

Magic in wild places: using the Generic Learning Outcomes framework to explore the experiences of wildfowling communities across the UK

Living heritage has, at its core, dynamic learning passed down generations and providing people with a deep connection to nature and understanding of their cultural identity. It is outside formal educational settings and is self-directed within a community. Through participation, people learn not only practical skills but also knowledge, language, values and social norms that shape their sense of place, belonging and continuity.

"Learning is a process of active engagement with experience. It is what we do when we want to make sense of the world. It may involve the development or deepening of skills, knowledge, understanding, awareness, values, ideas and feelings, or an increase in the capacity to reflect. Effective learning leads to change, development and the desire to learn more."

[Campaign for Learning's](#) definition of learning.

Originally established in 2003, the Generic Learning Outcomes (GLOs) framework expanded traditional understanding of learning in cultural settings. The GLOs draw on socio-cultural and constructivist notions of learning as a process of active meaning-making where learning is lifelong, involving the emotions and the intellect. "Learning plays an integral part in our everyday lives" (*Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, Etienne Wenger, 1998). The GLOs were designed to be open-ended and flexible in order to respond to a broad range of learning experiences that take place in places including museums, libraries and archives, and to take into account that the informal learning environment of cultural settings makes it especially difficult to determine the outcomes of informal learning experiences where learners establish their own agendas. The framework revolutionised the way visitors' cultural experiences are understood by providing a meaningful way to describe and evidence the social and learning value of culture and heritage. The framework is tailored to open-ended, flexible and free learning, that could be physical, bodily engaged, and sensory as well as cognitive. DCMS is believed to have described the use of the GLO Framework as the most rigorous piece of evidence they'd ever seen to back up a call for investment. The Treasury said it was 'most compelling evidence' when it was used during the Comprehensive Spending Review 2004, and the then Deputy Director of DCMS's Museums, Libraries and Cultural Property Division wrote that 'innovative and well designed research' carried out using the GLO Framework: '...provided valuable evidence and insight which has been used to inform Government policy in museum education' [see [2.4](#)]. In 2026 [the Framework was updated](#), to include sensory learning.

Using the GLO framework, we have measured the impacts of experiences related to us by members of wildfowling communities across England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. We have found evidence supporting all 6 of the GLOs: sensory engagement; enjoyment, inspiration, creativity; action,

behaviour, progression; skills; attitudes and values; and knowledge and understanding. The outcomes we found contribute to sense of identity, continuity, appreciation of nature and a connection to the past: all key to defining living heritage.

The material we received from wildfowlers captures the essence of wildfowling as a journey of development and discovery, drawing on rich sensory descriptions and reflective insights. From stepping into the freezing, star-lit darkness before dawn, individuals demonstrate a keen awareness of their environment and a deepening understanding of nature's rhythms. Evidence of knowledge and progression is woven throughout, as experiences with family and solitary moments foster skills, discipline and a respectful attitude towards wildlife. The material demonstrates how actions and behaviours - whether waiting in silence or observing birds - are shaped by inspiration, enjoyment and an appreciation for the challenges and rewards of the pursuit. They highlight the values cultivated through wildfowling, emphasising its role in connecting people to the natural world and inspiring lifelong curiosity and stewardship.

The Generic Learning Outcomes

Sensory Engagement

Wildfowlers are immersed in a vivid tapestry of sensory experiences, as evidenced by the accounts provided. From the moment they venture out into the pre-dawn chill, wildfowlers are greeted by a celestial display of stars and meteors overhead, while the ground beneath them offers the gritty texture of pebbles and the pungent aroma of mud, seaweed, and mussel shells. As daylight breaks, the landscape transforms with the dramatic sights and evocative sounds of wildfowl, including the breathtaking spectacle of skeins crossing a wintry sunrise and the remarkable appearance of wild birds, all of which contribute to a profound sense of connection with the natural world.

As we stepped out of the cottage and into the freezing icy blackness well before dawn, the stars shone bright high above, and shooting stars swelled and faded at frequent intervals.

...you become part of their world, with the awe-inspiring sight and spine-tingling cries of the huge skeins crisscrossed against a winter's sunrise.

