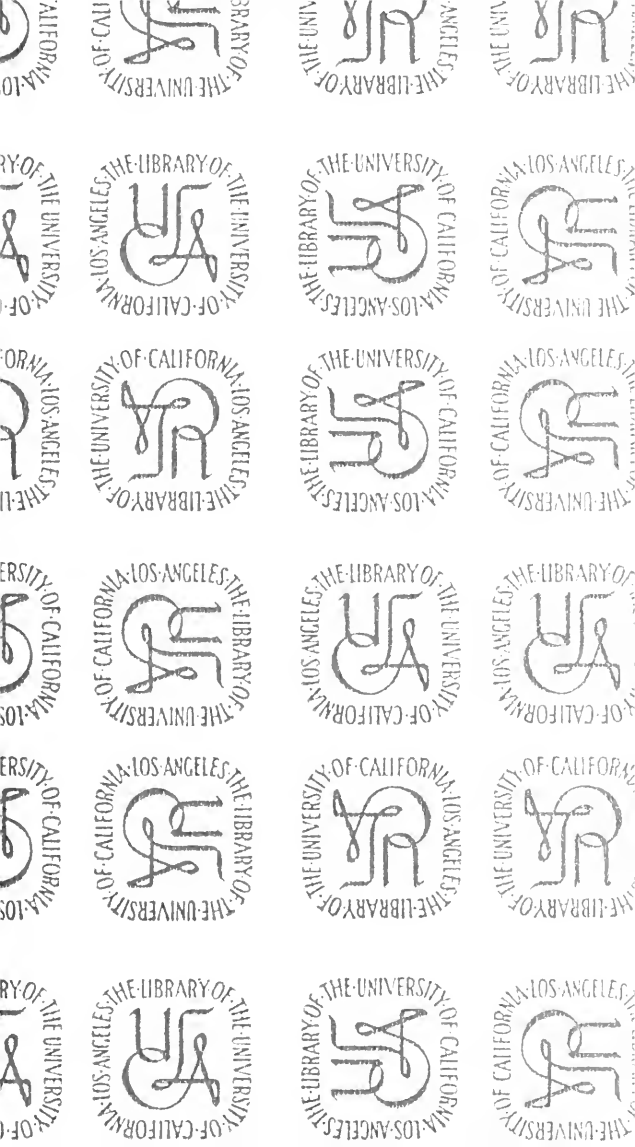


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# BRITISH DUCK DECOYS

OF

## TO-DAY, 1918.

By

J. WHITAKER, F.Z.S.,

of Rainworth, Notts.,

Vice-President of the Selborne Society.

Author of

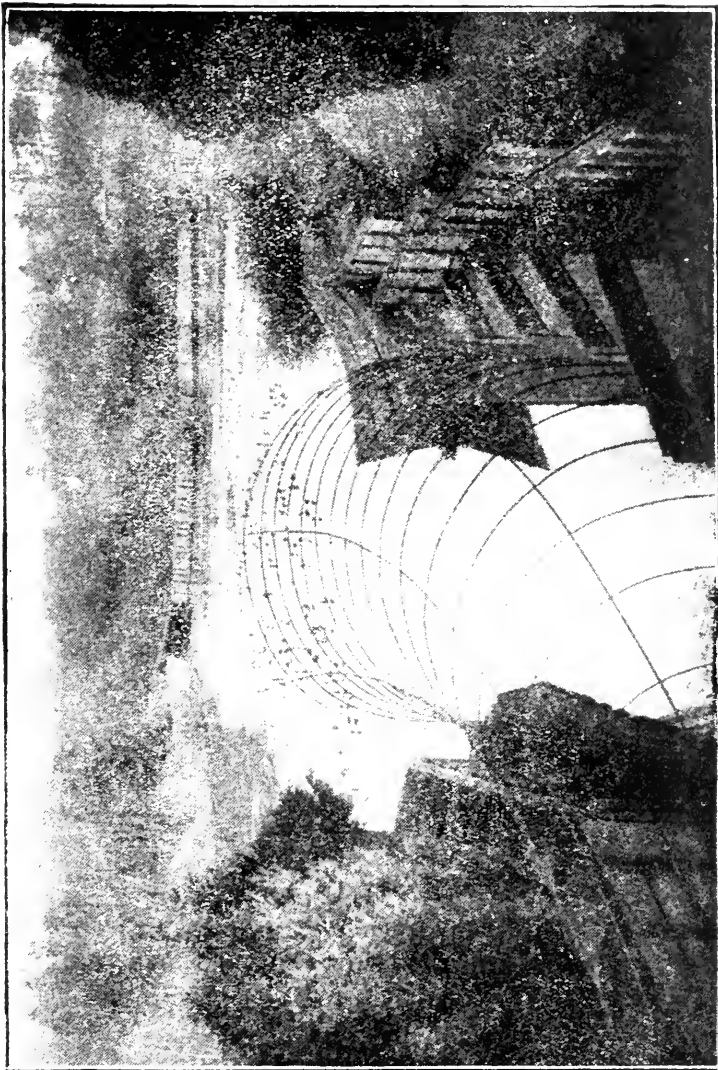
"The Deer Parks of England," "History of the Birds of Nottinghamshire," "Scribblings of a Hedgerow Naturalist," "Nimrod, Ramrod and Fishing Rod Tales," "Jottings of a Nature Lover," &c.; and Compiler of the List of Birds in the Victorian History of Nottinghamshire.

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*This book is dedicated by kind permission to  
Her Grace the Duchess of Bedford, a lover  
of Nature in all its forms, especially Birds.*

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## PREFACE.

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I am anxious for my readers to quite understand that this small book is not a history of duck decoys, but only a descriptive list of those that are being worked now. The late Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey, who, I am sorry to say, has died since I started to write these notes, brought out in 1886 a volume on "The History of Duck Decoys," which then, as now, leaves nothing to be desired. He was quite the greatest authority on decoys and punt shooting. It was only a few weeks before his death he most kindly gave me valuable hints as to the making of a duck trap on the pond here. In his capital book he gives a list of all the known decoys then worked, and made out forty-seven. Since then I find several have ceased to be worked, and I have only been able, notwithstanding much kind help, to find twenty-eight now being worked. I must admit I am quite at a loss to understand that anyone lucky enough to come into a property having a decoy on it should permit it to lapse. Some owners say, "Well, it does not pay"; but one would have thought that even if it did not the giving to one's friends and supplying one's house would have been a recompense for the loss of a few pounds, to say nothing of the delight of seeing scores, nay, hundreds, of ducks on the water during the taking season. It is supposed there were about 200 decoys in Britain early in the nineteenth century. Probably no one



## PREFACE.

catches so few ducks as I do, but the delight it gives me and the pleasure to my friends amply repays me for what time and food costs. The first thing I do when coming downstairs in a morning during the season is to look out of the hall window on the chance of seeing a duck near the mouth of the trap, and I find the common wild duck is the bird most likely to go in. The other morning there were seven tufted ducks and a pochard, and for over an hour they passed and repassed the trap, and once or twice looked like going in, but some noise at the house put them away. I can see now a drake pochard sitting on the water within 30 yards of where I write these lines, so the continual chance, though a catch seldom comes off, gives me untold pleasure; of course, most decoys are away from the house, but then a peep through the screens is an object-lesson and delight, and much can be learned of the everyday life of some of the most beautiful and interesting birds we have; and then the pleasure of being able to capture some of them is fine, for ducks take as much circumventing as do any British birds I know. Getting information for a book of this kind would be impossible without the help of one's friends and owners of decoys, and I am deeply indebted to many for kindly aid; and I sincerely thank these: Lady Payne-Gallwey for photographs of Sir R. Payne-Gallwey; Vera Bowden, my daughter, for sketches of decoy pipes and my decoy trap, which are of much interest; the Editor of "The Shooting Times," Dr. Salter, who up to lately was tenant of an Essex decoy; Mr. H. Forrest, who helped me with Shropshire decoys; W. Whitaker, my brother, for help with Leicestershire; Mr. E. R. Moorsom for most interesting account of Mr. Pretyma's decoy at Orwell,

## PREFACE.

Suffolk; Sir Ernest Paget; Thomas Gilbert Skelton, himself the designer of many decoys and the grandson of George Skelton (old George), who was the first to reduce the size of the decoy ponds, and with marked success; Mr. Fawcett, of Ashby Decoy; Mr. A. Crossman, of Sedgemoor Decoy; the Revd. B. D. Aplin, of Aston-le-Walls; Colonel Ireland-Blackburne; Colonel Saurin; Mr. Sydney Smith, of York; Mr. John Halkes; Major Berkeley; and Mr. Arthur Patterson, of Great Yarmouth, for the very clever sketches of a take, &c.; also Mr. Bruce, of Priors Marston, and Mr. Peter's, of Berkeley; and Mr. Williams, of Borough Fen Decoy, for photographs; Mr. Grabham, of York; and the Revd. C. G. Littlehales. To finish, this little book is only a modest account of the decoys *now worked*, with a few notes of the ducks taken in them and some interesting facts of the big takes of long-gone days, never, I fear, to return, and if it gives my readers as much pleasure to read it as it has given me to write it I shall be amply repaid.

J. WHITAKER.

Rainworth, Notts, September, 1918.

# BRITISH DUCK DECOYS OF TO-DAY, 1918.

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## CHAPTER I.

### DECOYS AND THE TAKING OF DUCKS.

The name decoy is said to be of Dutch extraction, and is an abbreviation of the word "Endekooy," i.e., the duck cage. We see in some old books it is called duck-coy or duck cage, and has been contracted into decoy, or it may be derived from de coy, the cage; it is also written duck-koy. Decoys are said to have been first made in England by Sir William Woodhouse in the reign of James I.

Owners and tenants were always naturally jealous of their property and rights, and particularly to those pertaining to decoys, and people disturbing decoys either by shooting near them or by trying to drive the fowl away by any means were prosecuted, and judges over and over again gave their decision in favour of the plaintiffs, and rightly so, for it was the destroying, or trying to do so, of their means of livelihood, for in those days a decoy was a very valuable asset, even when the price of ducks was so much less than nowadays, though the greater number of ducks taken in past days made up for the increase of value

in these, for where scores are taken now hundreds or more were then captured.

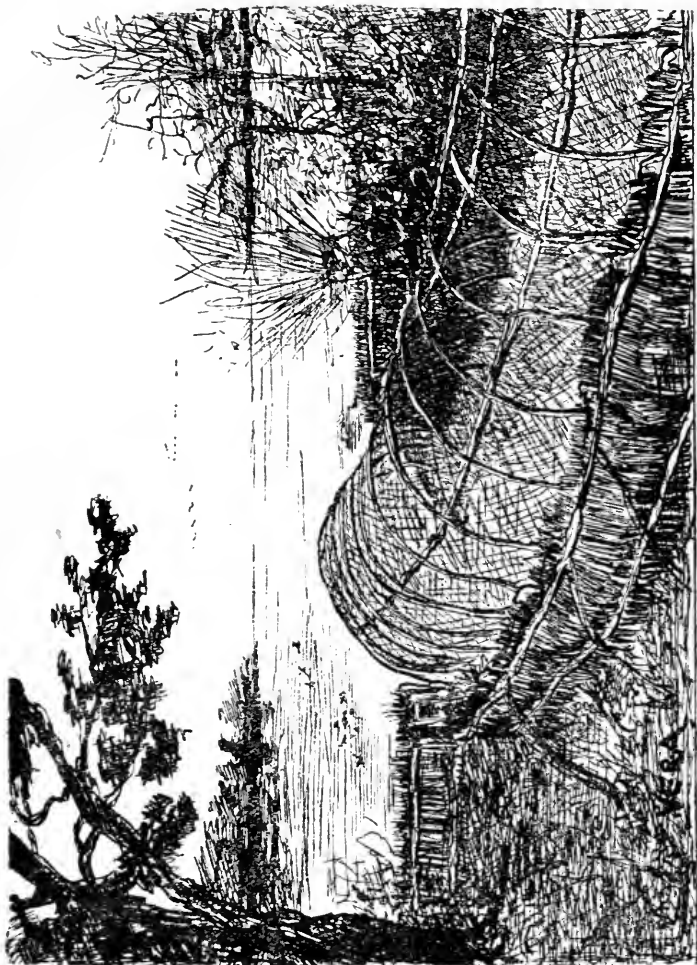
I must own I feel rather diffident in writing this simple description of a decoy and its working after the very elaborate accounts we read in Sir R. Payne Gallwey's book on "Duck Decoys," and also in Pennant, Goldsmith, Lubbock, Folkard, and several others; but as some of my readers may not have seen these accounts I give the following. The decoy is a piece of water on an estate chosen because of its attraction to wildfowl for the following reasons—because it is always kept quiet; this is the most important thing, and that it is attractive to ducks, for they are very peculiar in their likes and dislikes, for water that to us looks the perfect spot is not so to wildfowl. In this valley are eleven ponds varying in size from 17 acres to  $1\frac{1}{2}$ . On some we always see ducks at all times of the year, and it is only when they are frozen up they are not there. Then there are two both quiet and much like the others, but it is quite the exception to find ducks on one of them, and the other is never sure. This latter pond twenty years ago was a pretty certain find, but since then it is often blank. Decoys are generally in a wood, but such wood should have the trees away from the banks, and one surrounded by brushwood for a hundred yards is preferable to one with trees near the banks. Trees make ducks feel hemmed in, and they always fly round more before settling than if the pond lies fairly open. My friend Mr. Chaworth-Musters, of Annesley, thinks a perfect decoy pond would be one well out in the open with a bank running all round it, well back from the water, and I agree with him, for I know of no one more competent to



THE DECOY TRAP, RAINWORTH LODGE.

*By Vera Bowden.*

give an opinion on such a subject. In former days many decoys were on large pieces of water, because it was thought that the big sheets of water had more ducks on them, and the more birds the more chance of getting them; and it was not till George Skelton started planning decoys that small pieces were adopted. Many of the older men of that day smiled at his idea, which he proved to be right, for in a few seasons more ducks were taken in a decoy of 2 acres of water than formerly had been on decoys of 20 acres or more; there might be more birds on the larger piece, but they were not under the, may I say, control as were those on the smaller piece, for wildfowl will come from a moderate distance to food or a dog than they will from further off. The number of pipes vary from one to ten or more, but four is the general number. These pipes are placed so that ducks can be taken in most winds. This is very important, for ducks can only be taken when the wind blows up the pipe or at a certain angle across it. Then a piece of burning peat must be carried, so that the smoke will prevent the smell of the decoyman alarming the fowl. The size of the pool best suited is about 2 acres, or a little more. All repairs are done in late spring or early summer, for the decoy should be quite quiet from July 1st, as during that month neighbouring hatched ducks will begin to come in, and these will later on act as leads to those from further afield. The pipes are from 60 to 75 yards long, and where there is plenty of room the latter length is the best. The entrance should be from 16 to 25 feet across, and the wider it is the higher it should be. Under the first hoops the water in pipe should be from a foot to 18 inches deep, and gradually get shallower to 2 or 3 inches



THE MOUTH OF THE PIPE.

By Vera Bowden.

at the narrow end, which will be a foot or so wide. Here the tunnel net is fastened on, and the far end tied to a peg. In the more modern decoys the hoops are of iron, often fastened to posts sunk into the ground, and they are covered with wire-netting. The older decoys had wooden hoops and string-netting. The first hoops should be about 12 to 16 feet above the water, and get gradually lower to 2 feet at the end of the pipe. The reed screens run about three-fourths of the length of the pipe, and overlap each other, with a low one between the ends of each for the dog to jump over, and where the decoyman shows himself. It is generally October before many ducks are taken, and the following is a fair explanation of how it is done. When the greys of dawn begin to light up the pool the ducks start to come in for the day, the greater proportion having been away for the night feeding in the streams, ponds and sloppy places, often a long distance from the decoy; if the night has been very dark and they have not satisfied their hunger, they feed for some time after they arrive; then they preen themselves, and settle down to rest, many on the banks and others on the water. After a moonlight night, having fed well, they sooner settle down, so the decoyman tries them about 11 a.m. and again at 2 p.m. These are nearly always the best times. Then he proceeds to the decoy with his dog and often with a helper. He peeps through the screen near the entrance. This is done by slipping a peg of wood, flat and about a couple of inches wide. It is put through the reeds and twisted round, and a good view is obtained. Other pegs are fastened on the back of each screen for a like purpose. If there are plenty of fowl about the pipe which the wind favours he gives a gentle whistle,



which at once attracts his tame ducks, for it is the call always used at feeding time, and they at once swim to the pipe. He then throws corn, crushed oats, barley, or hemp seed. This floats on the top, and they at once start eating. The wild ducks generally are attracted, and swim to participate in the good things. He moves further up, and throws more, and they go deeper into the pipe, but if they will not proceed further he brings his dog into play, and it is sent over the low screen, which is between the high ones. This seldom fails, for directly he appears every head is stretched forward, and on they swim; again the dog goes over, and on the ducks follow, till he, peeping through, sees they are well up. He then signals to the man by holding out his hand. If he has no helper he goes back himself, for by now the fowl are generally suspicious and are often starting to swim back. Now is the time for one of them to show themselves, and wave his hat or hand. The sight of the man to the ducks acts like magic. Away they fly, and dash up the pipe, thinking that round the bend is safety. The man follows, showing himself here and there (I may here say, as the screens overlap, he is not visible to the ducks on the water). The ducks get more confused, dashing against the sides and top, but on they go; the pipe grows smaller and smaller, and they get more mixed up and alarmed, and at last into the tunnel net they crowd. The decoyman gets quickly to it and unties it, and placing the end between his knees, takes duck after duck out, and with a sharp twist breaks their necks—a painless death; and it is really wonderful how quickly an expert at this work can kill a great number of ducks, so within a few minutes of their entering the pipe they are lying dead on

the grass, and the other ducks on the water are none the wiser; in fact, in a short time another lot may share the same fate. This is how the pipe decoy has such a great advantage over the trap decoy, for as long as there are ducks and they will go in, take after take can take place, but in a trap only one take can be made in a day, as the ducks in it have to be left till after flight time. When the other ducks are gone, then the decoyman rows to it, catches the ducks with a landing net, baits and resets the trap. The lowering of the door has to be done with great care, for the fowl are very suspicious, and the grating of the door being let down will send the ducks, if near it, dashing out, and it will take a long time before they are persuaded to go in again. Some of the decoy traps are double, so two takes can take place if ducks are in. The partition is of wire, and the door is lowered by a wire which runs under the water, and is worked from a small hut or from the back of a screen by a windlass.

Then there is the trap which is always set. Ducks enter by a tunnel which runs well into the trap, enticed there by corn, and cannot find the way out, or seldom do. Sometimes a live duck is put in a partition at the far end of the trap, and by its calls induces other ducks in. These traps catch teal better than common wild ducks, and I have heard of 71 being taken in one night.

## CHAPTER II.

## BUCKINGHAMSHIRE.

Name of Decoy—Boarstall.

Name of Owner—Captain Aubrey-Fletcher.

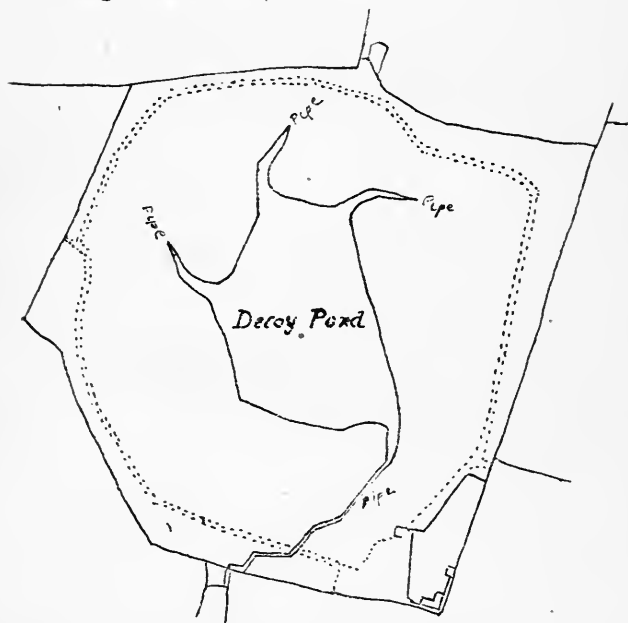
Size of Water— $2\frac{1}{2}$  acres.

Number of Pipes—4.

In a Wood of 13 acres.

Average number of Ducks taken—about 200.

A Dog is used.



This is the only duck decoy in Buckinghamshire. Ducks taken are mostly common wild ducks, some teal and a

few wigeon. This decoy lies about a quarter of a mile from the village of Boarstall, and 8 miles north-west of Thame. The Revd. B. D. Aplin, of Aston-le-Walls, writes to me and says when he visited this decoy some years back the decoyman told him the following: "One day he saw a fox going up the side of a pipe and the ducks following him, so he took advantage of the fox acting as his decoy-dog and made quite a good take, and blessed him for his kindly help."

Before leaving Cheltenham I had an afternoon at Tewkesbury, where I saw the Abbey, and I was very greatly struck with this fine church; in fact, after Durham I consider it to be the best example of Norman architecture in England, the nave being especially grand, the great central tower magnificent. No church except Westminster can rival its chapels, and the canopy over the tomb of Hugo le Despenser is admitted to be the most beautiful in Europe; it is indeed a building to see, to admire and to think about. From Cheltenham I went to Aston-le-Walls, seeing Stratford Church on my way, and stayed with my old friends, the Rector and Mrs. Aplin. On Friday, May 25, I went to Brill Station, and Mr. Lear most kindly met me and motored me over to Boarstall. We found the old decoyman, White, waiting for us. He has been on the estate for over 50 years and at the decoy about 40. His cottage is just outside the wood, and not more than 100 yards from a pipe. I may here say the wood, decoy, and garden are 15 acres, the size of the pool and pipes about 2 acres. We followed him to the nearest screens. These are well over 6 feet high, and wheat straw is used as no reeds grow near, and he

surprised me by telling me that a screen lasted for fourteen or more years. I at once noticed he did not use pegs to make a peep-hole as do so many other decoymen, but had holes about the size of one's hand covered with a piece of slate which could be moved on one side, the lower part being tucked behind a cross-bar, and I think this is one reason the screens last so long, because each time the peg is pushed through it crushes the reeds or straws and new holes are always being made, so the wet gets in and rotting takes place, and then if the peg is pushed through too far the ducks near can hear the noise and sometimes see the end of the peg move, and then the peep-hole is small, whereas the slate can be gently moved with no sound, and a hole of fair size is made. The pipes here are shorter than Berkeley, and are about 50 yards or so in length. My first sight delighted me. A gentle ripple was on the water, and the sun lit up the pool, all the bushes and trees were in tender green, the wood was blue with wild hyacinths, with here and there a clump of primroses, and on the sides patches of king cups, all so quiet, so fresh. Blackbirds fluted, nightingales jugged, and the silvery peal of willow-wrens' songs came from all sides. Not a duck or waterhen was to be seen. How different to winter-time, when the wind whistled through the leafless trees and the water was covered by hundreds of wild fowl. White told me that during the last season there were a couple of thousand ducks of several kinds on it at one time. We walked to the other pipes, and I was much interested by his conversation, and it was no difficult thing to see he was not only capable as a decoyman, but took a very great interest in his work. Amongst many things, he told me that in peeping through the screen one day he

saw several ducks swimming up the pipe heads out, just as they do when the dog is working. He showed himself, and saw it was a stoat they were following, and he took 14 common ducks, thanks to his helper, who on seeing him bolted through the wire and away. He uses a dog, and to make him more attractive ties a scarlet handkerchief round him. This decoy is not so artificial as the Berkeley Castle, the hoops to hold up the netting are of willow, and are lower, and between the pipes screens of branches are fixed, which are more in keeping with the surroundings than are wooden boards. In the season of 1878-1879 the most ducks were taken of the following kinds—common wild ducks 1,328, teal 200, wigeon 13, in all 1,541. The hour I spent went only too quickly, but it is fastened in my memory, and I shall ever remember the quiet pool, the pretty wood, and the old decoyman. Nor shall I forget the kindness of Mr. and Mrs. Lear.

