

# Jim Casada Outdoors

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## March 2015 Newsletter

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### Jim's Doings

I attended the annual [National Wild Turkey Federation Convention](#) in Nashville in the middle of last month, and as usual, it was a delight to see old friends and make some new ones. I left a day earlier than I had originally intended because of a winter storm moving into the area. I didn't want to drive home in that mess.

There were multiple high points to the convention and I'll highlight a few of them in passing.

- I saw my good friend Larry Proffitt, one of the true turkey men of the old school, and we got to talk a bit. I'll be hunting with him come spring and it's always a joy to spend time with someone who shares my obsession to the nth degree.
- I enjoyed a fine conversation with a fellow I see at most conventions, Bob Fulcher. He's a highly skilled callmaker (check out (check out his [Shadetree Callers operation](#)) with a knack for new angles and innovation when it comes to crafting calls. I came away with a paddle box call of unusual design Bob calls the Stepside Longbox. It's beautifully made, as is typical of his calls, and I look forward to giving it a try in the woods this spring.
- Thanks to a longtime reader of this newsletter suggesting it, I had a fine "shake and howdy" session with a talented wingbone call maker, Mark Sharpe from Claxton, Ga. Those who have followed my literary meanderings on turkeys over

### Special of the Month

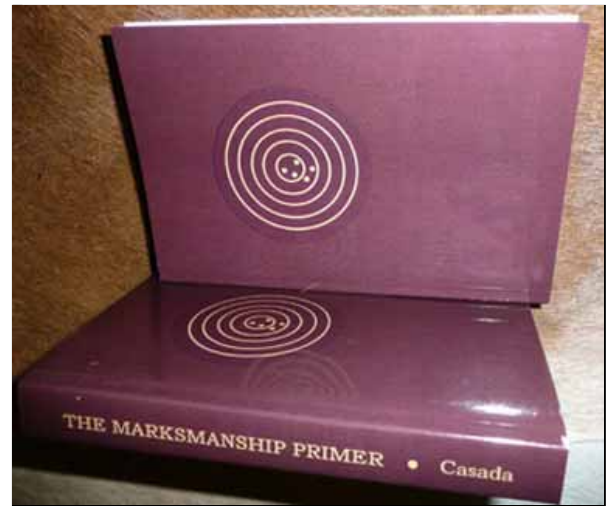
Some years ago the late Les Adams, a man with a great love of literature who was the conceptual genius behind a number of beautifully done series of books (Lefty's Little Library of fishing books, The Firearms Classics series I edit, and The Theodore Roosevelt Collection I helped with and completed of TR's "lost classics" entitled *Forgotten Tales and Vanished Trails*) approached me with a suggestion that I compile **a primer for folks shooting rifles and pistols**.

The idea was to bring together writings from some of the leading marksmanship authorities from yesterday and today into a single volume which would give any serious shooter excellent advice.

**Out of this came a work I edited entitled *The Marksmanship Primer***. It contains almost 500 pages of hard information from the likes of Jack O'Connor, Townsend Whelen, Charles Askins, Sr. and Charles Askins, Jr., Jeff Cooper, Bryce Towsley, Wayne Van Zwoll, and a bunch of others.

the years know I'm a wingbone yelper fanatic, and as I write these words I'm looking at a dandy Mark made.

- The massive collection of turkey calls formed by the late Earl Mickel and then passed through two owners after his death was on display and sale at the convention. Luckily I got there in time to acquire a wingbone yelper made by my mentor, Parker Whedon. It could be the twin of what has long been my "go to" call that Parker made using bones from the first fall hen and the first spring gobbler I ever killed all those many decades ago. I'm glad I bought it because not long afterward an anonymous buyer purchased the entire collection.
- Saw lots of good friends in the callmaking and call collecting world—Ralph Permar, Bob Harwell, Marlin Watkins, Don Bald, Herb Hornstra (had a nice chat with him about his relationship with Parker Whedon), Howard Harlan, Chris McDonald, Michael Marks – and a host of others.
- Enjoyed dinner with a bunch of outdoor writer friends, a real highlight combining camaraderie with culinary delight.



I've got some spare copies and am offering them for \$11, postpaid, as this month's special.

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Looking ahead rather than back, while I was away at the National Wild Turkey Federation, I got a phone call from a great-grandson of Archibald Rutledge. He invited me to join him at Hampton Plantation (the plantation home was sold to the state during Rutledge's lifetime but the family retained hundreds of acres nearby for hunting) for a spring turkey hunt. I'm really looking forward to walking what, for any turkey hunter, is sacred ground.

