

Arkansas OUT *of* DOORS



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ARKANSAS WILDLIFE FEDERATION PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

My favorite season is upon us. The weather is starting to cool down and fall colors are already looking good. Dove season and teal season have started. Archery deer season has started. And even the Razorbacks are looking good this season with Coach Pittman getting the hogs back on track. We have lots of great articles in this issue to celebrate fall, learn about endemic species, enjoy the hunt and explore the dark sky.

This summer a few leadership changes happened at two key agencies that support wildlife, habitats and water quality. After 36 years serving in various capacities, Director Pat Fitts retired from the AR Game and Fish Commission (AGFC). Pat was a staunch supporter of connecting kids to nature and loved the Wildlife of Arkansas Student Art Contest. We appreciate your service, Pat! In July, Austin Booth was hired as the 19th Director of the AGFC. Booth is a native Arkansan and has a great respect for Arkansas wildlife and wild places. In August, we were thrilled to learn that the Governor appointed AGFC Deputy Director, Chris Colclasure, to lead the Division of Natural Resources at the Department of Agriculture. Chris hopes to develop stronger partnerships throughout the state and especially with the conservation community. Congratulations to Director Colclasure. We look forward to working closely with Director Colclasure and Director Booth in their new roles.

An exciting offer from the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission is open to any student interested in a conservation career. Scholarships are available for any Arkansas resident paying in-state tuition with a declared major related to conservation or agriculture. A complete list of approved majors is available at www.agfc.com/en/education/classroom/conservation-scholarship.

Recovering America's Wildlife Act was introduced in the Sen-

ate in late summer. We are excited to tell you, Senator John Boozman has added his name as a cosponsor of the bill. After the senator signed on, several other key Senators from other states followed his lead and agreed to sign on to the bill as well. Thank you so much Senator Boozman, we truly appreciate you and what you do. If funded, Arkansas would be eligible to receive up to \$17 million annually in funding to help recover the 380 species of greatest conservation need in our state species that are on the decline. Read more about this once in a lifetime piece of legislation in the News of Note section.

With all that we have been through since the Covid 19 virus hit us, do yourself a favor and get outside. We are the Natural State. Get outside, hit one of our State Parks. Petit Jean State Park is awesome in the fall. Take a hike, take a walk. Just GET OUTSIDE. No mask required. Please take your kids outside, get them off of the X-box and the computer, they will thank you later in life. Teach a kid to cast a rod, shoot a bow, shoot a gun. When you do this, you are paving the way for future generations of conservationists.

If you all are not following the AWF on Facebook, please do. Updates, articles and pictures are posted weekly and sometimes on a daily basis.

"Environment is no one's property to destroy; it's everyone's responsibility to protect"

—MOHITH AGADI

Charles S. Buckner, III (Trey)
President

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Arkansas Wildlife Federation Mission Statement

To promote conservation, responsible management and sustainable use of Arkansas' fish, wildlife, habitat, natural resources and outdoor recreational opportunities through education and advocacy.



Arkansas OUT of DOORS

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Hunting the Big Woods of Arkansas

Story and photos by Jim Taylor



Urban hunting? Not me. No way. How about public land hunting in a 41 acre Wildlife Management Area (WMA)? Too confining for my sense of adventure. (Yes. *Arkansas has a 41 acre WMA...See end note*)

Tiny, claustrophobic cubes of remnant forests where slamming doors and car horns drown out honking geese overhead have never appealed to me. I want big. I want wild. I want big enough to get lost in.

THE BIG WOODS CHALLENGE

As a hunter who obsesses over the adventure of the hunt more than the kill, I'm drawn to big forests devoid of artificial advantages created by man.

Like my self-limiting bow and arrow, big forests also challenge me. That challenge, that slight edge retained by my quarry, is what lures me to return, with bow in hand each fall to the largest remaining tract of bottom land forest in

Arkansas; the 160,000 acre river bottoms of the Dale Bumpers-White River National Wildlife Refuge

But big forests, not yet carved up or cleared by dozers and plows, can challenge modern day bowhunters. Without man-made funnel like effects of hedge rows, barb wire fences, agriculture field lines and corn piles, many simply don't know where to begin when faced with 160,000 acres of untamed river bottoms.

FIVE TACTICS I USE FOR REFUGE WHITETAILS

Any one tactic by itself could put a refuge whitetail in front of me but the more I combine into one stand location the better.

1. Locate natural "pinch points" and "bottle necks".

With over 300 lakes on the refuge, consult your topo map to zero in on natural pinch points created by lakes, streams



Pinch point -North Unit of the refuge.

and rivers that lay in close proximity. Locate your stand inside these natural funnels to intercept traveling deer.

