

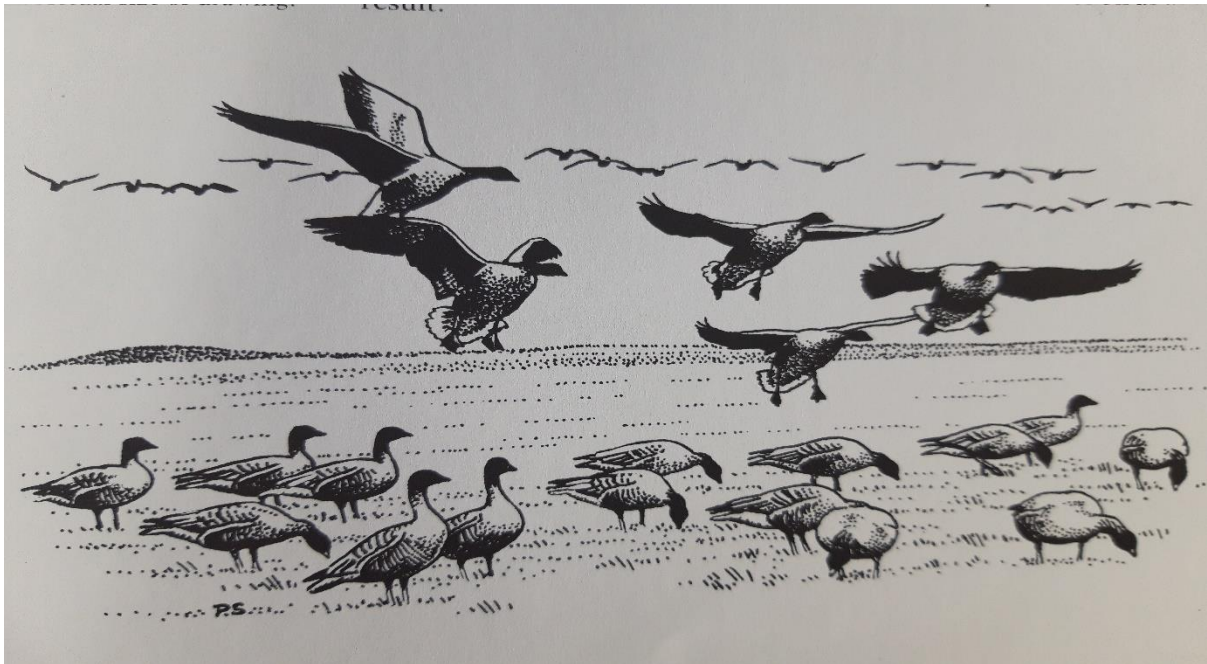
The Magical attraction of Wildfowling

It's certainly not everyone's cup of tea but for some of us being in a remote wild place on your own and watching the morning come alive is simply heaven. Unfortunately these places are slowly becoming less wild and the main reason for this is population numbers which our planet expert Sir David Attenborough has already suggested.



Looking at our situation here in the Kingdom of Fife there seems no end to the increase in housing that seems to be required. Even our small villages are taking a big hit in respect to this. This means the loss of what used to be farmer's fields that secured privacy and small amounts of food to various species of wildlife, developments bring people closer to what used to be wild places, causing the original inhabitants to pack their rucksacks and move elsewhere, if they can! I've noticed that other areas in Scotland are doing pretty much the same, if someone was to work out the simple maths I am sure the total amount of land used would equate to a surprisingly vast area. Politics is not one of my strong points and for that reason I will leave it at that.

The Eye of the Storm



Every now and again it is a wildfowlers privilege to witness extraordinary events and so it was for me back in Jan 2012. High winds were forecast for the beginning of the week and on the previous Sunday afternoon the wind had developed into a storm. Like any self-respecting fowler I was rubbing my hands and planning my tactics for I knew there were good numbers of pinks roosting in my local estuary. Driving up that morning I was delighted to hear Radio Scotland mention wind speeds of over 70mph coming from the south west, perfect - for me, but not so good for everyone else.

Opening the Landy door wasn't very easy and I remember taking great care not to lose an arm as I slithered out. Fancy hats wouldn't have lasted long so with the old balaclava on I battled onward towards the sea wall to a point where I had anticipated they would cross over.

