

A Note from the Editor



REBECCA JONES

As I write these words, July temperatures are running in the mid-90s. While I think about cooler fall days and wait expectantly for the upcoming

hunting season, it is pleasant to daydream about the wonderful hunting opportunities that await North Carolinians. Starting with dove hunting in September, North Carolinians can pursue bear, deer, ducks, furbearers, geese, quail, rabbits, rails and marsh birds, squirrels, woodcock, and even other species through the end of February. After a month-long break, turkey hunting kicks off in April.

From the coastal marshes and swamps through the Piedmont hills and forests to the high mountains in the western part of the state, North Carolina has a diversity of landscapes matched by few states east of the Mississippi River. If you are healthy and can get outside to enjoy this bounty, count your blessings because many among us are not so fortunate.

In this issue, we open with an article about Outdoor Dream Foundation (ODF), which gives those less fortunate among us an opportunity to pursue the hunt of a lifetime in diverse places across the country. Many of these kids have challenges and limitations few of us understand. Some will hunt one time in their short and challenged lives.

North Carolina has become a key location for the foundation to bring children to pursue black bears, and many North Carolinians have played a key role in making the dreams of ODF kids become a reality. ODF is one of many groups that help the unfortunate among us enjoy what nature has to offer. My hat is off to all those across our state who take the time each fall to introduce someone to the great outdoors and share with them what might be a life-changing experience.

Mark D. Jones

WILDLIFE RESEARCH PROGRAM SUPERVISOR
PRIVATE LANDS WILDLIFE HABITAT GROUP

THE Upland GAZETTE

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION AND HABITAT MANAGEMENT



MARK D. JONES

Left to right: Skip Still (ODF volunteer and board member), Ray Ball and Coy Parton (Tennessee bear hunters), grandfather James McCall, and brother Travis surround Trenton Lowe on the first morning of his "Dream" bear hunt in Craven County.

Outdoor Dreaming for Children With Life-Threatening Illnesses

By Mark D. Jones, Wildlife Research Program supervisor and Upland Gazette editor

The words "Outdoor Dream" conjure up a myriad of emotions among those of us who like to hunt and fish. Big white-tail bucks on our favorite North Carolina farm, trips to Alaska to fish for salmon, a great duck hunt on the Pamlico Sound, or a Western upland bird hunting adventure might come to mind. For many children in America, Outdoor Dream means all of that and so much more.

The Outdoor Dream Foundation (ODF) is an organization that grants outdoor adventures to children who have been diagnosed with terminal or life-threatening illnesses or injuries, and ODF has been coming to North Carolina since launching in 2004 to allow children to pursue their bear hunting dreams.

I spent a decade working as the Black Bear Project leader for the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission. During that tenure, I met many people and developed numerous lifelong friendships. One day in 2004, I received a phone call from my friend Skip Still, South Carolina's Black Bear Project leader. Skip told me about ODF, which at the time was a brand-new organization based out of Anderson, S.C. Local sportsmen started ODF after Make-a-Wish Foundation had decided to no longer take children hunting. Skip asked if I thought we could help ODF set up black bear hunts in North Carolina.

Our state had developed quite a reputation for some of the world's largest black bears, very high bear populations and readily available bear tags that could be purchased by non-residents. This made North Carolina an ideal destination compared to many other states. I could never have "dreamed," no pun intended, how that phone call would impact my life and the lives of untold numbers of North Carolina hunters, their families and the Outdoor Dream children.

North Carolina's black bears are large and abundant, but getting access to hunt them on choice private properties is sometimes a real challenge. This is where North Carolina's bear hunters and private landowners opened their hearts and agreed to share their best bear hunting opportunities with complete strangers. Simply put, the ODF concept brings out the best in everyone involved. Over the last 14 years, almost all hunters and landowners we have approached about helping ODF kids have responded with a resounding, "Yes!"

Dreams Do Come True

The first Outdoor Dream child we brought to North Carolina was a young man from Texas named Kory. Two bear hunting groups led by Eddie Frizzell and Chuck Blalock worked together and helped Kory hunt choice Hyde County properties to ensure he had a great chance to get a bear. Mattamuskeet Ventures Hunt Club even offered Kory and his mom, Linda, free lodging for the hunt, saving precious ODF resources to be used to help other children. These hunters and landowners also offered additional opportunities, like deer hunting during lulls in the bear hunts.

One afternoon, I was honored to guide Kory while he harvested his first white-tailed deer out of a choice deer stand graciously provided by members of the club. Ultimately, Kory harvested a black bear on his trip and made countless friends who shed many tears a few years later when he died from his illness. Linda put into perfect context why the hunt was so important to Kory, to her and to all of the hunters and landowners involved when she said: "Outdoor Dream put the smile back on my child's face and the will to live back in his heart."

After modest beginnings in 2004, ODF has taken over 500 youth from 40 states on outdoor adventures throughout North America. ODF has taken children hunting for some of North America's most prized game species. Mule deer, white-tailed deer, elk, pronghorn and black bear are among the most common species ODF kids wish to hunt. North Carolina has hosted at least 43 different children on black bear hunts with a 100 percent success rate.

Our highly valued black bears pair well with the frequent interest expressed in black bear hunting by ODF kids. Additionally, the

extensive road system found on many eastern North Carolina timber company lands allows easier access for children with sometimes limited ability to walk great distances. Furthermore, the organization operates on charitable donations and attempts to take children hunting at no cost to the family, so it is often favorable to hunt North Carolina bears because we are close to population centers, thereby reducing travel costs and other expenses.

