

RURAL & SPORTING

NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2023

Keeping you up to date with Rural and Sporting matters



HOW WAS THE 2023 GROUSE SEASON?

Moorland location leaves the season split between the good and the bad

Very definitely it was a picture in two parts. The first being Scotland, almost in its entirety being poor to very poor with the exception of the Moorfoots and parts of Perthshire. Indeed, this was a year when the majority of Scottish Moors hardly shot at all. Those that did found a hopeless old to young bird ratio. All of this in the year when we expected to see a significant improvement after the last two grisly Grouse shooting seasons in Scotland. The anticipated improvement was not to be. Explaining why parts of Perthshire and the Moorfoots were good to very good, whilst nearby Moors were awful (to include the Lammermuirs), is beyond our ken. We do think that the very dry early summer had a massive adverse effect including causing the hens not to be in good conditions when they went down to lay. In addition, there was a real shortage of insects for the chicks which are absolutely crucial in the first week of their life. Then added to

We can only hope that 2024 is a lot better north of the Border. It would struggle to be worse!

this, a significant strongyle worm burden on many Moors, with overall a marked increase in Louping Ill, which led to infected broods dwindling before the Keepers' eyes in July and August, and original expectations miles off the mark when it came to shooting time. We can only hope that 2024 is a lot better north of the Border. It would struggle to be worse!

In terms of the North of England, that was a much more varied picture with some exceptional shooting. However, again there was massive variation with some Moors being poor to very poor.

Generally (and generalisations always have exceptions!), the wetter and higher Moors did the best. As a result, the Northwest Pennines were in places awesome, and generally they were good to very good. The drier, shallower peat Moors performed less well (probably to be expected because of the very dry summer), but there again, some wet Moors over deep peat fared very badly and a few drier Moors did quite well. The difference in how Moors fared even when very close together was remarkable. What we have now found is a significant build-up of worm on many Moors, which is unsurprising given the number of Grouse that have been living in certain areas. We see this as potentially a very big problem going into the winter. Our very early predictions for the 2024 season (no-one should make predictions this early!), are that those Moors which had a lot of Grouse this last season are unlikely to fare well next, but those which decided not to shoot or to shoot very gently because of only modest stocks in August, could well see a significant improvement next summer. However, the age profile (young:old ratio) not being good this year on many Moors other than in the North Pennines, is generally likely to temper the size of the shootable surplus for next season. Therefore, please do not get too optimistic just yet!

Our take on heather quality is that in the main it was good going into this Winter and the very wet weather has other than potentially being a real help in increasing worm numbers, not otherwise done any real harm. Our overriding concern remains the potential for many Moors to experience serious losses in their Grouse stocks over the winter months, due to the increasing number of Strongyle worm.



JM Osborne

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WILLIAM POWELL

The Ultimate **Sporting Agency**

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An update on **LOW GROUND SHOOTING**

Sometimes being a Sporting Agent who manages Shoots and lets days shooting is a delight. Sometimes it is a real challenge, and this year has definitely been one of those!

We have now had three very “interesting” Game Seasons, due to Covid and Avian Flu and unsurprisingly we were rather hoping for something a little easier this season. Instead, we had the continuance, albeit at a much lower level of the Avian Flu problems in certain areas, the extraordinary imposition of GL43 and the absolute chaos that brought due to the complete incompetence on the part of Natural England (more of that anon!), and then a very significant downturn in demand for let Pheasant and Partridge shooting as prices rose alarmingly and people became much worse off. So much for an easier season!

We have always maintained that Game Shoots are marginal businesses and it has never been truer than this year. Although some of the enormous hike in input costs which we experienced last year - particularly feed and hence the massive increase in the price of poult, have fallen back, this has more than been offset by the very significant reduction in people wanting to take shooting. This reduction in demand has covered pretty well the whole of the UK and very surprisingly has also included absolute top-notch Shoots. Yes, Game Shooting has

become even more expensive, and as a result in many parts of the Country, Shoots including very good Shoots (in terms of the quality of birds, the hospitality and how they are run) have really struggled to let some of their days. Interestingly, a portend of this was the fact that the first time since the 1970’s, some Grouse days were still unlet in July. Perhaps the most difficult days to let have been early season Partridges, but even mid and later season Pheasants have often been slow to find takers. This is not true of all Shoots, but it is definitely something we have not seen for some time in the marketplace. It is as a result causing some upset and almost certainly this is going to have a massive effect on Shoot economics, with many Shoots this year going to make a trading loss. Given that few will have had good surpluses gained over the last three seasons, this is going to take some living with. As a result, we expect some Shoots will close at the end of this season. These will probably be a combination of fully Commercial ones, where the Operator can no longer afford to run the business, to Shoots on Farms and Estates, where in previous years let days have made a contribution to either reducing the cost for the

A reduction in demand and the corresponding reduction in availability will be a sensible correction in the marketplace

Owner/Operator or have actually been a profit centre in their own right. These Owners/Operators may well now decide it is not worth continuing running the Shoot. We think perhaps rather bizarrely that this will overall be a good correction in the marketplace. Clearly, there are too many shooting days currently available given the reduced demand. We do not see that demand massively increasing for next season, due to both the cost of most forms of Game Shooting and the state of the economy/people’s finances; on this we sadly are pretty pessimistic. Buying let shooting is very much a discretionary spend and given that the majority of let Game Shooting is bought by the middle-class (whatever they may be), when they feel poorer, this has an adverse effect on the demand for let shooting. As a result, we have seen this year people either buying smaller days (maybe 250 down to 200 birds) or buying fewer days. This is a very definite trend, which we think is here to stay for at least a while. Some Shoots will be immune to this, but many will not and therefore they are going to have to adopt their business model; accordingly, some may well be able to. Some will not, probably mostly on economic grounds but also

perhaps an inability to increase the number of shoot days (with all the on costs), to make up for having to host smaller days.

