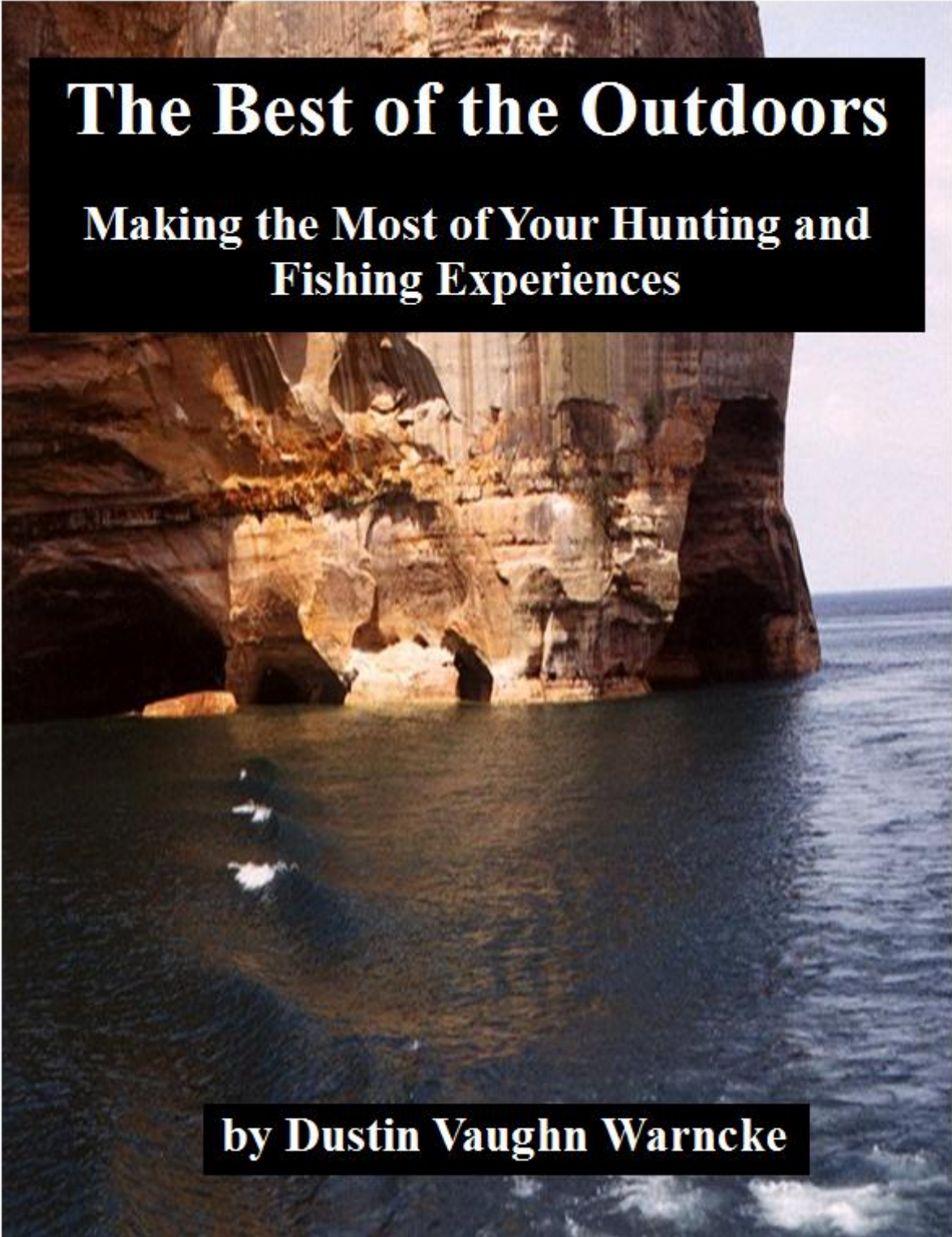


The background of the cover is a photograph of a dramatic coastal scene. On the left, a massive, layered rock formation rises from the water, featuring a large, dark sea cave. The rock is a mix of brown and tan colors, showing signs of weathering. To the right, the ocean is a deep blue with white-capped waves breaking against the shore. The sky is a pale, hazy blue.

The Best of the Outdoors

**Making the Most of Your Hunting and
Fishing Experiences**

by Dustin Vaughn Warncke

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Backyard Backstraps: Urban Deer Bowhunting

When most people think of deer hunting, visions of deer camp, tree stands, gun blinds, or a trail in the woods come to mind. When I think of deer hunting, I think of neighborhood streets and nicely manicured lawns. I have two pop up hunting blinds that I affectionately call my “city deer blinds” which I hunt each season. One stand sits on a 20 acre woodlot behind two houses and my other urban hunting set up sits directly behind a house against a greenbelt and an old creek that runs through central Texas. This area looks like it is in the middle of the city by the landscape but the property sits just outside of the city limits. There is a regional city park across from the creek less than 100 yards away from my blind where the sounds of people running on the hike and bike trail or kids playing on the ball fields can be heard.

Urban bowhunting for deer has been a made popular through hunting shows and even some shows in the reality TV realm on major TV networks. I have embraced this unconventional style of hunting for many years. The reason? Hunting in urban areas is a healthy way to control low-pressure deer populations and fill the freezer with meat. Many urban areas, such as large acreage subdivisions, are over populated with deer and landowners are happy to have respectful hunters take some deer off their property. Add to that the fact that many homeowners consider deer a nuisance and pest as they graze on expensive landscaping and you have a great combination. As a hunter, you are participating as the dominant predator in the ecosystem while also ensuring the health of the deer herd in that area.

Many people ask me how I can hunt an area so close to civilization. One of the reasons is convenience. Both of my urban deer stands are less than 15 minutes away from my house in the northwest suburbs of Austin. Deer season tends to be one of the busiest times of the year for my day job so being close to my family and not leaving my wife as a “deer widow” for a weekend or more is important since I don’t see her much during the week during deer hunting season. Another good reason to hunt urban areas that is often overlooked by many die-hard hunters is that some of the best opportunities on putting the hammer down on a trophy buck are not far away from home. Some of the best deer I have harvested in the last few years have come from one of my urban hunting spots and the hunting pressure on most deer in urban areas is relatively low.

Finding Areas to Hunt

Before you start prospecting areas to hunt, check with your local game warden to make sure that hunting is legal in the area. Some homeowners associations may also have issues with hunting in the area so check that out as well. Start by driving around areas with large acreages and low fences. These are prime urban hunting areas. You want to make sure deer can access you and you can easily track deer so I target 5 acre or larger parcels of land. Sometimes you can get away with smaller properties but the fewer landowners you have to involve in hunting and tracking your deer after the shot, the better. Do a little scouting and press the flesh with some homeowners in the area after you find a prime spot. If you don't know anyone in the area, plan a Saturday sometime before deer season and knock on a few doors. What you are simply asking is if homeowners would mind if you set up a small pop-up blind on their property and hunt a few months out of the year. In return, offer some of the meat you harvest or to bring some processed meat to back them in trade or, if they do not care for venison, offer to make a meat donation to a charitable organization like Hunters for the Hungry. When making this approach, I always dress in my Sunday's best clothes instead of my normal camouflage hunting gear and drive my SUV instead of the hunting truck. You want to put your best foot forward when meeting people and present yourself as professional and respectful as possible. The key to hunting in urban areas is to make friends with neighboring landowners after you have found your spot to hunt. This approach is similar. Just make sure you have the blessing of neighboring landowners to access their land if and when you need to retrieve a downed deer from their property.

Examples of the Author's Urban Hunting Set-Ups



Essential Hunting Gear

If you're a bowhunter, chances are that you have everything you need for a successful urban hunting adventure. If you are a gun hunter, you will want to invest in a crossbow if you don't already own one. They are usually easy to use and you can become proficient with one in a short amount of time. I personally prefer crossbows for urban hunting since the pop-up blinds I hunt out of are small. I prefer to use a trail camera to pattern deer and know when the prime times are to hunt. For instance, my creek stand blind has deer coming by it like clockwork every evening and my other stand is better for morning hunts. Set up your blind about 20 yards from your feeder or other food source such as a small food plot so you can make the best shot possible. I constantly reiterate how important it is to make every shot count in an urban hunting situation. I prefer to use a three-blade mechanical broadhead with a large 1 ½" to 2" cut radius such as the ones made by Grim Reaper Broadheads. Most all of the deer I have taken in my urban areas have dropped well within 100 yards.

A nice benefit of urban deer hunting is that the cost to hunt is much cheaper than traditional hunting ranches or seasonal leases and the benefits to your freezer and homeowners are great. To see some of my urban hunts, visit my website at www.dustinsprojects.com. Hunt hard and have fun!

What are We Teaching the Next Generation?

I have wanted to write this article for some time now. My thoughts and feelings on the subject of what we are teaching our youth, the next generation of outdoorsmen, is no secret to those around me. It is a subject that comes up often in conversation. Questions are constantly raised by other outdoor writers such as, "What do we define as a trophy?", "How do we introduce new young kids to our sport if they did not grow up around it?" or "How do we keep our hunting and fishing heritage alive if all kids are interested in are video games and the other technologies of our day?" The list continues. I often compare the hunting and fishing heritage for the next generation to another far different category... Fabric and sewing supply stores. This is a pretty far reach so I know what you are thinking but stay with me. Consider that many folks in older generations grew accustomed to making their own clothing and grew up in an era where sewing and altering your own clothes, as well as making other things at home, were a common practice handed down through the generations. As that generation born during the Great Depression and shortly after get older and pass on, the traditions of making your own clothing from patterns and fabric will pass with them. I think many of the stores frequented by these seasoned customers will fall by the wayside as a result. Our culture is different today than back then, after all. You can buy many things cheaper than you can make them in many instances. It's cheaper to replace than to repair so many things we own. The technology of our current time has made most of our lives easier and more efficient than ever before. But what about the next generation and the traditions and heritage we pass on to them?

I recently was reminded of the phrase "Use it Up, Wear it Out... Make it Do or Do Without". This was a common saying many years ago before we had many of the modern conveniences we have today. I was raised, in part, by Depression-Era grandparents who taught me the value of providing for your family from the land and water and where food really comes from. It certainly was not all from the grocery store shelves. Some hunters have told me that there is no need for the traditions of the past. We are in a brave new world. Everything is different now. I get that. But what will become of the sport and traditions we love and want to see live beyond our lifetimes with our children, grandchildren, and other young people around us if we manifest that attitude?

