

FAMILY OUTDOORS

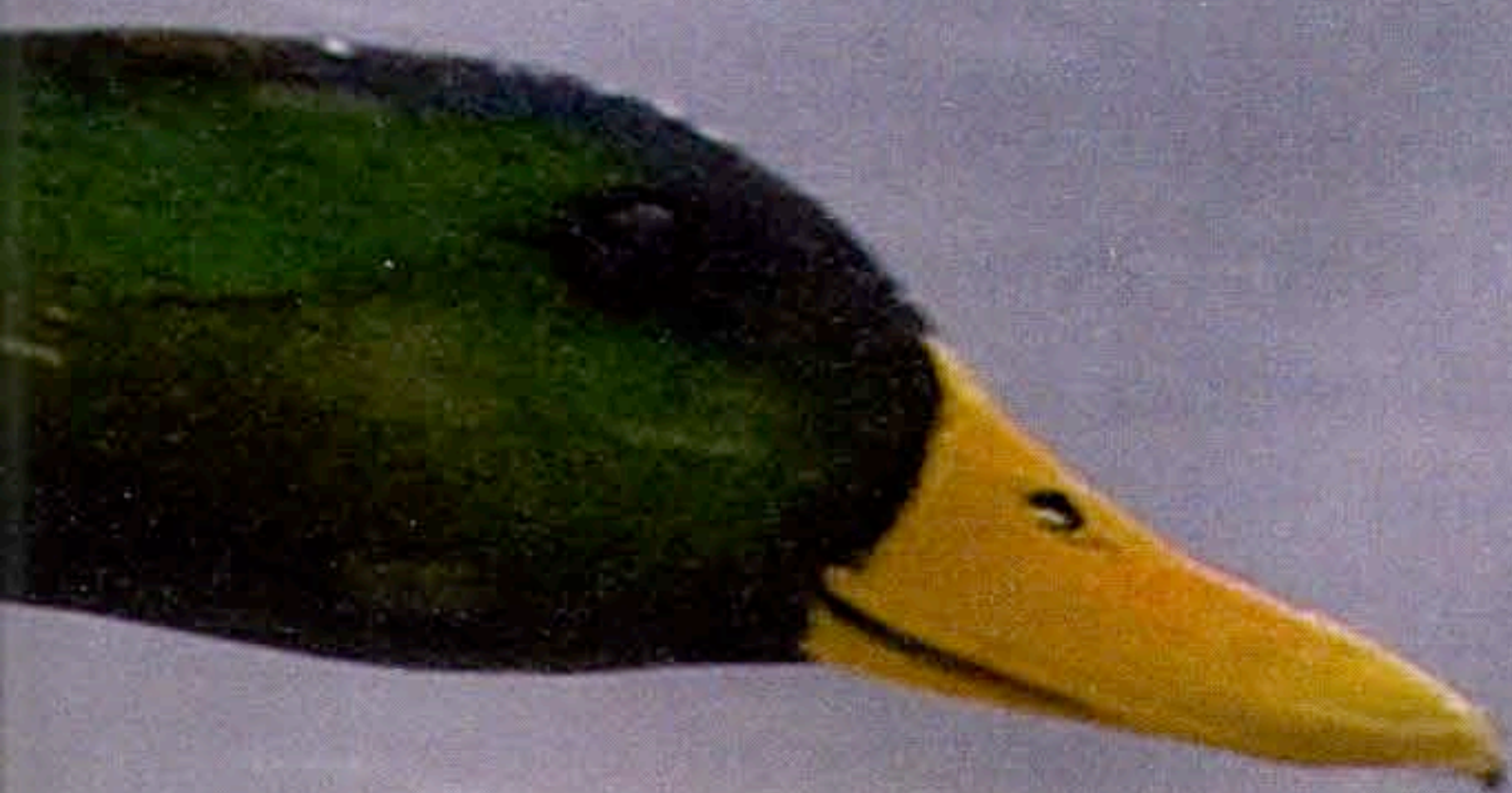
Snow gently fell as 60 mallards made wide swings around 200 decoys. Danny Guyer and Luke Rhoads peeked out of their blind while making sweet duck music that has made them successful. The mallards circled three more times, tightening their circle on each pass. Guyer and Rhoads continued making different sounds on their duck calls, a combination of tones that have constantly accented each other through 20 years of sharing a duck or goose blind.

