

1916



2016

100 YEARS

THE FIRST 100 YEARS of Protecting Virginia's Wildlife!

By Denny Quaiff

Over the last one hundred years the VDGIF has been the watchdog agency assigned to safeguard our wildlife resources in the Old Dominion. The many things that have transpired during this long-haul are monumental, and yet, the Department's mission statement has never wavered!

The Virginia Game Commission was established in June, 1916, which was the initial enactment of game and fish laws in the Old Dominion. These laws were sanctioned to set hunting seasons that protected waterfowl, upland birds and game animal bag limits from abuse.

It has been my privilege to have hunted in the fields, woodlands and waterways throughout our Great Commonwealth for over 57 of the 100

years since our game and fish agency was founded. Throughout the years I've, witnessed countless changes that have taken place and carried us to where we are today.

Back In the Day

Being of the Baby Boomer generation, I started to hunt in the late 1950's. It has given me a real understanding for how things have so greatly changed. Living

In 1930 the statewide deer harvest was 1,299 and news of a buck being shot drew a crowd, like these onlookers in downtown Richmond, Va. Pictured here is Ralph Goode (L) along with Lunse I. Goode and Tom Harding (R) when they drove in town to check the animal. The buck was taken by Ralph on his farm, which is now Swift Creek Berry Farm & Greenhouses and Piedmont Hops in the Moseley area of Chesterfield County. Ralph was hunting with his 12-gauge L.C. Smith that his son Clyde still used occasionally for deer hunting. Photo provided by Clyde Goode



The Virginia Game Wardens, now Conservation Police Officers, have been assigned the duty of enforcement to protect Virginia Fish and Wildlife Natural Resources since the agency was founded. Throughout this history eight wardens have lost their life in the line of duty. Photo courtesy of DGIIF



in a rural community with friends and family that enjoyed hunting was a way of life. I was ten years old when my father purchased my first hunting license. For my birthday that year he gave me my first gun, which was a J.C. Higgins single shot .410, which I still have today.

Early on most of my hunting was for small game animals. We had several beagles that were “cracker jack” rabbit dogs. Saturday mornings, during hunting season found us with friends at my grandparent’s farm chasing rabbits. These small organized hunts were my first training in hunter safety. My father was a World War II veteran who had extensive schooling with firearms while serving in Uncle Sam’s Army. He was serious about gun safety, and I paid close attention to his instructions. The 10 hour Hunter Education Class for first time hunters and youth reaching the age of 12 was not required until 1988. This era saw hunter safety move to the forefront with the mandate in 1987 to wear blaze orange during the general firearm season. My father’s guidance in gun safety when I started hunting has greatly influenced how I hunt today. It also played a role in my decision to become a hunter education instructor some 30 years later.

Virginia enacted their first Archery Season in 1954, and only 42 deer were taken that year. This was before the age of

compound bows and portable treestands. The only bow hunter that I knew during that era was my neighbor, the late Bobby Robertson. Bobby did a weekly hunting and fishing column for the Hopewell News. I remember seeing a picture of him that appeared in the newspaper with a deer he had taken while hunting with a traditional long bow shooting cedar arrows with a single blade broad head. Bobby figured out that bow hunting from the ground was not the way to go and started building

“In 1973 a primitive weapons season for hunters using a flintlock or side-hammer percussion rifle followed the two-week general firearm season in the west. Black powder hunters took 24 deer that year.”

treestands for a better advantage. I still have one of the homemade treestands he built for me. Bobby Robertson was a deer hunter that was truly ahead of his time.

Bob Duncan, executive director for the

VDGIF, said, “In thinking back over the past, I am ever mindful of the lack of deer in my native part of southwest Virginia. It is almost a cliché, but there were very few deer on private lands in the 1960’s and 1970’s. The bag limit was one deer per year and we did our deer hunting on national forest, both the Jefferson and the George Washington. I used to bow hunt the Mountain Lake area in Giles county as well as making trips with my Dad to hunt on national forest lands in Augusta County. It is amazing to me now that the deer herd is so well established on private lands and has declined significantly on national forest lands.”

