

Canvasbacks

of the Thousand Islands











Canvasback decoy from Lovelock Cave, Nevada, c. 1000 A.D. Made from tule rushes, white feathers, and painted with black and red pigments.



Native Americans have been credited with the concept of decoys, used to deceive waterfowl and help lure them within range of hunters. The earliest known decoys were buried in a cave near Lovelock, Nevada, and excavated in 1924. The decoys were preserved by the dry conditions there, and have been carbon dated to about 1000 A.D.

Canvasbacks (*Aythya valisineria*)

Canvasbacks are members of the bay duck tribe (Aythyini) or pochards. In North America this tribe includes the canvasback, redhead, ring-necked duck, and the lesser and greater scaup. Canvasbacks are larger ducks, about the size of the well-known mallard.

Canvasbacks can subsist on a variety of plant and animal foods, but have a fondness for wild celery. They are considered a delicacy by duck hunters and epicures, especially when they have been feeding on wild celery. In 1840, canvasbacks could bring as much \$2.00 a pair at market, equivalent to about \$46.00 today.

Population levels have declined over the years, due largely to long-term loss and degradation in both nesting and wintering habitats. As numbers declined, canvasbacks became rare in many areas where they were formerly hunted. Demand for canvasback decoys declined, and some of the decoys made earlier were converted to other species.