





NICK HORTEN has traded his flat hat for a face mask, his flatcoat for a Chesapeake and has now taken to the skies with a goose-calling revolution. Is this traditional British wildfowler turning into an American waterfowl hunter?

# GULLIBLE GEESE, BEWARE!

## NICK HORTEN IS COMING TO A SKY NEAR YOU...

With single subdued hues for my fowling clobber, Bullseye thigh boots, a decent 3" Greener Empire side-by-side and a flatcoat at heel, I'd always thought of myself as being a typical British wildfowler.

But recently, something rather disconcerting has happened. My shooting jacket has become so multi-hued that Joseph would have been proud of it; the flat hat has been replaced by a fleecy face mask that wouldn't look out of place on a medieval torturer; neoprene chest waders adorn my nether regions, and the beautiful Greener was replaced by a brutal 3 1/2" chambered gas auto years ago. To complete the transformation the elegant flatcoat has been replaced by a bull-necked beligerent Chesapeake. I'm almost too embarrassed to say it out loud but this traditional British wildfowler is looking like... an American waterfowl hunter!

It's just as well then that I enjoy pitting my wits against the local population of that quintessentially North American bird, the majestic Canada goose. OK, so the feral Canada isn't everybody's favourite quarry goose, but living this far south we never get to see greylags, pinkfeet or whitefronts, so it's Canadas or nothing.

I don't have a problem emulating our cousins across the pond especially with those ideas that definitely work, so it's not just their clothing I've adopted, I've also started a Canada goose-calling revolution on British shores.

Most of us can blow a respectable quack on a mallard call and I suspect that a large percentage of us own one, whether we can adequately 'play' it or not. Yet the fact remains that the duck call, and the goose call, are imported American inventions that have no counterpart in British fowling history.

Being a few years behind American technical development, I started my Canada goose shooting career with the already obsolete wooden resonant chamber goose call. It had one tone and that was about the end of its vocabulary.

The next call I discovered was the flute. US hunters had actually been using them for about 30 years before I discovered them, but the flute was a significant technical advance. With the flute in hand I was able to converse with the geese, and

so things remained until fairly recently.

If you've seen one of those American goose-hunting DVDs, with the theatrical high-fiving after every shot and a soundtrack that lurches from syrupy homespun philosophy to heavy metal head banging, then you must have heard some pretty spectacular goose calling. Which comes as no surprise since the majority of these DVDs are made by purveyors of the latest Canada goose-calling technical revolution, the short reed Canada call.

With one short reed you can hold an animated conversation with the geese. Honestly. It has more tonal flexibility than any other type of call and can duplicate the entire vocabulary of the Canada goose. Impressive, but is this just manufacturers' hype or does it really work?

The first short reed call phrase I mastered was a simple feeding call interspersed with a few honks. One October morning I tried it on a pair of Canadas passing 200 yards wide of me. The effect was instantaneous as they turned ninety degrees and passed within easy range with their heads searching for the source of the sound.

As my proficiency increased, I found the ability to make such a realistic noise that a dozen geese changed direction to fly back over me, whereupon I gratefully removed two of their number. So I put the gun down and concentrated on the calling. After successfully calling them back five times I realised I had nothing left to prove.

If, like me, you live in the south and grey geese are few and far between, or

if you want to be a skilled and adaptable wildfowler better prepared to take on the Canadas, I thoroughly recommend you consider acquiring a short reed Canada goose call.

But, you might well ask, is the British Canada goose population in danger of being severely dented by thousands of users of this new super-call? Let's be honest about it, as good as they are, the short reed call isn't magic and there will be occasions when it appears to have no effect on the birds whatsoever. The real stumbling block is that despite its effectiveness, the call is tricky to master. There is, I feel, a necessary balance in the fact that the call is deadly, but a swine to learn. Such is the nature of nature.

