with three separate incidents involving 180-200 firefighters.

We must state that there is a difference between prescribed or controlled burning and wildfires. Prescribed burning is the controlled burning of heather and grass plants. This is an effective method of land management with a vital role to play in the maintenance and recovery of several habitat types, including heather moorland. Whereas, a wildfire is an unplanned and uncontrolled fire.

The ease with which wildfires can start is a threat that our Fire and Rescue Services must be prepared for. Successful partnerships in high-risk areas, promoting cooperation and collaboration on wildfire issues are key. In this, gamekeepers, farmers and land managers have a particularly important role, as

they are frequently the first to see and report wildfires and their specialist equipment is invaluable in helping put them out.

But everyone can do their bit in preventing them in the first place, by following some simple rules when in the countryside:

- Do not discard cigarettes.
- Please do not light campfires or use BBQs as they are a frequent cause of wildfires.
- Dispose of all litter appropriately.
- Do not release sky lanterns. Once released, there is no control over where they end up.

If anyone finds themselves in a position where they encounter a wildfire that they are unable to bring under control safely, move to a safe location up wind and call the emergency services on 999 immediately, giving an accurate location of the fire.

This wildfire occurred near Belfast.





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Country Sports Ireland Launches NI Deer Stalking Training Course

Country Sports Ireland began delivery of our eagerly anticipated N.I. Deer Stalking Training Course on 1st & 2nd May at Creggagh Field Target Club, Draperstown. The course had been fully booked for weeks beforehand and feedback from learners has been fantastic. Learners were particularly complimentary about the unique online training manual which is provided FREE of charge to all learners upon registration.

The Country Sports Ireland N.I. Deer Stalking Training Course is accepted by the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Food Standards Agency Northern Ireland and is officially approved by Lantra - a leading training awarding body for the land-based/countryside sector.

Course content covers all relevant aspects of Northern Ireland's firearms, wildlife, animal welfare and food safety laws. There is also substantial content on safe and accurate shooting, deer biology, species identification, common parasites and diseases found in wild deer species.

For further information on the Country Sports Ireland N.I. Deer Stalking Training Course visit the 'Deer Stalker Training' section of the Country Sports Ireland website: <https://countrysportsireland.org/trainingDstc.php>



PSNI Pause New Firearms Magazine Policy

The Police Service of Northern Ireland has paused implementation of their policy requiring firearms certificate holders to apply for variation of their firearms certificate (at a cost of £30 each time) when making changes to the number of magazines that they possess.

Country Sports Ireland, other representative organisations, and a number of local politicians recently met with PSNI following significant concerns being expressed regarding the detail of the new PSNI policy on licensing firearms magazines and also the absence of any consultation on it.

The PSNI have now agreed to work closely with Country Sports Ireland and other representative bodies to find a better solution that enables the PSNI to meet their legal responsibilities but doesn't unfairly impact or inconvenience the shooting sports community. We will of course keep members up to date on any developments.

'Education' Phase for New Pet Travel Rules Extended to 1st July

Members will be aware that Country Sports Ireland has been working hard to overturn ridiculous new rules on pet travel which came into effect on 1st January following Britain's exit from the European Union, in collaboration with a group representing diverse canine interests.

This working appears to be bearing fruit with confirmation from Agriculture Minister, Edwin Poots that his department will extend the education phase for the new rules to 1st July 2021, to allow pet owners time to adjust to the new regulations. Routine checks will therefore not commence until 1st July 2021.

The minister has also reiterated his call for a Common Travel Area (GB, NI and RoI) for pets and says that his is continuing urgent engagement with UK, Irish and EU authorities to remove the unnecessary barriers to travel for pet owners after 1st July.

Under proposed new rules dogs travelling from GB into NI, including dogs returning to NI (for example, dogs participating in competitions, or bitches being mated) would require additional documentary checks as well as unjustified veterinary treatments (rabies vaccination, tapeworm treatments and veterinary certificates).



The first Country Sports Ireland N.I. Deer Stalking Training Course took place on 1st & 2nd May at Creggagh Field Target Club, Draperstown.

Country Sports Ireland Responds to Review of NPWS

A review of the remit, status and funding of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) is currently underway and will be concluded during summer 2021. A report will then be produced with recommendations for the future role and performance of NPWS.

NPWS is the government department responsible for the great majority of laws and licensing relating to country sports in the Republic of Ireland so the outcome of this review will be of significant interest to members.

Country Sports Ireland has been in direct contact with the review team; made a robust written submission on behalf of members and followed this up with a detailed online meeting. We also shared the link to the online Stakeholder Survey on our social media platforms, providing members with the opportunity to respond directly to the review process. We will be monitoring the review outcomes carefully and we keep members informed as things progress.



Country Sports Ireland has been working hard to overturn new rules transportation of working dogs from GB to NI.

Training

We have been inundated with enquiries about training course availability recently. In NI we have tentatively started course delivery with the NI Deer Stalking Training Course taking place on

1st & 2nd of May. At the time of writing Rol is still in Level 5 Lockdown but we would like to assure everyone that we will start full delivery of our leading training course programme again just as soon as regulations permit and of course it is safe to do so.

Updated information will be posted in the 'Training' section of the website www.countrysportsireland.org

A tragic loss for Ireland's Country Sports Community

Ireland's country sports community was shocked and deeply saddened to learn of the passing of our friend and leading country sportsman Adam Wilson on 13th April.

Son of Country Sports Ireland Gamekeeping Advisor, Ivan Wilson, Adam has been heavily involved in shooting and conservation from boyhood. Whether it was shooting woodcock, beating foxes from cover, lamping, deer stalking, rearing birds or fishing for salmon in the Owenkillew River, Adam was rarely without a gun or rod in his hand - normally with his dad and often brother Scott at his side.

Adam's broad smile and warm, friendly humour welcomed many shooters and field trial competitors from all over Ireland to Beltrim Estate, and Keepers Court shoot in Gortin, Co. Tyrone where he had recently taken over the running of both shoots from his father Ivan - having served a lengthy apprenticeship.

On behalf of all Country Sports Ireland members we send our sincere condolences to Adam's parents, Ivan and Gail, his brother Scott, daughter Lillia, Aunt Julie, his family circle, his many, many friends and all those who knew and loved him. May he rest in peace.

Contact Country Sports Ireland:

Email: ronan@countrysportsireland.org

web: www.countrysportsireland.org

Phone: NI 028 2954 1710 Rol 048 2954 1710



Adam Wilson will be fondly remembered and missed by many.

Obituary

BRIAN McCLEAN & HUGH NICHOLL

In the last year, two of shooting sport's greatest characters and gentleman sadly passed away. Brian McClean, this year on the 15th April and Hugh Nicholl on 30th August 2020.

They were great friends in the shooting field, lifelong trainers and breeders of working dogs and great fun to spend a day with. Brian and Hugh were generous in spirit and always willing to advise. Many of us benefitted from their help and enjoyed their company shooting in Co Tyrone.

Brian was often to be heard at the Irish Game Fair commentating on a gundog display in the ring, or taking part in a scurry. A day shooting with him was always accompanied by a running commentary and if it wasn't about your dogs, his dogs, or the success or otherwise of your shooting, it could be on as diverse a range of topics you would wish to hear.

Hugh was one of the best gundog trainers of his generation. He won the Irish Championship with his spaniel Aughanbrack Tittymouse (Lady) and throughout his life he bred and trained dogs for the field. Generous to a fault, more than one newcomer to the sport was given a dog by him. Hugh was always a good shot, whether of game or out ferreting rabbits. He was an excellent fisherman.

This picture sums them up and their friendship for me. Their ethos and approach to sport were what it should be. A few birds in the bag, but we'll not be greedy, if we have enough by lunchtime let's pick up a few rabbits with the ferret, or retire to Farley's Bar in Beragh where a hot whiskey might beckon.

They've finished the last drive. It's time to raise a glass to Brian and Hugh. Rest in peace.

By David Cowan Photo: Emma Cowan



Revealing the secrets of foxes

Fox scats are unlocking the secrets of foxes and shedding light on densities, revealing the real pressure on our ground-nesting birds. Mike Short explains:

Wildlife biologists can learn a lot by studying fox poo or 'scats' as we call them. As we continue processing the 800 or so samples collected during our recent EU LIFE Waders for Real project, we further unravel the lives of foxes that threaten the Avon Valley's breeding lapwing and redshank population.



How can common predators like foxes have such a detrimental impact on ground-nesting birds?

In monetary terms, fox scats are worthless, but to scientists trying to fathom why and how common generalist predators like foxes can have such a detrimental impact on ground-nesting birds, this sample is like veritable gold dust. Unfortunately, our LIFE-funding is over now, but the scats we amassed during the project represent hundreds of hours of fieldwork and a precious resource that we would like to make full use of.

Currently, our Predation lab is a fox scat processing factory. We still have 300 or so samples stored in the freezer ready for analysis, but others are oven-drying so we can weigh them and measure their volume, and others are flaking apart in water. Fox scat 'soup' makes the lab whiff, but it's bearable and all samples are judiciously teased apart.

By estimating the relative proportions of undigested macroscopic prey-items, such as feathers and bird feet, small mammal bones, and fur and teeth from rabbits and hares, we can determine the composition of fox diet and the frequency that various prey-items occur between sites. Alongside natural prey resources which occur locally, foxes are adept at subsidising their diet by exploiting a wide-range of anthropogenic resources, some of which are easily digested and don't appear in scats.



Scats are oven-dried so we can calculate the dry-volume of undigested prey remains.

For example, we analysed the stomach contents of a fox killed by a valley gamekeeper and found wax-paper wrappings from a McDonalds meal – a clear indication that foxes with access to river meadows can benefit from human food-waste from further

afield. The fox population has access to a wide variety of resources on a very large scale, as suggested by an adult vixen GPStagged in the Avon Valley, who travelled to Southampton and back in one night before she was culled on what is arguably the most important wader breeding area.

But a scat can tell us much more than what the fox ate: it also reveals the fox's individual

identity. From DNA, we can determine its sex, and degree of 'relatedness' to other foxes sharing the same landscape. Knowing the number of individuals present, provides important ancillary data to consider alongside our GPS-tracking data.

So, before we dissect a scat for diet analysis, we collect faecal DNA by carefully rubbing the exterior surface with a fabric-coated swab. Meticulous care is taken to ensure no cross-contamination occurs. Swabs are stored frozen ready to be shipped to a specialist laboratory, where geneticists use a combination of laboratory and software techniques to distinguish individual identities (genotypes) and determine whether each was either male or female. It costs about £45 to genotype a scat, but it is money well spent. Using the LIFE-funding, we sent DNAyielding material from tagged-foxes and faecal swabs to a Swedish laboratory highly experienced in fox work. The results from this initial sub-sample of scats were, quite simply, astonishing.



The DNA swabs will distinguish individual identities and sex.

In 2017, we GPS-tagged 10 foxes in the Upper Avon Valley on river meadows just south of Salisbury. These 10 foxes occupied two neighbouring fox territories (size = 32 hectares (ha) and 44ha) indicating a density of 13 tagged adult foxes/per 100 hectares which is far higher than we expected. However, genotyping of fox scats gathered between March-May, detected the presence of a further 15 foxes using the same 76ha area. Because of the timings of scat collection, these are assumed to be adult.

Many foxes (both tagged and untagged) were detected from only one scat, so these genotype detections cannot be used to distinguish territory-holding residents from encroaching neighbours or transients that may have been passing through. Nevertheless, it shows the extreme pressure that wading birds are subjected to and may explain why they no longer breed in this part of the valley. In the same project, we went on to GPS-tag foxes in the lower Avon Valley, on river meadows just north of Ringwood.

Lapwing and redshank still breed here, and again, we collected lots of fox scats. Now that we have tasted the power of DNA analysis, we would like to genotype these scats too, to determine whether these birds were under similar fox pressure. This is a potentially revelatory piece of work, perhaps explaining why wader productivity is so poor. Regrettably, the funding provided by our LIFE project would not stretch to that, so unless we can find sponsors – public or private – to fund completion of this ground-breaking research, it will regrettably remain unfinished.

Support GWCT Predation Research

It costs £170,000 a year to maintain current levels of research on predation, and we'd like to do a lot more. If you'd like to help us extend that research any amount would be welcome. All payment cards and PayPal accepted. For more information please visit <https://www.gwct.org.uk/predator>



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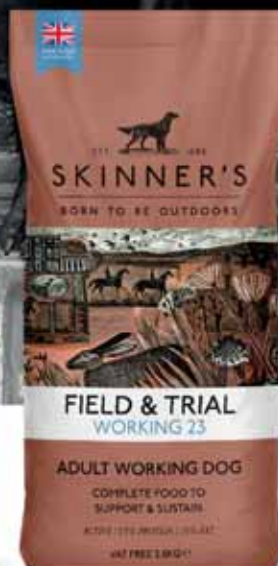
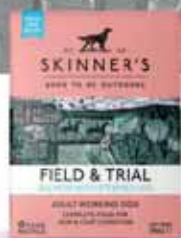
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Visit Britain's 'We're Good To Go' certification - Irish and UK Fairs awarded certification



Visit Britain have announced the launch of a UK-wide industry standard and consumer mark, in partnership with the national tourism organisations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales to provide a 'ring of confidence' for tourism as the sector works towards reopening.

The 'We're Good To Go' industry standard and supporting mark means businesses across the sector can demonstrate that they are adhering to the respective Government and public health guidance, have carried out a COVID-19 risk assessment and check they have the required processes in place

THE Game Fair, Ragley Hall Works 23-25 July 2021 has received certification

The Game Fair, which is set to take place Friday 23 to Sunday 25 July at Ragley Hall in Warwickshire, has received official 'We're Good To Go' certification from VisitBritain, the industry standard and consumer mark to provide confidence when restrictions are lifted, as per the Prime Minister's roadmap for recovery.

The three-day outdoor event covers everything from archery, clay pigeon shooting and food, to equestrian, fishing, dogs, and falconry, not to mention the amazing shopping.

First held in 1958, the annual event has grown from a gamekeepers' get-together to become the most comprehensive countryside festival of its kind in the world.

Tourism Minister Nigel Huddleston said: "I want to encourage the public to experience a great British holiday this summer and

be confident that they can do so safely. This new industry standard will show people that tourism businesses, destinations and attractions are adhering to the guidance. It puts safety first and is an important move in getting this industry back up and running."

VisitEngland Director Patricia Yates added: "With millions of jobs and local economies across the country reliant on tourism it is essential that businesses can get up and running as soon as the respective Government advice allows to capture the peak British summer season."

Managing director James Gower commented: "We are delighted to be given this seal of approval, which is testament to the hard work and commitment of our team who have ensured we are following best practice. Sales of tickets, camping and hospitality are high with some areas close to being sold out. The demand for events has never been greater. This accreditation will encourage even more people to come

together safely this summer and visit The Game Fair for what is set to be a well-deserved celebration."

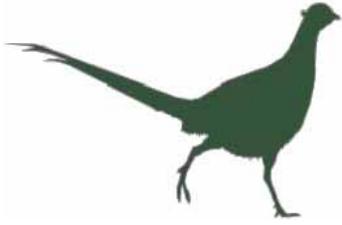
For more information, visit: www.thegamefair.org.

Irish Game Fair & Fine Food Festival 31 July-1 August has also received certification

Because the Irish Game Fair, as part of its planning for the 2020, had already robust 'Covid Safe' plans in place including a redesigned layout the organisers were 'quickly out of the traps' in having their plans approved and were delighted to receive their certificate and the approval to use the 'We're Good to GO' mark to indicate to traders, performers, competitors and visitors that all reasonable health precautions will have been taken to ensure the fair has a safe environment to visit.

In the light of prevailing advice we may be requesting visitors to take some personal precautions. This advice will be posted on the website www.irishgamefair.com





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- Dogs, donkeys, birds of prey
- Living History and much more



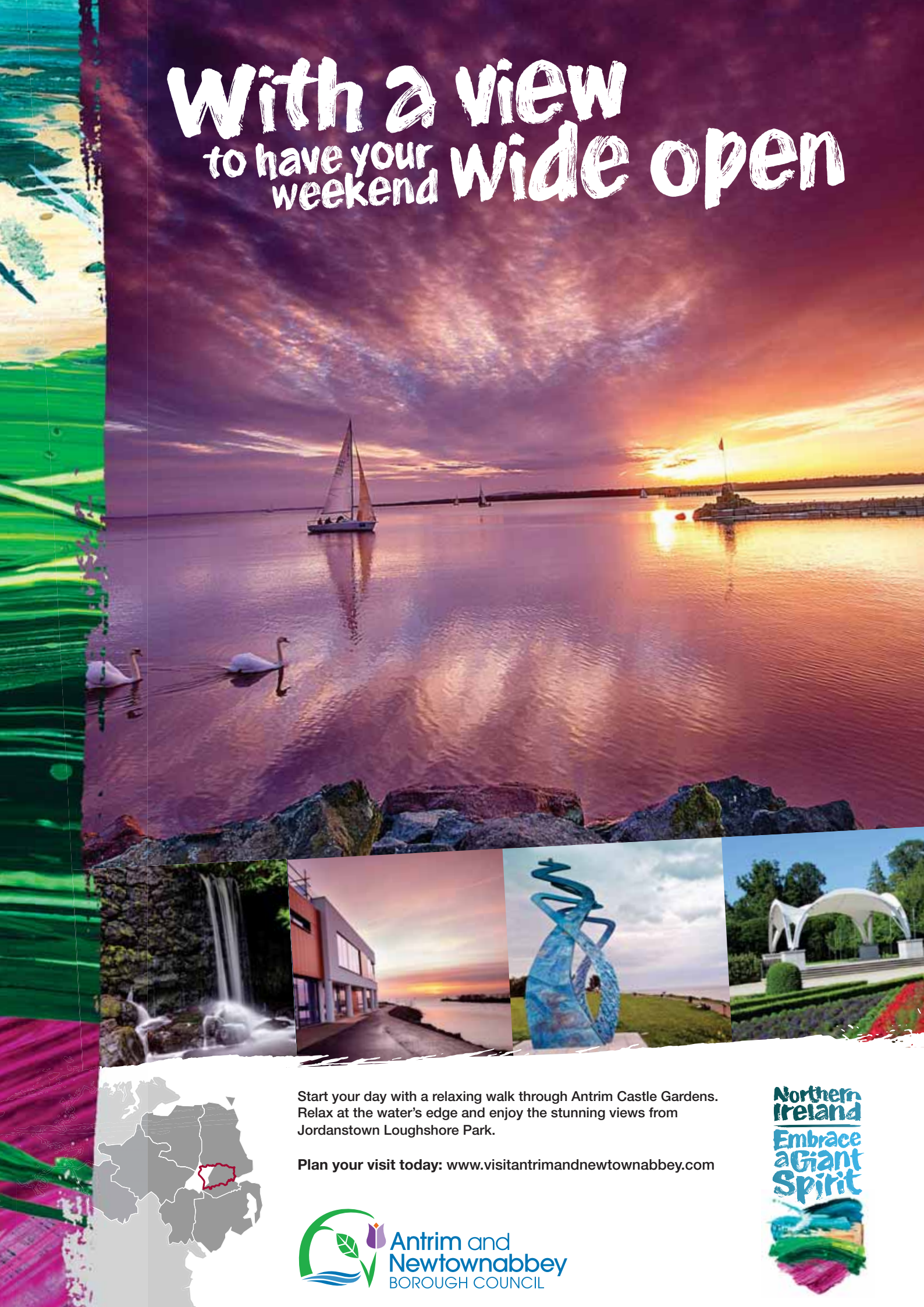
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www.thevirtualgamefair.com

THE GAME FAIR YOU CAN VISIT EVERY DAY

A warm welcome from Antrim to Game Fair visitors

Antrim restaurants, pubs, guest houses and hotels look forward each year to the weekend of the Irish Game Fair at Shanes Castle, not only for the trade but the sheer buzz it creates in the area.

In 2020, despite the best efforts of the organisers, Covid continued to plague the country and the decision had to be taken to postpone the fair until 2021. The new date for 2021 is Saturday 31st July and Sunday 1st August 2021.

AS ONE DOOR CLOSSES ANOTHER OPENS

However, the Great Game Fairs of Ireland team had an innovative contingency plan in place! Based on their 41 years' experience of delivering award-winning game fairs and country



FAIR 'opened' on the 29-30 August 2020 at www.thevirtualgamefair.com. The Virtual Game Fair was designed to replace not only the Irish Game Fair but all of

during 2020, 2021 and 2022. The Virtual Game Fair has provided a unique opportunity for traders to present their wares to a worldwide marketplace and for the host Borough to showcase the attractions of this unique area to an international audience. With the huge international readership of sister publication

Irish Country Sports & Country Life standing at 100,000 and the thousands of avid Facebook supporters from around the world, we have delivered an attendance to date of over 200,000 visitors from all over the world making this the most visited Irish Game Fair ever.

"The new dates for 2021 for the Irish Game Fair at Shanes Castle, Antrim are Saturday 31st July and Sunday 1st August 2021."

sports magazines they designed and built THE VIRTUAL GAME FAIR. With support from Antrim & Newtownabbey Council, THE VIRTUAL GAME

the other Game Fairs cancelled throughout the UK and further afield, in 2020. And it was designed to run 24 hours per day, 7 days per week and 52 weeks per year on an ongoing basis

EXHIBITORS ROWS & PAVILIONS



Competitions

THE VIRTUAL GAME FAIR Championships and competitions kicked off in August 2020, launching a schedule of interactive events covering essentially all aspects of country sports and living.

Some competitions were qualifiers for finals at the 2021 Game Fair at Shanes Castle, Antrim while others are for fun and, of course, the prizes!

Check out the events at www.thevirtualgamefair.com and on Facebook



Calling ALL Traders!

You are rather spoiled for choice to have face-to-face contact with customers at the Irish Game Fair at Shanes 31 July -1 August and /or to carry this contact throughout the year by joining the Virtual Game Fair.

To find out more, telephone 028 4483 9167 or email: marketing@thevirtualgamefair.com

Year-Round BARGAINS

The Game Fair has always been the place to pick up a bargain, and you can now get them at The Virtual Game Fair throughout the year. All your favourite Game Fair Rows and Pavilions are right here to explore with many more exhibitors joining us throughout the year. Visit any exhibitor to see their full product range and seasonal offers.

Added to that, several exhibitors present an extra special offer for The Virtual Game Fair's Bargains aisle. Many can be had right through the year.

For traders, The Virtual Game Fair provides a live, online marketplace to reach a potentially huge audience nationally and internationally.

The Virtual Game Fair Gundog Rescue & Rehoming Gundog Show sponsored by Feedwell and The Great Game Fairs of Ireland

The show was judged by Shauna McGroarty well known for her success with both working and showing golden retrievers. Entrants were simply identified by number.

Workers in action winners



1. Jean Collins-Pitman Consett, Co Durham - also OVERALL WINNER
2. Jean Collins-Pitman (as above)



Spaniel winners



1. Julie Warboys, Polegate, East Sussex
2. Gary Conlon, Co. Roscommon



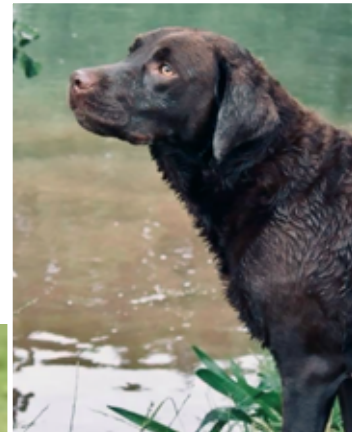
Pointer & Setter/HPR winners

1. Jean Collins-Pitman
2. Jean Collins-Pitman (as above)



Retriever winners

1. Sarah Hatton
2. Thomas Burns Ballywalter



The Virtual Game Fair Horse & Donkey driving show sponsored by **Toggi** and **Connolly's RED MILLS** organised in association with the Whip & Collar Club and the Donkey Breed Society NI.

