



# ANIMAL CONCERN NEWS

*Campaigning for animals since 1876*

SPRING/SUMMER 2005

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## AIRGUNS: DEADLY WEAPONS; NOT TOYS.

In Animal Concern News we try not to use too many graphic photographs as we know these can upset our supporters. In this issue we make an exception as we are not writing this for the benefit of our supporters.

People who support Animal Concern know about the pain, suffering and damage caused by air weapons. We hope our supporters will use this special issue of Animal Concern News to convince the new batch of MPs that airguns are indeed deadly weapons and not toys.

I have campaigned against the misuse of airguns for nearly 30 years. First with Friends of the Earth and then with Animal Concern. I know what I am talking about.

Every year airguns are used to kill many thousands of wild animals and birds. I'm not talking about someone cleanly shooting a rabbit for the pot. I'm talking about thugs talking pot-shots at swans, songbirds, squirrels, hares and just about anything they come across.

Pets are frequent targets of the .22 and .177 sharp-shooters. Cats seem especially prone to being shot at. Perhaps because they are out on their own and because some misguided gardeners do not realise they are not allowed to shoot cats which come into their garden.

Farm animals and horses are also victims of air powered cowboys. Many are injured and maimed by lead pellets fired from air pistols and rifles.

This Animal Concern News focuses on our campaign against misuse of air weapons. Please use it to question prospective MP's and to lobby those who are elected on 5<sup>th</sup> May.



Sidney Mansfield rescued his dog Bell from Milton Animal Welfare Centre. Bell was shot in the right eye with an airgun pellet on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> March 2005 in the grounds of the old Keil School in Dumbarton. A vet had to remove her eye but could not recover the pellet which was lodged in her brain.

Despite the best of care Bell did not respond to treatment and had to be put down on March 13<sup>th</sup> leaving Mr. Mansfield angry and distraught.

PHOTOGRAPH COPYRIGHT BRIAN AVERELL

## SPOT THE DIFFERENCE



Pic GM/Animal Concern

One of these guns is a .22 rifle, one is a .22 air rifle and the other is a .410 shotgun. The only difference is that a 17 year old can go and buy the airgun without a license or any checks. They can all kill.

The mentality of those who deal in airguns can be gauged by a lengthy threatening e-mail we received last October from an employee of a company called Outdoorsman of 122 Bohemia Road, St. Leonards-on-Sea, East Sussex TN37 6RP. This nutcase decided to put us on a hit list and told us we would be targeted in a secret, illegal campaign. It was not very secret as I traced the e-mail to their shop within about 45 seconds!

We sent the police round and they gave the culprit a verbal warning.

Airguns come in a variety of shapes, sizes and power variations. A basic (but lethal) pistol can be bought, new, for as little as £13. A new rifle can cost from under £35 to over £1,000. Second hand guns can be bought for pocket money prices.

Those nice people at Outdoorsman have a very extensive range of airguns. They also sell other items such as crossbows, Ghurka Khukri knives, machetes, Black Widow catapults and electric shock collars to help you train your gun dogs.

Some of the air rifles are powered by gas canisters which means you do not have to break the gun to load the pellets. One canister can let you fire up to 230 pellets.

Outdoorsman also sell air pistols, some of which look like revolvers or automatics.

You can buy over a dozen different types of lead pellets and steel darts to fire from your gun. There are pointed pellets to help penetrate fur and feather and hollow-nosed pellets reminiscent of dum-dum bullets. Apart from the animals and birds killed by being shot by these pellets many others will die of lead poisoning after ingesting pellets which miss their target.

Outdoorsman proudly proclaim;

*"We are happy to provide you with a discreet, personal service over the telephone. Alternatively you can either buy online with our 'Add to Basket' buttons and pay with your credit card, Email us with your request at sales@outdoorsman.co.uk, send us a shopping list and cheque or Postal Order to our shop or telephone us for a personal service on 01424 429343."*

I went through the purchase procedure on their website up to the point where my credit card details were required. At no point was I asked my age (you now to be 17 or over to buy an airgun).

