

Vermont Sporting Journal

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Andrew Bonanno
7 points, 210 lbs

Vermont 2024 Hunting and Fishing Licenses and Lawbooks Available

VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE - Press Release

Vermont 2024 hunting, trapping, and fishing licenses, as well as the 2024 lawbooks for these activities, are now available on the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department's website and wherever licenses are sold.

“License sales have helped pay for some of Vermont’s greatest conservation successes,” said Fish and Wildlife Commissioner Christopher Herrick, “from managing habitat for game species like the white-tailed deer and black bear to restoring our populations of the bald eagle and common loon.”

With ice fishing opening around the state as soon as cold temperatures arrive in January, Vermonters are encouraged to pick up their 2024 licenses at the earliest convenience. Existing five year, permanent or lifetime licenses can be updated online on January 1.

License buyers can also easily add a \$15 Habitat Stamp to their purchase to further support habitat conservation in Vermont.

“In addition to updating your license, it is helpful for hunters, trappers and anglers to pick up the current 2024 lawbooks,” added Commissioner Herrick.

Printed copies of the 2024 Hunting & Trapping Lawbook and the 2024 Fishing Lawbook are available from license agents statewide. The department's website has links to online versions as well.



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New Regulations for Trapping Come into Effect January 1, 2024

VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE - Press Release

Trappers must ensure they are compliant with Vermont's new trapping regulations that come into effect on January 1, 2024.

The new regulations include a requirement that live trapped animals be killed humanely and establish standards for trap types and use of baits to reduce the risk of catching pets and non-target wildlife. Trappers must also follow new guidelines for where traps can be placed, such as maintaining a 50 ft. setback distance from a legal trail, public trail or public highway unless set in the water or under ice.

“Vermont’s new trapping regulations will make trapping safer and more humane,” said Christopher Herrick, Commissioner of the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department. “They strike a middle ground between concerns raised by both activists and trappers, and are among the most comprehensive trapping regulations in the country.”

The full set of [new regulations](#) are available on the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department’s website. They will be taught in the department’s required trapper education course for new trappers, and published in the department’s annual hunting and trapping lawbook starting in 2025.

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board finalized Vermont’s new trapping regulations as part of a [larger update to the state’s furbearing species rule](#). During the board’s rulemaking process, Vermont’s Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules (LCAR) [filed an objection](#) to elements of the new trapping regulations, including its exemption from the 50 ft. trail and highway setback for traps placed in the water or under the ice.

LCAR’s objection does not prevent the new trapping regulations from coming into effect. Instead, it requires the board and department to prove that the regulations are consistent with legislative intent and the requirements of administrative law if the regulations are challenged in court.



A trapper sets a trap for fisher following the state’s new requirement that most body-gripping traps be set at least five feet off the ground, or in the water or under ice, to reduce the risk to pets. This trap also complies with new requirements to cover any bait used in the set, in this case with evergreen branches, so that birds of prey are less likely to be attracted to the set.

VTF&W Photo

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A WELL ROUNDED SEASON

By Ken Jones



As I'm writing this article I am winding down the last few days of my 2023 deer season. Having extended my hunting area to include New York and Massachusetts the last few years. It's opened up many new opportunities and choices.

Looking back on the 2021 season I'm reminded of the options

for a well rounded season. 2021 began as most seasons do well before the actual hunting begins. Our lease in New York just a little over an hour from the house allowed me to get some trail cameras up and get over there every couple weeks to check them. As September came I got over and did some weed wacking on one of my entry trails to quiet my entering to the hunting area.

I had been picking up several bucks one in particular caught my eye. He was obviously older than all the others and sported a great rack that if I could see it clearly may have been a 9 or 10 point. I could never get a good look to see if he had brows or not but he was sporting 4 on one rail and they were high above his head.

Opening of bow season came in on October 1st and I was poised and ready in the double ladder that looked over the early season community scrape I had the camera on. Every deer even the does would stop and throw their head into the overhanging branch above the scrape. (the main reason I run my trail cams in 15 second video mode) In the stand well before daylight and back in a few hours before dark and day 1 came and went without the sighting of even a fawn. When I talked to my wife that night on the phone, I told her it was typical of the fleabags to show and show on the cams but when you sit to hunt em, nothin. I ended our phone call with "it's only the first day, we got time"

Now I'd like to tell you I was holding out for my big boy but that just wouldn't be me. I've always been a bird in the hand kinda guy so it was definitely a first come first

serve basis. The first decent deer to show up, buck or doe was gonna get served a rage broadhead to the rib cage. Alamy Mathews Chill R better known as Ivy.

Day two and I was back over the community scrape plenty early. As things started to lighten up I had a video camera I had built a tree arm for and like every year I thought I'd try self-filming hunts. I have this video fantasy every season but it never seems to pan out. (punn intended) as I was getting ready to set the camera up I spotted a deer coming in. I immediately spotted antlers and knew one of my bucks was coming. His line of travel would have him crossing the log road that the community scrape was on at about 35 yards. It was definitely on!!! As he got close to the crossing, I drew the bow. I figured I'd shoot him once he got in the road. He came into the road and instead of crossing giving me a broadside shot. He turned and started coming down the road right towards me!! I opted to just hold at full draw and let him come. At first, I thought he might hit the scrape and that would give me a nice 20 yarder. But he kept coming!!! Fortunately, the road turned about 10 yards in front of the stand, and he finally started around the corner exposing his vitals and I settled the pin and hammered him right at about 12 steps. Looked a little forward but I figured it was good. He carried the arrow through some whippy trees, and it sounded like a playing card in the spokes of my old bicycle when I was a kid. As he crossed the log road right about where I initially planned to shoot him. He lost the arrow. The lighted nock showing me exactly where to start trailing.