2. Hunt South Facing River Bluffs.

Natural forest openings carved out by the river allows sunlight to reach the forest floor 30 or 40 yards beyond the river bluff, especially those South facing. This natural occurring "edge effect" created by bluff openings produces a never ending solar powered buffet of greenbrier, honeysuckle and other browse for hungry whitetails.

3. Know Preferred Food Sources.

Persimmons: Silence interrupted by the sound of a ripe persimmon slapping down through overhead leaves as it torpedoes to a sugar bursting thud onto the ground beneath my tree stand is the ultimate confirmation of my refuge setup. If you're lucky to find one loaded down (or even better, a group of them), you've got a hot spot.

Overcup and Nuttall: Few oak species are as well adapted to tolerate the seasonal flooding and poorly drained soils within the refuge as our Nuttall and Overcup. Though important fall food sources, they are so abundant and widespread that simply finding acorns under a tree won't guarantee you deer activity. For example, I recall in 2014 there was a huge mast crop. I easily located a dozen Overcup trees that had dropped so many acorns they made walking difficult. Yet I struggled to find cracked acorn hulls, deer scat or tracks. Then, in un-explained randomness, the next Overcup tree I looked under was littered with feeding activity. What's up? Deer are creatures of habit and security so I suspect that

once they find a tree dropping acorns they utilize it to the exclusion of others, bedding nearby and returning to eat at their leisure.

4. Ditch the Public Land Crowds.

I'm amused by hunters who complain about too many hunters on public lands yet they never get the connection between roads and crowds. For a host of reasons, these "average Joe hunters" never venture far from access roads and ATV trails. Maybe it's fear of getting lost, dread of packing an animal out, or general laziness. Bottom line is, the further you distance yourself from access roads and ATV trails the more likely you will find undisturbed deer habitat.



Lush vegetation along rivers edge.

5. Sit Tight.

If you hunt public lands it's inevitable, that in spite of your best pre-hunt planning and scouting, you will sometimes find yourself encroached by other hunters. When it happens, don't sweat it. Just sit tight. Average hunters are too impatient to sit long. Never confident in their stand selection, as daylight cracks they are soon out of their stands, aimlessly wandering and stirring up bedded midday deer that they never see right past your stand.

Good luck and enjoy your Big Woods hunting adventure.



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Yellowcheek Darter (*Nothonotus moorei*)

DID YOU KNOW THAT ARKANSAS IS HOME TO SEVEN SPECIES OF FISH FOUND NOWHERE ELSE ON EARTH? Due to their small ranges, these state endemics are some of our most vulnerable species; most are restricted to just one or two watersheds in the state. They are the Paleback Darter (*Etheostoma pallidorsum*), Strawberry Darter (*Etheostoma fragi*), Beaded Darter (*Etheostoma clinton*), Ouachita Darter (*Percina brucethompsoni*), Yellowcheek Darter (*Nothonotus moorei*), Caddo Madtom (*Noturus taylori*), and Ouachita Madtom (*Noturus lachneri*).

Five of the seven fish on this list are darters (*Family Percidae*), one of the most diverse groups of fishes in the state. Darters are benthic (bottom-dwelling) fish with unique adaptations suited to that lifestyle. Many darter species are renowned for bright colors and bold patterns that rival those of tropical fish.

Found only in streams within the upper Caddo and upper Ouachita River watersheds in the Ouachita Mountains of Arkansas, the Paleback Darter (*Etheostoma pallidorsum*) is a small,

ONLY IN ARKANSAS

Streams: the endemic fishes of the natural state

Story and photos by Dustin Lynch, Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission

slender fish that prefers quiet shallow pools on the margins of small, gravel-bottomed, spring-fed streams. The pale stripe along its back that gives this species its name can disrupt the fish's visual outline, making it difficult to detect among gravel and rubble stream bottoms. Males develop bright orange underparts and orange bands in the first dorsal fin during the breeding season (primarily February and March) but may retain the vivid colors long into the summer. Young Paleback Darters have been found in seepage waters and ditches in open pastures, which is due to their reproductive ecology – they can utilize vastly different habitat for spawning than what they

occupy during the non-breeding season. Like other darters, they eat small invertebrates including insect larvae and crustaceans. The Paleback Darter is considered imperiled due to its small range, small population sizes, and specialized habitat requirements. Like numerous other rare small stream fish species in the state, it is further impacted by the existence of man-made reservoirs that fragment the watersheds it inhabits.

