

# VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2019

FOUR DOLLARS



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DEER & WATERFOWL  
FORECAST**

# NOVEMBER/DECEMBER

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**Cover:** After a fierce battle, this buck turns to his awaiting prize. © Tes Jolly

**Left:** Snow geese fill the marshes on their journey south. © Rob Sabatini

**Back Cover:** Improving habitat can help protect the bobwhite quail. Page 22. © Maslowski Productions

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**RYAN J. BROWN**  
Executive Director

This issue of *Virginia Wildlife* marks my favorite season of them all—the fall. There’s just something about the smell of the woods on a cool, early fall morning that gets me ready for the adventures to come in October, November, and December—as well as ready to trade the stresses of everyday life for some time out in nature. In fact, a good friend of mine and I have a routine each year of calling each other on the first mornings in our areas where it “feels like hunting season!”

For those who, like me, are looking forward to another enjoyable deer season to come, I would ask that you also take a couple of extra steps this year to help ensure the future of the sport and the health of our deer herd. First, make the time to take a new hunter, young or old, into the woods. I promise you, there is nothing more enjoyable than

sharing our passion with others. Secondly, also educate yourself about the increasing threat of chronic wasting disease among our deer herd and things you can do to help prevent its spread. This past year saw a large geographical jump in the known presence of the disease into Culpeper County; we at the Department want to do everything we can to detect this disease where it is present and slow its progression.

Finally, this fall we also say goodbye to a true hunting legend, Mr. Clyde Roberts, who passed away on September 10, seven weeks shy of his 106th birthday. Many of you will remember Mr. Roberts as garnering national attention for his hunting talents; since turning 100, he harvested 13 deer and added two bucks last season. He was an inspiration to many of us and he most certainly had an outdoors life well lived!



IN MEMORY OF  
**CLYDE ANDREW ROBERTS**  
1913-2019

America’s oldest, active whitetail deer hunter.  
Beloved by all who knew him.



© Mike Roberts

#### MISSION STATEMENT

Conserve and manage wildlife populations and habitat for the benefit of present and future generations. Connect people to Virginia’s outdoors through boating, education, fishing, hunting, trapping, wildlife viewing and other wildlife-related activities. Protect people and property by promoting safe outdoor experiences and managing human-wildlife conflicts.



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# 2019 DEER & WATERFOWL FORECAST

By Matt Knox & Ben Lewis

# WHITETAIL DEER

## 2018 Deer Season Review

During the past deer season, 191,947 deer were reported killed by deer hunters in Virginia (See Figure 1, p. 6). This total included 96,442 antlered bucks, 12,543 button bucks, and 82,962 does (43% females). Archery (including crossbows) accounted for 14% of the deer kill; muzzleloaders, 23%; and firearms, 63%. For the first time since crossbows became legal for all deer hunters in the fall of 2005, the number of deer taken with crossbows exceeded the number taken with traditional bows. Approximately 161,800 deer (85%) were checked using the Department’s electronic telephone and online checking through the Go Outdoors Virginia system. The harvest numbers above do not include deer taken on out-of-season deer kill permits or those deer hit and killed by vehicles. Deer hunters, who would like to know

the annual deer kill totals by county dating back to 1947, including the county-specific 2018 totals, can find them on the Department’s website: [www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/deer/harvest](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/deer/harvest).

## What’s New For Fall 2019

There are many new deer regulation changes for fall 2019 including:

- It is now illegal to use unmanned aerial vehicles, commonly referred to as drones, for hunting.
- Archery deer hunting on Coalfields PALS lands in Southwest Virginia is now full season either-sex deer hunting.
- The firearms deer season on private lands in western Amherst, Bedford, and western Nelson counties has been extended from two to four weeks in length.
- Full season either-sex deer hunting

has been established during both the early and late muzzleloading seasons on private lands in Botetourt, Rockingham, (east of Routes 613 and 731), and Wythe counties.

- Earn A Buck (EAB) has been initiated on private lands in Albemarle, Culpeper, Floyd, Franklin, Grayson, Hanover, Henrico, James City, Pulaski, Shenandoah, and York counties and EAB on private lands in Clarke, Frederick, and Warren counties was changed from 1:1 to 2:1.
- The deer bag limit on private lands west of the Blue Ridge Mountains has been increased to two deer per day. Only one deer per day may be taken on National Forest lands, Department-owned lands, and Department-managed lands west of

© Matt Hansen

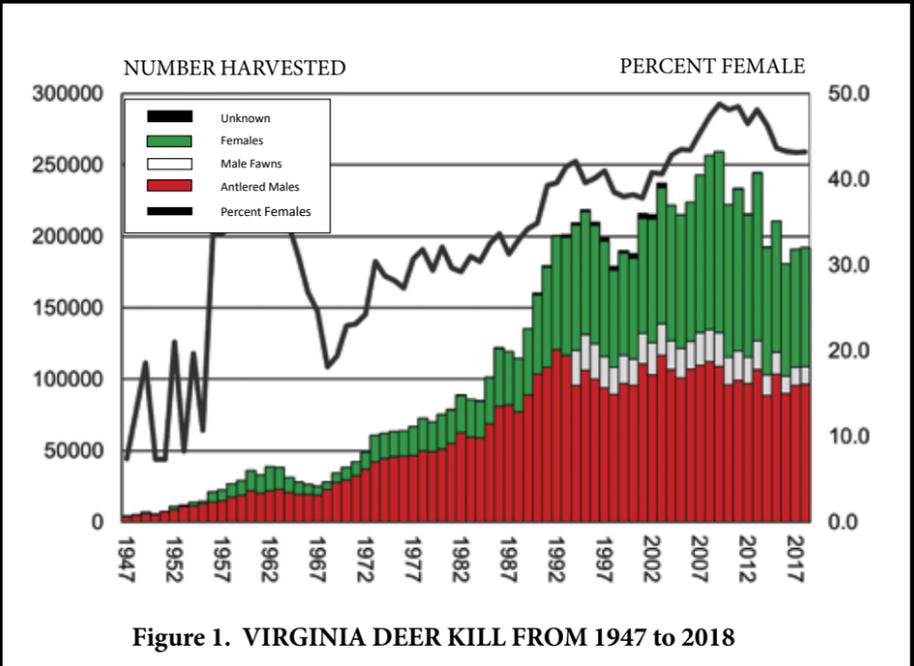


Figure 1. VIRGINIA DEER KILL FROM 1947 to 2018

- the Blue Ridge Mountains and on National Forest lands in Amherst, Bedford, and Nelson counties east of the Blue Ridge Mountains.
- One elk per day may be taken statewide except for Buchanan, Dickenson, and Wise counties.
  - The Antler Point Restriction has been dropped in Rockingham and Shenandoah counties to reduce chronic wasting disease (CWD) transmission risks.
  - Apprentice license holders are now included in the Youth Antlerless Deer Regulation.
  - The Youth and Apprentice Antlerless Deer Regulation is now effective statewide and includes Buchanan, Dickenson, and Wise counties.
  - Firearms either-sex deer hunting days have been increased in Augusta (private lands), Campbell (west of Norfolk Southern Railroad), Charles City, New Kent, Page (private lands), Pittsylvania (west of

- Norfolk Southern Railroad), Powhatan, and Smyth (private lands) counties.
- A firearms either-sex deer hunting day (the last day) has been initiated on National Forest and Department-owned lands in Alleghany, Amherst, Augusta, Bath, Bedford, Botetourt, Frederick, Grayson, Highland, Nelson, Page, Roanoke, Rockbridge, Rockingham, Russell, Shenandoah, Smyth, Tazewell, Warren, and Washington counties.
- A new deer feeding regulation was adopted that will prohibit deer feeding year round in any county designated by the Department within 25 miles of a confirmed detection of CWD. Deer feeding is now prohibited year round in Albemarle, Buchanan, Clarke, Culpeper, Dickenson, Fauquier, Frederick, Greene, Loudoun, Louisa, Madison, Orange, Page, Rappahannock, Rockingham, Shenandoah, Spotsylvania, Stafford, Warren, and Wise counties (towns and cities within included).
- Lastly, a new regulation prohibits the importation of whole deer carcasses and certain high-risk carcass parts (e.g., head and spinal cord) from anywhere outside of Virginia.

distribution of CWD positives continues to grow and spread. Clinically sick deer (e.g., starving, staggering, with neurological symptoms) are now being found and reported. To date, three clinical CWD deer have been found. CWD has also been discovered east of I-81 for the first time, and CWD is beginning to move south and become established in northern Shenandoah County. Due to the shifting CWD surveillance needs in the state, the Department will only be conducting mandatory sampling of hunter-killed deer from Shenandoah County this fall, and only on the first Saturday of the firearms season (November 16th). Samples will continue to be obtained throughout the four-county

been established. This will mean major changes within these three counties. Deer hunters will no longer be allowed to transport whole deer carcasses out of this area, deer feeding will be prohibited year round, and mandatory testing will be initiated on the first Saturday of the firearms deer season (November 16th). It goes without saying the Department will be relying on deer hunters for help.

Remember to report deer that appear sick with the following symptoms (starving, staggering, with obvious neurological symptoms) to your district wildlife biologist. For more information on CWD go to [www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/diseases/cwd](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/diseases/cwd).

**Tidewater Forecast**

Deer herds and deer kill numbers are down from a decade ago but are stable to very slightly increasing over the past five years across most of the Tidewater Region. In Tidewater, if HD is not a big player in the fall of 2019, stable to slightly increasing deer herds are expected. Continued high human population growth rates, crop damage, and deer-vehicle collisions remain important deer management issues in Tidewater.

**Southern Piedmont Forecast**

HD hit the southeastern half of the Southern Piedmont like a sledgehammer in the fall of 2014. Hence, deer populations are down over the last decade but increasing and recovering over the last five years. Although there have been ups and downs, overall the deer kill and deer populations in the Southern Piedmont has been relatively stable for the last three decades.

Just like in Tidewater, HD can play a major role in the Southern Piedmont. As long as there is not another big HD event in this area in the fall of 2019, deer herds over most of this region should be stable or up slightly.

**Northern Piedmont Forecast**

This is the one region where the Department continues to maintain long-term,

**Gift a Lifetime Hunting License!**

[www.GoOutdoorsVirginia.com](http://www.GoOutdoorsVirginia.com)

**Hemorrhagic Disease (HD)**

Bad news, fall 2019 appears to be a relatively big HD year in Virginia. As of early October, the Department has received nearly 100 reports from 40 counties involving nearly 200 deer. The worst hit area is in and around Bedford and Franklin counties. Based on past experience, HD has the potential to have a significant impact on deer herds in eastern Virginia and the best predictor for HD activity continues to be summer drought. For more information on HD, go to [www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/diseases/hd](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/diseases/hd).

**Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)**

Bad news on two fronts. First, in the CWD area in and around western Frederick County the number and

disease management area (DMA 1; Clarke, Frederick, Shenandoah, and Warren counties) from processors, taxidermists, road-killed deer, and deer dropped off by hunters at self-serve refrigerator drop points any day of the season.