Special Seasons, Youth Incentives and Comeback Stories

The first Spring Gobbler season was introduced in 1962 when Chester Phelps was director of the Game Commission. Determined not to be outdone, my old hunting buddy Bill Langford and I decided to take on the challenge. The week before the season opened, we scouted and discovered lots of turkey scratching on my grandfather’s farm. We built a makeshift blind and could hardly wait for opening morning of the six day season. I had purchased a box call from a mail order catalog and remember that my practice



Amour Deschamps gets in the picture at their old home place which was located where the Chesterfield County Library is today. The two 8 pointers were killed by his brothers in December 1939. The big buck on the left was known throughout the Chesterfield County hunting community as the 'Old Pocahantas Park Buck' –the deer weighed 234 lbs. Photo courtesy of the late Amour Deschamps.

sessions about drove my mother crazy. To make a long story short, we called up two long beard gobblers that morning and missed them both. However, this heart pounding experience for two rookie teenage turkey hunters was followed by many years of successful hunts and memories that will never be forgotten

Today, turkey hunters enjoy a fall and spring season. The fall season is broken up into four different dates, and last year 3,283 birds were taken. Our Spring Gobbler Season runs for five weeks and opens on the second Saturday in April. Last spring turkey hunters harvested a record number of 20,580 bearded birds...another of the

great success stories that Virginia's Game Department can be proud of.

Another one of the many wildlife come-back stories in our state is the black bear restoration work that continues to make headlines. I remember a story my father told about the Deschamps brothers who lived and hunted in Chesterfield county back in the 1930's. These guys had a noted reputation as some of the best hunters in their day. During these years of the great depression my grandmother fixed a big breakfast for the locals that would stop by before work on her wood cook stove. One morning, three of the Deschamps boys, Joe, Gus and Gene,

stopped by for breakfast on their way to the Great Dismal Swamp to bear hunt. So the story goes, my grandfather said, "You boys don't know anything about bear hunting and for that matter you've never been to the Dismal Swamp." However, three days later the Deschamps boys stopped back by my grandparent's farm hauling three black bears. Stories that follow this hunting family are endless!

Black Bear harvest data statewide have been collected since the early 1970's when less than 500 bear were taken. During the 2015 season 2,331 were harvested which plainly reveals how the Bear Management Plan is working. The 2015 season was the first year that a separate \$20 license was required to hunt bear. Hunting licenses sold for resident bear hunters were 30,780 and non-resident 926. A special Youth

"When various county deer populations did reach a level to justify doe harvest, one or two days of either sex hunting at the end of the season was permitted. Ol' timers were still having a hard time with this relatively new concept of shooting does."

Bear Hunting Weekend is designated for the second weekend in October. During the past hunting season Youth Bear Hunters killed 110 Black Bears during the two youth-only hunting days.

The deer population started increasing throughout most of the state in mid 1960's. Deer season opened statewide on the third Monday in November and closed on January 5 east of the Blue Ridge Mountains, unless it fell on Sunday. The western deer hunter's deer season also opened on the third Monday in November and ran for two consecutive weeks. Many of the county schools in the western part of the state were closed on opening day of deer season. School officials knew students would be skipping class if school was in session and decided that the day off was a better alternative. In 1973 a primitive weapons season for hunters using a flintlock or side-hammer percussion rifle

followed the two-week general firearm season in the west. Black powder hunters took 24 deer that year. This new season found many of the hunters reliving the days of Daniel Boone and Davey Crockett. Hunters not only enjoyed the challenge of hunting with their primitive weapon, but dressed in Buckskins and wearing a Coonskin Cap was a lighthearted way to relive the pioneer days.

In the 1960's, hunting regulations in most counties were bucks only with a two deer limit. When various county deer populations did reach a level to justify doe harvest, one or two days of either sex hunting at the end of the season was permitted. Ol' timers were still having a hard time with this relatively new concept of shooting does. There were clubs and landowners that set their own guidelines and restricted doe harvest on the property they controlled. Quality Deer Management as we know it today was unheard of.

Deer hunting with hounds was a common practice east of the Blue Ridge Mountains and this was how I got started. My uncle Dickie had a pack of Black and Tan hounds that knew how to run a deer. He had purchased a retired Curles Neck Dairy truck at auction that we used for our hunting vehicle. When I started driving and school was closed for the Christmas Holidays he would let me use the truck to haul the hounds and make deer drives with my hunting buddies. The rank smell of those hounds lying in the enclosed bed behind the front seat of that truck was about more than we could stand. But the good times we had during those deer hunting seasons, was a direct reflection of what the Game Commission was doing to bring the whitetail deer back. Early deer management had started to take shape.

