FELSher: Head out to sea for great time waterfowling

FROM PAGE 29

Bourne said, “Scoters prefer shallow-water. They also like to feed where oystermen or clammers are working. When the watermen work the bottom, they expose food for the ducks. The birds absolutely see the boats, but that means food to them so they are not shy about landing near boats in open water.”

With the wind and strong bay currents, sportsmen must retrieve their kills quickly or they will never recover them. Bourne attaches his anchor line to a buoy. He unhooks the line and motors over to pick up birds. Then, he returns to reattach to the boat blind to the buoy and resumes hunting in the same spot minutes later.

“Currents affect the boat,” Bourne advised. “Probably, 99 percent of the time, the boat will be parallel to the decoys with the wind coming from one side or the other. In this part of Chesapeake Bay, currents run north and south and the predominant winds are always north or south with a little eastern.”

In previous open-water hunts, we always put out massive decoy spreads. Bourne doesn’t do that for sea ducks. He usually uses two dozen decoys matching the species common to that area. We set out all surf scoter decoys attached to a decoy net for quick deployment. He used mostly drakes, but sprinkled in a few hens for realism.

During our hunt, surf scoters kept coming into our decoys steadily in singles, pairs and small flocks all morning until we bagged our limit of drakes. In open, featureless water, sportsmen cannot judge distances as well so place the decoys at a good shooting range from the boat. Use magnum No. 2 or BB loads with tight chokes to down these tough birds.

“Surf scoters are a little bigger than mallards, but 5,000 times tougher,” Bourne quipped. “They can take a lot of punishment. Surf scoters and black or common scoters are the predominant sea duck species in Chesapeake Bay. A white wing scoter is a trophy here. A white-wing is larger with a very significant white patch on its wing. We also shoot long-tailed ducks, formerly called oldsquaw. Longtails typically prefer deeper water than scoters. I definitely use longtail decoys where those birds are prominent.”

Many people say they don’t like to eat sea ducks. Back at my son’s house, Daniel breasted out the birds. Then, he marinated the boneless breasts in his secret concoction of Cajun spices and other ingredients, wrapped them in bacon and slow sautéed them in bacon grease. To me, they tasted like venison tenderloins.

We had so much fun. For your sea duck hunt, contact Wingman Guide Service at 910-467-6410 or look them up on Facebook.