

# Crunch time

While some of the corporate world may struggle, most will shoot through the credit crunch, says **Mrs Moneypenny**

**D**ID the Countryside Alliance get it wrong after the hunting ban? Instead of worrying about a few scabby sabs attacking shooting it should have been concerned about the pinstriped assault from within. The death-knell for shooting will be sounded, we are told, not by regulators but by the sub-prime crisis, credit crunch or whatever you want to call this unholy mess that the world's financial system is in.

This is tripe. To explain why, I am going to debunk the five most prominent current views circulating among those nervous of what the financial revolution will mean for shooting.

1 *Corporate shooting is over, because it's impossible to be seen shooting when you're laying off staff.* Well, I have done four days so far this season and know of many other people on corporate shoots. It is true that certain CEOs are more sensitive about being seen shooting – I have had one person decline an invitation for this reason and another tell me he will do Saturdays only – but there are many others who have readily accepted hospitality. Shooting remains the only corporate entertainment on any scale that allows for an opportunity to develop a relationship with key contacts while enjoying a day's sport outdoors. Fishing will never replace it – too few people fish and it is not as easy to learn as shooting.

2 *Corporate shooting is over now that the banks are nationalised or semi-nationalised because governments and taxpayers won't wear it.* Banks are not the only companies that take corporate shooting, and even before this crisis did not even account for the majority of days. Lehman Brothers, for instance, did not host shooting, and being abstemious with the lead did not save it. So corporate shooting is here to stay, however many banks are nationalised.

Private companies will always shoot. I have frequently acted as the front person for senior people who are not allowed to host shoots, so I pay and they invite, which introduces me to many senior people that I would never have met otherwise. And people who love shooting will pay for it out of their pocket and spend it while they can. It's as well to remember that

many cash in their chips later in life. If you're 60, you have a good 15 years to be active in the field, maybe more. But the reality is that the seasons are running out, not the money.

3 *Bankers will be out of the running in the future but other City sectors will be buying the shooting.* People who don't have shareholders (for example lawyers, other partnerships, private companies, me), will be buying shooting, as will wealthy private individuals. I also predict that more people will set up roving syndicates where they can enjoy the sport and like-minded company for a fixed price per head. And those in the wider financial community, such as hedge funds and private equity, will continue to shoot. As economists would point out, shooting is not an easily substitutable good. What are you going to do with your shooting clients instead?

“ Shooting is the only corporate entertainment that allows for a chance to develop relationships with contacts while enjoying a day's sport ”

4 *Sixty-plus days-a-season commercial shoots are already finding big gaps in their schedules, with guns not turning up even when they've paid their deposits.* This seems to me pure Chinese whispers – it might have happened once or twice this season and will in any season occasionally. I have just bought a day on 12 December which took me ages to find and cannot find any accommodation to use alongside it. The whole of Gloucestershire, it seems, is full the night of 11 December. I am having to resort to borrowing the home of one of my guns, a major City figure, which is cost-efficient but not ideal.

5 *This season is pretty safe but next season will be very different.* Yes, but different in make-up, not in volume. Demand will still be there but not from the usual places. Shoots will have to

work harder and sub-standard shoots will no longer be able to rely on demand exceeding supply. I shot the other day at Edgcott, run by Angus Barnes, who manages three other



work harder and sub-standard shoots will no longer be able to rely on demand exceeding supply. I shot the other day at Edgcott, run by Angus Barnes, who manages three other

shoots nearby. It set the standard in quality and presentation of birds, organisation and hospitality. This is the kind of shoot that will survive in the new world.

There's one other truth to remember – the commercial shoots and their clients do not constitute the shooting world. The vast majority go rough-shooting, belong to syndicates, enjoy wildfowling and pigeon-shooting or are fortunate enough to belong to the network of small private farmers' and landowners' shoots that Venn diagram almost every acre of the UK. One thing's for sure: they will be there next year, as they have for the past hundred, whatever happens in the City. ■

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