

RURAL & SPORTING

NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2025

Keeping you up to date with Rural and Sporting matters

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DEER MANAGEMENT
AND FOOD POVERTY

THE LEAD BAN

GROUSE DEBATE

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Where there was a reasonable stock of Grouse at the end of the 2024 season, then 2025 could be a really nice season.

GROUSE PROSPECTS FOR THE COMING SEASON?



WRITTEN BY
MARK OSBORNE

Last year was overall probably the worst Grouse season in living memory. Whilst there were a few (very few) Moors with a reasonable number of Grouse, it did not make much difference whether you were in the Peak District, the North Yorkshire Moors, the North Pennines, the South of Scotland or the Highlands, all had few Grouse and in many places very, very few.

It was a bizarre situation, caused by a number of factors combining together (worm, poor nutrition and horrendous weather over the end of May/beginning June), which meant that on some Moors less Grouse were counted in the July counts than had been counted in the Spring counts in March!

This meant that for most Moors, after experiencing over winter mortality of perhaps 25% to 33%, they went into the 2025 nesting season with very modest Grouse stocks indeed. It is the number of pairs of Grouse in the spring that plays a major part in determining how the next season fares, so this did not bode at all well.

Although we had 10 days of pretty grim weather

(cold and with a good deal of rain/wind) at the end of May/early June this year, overall young Grouse seem to have generally done well. The early broods in particular do not seem to have taken any harm from this poor weather, but those hatched at just the wrong time, have seen some brood sizes reduced from seven, eights and nines to fives and sixes. In some (particularly exposed) places, we are seeing some broods of threes/fours. However, as a corollary to this, we are also seeing many sevens, eights and nines and a few tens, elevens, twelves and the odd thirteens and a very few fourteens! On most Moors, the worry is the number of broods and the distribution of those broods and not the size of them.

Whatever happens, the 2025 season is going to be infinitely better than the 2024 one – it would be impossible not to be! There will be a smattering of Grouse even where the stock was really low (and that includes on many really good Moors in the North Pennines), but were there was a reasonable stock of Grouse at the end of the 2024 season, 2025 could be a really nice season, although no records will be broken. We are, however, in a much better place than last year and with sensible shooting

this season, we should find that most Moors will be ready (weather permitting) to be fully back on track in 2026. People have asked whether the recent very hot and dry weather has been a problem? Not, we think to the Grouse themselves (and there seemed enough moisture for insects early on), but the risk of wildfire has been almost constant this summer. We have commented on the very large and recent wildfire in Morayshire elsewhere in this Newsletter.



This newsletter has been put together by JM Osborne Rural & Sporting and William Powell Sporting, with the aim to focus on current Rural and Sporting matters. If you would like to discuss any of the topics featured in this publication or find out more about the services provided by either company, please contact us on any of the following details.

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LOUPING ILL

Are we getting closer to some form of solution?

Louping ill is a pretty potent virus, particularly to young Red Grouse, but it also affects (and therefore is hosted) by a wide range of other animals, including all deer, white (mountain) hares and sheep, to name a few. It is spread by sheep tick and the only known way currently of controlling louping ill, is to limit the number of tick on any Moor. Whilst it is perfectly possible to have high tick numbers and no louping ill, in reality, the two tend to go side by side and with high tick numbers, small pockets of louping ill can quickly spread across the whole of the Moorland Estate. When this occurs, Grouse suffer badly, with up to 85% of infected young Grouse dying.

Until 2017, it was possible to buy a vaccine for sheep against louping ill. Basically, this prevented those sheep which were properly vaccinated, from being a reservoir of blood infected with louping ill, which when ticks attach themselves, they were able to get a blood feed from which was contaminated by the louping ill virus. Over many years, it was found that the most effective way of controlling louping ill (and when it was at a high incidence, reducing its reach), was to have a combination of the right number of “treated” (with acaracides) sheep which were also vaccinated against louping ill, properly raking out over the whole Moorland area. It is these sheep treated with the acaracide (Dysect or Crovect in the main), which killed the tick. Unfortunately, that all came to an end once the louping ill vaccine was no longer available (due to it being a “live” vaccine and therefore having potential health issues to humans

manufacturing it). This means that there are now no sheep on the UK’s Moors, which have been injected with the louping ill vaccine and hence all of those sheep on the Moors in the North of England and Scotland are potential reservoirs of blood infected with louping ill. Louping ill does adversely affect the health of sheep, particularly lambs at high rates, but it is its disastrous effect on young Grouse, which is of most concern.

Fast forward and the Moredun Institute has been working flat out to try and find an alternative louping ill vaccine. They have done unbelievably sterling work and now have a prototype vaccine, which needs a little further development, before it can be released onto the market for Farmers and shooting Estates to buy and to inoculate our moorland sheep with. However, louping ill is a virus which only affects the moorland parts of England, Wales and Scotland, and sadly, given



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that the UK’s population of sheep is 70% of the entirety of the sheep flock in the USA, there is not going to be much of a demand for this vaccine anywhere else. As a result, it is not going to be commercially viable, and if we want (as we very definitely do) to have this new louping ill vaccine available for our hill sheep flocks, then we are going to have to financially support it ourselves. I understand that shortly there will be a fundraising initiative to enable this vaccine to get into production. We have seen, due to the lack of moorland sheep

Grouse suffer badly, with up to 85% of infected young Grouse dying

fully vaccinated over the last two to three years (and hill sheep tend not to live longer than five years), a significant increase in the spread and quantity of louping ill on Moors where we manage or consult on both in the North of England and Scotland. Going back 15 to 20 years, louping ill was only something which really affected Scottish Grouse Moors, and even there, mostly those in the Highlands. There were one or two areas of moorland in the North of England, particularly the Trough of Bowland, which did have quite high levels of louping ill, but this situation has completely changed over the last five or six years. We now have louping ill quite widespread

throughout Moors in the North of England, where it had not been seen before. We also have it similarly spread on Moors in the South of Scotland. This means that whatever else we do to try and ensure that we have a really good Grouse population (when the weather permits!) on our Moors, until and unless

we get on top of the louping ill problem, this will in many areas (an increasing number) be one of the major inhibiting factors of the number of Grouse produced. Given that it kills up to 85% of the young Grouse it infects, you

can see how devastating widespread louping ill can be. We therefore must back the fundraising efforts and ensure that we have the louping ill vaccine available as soon as possible.