Second, CWD was discovered for the first time in another area of the state: Culpeper County. Using a pilot statewide taxidermist project, the Department found CWD in a Culpeper County deer killed by a hunter in November 2018. To address this situation, a new CWD disease management area (DMA 2) that includes all of Culpeper, Madison, and Orange counties has

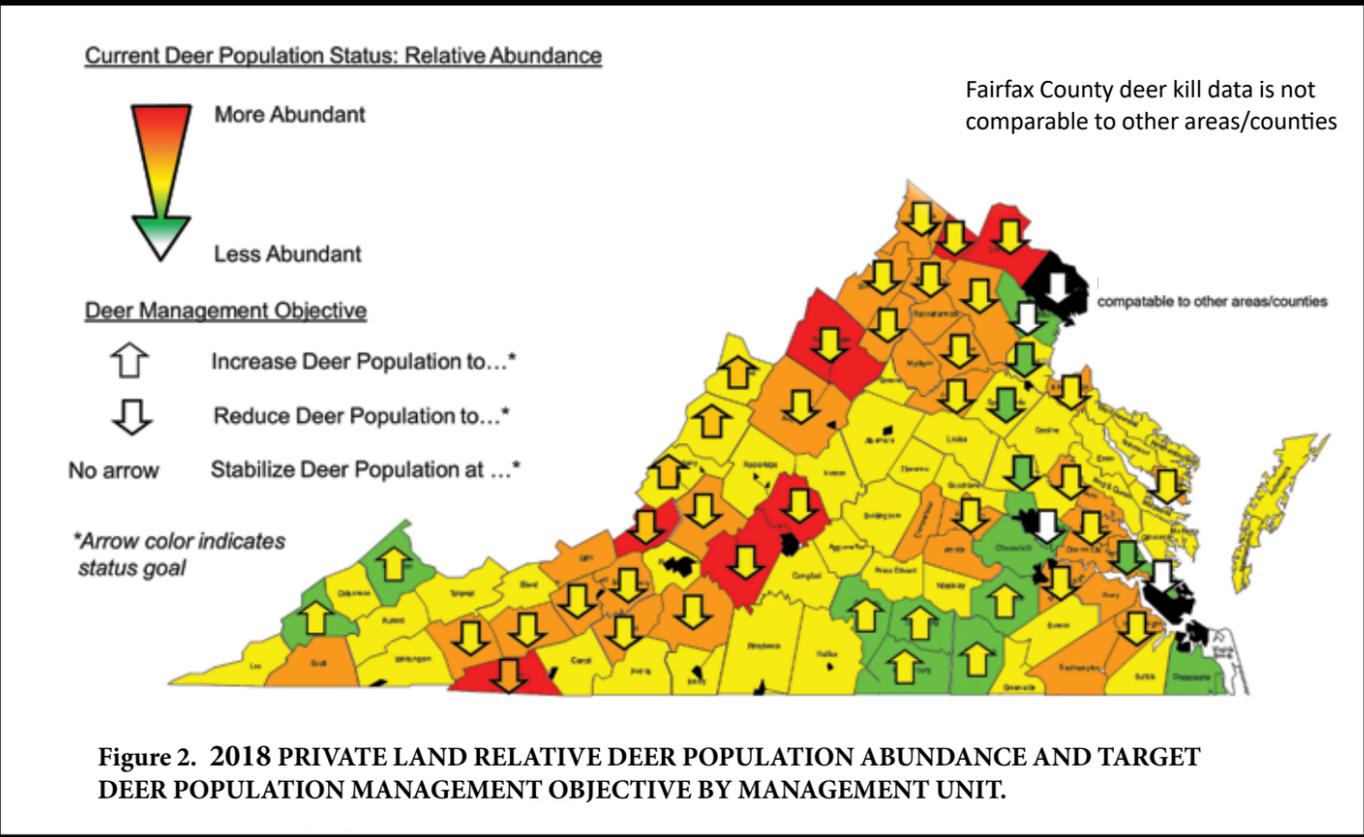


Figure 2. 2018 PRIVATE LAND RELATIVE DEER POPULATION ABUNDANCE AND TARGET DEER POPULATION MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVE BY MANAGEMENT UNIT.



© Matt Hansen

very liberal deer seasons. The female deer kill has been fairly high in this region for over a decade. Over most of this area, especially in Northern Virginia, the Department continues to try and reduce the deer population. The good news is that the deer kill over the region has been stable to slightly declining over the last decade. Stable to declining deer herds are desired moving forward. With continued very high human population growth rates, deer-vehicle collisions remain important deer management issues in the Northern Piedmont. HD can also play a role here.

### West of the Blue Ridge Mountains

Deer management in western Virginia remains the tale of two different deer management situations. Deer herds on private lands over most of western Virginia have been fairly stable over the past two decades (with the exception of Alleghany, Bath, Bland, and Highland counties).

With the exception of CWD in the northern Shenandoah Valley, the biggest challenge in deer management in western Virginia over the past 20 plus years has been the decline in the number of public land deer hunters and the decline in the public land deer kill in the mountains. To address the decline in the western public land deer kill, the number of either-sex deer hunting days on western public lands has been reduced significantly over the past decade to very conservative levels. These changes have been successful in reducing the female deer kill, but the western public land deer management situation has not shown any improvement to date.

### Relative Deer Abundance Map

The best way to compare deer populations in Virginia is based on the antlered buck deer kill per square mile of estimated deer habitat. Figure 2 (on pg. 6) shows the relative differences among counties in the kill of antlered bucks per square mile of habitat on private land

averaged over the past three hunting seasons. The current deer population status is indicated by the base color of the county. The deer population management objective is indicated by the color in the up or down arrow. Counties without an arrow are currently within their desired deer population range. This map indicates both the current relative densities of deer on private lands in counties across Virginia and the Department's current deer population management objective. This is the best map of where deer are in Virginia and at what deer population level the Department's Deer Management Plan indicates is appropriate for that area.

### Top Issue: Declining Number of Licensed Deer Hunters

A major limiting factor that cannot be overlooked in deer management in Virginia continues to be the steady decline in the number of licensed deer hunters. From just under 300,000 licensed deer hunters in the early 1990's to an estimated 185,000 in fall 2018, the Department has lost nearly 40% of its licensed deer hunters over the past 25 years; and the rate of this decline appears to be increasing. In the last decade Virginia has lost ~57,900 (24%) and just last fall ~8,600 (4-5%). What used to be a fairly stable ~1.2% annual decline has evolved into an average four percent annual decline over the past five deer seasons.

However, the relationship between the number of licensed deer hunters and the actual number of deer hunters going afield each fall is problematic because many groups of persons are exempt from purchasing a hunting license in Virginia and the number and participation trend of these license-exempt hunters is unknown. Anecdotal evidence indicates that license-exempt deer hunters has increased significantly over the same time frame that the number of licensed deer hunter numbers has declined.

The decline in licensed deer hunters represents the biggest statewide deer management issue in Virginia. This

decline in deer hunter licenses will have a significant negative effect on the Department's finances and at some point in the future may have a negative effect on the Department's ability to manage deer populations through recreational deer hunting over much of the Commonwealth.

### Summary

So, what is the forecast for the fall 2019 deer season? A major increase or decrease in the statewide deer kill total from the past couple of years is not expected. The good news for deer hunters is that over much of Virginia, deer population numbers should be very similar to previous years and probably even up in those areas recovering from recent HD events. However, due to the continuing decline in the number of licensed deer hunters noted above, I expect the statewide deer kill total in fall 2019 will be down.

Lastly, past experience indicates that the ups and downs in annual deer kill totals are in part attributable to food conditions and/or HD outbreaks. In years of poor mast (acorn) crops, the deer kill typically goes up and in years of good mast crops, the deer kill typically goes down.

Persons interested in more information on Virginia's deer management program can find the Department's deer management plan at: [www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/deer/management-plan](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/deer/management-plan).

In closing, please support the Virginia Hunters for the Hungry program (see story on pg. 40), do not feed deer and, most importantly, be safe.

*This white-tailed deer update was submitted by Matt Knox, who serves as the statewide deer project manager out of the Forest office*

# WATERFOWL

## Don't Forget Your Duck Stamps and HIP Registration



2019 Virginia Migratory Waterfowl  
Conservation Stamp artwork  
© Guy Crittenden

All hunters (licensed or license-exempt) who plan to hunt doves, waterfowl, rails, woodcock, snipe, coots, gallinules, or moorhens in Virginia must be registered with the Harvest Information Program (HIP). HIP is required each year and a new registration is needed for the upcoming season.

In addition, to hunt waterfowl in Virginia, hunters (age 16 and older) must obtain a Federal Duck Stamp and the Virginia Migratory Waterfowl Conservation Stamp. Both stamps can be purchased from DGIF license agents or from the Department's website:

[www.gooutdoorsvirginia.com](http://www.gooutdoorsvirginia.com)



### Waterfowl Forecast

Virginia waterfowl hunters will reflect on the 2018-2019 hunting season as one of the warmer winters in recent memory. Unseasonably mild temperatures, abundant rainfall, a declining mallard population, and a poor hatch of migratory Canada geese was a perfect storm of frustration for many Virginia waterfowlers. Although it was not the best year for puddle ducks, many hunters who ventured into the larger rivers of the state were rewarded with great gunning for canvasbacks which showed up on the wintering grounds early and in good numbers. While we cannot predict the weather for the coming year, reports from the breeding grounds provide an indication of what to expect from the fall flight. Official reports and data from both local and primary production area surveys can be found in the "Status of Waterfowl Fact Sheet" updated annually on the agencies website at: [www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/waterfowl](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/waterfowl).

### Duck Production Forecast

[Atlantic Flyway Breeding Waterfowl Plot Survey](#)

Although Virginia is primarily a waterfowl wintering area, several species (mallards, wood ducks, and Canada geese) also breed in Virginia. Each year a statewide breeding waterfowl plot survey is conducted by DGIF staff. This survey contributes to a larger survey throughout the Atlantic Flyway and provides flyway wide pair and population estimates for waterfowl that breed

in the lower 48 states. These estimates are also used to monitor trends in local populations and to set waterfowl hunting regulations. The survey consists of aerial and ground monitoring of 165, one-square-kilometer plots, which are randomly selected in different zones of the state. The plots are surveyed during the months of April and May. All waterfowl on these plots are identified and counted, and their breeding status (paired, single, and flocked) is recorded. Habitat conditions in Virginia during the spring of 2019 were generally good. Breeding pair estimates for black ducks and mallards were higher than previous years, while estimates for wood ducks and Canada geese were slightly lower.

In the larger Northeastern plot survey area, conditions were unusually wet, creating good nesting conditions although cooler than normal temperatures may have inhibited some nesting efforts. Overall population and breeding pair estimates for mallards and black ducks were higher than in previous years, while estimates for wood ducks and Canada geese remained similar to previous years. One notable result from the Atlantic Flyway Breeding Waterfowl Plot survey is the uptick in the mallard population estimate, the first increase in five years. Hopefully, this is a sign of a stabilization in this population, which in previous years had been continually declining.

[Eastern Breeding Area](#)

The Eastern survey area which consists of Atlantic Canada, Ontario, and

Quebec is an important breeding area for waterfowl that winter in Virginia and the Atlantic Flyway. Official habitat condition summaries were not available in time for this forecast but preliminary reports indicate that substantial winter and spring precipitation lead to above average nesting conditions this spring.

### What's New For 2019

[Eastern Mallards](#)

Mallards that are hatched in the U.S. portion of the Atlantic Flyway, referred to as Eastern mallards, are monitored as a separate population than mallards hatched in the traditional Canadian breeding areas. Eastern mallards account for roughly 60% of the mallard harvest in Virginia. This population has declined by 40% in the past 20 years. Due to this decline, the mallard bag limit will be decreasing from 4 mallards per day with a 2 hen limit, to 2 mallards with a 1 hen limit. Hopefully, this change in bag limit will help stabilize

and eventually increase the Eastern mallard population.

[Atlantic Population Canada Geese](#)

Of the three migratory populations of Canada geese found in Virginia, the Atlantic Population (AP) is the largest. AP geese nest in northern Quebec and migrate annually to their wintering grounds in the Mid-Atlantic region. In Virginia, AP geese are predominantly found in the tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay, east of Interstate 95. In 2018, the breeding population fell to 112,000 pairs, down from 161,000 pairs in 2017. This decline was a result of very poor nesting conditions that included snow and ice cover late into the summer, these circumstances resulted in the lowest production of young birds in the 20 year history of the monitoring program. Because of this poor production the 2019-2020 AP Canada goose hunting season will be reduced from a 50 day season with a 2 bird bag limit to

a 30 day season with a 1 bird bag limit. This change only applies to the AP zone in Virginia and regulations for the September Canada goose season and other Canada goose hunting zones (SJB and Resident zones) are not affected by this change and remain the same as previous years.

More information about these changes can be found on the DGIF website at [www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/waterfowl](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/waterfowl).

Despite the unknowns of weather and wildlife populations, the upcoming hunting season will certainly provide opportunities to get out and enjoy the diversity of waterfowl habitat that Virginia has to offer. So enjoy your hunting, be safe, and hopefully, we get to harvest a few birds along the way!

*This update was submitted by statewide waterfowl biologist Ben Lewis, who works in the Charles City office.*

## YOUTH & VETERANS WATERFOWL HUNTING DAY

February 8, 2020

For more information:  
[www.dgif.virginia.gov/events](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/events)



Dwight Dyke / DGIF

Hunting Canada geese with a well-trained Labrador retriever can be quite enjoyable!

# Savoring the Seasons



Story and photos by Mike Roberts

**L**ike so many other Virginians who appreciate our Commonwealth's natural resources, hunting and fishing remain cornerstone elements of my existence. Sitting patiently in a treestand for rutting white-tailed bucks is a favorite November pastime, but no more so than yelping an elusive gobbler within effective shotgun range during April; or January swamp time and swinging a bead in front of a pair of greenheads treading air over a spread of seductive-looking decoys. Angling for native brook trout in the rushing, boulder-strewn confluents of the Upper Piney has cost me countless days, but probably less than the number of nights spent wading the dark, forbidding waters of Staunton River in hopes of hooking a 20-pound striped bass spawning under a full, May moon.

