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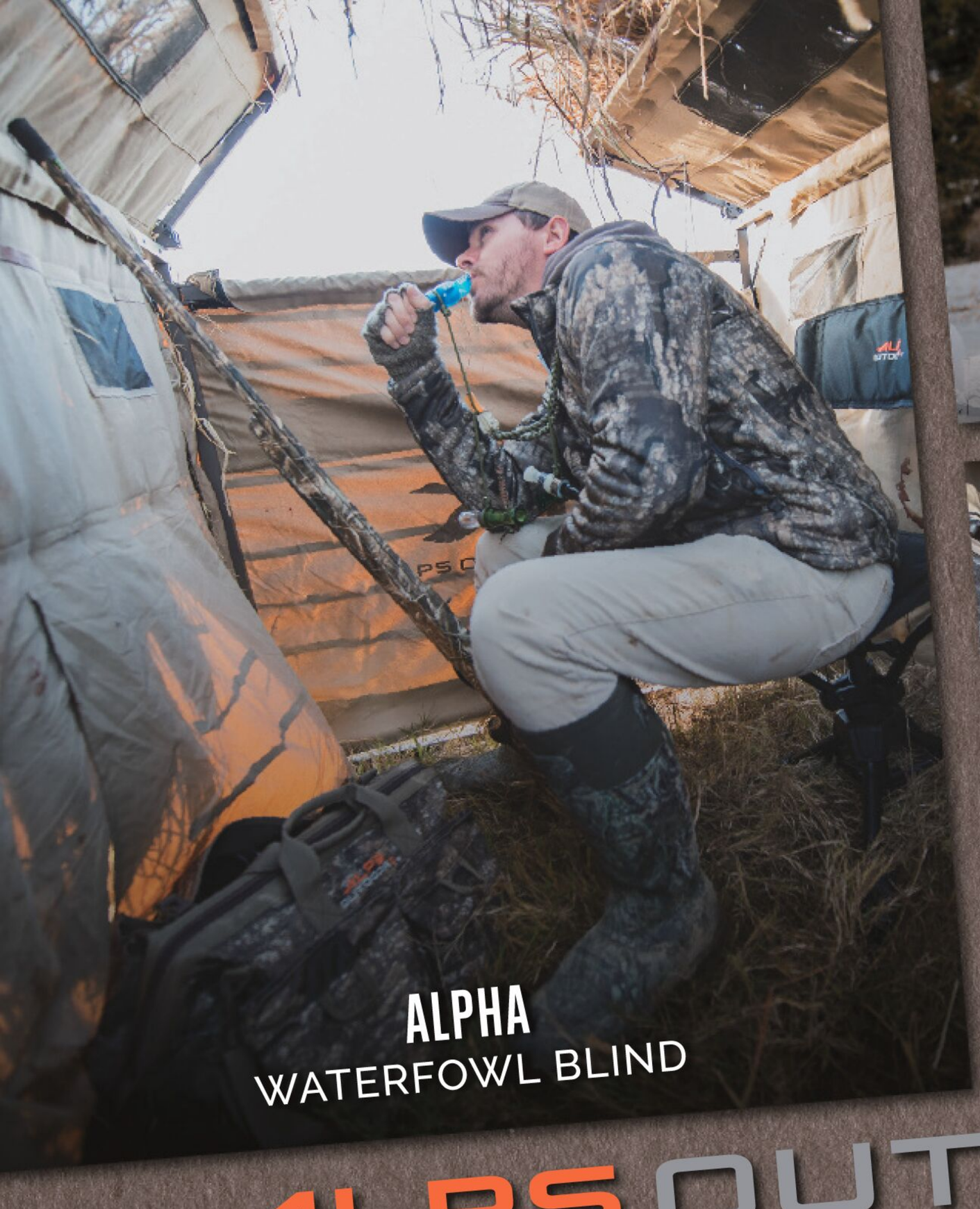

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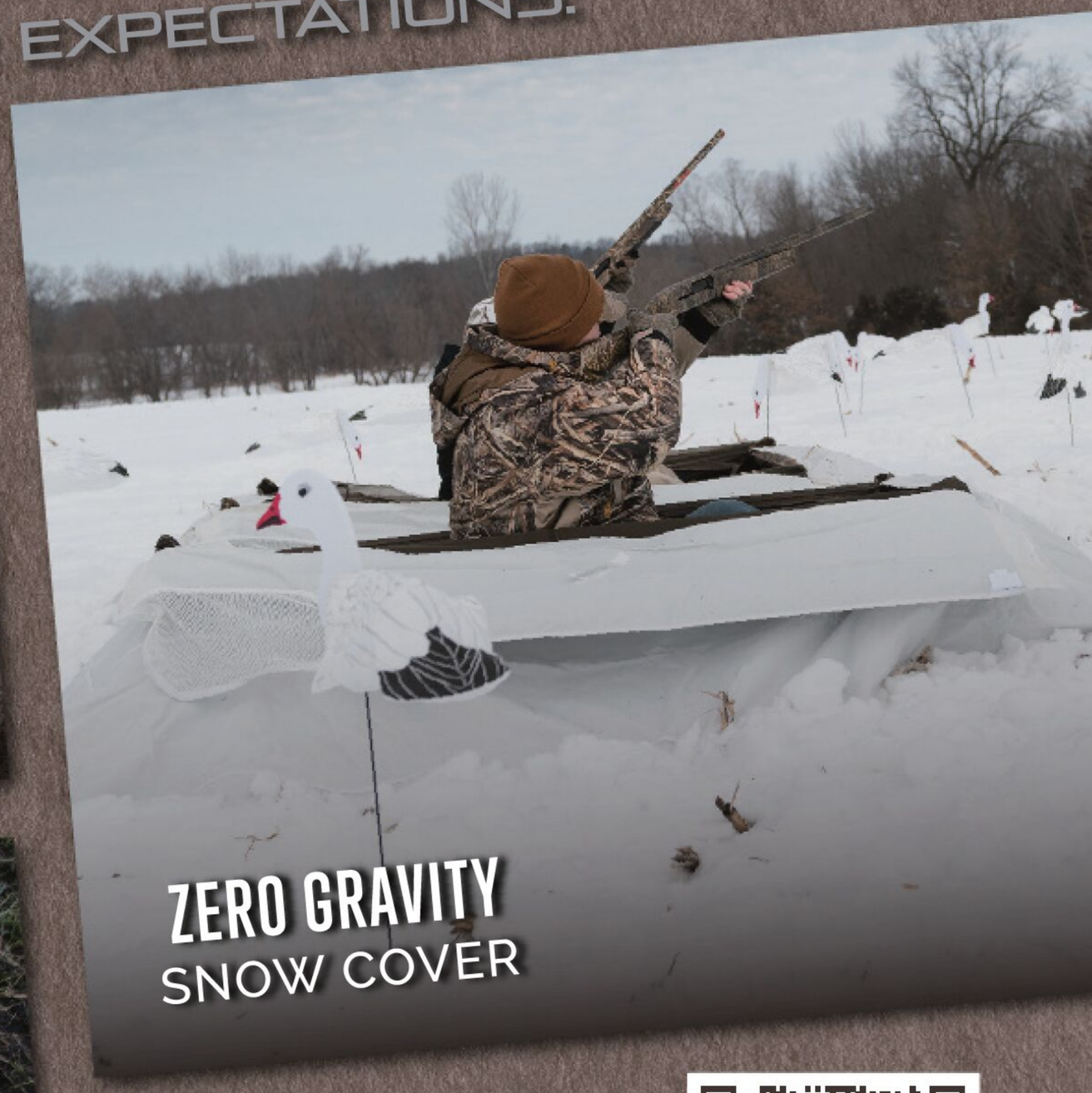

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TIME, IMAGINATION, AND MONEY

THE OLD MEN WERE stirring in camp long before daylight, and it occurred to me that they sounded a lot like waterfowl do in the pre-dawn as the marsh comes to life. Long-time hunters from California, the group had come to Canada to chase birds, and I could hear them shuffling about like a bunch of big honkers, groaning, moaning, and occasionally wheezing. Slowly the noises spread through the lodge and increased as the lights flicked on, until it sounded more like slightly alerted geese, picking up the tempo with some clucking. It was clear just when the coffee kicked in a half hour later and they started to get much louder, chattering like cacklers.

Then the real storytelling started, and laughter erupted as the caffeine hit and the old men sounded like happy flocks of speckle bellies and murmuring snow geese, punctuated intermittently when someone cut out with a big guffaw of laughter bursting out like a mallard hail call on a good acrylic.

Scattered feeder chuckles filled the gaps in the form of softer laughing, as the excitement toward a day of waterfowling in Alberta really built. At breakfast, some of the old timers had boxes of pills beside their plates, but that didn't stop them from the leaving their home country to chase geese in Canada. God bless them. They are still getting after it, I thought.

"Yesterday we were on the W or the Y but it sure as hell wasn't the X," said one of them, groaning about the only hunt in which limits weren't instantaneous. I hunted with Jordan Moll that October south of Edmonton (Hidden Prairie Outfitters), and came back in the spring. After years of wanting to chase super-late snows in May, I finally did it and was instantly hooked. I won't miss it again. The birds come in low and slow, all adults, and the thing that really hooked me was that it was true wingshooting at individual birds in small groups, not flock shooting, like typical snow goose hunts. Mild weather, naïve birds, light hunting pressure, just heaven. While people back home were chasing turkeys, we felt like we were getting away with something, hunting geese in May.

Waterfowlers change with the times. It seems no matter where you live, most of our backyard local duck holes coast-to-coast from Minnesota to the Eastern Shore to Louisiana and Texas are simply not at as reliable. Even Arkansas has felt it, and California's fabulous fowling is hamstrung by constant drought. It's just not as easy to simply go out and bang a bunch of ducks

© SCOTT HAUGEN

close to home, in many places.

The answer is to go where the birds are, and travel to chase opportunity elsewhere. The modern fowler's propensity for dreaming beyond the horizon is causing friction in places like Kansas, which is about to put the squeeze on non-resident hunters due to an influx of waterfowlers.

Kansas is following what Arkansas and Manitoba have done, moves that other provinces are considering. Increased pressure is blamed on Youtube and social media's shining spotlights, and that genie is not going back in the bottle. Restricting out-of-staters will help residents on crowded public lands, but may also drive the non-resident to lease private lands that people who grew up hunting will then be locked out of. The Kansas plan will super-concentrate hunters on those public waters on the few remaining days NRs can hunt, as well. Complicated issue.

But opportunities as a waterfowler seem to grow every year, whether it's adding a bit of travel or simply switching gears locally, and trying for something different like geese, wigeon or divers. Specks and snows continue to be the most emergent part of the famed Arkansas waterfowl scene. I keep going down to Arkansas to hunt mallards and the "secondary option" of afternoon speckle belly hunts end up stealing the show. It's some of the best goose hunting in the country. Limits are the rule.

Duck and goose hunters are becoming more vagabond, more willing to open their minds and hearts to new experiences. It seems across all hunting there are fewer hunters as a percentage of the overall population, but those still doing it are way more intense about it. Technology, digital and social media are part of that—increasing awareness and simply making it seem more do-able (there are sandhill cranes in Texas?! I can drive there!). And of course, that sword is double-edged.

I am still lucky enough to have a killer duck hole near home, but who knows when some rich guys from Denver will hear about it, show up and write a check I can't even pay for the ink on?

Follow those waterfowl dreams and do the best you can! Line up a plan A, B, and C this year, don't have all your duck eggs in one honey-hole basket: Hoping your normal spot is going to be good this year is a less reliable plan than it used to be.

Adventure and the waterfowl affliction all take a little time and timing, a little imagination and money. Pick a trip that sparks your imagination. Or just switch gears on your local area and try something new. Gear up and get out there.

We love to hear from you—
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR
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WOE IS MANITOBA

Dear WILDFOWL

Your magazine has been a lifesaver over the years—diving into vital statistics of shotguns, decoys, and just about everything to do with duck hunting. I read it from cover to cover within a few hours of receiving it! Keep up the good work. Regarding the change in the laws in Manitoba that mean you're going to require a guide in order to hunt waterfowl as a non-resident... Most people in articles including the newspaper in Winnipeg feel the government there is shooting itself in the foot. I had a duck camp in Manitoba on Lake Winnipegosis. It was a duck camp of your dreams where Eisenhower and Doolittle frequented a bay 30 miles long and 5 miles wide with small bays off of it and the bottom covered with shellfish. We would see divers as far as you could see from 100 feet offshore. It is one of the key staging points for divers coming to the United States. I'm glad I don't own it anymore; I wouldn't be able to hunt there. A lot of my friends that are ranchers in that area are very upset they're not going to be able to reunite with their American hunting friends. We used to go in Winnipeg to get our licenses and pick up shells, I am sure the local economies will be feeling it. Thanks so much!

Phillip Seeber, Northern Illinois

Dear WILDFOWL

I am writing regarding your piece titled Manitoba's Manifesto (Editor's Letter). While I will admit that I'm not very knowledgeable on the situation going on in Manitoba, I did recently listen to a podcast and I think you nailed it in your article when you say, "The number one problem with hunter recruitment is access..." From what I heard, access is a big reason for what Manitoba is doing. The local guys were losing so much access to "freelancers" from the US that many were quitting the sport. Apparently, a lot of "freelancers" are securing farms and illegally outfitting. I do feel bad for the true freelancers but feel Manitoba had to do something for the local hunters because without them the sport will be lost there.

Cheers,

Geoff Wood, Prince Edward Island

SAY IT AIN'T SO, KANSAS

Dear WILDFOWL

I have bought a non-resident hunting license in Kansas for over 30 years. I live just one mile off the state line in Missouri, but I have spent most of my life waterfowl hunting in Kansas. It's my understanding that the pending rule changes there will be for all public land and Corps of Engineers lakes. Non-resident hunters will only be allowed to hunt these places on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday. That will mean no opening day hunting, since Kansas always opens its season on Saturday, and we are not allowed to take our boats on those lakes on the four off days to scout. They are also raising the nonresident combo hunt/fish license fees and making a new non-resident duck stamp that we have to purchase along with the regular state duck stamp.

The five or more trips my group of five made to Great Bend, Kansas, to hunt the Cheyenne Bottoms, where we spend money at hotels and buying gas and food, will probably not happen just for a one-day weekend hunt. The changes will affect our late season hunting on Corps lakes when the marshes freeze up. It seems like non-residents are under attack as problem hunters in a lot of areas of this country and now Canada. I will still hunt Kansas because the season splits and the hunting is fantastic. I do have a lease on private ground that I hunt in Kansas and they did not regulate private ground, thankfully.

Thanks,

Bradley Close, Missouri

20 GAUGE KILLER!

Dear WILDFOWL

I just finished Scott Haugen's article on sub-gauge selections for waterfowl. A few years back, I started shooting a 20 gauge on timber hunts for puddle ducks. I agree with all of your findings for pattern and lethality. We did it initially to minimize pressure on the ducks. Now I only shoot 20 gauge for ducks and geese no matter what. I use Boss ammo which I find to pattern consistently in both my Fausti Stefano and Browning light 20 gauges. As always, your writing is perfectly on point!

Dr. Lincoln Godfrey, Mountain Home, Arkansas

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BY LYNN BURKHEAD

WHAT CAN DUCKS AND GEESE SEE?

BREAKING DOWN THE SCIENCE BEHIND WATERFOWL VISION

IN HIS CLASSIC WATERFOWLING TALE *"Pothole Guys, Friz Out,"* the late great Gordon MacQuarrie penned a line or two in one humorous essay that still brings a chuckle all these years later.

As he sat in a Wisconsin duck blind and talked hunting with Al Peck, the lovable Hizzoner character and president of the Old Duck Hunters Association, the topic was whether or not Mac and his father-in-law might take home a brace of mallards, or maybe even a black duck or two for the dinner table.

After another group of greenheads flew by, MacQuarrie spun his humorous tale.

"They would swing in high over the open water and look it over," he wrote. "They did not care for any part of our point blind in the snow.

"Wise guys," Mr. President said. "They see the point and two dark objects against the snow in the blind, and one of the objects wiggling all over the place. That'll be you."

Waterfowlers around North America know what Hizzoner was saying—been there, done that, guilty as charged. Because when it comes to waterfowl winging down the flyways, and our meager attempts to hide from and hunt them, well, ducks and geese can spot the ruse from a mile away, or so it seems.

This idea is worthy of consideration in this Conservation Corner column as hunting seasons begin nationwide in the weeks to come. With those opening days looming, we'll spend the time here taking a look at what ducks and geese can actually see.

To start with, let's focus on some biological basics. And since I'm one of those who needs complex ideas simplified a bit, I decided to find the

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5TH FLYWAY

BY LYNN BURKHEAD

UTAH CHANGES SWAN HUNTING REGS

After the Utah wildlife officials closed swan hunting early the past four years (thanks to the federal quota of 20 trumpeter swans being met in Utah), the Beehive State has made changes heading into the 2023 season.

In an effort to keep the swan hunting in Utah from having to close early again this year the Utah Wildlife Board voted to prohibit the harvest of trumpeter swans in the state, issuing only tundra swan hunting permits this year.

KANSAS: BAD NEWS FOR NON-RESIDENTS?

As reported recently on *WildfowlMag.com*, the recent trend of making hunting more difficult and expensive for non-residents—see Manitoba—appears to potentially be coming soon in Kansas. Commissioners with the Kansas Department of Wildlife voiced growing concerns over the Sunflower State's waterfowl numbers, and potentially declining opportunity for Kansas residents to enjoy quality hunting. As a result, a more expensive non-resident duck stamp and potential new regs are being considered, including restricting non-resident hunting on KDWP department lands and waters to a Sunday through Tuesday only timeframe.

TURKEY DAY GREENHEADS IN ARKANSAS

After a year of strong public input, the chance to hunt on Thanksgiving Day is once again a reality after the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission voted to change the 2023-24 duck season opener to the traditional weekend before the late November holiday. That means that the 2023-24 season will open up on the Saturday prior to Turkey Day with a first split of Nov. 18-26, followed by splits of Dec. 9-23 and Dec. 27-Jan. 31.

CALIFORNIA SEES IMPROVEMENT

While it remains to be seen what the final effects will be on California duck numbers, there were already a lot of smiles this summer in the Golden State as lush green conditions gripped the landscape. Rivers swelled with snowmelt following a record-breaking winter, lakes refilled after copious rainstorms, and there was more water across the state than in a long time.

MORE NR LICENSES IN SOUTH DAKOTA

While there was some pushback from residents, the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Commission voted in May to slightly increase the number of duck hunting licenses available for non-resident hunters wanting to head to the waterfowl-rich Mount Rushmore State. According to the Mitchell Republic newspaper the proposal approved includes 100 more non-resident licenses for use on private land in two parts of northeastern South Dakota along with another 200 non-resident and resident licenses being made available for a large part of the western and southern region of the state.

most easy to understand literature on the topic that I could. And when it comes to that hope, there are numerous studies out there discussing how and what waterfowl can actually see.

