

The grilse that failed, a theory

From the Director, Atlantic Salmon Trust
Andrew Graham-Stewart's article on the poor results achieved this year by the grilse fisheries of Scotland's northern rivers [Grilse Fail in the Far North, October issue] raises interesting questions about the variation in catches between different rivers.

Research fishing by Scottish and Norwegian scientists has emphatically demonstrated that post-smolts continue to swim near the surface, still in their migrating shoals, for months after leaving their native rivers. These migrating runs may be vulnerable to a newly expanding near-surface trawl fishery for mackerel, which operates in the Norwegian Sea in mid-summer, and which has recently been observed by Dr Richard Shelton, lately Director of the Faskally Fisheries Laboratory. The likely danger is that particular pelagic trawl passes may intercept shoals representing a significant proportion of the runs from one or more adjacent rivers.

The North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (NASCO) is taking this possible threat seriously. If its scale can be identified, we must seek the introduction of separation measures to protect the migrating smolts from this fishery.

*J B D Read,
Pitlochry, Perthshire.*

A flaw in the river strategy plan

From the proprietor of the Hooke Springs Trout Farm, Dorset

Your readers may not all be aware of the implications of the Environment Agency's 'National Trout and Grayling Fisheries Strategy' (March 2001). Those who are aware are deeply concerned and feel that their objections are being brushed aside.

I am surprised that the Agency can produce a paper so fundamentally flawed. To impose this Strategy as it stands would be nothing short of criminal. Someone must bring together all the big guns in the fishery world before it is too late. Otherwise there will be less trout fishing available and it will consist of virtually uncatchable so-called wild trout or alternatively 'engineered' and non-sustainable triploids.

In consequence there will be a decline in the numbers of trout fishermen. Yet again the countryside will take a knock—fewer fishers, fewer fishing tourists, fewer fishing hotels, fishery agents, tackle dealers, restocking farms, river keepers etc.

In my own case, if the stocking criteria of

the EA Strategy were embodied, and combined with the implications of the EA Native Crayfish Directive Policy, I would be forced out of business. As I write, another well known south country restocking farm has been sold (and not as a trout farm).

*Major A E Hill,
Hooke, Dorset.*

¶ See also leading article, p5; R C Dales, p68.

British standards, it was a true bill

I write to send you the warmest thanks of my wife and myself for the leading article in your October 2001 edition of *Country Illustrated* entitled 'The Great Expectations of Mr Duncan Smith'. I refer especially to the section beginning, 'This is the disastrous lapse of standards in British life.'

This has been my theme for the last many years. My main theory, with which I will bore anyone within listening distance, is that all the troubles of this country stem from the teacher training colleges. We now have parents, even grandparents, who were taught by the products of these colleges. If I had to name individuals responsible for the decline in our standards I would nominate those two great heroes of Social Democracy, Shirley Williams and Roy Jenkins.

The media, television in particular, must also share the blame. Loudness, yobbery, violence and sex are the norm. The words

'deference' and 'respect' have disappeared from the English language, like 'romance'. Even apparently admired inquisitors such as Jeremy Paxman must share this blame for their obvious lack of respect for the distinguished people whom they interview. If Mr Paxman can achieve fame and respect by being rude and aggressive, why should not everyone use the same approach? I refuse to accept the argument that a continuous diet of violence and yobbery on television does not affect viewers. If it does not, why do advertisers spend millions on television advertising, repeated over and over again?

We are now a loud, yobbish, ugly, unsporting race of litter louts. Most of our once beautiful market towns are ruined on weekend evenings by hordes of young people drinking only to get drunk. We do bed-and-breakfast here, but we would never recommend to our guests that they go into our pretty local town for an evening meal at weekends.

It is time that our politicians paid less attention to the problems of countries in which we have no business, such as the Balkans and Sierra Leone, and concentrated on the very serious condition of our own country. I could accept our decline if it was universal, but I fear that it is peculiar only to Britain and I would narrow it down to England. To nearly every thinking person one speaks, the deterioration in the standards of behaviour of the English is a main cause of distress.

*Peter Moore,
Snelston, Derbyshire.*

Spaniels and the Stud Book

Working enthusiasts in the spaniel 'minor breeds' are not, as you presumed, pressuring the Kennel Club for parity of field trial recognition with English springers and cockers [Under Scrutiny, October issue]. On the contrary, they had exactly that for the 100 years from 1899, and they seek its restoration. During this period the results of all types of spaniel field trials were respected equally, and the Stud Book thereby served as a full journal of record and a valuable element in the purpose of all field trials: to improve working breeds.