The shot was good, double lung and the trail was short. Low and behold it was the big boy!!! A beautiful 7 point 4 on one rail and 3 on the other with just a bump of a brow on one side. Not nearly enough to call it a point. We were off and running!!!

My hunting area in Vermont was also showing us a few bucks including a wicked nice 8 point but one I called the ugly duckling buck that I expressed my dislike for and that we should rid the area of the genes.

Wednesday of the first week I'd get a chance in there.

Utilizing my summit climber and Vermont having recently allowed crossbows for everyone I had been gifted an Excalibur from a dear friend in Virginia who had up-

graded to a Ravin. I'd always been a fan of the Excalibur crossbows because of their simplicity.

I shimmied up a nice pole type tree near one of our trail cams and pulled the card to check it with my portable reader to see what I'd missed in the first five days of the hunt. Well little Mr. ugly duckling was showing up quite regularly in the daytime. As I watched video after video of him on the little screen, I heard a rustle on the trail below me. I looked down to see what was interrupting my card search and low and behold, there he was!!! Right beneath the stand at about 8 yards!! I had to be careful now to get the card reader into a pocket and get the crossbow ready. He took a few steps down the road, and I was able to get to my feet and turned towards him. I slowly shouldered the crossbow when he sort of looked up at me. As he was trying to figure me out, I was settling the crosshairs on his vitals. I had a big dead pine right next to me and a broken limb was very close to the bolt at the end of the crossbow. This was either going to end beautifully with the bolt smashing this little buck or there was gonna be an explosion of dead pine and carbon bolt happening about two feet away from me. I squeezed the trigger and the bolt zipped past the pine limb and smashed into the pocket of the buck and he tore into the thicket, and I knew he wouldn't tote that very far. A short very good blood trail and buck number two within the first week of the 2021 season was riding in the truck!!!

The rest of the 21 season would be a little slow. I did pass a spike opening morning of New York rifle season seeing as I had filled my second archery tag over there with a nice doe in their crossbow season. Bringing the season total to 3 deer already.

Rifle ended and muzzleloader season in New York started Monday morning and I was once again in the summit this time with the CVA Optima V2. I had struggled to get in front of the deer in this area several mornings during the rifle hunt and today was no different. I could hear running deer in the pitch black as I got into position but decided to sit it out for a while anyway.



An hour or so into the morning I heard the non-mistakable sound of hoof steps in the leaves behind me. I slowly got turned around to catch a deer making its way through the timber. A too quick evaluation and I settle the crosshairs and squeezed. The little deer went down on the spot and the 2021 season had come to a close. Not the big Ole doe I thought it was but it was a rewarding exciting hunt and that's what does it for me.

With crossbows becoming more popular and Game departments getting on board. Your chances of widening your options can make your season very well rounded.

2021 was a very well rounded season for this lucky hunter. A buck with a vertical bow, a buck and a doe with the crossbow and a doe with the muzzleloader. Three different weapons, 3 different amazing hunts.

Don't fall into the crossbows shouldn't be allowed rabbit hole. Embrace it as another fun way to hunt!!!

2023 is just a couple hunts from being over but I'll hang until the last dog is hung!!

Until next time, be safe, have fun and shoot em up!!!



Photo Captions:

The author with three of his 2021 deer taken with three different weapons.

Trap Talk

By Randy Barrows

Happy New year to all. With the roller coaster ride that 2023 was I can only hope 2024 will be better for all of us. Just the weather alone is so depressing. Three inches of rain a couple of days ago , with major flooding and now bitter cold and windchills kind of slammed the door on any ground trapping. This mornings check showed that it would take a 300 pound coyote to set a trap off. Having trapped for a long time I went and pulled most of my traps > Smart move in hindsight.

It is a sad time for trappers in Vermont. I have been trying to keep you up to date on all of the B.S. going on down in Montpeculier and unfortunately trappers took a major hit. In a 15 page document released by the fish and wildlife folks trapping in Vermont will never be the same again. In the following writing I will try to explain the new regulations the best I can that will take effect on January 1,2024.

1. Authority

1. This rule promulgated pursuant to 10 VSA s4081,4082,4084,4828 and 4861. In promulgating this rule the fish and wildlife board is following the police established by the General Assembly that the protection, propogation , control, management and the conservation of fish, wildlife, and fur bearing animals in this state is in the interest of public welfare and that the safeguarding of these valueable resources for mthe people of the state requires a constant and continual vigilence.

In accordinance with 10 VSA s4082 and 4084, this rule is designed to maintain the best health, population, and utilization levels of regulated species.

This rule shall apply to all persond who take or attempt to take fur bearing animals by this method.