There is literally no alternative to this. We would recommend interested people read two brief publications produced by the Moredun Institute: “ticks and tick-borne diseases” and “best practice guidelines for LIV control in sheep flocks and on Grouse Moor in the absence of a vaccine”. It is unlikely that any part of the UK’s Moorland areas, will be free of louping ill in a few years’ time, if a new vaccine is not widely available.



Muirburn *or* Wildfire?

One of Natural England's staff in the Peak District the other day justified Wildfires as being a natural phenomenon.

It will have escaped the notice of few of those involved in moorland management, that combined with increasingly unpredictable and unseasonal weather, we are seeing a very significant increase in the number and scale of wildfires on the UK's Moorland. This mirrors what is happening overseas. Wildfires in the UK mostly occur on one of our most precious habitats, being heather moorland. Sadly, NatureScot and Natural England, the respective Governmental organisations charged with protecting these very valuable assets seem unaware of the rapidly increasing threat or if they are aware, still seem to be doing nothing very much to try and prevent it. This is a disaster waiting to happen and shows an appalling lack of responsibility; it is almost as though the people who should in Sir Keir Starmer's words be "grown ups" have not reached that age of maturity yet.

The end of June wildfire in Morayshire (close by Nairn), burnt approximately 30,000 acres in total on more than seven different Estates. The fire allegedly started due to a careless mistake by a Government Contractor and burnt for nearly a week. During that timescale, over 100 Gamekeepers, Farmers, Estate workers and other helpers along with the Grantown Fire Service and adjacent fire brigades, brought their firefighting machinery to both contain it and then to try and put it out. The scale and intensity of the fire was extraordinary and two Headkeepers that we spoke to who were involved, and have had many years' experience of heather burning, described the ferocity as unbelievable and fighting it very frightening indeed. The fire swept through heather moorland, established woodland and scrubland, as well as

more recently planted conifer and hardwood plantations. It jumped tarmac roads and such was the intensity of the heat, it consumed everything in front of it. It was eventually extinguished by heavy rainfall, but without that thousands more acres would have been burnt.

They are so pathologically opposed to burning, they are happy to accept the significantly increased risk of Wildfires.

The irony is that controlled habitat management on heather moorland has become much much harder in the North of England, because of Natural England's actions (managed burns over "deep" peat are now not allowed) and not content with that restriction, they are currently

trying to reduce the definition of what deep peat consists of. In Scotland, the devolved Government is bringing in its new Muirburn provisions, which again will make managed burning much harder to do. The Scottish Fire Brigades have made it clear that proper habitat management is absolutely essential in order to reduce the risk of wildfires, and yet both Governments and their respective environmental guardians seem oblivious to the contradictions which they have imposed. It is as though they inhabit a parallel universe. Although perhaps it is as the Americans say because none of these people in power or with power "have any skin in the game". It is an

None of these people in power or with power "have any skin in the game".

old adage of power without responsibility and when you meet and discuss this subject, it is clear that because they are so pathologically opposed to burning, they are happy to accept the significantly increased risk of Wildfires. One of Natural England's staff in the Peak District the other day justified Wildfires as being a natural phenomenon!

Almost certainly we have not yet seen the worst of what could happen given increasingly dry weather patterns and high winds. When asked some years ago at a Wildfire Conference, what would make Natural England take wildfires more seriously, their representative answered, "probably a death". We look in amazement at the devastation caused in other parts of the world by wildfires, and yet somehow we do not think that this will happen here. It can and it will. The Surrey Hills would be a perfect place for wildfires to occur, capable of burning properties and killing people, as well as the extraordinary environmental damage left behind. To appreciate what this is like, a visit to the recent Morayshire Wildfire should be a priority for the heads and senior staff of both Natural England and NatureScot. It will be interesting to see if they rise to the challenge but we will not hold our breath. What we can say with confidence is that this problem is going to only get worse, and our Governments' actions or lack of positive action, will only add to the problem.

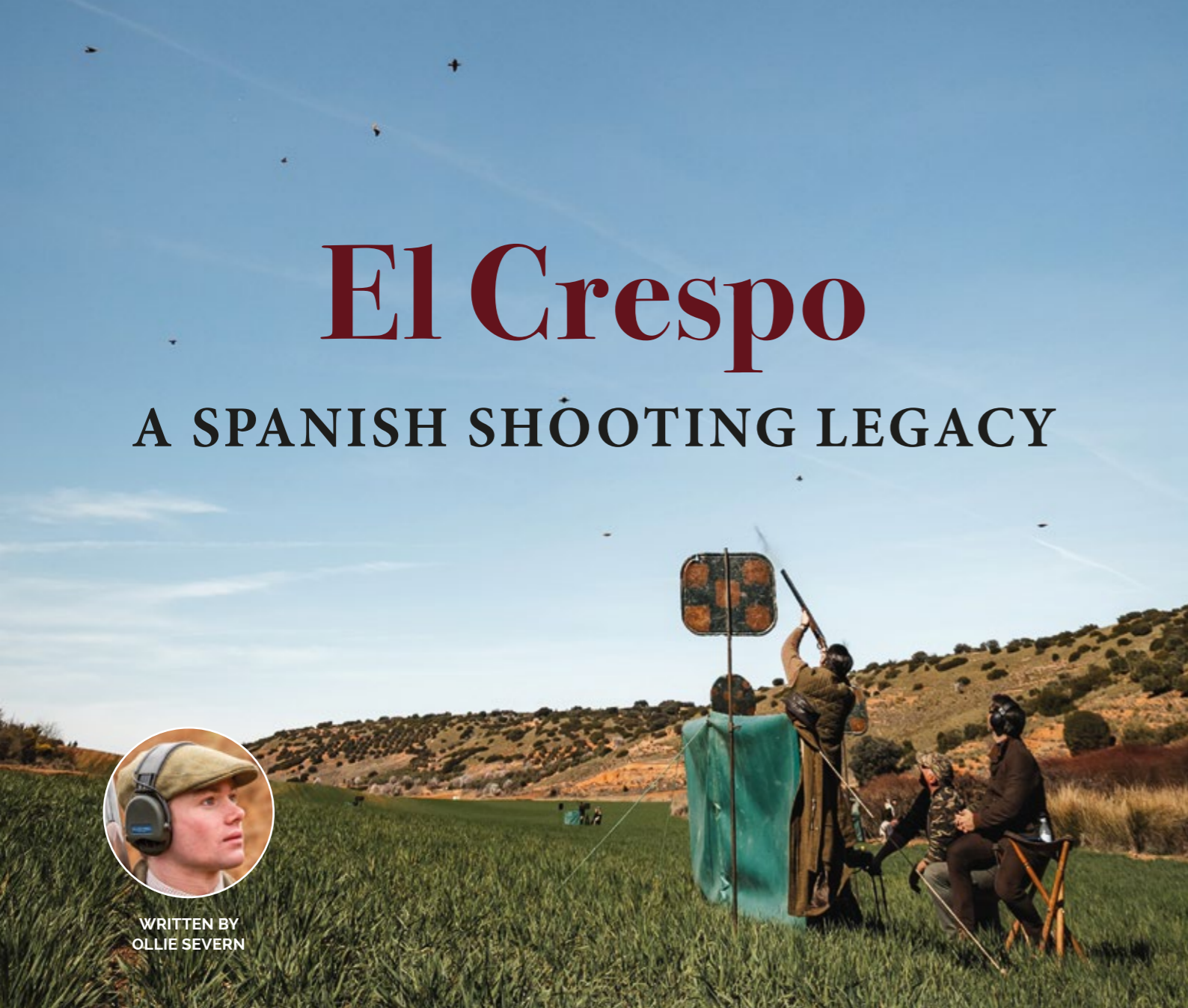
Sadly, we cannot truthfully say that in this regard, the people in charge are fit for purpose. It really is as simple as that!



