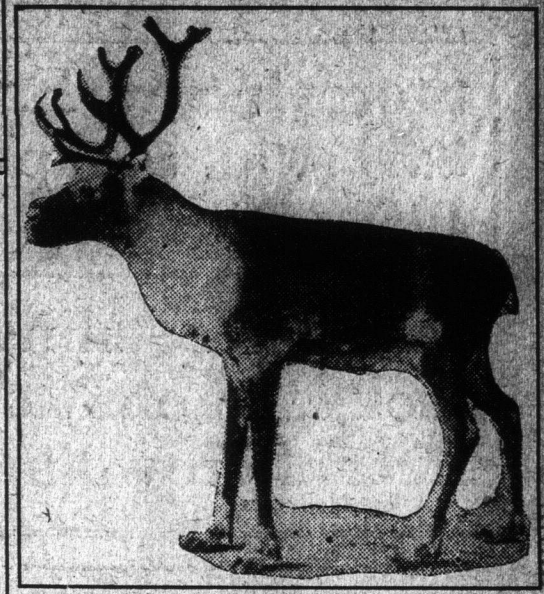


# Field Sports at Home and Abroad



## Sportsman's Calendar

DECEMBER  
 December 15—Last day for deer-shooting.  
 December 31—Last day for pheasants, grouse, and quail.  
 After November it is illegal to sell ducks, geese, snipe.

### A QUESTION OF FAITH

"Do you believe in fairies?"  
 A high, tempestuous wind out of the northeast had panned me indoors that September day. Under its current, flowing over my roof like the rush of a stream, I had worked through the hours with the assiduity of a heaver. No human voice asked what I did. The air waves clamorously broke on the walls of my one-room house. Without was the Saskatchewan prairie, nude and untroubled, sprowled to the far rim of vision. A blue-steel sky fitted it accurately as a cover does a pail. Wind and earth and the sound of my hammer in time these grew to be the entities of life.

When the desk of remnant flooring, conceived by the necessity of an idle day, stood forth completed, I laid down the tools of carpentry and took up implements of the chase. Windbound ducks I reflected, should be on the creek in the coulee. The thought of a pot filled with fragrance of wild meat speeded me to the hunting grounds. As I neared the water the unsubmissive sun broke through a crack in the containing sky and trickled down in mighty volume. It quickly filled the flat with running fire; before and behind me the grey, arrested slopes flamed to live coals, the sky was sundered into flaring splinters, and I was a speck caught in the slag of a titanic furnace. Mechanically, I drew forth tobacco and sat me down to wonder.

When the ash was knocked from my pipe, the absorbent earth had taken the deluge and gloom was welling up. The efficient hour for the filling of my pot was all but gone: I skulked hurriedly through the border grasses of the creek. No water-fowl came to sight and the dark grew steadily thicker. With a sigh I relinquished the vision of the pot glorified and turned homeward to my larder of canned goods. Athwart the coulee I caught a white glint and remembered the ambitious pool that called a sluggish spring its father. For sport for sport's sake, I veered aside and trod gently. From a tussock of grass I observed the better and as I lived I beheld a blot that moved upon the water and, as it moved, left ripples in its wake. The vision returned and my nostrils filled again. I re-committed to place the pool between me and the western sky, so that uprising Master Duck must show himself to best advantage against the last light. Down on my hands and knees I fell and crept into range of the ambitious pool, then sprang erect, ears attuned to the thudding roar of beating wings. Silence persisted as before, and I stalked openly forward, hope dying hard. I heaved a rock into the middle of the pool; it fell with a crash, smashing the surface to silvery fragments, and again came silence. Where was the duck? He had gone like the sunset colors, I vowed. "Little pool," said I, standing on its brim, "no duck would alight upon you. Thus far you are naught but a mud-puddle. I wish you growth."

My gun was heavy and the cactus spines in hands and knees were made manifest one by one as I lumbered up the slope to my larder of goods canned. Salmon or sardines? I ruminated as to what plays autumn would bring on the boards back east, what the trail of an automobile smelled like, how the bell of a locomotive sounded, whether clams were really as delectable as blue points, how rugs felt under foot. My thoughts were those of the forgotten homesteader. The inscrutable earth and sky told nothing.

