

The author contends that taking wildlife photos can be a kind of hunting without harvest.

Hunting without harvest

TRY “HUNTING” WITH A CAMERA, PEN, NOTEBOOK OR EVEN YOUR MEMORY.

Ron Weber

It had been a morning not much different than a thousand others. The dark had begrudgingly given way to the light and in so doing signaled the usual procession of events. Chickadees, blue jays and nuthatches noisily went about their business. Red squirrels, mice and voles scuffled through the leaves on their seemingly endless search for something to gnaw on. I had seen this play before but even so I was still on the edge of my seat wondering what excitement the next act might bring.

The star for this day made his appearance just after 8 a.m. A loud rustling of leaves drew my attention to the swamp edge and into view came a large, dark brown animal with the distinctive body and movements of a member of the weasel family. A large fisher moved from the swamp into the aspen and balsam fir forest in which I was sitting in my portable tree stand. As he closed the distance to about 20 yards he seemed to look up at me and recoil. He sat on his haunches for a half minute or so bobbing his head this way and that trying to figure out what that mysterious lump was up in that tree.

Curiosity got the better of him. He proceeded to run to the balsam positioned 3 feet in front of the tree my stand was in and promptly began climbing up to get a closer look. He made his way up until he was eye-to-eye with me. Almost inaudible huffs emanated from the large male as he surveyed me cautiously. I sat stock still with my eyes fixed on him trying not to breathe. After a minute or so he bored of my company and nimbly made his way back down to the ground. He disappeared into the woods before I could thank him for his part in the play that I still share with others 20 years later.

That experience and a memory full of others is what the lure of hunting is all about. For me, and I am sure many others, it has much more to do with that than guns and bows and harvesting game. The word “hunting” in its simplest terms means to search for, to seek, to pursue. It has become so entwined with weapons and harvest as to shut the door for many from participating in the great sport of hunting. Hunting can be done with the only harvest being by camera, pen and notebook, or simply one’s memory.

Why should what we traditionally think of as hunters be the only ones to enjoy these dramas that play themselves out in the fields and forests around us? Nonhunters could be doing the same, but I know of precious few who do. I have often wondered why more people would not want to witness so many of the amazing sights and sounds I have experienced over the years.

A few years ago I was turkey hunting beneath a large oak tree one foggy April morning. Right at first light I saw a shape waddling towards me. As it fully emerged from the fog it was apparent that the large boar raccoon was headed home from a night of cavorting around the countryside. I just happened to have chosen the base of his den tree to sit by. He cautiously approached me, the head-

GARY KRAMER

to-toe camouflage I had on no doubt making me hard to identify. He slowly walked within a couple of feet of me, his eyes and nose working feverishly trying to figure out what I was. Eventually he walked around the side of the oak and I could hear his nails scratching the tree as he ascended to his boudoir. For the next few hours I shared his dreams of frog filled ponds and fields where the corn is always ripe.

There are several obstacles to people getting involved in hunting without harvest. For starters, I don't think it has ever really been put out there or thought about as a serious option for people. Many people like to go for walks and such in nature but unless one is actively hunting, the odds of encountering many of the incredible sights hunters frequently see are greatly reduced.

Another big reason is quite simply fear. We are a country that is becoming in many ways paralyzed by fear. In much of Wisconsin we have bears, wolves, coyotes and bobcats. We should educate ourselves about these animals and have a healthy respect for them, but there is no need to fear them. Statistics more than prove that we have much more benign

things to fear than predators.

The possibility of becoming lost is another fear. Prior planning, including using topographic maps and compass, will help familiarize you with the area you intend to explore. GPS and mapping software have revolutionized how one can navigate in the field. As with any new skill, a little time and practice will allow almost anyone to feel comfortable about getting into the forest and back out again. It is also a good habit to let someone know where you are going and what time you are expecting to return.

Equipment needed can be as simple or complicated as one wishes to make it. The most important equipment is proper clothing and footwear to keep warm, dry and comfortable. Camouflage clothing is obviously advantageous for giving you the best chance for an encounter with wildlife. Blinds can be built from natural vegetation or purchased fairly reasonably. Blinds are especially helpful to hide movements and can make photography easier to do without detection.

Skill at the techniques used to hunt various species will come in time. One can get started by asking the advice of friends and family who hunt or by read-

ing how-to articles in sportsmen's magazines or online. Experience is the best teacher however, so don't hesitate to get out there and try new things. In this endeavor, no one is keeping score or judging you. Each time out you will become more confident in your skills and abilities. And each time out you will experience something that makes your effort worthwhile, whether that is a beautiful sunrise or an interesting encounter with one of the cast in the play of nature.

Almost all of my best and most exciting moments from a lifetime of hunting are found only in the corners of my memory. Like the red fox I can still see jumping in the long grass one frosty morning catching mice or the gray squirrel that perched on the end of my boot. Those are the true rewards of hunting and no weapon or harvest was required to make them. The adventures and memories are waiting. 

Ron Weber writes from Weyerhaeuser.



HUNTING WITHOUT HARVEST WORKSHOP

Ron Weber will be offering a Hunting without Harvest class at the beautiful Treehaven Field Station near Tomahawk Sept. 17-18. This course is designed to teach specific hunting skills that will give nonhunters the confidence to take part in the great sport of hunting in a non-consumptive way. Topics to be covered include:

- Skills and equipment specific to hunting deer, turkey and predators such as coyote and fox.
- Animal habits and signs.
- Basic orienteering (compass, map, GPS use).
- Safety concerns and ethical practices will be stressed throughout the course.

Much of this class will be held outdoors, so boots and outdoor clothing are required. Camouflage clothing would be helpful but not mandatory. A camera or notebook and pen may come in handy to capture any interesting moments from the hunt. Class size is limited to 20 participants. Cost is \$96 which includes meals and lodging. The registration deadline is Aug. 26. Call Treehaven at 715-453-4106 to register or for more details. You may also email Ron at ronw2492@yahoo.com for more info.



The author's upcoming class will teach topics such as how to recognize animal signs and habits.

HERBERT LANGE



A red fox jumping in the long grass is a vision fondly held in the author's memories.

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