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EDITOR'S LETTER

2 017 is something of a numbers game. Fresh from celebrating 350 years of the Cottesmore Hunt (p44) we now move on to the Gamekeepers' Welfare Trust's silver anniversary (p36) which will see a series of conferences around the country looking ahead to the future of gamekeeping. The Countryside Alliance celebrates 20 years this year, which is a good moment to reflect that many of the things we love can adapt and thrive in the modern world while still retaining core values (this is also showcased by the new Quorn Hunting Hat on p15).

The Countryside Alliance is certainly embracing this next phase of life, and pictured right you will see our new logo, the result of the work of top designer Steve Edge. You will be able to read more about the new family of logos created by Steve in our next issue as our individual projects roll out their fresh new identities. Two such projects each enter their 11th year of operation this year. The inspiring Fishing 4 Schools programme (p23) is in buoyant form as its director Charles Jardine explains, and on p18 three of our expert volunteers explain why their skills work together at the heart of our Casting for Recovery programme, which uses fly fishing as therapy for ladies with breast cancer.

Elsewhere this Spring, we bring you a briefing on the Polcing & Crime Act (p11), celebrate the Welsh Rural Oscars (26) and hear from North Yorkshire Chief Constable Dave Jones on bringing down rural crime (p34). Enjoy this diverse and packed issue.

Jill Grieve, Editor

Follow me on Twitter @CAjilly

The decision of Countryside Alliance Board regarding Board vacancies and a ballot of members ahead of the AGM on 12 September appears on the Countryside Alliance website.

Cover photo: www.alamy.com

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Countryside Alliance



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Review

Round-up of the stories that matter to you.

COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE

New logo, same values

The Countryside Alliance is celebrating its 20th anniversary with a vibrant new suite of logos

To mark its 20th anniversary the Countryside Alliance has changed its branding. The new look emphasises the Alliance's aim to ensure a future for the countryside which both preserves its traditional values and promotes a thriving rural community and economy; a countryside sustainably managed and sustainably enjoyed; a countryside where rural communities have equal access to the facilities and services enjoyed in urban communities; a countryside where people can pursue their businesses, activities and lives in a society that appreciates and understands their way of life.

Countryside Alliance chief executive Tim Bonner said: "We are committed to supporting people who hunt, shoot and fish – that won't change. This is about communicating the remarkable work we do to a much wider audience. We've always been a great campaigning organisation but we need to work harder at communicating that message and the broad range of

campaigning we do in other areas such as rural broadband and our Game-to-Eat programme."

"We are extremely grateful to Steve Edge who generously donated his and his agency's time and expertise to create our new logo. Steve is one of Britain's foremost designers working for some of Britain's top brands including Purdey, House of Garrard, and Fortnum and Mason to name but a few. Steve is a long-term supporter of the work of the Countryside Alliance and a committed angler. We have been delighted to work with him to develop the new Countryside Alliance brand logo – one that will increase our capacity to communicate in a digital age and stand us in good stead for many years to come."

New logos for projects including Fishing 4 Schools, Game-to-Eat and the Countryside Alliance Awards will be unveiled in our Summer issue alongside an interview with Steve, where he describes the vision for the dynamic new family of brand marks.

Welcome from our chief executive



In the Countryside Alliance's 20th year we are ushering in a new era. Our traditional core values will remain

and the organisation of which you are a member will still stand for hunting, shooting, fishing, farming and the rural way of life as we always have. However, we also need to move forward in this electronic, news hungry and politically unstable age, so how we look and the way we communicate across print and digital platforms is changing. You will have seen our new logo opposite, which is central to that evolution, and our new website is also vital. Our magazine is also moving forward and this is the final issue in the current format. I hope you like our new look and will continue to support our work.

"You will have seen our new logo opposite, which is central to that evolution, and our new website is also vital."

There is no change in our workload, and this year has already got off to a busy start on many fronts, from our input into the Policing & Crime Bill to celebrating the Welsh Rural Oscars and launching a prize draw with Beretta (see p40).

As ever we will always be available to you whether at shows and events, or through email and social media and I look forward to discussing our campaigning work, our new brand and our hopes for the next 20 years.

Tim Bonner, Chief Executive
Follow me on Twitter @CA_TimB

Countryside Alliance



"We are extremely grateful to Steve Edge who generously donated his and his agency's time and expertise to create our new logo."

SERVICES

The State of Rural Services

The Countryside Alliance was at the Parliamentary launch of the State of Rural Services 2016 report (published by the Rural Services Network in January 2017) which provides evidence regarding the provision of services to residents and businesses in rural England. The report covers nine service areas: local buses and community transport; welfare services; access to cash; further education; the

retail sector; mental health services; older people's services; public health services and community assets. Members and supporters will be well aware of the parlous state of many of our services, but we were encouraged by the media coverage the report generated, which can only be positive as we work to tackle the blatant inequalities of rural service provision.



The Quarter

OUR HIGHLIGHTS OF THE PAST THREE MONTHS

DECEMBER

● **Boxing Day** saw cheering crowds supporting hunts up and down the country. Please see our Facebook page for extensive photography. Also this month, CA head of policy Sarah Lee called for a "365 day a year tourism season" while giving evidence to the EFRA committee on boosting the tourism sector in England.



JANUARY

● **Avian flu** saw rural organisations work with the Government to circulate advice. The Countryside



Alliance raised concerns about the Environmental Audit Committee report into The Future of the Natural Environment after the EU Referendum, arguing that the report will create confusion due to its approach to 'rewilding'.

FEBRUARY

● **The Alliance's** new logo began its roll-out at the launch of our gun draw for the limited-edition Beretta 490 Serpentina at Beretta's London showroom (see advert on p40 for details of the draw). The Savills Countryside Alliance Point-to-Point took place at Badbury Rings in Dorset.



BBC

Holding the BBC to account

The Countryside Alliance (CA) is continuing to hold the BBC and its presenters to account. In September, 2016, our complaint regarding Chris Packham breaching impartiality rules was dismissed by the BBC Trust, ludicrously claiming that he was not a BBC presenter.

Though disappointed with the Trust's decision, we were hopeful that the new BBC Charter would ensure the corporation would be more accountable in future. However, now that the full details have been published regarding Ofcom's new role in regulating the BBC, it is clear that the Charter falls well short of what we were hoping for. Ofcom will only regulate, and be the final arbiter

with regards to editorial complaints in relation to broadcast news and current public policy. Chris' activities will, therefore, be outside the remit of Ofcom's limited role.

No doubt emboldened by the nature of the new Charter's and Ofcom's regulatory roles, earlier this year Chris launched a broadside on us on the Huffington Post blog, accusing us of using 'dirty tricks'. As we have always maintained, Chris is free to his views, but he should not use a publicly funded platform on which to air them.

The CA will continue to challenge Chris and the BBC in the media when they continue to fail rural communities like they have done over the past few years.

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Birdcrime Report massages statistics

In February the RSPB published its Birdcrime Report for 2015, providing a summary of the offences against wild bird legislation that were reported to the RSPB. While we are grateful for the work the RSPB do in the detection of bird crime, it is regrettable that the presentation of these statistics once again seems driven by a desire to create a narrative which supports an agenda, including the introduction of an offence of vicarious liability and the licensing of grouse moors, which the evidence simply does not support.

The press release circulated by the RSPB to mark the release of the report stated that “196 reports of shooting and destruction of birds of prey and 50 reports of wildlife poisoning and pesticide related offences across the UK in 2015”.

These figures refer to the total number of incidents relating to birds of prey reported to the RSPB. Less than half of these reported incidents go on to be confirmed, even fewer lead to a successful conviction. Even so, the total number of such reported incidents is in decline. The figures quoted from the RSPB press release represent a 33 per cent decline since 2010. This is especially pleasing given the enormous increase in many raptor populations and the improvements in raptor crime detection made by the RSPB and others during this time.

There is, however, a regrettable tendency for the RSPB’s press releases around their Birdcrime Reports to be needlessly divisive and to ignore both the progress that has been made and the valuable

relationships that have been built with farmers, gamekeepers and others. Nowhere is this divisiveness clearer than in the conclusion to the report. The report concerns 2015, yet the conclusions are headlined by a large pie-chart highlighting a high number of gamekeepers convicted of raptor crimes over the previous 25 years, implying that this remains a serious problem. Yet the RSPB’s reports for 2006–2015 show that gamekeepers were convicted of just 5 per cent of the 1,550 individual charges brought during that 10-year period. The RSPB’s focus on the gamekeeping community is totally disproportionate, and extremely damaging to its relationship with those they should be actively seeking to work in partnership.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Common sense on dog breeding

The Countryside Alliance has welcomed the decision by the Government to allow responsible dog breeders to have up to two litters a year before being licensed.

The current law allows dog breeders to have up to four litters a year before needing a licence. There have been calls for significant changes to the law with some even calling for those who have just one litter of puppies a year to have to register with their local authority and display their registration number when advertising. The CA made representations to the Government requesting that any changes not be too burdensome on responsible small scale hobby breeders.

In early February 2017, in response to a Government consultation, the Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs published a ‘Next Steps’ report, stating that the four-litter limit would be reduced to two.

CA chief executive, Tim Bonner, said: “While fully supportive of the



Government’s determination to improve welfare standards, the calls for all breeders to have to register with their local authority, even those who produce only one litter, would have been overly burdensome on hobby breeders and we are glad that the more extreme calls have been rejected by the Government.

“This law affects many farmers and breeders of working dogs and we are pleased with the Government’s

common sense-based approach to modify the current law.

“Puppy farming is a serious welfare issue and the CA supports any moves to tackle it. It is widely accepted, however, that the hobby breeding of working dogs is generally carried out to high welfare standards and we believe that licensing breeders who produce fewer than three litters would have been overly draconian and a waste of scarce resources.”



SHOOTING

Standing up for shooting

HSBC has confirmed it has no policy discriminating against shooting, and has offered its services to businesses it had previously rejected.

Having heard rumours that HSBC was declining services to businesses associated with shooting, the CA contacted one affected business to confirm what was happening. We found that at least one customer had been informed that shooting was considered a 'prohibited sport' and, as such, services had been denied. The business had written to the bank to complain but received no response.

CA chief executive Tim Bonner wrote to Douglas Flint, the chairman of HSBC UK, to raise our urgent concerns. In the letter, Tim pointed out the value of game shooting to the UK economy and the importance of shooting sports to millions of participants and asked if a policy discriminating against participants was in place at HSBC. Mr Flint responded very quickly to tell us that no such policy existed and committed to looking into the cases we had raised. Having investigated, HSBC found that its policies were indeed being misapplied, causing shooting businesses to be unfairly denied access to services. Mr Flint told us that HSBC would be ensuring that shooting clients would not be penalised in the future, and that they would be contacting the shooting businesses affected to date. Subsequently we did verify that this contact had been made.

AIRGUNS

Ill-thought out airgun legislation in Scotland

The Air Weapons and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2015 came into force in January, meaning all airguns in Scotland now have to be licensed. Those with a firearm or shotgun licence will not require a licence until the existing one is due for renewal. However, those carrying airguns into Scotland for competitive reasons or pest control will need to pay for a permit (£20).

The Scottish Countryside Alliance is vehemently against this new legislation and will continue to update members on progress.



HUNTING

Scottish hunting update

As Scotland's foxhound packs doff a cap to the 13th February as a significant date in their diary it's business as usual!

In November 2016 the Scottish Government's review of the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act 2002 was published. Evidence for Lord Bonomo's review was submitted by the Scottish Countryside Alliance (SCA), and the SCA helped to coordinate meetings between the review team and representatives from the Scottish mounted and hill foxhound community. It was also arranged for Lord Bonomo to attend and observe a mounted operation.

We welcomed Cabinet Secretary Roseanna Cunningham's endorsement of Lord Bonomo's findings, particularly that the searching and flushing by two dogs would not be as effective as that done by a full pack of hounds, but also that imposing such a restriction could seriously compromise effective pest control in the country.

We are committed to working with the Scottish Government, Police Scotland and stakeholders on a Code of Practice to strengthen the scrutiny



Photo: Ian Renton

and accountability of practitioners in the management of wild mammals. Further to this, we have initiated a series of open days for Police Scotland operatives and interested MSPs to help them understand the working dynamic of a foxhound kennel. We do still have concerns in relation to what would be best described as draconian changes to the law and working hard with the Scottish Government and our legal team to find a practical outcome. The fact that we still have a form of fox hunting in Scotland is testament to the determination of the people involved. Foxhound packs continue to make a major contribution to the social cohesion and community spirit of the locality and to highly valued features of rural life, something recognised within the review. Scotland's mounted packs emerged from the fight on February 13, 2002, blooded but unbeaten. Fifteen years on they continue working with farming and conservation interests to ensure that fox populations are kept to a minimum at sensitive times of the year.



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The new Policing and Crime Act – what you need to know

→ We take a closer look at the implications for firearms law and police powers when dealing with hunt protestors.

The Policing and Crime Act received royal assent earlier this year and makes significant changes to our firearms law. These laws are justly stringent, but it is undeniable that certain elements of our legislation serve no purpose other than to make life difficult for the legal shooting community, who have always shown themselves to be overwhelmingly law-abiding. Three such elements are subject to amendments within the Policing and Crime Act. These amendments were first championed by the Countryside Alliance, because they make a real difference to the lives of firearms owners.

One amendment tackles the confusion over who can lend a shotgun or rifle to someone who doesn't hold a certificate of their own. On designated clay-grounds there has never been a problem as they have their own legal exemptions, but everywhere else, anyone wishing to lend a gun has run into the uncertainty surrounding the definition of 'occupier'. The amendment introduced by the Policing and Crime Act finally brings clarity — someone without a certificate will be able to borrow a shotgun from anyone who has the right to allow others to enter the premises for the purpose

For many years hunts have faced violent protestors wearing face coverings, often paramilitary in style, designed not only to intimidate but also to make it difficult for them to be prosecuted where they break the law. Under section 60AA (3) of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 there is a stand-alone power which allows police constables to require the removal of face coverings where these are used for the purpose of concealing identity. However, this power could only be used if authorised in advance and in writing. This requirement is fine where the police know in advance when and where a protest is to occur. It is wholly impractical in the light of modern methods of protest, such as flash mobs using social media, where the police may

of hunting animals or shooting game or vermin. That same person can issue written permission to other certificate holders to lend shotguns and rifles and to supervise non-certificate holders.