Salmon or sardines?  
 I turned the knob and applied a match to the wick of the hanging lantern. The marvel of created light existed. It showed the stove and the pans and kettles, the proud, young desk, and the bunk and chair. Something more it appeared to show—a plate on the table in the exact centre of the oilcloth, and on the plate two slices of cake, thick and sturdy and white with icing. I closed my eyes, then looked again, and once more beheld this vision. I extended a cautious finger. Salmon or sardines? I laughed in the face of the larder.

Perhaps it was the motherly hands of my neighbor's wife who wrought this reality. Still, as I sucked the finger that was tipped with tangible icing, I asked of myself—  
 "Do you believe in fairies?"—John Mathier, in Recreation.

### A MORNING WITH WAWA.

Were you ever crouched in a pit out in the big stubble fields at daybreak on a late October or early November morning, waiting alert and anxious for the coming of the wild geese? And the burning thrills of goose fever, chasing the icicles out of your marrow as the beloved double-barrel cuts down a pair of great plump birds, each thumping into the stubble with a ten-pound thud—have you felt that? Or, perchance, the chagrin that comes when you cut woful gaps in the morning air just where the geese wasn't located? Did you say no? Well, if you are a believer in choked barrels, smokeless powder and chilled shot, please sit up and take notice. You have missed a whole great lot!

There is no other such game bird as the goose. Of whatever species, Canada gray, Hutchins, speckle-breasted, or white waxy, he is peerless. Wary and cunning, his five to twelve pounds of sapid deliciousness is ever-learned by the successful hunter. He is strong and speedy on the wing; despite his great size he is fairly difficult to hit; and armor-plated in his heavy coat of feathers you will find him decidedly hard to bring down.

What other game bird can string the hunter's nerve to such a pitch? His is not a burst from cover, in sight for an instant only. His coming is visible on the horizon for three miles distant; his stentorian voice rolls out over the sweeping prairie landscape as he approaches. Nearer and nearer—a moving mist a line, a dotted line, a wavering string of swelling round shapes, ever increasing into gray bodies with whiffing wings. Excitement! Ask the over-strung novice, in shooting position long before the flock is within range of his gun. The wild goose is the very spiritual essence of the Northland. His resounding honk is the voice of the wilds—of chill and somber November pains—of iced-rimmed sloughs and lakes. He is truly not of the South, though he winters there, but of the North; a type of the strong, Northern races that survive and prosper by right of hardihood.

"Mack, the geese have come! Heard them all last night going lakeward. Be ready Friday evening, four o'clock."

What man with a drop of red blood in his veins, and knowing the scent of powder, would scorn such a summons? At the appointed time we pulled out of town—four of us—and struck for the goose country. The Old Boy had hunted geese for twenty years, and his two sons, Andy and Rob, were chips of the original wood. Who could ask better company. The democrat bore two days' provisions for man and beast; the weather was windy—goose weather; the birds themselves were known to have arrived in numbers, and it seemed good to be again hitting the old trail lakeward in quest of Wawa.

Our intended destination lay some twelve to sixteen miles to the southwestward, according as the geese moved; but great was our joy, when scarce four miles had been put behind, to meet the flight—out looking for us it almost seemed. On the horizon above the sand hills to the westward hovered a moving mist, slowly circling. The unmistakable concourse of gray geese on their feeding ground, and five hundred if a dozen. The two days previous had been wet and foggy. What shooters were abroad had evidently not located the birds, and now to us the prospect looked rosy.

The geese were feeding on a field north of a long ridge of sand hills. We pulled into the scrub for concealment, unlimbered our guns and spread out along the edge of the willows to await the return flight from the stubble. The Old Boy took the outside eastern position, Rob went into the hills, Andy had the outside left or westernmost stand, while I held the center. So quietly were the birds feeding that we had not seen them in the field; half a mile distant, it would have been impossible to tell there was a goose in the country. A few, mallard ducks passed over, barely out of reach; they also were straggling feeding somewhere to the northward, but for obvious reasons they drew no fire. A sharp tail grouse, his crop stuffed with No. 2 Northern, and now quite ready for bed, came off the field and fluttered into the grass a few yards away. He, too, was unmolested.

"Hi! They're coming!" There was no need of the warning. The whole field was suddenly in commotion, as several hundred geese rose from the stubble. In a few moments they were in order, strung out into companies, the whole forming a line two hundred yards or more long, and coming dead on. I crouched in the grass, hugged the double-barrel and waited. At first it appeared as though the three of us would have a chance; but soon the line veered eastward, and when I rose to shoot the birds were all on that side and rather distant. At the double report one gray shape plummeted earthward; another dropped some distance and headed back toward the field, hard hit. The next instant I heard the Old Boy's gun speaking up and two birds came down.