It was in 1988 that the Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP) was put into place. James Remington was Executive Director of the VDGIF. Mr. Remington asked me to locate deer hunters from the four regions of the state to meet at the department for open discussions about this new concept. The program was laid-out that very night and the birth of Quality Deer Management as we know it today was up and running. Today, we have 782 cooperators made up of hunt clubs and landowners statewide with 1.3 million acres in the program. This has proven to be one of the best deer management tools ever designed, and I'm proud to have been

The mandatory check station system was initiated in 1947 and 4,019 deer were checked. By 1978, Virginia deer hunters had checked in, since 1947, over one million deer; by 1994, three million; by 1999, four million; by 2004, five million; by 2008, six million and by 2013, seven million. In the fall of 2015, exactly 70 years after the mandatory deer check-in program was initiated, deer hunters have checked in approximately 7.6 million deer. Deer Management throughout the Old Dominion has truly been a success story! Photo courtesy of the DGIF



The decade of the 1930s saw Virginia Game Farms raising 600 turkeys a year that were stocked in the wild throughout the state. A statewide wild turkey restoration plan was in the early stages during the first spring gobbler season in April of 1962. Today, turkey hunters enjoy a fall and spring season that accounted for 23,863 birds taken during the 2015 seasons. Photo courtesy of DGIF

in on the ground floor.

When I spoke with Duncan about the DMAP he went on to say, "The idea for DMAP started in some other states (Mississippi, South Carolina) and we adapted it to Virginia. We also started the Damage Control Assistance Program (DCAP) to encourage the taking of deer (and bear) causing crop damage during a legal season, instead of the summer. We then added the Deer Population Control Program (DPCP), Bonus Deer Tags, special Archery License, Special

Muzzleloader License and seasons, urban deer season and many other specialized deer management tools to help landowners and hunters." He continued by saying, "These have all been game changers and I know of no other state that offers as many different deer management options as we do here in the Old Dominion. I once calculated that if you hunted every possible season, every day with every weapon that one could legally harvest something like 176 deer per license year, twice that if you were in DMAP."

The Director went on to say, "Not to worry as our staff and I also kept and analyzed deer hunter success rates for years, and a small group of hard core biologists/hunters I know kept detailed records on the harvest of deer by the number of hours hunted. While the opportunity is there, most folks don't care to take a large number of deer or they may be hunting selectively for a certain deer. For those that do, there are always the Hunters for the Hungry Program. Looking back, it is hard to believe that we have come this far with deer, bear and turkey populations"

The Game Department efforts have never stopped looking for hunter opportunities. The introduction of the special Archery License in 1985, which was followed by the special Muzzleloader License in 1990 for the first six day statewide black powder season, was another good decision. Bow season for deer hunters opens on the first Saturday in October and runs until the general deer season opens east and west of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Crossbows are now legal to use during the general archery season, and the hunting license is good for any of the archery bows approved for hunting by the Game Department. The early two-week special muzzleloader opening date will vary some years depending on the calendar, and ends on the Friday before the general firearm season opens on Saturday. The late muzzleloader season in the west begins the first Monday in December and runs until the first Saturday in January. During the 2015 deer season, the total kill for all of the bow hunters was 26,797 which accounted for 13% of the total harvest. Muzzleloaders hunters, which are 88,492 strong, did their part by taking 42,517 which is 20% of the total statewide harvest.

While discussing how the deer population had such a great comeback, Duncan was not lost for words, saying, "Education and outreach have played a major role in the past 100 years. I remember a seminar by Dr. Leonard Lee Rue III, sponsored by the VDHA which kick started a lot of interest in the biology of the white-tailed deer. Dr. Rue remains a personal conservation hero to many serious students of deer, of which I count myself as one. The VDHA *Whitetail Times* publication has done much to promote the sound management of the white-tailed deer in Virginia and provide a means for sharing important information on everything related to deer including



The first archery deer season was held in 1954. Long or recurve bows with cedar arrows and single blade broad heads were a bow hunter's equipment. Compound bows, portable tree stands and modern day camo were not on the market. The hunters that took on this challenge arrowed a mere 42 deer during the first season. Photo courtesy of DGIF

“The special Youth Deer Hunt falls on the last weekend in September and, in 2015, the youth weekend logged 2,331 whitetails. Youth Spring Turkey Hunting is scheduled for the first weekend in April with 448 gobblers taken during 2015.”

harvest, diseases (HD, CWD), quality deer management and more.”

When speaking with the Director about Quality Deer Management he was quick to remind me how the VDHA was already at work when the idea for the Quality Deer Management Association was but a concept. Duncan said, “I know, because we were both asked by the then future founder of QDMA what we thought about the idea. Now when we think about the impact that QDM principles have had on deer hunting in Virginia it’s been a real winner.”

