

Irish COUNTRY SPORTS and COUNTRY LIFE

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Front Cover:

From a painting by Simon Trinder

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Managing Editor: Albert Titterington, **Editor:** Paul Pringle, **Associate Editor:** Irene Titterington

Publishers: (Editorial & Advertising) Country Lifestyle Exhibitions Ltd. Cranley Hill, 5b Woodgrange Road, Hollymount, Downpatrick BT30 8JE **Tel:** (028) (from ROI 048) 44839167

Email: Email: irishgamefair@btinternet.com **Web:** www.countrysportsandcountrylife.com

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Well, readers may have noticed already that my editorial comment this time is no longer restricted to Northern Comment and comes under a new heading representing all aspects of the magazine.

But firstly, I raise my hat to Derek Fanning who has held the position of ROI Editor for the past number of years. Derek wrote on many subjects with great authority and in a manner which was so well received by thousands of readers worldwide. His research on a huge range of country sports and other topics inevitably ended in a finely crafted article that was a delight to read.

However, I am very pleased to be able to report that Derek will not be totally lost to readers of this magazine as he intends to send us a regular article. What will his topics be? I have no idea but of this I'm sure they will be in his inimitable style and will be eminently readable.

Derek, I wish you well and look forward to meeting up with you again in the very near future.

Irish Country Sports & Country Life has always been keen to test new processes and evolve as part of the way that the digital age and indeed as you the readers have suggested. The ability to adapt has meant that while other country magazine titles are only a fond memory, this one, in spite of Covid, is in a strong position to deliver what our readers want. Importantly too our advertisers recognise that this title continues to grow apace, and that no matter what the challenges are, we expand our readership and continually seek to adopt what we do to make it better for everyone.

To take an example, as you probably know we are part of The Great Game Fairs of Ireland. You will certainly know that this year it was not possible to run the Irish Game Fair at Shanes Castle Antrim despite taking every precaution required under ongoing Covid 19 rules and regulations. It was a great disappointment for the organisers and the exhibitors and not least the

public at large. The Irish Game fair has thousands of supporters who look forward every year to enjoying the event set in the beautiful private estate of Shanes Castle.

But all was not lost! The situation saw the midnight oil burnt and low and behold THE VIRTUAL GAME FAIR was launched worldwide at <https://www.thevirtualgamefair.com/>.

Since the launch date thousands of people around the world have tuned in to everything that a 'real' game fair should be. It is packed with trade stands in the traditional game fair settings such as Gunmakers Row, Fishermans Row, Clothing Row, Gundog Row etc. PLUS there is a constantly changing Bargain Basement which is seriously too good to miss.

Another aspect which has really gone down well is the wide range of easy to enter competitions with excellent prizes.

As the organisers said at its launch - 'No tickets, no queuing. You're only a click away from the Virtual Game Fair! Where the weather's always just what you want it to be!'

While THE VIRTUAL GAME FAIR is at www.thevirtualgamefair.com traditionalists need not fear - pandemics notwithstanding the traditional and eagerly awaited Shanes Castle Game Fair is at the planning stage already to take place next year.

In this edition you will find articles with an international flavour alongside others set in pastures much nearer to home. Here's a small indication of what's in store.

Let's start with something most of us can only dream about - A Macnab. This challenging feat first arose in a tale by John Buchan's story where the central characters aim was to shoot a stag, bring down grouse and catch a salmon all in the one day. After many years trying, Simon K Barr writes about eventually achieving his dream in the Highlands.

A trip to Germany for Steven McGonigal sees him enjoy some exciting Teckel work but not before he hones his rifle skills to perfection. Then

it's an early start to the north of Heidelberg for an organised hunt with Teckels and Deutsch drahthaars.

Hugh Brady gives his personal insight into the world of pointers and setters with a detailed analysis of recent events, Simon Everett takes us bass fishing, David Hudson is high in the Scottish hills and Julian Schmeichel gets us taking a sharp intake not breath with his very latest 'chiller' entitled 'The Reckoning,' macabre tale where the devil comes calling on a poor farmer who rather rashly read some very old books on witchcraft.

Who remembers a page entitled AJ's Angst? This was a page where free rein was given to our publisher Albert Titterington to select and comment from a personal perspective on topics of his choice.

When other workloads got too much Albert decided to 'rest' A J's Angst but with an idea of resurrecting it in some form when he could spare the time.

Which brings us to this edition - and no you will not find an Angst among the pages.

What you will find is something called THE BACK PAGE, a page set aside for guest writers to express their personal views on topics of their choice.

Whilst AJ's Angst was written exclusively by Albert we felt that with the expansion of the magazine and indeed sharing an international stage with THE VIRTUAL GAME FAIR it would be an excellent opportunity to widen its range of writers, topics and locations.

Like Angst before it, I predict that THE BACK PAGE will become the very first page that readers turn to when they open Irish Country Sports either in hard copy or the FREE TO READ edition found at <http://www.countrysportsandcountrylife.com/magazine.htm>

Or follow the link to the magazine when you drop in to THE VIRTUAL GAME FAIR at <https://www.thevirtualgamefair.com/>

Paul Pringle, Editor

National Association of Regional Game Councils

Hello Readers of Country Sports & Country life. As things stand here in the Republic, we are once again living under strict restrictions. Confined as we now are to our respective homes, we are unable to meet up physically. October is a special time for the NARGC organisation. This is when we normally hold our Annual General Meeting with all the excitement that goes with it. Elections of Officers, debates on motions and topical issues and of course the gala dinner and dance that is the social highlight of our year.

I have missed meeting up with many friends seen too seldom but always enjoyed. Needs must when the devil drives and following a postal ballot we deferred our AGM to next March. Indeed, we should be ramping up for that event but in truth there is no guarantee that the COVID-19 virus will allow us to proceed even then.

Coming hotfoot from a Zoom National Executive Meeting, I can relate that we did convene a virtual Quarterly Governing Body meeting. This helped us gauge our capability to conduct a large-scale Zoom meeting. We will succeed hopefully and from there develop methods to manage our affairs in the teeth of this pandemic.



Participants at the recent Trained hunter (game meat handling) course.

We have not ground to a halt. Sub-committees responsible for the various elements of our operations continue working.

Before the latest restrictions, the Deer sub-committee in conjunction with the education officers ran a hugely successful "Trained Hunter (Game Meat Handling) course" in Bloomfield House Hotel in Mullingar. Our Vice Chairman, Mick Fenlon, reported that the twenty plus candidates were well pleased with the arrangements to ensure their health and safety. The management and staff in Bloomfield are to be congratulated on the facilities provided and the care taken of our officers and students.

Sadly, our Deer stalking course stands postponed for now, travel restrictions and indoor gathering rules holding sway over all of us.

The lead shot issue is once again to the fore

The Irish representatives on the EU REACH Committee have voted in favour of a total lead ban over wetlands. The game is not yet lost but we have taken a hit and our civil servants, at the urging of their Green Minister, have scored a massive own goal in voting for the proposed restriction that uses the RAMSAR 'wetland definition' and the short 24-month lead in period.

The NARGC had been interacting with the relevant people in the NPWS and the NSA (National Safety Authority). We believed that they understood the implications of the proposed European legislation and that they would be voting against the proposals. Green shoots popping up in Government Departments have brought about the U-Turn.



National Association of Regional Game Councils

They have exposed the Government to massive cost. They have endorsed proposed legislation that will criminalise the most law-abiding citizens and all because of pseudo-science and figures extrapolated on skewed small-scale studies.

Matters progressed further and not in our favour when the Environmental Committee voted for the proposal.

The battle is not over. We and our European allies are fighting this tooth and nail. Legal challenges are ongoing. MEP's are being lobbied and here every reader can play their part by contacting their MEP and urging them to reject this proposed lead ban and to send the thing back to the ECHA and REACH to come up with a fair, proportionate and workable proposal.

We are not confident that Irish MEP's on the Environmental Committee see our point of view, however. Green MEP, Grace O'Sullivan along with Mick Wallace and Billy Kelleher, are the Irish Members of this Committee. We cannot expect much support there.

The NARGC has carried out a study of the presence of lead contamination in wild ducks for each of the last two years and over the entire country. We have supplied duck gizzards to independent Labourites and published the results. In the 2018/19 season, a lead presence of 1.75% was found and in 2019/20 season, a presence of 0.2% was observed. Real numbers, real data and nationwide, with all 26 counties represented.

We have made our findings available but the powers that be seem content to follow the European herd rather than make the case for Ireland's unique geography and hunting practices. This is a far cry from the grossly exaggerated figures emanating from the so-called expert conservation bodies.

If it comes to a lead shot ban, then the key points to consider are: Accommodation for those with old guns (unsuitable for steel shot), cost effective alternatives to lead and an agreed phasing out period for lead. The economic impact of this decision.

When the ECHA presented its report to the EU Commission, it made for unpleasant reading. What was clear was that theirs was a pan-European Report with no exceptions or derogations envisioned. There was to be a unified, harmonised approach to the lead shot issue. In short there is no safe background lead level and we shooters discharge a toxic substance into the environment.

If we cannot stop this, the EU Parliament will legislate for the elimination of lead shot on wetlands and peatlands. Their definition of a wetland is as per the RAMSAR Convention which places nearly this whole island as a great big wetland.

Ramsar Convention on Wetlands define wetlands as: "areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six meters".

This will include seasonal flooding that usually occurs during our hunting season.

All lead shot shooting with shotguns will be banned in a wetland (hunting of all species and target shooting on ranges in the wetland). What is more, it will be illegal to even possess lead ammunition in a wetland! Think of the ramifications of this piece of law in the hands of some over-officious representative of the State. Think also of the fun and games in the Courts as we battle over what is and is not a wetland. The proposal is ludicrous.

Worse is to come; the ECHA is now taking submissions on alternatives to lead bullets with a view to eliminating all lead ammunition. They have shelved this for the time being we suspect

only until they get the wetlands ban over the line. Do not hope for a reprieve, there will not be any coming.

What we are doing

As this is an EU Directive, we will continue to work through FACE to influence the definition of wetlands as applied to Ireland. The Ramsar Convention is not universally adopted. We have identified the lack of gunsmiths and a Proof House in Ireland. We need a solution to the problem of modification of firearms and the possible continued use of unsafe guns post the lead shot ban. We will re-open the dialogue with Government and the NPWS so we can manage the transition and control the pace of change to the benefit of the sports men and women whom we represent.

Economic impact

Due consideration must be given to the economic impact of EU Directives. While the ECHA estimated this at an average of €60 per annum to hunters, this does not take account of the greater per capita impact on Irish hunters operating in a virtual total wetland. Some realistic compensation for unsuitable firearms must be derived.

So, to sum up the situation for readers then: The Irish Government and the NPWS are now quoting the AEWA Agreement as justification for their recent U-turn. Ireland signed that Agreement in 2003 and has done nothing about it since. Fact is that the NARGC tried to engage with them after the signing of that Agreement, but they failed to engage with us. Ireland has the rather dubious record of signing agreements and then walking away into the sunset making absolutely no provision for their implementation and all that would be entailed. This new Green Minister has added to the latest chapter to that particular

Irish archive. The NARGC will hold this Minister and his Department to account for their actions. We will continue to monitor and report on developments on this issue. We will have strategies to deal with non-toxic ammunition implementation as it emerges.

Bad news was followed by worse when we were shifted into the infamous Level 5 lockdown. The country became a virtual open prison. Confined to our homes now, allowed to leave only for government-defined necessary purposes. Individual freedoms so hard won were snatched away to combat the pandemic. Strangely though, certain people and occupations were exempt. Elite sports could continue and be televised to entertain those of us under house arrest! Stranger still we can leave our prisons for daily exercise within 5 Kilometres but while we hunters may take a dog and a walking stick, we may not carry a gun.

In the opinion of our leaders, the simple act of taking the gun moves us from necessary exercise to recreational hunting, a practice prohibited under this repressive regime. Now any notion that an individual walking the fields with dog and gun risks contracting Corona virus or spreading the virus to others borders on incredulity. When compared to upwards of 30 players along with assorted referees, umpires, kit men, coaches, and medical attendants, locked in contact sport in a confined field? Well the reader can judge for themselves.

The NARGC has brought a challenge to the Courts but encountered delaying tactics there. So even with a strong case to bring on behalf of our members, we are stymied at every turn.

It is hard in all the circumstances to wish you all a Merry Christmas, but it will certainly be a memorable one even for all the wrong reasons.

John Toal (National PRO) NARGC

IS THE RECOVERY OF WOLF IN EUROPE REFLECTED BY THE LATEST POPULATION ASSESSMENTS?

State of Nature 2020 recognises positive trends in wolf populations – So why do conservation status assessments show a different picture?

Last week, the State of Nature 2020 has been officially published as part of EU Green Week. It describes the conservation and population status in the EU during the period from 2013 to 2018, based on Member States reporting under Article 12 and 17 of the Birds and Habitats Directive.

While trends for population size are mainly unknown for most of the species

groups, the report highlights that mammals such as the Eurasian Beaver and the Wolf in the EU are showing increasing population trends and are one of the main beneficiaries of the conservation measures taken under the directives.

In general, promoting population growth, restoring the species' habitats and several LIFE projects lead to positive developments in Europe's large carnivores such as the brown bear, wolf, Iberian and lynx (Iberian



lynx and Lynx lynx) in several Member States.

Earlier this year, FACE explored the Article 17 reports for wolf and has come to similar conclusions. Results show marked improvements, not only for population trend but also habitat quality and range expansion. However, this largely positive trend is not reflected in the

overall conservation status of the Member State assessments. The conservation status is of particular importance since it acts as a barometer on how Member States are delivering on one the main objectives of the Habitats Directive, and greatly influences the management and conservation of the species at national level.

Compared with results of the previous State of Nature report 2015, the wolf assessments with a favourable conservation status decreased slightly from 19 (2007 – 2012) to 18 (2013 – 2018). At the same time, the number of wolf assessments with an unfavourable conservation status increased from 13 to 19. This is largely due to the increased number of new assessments brought about by range expansion, and lack of optimism on future prospects for wolf. To get a more detailed picture of the analysis and the reasons behind the increased number of assessments with an unfavourable conservation status.



A pack of wolves.



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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/advise 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 Fund Membership to Club Members who are under 14 for just €10

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)



SWAROVSKI OPTIK opens up a new dimension of wildlife watching with NL Pure Binoculars

A huge, revolutionary field of view combined with groundbreaking design in premium-class binoculars – the new NL Pure from SWAROVSKI OPTIK takes your wildlife viewing to the next level. This is all thanks to a sophisticated optical system embedded in incredibly compact, precise mechanics. The very finest materials and top-quality workmanship ensure that these binoculars will stand the test of time. The NL Pure accessories also have a focus on sustainability. The newly designed bag, cleaning set, and packaging are made exclusively from recycled fabrics and natural materials. From September 1, 2020, the 8x42, 10x42, and 12x42 models of these new binoculars will be available from selected retailers and online at swarovskioptik.com.

SWAROVSKI OPTIK's high-quality long-range optical products heighten our senses and inspire us to love and respect our environment. Carina Schiestl-Swarovski, Chairwoman of the Executive Board of SWAROVSKI OPTIK, explains: "Experiencing the unique beauty of nature and becoming immersed in it – it is this yearning that is behind our desire to design binoculars that allow the observer to become one with nature. The high standards that we apply to optical quality and design have led our experts to rethink the laws of physics. The results are revolutionary. The NL Pure offers an experience of unprecedented intensity – Pure Nature Love."

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As soon as you look through the new NL Pure, the technical masterpiece that lies within reveals itself. Thanks to the huge, revolutionary field of view of SWAROVSKI OPTIK binoculars (up to 71°) and the barely perceptible edges, you are completely immersed in the image, making it the most natural form of observation.

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The incredibly compact optics are encased in a uniquely ergonomic housing, which ensures that the NL Pure 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.



Breathtaking images with the new NL Pure from SWAROVSKI OPTIK.

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ALL PARTY GROUP ON ANIMAL WELFARE ESTABLISHED



South Antrim MLA, John Blair with USPCA Chief Executive, Brendan Mullan outside Parliament Buildings, Stormont.

An All Party Group on Animal Welfare has been established to address outstanding animal welfare concerns in Northern Ireland and to raise the profile of these issues within the Assembly.

Members of the group, who will be working closely with the USPCA, are intending to address animal welfare issues in relation to the puppy trade; enforcement of banning orders; EU exit arrangements and associated animal welfare issues and underground dog and cock fighting.

At the inaugural meeting of the All Party Group on Thursday afternoon, Alliance MLA for South Antrim, John Blair was elected as chair.

The South Antrim MLA said: "I'm delighted to have been elected chair of the all-party group on animal welfare, and to see widespread support across the political parties for introducing the group to prioritise a range of animal welfare issues.

"I look forward to working with colleagues over the coming months to progress legislation which will further enhance those protections."

Editor's Note: We have worked with John Blair in the past at the Irish Game Fair at Shanes Castle as part of his then outreach work with DAERA Fisheries. He has agreed to be interviewed by us for the Spring issue of Irish Country Sports and Country life. We look forward to working with John and his group on areas of mutual interest and wish them well.

MORE



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Mul-T-Lock supports the fight against rural and firearms theft

Theft has daily devastating consequences for the entire rural community, including farmers, livestock and firearms owners and agricultural businesses. NFU Mutual's theft claim figures reveal that rural crime cost the UK £54.3m in 2019. This is an increase of nearly 9 percent on the previous year, making it the highest cost recorded in eight years.

Leading security expert Mul-T-Lock is suggesting a number of ways in which farmers and agricultural business owners can protect their assets.

For those looking for an access control solution that offers convenience and comprehensive audit trails, Mul-T-Lock's eCLIQ technology includes the ability to schedule individual access permissions, provide time-limited access and revoke access to particular keys as and when needed.

Being able to revoke access if a key is lost or misplaced not only offers enhanced security but also significantly reduces whole life costing, as it removes the need to replace physical locks; and keys can be validated daily, weekly or monthly to keep them continuously secure.



Livestock theft also increased to £3m last year

Mul-T-Lock and firearms

Mul-T-Lock has seen a great deal of interest in its eCLIQ access control system – with multiple sales across the Republic of Ireland and momentum growing in the UK

Not only is maintenance not required for up to 200,000 cycles, but key batteries are also fast and easy to replace once every 30,000 operations, at a nominal cost to the business, with no need for specialist tools.



Mul-T-Lock eCLIQ gun cabinet.

Mul-T-Lock also boasts an extensive range of advanced products that provide protection to commercial and private vehicles of all types, including lock cases, Thatcham accredited slam locks, deadlocks, euro cylinders, camlocks and padlocks.

To learn more about Mul-T-Lock's array of security solutions to help protect against rural theft, please call 01902 364200, email internalsales@mul-t-lock.co.uk or visit www.mul-t-lock.co.uk.

October stocking of Departmental waters

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) has stocked the following waters with takeable fish in October 2020:

- 1 October - Brantry, Brown Trout, 500
- 1 October - Marshallstown, Brown Trout, 1,000
- 2 October - North Woodburn, Rainbow Brown Trout, 1,000
- 5 October - White Lough, Rainbow Brown Trout, 1,000
- 6 October - Glencrewan, Brown Trout, 1,000
- 7 October - Corrany, Rainbow Brown Trout, 500

- 8 October - Castlewellan, Brown Trout, 1,000
 - 12 October - Craigavon, Rainbow Brown Trout, 500
 - 13 October - Hillsborough, Rainbow Brown Trout, 1,000
 - 14 October - Lough Money, Rainbow Brown Trout, 1,000
- Details on recent fish stocking can be found on the [nidirect](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk) website at:
<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/2020-fish-stocking-figures>
- Further information on all aspects of angling is available on the [nidirect](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk) website at: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/angling>



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Poots praises cross community work at urban fishing project

Agriculture Minister Edwin Poots has highlighted the importance of cross community involvement work during a visit to a unique urban fishing project at the Waterworks in North Belfast.

Minister Poots was given a tour of the park by The Families at the Waterworks Angling Club, which operates part of the Belfast City Council site as a catch and release trout fishery; as well as being shown a demonstration of their skills at fly casting and fishing.

This unique fishery affords both local and visiting anglers an opportunity to enjoy urban trout fishing right in the heart of North Belfast and work is ongoing to promote and encourage angling participation by young people in the area from across the community divide.

Minister Poots said: "It is important that facilities such as the Waterworks are supported and maintained within an urban environment to give young people in particular, an opportunity to experience the benefits of an open air recreational activity right on their doorstep.

"My Department will continue to support the important cross community work being undertaken by angling clubs such as Families at the Waterworks which are actively promoting recreational angling to new participants within local



Agriculture Minister Edwin Poots casts a line with Edward Cassidy, Celtic Spey Challenge Fishing Club.

communities.

"My Department encourages angling clubs and community organisation to apply for funding through 'DAERA's Community Angling Outreach Event

Fund' which provides financial assistance to help assist in the staging of angling events to encourage participation by everyone in the community and the development of angling as a sport."

A Barbour Gift They'll Always Remember

This festive season, Barbour has Christmas covered with a choice of gifts to delight even the most difficult-to-buy-for friends and relatives! Choose from outerwear through to practical clothing, footwear and accessories for men, women and children.

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COUNTRY SPORTS IRELAND CALLS FOR EXTENSION OF SHOOTING SEASON FOR PEN REARED PHEASANTS

Country Sports Ireland was bitterly disappointed with the recent Irish government decision to prohibit the shooting of all pheasants until at least 2nd December - due to what we believe was a misunderstanding of the regulations within Level 5 of the Plan for Living with Covid-19 as they relate to shooting sports.

We opposed this action at the very highest levels in government but it quickly became clear that the main parties in government would not consider changing their decision or offering any kind of exemption. In an effort to minimise the impact of these unfair regulations we subsequently wrote to the Department for Housing, Local Government & Heritage calling for an extension to the shooting season for pen reared pheasants in February 2021 for all those clubs and organised game shoots who released pheasants during 2020 to compensate for the time lost.

We have been inundated with messages of support for this strategy from within the shooting sports community. We have also had messages of support from many politicians in different political parties and were pleased that to have the matter raised by Senator Joe O'Reilly in Seanad Éireann on 10th November.

Under the Wildlife Act 1976 the Minister for Housing, Local Government & Heritage is empowered to grant licences which permit the hunting of pen reared pheasants during the month of February. Pheasants are not a native species, they



are polygamous (don't pair up) and breed much later in the year so shooting in the February has no negative impact on their populations.

We are also asking all those clubs and organised game shoots who released pheasants during 2020 and who would welcome the opportunity to shoot pheasants until the end of February 2021 to contact their local TD as a matter of urgency. We also respect the views of anyone who doesn't wish to shoot in February and of course they will be able to exercise that personal choice but given the exceptional circumstances many groups involved in rearing, releasing and shooting pheasants find themselves in this year we believe the opportunity to shoot in February is important.

SHOOTING SPORTS RISK ASSESSMENT

Country Sports Ireland has produced a bespoke Shooting Sports Risk Assessment that will help gun clubs, shooting grounds and shooting syndicates throughout Ireland comply with any Covid-19 regulations that are in place at any particular time. In addition, in these challenging and uncertain times carrying out a risk assessment is undoubtedly a very worthwhile exercise for shoots of any size located anywhere in the country in terms of keeping members, shoot participants and the wider community safe.

The Country Sports Ireland Shooting Sports Risk Assessment is updated each and every time that Covid-19 regulations change - north and south so it is an excellent resource in terms of assisting shoots to comply with changing regulations.

Copies of the Country Sports Ireland Shooting Sports Risk Assessment have been sent to hundreds of shoots around the country and are available FREE of CHARGE to all Country Sports Ireland affiliated groups by emailing ronan@countryportsireland.org



TRAINING

The Covid-19 virus and various regulations aimed at controlling it, have really disrupted the delivery of Country Sports Ireland's leading programme of training courses throughout much of 2020. During July, August and September we were able to deliver a number of Deer Stalking Training Courses and Trained Hunter Large Wild Game meat hygiene courses with tuition and assessment taking place online on some occasions. At other times the regulations made the delivery of training courses impossible.

We have been inundated with enquiries about training course availability recently and 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.countryportsireland.org



The shooting sports community have played our part in the fight against Covid-19 but must not be unfairly treated by any regulations.

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NI Gundog Trainer transfers his training skills to win top International Working Dog Award

Billy Wilkinson a keen shot who used to train gundogs has applied those training skills to win a top international working dog award under the auspices of the AVD eV an German organisation based in Hannover which keeps a stud book for all Mastiff-type dogs of the Perro de Presa Canario breed developed in the Iberian Peninsula and Canary Islands.

The Perro de Presa Canario, also known as the Canary Mastiff, is a large Molosser-type dog breed originally bred for working livestock. The name of the breed is Spanish, means "Canarian catch dog", and is often shortened to "Presa Canario" or simply "Presa". The breed is sometimes also called Dogo Canario, meaning "Canarian Molosser". It is the animal symbol of the island of Gran Canaria

The AVD still selects for the real working functions of the Presas for wild boar hunting and protection work but most of all for producing healthy, stable and reliable family dogs

The breeding and selection priorities of the AVD e.V. are Health; Fitness; Endurance; Temperament; Character; Drive and Authentic Type. These are all well assessed at the working dog trials.

This year Billy travelled to the Slough 5 K9 kennels of Sati Gill to compete on the AVD Night Trials that Arron Polymore and his team had travelled from Germany to run.

There were 135 entries in Gold, Silver and Bronze categories and Billy was delighted to win the Gold Class with his young dog Ice, which at just 26 months old was the youngest ever winner. He has certainly enhanced the reputation of Billy's Castle K9 kennels and Bullvision kennels of the dog's breeders Scott and Chloe.



