

## **Deer Hunting is for the Birds . . . and Bucks**

For me, fall passed with little fanfare. What sticks in my mind is the fact that I was regularly wearing cotton shirts in November and December. No jacket, just a shirt! I never heard a single complaint from anyone. The extended Indian summer of 1998 will probably go down as one of the most balmy fall periods on record. It was so unseasonably warm just prior to our December 18th Christmas Bird Count that I actually wondered if we would encounter spring migrants.

It has chilled a bit since then. Temperatures on many days have dipped into the single digits, so it's perfect weather to reminisce about the birds I've encountered in the past few months. That is exactly why the subject of this *President's Statement* is deer hunting!

I had the best hunt in decades. My week in the woods was spent on property that Jody and I recently acquired in Langlade County. The nice mix of upland hardwoods and lowland conifers had potential to produce a monster buck and I was ready to wait him out.

Necessary preparations were made for seven days of enjoying crisp, clear air while perched on a stump deep in the forest. My priorities were all in order. First, packing of equipment and supplies was crucial. Warm clothes, a cooler full of food, and plenty of reading material were all readied for the trip north. Second, I had to search more than 100 acres to find just the right stump. Third, my bird feeding station had to be established. Fourth, . . . you read right, a bird feeding station!

Yes, I hunt for whitetails but there is so much more to enjoy than just searching for deer for hours on end. Remember, this property was new to me and I hadn't a clue as to what feathered residents might be present. I figured the next 70 hours of daylight would offer plenty of time to discover which birds frequented my tract of rich habitat along the upper Wolf River.

While other hunters were putting finishing touches on deer blinds or erecting tree stands, I hauled a couple of plywood platforms and pails of sunflower seeds, cracked corn, and wild bird mix into the forest. Piles of brush were strategically placed near the platforms that I screwed to stumps and to exposed roots of maples and hemlocks.

My late friend, Dr. Gregg Miller, taught me this trick a dozen years ago. He often carried birdseed into the woods during our deer hunts together. After climbing to his elevated stand, he'd sprinkle the seed around his feet, enough to last an entire daylight vigil. His stories of chickadees tugging on his bootlaces while they dined on his bird food are memories that still bring a smile to my face.

Gregg would be proud. I simply took his basic concept to a higher level and the birds responded. Although pleased to see two or three deer on day one of

the hunt, I was ecstatic that birds immediately located my table fare. At 7:10 A.M., a Blue Jay was the first to dine. By 7:40 A.M., juncos were on the food. Periodic visits from crows and ravens soon followed. A Red-tailed Hawk nonchalantly offered a low altitude fly-by. The first Pileated Woodpecker arrived at 9:40 A.M. Chickadees were next. This parade continued throughout the day and finally, as the light was fading into dusk, White-breasted Nuthatches were the last birds to feed.

The week progressed. Although I had yet to see many deer, the numbers of birds continued to escalate. Eventually, Thanksgiving rolled around to remind me that only two days remained until I was obligated to return to a desk, telephone, and the computer connected to my alter life.

I had saved something really special to help me celebrate this holiday away from home and family. Carefully placed in the pocket of my camouflaged day pack was a copy of the spring 1998 *Passenger Pigeon*. I had saved this particular issue in order to read Sumner Matteson's excellent interview with Sam Robbins. With every turned page, I would glance up to survey my surroundings. With no deer in sight, it was back to reading. I wanted this biography of one of Wisconsin's most prominent ornithologists to go on and on.

Unfortunately, the lengthy text finally came to an end. I decided to eat a sandwich. With my lunch and article both consumed, I slipped some ear phones on and dialed in a local FM radio station to see how the rest of the world was faring. Can you imagine my joy at tuning in Wisconsin Public Radio and recognizing a familiar voice over the air waves? It was none other than Sam Robbins doing his bird-oriented, Thanksgiving call-in show from Madison! The minutes passed like seconds, and Sam expended the allotted window of time for his incredibly interesting show much too soon.

The remainder of the afternoon and all of Friday produced no deer; however, the birds continued to make their appearances. Red-breasted Nuthatches, Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers, Brown Creepers, Barred Owls, and Red-bellied Woodpeckers were all added to the list before I left my stump, empty handed, for the last time.

Will there be venison in the freezer next fall? Who knows? Who cares! No one ever said that hunting has to be consumptive. However, there are two things for certain. You will again find me camped on that same stump come next November, and the birds will have no excuse to be hungry when I'm in the woods.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim ANDERSON". The "Jim" is written in a cursive, flowing style, while "ANDERSON" is written in a more blocky, all-caps style with some internal flourishes.

*President*