

OUTDOOR LIFE

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Outdoor Life

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OCTOBER

In this issue:
**HUNTING
IS NOW A
PATRIOTIC
DUTY!**



RAYMOND J. BROWN, Editor

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BUSHWHACKING BUSHY-TAILS



Sanderson and a bag which he and a companion brought down in 2½ hours

By
ROB F. SANDERSON

THIRTY years ago my grandfather shot his last squirrel, but the family tradition is still going strong. Not because it is a family tradition, but simply because these autumn-morning excursions will never cease to fascinate me. On those crispy days, when smoke smells as smoke should smell, I like to loaf leisurely through the frost-colored woods and along the cornfields. It's a fine appetizer for the general game season to come, and I find it a painless way of getting in shape for later shooting.

My grandfather was an excellent squirrel hunter. When the first heavy frost came, he'd load his percussion-cap rifle and follow his dog into the hardwood every morning. Ten squirrels in an hour was no exceptional bag in those days.

Old Shep was his favorite dog. Shep hunted with him for fourteen years, and was acclaimed by the neighbors as the best tree dog in the country. He'd leave the tree as soon as the gunner came into sight, and often would be barking up another before the first squirrel was shot out. Staying behind that dog would keep any man spry.

Grandpappy depended greatly on his dogs. He wouldn't think of sitting still on a stump or log, but he'd rove the woodland with an enthusiasm that

didn't require a bite of lunch on an all-day hunt.

So when I began my squirrel career with my first rifle, an old Stevens single-shot .22, I naturally inherited the tree-dog method. I had my own dogs as I grew older, and could comb from ten to fifteen miles of bluff country in a day.

It was on these circuits that I began to run into Old Fred with considerable regularity.

Old Fred was the most accomplished still-hunter of all the squirrel men I have ever met. When I knew him he was far past his prime, and I never discovered whether he still-hunted through



In skinning, slit the hide down back from neck to tail, loosen skin from body, pull stocking fashion over each end, and cut tail, head, and feet. Hide then comes off in one piece

choice or through rheumatism. It was hard for me to imagine a good squirrel hunter without a dog, so at first I accepted him with the tolerance you feel for the town patriarch who fishes under the bridge every day, and always goes home with his flour-sack creel still folded neatly in his pocket. But the sight of Old Fred homeward bound with a grain sack bulging with game changed my ideas.

Fred would locate every cornfield long before the shooting season. He'd browse around to find where the most husks and cobs were dragged into the woods. Just after sunup and just before sundown were his favorite shooting hours, but as his rheumatism became more troublesome he omitted the morning shift. According to Fred, these were the only profitable periods—the rest of the day being no good for cornfield still-hunting.

Rainy periods were a misery for Fred's rheumatic joints, but as soon as the sun came out you'd see him plodding across the fields for the nearest good stand, rifle in one hand and, in the other, a piece of oilcloth which his daughter made him carry to protect his seat against a rain-soaked log or stump. One day I came upon a rocking chair near a favorite stand, and I realized then that Fred's old Hopkins & Allen would not ring out for many more autumns.

Well, Fred proved to me that sitting on a stump can be an effective method of filling the game bag, where before I had known only the walking system. Which method is better? That question has been argued since the days of the Kentucky rifle. Grandpap got thousands of squirrels with the walking system; Fred got thousands by just sitting down. Now I use both methods with success.

Essentially, of course, the best method

is the one that suits the region you hunt. Fred hunted only at the feeding grounds and the den trees. He'd get dozens of bushy-tails from hollow den trees that had swallowed up squirrels treed by my dogs. But in ordinary straight timber, Fred was at a loss, while my dogs treed scores of squirrels.

Either way, a little time spent in perfecting your method will give you a big lead over the gunner who depends mostly on chance. Many a time I've come upon hunters who assured me that a patch of woodland was devoid of game, since they'd searched it from end to end without success. Usually, after a little quiet waiting, I knock out my daily quota from those same limbs.

In still-hunting the important things are location and time of day. Squirrels just can't be shot anywhere, any time. You've got to adjust yourself to the early-morning and late-afternoon feeding hours, and carefully choose your stand near a den tree or a corn or nut feeding ground. I prefer the feeding ground, for if you break a stick or blow your nose in approaching a den tree you'll sit solemnly for hours and wonder why you don't see fur. The best thing

to do is to get there half an hour before the squirrels start to stir.

This takes much more patience than I possess and for that reason I hunt the feeding grounds when I still-hunt. There's no location comparable to a lone cornfield flanked on three or four sides by hardwood. One evening I plugged five bushy-tails in less than half an hour at such a location, and another time I saw seven squirrels at one time run for the woods when my dog came in sight.

The corn robbers—often travel several hundred yards to get to a field. You'll have a steady stream, independent of each other and drawing from a wide area. Then if you frighten an early arrival it doesn't mean your shooting is spoiled for the day; in a few minutes there'll be another customer from over the ridge. A good stand of nut trees can be hunted in the same manner. Just stay out of sight at a place that commands a wide view of the best approaches.

