

ON SALE
to 23rd Nov 2015

Irish COUNTRY SPORTS and COUNTRY LIFE

Including The NEW IRISH GAME ANGLER magazine

Volume 14 Number 3 Autumn 2015 £3.00 / €5.00





Front Cover: : 'Pheasant slipping into cover' from a painting by John R. Moore.



Irish Game Angler cover: Children were introduced to angling at the Shanes Castle Game Fair.

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Printed by W.&G.Baird **Distributed by** Easons (Dublin), E M Distribution Also Available by Subscription ISSN No. 1476-8240

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The Irish Working Terrier Federation

- championing the right to practise what they love



After a few years in existence, the Irish Working Terrier Federation (IWTF) can reflect with satisfaction on a great deal of work done, but there are substantial challenges ahead and a lot of hard graft still required.

When speaking to me during the summer, Chairman Wesley Cole pointed out many of the positive things about the IWTF, including the fact the organisation is steadily growing in numbers, enjoys a dedicated membership and has established close links with many organisations. Some of the negative things include a misinformed media and unbudging anti-hunting groups who don't believe in the old adage of 'Live and let live.'

The IWTF has blossomed from a very small beginning. In May 2012 Barrie Wade got together with several terrier-men during the weekend of the Ballywalter Game Fair in County Down, and chatted about the possibility and necessity of establishing an organisation which would represent their interests. The matter was discussed again the following month during a RISE (Rural Ireland Says Enough) meeting in Cork, and a group of about ten terrier-men present at the meeting decided to found the IWTF. Some of their aims included setting out a code of conduct, and promoting and protecting legitimate terrier work in Ireland.

The IWTF now has a very

impressive website, and year on year they have a significant presence at the Irish Game Fair & Fine Food Festival at Shanes Castle, Antrim, and at the Irish Game and Country Fair at Birr Castle, Offaly.

Wesley told me that people sometimes assume erroneous things about terrier work. "What it is in fact," he said "is a humane form of pest control. Foxes can cause a considerable amount of damage on farms, and new born lambs are easy targets for these predators. It is because of this threat to farm animals that fox population control becomes an unavoidable part of rural life. Many members of the public unfortunately don't see this reality and are labouring under a misapprehension, which is a Disney, childish view of nature. As a result, they verbally attack farmers and hunters, calling them cruel; when in fact hunters are no more cruel than any other member of society and are merely dealing with a necessary reality of farm-life."

Farmers often see the devastation which foxes can wreak upon their livestock. For example, there was an article last January in the Farmer's

Journal which related the story of a Wexford farmer who spotted a fox with one of his neighbour's lambs in its mouth. 'My neighbour lives away from the farm,' said the farmer, 'so I usually check the sheep for him. When I was there on Saturday, I caught the flash of an eye with my lamp and saw a fox carrying the dead lamb. I took careful aim and took the fox with a shot to the neck. This is a strong area for sheep and dogs have done a lot of damage, but I see foxes around as well. Some people think foxes aren't doing any harm but this is proof. My neighbour was lucky that he only lost one lamb.'

Another problem is urban foxes and several members of IWTF have received calls from people living in suburban areas who want to get rid of this nuisance. "The urban fox sometimes plays havoc in people's gardens, including damaging lawns. Foxes can be attracted by the presence of invertebrate turf pests such as leatherjackets and chafers in lawns. They sometimes uproot flower beds and vegetable patches because they are establishing an earth, burying food, or helping themselves to fruit and vegetables," he added.



Some fine terriers from a recent show.

