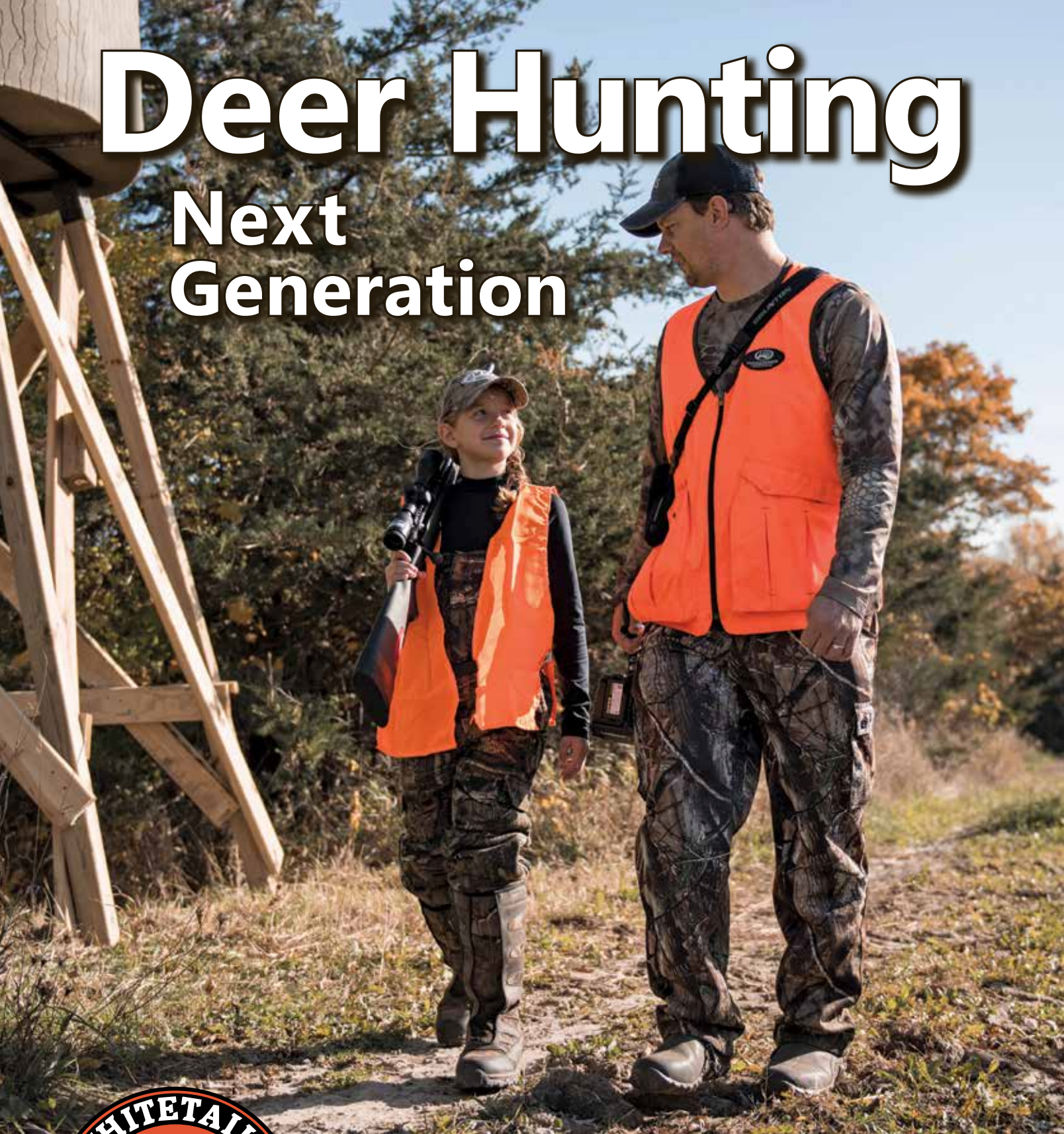


# Deer Hunting

## Next Generation



**Recruit, Retain, and Reactivate**

**The Three R's that can assure  
the future of deer hunting**



**T**he white-tailed deer is the most popular big-game animal in North America, and millions of hunters take to the field every year in pursuit of this majestic animal. This brief overview of deer hunting is intended to be an introduction to some of the topics and techniques for novice hunters, and a place for experienced hunters to see things they may not yet have incorporated into their hunting experience. Regardless of your level of experience, deer hunting is an exciting, challenging, and personally rewarding activity that is often a social and cultural event.

There have been entire books written on every topic in this publication; as you continue your hunting career, search out more information to become an even better hunter and improve your hunting experience.



Photo by Donald M. Jones  
Cover photo courtesy Banks Blinds



# Recruitment, Retention, & Reactivation – R3



Photo by Jeff Davis

In years past, most Americans were much closer to the outdoors than in today's urbanized society. In 1900, about 38% of the labor force lived on farms or ranches, or in rural areas, and that dropped to about 8% in 1960. Today, less than 2% of our workers produce all the food in this country, so the number of people who live on farms – and have easy access to hunting land – is very small.

As the percentage of farmers and ranchers has declined, so too have the numbers of licensed hunters, and that is a problem for all of us who love wild areas. Most state wildlife agencies depend heavily on license fees and an excise tax on hunting and fishing gear to operate. Since hunting numbers have been declining since the 1980s, the money generated for funding wildlife programs is in serious trouble. About 80% of funding that benefits all wildlife species – not just species that are hunted – are generated by hunters and anglers.

