

IN THE FIELD

DECEMBER 2021

By Sir Johnny Scott Bt.

“YOUNG SHOTS”

For the last fifteen years, to raise funds to support its Young Shots Training Days, BASC have auctioned; *“Three days guided wildfowling in October with the Newcastle Wildfowling Association and their President, Sir Johnny Scott, on the National Nature Reserve at Lindisfarne for two guns, full board accommodation included. Bid estimate £1500 - £2000”*. Lindisfarne is one of the most beautiful places in Britain and the great tidal dish created by Holy Island's elongated shape and the curved elbow of the Northumbrian coastline provides a protected habitat for the largest congregation of waders and waterfowl in Europe. A great multitude of oyster catchers, redshanks, greenshanks, golden, ringed and grey plover; trips of little Dunlin, scuttling like mice along the tide edge. Curlew, peewits, ghostly lapwings and coils of teal; bar-tailed godwits, whimbrel, snipe, mallard, golden eye, tufted duck, pintail, shelduck and gaggles of little pale-fronted Brent geese, all greeting each new day with a cacophony of exuberant birdsong. In early September, 20,000 wigeon begin migrating to Lindisfarne from the Baltic and 15,000 pink footed geese start arriving from Iceland and October is best time to have a crack at these.

The Lindisfarne Wildfowling Auction provides the successful bidders with a unique opportunity to spend time in the company of extremely knowledgeable guides and over the years, many thousands of pounds have been raised for this immensely worthwhile charity. The auction winners and wildfowling guides stay in a dog friendly wildfowling pub, and each day starts with the morning flight. Guns must be in position long before the dawn breaks and apart from a shot at the occasional, teal, mallard or wigeon flying along the tide edge, there is always the chance of a goose. The guides will have spent several days studying the flight paths of the pink foot geese when they rise with a great clamour from their shore roosts and fly to their inland grazings - not that anything can be guaranteed about the movement of geese. Then it is back to the pub for breakfast and off out onto the marshes again, carrying sacks of decoys to set for the tide flight and listening to the wigeon whistling out in the bay. The tide flight is always wind and weather dependent; a good north easterly is needed to push the wigeon in, but a shower of rain can spoil everything, as it makes the decoys shine and spooks the duck. The day ends as dusk turns to darkness and if we are lucky, the chance of a shot at geese returning to their shore roosts.

Invariably, those who have won the auction are professional people - doctors, lawyers, surgeons, fund managers etc - who have shot plenty of driven game and simply want to try a completely different shooting experience. This year, to our delight, the winners were two twenty year old university students. The youth of today has it too easy and not many are prepared to get up at four



Sir (Walter) John Scott, Bt. MFH

Sir Johnny (as he is better known) is an author, natural historian, broadcaster, columnist, countryside campaigner, artisan snuff manufacturer and retired hill farmer.

He wrote and co-presented the BBC2 series *Clarissa and the Countryman* with Clarissa Dickson Wright. He writes for a variety of magazines and periodicals on field sports, food, farming, travel, history and rural affairs.

A lifetime devotee of the countryside and its sports, he is currently:

- Joint Master, The North Pennine Hunt
- Regional Director, Vote OK.
- President, The Gamekeepers Welfare Trust.
- President, The Tay Valley Wildfowling Association.
- President, The Newcastle Wildfowling Association.
- President, The Association of Working Lurchers / Longdogs.
- Centenary Patron and Honorary Life Member, British Association for Shooting and Conservation.
- Patron, The Sporting Lucas Terrier Association.
- Patron, The Wildlife Ark Trust.
- Patron, The National Organisation of Beaters and Pickers Up.
- Board member, The European Squirrel Initiative.

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SEPTEMBER 2021

BY SIR JOHNY SCOTT BT.

o'clock in the morning to trudge across the mudflats in the hope of a shot. Fewer and fewer young people are coming into wildfowling and it is gradually becoming a dying art; to be able to introduce these two was particularly gratifying. Neither had wild fowled before, but as the first day unfolded it became clear that both were experienced, safe shots and they had obviously spent a considerable amount of time mugging up on species identification.

Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, legal wildfowl quarry is restricted to common pochard, gadwall, goldeneye, mallard, pintail, shoveller, teal, wigeon and tufted duck; Canada geese - most of whom are feral - greylag and pink footed, with white-fronted geese only in England. These are a fraction of the great host of waders and waterfowl out on the foreshore and since all wildfowling is snap shooting, much of it in the half light of dawn or dusk, you never have long to make the right decision. To the inexperienced, a shelduck or even a little pale-fronted Brent goose flitting past in the murk, can look not unlike a mallard; a lone barnacle goose coming in low, silent and fast out of a dark background, could easily be mistaken for a pink foot. Keeping Guns straight is part of the guides role, but it makes their job much easier if people have taken the trouble to do their homework first.

There is nothing artificial, contrived or predictable about 'fowling and this, as much as the mystery and antiquity of our lonely salt marshes, the stark winter beauty of mudflats, tidal creeks, foreshore and cries of waterfowl, is what attracted the great sportsmen naturalist to wildfowling. People such as authors, Abel Chapman, Eric Begbie and Denys Watkins-Pitchford; Sir Peter Scott of the Wildlife and Wetlands Trust; the artists JG Millais, Frank Southgate and Archibald Thorburn. The actor James Robertson Justice, Sir Ralph Payne-Galwey, one of the founding members of WAGBI, which became BASC in 1981 and the late Duke of Edinburgh, to name only a few. To lie unobserved as nature wakes and starts moving around you is a truly wonderful experience and every wildfowler knows that, during the course of a season, there will probably be only a handful of occasions when everything – moon, tides, wind, temperature and all the laborious studying of flight paths and movement of wildfowl will combine to produce the shot one remembers for the rest of one's life.

For it to survive, we need the young.



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