For a good crash course on the topic of duck and goose vision, I turned to a treatise written early in 2023 by Ducks Unlimited's John M. Coluccy, Ph.D., who addressed the five senses that waterfowl use in a DU Article. When it came to their sense of sight, Coluccy indicated that they rely on this sense more than any other as they move about each day.

"The structure of the eye in waterfowl allows the birds to see objects in fine detail two and a half to three times farther than humans can," he wrote. "Ducks and geese can also see a much broader spectrum of colors—spanning from near ultraviolet to red—than people do."

Coluccy also noted that since the eyes of a duck or goose are located on the sides of their head, waterfowl have "...panoramic vision, which enables them to see almost everything around them at once."

Dr. Coluccy notes that while that's true, such ability comes at a price since ducks and geese have a reduced depth-perception as a result. He says that they compensate for this by moving their heads from side to side rapidly, which allows the birds to "...observe an object with one eye from two different angles in quick succession, which creates a three-dimensional picture."

And you thought that when that flock of greenheads came over low last fall and a wise old Susie kept moving her head back and forth that she was searching for your impressive calling, right?

But there's even more to waterfowl vision's importance. Ducks and geese rely on their vision for choosing appropriate breeding and wintering habitat, choosing a mate and performing courtship rituals,

and daily feeding, both in identifying forage near the surface and even pursuing prey underwater.

Put simply, the ability of ducks and geese to see is of paramount importance for survival.

"The ability of waterfowl to recognize visual clues is important in almost every aspect of their lives, from finding their way around a marsh to navigating great distances between breeding, staging, and wintering areas," notes Coluccy. "Their acute vision also aids in detecting potential danger from predators, including hunters."

See Mac, your father-in-law was right after all. And who are we to ever argue with the president of the Old Duck Hunters Association, right?

In truth, ducks and geese can see and interpret more about their world than we can imagine. In fact, as the Iowa DNR notes, our beloved ducks actually go through life with each eye looking at different things at once—talk about multi-tasking!

Because of this, ducks must control each eye independently in order to perceive depth, or how far away objects are, notes the Iowa DNR. They do this very efficiently by controlling the curvature of both their lenses and corneas (outermost surface of the eye), which allows them to make adjustments for seeing in both air and water. Humans only control their eyes' lenses."

But there's more to consider here. Ducks can also see more sharply in a wider range of colors than humans because of a few adaptations of their retinas (back interior surface of the eye). There, ducks have more types of cone cells, allowing them to see into the ultraviolet spectrum, and no blood vessels, allowing for a higher density of sensory cells and thus a clearer image. Instead, they supply blood to the eye with a small, pleated tissue projection called the pecten oculi, which looks a bit like the slats on a vent.

If you can see all of this biological speak as clearly as mud, the point here is that ducks and geese have clear and precise vision that is superior to that of hunters, vision that is akin to a super computer scanning the world as they fly about.

And because of that, there are some significant implications to bring into our bag of tricks and hunting strategies this fall and winter. Starting with a key principle that I learned a few years ago during a visit with the folks at W.L. Gore, the company that has given us GORE-TEX, WINDSTOPPER, and even the Optifade pattern Sitka gear made famous.

You may see their Optifade Timber and Marsh patterns as nothing more than a hunter's personal choice, but on a visit to the Gore facility in Delaware a few years ago, I found out that it's much more advanced than that. That's because the whole premise of the company's micropattern OPTIFADE concealment technology comes from research into animal vision science, the science of camouflage, and even allowing high-powered computers to play a role. The result is a series of patterns that don't try to help you blend into your environment on a macro level as much as they attempt to disrupt what an animal can see on a micro level.

Meaning that a duck or goose on final approach sees our camouflaged forms in a blind, and doesn't flare away thinking that those forms are predators to be avoided at all costs.

My own hunting closet contains a little bit of everything, much to my wife's chagrin, since I'm a gear junkie at heart. I've certainly got some Sitka Gear clothes in the various OPTIFADE patterns, and I like wearing them in the field. But I'm also partial to my Mossy Oak Bottomland camo when I'm hunting

Decoy lines that blend in can be a smart bet.

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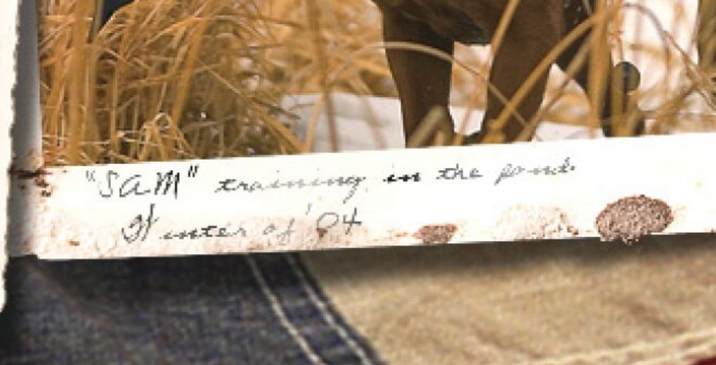

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To be honest, I really can't say that I'm any more or less successful, depending on what camo pattern I'm wearing. And that brings to mind an old adage in the fly fishing world, a fly shop mantra that indicates the dozens of fly patterns in the shop's bins are aimed at catching fly anglers as much as they are fish. There's probably a little truth to that idea in the camouflage world too since all of the patterns you see online, in your favorite catalog, or in the box store you shop at are aimed as much at getting a hunter's greenbacks as they are at putting a few greenheads on the dinner table.

How can we know that? Because the so-called good old days when our fathers and grandfathers went afield were times when they killed plenty of ducks without any of today's modern camo patterns or technology at their disposal. It was either muddy brown, khaki green, or WW II camo or bust. Meaning that in the end, location is always a key, unpressured ducks always help, and wearing drab colors and staying still in a duck blind can go a long way in fooling a few quackers and honkers circling overhead.

Now, onto a tip or two, including the decoy spread itself, since that's often the make or break selling point in the waterfowler's world. To be sure, *WildfowlMag.com* has plenty of online help about the various patterns to set decoys in, whether goose silhouettes work more or less than full bodies, and other pertinent decoy rig topics. But in general, I'd suggest using decoys that match the species in the area being hunted (don't show up to a snow goose hunt with only Canada blocks); use the best and most realistic looking decoys you can (i.e. flocked heads and fresh paint versus faded dekes); and setting those blocks out this morning where the ducks were yesterday evening (effective scouting). Add in a few high-visibility blocks to the spread, something like a few pintail drakes or Canada geese, and use decoy lines that have clear line on Texas-rigs to prevent ducks and geese from seeing them as they fly overhead.

You'll also want to pay attention to the blind itself, making sure that it's grassed up or brushed up with the region's vegetation, and that any holes knocked into the cover by a hard-charging retriever or hunter reaching for the morning's last donut are filled up. Overhead cover is good too as you try and ensure that ducks don't spot you wriggling from above. And finally, if you're hunting with a commercial blind utilizing some sort of modern fabric, make sure that its surface has been dulled up, or mudded, with some dirt and mud that knocks off the fabric's shine. In high traffic, heavily hunted places like the Texas Panhandle the Canada geese have seen it all.

And finally, make sure that you pay attention to the little details, because the ducks and geese will. You know, pick up spent shotshells, keep litter off the ground, and cover up your face and hands.

Why is all of this important? Because ducks and geese make a living by noticing things that you and I don't, a set of survival skills honed by months of flying up and down the flyways each year.

They see clearly, quickly, accurately and in ways we can't always fully understand, meaning that you and I can almost always be assured that if they flare from the decoy spread on final approach, there's almost always a reason why.

And as Mr. President said to Gordon MacQuarrie so long ago, that'd be me and you.

BY THE NUMBERS

28 the usual number of incubation days for Canada goose eggs in a nest, where some 5-8 eggs are typically laid each year.

$103,500 the record amount that a hand-carved J.T. Beckhart duck call sold for at auction in July 2011.

300 how many A.H. Fox Super Fox shotguns were reportedly made over a 20-year span from 1923-43, including Nash Buckingham's famous "Bo Whoop" HE grade side-by-side model.

545,300 the total active goose hunter numbers in the United States for 2021 according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

1,784,613 the Canada goose harvest in the U.S. during the 2021 season according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

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Cerakote protective finish on receiver and fore-end cap.

Velocity LR (Long Rib) concept adds 4 ½" to the sighting plane. Also, to reduce glare the top of the rib is finished in matte black.

True Timber® camo with Soft Touch finish.

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BAND REPORTS

COMPILED BY CHRIS INGRAM

❶
BAND #: 1286-07035
HUNTER: Auston Garrison, Muscatine, IA
SPECIES: Northern Shoveler (D)
BANDED: 1/4/2022 | Hayes, LA
RECOVERED: 12/04/2022 | Bluff Park, IA

❷
BAND #: 1226-52808
HUNTER: Don Eckrod, Sunbury, PA
SPECIES: Wood Duck (D)
BANDED: 9/21/2017 | Fergus Falls, MN
RECOVERED: 10/15/2022 | Caketown, PA

❸
BAND #: 1256-29468
HUNTER: Chris Duffy, Carlsbad, CA
SPECIES: Northern Pintail (D)
BANDED: 12/21/2020 | Alamo, NV
RECOVERED: 1/28/2023 | Niland, CA

❹
BAND #: 2087-81198
HUNTER: Barry Pratt, Flushing, MI
SPECIES: Mallard (D)
BANDED: 8/22/2014 | Big Point, ON
RECOVERED: 11/30/2022 | Saginaw County, MI

❺
BAND #: 1937-59618
HUNTER: Johnny Brosam, Decatur, IL
SPECIES: Greater White-Fronted Goose (M)
BANDED: 7/14/2009 | Deadhorse, AK
RECOVERED: 1/27/2023 | Neoga, IL

3,011 mile LONG-DISTANCE -CHAMP-

❻
BAND #: 1225-07510
HUNTER: Josh Simmerman, Sanford, FL
SPECIES: Blue-Winged Teal (D)
BANDED: 8/4/2018 | Yorkton, SK
RECOVERED: 1/29/2023 | Brevard County, FL

❼
BAND #: 1547-38179
HUNTER: Hunter Staniforth, Bayboro, NC
SPECIES: Surf Scoter (D)
BANDED: 7/29/2005 | Uigortlek Island, NF
RECOVERED: 12/05/2022 | Parkertown, NJ

Flyway Veteran

❽
BAND #: 1727-18235
HUNTER: Andy Hawkinson, Eden Prairie, MN
SPECIES: Ross's Goose (M)
BANDED: 8/4/2004 | Johnson Point, NU
RECOVERED: 9/15/2022 | Hagen, SK

❾
BAND #: 2177-11555
HUNTER: Reid Williams, Linwood, MI
SPECIES: Greater White-Fronted Goose (M)
BANDED: 7/10/2018 | Cambridge Bay, NU
RECOVERED: 12/20/2022 | Wiener, AR

❿
BAND #: 2257-65751
HUNTER: Johnny Bethel, Greenfield, TN
SPECIES: Mallard (D)
BANDED: 8/10/2022 | Houghton, SD
RECOVERED: 1/27/2023 | Yorkville, TN
NOTES: $100 Reward Band #108538

FOR AN EXPANDED "**BAND TALE**"
SEE NEXT PAGE >

WE WANT YOUR BAND TALES! Please send **band report information** or **band tale stories** including Band Number, Species, Sex, Banding Date, Banding Location, Recovery Date, Recovery Location, Hunter Name and Address and Comments, or photocopies of your band certificates for banded waterfowl to our Digital Editor: Chris Ingram (chris.ingram@outdoorsg.com) or Wildfowl Magazine: P.O. Box 1248; Middlebury, VT 05753. You can also submit on our website **WILDFOWLMAG.COM** or scan the QR code on the right. Please be sure to submit your own name and band information to the USGS.

SCAN ME

MAP BY RON FINGER & MICHAEL SCHMELING | DREAMSTIME.COM

8
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© DAVID STIMAC

BLACK BRANT TRIFECTA

ONE HUNTER SCORES FOUR BANDS IN THREE PLACES

JOEL MEETEER'S PASSION FOR hunting sea geese (Pacific black brant) was ignited by a first-time hunt on their southernmost wintering grounds in Baja, Mexico. "The bird's responsiveness to decoying and calling made for quick and fun hunts, but it was their delicious table fare that gave me love at first bite," he says. He was also fortunate enough to collect 2 bands, which appeared in our "Passages" section (December 2017-January 2018).

Upon returning home he ordered several dozen brant decoys and pursued the birds during Washington's limited three-day season. Bitten by the brant bug and unfulfilled by the brief local season, Meeteer soon jumped the border again, this time to hunt British Columbia's 10-day spring season in the Boundary Bay staging area. On the last day of that hunt, he was blessed with another band, which also appeared in "Passages" (August, 2019).

Those bands were more of a bonus than an objective but got Meeteer to thinking. Ironically, it was the U.S. where he needed to complete his North American banded black brant trifecta. "After reading everything I could get my hands on about Pacific black brant, I was compelled to see firsthand the vast pristine beds of eel grass at Izembek National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska, where the birds fatten up prior to migrating south," said Meeteer. The pieces fell together when he found Captain Jeff Wasley of Four Flyway Outfitters for a September 2021 hunt, and his loving wife gave him the green light to book it.

It was mid-way through the third day when four birds cut across the left side of the spread, banked right and came across the decoys into the wind, giving Meeteer a 35-yard passing shot. He targeted and dropped the last bird, Wasley's dog made a quick retrieve and Meeteer was delighted to discover the bird had not one, but two bands. "I was beyond elated to have been blessed with another banded brant especially when it completed the quest for the trifecta," he said.

In short, he shot two brant in Mexico that were banded on Alaska's North Slope, one in British Columbia that was banded on Banks Island in the Northwest Territories, and one in Alaska that was also banded the in the Northwest Territories, less than 400 miles from the BC bird.

THE Bands

HUNTER: Joel Meeteer, Arlington, WA

BAND #: 1987-11186
SPECIES: Black Brant (F)
BANDED: 7/15/2012
Fox Kill Lake, AK
RECOVERED: 2/19/2016
2 mi SW of San Quintin, CA

BAND #: 2007-29140
SPECIES: Black Brant (F)
BANDED: 8/1/2015
Near Nuiqsut, AK
RECOVERED: 2/20/2016
3 mi SW of San Quintin, CA

BAND #: 2067-01531
SPECIES: Black Brant (F)
BANDED: 7/24/2018
Near Sachs Harbour, NT
RECOVERED: 3/7/2019
1.8 mi W of Crescent Beach, BC

BAND #: 1547-36054 A2
SPECIES: Black Brant (M)
BANDED: 8/4/2005
Nias Point, NT
RECOVERED: 9/21/2021
5.6 mi W of Cold Bay, AK

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The Yamaha F25 is now being offered in matte brown to blend in and provide portable power to fuel your next hunting adventure. The 25 horsepower outboard features an innovative design for a power-to-weight ratio that's class-leading. The F25 offers a no battery required Electonic Fuel Injection (EFI) and one pull manual starting built-in for ease of use and peace of mind.

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REMEMBER to always observe all applicable boating laws. Never drink and drive. Dress properly with a USCG-approved personal floatation device and protective gear.
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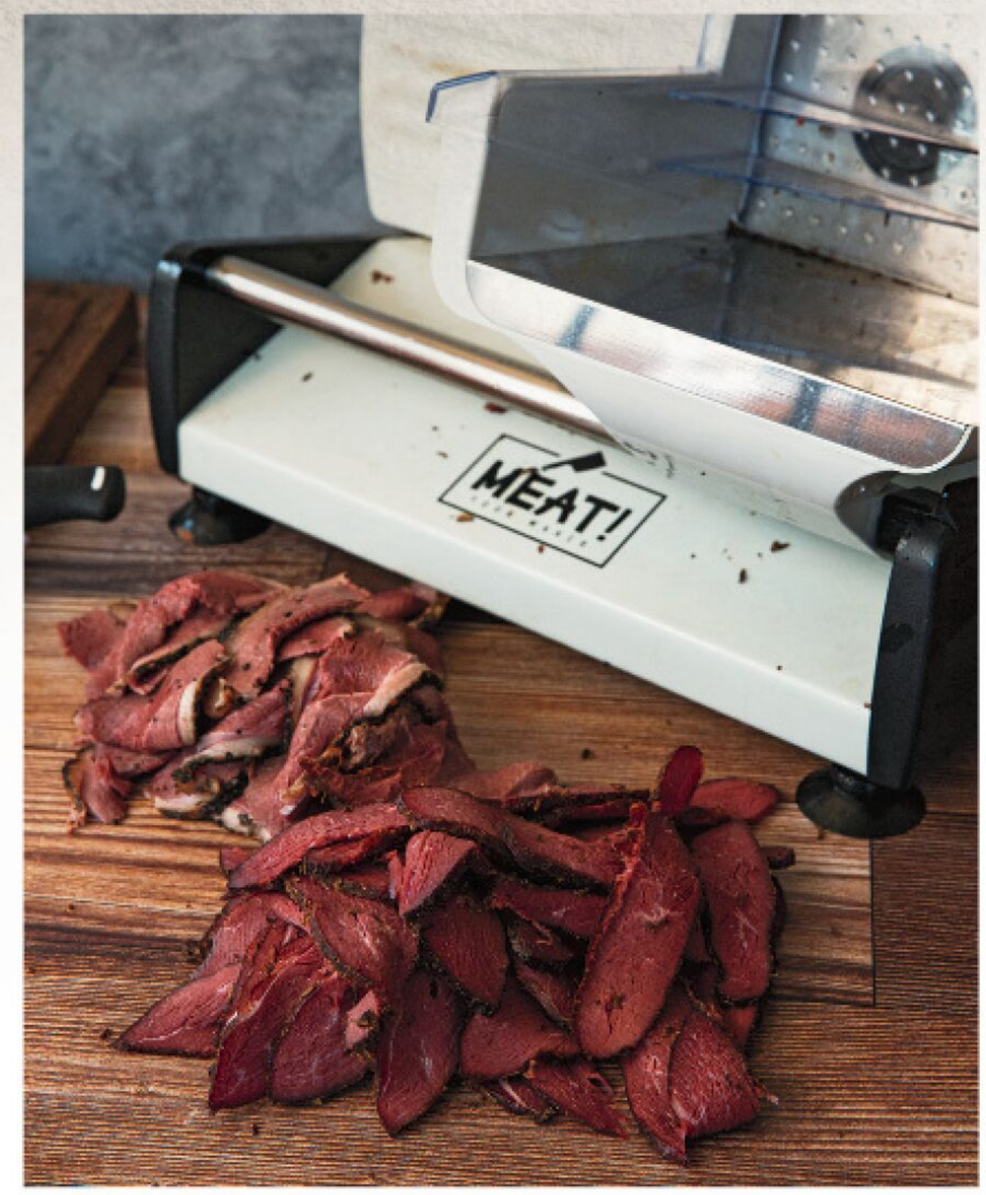
BY JACK HENNESSY



GOOSE BREAST LUNCH MEAT

A PERFECT WILD GAME MEAL FOR ON THE GO

'TIS THAT MAGICAL, dare we say, "momentous?"—time of year when kids go back to school. Parents pack lunches with renewed enthusiasm as they hand off boxes and whisk their little bundles of pride and joy out the door. A lot of shopping precedes this glorious occasion, so if after piling supplies, clothes, backpacks, etc., into the cart and praying for it all to end, take solace in knowing a great alternative to store-bought lunch meat sits in your freezer.

