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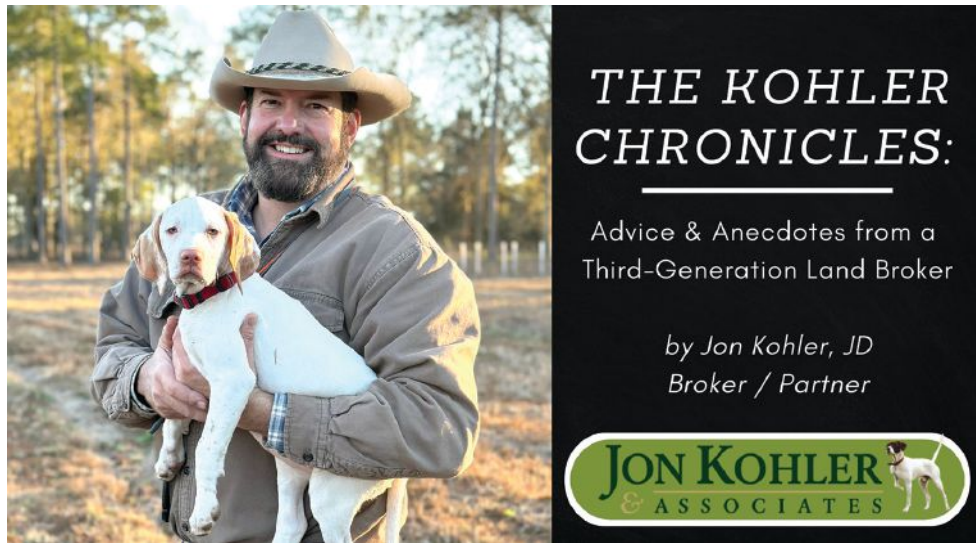
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Trout Rule
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**Suwannee
Swamp Ape**

**Fishing
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**Real
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Listings**





God, Guests and Good Stewardship

by Jon Kohler

Have you ever still-hunted a live-oak hammock, eased a skiff across the flats at sunset or waited in the dark for wood ducks to squeal in? Was it so beautiful you could almost feel it?

Sharing those moments with friends and loved ones is one of life's greatest blessings. I've done it alone, but I like it better with others.

God created this world – the vistas, the seasons, the songbirds – and He wants to share it with us. Life itself is about the experiences we share with one another, especially in the outdoors. There's something fundamentally right about doing things together outside that

you just can't get staring at an iPad.

It makes sense to me that after God created the Earth and admired it, declaring it "good," He wanted to share it. Share – not give – is the key word. Psalm 50:10-11 makes it plain: "For every animal of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the insects in the fields are Mine."

As someone who represents some pretty big landowners, I get that.

Anyone who's opened their gates to friends knows the uneasy feeling when hospitality gets overreached. In my business, the "professional guest" is a recurring species – or worse the nev-



er-learning kid with a rich uncle. I can't imagine creating a perfect world only to have loved ones mess it up.

Lick Skillet is far from perfect, but even small things can be great.

Recently, I let a buddy train dogs there. He left spent hulls scattered around, released too many quail and generally failed the etiquette test. My manager grumbled – rightly so. However, another complaint caught me off guard.

A long-time dog-trainer friend from Michigan and his girlfriend were visiting to pick up an English Cocker puppy from a nearby plantation. I went to law school up there and knew there were about four more months until the temperature would even begin to think about reaching 70 degrees. So, apparently his girlfriend took advantage of both the Florida sunshine and privacy at Lick Skillet and went sunbathing behind the guest cottage...topless. More than some men would call that a fortuitous sight. My manager driving by to check on things was not one of them. I didn't really know what to say, but he was genuinely offended. No one in Lamont has an "HR Department," so the incident was dropped.

He's had his share of surprises while driving around. Once, mowing the fruit orchard, he found a rattlesnake half-

way through swallowing a cottontail. The snake spit out the rabbit. He made a split-second decision and killed it. I'm starting to feel sorry for rattlesnakes the same way Gus and Captain Call in Lonesome Dove felt about the bandits after they cleared them out. There aren't that many left.

When I was a kid, there was a famous doctor in Thomasville that was the world's expert on treating snake bites. The old-time rattlesnake roundups really did them in. As I travel across the South, outside a few spots, you rarely see them. I generally leave them alone – unless they're in my quail woods.

A client told me recently that snakebites are so rare now some hospitals don't even stock anti-venom. He said his doctor quoted \$100,000 for a human dose or about \$5,000 if a vet administered it. Sounded like a Yellowstone episode – Rip calling the vet to treat a cowboy in the bunk house instead of a medical doctor or the ER.

Truth is that my bird dogs probably get better medical care than I do. My dad was a neurologist. It took months to get in to see him. The new pet hospital in Tallahassee, though, is like the Mayo Clinic – they even have a pet neurologist on call.

The balance of stewardship is hard
(Continued on next page)

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God is the ultimate Land Manager

(Continued from previous page)

because everything God made is connected. Like the DNA He made, we are yet to understand the connections. Except for a project I worked on in North Carolina, red wolves have been shot out of the South. St. Vincent's Island near Apalachicola may still have a few. But when the top predators disappear, coons, possums and foxes run rampant. Without trapping, ground-nesting birds like quail

and turkeys don't do well. Furthermore, every deer feeder is ensuring raccoons make it fat and happy through the winter. About the time deer feeders run out of corn, turkeys start to nest.

That's why the plantations I represent, which still trap diligently, have record numbers of quail and turkeys – while populations elsewhere decline. It doesn't help that the fur market collapsed.

Trappers now must be paid in cash instead of fur, all because the modern environmental movement shunned fur. Which makes no sense to me – it's the most sustainable material there is. We've been wearing fur since Genesis 3. When Adam and Eve sewed fig leaves, God Himself replaced them with garments of animal skins. Seems like today, anything God approves, society contests – almost for sport.

God isn't just the Creator. He's the ultimate Land Manager. Thankfully, He's more patient than I am. Too many architects can design but not build. God designed and manages every detail – from the microbes that make dirt smell like dirt to the wood ducks nesting in hollow trees to dodge southern predators.

One would think a duck is a duck.



When I was about 12, we hatched half a dozen wood ducklings but couldn't get them to eat. They'd sit right in front of food and starve. Somehow, my mom – pre-internet – figured it out. Wood ducklings won't eat until they drop out of the tree and hit the ground. So, we threw each one into a bowl of water to simulate the fall. The instant they righted themselves, they started gobbling food. We kids repeated the "drop test" a few extra times, just to be sure.

I love guests and I love sharing the outdoors. But God's love and patience go far beyond mine. I get irritated over



a few spent hulls in the woods, yet His sinless Son died for sins I committed and still commit on purpose.

Love is the one thing God created that He doesn't control. Sharing this world – His creation – with others is what this life is really about.

Celebrating and stewarding over what He made isn't just good living... it's worship.



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