

Interview Log

Interviewee: Al Dager **Tape #:** MAAF/KF/DE/FT6.17.607

Interviewer: Kelly Feltault **# of Tapes:** 1

Date: 6/17/98 **# of Sides:** 2

Location: Middletown De; on Al's back porch

Topic: hunting, trapping, collecting bird calls, land usage; development

Corresponding Photography Log #: MAAF/KF/DE/PS6.17.657-660

Comments: File name: Deft607.doc. See Fieldnotes: FN06.17.98. *Italics* indicate emphasis; [brackets indicate additional information not on the tape or asides by fieldworker]; "quotations indicate direct transcription."

Al has been interviewed by the DE folklife office, but not regarding his duck call collection. We do talk of other things regarding hunting and trapping.

BEGIN SIDE A

[turning off hot tub]

competition calling; started 1984; won first one; duck and goose; did Easton as beginner; pushed into practicing; doing a circuit travelling around the country; biggest ones are in Mississippi flyway; most held there;

types of calls; Sean Mann makes Eastern Shore goose call; lives in Towson MD; call maker;

diff between regional calls and calling styles

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does celebrity hunt and trip; had to be chosen; picked top 25 callers;

knows big name callers; talks about them [there is really a celebrity status to some of the more famous callers]

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big goose hunting time on shore was 1978-90; time of large guide companies etc; describes how many geese there were; he ran hunting parties; DE had 4 bird limit and it was too many; MD had 3 per day; if hunting 4 or 5 days then you bag 20 geese and it's too many to take home

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blinds everywhere, geese everywhere;

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duck pluckers; MD and DE; mixed women and men; good money; sell the feathers; 2-300 geese laying on floor; had to be tagged; run picking houses all night;

making his own goose calls; other equipment he has: blinds; boats; uses sage grass;

Lewes Outfitters in Lewes: friend of Al's who's an outfitter for hunting; does guide services; also owns Lewes Seafood and Produce; Chuck donahue; guides in winter and does seafood in summer;

Taking care of marshes; get rid of Phragmites; traps Taylor farm; what phrag does; cuts up the dogs finding ducks; bad for marsh;

[wife Shelly comes out]

Shelly dresses the geese; breasts them out for the people he guides; Shelly hunts; prefers to fish;

Sea duck hunts too; brandt;

Renting farms to hunt and trap; money he spends; loss of money for farmers; now let deer hunters rent farms;

Been renting Taylor's farm for 31 years; muskrat business; in 70s got \$10 a piece for muskrats;

Takes hunting party in morning; then check trap line; does it everyday; old timers he knew;

His calendar: Summer: plant acres of sunflowers on farm for ducks, clover, and white tail beans for deer; spray phrag in September and April; better to kill it in fall; dove season in fall; burn marshes in March; summer fish; September mow sunflowers for dove shoot; bow hunt and deer hunt; calling contests in September and Oct.; early duck season in oct. and mid Oct in MD; reed duck blinds in early Oct; muzzle loader season for deer in Oct.; paint decoys in Oct; Oct very busy;

Teal shooting is the best you can get; season splits: early in Oct. then shuts down; opens back up in 1st of Nov. shuts down until Thanksgiving week; then Thanksgiving week to 15 or 16 of Jan.; same for MD

So busy with hunting that on a 24 hour schedule it seems; takes off 5-6 weeks in hunting season; work schedule so that he can hunt in a.m. and work in pm

How he got into being a guide; worked for big guide company for geese in MD; then started his own; winning duck and goose calling competitions guys would ask him if he took parties out hunting; credits that with his success as guide;

END SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

Snow goose hunting; how his responsibility is to put them on the birds not shoot them for the hunters; stories of hunting parties;

PA hunting party; 4 older guys; pitch black out; walk through marsh to get to blind; one guy stumbled then said, "I lost my gun" had fallen; could not find the gun; take him out to the blind; in blind had a seat built from plywood and 2x4s; heavy set guy weighed 250 lbs; Al went to set out rig; and guy sat on seat and fell through it; stuck with his legs around his ears; still couldn't find his gun and now had to wedge him out of this seat; daylight came and found gun; had fallen on it and driven it straight down in the mud;

DE story of another 200 lb guy; in marsh like quick sand; shoot a duck send dog after it; Al says stay there I'll get you with the boat and we'll go to the dog; Al told him to step on the grass clumps but he stepped on the mud and sank up to his waist; couldn't get them out; 3 buddies in the blinds all making fun of him; finally put a rope around him and pulled him out;

These things happen every year; tell them stay in the blind don't get out but they always get out and get stuck; nothing bad but just funny accidents; in blind he tells them where to sit where ducks will come from; when to shoot; have to let the ducks commit and set in decoys;

Fun of the whole thing is to talk the ducks into the decoys;

Types of calls ducks do; does calling seminars; diff ducks and diff sounds and what they all sound like; Al does demos;

[gets duck calls]

collects them has 500 calls; how he wants to display them in his new house; demos with calls now;

calling for snow geese; like lots of noise gives all his hunting parties each a call when hunting them; starts with 1000 decoys for snow geese too

some of his oldest duck calls; stories of each call he has brought out; memory objects; [going through the bags of calls he brought out]

demos call made in 1912 and some home made calls; has one from local guy who made homemade calls from beer cans, PVC pipe etc; demos;

discussing various reed sizes and their effects;

buck and doe calls for deer; turkey calls;

END TAPE