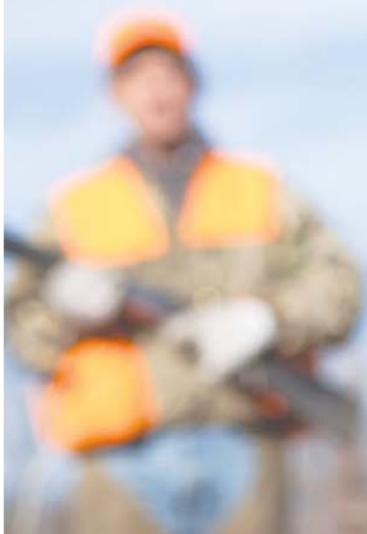


2023

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# OUTDOOR RECREATION *Guide*



 PENNYSAVER  


# Gearing up for Geese (and Ducks)

Evening Sun Outdoor  
Chenango Columnist  
Eric Davis

I really gained a lot of my hunting experience from duck and goose hunting in the Finger Lakes as a teenager. I did not get into archery hunting until I was in college, so I spent my autumn weekends in the duck blind rather than in a treestand in high school. Here are some things to know about waterfowl hunting and some equipment I recommend getting if

you want to get into waterfowl hunting.

Knowing the regulations and requirements is critical when it comes to hunting ducks and geese. They are migratory birds, so they fall under federal jurisdiction in the form of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). While NYSDEC Environmental Conservation Officers enforce the laws and regulations within New York for the most part,

they can have USFWS Special Agents come in to conduct investigations. With this, know that the fines and penalties that come with breaking the law or regulations are hefty. The first requirement is that everyone who hunts waterfowl in New York must register with the Harvest Information Program (HIP). It is a simple survey asking about hunting migratory birds last year. Once you answer all the questions, you get a HIP number that you must carry with you while afield waterfowl hunting. The second requirement is that hunters aged 16 and older must possess a Federal Migratory Bird Stamp while hunting waterfowl. This stamp can be purchased

at a United States Postal Service Office and the hunter must sign their name across the face of the stamp in ink. It is worth noting that about 98 cents off each dollar that is spent on Migratory Bird Stamps goes directly to acquiring habitat critical to migratory birds for breeding or for migrating. The third requirement to know is that you must use non-toxic shot, meaning shot other than lead, when hunting migratory birds. The most common choice is steel shot as it is the least expensive option. Tungsten, bismuth, and mixes of those metals are other options that carry a heavier price tag. The last requirement is that a shotgun that can hold more than 3 rounds total in the firearm must be modified so that it can only hold 3 rounds total (this is not required in the September goose season or during the snow goose conservation season). This is usually accomplished by placing a rod in the tubular magazine of a pump or semiautomatic shotgun, often referred to as a "duck plug." If you have questions about this process, visit



a gun shop to ask them for assistance.

When it comes to equipment, the first thing to invest in would be decoys, in my opinion. Using decoys allows you to place them where you want the geese to come in, so you get ethical shots at them. Geese will try to land with decoys without any calling more readily than they will try to land where there is calling but no decoys. If you plan to hunt in fields mostly, get decoys that are in feeding positions. If you plan to hunt over water where the geese come to loaf and nap, get resting and sleeping position decoys. When setting decoys, remember that geese typically land into the wind if it is blowing above 5 mph so leave an open area where they can approach and try to land, this is where you plan on getting your shots at them. If you buy decoys made for use in water, realize you need

to buy rope and anchors, so they don't just float away after you put them out. The second piece of gear to get would be a goose call. Adding sound to a decoy spread helps make it realistic. Most hunters will start out with a goose flute but over time will go to a short reed call because you can make a wider variety of calls on a short reed than on a flute call. The third piece of equipment to purchase would be a blind. Either a layout blind, which looks like a sleeping bag with doors, or an open-top ground blind will work but in different scenarios. Layout blinds allow you to set up in the middle of fields without a tall profile. This helps get away from hedgerows or wood edges that some birds can shy away from. Open-top ground blinds, like the Avian-X A-Frame, allow you to set up on fence lines, hedgerows, and other areas with more vertical structure to break up the outline of the blind. They are more comfortable to hunt out of but can lead to birds not finishing where you want for easy shots.

If you are interested in starting to waterfowl hunt, make sure you understand the regulations before going out. Remember to stay safe and only shoot in safe directions, because it can get hectic when a big flock comes in and you start shooting.

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# What is R3? Why does it matter?

*Evening Sun Outdoor  
Chenango Columnist  
Eric Davis*

In the past few years there has been a focus on how to get more people into outdoor recreation. The average age of the hunter in the United States is increasing instead of holding steady, which means less young people are getting into hunting to offset the increasing age of hunters. A similar trend can be seen in shooting sports, archery, fishing and trapping. Why is this important? Remember how the Pittman-Robertson Act collects excise taxes on firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment that is then given back to the wildlife management agency of each state. Similarly, the Dingell-Johnson Act does the same thing for fishing and boating equipment. The money is given based on license sales numbers for that state. So, a decrease in hunters leads to less sales of the things that get taxed and then based on lower license sales, the state agency gets less money. This means the state's wildlife management will get less funding to operate. To combat this, the Outdoor Recreation Adoption Model was