I knelt down onto the hard pebbles, and then lay flat, where I became ensconced in a world of mud, seaweed, mussel shells, and their distinctive tangy scent which filled my nostrils.

That was when I got a swarm of teal, maybe half a dozen, which I've never seen that many together in my life.

Just the two of us on a massive marsh watching the sun rise and the mud bursting with life.

Shooting pinks under the moon on the Solway. Being alone on the marsh in foul weather in the early hours. Magical! The dog working on the tide. Masses of geese magnified by the moon.

Often there was no quarry but to see the multitude of waders and non-quarry species from my floating hide was magical. Sunsets and sunrises will remain in memory. And the occasional misty morn with its chill. Just magical.

With Dad. The windscreen was icy. The estuary was frozen – great sheets of ice. We walked past the scary lime kiln in the dark. My wellies were too short to wade the stream so Dad lifted me over. A robin followed us all the way to the Point. It was bitter cold as we waited. The robin sang us a song. As the ice cracked in the main channel Dad told stories of his younger days, outlining punt gunning. I had aching fingers and couldn't mention it to Dad. Teal screamed past us – no shot. I remember the colours of the sunrise and the bird sounds. The huge ice sheets across the mud. Seeing Dad so happy. I didn't want to go home.

Enjoyment, Inspiration, Creativity

The shared moments with family, the peacefulness found outdoors, and the sense of adventure all serve as powerful sources of happiness and motivation. Through vivid recollections and reflections, it becomes apparent how being immersed in nature not only inspires a deep respect and fascination for the wild, but also encourages a creative connection with the environment, be it through observing wildlife, participating in conservation efforts, or simply absorbing the beauty of a sunrise over the marshes.

Despite having had so many successful flights since then, I highly doubt that I will ever have another shooting experience quite like it. And in many ways I hope I don't, as that morning, for me, simply cannot be matched.

Sitting in a hide waiting and watching a kingfisher catching fish not 10 yards away from me. The peacefulness of the morning just watching my dog watching the kingfisher. Not even getting a shot but that was my best morning of the season. Telling my friends about the morning.

My dad and I get the opportunity to spend time together and hone our common interest. We both enjoy our time outdoors and find it peaceful to be sat around cover trying to catch a glimpse of activity in the skyline.

Even now, 24 years later, I recall the wait in a hole in the merse of the Scottish Solway with my dad and cousin as the murky-grey dawn steadily advanced to a greater light... No shots were fired that morning, but I was infected and mesmerised by the whole thing which set me on the everlasting trail of the wildfowl; most notably the pink-footed goose.

It was my first wildfowling adventure under the moon. I remember that sense of the wild, of being alone, although there as someone with me. A sense of being able to escape into nature.

something that is challenging to attain, albeit attainable. This is exactly what 'proper' wildfowling on the foreshore is for me. Despite how experienced one might be and for how many years you've been doing it, it's always different, almost each time you go. The weather, tides, moon, habits of the birds, and the topography are rarely the same. I think it's taught me discipline, and certainly opened my eyes to the natural environment around us which so few seem to see. It gives a connection which I can't describe to the natural world, undoubtedly inspired by the hunting instinct. To put it into perspective, I and like-minded 'fowlers' are goose counters for the national Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme, where we collect essential data to form migratory goose population figures. This interest comes directly from experiencing the geese- most importantly the Icelandic geese, in a wildfowling scenario. However, despite how great it is doing the goose count, it just isn't the same as that intense anticipation which overtakes your soul as you wait, hunkered down into a saltmarsh creek in the dawn, waiting for the first sight and sound of the great skeins lighting in from the sandbanks; with gun and dog nestled in next to you. Most of the time a shot isn't fired, but that just drives you further to keep at it. Persistence, and a deep respect and understanding of these fascinating birds as you become part of their world, with the awe-inspiring sight and spine-tingling cries of the huge skeins crisscrossed against a winter's sunrise. There is absolutely no question of the fact that Sir Peter Scott, the great conservationist, was inspired and driven as a result of his wildfowling obsession to achieve the incredible life that he did in conservation. That piercing, overwhelming desire to be out and pit his wits against the most wild and wary of creatures in the most wild of environments was his motivation. It's exactly what I get from wildfowling, although I'll never achieve what Sir Peter Scott did of course!

