

Where to find field-sports heaven

IT'S something of a miracle that hunting, shooting, fishing and stalking remain an integral part of rural life in one of the most densely populated countries, yet a city man can become a country one in the time it takes to get home from work to catch and eat his supper.

The Hunting Act came into force nearly 10 years ago, but hunting remains as popular as ever. Whether you choose a two-horse day with the Duke of Beaufort's or a £2 day as a car follower in west Devon, it's still a sport for all. As Prof Roger Scruton describes it in *On Hunting*, it's a way of 'discovering England', viscerally as well as geographically.

The shooting man has an equally diverse canvas from which to pursue his sport. Grouse on the Yorkshire Moors are the stuff of dreams: a species unique

to our islands that needs management to survive in great numbers, but which is essentially as wild as the rabbit, noble as the eagle and as good to eat as the best-hung beef. Stalking the regal stag takes you to places of equally remote loveliness.

I'm always impressed by fishermen who don't allow failure to dent their enthusiasm. It shouldn't be too easy, they say, otherwise Nature isn't setting a proper test. A day on a Hampshire trout stream is as soothing a balm as Nature could offer. The trout might not be as challenging as the salmon, but his habitat is exceptional: our chalkstreams have taken millions of years to form but the gin-clear water should never be taken for granted.

Paradise is everywhere near us, but in danger of disappearing always.
Rupert Uloth

Staghunting on Exmoor

It's not what it was, thanks to the ban, and the two-hound restriction is dismaying, yet the pull of the moor and local passion for the deer are irresistible, especially in April when other packs have stopped. Stay at the Royal Oak, Withypool, where barman Jake Edwards is well informed (01643 831506; www.royaloakwithypool.co.uk). Visit www.devonandsomersetstaghounds.net for horse hire.

The Arundell Arms Fly-Rod Macnab

The elusive trio, Dartmoor-style, comprises wild brown trout on a moorland river, sea bass off the north Devon coast and night-fishing for sea trout on the Tamar. Chief instructor Dave Pilkington is great company and the hotel in Lifton has lost none of the atmosphere created in 1961 by Anne Voss-Bark, whose son is now proprietor (01566 784666; www.arundellarms.com).

Chalkstream fishing on the Itchen

This is the ultimate halieutic experience. Although

many of the best beats on the prime Hampshire river are private or fished by syndicates and few day tickets are available, three rods can fish a magical stretch at Abbots Worthy. The beat—single- and double-bank fishing—can be booked through Orvis (01264 349515; www.orvis.co.uk). Stay at the Wykeham Arms, next to Winchester Cathedral (01962 853834; http://wykehamarmswinchester.co.uk).

Salmon-fishing on the Tweed

The Lower and Upper Floors beats on the Duke of Roxburghe's estate at Floors Castle, Kelso, in the Scottish Borders, are the grandest spots on the esteemed river. With a five-year catch record of 452 salmon/grilse, Upper Floors has 17 named pools plus a stone fishing hut with log fire. Lower Floors has nine named pools, is currently catching more fish than for years and offers a hut with a log burner. Enquire at the estate office (01573 223333; www.roxburghe.net). Stay at The

Roxburghe Hotel (01573 450331; www.roxburghe.net).

Driven grouse-shooting at Gunnerside

Once described as 'a Highland estate in England', this 32,000-acre Yorkshire paradise was sold by the Earl Peel in 1995 to American magnate Robert Miller. The grouse shooting is still magnificent and the low-ground pheasants not to be sniffed at. Try to book a day with Dick Murphy at the estate office (01748 886007). Stay at Easby Hall, Richmond (01748 826066; http://easbyhall.com).

Walked-up grouse-shooting at Tulchan Lodge

In a breathtaking spot at the top of Glenisla, near Grantown-on-Spey in the Scottish Highlands, the 26,000-acre estate boasts two grouse moors and fine stalking. There's walked-up grouse-shooting on the lower hills and pursuit of elusive ptarmigan on the high ground. Stay at Tulchan Lodge, which was frequented by Edward VII and can

sleep 26 (01807 510200; www.tulchan.com).

Red-deer stalking at Black Mount

With its Munros and well-managed red deer, courtesy of three full-time stalkers, the 90,000-acre estate in Argyllshire is one of the best in Scotland. Those wishing to immerse themselves in the exploits of John Buchan's hero, John Macnab, can stay in the estate's Victorian lodge overlooking a sea loch. Contact Helen Polley at Bidwells (01397 702433; helen.polley@bidwells.co.uk).

Hunting with the Wynnstay

Foxhunting Nirvana is an under-

populated country of well-drained grassland, which is why we name the Old English pack founded in 1842 by Sir Watkins Williams-Wynn on the Cheshire/Welsh border. Joint-masters include former amateur jockey Lord Daresbury and former eventer Sir Jonathan Clark, so a scary pace is assured. Make contact through www.wynnstayhunt.co.uk first. Stay at Worthenbury Manor, Wrexham (www.worthenburymano.co.uk; 01948 770342).

High-bird shoot at Miltons

Exmoor boasts a few slick, high-bird shoots, but dramatic topography and superlative pheasant

drives, such as Howe Wood, Rookery and Collies Head, keep Miltons, near Dulverton, Somerset, at the top of the shooting tree. Pheasant days, from £39 per bird, are occasionally to let through Roxtons (01488 689788; www.roxtons.com). Stay at Tarr Farm Inn in the Barle Valley (01643 851507; www.tarrfarm.co.uk).

Wildfowling at Holkham

There's no better place than the Earl of Leicester's 25,000-acre estate on the north Norfolk coast. To endeavour to book a memorable rendezvous with teal, wigeon and gadwall at dusk, accompanied by bowler-hatted keepers,

contact the estate office (01328 710227; www.holkham.co.uk). Stay nearby at The Victoria Inn (01328 711008; www.victoriaatholkham.co.uk).

Rough shooting at Raby

Lord Barnard's 52,000-acre Teesdale estate is a Mecca for driven

grouse and semi-wild pheasant, but its friendly mixed species rough days, when the bag might include woodcock, snipe and even wild grey partridge, are popular. Enquire for next season at the estate office (www.rabycastle.com; 01833 660202). Stay at the Rose & Crown, Romaldkirk (www.rose-and-crown.co.uk; 01833 650213).

Hunting with the Scarteen

No foxhunter's career is complete without a visit to Ireland, a country unfettered by the ban, but with its own hunting politics. The Black and Tans have been in the Ryan family for more than 350 years; current

huntsman Chris Ryan gives a swashbuckling lead over hairy bank-and-ditch country. Arrange a visitor day through Richard and Catherine Power (00 353 61 390

192; www.scarteen.net). Stay at the Dunraven Arms in Co Limerick (00 353 61 605 900; www.dunravenhotel.com).
Kate Green and Paula Lester

Sporting address book

CKD Galbraith (01738 451600; www.sportinglets.co.uk)
Roxtons (01488 689788; www.roxtons.com)
BASC (01244 573000; http://basc.org.uk)
Guns on pegs (020-7491 1363; www.gunsonpegs.com)
Rods on Rivers (www.rodsonrivers.com)
The Vintage Tackroom (01798 861555; www.vintagetackroom.com)
Farlows (020-7484 1000; www.farlows.co.uk)
John Norris (01768 864211; www.johnnorris.co.uk)
William & Son (020-7493 8385; www.williamandson.com)
Hunting Stock Market (01258 817533; www.huntingstockmarket.co.uk)

