
SMALL GAME FOR SMALL HUNTERS

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"Babes do not tremble when they are shown a golf ball, but I should not like to own the boy whose hair does not lift his hat when he sees his first deer."

- Aldo Leopold

Written in the 1930s, this timeless statement embodies the natural wonder youngsters have for wildlife and all things natural. To nurture this interest and encourage active participation in Arizona's outdoors, the Department established "juniors-only" deer and javelina hunts in 1992. These hunts are open only to 10- to 14-year-olds who have completed a Department hunter education course and are accompanied by an adult in the field. This requirement encourages the adults to devote their undivided attention to teaching these young people about the habits of the wild critters they pursue, as well as hunter ethics, safe and responsible firearms handling, and respect for private property.

The juniors-only hunts have been a huge success since their inception and seem to become more popular each year. In 1994, a juniors-only elk hunt was added to give kids an opportunity to take part in that unique type of hunt. A wise person once said "parents who take their children hunting, seldom have to hunt for their children in later life." We have observed during our years of working with wildlife and the public that this statement is true.

Juniors-only big-game hunts provide a fantastic opportunity to Arizona youth and their parents; however, they take place during only one or two weeks in the fall, and a young hunter can participate only if lucky enough to be issued a

permit-tag in the lottery-style drawing. With our recent emphasis on big-game hunts for young hunters, parents may forget about the extensive opportunities that small-game hunting provides. Starting young hunters out on small game offers many advantages over diving directly into the chase for larger animals.

Regardless of where in the state you live, you can probably be small-game hunting within 30 minutes of your house. Whether it's cottontail rabbits, tree squirrels, or quail, you generally won't have to drive two or three hours to get to a good spot, and cottontail rabbit season is open year-round in most areas—and they're very tasty. Since you don't need a permit-tag for small game, you aren't restricted to a particular Game Management Unit to hunt. A trip to the nearest sporting goods or department store for a hunting license, a box of .22 shells, and a copy of the hunting regulations, and you're off to the nearest patch of public or state trust lands. In most areas of Arizona, you can easily accomplish it all in an afternoon hunt, allowing youngsters to sleep late in the morning or to attend to other activities.

Small-game seasons are relatively long, allowing ample time for multiple hunting trips, which means more opportunities for interactions between children and parents, and increased communication on such topics as safe firearms handling, wildlife management, wildlife food

habits, care of game meat, and other important concepts. Spending hours together in the field gives parents and kids a chance to talk about a lot of things—some related to wildlife and some not—but it certainly creates a special time for communicating, which is in short supply these days for most folks.

Not only are small-game seasons longer, with small mammals naturally more plentiful than deer, they also provide more opportunity for action. Rather than spending a week trying to get within range of a single big-game animal, the young hunters will be encountering many small-game animals in an outing. These frequent encounters keep kids' interest level up. Youngsters who sometimes get stuck in an infinite loop, surfing through 99 channels of cable, have shorter attention spans than young people in previous times, when you actually had to get up and walk across the room to change the TV channel.

Today's kids need action to catch their attention and keep their interest. If your son or daughter has not been able to stalk within range of a deer after four days of exhaustive hunting, they may start looking for the remote control. They've had about all of that channel they can stand. At least don't look so

SMALL GAME SEASONS

Tree Squirrel	Oct 13 - Nov 19, 1995
Cottontail Rabbit	Year-round
Gambel's Quail	Oct 13, 1995 - Feb 12, 1996
Scaled Quail	Oct 13, 1995 - Feb 12, 1996
Coyotes	Year-round

