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2023

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10

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TAKING OUR MILITARY COMMUNITY ON OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

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- 4** A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT OF ISPORTSMAN
- 5** OPERATION VETS WITH NETS
- 6** FOUR GENERATIONS OF HUNTING AT FT. MCCOY
- 8** IN PURSUIT OF PERFECTION
- 10** THE SUBURBAN HUNTERS GUIDE TO ETIQUETTE
- 12** SEEING SPARKS FLY: A DESERT BOWHUNT
- 14** GIVING THANKS TO A BEAUTIFUL DOE
- 16** THE FALLEN OUTDOORS
- 18** THE PICTURE PERFECT TOM
- 20** SET UP FOR SUCCESS WHEN TURKEY HUNTING
- 22** A TEN POINTER AT FT. MOORE
- 24** TOP FIVE BEAR SAFETY TOOLS
- 25** WINNING THE LOTTERY
- 28** NEVER STOP HUNTING
- 30** PERCISION DUCK HUNTING ON SMALL WATER

DEAR READER...

It has been nearly 15 years since we launched the first iSportsman software solution. A unique group of people saw the opportunity to not just provide a tool to make getting outdoors easier but also to build a community around those who support service to our country, understand the importance of conservation for future generations, and love the outdoors. That is why I am very excited to launch the first edition of the new *iSportsmanUSA* magazine.

The *iSportsmanUSA* magazine is designed to be an annual publication that highlights some of the best stories of the year and provides a platform where we can showcase expert insights into creating a successful hunt. As with all our content, our goal is to educate, inform, and inspire all our readers so that you can get more enjoyment from your outdoor activities. In these pages, you will find engaging stories all across the country, from Wisconsin to Georgia, and desert hunting to bear safety, every piece in this magazine will illustrate the beauty of the natural world while demonstrating the importance of responsible outdoor recreation.

As you flip through the pages, you will notice dedicated callouts to several non-profit organizations that have embraced a special mission to enable members of our military service community to get outdoors, learn a new hobby, and enjoy the comradery of fellow service members. Outdoor recreation is a healthy way for active-duty service members and veterans to form a new community, experience new activities and take their mind off everyday stresses in the peacefulness of nature.

We recognize that these are just a few of the groups that are part of our community and we plan to develop partnerships promoting every one of them in the hopes that a service member will reach out when needed most. Additionally, we want to encourage our readers to get to know these groups and support them in any way that they can as their mission is among the most honorable.

This magazine and the new *iSportsmanUSA* website are designed to be an extension of all that is embraced in these pages. I want to welcome you, our valued community, to read about your fellow sportsmen and women, outdoor experts, iSportsman community members, partners and the entire iSportsman team. We hope it will be a testament to our passion for hunting, fishing, and all outdoor recreation, and that it will help inspire you on your next outdoor adventure.

Finally, I wish to thank all of you for getting iSportsman to where it is today. With your support, we are making strides in building a community that can share our passion: helping people get outdoors doing what they love. iSportsman is honored to serve you, and we hope to continue doing so for many years to come.



-ANEIL KUMAR
ISPORTSMAN PRESIDENT

Aneil Kumar, with son Sajan; Photo courtesy of Aneil Kumar.

 iSportsmanUSA



OPERATION VETS WITH NETS

By: Connor Merritt



Operation Vets with Nets (OVWN) is a nonprofit organization that was founded in 2021 by Rich Segarra. The organization provides cost-free catfish and striper fishing to provide peace, rest, and relaxation to disabled service personnel. They take veterans and active-duty service members on fishing trips, which are fully funded and operated through volunteers. While they are primarily focused on disabled veterans, they also help active-duty service members and veterans who are struggling with ailments like depression. Rich decided to start the organization when he took a friend out and heard about the positive effect it had on his PTSD. "When we got back, he told

me, 'You have no idea what this trip meant to me, I haven't enjoyed doing anything for quite some time.'" Rich even said, "His wife reached out in tears saying, 'Thanks for taking my husband out – he's so relaxed.'" The driving force behind the organization is the many volunteers who supply both their fishing equipment (including boats) and their personal time, all to remind other struggling military members of the simple joy of life. "We really care. The heart of the organization is all our volunteers and what we're willing to do: Without them it's a one man show." The organization currently operates completely on donations and personal expenses. If you want, you can donate or volunteer, to help with the physical and emotional rehabilitation of disabled service members through fishing by visiting their website at: www.operationvetswithnets.org.



Rich Segarra with a monster catch; Photo courtesy of OVWN.
www.sportsman.com

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FOUR GENERATIONS OF HUNTING AT FORT MCCOY

By: Connor Merritt



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Hunting runs in the Stolowski family. Michael Stolowski has been hunting for 54 years, starting at the age of 10. Michael got his first deer at age 12 while tagging along with his father and older brother and, from there, was a lifelong hunter. After hopping between various hunting lands, they eventually settled on a place in 1977: Fort McCoy.

"I heard about Fort McCoy from my dad when I was a kid because he trained there during World War II and my brother trained there in the late '60s when he was in the Army National Guard."

Michael himself joined the Air Force Reserve and would take his unit up to Fort McCoy for training on the weekends. He even used the official business trips as a chance to check out different areas and do some site surveys. Michael has been hunting there going on 45 years. Fort McCoy holds a lot of history for the Stolowski family, both as a hunting ground and as a military installation.

It's gotten to the point where the fort feels like Michael's backyard; he can even tell you where every deer trail is.

Thanks to this expertise and familiarity with the area, Michael was able to harvest his biggest deer ever in 2018. He started setting up around 5:30 AM and waited for two and a half hours before he saw his targets.

"I just noticed a doe come running from the left straight at me. I was able to get a shot off and dropped her." Michael looked around to survey the area, "I saw antlers sticking out from behind the tree. The buck took one step, and I had a perfect shot at his shoulder and dropped him right in his tracks, about 20-yards from my stand."

Michael tagged out in less than a minute. At the time, he had what's called a bonus tag; meaning, he was able to shoot a buck and a doe. Everyone who hunted that day was extremely successful. Michael attributes this to the perfect conditions, "It just happened to fall right at the peak of the rut."

One of his younger brothers just moved back to town, and Michael plans on adding him to his usual hunting party: Michael, his son Paul, his brother Pat, and his other brother Tim. "We hunt the same patch of land that we have since 1977."

The newest addition to the party is his granddaughter; she's sparked a renewed wonder in the joy of hunting. "She has fun. We're putting on our boots and she's running down the trail yelling, 'C'mon! C'mon! We gotta go out there; we gotta check the deer hunting spots!'"