'Perro de Presa Canario dog 'Ice' is owned and trained by Billy Wilkinson.

ANGLER FINED

A Co. Armagh angler was convicted at Dungannon Magistrates Court of fishing without a licence and permit and using fishing methods not permitted under legislation.

The angler was found guilty in their absence at Dungannon Magistrates Court to three breaches of the Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966 and was fined a total of £350 along with an offender levy of £15.

DAERA Fisheries Protection Officers were on routine patrol of DAERA (PAE) Public Angling Estate waters at White Lough, Co. Tyrone when they detected the angler fishing without a valid DAERA rod license and permit and the use of an unauthorised method of angling on DAERA water known as "ground baiting" using sweetcorn and Halibut pellets.

The total fine of £350 consisted of fines of £150 for fishing without a permit along with £100 for the remaining two breaches detected of fishing without a rod licence and use of an unauthorised method of angling on DAERA water along with an offender levy of £15, a total of £365.

DAERA Inland Fisheries enforcement is committed to pursue those who have a detrimental effect on fish stocks. If you are aware or suspect illegal fishing, you should contact DAERA Inland Fisheries on 0300 200 7860 or outside office hours contact 0800 807 060.



Billy holding his trophy is pictured with 'Ice' after their Gold Class Win.

Countryside Alliance



Snares caught again in political firing line

Once again concerns have been raised about the use of snares, with the agriculture spokesperson for the Alliance Party asking Minister Poots the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail his Departments plans to reform the legislation or practices on the use of snares, including any consideration given to the banning of snares.

The following day CAI had a meeting with Minister Poots and voiced our concerns that this had been raised again. We briefed him on the importance of snares as a valuable tool for game keepers and land managers, helping stop predation of ground nesting birds such as curlew and that snares are only intended to be a restraining device. This allows non target species to be released if caught accidentally or should a fox be caught then the animal can be dispatched in a humane way.

We also briefed Minister Poots that CAI, UFU, BASC and NIEA officials were working together since 2011 and had agreed a draft legislation, The Snares Order (Northern Ireland) 2015, but due to the collapse of the Executive this had not been brought before Ministers.

Minister Poots had to consider the use of snares, around a decade ago in his previous position as Agriculture Minister and this matter was raised again when Mark H Durkan was Minister.

CAI spoke to the Alliance Party's Leader Ms Long on this subject three years ago at the party's annual conference. Ms Long informed us that she had reports that people were inappropriately using snares in towns and cities on domestic animals. We do not condone the use of snares in this way and the full weight of the law should be brought against anyone caught doing so.



Properly used snares are a valuable tool for game keepers and land managers.

Those opposed to snares have publicly stated that snares cause horrific injuries to thousands of animals each year in Northern Ireland, however, when we previously contacted the PSNI and NIEA neither had evidence to support such a claim.

AFBI Deer survey 2020

Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) are asking members of the deer stalking community in Northern Ireland to assist in their

deer survey for 2020 in an effort to better understand Tuberculosis in Red, Sika and Fallow deer across Northern Ireland. As part of a wider effort to eradicate bTB which costs an estimated £40 million per year with an average of 1000 cattle being culled each month in Northern Ireland.

AFBI have kindly given us an update on last year's survey and thanks to the generous contribution from hunters, a total of 225 deer were submitted to the project last year. From these samples they found relatively low instances of *M. bovis* in deer and that infection appears to be localised. These findings are very much preliminary and part of an ongoing project. At this stage it is not possible to draw any firm conclusions from this work. It is, however, a great first step into having a better understanding of how this disease functions in deer populations and across the agricultural landscape.

Further sampling will allow AFBI to gain a clearer picture of the extent of bTB in deer. Upcoming work on this project will combine genetic tests and more complex statistical analysis with the aim of generating a better understanding of how deer may, or may not, be playing a role in the current bTB epidemic.



CAI members are encouraged to support the project and submit heads.

CAI would encourage members to support this project and those who wish to submit heads for testing should ensure the antlers are removed, the head is double bagged and an AFBI bTB submission form is completed before contacting the DAERA Wildlife Unit for collection on 02877 442 399. Sample bags can also be requested on this number. Full details can be found in the news section of our website www.countrysideallianceireland.org

Whose right is it anyhow?

Over the past few months, we have received several enquiries regarding Sporting Rights. What is or is not included and who owns the rights? It is fair to say that no two cases are precisely the same and in some instances the person who owns the land may not even hold the sporting rights.

Sporting rights normally cover the taking of wild animals by either Shooting, Fishing or Hunting (using hounds).

So, who owns the sporting rights? To confirm the answer to this question, one will need to have sight of the title deeds to the property to confirm if there are covenants, restrictions or a separation out of 'Sporting Rights'. Some land may be sold or transferred with all the sporting rights, some with partial rights (for example the new owner may only get the rights to kill pests while the original owner retains the game shooting rights) and in other cases the land can be sold or transferred with NO rights whatsoever going to the new owner.

As an example, in the 1960's the water level of Lough Neagh was lowered which in turn exposed new land that had previously been under water. Farmers and landowners around the perimeter of the Lough were able to purchase this land from the Shaftsbury Estate, the owner of Lough Neagh, however in many cases the Sporting Rights remained under the control of the Shaftsbury Estate. This would mean anyone wanting to take game on this land would need permission from the 'Rights Holder' and the landowner depending on what was agreed at the time of purchase and what is included within the title deed before they can access and take game from these lands.

For anyone wishing to acquire Sporting Rights, it is wise to consider what exactly you want, the type of quarry you wish to take, the right of access you will need, and what other requirements you will need to enable the pursuit of your sport. For example, do you wish to have the right to erect pens or release birds and if so, how many? It is also wise to consider what obligations you or your group are prepared to agree to undertake in relation to maintenance of the land or improvements to the land and of course indemnity of the land owner in respect of claims. It is also important to establish if anyone else has any rights to the land?

As you can see from this short summary, rights are a very complex subject and can lead to a lot of confusion especially where land has been sold or passed on a number of times or where more than one party has rights to the land. Someone may have the rights to take deer while another only to take pheasants, for example. We would therefore recommend that any agreements with landowners and were applicable with other rights holders are confirmed in writing detailing precisely what has been agreed

and accompanied by the appropriate maps defining the area in question. Legal advice in drafting such agreements is advisable particularly where it is intended to be a longer-term agreement which you may wish to have registered with Land Registry as a burden on the Title Deed.

European Firearms Passes will remain valid in Northern Ireland

Under the terms of the Northern Ireland Protocol the Government has confirmed that Residents of Northern Ireland will still be able to request a European Firearms Permit and to use it to take a lawfully owned firearm to an EU country, including the Republic of Ireland, from 1 January 2021.

However, when the UK transition period ends, from 1 January 2021 residents of Great Britain will no longer be able to apply for a European Firearms Pass (EFP) or use one to travel to the EU with their firearm or shotgun.

What this means for you

Before travelling, NI residents will still need to check and follow the licensing requirements of any EU country they will be in with a firearm from 1 January, as well as import and export controls. This includes if you are in an EU country on 1 January.

Each Country may have varying lead times for applying for licenses, so we recommend you check the requirements well ahead of travelling.

Traveling to Republic of Ireland

Question: I'm from Northern Ireland can I use my firearms in the Republic of Ireland with only a EFP?

Answer: No you must get a Republic of Ireland Non Resident permit from the Garda Superintendent of the area you wish to visit.

Question: Can I travel with my firearms from Northern Ireland through the Republic of Ireland even if I'm not shooting with only a EFP?

Answer: No if you intend to transit through the Republic of Ireland you will need to obtain a transit pass from the Department of Justice at St Stephens Green.

Some recent perspectives on the lead shot controversy

From the Game and Wildlife Conservation



An interesting and topical video on the Danish experience of life without lead shot (Video)

The VIDEO presentation below was delivered by Niels Kanstrup from Aarhus University during the recent GWCT Game 2020 Conference and covers the Danish experience of shooting without using lead shot.

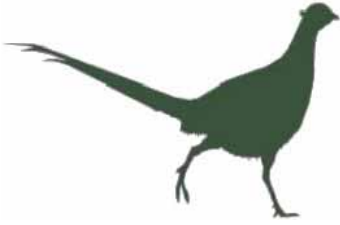


Will steel bust your barrels? – Fieldtester, episode 3



Fieldsports Channel are going to put this to the test " Some shotguns are steel-proofed, others aren't, but what happens to your barrels when you put a lot of steel shells through them? In this episode of Fieldtester, we have 10,000 Eley steel cartridges to put through a brand new Yildiz SPZME Black Edition 12ga shotgun."

<https://www.fieldsportschannel.tv/fieldtester3/>



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Tipping the balance: The effects of released gamebirds and their management

A new scientific paper in the journal *Wildlife Biology* came out, led by GWCT Head of Lowland Research Dr Rufus Sage, which delves into the effects of released pheasants and red-legged partridges on wildlife and the environment. It provides a summary review of what is and is not known and an overall analysis of whether gamebird releases are having 'good' or 'bad' effects on both the habitats around them, and the other species that share the fields and woodlands nearby.

Although there are other reports¹, this is the first peer-reviewed paper to be published on this topic. The authors used the literature itself to define important topics and then attached a simple categorisation to each (positive, neutral or negative), which could then be compared in the context of other factors such as the size of a release or the scale at which an effect might operate.

Summarising what is already a summary review into a very small nutshell: habitat management for gamebirds can have a positive ecological effect with more songbirds in game woods, as well as more bees and butterflies at their edges. Woodland is more likely to be planted or retained where gamebirds are part of the landholding, and this woodland better managed. In and very close to release pens, the pheasants themselves can have direct negative effects on plants, the soil and invertebrate communities. But there was little evidence for negative effects away from release sites, although mosses and lichens on trees may be affected away from the pen itself.

On open land, the presence of hedgerows, game crops and supplementary feeding are positive for farmland birds, but gamebirds may have a negative effect on the hedgerows themselves, as well as some impacts on invertebrates where released birds congregate, and a possible local effect on reptiles. Gamebirds tend to remain close to their release site, with 90% remaining within 1km. In general, negative habitat impacts are localised whereas benefits from habitat improvements can influence the whole woodland or farm.

The paper explores more complicated indirect issues as well, such as the potential effect of gamebird releases on predator

populations, and illegal killing of birds of prey. The first of these is not yet well enough understood for conclusions to be drawn – we need more research looking at this in the context of a range of land uses (for example different livestock farming systems). The extent to which raptors are killed alongside releasing is unclear, but any cases have a clear negative effect and this must stop. Overall, assuming an average shoot in terms of both size and adherence to good practice, the review found that ecological positives and negatives are approximately balanced; with ten positive outcomes, twelve negative and three neutral.

The context for this overall finding is that any modern economic land use will have negative ecological effects, and many have relatively few positive ones. This paper finds that the balance is relatively even for release-based shooting, and the ecological seesaw can easily be tipped either way: where shoots over-stock pens, site them in particularly sensitive areas etc, more negatives may occur, but where shoots keep to appropriate stocking densities in well-sited pens, support their

birds with ecologically valuable game crops for the winter and so on, the positives will outweigh the negatives and the shoot will deliver an overall biodiversity gain.

This is encouraging, as it suggests that increased awareness of the potential ecological effects, along with education around best practice guidelines, can help shoot owners improve their ecological profile with relative ease. Efforts in this area such as GWCT advisory visits, courses and publications can all help tip the balance. We don't need leaps in technology or a complete overhaul of the sector: we already know what makes a well-run shoot, and how these can be good for the countryside. It will be no surprise to GWCT members that adhering to our published best practice guidelines and principles of sustainable game management that several of the potential negatives can be reduced or eliminated to help a shoot fulfil its potential to deliver ecological benefits.

The message is simple: a well-run shoot that is guided by best practice and abides by the law can make a positive contribution to local habitats and wildlife.



Redleg in the sun.

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Inland Fisheries Ireland welcomes new CEO Francis O'Donnell



Iascach Intíre Éireann
Inland Fisheries Ireland

At the end of September Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) announced the appointment of Francis O'Donnell as the new Chief Executive Officer. Prior to this Francis held the position of the Director of the Western River Basin District with IFI. Before re-joining the inland fisheries service, Francis was the CEO of the Irish Fish Producers Organisation (IFPO). He has also worked with the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority and the Regional Fisheries Boards.

Francis O'Donnell was born in the Gaeltacht village of Carrick in south west Donegal in 1971 to Frank and Rose O'Donnell. He attended Carrick national school and later Carrick vocational School. Francis O'Donnell first joined the Fisheries service in 1995 when he was appointed as a fishery Officer with the Northern Regional Fisheries

Board. He spent a number of years in various Regional Boards and returned to the Northern Regional Fisheries Board where he worked as a Fisheries Inspector. In 2007 he took up a new role with the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority as a Sea Fisheries Protection Officer. In 2011, Francis was appointed as the CEO of the Irish Fish Producers Organisation where he worked in national and international marine fisheries management on behalf of stakeholders. He chaired a number of working groups at the North Western Waters Regional Advisory Council. While CEO of the IFPO he was appointed to various stakeholder forums by Government. He also served on the Aquaculture and Licencing Appeals Board.

Francis returned to Inland Fisheries Ireland in December 2019, as the director of the Western River

Basin District. He graduated from the University of Ulster in the environmental sciences in 2005, from Queen's University Belfast in 2006 with a master's degree in Ecology and from the University of Limerick in 2010 with an MBA. He is published in the area of stakeholder engagement and Corporate Social Responsibility and is also a guest lecturer in this field.

He has a keen interest in the conservation of fresh water fish and their respective habitats and sees the inland fisheries resource as an important socio economic driver. His vision for Inland Fisheries Ireland is to protect, conserve and develop the inland fisheries resource in line with stakeholder expectations while maintaining ecosystem integrity for future generations.

Memorandum of Understanding between Inland Fisheries Ireland and Cairde na Chláir

In March of 2020 Inland Fisheries Ireland and Cairde na Chláir signed an MOU. Cairde na Chláir is a group of angling clubs formed in 2015 that are associated with the Clare River. The Cairde na Chláir clubs involved in this MOU are the Milltown Anglers, Cregmore Athenry Anglers, St Colmans Anglers and the Tuam Anglers Association. The basis of the MOU is to enable collaborative work on the conservation and development of brown trout and salmon and their habitats on the Clare River and is focused on the development of a five year plan.



Inland Fisheries Ireland New CEO Francis O'Donnell.

As part of the first stage of the plan works have begun to restore over 900 metres along the Abbert River. This first stage of work is to

make habitats that will enhance nursery streams to be suitable to produce more brown trout and salmon. The project has been

estimated at over €100,000.

Along with the works on the Abbert River, IFI and Cairde na Chláir have plans to restore over 8,000 metres of nursery stream over a course of five years subject to governance and adequate resources being in place. In 2020 IFI and Cairde na Chláir targeted four projects in the Clare Catchment for instream habitat enhancement works. These projects were as follows: The Killaclogher River near Monivea, the Nanny River in Tuam, the Sinking River in Addergoole More and a tributary of the Grange River in Cloondahamper.

IFI designed enhancement plans for each river and carried out Appropriate Assessments for each to determine if the proposed works could have an impact on any of the protected habitats nearby. The enhancement works included the installation of paired deflectors, the excavation of pools and the insertion of spawning gravels. The aim of these works is to provide a varied flow and depth patterns in the rivers to make them more attractive to invertebrates and to provide spawning and nursery habitat for salmon and brown trout. In some locations the rivers were fenced off and alternative sources of drinking water for livestock were provided. This type of measure improves the water quality in the river.

In September the works on the Killaclogher, measuring 900m in length, were completed by the Office of Public Works under the supervision of local Inland Fisheries Ireland staff. The Nanny River project measuring 400m in length was completed by contractors supervised by IFI staff.

The Sinking River and Cloondahamper projects require in depth Natura Impact Assessments which will be carried out in the



Excavation of a pool in the Nanny River in Tuam.



Alternating deflectors in the Killaclogher River.



Pat Gorman, Francis O'Donnell and Fintan Gorman from IFI with Local TD Sean Canney, Members of Cairde na Chláir and the Office of Public Works (OPW) at the Abbort River development.

winter. This will allow those works to be carried out in the summer of 2021 when river conditions permit. These three projects make up over 1,800 metres of instream development. Any of these developmental works which are not completed in 2020 will continue into 2021.

Francis O'Donnell, previous Director of the Western River Basin District and current CEO of Inland Fisheries Ireland said: "Inland Fisheries Ireland views this type of partnership as being critical. Public private partnerships will help to build relationships and get work done to improve nursery habitat for various fish species. The Abbort River model is a clear example of how funded collaborative projects are prioritised and can progress. To see the success of this partnership shows how collaborative work is important for the future of our fisheries resource. Always getting the governance right and having

adequate fisheries development funding is critical as we head into 2021. While the MOU model is a significant development IFI will be working with all stakeholders. I am more of the view that partnership arrangements are needed without fixing a tag such as MOU to the method of delivery. As CEO I am committed to spending public money on the right projects and I intend to build relationships with all stakeholders, in particular those where our respective relationships may have become strained. I have spent significant time in my other role as director of the WRBD communicating my vision which is an inclusive one."

Update on IFI's Corporate Plan 2021-2025

Inland Fisheries Ireland is developing its next Corporate Plan 2021-2025. The purpose of which is to provide a strategic framework setting out the vision, policies,

values and direction for Inland Fisheries Ireland during the period 2021 – 2025. In February of this year IFI carried out a consultation process to allow members of the public to have an opportunity to input into the formulation of the new Corporate Plan with reference to the organisations previous strategy (2016-2020). The Inland Fisheries Act 2010 requires that Inland Fisheries Ireland shall submit a five year rolling Corporate Plan to the Minister for approval. Following internal consultation, IFI will consult again with members of the public with a view to seeking feedback on the draft themes and high level actions the organisation proposes to take over the life of the next strategy. The consultation will be advertised shortly and we look forward to receiving your input at that time.

For more information on Inland Fisheries Ireland please visit <https://www.fisheriesireland.ie/>.

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COMPETITORS WILL SUBMIT Three photographs; front, side, rear of a fly they have tied via email to countrysportsandcountrylife@btinternet.com. There is a small entry fee of £3/€3 payable to the to the FISSTA Paypal Account: fissta2017@gmail.com. The competition will be promoted on social media, Facebook/Twitter, The Virtual Game Fair site Competition and Country News pages, The Irish Country Sports and Country Life magazine and in the media.

CLASSES

- IRISH AMATEUR
- IRISH PROFESSIONAL
- IRISH LADY
- IRISH YOUTH (UNDER 16)
- INTERNATIONAL (ENTRANTS FROM OUTSIDE IRELAND)

Entries close on 28th February 2021.
Competitors can enter more than one fly.

PRIZES

The overall winner will win an Irish Crystal Trophy, a day's Salmon Fishing for two rods, plus a Salmon Rod and Reel sponsored by FISSTA <https://www.facebook.com/FederationofIrishSalmonandSeaTroutAnglers>

Other prizes include: Irish Class winners win Crystal trophies and a copy of the book *Tied In The Hand: Odyssey Of A Salmon Fly-Tyer* by Sven-Olov, published at £35.00 from Paul Morgan (www.anglebooks.com)

International winner and Youth winner will win a very special book sponsored by FISSTA *A Celebration of Salmon Rivers* by the North Atlantic Salmon Fund and the Youth winner also receives a £50 voucher from Smyths Country Sports <https://www.smythscountrysports.co.uk/>. All runners up (other than youth) get an engraved hip flask. Other prizes are sponsored by John Fairgrieve <http://johnfairgrieve.com>

Winners' flies will be featured in the Irish Country Sports and Country Life magazine and at the Irish Game Fair at Shanes Castle 26/27 June 2021. There will be an invitation to tyers to demonstrate on the FISSTA stand and a selection of the entrants will be featured on the Virtual Game Fair site in a video such as that produced for our Carriage Driving competition <https://www.thevirtualgamefair.com/noddyvyse-prestige-wins-inaugural-whip-collar-virtual-game-fair-show/>



Please note THE VIRTUAL GAME FAIR & FISSTA will have the right to publish photographs of any fly entered.

Gun Control

By David Leyonhjelm

“Gun Control”, by David Leyonhjelm, a former Australian Member of Parliament was written primarily for his domestic market in order to highlight the level of injustice perpetrated by the government on law abiding Australian citizens who owned licensed sporting firearms. He expands by listing the reasons why Australians require firearms for sporting/hunting purposes and fully describes the types of guns that were previously licensed in that country – and now can no longer be held.

The writer takes us through the minefield of firearms ownership – who can have what - and the reasons they can do so. He also highlights the draconian penalties that gun owners face in the event of using a licensed firearm in self-defence. Leyonhjelm critically exposes a multitude of anomalies in former Prime Minister John Howard’s Gun Laws introduced in 1996 following the Port Arthur massacre.

Highlighting the farcical “Buyback” scheme, he questions the logic of how anything could be bought back by someone who hadn’t sold or owned it in the first place, also referencing Howard’s blatant antipathy towards firearms. Curiously, classes of firearms which had to be surrendered in one particular state were still available on licence in other states. The author availed of this anomaly when he took up residence in another state by buying a firearm of identical calibre to one he was obliged to surrender in his previous state of residence.

All Firearms handed into Police custody under the “buyback” scheme were destroyed – well, not exactly all. A surprising number of valuable guns resurfaced for sale on the open market

abroad following their surrender to the Police – despite their owners having been paid a pittance for them by the Government. A subsequent raid on one Police officer’s home led to the discovery of a container full of guns that had been handed in to Police.

The author further relates how a colleague – a barrister – confided in him that he had ordered a new Bentley motor car because the legal profession was aware that “gun bans” generated increased demand for legal representation. This increase specifically refers to law-abiding citizens who through error or ignorance find themselves subject to prosecution for what previously were lawful activities.

“Gun Control” also contains several chapters on the licensing situation in a number of other countries allowing

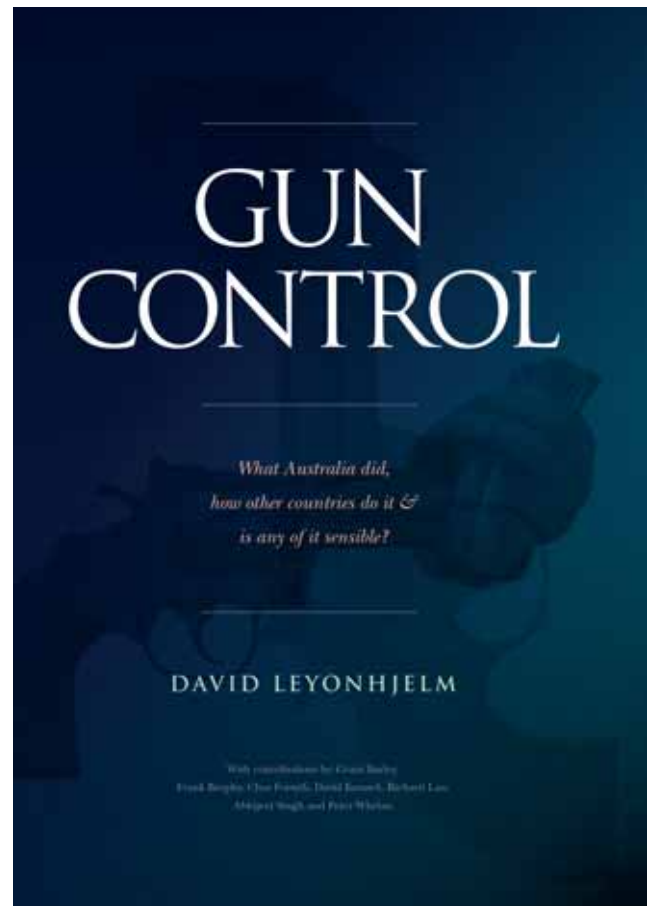
Australians to compare their lot with that of law abiding shooting sports enthusiasts around the world. Gun laws and their origins in New Zealand, Switzerland, USA, UK, Ireland, Malaysia, India and the Czech Republic are included, written by individuals in those countries who are highly experienced and well versed in firearms legislation in their own countries. The Czech Republic is indeed to be envied given that its (law abiding) citizens have a constitutional right to own firearms - a right that no public

servant can over-ride.

This book provides a comprehensive and analytical insight clearly showing that gun ownership and violent crime are independent variables, that is, they are unrelated. The author states that a high level of gun control does not reduce violence, and a low level of gun control does not increase it.

We are all only too well aware of many governments’ well-worn mantra that strict gun control reduces crime and violence. “Gun Control” is a fascinating read, indeed a must, for licensed firearms owners and shooting enthusiasts. Perhaps it should be mandatory reading for Politicians, Civil Servants and Police, many of whose views are usually based on fear and ignorance rather than on facts. Available on Amazon and the Book Depository.

Frank Brophy





THE GREAT ATLANTIC SALMON CONUNDRUM

Autumn and the big cock salmon take on a tartan veil.

The harvest moon rises above the wide plains of Mayo as we traverse the rushy fields from the river. The glorious autumn day has been kind – there has been good company, lots of banter and craic, good food and wine but more importantly there have been salmon.

Our residence for a few days in September is the glorious Mount Falcon Hotel, the grandeur of the decoration matches the beauty of the location and every year we take a few days to finish the season. This year has been special, the river was high but not in flood, Stuart had told us about the great runs of salmon in July but there were still plenty in the pools in September. The walk back gives us time to reflect on our days sport.