A Group Effort

Last November, I was privileged to accompany our latest hunter on a hunt in Craven County. Trenton Lowe, a young man from South Carolina, was joined by his dad Jarrid, mom Tracey, brother Travis, and grandfather James McCall. We were joined by regular ODF volunteer and leader Skip, now retired from South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, along with another ODF volunteer named

Jimmy Burdette. We hunted near Vanceboro on lands leased by Terry Morris and many of his local friends and family.

This ODF hunt involved the use of bear hounds, and it brought out an eclectic mix of folks. The local Craven County hunters normally share their bear hunting adventures with Tennesseans Coy Parton, his best friend Ray Ball and many of their friends and family. The Tennessee boys have been coming to eastern North Carolina to hunt for decades, and Coy and Ray have helped ODF children hunt bears before. The pair became local eastern North Carolina legends in 1998 when they harvested what still stands as the largest black bear taken

in the world. The 880-pound behemoth, taken in Craven County not far from where Trenton would hunt, was larger than most grizzlies in the lower 48 states and continues to bring unwelcome attention to the quiet and polite Coy and Ray. There was no doubt Trenton was in good hands and would almost certainly have a chance to get a bear while hunting with this experienced and seasoned mix of Carolina and Tennessee bear hunting veterans.

The Friday night before Trenton's hunt began, "Mr. Terry," as he is called by many of his younger hunting partners, presented Trenton with a complete hunting outfit, including Carhartt Overalls, to help him break through the nasty briars so ubiquitous in eastern North Carolina bear country. As I watched the Lowe family fellowship with Terry, I couldn't help but think about the generosity of bear hunters I have witnessed over the years when they take ODF kids bear hunting. Clothes, boots, miscellaneous gear and even guns have been donated to these children and their families. These kids will want for nothing on an eastern North Carolina bear hunt if our hunters have anything to say about it.

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BRAD JONES/OUTDOOR DREAM FOUNDATION

Eddie Frizzell (right) shakes hands with ODF hunter Chris Ewing on a Beaufort County bear hunt in 2008. Frizzell has been a regular ODF mentor since the first children came to North Carolina to participate in the program 14 years ago.



Landowners Mike and Tucky Vaughan have actively managed their Rockingham County property to develop a lush and diverse understory utilized by many wildlife and pollinator species.

CONSERVATION CHRONICLES

The Lone Ranger, Box Turtles and *Sericea Lespedeza*

The Winding Path to Managing a Unique Habitat

By John Isenhour, technical assistance biologist, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

Photographed by Melissa McGaw, photographer, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

Fourteen years of helping private landowners enhance wildlife habitat has allowed me to meet many unique folks. Landowner objectives can vary greatly, as can their management techniques. With that said, I find that most of my wildlife-focused customers have a few characteristics in common. Regardless of their financial situation or their land ownership tenure, they place a high value on the history of their land and hope their efforts will be part of the land's story once they are gone. Retired professor Mike Vaughan and his wife, Tucky, are just these types of people. They have researched, toiled and persevered to shape their 40-acre Rockingham County property and protect it for future generations.

It is funny how a person's conservation ethic can be shaped and developed. With

Mike, weekly radio broadcasts of "The Lone Ranger" and western movies sparked his interest in the Wild West era. While many of his childhood friends focused on a romanticized vision of quick-draws, stagecoaches and Billy the Kid, Mike began reading about the biology of the region and time period. He became fascinated with American bison, elk and other species which roamed the rolling grasslands of the Old West.

Mike's conservation ethic was further cemented as a teenager, growing up on the coast of North Carolina. In those days, New Hanover County had a population of about 63,000, with two-thirds of the residents living in Wilmington. The rural landscape along the Cape Fear River, combined with friends who loved to hunt, fish and shrimp, resulted in an upbringing that would cause

the most staunch free-range parenting advocate to cringe. These experiences of his adolescence provided Mike an insight into the interdependence of the natural world.

The "little buckaroo" grew into an accomplished scientist who earned a Ph.D. from Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Throughout his career as a researcher and professor, Mike spent much of his time exploring the puzzles held within DNA nucleotides. However, part of him longed to study the plants, animals and natural forces which shaped the prairies. In 1958, Mike was lucky enough to marry Tucky, who shared his respect and wonder for the natural world. The couple purchased their Rockingham County property in 1981 and settled in, raising their family and completing successful careers. In retirement, with more spare time, the

couple began asking questions about their property and used their well-developed research skills to track down answers.

During their search for information they became involved with several conservation organizations, including the Rockingham County Naturalist Club. During a club outing in 2006, the Vaughans were introduced to the federally endangered Schweinitz's sunflower along with common native plants, like yellow indiagrass, little bluestem and coreopsis. While becoming more familiar with native plants made for a successful field trip, the most critical information presented that day involved the past landscape of North Carolina and the historic existence of Piedmont prairies. Much like the exclamation "Hi-Yo Silver, Away!" the notion of prairies in North Carolina rekindled the interests of his youth and provided a new option for Mike and Tucky's property.

Connecting with Box Turtles

With new information about native grasses, wildflowers and the significance of early succession habitat, the Vaughans began exploring their property. As with most exploration, their observations generated questions. They wanted to know what plant species were here now and how they could better manage the land to benefit more wildlife. These questions spurred them on. At some point in this exploration, a friend pointed out several native plants, considered prairie remnants, growing along the power transmission right-of-way that cut through their property. Realizing that these native species were persisting along the utility easement generated one more question: "What did the land look like 300 or 400 years ago?" As they researched this question, Mike and Tucky decided to try to develop a prairie on their property.

