

# IT'S DIFFERENT *for* GIRLS:

HUNTING'S BENEFITS EXTEND  
FAR BEYOND THE HARVEST

WOMEN COME TO HUNTING  
THROUGH VARIOUS INTRODUCTIONS,  
BUT ALMOST ALL FIND THE  
PROCESS TO BE LIFE-CHANGING.

I remember the look of  
astonishment on my world  
history teacher's face as he  
gazed at the picture, at me and  
then back at the picture.  
"Is this Photoshopped?"  
he asked incredulously.





*Learning to hunt gives women self-confidence and can inspire them to do things they never imagined they were capable of. Pictured: Mia Anstine on her horse, Cowboy.*

MIA ANSTINE



*The author's father continues to mentor her as she works toward becoming the deer hunter she wants to be. Shown here having her first tree-stand lesson.*

MAX CROTSEY



*Kristine Houtman started hunting just as she was becoming a grandmother for the first time. She is pictured here with her first harvest, which she was able to serve to her family on Easter 2014.*

KRISTINE HOUTMAN



*A white-tailed deer hunt is what allowed Linda Powell to share a hunting experience with her own mom. Here Linda is pictured with a Mississippi whitetail in 2012.*

LINDA POWELL

“No, it’s real,” I replied.

In 2019, females comprised 21.7% of the about 18 million hunters in the United States. That marked a 16.2% increase since 2005, according to the 2020 industry intelligence report from the National Shooting Sports Foundation and National Sporting Goods Association. Although statistics are rarely perfect, participation and demographic studies are generally accurate when viewed through longer periods, such as a three- to five-year average. And you cannot deny there are fewer total hunters now than in 2005 — almost 3 million fewer according to the NSSF/NSGA report. Yet, the percentage of woman hunters has continued to grow.

### INTRODUCTIONS

Men typically introduce most women to hunting. I started hunting at 16, mentored by my dad and encouraged by guys on my junior rifle team. Kristine Houtman, author of the award-winning “Why Women Hunt,” acknowledges that.

“I think [for] every single one of the women in this book, the mentors were men in their lives, and that’s not to say that some of the women in the book aren’t mentors to others, but the pathway for this group of women was always with men leading the way and encouraging them and supporting them,” she wrote.

Programs such as Camp Compass Academy, run by John Annoni, help grow the number of female hunters and redefine the traditional hunter label.

“He introduces these inner-city students to the outdoors, firearms, firearm safety training and hunter safety, and he takes them hunting, and he has for 20 some years,” Houtman wrote.

### BY THE NUMBERS

Some women hunt to provide meat for their families, others for the thrill of the chase. Some hunt to spend time with family or friends, and others do it for solitude and a deeper connection with nature. Statistics from Southwick Associates Inc. revealed that white-tailed deer were the most popular game women pursued in 2019, followed by turkeys and upland game birds. An overwhelming 81.7% of female hunters surveyed pursued whitetails, with turkeys and upland

game coming in at 46.4% and 45.4%, respectively. (These percentages do not add up to 100% because some women pursue more than one type of game.)

Similarly, 80.3% of women surveyed reported hunting with a rifle, followed closely by 66.8% for shotgun. Crossbows (40.7%) edged traditional bows (38.6%) and muzzleloaders (34.9%). Handguns proved the least popular among the women surveyed, at 8.10%. Although rifles and shotguns have long been popular, the NSSF/NSGA report revealed that during the past 15 years, female participation in hunting with archery gear has increased 101.8%. In contrast, female firearms participation, excluding muzzleloaders, grew only 0.5% during that time.

The legalization of crossbows during archery seasons in many states has likely contributed to that growth. Likewise, better equipment options designed for women hunters have emerged during the past 10 years. Limited acreage in urban and suburban hunting grounds might also have contributed to the rise in the popularity of archery. A query of the 11,600 members of the Lady Bowhunters Facebook group revealed that many hunt with rifles, as well as bows to extend the season. One woman revealed she believes hunting with a bow and arrow makes her a better hunter. Another began a journey into competition archery that made bows a part of her everyday life. In most cases, boyfriends, husbands or fathers introduced those women to hunting, although in a few cases, moms were also involved.

