

Becoming a Wildfowler - Learning to read tides.

I'm 77 last May, so I'll be in my 78th year.

I have been wildfowling. probably since my 20s, 22, 23, something like that, yeah I went with a mate who did a bit of ferreting and then you were in the air rifles when I was really young and then a little bit of clay shooting, not a lot. I enjoyed the pigeon shooting but it was hard to come by.

And then I joined the local wildfowling club and I've been a member ever since, which was Westman Wildfoulers, which is in Cumbria, obviously. Yeah, and since then I've joined, I became an associate member of Morecombe Bay Wildfowlers. Left it a bit late at my age but I'm a member, a provisional probationary member now. When you get into the full category from associate, as associate you get three tickets per year but you've got to go out with a full member and that's a difficult part. Anyway, when you get in as a full member you're on a probationary for two years, you've got to attend the social events and all that sort of thing, do you remain, and help out where you can. They have work parties like any other club. Now I'm in my second year, so whether I get in as a full-fall next season, I'm not sure. We'll see.

You learn about wildfowl when you first start it's usually going with somebody else who's a bit more experienced and they guide you, you know, where to go. Tides are very important with wildfowling, what tide to go on and what not to. I always try and make sure I've got a retreat so I can get off the marsh. I mean some of these wildfowlers have been at it for a long-long time, they know that some of the marsh like the back of their hands. They'll know what height they can go on, what height you can't get off and all that sort of things. You've just got to be so careful with wildfowling because you get an onshore wind, right, and a low depression, it can bring the tide up another. It can bring that tide up another meter.

So if you were on the borderline when you went out and then this big strong westerly bringing it in you've got to be... ..you can be caught out so you've got to be really careful

So that learning from somebody else is... Yeah, well, you go... with somebody in there and they'll say well you can go on this side you'll be alright in this gutter it'll only come up to you when you're in a gutter (drainage channel) you might be down in and you've got on the marsh where the tide runs and you try and get a bit of cover in what we call the gutters but if the tide's making... ..we have belly waders on and you could be up to your knees within the gutter and then it will start to go back so you're alright. So there's certain heights you can get on and certain heights you can get off and all that sort of thing. And it's all experienced isn't it? If you know you can get on on a 4.5 meter you're alright. But if that winds on short, that's what you've got to look out for.

Why do I do it? I don't know what it is, it's, I know besides if you do get a bird and you're lucky enough to get a bird to eat, but it's, it's the early, if you go mornings, everything's waking up, the sun starts to come up, you'll hear things and see things that you won't see any other time and as it stars to come like, the birds start, the gulls start coming off, the lap wings are coming back onto the land, the curlews start moving, you'll see little egrets, all sorts of things, as well as the wigeon and I knew the wild fowl, you'll see things you won't

know. I've seen a fox on the mark, I was that in the gutter one morning and I looked and there's a fox trotting along the top of the bank, another time I was behind a seabank and I had my dog next to me and I looked down the bank and I could see this thing coming along the top of the bank and it was like rolling backwards, it was a badger, my dog got up and I grabbed it by the scruff of the neck and said, leave that alone and it spun round and off it went, so I saw a badger, you wouldn't think you wouldn't see a badger on a marsh, well I was under seabank at the time, yeah.

Conservation

On Morecambe Bay, there's a couple of marshes where they cut a bit of the turf back in the middle of the marsh, so that when the tide comes in, they just take so much of the turf off in a certain area. And when the tide comes, it will leave the water, it will leave water and basically you're making a flash for the duck to follow. You see, ducks like watered up and they'll come in and they'll feed on the grass round the flash, especially with them, they're like feeding on grass, just dabbling through the water and then mark a post that we put out, we'll renew them and repaint them and stuff like that, do you know what I mean?

Maybe a car park that we park on, we'll just put a bit of new gravel down so it makes it hard for the cars to park on, stuff like that. And if you're prepared to do that and help with the club and do the social side, like the hotpot suppers, that's the sort of member they want. They don't want to and you're just going to come and shoot. Shooting is the best bit. That's the bonus bit. The bonus bit. The bonus bit, yeah. Everything else, you know, it leads up to it. And then evening flights, you get the sunset, don't you? And I've seen some gorgeous sunsets, yeah, yeah. But you would never have seen it sitting in the armchair at home, do you know what I mean? Yeah. It's just making the effort to get up and go out, yeah. And as you get older, it gets a bit harder.

Is it still worth it? Well, I think it is. Yeah, I don't go as often as much because, you know, I'm getting a bit stiff in your joints and that.