Whilst some of the Shoots that close will have been very well run, we suspect that the majority will have always been marginal, in terms of quality, hospitality and perhaps even their financing. If the land they were shooting on is no longer going to be used for the purpose of driven shooting, it might well become available for rough shooting or smaller scale driven Shoots, on perhaps a self-help basis. Whilst this is not very good for us Agents wanting to let days, it could be very good for Game Shooting itself by widening participation in the sport. We also think that a reduction in demand and the corresponding reduction in availability, will be a sensible correction in the marketplace, which will mean that those Shoots still operating, might very well be in a much better place to let days, come next season.

Let’s hope so!

LOUPING ILL

A nasty viral disease that attacks the central nervous system of the host



We believe that the basis to any effective Tick Management Plan, is an effective and functional ‘Tick Mop’.

Tick borne diseases are on the rise across Europe on the whole, but Louping Ill (LI) in particular is becoming a major cause for concern in the UK, and for the first time not just in Scotland.

Louping Ill (LI) is a viral disease associated with sheep tick (Ixodes Ricinus). The disease attacks the central nervous system of the host, leaving them with severe motor deficits and often leading to death.

The potentially catastrophic impact of LI on Grouse Moors has long been recognised, but many people have previously shied away from the problem, believing it to only affect isolated Highland Moors. Cases of LI have risen exponentially in the last twelve months across Scotland, but also as far south as the Peak District, with the negative effects already being felt.

The reason for the rise in recent cases is largely believed to be a result of the sharp increase in tick numbers in what has been a prolific year for them, due to ideal weather conditions.

As most will be aware, ticks are small arachnids which require blood meals to complete their life cycle. There are over 800 species worldwide, but it is ticks of the Ixodidae (‘Hard Ticks’) variety which cause the most issues in the UK.

They are ‘three-host ticks’ meaning they feed three times in their life cycle with an adult being able to ingest 5ml of blood in a meal – enough to cause significant issues to lambs and Grouse alike. The life cycle can last from two months to three years, and during that time female adults can lay several thousand eggs after blood meals.

They are effectively blind and detect their prey through heat and CO₂. Once attached to a host, the tick will insert its hypostome (a long barbed mouth in effect) into the host and begin to feed.

Tick saliva is spread to the host during the feeding process and contains anaesthetic, anticoagulants, immunosuppressive and anti-inflammatory substances. It is this saliva which infects the host with pathogens, spreading diseases such as LI.

The consequences of widespread LI across the UK would be dire, with Grouse stocks being massively reduced. The disease is also a very real threat for Upland Sheep Farmers, with sheep being similarly impacted.

The only way the threat of LI can be managed is through rigorous tick control, and there are three main avenues to this; Pasture/Habitat Management, animal treatments and management of grazing and wildlife.

We must all decide whether we will take Tick Management seriously, and what resources we will commit to it.

Due to recent restrictions on the use of Asulam, widespread treatment of bracken beds is no longer possible, meaning that animal treatments and Grazing/Wildlife Management will be the key tactics in the near future. Based on this, we believe that the basis of any effective Tick Management Plan, is an effective and functional ‘Tick Mop’.

A ‘Tick Mop’ is a flock of sheep present on a Moor, which are treated on rotation with acaricides (crovect, dysect etc.) and actively shepherded to cover all corners of the Moor. The treated sheep will gather ticks as they roam the hill, which will succumb to the treatments on the sheep, thus reducing the number of ticks present.

It is crucial to have a flock of the correct size to properly cover and treat the Moor, and also to do as much as is possible to

control ‘Tick Taxis’ – other hosts which spread ticks such as deer.

Previously the industry had a stronger defence against ticks than just acaricides in the form of a vaccine which was administered to sheep. However, the previous vaccine was discontinued in 2017.

Since the discontinuation of the vaccine, it is anecdotally reported among Upland Farmers that there has been a 25-30% increase in LI cases in young sheep. Perhaps more reputably, the Moredun Institute has formally recorded an undeniable increase in the number of LI cases among Red Grouse since the reduction in the number of vaccinated sheep on UK Moors.

Given the evidence we are presented with, it is time for the whole industry to recognise the importance of proper Tick Management to combat LI and all that it brings.

The only positive news in the midst of so much tick borne despair is that there is a new vaccine in the final stages of development, which is in the final stages of testing.

The stumbling block for the vaccine will be its economic viability with the mass production expected to cost in the region of £2,000,000. With any commercial funding unlikely due to the incredibly niche requirement we currently have in the UK for an LI vaccine, it may well be necessary for us to fund this as an industry. Therefore, we must all decide whether we will take Tick Management seriously, and if so what resources we will commit to it.



If you have any queries about establishing a Tick Management Plan or would like to talk to a member of the team about an existing plan, please get in contact with JM Osborne Rural & Sporting.

Killer Eye-Bleeding Virus surfaces in France, raising concerns of this new Tick Borne Disease spreading to the UK

A deadly virus, known for causing severe eye bleeding in its victims, has surfaced in France, sparking fears of its potential spread to the United Kingdom. The virus known (CCHF), is typically transmitted through ticks and can cause severe illness, often proving fatal.

This alarming development comes amid growing concerns about tick borne diseases becoming more prevalent in the UK due to changing climate conditions. As temperatures rise, ticks are expanding their habitats, making them more common in previously unaffected areas. The CCHF virus has been detected in the region of Tarn, Southern France, leading to concerns that it may eventually find its way to the British Isles.

