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EDITOR'S LETTER

After a fast-moving and seismic few months in the political world it's good to be on the surer ground of our sporting seasons in the lead up to Christmas. Sorry to mention the 'C' word, but our gift and card collection features on p.12–13 and is a great way to support our work into 2017 (and beyond).

In addition to buying with us, please support us in other ways by attending our exclusive Hamish Mackie exhibition viewing in London (p.34) or one of our big Race Days – Cheltenham (p.11), Aintree and Ffos Las (p.47) are all in prospect.

This is also our annual report issue so please turn to p.9 for our report and accounts.

Sporting features abound this issue, with our moorlands providing the backdrop to both the Bettie Town Glenprosen Challenge (p.15) a shoot walk for ramblers (p.26). We also find out more about the Dess Estate in Aberdeenshire (p.44), and are grateful to busy lady Gun and shooting entrepreneur Victoria Knowles-Lacks, whose charisma is evident on p.48.

Former hunt saboteur Miles Cooper explains why the Hunting Act must be repealed (p.18), while Catherine Austen enjoys a day with the Heythrop (p.20) and Georgie Archer marvels at the 'show of shows', the Festival of Hunting (p.30).

Elsewhere we feature Bill Wiggin MP's love of Hereford cattle (p.23), our former chairman John Jackson writes of his smallholding (p.28), BT outlines its broadband plans (p.33), and Jim Barrington's 'Dogs with jobs' strand explores how dogs are being used to sniff out dry rot (p.36).

A grouse recipe, Fishing 4 Schools update, letters and events complete the issue. I wish you a sporting season.

Jill Grieve, Editor
Follow me on Twitter @Cajilly

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The Festival of Hunting

Photo: by Amy at www.hurworth-photos.co.uk

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COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE

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Review

Round-up of the stories that matter to you

POLITICS

Working hard on your behalf

The political team updates you on the many issues facing the countryside at the moment

The EU referendum may have disturbed the political landscape, but we remain focused on the issues that matter and are using every opportunity at Westminster and the devolved administrations to defend and promote the interests of rural communities.

The Government's Policing and Crime Bill is now being considered by the House of Lords and we are hopeful that some of the improvements to firearms law, proposed by Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP in the Commons, will be taken forward by the Government. We are also hopeful that the new Ministerial team in the Home Office will reconsider the proposal by Sir Edward Garnier MP to make it easier for police officers to remove face coverings from protestors.

Defra are expected to review a number of important codes of practice including the welfare of dogs, and gamebirds reared for

sporting purposes, and we will be working closely with the Department in these processes. We are also expecting the outcome of a review into dog breeding legislation.

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee has concluded its inquiry into animal welfare and is expected to report in October. This has included an examination of the RSPCA's role in enforcement of animal welfare laws. We have highlighted the potential conflict of interest between the Society's charitable, campaigning, investigatory and prosecution roles, and are hopeful that this will be reflected in the Committee's recommendations. The Committee is also looking into rural tourism and forestry management and we will be highlighting the role and importance of country sports in these two areas.

We have submitted evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee's inquiry into the future of the natural environment after the EU referendum and will be working closely with Defra and the new Department for Exiting the EU to set out the rural issues that must be considered during the exit negotiations.

This autumn we will once again be attending the main party conferences. Our meetings at the conferences will be on digital exclusion and panelists will outline what needs to be done to promote internet skills in the countryside. At the Conservative Party Conference, we will also be asking a second group of panelists to consider whether the BBC delivers for the countryside. Plenty to look forward to.



Welcome from our Chief Executive



We are living in interesting times, where we are assured that 'Brexit means Brexit' but don't necessarily know what that means.

In this limbo phase the Countryside Alliance is working to ensure that the voice of rural Britain continues to be heard, especially on shooting and conservation.

The opportunities Brexit may bring to the UK are numerous, and broader issues on which we have campaigned, including honest food labelling and a cut in VAT on home improvements, may be a step closer in time. Meantime, I encourage everyone, as I always will, to buy British and support our farmers. It is a period of uncertainty for them and we must show them that we are right behind them.

“Brexit means Brexit’ but we don’t necessarily know what that means’.

We have a busy autumn ahead with party conferences, fundraisers, our Rural Oscars and much more. I thank you for your continued support and remind you that the Countryside Alliance will be celebrating 20 years of operation in 2017. We will be marking that anniversary and will be asking you to contribute in various ways.

At the time of going to press, the sad news has been reported that our vice president, His Grace the Duke of Westminster, has passed away aged only 64. A stalwart of our organisation in good times and bad, he has long been renowned as a passionate countryman, and we send our very best wishes to his family and friends. We will remember him more fully in a future issue.

Tim Bonner

Chief Executive

Follow Tim on Twitter

@CA_TimB

COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE

OUR ANNUAL REPORT, ACCOUNTS AND BALLOT FORM ARE IN THIS ISSUE, TURN TO P9

SHOOTING

Securing the future of gamekeeping

A Countryside Alliance proposal for a new gamekeeping qualification has been approved by the Department of Business, Industry and Skills (BIS) and we are setting up a 'trailblazer' group to work with other organisations and employers to develop an apprenticeship course for new underkeepers. The proposal was supported by 20 shooting estates.

The Alliance acted after learning the current system of apprenticeships will end in 2020, with no guarantee that gamekeeping programmes will be part of the new system of qualifications.

Countryside Alliance head of shooting campaigns Liam Stokes, a former lecturer in gamekeeping, said: "It is vital for the future of



shooting that we have a high quality apprenticeship to help young people get their start. Getting involved in this trailblazer group is a way for employers to ensure that the new apprenticeship reflects the skills they want their gamekeepers to have. There are some really exciting opportunities to direct funding towards the training we feel trainees really need."

We are now calling on anyone who would like to join the underkeeper's trailblazer group and support the development of this crucial qualification to get in touch. If your shoot or organisation would like to be involved email liam-stokes@countryside-alliance.org

The Quarter

OUR HIGHLIGHTS OF THE PAST THREE MONTHS

JUNE

● **Olympic Gold medal cyclist turned jockey Victoria Pendleton** won the charity race at our Newmarket Countryside Race Day. Newly elected police and crime commissioner for Kent, Matthew Scott, announced a £39,000 of new funding to address the backlog in firearms licensing. Open Farm Sunday was a national success as farms throughout the country opened their gates to the public.



JULY

● **A new brochure, 'The value of grouse moor management'**, was produced by us in conjunction with the NGO to publicise the importance of heather moorland managed for grouse shooting. The brochure boosted a live display at the Great Yorkshire Show.

Casting for Recovery UK & Ireland, The Countryside Alliance Foundation's fly fishing project for ladies with breast cancer, returned to Kimbridge on the Test in Hampshire.



AUGUST

FISHING ● **The Countryside Alliance Foundation's Fishing 4 Schools (F4S)** project and Hadlow College in Kent received a £5,000 grant from the Angling Trust to improve facilities for disabled fishers and train young instructors at the college's Grove Farm Fishery. Also this month, the Countryside Alliance attended the first ever Countryfile Live, which took place at Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire.

SHOOTING

New season shooting badges and sweepstake cards now available

This season's shooting badges are available now, this year in a dark blue. The badges are available in two types – the £100 season badge in solid colour, and the £15 supporter badge in camouflage. Our new season sweepstake card takes up the colour scheme with illustrations of game birds by Ben Hoskyns.

The badges and sweepstake cards are once again brought to you by Pol Roger Champagne and a bottle will be sent to all who raise £1,000 for the campaign and every £1,000 thereafter. To order your badges and sweepstake cards please visit www.countryside-alliance.org or contact caroline-brough@countryside-alliance.org or 0207 840 9298.



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SHOOTING

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Preparation for the shooting season this autumn and winter is well underway, and your gundog is key to it being a successful one. To help the season run smoothly, it's important to protect your gundog from unexpected illnesses and injuries. This is where insurance comes in, and we believe it's an essential part of being a responsible gundog owner.

If the worst happens, and your gundog gets ill or injured, focussing on their health is your main concern, without having to worry about the cost of veterinary fees. Gundog insurance makes this possible, by protecting both your dog and your finances.

When deciding which pet insurance to get, it's important to consider what the policy covers. Is it limited by time or the amount claimed, and of course does it cover gundog related activities? Remember that not all pet insurance is the

same, so don't shop around on price alone!

Petplan® is the UK's No.1 pet insurer, and provides insurance for working dogs exclusively through us, and you'll get 10 per cent discount! Petplan®'s cover includes dogs being used in connection with the recreational activities of game shooting, stalking, gundog working, and training, including beating and picking up. This means you can be confident that your gundog is protected at work and at home.

To find out more about insuring your gundog, please visit our website and click on 'Gundog Insurance' under 'Membership' (www.countryside-alliance.org/membership/gundog-insurance/), or speak to Petplan® directly by calling 0330 102 1900 and quoting CAWEB.

Terms, conditions and excesses apply and may be varied on renewal. Petplan® is a trading name of Pet Plan Limited and Allianz Insurance plc.



WILDLIFE

Natural England grants licence for buzzard control

The Countryside Alliance welcomed the decision by Natural England in August to grant the licence for the control of up to 10 buzzards to prevent serious damage to young pheasants. Like all wild birds, they are protected by law, but can also be controlled under licence for certain well-defined purposes. They have, for example, been shot at UK airports for many years. The law allows for licences to be granted, and every year hundreds are issued to a wide range of species, many of them much less common than the buzzard. A licence cannot be issued if it will harm the population of that species. Buzzards can cause severe economic damage through preying on young pheasants and we support gamekeepers being allowed this management tool.

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COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE

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2015 ANNUAL REPORT



The Annual General Meeting of the Countryside Alliance will take place on Tuesday October 18 at 11am in the Gascoigne Suite, the Union Jack Club, Sandell Street, London, SE1 8UJ.

This report contains instructions and postal ballot forms by which you may

approve our accounts. Completed ballots must be returned to the Independent Scrutineer, Electoral Reform Services, London, N81 1ER by Midnight on October 7, 2016. You can vote online at www.ersvotes.com/ca16 and this will close at the same time as the postal ballot.

You will need your membership number which is on your membership card, on the polywrap enclosing this mailing or via our membership team on 0207 840 9300. Further, this report includes profiles of two new board members who have been elected unopposed.

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD (P2) EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN'S REPORT (P3) FINANCIAL INFORMATION (P4) BOARD PROFILES (P5)

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

Simon Hart MP thanks his colleagues for their loyal and staunch support and touches on how the digital age is influencing the work of the Countryside Alliance



Having taken on the role of Chairman in October 2015 my first duty is to thank Lord Mancroft and Kate Hoey MP who have both undertaken this post with great energy over the last few years. I am also very grateful to Sir Barney White-Spunner for guiding the organisation through his term of office. Barney stepped down as Executive Chairman in the autumn and a new Chief Executive, former Campaigns head Tim Bonner, took charge. Having worked closely with Tim when I was Chief Executive

from 2003 until 2010, I look forward to renewing that partnership with him on our diverse campaigning, fundraising and membership ventures. I also thank our President, Baroness Mallalieu, for her loyal and staunch support of our work come what may.

Working on our core campaigns is now done rather differently to previous years. In a digital age much of our campaigning, engagement and reach is online, meaning we have restructured our staffing in order both to save funds and to deploy resources where they can do most good. We have also moved into more practical premises in Vauxhall, leaving the Old Town Hall after 18 action-packed years.

Championing those who love the countryside, regardless of age and location, remains our mission and as we further develop our digital offering, with the ability to analyse who our members are, what you enjoy and what you want, we will be even better placed to serve your needs.

SIMON HART MP
Chairman

LIST OF BOARD MEMBERS IN 2015

President Baroness Mallalieu QC
Vice President Baroness Golding
Vice President Duke of Westminster
KG CB CVO OBETD CD DL

Chairman Simon Hart MP
Deputy Chairman Lord Mancroft
Chief Executive Tim Bonner

Elected: Tim Vestey
Jamie Foster
Johnnie Arkwright
Lizzie Pinney

Appointed: David Harrel
Charles McVeigh
Bill Tyrwhitt-Drake
Guy Portwin
Paul Dunn

TCAF Chairman Nick Bannister





Photography: by Emma Edgar



CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Tim Bonner believes we have every reason to feel optimistic that we are now communicating with an ever wider group of people.

I have been proud to work for Simon Hart MP, Kate Hoey MP, Lord Mancroft and Sir Barney White-Spunner as they led the Countryside Alliance to this point, and look forward to working with Simon and with our President, Baroness Mallalieu, in these exciting, challenging but overall optimistic times.

The Alliance always walks a line between the old and the new. We stand for the future of rural communities, for tradition and for heritage, but we are also aware that to survive we must adapt and embrace new ways of operating.

