

## **In Praise of the Hip Wader**

**By Bruce Masterman**

For most of us, our first pair of hip waders was a significant acquisition. It represented our graduation from mere dry land observer to being part of the water in which we fished and hunted. No longer were we stranded on shore, watching wistfully as a hook-jawed brown trout rose just beyond casting range or a cackling ring-necked pheasant glided into a thick willow patch on the other side of a shallow river. Hip waders bridged the timeless gap between hope and a legitimate chance.

More often than not, those first waders were made of cheap rubber. Thin adjustable straps at the boot tops looped around a waist belt, and closed with a simple snap. The question wasn't *if* that strap would break, but *when* – inevitably at the worst possible time. It might be when you were stumbling backwards with fishing rod bent double, your other hand wildly waving a landing net in the general direction of a struggling rainbow. Or perhaps as you're wading to shore – arms laden with decoys -- with icy waves already lapping over your wader-tops.

Eventually, you can bet on it, rubber hip waders will spring a leak. It seems they only have to be close to a sharp protruding branch or a barbed wire fence and, poof! -- as if by magic -- a hole appears. Your pants are drenched and you're chilled to the bone. Socks creep down off your ankle and foot until they become a soggy ball clinging to your toes. Even modern high-tech materials, such as breathable Gore-Tex and durable neoprene, haven't silenced that time-honored shocked reaction: "Aargh! Where'd that hole come from?"

Throughout this love-hate relationship, however, we cherish the ability to become amphibious, albeit temporarily. Hip waders provide grown-up opportunities while harkening back to the days when playing in puddles was part of growing up.