

Report on the 171st FCRS 12-Dog Novice Stake, held at Clifton Hall Shoot, Clifton Campville, Staffordshire.

The 171st Stake was held at Clifton Hall Shoot, Clifton Campville on Saturday 18th November 2017. Clifton Hall Shoot is a small farm shoot on about 600 acres, the land comprising areas of woodland, arable land and conservation planting. The trial was carried out as part of a normal syndicate shoot day.

Once again we had a full card and the weather was fine and dry. The 12 dogs and their handlers were split according to the running order with odd numbers on the left under judges Philip Wagland and David Bellamy, and even numbers on the right under judges Dan Higgs and Jane Fairclough. The Chief Steward was Roz Bellamy.

On the first drive all dogs were held in line, in two groups with their respective judges, and about 75 yards back from the guns. Eleven dogs remained steady and quiet throughout the drive, but one was withdrawn by its handler as it would not settle. Just 3 birds were shot, with one on the left being gathered



successfully, but of the two on the right, one became a runner and was lost and the other being gathered after the retrieving dog had initially failed to get to the fall, had been called up, and then picked the bird.



The second drive involved splitting the dogs and handlers either side of a road, the drive pushing birds either to a cover crop on the right, or another wood on the left. Several birds were shot on the right, some falling into a hedge and ditch, and the remainder onto a field up to 100 yards away. One dog failed to get to the fall and a second successfully picked a bird but stopped short of the handler

and put the bird down. Both were put out. Two dogs successfully retrieved two birds each from the hedge and ditch, including two runners, which completed their first round retrieves.

On the left, three birds were shot, but one falling bird led to a dog running in, and this caused two others to follow it, leaving just one dog on the left. A second round dog was sent across and two birds were picked, but in the excitement one of the birds was damaged and the dog was put out.

The third drive commenced with two dogs remaining handled by Diane Heywood and





Graham Clelland. The drive was an area of woodland with birds falling into an area of conservation crop. The crop had some rides through it but areas comprised dense vegetation requiring good hunting, as most of the birds had not been seen by either dogs or handlers.

A bird was picked from the centre of the crop, followed by two more, one by each dog, quite close to each other. Two more birds which had fallen in the edge of the crop and adjacent to a hedgerow were then used, and these were both picked successfully, although both dogs required a lot of handling to hold them in the area. With 5 retrieves successfully completed by the two dogs the judges announced the trial over.

Certificates of Merit were awarded to Diane Heywood handling Houndswood Aphrodite who also took the Trophy for the Best Lady Handler in the Awards, and to Graham Clelland handling Necessares Sorrel who also received Gun's Choice and the Lathkill Trophy donated and awarded by David Bellamy.

Philip Wagland provided the following comments on the trial: "We have had three drives over a variety of cover, the right sort of scale of drives and the right sort of number of birds. We had some ditches to cross and some rather terrifying cover at the end to hunt out. The two dogs that got through were steady, they did have some retrieves at distance in the open, they had some where they had to cross ditches or find birds in cover, and they fulfilled the basic requirements of a dog finding game and not having any serious or eliminating faults. That is the aspiration for the rest of the competitors; you had bits and pieces of the ability to do things but they shouldn't have been running in!

A very well organised day. The Club is doing its best to get the grade back to where it used to be. I have judged a number of Flatcoat trials over the years and this is certainly not the best and I haven't had one with no awards at all, but it can happen to the best of Societies. It is a credit to the shoot that 2 dogs got through and into the awards. Thank you to the Society for inviting us to Judge the trial."