In and amongst all their botanizing and prairie research, the Vaughans began participating in the Box Turtle Connection. This citizen scientist project, led by the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG), allows citizens to collect and submit data collected from Eastern box turtles they encounter. This information is part of a larger dataset collected all over the state to better understand populations, habitats and life cycles of North Carolina's state reptile.

Since 2009, the Vaughans have captured, marked, measured and released 114 different Eastern box turtles on their property. While box turtle research seems to have no place in this story, it is not just a cool project to be involved with, but it put them in touch



Top: This Coral hairstreak butterfly on butterfly milkweed is one of many pollinators that benefit from the Vaughan's management. Mike Vaughan shows off one of the 114 Eastern box turtles that he and his wife, Tucky, have captured, marked and released on their property as part of the Box Turtle Connection Project.

with Dr. Ann Somers from UNCG. During one visit, Dr. Somers mentioned the recently approved Wildlife Conservation Lands Program (WCLP) and suggested that Mike contact the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission for additional program information and more detailed guidance for managing the property.

Mike's initial onsite contact with the Commission's Private Lands Program was with then Stewardship Biologist Danny Ray. Danny made a site visit to the property and began the process of developing a plan that would qualify much of the property for reduced property taxes under the Wildlife Conservation Lands Program and provide guidance on the management needed to begin the habitat enhancement process.

The crux of the plan was to maintain an 11-acre forested buffer along a perennial stream and heavily thin 20 acres of loblolly pine plantation to promote a more lush and diverse herbaceous groundcover. Once thinned, the pine area would require a series of prescribed burns and herbicide applications to control invasive species and promote native species which were hopefully dormant in the seed bank. If needed, native species could be seeded to speed things up and add diversity to the prairie. This plan not only gave the Vaughans management prescriptions to reach their habitat objectives, it also qualified them to receive a reduced property tax valuation for managing two qualifying Wildlife Conservation Lands Program habitat types: early succession and riparian buffer. In 2010, the Vaughans became one of the first three landowners in North Carolina to enroll in the program.

Home on the Prairie

With a plan in hand, Mike and Tucky began the process of restoring their prairie. Many challenges slowed their progress. One of the first was finding a logger who would agree to harvest their relatively small acreage in a manner that would leave the proper number of residual, undamaged loblolly pine on the property. In addition, questions about the esthetic impact of the harvest and concerns about box turtle mortality came into play. With research, persistence and assistance from consulting forester Cliff Lewis, the timber harvest was completed in 2011.

The new supply of sunlight reaching the forest floor resulted in an eruption of vegetation, but it was not all desirable. After being suppressed for 30 years, dense stands of non-native sericea lespedeza sprung from the seed bank. Woody sprouts erupted from the hardwood stumps scattered throughout the 20-acre prairie. And if that is not

enough, prescribed burning on the tract would prove to be a challenge as the smoke could impact neighboring homes or the power transmission lines that cross Wolf Island Prairie. Despite these challenges, with assistance from the North Carolina Forest Service and U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Bill funds, four prescribed burns have been conducted on this site since 2011.

The Vaughans have faced each challenge head on, seeking advice and assistance from a multitude of sources. Two folks who have been instrumental in providing guidance are Dr. Johnny Randall from the N.C. Botanical Garden and Dr. Ken Bridle with the Piedmont Land Conservancy (PLC). In fact, Bridle and other PLC staff have worked with the Vaughans to ensure the property is permanently protected through a conservation easement. However, while many professionals have provided guidance and assistance, much of the heavy lifting to reach their objectives has fallen on Mike with Tucky's support.

When sericea lespedeza threatens the prairie, Mike dons a backpack sprayer or breaks out the sprayer-outfitted ATV to do battle. When few sources for local native plants or seeds were available, the Vaughans became active in the Triad Chapter of the North Carolina Native Plant Society. Mike has converted an abandoned 10-by-10-foot dog kennel into a hybrid greenhouse/potting shed, where he grows plants from locally collected seed. These seedlings are then transplanted to the prairie to increase species richness and abundance.

While many friends and professionals have been involved in the Wolf Island Prairie Project, the success is anchored squarely on the foundation laid by Mike and Tucky. Some scholars may question species composition, management techniques and level of restoration of the prairie, but this couple has followed the winding path to reach the destination they have chosen for their property. They have overcome many challenges as they have wisely used their resources and abilities to create their vision of what the land might have looked like in the early 1700s.

Even though the host of migratory birds and native pollinators that visit the Vaughan's property are critical in the ecosystem that we all share, Mike likely gets the most benefit from his efforts. The benefit is not financial, nor material, but rather something



Left to right: Mike Vaughan turns milk jugs into mini greenhouses to start native plants from locally collected seed. These plants will soon be transplanted across the property. Family dogs Moose Tracks (left) and Nora take a break from their daily search for box turtles at Wolf Island while Vaughan (left) and the author stand by. Piedmont prairies and open woodlands were a byproduct of large grazing animals like elk and bison coupled with fire on North Carolina's pre-European settlement landscape. Today, these habitats do not persist without intense active management.

impossible to quantify. It is the boost to one's spirit realized from reaching a long sought-after goal. There is little outward indication of this benefit except for the gleam in his eyes when he steps into the prairie. This is the same gleam that sparkled in his childhood, as he sat by the radio, intently listened to Silver's hoofbeats or as

he emerged from the movie theater after a Gene Autry/Roy Rogers double feature. Now, the prairie he longed to see in his youth is just steps outside his backdoor. 🐾

N.C. landowners interested in enhancing wildlife habitat on their properties can contact John Isenhour at john.isenhour@ncwildlife.org.