Horse Winners

Our judge Mr Joe Quigg commended all the entries and was amazed at the quality of horses, vehicles and harness. At The Whip and Collar Driving Club we are indebted once again to

Mr Albert Titterington for allowing us to continue our association with Great Game Fairs of Ireland and long may it last.



Winner and overall winner is John Gourley with his pair of Friesians from the Fawcett Stables put to a Brougham.



Runner up is Robert Picken with his Chestnut Section D Welsh Cob Albert put to a Morgan Back to Back Rali car.

Donkey Winners



1st Jill Castles



2nd Coalean Cochrane

Junior Class



1st Junior winner is Mark McAleese age 7 with his father's Black Section D Welsh Cob Cathael Black Magic put to a London Trolley.



Runner Up: Caragh Cochrane with roller

Overall winner receives a Crystal Trophy. Winners in each class win a Toggi Canopy or Balmoral Coat & Red Mills voucher. Runners Up win Toggi Detroit Boots.

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THE VIRTUAL GAME FAIR Country Sports Writing Competition

The inaugural Virtual Game Fair writing competition has certainly brought the poets out of hibernation with both winner and runner-up submitting poems.

The winning authors are:

WINNER: 'One Shot Wully' by Seamus Erwin

RUNNER UP: 'Water Wolf' by Pamela Marten

Seamus Erwin, a well-known hunting man took the top spot with his amusing tale, of a day out with terriers and a well known shot some 30 years ago... Written in the style of the great American story teller, Robert Service, the 'Bard of the Yukon,' Seamus's poem caused a few smiles from the team!

ONE SHOT WULLY

There's a man from Ballymena – I'm sure you know him well,
His name was Wully Allen and this story I will tell.
Big Wully was a civil sort and not a bad big bloke
But a dopey doc and a bottle of booze sent his wee house up in smoke.
Now Wully was a hunting man and many of you know
This little story I will tell, happened many years ago.
He loved to hunt at Clinty, Craigywarren and Carnbeg
Along with Harry Dempster, Bob Irons and Little Craig.
They all had fancy autos, gleaming in the sun,
Some of them held 5 shells – Big Wully's held only one.
He started off the season with 20 shells in his box,
Little were we all to know, he would only miss one fox.
Wully's single had no permit, no number or no name,
Yet he carried it everywhere – from Clinty to Coleraine.
But one day when out hunting, with Erwin and McDowell,
As Wully was taking up his stand, the fox slipped out the hole.
It ran down along the fence, then up along the brew,
Big Wully gave a jump as the fox came into view.
We held our breath in silence as Big Wully made his play,
Then came the bang we waited for but the bugger got away.
Wully stood there baffled, his gun down by his side,
He said, 'I thought I got him, but the shot was far too wide.'
Up the field came wee Erwin – his face was in dismay
And Wully got a bollicking on that cold winter's day.

Seamus Erwin

Pamela Marten from Dungannon earned the Runner Up prize with her paeon to her favourite fish – the pike.

WATER WOLF

I sit looking out across the water
Watching the wind blow ripples across the surface
And chasing unseen tides deep below
The grey top of a cold unwelcome mass.

I wonder where they are hiding?
Watching and waiting for prey to come along.
Or are they already feasting on a meal long caught,
Resting in the aftermath of a battle won?

The Water Wolf in its brilliance of colours,
Yellows, blacks, greens and browns,
With stripes and spots covering it's body
And providing camouflage wherein it lives and hunts.

Lightning fast speed for ambush and attack,
Jaws of razor sharp teeth, strong and lethal.
A head so big with ferocious features
And a powerful tail which speeds it along.

This is a creature hated by many men,
Seen as a pest who will eliminate stocks
Of the fairer fish – tastier to the palate
And as threat to us – we become a danger to them.

Man will ignore their natural beauty,
He will catch and kill, rather than see
That there is plenty for all of us to live on
And leave the pike to swim, wild and free.

Surely when caught, we should see nature
At its brilliance as defiant and strong.
These creatures will fight for their life and freedom
Rather than give up and die at their captor's hand.

As we release them back into the water,
They will take a minute to regain their strength.
Fight over, the energy restored,
They will swim away proud and free.

I alight from my daydream of my favourite species
And look again at the lake before me,
Surrounded with windswept trees, banks and bushes
Reeds in the water, making up the habitat of the pike.

Pamela Marten

sponsored by the Great Game Fairs of Ireland and Coch-y-Bonddu Books
www.anglebooks.com.

There were 31 entries from all over the UK and Ireland for the competition which was judged by Paul Daunton (UK) a well known stickmaker, carver and judge.. All photographs were resized and were sent to Paul only identified by a random code. It is interesting that he obviously liked the style work of Paul O'Sullivan and Adam Tipton whose sticks appeared in the results several times. The standard of the entry was so good that many excellent examples of

carving missed out within the prize structure. However a selection of these will be published on social media and in the Spring issue of the Irish Country Sports and Country Life magazine

Results:

Best Painted Stick and best overall a Pheasant head by Dafydd Davies, Mid Wales

Runner Up with a Tiger Snake Adam Tipton, Kirkham Nr Preston Lancashire
VHC Adam Tipton – Adder

VHC Paul Purnell with a Lions Head, Lincs

Commended: Robert Upton, with Spaniel with Dummy, Waterford

Commended: Pat O'Sullivan -Mouse, Cork

Best Unpainted stick Pat O'Sullivan, Cork - boot

Runner Up Mouse by Pat O'Sullivan, Cork

Commended: Robin O'Reilly with a Pheasant Head, Lois



Charity by the Mourne Sport Dog Club and sponsored by FEEDWELL, Barbour, Irish Country Sports and Country Life magazine and by Jim & Sharon Dalton who have donated prizes of €50 each to the top lurcher and terrier.

Judges were supplied with hard copies of the entries all of which had been given a number.

The Lurcher Championships judged by Davy Rodgers



Champion Lurcher Lurcher & Overall Champion

Owned by : Rebecca Dalton



Res Ch Lurcher

Owned by: Amy Edwards

The Whippet Championships judged by Jim Fletcher



Champion Whippet

Owned by: Darren Gallagher



Res Ch Whippet

Owned by: Amy Chaytor

The Terrier Championships were judged by Ian Heslip



Champion Terrier

Owned by: Jen Foster



Res Ch Terrier

Owned by: Grace Hilditch

Overall Champion was judged by Kieran Young and Albert Titterington

From three fine examples of their breeds the judges agreed that the lurcher should be overall champion.

All winners & Runners Up qualify for the Five Nations Championships at the Irish Game Fair, Shanes Castle Antrim 26/27 June 2021.

Special prize awarded by Albert Titterington : ' The Dog I would most like to take home not in the awards' : Patterdale owned by Odette Wilson



The Colette Gannon Memorial Award for Sportsmanship

In association with the VGF show Kieran Young decided to award the Colette Gannon Trophy for sportsmanship in the working dog world.

This year's winner is Lisa Beggs not only for her obvious care and conditioning of her dogs but also for her sporting demeanour when competing at shows.



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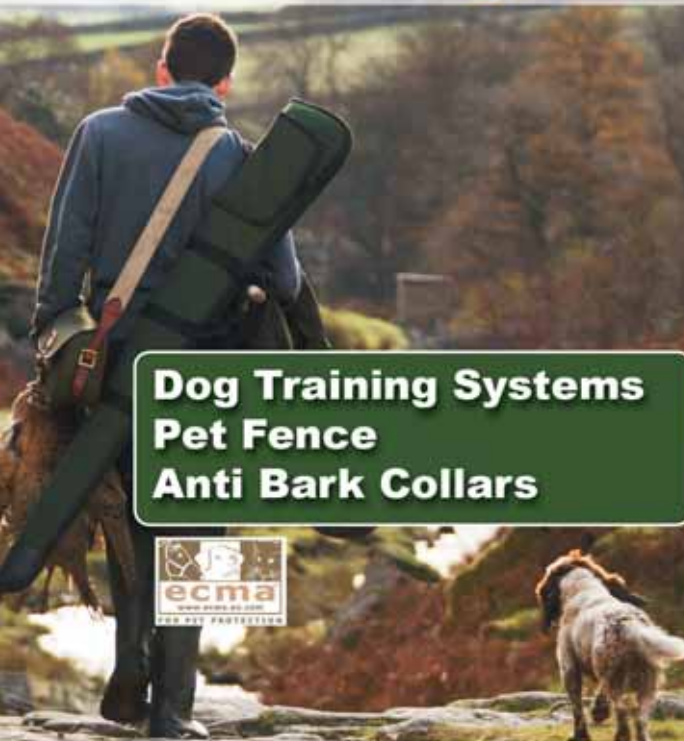
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Red hind stalking on Taransay

There's something quite magical about hunting on an uninhabited island on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean. Something that arouses a primeval sense of raw adventure. In Scotland there are around 140 uninhabited islands in total.

However, only one of them boasts its own herd of red deer, like Taransay does. The tiny, remote Hebridean island has been uninhabited since 1974, except for holidaymakers, and is the largest island in Scotland that lacks a permanent population. Remarkably, the 3,500-acre island has a population of approximately 50 stags, 100 hinds and 40 calves.

In the early 1980s the then owner of the island released 10 hinds and two stags to establish a source of venison for his family. Today's herd carries good body weights – they're of average stamp for west coast hill deer – plus there's a few Royals in the herd as well.

Made famous after starring in the

BBC series *Castaway 2000*, the bleak, treeless island became part of Borge Lodge Estate when it was purchased by pharmaceutical magnate Adam Kelliher in 2011 for a reported £2 million. It sold in just five days. The island is pristine, with picture-perfect beaches, rolling machair meadows, gargantuan rocks and numerous archaeological sites.

The island has evidence of inhabitation going back some 10,000 years, and it has a firm place in Celtic pagan folklore. Throughout history it has been the site of fierce battles including the Massacre of Taransay in 1544, when the Morrisons of Lewis invaded. At one time there were three villages on Taransay but the population dwindled, with the last remaining family moving to the mainland in 1974 when the island became principally a place for sheep grazing.

When I visited, I stayed at Borge Lodge itself, which is a plush nine-bedroom pile on the neighbouring island

Harris, and has recently undergone a complete refurbishment under the direction of swanky London interior designers, Beaumont Interiors. Marbled wetrooms, million-thread count cotton bed linen and views of the Sound of Taransay, all come as standard. This is five-star luxury accommodation where you would not expect it. A member of the Scottish Country Sports Tourism Group, Borge Lodge comes with a private chef and housekeeper and can accommodate up to 14 people. We had the place to ourselves, however.

The estate also has four self-catering cottages. Two are traditional island dwellings, but the other two are highly modern architecturally-inspired one-bedroom spaces that need to be seen to be believed – ideal for romantic getaways. According to a review in *The Financial Times*, "Borge Lodge Estate takes the self-catering experience to a level of sophistication previously unknown in the Hebrides."



We boarded the estate's landing craft, a leftover from the Falklands War.



My eyes were drawn to a large herd of reds.

Getting to Harris itself is not difficult. There are two options – fly into Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis or drive up through the Isle of Skye and catch a ferry. Road trips provide unrivalled thinking time and are a great way of shaking off work stresses before you arrive.

En route we spied all sorts of indigenous wildlife

Stalking red hinds on the Isle of

Taransay has to be one of my best diary entries. To reach Taransay, we boarded the estate's landing craft, named The Verley Anne. A leftover from the Falklands War, this rather eccentric vessel certainly aroused the inner explorer in me. After loading up the Argocat, deerhound and rifle, we began the 40-minute voyage from Ardhaisaig in Harris. En route we spied all sorts of indigenous wildlife including puffins, seals and a golden eagle.

After a busy few months at work, I was ready for some clean Hebridean air, wilderness and solitude to help recharge my batteries. Time forgot this part of the world. Islanders are orthodox Presbyterian, meaning virtually all commercial activity ceases on a Sunday and a large proportion of the population attends church every week. Inhabitants do not drive their cars, draw their curtains or hang out their washing on this sacred day. An atheist myself, but the slow pace and peace and quiet makes a visit somewhat soul cleansing and completely restorative.

Walking off the landing craft onto the untouched white sand was an experience in itself. So isolated from mankind but brimming with wildlife. I felt like the explorer Captain Cook or Tom Hanks in *Cast Away*.

I had the island to myself for the whole day. The plan was to work my Bavarian mountain hound Gretel and attempt to cull a hind or two using my new custom rifle. Trying to ignore the

It had fallen instantly to the shot and was found quickly by my hound.





Dragging her back to the Argocat before loading onto the boat back to the lodge.

distracting far-reaching views across to Harris, I concentrated on scanning the island for signs of the herd. With stag season now well and truly over, stalking wily hinds is doubly tricky. Hunting a lone stag that has been cast out of a herd by a more dominant rival is difficult enough but creeping up on a dozen twitchy hinds requires fieldcraft of the highest standard.

The hinds were on edge

I scanned the terrain for the flash of pale rump. Suddenly my eyes were drawn to a large herd of reds, containing around 40 animals, disappearing over a hill. Two of the stags in the group were sparring, causing the hinds to be on edge. Now out of sight, I decided to stalk into the group, using the dead ground as cover.

With the wind in my face, I belly crawled up the side of a small hill to catch a glimpse of the herd on the other side. I continued belly crawling through the tussocky grass strewn with deer droppings and couches where they'd been laid up. Now just 150 metres away from the herd, they appeared more relaxed as the stags had exhausted themselves. I was surprised to see stags

still rutting, but perhaps October's warm weather put their behaviour out of kilter. A satellite group of hinds were grazing to the left of the group and a lone hind at the back presented a safe shot. I unfolded my bipod and positioned the rifle in front of me. I wriggled into position and peered through my scope.

The herd was still unperturbed and unaware of our presence so there was no undue pressure. I could take my time. The ghillie ushered me to shoot the rear hind as he watched the group through his binoculars. I waited until she was perfectly broadside before squeezing off a round. It instantly fell to the shot. I reloaded and the herd stayed put, not knowing where the danger was coming from.

Once the herd had moved off I slipped my hound and allowed her to claim the beast as her prize. She was proud to indicate to us that she'd found the dead hind. I galloped her on the hill and then dragged her back to the Argocat before loading her onto the boat. Borve Lodge aims to cull around 20 hinds and 10 stags each season, and this old hind was most definitely part of the management plan.

After a day's hard hunting on the hill, the one thing every hunter wants is a hot bath. Borve Lodge boasts seven deep roll top baths as well as complimentary luxurious bubble bath. Once clean, the next thing most hunters want is a dram. This was served in front of the roaring open fire in the stylish, beamed drawing room. Somehow I knew the long drive home wasn't going to half as enjoyable as it was going the other way. I am already planning my trip back.

A day's stag stalking on Taransay costs £500 per outing. Price includes transportation from the Lodge to the island and light lunch.

For more information, visit: www.borvelodge.com

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The New Season Beckons



To be afloat on an Irish Limestone Lough during the Mayfly is a magical experience.

Walking through the frozen countryside it's hard to imagine the transformation which will occur over the next few months. The desolate landscape seems bereft of life but beneath the frozen earth the pulse of Mother Nature is beating strongly, the fallen leaves of Autumn are leaching nourishing nutrient through the soils and when the warmth of longer days calls new life to spring forth a new landscape will appear, lush herbage, a forest canopy to welcome and sustain a new generation of plants and animals.

Beneath the frigid waters of lough and stream, life goes on as normal throughout the winter, the shrimps, nymphs and caddis busy themselves foraging and the trout recover from their autumnal spawning activities.

Now that the shooting season is behind us, the angler's instinct kicks in and we are thinking about the new fishing season. The game shooting will provide a stock of fly-tying materials – pristine bronze mallard, pheasant tails, teal and partridge. Angling club meetings (now virtual meetings), WhatsApps and Facebooks are buzzing, new fly patterns are discussed, the older traditional patterns are given a

makeover, new materials breath life into old ideas. Everyone likes new toys and there's usually a new reel, rod or net to added to the list of (essential!) items to be acquired.

I still have a beautiful ten foot, four weight Guideline Fario rod bought last year which unfortunately didn't see a lot of action but hopefully this year it'll be guiding nymphs and skating sedges through my local river and maybe delicately dropping dry buzzers and sedge patterns at dusk on Lough Erne or Arrow should we be allowed to travel.

By St. Patrick's Day new life is evident along the river, snowdrops, (Galanthus or milk flower of the snow) will have been in bloom for a while, the primroses and daffodils will just be starting, the bright yellow stars of lesser Celandine show at the foot of hedgerows and woodlands' edge bringing colour to a barren landscape.

The dawn chorus will start with robins and blackbirds, joined by wrens and warblers as the days grow warmer. Below the surface of the cold, clear river nymphs of the large dark (spring) olive are stirring, Baetis Rhodani are the first up-wing fly to stir the trout and luckily they are quite widespread and fairly resilient to pollution.

Nymphs are agile darters and are very capable swimmers

Normally my trout fishing starts on St. Patrick's Day, it's my birthday and I always like to snatch an hour or two around midday in the bracing outdoors before retiring to the comforts of the pub and an open fire. Weather conditions are important for fishing the large dark olive, a cool, wet day will delay the emerging flies escape from the waters surface leaving it vulnerable attack by hungry trout, on dry days they hatch too quickly and on very bright days the hatch is usually sparse. The nymphs are agile darters and are very capable swimmers, they can be represented by hares ear or pheasant tail nymphs though I much prefer to imitate the duns with dry flies, a Greenwell, Kites Imperial or quill bodied emerger pattern is just the ticket.

A typical early season recce would see me arrive at the river about eleven, a nice upstream wind blows skiffs of rain up the valley but the biting cold has gone and daffodils and primroses nod in the breeze. Occasionally the sun will glint through the sullen clouds bringing some colour to a dull day. I walk slowly upriver, thinking I've too much clothing under the waders but there's a lot of



No finer specimen of wild brown trout can be imagined than the Irish Lough trout.

waiting and watching in this game and that's when the cold creeps in.

At last I come to the favoured stretch, a series of pools and runs, the nymphs feed on algae and detritus amongst the stones and weed, they seem to hatch from the fast runs and the trout take them as they sweep down into the pools. As I scan the pool for signs of a rise a dipper forages in the pool tail, Britains earliest nesting bird, it seems impervious to the cold and wet, we have erected nest boxes under all the bridges and the little birds are in them almost immediately. A kingfisher flashes past but the pool is otherwise quiet so I stalk quietly up to the next pool on the bend.

As I approach the neck of the pool a wagtail flutters from an overhanging bush on the far side and picks off a hatching fly, then repeats the performance a short while later, this is a good sign, the olives are hatching! I slide into the bank-side below the run and immediately spot a couple of small trout rising, splashing in the fast water.

A little wooden footbridge crosses a burn that comes in from the far side, the fast run slows at the mouth of the burn and the olives wash around caught in



The olives stir the trout on a spring afternoon.



Another beautiful fish on the fly.

the back eddy, it's in here among the golden gravel and gleaming green water crowfoot that a couple of trout are quietly sucking down the flies. I can tell by the bulges and the occasional flash of gleaming flank that these are better trout but getting into position without being spotted from the crystal-clear water could be a challenge, wading stealthily into the rushy margins I edge within casting range.

The breeze takes the cast to the back eddy

The trout go down for a while and I light a cigar and wait until the olives come down in little flotillas, then trout are back on the feed even more vigorously than before. I pull line from my old Hardy Marquis and lift a little Greenwell's Glory from the keeper ring, degrease the tippet once more and cast some line. The breeze takes the cast to the back eddy and I check the line so it falls in curves with plenty of slack to avoid drag. My heart stops as the fly drifts the currents of that quiet back eddy and just as its about to dragged

into the main current there is a whorl on the surface and the fly is gone.

Instinctively the rod goes up and that lovely solid feeling as the line thumps and vibrates down the rod. The trout bolts for the deep water down the pool and the old click pawl of the reel sings, the little nine foot rod bends into a hoop and after a few more runs a beautifully spotted wild brown trout wallows in the net. I unhook him, admire his golden flanks and perfect red and black spots while holding him in the current until he streaks back into the depths of the pool. A feeling of contentment sweeps over me, I sit down and admire the river valley, the pristine waters and the thought of a whole fishing season ahead!

By May the transformation of the countryside is almost complete, although the meteorological summer begins on June 1st (astronomical summer June 21st) there are signs of summer all around and compared to February and March the countryside is a different place. Nowhere is this more pronounced than the great limestone

loughs of Ireland where wildlife flourishes in the lush habitats, it's a paradise for nature and anglers alike.

How fitting that the mayfly (*Ephemera Danica*) should feature in these settings, it's the foundation of the food chain for so many species of wildfowl and fish and the basis for so many styles of angling in these stunning settings. 'Ne'er caste a clout 'til May be out' refers to May blossom (*Hawthorne*), the clout was a vest or undergarment so don't take off your vest until the Hawthorne blossom appears and it is this event that anglers are waiting for – once the Hawthorne is in bloom the mayfly will be hatching and the big trout will be on the fin.

By this time, the shores and islands will be a riot of wildflowers – herb robert (pink), marsh marigolds (yellow), cow parsley (white) with wooded areas carpeted with bluebells and wood anemones. The summer migrants have arrived – sand-martins and swallows, chiffchaffs, blackcaps, tree pipits, warblers, sandpipers and of course the cuckoo whose hawk-like flight can be

seen among the islands. Drifting along the shores listening to the chorus of birdsong, heat of the sun on your back, scanning the water for signs of fish, water lapping against the boat is mesmerising.

The smell of woodsmoke and mayfly dancing above the trees

My favourite time of year, the mayfly season is unique experience, the camaraderie in the pub and guesthouse, the excitement of a big wild brown trout and the sheer enjoyment of being out on the lough is fantastic. The evocative names of the Irish Loughs betray their beauty and conjure up memories of old friends, steaks over smouldering embers, strong tea from the Kelly Kettle, the smell of woodsmoke and clouds of mayfly dancing above the trees. Each Lough is unique, part of our natural and angling heritage – Sheelin, Arrow, Carra, Mask, Derg, Erne, Ennell, Owel, Conn, Cullin, Ree and the huge Lough Corrib which covers 68 sq. miles

and is reputed to have 365 islands.

There are several ways of fishing the mayfly: dapping with the natural insect, nymph and traditional wet fly fishing to imitate the duns but for me, the cream of the sport is the spent gnat. On a warm evening, with a slight breeze it's a rare sight to see the clouds mayfly dancing above the trees in their nuptial flight then watch the females set out over the vast expanse of water to lay their eggs and lie dying on the surface – hence the spent gnat. The ducks, terns and swans gorge and so do the trout.

As the evening light drops, the flies get trapped in the wind lanes and up come the big fish which normally don't show near the surface but this a feast not to be missed. Holding the boat just off the wind lane, or 'slick', watching for the tell-tale bulge, whorl or a little splash as a big trout moves upwind, slurping down the dead and dying flies. A bump, movement or rattle in the boat and the wary trout just melts away, the chance is lost.

Stealth is required, silently moving

into an ambush position on the oars, line out, ready to be cast, flies oiled and tippet degreased. Sharp eyesight is required to spot the fish as they cover some ground and can be quickly past before they're spotted. Often an angler can hear the 'slurp' of a feeding trout as it sucks down the flies, often before seeing the fish, the sound carries over water and excitement builds as the fall of spent intensifies, the light drops and the fish appear.

To be out in the vast Irish limestone Lough amid a glorious sunset, mayflies drifting overhead and struggling in the slick is pure magic, a sense of occasion, it's difficult to get the conditions right but sooner or later the fish will come up the slick, grazing down the flies and the cast goes out, the trout takes a couple of naturals then your fly disappears, the pause, then strike and the surface erupts as a beautiful golden flank flashes in the pink light of evening and the reel sings out in the quiet twilight. Yes, this is the Irish angling experience – a new season beckons!



The splendour of a lough sunset.