Yes, you can make lunch meat out of any wild game, though in regard to waterfowl, I recommend breasts no smaller than an average Canada goose (so at least 1 pound per breast). You can indeed use mallard breasts but you'll find you're stacking slivers on a sandwich versus slices, which isn't such a big deal, really.

That wild meat in your freezer is also quite a bit healthier than all that local-grocer packaged "deli" meat, which is pumped full of artificial-who-knows-what. Do you need a slicer? Technically not, but a decent one comes in handy if you plan on making this a thing.

Here we have two different recipes for a couple variety of lunch-meat styles. Goose pastrami is truly something special, so you should give it a try if you haven't already. You'll need some sort of smoking setup. But if you don't have that and still want to make lunch meat from your goose breasts, just use your oven. Set it as low as it'll go. Use a meat probe to monitor internal temp of goose.

Any questions or comments, please reach out on Instagram: @WildGameJack

INGREDIENTS (SERVES 4)

• Two Canada goose breasts
(approximately 1 to 1-1/2 pound breasts each)

Pastrami spice mix per 1 pound of meat:

• 1.2 grams Insta Cure #1
• 10 grams brown sugar
• 8 grams Kosher salt
• 5 grams freshly ground black pepper
• 5 grams caraway seeds
• 5 gram dry thyme leaves
• 3 grams mustard powder
• 3 grams paprika
• 3 grams ground coriander
• 2 grams onion powder

Other recommended rub for "roast beef" flavor profile:

• Fire & Smoke Society Black & Tan Steak Rub

Recommended condiments and toppings:

• For pastrami: rye bread, sauerkraut, mayo, Dijon mustard, pickle chips
• For "roast beef" version: sourdough bun or bread, mayo mixed with horseradish, lettuce, sliced tomatoes, sliced red onions, Dijon mustard, pickle chips

DIRECTIONS

1) To prep to make pastrami, in a mixing bowl, mix all ingredients (pay attention to amount per pound, so use a digital scale to weigh meat then ingredients). Remove any skin or fat from breast. Pat spice mix into all sides of meat. Place in a nonreactive or glass bowl and cover. Leave in the fridge for 72 hours.

2) To prep "roast beef" flavor variety, you can keep fat and skin on or off the beast—whatever you prefer. If keeping skin, lightly score it, then rub in ample amount of spice mix over every inch of meat. This will only need to sit overnight in the fridge prior to smoking.

3) To smoke, add your favorite wood. (I prefer mesquite.) Set to 160 degrees Fahrenheit. If you wish to sear your "roast beef" variation, you want to pull that breast when it hits 105 F. Sear on a grill, flattop, or skillet heated to 600 F for 1 minute each side, remove and allow to rest for 15 minutes prior to adding to fridge. The total smoke time may be anywhere from 1 to 1-1/2 hours to hit 105 F internal.

4) The full smoke on the pastrami or the "roast beef" version, if you don't plan to sear for crispy crust, is longer. At 160 F, it may take 4 hours, or more, to reach 140 F internal temp, which is our target goal. Make sure you are indeed using a meat probe inserted into the thickest part of the breast.

5) After pulling any breast, allow it to sit out at room temp for 15 minutes prior to placing in fridge.

6) To slice, let the breasts sit in fridge for a couple hours to cool. Cut breasts in half and place one at a time on the slicer. Start with a thin setting, then widen if you have to. You don't want to start with thick slices and have to work backwards.

7) Assemble your sandwiches however you prefer. Enjoy!

GEAR UP

GOOSE GEAR

BY DAVID REARICK

TOP ESSENTIAL ITEMS FOR THIS HONKER SEASON

JARGON WRECKIN' BALL GOOSE CALL

Straight from the mouth of Wisconsin Goose Calling Champion Dave Nelson, "The Wreckin' Ball is unique in its size and structure. It hits high notes for cackling and migrating geese and low notes for finishing big honkers, and everything in between. The sharp responsiveness allows the caller to run fast and smooth cadences in the field. It's amazing that a call of this size has such a rich tone that achieving big goose sounds comes with such ease." If this doesn't get you excited to try out the Wreckin' Ball this fall, you may need to check your pulse!

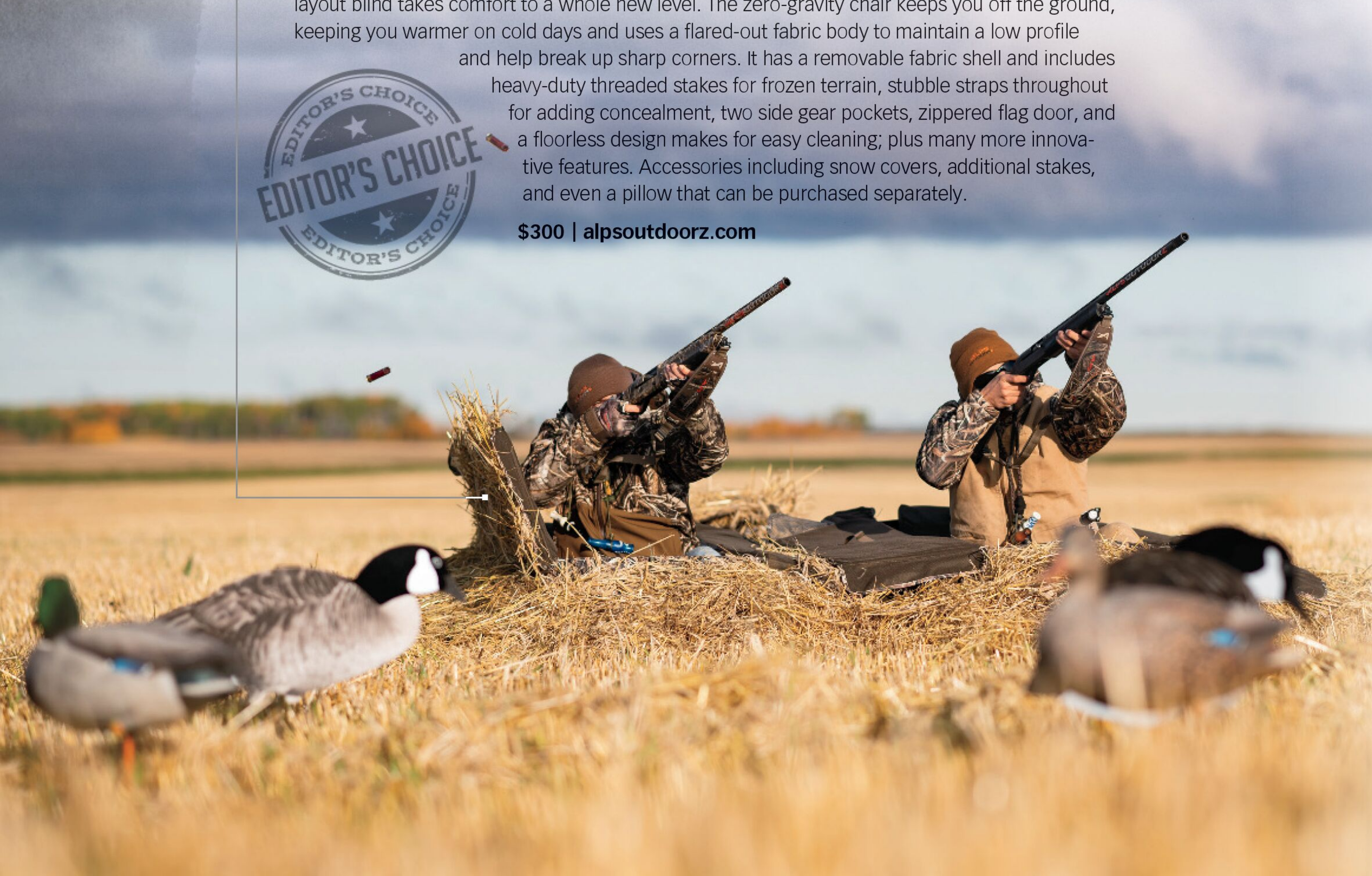
$160 | jargongamecalls.com

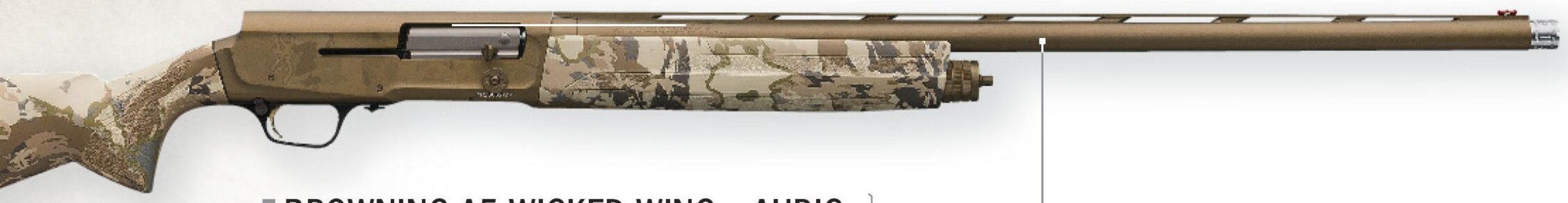
ALPS OUTDOORZ ZERO-GRAVITY LAYOUT BLIND

Put an end to frozen wet backsides! Using Alps Outdoorz patented chair design, the Zero-Gravity layout blind takes comfort to a whole new level. The zero-gravity chair keeps you off the ground, keeping you warmer on cold days and uses a flared-out fabric body to maintain a low profile and help break up sharp corners. It has a removable fabric shell and includes heavy-duty threaded stakes for frozen terrain, stubble straps throughout for adding concealment, two side gear pockets, zippered flag door, and a floorless design makes for easy cleaning; plus many more innovative features. Accessories including snow covers, additional stakes, and even a pillow that can be purchased separately.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

$300 | alpsoutdoorz.com





BROWNING A5 WICKED WING – AURIC

As pretty and reliable as it is deadly, Browning's new A5 Wicked Wing - AURIC combines the A5's classic style with Browning's Kinematic Drive recoil operation to create their latest great autoloading duck hunting shotgun. The A5 Wicked Wing includes a composite stock set with Browning's new AURIC Concealment and Burnt Bronze Cerakote camo finish on both the receiver and on the barrel. Key hunt-worthy features include an oversized bolt release, extended Invector-DS Goose-Band choke tubes, and a corrosion-resistant chrome bore. It even includes an ABS case to help keep your investment safe and field-ready for generations to come.

Starting at $2,279 | browning.com

BOSS SHOTSHELLS 12 GA 3" 3/5'S

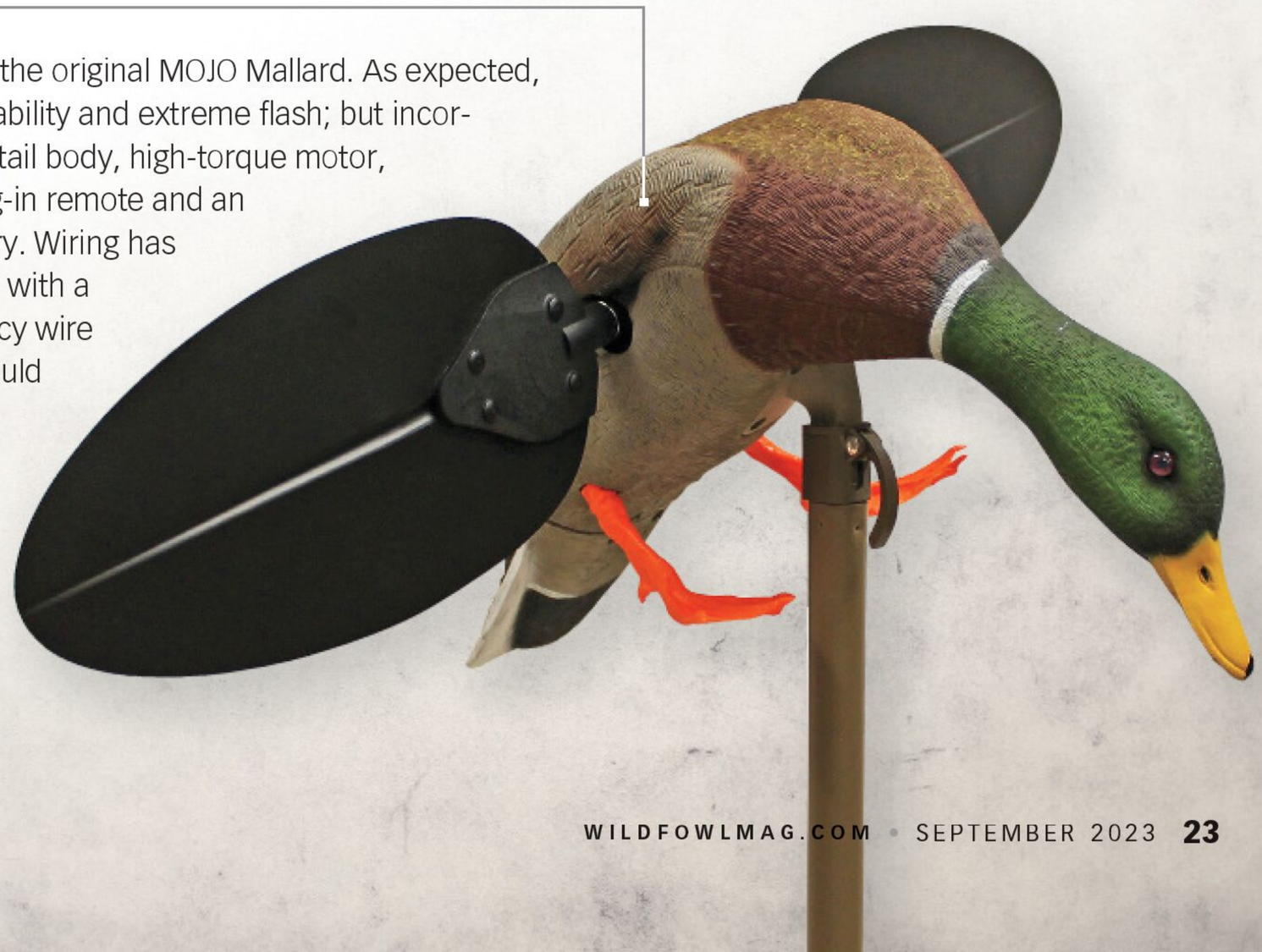
Available in 10, 12, 16, 20, and even 28-gauges, BOSS Shotshells 3/5 shot blend is a deadly package, especially on early season and small-body Canada geese. In 12 gauge, the 3/5 blend is available in 2 ¾ and 3-inch variations with 1 to 1.5 ounce shot charges. Using a combination of both three and five shot sizes, this duplex blend packs the punch of a larger shot size while maintaining the higher density of smaller shot sizes. In addition to the 3/5 blend, BOSS continues to manufacture their full line of non-toxic waterfowl and turkey shotshells.

$39 per 20 | bossshotshells.com

MOJO ORIGINAL MALLARD

Back by popular demand, MOJO has revitalized the original MOJO Mallard. As expected, it includes their legendary ruggedness, dependability and extreme flash; but incorporates modern technology including a high-detail body, high-torque motor, and fast aluminum wings. It also includes a plug-in remote and an efficient, long-lasting, rechargeable Li-ion battery. Wiring has also been simplified using a single wire harness with a single male plug-in and it even has an emergency wire to connect the motor directly to the battery should you experience any electrical problems in the field. The Good Ol' Days are back with MOJO's latest creation, just add ducks.

$200 | mojooutdoors.com



GEAR UP

737 CALLS THUNDERBIRD GOOSE CALL

The newest call in the 737 lineup, the Thunderbird is an easy-to-use, high-performance goose call made for hunters that need an all-purpose goose call. This compact call delivers everything you need to attract and bring in lesser, cackler, or late-season geese and can make all the notes required to both break'em down and subsequently finish them in the hole. The Thunderbird features 737's all-new broke-in gut system and includes a hand-shaven reed. This design provides for a fast, loud, and aggressive call that is still easy to operate, making it ideal for hunters of all skill levels.

$160 | 737duckcalls.com

DIVE BOMB DECOYS V2FF SLEEPER CANADA SILHOUETTES

Looking for an advantage in the early season? If so, check out Dive Bomb Decoys V2FF Sleeper Canada Silos. These things are deadly in loafing areas during the early season, as their posture is spot on and the soft, no-glare look of the fully flocked bodies is second best only to the real thing. They are also super lightweight at only six pounds per dozen and each box comes complete with 12 decoys in three different positions and one-piece, powder coated spring stakes. Couple these sleepers with actives/feeders and you will have a late-season spread that makes the haters drool.

$135 / dozen | divebombindustries.com

LUCKY DUCK DECOYS SUPER GOOSE FLAPPER HDi

The Super Goose Flapper HDi is bound to change the way you hunt. This flapping wing decoy was designed to be used like a flag, but placed away from the hide keeping the focus off of the hunter and blind. It is made of durable EVA plastic that will withstand years of punishment, has a flocked head for added realism, reversible magnetic wings, and has five speed settings that are controlled by the HD remote. It operates on a rechargeable lithium-ion battery, and the battery and remote receiver are stored in a completely sealed battery box that keeps weather out.

$350 | luckyduck.com

RIG'EM RIGHT XTREME GHILLIE LAYOUT BLIND

When it comes to waterfowl hunting, getting hidden is the first key to success. The all new Xtreme Ghillie Layout Blind from Rig'Em Right takes concealment up a notch. Featuring interchangeable ghillie covers in several color options and plenty of stubble straps for adding native vegetation, this low-profile blind practically disappears in the field. Additionally, the blind features their signature multi-layer padded backrest and water-shedding cover for warmth and all-day comfort and a unique frame design offers lightning-fast set-up and take-downs. With plenty of room under the headrest to stash extra gear, this is a low-profile blind that doesn't compromise comfort for concealment.

$300 | rigemright.com

GEAR UP

HEVI-SHOT HEVI-METAL XTREME

NEW for 2023, HEVI-Shot is excited to announce the next evolution of their popular HEVI-Metal line-up: HEVI-Metal Xtreme! Using their Pattern Density Technology. HEVI-Shot layered 30% original HEVI-Shot 12g/cc tungsten over 70% precision steel pellets. This gives you all the lethality at a great price. HEVI-Metal Xtreme also uses the FLIGHTCONTROL FLEX wads. These rear braking wads are designed to improve pattern density, consistency, and can be used with any steel rated choke, ported or non-ported alike. This ammo is non-toxic, available in 12 and 20 gauge, and loaded in the USA.

MSRP Starting at $59 | hevishot.com

BIG AL'S DECOYS X14 HONKER ACTIVE PACK

Including their new high-resolution poses, Big Al's Decoys continues to offer high-quality silhouette decoys for discriminating hunters. The X14 Pack includes 7 different poses and a total of 14 decoys, not 12, per box, giving you more bang for your buck! These decoys are large to help stand out, and include full color printing on durable coroplast covered with an excellent no-glare matte. Each 14-pack includes standard steel stakes, with spring steel stakes available as an option, and is proudly made in the USA. Big Al's offers five-pack discounts for those that need to bulk up their spread.

