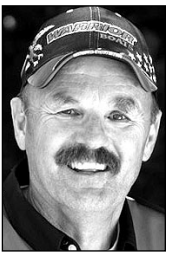


OF THE OUTDOORS

# The 'Neu' Wave Of Spring Snow Goose Hunters

BY GARY HOWEY

Peering through the mesh of my laydown blind, hundreds if not thousands of Snow geese were moving in our general direction. The windssocks, laid out in front of us, danced seductively in the wind, as five Vortex spinning decoys swirled around to our front. The boisterous electronic caller called out to the geese, this was just enough to turn the flock as they cruised over our decoy spread.



Gary Howey

As Snow geese always do, they made several wide circles, loosing altitude with each wing beat. With wings set and legs down, they glided into the landing zone, set up directly in front of us, when our guide John Neu yelled, "Take Em." In one swift motion, the lids of our lay down blinds blew open as seven camo hunters rose to meet the incoming flock.

The Snows backedpedaled; trying desperately to put distance between themselves and the hunters, as they attempted to avoid the volley of incoming volley of steel shot headed their way. When the smoke finally cleared, the departing flock wasn't quite as large as it'd been a few moments before, as we'd reduced the flock by a six geese.

It was the final days of March and we were located just south of Aberdeen, S.D. where we'd traveled to film and hunt with guide John Neu, Neu Outdoors www.neuoutdoors.com out of Yankton, during this years spring Snow Goose season.

He and his other guides had been pursuing the Snow geese



TEAM OUTDOORSMEN ADVENTURES PHOTO

Second day hunt: John Neu (second from left) is pictured along with Howey and hunters from Georgia with the geese taken during the hunt.

since the opening of the spring season. They'd begun hunting in southeastern Missouri, worked their way northward through the state and then jumped into South Dakota, following the birds as they migrated north.

Hunting with Neu and his guides were a group of 40 to 50 hunters. With each group being equipped with approximately two to three thousand decoys, lay-down blinds and electronic callers.

In order to effectively draw Snow geese into range, large numbers of decoys are needed. This is why guides such as Neu choose windssocks for their decoy spreads as they're easy to transport, don't take up much space in a trailer and add motion to the spread when the wind is blowing. Some folks believe that the wind always blows here in the upper Midwest, but on those rare occasions when it doesn't, the Vortex and SOS motion decoys add

enough movement to give the spread the realism needed to attract the Snows.

Facing into the wind directly in front of the landing zone, the camo lay down blinds, allowed the hunters to relax as they waited patiently for the next flock to be sighted. Once the birds were spotted, the two-piece doors on the blinds were flipped shut, concealing the hunters, still allowing us to keep an eye on the approaching birds through a mesh screen.

Since spring weather can be unpredictable, the lay down blinds had to be camouflaged in order to match the field we were hunting. Prior to our arrival, there had been snow in the field, so snow/white camo was the color of the day. As the temps rose the white camo had to be removed allowing the blinds to better match the environment we were hunting. The warmer the day became, the muddier it

became around the lay downs, so our blinds no longer blended in, standing out against the muddy field. This is when John muddied up the blinds by smearing each with a coating of the sticky mud from around the blinds.

Despite hourly changes in the weather and the mud we had to put up with, it was a great hunt as we observed numerous species of waterfowl including: Snow geese, Blue geese, Ross geese, Specklebelly/White Front geese, Canada geese, Mallards, Pintails and Bluebills staging in the Aberdeen area as they waited for snow to recede so they could continue their northward migration.

Flight after flight of Snows made their way overhead, with dozens of larger flocks coming within 80 yards. Not close enough for a shot, but close enough allowing us to pull small groups from the large flock down within range, enabling us to pull 4 or 5

out of each. Since the Snow goose population had become so large, they've literally destroyed the habitat in the Tundra where they mate. This is the reason for the special spring season, allowing hunters to hunt as they returned north in the spring, helping to bring the population to manageable levels.

Since Snow geese migrate in such large flocks, with many of the birds being the older mature birds that have seen every decoy and decoy spread imaginable, Snow geese are the toughest of all waterfowl to decoy. Because of this, during the spring Snow goose season, there are liberal limits and hunters aren't required to use plugged shotguns, so extender tubes on shotguns are quite common, allowing hunters to have as many as 7 or 8 shells in their shotgun. This along with the use of electronic calls, has given spring Snow goose hunters the opportunity to take excess birds out of the population during the spring.