It was now up to Andy to attend to the grouse, which had been nothing daunted by the firing. In fact, it took a great deal, we found, to daunt that bird. After considerable beating ground on our part, he finally flushed at Andy's feet and rocketed off with a derisive "Cuk—cuk—cuk!" quite regardless of two loads of goose shot following him.

Dusk had now settled down, and Andy and I started over to meet the Old Boy. Just as we reached him the shout of a goose sounded out of the northward, and instantly we became as dead men. I couldn't help but wonder where the old chap tucked away his 215 pounds avoirdupois, for there was mighty little showing over the mown meadow grass. There were four of the geese low down, coming fairly at us. Perhaps they had stayed for a parting nightcap after the crowd had moved off; anyway, they now seemed in a hurry. Three geese roared—each a double-barrel—and the four geese, with startled squawk and sudden wiggle, veered a little and went on, wondering no doubt what all the noise was about.

It was needful to explain how and why it all happened. It always is. But presently, for all that, the little willow fire was blinking cheerily in the scrub, the tea-pail boiling, and Gyp and Fred crunch-munching their oats. Been there, have you? It's the best hour of the day! What else has the brightness and life of a camp fire?

The lunch box emptied, Andy and I at once set out for the field, armed now, jointly, with a short handled shovel. We found the spot where the birds had been feeding, and

put down two pits. It was no small matter to "stubble" them, to hide the fresh earth, for the knoll was extremely bare; but we had long hours to spare, and finally the job was finished and we returned to camp—which now looked more like a camp. The little tent had been pitched, and snug hay beds within were waiting for us. Here was luxury, indeed! Usually we do not take the tent, and many and various forms of bivouac have been ours. On the open prairie a haystack or straw stack supplies shelter and bed but the scrubby bluffs are much preferable a camp fire then being a possibility. No night camp is half right without its fire, and camp yarns lack savor unless inspired by the genial blaze.

Orion was stalking across the Southern sky when, about a o'clock, we crawled out. No one mentioned breakfast. Each of us shouldered a load and we sallied out for the field. Two more pits were sunk forty yards off the others, and stubbled; decoys were set out, and all was in readiness when the ruddy tints of daybreak appeared. All signs proclaimed the coming day would be warm, clear and calm—ideal for many things but not for business such as ours. But there's more in goose shooting than killing honkers. The dawn of a new day, almost any time of the year, is worth the struggle to the early riser. It is good to just sit and listen to the wake-up sounds of the wild things—the first "tseep" from the sparrow in the grass, the far-off hoot of the horned owl in the sand hills, the coyote's clear quaver.

Far overhead and due north passed a whizzing line of projectiles. Greenhead, the early riser, was leading his troop to the stubble, and we sat up in the pits and enjoyed what we could not mar, as flock after flock in long, quivering, sinuous strings burst into eye-shot against the reddening east and passed on into the duller northern obscurity. In ten minutes the whole duck flight was over; but Andy and I could plainly hear the Old Boy's sentiments; that he would cultivate the acquaintance of that same flight and secure a closer interview.

"Honk!" Far to the southward came a sharp, clear call—the morning cry—a hungry, half inquiry note. We dodged down in our holes. Soon six geese came into view, but passed by without deigning to give us the slightest sign of attention. In a quarter of an hour the call was repeated from the same direction, and soon-fort more grays loomed up. They seemed bent on passing to the westward, but when about opposite suddenly swerved in towards us, winged unconcernedly over some stacks; set their wings stiffly, and, with much rapid fire goose talk, sailed into our midst.

Crash! ber-bang! Pandemonium! One big thud, three terrified geese quitting the country, and it was over.

"Rotten work!" suggested some one, sheepishly, and the statement went entirely unchallenged.

The sun was now almost peeping, and the flight began in earnest. Soon a dozen more grays were swinging by, but turned and came in just the right way, only a few yards from the ground. If there is any other such sight as geese decoying may I never see it! The first swing takes the great birds half round you—they must alight just so, to suit their peculiar taste for order or etiquette. Now they appear so large and close that you feel you could down them with a club. But dear experience has taught you that they are not yet in good range, and the Old Boy's, "If they're coming, always let 'em come," is well in memory. So you scarcely dare to peer through your stubble screen, and by sheer will pressure hod yourself down. And, oh, the anxiety of those few moments! One circle is usually enough for that cunning old, black-necked leader to see through the deception, and instantly whirl his troop off with him. But, to your joy, they circle again and with "All's well" calls—deep-throated mellow notes—they swing short, right in upon you, their great, plump, gray-brown bodies ruddy in the eastern light, wings whiffing noisily, white-patched, black heads out-thrust, and each turning ever so little, to right to left, cautiously, inquiringly—a sight magnificent! Now!

