

Run rabbit...

By Sine Robertson

Some farmers are happy to let experienced people shoot rabbits on their land, grateful to have the rabbit population culled by people who enjoy the task of vermin control.

Paul Washington, "the bunny assassin" of Lochinver in Sutherland, has gone one step further. A seasoned ghillie and gamekeeper, he has linked the task of vermin control to the thrill of the sporting shoot, furthermore, he has polished the link by providing access to accommodation, creating an attractive package for visitors. For himself, Paul has founded a business which is starting to flourish.

He takes up to three shooters, paying to shoot rabbits flushed out by ferrets, with the option to have friends spectating in a safe position, and advises them as to essentials – third party insurance, warm, waterproof clothes and a supply of cartridges.

"Ferretting and rabbit shooting is a very exciting and vastly underrated sport. Many good shots who are used to shooting pheasants or even clay pigeons don't know the fun and excitement to be had from trying to match the speed of rabbits flushed by ferrets. A lot of older people, farmers and country sportsmen, say they learned to shoot with rabbits," he said.

Paul describes flushed rabbits as "fast, furious and unpredictable as to direction". With driven pheasant, shooters know the range and direction from

which the birds are coming and shooting etiquette dictates the narrow range, bound by shooting neighbours, within which one can aim, while clays are predictable, released deliberately and with a warning shout.

For those keen to shoot in a spectacular location, Paul can arrange shooting and accommodation in Sutherland. Paul works closely with Kinlochbervie Hotel, but he can help his guests to make other arrangements if required. Meanwhile, those who book into the hotel can, according to season, opt for additional sport in trout or salmon fishing and sea angling.

Paul is widely experienced in other branches of vermin control. "I do a lot of mole trapping in winter. I put an ad in The Scottish Farmer saying 'distance no object' and I got work all over – from Fort Augustus to Ayrshire! I don't mind traveling a distance if the farmer can put me up. Mole hills do a lot of damage; the soil can damage the blades of the silage cutter, but more importantly, the soil brings bacteria into the silage and it can spread listeriosis which causes abortion or death in sheep and cattle."

"I work with Border terriers and I sometimes go out foxing with hound packs, but mostly I do dens in spring for crofters and estates in the north. It's important to protect the lambs from the devastation of the fox," he continued.

"The method for flushing out rabbits from the burrows is traditional; an exercise in team work between me, the dogs

and the ferrets, and it makes for challenging shooting. You need a fast reflex – and plenty cartridges," he laughed.

"There may be lots of rabbit holes, but only some are occupied; the terriers mark the ones that are in use and tell me exactly where the rabbits are. You want to work with the wind in your face and stay downwind of the rabbits. I put the ferrets in – and wait for the rabbits to appear. The ferrets are quite slow, and if they get stuck, I trace them from their locator collars and have to dig them out, but generally, the rabbits come racing out. You wouldn't hit a running rabbit with an air rifle pellet, you need the scatter of shot from a cartridge to catch them. It's a big challenge and some people get frustrated; it's not easy until you build up some experience, but it's suitable for all ages and levels of shooting ability," he explained.

■ For further information see www.bunnyassassin.com or contact Paul Washington 01571 855379



Paul and his Border Terriers take in the scenery on a shoot



Shooting at Kinlochbervie



Youngsters enjoy rabbiting and before getting near a gun, learn many important aspects of country sports, including safety and the handling and care of dogs and ferrets.



Ferrets get to see the prize

