



# Outdoors

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## Hunters help feed the hungry

From combined reports

**MONTGOMERY** | During the holiday season, the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources is encouraging Alabama deer hunters to participate in the Hunters Helping the Hungry program.

Hunters can donate field-dressed deer to participating processors who give frozen ground venison to local food banks.

Since Hunters Helping the Hungry began seven years ago, 319,000 pounds of ground venison have been donated to Alabama food banks and have helped feed thousands of needy Alabamians. The combination of Alabama's long hunting season, dense deer population and generous deer limit makes it possible.

"It's just something you've got to do. It's stewardship," said Jerry Cunningham, owner of Jerry's Taxidermy and Deer Processing in Oxford. His company has participated for many years. He helps supply more than 3,000 pounds of venison each year to area food banks.

"Thanks to the generosity of hunters, the amount of donated venison increased from 8,000 pounds in 1999 to over 57,000 pounds last season," said Commissioner of Conservation Barnett Lawley. "The number of hunters donating harvested animals increases each year, but more food is needed. I encourage every deer hunter to donate at least one deer this season."

Anyone wishing to make a donation may send a check or money order to the Alabama Conservation and Natural Resources Foundation, P.O. Box 140, Montgomery, Ala., 36101-0140. Hunters Helping the Hungry should be noted on the check.

"The key to success is having a deer processor available in all of our counties," says Craig Hill, assistant chief of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries.

"We don't have processors in 31 counties, but we do have hunters in those counties. Without the processors, food banks can't access the meat."

Deer processors can call 334-242-3467 for more information.

### HOW IT WORKS

Hunters field dress the deer and take it to a participating processor. A list of deer processors is available at [www.outdooralabama.com](http://www.outdooralabama.com). There is no cost to the hunter to donate a deer, but hunters may voluntarily pay processing fees to provide more venison for food banks to distribute.

Processors grind the venison, then contact their nearest participating food bank. The processors receive \$1 per pound from the Alabama Conservation and Natural Resources Foundation.

The food bank picks up the venison for distribution to those in need.

## Hunting not always about the kill

UNIONTOWN

"That really made a loud splash for a stick," I mused.

I stared down into the water with clinical detachment trying to figure out where the stick had come from and where it had gone. It wasn't floating and that's kind of funny for a stick. And then I noticed the sling waving gently at the surface.

It wasn't a stick.

"Oh, shoot [only I didn't say 'shoot'] that was your gun," I blurted out.

"No kidding [only he didn't say 'kidding']," my host responded in blasé fashion.



ROBERT DEWITT

I was still leaning against the gnarled vine that hung from the tree amid a cluster of limbs and smaller vines. Before it became my prop, it was Montgomery's gun rack.

Montgomery now stood with a bemused look on his face staring down into the calf-deep water. Lesser minds would have plunged their hands beneath the frigid water to retrieve an \$800 automatic. Not Montgomery.

The gun, you see, was already immersed in dirty duck pond water. Rushing to pull it out would have accomplished little. Instead he carefully considered his options like a man given the choice between the gallows and a firing squad. Neither is a good choice but it still merits careful consideration.

As manager and guide at Cottonwoods Sportsman's Lodge, he's probably had no small number of indignities inflicted on him by the lodge's customers. Maybe that helped him consider it calmly.

