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WILDFOWLING IN THE UK

A CODE OF PRACTICE

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this code of practice is to give clear guidelines as to what is acceptable conduct, both for the newcomer to the sport and experienced wildfowlers. In addition, it describes the general areas of the law relating to wildfowling but is not a full study of all relevant legislation in this area. It is vital that every wildfowler knows and understands the law relating to the sport. For clarification on particular laws relating to wildfowling, contact BASC head office, country or regional offices.

The wild ducks, geese and waders which are the legal quarry of wildfowlers, are largely migratory and overwinter throughout the UK, particularly in coastal areas. Through good conservation we can all work to ensure plentiful quarry species while benefiting the wider environment.

High standards underpin public and political support for shooting, now and in the future.

The code provides advice at two levels:

Advice that **must** be followed in order to deliver sustainable shooting – unless otherwise stated the term ‘must’ only applies to meeting the standards set by this Code of Practice and does not refer to a legal obligation.

Advice that **should** be followed in order to achieve Best Practice, any deviation from which would need justification.

THE FOLLOWING GOLDEN RULES APPLY:

1. In order to ensure the future of the sport, wildfowlers must meet the standards described in this code and show respect for the countryside, due regard to health and safety and consideration for others.
2. The use of lead shot for all wildfowling has been made illegal in England and Wales, and for all shooting on or over wetlands (including foreshore) in Scotland and Northern Ireland.
3. BASC strongly recommends the use of a competent gundog when wildfowling.
4. Ensure that you are able to recognise legal quarry species; if in doubt, don't shoot.
5. **REMEMBER** – ignorance of the law is no excuse. If in doubt, always ask.

2. BEHAVIOUR IN THE FIELD

Planning

- When wildfowling at a site for the first time, either go in daylight or with someone who knows the area in order to become familiar with the features of the marsh.
- Make sure you know the safe access and exit routes, marsh boundaries and any inherent dangers, for example, areas of soft mud or sand.

- Make sure you know all the local rules for the management and control of wildfowling.
- Always consult tide tables before going onto the marsh. Make any necessary adjustments for location and if British Summer Time is in operation add one hour to GMT. Remember that the height and timing of tides is affected by the prevailing weather conditions both locally and out to sea. In certain conditions this can mean that the tide can be several feet higher and appear hours earlier than predicted.
- Always tell someone when and where you have gone wildfowling, and do not forget to tell them that you have returned safely.
- Always plan your exit route, particularly when a big tide is expected. Never wait until the last moment to leave the marsh when the incoming tide is approaching. Channels fill quickly and in a very short time they become a torrent. You can easily be cut off by creeks flooding behind you.

Above all, be safe and be sensible.

Equipment

Useful equipment

- Always carry a waterproof wristwatch; it is essential for timing the predicted state of the tide.
- A wading stick is vital for walking on the marsh. It is used to test the water depth of creeks, gutters and crossing places.
- If you are out all day carry some food and a thermos containing a hot drink.
- Wear comfortable, inconspicuous, warm and waterproof clothing.
- Thigh or chest waders are normally recommended.
- A large bag or rucksack is useful to carry equipment, and to sit on.
- It is good practice to have your shotgun certificate with you, or a copy of it along with any local permits and your club membership card.
- Binoculars will enhance the day and are useful for bird identification.

Safety equipment

- In an emergency a mobile phone will enable you to summon assistance by dialling 999/112 and asking for the Coastguard. However, do make sure there is a signal for reception out on the marsh – many rural locations have poor or no mobile phone reception. Ensure that the battery is fully charged and the phone is stored in a waterproof case before taking it on to the marsh.
- A compass is a very useful piece of equipment to carry; it could, for example, be your only accurate guide off the marsh in fog. Make sure that you are familiar with how to use a compass before using one on the marsh. A pocket GPS receiver is an effective, modern equivalent, but make sure that you understand how to use it. Way points can be plotted on the way out and used to show the return route.

- Flashing a torch six times at minute intervals or firing a gun or distress flares are other methods of attracting attention.
- Always carry a jointed cleaning rod as it is all too easy to get mud or snow in the muzzle of your gun. Never fire a shot to try and clear an obstruction in the barrels.

