

Jim Casada Outdoors

March 2017 Newsleter

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This Month's Specials

Since turkey season is at hand, this month's specials focus on books dealing with America's grand big-game bird. I'm offer special prices on three books I've done in this field.

1. My collection, *America's Greatest Game Bird: Archibald Rutledge's Turkey-Hunting Tales*, normally sells for \$30. **I'm offering it for \$25 postage paid.**
2. An even better discount is available on *Remembering the Greats: Profiles of Turkey Hunting's Old Masters*. Normally \$40, **it is \$27.50 postpaid.**
3. And if you are a serious turkey hunter who really cares about the literature of the sport, how about my award-winning bibliography, *The Literature of Turkey Hunting: An Annotated Bibliography and Random Scribblings from a Sporting Bibliophile* for **\$60 (normally \$100)**. This is a limited edition book (750 numbered and signed copies) printed on top-quality paper, with leather-like Skivertex binding and a slipcase of the same material, gold embossing, ribbon marker, all edges gilt, lavishly illustrated, and indeed all the hallmarks of a top-quality book.



TO ORDER, CALL OR E-MAIL

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Jim's Doings

The last few weeks have been a mélange of writing, watching in dismay as spring arrived far too early (and we are paying the price as this is being written, on March 16, with temperatures at daylight hovering at 20 degrees, and four days ago there was snow on the ground when I got up). My blueberries, the local peach crop, spring flowers, and much else will pay a heavy price. Such are the vagaries of nature. I've lived long enough to just shrug my shoulders, think about the hard lot of those who wrest their living from the land, and all the while know that it's something totally out of my control.

On a more positive note, I enjoyed a pair of appearances at the Deckle Edge book festival in Columbia a couple of weeks back. One of the panels in which I participated also included longtime TV natural history host Rudy Mancke. It was the first time I had met him and we soon discovered plenty of shared interests and a lot of things in common in our backgrounds. As boys, we both were fascinated by the outdoors and now, many decades later, that continues to be true.

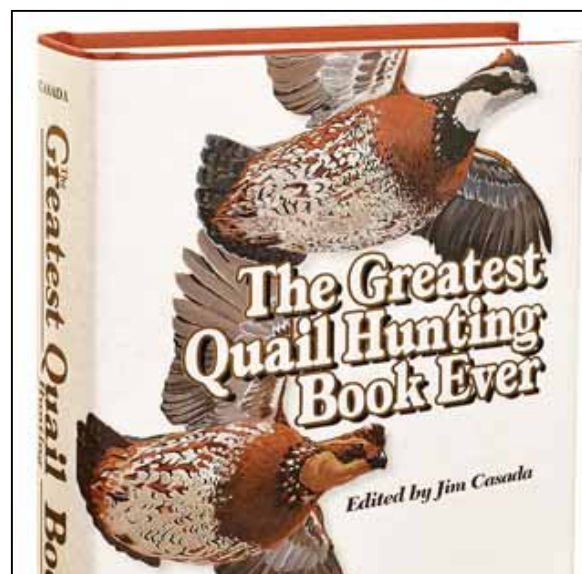
If you live in South Carolina, and a number of you do, I'll be at the Palmetto Sportsman's Classic in Columbia all day on Saturday, March 25. I'll be at the booth of *South Carolina Wildlife* magazine, a publication to which I contribute on a fairly regular basis and one of the finest publications of its kind found anywhere. Drop by if you have a chance. I'd love to shake, howdy, and exchange a tale or two. Speaking of the magazine, I have an article in the March/April issue, "Delightful Instruments of Deceit: The Lure and Lore of Turkey Calls." While mentioning the pressing matter of turkeys, look at [Sporting Classics Daily](#) for March 17. There you'll find a piece I crafted on the way I have preserved memories of every turkey I've ever killed by saving the shotshell, the bird's beard, and writing up a little tale of the hunt to go with these mementoes. You can sign up to get *Sporting Classics Daily* free while you are at it.

The February/March issue of *Smoky Mountain Living* carries my profile "The Angel of Brasstown," on Tipper Pressley, while the April/May one that has just hit newsstands has my piece on a wonderful black woman who meant so much to my father and indeed our entire family in Dad's later years, Beulah Sudderth. Other than my regular newspaper columns and my book column in the current issue of *Sporting Classics*, most of my current efforts involve book projects.

I just completed an introductory essay on Sam Hunnicutt, a mesmerizing old mountain sportsman who wrote a book, *Twenty Years Hunting and Fishing in the Great Smokies*, which is extremely rare in the original printing. Western Carolina University is reprinting it as the first volume in what will be an ongoing series of reprints. I'll be giving a couple of talks on Hunnicutt and his book in coming months, and once those dates are pinned down I'll share the details.

