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WINTER 2023

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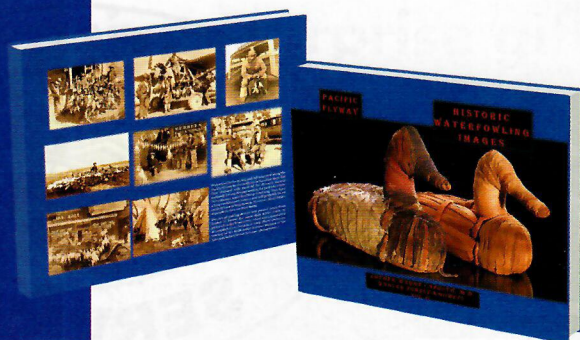
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BOOK REVIEW



PACIFIC FLYWAY: Historic Waterfowling Images

By Ramsey Russell

To this day, it still amazes me that my own grandfather's half-century worth of hunting and fishing experiences can be summarized in a slender binder of maybe a couple dozen old self-adhesive pages.

In just a few page flips, black-and-white photos transition to time-yellowed color photos of tar-papered camp cabins across the river; of fabled wet dogs that made legendary retrieves, talked about at more family suppers than can be remembered; of smiling little boys who became my father, uncle and family friends; and of my grandfather himself, the man who had grown much older by the time he mentored me.

I've spent countless hours studying those photos of bygone times. And I've oftentimes wondered if Grandfather would have written detailed captions — which is to say, any at all — had he known how treasured a family possession like that single album would become. Because, see, those old photos are the perfect summation of my own past, present and future as pertains to waterfowl hunting.

Photographs are powerful like that. And Yancey Forest-Knowles and Dr. Wayne Capooth, two accomplished old-school duck hunters who grew

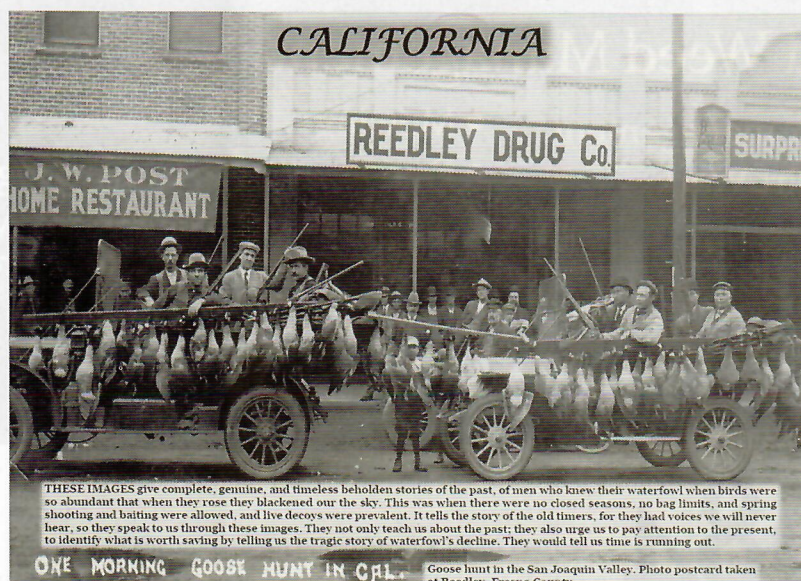
up hunting the Pacific Flyway and Mississippi Flyway, respectively, are well aware of it. Their passion for waterfowl hunting led them both to individually research and archive waterfowling's storied past such that they became foremost authorities on the subject. Little wonder they eventually became friends, duck hunting buddies and now collaborators on "Pacific Flyway: Historic Waterfowling Images," the most amazing collection of yesteryear waterfowling photos to have ever been bound between hardcovers.

In the sense that a photo is worth a thousand words, each page of "Pacific Flyway: Historic Waterfowling Images" is an indelible time-machine adventure. Only better, really, because the photos are also colorfully described with detailed captions.

My initial glance between the covers turned into a great afternoon spent reclined, poring through the pages. Both entertaining and informative, the book features over 250 images of historic waterfowling scenes on thick, glossy paper. For those that didn't know (and I did not), the oldest waterfowl decoys on earth — thousands of years old — were discovered in the Pacific Flyway. Century-plus-years-old hunting clubs, some of

them still existing, have long defined the Pacific Flyway. Likewise, pit hunting may have even originated there. I also learned that bull hunting — and I am going to leave you to read up on this unique hunting technique yourself — was borrowed from a traditional Mexican trick of the trade for filling up the commercial meat wagon quickly. (All of those gold rushers had to eat, after all.) And later came the goose patrols, using aerial techniques. Forest-Knowles' and Capooth's book covers

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THESE IMAGES give complete, genuine, and timeless beholden stories of the past, of men who knew their waterfowl when birds were so abundant that when they rose they blackened our sky. This was when there were no closed seasons, no bag limits, and spring shooting and baiting were allowed, and live decoys were prevalent. It tells the story of the old timers, for they had voices we will never hear, so they speak to us through these images. They not only teach us about the past; they also urge us to pay attention to the present, to identify what is worth saving by telling us the tragic story of waterfowl's decline. They would tell us time is running out.