2.0 Purpose The purpose of this rule is to regulate the taking of fur bearing animals.

3.0 Definitions

3.2 Bait means any animal , vegetable, fruit, mineral, or any other substance capable of luring or attracting coyotes or any other wildlife.3

3.10 Fur bearing animal means beaver, otter, martem, mink, raccoon, fisher, fox, skunk,coyote, bobcat, weasel opossum, lynx, and muskrat or as amended pursuant to 10VSA4001

3.11 Legal trail shall mean a public right away designed as a trail by a municipality as defined in Title 19 VSA 301(8) that is not a highway but is shown on a highway maps of the respective towns made by the agency of transportation, or a-was previously a designated town highway,or -b—is a new public right of way laid out as a trail by the selectboard for the purpose of providing recreational use or access to abutting properties

3.13 Public highway for the purposes of this rule means town, state, United States roads, shown on the highway maps of respective towns , made by the agency of transpotation.

3.14 Public trail-for the purposes of this rule means:
a. a path or corridor open to the public used for non motorized recreational purposes such as hiking, walking, biking, cross country skiing, horseback riding and other similar activiites that is designated and managed, maintained and clearly marked as a trail on municipal lands, on Vermont state owned land, or a federal land with in the state of Vermont

b. path or corridor, same language as A

c. Vermont Rail Trails designated and mapped by the Vermont agency of transportation, the Appalachian Trail designated and mapped and managed by the National Park service and the Long Trail designated and managed by the Green Mountain club

3.18 A tanned pelt is one that has been treated to turn the skin into leather.

3.20 Trapping means to hunt, take or attempt to take fur bearing animals with traps including the

dispatching of such lawfully trapped furbearing animals

- 3.21 a trap means a mechanical device used to capture, kill and /or restrain fur bearing animals excluding firearms muzzleloaders, and archery equipment.

BORED YET????It only gets worse.

4.0 Restrictions

- 4.1 A person trapping for furbearing animals under this rule shall visit their traps at least once every calendar day, except as provided in papragraph 4.2 , and dispatch or release any animal caught therein

- 4.2 A person who sets body gripping in the water or under the ice, colony or cage traps under water or foot hold traps under the ice shall visit their traps every three clander days and remove any animal caught therein

- 4.3 A person shall not set a trap on lands other than their own which does not have their name and address permanently attached and legibly stamped otr engraved thereon, or on a tag of rustless material attached thereto.

- 4,4 All traps set under the ice will be marked with a tag above the ice.

All of these above rules have been in place for many years, no change here , kind of standard operating procedure. All of the following is the new rules we must abide by if we continue to trap .

- 4.5 All foothold traps set on land MUST:

A Have base plates that feature a center chain mount with a swivel with free moving chainand at least two additional swivels that allow mobility for a captured animal

B Be anchored with a minimum of 12 inches of chain and a maximum of 18 inches of chain between the base plate and the start of the anchoring system, Extra swivel and/or shock springs can be added to the

chaining system, but the addition can not cause the chain to exceed 18 inches in length.

C be padded, offset, laminated, or have a minimum jaw width of 5/16s of a inch, or fully encapsulating the foot.

D Have a spread of no more than 6 ¼ inches measured at the widest expanse of the jaws.

E If a foothold trap is triggered by downward pressure, it must be adjustable for pan tension.

- 4,6 No body gripping trap shall be set on land unless: It is under 40 square inches, with out the use of bait, or

It is over 40 square inches and less than 60 square inches and is set five feet or more above the ground, or

It is over 40 square inches and less than 60 square inches and in a anchored enclosure with openings no greater than 60 square inches and with a trap trigger that is recessed at least 12 inches from all openings

Any body gripping traps of 60 square inches shall only be set in the water.

- 4.7 All meat based bait shall be covered at the time the trap is set. Covering shall include but are not limited to brush, branches, leaves, soil,snow, water, or enclosers constructed of wood, metal,wire, plastic,or natural materials

- 4.8 A person shall not use toothed foothold traps or snares when trapping under this section

- 4.9 A person shall not set a trap between December 31 and the following fourth Saturday in October unless the trap is in the water, under the ice, or on a float in the water.

- 4.10A person shall not possess a living furbearer animal except as provided by the rules of the board or 10 VSA part 4

- 4.11A person may not possess a furbearing animal

trapped outside its legal season with out the authorization of the department, not to include animals taken pursuant to to 10 VSA4828

4.12 A person may not possess fur or skin of a fur bearing animal unlawfully taken.

4.13 A person shall not take a furbearing animal by the use of explosives, chemical or poisonous mixture, with the exception of carbon dioxide chambers used accordance of the recommendations of the American Veterinary Association

4.14 A person shall not take a furbearing animal from dens by cutting, digging, smoking by the use of mechanic devices other than a legal trap set in accordance of these rules.

4.15 Trapping setbacks

a. no foothold traps or body gripping traps shall be set on or within 50 feet of the traveled portion of a legal trail, public trail, or public highway unless set in the water or under the ice. Setbacks shall not apply to public trails on wildlife management areas except those trail the Department specifically designates as a required a setback. The department shall post signage on wildlife management areas advising the public of hunting seasons and locations where setbacks apply.

b. No footholds or body grip traps , unless set in water or under the ice, shall be set on or with in 100 feet of a building, parking lots and maintained (cleared and continuously landscaped) portions of wildlife viewing areas ,visitor centers, parks, playgrounds, oicnic areas, shelters, pavilions, schools, camps, or campgrounds, and recreational facilities such as ball fields or tennis courts, owned and managed by municipal , state, or frderal entities except that trapping may occur with explicit permission of schools, camps or campgrounds.