Pyrotechnics and goose pandemonium this time on our side of the field; and two geese pounded into the stubble. One apiece to our guns. The birds hadn't given the other shooters a chance to do execution. There was no time to retrieve, as more geese were coming, and anxiously we waited for them to repeat the maneuver. But, like people, you can't fool all the geese all the time; so two or three flocks passed by, toll free, to breakfast elsewhere. A shotgun volley can be heard a long way lakeward, it apparently has big significance to Wawa, and once on the qui vive you can seldom outwit him. But soon newcomers were in sight, and again an unsuspecting bunch turned in to the decoys. They discovered their mistake a moment later, turned and made off; but the Old Boy was too quick for them, and two of their number remained. Many more passing flocks were thus put wise to our duplicity and passed on to the northward; but at length a goodly drove circled around and came in beautifully, almost between our pits—the finest sight of the morning. It seemed almost a sin, a sacrilege against Nature, to break that line and send them pell-mell, helter-skelter, away from us, minus three of their number.

Three geese to four guns! Poor work, it would seem, and the uninitiated looking on from a distance would wonder why we didn't kill them all—some twenty-five. But we always find that two, or even one, good shooter at the decoys gets as many birds as any larger number. The reason is doubtless that with every gun report the terrified birds wriggle and twist as they shoot skyward, and thus one shooter spoils the other's aim. In spite of his great size and weight, Mr. Goose is not at all slouchy in his actions, especially when one or two shots cut the air close to him, and a near neighbor bumps hard into the stubble.

The dead birds had scarcely been gathered (a necessity, as a dead goose belly-up is a mighty poor decoy) when a warning from the Old Boy sent us scurrying like gophers for our holes. A flock, with a pair some distance ahead, was working up over the same course as the last. "Take the right," I whispered to Andy as loud as I dared, for now the two were getting close and plainly to our side of the decoys. Next moment I raised my gun and drew on the left hand bird. It wilted, and I swung on the other one and it followed. Andy's explanation was that he didn't hear me and was lying low for the flock; all of which was doubtless true, though I fancy if he had seen the two I would have had small chance to make the double. That flock didn't come.

The last bird was only wing tipped, and led us a good chase before being captured. Rob had a standing order for such a goose; so I ran across to the stacks with the unfortunate and tied him to a sheaf of wheat. A small flock had again stormed the pits, and this time Rob and his father were shooting, and another bird was bagged, the Old Boy scoring the kill. Up to the present, the young lad, though sticking to his battery, had not succeeded in doing damage to the geese. A lone pair—sure decoys, as a rule—sailed without an instant's hesitation to our side and when within a few yards from us stiffened their wings, up-ended themselves, struck out their big black feet and—we gathered them in.

As the flight now seemed to be over, we left Rob in charge, and the three of us went to hunt for a winged bird that we had been unable to pick up. We had searched in vain some time, when suddenly a goose "Yu-wonk!" close at hand caught our ear, and four loud-voiced Canadas hove into view, decoyed at once, lumbered by me just out of reach, and circled fairly over the decoys. Down came their feet, and once, twice they seemed on the point of lighting, but each time took another little swing. Heavens! Would that kid never shoot? After about the third attempt the newcomers decided to go off and find fatter feeding company, and so moved straight away. At that a single, much belated shot rang out, and in a moment the leader of the four took a sudden swerve from the rest and dropped dead.

Andy and I returned to our pits in a vain hope that something of the sort might again happen, and soon three came back loudly calling no doubt for their leader who had fallen on the last visit. But though they came directly up to us they were now rather high, and only one came down to our fire, falling to Andy's gun.

The sun was now well up; and a flock returning from the north told that the flight was over for the morning, so we pulled up stakes. This consisted of filling our pits, packing up decoys and shells, and piling the victims, while Rob went off to the camp to bring the team. Fourteen birds had fallen, which with three of the previous evening made seventeen—big, broad breasted gray chaps—suggestive of many savory dinners, but more strongly reminding of the wonderful sport just ended.—By Hamilton M. Laing in Recreation.