Although many of the stories had happy endings, social media forums also see their share of women appealing to the greater community for help. In a breakup or divorce, the relationship might not be the only casualty, as some women lose their greatest mentor.

When asked what she observed in the female hunting community, lifelong hunter, guide and writer Mia Anstine wrote: "Something that I see with a lot of women is that they do rely on men to take them hunting, and they're not confident."

Anstine elaborated, noting that men are valuable hunting partners and mentors, but ultimately, each hunter needs to have confidence

in their abilities. Special women's hunts, events or groups can offer opportunities for women to gain self-confidence through education and experience. Social media platforms, posts and groups should be approached with caution.

"Years ago, hunters were out here just for the experience," Anstine said. "The hunt was more of an adventure, and whether they got an animal or not wasn't the main goal. ... I've seen a transition where now it's not necessarily even having an elk to take home and put in the freezer, but they want a picture for social media. And to me, it's a real detriment to hunting and the quality of the hunt, because there's so much more to being in the outdoors than getting a photo for social media."

That doesn't mean women should stop sharing hunting successes, but rather understand that success doesn't come only from a harvest. Anything learned and experienced can be counted as a success. Currently, websites and magazines feature more stories about the journey of a hunt and the experience, rather than the aftermath.

Why focus on female hunters? The focus should be on introducing as many people to the outdoors as possible, as is the mission of the NSSF's +One movement. But, introducing women can have an incredible impact far into the future. When parents are involved in an activity, their children tend to adopt it. Families in which one or both parents hunt have a unique opportunity to teach their children about the outdoors and life through experiences many children do not have, especially in today's world. I know of several children who have expressed an interest in hunting or the shooting sports, but whose mom, dad or both won't allow them to try. In other cases, the child encourages the parents.

### AN INCREDIBLE JOURNEY

Linda Powell, Director of Media Relations at O.F. Mossberg & Sons, started hunting in her mid-30s when she left the medical field in search of a new life. After a few odd jobs, she took an administrative assistant position in the public relations department at Remington. The job challenged her so much that she returned home many nights in tears, knowing nothing about guns or hunting. Several of the men

she worked with introduced her to shooting and then to hunting. Linda's first experience, bear hunting with a muzzleloader, began an incredible journey and started a chain reaction.

"I knew my life had changed," she said. "I remember looking down at that bear and thinking, 'Oh my gosh, I'm a hunter now, and my life's going to be different,' but I didn't know how much so."

During the next 15 years, Linda's changing roles at Remington allowed her incredible opportunities to learn more about hunting from some of the most experienced men in the outdoor industry. Although fortunate that the outdoors became such a huge part of her career, Powell found herself wanting more, including going to Africa by herself and learning about who she was meant to be while raising a son as a single mom.

"It gave me kind of a sense of confidence that I carry into other areas of my life," she said. "I've put myself in situations hunting that I could never even imagine myself doing."

Though her son never became an avid hunter, he found a passion for preparing and cooking wild game, and has the knowledge and skills to introduce his children to the outdoors.

"If you get mom involved, typically you're going to get the whole family involved," Powell said.

What Powell did not expect, however, was for her mother to want to join her hunting, not for the harvest, but just for the experience. A whitetail hunt in South Carolina provided that opportunity, and also allowed Powell the chance to introduce another young woman, who assumed Powell's initial professional role, to hunting.

"Learning to hunt and learning to shoot is life-changing, and sometimes you don't realize in what ways it will impact you," she said.

*— Serena Juchnowski is an avid deer hunter, competition shooter, and has earned the Distinguished Rifleman's Badge in high-power service rifle shooting. She is currently a member of the U.S. Young Eagles Palma team. She hails from Ohio.*