Michael plans to share the responsibility of teaching her the hunting ropes. "It's going to be a joint effort." The most important thing is that his granddaughter is enjoying herself, but Michael sees no trouble there.

"She'll see a deer at the side of the road and she's like, 'Oh, that's just a girl deer.' We gotta wait for the big buck, right Grampy?" Michael describes. "It gives you a good feeling that she's got it in her. You planted the seed basically."

Hunting runs in the family, and there's no better place to continue that tradition than on the military base that housed three generations of Stolowskis. Michael learned how to hunt from his dad and older brother, and he passed it on to his son. Now, he's excited to continue the tradition and inspire his granddaughter in the same way when he was her age.

IN THE PURSUIT OF PERFECTION

By: Connor Merritt

Sebastian Garcia believes that one must suffer before they find success. That the struggle is the most important part of any experience, and it's what makes anything worthwhile. Recently, Sebastian went hunting in the Nevada mountains where he encountered his fair share of pain and suffering. Sebastian loves to hunt and frequently ventures out with two of his close hunting partners, the father-son duo Hank and Clayton Combs. On a recent hunting expedition in the eastern Nevada mountains, Sebastian saw a three pointer dash across in front of him and decided to take some quick shots; unfortunately, he missed the buck twice.

Feeling a little down, Sebastian regrouped with the others, only to stumble upon a forkie in their path. Sebastian tried his hand once, but again was unable to hit his mark. Hank and Clayton made fun of Sebastian for missing so many times, so Sebastian tried testing the gun's aim to defend himself; unfortunately for him, the gun hit its marks and passed with flying colors. Despite feeling a bit down over his missed shots, Sebastian and the group resolved themselves and recuperated.

They decided to find some high ground to scope out the surrounding area in hopes of securing their next target. Soon enough, Sebastian found another buck—smaller than the previous ones but still worthwhile prey for the party. As the group moved to get into a better position, the deer got wind of them and spooked off. Sebastian tried his best to maintain a visual on the dashing deer but lost sight of him among the mountainous terrain.

While Sebastian was still trying to locate the missing buck, Hank alerted him of another one nearby. Sebastian quickly






switched his focus to the area Hank had indicated but couldn't find the deer. After monitoring the area intently for at least 20 minutes, he saw a buck appear from behind a burnt tree. Sebastian took a shot without any hesitation. He didn't want to let another opportunity pass him by. After the dust settled from the shot, the buck was nowhere to be seen. Sebastian missed once again.

Sebastian's heart sank as he desperately searched the mountain for any sign of the deer. He was beginning to worry this hunt wouldn't be successful. Out of nowhere, a doe popped up along the tree line, alongside the buck Sebastian was searching for. "There he is!" Sebastian exclaimed. He put the buck square in his crosshairs and BAM! Fearing the worst, Sebastian frantically turned to his hunting partner, "No way I missed dude, I was right on him!" Sebastian and Clayton couldn't locate the buck, no matter how hard they tried.

Right when all hope seemed lost, Hank came in over the radio, "Great shot!" Sebastian peered through his scope once more, and this time saw the buck face down on the ground. The deer almost got away—a few feet were all that separated him from freedom. Fortunately for the hunting party, the shot was good, and Sebastian was the victor. To him, it was like scoring a game-winning touchdown: Sebastian made up for his earlier misses and felt larger than life.

Hunting is a rewarding hobby, but it requires a huge investment of time, money, and resources; however, the bigger the investment the bigger the payoff. Each hunt is a struggle in its own way, but it's worth it to overcome all the hardships to prevail, just like Sebastian did that day. The trip didn't go according to plan, but that's part of the joy of hunting. For Sebastian and his hunting crew, the pursuit of perfection is the best part of the hunt. They might not have gotten the biggest buck out there that day, but now they have something to look forward to next time.

After all, if you achieve all your dreams, what else do you have to dream about?



THE SUBURBAN HUNTER'S GUIDE TO ETIQUETTE

By: Doug Howlett

The first time I hunted in central Massachusetts, I was shocked at the proximity of houses interwoven in the woodlots we were hunting.

One minute I was walking down a logging path that seemed to be as remote as anything you'd find in the Adirondacks, the next I was treading by a dude mowing his lawn with his kid swinging a few feet away. Mind you this was simply traveling into the spot where I was going to hunt, I wasn't eyeballing the guy's yard from my stand, but it still served as a bold reminder that not too far through the woods, there were folks in their homes and yards who may or may not get hunting.

Safety, and respect for other's concerns, are paramount in such an environment. States like Virginia, in recognizing the need to cull deer numbers in populated areas offer longer "urban zone" hunting seasons for deer hunters, typically with stick and string.

But firearm opportunities do exist. Bottom line though, if you are going to look for a place to hunt near where you or others live, you'd better be at the top of your manners and safety game. It only takes one well-connected resident, irked by a hunter's brazenness, to complain to the right local or state official, or even the neighbor who is allowing the hunting, and hunting opportunities can be taken away.

ADVICE FOR SMOOTH HUNTS:

Hunting guide and taxidermist David Sichik, who has guided hunts in suburban New Jersey most of his adult life, offers these tips for maintaining a smooth hunt now and in the future when hunting suburbia:

GO BOW

Even if firearms are allowed, consider your proximity to homes and the unwanted disturbance a booming gun might cause and consider using a bow. "I generally only bow hunt around houses," says Sichik. "It creates less of a disturbance and the less

people know you are there, the better off you are. It also shows more respect for the surrounding homeowners just because it makes them all feel safer.”

SAFETY FIRST

“To start, the most important thing every hunter has to keep in mind at all times is he has to be extra cautious because he is around homes,” Sichik says. It’s critical to know where homes or trails joggers may use are in relation to where he is sitting and then identify the areas or zones immediately around him where it is safe and not safe to shoot.

Getting off the ground, in a tree stand also helps limit concerns of sending an errant shot flying where it can create damage, as does staying a safe distance from buildings and yards whenever possible or where required by law.

KEEP A LOW PROFILE

Out of sight, out of mind. Never do anything to call unnecessary attention to yourself as you enter and leave to go hunting. If few people know you are even there, it’s fewer uninformed people you have to worry about trying to put a stop to your legal activities.

FOLLOW THE LANDOWNER’S RULES

If hunting on a homeowner’s property, let them know when you will be there and get clear instructions on where you can park and what times are best for you to be there to not inconvenience or disturb them—ever.

MAINTAIN GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE HOMEOWNERS ON THE LAND

“It is critical to maintain good relations with residents,” Sichik says. “I take them deer meat to eat, fish when I go fishing. I offer to do yard work around the house.

