

# Hunting's in fashion this fall

**AFTER DECADES OF DECLINING POPULARITY,** sport hunting is enjoying a renaissance in Quebec. A growing number of adults, especially young, urban women and men, are taking up the pastime

MARK CARDWELL  
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

Stella Panitsas remembers the first duck she shot — at a lake near Trois-Rivières two years ago, at age 12 — with pinpoint precision.

"I was kneeling down with my dad and my brother, wearing camouflage, when it came flying into range," recalled Stella, a Secondary 2 student at Laval Junior High School.

"I stood up and got him on the first shot. I was very happy."

Since then she has bagged a half-dozen ducks, including two on Sept. 20 on what was the opening day of the fall hunt for several species in Quebec.

One of her family's favourite spots to hunt for waterfowl is an inlet on the Ottawa River near Rigaud, an hour's drive from their Chomedey home.

"(Hunting)'s a great way for me to spend time with my dad and brother," Stella said. A fan of hunting and eating wild game, she has her sights set on bagging moose and deer in the future.

And she's not alone in her enthusiasm.

After decades of declining popularity as a pastime, sport hunting is enjoying a renaissance of sorts in la belle province.

A growing number of adults, especially young women and men from Montreal and other urban areas, are trying their hand at hunting for the first time.

According to the 125,000-member Fédération québécoise des chasseurs et pêcheurs — which represents more than 200 hunting and fishing associations across the province and is responsible for organizing and offering the training courses required to obtain a hunting permit — 18,290 new hunters got their licences in Quebec in 2013.

Nearly one-quarter of them — or 4,383 — were women.

Compared to a decade ago, the 2013 total is also a nearly 60-per-cent increase in the annual number of new hunters. The recent total is comparable to numbers from the golden days of sport hunting in Quebec — the 1950s, '60s and '70s.

Federation officials expect the number of new Quebec hunters in 2014 to be just as high. Proponents of sport hunting say wildlife populations for which hunting is permitted in the province are robust enough to support the growing interest in the pastime.

Waterfowl and small game such as partridge and rabbit are the most popular species among hunters in Quebec. Among big game, moose is the most popular, followed by deer and bear.

To prevent overhunting, the province can restrict the number of permits it sells. Prices vary — a moose hunting permit costs \$59.52 for the 2014 season, while a licence to hunt small game costs \$19.35. Prices are higher for people from outside Quebec.

"Hunting is in," federation president Alain Cossette



Fourteen-year-old Stella Panitsas with her retriever, Champ, at a hunting spot north of Montreal late last month. She got her hunting licence two years ago and hunts waterfowl with her father and brother.

JOHN MAHONEY/THE GAZETTE

says. "Things are looking very good for the future of our sport."

Cossette credits much of that rejuvenation to the success of government-supported federation initiatives, including the federation's youth hunting initiation program.

Under the program, kids as young as 12 can get a one-time apprentice permit that allows them to hunt with a licensed hunter before completing the firearm-safety course, a mandatory first step in every province to becoming a licensed hunter.

Another popular program the federation offers is Fauniquement femme. Initiated in 1999, the annual three-day course offers groups of as many as 25 women the opportunity to try a variety of instructor-led hunting- and fishing-related activities, from shooting shotguns, rifles and bows to fly-fishing and operating motorboats.

"Women are a little more timid than men when it comes to firearms," said Hélène Laurent, one of the federation's 500 certified firearm and bow instructors. "But once they get the hang of it, they're as good as men — even better in some ways, because they are more prudent (and) will let an animal go by if they can't get a clear shot and risk only wounding it."

Laurent, who runs her own annual hunting program for women, taught in the woods an hour's drive northwest of Ottawa, says female hunters were few and far between when she started offering firearm-certification courses 20 years ago.

But they now account for

about one-quarter of the students in her classes, which are 50-per-cent bigger than when she started.

"Demand is huge," said the 51-year-old, who has been hunting since age 12.

She added that many women tell her they have always wanted to hunt but couldn't.

"They either didn't have the time because their kids were small and they were needed at home, or didn't have the opportunity because nobody in their families hunted," said Laurent.

"But now their priorities have changed and they are in search of outdoor activities like hunting."

In addition to education

*"It takes more guts and skill to go into the woods and take a picture of wild animals than it does to kill them with a high-powered rifle."*

ANIMAL ALLIANCE OF CANADA'S GEORGES DUPRAS

and training programs, Cossette credits the federation's annual publicity campaigns for helping make hunting hip again.

Aimed at four main groups — teens, women, young men and urbanites — the campaigns include several slick pro-hunting videos that are featured on federation-run website pourquoichasser.com (and with English subtitles on www.whyhunt.com).