Tick borne diseases are a significant Public Health concern, with the UK already experiencing an increase in cases of Lyme disease, another illness transmitted by ticks. Experts emphasise the importance of taking preventive measures, such as using tick repellent and wearing protective clothing when spending time outdoors, to reduce the risk of tick bites and the potential spread of dangerous diseases.

The reappearance of the CCHF virus in France underscores the need for increased vigilance and public awareness regarding tick borne diseases and the importance of monitoring their potential spread to the UK.

Update

SUSTAINABLE (SFI) 2023 FARMING INCENTIVE

According to DEFRA, more than 14,000 people have registered interest for the new Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) scheme.

From 20th October 2023, Farmers are no longer required to submit registrations of interest and will be able to apply directly online. Those farming on commons should continue to express their interest with the RPA, who can support them to pull together an application.

Landowners have a free choice of what actions they wish to take and how much land to include in their SFI Agreement and a simple summary of the 23 actions that landowners can be paid for can be found at www.gov.uk/guidance/sfi-actions-you-can-do-on-different-eligible-land-types-and-features. Importantly, the Scheme is not competitive, and as long as the applicant is eligible, then they will be able to apply for an SFI Agreement.

These are three-year Agreements, managed online through the Rural Payment Service, and there is a rolling application window with new Agreements starting on the first of the month. Once up and running, payments will be made quarterly, starting on the fourth month after an Agreement starts.

Farmers will be required to complete an annual declaration confirming they have completed the actions with declaration needing to be completed prior to the release of the final quarter payment for the year. Each year it will be possible to increase. These will apply from the anniversary of the Agreement for the remainder of the three-year term.

Importantly, it is not possible to transfer the Agreement to another person and if Farmers need to end an Agreement on an area of ground, DEFRA may ask for repayments, which is important to keep in mind. There will however be no penalties applied to the remainder of the Agreement.

We are told that DEFRA wants to use different methods to assess the delivery Agreement (including remote sensing). The Scheme will move away from Inspectors to Field Officers. If Inspectors find something is not as it should be, their role will be more supportive and advising on how to improve delivery. Where a breach is found, DEFRA can seek repayments in most cases, but DEFRA will only apply a reclaim to the area of the breach, and this is likely be a one-year repayment rather than multiple years.

To discuss these options in more detail please contact a member of the JM Osborne Rural & Sporting team. Click or scan the QR code to visit our website.



RESIDENTIAL LETTING

In our last Newsletter we complained at the complete illogicality of a Conservative Government wanting to fundamentally alter the Law governing the letting of residential properties in England. We pointed out that prior to the 1980 Housing Act bought in by Mrs Thatcher, people who owned vacant properties had no incentive to let them out because if they did, they would end up with their Tenants being there forever and a day. There was therefore no desire on the part of Landlords to supply housing for people who could not afford to buy. Overall, the changes Mrs Thatcher brought in were massively successful, creating a free market in rented properties. Yes, there are always a few bad Rackman type Landlords, but the vast majority of Landlords are good and their properties likewise. Yes, rents have recently become very high, but that is reflective of the economy and also house prices. It is naïve of anyone to think that house prices can double over a ten-year period and rents will not follow suit.

We then had Michael Gove (again!) come up with one of his “bright” ideas. This was that the Government was going to bring in new legislation governing the tenanted residential sector, making it almost impossible to evict Tenants without fault. This meant that irrespective of what the terms of the Tenancy Agreement were, the house owner would not be able to get vacant possession unless they could prove the Tenant has gone into two months’ rent arrears, and this had to be three times in the last three years (yes you read that right!) or if the property was frequently being used for anti-social behaviour or if the Landlord wishes to sell or move family into the property. Landlords could also gain possession for redevelopment or if the Tenant had died. However, there was no ability when the Tenancy ended to let the property to another party – under Mr Gove’s bill the Tenant virtually had an automatic right to a new Tenancy. Overall, this proposed legislation ties the hands of Landlords and as a result would make it much harder for potential Tenants to find properties to rent as Landlords instead take their properties out of the letting market, either selling them or maybe doing AirBnB’s.

If anyone required confirmation that our Politicians are completely removed from what happens in the real World, then this was it. Mr Gove of course had moved on to yet another department (now Levelling Up where he seems to be struggling), but fortunately Mr Sunak realised that as the majority of Landlords who own residential property are likely to be Conservative voters, Mr Gove’s proposed changes were both a nonsense and also likely to upset his natural supporters. As of the 24th October 2023, the Renters Reform Bill has been shelved with the Government citing that the Courts are not ready for the changes. No timeline has been given for any further changes so the Bill is sat in limbo, adding more uncertainty for Landlords and Renters alike. You have only to look over the Border to see the effects of very similar legislation in Scotland and what that has done to the housing market there; at the end of October, Edinburgh City Council announced that there was a housing crisis in the City. Perhaps Mr Gove and others might take note or is that too logical?

Dr Kenny Stokes-Nutting

Debunking Common Myths & Misconceptions



There are many various old wives' tales that wind their way through our sector, often embellished or lost in translation within the broad scope of the internet. We wanted to set the record straight, so we spoke to Dr Kenny Stokes-Nutting, Director of St David's Gamebird Services, who here gives us some expert veterinary advice, debunking some of the most common myths and misconceptions we often hear within the shooting community, and putting us back on track.

I often get asked if I am a Google Doctor, which is quite a questionable label...and to clarify, I am not. I am a Vet and Director at St David's Gamebird Services, so am able to provide some help and advice to Shoots and businesses across the UK.

From conversations with customers, colleagues, and observing things online, I have seen and heard a fair share of tattling tales in my time. Often these come with goodwill but can cause negative end results. Here, I want to run through a few key areas of our sector which are often misunderstood and iron out the creases so that rural communities can feel safe in the knowledge that they are doing the right thing.