And even on a blank day, I always make it that I try and learn something.

Seeing special things at an early time of day, sometimes at night. Watching the sunrise or set. Being in wild places sometimes in wild conditions. Good healthy food.

Freedom. Being with nature. Peace and quiet.

...I just thought this is more challenging, more rewarding. I get to be out, even on the times where we don't get anything, which to be honest is quite a lot. It is just great being sat out, watching it slowly get dark, watching it even if it's not actual ducks, just watching the birds fly around.

That mentor took me on a two year voyage of discovery in Langstone and Chichester harbours until he felt I was ready to go it alone.

Peace, quiet and relax while working my dog. Watching the wildlife around me.

Relief from stress of work.

Peace and quiet and pleasure from seeing nature.

A pinkfoot flight on the mouth of the Tay 31 years ago when 3 generations of my family had success. That was something special and never to be repeated.

Action, Behaviour & Progression

These examples provide a window into the complex interplay of feelings, attitudes, and values that shape a person's relationship with nature and heritage/tradition?. There is sense of awe, respect for the natural world and deep appreciation for the privilege of participation. There's a level of introspection and consideration of connections to the environment and the importance of mindful stewardship in a rapidly changing world.

Wildfowling for me has changed how I think about shooting, and I find it an immersive and very natural experience, which provides possibly the deepest connection with the environment, which is hunting one's own food. As an ecologist and naturalist, I have observed that people in general have become increasingly 'urbanised' and isolated from the natural environment, with no direct interaction with it. People have become spectators of the natural world, if indeed they notice it at all. At best nature is seen through binoculars, always at a distance with the observer separated from it. Wildfowling helps me maintain a level of 'naturalness' that melds me with the environment, where my knowledge of the marsh, its weather and its tides aids my success as a hunter, but also ensures my survival in that liminal space between land and sea. I feel a deep personal connection with both the marsh, its birds and the process of wildfowling, it evokes in me a special type of sentience that I have never experienced anywhere else and find impossible to describe.

Despite having had so many successful flights since then, I highly doubt that I will ever have another shooting experience quite like it. And in many ways I hope I don't, as that morning, for me, simply cannot be matched.

It makes you curious. Curious about the world we live in. It makes me wonder, is there any small way I can help nature in a changing world.

I had read all the books on wildfowling I could get hold of.

I've been very lucky and I've been invited onto a couple of other people's nights as well. I think they're trying to encourage the younger shot.

Taking my boy out and flushing a group of teal from a creek. I shot 3 and my boy (5 years old) sent the dog. The look on his face was priceless. Another duck came that way [that he] spotted. I dropped it and he said "well done Dad, I knew you could do it!" We cooked them up that night. It was a cold, crisp day. I felt proud to be able to pass on my passion. The look on my lad's

face – pure innocence and nothing more normal. Great way to source your food.

The camaraderie of 10 fowlers meeting up.

When I shot my first duck I was 9 years old. My father asked me why I didn't shoot the other one that was flying with it. I was happy just to shoot the one. It was a hen teal that I seen coming around the point of our bay. When my Dad told me to shoot we both got up to shoot. I fired one shot and a bird dropped and his gun jammed. A day I will never forget. It was a cold first morning. I was overwhelmed shooting a duck. This is when I knew I would do this for the rest of my life.

Skills

Wildfowlers develop a range of skills. From practicalities like identifying birds, using decoys, shooting cleanly, preparing and cooking birds, to understanding environments, navigating and reading tide tables, training dogs, to practical conservation work on the marsh. While it's a solitary practice, there is a strong social aspect fostering communication and new language for the novice wildfowler to learn.

I have enjoyed the field craft of wildfowling for 5 decades, and have also given back my free time in support of this activity. Over the years I have mentored juniors and adults on both of the aforementioned marshes and taught individuals the skills of the art of wildfowling. The enjoyment I have had from spending time on the marshes and in remote places is an experience that is truly uplifting and a great activity for keeping fit, a healthy mental well being and also provides a valuable food source for people harvesting organic and free-range wildfowl from the land in this way.