4.16 Dispatch of trapped animals; Upon discovery, a trapper shall immediately dispatch a alive trapped

furbearer with a muzzleloader (?), or gun fired at arms length, or bow and arrow(?) or crossbow, or a carbon dioxide chamber in compliance with the American Veterinary Medical Association guideline , This section shall not be interpreted to prevent a trapper from releasing a unharmed captured animal or domestic pet.

So that isa brief summary of the new B.S. handed down to us. The complete summary is 15 pages long and is available on the fish and wildlife website. I was asked by the editor to not do all 15 pages for obvious reasons. As with all laws is YOUR responsibility to get up to date with these new regulations.

I am certainly not happy with these new rules. I personally believe a lot of folks , including our own fish and wildlife department caved on the whole process. I have trapped for 56 years and have never seen such a bunch of B S handed down. I grew up trapping road side ditches and to lose that hurts. The reasoning was if we meet these anti whack jobs partway they will leave us alone. That thought is seriously out of la-la land. My prediction is they are reveling their victory and will come at us for something else. I currently do not own one compliant trap after all of this is said and done. So its off to shed to make them all compliant(not) or become a person that used to trap.

I and many others firmly believe all wildlife issues should be handled by wildlife professionals, not a bunch of unaware folks residing at the states most expensive nursing home under the golden dome.

For the hound hunters, I am sorry for you folks too. All of you new regs are attached to the same document on the web site. You folks should also be preparing for round two.

And to think this will all go away! Think again. At the last fish and wildlife board meeting a ,well I can not even think of a good term to use, and that is rare for me, submitted a petition requesting the board make it a law where you can no longer shoot female bear. After a lively discussion I believe the board voted to not entertain the petition but stay aware as these topics seem to reappear.

Vermont's Preliminary Report on 2023 Deer Seasons

Hunters Took More than 16,000 Deer in 2023

VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE - Press Release

The final number of deer taken in Vermont's 2023 hunting seasons will not be available for a few more weeks, but the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department says the final tally will be a little over 16,800 deer. Those deer will provide approximately 3.4 million servings of local, nutritious venison.

The buck harvest will be close to 9,800, which will be up from 2022 (9,619) and the previous 3-year average of 9,336. The final antlerless deer harvest will be around 7,000, which will be down from the previous 3-year average (8,101).

"Hunting conditions were mixed in 2023," said Nick Fortin, the department's deer project leader. "Warm weather in October limited deer movement during



*George and Ainsley Gross with Ainsley's 5-point buck, Berlin
Photo provided by VTF&W*



*Cheryl Oakes
Photo provided by VTF&W*

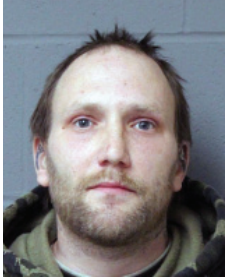
the day, and frequent weekend rain events reduced hunter effort. This resulted in harvests during the archery, youth and novice, and October muzzleloader seasons being down considerably from 2022. Conversely, seasonable temperatures and snow in much of the state during November and December resulted in increased harvests during the regular season and December muzzleloader season."

The primary goal of Vermont's deer management strategy is to keep the deer herd stable, healthy and in balance with available habitat. "Maintaining an appropriate number of deer on the landscape ensures deer and the habitats that support them remain in good condition and productive," said Fortin.

The 2023 White-tailed Deer Harvest Report with final numbers will be on Fish and Wildlife's website in early March. Beginning in late March, the department will be holding informational hearings to share biological information and to listen to any information people wish to share.

Athens Man Pleads Guilty to Federal and State Charges in Deer Poaching Investigation

VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE - Press Release



The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department reports that Ryan Goodrich, 38, of Athens, Vermont was sentenced to five years in federal prison to be followed by a three-year term of supervised release by the [United States District Court](#) in Rutland on December 20, 2023 after

pleading guilty to being a prohibited person in possession of firearms.

On December 15, 2023, he was convicted in Windham Superior Court on State charges for taking deer in closed season, possession of heroin, possession of a narcotic, and driving on a suspended driver's license. He was sentenced to serve 59-60 days, pay \$835 in fines and to pay \$2,000 in Fish and Wildlife restitution.

In late winter of 2021, the Vermont Warden Service began an investigation of Goodrich for hunting while under revocation after receiving a tip from officers of the Bellows Falls Police Department. During the investigation, wardens obtained information that Goodrich, who is prohibited from possessing firearms, was in possession of a short-barrel shotgun and that it was likely at his residence. Wardens coordinated with agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and executed a search warrant at his rented camper in Athens on March 3, 2022.

During the search, wardens located and seized the loaded short-barrel shotgun, six additional firearms, 2,978 rounds of ammunition, 880 bags of heroin, and over \$7,045 in US currency. Goodrich was not at the residence when the warrant was executed, but documents in his name were found during the search.

Goodrich was then indicted by a federal grand jury on March 10, 2022, and a warrant was issued for his arrest. The Vermont Warden Service worked with federal agents and several agencies in Vermont and surrounding states to apprehend Goodrich.

