

Spring is rattlesnake hunting time

Steinbruck finds dens, handles problems

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

Springtime is rattlesnake hunting season for Bob Steinbruck.

That's when the snakes come out of their dens to warm themselves on rocks and are more visible, he said.

Steinbruck has been hunting rattlesnakes for 45 years. His interest was sparked during a hunting trip in the Owyhee Reservoir area.

"We caught some snakes and ate them for a lark," he said.

Steinbruck, who recently moved to John Day, said he knows of 20 dens in the Bend area. He found about 500 snakes last year.

Finding dens isn't easy. Sometimes he returns multiple times to a site where he's spotted about five snakes sunning themselves on a rock before he's sure.

About 200 rattlesnakes can live in a single den, he said. Typically they're located on a south-facing slope with broken rock. Large rocks take longer to warm up after a chilly night, he said.

Grant County is home to Great Basin and northern Pacific rattlesnakes. The more aggressive western diamondbacks are found in Texas and Arizona, and timber rattlers are found east of the Mississippi River, he said.

Rattlesnakes eat mice, rats and small birds, and outbuildings or lumber piles can provide good hunting grounds. But a rattlesnake's den could be a mile away on the rimrocks above a ranch, he said.

If someone asks him for assistance with a rattlesnake problem, Steinbruck heads up to the rocky slopes and looks for skins. Rattlesnakes shed their skin once a year, including the rattle.



Contributed photos/Bob Steinbruck
Bob Steinbruck holds a northern Pacific rattlesnake by the tail when he was younger.



A Great Basin rattlesnake partially hides under a rock.



A northern Pacific rattlesnake coiled and ready to strike.

Venom from rattlesnakes is definitely dangerous, he said. Most people who get bit don't die, but it depends on a person's health and age. Emergency kits today include better suction devices to remove venom from bites, he said, but people should seek medical attention as soon as possible.

"It's easy to say, but don't get excited, just get in your vehicle and drive to get help," he said.

Most people who get bit were careless when handling rattlesnakes, Steinbruck said. Snakes are conservative about using up their

venom, so many strikes are "dry bites" with no venom. Antivenom is available for sale, but it can be expensive, he noted.

Steinbruck has no professional training, but he reads about them and he's tested rattlesnakes in the field. Rattlesnakes are deaf but acute to vibrations in the air and ground. He found he could sneak up on snakes by moving slowly and carefully, but the same snakes would start rattling if he approached quickly.

Herpetologists testing rattlesnakes in laboratories found their eyesight was generally limited to about 15 feet. Steinbruck said he tested that finding by wearing either dark or white shirts. The white shirt reflected more light and set the snakes to rattling more easily, he said.

To make up for bad eyesight, rattlesnakes boast heat-sensing pits between their eyes and nostrils. These enable rattlesnakes to hunt at night, Steinbruck said.

"When they strike a mouse and release venom, they immediately let go and then track the mouse for a short distance," he said. "If they hold onto the mouse, it might turn and bite them back."

Rattlesnakes swallow animals whole, headfirst. They have a tube in the bottom of their jaw which allows them to breathe while consuming the animals.

Female rattlesnakes give birth to half a dozen live snakes at a time around September. The young snakes come "fully equipped," Steinbruck said, but while they are more feisty than adults, they have less venom.

Steinbruck used to catch snakes by hand — when he was much younger. He uses snake tongs now. Most people kill rattlesnakes by shooting them with a .22 or shotgun, cutting off their heads with a shovel or bludgeoning them with a stick.

"They're pretty thin skinned," he said.

Steinbruck said people wanting assistance finding dens or handling problems can contact him at 541-508-9332.



Contributed photo
A full freezer of meat requires proper care of a game animal after it has been killed.

SHOOTING THE BREEZE Caring for the meat

We've shared lots of columns geared toward getting your game animal on the ground. Now I want to talk about what to do with it once you've gotten it there. This is written with the local deer or elk hunter or huntress in mind. These rules or the order of their operations could vary some depending on local custom or necessity.