## CUMBERLAND.

Name of Decoy—Silver Hill, Langtown.

Traps—About 24, set at different ponds.

Size of Water—12 ponds.

Name of Owner—Sir Richard Graham, Bt., of Netherby.

In Wood of 250 acres.

Number of ducks taken from 900 to 1,000 in a season, north-west of the Solway Moss, which is 1,000 acres.

Sir R. Graham informs me that some traps catch better than others, and they are baited with Indian corn and chopped turnips. In 1899 he bought a lot of teal from a decoy in Somersetshire, and kept them in an enclosure with their wings clipped till the following autumn. Most of them remained when they could fly. These taught the wild ones to eat corn, which previously they would not do. For some years teal were ringed and some of these were sent to a decoy in Essex. The following year one was caught at Netherby with a ring on, another was killed off the North Coast of Germany, one caught in a decoy in Wales, and several on the Continent. I have also received a very interesting letter from W. Bell, the Netherby keeper. He says: "The traps are all fixtures, and should be placed in shallow water. Size of traps, 21 feet on front next to water, 18 feet deep, the entrance 2 feet 6 inches wide,  $3\frac{1}{2}$  feet long of a tunnel shape, the end 8 or 9 inches wide. The best year was 1,233 teal, and the best take 76 teal and 2 wigeon in one trap at one time." He once saw a white teal there for a few days.

## DORSETSHIRE.

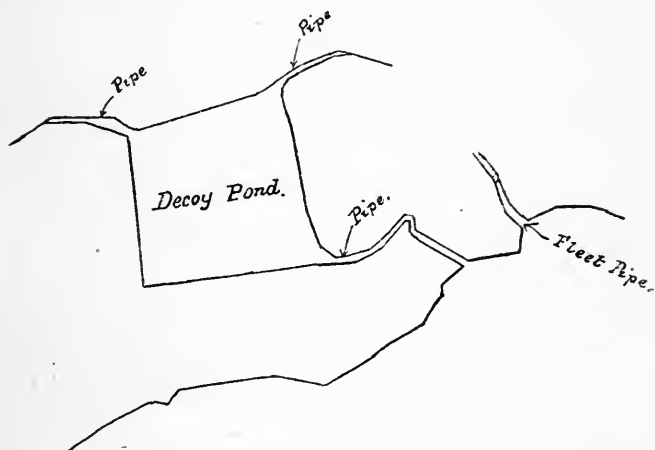
Name of Decoy—Abbotsbury.

Name of Owner—Earl of Ichester.

Size of Water—1 acre 1 rood 11 perches.

Number of Pipes—3, and one into the Backwater.

No dog used.

THE WEST FLEET.

A square pond surrounded by reeds and pampas grass. There is also a pipe near by leading into the open water of the Fleet or Backwater. Teal and common wild duck are the usual catch, but several other kinds are now and again taken. The decoy is 8 miles from Dorchester, at the head of the Fleet estuary. The date of this decoy being made is not known, but there is no doubt it is an ancient one, and probably belonged to the Monastery of St. Peter. Great numbers of duck, teal, wigeon, tufted



duck, pochard, and golden-eye visit it. The average number of ducks taken now is about 250. Close to the western end of the Fleet is the decoy. On this Fleet, which extends for 6 miles, a great number of swans are kept. Mr. Hutchings, Lord Ilchester's agent, kindly informs me there are now about 1,000, which is an average number. Years back there were over 1,500 one year and again 600. I take the following from Mr. Cornish's delightful book, "Wild England of To-Day": "During the winter wild ducks and coots in thousands frequent the sheltered waters of the Fleet, and in summer the hot and hazy surface of the shingle swarms with the young of terns and ringed plover. At the head of the water, in an almost tropical growth of pampas grass and fuchsias, is the Swan Paradise of Abbotsbury, and the rich and sheltered mead which fringes the Abbotsbury Brook is white with the graceful forms of hundreds of nesting swans. All the sites early in April are occupied by the jealous and watchful birds, each keenly resentful of any intrusion on its territory, yet in such close proximity that only a space of 10 or 12 feet divides them. Near the mouth of the small stream, which enters the Fleet below an extended bed of reeds, which is now and again cut down and stored for the use of the birds when nesting, lies the ground most coveted by the swans. Here are between two and three hundred nests or sites for nests on not more than 2 acres. So anxious are the birds to secure a space on this favoured spot that they remain sitting constantly on the place to be occupied in order to maintain their rights against intruders, and there collect with their long necks every morsel of reed and grass within reach to form a platform for their eggs. At this time the swanherd visits

them constantly, and scatters bundles of dry reeds from the stacks, which are eagerly gathered by the swans and piled round them as they sit." Mr. Hutchings tells me that the swanherd has never seen a cygnet hatched whose first feathers were white as in the so-called Polish swan, though at Cambridge a pair had now and again a white young one, one of which I saw when on a visit there to the late Professor Alfred Newton some years ago.

#### ABBOTSBURY DECOY, SEPTEMBER 12th, 1917.

After seeing Hamptworth I went via Weymouth to see this decoy and swannery. When changing trains at Poole I thought of Colonel Hawker and the shooting he did there in those long past days. Between Dorchester and Abbotsbury I saw a long-horned bullock in a meadow. How seldom does one see one of this rare breed nowadays. On arriving at Abbotsbury Station I found Mr. Hutchings, Lord Ilchester's agent, and was glad to be able to thank him for having so kindly given me information about the decoy. He now told me the keeper, Gill, would be at the decoy and ready to show it to me when I got there, which I did about 6 p.m. On my way I passed the church, and the ruins of the old Abbey, and in the bottom the Tithe Barn, which I understand is the largest in England, 270 feet long and 31 wide. About a third is in ruins; the rest is in fair repair, and is thatched with reeds from the decoy. It is a grand building, and the wooden roof is a wonderful structure. Down a short lane and over a meadow and I found the old decoyman waiting for me. He told me he had held the post for 38 years, and had been on the estate

for over 50. How I admire these old and faithful servants, who take so much care and interest in their masters' things. I found the decoy was fenced from the meadow by a high stone wall, which runs across the neck of land which contains the pool. He first of all pointed out to me a board on a high pole, and on it it is stated that in November, 1824, after a great wind and high tide the sea rose 22 feet above the decoy, the like which had never been seen before or since. A path runs along the left hand, and on its side is a pretty border of plants and flowers, which the old man takes the greatest interest in. Along the green walk we went till we were on the edge of the backwater, a long piece of brackish water cut off from the sea by the Chesil Bank, about 7 miles long, and varying in width, ending by the decoy in a wide piece of many acres. Here is the swannery, which is so well known, and where over 1,000 breeding swans live. How beautiful they looked in varied-sized parties dotted about on the rippling water. It was, indeed, a beautiful sight, and one I shall ever remember. Gill informed me that owing to the war no corn was given to them, and with the late cold spring not a single young bird had been reared. He generally placed 150 or more in the feeding pens. One-third of them were given away or eaten at the Castle, and the remainder went to keep up the herd. This swannery has been kept here for hundreds of years, and I was truly pleased to see so interesting a collection of these grand and beautiful birds. Under the bank on our left amongst a scattered weed bed were several hundreds of coots, and Gill told me that two big coot drives took place during the winter, and about 1,000 birds were shot each time, and he thought that at times there were from

eight to nine thousand of these birds on the water. He never remembered to have seen a variety amongst them. It was a pretty evening, still, clear, and bright, and a very charming picture was the great expanse of water and the numbers of great white birds on it. We now turned our attention to the decoy. There are four pipes, three of which open from the decoy pool, which is about  $1\frac{1}{4}$  acres in extent, surrounded by 3 or 4 acres of reeds, and on one side by some storm-blown trees draped with lichen, reminding me of the Dee-side trees in Aberdeenshire. The fourth pipe opens into the backwater, and this is the one in which the most ducks are taken. One day over 100 teal were secured. The most ducks ever got in a short time was a few years back when about 500 were captured in two days, 77 being caught at one take. The pipes are about 50 yards long, 9 feet high at the entrance, and about 4 yards wide there. They are of wire, and the hoops are of ash and willow. Each pipe has a run of water through it, and Gill told me this attracted ducks more than dead water ones. This I can quite understand. The screens average about 5 feet 6 inches in height, and are well made of reeds, lasting on an average of fourteen years; there are no screens between the pipe mouths, but one runs along by the edge of the backwater. The dense growth of reeds form a complete screen all round the decoy pool. A better situated decoy I have not seen, and the decoyman, I am sure, is an adept in decoying, and I much enjoyed my chat. He pointed out on the Chesil Bank where a large colony of common terns nested and a fair lot of lesser ones, and a long line of dark growths; these are peas, for a ship laden with them was wrecked here years back, and year by year they grow, but

now the pods are short and the seed small. It was getting dark and the sun was dipping westward before I could tear myself away from a spot which thoroughly appealed to my feelings, and I shall long remember the pleasant chat, the beautiful evening, and the quiet decoy so peacefully placed in that western county. Long may the swans float on the rippling waters, and may it be long, long years before the decoy is given up, as I am sorry to say so many have been in this our dear England.



PEEPING THROUGH THE "SPY-HOLE."

By A. H. Patterson.

## ESSEX.

Name of Decoy—The Grange.

Name of Owner—Mr. Attenborough.

Size of Water—Rather more than an acre.

Number of Pipes—6.

Is a Dog used?—Yes.



*The Grange Decoy Pool  
Essex.*

This decoy is in Tillingham Marsh, south of the Blackwater, and three-quarters of a mile from the sea. The average yearly take is from 1,500 to 2,000 ducks.

It lies in a flat part near the coast, which part consists of reclaimed meadows, intersected by ditches, and protected by a sea-wall. The quantity of wigeon which come vary very much. In some seasons there are great numbers, in others not so many, but some frequent the Marsh House Decoy, which is quite near. As many as 10,000 ducks of several kinds have been taken in one season not so many years back in this decoy.

After leaving Orwell I went on to Langford Hall, where I received a warm welcome from Mr. and Mrs. Littlehales, and the next morning, July 19th, he and I took train for Southminster, a quaint old town, with a large church, which has a very fine north porch and tower. Here a carriage was waiting, and we drove to the Grange Farm, and from there walked over a marsh field to the decoy, a distance of half-a-mile or so. This decoy lies surrounded by low trees and bushes, with a few tallish elms. It is about a mile from the sea-wall, and in the distance looks like an island in the great open flat. The pool is a little over an acre in extent, with six pipes, and has been a decoy for many years. The pipes vary in length a little, and in stepping them I found them, No. 1 70 yards, No. 2 70, No. 3 67, No. 4 60, No. 5 70, No. 6 63. These pipes are covered with netting on wooden hoops, with side and top supports of wood. The screens were 5 feet 6 inches high, the arch at entrance of pipes about 12 feet, and the water about 15 feet wide. Only two pipes had running back walls, as the growth of bushes acted for the others. This decoy is a very old one, is well kept, and must be very attractive to ducks. There were a fair number on it, and several gulls. The wood round it would be 6 acres or so, and we saw a lot of rabbits. As I stood

taking notes a stoat ran past us within 3 yards in the open part, and as we were down wind it never noticed us. Never before have I seen one come so near in the open and pass without spotting me. Not so the ducks, for directly we came to the pipe, where the wind blew from us to the pond, all the ducks about its entrance rose and flew across to the other side. This decoy was more like the one at Iken than any other I have seen.



## ESSEX.

Name of Decoy—Marsh House.

Owners—Dean and Chapter of St. Paul's.

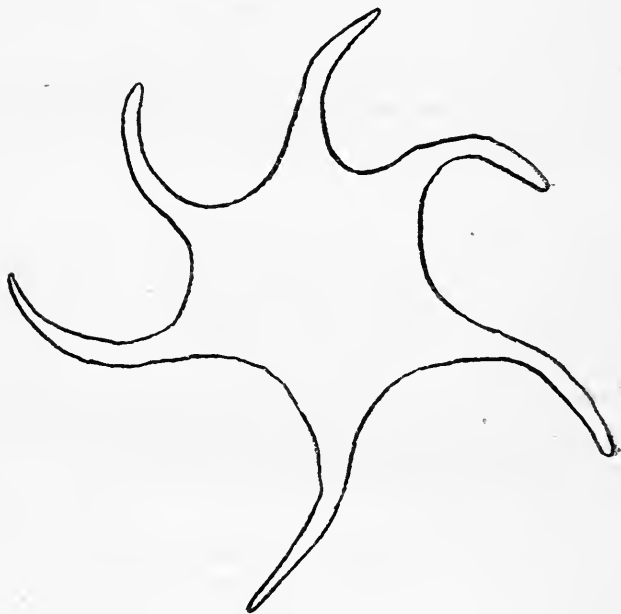
Tenant—E. Raby.

Size of Water—2 acres.

In a Wood of 8 acres.

Number of Pipes—6.

A Dog is used.



*Marsh House Decoy  
Essex.*

The Marsh House Decoy is in Bradwell Marsh, south of the Blackwater. It lies three-quarters of a mile west from the coast, and is about 2 miles from Tillingham. It is very secluded and well concealed with reeds and brushwood. A good many wigeon are taken, and most are taken in November, December, January, and February. Wigeon have once been seen on this decoy as early as August, but generally it is October before they come. This is a very ancient decoy, about 200 years old. Between 2,000 and 3,000 ducks are taken, principally wigeon. Many years back £400 were made of ducks sold. This would mean, counting teal and wigeon as half-birds, about 10,000 fowl taken in one season. In 1795, according to Daniel (p. 49), this decoy cleared £800 after paying all expenses. An interesting collection of different birds taken in this decoy from time to time is preserved at Marsh House, and comprises the following: Hooded crow, kingfisher, brown owl, kestrel, sparrow hawk, peewit, wild duck, scaup, garganey, shoveller, pintail, wigeon, gadwall, scoter ferruginous duck, tufted duck, smew, coot, redshank, spotted redshank, greenshank, oxbird, common sandpiper, little grebe, common gull, stormy petrol.

### THE MARSH HOUSE DECOY.

After a most pleasant hour at the Grange Decoy we drove on by Tillingham to the Marsh Decoy, and though as the duck flies it is only a bit over a mile from the Grange, it was 3 miles or so by the road. We walked from the farm buildings over a beautiful piece of marsh grass full of wild white clover to the decoy wood; it is

about half-a-mile. The pool is a little over  $1\frac{1}{2}$  acres in extent, surrounded by a wood of 7 acres or so. No high trees, but well sheltered with willow, alder, and birch. I always think low trees are preferred by ducks where the water is of small size, as they have more space to settle and rise. The pipes are six in number, covered with netting (string), and on wooden hoops, and are all about 10 feet high at the entrance and 15 feet wide across the water. The screens are 5 feet 6 inches high. There were a nice few ducks on the water. This decoy has not been worked for three years on account of the war, but will be again as soon as it is over. A pleasant drive back, and I saw the first corn of the year being mown (oats), and back to Langford. So ended my visit to all the decoys in Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex. In this decoy were taken in seasons of—

1852-53	...	...	...	1,227	ducks.
1853-54	...	...	...	2,668	,,
1854-55	...	...	...	3,008	,,
1855-56	...	...	...	2,062	,,
1856-57	...	...	...	2,076	,,

---

11,041 fowl.

I know no decoys now worked so well placed to attract wildfowl as are these two Essex ones, well out in a big marsh pasture close to the sea and sheltered by a ring of trees and bushes—perfect spots. More than once over 10,000 wildfowl have been taken in a season in this decoy.

## GLOUCESTERSHIRE.

Name of Decoys—Berkeley Old Decoy and New Decoy.

Name of Owner—Earl of Berkeley.

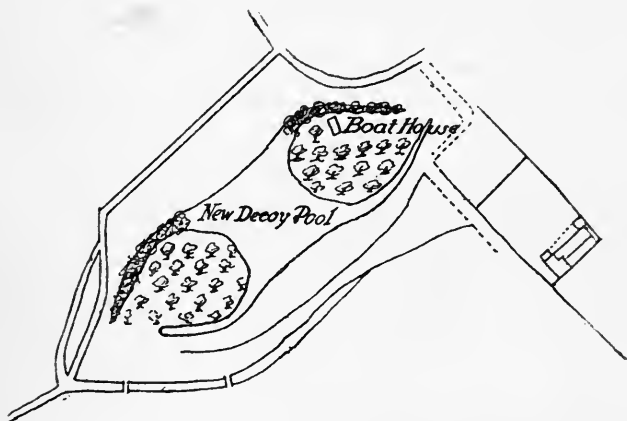
Size of Water—Old,  $1\frac{1}{4}$  acres; New, 1 acre.

Old Decoy in a Wood of 8 acres; New Decoy in a Wood of 5 acres.

Number of Pipes—Old Decoy, 4; New Decoy, 2.

Average of Ducks in the two Decoys—1,200.

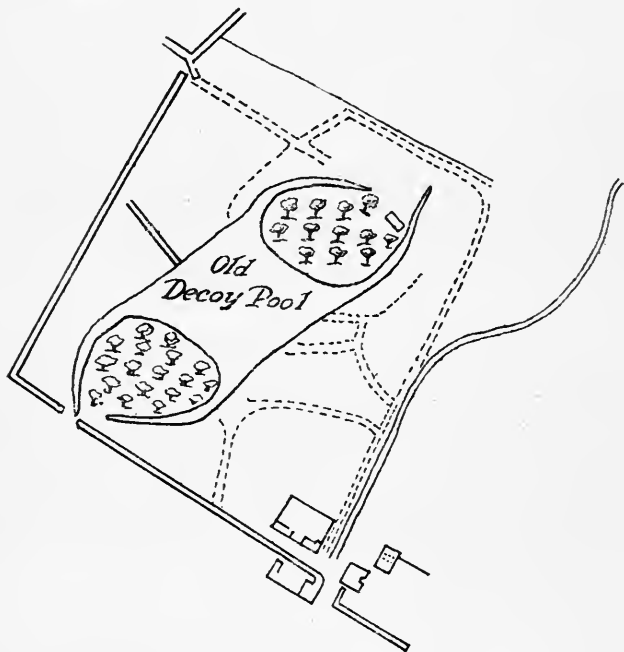
Is a Dog used?—Yes, in both.



Of the wildfowl taken an average of the common wild duck is 75 per cent. Other ducks taken are wigeon, teal, pintail, shoveller, pochard, scaup, and various divers (grebes).

This decoy is 3 miles north of the town of Berkeley and 12 miles south-west of Gloucester, and close to the bank of the River Severn. The pools are about a mile from each other, and the new decoy was made in 1840. They are on the same plan as that of Hornby Castle, in

Yorkshire, and were copied from the one at Sedgemoor, near Glastonbury, in Somersetshire. Years back a good many ducks were taken when feeding in the pipes at night by falling nets fitted at the entrance to the pipes and let down by pulling a cord.



### VISITS TO BERKELEY CASTLE DECOY.

It is wonderful how little we think of trouble and what distances we will go to see anything that interests us, and when on May 15th I left home for Cheltenham on my

way to see the Berkeley Castle decoy, distance, time, and trouble were the last things I thought about. Stopping at Worcester, I saw the Cathedral for the second time, and though perhaps with the exception of Chichester we hear less of it than of any of the others, I found it full of interest. It is one of the larger middle-sized Cathedrals, and is 426 feet in length. There are many interesting monuments, and none more so than that of King John, placed in the choir in front of the high altar. Some years back it was opened, and the body, which was in a fair state of preservation, was examined, and part of one of the stockings and the sole of a sandal removed and placed in a glass case hard by. I viewed these with much interest. The material the stocking is made of is dark in colour and coarsely woven, and must have been very uncomfortable to wear, but its condition after all these centuries is wonderful. I then proceeded to Cheltenham, which I now visited for the first time, only having passed through the station going west. I was much struck with its well-laid out streets and roads, the buildings, and trees everywhere; the Promenade is very pretty, fine trees with rooks nesting in them, one tree being of much interest—a large weeping willow, which was brought as a slip from the tree overshadowing Napoleon's grave at St. Helena. On the 17th I went to Gloucester, and enjoyed a good look over this fine Cathedral. On Friday, May 18th, I left for Berkeley Road Station, from which place I walked to the decoy, about 4 miles or so. A very pretty walk it was through winding lanes, by rustic cottages standing in nice gardens, bright with spring flowers, all freshened by the rain of the previous day. The mellow notes of blackbirds sounded on all sides; chaffinches poured out

their short jerky song from the fruit trees, which were smothered with blossoms, and the cuckoo's voice was loud. After about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  miles I crossed several fields and arrived at the keeper's cottage, which is close to the decoy pool, as it is called here. This decoy is laid out in the most approved way, and the trees planted round to make it as much hidden as possible, with lots of shrubs and bushes. There are four pipes, higher than usual and wider, and 70 yards long to where the trammel net is fastened, all the hoops to hold the net are of strong iron, and all the other supports are of iron. The netting is very strong, and tarred. The small ends and sides are of wire; between each pipe along the water's edge is a boarded fence 7 feet high, so the whole pool is screened. It is a most attractive piece of water, and being close to the River Severn is well placed for ducks. I went round and carefully looked at everything. I was much struck with many of the screens, which were overgrown with ivy. This covering caused them to look more in keeping with the surrounding trees and bushes. The decoy must have been laid out by a man fully competent for such a work, but so much iron made it look rather artificial. As I took a last look at the wood I heard two nightingales pouring out their melodious song, and many swallows were hawking over the water, and the rippling song of willow-wrens came from all sides. A pleasant walk back to the station and then by train to Cheltenham finished a happy outing.

