



November has seen some large numbers of geese passing through central Scotland, being there to intercept them is never easy especially for fowlers who are earning a living and hoping for a flight on a Saturday morning, I remember it well. Checking out movements on a Friday morning was always a great help if you could manage it before going to your work place. Even then that could easily be ruined by evening fowlers having a go at night hopefully not on their roost but still enough to move them on to their second choice bed time arrangements.

This season I've had many requests for information on where to go etc and my answer is always the same, you need to get yourself out there and sacrifice a few mornings shooting for reconnaissance, even that can change some times at the last minute. However you will eventually get yourself closer to the birds flight paths and when you do remember that old distance gauge of seeing the eye before slipping the safety catch and pulling the trigger this will ensure you are within 25 to 30 metres.

The clubs AGM is being held as usual in the Abbey Inn Newburgh on Wednesday 7th December at 8.00pm, committee members to be there at 7.30pm all invited.

For Decembers newsletter let me take you on one of those Wildfowling adventures where unexpectedly things all fall into place! And you end up with a rather hot heavy bag on your back!!

An unexpected morning flight fills the bag

My alarm was set for 4.30 am and having gone to my bed around 10pm ensured that I would get around 6 and a half hours sleep, more than enough especially as all my gear was laid out in almost military fashion for a quick breakfast and similar exit. What I didn't plan was one of my attic mouse traps springing into action around 3am. Every year when the temperature dips I suddenly have the company of the local field mice. Whether I got back to sleep or not is unclear but eventually my alarm sounded and within 30min I was loading the Landy and on my way to one of my local estuary's. The previous morning I had witnessed more than a few pinks flying Westwards from the estuary unfortunately not at the height I would have liked some were having a good look at the surrounding fields before continuing further west.

A weather change was on the cards and this was the main reason I decided to attempt to get under them. As I left the vehicle there was a definite wind building up and by the time I arrived at my chosen spot the tops of the reeds were bending ever so slightly in the direction that the forecast had suggested. There was approximately 30 min before my estimated flight time and groups of teal were popping in and out of flooded splashes 10 metres from where I stood at least I knew I was well hidden Teal are no fools however they were quite safe as my focus was completely on larger quarry that would hopefully be arriving as the morning light came in.

The wind was now gusting from time to time and with it my hopes of birds at a sensible distance, I counted 90 odd cormorants flying east towards the estuary no doubt heading for breakfast, lunch, and tea. Their numbers have trebled over the last 5 years which just shows how well they are doing!

The greyness of morning had just about disappeared when I spotted a small group of geese dropping completely silent into an adjacent field, my binoculars confirmed they were indeed Pinkfoot. If the bigger skeins came and followed their lines there would be no opportunity of a shot for me, and that's exactly what happened. Watching them dropping in and using my binoculars it was noticeable that there were 2 male birds that looked huge, both were leading separate skeins as they piled in to the winter crop. I estimated their weight to be slightly over eight pounds, now that's big for a pinkfoot.

There was only one thing I could do and that was to move west along the river hoping that they would jump up and head to the fields I seen them in yesterday. The reeds allowed me to quickly re-position unseen and having gained around 100 metres I stopped to catch breath only to hear a loud roar of wings, this was it something or someone had spooked the whole grand army! And it wasn't me.

Ear defenders on, cartridges in, and peering through the reeds showed they were already over me. Staying as calm as I could I let the first lot pass before taking a second wave their height was perfect and I was none too pleased to miss with my second shot the first coming down in the field, I was trying to take them out front to avoid dropping them into the river. Still more waves were coming and quickly reloading I shot a pair both dead in the air again they dropped into the field. 3 birds down and hopefully marked as well as I could. The flight still wasn't over and I only had 2 cartridges left so lifting the Browning for the last time came with additional pressure and it showed when I stayed on the bird to long and dropped it smack into the middle of the outgoing tidal waters.

Now If I had been a dog owner the water retrieve would have been my first priority but looking at the rate of flow and where it would take it I decided to pick my 3 birds in the field first hoping that no raptors would steal my pink which was floating belly up and looking very white and bright!

My marked birds would have gained me top marks at any of the local spaniel trials fairly straight out and into the bag, oh and a well taken jump over the fence! So within 10 minutes I was loaded up with 3 fine birds and checking my 4th through the binoculars I could see it was safely floating towards the other bank where I hoped to pick it after a 20 min quick march. No swimming required!

By the time I had reached the other side of the river my back was beginning to complain a wee bit, I also felt a slight warmth coming from my 3 mini quilts, then on seeing my 4th pink floating nicely at arm's length I relaxed knowing that they would now at last have the company of one more on the way back to the vehicle

It was a morning that just seemed to work out for me and if you're wondering why I only had 6 cartridges then my answer is I like to travel light and secondly if I haven't got a bird or 2 with 6 shells then I must be doing something wrong!

On behalf of the committee I would like to wish all members a very merry Christmas and all the best for 2023

JM