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IT'S NOT EASY

BAND TALES

# Golden Moment

A little CSI work, turns a mix-up into a historic hunt.

By Bob Humphrey

THE ODDS OF shooting a banded duck start out pretty slim, and can become less likely depending on the species you pursue. Last year, wildfowler Craig Swenson defied the odds by collecting a bird of a lifetime.

Swenson and his companions, Jeff Lange and Kenny White, set out early on the morning of Nov. 30, primarily to check out a new area for layout boat hunting. Their secondary goal was harvesting a drake goldeneye.

"It was our first time hunting this particular spot," Swenson said. "We were a little mixed up in the pre-dawn and found ourselves in very shallow water." With daylight fast approaching they decided to put the layout boats in anyway and give it a go. Swenson and Lange each took a layout while White manned the tender.

The first hour proved frustrating, with big flocks of ducks passing by out of range. Eventually, they spotted a large group of common mergansers headed their way with a couple of smaller ducks in tow. Lange and Swenson focused on the trailers and each dropped one. It turned out they had accomplished their goals as both birds were goldeneyes.

With predatory gulls circling over the downed birds, Swenson immediately flagged White to pick up the ducks. Motoring up to Swenson, White exclaimed, "You're not going to believe this. Your drake is banded."

A banded goldeneye is an anomaly, but trying to find out just how rare would prove particularly difficult. The band was so worn Swenson couldn't read all the numbers. Upon returning home, he made a few phone calls to determine how he might resurrect the old band. He


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eventually enlisted help from staff at the local crime lab who were able to etch and raise them.

With the numbers restored, his next step was to submit the band number to the USGS, which prompted an unexpected reply: "Discrepancies found. Please check the number and re-submit." He did, which resulted in another e-mail response advising him to call in. After explaining the circumstances, Swenson was assured everything was fine and that he'd be receiving information about the drake soon.

Shortly thereafter, Swenson received the standard certificate along with a letter of appreciation for sending in all the information from the crime lab. The biggest surprise came when he did a little more research. It turned out his bird—at 20 years, 5 months—was the oldest banded common goldeneye drake on record. Almost as interesting, the next oldest drake goldeneye—18 years, 5 months—was banded on July 12, 1984, in the same location as Swenson's, and reported shot on Nov. 2, 2002, roughly 200 miles from Swenson's recovery.

Swenson's record is on display at the newly established Flyways Waterfowl Museum in Baraboo, Wis. 

## THE BAND

HUNTER: Craig Swenson, Baraboo, WI

BAND #: 2327-65065

SPECIES: Common Goldeneye (D)

BANDED: 07/09/1992

LOCATION: 11 m N of Cass Lake, Beltrami County, MN

RECOVERED: 11/30/2012

LOCATION: 4.9 m E of Howard, Brown County, WI



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