

# *An Episode In Duck Hunting*

## **It Took A Woman To Provoke This One**



There was a special provocation for this particular hunt, as will be explained later.

To one of limited means a really successful duck hunt in Laguna Lake appears well nigh impossible. Of the various ways used in hunting ducks in Laguna Lake the following are the most common: shooting over decoys, shooting from bancas and from motorboats and sneaking to the birds by wading.

To get the day's bag of 35 ducks or even more, motorboats have to be employed. One can get quicker to the flock and can cover a much larger area. But the present law prohibits the use of motorboats and a bag exceeding 35 ducks a day. This prohibition however is virtually a dead law. Motorboats have been used during the last duck season. And what more, the violator is a commercial hunter.

The most enjoyable method is perhaps shooting over wooden decoys. One is relaxed all the time, and there is always fun fooling the birds. As a rule, however, the bag is none too attractive. But one who is a game hog should be satisfied with a half dozen big fat Chinese black ducks.

Shooting from bancas is the usual method employed by the natives. It is cheaper. But shooting from bancas is often dangerous as the bancas are riggerless and the water in Laguna Lake is very fickle. Then too, when trouble comes and one is out in the middle of the Lake, it takes very long to reach the safety of the shores.

The writer was out one day accompanying a Constabulary Officer in one of the latter's visits to a dynamite deposit on Talim Island and the big Constabulary launch we were on almost sank when the big waves rose late in the afternoon. The experience of Manoling Earnshaw and his party is good proof of how mean the Lake could become without giving any warning at all. The writer has an American friend who has developed an intense fear of the Lake. He went out duck shooting one morning using a banca. He almost never came back. His banca capsized and it was no little trouble afterward diving for his guns that sunk to the bottom. One may be a good swimmer but his chances of surviving are practically nil when he has to swim a mile or two ashore through rough water. In case the banca capsizes, too, one will likely lose his guns, ammuni-

tion and all. To the prudent, the writer does not advise shooting ducks in the Lake from a banca, unless the birds are close to shore, and this seldom happens except immediately after a storm when the birds are driven to shore to seek shelter among the reeds. And of course the potentialities of shooting ducks by wading towards them are limited. One does not get a full day's fun from it.

This article is the story of my most successful duck hunt in Laguna Lake. (I now shift to the first person, singular.) I want to tell it here because it is not only thrilling but also instructive.

For the benefit of foreign readers, Laguna Lake is a body of fresh water, about 346 square miles in area and surrounded by the provinces of Rizal and Laguna. This Lake is about 14 Km. from Manila. Its most important outlet is the Pasig River, a very important water highway of the Metropolis. The salt water from Manila Bay does not reach Laguna Lake during high tide. Many streamlets empty into this Lake from the two provinces and during heavy rain a large volume of water flows into this Lake. The water is always fresh and murky. Navigation here is practically limited to bancas and a few sail boats and the "cascos". Fish life is none too abundant. Commercially the lake is not very attractive. It is deep in some places and very shallow in others. There is a constant change in the conditions of the floor of this lake so that a regular course for commercial shipping is almost impossible. A channel now may be a sand bar tomorrow.

But Laguna Lake is the main source of food supply for domestic ducks—the producer of our famous "balut" eggs. The bottom of the lake is the breeding ground of many forms of fresh water snails, soft and hard shelled, which are highly relished by domestic as well as wild ducks. Hundreds of families rely on this industry for their livelihood.

From the air this Lake is clearly visible. Just when the migratory ducks from China discovered this Lake as a good feeding ground, no one knows. But as far as I can remember, Laguna Lake has always been the mecca of the migratory black Chinese ducks since I first came and hunted birds in Luzon 14 years ago. From the air too, the wild ducks can see all along the waters, close to shore, the presence of thousands of domestic ducks, swimming around. To the wild ducks, this indicated good feeding ground. They must have therefore swooped down, dove, hit bottom and discovered good chow there. They stayed, stuffed themselves to the limit, and when the call of Home came, they left fully satisfied. When they reached home they must have told their fellows there of their wonderful find, and so every year thereafter they came in increasing number to feed on the snails in the Lake when the migratory season comes.

When I made this particular hunt way back several years ago, the black Chinese ducks in the Lake numbered by the millions. I actually saw a flock on the water as wide as Taft Avenue and about a kilometer long. When it rose, as I approached, it made a noise like the giant purring of the four motors of the Clipper. Ducks were flying all over me, around me, all the time but beyond gun shot. What a sight and what a day, I thought. Yes, what a day indeed! They are still coming every year during the months from November to February. I don't know whether they come in greater or less number now because after this particular hunt, I never hunted them again.

I started this story by saying that this particular duck hunt was especially provoked. It came about in this way: My friend in Navetas invited me to hunt ducks in Manila Bay near Bataan. We chartered a launch and a banca. When we were close to the ducks we dropped anchor. got on the banca and approached the ducks. We were never able to come within shooting range. The ducks were few and wild. It was a very unsuccessful hunt but we had plenty of fun watching the porpoises, and roasting big squids which we got from a mammoth fish trap that housed four families.