Inland Fisheries Ireland reflects on 2019 and its role in the protection, conservation, and management of our inland fisheries resource



Each year Inland Fisheries Ireland reports on its activities through its statutory annual report and financial statements. As IFI prepares its 2020 report, the 2019 report was recently laid before the Oireachtas and this report will be published in the coming weeks. Highlights of the 2019 annual report are provided in this article.

Protecting and safeguarding our fisheries resource into the future is one of the key roles of Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI). The critical work carried out by our protection staff helps to conserve and protect our fisheries resource for all and safeguard it into the future. Fisheries Protection Officers spent 157,980 hours in 2019 on anti-poaching patrols. IFI personnel carry out these patrols by vehicle and on foot through different methods including the use of; boats, kayaks, PWC, quads, bicycles, air corps and drones.

The number of patrols totalled 28,274 in 2019. IFI inspection teams carry out regular checks to ensure that anglers and licence holders are in full compliance, in 2019 there was a total of 34,307 fisheries inspections. 158 Fixed Charge Penalty Notices were issued for breaches in fisheries and environmental legislation and for more serious breaches a total of 77 prosecutions were initiated and concluded in 2019. Over the course of the year 788 illegal items were seized. Among these items Illegal nets totalling a length of 9,499.48m were seized in our freshwater, at sea and along our estuaries.

IFI carries out routine water quality inspections to assess levels of pollution in different habitats, water quality is the most important factor to ensure fish have a habitat where they can thrive. In 2019 staff carried out a total of 25,064 water quality inspections. The estimated number

of fish casualties in 2019 amounted to 7,000 and these were due to various causes, such as: agricultural practise, industrial operations, municipal works, some unconfirmed and others by disease or natural causes.

Inland Fisheries Ireland works with the Office of Public Works (OPW), local authorities and associated contractors to ensure protection and conservation of our fisheries resource on several multi-annual flood relief schemes and other flood relief/defence projects. Some of the major flood relief works that took place in 2019 were: Dunkellin River and Aggard Stream flood relief scheme (Co. Galway), Cor River flood alleviation scheme (Co. Monaghan), Enniscorthy River flood relief scheme (Co. Wexford), the Bandon River flood relief scheme (Co. Cork) and Whitechurch Stream flood alleviation scheme (Co. Dublin).

The research and development division at IFI supports operations staff to manage our fisheries resource through research that helps to build accurate knowledge about our fisheries and their habitats. Part of this work includes a programme covering individual fish species, habitats, invasive plants, surveys of individual lakes and rivers while also meeting some of Ireland's obligations under the Water Framework Directive (WFD).

In 2019 a total of 233 rivers and 16 lakes were surveyed. Twelve fish species including sea trout were recorded in river surveys. Brown



RIB patrols with illegal nets, Galway July 2019)



Tagged Bluefin Tuna Donegal Bay 2019)

trout was the most common species and was recorded at 91% of sites, followed by salmon at 29%. In the 16 lakes surveyed thirteen fish species and one type of hybrid were recorded. Brown trout was the most common fish species recorded, occurring in 93.8% of the surveyed lakes.

Inland Fisheries Ireland continued to work on the following four significant hydromorphology projects: The Environmental Riverine Enhancement Programme (EREP), The EU-funded AMBER (Adaptive Management of Barriers in European Rivers) project, The National Barriers Programme, funded by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and the INTERREG cross-border Catchment CARE project.

The National Eel Monitoring Programme monitors the different life stages of the eel in key eel index catchments around the country. The recruitment of juvenile eels from the ocean into rivers was very poor for 2019 with low numbers recorded in four of the trapping sites (Ballysadare, Inagh, Maigue and Feale), apart from the trap on Lough Corrib which caught 122kgs of elvers. The poor recruitment in Ireland was matched with a similar

pattern across Europe.

IFI's research and development division are involved in a wide range of projects relating to salmon and sea trout and provide the information on which annual salmon management advice is based. A number of the projects include: Investigating the migration, distribution, habitat usage and survival of sea trout and salmon smolts in the marine environment on the west coast of Ireland – Salmonid West Project, including SMOLTRACK, implementing the Sea Trout Assessment Monitoring Programme (STAMP) at lough Currane in Co. Kerry and the COMPASS project, a transnational project that aims to build capacity for environmental monitoring and management of marine protected areas in the coastal seas between Ireland and western Scotland.

For the first time Ireland was granted permission to run a pilot scientific programme to catch, tag and release Atlantic bluefin tuna. These are the largest tuna in the world (over 4m in length and up to 1500lbs in weight) and they are highly sought after by sea anglers because of their power and speed. The bluefin tuna angling season opened from 15 August to 12 November 2019 and in that short time 209 tuna were tagged and

released in good condition by authorised skippers over 202 fishing trips. Data on the location, length and condition of every tuna encountered was recorded. The majority of the bluefin were tagged and released off the coast of Donegal (205), with one encountered off the coast of Clare and three off West Cork.

In May 2019 IFI's projects management office (PMO) opened the following new funding schemes: the Capital Grants Scheme, the Midland Fisheries Fund and the Salmon and Sea Trout Rehabilitation, Conservation and Protection fund. The PMO ran a series of workshops at nine different venues around the country and a total of 105 applicants attended these workshops. 26 grant applications were approved to a total value of €1,038,150. The Capital Grants Scheme had six successful applicants that were awarded funding to a total sum of €128,300, the Midlands Fisheries Fund had one successful applicant that was awarded funding of €15,000 and the Salmon and Sea Trout Rehabilitation, Conservation and Protection fund had 19 successful applicants that were awarded funding to a total sum of €894,850.

During 2019 the PMO team worked with regional staff on ongoing funding schemes. The



East Mayo Anglers Association disabled angling facility on the River Moy in Foxford, Mayo was funded €160,000 by IFI under the NSAD & a further €30,000 contributed from East Mayo Anglers Association.)

funding is to improve access to angling and to enhance riverine habitats. In 2019 IFI guided to completion 30 projects with a total value of €939,000. The completed projects included those relating to angling access, environmental assessment and habitat enhancement.

The Corrib Catchment Enhancement Plan was initiated in 2019. The project aims to inform on potential river enhancement and conservation works that would have the most positive impact on salmonids and their habitat. Under the project, river enhancement works will only be undertaken in rivers that have undergone hydromorphological modifications, but which have not yet recovered as expected. All development works are carried out in full compliance with both the Water Framework Directive and the Habitats Directive.

2019 was the International Year of the Salmon (IYS), a world-wide initiative of the North Atlantic Salmon Organisation (NASCO) and the North Pacific Anadromous Fish Commission (NPAFC). IFI's PMO team worked with NASCO to facilitate a grants scheme which had funding of €150,000. One project from the scheme was the National

Salmon Scale Project, which consisted of anglers becoming citizen scientists by taking scale samples from the salmon and sea trout they caught before they released them back into the water. When analysed, the scale samples can provide a great deal of information about the fish. The project was extremely successful in 2019 with over 570 scale envelopes received from anglers from 20 rivers to date. The initiative was such a success that it will be carried into 2020 and beyond.

Angling tourism is an important contributor to the Irish economy and it provides employment to numerous small businesses and other stakeholders in all areas of the country. In 2019, IFI's team of angling advisors attended a total of 17 trade shows spread across Ireland, the United States, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy and the United Kingdom. IFI finished a new suite of promotional angling brochures aimed predominantly at anglers from abroad who may be planning a fishing trip to Ireland. The brochures are available in English, German, Dutch, French and Italian. The new suite includes over 40 brochures. IFI also hosted twelve journalists on trips to Ireland and

worked with them to promote and highlight some of our prime angling destinations.

IFI has introduced a dedicated education and outreach team that is predominately funded through the Dormant Accounts Fund (DAF). Over 2019 the team ran a pilot novice angling programme around the country with the aim of getting more people fishing. IFI are also working on a Novice Angler Strategy that has involved extensive surveying and consultation and is hoped to launch in 2021. 'Something Fishy' is the main educational programme that Inland Fisheries Ireland is involved in and it continues to be very successful with a total of 110 schools having took part by the end of the 2018/2019 programme.

Inland Fisheries Ireland put together a Climate Action Framework as part of our obligation as a public sector to support Ireland in meeting its national carbon reduction targets. IFI continue to work on an overhaul of its fleet, as transport energy accounts for nearly 60% of IFI's overall energy consumption. The fleet now includes eight fully electric vehicles and 55 new vehicles with a reduced carbon profile. IFI carried out a number of other green initiatives including: the installation of external building cladding, energy monitoring and smart building systems, window and door upgrades, e-bike trials and procurement, telematics data management, heating system upgrades and the installation of solar photovoltaic systems installation.

The work of Inland Fisheries Ireland is to ensure that the valuable natural resource of our inland fisheries and sea angling resource are conserved, managed, developed, and promoted in their own right to generate a positive return for the community and the environment.

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THE GRAYLING'S JOURNEY

What could beat fly fishing for grayling in beautiful surroundings?

Those of us familiar with TV reality shows such as the X Factor know well that every contestant is on 'a journey.' That time in a life when purpose becomes a thing. In days of old we'd probably have reached back to Sunday school teachings for some Biblical reference: St Paul on the Road to Damascus springs to mind. The grayling has, albeit unknowingly, been on one such journey.

Latin names for fish are often dull and obscure but not the grayling *Thymallus thymallus*. It smells like it reads: the thyme herb. I knew an old river keeper many years ago who swore he could scent the presence of grayling on a cold, frosty morning. I'm not sure I ever believed him but grayling do truly smell unlike any other fish I have ever handled. The mark of a successful grayling day is hands that still, hours

later, trace in the air a musky, grassy but antiseptic aroma.

In this century grayling are a worthy adversary for any angler. Fly fishers enjoy the autumn challenge as trout take to their spawning beds for the winter. Coarse anglers delight in the sensual art of trotting, breaking out refined and perfectly balanced centre pin reels. It is the time of year to not only do battle against the fish but also the short nature of the days and swollen rivers. Success is usually hard won and we love our grayling for that. But in the last century that love was in short supply.

Today, writers such as myself readily describe grayling at the Fourth Game Fish or the Lady of the Stream but had I been penning this column 50 or a 75 years ago I wouldn't have been penning it all. For nobody liked, cared or was interested in grayling. They were vermin. I have fishery rule cards in my desk drawer from as late at the 1990s that state: All grayling **MUST** be killed. And it wasn't just the prejudice of a few. The National River Authority, as the Environment Agency of England



The Author with a 'Lady of the stream'.

and Wales was called back then, sought me out for access to chalkstreams so that their electro fishing teams could remove entire grayling populations.

It seems incredible now that such state sanctioned slaughter took place but it did, though ironically, I wonder how much good it ever did as population control because I'm sure fish numbers were more plentiful back then than they ever are today. Or maybe that is the memory playing tricks, but the truth is that such actions never seemed to much dent the numbers.

In Ireland, of course, you don't even have the option of deriding the grayling for the simple fact that you don't have any. You are not alone in this; grayling are not, for instance, native to Scotland. It seems this is a product of the last Ice Age 20,000 years ago which pretty well killed all freshwater fish under the ice sheet.

Prehistoric grayling scales found at archaeological sites

However, pockets of grayling did survive in what we would now call northern continental Europe so when the thaw began they colonised limited parts of England and Wales with prehistoric grayling scales found at archaeological sites to the north in Yorkshire, to the west in Wales and to the south in



A beautiful streamy run downstream with more unruffled water above.

Hampshire. The limited nature of the distribution was a product of the changing European water landscape; only a few continental rivers were connected to the UK mainland for a brief period of time allowing passage for the grayling. And that is pretty much how things remained for the next twenty millennia with grayling confined to the catchments of the Humber, Welsh Wye and Hampshire Avon until the intervention of man.

There is no record as to why we started to introduce grayling into rivers, to which they were otherwise absent. But we did, I guess, as much for curiosity and sport as for any particular scientific purpose. In 1816 the first grayling were removed from the Hampshire Avon and put in the River Test. It was to be nearly another

hundred years before the River Itchen followed suit. In 1855 grayling from the Derbyshire Derwent were sent to Scotland's River Clyde. Five years later a consignment arrived in the River Thames but disliking the polluted water headed upstream until they eventually took hold in a tributary, Gloucestershire's River Windrush.

And so the spread of grayling across England, Wales and Scotland continued, small introductions often accidentally extending far and wide across extensive river catchments, especially in Scotland. It has continued. As late as the 1980s new populations were introduced into the River Lambourn in Berkshire and rivers of south Wales. Why did nobody ever try in Ireland? I have no idea. It was not as if the process was very difficult; some 'Scottish' grayling are the result of 20,000 ova dispatched by train in wine bottles from Derbyshire in the 1860s.

Returning to that other journey: there was clearly a time when grayling were much admired – a welcome curiosity and sport fish for a period that lasted from the early 1800s to a time around WW1. It seems inconceivable to me that they would have been thought of otherwise when introduced into the hallowed waters of the River Itchen in 1901. Sometime after that there was a backlash, especially on the southern chalkstreams, where they became labelled as vermin, somewhat ironical when you consider that the longest chalkstream on the planet, the Hampshire Avon, was one of the original rivers for the native grayling.



A healthy river will support healthy populations of both trout and grayling like this one.

Why this change? I think it was snobbery disguised as science. The 'science' is that grayling diminish the brown trout population by competing for food and habitat but there really is not any evidence to support this; grayling and trout occupy different zones in a river. Likewise they spawn at entirely different times of year. A healthy river will readily support healthy populations of both species and the truth is that it is the brown trout, the most widely distributed freshwater fish across the UK and Ireland, that is the more durable should conditions turn sour.

No, what I think happened to the reputation of the grayling was a by product of the Halford dry fly revolution. Just as nymph fishing was seen as impure by Halford's disciples who held sway on the chalkstreams in the first half of the 20th century, so were grayling. The crime of the grayling was that they were not only not trout but also that they were 'introduced'. Dry fly fishing for trout was seen as the purest expression of the sport and any wretched grayling who had the temerity to rise to the dry was an unwanted interloper. But you couldn't say that out loud, so some pseudo science was

invented, fake news if you like. For those who knew no better, which was most of us, it seemed reasonable, so the mud stuck.

The renaissance of the grayling to its current day popularity can be traced back to the 1970s the most tangible evidence being the formation of The Grayling Society in 1977. However, rolling back half a century of misplaced beliefs was never going to be quick but grayling were to be helped by a changing society and attitudes.

I hate to say it but there was a generation that had to head off to the great chalkstream in the sky. After a lifetime of being told grayling were no good, trying to convert them to the grayling cause was a lost one, hence my catch cards that continued in circulation for another 10-15 years.

Changing times and attitudes

However, more generally I think our attitude to fish in general was changing. Catch and release, an anathema to that same generation who held grayling in disregard, was slowly becoming more commonplace. Frankly if you were content to release a trout why would you want to kill a grayling? I, for one, never fail to get excited whatever the

species of fish grabs my fly. We were also getting more liberal in our attitude to fly fishing. No longer was it simply the preserve of posh trout and salmon river fishers. The stillwater revolution bought in a whole new layer of society. Species you might never associate with the fly – pike, carp, saltwater – were suddenly being caught and written about. Fly catalogues started to sprout the most incredible creations. Nor should the advances in tackle and clothing be disregarded, especially the latter. Today, with all the polar fleeces, raingear and amazing waders, we can choose to ignore the foul weather that often accompanies a grayling trip. Likewise rod and tippet technology, not to mention new style flies, have allowed us to create rigs specifically designed to catch grayling.

In my mind I'm content that the grayling journey is over. It has travelled from curiosity, to villain to an elevated 21st century status that few would begrudge. It is wild. It is beautiful. And hangs out only in the purest of streams. As the youth say, what's not to like?

Simon Cooper is a fishing guide, writer and founder of chalkstream specialists, Fishing Breaks. www.fishingbreaks.co.uk



New fishing styles may be used successfully to tempt grayling.

Angling in a Digital Age



The past year has proved very difficult and strange for us all. Many people have had to adapt to a different type of working and living. This has led to an increased reliance upon the electronic devices within our homes. This may take the form of a TV with Netflix, or a laptop with zoom installed. A colleague recently joked that ‘Can you hear me ok?’ could be the most used phrase this year! With all this uncertainty, Inland Fisheries has adapted very well.

Many areas of the Northern Ireland Civil Service were already setup on a network based call management application. This allowed team members to seamlessly transition and use the same numbers that were used when office based. This is also helped by our partnership with NI Direct, which acts as the switchboard for the Northern Ireland Civil Service and also hosts a website with an abundance of information. This website has worked very well for us as an information hub on our individual



Anglers at their pegs.



Enniskillen and beautiful Lough Erne.



A fine reward for this happy angler.



sites: licence/permit purchasing, news updates and regulation queries.

Inland Fisheries introduced the electronic licence system in 2016 and without this I'm not sure how we would have coped this year. With all but essential businesses being closed this has allowed anglers to purchase their licence and permits with ease.

We welcomed the news that angling would be considered as an appropriate form of exercise during this pandemic. With mental health being a particular



concern, we continue to promote our sport as great outlet for those feeling the negative effects of lockdown and life in general.

We also took stock of our media presence and recently worked with one of Ireland's premier photographer/videographers, Gardiner Mitchell. Gardiner has captured the beauty of our sites in high definition drone footage which can be viewed on our departments YouTube channel. This can be found by searching DAERA on YouTube and our newly compiled playlist is found under the playlist tab. We are currently working on more videos and plan to utilise this platform more in the future. Why not subscribe and check for videos showing some of the stunning sites that can be accessed and fished with the appropriate licence and permit. The pictures with this article are stills taken from videos available on our playlist.

In the Department we take pride in our reflective approach to work. Partnering with many skilled teams we look at how we can improve upon the services we offer.

With this in mind we are currently working with colleagues on an app to be used by both staff and the public. This app will ensure a more effective service to all and help communicate our infrastructure needs throughout the public angling estate.

Anglers and their Pike caught in an Erne Predator Competition.



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CHASING THE STEELHEAD



Elusive, perplexing, challenging, considered by many as the ultimate game fish, and known among anglers as The Fish of a Thousand Casts: *Oncorhynchus Mykiss*, the steelhead. This fish belongs to the same species as the rainbow trout, but behaves more like a salmon. It hatches

in the gravel bottoms of fast flowing rivers of the American Pacific Northwest, Russia, and, while not native to but introduced in 1876, the tributary streams of the United States Great Lakes.

After one or two years, the steelhead then migrates into the Pacific Ocean (or

the Great Lakes), grows larger, with colour changing to that of silver and brass, black spots appearing on its back, and a lovely pinkish stripe emerges between tail and gills. After up to three years, it returns to the hatch river to spawn, but unlike a salmon, the steelhead journeys back to the sea, then returns again and again to its home river, spawning multiple times.

Stuart, an avid fly-fisherman living in Ireland, has fished Atlantic salmon, sea trout, and brown trout in Ireland, England, and Scotland, as well as sea trout in Argentina, but after several trips to the Canadian Province of British Columbia, and Northern California, the Fish of a Thousand Casts still eluded him. And so, when he announced he wanted to try yet again, I grabbed my cameras, he packed rods and boxes of self-tied flies, and off we went on a Winter fishing holiday, first to the North Umpqua River in Oregon State, and

The strong flow of bright water is broken up by ledge rock outcrops.





A grab from a very cagey fish.

then to the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State, to fish the Bogachiel and the Hoh Rivers.

The North Umpqua River, a tributary of the Umpqua River, is famous for some of the most challenging steelhead fishing in the world, and while much of the river is available to drift boats and bait fishing, it boasts a thirty-one mile stretch of fly-fishing only, a fly-fisher's

dream. It's a spectacular river, deceptively deep with a strong current, in places filled with boulders and crashing white water, difficult to wade with its extremely slippery river bottom, and true to its Native America name meaning "Thundering Water." As challenging to fish as the steelhead are to land. Rising in the high Cascade Mountain Range, and known for its

emerald water, a result of snowmelt during the entire year, the river has a reputation of both good Summer and Winter runs, though the Winter run of mid-January through March is much more weather dependent, and as we would be there in early February, Stuart knew he'd have to hope for the best.

Once we settled into our self-catering cabin near Idleyld, and got Stuart's



He fished hard across the river's 39 mile stretch.



We yearned to hear "Fish on!" so said goodbye to the North Umpqua.

license sorted, we set out to explore the river, seeking the legendary pools where the steelhead were known to lie. At the time we were there, all wild steelhead were catch and release only, on single barbless hooks. Anglers were allowed to keep two hatchery steelhead per day, distinguished by a clipped adipose fin, but the Winter run is entirely wild. Much of the water is public, and as it is bordered by the Umpqua Highway, access is relatively easy. We passed one or two anglers who had scrambled down rocky cliffs to the river, but as the water was taken, we determined to come back to these places when they were free.

We discovered lovely trails through the woods leading to prime fishing spots, most of those near the historic and storied Steamboat Inn, a long established lodge which first began as the Steamboat Store, a small lunch counter operation which Clarence Gordon had opened near the junction of Steamboat Creek and the North Umpqua River.

Clarence later moved his store to the present location farther downstream, and in 1957, he sold his business to Frank Moore and his wife Jeanne, who in turn built the Inn as it stands today,

overlooking some of the best fishing water on the North Umpqua. In 1951, Clarence Gordon, Frank Moore and many other anglers were instrumental in persuading the Oregon State Game Commission to change the regulations on the North Umpqua to fishing with artificial flies only for the thirty-one miles between Rock Creek and the Soda Springs Dam.

The Steamboat Inn is also the hub of the Steamboaters, a group of anglers formed in 1966 who have determined to protect the natural resources of the North Umpqua, and preserve the area for fly-fishing only. Roderick Haig-Brown, a Canadian writer and honorary member of the Steamboaters, in the 1960's described this section of the river as "The North Umpqua remains one of the best and most beautiful of summer Steelhead streams...The strong flow of bright water is broken up by ledge rock outcrops, the pools are deep and long and hold fish well..." Because of the ongoing passion of the North Umpqua anglers, the crucial drainage of tributary streams as well as threatened spawning areas have been, and will continue to be, surveyed, rehabilitated, and protected by Oregon Government agencies.

Just a bit past the Steamboat Inn, Stuart spotted the place for his first cast on the North Umpqua. Nice streamy deep water with a lovely gravel bar, and underlying bedrock perfect for fish to lie. Surprisingly, the water was open, and with his 13' 6" Sage double-handed rod and gear in hand, he hurried on the wooded trail ahead of me, eager to feel that clear blue-green water surrounding him, to hear the whistle of the line as it shoots out, hoping for the whir of the reel, the elusive steelhead on. He studied the water, chose to start with a ten foot slow sinking tip, selected a size 4 orange General Practitioner fly, and off he went.

But despite a tug, a nudge, then a grab, an almost take, and a few changes of fly size, the steelhead proved cagey yet again.

And so, after several disappointing hours, we moved to other likely places, but we continued to return nearly every day to the lovely Steamboat gravel bar.

For over two weeks, Stuart fished hard, every day, on every bit of that thirty-one mile stretch of the North Umpqua. We even went below the fly-only water, to Whistler's Bend Park, where Stuart landed a few whitefish and



There was a feeling of perfection when we first saw the river right at our back door.

a small juvenile steelhead, but not the fish he was after. We found several choice spots up river, places popular with other anglers, and when those spots were free, we spent hours there, the water always so sublime that surely that Fish of a Thousand Casts must be lying just within reach.

But sadly, despite endless casts in so many places, it wasn't to be, not on this river. Over the many days on the Umpqua, we met several other fishermen, all of whom were having the virtually same experience, few if any chances, and only hearsay of one or two fish landed. While it was early in the season, we all agreed that there should be more fish in the system. Stuart compared flies and gear with the local anglers, talked about the best pools, techniques, times of the day, depth of water, air and water pressure, sun, clouds, all of the things that can influence landing a steelhead, and everybody reached the same conclusion: even though the weather was generally pleasant above water, below was still too cold for the fish to actively run, the result of snow melt runoff from the mountains. The fish were likely settled much closer to the coast, or indeed, still in the Pacific Ocean, before running the approximately 110 miles to this fly-

fishing only section of the North Umpqua.