conceived and it explains the process of becoming an outdoor recreationalist. The model has been given the nickname of R3. This is because it describes the three phases of becoming engaged in outdoor recreation as recruitment, retention, and reactivation. Recruitment is the very beginning of becoming involved. The recruitment phase goes from awareness to interest to trial. It starts with becoming aware of the activity either from another person or seeing it online. Then it transitions to the interest portion where the person does more research, like watching videos on Youtube, to gather more information. When they go hunting/shooting for the first time, that is the trial. Once the first hunt is over, a new hunter has two options. Either keep hunting or quit. This is where the retention phase begins. In this phase the new hunter/shooter is given the opportunity to learn and build on their new foundation. The new participant can decide to continue without support but having support makes them more likely to continue. This support can come from friends and family who are

positive about their new activity but can also include getting help from other hunters/shooters. Mentored hunts have been identified as one of the best ways to help get new participants through the retention phase and to the point they consider themselves hunters or shooters. Pairing an experienced mentor with a new participant can help them overcome

mistakes that can make them want to stop participating. Reactivation covers getting hunters/shooters who have had a lapse in participation. This can include people who hunted until they had children and then stopped, it can also include people who developed disabilities that made it more difficult to continue participation.

The ability to define these phases of becoming an outdoor recreationalist helps state and federal agencies as well as non-government organizations make decisions that can help increase new participants. Some states have started offering Learn to Hunt programs that cover more than just what Hunter Education typically covers. The course does cover Hunter Education requirements, so the participants come out of it with their Hunter Education certificates and a better starting point

to be successful. Another popular course is Field to Fork, where participants are taught how to handle wild game from right after the harvest to proper butchering, and finally ways to cook wild game. As time continues to march on, as outdoor recreation participants we owe it to ourselves, and the outdoors that we love, to introduce more people to the outdoors so that they can enjoy it and so that the outdoors can enjoy the increase in funding put back into it.

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# Conservation and the Economy

Evening Sun Outdoor  
Chenango Columnist  
Eric Davis

What is the difference between preservation and conservation? Can you give an example of each?

These questions are commonly asked at Sportsman Education courses. I also remember getting asked this question on multiple exams as an

undergraduate in the Wildlife Management program at SUNY Cobleskill. I have even been asked this question when I interviewed for various job openings in the fish and wildlife field.

Preservation is the act of managing something in a way by doing very little to nothing. Think of the root of the word, preserve. The goal of

preservation is to protect nature from human use. Conservation is the protection of natural resources through active management. This means studying the resources and using various management tools to arrive at the best outcome for the resources. Regulated hunting is a common tool used in conservation. It is also worth recognizing that doing nothing is a tool used in conservation sometimes.

As already mentioned, regulated hunting is a tool used in conservation. In North America, unlike anywhere else in the world, the wildlife of the nation is considered a public resource no matter where they may live. With this notion, the government is responsible for managing these resources on behalf of the public. Under the model, the public is given access to the resources through regulated hunting. The benefits of hunting include helping prevent disease spread by reducing high populations, providing a source of

lean organic meat, and balancing human-wildlife conflict. Deer hunting helps reduce deer populations which results in over 200% fewer deer-vehicle collisions than if deer hunting was not allowed in the United States. Humans can mentally benefit directly from hunting. A 2002 study indicated that hunters ranked experiencing solitude, relaxation and relieving stress, and time to think among the most popular outcomes associated with hunting. Hunting helps fund state wildlife agencies through excise taxes and license sales. The Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act (also known as the Pittman-Robertson Act) puts an excise tax on firearms, ammunition and other hunting and shooting items that are collected from the manufacturer directly. This money is held by the Department of the Interior and is dispersed to each state using a formula based on how many hunting licenses were sold by the state as a fraction of all the licenses sold nationwide and how big the state is. It is usually close to a \$3-to-\$1 ratio for federal to state money. Over \$12 million of hunting licenses were sold in



New York for the 2022 season. In 1970, the Act was amended to provide funding for hunter education and public target ranges in addition to the original purpose of restoration of wild birds and mammals and to acquire, develop, and manage their habitats. So not only do hunters directly contribute to the conservation of game animals by buying their license, they also contribute when they purchase firearms, ammunition, archery equipment, and other hunting equipment. In 2017, \$882 million were apportioned nationwide under the Pittman-Robertson Act. Hunters also impact habitat management through the purchase of the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp, also called the Federal Duck Stamp. In 1934, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act. All waterfowl hunters who are 16 years old and older must purchase and carry a Federal Duck Stamp with them while waterfowl hunting. Out of every dollar that purchases a duck

stamp, 98 cents go directly towards the purchase or lease of wetlands and wildlife habitat. Since it was passed, the Duck Stamp Act has collected over \$800 million that protected over 5 million acres of habitat across the United States. Currently, the Federal Duck Stamp costs \$25 and is available for purchase at United States Postal Service Offices. There are additional economic impacts of hunting to local communities. Hunters may travel out of town to go hunting, where they will spend money on gas, food, and hotel rooms. Gun shops are always busy during the last week or two before the start of gun season. It seems that every hunter stops hunting on opening day so that they can all go to the diner for coffee at the same time! The money they spend at local businesses help pay the employees of those stores. The stores also collect sales tax, some of which goes to the local government and can end up being used to repair roads or provide other services to the community.