How to make a wigeon whistle (call) from two spent cartridges.

My father first prompted my interest in shooting by paying for me to have private tuition at the Ling Shooting clay ground, there I was taught the correct gun etiquette and how to be on target.

When I started, we used fairly simple equipment. We made hides using whatever we could. I used a galvanised water tank as a box. You would drag it out onto the mud using boards, dig a hole, and sink it into place so only a small part showed above the surface. Then you would build mud up around it so it blended in. Some people used wooden boxes, we called them coffins, in the same way burying them into the mud to create a low hide.

[I get] relaxation, motivation, friendship, knowledge, environmental enhancement [from wildfowling]

Food for the table.

[My son] has been shooting a 20 bore for the season and wanted his first experience at ducks. We went off on a stalk after teal and mallard and found

some! My heart was thumping more than ever watching him creep into the duck. When he was comfortable and had a safe, clear shot – bang! A mallard down as the ducks lifted there was a second bang which I never expected and he had a flying teal. Two firsts for him and two fantastic retrieves for our new young lab and memories to last a lifetime. I remember the noise of the estuary – all of the estuary sounds of ducks, waders, wind. The smile on my boy's face. A proper father-son moment. Man and dog working perfectly together.

The pride in watching my dogs work. The camaraderie of 10 fowlers meeting up.

Knowledge & Understanding

The contributions wildfowlers have shared demonstrate the gradual growth of knowledge and understanding through personal experience and mentorship. Each memory, from early outings with family to guidance from seasoned wildfowlers, reveals how practical exposure, observation and shared wisdom contribute to a deepening appreciation of the natural world. These accounts serve as compelling evidence of how wildfowling is learned through lived moments and relationships forged within communities. "Learning is as crucial and fundamental as being alive" (*Wise Up Learning to Live the Learning Life*, Guy Claxton, 1999).

Wildfowling here has always depended on local knowledge. People who had spent years on the marsh built up an understanding of the tides, flightlines, and feeding areas. That knowledge was often shared among those involved, especially when discussing how the marsh should be managed.

Learning came through experience — and it still does. Wildfowling is something you never fully master. I now go out two or three times a month during the season, continuing that lifelong learning process.

...from 5 years of going with my dad without a gun, just watching him, observing and absorbing everything, including the birds, marshes, and most importantly, the tide and how it affects the foreshore.

Father took me out with him on Saturday mornings.

Despite how experienced one might be and for how many years you've been doing it, it's always different, almost each time you go. The weather, tides, moon, habits of the birds, and the topography are rarely the same.

[I learned] by going out to the lough and watching and learning with friends.

So far, my knowledge is rather limited but from experiences with my father and other members from the club, I am slowly expanding my understanding.

I was taught by an older wildfowler. He was a widower with no family. He must have seen some promise in me. He was one of my heroes. Charlie took me with him, taught me how to find where ducks were coming to feed, where the teal would be feeding in the gutters... Where to cross the big gutters, using the lumps and avoiding the smooth mud.

Went with my father for years before I was the age to shoot. Just followed in his footsteps.

Wildfowling is a calming thing. It teaches you to be patient. It teaches you that you can not always be successful. It teaches you that success is not measured by the numbers you shoot, it is about a love of the wild.

...yeah, I think so [have a different kind of relationship with nature to your friends] Even like the basic stuff, like if we go on a walk, like if I go on a walk with my girlfriend, she'll see a bird and she'll ask me about it and I can, not all the time, but I can actually tell her what it is. I just feel like I'm much more aware of the nature compared to someone

I can go back in my family to at least 3 generations of wildfowlers, and I suspect there are probably more. I have encouraged my two sons to become wildfowlers, both are currently members at the Dyfi estuary, and we all spend time wildfowling together at the Dyfi estuary and occasionally, but less so these days, at the Burry Inlet as well. So that extends our family interest in wildfowling to at least 5 generations of active wildfowlers, spanning 3 centuries.