While we thoroughly enjoyed our entire stay along the North Umpqua, the gorgeous scenery, the daily picnics, the long walks through the woods, the lovely water that always beckoned, always held promise of that take, that cry of "fish on," it was time to change rivers. So, we said goodbye to the North Umpqua, and on we went to the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State, to continue the quest on the Bogachiel and the Hoh rivers.

As an aside, we did learn that later in February and through March, the steelhead run resumed on the North Umpqua, and while not with a huge number, there were still plenty of fish landed and released. We had been in the right place, but not at the right time.

After a two day drive up the scenic coast of Oregon and Washington onto the Olympic Peninsula, passing through the Olympic National Park, over the Hoh River, through the Hoh Rainforest, we turned off the highway onto a quiet, thickly wooded side road and arrived at our secluded cabin.

Luggage in hand, we opened the door, and there, through the windows and glass door at the far end of the living room, was our first view of the

Bogachiel River. Stuart dropped the bags, walked directly outside, stood on the small rocky bluff overlooking the river, gazing out over the water, his eyes bright with excitement, sizing up the potential. "It's fantastic. Just look at that water, that pool up there at that bend, there, that's the place," he said, some sense of relief in his voice. "It's different, it feels different." It did indeed, even to me. While the Bogachiel is flatter, less turbulent, more consistent in width than the North Umpqua, at least where we were, there is an altogether uncommon sense about it, the feeling somehow of, well, perfection?

We knew the cabin that we rented was "on the river," but we didn't expect it to be just outside the back door, the rushing water alternately calming and exhilarating. It was good to change rivers. It was the right place to be. He knew it. But now, was it the right time?

The Bogachiel is part of the Quillayute River system, which along with the Sol Duc, Calawah and Dickey Rivers, drains into the largest watershed on the north Olympic Peninsula. Its name is a corruption of the Native American Quileute words "bo qwa tcheel el," meaning "gets turbid after a rain," "muddy waters," or perhaps simply "big river." Like the North

Umpqua, it is known for prime steelhead fishing, but as opposed to the Umpqua, the Bogachiel, and indeed most of the rivers on the Olympic Peninsula, are primarily Winter run rivers, with smaller Summer runs. One advantage to the Bogachiel is that it is not glacier-fed, and does not have a runoff period from melting snow, resulting in a longer fishing season. In addition, at a length of fifty miles, it is a relatively short river for the steelhead to navigate, with excellent fishing only fifteen or so miles from the ocean, approximately where we were.

As we arrived on a Sunday, we had to wait until the next day to drive the short distance into the nearby town of Forks to check the local steelhead fishing regulations, which were the same as those of Oregon: all wild fish catch and release, limit of two hatchery fish per day, single barbless hook. The Olympic Peninsula Rivers allowed, at the time, bait fishing from boats and the bank, but because the steelhead are in trouble, with fish runs in sharp decline, as of mid-December 2020, this is no longer the case. There is no fishing from

boats, and all bait fishing is banned.

When in town, Stuart spoke to a few local anglers, and got some suggestions as to places to try where the access was public, so off we went to investigate the Bogachiel, but primary on Stuart's mind was to find out how to get to that perfect pool across from our cabin.

We crossed a bridge, spotted what looked to be a forestry road off to the side that paralleled the river, and thought this a likely place to start. The road curved around, we lost sight of the river, the woods thick. We kept going for several miles, and though we were now a fair distance away from the river, it felt, sort of, that it was time to pull over, and slog through the woods, lugging cameras and fishing gear.

Slog we did, through boggy ground, past beaver ponds, Elk trails, crawling under and over briars, brambles, fallen trees, every other obstacle you could image, the cover so thick that no sooner had we followed an animal path, it disappeared, overgrown like nothing I'd ever seen. Stuart felt for certain that this was still the right way to go, but as the light was fading, and we weren't

prepared to wander around all night, we reluctantly decided to go back, and make a plan for tomorrow.

All evening he looked at that river, selected flies for tomorrow, stuffed all possible kit choices into his bag, and just before 5am, he was up, grabbed a torch as it was still completely dark outside, and was off, determined to get to that pool on the other side of the river. And me? Alas, I remained behind, sprawled in the bed, vomiting into a bucket from the stomach flu that had attacked me in the middle of the night.

About 30 minutes later, I felt guilty. What if I wasn't there to see Stuart land his first steelhead? What if I didn't get a photo? I got up, and sat in the living room, watching the riverbank as the first light started to creep across the woods, and then I saw him making his way out of the trees and up the gravel bar to the bend, to the pool. He'd found the path. I grabbed my cameras and gingerly stepped outside, hoping I wouldn't vomit yet again as I clamoured over the rocks to a spot across from him. I waved, he waved, and just before he cast, another fisherman appeared. Rats,



He was on and the fish fought hard.



Success at last - a fine Steelhead.

was Stuart going to have to share his perfect water? No, this man was gracious, and understood the unspoken etiquette of leaving the water to the first man on it, and when Stuart told him that he was trying for his first steelhead, Chris, as he was named, stayed on the bank with his dog, offering to help him land it, if he had any luck. Chris and Stuart, and the dog Quill, struck up a fast friendship that will continue for many years to come.

I watched Stuart cast into the neck of the pool, letting the fly swing around. He moved a bit. He cast again. Quill curled up on Stuart's jacket. Chris stood by as Stuart stripped back, walked a few steps, and cast again, the fly swinging with the current. And then, from across the river, where I was perched precariously on a boulder, cameras in hand, I heard it at last. "I'm on! Fish on!" At last. The right place at the right time.

That fish fought hard, Stuart patiently working it in, then letting it run,

following it along the bank, mindful that it was on a single barbless hook, letting the fish take its time, running out, slowly bringing it back, hoping it wouldn't leap out of the water, dislodging the hook. After what seemed to me like an hour, but was in reality closer to ten minutes, the fish tired, and Stuart was able to get it to the bank, just at the tail end of the large pool.

And after years of trying, Stuart landed his first steelhead, a wild one, fresh from the Pacific Ocean, the Fish of a Thousand Casts. Some moment alright, and he was one happy angler!

He had used a 3 inch tube Mackenzie Cascade, but sadly he lost that lucky fly later the same day, snagged on rocks further downstream.

With the fish safely on its way up river, I went back to the cabin, and Chris took his turn at the same pool. But apparently it was only Stuart's day at that pool, and while they both fished other water of the Bogachiel later that afternoon, there were no more chances

to be had, not on that day.

As Chris, originally from Idaho, had been fishing the Olympic Peninsula rivers for over ten years, he suggested Stuart have a go on the Hoh, another top steelhead river we had driven over on our way to the Bogachiel. The Hoh originates at the Hoh Glacier on the northeast side of Mount Olympus, and is named for the indigenous people known as the Hoh. At about fifty-six miles long, the river flows west through the spectacular Olympic Mountains of the Olympic National Park, through the Hoh Rainforest, then through the foothills in a broad valley, and finally emptying into the Pacific Ocean at the Hoh Indian Reservation.

It's a huge river, where access is alternately extremely difficult and very easy. For the most part, the fishable areas are public, but there are several choice spots that are reachable only by boat, or by scaling sharp bluffs by rope, then trudging through thick wooded areas for several miles, without any

trail. Because I had the heavy cameras, and it would have been impossible for me to repel down a cliff on a rope, we sought out a few of the easy places, deciding to forgo the rope swinging, for now anyway.

The Hoh, what a spectacular river, and right away, Stuart had several chances at another fish, no takes, but enough to whet the appetite, and on we went, casting, walking, finding new places, loving everything about the splendid days out, surrounded by the incredible nature, and only two or three miles from the Pacific Ocean, just at the beginning of the steelhead run.

A day or two later, while we were again on the Hoh easy access water, Chris texted, he'd landed a fantastic huge steelhead on a stretch of water that was, of course, inaccessible to anybody but a mountain goat (which I clearly am not), and he kindly asked Stuart if he'd like to join him tomorrow morning at 5 am. He offered to take him there, and

over next few days, he'd show him his own favourite "secret" places. Now this was an opportunity not to be missed, spending time with another fisherman who had the same passion for what Stuart feels fishing is all about, the water, the solitude, the outdoors, the challenge, and ultimately, the respect for the fish. Needless to say, the next morning off he went hopeful, happy, excited, while I roamed around antique shops in Forks, did the laundry and went grocery shopping.

It was just past mid-day, I was sitting at the laundromat waiting for the dryer, and my phone beeped, a text, from a strange number. I checked it, it was from Chris, and there in the message, were photos of Stuart with another gorgeous steelhead. I was delighted for him, just over the moon, and while I wished I had been there to share his excitement, and get some photos for him, I was so very pleased that Chris was able to capture the moment on his phone.

So, after seven days on the Olympic Peninsula of Washington State, fishing hard on the Bogachiel and the Hoh, Stuart had at last succeeded in landing not one, but three lovely steelhead, the Fish of a Thousand Casts, as well as a sea-run cutthroat and a bull trout. A splendid achievement, and a perfect way to end our holiday, as sadly, the next day was to be our last. We reluctantly bid farewell to the spectacular rivers and forests of the Pacific Northwest, drove to Seattle, where we caught our flight back to Ireland, and now, we are already planning to return for the next Winter steelhead run.

"It's an addiction, an obsession, the desire to connect with this fish, to feel the sharp, powerful grab of the fly, the reel singing as the fish runs, the cold, blue water swirling around me, the fish and I sharing the same world. It's a feeling like no other. I will chase the Steelhead forever."



And the luck wasn't over, for just two days later, when they went out again, Stuart landed his third fish.

Federation of Irish Salmon & Sea Trout Anglers

Conaidhm na Slat Iascairí Bradáin agus Breac Geal

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

A new season begins

The Spring Salmon Season is now well underway and we still have cold weather with snow in parts as we go to print, it is too early to confirm the signs of a continued good run of springers from last season as yet. However, we face this season with a lot more hope as we now have in place a new Minister and a new CEO of Inland Fisheries Ireland.

I am sure his predecessors will agree that the new person in harness has progressed up through the ranks to become best qualified to date in fisheries management and protections to serve as CEO. Perhaps that is a pressure and an expectation that he can do without, but those of us who have tracked his career will remember his law enforcement and protection

experience. Their jobs are now at the epicentre of change and we are hopeful and give them every encouragement to exert maximum impact on the improvement of our wild Atlantic salmon figures.

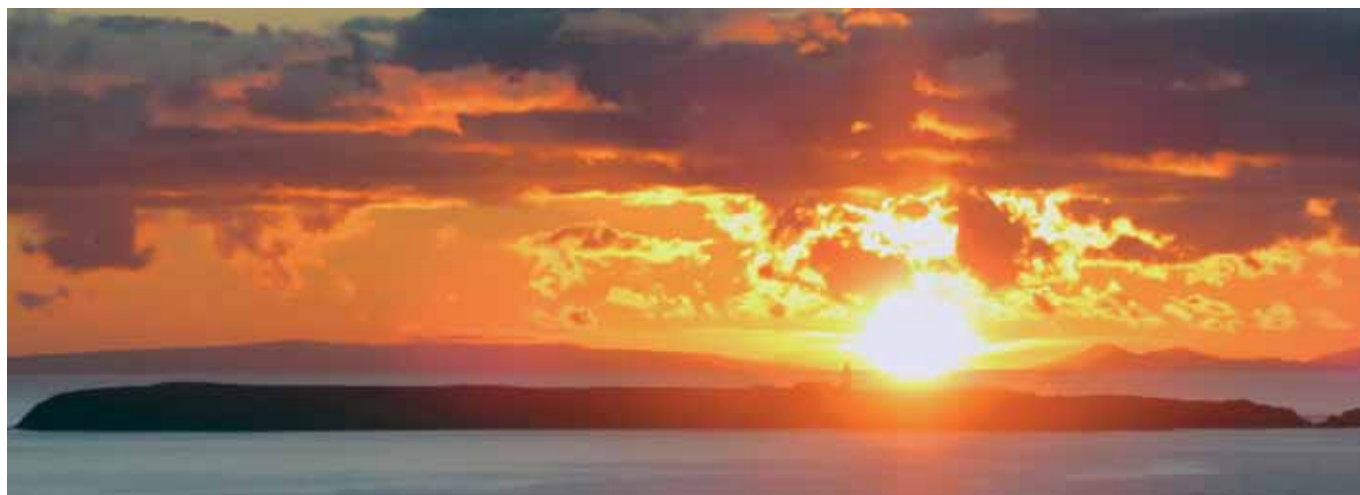
The measuring stick of success will be reopening of closed rivers, a continuation of last years increased runs for spawning and in the longer term, a much better survival rate coming back from the feeding grounds of the north Atlantic. We look forward to a future annual international NASCO conference where we will see the results of salmonid reports from official scientific body ICES - International Council for the Exploration of the Sea telling us that the graph is changing direction upwards at last. Maybe this is another of our naive

expectations, that two Irishmen at the helm of wild Atlantic salmon management can have such an impact in a short term, but such are the dreams of our angling members that we can only strive with all our NASCO NGO colleagues to realise this vision.

PAST FAILURES BY GOVERNMENT

We have in past articles highlighted the many failures by past ministers to stop the decline in our wild Atlantic salmon stocks. We know from unofficial sources that advice was to “control the controllable” and therefore saving the salmon was an impossible goal and many ministers took this advice and did nothing.

Even when in 2013 we eventually



Malinmore Rathlin O Birne Lighthouse with winter sun setting on the Mayo Stags of Broadhaven.

got the TDI study published that confirmed our national angling product, estimated at €150m, was grossly under valued and was then revalued at a staggering €750m. It would appear some Department personnel saw this revelation as trouble for them, and immediately downplayed it and eventually funded another study. Which meant that not one additional cent was applied for to consolidate and develop the resource. Because up until now, nobody in either government or state bodies believed in the policy lodged at NASCO along with the 18 other salmon countries as they ignored the problem of rapidly dwindling stocks.

We have yet to receive an answer from the Department Secretary or new Minister Ryan at the apparently bizarre situation where our Department personnel no longer appear to have belief in the policies they present on behalf of the Government.

I refer to the August 1st 2019 incident when the mask slipped and the Connacht Tribune carried a story that our main civil servant predicted the demise of our wild Atlantic which appears to be contradictory to the policy of his minister who was then Sean Canney TD. When we confronted him later, the minister showed no concern, only embarrassment and took no action.

We wrote to him asking if he believed the headline from Connaught Tribune reporting that it was said at a meeting in Galway: 'The Salmonid Species Will Be Extinct In Ireland In 30 Years.'

Chairman Paul Lawton's letter went ignored probably because it asked him the question if he shared this view and if he retained confidence in the officer quoted to continue in the role to implement his international vision for our Irish salmonid fisheries conservation programme as lodged at NASCO.

If he did not agree with this view, we asked him back then to confirm

Anglers angry at claim of Corrib stock threat

■ Fishermen dispute assertion global warming will wipe out native species

BY DARA BRADLEY

SALMONIDS will be extinct within 30 years because of global warming, according to the man tasked with the care of Galway's salmon and trout fisheries.

The Principal Officer in the Inland Fisheries Division, in the Communications, Climate Action and Environment, Denis Maher, outlined the doomsday scenario for salmon, brown trout and other species during a meeting with Ministers of State for Natural Resources, Seán Canney, and Galway angler representatives.

But the claim, that rising temperatures warming waters will wipe out salmonids within three decades, has been rejected by Oughterard Anglers, who have accused Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) and Government of 'hiding behind' Climate Change, and 'doing nothing' to protect native species.

Members of Oughterard Anglers believe that it is now official policy to 'abandon' native fish, in favour of mixed fisheries, which would include pike, because mixed fisheries are easier and less expensive to maintain and manage.

"The IFI, supported by the Government, is hiding behind global warming so that it can continue its 'do nothing', Laissez-faire approach. They don't want to protect salmon and trout. We don't agree that salmonids will be extinct in 30 years. This statement by Denis Maher, the man charged with caring for our fisheries, is appalling. It has reinforced our view that our native fish are being sacrificed for mixed fisheries, and for pike," said Mike Donnellan of Oughterard Anglers.

Mr Donnellan, who was among the delegation who met with Mr Maher and Minister

Canney in Tuam last week, said the State has hastened the decline of salmon and trout due to the introduction of policies to protect invasive species.

"To allow salmonids to decline in the way they have is a total disgrace. For years, the IFI has made no meaningful attempt to prevent the spread of invasive species. In fact, we fear that it has actively encouraged the spread of invasive species," said Mr Donnellan.

He said the impacts of global warming on salmonids could be mitigated by IFI if it engaged in proper predation control, and stream enhancements that tackle low water levels, and water quality.

"This attitude, to shrug your shoulders and say there's no point protecting salmonids because they'll be gone in 30 years because of global warming is a disgrace. The State appears to have no interest in supporting our native salmonids

species. It is management by neglect. There's a saying in the coarse angling world that 'pike thrive on neglect' and that's what's happening here," added Mr Donnellan.

He pointed out that independent research has confirmed salmon and trout fishing is worth €204 million to the Irish exchequer, and there was a need to invest more money in protecting fisheries such as Corrib.

Asked to comment on the claim made by Mr Maher at the meeting with anglers, a spokesperson for IFI said: "Inland Fisheries Ireland at all times endeavours to carry out its remit to protect, manage, develop and promote the inland fisheries and sea angling resources. Inland Fisheries Ireland works in partnership with colleagues in the Inland Fisheries Division in the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment

with a view to realising a world class, sustainable fisheries resource for all."

In attendance at the meeting, at Minister Canney's office in Mall Road, Tuam were members of Oughterard Anglers including Mike Donnellan, John Gibbons and chairman Mike Faherty.

Connacht Angling Council chairman, Martin Kimeavy was there too, along with Galway West TD, Noel Grealish (Ind) and County Councillor Thomas Welby (Ind). Denis Maher, who accompanied the Minister, is responsible for policy formulation and implementation to protect, conserve, promote and develop inland fisheries resources; and to exercise corporate governance over IFI.

Anglers have written to Minister Canney to re-litigate their concerns following the meeting.

the new team arrangements he would make to implement the Implementation Plan 2019-2024* which a staff member lodged at the annual NASCO meeting we attended in June 2019 at Tromsø in Norway, as we no longer had confidence in the person concerned to continue in salmon matters. Your IP clarifies to the nineteen other wild salmon countries around the Atlantic Ocean that: "The Irish Government acknowledges the status of salmon as set out in Directive 92/43/EEC (Annex II & V) and the requirement to protect and conserve this species".

We also sought clarification on whether the CEO of IFI also supported this view but he has not responded. Could it be that he was of the same belief as the article headline stated? We later suggested that he must be seen to distance himself from said assertion and to sort out his team to NASCO. We asked Deputy Noel Grealish TD who also attended the meeting in Galway if he agreed with these points as we needed to know what was he going to do about it? We are still awaiting a reply.

This is a very serious list of potential errors and a failure to respond to legitimate concerns that will not go unchecked as we are dealing here with a priceless national resource revered in history and

folklore that must be conserved protected and enhanced for future generations to enjoy. Every shoulder must be put to the wheel to achieve this and those who believe the Irish IP policy is futile, are better left off the team now as they are non believers who would rather implement other strategies that they believe are more credible than the national plan for conservation of the wild Atlantic salmon. We will keep writing until we receive a credible response.

We in FISSTA are giving Minister Ryan TD the benefit of the doubt until he clarifies his position to us personally on establishing a new Angling Consultative Council of Ireland (ACCI). Along with our colleagues in game angling that include NARA, TAFI and ITFAA, we learned this news from a Ministerial statement on the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications website published late on a Friday evening on 26 March 2021. The timing of this post was during a period when the Minister was progressing the Climate Change legislation through the Oireachtas and believe this was a significant distraction on his workload but we await his explanation to the questions we have posed.

The press statement ran: "Minister

Organisation	Angling Discipline
Angling Council of Ireland (ACI)	All
European Federation of Sea Anglers (EFSA)	Sea
Irish Angling Development Alliance (IADA)	Coarse
Irish Chartered Skippers Association (ICSA)	Big Game Sea
Irish Federation of Pike Angling Clubs (IFPAC)	Pike
Irish Pike Society (IPS)	Pike
Irish Federation of Sea Anglers (IFSA)	Sea
Salmon and Sea Trout Recreational Anglers (SSTRAI)	Game

Ryan established the Angling Consultative Council of Ireland (ACCI) in November 2020. The overall objective of this Council is to put a formal process and structure in place to harness those representative bodies that are willing to productively contribute to the sport of angling and to support cooperation across its component disciplines.

The current members of ACCI, as agreed by the Minister, are as follows:

The Council has been working since its foundation. Following an election among its members, ACCI is chaired by Mr Martin McEnroe and the Vice Chair is Mr Joe Birney. The Department of the Environment, Climate & Communications (DECC) (at Senior Official level) will co-chair meetings with DECC and Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI).

Participation is open to all national angling representative bodies. Expressions of interest have been received from a further two bodies and their participation will be finalised shortly to facilitate their inclusion at the next Council meeting. Other national bodies are welcome to join and should contact the Department by e-mailing inlandfisheries@decc.gov.ie. Participants are required to adhere to the Sport Ireland governance standards and criteria, the agreed Terms of Reference, and Code of Conduct which are supported by the Minister.

The Minister's intention is that the

Council will:

- be the channel for orderly, progressive and constructive engagement on significant policy issues with IFI in the first instance and also, Senior Officials in the Department and the Minister;
- be a significant conduit for access to organisation-related funding, particularly sponsorship and supports for youth development, social inclusion, training and development and governance;
- embrace and operate to the highest standards of sports governance (those of Sport Ireland); and
- be a key mechanism for angling stakeholder input into the development of a new policy statement for the Inland Fisheries Sector. End of statement.

Whoever in the Department signed off on this statement had to know that "the council will be the channel for orderly, progressive and constructive engagement" and omit the AGAF Alliance of Game Anglers Federation which comprises of four game angling federations that include TAFI, FISSTA, NARA and the ITFFA representing over 75% of the angling membership of his country, was pouring oil on an already rampant fire of their own making.

There is the suspicion that if a similar Department such as Agriculture Food and Marine set up a consultative forum to look into aspects of farming and decided to exclude for a time the IFA and the

ICMSA it would hardly be considered accidental. The Chairman and Vice Chairman have already been chosen for the consultative body with no input from ourselves or our AGAF colleagues and that is not in our view accidental. Since the Chairman has the right to approve the agenda this is likely to influence the matters that concern the group on an ongoing basis.

It seems the perception his Department want to project to those that do not fully understand the full facts is that a comprehensive consultative process has been set up but at the same with a 'fait accompli' on the workings of the body. This latest attack on our sport and businesses associated with it is added to the long list of similar treatments from the state and if anyone questions why Irish angling is disunited for so long, then they can read the Department website to learn why.

This apparent fiasco could have been avoided if the Department responded to our AGAF letter of the 13th March 2020, in which we responded with a number of proposals and modifications to a circulated draft, that included reviving the National Inland Fisheries Forum. Once again our correspondence fell on very deaf ears and we were not surprised.

We were however very surprised to read this new statement of 27th March 2021 as we believe any Minister reading this letter would have not established this new ACCI body without consultation with all concerned. We are awaiting his response as we go to press and will update our readers in the next issue.

FISSTA 2021 PLAN FOR SALMON CONSERVATION

Despite the pandemic limitations we look forward to progressing the FISSTA Plan with the new IFI CEO, the new Department team and the new Minister Eamon Ryan TD.

