

# KES VETERANS' DREAMS AFIELD

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hunting and fishing are the vehicles of the Field of Dreams, Inc. In addition to serving injured veterans, Field of Dreams, Inc., has a history of providing outdoor gateways to handicapped and disenfranchised children, and the orphaned children of warriors Killed in Action. Tom and his foundation are masters in generating second- and third-order support for his activities and the good people of the Sacramento River Valley certainly rallied to support the "Warriors in the Wetlands" event I attended.

Here is a list of those who supported the "Warriors in the Wetlands" hunting expedition in December 2011: Cecil Ranch, Bianchi Ranch, Baker Creek Ranch, and Barale Ranch. The other main sponsors were: the California Deer Association, Bianchi Ag Services, the California Outdoor Heritage Alliance, Kovarus Technologies, C&S Duck calls, the Barale family, the Montelli family and the Fregoso Foundation. The ranchers provided access to the duck blinds, while the others provided equipment, gifts and support.

Max Fregoso, of El Dorado, California, heads a foundation called the Fregoso Outdoor Foundation (916-275-5372), that also supports Veterans and children. Max and the Fregoso Outdoor Foundation have recently completed the production of a high-speed, lightweight chair specifically for outdoorsmen with disabilities. I don't know what more you can say about this piece of equipment, but it allows a wide range of disabled hunters a change to bag fair-chase game. Max expects to serve even more young hunters with the aid of his new hunting chair.

On December 2, 2011, 12 veterans arrived in Sacramento and were conveyed by their hosts to the small Sacramento Valley town of Colusa. There, all of the administrative duties were attended to and I received my coveted hog tag. Kittle's Outdoor and Sport Company in Colusa is the archetypical sporting goods store. It even has a taxidermist shop and barber shop right on the premises. There's nothing you might need to hunt ducks and geese that you can't get at Kettle's. This ain't your basic "big box" store; this is the place that has what you need. It was in Kittle's that introductions were made, and hunters and guides were paired up. It was very evident that this was going to be a big show.

The Sacramento River rice country is one of those places – like Stuttgart, Arkansas – that every waterfowl hunter has on his list of places to go hunt. This place has everything a migrating duck or goose might need: temperate climate, open water, food and a series of National Wildlife Refuges. The rice fields (called checks) are flooded to aid in the recovery of the fields and that agricultural effort produces feed and resting water. This is the home of the Snow Goose and the Pintail. I have had a chance to gun for the old Swordtail before, but never in these numbers. Some blinds

on some ranches shot well, others (like mine) struggled. I learned that Snow Geese do not like (and thus shy away from) spinning duck decoys; I wrote that gem down. More than enough birds were taken the first day to impress all concerned, and there was another morning on the schedule.

That first afternoon, Matt Dermody and Nick Montelli were to take the young Montana veteran, Morgan Shea, and me on a hog hunt on one of the Montelli ranches. At the ranch, another Matt who was to help and provide some four-wheeler support met us. The country, some 30 miles west of Colusa, was simply breathtaking. After spotting a few hogs, we had a meeting engagement with the old boy I took. I made sure I brought enough gun (.338 Marlin Express), knowing that these critters can and will bite you back. After spotting the boar at about 600 yards, the stalk was on. There was some minor bumping and sneaking, and then we had him at about 125 yards.

Because nothing ever works right, there were the 15 seconds of,

"Don't you see him?"

"NO, where is he?"

And then the old hog moved.

He was quartering away at a walk at about 150 yards when my Marlin and I delivered 200 grains of Hornady Leverrevolution. As the victorious hunters inspected the hog several things were evident: he had very big ivory (to be measured for SCI award), and that he was bleeding in many places where he had not been shot. This old boy had just had a major-league hog-type whooping. His right ear was completely split in half and his left eye was missing. I was thrilled and the guides Matt and Nick were uber-thrilled. Alas, Morgan had a chance to shoot a small hog later, but he listened to the siren's song of bigger hogs and didn't shoot, hoping for a larger one. He did seem to be having too much fun, however.

The second day of waterfowling was about the same as the first. Some blinds shot well, some didn't. The good folks who put this event on can and did control lots of moving parts, but they could not control the weather, the wind or the birds.

Without exception, the invited guests were thrilled to have been invited and amazed by how well they were treated. The needs of the warriors were met and exceeded during every minute of this trip. I had very little idea of what I was in for on this trip. It started as an ol' boy network invite to a duck shoot, and grew into so much more. I have lifelong friends and am proud to be a member of the Field of Dreams family. If you know a recovering warrior who likes to hunt and fish, feel free to contact the Field of Dreams or the Fregoso Outdoor Foundation for more information. The men and families, who volunteer to make these two foundations run, live to get the warriors of today back out on the water and in the woods. This is the real deal.