On the marsh

- Do not disturb local residents near access points by making a noise or banging car doors when arriving early in the morning or leaving late at night.
- Never arrive on the marsh late, or depart early and so risk disturbing the shooting of those who have taken the trouble to get into position in good time and those who wish to stay.
- Do not shoot in the immediate vicinity of houses adjoining the shore; be aware of footpaths and never shoot in a way that endangers people using them.
- Avoid disturbing or shooting towards livestock.
- There are no statutory bag limits in the UK, but some club's impose limits for their own marshes. Your personal limit may depend on the local conditions and, indeed, your own experience. Shooting excessive numbers of birds is considered by the majority of wildfowling to be unacceptable and unsporting conduct.
- Ensure that your dog is comfortable - if you sit on your game bag make sure your dog has a dry seat.
- Regularly look through your gun barrels to make sure that they are clear of any obstruction.
- Range judging when wildfowling is particularly difficult. Try to identify nearby features that can be used as reference marks so that you do not shoot beyond your own shooting skill distance.
- Ensure that you are able to recognise legal quarry species; if in doubt, don't shoot.
- Never leave cartridge cases, rubbish or unsightly pit holes in the marsh.

Respect for quarry

- BASC strongly recommends the use of a competent gundog when wildfowling.
- All shot quarry should be retrieved, and if necessary, humanely dispatched immediately.
- If necessary, shoot a wounded bird again to ensure that it can be retrieved – provided it is safe to do so.
- Do not leave a wounded bird while you shoot at another.
- If you do not have the use of a gundog when wildfowling, only take shots which will result in birds falling where you can ensure that you can reach them.
- Always allow time for the retrieval of all shot birds before leaving the marsh.

Leaving the marsh

- On leaving the marsh your dog may be cold and wet - attend to its needs before your own.
- Do not waste the birds that you shoot. For a wide range of appetising game recipes, visit <http://tasteofgame.org.uk/>
- When leaving the marsh keep all shot birds covered, or in a bag, particularly if using public access routes.
- Pay special attention to cleaning your gun - saltwater and sand will quickly corrode it. Check for faults which may need rectifying before the gun is used again.
- Always complete any required bag return for your day's shooting. This may be a condition of the lease for the foreshore you shoot.

3. QUARRY SPECIES AND SEASONS

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 provide for waterfowl shooting in the United Kingdom, with respect to quarry species, seasons and other aspects of the sport.

DUCK	GEESE	WADERS	OTHERS
Gadwall	Canada goose	Common snipe	² Coot
Goldeneye	Greylag goose	Golden plover	² Moorhen
Mallard	Pink-footed goose	¹ Jack snipe	
Pintail	³ White-fronted goose	Woodcock	
Pochard	Notes: ¹ Northern Ireland only ² England, Wales and Scotland only ³ England and Wales (voluntary moratorium in parts of Wales)		
¹ Scaup			
Shoveler			
Teal			
Tufted duck			
Wigeon			

Full details of open seasons for all legal quarry species is available from BASC by contacting head office, country or regional offices or by visiting www.basc.org.uk



Wildfowling seasons (All dates are inclusive)

- England, Wales and Scotland 1 September – 31 January – Above the mean high water mark.
- England, Wales and Scotland 1 September – 20 February – Below the Mean High Water mark. Note that duck and goose species can only be shot, below Mean High Water, after 31 January.
- Northern Ireland 1 September – 31 January

In England, Wales and Scotland, Mean High Water is defined as any area below the high-water mark of ordinary spring tides. Advice on this can be obtained from wildfowling clubs in the area, BASC head office and country and regional offices.

4. GUNS AND AMMUNITION

Guns

- A double-barrelled 12 bore is a suitable all-round shotgun for wildfowling. If your field craft is good you can be very successful with a standard 70mm (2 ¾ inch) chambered gun and cartridge. Traditionally however, wildfowling have often preferred a 76mm (3 inch) chambered gun which enables them to shoot heavier loads (more pellets in the pattern).
- Many wildfowling now choose to use an 89mm (3 ½ inch) chambered shotgun, in either double-barrelled or, more commonly, semi-automatic forms. This type of gun is designed to handle large steel pellets in modern wildfowling loads (provided it is steel-shot proved)
- Big-bore guns, such as 10, 8 and 4-bore shotguns, are also capable of handling large shot loads effectively, although for some they can be cumbersome, and, indeed, sometimes a burden.