In addition, wildlife managers use regulated hunting and fishing as a management tool to control wildlife populations by setting limits and seasons, and if hunt-

ers are not participating, it makes game management much more difficult. The decline in hunting is also a social issue, as people are increasingly removed from firsthand appreciation of nature through a basic understanding of natural cycles, and even knowledge of where food comes from. (An Illinois newspaper in 2009 posted a comment from an anti-hunter who said, "You ought to go to the store and buy the meat that was made there, where no animals were harmed.")

Participating in the sport of regulated hunting is a valued, necessary, and rewarding activity, and helps connect people to nature, the land, and wildlife. The modern locavore movement and farm-to-table philosophy fits perfectly with hunting, where people provide themselves with high-quality, organic protein, and can control all aspects of the food chain. Hunters often develop a close understanding of, and appreciation for, the animals that now sustain them – an

appreciation that is lost when meat is purchased wrapped in plastic on a white tray in a grocery store. Contrary to some opinions, hunting has nothing to do with bloodlust or wanton killing, and in fact killing animals is not the primary objective for most hunters; rather, participating in nature is a principal motivator for hunters.

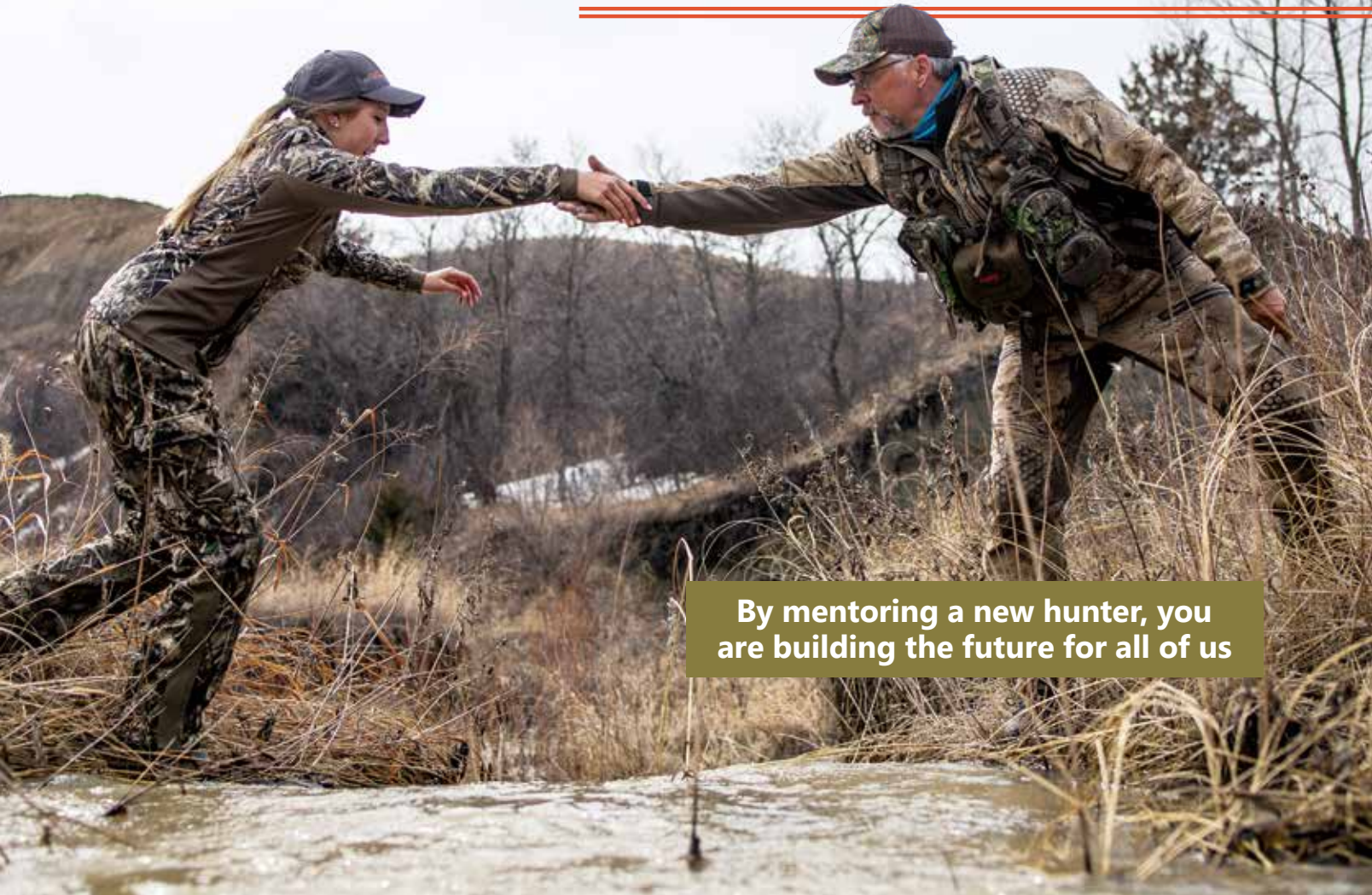
There is something elemental when a hunter is in the woods at sunrise, watching as light softly spreads over the landscape, and the sights, sounds, and smells of the deer woods awake once again. The world has a completely different feel when you are matching wits with the most popular big-game animal in North America – the majestic white-tailed deer.

However, for a variety of reasons, some hunters have stopped hunting, and youngsters are not being introduced to the sport as in the past. The R3 effort to recruit, retain, and reactivate hunters is one that every hunter, or anyone who may have an interest in hunting, can help support. This publication is aimed at providing an overview of deer hunting so the novice has a base to grow from, the experienced hunter can help with the effort to bring new hunters to the field, and so inactive hunters are inspired to head afield again.