We will always stand up for the rural way of life but are also incredibly proud of our charitable projects such as Casting for Recovery and Fishing for Schools. The Rural Oscars had their tenth anniversary in 2015 while we are also well known for our vital work such as on broadband and digital engagement. All of these issues, every piece of the rural jigsaw, need us to engage with those who love us, those

who hate us, those who have never even heard of us and those in political and media spheres who can help advance our work. The way to engage broadly is now not just through the traditional media (although this magazine remains a popular membership benefit), but also online. Our website and social media are an important shop window while our e-campaigns can engage many times the numbers we would have hoped for a decade ago while trying to make our voices heard.

We have every reason to feel optimistic that we are now communicating with an ever wider group of people. I thank you for your support thus far and welcome our new members. This is your organisation. Always feel free to tell us what you think we should be doing and I look forward to continuing to work hard on your behalf.

TIM BONNER
Chief Executive



FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Summary Income and Expenditure Accounts, Balance Sheet and Cashflow Statement for 2015.

A full set of the financial statements including the auditor's report are presented on our website at www.countryside-alliance.org

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT for the year ended 31 December 2015

| | 2015 (£) | 2014 (£) |
|--|------------------|------------------|
| Income | | |
| Subscriptions | 3,230,267 | 3,260,367 |
| Fundraising | 1,090,198 | 1,070,692 |
| Donations | 243,732 | 425,625 |
| TOTAL | 4,564,197 | 4,756,684 |
| Expenditure | | |
| Campaigning expenditure | 2,680,989 | 2,739,547 |
| Administration and finance | 386,859 | 390,357 |
| Fundraising and commercial expenditure | 430,747 | 479,580 |
| Membership and insurance benefits | 960,227 | 1,149,997 |
| TOTAL | 4,458,822 | 4,759,481 |
| Surplus for the year | 105,375 | (2,797) |

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION at 31 December 2015

| | 2015 (£) | 2014 (£) |
|---|------------------|------------------|
| Non-current assets | | |
| Property, plant and equipment | 65,997 | 42,810 |
| Investments | 5,100 | 5,100 |
| | 71,097 | 47,910 |
| Current assets | | |
| Inventories | 19,046 | 11,762 |
| Trade and other receivables | 296,664 | 602,881 |
| Cash and cash equivalents | 622,703 | 258,256 |
| | 938,413 | 872,899 |
| Current liabilities | (955,166) | (869,185) |
| Net current (liabilities) / assets | (16,753) | 3,714 |
| Total assets less current (liabilities) | 54,344 | 51,624 |
| Non-current liabilities | 297,300 | 399,955 |
| Income & expenditure account | (242,956) | (348,331) |
| | 54,344 | 51,624 |

CASHFLOW STATEMENT for the year ended 31 December 2015

| | 2015 (£) | 2014 (£) |
|---|------------------|------------------|
| Reconciliation of operating surplus / (deficit) to net cash inflow from operating activities | | |
| Operating surplus / (deficit) | 105,375 | (2,797) |
| Investments and servicing of finance | 30,172 | 36,383 |
| Waiver of loan | - | (120,000) |
| Depreciation charges | 26,501 | 22,141 |
| (Increase) in inventory | (7,284) | (2,893) |
| Decrease / (increase) in receivables | 306,217 | (18,257) |
| (Decrease) / increase in payables | (674) | 16,648 |
| Net cash inflow / (outflow) from operating activities | 460,307 | (68,775) |
| CASHFLOW STATEMENT | | |
| Net cash inflow / (outflow) from operating activities | 460,307 | (68,775) |
| Returns on investments and servicing of finance | | |
| Interest paid | (30,172) | (36,382) |
| Capital expenditure | | |
| Payment to acquire tangible fixed assets | (49,688) | (21,756) |
| Financing | | |
| (Decrease) in loans | (16,000) | (23,000) |
| Increase / (decrease) in cash in year | 364,447 | (149,913) |
| Reconciliation of net cash flow to movement in net debt | | |
| Increase / (decrease) in cash in year | 364,447 | (149,913) |
| Non-cash transactions | - | 120,000 |
| Cash flows from financing | 16,000 | 23,000 |
| Net debt at 1 January 2015 | (532,744) | (525,831) |
| Net debt as at 31 December 2015 | (152,297) | (532,744) |

Analysis of changes in net debt

| | At 31/12/2014 | Cash flow | Non-cash | At 31/12/2015 |
|---------------------------|------------------|----------------|-----------|------------------|
| Cash at bank & in hand | 258,256 | 364,447 | - | 622,703 |
| Loans due within one year | (415,000) | 15,000 | (100,000) | (500,000) |
| Loans due after one year | (376,000) | 1,000 | 100,000 | (275,000) |
| Net debt | (532,744) | 380,447 | - | (152,297) |



Photo: Verity Johnson Photography - www.verityjohnson.co.uk

BOARD ELECTION PROFILES

Two new board members, Richard Fry and Andrew Ogg, met the qualifying requirements and as such have been elected unopposed.

ANDREW OGG, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE



Andrew is a whipper-in, trail-layer and treasurer of the East Lincs Bassets. He hunts mounted with several Lincolnshire/Midlands packs and is also a member of a local rifle-range, shooting in large- and small-bore competitions. Other interests include military history and astronomy.

Andrew has been a Countryside Alliance Member since 1983 and is a former committee member of North & Mid Lincolnshire and South Lincolnshire Committees. As a volunteer he helped on show stands; talked to TV and press media and commented on accounting and charity law issues.

A self-employed chartered accountant, Andrew works with a wide range of rural clients. He has a zoology degree from Durham University and qualified as a chartered accountant in 1992 with subsequent experience in business and practice.

Andrew is a former member of his village Parish Council and has worked for Vote OK at constituency level from 2005 and as director for Lincolnshire from 2014.

RICHARD FRY, DORSET



Richard is a subscriber to the Blackmore & Sparkford Vale Hunt and hunts on a regular basis. He previously hunted with the Cattistock Hunt and has hunted continuously for over 30 years along with his wife and four children. As well as hunting, Richard stalks in Scotland and ran a pheasant shoot on his Dorset land. He farms 400 acres, mainly beef cattle. Part of the farm is organic and entered into the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme. He is involved in National Hunt racing as a Director of Harry Fry Racing Ltd and owner of racehorses under rules and point-to-point racing. Richard is also the owner of several eventers ridden by daughter Rosie Fry.

Also a member of the CLA and GWCT amongst other organisations, Richard has been Chairman of the Dorset and South West Wilts Committee since 2010 but has been involved with the Alliance for over 20 years. As Chairman of the CA point-to-point at Badbury Rings for several years, he raised an average of £20,000 each year. Richard has also helped raise considerable sums for the Alliance by chairing the committees for our Present Finder Ball and Minterne Midsummer Blast. In 2014 Richard was awarded the Goodson-Wickes Trophy for services to the Countryside Alliance.



To vote online please go to
www.ersvotes.com/ca16

POSTAL BALLOT AND PROXY

I (please print)
 hereby case my vote or appoint the Chairman as my proxy
 to cast my vote at the Annual General Meeting of the
 Countryside Alliance to be held at 11am on October 18 in
 the Gascoigne Suite, the Union Jack Club, Sandell Street,
 London, SE1 8UJ.

(Please vote by marking with a cross (X) in the box below)

1 To approve the Report and Accounts of the
 Countryside Alliance for the year ended 31st
 December 2015.

Approve Disapprove Proxy

2 To appoint Messrs Saffery Champness of Red
 Lion Street, London, WC1R 4GB as Auditors of the
 Countryside Alliance

Approve Disapprove Proxy

Signature

Date

Membership Number

COMPLETED BALLOTS MUST BE RETURNED TO: THE
 INDEPENDENT SCRUTINEER, ELECTORAL REFORM SERVICES,
 LONDON, N81 1ER BY MIDNIGHT ON OCTOBER 7 2016.



To vote online please go to
www.ersvotes.com/ca16

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● VOTING INSTRUCTIONS FOR POSTAL & ONLINE BALLOT AND PROXY FORM

To cast your vote on the resolutions you must put a cross (x) in either the box marked Approve or in the box marked Disapprove. To appoint the Chairman as your proxy you must put a cross (x) in the box marked Proxy. Completed ballots must be returned to the Independent Scrutineer at Electoral Reform Services, London, N81 1ER by midnight on October 7 2016. If you appoint the Chairman as your proxy and do not mark either the Approve or Disapprove box, your Chairman will cast your vote in favour of the resolution.

If you would prefer to vote online, you can visit the website www.ersvotes.com/ca16. You will need your membership number

which is printed on your membership card or alternatively please call the membership team on 0207 840 9300.

Spoiled, multiple or late ballots and proxies will be disregarded. Once received by the Independent Scrutineer all postal ballots are irrevocable. PLEASE BE SURE TO PRINT OR TYPE YOUR NAME AT THE TOP AND SIGN, DATE AND INCLUDE YOUR MEMBERSHIP NUMBER AT THE BOTTOM OF THE BALLOT CARD TO ALLOW THE INDEPENDENT SCRUTINEER TO CONFIRM YOUR VOTES. Your membership number can be found on your membership card. If you have mislaid your card or are unable to locate it, please contact our membership team on **0207 840 9300**.



POLITICS

New faces at Defra

David Cameron's resignation in July was immediately followed by the Queen appointing Theresa May MP as Prime Minister. Mrs May wasted no time in making major changes to the Government, including the almost immediate removal of George Osborne MP as Chancellor who has been replaced by Philip Hammond MP. Boris Johnson MP has been appointed Foreign Secretary and Amber Rudd MP moves to the Home Office.

After two years at Defra, Liz Truss MP has become Secretary of State for Justice and Lord Chancellor. Andrea Leadsom MP has been appointed as the new Secretary of State for Environment, Food

and Rural Affairs (Defra). Mrs Leadsom was elected for South Northamptonshire in 2010 and has publicly stated her support for country sports. She was a key Brexiteer and was one of the last two candidates for the Conservative Party leadership but stepped down, resulting in Theresa May being elected uncontested. She is strongly against onshore wind farms and HS2.

Therese Coffey, MP for Suffolk Coastal since 2010, has been appointed Parliamentary Under Secretary of State. She will be responsible for hunting and shooting as well as water and flooding. George Eustice MP remains as Defra Minister of State, in charge of farming,

Lord Gardiner of Kimble, Deputy Chief Executive of the Countryside Alliance until 2010 and most recently Defra spokesman in the Lords has been promoted to Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at Defra. He will be responsible for all DEFRA business in the House of Lords in addition to animal welfare biosecurity strategy, commercial projects, landscape and climate change adaptation.

The Countryside Alliance's political team looks forward to continuing to work closely with the Department.



New Environment Secretary Andrea Leadsom

Countryside comes to life at the Welsh Assembly

Assembly Members and guests were treated to a day in the countryside in late June as the Countryside Alliance showcased some of its campaigns in the heart of the Senedd. The event was sponsored by Assembly Members Andrew R T Davies, Leader of the Welsh Conservatives; Llyr Gruffydd, Plaid Cymru; David Rees, Labour; Kirsty Williams, Liberal Democrats and Neil Hamilton of UKIP. With important



Rachel is pictured with Sir Gareth Edwards launching "Shooting in Wales"

cross party support the day showcased the Countryside Alliance's campaigns from digital communication to rural services, rural communities, food and farming and wildlife management. It also featured the Countryside Alliance's campaign opposing open access to land and water whilst fully supporting improved access for the health and well-being of the nation.

Assembly Members were able to meet exhibitors who work with the Countryside Alliance on the many cross party groups of which we are members, including the Deer Initiative, the GWCT and the NGO. The Countryside Alliance was also joined by Sir Gareth Edwards to launch "Shooting in Wales – for Countryside and Community" which demonstrates the value that shooting brings in terms of conservation, well-being and its contribution to the economy in Wales, which is in excess of £74 million. Guests were also treated to a sumptuous Game to Eat cooking demonstration by Jason Lloyd of



Charlton House catering who served up roe deer and Thai rabbit with coconut curry which was enjoyed by all.

The Countryside Alliance Foundation was also well represented by Casting for Recovery UK & Ireland, the fly fishing therapy project for ladies with breast cancer, as well as Fishing for Schools, which was hosted at the Assembly by the pupils of Mounton House, Monmouthshire.

Rachel Evans, CA Director for Wales said: "This has been a fantastic opportunity to engage with so many Assembly Members and tell them about some of the key issues facing the countryside. One in three people live in a rural area and it is important that their voice is heard at the Assembly. I very much look forward to working with all the Assembly Members to promote our countryside and rising to the challenges that I am sure will be presented to us."

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Ready for the Cheltenham roar!

➔ Put Friday, November 11 in your diary, our popular Cheltenham Countryside Day will be better than ever this year.



Photo: <http://www.sarahfarnsworth.co.uk>

The popular Countryside Day at Cheltenham on Friday, November 11, will, as always, raise the curtain on the three day Open Meeting and the jumps season itself. In 2016, the day will raise funds for the Countryside Alliance (CA) and the Injured Jockeys Fund. Gates will open at 10:30am with the first race at 1:05pm, and everyone attending is reminded that the Armistice Day silence will be observed at 11am.