Parking by the little angling hut on the Boat Pool amidst the huge beech trees now turning gold, red and copper,

we marched upstream along to a straight, known to us as the Walk Through. Although the sun shone bright through a clear blue sky, a cool Autumn breeze stirred through the avenue of trees, the leaves dropping like glowing embers from the fire.

Occasionally a salmon would turn as we greased our lines and got just the right amount of lead to cock the float perfectly, excitement and fumbling fingers trying not to break the fragile prawn while mounting it on the hook. Finally the first few casts to find the correct depth and we are fishing.

The little orange top of the float glows brightly against the autumn colours reflected on the water, mesmerising as it drifts on the slow River Moy currents, anticipation builds as it covers a known taking lie, an upstream mend, a perfect free lined drift until dib, dib and it's away. It could be a

snag, the bottom, weed but it's gone too suddenly and the heart skips a beat, the rod springs up to strike and a salmon launches itself into the air crashing into the peaty water and the fight is on.

The prawn is the ideal bait for autumn as salmon never swallow and are always lip hooked which makes for a quick release. Although there's the occasional fresh silver fish most resident salmon have acquired the lovely autumn colours, copper and red with some of the big cock fish taking on a magnificent tartan appearance. It's one of the most satisfying aspects of angling to hold the fish in the current until it regains strength and shoots off into the stream, soon hopefully to finish its job on the spawning redds and ensure future generations can thrive.

Moving on from the River Moy and the fabulous Mount Falcon Estate, a quick glimpse at the angling reports in



Some fresher fish were present.

Ireland and the UK reveals a huge increase in salmon numbers reaching our rivers this year, we have to ask the question, has the deadly Covid-19 revealed a high seas scam which has been going on for years? Certainly that is the view held by fishery owners south

of the border who've had their problems with commercial exploitation in the not too distant past.

Other reasons for this boom in the salmon population

Before we point fingers I suppose we

could explore other reasons for this boom in the salmon population and one of these is that 2016 was a great spawning and recruitment year. Ireland's leading scientist in this field had already predicted bumper runs of salmon in the rivers which he was studying (Northern Ireland); there were good runs of fish, good spawning and great conditions to take the smolts to the sea, but could this apply all over the UK?

Another factor which may affect runs is the fact that for many years habitat enhancement schemes have been going on and clubs are recognising the importance of the right conditions to support populations of salmon and trout in their waters.

Factors affecting salmon migration patterns are also listed as sea conditions, predation, ocean currents, sea temperatures favouring food source availability such as krill moving northward following cold water, there is a plethora of variables but what is the



At this time salmon also take on copper and red hues.

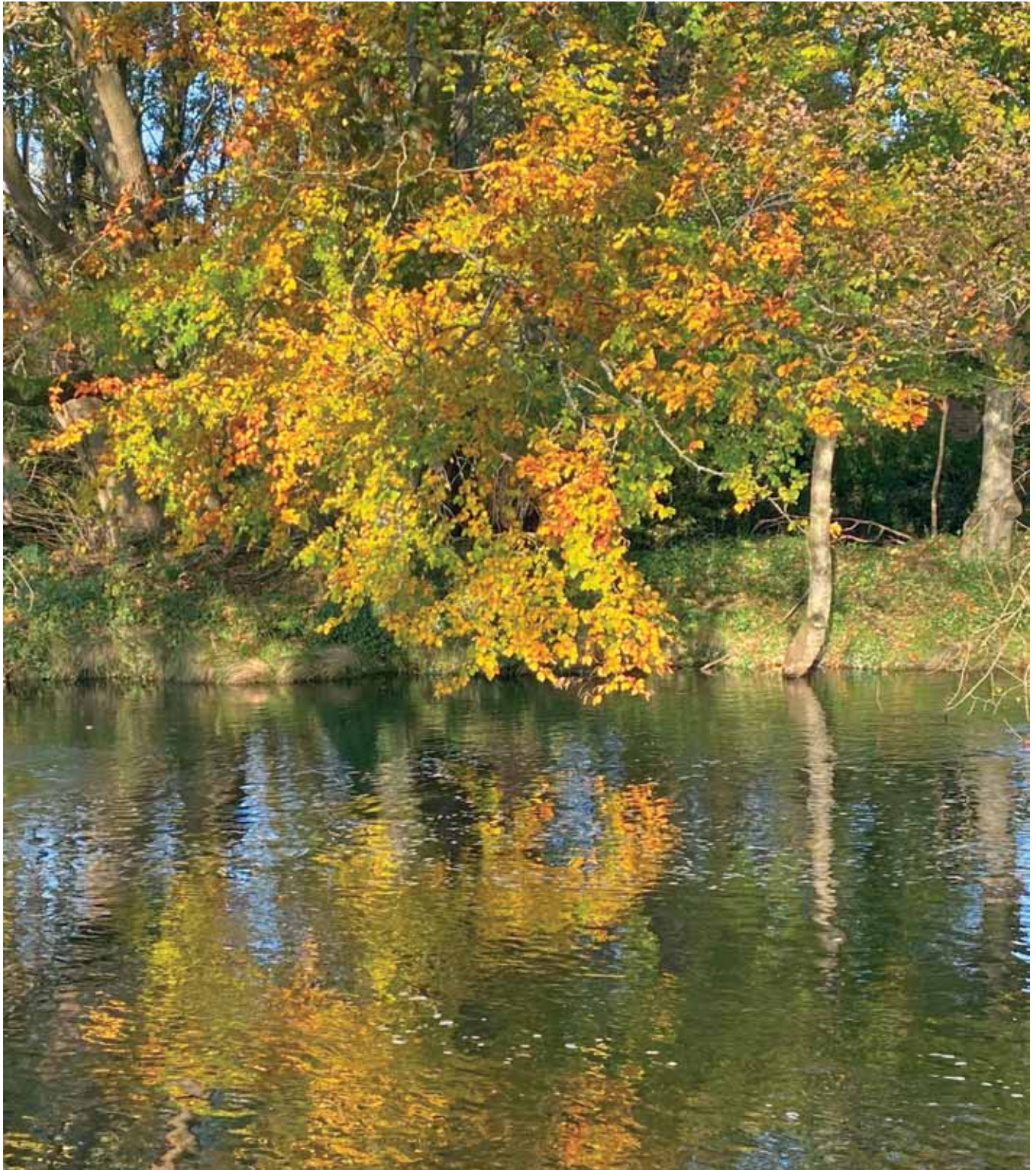
difference this year to previous years, why all of a sudden has an increasingly downward trend abruptly reversed in one year?

A quick glimpse on the Internet reveals during the Covid Pandemic 'salmon exports fell by one third in a week,' (The Fish Site) and in the Smithsonian Magazine a representative from the Geomar Helmut Centre for Ocean Research in Germany reports

dropped demand for fish, global slowdown, price collapse, disrupted supply chains and labour shortages. Seafoodsource.com reports 'the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the global industry salmon market has been significant with analysts projecting a drop in worldwide demand...in particular retail sales of fresh salmon and trout have fallen greatly.'

Until a suitably informed authority

performs an investigation into the sudden appearance of all these extra salmon we simply won't know the truth. Certainly 2016 was a great year for our salmon spawning and subsequent recruitment of smolts to sea, perhaps there are several factors at play, but what we have to do now is protect those fish while they're in our waters. It does seem strange that DAERA are refusing to issue licences to cull the increasing



Amazing colours set the background to a day's sport.

number of cormorants until November. I know globally the species is experiencing a decline (which happens naturally after every population explosion) but the iconic Lough Neagh dollaghan, the globally declining Atlantic salmon and our native brown trout are packed up and vulnerable in the shallow breeding streams and are being hoovered and ravaged by these feathered pests. Someone somewhere must think that a cormorant is more important than our gamefish or is it a case of pandering to the RSPB?

Guzzled on their spawning beds by cormorants

Covid is being cited as the reason for the delay in culling licences this year, but my club in Antrim had difficulty applying for licences in previous years and even after all the enhancement and conservation work to revitalise stocks of salmonids following serious pollution we are obliged to watch them being guzzled on their spawning beds by cormorants.

As the season draws to a close we

must celebrate the remarkable runs of fish. Certainly some of our local rivers had outstanding sport - by early October the counter in Kilrea on the Lower Bann had recorded almost nineteen thousand fish whilst the average is closer to eight thousand although 2016 had twice that.

Many of our clubs are engaged in habitat enhancement, fighting pollution, objecting to encroaching developments and although the odds are stacked against our rivers and wildlife we manage somehow to maintain them. A huge debt of gratitude must go to Richard Kennedy (AFBI) and John Kane (DCAL Fisheries) for their incredible scientific and enhancement work and also Jim Haughey and Robbie Marshall for a lifetime's work with the Ulster Angling Federation, continually fighting for our sport and preserving our angling tradition.

We as anglers now must think of the future, formulate a strategy for our individual rivers, what habitat enhancements would create ideal spawning areas, holding pools, predator

control, fenced buffer zones, tree cover, careful catch and release, return of all hen fish. Remember the fish when the season closes, they're still packed into the pools, noticeable and vulnerable and members should be patrolling the river checking for poachers; a walk along the river in November wearing polaroids reveals a fantastic scene as the salmon and trout jockey in the redds.

This has been a terrible year, we've lost many loved ones and because of demands of the Covid-19 virus essential treatment has been denied to those who need it. One thing that shines through all this is that people show each other respect and dignity, others have gone the extra mile, for example Willie Darragh, Paul Smith, Bobby Bryans and several others have done outstanding work raising funds for much needed protective equipment, so a special thanks to the boys and those who have generously supported them to help those workers who compromise their own safety to help others in their day to day jobs: well done fellas!



Angling clubs are the guardians of the rivers.

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Sharks, Rays and Chimeras

Kit's fine specimen fish.

2020 is a year to forget for me, as with lockdowns and travel restrictions I did not get out fishing much at all. We were locked down for the fine weather in the spring and then the summer was very poor. However I did prepare this piece following a trip out in January with Wicklow Boat Charters and Kit Dunne to target spurdog.

Sharks, rays and chimeras all come under the classification of Elasmobranches. They do not have bony skeletons but instead have 'bones' made of cartilage. They are one of the oldest groups of fish around and vary a huge amount, from tiny dogfish to the largest fish in the sea.

We have three species of chimeras in European waters, also called rabbit fish they live in deep waters. While they have survived almost unchanged for millions of years, many species have come under threat in recent years, largely due to human's increasing

ability to catch them in various fisheries. Often they die in nets intended for other species as bycatch, but many species are targeted for food or even like lesser spotted catshark, for pot bait.

As a kid I used to fish for mackerel from my father's boat with feathers. That was when huge schools of mackerel still abounded off the East Coast. We would often catch spurdog (spiney dogfish) on bare feathers. Spurdog were plentiful in those days all around Ireland and were a welcome catch for anglers. Indeed, I can remember the bad old days when angling contests insisted that all catches be weighed onshore, so boxes of spurdogs were brought in after a days competition. Spurdog were not eaten in Ireland, so often these dead fish were left on the pier to be put in skips and dumped.

They were not eaten in Ireland, but a strong market was found in the UK, France and Germany so the commercial

boats started targeting them. It did not take long for the stocks to be decimated. I was told that three vessels 'cleaned them out' of Donegal Bay. The Shannon estuary was also hit hard with refrigerated lorries waiting to take them to France to be sold to make school dinners. They are still popular in the UK as rock salmon, a name that covers everything from tope and bull huss to spotted dogfish.

One of the biggest problems is that spurdog are long lived and produce relatively few young, up to 21 after a gestation period of 18-22 months, which is one of the longest of any vertebrate. One of the major issues is that they aggregate in groups of the same sex, particularly when pupping, so the nets can catch huge numbers of pregnant females at once.

I did hear of a boat in the Irish Sea that caught 200 boxes in one day - probably pregnant females. Another big problem is that they tend to migrate and move



The Author's first Irish Sea spurdog in forty years.

around in big groups, so spurdog were in trouble in the northeast Atlantic within a few years. It was estimated that their numbers had declined by 95% at one point. They were declared “venerable” and put on the red list in 2006.

The EU declared them as zero TAC, which meant they could not be targeted or sold by commercial fishing vessels. Despite this and a bycatch allowance of 10% at the time, they were still caught (accidentally) in huge numbers. As the name suggests they have two sharp spines on their backs and a big number squashed together in a net means many die even if released. A number of countries tried several times to have the fishery reopened but so far spurdog remain on the protected list.

But the good news is that I believe they are starting to show signs of a slow recovery, but because of how they breed it will be slow. Looking at angling reports and talking to angling skippers around Ireland it appears that they are starting to show up in places where they were formally abundant.

Specimen fish were caught and released

I had a great trip out with Kit Dunne

off Wicklow in January when he was catching them at the time. Three experienced specimen hunters and friends from Cork, myself and a relatively young angler from Dublin all caught a spurdog including a number of specimens. I am happy to add that all fish were released and swam off strongly.

Like all shark angling nowadays, sharks are not killed and specimens can be claimed by length (I am delighted to be able to claim some input into getting this introduced).. What struck me on the day was that we caught a mixed bag of spurdog not all pregnant females but males and females, so not a pupping aggregation. A great day out. myself and the other Dubliner also learnt a lot from the Cork guys and Kit. My first spurdog in nearly forty years from Irish waters - I had caught them off the Canaries before in 600 feet of water and that was a workout.

Another interesting elasmobranch is the common skate, These are big fish and there are several species of skate found in our waters. In the 19th century it was decided that two of them were so similar that they should be referred to as one species, the common skate. For reasons unknown to me this was reversed in around 2010, so the old designations of flapper and blue skate returned.

They are largely distinguished by where they live with flapper skate being found in more northerly waters and blue skate off the west and southwest coast. They look almost identical and it takes



Dan got a nice tope.



And another specimen fish, this time for Ken.



A tangle of lesser spotted cat shark eggs some embryos moving in them.

experience to distinguish which fish you have - the flapper skate is slightly larger than the blue skate.

While both species were historically heavily exploited, both are now considered endangered and are protected from commercial exploitation under EU law. However, because they are bottom dwellers, they are very much at risk from bottom set nets and many die as bycatch and are discarded. It is interesting that the species survives so well. Having said, that a Spanish vessel was detained in a South West port and was found to have aboard 53 boxes of blue skate in 2019 and the Skipper was charged and fined. An interesting follow up to this is that the Spanish fish producer organisations are now seeking to have blue skate removed from the protected list. I honestly don't see it happening.

As an angling species they are a great fish to target, they fight hard and survive very well if handled properly. I did hear of one off Scotland which was caught and tagged, and it was subsequently caught and released about twenty more times. It was estimated by the authorities that this fish brought about two hundred pounds to the local economy each time it was caught and released, with anglers staying in local B&Bs and eating and drinking locally. It was several years after I heard about this Skate, and I discovered that she is called Mary by local charter Skippers. A number of small ports around Ireland have specialist charter boats that target Skate. All that I know of are careful about the welfare of the fish, as they know each is worth a lot of money.

It's not all rosey news though as I heard of a number of skate caught with no tails. At first I thought these might be the same fish but tagging proved otherwise. Last summer an angler caught one off Cork which had its tail and nose cut off, It was very odd looking but was obviously eating and healthy. The skipper who took a photo told me that he had seen this before, as skate when caught in bottom set nets are sometimes removed and released by

cutting their tails off as the tail has spines on it.

The charter skipper Nick Dent from Baltimore, is a former commercial net-man and when discussing this he told me that it is common practice to cut the tail off any skate caught in a bottom set net. The tail is the only place on a skate with spines, so rather than spend time untangling the fish, its quicker to cut the tail off. Some of these fish obviously survive, but how many die?

Angling for skate requires special tackle

Skate are still in trouble with them officially being extinct in the Irish Sea, formerly one of their strongholds. However I have heard of at least three being caught by commercial vessels and I have heard of anglers, including

myself, hooking something that they could not move and it just swam away. Angling for skate requires special tackle, and gear targeting smoothhounds won't cope with a big skate. I have seen a dead small skate left on a harbour having been caught in a razor clam cage in Co, Dublin so I suspect that they may just be very scarce in the Irish Sea rather than extinct. While spurdog give birth to live young, skate produce very impressive eggs, which are very big when fresh, but shrink when they dry out.

One other thing that has been raised over recent years is the attempt by some well intended, but misguided (I believe) groups to have angling for any protected species banned. I disagree with this as I believe responsible angling is the best way to monitor the populations and hopefully recovery of these species.

Not many people even realise that there are two species of electric ray and stingrays in Irish waters, all very reduced in numbers and distribution. As if to highlight the importance of angling, an angel shark (monkfish) was caught off Co. Clare earlier in the year and the angler posted a video if it being released on social media.

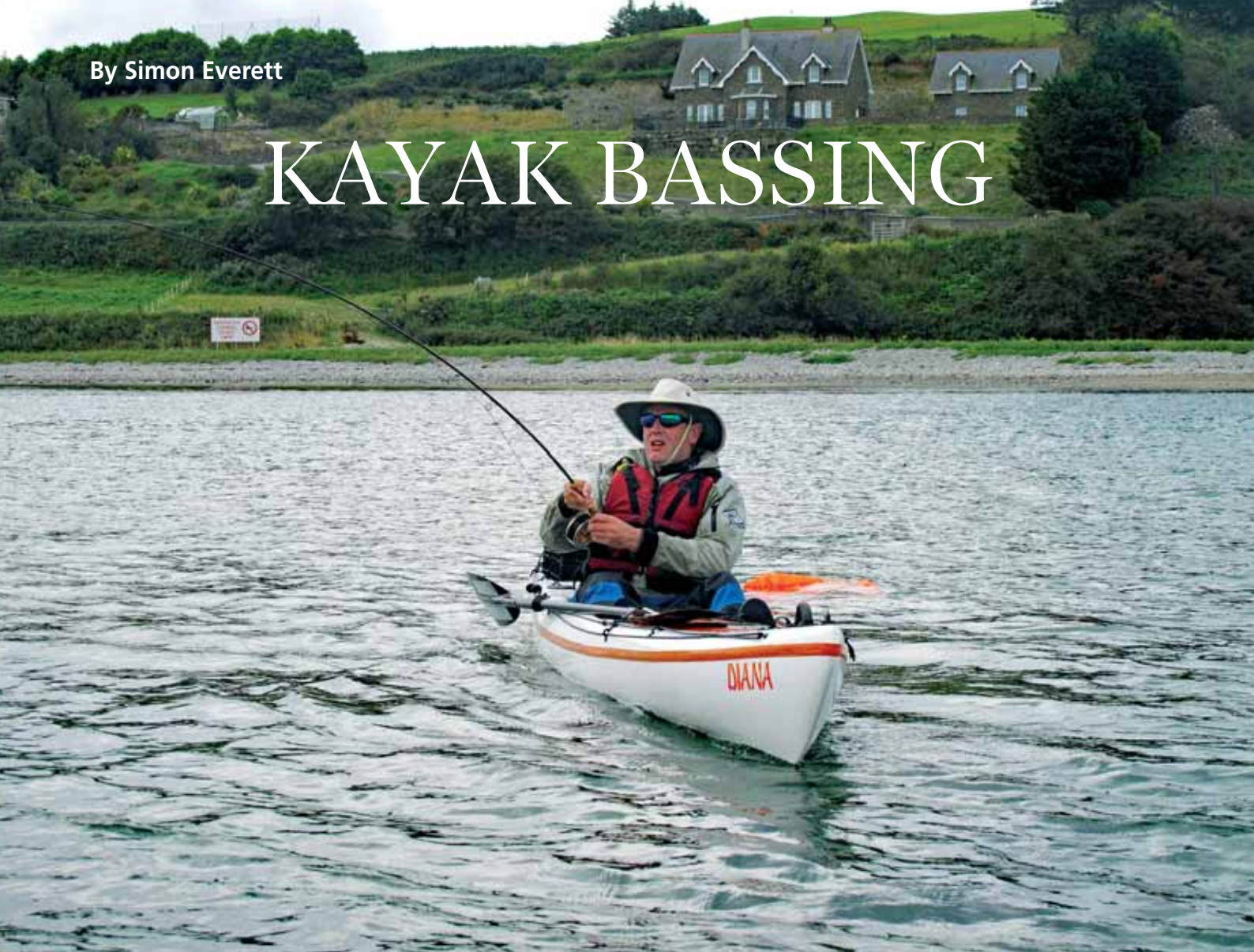
Someone added that they had caught one off Wexford, not places known for this species, while Clew and Tralee bays are known hotspots for them. I believe that there are 'relic' populations of them to be found all around our coastline. The only one I ever saw was by-caught in Malahide estuary by a bottom set net. The one off Clare was caught on a lure, so certainly was not a targeted catch, but it shows how anglers can add to the knowledge base of these rare creatures.



Darren's first ever spurdog.

By Simon Everett

KAYAK BASSING



The author bent into another bass.

A visit to Ireland is one of my fishing rituals. The reason I make the effort to go is because the bass fishing over there is quite simply the finest in Europe. This is down to the brilliant fishery management they have in Ireland, for twenty years there has been no commercial landing of bass in Ireland, they have a closed season to protect the fish during their spawning period and anglers are restricted to two fish per day. The result is a staggeringly brilliant sport fishery that makes it worth the cost of going. In one day you can catch more big bass than you would in a month of bass fishing at home. Add to that the mild climate, the genuine hospitality and the craic that emanates from every pub doorway and you have a mouth-watering recipe for angling tourism.

I drove over with the kayak on the roof, opting for the Holyhead – Dublin

ferry with Stenaline. Their ferry times are very civilised, leaving at 08.20 and returning at 21.30 these crossings effectively give me an extra day of fishing in my timetable. The road from Dublin west is very easy now and Cork is only three and half hours, even going steady with the kayak on the roof.

I set the alarm for an early start, I wanted to be on the water for 05.30, just about as it was coming light. As I drove down the narrow, bumpy lane to the slipway and small beach on the coast of County Cork the sea was flat calm. There was barely a ripple and there were no waves hitting the shore. These are not good conditions to go in search of bass. I like a bit of movement on, or in, the water and some white water from breaking waves on the shoreline helps too. The one thing in my favour was the fact that it was a spring tide and hopefully the tidal push would bring the bass on the feed.

In these clear, calm conditions I was putting my faith in the fly. For some reason a fly seems to work better when things are not quite right. Whether it is the subtlety of movement that gives the bass the confidence to take I am not sure, but I have been in conditions like these before where lure men have failed to interest a single fish but fishing a fly has accounted for several fish. I have also fished alongside commercial guys using both live eels and live prawns and they didn't touch a fish, but I was doing well just 30 yards from them fishing one of my special bass flies, much to their annoyance.

So it was with confidence that I rigged my fly rod, a 9-foot Orvis Helios rated for a #8, with a Rio Aqualux striper clear intermediate line. On the end of that I had a Mirage saltwater leader, it is pure fluorocarbon and I tie an additional length of 20lb Mirage to the end, to give me a working length



Simon's fly gear and one of his successful bass flies.

without cutting into the tapered leader as I change flies.

When the working length gets a bit short I simply nip it off and tie on another 3 feet of working end. On the business end went a baitfish pattern of my own tying, it has proved very effective in various sizes, this one was

tyed on a 1/0 hook and was about 5" long. That is all there is to it, fly fishing is so simple and yet so effective, especially from the kayak.

Here was moving water created by the surge from the reef break

I paddled out from the shore heading

for a stretch of shore reef that is usually productive, but when I got there the water was cloudy. I don't like fishing in cloudy water, not when clear water is available close by, so I turned round and paddled along the coast the other way to a stretch of broken rocks that is another spot that produces. There was a little bit of swell rolling in, imperceptible while paddling but the building wave over another shore reef and the steep breaker that was crashing down on the rocks was all the hint I needed. On an otherwise quiet shoreline this was the one area where there was moving water, created by the surge from the reef break and the push of the tide around the rocks.

The wind was blowing me offshore, so I paddled right in close to the rocks, almost within touching distance, and drifted out just clear of the rearing wave. I was able to cast my fly right into the white water at the base of the rocks and strip it back around the rocks and up the gullies between the pinnacles. On the second cast, just as I was drifting level with the crest of the wave, I got a take. It wasn't a firm take though, but it gave me renewed



The wave break that held the fish.



Like peas in a pod, a handful of fish around 5lbs made for a great morning.

confidence and on the very next cast I connected solidly with a good fish. The pull from the fish was dragging me into the breaking water, so I had to paddle backwards one-handed using my neck as a fulcrum, to clear the danger area, while keeping control of the rod in my other hand. Once out of the waves I was able to play a lovely 5lber to the side of the kayak and thumbed it on the lower jaw to gain control. The glistening flanks were flecked with gold in the early morning sunlight. I got out the B.A.S.S. measuring tape and laid it from snout to tail, it read 59cms and the

weight on my scales was 5lbs 8ozs. I took two scales off each flank and popped them in the scale reading envelope for the B.A.S.S. catch

reporters to read. Holding the fish gently in the water I revived it until it started to swim off, as soon as I let go, with one waft of it's tail it was gone.



That fly did all the damage.

Sometimes falling back on previously gained knowledge pays dividends and this was such an occasion. My plan was to go the other way, but the conditions meant I had to change my mind and go with instinct, born out of a mixture of blanks and successes. The knowledge accumulated in this way gives us the tools to work with. On this occasion my choice had worked, on other days they don't, but you can still learn from the result. I did a couple more drifts on this breaking wave and caught two more fish, like peas from a pod, they were all around the same size. The same fly did the trick each time, it was working so why change it? Unless to experiment. I wasn't in the mood for experimenting, I had come a long way and I wanted to make the most of my fishing time and catch a few fish.

