

Enjoying Thanksgiving on the Farm

Written by Kathleen Vinehout, State Senator 31st District

Monday, 23 November 2015 14:53 - Last Updated Monday, 30 November 2015 16:44

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Sen. Kathleen Vinehout takes a break from the politics of Madison and writes about the joy of being out in the woods – whether deer hunting or simply basking in the beauty of the countryside.

ALMA, WI - Tundra Swans arrived Friday.

These magnificent birds spend a brief time in Buffalo County on their way from the tundra of Canada and Alaska to their wintering grounds on the East Coast.

The brilliant, white birds with a 6 1/2' wingspan are migrants through our valley. They love the swamps and back waters. And when they gather they are very social.

The swans love to converse. I listened to their excited chatter sitting in my deer blind in the early dawn hours. They sounded like enthusiastic teenagers.

Swans showed up about the same time as dozens of shiny pick-up trucks. Many deer hunters flock to Buffalo County for the nine-day gun hunt.

If you didn't know these folks weren't locals, you would know when you met them on the single lane gravel road leading to our farm.

Most locals will at least raise two fingers off the steering wheel, which is the rural driver signal that passes for a friendly wave at someone you don't know but think you should remember. But these "foreigners" don't know the signal yet.

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Eating, drinking and lodging establishments are full and that is good for the local economy.

Deer hunting lost a bit of its social value this year. The Department of Natural Resources started a new on-line system for registering animals.

Registration often took place at a local convenience store or tavern. Hunters lucky enough to find success in the field take great care to arrange their trophies in the back of the truck before heading to town to register and show off their prize.

There are a few registration stations left – but most deer registration this year happened on-line (www.gamereg.wi.gov) or by phone (844-426-3734). Somehow, logging onto a website did not bring the same satisfaction as gawking neighbors and shirttail relatives crowded around the back of the truck to hear one more story of the hunt.

“My heart was pounding so loud in my ears, I thought the doe could hear it,” said one woman at the Kwik Trip. At least we can still share the story at the local gathering places.

Thanksgiving and deer hunting are social events. The telling of the hunt with good food and a glowing fire in the hearth brings real joy. Friends and relatives we haven’t seen in far too long bring home stories of worlds we can only imagine.

The camaraderie of shared history and experiences strengthen the bonds of friendship and family. And the stories of nature again remind us why we live in Wisconsin.

Every year it seems I learn something new about our farm during deer season. Taking the time to sit in the woods, I see the land and its inhabitants anew.

Big tracks I never noticed in the mud. A deer trail cut through the swamp. Clumps of tall grasses

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and fallen branches that could be used for the perfect blind. An overgrown trail carved out of the side of the bluff in what must have been a field road of long ago.

And the creatures: seven blue jays and dozens of squirrels; a nuthatch and five different species of woodpeckers. Two bald eagles were looking for breakfast.

As my friend Lisa and I headed back from the woods opening day, she pointed to the night sky over the old granary. "Owls," she said.

Not just one or two - no it was six owls. The short-eared owls flying and diving were silhouetted in the rose-colored dusk sky.

"In case you woke up this morning hoping that you too might encounter a flock of owls and wondered what to call them," wrote Jeff of the Chippewa Valley birder group the next morning. "I found they would be a parliament."

A parliament, I thought. I hope these owls are wiser than our Legislature.

Sending wishes for fun filled Happy Thanksgiving to you and your family. Thank you for the opportunity to serve you in the Wisconsin State Legislature.