

FISHERMEN'S VOICE

Vol. 12, No. 3 – Mar. 2007

News & Comment for and by the Fishermen of Maine

FREE

Bird Camp '06

For the third straight day, rain with the ferocity of a touch-free carwash, had beat on the low shaked roof at Fish River bird camp. Camp road, just passable in the best of conditions now resembled two semi-parallel brooks punctuated by mud ponds. Passability limited to moose and four-wheel drives. Leaves, even the oaks, were completely stripped away leaving minimal partridge cover which didn't make much difference because they'd left for parts unknown.

Where we once tumbled out at 5:30 for coffee and quick wash up (by those who do such a thing) there was a marked lack of enthusiasm. SUVs and trucks straggled out by 9:30 or ten when in prior years there'd be "blood in the trunk" by then. Gang would start to gather early at pre-arranged rendezvous instead of drifting in through the lunch hour. Quick beer libation changed to brown water and ice, even to refills. Fires had to be built with dry wood from camp under a semblance of shelter. Food tasted just as good though and stories probably lasted a tad longer as the reminiscer lingered longer over minute details.

For a warm up to bird week and some great fun this year, AJ and I had stayed with Mike and Dottie Fitzgerald (she of "Dottie's Kitchen" fame) at their beautiful new place on Madawaska Lake. Weather was splendid. We had a few gorgeous walks in the lingering autumn, found some new roads and truly enjoyed down time after a hectic summer season. Mike and I managed to get out a few afternoons to check the current ratio of miles per bird. There'd been many a conversation amongst the group over past year whether the bird population would recover or have a repeat of scorched earth '05 when birds were simply in abstentia.

Second afternoon out, Mike spotted two feeding just off a newly graveled road on his side and eased the jeep to a stop with engine running. (Theory being engine noise is soothing and masks some other noises such as jacking in shells, falling beer cans, or banging shotgun on door in haste to shoot.) Now what I'm going to relate probably underscores one reason we continue to chase these ignorant chickens. Both had started walking in that

queer way, necks stretching out with each step up the embankment. Slipping out the jeep door he quickly drew down on the lead bird and shot as it topped the crest.

“Bingo!”

Bird two, running, had made cover and slid under some low hanging branches.

“Mike,” I said quietly, “let’s bracket that clucker. You ease up left I’ll take the right. We’ll go real slow and listen. Speak before we shoot so other can move.”

About 20 yards apart we started into the mixed fall foliage and spruce. “Toc, toc, toc,” came the soft clucking—step by step we edged in. Every so often I could see Mike. Toc, toc, toc, and a rustle. Fifteen feet in and the bird headed for Mike. I called softly to him, could he see the bird? His reply was barely audible, “Negative.”

“Okay,” I said, “freeze,” and began to step quietly in his direction stopping after each step. “Toc, toc, toc,” ever so close, still out of sight in the thick copse of immature spruce.

Suddenly in that heart stopping way, the partridge exploded from the bushes and flew to a nearby tree still between us and about 12 feet off the ground.

“Mike, can you see the bird?”

“No.”

“Kneel down.”

“Okay.”

I raised and fired. Bingo. Number two. There were at least a few birds around. Teamwork and trust. Fun.

Day was waning fast. One more short road to try. Neither of us liked it. No cover. We came to the end and started to turn. Partridge bolts out of the raspberry bushes running hell bent for election just as Mike flips on the headlight switch. Cool and collected as if this was an everyday occurrence he stops, slides out the door, jacks in a shell and in one fluid motion dings number three as I set the gear in park. Never judge a road for lack of cover. Partridge don’t comprehend the difference.

Day before we were to go into camp, my longtime friend and hunting companion, Phil Albair, picked me up, clad in uniform of the day. A rainbreaker. First road, first trail walk, we shoot a bird. Bad, bad, omen but

we laugh and “enjoy” the drenching. Hunted rest of the day. No more birds. Stayed with and had a delicious steak feed at 87-year-old patriarch “Muck” Carter’s that evening, our generous friend who owns the Fish River camp. We woke early the next day, finished packing the grub, stopped at Porter’s for breakfast and squished into camp. Not only did the omen bade true, we never shot another bird, we never even saw another bird. We picked our best producer road, drove it continually back and forth the last two days. Nothing. Make no mind however, day in the woods is worth ten in civ.

It was still a great year, though the attendance was down. We had time for longer conversations, the sharing of past year’s experiences and ever present age ripening ailments. We probably ate and drank more than we should and with the newly instated “no smoking” in camp, the poker games were a tad disjointed. But we laughed at the same old stories, razzed each other unmercifully and spoke of bringing cameras next year instead of guns. Never did broach the question. If we didn’t see birds with guns, what difference would cameras make?

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Always on the lookout for, or thinking about, good cookie recipes. I happened to have two overripe bananas in the fridge and in true Yankee fashion had to devise a use or AJ would have them deposited by morning. With a little help from the Quaker this is what I came up with. I caught a bit of grief for the Crisco but against butter the numbers are okay and of course the oats lower cholesterol. Right on. Let me know how they fare on your scale.

BRWC Oatmeal Cookies (Banana, Raisin, White Chocolate)

1 cup butter flavored Crisco (or butter)
3/4 cup firm packed brown sugar
1/4 cup honey
1/2 cup cane sugar (unrefined if possible)
2 eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla
2 very ripe bananas (black)

Beat all together in large bowl:

1 1/2 cup + 1 tablespoon all purpose flour (pref. Robin Hood)
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon cinnamon

1/2 teaspoon salt (very optional)
3 1/4 cups Quaker oats (O.F. or Quick)

Blend in separate bowl then add and stir into first bowl blending well.

Add and stir again 1 cup golden raisins
1/4 cup chopped walnuts
1/4 cup white chocolate bits (have to have a little chocolate in one’s life, even white)

Bet you can’t stop with one!!

Good roads and fair winds.

Lee S. Wilbur