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# Ground blind rehab

Evening Sun Outdoor  
Chenango Columnist  
Eric Davis

What is the difference I remember buying a spring steel framed blind in high school that took me an hour to figure out how to put it back into the carrying case it came in. In the last 5-10 years, the pop-up ground blind has undergone a huge transformation to bring it to the top of the list of options for hunters. The hub-style blinds of today are easy to set-up and just as easy to take down. They can also come with magnetic doors and windows for added stealth or mesh windows that allow you to shoot an arrow through them. On the downside, they are somewhat expensive (a good 2-person blind starts at \$99). After investing in a quality ground blind, nobody wants to have something happen that would ruin their blind. A common use for ground blinds is for deer hunting. Since deer are skittish to “new” things in their everyday routine, it pays to set your blind up a few weeks in advance of the season starting so that they get used to its presence. Do

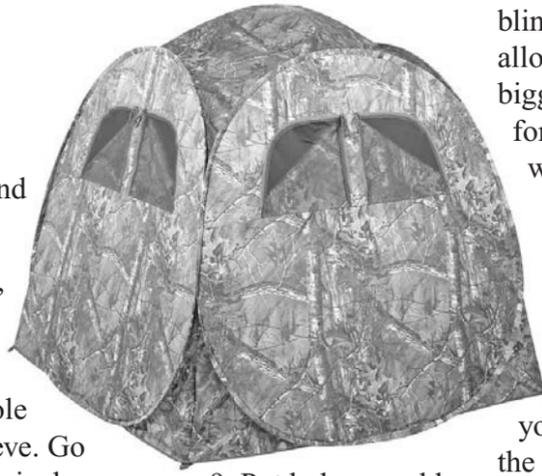
your best to brush it in so that it doesn't stick out as much but they will notice it. The downside to the weather in New York is the unpredictable start of the snowy season. When a heavy snow hits and it builds up on the roof of the blind, its weight forces the top to cave in. Once the top caves in, the weight of the roof is put onto the sides and one or more of the sides will break due to the increase in stress. Usually just one of the poles will break and the hub will still be okay. I had this exact scenario happen to me this past fall at the end of archery season. I went to check on my blind after a morning sit and noticed something was wrong from about 75 yards away. I had poles break on 3 out of the 4 sides after the roof had caved in. I spent about half an hour scooping the snow off the blind before I could break it down the best I could. I dragged it down the hill and put it in the garage to try to melt off the remaining snow and ice. After putting my bow away and changing my clothes, I started looking online at replacement poles for my blind. The model I

have was discontinued (of course) so parts were nowhere to be found. I could order a new hub with 4 poles for \$49.99, but I needed 3 to fix it so I'd spend more on the hubs and poles than I spent on the blind! I ended up complaining about my situation to a friend who said they had also gone through the same situation. However, they had found a solution on an online forum. They said to find fiberglass electric fence posts as they were the same diameter as most of the poles used in ground blinds. Then all you need to do is cut them to length and put them into the pole holders. I had thought about this all winter and finally when the weather broke a couple weeks ago, I spent a Saturday afternoon working on my blind. I am pleased to say that the fence posts worked phenomenally. Here's a quick rundown of how it went.

1. Identify what hub had the broken pole or poles.
2. Remove the hub assembly from the blind using socket wrench. Set all bolts, washers, and nuts aside.
3. Cut the broken pole flush with the end of the sleeve that is cabled to the hub.
4. Put the sleeve into a

bench vise and tighten the vise.

5. Use a 3/8" drill bit to remove the end of the pole from the sleeve. Go for about one inch.
6. Clean out shavings in the sleeve.
7. Put the blunt end of the fence post into the sleeve and make sure it stays snug.
8. Hold the fencepost up to another pole with the ends of their sleeves even, mark the fencepost to match the end of the pole, cut the fencepost.



9. Put hub assembly back together and put the pole ends into their pockets. Test opening and closing hub a few times.
10. If hub holds up to test, put a few drops of superglue into the sleeve where the fencepost is put in. This fix not only saved me from spending a lot of money to repair the

blind, it is going to allow me to use my bigger ground blind for the youth turkey weekend in April. This is critical because it is easy to run out of room when you have two mentors and a youth hunter all in the same blind. If you find yourself getting ready to throw out a hub-style ground blind because the poles broke, give the fiberglass fencepost a try. They cost less than \$2 a piece at farm supply stores so if they don't work, you aren't out that much but if they work you save a lot of money.

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# Starting out small



*Evening Sun Outdoor  
Chenango Columnist  
Eric Davis*

When talking to just about any hunter about how they got into hunting, the story often shifts to starting out hunting small game as a kid. Whether it was squirrels, rabbits, or upland birds, they were the start of a lifelong love of the outdoors. Consider making time this year to take a trip down memory lane and go small game hunting.