PROTECTION OF OUR WILD ATLANTIC SALMON IN NORTH ATLANTIC THE FEEDING GROUNDS

Our most urgent priority is to ensure our salmon continue to be protected in the North Atlantic feeding grounds so that they return to our natal rivers to spawn. To maintain this agreement which NASF & ASF have negotiated to the benefit of every salmon nation we have to contribute our fair share from the anglers Wild Salmon Conservation Fund which the state administer on behalf of the salmon habitat.

We urge the new Minister to live up to our international responsibility and grant funds to keep these agreements in place and protect these salmon in our feeding grounds

IN THE NATAL RIVERS

Over 120 of our 145 wild salmon rivers are now closed to the taking of a salmon under the angling regulations and this continued pattern of river closures is unacceptable to our Federation. Closing river communities and economies down for largely unjustified reasons of the IFI is self-harming to our fisheries and unacceptable to us. While we support the scientific reason to conserve we need the new Minister to

implement our visionary plan to return our salmon stocks to abundant levels.

SALMON FARMING IN IRELAND

We do not accept the policy of previous governments to support the licensing of open sea net-cage salmon farming, as the practice is unsustainable.

We need DAFM Minister Charlie Mac Conologue to regulate the salmon farming industry as Norway has done under their Norske Indusri plan that ends pollution, sealice and protects our wild stocks.

END GWEEBARRA & OTHER RIVER TAKEOVERS BY IFI

We have campaigned to IFI and a range of Ministers over a number of years to assist us in progressing angling tourism and fishery protection by cooperating with the vast wealth of experience in our clubs instead of the present hostile environment we endured with past regimes. It has cost Ireland's economy dearly as we believe we can double our contribution to €2 billion if we were operating on a partnership basis with the department.

We need Minister Ryan to end the IFI policy of hostile take overs of our waters.

RESTORE NIFF MEETINGS – MINISTER MUST APPOINT A NEW CHAIRMAN AND OVERSEE IFI PROGRESS

The public utterances of department officials have indicated that salmon conservation is not achievable and that the state is wasting funding on such futile plans. We need Minister Ryan TD to recruit new policy believers and resume under the 2010 Act the now defunct National Inland Fisheries Forum meetings so that progress be made on many issues of urgency. We suggest the Ministerial appointment of competent anglers to state boards.

REVIEW SCOTTISH STRUCTURE FOR ALL ISLAND ANGLING PLAN

The decline in salmon angling is mainly due to the decline in stocks but lessons can be learned from our competitors in Scotland who have maintained a strong angling tourism industry due to the much smarter management of their sport and regulations. The opportunity now exists for North/South institutions to progress plans for a better future for all involved in salmon angling. We need an all island conservation plan from North and South Ministers to agree a new angling plan to promote and manage our business and sport.



Pictured at the opening of the disabled angling facility at East Mayo Anglers site on the Moy River. (l/r)t Ray Brennan Ballina Anglers Association, Michael Ring TD and former Minister for Rural Development, Senator Michelle Mulherin, and FISSTA President Josephine Egan.



The impressive new disabled anglers facilities improve access greatly.



Wee Davy And The Otter

The Six Mile Water at sunset was the setting for this story.

During this astonishingly strange time, it is easy for us to become depressed, downhearted or feeling that there is no hope, especially if you have other problems or lost all your income due to Covid. But we have to stay upbeat and there is no better tonic I have found over the years than humour.

So, I have decided enough of feeling down, it's time to remember the great days and some of the real fishing stories in my lifetime of angling. I'd like to introduce just some of the many remarkable anglers and characters I met along the way.

Now I am well over the half century, I thought it was time to write some real fishing tales - stories of the fun times, the unexpected times, the lost fish and the leaky waders and the times of growing up fly fishing, and of the love of the outdoors which never really ends.

Remember you should fly fish for enjoyment and if you're not enjoying it you probably need to give it up and try something else that you might enjoy. Fishing is meant to be fun. I see a lot of people taking life and, indeed fly fishing, a bit too seriously. I must add I have always been very seriously into fishing, but that's a different thing entirely.

I was reading a fantastic book recently by the late Hugh Falkus, who for me is one of the all-time great angling writers. The book was one of his lesser known works entitled, 'Some Of It Was Fun,' which gave me the inspiration to write down some of the events in my life that still bring a smile to my face.

There are many individuals that I could write about, however the first angler I want to introduce is my old friend from Belfast, David Telford, known locally as 'Wee Davy.' He even

has a fly named after him which is in the late Malcolm Greenhalgh's great book, *Fishing Flies, A Guide to Flies from Around The World*. Sadly Davy's medical condition slowed him up, but he fished with me often before that and was a very passionate angler and also a really good photographer - and excellent company.

Through the years we spent many days on many rivers and loughs all over Ireland. He had many nick names, one such being Davy Indian, as when I first met him he was into rock music and motorcycles and had long black hair. I know he won't mind me saying he did look rather like a typical Sioux. I used to joke with him that he probably had some Spanish blood, from when the Spanish Armada were shipwrecked off our coast in 1596. Just general teasing, the kind you can do with real friends and he always took it in great humour.

It was all about being in the river

He also got called 'Dave the Otter' or even 'Mink the Merciless.' Davy loved to wade and liked nothing better than being up to the top of his waders in a river with a fly rod in his hand. Fishing for him was all about being in the river. Even sometimes when there was no need to wade, when the stream was too small, Davy would be in it! I think sometimes in angling we forget you should do it the way that you enjoy it, and not the way that others think you should.

He loved wet fly fishing in the traditional down and across manner. He enjoyed feeling his line swing across the riffles and pools almost more than catching fish, which he did very regularly, as he was an extremely capable angler. He was the 'King of Swing' and I have even seen him pack up if he could not feel his line traveling at the right depth or speed, even though he still had a good chance of catching with other methods. He would say 'I can't feel my line right, sure I will just watch you Stevie, as he lit another cigarette.

As for the wee man's love of wading, I remember one evening in the early 1990s on the Kells water, a tributary of the River Maine in Co. Antrim where I was once a club member. Davy and I had been fishing the river for Dollaghan, the lough-run brownies which travel from Lough Neagh to their spawning rivers. We often did so, in fact at one time we spent more time on rivers than anything else, including work or sleeping

As normal Davy had slipped into the river, though it was very fishable from the bank. He can't help himself and there was never any point in telling him. Do what makes you happy was always my take on his love of wading, but don't get me wrong I wade a lot too when I think it's necessary.

He had been slowly shuffling his way down the stream with his familiar step, cast, mend, swing, pattern that over the years I got to recognise, when an elderly



Wee Davy and one of the Dollaghan he encountered regularly on the Six Mile River.

local bailiff turned up and before he introduced himself, I heard him ask Davy what he was you doing in the river. But the moment he turned to answer him, Davy felt a take, lifted his rod and hooked a salmon on his Teal Blue & Silver. He shouted back, 'That's what I'm doing!' To Davy it was a silly

question as he was an angler that expected to catch fish! The bailiff was not sure at this point how to respond, said 'Oh good man can I help you net it?' What amused me most was Davy's matter of factness and he always had an answer, but to him he was fishing to catch a fish.



A nice photograph showing the fish prior to its return.

I remember another unusual experience with him while we were fishing our local river, the Six Mile Water, which is another stream that runs into Lough Neagh. Davy and I had both served on the Club Committee for a long time, I guided on the river for many years, having fished there since 1974 with my late father.

I had just returned home from working in England for the tackle company Hardy and giving casting demonstrations at many of the big angling events in the UK and Europe, where I also got the chance to promote our home fishing. I was eager to get back fishing, so I called Davy. He told me the river had had a good flood about a week before, with a nice run of fish so we met up at to try one of our usual places.

In those days we did a lot of night fishing for Dollaghan which can be a lot like sea-trout fishing and tremendous fun. But it can take its toll at times, especially if you have such a thing as a bed, or for that matter, a job to go to next day.

I met Davy just above a broken weir which had a good run that slowed into a deepish pool, nowadays not as deep and does not fish as well as it changed over



Gently slipped back unharmed to continue its journey.

the years with big floods. We had a quick chat and a laugh about an article that I had written for a French book about different trout species. They had asked me to do write on our local Dollaghan, and had sent them a various pictures, including one was of Davy retuning a fish which the author thought was me and put in the book thinking Davy was the guide!

The time that a fish 'ran right up the bank'

Anyway back to the fishing. We began as soon as the light started to fade, a good time to start a late session. I remember saying, 'You go first Davy, fish down the pool and I'll watch.' You didn't need to ask the wee man twice in those days. Davy slipped into the cold water quietly and I took up position watching from the high bank, my back against an old tree for cover.

He was fishing his normal methodical way, slowly wading down the stream feeling with his feet, and getting an occasional take as the pool had a good head of fish in it. But they were taking short that night and not staying on. I knew this as about every five or so minutes Davy would shout out a colourful word, and then tell me as if I did not know, 'Just lost one Stevie.'

I was enjoying the night just sitting there watching him and being home on our river, when suddenly Davy shouted, 'I'm in mate ! Good fish too!' I could see his rod tip bouncing in the dim light as the fish vigorously shook its head, then Davy yelled, 'It's a monster and its running up the river past me fast!' This has happened to us a few times and when it does it's usually a salmon or a very big Dollaghan and normally you lose it. Then Davy shouted something I have never heard anyone shout in all my years of fishing, 'Stevie!' he cried, 'it's now running up the bank on the far side above me...! Then Davy screamed 'It's up the bank! I could hear it was on dry land as I could hear twigs cracking on the far bank. Then he shouted it was back in the water. 'But its smaller....!



The Wee Davy Number 1.

By this time I was beside him and netted his fish which was around 4lb and we saw there was now a large bite sized chunk out of the fish. It was then it dawned on us what had just occurred: Davy got the take and hooked his fish, which then was grasped by an otter hunting at night, the otter then swam past him at a rate of knots and jumped onto the bank still holding the fish in its jaws with Davy playing it with full side stain and his reel screaming! The otter then let go after a short run up the opposite bank, dropped the unfortunate fish into the river and then Davy started to play it again!

Davy Telford was the only man that I know that has played a Dollaghan and an otter at the same time. Well not quite, for I told another friend about the otter, well-known local fisherman Bobby Bryans and he replied that happened to him one night too. But that's another tale and I have a few good ones fishing with Bobby besides that, which I will keep for future articles.

Last year I left a big Scandinavian tackle manufacturers to pursue a very new exciting project, which I could not turn down. I think their slogan, 'it's all about the experience' really is accurate as it certainly is what it's all about, not only in fly fishing but in life.

Tying: The Wee Davy No1

Hook: Partridge Double or single.

Thread: Red

Body: Flat silver holographic tinsel


Wing: Black squirrel.

Hackle: Kingfisher blue wound in front of the wing.

A fly by Davy Telford for the Dollaghan and salmon rivers draining into Lough Neagh. A useful fly anywhere and easy to dress. There is also a Wee Davy No 2, which is the same dressing changing the hackle to orange and the body to gold.

Stevie Munn. works full time in fly fishing, as a writer, event organiser, guide and qualified game angling instructor in fly casting and fly tying, he has also appeared in many angling books, magazines and DVDs and gives casting demonstrations at angling events all over the world. He has fished many places worldwide and grew up fishing on rivers and loughs of Ireland. You can contact him via email anglingclassics@aol.com, to book casting lessons. For more information visit www.anglingclassics.co.uk

THE BEAUTY & MYSTIQUE OF HARES



The advent of spring, away back in the 30s, when, as a lad, I was free to roam some 1700 acres, an agricultural estate my father managed, was always an exciting period as the countryside came to life after the winter months. There was so much to do, so much to watch and, in those days there was time to do it, for the rhythm of life was not geared to obsessions for sitcoms on television, or serials on the radio. Life, at least in the country, whilst often hard, was for living, enjoying God's gifts and the wonders of nature.

I would watch anxiously for the first signs that winter was coming to an end. Like rooks gathering twigs with which to refurbish their nests and blue bells pushing up shoots through a carpet of leaves in the woods, but most of all I watched for the antics of the so-called mad March hares - appealing and fascinating creatures, unique amongst our British mammals. Of course they aren't mad, their boxing, kicking, jumping, running are the males fighting for the attention of a doe, but it is not always the bucks that fight. Does too become involved in fisticuffs, not against each other, but with over amorous males, who frequently have a pretty rough time of it before mating takes place, as the does are bigger and

more powerfully built than their suitors.

Although a doe may breed three or four times in a year, there is no permanent pairing. Hares can, at times, be very promiscuous and, when ready, a doe may be served by two, three even four bucks in quick succession. The gestation period is thirty days and a litter is usually from two to six leverets, but litters of eight have been recorded. Normally a doe gives birth out in the open, frequently in a field of winter corn if available, or some similar terrain. Quickly after giving birth the doe makes a form for each of her young and carries them, as a cat does a kitten, to these. She will return every night to suckle her babies up to an age of three to four weeks, by which time the leverets are completely independent.

To my mind and to those of hundreds of others, leverets are by far the most beautiful young of any of our indigenous mammals, for unlike rabbits, rats, mice, voles, they are born with hair and their eyes open. True, this can be said of fawns, but it normally takes them twenty or so minutes to get to their feet and, when they do, their gate is, to say the least, somewhat wobbly for some hours; whereas a leveret can run within minutes of arriving in this world.

Along the edge of a hundred acre field, I spied a gathering of hares

On many, many occasions I have watched the mating display of hares, but one in particular remains clearly etched into my memory, although it must now be more than sixty years ago. One afternoon in late March I was walking along the edge of a hundred acre field, when I spied a gathering of hares, I counted nine, within yards of a belt of trees that had been planted right across the field some ten years previously.

I quickly realised that if I made my way quietly up the belt the wind was blowing from them and so, if I was very quiet, I had a good chance of getting really close. I ran the first part of my journey, being out of sight of the hares. Speed was important, for they would not be long before they moved, then almost crept for the last forty to fifty yards. Luck was with me, the group had moved, but even closer to my eventual vantage point amongst the trees and shrubs.

I had been right in my count, nine, but only eight were taking part in the 'ballet', although this is perhaps not a true description, for it was in fact a fierce fight, for the favours of a doe who watched from the sidelines. It was an



incredible display and I could clearly hear the grunts and hisses as they circled kicking and boxing each other. When the 'cast' was reduced to three suddenly the doe came to life and entered the arena.

Within minutes there was only the doe and one buck left. They sparred momentarily before mating. The buck, satiated, loped off. The doe remained quietly crouched to the ground for three or four minutes, some fifteen to twenty yards from where I hid. Suddenly she raced out across the field to where one of the other bucks, who had been wooing her, hopefully waited. After the briefest of courtships she mated again. Satisfied, the buck departed, quickly to be replaced by another that had been hovering in the background. However, it seemed the doe had had enough, for after sparring for a couple of minutes she hightailed it across the field, hotly pursued by her new suitor, and disappeared through the hedge.

It was some years before I was able to find a reason for various sightings I'd had of hares on remote seashores, for they are vegetarians, very partial to young corn and root crops. However, when staying with a friend of my father, who was a very knowledgeable naturalist, I happened to mention this and the mystery was solved.

Hares are fond of sea beaches

He produced a copy of an article by a keen naturalist at the beginning of the

century, Charles Cornish, which subsequently I saw quoted in Brian Vesey-Fitzgerald's book, 'It's My Delight'. In this article he stated that hares had an exceeding fondness for sea beaches, especially those on which certain sea plants grow, particularly the sea-pea which grows on shingles, such as the pebble banks found at Orford, the Chesil beach and a number of other places on the Sussex and Devon coasts.

Apparently Cornish lived at, or close to Orford and claims to have seen hares swimming the broad tidal river to reach what was obviously a delicacy for them. I certainly have not seen a hare swim an estuary, but in the company with my father and brother, back in the late 20s, we twice saw a hare swim one of the tidal channels that cut through the coarse grassland behind the Pebble Ridge at Westward-Ho in Devon.

Hares are classified as game, a tribute not paid to the lowly cony and were hunted with hounds, by the nobility, long before hunting foxes became fashionable. How far back the tradition of hare

hunting extends is hard to say, but it is on record that around 480 to 450 BC, the Greek soldier and historian, Xenophon, a friend of Socrates, hunted hares with hounds that followed their quarry by scent, not sight as greyhounds do.

For many hundreds of years a certain mystique has built up around hares, for they are the centre of many fables, from turning into witches to changing sex and in some of the oldest Welsh laws it is stated that 'The hare is outside legal valuation, since in one month it is a female and in the next a male.' Truly, then, a magical animal, but to me it remains one of grace, power and, when young, of unequalled beauty.

Publisher's Note:

When clearing out some old magazine files I came across a veritable treasure trove of articles by the late Michael F Twist who was not only one of the foremost country sports writers of his generation but a true countryman and naturalist. As they were paper copies, I put them aside to send to our editor.

I don't know whether it was a 'nudge' from Michael or simply serendipity, a couple of mornings later just after dawn a big hare came past my office window. This used to be quite a regular occurrence but reminded me that it was the first such visit for a few years. However it did encourage me to publish this excellent piece on the hare by Michael.



Art & Antiques

What a year it has been for sales houses and auction-goers. And who would have predicted twelve months ago the difficult times that lay ahead and the equally difficult decisions which had to be made by many to remain in business. But the majority of them have survived, at least up to now, and hopefully the weeks and months ahead will bring better times.

Thanks to the facilities provided by on-line sales many of us have been able to retain our sanity.

And this valuable outlet has no doubt won many new and permanent customers during these difficult months. That isn't to say we would not welcome again the atmosphere of a crowded sales room,,rubbing shoulders with friends and even foes and of course soaking up everything that a sale brings to the scene.

Sadly those days, if they ever really return, are well in the future. For I am afraid conditions this year will be much the same as they have been since last spring. But have no doubt about it, so



This Tadeusz Brzozowski's painting fetched €190,000 plus fees (WHYTES)

long as people have items to sell and there are others to buy them then auction sales in one form or another will be with us for a long time to come.

According to Ian Whyte of Dublin based WHYTES sales house, one of the most prominent in Europe, it was a busy and exciting year, saying: "We held our first major art auction of the year on March 9" he told me "just as the pandemic took effect in Ireland. It was the weekend the government imposed the first set of restrictions including a limit of 100 people at indoor events.

"The auction room at the RDS was packed and nearly exceeded that limit, the sale was extremely successful and grossed €1.2 million for 85% of the lots offered. Unusually the highest result was for a Polish artist, Tadeusz Brzozowski (1918-1987) whose painting MASTIFF (CWAJNOS), 1967, fetched €190,000 plus fees from a collector in Poland. Of course there was an Irish connection – the painting had been exhibited at ROSC, an international art exhibition held in Dublin - in 1967 after which it was purchased by an Irish collector."



'A sunny day in Connemara' by Paul Henry set a new world record price of €420,000 (WHYTES)

AUCTIONEERS ADAPT TO LOCKDOWN

A week later, however the first lockdown was imposed and all businesses closed their doors until June.

However, this did not deter Whyte's who continued to service buyers and sellers by internet and telephone.

Ian Whyte said: "Having been one of the first auction houses to have online bidding back in 1995 Whyte's were well adept at doing business in Cyberspace. On-line timed sales were organised for less valuable sales while "virtual" auctions which included telephone and absentee bidding as well as participation via various internet platforms throughout the world, hosted the higher ticket works."

In order to mitigate the fears of clients bidding 'blind' Whyte's provide, online, extra photographs including images to scale in a domestic setting and an app to project pictures to scale on walls. The auction house also publishes condition reports on-line and, very importantly, issues certificates of authenticity for every lot sold.

Ian Whyte concluded: "Collectors embraced the new forms of auction with alacrity and great enthusiasm, and prices, which were already showing much improvement in 2018-2019 were generously pushed upward with some



This Walter Osborne sold for €315,000 (WHYTES)



Jack B Yeats' 'Sculling' went at €190,000 (WHYTES)

aggressive online bidding.”

Whyte’s had postponed its annual and popular “Eclectic Collector” sale to late July, when relaxed restrictions allowed a room attendance of up to 50 masked bidders, socially spaced, in the appropriately historic

surroundings of The Freemasons Hall. Among the highlights was a 1916 Proclamation of The Irish Republic which fetched €190,000, a Wolfe Tone archive split into a number of lots and which grossed over €70,000, a John McCormack archive which made €42,000.

ANOTHER WORLD RECORD AT WHYTE’S

In the last few years, Whyte’s have broken world records for many Irish artists. In 2019 the firm smashed price records for Jack Yeats, Mainie Jellett and May Guinness. On 19 October 2020 Whyte’s sold an outstanding Paul Henry painting, “A Sunny Day Connemara” for a new world record of €420,000. This was a “virtual auction” with every type of buyer except room bidders due to the reintroduced restrictions.

Whyte’s rounded off the year on 7 December with a tally of €2.6 million for 90% of the works offered. The highlights of a fantastic sale were paintings by Walter Osborne at €315,000, Paul Henry at €240,000 and Jack B Yeats at €190,000. Just like the October sale, no room bidders were allowed due to a continuing ban on indoor events.

Whyte’s total sales for 2020 amounted to €7 million compared to €8.5 million for the previous year. “The increased demand for art and collectibles offset the worst of the effects of the pandemic,” Ian said. This demand was driven by savings made from not travelling abroad, not eating out, not drinking in pubs, not commuting and not buying clothes for work. Also the imposition of negative interest rates on bank deposits has encouraged cash rich individuals to purchase tangible assets such as art and collectibles.”



This painting by Jack B Yeats sold at €265,000 (ADAMS)



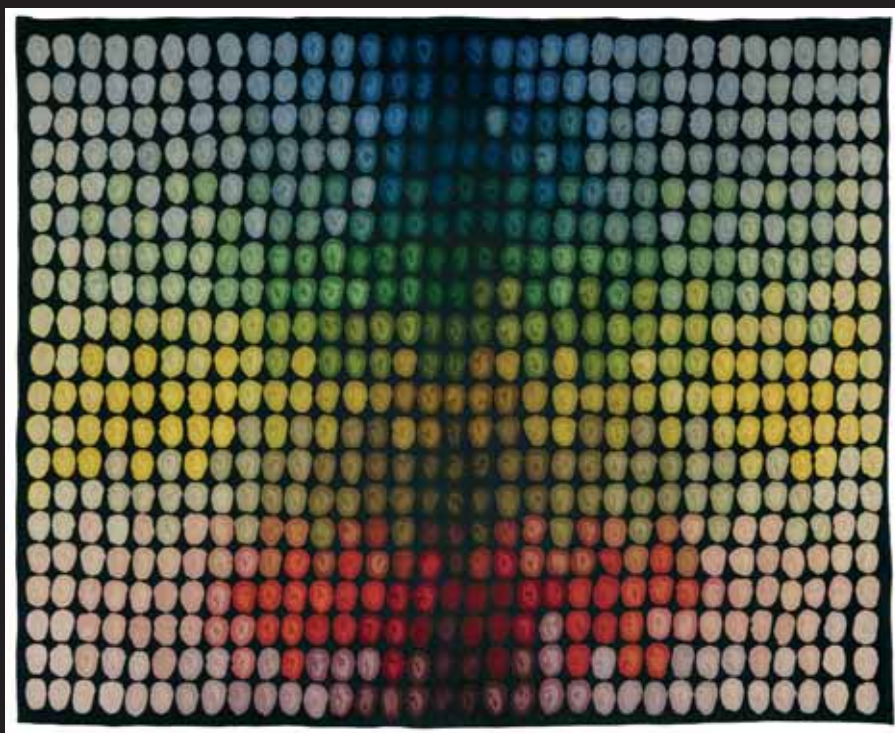
A fine Walter F. Osborne went at €90,000 (ADAMS)

This year, he believes will be another challenging one for everyone: “With the continuance, for several months at least, of the pandemic restrictions, and the end of the UK’s membership of the EU. The latter will cause problems for trading in art between the EU and the UK.