As I have written about before, I started later in the sport of hunting than many did. I made it a point to surround myself with experts and positive influences in my beginning years. “Birds of a feather flock together”, as another old saying goes. The same should be true for young people. Be careful in the stories and experiences you share with hunters in their formative years. While we never want to “shelter” hunters new to the sport from some of the possibilities that can happen in the field, we don't want them to get jaded or have negative experiences from our influence if at all possible. At the time of this writing, I was the youth hunt coordinator for Hill Country Bowhunters (www.hillcountrybowhunters.com). I recently returned from one of our youth hunts at DB Hunting Ranch (www.dbhunting.com), a ranch I also work for as Sales and Marketing Director. During our hunts with the youth, I make it a point to talk about any issues affecting our hunt or mistakes the hunters may have made during the hunt away from the young hunters, exclusively with the other adults in the hunting party. The youth need to know what is going on but they don't have to know every single detail about every aspect of the hunt when or if something goes wrong or they make a mistake in the field. They are there to enjoy the hunt and striving to make sure they have the best experience possible is our job as the experienced adult hunters guiding them.

I was recently at a “Captian's Day” event at our local Cabela's retail store in Buda as a Pro-Staff with Marty McIntyre and Garquest Bowfishing Guide Service (www.garquest.com) as one of the exhibitors for the weekend. Next to our table was an older seasoned outdoorsman who hosted summer youth camps for Texas area kids. His passion for getting kids outside and involved in outdoor activities was evident. Young boys and girls who came by were wide-eyed and grinning ear to ear about the prospects of attending one of his camps where he covered basics of archery, firearms, hunting, target shooting, fishing, camping, and more. He even offered scholarships for kids who could not afford the camp and talked with Marty about adding bowfishing to the mix of events offered at the camp in the future. This is the kind of thing that excites me beyond words. Getting kids who do not have a hunting heritage in their family or circle of friends is the core demographic we should concentrate on where possible and that is what this particular camp program was doing. Other larger programs like NASP (National Archery in the Schools Program) seeks to do the same thing through schools, although not directly hunting related.

While at this Cabela's event and talking to head director of this camp, the head of the bowhunting section of the camp came to visit and the two men engaged into a friendly debate about the message of the camp. The head director stated he did not want kids to be introduced to the “killing” stage of hunting, although that is what many kids, especially boys, were naturally interested in with bowhunting. The bowhunting director thought otherwise.

Why teach bowhunting if we are not sending the message that there is an end product to the hunting adventure? Both men made good points about the messages kids are exposed to today. Hunting and fishing should not be all about just "killing and catching" but that can certainly a draw for kids to get into the sport to begin with if they do not have any hunting or fishing background at home. What message do we send? The sportsmen's message of enjoying nature as it is and being part of it or, additionally, providing for yourself and your family out of nature in participating as part of the natural ecosystem is a good well-rounded approach in my opinion. Are we doing a good job of teaching both aspects of our sport (providing for yourself by "killing and catching" and enjoying the outdoors and natural beauty) now in what the young people of today perceive of our outdoor pursuits? All of these are good points and questions that I think need to be considered.

Recent Youth Hunts sponsored by Hill Country Bowhunters





Hill Country Bowhunters supports youth hunting and raises money for this purpose through to providing monthly 3-D archery tournaments and encouraging adults and youth alike to enjoy the sport of archery in a 30 target 3D archery course during the off-season of deer season. As I have mentioned before, 3D Archery is a great way to introduce youth to archery and hunting without a lot of extra time, money, or work. Just show up to the event and prepare to enjoy the outdoors and fellowship with others. The archery industry has seen a spike in young archers getting involved in the sport due to movies like, "The Hunger Games" and others where archery is part of the story line. The main thing we need to seek to do as experience archers and hunters is make sure the youth that are starting out are using the right fundamentals, being safe, and having fun at the sport. A youth bow can be purchased used or new very inexpensively and many young archers, along with adults, can practice in the privacy and comfort of a large backyard without having to ever visit an archery course or range, making daily practice at home a great habit.

On the subject of firearms, most of us started with BB guns, pellet rifles, and, of course, the venerable .22 rifle. With all the media hype on "assault weapons" and "black rifles", I think kids should understand that the look of a rifle, shotgun, or handgun, does not affect the function of the firearm. A gun is simply a tool. That being said, there are no bad or evil guns. For people to say that there are is a major misunderstanding. The media would have you believe that guns go off by themselves and harm innocent victims without addressing the people behind them who are pulling the trigger. A gun is certainly a more serious platform to talk about safety and fundamentals with a new hunter but we have to keep in mind that our youth are surrounded by a world who sends mixed messages about gun control as many of their peers that will never have the benefit of knowing and understanding the 2nd

Amendment or why hunters and target shooters use and own guns like most of us who have been around guns for a long time. Start them off with the right perception and outlook on firearms first. Obviously, one of the cardinal rules on guns is to get kids started with low-recoiling guns and moving up to higher and more powerful calibers only after they are comfortable with their shooting. I will never forget what it felt like when I was introduced shoot my first two high power rifles, a 25-06 and .308 Winchester. Now that was a new experience from what I had experienced with a .22 or an air rifle for sure! Many adult shooters that I have helped with shooting fundamentals as a range master at my local gun range over the years developed bad habits like flinching on anticipation of the shot, pulling off target to the left or right due to pressing the trigger too hard and fast, or other common issues, come to the surface because they were not educated in the right way to shoot when they were young or when they started target shooting or hunting later in life. New shooters and sportsmen in general need to be surrounded by champions that will build them up and encourage them as well as know what to look for in bad shooting form so a bad habit doesn't turn into a long-term issue down the road.

Another good practice I think we can all engage in is conducting ourselves with respect and dignity both in person, and in our correspondences on the phone and through the internet. I bring this topic up specifically because of a recent post on a very popular hunting forum that I frequently advertise on as well as take part in online fellowship with other Texas hunters. With the advent of technology, many hunters I have come across are well-meaning folks in person but will not hesitate to "dogpile" on an issue or attack someone, on a controversial issue, or even a hunting ranch or deer processor on a hunting or fishing forum. If you don't think kids read these posts, think again. They are on the internet all the time and very impressionable. One practice I will not take part in is jumping on the bandwagon of a topic or issue that I am not an expert in or have no personal experience with when it comes up. If you don't know the issue or situation or have a proverbial "dog in the hunt", it might be best to keep your comments and opinions to yourself. A recent hunter that visited our ranch came to the owners singing my praises for not getting involved in the politics of the hunting forum I was on. He said I made a good practice by just getting on there, doing my business, helping new hunters with questions as needed, and leaving the drama alone. My response to that is that I simply do not allow myself the time to do much more than that. Life has too much to offer and getting involved in a dramatic political discussion or throwing my two cents in with my opinions on a ranch I have never heard of or been around, for instance, is a waste of time in my view. Remember, people can read things you wrote on outdoor forums, social media sites, and more for many years. Choose your words wisely. You never know who is reading

and what they will think about our sporting heritage as they form their first experiences in woods or on the lake...

I love hunting shows. Of course, I am part of one of them so that makes sense. One issue I frequently take with many shows on television and the internet today is the message they send to new hunters and even the influence they have on those of us who have been around the block a time or two. I for one do not necessarily believe in taking 1,000 yard or more long range shots, leaving a deer overnight before going back out to track it the next morning, or shooting only huge trophy animals in the course of hunting. Everything is relative to circumstances, of course, but the limit is getting pushed every day on what we see in outdoor TV shows. Many popular hunting shows embody some extreme characteristics as common place and this is the wrong message to send to young or inexperienced hunters. I understand this is the nature of what hunters want to see but new hunters need to understand management hunting, depredation hunting, general land and resource management, and more. That might be boring to some but it needs a front row seat sometimes. So many times the fundamental subjects of our sporting heritage take a back seat to those extreme shots and huge trophy kills and catches.

Another topic that should be mentioned is what we consider a trophy in hunting or fishing and the message we send to those around us about this subject. Harvesting or catching a trophy doesn't always mean one hunter is better than the other. Unfortunately, the way many hunters judge themselves is to compare themselves hunters on TV or other career celebrities in the hunting industry when they asses what they have accomplished. Much like in our American society, we always look to folks who have bigger and better versions of what we have instead of enjoying the journey of life. I have been guilty of this as many hunters have but we should be careful again in the message we send to the youth and newcomers to the sport. The hunt does not always have to be about the kill. The fishing trip does not always have to be about the lunker bass or huge slob of a catfish. For many outdoorsmen, however, it seems the only thing that matters is the size of the horns or antlers, the number of keeper fish put in the box, the number of kills on a hunt, and the list goes on. The next generation of hunters notices this and will follow what you do carefully. Perception is reality to them. There was a story at my hunting camp this year of a young hunter who shot a 170-class Whitetail, which is a very large trophy-class deer by Texas standards. That may be the biggest deer he would ever shoot in his lifetime and it was his first deer. The question came up around the campfire that night, "Where does he go from here?" Those are high standards to live up to if you ask me. Young hunters and seasoned hunters alike should recognize it is about the experience, not necessarily the kill or catch at the end of the day. Limiting out, harvesting a

trophy animal, or other thrills of the trip are icing on the cake. A successful hunting or fishing adventure does not always have to be defined by meat in the freezer or a trophy on the wall. I fear we will lose many of our new hunters if they have to compare their successes in the field to what has been defined as success by many hunters today.

We must understand the amount of influence we have as experienced outdoorsmen and it is up to our seasoned hunting generation to pass the torch to those in the coming generations if we wish for our outdoor legacy and heritage, along with family traditions, to live on. Youth and new hunters of any age are looking to those of us who have "been there and done" that for tips, techniques, suggestions and general helpful advice. We must be ambassadors of our sport if we want it to continue. Share the legacy you have made in your own outdoor adventures with those young and impressionable hunters around you in a positive and educational manner. Take a young person in your life on your next hunting, fishing or other outdoor adventure, even if it is only to watch what you do and be a part of the experience. Approach the young and new hunters in your life with the same joy, wonder, excitement, grace, and understanding that you had when you started and show the same patience you were given by those experienced around you back then. I am excited about the future of our sport and our outdoor industry. It is better than it has ever been before and we should cherish that. Share your passion and love for the outdoors with those around you every day.



Positive Thinking in the Outdoors: Staying Upbeat When the Unexpected Happens

It is remarkable to me that many hunters I encounter never consider the power of positive thinking in the world of our sport of hunting. In our culture and throughout the decades and centuries before our time on this earth, you do not have to look far to find an excuse or run into someone who will gladly share their problems with you and negativity talk about how bad things are in the world.