# How You Can be a **Mentor**



**By mentoring a new hunter, you are building the future for all of us**

Photo by Connor Olstad

By Jeff Davis

**T**he best way someone can become a mentor to a new hunter is very simple – decide you are going to do it, and then do it. It works. I know it works because someone mentored me in turkey hunting when I was 61 years old – and I don't think either one of us really understood that 'mentoring' was actually happening.

I mentioned to my friend, Pat Kalmer-ton, that I had never hunted turkeys. Pat just loves to fish and hunt, and he lives to share his enthusiasm for the outdoors with other people. He's a fishing guide and charter captain, and a field rep for an outdoor company. His immediate response was to not just invite me to go hunting with him – he insisted that I go hunting with him. And I can't thank him enough. Now I'm hooked.

I had thought about turkey hunting over the years, but something always

seemed to come up to prevent me from getting out there, in addition to the fact that I had no idea of where to go or how to do it. This is the exact situation cited by many people who have considered hunting, but never followed through.

Pat solved this problem for me, providing expertise, gear, location, and encouragement. While sitting in that blind with Pat, I thought of how lucky I was to have a friend and mentor like him, and it occurred to me that I have failed to be that friend to people I know. While I have taken a number of novice shooters to the range, and far in the past I took some new hunters in search of ducks and small game, other than for my son I have done very little on a personal basis to help newcomers enter the sport.

The need to recruit new hunters is critical for our sport, and the best way to do that is to offer to take them to the

range, take them out small game hunting, loan them gear and equipment until they decide what to buy for themselves. Teach them safety, ethics, and hunting skills, and help them achieve their hunting goals. So get out there, let people know that you hunt, and that you are willing to mentor beginner hunters.

**There are an estimated 11 million deer hunters in the country, and if just 5% of us –**

that's one hunter out of 20 – took a new hunter into the woods, we'd have 550,000 new hunters buying licenses and gear, joining with us in the wonder of the outdoors and the thrill of the fair chase.

If you are a hunter, you should be concerned about the future of hunting, and understand that we all are responsible for preserving and expanding our sport. By mentoring a new hunter, you are building the future for all of us.



# How You Can Learn to be a Hunter

**B**eing a hunter takes some thought, and a fair amount of time and effort. Looking at everything that has to be accomplished before you take your first step into the woods on opening morning may be daunting, but like most things, the decision itself is the major task, and after that everything else can be broken down into a series of smaller, manageable tasks.

In the past, there was often a relative or family friend who took on the responsibility of introducing youngsters to the sport. Today, where only a small percentage of the population actively hunt, many families do not even know someone who hunts, and people are reaching adulthood with hunting never being an option in their lives.

The best way to learn to hunt remains finding someone willing to be a mentor, and there are a number of programs encouraging active hunters to take on the task. However, that may not be as simple as it sounds. By all means ask around, and if it works out, great! If not, don't be discouraged, because you can do this

– it's just going to take some time and effort. This is not something that you can decide on a Tuesday, and then be hunting on Saturday.

After deciding to become a hunter, realize that you have a lot to learn, but this education is going to be fun. Read as much as you can, get educated on the game laws and regulations in your area, and start making contacts with people who hunt. Don't be afraid to tell people that you are a novice, and don't be surprised or hurt if you run into jerks along the way. As with anything, there are jerks out there, but you will also find many hunters willing to help. Women are an important and growing demographic for hunting, but there are still gun shops with staff who will talk down to or patronize women who come into their shops – regardless of their level of experience. On the other hand, many businesses do understand that when they treat people well, they will develop a loyal customer base, so decide with your feet and take your business to places that treat you properly.

There are learn-to-hunt programs in many areas – search them out and take advantage of them. Ranges, outdoor shops, sports clubs, and state agencies may also have programs or resources that can help. Get into a hunter safety training class, and learn as much as you can. Find a shooting range nearby, learn how to shoot, and practice until you can hit that target, every time, with what would be a vital shot.

Hunting has its own culture, with many subcultures. As you work on your knowledge and skills, you will find groups that you are comfortable with. Go to the Whitetails Unlimited website and find a WTU event near you and consider attending. Almost everyone there will be a deer hunter, and many attendees are very active in hunter education, safety training, conservation issues, and other topics related to deer hunting.

One last suggestion: after you become an active, accomplished hunter (because you can, and you will), consider passing along your skills and enthusiasm by becoming a mentor to a new hunter.



Photo by ©BillMarchel.com



# A Management **Success Story**

Photo by Randy Hoepner



**T**he history of the deer population in North America is one of the greatest success stories in wildlife management. While many other big-game species have declined with the spread of industrial development and urbanization, the white-tailed deer has been able to adapt

to its ever-changing environment. Today, the white-tailed deer is the most plentiful, widely distributed, and heavily hunted of all North American big-game animals.

However, the late 1800s were tragic years for the whitetail. In the early 1900s, because of major habitat destruction and unregulated market hunting, deer populations plummeted to an estimated low of 500,000 animals. During this same period, the general public was made aware of the scarcity of deer – largely due to the efforts of early conservationists. As a result, people insisted on habitat improvement programs, hiring of law enforcement officers, and putting strict regulations on hunting. Despite that gloomy situation, today's population of white-tailed deer exceeds 30 million. In fact, in many habitat areas, there are more deer today than when the first European settlers arrived.