$92 / 14 decoys | bigalsdecoys.com

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GEAR UP

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If you thought the original Fasteel couldn't get any better, think again. Fasteel + uses layered shot sizes to create a binary load for optimal pattern density and uniformity. Additionally, Kent has incorporated a high-performance base wad for optimal cycling in semi-autos, and uses precision plated steel for improved punch. The new shot-shell design remains consistent no matter the weather conditions. These new shotshells are available in 12 and 20 gauge, all 3-inch lengths, in duplex loads of BB & 2, 2 & 4, and 4 & 6. Simply put, this ammo is next-level stuff.

Starting at $28 per box of 25 | kentcartridge.com

DAVE SMITH DECOYS MAXIMAS GOOSE FLOATERS

Brand new for 2023, the Maximas goose floaters by DSD are so popular they have had to up their production to meet the demand. These floating honkers are, simply put, so dang real you better watch your buddies don't get an itchy trigger finger. They are oversized, replicating a true giant Canada goose, include a weighted swimbait style keel, and each four-pack includes one upright, one swimmer, and two resters. Like all DSD goose decoys, the paint on these decoys is superb, yet durable, promising many years of worry-free use. Paired with some Maxima fullbodies along the shoreline, your spread will be lights out.

$250 | davesmithdecoys.com

BenelliUSA.com

DOMINATE THE SKIES

SBE 3 28-GAUGE

Legendary in quality and performance, three generations of the Benelli Super Black Eagle have carved their name in history. This historic line continues to expand in 2023 with the addition of 14 new models of the SBE 3 in 28-gauge, 20-gauge and 12-gauge. See one today at your local dealer or visit **BenelliUSA.com**.

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GEAR UP

GHG PRO GRADE CANADA GOOSE SILO DECOYS

GHG's Pro Grade Canada Goose Silo Decoys with flocked heads are perfect for hunters across every flyway. They have incredible photographic detail for a life-like appearance, flocked heads for realism and contrast, and a matte-finish to reduce sun glare and flaring. They are also extremely durable, made from a pliable construction to help them stand the test of time. Each box comes standard with 20-inch quick-set one-piece steel stakes featuring an easy-grab handle and includes two left active, two short active, two active uprights, two feeding hissers, two feeders, and two semi feeder body styles.

$90 | banded.com

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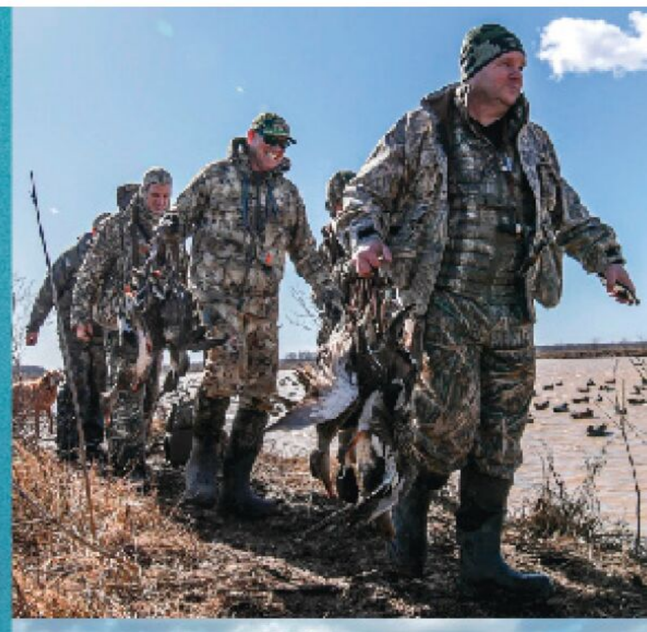
Perfectly situated in the middle of the Mississippi Flyaway, Commander's Corner offers some the best duck hunting Arkansas has to offer. Mallards comprise the bulk of daily harvests. Heavy straps are the norm. Hospitality is our sweet spot. Join us for the 2023-2024 waterfowl season.



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GEAR UP

KICK'S HIGH FLYER CHOKE

Kick's High Flyer choke tubes are not new to the game, but they are certified deadly and have been a go-to option for serious waterfowlers for years. High Flyer chokes feature outward angled diagonal ports to improve pattern density by up to 20% when compared to factory chokes and drastically reduce recoil. The result is quicker follow-up shots and less cripples. Kick's also offers a unique and valuable choke selector feature on their website, designed to get you the right choke for your needs and style of hunting. The High Flyer series consists of four choke constrictions including improved cylinder, modified, full, and x-full. Comes in 10, 12, 20 and 28-gauge configurations.

$60-$70 | kicks-ind.com

XTI®2
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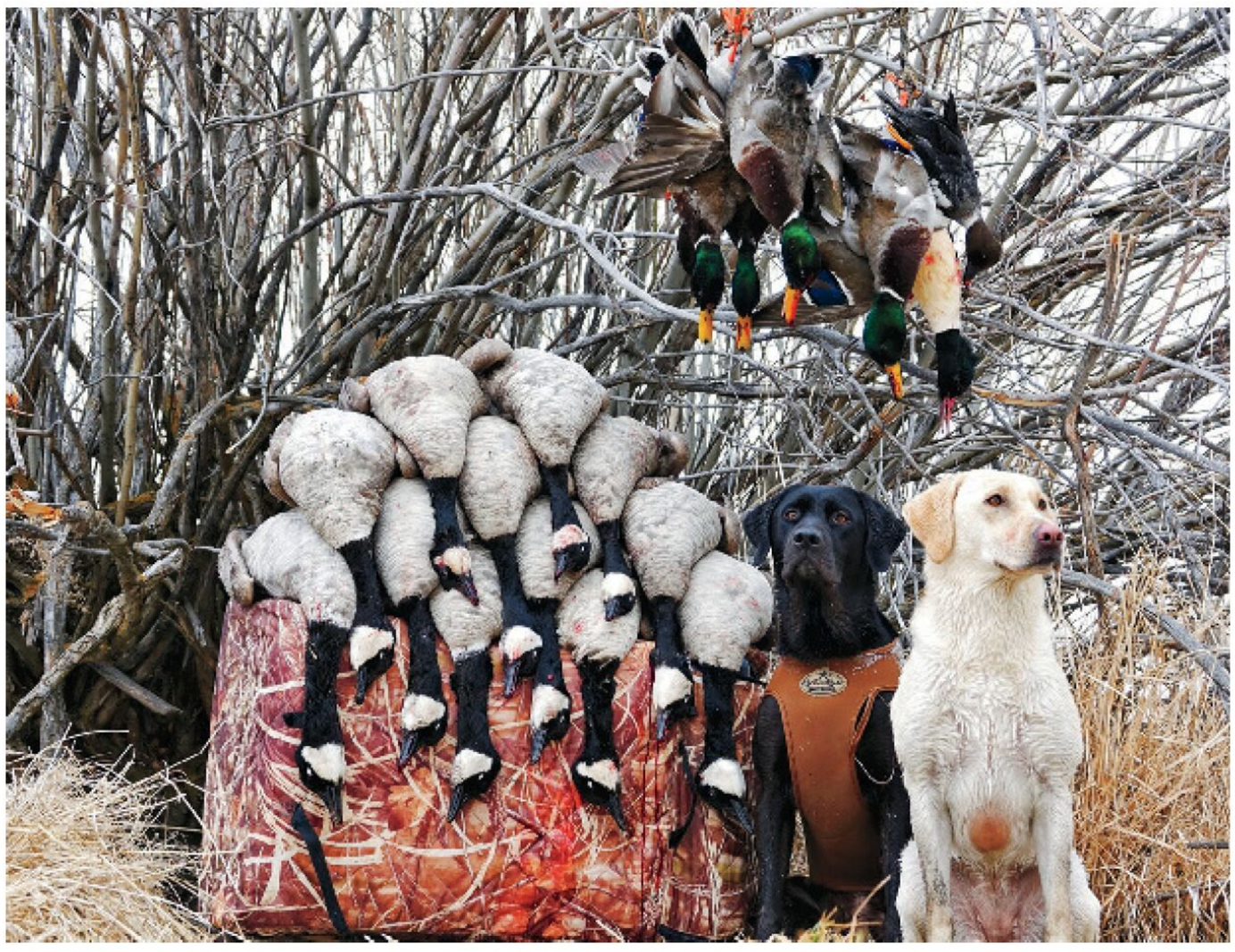
LESSONS LEARNED THE HARD WAY

UNDERSTANDING SHOTSHELL PERFORMANCE UNLOCKS THE DOOR TO KILLING MORE GEESE

GROWING UP my waterfowl hunting consisted of pass shooting high-flying fowl along the countless miles of marsh that penetrate the Great Salt Lake. I understand now that pass shooting is looked down upon by waterfowl purists, but I didn't know any better, nor did I have the funds to purchase decoys. Hell, I could barely afford to fill up my truck and buy a box or two of shotshells. However, one thing is for certain—the time spent in the marsh during my teenage years kindled the hunting flame that now consumes the majority of my time, thoughts, and energy on a daily basis. All waterfowl hunting accelerated my proficiency with a scattergun and before too long I was regularly bagging limits of ducks with the cheapest steel loads I could find.

Geese on the other hand, were an entirely different story. Despite my best efforts and many futile attempts, the geese flying overhead always escaped unscathed. It wasn't until several years later that I found myself belly crawling through steaming manure mixed with pasty mud that I finally bagged my first goose. Yes, I know, another frowned upon tactic. But you couldn't wipe the smile off my face as I trudged back to the truck covered head to toe in cow $%!# with my first honker in tow. Fast forward 15 years and my tactics for hunting geese have drastically changed, as has my success. Late-season honkers come through my corner of the world in droves, and chasing these wary migrators is something I look forward to every season.



Hindsight is 20/20 and looking back now, it is easy to see why I struggled for so many years to bag my first goose. The first, and most obvious struggle, was self-induced as I repeatedly "peppered" geese flying overhead with a cheap 2 ¾ inch #4 shot payload. The best shot size for tackling honkers has been a heated topic of blind banter for decades. However, most goose hunters agree that it takes larger shot sizes to penetrate the dense, armor-like, down feathers and break the bones of a hefty gander. "My go-to for 95% of my goose hunting is a 3-inch Blindside BB load," said Co-Host of RNT-V, World Goose Calling Champion, and goose assassin, Shawn Stahl. Larger shot creates slightly bigger wound channels but more importantly, they maintain greater velocity and necessary downrange energy to deliver terminal results on the biggest fowl in the sky.

Thanks to modern shotshell advancements, there has never been a greater time to be a goose hunter. Cutting edge technology and innovations have created a smorgasbord of deadly non-toxic loads, ideal for bringing down fowl of all shapes and sizes. The current craze in the waterfowl world, and with good reason, is the onslaught of devastating non-toxic shotshells loaded with tungsten and bismuth. These premium waterfowl loads deliver unmatched pattern densities and catastrophic terminal performance, knocking birds out of the sky with absolute authority. Unfortunately, premium performance comes at a premium price and these loads are often double the cost or more than

a standard steel load.

But do not fret, while much of the limelight is put on these premium shotshells, manufacturers have made leaps and bounds in the effectiveness of traditional steel loads, many of which are more than capable of bringing down a stubborn goose. Understanding the pros and cons of shot size, downrange energy, and pattern densities is the key to maximizing your effectiveness in the goose blind.

While not an all-inclusive list, below are some of my favorite and proven deadly goose loads.

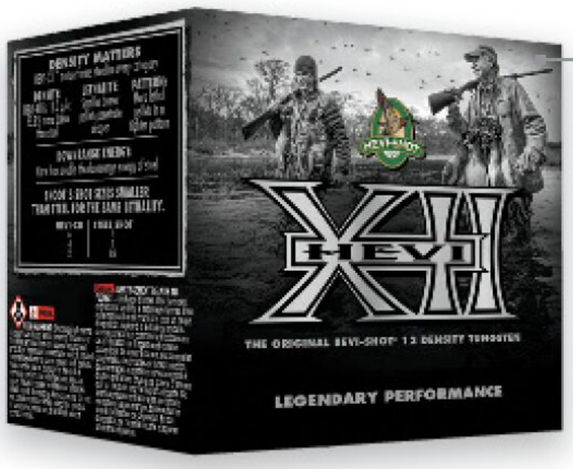
The trick to finding a killer goose load is identifying the ultimate combination of pattern density, downrange energy, and effective shot size for your goose hunting adventures. Depending on what species of goose you are hunting and the tactics you employ, the "perfect goose load" will vary but the basics remain the same. Do your homework and the results will speak for themselves next time you find yourself under a cupped, dirty dozen of honkers tumbling into your spread. Take em'!

KENT FASTEEL+

Kent Cartridge's new Fasteel+ shotshells represent the next generation in the proven Fasteel line. The science behind the layered payload provides hunters with tighter patterns and better downrange energy, both of which are absolutely essential when shooting geese. The Fasteel+ BB & #2 payload is guaranteed to end the migration on decoying geese as well as extend your effective range. **Starting at $28 per box of 25**

BOSS SHOTSHELLS

Boss Shotshells entered the premium non-toxic shotshell arena guns-a-blazing in 2018 with the launch of their copper-plated bismuth loads. Since then, their footprint on the waterfowl industry has not gone unnoticed as they continue to push the envelope and manufacture fowl-crushing loads at an affordable price point. The increased density of bismuth also allows waterfowlers to drop down a shot size or two, making any of Boss's shotshells loaded with #2 or #3 plated bismuth pellets absolutely deadly on incoming honkers. **$39 per box of 20**

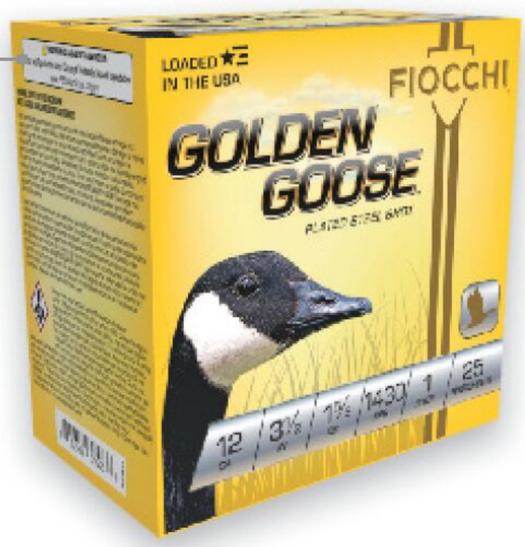


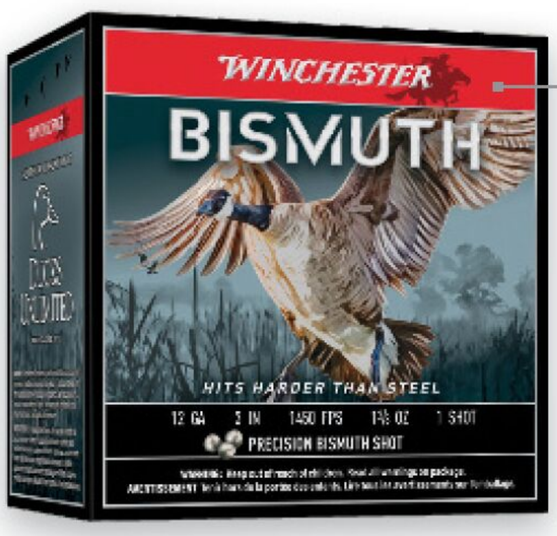
HEVI-SHOT HEVI-XII

No column about murderous goose loads is complete without a mention of Hevi-Shot's Hevi-XII. Loaded with 12g/cc Hevi-Shot tungsten pellets, Hevi-XII hits geese with a powerful blow that kills on impact and is guaranteed to crack a smirk of satisfaction. Hevi-XII is offered in 12-, 20-, and 28-gauge offerings, all of which will get the job done in the goose blind. I have seen hundreds of honkers succumb to the devastating impact of a Hevi-XII 3-inch #2 shot payload fired from my trusty 12-gauge Benelli Super Black Eagle over the past several years. **$84 per box of 25**

FIOCCHI GOLDEN GOOSE

Fiocchi's Golden Goose line optimizes velocities and pattern densities to produce a proven deadly shotshell for serious goose hunters. The Golden Goose line offers a wide range of plated steel shot sizes ranging from #2 shot all the way up to T shot to deliver terminal downrange performance across a wide range of goose hunting scenarios. Whether you are hunting lesser geese in the Midwest or late-season giants, Fiocchi's Golden Goose line is a staple in the goose blind. **$36 per box of 25**





WINCHESTER BISMUTH

Winchester's Bismuth load is the culmination of decades worth of technology and innovation from the ammunition giant. Winchester incorporated a proprietary buffer into the bismuth payload that not only aids in keeping the bismuth pellets intact, but tightened patterns by up to 50% when compared to other non-buffered bismuth shotshells. Loaded with #1 shot, Winchester's Bismuth loads wreak absolute havoc on geese. **$50 per box of 25**

WASHINGTON WAYLAYER

AN EVERGREEN STATE HUNTER BUILDS A LIGHTWEIGHT LAYOUT

BEN TYLER WAS HUNTING from his layout boat in a flooded 500-acre cow pasture at Oregon's Chimacum Valley. Air temperatures were in the 40s and the humidity caused a ghostly mist to linger above the watery stillness beneath an overcast sky. It was the perfect day for hunting ducks in November 2018, with the hunt the truest test yet of his newly minted watercraft, constructed over the summer specifically to overcome the difficulties of this very spot.

"For some reason, ducks like to fly right at legal shooting time," he said. "I could hear mallards, wigeons and pintails calling all over the field. The water is only 2 feet deep and there is no cover. It's either grass or water on top of grass. I dropped the boat and decoys from my Toyota SUV and drove it to a bluff about 100 yards away to hide it. I walked back, got into my boat and paddled it about 40 yards. Then I set 25 mallard and wigeon decoys and waited to see what would happen."

He saw a flock of mallards and cut two out of the flock with expert calling, waylaying them at the knife's edge of legal time. After that, he watched several flocks of wigeons circling the decoys. One flock even landed. He made good shots, shouldering the shotgun ambidextrously, and filled his limit before an hour and a half passed.

Benjamin H. Tyler III lives in Ports Townsend, Washington, calling it, "The rainiest place in the USA." Now age 72, the retired fisheries biologist worked for Idaho's Shoshone Bannack Tribes and the National Marine Fisheries Service. After retirement from fisheries management, he performed structural repairs on wooden boats for Port Townsend Shipwrights Cooperative.

He shoots a 12-gauge Remington 870 loaded with steel 2s and 4s and sets Avery GHG mallard and wigeon decoys. He began hunting with his grandfather, Ben Tyler, and his uncle, Jon Laurenson. The duo started making BenJon calls in the 1940s after they bought a call business from Perry Hooker and renamed it. They began teaching him to make calls when he was 22 months old. His grandfather hunted with Nash Buckingham at Beaver Dam Lake in Tunica, Mississippi and several places in Arkansas.