In my years guiding hunts for friends and family and working extensively in the hunting industry and in sales and marketing for a hunting ranch, I have experienced, more than a few times, how much of an impact a positive or negative attitude or thought process can make or break a hunt. Most would not argue with the point that much of what we do in the field is a mental game. On many occasions, I have worked with hunters who showed up expecting our guides to do all the work for them (wrong expectations) without properly preparing and practicing for the hunt (poor preparation and planning) as well as have an “entitlement” attitude about what they expect from the hunt. This happens more than you think. Furthermore, they take no responsibility for a missed shot or even poor shot placement during a hunt, expecting the guide to magically recover the animal or get another shot opportunity at another animal during the hunt. Then, if this doesn’t happen, they in effect, throw their hands in the air and blame the ranch for their own shortcomings.

Many of us have missed shots and even not recovered animals in the past. It is part of hunting sometimes, although not a graceful or glorious part we like to talk about often. The point of this is to not let negative emotions get the best of you. A good attitude and positive thinking is a choice. As I have written about and talked about on camera many times before, the point of hunting efficiently and effectively is to practice often and hunt with the best equipment to put all of the odds in your favor of successful harvest, no matter what the pursuit. The rest indeed is a mental game of keeping the negative garbage out of your head and staying positive about where you are and where you are going in your future endeavors.

Negative thinking, or as author and motivational speaker Zig Zigler called it, “Stinkin’ Thinking”, works in a snowball effect. I have seen it happen over and over on many hunts I have guided and with friends and family I have hunted with over the years. You forget to load your gun after you get settled in your blind, the deer of your dreams comes walking out, you get nervous and frazzled. Nothing seems to be going right. It doesn’t seem like your lucky day. You end up pulling the shot, missing the deer completely. The longer I live, the more I have

become aware that my response to a given situation could greatly influence the outcome... This is the case with all of us.

The last exotic hunt I was on is a good example of “Murphy’s Law” showing up. I was after a Silver Medal Corsican Ram and did a solo spot and stalk hunt to get him. I took my rifle as I didn’t think I would have a chance to get close enough for a shot with a bow and I figured it would be an easier hunt than it eventually turned out to be. Little did I remember that one of the part-time hunting guides accidentally let my rifle slip and fall off the truck seat on my last hunt and I didn’t follow through in re-check my zero at the gun range before this hunt. The shot I had was less than 50 yards and I hit the Ram low in the shoulder, right about the leg joint. He limped off and with no blood trail to be found. Yep. Not a fun feeling, my friends!

The next day, the ranch owner found the Ram. He was still alive but limping and in another part of the ranch property. He called me with the news. I quickly switched out rifles and headed that way. We got on his trail, did a quick spot and stalk, and I took him down in one well-placed shot. I responded to this situation and kept my cool after the bad shot and was blessed and lucky enough to get a second opportunity. No, it doesn’t always work out that way but there is something to be said for responsive (positive) thinking versus reactive (negative) thinking after something unexpected and frustrating happens.

Recent to writing this article, I filmed a short tech tip in the blind one evening while I was bow hunting on this same subject of positive thinking. Not 30 minutes after filming this segment, here comes a nice 8-point and a shot I have made dozens of times in practice and on previous hunts. The arrow hit the deer lower than expected, in the low shoulder. No pass-through shot. The arrow stuck in him and eventually pulled out. It wasn’t a fatal hit but certainly made my heart sink as I have lost very few deer bowhunting of the years. I spotted the deer shortly after this hunt and he made an almost full recovery from this shot, mainly just a slight limp. How ironic, I thought. I just filmed a segment about positive thinking in the face of unexpected challenges in the field and this happens! It was a great chance for me to dust myself off and get back at it. Two weeks later, same blind, same set-up, I nail a management spike buck in the morning. This one REALLY needed to be culled and you would have been proud of me for doing so. Perfect shot placement and he piled up in less than 45 yards and about 10 seconds after the shot! I hunted that same stand in the evening and shot a nice trophy class 8-point, who ran 30 yards, stood there for a second, and fell over. Two deer down in one day, same stand...Awesome! Moral of the story: Dust Yourself Off and Try Again, Cowboy!

I have seen many hunters virtually flop and the floor and foam at the mouth in the face of adversity or unexpected circumstances while on a hunt and their end result and outcome usually is never as good as hunters who stay calm, cool, and collective. The rule I generally use is to expect the unexpected but always have a positive outlook and hope for the best. You never know what is around the next corner. It is hard for me to admit I have been on some tough hunts, made a bad shot, or had other unforeseen circumstances happen but they happen to all of us and it's to be expected in the course of life. Staying positive and having a bright outlook is vital important as we (the experienced hunter) are examples to non-hunters, impressionable youth hunters, and even fellow adults just starting out hunting on their own. We sometimes never realize the full impact how we respond to situation and how it might affect the way people around us view hunters, including the non-hunting community. Remember, every experience in the field, no matter how it goes, is a learning experience. There is no such thing as wasting time when you are learning from your successes and mistakes in the process.

When I started hunting on my own in my early 20's after graduating college, I was very discouraged by a guide I had when I hunted government property on Fort Hood here in Central Texas. As part of that hunting program, guides were experienced volunteers who knew the area they were assigned to and were required to lead hunting parties to their respective hunting areas during rifle season for deer hunting. This included building and maintaining hunting stands, clearing shooting lanes, etc. This one particular guide always seemed angry and grumpy about something every time I hunted with him. He grumbled about not seeing any deer on a few hunts and then, when he finally shot a deer, he complained he had to use a buck tag because he shot what he thought was a doe but turned out to be a button buck. I quit hunting Fort Hood after that experience and began to think all hunters had this same attitude. Perception can be reality to those around us and we forget this all too often. Fort Hood is a great place to hunt but this guide almost made me leave the sport of hunting completely for a time.

I constantly seek to encourage youth hunters and adults who are new to the sport to be better at what they do and practice often but attitude is really everything when it comes to implementation of what you know out in the field. I don't hang around or associate with anyone who has a negative attitude. I have no time or energy for it. It drains the life out of me. The psychology of attitude is pretty simple to understand. Reactive actions are ones people take in recoil to a situation. "Flipping out" if you miss a shot, complaining or playing the "blame game", or other negative reactions are normal for some people but never HAVE to be a response to a situation. On the other hand, responsive actions are positive

approaches to a given situation instead of doing what “comes natural” to some of us. This is very hard sometimes but re-grouping and re-approaching a situation after something unexpected or challenging comes up can be the difference in success or failure in our outdoor adventures.

Here are some points to consider:

1) Be Humble. It is certainly alright to be proud of a trophy animal or near impossible shot or past accomplishments and trophies. I tell stories of my hunts and constantly have my phone out showing pictures or videos when the topic of hunting or fishing comes up in general conversation but that is because I love to share my passion with those around me. I am not trying to prove myself to anyone. The famous motivational speaker Tony Robbins once said, “People don’t respect you for what you say you are going to do.” Let your accomplishments speak for themselves. At the ranch I work for a segment of hunters that are usually guilty of “Big Hat and No Cattle” or “All Talk and No Walk” are handgun hunters and bowhunters. More than a few times I get stories about how accurate a hunter is in a local or national tournament circuit but they almost jinx themselves when they talk about how wonderful a shot they are before coming on a hunt with us. Many times these same folks end up wounding an animal that is never recovered or missing a seemingly easy shot completely. Keep your opinions about yourself to yourself and let other people make their own assessments about your skill based on your performance. No one likes a bragger anyway and hunters with huge egos usually get on everyone’s nerves after a while. Don’t be THAT guy...

2) Practice Positive Self-Talk and Daily Affirmations. Norman Vincent Peale’s best selling and timeless book, *The Power of Positive Thinking*, is among one of the classic “must-read” books out there for anyone wanting to have a better outlook on life in general. Even though the book was written several decades ago, the message still pertains to our lives today. A small synopsis of this philosophy is that what you think about is what you will become most of the time. We all have a “self-dialog” where we talk ourselves through different situations mentally. When you think to yourself, what does it sound like? Is it positive or negative? Is it victorious or defeated? Although it might seem a bit “hokey” at first saying phrases like, “I feel healthy, happy, and terrific!” or “I believe today is going to be a great day!” mentally to yourself throughout the day, this type of thinking will influence you in a positive way. I do say these kind of mental affirmations every day and, no matter what kind of day I am having, it always turns out better than turning to negative thought process. A daily affirmation I learned from the above book that I say every morning is “I am thankful and grateful for all that I have had, for all that I have, and for all that I shall have.” Regardless of your spiritual or

religious beliefs, this is a simple but effective affirmation that you can say out loud or to yourself every day. It is easy to remember and will do wonders for your outlook on life. More on that in a minute.

3) Celebrate your Past Accomplishments. As I am writing this article, I look up at various shoulder, European, and horn mounts of Whitetail Deer, two Silver Medal Rams, a Red Stag, a Catalina Billy Goat, and more. Many hunters I meet are never happy with what they have accomplished or satisfied with what they already have hanging on the wall or in their photo book. It's always about the next big buck, exotic trophy animal, predator, or something else. I try to live content with all that I have. I am so blessed to have been able to harvest the amount of animals I have in the past and realize that I have more to celebrate than many hunters might ever have, especially in previous generations. A year or so ago, I started even looking at any future fishing or hunting trips I would go on or animal I would harvest as a trophy would be "icing on the cake" on top of what I have already accomplished. A bonus! Be thankful and grateful for the opportunity and freedoms we have here in the US to be able to harvest our own food from nature or cull out invasive species as a recreation and sport. You can't do what we have the freedoms to do in the outdoors in many countries around the world.

4) Give Back and Share the Wealth. I am a supporter and promoter of organizations such as Hunters for the Hungry. World hunger has always been a personal target of mine and I am blessed to shoot enough deer to be able to give away some of my harvest each year and encourage everyone else to do likewise. Local area food banks and organizations like Hunters for the Hungry greatly appreciate meat or financial donations. My local Capital Area Food Bank here in the Central Texas area cheerfully accepts processed venison with an emphasis on ground burger meat as it can have many uses as a lean and healthy red meat. Every visit I make there, I feel like a new man when I leave because I am making a difference in the lives of someone less fortunate and venison is hot commodity there too! The food bank directors tell me that ground deer meat is usually one of the first meat products that is selected by local food support organizations from the food bank as it is low in fat and a great protein source! Giving in this fashion, whether financially or by donating wild game directly, is a very humble and service-minded way to show love for those in your community and those around you. I bring this subject up often whenever I encounter anti-hunters or non-hunters as it is hard to argue with a hunter who helps feed the less fortunate and needy in his or her community. Even many PETA advocates and hardcore vegetarians have a hard time arguing against my avocation of donating meat to feed the poor in our communities. This showcases

hunters as leaders and, while the goal is never to boast or be too prideful about giving, a little positive public relations exposure is never a bad thing for our hunting community!

