

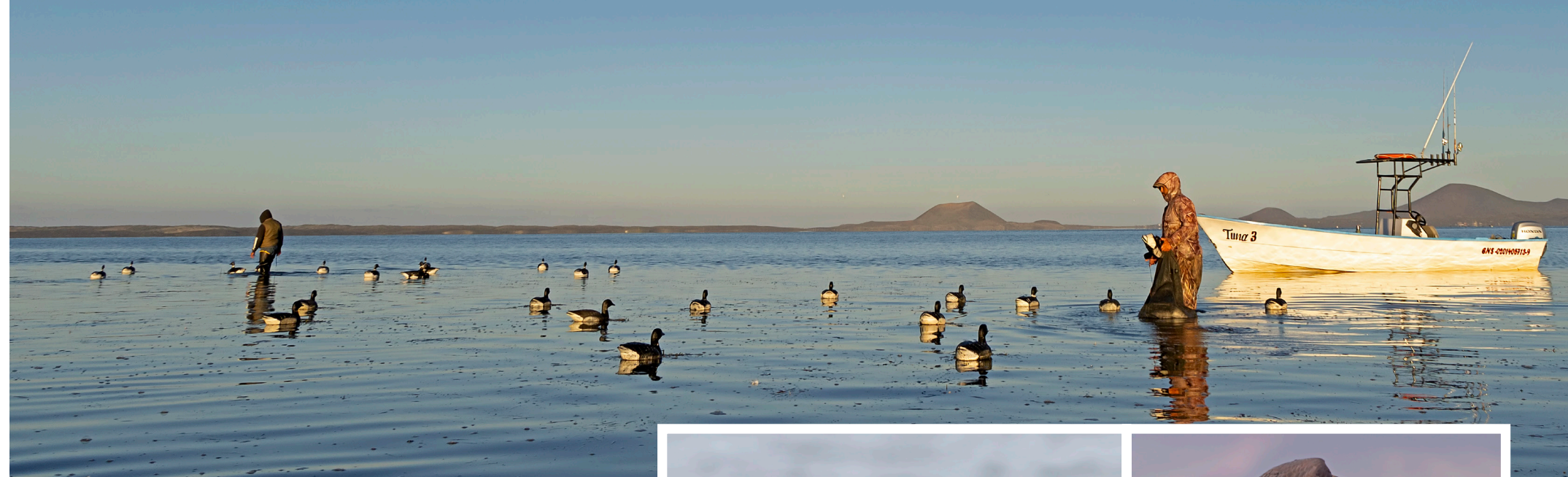
Sea Geese

Brant offer unique splendor to adventurous fowlers on both coasts

PHOTOS BY GARY KRAMER



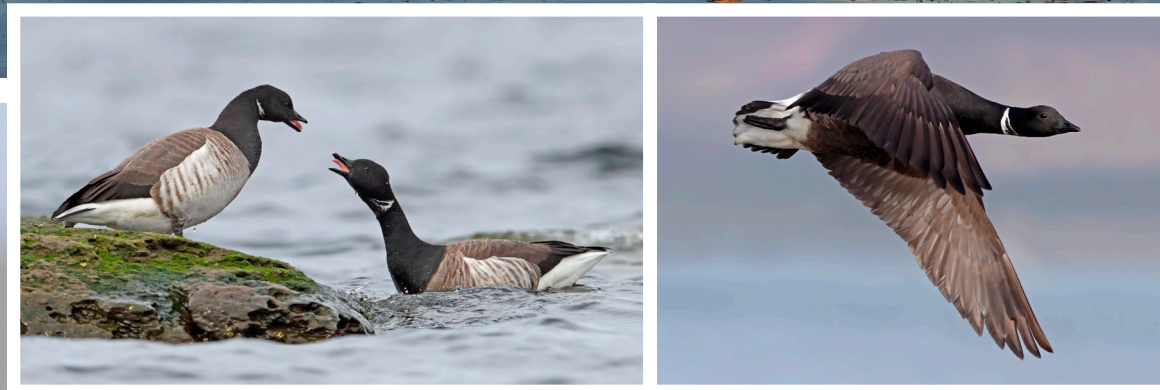
The brant is a somewhat unlikely sea bird in that its traits seemingly contradict the marine environment's standard influences on waterfowl evolution. It is smaller than many of its more turf-oriented cousins (and roughly the same size as North America's largest duck, the ocean-built common eider), almost exclusively vegetarian (can you believe that, scoters?), and utterly delicious to eat (no need for such qualifiers as, "You can eat them, but saltwater makes them *blah blah, yadda yadda.*")

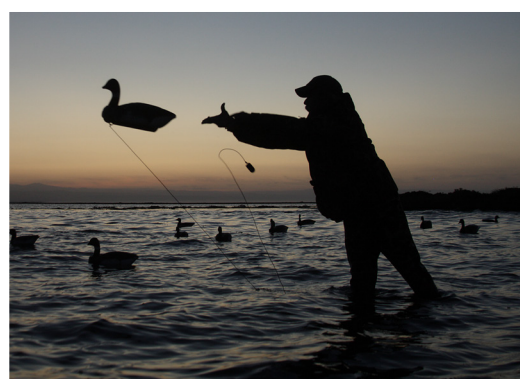


However, perhaps it's exactly this rebellion against coastal norms that gives the brant its charms—its status, among those hunters hearty enough to pursue it over all others, as the ultimate goose.

This sentiment holds for both subspecies of North American brant—the Atlantic and black brant—which are distinguished by largely superficial differences: The Atlantic brant's plumage is light brown to gray across its belly and side flanks, while the black brant sports a striking, tar-colored abdomen. Atlantic brant are also considered lesser table fare, particularly when they've fed on lawn-variety grasses due to declines in their preferred eelgrass. On the West Coast, eelgrass remains plentiful, and brant are considered by some to be the tastiest of all waterfowl.

Detractors criticize the brant as easily hunted and lacking in good sense. This argument unravels, though, when one





considers that no goose nests as far north as the brant and few migrate as far or as quickly. Is not a little naivete to be expected when birds that summered in the high-Arctic suddenly find themselves roosting in the neon glow of Atlantic City? That said, a few brant decoys deployed at low tide in a known feeding or loafing area tend to produce dynamite results.

Regardless of the coast, brant are a splendor to behold as they align themselves just right for a pass over the decoys. They are worth braving the tides, even if only once, to witness a spectacular flight driven south by polar winds. ▲

Renowned photographer Gary Kramer's latest book, "Waterfowl of the World," is available at garykramer.net.