Yet, in reality, the majority of tree stand time hinges on boredom. And there are those spring mornings when even the sweetest notes of a diaphragm turkey call falls on deaf ears. That ageless cliché regarding fisherman's luck, and the associated adjectives of "wet" and "hungry," is appropriate some days, too. To pass the time, some folks resort to packing a book to the stand or blind; a younger generation utilizes electronic games and social media to while away fruitless hours. Others simply abandon the pursuit.

To survive these enviable, stagnant stretches, one remedy is absorbing the vast amount of interesting natural history at hand. As a suggestion, whenever conditions permit, hang your deer stand in a red cedar. Not only does the presence of evergreen boughs break up the human outline, the tree's blueberries attract an abundance of avian life. While American robins, Eastern bluebirds, cedar waxwings, and Northern flickers are ever present, the setting opens a window of opportunity for watching species seen less frequently. Close observation of a curious, tiny bird flitting through the cedar limbs will likely reveal the gilded or cherry-red coronet of a wintertime pilgrim—either the golden-crowned kinglet or its ruby-crowned relative. And that mournfully wailing woodpecker, with a wine-colored forehead and throat patch, plus tawny breast feathers, is the infamous yellow-bellied sapsucker that migrates from the northlands to convert its summertime diet of sweet tree sap to dried fruit and residual berries.





A chipmunk's behavior can indicate other wildlife activities nearby.

A rustle in the leaves below your stand could betray the perfectly camouflaged attire of a woodcock probing the damp soil for earthworms, a meadow vole chancing a mid-morning veggie snack, or a least shrew scouring the leaf litter for insect larvae. Keep an eye peeled on the regenerating field's tree line for a motionless barred owl with dark eyes fixed on the ground in hopes of detecting a distracted rodent, or a gray fox attempting to roust a bedded cottontail from its honeysuckle haven. Once you discover there is always something wild to behold from the heights of a deer stand, apathy evaporates.

What's more, time spent keying in on nature hones one's sense of awareness. If a chipmunk pauses from its routine of gathering acorns, the rodent's body language and nervous chirps signal another animal moving through the

forest—possibly that big buck. Even if you remain skeptical of the lunar tables, realize increased periods of wildlife activity are an accurate barometer of deer movement. Whenever the woods come alive with birds and squirrels, especially during the middle of the day, keep your thumb on the safety!

Regarding spring gobbler hunting, failure to witness the beauty of the wildflowers, butterflies, and wood warblers is comparable to a cake without icing. Because turkey fanatics are typically sitting motionless and smothered in camouflage fabric, time afield promises a season refreshed with spectacular color and sound. Upon developing admiration for these seemingly insignificant plants and nongame animals, members of this fraternity of sportsmen will seldom depart the turkey woods disappointed.

Savoring all elements of the environment is equally important when fishing. Sure, the objective is landing a lunker, but familiarizing yourself with wildlife dependent upon riparian margins enhance the sport. Quietly drifting downstream in a canoe or kayak exposes a community of creatures that relish small-mouthed bass as much as human anglers do. River otters, belted kingfishers, great blue herons, osprey, and bald eagles do so for reason of sustenance rather than sport, though there is no denying otters take delight in chasing their dinner. If roll casting number 22 dry flies to trout rising for tricos in small, mountain streams suits



Tiny wildflowers, such as this violet wood sorrel, can be seen in late May.

your fancy, basic knowledge of creatures with six legs is mandatory—especially the ephemerals. And bug behavior is interesting stuff!

Insects are present, in one form or another, throughout each of the four seasons. Adult green darner dragonflies, that patrol ponds and lakes for mosquitos, survive cold weather by migrating to warmer climates. The handsome mourning cloak butterfly, a genuine harbinger of spring, converts body fluids into glycerol to prevent its body from freezing during the winter months. Rather than hibernation, entomologists refer to this physiological adaptation as diapause, which, along with migration, falls into the category of “freeze avoidance.”

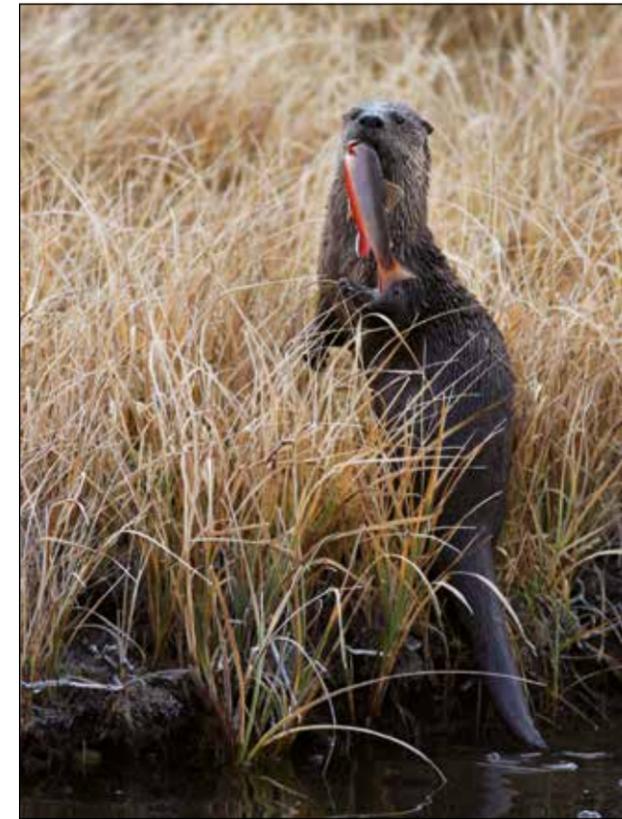
Amazingly, other insects survive winter through “freeze tolerance”—a simple term for a complicated, natural process where arthropods produce certain proteins that allow their bodies and blood (hemolymph) to freeze without tissue damage. Larvae of the Isabella tiger moth, the infamous woolly bear (or woolly worm), is one example. Come spring, regardless of whether or not their winter forecasts were accurate, the frozen caterpillars thaw out and emerge as adults.

There are many species of common insects with phenomenal natural history and cicadas are no exception. Practically everyone knows the colloquial “jar fly,” but details of its unique life cycle remains a mystery to most. The series of seasonal events is launched under the cover of darkness on some warm, late-spring night, when a creature, seemingly conceived of science fiction, crawls forth from its underground crypt and slowly ascends the rough bark of the nearest tree trunk. With wrinkled wings, the pale-white emergent labors to molt the tough, outer shell. By dawn, the cicada has escaped confinement of the casing and has morphed into an adult with clear, membranous wings suited for flight. If you are fishing Smith Mountain, Holston, or Moomaw during the summer months, come mid-morning the surrounding forestlands are abuzz with the courtship calls of amorous males. Some species even perform their mundane melodies during the hot, humid nights of August.

Upon mating, the female splits a small tree limb with her ovipositor and deposits dozens of eggs in the woody stem. Weeks later the small nymphs hatch and drop to the ground. Excavating their way several feet underground, they find fissures in the soil with exposed tree roots that provide a reliable source of sugary sap. Growing and molting numerous times, and depending on the species, cicada nymphs remain in this stage from 1 to 17 years.

Unfortunately, for these oversized true bugs (Hemiptera), just as the adults emerge to perform their summertime cantatas, another species of insect makes its annual debut—our largest parasitic wasp, the cicada killer!

Eastern cicada killers, belonging to the order Hymenoptera (bees, wasps, and ants), are typically solitary in nature. Sometimes referred to as digger wasps, they use their strong jaws to dig multi-chambered burrows in open, sandy areas; spines on the hind legs are deployed to kick the loosened earth outside the tunnel. Burrows can have eight or more individual chambers and it is not unusual to observe dozens of the excavated mounds in a single colony.



Even if you aren't catching them, a river otter can reveal that fish, like this brook trout, are there.



An unlucky annual cicada is stung by a female cicada killer in preparation for the journey to become baby food.

Nearly 1½ inches in length, the larger female has a long, intimidating stinger for paralyzing prey to provision her nursery chambers. Comparatively smaller, and lacking a stinger, the male furiously defends the breeding location from large, winged insects violating territorial parameters, including other males of the species. Whereas social wasps sting to defend their nests, cicada killers do not and are extremely tolerant of human presence.

With chamber construction completed, the female begins hunting for cicadas. Upon successful capture, she meticulously jabs her stinger into the victim's thorax to pierce vital membranes, which results in paralysis. Because a cicada weighs nearly twice that of its captor, transporting that much dead weight back

to the tunnel is a monumental task. Whenever possible, the tenacious wasp drags the immobile prey into a tree to gain altitude for the return flight. The sound of a cicada killer struggling to deliver its prey aeronautically often resembles that of a sputtering mechanical engine.

Securing the paralyzed cicada in the earthen tomb, the female lays an egg on the outer surface of its exoskeleton and seals off the entrance. The newly hatched larva feeds on the helpless, live insect. Upon reaching maturity, the larva prepares a cocoon in which it will overwinter as a pupa. Emergence of the next generation of cicada killers occurs in late spring.

The old saying, "Whatever goes around comes around," certainly applies to cicada killers. Later in summer, after the parasitic wasps' larvae pupate, another member of the same order of insects strike out in search of a particular food source to feed their own young. Upon discovery of a cicada killer's tunnel, the female velvet ant, a ¾-inch long, wingless wasp, breaches the nursery chamber barriers and deposits eggs on the reposed pupae. After hatching, the velvet ant larvae devour the defenseless grubs.

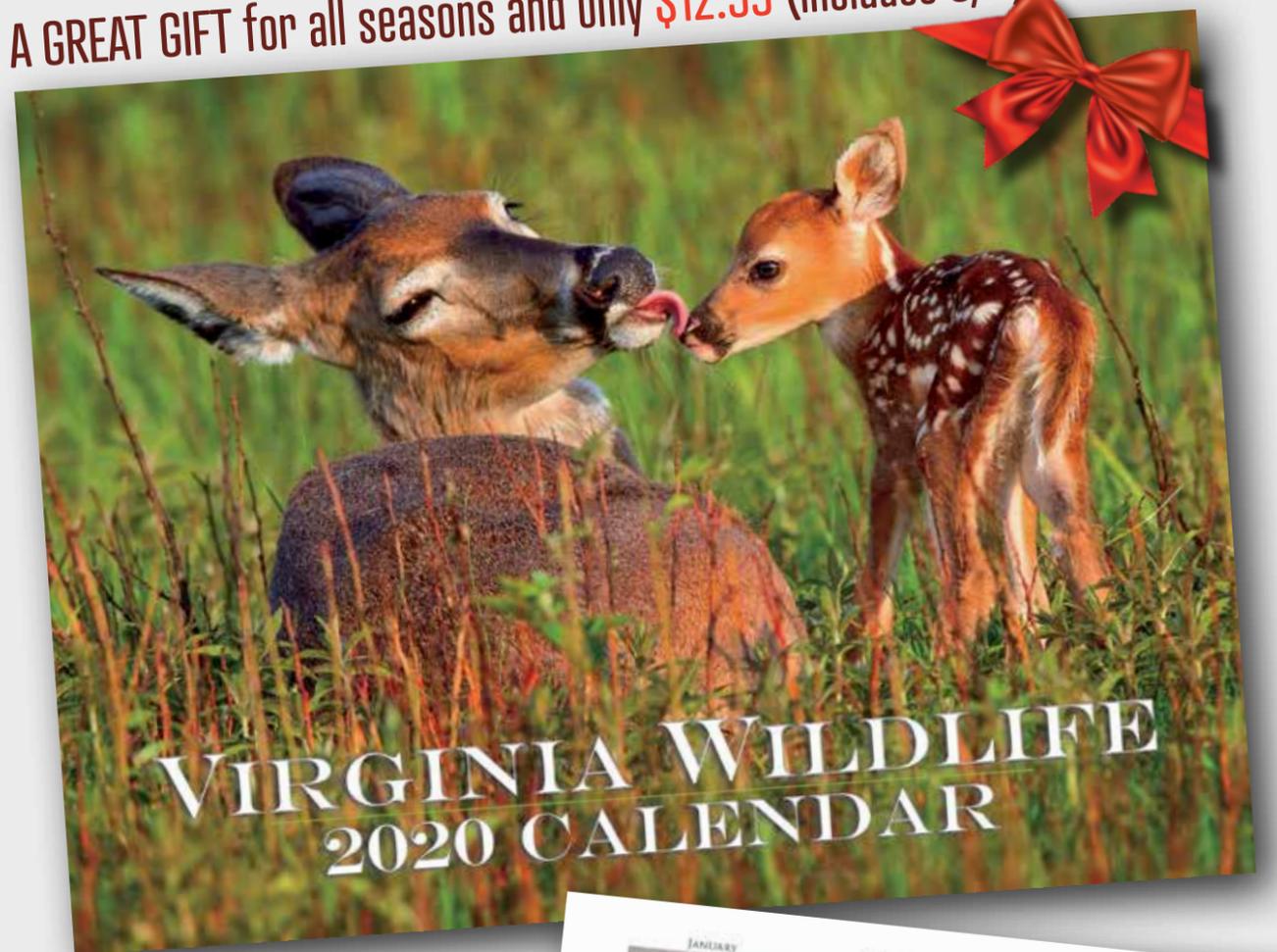
There is one other thing to keep in mind about this particular species of velvet ant: the red-and-black color combination serves as a warning to anyone tempted to catch one with their bare hands. Equipped with a stinger, the female is capable of inflicting a painful wound. Folklore describes the sting as being so excruciating it can kill a cow— hence the name "cow killer."