5) Eliminate the Negative. You can find negativity about anywhere you look in our society. The local and national news broadcast on television and newspaper are certainly laden with this and the reasoning is because people will watch it. “If it Bleeds It Leads” is a popular saying for the news, in any format, and it’s true. So, one thing invite you to do in your general life is to eliminate the garbage. I often advocate not listening to the evening news as 99% or more of the time you have no control of what happens in the world anyway. I am not saying that you should not be aware or even be in prayer for the people, places, and situations involved in stories that make the news but the issue is that we naturally internalize these issues and it does have an overall effect on how we view the world. I am not perfect here by any means. I used to be a talk and news radio junkie and even listened to the radio when I slept every night at one point in my life. I noticed a profound change in my life and thought process after I stopped filling my brain with all the troubles of the world. With the innovations of our time, you can get all the news you need on the internet or even most cell phones in about 90 seconds or less. Need the weather forecast? There’s an App for that or go find it in about 3 seconds on the internet. I am not saying that we should not care about what happens in the world around us or be informed about the problems of our world but you cannot better your life if you constantly surround yourself with negative thoughts and emotions.

Concentrate instead on what good you can do around you and for yourself. Practice shooting your bow or gun, teach an adult or youth around you how to shoot or get started in another way with our great sport of hunting or fishing. Support a wounded soldier event or charity. Get back to nature and “God’s country” instead of concentrating on the all the spin, hype, and garbage out there. If this doesn’t make sense, you can always go back to the doom and gloom of watching the 24/7 news channels and weigh yourself down with all the problems of the world or stay tuned for more garbage at 10pm. I will be thinking about my next hunt in the meantime.

6) Be Aware of Your Emotions and Your Response to a Situation. How long do you stay angry or upset? 15 minutes or 15 days? I am open with you about my own personal “tough days” hunting in the field to share with you that we all go through issues like being outdoors in bad weather, not seeing anything you are hunting for in the field or fishing for on the lake, a missed shot or even a bad shot placement. I have been there with you. We all have. One one trip, Marty McInyre (bowfishing guide with Garquest) and I both separately shot what would

have been a new lake record longnose gar on a bowfishing trip one night and both of our arrows pulled out of the fish. Sometimes you can't win! What happens sometime happens. It is what it is. What you do after that is your choice. To paraphrase most positive thinking books out there, it's not what happens to you, it's what you do with what happens to you. Keep smiling! Even if your gun jams, your arrow falls off the rest when you're drawing your bow, or you get a bird's nest in your fishing reel after you cast. Life goes on and there is so much we have to be thankful and grateful for in our world today. Sure, there are some tough days but attitude is always a choice. Remember the Law of Attraction rewards those who are thankful and grateful every time.

7) Remember, this is the Golden Age of our Era. We often take for granted the time we live in. Never before have we had the technological innovations and modern conveniences that people only dreamed decades ago. I have often said that I thank God every day for the age and time we are living in today. It's good to be alive. We have so many things to be grateful for at home and in the field. Life can be tough but look at all we have! GPS systems in the woods and in our vehicles, rifles and ammunition that can accurately shoot 1,000 yards or more, Crossbows that can send a bolt flying over 400 feet per second, 24/7 access to just about anything we ever wanted to know from our computers and cell phones, and much more. It's easy to take all this for granted but there is so much to celebrate!

8) When's the Last Time You Gave Thanks? It is easy to take things for granted in a world filled with premiere transportation, communication, and other technologies that make our life more effective and effect that ever before. But when was the last time you gave thanks for it? Regardless of your spiritual beliefs, thankfulness and gratefulness attract great things in life. When's the last time you felt grateful for your children, parents, or other family in your life? If you are blessed to have it, giving thanks for your good health is something we can all relate to in life. My late grandfather one time reflected on his childhood in the 1930's and 40's and the scarcity of food at his home back then unless you went out and caught it or killed it yourself. Today, we have grocery stores and super big-box stores full of every imaginable item in most every city and fast food restaurants within driving distance of most of our homes. The world is now at our fingertips. I can't find much to complain about with all that we have today.

9) Remember Who Made All of This. Mac & Prowler often talk about "God, Guns, and Country". Most of us outdoorsmen have a belief in a higher power. The organization and systems of nature alone is incredibly fascinating to me. An animal dies, another animal or organism is there to clean it up. There is not a lot of natural pollution, dead and rotting

carcasses, or other inconsistencies or imbalances found in God's country throughout nature. It all works on a self-sustaining cycle with or without our help. This was all created somehow and developing a relationship with the creator, God, is a crucial part of my life as well as my relationship and daily walk with Jesus Christ. No, I am not preaching religion here, but rather a personal relationship with the one who made what we enjoy so much in the outdoors. Honoring God and having a good relationship with Him is a great practice in life regardless who you are or what you do. Our connection with nature is a great way to remember and be thankful for all our creator has blessed us with. There is so much to celebrate. Personally, in the field, I sometimes well up with tears of joy and thanksgiving after making a good shot and recovering an animal. Whether you are saving deer one predator at a time, catching fish, or hunting for table fare, be thankful for the opportunity to do it and share it with those around you.

10) What Legacy Will You Leave Behind? Both of my grandfathers were avid outdoorsmen and my biggest inspirations to get involved and stay active in hunting and fishing, long after they passed away, because of their love and passion of the sport. My grandfather on my mother's side, "Opa", was an avid fisherman and ran trotlines every day he could get down to the river for catfish using bait soap and other "old school" attractants. My grandfather on my father's side was also avid fisherman and a deer hunter in South Texas. One of my first memories was watching him skin deer and one huge hog weight over 500 pounds that had just recently gone feral. I miss them both so much now. I will never forget what they taught me in my formative years and their spirit lives on in me. I am sure that you have someone in your life from the past or present to thank for why you enjoy the outdoors as well. We all do.

One thing we must never forget, however, is the legacy and memory we will leave with those around us now and after we are gone. What example are you setting for those around you? What do you want to share today with the youth of today that might impact the next generation or generations to come in the decades ahead? What legacy will you leave behind one day?

We have so much to be excited about in the day and age we live in and I think outdoorsmen and women have even more to be thankful and grateful for as we have the best of both worlds. We are blessed with modern conveniences of our time along with the pure natural beauty of the great outdoors. The world we live in is full of plenty of people who will never enjoy the passions and pursuits most of us have who hunt, fish, hike, camp or do other outdoor activities communing with nature. Take advantage of it and encourage those around you to come with you or share your experiences in a way they can relate to in a positive way.

It is your choice if you learn from an experience or make it an issue you complain to about to everyone all the time. We must remember that how we share our love and passion of the outdoors with those around us is a personal decision, as is the case with many decisions in life and the overall attitude we possess. Make yours a positive and memorable experience. As always, hunt hard, shoot straight, be safe, and have fun out there!

Accuracy and Hunting: What Counts in the End?

Much can be said about accuracy and its relationship to hunting in the field versus hunting paper at the shooting range. Many will argue the finer points about relative or practical accuracy in the world of hunting versus precision shooting or even just general target shooting at the gun range and I can certainly run with that crowd. Precision accuracy is not always a real world scenario when you are shooting off-hand without a solid rest, in a standing or kneeling position, or even aiming at a moving target while in the woods. Most public gun ranges don't prepare you for what you might encounter outdoors so I try to make it a practice to cover as many shooting scenarios at the range and elsewhere to become the best shot I can be when the moment of truth arrives.

Over the years, I have guided more than a few hunts and usually most the hunts I host are friends, family, or business customers of mine as I leave the professional guiding up to Jake Davis, Danny Barry, and the rest of the guide crew at DB Hunting Ranch where I serve as the outside sales/marketing director. I once guided a customer of mine, an owner of an outdoor shooting sports related business, on a hog hunt a few years ago. Not only was he the owner of numerous firearms, he was also a Vietnam Veteran and anyone who served in that war or any other war or conflict around our world has my utmost respect.

I had figured this hunt to be an easy one as I the hogs were hitting the feeder on the stand we were hunting on a regular basis in the morning and we were in our stand inside the high fence of the ranch just before daylight the morning of our hunt. A sounder of about 12 hogs came out shortly after shooting light dawned and I had my customer get into position to take a shot. Our stand was about a 65 yard shot and a spot that I had taken many hogs and other game from numerous times, so I knew he would get his money's worth from this set-up. He had a bolt action .243, more than enough firepower for a "meat hog". He hunkered down, took his time, and squeezed off a round. The group of hogs ran off into the brush including the one he had hit. It looked like a solid shot from what I could see tell so, after a short wait, we made our way down to the feeder together only to discover no blood trail or any other sign of a fatal shot. I went on a tracking job with Jake, the other guide that morning, after some time had passed and spooked the hog out of some heavy brush, never to see it again that day. My customer was rather upset that we did not take a shot at the hog when we saw it, as if we had the time and resources to act that quickly and just didn't do anything about it.

I explained that the hog was into another thick part of brush before we could even think of reaching for a gun to dispatch it with. We found the hog two days later...it was shot in the hind quarter. I chalked this up to a rushed shot or even nerves. We have all been there and if you have hunted any length of time at all, you have lost an animal and never recovered it after a shot. Yes, bad shots happen....but, then again, so do bad shooters. Both of those variables can be fixed in most cases.

Fast forward to before a recent deer season, when I was asked to help this same customer sight in his .30-30 lever action carbine before he headed to his deer lease. After getting the rifle "on paper" at 100 yards, I let him sight-in the rifle the rest of the way to fine tune his rifle to his desire since he would be the one hunting with it. His groups were about 6" or more low and to the left of the 10-ring bulls eye (about the 4 o'clock position) on a standard large rifle target. I advised him to keep shooting until he centered his group on target or could reasonably be comfortable with his point of impact with each shot without having to use "Kentucky Windage" and am off the target to hit what he was aiming at on his hunt. His response, "It's good enough. All my shots are going to be less than 75 yards anyway." Ruh-Roh... Now I began to see the problem with our earlier hog hunt and the reason I have far more meat in my freezer and trophies on my wall than he does...

I believe in the old success principal that "Direction is more important than Speed". This is a true philosophy with a person's path in life and the choices we make on a day-to-day basis through our lives, if you think about it, but it is also a good mantra for shooting and hunting as well.