## TO BERKELEY CASTLE DECOYS A SECOND TIME.

Owing to non-delivery of my letter to the decoyman at Berkeley, I did not see him when I went in May, so on my way back from seeing Hamptworth and Abbotsbury I stopped at Cheltenham with my daughter, and having had kindly permission from Mr. Peters, Lord Berkeley's agent, I again went in order to see the second decoy pool, which I did not see when there. I found the decoyman, whose father was there for many years, and his elder brother till he was unfortunately drowned. Though only a short time since he took the place he has worked with keen interest, and is carrying out the instructions taught him by his father when he was a boy, and I could see he took the greatest interest in everything pertaining to the decoying of ducks. We started with the old decoy close to his cottage, which I have described before. There were a few ducks on. After leaving we crossed the canal, a very fine one, 30 to 40 yards wide, and running for 14 miles without a lock. About a quarter of a mile or so we got over into a flat open piece of great extent, and at once about 50 wild geese rose several hundred yards away, and flew out and settled on the Severn, which is nearly a mile wide hereabouts. He told me they were bean geese. These come year by year early in September and leave in October, when their place is taken by the white-fronted geese, which are in big numbers, and these with a number of pink-footed live here till the spring, and there are many hundreds of them. After they have taken the best of the grass on this flat, or if it is deeply flooded, they go over the bank into the meadows beyond, and from there they are driven to the guns standing behind high



butts between the meadows and the river just at the back of the bank, and as many as 21 have been shot at one drive. Near here is the new decoy, lying a couple or more hundred yards from the flood bank and half-a-mile or so from the river. It is about an acre or so in extent, with two pipes. There used to be four. They run south-west and north-west, and the pool is surrounded by trees, and lies very quiet and sheltered. More ducks are taken here than in the old decoy, also teal and wigeon. The best take was some years back, when 300 ducks were caught in one day, and at two takes 180 and 120. Some of the screens are wooden boards, but most are of reeds, and they last about 15 years. One pipe is rather straight, but the other is a perfect-shaped one. When a big lot of ducks are in, and the tunnel net will not hold them, a drop door, iron rimmed, and of net, is dropped, the tunnel net is taken off and another is put on, and the ducks which have gone back to the drop net, which is about 6 yards from permanent end, are, after the others have been killed, again driven in. The big take filled the tunnel three times. The pipes are about 70 yards long, 18 feet wide at the mouth, and 14 feet high. The decoyman encourages ivy to grow over the screens, and he told me such covered screens lasted longer. He found that pheasants were fond of perching on the top of the screen, and they crushed and broke the reeds and rot set in, so he now runs a 4-inch-wide board on the top lengthways, and this not only keeps the birds off, but keeps the rain from running down the cut reeds. In the old decoy there are a lot of coarse fish, which attract herons. These perch on the top of the pipes and trees and at once spot the decoyman, then rising with their loud

squawk they disturb the ducks. He catches a few every season in the pipes and also in traps. In the new decoy over 100 teal have been taken in a day. He finds the wigeon the hardest to tempt in, but hemp-seed and millet thrown into the pipe floats down and often attracts them. Teal are very fond of these seeds, also of the seeds of goose grass and knot grass. The pipes are covered with strong cord netting, and all hoops are of iron, and they are higher and wider than in any of the decoys I have so far seen. He also told me his father never tried to take ducks by feeding, because he caught the lead in this way, and the lead are very important ducks, for they are continually bringing strange ducks into the decoy.

## LANCASHIRE.

Name of Decoy—Hale.

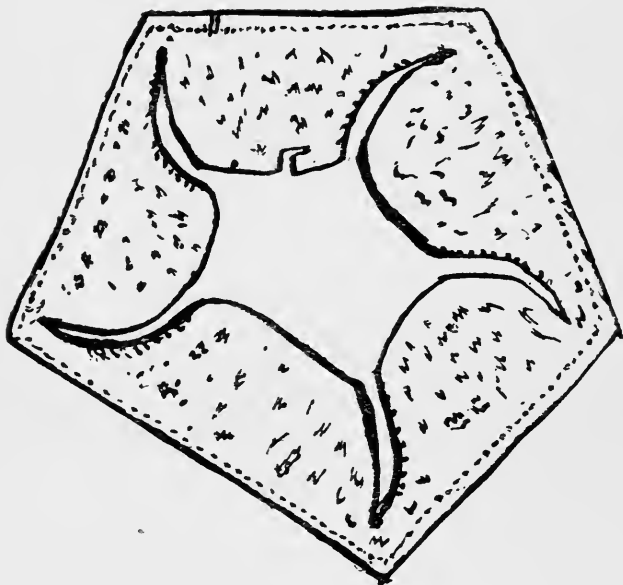
Name of Owner—Colonel Ireland-Blackburne, C.B.

Size of Water— $2\frac{1}{4}$  acres.

In a Wood of 8 acres.

Number of Pipes—5.

Is a Dog used?—Yes.



HALE DECOY.

Common wild ducks, teal, wigeon, pintail, are taken, and occasionally shovellers. Teal are taken in greater numbers than any other ducks. This decoy is only 9 miles south-east of Liverpool, and is in a marsh within a

quarter of a mile of the River Mersey, close to the village of Hale, and within 150 yards of the high road, and is surrounded by a moat 18 feet wide, which is filled during high tides, and forms a great protection to it, and is known to be at least 180 years old. Sometimes from 1,000 to 1,500 ducks are taken in a season, but the average now is about 600. A decoy book is kept, which dates from 1801 up to now. More common duck were taken up to 1875 than teal, but from that date a change has taken place, and teal predominate. This is the only pipe decoy in Lancashire. I have to thank Colonel Ireland-Blackburne for the following: "The most common wild ducks taken in one season, 444—that was in 1875; the most teal, 1,021, in 1898; and the most wigeon, 94, in 1894. Since 1900 teal have predominated, and three-fourths of the fowl taken have been of this species. From 1875 to 1885 1,361 common wild duck were caught; 118 widgeon also during this time, and 4,327 teal. From 1900 to 1917 221 wigeon, 820 common wild duck, and 6,545 teal were taken."

#### HALE HALL DECOY VISITED, November 22nd, 1917.

I often look back with pleasure to the days when I was collecting information for my book, "The Deer Parks of England," and well remember the many kindnesses I received from the owners or their agents and the great number of beautiful places I saw and the friendships I made; and now again as I get together information of the decoys now worked I find how kindly the owners are, how freely they give me particulars and ask me to go and see them. From none have I received greater kindness than

from Colonel Ireland-Blackburne, the owner of the Hale Decoy, and an invitation to go and see it and him was eagerly accepted by me. I left home on the 21st of November, and arrived at Liverpool in the early afternoon, and saw the New Cathedral which is being built; it stands in a fine position, and will be a very large and striking church, covering more ground than any other English Cathedral. I arrived at Ditton Junction, and was met by Colonel Blackburne, who shortly after gave me a hearty welcome at his house, a building of great interest dating back to the thirteenth century, at least a goodly part of it does. I was very much struck with the inner hall-door, the finest in a private house I have ever seen; it is 8 feet 6 inches in height, 5 feet 6 inches in width and 3 inches thick, of black oak, and looks as good as it did hundreds of years back; it is indeed a door to be proud of. The view from the west windows is a fine one over the park to the River Mersey, which here is  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles wide, and beyond it the hills of Cheshire form a grand background. We met the decoyman in the morning near the decoy, which is about a mile or so from the Hall. He was accompanied by his dog, a very smart-looking brown terrier, and I was pleased to hear there were a lot of teal on the decoy, and he said he was certain of a fair take. He had caught 18 the day before, and 16 on the previous one. The decoy is near the bank of the river, and is  $2\frac{1}{2}$  acres in size—this includes the five pipes—and is surrounded by 8 acres of wood, consisting of oaks, elms, and a few ashes; it is known to have been a decoy for nearly 200 years, and is as well placed as is possible to imagine. Leaving the road we crossed a flat, damp meadow, and arrived at the wood. A dyke surrounds all

this wood; it is about 6 yards across, and forms a grand protection from two and four footed intruders. I was much interested with the foot-bridge; this when not in use is locked on the meadow side, and when wanted is unfastened and swings over the water, as the swing doors of a canal do. Crossing it we entered the wood. Here is pipe No. 1, not used this season as the snow of last spring bent down some of the arches. I may here say the five pipes are about 70 yards long, 8 yards wide at the mouth, and 10 feet high there; they have iron hoops, and are covered with strong cord netting; the screens are of 1-inch boards, 6 feet high, and tarred, and the peep-holes in them are about 2 inches long, half-an-inch wide, cut across the boards. The ends of all the pipes run to within a few yards of the outside of the wood. The dog-leaps have a round hole cut through them, through which the small dog goes. This to me is better than the dog jumping over, as it does not startle the fowl so much. We now had a peep at the pool, and what a sight. It was to me a perfect picture; it was dotted all over with scores of teal and here and there a pair of common wild ducks. A bright sun was shining, showing up their lovely plumage. The place resounded with the whistling notes of the drake teal and the subdued quack quack of the females. I whispered to the keeper what number about are there; he replied between four and five hundred. I should have thought more. Many were sleeping, others preening themselves and little thinking their enemy man was so near. A delightful bird picture which I shall never forget. As the wind suited No. 3 pipe we moved on. I stopped half-way up it and glued my eye to the peep-hole; there were a lot of teal about the entrance. The keeper went

down with the dog and put her through near the mouth of the pipe. The effect on the teal was wonderful. Up went every head, necks were poked forward, and on the second appearance many swam up the pipe. Now the decoyman showed himself to them, and up the pipe they flew past me, so near I could feel the wind from their wings, and being near a dog-jump I could see to net at the end. Forward they dashed, and struggled into the very end of the tunnel net. We were quickly there, the decoyman unfastened the net, laid the hoop end on the ground, and started to break the necks of the teal which were sticking through the meshes; this he did by taking hold of the bird close to where the neck joins the body, then taking the head between the thumb and two first fingers he pressed the neck to his left hand and twisted the head round to the right, and so killed them quickly and with little pain. This done he emptied the birds out, and we found there were 28, all teal, with a proportion of two drakes to a duck. Beautiful they were in plumage and shape. I was amused to see the dog pick several up, look at his master, and with a smile and tail-wag laid them down as if to say we both have done it well; and it was wonderful to think that all this had been done in a few minutes and none of the fowl on the pool were any the wiser. Peeping down No. 4 pipe, which the wind only permitted from near the bend, we saw several birds on the side well up, so the decoyman asked us to stand well back, and he crossed through the trees to the pipe, showed himself at once and up they went. We joined him at the end net, and found eight teal and a waterhen in. Before we had been there a couple of minutes every duck on the pool was on the wing, having even at this distance got our wind, and con-

tinued to fly round till we had emptied and fixed the net; we then drew away amongst the trees and watched them. Round and round they flew, and gradually lowering at last swished down and settled again. This proves how soon they wind anyone and what an effect it has on them, and completely kills the idea of some folk that birds cannot smell. Having collected the 36 teal, we quietly left the decoy, passed over the plank bridge, which was swung over to the meadow, chained and locked, where I thanked the decoyman for a delightful exhibition and returned to the Hall with my host, and left for home after sincere thanks for such a sight which will never fade from my memory.

Name of Decoy or Trap—Hornby Castle, near Lancaster.

A Trap.

Size of Water—Made on side of River Lune.

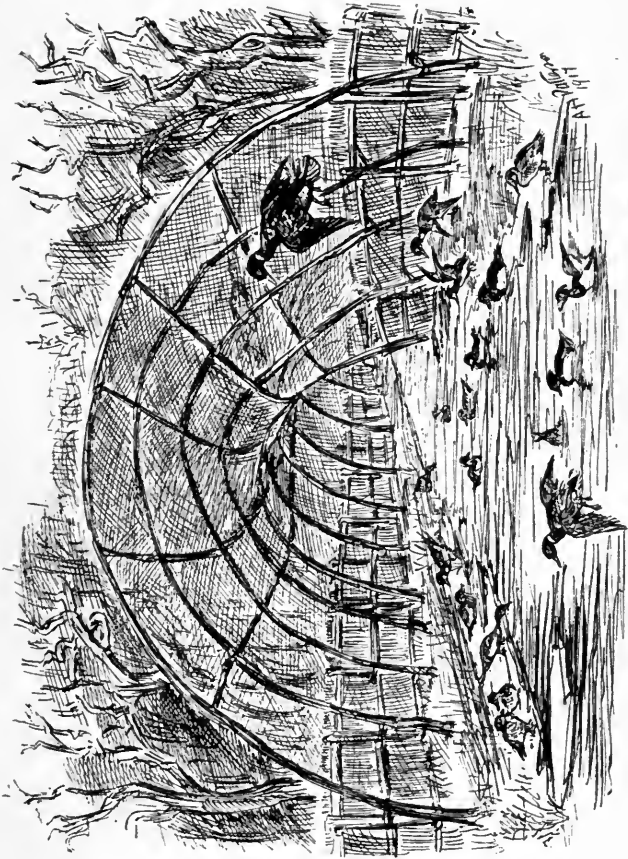
Name of Owner—Mr. C. H. W. Foster.

Size of Trap—24 feet square.

In a long and interesting letter the head keeper, W. S. Bowman, tells me the following: "This trap was made to catch up the tame-reared ducks, which are reared at Hornby Castle, from 200 to 300 in number, but some wild ones are taken, about 40 in a season, and 14 the most ever taken at one time." He writes: "The placing of the trap must be carefully arranged, otherwise there will not be much chance of success, the place selected to be on the river bank where willows or brushwood is growing. The decoy must be placed behind the brushwood, so that it is hidden from the ducks, but an inroad



from it to the river must be made, running to the entrance of the trap. The tunnel of the trap is the main object. This must be of a half-moon shape on arches of wire or willow running into the trap for about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  feet, the outer entrance to be made 2 feet wide by  $1\frac{1}{2}$  feet high, and must be fitted to a hole cut out of the end next the river and where the inroad runs up the cage, the end of this tunnel to be 1 foot wide, about the same height or a little less, so that the ducks can pass into the cage through it without having to squeeze in. Many ducks won't do this, but when they feel the wire touching them they back out." He says: "Middle day is the best time to look at the trap, as in the evening and early morning ducks are feeding, and it would frighten them much. The corn for bait must be laid from the water's edge through the cutting and the tunnel into the centre of the trap, the bait to be Indian corn. Most traps have a recess entrance, but I recommend the tunnel opening to be straight on the end."



WHAT HE SEES.

By A. H. Patterson.

## LEICESTERSHIRE.

Name of Water—Groby Pool.

Traps.

Owner—The Hon. Mrs. Grey.

Tenant—T. W. Everard.

Size of Water—20 acres.

Number of Traps—2, made of Wire Netting; Length, 14 feet;  
Width, 5 feet; Height, 4 feet.

The traps are baited with maize. One is in the rushes, the other on the side of water. Common duck and teal are taken, but never very many in a season. The best take at one time was fifteen common wild duck and nine teal. Waterhens are now and again caught. This is a very pretty lake, and much frequented by wildfowl; but a road runs on one end and is rather a drawback. Beds of reeds form a good covert for ducks, and much weed is also attractive.

## LINCOLNSHIRE.

Name of Decoy—Ashby.

Name of Owner—Mr. F. King.

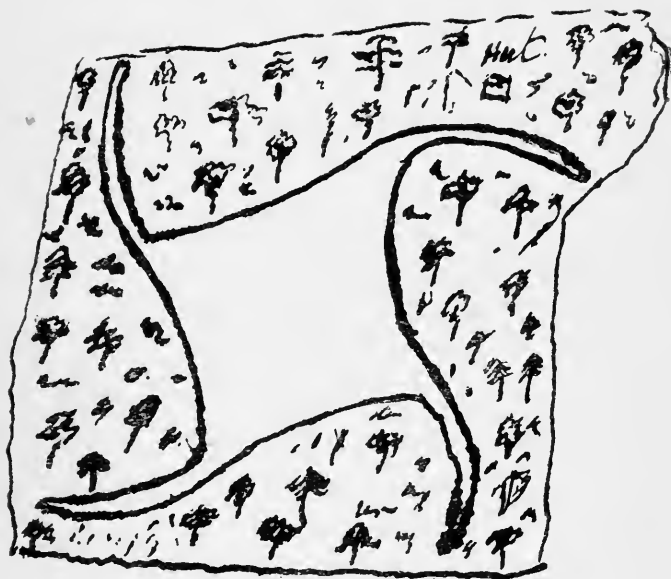
Name of Tenant—Mr. Noel Fawcett.

Size of Water—2 acres.

In a Wood of 10 acres.

Number of Pipes—4.

Is a Dog used?—Yes.



*Ashby Decoy*

This is one of the most celebrated decoys in England, and is now the only one in Lincolnshire. Years back there were thirty-eight. Most of them had been discontinued as far back as 1808, when over 200,000 acres in this

county had been drained; in those days there were no doubt more wildfowl in Lincolnshire than in any other shire in England. The most ducks taken in one season was in 1834-35, when 6,367 were caught, and in 1852-53 the take was 6,059, and in thirty-five seasons 95,865 ducks were captured, consisting of 48,664 wild ducks, 44,568 teal, 2,019 wigeon, 285 shovellers, 278 pintail, 22 gadwall, and 29 garganey. Mr. Fawcett informs me the proportion now is three-quarters common wild duck and one-quarter teal. In late years the best day's take was 248, of which number 113 mallard were taken at one drive. The decoy is 2 miles from the River Trent.

#### A VISIT TO THE ASHBY DECOY.

The owner of this famous decoy, Mr. King, having kindly asked me to run over and have a look at it, I need hardly say I jumped at the kind invitation, and a friend almost as keen offering to motor me there, we left home by 10 a.m., and were soon passing the entrance of the beautiful old abbey of Rufford, where King Edward stayed so often for the Doncaster St. Leger. The sun was shining, and the grand old trees and shrubs have never looked more beautiful. On through Ollerton to Retford, where after a warm up and a short rest we ran on to Gainsborough, where we were charged 1s. 8d. for bridge toll over the River Trent. After passing through the town, we came to Scotter and Messingham, and sinking the steeping hill, arrived at the decoy-house and had a hearty welcome from Mr. King. He told us that the decoy was frozen, but he would take us to the screens to have a look at the ducks. The water at this celebrated decoy is about 2 acres in extent, and

lies in a wood of 10 acres. The trees—oak, birch, and alders—grow down to the bank, and some are high ones. There are four pipes. In this decoy between the seasons of 1833-34 and 1867-68 were taken 95,865 ducks of seven different kinds. I also noticed in the list were twenty-nine garganey, taken in the following years:—

1833 ... ..	1	1844 ... ..	1	1854 ... ..	3
1834 ... ..	2	1846 ... ..	1	1856 ... ..	2
1836 ... ..	1	1849 ... ..	2	1857 ... ..	3
1838 ... ..	3	1851 ... ..	1	1861 ... ..	1
1840 ... ..	1	1852 ... ..	1	1863 ... ..	1
1841 ... ..	2	1853 ... ..	3	Total ...	—29

Garganeys are rare, and not being a winter bird, are seldom taken, makes this a most interesting list. During the thirty-five years only twenty-two gadwall were caught. This clearly shows that they are far from common.

The decoy is about a couple of hundred yards from the house, and is about 2 miles from the banks of the Trent. Near the river there is a good lot of warped land, which is made land, and is done in the following way: The high tide is let over the fields, and when the sediment has settled, it is run off at low water. This is continued till there is a sufficient deposit, which is very productive, being greatly composed of vegetable matter, and grows large crops of mangolds and potatoes. Mr. King informed me they generally warp 4 feet, but he has known as much as 10 feet put on, but, of course, it depends on the lie of the land, some parts wanting only 2 feet or so. These floodings attract great numbers of wildfowl, who frequent them to feed at night, resting by day on the waters of the decoy. After crossing the meadow in which the house stands, we passed over a plank and entered the

wood, and were soon at the screens. On peeping through I saw a great company of wildfowl standing on the ice. They were in two lots, and Mr. King estimated the number at about 700. They were principally common wild ducks, but there were a good few teal and some wigeon, and a very beautiful sight it was, their bright plumage showing up under the brilliant sunshine. I could have remained for hours, and my thoughts went back to the olden days when, instead of hundreds, probably there were thousands, for flocks of many thousands were often seen passing over from one part of the fen to another, and an old friend of Mr. King's told me he remembers years back 2,200 ducks being taken at Ashby in thirty-one days. After tearing myself away from the reed screens I walked down the side of the pipe, and so on to the house. In the hall Mr. King pointed out to me a case containing a stuffed dog, and informed me it was one of "Mr. Healy's."\* It was a long low foxy-coloured animal with an abnormally bushy tail. It interested me much, and I wondered how many ducks it had enticed to their doom. Outside was a stone to another favourite, and on it a Latin inscription, which, translated, reads thus :—

MOSSIE,

Amongst Dogs the Most Beloved.

Departed this Life,

1848.

This Monument was placed in her Memory

by

H. H.

On the top of the stone slab is a dog very beautifully

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\* Mr. H. Healy was a former owner of Ashby Decoy.

carved. The stone had only lately been discovered, having been used to cover a drain, but will now be taken care of. The Ashby Decoy is now rented by Mr. Noel Fawcett. The pipes are 75 yards long, 16 feet wide at entrance, and 14 feet at arch, and are covered with string netting; four in number, in good working order. The screens are of reeds and 6 feet high.



MR. H. WILLIAMS FEEDING DUCKS OVER THE SCREENS AT  
BOROUGH FEN DECOY, NEAR PETERBOROUGH.



## NORFOLK.

Name of Decoy—Wretham.

Name of Owner—Mr. Saxton W. A. Noble.

Size of Water—30 acres.

Size of Wood—38 acres of Woods on three sides; the other side Open Park.

Number of Pipes—3

Average number of Ducks taken in a season is about 1,000.

No Dog is used.

Common wild ducks are principally the ducks taken, but teal, wigeon, shovellers, and gadwall are caught now and again. The piece of water is known as the "Mickle Mere," and is situated in Wretham Park, midway between Thetford and Watton. It is now about eighty years since the decoy was made. One of the good seasons was 1883-84, when 1,640 ducks were taken. A decoy book was started in 1868. It is found here that a good year for acorns is a poor year for taking ducks, for the ducks then leave the water continually to go into the plantations to feed on them. Teal and wigeon are not often taken, though there are frequently many hundreds on the water. This is now the only decoy worked in Norfolk; formerly there were twenty-one, and in 1886 there were five. The following are some of the best years lately: 1896-97, 1,807; 1897-98, 935; 1900-1, 1,354; 1903-4, 881; 1906-7, 1,259; 1907-8, 806; 1908-9, 950; 1910-11, 711; 1913-14, 1,283; 1915-16, 992.

