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Women have always been hunters

They are being encouraged more now, but females afield is not a new phenomenon

By **MARISA FUTRAL**
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Some would like you to believe that women hunters are a relatively new phenomenon. Researching this topic, I have found this to be far from true, as women have been hunting for many generations. For example: Queen Elizabeth I was known to be an expert tracker; Annie Oakley (1860-1926) could reportedly shoot the head off a quail when she was only 12 years old; and British author Agnes Herbert hunted big game with her cousin Cecily on three continents in the early 1900s. And the list goes on.

On the local front, many Alabama women have been hunting for years as well. Starr Boykin of Mobile County learned to hunt from her mother Lynn at the age of six. Since then, they went on to get their world and grand slam turkey hunts together as well as enjoying several African safaris. Vivian Beech of Washington County was introduced to hunting by her father and older brother. For her, hunting was a way of life. She killed her first deer in the mid 1930s and her passion for hunting grew from there. In addition, she has been instrumental in introducing countless youth to hunting. Sharon Matthews of Clarke County started hunting in her 30s and has since taught both of her daughters how to hunt. These women never thought what they were doing was unusual; they just knew that hunting was something they enjoyed.

Dr. Mary Zeiss Stange, a professor of women’s studies and religion at Skidmore College in New York, has put together an entire book of women’s hunting stories, both past and present. In her book, *Heart Shots, Women Write about Hunting*, she reports that prior to World War II, American women hunted in significant numbers and were often featured regularly in outdoor periodicals like *Forest and Stream* (*Field and Stream*’s precursor) in the late



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The appeal of the hunt holds true for women as well as for men.

1800s and early 1900s. However, after the war, society began to push more “traditional” family values and women were actively discouraged from

outdoor pursuits such as hunting. Hunting came to be identified with manliness and the outdoor press fostered the notion that hunting was

and has always been a “guy thing.” However, in reality women have been hunting all along. In fact, Margaret Nichols, contributing editor to *Field and Stream* in 1973, observed “this men-only image never was all that real.”

Now, it seems, things have come full circle, as there is an incentive to provide encouragement for first-time female hunters. This is due in part to the declining numbers of male hunters and because it has become in vogue to promote women and hunting. The outdoor press has started to pay attention to women’s interests in hunting in order to boost hunting numbers.

The point here is that hunting is and always has been a gender-neutral sport. Dr. Stange reported in her book that women hunt for the same reasons men generally do and that they derive the same sorts of satisfaction from hunting. The appeal of the hunt, the drive to get back to nature, the experience of oneself as a predator, these desires are ageless as well as genderless. The notion of taking responsibility for what you eat, rather than purchasing it from the store, putting food on the table that isn’t pumped full of steroids and hormones, the sense of accomplishment one gets from a hard day’s work in the woods; these are all additional reasons that women hunt as well as men.

Therefore, to women and men who have never hunted and are considering starting, I wholeheartedly encourage you to do so. Hunting opens up a door to the natural world that you might not experience anywhere else, and you may just learn a little bit more about yourself as well.

For more information regarding this subject or other programs presented by the Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, please contact Marisa Futral, Hunter Education Coordinator, at 64 North Union Street, Montgomery, AL, 36130.