

The “Bull Coot”

Being as this is my first year hunting I was in “sponge” mode and trying to learn as much as possible. The gear, the terminology, the process, etc. can (and was) overwhelming in the beginning. In fact, the best thing I did was to walk in Pete's shop and strike up a conversation with someone who's “been there – done that”. Through Pete I was able to learn a great deal about many things. Another nice benefit was being introduced to lots of his friends and customers who were kind enough to take me under their wings and allow me to hunt with them.

I met Mark one day at the shop when he was looking at some gear and had brought his lab, Max, along for the ride. I love labrador retrievers (mine is called “Dusty”) and I went over to introduce myself and meet the dog. During that conversation I learned we had both attended the same university (Cal Poly, Pomona) and that was the beginning of many more conversations.

In early November, 2010 I was lucky enough to get a CA DFG draw for San Jacinto (I was lucky enough to get six draws this season). I invited Mark, Pete and another friend, Craig. After learning that San Jacinto only allows 2 people to a blind I was in the embarrassing position of having to un-invite a couple of people. After a few phone calls Mark wound up as the one whom I would be taking.

On our hunt day I met Mark at the check-in station and after getting our blind and driving to the parking spot we made our way over to the blind. Since it was my first time I was unprepared for “the crossing” - the monumental task of walking across the water over to the island where the blind was located. It was very dark that early morning and I had no idea of where I was going. I only knew to follow Mark. After managing to get across to the island and putting out our decoys we took our spots on our stool and started the wait.

I came to appreciate that time between set-up and shoot time. It's quiet. You're excited and nervous and the anticipation keeps building. It's also a great time to share some ideas and stories as you wait for the hunt.

I think this had been my second hunt – ever. In those early twilight hours it's tough to see and I was still unfamiliar with the sizes and shapes of what was legal and what would have been a fine. As such, I was extremely cautious and held off on shots in order to make sure I was doing the right thing. Mark got going and did fairly well in the early morning. Unfortunately, things did not go the way I had envisioned and I was still empty-handed yet having – ahem – a blast (I couldn't resist).

As the time wore on and it got warmer, the winds died down and completely went away. Everything stopped flying and the only movement was from occasional snipes and coots.

Since I didn't know much about coots I asked Mark what they were. We talked about them for a bit and I told him I had read something on the web from someone back in West Virginia about them being good eating. Mark explained that they weren't as good as ducks, but they are eaten and he explained how they would need to be marinated if you chose to take a couple.

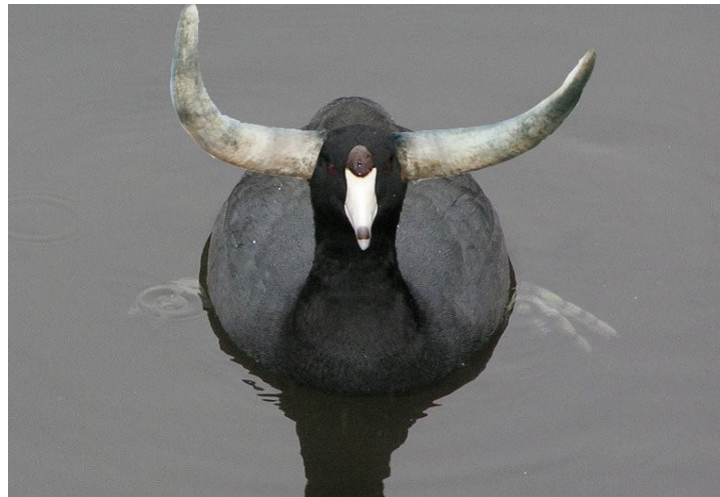
Well the morning wore on and it remained absolutely still. Sometime mid-morning a couple of birds caught us off guard coming in from behind. Mark swung on them, took pause and then fired off a shot. He managed to hit one of the birds – a coot – which he then went and retrieved. He brought it back and I had a good look at it. I asked him if he was planning to eat it and he said he was.

It was then that it happened. He took the bird, turned it over, did so again and held it up by the neck and said “now that's a nice bull coot”. I didn't think much of it at the time and stored it away as simply more knowledge gained.

Since things remained quiet we decided to call it a day and headed home.

The following week I checked in with Pete and told him about the hunt and Mark's catch which included the “bull coot”. Pete laughed and said I shouldn't get any strange ideas about catching those things. I had a little fun with it and posted an entry on the Facebook page about eating coots. Sure enough, Mark chimed in again mentioning the “bull coot”.

I like doing research and did a little digging on coots and, specifically, the “bull coot”. There are some links that are found on Google when searching for the term. Among them is a link that opens a page with the following information:



The Bull Coot (*Fulica Taurus*), a close relative of the American Coot (*Fulica Americana*), is a reclusive species that inhabits ponds and waterways in parts of North America. Care should be taken when approaching these temperamental birds as they have been known to gore unsuspecting hunters.

So hunters, there you have it. The story of the Bull Coot.

It's an interesting sport – with lots to learn.

Juan “Prospect” Ossa