The 2015 event was a record day,



Charlotte Dujardin gave AP McCoy a dressage lesson in 2015

raising £59,000 for Equestrian Team Great Britain ahead of the Rio Olympics and Paralympics and over £100,000 for The Countryside Alliance Foundation.

Race-goers were treated to a unique demonstration as racing met dressage, when AP McCoy took the reins of the Grand Prix dressage horse Barolo, under the careful tutelage of (now double) Olympic champion Charlotte Dujardin. Further fundraising activities on the day saw eventing athletes Tina Cook, Izzy Taylor and Kitty King ride out onto the course as part of the Hound Parade, with a number of auctions and fundraising activities organised by the CA taking place throughout the day.

This year, top-class racing, Christmas shopping, the spine-tingling hound parade, the stallion parade and a silent auction will all be part of the fun on the day. Local hunts will parade on the course after the second race and there will be six high-quality races. The feature event will be, as ever, the Glenfarclas Cross

Country Chase over the twists and turns of Cheltenham's unique cross country course. CA members will be able to enjoy tea and drinks in our members' area and we will also be selling our popular Christmas cards and gifts as Christmas shopping gets underway in earnest. Our lunch and auction has already sold out, with some incredible lots hoping to raise valuable funds for the CA and the Injured Jockeys Fund.

The annual CA Morgan prize draw will take place on the day, with one lucky ticket buyer winning a classic car - worth £32,000 - built to their own specifications. Tickets are still available from the CA website, priced at £50 per ticket www.countryside-alliance.org/shop/morgan-prize-draw

For tickets to the Countryside Day, go to Cheltenham Racecourse's website www.cheltenham.co.uk



Photo: <http://www.sarahfarnsworth.co.uk>

Shop with the Countryside Alliance this Christmas

→ The Countryside Alliance's Christmas card and gift collection is now available so please show your support this festive season...



Christmas cards

1 'His Old Demesne' by Sir Alfred Munnings

Pack of 10 Christmas cards depicting a gentlemen and two ladies taking a break whilst out hunting. A lovely scene of yesteryear.

Text: 'With Best Wishes for Christmas and the New Year'

Card width x height - 8.25" x 5.9"

£6.98

2 'Supper on the Sledge' by Jonathon Walker

Pack of 10 illustrated Christmas cards depicting a fox carrying his goose supper on a sledge.

Text: 'With Best Wishes for Christmas and the New Year'

Card width x height - 6.1" x 4.3"

£4.99

3 'Winter Flush' by John Trickett

Pack of 10 Christmas cards depicting a beautiful scene of a woodcock and spaniel in the snow.

Text: 'With Best Wishes for Christmas and the New Year'

Card width x height - 6" x 8.25"

£6.98

4 'Huntsman and Hounds in the Snow' by Katie Scorgie

Pack of 10 Christmas cards depicting a huntsman and his hounds in the snow - a wonderful hand-painted scene.

Text: 'With Best Wishes for Christmas and the New Year'

Card width x height - 6.5" x 4.7"

£5.99

5 'Cock Up!' by John Trickett

Pack of 10 Christmas cards depicting a cock pheasant breaking cover in the snow.

Text: 'With Best Wishes for Christmas and the New Year'

Card width x height - 4.7" x 6.5"

£5.99

6 'Frosty Whiskers' by Annabel Pope

Pack of 10 Christmas cards with illustrations of a brown hare in the snow.

Text: 'With Best Wishes for Christmas and the New Year'

Card width x height - 4.7" x 6.5"

£6.98

7 'Toutes Directions' by Imogen Mann

Pack of 10 Christmas cards of six delicately painted geese.

Text: 'With Best Wishes for Christmas and the New Year'

Card width x height - 6.5" x 4.7"

£5.99

8 'Rough with the Smooth' by Debbie Harris

Pack of 10 Christmas cards with two beautifully painted hounds.

Text: 'With Best Wishes for Christmas and the New Year'

Card width x height - 5.1" x 5.1"

£4.99



All of these products are found at
SHOP.COUNTRYSIDE-ALLIANCE.ORG

A selection of just some of our shop products

9 Large Heritage leather and tweed handbag in lavender

We have termed this a "large" handbag and they are particularly useful for those ladies who like to fit just that little bit more in their bag! Covered in either pine or lavender tweed alongside the leather, this is the perfect design for ladies who love the British countryside. The bag features a large central compartment, internal zip pocket, mobile phone pocket, and has an additional shoulder strap. Available in lavender or pine. *Dimensions - H: 34cm, W: 28cm, D: 14cm*
£79.99

10 Hunt map by George Butler

This beautifully illustrated A2-sized map shows the country of the UK's fox hunting and staghound packs. It has been commissioned by the Countryside Alliance for the wonderfully talented young artist and illustrator George Butler. To view more talented work by George Butler, visit his website: www.georgebutler.org

Signed: £70
Unsigned: £50

11 Blue horse watch

This delightful blue watch features a fun horse head illustration and would make a

great stocking filler for Christmas morning. Available in pink, red, purple and blue.
£9.95

12 Adult hunting tube socks

Adult tube hunting socks in a green and red design.
24" sock to fit UK child's 12-adult 8, EU 32-42
£5.95

13 China mug with hound by Debbie Harris

These bespoke British-made bone china mugs are a great Christmas present and available with all three of our countryside artists designs. Debbie is well known for her ability to bring to life the character of the hounds in her art. These mugs are a great Christmas present and available with all three of our countryside artist's designs.
Single mug: £9.95
Four mugs: £29.75

14 Countryside Alliance green silk tie

The iconic Countryside Alliance ties. The design of which has remained a constant symbol of the organisation throughout the decades. Made from pure silk these

ties are excellent quality and will survive the rigours of a sporting life, whether that be a day's hunting, shooting or a dinner party. Available in navy, green, maroon and black.
£29.99

15 Children's pyjamas

These cotton kids pyjamas feature a cartoon design by Sam Morris, a UK artist who specialises in cow art ranging from serious commissions to something a bit more quirky like these cows jumping over the moon! Available in both blue stripe and pink stripe, this is an ideal present for boys and girls. *Available in 6-12 months, 1-2 years, 2-3 years, 3-4 years, 4-5 years and 5-6 years.*
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16 Heritage leather and tweed holdall in brunswick

A luxury tweed and leather holdall with a quirky fox print lining. This bag features one internal zipped pocket, one internal open pocket, a zipped outer pocket, and comes with a dust bag and shoulder strap. Available in Brunswick or Pine.
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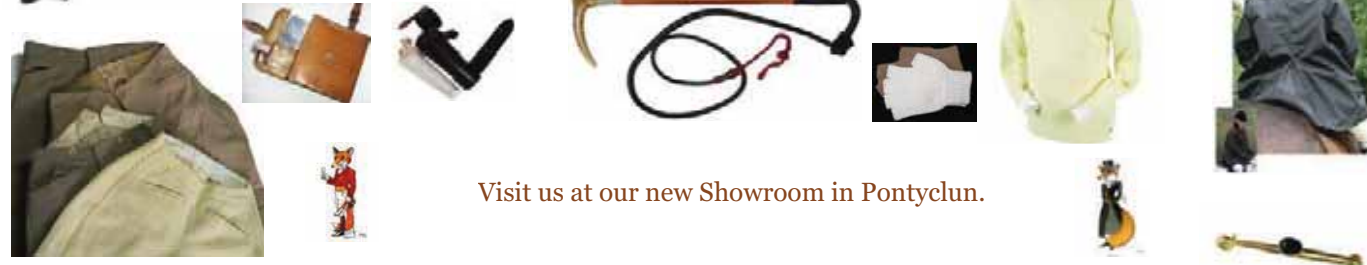


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Stop misleading the public on hunting

→ In his second piece for the Countryside Alliance magazine, former hunt saboteur **MILES COOPER** has several choice words for the anti-hunting brigade.

In the interview *From Hunt Sab to Hunt Master* published in the Summer 2016 issue, I stated my belief that the Hunting Act must be repealed and replaced with legislation and a wider statutory framework which protects all wild mammals from acts of unnecessary suffering. I also outlined that this regulatory approach should incorporate the full range of lethal control methods currently available enabling farmers, landowners and countryside managers to make management decisions informed by conservation, business and welfare considerations. This approach, I explained, would provide the country's land managers and associated businesses with an evidence-based, transparent and equitable legislative framework: a framework which could enjoy the confidence of practitioners, the public and parliament.

Importantly, this approach would sweep away the Hunting Act, which in the course of a decade has increasingly come to be seen as based upon prejudice not principle and political expedience over proper scientific evidence. This approach could also provide an opportunity to undertake a wider review and reappraisal of wildlife and countryside legislation.

It is important to get a few basic points set straight. The Hunting Act did not ban hunting, it materially altered the operating criteria. Hunting with hounds or dogs continues to be legal. Farmers and landowners have, for hundreds of years, carried out their own hunting activities jointly with neighbours, or invited other people to bring their hounds/dogs to hunt and kill foxes, hares and deer on their land. They have done this, and continue to do so, because they know that hunting with

hounds or dogs as a method of control does assist when balancing farming interests against the competing impacts of wild mammal populations. Different methods have comparative strengths under differing circumstances. Farmers and land managers, and not the anti-hunt political organisations, are undoubtedly best placed when deciding which method is most appropriate on their own land. Anti-hunting organisations' contribution is to insist that one method, hunting with hounds, is in every circumstance the worst option. How they come to this conclusion I have no idea: it is not a view supported by wider peer-reviewed scientific research, or by inquiries or hearings into hunting such as the Burns Inquiry (2000) or the Portcullis Public Consultation Hearings (2002).

I am certain that the overwhelming majority of 'anti-hunting opinion', which is actively fermented by the League Against Cruel Sports (LACS) and other groups, starts out in members of the public as a genuine and sincere concern that wild animals should not be treated cruelly. On this point, no right-thinking person could disagree. Nonetheless, the anti-hunting organisations claim to 'represent' public opinion, and present their campaigns as socially or ethically advancing or even that they contribute to the construction of a more modern and caring country. They achieve this deception by taking advantage of the British public's genuine concern for animal welfare through two principle methods.

The public are actively encouraged into adopting the view that hunting is carried out by people belonging to a cruel, land-owning, social elite and for no other reason than to satisfy their lust for blood. That is; people who are entirely 'other' and 'alien' and who therefore can be misrepresented and condemned with not only moral but also political justification. In the last issue I put forward the view that the politics of the anti-hunt movement functions on the basis of clearly defining a 'them' and an 'us': this approach allows for clear battle lines to be drawn; it provides the basis upon which it becomes culturally acceptable, to diminish



the concerns, views and aspirations of 'the enemy', to disregard and to sneer at the contribution hunting people make to their communities, the countryside, the country's artistic and cultural heritage and the economy; it becomes acceptable to write hate-filled posts on social media platforms revelling in, and mocking, the death of colleagues and children; it is judged acceptable to undertake covert operations and secretly film 'the enemy' without the agreement or knowledge of the police, the courts or the people themselves. Ultimately, it becomes its own moral justification for achieving a political end at any cost and damn the consequences.

Of course, a distortion and deception can only be achieved through propaganda

"THE HUNTING ACT DID NOT BAN HUNTING, IT MATERIALLY ALTERED THE OPERATING CRITERIA."



Miles Cooper was a committed hunt saboteur, but over time growing doubts about the hunt ban argument led him to change his position, very publicly. He is now a Master of Bloodhounds based in North Yorkshire.

which in turn has to play fast and loose with science in order to generate what the anti-hunt organisations like to call 'evidence'. The LACS are especially fond of what they term evidence, and how it proves conclusively that hunting with dogs is always the worst and that other forms of control are always better. The LACS like to talk a lot about 'evidence' and how it proves this, or disproves that. The LACS are so fond of 'evidence', I suspect they must keep it firmly under lock and key at LACS HQ, since not the faintest hint of an evidential crossed 't' or dotted 'i' has ever been produced by them. The LACS produce a lot of reports and propaganda (of course they do) but they insist on misrepresenting these documents as 'evidence' and then 'sell' them to the public and politicians in much the same way that Victorian Travelling Shows sold remedial tinctures and ointments to the unwary and willing to be convinced. Where the LACS continue to find certainty perhaps Lord Burns might act as an historic word to the wise: "Naturally, people ask whether we're implying that hunting is cruel...The short answer to that question is no. There was not sufficient verifiable evidence or data safely to reach views about cruelty. It is a complex area."

The LACS have been oblivious for too long as to the illogical and unequitable inconsistencies created by 'their' legislation. For instance, the law allows the use of terriers to protect gamebirds being reared to be shot for sport, but doesn't allow terriers to be used to protect lambs being reared for food or to protect hen harriers for conservation reasons. Evidence if ever it was needed that the LACS approach is unprincipled and expedient: the concession to protecting gamebirds only being agreed to because of an historic commitment

made by the Labour Party while in opposition that legislation 'banning' hunting would not impact upon shooting's interests. A political necessity which ultimately the LACS has not been able to accommodate itself to. But let's remember this is the organisation which has failed to ban hunting, claims that shooting is preferable, but would like to see it abolished as well and doesn't much like snares either which - you've guessed it - they actively campaign against and want to see banned. The LACS should come clean and adopt a principled stance which we could all at least respect for its honesty: that the fox be designated a protected species and all forms of control, whether that be dog, gun or snare, should be banned outright.