The Strawberry Darter (*Etheostoma fragi*) is a species restricted to a single watershed, the Strawberry River, in northeastern Arkansas. It is found in the upper portion of the Strawberry River itself, as well as headwaters and small

tributary creeks. Strawberry Darters prefer mostly gravel and rubble stream bottoms in riffles (fast-flowing, shallow portions of streams) with a moderate current and clear water. This is one of seven darter species in Arkansas that were once thought to belong to a single widespread species, the Orangethroat Darter (*Etheostoma spectabile*). While some of the other seven have not yet been formally described, the Strawberry Darter was elevated to full species status in 1997. Males have a breeding coloration dominated by bright orange and turquoise hues, largely red dorsal fins with narrow blue bands, and distinctive orange chevrons across the belly. As in most other darters, females have a more subdued coloration. The



Paleback Darter (*Etheostoma pallididorsum*)

spawning season, including a series of iridescent turquoise-blue blotches along their sides and blue and orange bands in the dorsal fins. Fish populations now classified as Beaded Darters

several species were split from *E. stigmaeum*, resulting in the description of five new species, each named after various political figures (presidents and one vice-president). They are sometimes dubbed the “presidential darters” for this reason. The northwestern part of Arkansas is home to another member of this group, the Highland Darter (*Etheostoma teddyroosevelt*), which also occurs in portions of adjacent states in the Ozark Highlands. With its tiny range and overall small population, the Beaded Darter is considered imperiled.



Ouachita Madtom (*Noturus lachneri*)

Strawberry Darter is considered imperiled due to its small range and a variety of threats within the single watershed in which it occurs, including nutrient enrichment and habitat alteration.

The Beaded Darter (*Etheostoma clinton*), described in 2012, is found only in highland areas in the upper Caddo and upper Ouachita River drainages above the Fall Line (the boundary where a mountainous region such as the Ouachita Mountains meets the Coastal Plain). The finely speckled, straw-colored upper body helps it blend into sandy substrate, as this species is most often found over a mixture of sand and gravel. Males attain a brighter coloration during

were once considered part of the widespread Speckled Darter (*Etheostoma stigmaeum*), a species which occurs in other parts of Arkansas. In 2012,

The Ouachita Darter (*Percina brucethompsoni*) is a member of the genus *Percina*, considered the most primitive darters. *Percina* are a bit larger and less specialized for a benthic lifestyle than darters in the genus *Etheostoma*. They retain a small swim bladder and may spend more time swimming off the bottom than other darters. In addition, the Ouachita Darter is not as brightly colored as some other species but has a striking pattern of elongated dark



Ouachita Darter (*Percina brucethompsoni*)



Caddo Madtom (Noturus taylori)

blotches along its sides and a bright orange band in the first dorsal fin, as well as a long snout. As its name implies, this species is restricted to the Ouachita River watershed, where it is found in portions of the Ouachita River itself and two major tributaries, the Caddo and Little Missouri Rivers. Unlike the previous two species, *P. brucehompsoni* does not occur in small tributary streams and is most often found over gravel and cobble in silt-free portions of these rivers. It is thought that the Ouachita Darter's habitat may shift between deeper pools and faster, shallower portions of the river at different times of the year. In recent years, biologists have found that the species occurs somewhat farther downstream in the Ouachita River than was previously known. Regardless, it is considered imperiled because of its low population sizes and restricted range.

The federally endangered Yellowcheek Darter (*Nothonotus moorei*) is endemic to a single watershed – the Little Red River of north central Arkansas. This small but stoutly built fish is found only among the cobbles in fast-flowing riffles. Unlike other darter species that also inhabit the watershed, it does not seem able to tolerate conditions in pools or other portions of the stream outside of riffles, which makes it vulnerable in times of drought. While the species had a very small range to begin with, that range was greatly reduced with the construction of Greers Ferry Lake. The reservoir was impounded only a short time after

the species was first described in the early 1960s, dooming it to a decline shortly after its discovery. The reservoir inundated most of the former range of the Yellowcheek Darter and fragmented what is left. Yellowcheek Darters now persist only in isolated populations in the four forks of the river upstream of the reservoir. Additional factors, like increased prevalence of drought and land development have subsequently impacted populations as well. For



Strawberry Darter (Etheostoma fragi)

these reasons, this critically imperiled species was listed as federally endangered in 2011 – one of only two federally endangered fish species occurring in Arkansas, along with the Pallid Sturgeon (*Scaphirhynchus albus*). Biologists are currently working on efforts to propagate Yellowcheek Darters in captivity, as well as to better understand how they are impacted by drought and other environmental factors.