The Internet

As we well know, the internet can be a good thing and a bad thing. It can be a brilliant place for sharing husbandry advice. However, from a disease perspective, we often need quick and direct answers. With this in mind, there is a lot of scope for error online.

Often when customers have a problem and are not sure where to turn, they naturally direct their concerns to Google and the wider shooting community on online forums. I am on some of these forums and have seen people posting pictures of diseased birds, asking the community what the issue might be. Inevitably, 10 different diagnoses come rolling in and not only is this confusing for the person posting, but for onlookers too.

It is really important to just pick up the phone – you can get a quick, accurate answer to your questions from your local Vet, remove any uncertainty, and act with confidence. Time is of the essence when it

comes to things like AI and Mycoplasma, and you do not want to be going down the wrong route off the back of someone else's advice, doing something with the bird that then prolongs the disease.

Do Mycoplasma vaccines work fully?

I get asked this question a lot because it can be quite controversial. It is a difficult one because I do not want people to ever think that the bird is never going to get the disease if it has had the vaccine. That is not what happens at all. It is the same with all vaccines – we have all experienced it recently with COVID, how the vaccine does not do everything but is an integral part of a prevention programme.

Like the COVID vaccine, Mycoplasma vaccines have their place and from our clinical experience on the ground, and the science behind what they do in poultry, they do work. Importantly though, you have got to have good husbandry, cull birds, and continuously test to make sure you know what is going on in that flock.

The research behind the Mycoplasma vaccines or any vaccines used specifically in gamebirds is very small, but that is the same with pretty much everything we do in Game because it is a small market and very unique to the UK. There is not the same money, science, and research as in other sectors but a lot of clinical experience and science can be translated from the Poultry World to the Game World.

No vaccine is ever going to solve every disease. So, to be clear, the Mycoplasma vaccine is not a plaster that is going to stop the bleeding so to speak, but it is a tool to help us fight the disease. We have got to have good biosecurity, and good husbandry to support its efficacy.



So, how does Mycoplasma transfer year to year?

The simple answer is that Mycoplasma is in the reservoir of the birds themselves; when a bird is positive for Mycoplasma, it has got that disease for life, and it will transfer that through its droppings, saliva, and mucus secretions for life.

The science has clearly shown that Mycoplasma does not last in external environments for very long e.g. shed walls, or the bottom of boots, because of how it is made up. It does not have a cell wall which means it is very susceptible to environmental conditions. It only survives from year to year on a Shoot or Game Farm in the reservoir of the birds themselves.

Mycoplasma / Blood Testing

Testing for Mycoplasma Gallisepticum is so important for laying stock in the Gamebird sector, so we know what levels we are dealing with. The recent Mycoplasma Gamebird approved and calibrated test is a real move forward in this respect. It is a great tool for us to use if we are catching up birds from the wild as it gives us an idea of what is coming and therefore the confidence to reject stock that might be positive. Likewise for overwintered stock, we are able to continuously test and make sure those birds are negative. As with any test, it is not 100% effective and there is always a level of caution when it comes to interpreting blood results, but it has certainly given us more confidence with Mycoplasma testing than we have ever had before.

I'm thinking about getting a pheasant laying flock, what should I vaccinate against?

Vaccinations for pheasant and partridge laying stocks are an important tool alongside good husbandry, biosecurity and other factors. Really the diseases that we want to look at covering are infectious bronchitis, APV and TRT (turkey rhinotracheitis as it used to be known and most know it as). We have suffered a lot with infectious bronchitis in previous years – it gives coughing and sneezing symptoms in the birds – so it is important we look at this. ORT sometimes needs to be covered and again Mycoplasma, which also depends on the situation and people's preferences.

Can we post a bird for a post-mortem?

When it comes to sending birds to us for postmortems after 24 hours there are a lot of limitations. In a realistic timeframe, once the bird dies you might get it into the post that day in 6-12hrs for it to arrive with us in around 24-36hrs.

Although there are some things, like gape worms which would be very visible in the trachea, which are easier to diagnose, trying to get a diagnosis from a bird that has been dead for 24 hours or more is very difficult; you cannot ascertain the levels of hexamer, the significance of the coccidiosis, or whether there has been enteritis or not.

This is because, after death, bacteria in the gut goes through a process called autolysis during which it breaks down the gut and basically



disguises what may have been going on there with huge plumes of bacterial growth. It is important to highlight these limitations and to emphasise that we need fresh, culled birds from the flocks you are concerned with to get an accurate interpretation of any gut infection. The best option of all is for us to come out, have a look at the birds, the husbandry, and see what other factors might be helping or not helping the birds concerned. From there, we can interpret what we can see on postmortem much more effectively.

When should we be worming birds?

We see it from both sides – the Shoot and the Game Farm asking when the birds are most likely to get worms and who should worm first. I think nowadays, with modern rearing systems, we rarely see worms on Game Farms, so really, we do not see the need to worm. Obviously, if there is a problem we will do and we will advise the customer to, but we just need to look at using the medication wisely.

The reason for this is that if we worm the birds on the Game Farm, we leave in the birds any resistant worms they have had and then we move those resistant worms to a Shoot where those resistant worms then get into the ground. We then create a cycle of resistance and those birds then become more difficult to worm. So actually, it is okay to move the birds with a very low level of worms to the Shoot where they will have both susceptible worms and resistant worms and then start worming after 7-10 days.

Obviously, we do not want to move birds that have detrimental levels of worms in them because that is a stress, so checking those birds before they go is really important in order to ascertain that level.

Am I using the right products?

Quite often we will see high levels of cocci in pheasant or partridge rearing set ups, so at the end of the year when we come to doing our veterinary health plan (VHP) visits, we talk through the reasons why that might have happened, the cleaning programmes being followed, and what products are being used.

