



SAVE YOUR GEAR: TIPS FOR BIRD HUNTERS

By Tom Keer

Bird hunters go through some of the harshest tangles, all of which destroy gear. It's not necessary to spend a small fortune on replacement duds when a few repairs in camp will restore your chaps, brush pants, waxed cotton jackets and vest, and boots. Here are a few tips that will get you right back in the action.

Fixing Torn Brush Pants, Chaps or Vests

1. **Buy a curved leather-stitching needle.** Curved needles give you the leverage to get through thick materials. They let you see around your fingers so you can get close, tight stitches. Large eyes accommodate thicker thread. A pack of 4 various-sized needles cost me \$9.
2. **Select a thread.** I use old 12- or 20-pound braided-Dacron fly line backing, because it lies neatly, won't break when you pull it tight and doesn't rot when it gets wet. Old non-stretch monofilament lines, like PowerPro, work well, too.
3. **Turn the lower pant/chap leg inside out.** Exposed thread will abrade easier than unexposed thread, so sew from the inside.
4. **Flatten the torn fabric prior to sewing.** Cloth with a cut edge rolls, and you'll want as much material as possible.

5. **Overlap the cloth ends and stitch.** Keep your stitches close together, so they won't open up or unravel. Tie off the ends and trim.

Toss a stitch kit in your gear bag for evening repairs at camp. Hunting vests, jackets, or shirts might need work as well.

Reproofing Waxed Cotton

Watching some professional waxed-cotton reproofers one time at a sportsman's show, I was green with envy at how fast they ripped through coat after coat followed by chaps and waxed-cotton pants. When I re wax my Filson jacket or chaps it more closely resembles a World Wrestling Federation grudge match. Still, here are a couple of easy tricks they used that make the process bearable.

1. **Heat the fabric before you wax.** Professionals use a

table that is heated to 180 degrees, but you can warm the garment in the sun, on a heater or, if you're vigilant, in an oven. It's easier to apply wax to a warm garment.

2. **Get the wax liquid.** If it's in a can, boil some water, stick the can in the boiling water with the lid on, and let it sit until it is fluid. If the wax starts to get solid, take a break and reheat.
3. **Use reasonable amounts of wax.** If you haven't waxed your gear in a while, you should resist the temptation to slather it on. Lighter, more regular applications are best. The cotton can absorb only so much wax and the excess stays on the surface. (You won't make friends with anyone who owns the chair you're sitting on, either.)
4. **Make a big cloth applicator.** Cut a 10-inch wide by 15-inch-long section of an old T-shirt, fold it in half and roll it up. Tie it off so it doesn't unravel. It's easy to grip and will cover more inches if you lay it down. It will get into tight areas if you hold it upright, as well.
5. **Hang to Dry.** When you're finished with the rewaxing process, hang the jacket or chaps in the sun or hit them with a blow drier. The last heat step will really make the wax sink in to the cotton.

Keeping Your Feet Happy

No one going swimming minds wet feet. Bird hunters who cover lots of ground, though, despise soggy socks and the accompanying blisters. Keeping your boots in condition makes for happy feet, and that means you can log many miles through good bird cover.

Rubber or Neoprene Boots: These boots are great for hunting river bottoms, but the thickets hunters travel through to get there can rip them to shreds. Whether it is a puncture from a stick or a slash gained from crossing a barbed-wire fence, a quick repair saves the day.

Material

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| 1. Small pouch or zip-lock bag | Storage |
| 2. Tube of Aquaseal | Gluing |
| 3. Bottle of Cotel-240 | Accelerator |
| 4. Alcohol swabs | Cleaning area to be patched |
| 5. Small bristle brushes or coffee stirrers | Spreading |
| 6. Woman's nylons | Aquaseal |
| 7. Knife or straight-edge razor blade | Flexible patch material |
| 8. Rubber glove | Cutting patch or nylon |
| 9. Lighter | Keeping fingers from sticking |
| 10. Masking tape | Melting Neoprene |
| | Holding cut together |

Purpose

Technique

1. Clean the area around the cut with an alcohol swab.
2. Close the tear with a strip of masking tape on the inside of your boots.
3. Cut a patch from a nylon stocking to cover the hole.
4. Mix 1 part Cotel-240 accelerator with 3 to 4 parts Aquaseal with a coffee stirrer or brush.
5. Spread mixture around the tear in your waders. Extend the glue 1/3 of an inch beyond the size of the patch.

6. Place patch in the Cotel-240/Aquaseal mixture and lay it flat. Apply a light additional coat of glue on top of the patch and lay flat to dry.

If you wear neoprene boots and are in a pinch, you can use a lighter and a stick. Melt the neoprene with the lighter and spread the molten rubber around the cut with a stick.

Leather Boots:

While the ancient Egyptians used beeswax, there are a host of waxes to use for waterproofing your leather boots. Goose grease, bear grease, mink oil, neats-foot oil (made from boiled animal hooves) lanolin, petroleum jelly, mineral oil, or pitch and pine all have their places in boot care. These waxes are similar in that they occupy space on the leather's surface to keep water from entering the natural hide.

Material

1. Brush
2. Detergent
3. Wax

Purpose

- Cleans leather
- Cleans leather.
- Conditions and waterproofs waxed leather

Technique:

1. **Clean boots.** Remove laces and use a brush and detergent to remove any dirt, grime, or factory coatings.
2. **Dry boots at room temperature.** If they are thoroughly soaked from going in above the top, two days or longer might be necessary.
3. **Heat wax to make it soft.** Waxes typically melt around 165 degrees. Leave a jar next to a window or boil water in a pot, let it cool for a bit, and drop the jar in for 5 minutes.
4. **Apply with a cloth.** Dip a cotton cloth into the wax and spread a light coat of wax over the entire boot. Pay particular attention around stitches for they might be prone to leaks.
5. **Drying the wax.** Set the boots in the sun or hit them with a hair dryer to soften the wax a second time. The wax soaks deeply into the leather. Wipe down with a clean cloth and go huntin'.

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