

Tub Blinds, Snowshoes, and Mud

Leo LeBlanc's got a hankerin' for the taste of sea duck

By Sandra Phinney

Just whisper the words “ducks” or “geese” and Leo LeBlanc’s eyes light up. As soon as the season opens and there’s a northwest wind with a little nasty weather brewing, Leo becomes a man with a mission: that mission is to have duck stew for supper. First he checks for the right tide—nearing the low mark—and then heads for the wharf, in the small fishing community of Wedgeport in South-West Nova Scotia. He boards his skiff, and maneuvers his way through the narrow channel to a wide expanse of mud flats, where he’s set up a blind. However, this is no ordinary blind.

LeBlanc remembers when oldtimers buried wooden molasses barrels in the mud flats and used them for blinds. Unfortunately, sea worms and the elements played havoc with these wooden structures and before long, they started to disintegrate and cave in. So LeBlanc—a boatbuilder by profession—devised the perfect solution. He constructs a three-foot-square box, 40 inches deep, out of ½-inch plywood, then applies a few good coats of fiberglass. Voila!—a relatively indestructible unit. After doing a paint job in camouflage blotches of grey, brown, and black, he heads to the mud flats to sink it. “I dig a hole roughly the size of the tub with a five-pronged pitchfork. If you use a shovel, the solid mud just sticks to it and you can’t get it off. But with a pitchfork I’m done in less than an hour,” he says.

After the hole is ready, he inserts the tub and attaches a five-gallon bucket, which he uses to bail out the water after the tides come and go.

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can sink a foot before you have time to splutter a string of expletives. In the old days, men strapped barrel staves to their boots, which acted like small skis. But this was awkward and cumbersome, and often more trouble than it was worth.

A few years ago, LeBlanc was snowshoeing on the edge of the flats and ventured out over the mud. It worked! He now uses round snow shoes but suggests that plastic ones would also work, or the regular kind with the extended tips in the back sawed off.

Every hunter has a story and LeBlanc

is no exception. “One year in January, it was blowing and freezing cold. My partner had a tub on the other side of the flats, so he dropped me off and kept going. When it was time to pick me up again, he lost the propeller. He tried coming back but the wind picked up and blew him to the far side.”

By this time the tide had turned and LeBlanc was up to his knees in water. He watched his buddy make futile attempts in 35-knot winds to row back to LeBlanc. They both fired every shot they had, hoping that someone on the mainland would notice their plight. It

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worked, but before LeBlanc could know this, he made a swift decision. “I stuck my gun in the mud, walked into the channel with all my clothes and boots on and started to swim. When I got to the middle I thought I was going to sink. I panicked, then decided to swim faster!”

By the time LeBlanc got to shore, help was on the way. His legs turned blue, but after a good soak in a hot tub he wasn’t the worse for wear. He tucks in, “I never got a cold all winter.”

Eiders are LeBlanc’s favourite duck for eating. “People say they taste like fish, but sea ducks only eat mussels, so they are really sweet.” He skins, rather than plucks them, hunks the eiders up and sauté’s them with half a pound of margarine and three of the biggest onions he can find. Then he covers the meat with a little water and a can of consommé. “Cook this slowly for two to three hours. About an hour before supper, add turnips, parsnip, potato, carrots, salt and pepper. Just before you’re ready to serve it, add a can of cream of mushroom soup.

This makes a great duck stew.”

Sometimes LeBlanc puts duck and goose in Rappie Pie—a traditional Acadian dish made with grated potatoes and hot broth. That’s a taste experience

all on its own. Every once in awhile someone asks him how to take the wild taste out of a wild goose. He shakes his head, “I tell them, go to Sobey’s!” LeBlanc’s favourite way of preparing a goose is simply to stuff it with lots of onions, sprinkle a good dose of salt and pepper, cover with bacon, then bake it with apple juice for three to four hours.

Back on the topic of hunting, another trick LeBlanc learned from the old folks is how to make decoys out of mud and eelgrass. Within 20 yards of his blind, he digs 30 to 35 hunks of mud the size of large footballs and turns them over on top of the flats. Then he covers each pile with dried eelgrass. It’s especially effective if the mounds are lying in puddles of water. Ducks will spy them from several miles away and the mud decoys work every time.

Finally, LeBlanc climbs into his blind with his gun and a grin—and waits. It won’t be long before supper comes callin’.

