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2015 HUNT ANNUAL

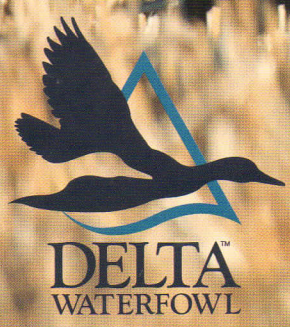
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Lone Star Layout

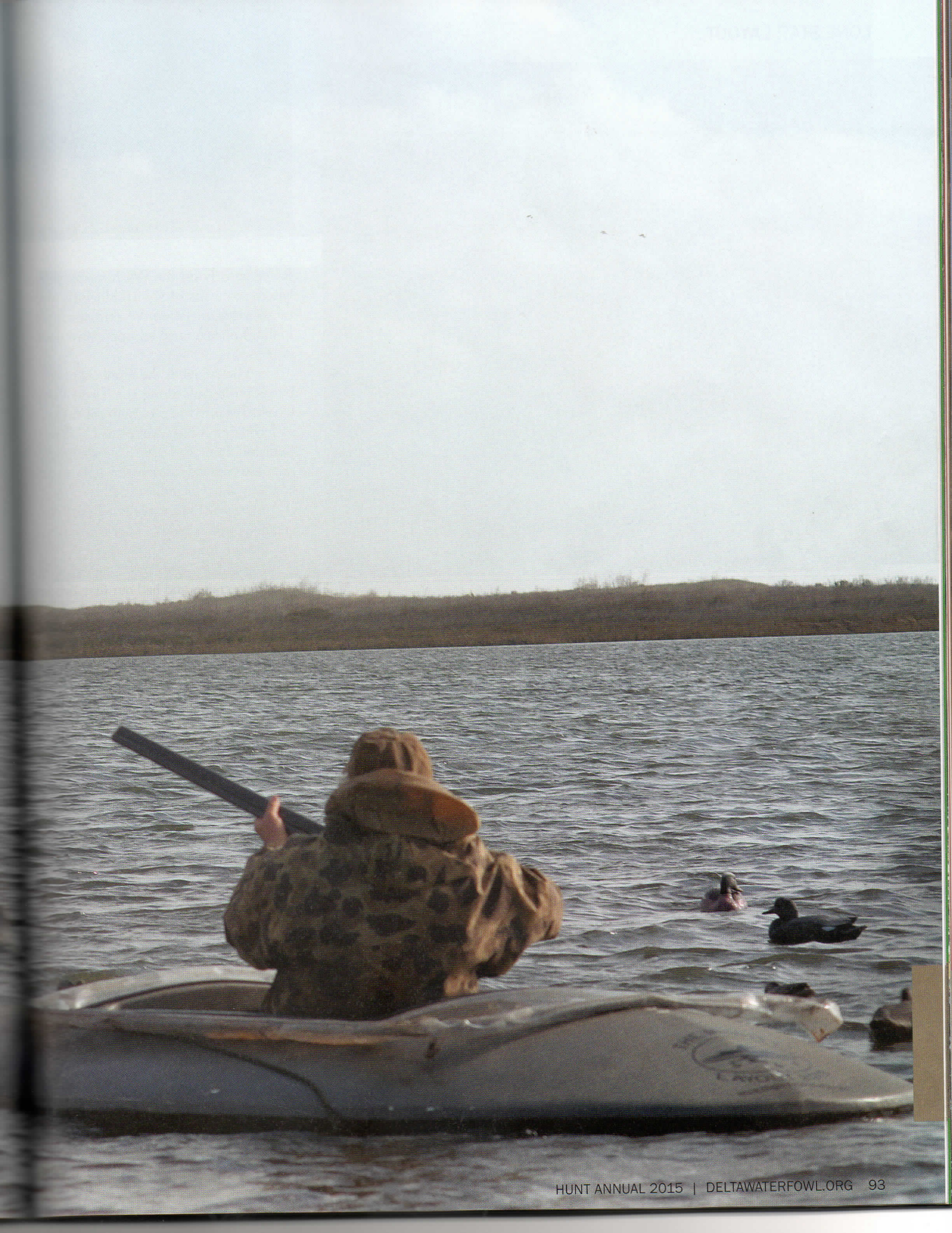
A DRAKE REDHEAD in breeding plumage is a very striking bird. So much so, that I rate redheads equal to canvasbacks. With such a bird in hand, one takes time to smooth the feathers and fully appreciate the species.

In western Oregon, where I live, redheads are uncommon. In 59 years of hunting the region, I have only encountered about a half-dozen. There are some in eastern Oregon, as well as on the upper Columbia

Wintering redheads swarm the decoys on the Texas Gulf Coast



STORY BY WORTH MATHEWSON
PHOTOS BY MARGE MATHEWSON





River, mostly on the Washington side, where redheads mix with bluebills and canvasbacks. In eastern Washington, near Idaho, I once hunted an impressive flock of redheads.

I had heard about the numbers of redheads wintering along the Texas Gulf Coast. I wanted to see them for myself, so I contacted Kris Kelley at Castaway Lodge in Seadrift, Texas. He casually said that if we wanted to come down, he could certainly show us redheads.

And he sure did. Not hundreds as I had guessed, but thousands — flocks that filled the entire horizon.

Along with the waterfowl, we got close to whooping cranes and had our first airboat experience. I'll not soon forget the boat ride. We traveled much faster than I liked in the pre-dawn darkness, approaching small islands at the same rate of speed, only to have Kelley cut the throttle a tad and power over those islands, small trees and all.

