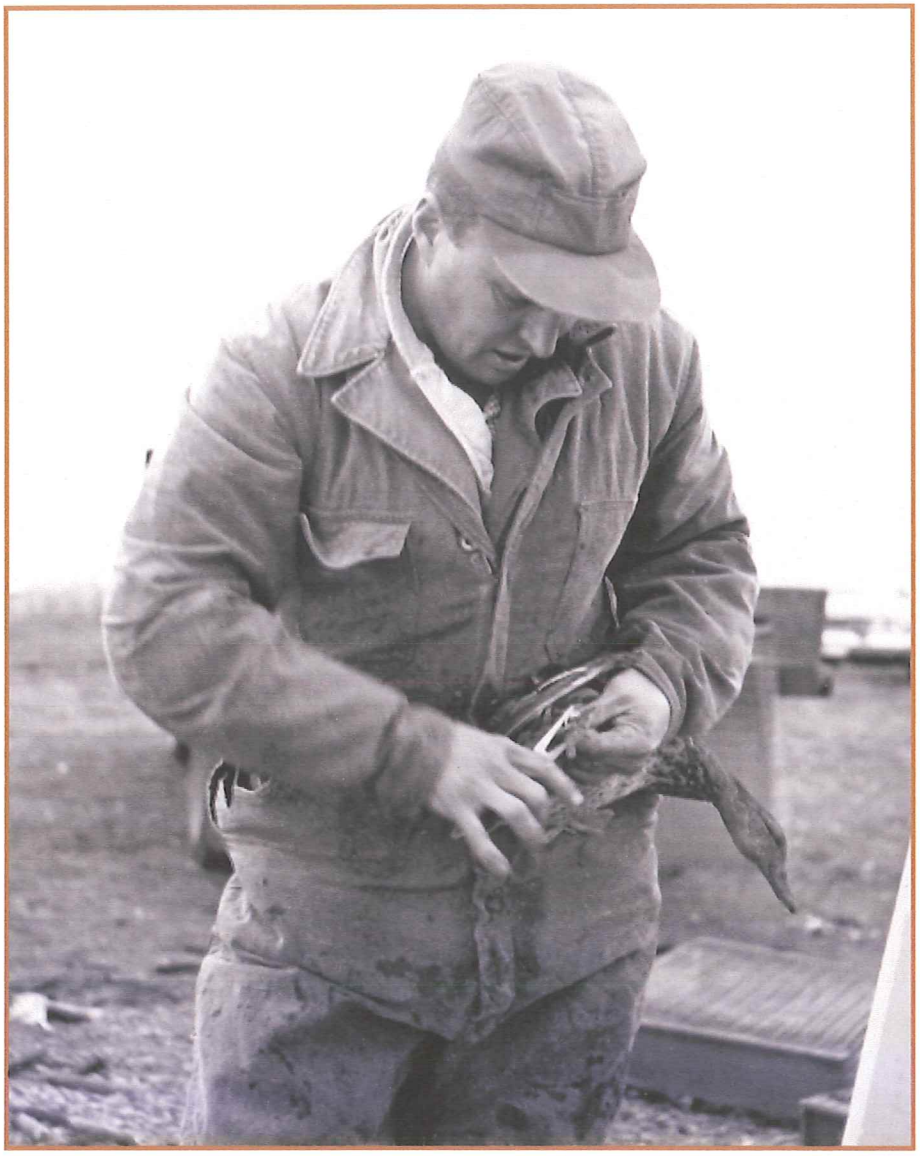
RICHARD A. HUNT

Waterfowler Extraordinaire



Introduction

Keen perception, usually far-sighted, candid and straight-forward, a willingness to help others, and a sincere, rigorous approach to career and life, together with a great sense of humor, all describe the character of Richard A. "Dick" Hunt.

Dick takes the words of Aldo Leopold to heart. His favorite Leopold quote may be "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise" (*Sand County Almanac*, 1949). Dick's frankness made him both famous and infamous. "Call a spade a spade," he says. Dick isn't shy about sharing his views on natural resource issues, especially in relation to waterfowl and wetlands.

Beyond the leadership Dick provided in natural resources management, he was a respected Boy Scout leader, a Deacon in his church, and "The best softball player in Horicon" according to the local paper. He spearheaded a planning committee to build a new church for his congregation.