“Individual collectors will have to pay 13.5% VAT on importation of art, and 21% on importation of collectibles from the UK. But UK collectors and businesses will only pay 5% VAT on imports of art and most collectibles from Ireland. Irish VAT registered businesses will account for the importation VAT in their returns to Revenue. Customs clearance charges will add an extra 1% to the cost of importing art and collectibles. “So a painting bought in the UK for €10,000 could cost an extra €1,450 to import to Ireland, and a €1,000 collectible will be charged €220 on arrival.” But with so much uncertainty surrounding the post Brexit era who knows what other difficulties may arise.

ADAMS' FINE SALE

ADAMS ended their year in fine style when, in their pre-Christmas Irish Art Sale, they sold a Jack Butler Yeats for €265,000 again underlining the significance of this great artist. This was followed by a Walter F. Osborne which went at €90,000, a great Daniel O’Neill which well exceeded its high estimate to come under the hammer at €58,000. A Louis Le Brocquy realised €54,000, while a Donald Teskey, an extremely popular artist today, made €35,000. A Paul Henry landscape with cottages, a familiar scene with this artist, made €34,000 while a Tony O’Malley oil was appreciated at €30,000. Another Daniel O’Neill sold at €27,000 while a Jack B Yeats made €22,000, with a Wm. Conor going at €22,000.



Louis Le Brocquy's work sold for €54,000 (ADAMS)



A Daniel O'Neill exceeded its high estimate came under the hammer at €58,000. (ADAMS)



Wolves Would We Want Them?

For almost two years now, a low-key debate has been ongoing about re-introducing wolves into Ireland. The species had been eliminated in this country around 1786 and its likely that there was a legitimate reason for doing so.

In 2019 the leader of the Green Party suggested that wolves should be reintroduced into Ireland. Mr. Ryan stated that wolves should have a place in Ireland's environment and would contribute positively to the country's eco-system and national habitat. That statement left most people, including many conservationists, aghast!

Just how wolves would contribute to our eco-system and national habitat has yet to be explained. In 2020 NPWS issued a statement that it had no plans to re-introduce wolves in Ireland. While we have to fully accept and respect the NPWS position, everyone knows that the stroke of a ministerial pen is all that is required to overturn any given situation.

The current relevant minister is a member of the Green Party and that alone is enough to raise concerns among the farming community, country sports enthusiasts, deer management personnel and country folk generally.

Such concerns are warranted as we well remember not too many years ago

when the Green Party's price for participation in Government resulted in the closure of the Ward Union Hunt. That was unlikely to benefit the nation's economy or reduce carbon emissions. It can only be seen as furthering Green plans to curtail country pursuits.

Latin students will remember the Romulus and Remus fable - twins who founded the city of Rome. Supposedly abandoned by their mother in surrounding hills the infants were discovered by a she-wolf who suckled them in a cave until such times as they could fend for themselves. Following many adventures the pair went on to establish a city along the river Tiber - Rome. A good story but nothing more, if for no other reason than a nursing she-wolf would simply have viewed a pair of abandoned infants as a free lunch.

Wolves were known man-eaters several thousand years ago. Canis Lupus has been around for a long time, probably as long as humans and has gained a reputation as a man eater in Europe, also earning much antipathy for

preying on livestock to the point that many countries engaged in culling exercises.

Wolves died out in Ireland over 400 years ago

They were finally eradicated in Ireland towards the end of the 1700s, the last one reportedly being killed in 1786, approximately 100 years after Britain had eliminated them. Their predations in these islands resulted in expressions such as "wolf-whistle" the "big bad wolf" and "wolfing down food" entering the English language.

The Irish wolfhound is so-called from its wolf-hunting days. Remember Little Red Riding Hood - or Hitler's U-boat Wolf packs in the Atlantic? All related to predatory behaviour.

European wolves were and still are known Rabies carriers. Being social animals this disease spreads easily among packs. Woe betides the human bitten by a wolf! It was, and today in certain circumstances still is, a death sentence if a human is bitten by a

Rabies carrier. Many records exist of human deaths in Europe caused by marauding wolves in the past. On a one only basis the wolf usually backed off attacking man, but a hungry pack sensing fear wouldn't! A highly intelligent animal, the wolf is extremely capable of stalking its prey and striking at the most opportune moment.

Down the centuries France appears to have recorded more casualties than any other European country. Parish records from the mid 1700s show over 50 deaths caused by marauding wolves in central France alone.

Single individuals tending livestock or unaccompanied small children were their main target. In 1900, a wolf entered a classroom and killed a teacher, and around the same time a young girl was eaten near her home in the Dordogne. Eleven children were eaten in Portugal in 1945, followed in 1956 with an Italian postman on his delivery route not far from Rome being killed and eaten. That same country also reports a soldier being killed by a wolf pack as he tried to defend himself with a bayonet.

Further east, Poland, Rumania, Russia and Finland suffered major wolf problems. Unfortunately WW2 also provided a gruesome abundant supply of unburied bodies in the frozen wastes of Russia resulting in countless thousands of the species acquiring a taste for human flesh.

Following WW2 the Soviet Union engaged in a major Wolf extermination programme, but in keeping with that State's secrecy policy little is known in the West about the result - with just one exception. In an unstipulated year during the 1960s Russia reportedly shot 30,000 wolves following 168 attacks on humans and 70,000 farm animals having been killed.

Finland which borders the then Soviet state was likewise obliged to take action. So severe was the problem there that the air force was used for bombing and machine-gunning known wolf haunts in forestry areas.

A former Finnish pilot during that country's Winter War with the Soviet



Would livestock like this be an obvious target?

Union and the later WW2 period told me in the 1980's that he had been involved in wolf hunts flying a German supplied aircraft. It sounded implausible and wasn't taken too seriously - until I did some research for this article. Unfortunately that old gentleman, Marti Silanpaa, is no longer with us.

The wolf population is on the increase throughout Europe, as must be the risk factor to humans. The EU operates an ongoing programme designed to keep Europe rabies-free, although there's a constant threat from some Eastern European countries. Britain had a minor outbreak in the early 2000's. France and Spain suffer occasional outbreaks, usually caused by the illegal importation of dogs from Morocco and Algeria.

Could a farmer shoot a marauding reintroduced wolf?

All of which begs the question as to why we would want wolves anywhere on this island? The farming community's livestock would be an obvious target for them. Currently a farmer is within his rights to shoot rampaging dogs attacking sheep or livestock and we all know that this is a huge problem during the lambing season. Theoretically, if wolves attacked livestock or sheep in Ireland would a farmer risk prosecution by shooting them, jeopardise his firearms certificate and possibly a portion of his livelihood? This issue is ongoing in a number of European countries where farmers who shoot wolves worrying their animals are open to prosecution.

Wild deer don't have any predators in Ireland and it has been suggested that the introduction of wolves would create a natural balance. Perhaps it might, but would a wolf stop to distinguish between wild deer, farm animals, or a border? We know the answers and can but wonder if there's a hidden agenda in all of this.

Given that the Ward Union Hunt was scuppered as the price for political support, would the introduction of wolves into Ireland be the beginning of the end for licensed deer stalking and culling, having become a pawn in some future political wrangling?

Just prior to last Christmas game shooting was banned for a period during Covid-related restrictions. One can but wonder if a green influence was involved! Thankfully that ban was overturned in the High Court following a successful NARGC challenge.

As it stands, we have the NPWS statement regarding no plans to introduce wolves into this island and we must accept it. Hopefully that position won't change because the loss of even one human life through wolf attack would be far too high a price to pay for a tiny minority's dotty dreams.

Editor's Note: Readers may also wish to visit BBC's Future Planet website where the question is posed: 'What would a truly wild Ireland look like?' See: <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20210211-rewilding-can-ireland-regrow-its-wilderness?>

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ICS&CL Publisher, Albert Titterington's interview with John Blair, MLA, Chair of the Assembly's All Party Group on Animal Welfare



We have worked with John Blair through the Game Fair when he was employed in the Fisheries Division of DAERA. He was responsible for helping with the 'Put and Take Fishery' for children and we know he is well respected for his work with angling throughout NI. He was also supportive of the Game Fair as deputy Mayor of Antrim & Newtownabbey Council and he has given public support to country sports. Since John was co-opted to the Assembly as an Alliance MLA, we have been impressed by his work ethic, his mastery of social media and his passion for a number of causes including the environment and animal welfare. We congratulated John on being elected to several Assembly committees and to the Chair of the All Party Group on Animal Welfare.

Unfortunately the Alliance Party has long had a policy position of wanting to ban hunting with dogs and John both politically and personally supports this policy – hence him proposing a Private Members Bill to ban hunting with dogs.

As a magazine that was founded on the principles of promoting and defending all legal country sports and the rural way of life; and one which recognises the interconnectivity amongst all country sports and the important social, economic and conservation role they play in the countryside we obviously take an opposing stance to John on this issue.

We extended an invitation to John to answer some probing questions on the proposed Bill.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS

As a graduate biologist, animal lover and practical and academic environmentalist and like the majority of our readers, I would be broadly in support

of your work on the environment and animal welfare but vehemently oppose your attempt to bring forward a Private Members Bill to ban hunting with dogs in NI.

We may return to other aspects of your work in future editions of the magazine but the following questions represent many of the points and concerns made about the proposed Bill to me personally, to the magazine and from many observers and interested parties on our websites and social media.

QU 1. As animal lovers we consider there are a large number of animal welfare issues affecting a great number of animals with which we have close interaction, including many of the issues raised in intensive farming by the Compassion in World Farming group; the undoubted stress to animals by the halal and kosher slaughter methods (unfortunately now very prevalent in NI and not just for faith communities) and puppy farming.

In view of the above, can we ask why you decided to give the welfare of the fox (an animal that, like rats and mice, can be regarded as a pest) priority over the animal welfare of these other animals? Have you plans to consider these other areas and if not why not?

A – As a public representative I deal with a variety of issues, both personally and through my constituency office, in any one day. When dealing with one issue it does not necessarily mean that any other issue has been de-prioritised or de-escalated. My taking forward of a Private Member's Bill, on hunting with dogs for the kill, is following on from work done, though not concluded, on this in the past, addresses the fact that legislation has been introduced in other jurisdictions though not Northern Ireland and is also following through on publicly declared Alliance

Party Policy.

The Assembly All Party Group on Animal Welfare, which I chair, has given high priority to the issue of puppy farming and the introduction of a register of animal welfare offenders. I have followed up on this also by working with colleagues to have these matters addressed through local Councils, tabling Assembly Questions relevant to these matters and declaring support for a Private Members Bill, by Robin Newton MLA, calling for the introduction of 'Lucy's Law' in Northern Ireland.

QU 2. Do you recognise that foxes do need to be controlled? if so what do you consider to be appropriate means of control? If you do not feel they need population control, why not?

A – I think there is a variety of available methods of pest control and a range of options open to farmers, if livestock is threatened, in this regard. I have not, for example, included use of snares in the proposed Bill. A need, if it exists, to control foxes does not always equate to a perceived need to hunt them using dogs to kill them, as has been demonstrated by a ban in other jurisdictions.

There are more humane methods of fox control, such as fencing, ultrasonic pest repellers, or artificial scents which deter foxes such as Scoot Fox Repellent.

Comment: In supplementary questions sent to John I made the point that his suggestions on fox control (and I understand on rabbit control to someone else) could be regarded as methods recommended (and not always successful) for keeping pests including foxes, cats and badgers out of gardens and these are not even 100% successful for that purpose. I said I had smiled when I thought of sheep farming friends trying to fox proof thousands of acres of moorland or

littering the mountains with thousands of electronic scarers and rags dipped in 'Scoat'. Unfortunately John does not appear to appreciate that the fox is a remarkably resourceful predator and often ruthless killer of lambs, free range fowl and even threatened species of ground nesting birds, not the fluffy, cuddly creature so beloved by LACS and other anti hunting organisations.

QU 3. Hunting has been a rural tradition for centuries and in some ways is the most natural form of control. The animal is hunted in its own environment and if it is young, clever and fit can evade the hunt ie almost pure 'natural selection' in practice.

This natural selection keeps the fox population healthy overall by removing mainly weak, diseased or old foxes from the population – in fact those culled are the very sort of foxes most likely to prey on lambs and farm chickens.

Can I therefore ask if your background research on this Bill included consultations with the Hunting Association of NI, CAI or the IWTF, or solely with LACS?

A - There was, as many will be aware, a public consultation on the Bill which, of course, any individual or group was fully entitled to respond to. Interestingly, some stakeholders seemed to prefer engagement through social media which made it difficult to determine whether they were speaking as individuals or on behalf of an organization or representative body. Further to that, it was also difficult to know if they consulted within their own membership in this instance.

I have spoken with a variety of groups and individuals on the issue of the Bill.

Comment: My supplementary questions asked would Mr Blair consult with the aforementioned organisations before drawing up the final version of the Bill. I understand he has not consulted with them to date.

QU 4. You have complained that people have misrepresented your proposed Bill in that you do not wish to attack shooting and angling but is obvious to us and others that you worked closely with LACS on this

proposed Bill including on drawing up the consultation, promoting the consultation, and in the PR for the consultation and the results of the consultation.

Are you aware that LACS have as their objective to ban all country sports?

A – There is no doubt that some tried to represent the Private Members Bill as a hunting ban which it clearly is not. The intention of the Bill is ban hunting using dogs where the dog is used for the kill. It could be that some were avoiding addressing the 'nub' of the issue knowing the strength of feeling on these matters.

I am aware of many LACS objectives and enquiries on those would be better directed to them. I have no issue with shooting and I've been very supportive of angling development during my time in the Assembly and before I went there. My record is clear.

Assuming that because I am opposed to one thing I must, automatically, be opposed to another is presumptuous and leads to the misrepresentation that I have referred to.

QU 5. Can you appreciate the unease with which angling and shooting interests view your obviously close relationship with LACS?

A - People are entitled to make up their own mind on work carried out by me and may well choose to label work related engagement as a 'close relationship.' I, of course have a right to describe such an assumption as skewing of the facts.

Comment: We are aware and welcome John's declaration of support for shooting and his very effective work for, and on behalf of angling, and welcome his reassurance that with regard to these sports he takes a different position to LACS.

QU 6. On the issue of John's relationship with LACS several readers raised this as a major issue including the suggestion that John was a member of LACS so we gave him the opportunity to clarify the relationship.

Can you detail how involved LACS were (a) in the drafting of the consultation

A - The consultation was drafted in my office in consultation with the Assembly Bills Team.

(b) in drawing up PR plans to promote the consultation

A - There was no formal, joint, PR plan.

(c) in you keeping them informed on the progress of the consultation

A - There were some general conversations just as there were with quite a number of people from the Country Sports sector during the time of the consultation.

(d) in the PR plans to launch the results of the consultation

A - The results were released by my office.

(e) Has LACS given funding or support in kind to you and /or the Alliance party?

A - I am totally unaware of any such support.

(f) I had previously asked John if he was a member of LACS

He had said that he was not.

THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION

I made the point to John that I could be regarded as something of an expert on marketing and market research. I have qualifications in management and marketing including an MBA and the Diploma in Marketing (Chartered Institute of Marketing). Plus I have extensive experience of carrying out academic and commercial market research and supervising literally thousands of pieces of market research by students through my 22 years as a Senior Lecturer at QUB and four years as a Senior lecturer/tutor on the University of Liverpool International MBA. During this period, I published 36 peer reviewed academic articles and 4 book chapters based on objective research which have been cited several hundred times by other researchers in <http://academia.edu/>

As an accredited senior consultant, I have carried out several local commercial market research consultancy projects including the feasibility study for the Lisnagelvin Shopping Centre and the Dundonald Ice Bowl, and hotel and

consumer product studies. I also have carried out several international longer term marketing assignments with donor agencies such as The World Bank, Asian Development Bank, EU and British Council in a range of countries including several in Indonesia, Cuba, Georgia, Moldova, Belarus and France.

On the basis of this extensive experience and expertise, I pointed out that I had grave reservations about the objectivity of the LACS poll, John's consultation exercise and the publicised results.

QU 7. I understand that you have claimed that you consulted with the Assembly experts on drawing up the consultation and the vetting procedure but yet the consultation exercise appears extremely biased and more of the nature of an 'instrument of persuasion' rather than a serious attempt to objectively seek the opinion of NI residents on whether they consider hunting should be banned or not. Did the Assembly experts not raise any concerns about this?

A – As previously and repeatedly stated, I have not suggested a ban on hunting. There is no question of 'claiming' anything as the consultation was carried out in accordance with Assembly practice and in a way similar to that done in relation to many previous Private Members Bills.

The Assembly Bills and Legal Teams were consulted throughout the process, and have raised no concerns in relation to the consultation when contacted by Countryside Alliance for example.

Comment: I was basing my question on John's response to a third party wherein he claimed "The Bills and Legal Teams were involved in the process of drafting the consultation questions." On the basis of my professional experience and expertise I can assert that neither the preface to the survey or the survey questions were of the objective nature that I would expect from an exercise undertaken to objectively research public opinion. I would also assert that they would appear to be at variance with the Assembly guidelines on such

consultations.

QU 8. Your preface to the survey was based on the statistics of a LACS commissioned poll which gave a totally different response to two earlier polls by Belfast Live why did you choose to highlight the result of their poll?

A – It is hardly surprising that I used a survey commissioned by an animal welfare charity. The Belfast Live poll, by its very title, could be perceived as not being regionally representative and asked, as far as I am aware only one question and therefore hardly addresses a range of relevant issues.

Comment: Belfast Live produce a news service for the whole of Northern Ireland and I would have expected that if one wished to get the objective views of respondents to a 'consultation' all relevant polls should have been included. However John made the claim in the preface to his survey

"There has been polling over the years in NI which shows a consistent support from the public for a ban on hunting live mammals with dogs." John goes on to quote ONLY the results of LACS commissioned poll which had an anti hunting result. He did not mention the Belfast Live Polls including the one that had only 35% in favour of a ban on hunting.

QU 9. You are aware that such LACS polls have been criticised by the Country Squire magazine as unlikely to be representative of the public's viewpoint. I concur with this and further, I contacted the company involved in carrying out the poll and they did not allay my concerns about how the respondents were selected or how the questions were introduced. Do you have any reservations about using these results to promote your consultation and bill rather than say using the earlier Belfast Live Polls which gave a totally different result?

A – I've replied on the use of previous polls rationale already. There was a quite staggering response to my own consultation which demonstrated widespread public support on the matter.

QU 10. Your survey appeared to be

characterised by its use of leading and closed questions which meant that it was difficult for pro hunting respondents to complete. Was this (a) deliberate on your behalf? (b) a mistake by the Assembly team assisting you drafting it?

A – I totally refute this allegation on the basis of factual accuracy and the slant in the question that I would do such a thing deliberately. Thousands of people were able to ably demonstrate their opposition to the proposed Bill and the questions were open questions which could easily be answered either positively or negatively.

You may wish to reflect that the questions in this 'interview' are hardly 'open' and it could be perceived that they have wavered between accusation and assumption.

I am not going to answer any suggestion of error on behalf of the Assembly Bills team who, like other teams in the Assembly, have worked under huge pressure this year.

Comment. I have acquired the Assembly guidelines for Private Members Bills and there are a number of areas where advice is given in order to give balance/objectivity to any consultation exercise. I do not know how much input the Assembly team had in drafting the preface to John's Bill and the survey questions, but it appears that mistakes WERE made in not seeking to make both more objective.

QU 11. Your preface to the consultation also included the apparently misleading claim that there was 'strong farming support' for a ban on hunting. Can you provide the evidence on which you based this claim?

A – I have not misled anyone and this is another accusing question which I could easily take exception to. I have been contacted by farmers who support my proposed Bill. We shouldn't assume a group of people take a collective position based on the job that they do or the place that they live.

In all walks of life and in all areas there will be differing views on the Private

Members Bill. There are those who seek to support the killing of wild mammals using dogs and those who don't. I firmly believe that those who don't are significantly greater in number.

QU 12. You are aware that the UFU totally rebutted your claim and implied that you had not consulted with them before making this claim. Why not?

A – I am aware that the UFU have a different recollection of a meeting held on 22nd December, when I mentioned the consultation launch, than I do. I'm not aware that they consulted their own membership on the issue.

Comment: People can have different recollections of meetings but it is a fact that while John may have mentioned his Bill to members of the UFU, the chief executive speaking on behalf of the UFU'S large membership, has made it clear that the UFU does NOT support a ban on hunting and further that the UFU (the largest democratic voluntary organisation representing farmers and growers in Northern Ireland) has an active memorandum of understanding in place with hunting organisations.
https://content17.co.uk/media/99/files/UFU_response_to_the_Public_Consultation_Private_Members_Bill_to_Ban_Hunting_of_Wild_Mammals_with_Dogs_.pdf

QU 13. Would you accept that neither LACS or you have demonstrated 'strong support for a ban on hunting within the farming community'?

A - I've answered previously on contact from farmers. Some are supportive of my Bill, others are opposed. I am very comfortable with freedom of choice and expression.

Comment: We have no doubt that some farmers may be opposed to hunting and some may have contacted John to support his proposed Bill. Apart from this, the only reference we could find to support the consultation claim of 'strong support from the farming community' for banning hunting was a report of a meeting in Downpatrick hosted by LACS and an Alliance Councillor with a photograph of the Councillor, the LACS representative and four people alleged to be farmers.

<https://www.farminglife.com/country-and-farming/down-farmers-raise-concerns-over-hunting-dogs-1741423>.

THE PROMOTION OF THE CONSULTATION

QU 14. To many of our readers, including some of the sporting organisations, this appeared to be a joint effort between you and LACS including you sharing their material and LACS carrying out promotion on social media to a worldwide audience. Do you consider this to be appropriate for a supposedly objective consultation with NI residents?

A - I am perfectly entitled to work with an Animal Welfare charity if I choose and in fact, I worked with more than one on this issue

QU 15. The Assembly Bills Office guidance on public consultation advises that respondents should be identified by address, email and telephone number - why was this identifying information not included in your survey?

A - The survey was only one element of public consultation and is intended only to help shape the Members thinking. It is important to point out this does not determine the detail of the Bill nor does it, either by content or numbers of responses, determine whether the Bill proceeds. It is worth keeping these matters in context.

I also took advice on GDPR restrictions and limited the collection of personal data on that basis.

Comment: I put to John the experience of a similar consultation exercise for the Welsh Assembly: "I assume that you are aware that a similar consultation for the Welsh Assembly was largely invalidated by responses from outside Wales. Obviously the data from your own exercise could have been 'cleaned' if the Assembly Bill Office guidance on public consultation had been followed. e.g

In Wales where it was found that similar 'animal rights' lobbying was mainly supported by people who did not live in Wales. In fact as Countryside Alliance Wales found "The petition, initiated by animal rights organisations,

wanted to ban pheasant shooting on Welsh public land. We found an astonishing 88.3% of the total signatures were from people outside of Wales.

Of 12,706 signatures, only 1,487 had Welsh postcodes, representing less than 0.05% of the Welsh population. Furthermore, almost 1,000 signatures were addressed from outside of the UK." The Welsh Assembly has now rectified this situation. "John has not responded to this point,

QU 16. Since you do not have this information how can you vet the responses that you received to remove responses from outside NI.?

A - There were responses, both for and against the Bill, which came from outside Northern Ireland. As previously pointed out, the survey, one aspect of a process, does not determine whether the Bill proceeds.

Qu 17. Are LACS involved in this vetting process?

A - No-one outside my office has access to survey responses.

Comment: To date we have had publicity on the results of the overall response by both John and LACS but NO published information on how the 'vetting process' was carried out or if it was carried out to attempt to remove responses from outside NI.

QU 18. One of the facets of this proposed bill that has given our readers most concern is the fact that the proposed bill goes much further than the legislation in GB, in that it would ban trail hunting and make farmers vicariously liable for hunting on their land. Why have you introduced these potential additional clauses and are these LACS inspired?