MARK D. JONES

Neighbors Helping Neighbors:

Two Prescribed Burn Associations Are Looking for Members

By Benjy Strobe, SEFA-CURE management biologist, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

Some tasks in life are hard to do alone. While that may bring many different things to mind, in this case, I am talking about meeting land management goals. Often having a neighbor with like-minded objectives can make it easier to accomplish goals when folks work together. Neighbors can share rides to various educational and trade show events, or they may share information about technology, resources and other issues. Neighbors may share equipment, tools or help provide labor. Neighbors will often share sightings of interesting critters in habitat that has been manipulated.

Biologically speaking, having connected useable habitat makes good sense for you and the species that use that habitat. In other words, a landscape scale approach, where you and your neighbor have shared habitat, can help you both achieve your objectives. For example: a 3-acre field of pollinator habitat or native grasses sitting out in the middle of row crops may provide limited habitat for some roving songbirds and other species. However, if you wanted to manage

for resident bobwhite quail and high-priority declining songbirds, that same field may provide nesting opportunities for the birds if it were connected by field borders or hedgerows to other types of useable habitat nearby. Increasing the scale of management increases the overall benefits to wildlife.

A good example of neighbors helping each other can be found in the Sandhills Prescribed Burn Association (PBA). Landowners from Cumberland, Harnett, Hoke, Montgomery, Moore, Richmond and Scotland counties are working together to accomplish much-needed prescribed fires on their properties. They assist each other with advice, equipment and even sometimes with the process of burning itself.

Neighbors in Bladen, Pender and Sampson are also working on setting up a similar burn association in southeastern North Carolina. If you have interest in the Sandhills

PBA, contact Jesse Wimberly at jesse@sandhillslandtrust.org. Those interested in prescribed fire in southeastern North Carolina may contact me at benjy.strobe@ncwildlife.org. We are hopeful that the PBA concept will spread to additional areas and help landowners all over North Carolina come together to meet shared goals and objectives for improving wildlife habitat.

Neighbors come in various shapes, sizes,

Increasing the scale of management increases the overall benefits to wildlife.

and, in some cases, uniforms. Don't forget to discuss your ideas with your next-door neighbor and with the different agencies (N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, N.C. Forest Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, etc.) that can help you. We are your neighbors too, and we want to see you succeed with your land management goals. 🐾

Reflections and Revelations Regarding the ‘Plant-It’ Mentality

*Dr. Craig Harper, University of Tennessee and
Dr. Chris Moorman, North Carolina State University*

The demise of quail in North Carolina is nothing short of depressing for all of us who grew up hunting the fast-flushing denizens of blackberry thickets, broomsedge and beggar’s-lice. Memories of flushes, shots made and missed, the setting in which the hunts occurred, a dad, uncle, grandfather, dogs, and birds frying in a cast-iron pan are forever etched in our minds.

Equally depressing is trying so hard to bring the birds back and relive those times only to realize that nothing seems to help. Research has uncovered much related to quail and other wildlife associated with early successional plant communities in the past 20 years, and both of us have been a part of it. We have some reflections and revelations we’d like to share, especially as related to the “plant it and they will come” mentality and the hard truth of landscape change.

To get to the point, quail populations have declined across North Carolina and throughout most of the eastern United States because of landscape-scale change in land-use practices resulting primarily from an ever-increasing human population, over-mature forests with closed canopies and poor groundcover, and advanced technology that allows double-cropped fields and elimination of non-crop plants (i.e., weeds). Period. Forget about aflatoxins, fire ants, eye worms, Cooper’s hawks, coyotes and mysterious insidious diseases. None of those factors matter if quail do not have anywhere to live.

This revelation has been made clear through recent research in multiple states. Click on Google Earth and view your property from above. Look at the properties that surround your property and the properties that surround those. What do you see? You probably see closed-canopy woods, fields that are multi-cropped or dominated by nonnative grasses with no quail cover, roads and houses. There probably is no connectivity of the isolated patches in which quail could live. We know quail populations can be maintained on areas as small as 500 acres if the area is in an open landscape. Properties of less than 500 acres in a predominantly forested landscape have little hope of supporting significant populations of quail, no matter how well managed. How does your property relate to this description? If you don’t have sufficient area to manage quail, and if you are not located in a relatively open landscape, you really should not try to manage the property for a huntable population of wild birds. It is not going to happen, and you will only be frustrated.

Research has continued to provide new information, and boy have recommendations changed over the years. We once planted food plots and bicolor lespedeza for bobwhite. Before that, some managers recommended non-native multiflora rose and sericea lespedeza. Well, we know none of that is needed to manage quail or any other wildlife species. Yes, quail may forage along a strip of grain sorghum, may find cover and seed amongst a bicolor patch, or escape from a hawk in a multiflora rose thicket. However, none of that is “needed.”

There are many beneficial native plants that provide food and cover for bobwhite, the vast majority of which are not planted,



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1. Dense stands of planted switchgrass (Bladen County planting) or other native warm-season grasses provide poor structure and very little, if any, food for wildlife.

2. Planted wildflowers, like these in Wayne County, are attractive and may be used by quail and other ground-dwelling wildlife. However, it is the structure that attracts quail, not the species planted. Do you see how thin the grass is with the open structure at ground level? This is the ideal structure, but landowners may be able to achieve it without planting. Another consideration is how many planted species fade over time and are replaced by species present in the seedbank before planting.