Accuracy is indeed important. In fact, Wyatt Erp is quoted as saying "Accuracy is Everything". Sometimes it is the most important factor in a given equation. Do you need to have a "bench rest" accurate rifle to hunt? Certainly not. But knowing the capabilities, point of impact at a given range, and accuracy of your chosen hunting weapon are all crucial to success in the field. I have been blessed with plenty of opportunities for big game hunting for which I am very grateful. I am proud to have a freezer full of meat each year and an office decorated with several trophy mounts to prove it. That success early in my hunting life did not come easy though. The preparation and work that goes into that success in the field comes at a cost though and I run into hunters every year with a "country song" sob story because they are not willing to pay the price to prepare correctly.

Another hunt I was on with a former next door neighbor of mine proved my "Direction vs. Speed" philosophy well. He had just received a Ruger Mk II chambered in .458 Lott from his business partner at a construction company he owned as a milestone achievement gift. Now,

the .458 Lott is an African game caliber that packs a punch able to take down a Cape Buffalo or similar-sized game. He insisted on not getting a scope for it and only using the factory iron sights. He hunted one evening in a separate hunting stand from me and took a low light shot at a large hog. The hog ran off and we found it by the smell because it was a bad, and I mean bad, gut shot. Upon further examination, we figured the hog died from the sheer shock of that round, not the shot placement. If it was hit with anything lighter, it would have died a slow-miserable death by a water-source, which is most often the case with a gut shot animal.

I practice the golden rule. If was an animal being pursued by a hunter, I would want a quick and ethical dispatch. I am amazed by some of the hunters that I run into from time to time, however, who seem to have a disregard for the welfare of the animals they hunt. We are sportsman and should be models of that good ethical behavior in our sport, especially to the anti-hunting community that surrounds and attacks our sport and heritage.

I just returned from the range here in the 100 degree plus Texas heat we are accustom to, working on my accuracy and trying to tighten my groups at 100 yards with my hunting rifle before deer season. I do the same with my crossbow and compound bow in my back yard at different yardages each season and have lost very few animals in recovery as a result. What frustrates me is many hunters I see around me picking up their gun or bow, shoot it a few times, call it good. Hope you hit what your aiming at, dude. In my humble opinion, good shooting fundamentals and habits should be practiced on a regular basis all year round.

Shoot an Air Rifle or .22 Rifle for Fundamental Target Practice

One habit I encourage my fellow hunters to develop is to practice shooting fundamentals using an Air Rifle or .22 Rifle. They are both cheap to shoot, have light recoil and are fairly quiet to fire compared to your normal hunting guns. Plinking for accuracy and shooting fundamentals at the range is one excellent habit that has me going to the range on a regular basis.

Expand your Target Choices

If you have not tried Ghost Targets (www.ghosttargets.com), buy a bag! If you think you are a good shot, you will soon find out what you are made of when you target shoot a marshmallow-sized (or smaller) white clay target. Ghost Targets come in a few sizes with the largest ones being better suited for hi-powered rifles. When you hit them, they vaporize into air and look like, you guessed it, a ghost flying away. If you really want to get the best shooting practice of “Aim Small, Miss Small” put a few Ghost Targets at 50 or 100 yards or even further and line up your shot. Shooting at a smaller target that can vaporize when hit,

like Ghost Targets, versus a regular paper target, is more challenging and will help your accuracy regardless of what rifle caliber you use.

User Related Technical Problems

So many times, we are the ones holding us back from our potential and shooting is no exception to this rule. I used to have a problem with flinching in anticipation of the recoil from my high-powered hunting rifles. To remedy this, I started shooting on the resident Caldwell Lead Sled that was kept at the gun range I frequent or would use a shotgun recoil shoulder pad, which straps around the outside of your shirt. While it might look weird, okay maybe a little girly at first too, it does hold the recoil down to a manageable level that has eliminated my bad habit. Recently, I have been using two shooting rests from HySkore, which have also been very beneficial in helping me shoot consistently and not anticipate recoil. Ted Werner, owner of Hyskore, reminded me in a recent conversation that oftentimes the shooter is the largest variable in the equation of shooting. If you shoot alright with iron sights, good for you, keep rolling with what works. I prefer to hunt with a scope set-up, especially in low light shooting scenarios like my neighbors hog hunt. I would rather pass on a shot than ever “guess” at my aiming skills.

Get a Spotter

If you think that YOU might be the culprit to your accuracy issues, have someone watch you fire a live round or even a snap-cap to see if you flinch or pull off the target before the shot goes off. This is a common tell-tale sign of an accuracy issue. One of the best methods is to have a friend load your gun with a snap-cap or live round, their choice, and see how you shoot regardless.

Slow Down and Get “in the Zone”

In both archery (compound bow/crossbow) and rifle shooting, I try to focus on the task at hand and block out every distraction to get in “the zone” of my shooting. I talk often about how watching professional and Olympic shooters reminds me of the almost meditative state they go into in an effort to steady their aim. Although your heart is racing many times and there are very few “perfect” situations in the field, if good shooting fundamentals are engrained in you, accuracy will be better every time. I often practice and repeat a mantra to myself such as “On Target, Deep Breath, Even Squeeze” as shoot each round. The main point is to slow down. Let your barrel cool at least a minute between your shots, especially when it the weather is extra hot. Your shot groups will be affected by anything touching your barrel

(so never shoot with your barrel touching your rest, only your forearm) as well as barrel temperature, as a general rule.

Practical Accuracy

Most of us have heard the general accuracy rule at 100 yards is to keep all of your shots within an 8" pie plate circle as this represents the vital area on most big game animals. I personally think that accuracy rules should be stricter than this, especially when you take into account small game and predator/varmint hunting. Accuracy certainly plays a more important role when your target is smaller. Yes, I am quite particular on what I consider acceptable in accuracy terms. All three of my main hunting rifles are capable of 1"-2" groups. To get here, I did a little custom work on each rifle such as having the trigger lightened up, free-floating the barrel, etc. I my personal tolerance for accuracy is a 2" group at 100 yards, as close to the 10 ring as practical without splitting hairs. I know some hunting rifles are not that accurate but I think 4" is the maximum tolerance for any hunter. With 2" MOA you at have a better margin of error if "life happens" and Murphy's Law shows up on your hunt. It often does. Having the best accuracy you can get out of your rifle by spending time on your fundamentals and maybe even a little gunsmith shop work on your gun, puts the best odds in your favor for a successful hunt.

Yes, I am more than a little compulsive about this subject but every season I hear and sometimes even witness cases of accuracy costing a hunter the trophy of a lifetime or a freezer full of meat, sometimes both. Inches count when you are sending a bullet downrange and to know your POI (Point of Impact) and the capabilities of your gun or other weapon may mean the difference in taking down an animal instantly or tracking it for days. Hunting season is always a busy time for my work schedule so putting the time and prep work is essential for me in the off-season.

If you are a bowhunter, joining a 3-D Archery Club or League is a great idea for some supportive fellowship with other hunters and "real world" shooting scenarios. I am a member of Hill Country Bowhunters (www.hillcountrybowhunters.com) which is an excellent example of such an organization and they also raise money each year to host several youth hunts .

The old saying is that "The road to hell is paved with good intentions" and the truth is that hard work makes luck. Don't just have good intentions. Life is too short to demand any less than our best from our rifles and other hunting equipment as well as ourselves as marksmen. We owe it to the game we pursue, regardless of how big or small. There are only so many days we will have in our lives to spend communing in the outdoors. Make every shot count.

Hunting on a Budget: Combining Durability and Price

I started hunting later in life than many. I grew up around a hunting family and have fond memories of my grandfather skinning deer from his hunting trips in South Texas with his old Willys army-style drab green jeep with a fold down windshield and old-school 4x4 shifters. One of my first memories is with my dad and grandfather skinning a huge 400-pound hog than had recently, and I mean very recently, gone feral on his deer lease. My dad and I would spend hours in the pasture of my grandparent's property practicing target shooting and gun safety with pellet rifles but he was more enamored with B.A.S.S tournament circuits since, in his words, you can hunt deer 2 1/2 months of the year (gun season) but fish year round.

Many people have told me that I am the king of hunting on a budget. Don't get me wrong though as I love hunting with the highest quality products in the industry and we believe the sponsors on our show are the best of the best. Everyone, for the most part at least, likes to save money and get a deal on what they buy. You can always find a productive outlet for the money you save, after all, right? If you are just starting out in the world of hunting as I was at one time, or interested in saving some money on what you usually do each year, I thought an article like this would be helpful to a hunter at any stage of the game. I only believe in hunting with high quality and durable products that stand the test of time as most of us hunters are hard on our gear. The truth is that quality, utility, and durability does not always have to come with a high price tag.

Used Guns

I graduated college with a music degree and other things on my mind when I first started hunting. Needless to say, starting out in the real world with a mountain of student loan debt and credit card bills, my net worth was about a half-a-box of No-Doz and a six pack of Miller High Life tall boys. I inherited a nice Remington Woodsmaster Model 742 in .308 Win from my Grandfather after he passed away that was handed down to my father. That was nice, especially because it didn't cost anything out of pocket and was a fantastic all-around rifle chambered in a versatile caliber. I went to a local pawn shop and traded a bass guitar amplifier I owned straight across the counter for a Savage .22LR rifle and learned the valuable skill of trading what I didn't want or need any more for what I wanted or needed for hunting. Later on I even traded a battle pack of South African .308 NATO rounds for military surplus rifle and another time even traded a beat-up war time surplus rifle I owned for a couple of

years for a really nice deer rifle. I judged the value of what I had owned and the appreciation in value over time and “traded up”. The South African Ammo I purchased for \$35 and traded it for a gun retailing for many times more than that. The same story was true with a surplus rifle in trade for the rifle. Being smart and saving money by “trading up” takes a little skill and knowledge but I have saved hundreds of dollars over the years on deals like these and have been able to put the money I saved into even more.

Purchasing or trading for a used rifle can be a great value on a budget . Most guns hold their value well but you can almost always purchase one used at a more favorable price than new. I have done a video on purchasing a used rifle for our show and website with things to look for and things to avoid so I won't go into all the details here again (See GUN TALES) . The general rule for any used gun is that if a firearm looks rougher than a night in jail on the outside, chances are that the parts you can't see will not be as pure as the driven snow on the inside either. I always equate this to buying a used car. Good deals are out there but there are plenty you should walk away from at the same time. An educated buyer is the best defense against a bad purchase, as is the case with most purchases in life.