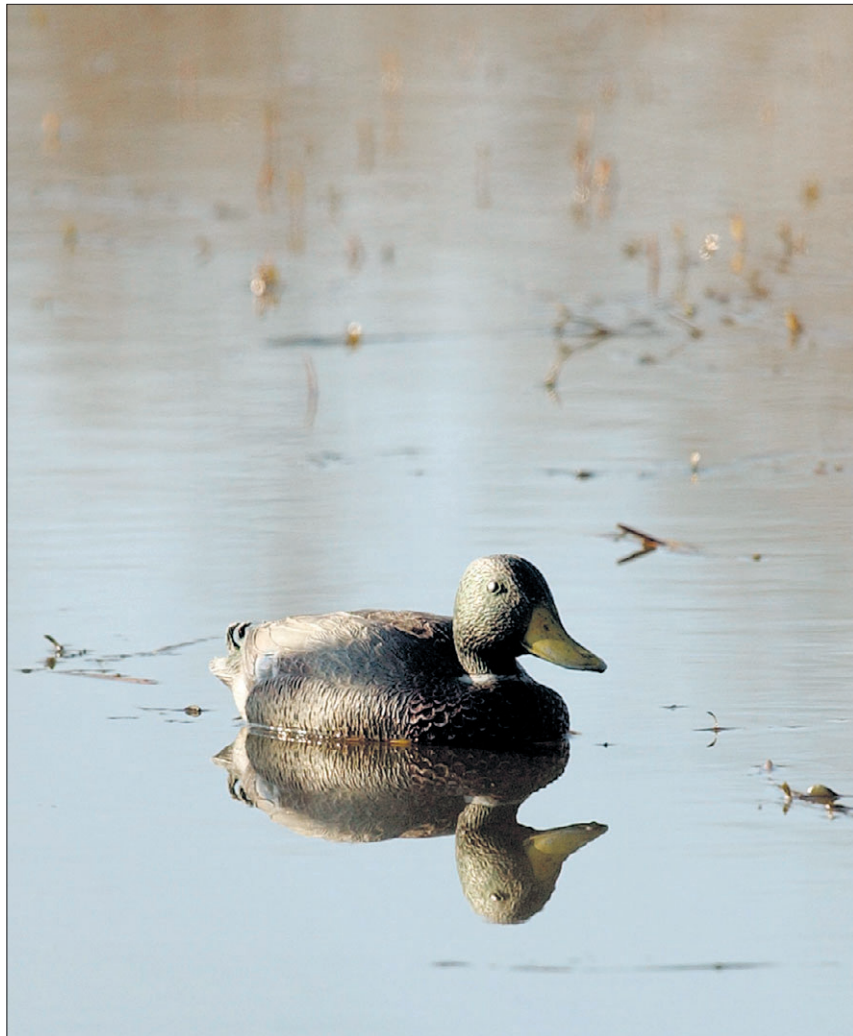
Behind us, the farmer cackled uncontrollably from behind his facemask. My embarrassment and Montgomery's misfortune struck him as high comedy. And he found great sport in repeating our initial lines to each other.

Wanting to save Montgomery from getting his hands wet, I tried to slip my wader boot between the sling and the gun and lift it with my foot.

"Here," Montgomery said, slipping the glove off his hand and fingering the strap so that he stayed as dry as possible. Muddy water poured from every opening in the gun and it made kind of a soggy sound as he unloaded it. Peering down the barrel, it was clear and he loaded up again.

Oh yes, duck season is back. Lovely beautiful duck hunting, which is so rotten when the weather is pleasant and usually so good when no sane human would attempt it. Unfortunately, Friday inflicted on us both frigid temperatures and empty skies.

It was a bitter end to high hopes. Montgomery had been chomping at the bit to hunt all week and I



STAFF PHOTO | ROBERT DEWITT

Cold weather is creating ideal duck hunting conditions. But the hunt isn't all about killing ducks.

arranged my work schedule around it. Robert McKee is a dairy farm so I guess it's just a matter of whether he's standing in freezing water or warm cow manure before daylight. You'd have to ask him which he prefers.

A reasonable person might call it a waste of time. A sane person might say that waking up at 3 a.m., driving an hour to lug a ton of equipment through the predawn darkness to stand in freezing water and come home empty handed is a flop. But, of course, duck hunters aren't known for reason and sanity.

Don't get me wrong, we'd rather have come home light on shells and heavy on birds. But I don't recall a dull moment during the three or so hours we spent in the blind. We probably wouldn't have left when we did if it hadn't been so doggone cold. Sure, if dropping my friend's gun in the water were the highlight of too many hunts, I'd probably quit. You've got to have that hope the birds will glide into your decoys, the buck will slip up under your tree stand or the bass will hit your lure over and over.

We didn't experience that Friday, but in the days to come we'll laugh about the funny things that happened. We learned a few things about each other and talked bad about people we know and dislike.

Catching and killing are only half of it. And as long as you're with the

right people, the other half is always successful.

The unusually cold December temperatures remind me that this year is the 25th anniversary of the bitterest, coldest winter of my lifetime. Looking back, at December 1981 and January 1982, I realize now that I'll never see its like again even if that kind of unprecedented cold returns to Alabama.

I had just finished the last final exam of my last semester at the University of Alabama when the first wave of cold air hit. I was done with school and had no job yet. The next month and a half was one big long hunting vacation and I think my parents bankrolled it. Leave it to a fresh UA grad to confuse genteel poverty with idle wealth.

On the day that the express train of arctic air slammed into West Alabama with gale force north winds, I sat on the bare ground beneath an oak tree with the Tombigbee River to my back on a club deer drive. The wind roaring through the hardwood bottom mingled with the mournful sounds of dogs and drivers in a spooky sort of way that continued to echo in my ears even after I sat at home in front of the fire that evening.

Serious cold fronts have hit Alabama before and since. We got down to single digits in years like 1983, 1989 and 2000. But never in recent memory has it gotten that

cold and stayed that cold as long as it did in December 1981 and January 1982.