3. Fallow plant communities like this one bordering a crop field in Bladen County respond from the seedbank following tillage and provide high-quality food and cover for bobwhite and wintering songbirds. Nothing is planted, and wildflowers (such as goldenrod, boneset, and partridge pea) are abundant.

4. Where tree cover is removed and the seedbank is stimulated with prescribed fire, as shown here in Buncombe County, a mixture of forbs, grasses and shrubs provides habitat for northern bobwhite, eastern cottontail, wild turkey, white-tailed deer and a variety of songbirds.

5. This field was a tall fescue hayfield in Forsyth County for decades. It was sprayed once with glyphosate and then burned. Nothing was planted. Immediately, the field was transformed into habitat for a multitude of species. Although the composition and structure is perfect for bobwhite, the surrounding landscape no longer supports quail because of encroaching suburbia and succession of once-farmed fields into closed-canopy woods. Fallow fields such as this also provide fawning cover and often more than 1,000 pounds (dry weight) per acre of selected forage for white-tailed deer.

and these occur naturally when released from competition of nonnative plants. These nonnative competitors include the multitude of perennial nonnative grasses (examples are tall fescue and bermudagrass) that blanket old pastures and idle hayfields across the region. The limiting factor is not what you have or have not planted, but rather it is the availability of early successional plant communities that include naturally occurring forbs, grasses and shrubs across the landscape, not in isolated small patches here and there.

Planting Isn't Always the Answer

Today, native warm-season grasses and wildflowers are all the rage, and planting these is widely promoted. Wildlife biologists (including us) have promoted these plants like penicillin in the 1950s. However, let's be clear: native grasses and forbs do not have to be planted, and planting them will not bring back quail if the property is too small or located in a forested or suburban landscape. It would

be depressing to calculate how much money and effort have been spent planting native grasses and forbs over the past 20 years now that research and experience clearly indicate planting is not necessary to provide habitat for quail and other wildlife.

In fact, research has indicated bobwhite avoid densely planted native grass, and populations have responded positively where naturally occurring fallow vegetation was encouraged with no planting. This information really shouldn't be surprising. Do we really need research to tell us that the fallow fields and cutovers in which we routinely killed limits of bobwhite from the 1950s through the 1980s are adequate to support quail? How is it that we have come to believe that ragweed, horseweed, beggar's-lice, poke-weed, blackberry, broomsedge, foxtails, sumac and sticktight are not good enough? Why would we believe grasses 6 to 8 feet tall and "wildflowers for pollinators" that cost hundreds of dollars per acre are necessary to increase numbers of bobwhite or other wildlife? Instead of planting grass (which quail do not require), why not kill the nonnative pasture grasses in your fields, clear some of your woods (not thin, but CLEAR to transform dense woods into quail habitat), and maintain those same early successional plant communities in which quail and cottontail rabbits once were abundant?

There are lots of problems associated with planting grasses and forbs, especially expense and competition from "weeds." Why not avoid the expense and use those weeds to your advantage? Instead of planting what you want, why not simply kill what you don't want? If you plant, you still are going to have to spray undesirable plants arising from the seedbank competing with the grasses and forbs you planted. We have found that selective spot-spraying using an open-cab tractor or ATV once per summer can transform a plant community into one favorable for bobwhite, cottontails and many other wildlife species that require early successional plant communities. You don't have to plant anything.

Fields dominated by nonnative grasses (like tall fescue, bermudagrass, bahiagrass and orchardgrass) should be sprayed initially with a broadcast application, but spot-spraying thereafter will lead to improved plant composition and structure for quail. More information can be found online by looking up "Managing Early Successional Plant Communities for Wildlife in the Eastern U.S." Of course, maintenance is requisite if you hope to provide quail habitat. Burning, disking and use of selective herbicides still are recommended to set-back plant succession and manipulate the structure of vegetation.

Although it is depressing that wild bobwhite quail will never again flush from many areas of North Carolina, we can identify those areas where populations can be restored or increased. Restoration of quail on these areas can proceed more efficiently when we finally recognize that we do not need to plant anything to provide vegetative communities that bobwhite and many other species require. 🌱

North Carolina's Tiniest Decoys

Wingshooters represent a special tie to the past

Written & Photographed by Chase Luker, hunter education coordinator,
North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

There's something about wingshooters. Actually, there's a lot about wingshooters. Some people classify us as stodgy, aloof, overly-proper, and I've even heard dainty. I'll contend that there's nothing dainty or stodgy about traipsing the woodcock woods, poling a marsh for railbirds or marching miles in search of a singular pheasant.

Still, wingshooters have a special tie with the past and tend to recognize their respective place in history. We're the result of generations prior to us, and we recognize that we're an integral part of the future. We enjoy literature by legends like Archibald Rutledge and Gene Hill. Fine art paintings of pointing setters stir us. Everything our predecessors used in pursuit of our beloved pastime is memorabilia—a representation of the good ole' days and a juxtaposition of how far we've come in our pursuit of sport and conservation. Still, nothing represents our past, both good and bad as it relates to conservation, quite like the antique bird decoy.

Antique decoys demonstrate the gumption and artistic abilities of early hunters and leave many of us waxing poetically about times when game was ever present

Left to right: Jesse Babb's red knot, crafted around the turn of the century on Portsmouth Village. Tiny Sanderling, originally discovered in an old cottage on Ocracoke Island. Opposite: "Beach Bird" decoys by Irvin Morris Sr. were used to attract a variety of species of birds. Harkers Island legend Jimmy Styron's peg head shorebirds are internationally recognized as folk art classics.

and time was abundant. North Carolina has a rich tradition of decoy making, though our yesteryear makers are much more known for their creativity in sculpture than they are for their deftness with a paint brush. Iconic examples of duck decoys by Outer Banker's Alvira Wright and James Best are international classics while masterpieces in paint and form by Mitchell Fulcher are as rare as they are beautiful. And yes, there are literally thousands of pedestrian examples made by folks like you and me—good enough to attract ducks but not quite good enough to attract collectors.

