

Records: Why Some Aren't Meant to be Broken

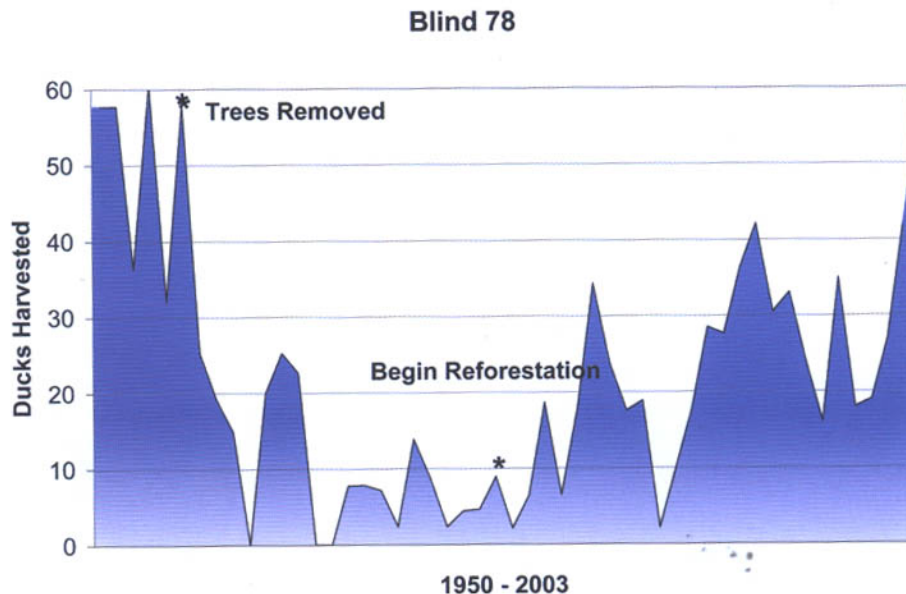
by John Schulte, DVM

My professors at the University of California, Davis School of Veterinary Medicine insisted we keep meticulous records on every case we studied. After graduation, my malpractice insurance carrier harped on the necessity of such records (good record-keeping is the best defense against baseless lawsuits).

The records you maintain will be your report card on whether your efforts are leading you in the proper direction.

Record-keeping is also absolutely necessary for good duck club management. The club to which I belong has records going back to 1917. We keep records about which blinds are hunted, the number of birds harvested from each blind, and at the end of the year, we calculate the percentage of the club's total take from each blind. Why keep such detailed records? It's therapeutic. At the end of duck seasons, my hunting partner goes into a post-season funk. To keep myself from falling into the same state of depression, I drag out the records of the past season and compare them to the prior 96 years. I graph the take from each blind and can determine from the graph if it has been more or less productive than in years past.

All duck clubs should have a management plan with goals for one-year, five-year, and 10-year improvements and management. These goals must be based



Using hunter harvest data, the author graphs the effectiveness of Blind 78.

on data. The records you keep will help you determine how to set your goals. I am amused by the way some clubs are run. If the members ran their companies the way they run their duck clubs, they could not afford to join their own club.

Duck clubs are subject to the 80/20 rule. In business, 80 percent of the income comes from 20 percent of the customers. In personal relationships, 80 percent of problems come from 20 percent of people. In

most duck clubs there are almost always certain blinds, the "hot" blinds, that account for the majority of waterfowl taken.

What information can be gleaned from these data? We take aerial photos of each blind and associated habitat annually. We compare the harvest data with the aerial photos. An excellent correlation can usually be made between habitat changes and hunting success. As an example, one year a large stand of willow trees was removed

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After the removal of a grove of willow trees, Blind 78 at John Schulte's club was nearly deserted by hunters. The use of aerial photos and detailed records of take dictated the trees be replaced.

Photos and graph courtesy of the author

from around Blind 78. The blinds in the area were then pretty much deserted because of the negative impact on hunting success caused by removal of the trees. Using the aerial photographs of the area before the deforestation as a template, we recreated the area by instituting a tree planting and propagation program. The birds responded, as depicted in the graph on page 29.

There are other ways this information can be useful. Never institute changes to your best blinds. Leave well enough alone! If, however, you have areas on your club that are not productive, then an analysis of aerial photos of your best habitat can give you guidance on how to revamp non-productive areas. The records you maintain will be your report card on whether your efforts are leading you in the proper direction. Most clubs report that they derive

the greatest benefit from concentrating on their more productive blind areas. I recommend that your habitat improvement efforts be devoted to poorly producing blinds with the understanding that some blinds will never be good producers.

Records can also produce short-term returns. Using computer programs such as Excel, one can determine from records the best blind to choose on any given day. A mouse click can tell me that I should choose Blind 8 in a south wind with rain late in the season and that the birds will be coming in from the right side of the blind. I have found that detailed record-keeping and analysis extend the pleasure of the past hunting season and are essential tools for guiding future marsh management efforts. 🦋