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## Mastering March Madness

If I suggested March was one of my favorite months, I'd be playing fast and loose with the truth. Indeed, it is probably the month I care the least about. After all, hunting of any kind is over until the spring gobbler season opens a few weeks down the road, the weather can be unpredictable at best and plain nasty at worst (I'm looking out the window at dense fog following a week that mixed two skiffs of snow, several hours of freezing rain, lots of clouds, and but a single day of sunshine), and in my part of the world, never mind that it is time to get early spring plantings in the ground, garden soil is invariably far too wet to plow. Indeed, I ventured out in the garden yesterday to pull up the last two heads of cabbage remaining from fall plantings (both had a bit of "frostbite" but were salvageable), and sank in a good inch with every step.

Confronted with such circumstances, my Grandpa Joe would just shake his head in dismay and mutter: "What's a body to do?" Mind you, he always had not one but several answers, and over time I've figured out plenty to do in March as well. Maybe running through some of these means of mastering the madness of March will give you an idea or two about how you can make it to the welcome embrace of April and the return of the greening-up time of spring.

- Cook a fine meal of squirrel. A common and most welcome item on the family table when I was a boy, squirrel seems to be almost the forgotten wild game of today. Yet bushytails remain plentiful, are fun to hunt, and provide splendid table fare. I've included a couple of recipes below.
- Look through seed catalogs or go to your local feed and seed store and get the things you need for planting once the weather gives you the break you need.
- Clean up your yard and garden. Right now I've got a bunch of prunings from my muscadine vines needing to be gathered up, and the ice storm left limbs scattered all over the three acres I try to keep in good shape.
- Even if it's too wet to plow or plant seed crops, you can put plants in the ground. Right now I've got some muscadines I rooted which need to be moved along with some thornless blackberries where I let the vines run out too long and they tip-rooted.
- Go for a walk in the woods and look (and listen) for the first signs of coming spring. On a warm day you might hear peepers giving voice, and you will certainly hear birds singing. This morning as I ate breakfast both redbirds and jorees (what mountain folks have always called the bird you'll find listed as a towhee in the books) were singing as if we were going to have bright sunshine any moment.
- Speaking of birds giving voice, probably my favorite March activity is getting into the woods before daylight on a clear, crisp morning to listen for gobbling turkeys. Over the weekend, on the one decent day of the week, a buddy and I completed arrangements on land we lease for turkey hunting and did a bit of walking on the property. Seeing gobbler tracks in a muddy road is one of the surest ways to lift my spirits, and there were plenty of them.
- Looking at the flowers of early spring. Already some of the more adventurous daffodils in those planted around the place have lifted their heads, although they got rewarded for their precociousness with a coating of ice that broke a good many stems. Some crocus have bloomed and just a few days ago I noticed sap oozing down the side of a maple tree to such an extent it had much of the trunk wet.
- Watching the tips of maple limbs swell and take on a reddish tinge as they prepare to "break out" in celebration come the first spell of warmth.
- Starting to think about my favorite spots for morel mushrooms. They usually "pop" here sometime between April 1-10, but I'm always looking by late March. Occasionally, if we get a spate of unseasonable warmth, they'll actually appear before the month is out.
- For this March, at least, I'll be devoting a great deal of time to a new book, "Profiles in Mountain Character." It will contain close to 40 detailed profiles of old-time mountain folks—those included will be noteworthy individuals, some who were decidedly notorious, and a number of so-called nonentities who loomed large in my life. Anyone who reads this regularly has met my Grandpa Joe, and a chapter devoted to him will open the book. There will be one on a wonderful old black lady who lived close to us named Aunt Mag (I've written here of her as well), a convicted murderer who taught me the finer points of catching catfish, a couple of notorious moonshiners, several key figures in creating the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the finest trout fisherman I ever knew, the funniest man I've ever been around, a woman guilty of infanticide, the man known as the "Squire of Hazel Creek," and more. I'm well past the halfway mark already. If you wonder what has happened to Archibald Rutledge, fear not. I had an enforced hiatus thanks to the Caroliniana Library being closed for a number of weeks to rearrange holdings and the like, but I'll get back to that effort once the archives reopen. Meanwhile, I'm starting to make a list of those who want the book on the mountains. It will be the first in a projected trilogy under the general title of "Portals of Paradise." This first volume, "Profiles in Mountain Character," will be followed by ones dealing with mountain places and mountain folkways.

[Just let me know](#) on both this and the Rutledge book and I'll be sure you are notified once the books appear. I would note that there will be a new reprint of a Rutledge piece out in May, the second in a series

of five chapbooks for which I wrote the Introduction. I'll let you know the details as soon as the book, *The Doom of Ravenswood*, appears.

