

Teaching our children to respect wildlife and enjoy the outdoors is a major responsibility of all parents. Whether or not the children become hunters shouldn't be a concern.

Having been blessed with two wonderful daughters, I absolutely relished the time spent outdoors teaching them to identify trees, wildlife and animal tracks. We spent considerable time along streams observing layers of soil in eroded banks, animal tracks on mud bars and vegetation growing along the edges. Occasionally, one of my children would accompany me hunting. I enjoyed these times so much that I didn't realize what I was doing for my daughters.

My older daughter although not a hunter, is now a science teacher entirely devoted to the outdoors, and participates in many Alabama Project Wild workshops. I've never been disappointed that she didn't become a hunter. She understands wildlife management principles and the importance of ethical hunting.

My younger daughter, graduating this year from the University of Alabama with a degree in ecology and a minor in geology, also grew up understanding wildlife management theories. Her interests during our earlier outings were directed toward the streams and

various wildlife species we encountered. She grew up enjoying hunting and wildlife watching. At age 13, she accompanied me on a turkey hunt and became "hooked" after harvesting a fine 18-1/2 pound gobbler. Although the turkey was close enough for a shot, she would not shoot (even after I whispered, "Shoot!") until there were absolutely no twigs or leaves between her gun barrel and the turkey's head. I was a nervous wreck! Fifteen steps!



GENE AND HIS DAUGHTER, ALICIA, WITH HER FIRST TURKEY TAKEN IN 1987.

leave until dark. We were hunting on land under the Alabama Cooperative Deer Management Assistance Program and had with us an antlerless deer tag. But she didn't want to shoot that big antlerless deer that came out of the swamp to feed about an hour after we got in the blind. We watched her with binoculars, and soon she was joined by two spike-antlered deer. Still, my daughter wouldn't shoot!

"I want an eight-pointer, Daddy," she said. I told her if she got an eight-point buck, I'd have it mounted for her 21st birthday in February.

About thirty minutes before dark we heard a deer walking in the leaves off to our right. The deer walked into the field and we saw that it was a nice, high-racked four-pointer. Still, she waited. Soon we heard what sounded like a herd of hogs walking in the dry, winter leaves. One by one, three more bucks walked into the field about 50 yards from our blind. The first was a long cowhorn, then two seven-pointers. I told her to shoot the last one since he was large with heavy antlers. Her reply was a flat, "No, I want an eight-point!"

That was when another buck walked into the field in the same spot as the previous three. Her excited reaction, "It's an eight-point!", was so high-pitched that all the deer stopped in their tracks and threw up their heads. My daughter started to shake, knowing the deer would wheel and run out of the field. To our amazement, they all relaxed and started feeding again. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a gun barrel move as my daughter lined up on the nice eight-point. Since my daughter had missed only one deer in her life, and had harvested five smaller bucks in years past, my wallet started to moan. I knew full well this one would be mounted.



LEFT AND ABOVE: ALICIA WITH HER EIGHT-POINT BUCK TAKEN DURING SEMESTER BREAK.

After what seemed like 30 minutes, but was probably only 30 seconds, the .270 roared. The big eight-point stumbled, and I heard another cartridge chambered as the spent case hit the floor of the blind. Another shot wasn't needed, however. Her prize eight-point buck lay motionless in the field. After she unloaded her rifle, we climbed down. She reloaded and walked slowly to the deer to make sure it wasn't going anywhere. When she saw what a trophy she had, she jumped with joy. To my surprise, she repaid me tenfold for everything I taught her over the past 21 years, when she kneeled down by her deer and said, "Thank you." At that point I knew she respected wildlife and was extremely grateful just to be there. What more could a father ask for?

The shoulder mount of her trophy now adorns her wall. Maybe, it's time you take your daughter hunting, too.

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TAKE YOUR DAUGHTER HUNTING