WRITTEN BY
MARK OSBORNE

El Crespo

A SPANISH SHOOTING LEGACY



WRITTEN BY
OLLIE SEVERN



Spain is renowned for its outstanding driven partridge shooting. Yet, it is rare to come across a Shoot of true quality that remains relatively unknown.

El Crespo, nestling in the province of Ciudad Real, just over two hours south of Madrid, is one such gem. This long-guarded and very private Estate is now available to a select few and we have been asked to assist with sourcing these clients.

For decades, El Crespo has quietly welcomed a small circle of family, friends, and international clients, all keen sportsmen and women who value authenticity, elegance, and understated quality. Following a visit in early 2025, it was immediately clear to us that this was something very special. From the terrain, the hospitality, hosting and tradition as well as the presentation of truly exceptional birds, El Crespo embodies the very best of Spanish partridge shooting.

El Crespo extends to more than 8,000 hectares (20,000 acres) of varied and dramatic ground. To the front of the lodge lie expansive plains, while behind, deep ravines and rolling valleys,

which create superb topography for presenting fast, high, and challenging birds. A typical two-day Shoot includes five carefully selected drives per day, showcasing the diversity of the Estate.

Each Gun is accompanied by a Loader and Secretario, ensuring a smooth and well-organised experience. Bags are typically shared across both days, with overages recorded individually and handled discreetly should individuals wish to shoot them, maintaining the Shoot's refined and traditional atmosphere.

At the heart of the Estate stands El Casón, the principal lodge, built in the mid-1980s by Don José Manuel Landaluce and his wife, María. The lodge is elegant and welcoming, offering 13 en-suite double bedrooms, eight



on the ground floor. Two adjoining lodges, originally constructed to accommodate His Majesty the King of Spain, provide additional guest accommodation.

The hospitality at El Crespo is exceptional. Head Butler José leads a dedicated team who ensure guests are looked after with warmth and precision. Meals are rooted in Castilian tradition and include game dishes, seasonal produce, and excellent Spanish wines, served in the dining room or al fresco when the weather allows.

El Crespo remains a proudly family-run Estate. In the 1990s, Don Pedro de Borbón-Dos Sicilias, Duke of Calabria, joined the management of the Estate alongside his late father-in-law. Together with María, they have nurtured a unique culture of sport, discretion, and hospitality that is evident in every detail.

El Crespo offers more than outstanding shooting; it offers a rare glimpse into a world where tradition is upheld, and guests are made to feel part of the family.

We are delighted to represent El Crespo as one of our select partner Estates. The standard two-day package includes all shooting, cartridges, permits, airport transfers, accommodation, and hospitality for a team of nine Guns. Tailored itineraries and longer stays can be arranged upon request.

Whether you are looking to join as an individual or bring your own team, El Crespo delivers an unforgettable experience in one of Spain's finest sporting settings.

For further information, please contact Ollie or a member of the William Powell Sporting team, we would be delighted to assist.

For more details email us on info@williampowellssporting.co.uk or call 01295 661033





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The Food:Conservation Dilemma

No Government has developed a really sensible policy on Farming and the Countryside, for at least the last 30 years. Every Government has offered platitude after platitude to Farmers and Conservationists alike, but whether it is because in the main we have had some pretty inadequate Secretaries of State for Agriculture and latterly the Environment, or whether it has not been an important enough issue for the brightest and the best to focus on, the end result has been massively disappointing. We have as a result, had a pretty disjointed series of policies, often trying to reconcile the irreconcilable. Really sad, given the importance of this subject to the health of the nation, but also environmentally and financially.

However, this Government has so far been worse than anything that has gone before. It used to be said that Farmers always did best under a Labour Government, but that is certainly not the case with Sir Keir's. The hapless Environment Minister (who really does seem to know absolutely nothing about his

It is very much a question of battening down the hatches, reducing costs and where possible, increasing efficiency

brief and probably does not want to either), has had to watch powerless as the Chancellor has introduced several fiscal changes, all of which have damaged UK Farms. It is difficult to see how things are going to get any better, certainly over the life span of this Government. Indeed, Labour is so unpopular now with Farmers (and many others!) that it seems likely that the Environment Budget will come under attack again, on the basis that they cannot really upset this type of voter any more, so at a time when money is very difficult to find, why not reduce the funds for this sector further?

There really is not anyone in Government who has any understanding of the Countryside, other than as a place to visit.

The root of the problem is that there really is not anyone in Government who has any understanding of the Countryside, other than as a place to visit. As a result, there is no empathy with the people trying, under increasingly difficult circumstances, to run viable farming and rural businesses. With few exceptions, as a firm we do not see anything at scale, which is very positive in terms of nicely profitable farming businesses for the next few years at least. Our definition of "nicely profitable" is a profit which reflects the risk: return. However, the IHT changes (will they even at this late stage be changed, like so much else?), will also adversely affect many mid-sized private business as well as Farms and Estates. All are going to struggle to find this new tax and most from declining pre-tax profits. Whilst it is not all doom and gloom, there is no doubt that running all businesses including Farms and Estates is becoming increasingly hard and will continue in that vein. Angela Rayner's new Employment Laws will only add to the burden.

