



Addiction To Divers

King Can and his princes, bluebill and
redhead, are royally thrilling

PHOTOS BY GARY KRAMER
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Of the four elements of nature—earth, wind, fire, and water—creation of a creature for wind and water was perfected in diving ducks, namely scaup, redheads, and canvasbacks. The canvasback drake is lauded widely as the king of ducks and, if that's so, then scaup and redheads are his crown princes.

No duck hunter—even the most dedicated greenhead devotee—can spend a morning in a blind close in proximity to cans, redheads, and bluebills and not come away in slack-jawed wonder. Speed, aerial acrobatics, beauty—divers have it all. Even on the dinner plate, when they've fed on

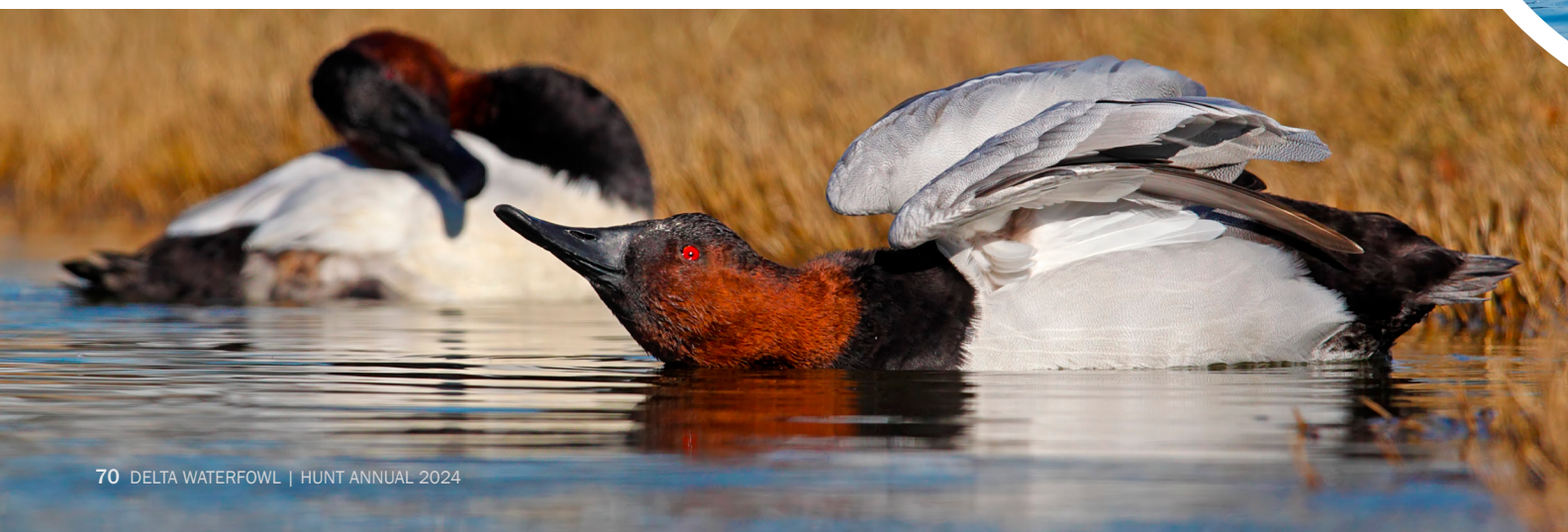


sago and celery and are done up right, divers reign. Why else would they have fetched the highest price at the fanciest restaurants back in the market gunning era?

Divers do so much with basic color schemes heavy on the black and white. There's nothing gaudy or garish about them; regal and royal are far more suitable descriptions of their palette.

And then, there's that sound!

It's not the proliferate, grating vocabulary of the mallard, the unceasing din of the geese that you still hear in your sleep, or the screaming whistle of wood ducks. In fact, the addiction to divers is to virtually no sound at all until ... out of a clear blue, seemingly duckless sky, there's the sharp, elongated tearing of a crisp, clean cotton sheet right next to your ear as a flock of 20 drops straight toward the decoys from an altitude so high they weren't visible a split second ago.





Then they twist, bank, barrel roll and use comically large, splayed, webbed feet as air brakes to make a laughingstock of your feeble attempt at shouldering your shotgun. Yet sometimes, perhaps even more often than not, they'll play like gentlemen and give your spread a second look.

To be addicted to divers is to be hooked on thrilling encounters close and at a distance. Sitting at a picnic table on the shore of Green Bay at sunset watching through binoculars as waves of new, migrating divers arrive is as thrilling as the take 'em moment in the layout boat the next morning, as satisfying as the heft of the king of ducks or one of his crown princes in your hand.

Divers are ... a very good addiction. ▲

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