The fly when it was slammed by something powerful

After the third bass had landed on my lap there was a lull. I did several more drifts without so much as a touch. Then as I cleared the reefy area and hit slightly deeper water I gave the fly a much longer countdown, instead of fishing in the top two feet, I let it sink for about 6 feet. I had only just started to retrieve the fly when it was slammed by something powerful. I played the fish

out, thinking as it stayed deep it was going to be a bigger bass, until I saw the golden brown of a pollack coming up through the crystal clear water. It wasn't a big one, about 4lbs so worth catching. However, I messed around too long with it and it threw the hook into my lap as I tried to grab its jaw with my thumb and finger. Had I bothered to take the landing net no doubt I would have boated it. I wasn't worried, I would have put it back anyway. It did signal to me that I needed to move though.

A nice looking bay down tide was beckoning and I paddled across looking into the water with my Polaroid sunglasses. I was crossing an area of alternating weed and rock and I immediately thought it looked fishy. I set up a drift that took me parallel to the shore, using the drogue this time to angle the kayak to the wind, which wasn't quite so offshore now. It was only about three casts in to this drift that I got another take. I had counted the fly down what seemed like a lucky number, 7 seconds, and started to retrieve in staccato pulls. The line tightened and the fish threw its head. This was a feisty fish, it was fighting faster than the others had and I combined letting it take line out through the rod and winding in what was lying in my lap at the same time, until I was playing it off the reel. It ran hard and fast four or five times

before boring deep for the weed. It got into the weed and I expected to lose it, and possibly my fly too. Thankfully, having learned from last year, I had stepped up my leader from 12.5lbs to 20lbs and this gave me enough additional strength in the system to pull the fish out of the weed. It turned out to be the smallest bass of the day, weighing in at 4lbs 8ozs, but what a scrapper!

I had had the best of it by now. The tide was easing and fish were getting harder to find, but they were still taking if you could put your fly in front of them, as this last fish proved. Sometimes though, it is best to finish on a high note and that is exactly what I did. I called it a day having caught 6 bass between 4.5lbs and 6lbs and a brace of Pollack for variety. The shore anglers I had seen making their way along the rocks returned to the car park at the same time I did. Naturally we swapped notes and they had not had so much as a swirl between them. On days like this there is little to beat getting out in the kayak, and using a fly, it really does give you a genuine advantage.

I travelled with Stena lines from Holyhead to Dublin Port. There are often ferry saver deals for a car and two passengers which makes it an affordable trip and a choice of either Holyhead to Dublin or Holyhead to Dunlaoghaire.

For those living in the south an alternative route would be from Fishguard to Rosslare. The road network in Ireland is such that you can drive to Cork from Dublin in just over 3 hours, even with the kayak on the roof. I only cruise at a steady 60 mph, which saves a considerable amount of fuel due to the windage of the roof load. Accommodation was with friends, but there are plenty of angler friendly B&Bs.

The Kaskazi Dorado has plenty of storage which is easily accessible.



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

SALMON SEASON CONCLUDES - GREATER HOPE FOR NEXT ONE

The sadness that comes with the season ending is compensated for when one recalls the highlights of what was in most cases a game changer with increased mid-season grilse numbers.

But long after the rods and tackle bags have been put away and the logbooks copied to the local club secretary, before being returned to IFI and maybe just before Christmas, we will get the expert analysis on the overall season and why we were blessed with a bounty of wild Atlantic salmon returning and in such superior condition that confirms there is a huge improvement for these fish in the feeding grounds in the mid-Atlantic, which is very welcome news.

Like the farmers preparing their fields for Spring, our club anglers can only continue to prepare their spawning streams for a better planting this winter as the increased numbers should result in a bumper crop in due course. Many clubs hold their AGM's in March to get the relevant reports and analysis on how our rivers are performing and whether remedial action is needed to assist the natural process for a long or short-term period.

The beauty of this sport is that it is so dependent on nature to respond to good work done maybe years before when the salmon was a parr or even before that. That is why we invest not



Salmon angler Cuan Muylaert from Boyne Navan Anglers County Meath visiting the Donegal rivers.



Instructor Jenny Creggan of Slieve League Angling Club teaching to her class of aspiring anglers. (Back left) Scott Pollock Strabane, Stephen Carr Carrick (front right) Peter Laffey, Strandhill Co Sligo on the Salmon Leap, Glen river.

just our recreational time but also our money into ensuring we all have a salmonid species for generations to come. We will publish in this column the news on how we are faring as January beckons and the new season starts all over again.

FISSTA WELCOME NEW CEO OF IFI

FISSTA welcomes the Board of Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) announcement that they have appointed Francis O’ Donnell to the position of Chief Executive Officer replacing Ciaran Byrne who we wish well in his new position.

Francis is currently Director of the Western River Basin District with IFI having taken up this role in January and represents the most swift promotion up the scales of this state body since it was established. Francis served on the Sliabh Liag Angling Association before joining the Northern Fishery Board. He graduated from the University of Ulster in Environmental Sciences before obtaining a Masters degree in Ecology from Queen’s University Belfast and from the University of Limerick in 2010 with an MBA. He is published

in the area of stakeholder engagement and Corporate Social Responsibility and has been a guest lecturer in this field where he has written the role of inland fisheries resource in line with stakeholder expectations while maintaining ecosystem integrity.

Prior to re-joining the inland fisheries service, Francis worked in the private sector and was the CEO of the Irish Fish Producers Organisation (IFPO) where he frequently represented the sea fishery sector in the EU. He has also worked with the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority. Francis is a keen angler and has been a member of many angling affiliated clubs to FISSTA for many years. He regularly wrote columns for the Marine Times and Inshore Ireland.

MORE ANGLING RESEARCH COMING DOWN THE LINE

It is now over seven years since we heard how valuable our angling was to our economy (€750m) and yet very little was done to increase the investment to consolidate what was an amazing achievement by the voluntary angling communities to keep visitors and revenues returning year after year. Still, the state bodies

decided to spend on more research that they deemed was needed to collect more data from selected sources that may not always be as informed as others. During 2017 IFI began a series of consultations through ESRI that cost over €300,000 and last year more consultants, were engaged to consult with “angling representative bodies, angling clubs and individuals who were both anglers and non-anglers” to draft a report on a Novice Angling strategy which will be aimed at increasing participation in angling.

The draft strategy apparently entitled “Let’s fish” will have to undergo various environmental assessments and IFI say they are seeking to get input from its stakeholders. This looks similar to the NSAD – National Strategy for Angling Development initiative that fell down before it could get started in 2015 and hopefully the lessons are learned this time from that debacle.

The strategy this time will document the main barriers that have been identified and sets out four key objectives on how its vision- “All fishing together” can be achieved over the next five years. However, angling federations are sceptical that it is more of the same in that future participation in angling will happen outside the cooperation and participation of the clubs that are the life blood of the sport.

IFI are once again seeking submissions for this Novice Angling Strategy and have identified four objectives which are:

- Getting the message out there: Developing greater awareness of angling as a healthy recreational pursuit and sport that can be enjoyed by and benefit every non-angler and young person.
- Helping clubs: Encouraging and enabling clubs to reach out and involve non- anglers and young people.
- Places to fish: Further developing

managed fishing locations across the country that are safe and attractive to non-anglers and to young people and their families.

- Let's talk fishing: Getting local communities and organisations interested and involved in fishing.

SEALICE & FARMING - INTERNATIONAL CONCERN AT NASCO 2020

FISSTA participated at the first virtual NASCO international salmon conference in June where the great and the good met online to discuss the state of the wild Atlantic salmon for 2020.

The Irish government registered their Implementation Plan which received controversial comments given the views of some state officials who were far from convinced the saving of our wild Atlantic salmon is feasible despite the contents of the Minister's plan saying it was.

However, the various topics were thrashed out on the agenda and suffice to say aquaculture or rather sea lice was the dominant threat to our wild salmon in the habitat once again. Our Co-Chairs Paul Knight UK and Steve Sutton Canada reported back that there is the potential for an Inter-Sessional meeting on sea-lice or open net sea-caged salmon farming to produce a more effective challenge to the NASCO parties and jurisdictions to move their IP actions towards achieving NASCO goals.

The NGO Group of which FISSTA is an accredited member since 1989, planned to present evidence to external review specialists as to how the wider salmon conservation world believes NASCO should be showing a genuine - and much more effective - international responsibility towards protecting wild stocks of salmon. Suffice to say the fight for wild salmon habitat enhancement continues in the face of unbridled salmon farming developments that continue to damage our species and some NGOs are under focus as questions are now

being put to all members in the light of some freedom of information questions that suggest funding is being given by the salmon farmers as a new strategy to lobby the opposition to their industry practices.

NEW MINISTERIAL BROOM MUST SWEEP OUT IN-STREAM CONSULTANTS PANEL

The new regime at Inland Fisheries Ireland under the new Minister Eamon Ryan TD and CEO Francis O' Donnell will have to reboot the policy on in-stream works as the following example has left local anglers very unhappy at the Dodder in-stream fishery enhancement project which was carried out in late September 2020. The project plan was drafted by the experienced state personnel with a wealth of successful work to their credit and senior research officers of Inland Fisheries Ireland.

The work was carried out by Office of Public Works under the supervision of an approved listed private consultant. In FISSTA's view the standard of the finished project is well short of satisfactory. IFI are the body which have supplied technical support to this type of work for decades so there was an absence of private consultants in the state with the relevant know-how.

Sadly, the Dodder project is the casualty this time and the state bodies involved including IFI and Office of Public Works have seen fit to allow this to happen. Many including FISSTA warned that the policy change to use non IFI technical staff for in-stream work would end embarrassment and waste of finance has now come to pass. The Dodder project has now a host of problems in each aspect of what was an excellent and very simple plan by the late Martin O'Grady RIP and the highly qualified Karen Delany.

The plan was to consist of a set of alternating deflectors with a corresponding talweg (continuous sinuous deep channel) with large

boulders placed in the channel. The procedure was to start at the top of the site with the first deflector and work downstream. The flow of the river coming off each newly constructed deflector dictates where the next downstream deflector is to be placed. This also dictates where the talweg is to be excavated.

What happened in this project was the exact opposite as the most downstream deflector was built first. Such incorrect procedure has now led to the deflector ending up in an incorrect position, and too close to a bridge and sadly on top of a known salmon spawning area. The only enhancement feature that could be placed near a bridge is a gravel shoal as if there was any issue with the bridge in the future the in-stream fishery work would be exempt from blame.

As the name suggests alternating deflectors, alternate from one bank to another. In this case in the intended section where this set of alternating deflectors were to be installed there were two deflectors and both on the same side and too far apart to be influencing the other thus showing a serious lack of understanding of the plan. An integral part of the plan was to dig a talweg but none was dug and as a result there were no boulders placed in the non-existing talweg, but random small boulders were placed in the channel instead.

This fishery work has two objectives the first to replace suitable salmonid habitat and in the second to improve an angling area. With this in mind the majority of installed random boulders should be sub surface. In this case not one is sub surface. Just upstream of the site plan more features were installed which was not documented as part of any plan. Incredibly, one of these features was a dam that impeded the pass of fish. This type of feature has for a long time been understood to be counter productive and even more shocking as it was installed below a deflector.



The Dodder River at Ballsbridge

Deflectors are installed to accelerate the flow. To immediately slow the flow up with an impoundment is incredible and IFI should be concerned that their plan was not carried out as specified.

Another point of concern is that the boulders used are granite which is not suitable in this case and should have been from the same material as the three inch broken stone that was used to fill the deflectors. At Herbert Park Hotel a further short section was carried out. It too is a prime example why IFI cannot trust its panel of external consultants. A single deflector at the start of the meander on the hotel side of the river would be the simple and correct feature for this site.

In summary, it is a very poor outcome to a project which had great potential and the question now is what IFI are going to do to remedy the situation. The only course of action is for IFI to send in a competent IFI officer to walk the OPW driver through the project. The River Dodder is a very important amenity to a large number of people and every effort should be made to ensure that this project and future enhancement projects on the Dodder are delivered in a professional manner. Our concerned anglers raised the issues with local IFI who after a site visit agreed the project was not implemented as per plan and they will be taking steps next year to bring the project up to the required

standard which is the right and proper thing to do. The new Minister along with IFI management should take the necessary steps to ensure that this sort of debacle does not happen again.

We in FISSTA have no professional expertise employed, but our angling members have a wealth of riverbank experience that rang the warning bells on this project as it was developing as far back as 2017. However, after IFI conducted an internal review the then Minister stated in PQ 583 that the panel was "appropriately qualified and experienced professionals." Endorsement of this panel does not augur well for their in-stream habitat enhancement projects and management of our fishery resources.

The new CEO of IFI has many challenges on his desk which we acknowledge and wish him well, but we feel he must urgently disband this panel of consultants and inform his board that he has the expertise within his own staff to undertake this work on our priceless angling resource.

'COMETH THE HOUR, COMETH THE MAN'

This salmon season past has been the strangest with the pandemic, lockdowns, and now with reports from all Irish rivers that the salmon runs have been the best in years.

Was it because the rivers and lakes had been rested earlier in the pandemic year or more importantly is it because of the renewal in 2018 of

North Atlantic Salmon Fund and Atlantic Salmon Fund agreement to extend the buyout of the commercial salmon fishermen quotas? Either way, we need to preach caution in that 'one swallow does not a summer make' and that the decline in salmon stocks could still be terminal.

These green shoots from the summer runs herald the most hopeful time for salmon in Ireland since 2007 when the driftnets were bought out, but sadly the expectations of big runs never came for reasons still with the scientist to confirm, while the anglers and politicians debate the issues. Meanwhile, we have a new Minister Eamon Ryan TD and a new CEO of IFI Francis O' Donnell who have fought the cause of the wild Atlantic salmon in their very different lives until now. One of the great benefits of being their age means they have lived like many of us to enjoy some great days fishing in the seventies and eighties and I know both men fished the Salmon Leap pools on the Glen river at different times (but maybe not together) back then. The 'native' would have caught much more than the Dublin visitor to Carrick, but both have experienced enough in salmon angling to know that the more deep-seated problems and threats still exist in the fight so that our wild salmon survives for future generations to enjoy. Can they make a difference now? No pressure.

WILD SALMON AND SEA TROUT TAGGING SCHEME (AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS 2020

Draft Regulations to be made by the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications include details of rivers which will be considered open or closed. The Draft Regulations can be found at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/consultation/ab7b9-wild-salmon-and-sea-trout-tagging-scheme-regulations-2020-and-conservation-measures-for-the-2021-season/>

Terrier, Lurcher & Whippet Show Roundup

Man O' War Dog Show and Race Day, Saturday 25th July 2020

The town-land of Man O' War is set near Clay Lake, surrounded by picturesque countryside and sits on the outskirts of Keady, Co Armagh. This was the venue for the annual Dog Show and Race Day Saturday and what an enjoyable day that was.

This show was to be a very special day for every show goer, as at the time, it appeared that the long months of lockdown were gradually coming to an end and the showing and racing season would ease its way in.

The show commenced at approximately 1.00pm with racing first.

Racing Results

Whippets - Lisa Beggs with Prydz
Lurchers Under 23" - Conor Nolan with Max

Over 23" - Liam Nolan with Bandit
Elite under 23"- Colin Mc Donald with Cooper

Elite over 23" - Michael with George

Under 21" - Yapper Hays with Rose

Elite under 21" - Rose McCoy with Texas

Rough Haired - Paddy McGrath with Whack

Heavy Bull X - Lisa Beggs with Cirez

Puppy - Shane Duffy with Shadow
Greyhound Race - Brooke Rafferty with Jess

Showing Results

Champion Strong Dog - Perry Coonagh with Lockdown

Champion Whippet - Colin Tucker with Cooper

Champion Lurcher - Lisa Beggs with Nina

Champion Terrier - Johnny Ferguson

Champion Bull X - Pip Farrell with Zeus

Champion Puppy - Gerald Mc Keown Reserve Jade Dunphy

Overall Champion and Best in Show - Pip Farrell with Zeus, Reserve Perry Coonagh with Lockdown

Congratulations to all the worthy winners and to the host and organiser of the show Charlene Rafferty and her brilliant back up team.

The DWTC Dog Show and Race Day, Sunday 23rd August 2020

With the threat of Covid 19, the showing season for 2020 has been dreadfully short circuited in these terrible times. As strict Covid 19 restrictions were in place, showing was held in the morning, with racing held in the afternoon. Rings were well spaced out, and all the good canine folk politely adhered to the instructions laid down by the show organiser.

There was a large turnout of terriers, lurchers, whippets and strong dogs and while the atmosphere was electric, folk kept in mind the importance of adhering to social distancing.

Showing Results

Overall Champion Puppy - Chloe Mc Keown with Mick

Whippets - Overall Whippet Champion Janet Duke with Elliott, Reserve Susanne Addis with Poppy

Overall Champion Lurcher - Maurice McDowell with Mafasa

(Winner of the Billy Copeland Perpetual Cup), Reserve Rose with Rocky

Overall Champion Terrier - Thomas Coleman with Troy, Reserve Aimee Agnew with Stubble (Winner of Danny O Neill Spade)

Overall Champion Strong Dog - Declan Owens with Prince (Winner of the Tony Lee Perpetual Shield)

Bull Cross Champion Cayce O Hagan and JP O Hagan with Tyson (Winners of the Darren Mackin Memorial Cup)

Overall Show Champion and Best in Show - Thomas Coleman with Troy

Racing Results

Bull Cross Champion - Lee Brooks with Rolo

Whippet Champion - Susanne Addis with POPPY

Puppy Race Champion - Stephen Mc Grath with Jess

Gary Farmer under 21" perpetual Champion - Earl Gardiner with Bonnie

Gary Farmer under 23" Perputal Champion - Colin Mc Donald with Copper

AP Canine Transport Hairy Dog Perpetual Champion - Edward Kane with Scooter

Over 25" Champion - Michael Pardy with George

Terrier Race Champion - Pero, handled by Neil Pinkerton and owned by Maurice Mc Dowell

Congratulations to all the winners. A very enjoyable day was had by all, and that's the show scene over for 2020. Until we meet again on the show and racing scene, hopefully in 2021, God Bless and stay safe everyone.

Pictured at the Man O' War Dog Show and Race Day



Champion Whippet - Colin Tucker with Cooper.



Champion Lurcher - Lisa Beggs with Nina.



Lisa Beggs with Prydz - Racing Whippet winner.



Lisa Beggs with Cirez who won the Bull X Race.

Pictured at the DWTC Dog Show and Race Day



(Left)
Champion Terrier
Thomas Coleman
with Troy,
Reserve Aimee
Agnew with
Stubble and
Judge Lee Peters.



(Right)
Overall
Champion
Puppy Chloe
Mc Keown
with Mick.



Over 25 Champion Racer Michael Pardy
with George.



Edward Kane with Scooter.



Colin McDonald with Copper.



Champion Bull X Winner with Tyson.



Earl Gardiner with Bonnie,
Under 21" Champion.



Terrier Race Champion Pero handled by Neil
Pinkerton & owned by Maurice McDowell.

Obituary

KAY CREAMER

We gathered at Dardistown in the sunshine on August 31st to say goodbye to Kay Creamer and celebrate a life well lived. She was my best friend for over fifty five years and I was so fortunate to be part of her life. I first met her when I started to show Springer Spaniels, she and Tom had already been showing their Cretoka Cockers for some years, it is impossible to write about Kay without including Tom, they were such an amazing partnership.



Bernie Ladd and Kay Creamer at the CLA Fair.

The Cretoka kennels (made up of their names, Creamer/Tom/Kay) was founded on stock from Dorothy Fagan's Lick bla Cocker Spaniels which had been successful in the field and showing for many decades, they were parti-colours and had superb temperaments. Cretoka Marigold born in 1964 from Lick bla Bagatelle is behind most of the many champions, they are too numerous to list but I remember Silver Tassie, Tamasha and of course the best known Int.Ch. Cretoka Alfredo, Fred to his friends, he was a black /white son of Marigold and was equally at home on the green carpet of Crufts or beating his way through the cover of the many shoots he visited with Kay. Dorothy Fagan died in 1994 she must have derived great satisfaction seeing her lines perpetuated by such competent and dedicated breeders.

In the mid 1960s Tom approached the owners of all the other Gundog breeds with the intention of forming a society for both show and field trial, we were poles apart in those days and most of us had no wish to get involved with each other, but Tom was not taking no for an answer and the Irish Gundog Field & Show society was founded. Training sessions were scheduled with the late Robert O'Farrell who patiently shared his time and expertise with people who had never owned a whistle previously. Breed seminars and talks by vets and other experts were organised, busy people who willingly gave of their time, Kay had a great way with people I doubt anyone she approached for help would have refused.

Encouraged by the society many show people went beating and picking up at shoots, we found we enjoyed it and some even went on to have field trial bred dogs and compete at trials and working tests. The IGF&SS held it's first Gundog Group Ch.Show in Santry Stadium in 1969, I was honoured to cut the cake at the 50th show last October, unfortunately Kay was not well enough to attend.

The International Gundog working tests at the prestigious RDS Spring Show in Dublin brought new challenges, not least explaining to the spectators what was happening. Kay took her place in the commentary box and kept the huge audience enthralled with explanations of the exercises and lots of background information on dogs and handlers. This event led to our participation in the International Team competition at the CLA Game Fair held annually at various country estates in England, Scotland and Wales. Bringing a team of Spaniels and Retrievers there was a massive undertaking for Kay and Tom, we had a luxury coach to transport handlers, dogs and supporters, the best hotels and smart outfits. Kay and I sat in the grand stand for both days of the competition keeping score, I have the happiest memories of those days and the people we met year after year.

With her continued success and expertise in the showing Kay became a popular and much sought after judge, she judged all over Europe and as far afield as Australia and The United States, the many tributes received by the family and posted on social media following her passing bear witness to affection and respect felt by those whose lives she touched all over the world. Kay judged with integrity and knowledge gained from her years of experience and good eye for a dog, she gave you an honest opinion if you asked for it but she was never unkind. It was a source of great pride that so many of the family have continued in dogs both for work and show, even on to the third generation with granddaughter Clodagh



Tom and Kay with the Irish Team at the CLA.



Tom and Kay - a hugely influential partnership in Irish gundogs.

who is a successful breeder of Pugs and an international judge.

A woman of many talents, Kay was a great cook and a welcoming hostess, whether at her Christmas parties in Coolgariff Road after the Boxing Day show or feeding judges and stewards off the bonnet of a car at field trials, her soup was legendary. We became part of each others families, celebrated many happy occasions together and helped each other over a few rough bits, anything told in confidence went no further. The January sales were a must, fitting on hats I found a check cap I thought might go well with the Barbour and green wellies, her opinion was without hesitation, "Take it off Ladd you look like a spiv" - end of check cap. Our world is a poorer place for her passing there is a void in the lives of all who knew her, our sympathies go to Tom and family who will miss her most of all. May her gentle soul rest in peace.

Bernie Ladd

From Wayne R Cavanaugh, USA

Cheryl, Hayley, Brody and I lost part of our soul today with the passing of our dear friend Kay Creamer in Ireland. We will surely miss her candid honesty, genuine kindness, sharp wit, and her common sense view of the world. We will miss the wonderful summers she and Tom spent here in Kalamazoo and our many, but never enough, visits to Dublin. Kay and Tom's support and loyalty have been unmatched and we will be forever grateful. May there be many hugs and wet doggy kisses awaiting you in heaven, Kay. You are much loved and we will miss you every day. Our sincere condolences to her wonderful husband Tom and the entire Creamer family.

Obituary

JACK SKELLY

17th May 1939 - 6th August 2020

I was friendly with Jack Skelly over several years and learned a great deal about him from many other mutual friends who knew him before I did. I thank Pamela Rush for filling in some of the additional information on his life.

Dad was born in Lisburn on 17th May 1939 and although he was involved in all country sports including shooting and fishing it was his love of, and involvement in, gundogs whereby we first met. As time went on I realised we had many mutual acquaintances and interest including the late Bill Parker who told me many amusing incidents that happened when they were youths in Lisburn, Alan Coates – game keeper and falconer, and Edwin Dash who knew him through shooting and Masonry. In fact I spent several very enjoyable evenings in their company at Edwin's Masonic Lodge dinners.

Jack in his youth also worked terriers and he later raced Greyhounds with his friend and 'partner in crime' vet Carson Archibald. An avid angler he loved fly fishing and he wanted his ashes scattered at Loch Aghery, Annahilt his favourite fishing place.

However my own personal involvement with Jack was mainly through gundogs, initially when I started to run in tests and trials and then he gave us invaluable assistance and advice when we were trying to resurrect the working side of the Ulster Golden Retriever Club. The club recognised this by making him a Vice President, a role which he filled until his death.

Jack made a major contribution to gundogs in Ireland being an A Panel judge and one of the founders of the Labrador Club of NI. He also ran training classes for the club initially with Albert Kilpatrick and then Michael McKee.



Photo of Jack taken at Stanhope in the Scottish Borders, when he was over shooting with Harry McCarrol, Martin Rush, Michael McKee and Alan Coates.

Jack inspired a generation of gundog handlers and trainers including his son in law Marty Rush, Michael McKee, the late Joe Morrison and the late Harry McCarroll. All like Jack were generous in giving of their time to judge widely at trials and tests and help out at gundog events.

Jack with his good friends Bob Fettis and Jimmy (the doctor) Magee joined Victor McDevitt's gundog team at the Game Fair and there is no doubt that the pre-eminent reputation that the Fair still enjoys for gundogs is largely due to the foundations laid down by these 'four wise men.'

Many Game Fair visitors to the fair still recall the informed and very entertaining commentary by Jimmy and Jack from their 'eyrie' in the Shanes Castle Tower. As Pamela put it: "I think a few bevies were imbibed, which only added to the wit, criticism and sometimes hilarious advice given to the competitors. Sometimes appreciated, sometimes not."