The other two endemic fish species in Arkansas are both species of tiny catfish. When most people think of Arkansas catfish, undoubtedly they picture Channel Cats, Blues, or Flatheads – large game fish species. But there are many species of catfish in the state that don't typically exceed five or six inches in length and more than a few ounces in weight. These species belong to the genus *Noturus*, otherwise known as madtoms. Of the 19 catfish species that occur in Arkansas, 12 are madtoms. Both of the state endemic madtoms are restricted to the Ouachita Mountains in southwestern Arkansas, with one species found in the Ouachita River watershed and one mostly restricted to the Saline River watershed.

The Caddo Madtom (*Noturus taylori*) is endemic to the Ouachita River watershed, where it is found in parts of the Caddo and upper Ouachita Rivers and their tributaries. Yellowish in coloration with prominent dark saddle markings on its back and white underparts, it is specialized for life in fast-flowing, clear

upland headwater streams where it inhabits shallow, gravel-bottomed pools below riffles, spending much of its time under rocks. Like other madtoms, this species can deliver a painful sting due to venom secretions from its pectoral and dorsal fins. While its range was small to begin with, the majority of what remains has been fragmented by the construction of major reservoirs in the Ouachita and Caddo River systems. The species

has been further threatened by pollution, logging, and gravel mining. For these reasons, this diminutive catfish is considered critically imperiled.

The Ouachita Madtom (*Noturus lachneri*) is found primarily in the forks of the upper Saline River and their tributaries but is also known from a few tributaries of the upper Ouachita River near Hot Springs. This slender species is uniformly brown to gray in coloration with a pale belly and sometimes dark-bordered fins. It prefers clear, high-gradient, gravel-bottomed streams of small to medium size and is typically found in quiet backwater areas. Like other madtoms (and most catfish in general), this species is primarily nocturnal; it spends the day beneath rocks or in other hiding spots and emerges after sunset to feed on small invertebrates such as aquatic insect larvae and crustaceans. The Ouachita Madtom is considered imperiled due to its small range and a variety of environmental threats in the region.

While these are the seven currently recognized endemic fish species of Arkansas, it is important to remember that our knowledge of the state's aquatic biodiversity is always increasing due to the efforts of biologists and research-



Beaded Darter (*Etheostoma clinton*)

ers. Populations currently regarded as belonging to more widespread species may be elevated to species status in the future as our knowledge increases, which is particularly true considering advancements in genetic analyses and laboratory techniques. Furthermore, dozens of other fish species in Arkansas are regional endemics, shared only

with one or two other neighboring states or confined to a single ecoregion.

The aquatic diversity of The Natural State is amazing. We are privileged to have endemic species living here, but we also have a special obligation to protect them and ensure their continued existence for future generations to treasure.

Dustin Lynch is the ANHC's aquatic ecologist. He has a doctorate in biological sciences from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville and a master's degree in zoology from Oklahoma State University.

The ANHC, an agency of Arkansas Heritage, focuses on science-based conservation to protect Arkansas's biological diversity and maintains a statewide System of Natural Areas made up of more than 70,000 acres. The ANHC's Arkansas Heritage Program biodiversity database tracks the location and status of rare animal and plant species, as well as natural communities in Arkansas.

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BEARCAT HOLLOW

WMA Habitat Improvement Project

9/18/21

Story by Wayne Shewmake

This is my 12th year for the Bearcat Hollow Habitat Improvement Project, and it was a great time for all. This year there were about 45 volunteers, which was very good considering the Covid pandemic in America. Most of the volunteers were Arkansas Tech University Fisheries & Wildlife Society students, along with representatives from the National Wild Turkey Federation, the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, the US Forestry Service, the Yell County Wildlife Federation and the Arkansas Wildlife Federation. The University of Ozark (UO) and University of Arkansas Fayetteville have also had a lot of volunteer over the years but did not send any this year because of Covid. Two former UO students Darby White and Montana Thomason, who have been coming to the event for 11 years, attended again.





Several of the students and some of the adult volunteers camped out on Friday night and had a good time and some really good food thanks to Trey Buckner III, AWF President, who sent plenty of his famous BBQ pork and baked beans. It was a very beautiful evening with an almost full moon shining brightly in the night sky. We also got to watch the International Space Station sail overhead, which only took about 5 minutes, but it was neat to see.

Our project work was to plant some of the fields with clover, to put up a new gate to protect the fields, paint some of the older gates, and to do some stream clean up on Richland Creek. All was accomplished. The students, working with experts in the different organizations, had the added benefit of learning more about conservation efforts at the Bear-

cat Hollow Wildlife Management Area. In addition to cleaning Richland Creek, Steve Filipek conducted an identification of macroinvertebrates with his work team. The team found lots of interesting creatures that indicated that the creek

was in excellent health.