What is really telling is the lack of real vision and leadership, from both our politicians but also the heads of the various rural Government Agencies. One gets the feeling that provided food is on the supermarket shelf and we are seen to be "doing good" in Conservation terms, the how and why and indeed the longer term sustainability of producers (yes we do need them!) is being completely ignored. Sadly, this merely reflects the ignorance of those in charge. It is to be hoped that the opposition parties are using this time to seriously consider what they would do if they were in Government. Let's hope so! In the meantime, it is very much a question of battening down the hatches, reducing costs and where possible, increasing efficiency. As a formula for growth, it seems very unlikely to be at all successful, but then if no-one in the Government nor in the Civil Service has ever run a for profit business, we probably should not be surprised!



WRITTEN BY
OLLIE SEVERN

EL KOUDIA

Where Tradition
Meets Ambition

Since forming a wonderful partnership with El Koudia in 2021, William Powell Sporting has dedicated considerable effort to supporting and promoting what we consider to be one of the most exciting driven shooting developments in recent years. While early marketing focused on raising awareness, more recently it has been about sharing the progress of a Shoot that is now very much thriving, with the last two seasons being exceptional and with very significant demand.

Established in 2018, El Koudia had barely opened its doors before the Covid-19 pandemic forced a temporary closure. However, in 2021 the Shoot was revived, and not long after, one of the founding partners approached us to explore the possibility of collaboration. With some wonderful characters already involved and an appreciation for the ambition behind the project, it was an easy decision to take a closer look.

That task fell to Will Southall, who travelled to Morocco to join one of the early shoot days and assess the potential. The feedback was unequivocal: while not yet the finished article, the foundations were remarkable.

Those familiar with the William Powell Sporting and JM Osborne ethos will know we rarely do things by halves. Recognising both the potential and the sheer quality of the opportunity, we fully committed to supporting the development of El Koudia. In the seasons since, we have enjoyed some of the most memorable driven shoot days.

The team has undertaken the development of five additional drives, extending the shooting area across the 12,000 acre Estate.

From 2021 onwards, the Shoot has expanded steadily while retaining its charm and authenticity. A growing number of days have been added each season, supported by significant investment in infrastructure. One of the most notable developments is the creation of a modern rearing field, a project that whilst perhaps modest by European standards, is among the most advanced in Morocco. The first eggs were laid in late February, and the field has already proved a success, offering greater control and consistency. That said, in the spirit of sensible risk management, a proportion of the game continues to be sourced from the Royal Hatchery, a relationship we value both practically and symbolically.

To support the increased demand and continue to improve, the team has also undertaken the development of five additional drives, extending the shooting area across the 12,000 acre Estate. Interestingly, while UK Shoots often seek to find steeper topography, El Koudia has the opposite challenge, finding some lower drives, but still capable of showing wonderful birds in a more “traditional” way and allow Guns to shoot suits their personal preferences.

Alongside the expansion, continuous improvements are being made to roads, tracks, gun stands, and the overall Shoot infrastructure. The team has also worked hard to manage predation and preserve the landscape, and the presence of healthy wild broods suggests their efforts are paying off. Not only do these wild partridge reflect these conservation efforts, but they also seem to help teach natural behaviours to the reared birds, perhaps contributing to the overall quality of the shooting, with a genuine mix of released and wild birds.

Sales for the 2025/26 season have been exceptionally strong, which was undoubtedly helped by the global exposure following Jonny Carter’s film which we enjoyed making with him last season. We are proud to be welcoming teams from across the UK, US, France, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, and Portugal, among others. There are a handful of dates still available.

The Ultimate Fieldsports Giveaway

To celebrate the continued success of El Koudia, we are pleased to launch our most exciting competition to date, headlined by an incomparable first prize.

First prize is two full days of shooting at El Koudia, accompanied by a non-shooting guest and £750 travel contribution - to be drawn at the start of October in celebration of the Moroccan partridge season.

Second prize is a William Powell Perdix 30” 12-bore,

Third prize is 2,000 Gamebore cartridges.

Entering is refreshingly simple and free; just scan the QR code on the right and submit your details.

We very much hope to see you in Morocco!

If you would, however, like to guarantee a trip to El Koudia, either as an individual Gun or with a full team, please don’t hesitate to contact Ollie, who would be delighted to assist.

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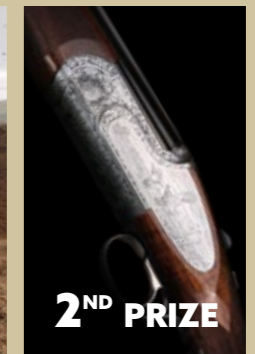
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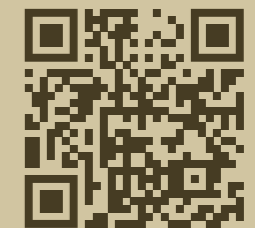
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THE NEXT MEGAFIRE IS COMING...

... AND NATURAL ENGLAND WILL BE TO BLAME!

Andrew Gilruth, Chief Executive of the Moorland Association discusses the hazards of large fuel loads on our moors and what needs to be addressed to reduce the risk of these all too common wildfires.

GUEST ARTICLE

In recent years, wildfires have surged to unprecedented levels across the UK's uplands. 2018 and 2019 together saw more land burned than the entire previous decade, and 2022 set a grim record for large wildfires. This year is on track to be even worse – by May 2025 over 35,000 hectares had already burned. The Moorland Association has estimated wildfires have cost the nation £350 million already. As the person entrusted with speaking for England's Moorland Managers, I am deeply concerned that despite this spate of infernos, there has been a complete lack of meaningful action from the very Government bodies tasked with protecting our landscapes.

The truth is that our moorlands are being allowed to become tinderboxes and key agencies, Natural England, Defra and the Home Office have all failed to step up. To add to the inertia, in April the Fire and Rescue Service was transferred from the Home Office to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. What we need is immediate reform: the Government must either enable us to protect our land, or be held responsible for the catastrophic consequences.

Systemic Failures: No Strategy, No Support, No Accountability

It shocks me that in 2025, we still lack a National Wildfire Resilience Strategy. Wildfire risk has escalated, yet there is no coherent plan from central Government. The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) has practically been begging for strategic leadership on this issue. The Home Office has issued platitudes about local fire planning, but provided no leadership or resources. Freedom of Information requests submitted by the Moorland Association to 21 fire authorities has revealed that not a single one had a plan for dealing with fuel build-up on our moors. In other words, no one in Whitehall is ensuring our regions are prepared.