Early Life

Born in 1926 at Edgerton, Wisconsin, Dick attended school in McFarland and graduated from Madison East High in 1944. Entering the Navy in 1945, he was stationed on Guam before VJ Day and was discharged in 1946. He entered the University of Wisconsin at Madison in January 1947, graduating with a B.S. degree in Conservation in June 1950. During that study, ornithologist John T. Emlen was his advisor, and he took courses from Norman Fassett and John Curtis in Botany and from Joe Hickey and Bob McCabe in Wildlife. Dick thought each influenced his approach to later waterfowl research.

Soon after graduating, Dick saw that better opportunity in conservation required an advanced degree, so he entered the UW's graduate program in Wildlife Management. Completing his coursework during 1951-1952, Dick needed a thesis project, and one developed in connection with a federal and state waterfowl research program. Joe Hickey, his major professor, strongly advocated formation of flyway councils and doing field research on the new subject of waterfowl population dynamics. Dick's thesis on effects of releasing captive-reared mallards began his long and illustrious career as a waterfowl research biologist and effective voice for "doing the right thing" when managing natural resources.

Career Start

After his bachelor's degree, Dick found no job with the WCD, so he wrote the Department's prairie chicken researcher Fred Hamerstrom, asking to work in exchange for room and board. Fred agreed and had him come to live with the Hamerstroms at Plainfield and assist with research for the summer. That September, Research Director Cy Kabat hired Dick as a temporary employee to continue prairie chicken work for the next 12 months, during which Dick also helped with research on deer, ruffed grouse, waterfowl, pheasants, muskrats and related habitat surveys.

When Dick completed graduate work in June 1952, WCD held an open exam for three or four biologist positions. He took the exam with at least 50 others and got a permanent position as a waterfowl biologist at Horicon Marsh.

Horicon Marsh

Arriving at Horicon that summer, Dick couldn't have known that he'd spend more than 50 years there, marry a local girl, raise three daughters and a son, become a respected member of the community and a star softball player, all the while establishing a reputation as one of North America's premier waterfowl researchers. His associates at Horicon were Ralph "Bud" Hopkins, the waterfowl Project Leader, and Laurence R. Jahn, another biologist. Larry and Dick worked as a team until Larry received his Wildlife Management doctorate and left for the Wildlife Management Institute in 1959. Dick quickly took an active role in the many surveys and studies that Hopkins had proposed.

Early Research

Dick and Larry wrote WCD's landmark 1964 Technical Bulletin 33,"*Duck and Coot Ecology and Management in Wisconsin,*" then one of a few comprehensive assessments of a breeding-ground state's waterfowl and wetland resources. Most of what are today's massive efforts to collect data for managing continental and flyway waterfowl populations had begun only in the mid- to late-1950s. "Tech 33" remains an important historical reference on information used to manage waterfowl and habitat in that era.

In Dick's thesis study, most captive-reared mallards released into the wild were shot during the first few weeks of the hunting season on or near their release site. Few survived to migrate and return to nest in Wisconsin. WCD's wildlife leadership had requested this study because sportsmen's groups were urging

them to rear and release mallards as was done with pheasants. Dick's findings spared WCD the considerable money and manpower of trying ineffectively to enhance Wisconsin's breeding duck numbers by stocking. He published the thesis as WCD Technical Bulletin 16 in 1958. Years later, the report provided guidance for other assessments of game farm mallard stocking. A 1971 symposium on hand-reared mallard releases supported Dick's conclusions and essentially shelved federal plans for massive releases of these ducks.

Another study that Dick worked on in the early 1950s also benefited the state's waterfowl. The project reared Canada geese in a large outdoor pen at Horicon, in hopes the captive birds would call to and attract migrant geese into the marsh's public hunting area. This was unsuccessful but produced longer-term positive results. The captive flock reproduced, and offspring nested on the marsh. In 1959, the captive flock was moved to the Crex Meadows Wildlife Area in Burnett County, and goslings produced were released to the wild there and at other locations.