Reaching home that night, the girl I was in love with teased me like h— and called me a "bum hunter". This got my goat. I swore to "show her". So early Saturday afternoon I motored to Taguig, ordered a motorboat rigged for a duck hunt the following day. A good boat to hunt ducks with should be of the proper type. Its motor must be silent and able to slow down to 5 miles per hour. The sides, front and rear should be reconstructed so as to permit the placement of water hyacinths and sufficiently thick enough to hide the men in the boat. This would reduce somewhat the speed of the boat but it is necessary to fool the ducks. All over the Lake are floating water hyacinths and from a distance such a camouflaged boat looks just like a big bunch of floating hyacinths.

When you sight a flock you approach it slowly and as noiselessly as possible against the direction of the wind to prevent the sound of the motor from being heard by the birds. All people inside must duck while approaching the birds and conversations must be in whispers. With me there was a motorman and a general utility man who also served as guide.

Early that Sunday morning, I hired a garage car (taxi were not yet in vogue then), bought a can of gasoline and some motor oil. Bread, canned goods and fruits were also purchased, including plenty of drinking water, smokes and chocolates. The most important of course were the gun and the ammunition— a .20 ga. Winchester pump gun and about 50

rounds of No. 6 High Velocity Peters and a box of No. 8 snipe load. A pair of high-powered binoculars completed the equipment.

When the sun showed its face, we were already far out in the Lake. There were plenty of ducks in the air and all over the surface of the water. We approached one flock after another but could not get within shooting range. Ducks flying overhead were also too high for good shooting. The morning was approaching noon hour and it was getting scorchingly hot. There was a little wind however to relieve us now and then. So far we have had no luck after having approached at least twenty flocks, big and small. Then away in the middle of the Lake, right straight from the Binañonan Cement Plant, I spotted another flock consisting of about 250 birds. Using the binoculars, I could see that the birds were asleep—their heads were hidden under their wings. They were heavy with snails and the light ripples rocked them easily to sleep. No one was flapping its wings or quacking at all. Our position was ideal. I ordered to steer slowly and right straight ahead. The instructions to the motorman were to slow down as much as possible and to watch me closely. As soon as he sees me stand up, with gun in hand, that means "full speed ahead" and to keep on until the firing ceased.

We ducked low and peered at the birds through the water hvacinths. We were close enough now and the binoculars were discarded. The birds were still asleep—I could see that clearly. I was tingling all over. The safety of my gun was already released. My left hand kept making signs to the motorman to slow down some more as we were getting already too close. I was afraid I could not get within shooting range again. Then one of the birds awoke, shook its head and wondered, with great big eyes, what was the thing in front of him that looked like a dark solid green. (Every part of the boat must be painted green.) He must have been the leader, for soon he flapped his wings and gave the alarm of quack, quack, quack. In the twinkle of an eye every bird was up and going. The moment of all moments had come at least! The birds were hardly 40 yards away. I straightened up and the boat shot forward at full speed. Hell broke loose. My gun never worked so perfectly as then and my aim was never truer and better. I fired when the birds were only a meter or two above the water, and when the shelling was over—you can't believe it—some of the birds were still on the water. They simply didn't know what was happening. They were so dumbfounded they didn't know what to do. My boat literally dove right into them and drove them away. My guide was shouting: "Tingnan mo, nataranta ang mga pato." (Look, the ducks are rattled.) I did not believe I could fire more than six rapid shots, and so when I saw that there were some birds left yet I fumbled for the shells.

But when I succeeded in reloading they were gone. (There was an extra .16 ga. gun belonging to my guide but he had no shells for it.)

Boy O boy—What a thrill! After cruising around for about an hour, picking the dead birds that were scattered far and near, **63 big fat Chinese ducks** were accounted for. With the use of the binocuiars every dead bird was located. We went after it but it refused to be approached, diving as soon as it breathed in a puff of air. The gun and the snipe load now went into play. For about an hour I spent gas and oil and shell on the darn thing and still he kept playing hide-and-seek. When the last of the 25 rounds was gone and he was still giving me the run-around, I decided to quit. I tipped my hat to him and said: "Well, you beat me, I can no longer afford to spend on you. You refuse to come and die a quick death. All right, rot slowly in that watery grave of yours." And we steered for the distant shore. We pulled out all the water hyacinths and relaxed. On the way we ate our lunch and when we were back at the car, the garage driver was sound asleep. When he woke up he was plain startled to see so many ducks being loaded into his rig. After paying the men and leaving them the excess provision, I ordered, "Home, James." When I reached home I passed by the kitchen, whispered to the cook to fétech the birds from the car and to make no noise about it. Then stealthily, I sauntered into the living room where my girl friend was with other girls and some young men. Among them I looked like a worn-out hobo—sunburnt with 2-day old whiskers on my chin.

"What luck?" said one of the young men.

"No luck again," I replied with downcast eyes, and they laughed loud. But a more intelligent guy noticed my khaki pants and white canvas shoes all smeard with blood.

"No luck, ha? What's the blood about?", pointing at the red patches.

"Oh, old stains from former hunts," I tried to explain.

My girl friend just ran into the kitchen and gave a yell. Why, the whole kitchen floor was simply littered with ducks! Everybody ran out, exclaimed in surprises and showered me with praises. I just smiled modestly. My girl's heart was touched: "Please don't shoot ducks again. I pity them all."

"I just wanted to prove to you that I am not a bum hunter." I said,

Total damage that day: ₱50.00 including all. Was it worthwhile? You bet. But it was in them good ole days when "to miss was mystery and to hit was history."—ERNESTO J. CARABALLO.