Milsurps – Surplus Rifles

Many years ago the gold standard for a military surplus rifle was an WWII Springfield bolt-Action Rifle in .30-06 or K98 Mauser chambered in 8mm Mauser. Back in the 1950's and 60's and even later, it was cheaper to “sporterize” an old military warhorse than to purchase a new gun. In most cases, the handguard part of the rifle stock was removed and bottom part of the stock was cut down and rounded off to make a new forend and resemble a commercial hunting rifle. Sometimes the gun was even re-barreled to a more popular hunting cartridge for better ammunition available or one that was better suited for the hunter's needs. Then the gun was usually always drilled and tapped for a scope, effectively turning it into a “deer gun” but ruining the collector value of the rifle as a result. Again, it was cheaper to do this than purchase a new gun in years past and there were plenty of guns available for a low cost. Part of the consequence for this though was that the market on these guns dried up and the collectible value rose high among the guns that were not sporterized. Now this being said, many gunsmiths today still do sporterizing and make some beautiful creations. There are several very well done milsurp sporters on the market today from years past and I happen to own one of these. I have an FN Belgium Mauser chambered in .270 Win and it is one of my favorite guns for hunting and target shooting.

The author's 1943 Mosin Nagant 91/30 chambered in 7.62x54R outfitted with a scout mount pistol scope and mount system and Scopecoat.



It is usually cheaper now days though to purchase a new or used rifle for the cost of sporterizing and old one unless you can find one already in “Hunting” configuration, which is a great value by itself. Many sporterized K98 Mausers can be found for \$175-\$250 and represent an excellent value along with several other military surplus guns like the Enfield, Swedish Mauser, Japanese Arasaka and more! Because of the recent importation over the past few decades of guns from around the world, many domestic and foreign ammo manufactures now produce ammunition for once hard-to-find calibers. Once again, there has never been a better time to be alive and active in the hunting and firearms industry than today.

Enter the Mosin Nagant, one of my personal favorites for its cost, utility, and durability. This gun has been called “the \$100 .30-06” because the 7.62x54r cartridge is close to a .30-06 in ballistics and the 91/30 version of the rifle can still be found for around \$100-\$125 at local gun shows. Shorter carbine versions, the M38 and M44 can be found for a little more but are easier to maneuver in the woods because of their shorter barrels and overall length. I recently did a video series on four of my Mosin Nagant rifles (See GUN TALES) so I won’t go into too many details on this subject. If you are just starting out in hunting or need an inexpensive but durable rifle, they do indeed represent a great value and anyone can easily add a scope rail on the existing rear sight assembly and a pistol scope or long eye relief scope without a visit to a gunsmith or drilling and tapping the receiver, effectively making a “Scout Rifle.” This set-up takes a little getting used to if you have never shot a gun with a Long-Eye Relief or Pistol Scope but this configuration works well in the 100-200 yard range for just about anything four-legged animal in North America. Many ranch owners also use a Mosin Nagant for a “truck gun” or ranch rifle as they are inexpensive and tough as nails.

**The Author's FN Mauser in .270Win (top)and Sporter Mosin Nagant (bottom) in 7.62x54r
(AKA "The Black Widow").**



Used Bows

With the advent of Craigslist and other local and regional peer-to-peer selling and auction websites and outlets, purchasing a bargain of a deal on a bow or crossbow is not hard. There are things to look for such as splitting or cracking in the limbs or riser, fraying or drying-out of the bow string, and nicks or sharp edges in the cams, to name a few important factors to look for when shopping. Tuning a modern bow is not hard to do these days in most cases and with the advent of different sized draw modules, most adult –sized bows can fit just about any adult archer with the right cam module installed for his or her draw length. This is also true with many youth bows. A good rule of thumb I learned when purchased my bow used is to try to find a bow that is 4 years old or newer if possible. Older bows are fine (especially for uses like bowfishing) but with the advent of newer models of bows, sourcing replacement parts can become an issue down the road if and when you might need them for the bow you purchase. I bought one of my bows when it was only 3 years old and it had less than 50 arrows shot from it by the previous owner, who was getting out of bowhunting completely in favor of gun hunting exclusively. I bought everything he had, and I mean everything, for only \$200! This included a hard case, arrows, field tips, extra nocks, you name it! The bow retailed new for \$500 in stock form when it was new and the previous owner had upgraded many accessories in the time he had owned it as well. I have won several 3-D Archery tournaments and harvested number of deer and wild hogs over the years with my bow without any issues with replacing parts aside from getting a draw module to accommodate my longer draw length.

The same rules apply for purchasing a crossbow except for the consideration that most crossbows are pretty universal to any size or age. An overall good rule of thumb is to buy a

bow as new as you can afford in the used archery market to maximize the best in quality and durability before having to put money into replacing the bow string or any moving parts. Like a used car, let the first owner take the hit on the depreciation while still getting the best part of owning part of the “new” life of the bow if you can.

One quick point about accessories for your bow should be mentioned here. Never purchase broadheads used or go with cheap knock-off brands. It’s not worth the chance of losing an animal or having a malfunction, which has happened to me in the past in such cases. I am a fan of Grim Reaper Broadheads (www.grimreaperbroadheads.com) which can retail in the \$35 range for three new broadheads but I always buy a replacement/rebuild kit and am usually able to rebuild the heads a few times before they become unusable. Grim Reapers have a solid core to their ferrule, or center part of the broadhead, making them easy to rebuild time after time. Many brands of premium broadheads on the market sell rebuild kits but are not as durable to go through as many rebuilds as the Grim Reapers. This is one reason why I will always spend a little more up front if I can get more utility out of what I buy down the road. The old saying goes that it’s better to by the best now than pay for inferior products over and over again several times down the road later and this is especially true in the realm of broadheads and other accessories we use in hunting. I always either shoot new or completely rebuilt broadheads on every hunt I go on to keep the odds in my favor.

Day Hunt Ranches

Mac (Randy) guides for a day hunt ranch and I work in outside sale and marketing for another one (DB Hunting Ranch – www.dbhunting.com) in our two respective areas of Texas. Day Hunt Ranches are an excellent and affordable ways to hunt without having to lay down thousands of dollars for a Deer lease or other hunting property. If you don’t have access to hunting land of your own or if you are after some exotic big game and don’t feel like getting on a plane or crossing state-lines on the road, this is an excellent choice. Find a ranch with a good reputation and ask around on hunting forums on the internet and or other venues about other hunters’ experiences. I have seen plenty of hunting ranches come and go over the years working in the business and a general rule is that ranches that don’t serve their hunters well over time don’t last very long. Hunters talk and news travels fast, especially in current time with social networking website and our internet age. I have shot Trophy Rams, Exotic Deer, Catalina Billy Goats, tons of hogs and more on hunting ranches like the one I work with and they are unbeatable. This is especially true when it comes to a variety of factors such as the amount of time and money you can save on a guided or semi-guided hunt compared to doing it on your own. For example, a hog hunt at DB Hunting Ranch here in

Central Texas runs around \$100-\$125 and includes a semi-guided morning and afternoon hunt. Exotic hunts are fully-guided with a guaranteed shot opportunity, giving you the best chance possible to close the deal on your pursuit. Exotics and hogs can also be hunted year round, making it even better for any season of the year.

Affordable Hunting Land

This is a subject that I am well versed on and all of my hunting buddies know me well for hunting on land in trade or barter for something or even free in some cases. Some of my friends even give me a hard time about my barter skills but I also spend my hard-earned on better things than they do most of the time. Two deer hunting hot spots I have near residential areas which make them perfect for bowhunting. One spot is on a 5-acre tract of land outside the city limits but about a 15 minute drive from my house. How did I get this place? A couple that attends church with me invited me to hunt there after hearing that I am a bowhunter a few years ago. I trade them a some processed deer meat in return for hunting the back part of their property and improving their land quality while I hunt there. Another spot I have is behind a neighborhood in a Municipal Utility District, outside the city limits, along a creek that is has been there for thousands of years. This spot is really close to civilization so I am extra respectful of the landowners and communicate regularly with them as well as my local game warden every season I hunt there. I nicknamed this spot "Deer City, Texas." Hunting this area cost me nothing in trade. Ok, maybe a little sweat equity from time to time. A single elderly woman owns this land and she asks me on occasion to help her with a few chores around her property that she is unable to do such as trimming trees and mowing from time to time. Plentiful deer and close to home.

These are not my only hunting spots by any means but as a busy guy with a wife, growing family, and demanding job (with my busiest time during the fall Deer season!), having two blinds set up 15 minutes from home to go spend a morning or evening is a welcome option versus having to pack up for a whole weekend and be away from my family. Many hunters I tell about the two above properties never believe they could pull something like that off where they live. My response comes from a famous quote from Andy Rooney, "Opportunities are never lost. Someone will always take the ones you miss." I am certainly an opportunist and am never afraid to ask if I see a chance to hunt somewhere new, which is how I ended up with these two hot spots. Your mileage might vary but chances are there are ample hunting areas that are far less than an hour drive away from you. Consider the fact that some recent studies have shown that bigger and better trophy bucks are being harvested near residential areas with archery equipment than many surrounding popular "deer hunting" counties way

out of the city. This is one reason why many hunting shows now cover “close to city” style bowhunting. It can be done but check with your game warden and local landowners around you to make sure what you are doing is legal and safe for everyone in the area. You will be surprised on what is available out there and how many homeowners and land owners welcome you back if you are respectful and professional in the way you handle yourself.

Barter/Trade

This brings up another point. Cash and credit seem to be the only medium of payment in our world today where our ancestors used to do quite a bit of commerce with barter and trading goods and services for what they wanted or needed in times past. There are even reality TV shows on this subject and I am a long-term student of the “Art of the Deal” or trading something you have for something some else wants or needs. I actually started out in the outdoor industry many years ago, when I was just starting to get away from “flat broke” in my financial situation, by selling hunts for a hunting ranch on the side in exchange for a free hog hunt for every 8 hunts I sold. This was certainly a good trade for both the ranch owner and I. I realize that not everyone is that creative or ambitious but most of us have something of value to trade for something we want and people value that. It never hurts to ask or offer your services or something else you have in trade for what you want as long as there is value in what you have for the other person. I heard of many people trading ranch labor for a predator hunting or big game hunting opportunity for instance. Networking is not just a skill used in the business world. Build your own network of those around you who have land or access to hunting property and take care of them accordingly. You might be amazed at what you receive in return.

Affordable Hunting Gear

Many people do all of their shopping for hunting gear at the big box sporting goods or outdoor stores. Even good ol’ Wal-Mart has a pretty good selection of camo clothing and other hunting gear and accessories around and during hunting season. All that being said though, few people I run into in the hunting community ever give a second thought to shopping at an Army/Navy Military Surplus store. Since where I live happens to be rather close to Fort Hood, one of the largest Army bases in the world, there is no shortage of places to explore in this realm. What can you get here? Many stores, especially the one closest to my home, now sell a variety of very reasonably priced hunting gear and have consignment items from all over the place. For example, I have a variety of military issue water canteens, which are excellent and durable for carrying water in the field, and inexpensive too! I call them the “Real Man’s Water Bottle” and it should make the environmentalist happy as it is a

reusable container and also looks pretty cool. As long as you don't set these canteens too close to a heat source, they will provide years of utility and durability. I have used the ones I have hundreds of times and they look super cool to carry around.

