



Outdoors

Our lives in the Northwoods

HUNTING

Bear harvest up sharply

Hunters on pace for biggest harvest in more than a decade

by MARSHALL HELMBERGER
Managing Editor

REGIONAL— Bear hunters in Minnesota are on a pace to harvest the highest number of bears in more than a decade, helped by dry conditions earlier in the summer that limited wild food production. As of Wednesday, the Department of Natural Resources was reporting 2,236 bear registrations.

The high harvest is falling heavier than usual on female bears, according to registration information compiled by the DNR. “In our area, we’re seeing 55 percent females,” said Tower Area Wildlife Manager Tom Rusch. “That’s sky high and from a population growth perspective, that’s not what you want to see.”

Hunters tend to take more female bears during years of natural food

shortages. In better food years, they are more reluctant than males to utilize baits, which most hunters use to draw bears to their stands.

See **BEAR HUNT...**pg. 5B



Right: Sixteen-year-old Troy Ray poses with the 326-pound bear he shot during the first week of the 2020 bear hunt. submitted



PERSONALITIES

Ricing with the new guy

Thoughts on tippy canoes and baby food, too

I took the new guy ricing recently. “The new guy” is our continuing appellation for David Colburn, who has served admirably as our Cook-Orr editor since we hired him back in February.

He was a last-second addition to our list of possible hires after we had received a surprisingly robust response to a job posting. It was his letter of introduction that sold us on him— it was well-researched, well-written, with a nice touch of wry Midwestern humor.

He’s a Kansas boy, although he’s been all over the place, including professional stints in Los Angeles, St. Louis, and Chicago. He’s been a school superintendent, ran a huge urban Head Start program, and left that to return home to take care of his mother and to be the editor of his local paper in Marion, Kansas, about six years ago. He also spent several months living in Sri Lanka, of all places, where he just sort of bummed around, meeting interesting people and visiting out-of-the-way places.

David is insatiably curious, has an eye for detail, and likes new experiences. He’s jumped into life in the North Country with both feet, so he was quick

Above: David takes a selfie in the reflection off his publisher’s sunglasses.

Right: Heading down Petrell Creek on the way to Breda Lake.

photos by D. Colburn

to say yes when I asked if he’d like to try ricing.

As he says, he was blown away the first time we arrived at one of the two lakes we visited this ricing season. He grabbed his camera right away and fired off a shot. Back in Kansas, he said, the shot would pass for a wheatfield or a tallgrass prairie. “In Minnesota, it’s a lake shot,” he exclaimed later on Facebook. “A frickin’ lake!”

It was not just David’s first time ricing... it seemed like it might be his first time in a canoe, at least for a number of decades. The unstable tippy feel, which reminded me of having a lumbering mope in the canoe, is a reliable sign that you have a greenhorn in the boat.

I tried knocking rice my usual way, perched on a low camping chair set just a bit back of the mid-section, with David paddling in the back. That



method has worked well for me in the past, but it requires a stable boat, so after nearly falling over a couple times, I moved to the front seat and sat backward. I’ve seen others rice that way and it worked passably well, especially under the circumstances.

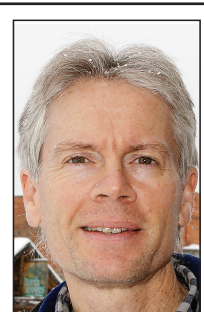
David eventually got the hang of paddling, although he spent too much time looking at clouds or interesting patterns on lily pads, to keep us consistently in the best rice. David was equally fascinated by the entire ecosystem of organisms that fall into the boat along with the rice. Humans aren’t the only ones to recognize the remarkable potential of this wild grain, after all. The rice is literally writhing with rice worms, rice moths, rice spiders, lady bugs, and a whole host of other tiny creatures that fill your boat and crawl up your pants legs, as David discovered with a hint of consternation

more than once.

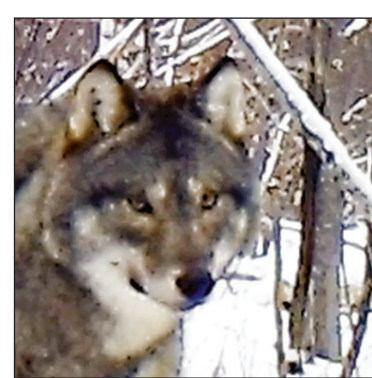
To him, it was all opportunity for distraction. I’d look around regularly as we were passing through marginal rice, only to see that we’d missed the thick stuff on that pass as David was daydreaming or, in the alternative, telling one of his long-winded stories. One thing we learned quickly about David is that he’s a talker, and a good storyteller as well. In that way, and others, he reminds everyone in the office of our former Cook-Orr editor, the late and much-missed Tom Klein.

