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Issue 320

November/December 2024

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Deer Hunt

B.A.S.S. News

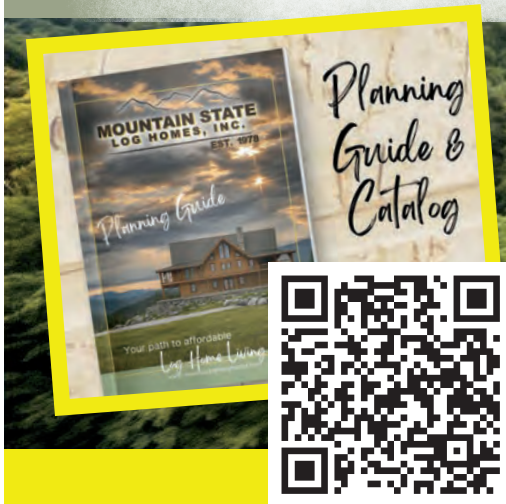
DNR Updates



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Cover Photo

Tim Mullins, pastor from Logan County, got this huge wild boar in Logan County. His butcher, from past experience from domestic pigs, estimated the weight as over 500 pounds. 1st boar on the cover of this magazine.

Some great bow bucks have been taken already this year. Send in your wild game pics from 2024. Page 38 details.

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Small Game & Trapping Opens

SOUTH CHARLESTON, W.Va. — The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (WVDNR) today announced that hunting and trapping seasons for several small game and fur-bearing species are set to open in West Virginia on Nov. 2.

“West Virginia has a hunting season for everyone and our trapping opportunities just add to the number of options folks have for enjoying outdoor adventures in the fall and winter,” said WVDNR Director Brett McMillion. “These seasons also provide an excellent chance for experienced hunters to share their knowledge, so we encourage everyone to invite a new

hunter along for the adventure.”

Small game hunting is allowed during West Virginia’s deer seasons, except for the first three days of buck firearms season, when trapping fur-bearing animals is permitted. Hunters should note that during buck season, No. 4 shot or smaller and slugs can only be carried if the hunter is also legally hunting deer or bear. Legal firearms for small game hunting include combination rifle-shotgun (over-under, etc.). It is illegal to hunt with any centerfire rifle, rimfire larger than .22 caliber or air rifles other than .22 caliber. Additionally, shot larger than

continue to the next page

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Baylee Belcher used her compound bow to get this buck.



Dawson Morison hunted in Mingo County for a huge buck.



Cole Huff, from Amma, used a compound for this massive buck.



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No. 4 or solid ball ammunition is prohibited in counties not open to buck firearms season.

Trapping Regulations

Trappers harvesting beaver, bobcat, fisher and otter must electronically check their catches within 30 days after the close of the respective season. A WVDNR-issued game check confirmation number shall be recorded in writing with the trapper's name and address and shall be attached and remain attached to each pelt or whole animal until sold, tanned, processed into commercial fur or mounted.

Trappers must also obtain a Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) seal for each bobcat and otter pelt harvested in West Virginia. Federal law requires this seal on all bobcat and otter pelts shipped to international markets. Trappers may obtain a CITES seal from the Elkins Operations Center or their local WVDNR district office. Contact information is available at WVDnr.gov/contact.

River Otter Research Project



Young Jason Lowell used his compound bow to harvest this huge whitetail buck.

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The WVDNR is also reminding trappers about its otter research project to examine annual survival, harvest rates, habitat use and movement rates. Radio-tagged otters are legal game during trapping season. Trappers who harvest a radio-tagged otter should contact Holly Morris at the District 4 office at 304-256-6947 to report the tag number and return the transmitter. More information about the otter research project,

including photos of tags and transmitters, can be found on page 5 of the 2024–2025 West Virginia Hunting and Trapping Regulations Summary.

Successful otter trappers who deliver a legally harvested and electronically registered skinned otter carcass to a WVDNR district office will be eligible to receive a \$20 gift card. Call your local district office to arrange a pick-up if unable to deliver the carcass. Collected biological samples will as-

sist biologists in making decisions regarding future trapping seasons.

Hunters 15 and older are required to have a valid West Virginia hunting license and form of identification while hunting. To purchase a hunting and trapping license, visit WVhunt.com. For more information about small game season dates and limits, consult page 2 in the 2024–2025 Hunting and Trapping Regulations Summary at WVdnr.gov/hunting-regulations.

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Bryan Utt hunted in Gilmer County for this nice 12 point buck. Photo courtesy of WV Wild Outdoors in Birch River.



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United States Hunting Statistics

What Percentage Of United States Citizens Participate In The Sport Of Hunting?

Since 2020, there have been over 15 million hunting-license holders in the US. However, because hunters sometimes purchase licenses in multiple states while other hunters, such as children, may not need licenses this number doesn't tell the whole story.

In 2021, Statista found that 25.87 million Americans aged six and older participated in some type of hunting activity. There were 309 million Americans in that age group overall, meaning that about 8.4 percent of US citizens participate in the sport of hunting. Is Hunting Participation Growing Or Shrinking And Why?

You may see hunters tout the fact that hunting license sales numbers have been increasing for nearly a decade, reaching 15.2 million in 2021 up 8.6 percent from 14 million in 1960. However, this is actually quite misleading for several reasons.

