



February's newsletter is usually late and this years is no exception. Accepting a late invite to shoot driven Woodcock added to an already busy calendar and with the opening of the Tay Salmon season it was full steam ahead towards the 20<sup>th</sup> February. Oh! and by the way driven Woodcock is certainly one of those things that requires to be experienced before you die!!

Beaters days have come and gone, on both the estates that I attend throughout the season all went well, with lots of craic, great food and in the company of like-minded people enjoying well organised safe days.

What we have left as I write is the remaining Wildfowling days below the high water mark. As we all know this can produce the chance in severe weather conditions, if they come, to pick up a bird or 2 before February 20<sup>th</sup>.

That leads me on to a recent Fowling Foray only last week with a young Trainee Gamekeeper who was lucky enough to bag a Canada back in September 2021 however the estuary duck up until now have been proving a wee bit more difficult.

## An evening flight to remember



Let's call this young man Rooster, he hadn't been out over the estuary that much this season a Canada being his only recordable bird unfortunately the ducks were managing to avoid his other few efforts and with only a couple of weeks left and the limiting tides and mild weather things weren't looking good.

For myself it was the usual checks tide, wind, temp, moon and dark time. I had chosen an evening flight that involved max effort in the walking department especially with a handful of decoys, shells, binos and refreshments, yip it was a long haul over the mud and not for the unfit!

Luckily it was a fine dry late afternoon stroll with the wind exactly as required to give us a great chance of bagging something resembling a duck. On the way we observed small packs of wigeon and mallard sitting on the edge of the tide also tracks on the mud indicating that an old 4 legged pal had been out hunting hours earlier. Before putting out our decoys we came across a lone Pinkfoot sitting on splash near the edge of the tide Rooster dispatched the bird with the appropriate device, once home a thorough examination would determine whether it was edible or not, great start no shots fired and a pink in the bag. Placing Rooster where we had flushed duck earlier seemed like the right thing to do before the tide would push us off to our intended position.

I had only set out the deeks and was walking over to my position when 2 shots went off. Turning round I marked a mallard drake as it crashed down into a large patch of estuary grass. Rooster had shot his first foreshore mallard, after 5min of searching we came across a couple of fresh feathers and seconds later the young man picked up a rather splendid drake bird and after much smiling handshakes and congrats we returned to our individual spots.

Shortly afterwards I had a mature male Pintail fighting to one side of me unfortunately over deep water hence no chance of a shot it continued over Rooster but carried on unseen. Then a pair of pins went over him and 2 shots rang out the female dropped like a stone dead in the air for sure and easily picked. I went over to offer congrats again! And to point out that it wasn't a small female mallard but in fact a much respected Pintail. Books are great for quarry identification however nothing beats the real thing, had he shot the male it would have been a lot more obvious. The next time he sees them in flight his identification will be spot on.

When the darkness hour approached it was a wee bit disappointing I did manage a fine drake mallard missing a second bird with my second shot Rooster got 2 shots off but never connected after that very little came in and who could blame them. My young friend had shot well given the opportunity's

With our rucksack and game bag loaded up 3 ducks and a goose strung over our shoulders we headed back listening to the skeins of pinks streaming in to the estuary it was now dark and the stars were fully out what a magical place to be. Feedback from Rooster was what we thought the pink had lost a lot of weight it hadn't been shot, now that was good news for his ferrets who were all in for some fine dining! Nothing is wasted on the foreshore!



Quality Foreshore Mallard Fillets

JM