## WRETHAM DECOY, JULY 15th, 1918.

I left my brother's near Leicester and went on by Peterborough and Ely to Thetford. It was close and hot, and

trains crowded, which made travelling anything but pleasant. The country looked bright and fresh after the rains of the last few days. I again saw Peterborough and Ely Cathedrals; both fine ones. The latter, I always think, is the grandest, both inside and out, in England, and I have seen them all. Thetford was full of soldiers, and I had much difficulty in getting a carriage, but at last succeeded and drove off to Wretham Decoy. The country I passed over was typical of Norfolk, moderately undulating, well wooded, with large open fields. Here and there were big pieces of bracken, with patches of heather dotted about. Lots of striking flowers were on either hand. Mulleins reared their long stems decked with yellow flowers, bedstraws, yellow and white, pink mallows, and lots of biting stone-crop, which seems to flourish on this dry, sandy ground. Six miles brought us to Wretham Park, and I found Brown, the head keeper, at home, and we at once walked across the park to the decoy. It lies a few hundred yards from the house, a natural piece of water called "Mickle Mere." It is about 30 acres in extent. Formerly there were ten pipes, but only three have been used for some years. It is a perfect-looking duck pool, and Brown said that during the season there were often thousands of ducks on it of several sorts, and any day there were hundreds. The first pipe I saw was the largest of the three, and the biggest I have ever seen. It was 96 yards long and 25 feet wide at the mouth and about 16 feet high at the top of the arch. This size was carried up for 20 yards or more, and the hoops, which were of flat wood, were strengthened with bands of iron, and supported as far as the bend by poles up the middle of the pipe. The hoops were fixed in strong oaken posts,

which came above the bank. The netting was of wire. I have never seen these centre supports used in a pipe before. The other two pipes were 65 yards long, and not nearly so wide or high. The screens are of reeds 6 feet 6 inches high, the dog-jumps wood, and not high. The best season Brown has had he got just over 1,800 ducks. The park is well wooded, and the house, a new one to replace the one burned a few years back, is of brick and large in size. There are several smaller pools about, which add to the attraction for ducks. Big belts of various timber trees surround the park, and it struck me as a very fine sporting property. My thanks are due to Mr. Saxton Noble for kindly permission to see it.



THE TAKE.

By A. H. Patterson.

## NORTHAMPTONSHIRE.

## BOROUGH FEN DECOY.

Name of Decoy—Borough Fen Decoy.

Name of Owner—Mr. Watson.

Name of Tenant—Herbert Williams.

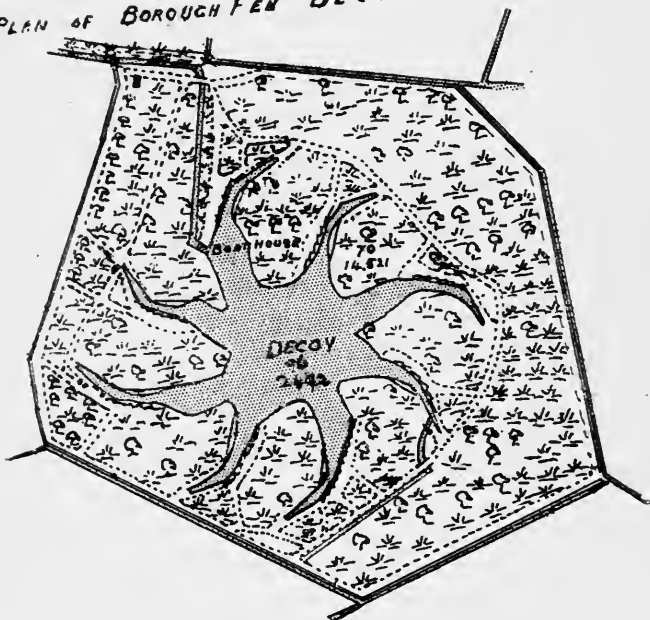
Size of Water—2 acres.

In a Wood of 19 acres

Number of Pipes—8.

A Dog is used.

PLAN OF BOROUGH FEN DECOY



This decoy has been in the tenancy of Mr. Williams' family for over 200 years. It is in the north-east corner of Northamptonshire and about 6 miles north of Peterborough. It is one of the oldest decoys, and was worked as far back as 1670. Very large takes were made in the past years, the duck taken in greatest numbers being the common wild duck, but a good few wigeon and teal are taken, some shovellers, and once or twice garganey teal; amongst other birds, two full snipe have been caught. Mr. Williams tells me that even now a goodly lot of duck are seen on the pool, as many as between 2,000 and 3,000 at one time. This decoy is most beautifully kept in every way; the pipes, screens, etc., in fact everything, in the best of order. After the great floods of August, 1881, more ducks were taken during the season than Mr. Williams ever remembers; just over 16,000 ducks were caught.

#### BOROUGH FEN DECOY, JULY 13th, 1917.

Having received a kind invitation from Mr. Williams to visit this well-known decoy, I took the opportunity when on a visit to my brother's to go, his place being nearer than mine, and the trains fitted better, for it is a labour in those evil times of few trains and higher fares to arrange to get to and return from places even though they are not so very far apart. Leaving Glen Station, we changed into the Peterborough train at Market Harborough, and were soon running through the great Welland Valley. Here many were busy with their hay; more than half the crop was carried, and was quite an average one. Away on the right we had a view of Rockingham Castle, and very fine

it looked, with its trees and great chimney stacks and its flag flying from the highest part—a beautiful position for such a house guarding the wide vale, and surrounded by oaken woods of great size. Leaving Seaton, where I have in the far past years got off for my old school, Uppingham, we passed under the long Midland viaduct of Haringworth and ran into a dried-up part of the shire of Rutland. Here pastures were brown and scanty, and corn crops looked none too well. This change was remarkable, for a few miles on the Leicestershire side of Seaton was fairly green; here burned up. Passing King's Cliff I was struck with the number and size of the woods and plantations. Soon we arrived at Wansford, and the old tale of the landlord of the hotel there came to my mind. He one Sunday afternoon when hay was cocked went into his meadow, and, getting on a cock, went to sleep. Earlier in the day there had been a big storm higher up the valley, and a great volume of water came down and away floated the hay cock into the river, but after a few hundred yards it stuck in a hedge by a road. After a time Mr. Percival woke up and wondered wherever he could be. His shouts brought a man on to the road above him. "Wherever am I?" he asked. "At Wansford," replied the man. "What, Wansford in England?" asked Percival. "Yes," answered the man. "Thank goodness for that," and so it is often called Wansford in England to this day. We motored from Peterborough over a typical marsh road through a typical marsh country for about 6 miles, then turning through a gate ran under a nice avenue of willows with a wide dyke on either side to the decoy-house, where Mr. Williams (whose ancestors have rented this decoy for over 200 years) was waiting for us

and took us at once to the decoy. It is in a wood of 19 acres, and the pool, including the eight pipes, is 2 acres. There is a patch of reeds in the middle. We were soon at the first pipe, and I saw at once they had been planned by an expert. The bend was perfect and the tapering shape capitally done. Nothing caught the eye. Nets of strong cord covered the pipes; they are dipped in tar every few years, and last about twenty-five, or in some cases more; along the bottom they were fastened to stout oak and elm boards, and the soil was dug away from the outside to keep the grasses from growing against the net and rotting it. The screens were well made; not so high as is generally the case, and I at once noticed the following, cut on the outside post of one of them, "John Williams, aged 21, 1833." Time had worn the sharp edges of the knife-cuts, but it was as easy to read as the day on which it had been done. This post was of oak, but of no great strength. The bottom had been sprunned, and the top was serrated by rain and snow, but the rest from the ground to within a few inches of the top was as sound as ever. John Williams was the father of the present tenant, and lived to be eighty-five. We now arrived at the boathouse, and getting into a boat, Mr. Williams rowed us out into the middle of the pool, where we could see the eight pipes and the surroundings. Several common ducks rose from the reeds, and also three shovellers. The pipes are 12 feet high at the entrance, and from 70 to 80 yards long, and slope down to 1 foot 6 inches where the tunnel net is fastened on. The mesh of the net is about 3 inches at the water-end and 1 inch at the small end. A white broken-haired terrier is used as a decoy dog. This white dog is not dressed in any way, so it seems ducks



are attracted by the animal, and its colour does not matter. Common wild ducks are principally taken, also wigeon, teal and a shoveller now and again; garganey on a few occasions in autumn on their way south. Mr. Williams told me there were large numbers of duck on sometimes. He thinks between 3,000 and 4,000 now and again. The wooden hoops to hold up the netting are of willow and ash, the latter lasting the longest. The spruns to the largest posts are oak and elm, the screen props willow or elder. The surrounding wood consists of willow, birch, poplar, and on the drier portions ash and elm. The ground under them is covered with high water grasses, meadow sweet, and here and there an apple tree. The decoy and its surroundings and outer hedges are kept in the most perfect order. Between the mouth of the pipes the screens are about 4 feet high of split twisted willows, and the outer fence of wood the same. When looking through the reed screens Mr. Williams does not use a peg as in some decoys, but has a short piece of willow run through and the other end pushed behind one of the bars. Thus it is always in place when wanted, and there is no noise or crushing of reeds, as where a peg is run through and twisted round. The best times for takes here are 11 a.m. and 2 p.m., and the most attractive food is seeds of fat hen (goosefoot), knot grass and wheat. I cannot imagine a more delightful occupation than the working of this well kept and attractive decoy, and I am very much inclined to envy Mr. Williams his occupation, and never shall I forget the quiet wood, the still pool with its reed screens, and the happy hour I spent seeing this charming spot. Since visiting this decoy I have had the pleasure of entertaining Mr. Williams at Rainworth. He

told me that last season, 1917-18, was a very good one. He had two takes one day with only a short time between; the first was 176, the second 140, all common ducks.

### A SECOND VISIT TO BOROUGH FEN DECOY, FEBRUARY, 1919.

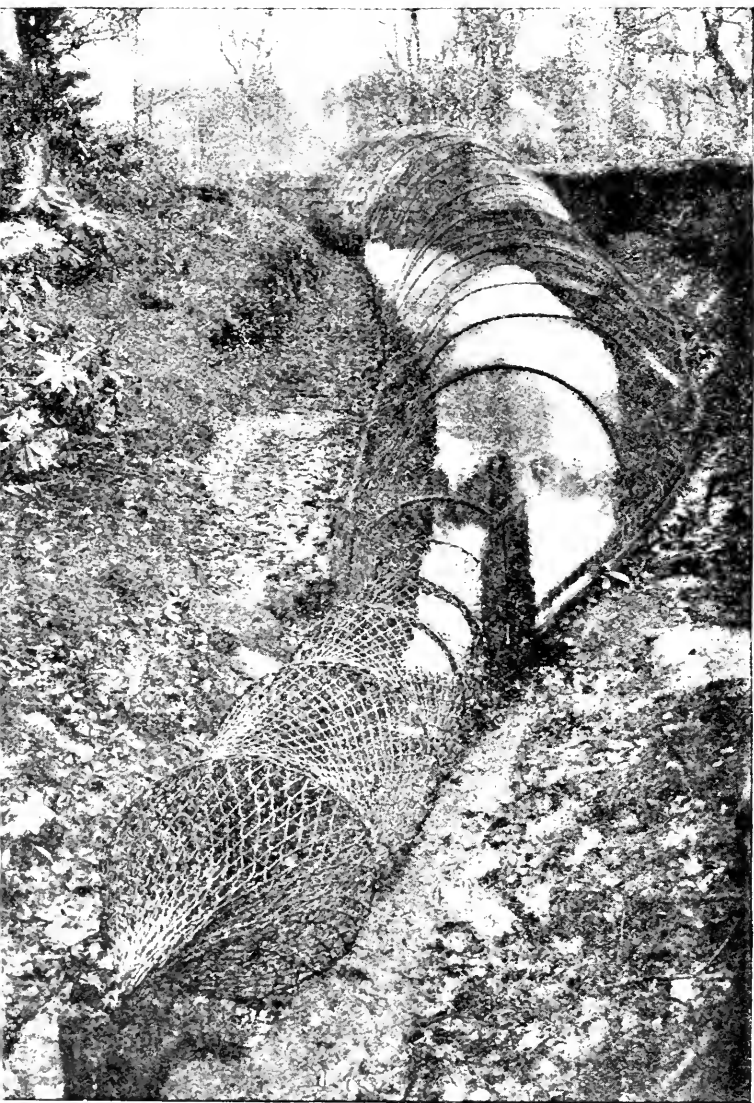
When I visited this decoy in July, 1917, I saw in what perfect order everything was, and it was an easy thing to see how thoroughly Mr. Williams understood all about the decoying of ducks, and since then I have had a keen desire to go and see a take or two. So when I had a kindly invitation to go there for a couple of nights towards the end of this season, 1919, I need hardly say I accepted it with delight. It was a typical February morning when I left home for Peterborough—still, grey, and cold—but as there had been no frosts since I heard I knew that the decoyman's chief enemy had behaved kindly to me. A sharp frost is fatal, for the decoy pools, lying low and sheltered, as they all do, are much more liable to get coated with ice than are more exposed waters, where the wind often prevents ice from forming. Often in decoys after the first night's frost the ice about the pipe which the wind favours is broken before day-break, and corn thrown in, the tame decoy ducks then keep it from forming till the wild ones arrive, and they at once make for the only open piece and keep it clear, and often with great results to the decoyman; but two or three nights seal up the water, and nothing can be done but to keep the pool quiet. Mr. Williams met me at Walton, and drove me out to the decoy house. On our way we passed a lot of pollard willows on the roadside,

and in one sat two little owls, and though we drove within a few yards neither of them moved. Turning from the high road through the gate, another flew from a willow, and Mr. Williams told me there were any quantity about, and I was glad to hear he gave them a better character than I have heard given in other parts. A kindly welcome from Mrs. and Miss Williams and a dish of tea, after which we went into the decoy wood to see the "decoy rise," as the leaving of ducks at flight time is called. As we walked along up wind, just inside the trees, I was surprised at the great number of wood-pigeons which had come in to roost. All the odd Spruce and Scotch firs were full, and even the swishy willows of no great height were grey with them. Never have I seen more in a wood of this size; there were hundreds. Every now and again a pheasant wirred out of a tree, and I heard several cocks go up further away. We fixed under some poplars, and soon the decoy rose. Ducks in pairs, ducks in fours, ducks in dozens went over, and on either side the air was full of them. Teal passed in quantities, and now and again the "Whew-whew!" of the wigeon came from small parties of this pretty duck, and the long and slim forms of one or more pintail showed up against the pale grey background. The flight is soon over, and this was much too soon for me, for never before have I seen such a quantity of ducks at a flight time. It was fairly dark now. So back to the house we went, and a great chat about decoys and ducks we had till bedtime. Another grey morning, but so far fine. Just before we started for the decoy, at 10.30, a slight powder rain commenced, but there was little of it, and, having received a burning piece of peat, we, his man,

and not forgetting the dog, proceeded to the first pipe. The dog, a curiously marked one, of pure white, with a jet-black head, such a marking as a Chilian swan has, is a long-haired terrier, perfectly broken, and full of intelligence. I may say the wind was as bad as possible for this decoy. Arriving at the first pipe, the man went to the first screen from its mouth, and showed himself to those ducks that were in the pipe. There was a rush of wings; the birds, well up, going forward, those who were about the mouth going away. I stood at the bend, and had a good view of the narrow end and the tunnel net. I saw one duck rise up, twist round, and fly back, evidently had seen this game before; the rest flapped past me, and into the small end they pushed, one over the other. To them we went, and the net was taken off, and the man started taking them out, which he did two at a time, handing them to Mr. Williams, who took them by the necks in his right hand, locked their wings with his left, and then, changing hands, twisted their heads and with a backward bend broke their necks—all done so quickly and with little pain to the victims. I was greatly impressed with this art—for I may term it an art—of killing in a humane way is only attained as he did it by long practice. The locking of their wings keeps them from moving when thrown down, and prevents them making the noise they would do, which would be heard by the ducks near. The time taken by the two men for each pair was about half a minute. On counting we found there were 24 ducks, consisting of 14 ducks and 10 mallards. We now proceeded to the next pipe, and went to work as before, and 10 ducks was the result, five of each sex. Williams now said there is just a sporting chance

for one other pipe, but only a poor one, but we will try. On peeping through the screen, he beckoned me to come and look, and I did so. There were a lot of ducks about the mouth and near by—I should say a hundred or so—nearly all common wild ducks, but a few teal, three wigeon, and one beautiful drake pintail. It was a pretty sight, and one that charmed me, and I would have much sooner stayed and looked than have tried to take any, but a movement of his hand sent the man to the first screen; then the rush of wings, and all but four flew up wind out over the pool; the four went right, and were added to the bag. There were now a goodly number of ducks flying round overhead, and I was struck at the little notice they took of us when standing still by the trees, but their attention seemed to be taken up by those that were on the water, many of which kept calling loudly. The slain were now fastened by their necks in two ropes and then divided and slung over the left shoulder, half on back and half in front. To the duck-house we went, and each bird, after being smoothed down, was placed on its breast on the shelf. Here they set, and their weight being on their breast flattens it out, making them look plump and wide. Here lay shovellers, pintail, wigeon, teal, and common ducks, and all of very beautiful plumage; for take the ducks as a family all in all they are the more striking and beautiful in dress than any other lot of British birds. I was given a pintail and a wigeon, both of which I found most excellent when cooked. It was now raining, and continued to do so all the afternoon and evening, and we never got out again, and, though fine next morning, the wind was in a worse quarter than yesterday, and I was sorry when Mr.

Williams said it was no good trying, but was pleased to have seen what I had. One is much interested in reading about the cost of things in long past days. What price game was, and I have no doubt those who come after us will be the same. I was shown a letter in which one of the largest London wholesale dealers said I have bought wild ducks by hundreds, and not so long back at the decoy for 1s. 3d. and 1s. 6d. each, 2s. 6d. and 3s. a couple, and I am now—February—giving 8s. each; 16s. a couple. What a price it is. Surely it will never be so much again. I need hardly say how much I enjoyed myself, for it is a great favour to be permitted to see a take in any decoy, and I sincerely thank Mr. Williams for kindly permitting me to do so.



DECOY PIPE, SHOWING TUNNEL NET.

*I thank Messrs. Cassell & Co., Ltd., for the loan of this block.*

## NOTTINGHAMSHIRE.

Name of Decoy—Annesley Park.

A Decoy or Trap?—A Trap.

Name of Owner—J. P. Chaworth-Musters.

Size of Water—About 5 acres.

In the open Deer Park; a few trees at one end.

Remarks—Mr. Musters informs me he only takes ducks for his friends and the house, and has caught the following kinds: Mallard, wigeon, pintail, gadwall, tufted duck, pochard, and shoveller.

Size of Annesley Trap—75 feet long, 8 feet high, and 10 feet wide, and when set the door is 2 feet above the water.



Name of Decoy—Rainworth Lodge.

A Decoy or Trap?—Trap.

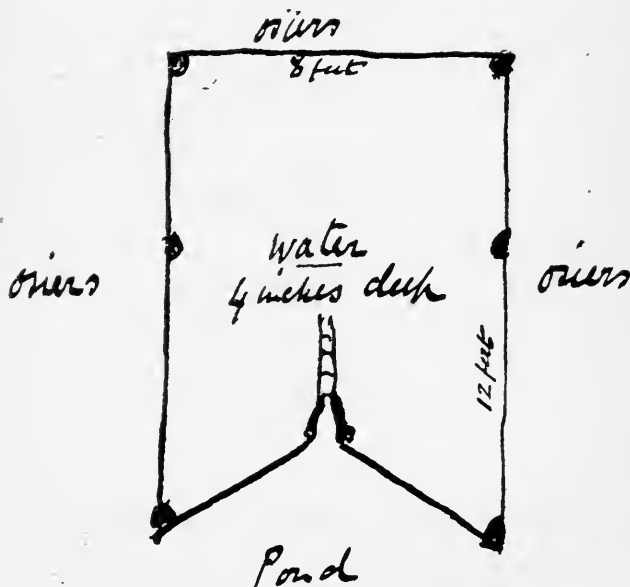
Name of Owner—J. Whitaker.

Size of Water— $1\frac{1}{2}$  acres; surrounded by trees.

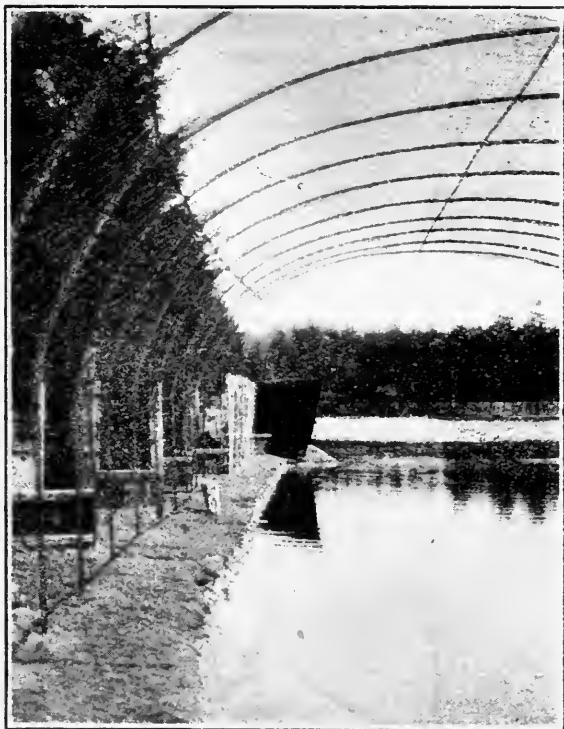
Size of Trap—33 feet long, 10 feet wide, and 7 feet high.

The trap is opposite the house, cut out of the bank of the pond, and is overhung by trees, and can be seen into from several windows. Few ducks are taken, but there is always the chance of getting one or two, which keeps up the interest. 200 yards away is a second trap, for teal,

#### TEAL TRAP.



which is 12 feet long, 8 feet wide, and 5 feet high. This one is at the shallow end of the water, and cut out into an osier bed; it is baited with hemp seed and corn, and ducks go in and cannot find their way out. This tail piece will give an idea of the ground plan.



ENTRANCE TO ONE OF THE PIPES, HORNBY CASTLE DECOY.  
DUCKS FOLLOWING THE DECOY DOG.

Copyright.]

[Photo by Oxley Grabham.]

## SHROPSHIRE.

Name of Decoy—Oakly Park.

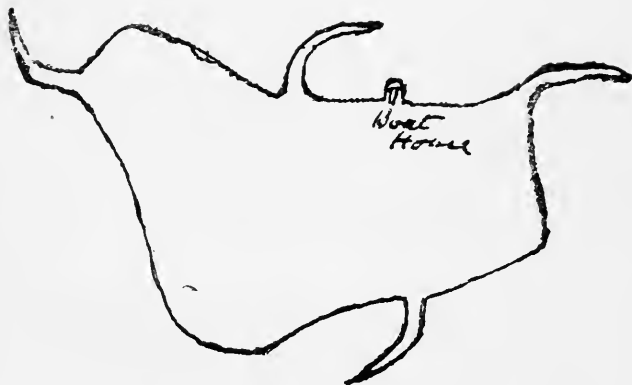
Name of Owner—The Earl of Plymouth.