I reckon I've got enough to keep me busy in March and hope you will as well. Just remember that gobbling turkeys, the first hints of pink from redbuds and white from dogwoods, and buds a-swelling lie but a few weeks distant. That should help you ward off the misery that can be March.

Now, let's turn to some fine table fixin's, and as I write this the smell of cabbage patch soup is wafting in from the kitchen. It's might fillin' and fittin' for a nasty day.

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## Recipes for March

### BAKED SQUIRREL

Mom often fixed fried squirrel, and when served with side dishes of biscuits, milk gravy made with the drippings from the squirrel, sweet potatoes, and turnip greens, it was among my favorite meals. However, I liked her baked squirrel even better, and the recipe below will work just as well for rabbit, a young 'coon, or muskrat. I realize some folks might turn up a dainty nose at the latter two, but let me assure you both are exceptionally clean animals that can make mighty fine fare.

2 (or more) squirrels, dressed  
Cold water to cover  
1 teaspoon of baking soda  
(more if you have more than 2 squirrels)  
1 tablespoon butter per squirrel

Cover the squirrel with cold water in a large saucepan. Add the baking soda and bring to a boil. Remove from heat, pour off the water, and rinse thoroughly under running water to remove any baking soda. Return to the pan and cover with fresh water. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to a simmer, and continue until tender.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Transfer squirrels to a baking dish, dot with the butter and bake until brown and crusty.

### SQUIRREL POT PIE

1 onion, chopped coarsely  
1 stalk celery, chopped coarsely  
1 large garlic clove, minced  
4 cups beef broth  
Freshly ground black pepper  
1 squirrel, cleaned  
Pastry for two-crust pie



There's no finer way to put squirrel on the table than by hunting with a good squirrel dog.

1 (12-ounce) can Mexican-style mixed vegetables  
1 tablespoon cornstarch

Preheat oven to 340 degrees. Combine the onion, celery, garlic, beef broth, pepper and squirrel in a large pot and bring to a boil; simmer until the meat is quite tender and easily removed from the bones. Debone the meat and set aside.

Measure out 1 cup of the cooking liquid and reserve. Fit the bottom crust into a pie pan.

Combine the meat, vegetables, reserved broth and cornstarch in a large bowl and mix well. Spoon the mixture into the pie shell. Top with the second crust, press the edges to seal and cut several vents in the top for steam to escape. Bake until the crust is brown, about an hour.



Hunting squirrels with a dog is productive and a fine way to get a youngster started in hunting.

## VENISON CHILI

It's hard to beat a steaming bowl of chili, especially if flanked with a fine chunk of cornbread or a plate of corn dodgers, on a cold March day. Here's a recipe to use some of that ground venison you hopefully put in the freezer back in deer season.

1 pound lean ground venison  
1 (10- to 15-ounce) can stewed tomatoes, drained  
2 medium onions, chopped  
2 tablespoons chili powder  
1 (16-ounce) can pinto or kidney beans  
1 (8-ounce) can tomato sauce  
1 (4-ounce) can mushrooms, drained, or a cup of fresh mushrooms, chopped  
1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce  
1 tablespoon soy sauce

Cook the venison in a large skillet, stirring to break up the meat, until brown and crumbly. Combine with the other ingredients in a large pot. Simmer for an hour or longer (longer is better).

## VENISON STEW

2 to 3 pound venison stew meat or roast  
1 (10 ½ ounce) can beef broth  
1 ½ to 2 pounds potatoes, cubed  
3 or 4 onions, quartered  
8 ounces baby carrots  
Salt and pepper to taste  
Worcestershire sauce to taste

If roast is used cut into one-inch cubes Combine meat in a Dutch oven with the beef broth. Simmer until the meat is nearly tender.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Add the potatoes, onions, and carrots to the pan and season with salt, pepper, and Worcestershire sauce. Cover and bake for an hour or until the vegetables are tender.

## BERRY CRISP

I've always had a sweet tooth, and few things in the dessert world tickle my fancy more than those featuring berries. You can use about any kind of berries with this recipe.

1 cup quick-cooking or old-fashioned oats  
1 cup all-purpose flour  
1 cup packed brown sugar  
¼ to ½ cup chopped nuts (black walnuts, English walnuts, or pecans)  
½ cup cold butter  
3 cups fresh or frozen berries  
½ cup white sugar, or to taste

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Mix the oats, flour and brown sugar. Add the nuts. Cut in the butter with a pastry blender or in a food processor. Place half the crumb mixture on the bottom of a well-greased 8-inch baking pan. Combine the berries and sugar and pour over the base. Top with the remaining crumb mixture. Bake for 30 to 45 minutes or until brown and bubbly. Serve warm with ice cream or whipped cream.

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