

## *Birds From A Blind*

*by Thase Daniel*

I tied the boat to tree limbs that hung low over the water so that it could not be moved by the wind. A Green Heron nest was about 30 feet away and while I was "setting up", she perched on a nearby limb and flicked her tail—Green Heron style.

A telephoto lens and camera were set up quickly on a tripod in my flat-bottomed boat. I covered myself, camera and tripod with a camouflage mosquito net, letting the lens protrude through a slit in the net. I was hidden. In less than five minutes a heron was feeding the three nestlings while I recorded it on film. But without a net under which to hide, I doubt if the heron would have returned to the nest.

This net allows me to see through it, for I am constantly watching for snakes. I have had them try to get into the boat with me. I suppose they mistake it for a log. But birds do not seem to be able to see me inside the net.

I have found that birds accept a boat quickly, especially if it is painted drab green, which is the color of my aluminum one. I had mine made to fit my station wagon with the back seat flipped down. It is about 7 feet long and is so light that I can put it in water in a few minutes. I use this boat in small ponds or bayous but never in open, choppy water.

My "net-blind" is made by sewing 3 widths (36 inches each) of camouflage mosquito netting together, about 12 feet long. I leave a small slit at one of the seams for a lens opening. This portable blind works almost anywhere and is a must for small boat photography. I buy the netting at Army-Navy stores and sporting goods stores. It is great for all water birds that have to be photographed from a boat.

I use a net, too, to wade and photograph ducks. A shorter net, about 6 feet long, is used. I throw it over my head and the ends fall into the water around my waders. I stand very still in water knee-deep or above, and look like an old stump protruding out in the water. At least, that is what I have been told. If possible, I try to stand near a tree or snag to break the pattern. For flying ducks I do not use a tripod. A pistol grip gives me freedom to swing and follow ducks on the wing.

The net blind is light in weight and easy to carry. I made a green cloth bag with a drawstring to carry it and throw it over my shoulder. This leaves my hands free for heavy equipment. Many times a photographer may have to walk a mile or more to the "shooting" site, and every pound of equipment is to be considered.

I have used the net in fields and deep woods as well as in a boat. But I have not found this blind satisfactory on windy days, for it is difficult to keep it from blowing. Sudden movement of any kind will frighten birds.

I use another portable blind that wind will not affect. Four wooden poles or aluminum tubing are driven in the ground about 30 inches apart, forming a square. A green cloth pillow case with a square top is dropped over the poles. A slit is left for the lens and I either sit on a small canvas seat or stand, depending on the situation. This, also, is light to carry.

This blind is especially good when photographing a bird at a nest. As soon as the nestlings are a few days old, I set up this blind and leave it. I wait to make certain that there will be no danger of the parents deserting the nest; they may desert eggs or very young birds. If there is wind, four guy wires made of heavy cord anchor the blind securely. Mine has remained solid through wind and rain.

But one objection is that it is very hot inside during the summer, especially if the blind has to be placed in the sun. When it is 98° and 100° F. in my part of the country, it must be 110° inside. Sometimes I nearly faint, but the picture comes first.

I use another "blind"—a camper. My "home on wheels" is comfortable regardless of the temperature. If it is freezing weather, I light a fire in one of the butane burners on the stove. If it is hot, I crank out the 7 windows and the breeze is cooling. I prop open the back door and cover the opening with a camouflage net. The lens on a tripod sticks out only about an inch. Birds soon accept this blind for it looks like a parked truck to which they are accustomed. In between snaps, a cold drink from the ice box is refreshing.

This blind is good for ground nesters and

low nesters, and even for those birds that build 15 to 25 feet above ground. I had an aluminum ladder built on the side of the camper, allowing me to climb to the roof and cover up with the net. This has paid off with nests such as the Robin in my oak tree and a Red-tailed Hawk in a Joshua Tree in the Arizona desert.

This past winter I pictured Snow and Blue Geese in the Louisiana marshes from my camper. No other type of blind would have worked, for these wary geese spook easily and fly at the slightest sound. Before daybreak I backed the camper into an area where the geese fed, so that when they flew in at sunrise, my blind would be in place. In the red glow, with curved wings, and feet dangling, thousands floated down to the marsh. All morning I recorded their flight patterns, long strings and V's, for some were leaving as others flew in. This piece of camouflage netting was worth

hundreds of dollars that morning, yet it cost very little. Geese came as close as 6 and 8 feet and I had a ringside seat for one of the greatest shows in the marsh. But it took some preparation. For two days I had studied their habits and knew exactly where to park. Important tip: know a bird's habits; this is essential to successful bird photography.

I have made pictures in only one area in the world where wildlife was not afraid of man and I could approach to within inches—the Galapagos Islands. But this is an exception. Nearly everywhere a blind will enable you to make better pictures. And some shots cannot be made without some type of blind.

It's all up to you. *Long lens* (I use 300mm, 400mm, and 600mm), *patience* and *ingenuity* will capture on film some bird or wild creature you did not believe you could photograph. It's worth trying!

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## The First Salon of Photographs

*Our first salon of bird photographs features some of the most prestigious names in nature photography, as the following pages will prove. It includes not only some of the most illustrious names among the professionals, but three active amateurs—all from the New York area—whose work deserves wider attention.*

*It is, of course, obvious that the selection of photographers included herein in no way exhausts the list of accomplished photographers of birds, both professional and amateur, now practicing in Canada and the United States. Some famous names are missing here, as well as countless lesser-known practitioners of great skill and artistry. Our salon next August will feature another selection, with perhaps a group of amateurs from another area of the continent.*

*Actually, the salon is some six pages (and photographers) bigger than planned. In projecting the exhibit, pictures were sought from twenty photographers, in hopes that with luck, acceptances would come from twelve. Amazingly, nineteen of the twenty responded with enthusiasm, although one, Roger T. Peterson, roaming far off Australia and then the Amazon, missed our deadline. We expect a print from the peregrine R.T.P. to lead off next year's salon.*

*As originally planned, the photographic salon was to have comprised a discrete 18-page section beginning on the opposite page. But it has been decided instead to group the photographs at intervals throughout the following pages, in order to add an element of surprise and visual pleasure to what would otherwise be page after page of solid text. The photographs are only roughly in regional sequence, and no suggestion of precedence should be attributed to their placement. The last is as good as the first.*