A renowned custom call maker, Tyler received the Third-Place award for Merit Design and the

The layout boat is coffin-shaped. The wooden strips on the bottom of the sitting compartment allow a foam pad to remain dry.

The boat is coffin-shaped because the sides were laid up in sections, rather than being fully formed to the frame contours for an easier building process.

First-Place award for Professional Design at the 2023 Call Makers and Collectors Association of America competition. He also won the First-Place award for duck calls at NWTF's 2023 Grand National Carving Championship.

However, when it comes to hunting, great calling isn't everything. A hunter must not be seen while heard. Tyler had become frustrated with wading hunts in the flooded pasture.

"I had been hunting there for four years and there just wasn't any place to hide," he said. "With my boat building skills, I knew I could build something that would work. I was walking in my waders and hiding by a tree line in the middle of the field. But the best spot was at the far end where there was no cover. Some mornings I would step in a hole and fill my waders and kept hunting. That was just miserable. I would walk to high ground to empty my boots, but I was still tooth-chattering cold. I hunted out of kayaks and other small boats but needed something I could lay down in that would hide me below the water level. I looked at some commercially made layout boats but they were too heavy, so I decided to build my own."

His expertise at refurbishing large wooden vessels served him well during the process, especially with regards to all of the smaller repairs he had done such as cabinet work. Initially, he sketched out some plans for the layout boat. But it turned out to be more of a trial-and-error process and he relied more upon instinct than the plans.

The finished boat is 7 feet long, 42 inches wide, 18 inches deep and weighs between 45 and 50 pounds.

The coffin-shaped cockpit is 60 inches long and the cockpit coaming is 11 inches high. The boat has a recessed bottom that is 50 inches long, 7 inches deep and 18 inches wide, tapering wider toward the bow. The framing strips were cut from yellow cedar planks. It took him only about 35 hours to build the boat from materials left over from working on large watercraft. The boat was free except for his effort and expertise.

He began by laying a sheet of 3/8" plywood on saw horses and cutting the hole for the recessed bottom. Then he shaped the sunken box-like compartment with 3/8" plywood. Four 1" cedar strips were added to the box to allow dry seating on a foam pad.

The framing is ¾"x ¾" cedar. The gunwales are 1/8" plywood sections, glued to the frame with epoxy and secured with half-inch staples. The boat was coated with polyester resin and a single layer of fiberglass cloth. Rolling another coat of resin over the cloth provided a textured

The finished boat prior to coating with house stain and covering with camouflage materials.

The finished boat prior to adding grass bundles for camouflage.

surface for coating the boat with gray house stain. Camouflage colors were added with aerosol paint cans.

Seine twine tied to the cockpit coaming secures fishing net. Bundles of grass from the hunting site are woven into the net for camouflage.

Conduit sections extending from top to bottom at each corner allow the boat to be anchored with 1" wooden poles. A kayak paddle provides propulsion.

"When I hunt, I am camouflaged from head to toe," Tyler said. "The boat is so effective at hiding me that that ducks have landed within 15 feet. A shoveler landed 5 feet away and I just froze, not shooting until he took off. The only thing I would change is finding a way to build it lighter."

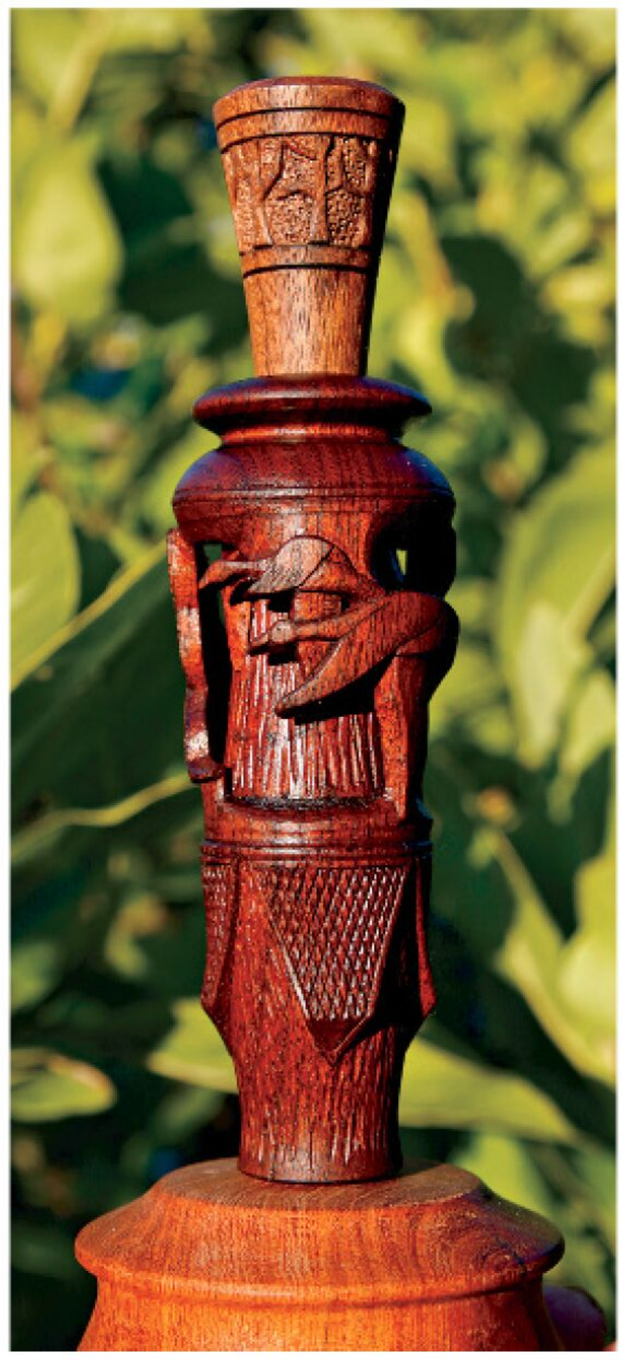
To see his exquisitely carved calls, friend or message Benjamin H. Tyler III on Facebook.

To see your boat or blind featured, email your name and phone number, a description, photos of the build and hunting scenes to Mike Marsh at mike@mikemarshoutdoors.com

MATERIALS LIST

Approximate Cost - $250

- 1 - sheet 3/8" plywood.
- 1 - Sheet 1/8" plywood
- 1 - Section 1" conduit
- Scrap - Yellow Cedar Planks
- 1 - Roll Fiberglass cloth
- 1 - Kit Two-Part Epoxy Adhesive
- 1 - Gallon Polyester Resin
- 1 - Box stainless steel staples
- 1 - Gallon Gray Exterior House Solid Stain
- As needed - Aerosol Cans Camo Paint
- 1 - Roll Seine Twine
- Scrap - Fishing Net



This call carved by Benjamin H. Tyler III received the First Place Award in the Professional Design Category at the Call Makers and Collectors Association of America competition held at Chicago in 2023.

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GETTING A GRIP ON BIG BIRDS

HOW TO PREPARE YOUR RETRIEVER FOR HONKERS

I'VE SEEN EVEN THE most confident dogs run out to retrieve their first goose, attempt to pick it up and then drop it and look back as if to say, "Seriously? This thing? Come on!"

It's one thing to have a really great duck dog, but when it's time for your retriever to pick up a goose that's two to four times as heavy and broad, it's a whole different experience. Rather than pausing your hunting season to deal with this new challenge, go ahead and do some prep work along with all of your other training. Here's how I do it.

WORKING TOWARD HEAVY LIFTING

Dealing with a bird the likes of a 10-pound Canada goose means figuring out how to handle the weight as well as the massive size. My approach to addressing both of these challenges starts with finding a throw pillow like you probably have on your couch (preferably one that the head of your household won't miss). The ideal pillow is about 14 x 14 inches with a zippered cover. The pillow isn't super-heavy (I'll touch on that in a moment), but it's large enough that it's awkward for your dog to carry, which is what you want.

You can introduce this new object at any phase of your dog's training; it's just another variable in all of the other things you're working on. Simply go out to the yard and do some short tosses for your dog to retrieve. It won't take long for it to figure out that first it needs to grab the pillow on an edge or corner, and

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second, that it needs to carry its head high enough to keep the pillow from dragging or causing a stumble.

Once your dog has figured out how to handle the new object, it's time to add weight. This is where the zipper comes in. You probably have plenty of lead strap weights lying around. They're ideal for this exercise because you can slip lots of them inside the pillow cover and zip it shut.

Start by adding a pound or so, and then gradually increase the weight day after day. Your dog will get better at dealing with the challenge as the pillow becomes heavier, and before you know it you'll be mimicking retrieving a 10-pound goose.

FIRST GOOSE HUNT

I'd advise that your dog has a few duck hunts completed before you take it goose hunting. It would be nice if the first Canada you dropped was a trim 7- or 8-pounder. Yes, I know you can't control that, but do make sure that when you send your dog for its inaugural big-bird retrieve that the goose is dead. It would be unpleasant for your dog—especially a young one—to find that its favorite throw pillow has morphed into a hissing, flapping, rage-filled monster.

Perhaps an even better first goose outing would be a field hunt for snows that run more like 5 to 8 pounds. Then again, that can be a pretty chaotic scene if you have multiple guns and heavy action, so pick the opportunity that matches your dog's capabilities and temperament.

Some dogs will grab their first goose and proudly bring it back. Others might be reluctant, even after all the prep work you did. If your dog hesitates (remember, this is still by far the biggest real bird your dog has ever encountered), there's nothing to panic about. Take a moment to do some short tosses with the fresh-killed bird right there in the field and do it with lots of praise and encouragement.

Sometimes the results are mixed.

"ONCE YOUR DOG HAS FIGURED OUT HOW TO HANDLE THE NEW OBJECT, IT'S TIME TO ADD WEIGHT"

I've seen plenty of dogs grab their first goose with no problem, but then drag it more than carry it back. Well, that's a start. Most dogs get smarter with every retrieve and, just like with the throw pillow, they learn how to carry the bird efficiently.

The ideal spot for a retriever to grab a big bird is right at the collar, that part where the neck starts to widen out and lead into the body. You can encourage this with some simple fetch and hold drills out in the field when you have a break in the action. But again, once a dog is confident in retrieving geese, it will start to figure things out through repetition.

If your retriever continues to struggle with how to handle big birds, take a fresh-killed goose to a shallow pond and do some fun retrieves. All your dog needs to do is get a grip on the bird and then essentially shove it back to you on shore. The water will support most of the bird's weight, so it will be a good experience and should instill some confidence that will transfer over at the next opportunity for a land retrieve.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE SIZE

If you don't have the patience to go through all the gradual steps I've outlined here, or maybe if your dog is such a hard-charger that you don't think it will find bird birds intimidating, I'd still suggest that during training sessions you occasionally use oversize bumpers. The slim, knobby plastic bumpers that almost everyone uses are fine, but there's no real challenge to carrying them. Mix in jumbo-size bumpers at random. Also, you can bulk up a bumper by taping two or three leftover pheasant or mallard wings to it.

Regardless of the approach you use, you'll be saving time and energy during the season if you practice for the excitement of this new challenge ahead of time.

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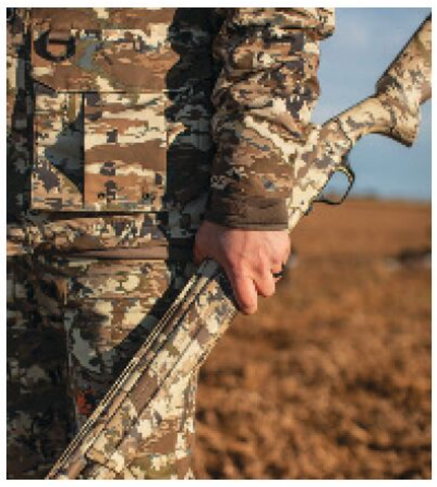

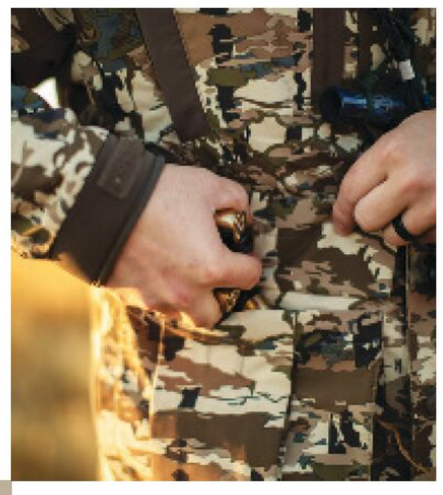

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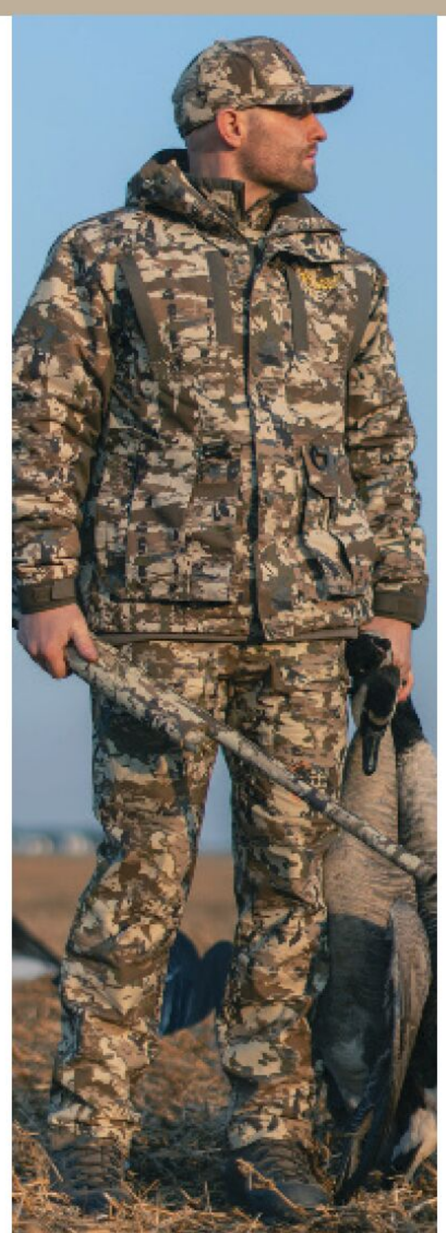

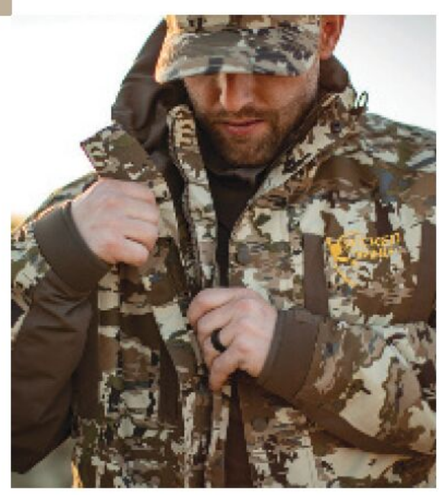

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BY BILL GIBSON

HOLDING ISSUES (PART 2)

HOW TO CORRECT DROPPING AT HAND

WHILE THERE ARE MANY causes of dropping at hand, one of the most prevalent causes is incessantly throwing marks and then on the return, grabbing the dummy out of the dog's mouth as it runs by, and immediately throwing another mark. Rather than bringing the current retrieve to a completion, one act blurs into another, thus the dog is thrown off. I have observed and listened, and as a trainer attempted to justify this by verbalizing that this was building the dog's "prey drive" by having the dog retrieve, retrieve, retrieve, and that these multiple retrieves are the name of the game while completely ignoring any semblance of obedience.

My take on this different style of training program is it advocates that at an early age the dog should not be steadied; instead, the pup should be allowed to break on the launch or throw of the dummy, go out as fast as he can, come back as fast as he can, and on the return, the trainer grabs the dummy and throws another mark as fast as possible. I simply view this as excessive marking and opine that if you rely on this nonsensical approach to train your dog, he will soon learn that when he returns with the dummy and drops it at your feet, the retrieving game speeds up and he gets more of his reward, that is, more retrieves.

Consequently, the trainer is conditioning the dog to break, not come to heel on the return, then sit and present the dummy.

Assuming your dog only occasionally drops the dummy and that dropping has not become a conditioned habit, dropping on the return can be fairly easy to correct. When the pup drops the dummy at your feet or even a short distance away, an immediate correction is mandated. Correct him by grabbing him by the scruff of his neck with one hand, holding pup firmly, pick the dummy up and command "hold" as you place it in pup's mouth. Once the dummy is in his mouth, immediately put your other hand under his chin, and place your thumb in the "V" of his chin to hold his chin up and his mouth intact with the dummy to keep him from dropping it, and repeat the command "hold." After a short time, command "give" and take the dummy from pup. As before, repeat this sequence five times and then give the dog a break. Then repeat this sequence five more times and quit for the day. After two or three days you should have eliminated this issue.

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The Playbook

BY SCOTT HAUGEN

GOOSE MOVES

SMART STRATEGIES FOR THIS SEASON

OUR SPREAD OF 18 dozen Big Al's silhouettes looked perfect in the gray dirt field. The brand new lesser decoys and big honker silhouettes were loosely spaced and spread far, with plenty of landing pockets between.

The field was atop a plateau. The geese were roosting on ponds in a valley below. We hunted in the evening and knew the geese would be coming in low, hopefully locking on to the field as soon as they gained enough elevation to crest the rim. The sun would be at their back, too. Because of these details, we chose to go with an all silhouette spread. It worked. Once geese started flying, we shot limits in less than an hour. Don't underestimate the power of silhouettes when it comes to September goose hunting.

During an afternoon hunt last September with Jordan Moll of Hidden Prairie Outfitters in Alberta, Canada, we hit a stubble field for dark geese. There were seven of us and we ran a big spread of 45 dozen silhouettes, 12 dozen full bodies and a few dozen shells. "I got eight dozen of Big Al's new lesser decoys, and when I saw how good they looked, I picked up 45 dozen more, including some of their new specks," smiled Moll. "You don't need flocked silhouettes, as it's freezing in September this far north, plus the decoys are getting dirty on the dry days."

Most of the decoys in this spread were honkers and lessers, with some specks tossed in. We also had a dozen snow goose silhouettes on one end. Flocks came for a look but wouldn't finish. We brushed-in the top of our A-frame blind better, but birds still wouldn't commit. Then we pulled all the snow goose decoys. Just like that, geese started dumping in and the shooting was nonstop. Sometimes September geese can be picky, so don't wait to make changes if birds aren't committing.

The next morning we hunted another plowed field with Moll. It was foggy, wet, and dreary, so calling and flagging became part of the scheme. As soon as birds were in sight, Travis Copeland, Moll's ace guide, started waving the flag. Once geese appeared to notice the flag, he hit his goose calls, hard. There were a lot of specks' and a number of honkers in the air. Once the birds turned, Copeland quit flagging, and once the geese were lined-out, he quit calling. If the geese seemed to hesitate or swing wide, Copeland would sweet-talk them. Once the birds looked serious, the decoys did the work. I

Flagging can be a great way to draw in early-season family groups.

ended up picking out an eight bird limit of beautiful tar bellies. It was a great morning for all of us.