The Crex Meadows project was the first WCD effort to rear or capture free-flying Canada geese and transplant them to restore the species. In 1962, these geese were confirmed to be of the "giant race," once native to Wisconsin and other Midwest marshes but thought to have been extirpated. These early efforts produced the forerunners of Wisconsin's expanding nesting population, now more than 150,000 Canada geese, primarily "giants." This probably represented the first successful species restoration in our state. In 1966, Dick was senior author of WCD Technical Bulletin 38, "*Canada Goose Breeding Populations in Wisconsin,*" summarizing results of the goose trapping and transplant efforts.

Managed Goose Hunt

Dick collaborated with the Game Management staff at Horicon to develop a prototype managed goose-hunting program around the refuge boundary. This offered public hunting blinds via a drawing system, and it spread the goose harvest among more hunters than before, which had been only to those having access, primarily by fee, on private lands adjacent to the refuge. The managed hunt attracted hunters from across the state, ran from 1953 through 1966, and tested innovative ideas to control and spread the goose harvest. As senior author, Dick summarized the tested techniques in a 1962 paper at the 27th North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference. Dick also wrote a second paper on shotgun shell limits and other regulations used during the managed hunt for the 1967 North Central Section of The Wildlife Society's "*Canada Goose Management Symposium.*"

New Challenges

Dick was promoted to Wetland Group Leader in 1960. In that position, which he held more than 27 years, he supervised biologists and technicians studying subjects ranging from ducks and geese to woodcock; from establishing secure nesting cover to controlling cattails; and from managed hunts to the incidence of lead poisoning in waterfowl.

Dick also represented Wisconsin on the Mississippi Flyway Council's Technical Section, which included waterfowl experts from 14 states and three Canadian provinces, plus U.S. and Canadian federal biologists. He became one of the most respected members and sometimes chaired the group. Representing Wisconsin there provided an international forum to display his strengths and wisdom. Chances to influence waterfowl research and management beyond Wisconsin's borders resulted.

A major Tech Section role was to recommend annual waterfowl hunting season options from among those that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service offered. Dick and biologists from the northern tier of Flyway states supported conservative season lengths and bag limits, thinking it best to err on the side of the resource and protect locally nesting ducks from overharvest.

As a member of the Tech Section's Canada goose committee, Dick saw to it that Wisconsin got a fair share of the Mississippi Valley Population annual harvest quota. He emphasized that rising numbers of geese around Horicon caused unacceptable crop damage. Dick and the Bureau of Wildlife Management felt smaller quotas hampered use of hunters to harass geese and minimize crop damage. The goose issues

diverted much of Dick's time and energy from critical duck management problems, but he recruited biologists who focused their research on ducks.

Dick took on tasks that others were reluctant to accept. For example, he arranged transportation and lodging for visiting state and federal biologists who analyzed duck wings that hunters mailed in to provide data on species, age, and sex of the annual harvest. He also volunteered at least twice for Canada goose banding expeditions that the Flyway Council sponsored in the Canadian Arctic. This pioneer work helped clarify which nesting populations furnished migrant geese to different parts of the Mississippi Flyway. The biologists on these trips underwent rugged travel, extreme weather, and hazardous conditions.

Duck Management and Research

Based on early surveys, Dick and most wildlife managers felt locally-nesting ducks, especially mallards, blue-winged teal, and wood ducks, composed a majority of the birds shot by Wisconsin hunters. Dick, Gerald Martz, and James March, investigated this quantitatively and banded locally reared ducks to estimate harvest and survival rates from 1965 through 1972. Dick's guidance on this study, his rapport with field managers and conservation wardens, and his ability to obtain financial support enabled development of methods for a statewide, spring aerial waterfowl census, now in its 38th year.

Census results and extensive banding gained recognition for Wisconsin as a significant duck and goose breeding area, helped secure federal funds to acquire and develop habitat, and showed that Wisconsin's duck harvest derived mainly from locally-hatched birds, especially mallards. With refinements, these studies still help to guide management of Wisconsin's breeding waterfowl.

Unique Contributions

Since 1972, the Wetland Group has seen new faces, most of whom have become respected wetland ecologists because Dick recognized their latent talents and mentored them. All of them acknowledge Dick's valuable contributions to their careers.

Dick worked closely with Wisconsin universities on joint research projects. He helped identify research priorities and provided funding for many graduate students, especially at UW-Stevens Point and UW-Madison. After retiring, Dick lectured at UW-Stevens Point's College of Natural Resources.

