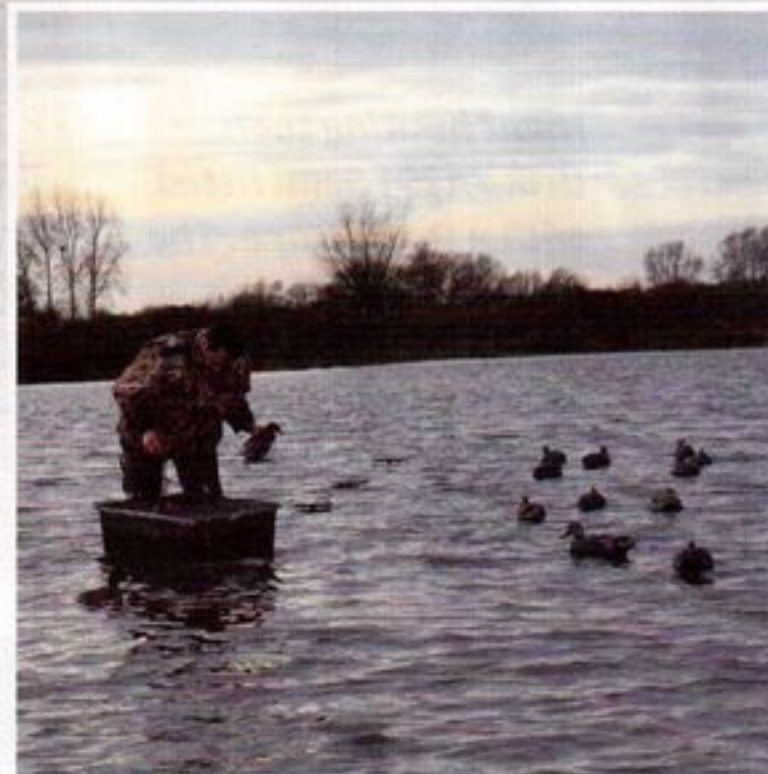
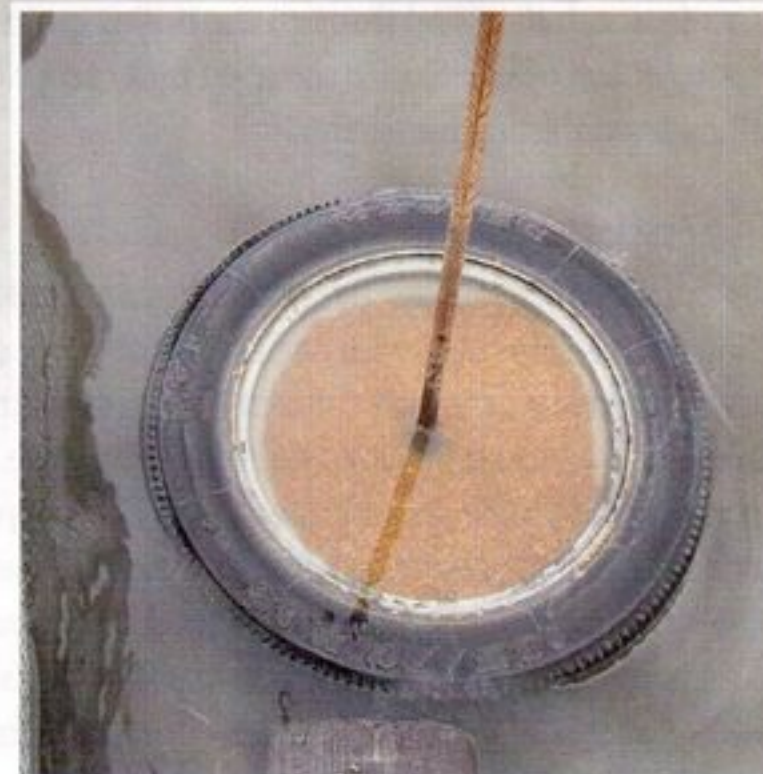




Hunting hosts Sandy, Benoit and 'Apple' the hound. Sandy speaks excellent English.



Benoit adds live decoys to the plastic ones already out on the pond



Neat idea for feeding a pond. The tyre floats up and down with water level so grain is always kept just under the water level.

our hutte. The hutte's flight pond and surrounding marshland totalled around four acres. Getting close to the hutte I was struck by how much it resembled a buried World War II bunker, complete with gun slits overlooking the pond but more on those later.

Howard and I were keen to get some lead in the air, so while Benoit arranged his decoys, we walked the bog with Sandy and her Spaniel 'Apple'. We saw snipe, but did not get on them because they lifted too far ahead. We should likely have left the dog with Benoit.

Pulling power

My first surprise on returning to the hutte was the decoys. In France, they use live ones! Benoit was standing in a penned off area of the pond which contained wing-clipped mallard, wigeon, teal, shoveler, pintail, gadwall, tufted duck and pink foot geese. He was wearing waders and towing a small floating cage. Each of the fowl had a clip on its leg. The birds were put into the cage and towed out into the main flight pond. Set in the water were small circular platforms about 8 inches diameter. These could be raised or lowered to water level. The fowl were then attached to the platform by a short leash

Asking for the WC, I was handed a spade, a loo roll and pointed out to the marsh

permitting them to stand out of the water or paddle near the platform.

The live decoys are bred to be good calling birds and are well cared for. Costing around 100 Euro for a pair of wigeon (double that for the Pinks) I reckoned that Benoit had more than 2,000 Euro's worth of decoys out on the water. In fact a growing problem in the region is theft of these valuable birds. Consequently many hunters take them home after a night's decoying.

With the light fading we took up strategic positions around the pond for the evening flight. On the edge of darkness I had a lovely wigeon crossing the pond on its downwind approach. It fell in the next field and was »