A second amendment gives the police an eight-week window after the expiry of a shotgun or firearms certificate in which the certificate will remain valid assuming the renewal paperwork was submitted eight weeks before the expiry date. We know from our own research that police licensing teams are placing huge numbers of people on Section 7 Temporary Permits when their firearms certificates expire, despite the certificate-holder submitting their renewal paperwork on time. This amendment will alleviate the need to issue Temporary Permits, freeing the licensing departments from that administrative burden and allowing them to focus on turning around renewals in a timelier fashion, resulting in a more efficient service.

A third amendment moves expanding

not have enough advanced information to have reasonable belief that 'activities may take place in any locality...that are likely (if they take place) to involve the commission of offences', but are suddenly faced with masked protestors and need



Photo: Emma Richardson

ammunition from Section 5 back to Section 1, so rifle owners will no longer need specific permission to hold expanding ammunition for their stalking and vermin shooting. This will make everyone's firearm certificate less complex, but will be of particular use to owners of large calibre rifles used for hunting abroad, who until now have not been able to hold and practice with the expanding ammunition they will use abroad.

to be able to act swiftly.

The Policing and Crime Act, passed earlier this year, amends the law so that the power to remove face coverings does not now have to be authorised in writing where it is not practical, but can be given orally and recorded in writing afterwards. Full use of this power is vital if constables are to prevent offences which masked protestors may otherwise commit, emboldened by their sense of anonymity, and also reduce the unnecessary intimidatory nature of such protests. This change is expected to come into force in the next few months. We will be writing to chief constables and police and crime commissioners to stress that the rural community expects the police to make the fullest use of the power when faced with masked protestors. ●

A stalk through time

→ Professional stalker **SAM THOMPSON** recollects an unusual client whose journey was firmly rooted in the past.

When, on the third day of stalking with you, a client has not raised a rifle, you start to question whether you're any good.

It was mid-August, the stag season was well underway, the heather was in its full parade colours, when my guest met me at the larder on morning one out of five. Taking a week of stalking for yourself is not the usual thing to do, but some people enjoy the unusual, and a man who wants five days of stalking without a day off is at least going to be a gentleman.

He had driven up from Kent or some such place for the occasion, and had booked a week of stalking as a complete beginner. His name was David, and at 62 years of age, some would have said he was a little late to be taking up any sport, especially stalking. But he proved himself able enough with a rifle on the range, and over the first three days I got to know him a little better.

A small animal vet before his retirement, he had spent a lot of his life working with death, and had never thought of it as a sporting occurrence until discovering the gamebook of his grandfather. He had never met the man, and knew very little of his past other than that he had been in the RAF. He had been an aircraft engineer, half Scottish, smoked cigars and didn't like religion. And until David found his stalking diary, that was all he knew of the man. After the war, his grandfather had spent two years every September on the high hills of the west coast, stalking with a group of friends. His gamebook contained a meticulous record of each day spent on the hill, whether he was shooting or observing.



Sam Thompson is a deer stalker who works with a number of estates across Scotland, predominantly in the Highlands. His work varies from guiding clients on trophy stalks to writing management plans, carrying out culls and trying to solve environmental issues where deer play a key role.

On David's second day on the hill, we took shelter in a hollow while I rolled the long glass over the ground, searching for the right group of beasts. David spoke of how the gamebook had become an obsession, and his only real link to his history. As I listened to his quiet voice, the sponge of sphagnum moss beneath us allowed me to sink a little deeper into the hillside and started to release its peaty water into my breeches.

He explained his childhood, and his lust for an adventure that never really came, as university followed school and a good job followed that. Then a family of his own came, and this combined with a veterinary practice that took him 25 years to establish left him little time for himself.

Following the discovery of his grandfather's gamebook, however, the idea of stalking had grown in David's mind, until one day he asked a pheasant shooting friend where to go to give it a try. And so he ended up standing outside my larder on a sunny August morning.

Throughout his story, my eyes were focused on the hill, looking for just the right shade of brown on the brown backdrop. A group of hinds milled into a far corrie,

wheeling themselves about to keep the wind on the right side, and we scanned a while longer before moving on in search of their husbands.

We tramped on, silent over the steep ground laced with damp scree, and I hoped that there would be stags sitting on the flat ground over the hill. Stopping at the top for a breath, we sat down on the granite, looking east towards the sea. We talked a little of the deer, and it was nice to have a guest who would rather talk of the deer than the details of a rifle or binoculars. How the hinds will move to there if they get our scent and how they will join with the stags for the greedy violence of the rut in September, before parting into their single sex groups again for the winter.

A way down, maybe a mile below us, we spied the deer. Seven stags sitting as

"HE HAD NEVER MET THE MAN, AND KNEW VERY LITTLE OF HIS PAST OTHER THAN THAT HE HAD BEEN IN THE RAF. AND UNTIL DAVID FOUND HIS STALKING DIARY, THAT WAS ALL HE KNEW OF THE MAN"



Photo: Glyn Satterley



idle as sheep in a barn. My heart raced at the chance, for there is nothing finer than a man shooting his first beast. With the binoculars on my face I started to form a plan, trying to second-guess the wind that kept swirling from my right shoulder onto my face. We talked it over a little, and I shifted the rifle to the other shoulder before starting the steep descent.

The wind changed, so my plans had to do the same, which added a few hundred yards onto the stalk. David stuck in close behind me, his feet followed mine through the deep black peat and over the rocks. We sat with our backs to a rock, and through the long glass we decided on a beast. He was lying on the far left, a heavy switch with one brow tine, chewing molinia grass with long strokes. He would do just fine, I thought, passing the tube and crook across to David and giving him his first close up look at the beast. His breathing quickened and he grinned at me.

With 600 yards to go, we were doubled over as we stalked down the boulder field, with our scent blown up behind us. The best stag in the group, an eleven-point beast with a neck to make an elephant proud, moved himself around the herd, rolling his head as he walked. We stopped and waited a while, both glassing to see if there was going to be a change of heart, but the deer stayed and we moved on. Once we were a bit closer, the rifle came out from the slip and I loaded the magazine with the lead-nosed cartridges marked Norma .270 Winchester.

Dispensing with the telescope and sticks, we crawled on over the hillocks of grass and heather. The wind dropped to a breeze, but stayed just about right for our deer. The switch had got up to stretch himself, and

walked with the same stiff gait a cat does when it's been lying down too long. Two hundred or so yards from them, we stopped for another glass.

David crawled behind me and, in single file, we edged closer to the herd. Our man had dried peat stuck to the long hairs under his chest and neck, making him look bigger than he really was. In other years it wouldn't be long until his whole body would be black as a winter night with peat, and his roar would make him seem like the most unearthly being as he staggered and jagged his way around the rutting stands. But not for this beast this year, his chips are down.

We stopped crawling at around 130 yards from the stag. Down went the bipod legs; up went the scope caps. I crawled backwards to allow David to get into a cold clinch with the rifle stock, and checked that he was happy with a thumbs up before drawing myself up next to him and finding the beast in my binoculars.

"Whenever you're ready, just behind the shoulder and half way up Sir."

The seconds seemed to turn into long hours as I waited for the muffled crack, but the rifle stayed silent. A hoody crow circled high above us; I spotted him as I turned my head to see if David was alright.

His eyes were closed and his head dipped from the stock. I waited a few seconds before prodding him in the arm and trying the old thumbs up one more time... after three days of nothing I was hoping he wouldn't lose his nerve at the last moment. A brief smile was his only response, before blinking and settling into the rifle like a seasoned professional.

The shot was good, and the beast dropped after a 30-yard death or glory

"... AFTER THREE DAYS OF NOTHING I WAS HOPING HE WOULDN'T LOSE HIS NERVE AT THE LAST MOMENT"

charge. David's approach was cautious, and it seemed to take a minute to sink in, before he sat on a tuft of grass and looked at the beast for a good long time. It was a very special moment, between a man and the animal that represented the grandfather he never knew.

As I worked the knife through the peat clotted hair of the beast's underbelly, the ripe scent of the gralloch soaked the air, and David watched on as the puddings spilled onto the October heather. I explained the job of gutting as I worked, but his thoughts were not with me and the stag, and later, as we dragged the stag from the hill he confessed that they had been with his grandfather, and the connection he felt between them. ●

Read Sam's blog at ardaleditch.wordpress.com

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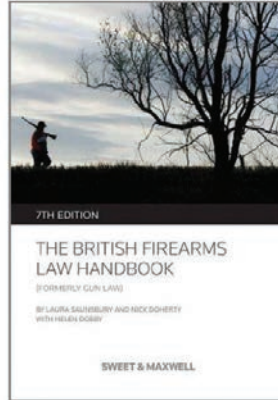


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Here come the girls

→ International fly fishing star **SUE SHAW** and former joint master of the Bicester Hunt with Whaddon Chase, **POLLY PORTWIN**, have joined the Countryside Alliance and outline their roles.



The CA has recently appointed two new staff members to enhance and develop its work on two fronts. Sue Shaw joined in January to help develop our charitable fishing projects, Casting for Recovery UK & Ireland and Fishing 4 Schools. At present she is focusing on delivering five retreats for Casting for Recovery, and will also work with Charles Jardine to help develop Fishing 4 Schools (see p23). Polly Portwin joined in December as head of hunting, a new role that will see her work alongside hunts themselves, and also represent hunting in the media and at Parliament. Both Sue and Polly perfectly encapsulate our work — using education and promotion to make the case for our way of life. You will be able to meet Sue and Polly at a show near you soon.

Sue Shaw, former fly fishing international, is the new projects co-ordinator for the Countryside Alliance Foundation



Sue says: "I have taken up the new role of projects coordinator for The Countryside Alliance Foundation. My main role is to help with the running and administration

of Casting for Recovery UK & Ireland (CfR) retreats (see p18). I will attend all scheduled weekends and be the main point of contact for all the applicants.

"It will be my job to let applicants know if they have been successful in our ballot and have, therefore, been invited onto one of our fly fishing therapy weekends. I am there to answer the many questions that invariably come to mind as ladies prepare to join us. There are various documents that need to be completed and returned as we take great pride in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of those women taking part.

"We already have a great team of volunteers from the medical side along with fly fishing coaches, retreat assistants and fishing guides. Looking to the future, I am keen to develop the programme so that previous participants can remain involved. Whilst I can extol the virtues of CfR, I think these women fully understand the benefits of the programme and are more than happy to pass this on to the new participants when they arrive to instantly put them at ease.

"I will be at various fundraisers and fly fishing and country shows in my role, including the Great Yorkshire Show and Countryfile Live. I was recently at the British Fly Fishing Fair International and we received a warm welcome from the fly fishing community who have always been so good to us. At shows, I look forward to speaking to potential candidates and also those from the fly fishing world who may wish to get involved, whether by tying flies for us or even coming on a retreat to guide one of the lady participants. As the project grows, all support is welcome, and we hope to roll out more and more retreats each year.

"The project started in 2006, when fellow England international (and double breast cancer survivor) Sue Hunter and myself ran CfR, with financial

"I LOVE MEETING THE WOMEN WHEN THEY ARRIVE ON THE FRIDAY AND SEEING THE VAST CHANGE IN THEM BY THE TIME WE SAY OUR FOND FAREWELLS ON SUNDAY AFTERNOON. IT'S QUITE INCREDIBLE"

support from The Countryside Alliance Foundation. In the early years we did everything - administration, transporting all the kit to the retreats in our own cars, erecting the marquee and running the fishing. I can't thank Orvis UK enough for their support over the years as well, as all lady participants are kitted out with Orvis all-weather gear, rods and tackle for the duration of the retreat. Sue and I both worked full-time as well, and so CfR work was done in the evenings and weekends — I'm still not sure how we managed this, but we were like a stick of rock with CfR running down the middle. I attended most of the retreats over the years and have met some wonderful, inspirational women during that time and am truly honoured to think that the work we do has had such a positive impact on their lives.

"Whenever I come home after a retreat I feel an overpowering sense of achievement, which is so very rewarding. I love meeting the women when they arrive on the Friday and see the vast change in them by the time we say our fond farewells on Sunday afternoon. It's quite incredible and I can't find the word to adequately describe it but, believe me, the camaraderie is infectious and resonates throughout the celebration lunch. I feel so lucky to be able to play a small part in making a positive difference to someone's life."

Find out more at: www.castingforrecovery.org.uk or contact cfr@ca-foundation.org for more information.

Polly Portwin, former master of the Bicester with Whatton Chase is our new head of hunting.

Photo: Sarah Farnsworth Photography www.sarahfarnsworth.co.uk



Polly Portwin became the CA's head of hunting in December 2016. Head of hunting is a new role that involves liaising with hunts themselves, with politicians and the media in promoting hunting

and wildlife management to as wide an audience as possible.

Polly says: "As a farmer's daughter, I've always understood life in the countryside and also took a keen interest in hunting, riding to hounds from a very early age. I was a joint-master of the Bicester with Whaddon Chase for 11 seasons, during which time I served on the Masters of Foxhounds Association (MFHA) committee. In 2013, I took on the role of hunting editor at *Horse & Hound* where I was responsible for the hunting content and visited many packs across the country and Ireland as a correspondent.

"This new role is a great opportunity to further develop the campaign for hunting, a campaign with a reputation for being extremely vocal on hunting's benefits, and strong in its support of those on hunting's front line. I hope to explore different ways in which we can challenge the Hunting Act and to provide better support for the hunt staff who come up against the challenges the unworkable Act brings to their everyday lives.

"I believe it is vital to maintain direct contact with the membership and hunting supporters. Hunting with different packs of hounds is the perfect

"WE MAY NOT BE MARCHING ON THE STREETS OF LONDON IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, BUT THAT DOES NOT MEAN THERE IS NOT A LOT OF WORK GOING ON BEHIND THE SCENES THAT NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT."

opportunity to meet those who support the CA and listen to their views. Out of the hunting season I will be representing the CA at the various hound shows and attending puppy shows when possible.