At Christmas, I bring them a turkey or remember them with a card. It’s important to distinguish myself from the usual hunter.”

MORE ON MAINTAINING A LOW PROFILE WHILE HUNTING

If you do score, don’t leave gut piles where they will be stumbled upon by nonhunters or found by the homeowner’s dog. Keep animals covered when transporting past homes either on an ATV or in the back of a truck. Other hunters might appreciate your trophy, but the nonhunter may not be so impressed. In fact, it might be enough to turn them against your hunting there as they are less equipped to deal with the actual consequences of life and death in nature. Why take the chance?

GO ALONE

Unless a landowner stresses that you can bring a friend, small tract hunts where neighbors can be easily angered is no place to be piling all your buddies in to hunt. If you do bring someone, only bring a friend you trust to be safe, to respect the rules and who won’t try to snooker you out of your spot when you’re out of town one weekend. “It’s easier to maintain positive relationships without worrying about one of your fellow hunters with a different agenda messing things up,” says Sichik.

FINDING THE RIGHT PLACE

Much of this mindset will apply when you are talking to friends or family who might have a spot or know someone with a spot you can hunt. Be sure to know what the law is and when approaching a person, dress decently, be polite and don’t become rude if the answer is no. Most counties and cities have digital property maps that will list some owner information as do some other apps. Don’t forget to check more traditional sources such as Craigslist, the local classifieds in your paper, and even some land leasing websites that can provide leads too. In the end, it’s going to take time, effort, and the ability to present yourself in the best possible light.

SEEING SPARKS FLY: THE UPS AND DOWNS OF A DESERT BOWHUNTING EXPERIENCE

A Re-cap from YouTuber Mike Rogers, Written by Connor Merritt

Arizona Landscape; Original Photo Courtesy of Mike Rogers.

11 *ISportsmanUSA*



Mike Rogers is a regular guy who enjoys going outdoors, watching anime, and barbecuing on the weekend with friends and family. Five years ago, he started bowhunting for the first time and was instantly lovestruck. Mike worked hard, improving with every trip; soon enough, this new hobby became one of his greatest passions. Eventually, he got the idea to share his enthusiasm with the world, hoping to inspire and entertain others with his YouTube channel, TLOMikeRogers.

Recently, Mike ventured out into the Arizona wilderness on an iSportsman sponsored trip in hopes of tracking down a big mule deer. It was the first time Mike had ever hunted in the desert and it was everything he wanted and more.

Though upon first arriving, he found himself asking, “Do deer really live here?” Even though it was an illogical train of thought, it stayed present in his mind until he found his first set of tracks and scat. “I lost my mind, I mean, this is real. They live here.” Mike said.

Eventually, Mike discovered 20-30 deer in one spot and decided that this was where he was going to stay for the rest of the trip. On the fifth day, Mike was ready to attempt a few shots.

Jamie, Mike’s hunting partner who accompanied him during the trip, was staying up high, to visually track the deer and provide intel to Mike as he moved on foot. Soon after, Mike was pinned by some deer, but Jamie urged him to move onto the next ridge to get into a better position.

“In my head I’m like ‘I don’t know’, but he has a better vantage point and can see more than me.” Mike made the decision to listen to his partner, who has more experience, “Trust is such a giant factor in these situations. I’m not worried about being quiet, because he made it seem I had to get there quick to get the shot off.”

Mike only took three steps before he heard noise all around him and saw a buck and six does dart away. “I could not fathom what happened, and I was so distraught and upset that I didn’t trust my gut.” Emotionally drained from the event, he later talked it over with Jamie to find that no one was really at fault: there were deer neither of them accounted for

and both the hunters were focused on separate groups the entire time. They headed back to California empty handed after their first trip, with Mike returning the following weekend.

On the second trip, Mike’s most exciting encounter was on day one. He was able to locate a buck five minutes before sunset and decided to try for it right away. While getting closer to the deer he saw that they were starting to approach him. “My heart was racing.” Mike thought, “This was really happening.” The buck was walking right at him in a beeline, about 75 yards away. The best shot for a bow on a deer is broadside, so Mike had to wait until the buck turned. Right when that happened, Mike drew back his bow and released the arrow. “It looked like it was going to hit, but then I saw sparks.”

Mike’s arrow was just a little short, hitting a rock in front of the buck, who was now speeding away at 35 miles per hour. “That was the best opportunity I had on the second trip. Unfortunately, I couldn’t execute.” Mike’s time in Arizona gave him a new perspective of hunting, “Hunting in southern California is harder than Arizona. It’s like walking through a field of potato chips.” Mike was referring to the excess of foliage and fallen leaves commonly found in his California hunting grounds. Despite the setbacks, overall, the trip provided many surprising experiences. “I’ve never experienced something so quiet in my life.” Mike explained, “The sound of nothing, sitting there in the quietest place on earth was the craziest experience of the whole trip.” Now that he’s been there himself, Mike has a few tips for anyone who wants to hunt in the desert: bring a puppy jacket in the winter to cancel the wind, get a high vantage point to survey the area properly, and don’t go cheap on your boots or optics.


With deer season finally over for Mike, he’s ready to go home; it wasn’t until he was on the drive back that he realized how tired he was. “Six days of hardcore hunting was my limit. At the end of deer season, I’m over it, I’m ready to rest and relax.” Looking forward, Mike is planning on enjoying some time off from hunting before deer season starts again in August. The most important thing is to take everything in moderation.

GIVING THANKS TO A BEAUTIFUL DOE

By: Connor Merritt



Sarah with her first doe; Original story and photo submitted by Sarah.
[13 SportsmanUSA](#)



Sarah is a relatively new hunter and has been searching for her first-ever deer over the last three years. Her husband helps guide her during rifle season, despite being a bowhunter himself. Together, they venture out into some of the best hunting grounds in Kansas every year. Despite their lack of success, the couple still enjoys their time out in the wilderness, even though their fingers get frozen in the process.

This past season, Sarah managed to score her first deer on a hunt, at the age of 37. Sarah and her husband ventured off into the Kansas hunting grounds, and positioned themselves at the edge of a field, with some woods behind them to break up their pattern. Sarah, intent on succeeding this year, focused all her attention on surveying the area around her, while her husband began taking a quick nap. Ten minutes later, Sarah spotted a doe at the field edge.

She whispered to her husband, "Hey, babe..." He lazily replied, "What, is it a deer?" "Yes"

While her husband quietly repositioned himself to try and get a better look at the deer, Sarah noticed the doe turned broadside. She knew this was the best opportunity for a shot, so she eased off the safety and checked to make sure the doe was mature. Sarah didn't want to make any mistakes when it came to her first successful hunt: It needed to be perfect.

