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## JANUARY 2018 NEWSLETTER



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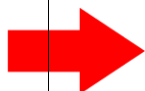
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### Upcoming Events



**SCI National Convention**  
January 31<sup>st</sup> – February 3<sup>rd</sup>  
Las Vegas

**SSC Banquet & Fundraiser**  
March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2018  
Doubletree Hotel in Sacramento

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## **SCI CONVENTION**

Don't forget to register for the 46<sup>th</sup> annual convention! Meet new outfitters, vendors, jewelry exhibits . . . lots to see! Click their main page to register at <https://www.safariclub.org>.

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## **EXPANDING BLACK BEAR HUNTING IN CALIFORNIA**

### ***SCI Foundation***

Northeastern California has seen an increase in black bear (*Ursus americanus*) abundance over the last 25 years. This population growth has led to increased human-wildlife conflicts near the town of Adin, just over 100 miles east of Redding near the California, Oregon, and Nevada borders.

In collaboration with Humboldt State University, the Integral Ecology Research Center, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), SCI Foundation will help shed light on bear demographics in northern California. Researchers intend to determine how black bears from Nevada and Oregon are entering the Warner Mountains inside the Modoc National Forest. Bears are moving between multiple areas of suitable habitat, but we don't know the location of wildlife corridors that make this movement possible. Once established, this project could determine where possible harvest zones should be.

This project will assist CDFW in implementing responsible wildlife management strategies in the future by implementing three methods of estimating black bear abundance: spatially explicit capture-recapture (SECR), multiple survey occupancy, and single survey occupancy. Comparing the three methods will help researchers determine which method is the most cost-effective. At the moment, single survey occupancy has been useful in determining migratory bird abundance inexpensively and efficiently, however it has not yet been applied to large mammals such as bears.

Once the initial estimates of black bear sex-ratio and abundance are made using all three methods, the second objective will be to provide the first estimates of black bear spatial variation across the study area. CDFW will then determine from these estimates if there are enough bears to warrant a hunting season, and where harvest boundaries should exist. Using the best available science to guide management, bear hunting in northeastern California could be reopened for the first time in decades.

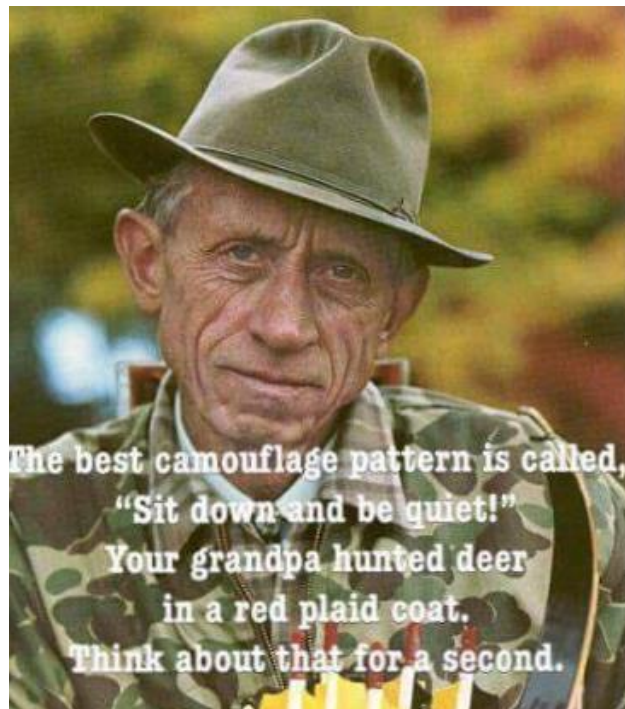
The third objective of this project will be to collect and build a database of black bear DNA. Researchers will then reference this database to determine if northeastern California black bears are primarily local, or emigrants from other populations in nearby states. Hair snares have proven to be the most cost-efficient and least invasive method of collecting bear DNA. Five primary grids of 20 contiguous hair snare grid cells will be placed strategically throughout the study area.

The final objective will be to recruit and provide training to at least 10 local community members, primarily hunters, to assist with survey activities. The project will benefit by gaining additional field support by those who know the area, as well as empowering the local community to manage and benefit from their own natural resources. Dr. Jared Duquette, who previously worked with SCIF on the Michigan Predator-Prey Project, will be leading this project and its community outreach components. This volunteer opportunity will maintain a positive working relationship with hunters, the local public, private, academic, and tribal groups, which will foster good relations between the community and the state on black bear management.