Meanwhile, local efforts are left unsupported. Local fire services, working with moorland communities and Estate managers have taken it upon themselves to establish Fire Operations Groups. These create wildfire response plans and conduct exercises with their local fire services. Gamekeepers and Farmers are often first on the scene of a wildfire, sometimes for hours before the Fire and Rescue Service can attend. Farmers and Gamekeepers provide equipment, training, and deep knowledge of the local access and terrain. No national

agency has stepped in to support or scale these initiatives up. Worse still, there is no accountability for state regulators whose decisions heighten fire risk. Agencies like Natural England increasingly prevent controlled burns or fuel load reduction, but face no scrutiny when the inevitable wildfires occur. When the Saddleworth Moor fire erupted in 2018, Natural England misled Ministers, suggesting it began in a managed area, when in fact it started where burning had been blocked for 23 years. Three inches of heather growth per year meant an inferno was inevitable. No inquiry followed. No lessons were learned.

Natural England's Policies: Adding Fuel to the Fire

Natural England's restrictions on heather burning are not only misguided, they are dangerous. Controlled burning, when done properly, is a time-tested way to remove dry, flammable vegetation and prevent summer infernos. Yet Natural England has championed blanket bans and stringent licensing, despite the evidence.

Since the burning restrictions of 2021, preventative management has collapsed by 73% over deep peat. This means huge amounts of combustible heather have been left to build up. The agency claims this benefits peat, but fire behavior models in the Peak District show terrifying projections of fire spread under current conditions. Fire officers confirm they cannot contain such events. In these places fuel levels are now way above any firefighting capability anywhere in the world.

And yet, even now, Natural England is proposing wider restrictions – including on land outside of protected sites. If this goes ahead, almost all meaningful burning will require a difficult-to-obtain licence. The results are predictable: larger,

hotter, more destructive wildfires. Once again, Natural England offers no operational support, no expertise, and no consequences for the fallout.

It is as if a petrol station had been built on every hill. With massive increases in vegetation, you get what we have – the worst wildfires in our history. The G7 leaders have recently called for the use of controlled burning as a means of preventing them “endangering lives, affecting human health, destroying homes and ecosystems, and costing Governments and taxpayers billions of dollars”. President Trump has issued an executive order to reduce restrictions on prescribed fires because he saw this as commonsense wildfire prevention. The European Commission also believes vegetation management is critical to reducing dangerous fuel loads. Natural England will continue to say it knows better than the rest of the world.

Practical Prevention: Use the Tools that Work

Controlled burning is not the enemy. When done in winter, it creates low-risk firebreaks and rejuvenates vegetation. Studies show wildfires are rare in areas that are regularly managed. In Scotland, 96% of wildfires occur in places where no preventative burning has been done. Fire Chiefs in Scotland and Wales endorse this approach – why not in England?

Grazing is another tool. Yet policies that discourage hill farming have removed sheep from the land, allowing grass and heather to grow unchecked. England's sheep flock has dropped by 7% in two years, removing a natural fire suppressant from the equation. Other countries see grazing

as wildfire prevention. We must do the same.

Above all, policymakers must listen to those with boots on the ground. Agencies and NGOs who set policy often have no operational responsibility – and no liability when things go wrong. The Climate Change Committee and other public bodies must be required to consult with land managers, not just lobby groups. The science is only half the story, field experience matters too.

A Demanding but Necessary Reform Agenda

To prevent further disaster, I call for a clear package of reforms:

- A National Wildfire Resilience Strategy across departments.
- Support and funding for local wildfire groups.
- Streamlined licensing for preventative burning and cutting.
- Mandatory fuel load reduction on high-risk land.
- Wildfire expertise embedded in agencies like Natural England.
- Personal accountability for public officials whose decisions block risk reduction and cause preventable site damage.

The State cannot have it both ways. It cannot impose duties on landowners while stripping away their tools. It cannot deny fuel management and then disown the consequences. If it chooses not to enable protection, it must be prepared to own the failure.

We are ready to work with Government, but if leaders continue to ignore the evidence and experience of those on the land, the next fire will be on their hands - and the flames will not wait.



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SFI

SUSTAINABLE FARMING INCENTIVE



WRITTEN BY
WILL SOUTHALL

The sudden withdrawal of the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) for 2025 has blindsided many in the agricultural sector. For those who had pinned their business models on stacking SFI options as a bridge from BPS to the new Environmental Schemes, this feels like the rug has been pulled from under them. DEFRA's rationale—refining the Scheme for better targeting—is of little comfort to those mid-application or already budgeting on anticipated income.

What is clear is that Agri-environment funding is becoming ever more conditional, ever more complex, and ever less predictable. Schemes like ELM, CS+, and other acronym-heavy offerings may still exist, but confidence in the process is eroding fast.

The removal of the SFI has also cast doubt on the Government's long-term commitment to supporting Farmers through the green transition. With Labour in power, there had been hopes for a clearer (and fairer) system, but early signs suggest bureaucracy may get worse before it gets better, or even if it does get better! For Farmers and Estate owners, the strategy must now be resilience. That means looking beyond state handouts: diversifying, investing in renewable energy, considering natural capital markets where viable, and lobbying for Schemes that genuinely support working land — not just parkland set-aside. The countryside can and should deliver for the environment, but only if those who manage it are properly supported to do so. After the SFI collapse, that principle is more important than ever and given this Government's track record to date, we are not holding our breath for a sea change in the short to medium term.

To discuss any options that may be available to you in more detail please contact a member of the JM Osborne Rural & Sporting team. Scan the QR code to visit our website.



WILLIAM POWELL
The Ultimate Sporting Agency



WRITTEN BY
OLLIE SEVERN

LETTINGS, LEGISLATION, AND LOOKING AHEAD

It is fair to say that gauging the health of the Shooting Industry is no straightforward task. What we can say with confidence is that the landscape has changed markedly in recent years. The days of Shoots being fully let year after year to long-standing teams, what many fondly referred to as "Dead Men's Shoot", are for the most part, behind us. A combination of rising input costs, ongoing economic uncertainty, bird flu, and wider geopolitical pressures have all taken their toll on demand. That said, the outlook is far from bleak.

This year's early-season lettings were encouraging, with strong activity in January and February, a trend that now seems to be the new norm. These early bookings were vital in helping many Shoots secure the working capital needed to commit to the coming season. Whilst enquiries have levelled off since, this follows a familiar seasonal rhythm. A number of Shoots still have dates to fill, but overall, sentiment is more buoyant than in recent years. This is likely due in part to supply and demand beginning to rebalance.