First, although the number of paid license holders has been increasing since about 2010, it had been in freefall since its peak of 16.2 million in 1982. In other words, despite the recent rise, numbers are still lower than they were 40 years ago when the population was much smaller.

Plus, speaking of population, it's grown much faster than the number of paid license holders. The US population in 1960 was

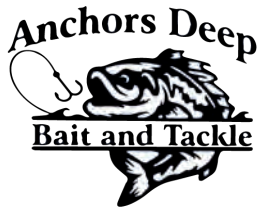
180 million, meaning about 7.7 percent of the population had a hunting license. Yet in 2020, the population was 83.4 percent high-continue to the next page



Jeremy McCloy bow hunted in Wood County for his 10 point..

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er at 330 million, meaning just 4.6 percent had a hunting license. That means the participation rate has declined by over 40 percent. Paid Hunting License Holders vs US Population Over Time

In reality, this decline is likely even worse since requirements

for licenses have only gotten stricter since 1960. Indeed, the numbers show that the number of Americans aged six and older participating in hunting has decreased slightly each year since 2017. Over the five-year period from 2017-2021, hunting participation dropped from 27.62 to 25.87 million.

Why Is It Shrinking?

The biggest reason is that Americans have been moving to the cities over the last 50 years[4]. In 1960, only 70 percent of Americans lived in the city. By 2021, that number was 82 percent.

Although urban dwellers can certainly still go hunting, it's a lot more difficult. Those in the country may be able to hunt right in their own backyard while those in the city probably have to drive

far away and plan an entire trip around their hunt.

These geographical factors and the lack of connection with nature in general encourage different ac-
continue to page 10



Ciara Casto hunted in Randolph Co. for this unusual palmated 15 point buck.



Robin Sears used her compound bow for this wide racked Wyoming County buck.

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tivities in the city. Indeed, the US Fish & Wildlife Service found that 13 percent of rural residents participated in hunting versus just three percent of urban residents.

Remember how the number of paid license holders has been increasing? Ironically, that may be the very reason overall hunter participation is dropping.

Many states have increased license costs. More importantly, they've made licensing schemes excessively complicated. You may need a certain license, various permits, different tags, all of which cost money and may require applications and lotteries.

This all represents costs and hassles that deter people from hunting.

The Myth of Cultural Changes

Many claim, and it's easy to believe, that the decrease in hunter participation is merely due to changing values in the United States. The idea is that people aren't as interested in hunting as they used to be, the same way people aren't as interested in quilting.

However, a little research shows this isn't true. For one thing, if interest in hunting were declining, there would be more hunters in older generations than younger. Yet the average age of an American hunter is 43.5, barely older than the overall average age of 38.

Moreover, research by the National Shooting Sports Foundation has actually found that interest in and approval for hunting has been increasing. For instance, 80 percent of Americans currently approve of legal hunting versus 73 percent in 1995.

This all suggests that it's the barriers of geography and regulation that keep people from hunting, not their lack of interest.

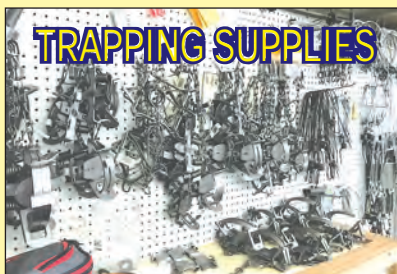
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Austin Starcher got a 16 point bow buck in Wirt County.



Levi Williams bow fished for a huge Ohio River carp.

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What Methods Of Hunting Are Most Popular?

The most popular hunting method is generally considered to be the rifle. When it comes to firearms, research shows 11 million hunters used rifles in 2020 versus 7.9 million for shotguns and only three million for handguns.



Cindy Payne caught a 24" rainbow trout. Photo courtesy of Middle Mountain Sporting Goods in Elkins.



Ashley Thompson hunted a fine Tyler Co. buck. Photo courtesy of Tyler Outdoor Supply in Middlebourne.

Statistics from the National Deer Association on deer harvest produce similar results for the 2020 season. Most successful kills were with firearms, usually a rifle. What Game Animals Are the Most Popular to Hunt?

Big game represents the most popular segment of animals to be hunted in the U.S..

Deer is by far the most popular game animal in the United States. Hunters spent an average of 14 days in 2016 hunting deer, more than any other animal, or over 57 percent of all hunting days. Rabbit was the next most frequently hunted animal at about 10 percent followed by wild turkey at less than seven percent.

How Many Jobs Are Supported By The Hunting Industry?

Hunting supports many different types of employment from out-

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fitter clerks and salesmen to park rangers and guides. Research by Statista has determined that there are about 15,550 employees in the hunting and trapping sector in the US. That number has been fairly stable over the last decade or so, and the industry is expected to add a few hundred jobs through

continue to the next page

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Additionally, it can be difficult to define exactly what a "hunting job" is, but the activity of hunting creates economic activity and growth throughout various sectors. Consider that Cabela's alone employs over 19,000 people. Although many of them are accountants at the corporate office or spend as much time selling kayaks as crossbows, hunting nevertheless supports much of their livelihood.

As a result, the Association of Fish and Wildlife estimates[13] that hunting supports over 525,000 jobs in the US in one way or another. This equates to \$21.5 billion in salaries and wages each year in economic impact.