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## **DO HUNTERS REALLY NEED CAMO?**

*From Captain Hunter*



If you're not so experienced in the field of hunting, then you've probably asked yourself this question: do I need camouflage to hunt?

Have you ever stepped in a hunting goods store and was surprised by the number of camouflage-printed things that greeted you? Or perhaps; have you ever seen a hunter in full camouflage gear and thought to yourself: do I really need all that to be able to conceal myself fully in the field?

Well, this article may tell you some, if not all, of the answers that you've been looking for. But first, let's define what camouflage is and how it is applied to the sport of hunting.

### **What is Camouflage?**

Camouflage, when defined as a noun, is a print or pattern that is used to conceal the wearer from the prey or enemy. It is a combination of certain colors and patterns, and its design will mostly depend on the environment it is meant to be worn in.

You've most likely already seen a standard camouflage print. The mixture of greens, brown, and black allows hunters to blend in with the natural flora of the forest or jungle. Variations in the pattern and colors of camouflage prints exist because of different environments, such as desert/safari and rainforest.

Camouflage is used by both hunters and military personnel because it conceals them from the enemy, or in the hunter's case: it conceals them from the prey. Concealment means low detection from the animals which can prove incredibly useful if the animals you're hunting have a keen sense of sight.

### **Do I Need Camouflage to Hunt?**

Getting back to our question before, do we really need camouflage to hunt? Can't we just wear normal clothes like our flannel and the [best hunting boots](#)?

Well, if you have experienced hunting in regular-colored clothes before and still killed something, then you have probably answered your own question. If you haven't tried hunting without camouflage on, then let me tell you that you don't really need camouflage to hunt.

Yes, you read that right. Hunters don't necessarily need camouflage to hunt. However, camouflage can help you remain undetected during hunting, but that isn't the sole factor—nor the most important—in remaining hidden from your prey.

So what do you need camouflage for? Well, let's take a look at how an animal sees things from its own visual perspective. Let us use the deer, one of the most common game, to illustrate our point.

## **Do I Need Camouflage to Hunt Deer?**

According to several studies, [deer can detect colors](#) that are near the violet end of the color spectrum. Thus, deer can see blue clearly as well as ultraviolet light. On the other hand, deer cannot sense green, red, or orange. This is where the camouflage print can prove itself useful. So as you can see, the camouflage does have its uses, so you can go ahead and buy yourself camouflage-printed hunting gear if you plan on hunting deer. Other animals can also be partially colorblind like the deer species and have affinities to particular colors. It only takes some research on which colors they see so you can plan your outfit accordingly.

Back to the deer. Let's say you're going to hunt deer and wear camouflage for the trip so it won't detect you. There's still no guarantee that the camouflage will conceal you completely because deer still have great senses of smell and hearing. Thus, you need to complement the camouflage with other strategies to remain undetectable such as removing scent and remaining silent.

Deer can still detect your presence if you move around too quickly or if you smell like a human, so the camouflage will be totally useless if you don't take other precautions. We'll discuss these other strategies to remain undetected later in this article.

## **How to Use Camouflage Properly**

So now that you know the answer to the question: do I need camouflage to hunt, we're going to talk about how to use camouflage properly. If you've decided that you want to try using camouflage-printed gear to become stealthier, then this section is for you.

Camouflage can conceal you from the animal's eyesight. You need to wear camouflage properly such that there are no other clothes visible that is of the color blue. As I've said before, deer can detect UV light so it may be best to stray from fabric cleaners that enhance the UV bouncing off the clothes as well.

Moreover, you should still be wary of your movements. Deer can be highly perceptive to movement especially that their eyes are on the sides of their head so they have a wide vision. However, if you're doing things properly, the deer can be looking directly at you but still isn't spooked. You can do this by mastering your stealth skills and remaining as still as possible.

## **Make Sure to De-Scent Your Clothes**

Camouflage will become totally useless if you don't put effort in removing the scent from your clothes. As stated before, deer have a keen sense of smell. A deer can detect your human scent

from half a mile away, so if you've used your favorite scented shampoo in the morning of your hunt, then you probably won't have any luck with finding deer.