The great outdoors is a fantastic, living classroom for people of all ages and there will be no better seat in the house than that of a tree stand, a turkey stool or a boat cushion. Exposure to these interesting life forms and their adaptive behavior sparks an increased level of appreciation and respect for all natural resources—the cornerstone of personal stewardship we are indebted to teach subsequent generations of conservationists. Less screen and more green! 🌿

*Mike Roberts is a lifelong naturalist, wildlife photographer, and columnist for this magazine, who utilizes his knowledge of animal behavior and nature to educate others about respect and appreciation for the great outdoors. You can reach him at: return2nature@aol.com.*



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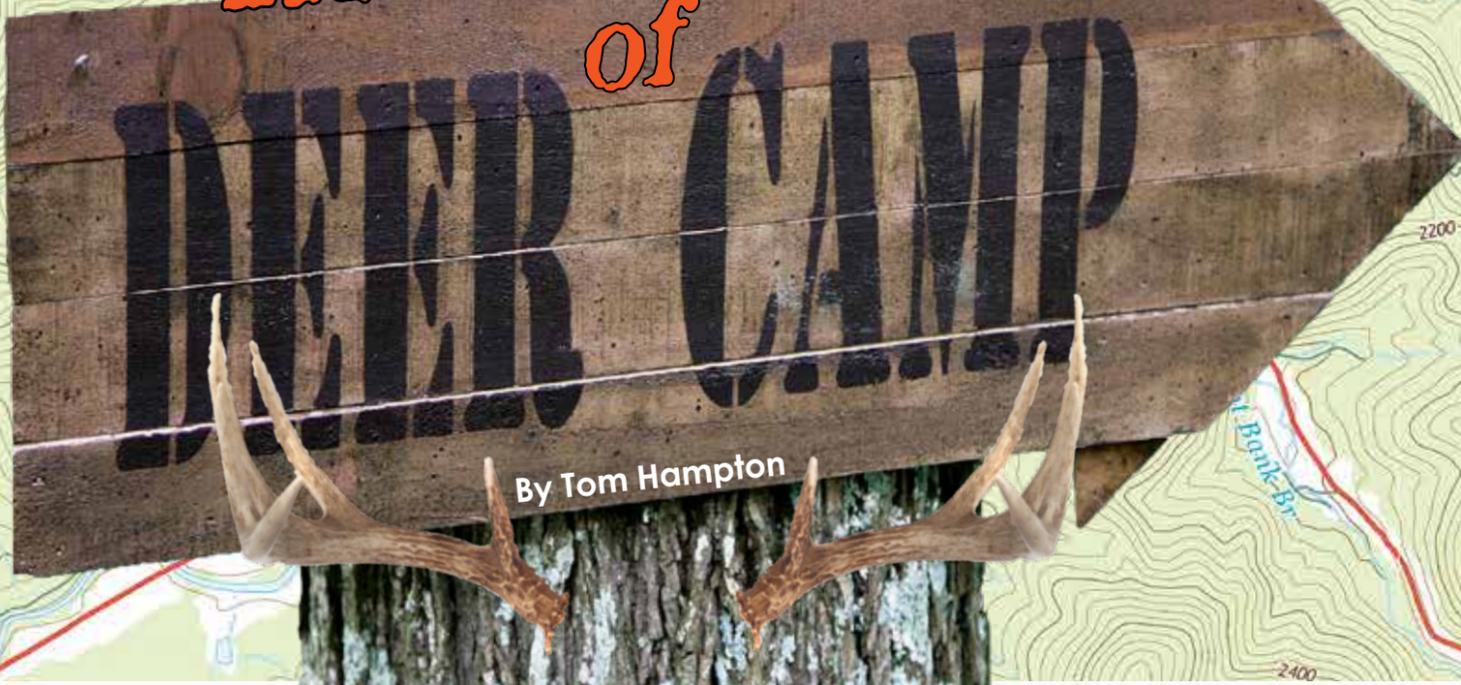


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# In Memory of



By Tom Hampton

**M**any of the values that frame my existence have their origin in deer camp. I like to get up early. I love to cook. The smell of wood smoke is intoxicating. Patience can be learned, and consistent effort eventually pays. Deer camp is a big part of why I am committed to conservation and passionate about public access.

I was fourteen years old when we were invited to deer camp. Dad and I had been hunting deer for five seasons with little success. We had seen a few deer and we definitely enjoyed spending time together in pursuit. One of Dad's coworkers invited us to hunt with him at a deer camp on National Forest lands in Craig County.

We owned a tent, but it wasn't really suitable for November weather. So, Dad decided to build us a camper. He worked most of the summer repurposing a Chevy Step Van. A personalized license plate reading "NO DEER" declared our status.

November finally came and we bounced our way along the forest road all the way to the end. A few hunters were already there setting up camp. However, Dad's friend who invited us was not there. We climbed out of "The Van" and introduced ourselves to three men that would become some of our closest friends on earth. Roy Lee was the undisputed king of the camp, and also the camp mouthpiece. He never met a stranger, and welcomed us

with enthusiasm. Big David, Roy's brother was a hulking man of few words. Bubby was the camp cook. Every morning he cooked gravy and biscuits and every evening he fixed a big supper.

After setting up our own campsite, we joined in with community camp chores. There was firewood to cut, water to carry, and a central gathering place to assemble. Here, we gathered by the fire at the beginning and ending of each hunting day. Finally, a stout locust pole was fastened between two trees with heavy rope. The game pole was about 8 feet off the ground and seemed long enough to hold a dozen deer. I liked the optimism.

I don't think I slept a wink the night before opening day. I didn't see any deer that first morning, but I was amazed at the number of shots I heard. By dusk on opening day, three bucks were swinging from the game pole. I stared in awe at the sight. It was my first opportunity to study a deer up close. After dark, I went back with a flashlight to look at them again. That game pole, and the deer added to it each day, made it difficult for me to stay in the woods long enough to kill a deer.

The second year we went to camp I got my first deer, a four-point buck. It was cause for celebration. Roy Lee was hunting one ridge over and heard me shoot. He guided me through the field dressing process and swiped a red "x" on my forehead. Big David was in camp when I arrived and snapped a picture of me

and the deer. When Bubby arrived in late evening he gave me a bear hug and declared me a deer hunter. Dad rejoiced in our success and changed the license plate to "01 Deer".

Over the years, we changed the license plate often. Most of the deer we killed would be considered small by hunters today. Occasionally someone would get an eight-pointer. Ten-pointers were hard to come by and were generally considered the deer of a lifetime. For us, it really wasn't about the size of the antlers. It was about the total experience: the place, the camaraderie, the challenges of the hunt and the delicious venison.

Our camp was one of hundreds scattered across the western mountains of the Commonwealth. The lack of deer in far southwest counties encouraged hunters in those counties to head "up the country" to locations with higher deer numbers. Others



THE GAME POLE



ROY LEE



THE VAN



Historical photos, license plates, and hunting items provided by Tom Hampton. Illustrations and other photos by Shutterstock.

came from east of the Blue Ridge, leaving behind the urban sprawl and flat land in favor of mountain hunting. Pickup trucks with camper shells, tag-along campers, canvas tents, modified school buses, and even plywood shanties formed temporary communities that sprang up on WMAs and National Forest lands each November.

In retrospect, it is clear to me that deer camp required a lot of effort. Camping gear had to be purchased or built, stored, and readied for the annual trip. For most of our group, this was the only time off work during the year. The boom and bust cycles of the coal industry also meant that some years they had been without income for portions of the year. The cost of licenses and travel were a considerable expense for these men who worked hard for meager pay. I recall that during difficult times the license money came from the sale of ginseng, scrap metal, or from benevolent loved ones who knew the real value of a week at deer camp. I am forever grateful to Dad and the others who invested in deer camp, and by doing so, invested in me.

Other hunters came and went over the years, but the core group of us had an unwritten accord to be in deer camp the first week of "rifle season". Deer camp survived going off to college, marriages, divorces, births of children and grandchildren, heart surgeries, and even the untimely death of Roy Lee at age 53. But eventually our deer camp died too.

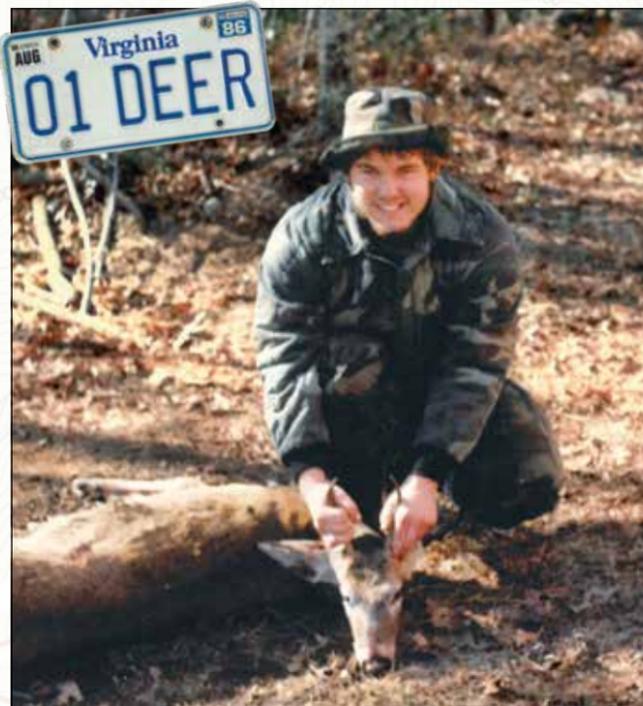
Our camp died for the same reasons that hunting is in decline across the nation. We failed to recruit, retain, and reactivate other hunters. Although each of us had been invited by someone else, we held onto our information with such a tight grip that we squeezed the life right out of the camp. Truth is, there was always plenty of room for more campers and literally thousands of acres of public land to hunt.

A new initiative, called R3, seeks to reverse declining participation by Recruiting new hunters, Retaining current hunters and Reactivating former hunters who have not participated recently. These efforts focus primarily on adults, with the goal of providing support and encouragement through all phases of participation. Beginning with information about why and how to hunt, programs will offer opportunities for new hunters to experience hunting with a mentor before developing the necessary skills and obtaining the gear needed to hunt independently.

There is still hope for hunting and for deer camp. In fact, two of the greatest benefits of deer camp are increasing in popularity. In stark contrast to hunting and fishing, camping is experiencing explosive growth in participation. A 2018 survey of camping in North America indicates increased participation and diverse participation. The age groups and ethnic groups now enjoying camping are remarkably close to the percentages found in the overall U.S. population. There is also a renewed interest in deer for more than just antlers. Trophy antlers don't hold the same allure with younger generations and new hunters. Tasty wild venison, however, holds great value for many who are seeking healthy foods. Venison is also a good fit for the locavore lifestyle.

After Roy Lee's death, Big David and Bubby told me that Roy Lee often worried that my job with the "Game Commission" might introduce me to better hunting or bigger bucks and cause us to leave the camp. At our deer camp we hunted hard. We left before daylight and hunted all day. The mountains were steep and we dragged the deer back to camp using only our own power. Quite often, the dragging would remove large patches of hair from the side of the deer in contact with the ground. Roy Lee was almost right. I did find bigger bucks, and I definitely found easier hunting. I can't remember the last time I dragged a deer far enough to rub the hair off. But, I never have found a better hunting experience.