On the issue of how you, the membership, can support the CA and Polly in their roles, Polly says: "It is vital that members step up when asked to help, and pull together in whatever way they can to ensure the future of hunting. From the volunteers and unsung heroes within every pack of hounds, to those hunting hounds or drafting government bills in case we get a change in the law, every bit of support for our cause is needed. We may not be marching on the streets of London in the foreseeable future, but that does not mean there is not a lot of work going on behind the scenes that needs your support." ●



Photo: Sarah Farnsworth Photography www.sarahfarnsworth.co.uk



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Casting for Recovery – the winning formula

→ We rely on many people to make Casting for Recovery work. Here, our top fly fishing, counselling and medical experts reveal what makes a retreat swing



Casting for Recovery UK & Ireland (CfR) uses counselling, medical support and fly fishing to great effect on weekend retreats for ladies with breast cancer. Here volunteers from those three disciplines, experienced counsellor Tina, top fly casting instructor Vera and clinical nurse specialist Lottie, explain why their talents all come together on retreat to bring ladies with breast cancer a memorable weekend.



Vera Carlson is an experienced member of the Game Angling Instructors Association (GAIA) who leads casting sessions on some of our retreats, often with her husband Bob.

I am Vee, and I am delighted to be a fly casting instructor at the CfR retreats. These weekend retreats provide participants with a fantastic opportunity to try out a sport they would probably never think of trying, without any pressure, in the company of other ladies. Most of the ladies who attend the retreats are completely out of their comfort zone when they arrive – they have usually seen fish, most probably eaten fish, sometimes touched a fish, but never thought they would catch one – and all this without the need to touch any creepy crawlies.

At the retreats, once kitted out with outdoor clothing supplied by Orvis UK, the ladies at least look like anglers and from this moment the fun begins. There is always help on hand to make sure everyone enjoys the whole experience from looking at the equipment, tying knots, and of course the casting. The casting is a great laugh because it is a very different thing to anything they have ever done before and we generally, in a short space of time, see some amazing results. Sometimes we see the fly line forming spaghetti when things have gone wrong, but who cares, we sort out any tangles, laugh about it and try again. Sometimes there is more laughing than casting, but we will always ensure the ladies have a good time.

Coffee break, a little rest and chatter

with newly made friends – dare I interrupt and say more casting? We have lunch to fit in somewhere, a bit of what fish eat and soon it's tea time. When does the fishing take place? Sunday morning is when it all happens and every lady is given a local fishing guide to help her catch a fish. These guides are specially chosen for their kind manner, plus they are all good anglers; but there is always a lot of apprehension. What will he be like? or Is my guide good looking? It's a bit like "Blind Date" and quite a bit of teasing takes place but we have a very scientific way of pairing a lady with a fishing guide and that is where the mystique lies.

Off they go to fish, usually the ladies are so involved with their casting, fishing and chatting with their guide they completely lose track of time and with hoots and shrieks around the fishery as trout are caught. It's great to see a huge change in the ladies as their confidence grows and their only concern now is how to cook that trout they are taking home in the carrier bag.

Fly fishing gives you confidence, a challenge, a new experience and an amazing hobby with new friends. The whole team at CFR ensures all ladies have a superb memorable weekend at a lovely hotel with amazing food and can go home with lots of unforgettable memories.



Tina Cooke is a Member of the British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists and runs the counselling side of many of our retreats.

Tina writes: The retreats facilitate informal sessions allowing participants to explore their own emotions and feelings. The retreats allow ladies to find their own voice whilst being respectful of others. Alternatively, if ladies simply want to relax and listen the choice is theirs; as we always tell the ladies when they arrive: "these retreats are all about you!"

Whilst it is true we are all unique and have unique circumstances, hopefully throughout the weekend ladies will come to realise none of us are alone in our struggles.

All of our participants are fully supported throughout the weekend from the moment they arrive on the Friday afternoon to fishing, lunch, and fond farewells on the Sunday afternoon.

The Friday evening's activities consist of a few ice breakers to help everyone relax and feel comfortable with all the other participants on the retreat - we appreciate that everyone who comes along may feel nervous about what they have let themselves in for, but we soon try to put them at ease. Cate (my partner in crime) and I are always on hand throughout the retreat if anyone feels the need for time out or space to deal with any concerns or issues.



Saturday afternoon's two-hour session is set aside for a group counselling session and relaxation - these sessions are tailored to the requirements of the group. The goal of the session is to share experience, strength, hope, concerns and feelings in a confidential setting - again no pressure, we only ask ladies to share what they feel comfortable sharing. Then comes the relaxation part of the section where hopefully ladies can unwind, chill and take some 'me time' - well deserved and hard to come by for most ladies!

Sunday morning has time set aside to allow everyone to reflect upon their weekend and what it has meant to them.

Casting for Recovery UK & Ireland offers a valuable source of support for ladies having had, or going through, breast cancer. (May I add that retreats are set in fabulous surroundings and everyone on the team is dedicated to making everyone as comfortable as possible)

Bonds, friendships, connections and wonderful memories have been created through CFR - so what are you waiting for?

Charlotte Weston is a Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) at The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust, RMH.



Charlotte writes: As a breast oncology CNS I support patients from diagnosis through treatment which can include surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, endocrine therapy, and targeted therapies.

I became involved with CFR as it provides a beautiful and unique opportunity for ladies affected by breast cancer to take a step away from the pressures of their daily lives and experience of cancer treatment. The retreats are exceptional quality, held in beautiful locations and staffed with expert support from hotel staff, fly fishing guides, counsellors and nurses. I have been struck by how quickly retreat

participants become at ease with each other and form new friendships, sharing experiences and laughter.

We tailor the healthcare professional-led group sessions to each group's information and support needs; management of menopausal symptoms and lymphoedema are popular subjects. The weekends provide an opportunity to address some of the issues related to breast cancer diagnosis and treatment such as fatigue, confidence, diet, exercise, stress, relationships, and body image. Warm-up exercises before the fly fishing sessions are fun and tailored to a women's specific needs as a result of their cancer or its treatment. The fly fishing guides are knowledgeable, supportive and enthusiastic, watching the ladies cheer each other on as they catch fish is one of my favourite parts of the weekend. The final three-course lunch of the weekend is held in a beautiful restaurant where each participant is presented with a certificate during a moving 'graduation' ceremony and there is a strong feeling of team spirit and a sense of achievement for everyone.

Working with CfR has inspired me to think of new ways to improve access to activities for all patients affected by breast cancer. I am inspired by all the participants I have met and the staff who give their time and resources to support this special organisation. ●

JOIN US IN 2017

Our weekend retreats are run at some of the most beautiful locations across the UK and Ireland, and we are delighted to advertise the remaining retreats for 2017. Ladies can apply to attend at www.castingforrecovery.org.uk and retreats will open to applications on a rolling basis. Please note that places on retreat are allocated by ballot and are subject to medical clearance.

Retreats in North Yorkshire and County Mayo have already closed to applications, but the following retreats may be of interest:

July 21-23 - Kimbridge on the Test near Romsey in Hampshire (open to applications)

September 22-24 - Forbes of Kingennie, Broughty Ferry, Angus

October 20-22 - The Arundell Arms, Lifton, Devon



The QH Hunter

➔ A new hat, designed by the Quorn Hunt and **CHARLES OWEN** is bringing safety to the hunting field this season.

Tradition dies very hard on the hunting fields in Leicestershire. It is a strength that has maintained Britain's hunts in fine heart and good fettle since the restrictions of the 2004 Hunting Act. Part of this tradition is to maintain the highest standards of dress and turnout, a mark of respect to the farmers and landowners who allow the hunt access to their land. But another element of tradition has come under scrutiny. The top hats, bowler hats and traditional hunting caps that are donned for a day in the field offer very little head protection in the event of a fall when following hounds.

The Quorn Hunt is regarded as one of the premier hunts in the country, if not the world. It was founded by in 1696 by Mr Thomas Boothby of Tooley Park, Leicestershire, and has a colourful and sporting history. Only two years after the death of Thomas, Hugo Meynell, the father of foxhunting, rented Quorn Hall and became master of the hunt from 1753/4

to 1799/1800. The Quorn has always attracted hard riding and stylish followers enjoying the thrill of riding to hounds over the best of High Leicestershire. In its hunting heyday the fields of Leicestershire rivalled the Capital as a denizen of fashion.

This bastion of hunting tradition has recently been involved in a major initiative to encourage the hunting fraternity to think again before they don traditional hunting headwear, and instead consider changing to modern protective headwear.

The reason behind the initiative was the tragic death of a well-known, local subscriber in a hunting accident. Peter Collins, who has been the Quorn's professional huntsman for 14 years, was asked by his eight-year-old son, "Is your hat safe, Daddy?" As a result of the innocent question Peter C. decided to discuss his concerns with the former honorary secretary of the Quorn, Peter Morrill.

"The Quorn Hunt, the committee and

officers, felt very strongly that they had a duty of care to provide the best possible headwear for their staff," explains Peter M. "The best way for this to happen was to set an example, and to encourage others to do so by setting a practical example".

So armed with the idea of a safer sort of hat for the hunting field Peter M. raised the issue with Charles Owen, one of the major manufacturers of riding hats. The firm is acknowledged as being at the forefront of improving safety standards so it was an ideal fit for the hunt looking for a modern solution. Technical expertise is all very well, but for the hat to hold sway when seen following hounds it was crucial that it looked the part, too. Luckily, Peter was on hand to provide extensive design input. The result is a brand new riding hat, called the QH Hunter. It is BSI kite marked with chin harness and has been modelled on the traditional deep crown cap favoured by most huntsmen, masters and subscribers.

"I have been wearing the hat all season



Quorn Huntsman Peter Collins models the QH Hunter in the field and in kennels

and find it extremely comfortable” says Peter C. “There have been many favourable comments from our subscribers and from other huntsmen, too.”

The response to the Quorn Hunt’s initiative has been encouraging. “We have sold many hats to local subscribers, of this hunt and neighbouring packs,” says Peter M. “Quite a few have gone further afield and even overseas. The hats have been bought by both modernists and dyed-in-the-wool traditionalists. They have made the decision to ditch the top hat or traditional cap to wear something that fulfils all modern safety standards, yet retains a certain style beloved by people who ride to hounds.”

He says. “There have also been numerous comments about how comfortable the QH Hunter is (I often had our old hunting hats cooking in the Aga trying to make them fit at the

“I HAVE BEEN WEARING THE HAT ALL SEASON AND FIND IT EXTREMELY COMFORTABLE.”

beginning of the season!). Unfortunately, we all know how easy it is to have a fall when out hunting. So if through the Quorn Hunt’s action in taking this initiative we save one person from having a life changing accident, or worse, then our efforts will have been worthwhile.”

“We also cannot thank the managing director of Charles Owen enough for becoming involved. What started off as an idea has become this season’s reality largely due to their support.”

Peter’s well-clad pate has been modelling the navy hat this season as the Quorn Hunt staff traditionally wear navy as part of their dress. But the hat is also suitable for other hunting countries as it comes in black, grey or brown velvet. A dashing grey velvet has already been spotted with the Belvoir, and ladies have the choice of navy or black to match their hunt coats, which means adopting the QH Hunter look does not require a full kit rethink. Although the hat is intended for the hunting community there have been enquiries from the showing fraternity and other pleasure riders who have made the decision to wear a safety hat. ●



The hat is manufactured to the highest standard and is available in black, navy, grey or brown velvet at a cost of £250. It is available to order from the Quorn Hunt, either directly online via the Quorn Hunt website or fittings may be arranged by appointment at the Quorn Hunt kennels - www.quorn-hunt.co.uk Telephone +44 (0)1162 596694



The QH Hunter

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Educating through Fishing

→ CHARLES

JARDINE reflects on 10 exceptional years of his Fishing 4 Schools project and looks ahead to many more.



Ten years. Gosh! Just think, a decade of Fishing 4 Schools (F4S) and thousands of young people, awards ceremonies in Westminster, a reach that has driven our little initiative (and now not so little) to every corner of England and Wales and in between, a field staff of some 20 dedicated people, a few tears, and many more smiles. It has, as they say, been a journey.

But what now? A bit of laurel resting perhaps. Not a bit, we are, as we approach our next phase, venturing into whole new areas of activity and continually finding different approaches to what we do.

Over the past ten years we have strived to be relevant. Vital for you vital for us. F4S must never be seen as tokenism. F4S must have a real and tangible bearing and bring meaning to young people's lives. It has: It does. We want to go further.

So, with a new logo and re-branding we embrace this new period, offering far more educational worth to young people. The programme now offers the Angling Trust CAST awards, a three tier platform of basic learning that can span all ages and be pitched accordingly, offering a really good grounding in the sport and basic biology. And for the older age groups we will be increasingly offering The AIMS award, also from the Angling Trust, but this time a bona fide module designed around angling and the environment, offering students credits towards a GCSE after 23 learning hours.



Charles Jardine is the founding Director of Fishing 4 Schools as well as a celebrated angling legend, author, artist and cook. His energy and enthusiasm know no bounds.

A big undertaking but, we think, worth it.

Perhaps the biggest departure from our normal *modus operandi* happened last year, with the creation of the Eastern F4S group — offering the start of a more autonomous approach to our way of working. This makes absolute sense.

With our growth has come the pressing need to reach regional schools and young people by coaches and assistants knowledgeable of that specific locale. By creating these micro-initiatives this has made local funding viable, visible and effective and, importantly, encouraged and engaged support and reach within the local community; a perfect scenario.

Of course, to realise the potential of this slight, but unquestionably sensible departure from the norm, you do have to have a verve and unbelievable drive of

a 'resonant' team and belief and finesse of a chairman. Sally Acloque is the embodiment of these virtues and graciously agreed to pull together a collection of coaches and well-known colleagues in the Norfolk area, and now chairs the eastern region with the sort of passion that burns. So last May, chief executive Tim Bonner and I, together with Sally and her team, had the huge pleasure of announcing and launching the Norfolk-Eastern F4S initiative in the Assembly Rooms, Norwich. Since that launch, open days have occurred in the form of specific educational programmes crafted by the team of Mike Smith, Jim Gill and John Armstrong. Strong relations with local press and media have been forged and local businesses have been enthusiastic about being part of the process. Vivally,



FEATURE FISHING 4 SCHOOLS



though, schools throughout the area have been reached in a creative, joined-up and meaningful way. It has been an unprecedented success.

We want to do more; more regions, more reach, more regional-based county initiatives. We shall. Of course, resource, that Achilles heel for any growing organisation, is a limiting factor and a constant consideration, both financial and human.