Human scent can be removed from clothes by using detergents, soaps, and shampoos that have been created for this purpose. Moreover, you can use commercially available products that are meant to mask the smell of human scent; sort of like a hunter's perfume.

### **The Different Types of Camouflage**

There are several types of camouflage print that can be used for hunting purposes. These are the woodland, jungle, and desert/safari prints.

The woodland camouflage print is composed of dark greens, browns, and blacks. This type of camouflage would help conceal you in the woods as you would blend in with the trees and bushes. The second type of camouflage, the jungle print, is meant for rainforests and jungles. They are composed of greens, black, and brown that are brighter than the woodland print.

The jungle camouflage print will allow you to hunt in rainforests. In these types of areas, flora is brighter and more colorful than in the woods, so the camouflage is brighter.

Safari and desert prints are composed of a variation of sandy brown and light green. If you're going to hunt in very dry areas where the land is mostly composed of sand with not a lot of trees, this type of camouflage can help you blend in with the environment.

### **When Buying Camouflage Gear**

When buying camouflage gear, do not just pick up the first camouflage outfit that you find. Not all camouflage items are of the same quality, some are cheaply made while others are higher quality but more expensive.

I would recommend buying camouflage clothes that are made of good quality fabric. The fabric shouldn't make so much noise while you're moving; remember that most animals have a good sense of hearing. If you buy camo pants that make a sound every time you take a step, then you're probably going to spook the deer before you get to a good shooting spot.

Aside from camo clothes, you can also buy different hunting gear with a camouflage print such as the [best hunting backpack](#).

## CONCLUSION

Do I need camouflage to hunt? The answer depends on you. Yes, a camouflage can help you stay hidden from prey if you also employ different stealth strategies along with it. But using camouflage is not necessary for you to be a successful hunter.

So did we answer your question? Hopefully, you've learned a lot and more with this article. Let us know if you have any comments or questions so post them down below. Also, don't forget to share this with your hunter friends as well. Thanks for reading!

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## **SCI and NRA SCORE VICTORY IN ELEPHANT IMPORT LAWSUIT**

*S. Comus*  
*SCI*

Chalk-up a win for Safari Club International and National Rifle Association of America in the continuing saga of the elephant trophy import question.

The road to complete victory continues, but SCI and the NRA have forced the government to do real fact-finding and not react to emotion from the antihunters. Although the ban on imports remains in effect until the government finishes its rule-making, SCI, the NRA and other hunting organizations now have a chance to get the real story of hunting-based sustainable use conservation on the table.

SCI and NRA received excellent news Dec. 22 from the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals. The court ruled in favor on a key claim in SCI's and NRA's 2014 elephant importation litigation. In that case, SCI and NRA sued the previous administration for imposing on April 4, 2014 an abrupt ban on elephant importation from Zimbabwe.

In its 33-page opinion, the D.C. Circuit reversed an earlier unfavorable ruling issued by the lower court. The appellate court ruled that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) should have conducted notice and comment rulemaking before abandoning almost two decades of a formal position that the import of legally hunted trophies enhanced the survival of the African elephants in Zimbabwe.

The FWS had adopted negative enhancement findings for elephants harvested in 2014 and 2015. SCI and NRA sued, at least in part, because the FWS's negative findings prevented U.S. hunters from importing Zimbabwe elephants harvested in those years.

Although the court determined that the previous administration had acted illegally, it will take some time before we know the effect the ruling will have on the ability of individuals to import elephants from Zimbabwe.

It is also uncertain how the FWS will respond to the court's ruling and how long the entire process could take if and when the FWS engages in further rulemaking on the importation of elephants harvested in Zimbabwe in 2014 and 2015. It is possible that the government will decide not to do anything, but that opens the door for hunting organizations to file petitions to try to force the government to propose a rule to lift the ban. Questions also remain about how this ruling will affect the decision-making process for the importation of other species for which the FWS has made or will make enhancement findings.

While some things about the practical impact of the ruling remain in question – there is no question that the D.C. Circuit's ruling is a victory for SCI, NRA and all those who recognize that hunting plays an essential role in conserving Africa's wildlife. The court's opinion requires the FWS to include the public, including the hunting public, in the process of decision-making that affects the importation of legally-hunted wildlife.

Hunters and organizations like SCI and NRA will be able to provide information about the role that hunting plays in species management and conservation. The FWS will not be able to impose uninformed, abrupt importation bans, like it did in 2014.