By Kenneth L. Kieser



Kenneth L. Kieser is a 25-year veteran outdoor writer with several thousand bylines in newspaper and magazine articles. His first novel, "The Trail of Death," will be published in Spring of 2007 by La Fronter Publishing.

A Family Tradition



The mallards made their last pass and started to drop in a well-placed opening in the decoys. Both hunters stood and picked out a greenhead, being careful not to shoot a hen or "Suzy." BOOM, BOOM! Soon two drake's feet pointed towards the sky, indication that the ducks were dead. Guyer's Labrador retriever, Big Water Willie made short retrieves of each drake. Raising and training championship stock is another passion shared by the two hunters.

Guyer and Rhoads both know that hens mean several more ducks during the nesting season. Shooting drakes does not hurt breeding. Ducks do not mate for life. Duck numbers are up for the most part and both active members of Ducks Unlimited and Delta water-

fowl want it to stay that way long after our generation is gone.

Minutes later a flock of pintails slashed through the falling snow like a flight of fighter planes in tight formation. The remarkably sleek birds made fewer circles and quickly tried to settle around their new fake friends. Soon two drakes with short sprigs join both mallards on the blind's roof, a colorful mixed bag that duck hunters live for.

Duck hunting is more than a sport for both Guyer and Rhoads. Calling in mallards and most other species is their passion.

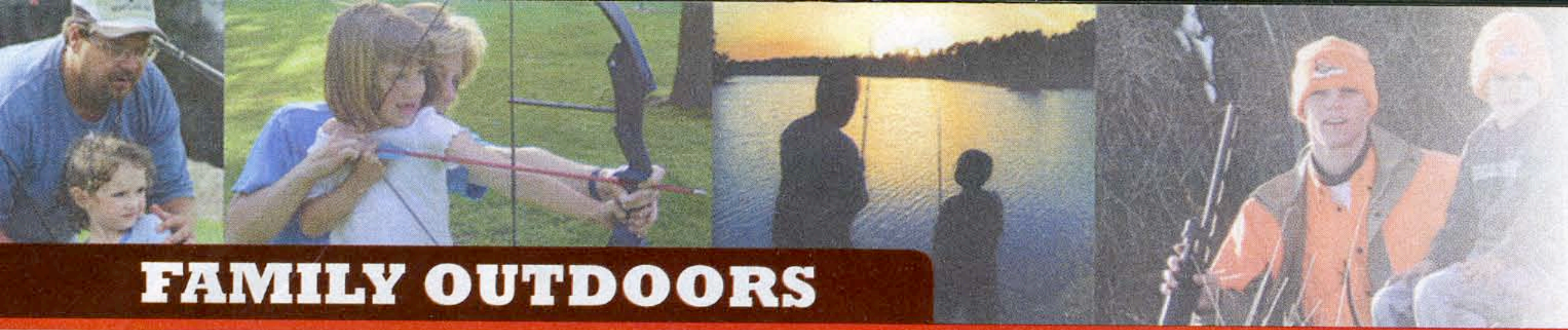
"Daddy had me in a duck blind when I had to stand on a crate to see out," Guyer said. "My dad and his friend, Paul Knick were two of the best callers around our area. Daddy is gone,

but Knick still joins us on hunts. He will always be one of the best callers."

Others have passed too, including hunting buddies that died too young in car wrecks or the result of Agent Orange from the Vietnam jungles. That just makes his hunts more special. The hunting spirit of others may very well accompany him on every trip.

"In fact," Guyer adds, "My Daddy's ashes are scattered a few feet from where those mallards just tried to land. Some of my family did not agree with that spot, but where else would he want to be?"

Danny's father, David Guyer, is inducted into the Waterfowler's Hall of Fame, located in Mound City, Missouri. His friends, Paul Knick, two-time world champion duck caller



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George Shaw, John Laukemper and many others are in the Hall too.

Recently past duck calling world champion and the owner of "Big Guy's Best Waterfowl Calls," Mike "Big Guy" Keller, passed away. During his induction ceremony into the Waterfowler's Hall of Fame, Guyer was asked to make some sweet, soft duck sounds on one of Keller's calls.