“Resource” and by that, I mean the people that drive this rather amazing little initiative ever further, is a key factor in our delivery. The right choice of personnel is crucial to our success — and what is more, it is not a role for everyone. The ability to reach, engage, enthuse, nurture and teach young people who have often not enjoyed the greatest of young lives, is a ‘calling,’ not just a fleeting role. In some instances, a coach might have to cope with threatening behaviour, have a pretty good understanding of the vernacular (they will be hearing it a lot) and see these wonderful young people not as hard-cases that are streetwise, ill disciplined, irreverent or lacking in a few ‘social graces’, but as fragile, vulnerable young people, often with a story to tell that would pale our worst nightmare into insignificance. Our coaches must listen, be subtle in their approach of knowing when to be firm or kind, talkative or quiet — before any of their undoubted skills of coaching. Our coaches are special, very special indeed. Amidst our disparate team, we have genius. Each team member

brings a balance of individuality and skill that is both breathtaking and brilliant. I can promise you, we have the best in the business.

The ‘trick’ is finding others. It is not a calling for everyone. Fishing prowess is a mere fraction of what a coach brings to these young peoples’ lives.

But of course, F4S is not just about young people with ‘difficulties.’ We must not fall into the trap of denying our beautiful sport to a small sector. We must be open for business to all young people, from all strata of society.

This coming year will see a further departure for F4S as we start to engage increasingly with young people from all areas in the slightly younger age group of years 4, 5 and 6. This sector of the school community is not only immense fun to work with but uplifting and a veritable sponge for angling information. From bugs to painting, to fishing and cooking, the young enthusiasm is just uplifting and invigorating.

I must also mention the benefits that the programme brings in terms of mental health. Dealing with some sectors of our society, as we do, takes us right into the areas which the Prime Minister, Theresa May, has highlighted in speeches recently. Angling is a door to quiet, rejuvenating calm in many peoples’ lives and is a known aid to those suffering from PTSD and other conflict injuries. We aim to explore this area in the months ahead.

Naturally all of what we do, from young people in Year 4 to a teenager in

“SALLY ACLOQUE GRACIOUSLY AGREED TO PULL TOGETHER A COLLECTION OF COACHES AND WELL-KNOWN COLLEAGUES IN THE NORFOLK AREA, AND NOW CHAIRS THE EASTERN REGION WITH THE SORT OF PASSION THAT BURNS.”

a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), comes with huge responsibility and a need for deep understanding of the more sensitive areas of our young society. At no point do we shrink from our responsibility to be safe, accredited and the best that we possibly can be. I am exceedingly proud to be able to say that through our robust policies and stringent measures of safety, and our acknowledged leadership in our field, that we sit with the Angling Trust on the Safeguarding Children committee to shape angling into a very safe future. We should be proud of that alone. In reality it is just a segment of the jigsaw of who we are; a complex jigsaw of various wonderful pieces that sit comfortably together to form a complete picture of angling through education.

Just think, 10 years ago it started with one school. ●

If you know of a school that may like to run a Fishing 4 Schools course, please get in touch with Catrin on catrin@ca-foundation.org or call 0207 840 9270

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The best of the best

→ Countryside Alliance director for Wales, **RACHEL EVANS**, introduces the Welsh Rural Oscars Champions, chosen from the cream of Welsh rural business.



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Having driven hundreds of miles, met dozens of inspiring and motivated rural businessmen and women, and consulted with my esteemed judging panel, I was delighted when the Countryside Alliance Awards reception at the Pierhead, Cardiff Bay, finally arrived and I could reveal our worthy Champions. Our Awards, nicknamed the Rural Oscars, are public-nomination-led across several categories and are designed to celebrate and offer a voice to our rural businesses and communities. I was grateful to leader of the House and chief whip, Jane Hutt, for doing the honours and presenting the prizes at the reception. The Minister told the reception: "For over 10 years, these awards have highlighted and celebrated rural businesses across Wales. It is important that we recognise the crucial role played by rural businesses in Wales and champion the ongoing growth and improvement of our rural economy."

"There is currently some uncertainty surrounding the Welsh economy following the UK's decision to leave the European Union. It is, therefore, more important than ever that the rural economy remains resilient and we maximise and manage the opportunities to ensure long-term success. The Welsh Government is fully behind rural businesses in Wales and I would urge all businesses to take advantage of the support available. Our Rural Development Programme offers a range of opportunities to support businesses, organisations and communities throughout rural Wales."

I would also thank the evening's sponsors, Assembly Members Paul Davies, Welsh Conservatives, Simon Thomas Plaid Cymru and Neil Hamilton, UKIP.



Rachel Evans has been Director for Wales for nine years. She has a background in farming and showing Welsh cobs.

From thousands of nominations, the following have been chosen to represent Wales at the Countryside Alliance Awards reception, to be held at the House of Lords on March 22nd. Good luck to all!

Local Food Champion

Pen-min-Cae Welsh Black Beef and Lamb, Gellynfen Lodge, Cwmbach, Builth Wells, Powys LD2 3RP.

This farming family enterprise pride themselves on selling only their own produced Welsh beef and lamb. Familiar faces on the show circuit to many I am sure, the Nixon Family cook up fabulous home-reared meat joints and burgers made by the family. Full traceability of the livestock, highlighted by photos on the trade stand of farming through the year gives consumers confidence in their produce and encourages them to ask questions about agriculture, which is always welcomed! The mail order side of the business grows daily as customers from far and wide buy with ease knowing exactly where their meat comes from. Popular amongst the locals and celebrity followers alike, it has been said by one customer that her mother hasn't tasted meat as good as theirs, this side of the



The Nixon family with Jane Hutt AM

War! I am delighted to award the top-spot of the local food category to the deserving Nixon family.

Runner up: Caroline Dawson of Fodder in the Field, from North Wales. www.fodderinthefield.co.uk

Butcher Champion

Edwards of Conwy, High St, Conwy LL32 8DE. www.edwardsofconwy.co.uk

The winner of this category is a farmer's son and butcher who has been in the trade for over 30 years, carrying with him the same farm supplier of beef and lamb for the shop. Opening his first shop at 21 years of age, Ieuan Edwards now employs over 75 staff at both the shop and factory unit, having developed his own brand Edwards of Conwy and now trades with some of the biggest names in supermarkets. He absolutely refuses to change the recipe that delivers quality and consistency. The products are now a familiar household name from here to Hong Kong. A huge selection of both un-cooked and cooked meat and Welsh produce is displayed to perfection at their shop in Conwy, with beef and lamb hung behind the glass frames for all to see. A butcher's block in the front window gives live displays of butchery and customers can see first-hand this age-old skill. A true ambassador for butchery for Welsh produce and Wales.



Ieuan Edwards with Jane Hutt AM

Runner up: Shan and Geraint Bowen of Bethesda Farm Shop in Pembrokeshire. www.bethesdafarmshop.co.uk

Farm Enterprise Champion

Hayley Hanson www.hayleyhanson.co.uk

This one-woman enterprise has evolved from her sheer love of cattle and farming, but particularly her strong feelings that every part of the beast can be used. Hayley



Hayley Hanson with Jane Hutt AM

Hanson Hide is a by-product from their own cattle and Hayley takes orders from farmers and producers too. Show winning hides from fatstock shows have made their way to Hayley's farm in Breconshire where she transforms them in to all kinds of goods from footstools to handbags, cufflinks and leather-bound hip-flasks. It's a lengthy process taking over 12 months to complete, and great care is taken to ensure that the hides are kept in good order and transformed in to keepsakes that will last for generations. A recent contract selling to a hotel in New York has given this small farm enterprise a significant boost, thus providing support for the farm income and a definite future for Hayley Hanson Hide.

I think it only right that I quote Hayley's words from her entry to the competition "I will always be a cattle farmer. Aside from my family it's my one big love". These cows have put a roof over our heads and provided us with a home — I have so much respect for the cattle. I need to secure the future of the farm for myself and my children, not only to be viable, but profitable".

Runner up: Rob Morgan and Lloyd of Gower Fresh Christmas Trees.
www.swansea-winter-wonderland.co.uk



Jane Hutt AM with the Pembrokehire Falconry team

Tourism Champion

Pembrokehire Falconry, Picton Castle & Gardens, Haverfordwest SA62 4AS.
www.pembrokehire-falconry.co.uk

The winning enterprise in this category has been providing unique experiences for tourists to Wales since 2004, welcoming hundreds of visitors from over 15 countries in 2016 alone. The unique offering in Pembrokehire to meet and fly birds of prey has been recognised by neighbouring County Carmarthenshire, and, from 2017, Pembrokehire Falconry have been chosen to set up the first British Bird of Prey Centre at the National Botanical Gardens of Wales. They will run this alongside an already well established tourist attraction at Picton Castle and are all set to welcome thousands more visitors to the world of birds of prey. I warmly congratulate Alex and Emma Hill of Pembrokehire falconry as the winners of this category.

Runner up: Gower Heritage Centre, Parkmill, Gower, Swansea, SA3 2EH
www.gowerheritagecentre.co.uk



The Pennard Stores team with Jane Hutt AM

Village Shop and Post Office Champion

Pennard Stores, Southgate, Gower, Swansea SA3 2DH.

The winning village shop and post office who will represent Wales at the House of Lords is situated in a small village, with a few more hamlets scattered in between, on the edge of the Gower. Since Jodi and Jamie Francis took on the family business, they have worked tirelessly to move forward with the times and explored new opportunities for the business. They opened a café and ice cream parlour to run alongside the shop and rescued the

Post Office along with its two members of staff when the Post Office closed. Local artists' work decorate the walls and they have recently purchased the run-down council facilities next door, giving them a total refurb and removing the eyesore of this popular, beautiful part of the Gower. Pennard Stores on the tip of the Gower Peninsula is the heartbeat of the community and I am very pleased indeed to be able to crown them as our Champions.

Runner up: Charlotte Christie and David Evans of Llanwrtyd Wells Auto Services and post office Carmarthenshire.



The Champions will now represent Wales at the British final in London on March 22.

Bringing the countryside to town

→ LIAM STOKES

commitment to education takes him to a range of locations, both rural and urban.



In January, this year, the Countryside Alliance's Campaign for Shooting took me to two unusually urban locales. To be fair, the majority of my work takes place in Westminster and Cardiff, but when I get to go on the road I'm much more likely to end up in a Forest-in-Teesdale than anywhere metropolitan.

Two very different invitations bucked this trend. First I was asked to give a talk at a meeting of the Tamar Valley Association for Shooting and Conservation (TVASC), where I explained how the Alliance operates as a political and public voice for shooting and took questions on what threats are coming over the horizon. The meeting took place in the heart of Plymouth, which itself sits in the middle of the Association's shooting permissions.

Then a few days later I was in Eastbourne at West Rise Junior School, where the Alliance had put on shooting lessons in conjunction with the local Normanhurst Clay Pigeon Shooting Centre as part of an outdoor activity day. I went along because both (Channel 4 News) and (Fieldsports TV) were turning up to film the day and wanted to ask questions about why schoolchildren should be handling shotguns.

It was a bright, icy morning in East Sussex when we all converged on West Rise, a perfect morning for filming. The news crew and I were greeted by Mike Fairclough, the now-famous 'hunky headmaster' who bestrides the school in a bear fur coat, and his partner in crime Alex Richards, the former gamekeeper who now operates as the school's farm

manager. And what a farm he gets to manage. The news crew and I were soon bundled into a quad trailer and were being whisked across the 120 acres of marshland the school rents from the council, hearing about the sheep, chickens, goats and water buffalo the pupils handle as part of their everyday education.

Out in the field children were up to all sorts; over here was fire-starting, javelin-making and shelter-building. Over there, pupils were dressing rabbits, pigeons, woodcock and duck, taking them from fur and feather straight to the pan and onto the plate. And around the corner, safely and expertly arranged, was our team from Normanhurst teaching two lucky children to shoot.

I have been doing this job long enough to wait for the *Channel 4* report to appear before declaring it a success, but they can't fail to have been impressed by what they saw. They asked understandable questions about whether this sort of thing was appropriate for 10-year-old children, whether it was safe and what they were learning from it. I often say that the role of the Countryside Alliance is to be the public and political voice of the countryside, and I had my chance to say my piece to the camera, but it wasn't my voice that laid the journalist's concerns to rest. The children who were shooting explained that they had learned that if you keep trying, you get a bit better every time. The children preparing the wild meat had learned about the ecology of the birds they were handling and the need to respect and care about where your food comes from. The children making fire could identify silver birch bark and douglas fir

cones, and explain why they made the best firefighters. And they were all calm, respectful and focussed on the tasks they had been given. Having been trusted to handle sharp tools, fire and guns the children were determined to prove themselves worthy of the responsibility. I was blown away to see such maturity in such young children.

It was brilliant stuff, but what was doubly remarkable was that these pupils were nearly all from an Eastbourne council estate that we could actually see from the marsh. These were urban kids getting a thoroughly rural learning experience. You could practically feel the perceived town/country divide melting away, which reminded me of a question I had been asked a few days earlier in Plymouth. A TVASC member wanted to know whether we were too quick to turn every controversial countryside management issue into a clash between ignorant townies and knowledgeable, idealised country dwellers. He pointed out that many keen game shots live in suburban semis, while rural properties are increasingly snapped up by people who are as likely to complain about farm smells than they are to get involved with their local shoot.

It's a good point, and one that felt particularly poignant in Eastbourne. Being part of the countryside community isn't about living in it, or being brought up in it, although people so-blessed have a unique and invaluable perspective. Being part of the countryside community is a state of mind, a shared love of our countryside, a desire to actively participate in it rather than simply look at it, and a determination to understand and protect it. What West Rise Junior School is doing is welcoming more people into our community, irrespective of where their parents live or what they do for a living. So let's have no more talk of ignorant townies, and more of the West Rise attitude. We best protect the countryside community not by narrowly defining it, but by seeking to grow it. ●



Liam Stokes is Head of Shooting Campaigns at the Countryside Alliance. A Nuffield scholar and former lecturer in countryside and wildlife management at Wiltshire College Lackham, he is passionate about enthusing the next generation.



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“...foxhunting we shall never see again”

→ **MICHAEL CLAYTON** has probably forgotten more about hunting than many of us will ever know, and his memoirs provide a window into his exceptional life on the hunting field.

From a career on Fleet Street and the BBC to two decades as editor of *Horse & Hound*, Michael Clayton has also written over 20 books on equestrianism and hunting. He is a foremost expert and passionate ambassador for hunting, and the following is an extract from his new autobiography, *The Ride of My Life*, which is available now.