The Game Fair team recognised their contribution by awarding them not only 'Country Sports

Commitment Awards,' but also to the triumvirate, the Major William Memorial Award for contribution to country sports and this was presented to them by Eveleigh Brownlow.

Unfortunately Jack suffered a serious accident when attending the Irish Retriever Championships which curtailed many of his activities, but he faced the challenges posed by this with his usual fortitude and good humour.

Jack will be greatly missed by gundog enthusiasts throughout Ireland and further afield and I am sure they join with me in sending condolences to his wife Doris, Marty, Pamela, Julie, Jeremy, Ellen and Emma and his fifteen Grandchildren and six Great Grandchildren.

I attach a little poem penned by Pamela's niece, Ruby:

Granda Jack

The chair no longer sat in
The dishes no longer done
Your mug will now be empty
Your scratch cards no longer won
The harp no longer sipped
The Maine man no longer comes
around (with illicit spirit)
Your cigarette remains unsmoked
Your hidden Whiskey no longer found
The pan no longer on the hob
The sacred cupboard no longer open
Your Crackers will be missed this
Christmas
Your stories no longer spoken
The bets no longer placed
The TV no longer on
Our Jigsaw will never be complete
Now that you are gone.

I will long remember his ready genuine smile and firm handshake when we met. RIP old friend.

Albert J Titterington

Congratulations to winners exclusively fed on Feedwell



John Barr Jr with FT Ch Shimnavale Jasmine of Drumnamoe Winner 2018 IKC Retriever Championship



Raymond Wilson with Int FT Ch Meadowbeat Neala of Greenbush 3rd in the IKC Spaniel Championship & 2nd in the GB KC Spaniel Championships



Ed McCauley with FT Ch Gardenrath Cheyenne Winner of the IKC Spaniel Championship

- Quality Nutrition for Working Dogs
- Made in County Down
- Natural Omega 3 and 6 Oils
- No Artificial Colours or Preservatives
- Sold throughout Ireland



A Fascinating Book About A Famous Hunting Hound Breed

Life is not always fair and some books which should be classics have never seen the light of day. This was the case for a book about the Kerry Beagle, which was discovered and published by a Loughrea man a couple of years ago.

This Loughrea man was the very fine equestrian writer Noel Mullins, who a few years ago was browsing through the library of one of his literary heroes when he came across a valuable manuscript which had never been published.

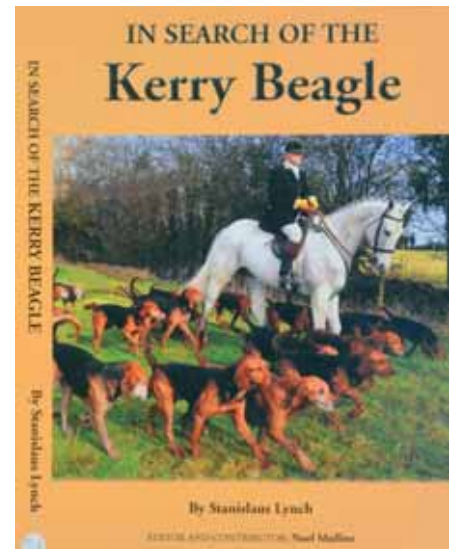
The “library, literary hero and valuable manuscript” were all connected to one man, Stanislaus Lynch. Some would say that Lynch was the finest equestrian and hunting writer which Ireland produced. I have read a lot of hunting literature and I would definitely put him up there. The unpublished manuscript was called “In Search of the Kerry Beagle” and, as Noel perused it in the library in Cavan, he realised he had stumbled across a lost treasure, which bore all the hallmarks of Lynch's best work.

With the permission of Stanislaus' wife, Margaret, Noel edited the book and published it in 2017. The book has

been well received but it still hasn't been given the amount of praise which I feel it deserves. Noel passed on the book to me a few months ago, because he knew of my admiration for Lynch, and I read it in a few sittings. I was very happy to see it was equal to the standard of Lynch's other works and, on each successive reading session, I dived gratefully back into the charming, exciting and fascinating world that he conjured, the very different universe of Ireland in the 1940s and 1950s. My hope in writing this article is that it will win more readers for this book, a destiny that it fully deserves.

There are many enjoyable things in Lynch's text; one of them is the theorising about the provenance of the Kerry Beagle, the other is the fantastic descriptions of the many larger than life people that he met on his hunting forays (including a lot of fabulous passages set in Kerry).

I will look firstly at the provenance of the Kerry Beagle. This is a complex subject but I will give the bones of it. There is an aura of mystery around the Kerry Beagle. It's one of the nine native breeds of Irish dogs / hounds, the others



In Search of the Kerry Beagle.

being the Irish Wolfhound, Irish Terrier, Glen of Imaal Terrier, Kerry Blue, Red Setter, White Setter, Soft Coated Wheaten Terrier, and the Irish Water Spaniel.

The word “beagle” is misleading for some. The breed is actually the size of a fox hound. The dog got its name from the French word “Beegueule”, which means “open-mouthed”, which is a description of them when they are hunting on a line.

The best known Kerry Beagle pack is the Scarteen Hounds in Limerick (Chris Ryan, Huntsman and Master of the Scarteens, wrote a glowing foreword for Noel's edition of Lynch's book). There are a number of foot packs which hunt with Kerry Beagles, mainly in Cork and Kerry.

The breed origins

We don't know the exact origin of the breed, and there are many theories. One theory says the breed arrived in Ireland as surviving dogs from the wreckage of the Spanish Armada along the west coast in 1588. Another theory, and a stronger one, is they came from a Welsh monastery; and the Welsh monks, apparently, got them from a monastery in France.



Pakie Casey, Donie O'Driscoll and James O'Sullivan of the Foilmore Club parading their hounds at the Kerry Beagle Hound Show. (photo Noel Mullins)



Tom & Noel Geary, Masters of the Killeagh Harriers with their Kerry Beagles at the Irish National Hound Show.

(photo Noel Mullins)

Some speculate that the Kerry Beagle can be traced back to Saint Hubert's hounds. Saint Hubert is the patron saint of hunters and he became the Bishop of Liege in 708AD. He was the eldest son of the Duke of Aquitaine and hunted in the Forest of Ardennes. (There's a great prayer to Saint Hubert by Don Dubuc which asks the saint to bestow on the hunter "a deep sense of respect and reverence for the game we pursue...In our souls instil the passion to share these precious traditions of the chase in the spirit of camaraderie.")

The late master and huntsman of the Scarteens, Thady Ryan, thought the breed had no connection with the foxhound. He theorised that they originated in France, the home of hounds, and were brought to Ireland by Spanish sea merchants when there was a strong trade between Ireland and Spain at the port on Valentia Island, County Kerry, in the 16th Century. Thady, in his book "My Privileged Life" said he saw a sculpture in the Canary Islands which resembled the Kerry Beagle. It was thought that these Canary Islands dogs had come from France. When Thady visited a hound show in France he saw the Grand Bleu de Gascogne hounds on display and was convinced that these were the closest hounds he had yet discovered which most closely resembled the Kerry Beagle in

appearance, size, and movement. "They are lighter boned, fast," he wrote, "and move with great freedom; they have a kind nature to the point of being affectionate. Notably too, they have a 'hare foot' – like the foot of a hare with the full pad on the ground and a long centre toe, as distinct from the foxhound's rounded 'catfoot'." The coloration of the Grand Bleu de Gascogne hounds was generally blue mottled (most people associate Kerry Beagles with the black and tan colour, but they can also be blue mottled, blue mottled and tan, black tan and white, and tan and white).

The tactic was to climb to various vantage points on the slopes

Some years ago myself and a few friends drove down to the Kerry mountains and met a foot pack in a remote, wild valley in the centre of the Iveragh peninsula. There were a few Kerry Beagles in their pack. The foot-followers were friendly, decent men who advised me that you couldn't jog after the hounds in the same way you might jog after a pack on the plains of Ireland. Instead, the tactic for the day was to climb to various vantage points on the slopes of the heathery, stone-strewn hillsides and watch the action from there. As we watched the dogs flying up and down the steep slopes,

encompassing vast sweeps of land, we realised it would be impossible for a human being to follow them in the same close way you might follow another pack on flat terrain. We could also hear the tremendous bellowing voice of the Kerry Beagles in the pack. The scent was strong and the pack hunted well for much of the day.

As I stood watching this fine display of hunting, I sometimes listened to the conversation of my fellow hunters with their strong Kerry accents. Their talk was sometimes serious, sometimes laced with gentle humour. "Fwisht", they would sometimes say, when the hounds were out of sight and couldn't be heard. Their sentences often began with "yerra." I did not think about it then, but looking back on this fantastic hunt with great hunting people in the Kerry wilderness it is possible that some of them were sons or grandsons of the men that Stanislaus Lynch hunted with when he came this way in the 1950s.

Stanislaus has great things to say about the Scarteen Black-and-Tans in his book. "Reputed to be in the Ryan family since the Treaty of Limerick, in 1691," he writes, "they are now used exclusively for hunting foxes, and are unquestionably one of the fastest packs in Ireland. I heard several masters of hounds, men who were competent judges of pace, say that under good scenting

conditions and in clean, open country, they could run any fox off his legs in twenty minutes. Their scenting powers are remarkable, and their music is truly wonderful. I measured several of them in their kennels, and they ranged from 15 to 24 inches." He said he joined packs of Kerry Beagles in Cork and Kerry where they "were used for hunting drags as well as foxes and hares."

On his first evening in Kerry, Stanislaus is standing outside taking the night air when he hears a solitary Kerry Beagle hunting in the darkness, somewhere in the surrounding bogland. He listens spell-bound and feels that the sound is better than a dozen brass bands. "Had a dozen brass bands turned out to welcome me to Kerry, their music would not have been half so thrilling as the cry of that lone hunter in the silent hills."

He also likes the Kerry people who bid him "hearty good-nights" which he finds "a refreshing relief from the frigid dumbness of Dublin City which we had left that morning." He meets the secretary of the Cahirciveen, Batt O'Connell, "a tall, quiet, young man, whose keenness for the task in hand captured my heart instantly."

He visits the home of Daniel O'Connell. O'Connell was also an enthusiastic huntsman and owned a

pack of Kerry Beagles (there's a great description of O'Connell hunting where he equalled "in agility men of half his age and poured forth an exhaustive stream of jest and anecdote, and entered with joyous zeal into the fullest of the sport.")

The hunt secretary shows him a few hounds. He describes one: "He carried his stern as gamely as any connoisseur could desire and it was nicely feathered from halfway up, then tapered off gradually to the tip. He had a clean neck, fairly long, with no suggestion of a dewlap or stockiness. His game-looking tan and white head was in perfect proportion to the size of the massive animal."

The Kerry hunting horn is different to the norm, we are told, more like an old-type American Army bugle. "It was a peculiar sound, one I had never heard before. It was a run of three notes repeated ad lib. The sounds were rather like: Ho-aw-ling, Ho-aw-ling, Ho-aw-ling! if sung to the tonic sol-fa: doh-fa-la, doh-fa-la, doh-fa-la!"

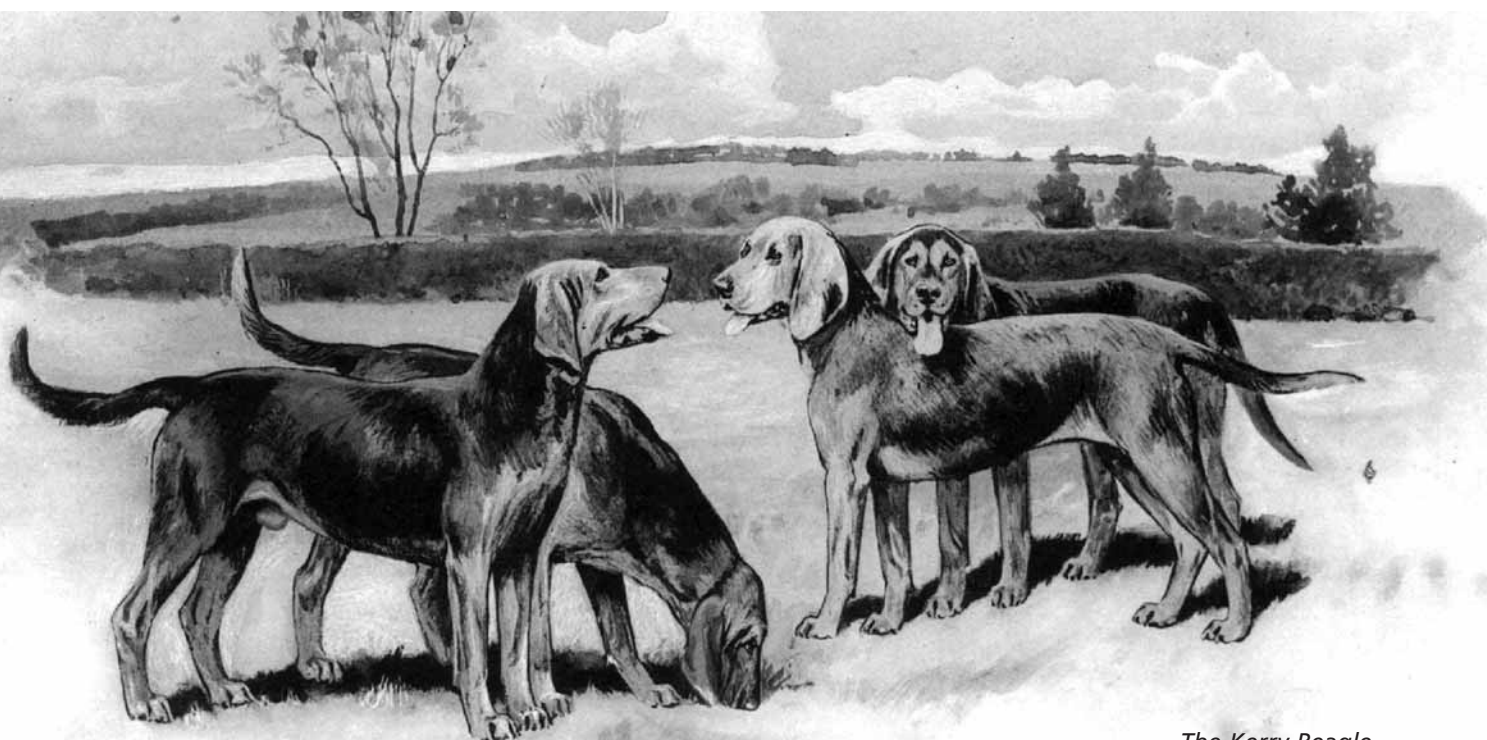
Of the countless marvellous hunting descriptions in the book I will choose a couple to bring this article to a close. They are both from a drag-hunt which Stanislaus attended near Cahirciveen. Standing on a bank he looks around at

the Kerry men beside him who are watching the chase and writes, "When I glanced at the roguish, twinkling eyes in a weather-beaten face on my right I couldn't help noting the difference between them and the strained look of nail-biting anxiety one sometimes sees at horse racing and greyhound racing events."

He describes the moment when the pack picks up the scent. "Like a flash, twenty-seven Kerry Beagles went away on their long twelve miles journey! The long line of black, tan, white and badger-pie surged up Lyons' Field; the line shortening every moment as its flanks raced in for close formation. They charged through a gap in the first bank, fanned out a little in the next small field, closed in again, raced ahead and went storming across the next high bank in a wave of flashing colour."

If you have enjoyed this article and would like to read a book which, by all rights, should be a classic of hunting literature, then you can get a copy from Noel Mullins on his website www.noelmullins.com

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Long Range .22 Rifle Shooting

The Anschutz .22 rifle and equipment used.

It's long been accepted that an accurate 100 metre shot with a .22 calibre rifle is about as good as it gets using either high velocity or sub-sonic ammunition. Back in the old target-shooting days, Olympic 50 metres was the standard shooting distance and we groaned if an occasional competition required firing out to 100 yards.

Notwithstanding, the Anschutz 1413 rifle that I used was fitted with Freeland tubular aperture sights fore and aft that involved simply swapping the foresight tube for a custom-made replacement with a lower base, designed to raise the bullet's point of impact from 50 to 100 yards. No rear-sight elevation adjustments were necessary apart from compensation for wind drift. Comfortably elevating the muzzle brought the foresight aperture to bear on the black bull target. Despite using the most sophisticated match rifles of the time, 100 yards was usually considered a .22's accuracy limit—probably because it never occurred to anyone to look beyond that.

Even in the hunting field when using a .22 sporting rifle and high velocity ammunition, a shot at a live target

further than 100 yards (or metres) was considered unethical and probably still is. Oftentimes when someone claimed hunting success with a shot at considerably longer range we simply didn't believe them. Many variables come into play – wind drift, mirage, shimmering and refraction of light from mist or rain, even shadows created by clouds moving across the sky on a bright day – all affect pinpoint accuracy.

Recently a colleague in South Africa mentioned that he was having great success with a bog standard 'scoped .22 sporting rifle using high velocity ammunition, competing at 200 and 300 metres against shooters using centre-fire rifles in .223 or 6.5X55 calibre. The immediate reaction was "can't be done". Apart from accuracy problems at long range, small-bore calibres are not normally permitted in centre-fire competitions anywhere, no more than a family saloon can be raced in Formula One.

However, knowing the man concerned, the claim warranted another look just to see if it was possible. Africa's hotter climate affects a rifle's muzzle velocity – as temperatures increase, so too does muzzle velocity.

So, using a .22 rifle in those conditions should raise the bullet's trajectory for both distances mentioned; although susceptibility to wind-drift etc would most likely create difficulties. A field test under Irish conditions could be an interesting exercise so I decided to try it out.

The .22 sporting rifle, an Anschutz, was cleaned and oiled. Although stamped "made in West Germany" (pre 1997) it's in mint condition and very accurate – age has no bearing on the reliability of a quality .22 if it's properly looked after. One slight issue existed – when new the foresight had been removed, the screw-holes plugged and a 'scope fitted, which in turn had recently been replaced by a red dot sight for 25 metre indoor shooting. The foresight had long since gone AWOL and no amount of rummaging turned it up, so factory iron sight tests were out. That left the red dot or the 'scope. I opted for the latter as it's more suitable for long ranges.

Precision shooting at far distances requires decent rifle-rests fore and aft along with a spotting 'scope and tripod. While the Schmidt and Bender 6 X 42 rifle-scope is more than adequate for



Ammunition - note the scope adjustment reminders in the turret caps.

spotting fall of centre-fire rifle shot on paper targets at 100 metres, it's not ideal for reading. .22 strikes at 200/300 metres, hence the spotting scope.

The field test was postponed until early September

Carrying out the test wasn't as simple as piling the gear into the car and heading off to the range – it was entirely weather dependent. Given variable Irish conditions particularly in March, the checking of weather forecasts for a suitable day became a ritual, as was a planned early morning start to get shooting before the wind rose. Covid 19 put an end to the planning in March and most of the summer, postponing the field test until early September when one misty night was followed by a flat, calm morning.

In previous 100 yard tests with this rifle using various ammunition brands, Remington Yellow Jacket bullets produced the tightest groups on paper; proved very efficient in vermin control, and so was the obvious choice for this exercise.

In the summer '20 edition of Irish Country Sports and Country Life I referred to some manufacturers that produce rifles with tighter chambers thereby increasing accuracy. Similarly, ammunition manufacturers produce more "accurate" (and expensive?) bullets by fractionally increasing the

projectile's diameter to create a tighter fit. In the southern hemisphere a tight .22 chamber coupled with "accurate" bullets plus local high temperatures could create interesting results, the very least being cycling problems in a semi-auto firearm. I'm assuming a bolt rifle was used by my Afrikaner friend.

On the range, an initial 5 shots were taken at 100 metres to check accuracy and grouping before switching to the 200 metre target. The 'scope remained at the 100 yards setting for the first three shots on the 200 metres, registering low strikes – just a safety precaution - as it wouldn't be unknown for long shots dropping early to ricochet off hard ground and skip over the backstop. It required 41 upward clicks on the elevation turret to achieve a half decent group at 200m. One click equates to a quarter of an inch at 100 yards, so the adjustment necessary to raise the fall of shot to 200 yards indicated a drop of almost one foot from the 100 yard point. Scope adjustments are set in inches, not metrics, by the manufacturers.

Grouping at 200 metres and then at 300 metres

A final group fired at 200 metres was quite respectable - but on moving to 300 metres the wheels came off. Ten shots registered on the backing board 3 feet below the paper target. Unfortunately it was not possible to elevate the scope setting any further because 7 clicks brought the adjustment turret to its full extent. No left or right wind adjustments had been required at any distance - a surprise despite the calm morning.

It wasn't clear from the South African claim whether a scope or iron sight was in use so I fired just two shots, aiming high above the top of the target resulting in two lucky strikes within the black border. It's very likely that aiming up is what's being done in South Africa, although the scoring area on centre-fire targets is huge making it far easier to register a score with the .22 bullet.

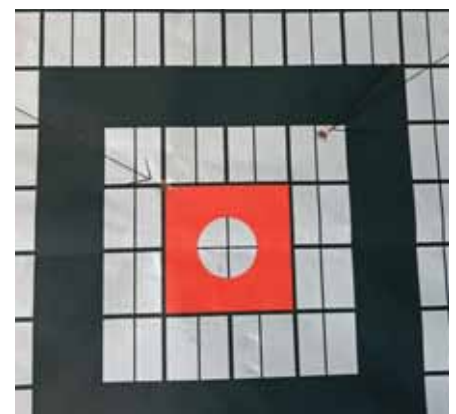
The target I used was designed for 100 yards - tiny compared to the large

targets used in long-range centre-fire shooting. Had a much larger target been available (I didn't have one) the 300m hits probably would have registered using "hold over". Far too much hit and miss is involved in firing high, compromising safety, so I called it a day.

Military ballistic studies have shown that a 40 grain .22cal high velocity bullet has an extreme range of 1,500 yards. Accuracy was not a factor in these studies which were carried out on high ground with a safe, suitable drop-off, and where a shot might eventually land was anybody's guess. A .22 performs best within a 100yd/metre distance, there can't be many reasons for going outside that. The manufacturer's warning on the side of an ammunition box about distance and danger is deadly serious and is not an advertising gimmick – because when a bullet exits a firearm's muzzle, the firer no longer has any control over it. That's quite a responsibility.



A reasonable group at 200 metres.



Two lucky strikes at 300 metres.



THE MACNAB

Setting off.

Looking back on my life, John Buchan's fable of John Macnab has always been omnipresent. In fact, until I penned this piece, I had not quite appreciated just how much the story had touched my life. I first read a tatty Penguin edition as a young boy and have since read it twice more as an adult. Each time I have devoured the dog-eared pages, finishing it in just a few hours. The words never fail to capture my imagination and the characters stay with me long after I have concluded the tome.

The last 10 years in particular – since my first attempt in Argyll – have been peppered with its narrative. When I married my lovely Selena in 2011, she surprised me with a very special wedding gift – a leather-bound first edition. The hardback had taken her two years to source. It now sits front and centre on my office bookcase amongst other fine sporting literature. After three failed attempts, in 2014 we moved from Sussex to the Scottish Borders partly so that I could be closer to the River Tweed to fish for salmon more regularly and to

master a double-handed fly rod. The vast majority of successful Macnabs start with the fish and I knew I needed to boost my chances. Being closer to the Scottish battleground would help too. There are yet more examples of Buchan's influence... more recently, we renovated our home and installed a hidden bookcase door in the snug. To gain entry, a copy of John Macnab must be partly pulled from the shelf, completing a successful challenge in itself. When we relocated the headquarters of Fieldsports Journal to Edinburgh, we renamed the building Macnab House. So you see, I am a bit taken by what is, in my view, the ultimate of personal sporting challenges.

In all, there are 11 chapters to my Macnab story, each ending in defeat, bar of course the last. All as important as one another, each chapter galvanised my resolve for the next chance to conclude my tale. It's been about patience, something I am little known for, bloody mindedness, I'm more of that by character, and determination. My story culminated in a grand finale where the

stars finally aligned in Caithness, about as far north as one can seek sport in mainland Great Britain. I am still on a massive high, it feels surreal to say that I have finally succeeded. It was my mission for a little over a decade – and it's now done.

When trying to explain the Macnab to non-shooting friends or those living outside of the UK, I normally use cricket as an analogy as it is equally eccentric and strange to the unaccustomed. Why would one be so motivated to carry out this bizarre challenge of catching a salmon on the fly, shooting a brace of grouse and taking a stag between dawn and dusk? I think cricket – also inherently British – has many strange idiosyncrasies such as the Ashes series lasting 25 days over five matches, and the absurd Duckworth-Lewis method for calculating a target score if rain interrupts play. There is quite a nice parallel between the two. To me, the Macnab was my own Ashes series.

I owe a debt of gratitude to the rivers that vanquished my chances over the



A fresh cock grilse of four glorious pounds - the Macnab was on!

years. They gave me perspective and ultimate respect for Atlantic salmon, the most wild and tricky of creatures in the British Isles. The Tilt, the Findhorn, the Orchy (an awkward bitch of a river), and the mighty Tay. I was finally gifted my chance by the Thurso, the most northerly salmon river in mainland UK. However, the final attempt was by no means straightforward.

It is customary to start with the fish, being the most fickle of components in the Macnab. The one time I chose to reorder the elements, I had a royal stag grassed and gralloched by 10am, a brace of ptarmigan in hand by midday that elevate the challenge and count as a grouse species. But alas, no lye in the Orchy would give up its treasure, so darkness fell and with it my hopes for that year. Salt was applied liberally to my open wound the following morning when my most unsympathetic of friends Gary Tate hooked a fresh 12lb hen fish from the same pool I finished at the night before.