Over the years I have purchased hunting clothing, knives, flashlights, gun accessories, and more at the Surplus store for far less than the big box outlets. Usually, since most of these items are built for the use and abuse of active combat in extreme conditions, durability is as good as it gets, if not better than many retail products found at many big box sporting goods stores. If there is a Surplus store near you, check it out! They are full of all kinds of fun stuff!



Branch Out to Online and Mail Order Retailers

Another great savings idea is to shop mail order and internet sporting goods stores. Among these, my favorites are Sportsman's Guide (www.sportsmansguide.com) as well as Cheaper Than Dirt (www.cheaperthandirt.com). Both have mailing lists you can get on to regularly receive their catalogs and an extensive online store. For knives and even some cool novelties, one of my favorite companies is BudK (www.budk.com). These guys have quality and value paired up well! I have several Bowie knives I use for Hog Dog hunting and other tasks for a fraction of the price that many are sold for elsewhere. Some retail less than \$10 with EXCEPTIONAL build quality for that price. If I lose one of knives in the woods on a hog hunt it's not a huge deal either. Sometimes you do get what you pay for but hang around guys like me for long and you will find both quality, rock-solid durability, and a good price tag all combined!

Hunting does not have to cost a second mortgage on your house or deciding between a hunting lease or your children's or grandchildren's college savings plan. To the educated bargain shopper goes the spoils and I save thousands upon thousands of dollars every year

because I have found ways to fill the freezer and even put trophies on the wall without spending everything I earn on hunting. I still believe there is no excuse for the very best in quality and durability but price does not always have to be in the way of these two factors.

Regardless of what you pursue, hunting is never the least inexpensive sport you can participate in but I will argue that most other sporting pursuits do not yield near the rewards as hunting can in meat, trophies, memories with family and friends, and much more. You certainly don't have to spend a ton of money to enjoy many aspects of the hunting lifestyle if you shop smart and build relationships with those around you. Save your money for some of the highest quality and best value products like the ones we represent on our show instead. I wish you many blessings in the field as always my friends. May your aim be dead-on target and your freezer be full of meat!

So...Are you Gonna Eat That?

In our house, we like to eat from the field. The one exception for eating primarily wild meat might be chicken but if I could find a feral group of chickens that strayed off a farm somewhere, I am sure I would find a way to hunt them. I grew up eating wild game meat and fish all my life so I have always enjoyed turning what I catch or kill into something tasty when possible.

A question I often encounter when I talk with new hunters, non-hunters, and sometimes even veteran outdoorsmen about eating some of the things I have in my freezer is usually, "You can eat that? Really? How?" Oh yes...You can! You can usually make most things you catch or kill taste great. Now that I am married, my in-laws especially have given me a hard time about bringing home raccoon, carp, gar, wild hogs, deer, and more wildlife from our local area and abroad. They always kid me in a playful and joking fashion, of course. My mother-in-law's favorite line when she comes over for family or holiday events is usually, "What kind of road kill are you cooking for us today, Dustin?" My father-in-law often reminds me that everything is edible, but you don't HAVE to eat it all! True. I enjoy eating what I kill or catch. It is part of the hunting or fishing experience and my adventures would not be complete without this process. I have cooked raccoon, rabbit, and squirrel in the crockpot and pressure cooked carp to make what resemble salmon patties. Many people do. Current reality TV shows and "field-to-table" outdoor shows help further the education on making some lesser known wildlife a tasty table fare.

I am a member and webmaster of a Christian-based wounded warriors charity named Crosswater Outfitters, based in the North Central Texas area. We host jug fishing events on Texas lakes for wounded soldiers and their families. At one of our last events, the fishing was tough. We had over 70 people to feed and were only pulling up one or two fish per 10 jugs we would run in the morning and evening. With about 8 boats having this kind of catch rate, I was getting concerned. On the day of the fish fry, which was planned later that evening, we pulled in two long-nose gar. In fact, that was all we pulled in that morning on my boat. I decided to keep them. Another boat mentioned they had thrown large a gar they caught back the previous day, seeing that it was unfit to eat or serve to our guests. I told all the boat captains to keep all of the gar they caught for the rest of the trip, if any more came in. With the rest of the days' catch, which improved as the day went on and boats went out and came back, it miraculously appeared would have enough fish. About that time, one of soldiers visited my cleaning station and commented, "Are you going to clean those two gar? Can you

even eat them?" I assured him that I was about to prove a point! By some miracle, all I needed to get the job done was a pair of tin snips to cut into the armor plating of the gar and, sure enough, by some stroke of grace, the leader of our boat crew had an old pair of them in his truck. It only took a minute to penetrate the armor of the two Gar and get down to the boneless strips of white meat inside. I trimmed out the meat and cut away all the undesirable areas and tendons, cutting up the remaining clean pieces into chunks for the deep fryer. To keep things separate, I made another batch of fish, the humble gar, to be fried after the fry crew finished frying all the catfish first. At dinner, I marked which tray was catfish and which tray was gar. There was nothing left but crumbs in the gar tray and plenty of catfish left over after the end of the meal. Several of the soldiers and members of their families, as well as even Crosswater staff, came up to me and remarked things such as, "I never knew a fish that ugly could taste that good!" and "How did you get that nasty fish to come out looking that nice? It didn't even taste like fish!" I was thrilled.

Aside from the regular cuts of meat on deer and feral hogs, I love to keep the wild game hearts and kidneys when possible as these "variety meats" can be really tasty if prepared right. Obviously, you want to inspect these organs to make sure they are clean and healthy. On a hunting show I watched a couple of years ago, the host kept the heart of his deer after the hunt, sliced it into thin strips, and sautéed the meat, making delicious tacos with peppers and onions. It reminded me of fajitas! Heart "meat" has a similar consistency to a thick, dense steak. It may be different for what you have tried before but it is certainly a way to broaden your culinary horizons.

As for kidneys, I have a special fondness for steak and kidney pie for some reason, which is a savory meat pie, similar to a beef pot pie. I picked up on this recipe from the British culture as I took a trip in the summer of 2011 to the beautiful island of Bermuda. There are several recipes for Steak and Kidney Pie but it is fairly easy to make. Like the heart, the kidneys are a dense meat that need to be cubed up into small chunks. I use wild game kidneys and steak for my version of this old recipe with fantastic results. Kidneys have a hearty flavor and are really tasty in a dish like a meat pie.

My rule is to try everything once, no matter how strange it may sound at first. If other people like it, you might like it too! Hunt hard, stay safe, and have fun out there!

Bowfishing: Aim Low, Think Big!

I was introduced to bowfishing after winning a silent auction package including a 4-hour trip donated by Marty McIntyre with Garquest Bowfishing guide service at one of our annual Fun Shoot events with Hill Country Bowhunters. Marty and I became friends as a result and have fished several different lakes and rivers over the years with our bowfishing gear. Since Marty taught me everything I know about bowfishing and I am proud to call myself part of his team and Pro-Staff, I enlisted his help and over 25 years of experience in bowfishing as he has fished all over the nation and even the Middle East during his time working overseas.

Marty and Dustin on a Bowfishing Marathon



Bowfishing using Lumenok Lighted Arrow Nocks



The Essential Bowfishing Bow and Gear

Bowfishing has come a long way from where it was even a decade ago with the advent of products such as the Safety Slide System, which helps prevent potential “snap back” of the arrow or line when shooting. One of the nicest innovations has been in bowfishing reels such as the AMS Bowfishing reel. This is nicer than having to hand spool the line, as was done in years past, or mounting a spin-cast style reel and having to remember to release the reel every time you shoot. Many arrows and points are also available and are now made with durable materials for big fish and harsh conditions.

For a bowfishing bow, most people prefer a compound or recurve bow. You can purchase one new but there is really no reason to not buy a used one from a pawn shop or other outlet. Just be sure to check the limbs for cracks or splitting as this could be a dangerous issue down the road. Also make sure that the string is in good shape and not showing serious signs of fraying as new bowstrings will run \$60 to \$100 or better. Other than that, you don’t need anything fancy or flashy and you can buy a used bow, especially an older one, for a very reasonable price. I acquired my bowfishing bow from Marty, an older Onieda Screaming Eagle lever bow. The finish was old and a bit dated so I sprayed it with black truck bed liner after taping over the cams and strings and other moving parts to prevent overspray. I followed that up with a glossy clear coat and ended up with an awesome looking bow that had a finish as tough as nails and It looked like new. Have fun with whatever you do.

Marty prefers a lever action bow, such as Onieda bows, because it is the best of both worlds in the power of a compound bow but with little let-off when at full draw, like shooting a recurve bow. I used to think these bows were uglier than five miles of mud fence until I shot one. Now, that is all like to shoot on most of my bowfishing trips and I can see why so many professional bowfishing guides and tournament bowfishing teams like them so much. Lever bows and even recurve bows are excellent for the fast “snap shooting” action of bowfishing if you can find one at a good price. Compound bows are certainly more common and will work fine as well as mentioned before.

For setting up your bow for bowfishing, AMS has a complete bowfishing kit available at most sporting goods stores or online, complete with the AMS reel, mounting brackets, arrows, hardware, and even a DVD of some bowfishing action. Marty even did an entire series on the step-by-step process on setting up an AMS bowfishing reel on a new or used bow (SEE GAR TALES). An important note here is to always purchase and carry more than one arrow every time to head out to the water for a bowfishing adventure. Many trips have been cut short by an arrow breaking or being lost by one means or another. Back-up arrows are always a good idea and a good repellent for Murphy’s Law.

The basics of shooting are simple. Draw back and find an anchor point, just like shooting a bow at a normal target on dry land. My anchor point is my middle finger on the side of my cheek, for instance. This will help yours shooting be consistent. Invest in a pair of Archer’s Gloves for protecting your fingers when shooting or a pair of “finger savers” which are a soft material that goes above and below your knocking point on your bowstring, to protect your fingers as you shoot. This will help you to draw you bow easier as well. I ran across another bowfishing videos on the internet one day and everyone on the boat was wearing a shirt with the phrase, “Aim Low, Think Big!” This sums up bowfishing quite well.

