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First DSC DUCK HUNT

BY SCOTT KEITH, HOST OF DSC'S "THE QUACK SHACK" TV SHOW

As the first streaks of morning light come from the horizon, the excitement in a duck blind is always palpable. Your eyes strain into the semi-dark trying to make out any semblance of ducks working your decoys. Your excitement convinces you that you see several flocks, but all too often your eyes play tricks on you in the low light. You turn your ears in every direction desperately trying to pick up the sounds of whistling wings. You think you heard something, but maybe not. As the streams of light grow more frequent, the brightness reveals nothing in flight. The balloon of optimism slowly begins deflating. You start second guessing yourself. Did I choose the right location? Is the weather not right? Maybe yesterday was the day to hunt? Or maybe it's tomorrow? You begin spending more time looking at the bottom of the blind than at the sky.

Get Ducks' Ryan Bassham helped kick off the DSC duck hunt in style with a morning to remember.





Author with a few of the greenheads harvested on the weekend.

Then in an instant, everything changes. An explosive *WHOOOOSH* comes from behind and detonates 20 feet above your head. Every hair on your neck stands erect from what sounded like an F-16 buzzing your blind. The experienced duck hunter instantly knows what it was, but no matter how long you hunt, the jolting sound always shocks the system. It's the sound only made by a flock of teal cutting the cold air at breakneck speed. The flock inspects your decoys, they make a hard bank, their landing gear comes down, and they start screeching to a halt in your decoys. In a split second, your gun is up and you are unleashing the fury of three-inch shells full of #2 shot into the flock. This is the duck hunter's moment when hard work, scouting, and the weather all align to put ducks right in your face.

And so it was with the First DSC Duck Hunt that took place in January 2015. Hard work and scouting by J.J. Kent of Kent Outdoors put 17 DSC members in the right spot for two days of barrel-melting action on mallards, pintails, teal and more.

The idea for a DSC duck hunt was first spawned in a frosty duck blind last hunting season. We were filming an episode for Season 2 of "The Quack Shack" on The Sportsman Channel, and we had invited Ben Carter, DSC executive director, to tag along. It was an extremely cold morning and ice had locked up almost every slough along the Red River. Fortunately for us, our outfitter J.J. Kent had found a prime backwater slough and had placed an Ice Eater in it the day before to keep the water from freezing. Needless to say with the only open water for miles, there were so many mallards wanting into our duck hole that even Ben was able to knock down a few!

During one of the few breaks in the action that morning, we started kicking around the idea of doing a DSC-members hunt. J.J. was the first to bring up the idea.

"I think it would be a great idea," Ben responded. "You know we have a lot of dedicated waterfowlers in our club who would jump at the chance. Even better though,

Kent Outdoors owner J.J. Kent and top guide Kelly O'Neill did a great job at finding the birds for the weekend. Left to right: Ryan Bassham, Cameron Kuenzer, O'Neill, the author, and Kent.





Youth members Caleb and Brennan Addison had the privilege of shooting their first mallard drakes Saturday morning.



DSC's The Quack Shack producer Cameron Kuenzer stuck around to film a fantastic afternoon hunt. Tough job!

there are a lot of members who would love to experience duck hunting but don't know where to begin. I think it would be an ideal event similar to our annual DSC dove hunt."

J.J. agreed that Kent Outdoors would be the outfitter for the event, and over the off season, he and the DSC staff would work out all the details. Of course, since DSC is the title sponsor of "The Quack Shack" TV Show, you can bet the film crew from Safari Classics Productions would be there to capture the event for The Sportsman Channel.

Now, in January 2015, the DSC Duck Hunt was hatched on a frigid, icy morning, and as fate would have it, when we arrived at J.J.'s lodge, almost every piece of water within 50 miles of Nocona, Texas had a thick layer of ice on it. A major arctic blast had engulfed North Texas and pushed a large contingent of waterfowl into the area.

