

Wildfowl conference 2025

SLIDE 1

Good afternoon everyone.

My name is Chris Kelly, and as you all can hear I come from Lancashire. This is a proper northern accent. I hope you can all understand me. Because there are no subtitles.

I am here today to tell you a little bit about Preston & District Wildfowlers Association.

Slide 2

Where we are // Our History // Our past work and or current projects and /// Our conclusions

I have the honour to be the Chairman of Preston & District Wildfowlers Association. (slide 1 logo) I am here with my good friend Keith Ogden who is the Vice Chairman of PDWA. I have been a wildfowler and a member of PDWA for 61 years.

Slide 3 then 4 then 5

We control a section on the upper reaches of the Ribble Estuary. It is an area of about 1100 acres and we also rent approximately 240 acres of partly reclaimed and partly tidal salt Marsh, as a sanctuary area.

Slide 6

Our club is made up of 110 members, 15 juniors, and 19 waiting list members, all are affiliated to BASC.

The club was founded in 1953 , from its start was affiliated with WAGBI which later as we all know evolved into its current form as BASC.

From its formation the club rented the shooting rights for 1100 acres from Preston Borough Council, and 240 acres sanctuary are from a local land owner. In 1992 the Council decide to sell its land holdings on the marsh, together with the sporting rights. We where able to reach an agreement with the councils grazing tenants, and together we successfully purchased the marsh. Heskeths Farms Ltd purchasing the land, and PDWA the sporting rights. At the same time securing a 99 year lease for the sanctuary. The only problem being that we did not have enough money. . BASC to the rescue , with a loan of almost 50% of our portion of the payment. Job done. Shooting rights secured.

Slide 7

Longton and Hutton Marsh is part of the Ribble & Alt Estuaries SSSI. It is also designated SPA , Ramsar & Natura 2000. Designated of European importance, for its short grazed salt marsh, essential to over wintering wildfowl. Although less than 5% of the whole area of the SSSI, we can regularly have up to 30% of many of the bird Populations that over winter on the estuary. Our peak widgeon count was recently 13,000, verified by our ongoing involvement with the monthly WeBS counts. We are fortunate to have a non time limited consent,

agreed in 1985 by the old NCC, Who proceeded Natural England.

We like most clubs have always thought we where doing a good job conservation wise. Maintaining flashes, maximising our small half acre island site where we could put out nest boxes and nest tubes for mallard, predator control, top up the local duck population number up now and again with released mallard. // But times change.

Slide 9

In 2015 Natural England informed us that unit 15 of the SSSI, did not meet their performance standard for breeding birds, // and so we set about to rectifying the problem. Our solution was The Hutton Marsh Habitat improvement Scheme(project map) . Unit 15 is basically our dry sanctuary. Almost 165 acres of reclaimed salt marsh, now used predominantly for silage production, and winter grazing. Post and wire fencing, less than twenty trees planted in an small open coppice, and two land locked former gutters of standing water, grazed down to the waters edge. Not much opportunity for birds to nest, anywhere.

Where to start? // We needed Land owners permission, Natural England permission, and last by no means least, the funds to do it, and do it right. // First NE to persuade, not as difficult as I thought. // Then the money to find. We spent a considerable amount of time and effort putting our grant application together. We where able to convince BASC in its guise as WHCT, that this was a worthwhile

project, and a grant offer was secured. Lastly to sell the scheme to the Land owner, and convince him that there were advantages for him. That was the harder // a lot harder.

Not an easy journey // But who ever said, "Life would be easy". // My dad once said to me, "who told you life would be easy" but he also said "There is always a way". Our passion prevailed. Possibly a little bit of stubbornness was involved, // and the project finally got off the ground in 2022 // "only took 7 years". A 10 acre site fully fenced. Seasonally excluded grazing. Water level control. Enhanced nesting opportunities.

Also we were able to top up the grant from WHCT with a grant from the Lancashire Environment Fund the // first shooting organisation that body had ever supported.

More recently a grant from the Ribble Rivers Trust to pay for planting that will speed up the protective habitat cover within the Project.

And did it work? // "Yes it did."