In early April 2022, the Vermont Warden Service obtained information that Goodrich was likely staying at a hotel in the Keene, New Hampshire area. On April 9, 2022, the Keene New Hampshire Police Department executed a search warrant at a hotel where they believed Goodrich was staying. Goodrich was not in the hotel room at the time of the warrant, but officers found documents inside the hotel room indicating Goodrich was staying there.

On April 19, 2022, the Vermont Warden Service obtained information that Goodrich had fled to the Deerfield, Massachusetts area and was attempting to obtain transportation to Texas. After coordinating with the Greenfield and Deerfield Massachusetts Police Departments it was determined that Goodrich was staying at a hotel in Deerfield, Massachusetts. He was apprehended later that day with the assistance of the Massachusetts State Police. Goodrich was extradited back to Vermont to face charges and has been in custody since his arrest.

“The Vermont Warden Service would like to thank the United States Attorney's Office in Burlington, the Windham County State's Attorney's Office, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, the United States Customs and Border Patrol Air and Marine Unit, the Vermont State Police, the Windham County Sheriff's Office, the Bellows Falls Police Department, the Keene, New Hampshire Police Department, the Greenfield, Massachusetts Police Department, the Deerfield, Massachusetts Police Department, and the Massachusetts State Police for their assistance in this case,” said Colonel Justin Stedman, Vermont Fish and Wildlife's Chief Game Warden.





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Be Sure to Visit VT Fish & Wildlife at the Yankee Show, Jan. 19-21

VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE - Press Release

The annual Yankee Sportsman's Classic show will be held January 19, 20 and 21 at the Champlain Valley Expo in Essex Junction, and the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department is inviting you to visit their exhibits and attend their seminars at the show.

"We are looking forward to talking with as many people as possible at the show," said Fish and Wildlife Commissioner

Christopher Herrick. "It's a great opportunity for us to share the latest information about fish and wildlife, and it gives people a chance to talk with us about fish and wildlife issues. Our wardens, biologists and other staff will be at our exhibit."

The 2024 hunting, fishing and trapping lawbooks will be available at Fish and Wildlife's exhibit booth. Hunters, anglers and trappers will also be able to buy their 2024 licenses.

Show hours are Noon to 6 p.m. on Friday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturday, and 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Sunday. Learn more about the show at: <http://yankeeclassic.net>.



Vermont Fish and Wildlife staff are urging visitors to stop by their exhibit and attend their seminars at the Yankee Sportsman's Classic show January 19-21 in Essex.

VTF&W Photo





**2023 Youth & Novice
Turkey Weekend**



R&L ARCHERY
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Thank you R&L for all of these great pictures!
rlarchery.com



Calling Contest

By Brett Ladeau

What's a turkey calling contest? Turkey calling contests typically consist of several divisions. Usually, a local contest consists of a youth division, a hunter or novice division for those just getting started, a friction division (pot calls/box calls), an open division, and an owl/locator division. Some bigger contests will also include a gobbling division and could include special divisions for women, team challenges, etc... The list of option is endless, but time and judges usually dictate the divisions offered.

In Vermont, we usually have our State Contest at the Yankee Sportsman Classic in January. This year the contest is scheduled Sunday January 21, 2024, and starts around 9:30am. This contest is sponsored by the National Wild Turkey Federation and is considered a sanction contest. A sanctioned contest qualifies the winner of the open and friction divisions for the following years Grand National Calling Contest in Nashville, Tennessee, which usually happens in mid-February.

There are several calls that could be asked for at a contest, such as the plain yelp, cutting of an excited hen, cluck and purr, gobbler yelps, fighting purr, etc... Typically, the contest organizer picks 3 to 5 calls from the list and the callers are judged based on their best rendition of call asked for. There is a number draw to see the order the callers



call in. If you draw number 1 you get to pick another number and call again. The contest doesn't use caller one scores in the results. Caller one is used to give the judges a chance to tune their ears for the rest of the contest. You have approximately a minute per call, so you need to practice a routine to make sure you don't go over your allotted time. You can lose points if you call too long. This rarely happens at a local contest, but I have seen it happen at Grand Nationals.

A contest has 5 to 7 judges that sit behind a curtain and cannot see the person calling. They use a scoring range of 0 to 20 for most divisions, and the high and low scores are thrown out. For example, on a five-judge panel, judge 3 provides the highest score, and judge 5 provides the lowest score. Those scores are not used in the final calculation and judge 1, 2, and 4 scores are added together, and whichever caller has the highest score wins. There is usually a call off to decide a tie. This can consist of one call or a re-run of the calls from the competition.



The gobbling and owl competition are scored on a 0 to 50 scale. These divisions go quickly because you get a minute to do your best to convince the judge that you're an owl or gobbler.

As mentioned, the winner of the open and friction division qualifies to call in the following years Grand National Call Contest (GNCC). The GNCC youth, team, gobbling, and owl division are open to anyone willing to pay the entrance fee and do not have a prerequisite to call. At Grand Nationals there are 3 youth division, separated by age, Poults are 10 years and younger, Juniors are 11 to 15, and Intermediate are ages 16 to 20 years old. This helps assure a more even competition for the younger callers.

There is no pressure for the winner of a local contest to go to Grand Nationals but for those that take their competition seriously it's the goal. When I started calling in 2013, I never imagined taking it too seriously, but I got bitten by the calling bug. I've been fortunate to call in the friction division at Grand Nationals in 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2022, and 2023. There was no contest in 2021 due to covid.

