

Jim Casada Outdoors

March 2014 Newsletter

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Jim's March Doings

March will be a pretty busy time for me as I hustle to attend several events, get ahead on things so I have some regular writing duties out of the way come April, work to put the garden and yard in decent order, and generally answer the call for energetic efforts which seem to be part and parcel of spring. At mid-month I'll attend, as is normally the case for me, the annual banquet of the local chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation. I've always been supportive of their efforts although sometimes I wish more of the funds they raise came back to the local chapter for local initiatives. Still, I can't help but admire a bunch of hard-working sportsmen who spend countless hours in making things work in connection with the banquet, youth day, and other events. I've been told the chapter is honoring me as one of their two "sportsmen of the year" at the banquet, so being there is a virtual must this time around.

Then, a bit later in the month, I plan to attend the annual conference of the [Professional Outdoor Media Association \(POMA\) in Knoxville](#). I was a founding board member of the organization and was made an honorary life member as a result. Although I haven't been particularly active in recent years, a really fine young man whom I consider a staunch friend (in part because he shares my passion for the literature of sport), Kevin Tate, asked me to participate in a couple of panels and a sort of sharing of life experiences at the conference. Kevin is POMA's outgoing president and conference chair, so I'll be joining Jim Zumbo, J. Wayne Fears, and John Phillips in a "Greybeards" session along with sharing thoughts, from the freelancer's perspective, on nuts and bolts issues such as editing and style. That's boring stuff to the average sportsman but mighty important for those of us who labor in the vineyards of outdoor communication.

Finally, month's end will find me in my beloved Smokies for a brief reunion with my



Book Browsing

Recently I acquired a largish collection of Archibald Rutledge books. A few items went into my own collection but most have been added to the extensive list of Rutledge offerings I have for sale. [Check them out](#) and maybe add to your collection.

There are a number of rare items at prices well below what you'll find them offered for elsewhere as well as dozens of comparatively inexpensive listings.

My special for this month also focuses on Rutledge and on the upcoming turkey season.

Old Flintlock, the moniker family and friends used when in his company, was a marvelous writer on turkey hunting, and the anthology of his turkey writings I compiled some years ago, ***America's Greatest Game Bird: Archibald Rutledge's Turkey-Hunting Tales***, is available for the month of March at only \$25 postpaid.

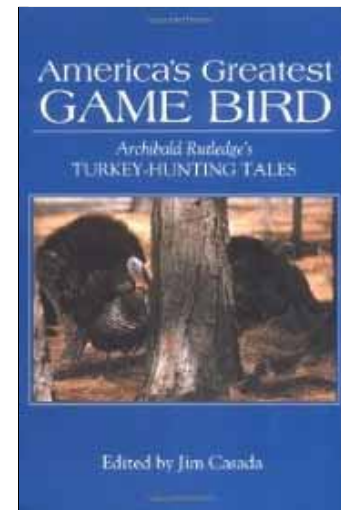
That's a savings of \$10 on the hardbound book offering 34 tales from a master storyteller.

brother, along with a cousin I haven't seen in decades and her family. The idea is for all of us to bushwhack to the old home place where her mother and my father grew up. In fact, I think her mother may have been born in



that hollow high up on a little branch in what is now part of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. At any rate, it will be a joyous time for all of us and, I suspect, a real revelation for her. After all, she grew up in the Chicago area and, other than summer and occasional Christmas visits to the Smokies, her youth was about as far removed from the steep hills and deep hollows of the Smokies as one could imagine.

A day before that hike and bushwhack up Juneywhank Branch, I hope to join several board members of the Southern Forest Watch, a group which has been battling the National Park Service over what we consider singularly misguided and illegally implemented backcountry camping fees, for a confab at the Cataloochee frontcountry camping area. I'll likely spend a day fishing in nearby streams while most of the other guys, avid hikers one and all, take to area trails. All in all it promises to be a busy month, but by comparison April's rites of spring will be even more hectic. If you are a turkey hunter, you understand. If not, just write yours truly and hundreds of thousands of others down as hopelessly lost souls.



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March Madness—2014

For most Americans, the term "March Madness" is associated with basketball. Mind you, have nothing against the sport. In fact, I played basketball in high school and in my junior year was part of perhaps the finest team old Swain County High School ever put on the court. My greatest contribution was as a bench warmer, but I still savor those memories and would like to think that in some small way I figured in the team's overall success. The team is enshrined in the high school's athletic hall of fame, so there's that to cling to if nothing else.