I will now tell you about how I finally succeeded, in September this

year. The water conditions of the Thurso were tragic for salmon fishing. There hadn't been any significant rainfall since July, so the water was very low, and far from ideal for fishing. However, the river was stuffed full of fish, albeit stale, bored and disinterested in flies having been stuck for weeks waiting to run at the first drop of rain and seeing everything thrown at them day by day. A seemingly hopeless situation. The first day I was on the river by 6am, I knew if it was going to happen it would be early in the short window of activity when the fish take up prime pool positions for the day. I had until midday to land one as advised by the keeper, otherwise the attempt was over for the day with not enough time for the grouse and stag. I fished hard for six hours without a break. The pools were boiling with activity, but nothing gave me a look. Accepting the inevitable we drew stumps. In the evening, as direct sun left water, we fished again – just for fun – and incredibly I caught a bloody salmon. Any day you hook a salmon is a good one, but this felt bittersweet. I

needed to catch the fish at 7am not 7pm!

The next morning, with renewed hope that these fish were catchable, we changed beat, to lower pools towards the sea. It was stacked with fish – even more than the day before. It was narrow like an Icelandic river, the sun was rising and there were salmon splashing everywhere, taunting me. With renewed optimism and a pat on the back from Jim Cameron the ghillie, I set about trying again. Within 20 minutes, it happened, I hooked a salmon. Then, after just four seconds, it was off. I don't think I have ever used bluer language on a riverbank. Very unsportsmanlike. I was shaking more than when I shot a Cape buffalo such was the adrenaline coursing through my frustrated arteries. I had nearly done it, but again it got the better of me. I was crushed, and behaving like my three-year-old daughter Skye, bottom lip out and irrational. Jim had words, told me to pull myself together, and go to the top pool using his traditional fly, more conventional than what I thought were



I now had my brace of grouse.

clever Iceland tactics I had been deploying. At 8am on the dot, swinging a classic dressed Willie Gun double over the neck of the pool, the line tightened, pulled, and my antique 1910 Hardy Perfect reel sung into action – if you know that sound, you’ll know why I fish with it. I gingerly played, palmed and landed a fresh cock grilse of four glorious pounds that must have snuck into the pool under cover of darkness despite the low water. The Macnab was on! For those questioning my decision to take the fish, the Thurso enjoys a sustainable surplus of salmon offering, at the angler’s discretion, a two-fish limit. This bar of silver fitted my ethical compass and was indeed a perfect table fish.

I was totally composed and in the zone. Jim hadn’t been hugged by an angler in the 16 years he has guided the Thurso but I think he understood. After my celebration, I felt ahead of the clock with most of a full day ahead. I jumped into the Disco and set off to the headwaters of the Thurso on Ulbster estates. The specific area was

Dalnawillan and Rumsale estate, located about 35 miles from John O’Groats. It is an area known as the Flow Country – a large, rolling expanse of peatland and wetlands, flatter than much of Scotland making stalking more of an art with less dead ground to cover an approach. It is the largest expanse of blanket bog in Europe and one of the UK’s most remote wilderness areas. First, Mark Pirie a veteran stalker and keeper decided we’d attempt the grouse. There are fewer in number this far north so this was by no means the easy bit. Driving through a ford, decamping then setting off, I was shooting over an experienced English setter called Flame. Half an hour of yomping through tussocks and heather passed, then he was on point. The covey flushed and my reflexes lifted an 1895 Rigby Rising Bite 12-bore to my shoulder. I cleanly shot the first, nerves getting the better of my gun mount, then missed the second. Mercifully, not long after, Flame winded another covey and, feeling more composed for the shot, I pulled the front trigger firing the right barrel which was

all I needed to bag my brace. At 10am things were looking promising. Now for the stag.

The ground to the stags was flat so we had a long way to go in the Argo following the Rumsdale burn, a small tributary of the Thurso. Once we identified a group of shootable animals, we stalked on foot for an hour then crawled slowly using what cover peat hags and the small burn gave us. We glassed hard antler in some rushes ahead of us and the head looked old. Perfect. The stag was bedded up and in no hurry to move. At 140 yards we could see his head clearly, moving occasionally from side to side, but enjoying the afternoon sun, he would not stand. I had to wait a gruelling 90 minutes, lying prone. I imagined the shot over and over until it was finally on and all between a Macnab and I. He stood towards us, offering a terrible shot, then turned, quartering away. I split the light between his front legs with the vertical post of the crosshair, came half way up the 14 stone body mass and squeezed. The .275 Rigby

dropped this majestic old beast a few yards from the burn. It was pleasing to think my Macnab concluded at the headwaters of the river I caught my salmon in eight hours and nine minutes earlier. It felt like the river was a

consistent thread running throughout all three elements of the day.

I feel everyday I have spent in the field with rod, shotgun or rifle since I first tried has been one day closer to being able to complete the Macnab. I

am a much better fisherman, shot and marksman since my first attempt. It has been a celebration of the wildest and most enjoyable sport on offer in the UK and has been a wonderful journey. I have relished a decade of trying. That evening when I arrived back at the Ulbster Arms, the staff and other guests gave me a round of applause as I walked through the door of the restaurant smelling faintly of gralloch and still clothed from the hill. It was – and is – absolutely brilliant. I would like to thank every ghillie, stalker and keeper who have been part of this story without whose good humour and skill would not have made it possible, and Selena my wife, for her patience and encouragement with my obsession to get it done. Every sportsman understands the magnitude of the accomplishment. There is no trophy or tie at the end of this challenge – just personal satisfaction, bragging rights and a fine dinner party anecdote.

With thanks to Lord Thurso for the privilege to complete this challenge at Ulbster Estates.

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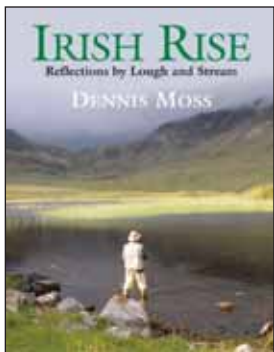
I finally had my Macnab after a decade of trying.

The Macnab Scrapbook

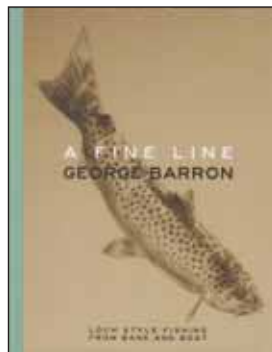


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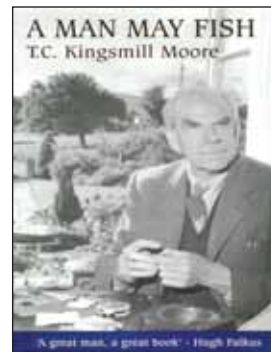
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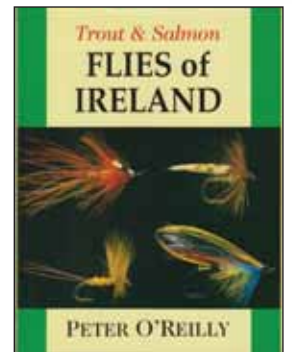
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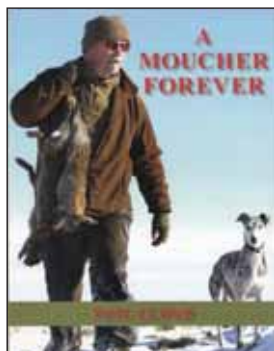
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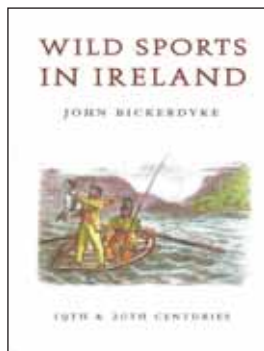
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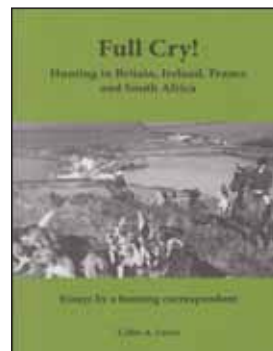
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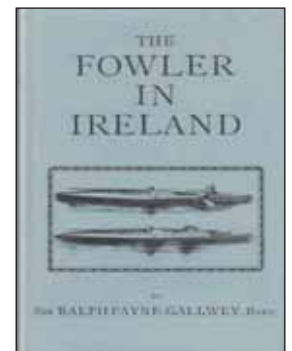
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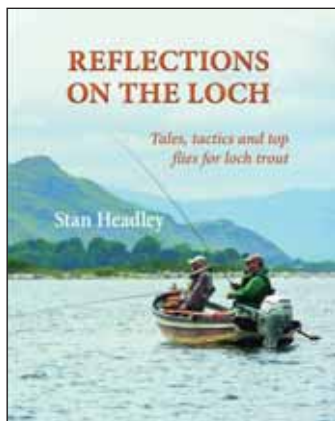
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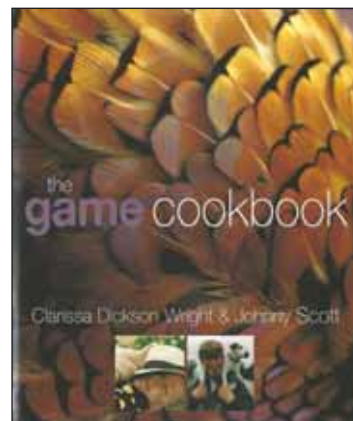
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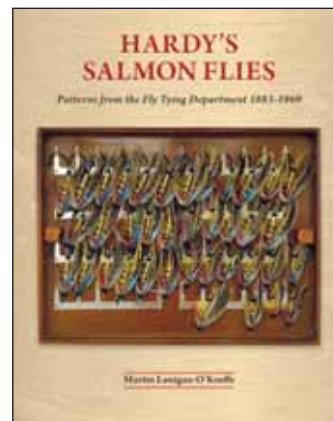
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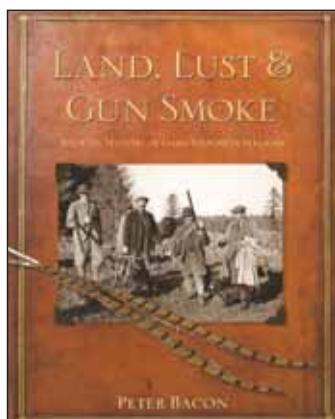
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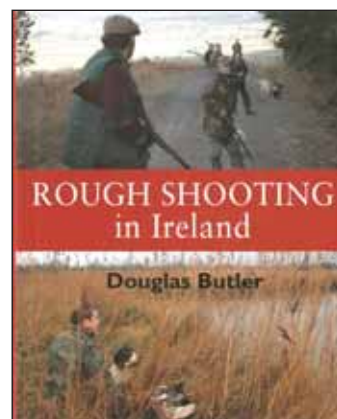
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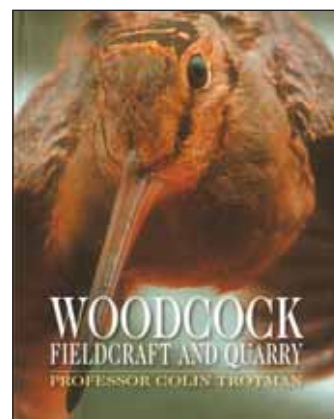
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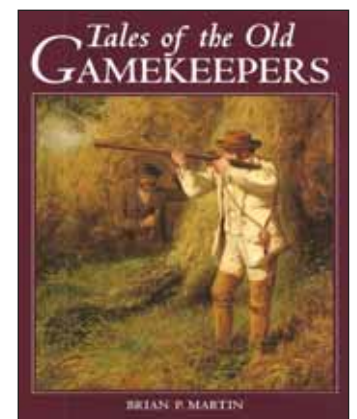
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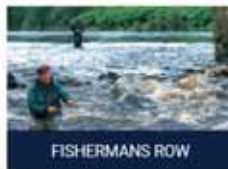








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THE VIRTUAL GAME FAIR – ‘made in Ireland’ FOCUSING on the WORLD

Our plans and objectives for this event was that it was not to be simply a ‘weekend replacement’ for the Shanes Castle event, when that event had to be postponed to 2021, but a year long event with both an Irish and international focus and visitor appeal.

We are delighted to report that THE VIRTUAL GAME FAIR has fully met our ambitious targets and just over two months after launch, with a top ranking on all of the major search engine, has become the MOST VISITED IRISH COUNTRY SPORTS EVENT EVER! With a huge number of visitors every day from Ireland, the UK, North America, Australia, Russia and Asia we are confident that it will rapidly become one of the most visited Irish events ever and a huge marketing platform and market place for Irish Tourism,

country sports retailers and artisan food and craft retailers.

However most of all we wished to make the VGF a source of information and entertainment for Irish and international country sports people and we hope to do this through a news service linked in to our hard copy glossy and FREE to read online Irish Country Sports & Country Life magazine and social media assets and through an exciting range of international country sports and rural life competitions.

Several of these have taken place and are likely to be repeated, others like our IRISH INTERNATIONAL SALMON FLY TYING COMPETITION are currently ongoing and several more are in the planning stages. See <https://www.thevirtualgamefair.com/competitions/>



COMPETITIONS - which have taken place for winners see

www.thevirtualgamefair.com/news/
Novice Stalker Competition – Sponsored & organised by Larry Taaffe

Taxidermy Association of Ireland VGF Taxidermy Championships

VGF Terrier, Lurcher & Whippet Championships organised by Kieran Young

Two Virtual Game Fair Facebook Prize Draws

Donkey Championships organised by the Donkey Breed Society of NI

Carriage Driving Championships organised by The Whip and Collar Club

Living History Display by Living History Ireland
<https://www.thevirtualgamefair.com/living-history-at-the-great-game-fairs-of-ireland/>

ONGOING AND PLANNED COMPETITIONS

Irish Salmon Fly Tying Championships; Gundog Show; Gundog Training Video Competition; Country Sports and Conservation Photographic Competition; Best Submitted Country Sports or Conservation Video; Country Sports Art Competition: Adult & Children's; Cookery Competition – Recipes and Best Plate of Food; Stickmaking Championships organised by the Celtic Stickmakers – Carved Stick only;

In hand Horse Drawn Carriage Show organised by Whip & Collar Club; In hand Donkey Show organised by the Donkey Breed Society NI; Clay Pigeon Competition – based on live videos – final at Shanes Castle 2021; 2nd Terrier, Lurcher & Whippet Championship; International Taxidermy Competition and Country Sports Writing Competition.



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Art & Antiques

With only a few short weeks left until Brexit really kicks in – in the United Kingdom – has anyone really given a serious thought about how its implementation will affect the sales of art, antiques and anything else we cherish. For make no mistake about it, Brexit, while bringing problems for practically everything that is bought and sold, will undoubtedly impact as well on the art and antiques trade in Ireland and elsewhere.

Just in what manner this will manifest itself I am not sure, but it will. After all, come January Northern Ireland will no longer be a part of a member state of the European Union. The Republic of Ireland will of course retain its status quo within the EU. So where does this leave us when bringing art or antiques into

Northern Ireland from the south or sending them the other way. What will the VAT arrangements be on the sales and purchases of art and antique items.

Will there be a uniformity between both parts of the island of Ireland or will there be two different rates and two different systems? Who knows whether it will be more economical to buy or sell in the Irish Republic or vice versa?

What will happen to the Artist Resale Rights Directive or droit de suite as it is known in France? For almost twenty years now living artists, if they are natives of a country in the European Economic Area, have been entitled to at least 4pc of the resale value of artworks worth €1000 or more when sold by a professional art trader in the EEA.

So what happens to that advantage which some artists have come to enjoy? At one time the United Kingdom was an attractive place to sell art because it had not implemented the Directive. Maybe that thought will be in some people's heads again. Will it continue to be paid in the south of Ireland and, if so, what happens north of the border.

Auction houses are still existing, but



Diamond cuff bracelet by Fred Paris which realised €60,000 (ADAMS)

I doubt if any new millionaires have been created during the present Covid 19 crisis. Of course sales are taking place but without the facility of online outlets most, if not all sales houses in Ireland, would have had to put their shutters up for a very long time. We are not out of the woods yet, not by a long chalk, but we can only hope and pray that things will continue to improve and that some form of sales normality will once again return to our scene.

The international scene

On the international scene, where those who have few worries about money buy and sell art and antiques at will, we will continue to see earth-shattering record prices paid. But away from that particular area, and nearer home, many will have to re-build their art and antiques businesses once again. For some of them it will not be easy. For the best part of a year Covid 19 has played havoc with the commercial lives of many. People who took years to build up their antique shops, their art galleries and their sales houses have been sorely hit. They need help and I don't believe much of it will be forthcoming from the

government.

There is no doubt, however many members of the general public have, in some cases, a bit more disposal cash around than they had this time last year. Summer vacations were, to put it mildly a wash out, so families probably saved some money on staying at home. Expensive days and nights of eating out over the past six months were almost wiped off the menu. So there were savings there too. If I am right then there are people around with a bit of extra cash at their disposal. And what better way to spend it than on purchasing a work by a living artist or an item of antiquity. No one has to be



A diamond necklace by Van Cleef & Arpels, sold for €25,000 (Adams)



Paul Henry's 'Hay Stooks with Collages' sold for €100,00 (ADAMS)

exceedingly rich to spent money on art or antiques. But now – in the midst of a crisis which we didn't make – is as good a time as any to get the collecting bug.

There are hundreds of online sales to avail of and the Internet is your oyster when it comes to researching anything

you may choose to buy. And it is wise to research before executing what could be a purchase made in haste. While I'm not saying sales houses are closing shop I am conscious of one thing. The world we once knew, where we jostled in crowded auction rooms to draw an auctioneer's attention or to pre-view an

item before the sale, has gone for the foreseeable future. When attending future sales we will, long after Covid 19 has gone, be keeping a respectable distance from all others. In many cases those who consider themselves vulnerable will be conducting their business from the comfort of their own



Jack Butler Yeats' 'Bound for the Islands' realised €90,000 (ADAMS)

living rooms, kitchens and who knows where: and they will be doing it all online.

What that will mean for the more distant future is difficult to predict. For so long as people create a demand for art, antiques, memorabilia and items of nostalgia there will always be some one there to sell to them. But the sales places could be a lot different to the past and the conditions and commissions a lot different too.

Nevertheless sales, large and small will continue to be held so long as people have something to sell and others have a longing to buy. There will always be a bargain to be had, a 'sleeper' to be found and a gallery or auction house to visit.

But will there be as many as there were ten years ago? I doubt it.

AROUND THE SALES

Dublin-based ADAMS' Fine Jewellery and Watches sale in September attracted many fine items

including an exquisite diamond cuff bracelet by Fred Paris which made its low estimate of €60,000, a striking coral, pearl and gold sautoir necklace by Cartier, circa 1965-70 which went at €40,000 and an impressive pair of diamond pendent ear-clips at a similar price.

A fine 18k gold, diamond and sapphire-set automatic 'Pearlmaster Datejust' bracelet watch by Rolex, 2017 made €30,000, while a pair of early 20th century sapphire and diamond pendent earrings sold for €28,000 as did a diamond single-stone ring mounted in 18k gold.

An important diamond necklace by Van Cleef & Arpels, circa 1995 made €25,000 and a rare 18k gold 'day date' Rolex Oyster bracelet watch, 2017 realised €20,000.

Earlier in the month, at the **Important Irish Art** sale, a Paul Henry's 'Hay Stooks with Collages' found a new home after a hammer bid of €100,000 while a work by Jack

Butler Yeats, 'Bound for the Islands' realised €90,000 and another Paul Henry, Connemara landscape went at €70,000.

A Louis le Brocquy Aubusson tapestry found favour at €65,000; a Gerald F Kelly portrait in oils made €36,000 and a Donald Teskey oil, €34,000.

Northern artist Colin Middleton's oil, 'Birth of David' sold for €28,000; a Norah McGuinness oil, €26,000 and Daniel O'Neill's Four Provinces of Ireland (a set) at €20,000.

Belfast based Bloomfield's Auctions is a regular Mecca for collectibles and fine items and recently an attractive silver oil lamp with blue shade made £700, a gold antique 9 ct. rose gold Albert chain a similar amount and a pair of unique Oriental figures, £420.

We are well served across Ireland, north and south by many small auction houses and long may they continue to ply their wares.



Donald Teskey's 'Coastal Report' sold for €34,000 (ADAMS)

The Reckoning

In these times of economic uncertainty, it is easy to forget, that we are not the first to experience monetary problems on a world wide scale. The years between the two World Wars saw an infamous financial crash, causing banks to call in loans, in a desperate attempt to bolster their reserves. This, combined with an agricultural slump, caused great hardship amongst the farming community; leaving many farmers teetering on the very edge of bankruptcy. This is a tale of how one farmer's desperation led to consequences of the very darkest kind.

Situated amid the high hedge lanes and towering elms of the Suffolk countryside, the village of Lower Houghton appeared far from the world of high finance, and yet even this rural backwater was not beyond the grasp of international banking.

Set by a rutted track that served as a road, Red House Farm was an imposing building, constructed in the decade following Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo. With land extending to 1200 acres, the farm was one of the largest in the area, and had belonged to the Snape family in perpetuity.

With a muscular frame and the facial complexion of a ripe cider apple, bachelor Tom Snape was in his fifth decade of life, and the hereditary owner of Red House Farm. He was also a much troubled man. Although weather worn from a life working the land, the lines and furrows that creased farmer Snape's forehead, were of more recent origin. They owed their existence wholly to the arrival by post of an unexpected, official looking brown envelope. This unwelcome communication from Tom's bank, had slipped through the letterbox, setting in motion a sequence of events, far beyond the imaginings of farmer Snape.

Upon opening the envelope, Tom learned that his Ipswich based bank, were calling in a loan assured some three years earlier. The letter was full of apologies and explanations of the dire circumstances in which the bank found itself but, in short, they wanted their money and they wanted it now.

Farmer Snape slumped into a kitchen chair and cast the finely embossed letter across the table. The loan, made before the financial crash, was a large one, and taken out to buy land and improve livestock. That same land and stock

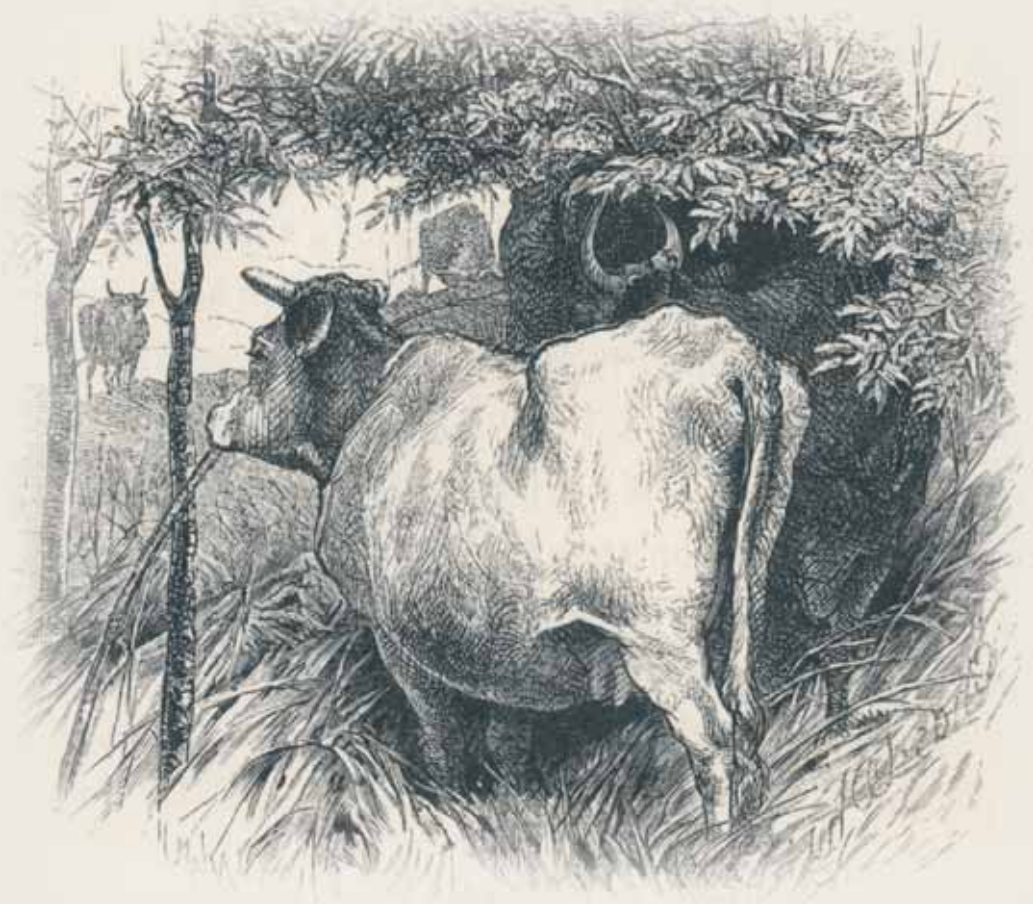
today was worth little, for now people lacked the capital to buy either. The harsh truth was that Tom Snape had no means to pay back the loan and now faced the real possibility of losing the family farm to the bank. A period of one month had been given for the debt to be settled; but this was irrelevant, as blood cannot be drawn from a stone.

A depressive mood settled upon Red House Farm and its owner, as with surprising rapidity, the sultry days of August slipped by. Tom Snape brooded at the kitchen table, staring blankly at its surface, until he knew intimately, every knot and split in its scoured oak surface. Still he didn't know how to pay off the bank loan.