### "A PHEASANT'S LENGTH IN FRONT"

The shooter much more often than not misses through firing low and behind. He is told in consequence to give the bird a lead of a foot, two feet, six feet, perhaps more. But he does not realize—or does he in time realize only too completely?—that these words have no meaning. When one man tells another to give a bird a lead of a foot, he does not know what a foot looks like to the other man. It is the old story of guessing at the size of the moon, as it Sir Robert Ball, or some other astronomer, who tells the story of the class of pupils who in turn estimated the size of a full moon? One said it was the size of an orange, another the size of a dinner plate, another guessed a sixpence and a fourth a cheese. The last perhaps was nearest the mark, since the size of a cheese remained to be determined. It is the same with aiming a foot or two feet in front of a flying mark. The better way in giving advice of the bird is also far simpler. The best way of putting it which the writer remembers hears is the advice of a father to his son: "Give that pheasant, my boy, a lead of a pheasant's length in front of him." Down came the pheasant.

### A FANTASY

A canoe glided noiselessly up the river on a rather cloudy July evening. The trees on the banks were a very dark green, and one could see their shadows dimly in the dark

water. The air was heavy, as before a rain, and the whole aspect and atmosphere was that of mystery and silence. The occupant of the canoe was a large, powerful looking Indian. His dress was that of an American sportsman and there was nothing in his whole appearance that was barbaric or uncivilized. He was known in his part of the country as King Pontas, and he lived in a little settlement of Indians who represented the last of their tribe.

Many white men had visited in the regions of King Pontas, in fact, many of them came every year to shoot the splendid animals that roamed the forests. Hearty, indeed, was the welcome given them by King Pontas and his people, for the chief was always glad to see them, and entertained them as befitted one of his rank and dignity. He and the white men had exchanged stories, his, tales of the wilds, and theirs, of the life of the cities. He had gone with them on their expeditions, and had guided them through the forests. Now they in turn were coming to settle in his domains, to build their houses, and their railways. Now must King Pontas and his tribe move far away from the place where they had lived so long. He thought of how the young braves would rejoice over the beautiful silver money they would receive from what the white man called his government.

Pontas did not despise money because he had learned of its value from the white men. But he loved his free life in the wilds far better, and his heart revolted at the thought of leaving them to go to the place which this government had assigned for him. True, he would still be chief of his tribe, but the white men would be there to rule over all.

Pontas paddled very slowly loath to miss the slightest object. The trees seemed to bend as if in sympathy, as if they sorrowed with him. He tried to think of how everything would look when it became a white man's settlement. In his mind's eye he could see a vast space made by cutting down the beautiful trees. There would be erected in their places neat little wooden boxes the white man's habitations. There would be heard the shrill whistle of the huge, ugly locomotive. It would be as if some magic power had changed the great wilderness of silence, into the busy hum of civilization, about which he had heard such wondrous tales.

"It is just," said King Pontas, "that we should make room for this race of white men, for ours will soon become extinct. Perhaps they, in their turn, will have to submit to the power of another people, as have the races before them. Such shall not be the fate of Pontas, for he will roam in parts, for from any white man's haunts." Some large black birds flew across the river, calling loudly. King Pontas sighed, and steered his canoe in the direction of the large lake away from where his people lived.—Mabel Block, in Rod and Gun.

### LIFE

When 'round yer lips the heart-sobs lurk  
 Then whistlin' mighty up-hill work;  
 But try and soon the tremble's gone,  
 Like darkness fadin' into dawn.

And when yer wants to growl, jest smile;  
 The effort's shorely worth yer while.  
 Yer trail's not half as steep and hard  
 As it might be; you know that, Pard!  
 —Effie McDowell Davies.

The record for "fancy" rifle shooting is something like 15,000 targets without a miss. This looks great, and maybe it is great. It might be interesting to look at the feat a little more closely. We will say the balls are 3 in. in diameter, tossed up 15 feet from the muzzle of the rifle. This gives a target 6 inches in diameter at thirty feet; 12 inches across at 60 feet; 2 feet in diameter at 120 feet; a 4 foot bull's eye at 240 feet, and 10 feet across at 200 yards. Probably a good many of our 200 yard sharpshooters who are accustomed to centering an 8 or 12-inch bull's eye at the distance when stationary, could manage to strike the shooting house pretty often if it were tossed in the air. That is all that would be necessary to become a champion; just hit the side of a barn when it was tossed a few yards into the air and so become a champion of the world.