Outdoorsman is just one of many outlets selling airguns and other lethal equipment. Most major towns will have at least one shop selling these weapons. This is in the UK in 2005, not Dodge City back when we were first established in 1876!



Pic: Sunday Post

The above picture of Jean Fulton and her cat, Cheeky, was used in our 1990 campaign to ban airguns. Since then hardly a week has passed when we have not had a report of another animal injured or killed by airgun pellets.

If only our politicians had the courage to make decisions instead of useless compromises.

**STOP PRESS:** As I am writing this (7/4/05) a report has just come on the radio news saying a six-year-old boy from Edinburgh is undergoing surgery after being shot in the head by an airgun pellet.

The Scottish Justice Minister has admitted to us that nothing is being done to monitor hunts to ensure they do not break the Protection of Wild Mammals Act 2002. Strange that the police could send van loads of officers and the odd helicopter to keep an eye on Hunt Sabs but they cannot send out a local bobby to make sure hunts observe the law.

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You may remember our campaign against poor conditions at the Argyll Wildlife Park near Inverary. The Park has now lost its license and been shut down.

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The annual rescue of hedgehogs from the Uist cullers is now under way. If you can offer a safe garden home for some teuchter Tiggywinkles please let us know.

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If you are in the Highlands this summer keep your eyes and ears open for evidence of "industrial scale" deer culling. We especially need evidence of close season shooting of heavily pregnant hinds, a practise we want MSPs to make illegal.

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A children's entertainer calling himself "Animal Man" has been plastering the West of Scotland with flyposters advertising his "mini-zoo" which he will bring to children's parties for a fee. He told one of our investigators that "Animals don't have feelings". After nine months of inaction it was only after we used the Freedom of Information Act that Glasgow City Council took action. They have told Animal Man to register under the Performing Animals Act 1925. All he has to do is apply and register, there is no mechanism by which we can object to his application. Looks like we have found yet another loophole in animal protection legislation.

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Over the winter we received several reports of neglected sheep from across Scotland. We must make sure new legislation gives these animals protection.

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We received reports that in February 15 dogs were used in a dog fighting competition in Renfrewshire. It was organised by gangsters from Scotland and Ireland.

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Keep an eye open for fairs giving goldfish as prizes and let us know where and when you see them.

There will be an Animal Blessing Service on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2005 at 3pm in Craigiebuckler Church on Springfield Road, Aberdeen. All animals and their human companions welcome. For further info please contact Myrna Forrester on 01224 313367.

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As you know we have been critical of many of the policies and practises of the SSPCA. We questioned if it was appropriate for Brian Pack, Chief Executive of Aberdeen & Northern Marts (the biggest farm animal auction group in Scotland), to be Director of the SSPCA. We also opposed SSPCA plans to close several animal welfare centres instead of cutting back on highly paid staff at its Edinburgh HQ.

SSPCA hired a new Chief Executive last year. Since then several well-paid admin posts in Edinburgh have been done away with. The Board of Directors has been cut from 24 to 12. Brian Pack made it onto the new 12 person Board but was among 4 of those who subsequently resigned. So far no welfare centres have been closed. It looks like the SSPCA finally has a Chief Executive with the right priorities!

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From 10am to 5pm on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> April Viva!'s Incredible Veggie Roadshow is at St. George's West Church, 58 Shandwick Place Edinburgh. It's free!

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The next meeting of the Scottish grass roots animal rights/welfare coalition is in Stirling on Sunday May 29<sup>th</sup> Contact Lynda at Advocates for Animals on 0131-225-6039 for full details.

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We suspect Michael Rodent and Donald Drake have been recruited as consultants by the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Theme Park Authority. Why else would they still be advancing plans to imprison foreign otters in pens at their concrete castle and pushing for permission to create giant fish tanks on the shores of the Loch? We must wait until they apply for a Zoo License before we can oppose these ludicrous plans. Meanwhile Animal Concern is thinking of applying for public funds to turn Ben Lomond into the world's biggest helter-skelter.

