

First big game hunt for a kid



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay



Avery Thompson with the cow elk she harvested with her father. Well done young lady. (Courtesy photo)

A kid's first big game hunt is probably the most important hunt of their life. Done properly, they will embark on a lifelong passion for adventure and appreciation for nature and wildlife. Done wrong, and they will grow up to be criminals, or seek their adventure in bowling, golf, or skateboarding. I had a rough introduction, but it turned out perfect in the end.

I was being raised by grandparents who were too old for hunting, and too old for a whiney little kid, but we were stuck with each other. I could hunt anytime I wanted if I stayed on our property. Unfortunately, game was rather scarce on our little place. What I really wanted was to go deer hunting with the men.

My old man mentor of all things outdoor related was Mr. Caster, a longtime friend of the family. Everyone loved Mr. Caster except my old grandmother, who

considered him a reprobate. She did not want him influencing her innocent little grandson with his "evil ways of the devil." Alas, after months of begging, arguing, and whining, she gave in, and said I can go deer hunting with him.

Mr. Caster told outrageous stories, liked loose women, smoked Chesterfield Kings, drank whiskey, knew hundreds of swear words, and shared this knowledge profusely with me. In other words, Mr. Caster was the perfect mentor for a boy.

Grandma was easy. I now had to convince Mr. Caster to take me along for a week of hunting. As I argued with Mr. Caster to allow me to tag along, he offered excuses like his old war wounds, blinding headaches, severe chest pains, a cold coming on, and about anything else he could think of, but he finally caved, probably from exhaustion.

Kids mature at different levels; some take longer than others. My wife is still waiting for me to grow up, but that is a story for another day. A properly executed hunting trip involves a collection of emotions in a child, from excitement, nervous, sadness, and the child type complaints that include boredom, tired, cranky, and hungry.

You as a parent must assess your child's level of maturity before embarking on the trip. Sometimes waiting another year makes all the difference in the world. The best way might be to bring them along as an observer, participating in many of the hunt activities like scouting, glassing, camping, cooking. Once an animal is down, see if they want to participate in the field cleaning, capping, and hauling out. If the kid jumps all over this, they are probably mature enough for a full hunt.

Before any young person

can hunt in Colorado, they must successfully complete a hunter safety program. This program gives them an introduction to wildlife, survival, etiquette, and firearms safety. I say "introduction" because it is up to the parent to follow through with this. The child is going to need lots of practice shooting and in the safe handling of firearms. During these practice sessions, keep an eye on how well the child does, and if they have solid muzzle control of the weapon at all times. Inform them of all the necessary precautions, such as no loaded weapon in the vehicle, and make sure they practice these safety precautions, without missteps, because any misstep can cost a life.

Hunting can be demanding, both physically and mentally. Keep your child's expectations in check. Weather conditions, hunger, not enough sleep, all put a demand on you, and it is much worse for a child who has not done this before.

In the months before the trip, you can quiz the kid on things like safety, firearms handling, and the animal they will be pursuing. At the same time, help keep their expectations down to earth. Tell them it won't be all fun and games, that there will be tough times and physically demanding times, and they need to be able to weather it all the same.

For example, kids might not want to, or understand why, we get up at dark-thirty, and head into the woods when it is so cold and early. Explain to them why the best times are early mornings and late evenings to find game. Help them understand why we rest in midday because many species are bedded down. If they understand our little rituals, they will be onboard.

Make sure the child is properly equipped with the right clothes. The clothing must fit properly, meet safety standards, and keep them warm. Don't give them hand-me downs that don't fit or aren't comfortable. My first hunting attire was all war surplus gear, and none of it fit properly, but it was all we could afford.

Footwear is another area to pay attention to. Kids grow out of shoes faster than a jackrabbit can change fuses on a date. Their hunting boots need to be warm, fit properly, and broken in before the trip. A child with a painful foot blister can ruin a trip for everyone. Hunting means a lot of sitting and waiting time. The trip will be more fun for everyone if the kids are comfortable throughout the hunt.

Stay focused on the fun factor. Not all hunts end with a kill, sometimes you miss, others you never get a chance. Make sure the kids understand this. One last

tip, keep plenty of snacks around. A teenager can make food disappear faster than a sanitary landfill, especially if it is cold, and a hungry kid is a miserable kid.

