

HUNTING WITH DANNY

By Darold Givens

Usually when the waterfowl season comes to an end, I am left with a hollow feeling except for the fact that the law allows for junior hunters to hunt for one more weekend. This is where certain club owners and hunters volunteer their time, space and money. They do this by opening up their clubs to the junior hunters and parents and providing them access to private club shooting. This means that the owners leave out decoys and flooded fields one more week. Our club, The Laughing Mallard was such a club. We hosted three 13 year old hunters, two boys and a girl. I was assigned Danny Speirn from Bolinas. He came with his friend Colin and Colin's dad, Thorny. The girl Sharin came with her dad from Rohnert Park.

All three hunters had some experience but a check of their equipment is always a good idea. I like to check their shotgun to see if it is a good fit and they are using proper shells and correct chock tubes. The next item would be clothing. Is it going to be warm enough and since they will be wading in ponds, are the boots tall enough so they do not get wet. There was a chance of rain so waterproof jackets were important.

Saturday morning was the first day and getting the kids out of bed was not hard. They were all in their camo clothes and ready to go. I was taking Danny to a new location called the Refuge Club. I had not hunted this blind before so wanted to get an early start. I loaded my dog Barron, hooked up the ATV that I tow and headed out. There was a good south wind that added to the excitement. When we arrived, I drove Danny on the ATV and Barron ran along side. I knew approximately where the blind was but finding it in the dark was confusing me. We finally located a stand up blind but it was so well camouflaged, we couldn't find the door until almost shooting time.

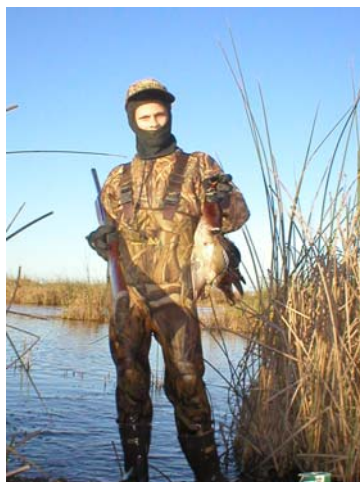
As Danny was getting prepared, we could see ducks landing all around the blind. This gets the blood pumping even faster. We could hear shooting in the distance but I checked my watch and it was 10 minutes early. Since there were only youth hunters, it had to be a junior hunter. I told Danny he had to wait for the legal shoot time. He agreed and when time arrived, most of the birds that landed around us had already flown away. But we could see many more birds working around the blind. His first shot was a pair that came over the top of us and he got them both. Wow! This was going to be easy.

Barron was able to retrieve one but the other got away. The next shot was a single and down it went. There were several misses after that. It was now daylight and we could see why this was named the Refuge Club. Right next to us we could see the fence line of the Sacramento Refuge and noticed hundreds of

birds descending beyond the fence. This did not stop several snow geese that got too close. Danny was able to get three of them throughout the morning. The morning shoot was over and we looked for crippled birds and headed back to the club. There were planned events such as a bar- be-cue lunch and shooting at clay targets to sharpen up their shooting skills. The daily limit is 7 ducks and 4 geese. Danny had 4 ducks and 3 geese so we headed to the Laughing Mallard that afternoon for more hunting.



Danny's expectations were running high. He 'only' wanted a drake sprig, drake wood duck, speckled belly goose and a blue winged teal. Our afternoon hunts were typically slow but some birds were working. I had to leave my dog Barron behind as he started to limp. The first pair of birds came by and Danny shot one. The other shrieked away and right away I knew he shot a drake wood duck. I told him to hurry out as we had no dog. He came back with the drake wood duck and a big smile.



The next was a pair of sprig and I told him to shoot the one on the left as it was the drake. He got off a nice shot but the bird fell into some tules and was not

dead. Once again he ran out to search for the bird and came back with a fine drake sprig.



The birds had taken a rest for a while when all of a sudden out of the corner of my eye I saw four 'speck' geese only 25 yards away. I yelled, Danny, shoot. He had turned to face the geese and his eyes widened as he aimed his gun to the closest one and down it came. Since that was his limit of geese, he did not shoot at the others. He ran out and got his goose.



Now how about the blue winged teal? If you know birds, a blue winged teal is rare in this area and I asked Danny to settle for a cinnamon teal as they have

blue wings. He said ok and later a pair flew by but Danny missed. Time was up and we left for the clubhouse.

The next day Danny and I went back to the Refuge Club. The weather was calmer and the birds were scarce. Since it was a new day, we could start a new limit of birds. Danny's aim was off quite a bit this morning and I'm not so sure his mother would approve of some of the language I heard. I told him to settle down and take his time. A single duck was coming towards us and Danny said it was too far. I told him it was not and to take aim. Bang, the bird folded like a card table. Since this was the first bird of the morning, Barron and I went out to retrieve it. When Barron handed me the bird, I noticed it was a hen gadwall, not a very impressive bird until I noticed a glint on her right leg. Yep, it was banded.



I could hardly wait to get back to the blind and tell Danny. It wasn't until later that it had sunk in as some hunters have gone their whole life without getting a banded bird. The smile came slowly and later that was all we talked about. The morning allowed a few more misses but he would say, so what, I have a banded bird.