At one point the temperature dropped below freezing and didn't rise above that mark for about two weeks. Freezing rain brought Demopolis to a halt and then snow followed. Then it snowed again.

Between the freezing rain and the snow, I checked on my favorite duck pond. I found a solid sheet of ice on the pond and about 300 ducks of all varieties standing on it. But it snowed that night and I had to wait two excruciating days before I could hunt.

When the roads finally cleared, I drove as close to the pond as I could and slogged through a mile of snow dragging behind me a child's red wagon with my waders and decoys.

I had to use the butt of an old Revelation shotgun to break the ice and the hole froze over as soon as my decoys were out. But the ducks didn't seem to mind. They descended on me like a scene out of Alfred Hitchcock's "The Birds." When the shooting was over, a point-system limit of mallard, black duck, pintail and teal lay scattered on the ice.

I caught a ride out with the farmer who owned the land and slipped and slid back to Demopolis in my dad's old '61 Chevy with no window on the driver's side. It was the first of several barnburner duck hunts that year.

The best may have been the next to the last day of the season. I even got my father to go and saw him make a beautiful double on mallards with his little 20-gauge Remington (back in the day when you could throw lead No. 4s at them).

Oddly enough the last day of the season was soupy warm and a complete bust. It was a sign of things to come.

A week or so later, I found a job as sports editor of The Daily Review in Morgan City, La. Trying to make a go in that oil boom town, I found out the difference between genteel poverty and abject poverty.

Gone were my days of long Christmas vacations and summers of working as a lifeguard. The duck population peaked in the early 80s and horrendous droughts in the middle of that decade decimated waterfowl numbers. By 1989 the limit was three per day. By then I had long lost my favorite duck hole.

With row crop agriculture collapsing in West Alabama following the 1980 grain embargo, dove hunting was already in its long torturous decline. And I won't even begin to talk about what's happened to University of Alabama football since that famous 1981 season.

I've never seen a winter like December 1981-January 1982 since and I never will.

Reach Robert DeWitt at [robert.dewitt@tuscaloosaneews.com](mailto:robert.dewitt@tuscaloosaneews.com) or 205-722-0203 or 866-400-8477, ext. 203.

## Dunns win couples event

From combined reports

**GUNTERSVILLE** | Tuscaloosa residents Ricky and Cindy Dunn put together a two-day total of more than 21 pounds of bass to win the L&L Marine Couples Trail Classic championship recently on Lake Guntersville.

The trail's top 20 couples — from all over Alabama and one couple from the state of Florida — wrapped up competition for the 2006 season of the L&L Couples Trail with the four-day event.

Practice days started out in 70-degree weather with fish relatively easy to catch. But the night before the first day of competition a cold front moved into the state, making it more difficult to put bass in the boat.

Following the Dunns were Hershel and Lisa Robbins in second place.

Gary and Karen Templeton finished third. Tony and Camie Smith finished fourth, while David and Becky Blevins were fifth.

Thirty couples fished at six tournament sites during the season.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

The top five finishers in the L&L Couples Trail Classic are, from left, Ricky and Cindy Dunn, Hershel and Lisa Robbins, Gary and Karen Templeton, Tony and Camie Smith and David and Becky Blevins.

The top five couples in the year-long points standings are Gary and Karen Templeton, Marty and Cheryl Summers, Billy and Carol Turner, George and Linda Ramey, and Ricky and Cindy Dunn.

The trail starts its 2007 season in March on Logan Martin Lake.

Couples interested in participating can contact Bob Hale or Ray Wilkins at 205-333-1605 or visit [www.landmarine.net](http://www.landmarine.net) for the full 2007 season.

### SOLUNAR TABLES

The schedule of Solunar Periods, as printed below, has been taken from Mrs. Richard Alden Knight's SOLUNAR TABLES. Plan your days so that you will be fishing in good territory or hunting in good cover during these times if you wish to find the best sport that each has to offer. The Major Periods begin at the times shown and last for an hour and a half to two hours thereafter. The Minor Periods are of somewhat shorter duration.

Day	A.M.		P.M.	
	Minor	Major	Minor	Major
Today	9:15	3:05	9:40	3:25
Monday	10:05	3:50	10:25	4:10
Tuesday	10:45	4:35	11:10	4:55
Wednesday	11:20	5:10	11:45	5:30
Thursday	11:55	5:45	—	6:05
Friday	12:20	6:25	12:35	6:45
Saturday	1:00	7:00	1:15	7:25
Sunday	1:40	7:45	2:00	8:05

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