Size of Water—3 acres 1 rood 22 perches.

In a Wood of 13 acres.

Number of Pipes—4.

Dogs have been used.



This decoy is an old one, and is marked on a map dated 1796. Originally there were only two pipes, but two more were added in 1834 by the late Hon. Robert Clive. Ducks are only taken to supply the house and give away, and the common wild duck is the bird caught. The decoy is 3 miles north-west of Ludlow. In Davies' "History of Whittington Castle," printed about 1800, the following curious lines from an epitaph occur :—

ANDREW WILLIAMS,  
Born A.D. 1693; died April 18th, 1776,  
Aged 84 years,

of which time he lived under the Aston family as decoyman for 60 years; this decoy has not been worked for a number of years now.

“ Here lies the decoyman, who lived like an otter,  
Dividing the time betwixt land and water ;  
His hide he oft soaked in the waters of Perry,  
Whilst Aston old beer his spirits kept cheery.  
Amphibious his life, Death was puzzled to say  
How to dust to reduce such well-moistened clay ;  
So Death turned decoyman and 'coyed him to land,  
Where he fixed his abode till dried to the hand.  
He then found him fitting for crumbling to dust,  
And here he lies mouldering as you and I must.”

#### OAKLEY PARK DECOY (APRIL, 1918).

Finding I could combine a visit to my sister at Clevedon, in Somerset, and to Oakly Decoy on my way back, I wrote to Mr. Bruce, Lord Plymouth's agent, asking for permission to see it. He most kindly consented, and asked me to stay a night at Prior's Halton with him. After spending ten days, during which time I saw the beautiful surroundings of Clevedon, I left on April 19th, and had time on my way to see the fine church of St. Mary's, Redcliffe, at Bristol, and the Cathedral at Hereford, I arrived at Ludlow, where Mr. Bruce met me, and as we passed through the old town I saw the church, a large and fine one, and the grand old castle, which played so great a part in the long past days. After a dish of tea, we proceeded to the headkeeper's, and found him waiting for us. In walking to the decoy, Mr. Bruce showed me a splendid oak, great in girth, long in bole, and with a grand

spreading top. It is a magnificent specimen of a grand old English tree, and now at its very best. Close by are the ponds, one of which is the decoy. The River Teme runs through them. The nearest to the decoyman's cottage is called the Upper Pond, and is about 6 acres in extent; then comes the Decoy Pool,  $3\frac{1}{2}$  acres, with some nice reed beds at one end; then the middle one, this is the largest, just over 9 acres; and the fourth is the lower pond,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  acres. The Decoy Pool is a perfect one for its purpose, large enough, but not too big, surrounded by a plantation of 13 acres, in which are some grand trees, especially silver firs. These are very tall and of great girth, and here and there big Scotch firs, long in the stem, clean of bark and ruddy in colour. It was cold, but the sun shone and birds sang. The decoy has four pipes—north, south, east and west. Here they are called *Flues*. Nowhere else have I heard this name used for a pipe. They are shorter than any I have seen, and are from 52 to 54 yards long, and do not cover so much water as in other decoys. The hoops are of iron, fastened to oak posts, and the covering string nets. The screens are of reeds, and not more than 5 feet high, less in some places. The entrance of pipes is about 9 feet high and 16 feet wide. The exposed parts of the banks have reed screens, and on the head of pond spruce boughs drawn through rails. No dog is used. There were nine mallards on the water. No doubt their partners were sitting in the bracken in the park, and I saw two pairs of coots. The decoyman, who had joined us, pointed out a bird on the water on the far side of the next pond, and said there is a Spanish goose, the first we ever had here. I put my glasses on it, and saw it was a great-crested grebe. I was surprised, partly at

the wonderful name given it, and also that it was the first they had ever seen, and the place such a likely one. After a delightful hour we left this interesting spot, and I was pleased to have seen another of the now only too few decoys in England, and I felt much indebted to Mr. Bruce for his kindness in giving me the opportunity of doing so.

## SOMERSETSHIRE.

Name of Decoy—Ivythorne.

A Decoy for Teal.

Name of Owner—The Marquis of Bath.

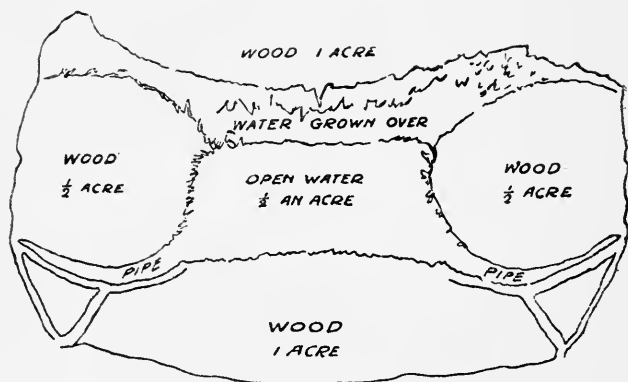
Name of Tenant—Mr. Alfred Crossman.

Size of Water—42 yards by 43 yards.

In a Wood of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  acres.

Number of Pipes—2.

Is a Dog used?—Yes.



*Plan of Sedge-moor decoy as it is now -1917*

One of the pipes is 40 yards long, the other 25. The average number of teal taken in a season is 500; the most taken in a season was 1,200, all teal; one white teal has been caught. The decoy lies at the foot of the Polden Hills, on the south side of them. It is surrounded by a great flat, and there is a lot of good feeding ground, which is attractive to ducks, especially teal. Not far away the Battle of Sedgemoor was fought in July, 1685, and

pieces of armour and swords are now and again turned up. This is a beautiful part of a very beautiful county. The views from the Polden Hills are delightful. In 1886 there were two other decoys close by in the flat, and two more within a couple of miles or so, but Ivythorne is now the only one in this shire.

### VISIT TO THE IVYTHORNE DECOY, SOMERSET.

On October 19th, 1917, after a very tedious journey from Newquay, the 170 miles taking over 8 hours to do, I arrived at Glastonbury, and found most comfortable quarters at "The George," an ancient and beautiful building, and arranged for a motor to take me out in the morning to see the Ivythorne Decoy at King's, Sedgemoor, which is now the only decoy worked in Somersetshire. There were two others here in 1886, when the late Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey published his book on decoys, and another at Shapwick, and one at Sharpham. These four have ceased to be worked now for many years. On Friday morning, October 20th, I left the hotel at 9.15 a.m. for Ivythorne, but on nearing it the road was so bad I had to leave the motor and walk the last mile or so. On arriving I had a most hearty welcome from Mr. Crossman, the tenant, and we were soon on our way to the decoy. I may here say it is a teal decoy. Mr. Crossman does not care for common wild ducks, which he finds also disturb their smaller but more tasty relations. The decoy is surrounded by trees, and lies well out in a great flat, which is of a marshy and rough nature. It is only a small piece of water now, the greater part being grown up, but it is very attractive



to teal, and one memorable day Mr. Crossman took 155 teal, 75 of which were captured at one draw. He said the surface of the pool was fairly packed with teal, and he thought that a stone could not have been thrown without hitting a duck. He told me that for so small a piece two pipes were ample. One runs north-west, the other south-east. Last season he placed a dummy teal made of wood and painted at the bend of the pipes, and he found it encouraged the ducks to go forward. I may say the 75 were taken without the help of the dog, the rest of takes that day with one. I saw the dog, a most intelligent-looking animal, of a rich brown colour, and of moderate size, a cross between a terrier and spaniel. There are some high poplars growing on one side of the decoy, and more than once when teal rose in a gale of wind he has seen some whipped down by the swinging branches. The longest pipe is 40 yards long to the tunnel net. The trees surrounding the water run about 50 yards deep. The screens are made of straw, and the most attractive bait for teal is the seeds of goosefoot and knot grass, and as they float well are soon discovered. Away over the flat he pointed out where the battlefield of Sedgemoor was, which proved so disastrous to the Duke of Monmouth's cause. I may add Mr. Crossman was most kind, and took a lot of trouble to show me his decoy, and I could clearly see he was quite an artist at decoying, and I shall long remember how I enjoyed seeing that quiet spot nestling at the foot of some of the prettiest hills in that beautiful western shire.

## SUFFOLK.

Name of Decoy—Fritton or Somerleyton Decoy.

Name of Owner—Lord Somerleyton.

Size of Water—3 miles by 180 yards to 250 yards. Surrounded by Woods.

Number of Pipes—4.

Average Number of Ducks taken—About 1,000.

Is a Dog used?—Yes.



Common wild duck, wigeon, teal, a few gadwall and pintail are taken, and now and again tufted ducks and pochards. The takes consist of 90 per cent. of common wild ducks. This decoy is at the east end (Ashby). The

water is very beautifully situated, and the acorns in the autumn are a great attraction to the wild ducks. The best months for mallard are November and December; and February for teal and wigeon. It is rather curious that a much greater percentage of mallards are taken than ducks—eight to twelve—and in many instances nothing but mallards have been taken. Over 2,000 ducks have been caught more than once in a season. In 1884-85 some sharp weather set in on the 20th of November, and 556 ducks were taken in three days, the catch on November 24th being 307. Between 1862-3 and 1876-7 13,421 ducks were taken, showing an average of about 900 per season. At the Rabbits and Game Advisory Committee meeting on March 27th, 1918, in London, Lord Somerleyton said that during the season of 1917 and 1918 1,500 wildfowl had been taken in his decoy at Fritton, mostly teal.

#### FRITTON DECOY, JULY 16th, 1918.

I left Thetford early and went on to Norwich, where I again looked over the Cathedral. It is a beautiful one, and the Norman work is more highly decorative than in any other one of this period I know. It has the second highest spire in England, 314 feet. After leaving Norwich we passed through great flat pasture fields; here were more cattle than I ever saw together before. On the side of the railway was a wire fence with wooden posts, and I was much surprised to see a heron standing on one, and more so that it was not sent off; it only raised its wings and refolded them as the train rushed by. After a kindly welcome from Mr. and Mrs. Patterson, whose guest I was, we started for Fritton Lake, walking from St. Olave's

Station, which is a mile or so from the lake. In doing so we passed Fritton Church. It has a thatched roof and round tower. I have never seen a church thatched before. We hired a light, roomy boat, and first rowed round the west end of the lake. I have often heard of the beauties of it, and I must say I was not disappointed. It is one of the very prettiest pieces of water I have ever seen, about 3 miles long, and from 200 to 250 yards wide, and is over 800 acres in extent. Beautiful woods fringe it all round, and patches of reeds and great mace add to its charms. The decoy is at the east end. Formerly there were as many as twenty-one pipes worked, eight at the north-western end, thirteen at the east. Now there are only four. The westward one is the shortest, and is so straight you can see the end from its mouth; it is only 40 yards long, mouth 15 feet wide, 10 feet high. The second one is 45 yards long; the third is 65 yards long, 14 feet high and 18 feet wide at mouth; the other about the same length. They are covered with wire netting on iron hoops. The screens are 5 feet 4 inches high, and are about the lowest I have seen. There is a wire duck-trap near the mouth of the third pipe. About its mouth are patches of water lilies, backed by reeds and great mace, with rhododendrons on its sides—a pretty spot, hung over by silver birches and dark firs. I may add the reed-screens are fastened by wire, not wooden laths, as generally is the case. A row back and home, a pleasant evening and a great bird chat was the finish of a delightful day, and I had the privilege of seeing many of Mr. Patterson's clever sketches of birds, animals, and humans.



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PIPE, FRITTON DECOY.

[H. Jenkins.

## SUFFOLK.

Name of Decoy—Iken.

Name of Owner—Mr. H. Boynton.

Size of Water—2½ acres.

Surrounded by 12 acres of Scrubs and Bushes.

Number of Pipes—6.

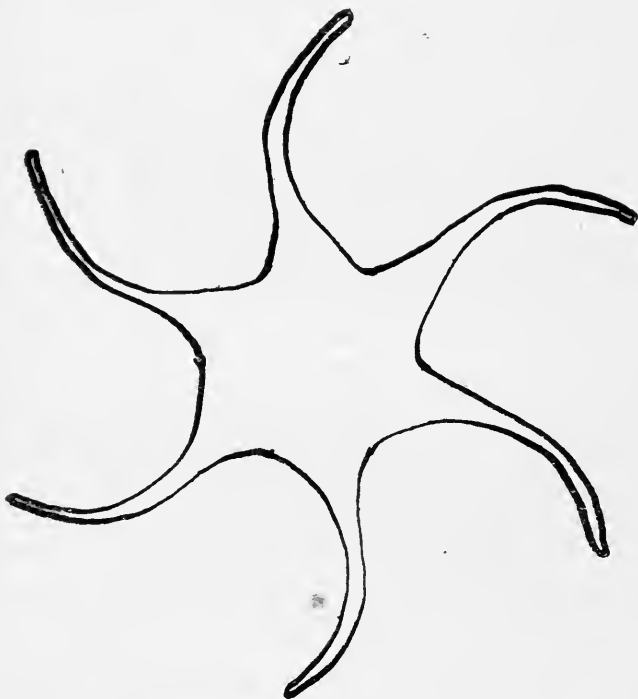
Is a Dog used?—Yes.

Ducks taken are mallard, teal, wigeon, shoveller, pintail, and at one time it was fitted with nets for pochards. The best season's catch was just over 4,000 birds, and others varied from 1,250 to that number. This decoy is on the Sudbourne Hall Estate, and 7 miles east of Wickham Market, and 5 from Saxmundham. It is situated near the source of the estuary of the River Alde, and on its south bank. It is in a very quiet spot, quite 300 yards from any road, and that a country lane, and is well surrounded by the owner's land—in fact, a perfect place for a decoy. It is an old one, and is shown on a map of the estate in 1807. Chillesford Decoy, on the same property, has been done away with since Sir R. Payne-Gallwey's book was published.

## IKEN DECOY, JULY 17th, 1918.

I left Yarmouth and arrived at Wickham Market about 11.30, where I found the carriage I had ordered waiting, and it was my privilege to have a lady driver. We soon passed Campsea Ash (The Speakers). There is a fine double lime avenue from the gates to the house, and in the park are some large oaks, Scotch firs, and elms. There are fallow deer here. About 4 miles further on we came

to Iken Heath, and very pretty it looked, the heather being in flower, and on the grassy sides of the road grew buglos with its dark blue flowers, chicory with light blue ones, yellow ragwort and pink mallows and others of shorter



*Iken decoy*  
*Suffolk*

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growth and varied colours. Soon after crossing the heath we turned down to the right and came to the Coy Cottage, as it is called in these parts; it is near the decoy. Leaving the carriage, I crossed a small grass field. Here was a wire cage with a dog in it; he acted as a vocal notice-board, for he gave tongue freely. Crossing the end of another paddock, I came to a high gate, and on going through I found I was close to the first pipe. There are only a few bushes and trees on this side. The rest of the pool has a much deeper fringe of trees. Beyond this, about half-a-mile away, is the River Alde, which forms a wide estuary, and looks the best of feeding ground for ducks. There are six pipes, not very long ones, all about 60 yards in length, covered with wire netting on iron hoops with running wooden laths for support on sides and top; between the pipe-ends and the tunnel net is a wire-covered square box-shaped fixture 3 yards long, 2 feet high, and 3 wide. This can be shut off from the pipe by putting down a board, so that when more ducks are taken than the tunnel net can hold they are made safe and are prevented from getting back up the pipe. The screens are low, only 5 feet, and must be very awkward for even a man of moderate height. The pool is a very attractive-looking one, and there were a big lot of ducks on, early as it was, amongst them a drake wigeon in partly eclipse plumage. The decoyman was not at home, but has since written to me, and I give extracts from his letter:—

Sir,—I was sorry to miss you when you came here to see Iken Decoy. The wigeon is a pricked bird, and remained after others had left. All the others are full duck, but we have teal, shovellers, and pintail in the



season. I generally get between two and three thousand ducks. I have got 4,000 when the seasons have been right. I get more when there has been an east wind blowing for some time. The most ducks I have caught at one take was 340. The most in one day 501. The most in one season 4,000.—Yours truly.

JAMES WILKINSON.

These latter-day bags compare very favourably with some of the past years, for in the season of '71-72 only 1,007 were taken, and during seven seasons from 1878 to 1884 12,683 were caught. I am very pleased to have seen this decoy, which is well placed. There are about 2 acres of water, surrounded by wood and marsh of 14 acres, and lies quiet and in a district where much food is to tempt ducks, and in a part with few inhabitants.

## SUFFOLK.

Name of Decoy—Brooke Hall Decoy Ponds.

Name of Owner—The Lady de Saumarez.

Size of Water— $5\frac{1}{2}$  acres.

Surrounded by a Wood of  $22\frac{1}{2}$  acres.

Number of Pipes—4 now used, formerly 6 were used.

Average number of Ducks taken in a season about 600.

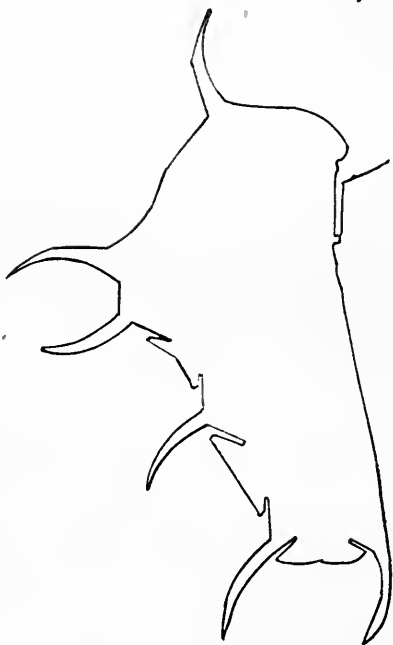
Is a Dog used?—Yes.

The average number of ducks taken during the last thirty years 600. In 1884 and 1885 500 fowl were taken in one week and 1,700 in that season. There is also a shallow teal pond, with two pipes, about 400 yards from the main pond. Both these ponds lie low, with rising ground around covered with wood. Mr. Cobbold informs me he has been tenant for thirty years, but owing to their proximity to Ipswich it has been increasingly difficult to keep the place quiet, and during the war no ducks have been taken, as soldiers have been camped near and have a rifle range. Let us sincerely hope they will again be worked when things are normal again. These ponds are about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles from the River Orwell, and on its north bank.

## BROOKE HALL DECOYS (TWO).

After seeing Iken Decoy I drove back to Wickham Market, and took train for Ipswich, and at 6 p.m. I motored out to see these decoys, Mr. Dudding, the estate agent, having kindly sent one of his staff to show me round them. These decoys also go by the name of the Purdis Hall Decoys. One has four pipes, the other, for teal, has

BROOKE HALL DECOYS.



Scale 25in. to 1 mile.



TEAL DECOY.

two. They were worked till the war, but a large camp having been formed near them they have stopped working, and soldiers are permitted to fish; but directly after the war they will be put into order and again worked. In the larger pool are four pipes. They are shortish ones, 50 yards long, covered with wire-netting on iron hoops, and have strong wire supports on sides and top instead of the usual wooden ones. They are not so high at entrance or as wide as many I have seen. The second pool is smaller, hardly an acre, with two pipes, and is used for teal, and is, as far as I could see, perfect for that duck. Small in size, shallow, and well-treed round, as this duck will take to a small piece of water with high trees round more readily than will common wild ducks. About these ponds are growing the finest alder trees I have ever seen, and there was one very big oak. In years past there were six pipes, but two have not been used for some years now. Lady de Saumarez has now taken these decoys into her own hands.

## SUFFOLK.

Name of Decoy—O1well Park (Duck Decoy).

Name of Owner—E. G. Pretyman, M.P.

Size of Water—2 acres.

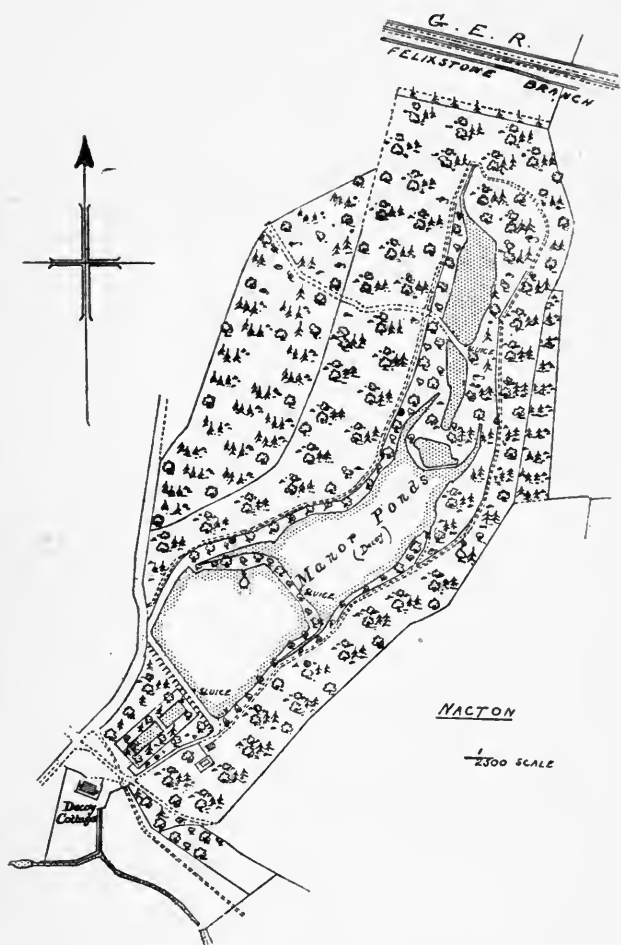
Number of Pipes—4.

Average number of Ducks taken—2,000 in a season.

Size of Wood—30 acres.

Is a Dog used?—Yes.

I have to thank Mr. Moorsom, Mr. Pretyman's agent, for the following most interesting account: "The decoy is in a valley surrounded by woods, and is one of a chain of ponds fed by springs forming the bed of a small stream. The Great Eastern Railway Felixstowe branch line runs within about 300 yards of the nearest pipe, but the wood intervenes, and the fowl take no notice of the trains. There are four pipes for the various quarters of the wind. Dogs are used. The decoyman, L. Skelton, has been the decoyman many years, and succeeded his father at this decoy. The family have been decoymen for generations, and come from the Fen. The frontispiece in Sir R. Payne-Gallwey's book on "Duck Decoys" is a portrait of one of his ancestors. Something like 50,000 ducks have been taken during the last thirty-five years, the catches varying from 1,000 to over 3,000 in a season. During the war the catches have been rather over the average, particularly of wigeon, which seem to remain longer on the East Coast through not being fired at by punt gunners or shore shooters. The main catch is mallard, wigeon, and teal. The last season, 1914 and 1915, almost a thousand of each were taken, but usually a greater proportion of mallard are caught. A



ORWELL DECOY.

good few pintail are taken each season, and a few shovellers, and now and again a gadwall, a pochard, and a golden-eye and some odd crosses have occasionally turned up. *No tufted* ducks are ever seen in this decoy, and no sea ducks are caught except an odd scaup. But for its being necessary to shoot the woods surrounding the decoy twice each winter, the catch would be considerably larger. The ducks are never fired at, but are put away by the decoyman on the morning of the shoot. A large portion of the wild birds, and, therefore, those most likely to be caught, do not return. There is no doubt there is a good lead now to this decoy, and this takes many years to establish. During frosts the ice is broken at night, and in the morning, just before the fowl return, floating food is scattered on the open water. The tame ducks feed on this, and so prevent the ice reforming until the wildfowl arrive, which, under such conditions, they do in thousands. In the winter of 1899 and 1900 over 1,000 were taken in one week of frost. The decoy is always closed on August 1st and opened at the end of March. Catching begins about the third week in September, and goes on till March 1st, but not much is done after January."