When hunting resident honkers in family flocks in the early part of the September season, I often only run six to 12 full body decoys. As flocks build, I'll increase my spread with silhouettes as it's simply a more cost effective way to build numbers. I'll also include shell decoys in the spread. A combination of brands and looks can be very effective in early season goose spreads. When mixing silhouettes and full body decoys, combine them in the main part of the spread, then build out the fringes with full bodies and a small smattering of silhouettes. This way, the full body decoys on the edge can be seen from any angle flocks might approach from.

I do like flagging in the early season, and I don't call a lot, but that could be because I'm not a good goose caller. Nonetheless, I like letting the decoys do the work and shooting geese in close. But sometimes flocks flare, and often times after the first shot, they can gain distance, fast, especially in a cross wind.

I have my favorite loads, with Browning's Wicked Wing XD topping the list. For early season geese I like #2 shot. The XD line is made of very round, smooth shot that's uniform throughout, thus it's extremely aerodynamic and thanks to the premium plating, this steel hits hard and penetrates deep without ripping apart flesh.

Last September I tried Winchester's new Blind Side 2. I don't normally body shoot geese–especially in the late season as feather density builds–but I wanted to test the acclaimed knockdown power of the Blind Side 2. It got my attention in the 30-40 yard range.

If you really want to see how a load performs, do a post-mortem inspection on your birds. Look at the depth of penetration and wound channel damage. Some damage is expected, but you don't want a load that shreds the meat, either. We hunt to eat what we kill, which is another reason head shots are preferred, to maximize meat retention.

When it comes to early season camo, don't get hung up on it; solid earth tones will do the job. Most hunts are done from blinds as natural cover is sparse and most fields, bare. Be sure to brush-in all black holes in the blind, especially the center line on A-frames. If hunting from a layout, shut the doors all the way and use the face shield, as sweaty faces shine.

If you do find yourself hunting from natural cover, check out Browning's new AURIC pattern. I love the print size and ability of this pattern to blend in in an array of habitat. I killed a lot of birds with it last season by simply hiding in natural cover.

There's nothing like kicking off September with some goose hunting action. Scout to pattern birds, properly place and brush-in your blind, let the decoys do the work, and have fun, because that's what it's all about.

Scott Haugen is a full-time author and waterfowl hunter of 48 years. Follow his adventures on Instagram and learn more at scotthaugen.com

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Changing Canadas

GOOSE HUNTING HAS EVOLVED. YOUR TACTICS SHOULD, TOO

BY M.D. JOHNSON

I was 15 in 1979. A year away from getting my driver's license. A freshman at Newton Falls High. That year, *Rock 'n Roll Fantasy* by Bad Company, along with the hit, and I use the term loosely, *Makin' It* by David Naughton were on the radio. Naughton, for those who might remember, starred as the real hairy guy in the cult classic, "An American Werewolf in London." Honestly, he should have stuck with acting.

I killed my first Canada goose in '79. Standing, I was, at the edge of my Dzedo's—that's Slovak for grandfather—sweet corn field, holding my old man's 1966 Mossberg M500 pump, the Poly-Choke screwed down to XTRA-FULL, and filled with three 3" #2s. Lead #2s. The geese, 15 or 20 strong, were on their way to the campground loafing pond. (NOTE: I'd be well into my 40s before I actually used the phrase 'loafing pond' as it applied in 21st Century terms to geese). Hell, then it was just a 17-acre pond some 500 yards behind me. It was pass-shooting at its finest. Right place. Right time; maybe not for the big gander that somehow managed to occupy the same airspace at the same instant as did my two ounces of copper-plated #2s.

I pulled the trigger, and watched, surprised, as the honker crumpled and sandbagged into the stalks. I scooped him up and ran to the house, where, after showing him off to Dzedo, I called my old man, who promptly made the 20-minute drive out to his folks' place in order to see "my goose" and give me a hug. Was it yesterday? It was not. Can I still see each and every minute? Right down to the sliding glass door on the back porch where me and the Old Man looked the goose over. Yes, sir. Maybe it was yesterday.

That was a long time ago; 44 years, if my math skills haven't eroded to nothing. And sure, it sounds like a cliché, but a lot has changed during those four-plus decades, including the art that is Canada goose hunting. Fact is,

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damn near everything about Canadas and the pursuit thereof has changed. Evolved. Gotten better. Gotten worse. Seldom staying the same. Populations. Distribution. Tactics and strategies. And my Lord, the equipment. Back in the day, I would have never thought—would have never dreamed—of 95 percent of this stuff. Tungsten shot. Short reeds. Anatomically perfect full-bodies and $1,000 chest waders.

Why this so-called 'Goose Hunting Evolution?' Why not? Everything changes; why should Canada goose hunting be immune from such? Change is inevitable. Natural. But how has goose hunting evolved from what it was back in '79 when I became a goose hunter? Or as my Pop put it, a goose shooter, as it wasn't until much later that I became—or at least I'd like to think I became—a goose hunter. Still, the heart of the matter comes 'round to how. And perhaps a strong dose of what.

"Goose hunting has changed in so many ways, just like the world has changed," said Sean Mann. Now 61, Mann, who lives in what many consider to be the epicenter of Canada goose hunting—Easton, Maryland—is the creator of The Eastern Shoreman, which, as he reminds me, "Is NOT a flute call," but is one of the most recognizable goose hunting implements to ever jump from the drawing board into reality. Don't know the name 'Sean Mann?' Sorry, but you need spend a little more time out from under that rock.

"When I was a youngster," Mann recalls, "and you read about hunting The Chesapeake Bay, Canada geese weren't really a 'thing.' I was fortunate, then, to grow up during the (rise) of the Canada goose

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population in the Chesapeake Bay region. I'm like a dinosaur who's happy to be a dinosaur because I got to watch the dinosaurs roam."

As Mann explains, the landscape of the Eastern Seaboard where he spent his youth was comprised of small family farms. A handful of cattle. Hogs. Immediate household-sized flocks of laying hens; that was, until the poultry industry expanded. Perdue Farms, Tyson, and Weaver. "These poultry businesses," he explained, "consumed more grain than Maryland could produce, so that gives you some idea of how agriculture changed here." Waterfowling in the region, then, changed to an extent from a water-based experience, now but a chapter in 'fowling's history, Bay market hunters after divers like canvasbacks and redheads, to, as the Canada goose population grew, a land-based field endeavor. "You're not going to find many canvasback or redheads in the fields," he said.

Other things changed in Mann's goose hunting world. "People didn't call (geese) out here much when I was a little kid," he remembers. "During the time between 1969 (NOTE: Mann killed his first Canada in '69 at the ripe old age of seven with a .410 single shot while sitting next to his father, William, who was, as he was want to do, sleeping in the blind) and when I was 15 and started guiding, and growing up in a gun shop, I watched the progression from us selling a dozen P.S. OLT 77s a year to us selling 20…30…40 dozen. Calling, then, became a 'thing.'" So, too, he said, did decoys. "The first commercially available (goose) decoys I saw," he said, "were G&H shell decoys. They looked great, but they were brittle plastic. Made noise when the rain hit them. Silhouettes were a 'thing' out here. And tire decoys. We called them 'junkyard rigs.' We watched a lot of things happen," he continued. "Hand-carved decoys. Paper mache' decoys. Homemade silhouettes. Herter's Styrofoam. Bigfoot. G&H kept getting bigger. Stuffers. Lead shot. Steel shot. What do you want to talk about?"

On the opposite side of the country from Mann, Bill Saunders makes his home in Kennewick, Washington, where when he isn't chasing greenheads or building calls, the 50-year indulges in his now-favorite outdoor activity, walleye fishing. That said, he's never really all that far from goose hunting. "My first Canada? It was on the north side of Lake Lowell near Nampa, Idaho," he recalls. "In 1986 or '87. Wait…" he interrupts himself. "I think I have this picture." You know the one he's talking about; we all have 'that' yellowed dog-eared picture blowing around.

Saunders surprised me, though, with his response to my query about the evolution of Canada goose hunting. "The simple answer? It's easy," he said. "It's become so much easier." Maybe, he explained, it's the technology available today, like the uber-realistic decoys and the new-age blinds. Or Al Gore's Internet. "A lot of it," he admitted, "is because I'm 50. When I was younger, I

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Gear that hunts

thought being the best caller was the be-all, end-all. The best caller was the best hunter. Now that I'm older and been around it enough," he continued, "it's experience that makes you the best hunter."

Saunders went on to speak to the technology of today. "Could I still be doing what I'm doing now with the equipment I had back in The Day? Probably not. I mean I had (old) Carry-Lites that my Dad bought for me in Meridian, Idaho. That's what I started with. But the more things change, the more they stay the same… and now silhouettes seem to be all the rage again. This is what? The third time I've seen (the silhouette craze) go through."

Understandable, given Saunders' chosen profession, the conversation turned to calls and calling. "In my waterfowling lifetime," he began, "the short reed has been the game-changer in terms of calling. Before there were the flutes—Tim Grounds Guide's Best, the OLT A-50, Sean Mann's Eastern Shoreman. But in my lifetime, I saw the invention of the short reed goose call, with its range and realism." In its infancy, the short reed, said Saunders, was a challenge for most to run, but that, he said, was "trying to change a flute guy into a short reed caller." Today, things are different. "This

Bill Saunders says hunters have so many more advantages today.

Ashur Tolliver with Dive Bomb says digital media sped up the great silhouette revival.

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younger generation," Saunders explained, "who have never had a flute in their hands…they're easy calls to run when you get right down to it. And,with so many people building calls today, I think it's easy to find one that fits (an individual's) style."

It's impossible, I reckon, to talk Canadas and perhaps this evolutionary process in particular without talking decoys. And social media…which sounds like an odd partnership, but one which 35-year-old, Ashur Tolliver, knows extraordinarily well. Tolliver, of Sherwood, Arkansas, shot his first Canada 'round about 1998 at the age of 10 out of a group of snows that decoyed to his youthful collection of three dozen snows and six Bigfoots. "When I was young," he said, "Central Arkansas would still get some migrating Canada geese. These days, there are zero migrating Canadas that make it down here."

That was a quarter century ago. Today, Tolliver, a former MLB hurler with a World Series ring won with the Houston Astros in 2017, serves as vice president and director of marketing for the popular waterfowling outfit, Dive Bomb Industries. It didn't take the young man long to respond when asked about this evolution of Canada goose hunting. "Social media has played a big role in many of the changes," he began. "(Canada goose hunting) has become increasingly more popular as other hunters have begun to see outfitters and guide services and reputable companies put up consistent results day in and day out over silhouette spreads."

BAM! There it is—silhouette decoys. New? Revolutionary? Absolutely not, but what Dive Bomb has done in the 12 years since founder Cody Stokes and company exploded onto the 'fowling scene has been nothing short of revolutionary, breathing life into Canada goose hunting.

"When I say social media has played a big role in this "evolution," Tolliver explained, "I mean one, people can actually see (on screen) the results, but two, you have people out there on YouTube and Instagram educating the masses on how to use these silhouette spreads." Remember what Saunders said earlier about the "more things change, the more they stay the same?"

As for me, I don't even know where to begin with the whole 'Canada goose evolution' discussion. Growing up in northeastern Ohio in late 1970s and early 80s, geese were a novelty. Targets of opportunity, generally taken— if they were seen or heard at all—while standing waist-deep in Bob Wolfe's Swamp shooting at wood ducks, mallards, and the occasional green-wing teal. Or, per my earlier story, two rows deep into my Dzedo's cornfield. I'm guessing I was well into my 30s before I owned a goose call. Decoys? Flambeau floaters, mirror images of one another, and only six of those. Most of the time it looked like they were sitting on top of a mirror.

My advantage? I had access to some of the best goose hunters to ever walk the planet. I called the late Timmy Grounds my friend and the Godfather of Goose, Fred Zink, same thing. George Lynch. Ron Latshaw, inventor

Everything old is new again: Silhouettes saw a massive comeback in recent years.

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of the original Eliminator and (IMHO) the father of the modern layout blind. Ron Wieneke. Scott Threinen of Molt Gear. Sean Mann. Bill Saunders. These men taught me not only about goose hunting, but about Canada geese themselves. Why the birds did—or didn't do—the things they did. They taught me to watch. And to listen. To truly observe and make note of what it was I saw and heard.

I grew up with the Canada goose. We evolved together. A short tale that, if I were being honest, was the catalyst for this story.

Here in southwest Washington home, I enjoy a 70-day goose season, a portion of which, at least in my 'Goose Management Area,' is held from early February through early March. It's a private land deal, and I'm fortunate enough to have access to a tiny portion of pasture ground toward the coast. By this time, the little geese—the cacklers and lessers—have more or less headed home to Alaska, and I'm left to hunt our only year-round resident Canadas, the big Western subspecies. This time of year many are paired up, but I still get plenty of singles and small groups.

Now I'm a small spread/minimalist guy when it comes to Canadas. I hunt alone, stubble my layout to the point of invisibility after carefully arranging my 18 Pro-Grade Honkers, and don't do much calling. Honks. Clucks. Moans. A little ground noise; not much. And I do pretty well. Over the last couple years, though, I noticed a pattern. A pair of geese would land 400 to 500 yards away. One would stand, neck straight, while the other sat belly down in the grass. Another pair would overfly the field, the earlier birds wouldn't make a sound – absolute silence – and invariably, the newcomers would ignore my 18 realistic fakes and, without hesitation, land by the first two. Time and time again, it would happen.

So in February '23, I decided to evolve. Do you have any idea how difficult—how frightening—it is to commit to hunting Canadas over TWO full-bodies? Oh, I hauled one bag, or six decoys, into the field, but only set two. One up. One down. The rig required 30 seconds; it took longer to pour my first cup of coffee. The first one was a single flying upriver. I clucked, he spun a 90, set his wings, and would have landed at 20 yards had I not interrupted his routine with a load of HEVI XII #4s. The

Sometimes changing your spread to a super-minimalist style gets the job done.

© JULIE JOHNSON

next two, though, came in from the side and landed behind me. While I'm plotting their demise, another pair land 60 yards to my north…and then two more with them. I'm not going to jump-shoot them (this time), so I scare 'em off, drag my hide 40 yards to split the difference, and secret myself alongside a little patch of bunchgrass. Uh…huh. The next pair like what I'm doing with Bill Saunders' new Triple B short reed, yet slide-slip my two decoys which puts them right off my boot-bag and inside 15 yards. Two shots. Done with my three. I bundle everything up, snag my TWO full-bodies, and go home.

Now I've worked out of the back of a 20' trailer and helped set 250 full-bodies in a snow-covered Midwestern cornfield. I've driven alone to the field in my Grandpa's '93 Chevy pickup, and surgically arranged 105 full-bodies—all I had at the time—only to have every goose in Jones County, Iowa, painfully shun me. In February and March of '23, I put out two decoys on four of eight hunts, and killed a three-bird limit in under three hours… and that was dragging it out 'cause I didn't want the hunt to be over after only 30 minutes.

It's all about change; that's what it is. Me and Bill Saunders, we've gotten older. We've seen a lot. Call it The Fourth Stage along the hunter's path, with a smidge of The Fifth. It's how we do it now. But we ain't old. As Saunders suggested, though I question it about myself, perhaps we've gotten a little wiser when it comes to the way we goose hunt nowadays. Maybe we, like the Canadas we love to chase, have evolved. If that's what it is, I sure as hell hope it keeps happening.

-TOP GUN-
GEESE

NAVIGATE YOURSELF TO THESE GOOSE MECCAS NOW, BECAUSE NOTHING BEATS HUNTING WHERE THE BIRDS ARE

BY ALEX LANGBELL

Talk to me goose! Most of you know the scene in Top Gun, where Maverick asks his navigator "Goose" to help him find the target. For the last 33 years, I've used this phrase lightheartedly to help me find my favorite target—high numbers of geese of many species. I have chased, scouted for, called to, hunted for, guided for, cleaned and stuffed geese my entire adult life—5 species and 9 subspecies of geese in 25 states and 4 provinces. An obsession, or pretty darn close. And so my good friends at this fine periodical asked me to round up my favorite places to hunt geese in North America, so here we go. First of all—I apologize if I missed your area and don't mention your specklebellies in the timber (I've heard of places in the south where you can do this), these are simply what I have experienced and can honestly talk about in my career of being a hunting guide and outdoor TV producer traveling North America, along with expert testimony from those spots.

CANADA

The first place I hunted geese in Canada is still one of my all time favorites; Alberta. I love Alberta, not only because some of my earliest traveling memories are from there, but for the different variety of geese. Greater and lesser Canadas, white-fronts, snows, Ross's geese: There are

so many options as they migrate through this province. When scouting you could easily see four different species using one massive pea field. Add liberal limits, and it's heaven on earth for an obsessed goose hunter. Good friend and goose man Rob Reynolds of Ranchland Outfitters, has hunted geese here for 40 years. He loves his home province, where his family homesteaded, because of the large concentrations of new birds that migrate constantly through September through December.

"When building up fat reserves on barley and peas, our geese become very predictable," he says. These birds haven't been hunted for months, giving you the opportunity for some incredible hunts. On one hunt we filmed, Rob had us set up on a fat, juicy pea field. We had 8 shooters and two camera guys. From the time legal shooting light started to the last volley we had killed 64 geese and 64 ducks. Here's the kicker, it took 25 minutes! The sun wasn't even up and we just took 128 birds. It's just a magical place and I will continue to head north each fall.

My next favorite place to hunt geese is Saskatchewan. I've experienced some of the most consistent goose hunting in this province. I've produced several TV shows here with the episodes being some of my favorite footage captured on film. Shawn Nyholt, owner of Pro-Staff Outdoors, has been hunting geese in Saskatchewan for 40 years. He loves it. "You get the chance to hunt birds that aren't pressured everyday. They react to calls and decoy spreads the way you expect them to. That creates the greatest of experiences," he says.

The differences between Alberta and Saskatchewan are minimal. They have similar limits, similar species fly through. I guess the only reason I think Alberta has a slight edge is because for the first 6 weeks in Saskatchewan you can't hunt geese in the afternoon and afternoon hunts are some of my favorite, just for the fact I can sleep in and you really can make sure your setup is perfect.

WASHINGTON

The next place is way up in the upper left corner of the U.S., the Columbia Basin, in central Washington. Now I wouldn't say this is area is better than some of the areas I'm going to mention, but the reason I love this place is because I grew into a bonafide killer learning how to hunt these geese. The majority of geese that would come through this area are cackling geese, coming from Alaska and Northwest Territories. These are small birds afraid of their own shadows. They come in large numbers and want to land in the middle of the field, afraid to land next to anything that might be an ambush spot. At the end of the season I would watch from the side of the fields as birds were so skittish, they would literally circle live geese in a field multiple times and decide, "Nope, I'll land over here by ourselves." These are some of the hardest birds to kill in North America. If you weren't in a flat pit, or if your hide was not perfect, forget it. If you weren't hunting with either stuffers or the best fully flocked decoy you could find, you weren't killing them. I love this though. It makes the challenge real and the tricks you learn you can apply anywhere successfully on tough educated Canadas.

LOOK CLOSE: The Columbia Basin is where stuffers became standard decoys.