Those warm memories from long ago aside, in my world of today March Madness translates to one thing—the every-growing sense of anticipation connected with the coming of turkey season. Just last weekend I spent a bit of time with two buddies looking over some land on which we have leased the turkey hunting rights, and during the course of our roaming we spotted a big group of birds, with eight longbeards following a group of hens. The hens had no interest whatsoever in the gobblers, but one of the latter was inclined to do some strutting every time he could stop without being left behind. Then he would comically break strut and hustle to catch up. Talk about a sight to get the adrenalin flowing! That's right up my alley, and precisely one month from the day in which these words are being written I'll greet dawn in high hopes of hearing gobbling and working a bird (or maybe several of them).

Meanwhile, March will be a fine time for getting the garden plowed, provided the weather gives me a break with a sufficient period of time without rain to allow tilling and planting of early crops. In this part of the country there are all sorts of cool weather vegetables which should go into the soil before the month is out. Among them are potatoes, green peas, onions, lettuce, cabbage, broccoli, radish, greens (mustard, turnip, Swiss chard and

kale) and the like. Just the thought of a mess of new potatoes and sugar snap peas is enough to set my salivary glands into action.

Even if it's too wet to plow, I've got outdoor chores aplenty demanding my attention—mulching my seedless blackberries, getting up all the trimmings from my muscadines and scuppernongs (I pruned them last month, as I always do in February), picking up downed limbs and trash from the yard, spreading some rotted wood chips in several places, transplanting a couple of trees and some muscadines I rooted, and more. Already the first daffodils are in bloom, bringing a bright and most welcome splash of yellow to the landscape, and you can see color on yellowbells.

I cherish March, never mind that it is a temperamental and often tempestuous month. After all, it brings greening-up with all of its manifold promise of renewal and earth's rebirth. Already maples in bloom are splashing the skyline with hues of red, dandelions and bluets have begun to bloom, and buds on a number of trees and bushes have swollen. We'll have another spate (or maybe two or three) of rough weather, but that's fine with me. Like Grandpa Joe used to say, "Once you've got February licked it may not be smoothing sailing but you know warming days and growing things are on the way."

In this part of the world the latter half of March brings glories without number in terms of blooming wildflowers. The forest understory takes advantage of every bit of spring warmth prior to trees leafing out fully, and as a result the observant eye sees beauty at every turn. The purple and white hues of violets; the yellow of buttercups, cinquefoil, Carolina jessamine, trout lilies, dandelions, and more; the hidden daintiness of jack-in-the-pulpits; the white of pipsissewa, service, and maybe early blooming wild strawberries and dewberries; and the deep purple of pawpaws (which seem to bloom too early about every other year, only to get nipped by a late frost). Most of all though, if the tail end of the month brings a warm rain followed by a few days of sun, my personal focus is on the morel mushrooms which pop up like magic.

I'm fortunate enough for the little piece of property I own—just under a hundred acres—to produce a goodly crop of morels year after year. They aren't easy to spot but that makes hunting them a challenge and a delight. The only downside to meandering for morels is that it comes at the same time as the onset of turkey season. As a result I'm invariably torn between concerns about disturbing turkeys and thoughts of a bag full of morels and the succulent magic they mean on the table (see recipes below).



Along with all its mixed vibes, March is a month of wondrous anticipation, and so it has been all my life. In youth and on into early manhood, that "can't wait" for next month enthusiasm focused on the opening day of trout season, which always came on the first Saturday in of April. It was often blustery, seemingly always cold, and I remember one opener when it was blowing snow and another when there was ice along the creek edges. It didn't matter. I was going to fish and that day marked, in my mind, the transition from winter to spring.

That same sense of eagerness still holds me, but its focus has changed from trout to turkeys. Mind you, I still love the trill of a sparkling mountain stream and still rejoice in the sight of a head-and-shoulders rise to take a well-presented dry fly. However, a fellow can fly fish pretty much year round. Turkeys, on the other hand, can only be hunted for a few weeks. Since they laid hold of my soul several decades ago, the big birds consume my April days in what many would find a most distressing way. For me, it's simply a matter of marvelous misery. In the turkey woods I've known misses and miscues, made mistakes and had mishaps, experienced missteps and

mysticism, but there are always two constants. It's an extended time of magic and one where the sole certainty is uncertainty. I wouldn't swap it for anything.