I can't say enough about how much I appreciate all the students and other volunteers for their help and support over the years. We have had over 700 volunteers and worked over 13,000





man-hours on the project. It has been such a great opportunity for the volunteers enjoying the outdoors and to see nature at its best. The habitat has improved so much for all wildlife and it has opened up a lot of useful areas for the public to use and see nature in the wild. It has created a great location for the public to enjoy hunting, hiking, and nature watching. It has also created a great habitat for elk, bear, turkey, deer and quail, as well as birds and pollinators passing through.

This project has meant so much to everyone involved, and has produced an awesome habitat for wildlife. It has allowed so many students to get hands-on awareness for future jobs in their chosen profession by giving them the chance to meet and talk with the representatives of government agencies and conservation organizations that were present about possible jobs while learning what they do in their daily jobs. Since 2012, AGFC has given AWF a youth elk tag to be auctioned to the public. This has been a great opportunity for someone to purchase it for a youth to allow them to get an elk. So far, the hunt has been 100 % successful, with each youth bagging a bull elk. These hunts have resulted in the state record for the largest elk taken by a youth and the record for the youngest youth to kill an elk in Arkansas all on Bearcat Hollow WMA.

I also can't say thank you enough to all the partners for their support and help in getting this project done. They too have brought volunteers to help on this project as well as see the work first hand. It has allowed me to make a lot of new friends and allowed us all to meet new people and get new ideas. It has been a learning process as to what works and what is best for the area.

This may be our last year for having a regular yearly work day each fall, because we have finished Part 2 of the project and have accomplished what was in the plan. There will always be regular maintenance on the area, but for now there are no plans to increase the projects size. So I would like to say thank you to everyone involved and for all the partners for their contributions that made it happen. Special Thank You to the volunteers that help me plan, prepare, and cook for all the volunteers who come over the past 12 years, it has been a heartwarming experience for all. Also special thank you to Jim Dixon, Dwayne Rambo (with USFS) and Jeremy Everitts (NWTF) for all their guidance and support.





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Thousand
Cankers Disease



Little Red River Fish Camp recruits future leaders, conservationists

By Zac Brogdon

Members of the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission joined local trout guides and educators to teach students about fishing and conservation at the annual Little Red River Fish Camp at JFK Park in Heber Springs.

Amanda Brogdon, AWF board member, teamed up with AGFC Wildlife Officer, Trent Whitehead, and AGFC Fisheries District Supervisor, Tom Bly, to develop a curriculum that would submerge these young people into the world of fish, aquatic resources, and fishing. This fish camp has evolved into a wonderful educational opportunity for

students in the area.

The camp is held at the pavilion in the Corps of Engineers, JFK Park below Greers Ferry Dam. “A great setting because it sits on the banks of Collins Creek,” Bly said. “The perfect outdoor classroom.”

This year’s camp included sessions on general fish facts and identification, career opportunities with AGFC, how trout are produced at the Greers Ferry National Hatchery, fish anatomy, fish habitat, and amphibians and reptiles. The campers were also introduced to a special lesson on invertebrates and also participated in cast-

ing games and a scavenger hunt in the park related to concepts learned during the course of the camp.

“The camp coincides with the Trout Program’s seasonal electrofishing sample on Collins Creek,” Bly said. “So they also get a firsthand look at how that works.”

Plenty of fishing-related activities and games keep the experience exciting for the youth attending and help burn off that excess energy summer brings. Participants are taught the basics of fishing, fly casting, use of spin-cast reels, bait selection, and fly tying. And, as long



as the river levels permit it, they get to put their newfound knowledge to work fishing with a mentor.

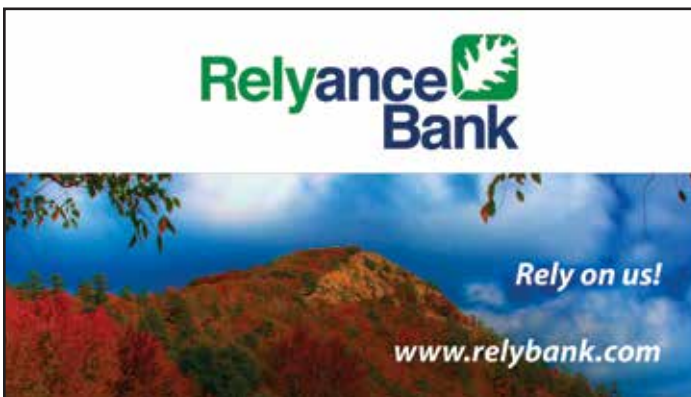
Cowboy Chevrolet, the Arkansas Wildlife Federation, Arkansas Fly Fishers, Trout Unlimited, and the Little Red River Foundation helped tremendously with the effort, through volunteers and funding.

