

# IN-HAND IDENTIFICATION OF WATERFOWL (A Teaching Method)

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In this day of emphasis on "species management" there appears to be an increasing awareness (if not increased knowledge) by the public, and especially hunters who are directly affected, that "you just ain't with it" if you don't know a Brown Pelican from a Blue-wing Teal or a Bald Eagle from a Bufflehead. The hunter generally knows that some ducks are a "no—no", some a "little bit" and most large ducks with a green head are mallards. He also is aware that "the Man" may come by and if there is a "no—no" or too many "little bits" in the bag that the "Man" can readily distinguish a hen Can from a hen Bluebill from a mile away. He *knows* that any person who is a professional wildlife manager, be he Biologist or Bush Cop, is an expert in all phases of his job or he wouldn't have it. He further knows that the far-off "Department" that has hired this expert is infallible in its judgment that the employees it pays so handsomely are indeed "experts". If the "expert" turns out to be as confused as the hunter over identity of some shot-up, retriever chewed, mud-wallowed bird, the powers that be in the "Department" immediately become a bunch of know-nothing politicians, one or more of whom are close kin to the "Man" or he wouldn't be toting that badge and pretending to be a pro in the business. If a representative of your Department or mine cannot correctly identify the game species he is hired to manage at once, the reflection of incompetence touches every employee of that agency. Where correct identification, especially of waterfowl where so many look-alikes exist, may directly affect not only a hunters pocketbook but even his privileges, the problem is magnified. Imagine, if you will, an officer dragging a poor, put-upon hunter before the Judge and accusing him of taking too many Canvasbacks, and the Judge, being a dedicated and astute duck hunter, immediately recognizes the "Cans" as female Scaup! It has happened—not in your State naturally!

To preclude the possibility, or at least to diminish the chances, of such a not-so-facetious happening facing any of us, we developed here in South Carolina many years ago a vehicle for teaching a method by which birds in hand can be quickly and easily identified. Margin of error is minimized if an employee realizes that such knowledge enhances not only his professional status, but it is personally gratifying to realize he is just a cut above most other people in this capability.

From a teaching standpoint the "props" needed are as follows:

1. An instructor who is familiar not only with his subject but who can relate to his pupils through his own experience. This phase is often the difference between a good instructional course and a "sleep session".
2. A good set of color slides showing the bird itself and another clearly showing the most outstanding identifying feature or features.
3. Wing and/or head mounts where applicable to illustrate differences in size, coloration or configuration.
4. A good identification guide for each employee. Kortwright's DUCKS, GEESE AND SWANS OF NORTH AMERICA is an excellent waterfowl guide, and if the pupil is honestly interested, can furnish much background information on particular species. A Guide to Field Identification, BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA, by Robbins, Bruun, Zim and Singer, published in paper and hardback by

Golden Press and available in paperback for \$2.95 is excellent. The latter book groups lookalikes together for easier comparison and is small enough for field use.

5. Two slide projectors and two screens for comparison use.

The actual mechanics of presenting an identification course can vary widely. Each instructor must develop his own presentation technique to generate the utmost interest and response in his class. Repetition, especially of the species most likely to give trouble in a given area, is highly desirable. I have found an excellent (and usually unailing) way to generate immediate interest and close attention is to throw out a "pop" test at the very beginning by showing slides of various species of waterfowl, including some that are not waterfowl at all, on which a *thoroughly competent* field man can score highly. The scores are un-failingly low (we collect these papers and grade them at once) and tend to engender a burning desire in those who did poorly to do much better, particularly if by "whisper campaign" or announcement by administrative personnel that ultimate grades in the class may reflect the individual's efficiency rating (and perhaps the resulting pay status, etc.). It is surprising how much interest such an announcement can generate.

A fairly short talk by the instructor on impact and importance of proficiency in the field of species identification and how it relates to, and reflects on, overall respect for both the individual and his Department by those with whom he comes in contact is appropriate.

