

# ***TAKING ADVANTAGE OF SOCIAL DISTANCING***

***WHILE HELPING RANCHERS AT THE SAME TIME***

***BY HEIDI LYN RAO***



For hunters, the end of hunting season can lead to some very long days. Unfortunately, we only thought we knew what long days were. Because of Covid-19, hunters along with

everyone else, find themselves sitting at home in a forced “shut down.” Additionally, many hunters are learning how quick a house can shrink like a new cotton shirt as they share their “self-quarantine” with a spouse, kids, dogs, and whatever else takes up oxygen! Instead of hiding in the garage, backroom, or the “back-forty”, take advantage of your “shut down” with your spouse and out-of-school kids by spending time together learning a new outdoor activity.

That is exactly what we did. We decided to get outdoors together while at the same time helping a local rancher. As the quarantine period started to take effect, I was talking to one of our local ranchers, Frank Galle of the Galle Ranch. We were discussing how the “shut down” was going to affect his daily operation. Frank stated that there is less human activity on his ranch and the neighboring ranches resulting in an increase in predator and nuisance animal activity. He then stated that he had lost several calves to coyotes, chickens to bobcats and foxes, and that the raccoons were causing a lot of damage to his barn and feeders.

It was obvious that Mr. Galle’s ranching operation was suffering due to the predators having free range on his property. Thinking to myself how this would be a great opportunity to get back outdoors and spend quality time with my family, while at the same time helping a friend with his predator problem, I asked him if he would like me, my husband, and four boys to come out to his property and set traps to reduce the number of problem animals. Frank welcomed the idea! Since at the time, we were not under mandatory “stay-at-home” orders or restrictions on the number of people gathering, I thought it would also be great to take as many kids as possible to introduce them to trapping.

Frank thought that was a terrific idea. Mr. Galle constantly looks for opportunities to get kids outdoors to hunt and fish. The Galle Ranch has opened its arms to the Texas Youth Hunting Program, the Boy Scouts of America, or individuals who think like he does – the importance of introducing kids to hunting, fishing, and camping. This opportunity was a win-win for everyone. We would remove problem animals and at the same time teach young men and women the art of trapping.

Our first day of trapping consisted of twelve trappers, including nine youths. The trapping “seminar” was going to be taught by myself, husband, and two of our sons, Dominic and Matthew. The other eight participants were new to the art



of trapping. The nine youth are members of BSA Venturing Hunting Crew .30-06 and have participated in various shooting and hunting events.

The twelve of us met at the Galle Ranch for two days of setting dog proof traps (DPs), coil spring leg hold traps, live traps, and cable snares. Our goal was to set the equipment the first day then run the trapline the second day. We were then going to bring the group back after a week for a couple of days to run their line again and set additional traps. In Texas, all forms of traps or other approved capturing devices must be checked every 36 hours and any animals must be removed. According to the law, Frank, myself, and/or my husband always

make sure that every trap was checked at least once every 24 hours. The reason that we planned to have the group back after a week of setting is because trappers know that it takes about a week to start catching the biggest threat to livestock – the wily coyote!

The first day of our “seminar” was very educational for our new trappers. They all learned about the benefits of trapping in the ranching world. We went over land management and showed them the cost that predators can have to a rancher. Our oldest sons Dominic and Matthew are very accomplished at trapping and anyone that has ever worked with kids know that youth learn better from other youth.



That first day we set out, our new young trappers set out twelve coil spring traps, eighteen dog proofs, nine snares, and five live traps. The kids learned how much work it is setting traps. Needless to say, they were exhausted when we were done. That night we had hamburgers over a campfire and set cots up under Frank's pavilion. We did not hear a sound from the kids once they laid down for the night. They were out like a light!

The next day we ran the trap line. We ended up with several raccoons and opossums! Not bad for a first day for brand new trappers! After we ran our trapline, we had lunch and discussed returning to rerun and set more traps after about a week. To add to their experience, every youth on this trip completed their NRA Winchester Marksmanship Award. Each participant earned all or at least one of the "Hunter Marksmanship Qualification Distinguished Expert" Pistol, Rifle, and/or Shotgun awards!



The following week Frank and I made sure the traps were checked daily. We continued to catching raccoons and opossums from the property. We were also beginning to see signs of coyotes working the area. Hopefully as planned, we would start catching coyotes about the time our group returned.

Unfortunately, the call was made by the government that only essential workers were to go to work and groups of people was prohibited from gathering. We had to let our

participants know that we could not return to the Galle Ranch as a group. We also made the decision to continue checking traps as a family. Fortunately, trapping was considered an essential agricultural job as well as hunting was considered an approved activity in Texas during the Covid-19 Pandemic. We took advantage of the “shut-down” and turned it into family outings.

We continued to run the trapline helping Frank with his predator and nuisance animal problems. Right on cue, we started catching coyotes. We would continue to inform the youths in our group of what did and did not work. Even though the youth could not be with us, they still learn valuable trapping lessons. These kids are now excited about trapping and are looking forward for this “shut down” to end so we can return to the Galle Ranch!

In the end, we got nine youths excited about trapping. They did not know this form of hunting was available to them. They also got to see the connection between hunting and the NRA in their Winchester Marksmanship Award. We used the “shut down” to our advantage. We used this time to spend quality time together as a family. We used this time to help a rancher with his predator problems. Most importantly, we took this time to introduced kids to a new method of hunting. When this Covid-19 Pandemic is over, what can you say you accomplished?