From Chapter Nine, Discovering the Shires, Michael writes: “The Quorn in the early 1970s was still hunting in a manner reminiscent of foxhunting’s golden years: a sharp bitch pack hunted on Mondays and Fridays on the light-going of High Leicestershire, and a doghound pack hunted westwards in the woodlands of Charnwood Forest and beyond on Tuesdays and Saturdays. The Quorn hounds were of the most modern stamp, at that time bred under the direction of none other than Capt. Ronnie Wallace. It was somewhat like having Harrods in to do the furniture, except that Wallace provided free after-service – by judging the annual puppy show to check on the new entry.

“The Quorn’s best country north and south of Melton Mowbray was still mainly grassland, but the march of arable farming was quickening. I was to enjoy Leicestershire in a condition ideal for “foxhunting we shall never see again”. Today’s four-lane A46 main road scything through the Monday country was a lesser main road which the Quorn field often crossed by leaping rails or hedges from adjoining fields. I was there when lorry drivers halted on the A46 by the Hunt were astonished to note the rider holding up the traffic was Prince Charles.

Most of the mounted field on the fashionable Mondays and Fridays in the best country each had two horses out,



Michael Clayton has had an illustrious career as a Fleet Street journalist and author of over 20 books. He has edited *Horse & Hound* and is an eloquent advocate for hunting.

and changed mounts during the day. The Quorn was unusual in that most subscribers lived outside the hunting country, and this included two of its three masters.

“This was a long-standing tradition in the Quorn country accepted by most of the farmers who afforded the mounted field the privilege of riding over their wonderful old turf and cut-and-laid fences. In return the Quorn went to exceptional lengths to entertain and reward farmers as much as possible, with annual dinners, free tickets to point-to-points and free hunting for themselves and their families if their land was crossed by the Hunt. The Chase had long added extra value to property and land in Leicestershire, and in the past provided farmers with a ready market for locally grown horse-fodder, plus many jobs in livery and dealing yards.

“I noted the Quorn field was an entertaining mix of personalities, all out to enjoy themselves and warmly welcoming to a newcomer, which was fitting since most were themselves ‘carpet-baggers’ (visitors seeking a good country to ride). They ranged widely across English society from High Court judges to bookmakers. There were some notably pretty girls in the field, wearing beautifully tailored breeches and coats and riding quality horses.

“In a Shires mounted field there was always someone interesting to talk to, and ripples of laughter were not infrequent. One young lady, I was told, was mortified to find she had arrived with two left riding boots, but put up with the excruciating pain of wearing both in order not to miss her day’s hunting in the Shire of Shires.

“Aside from the gaiety were the underlying risks attending a sport involving steering more than half a ton of horse over fences, surrounded by many others likely to barge into you, or bring you down. Amid the crush in a Quorn gateway there were some wry smiles when someone remarked: ‘So nice to get away from the crowds in London.’

**MICHAEL
CLAYTON**

The Ride of my Life

Memoirs of a
Sporting Editor



“The arrival and departure of scores of lorries bringing horses to the second horses meets half-way through the day, and the throngs of car followers all day, needed a miracle of rural traffic management to avoid jams in country lanes, but in the 1960s they were still tolerated by most of the local community. Avoiding holding up local traffic became an increasing headache later.

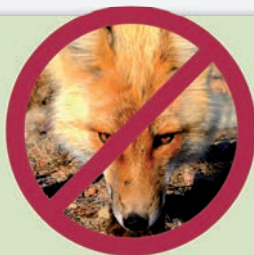
“The dress code in the mounted field was still traditional: male subscribers in top hats, red or black coats, white breeches and top boots with spurs. A few men still sported white buckskin breeches on wet days, and had white ‘champagne’ tops to their boots. Quorn farmers wore black coats and caps with fawn breeches. Most lady subscribers breached tradition by wearing dark blue hunt coats with matching caps, instead of traditional bowlers and black coats; some had shiny black tops on their plain boots.

“A few ladies persisted in riding side-saddle, wearing top hats and habits, none more elegant than Venetia Barker, blonde wife of joint master, Capt. Fred Barker. No one went better side-saddle than the more mature Lady Margaret Fortescue, a hereditary West Country landowner who came up from her home near Barnstable to take a hunting box each season in the Quorn country. She was noted for affecting a certain parsimony by remarking well after the opening meet: ‘I haven’t paid my subscription yet; I shall wait to see if I am still enjoying myself.’ She invariably did so, and her hunting career was only halted by a disastrous fall with the Belvoir in the mid-1980s”. ●

The Ride of my Life by Michael Clayton is available in hardback now. The book is published by Merlin Unwin and is priced at £20, but CA members can buy the book for £15 each plus £3.50 p&p. To take advantage of this offer please call 01584 877456 and quote Countryside Alliance.



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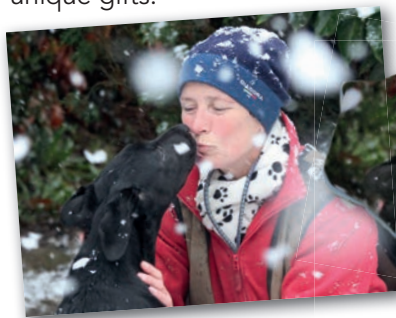
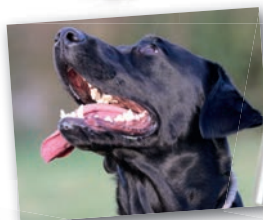


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The anti-social face of social media

→ **JIM BARRINGTON** examines the worrying trend for 'trolling' on social media



Unless you were drunk or spoiling for a fight – or both – it is highly unlikely that you would make inflammatory comments in a face-to-face meeting with strangers. Now, though, with the numerous forms of social media readily available to anyone with a phone or a laptop, things have changed dramatically.

People involved in fieldsports, particularly those supporting hunting with hounds, have long faced accusations of cruelty, barbarism and bloodlust. As time went on, even those insults seemed to lose their strength and, having created an atmosphere in which almost any offensive, untruthful or libellous statement is thought warranted, hunting folk are now commonly referred to as animal haters and likened to rapists, murderers and paedophiles. Perhaps the view held by many over the years to simply ignore such outlandish accusations has encouraged a greater degree of opprobrium, but whatever the case, this is no way for any campaign to be conducted and says far more about the attackers than those attacked.

Anyone who uses Twitter will immediately recognise the type of verbal assaults used by people who are obsessed about particular issues. Some aspects of social media – perhaps better described as unsocial media – allow total strangers to intrude into the lives of others and say whatever thought enters their blinkered and bigoted minds. I used to think such situations could be solved by the person involved just being told to get a thicker skin, after all they're just words, aren't they? But what is unknown to

those who prefer to engage in this form of abuse is the state of mind of their target. During the period my mother was dying, I was receiving disgusting and sometimes threatening tweets and blog comments from people totally unknown to me. The grieving families of Gems McCormick and nine-year-old Bonnie Armitage, both tragically killed in hunting accidents, were subjected to vicious, gloating tweets from people who claim to be compassionate; their self-satisfaction deflated only when they were tracked down and exposed in the press. I can now well understand how a young person, or indeed anyone at a particularly low ebb, may not be able to cope with a similar onslaught.

The fact that many of these 'keyboard activists' are anonymous – or so they think – only adds to their bravado. Indeed, those who consider themselves 'activists' should re-think the term, as lying in bed firing off vitriolic comments about those with whom they disagree can hardly be described as 'activism'.

The problems are exacerbated by those who appear to live their lives via social media. Speak only to like-minded users and you will think everyone sees things your way; believe 'facts' that are reported by those same people and the line between fake news and reality quickly dissolves. How many people now believe 400,000 badgers are snared every year simply because the League Against Cruel Sports director tweeted it? Or that those who attended 2016's Boxing Day meets, according to the same 'expert', are now mostly opposed to hunting? And nothing excites the keyboard warrior more than when some incident can give rise to a frenzy of tweets, creating an atmosphere akin to dropping a piece of meat into a tank of piranhas.

If all that resulted from social media was that those who seem permanently attached to one device or another were allowed to vent their anger it might not be so bad, but of course it doesn't end there. Inflammatory statements from

those who claim to oppose violence inevitably encourage others to do their dirty work. For a commercial concern, such as a pub or hotel, negative comments on the internet can cause financial loss. Threats to boycott a business or create some other difficulty for those establishments that might host a hunt meet or associated event must be taken seriously. It's not surprising that in certain cases these intimidation tactics work and they will continue to do so while little or nothing is done to curb it.

New Crown Prosecution Service guidelines are catching up with this modern form of communication and its abuses and those who are severely troubled by social media trolls should study them carefully with a view to contacting the police if a line of acceptability is crossed. Evidence will be needed for a prosecution and through the simple use of a 'screen-print' button on every computer, a tweet or any other social media comment can be captured, no matter how quickly it might be deleted by the abuser after having second thoughts (ask a young relative how to do this if you feel it is beyond your computer skills!).

As far as those campaigning for repeal of the Hunting Act are concerned, the insults, slurs and accusations mean just one thing – opponents are angry and frustrated that hunting, albeit in a different form, is still continuing; why else the torrent of childish and ignorant internet abuse?

So, despite all those insults, accusations, lies and obscenities, it is important to realise why it is happening... and, in that regard, maybe what is worse than being tweeted about, to paraphrase Oscar Wilde, is not being tweeted about. ●

CPS guidelines can be downloaded from www.cps.gov.uk/legal/a_to_c/communications_sent_via_social_media/



Jim Barrington is animal welfare consultant to the Countryside Alliance. A former director of the League Against Cruel Sports he has always met online abuse with great serenity and stoicism. Follow him on Twitter @jimbarrington

Prevention, intelligence, enforcement and reassurance – working to combat rural crime



→ **DAVE JONES** is chief constable of North Yorkshire Police and the national policing lead for Wildlife Crime and Rural Affairs. He writes exclusively for Countryside Alliance members about how we can help bring rural crime down.

Those who live and visit our beautiful county of North Yorkshire do so because of its outstanding rural beauty. Whether it's tackling crime along our county's designated heritage coastline or on the rolling hills of North Yorkshire Moors and the Yorkshire Dales, it presents a unique policing challenge.

I was delighted to become the national lead on Wildlife Crime and Rural Affairs with temporary assistant chief constable Amanda Oliver as my deputy, building on the existing work of Dyfed – Powys' police chief constable Simon Prince.

North Yorkshire's police and crime commissioner Julia Mulligan chairs The National Rural Crime Network. Their recent survey showed rural crime across the UK is vastly under reported, with more than one-in-four not reporting crime. The survey estimated the cost of rural crime to be £800 million a year. But it's not just the financial impact, it is the emotional impact to our communities. We must continue to build on the need for engagement when addressing rural concerns. We recognise that the rural communities are not reporting all crime that occurs, and the police must engage

further to break any barriers.

We have made great progress here in North Yorkshire in our core business of tackling rural crime, to involve and reassure our rural communities, and are addressing concerns on conservation. Under North Yorkshire's stewardship of the national Wildlife Crime and Rural Affairs portfolio, we aim to develop on the existing working practices. With a strategic framework of Prevention, Intelligence, Enforcement and Reassurance, the aim is to make our rural areas safer, and feel safer. There is also a focus on developing and strengthening our regional and national network of partners in order to share best practice.

PREVENTION

Recently in North Yorkshire I introduced a dedicated team of specialised officers – the Rural Taskforce. This team, consisting of 18 police officers, police community support officers and civilians is spread out across our huge county and are patrolling remote areas of North Yorkshire, engaging with people and businesses to provide bespoke crime prevention advice. This taskforce is the biggest of its kind in the UK, and its members work closely with our large number of special constables and volunteers who are making a real difference to people living in our rural communities.

INTELLIGENCE

The use of Automatic Number Plate Recognition technology (ANPR) and specialist resources, such as our Road Crime Team, make the 6000 miles of North Yorkshire's roads a hostile environment for the criminal fraternity to succeed. Exploiting the opportunities of ANPR as a national intelligence source is another tactic in the fight against those who

commit rural crime. The sheer volume of success in the use of this technology on a national level has resulted in continued investment by police in all areas of the UK.

ENFORCEMENT

Operation Checkpoint is the largest rural policing operation of its kind in the country, and saw Cleveland, Cumbria, Durham, Lancashire, North Yorkshire and Northumbria join forces to target cross-border criminals. This sent a clear message to travelling criminals: "If you go into rural areas to commit crime, we will catch you." Targeted proactive patrols involving police and our volunteer watch schemes have proven very successful. North Yorkshire is one of the safest places in the country, and we are determined to keep it that way. Operations similar to this across the UK will continue until travelling criminals get the message that rural areas are far from a soft target, and if they do intend to go out and commit crime they will face a dedicated network intent on stopping them.

REASSURANCE

Social media continues to be a fantastic tool in the fight against crime. The recent introduction of 'North Yorkshire Community Messaging' provides an effective way of getting information out to the community quickly. It's a free community messaging system that allows you to register to receive the initiatives aimed at tackling crime, notifications and community news happening in your local neighborhood, via text message, email or app. I urge all rural communities to engage through social media, not only as a method of bringing people together but also in the fight against crime.

In 2016 I attended my first national



Dave Jones is Chief Constable of North Yorkshire Police and the national policing lead for wildlife and rural affairs. He is the National Police Chiefs' Council leader for citizens in policing, where he is helping to develop stronger links between communities and the police through volunteering. He was awarded the Queen's Police Medal for Distinguished Service in the New Year Honours list.



Something not right? Call it in.



Wildlife Crime Enforcers Conference. Police and partners shared learning and experiences. In the hugely beneficial networking exercise the dedication, expertise and passion of these individuals and groups was plain to see. Present were members of the Nation Wildlife Crime Unit www.nwcu.police.uk. In particular, the head of that unit chief inspector Martin Simms recently revived a global law enforcement award in South Africa for 'leadership of one of the world's most outstanding police units dedicated to combating wildlife crime'. The conference reiterated the absolute necessity to continue to tackle wildlife crime in our countryside and at our borders in order to protect species.

