

OF THE OUTDOORS | GARY HOWEY

In Pursuit Of The Willy Wabbit

BY GARY HOWEY
Hartington, Neb.

Often as a kid growing up in northeast South Dakota, my buddies and I would pursue what we thought was big game that inhabited the thickets and woodlot along the river, the Willy Wabbit.

With BB guns in hand, off we'd go, heading down the Sioux River out towards Lake Pelican.

Didn't matter much what type of rabbit it was, we were just after rabbits, it could have been a black-tailed or white-tailed jack rabbit or a cottontail, we just wanted to say that we'd bagged a rabbit.

We knew there were a lot of rabbits around as we'd seen their tracks in the snow, so it was only a matter of time before we came across one.

Well, after numerous trips we had yet to see anything but tracks, pure frustration brought our Great Rabbit Hunt Expedition to an abrupt end.

Like many things that we try that don't work out, rabbit hunting became something that I was willing to forget

about, to bury deep in my subconscious, hoping to forget.

Several years later Shorty, a friend of my Dad, Cal who worked with him at Sanders/Sharpe Chevrolet asked if I and my brother A.J. would like to go along and do some rabbit hunting with him.

My first thoughts were, nope, been there, tried that, and didn't need it until he mentioned that we'd be hunting them with beagles.

After that, I was all ears, sounded like a good deal to me; I couldn't wait, when we were going, my bags were packed, I was



SUBMITTED PHOTO
Jeff Wilde, of David, City, Neb., is pictured with one of his rabbit hunting Beagles. These short-legged energetic little dogs with the boisterous voice of a much larger dog are great companions and eager bunny hunters.

ready.

That Sunday, after church, my brother and I waited not so patiently for Shorty to pick us up, man we were ready.

When he arrived, he looked at our BB gun and asked what we were going to do with them, I thought, Duh, were going wabbit hunting.

He shook his head, loaded us into the car with a couple of tiny little dogs, dogs that were not much bigger than some of the rabbits we'd heard about, since we'd never really seen a real live rabbit and had only seen their tracks in the snow.

Well away we went out into the country into an area that was covered up with plum thickets, brush piles and all sorts' nasty vines with sharp thorns.

Since I was the oldest, Shorty gave me the option of taking turns with my brother shooting our BB gun or using his 22.

Once again, I had to think this over, well any way about one mila-second and then there I was, the big brother with the 22, man, I had made it, I was into the big

time.

Neither, I or my brother knew a thing about these little dogs we were hunting with, but it didn't take us long to learn because in a heart beat these two mini mutts started bawling like a coon hound and with their nose's to the ground, they were off in hot pursuit.

At first A.J. and I sort of ran around like couple of goofs with their heads cut off, until we finally figured out that the dogs would run the rabbits by us. All we needed to do was wait and sooner or later, one of those bunnies would circle back and make the mistake of stopping long enough for us to get a shot.

To us, a couple of young kids, we thought this was real gentleman's sport, this was cool, no strenuous exercise, just a lot of standing around until the little short legged dogs, the beagles would run a bunny right to you.

That was years ago and I'd pretty much forgotten about how much fun hunting rabbits was until a friend of mine from Lincoln asked if we'd like to film a bunny hunt with him.

Didn't take me long to decide, because these guys were bunny hunting fanatics, running all over in pursuit of the wily cottontail.

Dick Turpin (Lincoln, Neb.), a retired game warden/law enforcement/hunters safety coordinator, knew his stuff when it came to hunting rabbits with beagles.

Dick and his friend Jeff Wilde had several good rabbit dogs and knew of some tremendous areas where lots of bunnies were running around.

The only thing different from my first hunt years ago was that we were using 4:10 shotguns instead of 22's, as many of our shots would be made on bunnies on the run.

We'll it didn't take long before one of Dick's dogs let out a bawl and they were off and running.

I stood by one brush pile while Dick

and Jeff posted on the outside edge along the bunny trails that wound in and out of the thickets and brush piles.

Those tiny little dogs, with those short little legs, went around and around in and out of the thickets on the hot trail of the bunnies until they forced them to run by one of our hunters, giving us a shot.

On that day, we managed to pop five bunnies, and then the best part happened we headed back to town where Jeff's mother would fry us up some rabbit, make up some gravy and that along with some potatoes was a grand way to top off a dandy Gentlemen's bunny hunt.