A customer might say that they are using Virkon, which is great – it kills viruses and bacteria, and is licenced for AI. However, it is not licenced for coxy. This is a prime example of why it is so important for us to look at what products are being used and whether they are able to kill cocci.

This year, we had a site that was really suffering with cocci in its partridge, so we used detergent, alkaline, and then we Interkokask the shed (a licenced disinfection). We let the shed dry before doing a second round of this, and fogging the shed. That shed went from having to be treated three times last year, with the loss of partridges amounting to about £10,000 with the cost of medication on top, to being treated just once this year. Using the correct product means a huge saving on costs and on the birds themselves in terms of mortality.

All in all, I hope this helps to give some guidance to those concerned.

LEAD SHOT AMMUNITION HSE CONSULTATION

Many people are asking exactly what is the latest position with regard to lead shot (and lead bullets too!). With the situation becoming confused, we have set out the latest update here.

Following the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) Consultation in 2022 the revised restriction proposals for the recreational use of lead ammunition in England, Scotland, and Wales are as follows:

1. Lead airgun pellets - No restriction proposed.
2. Lead shot for live quarry and target shooting (this means cartridges) - Proposed ban within five years or less.
3. Lead Rifle ammunition for live quarry shooting - No restrictions proposed as yet (but we do believe that this is around the corner).
4. Lead Rifle ammunition for target shooting will continue on approved ranges, where mitigation measures for lead removal are in place.

The proposals outlined above are subject to an HSE Public Consultation, which opened in mid-October and closed on 10th December 2023, so we will await the outcome of this.

As we have said above, whilst there are no restrictions currently proposed to rifle ammunition having lead bullets for live quarry shooting, the results of the consultation could alter this significantly (despite the evidence for secondary poisoning through rifle ammunition not being conclusive).

The results of the consultation will have a significant impact on future use of lead shot in the UK and we will write further on this after the consultation has closed and the findings published. However, be in no doubt that lead is generally on its way out and the Government will not accept the retention of it for the human food chain, whatever our arguments may be.



Scan or click the QR code to read or download our steel shot & the alternatives to lead document.



Get ahead of the game for 2024

GL43 - WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Since 2021, shoot operators have required a Licence to release common pheasants and red-legged partridges on or close to European-protected sites in England.

GL43 is a General Licence, issued by Defra, which authorises the release of these Game birds on or within 500m of certain European sites. An updated version of GL43 was published on the 31st May 2023 and is valid until 30th May 2025. However, this General Licence does not give consent to release on Special Protections Areas (SPA), and therefore, an Individual Licence must be applied for.

We have set out below a simple flow diagram to help Shoot Operators decide what consents are required.

Do you plan to release game birds on or within 500m of a "European Designated Site"?



Are the release sites on or within 500m of a Special Protection Area for Fauna (SPA) or a Special Area of Conservation for Flora (SAC)?



In or around a Special Area of Conservation Only

Any release of Common Pheasant or Red-legged Partridges made within the SAC must be no more than 700 birds per hectare of release pen.

Any release of Common Pheasant or Red-legged Partridges made within 500m of the SAC must be no more than 1,000 birds per hectare of release pen.

Activity in the buffer zone must not encourage the released birds to inhabit or occupy an adjacent European site.

If releasing 50 or more Birds you must provide the following to Natural England.

- 1 - Total number released within a SAC
- 2 - Total number within the 500m buffer zone
- 3 - Gamebird density (birds per hectare)
- 4 - Location of release site (6-figure grid reference)

Any release exceeding the above density would breach the General Licence and therefore require an application for an individual license. Operators are advised to check whether SSSI consent is required.



In or within 500m of a Special Protection Area

It is against the law to release any game bird, without a individual licence, in or within 500m of an SPA.

Please note an SAC may also be designated as an SPA, in which case an individual licence must be applied for.

Check your Shoot

Magic Maps

Check the location of SACs and SPAs
<https://shorturl.at/osOV5>

Gamebird Release map

See the 500m buffer zones
(Blue sections show the buffer zones)
<https://shorturl.at/dftCX>



To find out more about the Shoot Management Services that JM Osborne Rural & Sporting provide please click or scan the QR code.



GUEST ARTICLE

FOREST MARKET

REPORT 2023

Bull markets do not last forever. It appears the Commercial Forestry market peaked in the first half of 2022, after 17 years in which the market appreciated every year since 2005, a staggering run. Global economic pressures in Q3 2022 and subsequent months set the scene for forestry activity in 2023. Inflation, although falling, remains at a little under 7%; the 10-year UK bond market has hit a 25-year high at 4.6%; and investors are currently receiving over 5% interest from High Street Banks. Cash is an asset class again, something we haven't seen for over half a generation. During this year, timber prices have been stubbornly subdued. Some end users are still blaming Storm Arwen, but a reduction in the housing market and a drop in home improvements has definitely reduced timber demand. Muted positive feeling early in the year quickly waned and there are no indications we will see any timber price growth in the near-term.

WRITTEN BY
JON LAMBERT - GOLDCREST



So, what effect have these macro-economic pressures had on the forestry market?

While completed transactions are undoubtedly fewer than last year, the data suggests that pricing overall is down 20%. Most forests brought to the market have sold but there has been a considerable reduction in properties available. Our experience shows a greater range of values: some sales look similarly priced to last year while some were significantly cheaper. Purchasers are generally more cautious than 12 or 18 months ago, leading to longer due diligence periods, an increased demand to rectify “blemishes” before completion and a desire for higher yields. It is clear there is money in the system and demand outstrips supply. Buyers are searching, watching and waiting, ready to jump on an opportunity. However, they are more cautious and increasingly selective.

