

Bancroft groups help kids hunt



By Sarah Sobanski

Bancroft Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry and the Bancroft Fish and Game Protective Association have teamed up to keep up the area's hunting heritage.

Six local youth ages 12 to 17 were selected to participate in the partnership's first ever Bancroft Youth Hunter Mentorship Program. The program sees the youth through their hunter safety and firearms safety courses, helps them choose a firearm or bow to specialize in and pairs them with mentors for a hunting trip.

The program was modelled after a similar program in Pembroke. Past president for the fish and game club Heath Swannell said it's been two years in the making.

"[The] Pembroke [program was] geared to a waterfowl hunt because Bancroft doesn't have a flyway for waterfowl. That's why we open[ed] it up to large game as well," said Swannell.

A waterfowl hunt is for migratory birds such as geese or ducks. Large game will see the youth hunt bear, deer or moose. The way they choose is by seeing what type of hunting they favour. This happened at the program's training day Aug. 26, the second phase after youth had completed their certification courses.

Over the course of the day youth shot archery, long-range, trap, skeet and tested out handguns. Club members brought their firearms to share with the hunting students. They were also taught how to make blinds and fences, how to cook and prepare wild game and practised using decoys and calls. Supplies such as wild game cookbooks and gun cleaning kits were provided by local businesses. Members were also given a [pistol cleaning guide](#) to teach them the proper way to clean their firearms.

Swannell said the teens were eager to participate. He was impressed, especially by a 13-year-old girl in the program.

"First ever person that I've ever been able to see that's been able to switch from left or right eyes as far as shooting a bow and arrow or a firearm. She could do both well and she did equally good on whichever eye she was using. I've never run across that before."

He said he hoped the program would expand and keep youth invested in the area's hunting culture. He also stated that he enjoys showing the hunting students the different firearms that were used in hunting. For example the use of airsoft guns on smaller game, which some of the younger hunters may have found themselves more comfortable to use than a bolt-action rifle. [Fox Airsoft published a list of the best airsoft guns](#) and some students may very well want to start with one of these guns, if not for hunting then to get into the practice of learning to aim and shoot. Swannell often encouraged students to go online and learn more about the different firearms they may be using during the hunting season, as well as how to maintain gun safety. He also said to read deeply into matters like [bch tactical review](#) on handguns, so that they know all the pros and cons of a particular weapon before getting one. "It's kind of a misnomer... It's not necessarily all about harvesting the animal. A lot of times you go out in the woods and you're not harvesting an animal," he said. "You're sitting out there, and you're listening to the birds, and just being out in nature, no electronic devices with you to speak of. It's just getting out in the woods and peace and quiet and just enjoying nature. It's not always about that pull of the trigger or the sending of the arrow at the animal. Hunting is a lot more than just that."

Swannell also noted that hunting is a "true, natural food source."

This year the program drew youth from North Hastings High School, York River Public School and Our Lady of Mercy Catholic School. Bancroft MNRF conservation officer Joe Burroughs said next year he'd like to see the program draw from Bird's Creek Public School and Maynooth Public School as well.

"The original selection process was for kids that ... had an interest in hunting - whether they didn't have that exposure at home, or the parents don't hunt themselves or maybe they had grandparents that hunt - so they have some exposure to hunting but needed that extra push to succeed," he said.

Burroughs said he would like to see the youth develop lasting relationships with their mentors to hunt after phase three of the program, where the students go to a hunt with their mentor.

Anyone looking to get involved in next year's program can contact Burroughs at the Bancroft MNRF at 613-332-3940 extension 222.