First time wildfowling (and any type of shooting) with my mentor who I met through enquiries with WAGBI. Morning flight at Langstone harbour 1977 – February – and this set me on a lifelong passion for wildfowling. That mentor took me on a two year voyage of discovery in Langstone and Chichester harbours until he felt I was ready to go it alone. I shall be forever in his debt. I carried no gun - just observing.

Attitudes & Values

Through immersion in nature, wildfowling moves individuals beyond skill and achievement, developing a deep-seated respect for the environment, a sense of discipline and an understanding of the interconnectedness of life. These contributions show more than simple enjoyment of outdoor pursuits and indicate a broader understanding of stewardship and the enduring significance of the hunter-gatherer instinct in shaping one's outlook on the natural world.

It teaches you that success is not measured by the numbers you shoot, it is about a love of the wild. It is respect for the environment, the creatures that live there.

Solitude in wonderful beautiful places and watching nature go about its business. Bag size is the least important part of the experience.

All of us to some degree or other have in their make up, the hunter-gatherer instinct. For some it may be picking blackberries, finding mushrooms, for others shooting or hunting, it's all nature's bounty. But wildfowling, in a wild relatively untamed environment. That is the true hunter-gatherer experience.

I think it's taught me discipline, and certainly opened my eyes to the natural environment around us which so few seem to see. It gives a connection which I can't describe to the natural world, undoubtedly inspired by the hunting instinct.

Timing everything around the tide and light was important. We would go out onto the mud before dawn, lie up, and wait. The shooting itself was never about big numbers. A good outing might be four or five birds. You had to know where to be and when, and even then there was no guarantee.

I and like-minded 'fowlers' are goose counters for the national Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme, where we collect essential data to form migratory goose population figures. This interest comes directly from experiencing the geese- most importantly the Icelandic geese, in a wildfowling scenario. However, despite how great it is doing the goose count, it just isn't the same as that intense anticipation which overtakes your soul as you wait, hunkered down into a saltmarsh creek in the dawn, waiting for the first sight and sound of the great skeins flighting in from the sandbanks; with gun and dog nestled in next to you. Most of the time a shot isn't fired, but that just drives you further to keep at it. Persistence, and a deep respect and understanding of these fascinating birds as you become part of their world, with the awe-inspiring sight and spine-tingling cries of the huge skeins crisscrossed against a winter's sunrise.

We were undertaking a Canada goose cull for the local swannery because of the threat of avian flu from transitting birds. The local wildfowling group were called and we met up beforehand, shared goose bacon (not pleasant), stood down by the washes and after 40 mins, they flighted approx. 500+. I shot my first left and right on Canada geese then the 70 year old next to me finished the last bird with his 4 bore 18th century black powder shotgun.

The winter of 2011 was one of the coldest and prolonged spells of deep snow and ice for many years. There was a statutory shooting ban of wildfowl in place as the birds struggled to find any food in deep snow and in order to survive they would only fly very short distances to conserve energy. After some weeks of deep snow and the birds all starving I decided I needed to do something to see them through this period. I walked two miles four times with 56lb bags of barley on my back through two feet of snow to their roost. On spreading the barley I retired back thirty yards and all the swans, geese and ducks readily came to the feed, for now I was their saviour and friend. I felt far more satisfaction doing this for the welfare of the birds than any red letter shooting days.

A trip out on Strangford Lough for an evening flight with my dad in early September, waiting and hoping for ducks to fly over us but instead of ducks

flying over me it was curlew coming on the flight line for around 15 minutes and the joy of seeing these birds fly over me. [I remember] how low the curlew flew over me and hearing the beautiful call of these birds and in that moment how peaceful I felt after a stressful week in work and seeing the curlew made a great memory and end to the week.

