



Tips & Tricks for Taking Kids Along

By Steven Bridges
The Goldthwaite Eagle

While you may not hunt the same way as you would when you're by yourself or out with your best hunting/fishing buddy, taking kids into the outdoors is very rewarding. It takes a little more effort, but it's well worth it.

Some of my fondest childhood memories were of hunting trips with my dad. I especially remember being Dad's dove retriever, happily running out to get the doves he shot down. I can also remember the early mornings when Dad would load my brother and me into his truck well before daylight, and carry us one at a time, wrapped in a blanket, into the deer blind so we could sleep while he waited for that first deer sighting. When he saw the deer, he'd wake us up. He even lined the floor of the deer blind with some old 1970s shag carpet so we'd be more comfortable.

I was lucky to be brought up in the outdoors, and I feel it's very important that the love of the outdoors be shared with the next generation.

I've been taking kids with me into the field for years and I've accumulated quite a list of tips and tricks that I've shared with my friends who want to take their kids into the outdoors. My wife and I have learned that taking kids into the field requires a "tool box," and the more tools you have, the more fun and rewarding the entire trip will be.

First, always have toilet paper on hand for obvious reasons. Their bladders aren't as big as ours, and they always need to go at the most inopportune times. Also, when you're shooting, a small wad of toilet paper can make a good ear plug in a pinch.

But even better are the packages of disposable earplugs you can get at any store for a couple of bucks. I have little packages of earplugs stuffed in every gun case and tackle box and tool box I own. And if you ask me why



The dove hunters at Trigger Mountain were able to fill the grill with birds during opening weekend of the 2017 season. Pictured during their annual Family Dove Hunt are the Smiths, Terry, Mary Anna, Lila, Forrest and Grant.

earplugs are so important, you'll have to speak up because I grew up in a time when earplugs weren't in vogue.

I've found the ear muffs that go over the whole ear get hot and kids don't like them. The electronic ear muffs, though, are in the \$30 range, and the benefit of using them is you don't have to yell at the top of your lungs to get a kid's attention, and once the kids are used to them, they enjoy them.

Sunglasses, bug spray and sunscreen are all necessary items, but in addition to that, it doesn't hurt to have some little chairs and tables, some games, books, snacks, and drinks to keep the kids occupied when the doves aren't flying, and the deer aren't around. Kids have a short attention span, generally speaking, so you have to adjust to their needs.

One thing Debra and I do is take three or four sheets of construction paper of different colors, and fold them into a little booklet we call "the observation journal." With some markers and tape, the kids make the journal by drawing what they've seen while out hunting or fishing. They can also tape flowers, leaves and other things into the journal, and over time the collection becomes a history of your outdoor excursions. It's amazing to see what happens to be important to the kids when you look at their journals afterward. You can catch a 10-pound bass, and the kid will draw a picture of the rod and reel. It gives you a look into the kid's mind, and how it differs from an adult's mind.

For kids a little older, our emphasis has always been to "unplug," or to

have a cell-phone, iPod, video game free experience. It becomes a time to communicate with each other and learn how to observe nature and use your five senses in the "real world." When your dove hunt gets rained out, though, and you're stuck in the truck for hours waiting, all rules go out the window, and the outdoor doctor would recommend "apply electronic gizmos as needed."

Debra and I also trade off when dove hunting. One of us drives the kids around to look at animals and flowers, etc., while the other one hunts. Then about every 30 minutes or so, we switch. During the handoff, you have about five minutes to hunt together while the kids are distracted, but then when they get antsy again, it's time to split up and head out.

Lastly, kids love dirt and mud. After getting my truck mudded from the inside out by the kids a few times, my wife and I came up with a strategy that takes the stress out of cleaning up after the outdoor adventure. We picked up some free carpet squares (free samples from the carpet store), and we take a couple jugs of water, a towel and some clean, dry clothes. (Don't forget the underwear.) When we're done for the day, we put the kids on the carpet square by the truck and give them a quick "field bath." Then we dry them off, put their pajamas on them, and stick them in the truck.

After spending all day outside, the first thing they do when they get back in the truck is fall asleep in about the first 60 seconds of the drive home, so this saves you the headache of having to wake them back up to get cleaned up at home. You can just carry them, clean and dry, still sleeping, from the truck to their beds. And as anyone with small children knows, having tired-out kiddos who fall asleep in the truck on the way home is reason enough alone to take them out with you.