



Jean-Paul Gaudin

Country Diary

The gamekeeper is the countryside's overworked stage manager, doing everything that is required without being noticed at all

If the countryside were a perfectly staged production – rolling hills, tidy hedgerows, pheasants politely waiting their turn – then gamekeepers would be the exhausted stage managers muttering: “Honestly, I do everything around here” while fixing a fence with one hand and holding a mug of rapidly cooling tea in the other.

Keepers are often described as the countryside's unsung heroes, which is a polite way of saying they do an extraordinary amount of work while nobody is watching, applauding or offering them a lie-in. To the untrained eye, their job might seem like “looking after birds” but that's about as accurate as saying an airline pilot “sits down for a bit”.

Take habitat management. Keepers don't just wander about admiring nature – they actively build and maintain it. Hedgerows don't magically stay neat, woodlands don't politely manage themselves and fields don't organise their own biodiversity meetings. Gamekeepers plant covercrops, manage woodland growth, maintain water sources and generally keep the countryside looking like it belongs on a biscuit tin. Without them, things would get wild very quickly – and not in the charming, Instagram-worthy sense.

Then there's predator control, a task that requires skill, legality and the kind of patience usually associated with assembling flat-pack furniture without losing your will to live. It's a necessary part of maintaining balance in the ecosystem, protecting vulnerable species that would otherwise struggle. It's not glamorous, it's not widely understood and it's certainly not something



Keepers keep shooting viable but do so much more – bringing people and their funds into the countryside

fences (again), clearing fallen branches, maintaining equipment and responding to whatever fresh disaster has presented itself overnight. Livestock have escaped, a gate has mysteriously broken or a tractor has decided it no longer believes in working. Meanwhile, the weather is doing its absolute best impression of all four seasons in a single afternoon.

Ticking over

Gamekeepers are also key players in keeping rural economies alive. Their work supports shooting activities, which in turn bring people into the countryside – along with their wallets. Guns stay in local inns, eat in pubs and contribute to businesses that might otherwise struggle. So while the gamekeeper is out in the rain fixing something that wasn't broken yesterday, they're also quietly helping to keep the local village ticking over.

isn't quite right from about 200m away in poor light and generally driving rain.

Then there are the dogs. Loyal, hardworking and often far better listeners than most humans, they're an essential part of the team. They retrieve, flush and provide companionship, although they do have a habit of looking suspiciously pleased with themselves. There's also a strong possibility they eat better than their owners and have a more comfortable sleeping arrangement.

Despite all this, gamekeepers remain firmly out of the spotlight. If they're noticed at all, it's usually because something has gone wrong – which, in fairness, is often exactly what they've been working to prevent since before sunrise. They are problem-solvers, fixers, planners and reluctant meteorologists, all rolled into one.

So next time you're enjoying a beautifully kept stretch of countryside, complete with thriving wildlife and tidy landscapes, spare a thought for the gamekeeper. They've probably been up since dawn, fixed three things that shouldn't have broken and are currently wondering why they chose a job where a “quiet day” is considered deeply suspicious. Still, they wouldn't have it any other way – probably. 🐾

“The countryside has an excellent sense of timing when it comes to chaos”

you bring up at a dinner party unless you're prepared for a lively debate and possibly fewer invitations from those who have little to no understanding of the countryside.

Of course, no two days are the same in a gamekeeper's life, largely because the countryside has an excellent sense of timing when it comes to chaos. A typical day might involve checking feed, repairing

Animal welfare is another major part of the job. Gamekeepers monitor wildlife health, manage feeding and ensure that habitats are suitable and sustainable. It's a careful balancing act – too many animals and the land suffers, too few and the ecosystem falters. It requires knowledge, experience and a fair bit of intuition, not to mention the ability to spot when something

🔗 *Jean-Paul Gaudin, is one of the UK's most accomplished game Shots and recognised voices in the industry, showcasing the sport through his Seated Gun brand*