Generic Learning Outcomes, 2003, with examples



ENJOYMENT, INSPIRATION AND CREATIVITY

- Having fun
- Being surprised
- Innovative thoughts, actions or things
- Creativity
- Exploration, experimentation and making
- Being inspired

ACTION, BEHAVIOUR, PROGRESSION

- What people do
- What people intend to do (intention to act)
- What people have done
- A change in the way that people manage their lives including work, study, family and community contexts
- Actions (observed or reported)
- Change in behaviour
- Progression – towards further learning, registering as a library user, developing new skills – is the result of a purposive action which leads to change

ATTITUDES AND VALUES

- Feelings and perceptions
- Opinions about ourselves e.g. self-esteem
- Opinions or attitudes towards other people
- Attitudes towards an organisation e.g. museums, archives and libraries
- Positive attitudes in relation to an experience
- Negative attitudes in relation to an experience
- Reasons for actions or personal viewpoints
- Empathy, capacity for tolerance (or lack of these)

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

- Knowing about something
- Learning facts or information which can be:
 - Subject-specific
 - Interdisciplinary / thematic
 - About museums, archives, libraries
 - About myself, my family, my community, the wider world
- Making sense of something
- Deepening understanding
- Learning how museums, archives and libraries operate
- Giving specific information – naming things, people or places
- Making links and relationships between things
- Using prior knowledge in new ways

SKILLS

- Knowing how to do something
- Intellectual skills – reading, thinking critically and analytically, making judgements...
- Key skills – numeracy, literacy, use of ICT, learning how to learn...
- Information management skills – locating and using information, evaluating information, using information management systems...
- Social skills – meeting people, sharing, team working, remembering names, introducing others, showing an interest in the concerns of others...
- Emotional skills – recognising the feelings of others, managing (intense) feelings, channelling energy into productive outcomes...
- Communication skills – writing, speaking, listening...
- Physical skills – running, dancing, manipulation, making...

The proposed Generic Learning Outcomes Framework, with examples

Attitudes and Values

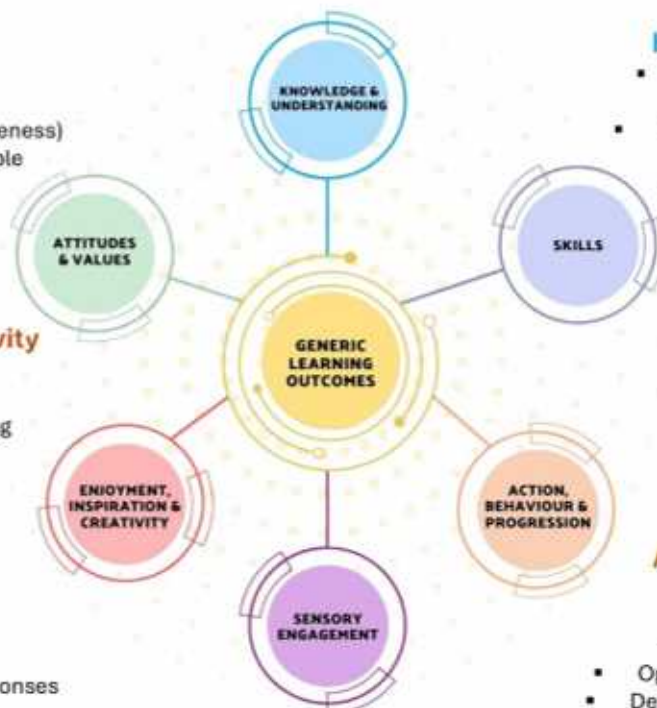
- Exploring feelings and reactions
- Questioning perceptions
- Opinions about ourselves (e.g. self-awareness)
- Opinions or attitudes towards other people
- Increased patience and empathy

Enjoyment, inspiration, creativity

- Being motivated
- Being inspired
- Exploration, experimentation and making
- Developing Creativity
- Having fun

Sensory Engagement

- Using senses to explore
- Choosing sensory stimulation level
- Developing curiosity and confidence
- Noticing and sharing reactions and responses



Knowledge and Understanding

- Knowing about something or someone
 - Learning information
- Understanding how and why things work
 - Developing understanding further
- Understanding how subjects join up

Skills

- Knowing how to do something
 - Developing reasoning and processing skills
 - Widening social skills
- Improving communication skills
- Practising new physical tasks

Action, behaviour, progression

- Questioning what people do, have done and intend to do
 - Noticing own actions and reactions
- Openness to understand other's behaviour
- Developing new ways of reacting and acting
 - Developing a sense of cultural belonging