"I never used to hunt, in fact, I had my own negative preconceptions (about it)," a young man recounts in one video. "But hanging out with my biologist friends gave me a whole new perspective.

"I realized that hunting

isn't necessarily bad for wildlife, as long as it's done in a reasonable way, using a scientific, data-based approach and proper planning."

The federation also uses humour to get its message across.

One notable shtick in the 2010 campaign, which is also up on the whyhunt website, features camouflaged hunters calling ducks at the corner of Peel and Ste-Catherine Sts. during Friday afternoon rush hour.

Last year, the federation launched Zone Chasse, a mobile app for iPhones that lists hunting seasons, bag limits and other regulations for Quebec's 29 hunting zones.

Now also available in

Android, the app has been downloaded more than 20,000 times.

"We've put a lot of work into communicating the joy of hunting," said Cossette.

"And our message is getting through."

Not everyone, however, appreciates that message.

"Sport hunting is a photo-op for guys with guns," said Adamie Delisle Alaku, vice-president for resource development with the Makivik Corporation, which is the legal representative of Quebec's 12,000 Inuit.

Delisle Alaku says sport hunters are at least partly to blame for the dramatic decline in numbers of the two

caribou herds in Northern Quebec in recent years.

The population of the George River herd, in particular, has plummeted 98 per cent in 20 years, down to an estimated low of 14,200 animals from nearly one million in the early 1990s.

The governments of Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador have banned hunting of George River caribou for the last two years, and the Inuit, Cree and Naspaki have voluntarily stopped. Quebec Innu continue to hunt the herd's animals. First Nations people are not bound by provincial hunting laws, and don't need firearm licences or permits to hunt and fish year-round.

Though several factors have been suggested as the cause of the herd's decline, Delisle Alaku says First Nations elders blame sport hunters.

"They say the animals are smaller and more fragile now because hunters always go for the biggest and most virile males," he said.

"And they just take pictures and the antlers and leave the rest for the wolves. But we eat and use everything when we kill an animal, because we don't have grocery stores like you do down south."

Georges Dupras shares the outrage.

"Killing animals is not a sport," said the Montreal board member of the Animal Alliance of Canada, which promotes animal welfare. "It takes more guts and skill to go into the woods with a camera and take pictures of wild animals than it does to kill them with a high-powered rifle."

The animal rights advocate says both commercial and

sport hunting are detrimental to animal populations.

"Hunters always take the biggest and best."

Dupras said he's surprised that hunting is gaining in popularity. "Hopefully, it's a trend — like swimming with dolphins or going on a safari or eating sushi. People will eat a goat's eyeball if everybody's doing it."

Laval University biology professor Steeve Côté, however, isn't worried — for now at least — about the impact of sport hunting on populations of big game in Quebec.

"They all seem to be doing quite well," Côté said.

Though concerned about the 53 front-line jobs that were cut this year by Ministère des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs — a 10-per-cent reduction in staff that included several biologists and 16 game wardens — Côté said he believes Quebec is effectively managing its wild game resources.

"Our moose population is about 75,000 and we sell twice that number of hunting permits annually," he said.

"But only about half the population gets harvested each year."

Which is OK, he says, since moose repopulate quickly.

Côté, an avid hunter who says his own kids have never eaten commercial meat at home, says he has noted a rise in the popularity of hunting among his biology students.

"I'm not surprised," added Côté.

"Hunting is a big part of our culture. It's a good food source (and) people are more interested now in getting outdoors and enjoying nature."

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## At 84, this hunter still has game

It's a lifelong passion for former mayor, who has started using bows, crossbows

A few days ago, Robert Paquet bagged yet another moose at his hunting camp north of Quebec City.

The 84-year-old hunter is a resident and former mayor of St-Ferréol-les-Neiges, a picturesque village 50 kilometres northeast of the provincial

capital. Paquet started hunting for partridge and other small game at age 10 with his uncles.

He killed his first moose with a rifle at age 16.

He figures he's shot and killed a moose in most years after that. And since age 75,

he also has been hunting with bows and crossbows, something he took up because one of his sons is an expert.

And Paquet plans to keep hunting for as long as he can.

The head of the biggest moose he's shot, featuring 1.5-metre-wide antlers, hangs on his living-room wall.

Paquet took down the 1,500-pound male 20 years ago, after it wandered into his camp one morning while Paquet was making coffee and

still dressed in his pyjamas.

Two other huge trophies from northern Quebec — a caribou head and a trout — hang in the same room.

"I love hunting," said Paquet, whose sons often accompany him on his hunts.

"I love getting away in the woods and the thrill of the hunt.

"And I love eating fish and game."

MARK CARDWELL



Sport-hunting enthusiast Robert Paquet, 84, with the head of a 1,500-pound moose he shot 20 years ago.

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