

A guide with a unique approach

The first time Burbank's Paul Sullivan told me to show up at 9 a.m. for a duck hunt, I was sure I'd misunderstood. After all, four a.m. wake-up calls and stumbling around an inky black pond placing our decoys are the price we waterfowlers must pay.

But Paul is one duck guide who's convinced it's a mistake to be out at first light or to hunt until closing time. Only a half mile from a closed portion of the Snake River and abutting 100 acres of uncultivated barley, his two ponds are real mallard magnets, but he says the wrong approach would ruin them.

"Sure, we could be out at dawn and have a few terrific shoots, but to keep these two ponds productive over our entire season, we have to give the duck time to get to food and water without being harassed or they'll go elsewhere. An old timer back east who was asked what his secret was because ducks kept coming back to his ponds," Paul states. "He answered, 'I never hunt them before 8 a.m. or after 2 p.m.' He's the only other duck hunter I know who embraces my philosophy."

"It's a comfortable system that sure seems to work. I still have fond memories of my first Dur-

bank pond shoot, and when I joined Paul, his fellow guide, Eddie Bitseff, and three fellow hunters last week, even super-high winds couldn't derail our outing. From 10 o'clock on, mallards that had left en-mass when we arrived tricked back in singles, pairs and small flocks. Paul and Eddie handled the calling, the four of us hunters taking turns shooting first.

Paul's blinds and decoys are two more parts of his lifetime waterfowl study. After years of modifying commercial products, he finally concluded he'd have to manufacture his own. Now his Full Curl Decoys incorporate the flocked heads and natural tones he swears by and his blinds blend into their surroundings.

"For a while I was making my blinds out of wire fencing and Tule Mats," he explains, "but this created too much of a solid entity," he says. "Look carefully at nature and you won't see solid structures, and neither will a duck."

After a whole lot of trial and error, Paul came up with a product he markets as E-Z Fab, a grayish mesh fabric that attaches to a metal framework, then is interwoven with natural vegetation. Hunters can see incoming waterfowl through this mesh, but unless there's movement, the ducks won't spot them.

"The main thing, though, is that we're in a blind that blends with its surroundings," Paul emphasizes. "To a duck this is



Paul Sullivan photo

Paul Sullivan poses with some ducks near one of his ponds near the Snake River.

just another patch of weeds."

That morning calling and using a pull-cord spin-wing decoy were dictated by our quarry. When no birds were visible, Eddie blared away just to let birds know where we were, but when a flight approached, both callers often fell silent.

"Some days you can call them right into your lap, but at other times close-in calling just makes the birds nervous," he said.

Perhaps the strategy that surprises Paul's first-time hunters the most is his refusal to shoot birds out of big flocks. That morning we picked away at groups of ten or less, but when fifty mallards swooped in, several

landed in our decoys, the fat was sent out to chase them away.

"Again, whether it's ducks or geese, I just can't afford to be educating that many birds at one time," he explains. "You shoot one or two and the rest are a whole lot more wary of this place. Plus, when you push a big flock back to the river without shooting, singles, pairs and small groups will break away and come right back in here."

When one o'clock rolled around, we'd gathered the decoys and were snapping photos of happy hunters with their harvest of greenheads. About then it was pretty tough to argue with any of Paul's duck hunting strategies.



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for The World