

B&C PROFESSORS' CORNER



Jordan Pusateri Burroughs

PROFESSIONAL MEMBER
Boone & Crockett Wildlife
Extension Specialist,
Michigan State University

Adult-Onset Hunters

Hello my name is Jordan Burroughs and I am an adult-onset hunter.

Believe it or not, I am a wildlife biologist, B&C Professional Member, B&C Extension Specialist, and I did not grow up hunting.

As a budding wildlife biologist, I wanted to better understand the stakeholders (i.e., hunters) I might work with during my career, so I enrolled in Missouri's hunter safety program (still unsure whether I would ever actually hunt). There on a cool September day, I sat in a hunter education room with fifteen 11 to 14-year-old boys and their dads. Talk about being intimidated and feeling out of your element. Everyone, except me, was dressed in their blaze orange and/or camo including the instructors. Little did anyone know that I didn't own a shred of camo or blaze orange.

During the two-day session, we spent considerable time learning how firearms work, the proper ways to handle firearms, hunter responsibilities and ethics, Missouri-specific hunting rules and regulations, and an overview of wildlife conservation and management.

All of my classmates handled the firearms with ease and confidence. I, on the other hand, was embarrassed that I had never touched a firearm and fumbled my way through the proper handling exercises. I could have sworn my instructor was speaking a different language when he starting talking

how or teach me the other skills and techniques necessary to succeed as a hunter. I didn't grow up in a hunting family and wasn't sure where to go next to learn the skills necessary to be successful in the field. I felt like I had just completed a cooking class, but didn't own a single cooking utensil or even have an oven and yet I was expected to prepare a beef Wellington.

A dozen or so years have passed since I took hunter safety and a lot has changed. Many states have restructured their programs to include a field-based, hands-on learning opportunity. The field day component allows students to learn and demonstrate safe handling of firearms, often includes live fire at a range, and concludes with a mandatory exam.

Today, technology plays an enormous role in hunter safety from the explosion of online hunter safety education options to virtual shooting experiences (e.g., laser shot hunting simulators). Many, if not all, states offer an online hunter education component as part of their overall hunter safety training. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission has partnered with Florida

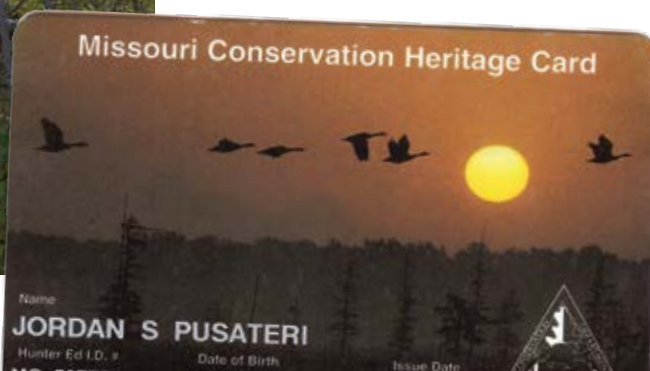
Virtual School (the nation's first and largest online public school district) to offer high school students the opportunity to complete their hunter safety and boater safety certification while earning 0.5 credit for high school. The course incorporates both online and outdoor learning. Minnesota and Iowa were the first states to offer an adults-only, online firearm safety option. Their courses increase certification accessibility to working adults who traditionally have conflicts scheduling a multi-week classroom course.

Traditionally, the natural path to become a hunter is from a family that hunts. Like me, more and more new adult hunters are joining the hunting ranks for other reasons besides family tradition. Across the country we are seeing initiation into hunting for adults who missed the natural path but

Across the country we are seeing initiation into hunting for adults who missed the natural path but have an interest in sustainably harvested food, healthy living and eating local.

about wads, cartridges, pellets, gauge size, and caliber. Looking around the room at my youthful classmates, I was the only one who appeared befuddled. My memory is foggy, but I vaguely remember seeing a demonstration of how fast black powder burns, yet I don't recall ever shooting a firearm as part of my class. And yet 12 hours after starting the class, I aced my hunter safety exam. A few short weeks later, I received my hunter safety card in the mail. To this day, I still carry my Missouri Conservation Heritage card next to my library card and ATM card in my wallet as my rite of passage.

Technically, I was certified to purchase a hunting license, but still I had never shot a firearm. Huh? What's wrong with this picture? I had never shot a firearm, and I couldn't think of anyone who could show me



Jordan is a natural in a treestand, and to this day still carries her Missouri Conservation Heritage card in her wallet as a rite of passage.

have an interest in sustainably harvested food, healthy living, and eating local. The phrase adult-onset hunter was coined by my friend and colleague, Tovar Cerulli, in his book, *The Mindful Carnivore*.

After completing hunter safety education, many adults from non-hunting families are hard-pressed to find someone to take them under his/her wing and teach them how to hunt. Sure these adults know how to safely and properly handle a firearm, but what do they know about the animal's biology and behavior? Do they know how to scout for a good hunting spot? What do they know about hunting ethics and responsibility? Hunting gear? Calling game? Oh yeah—and what happens next should they successfully harvest an animal? Can you even learn how to field dress an animal from a book?

Several state agencies have answered the call to provide hands-on hunting instruction, tools, and experiences to teach adults, new to hunting, how to hunt. Wisconsin's Department of Natural Resources offers Learn to Hunt Programs that teach hunting basics and allows beginning hunters to experience a high quality, first-time hunt with an experienced mentor. Several other states are following Wisconsin's example by offering a variety of other learn-to-hunt programs

with species-specific hunting classes (e.g., deer, turkey, big game, waterfowl) and clinics that focus on a specific type of hunting equipment (e.g., handguns, crossbows).

As the pioneers of conservation, what can we do to pass on our hunting ethic and heritage to a new generation of hunters and conservationists? What can we, as Boone and Crockett Club Members, associates, and partners, do to help build the foundation and serve as a social network to help recruit new hunters (young and old) into our hunting tradition? The most obvious answer based on my experience is to serve as a hunting buddy/mentor for one of the adults that are being churned out of the various states' Learn to Hunt programs. As I mentioned, Learn to Hunt programs typically culminate in a trial hunt experience. This is the point where state agencies need to be able to hand these folks off to experienced, ethical hunters—like those affiliated with the Boone and Crockett Club, who can perform the role that many of your parents and grandparents served in your own recruitment into hunting. As the Club's founder, Theodore Roosevelt, so eloquently stated, "Those of us privileged to take to the field are entrusted by fate and circumstance to hold and nurture the hunter's legacy." ■

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