With a need for fresh air and to clear his mind, farmer Snape wandered into the kitchen garden at the rear of the property. Glancing around, his notice was taken by a patch of thistle covered ground by the garden wall. More out of habit than necessity, Tom set about weeding. As he worked, his mind drifted away from matters financial and a high August sun soon brought perspiration to his furrowed brow. So engrossed was he in his work, in fact, that he failed to notice a figure



Snape looked up to see the smiling visage and portly figure of the Parson.



Amongst the familiar odours of warm cattle, Tom detected a smell that didn't belong - sulphur!

observing him from the other side of the garden wall.

Startled almost, Snape looked up to see the smiling visage and portly figure of the Parson. A hub around which the entire village turned, Parson Rowntree took a genuine interest in all his flock, even those like Tom, who were somewhat reluctant to come within the fold. Astute and intuitive, Rowntree sensed that he was troubled, as dark rings under Tom's eyes hinted at a lack of sleep and perhaps more.

Driven by a sense of compassion, the Parson made light conversation about the weather, harvest predictions and the profundity of Tom Snape's strawberry patch. Then, after a somewhat elongated pause, he asked the farmer if something was troubling him.

Snape leant over his fork, and relieved at the opportunity to unburden himself, told the Parson about the letter from the bank in Ipswich, the loan, and his grave fears the farm's future. Talking cures and psychiatrists were things quite unknown in villages like Lower Houghton, but Rowntree knew that a trouble shared was a troubled

halved, so listened to the farmer's woes, quietly, and without interruption.

His smile descended into a frown of concern

Feeling a little more hopeful, Snape asked the Parson what he should do and from where the money might come to pay off the bank loan? Rowntree pursed his lips and, for the first time since stopping by the garden wall, his smile descended into a frown of concern.

He shifted his feet. Unable to offer monetary hope or support, the Parson related numerous cases of which he knew, where banks had foreclosed on farms in the near county. He told of farming families left homeless and landless as victims of the gathering financial depression. Rowntree hated himself for rolling out the trite affirmations, "Keep your chin up," and "every cloud has a silver lining," for he knew they were as a lead weight to a drowning man. Powerless to help, he could do little more.

Staring his fate full in the face, farmer Snape tried to make light of his situation, as the British often will when things are truly bleak. "Well Parson," he

joked, "I could always sell my soul to the devil!" Wearing a sympathetic grin, Rowntree, seeing beyond the joke, offered, "Oh really, Tom. I wouldn't recommend that." He then bid the beleaguered farmer "Good Day" and turned toward the Parsonage and thoughts of evensong.

Had he for a moment glanced back, the Parson might have witnessed a change come over Tom Snape, as the farmer, still leaning on his garden fork, seemed to stare at something indistinct and very far away. Quite spellbound, Snape appeared as one who has experienced a revelation, then turned on his heel and ran back to the farmhouse, leaving the fork to lie where it fell.

Without even bothering to remove his clay heavy boots, Snape entered by the back door, then climbed stairs to his book lined study. Here, he began frantically to remove old and dusty volumes from shelves undisturbed for decades, as he searched for only he knew what.

Day ran into night and into day again, but still the farmer searched through volume after yellowing volume.

Books, well foxed and leather bound, formed an uneven heap in the centre of the room, until suddenly all fell silent. There, in his hand, Snape held a dusty volume purchased long ago by his book collecting grandfather. Bound in leather faded grey by the years, this slim and unprepossessing treatise, was written by John Dee, alchemist to the court of Queen Elizabeth 1st and a man who had only narrowly escaped being burned at the stake for witchcraft and satanic practices.

Each leaf contained pentagrams, scrawled notes on necromancy and alchemy

With daylight now fading, Snape lit an oil lamp on a nearby bureau, and turning up the wick to give greater illumination, began to thumb through the book's fragile pages. Each leaf contained pentagrams or geometric diagrams, scrawled notes on necromancy and alchemy, with references to mandrake, wormwood, belladonna and antimony. Much of the text was written in middle English, and some in ancient languages quite undecipherable. All was scrawled with a sharpened quill and in the erratic hand of John Dee. When the book had last seen the light of day Snape knew not, but remembered it being mentioned by his grandfather many years ago.

The farmer now flicked through the pages feverishly, wild eyes scanning briefly for the guidance he sought before moving on. He mumbled to himself as his fingers skipped rapidly over the pages, then suddenly came to a halt. Staring intensely, the farmer's eyes bore into the script as he read and processed all that was written there.

Betrayed by the bank. Abandoned by the church. If neither God nor man would help him save his farm, Snape saw only one option: summon up the devil himself for assistance, using methods formulated by John Dee more than three centuries ago.

Book in hand, he strode out of the room, out of the house and across the farmyard to his workshop. Geese and chickens scattered before him, but

absorbed by his diabolical task he saw them not. Entering his workshop, the farmer proceeded to scatter the contents of rusting tins, old buckets and lidless jam jars across an oil stained bench. Sifting the resulting debris through horny hands, he found something upon which all his hopes now rested. A simple four penny nail!

Drained both physically and mentally by the stresses of the past week, Tom Snape slept the afternoon away, appearing again only when owls and bats had taken flight, and the church clock had chimed the half hour before midnight.

Collecting a claw hammer and hurricane lantern from the shelf by the back door, the farmer walked out through the garden gate and made his way down the hill towards the village crossroads. In the pocket of his old jacket he carried John Dee's book and the cold steel nail. Few eyes would see him pass along the village street and little he cared, but decent folk would be safe in their beds by this hour.

Not an owl screeched and even the village dogs had fallen silent

Silent and shrouded in gloom the crossroads met him, and only by lighting the lantern that he carried, could Snape calculate with carefully measured paces, the exact centre of the lonely junction. Having satisfied himself that his measurements were correct, the farmer scored the spot with the heel of his boot, and then removing the nail from his pocket, looked about him. All was still, with not even a breeze to stir the tops of the surrounding elms. Not an owl screeched, and even the village dogs had fallen silent.

Taking his watch from his pocket he held the lantern near and saw that the hour of midnight was but two minutes away. Placing the lantern, the watch, and the book of sorcery on the ground, the farmer placed the nail at the centre of the crossroads and raised the claw hammer ready to strike. Steadily, the second hand of the fob watch laboured

toward twelve midnight and at the exact moment that it reached its zenith, the kneeling farmer drove in the four penny nail with a single mighty blow. At the same time, Snape repeated aloud the words scrawled on the marked page of the ancient book. The incantation was designed to raise the devil and written in an archaic language not uttered in three hundred years. Cold iron and sorcery interwoven to bring forth the prince of Darkness.

As the farmer's utterances died away, so too did the chimes of the distant church clock. Once more silence descended upon the lonely crossroads, and Snape, expecting to witness some miraculous appearance, stood up and looked about him. He proffered the lantern to all compass points, to illuminate the blackness of night, but nothing happened. Absolutely nothing, save for the distant lowing of some calf-less cow. So still was it, that the farmer could hear the lantern wick burning, but all was quite unchanged.

Snape's head slumped as he realised just what a fool he was and what a ridiculous spectacle he must make. A grown man, desperate, standing at a village crossroads, trying to conjure up the devil, a non-existent bogey man, created to frighten simple minded peasants. Lowering the lantern, the dejected farmer picked up the book, the hammer and his pocket watch and began the long and weary trudge home. As he did so he considered what had just passed and was thankful, at least, that no one had witnessed his nocturnal folly.

Deep in rumination, Snape crested the brow of the hill and then came to a jarring halt. The nearest cottage hearth was still over half a mile away and yet strangely Tom's nostrils were suddenly filled with an overpowering smell of sulphur. Spinning around, the farmer stared back toward the crossroads a quarter mile distant. The stillness was absolute and, as blackness closed in about him like an unconfessed sin, the first cold tendrils of fear began to pry the latches of his rational mind. Afraid

at what he might have done, Tom Snape fled home.

It was long past cockcrow when still fully dressed, Tom rose from his bed the following morning, and in his sleep fuddled state, the folly of the preceding night seemed more like a bad dream than reality. Not entirely awake he stumbled down the stairs and slipping into his boots, opened the front door wide and strode out. Seconds later he found himself sprawled facedown on the gravel of the farmyard, having fallen over an object placed hard across the threshold. There seemed to be no end to farmer Snape's misery, as dazed, he rose onto all fours and wiped the blood from his gravel scarred brow. Kneeling, he turned to see just what he had fallen over, and was amazed by what confronted him.

What happened next rendered farmer Snape speechless

There, now lying on its side, was a gleaming, black leather holdall, of the kind that travelling salesmen often carry. Tom's first reaction was bewilderment, for why would such a person leave his bag there of all places? Rising to his feet the puzzled farmer dusted himself down and looking around saw that the farmyard was quite empty. Baffled, Snape walked over and picked up the bag, which by its condition was brand new and not the kind of thing that anyone would leave behind. He was immediately surprised by its weight and, wondering what it contained, released the bag's brass clasp fastening and opened it. What happened next rendered farmer Snape speechless with wonder, for, as he opened the bag wide, he found that it was absolutely brim full with rolls of bank notes.

Tom stared at the money in open mouthed amazement, before once again looking around the farmyard for its possible owner. The yard stood silent and empty, with nothing to indicate who the bag might belong to, so turning on his heel, the bemused farmer hurried back into the farmhouse slamming the

door behind him. Snape's mind raced with possibilities, as his conscience vied for mastery over his need for cash.

The farmer opened the bag wide and tipped its contents out onto the kitchen table. Wads of notes spilled over the worn oak surface, forming an uneven heap before him and as Tom gave the bag one last shake, something small and metallic fell out, bounced off the table top, and onto the kitchen floor. Stooping, the farmer bent and picked up the object.

Had Tom imagined that events could grow no stranger, he would have been mistaken, for there, resting in the palm of his weathered hand, and still bearing dust from the road, was a slightly bent four penny nail. It was then also, that the strange smell emanating from the rolls of bank notes reached Tom's nostrils, and he recognised the same sulphurous odour, he had detected on leaving the crossroads the night before. Then, looking down into the open bag, farmer Snape discovered that it wasn't quite empty; for he saw that it still held a single sheet of crisp writing paper. He took out the paper and read aloud the words written upon it. "Balance due: one mortal soul." Had someone observed his nocturnal theatrics of the night before and this was their idea of a joke? Was the money even real? It looked real.

Feverishly, and with trembling hands, he removed the paper bands from each roll of notes and counted them. There, resting on the table before him, was £100,000! He counted again, but there was no mistake in his calculation. A King's ransom had been left on his doorstep, but he had to establish that the money was genuine. To this end, over the next few days, the anxious farmer spent several of the notes in the nearby market town and, as the ultimate test, paid a few of them into his account at the local bank. All were accepted without question; so they were genuine!

Days went by, as Snape waited for someone to come forth, claim the money, and explain the joke, but no one did. At the end of September, nearly a

month after discovering the money, Tom took the bag and its contents from its hiding place in the cellar and dressing in his smartest suit, journeyed to his bank's main branch in Ipswich and paid the whole amount into his account. The cashier's eyes stood out on stalks, when farmer Snape opened the bag containing the money and, flustered, called the manager to deal with the transaction. The manager was also taken aback at seeing such an amount of cash, but having known Tom for some years, accepted his explanation that the money had been willed to him by a distant relative.

Hardly daring to believe his luck, Snape walked out of the bank a very wealthy and much relieved man. Within days his loan was paid off and the threat of losing the farm evaporated. He bought more cattle, took on two farm workers to ease his load, and even decided to make a generous donation to the parish church. Life was good it seemed, and without a cloud on the horizon. Or was it?

Pangs of conscience, and the fear that the money's rightful owner might appear, had eased, for almost a year had passed since the appearance of the mysterious black bag. The anniversary of this event came without notice to the busy farmer, as habitually Snape rose early to feed his hungry stock.

Shorthorn and red poll steamed in the byre, as Tom forked tortured looking mangolds into the worn wooden manger. Talking to his cattle as he often did, the farmer leant on his fork, and marveled at how simple their life truly was. No thoughts of interest rates or bank foreclosures troubled them, for as long as they had food, his beasts were happy. Everything here was as it should be, as it always had been. But then, amongst the familiar odours of warm cattle, hay and manure, Tom detected a smell that didn't belong, but which was oddly familiar. It was sulphur!

The man was both immaculate and disturbing

Sensing a presence behind him, the

farmer turned, expecting to see parson Rowntree, who he had asked to call in, to discuss details of his donation to the church fund. To Snape's surprise, however, he was confronted by a well dressed stranger standing in the byre doorway. Tall, slim, and clad in a black three piece suit and long coat, the man possessed possibly the darkest eyes Tom Snape had ever seen; darker yet, as they were set against skin of alabaster white. With black patent leather shoes, and jet black hair and moustache, the man's appearance was both immaculate and disturbing. As the figure moved towards the farmer with silent footfall, the sulphurous smell became almost overpowering. The odour of a well used chimney long abandoned, Snape thought.

"Farmer Snape?" the stranger enquired, although it was more a statement than a question. "Yes," replied Tom, rather shakily and somewhat taken aback. "We have business together you and I," the stranger continued. "Business?" replied Tom. "What manner of business, exactly, and who are you?" Looking thoughtful for a moment, as though he had never been asked this question before, the stranger smiled a terrible smile, before replying most deliberately, "My name is Legion." He grinned as though from some private joke, then continued, "But farmer Snape, you requested my presence, exactly one year ago today. Or should I say...tonight." Tom, baffled, replied, "Well, Mr Legion, I can assure you that you are mistaken, I don't know you, and I would thank you to leave my property, now."

"Ah, property, the stranger hissed. The very property which without my intervention, you would have lost to your bank." Taking a step forward, the stranger met the farmer's gaze with eyes as black as a hanged man's hood. He smiled again and said, "Oh come now farmer Snape, you know me very well and you summoned me one year ago tonight to aid your financial situation and prevent the loss of your farm. Tom Snape's mouth gaped wide, and

chuckling, the stranger added, "Better the devil you know eh, farmer Snape?" "This isn't possible," stammered the shaken farmer, "this is a joke." "A joke?" replied the stranger, indignantly. "I have been called Satan, Lucifer, Beelzebub, and many other things besides, but never a joke!" This last statement was delivered with a reptilian hiss, the stranger's eyes burning with a dark fire, as his facade of humanity suddenly grew very thin. "I am the devil farmer Snape, the devil, and I have come to collect the balance owed to me, for giving you £100,000 and saving your farm. I have come to collect your mortal soul!"

His legs buckling in shock and terror, Tom Snape staggered backwards onto a heaped mound of mangolds. "You can't be the devil. You don't even look like the devil", offered the petrified farmer. "Oh," said the stranger, "you mean I am not red and lack horns and a forked tail. Well, perhaps I can accommodate

you?" With this the stranger snapped his fingers and was instantly transformed into the crimson hued, fallen angel. Striding forward, the devil flicked out a forked, lizard tongue and hissed, "I am the devil farmer Snape, and I will have my due".

The disappearance of the wealthy farmer Tom Snape, is a mystery that is spoken about in Lower Houghton to this day. That such a well-to-do yeoman should simply vanish without trace is thought very strange indeed. Stranger yet however, was the discovery made by the village parson, whilst calling in on parish business. The Reverend Rowntree, in his statement to police, told how he had expected to find the farmer in the byre feeding his cattle, but instead, discovered only a pile of grey ashes, slumped over a heap of mangel-wurzel. Close by and containing a rather bent four penny nail, stood a black leather bag, of the kind that travelling salesmen often carry.



Petrified, Snape heard the stranger hiss "You mean I can't be the devil as I lack horns and a forked tail.

A Heidelberg Winter Morning

I finally reached my destination on a dry and cold winter's night, to be met by Julia Szeremeta and Dr Markus Sack and several teckels at the train station. The journey leading up to this would take an article itself, but to cut it short I got on the wrong train not once, but twice and the airline lost my luggage! I am now very clear on the difference between a regional and an Intercity Express train. In future, jump on the white one!

It was so great to see my German friends, the teckels and again experience beautiful Germany for a few days. What is not to love about Germany? The

people, the culture, the food & not to mention the hunting tradition which for me is the best in the world. Germany is everything I could ever want and my only regret is that I didn't discover it when life would have allowed me the opportunity to spend years instead of days there.

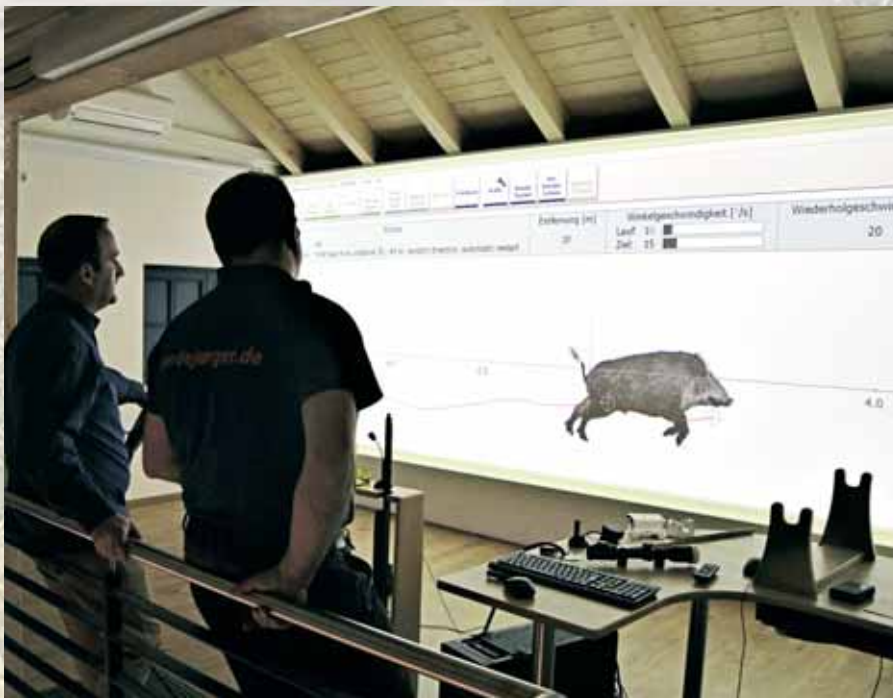
I had come to Germany on the invitation of his Highness Ferdinand Graf Von Merveldt who I had the pleasure of meeting earlier in the year while working with Teckels on a driven hunt in the same area. He and I discussed trees, Germany and Ireland at length and some months later I received

a very kind invitation to participate in a state hunt in the area where I had previously been. I could never quite put my finger on exactly what it is about oak forests, boar and teckels that really quickens my blood, but it really does. It's simply not possible to put into words the feeling and atmosphere of standing in a forest with dogs baying, shots going off and boar dashing between ancient oak trees. To say I was looking forward to it was an understatement!

Driven shooting with a rifle simply does not exist in our part of the world. It is not something many people are accustomed to, least of all me and Julia



Teckels ready for boar.



Discussing lead with Jochen.

suggested that some practice may be in order so as I could make the most of my hunting opportunity and she knew just the man for the job!

Jagdschule Rhein-Main, which is the Rhein-Main hunting school is run by husband and wife team Jochen and Nadja Nieser who gave Julia, Markus and me a most warm welcome into their beautiful German home on a dry, sunny winter's morning. We had much to discuss and while Jochen who is a CPSA qualified instructor and an absolute passionate hunter had many questions about hunting in Ireland I had many more about hunting in Germany. We drank coffee provided by Nadja his wife who is an equally passionate huntress and discussed all manner of German and Irish country sports I felt, as I always do in Germany, very much at home. Before long, it was time to get down to business and it would be here that Jochen would show me just why he is a highly regarded hunting instructor in Germany.

I must be honest, a wild boar simulator sounded something akin to learning to shoot on a PlayStation and I had slightly disregarded it as a novelty. However, I was soon to be proven wrong. As he rigged up the Mauser M12 .308 rifle I would use the following day in Heidelberg, I took in the rather large cinema screen in front of me. Jochen

explained that the country scene in front dotted with bushes and trees was my hunting area and when I was ready the boar would appear from anywhere and I had to shoot them! The Mauser was connected by laser to the screen and as the boar appeared I fired and missed and the screen then switched to close up showing where the shot went and the proceeding lead on a timeline, a very

technical and informative system which is known as the Marksman ST2. Jochen quickly explained where I was going wrong with lead, foot placement and mounting and of course within several more shots, a little advice & further encouraging words I began to hit more and more boar crossing the screen.

With all doubts of tomorrow's hunt firmly brushed from my mind by Jochen, we set off to the local gun range for some moving target practice. German hunting practices get as close to the real thing in every scenario, from dogs to shooting and this was no different. A 'running' boar which was hidden but appeared at random across the bottom of the range was the target and I had to hit it with the Mauser M12 which was now back to fully analog and firing .308 ammunition with quite a thump. I took a few shots to get the swing of it and within a few more Jochen was giving me an encouraging pat on the back with each successful three rounds and we walked up and down the range placing stickers over the old shots so we could recognise the new shots until I was hitting the target each and every time.



Success!



Steven with Julia Szeremeta.

With a firm handshake and a “Waidmannsheil” from Jochen and Nadja we left the range and travelled back through Darmstadt to Mannheim where we had been celebrating Julia’s birthday the night prior in a fantastic restaurant with Daisy the teckel, Markus, Antonio, Regina, my new friend and wine expert Matthias and his wife Jenee. This was of course followed by a sort of German style pub crawl with a rather large tankard of German beer consumed in each new pub! A long but absolutely fantastic night and one I shall never forget!

At 5.30 am we were en route to an area just North of Heidelberg

With the simulator complete, the range well shot and a good night’s sleep under my belt I was in Julia’s jeep at 5.30 am and we were en route to an area just North of Heidelberg, the location for today’s driven hunt. I was feeling confident after yesterday’s instruction from Jochen and looking forward to the day.

The air was still, slightly foggy and almost warm. We were among the first to arrive and as we stood in the small

lay-by along the road at the edge of the forest it was easy to see hunters approaching wearing Tyrolean hats, blaze orange or sometimes both. I received warm handshakes from many faces new and familiar including Alexander and Volkergrab, Martin Böckenhoff and of course his Highness Ferdinand Graf Von Merveldt.

After many regulations and rules, translated for me very quickly by Julia, we were loaded into a large Mercedes truck and set off into the forest to our respective high stands for the morning drive. I was shown my stand and I



Presentation of the Brauch from His Highness Ferdinand Graf Von Merveldt.

climbed up the oak rungs as the morning sun broke through the trees. The air was still and heavy with a light fog and I could see a little more than one hundred yards ahead.

I took the rifle from the slip, loaded a magazine into the gun, checked the safety and got it into position. The surrounding trees had arrow markings showing which direction to shoot and not shoot, and I had about 300 degrees from where I was, so I had a good opportunity should anything come my way. It was cold, and only got colder as I stood. Every now and again I would hear the dogs baying in the distance, sometimes followed by a shot ringing out.

As I stood deep in thought some movement caught my eye which snapped me back to reality, but it turned out to be a teckel by the name of Daisy, currently in training with Julia before returning to her owner Mike Schlapa in the USA. Daisy was quickly followed by Milo, sire of my bitch Cider and a top class boar dog with absolutely no fear!

Milo travels for miles on driven hunts and on a previous hunt in 2019 he travelled so far in pursuit he ended up joining another pack of dogs on a totally different hunt miles away, until a hunter rang the number on his collar and Julia was able to retrieve him that evening. I saw nothing further until the Mercedes truck arrived to collect me and, speaking with several other Guns with my limited German on the way back down off the hillside I learned that there had been some boar moving and a few shots. I was not the least bit disappointed in my case - being here was plenty for me!

Our second drive was proceeded of course by a large log fire, strong coffee and much German cake and all sorts of delicacies. I spoke with the beating team lead by Michael Sprenger whom I met earlier in the year and he had been having a great season so far. Michael and his partner Anna Marie travel to driven hunts with their team of dogs all over North Germany several days a week, 6 months of the year and they really are something to see in action.

I was back in another 4x4 with several other Guns and driving up quite a steep forest track before again being dropped off at a high stand. This was being slightly more limited as I could only shoot one side and it was also quite unnerving as I could hear the beaters close by several times. Shooting in close proximity with a shotgun is something we do as second nature, but shooting a .308 in such a situation does unsettle me slightly!

This drive would be slightly shorter as with short winter days there is a requirement for extra time to allow for the collection of animals, dogs and of course the hunting ceremony. After two hours I had seen nothing, not even a dog, but I had genuinely a really fantastic time, I had enjoyed every second of every minute in that forest, I enjoyed seeing old faces and meeting the new ones, seeing the dogs work, and just being in Germany.

All of a sudden a roe deer was coming towards me, at full speed! It caught sight of me and it veered right. It

kept running and approached the forest track and as I mounted the gun, Jochen's words came to my mind, feet, mount, pull through... bang!

"Steven McGonigal Eine Reh," Ferdinand Graf Von Merveldt called out as I stood alongside the other hunters and beaters with the deer, boar and foxes laid out on branches with the logs burning in each corner. I walked forward and removed my hat and he presented me with the 'Brauch.' It was a great moment, and I felt very proud to have had the opportunity to hunt in Germany in such a spectacular place, and if I had not shot anything it would have made no difference, it was a once in a lifetime day.

