

A BLIND FOR THE SNEAK SHOOTER

THE DUCK HUNTER, ANTICIPATING THE SPORT OF THE FALL, SHOULD PREPARE NOW TO BUILD HIS RIG AND BLIND FOR SHOOTING DAYS TO COME

By PAUL F. BARTLING

THE majority of duck hunters who go to the bays, lakes or marshes for a week-end or a week or two of hunting in the fall usually follow the line of least resistance and confine their kind of shooting to Jump, Pass or Point, according to the layout and location of their shooting ground. The three methods named are really the simpler ways of duck shooting and from which the duck shooter graduates, as he becomes more proficient, to the more difficult forms of hunting, provided, of course, he cares to go to the trouble and expense.

The other methods I have in mind are known as "Layout" and "Sneak" shooting. Neither of the last mentioned methods are used until after the river or lake ducks come down from the North which, usually, in the lower lake region of Michigan, is around October the twelfth or fifteenth. Mallards and other marsh ducks will not decoy well enough in open water to make it worth while to hunt them, though I have had mallards decoy to a layout "set" just as prettily as any red-head or blue-bill, and have killed quite a number that way. Widgeon, too, will swing over close enough for a shot and will often decoy well.

Jump shooting is good sport. About all that is needed is a good, light punt and a gun. A dog is often of good service in retrieving cripples or dead birds that fall in the high grass or rushes.

Good jump shooting can be had on large wild rice beds early in the season or, in fact, any time and place when ducks come into the marshes to feed.

Pass shooting is usually done early in the morning or just before dusk, favorite places being channels connecting lakes or points in the line of flight used by ducks coming in or leaving the marshes at dusk or early in the morning. Good shooting may also be had on stormy days when the ducks are kept moving and are flying low.

Point shooting over decoys is probably well enough known to most hunters to need but little comment. It is probably the best and easiest method of shooting ducks. Having a good point with the proper wind and in the line of flight, one can usually get a good day's shoot and gather in a good bag.

The only objection to point shooting is that, after a short time, they are usually "burned out." Hunters, good, bad and indifferent will be after the good points every day and after having been shot at every day for a week or two the ducks learn to give the points a wide berth. Also, it may happen that after the first severe frost the rushes on the points are so broken down by the hunters and storms as to no longer afford good cover. This is especially true of points that are formed from rushes grow-

ing out in the water. On land points it is not at all difficult to build a blind that is not too conspicuous; and in making blinds always remember that the blind must not be in too great contrast to the surroundings.

Perhaps you are hunting from a shore that has no good shooting points but where the ducks feed some distance out in the bay or lake. It is at this time and under the conditions just named that layout and sneak shooting really come into their own though they were as effective, and probably more so, when the shooting was good on the points. But why go way out into the lake to hunt when you can get the ducks to come to you on the points? I do but very little



Gathering a double

outside shooting until the ducks start to shy the points.

Shooting from a layout is great sport but a man must be quick to rise to a sitting position and in getting his gun to bear on the birds.

Layout boats, built specially for the purpose, are narrow, box-shaped affairs with the deck extending from six to ten inches beyond the sides and built so as to be nearly flush with the surface of the water. The weight of the gunner brings the underside of the deck even with the water. On stormy days a canvas combing is raised to keep out the water which may wash over the deck.

This method of shooting requires two men and a larger boat or launch to carry the hunters and decoys to the shooting ground which, depending on locality and general conditions, is sometimes a good distance out in the lake or bay. But at best, a rowboat is necessary to carry the decoys and tow the layout.

The man in the rowboat must also anchor at a distance from the gunner in order to pick up dead birds and to chase cripples.

Before setting out decoys for layout shooting it is always a good policy to get a line on the flight of the ducks or to set out where the ducks have been feeding or bedding. Arriving at the selected spot the layout boat is anchored in position and the decoys are thrown ahead to form a crescent, bringing the ends in toward the boat on each side. This method of setting will give the shooter a better chance at the birds that "swing the ends."

Until recently there was no limit to the number of decoys that could be set out in Michigan waters. The law now says you may use only fifty and it is, therefore desirable that they be placed to the best advantage. When properly set, the boat should lie from twenty to twenty-five yards away from the ends and centre of the decoys. When it is possible to use more than fifty decoys they can be set close in and around the front and sides of the boat. Ducks will decoy better to a larger flock of decoys and will not notice the boat so readily, though it seems that on certain days they wouldn't decoy if you had a thousand decoys out. I have never been able to understand why this is. In fact, I think that any one who can figure out just how ducks reason is a wonder.

When coming in to the decoys there is no doubt but that they see the boat but, apparently pay no attention to it, they being intent on finding a place to light in the flock or, at least, giving them the "once over." All of this when the ducks are in a mood to decoy. Otherwise, about the best you can get is a few shots at the birds that swing the ends with, occasionally, a single that sails right in and has its wings all set to light when, if you are quick enough, you finish the operation for it with a load of number fives.

