



Gedney Drove End & District Wildfowling Association

Affiliated to: B.A.S.C and Countryside Alliance
Headquarters: The Rose and Crown, Fleet Hargate
Web: www.gde-wildfowling.co.uk
Honorary President: Mr S Piccaver
and Vice President Sir J. Hayes M.P.

Re: Letter of Support – Nomination of Wildfowling for Inclusion in the UK Living Heritage Inventory

On behalf of Gedney Drove End and District Wildfowling Association, I am writing to express our strong belief in that wildfowling is an important element of UK Living Heritage Inventory, and to confirm that we fully support the efforts of the British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) to seek formal recognition of wildfowling in the UK Living Heritage Inventories.

Gedney Drove End was formed in 1963 when the local wildfowling were in danger of losing the shooting on the marsh. General disturbance of the marsh by uncontrolled wildfowling and increased awareness by various conservation bodies, also the problems of operating a live firing range by the MOD were the main causes. The first meeting was held in the "Wheatsheaf Inn", Gedney Drove End, which is sadly no longer there. In 1969 Holbeach Wildfowling Association, Spalding Wildfowling Association and Gedney Drove End Wildfowling Association joined forces to form the Dawsmere Group. From that union emerged an agreement with the MOD to allow members of the three clubs to wildfowl over MOD marshes, so giving greater control over this area. The alliance continues to this day with each new commanding officer of the RAF bombing range being fully briefed from time to time on wildfowling matters. GDE offers shooting from Lawyers Creek in the West to the River Nene in the East, managing the marshes with regular litter collections, adopting best practice and working with governing bodies for the best interest of wildfowl and wildfowling.

Our Chairman, Nigel reflects on his time wildfowling.

Iv been wildfowling since the age of twelve so for over forty years mainly on the foreshore but quite a lot on inland washes and ponds. I have experienced many flights after Pinkfoot geese under the moon and morning flights. Shooting geese under the moon is magical their sound is intensified which makes your heart start thumping. I've had some good flights at geese but I am more unsuccessful than successful on the marsh your chances are a lot better inland but I never worry of the bag size if there is one. In my forty years of shooting, I have managed to shoot all the wildfowl species apart from a whitefront. There's been some amazing flights at ducks sometimes iv shot far too many when I was younger but the size of the bag doesn't matter anymore, I'm as happy and lucky to come off the marsh with a single bird nowadays. This season I remember shooting a right and left at a pair of pintail a drake and a hen both in full plumage in complete darkness just those two ducks made my season from that moment. My real passion though is decoying on an evening flight on some splashes either by myself or a mate but always with my dogs For me its all about the anticipation of some ducks suddenly looming out of the darkness on set wings coming into your decoys sometimes with only just enough light to make them out. Its strange how well you can shoot in total darkness at birds you can hardly see but for me that's exciting. There's been many nights over the seasons shooting wigeon and teal like

this with other species mixed in. I can still remember most of these nights as if it was yesterday and I hope I get the chance of plenty more. As wildfowling we will sit out on a freezing wet marsh in the darkness at a ridiculous time for that one chance of a shot. But the proper wildfowling will be back out again as soon as they can.

UK wildfowling has a history dating back centuries. It possesses a number of elements that set it aside as a living and evolving practice combining traditional knowledge and skills to maintain a sustainable harvest. It includes locally rooted knowledge of tides, weather, habitat conditions and the behaviour of the plants and animals found in coastal areas managed for wildfowling. These practices embody a close, beneficial relationship with nature underpinned by a strict ethical code, established safety practices, and a strong sense of responsibility towards the environment.

Historically wildfowling was an important source of livelihood in coastal areas and an affordable source of food within traditional coastal foodways. Wildfowling's role in shaping coastal areas and traditions is reflected in landscape, local language and customary practices. As wildfowling has developed from a source of income to a sporting past time for naturalists, the clubs that now manage the marshes, both salt marsh and in-land washes with conservation in mind, whether that be the introduction of no shooting areas to allow birds opportunity to rest, or full-on reserve to promote not just wildfowl but natural areas for all species to thrive.

For myself personally wildfowling offers the opportunity to return to a simpler way of life, being immersed in the mud flats, the tide and wind a making a difference to chance of success, providing a small source of sustainable meat to feed my family, every bird is hard earned.

I am a member of several clubs around the Wash and North Norfolk, all areas offering different tests and experiences. My Grandfather and Father were both fortunate to wildfowl with the legendary McKenzie Thorpe, I was keen to shoot my first Pinkfooted goose on the Wash. On arrival there where several intrepid 'fowling' already geared up and ready to go, they disappeared off into the darkness, they were clearly in the know to where the main flight line would be, but the business of the car park also meant one thing, the geese were in. Making my way to the left of the access away from the river, the tide was up, meaning that the creeks were full and very little cover on offer, an early chance in the half-light would surely be the chance if any. On the walk out half a dozen geese were heading towards me, skimming the grass, Brent surely, quickly removing the old gun from the slip. A basic 12 bore 3 " Spanish Magnum, my Grandfather had bought in the 50's, both my Grandfather and father had shot their first pinkfeet with this gun, and so had I many years earlier on the Norfolk coast, the barrels had been parkerised to help it against rust on the salt marsh, this had caused the barrels to turn silver, which is the name the gun now held, 'Old Silver'. A single wink wink, confirmed they were Pinks, what a chance, keeping still in the darkness they started to drift to the left, further and further and just out of range, maybe another chance would present itself. Finding what cover, I could in the grass, the geese started to move, in my experience a high tide pushes the birds of the roost earlier, the flight line was down the river, several shots echoed the marsh. Gulls were also moving inland, flopping across the gentle waves, but one was flying straighter and faster, a single goose in the half light, keeping down, pressed into the wet crab grass, it was going to pass to my left again, it looked to be just in range for single shot from the choke barrel, up and swinging through the bird plenty of lead, and pressing lightly on the trigger, the bird instantly stopped and spun out, success! As the morning sun rose so did the geese, but a spectacular sight witness as the large skeins moving to feed inland. Arriving back at the car, the other 'fowling' now ready to chat and debrief the morning. Several geese had been bagged that morning, for me on a morning I will never forget.

Wildfowling teaches field craft, patience, self-discipline and the chance to spend time in a natural wild space, not so common now in the UK, I hope to pass these lessons on to my children and my grandchildren, and hope that they have the same experiences that I have.



Wildfowling skills and traditions continue to be transmitted through informal teaching, mentoring and community involvement supporting a strong connection to place, local identity, and conservation engagement with wetlands.

Inclusion in the UK Living Heritage Inventory would provide appropriate recognition of wildfowling as a living tradition and would help ensure that the associated knowledge, customs and community practices are recorded and safeguarded for future generations. For these reasons, **Gedney Drove End** is pleased to offer our full support for the nomination of wildfowling to the UK Living Heritage Inventory,

Yours Sincerely

Thomas Flavelle
Secretary
Gedney Drove End & District Wildfowlers Association

Signature: *T. Flavelle*