I have a personal weakness for traveling when I hunt. Sitting on a damp stump, while the dew drips down my neck from a bough and my blood congeals, has no appeal for me. I like to rove the sunny autumn woods, and run toward the sound of barking dogs.

The best day for a walking hunt is a dark one when the ground is damp. Squirrels move abroad at any time when the sun is hidden, so you get consistent shooting all day with no midday lag. In dull weather, too, the furry nutcrackers are not so likely to run for their hollows, but cling quietly to some obscure part of a tree. Then you're likely to pass many a game-bag evader if you're not careful. Likewise the squirrels do not flee from a dog as readily. More of them will be found in the exact tree a dog is barking up, rather than in one several trees away, and as scent holds well on damp earth the dogs have a big time too. On such a day there will be a low percentage of running shots, and a rifle will handle all the shooting you'll get.

While sunny days are more pleasant for hunting, they require a different technique. Then, instead of walking cautiously and peering at the branches, you'll do better to move quickly and lightly through the woods, keeping a careful eye well ahead, rather than only on the limbs above. When their keen ears pick up the sound of your coming, the squirrels often flee toward their dens, and perhaps you'll see a tail bobbing wildly ahead on the ground. Though a man can run a squirrel down in the open, thick cover is a different matter; so the faster you move the better. Too, not so many squirrels are likely to flee if you walk briskly along, which (Continued on page 62)



If you don't want to lug a rifle on a shotgun hunt, take along a .22 pistol for the still shots

Left: A cornfield—flanked on three or four sides by hardwood timber—is the best place in the world to find game



When this little hound barks up there's always fur in the tree

Rifle or shotgun for squirrels? Go after them or wait quietly for a shot? A veteran weighs the experience of years

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Bushwhacking Bushy-tails

(Continued from page 33)

is also true of other game. Many a rabbit, bird, or deer would never have moved had I continued walking by, but jumped as soon as I paused. This, of course, holds true only of game that knows you are there.

A good dog works well ahead, making you run forward to reach the tree. Tread carefully when you approach closely, because many a squirrel that will make faces at a dog will flee in high gear if he hears the hunter. A cautious approach has enabled me to shoot bushy-tails on limbs of even hollow trees.

On a bright day it's a good idea to take a shotgun along. Then, in low timber or hollow-tree country, you'll get running shots that you'd miss with a rifle. Some still-hunters object to the use of scatterguns on squirrels, but I see nothing less sporting about shooting a running squirrel with one than shooting a sitting squirrel with a rifle. If there are several hunters in the party, one can carry a rifle, to be used by the man who discovers a sitting shot. If you take only one gun, let it be a rifle on wet days in tall timber, and a scattergun on bright days in low, hollow timber.

My brother and I have solved that problem. When we go out on a shotgun hunt we simply take along a .22 target pistol for the still shots. Sometimes in a tall tree two or three shots are needed, but the results with the pistol may be deduced from the fact that on a hunt last fall we shot seven out of ten kills with the pistol. The shotgun is always ready for moving shots, or when the squirrel makes a quick break for the den tree.

WHILE the shotgun is the medicine for squirrels in fast flight, there is no need for a blunderbuss. My own .410 repeater is very satisfactory. A larger shot charge puts too many little marbles in the gravy, spoils too much meat, and is excusable only when it's the sole shotgun a man owns.

The modern shotgun-and-rifle combinations, with a rifle upper and a .410 lower barrel, give you a chance to shoot according to circumstances. They are just as accurate as the average squirrel rifle and probably make the best squirrel combination ever invented.

Among rifle men, the .22, using Long Rifle ammunition is the favorite caliber. Accurate sights are essential, since one sitting shot is usually all a squirrel will allow, and a square shot in head or chest is required for a clean kill. Scope sights are not necessary, but they are effective and convenient, especially when you're shooting in poor light or against strong light. I prefer the ordinary peep sight, which lines up for quick shots more readily. Naturally, preferences in guns and sights vary with each hunter. The heavier outfits are more accurate, but a bother to drag around, and a difference of 1/10-inch potential accuracy doesn't make a great deal of difference.

There are several favorite hiding locations for treed squirrels. One is in the upper reaches of the trunk just above where a large limb branches out. A bushy-tail flattened out here or on the top of a large limb is mighty hard to see or shoot. The tip top of a tall tree is also a very hard location, especially if the wind badgers it unevenly back and forth. This is favorite place for a squirrel, especially if a few of the leaves remain. But remember that there is among

squirrels a tendency to kink the end of the tail slightly sidewise, and this wisp of hair sticking out of hiding has betrayed many a bushy-tail.

If there is a nest in the tree it will be a likely refuge, but never shoot into it unless you can climb the tree. No use leaving a dead squirrel in the nest. Bushy-tails are likely to build in a tree which has a grapevine climbing it, because the vine furnishes a good framework for the nest and because the grapes are good eating. A few well-timed tugs on the vine will set the whole upper tree swaying, and bring its occupants out on the run. I got four animals from a small oak in this manner.

