

THE WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS HUNT AND TOY, AND THE BIRTH OF FAIR CHASE

In Colonial America, there were few regulations regarding fish and wildlife. Our nation's founders had the vision to set up a system of conservation, hunting, and fishing vastly different from what had existed in Scotland, England, and the other countries where the early settlers came from. There, kings owned the fish and wildlife and the rights to take them.

Early in our nation's history, our Supreme Court ruled that this "property" that once belonged to the king was now owned by the people—and equally—that they be held in the public trust. This eventually led to our current system of hunting and fishing and the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. However, people were free to kill and sell wildlife, resulting in a major decline in their populations. Our nation, for example, lost the passenger pigeon and drove countless other species to the brink. The whitetail deer population in my home state of Mississippi dwindled to approximately 1,500 animals, compared to approximately 1.5 million today.

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— Norman Schwarzkopf, Boone and Crockett Member

Concerned hunters took notice. In 1887, Theodore Roosevelt (TR) and others started the Boone and Crockett Club. Conserving big game and furthering policy for those purposes were its main tasks. It is North America's oldest conservation organization. The Club saw a crisis in humanity's impact on wildlife and their habitats and called citizens to action to change America's direction. TR and others led the way and created a system of conservation that is now the envy of the world.

These early leaders in the conservation movement initially focused on protecting wild places and impeding the killing of fish and wildlife for markets. They shaped the conservation policies of North America and developed the cornerstones of the conservation movement, including the creation and establishment of the National Forest System, National Park System, National Wildlife Refuge System, and the federal agencies to oversee those systems. In addition, the Club established modern-day game laws such as seasons and bag limits to allow taking

while sustaining fish and wildlife populations.

The founders and early leaders of the Boone and Crockett Club viewed how we pursue wildlife as equally important as conserving them. Wildlife must be given the chance of escape—that's called fair chase. In case you don't know the story, it made national news when TR and Holt Collier hunted black bears in the vast swamps of the Mississippi Delta, and TR refused to shoot a defenseless bear.

In 1902 TR traveled south to settle a border line dispute between Louisiana and Mississippi. While there—as many of us are keen to do—he mixed business with pleasure and hunted black bears in the Delta, my home region, which is a vast floodplain of the Mississippi River. In his book *God Shakes Creation*, David Cohn writes that the Mississippi Delta begins in the lobby of the Peabody Hotel in Memphis, Tennessee, and ends at Catfish Row in Vicksburg, Mississippi.

During the hunt, a renowned bear hunter and African American guide, Holt Collier, pursued a bear on horseback, lassoed it, and clubbed it with his rifle. Tying the bear to a tree, Collier badly wanted TR to kill the bear, as he wanted him to have a successful hunt. Upon arriving, President Roosevelt refused to kill the defenseless bear. His reasons? He had made no effort to hunt the bear himself, nor was there any way for the bear to escape.

The accompanying press covered the story. A political cartoon depicting the event ran in the *Washington Post*, and a shopkeeper in



James L. Cummins
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Brooklyn, New York, had the idea to market stuffed bears and call them Teddy's Bear. He telegraphed President Roosevelt to get permission to name the bear after him, and he agreed. This event gave birth to the most famous toy in the world, as tens of millions of Teddy Bears are sold annually. The Teddy Bear is also the official toy of the state of Mississippi. This hunt brought attention to a new kind of hunting in which sportsmen and women replaced outright killers. This event, often considered the most famous hunt to have taken place on American soil, was the birth of fair chase.

In 1936, Collier died and was buried at Live Oak Cemetery in Greenville, Mississippi, initially in an unmarked grave, then later a single headstone was erected. The cemetery sits on land previously occupied by Plum Ridge Plantation, owned by the Hinds family. The remains of Holt Collier, a formerly enslaved person at Plum Ridge, are interred here. A few of my friends and I raised funds from a small group of local Holt Collier fans and renovated his gravesite with the family's permission. It now includes a 4-foot by 2-foot bronze plaque with a detailed inscription describing Collier's life, which lies atop his grave. The plaque sits on a brick foundation. The gravesite is bordered by a wrought-iron fence just over two feet high. We also worked to place this historic cemetery on the National Register of Historic



When President Theodore Roosevelt traveled to the South to settle a border line dispute with officials from Louisiana and Mississippi, he did a little bear hunting. His guide was Holt Collier.

Places. This landmark designation will make it much easier to raise grant funds and take care of a cemetery where one of my heroes—Holt Collier—is buried.

