



Looking west from the remains of Lucky Scaup tower gives you fine views of Tayport and onwards to Dundee, Broughty Ferry being almost opposite to the north. The tower was erected around 1861 after the local salmon bothy was demolished, Admiral Dougall reused the stones which took the tower up to approximately 33ft. It had 2 levels with a spiral staircase for access. The Island itself was believed to have been created via ballast from sailing ships coming back from Perth docks.

During the summer season you can spend many a fine day casting a line and hoping for a wild seatrout which will be heading into the estuary and then on towards Perth and beyond. If your luck is in you might even see a pod of Bottlenosed Dolphins as there seems to be around 50 with calves in and around that area. (usually seen chasing salmon)

On the next page I've gone back in time to 1995 with an article from what was Eric Begbie's excellent Wildfowling Magazine. The topic of Inland fowlers and Estuary fowlers has been going on since I can remember it's a touchy subject however I like to keep it light-hearted as I enjoy both disciplines and if the end result makes for a happy landowner and presents a delicious meal then all's good with me.

JM

The Best Laid Plans.....

Creekcrawler discovers that, even inland, success is not guaranteed

EACH YEAR there is inevitably a report or two in the sporting press about so-called "sportsmen" who have ignored the ethics of wildfowling and shot a very large bag of geese on the inland feeding grounds. Conduct such as this tends to taint the reputation of an entire branch of our sport.

To make matters worse, there are folk like me who write colourful reports of foreshore fowling and, either by implication or decree, insist that inland duck and goose shooting cannot be classed as "true" wildfowling. The Guns who seek their quarry above the high water mark are somehow second-class citizens who lack both the skill and the grit to pursue the fowl on the mud and saltings of our estuaries!

The time has come to make amends and to confess that I do not really look down my nose at inland goose shooters. It is also important to demonstrate that not all decoying involves an unholy slaughter.

I recall one outing when everything conspired against success. Torrential rain had fallen throughout the night and my 10 mile drive had to be taken with the utmost caution to avoid the deep flood water under which several sections of the road were submerged. Doubtlessly the local authority would have its standby squads out to clear blocked drains long before the commuter traffic took to the highways but, at 5.30 am, I passed several stranded motor cars on my journey to meet a well-known fowling guide at the hotel which served as his base.

Persistent Drizzle

WHEN I DREW up in the car park the rain had abated to a persistent drizzle. Under the halogen security lights I was introduced to the two visitors who would be shooting that morning and I nodded sagely as the guide recited his ritual briefing. No guns were to be loaded until the hides had been built and decoys set out. The geese should be allowed to circle until they were within easy range and no-one must shoot until he gave the word. Whatever the outcome, we would leave the fields by 9 o'clock in order that the birds might be allowed to settle and enjoy a full day's feeding without harassment. His lecture concluded, our guide then climbed into his van and led the small convoy eastwards.

At the farm we parked in an extremely muddy field where, our boots squelching in a veritable quagmire, four bulky sacks were unloaded from the vehicle and hoisted on to our shoulders. Thus laden, it was necessary to cross two fields of barley stubble and one of soft rutted plough before reaching the place where geese had been feeding the day before. Only a wire strand fence gave any semblance of cover so the first task was to unpack camouflage netting from one of the sacks and drape it over the wire. To give our hide a more natural appearance, armfuls of straw-coloured grass were piled against the base of the netting and a few tufts woven into the mesh to break up the uniformity of its outline.

One of the other sacks contained half a dozen full-bodied plastic geese while the remaining two held 40 lightweight shell decoys. Under the master's instruction we placed those out on the barley stubble in an irregular pattern, taking care to ensure that the majority faced into the wind. Some wildfowlers believe that they can make do with 10 or 12 decoys but most professional guides consider that a much larger number is required to give a realistic impression of a feeding flock.

While we patiently waited in the murky dawn, the visiting fowlers, who hailed from Ireland, told tales of flying whitefronted geese on the Wexford Slobs and shooting mallard, goldeneye and pochard beside Lough Sheelin. Then, from far away in the grey morning sky, we picked up the faint music of pinkfeet. The guide put his wooden goose call to his lips and began to talk to the, as yet, invisible skein. Peering through the mesh of the netting we scanned the horizon as the sound of the pinks grew in intensity. At last, through the mist and drizzle, a wavering line of around 30 birds emerged and the master changed the notes from his call to produce the low, chattering murmur of feeding geese.

Lower and lower came the pinkfeet, circling the field once, twice and then a third time. They were obviously interested in the decoys but hesitated to approach too close. On their fourth circuit we thought that the birds were about to alight amidst their plastic lookalikes but, while still over the centre of the stubble field, the leader wiffled from the sky and the others followed to land 150 yards from our fence.

Real Geese

THAT IS just about the worst thing that can happen when decoying. During the next half-hour three more skeins of pinks approached but, try as he might with his call, the guide could not persuade them to come to our decoys in preference to the ever-increasing flock of real geese in the middle of the field. Eventually, true to his word, he announced that it was 9 o'clock and we drew stumps without having fired a shot.

Over a hearty breakfast in the hotel a post-mortem was held. Our best guess was that the incessant rain had imparted a slight shine to the decoys but, as is always the case in fowling, there could have been a dozen other explanations. Whatever the truth, the lads from Ireland were not downhearted and were already eagerly anticipating the next morning when, perhaps, a change of strategy might bring the geese within range.



Inland shooting on Loch Leven