

## Buy The Book

### Friends In Low Places By C.L. Marshall

Opening day of the October split of duck season had come and gone in the Free State. The spring and summer had been favorable for breeding local wood ducks. The fifty or so wood-duck boxes erected over the late-winter months by a host of volunteers had done their job. Early scouting in late summer provided evidence of the breeding success that these boxes had had on the local wood duck population. Our first two hunts of the year had confirmed it.

Opening day on a public marsh is quite an ordeal. All duck hunters should experience it at least two times. After the first time, most will walk away wondering just what the hell happened. A second experience will allow the unindoctrinated to soak up more of the chaos that surrounds it. It's a first come, first served type of environment. For many, like myself, it's a first real chance to get duck hunting. It brings out all the kindred spirits. Yes, once muzzleloader season for deer starts, the once-bustling little ramp only handles a few boats a day. That number usually falls to just one or two as the season winds down. Now, on a midweek day toward the middle of the second split, the ramp served just two.

Launching my boat early on a moonless morning on a strong outgoing tide, I thought it strange that I was the only person at the ramp. My young chocolate Lab, "Milo," and I hopped in the boat, fired it up and quietly made our way to a bush blind deep in the cypress swamp. Making our way up a narrow gut against the strong outgoing tide, I understood that this morning's hunt would last only ninety minutes or so if I planned to make it to work before 9:00 a.m. On the way in, I hazily tossed over half a dozen wood-duck decoys and continued to the creek. The boat was stashed in a small feeder gut, bowline lashed to a two-by-two pole planted there for that purpose. The old Remington, fifteen or so shells and my ever-present five-gallon bucket were snatched up out of the boat, and Milo and I made our way to the vegetation-covered blind.

This was Milo's first true year of hunting. I'd picked her up from Dave Bramble in Tolchester as a pup, and in her first few outings of the last season, she'd shown promise. Her skill thus far in the season had exceeded my training ability. She was eager, hyper as hell and blessed with a keen nose. In her first few hunts, she'd performed admirably. The little chocolate Lab proved to be a bit hard to control at the blind, but she marked and found birds very well. She knew what her role was. These

wood ducks were primarily passing shots. Birds that were hit fell in thick vegetation, in muddy muskrat leads and in other areas not accessible by man. She found them routinely.

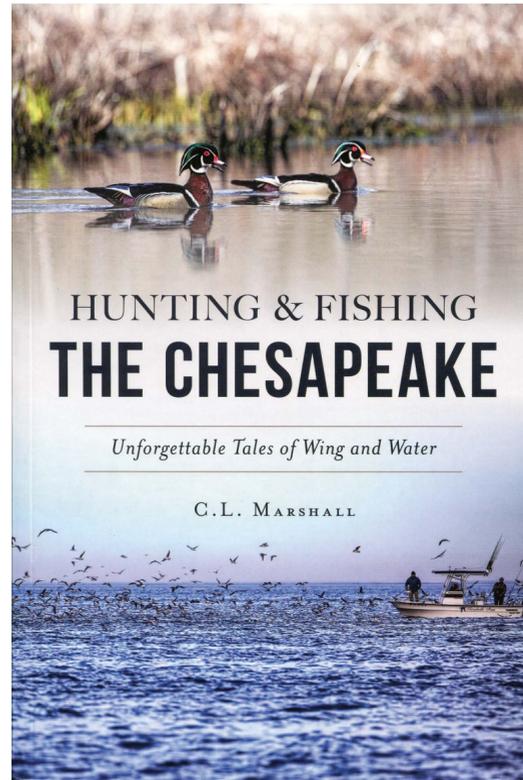
Things got underway quickly, most likely a couple of minutes prior to legal. A single wood duck hovered near the mojo, resulting in an easy retrieve. I shot selectively, taking only shots that I felt had a high likelihood of success. In twenty minutes and with only five shots, my three woodies lay lined up in the bushy hide. Five more minutes were allotted in the hopes that a few bluewings would pass by. The time passed with only more wood ducks being interested in our location. As the sun began to shine through the line of cypress trees to the east, we began our short trek back to the boat. About halfway there, five shots rang out only a couple hundred yards from my location. I was glad to be heading out with only a limit of three woodies. I was unsure of who had come up the little creek behind me. It was an uneasy feeling. My thoughts raced as to just who these folks were. Thinking back to other "confrontations" that I'd had in this same marsh, I could feel my blood pressure beginning to rise. Public hunting is not