I have done layout shooting in a fifteen-foot boat of good beam, setting about twelve inches above the water. Most of the layout shooting on the lower part of Saginaw Bay is done from the larger boats. The ducks seem to decoy as well and one can carry his own decoys and pick up his own ducks.

OF the utmost importance in layout shooting is that the gunner lie perfectly still until the ducks have come in as close as they will or have set their wings to light. The shooter should then be able to rise to a sitting position and to bring his gun on the ducks in one motion. No time can be lost as the birds sure get "in high" when a man bobs up from an innocent looking boat that, to them, as they are flying, probably ap-

pears to be some object drifting with the wind or current. I have had singles come in and light, or attempt to do so, while I was sitting up in the boat sky gazing, but I wasn't moving. An object doesn't really mean much to a duck until he sees it move. Many good shots at birds have been lost by hunters who could not sit or lie still until the bird came within range. I once had a good trap shooter but a novice at duck shooting out hunting with me. I marked a mallard heading straight in though still a long way from the decoys. I cautioned my friend to be ready, telling him that "a duck is heading in." He raised up above the blind and, taking aim, waited, or started to wait for the duck to fly right up to him and give him a shot: maybe he thought he was at the traps. He didn't get a shot but I gave him a nice little lecture and a few words of advice. When I got through he told me that he didn't know there was so much to learn about duck shooting.

There isn't such a great deal to know

law covering the subject one hundred to one hundred and twenty-five makes a good sized flock. The shooting ground, as in layout shooting, should be on the feeding or bedding ground, or in the line of flight. The flock may be mixed, using blue-bill, red-head and canvasback together, though it is not a bad plan to keep the different species by themselves. They should be set either in square or rectangular form with an open space eight or ten feet running through the center through which you guide your boat when coming down.

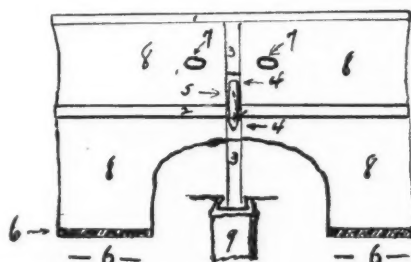
The types of boats vary in general design; they are fifteen or sixteen feet long and from thirty to thirty-six inches beam and from eight to twelve inches above the water line. The cockpit is roomy as usually two men hunt from the boat and there must be space for the decoys also. The boat is pointed at both ends for, when "lying back" the boat is anchored from the stern.

Next in importance to the boat and decoys, and that which really makes

holes should not be cut until after blind has been finished and set up in boat and you have gauged the proper place for them by taking the position you would use in watching the flock as the man paddling brings you down on the birds. They should, in any case, be cut low enough so that the observer's head will be down behind the blind. The blind I am about to describe is of simple construction but it will be serviceable and will answer the purpose. After having built this blind and used it you will, no doubt, see room for improvement and alterations to fit your particular boat. As mentioned before, there is no standard pattern; each hunter building his blind to fit his boat and to suit his own ideas without departing from the primary idea of the purpose for which it is intended.

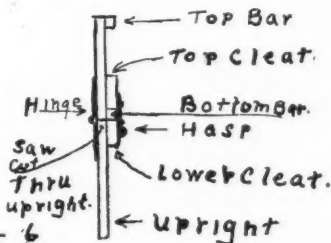
For the blind that I have in mind all that is needed are two yards of canvas, two pine edgings $\frac{3}{4}$ x $1\frac{1}{4}$ x 6', one piece of ash or oak $\frac{3}{4}$ x 2" x 2', one medium size strap hinge, one hasp

Inside of blind.

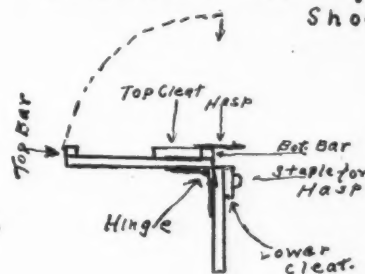


- 1 - top Bar 5 Hasp
2 - Bot. Bar 6 Lead Weights
3 - Upright. 7-7 Peep Holes

Cross Section.



Cross Section Dropped for Shooting.



- 4-4 - cleats. 8 Canvas
9 Socket to hold blind.

but a man must be patient and, above all, must learn to keep down until he is ready to shoot.

Sneak shooting is all action but, as in all forms of duck shooting, all movement must be concealed. Sneak shooting is a game for the veteran hunter. It requires plenty of hard work, good judgment and quick action.

Before going further a few words on the equipment necessary will be in place.