#### ORWELL DECOY, July 18th, 1918.

I stayed the night of the 17th at the White Horse Hotel in Ipswich, an inn known far and wide as one which Mr. Pickwick stayed at, and a more comfortable one I never met with. The 18th broke fine and clear after the terrible thunderstorm of the previous night, and soon after 11 a.m. I left the train at Orwell Station and walked through a

wood to the decoy about 1 mile or so. I found Skelton busy with some reeds preparing them for the screens, and I thoroughly enjoyed my walk round with him, for he is an artist at decoying, and everything spoke of a master-hand, and it was what one would expect, for he is descended from a line of decoymen, the George Skelton, who was the first man to lessen the decoy pools, being his great-great-grandfather. The Orwell Decoy is by far the most elaborately laid out one in England, everything spick and span. Two ponds lie in a short deep valley, and the second one is the decoy. There are four pipes, very large in arch to the bend, high and wide at the entrances. They are covered with string netting, which Skelton told me lasts, if often dipped and looked after, for thirty years. The longest pipe is 70 yards, 20 feet high at the arch, and 22 feet wide at the mouth. The other pipes are somewhat shorter. They all have a pronounced bend. On the bank above each pipe is a rustic hut, approached up a trench, where through spy-holes the whole performance from start to finish can be clearly seen. Nowhere else have I seen this, and it must be most instructive and interesting to be an observer when a take takes place; from everyone the whole of the decoy pool can be seen, and what a sight it must be to a naturalist when there are, which there often are, several thousand ducks on the water. Skelton told me he had seen 8,000 on at one time, and no one is better able to calculate the number than he is. The screens are 6 feet high, and the running walls at the back are 5 feet 6 inches. The pipes have very strong iron hoops, and have flat iron supports at the sides and top. The pool is 2 acres in extent, so if there are 8,000 ducks on



it, it is almost one to the square yard. His best single take has been 112, and on one occasion he took 83 and 82 at two takes with only a short time between. Last year was one of his best, and nearly 4,000 ducks were captured. After one of the most delightful hours I ever spent I walked on and saw the Deer Park, which made 179 I have seen in England. I may add there was formerly a teal decoy beyond the decoy, but it is disused now; it looked to me a very good spot, where I have no doubt many of these little ducks could be caught, and it is a pity such a likely place should not be taken advantage of.

## WILTSHIRE.

Name of Decoy—Hamptworth.

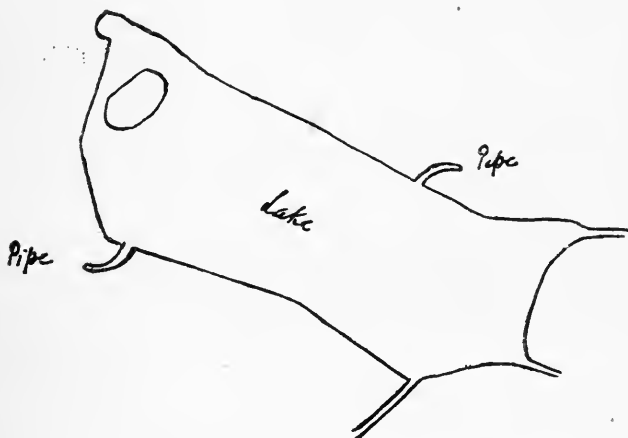
Name of Owner—Mr. Harold Charles Moffatt.

Size of Water—A Lake of about 20 acres.

It has a Wood on two sides and is open at the Top and Bottom.

Number of Pipes—2.

No Dog used.



## HAMPTWORTH DECOY POOL.

Only the common wild duck are taken. The decoy is not often used, or the takes might be much larger, as only ducks are caught for the house and friends. The most ever taken at one time was 51 ducks, but this was some years back. As many as 1,000 ducks have been seen on the water at one time. The decoy was made in 1882 by the late Mr. S. Morrison. It is  $11\frac{1}{2}$  miles south-east of Salisbury.

On Wednesday, September 12th, 1917, I left Salisbury by the 10 a.m. train for Downton, and motored from there to Hamptworth Lodge, about 4 miles. Mr. Moffatt was at home, and gave me a kindly welcome, and the decoyman, King, was waiting to show me the decoy. The surroundings of the Lodge are delightful. The Decoy is a short distance away in the valley, surrounded by hundreds of acres of fir and birch wood. It is on the fringe of the New Forest. The open water is as nearly as I could estimate about 10 acres in extent (but there is a lot of slop and rushes), and has a pipe on either side, one called the Old Decoy, the other the New. Here ducks are taken as in no other decoy I know; no dog is used and no decoy ducks. It is as follows: There is from the end of the pipe, about 60 yards away, a peep-house, with short screen wings on either side, so the decoyman can enter it unseen by any ducks in the pipe or on the pool. On looking through a small square hole a view of the water-end of the pipe is clearly seen, and the pipe as far as the bend; if any ducks are in the keeper goes behind the screens on the side of the pipe and shows himself, and then follows the ducks, which rush round the bend and into the narrow end of the pipe. When the ducks are at the end of the wire (there is no trammel net as in other pipes I have seen) the decoyman lets a wire door down; it is 6 yards from the end; this makes all safe. The ducks are now at the small end, and the man puts down two pieces of slate through the niche in the wire, and thus pens the birds in about 4 or 5 feet. Then he opens a door on the top of the wire and takes the ducks out. The pipes are about 50 yards long, 4 yards wide at the mouth, and about 6 feet high. The pipe of the old decoy is a little

longer and about a foot higher, and more ducks are taken in it than in the new one. The screens are about 5 feet 6 inches high, and made of bracken and heather; the hoops are of iron, and galvanised wire is used. I never saw a more attractive piece of water, and King told me large quantities of ducks were there all the winter, but only taken for the house and to give away. I was much impressed with the quantity of rhododendrons, which flourish in a wonderful way, and was struck by the long hedges clipped of this useful and ornamental shrub, and I thank Mr. Moffatt for his kind permission to see the pool and its surroundings and for showing me the beautiful house which he has lately built.

## YORKSHIRE.

Name of Decoy—Thirkleby Park.

A Pipe Decoy.

Name of Owners—Trustees of late Sir Ralph F. Payne-Gallwey, Bart.

Size of Water—1 acre.

In a Wood of 7 acres.

Number of Pipes—3.

Average number of Ducks taken—50 of late years, but in years back a much larger number were killed.

Is a Dog used?—Yes.

Remarks—A great proportion of Ducks killed are the common wild duck.

I am sorry to say since I started to get information for this small book that Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey has died. So the greatest authority on decoys has gone, but he has left behind him a book published in 1886, "The Book of Duck Decoys." It is full of interesting information on this subject, and will be a standard work for all time; every subject pertaining to decoys is clearly and fully gone into, and leaves nothing to be desired, and I have learned much from it. Only a few weeks before his death he most kindly wrote me hints for my own small trap here at Rainworth, and I sorrow to think so good a sportsman and kindly a man has been taken from us at a comparatively moderate age.

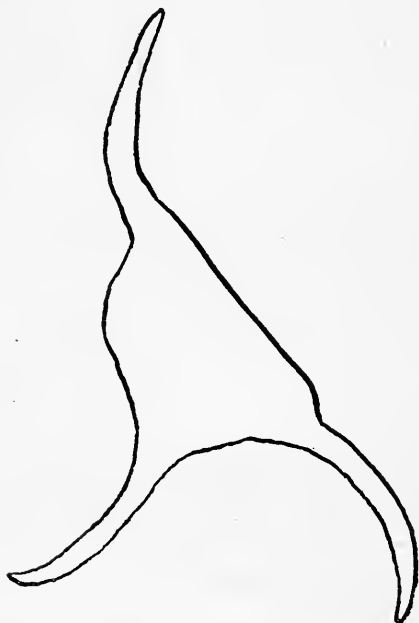
## THIRKLEBY DECOY, JULY 30th, 1918.

I left home on a beautiful summer morning, but as the day grew older the heat was overpowering. No wind and crowded trains did not make it any the more pleasant.



THE LATE SIR RALPH PAYNE-GALLWEY, BART.  
(A great authority on Duck Decoys).

I travelled by Newark and York, and wherever we stopped there were quantities of soldiers coming and going—strong, fresh, cheery, young fellows. I arrived at Thirsk



*Thirkleby.*

THIRKLEBY DECOY.

soon after 3 by the clock, and drove out by the York Road, on the right-hand side of which, and close to Thirkleby Park Gates, stands the finest sycamore tree I

have ever seen. I stopped and measured, and found it was just over 21 feet at 5 feet above the ground. Though hollow, its perfect-shaped top was well covered with leaves; it was, indeed, a grand specimen. About half-a-mile further on we turned to the right and drove down a grassy lane, and soon came to our destination. There were two plantations, one on either side, and in the right-hand one was the decoy. A tall pale fence ran along the roadside. Impervious to intruders, the pool is only a score or so yards away. It is an acre in extent, and has three pipes, but at present only two are used. They are 70 yards long, have iron hoops, and iron stays at the mouth; they are 14 feet high, and 8 yards over the water. They are covered with wire. The dog-jumps are of wood; this I don't like, as now and again the dog catches his hind feet on the top, and his claws scrape and rattle and disturb the ducks. The screens are of wood boards 6 feet high, and creosoted. The peep-holes are slits of 3 inches long and  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch wide. It is a tempting-looking pool, but I consider the trees are much too near its edge and should be cut down farther back. This would give ducks greater confidence to settle down, and let more sunlight in.



## YORKSHIRE.

Name of Decoy—Hornby Castle Decoy—a Pipe Decoy.

Owner—The Duke of Leeds.

Size of Water— $1\frac{1}{2}$  acres.

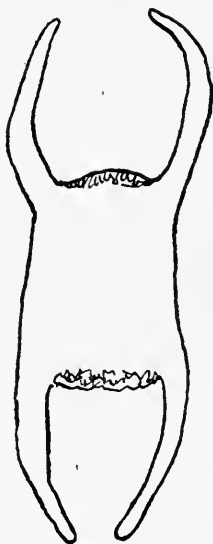
In a Wood of 12 acres.

Number of Pipes—4.

Average Yearly Number of Ducks taken—257.

Is a Dog used?—Yes.

Remarks—The Decoy is surrounded on two sides by good agricultural land, of which a fair proportion is arable. Most of the birds taken are Common Wild Duck; 10 per cent. of them are Teal and 3 per cent. Wigeon.



*Hornby*

HORNBY CASTLE DECOY, YORKS.

The decoy is in the Park, and was made in 1882. The wood in which it is, is called the Bessington Plantation. It was made under the direction of Lord Fitzharding's decoyman from Berkeley Castle, Gloucestershire. When first made the takes were much larger than now, and as many as 1,500 were taken in the best season. 250 fowl were caught in one day, and 50 to 60 duck and teal at one drive.

#### HORNBY CASTLE DECOY, JULY 31st, 1918.

After seeing Thirkleby I went on to Bedale, where I stayed the night, and as trains run so very badly nowadays I started at 7.30 a.m. to drive to Hornby, which is about 4 miles away. I arrived at the meeting-place to the minute, 8, and met the keeper, and we walked over a corner of the park to the decoy. It is in the Bessington Plantation, which is paled round 7 feet high. There are four pipes—north, south, east, and west; the south one is called the Boathouse Pipe, and is the most prolific one. The pipes are all about the same length; the shortest is 70 yards, the longest 75, covered with string netting, which the decoyman thinks is much better than wire, for ducks often fly up against the wire and make a noise, but the cord netting is darker above them and they carry on better; the hoops are of iron, and the side and top stays of iron bands. The arch of mouth is 16 feet high and 14 feet wide on water. The screens are boards just over 6 feet at lowest parts and 7 feet at highest, and the peep-holes are round ones, with disks of wood on screws to cover them. These can be moved either side, and one gets a better sight than through the slits. The pool is about an acre in extent.

All the banks between the pipes are boarded. The trees here are also too near the pipes, but not so near as at Thirkleby. About 6 yards or so from the tunnel net is a drop-net, which is let down and makes all safe, preventing the ducks breaking back, which now and again they will do, not liking to face the tunnel net. After walking round all the pipes I felt a proud man, as this decoy completed my visits to all those now worked in England. I had travelled many miles, seen many places, and received great kindness from all—visits of great delight to me as well as instructive ones.

## IRELAND.

Name of Decoy—Kellavil or Kellyville, Queen's County.

Name of Owner—Captain O. Ock. Webber, R.E.

Size of Wood—15 acres.

In a Wood of 20 acres.

Number of Pipes—7.

Is a Dog used?—Yes.

This decoy is suspended during the war like Longueville, but as both are in order and will start again, I give them. Ducks taken are common wild duck, teal, wigeon, shoveller, and pintail. The lake is also frequented by pochard and tufted ducks. More teal are taken than other ducks. The largest take in one season was 2,500 ducks. The decoy is on the borders of Queen's County, and was made in 1840. It is near the House, and is in part protected by canals from intrusion. In winter vast quantities of wildfowl frequent it, and in December and January great flocks of foreign ducks arrive. They are known from the home birds by being slighter in body and tired after arrival, and more easily decoyed. One side of the water is open, but unless people stop to look the ducks take little notice of them

## IRELAND.

Name of Decoy—Longueville, County Cork.

Name of Owner—R. E. Longfield.

Size of Water—About 4 acres.

Number of Pipes—2.

Average number of Ducks taken from 300 to 400.

No Dog used.

Ducks taken are mallard, pintail, wigeon, teal, and a few gadwall. The decoy has not been worked during the war, but from a letter written to me by the owner, Mr. Longfield, he will keep it quiet, and probably start again after. The decoy is near Mallow. It is only about 300 yards from the house on the south side of the parish and close to the high road from Mallow to Kantwick. It was first constructed in 1750, when it had four pipes, two of which were enlarged in 1865 and two done away with. In 1875 Mr. Longfield made a new pipe on a large piece of water near the old ones. It is called the New Decoy. In Thompson's "Natural History of Ireland" (1851) it is stated that the most ducks ever taken at one take was seventy. This was in 1845-46; during that season 730 were taken.

There are no other decoys in Ireland, for Desart House Decoy mentioned in Payne-Gallwey's book has not been worked for many years now.

## SCOTLAND.

Neither Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey or myself have been able to prove there was ever a decoy in Scotland. Major Chadwick years back started to make one at Moy, near Forres. It had about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  acres of water, in a large wood, but it was never completed. The number of pipes were four; it was on the estate of J. R. Murray Grant, of Glen Morrison, which Major Chadwick rented, and was about 7 miles from the sea.

## WALES.

## PEMBROKESHIRE.

Name of Decoy—Orielson.

Both a Pipe Decoy and Trap Decoy

Name of Owner—Colonel Sauri?

Tenant—Mr. Praed.

Size of Water—15 acres.

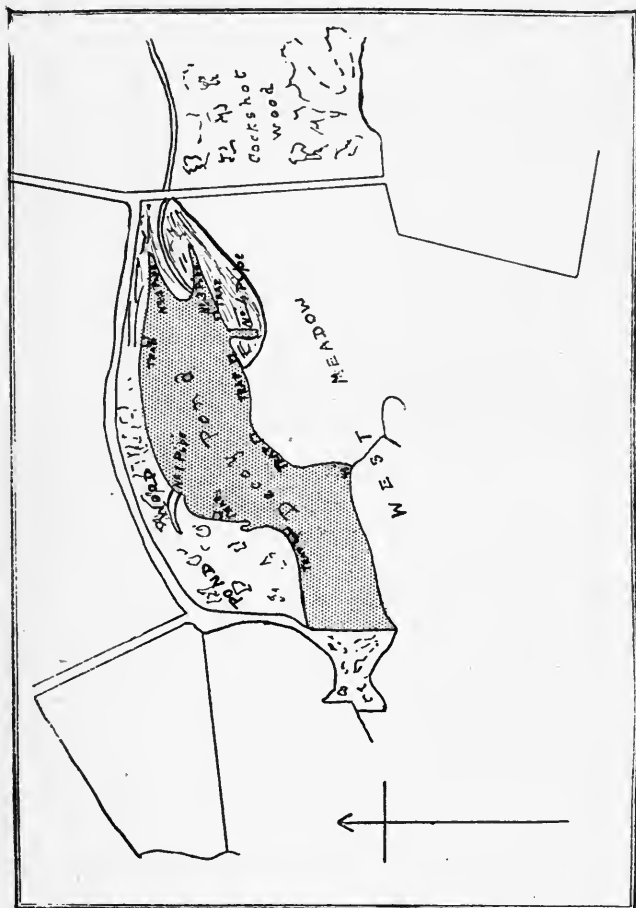
Number of Pipes—4.

Is a Dog used?—Yes.

Size of Traps—12 feet long, 12 feet wide, 6 feet high.

This decoy is bounded on the north by a narrow wood of about 4 acres, and on the east by a wood of considerable size. Orielson Decoy is  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Pembroke; the carriage drive runs within 200 yards of one of the pipes. The lake lies from east to west, and is over a quarter-of-a-mile long, with a width of about 150 yards, and a stream runs through it. No. 1 pipe is on the north side, No. 2 at the north-east corner, No. 3 at the east-south-east corner, and No. 4 on the south side of the lake. No pipes could be placed at the west end, as there is a high embankment there. This is a disadvantage, as the prevailing wind during the season is westerly. The pipes average 12 feet in height. The average width of the mouth is 18 feet; Nos. 2 and 3 are 70 yards long, No. 1 60, and No. 4 is 40 yards. The lake is artificial, and was made in the year 1820, and it was in 1868 that the decoy was started and one pipe made. No account was kept early on about the number of ducks taken, but a book was started in 1877. We find the largest number of teal taken at one time was 130; this was in 1879; and the largest number of ducks taken in one day 202, of which number the 130 formed part, with 40 more teal, 18 widgeon, and 14 common duck. From 1877-78 to

1884-85 the number of fowl taken is as follows: 1,197 common wild ducks, 4,150 wigeon, 2,975 teal, 28 pintail, 16 shovellers, and 67 various. These consisted of





swans, pheasants, snipe, waterhens, coots, and two divers. A curious incident occurred on December 6th, 1884. As the decoyman was entering No. 1 pipe to feed the tame ducks a heron, pursued by a peregrine falcon, dashed into the pipe; the man at once showed on them, ran them into the trammel net, and took them both. The decoyman finds the dog of the most use early in the season. Most of these notes are from Payne-Gallwey's "Duck Decoy Book." The following is kindly given by Colonel Saurin; it is full of interest, and I thank him. It has added much to the interest of this small book. His letter is dated March 13th, 1917. He says: "In reply to your letter asking for information about the decoy at Orierton, Pembrokeshire, for the account of its establishment, I must refer you to Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey's book, but I send you some later particulars which I think may be of interest. Two traps were placed on the pond in 1913 by Alexander McTaggart, gamekeeper at Orierton. The number of wildfowl of various sorts taken in these two traps during the first week was 70. The traps are formed of wire-netting, and are about 4 yards square and 6 feet high. The entrance to a trap starts on a slant from the full height, where it is about 2 yards wide, and decreases in size so that at the water-line an ordinary duck is able to enter. There is an outside trap about 2 feet wide extending right round the trap, in which are placed teal and wigeon as decoys. The traps are cleared at night by lamplight, after the wildfowl have left the pond, and fresh seed is placed in the traps in readiness for next day. The traps stand half on land and half in the water. The best haul in one day has been 47. The traps are not placed near the pipes in order to prevent the tame ducks

being caught. Of late years sheet-iron screens, which are considerably cheaper, have been substituted for the reed screens on the side of the pipes, and it is found that the wildfowl lie as well up to them as to the old ones; but very great care has to be taken in working the pipes, as the slightest touch on the iron is heard by the ducks. A wire-net cage with a drop door has been substituted for the cord trammel net formerly used. This cage is about 15 feet long, and has a small cage at the end, into which the wildfowl are driven, and are then taken out through a hole at the top of the cage. This arrangement does away with the annoyance of wildfowl escaping through holes cut in the trammel net by rats and rabbits, etc. This alteration has also been made by McTaggart, who hopes, with the addition of two or three more traps and an automatic seed distributor, which is now being completed, to greatly increase the number of wildfowl taken on this decoy pond."

## WILDFOWL TAKEN IN ORIELTON DECOY.

Season.	Duck.	Wigeon.	Teal.	Pintail.	Shoveller.	Various.	Total.
1905-6 ...	73	742	411	5	9	1	1,241
1906-7 ...	34	553	542	12	11	0	1,152
1907-8 ...	48	263	572	12	15	0	910
1908-9 ...	60	501	411	7	18	2	999
1909-10 ...	64	239	246	0	1	0	550
1910-11 ...	25	242	82	0	11	0	360
1911-12 ...	13	117	171	0	0	17	318
1912-13 ...	5	463	93	0	0	34	595
1913-14 ...	46	341	164	0	9	44	606
1914-15 ...	25	318	369	5	10	144	871
1915-16 ...	7	238	163	10	4	84	506
1916-17 ...	54	256	140	7	4	85	546
1917-18 ...	11	290	385	5	1	95	787

The lists comprise moorhens, the largest quantity, coots, watertail, golden-eye pochards, tufted duck, smew, gadwall and scaup of late years; moorhens and coots have been much more numerous on the water than previously. Formerly these were not taken any account of, but latterly they have all been counted and included in "Various."

## CHAPTER III.

INTERESTING NOTES ABOUT DECOYS AND  
DUCKS.

In 1799 ten thousand head of wigeon, teal and wild ducks were caught in a decoy in Essex by the Reverend Bate Dudley.

Twelve thousand wildfowl were taken in one season in the "great Oakley Hall decoy" in Essex.

In one season, 1714, there were taken in the Steeple decoy 675 wild ducks, 347 teal, 46 pintail, and 6,296 wigeon, or, as it was then spelt there, wiggin—a total of 7,364 birds.