The anti-hunt groups also like to claim that draghunting or riding to bloodhounds is an alternative to foxhunting. A year ago, the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) wrote to the Masters of Draghounds and Bloodhounds Association (MDBA) asking for information about how hunting days are organised and whether there have been changes to ways of working over the last 10 years. Immediately, it was clear to me on reading the letter that, firstly, IFAW did not have the faintest clue about 'draghunting' and 'hunting the clean boot with bloodhounds' and secondly, that the letter was nothing more than an attempt to drive a wedge between the MDBA packs and colleagues in the MFHA. It was also an attempt to gather information which could be used to amend the Hunting Act and do away with trail hunting. We have seen what a mess the antis make of legislation. We know that their longer-term aims are hostile to sports which use horses and hounds for sporting or recreational pleasure. It is reasonable to surmise, therefore, that this

"THE LACS APPROACH IS UNPRINCIPLED AND EXPEDIENT..."

move by the antis represents a real and substantial threat to the draghound and bloodhound packs in the UK. There is historical precedent for this skull-duggery. As far back as 1996, the LACS produced a document which claimed to be 'evidence' that draghunting was a replacement for foxhunting. The then chairman of the Masters of Draghounds Association, Brian Stern, was clear in a letter to the LACS at the time that this claim was motivated only by their desire to attack foxhunting and was definitely not representative of the sports of draghunting or riding to bloodhounds. Nothing has changed in 20 years.

Legal experts and senior police officers are on record as saying that the Hunting Act as it stands is a very difficult piece of legislation to interpret and apply. Extending it to a ban on trailhunting inevitably involves draghunts and potentially even bloodhound packs. It raises the spectre of the law of unintended consequences and would pile misery and further confusion upon an already unmitigated disaster. Who is to interpret the difference in the field? It's very easy to imagine a situation whereby saboteurs or monitors witness a pack of draghounds or even some of the bloodhound/old english foxhound crosses. Most will not be able to tell the difference in the field between hounds hunting a drag or a human scent and hounds belonging to one of the foxhunts.

As a current Master of Bloodhounds, my response to LACS' and IFAW's connivance is clear, and I am very happy for it to be repeated publicly as often as is necessary: "Draghunting and hunting the clean boot with bloodhounds are distinct sports in their own rights; they are not alternatives or replacements for foxhunting in much the same way that football is not a replacement for rugby. Yes, there are similarities between the two, but they are very different. Please stop using the sport I love as a means by which to attack another country sport which I support. You don't have my pack's interests or my sport's interests at heart. Furthermore, you do not represent us. In fact, you deliberately misrepresent our sport for your own political ends, so please stop misleading the public and politicians into believing that you have any legitimacy to speak on our behalf." ●



Miles and Dr Nick Fox during the fox shooting study.

THE SPORTING SALE

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We are now consigning for our forthcoming Sporting Sales. Items of interest include jewellery, silver, pictures, books, works of art, ceramics, prints and practical items relating to the traditional field sports of hunting, shooting, fishing, racing and other outdoor country pursuits.

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A field trial with a difference

→ **ADRIAN BLACKMORE** reports on The English Setter Club's 'Bettie Town Glenprosen Challenge'.

Saturday, August 13 2016, was a very special day in the history of the English Setter Club, the country's oldest gundog club running under Kennel Club rules. Founded in December 1890, the English Setter Club's first field trial took place on the Bradfield Estate, Devon, in April 1893 – though it was another 58 years before its very first grouse trials were held at Stanhope in County Durham, in 1951. Although field trials are run as closely as possible to replicate an actual shooting day, they have historically rarely involved the shooting of live game, so there has nearly always been an element that is missing. However that was not to be the case with the Bettie Town Glenprosen Challenge.

This 'one-off' field trial was run as a proper day's walked-up grouse shooting with a team of four experienced Guns, one of whom was Robin Batchelor, owner of the Glenprosen Estate. The estate is not only an exciting driven grouse shoot, it has also been a flag bearer for shooting over pointers and setters for many years, and the home team has a wealth of knowledge and understanding of the sport. It is a magnificent mixed sporting estate which straddles the south-eastern boundary of the Cairngorms National Park in the Angus Glens, and a superb venue to hold this very special event in memory of the English Setter Club's late president, Bettie Town,



Adrian Blackmore is Director of Shooting at the Countryside Alliance. County Durham based he is especially knowledgeable about our uplands, moorland management and grouse shooting.



who died in 2013, aged 89.

The Pointer Club, the Gordon Setter Field Trial Society, and the Irish Setter Association, were each invited to select a team of six dogs from their respective breeds, to compete with the English Setter Club, each handler being restricted to a maximum of two dogs. With English, Irish and Gordon setters and English pointers competing against each other, the dogs were tested not only for steadiness on the wing, but, because the grouse were being shot, also on the fall. Stamina also played a major part in the day, as each dog had to run for a minimum of 15 minutes, with some having to work downwind beats. And that did not include the time taken to pick-up shot grouse, a task that was expertly carried out by the estate's gamekeepers with their dogs.

The judges for the event, Colin Organ and Fiona Kirk, have considerable experience with setters and pointers, both in the

world of field trials and game shooting. The Guns also had experience in shooting over setters and pointers, and it was marvellous to see how they were able to be selective when shooting, picking out the old or weak grouse from each covey – and avoiding the 'cheepers', or birds that were not yet fully grown, of which there were a few with it being right at the start of the season.

With blue skies and sunshine, there was a real sense of anticipation in the air, and having received a briefing from Bruce Cooper, the headkeeper, the Guns joined the competitors and spectators and set off for the hill, the excitement growing as they climbed higher and higher up the Glen.

First to run was an English setter and Gordon setter – and before long the English setter, running at full pace, slammed onto point. The handler positioned the Guns on either side of the dog, and everyone held their breath as the point was worked out. Suddenly, a covey of grouse burst from

"THIS 'ONE-OFF' FIELD TRIAL, WAS RUN AS A PROPER DAY'S WALKED UP GROUSE SHOOTING WITH A TEAM OF FOUR EXPERIENCED GUNS SHOOTING GROUSE..."

Gerry Devine's English setter dog Field Trial Champion Ballyellen Cody





the heather, shots were fired, and the first grouse was in the bag. This set the scene for what was to be a very special day, and it was both exhilarating and a real privilege to see the dogs do what they were bred to do, and in such a stunning location.

At the end of the day, the overall winners were the English Setter Team; Dom Goutorbe, Gerry Devine and Meryl Asbury, with the top dog being Dom's Field Trial Champion Upperwood Hera - which also happened to be the Guns' choice for best English setter. The top downwind dog was pointer Fearn Questron. The Guns' choices for best Gordon setter, Irish setter, and pointer were White Paws of Gawcott, Field Trial Champion Coldcoates Rapid Meg, and Frosted Elfin of Fleetstalk respectively, with the latter also winning the keepers' choice.

Bettie would have loved every moment of this remarkable day and the memories that it would have brought back, and it is only sad that she couldn't have been there to enjoy it for herself. At the age of 19, Bettie had gone to work as secretary to Captain William Parlour at Croft-on-Tees in North Yorkshire, and it was there that she was introduced to his kennel of Sharnberry English setters, and became a proficient shot, shooting grouse over them on the Newbiggin & Hunstanworth Estate on the Durham/Northumberland border. Bettie helped train the setters alongside his keepers, and the first one she handled was Field Trial Champion Sharnberry Whitestone. He became the top winning English setter in Britain, and won the English Setter Challenge Trophy for six consecutive years between 1951- 56.



The Gun is Robin Batchelor, owner of the Glenprosen Estate. The handler is Dom Goutorbe, captain of the winning English Setter Team with Field Trial Champion Upperwood Hera, the top dog and Guns' choice from the English Setter Team

Bettie won this trophy for the last time in 2002, aged 78. She also won the Pointer and Setter Champion Stake three times with Sharnberry English setters.

Bettie never missed being out on the moors on the Glorious Twelfth, something that she continued doing well after Captain Parlour's death when the estate was handed over to his niece Daphne Scott-Harden who, along with her family, are just as passionate about grouse shooting and dedicated to the management of the moors as he had been. The family have been great supporters of pointers and setters over the years and have hosted the Yorkshire Gundog Club's setter and pointer trials in July every year since 1949; a unique achievement.

Bettie was a true sportswoman. There could have been no more fitting tribute to this remarkable woman than the Glenprosen Challenge, and an enormous thank you must go to all those who supported this special day, in particular the Glenprosen Estate for hosting it, and making everyone so welcome. ●



Dom Goutorbe receiving the Guns' Choice Award from chief steward David Hall and Glenprosen Estate owner Robin Batchelor

All photos: by kind permission of www.rebeccagoutorbe.co.uk

Barely time to unscrew a hipflask

→ CATHERINE AUSTEN recounts a fast and furious day with the Heythrop last season where the respect and unity between hunting and shooting was much in evidence.

There is nothing more thrilling – for me, at least – than galloping across country on a good horse with hounds hunting hard in front of you. It is often said that a bad day’s hunting is still a good day, but a great day’s hunting is something close to heaven.

The tone was set from the start. A trail had been laid away from the meet at the Landless family’s Hill Farm in Duns Tew, Oxfordshire, and the Heythrop hounds hit it off immediately. We left the farmyard at a canter and barely had time to unscrew a hipflask for the rest of the day.

This part of the Heythrop Monday country is something of a well-kept secret; it doesn’t attract the large, thrusting fields that jostle for position on a Saturday, but it is a fantastic place to go hunting. Simon Lawrance, who has been a Heythrop joint-master since 2008, gave us a superb lead as field master and we jumped our socks off over rails and hedges across the Ballards’ land, then hunt chairman Mikey Elliot’s farm. After second horses, they found on the Flemings’ Barton Abbey and hunted so swiftly to Wootton that it was nearly impossible to stay with them. Hunt secretary Guy Avis, who has hunted with the Heythrop for 50 years, said he could barely remember a faster hunt.

Simon, who has ridden round Badminton and Burghley, inspires enormous confidence in his field; they trust him, and will follow him over places they would not follow a less experienced field master. I was riding a lovely, elegant grey horse lent to me by Heather Moodie,

which was bold and a real galloper, yet mannered and impeccably balanced. Riding him across country with hounds always in sight ahead of us meant I was still buzzing from the experience 24 hours later, and had bored nearly everyone I know about what a brilliant day I had had.

Charles Frampton is in his fourth season as joint-master and huntsman of the Heythrop, and the hounds are showing excellent sport. It has taken time to develop the pack he wants, but quiet persistence and patience are now paying off.

Anyone who goes hunting with Charles will notice how little noise he makes, and how little he interferes with his hounds.

He says: “It is essential to let the hounds do as much as possible on their own. We have bred them for 300 years to go hunting – they are specifically and carefully designed to do so – so why not let them do it? Assistance from the huntsman should be the last resort, not the first resort. “They lose self-confidence if you interfere – rather like the effect of a nagging wife!”

“Good gundog people know exactly what I mean. A good pack of hounds is well-disciplined, but they need to hunt independently [as a pack] with confidence in their own ability.”

In the 2015/16 season he hunted a mixed pack – the doghounds and the bitches together – with the slightly steadier, hard-working doghounds working well with the sharper, quicker bitches.

The Heythrop is a four-day-a-week pack, and Charles says: “The primary reason I am now hunting a mixed pack is because during the shooting season we cannot always guarantee two days a week for both the dogs and the bitches, and if I still hunted them separately the doghounds would only get one day’s hunting a week sometimes. A lot of hunts come to the Heythrop to use our stallion hounds and



“ASSISTANCE FROM THE HUNTSMAN SHOULD BE THE LAST RESORT, NOT THE FIRST RESORT. ‘THEY LOSE SELF-CONFIDENCE IF YOU INTERFERE – RATHER LIKE THE EFFECT OF A NAGGING WIFE!’”

we must ensure that they are 150 per cent proven in the hunting field.”

There is no doubt that in many areas of the country the balance of power between hunting and shooting has shifted in the decade since the Hunting Act came into force.

“Certainly in the time I have been a master, shoots have become more prolific and estates are shot more intensely,” says Simon.

And there are lots of hunts that suffer much more than the Heythrop do – estates such as Blenheim, Batsford, Sezincote, Eyford, Swell Wold and Fir Farm, to name a few, are welcoming and friendly towards hunting. But there are others, often with long-established historical ties with hunting, to which access is difficult.

“For the future of the countryside, it so important that country sports stand together,” says Charles. “Hunting is such a community; shooting less so, because there tends to be one keeper working in one place, alone, and it is essential to do all that we can to include them in the broader country sports community.”