Through prevention, intelligence, enforcement and reassurance, my vision is that we will be more visible and available to our rural communities. Listening, engaging and addressing the issues that matter most. Giving rural policing the national priority it deserves. ●

The Countryside Alliance is proud to be a stakeholder in the National Rural Crime Network, the group that works with Government, the Police and other rural organisations to highlight the key problems of rural crime. Our Head of Policy, Sarah Lee, attends meetings of the network and is in regular contact with other stakeholders. The network's 2015 survey of over 17,000 people living and working in rural areas throughout England and Wales suggests the true cost of crime in rural areas could exceed £800m. This figure is 21 times higher than previous figures, dwarfing earlier estimates.

The survey also indicates that hard-pressed young families and farmers are the most frequent victims of crime, with the average cost of those crimes to a household being over £2,500 and for a business over £4,000.

Moreover, there appears to be a vicious circle of low expectations, leading to chronic under-reporting, anger, frustration and worry. The result is increasing fear of crime and significantly lower satisfaction levels in the police than the national average.

As a consequence of these findings, the Network made seven recommendations including fair funding for rural areas; more joined up working with partners and communities, building on rural resilience; embedding best practice; developing new policies and ways of working; and ensuring a more targeted approach within rural communities.

The key survey results were:

- Financial impact of crime on rural economy is significant – the cost of crime to rural communities is estimated to be £800 million¹ equivalent to £200 for every household in the countryside. The average cost to rural households who are victims of crime is £2500 and £4100 for rural businesses.
- Fear of crime is increasing – 39% of rural people are very or fairly worried about becoming a victim of crime, compared to 19% nationally. Even more worryingly, 32% of respondents are more fearful of becoming victims of crime than five years ago, compared to only 3% who are less fearful. Rural businesses are the most fearful of becoming victims of crime, with 51% very or fairly fearful, closely followed by younger families.
- Low satisfaction rates of police performance in rural areas – just 39% of rural people rate the police as good (32.4%) or excellent (6.3%). Among rural businesses this figure was just 32%. Those figures compare to 63% nationally who think the police is doing a good job (53% Good and 10% Excellent), showing rural communities have a significantly lower satisfaction rate than their urban counterparts.
- The survey showed satisfaction levels drop to just 23% when it comes to the rural public's perceptions of the police's ability to solve crime.
- Crime is under reported in rural areas – more than one in four (27%) did not report the last crime of which they were a victim. This means Home Office figures of 294,000 rural crimes between April 2014 and May 2015 could be incorrect and the actual number of crimes could be as high as 403,000.
- Rural communities are resilient – community spirit is clear to see in our rural communities. The vast majority feel they very or fairly strongly belong in their community, with 27% feeling that sense of belonging has increased in the last five years. 25% of people also felt that their community pulled together to improve their neighbourhood
- Lessons for Local Authorities and other partners – two issues of greatest concern to the rural community were road safety (63%) – which the police play a crucial part in, but which they cannot resolve without working with partners – and fly-tipping, which is now a civil offence (61%).

Supporting keepers for 25 years: The Gamekeepers Welfare Trust 1992-2017

→ In 2017 we can all support and celebrate the 25th anniversary of this valuable and much-loved charity.

The Gamekeepers' Welfare Trust (GWT), a charity formed 25 years from the Gamekeepers' Benevolent Association, was formed to support gamekeepers, help alleviate poverty and make provision for retirement, and it still does so today. The GWT started in 1992 with impetus from Sir Joseph Nickerson via a generous donation and further support from The Earl of Aylesford who has chaired the Trust from the outset.

There have been many raffles, dinner dances and auctions throughout the years to raise funds, and gamekeepers and their families have been the recipients of necessary and welcome grants in times of poverty, old age and ill health. Small grants have also been given for educational purposes.

In recent years, additional support has enabled a holistic service which has taken account of the needs of working keepers and loneliness and isolation of individuals and families in difficult times and in retirement. Whilst gamekeepers, stalkers and ghillies tend to be a close-knit community who look after their own, it is more difficult once retired and away from networks of friends and activity especially when in failing health. This can cause intense isolation with many associated effects including poor mental health. A 24-hour helpline now provides a significant source of support, whether to listen in confidence, inform and provide ongoing help which is not time constrained.

Other benefits provided include annual grants for individuals and families below benefit level, cards, flowers and gifts, as well as letters and telephone calls. Email, text and Facebook messaging has provided additional means of contact.

The GWT is an independent charity with a modern outlook in its 25th

year. Working with all the main organisations which provide a focus at game fairs, recognising the gathering places for gamekeepers, and an ongoing aim to be known by every working and retired keeper and their dependents. This means a close-working relationship with the NGO, BASC and SGA as well as the CA, CLA, Moorland Association, Scottish Land and Estates and others. This also means being known in the charitable sector, NHS and social sector. Working with colleges and students is focussed around providing packs of information on career paths, job register and self-help, travelling round the colleges and providing information and support through the helpline and website.

Volunteers have come on board throughout the years to bring a wealth of knowledge and experience in these areas, providing expertise in health, employment, with associated fact sheets, social media, a presence and support in fundraising and events and much more.

To celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the GWT, achievements to date, and strategies for the future, there are a number of events planned for the year. A series of conferences are outlined below and will be held during the Spring. The Gamekeeping for Life conferences will feature speakers outlining their experiences of how gamekeepers work with their employers to boost conservation and the local economy through shooting, and how adversity can be overcome through inspiring courage, fortitude and cooperation.

Gamekeeper packs will also be distributed during the year. Further details and booking forms for the conferences will be sent in early February and will be available on the website. There will be no formal ticket price, but donations would be warmly welcomed to cover costs. ●



25th anniversary celebrations for the Gamekeepers' Welfare Trust

Gamekeeping for Life conferences will be held at the following dates and venues with keynote speakers from major estates in the UK as well as local estates:

21 March Tuesday

Packington Hall, Meriden, Warwickshire (home of GWT Chairman The Earl of Aylesford). Key note speaker: Lord James Percy, Patron of the GWT.

28 March Tuesday

Swinton Park, Masham, Ripon, North Yorkshire. Key note speaker: Lord Masham, and briefings from local sporting estates.

12 April Wednesday

Blair Atholl Estates, Blair Atholl, Pitochry, Perthshire, with opening address from Mrs Sarah Troughton and briefings from local sporting estates.

25 April Tuesday

Floors Castle, Floors, Kelso, Roxburghshire, with welcome from His Grace The Duke of Roxburghe, key note speaker Lord Dalhousie and briefings from sporting estates.

3 May Wednesday

Sparsholt College, Sparsholt, Winchester, Hampshire, with key note speaker and briefings from local estates.

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thegamekeeperswelfaretrust.com

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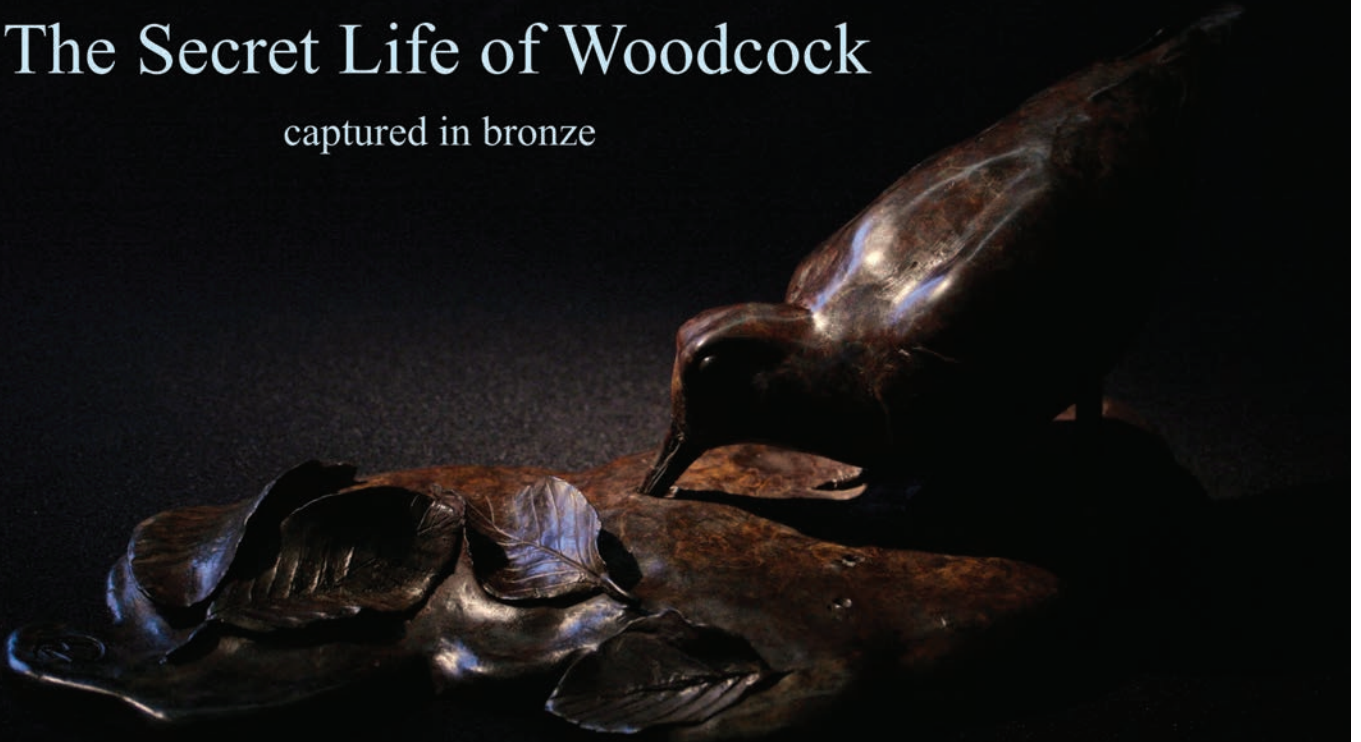
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Heart of the Countryside dinner

→ **DAMIEN MCCRYSTAL** recounts a unique wild and foraged dinner created to raise funds for the Countryside Alliance.



The problem, really, with preparing a showcase 'Heart of the Countryside' dinner for 10 people was never about the cooking – particularly as I had the *Masterchef* judge William Sitwell working with me in the kitchen. The difficult bit was going to be the sourcing, particularly as all the guests were familiar with traditional game cookery and were not going to be swept off their feet by roast pheasant or similar.

The plan, dreamt up by the City PR man and Alliance supporter Nicko Miles, was to concoct a menu different and intriguing enough to attract a big bid at the Alliance's annual Wine Auction Dinner, where City money flows freely for cases of fine wine and shooting days.

IN THE END, THIS WAS THE MENU ON OFFER:

Appetisers

Squirrel curry, hare pie, rabbit poached with hops, mini kebabs of game bird liver and heart with chilli, tiny grouse burgers.

Amaze-Bouche
Venison liver crème caramel.

Starters

Pan-fried breast and leg of pigeon.

Fish

A 'Surfeit of Lampreys'.

Main

Chinese Water Deer three ways (seared saddle, braised foreleg, barbecued haunch), with game porridge and seasonal vegetables.

Pudding

Pears poached in spiced white wine with parsnip-and-honey ice cream.

Cheese

Rollright hand-made cheese from Oxfordshire and freshly made soda bread

It was interesting enough to attract some busy bidding, culminating in a

£3,000 offer by the Wine Auction Dinner's chairman Simon Mackenzie-Smith.

All the birds, rabbits, hare and squirrels (and parts thereof) were shot or trapped in North Yorkshire, and I was helped considerably by gamekeepers Jonathan Mudd at Wydale and Matthew Streadman at Wykeham Abbey. Four weeks before they were needed, I was stuffing carcasses and bags of offal into the freezer. My wife was particularly disgusted when she found a crow (a surprise dish not advertised) staring up at her.

But that was the easy bit. Lampreys are a lot harder to find. Once, these ancient vampire vertebrates (at half a billion years old, they outrank the dinosaurs) were very popular for the table. Indeed, the Ancient Romans loved them and our own Henry I was said to have died from a surfeit of them in 1135. But a combination of pollution, interference with river flows and lampreys' appetite for gamefish resulted in them being almost wiped out in the UK. The people of Gloucester wanted to make The Queen a lamprey pie for her Diamond Jubilee in 2012, but had to import them from Canada. At one stage I was making enquiries about travelling to Latvia to fetch some. However, when told of my search, the well-connected Yorkshire landowner George Winn Darley suggested I contact Shaun McGinty, the Environment Agency's helpful fisheries officer for North and East Yorkshire, who in turn put me in touch with Paul Bird of Marine Nutrition in Grimsby. He has one of the very few lamprey netting licenses and agreed to supply me with 36 of them. Preparing them was grim and messy: they are covered in slime which can only be removed by blanching them in scalding water and then scraping them. Once gutted and slow-cooked in chopped tomatoes and white wine, however, they were very tasty – not unlike sardines.

Somewhat easier to find was a Chinese water deer. Introduced to Britain by the Duke of Bedford at Woburn Abbey they – like the muntjac – have escaped and

proliferated throughout East Anglia and beyond. It is hard to understand why this delicious meat is not available more often in butchers' shops and restaurants. Janey Cator of Ranworth in Norfolk lent me her gamekeeper – the endlessly patient Robert Seaman – and a doe was shot. I marinated the haunch for several days in spicy ginger beer, replacing that with a thicker marinade of olive oil, herbs, garlic and maple syrup. The saddle was simply seasoned and seared while the foreleg was braised for several hours with onion, bacon and white wine, until it was falling off the bone. The liver was used for one of the most controversial dishes of the evening: venison liver crème caramel. It sounds horrible but tasted wonderful not unlike a foie gras crème brûlée I enjoyed many years ago. Next to these, the parsnip-and-honey ice cream and the strong Oxfordshire cheese were child's play.

Back to that crow: I finely chopped the breasts and heart and fried them in butter, serving them on little crackers. Everyone ate them (I think) but did not know what they were until afterwards. Simon probably summed up the general attitude when he said: "I would be lying if I said all of it was delicious — the crow was at the trickier end of the scale." I thought it was pretty good.

Still, digestion was no doubt helped by the array of wines laid on by Nicko Miles: Pol Roger Cuvee Winston Churchill 2000; Valentini Trebbiano d'Abruzzi 2007; Meursault Charmes, Darviot Perin, 2007; Anwilka (Stellenbosch) 2006; Alter Ego de Chateau Palmer, Margaux 2009; Haut Brion 1990 and Rieussec 2002, Sauternes. Helped by that lot, anything would have slipped down pretty nicely. ●



Damien McCrystal formerly city editor of *The Sun*, is a food writer and restaurant reviewer. He was one of a team of supporters keen to support the Alliance's work in an unusual and delicious way.

