

*“The preservation of our wildlife is of importance to every man, woman, and child in this state, and this movement deserves the wholehearted support of every right-thinking individual within our borders, whether hunter, fisherman, or not.”*

-Harry Hampton, Father of SC Conservation Movement

### Hunting in the Wilderness

Native Americans hunted the lands for years before the first European settlers arrived. They hunted deer and other small mammals for meat and hides, and birds for their feathers. When the colonists arrived in 1670, they too hunted for survival, but also for the value in trade.

After the Revolutionary War, the idea of hunting simply for sport took off, and South Carolinians refined the hobby to specific seasons and established restrictions to protect both the animals and the land. Established in 1785, the St. Thomas Hunting Club kept minutes that recorded members' names and club activities. Members were charged yearly with finding food and drink for one of the club's monthly meetings. Rules also specified the division of all game killed by the members.



Hunting with Hounds, *South Carolina Historical Society collections*

### Nineteenth Century Hunting

The planting elite hunted primarily for sport, wearing elaborate dress and style to emulate English gentry. They often used dogs to chase down the game and their slaves as hunt masters. The enslaved and the poorer white farmers also hunted, but primarily for food.

After the Civil War ended in 1865, some plantation owners could not afford to keep their land and sold it to wealthy northerners who in turn used the old plantations as hunting preserves. Other planters held onto their plantations for their own recreational purposes and even rented the land to other hunters. Eventually, hunters worked together to create hunting clubs. By pooling their resources, they could afford the large tracts of land and upkeep. Many of these clubs separated races and classes and rarely, if ever, permitted women.

### Santee Gun Club, est. 1898

In 1898, Captain Hugh Garden of Sumter purchased former plantation land to establish the Santee Gun Club. The membership included mostly wealthy Northerners, including President Grover Cleveland.

This land, and these plantations, had strong ties to the history of South Carolina. Before European settlement, the Sewee and Winyah Native Americans inhabited the land, but like many tribes, suffered decimation from diseases like Smallpox. Revolutionary War heroine Rebecca Motte owned Eldorado Plantation and built her home there in 1797. Eliza Lucas Pinckney's son, Thomas Pinckney, married into the family, and also lived at Eldorado. The other plantation that Garden purchased, Ormond Hall, was owned by John Williams, a free black, in 1757.

In 1974, the Department of Natural Resources purchased the land from the Santee Gun Club and donated it to The Nature Conservancy. Today, the 24,000 acres of land is a protected Wildlife Management Area called the Santee Coastal Reserve and is open to recreation through miles of biking and hiking trails.



The Santee Gun Club, McClellanville, South Carolina  
*South Carolina Historical Society collections*



Bird hunting, *South Carolina Historical Society collections*

### Growth and Formalizing Hunting as a Sport

The differences between old-time hunting clubs and today's clubs reflect South Carolinians' understanding that they are partners in the environmental history of our state. Some of the change in attitude can be attributed to landowners who were not originally from the state but arrived in the period between 1870 and 1930. This period marks the decline in rice cultivation and the increase in railroads. Some sportsmen purchased plantations to convert into hunting and fishing retreats while others joined existing clubs.

As the state continued to grow into the Twentieth Century, and technology changed, South Carolinians formed nongovernmental organizations to help conserve the land and protect the natural resources of their state. Three notable groups include Ducks Unlimited, Quality Deer Management Group, and the National Wild Turkey Federation.

The state government helps with formalizing regulations through the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, but the state as a whole also benefits from income generated through the sport. Hunters spend money on everything from gear, weapons, and dogs to vehicles, land leases, and licenses. The state makes millions of dollars on hunting licenses every year, and not just to citizens; out-of-state hunters travel to South Carolina every year for recreational purposes.