

SnowGoose_Stutzenbaker_Charles_Sawyer_Rob_PortArthurTX_15October2009.mp3

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:00:00] This thing - goose wars - I don't know if that's really the right term for it.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:00:06] But, years ago, and it started probably in the forties, geese started spending more time on the several national wildlife refuges in the Midwest. These were all Canada geese.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:00:25] And about that same time, Louisiana started noticing that they were getting fewer and fewer of the large Canada geese, the bigger variety, that weighed, you know, seven, eight pounds. And we began seeing fewer and fewer of those big birds here in Texas, although we didn't have as many as they had in Louisiana.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:00:48] Well, anyway, immediately, the Louisiana State Agency people said, 'Well, the reason we're not getting these geese is because you're stopping them. You're shortstopping.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:01:01] And of course, the states up there and the federal government said "No", said "We're protecting our birds, and you guys in the south are shooting them out. You're killing too many of them."

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:01:12] So there was what they call here in Texas, "a Mexican standoff", you know, just two hardheads butting together.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:01:19] And so in order to make things better in Louisiana, they started trapping geese in the Midwest, putting them in trucks and sending them to Louisiana.

Rob Sawyer [00:01:34] Who did that?

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:01:35] It was a co-operative thing, as I understand, between the states and the federal government.

Rob Sawyer [00:01:40] And the law of forced migration. Well,

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:01:42] The 80,000-acre Rockefeller Refuge over at Grand Chenier in Louisiana built some big pans. And they brought those birds down there. And I can't remember whether they trimmed the wing feathers or whether they disabled a muscle in the wing.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:01:59] But they eventually built up a what I would call a captive flock. They had maybe as many as a thousand birds, you know, 500 somewhere like that. And some of those birds bred and they fed those birds and they closed the season in Louisiana.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:02:19] But those birds never did really build up in large numbers. They were trying to build up a southern breeding flock of large Canada geese.

Rob Sawyer [00:02:29] And it just smacked in the face.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:02:30] Yeah, it just smacked in the face of biology because those birds were destined to breed way up north under those climatic conditions and migrate south.

And that program at Rockefeller lasted many, many years. And I think it's as far as I know, it has faded away in obscurity.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:02:52] Well, shortly after that, we started looking at the inventory records, and the national refuges were picking up tremendous numbers of snow geese.

Rob Sawyer [00:03:05] To Florida,.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:03:07] Particularly in Missouri and Iowa, and to some degree, in South Dakota. And we were looking at maybe a quarter of a million birds on these refuges in December, January where just a few years earlier there had been no birds.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:03:27] And what was happening was that some of those ... the Fish and Wildlife Service initiated an evaluation procedure for those refuge managers based on who stays. You multiply the number of days. This formula may not be right, but somehow you mathematically multiply the number of geese times the number of days and came up with a goose-use-day figure.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:03:55] And that was used partially to evaluate the refuge manager's ability to manage the refuge.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:04:03] And we found out about that. And then, of course, we put all that together with the fact that those birds were spending more and more time in the north. And we were really concerned that we were going to be confronted with the same thing with snow geese, the Louisiana had experienced with Canadas.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:04:20] And so there was a long set of dialogues. And the people in the North and Fish and Wildlife Service defended their position that they weren't doing anything wrong.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:04:30] And we found out that this one refuge manager,.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:04:35] and I hope he's deceased now,.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:04:37] But we found out that this one refuge manager was violating the review standards. He was cutting the corn. They had a dictate that you planted corn, but you just left it on the stalk and he was out there with a mowing machine mowing it down.

Rob Sawyer [00:04:52] Just so he could get his goose is more. Well, I don't know if that was the case or if he just, you know, felt like that was the right thing to do.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:04:59] But it became a, you know, a bad situation where personal feelings got involved.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:05:05] So we flew.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:05:08] The we flew the.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:05:09] To the Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge in Iowa in two planes. We took Louisiana State plane and we took our state plane. We flew up there in formation.

