

UNUSUAL DEKES

by Billy Gianquinto



Gianquinto has seen some pretty creative decoys during his years of hunting waterfowl.

Photo courtesy of the author

You would have to use a calculator to add up all the articles and books written about decoys. Wooden, plastic, canvas, rubber, tulle, all kinds of materials have been used to entice waterfowl ever so closer to the gun. (Now mind you, I don't want to pay any reverence to mechanical decoys.) Mention duck decoys and people instantly think about an object that looks like a duck. But, what about objects that don't resemble ducks and geese? How about a Volkswagen or a rubber tire? Or maybe what you slept on the night before? While I'm at it, what about a playful dog running about your blind? All of these things and more have been used to attract waterfowl. It sounds crazy, but I bet many of you have experienced some crazy decoys as well.

Let me take you back 35 years to when I came across my first unusual decoy set. It was 10, eight-foot, plywood honker silhouettes in the Sacramento Valley. The guy swore by them. "The geese can be seen

from a mile away," he said. I talked with a Washington goose guide that showed me pictures of one of the most ingenious ways of luring geese. Two Volkswagen bugs were painted like honkers, with sheet metal necks and heads, and parked amongst his regular goose decoys. His clients sat in the front seats and stepped out to shoot. When it rained, the windshield wipers were on. All the comforts of home, just like going to the drive-in movies.

My next encounter with screwy looking decoys came in the early 1960s in the Suisun Marsh. They were cut up, quartered, old rubber tires painted with a wide white stripe and mounted on wooden stakes. Some blinds had hundreds of them. Let me tell you, they attracted sprig and other ducks as well! These decoys were a no-no in the Sacramento Valley rice fields, because one misplaced decoy could break down a harvester.

One of the guides on the old *American Sportsman* TV show down in Texas used

white bed sheets and pillowcases to throw amongst his real snow goose decoys. It made his set look that much bigger without too much sweat. You tell me if a flock of geese can decipher between a sheet and a snow goose decoy from a half a mile. I think not. This is why color is so important with decoys. I always tell people to use all males in their decoy sets. The color makes all the difference.

In 1970, I came across a flock of snow geese that was standing about 20 yards from a ditch. I thought I was really going to score on these birds. As I ran down the ditch I peeked up every 20 yards, and they were still there, getting closer and closer. As I peeked up for the last time, raising my gun, "You idiot, Billy," I said to myself. Here before me were over 300 windsocks wiggling in the wind. I swear I couldn't tell they were phoneys. Believe me, windsocks have fooled many a goose hunter.

By far the most unusual of all the attractors that I have seen or heard about is the tolling dog. It originated in Europe and has been used extensively on the East Coast up into Labrador in the early 1800s and into modern times. It is a fox-like dog used by hunters to lure resting waterfowl to its master's gun. When I researched it, I didn't believe it either. When ducks, mainly divers, rest on the water in great rafts it is nearly impossible to make them move, let alone fly. Concealed gunners throw a stick or ball for the tolling dog, and the pooch romps and frolics along the shoreline in a playful manner. This movement catches the attention of the flock and draws the curious birds closer. The entire raft will swim within 10 to 20 yards of the hunters—then boom. And here's the most amazing thing of all: the tolling dog can lure the same raft of birds two to three times in a day.

Different techniques, different ideas. All a part of our wonderful world of waterfowling. 🦆

The author has been a professional caller for 28 years. He has authored a series of videos and cassettes on calling and waterfowling.