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Beagles raise funds - by shooting

→ POLLY PORTWIN reports on a fundraising shoot that saw farmers, gamekeepers and hunt staff come together for a great day in the field.



Polly Portwin of the CA receives a cheque from Mike Smith.

Photo: www.ruralshots.com

“**G**ood farming and good conservation have been my passion during the 46 years we’ve lived here,” explained Old Berkeley Beagles (OBB) former hunt treasurer John Harper, whose Pimlico Farm in Oxfordshire was the setting for a shoot held in January this year which was raising money for the beagle pack and The Countryside Alliance Foundation (see box).

For the last three years, the hunt has been given the opportunity to auction a day’s shooting hosted by the Harper family as one of the lots on offer at their Christmas Lunch which was held at Addington Manor Equestrian Centre. For this season’s auction, it was decided that the hunt would split the proceeds raised from the shoot with the Alliance due to the strong links between the two organisations.

Joint-master Mike Smith and his son James (18) - who is now hunting hounds

“...NOTHING SHOWS THE SOLIDARITY BETWEEN US BETTER THAN DAYS LIKE THIS WHERE THERE ARE FARMERS, GAMEKEEPERS AND MEMBERS OF HUNT STAFF ENJOYING A DAY SHOOTING TOGETHER.”



James Smith.

following on from taking part in the Association of Masters of Harriers and Beagles (AMHB) hunting bursary scheme - were two of the 10 guns that were treated to a day of generous hospitality. Monica Harper provided lunch for everyone involved and after shooting there was a shoot supper in a local pub where I was delighted to receive a cheque for £1,000 (pictured right).

“We are incredibly grateful to the Harper family who continue to be very generous to the beagles,” explained Mike. “This shoot has raised a huge amount for our pack over the past few years and this year we wanted to raise money for The Countryside Alliance Foundation as well.

“The hunting, farming and shooting fraternities all work very closely together throughout the year and we are delighted for this opportunity to be able to show our support for all country sports,” continued Mike.

Local farmer Julian Price, who supports the beagles as well as hunting with the local foxhound packs, bought the day for two guns at the auction.

“Both my guest and I enjoyed our day so much last year that I decided I didn’t want to miss out so I made sure I bought it again this year,” enthused Julian whose guest on this occasion was Gareth Bow, huntsman of the Brocklesby in Lincolnshire.

“The Countryside Alliance works hard campaigning on behalf of all our country sports and nothing shows the solidarity between us better than days like this where there are farmers, gamekeepers and members of hunt staff enjoying a day’s shooting together.”

The other guns included former Bicester Hunt countryman Andy Coupe, farmer Michael Woodford and gamekeeper Steve Stringer from Wales.

Along with his sons Michael and Paul, John Harper enjoys supporting other charities by using the facilities they have

developed on their farm at Tusmore near Bicester. “We have achieved hunting, shooting and fishing here and run charity events in all three sports every year.”

The Old Berkeley Beagles, whose country lies in Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Hertfordshire, opened their newly-built hunt kennels near Aylesbury last summer. With accommodation for hunt staff and hounds all powered by solar energy, the pack will use some of the other funds raised during the shoot for further improvements to their site. ●

What is The Countryside Alliance Foundation?

This is a charity which informs the public about the countryside and the natural environment.

The flagship project is Fishing 4 Schools (see page 23) which teaches young people the unique skills of fly fishing. Through short courses at schools across Britain, world-famous angler Charles Jardine and his team have enhanced the syllabus for many young people.

In 2015, the Countryside Alliance Foundation took over the administration of Casting for Recovery UK & Ireland (CfR) (see page 18). This offers all expenses paid fly fishing and counselling retreats for ladies who have (or have had) breast cancer.

For further details about the work of the Countryside Alliance Foundation, visit www.countryside-alliance.org/the-foundation



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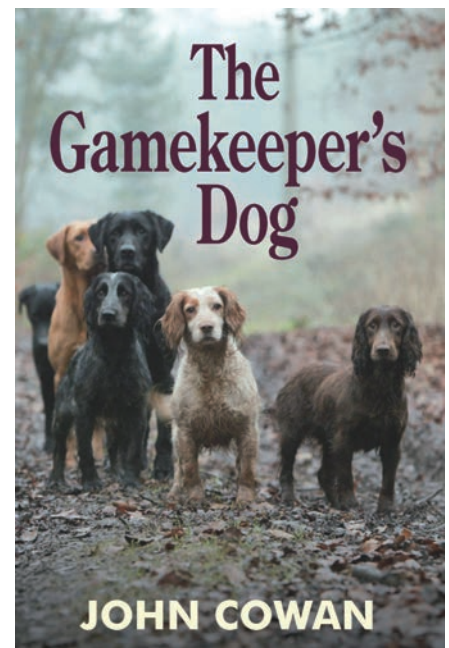
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'The Gamekeeper's Dog'

→ **JOHN COWAN** is an experienced gamekeeper working in Scotland and in his book 'The Gamekeeper's Dog' he shares a life-time's expertise in using and training working dogs. Here we bring you an extract from the book; please see below for a special member discount.



Terriers have always been widely used by gamekeepers especially hill keepers. No dog in the keeper's kennel is loved more than his terrier. He may be a poultry killer, fight other dogs in the kennels or even, sometimes disastrously, his employer's dogs, chew the head-rest of the Land Rover when left unattended, chase sheep, roll in a long-dead fox just before you are about to put him in the Land Rover or disappear down a rabbit hole for 24 hours at six o'clock just as you were about to go home but the keeper always forgives him because he delivers the goods that matter: he kills foxes and cannot be replaced by other methods.

TERRIERS AND FOXES ON THE HILL

The ban on Cymag gas meant that a good terrier became essential to the fox controller and many more keepers kept one or more, even a small pack where there was enough work. A hill keeper with a large beat (more than 5,000 acres) will know the location of every fox earth on that beat and will check every hole at least once a month or even fortnightly. This is virtually all year round but certain times of the year are more likely to find a fox at home. Ground where there is little cover in the way of woods is the most likely place to find a fox because in fine weather the fox will be lying out in the sun in preference to going into a damp earth. Sunny banks of bracken are also favoured. So the keeper only tends to check the holes when the weather is extreme: cold, biting wind, heavy rain, deep frost, snow.

During a heatwave foxes on the hill tops can be found sheltering in peat runners. A peat runner is formed when a burn has gone underground making a tunnel in peaty ground. In the summer these usually dry up, especially in the really hot weather. The fox finds these tunnels cool and free from

the insects which can annoy him on the low ground. The keeper when checking these runners usually takes a fellow keeper or companions with him as they can be over 50 yards in length. When the terrier is entered, the fox may flush out of shot if only one gun is present. The keeper who knows his ground will know the dens that can be checked single-handed and will tend to check these alone.

The weapon of choice nowadays is the multi shot semi-automatic shotgun: this is not sport and a miss and a fox escaping is not a scenario to be countenanced. The grouse keeper will check earths more regularly as soon as the shooting season for grouse is over (the beginning of December). Foxes at this time are often on the move as the breeding season approaches and vixens explore new territories, looking for an area unoccupied by other foxes with a good food supply and little disturbance. A grouse moor fits the bill perfectly so there is a never-ending supply of new 'recruits' to colonise the moor and take advantage of the bounty that it offers. From the beginning of December to the end of January the earths are checked regularly then left until the end of March to the middle of April. The reason for this is to leave the breeding earths quiet so that any vixen on the moor will have her cubs on the moor and be more easily accounted for.

When checking an earth, it must be approached into the wind. Perfect quiet is the order of the day. This can be difficult if there are two or three guns but it is essential if the fox is to bolt. The terrier should be let loose 20-30 yards from the hole and left to check it himself while the guns as silently as possible should take up their vantage points to get the best chance of a shot. The terrier should be a bolter i.e. a terrier which does not fight with the fox but harasses him until he vacates his den. Obviously if the fox has heard human footsteps, voices or a gun being cocked, he

will be less inclined to show himself and may decide to try his luck with the terrier. Some terriers are better than others at shifting foxes and some breeds tend to be better than others.

When the fox bolts he usually makes no noise and accelerates to top speed in a very short distance. It is an exhilarating experience and often requires a very difficult shot. Occasionally in 'foxy' country there can be more than one fox at home: this is especially likely during the mating season which runs from approximately mid-January to mid-February although there is evidence that some vixens are coming into season earlier and later than this. The majority of cubs are born in the month of March and most keepers check known dens from the middle of April.

It is not difficult to see how the keeper becomes attached to his terrier in these circumstances. Usually he will take a vehicle as far into the hills as he can, then hike up into some remote glen where he knows of a den which is regularly used. This far north and this high up, the weather in April can be anything from pleasantly warm to sub-zero with snow on the ground and the keeper and his small dog feel as though they are both united with a single purpose. ●

The 'Gamekeeper's Dog' is published by Merlin Unwin, normal RRP £20 each, but Countryside Alliance members can buy for £15 each plus £3.50 p&p: simply call 01584 877456 and quote Countryside Alliance. The deal runs until 30 April.

The Cottesmore: 350 years and still going strong. For'ard on!



→ The history of the Cottesmore hunt is a trail that can be followed back to the reign of Charles II. Now, 350 years from its beginning, the hunt has celebrated this milestone with a weekend of events and parties. **CHARLOTTE COOPER** finds out more about this venerable pack.

IN 1666, as London was recovering from the effects of the Great Plague and fighting the Great Fire of London, Henry Viscount Lowther decided to travel with his hounds the 200-odd miles from Lowther Castle in Westmorland to Fineshade Abbey in east Northamptonshire for a spot of deer hunting.

This desire to try his hounds in the widespread forests that surrounded Rockingham Castle was the start of a centuries-long connection between the area and vinery that puts the Cottesmore firmly in the running for the hotly contested title of England's oldest hunt. And it means that this season they have a lot to celebrate.

The Cottesmore's motto for this anniversary is: "350 years and still going strong. For'ard on!" And they are determined it will be around for many more decades.

A celebratory weekend was held from 16 - 18 December - starting with a carol service in Cottesmore Church, followed by a special meet on the Saturday and a ball that evening, then a Christmas lunch on Sunday.

Hunt secretary Clare Bell was one of 30 stalwart souls who managed all four events.

"It was a full-on weekend," she said. "I went to bed at 7am on the Sunday after doing the horses, then got up three hours

later for lunch! We decided it would be best to do it all in one go and have a real focus rather than drawing it out across the season.

"The carol service is an annual event and we have our own choir made up of hunt members who have sung together for five years now," she said. "Then our meet took place the next day at Robert and Sam Weatherby's place, Burrough House at Burrough on the Hill. It was fantastic. There were around 200 mounted and the same again on foot, but they were prepared. They had stacked bales with the drinks and food on them, so you just rode up and helped yourself! It was a lovely day."

That night, 430 supporters attended the Scarlet Fever Ball at the Rutland Agricultural Society building in Oakham, in a tent decorated all in scarlet with poinsettias. Then 200 came to the marquee for the annual Hunt Supporters' Club Lunch the following day, which featured a huge display of hunting memorabilia.

"I think we managed to involve the whole hunting community over the weekend," said Clare.

Another popular part of the 350-year celebrations has been *The Pick of the Pack*, an oil painting of four Cottesmore hounds commissioned from hunting artist Paula Vize. The original was sold at the Sunday lunch and sales of canvas reproductions are going well, raising money for the hunt.

Joint-master Andrew Osbourne explained that the four hounds chosen to be immortalised in oils (below) - Monarch (15), Barber (12), Brainwave (11) and Hassle (12) - represent the important bloodlines that run through the hunt's 55 couple hounds.

The Cottesmore hound is a Modern English produced from an Old English base with outcrosses to Welsh, American and Fell hounds. The hounds in the picture have pedigrees that can be followed back to the 18th and 19th centuries.



The Pick of the Pack by Paula Vize.



Charlotte Cooper is a media consultant for the Countryside Alliance and previously worked for *Horse & Hound*. Derbyshire based, she hunts with the Barlow.



Photos: Steve Carr <http://www.carrphotocouk>

“This breeding produces the hybrid vigour and desire to hunt that is so needed in the modern agricultural country that we hunt across,” said Andrew.

“THE COTTESMORE HOUND IS A MODERN ENGLISH PRODUCED FROM AN OLD ENGLISH BASE WITH OUTCROSSES TO WELSH, AMERICAN AND FELL HOUNDS.”

Paula Vize visited the kennels in Ashwell, Oakham, last October and spent a day meeting and photographing the hounds with huntsman Chris Edwards. She was immediately drawn to Monarch, whom she described as the “George Clooney of the hound world.”

“Hounds are usually pretty impossible to sketch as they are either running around or curled up asleep,” she said, “but whenever you let Monarch into an area he just stood and posed.”

“I didn’t have long to work with the hounds but I knew what I wanted – Barber

was chosen for his breeding. Brainwave for her brilliance in the field and Hassle is the archetypal Cottesmore hound – woolly and lemon-coloured. You always fall in love with the hounds you paint, but I’d love to go back to the Cottesmore kennels again.”

As a hounds trustee joint-master Bee Bell is responsible – with the extremely knowledgeable journalist and author Michael Clayton – for keeping a watchful eye over the hounds breeding going forward. But this is not the only way she plays a part in the future of the hunt.

“My big passion is getting young people out hunting,” said Bee. “I run the hunting test for our Pony Club branch and like to get the children up at the front where they can see what the huntsman is doing. Over the centenary weekend we had 30 or 40 young people out.”

The Cottesmore was also part of our Hunting Newcomers’ Week (October 22-29 2016) putting on a special meet on October 22.

Bee added: “The Cottesmore has an amazing history and it is a real honour to be a small part of it. I’ve been involved

with them since I was six, so I have known some amazing people. It’s fantastic for us to celebrate our illustrious past, but the young riders are our future.” ●

Timeline of the Cottesmore hunt

1666: Henry Viscount Lowther rides from Lowther Castle to hunt in the forests of Leicestershire and Northamptonshire.

1696-1779: The area from Belvoir to East Northamptonshire is hunted on a shared basis by one pack, belonging to the 3rd Duke of Rutland, the Earl of Gainsborough, Earl Cardigan, Lord Howe and Lord Gower.

1732: The Gainsboroughs set up their own pack to hunt the country later known as the Cottesmore.

