

Agents help kids go duck hunting

Holt County conservation agents organized the first annual “Big Muddy Duck Hunt” on opening day of the Youth Waterfowl Season for the children of military families.

“Overall, I’m pleased with the turn out and success of the youth hunters,” said Conservation Agent Anthony Maupin. “It is great to have local duck clubs, club members and organizations all chip in to make this possible. It’s a lot of fun seeing kids develop their shotgun skills at the range. When they shoot at their first duck, hit or miss, they are having a great time and are hooked on waterfowl hunting.”

The hunt was a collaborative effort between the Conservation Department, Air National Guard, Ducks Unlimited, Dick’s Sporting Goods, Wal-Mart, Kiwanis, local sportsmen and private donors. Fifteen youngsters whose parents are in the 139th Airlift Wing of the Air National Guard got to hunt.

Feedback from parents, volunteers and the Conservation Department staff involved was positive. One parent said, “This is a good program to get my kids interested in hunting. The ‘hunting’ care package to get the kids jump started is a great idea.”

Another parent commented, “Well, my daughter is definitely hooked on duck hunting. Looks like we’ll be making plans to hunt Bob Brown or Nod-away.”

The first of the two-day event was in a classroom and focused on educating parents and youth participants about duck hunting. Instructors covered duck calling, decoying, identification, habitat, regulations and firearms safety. Time also was spent on the trap range learning basic shotgun shooting skills. For some of the young participants, it was the first time they had ever handled a firearm.

The military families met at 6 a.m. in Bigelow, Mo. on the opening morning of the Youth Waterfowl Season. We grouped them with a local sportsman



Holt County Conservation Agent Anthony Maupin with two first-time duck hunters.

who would serve as their duck caller and guide for the morning hunt. Youth hunters, their parent/guardian and guide trekked to private duck clubs neighboring Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge near Mound City where they were allowed to hunt until 10 a.m. At the end of the hunt, the kids had harvested about 12 ducks of varied species.

Each participant received a care package containing over \$100 in duck hunting equipment. Ducks Unlimited donated duck calls, painted wood duck decoys and Greenwing subscriptions. Dick’s Sporting Goods donated floating blind bags. Wal-Mart supplied each participant with a duck call lanyard.

We bought duck carriers, camouflage caps, hand warmers, thermoses and commemorative t-shirts with funds donated by area sportsmen and Kiwanis. The idea was to provide the kids with items they would keep through the years to help them

remember the experience they had at the youth clinic and the fun they had while duck hunting.

“It seemed to me like a success on many levels,” said Conservation Agent Jade Wright. “While conducting routine compliance checks in the Youth Waterfowl Season, I have always been amazed how few of the private duck club blinds had young hunters in them. Speaking with non-duck hunters about the sport, I find many are apprehensive about giving it a try because of the amount of equipment necessary, their inability to identify waterfowl and their ignorance of the many waterfowl regulations.

“This was a great chance to put young hunters in duck hunting blinds, and give them an opportunity to try it in a safe environment. The fact we were able to provide this hunting trip to military families, who regularly sacrifice for our benefit, made it an even more worthwhile event,” Wright said.