

## **Wildfowling History – Self regulation**

When I first started wildfowling in the early 1980s, it was a very different world to what it is today. There were no mobile phones, no digital maps, and certainly no modern clothes. Everything depended on what you knew — and what you had learned from others.

Being a member of the club and going out onto the estuary with older, more experienced men taught me the fundamentals — how to read the tides, how to judge the ground, and most importantly, how to stay safe. In those days, safety knowledge was passed on through stories as much as instruction. You heard about people getting caught by fast-moving tides or misjudging the marsh, and you paid attention because you knew it could happen to you.

Access to the marsh was more limited too. We parked where we could and often had long walks in, always aware that the tide could cut you off if you weren't careful. You learned to plan your movements around the tide tables, watching the speed and height of the water and understanding how quickly conditions could change.

Conservation was already part of wildfowling practice. I remember how, in the early 1970s, clubs agreed voluntarily to stop shooting certain species, like the Greenland white-fronted goose, when numbers began to decline. That decision came from within the wildfowling community itself, long before formal regulations required it.

Equipment has changed over the years too. When I started, I used a simple single-barrel shotgun, and later saw the gradual move away from lead shot towards alternatives like steel, even before it became mandatory. Early steel cartridges were not particularly effective, and many of us experimented and adapted, learning how to make them work.

Looking back, wildfowling was built on experience, shared knowledge, and a deep respect for both the environment and its risks. It wasn't something you could learn quickly or from a book — it had to be lived. And in many ways, that is what has kept the tradition going, passed from one generation to the next through time spent on the marsh.