"I don't know why our community

didn't have something like this already, but we needed it," Brogdon said. "Many of these kids have never held a fishing pole in their lives and may not ever be exposed to fishing otherwise."

The event was truly team effort with a strong contingent of volunteers including AGFC enforcement officers, education specialists, and biologists, community volunteers, former attend-

ees and parents. A special shout out to the following folks for helping to get these kids hooked on fishing: Tabbi Kinion, J.J. Gladden, Trent Whitehead, Bo Davidson, Tom Bly, Matt Horton, Matt Schraeder, Morgan Gantt, Lori Monday, Katie Bennett, Marc Dyer, Kim Dollins, Jo Selby, Melinda Nabholz Smith, Bradley Skelton, Jeff Bennett, Rob Reedy, and Adam Musto.



ARKANSAS WILDLIFE News-of-Note



North American Grasslands Conservation Act

The grazing lands that have sustained generations of farmers, ranchers, and tribal nations are dwindling. Species from pronghorn and elk to teal and pheasants are struggling to navigate fragmented landscapes. Total grassland bird populations have declined by more than 40 percent since 1966. Some species teeter at the edge of extinction and others, like the bobwhite quail, have seen declines of nearly 85 percent in the last half century. A new North American Grasslands Conservation Act would help kickstart the voluntary protection and restoration of grasslands by creating a landowner-driven, voluntary, incentive-based program to conserve and restore threatened grassland and sagebrush steppe ecosystems. By enacting a North American Grasslands Conservation Act, working grasslands can keep working. The bill would provide voluntary technical and financial assistance that will increase the protection and restoration of our continent's most imperiled ecosystem, while contributing to climate resilience,



ranching livelihoods, and wildlife abundance. To learn more about this bipartisan solution to restore America's grasslands and help revitalize rural communities, please visit www.actforgrasslands.org.

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Guide to Passing Wildlife-Friendly Property Maintenance Ordinances

The National Wildlife Federation is continuing to expand resources for local leaders to support them in creating wildlife-friendly habitat while engaging residents in conservation. A new “Guide to Passing Wildlife-Friendly Property Maintenance Ordinances” is now available for local and municipal leaders. This guide spotlights ordinances, policies, and landscape plans from cities and homeowner associations that incentivize resident engagement in wildlife gardening and the expansion of managed natural landscapes. The guide focuses on wildlife-friendly landscaping practices and provides model ordinances, policies, and landscape plans to incentivize resident engagement in wildlife gardening and the expansion of managed natural landscapes. To download or share the guide with your community leaders, visit <https://www.nwf.org/landscapingguide>.

Senator Boozman co-sponsors Recovering America’s Wildlife Act!!

We’re making great progress in Congress to move this important piece of legislation forward. The Recovering America’s Wildlife Act will be the most significant investment in wildlife conservation in many decades. The bill will fund state-led efforts to help wildlife at risk and to prevent wildlife from becoming endangered. In Arkansas, that means \$17 million annually to AGFC to help the 380 species in need through targeted conservation actions including habitat restoration, education, species reintroductions, research, and more. There is a lot we can do for these species, but finding the money is a challenge. Right now, the federal funding available is about five percent of what is needed to prevent wildlife from becoming endangered. Generally, it is cheaper and more effective to step in as a wildlife species is starting to decline rather than waiting until it is threatened

with imminent extinction. If a species is in such bad shape that it qualifies for the “emergency room” measures of the Endangered Species Act, it is much more difficult – and more expensive – to recover the species. Saving wildlife is an investment in a clean, sustainable, and thriving economy for rural and urban communities alike.

Senator John Boozman recently added his name as a cosponsor for the Senate version and Representative French Hill is a cosponsor of the bill in the House. AWF is grateful for their leadership to move this legislation forward. Please reach out to your other members of congress to encourage them to support Recovering America’s Wildlife Act for the sake of Arkansas’s wildlife, economy and preserving our Natural State. If you would like to add your organization or businesses’ name to a letter of support, please email hoeyg@nwf.org.