Explain to the class that the program is *not* a technically oriented method but a practical way to identify the bird in hand by elimination of species it *couldn't be* and finding the distinguishing feature on the *one and only one* it is. To this end we simply divide all ducks into three categories, namely "big ducks", "middle-size ducks" and "little ducks". Any duck will fit into one of these areas, and the individual making the identification uses his own classification system. After the pupil has put the bird into one of the size groups, he next looks for a feature which would separate it from another species which has many of the same characteristics or colors. Here we must use some definite feature, or combination of features, which appears on no other bird in the size group. For example, the Redhead and Canvasback may both be called "big ducks" with coloration of the sexes similar one to the other, but the shape of head and bill will immediately identify the "Can". Both Ringneck and Lesser Scaup are similar in coloration and size but the "ring" on the bill of the Ringneck is easily spotted. The Gadwall and Wigeon are similar in size and coloration and either could be mistaken for a female Pintail until you look at the "wing patch" or speculum.

The same applies to the hen Mallard and the Black Duck. Only two of our North American ducks have a bright blue patch of color on the *leading* edge of the wing, but the size differential and bill shapes will easily separate the Blue-wing Teal from the Shoveler. Any duck with a "saw-tooth" bill is a Merganser but the size and coloration of the "wing patch" will separate the Common from the Red Breasted and both of these from the Hooded Merganser which is sometimes mistaken for a Wood Duck simply because both have a "crest" and are about the same size. If it has a "saw-tooth" bill, it can't be a "penitentiary mallard".

We could go on through the complete list but I believe you have gained the general idea of what the course is designed to do and how to present it. We do not claim this course is as comprehensive as a two hour credit course at an institution of higher learning (if it were available), but it does outline what may be done with a minimum outlay of funds and time, and can be easily incorporated into almost any type of pre-service or in-service training program. I have found that an abbreviated version is welcomed by Conservation groups and Hunting Clubs, and makes a welcome addition as a public relations tool.

Because of the time limitation, we will not be able to show the complete course, but we will show a representative sample so you have a complete understanding of how the thing is put together, and afterwards I will be glad to answer any questions relating to the program.

## THINGS EXPECTED OF A ROOKIE CONSERVATION OFFICER

By JIMMY D. JONES

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I do not care how smart any of you are or what rank you now hold, you had to start out as a "rookie". Most probably things have changed a lot since some of you started your rookie year. All of you think back; try to remember some of the things you did during that first year with your department. I would be willing to bet that some of the things you did would astonish any young man just starting his career in Conservation today. Even though the things we did are greatly different, the things expected of us are mainly the same.

One of the first questions to arise when a new man has been hired is, can he follow the departmental rules and regulations. This is a must if he is expected to continue with the Department. Another important requirement of a young man is his ability to work with fellow officers. No one man can do all the work.

When I played football in high school and college, the first thing I was expected to learn was teamwork. This not only applied to football, but to conservation as well. The work one man can do alone, two men can do better.

Next in the line of rules and regulations would be care for state-owned equipment. Some young men might get the wrong impression regarding this equipment, which almost always includes a vehicle, and in many cases a boat, motor and trailer. Although we, the State Conservation Officers, do not have to pay for the up-keep of this equipment, we should treat it as though it were our own.

A young officer should concern himself with the service he has to render upon his community, state and country through firm but courteous enforcement of conservation laws. A Conservation Officer is specialized in his work, this being enforcement of state conservation laws and the protection of all natural resources. He patrols an assigned area to prevent and detect violations of game and fish laws; interprets conservation laws to individuals encountered on patrols and makes arrests of violators; makes reports of findings and appears in court as a witness in cases brought to trial; inspects state lands and makes periodic reports on conditions; works with farmers and landowners in proper land utilization involving observance of sound conservation practices.

Bring all these phases together, along with showing no partiality toward anyone no matter how rich and powerful or poor and ragged he may be, then you may consider yourself a servant of the community, state and your country.

A young officer should definitely be concerned about his personal appearance and moral standards at all times—on and off duty. He should, while on duty, and where working conditions do not otherwise require, have a clean shave, clean, pressed uniform, shined brass, polished shoes, neat haircut, clean hands and fingernails and no body-odor. Any one of these things can easily be very distracting. Also, when an officer puts on his uniform, he should put it all on, not just part of it. Most departments have a rule about being out of uniform.

When we think of morals—on and off duty—most of us immediately think of drinking in public. If an officer does drink, there is a time and place for it, but not while on duty.