



# Game Trails

## continued

**SPORTS  
AFIELD**  
THE PREMIER HUNTING ADVENTURE MAGAZINE  
PARTNERS IN  
CONSERVATION

### THE MYTH OF EDEN

*This article is the first part of an essay that explores the mistaken beliefs about our great North American wilderness.*

For hunters, reaching the North American public with our shared accomplishments for wildlife conservation will not be an easy task. Nor will it be a short campaign. As I indicated in the my last essay, the complex machinery required to maintain wildlife is completely unknown to most North Americans, and as a consequence, they often accept the argument that removing man from nature is the best means for improving wildlife fortunes. They have fallen prey to the myth that the wildlife abundance of North America exists by accident.

The hunting community has to realize that this notion is being communicated to the public in many subtle and not-so-subtle ways. It is also being provided on a near continuous basis. We

in the hunting community, and indeed all those who believe in the sustainable-use approach to natural resource management, have largely failed to provide evidence to the contrary. Our approach to conserving wildlife, based upon the principles and applications of the North American Model, was supposed to have been self-evident, one must assume, given our lack of communication efforts.

However, it is clear that the citizens of Canada and the USA have not been convinced. In the absence of information, they have remained either unaware of our achievements for wildlife or accepting of the information they have been given by those who do not accept sustainable use and may be opposed to hunting.

As a result, we should not be surprised at, nor find fault with, an uninformed public that accepts the only perspective they have been given on this issue of profound importance. The

compass of responsibility must swing to us. We have failed to communicate our history. We have failed to communicate our achievements. We have failed to honor our heroes. As a result, we have a serious and deeply embedded problem. For us to meaningfully address this, we have to understand how and why it has arisen. No amount of chest thumping and hysterical claims about our right to hunt will suffice to counter this powerful social reality. We might as well try to empty the ocean with a thimble. A much more thoughtful and professional response is required—whether we like it or not. Furthermore, hunting deserves a better response than this!

As concerns over global environmental issues increase, we may anticipate that philosophies opposed to hunting will gain more widespread acceptance, particularly within the broadening sector of humanity for whom nature is little more than a digital reality. Hunters must recognize that we have been privileged to engage with and understand nature on its own terms, and not simply through the edited lens of television or the manufactured experiences of zoos and urban green spaces. But as hunters, we represent only about 6 percent of the population. For many people who have not had our experiences, the notion that man should withdraw from nature (or only passively engage it as a voyeur) will resonate as a sort of “return to Eden” vision.

Driven by an understandable love and fascination for wild creatures—but with life experiences that have no connection to the birth-and-death drama of the planet’s natural systems—many in the public will simply wish that animals remain untouched. Without knowing what it takes to conserve wildlife, they will inevitably fall prey to perspectives that appear motivated by wildlife’s best interest, but which really offer no long-term solution to the many challenges that wildlife face in a modern and increasingly overpopulated world. Their vision will be understand-



*Ankeny National Wildlife Refuge is one of three northwest Oregon refuges set aside in the mid-1960s to protect dusky Canada geese. Through the Duck Stamp and other programs, hunters are the leading source of funding for such wildlife conservation efforts.*

DALLAS SAFARI CLUB



# Game Trails continued



ably important to them, for as they see it wildlife must be protected, and that protection may need to extend over all forms of human intrusion.

We need to understand that this vision may not always be an antihunting sentiment per se but simply a wish for an environmentally safe and harmonious world, a desire we all may share.

Many people would like to believe that man can somehow prosper without taking from or manipulating nature, and that this was his ideal circumstance in some past and perfect time. Hunters need to be very careful in separating such beliefs from those that are hunting-focused, and those that condemn the activity specifically. We need not

mistake what is simply a different viewpoint for one that is deliberately opposed to what we do.

As hunters, we also need to be careful in ascribing such views to fringe elements in our society, antihunting or otherwise; for this is not necessarily the case. After all, a distorted story line has also been presented by virtually every high school textbook when describing the lives and economies of the native peoples of this continent (and of South America) at the time of European discovery. We need to reflect on the powerful influence this has had on the North American psyche, and how it has influenced public perceptions toward hunting.

—Shane P. Mahoney



*As hunters, we have been privileged to engage with wildlife and explore natural ecosystems such as wetlands. We need to remember that many people have never had that chance.*

*In the conclusion of this essay, coming in the next issue, Mahoney describes the opposing forces that cling to the myth of Eden, the harm of this distorted reality, and the need for a remedy.*

## DALLAS SAFARI CLUB, CONKLIN FOUNDATION JOIN FORCES

*Partnership will promote  
fair-chase ethic*

Wildlife conservation, education, and ethical hunting will benefit from a strong new partnership between Dallas Safari Club, the premier international hunting organization, and the Conklin Foundation, a 501(c)3 whose goal and mission is to strengthen and foster support for ethical and fair-chase hunting throughout the hunting community. The Conklin Foundation will present the 2010 Conklin Award at the Thursday evening gala banquet of the 2010 Dallas Safari Club annual convention, First Light.

The Conklin Award is the “Tough Guy” award. It recognizes the world’s great-

est active hunter who pursues game in the most difficult terrain, exhibits the highest degree of ethics, and is a strong participant in wildlife conservation. Previous winners include Donald Cox, Gary Ingersoll, Jesus Yuren, Pete Papac, Bob Speegle, Bill Poole, and Craig Boddington.

James E. Conklin, M.D., was a true sportsman. If the game demanded vertical steps, a lot of sweat, danger, and miserable conditions, Dr. Jim hunted it. That was the way he was, and that is the essence of this award. Dr. Jim exhibited the highest degree of ethics in his extensive hunting career. He was a true sportsman who hunted strictly within the rules of fair chase.

“Dallas Safari Club is a leading force in wildlife conservation, youth

education, and the promotion of ethical hunting worldwide,” said DSC Executive Director Ben Carter. “This partnership will help us to take those efforts to the next level and will take our convention, already known worldwide as one of the finest hunting and sporting celebrations of its kind, to new heights,” Carter added.

2007 Conklin Award recipient Bob Speegle said, “The Conklin Foundation is excited to be coming to Dallas. Everywhere The Conklin Award has been presented has been superb, and the Dallas Safari Club crowd seems like a great fit for our presentation. We look forward to working with the folks at DSC as partners in conservation.”