

Decoy collector tells tales

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with basswood for the head and Michigan cedar for the body. Less expensive models are made of plastic and polystyrene.

"The more expensive handcrafted decoys ride the water better, take paint better and don't become water-logged and float at undesirable depths," he says.

Ducks are fooled by the imitations, says Lancaster.

"Decoys are so good that ducks have been observed romantically cooing up to decoys near Peche Island and around Saginaw Bay," he says.

Although the decoys are cherished among hunters, Lancaster has obtained many of them for free.

"Price is determined by the desirability of the carver's work, the patina (the way the paint ages), design, authenticity and the way they behave in the water meaning a minimum amount of wobble," he says while wandering through his collection and

pointing out examples of what collectors look for in their pursuit.

Decoys, while bought at stores, also can be traded at conventions conducted around the country or ordered through contacts with members of a large mailing list of interested collectors and hunters.

Ducks, like humans enjoy comfort, company and food, says Lancaster and therein lies the attraction of the decoy. This, he maintains, is why ducks swing, wheel, set their wings and slide into the water alongside the imitators, he says.

Lancaster is enthusiastic over his hobby.

"They're just plain pretty to look at; just as any other work of art," he says. "From an economic point of view, they are a good investment. Increasing interest in decoy collecting is causing a rapid price appreciation at present. Of course, you have to know your birds."



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