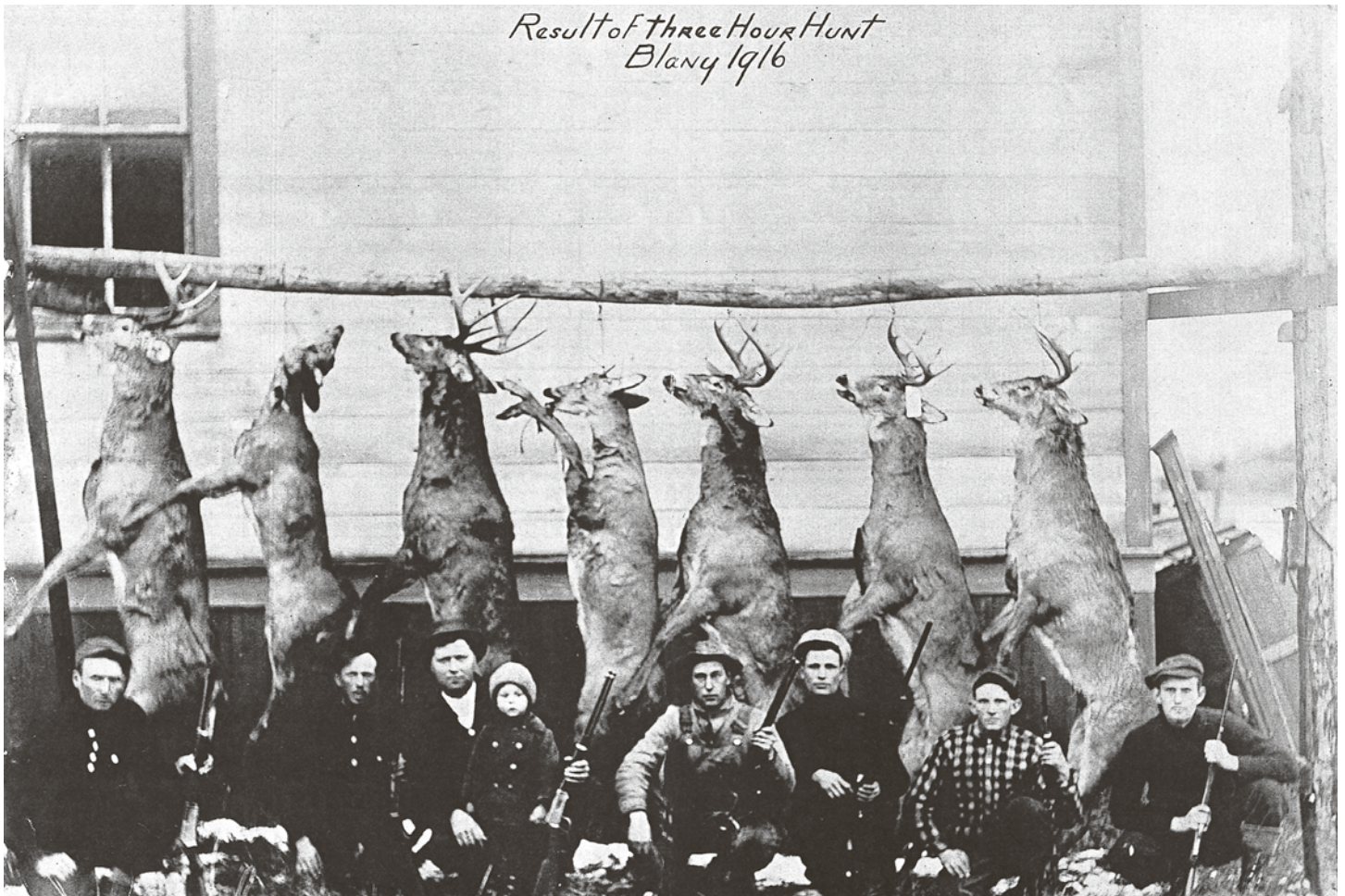
The North American white-tailed deer ranges throughout the United States and in large parts of Canada and Mexico. There are some 30 subspecies of white-

tailed deer, though only 16 of these subspecies can be found in the ranges of North America. The size and weight of an adult whitetail varies greatly from the very small Key deer of the Florida Keys to the largest subspecies in the northern woodland region.

This being said, an overpopulation of deer can become a liability and have a significant negative impact on the species as well as other animal and plant communities. Excessive deer numbers cause an increase in deer/vehicle collisions, disease, crop depredation, and a destruction of habitat.

Many decades of research and management support regulated hunting as the most beneficial tool that wildlife managers have to control deer populations. Options routinely suggested as alternatives to regulated hunting are typically impractical and too costly to implement.

Regardless of where deer live, their beauty, alertness, and adaptability continues to make them the most popular big-game animal in the United States.





# Fast Facts



## Whitetails are fascinating animals

Photo by Linda Arndt

**B**efore preparing for the hunt, take some time to better understand your quarry. Studying the white-tailed deer can be fun and will give you the satisfaction of becoming a more knowledgeable, skillful, and responsible hunter.

► Deer have extraordinary senses. Their ability to smell is probably their greatest asset, but deer also have exceptionally keen hearing and eyes that can spot the slightest movement.

► The whitetail is considered a “browser” because it wanders, feeding on tender buds, twigs, and leaves – but remains close to the woods for quick escape and cover.

► Most whitetails are born in late May or early June, depending upon geographic location. The normal gestation period of a whitetail is 200 days.

► A mature doe will typically bear twins, which usually double in size during the first two weeks after birth. The fawn’s development is hastened because of the richness of the mother’s milk. In comparison to cow’s milk, deer milk is richer and much more nutritious.

► The average weight of a newborn fawn is between 5 and 8 pounds. Nature pro-

vides the newborn with a camouflage of white spots to protect it from predators.

► For bucks, antler development usually begins in April or May, and by the month of August, the antlers are fully grown.