I've been back several times, and I'm planning on going back again after the first of the year, as bunny hunting, especially with beagles gets in your blood and you just have to go back for more.

Rabbit are excellent eating and with liberal limits of seven cottontails per day in Nebraska and a possession limit of twenty-eight, it's an excellent way to get some shooting in during the first part of the year.

In South Dakota the limits on cottontails are even more liberal as you can take home ten a day and have thirty in your possession, so there's a lot of shooting as well as excellent eating when you're finished hunting

In both Nebraska and South Dakota the seasons runs through Feb. 29, 2012.

Rabbits are an underutilized wildlife species and hunting them is another excellent way for us to get out and spend some time in the outdoors after many of the other seasons have closed.

Gary Howey, Hartington, Neb., is the producer/host of the Outdoorsmen Adventures television series, which airs each week throughout the upper Midwest on Fox affiliates. For more information on hunting, fishing and the outdoors go to www.outdoorsmenadventures.com.

Traps Can Pose Threat To Dogs

BRAINERD, Minn. (AP) — It was, Gerald Noska said, a perfect day to be grouse hunting. Sunny and in the mid-30s, only a trace of snow covered the ground on Noska's property about 10 miles south of Staples.

But there would be no hunt that day. And probably not any day soon. And that's understandable, even for a hunter who said he spends 30 to 60 days a year afield with his two dogs, hunting ruffed grouse.

There is only one dog now. And while Noska said it's a good dog, a good hunter, he is still mourning the loss of his prized hunting dog, Sue, an English setter killed in a trap recently at the Dry Sand Wildlife Management Area north of Staples.

While that's fairly rare in the greater Brainerd lakes area, Noska's dog was the second killed by a trap in north-central Minnesota in less than 10 days. John Reynolds of Merifield said he lost his springer spaniel, Penni, to a trap near Emily Lake just outside of Emily on Dec. 17.

Noska and Reynolds both said they have trapped in the past — Reynolds in the last year — and have nothing against trapping. It's the type of traps being used that "terrifies" both as dog owners.

Both dogs were reportedly killed by Conibear 220 traps, which are commonly baited and set inside a 5-gallon bucket, which in turn sits on the ground. A lightweight and compact body-gripping trap with a jaw spread of 7 inches, it's popular for trapping bobcat, fishers and otters in this area — Crow Wing and Cass counties were among the trapping harvest leaders for each of those species in 2010-11, according to the Department of Natural Resources. And the traps can be placed almost anywhere on county and state land. The fisher season ended Dec. 4; the bobcat and otter seasons run until Jan. 8.

"I'm absolutely terrified," Reynolds said of the traps. "I spend a lot of time out in the woods. It's my favorite thing to do. I go out at least once a week from fall to spring. But I'm seeing those buckets (with the traps) and seeing evidence of more and more every year."

Reynolds, who said he's heard of four dogs being caught in 220s — and only one surviving — in Crow Wing County in recent years, said he had seen the traps while out with his dog, but never in the area it was killed.

"We had been past that spot two or three times, but the wind was in the wrong direction and didn't bring the scent (of the bait) to her. That day it did."

Noska said he never even thought about the traps when out with his dogs.

"It never entered my mind," he said. "I didn't think this kind of stuff

was legal. It terrifies you."

Jason Abraham, season setting/fur bearer specialist for the DNR in St. Paul, said he's only had seven reports of dogs killed by traps since 2007, although "I'm sure there have been more (that haven't been reported)."

"We're sympathetic toward the dog owners," Abraham said. "We definitely understand it's no fault of their own. It's a hunting situation. But on the other hand, you have trappers who are legally trapping on state property who bought a license who expect and deserve the right to enjoy their sport."

"These things happen. I know a lot of trappers. I set traps. If it happened to me (a dog killed in his trap), I'd feel terrible. Two user groups in the woods can cross over and the results can be tragic."

In 2010, Abraham said the DNR enacted rules restricting the placement of 220 body-gripping traps near houses and buildings occupied by livestock and said the DNR will continue to discuss regulations aimed at limiting accidental catches of pets.

According to Reynolds, it's the traps themselves, not the rules, that pose a problem.

