



| Claude Jenkins, AWF Land Stewardship Biologist

RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP

Prime Time

In broadcasting/communications, the term “prime time” is used to describe when the largest television audience is available, and it’s during this time when advertising rates are usually the highest. In this context the term originated in the United States soon after World War II. Centuries earlier, however, the term “prime time” was coined to mean spring or at the beginning (of the day, of life, etc.). The term was likely inherited into English from the French word for spring - printemps, and by the 16th century the Anglicization to prime time was complete.

To my daughter Jessica and me, “prime time” has a different meaning. It’s a term that we use to describe the time during a hunt when our chance of seeing a deer is generally best. Although deer can be active during any time of day, they are primarily crepuscular, active mainly at dawn and dusk. It was at this time during the 2010-2011 deer season when we would look at each other and whisper, “its prime time!” Our senses seemed to be more acute during this time as we anticipated seeing a deer. Although there were a few “successful” hunts, we never went home feeling dejected if no deer were harvested or even seen.

By far, Jessica’s favorite outdoor-related activity is deer hunting, and she has been hunting deer now for seven years. And, if asked, she will tell you that her favorite hunting partner is me...her dad! In the beginning, the primary focus for Jessica was to harvest a deer, as it was for me when I was introduced to deer hunting. It was important in those early years to begin instilling in her sportsmanship and an ecological awareness – virtues critical to sustaining the sport of hunting and to wildlife conservation! Proudly, I’ve watched Jessica develop into a fine sportsman! I watched, over time, as she developed an ecological awareness stirred by the profound splendors of the natural world; an intellectual awareness – not emotional – that is shared and understood only by true conservationists. Since enrolling in The University of Southern Mississippi, Jessica has less time to hunt than before; this makes every hunt we share even more special!

It was a frigid 18 degrees with a five mph NW wind. This describes the weather of our last early-morning deer hunt of the 2010-2011 season. The frigid weather was too much to endure that morning, and after spending less than two hours in the stand, we began to make our way back to the jeep. I noticed that Jessica’s pace was much slower than usual. Her reluctance to leave despite the cold was evident. She would occasionally stop, look around and back from which we came to savor the experience, knowing that this would be her last hunt of the season. I did not rush her because I knew what she was feeling, and like Jessica, I too didn’t want our last hunt to end. We

made it back to the jeep with mixed emotions: we wanted to hunt, but we looked forward to the warmth that the jeep would provide. During the ride home, Jessica expressed how important hunting is to her, and with deep emotions, how much she loved hunting with me!

On the afternoon of January 16, Jessica left for Mississippi as the spring semester was scheduled to begin in two days. Our hunting season was now over. At 4:26 that same afternoon, my cell phone alerted me of a new text message. The message was from Jessica: “Its prime time,” she wrote, followed by a smiley face! “Yep, it is,” I replied! I couldn’t help but reflect on our time hunting together and wish that we could hunt just one more time. Deer hunting for Jessica and me is more than just hunting deer; it’s a means of capturing that irreplaceable dad-daughter time that can be easily lost to life’s demands. One thing is for certain: whether a deer is seen or not, we have fun!

Its prime time in the Swamp Field, one of Jessica’s favorite hunting spots. I’m here, to hunt of course, but primarily to jot down notes for this article. Being here without Jessica feels strange to me as I had hunted this stand only once without her in the last seven years. I can’t wait ‘til next season when Jessica and I can add to the collection of memories associated with hunting, and to experience together the heightened anticipation of seeing a deer that can only be experienced at prime time! 🍷



CLAUDE JENKINS