Antlers fall off after the breeding season, typically in January. Antlers and horns are different things; antlers grow and fall off every year (such as with deer, elk, moose, and caribou), while horns are permanent and grow throughout the animal’s life (such as with sheep, goats, bison, and cattle).

► Deer antlers are among the fastest growing tissues in the animal kingdom, possibly growing as much as an inch per day during peak development. This is the only skin tissue that regenerates in mammals. The development process and ultimate size of the rack can vary greatly, and depends upon the genetics, general health, and nutrition available to each deer.

► Growing antlers are covered with a living tissue called velvet. During development, a deer’s antlers are very delicate and extremely sensitive.

► Deer coats consist of hollow, kinky hair designed to insulate and reduce heat loss; the color ranges from grey/brown in winter to reddish in summer. Deer are

strong swimmers, and the hollow hair helps keep them buoyant in the water.

► Whitetails can reach speeds in excess of 35 miles per hour. They are also capable of clearing a vertical fence up to 8 feet in height, and can cover up to 30 feet in a horizontal leap.

► Deer are known as ruminants or cud chewers. They have a four-compartment stomach that allows them to take in food quickly and regurgitate it later for final chewing and digestion.

► A high browse line on trees and brush signals a tough winter with a shortage of food. Very often, both the youngest and oldest of the deer herd die in winter. Some very bad northern winters have resulted in a 75% mortality rate in local deer herds. This is Mother Nature’s way of managing the deer population.

► Venison is a nutritious, healthy, and delicious food. It is organic and drug free, and is a complete protein that is full of iron, B12, and B3 vitamins. Venison is also lower in calories than beef, lamb, turkey, or chicken.

► Like humans, deer have ‘baby teeth’ which fall out and are replaced by permanent teeth.

# How to Get Started

Photo by Jeff Davis



**T**he most important part is making the decision that you want to be a deer hunter. There are a lot of steps to accomplish after that, but they are all manageable once you set the personal objective of being a hunter.

## Understanding Hunting

Hunting has an historical culture that pre-dates written history, but in our modern world, few people have to hunt to survive. It is an activity, or sport, that has an interesting culture, with many subcultures depending on where you are and what you are hunting. Reading what you can and talking to experienced hunters will provide a basis for understanding hunting culture.

Modern wildlife management is only about 100 years old, and it has been very successful in the United States because it is based on what is known as the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. Before the early 1900s, wildlife was there for the taking – or exploiting – by anyone, and the huge numbers of animals in the sparsely settled country seemed to be inexhaustible. However, in just a

few years, some animals (like passenger pigeons) were hunted to extinction, and many more (like American bison and waterfowl) were getting close.

The North American Model holds that wildlife belongs to everyone, and it is the responsibility of governments to scientifically manage these resources under democratic processes to provide hunting opportunities for everyone. It also outlaws commercial hunting of wild animals, which had decimated many Western species.

State governments, usually through an agency like the Natural Resources

Photo by Jeff Davis



Department, are the primary wildlife managers, and establish seasons, limits, times, and hunting methods. *These specific regulations can vary widely, and every hunter must be familiar with, and follow, the laws where they hunt.*

## Hunting is Conservation

The vast majority of money that funds conservation in the U.S. comes from those who hunt and fish. The ‘Pittman-Robertson’ tax benefits all wildlife, not just game animals, even though it comes only from the part of the population that hunts and fishes.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service distributes funds to all 50 states and U.S. territories, and for most states this is a substantial part of the total funding for their state wildlife agency.

## Take a Hunter Safety Class

Most states require hunter safety training for new hunters, and even if you can get a license without the training, it is a very good idea to get the education anyway. In many areas, this training is available online. Hunting is a very safe activity, coming in third safest when compared to 28 other recreational activities, like golf, skiing, snowboarding, and softball (NSSF research). One of the reasons that hunting is so safe today is that mandatory hunter safety training was instituted in the 1970s, and it works. Get this done early – if you wait until just before the season, you may be out of luck.

## Find a Place to Hunt

Increasingly, this is one of the biggest problems for deer hunters. Some land-

owners have restricted access to their land because of slob hunters, or the fear of liability. Public land is available, but some of it has a lot of hunting pressure and may not be an easy or productive option. Ask your friends, co-workers, and members of your extended family if they know of a place you can hunt. Start early, and stay active in your search.





## Decide What You Will Hunt With

There are many ways to hunt deer, and the best method for you will depend on local regulations, how much time you want to spend hunting, and how chal-

lenging you want the hunt to be. High-power rifles may be the most popular firearm, but other options may include shotguns with slugs, muzzleloaders, handguns, archery (including crossbows), and even large-caliber airguns (check local regulations). All are viable options, and each presents its own advantages and challenges. Archery seasons are typically longer, starting in some areas in late summer and extending into January, but the hunter must get much closer to the deer for a reliable shot. Firearm seasons are usually the shortest in duration, but shots at longer ranges are possible. Modern muzzleloaders can extend the firearm season, and modern slug design paired with a dedicated slug gun and scope will provide performance that rivals many rifles.

## Learn as Much as You Can, and Practice

Every hunter has their own ideas and preferences on how to hunt and what gear is necessary. Talking to two different hunters may lead to two completely different opinions. Learn as much as you can, and develop your own hunting style.

There is also no substitute for marksmanship practice, and if you intend to be a hunter you have a responsibility to the animal to be the best shot you can be, under all hunting conditions. Be sure to practice in the conditions you will hunt (such as from a stand), with the clothing you are likely to wear during the season.

