

## Sounds Like a Plan

Following on from November's duck flight, the pinks that I had seen on my way back to the car pestered me for the rest of the day. I just had to try for them especially as the tide would allow me to get into a small creek 50m from the rivers edge.

Next morning my alarm went off at 0430. After a light brecky the car was packed with the minimum amount of equipment and I was soon on my way to my usual car park. The weather was similar to the previous day - a stiff west breeze and no frost - chances were good for a repeat flight. Timing should never be an issue for any keen wildfowler. Being 5 minutes late will have grave consequences so it's better to be 30 minutes early and be listening and watching just in case there are roosting birds on your way out. We have all mistakenly stumbled on them at one time or another.



In darkness you will be using years of navigational skills to follow small run-offs into creeks and flooded areas left by the tide. Distant lights, some in various colours, are more than helpful.

Proding with my wading stick I edged out over the mussel and cockle beds carefully taking the firmest route - old age is not an option! After approximately 40 minutes I had reached my chosen spot. During that time I had wigeon and pintail overhead, these birds were appreciated but not on the script for a goose flight. I settled down on the edge of a small gully keeping

myself dry. Being warm was already taken care of via my stroll out. It was like any airport – waiting, almost departure time, anticipation was at maximum.



I could hear the sound of pinks on the northern side of the river however they seemed much further than I had hoped. It's always so very disappointing to realise that after all your efforts the birds have roosted in a slightly different area.

With the light almost fully in, they all jumped up at once - a great sight and sound. However before the first of them reached the river I could tell it was going to be a light bag I would be taking home. As they came directly overhead I could only tip my hat to them, approximate height would have been around 50m alas too high for my steel shot, so that was it no chance for the following day because the tide was now pushing me back down the gulley. I could see reference points that I had taken now under water - time to leave the family of seals that were just in front of me, the flight was over.



Four wild swans - whoppers - heading over the sea wall, the familiar bugle calls confirming their identity.

The wildfowler on foot today be it on the sea wall or out over the mud now has a more difficult task than ever bringing home a wild bird for the table. On a low tide to get out there on a new moon you have 3 or 4 days in the month with dark and natural light. On the full moon the same number of days with unnatural light where the birds are unpredictable. Weather like fog, wind, and drops or increases in temperature all hamper these days. On top of this there are natural predators – foxes and sea eagles - all these added up together make it a small window and huge effort.



On a high tide attempting a flight at the sea wall there are more people about in the early hours than ever before. As members of the public they have every right to be there but unfortunately most geese are flying in the grey dark and day light hours which means the wildfowler will be meeting them. Even when heading out for a flight it is quite common to meet the general public carrying out tasks before going to work.

Runners, bikers, walkers, dog walkers and bird watchers all with the latest head torches, collar indication lights for dogs, flashing and non flashing. Places that were pretty remote are now well within reach as more people are getting into the countryside to carry out their sports and hobbies.

Good luck with your Christmas goose let's hope I will not be buying a farmed one. Hope to see some of you at our annual general meeting.

JM Secretary