

LETTERS

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Crows

From Dr RD Gartside

I wonder whether an observation I made recently is of interest or whether it is commonplace and I am simply unaware of it.

I catch an occasional mouse in old-fashioned mousetraps. I dispose of the mice by throwing them out on

the lawn where, within a few minutes, they are spotted by our resident crow, which eats them.

Sometimes he turns them headfirst and down they go. At other times, he stabs at the belly and plucks the fur off and eats the mouse bit by bit. However, one morning I happened to catch two mice.

He swallowed the first one whole and then walked around with the second one. He clearly did not have the appetite to manage the second mouse

straightaway. I watched him through a telescope from my study window as he buried the mouse in long grass beside a wall.

Later I went down to inspect it and discovered that the mouse was neatly wrapped up in grass. Only its nose was visible.

I know of several creatures who hide food in this manner but is this normal behaviour for a crow?

Robert Gartside
Bowness, Cumbria

snipe or the African snipe". While that might perhaps point to their being great snipe, I can find nothing in the literature, or from my correspondence with East African sportsmen and game wardens, to indicate that these occur in sufficiently large local densities to enable big bags to be made regularly. If great snipe did congregate, or if they jinked when flushed, they were behaving atypically, since this species is solitary when not breeding, and rises with a low, slow flight.

Often, great snipe frequent much drier ground than the soggy marshlands favoured by common and African snipe. *Waders Of The World* states that great snipe are rather scarce in eastern Africa, apart from Zambia and Malawi.

Do any of the correspondents have a photograph of the birds they shot or a mounted specimen? Another less likely possibility is that it is an unrecorded species or subspecies of snipe.

Colin McKelvie
Culbokie, Ross-shire

Praise From The Town

From Mrs E Appleby
Far from being an average reader, I am an 80-year-old country-loving woman who is now forced

to live in a town. I have never shot, fished or ridden, but to me *The Field* is the most interesting, enjoyable and valuable magazine of all, representing every aspect of the country. Your excellent articles and superb photography are a continual joy – long may you flourish!

Betty Appleby
Guildford, Surrey

Inequality Of Spaniels

From Mr J Darley
In defiance of its own advisory body on working gundogs, The Kennel Club has decided that four of the six English working spaniel breeds may no longer compete in Open field trials. These are to be confined to English springers and cockers.

The Kennel Club is also denying the minority breeds the chance to run in the Any Variety Championship. By consigning them to the lower levels of competition, it is closing the book on further redevelopment of the clumber, sussex, field and Welsh springer spaniels.

Evidently still smarting from the scruffing it received from the working gundog community last year before restoring full recognition in the stud book to

field trials and awards involving the minority spaniel breeds, The Kennel Club has decided to bite back. It has done so without notice or consultation, and disregarding its own Field Trial Liaison Council that last May backed the minority breeds and resolved that all spaniels should be treated equally.

During the stud book dispute the minority breeds were warned to expect reprisals. That threat, now implemented, comes at a time when determined efforts to improve the work of these breeds have never been stronger. The clumber in particular is enjoying a small but significant comeback, with field trial records unsurpassed for a century and an increasingly successful breeding programme within the Working Clumber Spaniel Society.

Just when clumber handlers are eyeing AV stakes as the next platform on which to test their dogs, the lure of Open stakes has been removed. While Open AV stakes are to be closed to all spaniels bar English springers, Novice and All-aged AV stakes are to remain accessible to all types of spaniel – confusing.

At a stroke, the grey suits of The Kennel Club have decided

that no matter how talented an individual clumber or other rarer spaniel may be, if it wins a Novice stake against springers it may go no further.

For a body charged with representing the interests of all dog breeds, registered societies and participants in its events, and being the regulator of all dog affairs (that allows no other organisation to represent any of us), this is another example of abuse of its privilege.

James Darley

Radnage, Buckinghamshire

Lightweight Lovelies

From Mr D Tate

"Melksham" correctly suggests (*Letters*, April issue) that the appropriate weight of an English driven game gun is 6lb 10oz. Given the nature of the roman candles some guns feed their 12-bores in order to down really high driven pheasants, even that may be too light.

He asks are, "lightweight English guns works of art or anachronisms?" They are neither. I own a beautifully crafted lightweight, self-opener by an English provincial maker that is just perfect for shooting quail over pointers.

It's a gun that may have been conceived for walked-up game on a Scottish moor but it has found a new home in the American West. I have shot four species of quail with it.

Douglas Tate
By email

With Friends Like These

From Mr K Wilson

I was disappointed at remarks made by Chris Tarrant on his television show, *Tarrant On TV*.

Following a sequence showing an Australian hunter taking a buck while explaining his philosophy of killing to eat, Tarrant said: "Although Kenny extols the idea that he only shoots that which he can take home to feed his family, to many of us that's not justification enough." Chris Tarrant is the chairman of the Angler's Conservation Association. With friends like these...

Keith Wilson
By email