Before I was old enough to deer hunt, I looked forward to the Christmas season because it meant that my friends and I could start rabbit hunting on their dairy farm with the conclusion of the muzzleloader season. We hunted with a dog but she wasn't a rabbit dog. Daisy was a small, mixed breed dog they got from the local shelter that went everywhere with Todd and Matt. We would walk up overgrown creek bottoms going from one patch of brush to the next looking for rabbits. We would set up in a triangle around the brush and someone would convince Daisy there was a rat in the

brush (she loved killing barn rats). Once Daisy was in the brush, any rabbits that were hiding inside would come running out and hopefully one of us would get a shot at the fleeing rabbit. Sometimes the brush was too thick for even 10-pound Daisy to fit in so we would have two shooters on the ready and one person would go up and kick and stomp the brush to get any hiding rabbits to leave. We would have a variety of firearms between the three of us. One person carried a .22 rifle for rabbits that stopped in plain sight and the other two carried shotguns, often one 20 gauge and one .410 for running rabbits.

Squirrel hunting was often an early fall activity when I started hunting but now that I goose hunt in September, and archery season starts October 1st I don't even think about squirrel hunting until later in the fall. Honestly, I think about squirrel hunting all fall as they make a ruckus around my treestands while I'm deer hunting. I just wait until deer season is over to hunt them. Hunting squirrels late in the year can be tricky as they don't move a lot since it's cold. It sounds just like late season deer hunting; you need to hunt the food. Oak flats and hickory groves are often productive as squirrels will hang around looking for any leftover nuts on the ground, or they have their stashes of nuts in the area near these trees. I like a .22 rifle with a scope for this. The woods are wide open as most low vegetation has died and all the leaves are off the trees, so a firearm that can shoot a squirrel at a distance is needed. If you want to knock back the population near your treestand, sit right in the stand. Otherwise pick a spot with a decent vantage point and sit there for half an hour, then move if you haven't had any action. Try to stay still and move as little as possible, squirrels are almost always nervous since a lot of things will eat them and they can pick up on movement.

As with any other game species, proper care after the harvest is what leads to good meals. Rabbit stew is one of my favorites. There are very few things better than a slow cooker full of hot stew after working outside in the cold. Squirrel can also make a good stew. I've heard from other hunters that squirrel legs dredged in flour and deep-fried are delicious but I am yet to try this method.

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# Range Bag 101

*Evening Sun Outdoor  
Chenango Columnist  
Eric Davis*

In June I was lucky enough to win a firearm at a NWTF fundraising event. It took a couple weeks for it to be shipped to the local dealer I chose, but I finally went and passed the background check to take possession of the firearm. I also found a place online with clearance turkey hunting shells and the firearm I won is a .410 shotgun. I had them shipped to another local dealer I know and picked the ammo up the same day as I picked the shotgun up. However, I haven't had the time to go shoot it and try out the different ammo I bought to see what shoots the best. I think this weekend I might finally have the free time to go and shoot it, which got me thinking about making sure my range bag is stocked up. Here are some important items to make sure you put in your range bag

before you leave the house.

**1. Range Bag-** Without a range bag, there's nothing to put things into. While you don't need to get a bag, bags are more common and come with lots of pockets and compartments to hold all your gear. A medium-sized toolbox or tackle box can also suffice. If you have a lot of firearms, it may make sense to have a bag/box for each type of firearm. I used bags for shotgun and rifle shooting but a toolbox holds all my black powder shooting accessories.

**2. Ear Protection-** One of the most important pieces of safety equipment is hearing protection. Spending a day on the range without any will likely give you a bad case of tinnitus (ringing of the ears) for days. Spending years on the range without any will lead to premature hearing loss. Ear protection

comes in two major forms, inside the ear and outside the ear. Foam ear plugs are inexpensive and do the job. These are my go to when shooting certain firearms where I find my earmuffs coming off from shouldering the firearm. For most

bench shooting, I go with earmuffs. Earmuffs usually get a higher noise reduction rating (NRR) that earplugs so they tame the bark of firearms better. If you shoot with a group of people and you converse with each other during your range time, an

electronic pair of earmuffs or plugs may be the way to go. These contain a microphone and speakers so you can hear everyday voices and sounds but when a sound is above a certain decibel, they muffle the sound.

**3. Eye Protection-** A piece of safety equipment that is often overlooked, eye protection should be

worn on the range. In the event of a firearm malfunction or the wind blows clay pigeon dust towards the shooter's location, eye protection can save you sight. There are plenty of options out there, you can even find tinted lenses that make it easier to see orange clay birds in cloudy conditions or in bright sunny conditions.

*continued next page*



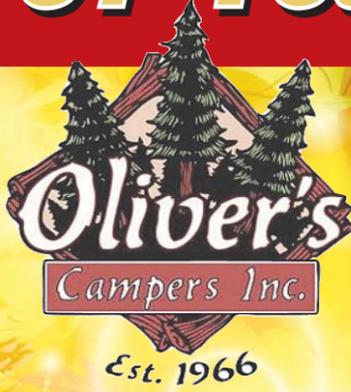
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# Range Bag 101

*Continued*



turkey gun patterning). If you go to a gun club, they will likely have shooting benches set up so you just need a simple V-type of rest or sandbag to put the front of the gun on. While larger than most shooting bags, a full gun rest that holds the butt of the firearm and the forearm or barrel will hold the firearm completely still and will allow for small changes in windage and elevation to fine tune your aim. Look at the Caldwell Lead Sled line of rests to help tame recoil on the bench while allowing precise tuning.

