



AT A VERY YOUNG AGE, NRA Ring of Freedom member Kaan Karakaya learned a valuable and formative lesson regarding the role of hunter as conservationist. He learned the lesson on a hunting trip, while at the side of the greatest friend and teacher he ever had: his father, Suleyman Karakaya.

In the 1980s, Suleyman Karakaya worked as the head of Turkey's wildlife department, employing around 40 men who acted as something akin to game wardens in the Termessos National Park of southern Turkey. A devout and determined conservationist, Suleyman was instrumental in establishing responsible big-game hunting in Turkey.

Kaan recalls accompanying his father on one particular hunt, as an observer, at around the age of 9 or 10. This was not a hunt in the traditional sense. There would be no meat harvested for the table, no trophy mount collected for the wall. The purpose of this hunt was to assist in the propagation of a severely endangered species in Turkey, the fallow deer.

At the time, a limited number of fallow deer were kept in captivity for the purpose of breeding. Unfortunately, the majority of those captive deer were does. Suleyman's idea was to capture a buck from the wild and have it brought to the does, whereupon romance would ensue and nature would take its course.

With that plan established, Suleyman and his men went afield, armed with large, sturdy fishing nets and a tranquilizer gun. They strung their nets among and between the forest trees and began driving the fallow



From left: Karakaya shot this leopard on the Selous Game Reserve in Tanzania. The mount is now one of many in his Antalya, Turkey, office; Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, once a cathedral, then a mosque, now a museum; Karakaya in the Taurus Mountains near his home in Antalya; Kaan poses with a mounted bezoar ibex in his office. He ranks the ibex as his favorite species to hunt.

On Safari: Kaan Karakaya and Shikar Safaris

How a Turkish citizen learned the importance of wildlife conservation and the American Second Amendment

By Steven M. Brown



deer toward them. Suleyman, armed with the tranquilizer gun, spied a buck among the small herd and readied himself for a shot. The tranquilizer gun malfunctioned; Suleyman could not get off his shot, but he was determined not to let this rare fallow buck escape.

Instincts, prior experience as a wrestler and perhaps a bit of bull-headedness kicked in. Suleyman launched himself upon the buck and rode it for about 10 yards

before the buck was eventually netted. Kaan's father had broken ribs to nurse, but the fallow does in captivity would have their mate and

Kaan Karakaya and Shikar Safaris

Kaan would see firsthand the hard work and dedication required of the hunter as conservationist.

Kaan's father would continue to take his son hunting nearly every weekend throughout his childhood, provided he made good grades in school during the week. Looking back, Kaan is grateful for the time spent with his father in the field. Whether traveling strictly as an observer or taking an active role in the hunt, Kaan was able to learn a great deal, and the time spent in the field brought the two close together.

"I don't think there are too many kids in the world who had a childhood like I had," Kaan says. "My father was a really close friend. He took me every weekend either hunting or fishing, and we spent a lot of time together. That created a very good friendship.

"I'll never forget what he did for me," Kaan says of his beloved father, who passed away last year. "If it wasn't for him, I wouldn't have been able to do what I do today."

Putting the knowledge gleaned at his father's side to use, young Kaan became a professional hunter at the age of 19. Less than a decade later, in 1996, he would start his own business: Shikar Safaris.

Kaan's family has a rich history in the area of Antalya, Turkey, dating back to the 15th century. He comes from a long, long line of hunters and military men, including one ancestor, Bali Sultan (Malkocoglu), who served as the head of the army for Suleiman the Magnificent, the longest reigning sultan of the Ottoman Empire. But when Kaan started Shikar Safaris, there were few open hunting areas in his native Turkey. The wildlife there was suffering due to poaching and poor land management, so Kaan set out to find new hunting destinations for his safari company. He started with Azerbaijan, guiding hunts for the mountain-dwelling East Caucasian tur. He then



Main photo: **Kaan Karakaya, backed by professional hunter Celal, scopes for game.** Clockwise from above: **the Valens Aqueduct in Istanbul; Kaan's father, Suleyman Karakaya; Kaan Karakaya ready for the hunt in younger days; Kaan celebrates with his daughter Pamir on her 14th birthday.**



Putting the knowledge gleaned at his father's side to use, young Kaan became a professional hunter at the age of 19.

moved on to Iran, which was once a prime destination for sheep hunters but had been closed to hunters since the Iranian Revolution of 1979.

“People were against this because they didn’t think there was any game left in Iran,” Kaan says. “I traveled, took pictures and discovered there were still lots of nice places to hunt.”

Due in no small part to Kaan’s exploration and research, Iran, with its eight subspecies of wild sheep, is once again open to foreign hunters.

Next came Pakistan: A country and hunting destination that Kaan holds especially dear. Outside of Turkey, it is his favorite place to hunt and to guide, whether it is for urial, ibex or the majestic markhor with its tall, corkscrew-like horns.