The market, both National and International, comprises high net worth individuals, institutional buyers including pension pots, charities and end users. They are satisfied with the long term fundamentals of commercial conifers: the UK imports 81% of its wood products, second in volume only to China; there is an increasing world population; developing countries consume more timber as their affluence grows; concrete and steel are becoming increasingly unfashionable; and timber is in short supply across the globe. Undoubtedly, demand for timber producing forests remains. In a global context, the strength of our legal system, political stability and robustness of our economy underlines the appeal of investing in the UK and confidence remains in long term forestry investment at home.

Specifically, demand for good commercial planting ground continues. Desirable/appropriate sites are harder to find. Grade 4 ground, unfettered by populations of wading birds or Black Grouse, with a low landscape impact and sympathetic local communities, in desirable locations close to markets, and, of course, with sound access, are top of the list and hard to come by.

Although sales of young plantations have been few and far between, demand remains strong. Conifers that have received validation for Pending Issuance Units (PIUs – Carbon Credits) are sought after but the jury is still out on young plantations

where the PIUs have been sold off. Contracts for the sale of PIUs away from the land and trees have improved significantly in recent years, but elements of the market are jittery about owning a plantation where the PIUs have been sold to a large corporate with a hefty compliance department.

The market is confident in fully established plantations with predictable running costs. These mid-rotation properties cover a broad spectrum and numerous factors affect pricing: quality, location, workability of the site, wind hazard class and soil quality to name but a few. In 2023 we have seen average to good mid-rotation properties sell at a slight discount to the overall average. Over the life of the crop, timber will grow at 5-6% per annum (higher than the gilt yield) and, with medium term timber price inflation predicted, this age class is perhaps the most sought after by the discerning investor.

Lastly, let's consider the market for maturing and mature forests with an age profile of say 30 – 40 years and above. If the trees have reached their critical height and are ready for imminent felling, even with depressed timber prices, valuations become easier, provided volumes are accurately measured. Some investors are keen to purchase properties which produce instant income while others prefer to avoid the hassle of a felling and restocking program. Again, the relatively small number of transactions this year has underpinned prices, which have been significantly above the overall average.

The rise of the more cautious and selective buyer means an Agent's advice in how to secure the maximum price is all the more important. Well presented, fully advertised opportunities are generating competitive interest but many properties have sold at sub-market levels where sellers have chosen to bypass open market campaigns in favour of private sales.

In summary, 2023 has seen changes in the Commercial Forestry market with decreased timber prices, a reduction in properties coming to the market and increasingly particular buyers but it remains resilient. Forestry is still sought after.



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been buzzing around various news outlets since The Global AI Safety Summit at Bletchley Park at which tech tycoon Elon Musk was quoted as saying;

“There will come a point where no job is needed.”

AI has the potential to be a huge disruptor to most industries. In this article, we take a look at how AI may impact upon the rural sector which perhaps has a history of being slow to adopt emerging technologies!

Firstly, what is AI?

To establish this, we asked ChatGPT (an AI text generator);

“The development of computer systems that can perform tasks typically requiring human intelligence, such as learning, problem-solving, and decision-making.”

AI is already being utilised in a wide range of tasks in our everyday lives and despite the recent articles in the news warning of its dangers, it is widely acknowledged as a huge opportunity for businesses.

In the rural world, AI has a small foothold of early adopters mostly in precision agriculture and specialist services. With the technology being more prevalent in other sectors, it is only a matter of time before it is also considered part of the norm for rural businesses.

An area which AI is currently being utilised in the rural field is in the analysis of management techniques in the Yorkshire Dales. Here, AI is coupled with drones which have light detection and ranging (LiDAR) sensors to create a 3D map of the Moor. This data is then crunched by AI which then produces a measurable record of bare peat and other Moorland features. This mapping can then be analysed by AI to create a Management Plan which meets the objectives set by the Land Managers. In this process, AI has reduced the time it takes to interpret data collected and create a Management Plan. However, systems like these do have their limitations and advisors will still be needed to ensure the plan can be enacted in practice.

This is but one example of the direction of travel of AI in the rural sector with others such as a wide range of emerging programmes which will schedule preventative vehicle maintenance accounting for use/hours run and other vehicle metrics. There are also livestock monitoring systems which can monitor the behaviour of animals and alert Farmers if livestock show signs of illness as well as programmes helping manage a rural business with automated invoices.

In conclusion, AI presents significant opportunities for rural businesses to become more efficient and productive. While it will not replace the human element (in the near future or perhaps ever), it can enhance the capabilities of Rural Businesses and Land Managers, allowing them to make better-informed decisions and leverage data to their advantage. The key as we see it is to embrace AI as a tool for progress and to invest in the skills and infrastructure needed to harness its potential.



HUNTING WITH DOGS ACT 2023

Under the new 2023 Hunting with Dogs Act, it is now illegal for a person to hunt wild mammals with more than two dogs in Scotland, unless a Licence from NatureScot has been granted.

NatureScot has set two distinct purposes for issuing a Licence. The first is to kill mammals such as foxes at lambing time which if not dealt with, would cause considerable damage to young livestock. The second is to protect woodland and crops against mammals such as rabbits and hares. This second purpose is for what is classed as an “*environmental benefit*” and must be undertaken as part of a “*Scheme or Plan*” for preventing, protecting or restoring a particular species (which may include controlling the number of species for its own welfare).

When it comes to rough shooting, rather than flushing mammals to protect livestock, crops etc or for an environmental benefit, where the quarry might be birds and wild mammals, then if more than two dogs are involved in the activity, they must not be allowed to come together to form a pack of more than two dogs.