Flonheim is an Ortsgemeinde, a municipality belonging to a Verbandsgemeinde, a kind of collective municipality, in the Alzey -Worms district in Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany. Julia Szeremeta and I were travelling here today with Milo, Cookie and Daisy to participate in another organised hunt, mainly focused around the Vineyards which Flonheim is known for. It was a stunning area and you would be hard pressed to know by looking if you were in France, Germany or Italy, with old buildings, vineyards and local wine available on the roadside. A special feature among the vineyard cottages that served farmers and winemakers as huts throughout Rheinhessen are the 'Trulli,' like white sugar hats they light up between the rows of vines. Three of them can be found in the region around Flonheim. The name comes from the round houses that are found mainly in Puglia / Italy. In the Flonheim region they were built in the 18th century as huts in the vineyards.

We assembled with the other hunters in a small picnic area along a quiet road. The atmosphere was friendly and jovial and along with the many teckels, there were some Deutsch drahthaars in attendance. After providing our hunting licence for inspection to be stamped by the person in charge, it was on to the game cart and off to the first drive.

Two fine specimens of roe bucks nearly knocked me over

We reached a large lake and as the guns spread along one side, the beaters pushed through the cover on the opposite side and the first thing that nearly knocked me over were two fine specimens of roe bucks - they were stopping for nobody! This was a small game hunt today however, so the deer were quite safe. A few ducks fell to the guns initially and all were retrieved from water and ground by a couple of teckels. Julia's Cookie made a fine retrieve of a large mallard and I spotted another Teckel carrying a pigeon while crossing into the second or third field on the scent of a deer!

Our second drive began on the top of a vineyard and so scenic was the area I almost forgot about shooting! A fine Sunday morning in a German vineyard, teckels breaking the silence and pheasants, roe deer, hares and foxes breaking everywhere, what more could you want! To my left and right two pheasants went down quickly followed by a fox behind me. Two roe deer passed me, rumbling on the hard ground as they did so, and tight behind them was a young Teckel 'Felix' owned by Patrick Ergal from Darmstadt. The guns went quiet, and again it was time to move. There were many areas to cover within the 3000 hectares and we had no time to waste.

Our third drive of the day was quite high on the hills and I was placed right beside a small hut on wheels, obviously used for deer stalking. I had a view of the entire Flonheim I was so high up, and the beaters worked below and towards us coming uphill. A few cock pheasants went over the crest but were out of my reach and below I saw a fox slipping through the cover, but his scent gave him away as a pair of teckels opened up on him. The roe deer in this area where prolific and just kept popping out from behind trees and bushes! We worked our way downhill gradually and eventually met with the beaters in the middle and then across to the game cart. This took us back to the meeting place, where teckels

roamed around and guns discussed the morning's sport and we ate fantastic soup and warm bread, of course followed by the usual German cake! I felt very at home as I always do in Germany and the hunters made me very welcome. Julia had been in the thick of the action with the teckels and had cut her hand quite badly which we managed to clean up and get back together before setting off on the next drive which - little known to us - would go on into darkness.

I was positioned at a deer stand on the ridge of a hill, the scenery was so spectacular, if something had broken before me, I would have missed it! Rolling hills of vineyards as far as the eye could see, and boar roaming on a crest in the distance. I could see the teckels and a drahthaar working below and along with Daisy, Cookie and Milo there was a tiny little smooth haired Dachshund called 'Hexa' which is German for witch. The little dogs have so much energy, beating, retrieving and baying since 8.00 am and they were still going! Eventually the guns met the beaters such was the layout of the ground and I was glad to see the game cart arrive at the lower vineyard.

We climbed aboard the cart with pheasants, foxes and hares among the bag and as we trundled down a steep track the spirits were high. I reached the bottom, met Julia and the game was laid out and the guns and beaters assembled for the horn blowing ceremony, joined by some members of the public who asked if they could watch. They took great interest in proceedings as they showed their children the laid out game and the teckels ran among them in their usual high spirits even after covering many miles over some very steep ground.

It had been a great end to an amazing few days. To his Highness Ferdinand Graf Von Merveldt and the hunters from the Heidelberg hunt, Jochen and Nadja Niesner from the Jagdschule Rhein-Main and of course my great friends Julia Szeremeta and Dr Markus Sack, "Ich möchte mich recht herzlich bedanken." These are the days I will look back on and smile.



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Covid & Summer Grouse

Georgina and MayBelle produce a covey for Sandy and John.

For a long time it looked as though our usual summer activities of grouse counts, Field Trials and grouse shooting would all fall victim to the Covid-19 outbreak. Between shielding, lock-down, travel bans and restrictions on social gatherings there was little to look forward to as June slid into July. But then, just in time for us to start grouse counting, the ban on travelling more than five miles from home was lifted and it became possible to reach the moors again.

Not for Field Trials of course, the whole summer circuit was cancelled, but as long as we maintained social distancing and didn't share drinks bottles or gather in the café afterwards there was no reason not to get on with our annual summer counts.

Although Georgina and I considered ourselves fortunate to live in an isolated farmhouse with a big garden so that we were not stuck indoors with only daytime television for entertainment, it was still a tremendous rush to be back on the Pennine hills with the bell heather coming in to bloom, the burbling of curlew and the piping call of golden plover, the feel of rock and heather underfoot and above all, the sight of a dog on point and a covey of

grouse gliding across the moor.

I had thought that the long, dry spring would have been good for the grouse, but once we started our counts it became clear that this wasn't the case. Instead of the big broods that we were hoping to find there were too many small coveys, often with young birds that were well behind the stage at which they would normally be in mid-July.

Whether this was due to a lack of water to drink or a shortage of insects

for the chicks to eat in the first few days after hatching we had no way of knowing – most likely it was a combination of the two factors – but the result was that the counts were generally disappointing.

The moor where we were counting is largely dry anyway and the drought had left the peat cracked and parched in many places. As if to confirm the hypothesis, when we worked the dogs over some of the wetter beats there were



Lab Blotto retrieving a grouse.



John and Sandy at the ready as Hannah works Boo in on a covey.

bigger coveys of well-grown birds: much more the sort of thing we were hoping to find. Reports from other moors were generally along the same lines so it seems likely that 2020 will not have been a great year for grouse, even for those moors that were able to overcome the logistical challenge of getting Guns, beaters and pickers-up around while still social distancing.

Our smaller shoot went ahead

Our grouse shooting was able to go ahead as normal because we get by without beaters, loaders or pickers-up and neither do we require vast numbers of grouse for a successful day. Indeed, just a few coveys – half a dozen will do – are enough for us to enjoy a cracking day over the pointers and setters. Someone once wrote that the ideal shooting party would consist of just two participants – him and his dog. While I can see what he meant we are usually slightly more numerous with maybe four dogs plus handlers and two, three or four Guns. If one of the Guns has a



Piper at work.



Covey away from Joy and Quern.

Lab or a spaniel for picking-up then we have a full complement. All we need then is a few grouse.

Social distancing isn't an issue when there are six or eight of you surrounded by three thousand acres of empty rock and heather. In fact, when your dog

comes on to point and you look round to discover that your Guns have stopped for a blether a quarter of a mile back down the hill you may well find yourself wishing that they were somewhat closer. A quarter of a mile closer give or take a couple of yards.

In their turn, when they have yomped across that quarter mile of uphill heather to get to the point, with you waving them on with a certain amount of enthusiasm – well, the grouse won't sit for ever – they too may wish they had kept a bit closer to the action. Accurate shooting becomes difficult when you are gasping for breath and have sweat running down into your eyes.

We have had some very different days on the hill so far this season. The Twelfth was hot – very hot – and the breeze was very light and variable. It was hard work for the dogs as well as for the handlers and Guns. Early in the afternoon we had a choice: climb the hill onto the ridge and hope we would find a breeze and some grouse on the higher ground, or turn back towards the vehicles. The decision was unanimous among the humans and I suspect the dogs would have been in full accord if we could have asked them. We turned back instead of climbing the hill.

The next day was just as hot, but with a good steady breeze in our faces



Sandy with a grouse.



Socially distanced – Val and Georgina with Albert and Flame.

as we set off. The dogs ran harder and kept to a decent quartering pattern, the Guns were quick to every point and even the grouse entered into the spirit of the thing and sat well on nearly every point. The bag wasn't enormous – four brace for the day – but it was well earned by Guns and dogs alike.

Swarms of midges 'the curse of the Highlands'

Two weeks later a warm and windless day left us exposed to swarms of midges – the 'curse of the Highlands' as someone once dubbed them. There was very little breeze for the dogs to work on and somehow it always seemed to be behind us. The grouse were in short supply as well and I think everyone was glad to get back to the vehicles after a long, hard day.

There was a bit more breeze to keep the midges away the next day but there were showers of rain to soak the heather and unsettle the grouse. We were high up on a ridge with no shelter when the showers swept across but we saw a good few coveys. 'Saw' is the

appropriate word here because – as so often on a wet day – the grouse tended to run from the point as the Guns were approaching, then jump just out of range and sail off into the distance.

Our final two days in September were also notable for grouse that ran instead of sitting. We tried some new ground that was reported to be 'hooching with grouse' on the first day. I am not sure what population density of grouse is required for them to qualify as 'hooching' but I am fairly sure that the beat we worked didn't meet the standard. The dogs all worked well – we had Scooby the Irish setter, Finn the Gordon and two pointers, MayBelle and Boo – and Labrador Betty to pick-up. As it turned out Betty was mostly unemployed because what grouse there were chose to run rather than sit – something of a familiar story this season.

For our final day on the hill we added pointer Piper to the dog team and went back to the ridge where we had seen a good sprinkling of grouse on a previous day. This is always a high risk strategy.

Far too often we have said 'Let's go back to such and such a beat – we know there are birds there.' only to find that the birds have, as it were, flown. For once though we found a steady supply of grouse that, unfortunately, were anything but steady when the dogs pointed them. Once again, they ran like stoats and almost without exception lifted on the very extreme of range for a shotgun. That said, Frank managed to drop one over Piper at a good forty or fifty yards for Betty to retrieve. I expect by now it will be seventy yards at least....

And that was our summer dog work. Counts that were a tad disappointing and six days shooting that never quite lived up to expectations as far as grouse in the bag went. The great thing was though that we were able to get to the hill at all despite the Covid-19 restrictions. And even when the midges are biting, the grouse are running and the rain is trickling down your neck a day on the hill with the pointers and setters is something I will take over almost anything else. Roll on 2021.



Review of Pointer and Setter Field Trials - Autumn 2020

Joan McGillicuddy's FTCh (Snipe Ch) Ballydavid Gaelforce of the Kingdom.

One of the fascinations of the sport of pointers and setters is that most of the events are held in beautiful places usually at altitude! Therefore, most competitors would make decent meteorologists and can usually predict rain, fog, sleet or other innumerable weather conditions that are never perfect for our sport.

We usually can see a swirl in the clouds from the height of the mountains, where warm air and cold air dance around each other rather than combining. This is common in Ireland, where with the Atlantic from the west cause our changeable weather. They form a boundary between the cold polar air from the north and the warm air coming from the south. These spirals cause rapid changes between the familiar wind, rain and sun as the arms spiral past.

The other things adored by competitors is tea! By pouring milk into tea and with a quick stir, there is a familiar swirl, a spiral of two fluids circling each other barely touching with similar arms before eventually merging,

High pressure chases low pressure. In the fourth century BC, Aristotle declared the “nature abhors a vacuum” and this seems to be the way the world stays at equilibrium.

Readers will be familiar that field trials for pointers and setters were stood down in March when it became clear that the pandemic had reached our shores. With the restrictions since then, and foreign travel not encouraged, the annual pilgrimage to Great Britain for grouse counting did not materialise. The implication of this meant that dogs could not have the opportunity to work on game or gain fitness, prior to the start of the trials on August 1st.

With the loss of grouse counting in 2020, it meant that younger dogs lost a critical opportunity to work on grouse, where they are plentiful. It is a defining time for many young dogs. Some careers may never start. The average age of dogs competing at field trials is now much higher than the past, meaning the standard of trials is higher as more field trial champions continue to compete. If you are lucky enough to

have a good dog, the dog will compete over a long career. Three of the four dogs in the awards in the recent Irish grouse championship were over 6 ½ years old while the winning dog was 8 ½ years old. It is also true that levels of husbandry, nutrition and care have improved dramatically over my time in field trials, which means that dogs can have a more prolonged career at the highest level as they are carefully managed.

The field trials for pointers and setters did get a green light to proceed, albeit with additional safety measures and strict protocols. The fact that pointer and setter field trials venues are on top of mountains where social distancing is the norm, no doubt supported this decision.

An excellent stake with plenty of grouse

The Irish Red Setter club, the oldest existing club in Ireland, traditionally begins the calendar with its trials on August 1st and 2nd. Expectations were low, given the lack of opportunity for

fitness and bird work. Both days were set in Kilchreest, county Galway with the international breed stake initiating proceedings. Judged by Pat Dooley and Kieran Walsh, the standard surprised many and with a good entry of keen handlers, an excellent stake with plenty of grouse followed with a full set of awards.

The winner was Aidan Dunne's FTCh (Snipe Ch) Blackstairs Behenny with second to Joan McGillicuddy's FTCh Ballydavid Gaelforce of the Kingdom and third place to local man Joe Tannion's FTCh Mountbay da Vinci and reserve to Hugh Brady's FTCh (Snipe Ch) Malstabodarna Embla of Ballydavid. In my view, it was the best red setter breed stake since 1986 when it was held in Lord Rossmore's estate in

Monaghan where Jack Nash's Irish setter Moanruad Quiva took the honours on both days.

Dogs seemed fresh and enthusiastic and perhaps it is a coincidence that dogs were not grouse counting for in Britain in the weeks before the trials. The following day was the second day of the Irish Red setter clubs summer schedule. Judged by Colin Forde, Alan Bartley and Paraig Kiely, birds were evasive all day but in the third round the opportunity was taken giving the win to Aidan Dunne's Maadhog Feochadan.

The next scheduled events involved Kildare, Laois and Offaly, which in local lockdown meant that your scribe was not in attendance. The English setter club stake did proceed but there were no awards while Cill Dara

unfortunately had to cancel. On the 22nd August, the Irish pointer breed stake went ahead.

Judged by Jim Sheridan and Ollie Kelly, the winner was newcomer, Peter Gorman's ArdnaGrath Gos who had an excellent performance. Strabane's Michael Houston was second and third with International FTCh Ardclinis Francie Frank and Koram Kendall respectively.

Cashel field trials had to cancel its trial in Kinnity, county Offaly due to local lockdown restrictions. The Irish Championship on 29th and 30th August was postponed till the 19th and 20th September, but more of this anon.

In the Wicklow Mountains

The Irish red and white open stake took place in the Wicklow mountains in the view of the Sugarloaf. Judged by Aidan Dunne and Jason Benson the winner was Jim Crotty's liver and white pointer Brackbawn Thunder ahead of Jim Sheridan's Irish red and white setter FTCh Craigrua Devin. A warm day with a dry breeze, dogs showed their abilities with some strong performances throughout.

The next day also in the Wicklow mountains, being the re-scheduled Irish pointer club open stake. Judged by Jim Crotty and Anthony Mulhall, there were some excellent there was some opportunities on grouse but not taken. The winner was Hugh Brady's Irish setter Ballydavid The Morrigan with an excellent award on grouse.

The following weekend of 12th September, the circuit moved to the beautiful Cut, which is part of the Slieve Bloom National Parks. Judged by Aidan Dunne, Larry Quinn and Sean Hogan, birds initially proved elusive, however in the second round, on the sunny side of the mountain, some good dog work followed. The winner was Jim Crotty's pointer dog Brackbawn Thunder, this win making him a field trial champion. Jim is one of an exclusive club having handled champions in both Irish setters and English pointers. Second place and also excellent was Joan McGillicuddy's



Jim Crotty with his pointers Wildfield Highlander and Brackbawn Thunder.



Paraig Kiely's FTCh Ballinahemmy Rose was the most stylish dog of Day 1 of the Irish Championship.

FTCh Ballydavid Gaelforce of the Kingdom with third place to Pat Reape's FTCh Ballinahemmy Mike. The next day was the Irish Red & White setter breed stake in Wicklow. While a small entry, there were some very good dogs. The winner was Ray Monroe's FTCh Rosie Jim with second to his other dog Craigrua Hardy.

The Irish Championship

The re-scheduled Irish Championship took place and great credit for the agility of the Officers to be able to run it at short notice, particularly secretaries Maeve Waters, Christy Davitt and Chairman Michael Houston. With some withdrawals, a significantly smaller number than normal went to post being 31 dogs rather than the usual 50 dogs. Judged by Hugh Brady, Kieran Walsh and Anthony Mulhall, all on their third time judging this most prestigious stake.

As was the trend this year, the first day of the championship, birds did not oblige and just one dog carried a find

into the second day. There were some strong performances with most stylish dog going to Paraig Kiely's Irish setter FTCh Ballinahemmy Rose. After the second round of nine and a half brace, birds were still not obliging and some opportunities were not seized.

The highlight of this round and indeed the run of the championship was the brace of Mark Adams' Ballydavid Spitfire and Alan Bartley's Ballinahemmy Pretty Bell who produced a run that will live long in the memory of those that witnessed it. A further seven and a half brace were called for the third round and Maeve Waters Irish setter Blackstairs Tess had a wonderful find on a covey of grouse.

In the next brace, Mark Adams' Irish setter FTCh Ballydavid Spitfire added to his credentials with some lovely work ultimately producing a covey of grouse. Pat Reape's FTCh Ballinahemmy Mike, handled by Alan Bartley, was found on the extreme left, holding firm before producing his birds. Not to be undone, Alan Bartley's

impressive Ballinahemmy Pretty Bell produced birds at the end of her third-round run. The penultimate brace produced a joint find for Aidan Dunne's FTCh Maodhog Feochadan and Ray O'Dwyer's Sheantullagh Bolt. A beer dog (a dog with no interest left in the trial) was called in to run with Ger Devine's bye dog to finish this round.

An extension to the third round was called for one brace of dogs namely Jim Sheridan's excellent FTCh Craigrua Devin and last year's winner Alan Bartley's FTCh Lisduvoge Tyson. There was no further excitement so the judges went into conclave to consider their position. The winner was announced as Mark Adams Ballydavid Spitfire who now also gained the title of International FTCh. Second place was Maeve Waters Irish setter Blackstairs Tess, who gained her FTCh status. Third was Aidan Dunne's FTCh Maodhog Feochadan, who also won most stylish Irish setter and Best young dog and reserve to previous championship winner, Pat Reape's



Ballymena's Mark Adams with International FTCh Ballydavid Spitfire winner of the 62nd Irish Championship in Wicklow.

FTCh Ballinahemmy Mike. Certificates of Merits were awarded to Alan Bartley's Irish setter Ballinahemmy Pretty Bell and Ray O'Dwyer's Sheantullagh Bolt. This concluded an excellent Irish championship, certainly the best that I have judged.

The Connaught field trial club open stake on grouse was held in Kilchreest under judges Christy Davitt and Alan Bartley. Autumnal weather and a decent breeze made for almost ideal conditions where game was supplied through both grouse and snipe. Autumnal weather being summer in the sun and winter in the cold. Loughrea lake glistened on one side of the hill, while the extremely flat plains of Galway allowed visibility as far as Galway Bay and further to the Atlantic Ocean. A lot of ground was covered over three energy sapping rounds with a full set of awards being announced. An extension to the third round was held with David Bell's Irish setter Sheemel Dream and Jim Crotty's

pointer Wildfield Highlander.

The winner was Joan McGillicuddy's FTCh (Snipe Ch) Ballydavid Gaelforce of the Kingdom who became a Snipe champion to add to her FTCH status. Second award was to Jim Crotty's pointer FTCh Brackbawn Thunder. Hugh Brady's Irish setter in third and Joe O'Sullivan's Gardenfield Rena in fourth. All dogs were graded excellent. The following days Cill Dara field trial was cancelled.

Beet trials are traditional in Autumn and the Irish Pointer club return annually to Athy in the county of Kildare. The open stake yielded no awards due to the elusive nature of wild pheasants in sugar beet though best pointer of the day was to Pat Dooley's Raigmore Sirocco. Other dogs to impress were Pat Rohan's exciting young liver and white pointer Nas na Riogh.

The following day was the breed stake and despite some chances there

were no awards. The English setter clubs open stake in the Wicklow mountains was cancelled due to inclement weather conditions on the morning.

As I write, with Dublin and Donegal in Level 3 restrictions for the last fortnight, the entire of the Republic of Ireland was moved to Level 3 restrictions. This in effect has suspended the remainder of the season. The difficult but inevitable decision was made to cancel the proposed trials in Ulster also.

Many thanks to those behind the scenes who allowed at least part of our calendar to proceed. It was a lost year for many, but memorable for some.

The vacuum of few trials this year is being filled. People merge into new and busy routines of family life and other interests. Hopefully, by Spring 2021 things will have markedly moved on for all of us and we will see familiar faces again. Till then stay safe.

The Back Page

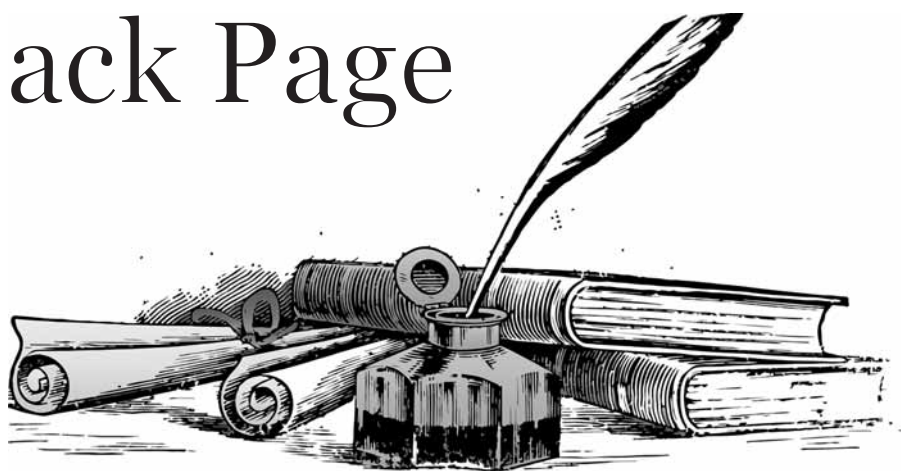
Our response to the virus has been to 'up our game' and adopt a global focus hence the launch of this new 'Back Page' to support our main magazine editorial and the Country News section of the virtual game fair. We thank Derek Fanning for doing an excellent job taking over from Philip Lawton as ROI editor, and he will continue being a contributor. This 'Back Page' will feature guest editors from all over the world, including Ireland. We can confirm there are no plans to invite Chris Packham to be one of our guests!

There are many reasons why the Great Game Fairs of Ireland has been such a successful and long lasting brand over 41 years for the Game Fairs and 35 years for the magazine but arguably the two major ones are the commitment of the team and the ability to innovate and move with the times.

It was the Great Game Fairs of Ireland team who brought Ireland the first sustainable Game Fair and the most read ever and arguably the best quality ever Irish Country Sports magazine. And of course the team also took the magazine to a massive online audience through the FREE to READ online version at www.countrysportsandcountrylife.com.

However when Covid 19 restrictions caused the postponement of the Game Fair until 26/27 June 2021, the GGF team launched possibly their most innovative project yet, THE VIRTUAL GAME FAIR www.thevirtualgamefair.com. This was designed not simply to be a short term fix to replace the postponed fair at Shanes Castle, but a new innovative resource for country sports enthusiasts and hard pressed companies supplying the country sports market.

It is often said that 'imitation is the sincerest form of flattery' and others have followed us into the 'virtual' promotion of the country sports market. We wish them well but as usual the



GGF of Ireland team consider they offer the premium package for visitors and exhibitors.

Since most of our trade customers had their businesses adversely affected by Covid we decided that THE VIRTUALGAME FAIR should be used to help them through the crisis and thus we decided to subsidise the trade exhibitors at the event by making the cost of exhibiting a nominal amount redeemable against their stand at the 2021 Game Fair or advertising in the magazine.

We also decided that not only 'entry' to the Virtual Game Fair be free to country sports enthusiasts but that entry to the wide range of competitions would also be FREE or for club funds or good causes. We, ourselves, invested in several of the prizes and we are grateful to those exhibitors and advertisers who supported us with other valuable prizes. As can be seen from the competition reports, those that have taken place have been very well supported and there are many more scheduled throughout the year. If your company would like to sponsor an event we have several reciprocal promotional offers.

Apart from virtual competitions and attractions the team will hopefully be covering more live events either in person or by featuring submitted videos e.g. Living History Ireland put on a couple of 2021 preview events covered by Mike Lindsay <https://www.thevirtualgamefair.com/living-history-at-the-great-game-fairs-of-ireland/>

The VIRTUAL GAME FAIR

exhibitors area is a market place brimming with country sports and living products and many of the exhibitors have special seasonal offers plus in our bargain basement area we highlight just some of these bargains that 'caught our eye'. There are many more throughout the site.

So far THE VIRTUAL GAME FAIR has been a success being featured in mainstream and country sports media including the BBC's 'Your Place and Mine' & Fieldsports Channel etc It has and is attracting a huge number of visitors from all over the world including serious traffic from the UK, US, Germany, Russia, Australia and Canada. It is well on target to surpass our original target of 150,000 visitors.

Now we, at the Great Game Fairs of Ireland, consider we have 'gone the extra mile' in providing Irish country sports enthusiasts and increasingly thousands of fellow enthusiasts throughout the world TWO UNIQUE FREE resources in www.countrysportsandcountrylife.com and www.thevirtualgamefair.com. This has only been made possible through the support of our magazine advertisers, most of the main country sports organisations and game fair exhibitors. When you are purchasing Christmas presents or looking for a staycation or break why not 'give them a shout'. By helping them survive and prosper, you will help us continue to provide these important FREE countryside resources and to promote and protect the sports we all love.

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