

Warning: preg_match(): Compilation failed: nothing to repeat at offset 1 in /home/southc59/public_html/wp-includes/class-wp.php on line 222



by Caleb Reeder
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The 2019 South Carolina Wildlife Outdoor Writing Contest top five entries have been selected and are featured right here on SouthCarolinaWild.org! The top five student writers include: Kassie Burkett, Madison Greer, Gracie Howard, Caleb Reed and Emily Thigpen.

"I hunt, but I'm not a hunter," I'll jest to my family and friends. This is truer than I thought, now that, again, I'm walking back from a hunt with nothing but the Remington .270 I carried in. Likewise, I retrace my footsteps from two hours earlier. Today was not a success. I now must face my little brothers who, as always, look through the living-room window in bright anticipation that today might be different. When I began this morning, fresh from a cup of coffee, I was optimistic. "Maybe today" is the reoccurring thought. I usually don't begin with a different method than before, so I have no warrant to think this.



Those turkeys must have known I had no tags for them, because they walked directly in front of my sights!

The pine-saplings were the first to greet me. An acre's worth of pine, working as a key-hole to the rest of the long and narrow property. I walked through with the fragrant needles brushing drops of the cold morning dew on my face, while I also looked down to admire the deer tracks. Consequently, in contrast, as I imagined coming home with a sixteen-point buck swung over my shoulder, a spider's web encountered my path and went directly into my face. This was the only time in my hunt that I put aside every purpose of minding my actions, because then I laid my rifle against a shrub, and used both hands to peel every trace of that sticky-fiber out of my eyes, out of my mouth, and anywhere else it lingered. I then picked up my gun and checked the scrapings: bent-over pines with frayed bark and a slices of yellow running down the narrow trunks.

The oaks greeted me next. I left the pine-gathering and continued up the hill where the pine and oaks mingle: my hunting spot. The sun began to rise, and its penetrating light cut through the trees and brought visibility to what was a dark forest. I sat where was usual, on a fallen Y-shaped tree. The still-hunt began; it was time to fix myself in an ample position and wait. I sat on the top of a hill with a clear view of all that lay below. No animal was yet visible. I began recalling the flock of turkeys that once approached me from the back of where I sat. Those turkeys must have known I had no tags for them, because they walked directly in front of my sights! This led to me thinking of how long it had been since I saw so many turkeys at once, but my recollection was interrupted by a loud noise of rustling in the thicket ahead of me. I did not let my eyes budge from the spot of excitement; the wait was unbearable. But, to my great disappointment, what startled me was a small grey squirrel, who decided it was time to alert all deer to desert the area. I still wonder if there's a conspiracy with squirrels and deer. It was at this point of my hunt that I began to feel discouraged.



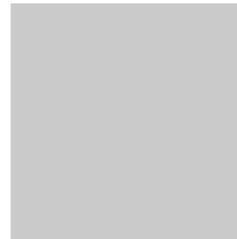
Amidst the intricate webs, the sweet-smelling pine, the bustling squirrels, and the rhythmical singing of birds come a distinct scene of aromatic, congenial woodland.

As the squirrels continued to chatter and chase each other, zipping from branch-to-branch, the birds began to sing, flying back and forth; and all of this gave life to the forest. I began to hear a consistent noise behind the other hill in front of me. It didn't sound like a squirrel, because the squirrels are always somewhere else; this sounded like a deer. A deer, however, out of my vision. I fixed my eyes intently on the edge of the

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other hill's summit – waiting, if perhaps it was a white-tailed deer. Regrettably, the noise reduced; and as it became quieter and quieter, I felt as if I was a five-year-old who looks up to the balloon that mistakenly slipped out of his hand. Again, I was left with the irritating squirrels – mixed with the pleasant birds.

So, here I am retracing these earlier steps of mine. The sun has fully risen, and its beams now reveal the spiderwebs I am vulnerable to. Though I feel that this forest is dead as a desert, I am realizing that I'm wrong. These woods are full of life: the plants and trees, spiders, squirrels, birds – and deer. Amidst the intricate webs, the sweet-smelling pine, the bustling squirrels, and the rhythmical singing of birds come a distinct scene of aromatic, congenial woodland. I know that this forest has deer, yet their motive for secluding themselves exhibits that they are no "dumb" creatures. This causes me to wonder in amazement. As I continue this walk home, the 104th psalm rings loudly in my ears: "O Lord my God, thou art very great ... how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches." I now have an answer to give my little brothers when they ask me all at once, "Did you get anything?" "Yes," I may reply, "I gained by what I learned."

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