ONE MORNING GOOSE HUNT IN CAL.

Goose hunt in the San Joaquin Valley. Photo postcard taken at Reedley, Fresno County.

all this and more, treating readers to a rare glimpse into waterfowling's dramatic history.

Mississippi author William Faulkner once wrote, "The past is never dead. It's not even past." Even if events occurred in the past, they can still affect and influence who we are today and tomorrow. Since forever, waterfowl hunting has been a hand-me-down tradition. Many of us duck hunters first experienced waterfowl hunting as children, carried to blinds on the shoulders of camo-clad giants. We watched ducks streak through

orange-hued sky, sometimes bending to the will of the grown men that raised us, lured by the magical sounds of their calls. Ducks would race toward the decoys, banking abruptly with speculums gleaming, and splashing water as the old guns boomed. Our eyes, big as thermos lids, took it all in, and in an instant we'd become intimately connected to nature. Even before the intoxicating smell of gunpowder had vanished downwind, we aspired to be like those great influences, to possess their skill sets.

And then, we became duck hunters. Even if those men never even instructed us back in those wonder years about the finer points of shooting or calling, or handling dogs or decoy placements, it didn't matter. They took us along, and we learned by example. And all these years later, we know we're who we are because of them.



calling team of market hunters known as the "Doc Stuart Outfit." At the Glade Ranch north of Rio Vista, the morning of the hunt. Stuart "raised" geese from distant fields and had them circling above the ex-president, who killed — hunters, seldom missing his bird. He stated that "although I have enjoyed fine goose shooting east of the Rockies, I have never seen anything to compare with it. The sport and the system connected with it, so far as I know, have nothing like these elsewhere." He also hunted in the San Joaquin Valley. The pit where he hunted for two-days because famous and was named the "Harrison Hole." Here he and four others killed over 400 geese, mostly snipes.

"In 1902, at Novato, the record kill for a morning shoot by a sportsman was done by Frank Robinson of Sacramento, killing 240. Here, three highly sought-after professional guides were Al Crump, Claud Kagee, and Doc Stuart. The former two considered the best goose callers in the state."

"In September 1897, ex-president Benjamin Harrison traveled to California to hunt geese with Ed Plant, Al Crump, and Claud Kagee. These experienced market hunters and the "most skillful callers of waterfowl in the state" the latter two being townsmen of a great goose."




(CREDIT: Merced County Historical Society/Courthouse Museum Collection.)

The passing of the hunting torch successively reaches through generations. For that, we should all be thankful. Is there any other sport that so perfectly embodies the past, present and future in one fell swoop as waterfowl hunting? "Pacific Flyway: Historic Waterfowling Images" documents our extraordinary tradition, allowing us to witness and appreciate the way both hunting and conservation have evolved over time.

Former U.S. presidents broke personal records. Hollywood A-listers and famous athletes, business people from far and

wide, market hunters and market-hunters-turned-professional-guides, friends and neighbors — they all flocked to wetlands throughout California and the Pacific Flyway in pursuit of waterfowl. And it's all right there in black and white.

"Pacific Flyway: Historic Waterfowling Images" is more than just a collection of photos. It's the pictures-perfect story of an incredible waterfowl hunting culture. It's our collective story, embodying our past, present and future. It's what we still do, and ensuring its continuance is why we strive to achieve the

monumental task of waterfowl habitat conservation. And one day, we, too, will be among those hunters from a bygone era, our own images staring back at future generations from a book, imploring them to do the same. 

Ramsey Russell is the owner of GetDucks.com, a company that has specialized in facilitating duck hunting experiences all over the world for over 20 years. The authors of "Pacific Flyway: Historic Waterfowling Images" may be contacted by email at yknowles@prodigy.net and wcapooth@gmail.com.



Members of the Elk Gun Club, near Dixon in Yolo Basin, 1927. William "Bill" Banta is on the top wing to the right. He owned two Irish Water Spaniels for retrieving and catered not only to sportsmen but also to the "Fair Nimrods." He also managed two Elks Clubs.

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