Sarah's husband confirmed the doe's maturity and just when Sarah whispered that she was going to take the shot, a fawn appeared to join the doe. Sarah's resolve wavered, and she hesitated for a moment to take in this new information. While keeping a sharp focus on the two animals, Sarah noticed that the fawn did not have any spots. She decided to double check with her husband, "That fawn is big enough to survive on its own, right?" Her husband confirmed what Sarah already knew, but still she hesitated. Some people might say that there should be no hesitation when shooting a doe with a fawn, while others might think it's cruel to do so. After about five minutes, Sarah made up her mind. The doe

moved into a broadside position, providing Sarah the perfect opening. She took aim and prepared to pull the trigger; however, just at that moment the doe repositioned herself again. Sarah's heart was pounding as her whole body tensed up. She was mere moments away from securing her first deer. You could hear her heart beating from a mile away: ba-dum, ba-dum. Sarah felt like she might even have a heart attack right there.

Sarah knew she was in no state to take a shot with how tense she was, so she attempted to calm herself down using her meditation and breathing practices. It didn't work initially, but eventually, she could feel her heart slow down to a normal rate. Now Sarah knew she was ready. After calming down and refocusing on the doe, Sarah saw another opening for a clean shot. Sarah eased the safety off once again and steadied her aim...BOOM!

Sarah felt the violent impact from her firearm but managed to keep her attention exclusively on the deer. Through the smoke of the shot, Sarah witnessed the doe drop right where she stood. She always imagined this moment would be an emotional one, after all, she just took the life of a living creature; however, Sarah found herself sitting in contemplative silence for about ten minutes afterwards.

It was then her husband reached over, squeezed her shoulders, and said, "Good job." That calm assurance was exactly what she needed. She finally stood up and gave thanks to the beautiful doe. It was at this moment that Sarah finally began to cry, feeling the intense solemnity that comes with taking a life. She had been waiting for this moment for three years, and it was finally here.

Sarah couldn't have accomplished such an amazing feat without the love and support of her husband, even if it did take several years. While she will hunt again, she's not optimistic that she'll ever have a more satisfying experience than this one, but she does know that every trip will be memorable in its own way. That's the most exciting part of hunting, and she can't wait to try again.

THE FALLEN OUTDOORS

By: Connor Merritt

The Fallen Outdoors (TFO) is a nonprofit founded in 2009 in a remote outpost in Afghanistan by Eric Bakken; from there, it's grown into a nationwide community. By organizing outdoor adventures for veterans and active-duty members of all ages, TFO aims to connect servicemen with a community of like-minded individuals. To do this, TFO plans, organizes, and supervises trips with any interested military-affiliated servicemen. This is only possible thanks to the charitable donations and generous volunteers who make TFO work.

TFO understands the benefits of being outdoors and having a strong support system. That's why the organization is run by veterans and active-duty service members who volunteer to help other people like them. They'll do anything to help get people outdoors because they know the positive healing effect that nature can have on someone — especially when they encounter stress in their everyday lives. TFO combines this love of the outdoors with a community where any veteran or service member is welcome.

"The goal is to bring back the camaraderie veterans had while they were in the service" said Ducky Lique, TFO team lead for the Commonwealth of Virginia. "We give them an avenue to get outside."

This is particularly important for members of the military, who frequently travel and relocate due to the nature of their career. If someone moves across the country and finds themselves in unfamiliar territory with no contacts, TFO is there to provide them with activities and community. For example, Ducky had trouble finding

community when he first returned home, but TFO helped him with that. At first, he didn't have any way to connect with other military members; once he found out about TFO, he was able to be part of a community again.

"I was able to be with other brothers and sisters that served — it's great to have that again." Ducky continues, "Being outdoors is peaceful and gives you a break from all the stressors in your life."

At the end of the day, volunteers like Ducky want to share that same experience with everyone who gets involved with TFO. Seeing the positive impact that the organization can have on the lives of service members is one of the greatest joys they can have. In fact, the outdoor excursions can provide just as much help and relaxation for the volunteers as it can for the participants.

There was one trip where Ducky took out a first-time turkey hunter and was able to guide him to tag out pretty much as soon as they started. Ducky could feel the pure elation on the man's face as he succeeded in his first outdoor excursion: his delight was infectious.

Last year, TFO was able to run 121 trips like that one, helping to connect 352 members





with the outdoors and each other. While these are great numbers, TFO knows that there's always room to assist more people in getting outdoors and finding a shared community. Looking forward, TFO wants to host more trips and get more veterans and service members outdoors with each other. Everyone can escape everyday stressors, relax in peaceful nature, and experience the wonderful sense of camaraderie that they've been missing from military life. Community and connection make the biggest impact in life. Ducky explains, "It's one of those things you won't forget." If you wish to be part of this unforgettable experience, you can donate, or volunteer your time, land, or gear. You can find TFO online by going to their website at **www.TheFallenoutdoors.org** and you can also find them on their social media channels on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.



Kim Bailey with his tom; Original Photo Submitted by Kim Bailey.

THE PICTURE PERFECT TOM

By: Victoria Tillinghast

When Kim Bailey snagged what he considers the most photo-worthy turkey he's ever tagged, it was the second day of a spring hunt on the scenic pastures of the Kentucky horse farm near his home.

The first day, the scenery was the only entertainment as the morning stood quiet and without so much as a gobble. It was the second morning as the sun began to rise that the familiar gobble of a large tom caught his attention.

"Just like clockwork," Bailey said. "You might not hear them but they're there the whole time."

It was then he pulled his well-used dried wing from his vest and began flapping it to mimic the sound of a hen flying down from the roost. Without even making a call, the strutter came running into Bailey's view and became what the veteran hunter estimates is the 170th bird he's harvested.

"With every one I kill, I thank the Lord," Bailey said. "That picture of the turkey is of a beautiful specimen, and they're such beautiful birds."

For Bailey, his life as an outdoorsman began at 15 years old when his sister drove him to a spot the family had been scouting, dropped him off and left him until nightfall. Before the sun set, however, he scored his first deer with a bow.

Since 1980, the attraction of the crisp morning air and a throaty gobble in the distance is what brings Bailey back to the woods season after season. And his love for turkey hunting has led him to adventures in Alabama, Tennessee, Missouri, Nebraska, and Oklahoma—with Missouri holding a special place in his heart.

Bailey was fortunate to spend several spring days scouting and hunting various farms in Missouri, but there was one that was always out of his reach. When he and his party saw

a gaggle of big gobblers out in the field, a field they didn't have permission to hunt, this farm became a destination he dreamed about.