Guyer stood behind a full life-size silhouette of Keller in a marsh that was created for the ceremony and started calling while the audience sat in stunned silence with many tears. Guyer paid a hearty, heartfelt tribute to his friend and was greatly honored for this unusual opportunity.

"I have a lot of friends in this business," Guyer said. "I went to high school with Luke, my best hunting buddy. We have shared thousands of hours in a duck or goose blind. He knows what I am thinking and I know what he is thinking during most hunts. He makes things more interesting with

his gadgets, like Inspector Gadget. He is always working on something to help our hunts."

I witnessed this on a calm day when the decoys were not moving. The still decoys did not look natural to passing ducks, so Rhoads lowered his Robo Duck to water level, and attached two wires on the wings that beat the water. The decoys started to bob and move, a fact not lost on the ducks who responded while hunters in other blinds were shaking their heads.

Guyer grew up hunting the remarkable Squaw Creek area in Northwest Missouri. Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge's 8000 acres is a stopover for thousands of geese and ducks that have passed through the area since migrations began. In fact, Lewis and Clark no doubt dined on waterfowl while passing through this area.

Most hunting in the area was on private grounds during Guyer's youth in the 1960s, so the State of Missouri developed the Bob Brown and Nod-

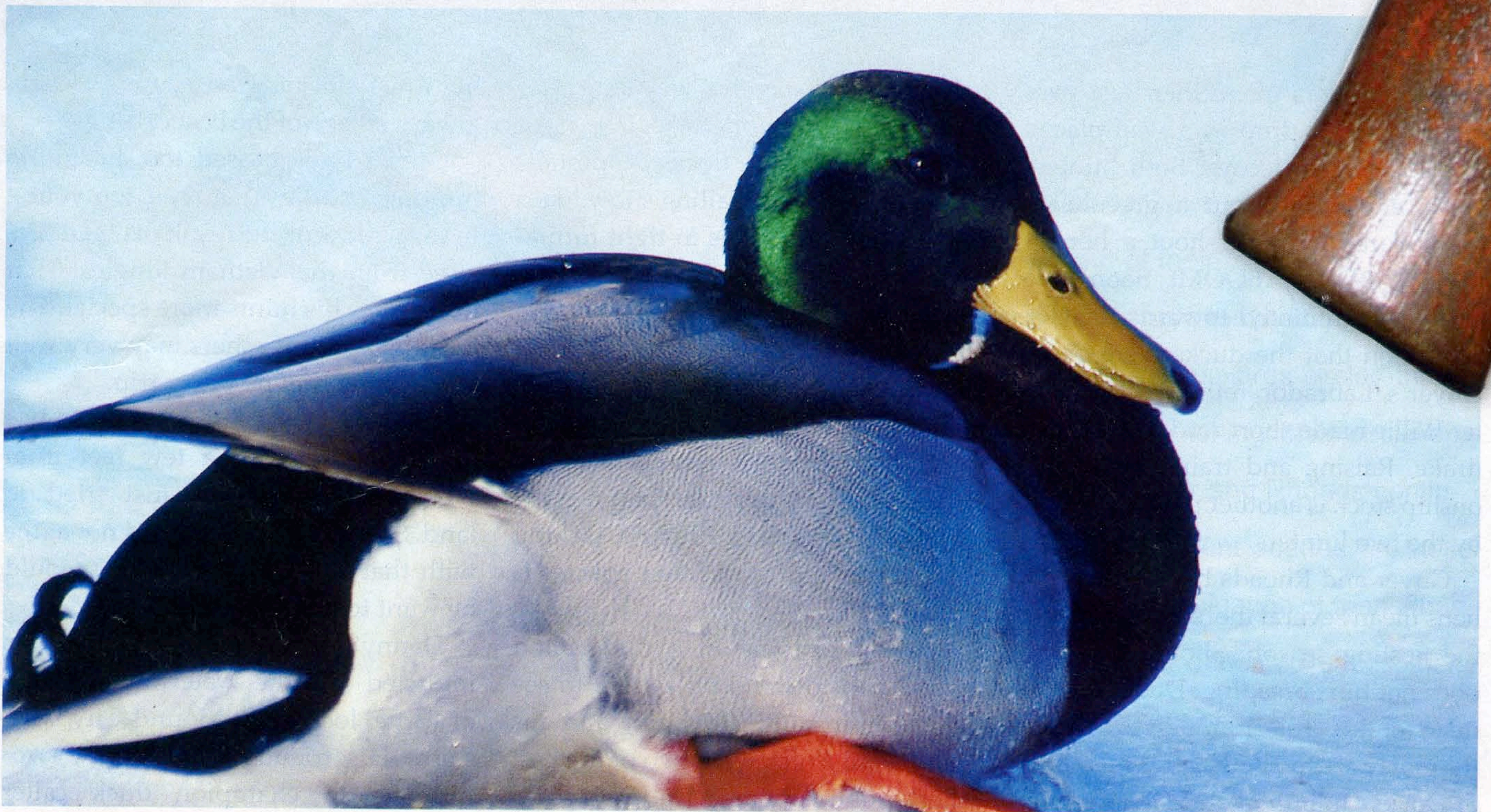
away Valley public hunting areas. Guyer and Rhoads have hunted most of the properties in the Squaw Creek area and several spots on their favorite, Smithville Lake, located 30 miles north of Kansas City.