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OREGON/CALIFORNIA

A region that I experienced way too late in my hunting life is the Klamath Basin in Oregon and California. A few years ago, I was invited out to hunt the late snow/speck season by my friend and guide Shawn Howe. He invited me to experience the late season, when there is a 10-bird specklebelly limit and a 20-bird snow goose daily limit. He said, "We'll be shooting them over water!" and I couldn't get my response out fast enough: "Hell yeah." I drove to Oregon with my black Lab Ellie, and the next morning we set up our A-frames on the bank of Klamath Lake. Using an 18 foot Jon boat, we put out 10 dozen floater speck decoys out in front and 10 dozen mixed spread of snows and specks behind us on the land. The birds had no chance. The calling was "speck-tacular." My little girl Ellie never retrieved so many birds over water in her 5 years of life. At one point we had so many dead birds on the water, we had to get the boat. Ellie would have been there an hour retrieving all of them. We ended up hunting three days, harvesting a pile of birds. It was probably the coolest, most epic goose hunt I'd ever been on.

COLORADO

I really enjoy hunting geese on the Front Range of Colorado. This face of the Rockies holds hundred of thousands of big and little geese, but lately with hunting pressure and warming weather patterns the goose hunting has seen a slight drop off. The hunting is still very good, but not as guaranteed. One thing that really stands out about Colorado is it has the best goose hunting backdrop I have ever seen. It's hard to describe in writing how incredible a big flock of geese looks when it's about to land in your spread and you have the Rocky Mountains in the background. It's simply stunning. If you want to experience one of the most epic hunting sceneries, I suggest you climb in your truck and head for Coors country.

MONTANA

This next place I am very hesitant to write about it is my home state of Montana. The Big Sky State is well known for the big game opportunities, but waterfowlers have figured out with our winters becoming milder and milder the birds are staying further north, especially the big Canadas that can weather the toughest storms. It's literally a walk in the park for these practically non-migrating birds. That's all I'm going to say about Montana, except Kevin Costner's full of it, Montana sucks, I wouldn't come here.

ATLANTIC

Let's continue talking about geese over water. Let's go all the way on the other side of the continent to the Jersey Shore. It was here that my lovely killer-of-a-daughter Sierra and I hunted Atlantic brant for the first time. A couple local guys, one being the local game warden, invited us to hunt with them. The morning of the hunt, following the navigation app on our iPhone, we ended up at a dock located in a neighborhood subdivision where we found several camo clad gentlemen standing next to a couple of blind-covered, surface drive-powered jon boats that were waiting for us. We climbed

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into the boats and putted off into the salt marsh. After a 10 minute boat ride, we pulled up to one of the small islands scattered throughout the marsh. It had little to no cover, but our hosts were confident it would work. After throwing out about 4 dozen homemade wooden decoys, we settled into our blinds and loaded our Berettas. It wasn't but a few minutes later the first birds approached our spread. As they approached into shotgun range, our friend Jeff, who was hosting the hunt, called me and Sierra out. Two birds came in and two birds dropped, splashing into the water. The bird I shot popped up, legs up. I looked at the bird and said to Sierra, "I think I just shot a bird with a tarsus band." Well it turns out I was wrong, I didn't shoot a bird with one tarsus band, I shot a bird with two tarsus bands. The first Atlantic brant I ever shot had three bands on it, two white tarsus bands with black lettering wrapped around both legs and a third alloy band around the left leg. It wasn't long and we filled our two-bird limit. Short and sweet. The birds worked incredibly well with shots from our boat blind less than 30 yards. Did I mention the Atlantic boardwalk was our back drop? Simply an incredible hunt.

HEARTLAND: BETTER THAN CANADA!

The last place I want to mention is a general area involving several states, South Dakota, Missouri, Kansas, Illinois and Oklahoma, or we'll just say the Midwest. It has probably the largest concentration of geese; big, small, gray, brown, white, blue, you name it. The sheer number of birds is staggering. It's nothing for you to find fields of 20,000 birds. This area is the heart of goose hunting in North America. You could spend months here chasing a variety of birds. I asked my close friend Mike Miller, owner of Whiskey Creek Outfitters located in Oklahoma, why he loves hunting geese down there. He stated, "It's like Canada except better. We have the variety of birds Canada has. We have the amount of birds Canada has, except they aren't flying through, most of them are staying."

And here's the big one: "They are all in full plumage."

Spot on. Early season birds in Canada are covered in pin feathers. It's not until mid-October that they start getting fully plumed out. So if you want a good specimen to mount, Canada wouldn't be my first choice, unless you took a bird in the spring. Of course, the birds in Canada aren't pressured like the birds are late season in the states and Midwest.

So if your goal is to experience difference places in North America to hunt geese, I wouldn't hesitate to hunt any of these areas. "Make sure your pattern is full, Ghost Rider," and the geese are "below the hard deck." Good luck and good hunting.

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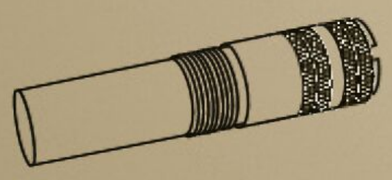

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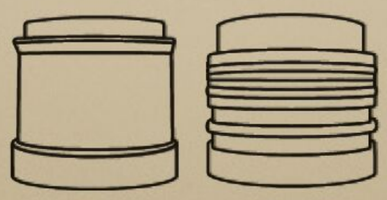

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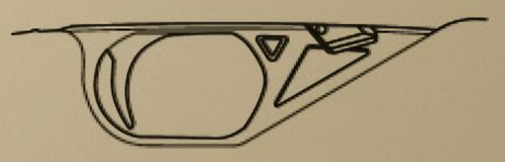

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BEYOND THE X

BY FOSTER BARTHOLOW

Throughout the season, you'll find certain spread designs and sizes just flat-out work. Whether you're hunting lesser Canadas in the wheat fields of Texas or giants in the vast cornfields of South Dakota, there's almost always a spread that will work more days than not.

The weather conditions, timing within the season, group size and hunting the "X" versus traffic birds will always play a critical role in determining the spread size, layout, and location within the field. A word to the wise, relying on hitting the location of the "X" in the field may not always be your best option. Several times you will watch birds jump field to field while snow goose hunting, Canada geese hit different areas of fields when weather conditions change, and stale birds make you scratch your head.

This year, my buddy Corey and I set out to shoot Canada geese in a genuine SD whiteout blizzard. To a waterfowl hunter, there's very little that can top strong winds, blowing snow and cold temps.

Knowing the layout of the field and how birds react to windy conditions, we set up at the southern edge in a lowly pass of the field. Our spread consisted of 120 SX fully flocked decoys and two blinds with snow covers. Normally, we park hundreds of yards away from the spread, but on this day, we parked 80 yards upwind, the white truck not visible from the decoys.

What started off with a couple small pairs of geese quickly arose into flocks of 30-40 birds. The view from the blinds was like nothing I had witnessed before as these birds would suddenly appear as a dark smudge mark, turning into the shape of a goose around 40 yards away, and by 20 yards they would be visible. Corey and I each called our own shots into the flock, shooting one or two birds until we quickly reached our limit.

If we would have relied on the location of the "X" from the previous day, these birds would have short-stopped us couple hundred yards.

In waterfowl hunting, wisdom almost always comes with experience, but following some of these tips will help make you more successful in the field.

CANADA GOOSE SPREADS

This past honker season, we found several days of success and failure throughout the season. Personally, I felt two of the largest contributing factors to the times of failure is when we had stale birds in the area and warmer temps. The geese would play follow the leader and turn

decoy-shy in a hurry. It did not matter the spread size or layout; they would simply pass over you like there was a large "don't land here" sign.

We would let the fields build up for a week or two at a time, but still found these birds acting wary, even to the fully-flocked decoys. Once a storm would hit and new migration would push in, the game was back on.

There are five things that come to mind when Canada goose hunting that will help you set the perfect spread. These are weather, hunting in snow, spread size, spread layout and an organized trailer.

WEATHER

Prioritize days off for hunting around winter storms that will push new migrating birds to your area. We will watch the forecast closely and plan to hunt days that show more favorable wind speeds/directions, snow, or winter squalls. Anytime you have windy conditions of 25 mph+, know the birds are typically going to land at the back of the spread. Try setting your spread in an upside down "Y" shape with the small landing zone 20 yards downwind of your blinds. Our experience on these days leans towards the birds wanting to get down as fast as possible. If you can hold up in the grueling conditions, chances are you'll have great decoying action.

HUNTING IN SNOW

There is something about hunting hungry Canada geese in a snow-packed field. I've found more close-action success day in and day out when hunting birds with a fresh blanket of snow on the ground.

If I have the opportunity, I will let the field rest for an extra day knowing there's fresh snow coming in. The contrast of the decoys to the snow helps you gain visibility to these birds coming in, there's far less shadows seen when the birds get close, and if you take a rake and shuffle the snow around making the landing zone look like birds have been hitting the ground and feeding, they feel comfortable and float right in.

Another tip whether you're in snow or a dry field, get a couple dozen square base stands that are approximately 12-14'' taller than regular bases to help hide the additional height of the blinds and give a better perception of being flat in a field. We store these in the front of the trailer, making a quick set up when pulling the blinds out.

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QUALITY VS QUANTITY

If we could all hunt with 50 decoys and find success every day, what a wonderful world that would be... unfortunately, that's just not the case. While this can be a blast shooting honkers over smaller spreads, I've noticed that hunting with four or more friends and a small spread can be quite challenging, especially when trying to hide the blinds. We have made the investment to go with a larger spread consisting of 350 - 400 decoys, giving us a much easier pathway for birds to overlook the blinds, gain confidence in numbers and focus on the landing zones when hunting with groups of 5-8 friends.

Running a spread of fully flocked decoys is undoubtedly more work, but the reward with no shine on sunny days and the extra contrast in snow is worth every penny. Even having a couple dozen fully flocked decoys around the landing zone can help tremendously to fool the birds.

SPREAD LAYOUT

From spread designs looking like U's, straight lines and about anything else imaginable, we've noticed breaking up our decoys into small family pods with additional space between them will help create a natural look and give a landing bird or flock more options when picking out their spot.

This year, our spread layout consisted of two pods of 15-30 shell decoys at the back of the spread, followed by a gap of 20-30 yards into 350 full bodies in what looked like an upside-down McDonalds arch. We would place the blinds in the middle bulk of decoys, give another 20–30-yard gap and set a final family pod of 30 decoys. This layout gave the birds multiple landing zones in the event of a wind change and allowed birds roosting in different locations to float right in without having to make multiple passes to center up.

ORGANIZED TRAILER

To set the perfect spread, the information above is only three-quarters the battle. If you've been with friends that have a disorganized setup, the amount of time wasted can be tough to swallow... especially when you've shot your limit for the day and are trying to get out of the field quickly to save it for another day.

You must organize your trailer so that it allows for a fast set up and easy take down. We bungee our blinds on the sides of the trailer for easy access and ability to keep stubble in throughout the season. Next, we keep all our shells and tall stand decoys in the front of trailer. When we get there, we start at the front of the trailer with setting the shell decoys. Once completed, we pull the trailer forward to set the next portion of the spread. This continual moving of the trailer will not only save time but saves countless steps and helps lay out the spread design more efficiently.

GREATERS VS LESSERS

If you've had the opportunity to hunt both greater and lesser Canada geese, you know the methods for hunting these birds are completely opposite. Let's discuss the main differences:

Hunting in Pierre, SD while I was growing up gave me opportunities to target lesser Canada geese. These fun little devils can be quite challenging, and I like to compare lessers to snow geese. They pack in tight, love tons of calling, and make grown men cry. Hunting these birds typically require several dozen more decoys because of the nature of setting up the spread. You

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almost make 500 decoys look like 250 in the field, and your layout is typically more of a donut looking shape with a landing zone in the middle.

To accommodate for the additional decoy setup time and to help spread out the calling, guys will generally run larger groups for these birds. When calling we hit it hard to keep the birds excited and locked on. The thrill of the hunt for these little geese is well worth the sore cheeks you have from calling. Watching hundreds in a flock get loud and start racing down to the spread is a sight to see.

If you hunt greater or giant Canada geese, you know the tactics are about opposite the strategy for lessers. These birds like their space, (typically) are a lot quieter, and seem to have a much more relaxed floating-in approach when coming into the decoys.

Generally, a couple callers are all it takes to successfully interact with these geese. You can make 500 decoys look like 750 in the field with these geese, and the layouts will be much more inviting with several open pockets for landing zones. Rather than a huge spin, you'll tend to see these birds in smaller flocks of 20-100 birds. I'll tell you one thing though... when you have a flock of B-52's coming your way, it's one of the most remarkable views in all wingshooting.

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SNOW GEESE

After hunting snow geese, most guys' answers for setting a spread is this: "There is no perfect spread for snow geese, they do what they want."

While this is partially true, let's look at the nature of snow geese. They have a very aggressive attitude toward feeding in a field. Like the great Ricky Bobby said, "If they aren't first, they're last." Watch a group and you'll constantly see them jumping ahead of each other to have first shot at untouched grain.

Knowing whether you're hunting adults or juvies will determine the spread size. Typically, juvie spreads are a lot smaller, consisting of 250-1,000 decoys, whereas your migration spreads can consist of 3,000-8,000 decoys.

Hunting these magnificent headaches from God make you realize humility, patience, and hard work. Usually, one or two out of ten hunts you have are going to result in harvesting over 35 birds, and to hit the triple digit mark... well, that is more like one of twenty to thirty hunts.

At the end of the day, you'll get beat up, worn down and muddy as hell... but it will all be worth it when the stars align, and you get to experience a tornado of thousands of geese falling from the heavens.

There's two main ways we set up: Migration and juvie setups. If you hunt juvie sets, try to keep family pods at the back of the spread, making it look like those are your relaxed birds that aren't necessarily feeding, but just grazing in the field. As you work towards the leading or feeding edge of the spread, you'll start bunching up the decoys tighter to resemble highly aggressive feeding flock. Any motion is generally at the top end of the spread and your blinds will be up in this area as well. We would always try to leave an open hole in the decoys for a landing pocket that resembles an "A" shape.

Migrators are a different animal. We set up around 2,500-3,000 full body decoys in more of a "U" or "W" shape at the leading edge. Down 150-200 yards below us we would set out a "J" with rthe emaining 2,000-3,000 socks as filler to make the spread look giant.

If you can add more sound throughout the spread in the springtime, that never hurts. Try and keep the directional power horn speakers positioned so the birds never have an audio gap. And always come prepared with an extra flat of shells because you never know when you're going to be in the middle of a tornado.

Shoot straight and best of luck this season!

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THE Big Easy

A RETURN TO CANADA REVEALS THE HUNTING IS BETTER THAN EVER

BY SKIP KNOWLES

© SCOTT HAUGEN

Sometimes you go to Canada expecting fast and furious waterfowling action only to discover that bird hunting is bird hunting, there are no free rides, and that it can be tough sledding, even up there in the goose factory.

This was not one of those times.

We stepped out of the rental car in the middle of a cut-over pea field the afternoon we arrived, running late, still wearing our street clothes, and joined our mid-September party right there in the dirt and chaff after a daunting trip full of delayed flights and an unplanned overnight in a hotel with a voucher coupon.

But we were here at last, and right away, on cue, a few hundred adult snow geese appeared and started maple-leafing down trying to land about 200 yards away from our parked trucks, flying straight toward us into a cool west wind. I stood there in my travel clothes, smiling, watching. The exhausting travel harangue and lost morning of hunting were quickly forgotten, despite the limits of Canada geese our friends had torture-texted us from the missed morning hunt.

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"GEESE BOTH LIGHT AND DARK WERE EVERYWHERE, AND THE ROADSIDE PONDS WERE COVERED IN BIRDS. IT WAS CLEAR THE HATCH HAD BEEN EPIC"

My luggage was still lost, but Rafe Nielsen with Browning had my back, loaning me a Wicked Wing bibs and coat in their killer new AURIC pattern. I always travel with shoes I can wear hunting in a pinch for just this reason, so I was ready to take the travel frustration out on the birds. Mid-afternoon, and we could not even get in the blind, load guns and cover up before ducks were swirling.

Well, hello Canada…I had missed you. For two years Covid had blocked us from venturing to the provinces, but nothing much had changed. We were counting piles of ducks in just over an hour, a mix of gadwall, pintails and mallards. Geese light and dark were everywhere, and roadside ponds were covered in birds. It was clear the year's hatch was epic. A relief for a waterfowl magazine editor. It is one thing to hear it but another to see it with your own eyes. We saw legions of young birds in the mix.

Not bad for a trip that started with a run to Walmart for underwear, socks and a belt.

CANADA IS THE BIG EASY of waterfowling, and south central Saskatchewan is where many birds are born and many more funnel down from further north to launch the migration. The night prior, I'd fretted about the full moon, warm temps, and the dead calm, all bad for waterfowling. Then I remembered: It doesn't matter—we're in Canada! Technically it was still summer, but we were getting

a hell of a sneak-peek into fall. While stateside friends were slapping mosquitoes and praying for teal to arrive, (and not depart), we were headed out amid gorgeous stubblefields set against green alder patches below either blue or at times dark sullen skies. Chilly in the morning and mosquitoes by evening. It's a lovely time of year just outside the hunting hub city of Saskatoon. I'd forgotten the prairies can be so pretty and green.

Driving to the lodge, Nate Robinson, Winchester ammo's marketing manager, was amazed by the endless presence of waterfowl in Saskatchewan. "You don't see many regular birds, songbirds or blackbirds or robins and crows…it is almost all stuff you can hunt," he said.

The next morning came way too fast, as it does in September up north, and we were up at 2:30 a.m. and setting the spread at 3:25 after a one-hour drive. I was running on Mountain Dew and to my dismay could only find it at the store in pineapple flavor. Pineapple Mountain Dew. Tim Horton's, all closed. WTH, Canada. But in short order, the headlamps were stowed and a gaggle of Ross's slid in from the left, followed by group after group of geese of all flavors. Dozens of Canadas, a pile of ducks. Then the magic evaporated, and birds ignored our calling, sliding around us to the east-northeast so the sun was soon shining in our eyes instead of in theirs. The guides groaned, but we still had almost 50 birds and it was only 8:30 a.m.. How spoiled they are up here. The

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The Browning AURIC pattern worked in a variety of terrain and hides.

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new Blindside 2, a mid-range load, was clearly murderous under 40 yards.

You can't shoot dark geese in the evening in Saskatchewan, so it was back to the ducks over water, a pond rimmed with wheat stubble. Late-running blue winged teal broke out in hungry flights across the shallows and the little ducks were a real treat to behold. Beautiful in flight, they were hooking in with acrobatic twists and dropping their wing tips straight down past their toes as they hit the brakes. Many times I just stared and didn't raise my gun. Worth the price of the trip alone, with a perfect west breeze to set them up.

A dirty duck blind trick: We unloaded Nate's gun when he wasn't looking, then called him out on a single. His reaction upon clicking was to violently tear at the forestock of the Maxus II to make it cycle.

"You used to shoot a pump didn't, you!?" I said.

"Yeahhhh," he grinned sheepishly. Everyone laughed.