In the early 1970s, Dick began to study how electric power lines affect duck and goose behavior or cause direct mortality. He made field observations along East Central Wisconsin power lines and served as an expert witness in court cases involving power lines that cross wetlands or waterfowl concentration sites. His is some of the earliest Midwest research on this type of environmental impact.

Another example of Dick's innovative effort beyond his job description was work to sensitize managers and sportsmen to the lead poisoning problem in waterfowl, especially Canada geese and tundra swans. He searched for and recovered hundreds of dead and dying geese. These were necropsied to gage the extent of lead poisoning on marshes and lakes. With Daniel Trainer, Jr., Robert McCabe, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture's Animal Diagnostic Lab, and Milton Friend of the National Wildlife Health Lab, Dick found that lead poisoning caused significant mortality of geese, swans, and ducks that migrated through Wisconsin.

Along with Bureau of Wildlife Management Director John Keener and a group of hunters, Dick promoted development of non-toxic shot for waterfowl and strongly advocated that it be required, a distinctly unpopular idea in some of the other Flyway states. Wisconsin's efforts ultimately succeeded. The state was one of the first to switch to non-toxic shot and became recognized as a leader on this issue in the Flyway and nationally.

Resolution of Conflicting Interests

Another issue showed Dick's ability to dig into a problem, assemble facts, and enlighten the public and appropriate state and federal agencies. Besides his work on lead poisoning, he documented the extent and cost of crop depredation by Canada geese, especially near Horicon Marsh. While the Wildlife Management Bureau and others also worked on this problem, Dick's quantitative assessment of crop losses helped sensitize other Flyway states and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to its magnitude and to adverse effects on landowner relationships, eventually leading to a cooperative damage abatement effort.

Dick was an active member of the Citizens Natural Resources Association and successful in steering funds toward significant waterfowl projects. Among these endeavors receiving financial support was an initiative to create a buffer of reduced development around Horicon Marsh. This fledgling project -- the Horicon Marsh Area Coalition -- became the very successful Rock River Project devoted to watershed protection.

Beyond Waterfowl

Duck and goose problems didn't totally dominate Dick's interest and attention. With his advice and supervision, the Wetland Group also studied marsh vegetation management, cattail control, and flowage development. When responsibility for "web-less" (non-web-footed) migratory bird research was assigned to his group, Dick shared his talents and guidance with woodcock biologist Larry Gregg. Together they conducted one of the longest running woodcock studies in North America.

In the early 1970s, Dick arranged for some "web-less" funds to study Wisconsin's sandhill cranes. Working through UW-Stevens Point Prof. Lyle Nauman and grad student Ernest Gluesing, Dick initiated this research at a time when the sandhill crane was being considered for listing as threatened or endangered in Wisconsin. Their status reports focused public attention on cranes and showed that they were more common and widespread than previously thought.

As Wetland Group Leader, Dick strongly supported his staff by obtaining the seasonal manpower and funding for many studies. Dozens of university students got field experience working for Dick and his biologists. Many of these students later became stars in their own right at government agencies and universities. Another key contribution to wildlife research was Dick's focus on gaining approval and support from DNR leadership for new studies that addressed management priorities. This required an open, trusting relationship with administrators and field managers, which Dick maintained through most of his career. Not everyone agreed with his ideas and positions, but they respected his openness of expression and positive attitude.

Never satisfied with just maintaining the status quo, Dick was usually receptive to testing new methods of survey and management that might improve the resource. He encouraged his staff and peers at state, flyway, and continental levels to do the same and was always willing to cooperate in joint initiatives.

Helping Others

Dick took special interest in helping the Illinois Natural History Survey's Canada goose taxonomist, Harold C. Hanson, study goose taxonomy and behavior. Harold, who, with help from Dick and others, rediscovered the "giant" race of Canada geese, was working to identify the various races of North American geese and acknowledged Dick's contributions.

Dick also contributed regularly to a study of tundra swan migration by William Sladon of Johns Hopkins University. He guided Bill to swan concentrations around Dodge County, and he recorded dozens of neck collar observations for the study.