## Hunting Legally and Ethically

Hunting legally is a pretty easy concept – you must obey the game laws. If you only have a buck tag, then you cannot legally shoot a doe. Hunting ethically may not have bright lines that define what you can and cannot do, but with a little training and thought, the ethical lines usually become clear. One way to define hunting ethics is referred to as the Four C's: Careful, Considerate, Capable, and Courteous. One example: if you are a confident shot out to 150 yards, and you see a deer at 350 yards, it would not be ethical to attempt a shot at this range, even if it would be legal.

Remember that every time you are hunting, you are a representative of our sport, and your behavior reflects on all of us.

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# Preseason Preparation



Photo by Jeff Davis

**F**or a successful deer hunt, whether an animal is harvested or not, planning and preparation are the key ingredients.

Deer hunting is relatively easy to understand, but success is never guaranteed. A white-tailed deer is a true survivor, using its very sensitive eyes, ears, and nose to detect and avoid potential danger. It is interesting to observe just how the whitetail uses these senses in appraising danger.

In order to overcome a deer's defense system, a hunter must fully develop his or her own outdoor abilities. Preparation for the hunt should include target practice, physical conditioning, study, understanding of the whitetail, and prescouting.



Photo by Randy Hoepner

*Scrapes are areas where a deer has removed ground cover to bare earth, and then urinated. Deer use scrapes to communicate with each other, so they are important to note while scouting.*

Prescouting is the process of assessing the contour of the land in detail, the routes deer travel, and the selection of several good sites for your hunting location or stand. Always remember when prescouting that there are a number of variables to consider which alter a deer's feeding, bedding, and traveling habits. These variables include the weather, hunting pressure, and the breeding season, commonly known as the "rut." With these changes in mind, it will be easier to make the necessary adjustments during the hunting season.

Once you've determined an area to hunt, it's time to get down to work.

First, simply get out and walk the area. Search for tracks, droppings, bedding areas, scrapes, rubs, or any sign indicating deer are in the area; then observe local ridges, swamps, fields, and waters associated with good whitetail areas. The number of hours you spend in the woods before the season will have a direct effect on your success on opening day.

A certain amount of luck is involved with hunting, but prescouting puts the odds in favor of the prepared hunter. Listed next are some guidelines to follow during your preseason scouting activities.

## Preseason Scouting

After you have permission to hunt an area, pick several spots you feel should be good habitat for deer. Take some time to scout the area and determine key trails, feeding areas, bedding sites, and locations you intend to hunt.

Topographical maps, aerial photos, or a GPS unit with map graphics are often helpful for determining the lay of the land. Studying the maps may help you pinpoint good hunting locations prior to walking the property.

The first thing to search for is feeding areas. Ideal deer foods are low-growing shrubs, fruits and berries, brushy vegetation, and young tree growth that is within a deer's reach. Hunting near key deer foods will greatly increase your odds of being successful. Deer are

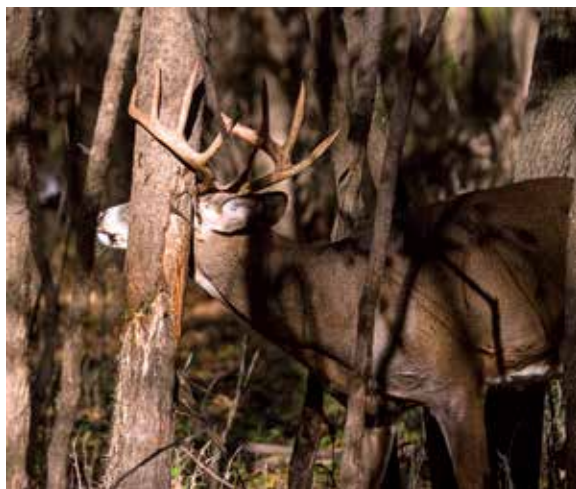


Photo by Randy Hoepner

*Rubs are created when bucks rub their antlers on trees to mark territory, often stripping the bark. It gets easier to determine which are active and which are old after seeing a number of rubs.*

very adaptable with what they eat, and preferred foods will depend on what is available in your area.

The availability of water is something that should not be overlooked. White-tailed deer are not fond of traveling far for a drink. Normally, the water source is in close proximity to their daily feeding areas.

Bedding areas are another important aspect to bear in mind. Deer use differ-



ent bedding areas depending on the time of year. Deer beds can be distinguished by areas where grass, snow, or leaves are flattened in the shape of a deer.

Deer trails and escape routes are probably the most vital signs to look for during prescouting. Well-used trails normally link feeding areas to bedding locations. Identifying the trails deer use to travel to a favored food source is often the key ingredient to a successful hunt.

Hunting near scrape and rub areas can be very productive during the rut.

Active scrapes are bare, pawed-up areas that smell strongly of fresh deer urine. Bucks make scrapes and check them frequently in search of a receptive doe during the breeding season. Rubs on young trees are made by bucks to vent aggression and mark territories. Rubs are often made along a scrape line and are part of the annual breeding ritual. If you find active rubs or scrapes, look for trails that connect them with bedding or feeding areas.



Photo by Tommy Kirkland

*When scouting, look for trails that connect water sources with bedding areas and food locations.*

## Hunting Gear



Photo by Jeff Davis

clothing, but these regulations may vary for different seasons. For instance, in Wisconsin's archery season, blaze orange is not required, but it is mandatory during the gun season. Blaze orange is an incredibly important safety item that has greatly reduced the number of hunting accidents, and even if it is not required, it is still a good idea to wear during any hunting season. Before you purchase hunting clothes, check your state regulations for compliance.