Because of the refraction of the water, your shot will always be higher than the fish actually is if you aim right at where the fish appears to be. This is one of the unique properties of water and the way the human eye sees what is in the water. How far to aim under the fish depends on the depth of the water and distance of the fish from the boat, hence the challenge of the hunt! Bowfishing certainly shares all the challenges and excitement of bowhunting. I believe in rod and reel fishing too but enjoy bowfishing more simply because of the challenge and, quite frankly, the adrenaline of the hunt. Much like rifle shooting, you have a good days and bad. Sometimes you hit almost everything you aim at and sometimes you can’t hit the broadside of a barn from the inside.

Starting Out and Bank Fishing

Many people think you have to have a boat outfitted with elaborate light rigging and a generator to fish at night for bowfishing. This is not true. When it comes to navigating many different places on a lake or river and get to more fishing opportunities, a boat certainly helps, as it does in normal rod and reel and other types of fishing. For bowfishing, it's not always a necessary tool. Marty has one of the nicest bowfishing boat rigs I have ever seen, let alone had the chance to fish from, and he still enjoys bowfishing from the bank. All you need are a pair of polarized sunglasses for daytime fishing or a portable white light LED for night fishing and your bowfishing gear. Polarized glasses will help your eyes penetrate the water and a white light will penetrate the darkness of the water better than any other color of light for the most part. Until you get to know your area well or unless there is adequate lighting, I would recommend bank fishing during the day at first. You can chum an area, much like you would for catfishing, with range cubes, dry dog food, or even deer corn, depending on what you are fishing for. You can wade in the water or walk around on the bank on dry land and fish a stationary point or slowly stalk the water as you would hunt anything in the woods. I have done this both day and night time and it is fun. I even got a new acquaintance hooked on the sport of bowfishing when we met at a Christian fishing ministry event by bowfishing the bank and boat docks around our lodging during our downtime away from jug lining for catfish. I chummed the water earlier in the day and we wait until night time and took several shots at carp and bull shad that night alone. Needless to say, he went home and outfitted one of his bows with bowfishing set-up right after our event and has been hooked ever since!

If you have a boat or access to one that you can rig for bowfishing, high pressure sodium (HPS) lights or LED lights are a good light choices. Marty has four HPS lights on each side of his boat for a total of eight lights. One to two generators are a good idea for keeping your batteries charge: one for the battery powering your night fishing lights and one for your trolling motor battery. You can easily find a power converter for your charging system at most RV retail outlets. There are pros and cons for inboard and outboard motors and many even prefer to step up to an airboat or fan boat. Again, our rule is to use what you have where you can if you already have a boat or easy access to one you can use if you are just starting out. A good trolling motor will make your adventures on the water the most enjoyable, even if that is the only motor you have. Marty often fishes local rivers, like the Brazos and Leon River, near his home with a two man pontoon boat and trolling motor during the day with his best friend, Ivy the Gar Dog. He has filmed and produced many videos with his GoPro video on his website and on ours under GAR TALES or www.GARQUEST.com if you

want to see how this is done. It is simple, effective, and a very inexpensive way to make a solo bowfishing trip or one with another person.

Bowfishing for Food

I certainly love to eat what I catch on the water or hunt in the woods. For many years when I fished for carp before I started bowfishing for them, I would pressure cook carp in canning jars, which was a technique I learned from my grandparents when I was growing up in my formative years. You could make fish patties, similar to salmon patties, and they were decent, just not my first pick of a fish for good table fare. Since I usually am blessed with a freezer stocked with fish from saltwater fishing trips and catfish and other fish from our local freshwater lakes, I usually don't keep many of the fish I shoot in bowfishing with the exception of Gar. When I started bowfishing, I initially had a moral dilemma with the issue of not eating what I shot as it seemed wasteful. But then I realized that there are plenty of fish, turtles, snakes, even raccoons and birds, who are most grateful for an easy meal now and again and nothing ever goes to waste in cycle of nature. I do save meat from Carp, Buffalo, Red Horse Suckers, bull Gizzard Shad, and other fish on occasion for making frozen chum or making cutbait for my other rod and reel or jugline fishing adventures. Just about everything is edible in bowfishing though, as with most things in life, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Many people do not know that carp were originally imported into our country and widely distributed into lakes and ponds as a food source back when our country was in leaner times in the early 1900's. Most Americans turn their nose up at Carp and other "rough fish" but many countries around the world wouldn't think twice about eating meat from one and often do on a regular basis. Native Americans would frequently bowfish for Gar and Buffalo on a regular basis as a food source for many decades and centuries ago before the US was settled.

Two serious considerations for table fare are the Alligator or Long-nose/Short-nose Gar and Tilapia. Gar are relatively easily easy to find during day or night and can be easily cleaned with a pair of "tin snips" or any tool that can cut through their armor plating. Under that armor are two white strips of boneless meat, similar to deer or pork backstraps, which make a great meal just about any way you cook them. Once you get the hang of it, they are easy to clean and yield a good amount of meat for the work. Cajun Gar Balls, Gar Patties, or just regular Fried Gar is good. One method I like is to boil the meat in a Louisiana Cajun crawfish boil for about 10-15 minutes or until the meat is cooked all the way through. Then, let it sit in that water and cool for about 5 minutes after you turn off the heat so it soaks up more spice

and flavor. You can do a variety of things with the meat from this point. It reminds me of lobster in its texture and even a little in the taste...and now I am hungry...

Mmmm...Tilapia

We had Tilapia in the Comal River which ran through our local park in New Braunfels, Texas when I was growing up there. I never knew much about them other than they did not eat the bait I was fishing with and, consequently, were a hard fish to catch by normal means. Tilapia is now one of the most popular fish in meat markets and restaurants today. Concentrated mainly in warmer-water lakes in the southern US, Tilapia are a challenging fish to pursue and Marty teaches me something new each trip we make hunting... I mean bowfishing, for them. Power plant cooling lakes usually have good quantities of Tilapia, especially here in Texas. Lakes such as Calaveras, Brauning, Colleto Creek, Gibbons Creek, and more are all known for Tilapia bowfishing and cast netting around Texas as they are all centered around privately owned power plant facilities with warm water discharges. These lakes are neat as they are man made and many times stocked with fish for rod and reel fisherman, like freshwater redfish, that many other lakes do not have. Power plant lakes use the water from the lake to cool the plant during its operation, yielding warm water year round.

One method Marty perfected in his earlier days is to get a tripod hunting stand or step-ladder and set it up in about 3 or 4 feet of water, much like a deer hunting stand. Climb up on top of your elevated platform and just wait for the tilapia to come in during the day, right off the bank. They are curious fish and always like to see what is new in their surroundings but if they see any fast movements from above, they will dart for cover in a flash... hence the addiction to game. It is similar to bowhunting on land for deer or turkey in many ways. Get a floating costal stringer and you can have hours of fun just wading out or sitting stationary bowfishing for these crafty fish. It goes without saying these fish are an excellent table fare as well as tons of day time fishing fun!

Many other lakes will have tilapia as well. Marty and I happened upon one of the best kept secrets on our recent Tilapia fishing trip with Lake Calavaras having mixed results since the cast net boats had been through the bank lines and the water was unusually cloudy, making visibility an issue. We hit the jackpot on some nice huge slab Tilapia on Lake Dunlap though, which is part of the Guadalupe River that runs between Austin and San Antonio through my hometown of New Braunfels. This little gem of a lake holds a ton of different kinds of fish and was an unexpected bowfishing paradise both times we have been on it in the last year. On one night trip we took on this lake during the last leg of a four lake 24-hour bowfishing marathon yielded several Longnose Gar, a few Plecostomus (Armored Sucker Catfish/Algae

Eaters), a Rio Grande Perch, Tilapia, and more in a two hour time span! Talk about hot bowfishing action! I caught my second wind real fast after we started shooting fish that night even though I was about worn out from the efforts we put in earlier in the day.

Lumenoks for Bowfishing

For night bowfishing, product that Mac, Prowler, Marty, and I have all fell in love with lately are the bowfishing products from Lumenok (www.lumenok.com). From lighted arrow nocks and adapters for your current bowfishing arrows to complete assemblies of entire bowfishing arrow with the Lumenok included, these definitely deserve some consideration for your bowfishing war chest. Being able to watch your shots and get immediate feedback on your point of impact in the water is awesome. What's even more is that Lumenoks have a long run time and replaceable batteries making them a great value with long-term use. As an added bonus, we love filming video on bowfishing trips using these lighted nocks as they show up very well on camera.

If you are new to bowfishing, or just need some pointers to get better at your game, hiring a bowfishing guide is an inexpensive way to get introduced or brush up on the sport and most guides will have all the equipment you need for the trip. Since bowfishing is becoming more and more popular nationwide, there is most likely a full-time or part-time bowfishing guide service in your area. Marty is one of the best bowfishing guides in the industry and if you are in the Texas area, please visit his website and consider booking a trip with him at www.GARQUEST.com or call (254) 931-3474. He has an awesome bowfishing boat and travels frequently.

Whatever you are after, bowfishing is a fun way to keep up with your archery skills, take invasive fish out of your local lakes and rivers, and enjoy the great outdoors in a fun new way. Every time I step on Marty's boat, it is as exciting as the first time I met him and picked up my first bowfishing bow. Aim Low, Think Big and have fun out there on the water. Be creative on how and where you fish and even call your local area game warden to see if he has any problem areas or good spots while you're at it. Most likely, he will be happy you are out there fighting the good fight against the invasive species or as the Garquest logo goes, "Saving Game Fish, One Trash Fish at a Time." Now go shoot some fish!



WARNCKE ENTERPRISES

About the Author

Dustin Vaughn Warncke is an avid outdoorsman and expert in sales and marketing with a specialization in the outdoor industry. Warncke has served as a motivational speaker and master teacher, conducted custom seminars and breakout sessions for national companies, and worked with numerous small businesses in sales, marketing, website development, and business consulting.

Dustin is an expert writer, speaker, web designer, marketer, and small business consultant. He has an unbridled drive for working with start-up outdoor industry products, small businesses, and large companies.

In addition, Dustin also serves as marketing director and co-host for Mac & Prowler's Coyote Tales TV Show and has filmed and been featured in several TV shows featuring hunting-related products as well as rifle, shotgun, and archery "tech tip" segments. He also films, edits, and produces his own outdoor adventures. Many of his video productions have been featured on regional and national television networks in the US.

Dustin is also an avid outdoor writer and book author and is a regular contributor to www.macandprowler.com and www.thehuntingchannelonline.com as well as other websites and blogs. He also serves as a reporter and contributing editor for Texas Fish & Game Magazine, which is currently the largest independently owned outdoor magazine in the nation and the largest and most popular outdoor publication in the state of Texas with circulation of around 100,000 paid subscribers.