Gender

Hunting has long been viewed as a male-dominated activity. For the most part, this impression is

accurate. As of 2019, roughly nine in 10 American hunters are men. Men also have a participation rate of eight percent versus just one percent for women.

However, studies have found that this number varies a lot by location. States and regions with easier access to hunting and elab-



Brooklyn Horrocks, from Dixie, bow hunted a great buck.

orate cultures around it often have far more female hunters. In Wyoming, for example, 22 percent of hunters are female, more than one in five.

Race

American hunters are predominantly white. The most extensive survey that looked at hunter race was the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Ser-

continue to the next page



Jeanne Hughes used her compound bow for a whitetail buck.



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vice's National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation published in 2016. They surveyed over 250,000 people and found that of the over 11,000 that participated in hunting that year, less than 10 were black or Asian. 97 percent were white with two percent representing "other" races, likely Native American.

Hispanics as a cultural group also hunted less than non-Hispanics. While Hispanics are roughly 17 percent of the US population, they represent only three percent of hunters and have a hunter participation rate of just one percent.

Age
There is a widespread myth that hunters tend to be older or that the

hunting population is aging. This simply isn't the case. Despite being the largest age group, seniors aged 65 and older had the lowest hunter participation rate overall at just three percent.

Hunting By Age Statistics

The ages that hunt the most relative to their proportion of the survey and therefore the US population are those 45-64, or the middle aged.

Hunting Statistics By State

Next, we look at hunting statistics by state as reported by state wildlife agencies.

Texas boasts the country's largest hunting population at over a million hunters. However, Texas is one of the largest states, both by

area and population, so this isn't surprising. What we find more interesting is the hunter participation rate
continue to the next page



Jeremy Allen used his compound for a quality Kanawha Co. buck.



Kim Moore bagged a nice fall turkey.



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tion rate, or the number of people in each state who are hunters.

The info displays both hunter participation by state, for which South Dakota leads with 24 percent, and the total number of hunters. How Much Do Hunters Spend In The United States And What Do They Spend It On?

Hunters have a huge economic impact, both federally and at the state level.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service also found in their 2016 survey that hunters spent over \$26 billion that year on hunting, or \$2,287 per hunter. This includes everything from the food on hunting trips to hunting licenses to hunting magazines.

Equipment is nearly half of all hunting spending in the US, and hunting-specific equipment, such as rifles, bows and sights, is the

largest category overall, even more than vehicles and land, purchases with hefty price tags.

In fact, that works out to over \$7 billion on those items alone. And since we were curious how that broke down, we know you are too.

Research by the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies found that hunting generates \$5.3 billion in federal tax revenue as well as \$3.4 billion in state and local tax revenue for a total of \$8.7 billion each year. This breaks down to \$23.8 million per day.

How Is That Revenue Used By The Government?

Many are unaware that the tax revenue from hunting is generated continue to the next page

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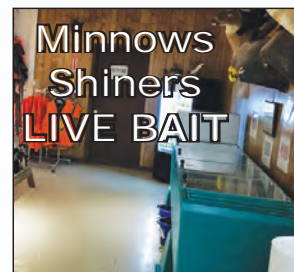
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Shawn Stidham used a crossbow for a Putnam County 8 point buck.



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ally used for wildlife conservation, wildlife research and hunter education. In fact, nearly all the money generated from the sale of licenses, permits and tags is used to fund state conservation agencies and maintain public lands. This alone provides \$1.8 billion for conservation efforts each year.

Additionally, the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937, commonly known as the Pittman-Robertson Act, specifically directs tax revenue from hunting

equipment towards conservation. It levies an 11-percent excise tax on firearms, ammunition and archery equipment. Half of this money goes towards hunter education programs while the other half is used for wildlife conservation programs, including the acquisition of land for reserves and reintroduction of species.

Elk is the best example of this. Since 1937, elk have been reintroduced into eastern states where they'd gone extinct by 1937. Many of these states have even begun operating managed elk hunts.

Estimates suggest that hunters spend between \$3 and \$5 billion on equipment taxed by the Pittman-Robertson Act each year generating upwards of \$324 million annually. Since its inception, the act has distributed \$12 billion to its various programs.

Bowhunters spend over \$13 billion each year on hunting. In 2016, they spent \$1.6 billion on bows and arrows alone.

According to the 2016 survey from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, American hunters spend

\$2,287 each year. This is primarily on equipment.

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Stacy Hart caught her personal best rainbow trout.

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Young Zada Mayle got her 1st bow buck. Photo courtesy of Tyler Outdoor Supply in Middlebourne.

Hunter Education For New Hunters

SOUTH CHARLESTON, W.Va. — As opening dates for fall hunting seasons approach, the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (WVDNR) is reminding new hunters who were born on or after Jan. 1, 1975, that they need to complete a certified hunter education class before they can purchase a hunting license.

“The WVDNR’s hunter education class is an essential part of ensuring that all new hunters in West Virginia are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to hunt safely, ethically and responsibly,” said WVDNR Director Brett McMillion.