A - Some of the detail you assume to be factual has yet to be determined though there is evidence that trail hunting in other jurisdictions has produced uncertainty in pursuing and securing prosecutions when actual, deliberate, hunting, has taken place. There has been discussion in GB around reviewing this.

I should point out that hunting associations raised clean boot hunting and drag hunting with me though you have not

mentioned these in your very selective question. I felt it important to place a duty of care on those taking part in these hunts for the protection of wildlife and habitats.

QU 19. Bearing in mind the long history and traditions of hunting and the selective breeding of hounds and horses and the social side including not only those who hunt, but followers, hunt balls & charity work and Point To Point races is it really your intention to completely ban all of this without offering the alternatives of Trail Hunting?

A - Drag hunting and clean boot hunting will not be banned if the Bill proceeds.

Comment: We did not intend to misrepresent John on this but these alternatives were not suggested in his consultation. We did ask him "Do you really want to have such laws as to divert our already hard pressed and under resourced police force into policing and arbitrating on pursuing prosecutions against hunters and farmers as to whether hunters are hunting an animal or following a trail, drag-hunt or clean boot?"

QU 20. Bearing in mind we are in the middle of a pandemic and NI possibly facing some of the worst economic conditions of our lifetime have you considered the economic impact such a restrictive bill could have on rural businesses including :Hunt staff & their families losing their jobs and homes; Farmers – threat to fowl & lambs, removal of fallen livestock service, straw & hay sales and the cost of policing hunting on their land; the horse breeding industry; vets & farriers; stables & livery; 4 x4 retailers; horse box manufacturers; country clothing retailers; horse & hound feed; hospitality outlets, country sports insurers etc? Have you or the Alliance party carried out an economic analysis of this?

A - I am sure you are aware that many of the examples of businesses you have cited do not depend solely on hunting with dogs for the kill.

I think there needs to be a much wider analysis of the rural economy in terms of a

more green recovery and it is for Government Departments and associated agencies to carry out this analysis fully and professionally.

Comment: In a reply to John I said "We have not asserted that these businesses solely depend on hunting BUT for many it generates a significant part of their business and of course many of these have already been severely damaged by the pandemic. Will you /the Alliance party ask the relevant government department/agencies to carry out a full economic impact analysis before this bill if passed becomes law? John did not respond but, with respect, if a party has a policy to ban something surely it is irresponsible not to have thought through the social and economic consequences?"

QU 21. On animal welfare, have you considered that several horses would be redundant and may have to be put down together with over 700 hounds. The latter are a pack animal and unsuitable to be re-homed?

A - Of course I have considered these issues and the need for statutory agencies to discuss with owners as things move forward.

QU 22. Before the final drafting of the bill will you demonstrate that you have looked at all aspects of the proposed bill by consulting with hunting interests?

Yes

Comment: We were somewhat reassured by this but asked the specific question "Will you specifically consult with those organisations representing the interests most likely to be impacted upon by your proposed Bill i.e Countryside Alliance Ireland, The Irish Working Terrier Federation, The Hunting Association of NI and possibly since hunting often occurs on an All Ireland basis the Hunting Association of Ireland?" We have not had a response to this

We would like to thank John for his participation in this exercise to attempt to give clarity to a debate which to date has been mainly carried out 'on the air waves' and social media. Hopefully when this current matter is settled many of us will be able to work wholeheartedly with John on

issues of mutual concern. With that in mind we asked John about his future plans with the All Party Group on Animal Welfare.

FUTURE PRIORITIES FOR THE ALL PARTY GROUP ON ANIMAL WELFARE

Question: Perhaps you would like to address what will be the next priorities to be addressed by the All Party Group on Animal Welfare and say something about your other priorities in the Assembly including your environmental focus.

A - The formation of an Assembly All Party Group on Animal Welfare is a welcome development and the cross-party membership very encouraging. We are all, as members of the group, aware, however, that time is limited in this Assembly mandate which expires in May of next year. We have already prioritised regulation of sale of pups in an attempt to tackle the 'puppy farm' issue, the introduction of a public animal welfare offenders register and enhanced regulation of animal related business more broadly. We have taken these issues up with Ministers, worked with colleagues in local Councils and will continue to pursue these matters.

More generally in the Assembly, I am acutely aware of the huge effort that is required to take us through Covid recovery and the environmental challenges which face us right now such as species and habitat loss as well as, of course, the climate emergency. These issues will be best tackled by urgently looking at how we can do things differently, in a more collaborative way which includes all layers of government. Interdepartmental actions will be increasingly required within the NI Executive and Departments, in turn, should work more closely with Councils on environmental issues such as waste management, pollution and protection of nature. This joined up approach, talked about for a long time but not yet delivered, is also essential in engaging communities in the work of government and sharing goals.

The ancient and proud history of hunting with hounds

The practice of hunting wild mammals with dogs has been with us in Ireland for an incredibly long time. No one has an idea exactly how old the practice is but it could be several thousand years old. It's almost certain that our prehistoric ancestors engaged in the activity. Therefore when you head out in the fields and woods to hunt foxes or hares you are part of an extremely ancient tradition.

Some people are under the mistaken illusion that hunting with dogs is a tradition introduced by the British a few centuries ago. The activity is much older and it's completely wrong to associate it with the British because it in fact transcends national identity. Hunting is an instinct innate in each of us regardless of our race, nationality, gender or creed.

The famous zoologist Desmond Morris points out that for about a million years our ancestors roamed the Earth, in small groups, hunting and gathering. You cannot erase a million years of hunting by wishful thinking or fashionable ideology, because it's hardwired into our psyches and, according to Morris, is connected to our feelings of happiness. The moments in

our lives when we achieve something hard-won and punch the air in triumph is related, he says, to the moment when our ancestors caught and killed their prey. Our hunter-gatherer forebears spent much of their time and energy engaged in the chase. Thankfully we no longer have to devote so much time and energy to the pursuit of food but the instinct is still very powerful in us.

We of course do not know when these hunter-gatherers started using dogs to assist them in their hunting. It's estimated that it could be about 20,000



In Ancient Greece hounds were used not to catch the hare, but to drive it towards nets and a hidden huntsman, a practice which was perhaps familiar to the ancient Celts. This illustration appears on a phial in the British Museum.

years ago. Agriculture began about 10,000 years ago and with the passage of time hunting increasingly became a sport rather than a matter of survival. Cave paintings which are 6,000 years old show pointers, shepherds, mastiffs, greyhounds, and wolf breeds.

At the turn of the 20th Century, Lady Gregory went through a lot of manuscripts featuring Irish myths and married them expertly in her excellent book "Gods and Fighting Men". In this book Fionn Mac Cumhail and the Fianna engage in an awful lot of hunting and there are many references to hunting with hounds. The Fianna are lovers of music and poetry as well as the chase (for example, there is reference to a woman harper called Fethnaid who is one of the Tuatha de Danaan and plays music which is "the delight of their minds".) The manuscripts which Lady Gregory used date back to the 9th Century, which shows that hunting with hounds was a very popular activity in Ireland as far back as this at least.

Many people think the Fianna (or their equivalent) hunted with wolfhounds. In fact this is not so. Archaeologists have found no dogs of Irish Wolfhound size at Irish sites from



Early medieval manuscripts created in monasteries often feature depictions of hunting dogs, which look similar to Celtic Hounds, or sight hounds like the contemporary Galgo Español which is believed to be descended from the Celtic Hound.

1000 BC through to 1200AD. The dog bones which they have found indicate that the hounds of the Fianna would have been no larger than an Alsatian. Scholars refer to them as "Celtic Hounds" and point out that related contemporary breeds include the Galgo Español or the Tyrolean Hound. When you look at photographs of the Tyrolean Hound you will see a scent hound which reminds one of a beagle or a harrier. Tyrolean Hounds can be used to hunt hares and foxes. The Galgo Español looks like a greyhound and is a sight hound (which is often used to hunt hares).

Hounds were strongly valued in the Celtic world

In one of the countless hunting stories in "Gods and Fighting Men", Arthur, son of the King of Britain comes over to hunt with the Fianna. He's so impressed with three of the Fianna's hunting dogs that he steals them and brings them back to Britain. Fionn follows him and after a fight gets back his hounds. There are other tales of

hounds being stolen in the book which perhaps indicates that they were strongly valued in the Celtic world and their theft was reasonably commonplace. On one occasion a "woman-Druid" falls in love with Fionn but he rejects her (so long as there was another woman to be found in the world, he says, he would not marry a witch). She gets revenge by stealing 150 of his dogs which he never gets back. The strong emotional bond between dog and human is touched upon in the book. A famous hound called Adhnuall "gave three loud howls" above the graves of fallen Fianna warriors, "stretched himself out and died."

Fionn likes to head-count his dogs after a hunt, something which contemporary huntsmen still do: "And as to the Fianna, after their hunting was done they gathered together on the hill; and as the custom was, all Finn's hounds were counted. Three hundred full-grown hounds he had, and two hundred whelps; and it is what the poets used to say, that to be counting them was like

counting the branches on a tree."

On the day of a hunt on the plains of Magh Chonaill, three witches lure the Fianna into their cave where a spell is cast upon the warriors and they are tied up. The hounds are left outside the cave and they protest at being separated from their masters. "And there began at the mouth of the cave a great outcry of hounds calling for their masters that had left them there. And there was lying on the hillside a great heap of deer, and wild pigs, and hares, and badgers, dead and torn, that were brought as far as that by the hunters that were tied up now in the cave."

In the ancient world the Celtic Hound was much sought after by the Romans who, it is thought, probably favoured the Galego type sight hound. The Irish Celts of the time, it is believed, liked to use their scenting hounds to find the quarry and push it out to a point where sighting hounds could be released to course it. It's also theorised that some ancient Irish chieftains would have considered hunting to be a good training

There is a huge body of art and literature based on the hunt including this 1833 painting of Delme Radcliffe and his harriers.





The Beecher family of Duhallow at Ballygiblin c.1895. Many people associate hunting with hounds with landed gentry, the wealthy and the British. The story is much more complex than that.

ground for their warriors (an idea which continued until relatively recently when cavalry officers encouraged their subordinates to go fox hunting on horseback as it would give them "an eye for the country".)

There are many hunting scenes carved in stone at various religious sites. On the 9th Century Bealin Cross in Westmeath there's a dramatic depiction of a hound seizing a deer followed by

its master with a spear. There's a hunting mural in Holy Cross Abbey in Tipperary, and on the tomb of the Earl and Countess of Ormond in St Canice's Cathedral, Kilkenny.

The Market Cross in Kells has a hunting scene. The deer or stag is usually the hunted animal in the earlier sites; the quarry species changes with the passage of time. During a period of the Middle Ages the hare was

considered the most desirable of the quarry species, for people on foot as well as mounted followers.

A fast hound was needed for red deer to flush them out into open country

When the Normans arrived in the 12th Century the hunting method they preferred was the French fashion of using scenting hounds; and they



Tynan & Armagh Foxhounds

(Photo: Tom Fulton)



Sunnyland Beagles

(Photo: Tom Fulton)

preferred hunting fox and hare rather than deer because the latter, being the Red Deer, was large, agile and very quick and therefore a difficult quarry. A fast hound was needed for red deer, the idea being to flush them out into open country. A 1244 mandate to John Stronge, Justiciary of Chester, required him to provide 80 fallow deer from the King's Parks in England for shipment to Dalkey from where they were to be taken to the King's Park of Glencree. The fallow deer was seen as a more suitable quarry for hunting with a pack of scenting hounds and their introduction to Ireland was for that sole purpose. We also hear of the Abbot of St Mary's Abbey in Dublin being accused of using illegal methods of hunting, including nets, in the Royal Forest of Glencree. St Mary's was one of many abbeys which had hunting rights. Many Anglo-Norman nobles also appear to have had their own hunting forests. These nobles usually kept packs bred for scent and voice rather than pace.

The form and customs of hare and fox hunting as we know them today date back to the first half of the 18th Century. The Duhallow Hunt in County Cork dates back to 1745 and is generally regarded as Ireland's oldest foxhound pack. The Scarteen pack in Limerick is older, dating back to the early 1700s (possibly as far back as 1691, according to Stanislaus Lynch) but it consists of Kerry Beagles therefore, strictly speaking, it's not a foxhound pack. It's believed the

Duhallows in fact were in existence before 1745 but there is no recorded history.

As the 18th and 19th Centuries progressed the sport became increasingly popular throughout Ireland. Foot harrier packs also made an appearance, which hunted hare, and were popular with people of lesser means. Today hunting with hounds is still widely practised and enjoyed by many people throughout Ireland.

A much-cherished tradition in the face of sweeping and rapid change

In rural communities hunting with hounds is a very important social outlet for a lot of people who look forward to their day out as a highlight of their week. Lasting friendships are often formed. Love blossoms, with marriage sometimes being the outcome. When so much has been taken from rural communities and rural communities feel under so much pressure and threat, hunting represents the continuity of an

ancient tradition; it represents the resilience of much-cherished tradition in the face of sweeping and rapid change. Hunting is also a not unimportant economic activity, with practitioners parting with quite a bit of cash during their activity, including paying for equipment, accommodation and food.

Nowadays, hunting with hounds is controversial and is under considerable ideological threat. Those attacking the pastime unfortunately don't practise the decent attitude of live and let live.

Instead, they condemn without adequate knowledge and insist on imposing their beliefs on others. Faced with this ideological onslaught the attitude of many hound followers is the very understandable one of keeping their heads down while keeping on hunting. They want to fly below the radar as much as possible and keep away from others' censure. This is a sad state of affairs for a pastime which has such an ancient and proud history. Hunting should be a badge of honour not a badge of shame.



Gone away!

The First in a Series of Country Sports Profiles

Declan Feeney huntsman to the East Down Foxhounds

Declan Feeney was born into hunt service, his late father John Michael Feeney at that time being second whipper-in to the Iveagh Harriers, where Johnny Flynn was kennel huntsman and first whipper-in and they both turned hounds to Albert Uprichard MH. One of Declan's brothers, Peter, also followed his father and was huntsman to the Kildare Foxhounds.



Declan Feeney in the saddle.

In later years, John Michael Feeney was appointed kennel huntsman to Brian Faulkner MH, the Former Prime Minister of Northern Ireland who now hunted the Iveagh Harriers. A week after his appointment John Michael Feeney was murdered by loyalist terrorists and Declan's brother Jimmy succeeded his father for a brief time. It was at this time that Albert Uprichard became an influential mentor to Declan, which he has not forgotten.

Declan continued to hunt as a schoolboy while working at a tracking centre for George Bailey, who paid for all Declan's schoolboy hunting, before leaving school and working in a harness and tack shop for four years. While working with Polo ponies for Stephen Hutchinson MH (South Tyrone) Declan



Declan Feeney is a marvellous ambassador for hunting.

travelled throughout the UK and met Terry and Jan Hall who sourced and liveried the Cheshire's hunt horses.

Terry Hall made good on his promise to get Declan into hunt service, which he did at the Cheshire Hunt where Stuart Coley was huntsman. It is relevant to note here that one of Terry Hall's staff was Cathy Sharp, whom Declan subsequently married in 1992. When whipper-in Paul Steele was injured Declan stepped into the breech and gained more experience with these Modern English hounds.

After two years with the Cheshire Declan moved to the South Shropshire where Michael Rowson was huntsman. Declan greatly enjoyed and learned a lot from his two years with this marvellous ambassador for foxhunting.

He then moved to the Flint and Denbigh as first whipper-in under Michael King, with Major David Watkin Williams-Wynn as Master.

Michael King had learned his trade under Bruce Durno at the Fernie and, as with Michael Rowson, Declan was happy with and learned a lot from another excellent huntsman. This was Declan's first experience with Old English hounds but it was something which he took in his stride. Two years later, Declan moved, as first whipper-in, to turn hounds to David Barker at the Meynell and South Staffordshire.

The East Down job then came up and Declan secured it with Craig Caven and David Sandford as joint masters and local lad Ryan Carvill helping out in kennels. Declan then returned to the Meynell as kennel huntsman and first whipper-in to Johnny Greenall MFH who hunted hounds. Ryan Carvill accompanied Declan as second whipper-in and kennel man, David Barker having retired. After two years at Sudbury, the East Down job came up again and Declan returned home in the



The fine Kennels block dating to 1841 has listed status

“foot and mouth season” and he has been there ever since.

The passage of time has brought many changes to a huntsman’s working conditions. It is a much harder job now as agricultural practices, irregular weather patterns, diminishing and increasingly built up country, social media and false ideas about hunting on the part of the general public, have each brought their own influences to bear.

The entire kennels complex now has listed status, the main kennel block bears a plaque denoting its 1841 origins and this status brings extra work in its wake for the huntsman, who keeps the

entire complex in pristine condition.

Declan was anxious to underline that he considers himself to have led ‘a privileged life, having been paid for doing a job he loves and being able to visit places and meet people he couldn’t normally have done.’

He stressed that he would be eternally grateful to mentors such as Albert Uprichard, George Bailey and huntsmen such as Michael Rowson, Michael King and David Barker. Each of these huntsmen generously drafted hounds to Declan to enable him to join with Craig Caven (master of the East Downs 1978-2013) in building up a top

class pack of hounds, a position they enjoy to this day. Indeed they have had no little success in showing at Ireland’s two premier Hound Shows, Clonmel, (which moved to Stradbally) and Armagh having won Championships in both doghound and bitch classes at both shows.

It is a matter of great pride to Declan that in a total of twenty-two years as huntsman here he has only had five hunt horses, although he admits to ‘having had to borrow the odd one now and again.’

Declan says that nothing he has achieved would have been possible without the support of Cathy who, apart from anything else, turned his horses out to a very high standard and he remains greatly indebted to her for her support and, where necessary, advice.

Finally, Declan applauds his amateur whippers-in Ryan Carvill, Michael Smith, James Armstrong (both also joint masters), Daisy Dillon and Brian Toner for ‘their patience with my not so patient ways.’

Declan Feeney is very much a one man band at the East Downs and it is to his great credit that the Hunt holds the position which it does.



Success in the show ring with a top class pack of hounds.

From Rescued Dog To Rescue Dog



Charlie's journey started with us much like many other of our rescues. He was an unwanted pet springer, with bundles of energy (just how we like them)!

During the first lockdown (March 2020) the mother of the Corbett twins, Christopher and Mackenzie, approached Gundog Rescue & Rehoming to ask if we had something suitable for the boys to train during lockdown.

The Corbett twins had shot to fame when with their Dad they won the GR&RH Estate Challenge at the Irish Game Fair in 2019 after both competing with credit against adults in the spaniel and retriever tests at the Fair.

They were the perfect trainers and Charlie was the perfect project! He was given to them with the remit to train as a search dog, not a gun dog. The twins spent their entire lockdown devoted to Charlie's training. After the boy's hard work Charlie was sent for a trial with An Garda in Dublin, but was found a little too immature for the work he was needed to do. But the twins were not afraid of a challenge and took Charlie back and worked on the guidelines given by the Garda dog team. But unfortunately, Charlie had missed his chance of an intake with the Garda, so came back to us at GDR&R just after Christmas.

After Charlie's return, we saw a massive change in him, he showed us huge energy and enthusiasm and we thought this would suit a more active working search role and that he would be wasted as a pet. We then decided to contact the K9 Search and Rescue Team of Northern Ireland, to explain the training he had undergone and that he had trialled for the Garda.

It wasn't long before the the NI Rescue Team called with us at GDR&R for a chat and an initial assessment of



The NI Rescue Team meeting Charlie at Gundog Rescue & Rehoming Headquarters



Some dry land training gets underway



Charlie getting his sea legs on the Rescue RIB.

Charlie. Seeing his ability straight away and his potential, they agreed to give him a more in-depth trial. That was it - Charlie was off for his trial as a search dog!

The first photo we received of Charlie in his new adventure was dry land training! Charlie wasn't fazed! A few days later and like a duck to water, Charlie had taken his first try on the Rescue rib out on Lough Neagh. The Pictures were astounding and shows Charlie's braveness and willingness to learn!

Next, our great sponsors Feedwell Dogfood and The Great Game Fairs of Ireland contacted us and asked if there was anything they could do to help with this union of dog and Rescue team. Albert Titterington of The Great Game Fairs of Ireland offered to cover part of Charlie's adoption donation to our vet account. We also had another great supporter of Gundog Rescue come forward and offer to donate an equal amount to our vets! Jamie Clegg of Feedwell Dogfood offered to sponsor Charlie's food during his placement as a team member of K9 Search and Rescue. Amazing!!

Everyone at Gundog Rescue are so proud to be involved in rescuing dogs like Charlie and being able to offer them a new life! We are even prouder to be

able to work in conjunction with the K9 Search and Rescue team and hope our future working together is a long one!

Charlies journey is still ongoing, but it is clear from the pictures he's taking it all in his stride. The Gundog Rescue and Rehoming team would like to thank everyone concerned in Charlie's story and our other followers and for your support in making new futures like this happen for dogs like Charlie.

Some great work sees Charlie home in on the missing item.



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GWP FT Ch. Squire Astor

GWP FT Ch. Squire Astor - AKA Rom, The Dog of a Lifetime

At the outset I must confess, when it comes to gundogs, I'm a dedicated pointer man. To be more specific, it's the Hunt, Point, Retrieve (HPR) group that interest me most. My introduction to gundogs was a sudden affair when my late father, Foncy, arrived home with a liver and white pointer bitch. It was sudden because it was unannounced, her name was Gin and I was about 10 years old.

I can remember being gripped by a surge of excitement when Gin came on point, a sensation I experience to this day when my German Wirehaired Pointer has a find. It was while out hunting with my Dad that I witnessed my first HPR. Yes it was with our wee pointer bitch working out the bottom of a long, narrow, rushy field and Gin came on point. With my Dad encouraging her to flush and my heart seeming like it would burst through my chest, up flew a cock pheasant which my father took on the first shot! Having searched for about 15 minutes, the dog scurrying about also searching, we decided we would have to leave with darkness falling. We were in the next field when along came the pointer bitch having retrieved the bird and delivered to hand. I was so happy and excited.

Many times during the years that followed I heard my father retell the



German Wire Haired Pointer FT Ch Squire Astor with a small selection of his trophies.

story finishing off with the words I uttered on that day: "Daddy, we have a pointer and a retriever now." So started my appreciation of the HPR breeds that we owned two German Shorthaired Pointers and two Hungarian Vizslas before I bought my own German Shorthaired Pointer pup with a view to running him in field trials.

I joined the German Pointer Club of Ireland (GPCI) and attended my first working test in Termonfeckin, Co Louth in June 1990. My ambitions to be

a successful handler were not realised and I didn't renew my membership for 1994. It was 23 years until I attended another GPCI event, the annual Retrieving Test held in Mullingar in July 2017. Accompanied by my wife Mary, we met the Field Trial Secretary, Stephen Mc Manus, who introduced us to

another Donegal man Ricky Roberts who was running his GWPD Todlachie Black Tarquin aka Kaiser.

It wasn't until the following September that I would meet Stephen again at an Open Field Trial in Glennoo, Co Tyrone where he introduced his young dog Squire Astor aka Rom. He finished second that day and followed this with three more seconds and a third placing before the end of the season in January 2018. It was at an Open Hunting and Pointing Trial the following month that Rom was to take first place. This was the first of 7 consecutive wins that Rom earned on the trial circuit in 2018/19 culminating with him being awarded The IKC Points Cup 2018 for Section 5 Dual Purpose Gundogs. He went on to win three more trials in the latter end of 2019 together with a repeat taking of the IKC Points Cup, victorious for the second consecutive year. As I write I have learned that Rom has also been awarded the IKC Points Cup for 2020. This completes the hat trick!



Dog and handler working in symmetry together.

By any stretch of the imagination FT. Ch. Squire Astor is an exceptional gundog. To watch him and Stephen working together in total symmetry is a sight to behold.

Last week I conducted a Q&A with Stephen by telephone:

Stephen what's your background with gundogs?