Equestrian journalist Catherine Austen, who wrote for *Horse & Hound* for 11 years, is passionate about hunting and racing and has hunted all over Britain and Ireland. Follow Catherine on Twitter @cfausten



Photography: Sarah Farnsworth www.sarahfarnsworth.co.uk

Communication and respect between both sides is vital; the better both sports work together, the greater the benefits to both."

Lee Walker is headkeeper at Blenheim. He says: "I've worked on too many estates where there is a 'them and us' attitude to hunting. I don't like that; we should support each other.

"As long as it is not the day we are shooting, we're pretty flexible about hunting and I like to see the hounds."

The Heythrop organise a keepers' dinner and a keepers' clay shoot every year, and Lee says that events like these, and invitations to hunt events such as the puppy show, improve relationships between hunts and shoots enormously. "The Heythrop have been great about including keepers in events, and I've seen the relationship between the hunt and shoots get much better in the past few years, which is as it should be - after all, we are all in the same boat." ●

FIELDSPORTS

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An away-day

At the beginning of February, the Heythrop hounds visited Leicestershire to hunt the Cottesmore country, by kind invitation of the Cottesmore masters. A mounted field of 157 - huge for a modern mid-week meet - met at Bleak House, Knossington, with representatives from at least 12 different packs present.

This is the most famous bit of the Cottesmore hunting country, often termed "the playground" for its myriad jumping opportunities, and parts of the day were something akin to riding in the Grand National with three times the number of runners Aintree allows.



Ashley Bealby did a first-class job as field master and there were dozens of empty saddles, including your

correspondent at only the third fence. I rode two excellent horses belonging to Ollie and Rachel Finnegan and, despite embarrassing myself by hitting the deck, had a cracker of a day.

It has been really difficult to find hirelings in Leicestershire in the past decade, and Ollie and Rachel, who set up their business at Pickwell Manor this season, have been welcomed with open arms. Their horses are turned out immaculately and are guaranteed to go well.

With a heavy frost coming out of the ground, the Heythrop hounds acquitted themselves extremely well in difficult conditions, and the large team of visitors returned south at the end of the day - after a very generous tea - feeling very proud of them.

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COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE

The voice of the countryside

Political animals: the MP with a pride in his Herefords

➔ It's no surprise that North Herefordshire MP **BILL WIGGIN** is a fan of Hereford cattle, the famous native breed of his rural constituency.



Known for his strong support for the countryside and the rural way of life in Parliament, politics and farming have been in Bill Wiggin MP's family for generations.

Bill's father, Sir Jerry Wiggin, was a farmer in Worcestershire before becoming MP for Weston Super Mare. Although largely an arable farmer, he did have a Hereford bull for his dairy herd. Coming from such a background, Bill could not resist the attractions of a rural constituency.

Bill Wiggin was elected MP for Leominster, now renamed North Herefordshire, in 2001, a rural constituency with a large proportion of agricultural-based industries.

Bill works hard to understand the concerns of his farming constituents, so that he can work effectively to represent them in Westminster. By farming himself, he is able to gain some understanding of the hurdles that his constituents face, whether it be dealing with the Rural Payments Agency or Bovine Tuberculosis.

Bill began to farm in 2005 and farms on his own, looking after his cattle all year round, with help from his three children and his wife. Without staff, Bill deals with all aspects of farming, from mucking out the

"NOT ONLY DO HEREFORDS CONVERT GRASS INTO BEEF MORE EFFICIENTLY THAN OTHER BREEDS, THEIR DOCILE NATURE AND EASE OF HANDLING MADE THEM PERFECT, PARTICULARLY WHEN THE FARMER'S HELPERS ARE CHILDREN GROWING UP AROUND CATTLE!"

shed, to making his own hay.

Bill currently has a herd of 20 Hereford cattle. They are the most popular breed in the world, and for good reasons. Not only do Herefords convert grass into beef more efficiently than other breeds, their docile nature and ease of handling made them perfect, particularly when the farmer's helpers are children growing up around cattle!

"Tremendous support has been provided by the Hereford Cattle Society, who are very friendly and welcoming," Bill says. "Other Hereford breeders have been enormously helpful and kind to me over the years, and many of them make their living from this

magnificent breed."

Bill recently came third in the Hereford Cattle Breeders' Association competition, for the small herds section. "I enjoy showing my cattle," says Bill, "although I don't expect that other breeders find my efforts at showing cattle very threatening! It is good fun though; the comradeship and advice ensure you learn fast."

With technology playing an increasing role in farming today, Bill comments that he thinks that the increasing use of technology in cattle breeding is very useful.

He uses the estimated breed values for ease of calving, milk and growth as this helps him to improve the breeding of his herd. ➔



Photo: Viki Ross Photography <http://www.vikrossphotography.co.uk/>



In September 2014, Bill spent a week in Cheshire learning about cattle scanning. Bill continues: "This was a fascinating opportunity to learn the skills of pregnancy scanning, which, given where you have to insert the scanner, mystified many of my colleagues in Westminster!"

"I strongly feel that this type of hands-on experience of farming is very useful. My fellow MPs know about my passion for farming. The former Prime Minister, the Rt Hon David Cameron MP, sought my advice about the Basic Payment Scheme and the direction that the Government should have taken."

"MY TOTAL SUPPORT FOR RURAL PURSUITS HAS NEVER BEEN IN QUESTION."

He adds: "Since I am aware of some of the difficulties that my constituents face in farming, as I have either experienced myself, or I understand much more clearly than I would otherwise, the situation in which they happen to find themselves, I raise their concerns in Parliament and represent them to the Government. Therefore, in a tangible way, I am contributing to positive change for the

farming industry to take better care of our farmers."

Bill has held a number of positions in Government: a whip both in Government and in opposition. Currently the chair of the Committee of Selection, and a deputy chairman of the Liaison Committee, he was shadow secretary of state for Wales between 2003 — 2005. He has been Shadow Minister for the Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs twice.

Bill believes in hunting, his grandfather was Master of the Croome. Although unable to hunt himself, due to an allergic reaction to horses, he enjoys supporting all of the 11 local packs as often as possible with his family, and occasionally making rather brief speeches at meets.

Bill was a teller counting the votes when the Labour Party brought in the current ban on hunting. Although the newspapers did not include the names of the four tellers the following morning.

"I was unhappy that my vote to support hunting was not reported," says Bill. "My total support for rural pursuits has never been in question."

In fact, one of his proudest achievements, he admits, was receiving the Countryside Alliance Westminster Award in 2008, a Rural Oscar, which has pride of place in his Westminster office. "I treasure my Rural Oscar and the Countryside Alliance has my gratitude to this day." ●



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The moor the merrier

→ **LIAM STOKES** introduces our new campaign: invite the public to a moor and let them find out the benefits of shooting and moorland management for themselves.



A new campaign aiming to bring the general public onto shoots across the country has kicked-off on Ilkley Moor. Cutting the media campaigners and social media slactivists out of the conversation and giving the facts a chance to speak for themselves, the visitors' reactions to a well-managed shoot were universally popular. Now we need your help to roll this campaign out across the UK.

We spend so much time battling the anti-shooting element that we sometimes start to imagine the whole non-shooting public is against us. The media is certainly

complicit in this collective sense of being permanently under siege. Whenever a newspaper or broadcaster wants a comment or a discussion on shooting, we invariably seem to find ourselves put up against the most strident ideologue the producers can find.

Social media is culpable, too. The shooting community feels under attack from anti-shooting users given the illusion of coordination and numbers by hashtags and petitions. The temptation, one we've all given into at one time or another, is to shout right back at them. When the media is giving platforms to the most hard-line of antis and we're hunkered down in our social media bunkers trading barbs with people hoping to ban our way of life, it is hard not to assume the world is against us. It is tempting to withdraw from the debate altogether.

But there is an alternative, and that's to shift the debate to the terrain on which shooting does its best work—the real world. It only takes 10 seconds

to see a nasty picture of a dead raptor and click a petition — it takes a lot longer to understand the complexities of countryside management and the apparent paradox of game shooting as a conservation tool. Reasoning that people would be a lot more willing to give the necessary time if they were out in the beautiful landscapes managed for shooting, we at the Countryside Alliance launched a campaign to invite the public onto some of the best shoots in the country, there to meet with real gamekeepers, see real conservation work and discuss any concerns they

“WE AT THE COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE LAUNCHED A CAMPAIGN TO INVITE THE PUBLIC ONTO SOME OF THE BEST SHOOTS IN THE COUNTRY, THERE TO MEET WITH REAL GAMEKEEPERS, SEE REAL CONSERVATION WORK...”



Liam Stokes is the Countryside Alliance's head of shooting campaigns. A former lecturer in conservation and wildlife management, he is passionate about broadening education.

might have about shooting.

The first event was arranged at Ilkey Moor, where we introduced 16 ramblers from the Bradford CHA Rambling and Social Club to Simon Nelson, head gamekeeper of the Bingley Moor Partnership that leases the moor from Bradford City Council. Although avid walkers and lovers of the countryside, the group comprised mainly of self-confessed townies, but not exclusively. We had an avid birdwatcher, an archaeology enthusiast and an amateur botanist, among a wide range of other interests. This made for a diverse and interesting array of questions and a wide ranging discussion as we hiked our way across the 1,000-acre moor.

Away from the noise and bluster of the anti-campaigning, concerns were aired and discussed in an atmosphere of respect and friendship, united by a love for the landscape on which we were walking. Questions regarding raptors were answered, as a red kite drifted overhead, and flooding was discussed as the walkers were shown blocked drainage ditches (known as grips) and told how water was being stored on the hill. Encouragingly, the walkers were equally interested in poaching-prevention, the involvement of

“WE NEED PEOPLE WITH SHOOTS TO SHOW OFF, TO COME FORWARD AND OFFER TO HOST SIMILAR WALKS, TO TALK TO THE PUBLIC AND REACH A MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING WITH THEM.”

the local community in the shoot days, and the economics of the Bingley Moor Partnership. Rather than having to pay to manage the moor themselves, the council actually receives £12,000 for the shooting rights and can leave the conservation work to the Partnership’s keepers. As one guest commented, “the council doesn’t have the money to manage the moor, so why not let the shoot do it? The council also needs the money.”

It was a bit of a revelation to see people being so open-minded. It is one thing to shout at the antis about the conservation benefits of moorland management. It is quite another to show the public curlew, skylarks and kites while an expert gamekeeper explains how their work provides habitat for the species they are seeing, as well as those they are not — wheatear, golden plover and merlin. The reaction, particularly if

you are used to online shouting matches, was incredible. Not everyone left itching to pick up a gun themselves, but that was never the idea. A few people told me they still didn’t really understand why people like shooting, but if it paid for all that “conservation stuff” it was fine with them. Some had come along specifically because of the controversy over grouse shooting, and left convinced that the shoot was a good thing to have on the moor, both for the birds and for the community. One even said he would write to the council saying so. The best thing was I didn’t say a word. This wasn’t a conversation for campaigners, it was a conversation between people who love the countryside and those who work on it.

Now imagine conversations like these taking place on shoots up and down the country, on lowland pheasant shoots, foreshores and grouse moors. We can make this happen, but we need your help. We need people with shoots to show off, to come forward and offer to host similar walks, to talk to the public and reach a mutual understanding with them. Let’s take the megaphone out of the hands of the writers, journalists and media personalities, and let’s put it into the hands of working country people. ●



Self-sufficiency and 'A Little Piece of England'

→ Barrister, businessman, campaigner and author **JOHN JACKSON**, a former chairman of the Countryside Alliance, introduces his book *A Little Piece of England*.

I grew up in rural Devon in the 1930s, and my family were flat broke. We lived on what we could grow or forage from the land or sea. By the time I was four, I had had an extensive, albeit somewhat premature, education in how to look after myself.

Fast forward to the mid-1960s, during the height of my corporate career in the City, when I returned to the countryside and moved my wife and three young children from London to Underriver in Kent. I wanted them to experience the joys of knowing how to use the land, too.

Then, much like now, Britain felt like a volatile place. I and many others looked to self-sufficiency and the land to find a sense of security — and a means to provide for our families, no matter what happened.

My wife and I, and our enthusiastic young farmhands, started out innocently enough with a few chickens. Before long we had assembled a cast of memorable characters — bullocks, cows, horses, sheep, goats, and geese — as well as a few four-legged freeloaders, largely kept on land borrowed from neighbours on a 'barter' basis.

This is the tale brought to life with the help of Val Biro's charming pen and ink illustrations. Originally published in 1979 as *A Bucket of Nuts and a Herring Net*, my tale has since been republished for the Countryside Alliance as *A Little Piece of England*.

I hope now, as I did then, that it will inspire you to experience the joys of self-sufficiency — and perhaps get a bit closer to your own little piece of England.



John Jackson, or JJ, was chairman of the Countryside Alliance from the late '90s until 2005. JJ has always been a staunch defender of rural liberty and this was very much in evidence as he championed fieldsports at one of the hardest points in history.