Toxocariasis is the most common disease which foxes are likely to transmit to man

Urban foxes can also cause illness in pets and people. They can carry a range of parasites and diseases which affect the health of domestic pets and people. They can harbour numerous canine diseases which can be injurious to your dog. Toxocariasis is the most common disease which foxes are likely to transmit to man, via microscopic toxocara eggs which can remain infective in the soil for two to four years after the faeces has disappeared. The eggs have sticky shells which adhere to fingers and clothing and humans become infected by accidentally swallowing the eggs. Because they tend to put dirty fingers and toys in their mouths crawling babies and toddlers are most at risk. In the UK about 100 new cases of Toxocariasis are diagnosed each year. The symptoms of this disease are unpleasant and difficult to treat and include stomach upset and pain, headache, sore throat, wheezing and listlessness. It can also cause blindness. Domestic cats and dogs are also prone to this affliction. Foxes are susceptible to Weil's disease which is a potentially life threatening condition and can be passed on to domestic pets and humans via contact with their urine. Foxes can pass mange on to dogs. If the opportunity arises foxes will kill small domestic pets such as kittens, guinea pigs, birds and rabbits.

Councils in Britain advise the public to refrain from feeding urban foxes. 'It is very important,' said one English County Council, 'that no attempt is made to try to tame foxes, to encourage them to feed from the hand or to encourage them close or into houses using food. This is only likely to cause problems. Urban foxes are wild animals and should be treated as such.' The Council pointed out that some people regard urban foxes as a nuisance, 'especially if they occupy a den under a building or undertake certain activities too close for comfort.

Complaints include fouling, digging up of lawns or flower beds, and causing a disturbance by barking at night.'

A third of their diet is from farm livestock

It is interesting to read about the problem of pests in other countries. For example, the company Animal Control Technologies Australia (ACTA) specialises in the control of a number of pest animals including foxes, wild dogs, feral pigs, rabbits, mice and rats. The European fox was introduced to Australia in the 1870s for hunting purposes and today foxes are widespread in the country. Foxes prey on many species of Australian native wildlife including birds, small mammals and reptiles. ACTA says that effective fox control has been shown 'to reduce the extinction pressure and to allow population recovery.' ACTA also states that 'serious economic damage results from fox predation on farm livestock, including lambs, calves, poultry, water fowl and goats. With a typical fox density of about 4 foxes per 400 hectares (1000 acres), each fox will eat about 400 grams a night, or a little over a tenth of a tonne of food in a year. Overall, about a third of this diet is from farm livestock, a third from pest vertebrates like rabbits and mice, and a third from wildlife.'

Wesley Cole told me that the IWTF has a number of objectives, including: "Promoting the best, most humane and efficient practices in relation to the use of working terriers for pest control purposes; improving public awareness of the manner in which properly conducted terrier work is carried out; encouraging new participants to join a recognised working terrier club and learn from more experienced members; unifying the working terrier clubs under one umbrella organisation and providing a single reference point and centre of excellence on matters relating to terrier work; countering the activities

of those who by their actions would bring terrier work into disrepute; protecting both the working terrier and its owner from harmful legislation."

When the IWTF was formed the primary idea was to protect terrier work and counter the negativity frequently thrown at it. At the time, the founding members were also concerned about upcoming Government legislation which could be a threat to terrier work. During the RISE meeting in Cork, the Chairman of the Irish Foot Harriers Association (IFHA), John Flannery, gave an emotional, determined speech during which he pledged the strong support of the IFHA to the IWTF. On the 24th of September 2012 the IWTF received written support from the IFHA. Two months later they received written support from Countryside Alliance Ireland. The winter of 2012 was an anxious time for the IWTF as the government prepared its Animal Health and Welfare Bill. Thankfully, as it transpired all the anti-hunting amendments were voted down by an enormous majority.

There are many hunting people out there who don't wish to be proactive and would rather bury their heads in the sand and do nothing. The threats to the sports we love are too large to go along with such an attitude. The hardworking committee of the IWTF knows that it will have to persistently fight against the negative misinformation which is regularly entering the public domain. The people peddling this misinformation want to do away with all fieldsports including fishing, shooting and foxhunting. No one is dictating to these people the way they should live; but unfortunately they wish to dictate to us what we can or cannot do. Many of them would consider themselves liberal, but in fact their attitude is illiberal. It is also a skewed vision of the world as it really is, a world where the need for pest control will always remain.