

Late-Season Hunting Opportunities Explained

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You might say that late-season hunting separates the men from the boys. Even for the most dedicated, these trips do certainly present something of a challenge.

Without a doubt, late-season hunting is 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 The almost-balmy weather of November has been replaced by bone-chilling winds that sting exposed cheeks and ears.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 an afternoon jaunt in the outdoors to the comfort of an easy chair next to the fireplace.

Still, excellent opportunities can be found long after the fair-weather hunters have hibernated to watch television. Certain upland game seasons remain open, waterfowl seasons in southern Illinois are still going strong and there are even opportunities for certain furbearers.

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. For various reasons, the major migration has most often occurred much later 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 recorded waterfowl information hotline that provides updated information on waterfowl populations at various sites throughout southern Illinois. The phone number for the hotline is (800)GEESE-99.

The North Zone Canada goose season concludes Jan. 14. 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? Conditions are nearly ideal for a bit of this action.

Combine the recent snow cover with 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 week of the Illinois rabbit season often brings some of the finest hunting for this species.

The Illinois rabbit season wraps up 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.

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 except during the firearm deer hunting season. Hunting hours 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.