

WOODEN SHORE BIRD DECOYS

By Raymond H. Bubbs

During the recent EBBA convention more importance was added to shore bird banding. The details were well covered by the banders who had charge of that class. Later, however, as I talked with Mrs. Betty Knorr about the use of wooden decoys, she said that that was another interesting phase which could be added to shore bird banding. After some discussion with her and the Editor about decoying shore birds, we thought that some of the other banders might like a story on the use of decoys.

First off, here is a briefing on the history of decoys. Many years ago a primitive Indian watched, as ducks flew beyond the range of his arrows, from his hiding place among the marsh grass. After some thought he shaped out a crude duck outline with the use of reeds. With the use of that first decoy a pattern was started which was to pass down through history in the following stages of decoying: to obtain food for survival; by the market hunters to meet the food value demands; in use as a way of sport hunting of ducks, and also now by the bander to net them just for banding studies.

The materials used in the construction of decoys ran from reeds, to woods of light weight (pine, cedar and balsam), to metal folding type (shore birds mostly), and today's decoy ducks of papier-mache or rubber. Shore bird hunting with the aid of decoys was practiced during the 1800's. Soon a rapid decline in their numbers was noticed, so this type of hunting was outlawed in 1918 by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Feeling that shore birds decoyed in over all types of decoys under hunting pressure, I thought they probably would decoy easily into nets for banding. Two decoys were carved of pine and painted for this purpose.

Most of the shore bird banding we do is on a small flat island in the Susquehanna River, which has mud flat tide regulation caused by the water level use of a dam down river. Since it takes a lot of promotion to reach this banding site, our time has been limited for netting shore birds, so the aid of decoys has helped us in netting more birds, rather than just waiting for them to fly into the net.

With a net stretched across a narrow section of the mud flat, or in a corner of the mud areas, we placed two decoys close to our net. As we watched from a short distance, we soon saw Dowitchers approach to land among the two decoys, only to hit the net. The birds were soon banded and released. A Yellowlegs, flying overhead, circled around after seeing the decoys and was soon in the net. There have been a number of different occurrences where we felt sure that the decoys helped us to catch birds that would normally have by-passed our nets.

Shore bird decoys can easily be made by drawing up a pattern of any one of the peeps to full size. The drawing below is a plan of the universal type decoy that I used for decoying shore birds. At the present time I am carving a number of other types which I hope to try this fall.

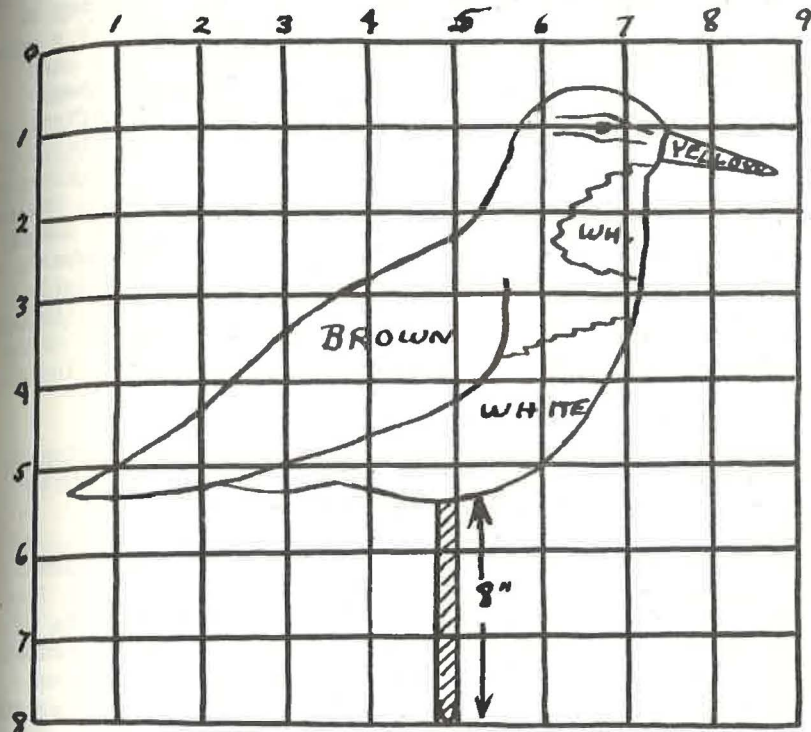


Fig. 1
Pattern for
Shore Bird
Decoy

(Enlarge to
one inch
squares)

Trace the pattern you wish to use on a piece of pine or balsam wood. Saw out the shape on a jig saw or band saw, and round it off to make a three-dimensional shape. A piece of 3/8 inch hardwood dowel, tapered down, can be used as the bill so as to stand some rough handling. Another 3/8 inch dowel can be used as the standing support for placing the decoy in the mud or sand close to your net.

This story contains but a few of the ideas that can be used in decoying for banding purposes.

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