If you do your job properly, you will have a hunting partner for life, and they will embark on a lifelong journey in the outdoors. I did not get a deer on my first trip, but what I did get was an understanding. The entire trip, I interacted with that raunchy, smelly, old woodsman. I listened to every one of his old stories, repeatedly. I decided right then and there, this was what I wanted to do every day, forever, and having hunted for 55 years on 4 continents, the old man did a good job mentoring me, and I don't play golf or skateboard, and am not a criminal.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press, Delta County Independent, and several other newspapers, as well as a feature writer for several saltwater fishing magazines. He is an avid hunter and world class saltwater angler, who travels around the world in search of adventure and serves as a Director and Public Information Officer for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. Personal email is elkhunter77@icloud.com For information about the Posse call 970-765-7033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org

Beaver found on Gunnison River tests positive for tularemia

SPECIAL TO THE MDP

GUNNISON, Colo. – A beaver found dead last week at the Gunnison River Whitewater Park was sent for disease testing by Colorado Parks and Wildlife. The carcass was examined by CPW's Wildlife Pathologist and submitted to Colorado State University's Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory, which confirmed the animal was positive for the zoonotic disease, tularemia.

Tularemia is a bacterial disease that can infect humans and other animals. Species affected in Colorado include rabbits, hares, beavers and other rodents. It is less commonly found in other species, including domestic animals and humans.

Infections can be fatal if not diagnosed and treated properly. CPW recommends the public always keep pets away from wildlife and to never allow pets to consume carcasses. The public should not handle sick or injured wildlife.

"A diagnosis of tularemia in a wild animal in Colorado is not unheard of," said CPW Wildlife Health Veterinarian Peach Van Wick. "However, CPW's Wildlife Health Lab usually only receives reports of tularemia in wildlife a couple of times per year. Large-scale outbreaks are less common."



A beaver is pictured along a creek. A beaver found dead last week at the Gunnison River Whitewater Park tested positive for the zoonotic disease tularemia. (John Livingston/CPW photo)

Tularemia is caused by the bacteria *Francisella tularensis*. Infection with this type of bacteria is fatal in species including rabbits, beavers, squirrels and other rodents. Infection is usually transmitted through ticks, biting flies and fleas. Wild carnivores and pets can become infected by eating infected carcasses, and any species can be infected through tick, fly and flea bites.

Hunters and trappers may be exposed to the bacteria when skinning carcasses, handling tissues or consuming tissues from an infected animal. When hunting, do not skin or consume animals

that you observe to be sick or dead. When field dressing carcasses, protect yourself from contact with tissues, fluids, and parasites such as ticks and fleas.

Less commonly, infection can occur by ingesting food or water that has been contaminated with animal wastes or infected carcasses. Infection may also occur from breathing aerosolized bacteria, as could happen when mowing over dead rabbit or rodent carcasses.

Contact your physician immediately if you feel ill or develop skin lesions following contact with wild animals, ticks, fleas or other biting insects.

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Tularemia

- Tularemia is a fatal bacterial disease of rabbits and rodents that can spread to humans and other species.

Species Affected in Colorado

- Rabbits, hares
- Beavers, other rodents
- Less commonly, other species including domestic animals and humans.

What to Look For

- Multiple sick or dead rabbits or rodents (including beavers)
- Pinpoint white spots throughout the liver and spleen, not to be confused with tapeworm tracks in the liver (see CPW rabbit tapeworm fact sheet)

In some cases of tularemia, hunters may observe pinpoint white spots throughout the liver.

Cause and Transmission

Tularemia is caused by the bacteria *Francisella tularensis*. Infection with this type of bacteria is fatal in species including rabbits, beavers, squirrels, and other rodents. Infection is usually transmitted through ticks, biting flies, and fleas. Wild carnivores and pets can become infected by eating infected carcasses, and any species can be infected through tick, fly, and flea bites. Hunters and trappers may be infected when skinning carcasses, handling tissues, or consuming tissues from an infected animal. Less commonly, infection can occur by ingesting food or water that has been contaminated with animal wastes or infected carcasses. Infection may occur from breathing aerosolized bacteria, as could happen when mowing over dead rabbit or rodent carcasses.

Public Health Considerations

Tularemia can infect humans and domestic animals, and infections can be fatal if not detected and treated promptly. To prevent infection, avoid ticks, flies and fleas by wearing long clothing and insect repellents, and using flea and tick preventatives for your pets. Do not allow pets to consume carcasses. Do not handle sick or injured wildlife. When hunting, do not skin or consume animals that you observe to be sick or dead. When field dressing carcasses, protect yourself from contact with tissues, fluids, and parasites (i.e., ticks, fleas). Contact your physician immediately if you feel ill or develop skin lesions following contact with wild animals, ticks, fleas, or other biting insects.

Additional Information/References:
 Tularemia; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/Tularemia/>
 Tularemia; Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment: <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/tularemia>

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If you have been exposed to wildlife that has tested positive for tularemia, contact Gunnison County Health & Human Services at 970-641-3244.

CPW appreciates the public continuing to report sick or dead wildlife and would be interested

in any additional beaver mortality observed along the Gunnison River west of Gunnison.

To learn about preventing tularemia exposure in humans when outdoors and during hunting activities, go to <https://www.cdc.gov/tularemia/prevention/index.html>.

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