The two-day, 12-hour class is free and offered at various locations around the state. The class covers topics such as gun safety, wildlife management, ethics, survival, first aid, game identification and other need-to-know information. Once a hunter completes the class, they must also complete a hands-on firearm practical and pass a final exam under the supervision of a Natural Resources Police officer or volunteer hunter



Emily Parish used a crossbow in Wood Co. for a nice buck.



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tion certification because it will allow them to hunt in other states that may have different hunter education requirements,” said Natural Resources Police Colonel Bobby Cales.

continue to the next page



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West Virginia's Fall Hunting Seasons

West Virginia offers several small and big game hunting seasons throughout the fall. The first hunting opportunity comes on Aug. 31 with the first split of the black bear firearms season. Additional black bear firearms seasons open in September through December. Squirrel season is the next to open (Sept. 14), followed by the archery season for white-tailed deer, black bear and wild boar (Sept. 28). Additional hunt-



Jennifer Hall caught her 1st musky from the Kanawha River.



Johnny Richards, from Rock Cave, got a BIGGEN with a bow.

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ing seasons for wild turkey come in October. The early firearms season for antlerless deer opens Oct. 24, with additional dates in November and December. The buck firearms season is Nov. 25 – Dec. 8.

To learn more about West Virginia's hunting seasons, download a copy of the Hunting Regulations Summary at WVdnr.gov/hunting-regulations. To purchase a West Virginia hunting license, visit WVhunt.com.

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Deer In The Rear View Mirror

I don't know about the rest of you deer hunters, but I can't remember how many times I have been surprised by deer that suddenly appeared right under my treestand. Many times that has worked out better for the deer than for me. Murphy's Law is real. Whenever I spend most of my time watching one direction, I'm nearly always looking the wrong way.

These days, my old ears no longer provide the audible detection system that worked when I was younger. Now, I must depend almost exclusively on my eyes to "see" all game animals. Unfortunately, a deer's eyesight features a much wider field of view than mine, it works better in low light conditions and they can detect quick movement over 200 yards

away. They have the visual advantage. On top of that, deer have better noses than bloodhounds. They can smell a hunter half a mile upwind.

One of the best pieces of deer hunting advice I was ever given was to look for "deer parts" instead of a whole deer. We often get our first glimpse of a head, leg, tail or even an ear twitching before we see the whole animal. When we watch deer that are moving normally, it's obvious "the stealth mode" is in their DNA. When they stop, they blend into the surrounding woods.

One way for hunters to avoid the
continue to page 20

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Ronnie Drake harvested a 10 point whitetail buck in Wood Co..

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“deer radar” as we travel through the woods is to mimic deer behavior. One technique is to take one step. Use the time it would take for three more steps to slowly scan your surroundings. Then, take another step and repeat. A lot of the deer who see a hunters walking in a direction that does not approach them directly will be more curious than threatened. As long as you don’t make prolonged eye contact, and they don’t think you see them, many deer will just stand motionless and watch you move away from them.

Some deer will even follow a hunter to see what they’re up to. Natural curiosity is one of the few whitetail weaknesses we can exploit. That’s why calling, rattling, decoys and doe urine can often lure in a buck

One of the first deer hunts with my youngest son took place in the Monongahela National Forest. Late morning of opening day found us making a fast trip back to the truck. We desperately needed to warm up and put on more clothes - before we froze to death. Both of us stopped dead in our

tracks at the sound of a branch snapping 40 yards behind us. There stood a big buck, right in the middle of the trail. He must have been concentrating on keeping us in sight. Otherwise, he would have never stepped on that branch. Although we had plenty of time, both of us were too cold, shaky and surprised to put a scope on him. He hesitated for a few seconds then simply walked off the trail and disappeared. If either of us had been watching the trail behind us, my son might have been able to make that shot.

Be safe and good luck this year.



Justin Russell arrowed a heavy beamed buck in Nicholas Co..



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Hillbilly Squirrel Hunting

At some point in recent history, squirrel hunting fell down the totem pole of upland game acceptability. Doves, quail, grouse, rabbits, and ring-necked pheasants are a species not even native to this country all command more admiration and respect from a genteel crowd than squirrels. That's a shame, because squirrels are perhaps the most abundant, accessible game animal in North America.

Still, there's something of a stigma attached to hunting them. They're rodents, chased in the hills and hollers by hillbillies (as a fun aside, the gray squirrel is the state game animal of Kentucky). Fortunately, stigmas have never bothered hillbillies all that much. We just keep right on shooting

and eating squirrels, taking quiet pride in the woodsmanship learned along the way, and stopping to appreciate all the good country we still have mostly to ourselves.

But if you want to pal around with people like us, welcome to the fold. These 25 tips will help you get started.

1. Become an Amateur Arborist

A squirrel's diet changes depending on season and location, but generally, during fall hunting seasons, they're eating hard mast like acorns and hickory nuts. Simply knowing how to identify those trees by their bark, leaf shape, and mast they produce is the first step in finding squirrels. A close second is knowing where those trees are likely to grow in the forest.

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Understand that and you can frequently eliminate unproductive squirrel country simply by looking
continue to page 24



Carter Meadows shot a 10 pt. Nicholas Co. buck. Photo courtesy of WV Wild Outdoors in Birch River.



Jerrold Terral bagged a huge Boone County bow buck.

