

SPRING 2009

# FIELDSPORTS

*The shooting and fishing quarterly*



## FABULOUS FISHING AT HOME & ABROAD

IMPORTANCE OF SAVING THE GREY PARTRIDGE

GETTING SIMULATED WHY GUN INVESTMENT MAKES SENSE

SHOOTS IN DEVON, YORKSHIRE, ARGENTINA & BURGUNDY

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# A taste of Burgundy

BEN CROZIER takes a trip to Chateau de Villette where he enjoys sport to match the rural charm and vintage wines.

PHOTOGRAPHY: JAKE EASTHAM

**W**hen photographer Jake Eastham asked me if I fancied joining him for a day's shooting in Burgundy, I did a double take. And we would be staying in a chateau for a couple of nights. Do bears live in the forest? Yes, I would be very happy to join him. Everything else was immediately cancelled.

CHATEAU DEVILLETTE,  
BASKING IN WINTER  
SUNLIGHT

Our destination was Chateau de Villette, the home of Coen and Catherine Stork. The couple bought the property in 2001. It was in some state of disrepair, but potentially their dream home in a very lovely part of the world. Once bought, along with the 200 hectares in which it stood, Coen, a native of Holland, discovered that the estate had once been one of France's best redleg partridge shoots. As a keen shooting man the temptation was too great to resist. In fact, he didn't even try. Not enough to renovate a fabulous 18th century chateau, he would recreate the shoot. Now seven years later we would get a first hand opportunity to monitor his progress.

First, a European Gun Licence. Amazingly it took just a week from posting my application - free too! We decided to travel by car, with Channel crossing via Eurostar. And while we later discovered that the local station to Villette offers a 90-minute TGV ride to Paris, our destination is only a five hour drive from Calais. We took longer, not because of getting guns through customs (we sailed through) but because we stumbled across the vineyard which produces my favourite wine - Puligny-Montrachet - and it was just up the road from Villette. So we were



READY FOR THE DAY

MALLARD IN THE BAG



able to arrive at our destination with perfect timing (and a very full boot) at 7pm.

I should add that the weather was horrendous. Pouring with rain. But even in these conditions the chateau, its lights winking in the wet, looked fabulous. And so it was. In fact, it was heaven from start to finish.

Coen and his Belgian wife Catherine could ➡

## SPORT CLASSIQUE

not have been more welcoming and the Dutch Guns who were there for two days' shooting were excellent company - even better, they spoke flawless English throughout so as not make Jake and I feel we were outsiders.

The house itself is very elegant, but comfortable too. The dinner meanwhile was superb. What was I to expect in the heart of Burgundy - along with fantastic wines? It transpires that Coen is a national wine judge. We stepped down from the table to sip a brandy and chat in front of the fire before retiring to get a few restorative hours sleep in readiness for the day in front of us.

Regrouping for breakfast at 8.30am, then dispersing to collect clothes and incidentals, then gun and kit from a seriously impressive gunroom.

Lots of beaters and dogs for the first three drives, a mixture of pheasants and partridges, which were to be within walking distance from the chateau. Not a great number of birds as this was the last weekend of the season, but both pheasants and partridges flew well and the presentation gave all of us some good sport.

I should add that Saturday had dawned wet and it had rained non-stop until this point, but







COEN AND  
CATHERINE  
STORK

LEFT: THE GUNROOM

BELOW: THE HOST TALKS  
THROUGH THE NEXT  
DRIVE WITH KEEPER  
BEN HOLLAND

the sight of champagne and canapés out of the back of a Land Rover brought the sun out and Jake dashed back indoors for his cameras, leaving me to fly the flag for GB.

Next stop... duck. We all hear mixed reports about duck shooting, but full marks to Coen - these were the business. Both high and fast, the shooting was very exciting.

Now back to the house for lunch - again, absolutely

delicious. Then a couple of drives in the afternoon, before concluding the entertainment with a duck flight and I enjoyed a shot which made my weekend, by now virtually dark but somehow I picked out a beauty. That's me sorted! They also accommodated an extra Gun so Jake shot too. We were both teased about poaching birds - it wasn't me!

We got back to the house at 5pm. Some went to their rooms, for a snooze and bath. Others of us stayed downstairs and chatted for an hour or so. It was all very agreeable.