Slide 11

Target species in the five year plan, took up residence in the first year.

Red Shank, Oystercatcher, Little Ringed Plover, as well as the ducks we expected, Mallard, Gadwall, Shoveler and some stay behind Wigeon. Egrets, Wagtails Swans. All witnessed nesting, and fledging young. Our first reed bed well established, our second one underway, nest tubes,

nestboxes, all successful. But the icing on the cake, was 6 pairs of avocets taking possession of a couple of newly built islands. The first breeding colony of avocet's ever recorded on our marshes. 11 chicks fledged.

This was the first major conservation effort we had undertaken, but it has opened a door of opportunity, and has given us the vision of what we can achieve. What we can ALL achieve.

Slide 12 then 13 then 14

Project Penelope

The Hutton Marsh Habitat improvement Project provided us with a manageable site, for our involvement with Project Penelope. Project Penelope was and is, a European wide collaboration to study the migration of Widgeon from their wintering grounds in the UK, to the breeding grounds in northern Europe, and Siberia. Cannon netting over wintering birds, and then fitting the standard BTO metal ring on the right leg, and a coloured ring on the birds left leg, with two letters or numbers, so that the birds can be identified with optics or cameras, removing the need to physically capture the individual in order to update its record and details. // Knowledge is the key.

Again WHCT are the funding body that made it all possible. We at Preston did not claim any part of the funding as part of this project, We where happy to donate our time and effort to further the knowledge of this enigmatic quarry species. But we did not only catch Wigeon.

Slide15

The Hutton Marsh Camera Project

Born out of our involvement with Project Penelope we saw an opportunity to open up an area with no public access (our improvement scheme), and make it useful contribution to scientific study.

Again with funding from this time from BASC Wild Life Fund, we where able to buy the kit, and set up the infrastructure to make this happen. 4G IP cameras, cloud storage, data contracts feed etc. The c peability of these cameras is fantastic. I was able to set them up, view and record from America, 4500 miles away.

The species we chose for this study was Shelduck.

Why shelduck? Well the answer to that is two fold. The shelduck that frequent our marsh are changing their nesting habits. Historically Shelduck did not nest on Longton and Hutton marshes. Their preferred nesting sites where in rabbit holes, some distance in land. With the collapse of the local rabbit population due to myxomatoses' Shelduck are forced to do something different. // We have noticed that they are now using nest

boxes, and nest tubes, that we have introduced into the Hutton Improvement Scheme, to provide nesting opportunity for Mallard. If we can fit a combination of coloured leg rings to the birds on our marshes, we can then identify individuals, study their behaviour, habits, competition for nesting sites, and their nesting success. As always Knowledge is the key. Again The generous support and grant funding by the Wildlife Fund enabled us to pursue this goal. Oh and the other reason we chose shelduck, they have long legs. Easy to spot the rings.

Slide16

What are the benefits.

Importantly these projects, again with the aid of BASC, provide an opportunity to break down the barriers and prejudices caused by lack of knowledge, that unfortunately many of the public have about wildfowlers, Working with bird watchers and bird ringers, people from NE, WWT, RSPB, and other local conservation bodies, helps us to allay and dispel these misconceptions, and show to the Public what we can do.

What we can ALL achieve.

And have we been successful?, and what does success look like?

I think that it looks a little like this.

Heather ringing her first wigeon

Wigeon flighting over the sanctuary

The end of a successful young shots day

A black tailed godwit taking up residency on the Hutton project.

Or the success of our first Avocet colony.

So what is to come? A couple of artificial rabbit warrens to study the Shelduck. A sand martin nest barrel, mini nest tubes for grey wagtails , small bird boxes and bat boxes in our mini coppice, Bee hotels to encourage the growth of our solitary bee population, another reed bed, another Gravel beach, another island, all to maximise diversity on our relatively small site. Working with The BASC wing survey (1427 wings supplied so far), participation in the nest tube monitoring, The list of ideas goes on and on.

“ THERE IS ALWAYS A WAY”

Thank you BASC for your support.

Thank you for the confidence in us, that we will do our utmost to deliver.

Thank you for the funds that make our efforts become reality .

And lastly

Thank you all for listening.