Depending on the location of your harvest, you may only need to complete a basic field dressing of the carcass or, conversely, a complete quartering thereof. Typically, if you're within dragging distance of camp or a roadway, merely doing the basic field dressing will result in keeping the carcass cleaner until it's hanging from the meat pole. If you're having to pack out the meat a considerable distance, then field dressing, skinning, quartering and cutting all usable meat off of the carcass will be necessary there on site.

Once you've transported your meat back to camp, hang it up to cool. I've seen folks hang them by the head, and I've seen others hang them by the back legs. I prefer the latter. You'll need to remove all skin and trim off anything that is bruised or blood-shot. Having a clean water source will be necessary for washing the meat to remove any dirt or hair. You'll need at least 4-5 gallons of water for this step. Regardless of weather or climatic conditions, always cover your meat with a game bag to prevent insects from laying eggs within it, and to keep birds and small varmints from consuming any of your har-



Dale Valade

vest. Failure to do so will result in partial, if not total, loss of the meat.

I like to let my deer hang for 5-7 days and elk for 10-14. Some folks eat it fresh, and others hang it longer still. Hanging the meat allows it to cool and tenderize. During certain times of the year, this will have to be done in a cooler versus in open air as the weather could be much too warm and the meat could spoil. Bow season, antelope season and occasionally even into deer season, the heat must be taken into account. After a day of hanging, the meat should develop a hard crust or case on its exterior. This is normal, and it means all is well.

Once the carcass has hung for its preferred period of time, it's time to butcher the meat. You can take it to Russell's or do it yourself. This is a long and painstaking process to undertake, so I will let you decide which course to pursue. I prefer to butcher my own as I have the knowledge and facilities to do so.

Once butchered and wrapped, you are ready for my favorite part: the eating! Venison is relatively simple to prepare. Like other red meat, simple seasonings like garlic, salt and pepper work well! Everyone has their standby recipes, but my favorites are fried or barbecued. Just one of the few things in life that is a literal pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

Got any favorite wild game recipes to share? Please drop us an email at shootingthebreezeme@gmail.com!

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COUNTRY FINANCIAL

19th Annual Grant County Quilt Show

Presented by the Grant County Piecemakers Quilting Guild
Friday and Saturday May 10th and 11th, 2019
Grant County Fairgrounds Trowbridge Pavilion, John Day, OR
\$5.00 for both days - Fri. 9am to 6pm, Sat. 9am to 4pm

Sunday Workshop - Daybreak Quilt (strip set friendly)
taught by Karen Hinton and Mary Lou Drury

Sunday May 12th Workshop
9am to 4pm
\$20.00
Flowers for Mother's and Mother's Day
Door Prizes

Vendors for lots of shopping include our Country Store, Marilyn's Pickets and Patchwork, Shiny Thimble Quilt Studio, Thimbles and more, Mary Lou's Quilts, Amanda Jo's Lularoe, Tom's Beautiful Jewelry, Outlaw Creations and more. Deli items will be available.

Door prizes, Demonstrations and special awards too. Pick up a packet for our special quilt challenge for next year. Our guild will be selling raffle tickets for this gorgeous quilt. The winner's name will be drawn on Saturday at 3pm.

For info or class sign up send email to gcpiecemakers@gmail.com or call (541) 620-2798 (Mary Lou's Cell) or The Shiny Thimble (541) 932-4111 (store) or (541) 620-0120 (Karen's Cell).
Drop off your quilts on Thursday 7am to 6pm for show.

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National Nurses Week
May 6-12

During National Nurses Week, we would like to recognize the dedicated Nursing Staff at Blue Mountain Hospital. The care and compassion with which you treat our patients is noticed and appreciated. Thank you for your commitment to excellence in patient care - we are fortunate to have you here!

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