Rob Sawyer [00:05:20] hahaha.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:05:20] And we flew over that. We didn't tell them we were coming, which was, in retrospect, not the right thing to do,.

Rob Sawyer [00:05:28] Right.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:05:28] But we flew us an aerial survey and took pictures over the refuge, and then we came down and took the rooftops off the refuge building. We buzzed them.

Rob Sawyer [00:05:38] hahaha.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:05:38] And we landed in just a precariously small strip.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:05:43] I was.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:05:43] We were flying a twin engine. I was afraid we weren't going to make it in there, but we made it in and landed. Of course, they came and find out who we were and so.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:05:52] And the refuge manager got so mad I thought he was going to have a heart attack.

Rob Sawyer [00:05:57] hahaha.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:05:58] And of course before we got in the airplane and left it had already gotten to Washington and all the other state agencies. So, boy, there was a lot of animosity towards Texas and Louisiana, towards the several of us that were on that trip.

Rob Sawyer [00:06:12] What year was that?

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:06:15] In the seventies.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:06:16] I've got ... I can find it. I wrote two magazine articles for the Parks and Wildlife magazine outlining the trip and what we found. I may be able to find those things in short order if we look through there. You can help me look through the stack.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:06:34] But anyway, it just. You know, the situation just got worse and worse. We had a lot of meetings. We had a special meeting in Kansas City where everybody came and. And so finally the federal government, state agencies said, "All right. What do you people in Texas, Louisiana, want? What do you want out of this?"

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:06:54] And so we said, "What we want is a restoration of waterfowl distribution in the 1940s, or something like that."

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:07:06] It there was a long silence, and something to the effect, of you know that's impossible. And it was impossible.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:07:13] Anyway, it finally just died down. I think what we did do is we forced a little bit different operation of the national refuges where they weren't, where individual managers weren't trying to just keep birds as long as they could.

Rob Sawyer [00:07:30] Right.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:07:31] But the distribution of geese has changed. There's a much retarded flight coming south because these birds stop at both state and federal wildlife areas. They spend more time. They get here later.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:07:45] And right today, or this coming year, there'll be a really large number of snow geese.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:07:53] In the Louisiana Delta.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:07:56] Up in north Louisiana and to some degree in Arkansas. Those birds have found the rice fields and the grain fields there.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:08:03] So there are more birds spending more time north of the traditional coastal area now than there was historically.

Rob Sawyer [00:08:11] And low prices.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:08:12] Told you what the numbers the last two or three years have been in Texas.

Rob Sawyer [00:08:16] No, those numbers are always suspect, but.

Rob Sawyer [00:08:21] They're estimating between 350 and 400,000 snows in Texas compared to 1.1 in the 1990, 1.1 million in 1990.

Rob Sawyer [00:08:33] Shannon was comfortable enough with those numbers and the the way that they've been publicly debated that he went ahead and published an issue this past fall. Places like Powderhorn Lake. Traditional wintering grounds for snow geese.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:08:51] Been out there. And. Yeah, but it's.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:08:55] But the land has changed, the land use has changed.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:09:01] But let me just. Why don't you cut this thing off.

Rob Sawyer [00:09:04] And you tell me real quick about the trip that the Missouri made down here. Oh.

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:09:08] Well, anyway, in retaliation, the Missouri Game department dispatched an airplane and they came down and they showed up at the airport. And it was one of those, well, those are one of those situations where a cold front came through and stalled and visibility was about, barely ten miles at the very best, probably close to five. I mean, you

could fly in it, but it's really hazardous. So they came down there and they called us, and I went out the airport, met them, brought them back to the office, and we ate lunch together. And I knew the biologists real well his real work,.

Rob Sawyer [00:09:43] What he planned to accomplish.?

Charles Stutzenbaker [00:09:46] He was going to come down here and see how many ducks, see how many geese were in Texas, he was going to do his own aerial survey.