



The Birth of DU

BY MICHAEL FURTMAN

*The amazing story of how a small group of waterfowlers
changed the course of conservation history*

The banks of a trout stream may seem like a strange place for the birth of an organization devoted to waterfowl, but that is indeed where Ducks Unlimited was born. The stream was upper New York's famed Beaverkill River, but the organization did not exactly spring forth that day as if by immaculate conception.

DU's founders had already formed and funded an organization known as the More Game Birds in America Foundation, which had laid out a 10-year plan of action for increasing upland game bird populations. But now they were about to do something incredibly bold, something that had never been done before—create an organization that would manage habitat on a massive scale to impact species that spanned an entire continent.

Sitting at the fishing camp of the hard-charging, never-take-no-for-an-answer Joseph Palmer Knapp, the men discussed possible names for an organization that would restore duck numbers. With Knapp at the lodge were John C. Huntington, Arthur M. Bartley, and Ray E. Benson. Benson was on More Game Birds' staff as publicity director and had helped organize this meeting. He would later become secretary of Ducks Unlimited.

Huntington was the son of Dwight Huntington, a St. Louis attorney who as early as 1912 had begun promoting restoration of game birds and was active in the Game Conservation Society. It was his vision that led to the creation, by his son, of America's only gamekeepers' school, the Game Conservation Institute of Clinton, New Jersey. This school would eventually be acquired by the More Game Birds in America Foundation.

It was that acquisition that led to John Huntington becoming an important player in the Foundation.

Bartley was More Game Birds' vice president and also the director of field operations. He was a man who liked to get his hands dirty and his feet wet, and he spent years touring waterfowl breeding grounds. He would eventually become the executive director of Ducks Unlimited, a post he would hold until 1962. Bartley had served with John Huntington during World War I, and both had gone to work for the senior Huntington at the Game Conservation Society soon after the war.

Of the men in the room, it was Joseph Knapp who was the captain behind the wheel, the coal in the furnace. Well educated and wealthy, Knapp had become enthralled with the idea that wildlife could be raised and managed following the European model, and that science could offer answers to the problems facing game birds. The European model depended largely on the artificial raising of birds to be released before the gun, and this was to be the focus of Knapp's—and More Game Birds'—solution. To that end, after founding More Game Birds in 1930, he directed that the organization take over Huntington's well-regarded gamekeepers' school. Although More Game Birds took over management, funds for its operation came from the deep pockets of Mr. Knapp himself.