Camouflage clothing is used to break up the human figure and disguise hunter movement. It offers greater benefits to the hunter who encounters deer at close range. Remember that deer are colorblind. Select cam-

ouflage patterns that blend in well with the terrain you will be hunting.

Choosing clothes that ensure personal comfort will add to your hunting enjoyment. Also take into consideration scent-eliminating technology, moisture management, and quietness. Quality clothing usually costs more, but can be worth the investment.

The primary function of any outdoor clothing is to provide protection from the various elements that may be encountered. Warm weather hunts are generally easier to dress for, as compared to cold weather hunting. There is no perfect cold weather clothing, but certain materials work better than others. The final selection will depend on your specific location and weather conditions.

Layer your clothing to accommodate for changes in body temperature due to activity and weather conditions. Mov-

**W**hether you plan to hunt the northern hardwoods, swamps of the south, or the western plains, it is of utmost importance to choose the proper clothing and equipment to fit your needs. In doing so, you will add to the safety and comfort of your whitetail hunt. Keep in mind that you will experience varying and sometimes adverse weather conditions, those conditions can change quickly, and you need to be prepared. The conditions, depending upon geographic location, may range from severe snowstorms and frigid cold, to high winds, heavy rains, and even very warm temperatures.

Most states require deer hunters to wear a certain percentage of blaze orange



Photo by Jeff Davis



ing through the woods can warm you quickly, so remove layers or ventilate to avoid sweating on your way to and from a stand. Dressing in layers also allows you to remove garments as the day warms. When insulated underwear is needed, the best choice is a type that wicks moisture away from your skin as well as provides insulation.

A good hunting boot must be comfortable, provide adequate traction, and keep your foot the proper temperature under the hunting conditions. Be sure to walk with your hunting boots and socks extensively before the season to break them in and avoid blisters on opening day.

There are numerous hunting aids that are very important to carry in your day pack. They include flashlight, knife, dragging rope, matches, compass, gloves, and extra ammunition. Don't forget a map, GPS unit, and cell phone (for emergencies). For lengthy hunts, bring along something to eat and drink. Always plan for bad situations and conditions, and pack so you are prepared.

There is no perfect caliber, cartridge, bow, or arrow for deer hunting. The most important thing to do – whether you hunt with a rifle, muzzleloader, bow, handgun, or slug shotgun – is to practice before the season. This practice should include shooting from hunting positions while

wearing your hunting clothing. Being a crack-shot in August off a supported bench at the range may not translate to being successful while shooting with winter clothes from a tree stand in December.



Beginners should develop an ongoing marksmanship program. Know your abilities and the effective range limitations of your weapon, and don't exceed those limits.

Attractants and scent control products are popular with many of today's deer hunters. Once considered gimmicks, these products can improve a hunter's chance of seeing deer if used properly. Some of the more commonly used products include rattling antlers, grunt calls, and

assorted types of deer scents, and products to reduce human odor.

Odor control has become a widely used technique used by many hunters, and includes sprays to eliminate human odor, clothing that reduces odor, and ozone generators that destroy odor-causing molecules and bacteria. Many hunters combine these tools, or use them at different times or under different conditions. The decision is yours, but giving it a try may offer you the chance to use some creative tactics to fill your tag.

Pop-up blinds, ladder stands, and portable tree stands offer alternatives to traditional ground blinds. Many are compact and light enough to be backpacked into

remote hunting areas. Elevated stands can provide you with a better vantage point to view deer movement without being noticed. Before you purchase a portable tree stand, check out state and local laws that regulate their use (many public hunting areas allow portable stands, but they often cannot be left overnight). Remember that safety is a key factor when using an elevated platform. While hunting is a very safe recreational

activity, most injuries and fatal accidents while hunting involve elevated stands. When using a tree stand, always wear a full-body safety harness and a lifeline every time you leave the ground. If you are going to use an elevated stand of any type, practice setting it up, using it, and properly ascending and descending in advance of the season.



Photos this page by Jeff Davis



# Hunting Methods

Photo by Donald M. Jones



**S**tand hunting is probably the easiest and most often used method of deer hunting. In most cases, it has a higher success ratio than other hunting techniques. The greatest attribute a stand hunter must have is patience. Typically, once a deer is in range of the hunter, it is at a great disadvantage because it will be unaware of the hunter's presence. Many hunters simply post near a tree to break up their image, though some hunters prefer to build elaborate blinds on the ground or choose to hunt from an elevated stand. Important things to remember when stand hunting are to have clear shooting lanes and proper cover, and to know the wind direction in relation to where the deer are expected to be and where the stand is located (the hunter should be downwind of where the deer will be).

The key to stand hunting is staying alert and avoiding movement. Continually scan the area with your eyes, and if you need to move, do it very slowly and deliberately. Sitting still for extended periods is not as easy as it sounds – your muscles can get tired and cramped, after a time you can get chilled (or downright cold), in early-season hunting insects can be a problem, and you can get sleepy. In any situation, movement can alert a deer, and even if it does not immediately identify danger, seeing something move will

place it on alert. All of these problems can be overcome by being motivated and prepared (with proper clothing, scent control, and insect repellents), having a comfortable seat, and working to keep muscles loose. Any hunter who prefers to hunt alone and is capable of sitting still should consider stand hunting as a simple and effective method.

Still-hunting is an enjoyable way of hunting during periods of the day when whitetails reduce their movement to a minimum. Still-hunting is something of

a misnomer, although it is the common name for this technique. It is also called stalking or spot-and-stalk. The still-hunter walks slowly and quietly, occasionally pausing to search the area for an inattentive deer. The hunter's primary goal is to locate an animal before it detects him or her and flees the area. Once a deer is located, a still-hunter is generally presented with a good shot. Still-hunting is a method that is very challenging to master, but if you are seasoned and ready to accept the challenge, still-hunting may be a way to outsmart the elusive whitetail.