The smell of the November woods and the hum of a Coleman lantern remind me of a very special place. If you are part of a hunting camp, do everything you can to keep it alive. If not, consider starting your own hunting camp tradition this season. You can find your own comfort level in hunting and camping. For several seasons, when my son was a teenager, we deer hunted from an old farmhouse with several of his friends. The old house had basic electricity and running water, but it was still camping and we made great memories. You don't have to stay in the woods all day or camp for an entire week but do try to be there for opening day. I've tried, but I just can't replace the feeling of anticipation that washed over each of us on the evening before opening day. If I had access to a time machine, Deer Camp 1986 would be my very first stop.

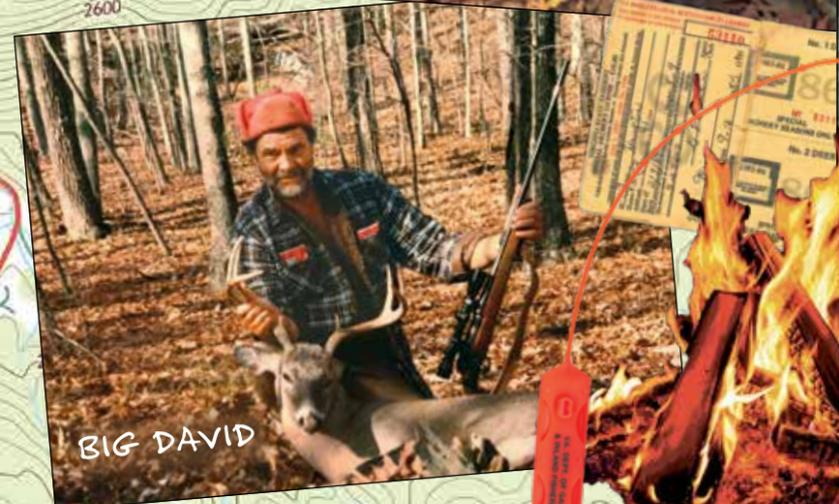


Posing with his first buck shot on November 21, 1984, today, Tom Hampton is a Lands and Facilities Manager in Southwest Virginia. He leads a team working to enhance wildlife habitats and public access. Contact him at: [tom.hampton@dgif.virginia.gov](mailto:tom.hampton@dgif.virginia.gov).



DAD AT DEER CAMP WITH A GREAT BUCK

Hanging Rock



BIG DAVID



BUBBY OUR CAMP COOK



THANKSGIVING AT DEER CAMP



ANDREW & DANIEL MARTINEZ

MY SON CHARLIE



1063



Story by Clarke C. Jones ♦ Photos by Bill Murden

Seems like yesterday I was sitting beside my grandfather on his screened back porch on a mid-summer afternoon. The shadows were lengthening as we heard a quail's call in the warm breeze that it was time to huddle up for the evening. "I don't know what is sadder," he reflected, "listening to something that sweet but never hearing it again or never experiencing a quail call at all." That was a philosophical statement to a six-year-old country boy in 1954. I guess I remember his words because they were one of the last things he said to me.

Over the next twenty years or so, while hunting rabbits in fields where quail coveys used to flush from the brush and startle me, I noticed the silence. Where were the quail?

Unfortunately for the quail, the obsession with manicured landscapes, coupled with the increased planting of fescue for maximum grazing area has diminished the breeding areas for quail. Add in the fact that just about every wild-life predator walking, slithering, or flying wants to eat them and you can see why quail—the Northern bobwhite, *Colinus*

*virginianus*—have been particularly affected. "Save the Quail" does not seem to have the same panache as "Save the Whale".

Nevertheless, some property owners in Virginia are quietly improving habitat for quail.

Several years ago, Houston native and entrepreneur, John B. Poindexter, whose roots stretch far back in Virginia, purchased Cumberland Plantation in New Kent County. The historical restoration he has overseen of the manor house and other residential buildings on

his property is most impressive, but even more remarkable are his quail restoration efforts on the 3,200 acres. As with the building structures, the land also needed improvement. Much of the thick understory in the pine forest area, which inhibited quail from moving about, was cleared and planted in Kobe lespedeza. Unproductive acres of hardwoods were removed in certain areas and land cleared to plant additional species of lespedeza and other pollinator plants that should boost quail survival rates.

"We learn more about quail survival each year," said Dale O'Connell, onsite manager for the Cumberland Plantation properties. "For instance, quail move around a lot on the plantation. The quail you hear in the pine forest area near the manor house may disappear for a few weeks and then all of a sudden they are back again. In another area we have a swamp and there the quail come out to feed then go back into the swamp." Selective herbicide sprays were used to prevent the resurgence of Johnson grass, stilt grass, locust, and other invasive plants, but now controlled burns are planned. Dale related that switchgrass was planted to provide protective cover for the quail. "Quail restoration requires a long-term commitment and quail restoration is something John Poindexter feels very strongly about," stated O'Connell.

Lorien Koontz, a private lands wildlife biologist working in Virginia via a partnership between the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Conservation Management



Planting seeds like native lespedeza (left), and native partridge pea, is a great start for enhancing habitat.



At Cumberland Plantation, in New Kent, clearing land is the first step to make it tillable for planting native seeds.

Institute at Virginia Tech, met with D. G. Van Clief, Jr., owner of the 500-plus-acre Christmas Hill property in Albemarle County. Van Clief was interested in the viability of improving his land for quail habitat. Koontz noticed that his property has hardwood, warm season grasses, legumes, ragweed, milkweed, goldenrod, and many other good native herbaceous plants; all a good mix for both quail and pollinators like honey bees. While D.G. has worked diligently to rid his property of invasive plant species, such as Tree of Heaven, privet, and locust, Koontz suggested other spraying options for improving overall habitat conditions based on his goals and economic conditions.

Van Clief asked if there had been any definitive studies as to the causes of the decline of quail. According to Koontz, "Studies have shown many factors are involved, but habitat loss through a variety of causes is the number one reason quail have declined. Farming became more mechanized, fields became larger, fencerows were sprayed and cleaned up, and farmers now have to feed a lot more people on fewer acres. This also meant an increased reliance on non-native sod forming grasses like fescue for cattle production. These grasses do not provide much for quail or pollinators. Simultaneously, more and more people means more and more development. And this meant intensification in all land management."

"Prescribed burning your field is one of the best methods for eradicating invasive plants and bringing back native cover," said

Previous page: Frank Winslow and his son, Ben, enjoy a traditional bobwhite quail hunt in Goochland County, a rare activity these days.



D.G. Van Clief, Jr. discusses quail habitat strategy for his Christmas Hill Farm property with Lorien Koontz, a private lands wildlife biologist.

Lorien. “If you do not want to burn or cannot burn, disking would be another good method to create habitat for quail. Bush hogging or mowing has its place, but is a measure of last resort.” Bush hogging can spread the invasive seed you are trying to eradicate, so ask the private lands wildlife biologist in your area when to bush hog and at what height. Also, note these management methods should be used in a rotational manner over time so that not all the cover is being set back every year.

Preparing and maintaining your property to improve quail habitat does not come without effort or cost. However, as Koontz explained, “There are a number of programs to assist the landowner and they are available statewide. There is a financial incentives practice available for just about anything a landowner would want to do to help quail or other wildlife, but there is a process that needs to be followed in applying. That’s something we specialize in, helping landowners through this process.”

Koontz emphasized that quail restoration is not a short-term project. Quail management requires something to be done about every year. It has to be a labor of love.”

Barbara Brown, who lives on 15 acres in western Powhatan, is a prime example of how one does not need a massive amount of acreage to bring back quail—if your land borders on neighbors, whose property conditions also benefit quail. She has also combined her interest in the revitalization of quail with her love for beekeeping. Marc Puckett, a small game biologist with the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, met with Brown to see firsthand the work she has done to merge honeybee and quail nesting landscapes. “Much of the property had been left unattended for about 15 years. When I bought it, the briars had overtaken the fields so much that a four-wheel-drive could not go through it. I had to have a bulldozer clear the fields so we could start over,” said Brown.

Puckett praised Brown’s approach to what she had done. “Sometimes things get out of hand and we have to set back succession to very early stages and start over,” noted Puckett. “When providing quail habitat, you want to have a diverse mixture of species and cover types, just what Ms. Brown has done.” According to Brown, “What I have tried to do with my quail habitat restoration is select plants, so that at any point in time, there are seeds on the ground.” Brown also reminded us that people interested in quail management have to understand that it takes time to manage your property for quail restoration. “You just cannot plant warm season grasses or other plants and then leave them, because in a short time your property will go back to the way it was,” said Brown.

Puckett agreed, “You have to disc from time to time and you have to burn every few years. You need a plan, and you need to manage the rotation in such a way so the vegetation does not get too far ahead in the race. You are mainly trying to keep three different stages of vegetation: young first year weedy growth, some second year growth that is a little more grassy, and then some slightly older growth that is providing brier and shrub thickets. Quail managers call this the “Thirds Rule”. There is cost sharing available in every county in the state and that is one reason we have hired private land biologists to help make that process easier.”

Like quail, honeybees are another small important species that have been on the decline. Plants that attract bees and other pollinators such as elderberries, milkweed, buckwheat, and native sunflowers provide good quail habitat. According to Puckett, ragweed works well for quail, both as a brood rearing cover and as winter food. In addition, it’s free, usually coming up on its own after winter disking or burning in the winter says Puckett. A shrubby cover is critical, things like blackberry, plum, sumac, greenbrier, and other types of thicket forming plants. Without thickets, no matter what you plant in the spring and summer, quail won’t make it through the winter.

“Many times you really don’t have to plant anything for quail. The native seedbank often provides for them after soil disturbance, but if you want to plant partridge pea or *Chamaecrista fasciculata*,” said Puckett, “it has a beautiful flower that comes out at the end of July and blooms all the way to October.” Bees, butterflies, and quail love it. Or a good pollinator mix will also do well.”

I have many happy memories of times spent with my grandfather—fishing in the pond, picking strawberries in the garden, sharing an egg salad sandwich on a hot summer day. Listening to the quail’s calls together were special. Hopefully, the results of quail restoration in Virginia will ensure the quail songs are more than just a memory. 🐾

Clarke C. Jones spends his spare time outdoors hunting up good stories. You can visit Clarke on his website at [www.clarkecjones.com](http://www.clarkecjones.com).

If you are interested in bringing back quail and attracting pollinators to your property, you can contact Marc Puckett, the small game biologist with DGIF at: [Marc.puckett@dgif.virginia.gov](mailto:Marc.puckett@dgif.virginia.gov) or by calling (434) 392-8328.



Marc Puckett, a small game biologist with DGIF, shares a laugh with Barbara Brown, of Powhatan, who focuses her habitat restoration on native plantings for quail and pollinators.



Clearing sections of Cumberland Plantation’s vast 3,200 acres is the first step towards planting prime habitat for quail and other wildlife species.



Here is a great example of proper quail habitat as seen at Christmas Hill Farm; plenty of cover, nesting locations, and food.

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# MASTER ANGLER

By Tee Clarkson

**T**he freshwater drum doesn't get much fanfare. Located primarily in Kerr Reservoir (Buggs Island) and the rivers that feed it: The Staunton, The Dan, and The Hyco, it's relatively safe to say that most Virginia anglers don't even know it exists.

For one angler though, Stephen Miklandric, the obsession with catching a freshwater drum, and a citation one at that, was beginning to border on the obsessive as the high waters of spring pointed the fish upriver.

Going into the spring of 2019, more than 30 years into his quest to become the first ever Level V Master Angler in Virginia, Miklandric lacked only a citation freshwater drum to complete what had never been done, catching at least one citation for each of the 25 gamefish species listed by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF).

Over the last six years, he has fished

for freshwater drum anywhere from 15 to 20 days a year, making the trek from his home in Chesterfield County to try and catch the elusive fish as they migrate up the rivers that feed Kerr Reservoir in the spring.

It wasn't that Miklandric hadn't been successful in his drum fishing. He had caught hundreds, just not one that would qualify as a length citation (24 inches) or a weight citation (6 lbs).

That was until April 7th of 2019.

To understand the moment, the moment when that citation drum finally came to the boat, one must first understand Virginia's Angler Recognition Program (VARP) and then understand the man, Stephen Miklandric.

