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# MOOR PRACTICE



A world away from the typical lowland shoot, grouse shooting requires serious practice. James Marchington visits two shooting grounds who specialise in getting game shooters ready for 12 August

The first time you face a covey of driven grouse, you'll most likely be standing open-mouthed long after they've passed. They really are that fast. Even if you are an experienced driven game shot, nothing prepares you for the low, scything flight of a grouse. In fact pheasant and partridge shooting will have got you into the wrong habits for driven grouse, claims John Heagren, senior shooting instructor at Bisley Shooting Ground in Surrey. John sees many clients who are looking forward to their first taste of driven grouse, and want to be ready to make the most of the opportunity.

"Experienced game shooters start with their gun muzzles pointing up at the sky," he says. "That's the 90 etiquette on a pheasant or partridge shoot, but it won't work for driven grouse. You need to get used to holding your gun at ground level."

Bisley SG is the perfect setting to learn the skills of driven grouse before your trip north. It lies in the heart of Bisley Camp, the spiritual home of British shooting. The ground covers 80 acres of heath with birch, oak and fir trees. If you squint, you could almost be in Scotland already – there's even a herd of red deer, brought in as an experiment to control the regrowth of scrub on the heathland.

John started his working life as a gamekeeper at Longparish in Hampshire, so he knows his game shooting – which helps when clients ask about the birds' habits and natural history. Bisley Shooting Ground is run like a golf club, with a membership of around 400, but non-members are welcome to book a lesson – and many do.

Suppose you've been invited driven grouse shooting, how would John suggest you prepare? "Ideally you won't come here on the Friday before heading to Scotland for the weekend, although

some do," he says with a grin. "It's better to give yourself time for a series of lessons – I've got one client who first came in May to start preparing for grouse on the twelfth of August."

With anyone new to driven grouse, John will start by showing them a typical grouse butt, and explaining the safety angles. There's a row of five butts on the ground, where they can simulate an entire drive if need be.

Next is that crucial introduction to the fast, ground-hugging flight of the quarry. Remem-



Bisley is the home of shooting and not a bed (please to brush up on your grouse-shooting skills)





John Heagen coaches a client in the grouse but at Bishy Shooting Ground



Remote-control clay traps simulate the ground-hugging flight of grouse

controlled clay traps throw targets at blistering speed to right and left of the butt. "The first time someone sees our targets, they ask 'are real grouse that quick?'" says John. "I tell them yes, and quicker with the wind behind them."

As with real grouse, when you see the targets there is no time to think. It's up with the gun and bang bang. They don't need much lead, if any. "It can be hard for a pleasant shooter to forget about lead and just 'shoot their feet off,'" says John, "but that's what you need to do."

Often that first lesson does little more than open the client's eyes to what driven grouse involves. After that, they want to come back and work on improving their reflexes and technique, and boosting up their speed.

Even simple tasks like loading and closing the gun become difficult when you rush. Once a client is getting the hang of it, John likes to pile on a bit of pressure. "The real thing gets the heart pumping, so it helps if we've been able to give you a taste of that here," he explains. "Otherwise you'll be spilling cartridges all over the floor of the butt, and your shooting will be all to pieces."

Come 12 August, John will be up on the moor, with a client rather than doing the shooting himself. But he wouldn't miss it for the world. "It is the most fabulous shooting. I always say, if you get the chance, don't hesitate. Cancel everything and just take it. It's an experience not to be missed." ■

To enquire about lessons, call 01483 797017 or visit [www.bishyshooting.co.uk](http://www.bishyshooting.co.uk)



## GUN MOUNT IS THE KEY

"A good gun mount at speed is absolutely crucial to driven grouse shooting," says Tim McPherson – and he should know. When he's not coaching at the Royal Berkshire Shooting School, he's shooting himself, and driven grouse are his absolute favourite.

"It's a huge privilege to shoot driven grouse," he says. "You're up on the moors in some of the finest countryside in the world, shooting a truly wild bird. You're in awe of the whole situation. I've been fortunate enough to shoot most things over the years, and a good day's pigeon shooting is up there, but nothing can beat a day at driven grouse."

Clients often come to Royal Berkshire to prepare for driven grouse, and the school has an excellent grouse but layout to replicate the targets and conditions. "You can't throw a clay target directly at the shooter for safety reasons," says Tim, "but we've developed the targets to give as good a simulation as you'll find anywhere."

Most people who come to practise driven grouse are already experienced game shots. Tim starts with the gun fit and mount. "The gun must shoot exactly where you're looking," he explains. "We start on the pattern plate, and on a straight incoming target."

Next is speed. "They're fast. Very fast," he emphasises. "You have to get used to shooting with very little time. Most driven grouse are quartering your front, so you don't need a lot of gun movement. But on many Scottish moors you have a very short window. The lie of the ground means you first see them 40 yards in front – you blink and, *bol*, they're through the line."

"Shooting driven grouse is an art form. People spend a lifetime building up their knowledge and experience of how to do it well. It's not for the faint-hearted, but it really is the best of the best."

Contact the Royal Berkshire Shooting School on 01491 672900, or see [www.rbsa.co.uk](http://www.rbsa.co.uk)