

# Time traveling in a deer stand

**I**t's funny how an odor, a sound, or the ghost of a flavor can instantly transport one back to some earlier, fondly-remembered time. A few bars of some popular song from your high-school days can suddenly bring rushing back all the emotions, hopes, and sensations of your dating days.

(If you're still living your dating days, just ignore me and enjoy yourself; you may have to wait a few years to understand what I'm talking about.)

One pretty evening last week I was sitting in a blind in West Kerr County, hoping for a shot at a wild hog that has been raiding a friend's deer feeder. The evening was calm ... calm enough that I could hear very distant sounds quite distinctly. Somewhere a small dog was hysterically protesting – what? Was my hog afoot? Had a stranger entered his yard? Was he denouncing a raccoon scratching at a rotten board in the henhouse? (I could hear hens clucking, but not in wild alarm.)

Sitting quietly, letting the sounds paint mental pictures of a rural homestead settling for the night, a movement in the edge of a cedar thicket sent my right hand toward the scoped, single-shot Contender pistol balanced on a sand bag, its muzzle pre-aimed at a point beneath the feeder. But it was a white fallow doe that stepped out of the woods and stopped to survey the clearing. A pair of tiny fawns with faint spots showing through their creamy coats followed her, and I could see other animals behind them. There would be no wild hog around this bunch.



John Wootters photo

**In their native Africa, guinea fowl are plentiful and good game birds, too. Here the author, right, examines the bag with a South African farmer who hosted him for a guinea shoot. The birds behave somewhat like pheasants in America, tending to run in front of the beaters to the end of the cover and then flushing in great coveys, cackling raucously on take-off.**

Another white fallow deer emerged, and then two brown fallow does, followed by a handsome spotted doe and a brown fawn. On the other side of the clearing, a pair of whitetail does stood like statues, studying the exotics.

At the feeder there was no noticeable sign of aggression, but the two species did not mix. I knew that axis and sika deer will dominate whitetails at a feeding location, but had never been able to watch fallow deer and native whitetails interact. The interaction was extremely subtle, but the whitetails did not share in the richest part of the feeder's corn distribution pattern.

Now other sounds reached my ears; a woman's voice, a clanging of tractor-mounted implements dropped, and then ... another sound, one I hadn't heard for many years but which was immediately familiar. I turned my head slightly to bring my good ear into play, holding my breath, and ... yes, there it was again, the kek-kek-kek of a guineafowl!

Instantly, I was no longer in West Kerr country! I was whisked back to a gentler time of my youth in East Texas, where my grandmother kept guineafowl and Maggie, her colored cook, produced a savory dish of smothered guinea hen.

Then the savor of the rich dark meat carried my reverie across oceans and continents, halfway around the world to Africa where my wife and I made a most extraordinary safari in 1976. With a professional hunter, we took a hunting car and only two native

## Currently Outdoors



John Wootters

staff – one an expert tracker and skinner, the other a cook – and made a 10-day safari into an area in northeastern Botswana where we believed no white man had hunted for maybe a 100 years and no motorized vehicle had ever been.

We traveled light, carrying no tents and little equipment. We slept out under a blazing tropical moon, and used elephant paths for roads, there being no other roads in this wilderness. That wildlife — even eland, the spookiest of the large antelopes, stood like cattle and watched us pass as close as 50 yards, proved how virginal the area really was. It was like a time-machine journey back to a place and time when Eden still existed.

We were hunting an elephant and often camping

close to waterholes, posting one of the staff in a tree from which he could see game at the water. We wouldn't fire a big-game rifle to collect meat for fear of warning elephants of our presence.

But we had a Browning shotgun, and the woods were full of flocks of guineafowl exactly like those my grandmother raised in east Texas. The shotgun's report neither disturbed the surroundings as sharply nor carried as far through the forests as a rifle shot.

So for most of 10 days we ate guineafowl. Our cook did an incredible job of varying the entrées. We enjoyed baked guinea, fried guinea, fricasseed guinea, roast guinea, guinea with noodles, guinea stew, guinea soup, cold guinea sandwiches for lunch on the trail, and leftover guinea with scrambled eggs for breakfast. No, he didn't give us smothered guinea like Maggie used to make, but all his meals were delightful. He also baked fresh bread, and had brought potatoes, onions and other fruits and vegetables that needed no refrigeration. What he could do with only a stewpot, skillet and a couple of pans was simply amazing,

especially out there in the bush, a day's drive from any source of re-supply, with only a campfire for stove and oven. This guy was more than just a cook; he was truly a talented chef, who might have made guineafowl the rage of the New York restaurant scene.

All those memories came flooding back while I sat on the blind in West Kerr County, so powerfully and vividly that I might not have been astonished if the fallow deer had turned into zebras and kudu and an African elephant had wandered out of the cedar. Whoever keeps those guineas will never know what a ride he gave me for a few minutes on a warm July evening.

The wild hog didn't come that night, but I did get the elephant back in 1976.

**John Wootters, of Ingram, is a semi-retired outdoors writer with more than 30 years experience. He was editor of Petersen's Hunting magazine and author of the monthly column "Buck Sense" and has written the all-time best selling book on deer hunting, "Hunting Trophy Deer." He has served on the Board of Directors of the National Rifle Association and written for Shooting Times, Rifle, Handloader, Guns & Ammo and Petersen's Hunting magazines.**