

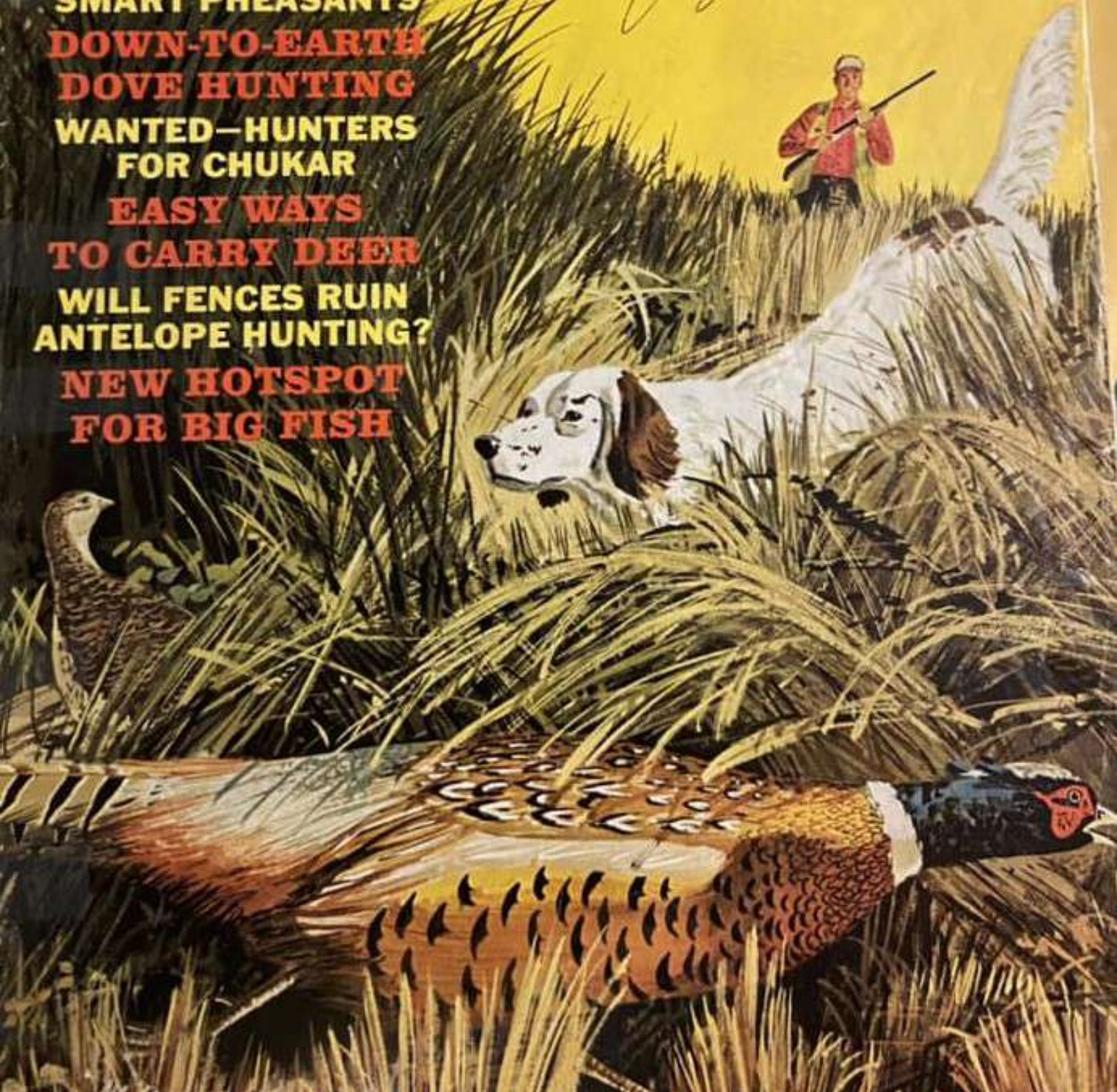
HOW TO HUNT IN YOUR AREA—GEAR YOU NEED

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DOGS THAT DECOY DUCKS



The black duck is among the wariest of birds, but he forgets caution when his curiosity is aroused.

All you need to fatally attract him is a stick-chasing dog **By NICHOLAS KARAS**

I NEVER would have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes. Black ducks are without equal among waterfowl in intelligence and wariness, hence are the most difficult to decoy. But I had just witnessed a horde of more than 2,000 of them act as if they had been hypnotized. An entire raft of blacks, abandoning all caution, had swum more than 300 yards in a matter of minutes to within a few feet of our blind and well within shotgun range.

We hadn't set out decoys or called the ducks or enticed them with grain. Our only bait was a frolicking, foxlike dog that retrieved a stick thrown from the blind as fast as Paul Armstrong could toss it out. We were tolling.

Tolling isn't new. In fact it's quite old, but today a mere handful of hunters still use tolling dogs the way hunters did in the old days of waterfowling a hundred

or more years ago. Tolling had its roots in Europe, where dogs were used to lure waterfowl into long, net-covered pipes, weirs, or traps. In this country the ducks were always tolled before the gun.

My own education in the art started several years ago, when I was thumbing through an old book on duck hunting written about the time of the Civil War. I thought I had heard of all known methods of killing ducks, but when I came upon a chapter, "Tolling Ducks," I found something new, at least for me.

According to the author, "There is a most curious process resorted to by the shooters on Chesapeake Bay . . . the wonderful mode of decoying ducks, termed tolling. A species of mongrel water-dog is taught to run backwards and forwards after stones, sticks, or other missiles,



As fast as Paul Armstrong tossed out the stick, the tolling dog ran to retrieve it (*above*). This furious activity aroused the ducks' interest, and they swam into shore for a closer look (*left*)

thrown from one side to the other along the shore. The motion of the dog will soon be perceived by ducks on the water, who, stimulated by an extreme degree of curiosity, and feeling anxious to inform themselves, rise their heads high on the water and come swimming for the shore. When the ducks are within range, a battery of hunters let loose, killing the ducks on the water. The dog immediately rushes into the water to arrest the flight of the maimed and wounded, who, struggling on every side, dye the water with their rich blood."

Though the description may be a bit gruesome by today's standards, it did present a fascinating way of hunting ducks. However, in my experience, any duck that spotted a dog always took off in the opposite direction. So the idea of tolling ducks didn't seem too credible. Anyway, I all but forgot the story until last year, when I was on Long Island Sound fishing for striped bass with Roland de Grosbois, manager of the New York office of the Canadian Government Travel Bureau. During a lull in the fishing we started swapping stories of good hunts we had had in the past.

"Say," Roland said, "I'll bet you never hunted ducks by tolling."

"No," I replied. "But no one hunts like that today."

"Sure they do. There are still a few fellows in Nova Scotia who have tolling dogs."

That was the lead I needed. After a series of letters and phone calls, I finally wangled an invitation to toll with Paul Armstrong, of Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. Paul is a building contractor, but his hobby is raising tolling dogs. Currently he has three, which is a large number since there are fewer than two dozen of the breed in existence.

The first half of the Nova Scotia split season for ducks was nearing its close when the invitation came, so we had to set up the hunt for the second half, which opened on December 7. From the beginning, Paul was dubious of a second-half hunt. December is late for waterfowl hunting in Nova Scotia, the ponds and rivers usually being locked in with ice. However, we made our plans and hoped for the best. Luckily, no cold spells hit the East during the month of November, and the weather the first