



## SCOUTING the Northwest

By Scout Arnone

### The responsibility of hunters

Even as a die-hard vegetarian I can see the inherent value in hunting. Whether hunters realize it or not they willfully or unwittingly fund the thing which is nearest and dearest to my heart: conservation.

I readily decline all invitations to sample jerky and elk burgers and I hate to see a duck go down, but I can respect the folks in camouflage who pay up, hunker down, shoot and consume their kill.

Through the Duck Stamp Act, hunters fund protections for the habitat of migratory waterfowl. Since 1934, six million acres of habitat has been conserved for migratory waterfowl as a direct result of funds from the Duck Stamp Act. Through the Pittman-Robertson Act, taxes on

firearms, ammunition, and hunting-related accoutrement has contributed more than \$14 billion since 1937. Outside of user fees it's estimated that hunters and sportsmen in the United States contribute \$400 million to wildlife conservation funds through their membership dues and donations. And why wouldn't they? Funding conservation keeps wildlife populations within the balance that allows for regular seasonal hunting.

Besides wildlife conservation, the hunters and I share another thing: our rage at those who circumvent the law to satisfy their bloodlust. We're talking poaching here, people. And Central Oregon is rife with it. A study some years back discovered that 20 percent of Central Oregon's mule deer population deaths were the result of poaching. Oftentimes, poaching is a crime of opportunity. Someone sees an animal and acts impulsively. Other times poaching is the direct result of lacking wildlife education. Poaching can be either intentional or unintentional. The former can be addressed with diligent hunters willing to call into the ODFW hotline when they see suspicious or illegal activity taking place. The latter can only be quelled by good education.

I've known many a young person who, now bored with playing out their gunslinging fantasies on tin cans at the

cinder quarry, find it irresistible to shoot a quail or a rabbit. It's just one. They didn't see it die because it ran off and died of its injuries in the sagebrush.

This is not hunting. Any animal killed without a permit to do so is poaching, and the seeds of this crime were sown at home.

With more than 500 bird species calling Oregon home, it can be hard to determine which ones are protected under the Migratory Bird Act and which ones you're going to allow your child to shoot at with a BB gun. Spoiler alert: it's never cool to allow your kids to maim animals and it can come with a very hefty fine. A family with a proud hunting tradition encourages their kids to be sharp-eyed and responsible with their firearm: never point it at anyone, keep the safety on till you're ready to shoot. But the lesson often neglected is in animal identification and in this one small detail parents fail their children and neighbors fail each other completely.

An 8-year-old proudly shows off the European starling he killed not realizing it was actually a Brewer's blackbird (a federally protected bird). Someone posts pictures of their Eurasian collared dove, now a bloody pile of feathers, not aware that it's actually a mourning dove. Further, and more alarming, there is a trend of



PHOTO PROVIDED

Isabel Rickert's hunting contributes to wildlife conservation in Oregon.

hunters shooting animals illegally and then claiming mistaken identity because law enforcement often gives them a slap on the wrist and sends them on their way. That's how almost four percent of Oregon's wolf population was poached in 2017.

Any person who intends to engage with animals, either in their preservation or pursuit, has the responsibility to know exactly what they are interacting with. The results can be catastrophic. It's the responsibility of anyone who preserves or pursues animals to alert their neighbor of their error and seek to educate them. Only through gentle

education can the hunters and anti-hunters find the common ground that generates more sport on a crisp autumn morning and more birds at backyard feeders.

It's your Oregon and so it's your responsibility to know her.



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