The redhead and pintail hunting was made much better as Marge and I were able to do it from layout boats rather than shore blinds. One of Kelley's guides, a young fellow from Minnesota, had brought two layouts down to try. I think Marge and I were the first to shoot from them.

Diver shooting over decoys is a classic hunt, and enjoying the experience from a layout boat makes it even more so. A few ducks came over my head low enough I could have hit them with the gun barrel.

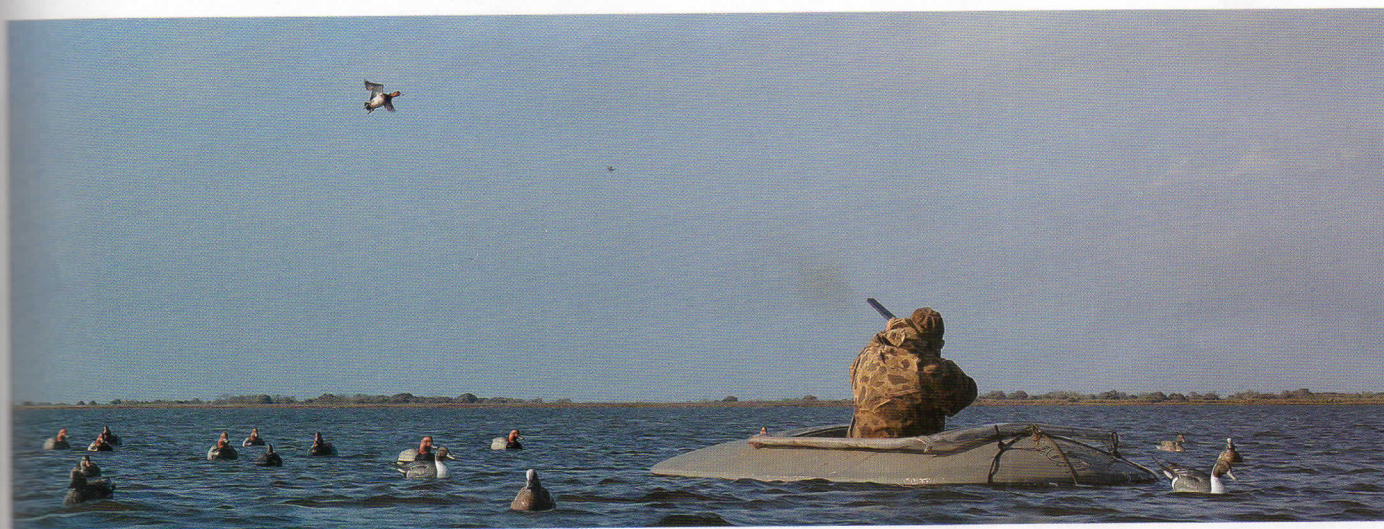
Everything fell into place to make it a memorable hunt. A part of that was the old, worn gun I used: a W&C Scott back action 10 bore from the late 1880s. It has been chambered into a 3-inch, 12-gauge. This is the same gun I once dropped into Swan Lake in Oregon and found in two years later when the lake went dry. I replaced the barrels and stock, but the action was fine.

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An advertisement for the White Rock Decoy Company. The background is a dark, moody image of a person in camouflage gear standing in a field, holding a large black and white duck decoy. Several other similar decoys are scattered on the ground. In the upper right, a large black silhouette of a bird in flight is shown. The word "New" is written in orange script. The product name "BLACKOUT" is in large, bold, white capital letters, with "3D HEADED SILOS" in smaller white capital letters below it. In the bottom left corner is the White Rock Decoy Company logo, which features a stylized bird silhouette and the company name. In the bottom right corner, there is a QR code and the text "Be A Nomad" and "Decoy Solutions for the Mobile Waterfowler".

New

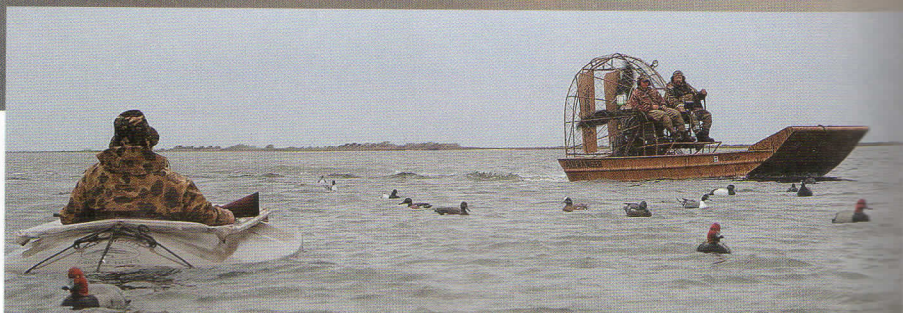
BLACKOUT

3D HEADED SILOS

White Rock
Decoy Company

Be A Nomad
Decoy Solutions for the Mobile Waterfowler

LONE STAR LAYOUT





We had only one small disappointment on the trip. For many years, I have thrown out a special decoy when diver hunting. I have taken it with me on several diver trips outside of Oregon. Kelley laughed when I pulled it out.

"We have seen just about every species of ducks down here, but never one of those!" he quipped.

I threw it out anyway. The species I hoped to decoy with it didn't come in, just like so many hunts over the years.

But perhaps one day that special bird will home in on my decoy with cupped wings. You never know.

Delta Waterfowl field editor Worth Mathewson and his wife, Marge, hail from Amity, Oregon.

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