The itch stayed with Bailey and his buddies until the next spring season when they decided to drive all night from Kentucky to Missouri on opening morning and ask the farmer for permission to hunt there.

The farmer recognized Bailey and his crew from years before and was surprised to hear they made an overnight trip just to ask for his blessing.

"He said we were crazy, but he let us hunt on his property and treated us like family for the next 16 years," Bailey recalled. "You have to know how to talk to people."

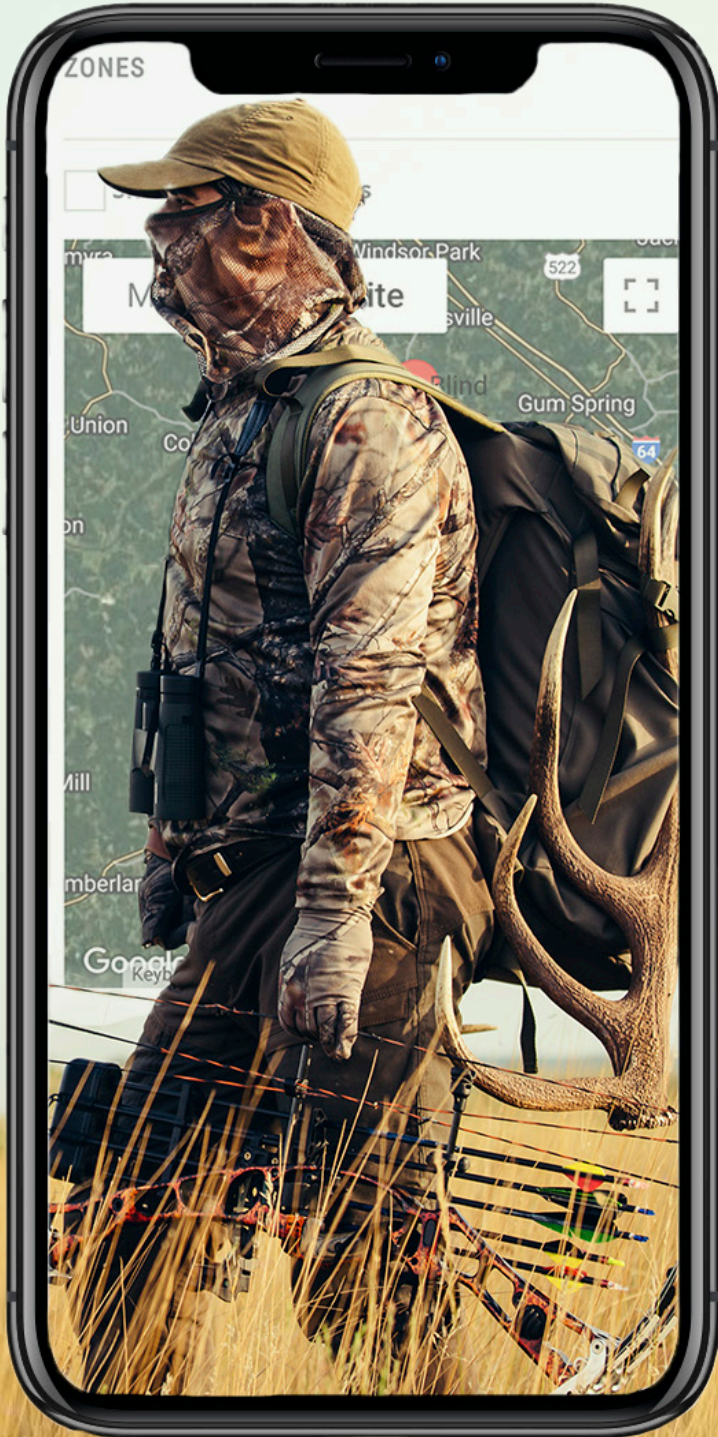
Nowadays, Bailey prefers the spring hunt over fall season. Though he has been watching his trail cam footage recently and the birds are in convincing enough numbers that he is considering breaking tradition and heading out soon with a bow.

"I'm kind of old school. Everything I hunt with looks like it's well used because it is," Bailey said of his methods for chasing down toms. "And though my ponies aren't as young as they used to be, I rely on scouting more than actual hunting tactics."

Bailey attributes his bird hunting success to putting in the work and knowing where to go, which, aside from his state travels, also included many iSportsman managed destinations such as Fort Knox, Fort Novosel, and Fort Leonard Wood.

And like Bailey, it may take until your 170th bird to harvest one so picture perfect you want to share it with everyone, but it's all about the people you meet and experiences you have along the way. "There are a lot of things in turkey hunting that take several years to figure out."

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SET UP FOR SUCCESS WHEN TURKEY HUNTING

By: Doug Howlett



In more than 30 years of turkey hunting, I've seen it happen hundreds of times. A hunter is working the turkey woods, walking, and calling every so often to strike a gobbler, when suddenly he hears one rocket back in reply. I've seen hunters dive for the nearest tree in a virtual panic, worried the tom was going to just burst right into sight. Now sometimes he is. But if you hunt expecting to hear that gobble and keep aware of your surroundings before making that call, you can quickly choose a setup that will lend itself to better success rather than just dropping down in a spot that may make you more visible than you realize or obstruct the gobbler's approach, so he hangs up and never struts in.

PINPOINT YOUR TARGET

As soon as a gobble shatters the otherwise silent woods, you need to quickly determine the following: Where is the bird? How far away is he? Is he approaching or staying in one spot? What lies between you and the gobbler? That last one can be important because if there is a wide creek or river between you and the tom or a thick tangle of briars or grown up clearcut, you may have to work your way to the same side of the obstruction as the turkey. Gobblers are often reluctant to cross such terrain.

It's also vital to determine how far away the turkey is. Wind, rain, hills, and foliage can all impact how well you can accurately hear a gobble and use that sound to determine where a turkey is. If any of those are at play, a turkey that would sound 150 yards on a clear day, may be twice as close when wind, rain or other noise or physical obstructions are limiting the sound. Determining how far the bird is and whether he is moving toward you will tell you how much time you have to get set up or if you need to make a strategic move on the gobbler.

STAY OR GO?

In most cases, as soon as you hear a gobble, you are going to want to close the distance between you and the turkey. Go at least a quarter of the way toward where you think the longbeard might be and then hit him again, but this time with a locator call; particularly if he fired quickly back on a hen call just moments before. If he doesn't respond, then use the call that he answered before, but do so next to a tree suitable for sitting against should you need to drop to the ground for a quick setup. If the tom is still

where you first heard him, keep moving forward some more. If he has begun coming your way, now it's time to assess exactly how to play this guy.

