

A SPRING WHITE GOOSE

HUNT

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Snow geese have extremely sharp eyes and an uncanny sense of survival that rival most wildlife. Their survival abilities inflated numbers to the point of causing great harm to the Alaskan Tundra during their nesting and resting months throughout late spring and summer. Thus, a spring white goose season was created to eliminate white geese in big numbers, a wide open sport

where plugs are legally taken out of pump shotguns, limits are either non-existent or exceptionally large and electronic callers are allowed. (Check your local regulations.)

The morning started out cloudy, windy and cold on March 7, 2007. Scores of white geese from beautiful Squaw Creek Refuge in northwest Missouri flew high enough to use

oxygen. Long lines of Canada geese slipped over in tight formation while small squadrons of ducks buzzed past our blind as a flyby tribute, or at least that's how we perceived it. I glanced back at Danny Guyer's remarkable black lab, Mam-J who studied the overhead ballet with great interest, wondering when her chance to retrieve a fat goose would come.



My sheet of cardboard became hard to sit on after awhile. Injuries from younger, more foolish days make sitting in one spot unbearable for long periods. But our set was good we had plenty of geese to hunt, a good reason to be uncomfortable for long periods of time.

We started with only the electronic callers and then decided to field test

Knight and Hale's new White Noise goose call. My calling is mediocre at best and Guyer provided needed instruction.

"Listen to the higher pitches by live geese," He said. "Now try to make those higher sounds, like this."

He took out his call and started producing higher pitches followed

by low, guttural sounds. His cadence took on numerous sounds from a flock of white geese. Lawrence Taylor and I took note and started practicing. Soon we were both producing the correct sounds and two blue geese started hovering overhead.

I glanced up at the geese that were legal to shoot with a brace of snows

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and marveled at how they were hanging in space without moving forward, backwards or losing or gaining altitude. They were over the top of us and hanging there, surveying the area for danger. Our camouflage worked and both geese slipped low over the decoys. One blue goose flew away and the other stayed, a great head shot by Taylor. Mam-J got her wish and made a picture perfect retrieve.

We were set up for singles and doubles while most of the big flocks flew high over Mound City and over the river bluff hills where huge fields of row crops still offered nourishment to incredible numbers of waterfowl. Most had fed on the fields since fall.

Mild weather allowed the birds to stay in this Mecca. Remarkably, we could watch thousands of

white geese flying over our position for two hours in long, stretched out flocks and suddenly the skies were empty. Yet we knew the entire mob would eventually return. This was when the snacks came out and stories were told including a great idea by Guyer for any duck or goose blind, a bag of apples and caramel dip—something my fat gut did not need but welcomed.

A lone honk soon brought us out of our leisure time and the aggressive calling started again. Our sounds on the White Noise goose calls coupled with the electronic caller that was set for a single goose sound convinced a Ross's Goose to swing in for a look. Soon the little goose that is legal with a white goose limit where we were hunting met a load of steel shot and flopped in

the decoys for Mam-J. That little beauty will soon hang on my office wall.

Another lone goose slipped into our airspace late in the morning. The mature snow goose had solid black wing tips and a beautiful white body. The cautious bird made several wide passes before settling into our decoys. A well-placed load of steel shot easily dropped the goose.

That evening we packed up our gear and walked down a mile-long dike past pools of muskrat dens and beavers slapping their tails in protest of our presence. A flock of ducks occasionally passed overhead and landed in each pool. We tried to name each duck by their silhouettes, possible but not probable in the darkness. The dark sky suddenly filled with sounds of returning geese winging towards the Squaw Creek Refuge.

I stopped and closed my eyes to listen as hundreds; possibly thousands of high-pitched voices filled the air. I silently thanked God for this miracle and that future generations may enjoy the same, just as earlier generations of hunters and conservationists had wished the same for my generation. Soon the flocks landed and we continued on, silently remembering that addictive sound in the sky.



MAKE YOUR OWN SNOW GOOSE SET

We set up for smaller groups in a marsh by a big pool and had a great time fooling singles and doubles that happened by. Three geese hung overhead approximately 40 minutes while we traded goose sounds with them. We finally gave up and let them go. They hung around a few more minutes, before heading north—swine geese!

Guyer set out approximately 300 decoys and two speakers. We had a great time picking out smaller flocks to call. Most were returning from the fields and looking for suitable places to rest.

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Big, established outfitters take a more ambitious approach by setting out one to three thousand white decoys, rags and other white things with at least four speaker sets making goose sounds. During my youth in the 1960's white geese decoyed to row crops filled with white diapers or even sheets from newspapers. The Sunday



morning edition could mean a white goose dinner. The geese are more educated now and elaborate sets of white goose decoys are used.

Sets are generally in big row crops where geese fed the previous day before returning to Squaw Creek Refuge. Scouts follow the geese and set up where they are going, a key rule of any kind of waterfowling, be where the geese or ducks want to go. They can only hope that permission is granted by the land owner or that the geese swing in close to a field where they already have permission and large numbers of decoys.

One guide said he had set out decoys all night and only got an hour sleep. You could see bags under each outfitter's eyes that

evening at Quacker's, the local hunter's restaurant where Taylor, Guyer and I enjoyed a fine K.C. Strip steak, baked potato and salad.

The guides from each outfitter worked hard to earn their \$100 to \$300 fee per hunter. Occasionally we could hear a barrage in the hills where eight or ten hunters cut loose on clouds of geese that dropped in to eat. Chances are good dead geese were carried out of each field in large numbers to later be made into goose jerky or sausage, a local favorite. Others take the goose breasts and make McNuggets or roast each breast on the grill after marinating in Italian salad dressing or buttermilk over night.



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ABOUT THE AREA

Lewis and Clark passed through the Squaw Creek area a couple of hundred years ago via the Missouri River and noted dining on the abundant wildlife, perhaps waterfowl included. Geese and ducks have traveled to this area on their annual southward pilgrimage and then back in the spring for centuries.

Hunters in the area are legendary, including celebrities like Ted Williams and many locals who were darned good hunters. Many world champion callers came from the area and are now inducted in the Northwest Missouri Waterfowlers Hall of Fame. I first hunted geese in the area in 1965 and was amazed at the number of geese that flew over our blind. The numbers of geese that passed overhead this March were even more overwhelming.

Today's Squaw Creek spring survey numbers on March 7, 2007 are remarkable with 300,000 geese, 44,000 ducks and 25 bald eagles who love to follow waterfowl flocks in search of injured or already dead birds. Waterfowl numbers in the area change daily. The entire mass of geese could move out with northern weather improvements and probably will by the time you read this.

You can contact Squaw Creek Refuge by calling 1-(660)-442-3187 or check their web site at: www.fws.gov/midwest/squawcreek

THE WATERFOWLER'S HALL OF FAME

Waterfowl hunting in Northwest Missouri is legendary. Many celebrities from the 1930's through the 1960's 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 1-800-490-8035 or email laukemper1@squawcreek.net.