The night before our first hunt, DSC members both young and old began to trickle into the lodge. It was great to see and catch up with friends such as Dewey Dalton, DSC Life Member. Dewey had brought his two grandsons, Brennan and Caleb. I was looking forward to hunting with Brennan and Caleb, as I knew they were avid fans of my Quack Shack Duck Calls, plus there is something special witnessing the bond between a grandfather and his grandsons. Another treat was having DSC member Todd Williams attend the hunt. My friendship with Todd goes way back to our rabble-rousing high school days, and Todd was one of my first customers when I started Quack Shack Duck Calls. Besides the old friends, there were plenty of new faces on this duck hunt, and it was a pleasure getting to know each and every one of them. One of the remarkable things about DSC is how people from all backgrounds and with various levels of hunting experience come together to form a bond.

That night after devouring some world-class fajitas, the adult beverages began to flow and I intently observed the scene unfolding in the beautiful lodge. A raucous "\$100 buy-in" poker game had broken out at the card table next to the bar. The guys lounging on the couches by the fireplace were comparing their whitetail seasons. Tales of Cape buffalo hunts were being spun by those left at the dinner table. The newbie duck hunters had cornered J.J. and were peppering him with questions about duck hunting and what to expect. And all the while, the younger hunters sat quietly soaking in the magical allure of what makes hunting camp so special.

Saturday morning found everyone itching to get in the duck blind, and when the sun broke, it didn't take long to realize that we were in for something special. My blind consisted of Dewey and his grandsons, my old buddy Todd Williams and one of his friends, as well as Ramsey Russell and Ryan Bassham of GotDucks.com. We were hunting a large stock tank whose deep water had prevented it from completely freezing over. All the hunters had pitched in and in the dark, we set up two blinds on the end of the tank that hadn't frozen over. Just as legal shooting time came, a duck crested the levee and committed feet down into our decoys. J.J. called the shot, and we dispatched an incredible full plumage drake spoonbill. As we passed the spoonie around the blind for inspection, J.J. spotted three ducks locked in on our decoys. "Get ready, boys" barked J.J. Seconds later, three mallards floated belly up in the dikes. Before our dog could even retrieve the three floating mallards, two more greenheads were cupped and falling into our spread. They came in on a string and when the shot was called, both ducks folded and hit the water with a thud. Everyone in the blind immediately started whooping and high-fiving. It was great seeing the smiles of



DSC members Ryan Bassham and GetDucks.com Ramsey Russell were happy with their bag.

excitement on the guys' faces.

The ripples of the two dead greenheads had barely drifted to the shoreline when three more mallards were spotted with feet down barreling for our decoys. Needless to say, their migration came to an abrupt halt a few seconds later. And so the scene played out for the next hour and a half. Mallard after mallard committed to our decoy spread, and mallard after mallard was reduced to possession until we had a teaming strap of mallards that would cause envy in the heart of any hardcore waterfowler. After the hunt, everyone clamored to get a picture with the bulging game straps slung over their shoulders. For a few hunters in the blind that morning, this was their first time to harvest a big mallard drake.

Later that afternoon, another group of the DSC hunting party hunted a flooded milo field, and the action there proved to be even more fast and furious than my group's morning hunt. Thousands of green-winged teal buzzed the hunters while landing in the flooded fields. Graceful flocks of finicky pintail drakes were fooled into the decoys. And flock after flock of mallards bombarded the decoys giving everyone barrel-melting action.

When all the smoke had cleared from two days of hunting on the First DSC Duck Hunt, you couldn't wipe the smile off the participants' faces. For the record, a grand total of 146 ducks and four Canada geese were harvested; but more importantly, new friends were made, old relationships were strengthened, and lasting memories made. GT



(left to right) The author, Tim Danklef, Kelly O'Neill and JJ Kent gather around a string of ducks and geese, carefully guarded by a four-footed hunter.