

## The Basin

### Morning Flight

The car lights stabbed into the darkness and miles of tarmac thundered under the wheels as I drove north. A brief interlude followed as I picked up my good friend and guide (JE) for the day. Another 40 minutes of driving found us at the main car park of one of the most iconic wildfowling estuaries in Scotland. Despite it being the middle of January it was quite remarkable how mild it was. Quickly we got our kit on. The warden appeared and permits were checked and found to be in order. Walk on time arrived and we were off without jackets on!

The walk out was a slog but spirits were kept up by the constant calling of pinks on the roost. I was assured that we would avoid spooking a good number of geese that could potentially flight over us by taking this route. Thankfully the walk came to end and J suggested for me to take his favourite spot, which I gratefully accepted. He then took up a position some 100 yards to the south of me. A brief search had me settling down on the driest bit of mud I could find. The gun was pulled out of its cover and two long grey cases of steel shot were slipped into the chambers and the gun snapped sweetly shut. Now ready I waited to see what the dawn would bring.

It became quickly apparent I was in the wrong spot as in the lightning gloom two groups of 3 pinks passed wide of me 80 yards away. No sooner had I moved and settled down on that line then a party of 4 birds swept towards me, scarcely believing they were geese, being so low I had to wait until they were broadside so I could identify them as pinks. Very little lead was required as my first basin goose slapped on to the mud quite dead. I held the dog back on the retrieve as I heard more geese on the wing, disturbed no doubt by my shot. And out of the murky dawn a skein of 40 pinks in full voice bore down on me. They drifted away slightly but the tail end Charlie was on. A more aggressive swing was needed, the first shot missed but the second hit home, the goose fell clearly dead on to the mud. This time I allowed the dog to pick up. Chances thereafter were slim, my only other chance was poorly missed as it caught me unawares. The lighter it got the harder it was to remain invisible on the very flat mud and as such it was easier for the geese to see me and take avoiding action! J had been out of the flight line but he had a few shots which went astray. However wildfowling is more than just shooting and it was wonderful to watch the mass skeins of pinks flighting out of the sanctuary zone, I did not however see so many ducks. All too soon the flight was over and we made our way off the mud to the car.

### Between flights

Back at the car J received a call from his friend M, who invited us up to his house. A short 5 minute drive and we were there. The next few hours were spent drinking tea, swapping fowling tales and looking at the two 4 bores which M owned. J and I then agreed it was food time so we headed in to the local town. We found Tesco's and had a hearty fry-up in the cafe. We nursed our food as long as we could as we tried to spin out the time till evening flight. Outside as we left a stiff south east wind had sprung up which raised our spirits for evening flight.

## Evening flight

We decided to return more or less to the same positions as we had in the morning. To return the favour I suggested that J take the first pick on his position, which he did. I settled on a nice little gravel bank. Away to the south I noted a fowler taking up spot way out on the mud. A few pairs and single pinks were flying aimlessly about and a pair which came tracking towards me offered the first chance of the night. After trying to remain still as I could, the pair swept by at 40 yards. Managing to get on to my knees a well-aimed shot of steel no1's rattled a bird hard. Unbelievably it did not fall, I followed its flight for 200 yards where it all of sudden dropped dead from the sky. The dog had marked its fall and I sent him on his way and he performed a text book retrieve.

At last the day was almost night and far to the south came several large skeins which swept down over the river and to safety in the reserve. Inwardly I groaned and hope we would see some geese this side of the basin. A few shots were heard off to the south and it was clear a fowler was getting some sport.

Before long geese were heard to the north and I eagerly turned to face that way. Broken up by the wind the geese came - not in a few large skeins but in manageable skeins of 30, right up to small family parties of 6 or 7. For some considerable time the geese came this way, not more than 30 yards high. Thankfully J was under the flight line as well and we had some fine sport and 6 pinks lay on the basin mud beside me. Personal bag limit reached, I put the gun away and sat transfixed watching as more and more pinks came in. It seemed to me that more came back to the roost than had left this morning.

No more shots were coming from J so after sorting my gear out I sought him out and found him with 4 pinks. He was in the act of packing up himself and in any case shooting time was almost up. Together we walked off the mud, with geese still coming in, not as intense as half an hour before but still coming. High as kites we shared our experiences of the flight and before we knew it were back at the car. Then all too soon the car was rumbling south to home, but I will be back!

SW Club Member



