

PHOTO BY BILL FAVER

It's Not Easy To Fool The Birds

Several times when I've been fishing the small sandpipers along the beach have come almost up to my feet. They seemed oblivious of my activity as they marched about along the incoming wave in search of food. Any movement on my part only meant they would move away a short distance and then return.

If I add a camera to my fishing gear and begin watching their movements they seem to sense my activity and become wary of my actions. Their interest in feeding diminishes with my proximity to them. They seem to establish an imaginary line beyond which I could not cross without disturbing them.

In a recent issue of *National Wildlife*, a scientist tells of his experiments in bird banding on a Canadian



Bill Faver

Island. It seems he used a fishing pole to help throw the net-like device used in capturing the birds for banding. He also wore a yellow rain slicker and old hat.

Each time he emerged to begin his field work, the gulls and terns with which he was working would rise up in unison and begin squawking and fussing at him. It got to the point it would almost disrupt his work.

He began to experiment with what might cause the birds to be excited and what would keep them calm. He found he could walk out without the fishing rod and the birds would continue their excitement. Then he came up with a disguise of a yellow wig, a different hat, and a different jacket. He could then walk among the birds with no disturbance and little reaction.

Other people who were working with him seemed to cause no grief to the birds, either. Then he would walk out of the quonset hut with the fishing pole and get some reactions, but not as severe as when he wore the yellow slicker and the old hat.

It seems the birds had patterned

that he was danger and a threat to them. Other workers could wear the slicker and hat and not get much reaction. It seemed to be a combination of his walk, outfit, and behavior they reacted to.

I understand some of these things from my experience in tracking and watching birds. It seems binoculars and cameras are not much of a threat, but a long 600mm lens, resembling a shotgun, causes birds some fear. I've learned it's not easy to fool the birds. They are smarter than a lot of the people I know. They have to be, for their very survival depends upon their awareness and their ability to keep their distance from predators and danger.

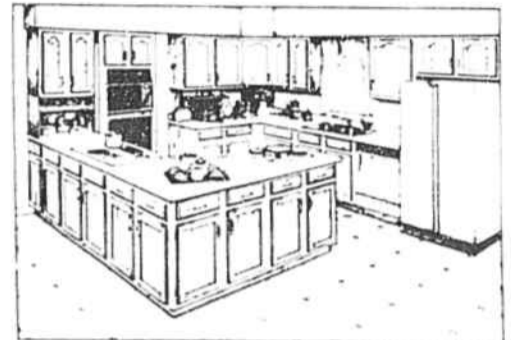
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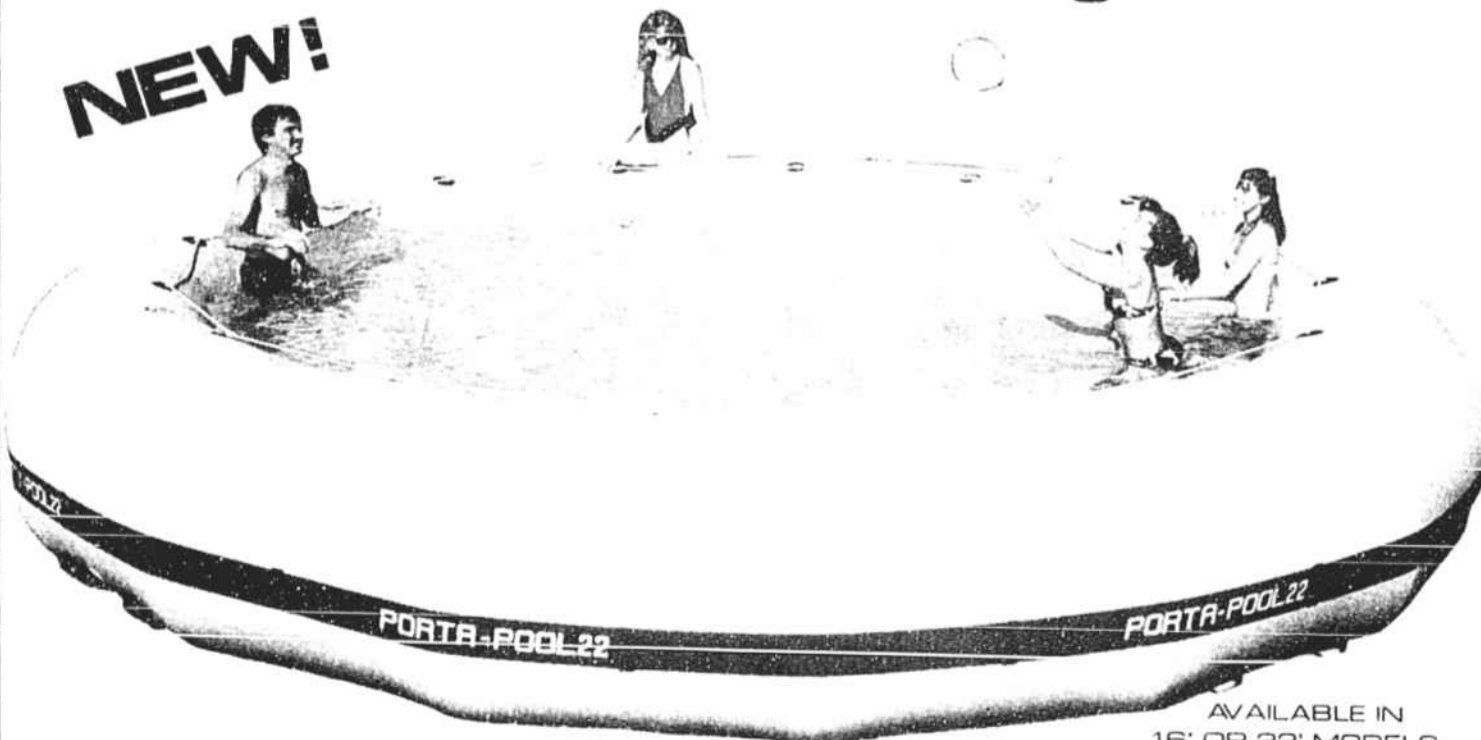
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