



As anyone knows, I love it when a daddy, or mother takes time to hunt or fish with their children. Children are our future. For years, I took as many children hunting and fishing as I could; those years are long gone, so now I leave it up to the parents and others to get the children into the woods. This is one such story.

Jynsi Blue Abney, age 8, loves to hunt with her dad, Jason Abney. Jynsi has hunted with Jason for four years, and although she has yet to connect on any game, she still loves the thrill of the hunt. The law of average is working in her favor, now.

She packs them a lunch, so they can stay in the woods longer. Her lunches are Little Debbie snack cakes, homemade beer cheese and chips, and of course her favorite drink, Ale 8. This was her first time hunting in Kentucky, as they just moved back here from Oklahoma where Jason's

job had taken him. Jynsi had outgrown her hunting gear, so an upgrade before season was called for.

Jynsi is the baby of 6, and would like to be in the outdoors, rather than in the house. No pool for her, just give her a creek to wade in. Jynsi loves to whistle, she could teach a class on it, and has whistled since she was three. Her sisters are kind of put out, because they

can't whistle. Jynsi, like my youngest daughter, Nema, is a daddy's girl. On Halloween, she dressed like her dad. Jynsi enjoys the simple things in life. Jynsi, take it from an ole hunter that has hunted the world over, just keep trying, never give up, and sooner than later you will score your trophy.

You can email Steve Brewer at <Steve@EstillTribune.com> and message is automatically forwarded.



Jason Abney and 8-year-old daughter Jynsi Blue Abney

Kentucky wildlife was saved from extinction by Wildlife Resources

I love it when people such as Steve Brewer and Betty Arvin Young take time to write about those precious times from their past. I wish some others would take time to do the same and that some who wrote some wonderful stories in the past would take up the task again.

I also wonder how many hunters today realize what an important job the Kentucky Fish & Wildlife Resources has done to restore and preserve the game and other species in Kentucky. Wildlife wasn't always as plentiful in Estill County as it today and many were once extinct statewide.

Kentucky's wildlife resources today are significant at both a national and global level. From the Mississippi River to the Eastern Kentucky Mountains, the diverse habitats in Kentucky are home to countless wildlife species, and it is the role of the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources to conserve and enhance all wildlife.

Within the past century, the list of species that were either extinct or on the brink of extinction in Kentucky included: white-tailed deer, turkey, otter, American black bear, and bald eagles. A field survey of Kentucky's diminished deer herd in 1915 had revealed they were almost extinct, and an early commission recommended legislation to protect deer until 1921. Future legislatures continued to prohibit deer hunting until 1946.

As a result of efforts from the agency, numerous state and federal partners, and the support of our sportsmen and women in Kentucky, all of these species are now thriving in the Commonwealth. Bald eagles have been nesting in Estill County and even the elk that was established in Eastern Kentucky, sometimes venture west. But it wasn't always like that.

Although we lived our early life at Tipton Ridge (now called Whitepine Lane off Furnace Junction), the six children in our family spent much or most of our young life living in the Iron Mound community on Cressy Road. After a short time in a rental house across from where the Iron Mound Post Office had been operated, we moved to a small farm just out the road which our parents were able to buy. The 13-or-so acres were separated into three nearly equal parts -- over the cliff, the bench where our house and barn stood and the wooded hill across the road. About 2/3 was cleared for pasture land and was dotted by walnut trees and lots of hickory trees -- hence, the name "Hickory Holler Farm," was given by one of our sisters.

A creek ran through the lower part of the property and was known as Caney Branch which ran three or four miles west to empty into the Red River. Since we were a few miles from the bend in the river where the large railroad bridge stands, if you went to the west or north you would eventually reach Red River. There were many more small farms in the area with quite a bit of cleared pasture land. But because of the rugged terrain, there also was quite a bit of forested area.

You would think that with this mix of farm land and forest land with an abundance of water

sources, you will see quite a bit of wildlife. Not so! Most of the wildlife was so scarce, I can almost remember every first sighting of various animals.

The Cressy area has been well-known for several years for deer hunting, but 50 years ago, poaching had reduced the population so low, we rarely ever caught sight of even one deer. While walking near the bend of the Red River I once saw numerous deer tracks -- but that was it. Years later, while passing an area on the Cressy Road known as "the thrill bump" we caught a rare sight of five or six deer together, crossing along a trail that led toward the Kentucky River.

