

## First fowling foray of the season

My first fowling foray of 2018 turned out to be full of surprises, A few days after a full moon was not ideal. Setting the alarm in the wee small hours is never a thing that I look forward to and it also means that you may be eaten alive by midges if you're hiding in long grass, or worse still, thick reeds. It was over the mud flats for me so at least there would be no insect bites across my forehead and neck!

En route by car my first stop was to inspect a badger which was laying by the roadside looking like it may still be alive. Unfortunately this was not the case, however it was still warm so could only have happened within an hour of my passing.

Having parked the car and walked to the sea wall I gave it the usual five minutes listening for whatever I could hear. The bad news was that the light was coming in already - always difficult to gauge near a full moon. With both gun and fishing rod, for this was to be a dual purpose attempt, I slowly headed out along a tidal run-off that would take me close to the river. Halfway out I caught sight of two fine flights of duck going over in the grey dark - shoot-able if I had been in my anticipated position. There is no excuse for being late so I had to take that one on the chin.



Close to the river I found a small creek with a good firm shell-strewn bed that would support me in a kneeling position and at the same time keep my head below the flats level. Once settled in with a couple of steel no 3s slotted into the barrels I was at last ready for action!

However, for the following hour nothing happened. Not one duck came my way. There was a little bit of excitement when 30 odd Canada geese passed me honking loudly but they were slightly out of range. The time was now 7am and for me the magical duck time was over. Fishing was now on my mind however I kept the gun ready as I walked towards the river. Overhead there were two peregrines showing off - no wonder the local waders were in a bit of a frenzy.

Just as I was relaxing and enjoying my stroll towards the river, I heard a familiar 'wink! wink!' followed by others! Pinks! I dropped like a youngster and slid two BBs into the browning. After about five seconds the noise grew louder and I slowly lifted my head to see what was happening. About 100-plus birds were approaching low and right over me. Staying calm and from the kneeling position I edged the browning up, taking the birds directly above - both dead in the air and coming down within 30 metres - well away from the river. 'Did that just happen?!' I said to myself. A left and right on my opening morning.

Using my wading stick I carefully made my way over some rather soft mud to collect a young and an adult bird, washed the estuary mud from them and slipped them into my waterproof game bag. The tide had now turned giving me less than an hour to pick up a sea trout. There were seals swimming around - does that indicate fish?! Unfortunately it was not to be so I had to leave the poor man's double for another day.

Whilst packing the rod away and making my way back to the sea wall, I turned round to watch the resident seals popping their heads above water - was that them smiling? Or was it just my imagination?

JM