

November 06, 2013 – Aerial Waterfowl Inventory Blog

I was recently asked to settle a dispute between a father and son, both veteran duck hunters of the Illinois River. They had a disagreement about how big their decoy spread should be. The question was posed, “while flying, can you tell one blind from another by just the size of decoy spread.” My answer was a very quick, YES. I can see larger decoy spreads from greater distances while in the airplane. I can also see larger groups of ducks at greater distances than smaller concentrations given similar wetland habitats. I know of duck blinds along the Mississippi River that use 4,000 to 5,000 decoys with 10-15 spinners, a few squirters, and a couple jerk strings. They shoot a lot of ducks. Other clubs use a few dozen decoys that are picked up each day, and they are very successful as well. Most of the time from the plane, I can’t tell the difference between expensive decoys and the cheaper variety, but I think this boils down to personal preference. I can’t say for sure if ducks decoy better and hunter success increases over larger spreads, but my personal experience suggests you need as many decoys as your wallet can afford. Other things I see from the air are the openings (shooting holes) in duck blinds. These openings stand out and maybe the ducks begin to figure it out as well. The same thing goes for a boat placed 25 yds from a decoy spread. The hunter might not be able to see the boat from the ground, but a wary mallard can see it from the air. In the end, it comes down to location, location, and location. If they guy next to you has 1,000 decoys, you’re probably not going to be very successful with 2 to 3 dozen. I have posted (Facebook - Forbes Biological Station) a few pictures of decoy spreads taken from the plane for you to view. I believe hunters in duck blinds that blend into the existing vegetation with decoy spreads that simulate natural aggregations of ducks on a wetland probably harvest more birds than other hunters in less cryptically positioned blinds with fewer and evenly spaced decoys. But, you be the judge.

Stay tuned for more updates next week.....