The Virginia Angler Recognition Program (VARP) began in 1963 to generate additional excitement in the world of freshwater sportfishing. Freshwater game species were assigned a weight and

a length which would constitute a trophy. Anglers catching "trophy" fish could register them with the state and receive acknowledgement in the form of a citation.

Over the course of the program more than 250,000 trophy fish have been registered with DGIF.

"The Virginia Angler Recognition Program gives any angler the opportunity to be distinguished for their trophy catch. Whether it's your first trophy fish or you're a seasoned veteran angler, a trophy fish citation issued by the state allows you to truly remember and relive the experience," said Alex McCrickard, Aquatic Education Coordinator for DGIF.

Within the VARP, anglers can become an Expert Angler by catching more than 10 trophy fish of the same species, Angler of the Month by registering the largest trophy of a species in a given month, Species Angler of the Year by



registering the largest trophy in a given species during the calendar year, and the Creel Angler of the Year which goes to the angler who registers the most citations in a year.

Then there are the Master Angler Awards. For every five species for which an angler has caught a trophy, he or she is awarded a new level of Master Angler. With 25 species, the ultimate goal and highest achievement would be Master Angler V. In the 56-year history of the VARP, no one had ever been awarded Master Angler V.

"Fishing is like playing an Xbox or any gaming system," Miklandric said. "There are 25 games, each species is like a game. There are 12 variations, one for each month of the year. The fish are

always doing something different."

Even Miklandric, a systems analyst for ICMA-RC recognizes, after all the years and days on the water, he still has more to learn.

"There are so many details to fishing. If you lived five lifetimes you would never figure it all out. Fishing is not an exact science and nobody will ever know it all."

Still, if you wanted some insight on catching trophy species in Virginia, Miklandric would be a pretty good guy to ask. To date he has caught 1,607 registered trophy fish, and those are just the ones he has turned in. He is an Expert Species Angler in 20 out of a possible 25 species, has been Species Angler of the Month 60 times in 19 different species of fish, has been Species Angler of the Year

12 times, and Creel Angler of the Year 4 times (rumor has it that it might be 5 times by the end of this year).

Like everyone, he has faced challenges in the pursuit of his dream. Miklandric ripped a stomach muscle loading his boat onto the trailer which ultimately lead to kidney failure (fortunately he made a full recovery), had a propeller fall off on the James River, and was lost in the Dismal Swamp.

"I have had just about everything you can imagine happen to me," Miklandric joked.

Of all the challenges he faced, it finally came down to the freshwater drum. The final hurdle. For the last four years, he has lacked just that citation fish to complete his quest.



Finally, on Sunday April 7th, 2019, 32 years, 10 months, and 21 days after landing his very first citation, a smallmouth bass on the James River, Miklandric became the first ever Level V Master Angler in Virginia by catching a citation freshwater drum.

"I know the fish are going to be in the rivers in the spring. I know they prefer sandy bottoms. I know they are bottom feeders," Miklandric said, noting that most people who catch trophy freshwater drum are fishing for other species.

"The flooding in 2018 had changed the Dan River in many places," Miklandric said. "I pulled up to a new area where sand had been deposited during the high water and started casting. On the third cast, 'BAM!'"

Miklandric was sure the fish was a citation as soon as he saw it. Still he had to get it to the net, by himself, fighting the current. Finally, after a few tense minutes, after a lifetime of fishing, a fish from a little-celebrated species changed Miklandric's life.

"It was like someone hit me in the chest with 200 volts of electricity," he said. "I couldn't get the hook out. I couldn't stand. I couldn't sit. I couldn't laugh. I couldn't cry. I didn't even know if I could drive the truck home."

"Becoming the first ever Level 5 master angler is nothing short of the accomplishment of a lifetime," said McCrickard. "Miklandric is truly an ambassador of the sport and his love and passion have led him to this respectful distinction."

Currently there are only three other anglers who have achieved Level 4 status and another 28 at Level 3.

When Miklandric returned to the ramp, there were no crowds to celebrate with him, and of course, there won't be an oversized check presented at a podium, no smoke machines, strobe lights, or confetti falling from the ceiling of an arena as thousands look on.

But for Miklandric, that's just fine. "I'm just in it because I love it," he said with a smile. ☺

*Tee Clarkson has been writing about the outdoors for more than 15 years. He currently works in land conservation at Atoka Conservation Exchange, and runs youth outdoors programs at Virginia Outside. Contact him at: tsclarkson@virginiaoutside.com.*

Clockwise from top left: Steve proudly poses with a 46 lb. flathead catfish, 3 lb. redear sunfish, 8 lb. walleye, the 6 lb. freshwater drum that earned him Master Angler V, and a 5 lb. chain pickerel.

Clockwise from top left: Steve strikes the pose with a 20 lb. striped bass, 14 lb. bowfin, 5 lb. smallmouth bass, 8 lb. largemouth bass, and a 4 lb. brook trout.

# THREE SEASONS FOR

Story and photos by Scott E. Naff

# SUCCESS!

I started 2018 off with high expectations of getting out more than I have been able to in the last couple of years. In my line of work, fall is very busy, but I have great colleagues and staff who allow me the time to slip away. This year, I planned to take them up on it. But most importantly, I had also secured approval from my wife by taking care of many honey-do's prior to the season!

Being a deer hunter for over 35 years, I have learned a lot from reading thousands of articles in hunting magazines, watching hundreds of hours of hunting shows, and listening to other hunters who I could only hope to know as much as they've probably forgotten. But I have also learned from my mistakes.

I am a believer in hunting the wind, being as scent-free as possible, and learning the land I hunt. The wind is very important because deer rely on and trust their sense of smell for survival. If you use the wind in your strategy, you actually have room for errors that may show up in the other areas of your strategy. If a deer is upwind of you, it really doesn't matter what you smell like. But...if it is downwind of you and doesn't like what it smells, it is gone and in many instances it is gone before you ever knew it was there. This is why I am a believer in being as scent free as possible. I'm not super crazy about it, but I do wash with perfume-free soap. (Dove makes a version for sensitive skin that works great and is cheaper than the commercial hunting soaps.) I wash my hunting clothes in "Free and Clear" detergents (again, cheaper than commercial hunting detergents), and I store them in a waterproof/scentproof dry bag. I put on my hunting clothes when I get to my



Naff's favorite method of hunting is archery and with his knowledge of food sources and wind direction he scored this fine buck.

hunting property and take them off and store them before I leave.

Too many hunters lock themselves into one favorite stand and will hunt it despite the wind and will quickly notice that as the season goes on, they see less and less deer from that stand. By hunting a stand only when the wind is right, you increase your odds for seeing deer from that stand throughout the season.

Learning the land can be done while sitting at your desk or easy chair by studying topographical maps, Google Earth, the HuntStand app, or any other variety of mapping sites/apps. Once you

have determined inside corners of fields, saddles, ridges, funnels, hardwoods, pine thickets, cutovers, and clearcuts, you can then be better prepared when you actually get to the property.

Walking the property and looking for fresh signs is very important. Deer can quickly move from one food source to another and if you find signs in early September, the deer can be doing something completely different in early October. Make every hunting trip a scouting trip—be sure to be observant as you walk to and from your stands and be sure to talk to other folks that may hunt the same



Muzzleloader season offered another chance for a big buck extending Naff's opportunities in some of the same locations he hunted during archery season.

property to find out what they are seeing.

With archery, my favorite method of hunting, that season could not arrive soon enough. I took time to practice with my Mathews bow and was feeling very confident. During early archery season deer are generally in feeding patterns and finding food is key. For me, when I find fresh rubs in an area with acorns that is near a bedding area, I set up there. If there are no acorns, I look for rubs along field edges and set up there, usually back in the woods if the terrain allows.

Opening day found me sweating and swatting mosquitoes as I climbed into

my tree in Pulaski County. Despite the nuisance, being home in the mountains is always refreshing. This particular property had no acorns, so I had settled on the edge of a green field at the base of a wooded drop-off with the wind gently blowing into the field from the woods—so far so good. After sitting motionless for what seemed an eternity, I turned to peer behind me only to look eye-to-eye with a mature doe who immediately blew, ran, and then blew for what seemed like the rest of the evening. Not being able to smell me, she was very inquisitive about what I might be.

Next morning, the wind was right for me to hunt a favorite early season stand on a travel corridor between a large field and a ridge with lots of blowdowns where the deer like to bed. This is a property where the landowner has DCAP tags and is appreciative of all does taken. A few years prior, I actually harvested two mature does from that location in the same morning using DCAP tags. I climbed the familiar tree in my trusty Summit climber and after watching fox squirrels and a raccoon, I caught movement and saw two does heading my direction. They would pass within 15 yards of my tree and I drew back undetected and when the bigger of the two does fed into an opening, I released my arrow, it found its mark, and the Rage Hypodermic did its job which made for a short tracking job.

The following Saturday found me traveling for an afternoon hunt to a farm in Cumberland County. I had done some scouting a few weeks prior and determined that this farm was loaded with falling acorns. As I was walking to an area where I had captured some trail camera pictures of a couple nice bucks, I noticed that the recent hurricane had knocked boughs of oak limbs to the ground with acorns still attached. There were several fresh rubs and the ground was very disturbed and I knew deer had been feeding heavily on the fresh acorns. I climbed into a tree and got settled in for the evening. The sun had set and time was getting short when I had a doe run in from behind me. She was acting as if she was being pushed by a buck. It seemed early for this, but sure enough, a nice 8-pointer was following behind her. She stopped under my tree and he stopped behind my

# SUCCESS!

tree and started feeding on the acorns. She still seemed nervous and that's when I heard the heavy walking of another deer, and it was a larger buck walking straight to my tree. He stopped directly under me and the doe moved off. He stood there motionless and I was afraid he was going to keep standing there beyond shooting light. Finally, he turned and started to come around the tree offering me a 14-yard shot. I had been given an Afflictor broadhead to test by Kip Campbell of Red Arrow TV and it resulted in a short tracking job that led me to a beautiful 9-pointer. I ended up hunting the same area a few more times and harvested another adult doe with my bow. Now, I could focus on black powder!

The opening day of muzzleloader season found me in the same tree where I had taken the 9-pointer with my bow. Acorns were still on the ground and this area of the farm is an oak ridge that lies between two cutovers and the bucks always seem to travel this corridor between the two distinct bedding areas. By early November, the buck activity is much greater as they travel looking for does so funnels and known travel corridors are great locations to intercept bucks on the move. Around 10:00 a.m., I caught movement, a glimpse of antler, and there was a nice buck heading in my direction but on the wrong side of my stand. He was going to hit my scent before he would be able to offer me a shot. And sure enough, it was like he hit a wall when he caught my scent. The buck didn't waste any time doing a 180 and bolted out of there. Feeling very disappointed, I decided that I would move my stand over the ridge further downwind so that any other crossing deer would be more likely to be upwind

of me. In changing locations there would be more of a drop off on the downwind side offering me a little more height for my scent to be above any downwind deer.

Being adaptive and learning from a mistake is important and this move paid off. Well before sunset, I caught movement and had a mature buck step onto an old logging road from the thickest part of the hillside below me. I immediately

“I am a believer in hunting the wind, being as scent-free as possible, and learning the land I hunt.”

— Scott Naff

settled the crosshairs of my T/C Encore on his front shoulder and squeezed the trigger. There was enough of a breeze to move the smoke out of the way so I could see where he ran. As he dove out of sight, I heard a loud crash and knew my Shockwave had hit its mark. I climbed down and easily tracked him to where he fell. He was a great 8-pointer with kickers on each G2. He wasn't very wide, but had good mass and tine length. Now I was in a dilemma that I hadn't found myself in before—I only had one buck tag left. I hunted several more days of muzzleloader season in both Cumberland and Pulaski counties and passed on several bucks that I would have normally been more than happy to harvest. I wanted my third tag to be filled with something bigger than the two I had harvested thus far. Actually, by not shooting a third buck, I was watching

deer activity that I probably wouldn't have seen otherwise. It was a great end to a fantastic muzzleloader season.