Effective loads

- The measure of potential effectiveness is the count of pellets in the traditional 30 inch circle placed over the centre of the pattern printed on a pattern plate or large sheet of paper. For example: Geese out to 50yd need a minimum 55 pellets in that circle; large ducks to 45yd need 90+; small ducks some 140. Effective pellet sizes vary according to the size of the quarry so that vital organs are hit.
- You need to pattern your gun/cartridge combination to make sure it will deliver the appropriate killing load – provided, as ever, you can consistently centre your pattern on the target.
- Advice on cartridge patterning is available from BASC in the booklet, *Cartridge Patterning. We need to do it and better!* Remember that if you cannot consistently hit and kill your target at a given range, confine your shooting to a shorter range.

Non-lead shot

- Following the ratification of the Agreement on the

Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) by the UK Government in 1999, the use of lead shot for all wildfowling has been made illegal in England and Wales, and for all shooting on or over wetlands (including foreshore) in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

- The range of non-lead shot alternatives is growing and information is available from BASC.

5. WILDFOWLING AND THE LAW

Prohibited methods

- A number of methods of killing or taking wild birds are prohibited. These include gin, spring, leg and pole traps, snares, nets, electrical scaring devices, poisonous substances, bows or crossbows, explosives (other than firearm ammunition), artificial light, mirror or dazzling devices, devices for illuminating a target or sighting device for night shooting, automatic or semi-automatic weapon (unless it is incapable of holding more than 2 rounds in the magazine) and shotguns with an internal diameter at muzzle more than 1¾ inches.
- The use of sound recordings, and decoys of live birds tethered, blinded or maimed is illegal. It is also an offence to cause or permit such methods to be used.
- It is an offence to use any mechanically-propelled vehicle - including boats - in immediate pursuit of a wild bird to kill or take it.

Shooting on Sundays and at night

- England and Wales - before the passing of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, orders prohibiting the shooting of wildfowl on Sundays were made under the Protection of Birds Act 1954. These orders have not been rescinded and so in the following counties/part counties the shooting of wildfowl is prohibited on Sundays: Anglesey, Brecknock, Caernarfon, Carmarthen, Cardigan, Cornwall, Denbigh, Devon, Doncaster, Glamorgan, Great Yarmouth County Borough, Isle of Ely, Leeds County Borough, Merioneth, Norfolk, Pembroke, Somerset and North and West Ridings of Yorkshire.
- There may be local restrictions on shooting at night.
- Scotland - Wildfowl and waders may not be shot on Sundays and on Christmas Day.
- Northern Ireland - All wild birds are protected on Sundays, Christmas Day and at night (defined as commencing one hour after sunset on any day and ending one hour before sunrise the next day).

Severe weather

- Under exceptional circumstances of prolonged severe weather the relevant Government Minister may protect by order any species of ducks, geese, waders, snipe, woodcock, coot and moorhen for periods, normally of not more than 14 days. The Minister will act in accordance with

criteria and procedures previously agreed by Government and shooting and conservation organisations.

- Any such suspensions are widely publicised. Typically, a statutory suspension comes into force after 14 days of severe weather (as defined) and can be imposed separately in any of the UK countries.
- Please note - after seven days of severe weather BASC may well call on all waterfowl shooters to exercise restraint in their shooting, if it appears that birds are under pressure from the weather conditions.
- Full details of the severe weather procedures, how any voluntary restraint measures can be put in place and when and where any statutory suspensions are in force, will be on the BASC website and updated frequently.

6. INSURANCE

It is advisable to have adequate legal liability (third-party) insurance when shooting. Membership of BASC includes insurance for recreational sporting activities.

<http://basc.org.uk/join-basc/basc-members-insurance/>

7. FURTHER INFORMATION

References

- *Code of Good Shooting Practice*
- *BASC Handbook of Shooting*
- *BASC Respect for Quarry*
- *BASC Shotgun Code of Practice*
- *BASC Wildfowling Manual*
- *BASC Handbook – Wildfowling* [Quiller 2007]

BASC is the largest representative body for sporting shooting.

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