Old-time makers may have made as many as 5,000 decoys in their respective lives, all to support a burgeoning market hunting business or outfitter's lodge. Still, the rarest of the rare North Carolina bird decoys are those crafted to lure shorebirds into gunning range. Long (and thankfully) outlawed, shorebird gunning went extinct just in time to save our migratory beach birds. Species from our tiniest peeps to the large curlews are now prevalent, though reclusive, hiding and thriving in our most formidable wetlands and sparse beaches. However, North Carolina's remaining examples of authentic gunning shorebird decoys made prior to World War II provide many hunters and collectors with a lot of joy.

While hunters made thousands of duck decoys, shorebird hunting was a slim pastime, and very few decoys constituted a "rig."

Therefore, very few were made, and even fewer survived. Some are as simple as silhouettes cut from clapboard siding while others are round, shapely and bold. The one commonality in all good, old shorebird decoys though is dramatic profile. The primary species that were pursued were red knots, yellowlegs and curlews, though old examples of tiny sanderlings and looming egrets exist.

Collectors especially enjoy decoys with shot scars—proof positive of the glory days when marshes were flush with birds, but also a warning to the ills of unregulated killing. These decoys were made and used within the earshot of crashing waves up and down our wild coast. It's important to remember how sparse and undeveloped much of our coastline was prior to 1940, too. Boat travel was the norm, electricity was intermittent and technology was slow. But the men, and yes women, who crafted decoys possessed the work ethic and creativity that folks elsewhere would admire.



Hunting techniques for shorebird hunting were as varied as the decoys. Often, shorebird hunters were called "pot hunters" since they were simply trying to collect groceries for themselves, but others were market hunters collecting plumes for use in ladies hats which was the fashion of the day. Like ducks, beach birds migrate, too. The flocks can be as spectacularly dense as the flocks of snow geese we still see today. Uncovering and investigating the facts of shorebird hunting is tough because virtually nobody



alive today legally hunted shorebirds. Once it was outlawed, many hunters destroyed their old shorebird rigs and set aside the memories and recollections they possessed about shorebird hunting.

Accounts recorded by historians in the 1970s and 1980s are virtually all we have to help us understand the what, when and how. Regardless, there are many who still remember preparing and eating shorebirds that were bagged by their grandfathers. Some, like the red knot, are remembered with a large degree of disdain as the birds were “too small to taste so fishy.” Accounts of “yellow-shafts” (colloquial name for yellowlegs on the Outer Banks) detail a pleasant taste and that they were easy to skin. Still, it took a mess to make a meal, so bagging a sack-full of shorebirds was important if the plan was to fill the pot for supper.

Those that remember shorebird hunting or the stories of shorebird hunting all use the term “knot up” to describe the moment that one would take the shot. Shorebirds, like most other birds, are social animals and are therefore subject to betrayal by wooden counterfeits and a peeping whistle. From the several accounts that I can best piece together, the standard procedure for a successful shorebird hunt would be to strike out prior to sunrise with a dozen little shorebird decoys.

After staking the rig out in the sand, a temporary blind or shallow hole would be crafted to conceal the hunter. First light brings first flights, and when the decoys were spotted, the birds would wheel over the decoys often “knotting up” into a ball prior to landing with the fakes. It was at this precise moment when one shot from a

small-bore shotgun would have the greatest impact on the flock. Bagging a dozen birds or better with a singular round was the goal because there were more pressing things to do in these days than to sit on a beach with a shotgun.



Still, there were hunters who also shot shorebirds for the market. A sackful of shorebirds might have fetched \$3, a kingly sum for a day's work in 1920. Like waterfowl,

As conservationists, we've learned from history. As wingshooters, we can appreciate our past in a way that many other hunters can't. Artifacts from a bygone era are as loved as the game itself.

they too were packed into barrels and shipped to northern cities and their fine restaurants. However, unlike waterfowl, few people pursued shorebirds, so there was even less advocacy for their conservation.

Some species, like the Eskimo curlew are now extinct while red knots are now threatened. Other species, like the black-bellied plover are recovering nicely. Dowitchers and whimbrels are seen by beachgoers regularly, and yes, the tiny sanderlings that amuse us

all with their back and forth battle with a running wave are doing fine. Some shorebirds are also indicator species for overall upland and wetland habitat. Curlews, for example, are rarely spotted in North Carolina anymore. Whether it's absence is related to wetland degradation or water quality is still unclear, but it's something biologists are making a priority.

As conservationists, we've learned from history. As wingshooters, we can appreciate our past in a way that many other hunters can't. Artifacts from a bygone era are as loved as the game itself. Antique wooden decoys represent all that is good about our ancestors who survived and thrived on our state's eastern border.

Wonderful collections of antique shorebird decoys are open to the public in a variety of museums, but the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission's Outer Banks Center for Wildlife Education in Corolla (ncwildlife.org/Learning/Education-Centers/Outer-Banks) has arguably the most comprehensive grouping of these tiny and rare decoys. Whether you've got a collecting gene or not, take the opportunity to admire these special pieces of our state's wingshooting history. You'll be glad you did. ♣



Give and Take: How One Landowner's Dream Became a Reality

By Deanna Noble, technical assistance biologist, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

Photographed by Melissa McGaw, photographer, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

One's first impression of Terry Herndon may be that of an average landowner. However, after spending a day riding on his Polaris and meandering throughout his approximately 380 acres in Harnett County, you will quickly conclude that this average man is not so average after all.