**7. Ammunition-** It may seem silly, but make sure you have ammunition that will work with your firearm. Match the box of ammunition to the caliber/gauge stamped into the side of the barrel. If the firearm is new to you or you aren't thrilled with how it has been performing either just shooting or hunting, bring a couple options of ammunition. Make sure to give your firearm time to cool down between shots as a barrel that is overheated will cause poor accuracy. Mark your target with the ammunition information so you can compare them and decide what ammunition you want to use.

**4. Targets-** What you are aiming at can influence how your range session ends up. When shooting a rifle with a scope, a target with one-inch boxes on the paper and the bullseye in the middle makes it much easier to know what adjustments to make after shooting. Or when patterning a shotgun, a 10" circle is the standard target to use or a paper target with a turkey head and neck portrayed on it. This should also include tape to hold the targets on a backing, or staples if using a piece of wood.

**5. Multitool-** There are few worse feelings that taking the cap off the turrets of a scope and finding that it requires a flat head screwdriver (or a coin in a pinch) to adjust the crosshairs. Some sights require Allen tools to adjust. Look over your firearm and know what you need to bring to make any adjustments.

**6. Gun Rest-** This might not be needed if shooting clay pigeons or handguns, however a good rest is the key to accurate rifle shooting (and



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# Go With It

Evening Sun Outdoor Chenango Columnist Eric Davis

When it comes to hunters, many of us like to have a plan. The plan can be as simple as “Tomorrow I’m going to sit in the stand in the oak flat.” Or can be complex, like “I’m going to go on a 5-state trip turkey hunting next spring to shoot a Grand Slam.” The issue is when something comes up and disrupts that plan. Just like in every other aspect of life, it not getting knocked down that is important, it is getting back up.

Almost 10 years ago when I was fresh out of college and living back at home, I decided to go deer hunting on a weekday when I was off from work. I did not get out of bed right when my alarm went off but rather laid around for a bit before

**The doe kept walking and made it through all my shooting lanes before dropping down a small ravine to cross a stream.**

heading to take a shower. This snowballed into me getting to the winery where I was hunting about the same time as I wanted to already be in a stand. So, I decided to go to the stand with the shortest walk from where you park. As I rounded the bend in the private road where you park for that stand, I saw an SUV parked there that belonged to an older guy that knew the winery owners. I knew he was in the stand I wanted to go to. I almost went home after seeing that, but I kept on going down the road and parked at the very bottom. It had a longer walk but I decided to go to a stand we call The Stone Wall.

It was the coldest morning of the season and had no wind. I felt like I had to be scaring away every deer within 10 miles with how loud walking on the frozen leaves was. I wanted to go slow to minimize noise, but I was so late that I wanted to walk fast at the same time. After what felt like a half hour of slowly walking, I made it to the stand. Once up in the stand I realized that in my rush to get out of the house, I forgot my binoculars! After a while, I started to hear footsteps coming through the frozen leaves above me on the hillside. I scanned but could not see what was making the noise. The walking was getting louder so I knew it was getting closer. I

grabbed my rifle down from the tree hanger and turned the power on the scope up. Finally, I spotted some movement and could make out legs coming through some bushes about 80 yards away. The deer walked out from the cover, and I could tell it did not have antlers. I had a doe tag and was thinking about filling it when I heard more footsteps while watching the doe stay still. I decided to hang on and to try to see what the second deer was before shooting the doe.

After a little bit, I could see legs again in the bushes but couldn’t make out the body or head. “What a great day to forget your binoculars,” I said to myself as I squinted. The doe kept walking and made it through all my shooting lanes before dropping down a small ravine to cross a stream. I saw her come back up on the other side and knew my chances to shoot her were gone. However, the second deer managed to walk perfectly behind bushes until the edge of the ravine. Before it could start to drop down, I pulled out my grunt tube and grunted a few times. I saw its legs all stop as soon as I called. I shouldered my rifle and tried using the scope to see if it was a buck, but it was perfectly behind a bush. I heard a twig snap in front of me and looked up to see the doe had come back to investigate the grunting.

With the second deer not moving an inch since I grunted, I said to myself a filled doe tag beats unfilled tags. So, I shifted to my right and shouldered my rifle as I took the safety off. I aimed at the shoulder of the doe and squeezed the trigger. She fell to the ground and was done for. The crashing in the leaves from this was enough to get the second deer to take a few steps to see what was going on. When it did this, I could tell it was a buck with a good-sized body. I ran the bolt of my rifle, put the crosshairs on his shoulder, and squeezed. I watched as he too fell like a pile of bricks to the ground but rolled over the ravine edge out of sight. I gave it a few minutes and I climbed down out of the stand. I walked up to where the buck had been since I could see the doe on the ground from the stand. I got to the drop for the ravine and saw the buck 10 feet away in the middle of the stream.

I took off almost all my clothing that I had layered up to fight the frigid temperature and dressed out both the buck and the doe. I then made two very hot and sweaty trips dragging the deer back to my vehicle. When I was all done, I was glad that I didn’t go home after seeing the other hunter’s vehicle first thing!



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# Less Bites, More Fun



Evening Sun Outdoor  
Chenango Columnist  
Eric Davis

Nothing is quite as annoying as the constant buzzing of mosquitoes around your ears while sitting in the stand during bow season. In the spring you deal with mosquitoes and blackflies while trying to listen for gobbling turkeys and then while trying to stay still while waiting for a tom to come into your calling. On top of flying insects, you also must be on the lookout for crawling pests, like ticks. I personally removed two embedded ticks this spring during turkey season. To make your time outdoors more enjoyable, finding a way to keep these literal bloodsuckers at bay should be a high priority.