SCI and NRA will continue to provide additional information as it becomes available.

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## **A WEDDING, SOME PLAINS GAME AND HUMAN CONNECTION IN THE MOST UNLIKELY PLACES**

***By Jen “The Archer” Cordaro - Benedet  
SSC Member***

I’ve often heard people say that once you hunt in Africa, you’ll do almost anything to go back again. Like it’s some sort of magically captivating place that grabs hold of the depths of your soul. I’ll be the first to admit that even as a well-travelled person, I was always skeptical of those people. I never thought I’d end up hunting on the African continent—it’s not really of interest to me, or so I thought.

In May of 2016, my fiancé Vince and I were at a fundraising dinner that I had helped to organize. I was running around the dinner doing things on the backend while the live auction was going on. When I had a chance to stop by the table that Vince and his friends were at, he handed me a receipt and said, “We’re going to Africa!” I looked at him with uncertainty as if he were playing a joke on me. I grabbed the paper, looked at it and said with both anger and excitement, “Are you kidding me?!? You bid on this? Our down payment on the house is due next week!” I could have strangled him. He just laughed....

Fast forward to October 2017, we had finally arranged our trip to Namibia for a 7-day plains game hunt. We wanted the trip to be our honeymoon but the only problem was, we weren’t



married yet. So, on a whim we found a Namibian wedding planner named Pam on Facebook and hired her. We wired her some money, not knowing if we'd ever see it again, and hoped for the best. Our only instructions to her: "Please plan a wedding on October 11th for two in the outdoors with a romantic dinner to follow. There will be no guests and we'd like to just show up—stress free. There is one more thing, we arrive late afternoon on the 10<sup>th</sup> and leave the morning of the 12th. We have faith that you'll plan something beautiful and simple."

Pam, a thin young woman, maybe 25 years old, picked us up from the airport in Windhoek, the capital of Namibia. She handed me a dozen roses and drove us to a hotel room that she had picked out and decorated so we could drop our luggage. She quickly swooped us off to the Office of Home Affairs where we'd seek permission to marry. We were told that no one was in the office and to come back tomorrow at 9am. The next morning, Pam arrived at our room and we went back to the office. This time, we waited for some time to see someone and eventually we were told (firmly I might add) to come back later, around 3pm only one-hour before our wedding ceremony. We left the office unenthusiastically. We arrived back at the hotel and Pam asked her team to come and do my hair, makeup, and get us ready for a wedding that we were uncertain would happen. At 3pm, in full wedding hair and makeup, we return to the Office of Home Affairs—everyone was staring at me and it was more than awkward.

Mr. Shekale, a large stout man in charge of our interview kept asking us with a skeptical expression, "Why are you getting married in Namibia and what are you running from? Do your parents know you are here?" He kept on with impossible questions to answer with proof. Mr. Shekale asked for copies of the wedding invitation, copies of the reception activities—all things we couldn't produce in a wedding for two, with no guests. I offered to show him our well-wishes from our parents on Facebook as proof that we weren't running and that our families knew about the ceremony. With a raised eyebrow, he glanced at our phone screens and immediately demanded copies of everything, including our social media walls, to show proof that we were not in fact running away from the law or our family—like a modern-day Bonnie and Clyde. Pam ran to the printers down the street to have copies of our passports, our visa stamps, our social media accounts, our flight itinerary, our hunting contract, all printed. We sat across from Mr. Shekale's office in the drab hallway of the half-dilapidated building waiting for her return. After about 15 minutes Mr. Shekale came out of his office and started impatiently saying he didn't have time for this and the wedding planner should have already had copies of everything for him—that she wasn't doing her job and our inability to have a wedding should be blamed on her. He shut his office door and left. My heart sank. The time was now 3:45pm.

It seemed like getting permission was going to be impossible. A few minutes later Mr. Shekale returned to his office and called us in. We handed him the copies and he shuffled through them and set them down. He pulled up the Namibian laws and started reading them aloud. He now wanted us to produce documents that the United States doesn't use, like a police clearance to marry. When we told him that our country doesn't use that document and that all we had was the international apostille validating our marriage license, he responded with a straight face and loud voice, "So you think just because you are from a Superpower country that you can do what you want? This is Africa! Your rules don't apply here. You cannot marry without these things. It's Namibian law. Are you asking me to break the law? If you don't have these things, you cannot marry." He was very stern and very bothered by the fact that we were still sitting in his office in that moment. So much for a stress-free wedding day. The truth of the matter was that we really didn't need his permission because we could have had the ceremony and just gotten our official paperwork in California when we returned—like most people. But, we aren't most people and apparently, I'm a sucker for crazy experiences.

