

# *Hunting Waterfowl with Dean Regehr's Outdoor Adventures!*

By Bill Saiff III

Hunters adjusted decoys as the Alberta blackness gave way to a rising ball of fire in the east. This day would dawn clear and cool. The remnants of this stable high pressure system would soon give way to the Chinook winds that preceded the next front. Geese and ducks would be on the move today taking advantage of the “small grain” smorgasbord that lay on the Canadian countryside. Our outfitter Dean Regehr and his partner Phil Cahoon had arranged decoys to represent a field full of content feeding Canada Geese. The duo had scouted this field the night before and used laser range finders to pinpoint the exact location of the geese. They explained that it is vitally important to rig the decoys exactly where the geese want to sit. Dean stated, “Our fields are full of feed for the geese and they can get a meal just about anywhere but certain geographic characteristics can be more appealing to them.” “We take note of these changes in topography and rig exactly where the geese last fed!”

The “Seaway Gang” a group from New York laid sequestered in their low profile blinds. Chit chat consisted of old waterfowl stories highlighted by tales of shooting excellence—the usual goose hunting talk! September goose hunting in Alberta is an early morning affair. Geese at this time of year feed twice a day and the first flight usually occurs around 7:30 am. A vision of incoming Canada’s danced in our heads as the morning quiet was broken by the rush of wings. At first it sounded like a far off jet fighter but the “sheet



ripping” tear of primary feathers in a fast descent could only mean one thing - “DUCKS”! I shot a glance at my wristwatch, it read 6:41 am. Ducks are always the first to arrive and today would be no different. A knot of Mallards and Pintails swung the rig from behind, running with the wind as they eyed the dekes that surrounded our stealth blinds. Someone hissed “Let Em’ run” as gunners hunkered down to try and be as inconspicuous as possible. Natural vegetation from our swath field had been woven carefully into the grassing straps of our hunting blinds. With camouflage in place, these hides were virtually invisible to the untrained eye. Rod Haydel, my friend and duck calling professional from Louisiana leaned on his double reed call as the birds passed the downwind perimeter of the rig. One by one these hungry dabblers broke formation, turning to face the wind. Phil had placed 4 dozen G&H Mallard shells just 15 yards behind the blinds and it appeared that this group of ducks was already locked on. There was no need for fancy calling as Rod worked some magic with a few simple positioning quacks. The ducks looked right through our trap as they bore down looking for a place to land. As orange paddles stretched towards earth we heard the words we had all been longing for, “Cut



Em’ boys!” Lids flipped on stealth blinds, gunners rose, and my mind’s eye shifted the whole scene into slow motion as my level of concentration increased. I can vaguely remember the black, tubular mass of the barrel as it lifted acquiring the first target. Drawing a line from underneath the big Mallard I blotted him out and touched the trigger. The ducks in front hovered, combating gravity as they

strained to gain lift. Ducks began to fall, and through my peripheral vision I could see my partner's handy work paying off. Dean's dog Coco was already at work policing up the 7 downed Dabblers from the stubble. Soon, 5 good sized Mallards and 2 Pintail were hanging from the game strap- "Our hunt had begun".

The first morning of the first hunt is always the same. Hunters are filled with a higher level of anticipation than at any other time of the year. The many provinces of Canada provide an early season getaway for duck and goose hunters. While great hunting is to be had across the prairies, Alberta is special. Generally, hunters gun for Canada Geese in the morning and for a mix of dabbling ducks in the afternoon. Sometimes, like on this day, both ducks and geese are frequenting a field.

The style of hunt can also vary. Field shoots for ducks and geese are common but "pot-hole" hunts for ducks and true "marsh style" hunts for waterfowl also exist. This variety is what first attracted me to Alberta. During September, most waterfowl seasons in the States are closed except for some early opportunities at resident geese and migrating teal. September in Alberta is a no-holds barred look at all types of waterfowl hunting. It's entirely likely that hunters will even encounter some Snowgeese or Specklebellies! Indian summer days characterize the weather but Mother Nature can fool you at this time of year. 60 degree weather has given way to frosty temperatures and 6 inches of snow in just 24 hours. These conditions can throw a logistical hiccup into a hunt but Dean and Phil are well equipped to handle any situation. This was evidenced in 2003' when the snow hit our group on September 16<sup>th</sup>. We rigged decoys in blizzard conditions but when daylight arrived so did the ducks! We were fortunate to be filming for our outdoor series "Cabin Country" on this day. The program we taped was called "Snowbound Mallards", and is probably the most memorable hunt we've ever shared in Alberta. The camera captured most of the 48 ducks taken, as they pitched the rig with a reckless abandon seldom seen. Our production team makes it a priority to film with Dean and Phil every year. Dean Regehr's Outdoor Adventures holds a top spot on our destination list because of the consistent hunting. There are never any guarantees in "fair chase" hunting but this is as close as you can get!

Our gang of hunters shared plenty of excitement on the ducks that worked our rig at first light. We knew that whatever Mallards and Pintails were taken were simply a bonus to the Canada Geese we were hunting. Several roosting ponds were located near our feed field and it wasn't long before the long mournful honks of approaching Canada Geese could be heard. Rod Haydel spotted the Canada's first, a thin skein of black on the horizon. Rod long honked on his company's new short reed call (The Haydel SC-04) and the geese banked in our direction. Our group was field testing the new Haydel goose call on this hunting trip and we had high hopes for how it would perform. Three T-Flags twitched simultaneously adding the illusion of landing geese to our rig. The group of 25 geese approached closer and we switched to the rapid clucking indicative of greeting calls. The flock seemed mesmerized by the sound as they spread their formation and looked at the landing holes in our decoy pattern. Our pattern was a loose rig of family groups that represented the appearance of the live geese we had seen feeding in this field the day before. When the geese broke the 100 yard mark, flags were lowered and our callers imitated the gander whine of the lead honker. There is always one opinion leader in each flock and we had this birds attention. The flock was completely fooled as they back-winged with paddles down. Our hunters



rose from their stealth blinds and methodically began to cut the group. The proper harvest and management of an incoming flock can be a surgical operation. When a flock is well managed, gunners begin shooting the outside edges and work their way towards the center of the flock. Geese on the inside practically have to land before they can regain the necessary loft to escape their predicament. When gunners harvest large numbers from any flock, this is how it's done. Novice waterfowlers tend to concentrate on the closest birds (the candy shot) while the outside perimeter of the flock eases out of gun range. The result of poor flock management is a hunt where gunners "chip away" at incomers, extending the hunt and educating plenty of birds. Waterfowling is a sport where veteran hunters understand the beauty in precision.

The Canadas continued their sorties over our swath field and for the next hour and a half, hardly a moment went by that there weren't geese in the air. A combo shoot for ducks and geese was the perfect way to begin our six day stay. It had been a full year since we had enjoyed the camaraderie and quality hunting that takes place on these fertile plains—"It was good to be back!" The friendship, the jokes, the tremendous number of birds and a well managed hunt keep us coming back for more. September in Alberta spells pure waterfowling adventure!



**Note:** Bill Saiff III is the host of the outdoor television series "Cabin Country", as seen on public television stations. He and his group from upstate New York hunt annually with Dean Regehr's Outdoor Adventures. VHS copies of waterfowl programs taped in Alberta can be obtained on-line at [www.wpbstv.org](http://www.wpbstv.org).