Unlike most property owners in North Carolina, Herndon did not acquire ownership of his land from his parents, grandparents or even great grandparents. He does not come from a long generation of landowners. In fact, Herndon did not obtain ownership of his land until 1976. Until then, Herndon had worn many hats as a successful business owner. He has accomplished everything from owning his own record store to creating a lucrative sanitation business. He thrived on meeting and learning from different

people from all different walks of life. While talking with Herndon, he reminds me that every person has a story to tell. "It is what you learn from each of those stories and how you use all the details to help your own life take shape that makes a mark on your life forever."

Terry Mason Herndon Sr. grew up in downtown Fayetteville. The sights and sounds of the city, although exciting, did not "make his world go 'round." He knew at an early age that life as a city boy was not for him. He yearned for the outdoors. Since childhood, Herndon knew that his happy place was in and around everything natural. His Uncle John Kennedy would fuel his passion for all things wild. There was nothing Herndon loved more as a small boy than tagging along on a hunt, wetting a hook and even learning how a beloved bird dog could provide another dimension of hunting all together.

Herndon attributes his die-hard obsession for bird dogs to his Uncle John. From gaining the dog's trust and loyalty to training, Herndon is well known for his gift of being knowledgeable and a true "bird dog whisperer." Herndon has read about and soaked up an abundant amount of training techniques to produce bird dogs that any hunter would be privileged to call their best friend and hunting pal.

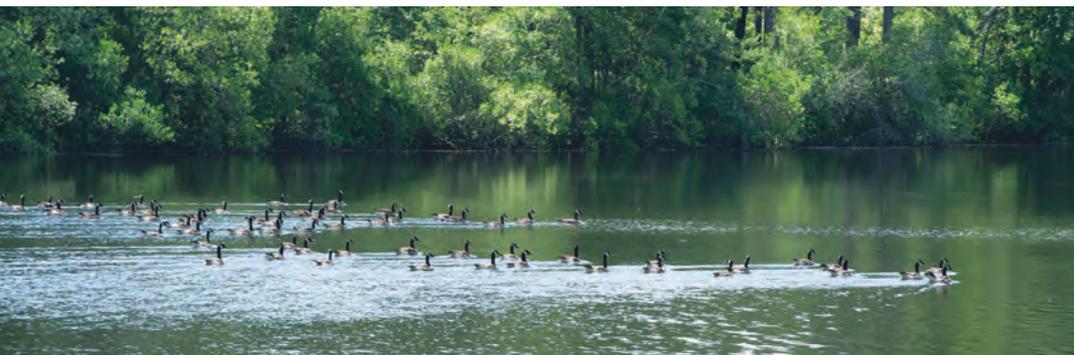
There always seemed to be a void in Herndon's heart that he could never define or explain until that day in 1976 when the moon and the stars aligned and seemed to be in perfect harmony. That day he decided to purchase land in Harnett County. Prior to that day, Herndon and his wife and boys had been accustomed to life in Fayetteville and a beach house on Long Beach in Oak Island, where they enjoyed long days in the summer sun on the boat. Those days were not as fun filled for Herndon.

"I would have to rush down and haul the boat on Friday afternoons to hurry up and pack up to leave and travel back to Fayetteville late on Sunday evenings," Herndon said. "There was a lot of packing and unpacking and not much relaxing." This fast-paced life was taking its toll on Herndon and his family.

"I made up my mind that I wanted to move to the country," Herndon said. "I knew what you could do in the country,



Top: Terry Herndon's thinning and burning are paying off in this stand that provides a lush understory benefitting many species of wildlife. Bottom: A flock of Canada geese enjoy retreating to Herndon's pond.



and I learned that from Mr. Maynor. Andrew Maynor was a family friend that had one of the first shooting preserves in North Carolina. I confided in Mr. Maynor that I wanted to find a place in the country, and he assured me that he could help me do that. “We can handle that.”

Herndon mentioned to his clients that “someone” was looking for a farm, but initially they would not concede that they knew of any land that was for sale. Once they learned that it was Herndon, they not only knew that there was a farm for sale but could provide more details than you could ever imagine. The clients let him know that there was a doctor that had a place that was exactly what he wanted. They all agreed it would be a great place for Herndon and his family. Herndon made up his mind that he would go look at the property himself. According to Herndon, this property was even listed in the *New York Times*.

This meant it was time for a family vote to consider leaving Fayetteville and foregoing those boat rides at Long Beach. The votes were unanimous, and all were in favor of a new chapter to add to their lives that meant moving to Harnett County. One of the unique details about the process was that Herndon ended up selling all his previous properties in Fayetteville and at the beach to the gentleman that notified Herndon of the land in Harnett County.

A Routine That Never Disappoints

Most days have been the same for Herndon over the past 42 years since purchasing the property. He begins each day with a breakfast that consists of boiled eggs and bacon or cereal if he is pressed for time that day. Next, he is off to his dog kennels to clean and feed the bird dogs. He continues his feedings with the quail, ducks, geese and fish. Jumping on his Polaris, he then heads off to the callback pens to ensure that the quail have all returned. By now, it is lunchtime, and he prepares his famous “Terry special.” The sandwich is made of two pieces of rye bread—one side mustard, one side mayonnaise, a slice of bologna, a slice of cotto salami and melted mozzarella cheese. Don’t forget the best part...a dill pickle and plain potato chips on the side. If you are especially lucky, there will always be a sweet treat in the freezer or a cookie or two in the jar. Just about the time it seems Herndon has completed his chores for the day he is back at it. “I pretty much have to repeat the morning processes all over again!”