TAKE A SEAT

If possible, it's always best to set up where you will already be in shotgun range when the gobbler first steps into sight. If a tom is in a field, set up off the field in the woods to make him enter in search of what he thinks is a hen. Other good setup points are just off a break in a ridge, a bend in a road or just off a small food plot or opening in the woods. By setting up in such spots, a gobbler is forced to come looking for the hen. For both safety and concealment, set up against a tree wider than your shoulders and taller than your head. And never try to hide in thick brush. It will only limit your ability to swing the barrel of your gun to take aim on the bird should he come in from a direction you weren't expecting. Trust your camouflage and your ability to sit still to fool a turkey's eyesight.

ASSUME THE POSITION

Once you're in position, sit on your butt, with your knees up and your shotgun balanced on your knees, ready to shoot. If you're right-handed, angle your left shoulder in the direction from which you anticipate the turkey to approach. (If left-handed, do the opposite.) This will allow you to easily swing to your left and to your right with minimal movement should the longbeard vector in from a slightly different direction. Here, you want to go ahead and position your head close to the shotgun, but don't hunch all the way down on it. You want to be ready to shoot, while still maintaining a full field of view out in front of you.

MAKING THE SHOT

Most gobblers are going to come in quietly and cautiously. Listen for the sound of drumming or footsteps in the leaves rather than overly focusing on gobbling. Also, never call when a turkey is in plain sight of your position. He can pinpoint exactly where the sound came from, and if he doesn't see what he is looking for, he is likely to hightail it out of there. Move your shotgun only when the bird's head is obstructed by a tree. Move your gun slow and steady and as soon as the bird steps into the open, have the gun waiting on that spot, take aim (now is when you want that cheek placed firmly on the stock), and gently squeeze the trigger. Don't lift your head to see the shot. If you do everything right, there should be a dead gobbler flopping in front of you.

SCORING A TEN POINTER AT FORT MOORE: THE ALTERNATIVE TO WORKING UNTIL YOU DIE

By: Connor Merritt

Don Maulden and his wife Elizabeth love hunting together, and they've been doing it for over thirty years. It all started when Don would go hunting while off duty and Elizabeth used the opportunity to spend more time with him; throughout the years hunting quickly became one of her lifelong passions too. Hunting was particularly important to them during the COVID lockdowns, when there were limited options to leave the house.

Don said, "The outdoors was really the only place we could go to avoid the insanity." They used their passion and joy for hunting to stay active and sane during the worst of the pandemic. It helped them take their mind off things while enjoying nature.

In addition to recreation, Don and Elizabeth also hunt for food. They eat a lot of venison themselves, and make sure the rest is put to good use: Anything that they don't eat is given to family and neighbors, and all the scraps are given to the dogs. "We don't waste any deer."

Their favorite spot is Fort Moore, conveniently located about a kilometer away from where they live. It's over 200-thousand acres, with many open access opportunities. Don has been hunting all over the world thanks to his military career, and he swears by Fort Moore as one of the best hunting grounds.

"I've never found a better place to hunt for wild hogs, whitetail deer, and turkeys. When it comes to whitetail deer in the south, Fort Moore is the best."

They had a successful season at Fort Moore this past year, taking down a couple of hogs, and an eight pointer. Elizabeth has gotten

one or two eight pointers every year for the past five years, but this season she shot her best yet: a ten pointer.

When they got to the hunting grounds they split up: Don went left, Elizabeth went right. She picked out a trail, found a spot, and set up in a tree. After spending about an hour up there, a Doe ran by, with a buck shortly in tow. "I could hear him come barreling through the bushes."

The buck froze as it passed, about thirty yards away. Elizabeth was astounded by how close he was. "My heart was beating so hard it was just amazing!" Elizabeth waited patiently for her opportunity, "I knew it was a neck shot or nothing."

The buck slowly turned its head, giving Elizabeth a clean shot. She took aim with her .243 and slowly pulled the trigger. "He dropped like a rock."

After she shot him, she just sat there and stared at him, taking in the moment before climbing down the tree. "I went up there and texted my husband 'OMG! What a buck!' and he texted back, 'I'm on my way!' and that was it: we got him."

Don and Elizabeth are both retired now, with plenty of time to hunt to their hearts' desire. They tend to hunt four to five days a week and try to get out whenever they can. It's something they love to do, and it brings them closer together. Don explains, "There's life after retirement. There's no law that says you gotta work 'til you die."





Elizabeth Maulden with her ten pointer; Original photo by Don Maulden. Story inspired by Don Maulden.
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TOP FIVE BEAR SAFETY TOOLS FROM EXPERT KIM TITCHENER

By: Victoria Tillinghast

Kim Titchener began working with black bears and grizzlies at Banff National Park while attending university. Her lifetime experience has been critical in providing vital information to improve bear safety. From personal accounts from friends and survivors of bear attacks to immediate response to fatal bear incidents in the town where she lived, Kim is passionate about helping everyone enjoy the outdoors and do so safely. In 2012, she started her own consulting business called Bear Safety and More, educating industry entities in both Canada and the United States.

Wanting to do more to ensure everyone was knowledgeable and safe, Kim also launched Rec Safe with Wildlife as both a public repository of bear safety resources and a platform to offer free bear safety classes on Instagram and Zoom each week.

While there are some environmental factors that contribute to more frequent bear encounters, Kim is certain the rise is mostly due to an influx of people in bear territory. Between population growth and the increased popularity of outdoor recreation due to COVID-19, humans are spending more time in bear habitats. This fact doesn't have to lead to tragedy for either the people involved or the bears. According to Kim, it's important to be

proactive about encounters while traversing in areas known to harbor bear populations. And while this can and

should require some additional gear—such as firearms, and most importantly bear spray, Kim said everyone is already equipped with the most powerful tool to deter a dangerous encounter.

YOUR VOICE

“The number one thing that I always like to tell people is that the most valuable deterrent we have, that doesn't cost anything, is our voice. It's the number one bear deterrent in the world,” says Kim. By this she means making noise every couple of minutes, while traveling through



an area. This allows bears nearby to know you're coming, you're human, and most importantly, your intentions don't entail ambush. This tactic gives the large carnivores the opportunity to move away from you and eliminate accidental surprise, which can lead to a reflexive, defensive response. "Now, can you do that while you're in the middle of a military exercise? No. Can you do that while you're out fishing and hunting? No. So, you got to, of course, be more cognizant of the environment that you're in," says Kim.