Turkey was unheard of in the 1970's. Their population had been wiped out for food many years earlier. Some time in the late 1980's the wildlife service made some trades with other states including Missouri which brought turkeys back into Kentucky. I traveled with a group that went to three undisclosed locations in Estill and Lee counties where the first wild gobblers in several years were released to restore the game population to what it is today. The crates were unloaded from pickup trucks and the door was unfastened. Some birds were a little reluctant to leave the cage but others shot out like a jet plane taking off and landed in a tree that looked to be a quarter mile away. Gobblers were back.

Ground hogs and rabbits were two animals that were in abundance as was the Bob White bird with its distinctive sound. Most of the farmers hated ground hogs because of the holes they left that were dangerous to livestock. We had a cliff running from one side of our property to the other so we had plenty of ground hogs. My uncle, John Patrick, made regular visits and usually hunted for ground hogs while visiting. I helped him clean one, and although they are one of the cleanest eating animals, after I helped clean it, I didn't want to eat one. I've still got a pint of ground hog oil setting next to a tree out back if anyone is interested.

It seemed like rabbits were everywhere, and so were the rabbit hunters. My Uncle Orval was one of the few that came rabbit hunting on our farm with permission. I went with him one time, because with rabbit hunting you can make as much noise as the dogs; unlike squirrel hunting where you've got to stay quiet. Other rabbit hunters crossed our land without permission. They went in on the neighboring farms and apparently never understood what a fence meant. Once I was standing near a walnut tree at the edge of our garden when a rabbit came running up to me and bumped into my leg. It seemed scared and I was as surprised as it was. I was even more surprised when I looked over the cliff and saw a hunter with his gun trained on the rabbit -- and me.

O'possums were another one that seemed in abundance. Our chickens were the attraction and we lost several to them. If we even saw them near our farm, we tried to hunt them down with our dogs but I don't remember ever killing one except maybe with the car. I caught one in our chicken

house one night and decided I was going to shoot it. I got a 22-rifle and took a good shot at it. I don't know whether I hit it or not, but the slug ricocheted off the hard oak boards and smacked into the door facing next to where I stood. I think I just ran him off and gave up trying to shoot him.

Polecats now seem like they cover the highway in spring but the first one I saw in the wild was one that startled me while I was picking blackberries. I decided I was going to shoot him and I ended up with both a rifle and a pistol but few bullets. He started running across our pasture and I ran alongside him to try to get a shot. But his small head bobbed up and down and I kept missing the shot. All the while he was stopping occasionally to turn his business end toward me and I would back off. Finally, I ran out of bullets, so I threw both the pistol and rifle at him and then went to the house.

My dad caught the business end of a polecat one night. We had a young pup that started crying and my dad went out in his boxers to see what was the matter. He grabbed what he thought was a cat and slung it off the porch but realized too late what he was holding. You can throw away the boxers but there are some things that even bleach won't take out. I imagine he had a lot of explaining to do at work the next day.

Some of the more elusive creatures I remember are the red fox, the gray fox; and back then, the raccoon. The first raccoon I saw in the wild was treed by some dogs on Caney Branch near the Red River. Now, it seems like they're everywhere and tearing up everything. A red fox, which was by the way, imported from Europe for running with dogs, will occasionally cross the highway. The native gray fox is not much bigger than a house cat and are mostly nocturnal. Some neighbor friends took me one time to see the den of a gray fox and I took some pictures with a zoom lens. Since then, I've spotted a couple on the highway at night, because they are also road scavengers.

In recent years, the coyote has been more common. We never heard of a coyote being here in the past but they could be most anywhere, crossing the road, or running across your yard in the country or the city. Their form and gait is almost instantly recognizable. Several have been seen crossing the road at the high school, and that's the same location where an armadillo crossed paths with a vehicle last year.

Despite having lots of nut trees, we really didn't see many squirrels. Maybe because they were hunted so much by the neighbors. Some of them hunted every day when they were in season and walked for miles to favorite spots. They were fried and eaten with biscuits and gravy. One time we ate some at my Aunt Madalene's that her husband Troy had shot. The kids ate the fried heads like a boiled egg, cracking the skull and picking out the brain. Some years later they claimed eating squirrel brains might cause a disease similar to "mad cow disease." If so, that might explain a few odd behaviors.