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Falcons, fly fishing and Nutria

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More than 100 vendors showed up last weekend for the inaugural Cape Fear Wildlife Expo.

I had a lot of fun meeting interesting people and learning about new products and programs. Out of all that, I've picked the top five things that really struck me. And perhaps later I'll write stories that detail them a little more.

1. Falconing isn't for the birds. It takes brains.

Mike Nystrom, a Hampstead resident, is a member of the N.C. Falconer's Guild. He brought a bird with him who stayed perched comfortably on his leather-gloved hand while I took pictures. The bird didn't look very happy about my camera staring him down, but he didn't move from Nystrom's hand.

I walked away learning that in order to own and hunt with one of these birds of prey, falconers have to pass several difficult tests before being granted their licenses. I also learned there are more falconers in our area than I thought.

2. Big eyes make better flies.

The most charming person I met at the Expo was, without doubt, 89-year-old George "Chappie" Chapman.

Chapman, an avid fly fisherman, moved to Supply just a few months ago. He's been focused lately on tying flies with modern materials such as foam. Over the past four decades or so, his patterns have been published in numerous books including one by Lefty Kreh, the granddaddy of all fly fishermen.

Chapman is retired from the navy, where he spent a lot of time diving and filming



Staff photo | Amy Hotz

Mike Nystrom of Hampstead said falconers must pass several difficult tests before getting a license to own the birds of prey.

fish. From that experience, he realized that fish seem to be very attracted to large eyes. Some smaller fish even have large spots on their tails to deceive larger fish into attacking in the wrong place so they can make a fast getaway.

Kreh told Chapman he made the biggest eyes Kreh had ever seen. But Chapman says if it works, use it.

As a newcomer, the old fisherman says he's looking for some folks with similar interests, so he's trying to put together a fly fishing club in the Supply area. If you're interested, shoot him an e-mail at chappieusa@earth

link.net.

3. I do, in fact, have enough coordination to bowhunt.

I learned I can shoot a compound bow without too much of a problem.

As a kid, I always played around with toy bows and arrows. I even had a nice wooden bow my parents bought me somewhere near Grandfather Mountain or Linville Caverns. But I could never hit the broad side of a barn with any of them.

When my husband showed some interest in bow hunting, I told him, "Have fun, but I'm not doing it."

That was before I saw the N.C. Bowhunters Association booth at the Expo. They had a bow and arrow range set up with a foam feral pig at the far end. One of the gentlemen chose a small compound bow for me, showed me how to hold it, how to aim and how to pull back properly. I hit the pig square in the head on my first few shots.

I was aiming for just behind his front leg, but consistently hit the pig in the head. The demonstrator changed the sights around a little for me and after that it was all, "Bye, bye piggy." The arrows went straight for the back of the leg.

Now that my confidence is up, who knows what I might get into next.

4. Swamp rat tastes like chicken.

Some North Carolina Trappers had their booth set up with fur pelts and examples of traps. They also had a stuffed animal on the table that I recognized as a Nutria, that giant rat that has caused so much damage to the New Orleans levees.

According to Jefferson Weaver, one of the trappers, this area is on the verge of a Nutria outbreak. Those giant rodents ruin land and eat vegetation that other animals native to this area need to survive.

On the plus side, though, Weaver says that Nutria are good to eat. And, although it

seems cliché, he promises that they really do taste like chicken.

5. There's a big niche market for hunting lands.

At one time or another most people have probably daydreamed about owning their own little backwoods getaway. But who knew there are real estate agents who only deal in hunting lands?

I saw at least two real estate companies at the Expo that will find a piece of land suitable for your game of choice and sell it to you. Some will even build a log cabin on the property (minus electricity and plumbing.)

It's tough to find hunting lands these days, but that's quite a niche market.

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