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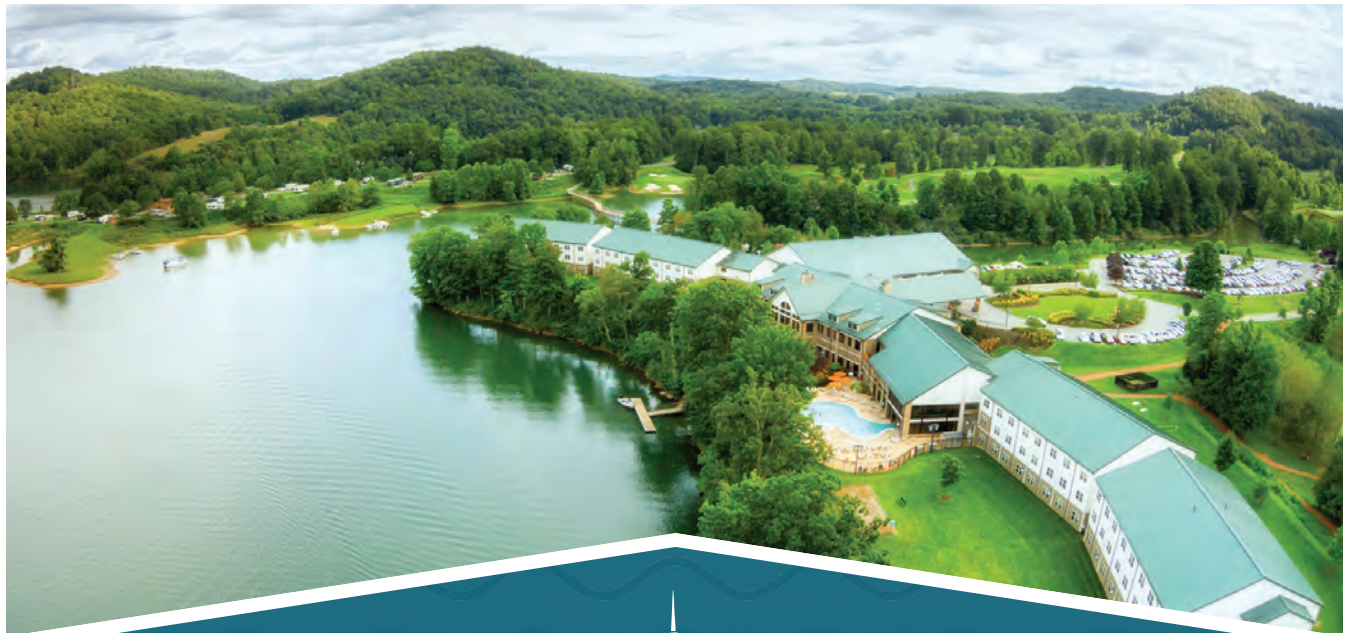
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king at a topographic map or app.
2. Understand the Seasonal Rotation

Squirrels like mast in the fall, but it's not all ripe at the same time. Around here, they love pine cones in the late summer, but transition quickly to hickories through about the first of September. They'll eat beech nuts in early October if there's a crop of them, and after that, falling white oak acorns will bring an entire woods' worth of squirrels out of the treetops to forage on the ground, where they'll feed most of the winter.

3. Start High, Move Low

Hickory trees are the classic place to squirrel hunt in early fall, since one good shagbark or pignut (You did learn to identify those, right?) can draw multiple squirrels at a time. Squirrels feeding in these trees are noisy and fairly easy to locate and you can scout good trees ahead of time simply by looking for cuttings at the base of the tree. When you're scouting for the first ripe hickories of the season, maybe for opening morning, look to the ridgetops first, since those trees seem to ripen just a few days earlier than the trees at lower elevation.

4. Hunt with Your Ears

Squirrels make particular noises, whether they're dropping golf ball-sized nuts out of the treetops, searching for acorns on the ground, or barking at a predator. Other critters such as blue jays and woodpeckers make similar noises but they're not the same. Good squirrel hunters know they'll locate half or more of their game by hearing them first, and by recognizing what is indeed a squirrel and what is something else. With experience, you'll learn, too but you have to shut up and listen.

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Sit and listen. You'll locate most squirrels with your ears.

5. Still Days are Best

continue to page 26



Adam Harvey used a bow in Wyoming Co. for a fine buck.



Bradley Perry bow hunted in Randolph Co. for a wide rack buck.

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Squirrels can seem invisible on windy days. My favorite days to hunt are 12 hours or so after a steady rain, when the woods are dead still. I don't want water droplets dripping from the trees" they're hard to distinguish from squirrel cutting sounds" but I do like for the ground to be damp and soft for sneaking around. When there's no breeze stirring, squirrels are easy to spot jumping about up in the trees. Shoot, I get excited just thinking about a morning like that.

6. Don't Forget Soft Mast

Hickories and oaks rightfully get most of the glory, but squirrels do relish soft mast at certain times. During the spring season, mulberries and flowering tulip poplars are good trees to check. In the early fall, wild grapes, dogwood berries, and wild cherries attract squirrels.

7. Bring Binoculars

A 14-ounce squirrel feeding in a hickory 80 yards high is tough to see when the leaves are green and thick, and they can be even tougher to see when they're alarmed and hiding. A good pair of binoculars can save you a lot of eyestrain.