At the GNCC there is a preliminary round for the fric-

tion and open divisions. In the friction division there are usually 30 to 40 callers vying for a top 12 position to make the finals. The prior years winner gets an automatic bid to the finals. To me the most stressful day of the contest is the preliminary round. If you are lucky to make the finals, the day of the finals are more about putting your best effort forward. The high stress is making it there. The friction division has been a separate division since 2006 and has seen 8 different winners. The current defending Champion, Rodney Eckstine, has won back-to-back titles. Bobby Woods and Matt Van Cise have each won the contest 4 times.



The Senior Open division is considered the Super Bowl of turkey calling and there are about 35 to 40 people vying for the finals as well. The open finals format has undergone a few changes in recent years, but for 2024, there will be mini-scenarios to help find a winner. The Senior Open is the longest running division at Grand Nationals, and according to NWTF data there have been 22 different winners since 1977. Current defending champ, Matt Van Cise, has won a record 8 times.

Current Owl Hooting Champion, Kaleb Payton, has won 5 of the last 6 titles, and Travis Hamm will be defending his first Gobbling title in 2024.

There is a long tradition of turkey calling contests and hopefully I've given you some insight on how a contest is run and why some of us call. I encourage anyone interested in giving calling contests a try to just dive right in. Most of the current callers are willing to assist in any way possible. It's a lot of fun, makes you a better caller, and opens the door to relationships that will last a lifetime.



I Can't Wait to Do That Again

By Brad Roy

I'm not a great deer hunter. After twenty years of wandering around the Vermont woodlands in search of deer every fall, I would guess only the past few were anything other than aimless rambling in hopes of crossing paths with a legal deer I could pack away into nice little blocks of future chili, steak, and tacos. However, I am passionate about spending time in the deer woods each and every chance I get, and along with the vast wealth of new knowledge that comes along after each year spent hunting, I find myself learning more and more every year about how very, very little I actually know.

I have always been a sitter. I killed my first deer, and every deer since, while stationary. Over the past two decades I have given my best a number of times to track down deer and get a shot off, but have been only met with stream-soaked boots, sore knees, and if I'm lucky, a quick glimpse of a stiff white tail bounding away through the trees. I relish the thought of being able to distinguish a nice track amongst a tangle of prints in the snow; then having the gumption and skill to pursue a single track for miles without mixing it up with another. I cherish the dream of one day having a mount on my wall (or at the very least, a freezer full of steaks) from a deer I outmaneuvered, outwitted, and outgunned before it fled back into the gnarly depths of the nearest thicket; but so far, those dreams remain just that... dreams.

This year I made the most honest effort I ever have to run down a deer during the muzzleloader season, my first true opportunity all year to have the soles of my green rubber boots met with a few inches of freshly fallen snow. I hit the ground as soon as possible after a morning daycare drop-off, and quickly got myself onto some fresh tracks I spotted on the drive into my hunting location.

The tracks showed, as best I could figure, a group of deer meandering their way through a well-known travel corridor I had hunted many times before. While some of the tracks were on the small side, a few were of decent size. With an antlerless tag in my pocket and no success during the prior part of the season, I was game to harvest anything except a spikehorn... and only because the unit I was in doesn't allow it.

The snow was perfect. Damp, easily trodden-through but wet enough to leave distinct prints behind the feet of any land-based critter roaming around. I followed the tracks quickly and silently, and was making great headway on them for about two hours before they came to the edge of a large field. What's notable about this field though, is it was the very field I drove through on my way in to begin hunting. As I followed the tracks across the open expanse of summer pastureland, I began to feel like I had missed something earlier in the day... These tracks were under my tire prints, meaning they had crossed here BEFORE I drove in. My stupid self must have been adjusting the radio, or looking for deer out across the field and completely missed these prints, meaning I had just spent a few hours and miles tracking deer to a place I had already been!

The only good news was I was close to the truck again, and having failed to bring any nourishment besides a gas station bought pack of Werther's Originals, I hopped in for a quick rest; punctuated with a snack and the remaining lukewarm coffee in my knock-off Yeti cup from tractor supply.

After the rest and refreshments, I hatched out a plan to loop around the next patch of woods the deer had moved into and try to cut them off on the back side. The wind was perfect, the day felt like a cool springtime than late fall, and my legs were ready to do some more walking! I moved along with purpose until I got around to where I expected the deer might be and slowed my approach.

As I walked, my senses were sharpened. I was stalking my prey and everything felt right. After pursuing my nonexistent quarry for another few hundred yards, I cut the tracks again. This time, moving at a running pace across a cornfield. I got on the trail and swiftly walked through the remaining corn stubble until I reached the edge of a big valley. The deer seem to have gone down this bank effortlessly, but it would be a different story for me. The path was practically straight down, and the fresh snow atop a wet layer of leaves made things exceptionally slippery.

Doing my best to gingerly make my way down the bank, my eyes darted, searching all through the ravine

for signs of life. I took one more step and went down... hard. Landing on my rear end, I looked to my left to see the entire group of deer busting out of there comfortable bedding area and lurching down that ravine without so much as a glance back my way. I was busted.

