

“Hounds Please”

Throughout a busy few months of point-to-points, racing, country and hound shows, the question on everyone's lips, muttered away in beer tents the length and breadth of the country, seems to have been “Who is doing what for hunting?” backed by a general feeling of utter confusion and lack of direction. Nowhere more so than at the superb Rydal Show in August, where all the usual suspects once again gathered for that very special occasion in the hunting calendar. It was so good to see everyone again and catch up. The day was simply perfect.

Blessed with a clear day and bathed in the sunshine that illuminated scarlet coats, polished buttons and fell boots, we were treated to a show of hound breeding excellence and hunting cultural heritage par excellence. The surrounding fells provided a ring of protection for a timeless ‘bubble’ within, that if you whispered it, could have come from a different age when common sense reigned supreme and all was well in the world of hunting. “Not sure this’ll still be going in a couple of years” I heard an eminent fell hunting man say, with more than a tinge of nostalgia and not a little sense of tragedy.

Not far away from Rydal, is the battlefield of Solway Moss, fought in 1542 when the much-outnumbered Cumbrian horsemen defeated a sizeable Scottish force, due to the latter being ‘Beguiled by their own guiding’. A wonderful phrase attributing the reason for failure to the complete disintegration of the command structure and refusal of various leaders to accept command. You might feel comparisons with hunting and its PR in the public realm and lobby in Parliament, echoed by the crowing from the dung heap by those supposedly representing hunting. And then how that might play out in real terms, as opposed to self-promoting spin.

More rewarding was our attendance at most of the other



summer shows, where ‘Hunting Kind’ was delighted to make a presentation of a hunting horn to the Hunt Staff Benefit Society young handler class at Peterborough in memory of the late James Barclay. This is all about acting now to ensure that we hand over a working legacy to the next generation and we very much hope that Miss Sophia Bland, from the Vale of Lune Harriers, will carry this promising start into a lifetime with hounds on the hunting field. Well done to Sophia and her fellow competitors.

In fact, there has been a shift towards some very positive murmurations over the last few months. Not that we would wish our plight on anyone, but the last few months have witnessed yet more attacks on shooting in Wales as well as further threats to moorland management and grouse licensing. These, coupled with the prejudice of the ‘de-banking’ of shooting and hunting organisations, have at least focussed the reality of emerging threats into the rural psyche and created glimmers of the need for a concerted stance.

In addition to our ‘Hunting Kind’ community of eighteen organisations and seventy thousand followers, author/campaigners like Jamie Blackett, Charlie Jacoby and his Fieldsports TV, along with articles in country magazines, have all contributed to building a momentum that any politician looking for election next year would be foolish to ignore. Has this moment been seized on by Ian Gregory in his creation of ‘Rural Reaction’ as a political party to



Above: The Blencathra had a winning day at Rydal

provide a ‘not so gentle’ squeeze of the softer parts of the archetypal vacillating Tory MP? I am afraid that the appalling legacy of the Zac Goldsmith/Carrie Johnson effect on Tory ‘animal welfare’ policy might well have added lead to Gregory’s pencil.

Yet all is not lost. The objective clarity of various members of the House of Lords in conjoining serious UK based and international scientific and academic opinion into the Hunting Trophies (Import Prohibition) Bill (and its negative effect on international conservation and communities), has resulted in the argument being very nearly won. This Bill is yet another ill constructed piece of legislation, based on no proper research or evidence, as well as wilful ignorance and prejudice. Ring any bells ladies and gentlemen?

Then there is the ‘Kept Animals’ Bill, which attracted a third stage amendment by the Shadow Environment Minister that would have made it a requirement for all hunting breeds of dog to be licensed and registered. Imagine if the granting of a license to a pack of foxhounds lay in the hands of Jim McMahon? Anyway, thankfully that Bill evaporated at that point. Probably the less I say about how that happened, the better. The call for scientific research to be conducted into UK Wildlife Law by veterinary surgeons, who see current law as, to varying degrees, being outdated and thereby not fit for purpose, received widespread national coverage earlier

Below: (left-right) Names to follow





Above: Jubilee hound by Debbie Harris

in the summer. We will continue to work with the Veterinary Association for Wildlife Management among others, to pursue this request for scientific research to be commissioned by government. This will better inform proper law making. This is all good news. This is useful PR. This is effective lobby. These are positive results. This is where our future lies. Effective people, forging alliances and delivering results with a demonstration of conviction. What a pleasant change from the utter tripe that we have been fed for the last few years which has just beguiled everyone and achieved nothing of any real value.

In April I attended the annual General Assembly in Paris of The International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC). As ever, I was hugely impressed and encouraged by this organisation, its members and speakers. With the benefit of their international reach, they have positioned themselves as the arbiters between conservation and hunting. Shane Mahoney from Newfoundland stole the show with the most uplifting and sensible speech that I have heard delivered for years. Standing ovation, thoroughly deserved. This is the space to watch.

So, this is what Hunting Kind has been doing. Rafting up and acting. Forging alliances with relevant people and organisations in this field. Moving forward and delivering outcomes. Achieving not insubstantial political success, following on from our inaugural success with the Bill to ban Hunting with Dogs in Northern Ireland twenty months ago.

"Swales has gone off piste, he's now trying to save giraffes" I hear you say. Why? Well because simply it is the same argument, with the same people involved. It centres on wildlife, conservation, scientific research, rural communities, and respect for minorities. If you can convince enough politicians that recent legislation steered by animal rights lobbying is virtue signalling nonsense, misguided, bad for wildlife, bad for conservation and bad for the rural communities involved in wildlife management, then that argument applies as much in Botswana as it does in Berkshire. Any UK voter with half a measure of objectivity and balance is probably

going to agree with that. The evidence is waiting to be presented. Our challenge is to make sure that it is presented. And that it is packaged properly. That is when you start to win the 'social license'. Rural votes matter.

Finland recently voted down it's version of the Trophy Imports Bill. I would be interested to hear of a country more politically progressive than Finland. They genuinely care about the management of their wildlife. And in April the French Senate rejected two Bills to ban hunting with hounds and wildlife management using terriers, based not only on the science, but also on matters relating to cultural heritage and tradition. They are maybe not as obviously progressive as the Finns, our French cousins, but I love 'em anyway for their pragmatic and no-nonsense approach to such woke baloney.

The points we put forward into that political process in Northern Ireland delivered results. We explained 'Natural Hunting' as a naturally selective wildlife management method which benefits species, conservation and the communities that share that space.

What provided the ammunition were arguments as follows:

- Scientific research and evidence being essential to any sensible outcome.
- Cultural Heritage and its intrinsic value to cohesion in rural communities.
- Respect for Minorities in a Parliamentary Democracy.

We aim to reinforce success with the approach taken in Northern Ireland and continue in Westminster, progressing our objectives into a positive outcome.

Finally, Charlie Jacoby of Fieldsports TV, a seriously valuable weekly Youtube channel which promotes our way of life, could do with your help. He is being sued by Chris Packham and has a day in court in November, costing £60k. You can help by becoming an annual member of Fieldsports Nation by subscribing for just under £55 a year. Please look up Fieldsports TV online and join up. They need another 400 members to get them over the line. Thank you.

"Hounds Please"

ED SWALES