Other book projects include two which I've just begun along with working in fits and starts on Archibald Rutledge and "Profiles in Mountain Character." The new undertakings will be a pair of anthologies I edit. Both are to be published by the book wing of *Sporting Classics*. They will follow the basic pattern employed in *The Greatest Quail Hunting Book Ever* and will deal, respectively, with timeless whitetail tales and classic stories of Africa's "big five" from the storied hunters of the 19th century. Meanwhile, if you want some fine reading, [visit my website](#), and order the quail anthology.

I have plans to be in the Bristol, TN area twice in coming weeks. The first one comes at the end of this month when I'll attend the 150th anniversary of my alma mater, King College (now King University). While there I'll be attending a meeting of the Alumni Advisory Council of which I'm a member and, much more exciting, going to a Josh Turner



concert which is a part of King's sesquicentennial celebration. I'm a big fan of traditional country music, and Turner is one of the relatively few modern country singers I find appealing.

Then, a week later, I'll be back for a few days of turkey hunting in the area along with attendance at the inauguration of a new president, Alexander Whitaker, IV, at King. I look forward to these events although my being present is contingent on how things go with Ann, my wife of almost 50 years. She isn't doing well, and each week that passes sees her fading more and less aware of the world around her. I visit daily and honesty compels me to say that those visits, important as they are for my peace of mind on one level, mark the low point of each day on another level. I appreciate the kind thoughts, notes, prayers, and more so many of you have offered, and if I can offer anything worthy of note out of this ongoing test of my character, it would be to advise each and every one of you to savor each moment. Seize the sponge of life in a firm grip and wring every essence of goodness from it whenever you can.



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The Madness and Magic of March

Every spring there are two days I look forward to with all the eagerness of a teenager heading out for his first date, or perhaps more appropriately for the subject matter at hand, a youngster receiving his first gun. Those two days are the opening and closing days of South Carolina's turkey season.

As the opener draws nigh, and as reports of gobbling and strutting turkeys reach my ears, I'm much like a kid waiting for Christmas Day. Visions of past encounters with gobblers, some of them glorious, others ghastly, ramble through the corridors of my mind in a most unsettling way. I'm fidgety, tend to wake up long before dawn as if the season had already arrived, and do the kind of things only fellow addicts can understand—practice calling, check and re-check my vest to be sure all is in order never mind that nothing has changed since the conclusion of the season last year, pattern my gun despite having decided on the ideal shell for the shotgun a 'coon's age ago, and generally acting like someone who has, as my Grandpa Joe used to say, usually referring to some adolescent high jinks of yours truly, "taken leave of his senses."

Once the season opens, like many others who long ago lost a corner of their soul to his majesty, the lordly wild gobbler, I feel duty bound to be afield every day if at all possible. Over the course of days and then weeks that pattern of behavior—rising way before dawn; gobbling down hasty breakfasts and eating way too much fast food in the middle of the day; doing both a lot of walking and a great deal of trying my best to imitate a stump by sitting perfectly still; being too tired at day's end to prepare a decent supper and therefore eating too much sodium-loaded restaurant take-out; getting behind on chores, assignments, laundry, and house cleaning; invariably suffering (often more than once) the almost predictable heartbreak of some type of foul-up—takes a toll.

So much is that the case that by season's end honesty compels me to admit it comes with huge mental sigh of relief. I look forward to the last day almost as much as the opener, albeit for decidedly different reasons. Finally I can start catching up on sleep, address long-neglected chores like gardening and tending the yard, and in general bring something approaching normalcy back to my life.

In other words, turkey hunting is a mixture of magic and misery, but those of us who are long-suffering members of what Tom Kelly, the unofficial poet laureate of the wild turkey, described as the "Tenth Legion" take it all in stride. Incidentally, if you are familiar with the literary implications of "Tenth Legion," it was a unit of the Roman Army which never quit, never admitted defeat, and refused to do anything but persevere. Such are those who are hopelessly infected after having been bitten by the turkey bug.

March is also a month for the gardener to begin getting down to serious business. I've already got Kennebec potatoes and white onion slips in the ground, new tines waiting to be installed on my tiller (I have really rocky soil and in about three years it "eats" tines down to the point where they have virtually no curve and do nothing but disk the ground), an obstreperous old riding mower that has so many "ills" I reckon I'm going to have to replace it, prunings from some of my muscadines still to be gathered up for burning, enough dead limbs and trash littering my three maintained acres to require a day of gathering and burning, and enough assorted chores to keep me more than busy. Of course, as is ever the case in turkey time, most of them will be greeted with delay, procrastination, thoughts of "I really need to get that done," and what I just like to view as salutary neglect.

Much of my gardening will be done in slipshod fashion until May, because April finds me struggling just to find a few hours "off" from the turkey woods for things such as meeting story deadlines, getting columns in on time, tending to basic chores such as paying bills, and giving housecleaning at least a "lick and a promise," as Momma used to describe some of my half-hearted efforts connected with chores. But you can garden and tend to other matters most any time of the year. The turkey hunting window is open only for a few weeks.

