

# Gun fun under the hammer

As the season approaches, we look back at how one party celebrated the Twelfth in 2016

**A**t last year's Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) Scottish Auction, held on 4 May 2016 at Prestonfield House hotel in Edinburgh, Holts Auctioneers' Nick Holt won the bid for one of the most coveted lots – a day's walked-up grouse shooting for five Guns on an estate on the Lammermuir Hills in the Scottish Borders.

Some enthusiastic pre-auction bidding had got things going before more than 400 people arrived for the event itself, where guests enjoyed a champagne reception and a talk from the GWCT's chief executive Teresa Dent about the Trust's activities in Scotland.

There was then some fast and furious bidding in the silent auction throughout dinner before the live auction began. The two auctions and a raffle between them raised a healthy total of more than £132,000 – a significant amount towards the GWCT's excellent work.

Nick and his guests were lucky to be able to take advantage of his successful bid because many grouse shoots on the Lammermuirs were cancelled in 2015



Top: Guest Paolo Morandotti with a brace of grouse. Above: Headkeeper Craig Jones, with the Guns

due to the low bird count. Heavy snow in April 2016 disrupted the incubation period of many hens, which led to nest abandonment, and the heather did

not start greening up until the end of May, so the grouse were scratching about for food. The keeper was

pleased with the count, however.

Nick had invited a mix of longstanding clients and colleagues to enjoy the sport, many of whom had never shot grouse before. The teams enjoyed perfect weather conditions on both days – breezy, dry and warm.

“Our day was cancelled in 2015, which is why we are now in fact

shooting two back-to-back days this season [2016],” said Nick.

Managed by Strutt & Parker, the Berwickshire estate lets three driven days and two walked-up days each season.

One of the Guns was Holts Auctioneers' German representative Ralph Paschen, regular client Baron von Nolken and author Donald Dallas, who has written numerous books on the history of British sporting guns and rifles and who managed to shoot an impressive right-and-left.

“It was a special day as I have only ever shot pheasants before,” Donald said, adding: “Nick also claimed that we ‘shared’ a grouse towards the end of the day, but I am sure I pulled my trigger a fraction before he did!”



Nick Holt made the winning bid for the coveted lot



Ralph Paschen takes a shot, watched by picker-up Mark Ewart



Picker-up James Crowley collects a grouse from his charge, as Paolo Morandotti looks on