An extract from *A Little Piece of England*

One evening in midsummer, still in my office clothes, I was lured down to the paddock by the suggestion that the fencing needed inspection as a matter of urgency. With a grinning family behind me, I was confronted by two shaggy-coated brown and white animals, standing about two feet high at the shoulder, eyeing me suspiciously and looking something like a cross between sheep and goats, with long tails. They were two Jacob sheep, shearling ewes — one year old, that is — and their names were Moon and Sixpence.

We had been thinking of venturing into sheep for some time. Ann and the two girls had followed up an advertisement in the local paper, found a flock of Jacobs and bought the two ewes on the spot. It was not just a matter of impulse. Jacobs are good dual-purpose sheep. There is a strong demand for them as park animals, and they are excellent eating. They are a hardy breed, and first-generation crosses with other breeds produce vigorous, meaty lambs.

We had read recently that a Scottish farmer had paid some hundreds of pounds for a Jacob ram. Scottish farmers don't spend that sort of money lightly.

I was a bit apprehensive about Moon and Sixpence. They were the largest farm creatures we had acquired yet and they were very different from my idea of sheep. However, I confined myself to the comment that the paddock had been fenced with horses and ponies in mind and that I didn't see what was to prevent the ewes from simply stepping over the bottom rail and raiding the garden. Ann and C-J withdrew discreetly leaving Sue to explain to me that generations of breeding had taught sheep to respect fences and that even if they did stray in a fit of absent-mindedness, they would

"I RETURNED TO THE COUNTRYSIDE AND MOVED MY WIFE AND THREE YOUNG CHILDREN FROM LONDON TO UNDERRIVER IN KENT. I WANTED THEM TO EXPERIENCE THE JOYS OF KNOWING HOW TO USE THE LAND, TOO."

A LITTLE PIECE of ENGLAND



A Tale of Self-Sufficiency

JOHN JACKSON

behave just like the geese and only eat grass. At any rate, that was the gist of it.

Apparently generations of breeding had taught Moon and Sixpence a great deal. Whenever I was about, they were grazing innocently in the middle of the paddock.

But strange things were happening in the garden. Small shrubs were disappearing, eaten down to the ground. Larger shrubs and trees were being barked by something. Whatever was doing it had a particular liking for the camellias. That demonstrated excellent taste, but did not fill me with enthusiasm. I asked Sue if she was quite sure the two ewes were not getting out. Sue said she was quite sure with a 'don't you dare disagree with me' quality in her voice. Rather less belligerently she pointed out there was no sign of sheep droppings and that the tree barking stopped six inches above ground level. These observations were difficult to counter. The fact remained that the happenings had started as soon as the sheep had arrived... ●



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On parade at the Festival of Hunting

→ Countryside Alliance hunting correspondent **GEORGIE ARCHER** went on assignment to the Festival of Hunting at Peterborough in July. Here's her report from the show of shows.

A few weeks before the day of the Festival of Hunting in Peterborough, our tickets had come through the post. From that point on, the suspense was building – last year we had had a lovely day – the thrill of the inter-hunt relay was something that can't be forgotten and I was excitedly anticipating it this year. On top of that, I thoroughly enjoyed taking photos of the stunning hounds being shown by the hunt staff who care so tirelessly for them and had driven for hours to show off members of their hunt's pack.

Nevertheless, the four-hour journey – on one of the hottest days of the year – to the East of England showground for this year's Festival of Hunting was still gruelling. Crawling through traffic dampens anyone's spirits! Despite the best efforts of the car's air-conditioning, my mother, sister and I arrived in a state of heat-driven, crazed exhaustion. Stepping out into the hot air, we were relieved to feel a breeze and to finally hear the excitable narration on the inter-hunt loudspeaker. The chattering of hounds leaked from the lorry parking area and show rings; in the pens around the main ring hounds from hunts across the country lounged in pens, pressed up against the bars. We headed for the bustling tents and show rings, ready to immerse ourselves in a hunting extravaganza, forgetting already about the long car ride.

The inter-hunt relay arena was centre stage, attracting visitors as it was right in front of us, flanked on two sides by rows of shops. Leaning on the metal railings were young children licking melting ice-creams, elderly men in crisp

tweed suits, women in smart dresses and hats and inter-hunt and hound showing competitors in black jackets and riding hats or white coats and bowler hats. The spectacle keeping their attention showed teams of riders racing around the arena – with older riders on large hunting horses and younger ones on speedy ponies. We turned to watch the competitors, drawn in by the cheering and jubilation. Agile horses leaped rustic fences and hunt staff and supporters tested their skills by opening and shutting a gate, navigating a sandy 'bridge' and handing over a hunting whip. The riders who dared to take the tightest turns managed to cut precious seconds off their team's time, providing that they also managed to clear the obstacles. The atmosphere was tense: supporters whooped and clenched their teeth as opposite team members raced towards the finish line. Meanwhile, one rider on a spotted horse crashed through the metal railings on the opposite side of the arena from us – luckily, horse, rider and bystanders were all fine. The horse daintily hopped out of the railings, successfully removing its tangled legs without a scratch, showing self-preservation skills well-suited to the hunting field! However, we had to move on as there was so much more to see.

We passed many rows of shops, sporting a vast range of goods and products. Hundreds of people wandered around, flitting in and out of shops. Many had dogs pottering around on the end of their leads (or simply dragging them across the showground). Long-legged greyhounds elegantly pranced, whilst small, scruffy terriers scooted along,



“THE STUNNING HOUNDS BEING SHOWN BY THE HUNT STAFF WHO CARE SO TIRELESSLY FOR THEM.”

sniffing everything in reach. In multiple show rings hounds were on display, from bloodhounds and old English foxhounds to whippets.

A collection of Irish Wolfhounds lounged in the collecting ring of an empty show ring, panting heavily. We stopped to watch at the side of several arenas, admiring the rich variety of hounds on show, and took photos of the animals and people absorbing the showground feeling.

We paused again, this time to watch the hound showing inside the tent, where spectators were packed into stands and hunt staff were parading their hounds with rosette-laden arms. Judges inspected every hound for the desired features: the maximum 16" height of the beagles at their withers and their broad head and the slightly finer, intelligent head and well-muscled top line of the foxhound. Behind us, the pens were filled with snoozing and snuffling hounds; not everyone was finding it easy to relax in the sunshine.

However, we had to think about leaving as the journey home was still to come. We bought some ice-creams, which began to melt the second they left the relative cool of the ice-cream van, and then wandered back towards the car via the equine show rings. Big, impressive hunters cantered around the arena in the side-saddle class, whilst finer-boned horses leapt around a large track in the working hunter class next door. On the other side of the fence, these show rings felt like a completely different world – away from the busy shops and loud inter-hunt noises (now on the junior team classes), it was much quieter.

Finally, we reached the car and set off back towards home, tired, but happy and still buzzing after another exciting day. ●

Festival of Hunting photos: <http://www.hurworth-photos.co.uk>



16-year-old Georgie Archer has hunted with the Golden Valley for many years and is an enthusiastic Pony Club member. She is a regular hunting correspondent for the Countryside Alliance.



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Reaching the final 5 per cent on broadband

→ BT explains how it is working with communities and using the latest technologies to roll out fibre broadband.



BT has invested billions of pounds to roll out fibre broadband as far as possible. With additional government funding, through Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK), BT has extended fibre to more challenging rural areas across the UK, to help the government meet its target of 95 per cent of premises with superfast broadband by 2017. The rollout is advanced, with 25m premises now passed. We want to help ensure that premises amongst the most difficult to reach, the final 5 per cent, can also benefit; the initiatives listed here will help achieve this.

COMMUNITY FIBRE BROADBAND PARTNERSHIPS

This scheme aims to enable all communities to find a fibre solution. We work with communities to agree affordable options to bring fibre to areas not covered by existing roll-out plans, providing tools to establish local demand. We have set up a partnership with

crowdfunding organisation, Spacehive, to help hard-to-reach communities via a package of co-funding and support. For further information, visit www.communityfibre.bt.com/

NEW BUILD SITES

High-speed broadband connectivity is a major factor for home buyers. BT has been working with the government and builders on agreements that will deliver superfast broadband connectivity to new-build properties. This will see fibre-based broadband offered to all new developments either for free or as part of a co-funded initiative. It is estimated that more than half of all new-build properties can be connected to fibre broadband free of charge to developers. For more on the subject please visit www.newdevelopments-openreach.co.uk/

SATELLITE BROADBAND

BT is working with BDUK and local

authorities to deliver satellite broadband in more remote areas. BT's subsidised satellite broadband service offers a choice of affordable high-speed broadband packages from a range of retail service providers. Further details can be found here: www.mediaandbroadcast.bt.com/wp-content/uploads/BT-MandB-BDUK-Satellite-Broadband-DS.pdf

PLANS FOR ULTRAFAST SERVICES

BT wants to take UK broadband from superfast to ultrafast. Openreach plans to deliver ultrafast speeds to 10 million premises by 2020, and to the majority of the UK within a decade, through a combination of fibre-to-the premises and new G.Fast technology with speeds of up to 1Gbps.

If you wish to find out more or discuss any of these areas, please contact your BT regional partnership director. Visit www.bt.com/btregions to find out more about your region and who to contact. ●

Coleorton, Leicestershire

Because they could only get internet speeds of around 1–2Mbps, residents in the Leicestershire village of Coleorton partnered with Openreach, BT's local network business, to bring superfast broadband to their village. People living in Coleorton Hall, a Grade II listed building converted into residential apartments, weren't included in any fibre broadband plans so approached



Openreach to find a solution. Working together, the community and Openreach agreed to jointly fund the fibre build with Openreach contributing the standard amount for a fibre upgrade in line with its commercial model. The community worked together to gap fund the additional costs.

This partnership represented a major milestone nationwide, as Coleorton became the 50th community in the UK to be connected to the fibre broadband network after thorough community action, working directly with Openreach. A new roadside fibre broadband cabinet was installed just outside the entrance to the Hall, as previously each property was connected by 'exchange only' telephone lines.

"We're committed to working with communities like Coleorton to help them achieve their goal of a fast fibre connection. Rural areas often present the most difficult and complex challenges, but working together gives us the best chance possible of finding a suitable and affordable way forward," said Kim Mears, Openreach's managing director for infrastructure delivery.

ENJOYING THE BENEFITS

It's not just those living in Coleorton Hall

who benefit. Around 120 homes and businesses across the wider village can also sign-up to fibre broadband thanks to the newly installed network. Residents are now enjoying a superfast service on the network, which is open to all communications providers on an equal wholesale basis, enabling them to choose from a number of internet suppliers. They're enjoying download speeds of up to 80Mbps.

Bill Murphy, BT's managing director for Next Generation Access, said: "We've been very clear that we'll never say no to any community wanting to work with us. The residents of Coleorton Hall have shown great vision in joining together with Openreach to secure access to the fibre broadband network. It's a major step forward for the village and fibre opens up endless opportunities for people living and working locally."

"WE'RE COMMITTED TO WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES LIKE COLEORTON TO HELP THEM ACHIEVE THEIR GOAL OF A FAST FIBRE CONNECTION."

Hamish Mackie's life in bronze

→ Hannah Treliving from Roxtons speaks to talented sculptor **HAMISH MACKIE** ahead of an exclusive private view of his work in London this October.

The notion that nature inspires creativity is a truth universally acknowledged, but in no one's work is this more blatant than in the sculptures of Hamish Mackie. He is fast establishing himself as one of the country's leading wildlife sculptors and his work seems born out of an enviable affinity with animals and their habitats.

Having been brought up on a Cornish farm, Hamish's early surroundings formed a backdrop which remain a great inspiration and one that he constantly refers back to. He credits observation of the farm's livestock and wildlife along with the pursuits of fishing and shooting as vital early influences to his work.

In an age when society is, regrettably, becoming increasingly detached from nature, Hamish says it is ever more important for artists to stay 'tuned in' to their subject and it is this commitment to working from life that has led him to all corners of the globe. He admits that his research trips to the wildlands of Africa,

Australia and Asia are a huge privilege of the job and he is well aware that his predecessors would not have been so fortunate, instead having to visit zoos to observe their exotic subjects in artificial habitats. Recent trips have included a trip to the Varzuga in Russia with Roxtons, who have been organising fishing and shooting days and holidays since the 1970s. Hamish headed out to the Kola Peninsula to study Atlantic salmon and the magical Arctic Terns, amongst other species. One day he caught 14 fish before lunch, yet still managed some thorough research: "Just don't mention the vodka!", he adds. Modern photography means that it is so easy to capture these experiences and masses of shots are taken which, together with miniature clay studies, are taken back home to the studio and then used to bring the raw, malleable clay to life.

