



Late Season Hunts - Only for the Dedicated

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Late-season hunting here in downstate Illinois typically separates the men from the boys. This season, in particular, has brought an ample early sampling of winterlike weather to our area. This means most fair-weather sportsmen have retired their hunting boots for the winter.

As might be expected, late season hunts are tougher. Game populations, thinned to some degree by opening-day crowds, have retreated to denser cover. The almost-balmy weather of November has been replaced by bone-chilling winds that sting exposed cheeks and ears.

It is only the truly dedicated hunters that prefer the cold seat of a tree stand or goose pit to the comfort of an easy chair next to the fireplace.

Still, excellent hunting opportunities can be found long after the fair-weather crew have hibernated to their easy chairs. Certain upland game seasons remain open, goose seasons in southern 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 goose hunt. Downstate goose hunting has certainly taken on a different appearance in recent years. Warm, almost springlike weather has delayed the major migration into the state's southern reaches.

How long this will last is anyone's guess. A sudden blast of winter weather, like we've already experienced, 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 goose hunting success before planning a hunting trip. Each year, the Williamson County Tourism Bureau provides a hotline that features current waterfowl numbers in that part of the state. The toll-free phone number for the hotline is (800)GEESE-99.

Goose hunting in the southern zones continues through January 31. Snow goose hunting continues after that date..

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.

This year, the Illinois rabbit season has been extended for more than a month. The statewide rabbit season concludes Feb. 15. Oddly enough, relatively few rabbit hunters actually take advantage of these nearly ideal conditions found during the last two months of the hunt. Late-season hunting pressure on most public hunting areas is

extremely light or nearly non-existent.

In fact, a number of public hunting areas offer their best rabbit h 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.