At William Powell Sporting, we are fortunate to work closely with our sister company, JM Osborne Rural & Sporting, widely regarded as a leading specialist in the management and consultancy of some of the UK's finest Sporting Estates, including many of the best-known Grouse Moors. This relationship gives us a uniquely informed perspective on the broader shooting landscape, both on and off the ground.

Naturally, one of the questions we're asked most often, perhaps because of this link, is about the state of the Moors. As ever, it is too early to tell definitively. Grouse numbers are almost impossible to predict until late July when brood counts are complete. That said, the spring was overall relatively kind, and while regional variation is to be expected, there are good reasons to be cautiously optimistic. Should we enjoy another similarly favourable spring next year, we may well be on for a very good 2026!

A major challenge this year has been the impact of the revocation of GL45. For Shoots located on or within 500 metres of SPAs (Special Protection Areas), the consequences have been significant, forcing some to completely alter their model, and in a few cases, to close altogether. The ongoing work of our representative shooting organisations on this matter has been invaluable and deserves recognition from us all.

More positively, we are continuing to see the return of international teams, particularly from the US, which is always most welcome. Interest in overseas sport remains strong and seems increasingly driven by the pursuit of experience-led trips rather than the larger driven days typical of the UK. El Koudia in Morocco has firmly cemented its position as a client favourite, and with demand high, we look forward to almost weekly visits in the season ahead.

We hope this has provided a useful overview of where things currently stand.

As ever, whether you're looking to shoot in the UK or abroad, we would be delighted to assist, email: info@williampowellssporting.com or call: 01295 661033.



Lake Vyrnwy and the cost of conservation:

ARE WE GETTING VALUE FOR MONEY?

This is conservation driven by ideology, not evidence - and it's happening on the taxpayer's tab



WRITTEN BY
WILL SOUTHALL

The recent RSPB report on its long-running stewardship of Lake Vyrnwy in mid-Wales has reignited a critical debate: what does successful conservation actually look like - and are we getting value for public money?

Lake Vyrnwy was once a productive Upland Estate, managed for Red Grouse and home to a wide range of wildlife species under a regime of traditional moorland management. It was representative of the 100's of Grouse Moors throughout the UK. That changed when the RSPB took over the management of the Moor over 30 years ago. When they did so, they set out their explicit goal of demonstrating how non-interventionist conservation could succeed without gamekeeping, predator control, or rotational burning.

The RSPB have recently published a report on the site, which claims that it is a beacon of ecological restoration. However, a closer look at the outcomes — and an excellent analysis by the Moorland Association (see: moorlandassociation.org/post/lake-vyrnwy-and-the-cost-of-conservation-are-we-getting-value-for-money) — tells a very different story.

No Grouse, Few Waders – and a Lot of Bracken

It will not shock you that Lake Vyrnwy no longer supports a shootable population of Red Grouse. In fact, there are now no Red Grouse at all. Lapwings have also disappeared, and curlew populations have plummeted. One of the site's supposed "successes" is the increase in tree pipits and stonechats and whilst these are undeniably interesting species, they are hardly the indicators of thriving upland biodiversity.

The abandonment of core moorland management practices, particularly controlled burning and legal predator control has led to exactly the kind of degradation that active Estates work hard to avoid. The site has seen bracken and scrub spread significantly leading to a much higher wildfire risk, and predator numbers have gone unchecked.

The RSPB has reportedly spent over £5 million of public money on the site, including £750,000 from a "green recovery fund". The key question must be: what is the return on that investment? The decline in iconic upland bird species strongly suggests it has not been value for money especially when you compare this with privately managed Moorland Estates, many of which deliver higher densities of curlew, golden plover and lapwing, as well as the economic and community benefits of sustainable shooting. Estates that still carry out rotational burning and predator control consistently outperform non-managed land when it comes to key biodiversity indicators, particularly for ground-nesting birds. The RSPB's failure at

Vyrnwy highlights the danger of conservation in a vacuum. Habitats do not thrive when left alone; they decline. Biodiversity does not increase simply because humans withdraw. In upland Britain, nature needs management and this management does not have to come from the taxpayers purse, as evidenced by the vast number of moorland owners and tenants who contribute millions of pounds annually into the management of the uplands in the UK.

The concern many in our sector share is that Lake Vyrnwy is being positioned as a conservation success in order to validate a model that does not work. This is conservation driven by ideology, not evidence - and it's happening on the taxpayer's tab. Of course, the RSPB does valuable work in many areas, but Lake Vyrnwy is not an example to replicate. If anything, it should be seen as a cautionary tale. It is a vivid reminder

of what can happen when you remove skilled land managers, ignore ecological complexity, and spend public money chasing the illusion that "rewilding" can replace hands-on Stewardship.

Estates that still carry out rotational burning and predator control consistently outperform non-managed land

The RSPB's experiment at Lake Vyrnwy should prompt a serious rethink. If Government is to support Environmental Schemes, it must ensure that public funding delivers tangible biodiversity outcomes. That includes backing the proven success of well-managed Upland Estates, rather than undermining them. The story of Lake Vyrnwy is not one of triumph, but one of lost opportunity, an object lesson in how removing management can do more harm than good.