Hamish favours the lost-wax method, which captures his signature style so perfectly. "Leaving a fingerprint in wet clay is just so exciting" he explains, and it is

Mackie's forthcoming exhibition 'Life in Bronze' will showcase over 40 of his latest pieces in London's Mall Galleries from October 10-22, 2016. Roxtons Field Sports, Countryside Alliance and *Country Life Magazine* have collaborated and are delighted to be sponsoring a private view evening on Tuesday October 18. For more information or to request an exhibition catalogue, contact Caroline Brough on caroline-brough@countryside-alliance.org

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this gestural quality which gives his three dimensional creations such vitality. The inherent strength of the bronze allows the sculptures to be positioned in poses not possible in other mediums so they can be caught in motion with one or even no legs on the ground. ●



"IN AN AGE WHEN SOCIETY IS, REGRETFULLY, BECOMING INCREASINGLY DETACHED FROM NATURE, HAMISH SAYS IT IS EVER MORE IMPORTANT FOR ARTISTS TO STAY 'TUNED IN' TO THEIR SUBJECT."

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How dogs help stop the rot

→ In the latest in his Dogs with Jobs series, **JIM BARRINGTON** meets the Enviro-Dogs.

Buying a house, particularly an older building, can be a headache at the best of times. The last thing any potential purchaser wants to find is some hidden problem halfway through the process.

Dry rot can affect many buildings, large or small, and while it is often detected by surveyors, sometimes, because of furniture, floor coverings and other obstacles, the places it infects can be inaccessible and hidden from view. This is where the extraordinary scenting ability of the dog can be utilised, searching out this invasive, damaging fungi and potentially saving house-holders considerable amounts of money.

Enviro-Dogs was formed by Mark Doggett in 2012. Previously employed in building construction, Mark had no real experience with working dogs until he came up with the idea of using his animals to detect the timber-eating fungi that we know as dry rot.

The training process is remarkably simple: "It's the play and reward system." Mark explains, "a ball is placed in one of a number of small pots aligned in a row. When found by the dog, a food treat is given. Then a piece of wood infected with dry rot is put in a pot with the ball and reward given as usual. After a while, the ball is removed from the routine, but the treat is still given, now that the dog associates that particular smell with reward."

The stars of Enviro-Dogs are Meg and Jess. Meg is a border collie and is known for her slower, but methodical work. Jess, a Springer spaniel, "just gets on with it" according to Mark and is used for derelict buildings, where speed is preferred. Jess' relatives are also workers, involved in search and rescue, as gundogs and in police and security work.



Jim Barrington is animal welfare consultant to the Countryside Alliance and has long admired the scenting abilities of dogs and the many ways in which they can assist us in everyday life.



"... WE CAN SIMPLY MARVEL, ONCE AGAIN, AT THE EXTRAORDINARY SCENTING ABILITY OF DOGS."

Meg and Jess nevertheless have to combine their talents with human expertise. Mark has studied in detail the problems of dry rot, building his knowledge by working with treatment companies. "There are four stages of dry rot infection," Mark tells me, "and distinguishing the fungi from other smells on a variety of different types of timber, such as pine or oak, is crucial." It can work its way through brickwork and concrete and lay dormant for years, appearing only when conditions are right.

Properties examined by Enviro-Dogs range from the smallest terraced house to 50-bed mansions and castles. Listed buildings pose a particular problem given the limited degree to which floorings, wall-coverings etc. can be removed and here is where scenting dogs can be of particular benefit.



An example of how valuable the service Enviro-Dogs offer was described Mark: an occupied house was to be sold, but the vendor used a variety of excuses why the carpets and other coverings should not be removed. The surveyors suspected dry rot, but couldn't prove it... until Mark, Meg and Jess were called in. The infection was discovered and the sale terminated, saving the buyer a considerable amount of money.

Other instances are more light-hearted, with Meg and Jess once finding a coffin, thankfully unoccupied, in a derelict house. Another survey saw Jess become impatient with Mark (who was busy talking to a client) for not throwing back her ball. She duly took it to the next person standing nearby, except it was no human being but a suit of armour!

Problems with the "hidden invader", as dry rot is known, can be far more than just a minor inconvenience, with rectifying work sometimes running into tens of thousands of pounds. It can mean the difference between buying the house you desire or moving on to seek another property.

For the potential purchaser or for the existing house owner, therefore, Enviro-Dogs can be a very wise investment and, whatever the outcome, bring peace of mind; for everyone else, we can simply marvel, once again, at the extraordinary scenting ability of dogs.

Mark, Meg and Jess work across the UK, and you can find out more at www.enviro-dogs.co.uk. Email Mark on info@enviro-dogs.co.uk or call him on 07764 755 301

The Fieldsports Channel story

In 2008, bright young ITV producer David Wright took British shooting magazine editor Charlie Jacoby to Croatia to make a film about wild boar hunting. While there, they talked about a film about hunting and shooting sports, maybe a series about the subjects, perhaps try to do what the shooting magazines do but in video... a year later, on the Glorious 12th August 2009, Fieldsports Channel was born.

Since that date, they have made more than 300 episodes of their flagship weekly magazine show *Fieldsports Britain* from locations all over the world, they have launched other shows including *AirHeads* about airgunning, *Claysports* about clayshooting, *Fieldsports Africa* – creating a post-Cecil world that one! – and *Fishing Britain*. They have produced and launched whole other channels on YouTube, including Club Digweed and NRA TV. They have introduced dozens of hunting and shooting industry companies to YouTube, and created channels for them, as well as film content for clients including the BBC and foreign TV channels.

Pour yourself a whiskey every Wednesday night and enjoy these free-to-watch TV shows about the best hunting, shooting and fishing:



[YouTube.com/fieldsportschannel](https://www.youtube.com/fieldsportschannel) ◆ [Facebook.com/fieldsportschannel](https://www.facebook.com/fieldsportschannel) ◆ [FieldsportsChannel.tv](https://www.fieldsportschannel.tv)



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● Split the chicory in half lengthways and BBQ until a little charred.

● Also, BBQ the radicchio leaves.

● Lastly BBQ the sourdough.

● Place the grouse and charred leaves on the bread and drizzle over a little lemon oil and chopped chives and serve.



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HOUSE AD

Tight lines and best fishes

→ **CHARLES HALLIDAY** reports on exciting times for The Countryside Alliance Foundation's Fishing 4 Schools project in the South West.

The demand for Fishing 4 Schools (F4S) in Bristol, Bath and Somerset is greater than ever before, with schools engaged during 2014/15 requesting either further or greater provision the following year. Such firm enthusiasm and endorsement gives plenty of reason for F4S to celebrate, but reflects the considerable value and importance perceived by education professionals. This clearly demonstrates the need for continued F4S availability and for resources and provision to be developed further, and ideally more widely. The commitment from schools that serve special education needs has been particularly strong, but reaching all pupils from all school types continues to be a challenge. Peer mentoring amongst a growing F4S team; greater equipment resources; and agreements with fisheries within close range to each school has all helped to strengthen existing foundations.

There are currently nine schools committed to ongoing F4S courses – one in Bristol, two in Bath and six in Somerset – which, to some extent, reflects the proximity and accessibility of fisheries to the schools in each region. Threeways School, based in Bath, provides for a wide range of special education needs and is entering its 10th year with F4S. Their invested commitment has forged a well-honed and highly effective course programme, unique to the school's requirements. The close working relationship has allowed continued course development with learning value being added year upon year. Pupils benefit from a comprehensive and

"PUPILS BENEFIT FROM A COMPREHENSIVE AND IMMERSIVE OUTDOOR LEARNING PROGRAMME..."

immersive outdoor learning programme, utilising a nearby Wessex Water fishery that is rich in habitat and wildlife, and normally reserved for the exclusive use of disabled anglers. Other recent development has seen an additional class of year 10 pupils double their guided learning hours allocated from curriculum; and the development of a 'hook to cook' program within the Design and Technology department, which was recently documented in the Bristol Food

Network magazine.

Other developments include a new F4S programme for primary schools which was successfully piloted during the Spring Term with Eastover Primary school, two afterschool clubs so



that F4S pupils have an exit route to continue their new-found interest in angling outside of curriculum time, and the involvement of three more qualified angling coaches. One of those coaches is ex F4S pupil, Jordan Jones, who took part in the F4S course whilst studying at Elmwood School in 2012. He recently met with his old teacher while inspiring the next generation during a coaching session and has now just completed a diploma in Fish Husbandry at Bridgwater College. Jordan is currently working full-time at Summerhayes Fishery over the summer holidays and is the current lake record holder of a 32lb carp. ●



Teachers and pupils alike are enthusiastic

"... a brilliant course that ties in superbly with the ASDAN 'Personal and Social Development' qualification. Students work with the teachers to set their own goals and decide necessary steps to achieve them with the assistance of F4S coaches. Students are particularly focussed and enjoy learning new skills," says Pip Harding, teacher of Brunel Class at Threeways School.

A pupil from Brunel Class says: "I think it's good because I like catching fish. The coaches are good, I like Steve the most because he is funny and a good instructor. The coaches are nice. They help me to get better".

It has also been a fantastic year for the project in Kent, with five new schools joining the programme - bringing the total to 10 schools. The majority of these schools are for youngsters with physical or behavioural challenges and they are trained by our instructors towards their Cast Awards (administered by the Angling Trust). For some of these children this might be the only qualification they gain at school and it is a great boost to find out they excel at something.

For more information, please contact Catrin at F4S on 020 7840 9270 or email info@ca-foundation.org



Charles Halliday has been an instructor with F4S for a number of years. A passionate ecologist and environmentalist, he is keen to pass a love of our waterways on to the next generation.





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{ RURAL VOICES }

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Fair funding for rural police

FAIR FUNDING FOR RURAL POLICE SERVICES HAS BEEN

a central goal of the National Rural Crime Network (NRCN) since its inception. And with Brexit raising fresh questions over future funding for police, rural forces like my own have been keen to make sure the government gives them a fair share of the overall policing 'pot' and that they do not lose out to their urban cousins.

Whilst the Home Office retreated on the last funding formula proposals, they are soon to undertake a fresh review. To ensure the right lessons were learned, as chair of the NRCN

I commissioned a study by academics at Plymouth University to assess the last pitch the Home Office put forward.

Its conclusion was that work done so far to develop the criteria for police funding is inherently unfair on rural areas, particularly those with sparse populations. We believe the government's approach to date is so flawed and inequitable that it needs to go back to the drawing board and think completely afresh.

This is because the government appears to favour using the number of crimes recorded in an area as the principal basis for allocating funding. This

would mean funding would be disproportionately influenced by volume crimes such as shoplifting. By definition, there are far more of these crimes in urban areas than in rural ones and they do not reflect the growing complexity of demand on policing. Put simply: it's like allocating NHS money on the basis of the number of people in an area with a cough and cold. The more people, the more coughs and colds. But this in no way takes into account the complexity of serving the public properly, especially in sparse, rural areas.

I want to thank the Countryside Alliance for its support of

Editor's choice



Julia Mulligan

the NRCN to date and would encourage its members to back our Rural Policing Matters campaign at www.nationalruralcrimenetwork.net/work/rural-policing-matters

JULIA MULLIGAN
Police and Crime Commissioner of North Yorkshire Harrogate, North Yorkshire

 **Congratulations to Julia, winner of the £50 Chudleys voucher.** www.chudleys.com

Wildlife Licensing as it should be

The granting by Natural England (NE) recently of a licence to kill 10 buzzards to protect young pheasants was an important milestone towards common sense in wildlife management. There are 300,000 buzzards in the UK and the species is increasing faster than virtually any other British bird.

The buzzards in this case had habituated to killing young poults and the damage was deemed by NE's experts to be serious and 'above normal business risk'. Numerous non-lethal approaches to solving the problem had failed. The lawful criteria for a licence had thus been met and it was right that it was granted.

The case will not 'open the floodgates'

as shrill campaigners from the usual quarters have chirped. Nor is it a "worrying precedent" leading towards licensed culling of much less common birds, as Martin Harper of the RSPB has alleged. (You would think that as their conservation director he would know that there is a legal backstop preventing the grant of any licence that would harm the conservation status of a species and that each application is assessed on its individual merits, so precedent does not apply).

The existence of a legal licensing route for managing birds that would normally be protected has huge advantages. Apart from allowing genuine problems to be resolved, it

enables accurate monitoring of the species and numbers being controlled, so that the true impact on conservation status can be assessed.

A properly administered licensing system also removes any vestige of an excuse from those who do irreparable damage to shooting's reputation by illegally persecuting birds of prey. Organisations like the RSPB, which rightly condemn illegal persecution, should support reasonable licensing decisions as contributing to its demise.

CHARLES NODDER
Political adviser
National Gamekeepers' Organisation
PO Box 246, Darlington, DL1 9FZ

Sally Elliot, winner of The Lady Scott Rose Bowl for the Game Bird of the Year 2016

Through Sally Elliot's devoted care of ponds, hedges, grassy wet bits and arable edges, our wader population has exploded from basically a handful of curlew, plovers and oyster catchers in total to at least two dozen curlews, same for plovers and well over 100 oyster catchers in the last 5–6 years. Sally is constantly on the ground monitoring and caring for the birds, feeding, preparation work of cleaning, erecting pens and hoppers. All this with two children and a kennel of

dogs, too. Sally prepares beaters' lunches, all appreciated by the team. Sally does all this with a love for the land, the wildlife and her time sharing her husband's passion. Tullybeagles, the wildlife, the team, my family and friends all benefit from the hard work and devotion of Sally.