Your writer is quite wrong to compare the disquiet among those dedicated to improvement in the minor breeds with any disappointment among springer and cocker handlers not among the awards at field trials. Our concern is that for the three seasons from 1998-'99, all minor breed field trial award winners have arbitrarily been ex-



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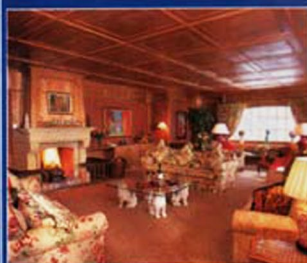
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ATOL 3072

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

cluded from the records; and that, as an unprecedented complication, only first place among award winners is to be included from 2001-'02. This peculiar discrimination has come at a time when the standard of performance in one breed, the Clumber spaniel, by the objective measure represented by the hard game of field trials, is higher than for a century.

Your article argued that recognition should follow success. During the last four seasons, four different Clumbers have been placed first in restricted trials (the Stud Book now records only the earliest). Yet you chose to remind 'disgruntled proponents of the minor breeds that those hoping for mention in despatches must first do something to deserve it'. As you are clearly unused to opening the Stud Book, allow me to draw on the history of field trials contained in it to explain that nothing similar has occurred since the period 1902-'04.

Before World War One, such names as Col R Claude Cane, H W Carlton and C A Phillips, better known as springer and cocker men, were dominating minor breeds trials with Clumbers, when, incidentally, fields were typically six or eight strong, often fewer, unlike today's usual full cards of up to 18. Yet no blinkered view was offered to those owners about doing something with their Clumbers to deserve recognition or about downgrading trials for minority breeds.

Standards in all breeds vary up and down over time. In early field trials, Clumbers were pre-eminent. Cockers have recovered from a bad patch in recent memory. For a century, English springers have dominated. But when breeds are down, and particularly when their determined owners can show they are on the rebound, they need encouragement. The high standard of performance demanded at field trials is a key incentive to improvement in working ability and, contrary to what you suggested, minor breeds owners have no difficulty accepting the value of maintaining those standards.

If their dogs do not perform, judges do them a disservice by

applying the rules inconsistently or by giving awards to the undeserving. The answer lies with the judges, not in downgrading the field trials, taking away Stud Book entry, and handicapping our efforts to breed better working lines in the minority spaniels.

James Darley,

Aston Clinton, Buckinghamshire.

Out with the Ooty Hounds

Recently I had a day with the Ooty Hounds in India, and thought your readers might like to hear about these, the last remaining foxhounds there. For background, I served in the Welsh Guards (hence Captain). I have hunted in Leicestershire with the Quorn and Belvoir for 10 seasons, as well as with the Cotswold where I am a landowner.

Hunting in the Nilgiri Hills can be traced back to 1844, if not earlier. The country was formerly a huge forestry reserve, known as Wenlock Downs after Lord Wenlock, Governor of Madras. Jackals were protected in this 40 square mile area other than from hunting by hounds in the season.

By kind invitation of the Masters, Captain Samir Advani IN and Colonel Kishan Singh, I had a day with the Hunt and was provided with a hardy, sure-footed charger (a former dressage champion). Thanks are also due to Lt Col V Gowda, the hon secretary.

The Masters and members of the Committee wear a Victorian style full frock coat with green collar. Hounds number 12 cou-



Captain Roddy Sale on the steps of the Ooty Hunt Club, India (see letter above).

ple of Old English foxhounds with bloodlines from the West Street in Kent. They are a little smaller in size than one would expect, on account of inbreeding. The pack is in fact in need of fresh bloodlines from an Old English doghound. Six couple of dogs and bitches were out.

We met at 7.15am, the field of 40 mounted followers mostly from the Indian Staff College at Wellington, including officers resplendent in long blue puttees reminiscent of the Great War, together with various wives from the three Services, and one or two other civilians.

We set off for the first draw over wonderful rolling countryside, mostly grass, commonland interspersed with terracing bounded by eucalyptus plantations planted some 40 years ago, restricting the once open wide grasslands. Hounds drew plantations and scrubby patches of gorse growing to almost 12ft in height. Hounds spoke, but no jack was evident. We drew on towards Pamela's Crossing, covering about 2 miles.

The country included water obstacles and bogs—one rider fell and was submerged. Shortly thereafter, we drew uphill towards Glen Morgan. We viewed a jack which ran into a thick wood, but hounds were not in contact. The field rode to the Karrkimund viewpoint for the most spectacular of views of the Blue Mountains and the country which we had covered.

Hounds went home, and the field proceeded to the Staff College Boat Club for a splendid liquid breakfast of beer and gin together with masala dosa. Thus refreshed, we proceeded on a boat trip up the dam, still in our hunting kit. Thus ended a most memorable day's hunting. Some truth remains in the description by Captain Pennell Elmhirst (Brooksby) of the Ooty Hunt.

*Captain Roddy Sale,
Mumbai, India.*

Letters intended for publication in these pages should be posted to the Editor at Kent House, 14-17 Market Place, London W1W 8AJ, or faxed on 020 7255 3332. Letters may be edited for reasons of clarity or space.