8. Bring a Laser Pointer

Speaking of eyestrain, a laser pointer is an incredible tool for pointing out squirrels that you can see to hunting companions who can't see them. Just the other day, my 8-year-old borrowed my laser pointer to show me a squirrel balled up on a limb that might as well have been invisible to me. Lasers aren't legal to use everywhere, so check your local regs before trying them.

9. Hunt Gray Squirrels in Big Woods

Many public-land tracts in the East are noted for huge swaths of aging timber, with a dark canopy and open understory. That's not ideal habitat for whitetails or grouse, but it's just about perfect squirrel country. If you want to find squirrel trees and gray squirrels, head to the biggest block of

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old-growth timber you know of and start scouting.

continue to the next page

Send In Your Big Buck
Photos from 2024
Form Is On Page 38



Paige Miller got an 8 point buck. Photo courtesy of Middle Mountain Sporting Goods in Elkins.



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9. Hunt Gray Squirrels in Big Woods

continue to the next page



Ross Mellinger used a bow on a big buck living by the Ohio River on a small stretch of land. *Photo courtesy of Game Over Outdoors.*

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Many public-land tracts in the East are noted for huge swaths of aging timber, with a dark canopy and open understory. That's not ideal habitat for whitetails or grouse, but it's just about perfect squirrel country. If you want to find squirrel trees and gray squirrels, head to the biggest block of old-growth timber you know of and start scouting.

10. Hunt Fox Squirrels in Woodlots

Though there is certainly overlap between the two, fox squirrels" which are noted for their striking rufous coloration and large size "are more typically denizens of small woodlots and ag field edges. In fact, as you get into Midwestern farm country, fox squirrels can outnumber grays as the most common species seen.

11. Shoot Like a Turkey Hunter

Even with a shotgun, most shots are taken at stationary squirrels. Squirrels are also physically tough with a dense hide. If I'm toting a shotgun, I'll pair it with a full choke or even a turkey tube to ensure a dense pattern and clean kill. Lately, I've seen several squirrel hunters use lightweight .410 turkey single-barrel guns topped with optics, and they're just ideal for the task.

Today's .410 turkey guns are ideal squirrel guns for youngsters.

Today's .410 turkey guns are ideal squirrel guns for youngsters.

12. Use Enough Shell

Save the light loads for the skeet range or dove field. It's worth splurging for heavier high brass game loads when squirrel hunting. From a 20-gauge, I like a full 1-ounce load of No. 6 lead, like FEDERAL'S HEAVY FIELD GAME LOAD. In my son's .410, the 3-INCH, 11/16-OUNCE LOAD OF 6S works well out to 30 yards" again, when paired with a tight choke. Assuming your gun patterns it well, larger No. 4 shot provides good terminal effect on squirrels without filling the edible quarters with lead.

continue to page 30



Jennifer Riffle Burns caught a largemouth at Stonewall Jackson.



Beth Ann Beverage has a quality whitetail buck.



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13. Tote a .22

An accurate .22 rifle is the quintessential squirrel gun, and using it effectively requires a step up in skill from using a shotgun. Open-sighted rifles work, particularly at close range, but a good scope allows for more precision shooting. A worthy squirrel rifle will put five shots into a quarter-sized group at 25 yards. Can it be called a squirrel rifle if it shoots wider than that? Meh, maybe you need more practice. Opinions vary on the best load for squirrels, but I prefer high-velocity hollowpoints such as the 36-GRAIN CCI MINI-MAG or 37-GRAIN WINCHESTER SU-

PER X COPPER-PLATED HOLLOWPOINT.

14. Tote a Magnum

Though I grew up hunting with a .22 and still frequently carry one today, my modern squirrel rifle of choice is actually a bull-barreled .17 HMR loaded with CCI'S 20-GRAIN FULL-METAL JACKET. With a muzzle velocity of almost 2,400 fps, the round has a flat-enough trajectory to hit a squirrel through the head to 100+ yards, and off-the-shelf .17s are, in my experience, incredibly accurate. The FMJ bullet keeps meat destruction to a minimum, though I still prefer head-shots. If you're using anything frangible (which, most .17 HMR bullets are polymer tipped or hollowpoint), head-shots are mandatory. CCI's 20-grain FMJ is an excellent .17 HMR squirrel load. CCI's 20-grain FMJ is an excellent .17 HMR squirrel load.

15. Learn to Rest

One lesson from squirrel hunting that's applicable to hunting everything else is learning to find make-shift gun rests in the field. Not many people can consistently hit squirrels in the head with a rifle, off-hand. Taking a post off a tree, and using your hand to buffer the forend from the bark, is about as solid as it gets in the woods, and it's fast. Right-handed shooters need to use the left side of the tree when possible.

16. Carry Sticks

Sometimes, there's not a good rest tree growing exactly where you need it. In that case, a set of shooting sticks (I like Primos Trigger Sticks) is pretty handy. They make for a decent walking staff the rest of the time, too.

Hunting with a rimfire teaches you to find a solid rest in the field, no matter what.

continue to the next page



Jonathan Caltrider used a bow for a 400 lb. black bear in Ritchie Co.



Aiden Crockett caught a big smallmouth on Bluestone Lake.

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they hunker down and hide (fox
continue to the next page



BJ Golden arrowed a true 12 point buck in Wood County.