The first option to help alleviate the issue is to pre-treat your clothing and equipment. This is my preferred way to combat ticks. Spray your clothing with a

0.5% permethrin treatment and let it dry for 24 hours before wearing it. This treatment even lasts for a few trips through the laundry before needing to be reapplied. This treatment also repels mosquitoes.

The next option for treatment would be a repellent actively applied while afield. This can be a chemical treatment such as DEET or a natural treatment such as essential oils. This treatment option can work in some situations but might not be ideal in others. These treatments, especially natural ones, can be greasy. A greasy feeling on your hands can make handling equipment difficult especially fishing rods and reels. It also can transfer onto your lures and/or bait, which could be detected by fish making them not bite. Additionally, these treatments do wear off and need to be re-applied every so often. When working in the Adirondacks in 2013, I

endured the black fly swarms that are famous up there. The main problem that I had was keeping them from biting my hands as I was trying to write notes into my field journal. After trying out a handful of products, I found a product that worked at a gas station. It was a thick gel that had citronella in it.

A second option for in the field treatment would come in the form of heated chemicals, such as candles and torches. This can be a good option when fishing from a boat that is not moving fast, as the chemical that is heated makes a zone of chemical around the heat source. Another popular form of this is the Thermacell. This is a small butane powered device that heats up a chemically treated pad to make a zone of repellent. It gets great

reviews for repelling black flies from spring bear hunters in Canada. I have used one for a couple of years and am happy with it. The only thing to remember with these treatments is that it takes time for the zone of repellent to become established and heavy winds can make the repellent useless.

A third option that my wife and I are trying after talking with a few people that use them are magnetic repellents. These little cards get placed in a

sock or on a necklace with the magnetic strip facing your skin. The card creates a repellent zone after 24 to 36 hours that lasts for 3 months.

After spending time afield, particularly if you went through tall grass or low brush, you should check yourself for ticks. They will head towards pockets on the body. Look at armpits, the groin, behind your knees, and along your hairline. If you do find a tick that is attached, it is recommended that you remove it by grabbing it as far forward on the body with tweezers and pulling it straight up. DO NOT smother the tick with oils or Vaseline. This will cause the tick to regurgitate as it tries to detach, which is when

it can pass the bacteria that causes Lyme disease.

If you are not able to fully keep the other biting insects at bay, you may find yourself itching and scratching irritated bites. Excessive scratching at bites can lead to infection. To battle this, you can use antihistamine creams applied directly to the bite area or antihistamine pills. Black fly bites can swell so ice can be useful to combat this.

Whether going afield to hunt, fish, shoot, or just to go for a hike, hopefully this article can help you be able to stay in out longer by dealing with the biting insects that can cause you to stop early.

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# My New Favorite Way to Cook Venison

Evening Sun Outdoor  
Chenango Columnist  
Eric Davis

Whatever cuts were good for grilling were marinated in Italian dressing and then grilled.

and sister both refused to try eating any of it. Once I was in college, I turned to ground venison for a lot of quick and easy meals like tacos or sloppy joes. I would often have the entire first deer of the year minus the

backstraps and tenderloins turned into ground venison. I used ground venison so

much that now my wife, who I met in college and cooked for, won't eat sloppy joes at all, and tacos and chili are tolerated on a once-a-month basis. In college I also started using a slow cooker for roasts. Fast forward a few more years and I bought a pellet grill and smoker after my aunts and uncles sent me a check to buy one as a wedding gift. I have been learning how to use the pellet grill and smoker for a variety of foods. I have perfected racks of ribs and pork loin roasts. Venison pepperoni and summer sausage have also been produced

using the smoking features of the grill. However, I have continuously been trying to find the best way to cook venison backstraps outside of in a cast iron skillet with butter and onions. That method requires you to slice the venison before cooking it. This makes it easy to overcook the venison and dry it out. I like to cook the venison as a big piece and then slice it to serve it, just like a prime rib. One method that worked was to sear the backstrap on all sides in a cast iron skillet, then to put the whole thing in a 400-degree oven until the internal temperature was what you want it to be (145 for medium). This method worked but it would often produce a lot of splattering in the oven and make it a mess.

When I got a book on smoking meats a few years ago at Christmas, I read about reverse searing beef steaks and was confused about it. The reverse sear works by

**Carving the roast at the end, seeing, and tasting how moist and delicious it was cemented the reverse sear into my venison cooking repertoire.**

slowly getting the internal temperature to how you like your meat cooked, then letting it rest for 10 minutes before searing it in a hot pan so that it gets some color and crust on the outside. Reverse searing can be done using the oven, but the book talked about using a smoker for the first portion of the cooking.