an endeavor for the thin-skinned. Reaching the boat, I was looking forward to chatting with these so-called hunters who had the nerve to hunt on "my" public marsh. Hopefully, stern talk and hot air would prevent them from a return trip. I wouldn't mind if they called me an ass, jerk or whatever they chose to, as long as they left my wood-duck hole alone.

Milo hopped in the boat eagerly, as if ready for the next adventure. I, on the other hand, ambled along the edge of the creek gingerly. This marsh is one of the harshest to walk in that I've ever seen. A spill in the muddy creek wasn't in my plans. Unleashing the bowline, I dropped the gun and birds in the boat. A couple shoves on the push pole and the boat entered the fast-ebbing creek. There wasn't enough water to operate the motor. Mud, seemingly fifteen-miles-deep, and silt made poling somewhat difficult. I used small, short, shallow strokes, keeping the aluminum hull away from the "three sisters" stumps exposed on the starboard side of the creek. Drifting with the outgoing tide to the front of the blind, I quickly picked up the six wood-duck decoys. Finding deeper water in the larger entrance creek, the motor was engaged in shallow-water drive. The two hundred yards were traversed with some difficulty. I was glad we were getting out of there when we did.

Rounding the last bend, I slowed due to the decoy spread at the entrance to my little creek. The spread was appropriate for the type of hunting. Across the creek, two hunters sat in their boat. I eased over to see how their morning was going. It was

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at the least I could do after driving through their spread. We chatted for a few minutes about my fortune this morning. They confided that they had knocked down a pair earlier, but after half an hour of searching could not locate the two birds in the dense marsh. Since the morning flight was clearly over, and the clearing skies proved that the day would be more suited for rockfishing than duck hunting, I asked if it'd be all right if I tried to send the dog to find them. They agreed. Neither they nor I expected much to come out of this exercise.

Inosed the boat on the soft mud on the opposite shore, then Milo exited quickly. She stood broadside, awaiting me to come ashore with her. I had no plans of it. As she heard me order her into the marsh with the usual four-word command, "Milo, get that sumbitch!," she sloshed off through the water and mud. Moving through the vegetation, I quickly lost sight of her as she searched in various muskrat leads and crevices that made up the pockmarked terrain. Emerging from a muddy slophole with the hen wood duck firmly in her grasp, she bounded back toward the boat. Delivering it to hand, she was re-deployed in attempt the find the second bird. She returned rather quickly with the second. I must say that I was quite the proud dog owner as we returned across the creek to deliver the fowl to the waiting hunters.

Upon delivery to the two young hunters, they were very complimentary of the dog's effort. I was utterly shocked, thinking that we had little chance of finding one,

much less both of the felled woodies. I pulled alongside their boat, and we sat together and took time to have a cup of coffee while Milo jumped ashore looking for whatever was next for her. I certainly didn't mind her swimming to get the mud off her prior to jumping into the truck.

Introductions were made. Prior to us parting ways, one of the young men, Elliott, pulled his duck call off his lanyard and handed it to me. I resisted, but he was insistent. Upon inspection, he informed me that he had in fact made it himself. I hit it a few times; the sound was just what I was looking to add to my arsenal. I appreciatively accepted it and made my way back to the ramp.

That call still occupies a loop on my lanyard to this day. Each time I call on it to perform, it does. Several times, it has provided me with just the right sounds to convince the birds to fully commit. Each time I use it, I can't help but think of the young man who made it. Most important, I recall my personal lesson learned. I remember that there are still some good souls who take to the marshes for all the right reasons.

All hope is not lost.



To read the rest of the story, you'll have to BUY the Book!