The Act allows for the use of one dog only below ground and only in respect of foxes. When the dog is below ground, it must be fitted with a device allowing the handler to track its position. Once the quarry has been flushed from below ground, they then must be shot or caught by a bird of prey and humanely dispatched. You are no longer allowed to use a dog to flush rabbits from below ground level. However, you may flush rabbits from cover above ground in order to prevent serious damage to woodland or crops, but the rabbits must be shot dead or killed by a bird of prey as soon as reasonably possible.

NatureScot has stated that the bar has been “*set high*” to obtain a Licence. After reading through the licencing restrictions, we believe that NatureScot has made it unnecessarily difficult and in some instances, unfeasible to acquire a Licence, especially in the case of fox packs needing to provide a service to Farmers facing issues with lamb losses for example.

This Act is a classic case of using a hammer to crack a nut and will just make life much harder for rural people.



WHAT IS

REWILDING?



WRITTEN BY
MARK OSBORNE

I am asked this question an awful lot nowadays and the answer is not at all simple. Essentially, rewilding seems to cover a myriad of interests and is a generic term widely and often inaccurately used to describe a physical change in the countryside. In essence, rewilding seems to be what most people think of as a “return to nature”.

Our countryside exists today as a product of well over 2,000 years of man-management. Over that timescale, it has seen a massive increase in population and vast changes in everything which has happened on the land, to include farming, forestry, building, transport, etc. In a modern age where almost everyone in the country is far removed from actually working on the land, there is not only a belief that what we currently have by way of countryside is somehow not very good, but that if we put the clock back by “rewilding” the land, it will be much much better. I believe that this is fundamentally very wrong.

Whilst there may come a time when we are not dependent on farmland for food production, currently we are even if that farmland is somewhere else in the World rather than in the UK. We have a concurrent theme of Global Warming caused by carbon emissions leading to a desire to reduce the use of fossil fuels and yet at the same time, the vast majority of the population seems perfectly happy to import food from all over the World, causing a massive food mile problem. This seems very strange given that we could with good long-term planning and a modest change in our dietary habits, produce significantly more of our home-grown food, saving much in the way of airmiles and consequently carbon emissions, etc.

The vast majority of the population seems perfectly happy to import food from all over the World, causing a massive food mile problem.

However, perhaps the strangest aspect of all of this is the belief that somehow the countryside which covers much of the UK today is not what most people want to see. The idea that the Highlands of Scotland and indeed the hills of the North of England would look significantly better “rewilded”, seems somewhat disingenuous. The same with the Cotswolds, Dartmoor or even well looked after arable ground, with a mix of farmed land, hedges and woods. I am not convinced that the vast majority of the British public think that this visual change would be at all better than what we currently have; trees growing right up to Council roads is not going to provide much of a view of anything from cars passing by! Rewilding definitely includes a physical change in use and almost inevitably and over time, a change in the appearance of the countryside. This does not always have to be by active intervention. In the case of carbon sequestration, this does involve the planting of generally widespread native conifers and hardwoods, but the process could also be the much less intrusive ending of grazing by sheep and cattle (or in the

case of much of the Highlands, by red deer). Whilst some tree planting and particularly open spaced planting with a mix of tree species can look very attractive, it does have disadvantages. These include the removal of livestock, which clearly means the lessening in the amount of UK produced food. Such planting also increases the habitat for predators and as a consequence the likely decline in some vulnerable bird species. If such Moorland is then replaced by Woodland Planting, this becomes an ideal environment for ticks which seem to be increasingly linked to viruses which adversely affect humans, sometimes fatally. In addition, open spaced tree planting is not suitable for felling, so there is no income generation there. What economic activity will occur there apart from currently the high risk selling or long term letting for carbon offset? Will that last in the long term or just be a bubble I wonder?

The argument for rewilding is generally that it will make a positive impact on our carbon sequestration, because it will be better in this regard than Farming. However, the jury still seems very much to be out on that count; a little like diesel cars being far better than petrol ones! Unfortunately, the truth seems very often to be lost when there is both much fervour as well as certainty on the part of rewilding’s proponents. If you do not agree, you are not playing your part in combating climate change. The arguments have become incredibly simplistic; possibly this just reflects the lack of real knowledge and definitely experience on the part of most of us, including DEFRA, Natural England and the like.

Examples are given of successful rewilding schemes; Knepp being the obvious one. A rather closer look under the surface at this should hopefully convince the unbiased that not only is Knepp totally unsuitable to be transposed to many other parts of the country, but that the advantage to either the Landowner or indeed to the community at large from such schemes, may not be anything like as beneficial as often espoused. I agree that rewilding (which is a term which I actively hate!), does have a part to play in the overall pattern of the countryside, but that is the point, the countryside is made up of many many different uses and of different scale of such uses, often reflecting ownership and occupation. If