"I'm not against trapping. I'm absolutely against taking unnecessary risks with someone's family member," Reynolds said. "This thing (220 trap) is not necessary. There are footholds and snares. The alternatives have worked for hundreds of years. We need to force trappers to stop doing this. They have alternatives."

"It's basically the dumbing down of trapping," he added of 220s. "Anyone with a bucket and a 220 can call themselves a trapper. They (220s) are very effective."

Reynolds enjoyed hunting grouse with Penni, who was about 2, and brought her to work with him, so spent "24 hours a day" with her. "She meant the world to me," he said in a recent letter to the editor in the Brainerd Dispatch.

He and Noska both said they plan to "replace" their dogs — someday.

"I wouldn't have sold her for \$10,000," Noska said of Sue, who he said was about 6 years old. "She was at her peak. She had another five years (of hunting)."

Noska said of the day that Sue died in the trap, "We spent four to five hours hunting and (the dogs) flushed 18 birds. She (Sue) flushed 16. It (a hunting dog like Sue) is a once-in-a-lifetime deal — if you're lucky."

"I don't know when I'll go out again. Probably not this year. ... I want to go out again someday, but I don't want to have to worry about this (traps). I wouldn't wish this on anyone."

TROPHY SPOTLIGHT



LEFT: Norm Blaaidid of Yankton caught this walleye on Dec. 29. (PHOTO: Captain Norm's)

BELOW: Heidi Olson of Yankton caught this 5-pound, 23.5-inch walleye below Gavins Point Dam on Jan. 4. She was aboard the "little red boat" captained by her father. (Submitted Photo)



Wagner Tops Parkston In SESD Dual

PARKSTON — The Wagner Red Raiders grapplers traveled to Parkston to upend the Trojans 38-28.

Wagner won five straight matches from 138 to 170 pounds to seal the victory.

106 — Kyle Holzbauer P pin. Dawson Petrik 1:27; 113 — Nick Dion W dec. Black Beltz 9:3; 120 — Wesley Dvorak W pin. Zach Ruckteschell 0:28; 126 — Tyler Dion W tech. fall Cameron Fanning 20:5; 132 — Myles Bialas P maj. dec. Miles Kreeger 12:2; 138 — Brady Soulek W dec. Chase Stoenner 7:4; 145 — David Kocer W dec. Mitch Heisinger 3:2; 152 — Alex Kocer W pin. Chandler Baumgart 1:07; 160 — Derek Dickerson W pin. Dillon Stadium 0:57; 170 — Trevor Lensing W dec. Miles Semmler 9:3; 182 — Brady Ralff P pin. Jacob Kvigne 0:40; 195 — Dakota Zepher W dec. Andrew Semmler 9:46; 220 — Austin Bertram P pin. Kade Lienes 1:51; 285 — Elijah Heth W pin. Jeff Hyke 3:22

Bo Levi Mitchell Wins Payton Award

FRISCO, Texas (AP) — Eastern Washington quarterback Bo Levi Mitchell won the Walter Payton Award on Friday night as top player in the Football Championship Subdivision.

Mitchell, who led the Eagles to the national championship a year ago, received 57 first-place votes and 453 points from a national panel of 131 voters. Lehigh quarterback Chris Lum and Indiana State running back Shakir Bell tied for second with 219 points.

The 6-foot-2, 210-pound Mitchell led the nation in passing yards (4,009) and touchdown passes (33) during the regular season. He completed 318 of 503 attempts and had 13 interceptions for the Eagles (6-5).

"It's an honor even to be mentioned in the final three," Mitchell said, "but to win the award is a huge accomplishment not only for me but for Eastern and our community."

Mitchell, from Katy, Texas, is the second player from Eastern Washington to win the award — following quarterback

Erik Meyer in 2005 — and the sixth winner from the Big Sky.

Mitchell transferred to Eastern Washington from SMU following his sophomore year.

"He really had an amazing career here," Eagles coach Beau Baldwin said. "It's a compliment to his work ethic and his ability to pick up a new system. He had the talent and basically just evolved within our system and kept getting better. Even though our record wasn't what we wanted, he kept finding a way to improve and get better every week all the way until the end of the season. That says a lot about his mentality, his competitiveness and his overall drive."