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Meditating on the Hunt

Story & photos by Johnny Carol Sain

It was that distinct big hound bawl booming up from the hollow that got my attention. The sound rolled over top of the choppy beagle barks and brought my focus to the mountain bench below. Gripping the shotgun, I focused every bit of my ten-year-old awareness on that Ozark bench and waited as plumes of vapor drifted up with every ragged breath. Dry oak leaves crunched with the rhythm of a running deer, but before I could shoulder the old 16 gauge, the brown form dashed across my lane of view and that familiar white flag of defeat waved goodbye. Not far behind, my uncle's long-legged bluetick hound trotted through, nose to the ground, bellowing with every other step. Seemingly minutes later, my beagles Ziggy and Rascal, yipped and yelped on the trail, and I remember wanting to call them over for a few pats on the head. But knowing that Dad frowned on pampering the dogs while hunting, I simply watched them trail the deer down into the hollow.

This was deer hunting for the Sain clan in Newton County, Arkansas circa 1981. The vast Ozark National Forest surrounding my grandparent's property was our hunting ground, and it was tough hunting. Mountain deer were sparse. Couple that with rugged terrain and a utilitarian attitude toward hunting, and it's easy to see how the hounds became a favored tactic. The few deer checked at my grandparent's country store were mostly credited to the dogs. My name was never on one of those tags, though, and even my dad rarely scored.

I quit dog hunting when I bought my first bow at age 15. I even protested the hounds because it seemed too easy. Though the numbers didn't support it, though we rarely saw more than a handful of deer per season, and though I never killed a deer by way of dog, I thought deer hunting with dogs was unfair to the deer.

As I became more proficient with the bow, the gun seemed



*“That
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became
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unsporting as well. That arrogant yet accurate bowhunter’s mantra — a bowhunt begins where a gun hunt ends — became my creed. My goal was to get whisker-counting close, and I worked at it. I studied topographical maps and walked my tail off, probing the terrain, searching for the place I could predict a deer’s path would intersect my stand within a 20-yard radius. Physical and mental work was the sacrifice I made for the hunt. But then circumstances changed.

It was only 55 acres surrounded by other rural holdings, but it was all mine. I bought it when the food plot/corn feeder craze really hit whitetail hunting culture. No more winter scouting, no more topographical maps, but plenty of deer. In fact, I expected to see deer on every hunt. A sense of entitlement followed me to the stand. I practiced selective killing and doe management while perched above a green plot with a corn feeder sitting in the distance just far enough away for me to feel OK about it. It was a far cry from every-

thing the hunt had offered in years past.

But long sits in a tree offer opportunity to think, and one bright November afternoon all that thinking led to a question. Perhaps the best way to describe it was doubt because it was a question I could not articulate. I felt as though something had been lost along the way.

Philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset, in his thought-provoking book “Meditations on Hunting,” said that separating sport from utilitarian hunting was pointless: “That hunting is a sport is incidental. There is also the purely utilitarian form of hunting, which was practiced by Paleolithic man and which the poacher of any epoch practices. This type of hunting, not at all sport hunting, is no less hunting than is the other type.”

Gasset’s words cut to the bone of what hunting is. Dress it in pretense, substitute other verbs to sanitize it, and argue about method all you want — hunting is still about killing. Gasset’s take on sport and hunting was the catalyst for my doubt. It led me to my own meditations on hunting.

Hunting, by its most primal and basic definition, is not a sporting endeavor. It’s defined as a sport today in the developed world only because it is not a necessity. Sure, we eat our kills and many of us nearly live on meat that’s never rested on styrofoam. The meat is our connection to times-past when running the herd off a cliff was the chosen method of hunting. Explaining the idea of a sporting kill to our grandfathers from the Pleistocene or some Ozark hunters from my childhood would be like trying to explain a sporting kill to the coyote. It’s a concept beyond their scope of understanding. It’s a concept afforded to us only because a refrigerator full of food allows it.

What we search for, what we pay homage to when we pick up a weapon and take to the woods, is that hunt for survival. Our efforts to level the playing field and earn our kills are symbolic gestures. They’re meant as a sign of respect to the animal and to those who followed the mammoth herds, and our closer kin from just decades ago who survived on what the wilderness had to offer. We want so badly to emulate this purest form of hunting, but we can’t even understand it. We try to do it through sacrifice of convenience, and that’s why getting a pizza could never be considered sport. It’s why I took a long hard look at my tactics on that crisp November day. Of course, the definition of convenience is up to the individual, and a long list of variables define it.

As for me, I’ve gone back to hunting away from the food plots and feeders. I’ve quit using cameras and even broke out my old paper topographical maps. This November, after 20 years of exclusively bowhunting, I dusted off Dad’s Model 94 and remembered his advice of taking a full bead as I fired a few rounds. The nagging feeling that I’ve left something behind has dissipated a bit, but I’m still searching. I think I can find what I’m looking for with rifle in hand on one of those Ozark ridges.