As he continued berating us, he started filling out a piece of paper on his desk. He kept on about how we were ineligible to marry in Namibia and how we should be mad at people other than him about the situation. We weren't mad though, slightly disappointed and annoyed at this point, but not mad. As all of the commotion continued I could feel the heat swelling in my face, the pressure behind my eyes building. Uh-oh, stress tears are coming and I can't do anything to stop them. Low and behold he stops talking, looks at me and says, "Why is she crying? It's her wedding day" and hands us the paperwork he was filling out—our permission to be married in Namibia. Talk about a swift change of heart! We still don't know what made Mr. Shekale change his mind on giving us permission, but we weren't about to ask either.

We were married on October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2017 at Avis Dam just outside of Windhoek, Namibia at sunset after only being in Africa for 24 hours. The wedding was beautiful, set among the rolling foothills and backed by a waterhole that appeared to come straight out of National Geographic. The coolest part? We got legally married in Namibia, as two foreigners, with an official Namibian wedding certificate which is unheard of according to Mr. Shekale. We left a handwritten thank you note for Mr. Shekale at the Office of Home Affairs. It's crazy how one person can change the course of history. For us, that was Mr. Shekale.



The next morning at 10am Thormahlen & Cochran Safaris picked us up from our hotel in Windhoek. We had about an 8-hour drive ahead of us to get to the Anabeb Conservancy in Northern Namibia. After two vehicle changes, a flat tire, and 3 hours on a dirt road, we saw lights in the near distance. We had arrived. Vince and I were greeted by the camp staff and taken to our tent to unpack and settle in. The camp staff got wind that we were married the day before and had decorated our tent with dried rose petals, a card, and some chocolate—a very sweet sentiment and completely unexpected. Vince and I were both glad to have finally made it to a remote area, outside of the city, back into our comfort zone of peace and quiet and the outdoors. After we unpacked, we walked out to the fire pit, surrounded by the giant African mopane trees and enjoyed the stars, the sounds of the Namibian bush, and each other's company as husband and wife.



As daylight broke, Vince and I double checked to make sure our bows were still sighted in with all the travel and banging around they experienced. Our Professional Hunter (PH), Chris, also wanted to make sure we were proficient before hunting. We had an audience of about 6 people at the camp who looked amazed that we were shooting out to 60 yards. I couldn't understand why they were so amazed—it seemed so normal and routine to me to check our equipment before a hunt. The PH explained, “We’ve only had one other bowhunter out here at this camp and he couldn’t hit the target at 30 yards”. He went on to say that I was the first female hunter they’ve ever had at that camp and that the staff had never seen a woman shoot a rifle, let alone a bow. “It’s a pretty cool thing, you know?”, Chris said with a smile.

We grabbed our stuff and took off for our first hunt. Throughout the next 6 days we would hunt for Hartman Zebra, springbuck, kudu, warthog, Gemsbuck, and ostrich for trophy and then help the local concession to fill their community tags for zebra, springbuck and ostrich. We spotted and stalked our hearts out through the open plains of Northern Namibia with our bows—completely wild and open bushland that went on for hundreds of miles. The scenery was breathtaking and the water-colored sunsets seemed fake over the red dirt in the horizon. The bone chilling sound of baboon congresses echoed in the distance as they ran over the hill tops and disappeared at what seemed like every turn. Watching the clumsy looking giraffes and speedy ostriches run across the flat, open plains was like watching a cartoon in real life. I’m still not sure which is more fun to watch run.





I asked a lot of questions to our PH, tracker, skinner, and game guard. We learned so much about the how hunting is regulated with some amazing wildlife management practices, how hunting supports the local economy in so many ways, how their permit (tag) process works, and how their meat delivery system is set up to benefit as many people in the concession as possible. During the time we were there, we employed more than 35 people who used the money they received for farming, school, and improving their houses. The meat from our trophies and community hunts fed dozens of families. These communities don't have access to grocery stores nearby and don't necessarily have the resources to hunt their own game on the permits they are granted from the government. They make money by leasing their land and selling their permits to the safari company who then sells their permits to hunters via "trophy fees"—the same number of permits are issued for animals in a concession no matter who hunts them. The concession gets the meat from the animals regardless if they use their resources, like the one truck and one gun they might have for an entire concession from the government (similar to California county areas), or if foreigners hunt for them. The difference is, if they go into business with the safari companies and others hunt for them, they receive the money and the meat, which increases their wealth while saving their effort and resources—a smart economic plan to increase the concessions well-being.