General firearms deer season opened and it was slow. It seemed that all of the bigger bucks I had been seeing were locked down with does and there were only little spikes and fawns walking around. I was getting an occasional buck on the trail camera, but it was just terribly slow. With family commitments, I wasn't able to hunt leading up to Thanksgiving. However, the day after Thanksgiving was going to see me in the woods somewhere and hopefully, the bigger bucks would be on the move again. Looking at my HuntStand app, I realized that the wind was going to be great for a piece of property that I hadn't been able to hunt much. I was able to get there before daylight and made entry to the tree I was going to climb without spooking any deer. It was windy and cold, but the wind was

consistently blowing the way it was forecasted, so I bundled up and was going to stick it out. The first hour and a half were quiet with zero activity. However, around 9:00 a.m. the woods came alive with deer. At one point, I had 11 deer within 40 yards of me, but only one buck—a respectable 5-pointer. They all fed off with the exception of one big doe and she bedded down about 20 yards behind me. Once again it was quiet. Just before 10:00 a.m., I looked to my right and saw antlers—and then the deer, it was a very nice buck walking right toward my stand. He stopped about 40 yards out and began rubbing a pine tree as big as my forearm. He rubbed, smelled, licked, and rubbed some more on that tree for over five minutes. I videoed him rubbing it for about a minute after I realized he was going to be there a while. Once he finished, he continued on

# SUCCESS!

his way toward me. He hit the scent of the bedded doe and turned in her direction. She got to her feet and trotted off. He was moving through the brush and I decided that he was definitely a candidate for my third and final tag. When he quartered away, I settled the crosshairs behind his shoulder and squeezed the trigger. The 117 grain 25/06 bullet flew true and the heart-shot buck only made it 20 yards before crashing into a cedar tree. I climbed down and found him with the tree lodged between his antlers. As with each deer I harvest, I knelt beside it and gave thanks to God for providing such majestic creatures and such beautiful scenery for me to be a part of and enjoy. After using the GoOutdoors app to eNotch and check him in, I field dressed him, got some photos and had to rush home so we could make it back in time for the Virginia Tech/UVA game in Blacksburg. The buck was donated to Hunters for the Hungry and will hopefully bring joy to someone who needs it.

Paying attention to the wind and knowing the properties I hunt were huge factors in being able to harvest great bucks (for me) with my compound bow, muzzleloader, and rifle. Getting out when you can, despite the weather, is also very important, especially during the rut. The bucks will be looking for receptive does no matter the weather. Being able to tag a deer in each season was very exciting and hit home how blessed I am to have places to hunt, the time to hunt, and understanding colleagues and family! 🦌

Scott Naff, a native of Radford, Virginia, is an avid outdoorsman with a passion for bow hunting. He is also the Assistant Chief of Operations for DGIF's Conservation Police.

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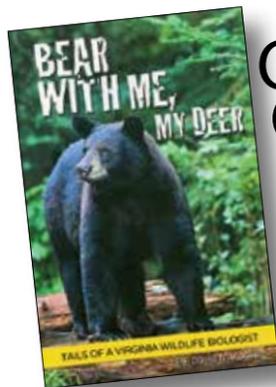
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# OUT & ABOUT



## Outdoor Classics

by  
Beth Hester

*Bear With Me My Deer: Tails of a Virginia Wildlife Biologist*

David M. Kocka  
Christian Faith Publishing, Inc.  
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*"Some days I feel like I should be a counselor. More and more wildlife decisions are based on cultural carrying capacity, not strictly on biology...biologists deal with this often with a variety of wildlife, especially bears and deer. In urban areas, one neighbor likes to see the deer, and may even want to feed them, while another neighbor does not want to have any deer in their yard possibly affecting their gardens, etc. Dealing with issues like this emphasizes the 'art' in the art and science of wildlife management."*

– David M. Kocka

Since 1989, Kocka has been a district wildlife biologist with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. Currently, in this role, he has been responsible for the implementation of agency wildlife habitat and population programs spanning six counties in northwestern Virginia. This collection of short essays are focused on what can happen when the domain of wild animals collides, often literally, with that of human beings. Because these close encounters occur with some frequency within urban and suburban

environments, Kocka has been called upon to 'mediate' these dicey encounters at all hours of the day and night.

Whether it's rescuing a deer trapped in a convenience store, responding to bear raids on dumpsters at burger joints and retirement communities, or consulting with security police about unwelcome deer incursions at a clandestine government facility in Clarke County, Kocka stands at the intersection between the realms of wild animal and hominid, armed with skill, scientific data, and a dart pistol loaded with animal-sedating potions. Some encounters are humorous, others teach important lessons.

Though Kocka's district covers an area roughly the size of the state of Delaware, he takes every opportunity to educate the general public about the do's and don'ts of wildlife interactions. Despite policies meant to regulate these encounters, Kocka's experiences reveal that many citizens are either unaware of these policies, or actively flout them. Sure, baby deer are cute, but they don't belong in your basement. They are wild animals that grow up and become instinct-driven beings that can pose a danger to their captors. Bears love nothing more than to graze on leftovers in unsecured dumpsters or handouts from humans, but it can be hard to deter folks from behaviors that lure both bears and people into potentially life-threatening situations. People can literally love wildlife to death.

Kocka writes: "In Virginia it is illegal to hold any wild animal in captivity without a permit from our agency. However, it amazes me every year how many people attempt to make pets out of wild animals. In addition to being illegal,

it is often detrimental to the long-term survival of the animal because after they become too accustomed to people, the animal won't be able to survive on their own; thus, they can't be released into the wild. Due to no fault of their own, these animals are most often euthanized." Likewise with bears. When people feed wildlife they are changing the animal's natural behavior, and often, such animals have to be destroyed. Kocka mentions the bumper sticker that accurately states: "A fed bear is a dead bear."

Kocka's 'tails' provide insight into a profession that works on behalf of wild creatures who cannot advocate for themselves, managing wildlife populations for the benefit of all.

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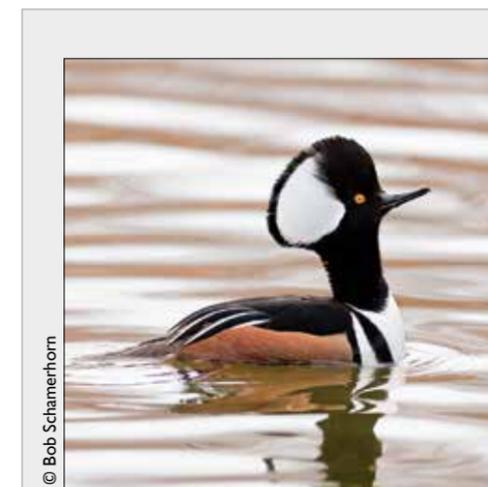
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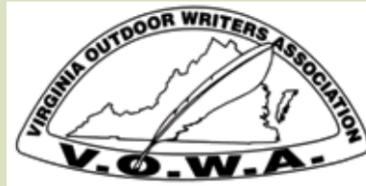
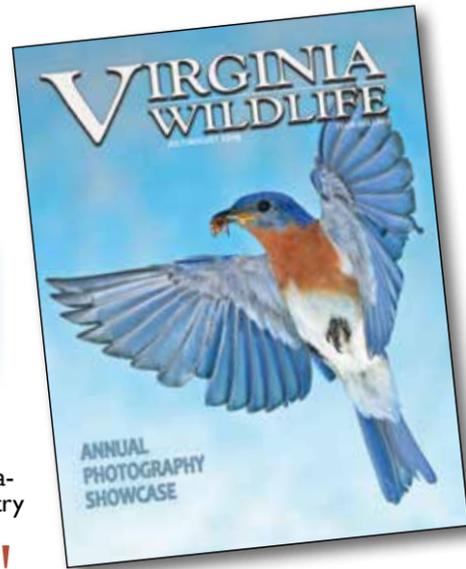
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Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation	89%	87%

**AHHHHH....**  
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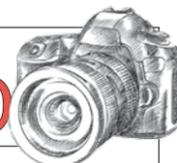
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**PICS FROM THE FIELD**



Congratulations to **Calvin Holdren** of Vinton for his beautiful portrait of a red-bellied woodpecker captured with a Nikon CoolPix P510 camera, shot at a focal length of 180mm with settings; ISO 800, 1/50, f/6.6. Bill reports that every fall he puts black oil sunflower seed in a bird feeder that he can see from his kitchen. This bird became a frequent visitor so Bill decided to capture some images of it while he sat at the kitchen table. Well done Bill! Thank you for sharing!

You are invited to submit up to five of your best photographs for possible publication in *Pics from the Field*. Please include contact information and send only high-resolution (300ppi, 8X10 min size) jpeg, tiff, or raw files on a CD, DVD, or flash drive and mail to: *Pics from the Field*, Virginia Wildlife, P.O. Box 90778, Henrico, VA 23228-0778.

We look forward to seeing and sharing your best work!





# Working Together

By Lynda Richardson & LeeWalker ♦ Photos by Meghan Marchetti & Lynda Richardson



Left: Joe Albert, owner of Green Valley Meat Processors, pulls bags of donated and processed white-tailed deer to be transferred to the Solid Rock Baptist Church food bank. Right: Tina Wilson, supervisor of the food bank, and Gary Arrington, special projects coordinator for Hunters for the Hungry, hold donated venison in the church basement distribution area while shoppers select from a wide variety of donations.



Vickie checks heavy bags of donated venison.



Volunteers transfer meat from van to food bank freezer.



Recipients select their food. Tina distributes packages of donated frozen venison.



This sign hangs above the door of the church food bank.

It was 8:00 a.m. at the Green Valley Meat Processors in Monroe as Tina Wilson, supervisor of Solid Rock Baptist Church food bank and Vickie Seacrest, a volunteer, waited in a large white van. The doors of the plant opened and out walked owner Joe Albert to greet them. “Good morning ladies! We have about 450 pounds of meat for you today!” Tina and Vickie got out of the van and joined Joe in front of an outdoor, upright freezer. Icy air rolled out of the open door as Joe stepped in and went to work pulling out large, plastic bags heavy with white paper packages, handing them to the ladies.

Back and forth they went swinging cold bags into the back of the spacious van and when all were loaded Tina and Vickie said their thank you’s and good-byes and headed off to the Solid Rock Baptist Church in Madison Heights.

Half a dozen people were already patiently lined up outside of the church’s basement food pantry when Tina and Vickie arrived. Volunteers came out with shopping carts to greet them and transport the meat from the van to a freezer inside. At 9:00 a.m., the “doors” were finally opened and the line stepped down into a room full of generous selections—everything from colorful birthday cakes and frozen pizza to bags of dried beans, packaged salads, fruit, and fresh tomatoes. But it was the frozen, white packages that most folks were eager to receive.

But where did those coveted packages actually come from? When it comes to worthy causes, there may be no better example of a program that mixes wildlife conservation and the needs of people than Hunters for the Hungry. Since its meager beginnings in 1991, Hunters for the Hungry has been “hunting down hunger” with a win-win program that uses a renewable resource (white-tailed deer) to feed folks in need. Since it began, hunters have provided 6.9 million pounds of low fat, high-protein venison that in turn has provided 30,000,000 servings to needy families around the state—a definite win-win for all Virginians!

Hunting is an important wildlife management tool to help balance growing deer populations with the constant loss of habitat and lack of natural predators. By purchasing hunting licenses, hunters help provide important funding for wildlife conservation work across the country and, right here in Virginia. Hunters for the Hungry is yet another opportunity for those same hunters to lend a helping hand.

The program is simple. Hunters, who are successful enough to harvest a deer, donate it to a professional processor who then cuts, wraps, and freezes the meat which is later distributed to food banks across the Commonwealth. This unique cooperative effort was built on passionate hunters’ love of the sport and the realization that hunger is still a problem in our state.

That day, Gary Arrington, special projects coordinator for Hunters for the Hungry, looked around at the dedicated volunteers of Solid Rock Baptist Church and the recipients of people’s generosity, “Giving someone something to eat is one of the noblest things we can do.”

## How Can You Help?

- It’s easy to donate. Simply drop off your whole, field-dressed deer at one of the more than 80 Hunters for the Hungry processors and collection sites located all across the state. Find them at: [h4hungry.org](http://h4hungry.org).
- At the processor, fill out simple paperwork: your address, phone number, game tag number, county of harvest, and date of harvest. That is all there is to it.
- If you are unable to donate a deer or if you already have but

still want to contribute more, Hunters for the Hungry needs help with funds to process the venison. Processors donate their time and effort at a reduced rate.

- You can donate funds when you buy a hunting license at: [www.gooutdoorsvirginia.com](http://www.gooutdoorsvirginia.com). Look for options to donate to Hunters for the Hungry under “Popular Items” in your Go Outdoors Virginia account. This year, an auto-renewal option has been created making it even easier.
- Another way to donate to Hunters for the Hungry is through one of the more than 500 license agents throughout Virginia.