After giving things a half hour or so, I slowly and silently made my way toward the area the deer had jumped from. Eventually, after following the tracks for god knows how much longer, I decided to call it quits. As I walked through the cornfield back toward my truck, I held my head low with the disappointment of knowing I had ruined yet another attempt at tracking a deer. Just as I was beginning to swallow the lump of frustration in my throat, a deer busted out from the birch grove just outside the barbed wire fence I was walking along! I raised my gun but there was no hope. It was gone.

Now the frustration at my own apparent lack of woodsmanship was palpable. I couldn't believe I blew another shot! I got on the deer's tracks and followed for a while until they were lost in the bare earth under a stand of evergreens. Looping around back to the trail though, I jumped the deer again! It bolted and so did I. We both ran

at as fast as we could until one of us got winded and had to stop, and I'll let you guess which one of us that was...

Moving along toward an open area punctuated by large, dense, birch groves, I inspected the tracks of what looked to be at least three deer that had been right in front of me, hidden in plain sight. I followed them for a bit, but decided to call it when they busted across another large, open field. Dark was coming soon, and I was as spent as spent can be. I trudged my way back uphill to my truck, and wouldn't you know it, just a few hundred yards from where I was parked spotted more deer! They were standing in a small group, and I quickly brought my muzzleloader up to a tree for support and looked them over for spikes. All looked good and I let a bullet fly. Upon further inspection after the hard-earned shot, I had botched it. The deer ran off and I hung my head low as I returned to the truck with my tail between my legs. My feet were soaked, my legs felt only slightly better than a stiff jelly, and my ego was pretty bruised. All that work only to take a shot 100 yards from the truck and blow it! I was broken and beat down, and as I drove home that night all I could think was "I can't wait to do that again".

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Ice Fishing Safety for Inconsistent Ice Conditions

VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE - Press Release

Ice conditions across Vermont are inconsistent due to warm and variable weather, and the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department is urging anglers to put safety first if they venture out ice fishing.

“Check the ice as you go, avoid areas where currents can create weaker ice, and if you are not sure the ice is safe find a different waterbody,” cautioned fisheries biologist Shawn Good. “With good judgment ice fishing is a safe and fun way to get outside in winter. But that means making cautious, smart decisions and changing plans if conditions are not what you hoped for.”

Ice conditions are currently variable across Vermont. At higher elevations and in the Northeast Kingdom many lakes and ponds have frozen over completely and have fishable ice. But in southern Vermont and the Champlain Valley, many lakes and ponds are not yet safe for ice fishing.

“Three to four inches of clear black ice is the minimum for safe ice fishing,” said Good. “For the kind of gray or

opaque ice we get after repeated freezing, thawing, and re-freezing we recommend anglers look for at least six inches of ice where they plan to fish.”

Even on a single waterbody it is important to know that ice thickness is not always uniform. Areas around pressure cracks or near stream or river inlets can be thinner and weaker than surrounding ice.

The department says anglers should always carry a spud bar to test the ice as they go and should have a set of personal ice picks for self-rescue. Anglers should avoid fishing alone and should let someone know where they will be fishing and when they plan on returning home.

But despite poor or non-existent early season ice conditions in some areas of Vermont, eager anglers can still find safe ice fishing opportunities this month.

“While we wait for colder weather to freeze up waterbodies statewide, I recommend anglers focus on planning and getting their gear in top shape—or that they

hit the road and explore the higher elevation waters or northern waters where there is already good ice,” said Good. “Fishing somewhere other than your home waters can be part of the adventure and allure of ice fishing, and is a great way to explore Vermont.”

To learn more about ice fishing safety, tips for beginners, and places to fish visit Vermont Fish and Wildlife’s [“Ice Fishing Basics”](#) and [“Ice Fishing Opportunities”](#) webpages.



Three to four inches of clear black ice, visible in this ice fishing drill hole below the top layer of snow, is the minimum recommended for safe ice fishing.

VTF&W Photo

Vermont's 2024 Trapping Regulation and Application for Permit to Hunt Coyotes with Dogs are on VTF&W's Website

VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE - Press Release

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board took its final vote on a regulation on trapping and hunting coyotes on Thursday, December 14. Information on the regulation and a permit application to hunt coyotes with dogs are available on the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department's website.

The new regulation establishes a season for hunting coyotes with dogs and is effective on January 1, 2024. The season for hunting coyotes with the aid of dogs will be December 15 through March 31 each year.

Legal hunting hours for taking coyotes with the aid of dogs will be one half hour before sunrise to one half hour after sunset. The coyote dog training season will be from June 1 through September 15.

Previously there was no special season for hunting coyotes with dogs. The season for trapping coyotes remains the same, and there is an open season for hunting coyote without the aid of dogs.

Applications for hunting coyotes with the aid of dogs may be downloaded from Vermont Fish and Wildlife's website. The deadline to apply is January 15, 2024. No coyote hunting with dogs is allowed until permits are received.

Only 100 permits are available. If more than 100 permit applications are received, a lottery drawing will be held by the Fish and Wildlife Department.

New Due Date for Annual Trapper Reports

The regular trapping seasons began October 28, 2023 and continues through March 31, 2024. With that in mind, we wanted to make you aware of several options for submitting the mandatory annual trapper reports. These reports can be submitted anytime but are due no later than April 15, 2024. Please note the earlier due date. This will help us meet our reporting requirements in a timely manner and hopefully will keep the season's activity fresher in your mind.

There are two options for submitting your report.