At the end of our week we gathered up the SCI Blue Bag that was filled by us, the Sacramento SCI Chapter, Shasta College Athletics Department, a few friends, and brought it to a rural elementary boarding school in a nearby concession area. The kids came out of their classrooms and makeshift tented rooms to receive the bag. They asked us to take everything out one by one and show the kids, so we complied. The kids tried to hide their smiles as they saw all the basketballs, footballs, soccer balls, and school supplies! The teachers were excited we were hunters and told us that they need more meat for the school because the kids primarily eat cornmeal-based porridge (which by the way tastes like flavorless gelatinous glue!). We were asked if we'd be willing to hunt for the school. Unfortunately, we were near the end of our trip but we agreed to pass on the information to our PH to see if he'll talk to the concession about different meat distribution options. The kids sang their school songs to us as we departed—a very sweet and memorable experience to say the least. I'm not sure who was impacted the most by this experience, the school or us, but I think it's a fair bet to say that it was probably us.





After our week at camp concluded, Vince and I were content and our hearts fulfilled. It was like we had spent a week detoxing our minds and bodies. Life is raw, uncomplicated, authentic, and full of strong community facing the reality of life and survival head-on in the Anabeb Conservancy. No one cares what brand your optics are, what kind of knife you're using, what the latest and greatest is in the industry, or what your photos look like for your social media boost. There is no internet, limited cell service, and no such thing as a new tire. There is however, each other and sometimes that's all you need—Anabeb Conservancy was a good reminder of that for me. It was really amazing for Vince and I to be able to share and teach our hunting skills as archers and for our hunting group to be able to share their African animal hunting skills with us. The positive exchange of information and skill sets was beautiful and it was all we needed to be successful.

At the end of the week we were driven back to the Windhoek airport where we asked to stop at a building supply store. Vince and I had noticed that our game guard's livestock fence around his home was not completed. When we asked around about it, we found out that he had been saving his tips for a couple of years to buy the materials from Windhoek to finish it. He was only one roll of wire short to complete it. So, we bought it for him and sent it back up north with the safari company since he had been such an amazing person to hunt alongside. We hope it's useful to him and that he can now successfully keep the goats from coming into his house. We look forward to seeing his new fence the next time we come because there will be a next time...

I never thought I'd hunt in Africa. I wasn't against it but it just seemed so pretentious to me—like some kind of unnecessary assertion of wealth. My own assumptions, no doubt fed and informed by media and though I don't want to admit it—the American hunting community too. I was so far off about hunting in Africa it's unbelievable. As a hunter, I had reservations about hunting in Africa because the information I had access to stateside was either too regurgitated or performed from the hunting community or was displayed in a way that said, "look at ME! I took down 12 animals! Isn't MY life awesome?!?" and was sold as a narcissistic packaged vacation. Hunting in Africa seemed so manufactured and unauthentic to me before this trip.

I've had many conversations with people leading up to this trip questioning my morals, ethics, purpose, intent, and character—hunters and non-hunters. With all the untruthful, sensationalized media out to grab attention and point the finger at hunters for everything and anything, we have a hard road to travel. But, as a hunter who knows others who have gone to Africa to hunt, even I had my own skepticisms about my purpose and intent for hunting outside of my own local forests. Why was I going and how would this enrich the world? I didn't know, well, except that we had won the trip (of which I still blame Vince for) ...but I went anyway. As I got on that plane to go to Namibia, I felt like I had succumbed to my own negative judgements and joined

an elite class of narcissistic hunters that would exploit exotic communities and animals for trophy—not at all what I wanted to be or portray in my life.