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The draft of the new Animal Welfare (Scotland) Bill is due any day now. We will contact Members with lobbying advice once the Bill is published. Any supporters on e-mail should send us their e-mail address to be kept up to date with campaign alerts.

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If you see shops selling real fur send us the details and we will send them the details of where fur comes from and the suffering it causes.

Following the death of young Andrew Morton on 4<sup>th</sup> March (the second child killed by airguns in Glasgow in less than 6 months), Animal Concern sent the following message to all MSPs:

*"Dear MSP,*

*Sorry to have to write to you again so soon after my e-mail about livestock farmers but today I must write concerning the hellish incident in Glasgow where a two year old child has been killed by an air weapon.*

*I am not jumping on a bandwagon here - I have been actively campaigning against the misuse of airguns for over 25 years, first with Friends of the Earth and then with Animal Concern.*

*I first became concerned because of the vast number of incidents where pet, farm and wild animals and birds are killed or injured by thugs with airguns. Ask any vet how many animals he or she treats for airgun injuries and I'll bet you would be shocked by the numbers.*

*After looking into the issue more deeply I discovered that airguns are used in 65% to 75% \* of all reported gun crime in Scotland every year. They are used in robberies and assaults and are a favoured tool of vandals. Each year several people are blinded or otherwise maimed by airguns. Every couple of years or so airguns are involved in fatalities.*

*We should never forget that Thomas Hamilton gained his love of guns through air-rifles and first came to the attention of police as a teenager when shooting birds from his bedroom window. He later used the promise of air gun "training" to lure young boys to his clubs and camping weekends.*

*When the new tightened laws were recently brought in on airguns we dismissed them as inadequate. I think today's tragedy proves that.*

*Airguns should be banned or, at the very least, restricted to licensed pest controllers and licensed target sports gun clubs where they are kept under lock and key when not in use and never leave the premises.*

*It may take years to take the majority of existing airguns out of circulation but if the law is changed as soon as possible it would stop new guns going into circulation and start the change required to protect innocent children and others from people who think these lethal weapons are mere toys.*

*Regards, John F. Robins, For Animal Concern"*

Later in March First Minister Jack McConnell expressed support for similar changes in the law to those we had proposed. However, as firearms control is a wee bit complicated and too big an issue for silly Scots to decide on their own, it is a reserved issue. We also raised our concern with the Westminster Parliament.

Caroline Flint MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Home Office, wrote on 23<sup>rd</sup> March stating: *"We recently toughened controls on air weapons by raising from 14 to 17 the age for owning them and by making it an offence to have one in a public place, even if it is not loaded." ..... "We are presently reviewing firearms law in its entirety and we are looking carefully at whether further controls on air weapons are necessary."*

If Ms Flint and her colleagues had listened to us decades ago and banned airguns perhaps Andrew Morton and several other people would not have been killed by them in recent years. Even before the *"toughened controls"* were brought in it was already illegal to carry an uncovered airgun in a public place. There must be no more tinkering with the laws, only a ban on the widespread ownership of airguns will do.

**CALL FOR ACTION:** Question your parliamentary candidates on airguns. Ask if they will support a total ban, or, at the very least, restrictions on the ownership of airguns to licensed pest controllers and licensed target sports gun clubs where they are kept under lock and key when not in use and never leave the premises. Also ask that firearms laws be devolved from Westminster.

Immediately the election is over get the name of your new MP and write to him or her asking them to take urgent action to gain the above objective.

Whenever you see someone with an uncovered airgun in a public place (including the owner's own garden if it is not totally enclosed) dial 999 and report it to the police. Encourage others to do likewise.

\* **NOTE:** The figure of 65% to 75% of Scottish Firearms Crime involving airguns was accurate almost every year until 2001 when the number of "Unidentified" firearms rose dramatically. Latest figures (2003) show 43% of offences involved airguns and 37% unidentified guns. It is likely many of the unidentified guns were airguns. It is also the case that many airgun crimes, especially those where the victims are animals and birds, are never reported.