THE decoys should be much larger than those used for other forms of shooting. For comparison, I will state that I have canvasback decoys as large as live wild geese. The ducks will hold better with the larger decoys. The bottoms should be flat and well weighted, or fitted with a metal or wooden fin, or keel, to prevent them from rolling in roughwater. It is not absolutely necessary to have the larger decoys but they answer the purpose better. The larger your decoys, of course, the fewer you can carry unless you have a launch to take you to your shooting ground. The number will necessarily vary according to the laws of the state in which you hunt. In Michigan, as before stated, the legal number is fifty, but where there is no

sneak shooting possible, is the sneak blind. This, usually, is made of canvas and extends twelve or fifteen inches from each side of the boat and is from twelve to eighteen inches high, depending on the depth of the cockpit. The canvas is trimmed on the bottom of blind to fit the shape of deck and extends to the water to hide any movement of the paddle. Perhaps a description of a type of blind would be of interest. Since these blinds are mostly home-made affairs, built to suit the fancy and type of boat of the hunter using it, there is no real standard shape or size. The type shown in drawing is one that can be easily made in an hour or so at a cost that ought not to exceed two dollars.

Consider that the blind is intended to conceal you and your movements when paddling or steering your boat and you will not have much trouble in designing it to fit your boat. Determine just how wide you want to make the blind by judging how far over the side you will reach when paddling. The height can best be judged by the depth of the cockpit. It should be high enough to cover the head of the gunner in the front of the boat, who should be kneeling and leaning forward or on hands and knees. The peep

and staple, some screws and tacks, and three or four pounds of lead which can be melted and poured to form two strips to be used as weights for the canvas flaps that extend to the water on each side of the boat. Determine how high you want your blind by the depth of your cockpit and height of combing at the bow of your boat, remembering that the deeper the cockpit the lower the blind should be, but make it as low as possible. Lay strips at desired distance apart and screw on upright directly in center. Fasten on hinge so that joint will come on bottom edge of bottom bar. The canvas can then be tacked on, leaving surplus on bottom to be trimmed when blind is set up, to fit around combing and deck and for the flaps that drop to the water. Saw through upright from inside to meet joint of hinge.

Two small blocks will have to be screwed on inside of upright, just above and below bottom bar, to bring it flush with lower bar so that the hasp and staple can be fastened on. The hasp is used to hook up blind with lower part of upright to keep blind up when going down to your decoys. When up to the decoys and ready to shoot, the hasp is

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 370)



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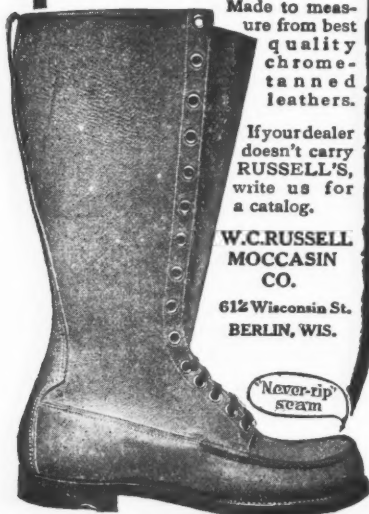
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A BLIND FOR THE SNEAK SHOOTER

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 345)

unhooked and the wind causes blind to drop forward on the deck of the boat, giving the hunter a clear view and plenty of room to shoot. On front end of cockpit make a socket to take squared lower end of upright. This should be made so that upright will fit snugly to prevent blind from turning in the wind. After you have set blind up on your boat, cut out balance of canvas to fit snugly over deck of boat and around combing. Weight the bottom of flaps with lead and your blind is ready with the exception of a white or light gray coat of paint.

Should the blind extend too far on the sides, the ends can be cut off to the proper length.

A short paddle is a necessary part of the outfit as a long handled paddle would show above the blind. The boat should be fitted with a hook on the stern to which the anchor line can be fastened. The anchor line should have a buoy attached near boat so that line will float and at the same time be marked. This will save hauling anchor each time. The boat, paddle and blind should be painted white or light gray. The hunters should wear a white suit of overalls such as used by painters or plasterers. It is not absolutely necessary to wear white and, often, not practical, but it is less conspicuous should you, by any chance, show above or from sides of blind.

NOW, assume that you have made blind and are all rigged out for sneak shooting. The boat is loaded with decoys and all made ready the night before. You start out not too early in the morning as sneak shooting isn't like point shooting. With point shooting you are up long before daylight and on your way to your favorite point. If you are lucky, you get there first and throw out the decoys and wait for daylight and what ducks may come your way. In sneak shooting or layout shooting, it is not necessary to start so early unless your cottage is a long way from the shooting ground, for you will want to see how the ducks are moving before you "set in." Arriving at the shooting ground and having decided just where you will set the decoys you proceed with the following operation, remembering that opening for your boat running through the decoys:

We will presume that the ducks are flying in good shape so you speed up and are just a little excited. The decoys are set to your satisfaction so you row back about two hundred yards to the windward directly back of your decoys, allowing for the drift of the current. If any, as the main thing is to come down on your decoys in as straight a course as possible—tacking should be avoided. Getting back the proper distance you throw the anchor and hook line to the stern of the boat. Next, you set up your blind, hooking it with hasp and staple to keep it upright. The guns are loaded and you