And in the same decoy in thirteen seasons 4,576 wild ducks, 1,396 teal, 138 pintail, and 44,677 wigeon, and in one day 548 wigeon were taken.

In the Ashley decoy, in North Lincolnshire, in one month 2,300 ducks were taken. And in 35 seasons the wonderful number of 95,836 birds, consisting of 48,664 common wild duck, 44,568 teal, 2,019 wigeon, 285 shovellers, 278 pintail, 22 gadwall; and in these years, though not counted in the above and caught in the spring after the season, 29 garganey; the most in one season, 3 of these rare ducks.

So many pochard or dunbirds have been taken at one pull of the net that they filled a wagon, and four horses were used to take them away.

In another Essex decoy, at Goldhanger, at one pull of the net so many pochards were taken as to fill a wagon and two carts.

Six hundred ducks have been taken in an Essex decoy in one day, and not long ago Mr. Alfred Crossman tells me he took 75 teal in one of his small pipes at one take.

Pennant, in his *Zoology*, Vol. II., page 595, writes:—

“The account sent us of the number caught is amazing, for in one season, in ten decoys, about Wainfleet, Lincolnshire, thirty-one thousand two hundred ducks were sent to London, and as teal and wigeon were counted two for one duck, the number was many more. Ducks were so plentiful that they were delivered in Boston, 15 miles from Wainfleet, at tenpence a couple.”

The following is interesting: it is dated 1754:—

“A sober man, either single or married, who can come well recommended and understands managing a decoy pond, by enquiring at Pond Hall, in Wicks, near Manningtree, in Essex, may hear of a place. He will have husbandry work found him after the catching season is over, and a house to live in if married.”

“Whereas the wildfowl coming and going to and from my decoy ponds have several times last season been affrighted by people shooting and making paths through my fields out of the ancient church or paths, I give this publick notice to prevent unwarrantable practices, that I will bring an action at law against any persons who shall presume to do any detriment to my said ponds for the future; and as an encouragement to my decoyman or any other person who will make discovery of any one doing me damage in the above manner, or breaking of my hedges: I do offer upon the conviction of any one person,

a reward of two guineas to be paid by me.—Tho, Hickerlingill.”

Lubbock mentions that in a Norfolk decoy two hundred and twenty teal were taken at one time.

A spring of about four hundred teal visited the decoy at Mersea, in Essex, and in a few hours the greater part of them were taken.

Coots are very difficult to take in a pipe decoy. Most decoyman like to take fowl when the wind is blowing up the pipe, but some few like a side wind, when, of course, they keep to the leeward side of the pipe and burn peat.

Mr. Crossman, of the Sedgemoor Decoy, Somerset, always locks the wings of the ducks before breaking their necks, especially if the pipe is not a long one, else the noise made by their wings when dying may disturb the fowl on the pool. It takes a smart decoyman quite an hour to break the necks of 400 ducks. To the outsider it looks quite simple, but nevertheless it is an art to do it quickly and give the bird no pain. It is done thus: Take the head between the thumb and forefinger of the right hand and the body by the left; twist the head round, and meet the twist by jerking the body by the left hand; the neck snaps, and feeling is instantly destroyed.

If a wooden duck, truly painted as to colour, with glass eyes, is anchored beyond the bend near the end of the pipe it gives the decoyed birds confidence, and they rush up to the tunnel net more freely.

Years back Lincolnshire had more decoys within its boundaries than any other English shire. Essex was the second for numbers.

There is an old saying, “You cannot eat your cake

and have it," but it is not so with a decoy or duck trap. You can take hundreds of ducks and still have the pleasure of always having quantities on the water, and if only the decoy is within sight of the house, which in some cases it is (and I may mention Park Hall, now not worked, as being so), you could sit in the library window there and see many hundreds of ducks on the water and banks and watch them sporting about, and notice lots coming and going; and a delightful occupation it always was to me. Even on my small pond here I have seen forty wild ducks within shot of my writing-table. If you shoot your ducks, you get a certain quantity, but you drive the rest away (as I write this I can see eight or more wild ducks not 20 yards away, and can see one or more in the trap). If I shot them none would remain on this small water, so I can catch more than I could shoot and always have some to look at. Quiet and food is a certain way to attract wild-fowl, and no bird I know sooner finds this out than does *Anas Boscas*, and not him alone. One day in last spring two tufted ducks came, and, finding quiet and food, returned, bringing others, till I had over thirty diving and feeding within a gunshot of where I wrote and read. A more delightful sight I never remember.

On the East Coast January and February are considered the most prolific months for wigeon. Mr. Crossman, of the Sedgemoor, tells me December and January for teal. When old George Skelton made the first small decoy of 2 acres or so he was laughed at by the other decoymen, who worked pipes on large pieces of water of 20, 50, and in some cases 100 acres or more, but by the end of the season the laugh was on his side, for during

November of his second season in six consecutive days he took 1,010 ducks, principally teal.

Mr. E. Fontaine informed Sir Ralph Gallwey that 15,000 wildfowl had been taken at Lakenheath decoy in Suffolk during one season years back.

George Skelton (old George) in 1819 took in a decoy in Huntingdonshire 2,400 ducks in seven days.

When a man named Williams had this decoy he was said to have cleared a thousand pounds in one season, and to have sent to London a ton of ducks twice a week. Two thousand six hundred and forty-six common wild ducks were taken in two days near Spalding. (See "Birds of the Humber District," page 163.) In these times a flock of wild ducks has been observed passing along from the north to the north-east into the East Fen in a continuous stream for eight hours. Camden, speaking of the dwellers in the Fens, near Croyland, Lincolnshire, says: "Their great gain is from fish and wild ducks that they catch, which are so many that in August they can drive at once into a single net 3,000 ducks, and they call these pools their cornfields, but there is no corn grown within five miles."

Colonel Montagu, in his Supplement published in 1813, writing on wigeon, says: "The wigeon appears to be the most plentiful species of duck that is taken in our decoys; more are caught in the decoys of Somerset and Devonshire than wild duck or teal and all other wildfowl collectively, as we are assured by an old and experienced decoyman. The same person asserts that wigeon and teal rarely assemble together on the pool; nor frequently with ducks, but when ducks come to the pool teal frequently follow."

The tunnel net is of twine, and is fastened at the end of the pipe and laid on land. It is about 14 feet long, and is taken off and the ducks taken out and their necks broken. Mr. Crossman tells me it is not the body smell of men the ducks smell, but the breath. He has tried it. If the burning peat is held low the ducks near smell him at once, but if held near the face they take no notice of him. He has tried it several times, and always with the same result.

Yorkshire claims to have had the earliest decoys in England, and states one was constructed near Doncaster in 1657, but I must say that Norfolk holds the prior claim, as there Sir William Wodehouse made one in the reign of James I., and as that king died in 1625 they stand easily first. Still, there were several important decoys in the bogs and mosses on the north side of the Humber, and it appears that ducks were in as great numbers there as in Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex, for here are samples of it in an interesting entry in the diary of the Revd. Abraham de la Prynne, written in the seventeenth century, and it runs as follows: "This day I have heard for a certain truth, and there are many that will give their oaths upon it, that Thomas Hill, fowler for Mr. Ramsden, did shoot thirty-two pair of duck and teal at one shot in the Devels Hatfield, near Doncaster. Dated November 20th, 1697."

The Coatham decoy, near Redcar, was renowned for the quantity of fowl taken in it, and it is stated that on one occasion nearly five hundred duck were enclosed in the net, which broke with their weight, and all escaped but a hundred birds. The following ducks were taken from time to time in it: Sheld-duck, shoveller, pintail;



mallard, wigeon, teal, pochard, and occasionally a scaup; and once in 1850 a ferruginous duck. Even as late as the 'seventies there were a lot of ducks, for Mr. Riley Briggs, the owner of the Osgodley decoy, 3 miles from Selby, informed Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey that as many as 1,500 ducks were on the water at one time. Yet this decoy was let to run out in 1877. It was curious that more teal were taken in the eastern pipe than in the others, and more mallard and duck in the south pipe.

I find that Cheshire had a decoy earlier by twenty years or so than the Yorkshire one, for I read in Coward and Oldham's "Birds of Cheshire" that Sir William Brereton, the Parliamentary general, had land in Cheshire, where he had a decoy, as when visiting a decoy in Holland in 1634 he describes a visit he made at that date to one Gabriel Direckson, of Delft. He says: "His coy is seated near his own and divers other houses nearer by much Doddleston Bridge or Findloes House is to my coy. His coy has five pipes, as mine." From this we may take it that his decoy was in being some time before 1634, and so over twenty years older than that near Doncaster. Writing about the numbers of ducks on pieces of water reminds me of reading in Pidsley's "Birds of Devonshire," where he writes: "I visited Slapton Lee on March 1st, 1890. This is the largest piece of water in the West of England. It is about 400 acres. I was much struck with the large number of wildfowl swimming about on it, amounting to some 10,000 birds."

There was a decoy in Surrey in 1681, from the following very interesting note of John Evelyn in his memoirs. He writes: "August 23rd, 1681, I went to Wotton, and

on the following day was invited to Mr. Denzil Onslow's at his seat at Pyrford, where was much company and an extraordinary feast for any country gentleman's table. What made it more remarkable was that there was not anything but what was afforded by his estate as venison, rabbits, hares, pheasants, partridges, quails, poltrie, all sorts of fowle in season from his own decoy neare his house. After dinner we went to see sport at the decoy. I never saw so many herons!" This decoy was in existence for more than a century after Evelyn's visit.

An old keeper who lived near Lakenheath declared that he once saw fully 3,000 fowl sitting in the fen outside this decoy waiting for those inside to be taken to make room for them, as the decoy was so full it looked as if one could not prick a pin in anywhere.

William Hall, the Fen Poet, was born in 1748 at Willow Booth, a small Lincolnshire Fen Isle. Says he has been told by Fen men that ducks were so plentiful on a certain decoy pond of about 3 acres that an egg could not have been dropped without hitting one, while at a mile away the tumult of their rising from the water was like the sound of distant thunder. Those were grand days for the Fen fowler, of whose origin and habits Hall gives us some idea in the curious lines he wrote:—

“ Born in a coy and bred in a mill,  
 Taught water to grind and ducks for to kill,  
 Seeing coots clapper claw, lying flat on their backs,  
 Standing upright to row, and crowning of jacks  
 Laying spring nets for to catch Ruff and Reeve  
 Stretched out in a boat with a shade to deceive,  
 Taking geese, ducks and coots with nets upon stakes,  
 Riding in a calm day to catch moulted drakes.”

The following is an amusing incident which took place the first time the Didlington decoy (Norfolk) was worked. Mr. Fountaine, who constructed it, was anxious that its reputation should be at once established by making a successful catch in it the first time. In the presence of the seventh Duke of Leeds he proceeded to work the decoy.-

In one pipe were some eighty ducks he had lured well inside; all were driven up the pipe successfully, but, alas! the tunnel net had been omitted at the pipe's end, and every bird dashed through and away to freedom. Quoth the Duke: "Well done, Mr. Fountaine, now can you put them through again, may I ask?"

At Dowsley decoy in Lincolnshire, now long disappeared, there was caught between October the 1st, 1765, and April 1st, 1766, 17,180 ducks, which were sold for £386 6s. 10d. Now-a-day prices would have made it well over £1,000.

Early in 1800 it is estimated that in England, Wales, and Ireland there were quite 200 decoys in work. Now I can only make out there are 28, or about. Any pamphlet or paper about decoys, however short, would not be complete without some mention of the famous family of Skeltons. Old George Skelton was born at Friskney, in Lincolnshire, circa 1760. He, I may say, revolutionised the size of the decoy pond. Of course, before his time, there were decoys which had only small pieces of water, but they were, though small, naturally adapted for such work, but most of the waters were large. He started the smaller ones. He died in 1840, and was buried at Winterton Church, Norfolk, where he had worked the decoy there till his death. He left four sons—George,

William, Richard, and Henry—who all acted as decoymen and makers of decoy ponds. This morning (November 18th, 1916) I have received a letter from Thomas Gilbert Skelton. He, I am sorry to say, is spending the evening of his life (he is about 84 years old) in Wells Union. He is a grandson of old George Skelton, and bears a name that will be handed down the ladder of time as long as ducks and decoys are written about. He laid out several, Lord Lilford's at Lilford being one of them.

#### THOMAS GILBERT SKELTON'S LETTER.

“Sir,—I send you a copy of some of the decoys we have constructed, if you have any ponds frequented with wildfowl and wish something to catch them. I cannot advise without seeing the place.—From yours,

“THOS. G. SKELTON.”

#### DECOYS PLANNED AND ALTERED.

“Wells Union, Somersetshire.

“1839. By William Skelton and Son, Thos. Gilbert Skelton: Friskney decoy and Farm Depen, Fen; two decoys and farm, Lincolnshire; Grange decoy, Tillingham, Essex; Marsh House decoy, Tillingham, Essex; Lakenheath decoy, Suffolk; Winterton decoy, Norfolk; Earl of Craven's decoy, Combe Abbey, Warwickshire; Earl of Caledon's decoy, Caledon Castle, Ireland; Lord Fitzhardinge's two decoys, Berkeley Castle, Gloucestershire, and Hale decoy, Lancashire; Iken decoy, Suffolk; Colonel Saurin's decoy, Pembroke, Wales; Major Chadwick's decoy, Moy, Elgin, N.B.; Lord Lilford's decoy, Lilford Hall, Northamptonshire; Walton decoy, Sharpsham Park, Somersetshire; Ivythorne decoys (three), Walton, Marquis of Bath.”



THE LATE THOMAS GILBERT SKELTON  
(Grandson of old George Skelton, the designer of the small  
decoy-pool).

## DECOYS MADE BY THOS. GILBERT SKELTON.

“Thirkleby Park decoy for Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey, Bart.; Hornby Castle decoy for the Duke of Leeds; Holm Fen decoy, Minting, Fen, near Peterborough.”

“A thorough Lincolnshire decoyman seeks an engagement; well-versed in everything that appertains to a decoy—constructing and management.—Apply Thos. Gilbert Skelton. My advertisement in the ‘Field’ newspaper.”

I have to-day received a second letter from Thos. Skelton, and as anything is of interest from him, who is most probably the last designer of decoys, at any rate of the old school, I give it:—

“Wells Union, Somerset,

“Nov. 26th, 1916.

“Sir,—These are a few more of the decoys planned by us. Lord Ilchester’s decoy at Abbotsbury Castle, Dorsetshire, and Towlesbury decoy, a fine place in Essex; and Mersey Island decoy, near Maldon, Essex, and Nacton decoy, near Ipswich, and two decoys between Hull and York; but as it is more than 20 years since I visited these, so I cannot say anything about them. George Skelton was my grandfather, at Winterton. My father went there in 1841 or 2; from there he went to Combe Abbey, the late Earl of Craven’s, where he was steward for seventeen years.

“Any gentleman wanting anything erected, I am here!

“From yours truly,

“THOS. G. SKELTON.”

Amongst some of the earliest writers of sport and nature

Willughby gives a short account of decoying ducks, and gives a sketch of a very primitive decoy, which I



PLAN OF DECOY

Given in Willughby's Ornithology. 1678.

here give. He says, and he takes his information from Markham, from the pool you can make as many ditches, or pipes as they are called, as you like, though there are only three on the sketch, and those quite straight, so perhaps some of the early writers were not far wrong when they say the dog drives the ducks into the net at the end, and, naturally, they would be loth to face the tunnel net at end of a straight short pipe; so after being enticed in by the tame ducks and food, or by the dog, the decoyman and his dog getting between them and the pool, might frighten them into the net at the end. Probably Willughby may have seen decoys in Holland, for he travelled a lot, especially for one in those days. Evelyn mentions that Charles was making a decoy in 1665, which would be one of the earliest English ones; and from what I have seen of Houghton, Notts, I am quite certain it is also one of the first to have been made, as between the two traps the soil taken out was piled up in a great heap, and on the top grows an oak tree, either planted or has come up from an acorn dropped there; but there is no doubt in my mind and in others that have seen it that its

age is not less than 250 years, or about that, from its size now; and probably the Earl of Lincoln of that day copied the King's example. I regret that during the last few years this very old duck-catching trap has not been worked, and it is a perfect mystery to me that those who own a decoy or trap on their properties should let them die out, for decoying of wildfowl is an art in the practice of venary, and to outwit a wild duck is a feather in the cap of any sportsman, to say nothing of the delight of being able to watch the hundreds of different fowl which collect day by day in a decoy. Since writing this I have been given an old print of Houghton taken in 1698, and it very clearly shows the decoy pond with two pipes. This has interested me, so I went over, and you can still see where the pipes were. Mr. Fawcett's uncle, Mr. Wightman, remembers this decoy seventy years ago, and then there was only one pipe and one trap.

I have lately come across the following taken from a book published in 1853: "Wittlesea Mere in 1786 was  $3\frac{1}{2}$  miles long and  $2\frac{1}{2}$  broad; it was shallow; in 1835 it had become much shallower, but it was frequented by a vast number of wildfowl, and at the Holme decoy as many as fifty dozen ducks were commonly taken in one day."

Thomas Gilbert Skelton died in Wells Workhouse, January, 1918, in his eighty-fifth year.

Not only were ducks in such vast numbers, but also geese. Mr. Thos. Kemble, of Runwell Hall, speaking of Bradwell, in Essex, in his "Sporting Reminiscences of an Old Squire," says:—

"I am now going to relate what sportsmen who go there at the present day wildfowl shooting will not believe. I have seen the sky darkened with wild geese, covering a



space of half a mile by a quarter of a mile, as thick as manure spread upon the ground, making a noise which only could compare with fifty packs of hounds in full cry. I have also seen 7 acres at low water covered with wigeon and ducks making a noise that I could not hear my brother speaking a few yards off."

The following list of wildfowl will be read with interest, as to the large quantity taken and the low price made of them in comparison with the abnormal price nowadays, for common wild duck last season, 1917-18, made as much as ten shillings a couple, and this year, 1919, in February, sixteen shillings a couple. These birds in the list were taken in the Steeple decoy, Essex:—

## AN ACCOUNT OF WILD FOWL KETCHT ATT STEEPLE DECKOY.

	Wild ducks.	Teal.*	Pyntail.	Wiggin.*	Burds.	H. burds.	£	s.	d.
1714...	675	347	46	6,296	11	0	150	0	0
1715...	459	518	42	6,088	0	0	143	04	04
1716...	392	154	15	5,817	0	0	147	04	02
1717...	329	30	1	5,207	5	1	130	08	09
1718...	193	40	6	3,138	10	1	78	13	08
1719...	207	14	2	825	11	1	27	15	06
1720...	81	7	0	2,789	1	1	62	00	03
1721...	267	24	3	3,317	0	0	94	16	00
1722...	568	17	8	4,514	2	1	164	15	08
1723...	449	70	7	3,260	3	1	142	08	08
1724...	498	145	4	1,306	3	0	81	16	06
1725...	202	19	4	1,671	4	1	69	18	00
1726...	266	11	0	449	7	0	33	00	00
	4,576	1,396	138	44,677			1,326	1	6

\* When sold, two teal and two wigeon counted as one wild duck.

## THE WIGEON.

We see in many of our older nature books the name is more often than not spelt widgeon, and some few to this day still do so. I once asked a learned friend why it was so, and he replied, people do not

spell pigeon with a "d" why should they do so with wigeon; but this is wrong, for now and again we find educated men spelling pigeon with a "d"—pidgeon. The Reverend John Mulso in one or more of his letters to Gilbert White does it.

The drake of this species is another of our ducks of beautiful plumage. His ruddy head, with its yellow crown, is a striking and charming combination of colour. He has a wild, whistling pipe, "Whee-yow-Whee-yow." One day in the middle 'seventies, when fishing on the Gauer, in Perthshire, I put no less than three wigeon off their nests when crossing bits of heather in the bends of the river; and this was the first time they had been noticed nesting so far south in Scotland. Now they have extended their range, and I have seen many pairs breeding on the big island in Loch Leven, and once, many years back, a pricked duck remained on a piece of water in this county. She was joined by a drake, and they brought up a brood of young ones. On August the 5th, 1883, when I was walking round the Rainworth water with Messrs. Aplin and E. Bidwell, we saw a drake in full breeding plumage. It was about for several days. I need hardly say we were all much astonished to see one so far south at that time of the year. Twenty-five years ago, during the winter, wigeon were fairly common in these parts, but it is not so now; in fact, I have only seen two wigeon on the ponds here during the last ten years or more. Years back, after a foggy night, the Cave Pond was almost a certain find, and when waiting for flight at Rainworth Water the old keeper always said if you stand at the top end of the lake by the poplars you will get a shot at the wigeon, and we generally did. I have

seen numbers feeding on the grass near the decoy at Park Hall, and suggested to the late owner if he encouraged a growth of grass by covering a patch with thorns and then placed a clap net he might capture a lot, but it was never tried. I have now and again seen an adult wigeon dive quite under for some tit-bit, but not often. Varieties of this duck are even rarer than in teal, and it was many years before I got one shot in Essex. It is a pale-coloured bird. When wigeon are flying the white on the wing of the drake is very conspicuous.

When wigeon are on the water they generally sit well out in the middle. When one stands for flight the whistle of the drake is generally heard well before the birds are within shot. Wigeon are very suspicious, and fly round over the water several times before they pitch, and directly they do so all the drakes give out their calls. Ducks generally arrive at the pond they come to in the following order: Tufted, teal, common wild duck, and, last of all, wigeon; whether it is that they come further, start later, or fly slower, I do not know.