Today Virginia’s general gun season, which continues to draw the largest group of hunters, opens east and west of the Blue Ridge Mountain on the third Saturday in November. Our eastern hunters continue to enjoy a long firearm season that doesn’t end until the first Saturday in January. The long-standing traditional western season for two weeks has just gained two more days with opening of Sunday hunting in 2014. Gun hunters continue to lead in total harvest with 139,883 deer taken this past season. Total harvest for 2015, which also includes all of the specials seasons was 209,197 deer. The Game Department has been collecting harvest data since 1947, when the total statewide hunter harvest was 4,019 deer. Deer management in the Old Dominion has a proven track record. It is an agency of Conservation Officers, Wildlife Biologists and department administrators who are and have been committed to our wildlife natural resources.

In 1996 the General Assembly passed legislation to enact a special Youth Hunting License for youngsters between the ages of 12 and 15. The license was issued at a reduced cost to help encourage more



DGIF wildlife biologist Dan Lovelace traps and transports a young Virginia black bear from an urban setting. The population of black bear has been growing over the past decade, and they can now be found in just about every county in the state. During the 2015 season, hunters harvested 2,331 bears. Photo courtesy of the DGIF

youth hunter participation. In 2008, the agency saw another opportunity to adapt an apprentice license that would hopefully get more people hunting. The Apprentice License for first-time hunters is good for two years. Apprentice license holders must have an adult licensed hunter within arm-length at all times. This is great way for a hunter to decide if hunting is something they would like to do, before taking the 10 hour hunter education class.

In an ongoing effort to promote hunting, the Game Department saw another opportunity in 2009, to add special Youth Deer and Turkey Hunting Days. The special Youth Deer Hunt falls on the last weekend in September and, in 2015, the youth weekend logged 2,331 whitetails. Youth Spring Turkey Hunting is scheduled for the first weekend in April with 448 gobblers taken during 2015.

Youth hunters for the special October weekend this past fall bagged 57 turkeys. These special seasons have continued to grow, with more young hunters learning to appreciate the importance of ethical hunting practices. Recently, I served on a committee that outlined helpful ways that the Game Department could better prepare for the ways of the future. The one thing that continued to come up among each of our break-out groups was more youth hunter incentives. Our youth are the future.

The Game Department has continued to act on hunter requests and while working with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, we now have a healthy elk herd ranging in the very southwestern part of the state. This is another fine example of how our state game agency is working to meet the many demands of hunters statewide.



Fifty-one elk from Yellowstone National Park were released in Giles and Botetourt Counties in 1935. In 1957, the state game agency opened elk season in Bland, Giles, Botetourt, and Bedford Counties. The hunter-harvested elk in this picture is believed to be one of the last taken in Virginia, during the early 1960's. Today, the Virginia Game Department and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation work together and have a healthy elk herd ranging in southwestern Virginia, and the future looks very promising. Photo courtesy of the DGIF

Conclusion

Having the opportunity to write this article brought back many fond memories of days gone by. While hunting over the past 57 years, and watching sunrises and sunsets, I have gained a lifelong respect for the magnificent landscape that God has created. It's been my pleasure to have hunted in almost every season for deer, turkey, small game and waterfowl, which are regulated by our game and fish agency. Staying actively involved throughout the years has given me a sense of self-satisfaction. Playing a small part in many of the changes that our Virginia Game Department has implemented carries with it a feeling of pride for future generations to follow.

In Duncan's final remarks he stated, "It has also been very gratifying to have had VDHA support the DGIF in many deer management issues over the years, including regulatory and legislative issues. High fences and deer farming are two that come to mind. While we may not agree on everything, I truly believe that conservation partnership has benefited

both the deer resource we all love and the deer hunters as well."

Bob Duncan concluded by saying, "After 42 years in the wildlife profession (38 with VDGIF), I have really come to value the friendships and partnerships with the many fine sportsmen organizations in our Commonwealth. It is the opportunity to work with you for the good of the resource that makes our jobs so fulfilling. This is especially true of the Virginia Deer Hunters Association, who, for 31 years, has been a full partner with DGIF in charting a path forward for the next 100 years!"

One hundred years of being assigned the task to safeguard Virginia's Wildlife Natural Resources is truly a huge obligation that has never been taken lightly. The longevity of this agency has played a major role in the way hunting has been such an important part of my life and others I have known who are no longer with us. Our Game Department's numerous achievements, which have so greatly benefited our hunting community and the general public, are the things that truly deserve recognition!

The Virginia Wildlife Magazine, official publication of the VDGIF, has a feature article in their May issue titled, "A Century of Conserving Virginia's Wildlife Resources," by William H. Funk, Journalist. Funk has captured in-depth the 100 year history of the agency in this colorful 16 page article. The article can be read online at www.dgif.virginia.gov and copies of this special collectors edition will be available at the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' headquarters and regional offices.