JOHN HAVEN
Laird of Tullybeagles
Tullybeagles Estate
Meikleour, Perth, PH2 6EA

A presentation to Sally was made at the GWCT Game Fair at Scone, Perth, on Friday, July 1 to recognise Sally's achievements. Lady Scott, trustee, Sir John Scott Bt, Honorary President, Raymond Holt, Trustee, Helen Benson of the Gamekeepers' Welfare Trust (GWT) and Alex Hogg Chairman of the SGA were in attendance. The Rose Bowl was presented along with a named gilet donated by Game & Country, main sponsors of the Game Bird Award.



A perfect Scottish retreat

→ The Lower Dess Estate is described as “a perfect Scottish retreat”. **JAMES SOMERVILLE-MEIKLE** finds out about the hard work and care that ensures this is no idle boast.

For a fishing enthusiast there can be few greater pleasures in life than casting a fly on the River Dee, one of Scotland’s four largest rivers. As I waded into the crystal-clear water of one of the pools at the Lower Dess Estate, near Aboyne, I think how lucky I am to be following in the footsteps of generations of fishermen. Conditions are almost perfect; it is a warm day with a gentle breeze and enough cloud cover to keep the sun off the water. All around me are uninterrupted views over the valley to the Forest of Birse, a truly stunning setting. But the tranquillity of the day hides what has been a challenging, but also exciting, five years for Lower Dess.

Jeremy and Jenny Clayton purchased this 428-acre estate in 2011 to fulfil a lifelong dream of owning a Scottish estate. For Jeremy “Lower Dess ticked all the boxes, it has good fishing, is very beautiful, quiet and secluded and had enough

projects to make it really interesting”. Since becoming owners they have carefully and accurately restored much of the estate to its full potential.

The renovation programme has recently culminated in the complete transformation of an old farm steading into a luxury 10-bed lodge complete with kennels and gunroom. The conversion has breathed new life into the old granite stones of the derelict buildings and given them a new purpose as a holiday destination for sportsmen and women enjoying the fishing on the estate as well as local shooting, stalking, golf and skiing. Some of the best grouse shooting in the country is within a 30-minute drive, although grouse numbers in Angus and Aberdeenshire are significantly lower than last year. The lodge can also be let on a B&B basis and takes in residential photography and art courses which is a useful source of business, particularly outside of the game seasons.

As well as building the lodge, Jeremy and Jenny have also installed new access steps to the river, modernised the main house and cottage, installed central heating and double glazing to all properties bar one, completely renovated the farm house and re-fenced the entire estate. It is wonderful to see the investment that is being made in



the estate which is driven by a love of the local area and a long-term commitment to the estate’s future success. All of the investment has been done with the help of local tradesmen, helping to stimulate the local economy, and the progress that has been made is clearly a source of satisfaction for Jeremy and Jenny.

This progress has been made in the face of some of the most challenging times for landowners in Scotland. Since Jeremy and Jenny purchased the estate five years ago, they have witnessed the turbulence of the Scottish independence and EU referendums, the plummeting price of North Sea oil with the knock-on effects in Aberdeen and Deeside, as well as the uncertainty created by the land



James Somerville-Meikle is political assistant at the Countryside Alliance. He has worked on a number of sporting estates in Scotland during the last 10 years and now helps to deliver campaign work in Westminster.



“A HOLIDAY DESTINATION FOR SPORTSMEN AND WOMEN ENJOYING THE FISHING ON THE ESTATE AS WELL AS LOCAL SHOOTING, STALKING, GOLF AND SKIING.”

reform agenda in Scotland. One element of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act, passed earlier this year, was legislation to enable the reintroduction of business rates for sporting estates and this is something which Jeremy is particularly concerned about. “At a time when the rural economy is fragile, it would be an extra burden on the business, at present, every penny the estate earns is put back into it (and more) and if the introduction of rates happens, we will have to consider whether to keep investing.”

The biggest challenge came earlier this year when the River Dee burst its banks and flood waters rose to their highest levels in 200 years. Whole sections of the estate’s roads were washed away, fishing huts were badly damaged and in some cases completely destroyed, and flood water came into the tackle room up to the necks of two stag heads mounted on the wall. The water was only at its highest for 12 hours, but the damage has taken months to repair and the nearby town of Ballater is still recovering.

Thanks to commitment of Jeremy and Jenny and the help of the local community, the estate has now almost completely recovered. Roads that were washed away have been replaced, fishing huts repaired or rebuilt and the stag heads in the tackle room have been cleaned up.

The best news is that the floods do not appear to have caused any long-term damage to the fish stocks or the quality of the fishing on the estate. The force of the flood waters altered many of the pools on the estate, but Jeremy explains that “whilst the river has changed, our fishers have adapted, and our catches are significantly better than last season.” It is an amazing testament to the resilience of the fish that they are still here in good numbers after the floods.

The estate comprises almost 2.5 miles of the north bank of the River Dee and fishing is by far the main sporting element of the estate. Traditionally there were two beats - Lower Dess and Upper Dess but they are now owned and fished as one estate (Lower Dess) with a total of 16 named pools. It boasts some of the best spring and summer salmon fishing on the Dee with excellent Sea Trout in June and August. The river is fished on a fly-only basis and since 1999 there has been a catch and release policy in place with over 90 per cent of caught fish being released which has helped to increase stocks.

The reputation of the estate is growing and according to the estate’s ghillie, Eoin Smith, fishing guests come from all over, “from the nearby village of Kincardine O’Neil to Tokyo”. With this in mind I ask Eoin whether even a novice man from Kent, such as myself, might hope to catch something. He smiles and says: “the fish have no idea who is on the other end of the line, and it makes no difference whether it is me or the Queen who is casting”.

We make the short journey down to the river bank along a newly repaired road and Eoin gives me some much needed advice. I wade into the river and feel the force of the water against my legs and I am pleased to have the stick that Eoin has lent me to keep my balance. I start to cast and make my way down the river a yard at a time after every few casts. Down the river a salmon jumps out and I think my luck might be in. I make my way to where I saw it, and no sooner am I casting in that spot when salmon start to jump in another part of the river. None of them are tempted by my fly, but it is a truly wonderful sight to see the salmon burst out of the water, glisten in the sun, before disappearing into the water. Against the odds, the fish, like the estate, are thriving. ●

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➔ **MORE EVENTS** Our online listing is updated regularly and can be found at www.countryside-alliance.org/events/upcoming-events

{AUTUMN 2016}

Get involved. Top events for the next few months



Nominate now in the 12th annual Rural Oscars

Awards, also known as the Rural Oscars, are Britain's premier business awards and give a voice and platform to the best of our produce, enterprise, heritage and communities.

Please nominate your favourite businesses now! The categories are:

1. Local food and drink
2. Village Shop/Post Office
3. Tourism Enterprise
4. Farm enterprise (new for 2016)

Please support rural businesses through our Awards. Nominate online at www.countryside-alliance.org or email awards@countryside-alliance.org to tell us who your favourites are and why. **Nominations will be accepted until November 4.**

■ **September 17-18**
Midland Game Fair, Weston Park, Shropshire.
www.midlandgamefair.co.uk

■ **October 4**
London Wine Auction at the Victoria and Albert Museum. The popular annual event is sold out – look out for a photo gallery in our Winter issue.

■ **October 18**
Countryside Alliance Annual General Meeting at 11am in the Gascoigne Suite, the Union Jack Club, Sandell Street, London, SE1 8UJ. Richard Fry and Andrew Ogg have been elected to the board unopposed – to read more about them, and for the ballot form to approve our accounts, please see our annual report from p.9 of this magazine.

■ **October 18**
Hamish Mackie exhibition, at the Mall Galleries in association

with Roxtons and Country Life (see p36).



■ **October 23**
Aintree Countryside Day
Join the Countryside Alliance for lunch and a thrilling day of racing at the famous Aintree racecourse. Gates open at 10:45am with the Countryside Alliance Charity Race at noon. Following the charity race you are invited up to the Countryside Alliance enclosure in the main grandstand for a Champagne reception and three course lunch before the rest of the racing gets underway.

Tickets are £60 per person and include:

- Members entry
 - Race card
 - Champagne reception
 - Lunch
 - Access all day to our enclosure in the Grand Stand
- Book your tickets online at www.countryside-alliance.org/product-category/events
- Tickets for children (under 14-years-old) are available at £30 each. Tables come as 8, 10 or 12 person. Please let us know the name of your table host when booking if applicable.

■ **October 22-29**
Hunting Newcomers' Week
The popular annual week where hunts encourage those who have never been hunting to give it a try. Keep an eye on our Facebook page for news and photos.

■ **November 11**
Cheltenham Countryside Day
The popular day will raise funds for the Countryside

➔ **NOVEMBER 6**
COUNTRYSIDE DAY AT FFOS LAS, CARMARTHENSHIRE.
Tickets are on sale now so come and support the Countryside Alliance in Wales.



Alliance and the Injured Jockeys Fund and will, of course, include the Armistice Day silence at 11am (see p11).

■ **November 18**
Old Berks Christmas Fair
11am – 7pm at The Kidson-Trigg Auction Rooms, Nr Highworth, Swindon, SN6 7PZ. Take the hassle out of Christmas shopping and come to our fair where stall holders offer a varied selection of unusual and affordable Christmas gifts for you, your family and friends. Shop after 5pm and enjoy a complimentary glass of mulled wine.

For a list of stallholders, visit: www.countrysidechristmasfair.co.uk or contact sara-rutherford@countryside-alliance.org

Supporting Thames Valley Air Ambulance, the Old Berkshire Hunt and the Countryside Alliance.

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Entrance: Adults £5.00 under 15 free.

➔ **NOVEMBER 20-27**
GREAT BRITISH GAME WEEK. Keep an eye on our website for updates on events taking place.

VICTORIA KNOWLES-LACKS

is the founder of the Shotgun & Chelsea Bun Club, encouraging women to get involved in shooting.

To me, my countryside is all about community. I'm so lucky to be a part of a number of thriving and devoted communities and to be able to benefit from all of the amazing and enriching things that they bring. It's that community spirit and mucking in that's most important to me and what I think is so unique and wonderful about the Great British countryside. It's also those chilly days stood on a peg that I adore, hearty food, cosy nights in front of the fire, and sunny mornings over the field with my lakeland terrier in the summer.

Home for me is on the beautiful Worcestershire/Shropshire border. I absolutely love it here. It's the kind of place where you can leave your door unlocked. There's a bustling village with so many independent shops, a handful of pubs, and we're surrounded by proper hunting and shooting country with never-ending bridleways and swathes of cover crops. I love nothing more than popping in to the pub and catching-up on goings on, getting fresh bread from the local bakery and fresh produce from the local shops.

It's about being a part of the shooting community, being amongst friends I know and those who I've not met before, and knowing we're on the same page. It's those quirky types who never fail to make you laugh, or dole out a tongue in cheek comment. It's being myself amongst such a diverse array of people. Whether old or

“It's all about celebrating successes and building each other up, regardless of the size of the achievement.”



young, rich or poor, it's about mucking in for the love of the sport. It's sharing the most incredible days, the joy of a towering bird, witnessing a spectacular retrieve and having a jolly time in some of the most beautiful places. Most importantly, it's being me but all of us being as one with a common cause - our love of fieldsports.

My day job, or my mission in life should I say, is sharing my love for shooting with other women. I'm fortunate enough to run my own business, a ladies' shooting club. We introduce new ladies to the sport along with providing a place to network for more experienced lady guns. We have our own fast-growing community right at the heart of what we stand for.

The ethos of the club is about support, the sisterhood, and having each other's back, whilst doing what we love. It's all about celebrating successes and building each other up, regardless of the size of the achievement. I get such a high from firsts of our members. Whether one of our members gets their licence granted, as many are doing in their droves, shooting their first bird, buying their first gun, or just going to the local gun club on their own. It's all these things that are so worthy of celebration. It's also enticing ladies from the cities out to a shoot; it's the joy of fresh air, hidden gems of country pubs, slowing down for horse riders and livestock, or just scenery which takes your breath away.

Talking of celebration, we are so lucky to have so many amazing people amongst our ranks, who each weave their qualities into our rural communities. Those who put their heads above the

parapet, or those who just keep their head down and do their thing.

I hope your countryside is as rich as mine. ●



Photos: <http://www.hurworth-photos.co.uk>

For more information, visit www.shotgunandchelseabunclub.co.uk. You can also find the club on Twitter and Facebook. The club celebrates its fifth anniversary this year and we offer warm congratulations.

IAN COLEY

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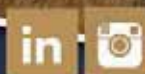
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