



# Fritton Lake & Duck Decoys



A Duck Decoy was a traditional method of capturing ducks and wildfowl. In former times, wild birds were an important resource: Their meat was very flavoursome, and their feathers used for domestic purposes (eider-down and duck down duvets and pillows).

They are understood to have originated in Holland, and were first introduced to England about 1600. The word *decoy* is derived from the Dutch word *eende-kooi*, which means duck cage.

A Duck Decoy consists of a tunnel made of nets, supported on iron hoops of decreasing size. These were erected over a curving water channel, called a pipe. Reed screens would be erected either side of the pipe, which would conceal the decoy man.

Ducks would be driven into the pipe in one of two ways. Either the decoy man would place several wooden ducks at the entrance, and provide lots of grain for the birds. He'd then progressively feed the birds further up the pipe, before jumping out from behind the screens and scaring those in the pipe to the tapered end of the net. The second method involved using a small dog, known as a pike. The dog would run around the screens, and (owing to a duck's curiosity) the ducks would swim up the pipe towards it. The dog would continue to run round the screens further in, appearing and disappearing behind each one as he went. Finally, the birds would be spooked, by the Decoy man jumping out from behind the lakeside screen, and the birds would fly into the tapered end of the net.



Fritton Lake, formerly known as Fritton Decoy had a large number of Decoy Pipes. In total 21 have been found, although not all these would have been worked at the same time. Records held by the Somerleyton Estate showed that one pipe alone produced a seasonal catch of 2800 birds. By 1868 eight pipes were still active at Fritton Decoy, but within a century the art had declined, in favour of more modern, but less human methods of farming birds.

You can visit our reconstructed Duck Decoy at Fritton, which is located in its original position in the bay below Fritton House. Adjacent to the pipe is an information board, and in our Visitor Centre is a 2m long model and further information about the Fritton Lake Duck Decoys.