Devlin "the Duck" Hodges of NFL fame was on the

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hunt and calling sweetly, just as he did as signal caller for the Steelers during that magic season. Pro football's only famous duck caller has definitely found his calling off the gridiron. "If duck season's open in Arkansas, I will be there, somewhere," he laughed. He's a hell of a shot, unsurprisingly.

WF writer and veteran 'fowler Scott Haugen has killed man-eating polar bears, king eiders and cacklers but had somehow never killed a blue-winged teal. You'd have thought it was a drake eider with a solid gold band, he was so excited, holding that first blue rocket in his hand, his head bowed with admiration. The emotion from that spread to all of us in the moment.

Public Enemy Number One for geese is Thunderbird guide Hunter Pickett, a soft spoken killer with contagious enthusiasm (thunderbirdoutfitters.com). He had us on a dirty X for big dark geese on our last morning that would have been rated XXX by the film industry. We set up on pea fields full of waste grain facing east-northeast over 15 dozen silhouettes. Not ideal to face the sunrise like that but it would not matter because we'd wrap it up long before the Saskatchewan sun kissed those golden fields.

Flocks of 20-plus geese came honking in low, tight,

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slow and unsuspecting, right away…and then all the way. A hunter doesn't get to witness this kind of bird behavior often enough in this life. Later, I asked Rafe, a veteran public land 'fowler from the Salt Lake Wars, just when he realized it was going to be that kind of day. He stopped, looked down in thought, and said, "when the third straight flock did it right."

You can always get lucky on a flock or two before sunrise, but this was different and we all knew it. Hell, we were halfway to limits by then. Two big, rambunctious Labs burned lines to fallen birds and back non-stop, and I got my bell rung in the melee by a wounded honker that thumped down behind my layout and cracked me on the head with a wing like only a whopper honker can. The birds all came from the right side of the row of layouts, circled once or not at all, and we ground them up with 3" #2 Blindside in the easy light of predawn.

In a bizarre twist, at one point a few wounded birds were hunkered in the decoys. When approached, they leaped up like drunken turkeys and ran toward the layouts full of hunters, an event now known as the "charge of the zombie goose brigade."

None of us had seen that before. To top it all off, we were about finished with dark geese when a long line of snows in interlacing groups spiraled right down on us. We cut into them, and Nathan put an exclamation point on it and dish-ragged one at 62 yards just to show Blindside 2 could do it. He was not modest about the feat, but at least he did not try to tear the gun's forestock off for a follow-up shot.

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CANADA DISPATCH, PHASE 2—ALBERTA

Jordan Moll doesn't give a flying you-know-what about anything except hunting. He is a big strong former Colorado college football player and a gifted killer with the focus of a well-trained pointer and the field marshal brain of a military strategist. We hopped the border and ran to Alberta to see my old friend.

"What's with Jordan?" I asked Monique, the lovely woman who helps run Hidden Prairie Outfitters, Moll's camp. "He looks like a blonde Baywatch lifeguard, but never has a girlfriend or even talks about partying or normal young-guy stuff. Even goes to bed on time."

"Jordan lives for the hunt," said Monique, who made sure we gained 5 pounds in our 3-day stay with her dream man-food dinners. "He is married to the hunt."

Married to the hunt. Figures. His dad Steve almost died for the hunt. On the wall outside the luxe bar is the grill of a

Jeep and, atop it, a whitetail buck rack. Steve was hunting a big buck (Sask-big) and hit a whitetail that flipped his Jeep. It took the hard top off, and almost his head, but he lived. Barely.

The first afternoon, we threw up panel blinds that were wrapped in canvas with tall grass attached and then buried them in cut poplars we'd hauled in the trailer. Soon, we met up with Travis Copeland, a soft-spoken Oregon native with a terrific self-trained Lab. With minimal calling and just two shooters, we hunted a small pea field above a broad coulee, and the geese came to us from below the horizon. T-shirts and 70 degrees, just amazing, and we clobbered 16 lessers and greaters in a few very pleasant hours. You know it's good when you curse yourself for not tripling when you clearly should have.

Every day, different spot, same bloodbath. We'd wake up, drive a short distance, and wreak havoc on birds. The kick ass thing about Hidden Prairie Outfitters (call 320.630.9535) was that the hunts were mostly within 20 minutes of the lodge. This is huge for a tired traveler. Flocks of pintail and wigeon ("pigeon" as Scott and I call them) often made short work of duck limits for double-doubles as the guides say of duck + goose limits. On the slowest day, overcast and breezy, we still had shooting every 10 to 15 minutes.

At the crack of dawn the last day it was clear we had gained a bunch of birds overnight as the migration gained steam and built with endless flocks. All manner of birds were coming off a farm pond roost and a local lake. We watched and listened, thrilled to the sounds of pre-dawn wings and clucking and finally started shooting over another pea field with wooded edges. We were unloading our guns by 7:11 and starting to pick up, a wild mix of geese on the ground.

Haugen lurked outside the blind with his 3-foot long zoom lens like a waterfowl Paparazzi, as always. Playing

THE GUNS/AMMO/CAMO FOR A CANADA RUN

The most comfortable hunter can stay out in the field the longest, and Browning has long done intelligent design on all of their Wicked Wing line of clothing. We like it in the AURIC pattern as the best yet. Hunters want systems, and Browning hit the sweet spot as not the most expensive (you can buy more than one piece a year!) but still super-high quality. The brand is steered by hunters who know what hunters want and need, and it shows.

"This is why we're here," Rafe Nielsen, director of marketing, said of the Canada trip. "Lights out hunting to really get a feel of what works and what doesn't. It really opens your eyes in terms of what is needed in future product development. You just can't get this kind of experience and product testing anywhere else. This is the proving grounds, the genesis of new ideas."

So many camo patterns in the past 20 years focused on amazing detail to appeal to hunters' eyes like a fancy fishing lure, and those mimic patterns work very well on specific backgrounds. With AURIC, Browning created a pattern to break up outlines more than trying to match specific backgrounds and it disappears into about any field environment. To my surprise it worked even in the greenery of the cut aspen limbs covering the panel blinds (it has just enough green in it), though it really shined if someone laid down in any of the cut-over fields we hunted, blending beautifully.

You can tell a killer break-up pattern because it looks good not only up close but also as you move further away.

On the 12-gauge A5 and MAXUS II shotguns we used, the guns looked both functional and edgy-cool, with the Cerakote/camo combos unbeatable. A couple of times in

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low light I had to take a second for my eyes to focus to spot my gun leaning in the blind…right in front of me.

The Winchester Blindside 2s are mid-range death on even the bigger geese. Somebody shot a wounded bird and it absolutely maimed it, and another guy shot at a landing bird and killed it… and more than a few others. Both instances showed what the hexagonal pellets of the load is capable of if you do your job.

We also burned the geese up with Browning Wicked Wing XD, their excellent plated steel ammo that is known for it's high speed and consistency even when you have to reach a bit. It is among the elite of steel shot.

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it safe, we'd left room for one more goose and were just taking it all in, when a giant Quill with white-rimmed wings drifted in with two others and landed 500 yards away. A massive unicorn of a goose. I took a hike to sneak around the field and try to bump the trophy goose to my friends but it didn't work.

Every real waterfowler needs to experience this place. The birds that they DON'T call the shot on will freak a stateside hunter out, as the guides whisper "let's wait for a bigger group." Ole Johnson is a Californian who comes and helps scout, locating these red hot Xs, and he just loves to see the reaction from old Mississippi flyway hunters from the states.

"They are completely overwhelmed by the amount of birds," he says. "They'll see more birds in three or four days here than they do all year back home. They just say 'oh wow, oh wow' non-stop."

That's what Jordan lives for, too. "Getting to see their faces and the opportunity they have never experienced before in the states is the best part," Moll says. "We had a group from Utah just giddy as hell getting to shoot specks."

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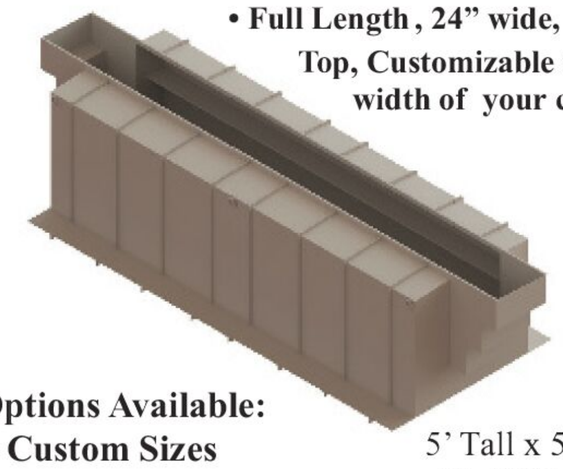

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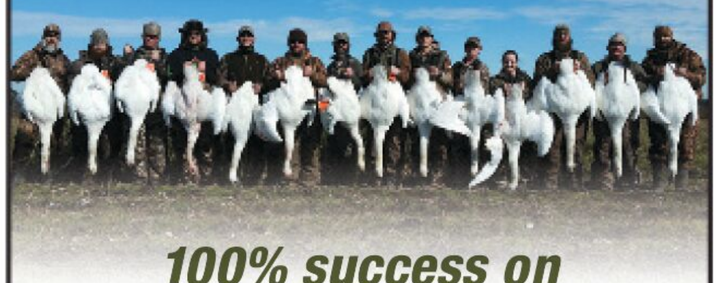

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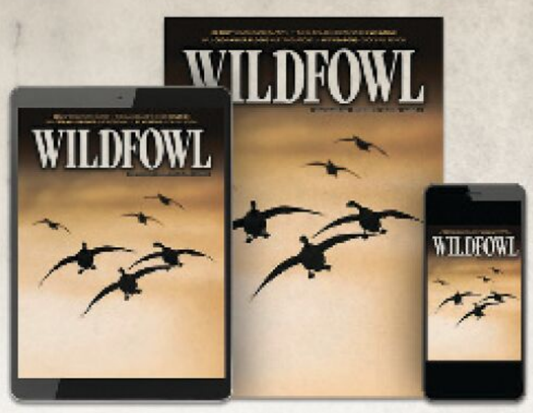

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 (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 96)

black 3. With some white 4. And they all say some variation of "honk." Trying to parse these differences with a bird on the wing at say, forty-five yards, is akin to hitting a rising fastball outside the zone. You might connect, but only because you closed your eyes and took a big ol' swing.

Take the dusky Canada goose of the Pacific coast. Found only in small populations ranging from southwest Alaska down through western Oregon, this goose looks just like your common Canada. Except it's duskier. Hence the name. How much duskier, you ask? Well, I'll just quote from the official Washington State Migratory Bird Regulations' guide to dusky ID: "Munsell color chart (10YR, 5 or less)." That clear things up? If not, let me also add this helpful distinguishing feature, also from the printed regulations: "Culmen length of 40-50 mm." Now I'll spare you from having to Google "culmen length" (don't do it – you'll be endlessly spammed with "enlarge your culmen naturally and effectively" ads for the next six weeks) and just tell you they're talking about how long the beak is. That's right. HOW LONG THE BEAK IS. Which means to avoid harvesting a dusky Canada goose, which is closed to hunting in every flyway and carries stiff penalties for transgression (including the loss of goose hunting privileges for the rest of the season in Washington State), all you'll need to do is: 1. Find a goose. 2. Measure the culmen. 3. Whip out your Munsell color chart. 4. Blam! Blam! Blam!

Which is to say: it ain't easy telling one goose from another. In fact, the only man I ever knew who could identify geese with unfettered confidence is, sadly, no longer with us. Fred Zurn (RIP) was a crusty old goose guy I met in my late teens. We both had permission to hunt the same soggy cucumber farm in the Puyallup River Valley, and more often than not, when I rolled up the rutted farm lane for an after-school honker hunt, Fred's truck was already parked by the barn. No matter. Fred was grateful for the company and usually had an extra five-gallon bucket seat waiting for me in the blind.

"Taverner's," he would announce, nodding toward a high-flying flock of black flappers.

Wow, I would think, I can hardly even SEE those.

"Here's a big wad of Vancouvers," he'd remark, a few minutes later as another distant flock flecked the horizon. "Lots of them squeakers this year."

The pattern went on. Ross's, lessers, giants, Aleutians, Emperors, Nene's…Fred's identification skills were without parallel in my young experience, and the authority with which he spoke on such matters left me in awe.

Until 15 years later, while sharing photos with a waterfowl biologist at a management event. The topic of Taverner's migration patterns slid into the conversation. So I pulled out my phone to show him an old pic of Fred and me, at the cucumber field, honkers in hand.

"Those aren't Taverners," the biologist said.

"Excuse me?"

"Those are Pacific cackling geese," he explained. "Who told you they were Taverner's?"

Things unraveled quickly at that point. More photos were examined and, as it turns out, Fred's goose ID skills consisted in one quality and one quality only: unbridled confidence. If you say it like you believe it, everyone else will, too.

"What are those?" my seven-year-old son pointed to a barely-visible group of a dozen black and white birds, flapping low over the river.

"Aleutians," I said after a glance. "Lots of them squeakers this year."

"Wow, dad. Where'd you learn how to identify geese like that?"

I smiled. "A guy named Fred taught me."

ANONYGOOSE: UNTANGLING THE MYSTERY OF HONKER ID

HAVING CONFIDENCE IS THE KEY TO THE COMPLEXITIES

FOR A BRIEF WINDOW last October, the eyes of the nation were transfixed by a celebrity waterfowl.

Let's set the stage. It's a Wednesday night in Los Angeles. Game Two of the National League Divisional series, Padres vs. Dodgers. Bottom of the 8th inning, two outs, Dodgers down 5-3 with none aboard…when this happens.

Play by play: There's a bird out there in center field.

Color: Huh?

Play by play: It's a duck!

Color: Ha!

Play by play: Ha! Ha ha!

Color: Ha ha!

Play by play: We thought we'd seen everything in this playoff game, but now….

Color: ….a duck.

Crowd roars as live footage of the bird is displayed on jumbotron

Play by play: I don't necessarily want to bother our feathered friend out there. Ducks are very aggressive, don't know if you've heard of that.

Color: I don't.

Play by play: They're VERY aggressive.

More cheers, laughter, confusion as camera zooms in on the befuddled bird squatting in center field.

Color: If the Dodgers come back and win this, they're going to have a rally duck.

Within minutes, "Rally duck" was trending on social media, and —as you can imagine—the puns were insufferable ("What the duck" from the official FOX MLB Twitter account; "Fowl ball," "Duck and cover," "Buy me some quacker jacks"…I'm nauseated just typing these).

Meanwhile, back at home, every **WILDFOWL** subscriber in the nation was shouting at the TV and pulling out their hair because clearly, as any person with two eyeballs and an ounce of waterfowl sense would tell you….THAT. WAS NOT. A DUCK.

It was a goose! A Greater White-Fronted goose, to be specific. A specklebelly. As un-ducklike as you can get while still sporting webbed feet and a beak. And in this one moment of stardom—those fleeting moments when this undervalued species was squatting squarely in the national spotlight….it was misidentified as a mallard.

Now before we pour it on too heavy on those naïve baseball chuckleheads, we in the waterfowl community should be the first to admit—goose ID is hard. Unlike ducks, most subspecies of Canada geese are basically: 1. Gray 2. And

Marsh Madness BY TIM SPIKE DAVIS

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 95)

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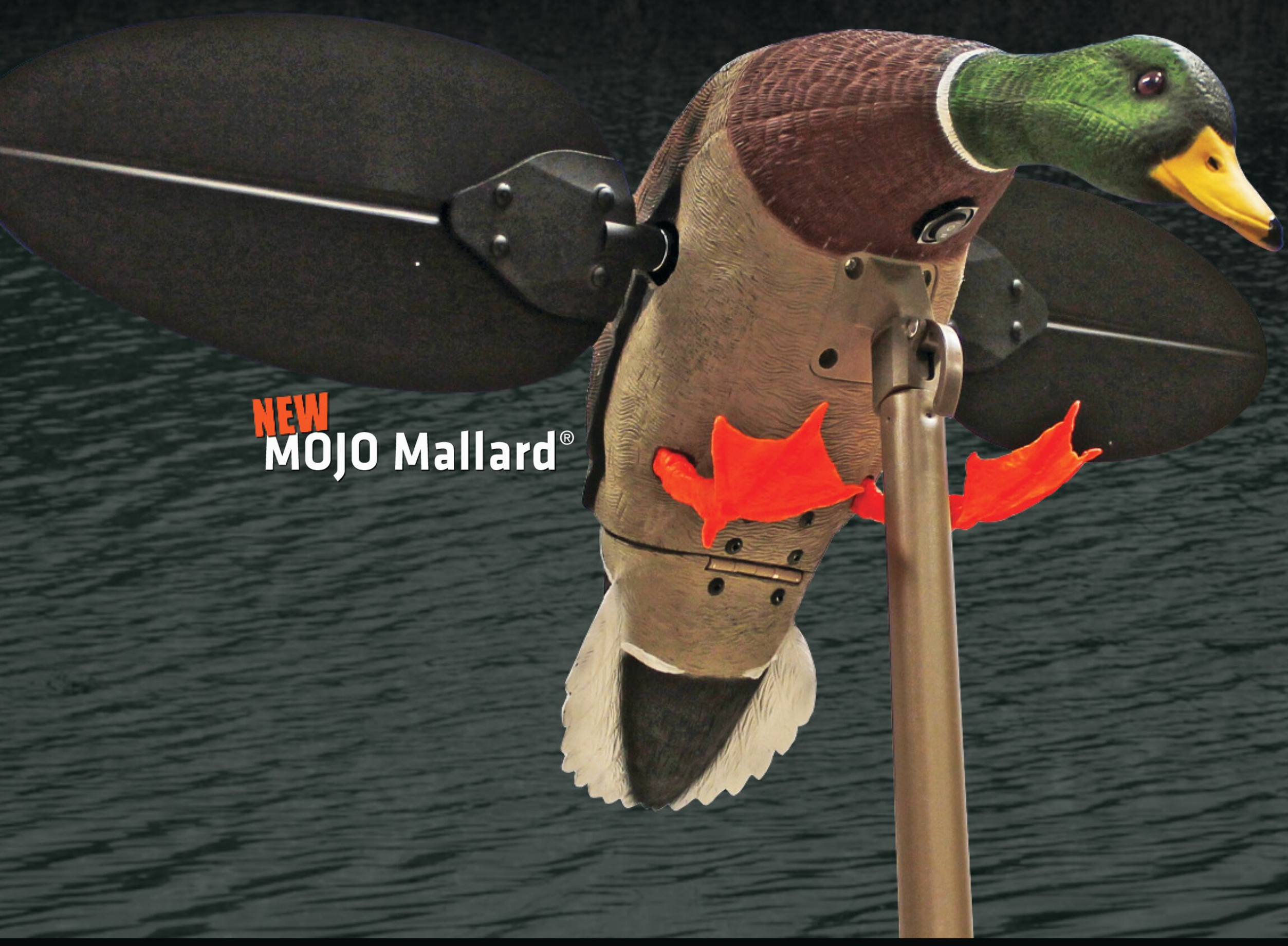

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