SMcM: *My grandfather used to run Red Setters on the bogs of the Midlands for English shooting visitors in the 60s and 70s and I used to accompany them. My first sighting of a German pointer was one of these Englishmen brought over his own dog and I thought it was a pointer without a tail. The first HPR dog I owned was a GSP given to me as a gift from the same man.*

How did you get into trialling?

SMcM: *It must be 35 years ago since Paul Walsh of Arklow introduced me to German Wirehaired Pointers. However it was through Gerry Devlin that I got into trialling. I used to drive from Athlone to Hackballscross in Louth on weekends to train with Gerry.*

Did you have any dogs of note before Rom?

SMcM: *In the mid 90s I had two very good GWP's called Cara and George with whom I had numerous successes. I believe George would have been made up as a Field Trial Champion if he hadn't been hurt when he retrieved a bird in a trial having won the IKC Points Cup in 2013. With Cara she had the points built up to be Ft Ch but not under enough different judges. Bitterboom Angus was a GSP I owned, also an excellent dog, whose name you'll see on many GSP pedigrees.*

Where do you train?

SMcM: *There are ample snipe bogs around the midlands which provide great scope for training pointers. I do my water training on the river Shannon in my home townland of Clonown, which of course is my kennel name.*

What do you look for in a dog?

SMcM: *The first thing I look for is the pedigree and then there must be drive, you need that explosion of energy when casting your dog. As for picking from*

the litter you should remember that they will all be the same size when they are a year old. It's up to the handler to tap into the pups potential and take it out of them. As for male versus female I have no preference.

Any tips for would-be handlers?

SMcM: *Go and see both parents of your pup if possible because if you have family you will be bringing a hunting dog with a high prey drive into your home. Consult a breed club like the GPCI and also seek advice from winning handlers/owners like Gerry McErlean and Kieran Fox. I can remember well watching two great handlers, both now deceased, Paddy Mooney from Louth and Tommy Burke from Derry, neither of whom used a whistle. I was fascinated.*

How did you choose Rom as a pup?

SMcM: *I didn't. He was 9 months old when I got him. I was asked if I would take him and having seen the pedigree I decided to take a chance with him and he has more than repaid me since with his temperament and affection. Bred by Larry Ryan in Tipperary, he is from Diana Durnam Walters's famous Wigginsburg line. She is one of the worlds most renowned falconers. I am therefore his third owner, I think.*

Did he show promise as a pup?

SMcM: *When I got him at 9 months old he was very wary of people and had never seen game so I sat on a bench, with him on a long rope for a while every day for up to 10 days, until he finally started to trust me. A fortnight short of his first birthday he came second in the Puppy section of the GPCI Retrieving Test in Mullingar. He turned out to be a natural game finder and a very obedient dog.*

What was his most memorable trial?

SMcM: *Every trial carries it's own memories. I really enjoyed our win in Glennoo as the trial is in memory of my good friend Peter Higgins and I always wanted to win it. There are also two other trials that stand out for me, Drumconrath in Meath and Ballinacor in Wicklow. The former because it was the Paddy Mooney Memorial Cup that Rom brought home and the latter because the ground is so difficult and he was classified Excellent that day!*

Do you shoot over Rom?

SMcM: *Yes I shoot over him all the time, I couldn't keep a dog for just 8 trials a year.*

Footnote: I believe that Ft Ch Squire Astor may be the most celebrated Section 5 dog in Ireland. I base this on the fact that he has accumulated 34 Green Star points to date, winning 10 Open Trials and taking the IKC Points Cup for 3 consecutive years. He's not a bad looking chap either having earned Reserve at a Green Star Show in October 2018! And the final words go to Stephen: "An all-round honest dog, Rom loves what he does. He's the dog of a lifetime".

Not just for trials - Rom is a practical working dog too.



Irish Kennel Club Retriever of the Year 2020

Sean Kearney owns, runs and breeds Labrador Retrievers for competition, shooting and family dogs. His passion for dogs is certainly evident and he attributes this to his late father, also called Sean, who firstly introduced him to fishing, coursing and ferrets at the tender age of 6 years. From that day onwards, Sean has always had a dog and, as they say, the rest is history.

His first dog was a lurcher (Rosie) who he took pups off alongside working his terriers and ferrets too. His passion for the outdoors got stronger and stronger, spending all spare time out with his hunting dogs and ferrets.

Sean got his first Labrador Retriever

as a pup, Timpany Forest Fox 'Broc' as a shooting dog. One day, while enjoying working Broc he came across some men training their dogs for field trials and there and then he decided to extend his training discipline with Broc. Soon, Broc got him started winning, but as everyone knows, when you start training for trials the addition of more dogs is par for the course.

Sean had a real hunger for trials by now and got his own Kennel Club prefix as he wanted to try to breed some winners too. In due course this prefix became known worldwide. As I mentioned success came with FTW Timpany Forest Fox 'Broc', then FTW Shinnavale Firefly of Kelmarsky 'Fly,'

OFTW Emmanyan Vienna Of Kelmarsky 'Pip', OFTW Kelmarsky Bugatti (home bred) FTW Astraglen Pearl Scout), FTCH Kelmarsky Crow 'Crow,' who became the Irish Kennel Club Retriever of the Year 2020, and OFTW Klemarsky Ash, known as 'Ash.'

Sean would say that FTCH Kelmarsky Crow is a special dog. He has superb natural ability, drive, style, lovely temperament, strong and with superb game finding ability. Running Crow was a big challenge that Sean thrived on, but achieving FTCH status and also being awarded Irish Retriever of the Year 2020 was simply the icing in the cake for Sean.



A typical picture of Sean Kearney enjoying some training with his Labradors.



All Sean's dogs are trained for ability in work and field trials.

Sean also runs another young dog OFTW Kelmarskey Ash who has achieved 2nd & 4th Place in two, Two Day Open Stakes at the age of 18 Months and winning a 16 Dog open Stake at 21 months, some achievement indeed for Ash.

Sean loves the competition of tests, trials and accepts that the field is a great leveller of people as there is 'nowhere to hide.' "When you step out in competition with an old or new dog your expectations are high. It's you and your dog, a team which brings new hope." Sean loves training, competing and social life with his dogs is what keeps him going.

Sean also enjoys life with his son Kelvin his dogs, but there is another aspect - he also likes going to Mayo to fish for salmon which is another passion he got from his Dad.

Sean attributes his success to his Dad, Sean Snr who is no longer with us, and to the many friends he made on the trips throughout beautiful Ireland running his dog.

He is especially grateful to Brian Byrne, Drumbanagher Estate Shoot, for allowing him to train and pick up there. He is also appreciative of his fellow competitors, The Irish Kennel Club and especially all the Field Trial Clubs for their hard work in organising grounds for trials.

In conclusion, the pinnacle for the 2020 season for Sean Kearney was being selected as The Irish Kennel Club Retriever 2020.



Sean (left) pictured picking up with Gun Paul Donaldson and his wife Helen as our Editor Paul Pringle (right) enjoys the spectacle.



Setters & Shooting in Glen Prosen

International FTCh Snipe Ch Ballydavid Starjet producing a well-sized covey of grouse.

During these appalling times, never have magazines and shooting books been as important, particularly for the older generations. Over Christmas, I gifted Douglas Butlers book “Rough Shooting in Ireland” to a close friend. With the rolling lockdowns, the evocative imagery of wheeling teal circling ponds by the light of the moon, to the explosion of a cock pheasant from auburn bracken transported my friend to his younger days shooting in wild, untamed places. The only downside to the book in fact was the mourning when it was finished.

Escapism was always important and I remember being drawn to images of the Highlands in Scotland with ponies carrying red deer off the mountain faces. I was particularly attracted to the tweed clad shooting parties trying their hand at the king of all game-birds, the red grouse with the heather in full bloom and the sheer majesty of the terrain.

I have been fortunate to work my setters for guns in Scotland for a number of years but this article refers to one of my trips across to Glen Prosen estate.

The estate manager Bruce Cooper organises dates at an early stage. Glen Prosen has been written about on numerous occasions in shooting journals as it is one of the MacNab estates having access to great salmon fishing on the river Tay, herds of magnificent red deer roam the estate at times during the year while the estate also provides both driven and walked up grouse shooting. The 21,000 acres managed by the estate is situated in the heart of the Angus Glens and touches the world famous Cairngorms National Park.

Packing for a week or so of dogging is no easy task especially when you are fitting most of the gear required into a roof box. A team of six Irish setters, including two pups of twelve months would also have to be fitted. We would

be working the dogs for a week in Glen Prosen, therefore also requiring several changes of clothes.

Birds are mature and weather is unlikely to ever cancel the days

There is always relief when you are seated on the ferry and the boat is gently moving towards Scotland. Normally your thoughts drift to weather forecasts as when counting poor weather either wind or rain can negate the entire trip. Shooting is different in that birds are mature and weather is unlikely to ever cancel the days. While the journey is long to the North East of Scotland, it is unfamiliar and Stirling Castle is a dramatic landmark. It is one of the largest and most important castles in Scotland, both historically and architecturally.

The castle sits on top of Castle Hill, an intrusive crag, which forms part of the Stirling Sill geological formation. It is surrounded on three sides by these



FTCh (Snipe Ch) Malstabodarna Embla produces a pack of grouse for the guns.

steep cliffs, giving it a strong defensive position. Several Scottish Kings and Queens have been crowned at Stirling, including Mary, Queen of Scots, in 1542, and others were born or died there. There have been at least eight sieges of Stirling Castle, including several during the Wars of Scottish Independence, with the last being in 1746, when the famous Bonnie Prince Charlie unsuccessfully tried to take the castle.

The destination is Kirriemuir known locally as Kirrie. The playwright J. M. Barrie was born and buried here, and a statue of his best-known creation Peter Pan stands in the town square. It is a quaint town with stone buildings and cobbled streets. It is home to a few Inns which would provide sustenance in the evenings. It also has a public park which allows the dog a leaded walk after the considerable journey. They are also fed outside the car for they would have a busy day tomorrow.

We go into the Airlie Arms Hotel for dinner before heading to our lodgings in an old world B&B. The landlady is quintessentially Scottish with a fabulous dry wit and a curiosity in people that makes her the perfect host. The Scottish full breakfast seems incongruous with its sheer size complete with haggis but never is a breakfast more required.

Nerves start to jangle and I sense all the

things that could go wrong.

The weather systems at this altitude are unique to the rest of the country. Though it is the Glorious 12th of August, we have seen weather from dry arid heat to rain storms. Gamekeepers are frighteningly punctual whether just counting or on the formal shoot days. The journey into the mountains is approximately a half hour from our lodging but is absolutely dramatic in terms of wildlife and scenery.

Usually as we leave the arable lands and the wild partridges pacing the hedgerows, the next stage are the ancient forests with its copious supply of pheasants, which can cause quite the traffic jam. The red phone box in the

forest indicates our turning point for the estate which involves passing over freshwater streams and waterfalls. A school bus collecting the mountain children can be a delay so best to leave additional time!

We usually hope to meet the shepherd on the way up, a Welsh man with an enormous affinity and natural gift with animals. On arrival pre backed bags including lunches are transferred into the estate land rovers and dogs leap into the dog boxes. The Estate's team of black labradors are already sitting in the back and are not for moving.

There are informal introductions to the guns for the day and the cavalcade of "estate Landies" snake up to the



FTCh (Snipe Ch) Ballydavid Gaelforce and the offer of a cock grouse.



A pack of Black Game for FTCh Malstabodarna Idun.

allotted part of the Estate for the day. The vista is truly mesmerising with a hanging valley crafted from a glacier millennia earlier. The sheer scale of the mountains and rugged beauty made you feel incredibly fortunate to become an active part of this landscape.

When the Land Rovers jangle to a stop, everyone jumps out and the wind whips into you. The Head keeper then points to some distant land across a multitude of gargantuan mountains which will be our ultimate destination. Definitely a sporting challenge and not for the faint hearted. Safety rules are repeated and if there is a team of guns, this is where they are paired. Only two guns per dog's point, reinforcing the sporting element of the day. Lunch would normally be taken on the heath but if the weather is not suitable it is in a refurbished "bothy".

When the dog sets, the pair of guns move twenty yards left and right of the dog

It is always helpful for the dog handlers if the shooting party has previously shot over dogs. Guns with driven shoot experience are used to cocking their guns at the peg and wait for the arrival of the birds. They are also more familiar with shooting from a stationary position and therefore moving in tandem with a setting dog is very different for them. The plan is that when the dog sets, the pair of guns move twenty yards to the left and right of the dog. The dog forms the bottom of this triangle. As the dog draws forward, the expectation is the grouse will rise

within shooting range of the guns.

Our own plan would be informal but unlike the Wedding Feast of Cana, you normally start with the infallible dogs. As described, it is different to field trials but over the years the team has consisted of three international field trial champions, and four field trial champions and a pair of pups. The dogs are normally run singly and rotated every fifteen minutes with the pups getting their turns in more suitable ground and into the wind. Normally, the pups would complete one run to every two runs of the adult dogs. The pups run will end with a find even if it is only recently off the lead. Joan handles the dogs first until we have a few successful grouse situations. She handles either Starjet or Idun. You are hoping to have a few grouse in the bag early on to get the day off to a good start and reduce the pressure for the rest of the day. Experience has shown that as the day continues, fatigue, cramp and general tiredness of carrying a gun, the shooting will become more erratic. The bag limit

for the day is twelve brace, which is considerable given the difficulty of the terrain.

A dog must be very staunch holding their game

As someone working the dogs, you want them to be perfect. The commitment of the team of keepers not to mention the shooting party and their guests for this day can definitely create butterflies in your stomach. The most significant challenge is the time waiting for the guns to arrive to the setting dog. A dog must be very staunch holding their game. With such time delays the packs of grouse usually run, especially if the point is on a downward slope. This requires the dog to remain focussed and using air scent, rather than foot scent lead the guns in the most direct route to the seat of the birds. Another significant challenge, again vastly different as to how we train and compete, is the wind direction. We always work our dogs into the wind. On a shoot day the direction is a specific location so often the dogs have not the benefit of the head wind. However, neither of these potential issues caused any difficulties over our days.

There are other aspects that are to be expected but are not commonly tested in practice in Ireland. The ability of the dog to produce a pack of grouse holding steady as each bird is flushed while shots ring out. Remaining staunch until the guns have reloaded and producing any remaining birds on command is vital for these days. Experience has



Some grouse flying very high.

shown that while the majority of the pack can be missed, a sitting single grouse produced after the barrage of initial shots can be successfully shot. Perhaps a single bird focuses the mind, or there is less adrenaline than the clatter of wings of a large pack of grouse?

As one of my interests is field trial competitions, there is also expectations of the dogs that may be quite impervious to the guns. While presumably the guns and the keepers appreciate a wide running dog searching each side, thereby reducing the forward distance of the guns and certainly the speed of that walk, I also expect dogs to show dash and style in their quest.

It is a given, the wider the dog searches each side of the guns, the better chance of happening on to game. The speed of the search may not be as important to the guns albeit I do believe it is part of the spectacle. Irish red setters are not renowned for unproductive points, stopping where the birds have left, so this has not thus far been an issue. There would be nothing worse than dragging tired guns to the top of one of these steep peaks with no birds when they get there!

The retrieval of the shot grouse by the estates Labrador team is more good training for the young setters. Their instinct is to move through the cone of scent to the seat of the bird. With falling birds, the setters must drop to shot and

remain there till the birds are retrieved to hand.

Another unexpected but marvellous surprise was the amount of black game on the estate. Black Game, as I had experienced hunting them in Sweden, have in some ways the characteristic of the pheasant in that they are able runners. On a usual shoot day in Glen Prosen, there could be five or so points on Black Game. Though plentiful in Glen Prosen, they are not shot and are protected by the Estate.

I have many golden memories of the long winding workouts on what turned out to be Black Game. I remember a particular one with the dog Idun who followed them efficiently down a decline across some banks until eventually producing the pack at a burn. Exhausted guns were raised which was pierced by the shouts of the keepers screaming “don’t shoot.”

There were of course some memorable moments particularly with the pups. Any dog person is more excited when the pups do well. There is the expectation that the mature dogs will consistently do their jobs well. One particular moment that I remember still is when the pup Luna (Ballydavid Eriu) was steaming at terrific pace down a valley and she stopped so suddenly the world seemed momentarily off its axis. Her body was in the most unusual contortion. She produced an old grouse and his fall was dramatic falling perhaps

a hundred feet of the edge of the mountain. The retrieve from the keepers Labradors was just as impressive. In terms of style and class, this pup was very exciting. Her rotation of working for the guns became the same as for the adult dogs.

After the first two days, a certain routine develops. The dogs are fed and kennelled, and checked for any injuries. A filled sheep trailer of straw has miraculous powers of recovery. Usually our stay includes a Sunday, which means a rest day for the dogs, if we are not counting with pups.

The shepherd takes the dog for a walk on that day to keep them limber.

We have spent some fabulous days as tourists, whether visiting Glamis Castle or some whisky distillery or of course a sneak peek at Balmoral Castle. Being so close to the Cairngorms National Park is another marvellous benefit to the trip. On arrival back to the yard, the shooting party may invite the keepers and handlers back to their lodgings for some refreshments and the banter is very enjoyable.

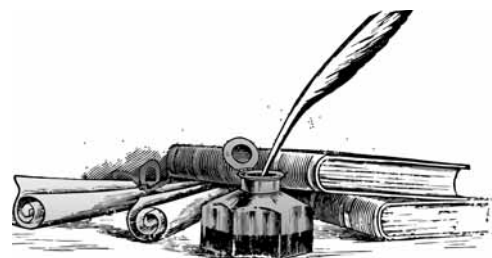
The body becomes accustomed to the terrain and after a day or so, the stiffness is gone in the mornings. The same cannot be said for the guns on a second day. Tired bodies greet us on the second day of a shooting party as tonic water is produced to sooth aching legs. The setters mechanically find a spot in the estate dog trailer and do not seem to notice the Labradors. With a new shooting party, the same anticipation at the first day envelopes you. The energy from a new shooting party is palpable and there is no credit in the bank regarding previous good performances on the hill. The sense of camaraderie grows quickly with a number of successful shots and as the immediate trepidation of the guns subside, the shooting seems to improve.

As we drove home, the first flocks of geese with their evocative sounds arrive from Greenland. With exhausted dogs and tired bodies, we have a long journey till we get home. Till the next year, we can only dream of Glen Prosen.



Ballydavid Eriu (Luna) of the Kingdom producing a bird.

The Back Page



predetermined outcome, given that it was open to anyone no matter where in the world they happen to live. In explaining this proposed new legislation, evidence was ignored when inconvenient and selective references from Lord Bonomy's review of the Scottish law used that were entirely at odds with that report's findings. It did not say why this legislation is needed and was based on what can only be said to be a questionable polling and not on scientific evidence.

For example, Lord Bonomy, in discussing hunting as an activity and method of wildlife management reaches very similar conclusions to the earlier Burns Inquiry. His findings support the continued use of packs of hounds for pest control and confirm the view that the restrictions on hunting in Scotland are not supported by the evidence. His findings also highlight how the Hunting Act in England and Wales, with its two-dog limit, is even more arbitrary and without an evidential basis than the law in Scotland.

Even more concerning is the fact that there was little engagement with a wide range of highly relevant stakeholders including ourselves and notably the Ulster Farmers Union, whose members would be directly affected by his proposals, and wider stakeholders who are interdependent on hunting. It would also seem that a social and economic impact assessment has not been undertaken.

We have to take into account dedicated hunt

As promised in the last issue this page will be devoted to giving a platform to members of the country sports fraternity to raise issues of concern to them in a robust fashion. The views expressed are the views of the author and are not necessarily the views of the editorial team of the magazine.

This issue's platform is given to: Gary McCartney, NI Director of Countryside Alliance Ireland.

I first met Mr John Blair at the launch of the Irish Game Fair at Shanes Castle not long after taking up his position as an Alliance Party MLA. I was obviously naturally wary of his presence due to the party stance on aspects of county sports and land management. However, I was reassured by my colleagues, who pointed out John had come from DAERA Inland Fisheries and that he had done a lot at the fair to promote angling notably the catch and release.

During his address John said not once but twice "country sports have a friend in me." I had hoped this new face in the party would have brought some balance and could be someone to help



Gary McCartney

the party, which appears to have been influenced by animal rights groups, better understand the need for wildlife management, in addition to the conservation and economic benefits this brings.

Unfortunately, this was not to be the case and whilst we were in the middle of the second wave of the COVID-19 virus with case numbers increasing daily, John decided to start the public consultation process to introduce his Private Members Bill to Ban the Hunting of Wild Mammals with Dogs.

It appeared to many in the country sports community that this consultation was in name only, leading to a



Most farmers welcome the tradition of the hunt on their land.

staff, some of whom have young families to support. What has been done to establish how these people and their families will be affected? Some could even be left homeless if John's ban is successful. In the last year alone unemployment in Northern Ireland has increased by over 10,000.

Again, we have to look at the other services interconnected with hunting - farriers, veterinary surgeons, feed merchants, insurance companies (for animals, employees, members and grounds/ buildings), various saddleries and grooms to name but a few.

We also have the thoroughbred industry in Northern Ireland. Hunts throughout Northern Ireland hold race meetings: 'point-to-points'. These have been described as "the lifeblood of the racing industry in Ireland." There are 12 point-to-point courses in Northern Ireland and races are held here either once or twice a season. These generate an average turnover of £21,500 per meeting. To run a horse at one of the race meetings they need to have obtained a 'Hunter Certificate', these cost £50 each and there were 2,836 issued throughout Ireland.

It is reasonable to question, as is often the case with animal rights activists, whether any thought has been given to the knock-on effects of their proposed actions. If hunting is banned, how long will it be before National Hunt racing is put under the scope?

We have the very successful horse export industry in Northern Ireland, with a total of 401 registered breeders in Northern Ireland in 2018. Ireland and Northern Ireland are world renowned for their breeding of both thoroughbred and Irish Sport Horses. Point-to-points are vital for the breeding and training aspects of the sport. Many horses that start their racing life at point-to-points

graduate to the highest echelons of National Hunt racing, both in Ireland and the UK, for example 'Looks Like Trouble' who won the Cheltenham Gold Cup and was bred in Northern Ireland. These point-to-point horses are important in terms of the continuing worldwide reputation of Irish horses. The sale and export of these horses is the main income of most horse breeders. Without the overseas interest this industry would be negatively and irreversibly affected.

The 2019 Deloitte report found that the overall Equine industry in Northern Ireland is estimated to generate £212 million of direct and indirect expenditure, over £200m of this total is on the cost of keeping, riding and training horses, the largest items being livery/training (£37m), feed (£26m) and £21m on transport and equestrian equipment respectively.

Last year was a 'write off' for most businesses and the first half of 2021 is looking the same. Add in Brexit, difficulties importing goods from our main trading partner and the ongoing uncertainty of the pandemic and it's relevant to ask if these businesses afford another blow at this very difficult time.

Some try to claim hunting is cruel, yet many vets state that the use of scenting hounds is natural for both

hunter and hunted. Even members of the Burns Inquiry, including Lord Burns, have publicly said that their report did not conclude that hunting with dogs can be deemed cruel.

It should never be the case that public representatives attempt to impose the will of a vocal minority upon the majority of a country, not least when that support might be considered to lean heavily on views from outside NI and on the biased views of animal rights activists for its validity.

In closing, we must ask where this animal rights agenda ends. Look at the grounds of John Blair's proposals and at the recent report by an animal rights group backed by a handful of Tory MPs, which recently claimed recreational angling is making fish suffer. Again, these are allegations not backed by science and robustly challenged by the Angling Trust.

Once on this moral crusade road what choice will the Alliance Party have but to attempt to stop or restrict other country pursuits. We only have to look at the proposed amendments by some MLAs during the passage of the Welfare of Animals Act in 2011 to realise that in spite of Mr Blair's assertions this Bill could issue threats to shooting and fishing.

Gary McCartney



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