Your contribution fulfills a great need and ensures there will be funds to process all of the deer that are donated. Remember, every dollar makes a big difference. Consider helping today!



Dear Luke,  
I have a friend who is extremely successful and very well connected. The other day he invited me to an all-expenses paid, Georgia plantation quail hunt for three days and then we are to fly in his company's Learjet to the Super Bowl, where he has invited me to sit with him in one of the team owner's sky boxes. Again, the whole trip is free—meals, hotel room, everything! There is one small problem. I am getting married the day before we are to leave, and I would have to postpone my honeymoon. My fiancé seems to be very understanding...and said I should go with my friend. What do you think?

Steve H., Powhatan, VA

Dear Steve,  
For a dog the answer is very simple—GO! However, there are so many honeysuckle tangles and cat briars in this deal that I would be remiss if I did not point out a few things. First, you have to understand that people who are engaged say a great number of things to each other, but once that status changes to married, you will learn what was said, what was meant, and what is remembered gets all twisted up like a line in a cheap fishing reel.

Being engaged is like being a young Lab puppy. Your human is all excited about having you around. You get to chew on a few things that you shouldn't have and are forgiven. You play "retrieve

the old sock" in the hall and maybe you mess up once or twice on the Oriental rug. It is all "no worries" and everything is forgiven. Then one day they slap a choke collar on your neck and it's off to obedience training. No more running around freely—because you have to be at heel all the time. According to Ol' Jones, unlike dogs, the training of the married male can go on for years!

Second, this will not be a free trip. You are about to incur a huge debt. Whatever you were planning for your honeymoon before, you better figure on doubling or tripling it. You have probably already made this trip a big deal in front of your fiancé. Now your fiancé is going to want to make your honeymoon more memorable than a hunting trip and a football game. Yeah, I know it's not just any hunting trip or football game, but that is how she will see it. I see a trip to New York for dinner and a Broadway play—followed by a flight to Paris in your near future.

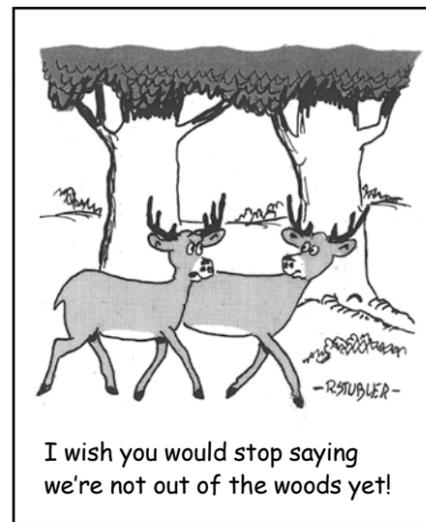
Perhaps the biggest surprise you will have is that you will notice a number of your married male friends will suddenly be unavailable. In fact, some will not even acknowledge you exist. This isn't because they are jealous of your good fortune. It is because they know that when the alpha female in their pack learns of this bold decision on your part to take the trip, even with your fiancé's blessing, you will be considered a pariah to the female alphas

and by default your male friends will follow suit. The biggest reason that your male friends will desert you however, is that they do not want to play that "What Would You Do?" game their wives will want to play. This is the game that some wives make up by putting their husbands in an imaginary situation that is similar to any situation they find distasteful, i.e. hunting trip vs. honeymoon, and see what their husband's answer will be. The female's question will be imaginary, but the male's answer better be believable or there will be a long, warm, one-sided discussion about how if you had the choice, (which you never did), you would go on the hunting trip and football game. Believe me married men do not embrace this sort of problem and most of them will see your trip as problem potential.

The real choice for you is: Are you going to be the MAN and go along with the wedding plans or are you going to be the DOG and go on what sounds like the trip of a lifetime? If you are going to "man up" as they say, please let your friend know that I never turn down a Georgia quail hunt.

Keep a leg up,  
Luke

*Luke spent many sunrises hunting up good stories with Clarke C. Jones, and thankfully, left us a cache of colorful tales. You can learn more about Clarke and Luke at [www.clarkecjones.com](http://www.clarkecjones.com).*



# A Walk in the Woods

Column and photograph by Mike Roberts



*A lifelong naturalist and wildlife photographer, Mike Roberts enjoys sharing his knowledge with others. You can reach him at: [return2nature@aol.com](mailto:return2nature@aol.com).*



# PHOTO TIPS

Column by Lynda Richardson  
Photograph by Susanne Smith

## SHOOT IN COLD WEATHER WITH A KATA COVER!

Each year, my “Adventure Buddy” Susanne and I pick some crazy location for a trip together. My destination two years earlier was snorkling in the warm Caribbean with whale sharks. When it was her turn, Susanne chose a dog sled trip over the frozen sea ice of southeastern Greenland. “It will be soooooo coooool,” she said.

Our Greenland guide, Rick Mantfield of Pirhuk Greenland Mountain Services, sent us a six page list of the minimum gear required. Wow...How many layers can you wear before officially being called a blimp? From the list alone it sounded a little more challenging than packing a bathing suit and sunscreen!

As I got my expedition gear together, I started thinking about photography. Such an adventure would obviously require photographic coverage so not only did I have to plan for keeping myself warm and dry, I had to do the same for my camera gear.

After rooting around my photo equipment closet I discovered several old rain covers made just for cameras. The sturdiest one was a KATA Elements Cover E-690 which appeared easy to use and pack. Little did I know just how important one piece of gear would be!

Months later, there I was on one of two dog sleds sitting behind our Greenlandic dog driver, with Susanne behind me. On the other sled was our gear, additional survival equipment, and a dead seal (for food). As our two teams of 12



I hold the Kata cover as Rick and I pose after our challenging dog sled adventure.

dogs alternately trotted, ran, and plodded across the snow covered sea ice, I took in the surroundings as well as pictures.

Breath-taking monochromatic landscapes rose up around us. All I could hear were the skids of the sled carving through ice, the dogs panting, and an occasional command shouted by our driver. I held my Canon 5D Mark III camera with a Canon 16-35mm lens in the KATA cover on my lap for easy access. I will have to say, I have never been more impressed with how well it worked.

The KATA was like a hand muff where you put one hand in each of the side openings to handle the camera. An elastic band closed around your wrists keeping out the ice and snow. The lens had its own adjustable cover which you could tighten around the lens. There wasn't a front lens cover, which you wouldn't want anyway, but I did have a UV filter on it.

I just had to keep checking and wiping away any blobs of snow and ice that froze to it. On the back was a plastic screen for viewing the LCD screen of the camera. Even wearing bulky goggles I could easily view settings and change them. For \$50, it was a necessary photographic lifesaver!

A bonus regarding the KATA was not only did it keep my camera dry but since I couldn't change camera settings wearing the required humungus gloves, I had to strip down to my thin glove liners instead. Amazingly, the KATA was warm enough to protect my fingers and hands from frostbite.

The weather was ever changing. One minute swirling snow and strong winds would burst across the open landscape and ravage us. Sometimes I would shoot not even seeing what I was shooting... just to see if I could get something crazy! Other times, the weather would lay down and capturing stunning images was easy.

If I hadn't had that KATA, I probably wouldn't have been able to take any photographs without losing a finger or two. So, my tip to you; the next time you're taking pictures in challenging conditions consider a KATA cover for your camera. Nowadays, there are many types available for up to \$200 so pick the one that works best for you! Happy Shooting!

*A former career photojournalist for more than 30 years, Lynda Richardson is the art director for this magazine. Want to see more of her dog sled trip in Greenland? Check out her personal website at: [www.LyndaRichardson.com](http://www.LyndaRichardson.com)*



# LET'S GROW Native

Column by Carol A. Heiser  
Photographs by Lynda Richardson

As the year comes to an end and days turn colder, wildlife seeks protective cover from the elements. This is the time to resist the temptation to “clean up” your yard! Before you rake and bag up all the leaves or send bundles of pruned branches off to the landfill, consider the high value these resources can have for wildlife.



Be mindful when you “clean up” your yard this winter. This sleepy hibernating gray treefrog was discovered in leaf litter during winter maintenance. Please leave your leaves!



Constructing a brush pile is a great way to recycle large tree branches and smaller limbs that have fallen during the year. The myriad nooks and crannies of a brush pile are good places for birds and small mammals to quickly escape predators and hunker-down out of the wind. The eastern red bat has been known to hibernate under large log piles.

Keeping the leaves on the ground and allowing dormant flowering plants and grasses to remain standing, rather than cutting them back, are two other

excellent ways to ensure that wildlife has adequate shelter in the coming winter. This habitat component provides thermal cover as well as refuge from precipitation. Some insects lay their eggs in the stems of plants, to develop the following year. Other insects, like beetles, bugs, millipedes, and grasshoppers overwinter as adults under leaves.

A thick leaf layer is key to survival for many species, including salamanders, box turtles, chipmunks, and toads. Four frog species hibernate under leaves: wood

frogs, spring peepers, chorus frogs, and gray tree frogs (see photo). Some butterfly and moth species require leaf cover for their eggs, pupae, or adults. For example, caterpillars of the great spangled fritillary spend winter diapause in the leaf layer, while luna moth cocoons are camouflaged to look like the dead material.

Leaf mulch has numerous environmental benefits. It protects soil from displacement during rain events, which greatly reduces the likelihood of erosion and sediment being washed into creeks and streams. Soil is also much less likely to become compacted when it has a blanket of leaf mulch over it to create structural spaces. Leaves help to insulate the soil and minimize extremes of temperature, and they retain moisture for plants' roots.

As leaves gradually disintegrate from the decomposition process of fungi and bacteria, and from insects and other soil organisms that chew, shred, or otherwise fragment the leaves, the result is soft, loamy organic matter that improves soil structure and recycles nutrients back to surrounding plants and trees. This light, fluffy material is what gives a forest floor—or your mulched garden beds—a spongy, springy quality. Protecting the leaf layer and soil condition in your landscape will provide a good foundation for a healthy habitat that supports many plant and wildlife species year round.

*Carol A. Heiser is Education Section Manager and Habitat Education Coordinator at the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.*

## RESOURCES

- ◆ *Brush Piles for Wildlife*, Va. Department of Forestry: [www.dof.virginia.gov/infopubs/Brush-Piles-for-Wildlife\\_pub.pdf](http://www.dof.virginia.gov/infopubs/Brush-Piles-for-Wildlife_pub.pdf)
- ◆ *Native Shrub-ID-spreads\_2016\_pub.pdf*
- ◆ *LeaveTheLeaves*, Xerces Society: <https://xerces.org/2017/10/06/leave-the-leaves/>

Try this quick, easy venison recipe for a delicious and savory meal!

# Venison Tenderloin Medallions with a Mushroom Rosemary Cream Sauce

Recipe by Paige Pearson • Photo by Meghan Marchetti

Cozy up to the fire and enjoy this simple to make venison tenderloin medallions. Adding the mushrooms and rosemary cream sauce is a truly delicious addition that will be sure to make your taste buds explode. Nothing like a warm, easy winter meal. Perfect for the holiday season!

See more of our fare game recipes in each issue of *Virginia Wildlife*, or visit [dgif.virginia.gov/faregame](http://dgif.virginia.gov/faregame) for more ways to bring your hunting or fishing experience full circle.

## INGREDIENTS

- 8 oz. baby bella mushrooms, sliced
- 2 Tbsp. shallots, finely chopped
- 2 Tbsp. rosemary, finely chopped
- 4 Tbsp. olive oil
- 4 Tbsp. butter
- 1 tsp. seasoning salt (to taste)
- 1 tsp. pepper (to taste)
- 2 cups heavy cream
- 1 cup dry white wine
- 1 venison tenderloin, sliced into individual portions

Serves 4

## DIRECTIONS

### For the Cream Sauce

- 1 In a large pan, melt the butter and olive oil on medium-low heat until bubbling.
- 2 Add the mushrooms, shallots, and rosemary to the mixture.
- 3 Once the mushrooms are cooked through, add the white wine, heavy cream, seasoning salt and pepper and let simmer and reduce by half.

### For the Tenderloin

- 4 Add olive oil to another pan and heat on medium-high.
- 5 Slice the tenderloin into individual portions.
- 6 Season with seasoning salt and pepper to taste.
- 7 Add the tenderloin to the pan and cook on each side until preferred doneness.
- 8 Place on plate and add cream sauce. Garnish with fresh sprig of rosemary or parsley.

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—Lee Walker, Interim Editor



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