

Weymouth Wildfowlers

From: Richard Williams

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Subject: BASC Heritage and SW Forum

Hi Scott,

Looks like you have mustered quite a gathering for the meeting, well done. I'm sorry not to be there, hopefully next time. As previously informed, Ben Elliott will represent us, but our Chairman Mark Phillips may also attend if he gets back from a trip in time.

Just to confirm for Ben and Mark, meeting is at Exminster Golf Centre kicking off at 7pm on Monday 9th March.

I have pulled together some information and evidence that might be appropriate for the BASC application which is attached. I also thought a brief summary might be helpful – see below.

Weymouth and District Wildfowlers Association shoot over the Fleet, a tidal lagoon behind Chesil beach that stretches from Portland Harbour in the east to Abbotsbury in the west. Approximately 7 miles long, it's an SPA, RAMSA, SSSI you name it, but fortunately for us it is also privately owned by the Ilchester Estate, our gracious and most supportive landlord! We shoot the middle half, if that makes sense with wildfowl sanctuaries at either end. The western sanctuary, is particularly relevant being the "world famous and unique" Abbotsbury Swannery.

The story begins in the 10th century with the founding of a large Benedictine Monastery at Abbotsbury, located in part, to harvest the abundant wildfowl and fish on the Fleet. To augment the migratory and thus seasonal wildfowl the monks established a swannery to rear swans for the table.

Alas for the months, Henry 8th dissolved the monastery and its lands including the Fleet were acquired by the Strangways family in the 16th century. This remains the case to the present day although it is now known as the Ilchester Estate.

Under the patronage of the Estate the Swannery continued to generate Swans and wildfowl for food and the Fleet had a resident population (to borrow a birdwatching term) of local fowlers ultimately using the Abbotsbury branch line to transport their harvest to market. Over the last 150 years or so the Swannery's focus progressively switched from harvesting swans for the table to building a privately owned flock for conservation and latterly tourism reasons

Currently in the Swannery there is a display of historical wildfowling and pint gunning. Pictures attached (more available if useful)

Another key component of the Swannery is the decoy, originally built as an efficient method to harvest wildfowl before the invention of firearms. It is still in use today though now for ringing purposes. Its use and history is featured in a book "Decoys of Dorset" and I have attached pictures of relevant sections. It's clear that wildfowling, using the technology of the day was happening on the Fleet for many centuries.

And so to the current era. In the early 1970's the Ilchester Estate was looking to modernise the wildfowling on the Fleet. By which I mean bring a level of control over the groups of local fowlers and establish their "ownership" of the Fleet's foreshore. Having achieved this the Estate approached the WDWA, then an offshoot of the Dorset Wildfowlers with limited shooting over a small marsh to the East of Weymouth called Lodmoor. (Alas no more as this marsh was partially reclaimed for housing development and what remains is an RSPB reserve.) WDWA agreed to act as custodians of wildfowling on the Fleet taking in the local fowlers and formalising the continued and sustainable harvest of wildfowl from the Fleet under a WAGBI affiliated club. This mutually beneficial arrangement exists to this day.

Hope this is helpful and hope the meeting goes well.

Regards

Rich 1.