We tried switching roles in the boat at one point, after persistent complaining from David that he had been stuck with the hard work. So, I paddled from the front (keeping the boat in thick rice, mind you) and he tried

See **NEW GUY...**pg. 5B



MARSHALL HELMBERGER



PUBLIC INPUT

DNR seeks comment on gray wolf plan update

REGIONAL— Minnesota’s iconic gray wolf is the focus of upcoming public input opportunities sponsored by the Department of Natural Resources.

In three virtual meetings and a parallel online input period, the public will be asked to weigh in on various questions about wolves, including specific questions and open comment opportunities about wolf numbers and geographic range, conservation options, and impacts on agriculture and other wildlife species.

The DNR is seeking this input as it updates the state’s 20-year-old wolf management plan.

“Discussions about wolves bring out opinions from a broad range of interests,” said Dan Stark, DNR wolf management specialist. “We want to both provide information about wolves in Minnesota and understand the concerns and issues that people have about the future of wolf management. These public meetings are part of a broader process to update the plan and give people an opportunity to share their views.”

How to take part

The virtual open houses will include informational presentations from the DNR and allow real-time public input and Q&A. The open houses will each focus on a particular geographic area, and all are welcome to join the open house focusing on their area of the state or region of interest. Each takes place from 6-8 p.m.

➤ Northwest region - Tuesday, Sept. 29.

➤ Central and southern region, including Twin Cities metro area - Tuesday, Oct. 6.

➤ Northeast region - Thursday, Oct. 8.

The open houses will be accessible by computer, smartphone, or phone (audio only for those joining by phone). Registration for the event is required and will be available Monday, Sept. 21, on the wolf plan webpage. Individuals wishing to be notified when registration opens can sign up to receive updates about wolves from the DNR.

Fishing reports

Ely area

Walleye fishing proved to be very challenging for many anglers this last week as several cold fronts and high winds made walleyes sluggish and boat control extremely challenging. Still some anglers were able to locate and catch walleyes. Best reports came in 10 feet of water or less on wind-blown shorelines. Jig and minnows were the top producing, but there were a few reports of crawlers also being effective, on a jig. Water temps continue to fall into the 50's now, so anglers should expect the minnow bite to only get better and better.

Smallmouth bass anglers struggled, too, but there were a few reports of topwater fishing working during the early morning hours. Whopper ploppers and hulla ploppers accounted for the topwater action reported by anglers. Anglers also reported

catching numbers of smallies out on top of sunken islands, with a jig and big minnow.

Pike anglers reported good fishing, but most fish were on the small side. Anglers mainly found pike inside weedbeds and around river mouths. Large spoons, spinnerbaits and in-line spinners were very effective on pike.

Stream trout anglers reported good fishing from shore this last week. As water temps drop, stream trout rise back up and start cruising the shoreline. Anglers caught trout by floating a crawler off the bottom. Casting small spoons and small jigs and twisters, fished around downed trees or near large flats, was very effective. Early and late in the day were the best times to be out fishing for them.

Courtesy of Arrowhead Outdoors in Ely.

BEAR HUNT...Continued from page 4B

The season opened on Sept. 1 and the registrations were tallied through Sept. 9. While the season runs through Oct. 18, Rusch said hunters typically register about two-thirds of the harvest in the first week of the season. The harvest through the first nine days nearly surpasses last year's total harvest of 2,340. Rusch said it now looks likely this year's harvest will surpass 3,000 bears, which could well make it the highest take since 2007. Rusch said he expects hunter success to exceed 50 percent.

Those who utilized experienced guides likely did better than that. Indeed, ten of the 12 hunters who signed up for the hunt at Udovich Guide Service, harvested bears, according to longtime guide Dennis Udovich. "It was a pretty good season," said Udovich, who noted that all of his hunters had multiple opportunities to see bears. "We had multi-

ple bears on the baits, so I urged them to take their time," he said. "One guy got to watch a female with three cubs."

Udovich stresses the importance of harvesting only male bears and his hunters followed that guideline this year as well.