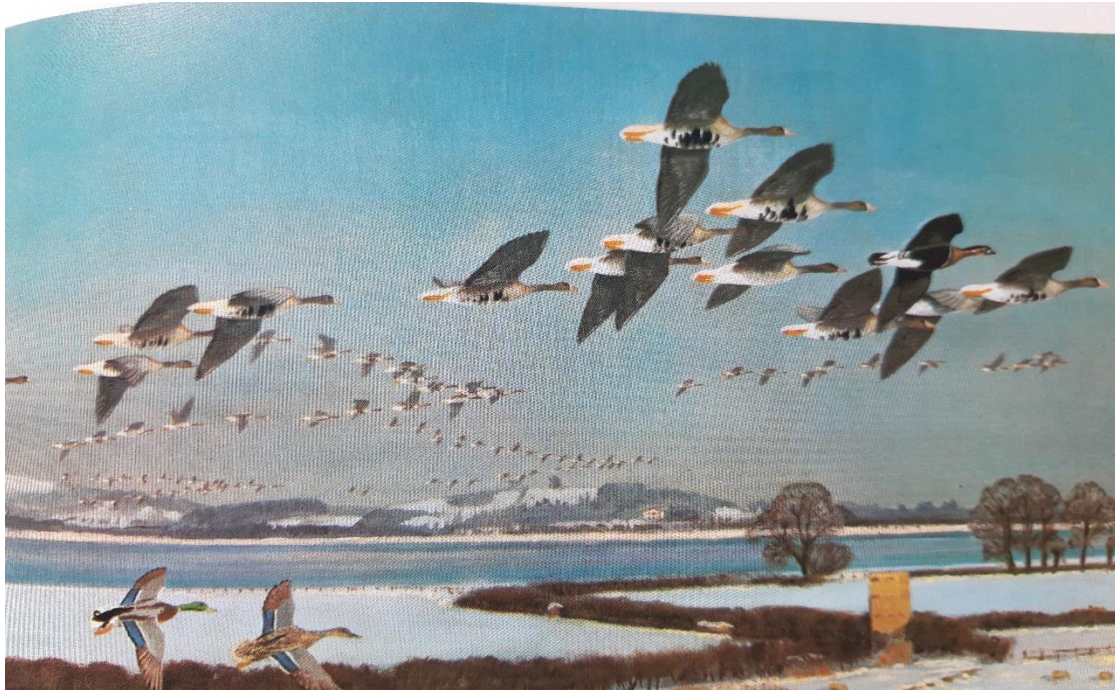
It was still dark when I arrived to my chosen spot and the 30 minute wait before flight time was more than welcome for I had been bent over walking into the wind which was by now more like a storm and still increasing. I would like to say that the sound of roosting pinks could be heard but that was never going to happen with the wind levels. Gradually the darkness faded and I could use my trusty binoculars to scan the flats out in front of me, unfortunately nothing was seen.

Not seeing birds out on the flat estuary wasn't good - I just had to wait and hope for the best. In the meantime as the daylight came in so did the storm. I was curled up in a small whin bush and unknown to me at the time the wind had been gusting at over 100mph. If you've never experienced it I can assure you if you lean into a wind at that speed it will actually hold you up!



At Last I heard the sound of distant pinks, only coming way over from the reserve slipping 2 shells into my browning I felt ready, they were a long way off and crossing the bay where I thought they would have been. Just as the excitement was building I seen them divert and land way out in the bay. They had only flown about 500 meters. Looking with my binoculars confirmed they had joined a group I hadn't noticed. Relaxing I watched another 200 odd birds do the same then 10 minutes later a small group jumped up from that spot and headed towards me, I had got my position right after all. As the bunch came closer I could clearly see how tough it was for them to fly into the storm. So bad that half way they turned round and went back to land beside the others. This was something I had never witnessed before and I wondered what would happen next. Approximately 15 minutes later the storm seemed to ease and at that time a larger group took to the air and crossed the sea wall 100 meters to my right- they were only 10metres high. Then as I watched them cross the first field they about turned crossed the sea wall and landed back with the others, amazing! They obviously thought that the wind was still too strong for the distant field

they intended. As any fowler would do I moved to where they had crossed and lay in wait.



I've no idea what the wind speed was at this time but it was certainly dropping and now a fair sized skein was heading straight for me, these birds were both the lowest and slowest I had seen so I took 2 birds out in front and watched them fold and fall on the estuary mud below me. I turned to watch the rest as they flew over the field and on to their destination.

Another large skein jumped probably knowing that the wind was now falling to an acceptable level. This last large bunch were battling towards me however I was more than happy with 2 in the bag hence they flew safely on to join the others not knowing who was admiring them from below. It was just their luck I had bagged 2 birds for some good friends the week before on another estuary or I might have taken more.

I would never have imagined that I would witness a day where the geese were not physically able to flight out from the estuary, but there you go!

From the Chairman, Treasurer, and myself have a merry safe Christmas and all the best for 2021.

JM