Arkansas Wild Kids



Can You Find The North Star?

By Darcy Howard, *Central Arkansas Astronomical Society*

THE NORTH STAR IS A STAR THAT HAPPENS TO BE RIGHT OVER THE NORTH POLE OF OUR EARTH. When we see the North Star, we are looking directly north. Before compasses and cell phones, that's how people found their way around. And do you know what the other directions are? Clockwise, they are North, East, South, West. You can remember them with the jingle "Never Eat Shredded Wheat." The first letters of the words are the same.

How do you find the North Star? Its other name is Polaris, and it is not the brightest star in the sky. It is the end star in the handle of the Little Dipper. The stars of the Little Dipper aren't very bright, and the city lights at night around us wash out the fainter stars, which includes most of the Little Dipper. However, you should still be able to see enough stars to find your way to Polaris. We can use the Big Dipper to show us the way.

The Big Dipper is an easy to recognize group of bright stars in a pattern that looks like a pan with a handle. These stars are part of the constellation Ursa Major, or the Big Bear. The Little Dipper is a similar pattern, but upside down, smaller, and with fainter stars. Its proper name is the constellation Ursa Minor, or the Little Bear.

I've made a map for you that shows the north part of the night sky. Something really cool about this part of the sky is that the stars close to Polaris don't rise and set, but instead circle around the North Star. They have a special name called circumpolar stars. "Circumpolar" means "going around the pole." In one night, you can see the stars

change position, but not go below the horizon.

In Arkansas, the North Star is about 35 degrees above the horizon, which is a little less than half way up to a point overhead. You can use the two stars in the bowl of the Big Dipper as pointers to the North Star, and use the distance between the pointer stars as a ruler. Stretch out your hand and use your fingers to measure the distance between the pointer stars, and then measure out five times the distance following the direction the stars point. See the pointer on the star chart. Even if you don't see Polaris, you will be looking North.

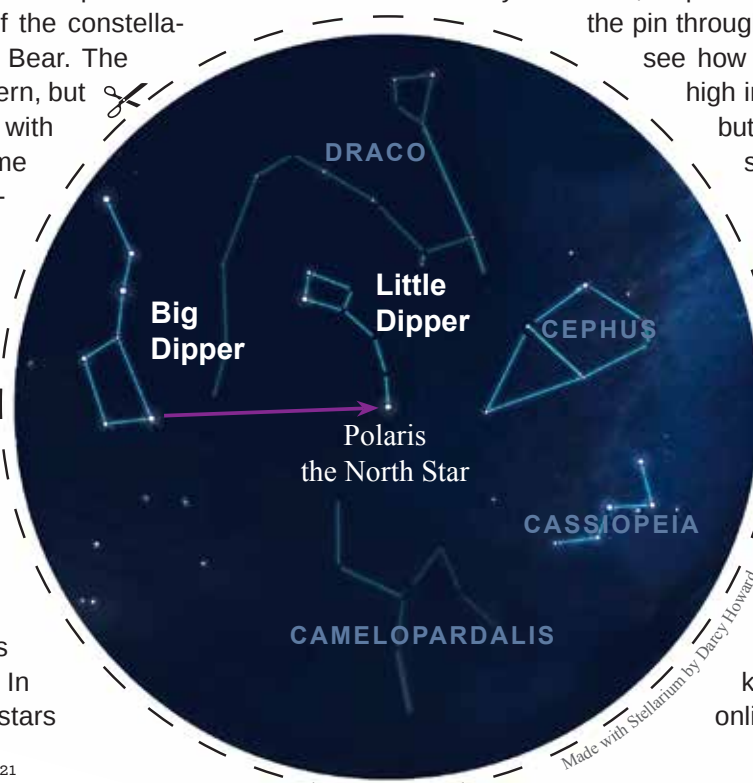
The Star map on this page shows lines between the stars, or between where the stars would be if you could see them. This map shows stars down to 4th magnitude, which is what the sky in some cities looks like. In a good dark sky, you can see the faintest 6th magnitude stars.

You can use this map to make a rotating star chart. Photocopy it and glue it onto some cardboard. You can turn it with your hands, or pin it to the eraser on a pencil. Put

the pin through Polaris and turn the chart to see how the Big Dipper is sometimes high in the sky, or sideways, or low, but the North Star stays in the same place. The story goes that the water is pouring from one Dipper into the other.

If you want to see an exceptional night sky, the Buffalo National Scenic River is designated as an International Dark Sky Park and often has night programs focused on exploring the night sky.

For a schedule of public star parties (when Covid permits) visit the Central Arkansas Astronomical Society online: caasastro.org



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