The youngest hunter of the season was a 16-year-old from Wisconsin, who attended Udovich's bear camp with his father and two uncles, and they all went home with bears. The 16-year-old, Troy Ray, shot a 326-pound male. "We had three bears over 300 pounds," said Udovich, including the largest, a 346-pounder.

LAKE COUNTRY FORECAST

from NOAA weather

Friday					Saturday					Sunday					Monday					Tuesday				
66 48					61 44					59 39					65 50					72 53				
Ely	Hi	Lo	Prec.	Sn.	Emb.	Hi	Lo	Prec.	Sn.	Cook	Hi	Lo	Prec.	Sn.	Orr	Hi	Lo	Prec.	Sn.	Tower	Hi	Lo	Prec.	Sn.
08/31	71	43	0.13		08/31	72	39	0.19		08/31	71	49	0.18		08/31	64	50	0.88		08/31	74	46	0.46	
09/01	65	37	0.46		09/01	66	38	0.45		09/01	65	46	0.62		09/01	66	45	0.02		09/01	65	40	0.34	
09/02	71	37	0.30		09/02	71	39	0.19		09/02	68	47	0.33		09/02	68	48	0.35		09/02	70	47	0.33	
09/03	70	50	0.19		09/03	70	50	0.00		09/03	68	48	0.34		09/03	59	48	0.25		09/03	69	51	0.20	
09/04	59	39	0.09		09/04	61	39	0.00		09/04	59	43	0.10		09/04	66	39	0.08		09/04	59	43	0.06	
09/05	67	34	0.00		09/05	67	33	0.00		09/05	66	41	0.00		09/05	70	39	0.00		09/05	65	33	0.00	
09/06	71	34	0.00		09/06	70	43	0.00		09/06	70	41	0.00		09/06	72	52	0.00		09/06	71	33	0.00	
Total			14.63		YTD Total			14.94		YTD Total			21.81		YTD Total			NA		YTD Total				17.27

NEW GUY...Continued from page 4B

knocking rice for about half an hour. I heard rice fall into the boat a couple times, probably by accident, and he was the one who eventually said he wouldn't mind switching back. Besides, he said he preferred the sound the rice made when I knocked, which he compared to "smooth jazz," as opposed to his "punk rock."

In the end, despite it all, after a couple trips to two different lakes, we ended up with plenty of rice for another year, and then some.

I don't know whether David will eat much of his rice. He's lived alone now for many years and as a single guy, he's lost touch with the idea of cooking, much less eating healthy. His idea of lunch at the office is something called a "hot pocket." I had to ask him what it was the first time he sat down with one, since I had never seen a hot pocket before.

For a little variety, David will regularly turn to a gas station burrito, the local variety appropriately branded "The Bomb," which is what I assume it feels like when it reaches your gut.

He brought one back to the office earlier this year, heated it up in the microwave, and took a couple bites before sensing something wasn't quite right. He turned it over only to find the bottom covered with bright green mold. I half expected him to scrape it off and just keep right on eating, but at that point he figured it was best to toss The Bomb. Even the dog wouldn't touch it.

You can tell he mostly eats by



David Colburn, with an impish twinkle in his eye, enjoys a lunch break, which involves sucking a yogurt-like goo from a tube-like package in between handfuls of Fritos corn chips.

photo by M. Helmberger

himself, since he's pretty slovenly about it (sorry, as a reporter I just have to tell it like it is). He has, in keeping with my description, prompted a betting pool in the office about how thick the mold will grow on his stale coffee in the coffeemaker before David decides to rinse the pot. Funny how David and mold keep coming up in the same sentence, isn't it?

For David, mostly it's about convenience when it comes to food. While ricing, I had brought a salmon-salad sandwich, with fresh garden lettuce on multi-grain bread, my favorite tortilla chips, and some exceptionally delicious cookies that my wife Jodi had baked the night before (I shared them, of course).

David had brought Fritos and

something in a tube. It was some kind of creamy, sweetened goo that the manufacturer described as "yogurt," which appeared intended for infants. "Is that baby food?" I asked as he sucked on one end of the tube while squeezing out the goo. Insulted, David corrected me. "No, it's for toddlers."

David seems to appreciate self-deprecating humor, which is why I expect he'll still be working for us after reading about his introduction to ricing. Besides, being the target of occasional ribbing comes with the territory when you're "the new guy," and on that front David's content to go with the flow, even if the canoe might be a little tippy...

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