Speaking of chores, another ritual requiring attention this time of year involves cleaning out the freezer. I made a bit of a start last night with some fine fried quail, gravy over rice, and asparagus. But there are soups and stews aplenty in the near future as I try to use up a goodly portion of the game, last year's vegetables, and the like now residing in my two freezers. Indeed, as soon as I finish this month's musings up with a selection of recipes, I need to take some peaches out for a cobbler, give some thought to making a stack cake (I've got a magazine assignment revolving around this traditional mountain dessert for a summer issue), and see what I can whip together from crowder peas, corn, tomatoes, and other frozen goods (sounds like venison/vegetable soup makings to me).

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Recipes

QUAIL GRAVY

The way I make gravy for quail, or for that matter to go with fried chicken, cubed steak, or even hamburgers, is simple and straightforward. It's pretty much what mountain folks where I grew up called "sawmill" gravy, and no working sawmill or CCC camp ran right if it didn't have a cook who could take the "leavings" from bacon or fried fatback, mix in flour and then milk, and make gravy that adorned biscuits in lip-smacking fine fashion.

As soon as I've finished frying quail (or whatever your are frying) I removed the meat from the pan with tongs, holding each piece over the pan to let as much of the grease drip back in as possible, and place it atop paper towels on a platter or warming dish. The meat will have been well coated with flour when first introduced to the oil, so there are already some luscious pieces of browned flour bits in the grease. Add more flour, stirring constantly, until it is browned as well. This is much like making a roux. Once you reach the desired state of brownness, pour in milk and continue stirring to thicken. If the flour/grease/milk mixture becomes too thick, just add more milk. Keep in mind that you want the gravy a bit on the thin side when you remove it from heat, because it is going to thicken up some more. That's it other than adding salt and pepper to taste. One tip—make sure you stir enough to get rid of any little clumps of flour.

FREEZER CLEANING VEGETABLE/VENISON SOUP

While I tend, as a rule, to have more leftover venison than other game, in truth almost any surplus game available when it comes time to clean out the freezer can be used for soup. That includes turkey (this is a great way to use dark meat from a wild turkey, something all too many folks discard), game birds, squirrel, rabbit, or whatever you happen to have.

Use frozen or canned tomatoes (I blanch them to remove the skins, cut in quarters, and freeze for purposes such as this) and tomato juice (or V-8 juice, which adds a taste I like) for your liquid base. If you've got meat stock you can mix it in as well; if not, use beef or chicken base and the appropriate amount of water—make the soup thick or thin according to your preference.

Once you have cooked the meat, add it to the tomatoes and liquid in a large soup pot. Simmer for a time and add vegetables according to the time they require to cook. For example, carrots, potatoes, and onions are going to need some time to cook tender, whereas corn or crowder peas from the freezer have most likely already been cooked. At any rate that's the way I process these vegetables. You don't want to add them until the last minute or otherwise you will end up with vegetable mush.

When the raw vegetables reach the desired tenderness, add the cooked ones, bring the soup pot back to a simmer, and serve as soon as hot.

You can use a truly wide variety of vegetables in soup of this kind. I've even tried turnips and parsnips, although I think they are better roasted then used in soups or stews. Whatever blend of ingredients you have though, serve with a pone of cornbread and you have some fine fixin's.

STRAWBERRY TRIFLE

I had my first taste of a trifle in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1971, and has someone who already had a sweet tooth, not to mention being all too ready and willing to try a new dessert, when the two spinsters who ran the bed-and-breakfast establishment where I was staying asked if I'd like a bowl of trifle to complete my meal, I readily agreed. I told them I had no idea what a trifle was, but given the fact I had already ventured into unknown culinary terrain such as "neeps and haggis" (turnips with a meat dish sort of like sausage—you are maybe just as well off not knowing all the details of the ingredients) I instantly acceded. It was strawberry season, and with the first bite I became a lifelong fan of fruit and berry trifles. They can be made using a wide variety of things—strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, peaches, blackberries, dewberries, and more—but if you somehow have access to wild strawberries that gives a trifle an advanced degree. Here are the basics:



- 1 package yellow cake mix
- 1 quart strawberries
- Sugar to taste
- Grand Marnier, other orange liqueur, or dark rum
- 3 packages vanilla instant pudding mix
- 6 cups milk
- 2 (12-ounce) tubs whipped topping or the equivalent amount of real whipped cream

Bake the cake according to package directions, allow to cool, and then crumble.

Set aside a few capped berries for garnish and combine the rest in a saucepan with sugar and a dash of the spirit of your choice. Cook for a minute or two until the mixture is juicy.

Prepare the pudding with the milk according to the package directions.

Cover the bottom of a large bowl or trifle dish with a layer of crumbled cake. Top with a layer of strawberry mix. Next spread a layer of pudding over the berries and then a layer of whipped topping. Repeat the layers until you have used all the separate ingredients up, finishing with the whipped topping. Garnish with the reserved berries.

This is scrumptious when served as soon as finished, but trifle at its best is much like the situation with stack cake. Give the trifle a day or two in the fridge for the flavors to mix and mingle and for the cake to soak up juices; then you have a dish for the gods.

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