



OUTDOORS

CANADA HUNTING



LARRY PORTER/THE WORLD-HERALD

Sportsmen who travel into Canada to hunt or fish are likely to see plenty of wildlife along the roadsides, such as this young black bear.

Faux paws

Placed to attract bears, bucket draws a crowd

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ARMSTRONG, Ontario — A huge skunk — a trophy-sized stinker — lumbered out of the brush, walked to the bait bucket, plopped down on his stomach and began to dig at the lip of the overturned bucket.

A head-sized hole was quickly excavated, and the skunk leisurely feasted for an hour on the mixture of oats, molasses, cooking oil and other goodies meant to attract bears. Finally full, the oversized skunk waddled off into the woods.

Another skunk, somewhat smaller, poked his head out of the brush and dashed to the bucket. Then, a third skunk made a cautious approach.

In a split second, the quietness of the North Woods was splintered by a yowling, spitting, snarling skunk fight.

I recoiled in my tree stand, which was only 15 yards from the bucket.

The wind was blowing in my direction, and I fully expected to be engulfed by the awful fallout when the combatants resorted to chemical warfare.

The battle raged for two minutes before it became apparent that there is honor among skunks. Neither gassed the other. During the next three days, I witnessed three other fights among six skunks that visited the bait bucket. The fights were serious, but the dreaded spray maneuver was never employed.

"It's fun to watch the feeding activity at the bait," said Dusty Brodhagen, whose family owns Bear Creek Outfitters, an archery moose and bear hunting camp in northwestern Ontario. "It gives you something to watch when the bears aren't coming in."

While in a tree stand, Dusty's mom, Sandy, once watched a snowshoe hare kick a gray jay to death. With apologies to Walt Disney, Sandy named the heavy-footed hare "Thumper."

"Rabbits actually are very aggressive around the bait," said outfitter Rob Brodhagen, who is conducting seminars



Sitting among a variety of archery targets, Eigil Pagh holds the bait bucket he inadvertently shot with a crossbow while bear hunting. "You can't compare a rifle hunt with an archery hunt. I was 24.5 yards from a big bull moose last year and 17 yards from a bear this year. Your heart is pounding. It's awesome," Pagh said, despite missing his bear.



There are seemingly endless opportunities to photograph wildlife, such as black bear or red fox. At left, Jim McDonnell of Royal, Iowa, thought that he missed his shot when his bowstring snagged his safety harness and struck the bear in the hip. But the arrow resulted in a fatal hit, as it severed a femoral artery.

during the River City Hunting and Fishing Expo that ends today in the Mid-America Center in Council Bluffs. The Brodhagens will return March 6 through 9 for the Omaha Boat, Sports and Travel Show.

There is a definite pecking order among the small critters that visit a bait bucket. Skunks are at the top of the ladder, followed by rabbits, gray jays and red squirrels. Chipmunks occupy the lowest rung.

Hawks and pine martins often lurk in ambush. They don't eat the bait, but they patiently wait to pounce on an unsuspecting diner.

Up in the tree stand, a hunter waits just as patiently

for a black bear to come to the bait. But surges of adrenalin sometimes plague hunters, who whiff more often than do pine martins and hawks.

For instance, Eigil "Ike" Pagh, 72, who lives in Hawthorn Woods, Ill., a Chicago suburb, was so excited when a bear came in that he didn't check to see if the arrow in his crossbow was correctly seated. The misdirected arrow took out the bait bucket instead of the bear.

No matter. The close encounter with a bear was reward enough for Pagh.

"I've been hunting with a rifle since 1964," Pagh said. "You can't compare a rifle hunt with an archery hunt. I

was 24½ yards from a big bull moose last year and 17 yards from a bear this year. With a rifle, you don't get that close. And you don't get that excitement. Your heart is pounding. It's awesome."

Pagh no longer is able to draw his compound bow. But the use of a crossbow allows him to continue to hunt with archery equipment.

Iowa Department of Natural Resources officials two years ago realized that old archery hunters were fading from the hunting scene because they were not able to use their archery equipment. Now hunters 70 and older are allowed to use crossbows to hunt antlerless deer.

"It used to be that you needed a doctor's certificate to hunt with a crossbow in Iowa," said Jim McDonnell of Royal, Iowa. "But there was a concern about older hunters leaving the archery field. Now Iowa isn't letting the older hunters slip away."

"These guys have time on their hands. A crossbow gets them back in the field and helps connect with their grandkids. They aren't sitting in a chair, staring out the window and wishing that they were back hunting again. Now they can."

Nebraska hunters who want to use a crossbow, regardless of age, are required to obtain a doctor's certificate stating they are physically unable to use conventional bows.

McDonnell, 70, still hunts with a compound bow and killed a black bear while hunting with the Brodhagens last fall. But McDonnell's shot didn't go as planned.

As the bear came into the bait, McDonnell drew his bow. The bear then turned, facing him, and he had to hold at full draw for what seemed an eternity. When the bear finally turned broadside, McDonnell shot.

"But the bow string caught on the buckle of my safety harness," McDonnell said. "The arrow went right into the bear's hip. I was sitting there praying that somehow he would be able to remove the arrow and recover when I heard a loud moan. It was what bear hunters know as the death moan. I thought, 'My gosh, how did I kill that bear?'"

A half-hour later, McDonnell climbed down from his tree stand and found the bear. The broadhead had severed the femoral artery.

"Mentally," McDonnell said, "I can never use that safety harness again. I don't know how that buckle bulged out to catch the bow string. But when I saw that arrow sticking out only eight or 10 inches, I was sick. It was a terrible hit."

"You think all kinds of bad things about yourself. How the arrow even got that far — it was a 17-yard shot — is beyond me. It shows you the power that these bows have."

"When they say it's better to be lucky than good, this is it."