In 2004, the Club worked to establish the Holt Collier National Wildlife Refuge in his honor. It is the nation's only National Wildlife Refuge, among 500, named for an African American. It is also the only refuge named for a guide—and a great one at that. TR once said, "Holt Collier is the greatest hunter and guide I have ever known." In 2008, Holt Collier was inducted into the National Multicultural Western Heritage Museum and Hall of Fame in Fort Worth, Texas, and a larger-than-life bronze monument of him on horseback was erected in his honor in Waco. Collier was a sharpshooter and cavalryman in the 9th Texas Cavalry, starting at age 14. Collier was the subject of a book, *Holt Collier: His Life, His Roosevelt Hunts, and the Origin of the Teddy*

Bear. Also, Sam Fathers, a character in William Faulkner's 1955 collection of stories *Big Woods*, is thought to have been based on Collier.

We are fortunate to live in a country where those who came before us set up the system we have today. Former Boone and Crockett Club member Norman Schwarzkopf said, "What people don't understand is this is something that we only have in America. There is no other country in the world where an ordinary citizen can go out and enjoy hunting and fishing. There is no other nation in the world where that happens. And it is very much a part of our heritage."

As hunters, we must always remember what General Schwarzkopf said. As our founders established, fish and wildlife belong to the people, and hunting and fishing are privileges. How people view these activities will determine their future. Jim Posewitz, in his book *Beyond Fair Chase*, defines

an ethical hunter as "A person who knows and respects the animals hunted, follows the law, and behaves in a way that will satisfy what society expects of him or her as hunter." Unfortunately, there are many smart people today who say hunting should end. "Poachers" and game hogs are giving hunting and fishing a bad name and are jeopardizing hunting's future existence.

Taking care of fish and wildlife resources is a great moral responsibility, and how hunters and anglers are perceived will determine the future of hunting and fishing. Many of us in the Boone and Crockett Club have dedicated our lives to ensuring future generations of Americans have the same opportunities to enjoy them as we all have today.

The Club has made notable progress in conserving North America's natural



THE BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB ASKS THAT YOU PLEASE THANK OUR TRAILBLAZERS WITH YOUR PATRONAGE.

Read more about TR's black bear hunt and Holt Collier on page 28.

resources since we were formed 137 years ago by enabling the protection, restoration, and enhancement of hundreds of millions of acres of land, including Holt's and TR's historic Lower Mississippi River Valley hunting grounds. We haven't done it alone, working with a community of like-minded people, private landowners, other organizations, and government agencies.

And, with 80 percent of Americans now living in urban areas—farther from natural spaces—our challenge now is to help people maintain enough of a connection to the land and the natural world to care about it and see it as essential to their well-being.

Thankfully, many Americans value outdoor experiences. Today, more Americans care about healthy fish and wildlife populations and functioning natural systems than at any other time in our nation's history. They believe, as I do, that we all share a responsibility to conserve them for present and future generations. Our approach is to help people see that conservation often makes common sense and economic sense. We do that by working with government agencies, policy leaders, and businesses to create incentives to protect water quality, conserve natural habitats, and even use natural systems to reverse the effects of a changing climate.

The Boone and Crockett Club believes that it is not enough to preach that we all have an unquestionable responsibility to conserve the fish and wildlife resources around us; we must practice it too. This includes regulated hunting and fishing. But it does not include the illegal and senseless taking of our natural resources. Posewitz once said, "A society or culture is ultimately measured not by what it develops or consumes, but rather by what

it has nurtured and preserved." That's what this great Club has done through its selfless and steadfast actions to make North America a better place to live, work, and raise a family by preventing a few "bad apples" from stealing from the public trust.

But what keeps me, and the entire Boone and Crockett leadership and staff, up late at night is worrying about how to keep the world's greatest system of hunting and conservation healthy for the next 137 years. Especially with all of the political, economic, social, technological, and environmental changes we are experiencing.

Keeping this system healthy has never been easy. Is it worth all the effort, resources, and energy? Before you answer, think about life without hunting and fishing, which was almost a reality. Now think about how this great system of conservation and fair chase hunting was created largely thanks to a handful of concerned sportsmen and women. I have to believe Holt and TR would be proud of what has been done. ■

Jan F. Cannon



In western Mississippi, close to where Louisiana, Arkansas, and Mississippi meet, sits both the Holt Collier and Theodore Roosevelt National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). Roosevelt was largely responsible for creating the nation's National Wildlife Refuge System.