All squirrels are skilled at playing ring-around-a-rosy about the tree trunks, sometimes remaining hidden while you completely circle the trunk four or five times. They keep track of your movements with their keen ears, and always remain on the other side of the trunk from your position. If two hunters approach a tree, one should remain quiet while the other circles, which will usually force our little playmate into full view of the standing hunter. Or the lone hunter can throw a stick or rock into the brush on the other side, startling the squirrel into showing himself.

At times I've despaired and left a wary old dodger up a tree which had a very elaborate branch system, thinking that any squirrel so sly must be old and tough. If the trunk is straight and tall, I circle as closely as I can get, and anyone who does much straight-up shooting will soon learn to use a light gun. If you circle too far away, the homesick nutcracker may dart down the trunk on the opposite side and be off before you know it.

Few squirrels fail to see a hunter first, except when the latter is still-hunting. Even on cloudy days, when the ground is damp and you think you can stalk unheard, most of your shots will be at squirrels which have frozen quiet and hope to be passed unseen. If a bushy-tail hears or sees a hunter a long way off he is likely to flee for cover, but if the hunter gets close before being discovered the game would rather take a chance on freezing. Perhaps on dark days a squirrel's eyes cannot adjust themselves to poor light as well as human eyes, and the little beasts tend to be too optimistic about not being seen.

It's hard to name any particular kind of dog as being best for squirrel work. My uncle had a beautiful Irish setter, Lad, who'd make a bee line for the trunk of a tree when chasing a squirrel, rather than make the conventional curved run of other dogs. He'd watch the treed animal with great care, and when it jumped or was shot out he'd catch it before it hit the ground. I've also known terriers, collies, and regular tree hounds to make good squirrel hunters.

MY OWN favorite was a crossbred with greyhound blood. He'd hunt all day at a tireless gallop, treeing any squirrels abroad. He worked far enough ahead of me, and fast enough, to serenade his treed squirrel before my own approach could be seen or heard. He worked both by smell and sight, and I'd follow him from tree to tree for hours on end.

When a dog barks after trailing up to a tree, the wise hunter will never leave until he has combed all adjoining trees.

Squirrels often change trees several times before the dog arrives, and your dog is all the better if he sometimes barks up an adjoining tree, as it proves he depends strongly on scent and not on sight alone. Once when my dog treed I shot two squirrels out of the next tree and two from a tree thirty feet away. Many a squirrel's been passed by merely because another was located and shot out, and the hunters looked no more.

Although a dog is a big help in keeping squirrels from running to the den, as well as in locating them, it's best to leave the woods which are full of hollow old patriarch trees—ventilated with knots and hollows—to the still-hunter. Choose, instead, woods where trees grow thick and straight. Here the hunting will be easiest, and your dog will lead you to fewer hollow trees.

Clean your squirrels when you've shot them, and the meat will always have a better flavor. This is not time wasted, as frequently the dog will bark up again before the last squirrel is cleaned. Wrap each carcass in clean wrapping paper or waxed paper to prevent the flesh from collecting loose fur or other debris.

Here's my favorite method of skinning. With a sharp knife I slit the hide down the back from base of tail to base of neck, then pull over the front until neck and forelegs are skinned. Next I pull backward with the body bent in an arc, until the base of the tail is exposed. Then I sever the tail and pull the hide down to the hind feet. At this point the hide is completely loose, but attached at both ends. Then I cut off head and feet and throw the hide away. A slit down the stomach and the game is dressed.

Any crisp day this fall you'll find me out in the woods with my dog. And years from now, when thousands of squirrel miles and rheumatism have turned me into a still-hunter, perhaps your son will come upon me sitting in a decrepit rocking chair under a giant white oak. But I'll have my .22 and I'll still be hunting squirrels!

Too Many Elk and Deer

REMARKABLE increase in deer and elk, despite open seasons and considerable kill by hunters, is shown by reliable figures covering the population of those animals in Colorado for the twenty years ending with 1940.

The number of deer was estimated by the U. S. Forest Service as 20,000 in 1920. In 1925 it was 25,000; in 1930, 42,000; in 1935, 80,000; and in 1940, 143,000. Elk in 1920 numbered 5,000; in 1925, 7,000; in 1930, 10,000; in 1935, 15,000; and in 1940, 22,000.

Thus the annual increase of the deer amounted to an average of 27 percent, and of elk 12½ percent. According to "Colorado Conservation Comments" this increase continues at this or even greater rate, and it amounts to considerably more than the number harvested yearly by hunters.

Over the same two decades the take by hunters has been less than 5 percent of the estimated deer and elk populations. The difference between the increase and the take by hunters leads to difficulties in big-game management. Establishment of "antlerless" seasons has made some improvement, but many areas in the state are badly overstocked, which results in damage to agricultural crops, destruction of natural food on the game ranges, and excessive winter losses among the herds. The conclusion reached is that female deer must be reduced in order to make any progress in herd control in the area.

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