GROUSE DEBATE

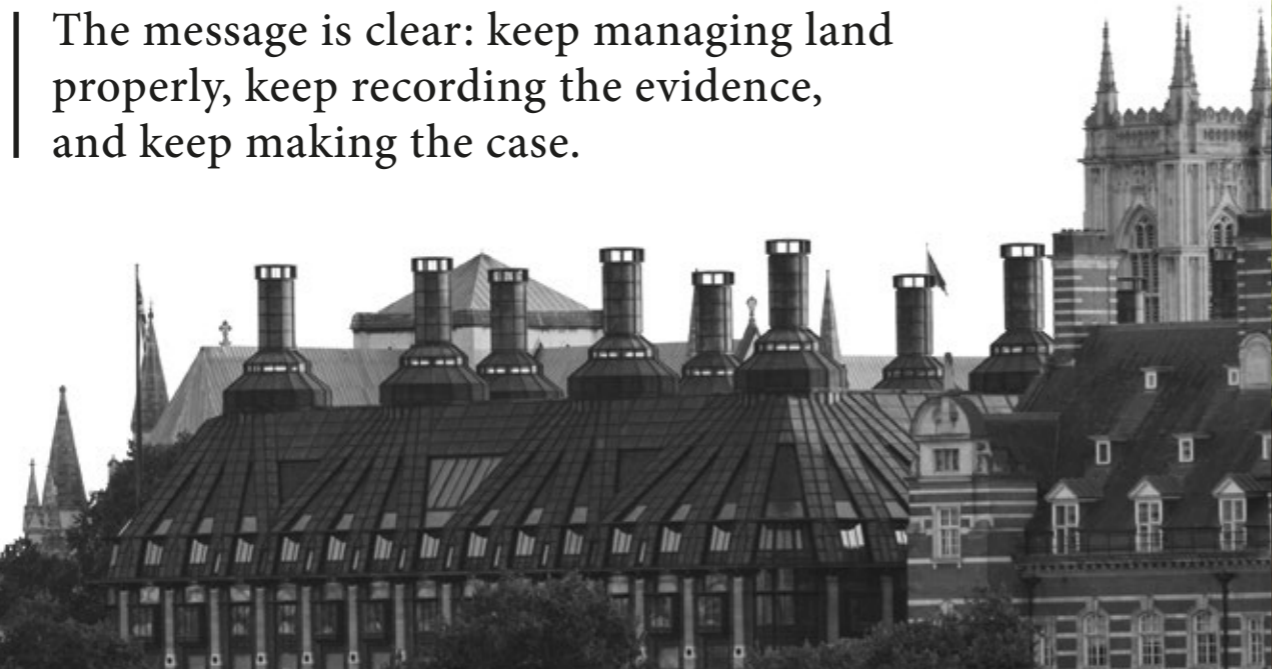
Yet again we had another House of Commons debate on Grouse Shooting, which took place on 30th June. This was sparked by a petition organised by the anti-shooting campaigners Wild Justice. It again highlighted the gulf between perception and reality when it comes to upland land use. However, what was very surprising to those of us pro Grouse shooting, was the appalling lack of support the “banners” had in the debate; it was almost comical how having orchestrated the debate and yet when it came to it, they had so little support.

As with previous attempts, campaigners painted Grouse shooting as “bad for people, the environment and wildlife” and “economically insignificant.” The reality, however, was made starkly clear in the House, with MPs from across the UK robustly defending the practice. John Lamont MP and former Prime Minister Rishi Sunak highlighted the annual economic benefit to rural areas including the 3,000 jobs which are supported through Grouse Shooting. Gamekeepers were also credited for preventing wildfires, boosting biodiversity, and managing some of the last strongholds for curlew, lapwing and golden plover. Labour’s Sam Rushworth acknowledged the positive role of moorland management — proof that support exists across the political spectrum.

Only Olivia Blake MP spoke in favour of a ban, citing concerns about peat burning and over-commercialisation. Yet her claims ignored the growing body of evidence that well-managed Moors deliver better conservation outcomes than those left unmanaged — Lake Vyrnwy being a prime example of failure when management is removed.

In short, Parliament agreed: driven Grouse shooting is vital to the countryside. The Petition was rejected, and there will be no immediate legislative changes. However, with pressure from anti-shooting groups ever present, our sector cannot afford complacency. The message is clear: keep managing land properly, keep recording the evidence, and keep making the case.

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A CAREER IN LAND AGENCY

The Value of Work Experience



WRITTEN BY
JACK LAWRENCE

My interest in the countryside began at a young age, working on farms, shooting, and generally appreciating the fascinating rural landscape we often take for granted. At 17, I visited a local livestock market that also had a Land Agency arm. I contacted the firm via email and was fortunate enough to be offered some work experience.

That initial opportunity opened my eyes to the industry and has been a major factor in getting me to where I am now. Off the back of it, I applied to Harper Adams University, where I studied for two years. I now find myself on my placement year at JM Osborne Rural & Sporting, with a passion for continuing my career as a Land Agent and working towards becoming a member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) and of the CAAV (Central Association of Agricultural Valuers).

I would not be where I am today without that work experience. That is why I firmly believe employers have an important role to play in offering and encouraging such opportunities. The most recent survey in 2013, showed that the average age of a Chartered Surveyor was 55; a clear sign that the profession must do more to attract young people.

Land Agency is a profession that is often underestimated, even by those within it, for the variety, challenge, and satisfaction it offers. Whether it is Estate Management, Valuation, Rural planning, or Sporting Consultancy, the industry combines traditional countryside knowledge with problem-solving, people skills, and commercial thinking.

JM Osborne Rural & Sporting has welcomed Graduates and Placement Students for over 30 years. Many of those who began their careers with the firm have gone on to become leading Land Agents undertaking a very wide range of work.

At JM Osborne Rural & Sporting, we are delighted to offer opportunities for young people to gain valuable work experience with us. Choosing a career path can be daunting, but if you really enjoy the countryside, are (or think you could be!) interested in land and property, keen on the environment, or simply curious about how the rural economy works, then Land Agency might well be the career for you.

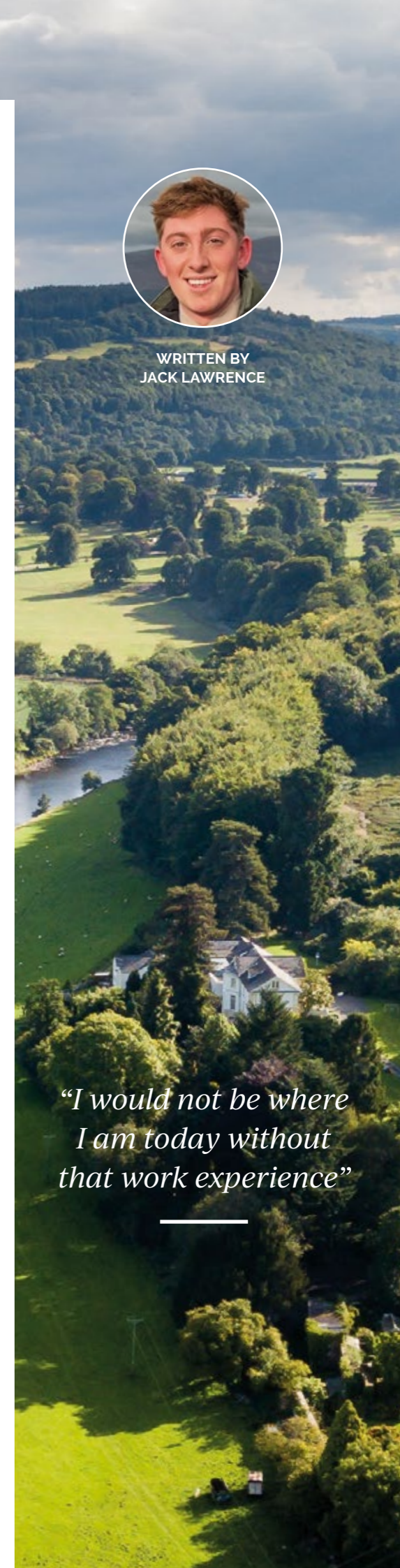
If you are in the same position I was, and this sounds like something you would like to explore, we would love to hear from you. Please email us at jobs@jmosborne.co.uk with a short note explaining why you would like to gain experience with our firm.