So finally this spring when the weather broke, I decided to try doing a reverse sear on some venison steaks as a test run. I put a rub on the steaks and refrigerated them for a couple of hours. I started the pellet smoker and took the steaks out to get to room temperature while the smoker heated up. Once the smoker hit 250 degrees, I put the steaks on with a wireless thermometer in the thickest one. The receiver was set to 135 degrees, so it would beep when the temperature was reached. Once that happened, I removed the steaks and put them on a plate. Then I put a tin foil cover over them to trap in any moisture leaving the steaks for 10 minutes. I heated up a cast iron

pan, so it was hot when the 10 minutes was over, and I added avocado oil to the pan (it has a high smoke point, so it won't burn in the pan). Then I seared the venison for about 2 minutes on each side. I removed the steaks and cut into one of them to see how it looked. It looked gorgeous! The middle was pink with juices running out of it once cut and the outside had a nice crust with the beginning of a smoke ring from the low temperature on the smoker. The only thing better than the look was the taste! A couple of weeks later, I decided to try the reverse sear on a hindquarter roast since it wasn't cut into steaks yet. I did everything the same as the first time and it also turned out spectacularly. Carving the roast at the end, seeing, and tasting how moist and delicious it was cemented the reverse sear into my venison cooking repertoire. I encourage you to try the reverse sear this year because you won't be disappointed!



For the first 3 or 4 years that I deer hunted and was successful, I tended to cook my venison in two ways.

Everything else was turned into jerky. I was in high school and my mom

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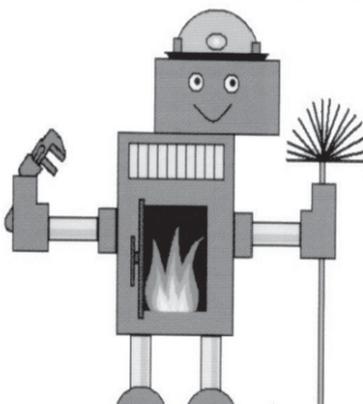
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# So Many Options

Evening Sun Outdoor Chenango Columnist Eric Davis



It is that magical time of year for outdoor recreationalists because there are so many different options of what to do. Archery season began October 1, the salmon are running in the Salmon River, pheasant and duck seasons begin Saturday October 16. With so much to choose from, how can you decide what to do with your limited time off? Use the

*If it is supposed to be warm and dry, an upland bird hunt can be a great way to enjoy an autumn day. The DEC stocks pheasants on some pieces of state land*

churning of the water from the rain mixes up invertebrates and plant seeds in the water and makes them easier for the ducks to feed on. Rain also hides camouflaged hunters better by limiting the ducks' visibility. A spinning wing decoy will get incoming ducks to try landing with it so put this where you want to be shooting and leave a little pocket around it. Early in the season, a decoy spread of a dozen or two is all you need. If it is supposed to be warm and dry, an upland bird hunt can be a great way to enjoy an autumn day. The DEC stocks pheasants on some pieces of state land, so put on your blaze orange with either some buddies and/or your hunting dog. Work into the wind with your dog so they can get the scent of any birds. If hunting without a dog, walk in a line with the hunters spaced apart so birds can't run through between them. Just be mindful that archery season is open so make sure you are following proper safe handling of your firearms and are careful of your shooting directions.

Warm days may also call for getting cooled down in a creek or river. You might catch the tail end of the salmon run up north or you might find brown trout getting ready to spawn in rivers locally. Fall bass fishing can be fun as they are feeding aggressively to get ready for winter. As they chase baitfish in shallow, topwater baits can lead to some spectacular action.

If a cold front comes in, it may be best to sit in a treestand or ground blind. Cold overnight temperatures can lead to deer feeding longer into the morning before heading to bedding areas. As they head to lay down, now the sun is up and you can get a shot. As the day length gets shorter, bucks will start to use scrapes and rubs to mark their territory as the rut approaches. Rattling can be a good technique as the bucks are establishing territories and the sound of fighting bucks can draw other bucks in to get in on the action. The first does will start to come into heat in late October and the bucks will start cruising trying to find the first receptive doe of the year. Halloween is a favorite day of many bowhunters to start all day sits.

Do not be afraid to double-dip or mix-and-match your days. Duck hunt in the morning and then bow hunt in the afternoon, or bow hunt the morning and then hit the pheasant field after lunch. With so many options available, there's no excuse to stay at home!

weather to help you decide.

If rain is in the forecast, consider skipping an archery hunt and hit the swamp for wood ducks. Rainy days are often called ducky days. The

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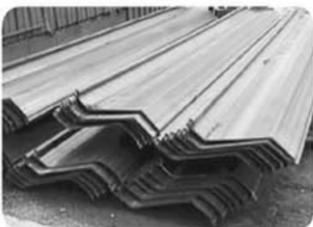
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# Fall Turkey Tactics

*Evening Sun Outdoor  
Chenango Columnist  
Eric Davis*

While the thunderous gobbles of mature toms make the spring turkey season so exciting, a good fall turkey hunt can feel more rewarding. Autumn has turkeys focus on one thing, getting ready for winter. To go into the cold season as prepared as they can be, turkeys must pack on fat reserves that will help them get by when snow is covering the ground (and the foods they usually eat). Because of this, hunting turkeys in the fall typically relies on patterning the turkeys. A turkey has a simple life motto of, "if I survived yesterday, I'll do the same thing again today." This lends itself to making fall hunting easier as long as you know what the turkeys did yesterday. Getting to know their schedule, such as hitting a corn field in the morning or being in a block of woods in the afternoon lets you create your game plan. If you know the birds travel plan, you can set up an ambush spot. Make sure you get there a little early so you can get settled in and make sure of your shooting lanes. If you know the turkeys' pattern well enough, you don't need to bring any calls. Calling fall turkeys is a different game than calling spring turkeys. In the fall, toms and last year's jakes form into bachelor groups that generally do their own thing compared to the hen and poult flocks. If you know the whereabouts of a bachelor flock, using some gobbler or jake yelps can convince the group that either a member is nearby. They may also