## Industry News

### NSSF Commends President, Congress on Gun and School Safety Laws

The National Shooting Sports Foundation® (NSSF®), the trade association for the firearms, ammunition, hunting and shooting sports industries, today commended President Donald Trump and Congress for signing into law the omnibus legislation containing Fix NICS and Stop School Violence provisions. Both legislative measures were called for by President Trump and supported by NSSF as measures to help ensure firearms remain beyond the reach of prohibited individuals while respecting the rights of law-abiding firearms owners and working to keep children safe.

"The legislation passed by Congress and signed into law by President Trump is a true achievement to making communities safer while respecting individual rights," said Lawrence G. Keane, NSSF senior vice president for government and public affairs and general counsel. "This law will enable the FBI's background check system to work as intended, a longstanding goal for the firearms industry, as well as providing resources to states to improve mental health and intervention services critical to enabling authorities to proactively address potential threats in their communities."

NSSF thanks Sen. John Cornyn (R-Texas) for his leadership to reach across party lines and gain support from 77 senators to make true changes that make communities safer while respecting constitutional rights.

"Fixing the background check system will help save lives and reduce the likelihood of what occurred in Parkland and Sutherland Springs from happening again," said Sen. Cornyn in a press release.

Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) praised legislation for the measures to work with states to ensure all disqualifying mental health and criminal records are uploaded to the FBI and resources are available to intervene to prevent tragedies witnessed in Florida.

"This bill fixes and fully funds the FBI's National Instant Criminal Background System (NICS), a critical step to keep guns out of the hands of people with a criminal history," Speaker Ryan said in a press release. "It implements key provisions of the STOP School Violence Act to fund Department of Justice grant programs that help keep schools safe. Overall, the bill provides more than \$2.3 billion in new funding for mental health, training, and school safety programs."

NSSF launched the FixNICS® campaign in 2013 and worked successfully to reform laws in 16 states, resulting in an increase in the number of disqualifying mental health records in NICS to nearly 5 million, from about 1.7 million, a 200 percent increase. NSSF previously endorsed S. 2135, the Fix NICS Act by Sen. John Cornyn (R-Texas), which topped 77 cosponsors. NSSF also endorsed H.R. 4909, the Stop School Violence Act, which overwhelmingly passed the U.S. House of Representatives. Both bills were merged with the omnibus legislation and are now law.

## Recipes

### Bacon Wrapped Quail

<b>Ingredients</b>	1/2 cup(s) H-E-B Artisan Cheddar Cheese, shredded
Recipe makes 14 Servings	1/4 cup(s) shallots, minced
2 jalapeños, divided use	1 Tbsp garlic, minced
1 Lb H-E-B Black Pepper Bacon, divided use	1/4 cup(s) bourbon, optional
1 pkg. Frozen Quail Breasts, thawed and breasts split	2 Tbsp maple syrup
1 Tsp kosher salt	2 Tbsp Dijon mustard
	3 Tbsp apple cider vinegar
	2 Tbsp salted butter

#### Instructions

- 1 Preheat oven to 450°F, or if grilling, preheat grill to medium-high.
- 2 Cut 1 jalapeño into 14 strips, and cut 7 slices of bacon in half.
- 3 To prepare quail: season each breast with salt then top with 1 strip of jalapeño and some shredded cheese. Fold breast over then wrap entire breast with 1/2 piece of bacon. Secure with a skewer or toothpick. Continue until all breasts are wrapped.
- 4 Place on a lined baking sheet and bake or grill 20 minutes.
- 5 Meanwhile, dice 4 to 5 slices of uncooked bacon, and place in a skillet over medium-high heat.
- 6 Cook several minutes to allow some fat to render out and the bacon to begin to crisp.
- 7 Finely dice remaining jalapeño then add to bacon along with minced shallots and garlic. Cook 2 minutes, stirring occasionally.
- 8 Add bourbon and carefully set on fire (using a stick lighter) to allow alcohol to cook off.
- 9 Once alcohol has cooked off, stir in maple syrup, mustard, and apple cider vinegar. Bring to a simmer for 1 minute, remove from heat and quickly stir in butter.
- 10 Serve sauce in a small bowl next to quail.

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