Before leaving on this trip to Namibia, I was really nervous about how I might change as a hunter...how I might become Jen “the African trophy hunter”—what I thought was far from my original path as someone who just wanted to live sustainably as a “recovering vegetarian”. Here’s the thing, life is fluid and as a millennial, educated, former-vegetarian, female hunter from the city, my beliefs and values are probably pretty different from a lot of other hunters—but I would bet that they’re pretty congruent with most other millennials from the city, both hunters-in-hiding (what I call the more liberal hunters) and non-hunters. I didn’t grow up hunting and I didn’t even know anyone who hunted until the last 5 years. All the information I know about hunting has come from the hunting community. You all teach me (and other hunters) every day, what I should think, how I should act, what I should say when crisis arises about morals, ethics, and hunting. It’s not to say I don’t do my own research as an academic and have my own thoughts but largely in social situations where issues the hunting community faces appear, like hunting in Africa, my ammo is coming from you because I didn’t have the experience or the stories to talk. That is a lot of responsibility for all of us to take on—being the source of information for others, albeit perhaps unknown responsibility. I was skeptical about hunting in Africa. However, I am thankful that I went because I found an experience that was far different from the narrative I heard and saw in our own community about hunting in Africa. We all have stories, whether it be about duck hunting in California, fishing in Alaska, or hunting the Big 5 in Africa. Those stories have an impact and depending on how we tell them and what we focus on, they make a difference for the future of our outdoor lifestyles. We are all teachers and we are all learning from one another trying to figure out what our future as a community looks like. My experience in Namibia was one that I’d be proud to share. Every time I talk about it, a different story from a different day comes out and together they all paint a picture of our wedding, some plains game, and human connection in the most unlikely places.

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## **HUNTER’S CORNER**

Hunters Corner: Adventures in Texas at Starry Night Ranch



By Grant Carson  
Columnist

An adventurous and exciting 2018 to all my SSC friends! This month’s hunter’s corner spotlight hunter is none other than me! This past December, I set out on an adventure to the Lone Star State on my first deer hunt at Starry Night Ranch. Let’s dive into the story.

While interviewing people at last year’s banquet, an SSC’er introduced me to Robert Emmons, owner and manager of Starry Night Ranch, and a lifetime member of SCI. We

instantly connected, and soon thereafter set up a trip for myself, Dad, and Mom for December. When some moons had passed, it was time for our Texas adventure!

We decided to call this hunt “classic” themed, and choose a fitting rifle. I was thrilled that Dad bestowed upon me the honor of using his early 1970’s Remington model 700 BDL .270 Winchester rifle. Dad’s first big game rifle became my first North American big game “arm of harvest,” as I call it. Dad and Mom shared the other classic, a Ruger M77 7mm Remington Magnum, from the early 70’s too. These retro firearms were “fueled” by hand loaded cartridges with Nosler partitions and Hodgdon H4831SC, the modern version of the old, reliable military surplus powder. To note the special year, Hodgdon celebrated their 70th year as a company in 2017! While modern innovations in gun manufacturing and ballistics have produced long range custom rifles and high velocity custom rounds, a classic firearm with classic configurations of powder and bullets does the job excellently, as will be shown later in the story!

Throughout the week of hunting, I enjoyed learning about the history, goals, and management practices of the family-run ranch. Robert and his wife Pam provide a non-commercial, custom-tailored experience for their clients. Fulfilling the SCI goal of involving next-generation youth hunters, Robert provides special youth-friendly hunt packages. He also partners with charitable organizations promoting adventures for wounded veterans, the terminally ill, and youth, while also donating game meat to a local food bank.

I was fascinated to learn about the science of wildlife management. Ranch Biologist Leif Henderson, who formerly worked for Texas Parks and Wildlife, has developed a management plan which rapidly produces quality deer, tightly controlling age, competition for forage, and other factors. I summarize these practices into a “growth triangle,” which contains three crucial factors: genetics, nutrition, and age. Basing management practices on this model, Robert has every class of whitetail deer to hunt, from meat management to world-class SCI trophy.

Time for the hunt! On the first morning of the hunt, Robert, my parents, and I headed out in the Polaris to Lone Star blind (yes, all the blinds are named!). Seeing whitetail antics up close for the first time was thrilling! With no deer down that morning, we regrouped, and headed back out to another blind that night. Since the hunt demands stillness and quiet by patient hunters in a blind, I was able to soak up the scenery. The vast expanse of hill country and vivid sunsets were reminiscent of the plains and forests of Africa on my safari in 2015. Finally, after a very long day, we enjoyed a good night’s sleep at the lodge.