And then... dinner! A Burgundy five-courser, the food was so great, and beautifully organised by Catherine, who also proved to be such easy company, a natural hostess. Perhaps it was as well we were departing the next day and that we were to do some walking before leaving. Our trouser waistbands were shrinking.

While Saturday had been a full driven day, Sunday (yes, Sundays are OK in France) was much more informal with fewer beaters. It was very enjoyable, but sadly we had to pull the plug before lunch and hit the road. It had been a brilliant weekend.



BEAUTIFULLY RESTORED  
AND FURNISHED



GOOD, CHALLENGING  
DUCK SHOOTING

THE BEAUTY OF  
BURGUNDY



### THE STORY SO FAR

It all started when, with a 40th birthday looming, Coen Stork decided that he had had enough of life as a senior director running divisions of multinationals from different countries around Europe. “I had always dreamed of owning a castle,” he explained, “but when Catherine and I found Villette that was it.”

Certainly impressive to look at, but it had been in the same family for four generations and had neither electricity, or central heating, and the water was drawn from a well. But they could see the potential.

It is a tribute to their perseverance that the place is now utterly transformed. It sits beautifully and has become a gorgeous home for the couple and their young son.

As if this house restoration wasn't enough, when Coen stumbled upon the fact that this was once one of France's best partridge shoots, with annual

bags of 300 brace of wild redlegs, the temptation was too great to resist.

A keen shooting man, he has shot in the UK for years, and around Europe, he decided to recreate the shoot and bring back the redlegs. He took a lot of advice, from home and abroad. The Game Conservancy's Martin Tickler visited a couple of times. Cover crop specialists Belmont helped draw up the plan. He got subsidies from the French Ministry of Agriculture and Fauna and installed pens, hoppers, game crops, conservation headlands, over-winter stubbles, unsprayed strips, predator traps and he released pheasants. Predator control would cover badgers (legal in France) and fox cage trapping (lamping is not permitted) - he even took exams to become a qualified trapper. So how has it turned out?

“I would be first to admit that I have learned a lot of lessons along the way. One of these is that when recruiting a new gamekeeper it is vital to interview the wife or partner first! Happily we now have super couple in Ben and Sue Holland who joined us last April from Suffolk - Sue is a true country girl and a great support to Ben. It has worked out really well.

“The wild partridge project has been a success



inasmuch as in a good year we will have 200-300 wild birds on the shoot, but because we have stepped up the amount of shooting with 10 weekends per annum, we have had to release redlegs also. We now have nearly 2000 hectares (5000 acres) over which to shoot, and we will have nine new drives this year, due largely to demand from existing groups to provide more shooting (double days) on our estate, rather than on neighbouring estates. Many of these will most likely be partridge shooting. Pheasants are incredibly difficult to hold due to there being so many hedgerows. They follow the line of the hedges, aided by a high number of goshawks (protected) which chase them. So when the season starts we will have probably 85-90% of our partridges still on the ground but only 50% of our pheasants, which is dramatically up from a pre-Ben figure of 15%! Dogging in is a non-stop job for him.

“We no longer have subsidies from the government, due to the number of let days. I fully understand and while the financial help was useful at the time, the real plus of the subsidy was the way in which it highlighted what we were doing.

“The other problem is wild boar which seem bent on destroying our cover crops. They are pretty elusive creatures which come out at night. On some of our weekends we also have a wild boar shoot. Driven wild boar is very exciting - when you get a group of 40-60 boar charging at you, it's pretty scary. Our visitors find it very exciting.”

The normal weekend programme includes two or three days shooting, boar and birds, often combined with wine tasting and other sightseeing. “I am pleased with what we have achieved so far. We are still a young shoot, but we now know which drives will deliver good birds, and we have plans to develop others, including the new ground, where Ben sees great possibilities. More than anything perhaps it is very satisfying that we have come this far. There are probably only five or six shoots like this in France. And French visitors cannot believe that we release the birds in the summer and not the day before the shoot!”

It is all a far cry from the couple's previous life - does Catherine enjoy it too? “Definitely. Catherine has now taken up shooting, and on a recent trip to England when we shot at Conholt Park she was the best Gun. Better than me! But that's great and we love it here!”

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THE FIRST THREE DRIVES WERE IN WALKING DISTANCE OF THE HOUSE



REACHING FOR A HIGH REDLEG



THE TEAM AND THE BAG