17. Be Careful with Squirrel Calls

Squirrel calls are usually designed to imitate a squirrel's bark or the distress sounds of a young squirrel. Both sounds will cause nearby squirrels to take notice and sometimes bark in response" but they put the

critters on high alert, too. Sometimes I'll use a squirrel call to make a stubborn squirrel show itself, or I might make a little barking chatter to stop a squirrel for a shot. Otherwise, keep quiet.

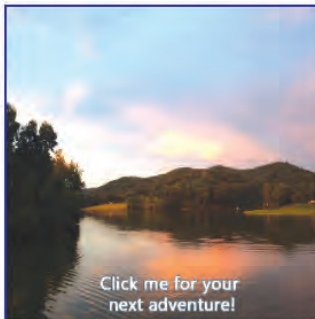
18. Circle a Tree

Gray squirrels will often run when spooked, but sometimes

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squirrels almost always try to hide). As you circle the tree for a shot, they will circle in turn, using the tree trunk to obscure themselves from your view. When you're hunting alone, this can make it difficult to get a shot. I've thrown limbs to the opposite side of the tree and even tied ropes to saplings and shaken them, with mixed results. But if you're hunting with a buddy, one of you can almost always circle the tree and push the squirrel around for a better shot. The squirrel will move away from the person who's moving, so the shooter should find a good opening and steady rest and be ready to shoot soon as the buddy makes the circle. When pressed, gray squirrels will frequently jump tree and run.

19. Hunt Over a Dog

I'll fully confess to not being

a dog guy. I don't have the patience to be a trainer, and I prefer to sneak up on squirrels for a shot. That said, hunting with dogs is fun, and most serious squirrel doggers are eager to introduce people to the sport especially if you know of a good place to let them run their dogs. Squirrel dogging is at its best in the late season because squirrels are foraging on the ground, where dogs can both see and smell them, and because the barren trees make it easier to locate them for a shot. If you've got designs on trying it, stockpile a few places to go for a winter hunt, and then don't be shy about asking.

20. Take a Kid

Even under the best of circumstances, deer and turkey hunting involve a lot more boring moments than exciting ones. With squirrel hunting, you can stay on the move, and your kid can kick mushrooms and play in the creek in between stops. Yet, squirrels are surprisingly wary, so a kid learns fast to shut his mouth and keep still, too, if he wants fried squirrel and ketchup for dinner.



Juton Bunner used a bow for a black bear with a white blaze.

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It's all a wonderful lesson. Speaking of dinner, if you only bag one squirrel with your kid by your side, remember that it's still worthy of a feast. Take it home, cook it up, and celebrate properly.

21. Skin Clean

There are plenty of ways to skin a squirrel, and you should learn a couple to see what works best for you. Regardless, show up to the cleaning station prepared to do a clean job. I like a slick 2x8, upon which to set my skinned squirrels as I work, and running water available if possible. Soon as the skin is off, get it and the tails away from the meat, and rinse the meat frequently as you work. Squirrel hair belongs on fishing lures, not the dinner table.

22. Bring Shears

The handiest squirrel-cleaning tool ever made is a pair of heavy-duty game shears or utility scissors. I buy a new set from

continue to page 34

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Nov/Dec 2024 ~ Page 33



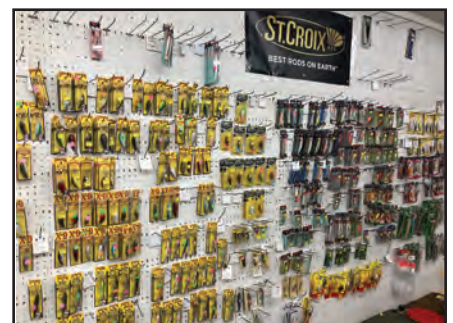
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the hardware store every couple seasons. They work to snip off squirrel feet, and cut right through bones. A properly cleaned squirrel should render two front legs, two hind legs, and the saddle, which is the middle of the back (bone-in) with two backstraps attached.

23. Age a Squirrel

The time-honored way to age a big male squirrel is by looking at the balls, which are perhaps proportionately larger than those of any other creature on Earth. If you couldn't show them to your mother without blushing, that squirrel is likely to be tough. Save him for the stew pot and slow cooking. Young squirrels are better for frying.

24. Make a Hanger Tote

Get a wire coat hanger and snip it apart on both the top and bottom. The wire should be about 7 inches long on the top and bottom when you're done, and shaped into a rough V. Curl a hook into the top wire with pliers, so that you can loop it around the bottom wire,

and clip it on and off. Thread the bottom wire through a dead squirrel's rear-leg tendons, and you've got a perfect squirrel tote that will hang securely from a belt loop or pack.

25. Scout from Your Stand

One for the deer hunters: Ever seen a squirrel from your stand? I have. Sometimes, hillbillies need a break from being scent-free, low-impact, and generally



Shawn Riddle got a big tined buck in Lewis Co. with a crossbow.

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stressed about hunting.

This is, after all, supposed to be fun. Once you try it, you'll realize there's no shortage of fun in squirrel hunting. Try squirrel hunting this season.



Kevin Overly got a wide racked buck in Lewis Co. with a bow.