On Thursday night, New Hampshire junior linebacker Matt Evans won the Buck Buchanan Award winner as the outstanding defensive player. Towson running back Terrance West won the inaugural Jerry Rice Award as the top freshman, and Towson coach Rob Ambrose took the Eddie Robinson Award as the coach of the year.

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Briefs: Mobridge Chamber Tourism Ice Fishing Tourney Set For Jan. 14

MOBRIDGE — This year's 11th annual Mobridge Chamber Tourism Ice Fishing Tournament filled its 450 two man team limit in 41 minutes, 28 seconds and these 900 anglers are scheduled to vie for over \$150,000 in cash and prizes on Saturday, January 14 on Lake Oahe.

The Mobridge Chamber Tourism Committee began the tournament in 2001 as a one person ice fishing tournament and received 50 individual entries. Their recipe for success for this type of tournament cannot be denied and they are already working on the registration rules for the 2013 tournament because of increased interest from all over the United States and Canada to enter this event.

For more information on the tournament, call the Mobridge Chamber of Commerce at 605.845.2387.

CWD Found In Buffalo, Custer, Holt Counties

LINCOLN, Neb. — Chronic wasting disease (CWD) in deer has appeared for the first time in Buffalo, Custer and Holt counties, according to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

There were 1,565 lymph node samples collected from deer taken during the 2011 November firearm deer season, with 26 samples testing positive for CWD. In addition, samples were taken from 37 culled deer that showed clinical symptoms for CWD, with one male mule deer from Garden County testing positive. Those symptoms include a rough, emaciated appearance and a lack of fear of humans.

There were a record 51 positives from 3,645 samples in Nebraska in 2010. However, the surveillance effort was reduced in 2011 due to a lack of funds. The 2011 effort focused on central Nebraska, the leading edge of the disease as it spreads from west to east.

Game and Parks confirmed CWD in the state's deer population in 2000. CWD is a disease that can affect deer and elk and always is fatal to the affected animal. Humans have never been known to contract CWD.

Funding Available For South Dakota Trails

PIERRE — South Dakota State Parks Director Doug Hofer announced today that applications are being accepted for grants from the Recreation Trails Program (RTP) for trail projects sponsored by municipalities, counties, state parks, civic organizations or tribal governments.

The Recreational Trails Program provides partial reimbursement for approved trail projects. Eligible projects include constructing new public trails, rehabilitating existing public trails, developing trail-related facilities, and educational programs that specifically address recreational trail issues.

The application deadline is Friday, April 13. RTP funds come to the state through the Federal Highway Administration, and are apportioned to states by Congress to fund both motorized and non-motorized public recreation trail projects. The amount of funds available is based upon the number of recreational vehicles licensed in each state. Application packets are available online at the Game, Fish and Parks website.

For more information, contact Grants Coordinator Randy Kittle at 605-773-5490 or by e-mail at randy.kittle@state.sd.us.

Men Cited For Poaching Trumpeter Swans In Neb.

GIBBON, Neb. (AP) — Authorities say two men have been cited for poaching trumpeter swans near the Platte River in south-central Nebraska.

The Kearney Hub reports (<http://bit.ly/lyr5zKp>) the incident occurred Saturday morning.

One of the hunters told a Nebraska Game and Parks conservation officer that he thought he was shooting at a snow goose.

Jerry Pecha is a conservation officer supervisor for the Game and Parks office in Kearney. He doubted the hunter's explanation, saying the differences between the two species are obvious.

Pecha says trumpeter swans are state and federally protected.

The men could face damages of \$750 per swan and a \$100 fine.

Their names have not been released.

Game And Parks Suggests Tips For Safety On Ice

LINCOLN, Neb. — Stay safe on the ice this winter while enjoying a day of ice fishing. Follow these Nebraska Game and Parks Commission tips for ice safety:

- There should be at least 4 inches of clear, solid ice before an angler ventures onto a frozen lake or pond.
- Wear a life jacket.

- Commercial or homemade ice picks should be worn around your neck in case you fall through and need something to grip the ice and pull yourself out.

- Use an ice chisel or spud bar to check ice thickness every step of the way.
- Keep a long rope with you so someone can help rescue you if you break through the ice.

- Avoid alcoholic beverages. These affect your judgment and increase your chances for hypothermia.

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