1. The forms are available online at the VT Fish and Wildlife website. You'll need to download the forms to your computer, fill them out and save them, and then either email or snail mail them to us. The email address and mailing address are on the website and in the report instructions.
2. Or, if you don't have access to our website, we can mail them to you. Give us a call at 802-289-0629 or email marybeth.adler@vermont.gov

Watch for an email from the Furbearer Management Team in the next week with more information.

Thank you for continuing to provide this valuable data for managing Vermont's furbearer populations!

-The VFWD Furbearer Management Program Staff



Vermont's Free Ice Fishing Day is January 27

Ice Fishing Festival to be Held at Elmore State Park in Celebration

VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE - Press Release

Vermont's state-wide Free Ice Fishing Day is Saturday, January 27, 2024.

Free Ice Fishing Day is held annually on the last Saturday in January. The day is geared toward giving new ice anglers an opportunity to try ice fishing before purchasing equipment, but any angler may ice fish on any waterbody open to ice fishing statewide without a fishing license on Free Ice Fishing Day.

To celebrate, the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department is holding an Ice Fishing Festival at Elmore State Park in Elmore. The festival will be held from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. The event is free and open to all ages as well as families with kids.

"The Ice Fishing Festival typically draws between 500-700 participants for a day of fishing, skill-building and community," said Education Specialist Corey Hart. "The annual event is moved around the state each winter, and we are excited to be back at Lake Elmore for 2024."



Vermont Fish and Wildlife staff, as well as instructors from Vermont's Let's Go Fishing Program, will be on-hand to teach ice fishing skills. These include knot tying, baiting and using an ice fishing rod, and most importantly, how to stay safe on the ice. They will also discuss fishing regulations and fish identification.

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Fish and Wildlife staff will operate a fish fry station to cook up participants' catch, and there will be plenty of cocoa on hand. Participants are encouraged to dress appropriately for the weather, and ice cleats are strongly recommended.

“Ice fishing is one of the most accessible forms of fishing and can be a great way to introduce people to how much fun fishing can be,” said Fish and Wildlife Commissioner Christopher Herrick. “This festival will demonstrate that ice fishing isn’t just about catching fish. It’s also a great way to spend some time outdoors with friends and family. You can skate, sled, make a snow fort, and have a cookout – all while waiting for the flags on your tip-ups to signal when you’ve caught a fish.”

Fishing equipment will be loaned for this fun day on the ice, or participants may bring their own. For more information, visit the Vermont Fish and Wildlife website. Registration can be completed online in advance at <https://www.registered.com/events/view/206074>

or people may register when they arrive, although registering in advance will enable participants to get on the ice faster.

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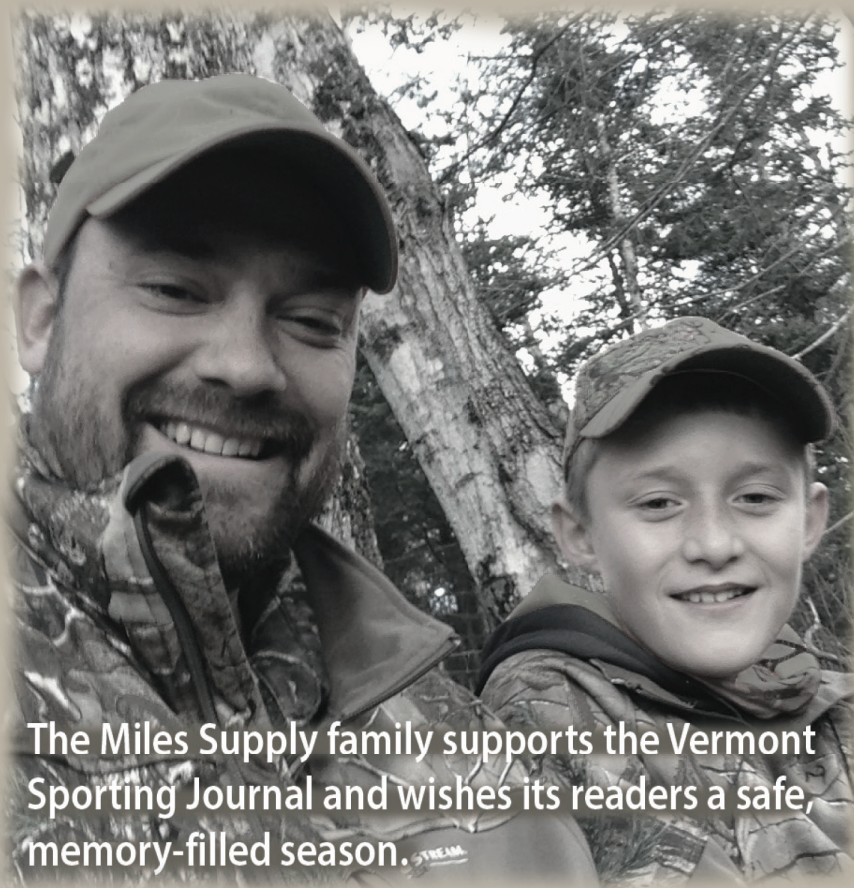
To celebrate Free Ice Fishing Day, the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department will hold an Ice Fishing Festival for kids and others new to ice fishing at Elmore State Park in Elmore on Saturday, January 27.

VTF&W photo



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