

Tuesday, December 8, 2009

Outdoors: Numerous holiday gifts available for sportsmen

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It's time to fill the sportsman's Christmas stockings. Here are a few last suggestions for something new, unique, or indispensable.

Sutton's premier fly fisherman, Tom Johnson, just published "Life on the Fly," chronicling his love and obsession for fur, feathers, hooks, and streams. Share his incredible adventure and passion at www.tjohnsononfly.com.

My elk-hunting brother-in-law in Colorado apprised me of a great new broadhead, the Ram-Cat. It's deadly. I took 3 deer this year with them, all pass-throughs leaving easy-to-follow, spraying blood trails. It flies like a field-point without wind plane. Ram-Cat blades roll forward, creating a devastating backcut. For more information visit www.smokebroadheads.com.



Rattlers, Peepers, and Snappers is the first DVD guide to all 52 reptiles and amphibians native to New England. Watch it and you won't make the outrageous mistake of thinking you saw a poisonous snake in Worcester County. Fellow teachers, herpetologists, snake, salamander, frog and toad lovers, this is a must for your home or classes. It even has all our native frog songs to teach you who's making all those burp-sounds down at the pond. From vernal pools to turtle tunnels, Vince Franke and Jim Andrews have created an entertaining and highly educational production providing the most current information and status on all our beloved herps. To purchase, visit www.rpsdvd.com.

Jon Dunn and Jonathan Alderfer's new National Geographic Illustrated Birds of North America, Folio Edition, is a great reference, like its field-size little brother. It's my personal favorite. The extra-large format allows for extremely detailed, feather-vein-close-up looks at all 957 recorded North American species. Twenty bird artists contributed over 4,000 paintings. I love its beauty, detail, scientific accuracy, and unparalleled range maps, showing the known limits of each species. Contact pdackis@ngs.org for more info.

I had a bad fall breaking 3 ribs during a tough hunt on icy slopes in Alaska. Every winter here in Worcester County there are broken bones and emergency room visits, sometimes just from negotiating slippery driveways. Microspikes provide a stainless steel chain and spike slip-on that provides a significant measure of safety, easily going over the sole of your boot or shoe, giving you quick, secure, no-strap, no-buckle traction, a lot like the chains we used to put on our tires here during icy winters. I like them for ice-fishing, too. They're available from www.kahtoola.com.

A good light for tracking, finding a stand or safely walking out of the woods in the dark, alerting other hunters of one's presence, or tracking is indispensable. The Energizer Night Strike is outstanding. It has a high-intensity 100 lumen LED for following blood trails, and multiple LEDs of white, red, blue, green, and UV. Running on 1 or 2 AA batteries, it provides great advantage over lights requiring expensive, hard-to-find batteries. I used this light on every hunt this season, except when my son "borrowed" it.

A great watch for the serious sportsman has an illuminated dial to let you know it's half an hour before sunrise, the legal time to begin shooting, or half an hour after sunrise, the legal quitting time. Game wardens have arrested many hunters who couldn't tell time. Having an instrument that can also give altitude readings has helped me find species that have restricted ranges, whether I'm in the Andes or the slopes leading down to the rainforest. An instrument that can give compass directions is indispensable, especially when you're trying to figure out wind direction for stand selection, or your route coming or going. Barometer and temperature capabilities can help you anticipate upcoming storms or clearing, often critical to hunting success. It would be tough to find a more useful watch than the Timex Expedition WS4, which has it all.

I bought my first Jet Sled at Bob's Gun and Archery years ago for hauling ice fishing equipment but found that it's great for hauling deer, too. It even fits into a big trunk. The sled can contain the carcass and prevent blood from causing stains and odors.

I love jerky and usually make my own to take along on a long hunt. Primal Strips is a high-protein, low-cost, no-meat jerky for back packing or snacking, flavored with shiitake mushrooms and soy. It's made by Primal Spirit Foods in Moundsville, West Virginia.

Muckboots are the most comfortable, waterproof, early-season hunting boots I've ever worn. From the first time I put them on at Archery Plus in Spencer, they felt as though they'd been a long-time friend.

We hunters would rather receive a gallon of no-scent laundry detergent, body wash and shampoo than the fanciest cologne from GQ.

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