YOUR SURROUNDINGS

Watch for signs of bear activity. Look for scat, tracks, digging, overturned rocks or logs; if you smell a dead animal or find a mound of dirt and grass that turns out to be a buried carcass, this can all indicate bears close by. Bears come out of hibernation in early spring, and female grizzlies will stay in their dens longer with cubs waiting for adequate food sources to be available.

YOUR GROUP

While noise is a great first step, there is also strength in numbers. "We find that people who are in groups of four or more tend to not get attacked by bears," says Kim, "It's the smaller group sizes, where people are by themselves or with one other person that are more likely to get attacked." Group size is beneficial simply because larger groups tend to generate more noise. Kim says there is also a chance that lone humans can be perceived as vulnerable prey.

YOUR REACTIONS

"If you find yourself in an encounter with them, you need to let them know that your intention is not to eat their one-week-old moose carcass, not to eat their little cubs or kill them; you need to be submissive and start backing off and giving them space," Kim says. "Don't yell or scream. Start backing off and giving them the space that they need so they understand that this was an accidental encounter." While this may sound at odds with advice

commonly given in grizzly country, it is the best first step. Should a bear continue to approach you, you should start making noise, making yourself look bigger by raising your arms and trying to scare the bear away.

YOUR ARSENAL

When that doesn't work, you need to be prepared. This is where bear spray and firearms come into play. Surprisingly, bear spray is typically more efficient in this case. Since most bear attacks happen at close range and rather quickly, discharging a firearm in self-defense becomes complicated. "Most of us are not trained to fire and get a kill shot on a bear at close range. Most of us, while we're out hunting, we have the time to look for that perfect shot and take it," says Kim. "You don't get the opportunity for that perfect shot during a close encounter."

Not to mention, those who find themselves in bear country with a firearm ready for use tend to be quieter than say, a hiker who is not hunting, making surprise encounters more likely. Kim says, hands down, bear spray is the most effective tool to use in emergency situations. A study on the efficacy of bear deterrent spray in Alaska found that when comparing cases of bear encounters, including black bears, grizzlies and even a handful of polar bears, 98% of those who used bear spray survived the encounter uninjured. That compares to a study on the use of firearms for bear defense in Alaska, which found no significant difference in survival rates when firearms were used versus not used at all.

The key to using bear spray efficiently, however, is deploying the spray before the attack begins. Kim says, "You have to have [bear spray] physically on your body, so you can grab it and use it before the bear makes contact." For more information on bear safety, or to reach out to Kim Titchener for her knowledge and services, please visit www.bearsafety.com and www.recsafewithwildlife.com or email Kim directly at Kim@bearsafety.com.

WINNING THE LOTTERY

By: Connor Merritt

Larry Born, an Army retiree and avid outdoorsman, wanted to hunt at the highly popular United States Air Force Academy in Colorado more than anything. He knew it was one of the best spots in the state and he was excited to check it out for himself; unfortunately, it was also one of the most difficult tags to draw based on a point system. Fortunately, Larry is local to the area, so he could volunteer with the wildlife service to get a sneak peek at the hunting grounds while assisting in deer surveys at the same time.

Each year he goes out with other volunteers around the grounds tracking statistics such as age, class, quality, and quantity. Last year, Larry was optimistic -he had enough points that he knew his tag could reasonably be drawn. However, when the time in June to draw the tags came and went, Larry wasn't picked. While disappointing, Larry had gotten used to this feeling over the last ten years, since he first put his name in the draw. He had resigned himself to waiting another year, but just one month before the season kicked off that Fall, Larry received an email telling him someone had backed out and his tag was drawn. Larry was ecstatic—this was an even more surprising turn of events than if he had been picked in the original draw.

By midmorning on the first day, Larry had already seen 12-15 bucks, passing them over in search of the big one. After a bit of driving around the property, he found a secluded section on the south end inaccessible to vehicles: this was the spot. "As I was watching a group of four yearlings about 100 yards away, this guy walked out of some brush to start eating acorns about 40 yards from me." Larry knew, "I was not passing on this one." This was his chance — Larry took off after him on foot and made an offhand shot with his Tikka Roughtech in .300 Win Mag. The buck kept moving for about twenty yards, before eventually collapsing: The shot was good! The buck field-dressed 210 pounds with zero fat, as it was a post-rut hunt. Any day now the shoulder mount will arrive to take its place of honor in his home.



Photo submitted by Larry Born; Original story inspired by Larry Born.
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NEVER STOP HUNTING: A LIFETIME OF TRADITIONS

By: Connor Merritt

Photo by Scott Sturkolcourtesy of DVIDs. The appearance of U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) visual information does not imply or constitute DoD endorsement.

27 ISportsmanUSA



Dan Beaudry is a lifelong hunting enthusiast: He started when he was 13 years old and hasn't stopped since. He's 68 years old now, but he still makes sure to participate in every deer season with his longtime hunting party.

What started out as a group of friends hunting together eventually turned into a generational venture, as many of the hunters brought their children out to hunt with them. It's grown over the years and now they all look forward to every trip together.

Over time, Dan's become the group organizer, securing all the permits, planning the trips, and coordinating with the group — all to ensure they spend as much time hunting together as possible.

"I'm on top of it, as soon as they're available online, I'm signing everyone up." Dan has a set of traditions that he and his group honor every year to get the most out of their hunting seasons.

The first of these is a yearly trip to Costa Rica where Dan and his hunting group go deep sea fishing. Even though it's not technically part of the hunting season, they always use this as a chance to kick back and relax in some warm weather in preparation for the cold deer season.

Once the deer season begins in full swing, Dan and his group have another ritual.

First, they go to the bar on Thursday nights to play pool, drink and blow off some steam; then on Friday, they go out scouting together; and finally on Saturday, they're up and at 'em bright and early, ready to hunt.

"It's like a religion to us." Dan explains, "I've never missed an opening day in my life."

On one recent trip to Fort McCoy in Wisconsin, the group downed three bucks—one by a friend's son, another by Dan, and the final by Dan's own son.

Dan got his opportunity when he was hunting over a big field on the south end, positioned on a small knob at the apex. He was surprised when, from the corner of his eye, he saw a deer emerge from the western tree line.

Dan figured it was a late rut when they went out that season, due to a particularly odd encounter he had when the buck first appeared.

"He and I made eye contact and 99 out of 100 times, that deer is going to pivot and go the other way." Describing the oddness of the deer's behavior, Dan said, "But he was smelling something, and he just kept going."

As the deer moved from the west, he crossed right in front of a parked Tahoe that Dan had noticed earlier. The car was parked by a tank trail, and it nearly put Dan's hunt in jeopardy.

"I had to wait for him to clear the Tahoe before I could shoot him, so I wouldn't shoot this guy's truck." Dan laughed. He said to himself, "He's gotta clear the Tahoe, he's gotta clear the Tahoe."

