

FISHERMEN'S VOICE

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News & Comment for and by the Fishermen of Maine

FREE

Bird Camp '08 (in Abstentia)

Two years we'd been talking about it. Half dozen of us get into bird country early. Rent a cabin for the first few days then meet up with the rest of the crew for last five. Pieces of the puzzle finally slid into place. Woods road partner and driver Albair got coverage for his store. Bates was flying in from Arizona. Byrnes had snagged a few extra days. Cabin had been found and rented and Bearce Carter would come up early from Florida and join us from his Dad's place just down the lake.

Early reports filtering back were birds had been busy propagating in a big way. Combined with a warm dryish spring allowing for more than one hatch might give us a fall to make up for the past ten years when petrol per partridge was well in favor of the partridge. Sounded up town.

Having to forgo the annual St. Partridge Day (October 1st) gathering at Riley Brook in New Brunswick, Canada this year AJ and I didn't point the jeep north until second week when I would hook up with the early gathering on Saturday.

We would stay and hunt with "Muck" Carter and "Toody" Mulherin, two avid birders at their cabin/house on Cross Lake. "Muck" had inherited a third interest in the main hunting camp and now with advancing age was passing this same share along to the able management of son Bearce. The Carter families have long been numbered amongst the most hospitable of hosts to say nothing of the able food and drink they manage. So we always look forward to our time with each.

This fall of '07 was a winner. One for the memories. Warm, crystal clear days with vibrant leaf colors and cool nights. Often wore shorts and worked shirtless while building a new studio and workshop. It was just like Maine travel brochures describe the way "It's supposed to be." However... the gremlins were afoot. Somehow, some way, some reason, dues began to pop up on the scoreboard and the edge began to slip away. First day at Cross Lake was rain and nasty wind. Okay, good reading day. Second day more rain but navigable. Saw two birds. One had smoking tail feathers as he zoomed across the road and out of sight. Other walked slowly into the underbrush which turned quickly to foot sucking marsh. Birds two points up. No problem. Still plenty of time ahead.

Adage Bird Hunting 101: Leave no forwarding address and cell phone at home. Act as if dead for duration.

Phone rings as we walked soggy footed through the door in late afternoon. Rental property situational emergency. Nothing to do but repack jeep. Put locks on the guns and retrace down 95 to real world. All that

remained was to live vicariously from ecstatic emails and phone calls that came week after bird camp. This is the time one takes stock and miserably remarks “What did I do to deserve this?”

Monday morning, week later, by 9 am phone rang in Albair’s Jewelry Emporium, “Well,” I said, “give me all the self-ennvious details and don’t spare anything. If I’m gonna shed tears this might as well be delicious.”

“Are you sitting down?”

Uh, oh. “Yes,” not really sure now I wanted to know. “That bad?”

“Out of my jeep. Crew who hunted with me. We counted 96 birds. Entire crew limited out. Just like the old days. They were everywhere. And...we only counted birds we saw. No “heards” or “maybes”.

“...No, no, no. I am going to shed eye water,” I said.

“And listen to this. Byrnes and I were hunting alone. Saw a lone bird on my side down an embankment. We stopped. I eased out, slipped a shell into my old single shot .410 (Albair likes to give all game a sporting edge – barbless hooks, etc.) and headed this bird on his first step to the oven. Byrnes slipped out and started to walk head and cheek for siblings while I layed the .410 on the jeep hood and slid down to retrieve my bird. I got to the bottom, stood up, looked around, and went instantly dry mouthed. I softly called to Byrnes. “Tom, there’s more. Slide my gun down.” Which he did. I had no shells.

Shaky, low voiced I managed to get out again, “Throw me some shells. Two came down, .20 gauge, his shells. Wrong. “In the console. Mine. Send a handful.” All the time birds didn’t move.

“No way.”

“Yes.” I slowly picked up some shells and Byrnesy started to walk down the road again. I shot one on the ground, and then saw another in a high bush. Byrnes fired on the road ahead and to my right. I popped the one on the high bush, and then stepped forward to retrieve as another one exploded from underfoot. Shot him on the wing. Then I started to pick it up and Byrnesy said softly, “Mine dropped on your side.” So I eased back to the ditch and made my way through the alders to pick it up as he shot again. “Keep walking,” he said.

“No, no Phil, I’ve heard enough. The box of tissues is empty and my hanky is soaked,” I cried.

“Yes. One covey. Five birds and probably five more we didn’t see.”

“And they sat that long.”

“Yes,” he replied, “and everyone in camp limited out,” he repeated again for my benefit.

And listen to this true story. We’d finished cleaning camp on Sunday so I went out to the small outhouse, you know the one over by the bunkhouse, and was sitting there, door open of course. Hard to close that one and sit down. This bird comes walking across the lawn. Brazen as Billy be damned. He had to know it was Sunday. I half expected it to say, “See you next year.”

Enough was enough.

I would have to guess that the only morals I can eke out of Bird Season ’07 is that Bird Season ’08 will be twice as sweet. AJ and I, one way or another, will be at Riley Brook for St. Partridge Day on the first. And, don’t bother to call us after September 25th ’cause Verizon will be on furlough for the following six weeks.

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For years I've cast a wary eye at that ubiquitous pot luck dish lasagna. Often times its goushy, has no real flavor or is dry and overcooked. Also over used, "Oh, I'll bring the lasagna". Done well though it's great and there are some dynamite variations. This, for better or worse, is one I put together last week after complaining of an overfull fridge where anything needed was always way in the back.

Salsa Lasagna

1. Oil the pan with good extra virgin olive oil.
2. Cover bottom with no-boil lasagna noodles.
3. First layer of cottage cheese, some cilantro and spring onion and cover with romaine lettuce leaves.
4. Lasagna noodles.
5. Layer of fresh salsa (mild or medium), sliced mushrooms and some crushed cooked bacon.
6. More noodles (Italians must have another name for these. Noodles mean long and thin and multishaped).
7. Layer of combined cottage cheese and shredded extra sharp cheddar.
8. More noodles.
9. Layer of salsa (medium-hot) with basil (fresh preferably or dried) and some minced fresh garlic.
10. Cover with more shredded cheese and decorate with some lengths of spring onion.

This one's going in my permanent collection. Fair winds and good roads.

Lee S. Wilbur