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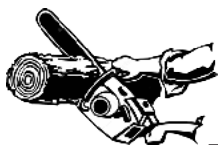
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B.A.S.S. Nation Championship

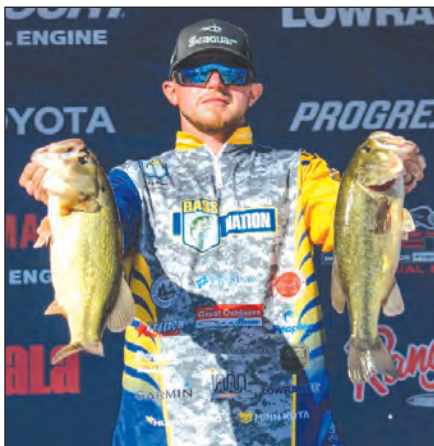
Blake Capps from Muskogee, Okla. has won the 2024 Mercury B.A.S.S. Nation Championship presented by Lowrance with a three-day total of 42 pounds, 14 ounces.

GROVE, Okla. — When Blake Capps was in first grade, he and his classmates were asked to write down what they wanted to be when they grew up. The scraps of paper then went into a time capsule that was opened a dozen years later when they were high school seniors.

“I wrote that I wanted to be a professional fisherman,” Capps said.

After winning the 2024 Mercury B.A.S.S. Nation Championship presented by Lowrance, Capps can officially say his wish has come true.

The 28-year-old Capps weighed a three-day total of 42 pounds, 14 ounces to win the championship that concluded Friday on Grand Lake O’ The Cherokees, less than 100 miles from his home in continue to the next page



Alex Goff, from Clendenin, represented WV and lead day 1 with 15 lbs, 15 oz. He ended up in 10th place after 3 days.

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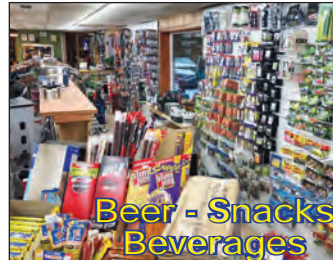


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Muskogee. Capps had the heaviest bag of the day (14-14) which propelled him to a 14-ounce victory in a tournament that featured nearly 500 of the best B.A.S.S. Nation anglers from around the U.S. and several foreign countries.

The victory at Grand Lake comes with a wealth of riches, among them a spot in the 2025 Bass Pro Shops Bassmaster Classic which will be held March 21-23 on Lake Ray Roberts in Fort Worth, Texas. Capps also collected \$50,000 cash, an invitation to compete in the 2025 Bassmaster Elite Series, and a Nation's Best boat and truck combo to use for the year.

After hoisting the Bryan V. Ker-

chal Memorial Trophy that goes to the B.A.S.S. Nation Champion each year, Capps (who works as a petroleum operator at a nearby power plant) reflected upon the time capsule that was cracked open back in 2015.

"I haven't had a chance to do a lot of competitive fishing because of work and the cost that goes with being a tournament fisherman," he said. "But I'm definitely gonna have to sit down and think about (accepting the offer to fish in the Elite Series).

"And I can tell you, I'm leaning really heavy toward it," he said, chuckling. "I may go out there and get my butt whooped. But somewhere down the road I can look back and say I was a Bassmaster Elite one day. It'll be almost impossible to pass up this chance."

Living close to one of America's premier bass fisheries didn't hurt Capps' chances on Grand Lake, but he noted he's never fished the reservoir at this time of year. With temperatures warmer than usual, though, he figured bigger bass

would be feeding in shallow water. They were, but the bites were scarce enough that each one was precious.

"I don't know if anyone covered as much water as I did this week," he said. "I ran constantly, and it was all for five, six, seven bites a day. It was work, but it paid off."

And when most anglers were throwing myriad lures trying to entice the fickle Grand Lake bass

continue to the next page



Brandon Grose arrowed a huge McDowell County buck.

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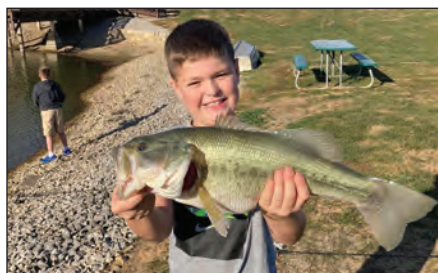
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bite, Capps settled into a winning pattern amidst his run-and-gun routine.

“Out of my 15 fish, I think I caught 14 on a simple white spinnerbait,” Capps said, adding that he rotated between War Eagle and BOOYAH Covert lures throughout the championship.



Fisher Berga takes after his dad Brad & grandad Tom and loves to catch bass.



Brandon Plumley hooked a November smallmouth bass.



Eddie Humphreys scored on a huge buck on his birthday.



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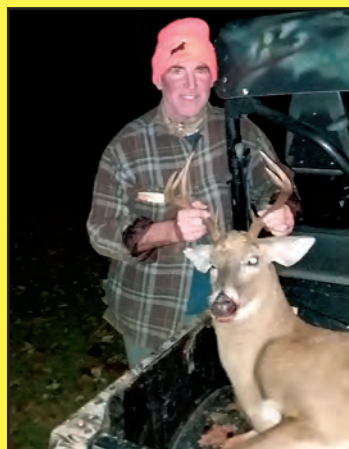


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