

ESSENTIAL ETIQUETTE

A beginner's guide to correct conduct. After all, you want to be invited back. By Rosie Nickerson

Traditionally, shooting was a sport for aristocrats, landed gentry or farmers. The only newcomers to the pastime were their sons and, occasionally, their daughters, who spent years in the beating line absorbing all the dos and don'ts.

Today's shooting novices are often immensely successful professionals who have the means to catapult themselves into the heart of some of the country's leading shooting estates. Some have barely had more than five lessons at a clay school. This is like going heliskiing in the Rockies after just a few days on the nursery slopes. It doesn't always work out well.

Hunting is also having something of a renaissance, with hunts up and down the country reporting record numbers of new subscribers. This is one of the most social of all the fieldsports and a good working knowledge of the correct etiquette is vital for the newcomer to be properly accepted into the fraternity. William Cracroft-Eley, joint master of the Burton Hunt in Lincolnshire, advised me on hunting etiquette.

The beauty of fishing is that, as long as you aren't affecting anyone else or doing it illegally, you can go about it as you wish. Behaviour is either dictated by the rules of the beat on which you are fishing, or by common sense and good manners. Jonathan Young, editor of *The Field*, gave me guidance on essential points of fishing etiquette. *Rosie Nickerson is the author of How to Be Asked Again – How to Be the Perfect Shooting Guest (Quiller Press, £20)*

NAKED ANGLERS SHOULD ALWAYS WEAR AN MAG NARY HAT TO RA SE POL TELY



Fishing

BR NG A L T T L E S O M E T H N G FOR THE P C N C



ILLUSTRATIONS: STEVEN APPELBY

If you're salmon fishing and another fisherman comes along, don't hog the pool. Cast, let the line swing round, then take a big step down river. The newcomer will follow you down.

If you're the newcomer, never cut in front of the person fishing. Try that on a Scottish fishing-club water and you're likely to end up in it.

Keep all noise to a minimum so you don't disturb your neighbour fishing further down river.

Always take money to tip the ghillie and offer him, if he works hard, a slug of malt from your hip-flask.

If you're invited fishing, it's polite to take something for the picnic. Potted shrimp and a bottle of Sancerre are standard. Cool the latter in your landing net, dunked in the river.

Try not to bolt home early. You might make supper but you'll miss the evening, one of the most productive times of the day. And you'll be abandoning your host.

Never kill a salmon unless you've been given express permission. Many rivers now operate a catch-and-release policy. If you do kill a fish, it's not yours to keep until after you've offered it to your host.

Many women catch salmon on dour days because they actually follow the ghillie's advise on salmon flies and where to cast – a lesson many men could learn.

Never do what a famous journalist did and get up early to fish before breakfast, on a beat that was assigned to someone else in the party that day.



Hunting

Check the correct dress of the hunt you are joining. If you choose to wear a top hat and tails, you will stand out, and if your riding is not up to it, you will look a fool.

Buy an Ordnance survey map so you can find your way to the meet without getting lost. It's always worth tacking up your horse before you set off. That way you will both be calmer if you arrive late.

Your horse must be clean and well-groomed, with tack clean and in top condition. Replace it if it isn't – your life hangs on reins, stirrup leather and girth.

Always make a point of saying good morning to the master and never use their name, always address them as master: 'Good morning, Master.'

The three golden rules are never overtake the huntsman, never ride ahead of the master and never head for hounds. Doing the latter means that you may be putting yourself in the line of hounds, and crossing the scent.

If your horse kicks, sell it and get one that doesn't. If you insist on taking it, tie a red ribbon on its tail and you MUST keep out of the way at the back of the field.

Always follow the master's line across country. They know where you can and cannot go.

Always obey the master's command. Their authority is absolute.

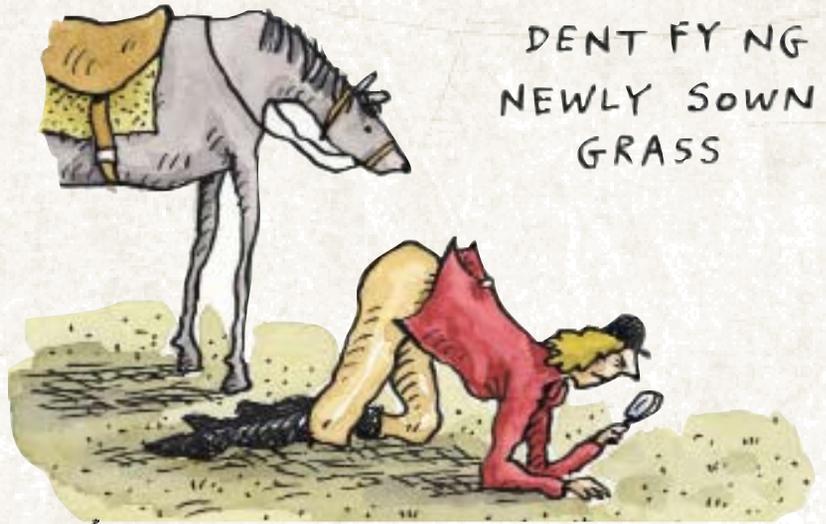
Make sure you close gates behind you. And thank anyone who opens a gate for you. If they have dismounted to open or close a gate for you, wait for them to remount before galloping off.

Always be courteous to anyone on foot – they may own the land you are riding over.

Don't ever ride on crops or newly sown grass. To the non-farmer it might be hard to tell. Try to learn to identify them, and if in any doubt keep tight to the field edge.

Never gallop through fields of livestock. They may be pregnant. Treat them as you would a pregnant woman.

Never let your horse kick a hound. Hounds are as sacred as masters – if they need to pass you, turn your horse to face them.



Shooting

NEVER PULL THE TRIGGER
UNLESS YOU ARE SURE
THE SHOT IS SAFE



Always arrive on time. There may be up to 40 shoot staff all lined up in the cold and wet, waiting to start the day.

Don't forget vital bits of kit – you would be amazed how many people forget their cartridges or, on some occasions, even their gun.

Never pull the trigger unless you are 100 per cent sure the shot is safe.

Don't poach your neighbours' birds. Once or twice can be amusing if you've known them since birth but never more, and never when it's your host, a youngster or novice shot.

Driven-game shooting is not a competitive sport, it is a team effort. You should never discuss how many birds you shot unless specifically asked. Don't brag!

Smile and talk to the shoot staff as you see them, and thank the beaters as they stream past after the drive is over.

Count and mark where your birds have fallen when possible and make an effort either to pick up the wounded birds yourself or, at least, advise a picker-up of where you think they fell.

Thank your host repeatedly during the day, telling them what a great drive you've had or how well the birds flew, and so on. However charming your thank-you letter is when it arrives a week later, the guest's attitude towards their host on the day is what's remembered.

Never drink too much at the shoot lunch, and don't dawdle once your host has announced that you have five minutes to get ready. 'Two pm in the vehicles' means exactly that, so don't be the one lingering in the loo.

Always tip the keeper, and ask your host if you're unsure of the amount. And don't just tip, say something about what worked particularly well that day.

Accept the gift of a brace of birds from the keeper, even if your freezer is full of them. You can give them away later but it looks rude not to take them on the day.

Write your thank-you letter promptly. A handwritten letter is expected, but you might get away with an email if it's a very good friend. □