That should give you a pretty solid indication of where my thoughts are turning these days, and for the present I need to do a passel of "getting ready" in the form of checking equipment, getting fully caught up on all my writing assignments, working a bit on fitness (I've done too much reading and sedentary stuff and too little exercising, as a scouting session for turkeys a few days ago told me in joint-aching fashion), and, mostly, dreaming. In my mind's eye I see gobblers coming to my calling like I was an irresistible oracle, telling shots leaving majestic birds lying before me at 30 paces, and spring woods bedecked in wildflowers in an all-encompassing blanket of beauty. The last part of the dream will become reality as sure as the return of greening-up spring. As for the first two, well, as Grandpa Joe always said, "A man's got to dream and once in a while they might even come true."

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RECIPES

SAUTEED MORELS—AND MORE

If you enjoy the luxury of having morel mushrooms you can find with some level of predictability in the early stages of spring, then you have the raw ingredients for one of the finest forms of nature's bounty. My favorite way to fix morels is to sauté them in butter (the real McCoy, because I've got a reader who is also a dear friend who read me the riot act and gave me a major ration of grief when I dared suggest substituting margarine in a recipe a few months back). Clean the mushrooms carefully by soaking them in cold water, then rinsing and patting them dry with paper towels before splitting in half length-wise. From that point forward it is merely a matter of putting them in sizzling melted butter and cooking until they are just right.

Another way to prepare morels is to clean and split them as is noted above, then drench in a bath of beaten eggs followed by a dip in Saltine cracker crumbs. Fry in butter (you can use olive oil but I prefer butter) to a golden brown turn.

Or there is morel mushroom soup or chowder, and for me it's a good way to use "extras" (if you are fortunate enough to have that big a crop) many months later. Morels can be dehydrated and stored in a freezer for reconstitution somewhere down the road, and soup is an ideal way to use them either fresh or dried. Here's a favorite chowder recipe:

- 2 cups morels, cleaned and sliced
- ¼ cup chopped onion
- 1 cup peeled, diced potatoes
- ½ cup finely chopped celery
- ½ cup finely chopped carrots
- 4 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon flour
- 2 tablespoons cold water
- 2 cups chicken broth
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon black pepper



1 cup whole milk (or for really rich chowder, half and half)
 ¼ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

Clean and slice mushrooms; chop vegetables. Melt butter and add olive oil. Add onions and sauté until tender. Add mushrooms, potatoes, celery and carrots; cover and cook on medium heat for 15-20 minutes or until the vegetables are tender. In a small bowl, thoroughly combine flour with cold water and slowly stir into vegetables. Add chicken broth, salt and pepper until heated through. Add milk and Parmesan cheese and heat. Do not boil. Serve immediately topped with additional Parmesan cheese and paprika. Serves four.

CLAM STUFFED MORELS

10 medium to large morel mushrooms, cleaned and sliced length-wise
 1/3 cup butter, melted
 1 clove garlic, minced
 1 (6 ½ ounce) can minced clams
 3 tablespoons finely chopped green onions
 1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley
 Salt and pepper to taste
 ¾ cup mayonnaise
 ½ tablespoon prepared mustard

Clean mushrooms well and remove most of stem. Cut morels in half and chop the stems finely. Melt butter; add minced garlic and mushroom stems and sauté for 8-10 minutes until stems are tender. Drain clams and add to skillet with onions, parsley and salt and pepper. Sauté for 5 minutes. Stuff morel halves with clam mixture and place in a greased baking dish. Combine mayonnaise and mustard and top each stuffed morel half with a dollop. Bake for 10-15 minutes at 350 degrees. Serve immediately.

VENISON HAMBURGER STEAK WITH ONION TOPPING

If you have leftover ground venison, here's a hearty recipe for a cold March day.

2 tablespoons canola oil
 1 to 1 ½ cups sliced sweet onions
 1-2 tablespoons water
 ¼ teaspoon paprika
 Black pepper to taste
 1 pound ground venison
 Salt to taste

Head canola oil in a large skillet and sauté onions until tender. Add water to avoid sticking (if necessary) while preparing onions. Stir paprika and black pepper into onions; remove onions from pan and keep warm. Season ground venison with salt and shape into 2 large 1-inch-thick patties. Pub hamburger steaks in onion-flavored oil and cook over medium heat until browned on both sides and desired doneness is reached. Arrange steaks on plates and top with reserved, cooked onions.

NOTE: All the recipes above are from *Wild Bounty*, an award-winning cookbook which is [available through my Web site](#) for \$20 + \$5 shipping.

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