



The no-hit list

LAST Wednesday, Natural England (NE) announced that, in two days' time, it would revoke three general licences for the control of wild birds. For almost 30 years, these provisions have allowed the control of 16 species, including crows, pigeons and Canada geese, to prevent harm to public health, crops, livestock or wildlife.

'I hadn't heard a thing. I could have gone out tomorrow, shot some pigeons and fallen foul of the law,' comments shocked Norfolk farmer and land agent Jake Craig.

Ian Bell, chief executive of BASC, has reportedly taken Tony Juniper, brand-new chairman of NE, to task over the decision, arguing that it's like changing the speed limit tomorrow and 'putting out a notice on the internet'.

Speaking to COUNTRY LIFE, the RSPB, which in 2017 shot 528 hooded crows to protect curlew—something it's no longer able to do—expressed surprise. However, the charity later commented on NE's promise to bring in an alternative, saying: 'We need an open and transparent system of licensing that everyone can be confident in.'

Mr Juniper took to social media to defend his organisation's stance, saying this 'is not the choice of NE, but the result of a legal challenge'. That challenge was later claimed as a victory by BBC broadcaster Chris Packham on behalf of Wild Justice—a not-for-profit group set up by Mr Packham and former RSPB conservation director Mark Avery—that believes the licences have been exploited, resulting in 'the unlawful casual killing of millions of birds'.

To many people, far from being a victory, the news is 'already causing chaos and confusion and could also devastate wildlife and livelihoods,' laments Liam Bell, chairman of the National Gamekeepers' Organisation. 'This couldn't have come at a worse



time for ground-nesting birds. Without spring corvid control, birds such as the curlew and lapwing will suffer.'

He adds: 'Stopping the use of all corvid traps and the shooting of crows and magpies at this time of year will be a disaster for wildlife, to say nothing of the livelihoods of those dependent on well-run grouse moors and farms where wild game birds, such as the declining grey partridge, are managed.'

On Radio 4's *Farming Today*, Dr Avery said Wild Justice is 'delighted' and that the speed with which its victory has been implemented was NE's decision. He says he's hopeful farmers will be able to control birds eating their crops, but asks whether (seemingly referring to corvids) it is right

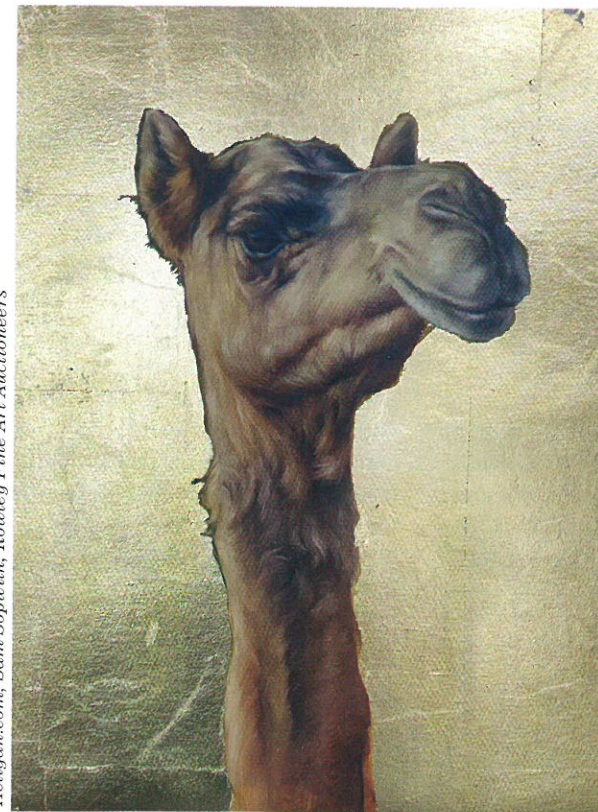
Clockwise from top left: Rook, herring gull, jackdaw, ring-necked parakeet, sacred ibis, carrion crow, collared dove, Egyptian goose and jay are among the species now not covered by general licences

'to kill lots of native species so that there are more pheasants running around at the end of the summer'.

Later, on *Today*, the president of the Countryside Alliance, Baroness Mallalieu, called Dr Avery to account on this, arguing that he is 'strongly opposed to game-bird shooting'. Dr Avery rejected the suggestion, but Lady Mallalieu was resolute, convinced that, ultimately, Wild Justice 'hopes to persuade Natural England to impose restrictions on gamekeeping'.

At the time of going to press, more than 100,000 people had signed an online petition calling for the BBC to sack Mr Packham on the basis that he is not impartial and seeks to ban country sports.

The Lost Gardens of Heligan, Cornwall, already riotously in bloom, has another reason to celebrate this month: the arrival of rare-breed lambs. So far, 35 have been born of an expected 42—mostly Devon & Cornwall Longwool lambs (including Marvin, pictured), plus Kerry Hill, Jacob and one Ryland



Heligan.com; Sam Sopwith; Rowley Fine Art Auctioneers

The camel's back

SAM SOPWITH'S *The Watchman* is among some 60 of her works to be exhibited at Patrick Mavros, London SW3, from May 8 to 17. This is not the first time the artist has featured in COUNTRY LIFE—Jo Malone chose a charcoal of a horse by her as her favourite painting (*July 3, 2013*). 'I am not against doing human portraits,' she says, 'but I find it frustrating that the result is so dependant on how well the model sits for me.' Miss Sopwith is the granddaughter of Sir Thomas Sopwith, whose Sopwith Aviation contributed to the early RAF, including with the iconic Sopwith Camel.



The snapshot of Daphne that concealed a treasure

Do look

PREVIOUSLY unseen ten by Daphne du Maurier, selling author of *Rebecca*, *Inn* and *Don't Look Now*—other works—have been inside an old photograph. Auctioneer Roddy Lloyloguing an archive of letters and pictures when he found a small photograph of her in a frame, he found a folded paper with poems on each side written when she was in her late 20s. 'The poems are not just of a child nor the polished work of her later years,' explains Lloylog. 'They show her working at an interesting time and