investigate because there is a pecking order within the flock so they will come try to put this new guy into his place. Where most callers have success in the fall, is calling to the hen and poult flocks. Multiple hens with their poults from this spring form larger flocks where they use the strength in number approach to surviving. However, the flaw in

their system is that poults can wander off without being noticed in the crowd. When a poult gets lost or too far from the others, they will call to see where the flock has gotten. This call is referred to as a kee-kee. It often sounds more like a whistle than a "turkey call." When hens hear this, they will cluck yelp in response. It is like the wild turkey version of

Marco Polo. The ability to replicate the kee-kee makes a hunter's success rate go up. To produce this high-pitched call, use a diaphragm call what has 2 reeds and doesn't have any cuts in the reeds. Another calling tactic that can work is to challenge the dominant hen in a flock. The flock has a pecking order just like the bachelor group

does, with one hen being the alpha. If you call aggressively at her, she may respond with her own excited yelps and cackles. Generally, I try to mimic what I hear from the live bird that way I don't get too aggressive and cause her to take the flock the opposite direction. One hunting technique that deserves to be in its own category is fall turkey hunting with dogs. It is legal to use dogs to fall turkey hunt in New York, as well as dozens of other states. The approach is

somewhat simple but complex all the while. You go out with your dog to get on the scent of a flock of birds, set the dog off and the dog breaks up the flock. You then get the dog and pick a spot to sit and call. Since the birds want to be back together, you call like one of them and hope they reconvene within range of you. This is a technique that still requires you to have a good idea of where the turkeys are at a given time so you can get the dog onto fresh scent.



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# Outdoors Recreation Stages

Evening Sun Outdoor Chenango Columnist Eric Davis



When someone takes the Hunter Education Course in New York, they learn about the 5 stages of hunter development. The stages cover the typical transition a hunter goes through and they do not necessarily go through the stages in the same order as other hunters do. The five stages can easily be used to describe fishermen or women also.

The shooting stage typically is first. The focus of the hunter is to get shots off without a real focus on the quality of the shot. Due to being “trigger happy,” the

hunter can make bad shots that aren’t lethal to game or can be dangerous to other hunters. Hunters in this stage move out of it quickly with the help of experienced mentors and putting in some time on the target range. For fishing, I would replace the word shooting with casting. The focus is on fishing as many places as possible and can lead to making casts that end up in trees or over powerlines.

The limiting-out stage happens when the hunters uses limiting out as their measure of hunt success. A hunt that results in less than a limit of game is considered a failure. Due to the focus on harvesting a limit, hunters in this stage also can take dangerous shots that put other hunters in potential harm. Again, experienced mentors can help hunters grow out of this stage. This stage can be seen in fishing with anglers wanting to catch their limit of fish. In fishing, this could include keeping fish that are below the legal keeping size to make the total catch appear bigger and/or better.

When a hunter is selective and judges their success by the quality of

the animal instead of quantity, this is called the trophy stage. The hunter will pass up animals that aren’t deemed to be a trophy. Most of the time in hunting, this will apply to big game hunting. Waterfowl hunters aiming to harvest beautiful drake ducks can also be called trophy hunters. There are plenty of fishermen that are on the hunt for the fish of a lifetime.

The method stage is when a hunter puts more focus on the technique over the quality or quantity of game harvested. For big game hunting, this could mean using archery or black powder equipment for the first time. It could also mean trying to track a deer in fresh snow. For small game hunters, it may be hunting with a dog for the first time. For fishermen, it could be trying to catch a trout on a fly rod or catching bass on a weedless frog in the lily pads. The size of the fish or number of fish doesn’t matter if it is caught using that specific method.

The last stage is the sportsman stage. In this stage, success is measured by the entire experience of the hunt. It includes an appreciation for the animal hunted, the technique used, and the companionship of other hunters. In this stage, a hunt can be called successful without any animals being harvested. In fishing, spending the day with friends on the lake may be considered a success without any fish being caught.

I would say that hunters can be in different stages at the same time, particularly if they are trying different types of hunting (small game, waterfowl, big game). I know that I am at least. With my compound bow I pass up smaller bucks in hopes of seeing a bigger buck (trophy stage). During firearms season, I focus more on filling the freezer with venison (limiting-out stage). My waterfowl hunting has come to focus on hunting with good friends and maybe harvesting some ducks (sportsman stage).

When it comes to fishing, I am at a hybrid stage between trophy stage and method stage. Due to my allergy when consuming fish, I don’t try to catch fish to put on my dinner plate. So instead, I try to focus on technique and catching bigger fish that I release anyway. My next adventure is going to be fly fishing. I took a fly rod and a couple boxes of flies from my grandfather’s house after he passed last year with the goal of learning how to use them. No matter what stage or stages you may be in, the key is to get outside and enjoy yourself. And don’t forget to invite someone new to come with you!

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