John, his guides and clients of Neu Outdoors are doing their best to remove those excess birds from the population. During the 2011 special season, they've taken over 8,000 birds. On this trip, our group did its best to help alleviate the over-

population as we pulled 118 birds out of the flocks.

While we were hunting with Neu, there was a mixed bag of hunters in camp from throughout the U.S. including those from Georgia, Washington, Utah, Nebraska, South Dakota and Iowa as well as numerous other states.

Spring Snow goose hunting is an exciting hunt, with thousands of birds in the air, giving you the opportunity to observe the waterfowl in their spring plumage. In the spring the plumage of the waterfowl is breathtaking, giving you the opportunity to enjoy some of the best that Mother Nature has to offer. If you're looking for a Snow goose guide that does it right, give Neu Outdoors a call as they have Snow goose hunting dialed in.

Gary Howey, Hartington, Neb., is the president of Outdoorsmen Productions LLC and the producer/host of the Outdoorsmen Adventures television series that airs on Fox affiliates throughout the upper Midwest. For more information on the outdoors or to watch the show, go to HYPERLINK "http://www.outdoorsmenadventures.com" www.outdoorsmenadventures.com.

## TROPHY SPOTLIGHT



PHOTO: CAPTAIN NORM'S

Nate Loecker caught this 65-pound Grass Carp on Lake Yankton earlier this spring.

## MASTERS

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He was tied with big-hitting Alvaro Quiros, who had a 73.

Fred Couples, the 51-year-old wonder at Augusta, somehow got into the mix, bad back and all. Couples shot a 68 and was in the group at 139 that included former PGA champion Y.E. Yang (72), 22-year-old Rickie Fowler (69) and Lee Westwood, the runner-up at Augusta last year who got back into the mix with a 67.

Experience never hurts at the Masters.

"I'm playing my 12th one. I don't know how many they are playing, but I don't think it's that many," Westwood said. "I've been in the situation before, probably more recently than anybody around this golf course. I think it's a big advantage."

Then again, Colin Montgomerie said the same thing when he was paired with a 21-year-old Woods in 1997 going into the weekend.

Woods blew him away with a 65 and was on his way to a 12-shot victory.

It doesn't figure to be that easy for McIlroy, even as easy as he has made it look over two days.

His swing looked strong as ever when he pounded a driver on the fifth hole, leaving him a wedge that he hit to 6 feet for birdie, and another big tee shot set up a sand wedge to the back pin on No. 9 to 4 feet. He bounced back from his lone bogey with a 6-iron into about 10 feet for eagle on the 13th, though he missed the putt.

McIlroy never put himself under much pressure. He was having so much fun that he wasn't even paying attention to Day, one of his playing partners, who was slashing out of the pine straw and firing at flags, piling up one birdie after another.

"We had a lot of fun out there," McIlroy said. "I didn't even realize Jason was going so good. I saw he was 6 under on the 15th and thought, 'This is going to be a

decent round.' We just fed off each other. The crowd got behind us."

McIlroy, Day and Fowler were quite the group — ages 21, 22 and 23. The more important number was 18 birdies they made. McIlroy's only regret was not making as many putts as he would have liked.

"I can't really complain," he said. "I'm in the lead going into the weekend at the Masters."

He's just not in the clear. Woods made sure of that with three straight birdies around the turn — all of them inside 4 feet — a clutch par save on the 11th and three consecutive birdies starting on the 13th, again all of them from close range.

"I played myself back in the tournament," Woods said. "I'm three back, and we've got a long way to go. It's going to be fun."

Phil Mickelson has far more work to do.

The defending champion played more aggressively, but failed to save par too often when he missed the green. Mickelson

also failed to birdie the par 5s on the back nine and had to settle for a 72 that put him eight shots behind.

"There's a lot of golf left in this tournament, and I'm going to be making a run at him and the other guys ahead of me," Mickelson said.

Asked what gives him confidence he can make a move, Mickelson replied, "Three green jackets."

The cut was at 1-over 145, matching the lowest ever at Augusta. Among those going home are the last three major champions — Martin Kaymer, now in danger of losing his No. 1 ranking; Louis Oosthuizen and Graeme McDowell.

Woods' 66 was his best round at Augusta since he shot 65 in the third round of 2005, which also is the last time he won the Masters. The two players in front of him have only three wins between them, none in a major.

But that's the thing with so many kids. They don't seem to care.

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