

# The best drive

## Fern Pen

**WHY IT WORKS:** Coppiced trees and bracken provide cover and the Guns line out 300 yards away behind a belt of trees. Silence must be maintained as the Guns line out and the beaters slowly work through the drive. Birds flush quickly and tend to climb the trees to give the line sharp and steady shooting while, at the same time, duck from a pool behind the line add another dimension to the sport.



including Tony Matthews and Mark Neil, help out on the shoot and assist with the never-ending battle to control foxes, magpies, squirrels and crows. Surrounded by suburbia, the shoot is vulnerable to foxes and only constant vigilance by lamping keeps the situation in hand.

## An all-inclusive shoot

On a raw grey day before Christmas, the syndicate of nine Guns and a dozen beaters, including several youngsters, gathered for a pre-shoot coffee and roll. This is a shoot that, quite rightly in my opinion, takes a democratic approach to the sport. The beaters, pickers-up and the Guns are a team who mingle together and have one aim in view, good sport. Picking-up on this day was Michelle Athey with her two very efficient Labradors.

This is a driven shoot in the making and several of the drives have been created virtually from nothing. The first, Landfill Hill, was once a council landfill site, but now, by judicious blanking-in to a high brush-and-tree-covered bank in front of the Guns, a modest number of birds can usually be sent over the line. Next year, covercrops will be planted here to improve the holding cover, but on this occasion only a handful of pheasants and partridges were flushed, though none provided safe shots. On then, in a drizzle of rain, to the second drive, Landfill Lake.



With instruction from his grandfather, Dick Tomlinson, 12-year-old Charlie Caulfield brought down his first duck on the Bluebell drive

Again, the beaters blanked-in a long stretch of silver birch, oak and ash to send over the line a dozen or so good birds. I was standing with Mark Neil, who comes from Leigh-on-Sea, near Southend, in Essex, and who has been shooting for 25 years. The rain had ceased, blue sky and sunshine brought light to the day, and as a jet hissed overhead, Mark killed a neat pair of hens, while Guns to my right dealt with a sudden flurry of birds from the copse in front. This, as I discovered



Dick Mumford, father of the shoot's keeper Richard, at the second drive, Landfill Lake



Picker-up Michelle Athey was kept busy throughout the day