1776: Boundaries agreed with Hugo Meynell between the Quorn and the Gainsborough pack, kennelled at Cottesmore.

1880-1900: In the heyday of Victorian hunting the Cottesmore becomes very fashionable.

1914-1918: Limited hunting takes place during years of World War One thanks to Hugh Lonsdale who kept the hunt afloat financially and practically.

1918-1939: The period between World War One and Two is another purple patch for hunting.

The construction of Cottesmore Airfield (1938) and Rutland Water (1978) removes 3,100 acres of hunting country.

2005: Hunt moves into new kennels at Ashwell.

Today: The Cottesmore continues to flourish, hunting within the confines of the Hunting Act.



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➔ **MORE EVENTS** Below are a few of the big dates for 2017 – our website has more at www.countryside-alliance.org/competitions/upcoming-events

Dates for the diary 2017

■ March 30

Dinner at the Manchester Tennis and Racquet Club,

Salford, Greater Manchester.
The evening includes a Champagne reception and three course dinner. Guest speaker will be Tim Bonner, and a sporting auction will be run by Mike Kenyon. Tickets cost £55 each, to book email hattie-roger-smith@countryside-alliance.org

■ May 3

The second annual 'Fishing for our future' dinner and auction, will be held at the Royal Hospital, Chelsea. Tickets are £300 each and funds raised will support our Fishing 4 Schools and Casting for Recovery UK & Ireland and the Angling Trust. email pippa-chambers@countryside-alliance.org or call 0207 840 9258

■ May 3-7

The Mitsubishi Badminton Horse Trials,

Badminton, Gloucestershire.
www.badminton-horse.co.uk



■ May 31-June 3

The Royal Bath and West Show,

Showground, Shepton Mallet, Somerset.
www.bathandwest.com

■ June 8-10

South of England Show and hound show,

Ardingly, West Sussex.
Congratulations to the South of England Agricultural Society on their 50th annual event.
www.seas.org.uk



■ June 8-10

The Royal Cornwall Show,

Showground, Wadebridge, Cornwall.
royalcornwallshow.org

■ June 17

Clay Shoot at Minterne House,

Minterne, Dorset, by kind permission of the Digby Family. Teams info sara-rutherford@countryside-alliance.org

■ June 17-18

A national weekend of community activities.

Including street parties, bake-offs, picnics and barbecues will take place to mark the anniversary of the murder of Jo Cox MP. Read more information on our website.

■ June 22-25

The Royal Highland Show,

Ingliston, Edinburgh.
royalhighlandshow.org

■ June 28-29

The Royal Norfolk Show,

Showground, Norwich, Norfolk.
royalnorfolkshow.nraa.org.uk

■ June 30-July 2

The Scottish Game Fair,

Scone Palace, Perthshire.
www.scottishfair.com

■ July 11-13

The Great Yorkshire Show and Hound Shows,

Showground, Harrogate, North Yorkshire.
greatyorkshireshow.co.uk

■ July 19

The Festival of Hunting,

East of England Showground, Peterborough, Cambridgeshire.
festivalofhunting.com

■ July 24-27

The Royal Welsh Show,

Showground, Llanelwedd, Powys.
www.rwas.wales

■ July 28-30

The Game Fair,

Hatfield House, Hertfordshire.
www.thegamefair.org

■ August 4-5

The Highland Fieldsports Fair,

Moy Estate, Invernesshire.
www.moyfieldsportsfair.co.uk

■ August 12-13

The Lowther Show and hound show

Lowther Estate, Penrith, Cumbria.
www.lowthershow.co.uk

■ August 31-September 3

Land Rover Burghley Horse Trials,

Burghley House, Stamford, Lincolnshire.
www.burghley-horse.co.uk

■ September 1-3

Chatsworth Country Fair,

Chatsworth Estate, Derbyshire.
www.chatsworthcountryfair.co.uk



■ September 10

Hampshire Country Sports Day,

Tichborne Park, Hampshire.
www.hampshirecountysportsday.co.uk

■ September 12

AGM of the Countryside Alliance

in London, details will be given in the summer issue.

■ September 16-17

The Midland Game Fair,

Weston Park, Shropshire.
www.midlandgamefair.co.uk

■ October 29

Aintree Countryside Race Day,

Info to be published in the next issue.

■ November 17

Cheltenham Countryside Race Day

Cheltenham Racecourse, Gloucestershire.
cheltenham.thejockeyclub.co.uk



➔ THE GAMEKEEPERS' WELFARE

TRUST (GWT) is holding a series of 25th anniversary celebrations this year in the form of Gamekeeping for Life conferences. Confirmed dates are listed below:
March 21 – Packington Hall, Meriden, Coventry.
March 28 – Swinton Castle, Masham, North Yorkshire.
April 12 – Blair Atholl, Perthshire.
April 25 – Floors Castle, Roxburghshire.
May 3 – Sparsholt College, Hampshire.
For more information, email gamekeeperwtrust@btinternet.com

Christ Church — The Albrighton War Horse

→ The Chase Project tells the tale of an extraordinary hunter who showed immaculate conduct in the Great War

During the Great War over 16 million horses were used on all the fronts, of which half perished. The book, film and play *War Horse* highlighted their tremendous contribution. However, Richard Pursehouse and Lee Dent of Staffordshire-based The Chase Project have unearthed a possible inspiration behind the ‘true war-horse’ story.

On a sunny morning in early August, 1914, Lieutenant Viscount Sandon (later the 6th Earl of Harrowby) of the 6th Stafford Battery, Royal Field Artillery, arrived at Stafford Grammar School to inspect the horses commandeered for use by the British Army from neighbouring farms and hunts. His eye fell upon a light chestnut gelding with a white star on his nose, some 15½ hands in height.

The six-year-old horse, Christ Church, had been hunted with the Albrighton (with country across Staffordshire and Shropshire). Sandon formed an immediate partnership with the companion he called

his “War Horse”.

After seven months of training in Bedfordshire and Essex, in February Sandon, Christ Church and the 232nd Brigade Royal Field Artillery headed to France. This was no ‘workhorse’ pressed into service by the British Army, Christ Church was a frontliner, a mount for his master as they rode towards the guns. The two shared the perils of battle, the “close-range fire from low-flying aeroplanes”; his first taste of action was in the Ypres Salient when a gun was stuck in a shell hole and with machine gun and rifle bullets “rattling all around us”, Christ Church with ears cocked, stood adamant, listening to the bullets whining all around him.

For Viscount Sandon, Christ Church would become “a horse who passed through many a barrage, who would close his old head down for a five minutes ‘pow wow’ nuzzling my neck reassuringly.”

On one occasion in No Man’s Land at La Maisonette (near Peronne, France) Christ Church “performed a prodigious feat of



Christ Church and house manager John Guest.

faultless extraction from a sea of barbed and hooped wire and derelict shell holes”, and Sandon commented: “What does a horse think about when the shells are bursting and the bullets are whistling round his head?” Adding wryly that the horse was probably thinking of running around in a field back home, or what mischief he could get up to that night in the lines.

His former groom during the war reminded Sandon in a letter of condolence that Christ Church would nearly every night get loose from the picket line and roam around eating all he could find (once managing to consume nearly all of the sections’ ration of oats), or trampling saddles into the mud, chewing blankets or stirrup leathers. The groom also seconded the statement about Christ Church not being restless under fire.

In a letter published in *The Times* in 1933, Sandon compared his charger to Wellington’s Copenhagen, Napoleon’s Marengo, General Seeley’s Warrior, and even Snarleyow (the subject of Kipling’s 1890 poem describing the fatally wounded artillery horse that attempted to follow his gun). Sandon’s letter also referred to happier times – of how the implacable Christ Church would briefly break loose from him, for example in April 1918 when he saw green standing corn, he proceeded to eat at the canter until brought back under control.

Sandon and Christ Church forged an unbreakable bond: “Should my stick, strafing on his shoulders to increase, say, the pace

“CHRIST CHURCH REPRESENTED “SOMETHING EMINENTLY STABLE, STEADY AND SANE IN A WORLD THAT NEEDED ALL THAT.”



Viscount Sandon and Christ Church.

of his trot, be distasteful to him, he would turn his head round and bite my leg, not to the extent of pain, but as a tangible manifestation of disapproval... as of a senior 'ticking off' a subordinate!" On one occasion, he was unsaddled into a puddle of mud, with — he was convinced — a sardonic snort from his mount. However, throughout the war, culminating with a procession behind the victorious regimental bands as they crossed the Hohenzollern Bridge at Cologne in 1919, Christ Church represented "something eminently stable, steady and sane in a world that needed all that."

Unlike many of the horses pressed into service during the Great War, Christ Church returned to England, living out his life at Sandon Hall in Staffordshire, enjoying long periods out to grass. Most days he was ridden for three hours, and Sandon would encourage his two sons and daughter to ride from as early as one-year-old. Until October, 1933, Christ Church rode with the North Cotswold Hunt and around the estate until the following month. By December his health had declined and he was put to sleep.

In his letter published in *The Times* Sandon offered panegyric praise to his



Lieutenant Viscount Sandon
September, 1914, Stopsley in
Bedfordshire.

confidante, claiming that he "will never love another animal on this earth as he did the companion whose tail he could (and did) pull like a bell rope, whose mouth he could (and did) kiss, or whose teeth would clench his hands without painning them...Whom he could talk with for hours in war or peace with complete mutual understanding in the silences of a still night or in the moment of crisis or trouble."

Christ Church was buried at the family animal burial ground at Sandon Park, his tail was mounted on the wall at Sandon Hall, as were his head and neck (a task undertaken by taxidermist Edward Gerrard). After the Great War his portrait was painted by James Lynwood Palmer.

British cavalry troopers and drivers cared for their horses, consistently tending to their needs before they focussed on their own, no matter how exhausted they were. The Germans dismounted their cavalry and put them into the trenches and either slaughtered their horses for food or set them to work (as happened to Joey and Topthorn in *War Horse*).

When the Germans broke through in the Kaiserschlacht Spring Offensives of 1918, British cavalry was used effectively as mobile infantry, shoring up the line wherever the need was greatest. When the British moved onto the offensive for the advances in the last 'Hundred Days', cavalry was used as shock troops. A trooper and a horse can move quicker than just a soldier whether in defence or attack. Whatever his faults, Haig's decision to maintain the cavalry can be argued as a major contributor to an allied victory; artillery may have 'won' the war, but horses moved the guns forward. Haig understood the war would be won with boots — and hooves — on the ground.



Christ Church with Sandon
and son riding pillion.

"ARTILLERY MAY HAVE 'WON' THE WAR, BUT HORSES MOVED THE GUNS FORWARD. HAIG UNDERSTOOD THE WAR WOULD BE WON WITH BOOTS - AND HOOVES - ON THE GROUND."

The final paragraph in Sandon's 1933 letter printed in *The Times* suggests Christ Church represented all horses who went to war: "Goodbye to all our dumb pals... who served us all those years without a day's leave." Sandon described Christ Church as faithful unflappable my brother-in-arms, his true war-horse his Frontliner Christ Church would have been nonplussed by such praise; Sandon's understated observations concluded: "He just did his job." ●

Sandon hall.



The Chase Project is appealing to readers for any additional information about Christ Church and the whereabouts of his portrait by James Lynwood Palmer. They can be contacted at thechaseproject@gmail.com

Devon farmer
**WILFRED
EMMANUEL-
JONES**

set up the award-winning brand The Black Farmer 12 years ago. Having battled leukaemia in 2014, he still farms near Launceston in Devon.



When I was a kid growing up in central Birmingham, living with parents and eight siblings in a two-up two-down terraced house, as the eldest boy it was my job to help my Dad with the family allotment. There was no money, so being able to supplement what little food we did have with vegetables from the allotment was vital. Whilst there were jobs I hated (like picking Brussels sprouts in winter), what I did love was the sense of space and freedom this small oasis of land gave me in an otherwise overcrowded and noisy household. I vowed then that one day I would buy myself a small farm in the open countryside. I have a lot to thank that dream for as it became my driving force and focus for the next 40 years of my life. After a varied career (after an unsuccessful spell in the Army) first working as a chef, then in TV as a producer/director for the BBC which allowed me to travel the world making films about food and drink, and where I was credited with bringing many of today's major celebrity chefs to the small screen for the first time – including Gordon Ramsay, Brian Turner and James Martin. With my interest in food and drink I started a marketing consultancy and built it into a successful business as a result of which I was able to achieve my dream and bought

a small farm on the Devon/Cornwall border. And that was the start of my next journey!

Being in Devon inspired me to start a new business venture. Spurred on by my love of sausages, but appalled at the lack of quality in supermarket offerings back then I decided to come up with my own. And so The Black Farmer brand was born. Thanks to my neighbours who referred to me as the black farmer, the brand name was a no brainer – and 12 years ago it certainly caused a stir and put The Black Farmer on the map. Today, we not only produce one of the UK's favourite brands of super premium gluten-free sausages, but a very successful range of chicken, burgers, meatballs, bacon, eggs and cheese.

One thing I have learned about life is that it throws the odd curve ball. Mine came in 2014 when I was taken ill with leukaemia. If it wasn't for the team at University College Hospital, London, I would not be alive now. I spent that year in hospital and underwent a stem cell transplant which has been very tough. It's been a long haul, but as anyone will tell you a near brush with death re-focuses the mind and your priorities. After all, I had a year in hospital and plenty of time to think about it!

For the last 12 years The Black Farmer

“Spurred on by my love of sausages, but appalled at the lack of quality in supermarket offerings back then I decided to come up with my own. And so The Black Farmer brand was born.”

has been my passion, and while many people after major illness want to change their lives and do other things, I don't. I love what I do. But I do want to do the things I have always wanted to do, and to give back – I don't want to leave this life with regrets. All my energy is going into taking the company to its next stage of development and part of that was to make a TV commercial, something I have longed to do for many years. To bring together a team of creative people including my hero, Hollywood legend director Tony Kaye, and to create a game-changing advert was exhilarating. And it gave voice to the things that make me tick as an individual, as The Black Farmer – including Morris dancing. It gave me the opportunity to shout about my love of and support for rural Britain, its place in our lives and its traditions. I am thankful to still have so much to be excited about. I am one lucky man.

Find out more about The Black Farmer, including stockists, and to see the ad Wilfred mentions, visit www.theblackfarmer.com.



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