



Hunting Seasons Underway

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The firearm deer seasons are underway and, with the arrival of colder weather, many hunters prefer to retire to their easy chairs. Still, excellent hunting opportunities can be found long after the fair-weather crew have hibernated to watch television. Certain upland game seasons remain open, various waterfowl seasons throughout Illinois are still going strong and there are even opportunities for archery and firearm deer hunting.

Sure, a late-season hunt often requires a little more effort but a successful day in the field is much more rewarding.

No list of late-season opportunities would be complete without some mention of a southern Illinois waterfowl hunt. Downstate goose hunting has certainly taken on a different appearance in recent years. For various reasons, the major migration has most often occurred late in the season.

How long this will last is anyone's guess. A sudden blast of winter weather could make a significant and quick difference.

Plenty of goose hunting opportunities await those willing to travel to southern Illinois. And, a little advance planning can help to ensure a successful trip.

Perhaps the best plan is to check on the duck and goose hunting prospects before planning a hunting trip. Each year, the Williamson County Tourism Bureau operates a website containing waterfowl information that includes updated information on waterfowl populations at various sites throughout southern Illinois. The website is located at visitsi.com

Though the North Zone duck season closes Dec. 13, Canada goose hunting continues through Jan. 12. The Central Zone duck season ends Dec. 20. The Souths Jan. 31 in the South Zone. Still, Canada goose hunting in the Central, South-Central and Southern zones continues through January 31. Snow goose hunting, however, continues until March 31 under the special Conservation Order Light Goose Season.

If goose hunting is not your cup of tea, how about a rabbit hunt.

Combine a layer of fresh snowfall, a couple of hard-working beagle hounds and a sunny winter afternoon and you have all the necessary ingredients for a first-class rabbit hunt. The final weeks of the Illinois rabbit season often bring with them the best odds for this perfect combination.

The Illinois rabbit season ends Feb. 15 statewide. Oddly enough, relatively few rabbit hunters actually take advantage of these nearly ideal conditions. Late-season hunting pressure on most public hunting areas is extremely light or nearly non-existent.

A number of public hunting areas offer their best rabbit hunting late in the season. These are sites where dense cover makes it nearly impossible to see rabbits without the white background of new-fallen snow.

Federal lands surrounding each of Illinois three big Corps of Engineer reservoirs are excellent choices for a late-season rabbit hunt. Free maps of the public hunting lands are available by contacting the specific lake management office.

The final weeks of the Illinois archery whitetail season is certainly a far cry from the shirt-sleeve hunting experienced in early October. The statewide Illinois archery deer season continues through Jan. 17, though few hunters take advantage of the late-season opportunities.

Before spending any significant amount of time in a tree stand, you will want to make sure you are hunting in a high-probability area. Prime areas during November and early December may not offer the best late-season hunting.

Keep in mind that whitetail patterns significantly change following the rut. They tend to congregate in large groups which makes them somewhat easier to locate. Food and cover have now become the most important concerns to a white-tailed deer.

Coyotes are undoubtedly among the wariest animals an Illinois hunter can pursue. This is why these creatures continue to thrive in areas where the hunting pressure is quite heavy.

The coyote season is among the least restrictive of all Illinois hunting seasons. It is open year-round during the firearm deer hunting season. Hunting hours may vary throughout the year.

In some parts of the state, coyotes are driven by hounds. The system works but requires permission to hunt on a great deal of land.

Perhaps the most practical and exciting method to hunt coyotes is by predator calling. Calling a coyote into shooting range with a mouth or electronic calling device is certainly the most challenging method of hunting these creatures.

Good camouflage and patience are required to attract a mature coyote into shooting range. Many times, the coyote will simply circle around and disappear without the hunter ever knowing it was there.

While relatively few Illinois hunters pursue these creatures, those that do find the challenge addicting.

