

RIPLEY CASTLE SHOOT

**RIPLEY CASTLE : NIDD : HOB GREEN : CAYTON : EAGLE HALL : ASHFOLD SIDE
HARDCASTLE AND HEATHFIELD MOORS**

November 2014

GROUSE 2015

I am delighted to report our 2014 grouse season will produce in the region of 2,300 brace from Hardcastle and Heathfield Moors with roughly equal returns for both Moors. This is a truly remarkable return from only 4,000 acres of moorland and an all-time record for both moors. Our success can only be down to the hard work put in by George and his team, John, Joel and Callum which I know we all appreciate. I will advise actual returns once the grouse season ends in December.

Having only just completed our grouse days this season and I am experiencing an unprecedented number of enquiries from both established and new guns to shoot with us in 2015, so our success must have spread. Given this demand my first and foremost priority is to offer days to everyone who supported the Moors this season.

So where do we go from here? With the support of my landlords we have an ongoing plan for improving the tracks, particularly at Heathfield where the tracks have deteriorated due to the severe weather conditions. Our “motorway” at Hardcastle has bedded in very well with further improvements planned.

The actual condition of the Moors and particularly the heather is the finest it has ever been with George’s burning regime one of the major factors in our success. A considerable area of bracken has also been sprayed which will allow further areas of heather to flourish. Most important of all we have left a very fit young stock of grouse remaining on both Moors.

I would like to believe we would be able to repeat the success of this season but managing a grouse moor is always a gamble as I have found to my cost during past seasons. The increased revenue this season has been a welcome change to the losses of the past so George has been on a spending spree, he has some very useful new equipment.

I feel everything possible is in place to achieve another successful season in 2015. However Mother Nature is always full of surprises and I am more aware than anyone that nothing is certain with grouse. Although we are hopefully on top of the worm problem of previous seasons due to the availability of medicated grit, we do have some dark clouds on the horizon. An avian disease known as Bulgey Eye (this is nothing to do with bird flu) for which there is no known cure has been working its way through the more northerly Pennine moors causing considerable damage to grouse stocks. I understand it can kill up to 30% of the stock. Unfortunately the moors on the opposite side of the Nidd Valley to Hardcastle and Heathfield Moors have been hit. Particularly Dallowgill and Swinton Moors, so this is something we cannot ignore.

There has also been a considerable increase in the number of birds of prey, particularly buzzards and red kites. There have not been many shoot days where we have not seen one and more often quite a number disturbing the drives. The estimate is that we will lose up to 30% of our stock to raptors throughout the year. There is nothing whatsoever we can do about these two problems and must sadly learn to live with them.

So how do I plan the number of shoot days in these uncertain times. Being the eternal optimist I am proposing a similar number of days to the present season with slight amendments to the “rules”.

As stated previously everyone who has supported the Moors this season has the opportunity to reserve the same or similar days before I offer elsewhere. I stress reserve as I know it may be impossible to actually plan so far ahead. You can reserve now with a final commitment in January 2015, with confirmation and invoicing to follow in February. As in the past payment will be spread over the year.

- We will field 9 guns each day on both Moors.
- Our target bags may vary from 60 to 140 brace and hopefully to average around 100 brace.
- The cost remains as at present at £165 per brace plus VAT.
- A deposit of £1,100 per gun + VAT will be charged on final confirmation in February which is equivalent to 60 brace. If we shoot the day but achieve less than 60 brace the deposit stands.
- If George and I feel we do not have the stock we may cancel days when the full deposit will be refunded.
- Any excess over 60 brace will be charged equally between the team on the day up to 140 brace. There will be no further charge if we shoot more than 140 brace. (This is an increase from 120 brace in 2014).
- The days are sold to average 100 brace so in the event of a day being cancelled due to poor weather, the amount of the claim and amount owed would be £1,833 + VAT per gun less your deposit.
- The use of double guns has been given much discussion. I feel it is more important to have a loader as a spotter but on some days shooting double guns can prove effective. So this season anyone who wishes to may shoot double guns on grouse only days.
- On our mixed grouse and partridge/pheasant days our target bags will be 35 brace of grouse plus 150 partridge/pheasant at £1,285 per gun + VAT.
- On all our partridge and pheasant days the cost per bird remains as the current season.

I attach a list of our available dates for August, September and October 2015 for grouse, partridge and pheasant so please reserve whatever you wish. I would appreciate your preferred dates by Friday 5th December 2014 when priority will be given to similar dates in the new season i.e. everyone who shot on 12th August has first option in the new season.

Where full days have been taken during the current season, the host will have first option on these days. If however anyone decides not to re-book more guns will come available.

I do hope you will find my proposals of interest and look forward to hearing from you.