The next day, we switched our quarry, I was after blackbuck. A surprise gift from my parents, a blackbuck hunt had been my dream for nearly a decade. A mature buck’s coat develops a rich black color, its horns reminiscent of African spiral horns. Native to India, Nepal, and Pakistan, this species has become a common exotic in Texas. For me personally, common exotics in Texas make the hunt unpredictable, mixing in some African spice - always seeing a new species around the bush! After making tracks to frequented areas, spooking some of these elusive creatures, we finally spotted a herd with a mature buck, and waited behind a cluster of trees, setting up the shooting sticks in the perfect ambush spot. Now, the key to conquering this species: waiting. Time seemed to tick at a fast pace, yet a watch hand would seem to tick too slowly; the excitement and uncertainty of every moment was truly energizing.



All of the sudden, Dad shouted in a whisper, “There he is, there he is!” I mounted the beautiful stock of the 700 to my shoulder like a magnet and expertly aligned the scope with the emerged target: a beautiful, mature buck, with the smooth white on the belly contrasting with the sleek black coat on the back, all towered over by solid, swirling horns with the majesty of a medieval towers - a true trophy. In an instant, I fired, and in the next instant, trophy down! A perfect 120-yard quartering shot done in a split second. It is always nice to anchor the game. All the exciting tenseness of waiting now exploded in uncontainable expressions of congratulations and happiness. Running up to the downed creature, awesome trophy photos were taken, capturing me with my glistening 270 in one hand and a majestic exotic in the other. Dream fulfilled.

Viewing elusive big bucks with massive antlers in person was exhilarating to experience after watching show after show on TV. Every spotting built the suspense of the hunt, and made me more excited to find our targeted class of trophy, a healthy, medium sized management buck. At most blinds there was considerable movement; my buck could be around the next bush!

On the third morning, Robert, Dad, and I were patiently hunting in the blind. I say hunting, not waiting, because being in a blind does not mean being passive. Constantly scanning and glassing the environment for signs and movement while monitoring the wind, we developed strategies to call, use scent, rattle antlers, or be extra still. While the three of us were enjoying this process, a reverberating pop whipped through the air! Mom had fired from her blind with Pam a mile or so away. We drove to meet her, and after tracking for about fifty yards, we found a beautiful management class 11-point basket buck! A fantastic trophy for an eager huntress taken by one clean shot with the 7mm. Congrats Mom - meat for the freezer, a mount for the wall, the experience to share with friends, and the memory to last a lifetime! That same night, Dad bagged a good-sized management buck with attractively strange “antlers” - they looked like they belonged on a roe deer!





Now the focus was exclusively on my targeted deer. Scouting out a highly frequented game trail, we set up a camouflaged pop-up blind about fifty yards from the high-traffic area, a perfect ambush spot! Letting the area rest for hours, we snuck into the blind a couple hours before sunset, the peak time for deer activity. This was the place to be! We were visited by enormous bruisers and investigated by cautious does until finally, Dad peeked out the corner of the blind to see a magnificent medium-class 9-point buck walking right next to the blind. With a wary warning stomp, the buck proceeded into the open area where I could get a shot. Robert analyzed, and concluded to take the shot! Tapping me on the shoulder to confirm, I felt a surge of buck fever - a thrill I thought I was immune to. But no, seeing this buck broadside was a rush of excitement. Steadying myself, I slowly crept the .270 onto the sticks, aimed behind the shoulder in the target pocket, and fired! Buck down! We celebrated coming out of the blind and running up to the buck, captured unforgettable trophy photos, and packed the harvest in the Polaris. His meat will feed us for quite some time. I finally got the deer of my dreams!



The adventure with my family at Starry Night Ranch fulfilled many dreams. Every adventure has unique turns, surprises, and outcomes, and on this “safari,” dreams came true in a way I could never have imagined! I felt like a sponge, surrounded by the adventure, natural beauty, majestic trophies, and loving family (my parents and new “family” of Robert and Pam),

soaking up one moment at a time and giving praise to God. Whether gripping the sleek stock of “my” vintage rifle in pursuit of a trophy, sitting on the porch singing music in my mind, or gazing up on a brisk night at the countless lights of majesty named in the ranch’s title, I had an unforgettable, memorable, dream-fulfilling adventure of a lifetime.

To set up your hunting adventure at Starry Night Ranch, contact Robert Emmons:

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