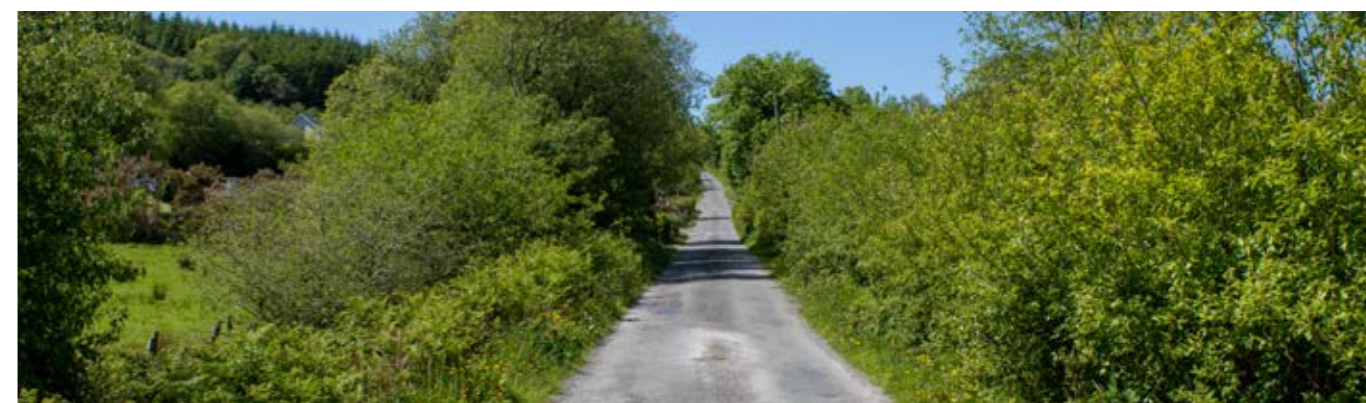


you like shooting, then your Farm or Estate may look rather different than if you as an owner or occupier are fixated on optimising farming returns; similarly, the shires were “made” as they are because of hunting. If you are passionate about Forestry, your land will look rather different to where there is woodland planting, but the owner or occupier is not that keen on their Forestry. The advantage of having thousands of small occupiers of land as compared to monoliths like the National Trust and the Forestry Commission is in maintaining and indeed improving that diversity. I am not at all convinced that

“Every action has a reaction” particularly applies when managing land and we ignore it at our peril.

we need rewilding on any major scale to do this. Indeed, and perhaps my main reason for being so opposed to rewilding, is a belief that in a world with so many people starving, we have a moral duty to feed our population and to do so importing as little food as possible. That seems to be fundamentally opposite to the very essence of rewilding. It is interesting when one looks at the people who are so enthused about rewilding, particularly when you consider their political beliefs, that they seem to have little regard for the effect of food being produced abroad, very often to the detriment of those indigenous populations and their countryside. We should also take into account the air miles in the transport of our food and the economic and social loss which would occur in the UK if rewilding on any significant scale occurred instead of farming and active management.

As Princess Anne recently said, rewilding in small parcels is probably a very good concept (and I think she was suggesting very small parcels!), but it is far from the Panacea many of its proponents suggest. In any event, history (including recent history) is full of examples of human beings fervently embracing causes only to find out much later that the consequences are not what they either thought or desired. The phrase “every action has a reaction” particularly applies when managing land and we ignore it at our peril.





WILL SHOOTS STAY AS WE KNOW THEM

or has Shooting become too expensive?



It is undoubtable that for those with a passion for Country Sports owning and running a Shoot is a superb lifestyle, and when the business is run well it can be profitable.

However, that is just it, **Shoots are a business** and running a business is challenging. Unfortunately, the Shooting Industry has faced a number of adverse factors in recent years including Bird Flu and commodity prices to name but a few, which have impacted upon the market.

A Pheasant poult in 2021 cost £4 and a Partridge £4.50, for the 2023/24 Season we saw £6.50 a Pheasant poult and north of £8 a Partridge

That is 63% increase for Pheasant Shoots, and a 78% increase for Partridge Shoots!

“It’s far too commercial for me...”

For a shooting business to survive it must either be underpinned by a wealthy individual or group of individuals or be commercially viable. Overheads such as wages, housing, sporting rents, or equipment are ever increasing. It is important for a Shoot to achieve an economy of scale whilst maintaining the “magic” of a shoot day and avoiding the overt commerciality of a pure business operation. Scale and output are often said to be a business’s best friend, but perhaps it is not always the best port of call for Shoots. After all, they operate in the hospitality sector, and the experience is everything.

We are fortunate to have involvement with dozens of shooting businesses up and down the country, working closely with large commercial entities and small “family” operations alike. The art of making a shooting business financially viable is intricate and meticulous, and having the correct management is the key.

Shoots can be run in a number of ways, and for a number of reasons;

- Solely for the pleasure,
- Clubs run for the provision of sport *or*
- A business run for the production of profit



To find out more about the Shoot Management Services that JM Osborne Rural & Sporting provide please click or scan the QR code.

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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WILLIAM POWELL

The Ultimate **Sporting Agency**

Concierge Services

Over a number of years, William Powell Sporting (WPS) has established itself as one of the UK's leading Sporting Agencies building a client base who shoot, stalk and fish in superb locations, both in the UK and overseas.

With such an array of sport on offer and with a broad client base, WPS has become well versed in not only sourcing and organising the most exceptional experiences but also facilitating everything that goes with them as well.

Attention to detail is the key to ensuring that we deliver only the finest sporting opportunities for our clients, and both our front and back-office teams work tirelessly to ensure that this is the case. We have crafted this process over the last 40 plus years of trading and as a result, are now acknowledged as being one of the UK's leading Sports Concierge services. Over the last few seasons, we have also made these services available to new clients who may not necessarily be booking shooting with us, but who need assistance with everything and anything from gun transport logistics, car hire, cartridge provision, instruction, gun hire, etc., etc. We have seen a huge demand for this personalised service, and we are delighted to be one of the very top providers of such shooting orientated assistance in the UK at the current time.

No job is too great or too small for us, nor any destination too close or too far. We are intent on providing the best possible service so that each and every client of ours, have a truly exceptional experience. We take all the hassle out, so that you can fully enjoy the experience without the worry.

With logistics and transport ever more complicated and convenience increasingly important, if you are at all interested in any services that WPS as an Agency or our Concierge Service are able to provide, please email us on sporting@williampowellsporting.co.uk or call **01295 661033**, where we would be delighted to assist you with your next sporting adventure.

WILLIAM POWELL
sporting

To visit the WPS website
please click or scan the
QR code.