"I am just glad that Daddy had the time to take me hunting," Guyer said. "We believe that today's youth should experience waterfowl hunting too."

Both hunters took great pride in introducing Nicole Jeannin to the sport several years ago. The 17-year-old high school student has gained a lot of skill calling and shooting ducks with friends or by herself. She has attended classes in camouflage after visiting the duck blind before school, a fact many of the boys find very appealing. She calls Guyer every day for what they call a "feather report."

"Just hope she marries a duck hunter after college," Rhoads said.

Jeannin has gained many of the ethics taught through observation in a sport that once was





only enjoyed by men. Guyer and Rhoads only hope that she will always have choice places to hunt.

"We have enjoyed the luxury of many choice hunting spots throughout Missouri," Guyer said. "I am just glad that duck and goose hunting is still alive and well. Duck numbers dropped pretty low a few years ago. We try to only take what we will eat at one sitting. We want to help preserve duck numbers."

Guyer and Rhoads don't just limit their selective hunting ethics to ducks. I recently witnessed this on a northwest Missouri goose hunt. The hunters only planned to shoot giant Canada geese, or maybe a snow goose or two that passed by.


They called to several flocks and soon were rewarded by a group that dropped down and landed. Five lesser Canada geese settled in and stood ten feet from the blind on a frozen pond close to several goose decoys. Guyer and Rhoads watched the birds, who

soon took off and disappeared over a nearby tree line.

"That is not what we are after," Rhoads said with a half smile on his face. "We are after the big geese today."

The day passed without another goose in shooting range. Then, at five minutes until the end of legal shooting time, three giant Canada geese drifted in and were dropped in the decoys by three shotguns. Guyer picked up a goose and sized up the heavy bird.

"I guess the hunting gods rewarded us for being patient."

Most will never consider waterfowl hunting a spiritual sport, but who knows? Those who constantly participate consider goose and duck hunting a passion. Those who passed away and loved the sport may still be around when mallards circle or a flock of giant Canada geese drop in. At least I hope so. 

■ HALL OF FAME

The Waterfowler's Hall of Fame

Waterfowl hunting in Northwest Missouri is legendary. Many celebrities from the 1930s through the 1960s traveled to this area for remarkable goose and duck hunting. Area hunters developed a high skill level for hunting ducks and some became world champion duck and/or goose callers.

The Waterfowlers Hall of Fame is a legally incorporated, not-for-profit institution chartered in the state of Missouri. Its mission and goal as stated in its charter is to honor those individuals who have contributed to the waterfowling scene - whether as a sportsman, writer, artist, sculptor, canine companion, or conservationist.

The Waterfowlers Hall of Fame began in 1990 when the first group of inductees was honored. A class of inductees has been inducted in each succeeding year. To date, these inductees, now totaling 154, have been active in waterfowling around the Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge area in Northwest Missouri. However, at the suggestion and request of visiting waterfowlers, it was later decided by the board to open up the Waterfowlers Hall of Fame nationally to honor all aspects of waterfowling.

The list of inductees is growing, and memorabilia is collecting, in oak cases, adding some classy decor to the McRae Community Center in Mound City, MO. For more information call (800) 490-8035 or email laukemper1@squawcreek.net.