We look forward to meeting some of the next generation of Land Agents very soon.



SCAN TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT
JM OSBORNE RURAL & SPORTING

“I would not be where I am today without that work experience”



THE
COUNTRY
FOOD
TRUST

10
YEARS

Founded in 2015, The Country Food Trust (CFT) is celebrating its 10th year of operation this summer, by launching an appeal to fundraise for refrigerated vans, so that more meals to more locations can be achieved.



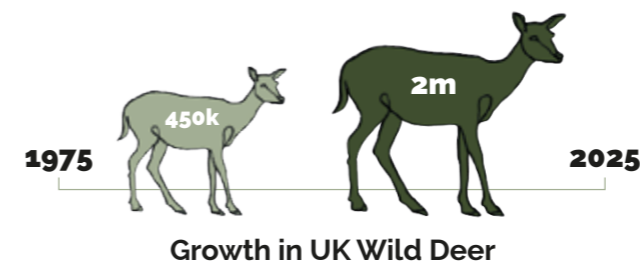
Deer Management

The Country Food Trust is a food poverty charity that distributes wild meats, largely, pheasant, partridge and venison to foodbanks and community kitchens in the UK. We do this in two ways; raw meat and ambient meals (Venison bolognese, Pheasant casserole, Partridge curry). These ambient meals are pressure cooked in special pouches, which gives them a store cupboard shelf life of 12 months from manufacture. As the meals are fully cooked inside the pouches, they can be eaten straight from the pouch, if no heating facilities are available or, they can be heated in the microwave and added to a carbohydrate for a complete meal.

Protein is the most expensive food group, yet it is the most important food group for optimal human health. Unfortunately as it is so expensive, it is the first to be dropped by people that are hungry and cannot afford to buy food. By offering protein in the form of wild meat, CFT is trying to alleviate food poverty, and preserve the health and well-being of families around the country.

Since 2015, CFT have delivered over 6 million meals to around 1,500 foodbanks, community kitchens and homeless shelters in the UK. We have also delivered over 70,000 meals to the front line in Ukraine as part of our international humanitarian aid programme.

Last year, CFT began its first deer management project. It is estimated that there are around two million deer in the UK. Overgrazing by deer is degrading woodlands, impairing tree regeneration, reducing biodiversity (including low nesting birds and woodland plants) and harming the yield of Farmers crops. There are six varieties of deer; red, sika, fallow, roe, Chinese water deer and muntjac. The last two are non-native species. In order to get the deer population under control between 500,000-750,000 deer need to be culled every year, less than half is currently being achieved, so CFT set up an environmental and positive social impact project to address this.



In Sussex, we set up a project to cull fallow does (females) and once processed to donate the meat within Sussex to those in need. After the first season, we managed to cull 884 fallow does and feed over 170,000 people with venison costing less than 60p per portion.

The project was so successful, it is being run again in Sussex and replicated in other regions, so that CFT can feed more people.

For every deer culled, CFT are enabling forest regeneration, carbon sequestration and habitat restoration, all whilst feeding people in need with this highly nutritious meat.

The illustration on the right shows the impact of 1,000 deer to their local environment.

Next season, we are already looking at culling over 5,000 deer, mainly Chinese water deer and Muntjac, which will feed over 500,000 people.

We are always looking for more areas to make an impact.

Do you live in an area that has too many deer, destroying the landscape?

Contact SJ Hunt
Chief Executive, The Country Food Trust.
sj@thecountryfoodtrust.org



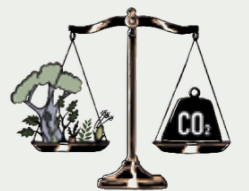
The impact of 1,000 Wild Deer over a 10 year period



1,000 breeding Fallow Does become 47,000



Or the carbon sequestered in 360 hectares of mature woodland



Consuming 60,000 tonnes of biomass. That's 108,000 tonnes of captured CO₂.

*Assumptions: fallow does begin breeding in 2nd year; 90% of breeding does give birth annually; 1 fawn per breeding doe; 75% of female fawns survive to breed; optimal conditions otherwise - no adult mortality; sufficient food etc; Av daily biomass consumed per deer 1.125kg

THE LEAD SHOT BAN



WRITTEN BY
WILL SOUTHALL

WHAT IT MEANS FOR GAME SHOOTING

The announcement of a definite phased ban on lead shot across England and Wales for live quarry and clay shooting has predictably sent ripples through the shooting world. The current timeline for this phased ban means that it will be an offence to use lead shot from the Summer of 2029.

For everyone involved in Game Shooting, the use of lead has long been a staple; until quite recently, it was the only source of shot (pellets). However, with environmental and food safety concerns reaching the political mainstream, the direction of travel has for a few years now been clear: lead's days were numbered and we now know the timescale for this change.

The phased approach may provide time for adjustment, but the practical consequences will be significant. These will especially be felt by the Cartridge Manufacturers, given that the announced timeframe is less than the HSE's advice of a five-year transition.

Whilst non-toxic alternatives such as steel, Bismuth, and Tungsten have significantly improved, each carries trade-offs in cost, performance, and gun compatibility. Steel, while cheaper, requires specific proofed guns for safe use of High Performance steel cartridges and Bismuth and Tungsten, while effective, are expensive and not always universally available.

What does this mean for Shoots throughout the UK?

Firstly, education is key. Many Guns are unaware of their current gun's proof and choke status and Shoots should be taking the lead informing their Guns as to the changes and impacts that they will have on them. Secondly, Shoot owners may need to enforce ammo rules to avoid liability issues and finally, there are the reputational considerations. As shooting increasingly comes under public and political scrutiny, compliance with evolving standards will be a measure not just of legality but of responsibility. The lead shot ban is not just about what comes out of the barrel - it is a test of the industry's ability to adapt and remain credible.

It is interesting to note that rifles smaller than .243 calibre and air guns will not be restricted.

Whilst writing, it would be amiss of me not to mention our sister company, William Powell, and their tireless work to produce the very best (and economical) steel shot proof over and under and side by side shotguns. They are producing guns fit for the future, and I would recommend taking a sneak peek at their website or speaking to Tom Peachey in the Gunroom.



Scan the QR code to
visit the William Powell
Gunroom website

