

Borough Fen Decoy, 1968

January was an open month with the decoy pond frozen for only four days from the 10th to the 15th. As in the previous January, the proportion of duck dogged into the pipe (32%) was higher than the general winter level, perhaps indicating an influx of naive birds. Deeping Lake trap was operated throughout the month; besides the duck, 80 rails were ringed. During the period 10th to 17th about 850 surface feeding ducks were roosting on Deeping Lake, but the majority of the diving duck left. Unfortunately the area of open water was not near the trap, and the waterfowl did not seem prepared to make a big trek over the ice.

The birds in the Decoy ignored the dog almost completely in February. Plenty of frozen potatoes were made available but grain appeared to have a

greater attraction. Once the duck were in the pipe feeding, however, they would stay and dabble amongst the potatoes. Catches in the Deeping Lake trap were disappointing considering the numbers there.

The season ended in March with a total of 3,695. Early migrants at Deeping were Sand Martins on the 25th, and Chiffchaff 27th. They preceded the first Lepidoptera, Tortoiseshell and Brimstone butterflies on the 28th. The first passerine nest found with eggs was a Dunnock with two on the 21st, followed by a Song Thrush with one egg on the 23rd. Twelve nests had been found by the end of the month including three Mallard.

Maintenance commenced in April with a biting easterly wind and squalls of sleet and snow. The approach roadway was repaired with broken limestone. Fifty

bundles of reed were cut from the Decoy reed bed for screen repairs, and the willow and poplar off-cuts bundled for rebuilding backwalls. Some big willows were felled on the north side of the pond, and about 50 poles of willow and poplar taken out for use at the Peakirk Waterfowl Gardens. A concrete post was incorporated in the screens rebuilt this year. The wooden posts used in the past rot just at ground level after about six years. The peat appears to preserve the buried portion whilst the part which is high and dry also remains solid. Overhanging branches at the little ends of pipes were ruthlessly cut back and the whole system of paths mown prior to the Open Weekend on the 25th-26th May. In superb weather conditions 172 visitors were shown the techniques of decoying, plus recovery maps and other display material.

A diaphragm-type pump was hired to remove the mud from each of the eight pipes which were badly silted up, there being only a few inches of water over a foot or so of mud. This very shallow water evaporated very quickly and necessitated frequent topping up in the traditional way from the River Welland. Each pipe was dammed off, and all the sludge and water therein pumped over the back bank into the vegetation. The water then filtered back into the pond whilst the residue was quickly hidden by a strong growth of nettles and goose-grass.

The first catch of the new season was made on 3rd July and 38 duck had been taken by the end of the month. There was considerable storm damage after 4 inches of rain in 24 hours on the 10th. A mature white poplar fell on to the NE. pipe completely demolishing the first 5 hoops. Some repairs were made to the trap at Deeping Lake, materials and labour provided by the owners, Messrs. Dandridge. As well as the Mallard 40 Mute Swans were ringed.

Assisted by the Spalding and District Wildfowlers' Association a round-up of flightless Canada Geese was carried out at Grimsthorpe Park, Lincs.

An analysis of Decoy-ringed Mallard over the past 10 years was completed. As a policy decision, an experimental quota limit had been set to the numbers of Mallard to be caught in September and October when the origin of the birds caught is very much in doubt. However, the weather took a decisive hand and gale force winds with heavy rain reduced the number of duck roosting on the pond from 1,000 to less than 100 on 14th September. Several more trees were uprooted

during this period: one ash, falling across the mouth of the West pipe, fortunately caused no structural damage. There was also considerable disturbance due to late harvesting operations, with combine-harvesters and strawbalers frequently becoming bogged down.

In October heavy and frequent rain made the approach paths to the pipes very muddy and great difficulty was experienced in moving around the decoy quietly. There was a lot of local flooding and the duck became very lethargic when on the pond, probably due to the abundance of food in the unharvested cereal and root crops.

Some improvement in the weather occurred in November and the catch was quite satisfactory. Blood samples were taken for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food from the ducks and rails for the Duck Plague virus. No positives were discovered.

The early frustrations of the season carried on to the end of the year, and no duck were caught after 19th December when the pond froze and remained so until the New Year.

However, one cheerful point was that the Deeping Lake traps had succeeded in catching a record lot of diving ducks, including 101 Tufted Duck.

A Curlew Sandpiper I ringed in 1963 was recovered in Tunisia in May; two Black-headed Gulls ringed in 1965 were found in Finland during the year; a long-lived Goldfinch met its end in Northumberland nearly seven years after being ringed in September 1961. 181 Nest Record Cards covering 23 species were completed and also 50 Moulting Cards from 25 species. A total of 1,771 birds other than wildfowl were ringed.

Monthly totals of ducks caught at Borough Fen Decoy and Deeping Lake, 1968.

	<i>Borough Fen Decoy</i>	<i>Deeping Lake</i>
Jan.	131	99
Feb.	120	28
March	47	58
April	—	—
May	—	—
June	—	—
July	38	22
August	284	17
Sep.	707	29
Oct.	526	15
Nov.	420	39
Dec.	91	41
Totals	2364	348

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