Dick was especially willing to help other Department programs. Most of his effort, as expected, went to assisting wildlife managers in the field and at the main office. In addition, he spent many hours outside his normal schedule, working with conservation wardens . During the so-called "goose wars" of the 1960s and 1970s, Dick helped state wardens and federal agents control illegal kill of Canada geese in the

Horicon Goose Hunting Zone. Law Enforcement administrators showed appreciation for Dick's help and expertise by maintaining his status as a Special Conservation Warden beyond the normal warden's retirement age of 55, a rare occurrence. Upon retirement, he also was given his badge, mounted on a wooden plaque, an honor few other Research employees have received.

Working alongside wardens, Dick saw a need to improve their waterfowl identification skills. Together with Thomas Harelson, the Horicon Area Warden Supervisor, Dick devised a course to train wardens in duck identification. Universities, nature centers, and natural resource agencies adopted instructional innovations that Dick developed for that course.

Upon his retirement from DNR in 1987, Dick was invited by Prof. Lyle Nauman to serve as a lecturer on Waterfowl Management at UW-Stevens Point. Dick's unique insights into the politics and procedures for contemporary waterfowl management delighted the students, and their response provided Dick with a rewarding experience.

Dick offered his expertise to a wide array of organizations including the Wisconsin Chapter of The Wildlife Society, the Prairie Chicken Society, and the International Crane Foundation. An active member of the Citizens Natural Resources Association, he succeeded in steering funds toward significant waterfowl projects, among them an initiative to create a buffer of reduced development around Horicon Marsh. This fledgling project, the Horicon Marsh Area Coalition, became the very successful Rock River Project devoted to watershed protection.

He provided inspiration, planning guidance, and personal financial support for the thriving Horicon Marsh Nature Center, also contributing waterfowl specimens for their educational displays. Dick also provided the Milwaukee Public Museum with specimens for collections; among them were two Wisconsin "firsts": two sooty terns and two cattle egrets.

An Example to Emulate

Dick thrived on hard work and long hours. He set a high standard for himself and his co-workers, as well as for dozens of students and interns lucky enough to work with the Wetland Group. By strong personal example, Dick inspired his staff and seasonal help to represent themselves in a moral, professional, and ethical fashion that would reflect positively on the Research Section in the eyes of other Department employees and the public.

Above all, Dick took intense satisfaction in learning about the natural world and its functions, especially wetland flora and fauna, adopting practical, scientific, and utilitarian approaches to studying it. For over 60 years, he contributed to protecting, promoting, and managing Wisconsin's migratory birds and their habitat, particularly with regard to wetlands. His continent-wide efforts benefited those species immensely. Therefore, he is eminently deserving of a place in the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame.

Professional Honors and Awards

- 1970s *Tympanuchus cupido pinnatus* award – Honor for scientific consultation and continuing support to the organization instrumental in establishing and maintaining prairie chicken populations in Wisconsin.
- 1970s Minnesota Waterfowlers Award – A special service award given Dick Hunt and Larry Jahn in recognition of Technical Bulletin Number 33, and its important contribution to Mississippi Flyway waterfowl management.
- 1986 Wisconsin Award – Wisconsin Chapter of the Wildlife Society award in recognition of outstanding, long-term contributions to wildlife.
- 1987 Waterfowl Conservation Award – A Mississippi Flyway Council meritorious service award. Only six of these special awards have been given to participating biologists over its history dating from 1952.

- 1987 – Law Enforcement special services award presented by the Department of Natural Resources Chief Warden in recognition of Dick's career-long law enforcement fieldwork with special acknowledgement of his creation and participation in an annual waterfowl identification-training program for conservation wardens. He also received a Certificate of Appreciation from Chief Warden Ralph Christensen for his years of service to their program.
- 2007 Trumpeter Swan Society Award – Honor for scientific consultation and dedication to the establishment of a breeding population in Wisconsin.
- 2007 Trumpeter Swan Film dedication – A film on the restoration of the trumpeter swan in Wisconsin was produced by the Trumpeter Swan Society and dedicated in Dick Hunt's name for his outstanding contributions to this project.
- 2007 Commemorative wetland dedication – Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and the Madison Chapter of the Audubon Society joint award naming a Jefferson County wetland unit of public land in honor of Dick Hunt and his wife, Janice, in recognition of Dick's lifetime dedication to "making a difference in Wisconsin Conservation."

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