Consult the 1995-96 Fall Hunting
Regulations for seasons and exceptions

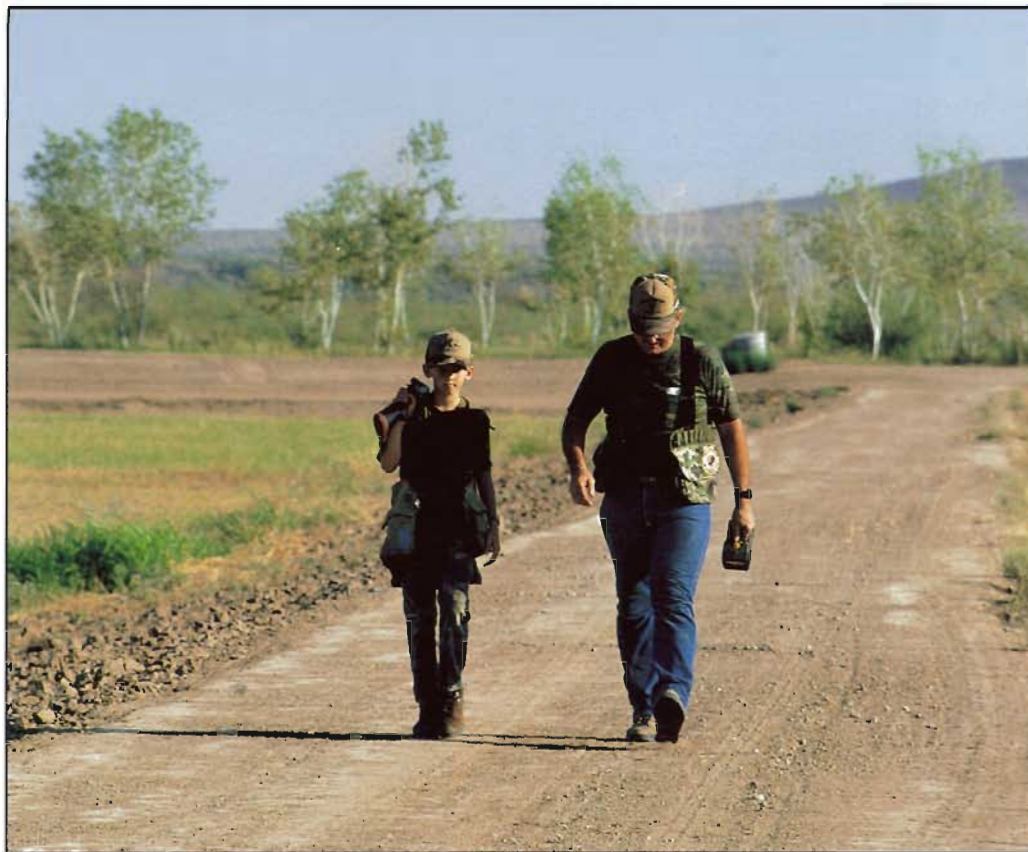
surprised when the Gameboy comes out of the backpack while you're glassing a distant hillside.

The firearms generally used for small game are better suited to small hunters. Squirrel and rabbit hunting is best accomplished with a .22 rimfire rifle. A single-shot .22 rifle is an inexpensive, lightweight, small gun that's ideal for any youth. Also, a single-shot firearm teaches young hunters the value of marksmanship and of making each shot count. The recoil from such a firearm will not cause excessive damage to tasty small-game meat as well. A firearm of this caliber will not punish the budding sportsman or woman with each shot. A sure-fire way to guarantee your child will never want to go hunting again: give 'em a .300 Winchester Magnum with a muzzlebreak and no earplugs.

Small hunters also find it easier to physically handle small game. And you won't find yourself packing your daughter's elk quarters out of Nasty Canyon while she sits in the truck and eats sunflower seeds with the heater on. Taking an active part in field dressing game helps young people learn about the internal organs necessary to keep animals (and humans) alive, and assures that not all members of the next generation will think meat is manufactured in factories, prior to being packaged in cellophane.

Last winter was characterized by abundant and well-timed rainfall. This moisture equates to an abundance and diversity of weeds and grasses which make for fat and happy rabbits and quail. Animals with abundant fat stores reproduce at a much higher rate than animals in poor condition. In good years such as this one, small-game populations have the capacity to increase tremendously. This is the year to dust off that .22 rimfire and tune-in your youngsters to the excitement of small-game hunting.

Many people grow-up hunting small game. But as we get older, with busy jobs (and the money to pay someone else to raise our food), we sometimes forget about the fun of rabbit, squirrel, and quail hunting. Let's not allow this fun to slip by the next generation, without letting them try their hand at it. 🦋



Juniors-only dove hunts are just one of the opportunities parents and kids have to spend time together in the field. This time presents a chance to talk about a lot of things—some related to wildlife and some not—but nonetheless, a chance to communicate.