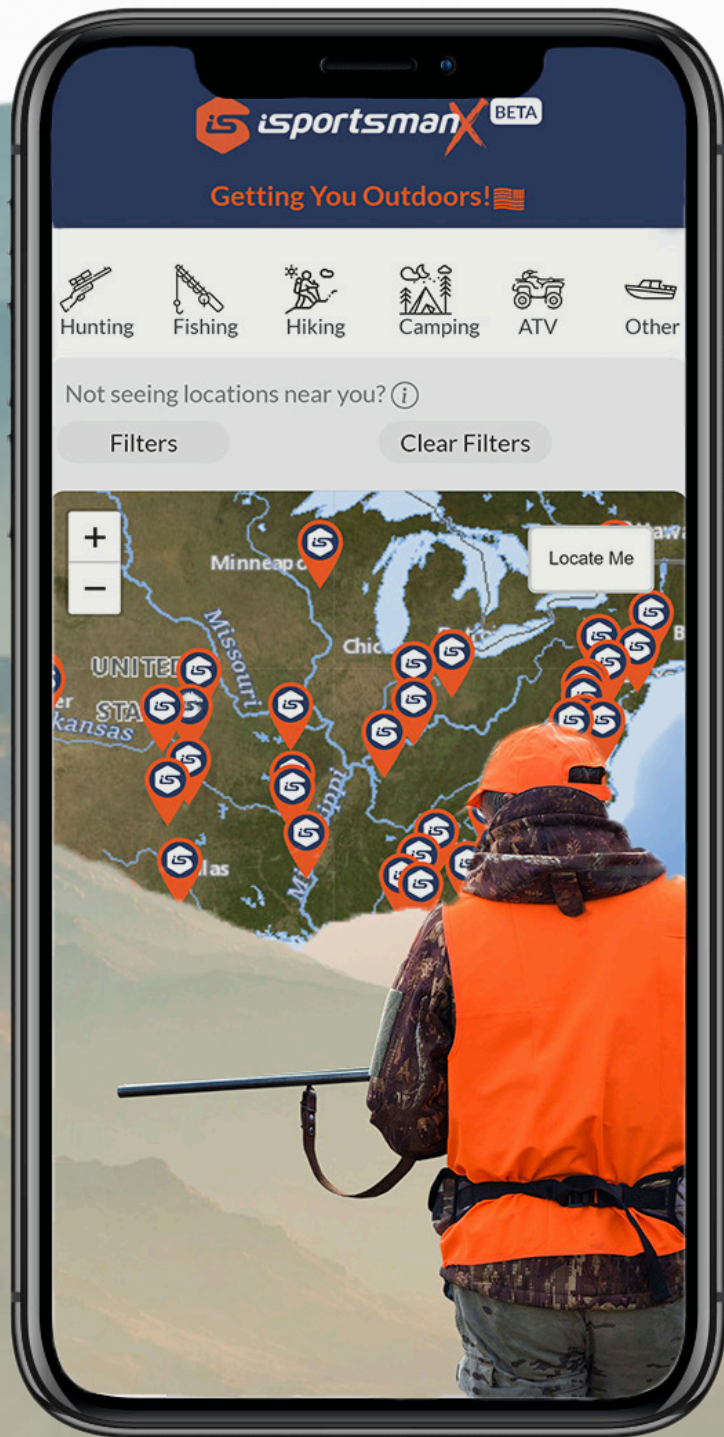
It took some patience, but eventually Dan had his opportunity. "I was on him and as soon as he cleared the Tahoe, I shot him in the neck. Down he went. He never took a step."

Within half an hour of legal shooting time, the day was already over for Dan. It was an exciting moment, the first deer he had shot in 17 years.

Dan hopes that his age won't keep him from pursuing his passion as the years progress. "I live for it. I'm getting older, but I don't want it to end."

Though he can no longer run around or climb trees like he used to but he's still ecstatic to hunt on the ground any chance he gets. And that proved to be enough with last season's success. "I'm looking forward to next year already."

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29 iSportsmanUSA

PRECISION DUCK HUNTING ON SMALL WATER

By: Doug Howlett

For many of us, finding those pinpoint spots where ducks are coming and going among the timber and fields near our homes is one of the greatest joys in our lives. However, it's not always that easy to hunt ducks on small water. To make the most of our limited days in a blind (or huddled on a brushy shoreline) try these five tips.

SCOUT LIKE A DEER HUNTER

Hunters need to scout isolated farm ponds and millponds, swamps, creeks, potholes, and other small waterways where ducks will feed during the day and roost in the evening. If you only have one or two spots, this is an easy task. Ideally, you want a selection of areas you can hit and check out, both in the morning and the evening, to see when and if ducks are using them.

BUILD A PRECISION SETUP

Fortunately, small water hunts typically don't require much gear—primarily some waders, a handful of decoys and maybe a kayak or canoe depending on the depth of the water. Much of the hunting can be done from a bank or wading in shallows, and ducks can be

retrieved by hand (or a good dog if you have one). To maximize useable space, if the pond or waterway is elongated like in an oval you want to set up at whichever end puts the wind to your back since ducks prefer landing into the wind. This is the best-case scenario given it will give ducks more air space to drop into your set up and size up where they want to set down. If you have a stronger crosswind, play the wind more than the configuration of the pond. You also want to keep the sun at your back if possible, since as soon as the sun breaks above the tops of the trees, if you're looking straight into it, it will be impossible to see your targets as they set.

DECOY CONSIDERATIONS

On small water, a dozen or fewer decoys is often all you will need. Set them up in the same fashion as you would a large water spread, meaning you want to leave a nice hole in the center for birds to set down, ideally 25 to 40 yards from where you will be set up.

LESS IS MORE WHEN CALLING

If birds do look like they are going to pass, go ahead and throw out a hail call and as they approach, don't be shy about giving some feeding calls and quacks, but use a call that keeps volume down and merely adds to the realism of the setup. A jerk string attached to a decoy and given an occasional tug, a motion decoy on a stake or bobbing in the water, or if you're wading in water not far from the decoys, rocking your leg back and forth to create ripples, will all add to the deception that real ducks are already there.

DON'T OVERSHOOT

Try to keep your shooting to small groups of ducks hitting the water instead of big flights, as it can serve to educate the birds and keep them from revisiting your hot spot. If there are a series of ponds in close proximity on the property you hunt, it's also a good idea to leave one as a sanctuary that is never hunted. This will keep birds in the area and feed a continuous supply of ducks and geese to the ponds you are hunting throughout the season.





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