

Codorus Duck And Goose Guides Water Fowl Hunts

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YORK (York Co.) — A flock of geese winging overhead in September stirs various emotions: admiration for their beauty, sadness for the ending of another summer, or anticipation of cooler weather and the hectic pace of the harvest season.

At Codorus Duck and Goose, a flock of geese winging overhead generates excitement, expectation and likely some calls from clients.

Codorus Duck and Goose is the year-old business established by a trio of York-Adams area outdoorsmen who have teamed together to provide guided waterfowl hunts. The three are currently filling their schedules for this year's lineup of hunting trips.

Lee Irwin, Frank Plewa, and Mark Flaharty are all local conservation-organization employees. Irwin and Flaharty work for the York County Conservation District and Plewa is with the Army Corps of Engineers Adams County office. Though their conservation work, the three have become quite familiar with the terrain and wildlife populations of southcentral Pennsylvania. Plus, they're all avid hunters.

"My dad and I used to hunt a lot on the Eastern Shore with guides," explains Irwin of his background in waterfowling. "As we did more hunting, people used to ask to go along with us, so we knew there was interest."

"All three of us spend a lot of time outside and cover a lot of territory," he adds. "So we knew the areas where there are concentrations of ducks and geese and contacted landowners to lease hunting rights."

The Adams-Lancaster-York area is in the Eastern flyway of many species of waterfowl migrating between summer breeding grounds and wintering locations. And, large flocks of Canada geese grazing in fall grain fields have become commonplace in recent years, as increasing numbers of the big waterfowl winter in the area, rather than on the traditional grounds of the Eastern Shore.

According to Irwin, the Eastern Shore, "the goose capitol," has been hunted extremely hard in the last 15 or so years. More of the birds are "short-stopping" from that traditional destination, making southern Pennsylvania waterfowl hunting increasingly

attractive.

The number of local private ponds has also increased considerably, according to these conservation professionals, enhancing the area's desirability to waterfowl. Milder winters and geese returning to their place of hatch further add to the higher waterfowl population in the southern zone of the state's hunting regions.

But, while picturesque to watch, dozens — in some cases, hundreds — of geese nibbling away at wheat, barley and wintering alfalfa stands can wreak economic havoc on those acreages. Overgrazing by flocks of feeding waterfowl may result in thinning or complete elimination of large sections of crop plantings. Codorus Duck and Goose is interested in making contact with landowners who have such crop problems from waterfowl and who might consider leasing hunting rights.

Dabbling ducks, primarily mallards, wood ducks, black ducks, plus some green-winged teal and occasionally widgeons are the most likely targets for the duck hunting side of the guide service. The dabblers favor the shallow water and wetlands-type locations more prominent in the areas where Codorus Duck and Goose conducts its hunts. Diving ducks are not usually offered on these hunts, because diver species favor large, deeper bodies of water. For hunters favoring other game birds, pheasant and quail hunts can also be arranged.

Because weather and seasonal conditions affect the feeding and flight patterns of geese and ducks. Codorus Duck and Goose aims for a minimum of six locations from which they can select to hunt. Either above-ground blinds or field pits are used, based on terrain, weather and feeding conditions.

Buried pit blinds, of either wood or concrete, are a more permanent hunting location constructed on some of the land used by the guide service. They also utilize temporary, moveable blinds, which can quickly be set up in weeds and hedgerows. Weather, time of year, and location all factor into the need for hunt flexibility toward the end of the season, when birds have grown more wary.

As birds move from place to place, depending on changing conditions, the guides conduct ongoing field scouting and fre-



Their yellow lab retrievers are as vital wildlife "conservation" tool for Codorus Duck and Goose guides, from left, Mark Flaharty with Sandy, Lee Irwin with Oakley and Frank Plewa with Sheena.



Part of the guide service of Codorus Duck and Goose is providing and setting up decoys to lure the birds within shooting range.

quent consultations as to where the waterfowl action is the best.

"We try not to hunt the same place too often," notes Mark Flaharty. Though he has the least waterfowling experience of the three, Flaharty has adapted to the sport quickly. He has found one of the most exciting hunting techniques to be simply stretching out on the ground — garbed in camouflage of course — where birds nearly land on the hunters calling them into feeding.

Hunts can be arranged for either half or full days, six days per week during the season; combined hunts for both ducks and geese are available. South Zone seasons on ducks runs October 18-23 and November 18-25. Canada geese season in the South Zone is October 18-25, November 17 to December 31 and January 1-17, 1994. A special late season for resident geese in certain areas along the Susquehanna and Juniata Rivers runs January 20 through February 5, 1994. Bag limits on geese and ducks vary with species and the season's progression.

Utilizing guides provides hunters with a service aimed at a more productive hunt. The service scouts out the farms, to determine the locations' uses as flyways or feeding spots. Decoys and their set-up, as well as calling in birds, are all part of the service.

Each guide also relies on his four-legged partner as a vital part of the hunt. Irwin, Flaharty and Plewa all have yellow labrador retrievers, dogs which they

emphasize are a "conservation" tool of hunting. Codorus Duck and Goose clients with their own retrieving dogs are encouraged to bring them along on the hunts, too.

"If a hunter is allowed three ducks, that hunter's probably going to take home three ducks if at all possible, regardless of how many have been shot and lost," says Frank Plewa. "A dog can go out and find a downed bird that a person would never be able to spot. Every bird retrieved is a bird that won't go to waste; the dogs are so much better at conserving them in that way."

Plewa's four-year-old Sheena is a retriever trials champion; most of her recent litter of puppies were sold even before she gave birth. Irwin's dog, Oakley, and Flaharty's Sandy are younger dogs with great enthusiasm for the outdoors and the hunt.

Codorus Duck and Goose continually emphasizes safety as part of its guiding service. In fact, their promotional brochure plainly spells out the rule that a guide reserves the right to ask a hunter to leave if either unsafe or unsportsmanlike practices occur.

"We brief our hunters on safety and on what to expect during the hunt," emphasizes Lee Irwin. "We tell them when to take their gun safeties off, too."

"We will terminate the hunt if any unsafe conduct occurs," he repeats, adding, "the large percentage of hunters are very good sports."

In keeping with its safety and sportsmanship emphasis, the guide service forbids techniques like "sky-busting," the blasting away at flocks of fowl high out of shooting range.

Pleased with the first year's success, Codorus Duck and Goose already has several bookings for fall.

Since Maryland has reduced the limit of birds that may be taken this year, the guides expect increased interest in Pennsylvania's waterfowl hunting, with its more liberal bag limits.

Last year's reservations brought hunters from Washington, D.C., Baltimore, central and northern Pennsylvania, as well as some local shooters. Their success rate was about 80 percent on the more than two dozen hunts through the season.

"We had one hunter from England. He was here with the Izaak Walton League and did a program for our chapter so we took him for a hunt," recalls Irwin of guest who came from the farthest distance to hunt with them.

Fees for the guide services provided by Codorus Duck and Goose range from \$85 for a half day of duck or goose hunting to \$125 for a full day of combination hunting, for parties of up to four hunters.

For more information, contact Codorus Duck and Goose, R2, Box 50, Glen Rock, PA 17327, or phone (717) 227-0212 or (800) 484-7457-0313.



Decoys set up in an alfalfa field help lure flocks of Canada geese to within shooting range of the guides, waiting in a lineup of round hay bales.