Back to his home country, Kaan called upon the knowledge gained from his conservation-minded father

to bolster the population of wildlife and revive big-game hunting in Turkey. Kaan initiated a program whereby a portion of the revenues from hunting is

returned to the local communities. With this financial incentive, it has become incumbent on locals to better manage the wildlife habitat and report any occurrences of illegal poaching. As Kaan puts it, the local people are now the “guards of their own mountains.” As a result of the program, Kaan says, the wildlife populations are on the upswing, and Turkey is once again a legitimate destination for big-game hunters.

Now in its 17th year of operation, Kaan Karakaya’s Shikar Safaris offers unique, tailor-made hunts in a variety of exotic, culturally significant destinations across Asia and Europe—Turkey, Azerbaijan, Iran, Pakistan, Mongolia, Switzerland, Austria and Spain, among others. Due to the relationships Kaan has developed and nurtured with the various wildlife departments and local tribes in the destinations he has opened, Shikar Safaris makes it easy for its clients to enjoy a hunting adventure they might not have thought possible.

“I was able to turn my hobby into my business,” Kaan says. “I’ve met some wonderful people through hunting—all around the world. That means a lot to me. I’m so fortunate to have this business.”

Although his business, Shikar Safaris, operates exclusively in Asia and Europe, Kaan Karakaya is a strong proponent of the National Rifle Association and the American Second Amendment it fights to

Main photo: Bob DuHadaway and Karakaya pose with an ibex Bob has taken. Clockwise from top right: John LoMonaco and Kaan were successful in their hunt for this sulaiman markhor in Pakistan; Karakaya speaks with a game warden; Kaan instructs Bob DuHadaway prior to the shot; Karakaya takes in the sights of the Taurus Mountains.

Kaan Karakaya and Shikar Safaris

Due in no small part to Kaan’s exploration and research, Iran, with its eight subspecies of wild sheep, is once again open to foreign hunters.

maintain. Gun regulations are far more restrictive in Kaan's Turkey than they are in the U.S., and this has given Kaan a unique perspective on the importance of firearms freedoms.

Kaan Karakaya and Shikar Safaris

"Whatever happens in America affects Turkey, because we are very close. We are allies," Kaan says. "What I see is, if you lose your hunting rights

and gun ownership right in the United States, I can't imagine how it would affect Turkey."

Even now, Kaan says, it is very difficult to own a gun in Turkey. He describes a lengthy and expensive process for those Turkish citizens who apply for a firearms license. First, applicants must prove a legitimate need to possess a firearm, such as hunting, personal protection or security. Next comes an exhausting array of legal and medical background checks.

Those deemed eligible for a firearms permit must then pay a healthy sum to register each firearm they purchase—and they must reapply and repay every five years. Kaan says he must pay nearly \$1,500 every five years to re-register each of the rifles he owns.

Kaan dearly loves his beautiful home country, but notes one possible improvement that could be made: "I wish we had the NRA in Turkey." ★



Kaan says he must pay nearly \$1,500 every five years to re-register each of the rifles he owns.

Hunt with Shikar Safaris and Support the NRA

Kaan Karakaya has previously supported the NRA through cash donations and through donations of auctioned hunts. His generous support of the NRA continues in 2013 with two hunts being donated for auction at the 2013 NRA Annual Meetings & Exhibits in Houston, May 3-5.

The first hunt, which will be auctioned the evening of May 3 at the NRA-ILA Dinner and Auction, is for one of the world's most majestic and historically sought-after trophies in a stunningly beautiful location: it is a hunt for a Marco Polo sheep, like the one shown in the photo above, in the Pamir Mountains of Tajikistan. The seven-day hunt (plus three days of traveling) can be taken between October and February 2013, 2014 or 2015 and includes any size Marco Polo trophy fee, one-on-one guiding, licenses, permits, full accommodations during the hunt, ground transportation, daily fees and airport meet and greet services. The hunt's value is \$42,000, and 100 percent of the proceeds from auction will go to the NRA.

Kaan's second donation for 2013 will be auctioned during the NRA Women's Leadership Forum Luncheon on May 3. At auction will be a bronze-medal Ronda ibex hunt and a bronze-medal stag hunt in one of Shikar Safaris' newest destinations: Spain. This will be a five-day hunt with two days of traveling, which can be taken between Oct. 15 and Dec. 30. This auctioned hunt is for one hunter plus a companion, and Shikar Safaris takes care of all the logistics so the winning bidder can enjoy his or her hunt. The value of this Spanish ibex hunt is \$14,500, again with all proceeds going to benefit the NRA.



Left: Karakaya speaks with game wardens in the Taurus mountain range. Upper right: Kaan with a Marco Polo sheep in the central Asian Pamir Mountains. He will donate a Marco Polo sheep hunt in the Pamirs at the NRA-ILA Auction during the 2013 NRA Annual Meetings & Exhibits.