### TEAL.

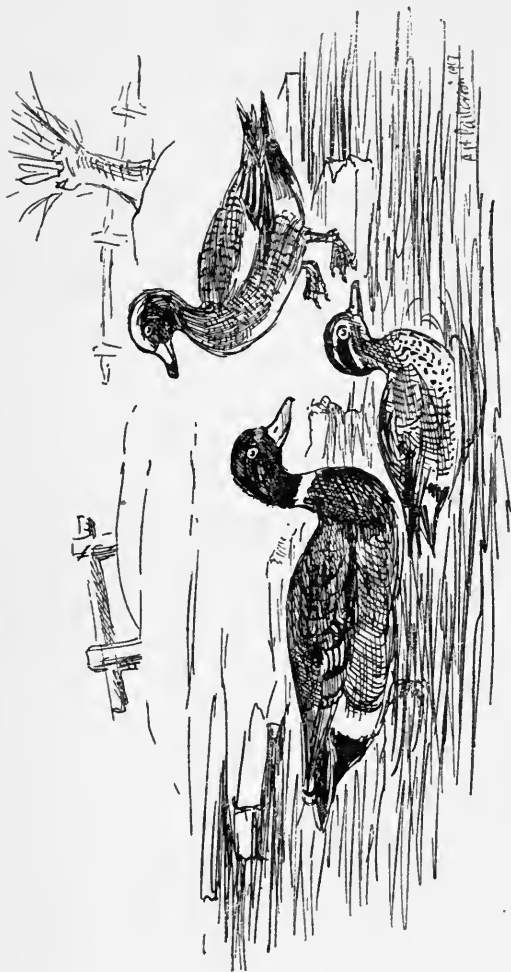
Teal stand second in quantity in the list of ducks taken in our decoys. This is a bright and agile bird. Agile seems rather a curious term to apply to a duck, but those who have seen them spring from the water, going up almost straight for yards, will, I am certain, agree with me that this word is well applied to this beautiful bird, neat in shape, charming in plumage, and swift of flight, to say nothing of being considered by many to be the most delicious table duck we have, its one and only fault being it is too small; its shape when cooked and on

the table leaves nothing to be desired; it is indeed a tempting morsel. When on the water it sits high for its size, and floats like a cork, and is far away the most buoyant of any of our ducks, and it delights the eye to see several dashing down towards the water, twisting about, swooping and gliding from side to side, then settling with little splash, an example of the power of flight which is not surpassed by any bird. The note of the drake teal is a whistle, and in early spring, when they are pairing and many are calling, the sound is very striking when heard from a distance, as it rises and falls, with now and again the sharp "Quack-quack" of the female, making quite a wild music and well in keeping with the surroundings of rushes, water grasses, and alder bushes. Teal nest later than wild ducks. Nests are sometimes made near the water. I have never seen one on the edge; sometimes a long way from it, especially where there is heather, to which they seem to be very partial. This last June I found one placed on the top of a root of old water grass, often called Hassock's, because in olden days they were dried and clipped short and used as busses to kneel on, and even now I hear are so used in a church in the county of Rutland. The bird was on, and it was only her eye that caught mine. I was within a yard of her, and a pretty picture she made, surrounded by yellow grass and covered all over with her own down, only her neck and head showing; and it was only when I touched her with my stick that she flew off, showing nine eggs, which were close to hatching, and I was pleased to find that, on looking a couple of days after, she had taken all off. If you shoot a duck teal on a small pond the drake will return shortly after, and, if not killed,

will return several times during the day. Varieties of this duck are very rare as to numbers, and I only remember having seen three or four; I have one which is of a pale slate colour. This duck prefers small ponds and the shallower parts of them, and you rarely or ever see them out in the open water of a large pond. In such places you find them near the sides, and if trees hang over the water often under their shade. Some waters are more attractive than others. We have one pond here I never remember seeing one on, and then there are others which are almost always a sure find, though to the eye they both look very much alike. This is more a fresh-water duck than are either the common wild duck or the wigeon. Now and again we shoot one that has ferruginous stains on the breast, probably from frequenting water with a large proportion of iron in it. Swans' heads often show this stain, probably from the same cause.

### COMMON WILD DUCK.

The duck most frequently taken in decoys is the common wild duck. I mean this, that in all the decoys the number of wild ducks, if added together, would outnumber teal or wigeon. Of course, in some individual decoys teal predominate, and in one or more near the coast wigeon are taken in big lots; but of ducks taken in existing decoys and traps the common wild duck would as to numbers head the list. To my mind, the males of many of our ducks, both fresh-water and sea ducks, are quite the most beautiful as to plumage amongst all the different species that frequent our island, and none are more so than the male or mallard of this species; a perfect



THE THREE DUCKS PRINCIPALLY TAKEN IN DECOYS: COMMON WILD  
DUCK, TEAL, AND WIGSON.

By A. H. Patterson.

picture is he, with his vivid green head and neck, his beautifully checkered grey back, the pinky chestnut of the lower part of the neck, and the velvety black curly feathers over the tail; these, set off by his bright pink legs and feet, form a combination of colours which, though so striking, blend as a whole; then his shape is pleasant to look upon; and lastly, but not least, he is quite one of our best birds when partaken of as food, especially the decoyed ones. Shot ones, when being roasted, the juices in the body run out through the holes made in the skin, and are lost to a great extent. This duck pairs early, long before some of our others, and may be seen in pairs in January, if the weather is not very severe, and in an early spring there are young ducks early in April, but, of course, this entirely depends on the weather. I have found a nest in the big wood here, several hundred yards from the nearest outside, and a long way from any water. Now and again they will nest on pollard willows here. The young ones jump down into the grass or water without the least harm to themselves. Young ducks of this kind often dive till half-grown for food, and I have many times watched them do so, but when full-grown they rarely or ever do so. When these ducks are paired and are flighting, the duck always leads. Flighting varies according to the light; they come sooner on a dark night than one when there is a moon, but so punctual are they that a time-table made by my son some years ago holds good year after year. Each evening has its time on dark nights, moderately dark, and moonlight ones, and I always consult it when I go to try for a shot, as it saves one waiting in the cold longer than is needful. These ducks, like all

others, leave the waters where they have been during the day for other ponds or feeding places, and return at day-break. They are fond of going to barley or bean stubbles, and one night here I counted over ninety come over me into a large field, and probably there were as many more on the other sides too far away for me to see. I consider the wild duck an easy bird to shoot, though he flies fast, but rises much slower than teal or pintail, and he has not the rush of the pochard, tufted, or teal at flight. They are easily tamed, and I have succeeded in getting pure wild ones to eat out of my hand. During the last few days—November 1st and after—I have seen mature wild ducks diving for food in 3 feet of water, going right under and keeping down five to seven seconds, coming up five or six yards from where they went under. I have never seen this before.

At the great feast given by Archbishop George Neville at York (1465) 4,000 mallards were served at a cost of twopence each. Curiously enough, at this time teal were valued at fourpence. Many years after a mallard was worth two teal. We see in some books on birds the name mallard applied to both sexes of the common wild duck, and in others it only applies to the male of these ducks. I myself think the latter name right, and it distinguishes the one sex from the other; in all the other ducks they are termed drake and duck. I notice the ducks that feed in shallow water are much more noisy than those feeding in deep water both during the daytime and night, and they flight more regularly than do the diving-ducks. Teal, wigeon, and common duck when flighting often call, but tufted and pochards seldom, though tufted do when they rise and when they settle on the water.



“ Oft as the sun’s last lingering ray  
Gleams faintly o’er the fading scene,  
By some still lake I wend my way,  
Where decked in plumage brown and grey  
The mallard oft is seen;  
With glossy neck of emerald hue  
And wings barr’d with the deepest blue  
That sapphire gives; and ruddy breast,  
By the clear dimpling waters pressed;  
In sedgy covert near the mere,  
Upon her nest of rushes made,  
His mate in humbler garb arrayed,  
Broods o’er her eggs with anxious care.”

The catches of wildfowl in past days were so great that people nowadays can scarcely believe it possible, but we have it handed down on the highest authority, and there is no shadow of doubt that the statements are perfectly true.

Daniel writes: “A decoy in some seasons is astonishingly lucrative. In 1795 the Tillingham decoy, in Essex, at that time in the occupation of Mr. Mascall, netted, after every expense, upwards of eight hundred pounds, and the only birds taken were duck and mallard. Eight hundred pounds at that time represented twice the amount it does now.

## CHAPTER IV.

## DUCKS TAKEN NOW AND AGAIN.

The three kinds of ducks aforementioned are the staple produce of a decoy, but now and again others are captured, but only now and again, because some will not decoy, and some are so rare that it is at only long periods they are caught.

## POCHARD.

These ducks, which for eating are first rate, curiously enough, are bottom-feeding ducks, and are by some only to be compared to the canvas-backed duck of America. They are no doubt very good, but I myself prefer a teal or a common wild duck. Pochard are sometimes tempted by the dog to enter a pipe, but almost invariably dive back to the open water when the decoyman shows himself between them and the pipe mouth. Now and again, if there are many ducks, one or more is hustled up the pipe by the rush of the other birds, but this is rare. So where pochards were in quantities in the olden days nets were made, and were placed on four sides of the pond, sometimes between the pipes, and here and there ponds for pochards alone were kept. These ducks when taking flight rise very slowly, flying close to the surface of water for some distance, so when they were well on the wing the bolt was drawn and the net rose, and into it many of them flew. It was so timed that a few went above it, so as to give the others a good lead, and in

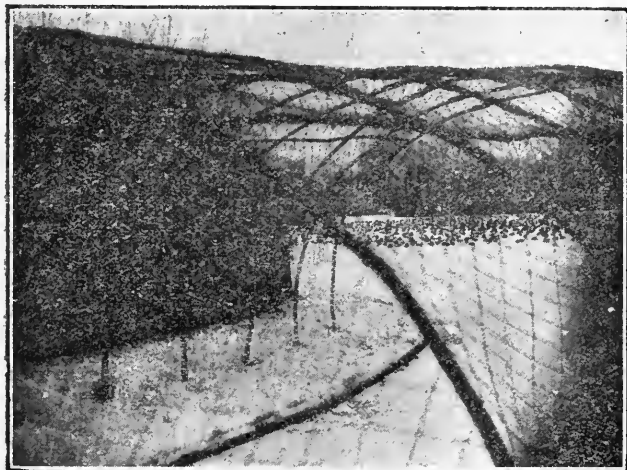
this way hundreds were taken at one time. At the foot of the nets were trenches dug into which the pochards fell, and so, piled on each other, could not escape. We read that so many were the birds in them that the bottom ones were squashed flat by the weight of those on them, and a wagon load, with four horses to draw it, was taken at one pull, as mentioned in "Wildfowler," by Folkard, page 96, written in 1873. The birds were often so numerous as to thickly cover all the surface of the pond, and 500 to 600 taken at a pull was not considered more than a fairly good draw. The county of Essex was renowned for the vast quantities of pochards to be found there.

Now and again they venture into a duck trap, and if the fowler is about, and the door lowered, there is no escape, as in a pipe decoy. Some years back a big lot of these ducks frequented the lake at Park Hall, but nothing in the way of food would induce them to enter the trap. A bright idea entered Captain Hall's head, and was carried out. Thus, a half-grown kitten was put in a hamper, and before the morning flight time it was placed in the trap, and in the decoy house the man waited. As day broke ducks came from all sides and settled on the water. Soon the pochards arrived, settling near the island, where the trap was. In a little the kitten, feeling lost, set up strong and piercing calls. This very soon attracted the attention of the pochards, who swam to the entrance, and, with heads held well up, listened. Their inquisitiveness soon overcame them, and one or two swam in, followed by others. The watcher was anxious to get all he could; he waited, but, noticing some turning, lowered the door, and when the trap was entered

at night he found he had captured over a score. After a few days it was tried again, but not a bird was persuaded to go in. This was the first and last good take, only an odd one now and again being got. The pochard has a very beautiful eye, much the colour of port wine which has been in the wood a long time. They nest in this county but rarely, and I have only known them to do so on the ponds here once or twice.

### THE TUFTED DUCK.

I often feel I ought to raise my hat when I see tufted ducks, because it is through that species I have made so many friends who but for this duck I should never have known, and it has been my privilege to entertain almost all

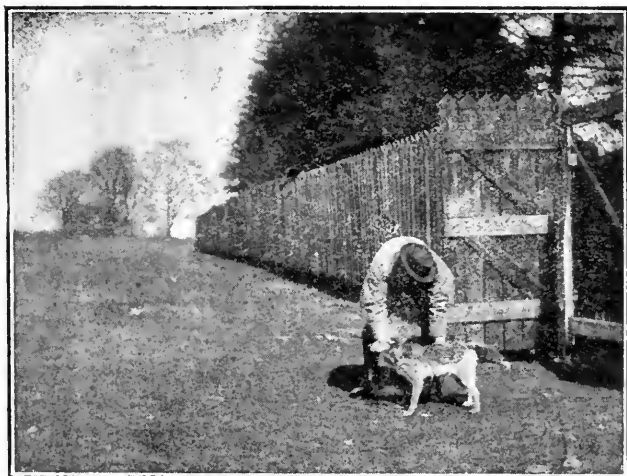


BOROUGH FEN DECOY, WINTER, 1918.

the well-known nature lovers here—men whose names will be handed down through the years to come to the nature lovers of future generations; and this was how it happened. In the spring of 1873 a letter was written to the "Field" saying that a pair of tufted ducks were nesting in a certain county, and the editor's note said, if I remember right, that it was only about the seventh authenticated nest found so far in Britain. I at once wrote, saying we had twenty or more nests on the waters here, where they had bred in numbers since the 'thirties. The consequence was my letter-bag for days was plump with letters from bird-loving men, and those letters led to my asking them here, and friendships made for life. Many since then have passed the Bar, and sad it was to me; still I have some left whom I delight to hear from and see here, and we cherish the memory of those gone.

In the good old days of duck-decoying the tufted was a rareish bird, and I do not remember seeing one in the list of taken ducks in any decoy of those days. Of course, he, like his cousin the pochard, is a bad one to catch, as he, too, dives out and will not be driven up, but now and again he is captured in a duck trap, and quite a few were got in this way in the one at Park Hall. Captain Hall gave me several, which I pinioned and turned up on the water in front of this house, and I found that the males which had their wings cut never changed into eclipse plumage, which is interesting. These ducks get almost all their food in deep water, and in doing so remain under on an average of fifteen seconds; but if food is plentiful they are under a shorter time. Naturalists place our ducks under two heads—surface-feeding ducks and diving ducks—but this is very misleading, for all our ducks get

their food from the bottom, and a better distinction would be—ducks that feed in shallow water and ducks that feed in deep water. The so-called surface-feeding ducks—teal, common wild ducks, shovellers, etc.—get the greater part of their food from the bottom, which they reach by putting their heads under water, and when they cannot thus get at it they tip up to do so. Pochard, golden eye, tufted ducks, etc., get theirs in the deeper water, going quite under and never tip up or feed in shallow water. I say these hardly ever do so, for even ducks do curious things now and again, but I have never seen them, and perhaps no one in England has a better chance to observe their habits than I have. There is not a day in the year when



FITTING THE FOXSKIN COAT AND BRUSH ON TO THE DECOY-DOG.  
THE LATE MR. BARRETT (DECOYMAN TO HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF  
LEEDS) AND "ROVER." HORNBY CASTLE DECOY.

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[Photo by Oxley Grabham.

there are not some on the ponds here, and very few when there are not some on this pond. Within shot of my writing-table there are two to-day, and I have seen over thirty one day this year, so I have every opportunity. A handsome bird is the tufted duck. The contrast of his black-and-white plumage is very striking, and shows up well on the water and at flight. No duck flies faster. Many do not care about them for the table, but I do not think a young bird is to be despised. I saw a pretty sight here one June day. A tuftie had just hatched off her brood on the island here, and I happened to see them as they got on the water. After a few minutes she dived. The young ones were surprised and lost, and swam about wildly. Up she came, and they rushed to her. Presently down she went, and again they swam round looking for her. After another dive or two, two or three tried it, and shortly all were diving in fine style. I wrote and told my friend Mr. Millais, and he mentioned it in his fine work on diving ducks. When these ducks are paired nothing will induce the drake to fly till his partner rises. I have always seen this so. The following is interesting. One day, years back, myself and some friends were walking round the Rainworth water. It was spring, and we flushed from a spit of sand washed in by thunderstorms a common sandpiper. It flew down the lake towards the bend, which as the banks elsewhere are steep and rush-clad, was the only other place where it could land; but a keeper being there, it flew to the end, and returned; finding us near the spit, it turned and flew to a pair of ducks which were floating on the water, and tried to settle on the back of one. The tuftie dived at once, so away flew the piper, and then returned and tried the same thing again.

Both ducks dived, so having no other settling place it left the lake and flew away. We were, I need hardly say, much amused.

The following is remarkable, especially for what I may term a water duck to do, for I may truly term them water ducks, for they feed and sleep on the water and rarely come off it except to nest, whereas common wild ducks, wigeon and others spend a good lot of time sunning and sleeping on land, and they often feed on it in the way of corn, grass, etc. Some years back when a keeper was trimming the banks of the decoy at Park Hall (this is done for the ducks to plume and rest on, and the shorter the grass the more they like it) he mowed over a nest in the fringe of the rushes on the water's edge. He took the eggs to the



THICKLEBY DECOY.



housekeepr (a clever hand at rearing poultry of all kinds), who put them under a hen, and succeeded in rearing seven, feeding them the same as common ducks, worms being also given to them in a tin of water to dive for. In the autumn, when full grown, they left the yard and joined the wild ones of their own species on the decoy, and were lost sight of, the housekeeper being congratulated on rearing such tender birds, and no more was thought about them. However, one day the next June a tufted duck was seen by some of the servants to fly over and settle in the yard at the back of the house and try to get in at the kitchen door and also the hencoops. On the housekeeper being told, she went out, and, giving the same call she had been in the habit of using when feeding the young ducks the previous year, it immediately ran to her and followed her into the kitchen and ate out of a saucer and from her hand. This it did for several days, until one morning it appeared followed by eleven young ones, all of which after being fed returned to the lake for the day. This daily visit continued until all the young ones had died—no doubt from being draggled through the long wet grass, the lake being fully a quarter of a mile from the house.

This is the first instance (and last) which I ever have heard of a tufted duck of its own free will leaving its wilder brethren and bringing its young to the poultry yard to be fed; but no doubt it was influenced by kindly recollections of the good treatment it had received the year before. I could write much more about my favourite duck, for when I see them I always think of the pleasure I have had in watching them and of the many true friends they have been the means of my knowing and entertain-

ing. This summer (1918) I had two lots of young tufties on this pond, and I was surprised to see one several times on its mother's back, where it remained for some time preening itself—a pretty sight and new to me.

### THE SHOVELLER.

Another beautiful-plumaged duck, by some thought the most beautiful. The old wildfowlers called them spoon-bills, not only, I fancy, from the shape of their bills, but from the way they sometimes feed—scooping up the small floating seeds, etc., as if with a spoon. In the spring the drake flies after the duck, following every twist and turn of her flight, all the time calling “Tuck-tuck” in a short, quick way. They nest here, and have done so for many years. Some years we have only one or two pairs and others ten or more. They nest generally away from water in a hedge bottom or in a patch of nettles. Not bad birds for the table, but not so good as teal or fresh-water wigeon.

I shall never forget my wife's delight when on June 21st, 1885, she found the first authenticated county nest in the meadow hedge here, and, curiously enough, the drake was on. It was about a hundred yards from the brook.

Now and again a decoy is visited by more of the scarcer ducks than usual, and in the season of 1917-18 it was the case at Borough Fen Decoy. Mr. Williams took over 200 shovellers in that season.

### GADWALL.

Nowhere is it but rarely found except in Norfolk, where years back Mr. Fountaine, of Narford, turned up

several pairs on the lake there, and these increased and spread. It is only now and again in the list of ducks we see one of this species taken in a decoy. The duck might be passed over amongst females of common wild ducks, but the white speculum is always a distinctive mark, being the only British duck that has one.

### PINTAIL.

Beautiful in shape and colouring and called by some the sea pheasant. At Ashby and some other decoys they are taken now and again. This bird is a very near relation to the teal. This is proved by its call note and general markings of its plumage. Drakes vary much in weight. The heaviest I ever knew was shot in Inverness-shire, and weighed 2 lbs. 10 ozs. I have read of a goosander being taken and a scoter. Of course, other ducks not mentioned by me may have been caught, yet I have never heard of them.

### GARGANEY TEAL.

This pretty duck has been taken now and again, but has generally gone South before decoys have started working, or arrives in the spring after the season is over.

### OTHER CAPTURES.

We read of many curious captures in decoys, the taking of most unlikely birds. That a peregrine falcon pursued a heron up a pipe, and the decoyman rushed them into the net and took them both; and amongst strange birds owls, hawks, crows, partridges, pheasants, and others have from time to time been caught.

During the autumn and winter the decoyman has the

pleasure of watching the wildfowl that frequent the pond and the sport of taking a certain quantity. All these weeks the decoy is alive with fowl, and other birds come and go. Woodpigeons sun themselves in the bare trees; flocks of starlings stream over from time to time; numbers of rooks pass on their way to roost; the hedge-sparrow hops about the screens; families of tits search the boughs; and when the red sun is setting robins sing their Vesper hymns. Then, in spring and summer, though the bird life is different, there is something very interesting about it. Swallows skim about over the water, and the grating notes of sedgebirds come from the reeds. The whitethroat flutters up from the boundary hedge and sings his jerking notes. The stormcock's song sounds loud in March, and blackbirds flute to the rising sun; and even in the baking days of July the yellowhammer calls for his "Bit-of-bread-and-cheese." No, there is no period of the year in which there is not something to interest the nature lover on or about the decoy, something to learn and something to remember.

THE END.

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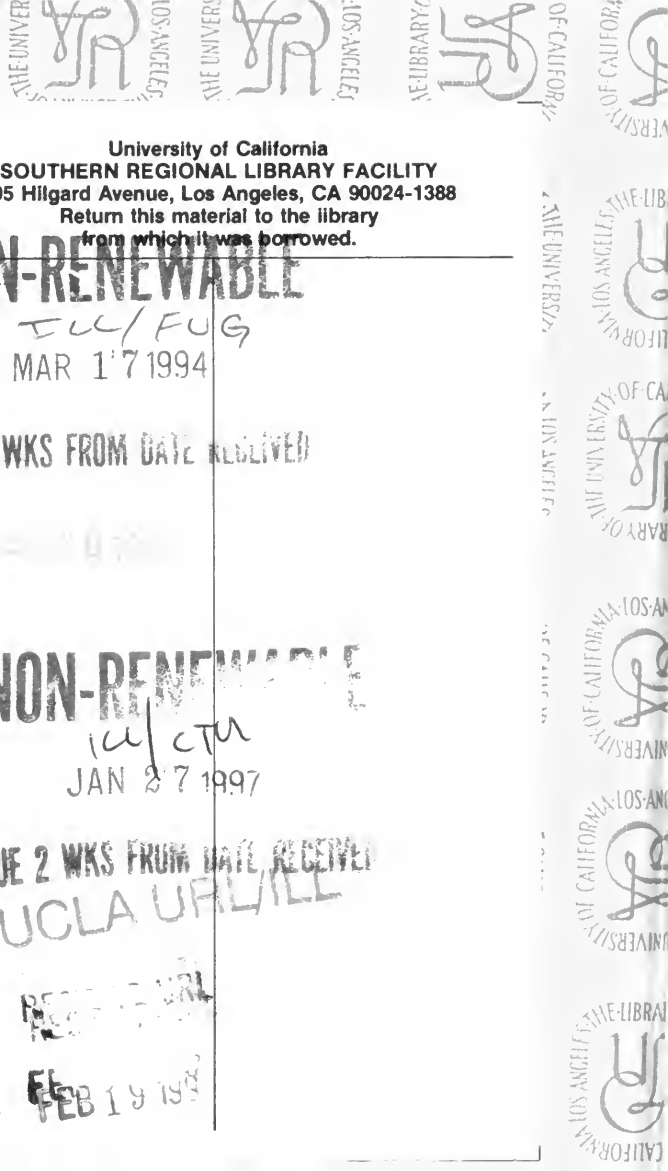
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