

How to Tackle a Dirty Duck Call

“A duck call in the hands of the unskilled is one of conservation’s greatest assets.”

—Nash Buckingham, De Shootinest Gent’man, 1941

The above quote is very true, but what is often overlooked is that neglecting to maintain your duck caller, which may affect the sound of your call or make it stick, can be as much an issue as how you use it.

The most common problem is food particles that gum up the call’s insides and reeds. We all eat and drink when out duck hunting and not all of this travels to our stomachs. The worst offenders are sugar-based foods and drinks. They are naturally sticky and small bits of food get stuck between the reeds, or between the reeds and tone board of the call. The remains of those drinks also combine with our saliva to create a sticky liquid, sticking the reeds and tone board together.

Cleaning your duck call before the start of the season is easy. Simply separate the call barrel from its insert by gently twisting them apart, then flush them both with warm water. Once rinsed, take a piece of dental floss and slide it between and under the reeds. Work the floss in and out to remove any unwanted particles. Stand the call barrel and its insert in a warm spot to dry, but do not try to dry them using heat, as this may damage or split your call. Once everything’s dry, squeeze the parts together again and try your call to see how it sounds.

If your call doesn’t sound right, you may need to disassemble it even further, removing the reeds and cork to thoroughly clean all the parts. We suggest you look up the internet for a good set of instructions as to how to do this. Many a duck hunter has pulled apart their call, only to put it back together for it to sound like a sick cow. Don’t do this in the field!



For simple cleaning out in the field, separate the barrel and insert, and take a five dollar bill or other note and gently pull it between and under the reeds. This should be just enough to get you through the day until you can give the call a better clean at home in the evening.

Calling is an integral part of successful duck hunting. For calling to sound good, you not only have to be skilful, your call needs to be clean and functional. Make sure you give yours a clean before opening, or be sure you know how to do a quick clean in the field, so you can continue hunting fruitfully.