

A Missed Opportunity

Shooting a Drake Pintail for me is reaching wildfowling paradise. Even more so given that I have never achieved that accomplishment. Come with me then to a cold, windy and rain lashed Estuary in December for evening flight and see how this wildfowlers luck was or wasn't!

There was already a car in the car park as I pulled in. Dressing quickly into fowling gear and shouldering gun and whistling Mal to heel I was off. In the hide right on the point I found the owner of the car, a local fowler, and a brief chat was had but I had a distance to go so I made my excuses and left him in his hide.



The Illusive Drake Pintail

Hastened on by the wind at my back I made quick and good time to the pool. I knew the walk back would be a killer in the teeth of the wind. Settling down on the mud and loading the benelli up, I saw movement to my right as a wildfowler made good his position next to the river. Then a few minutes later I saw another fowler moving into position over to my left, again by the river. This was pleasing as we were all well spread out across the mud and as such we'd hopefully keep any birds moving. Old style wildfowling - my favourite and oddly this had happened a few times this season.

Right on dusk a couple of shots rung out from the fowler to my right and I gripped my gun tighter in anticipation of birds coming my way. But nothing appeared, it wasn't until the night had closed in a bit more and a shower had passed that the birds started to move. A couple of packs of Wigeon fluttered by on the edge of range, they got closer as it got darker and as such it was just a question of time until I got a shot. The height of the birds really struck me - the wind had such strength they could only fly a couple of feet above the mud, very impressive to see.

At length a pack of Wigeon flighted toward me in the gloom but peeled left and a single shot from the auto brought one down into the Wigeon pool, Mal clattered out into gloom to collect. Birds were on the move constantly now and another couple of shots had two more Wigeon in the bag. The flight was really hot when a pair of birds hung over me, fighting against the wind. I raised the gun to the left hand bird and as I fired I saw the long pintail of the other bird. A drake Pintail. Paradise in reach the Benelli was swung on to it, the trigger was squeezed and then nothing.... The gun had jammed and the Pintail made good it's escape. I could've wept - my first chance at a drake Pintail on my own local Estuary and my gun had let down.

Mal returned with the Hen bird which did nothing to improve my mood. It then seemed that the flight had passed, obviously the fowler to my left thought so too as I saw him coming off. I remained in my position and I gave him quite the fright when I spoke as he passed by.

Perhaps it was the fright I gave him or maybe he had blanked I was given a brief grunt of acknowledgement as he squelched off into the gloom.

I myself packed up and headed directly south for the shelter of the old railway line and thus out of the gale. It was a rueful walk to the car and my thoughts turned to getting an sxs shotgun for next season which I duly did that summer. There was a surprise for me at home when I was able to inspect the birds in the light - It transpired I had in fact shot two Hen Pintail. It would have appeared there was a few Pintail about that night but my luck wasn't in, I guess I'll just have to keep trying!

This happened five or so years ago and I'm more than happy to say I have got my drake pintail but that's a story for another time.



Pintail, Mallard, Wigeon & Teal

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