

Duck Hunting Tips - 6 Old Tricks That Still Work

by Doug Howlett



Waterfowlers have proven to be some of the most resourceful of all sportsmen throughout history, with their combined approach of calling, decoying, and plain old woodsmanship. Here are six old-school tips worth remembering as you prepare to hit the water for ducks and geese this fall.

Add motion ▶ Before motion decoys, hunters used jerk strings and pumped their legs in the water to send ripples through their spread. Another great trick is to mount an electric trolling motor to your blind or on a wood frame painted to blend in, set it near your spread, and let the propeller run just below the surface. The motion will provide silent but continuous motion to your decoys and keep water from freezing, too.

Fake a water hole ▶ Virginia waterfowler Kurt Derwort can be found most days of the season hunting geese on the state's famed Eastern Shore, where on frozen mornings old-timers used to use large sheets of plastic—cut in irregular shapes—to mimic a shallow depression of water in a field. To make the trick work for ducks or geese, Derwort says to find a depression, remove any big stalks and weeds, lay the plastic down, and put the weeds and a few decoys around the edge. Sprinkle the plastic with water to give it more reflection and shine. From the air, it will look like open water when everything else is frozen.

Muddy the waters ▶ Ducks feeding in the shallows upset the bottom and make the water muddy. Clear water will look unnatural to ducks pulling a fly-by, so stir the muck up in your spread by stomping through it and grinding your feet around during slow, flightless periods. Skim the submerged soil with a paddle, or if you're on an ATV, drive it in figure eights to stir up silt, which will linger for at least a half hour.

Multiply with mud hens ▶ Another old trick is to hunt a marsh at low tide and flip a shovelful of mud onto an existing mud mound or in a very shallow spot to make it look like a duck floating among a scattering of real decoys. Derwort says mud hens or mud ducks are a cheap way to make it look like there are more bodies in your spread than you've actually put out.

Ratchet it up ▶ One of the best pieces of waterfowling gear to carry along with your calls and shells is a pair of ratchet cutters. Whether your blind needs a quick spruce up just before legal shooting light or the ducks prefer landing in another part of the lake and a move is in order, cutters allow you to quickly and quietly snip limbs up to a half inch thick that can be used to brush-in a favored spot or set up an impromptu blind along an open bank where the ducks are waiting to land.

Look lazy ▶ On warm, still, or cloudy days when ducks can see every detail and flights are few and far between, add a few sleeper decoys to your mix, as well as field decoys lined up on a log. Real ducks tend to loaf like this on such days, and adding these dekes to your mix will make your spread appear far more realistic. A cordless drill enables a quick and easy setup. Just drill a few holes in an existing log and insert your decoy stakes into the holes. Sleeper decoys will also help add to the realism of your goose spread—and can be effective straight through the tail end of the season once ice becomes a factor. A spread of standing, floater, and sleeper decoys can be just the ticket to fool late-season birds that have been shot at for weeks on their way down the flyway.

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