When Herndon decided to purchase Pineland Farms in Harnett County, the land became much more than just a new place to call home. He finally had his very own land where he could recreate the familiar landscapes of when he was a gun-toting boy behind a bird



Terry Herndon checks one of his bluebird boxes and counts eggs to track productivity of the birds on his property.

dog. It took numerous management practices to manipulate and restore the land that he remembered as a child, and he wanted to bring to fruition these things on his own property. Shortly after he purchased the land, Herndon used a bulldozer to remove the furrows that had been created from a bedding operation to plant loblolly pine years earlier.

“I had never used a bulldozer before, and it took me an hour to realize it had more than one gear,” he says chuckling.

He realized at that point there would be a steep learning curve, but he was eager to take on the challenge. After the land was smoothed, he planted longleaf pine and began a prescribed fire rotation. The 30-plus-year-old trees have been thinned, and the ground cover has naturally regenerated. Wiregrass and other herbaceous plants in the understory form a dense layer of cover creating excellent wildlife habitat.

The single most important management practice Herndon has implemented on his property is prescribed burning. He rotationally burns his property so that all the forested land, including the bottomlands, are burned nearly every other year. On average, he and his sons Mason and Brant burn approximately 150 acres each year.

“Burning is the best tool you can use, it helps everything...wiregrass, broomstraw, partridge pea...it helps the pine trees grow.”

Some folks may think that the same routine and daily maintenance of the same property could be monotonous and unexciting. However, Herndon greets each new day as an opportunity to embrace all the things about his land that he enjoys most.

“It’s a blessing from God,” he said. “I get to see Him every day through the beauty of His creation...the changing of the seasons, the green rolling hills, the sunrises and sunsets, the way the sun and moon reflect off the water, the stars in the sky, and the sunlight on the longleaf pine. ...it’s a place of solitude...not a neighbor for three-quarters of a mile. I never get tired of it. This land is what keeps me going.” 🌿



Terry Herndon with two of his many bird dogs who have shared his land over the last four decades.



MARK D. JONES

Outdoor Dream Foundation hunter Trenton Lowe with longtime ODF Mentor Terry Morris from Craven County.

The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission also contributes to the ODF experience by providing free licenses to most participants over recent years. This saves money on non-resident licenses for ODF and allows the organization to focus its time and effort on travel and other costs. For a 100-percent volunteer organization, which to date has spent over 98 percent of its funds directly on adventures for its kids, this is an important benefit.

Saturday did not produce a bear for Trenton. Despite providing access to some of the best bear hunting properties in North America, it just wasn't the day for the dogs to scent track a bear. While the bear hunters rested on Sunday, worshiped and spent time with their families, Skip and I took Trenton and his brother, Travis, fishing. It is common for ODF kids to get to experience extra adventures above and beyond their "main event." White-tailed deer hunting and fishing are commonly added to hunts for bears, elk, pronghorn and other animals. In keeping with this theme, ODF even has a long-term mentor program for kids who live near their volunteers. The program provides regular fellowship with youth and families in local environments while giving the children an opportunity to enjoy the traditions of hunting and fishing.

On Monday, I knew Terry, Coy, Ray and the rest of their hunt party members would do everything in their power to ensure their dogs would tree a bear for Trenton. It wasn't long before one was treed a few hundred yards from the nearest field in some real nasty and thick eastern North Carolina

bear cover. A group of hunters chopped a path for Trenton through briars, small trees and vines to allow the young man to get to his bear. With one shot, the hunt was over.

A large group gathered to watch as the hunt participants brought Trenton's bear out of the woods amid smiles, handshakes and pats on the back. Trenton and his family were grinning ear to ear as well. A large group of hunters, farmers, family members and well-wishers gathered to congratulate Trenton and enjoy reveling in his success in achieving an Outdoor Dream of his own.

ODF works to ensure that their young hunters learn about all aspects of a hunt and get to experience memories that will last a lifetime. The meat is properly handled by volunteers and provided to the families and/or needy individuals. ODF hunters are always paired with experienced volunteers who teach the children to respect the animals they hunt and develop a strong conservation ethic.

Many of us are blessed to have our health and the ability to enjoy and utilize North Carolina's abundant natural resources, including our plentiful game populations. Outdoor Dream Foundation reminds us how precious these opportunities can be and how not everyone has the chance to enjoy these resources. ODF kids can turn a grizzled and tough old bear hunter into a tender-hearted teddy bear in a New York minute. ODF brings out the best in everyone, and North Carolina's hunters and landowners are doing their part to show the world what it means to give back to those less fortunate in ways that change lives forever. 🍄



HOW TO HELP

Outdoor Dream Foundation is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization. It raises money every year at an annual banquet in Anderson, S.C. This year's event was held on Friday, Aug. 3. Additionally, the foundation takes donations year-round. Information about the organization, its annual banquet and making donations can be found at outdoordream.org.

While some ODF mentors were mentioned in this piece, there is a long list of regular, long-term contributors far too long to name here. Simply put, ODF has been assisted by too many North Carolina hunters and landowners to name in this article. ODF would like to thank all the bear hunters, club members and landowners who have given so much over the last 14 years to make treasured memories for ODF children and their families. Rest assured your efforts have changed young lives for the better.

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