Remember that you are hunting, not walking through the woods. Slow is the operative word, and by slow think 'glacial.' Remember that deer are constantly scanning for movement, so the movement of your entire body must be slow enough to not attract attention. It's hard to set a speed, but slowly moving one leg in a small step, setting your foot down so as to not make any noise, then scanning the area around you with just your eyes, and then repeating the process with your other leg, may take a minute or so. This method is not designed to cover a lot of ground, but if you have located a good bedding area with multiple trails, it may be worth a try. You do not need to move constantly; after an hour or so, sidle up to a tree and imitate its lack of movement. If you are doing this correctly, you



Photo by Jeff Davis

*There are many strategies and techniques used by successful hunters, including using tree stands (above) or posting on a tree line. Blaze orange is very visible to humans, but deer do not see colors well and are not spooked by solid orange. However, deer are very sensitive to movement, so being still and moving very slowly when needed are very important.*



may be exhausted by the end of the day, even if you are covering only a small piece of ground.

Bad weather – rain, mist, wind, or snow – can shift the odds in favor of the still-hunter. Wet ground is easier to move through without making noise; wind makes trees and foliage move, masking the hunter's motion; and rain or snow may dampen noise as well as keep a deer's head down. In addition, moving will help keep you warm, though sitting on a stand as the wind whips around you can chill you to the bone.

Group hunting has gained popularity among certain sportsmen and women who enjoy the company of other hunters. This type of hunting is especially

this kind of hunt, there is no such thing as too much blaze orange, even if it is not required.

In some areas of the country, the 'deer drive' is a preferred method of hunting, and local terrain provides the reason. If there are natural funnels on the land, or terrain features like a long, narrow stand of trees surrounded by farmland, a drive may work well. One or two 'standers' position themselves at the end of the funnel or woodlot, while other hunters get at the far end and walk through, trying to 'drive' the deer to the standers. Again, it is vital that the standers do not fire toward the drivers, or each other!

An interesting example of using terrain to the hunters' advantage was when

hunters in southeast Minnesota would go to small, public, wooded islands in the Mississippi River and drop off one hunter at the end of the island, where he would find a good shooting location. They would wait for a while, and then the other hunters would go to the opposite end of the island and form a line and walk toward the hidden hunter. Any deer on

the island would move toward the stander, preferring to stay on land, even though deer are good swimmers. While many islands held no deer, the hunters had great success on other islands. One interesting issue was to make sure the island was on the Minnesota side of the river, because they only had Minnesota resident deer licenses.

Regardless of the technique selected, you must always hunt in an ethical and responsible manner. In time, the high standards you set for yourself will add to the enjoyment of your hunting experience.

Future opportunities to engage in the sport of deer hunting will depend upon what you learn while hunting. The more you learn about the wilderness around you, the



*Having an extra set of hands makes dragging a deer out of the woods much easier.*

more you will be prepared to enjoy the day outdoors. No true hunter measures success by the number of deer harvested. The real measure of success is in the knowledge that your time was well spent enjoying the great outdoors.

If you are one of the lucky to harvest a whitetail, there are still several steps left to complete your successful hunt. Every hunter should know the simple process of how to field dress an animal. The process is easy to learn by reading one of the many step-by-step instructions readily available from numerous sources. The final step in handling your deer is having it processed and wrapped for the freezer. After that, it's time to cook, eat, and enjoy.



*Be prepared for success – have a sharp knife, gloves, and other supplies to field dress your deer. Your first time will be a little messy, but it gets much easier each time you do it.*

Photos this page by Jeff Davis



*Many states require successful hunters to tag their deer immediately and register their kill within a set amount of time. It is important for ethical hunters to know and follow all game laws and regulations. State regulators use the information for future management decisions.*

popular when hunting pressure alters the normal movement of deer in the area. A good combination is two or three hunters who divide the tactics of a solo hunter. When you properly combine efforts, it can become a very efficient method of moving whitetails. An excellent way is to alternately still-hunt, while the other hunters watch from a suitable vantage point. If the joint efforts are carried out properly, it just may offer one of the hunters an excellent shooting opportunity.

If you are hunting with other people in the same area, it is imperative that there is a plan for the hunt, and that everyone sticks to the plan. Each hunter must know where the other hunters will be, and everyone has to know where it is safe to shoot, and where they cannot shoot because another hunter is in that area. Each hunter must have the discipline to hold fire and pass on a shot, no matter how big that buck might be. In



# Hunting Tips

Photo by Randy Hoepner



**T**he more you hunt, the better you will be; it's as simple as that. Deer are very adaptable, and local conditions may produce behaviors in your area that are different from another region. Having said that, most deer behavior is predictable. Here are some general tips:

► A bedded deer would prefer to remain still. Often deer that see, smell, or hear you will remain motionless until they feel they've been spotted or are in immediate

danger. When still-hunting, always be prepared for a deer to burst out, heading for nearby cover.

► On cold, sunny days, when measurable snow is on the ground, look for deer on the leeward side of slopes and hills where the warm sun may be melting snow. Deer will often look for both protection and warmth during winter months.

► An experienced hunter will sometimes hunt near a water source. Deer frequent watering areas during the active feeding times of early morning and late afternoon.

► Spotting deer beds in snow can be difficult because of shallow depressions and limited melting. Look for bedded deer on the edge of fields, under low-hanging tree branches, and on higher hills overlooking lower terrain.

► Most often, deer trails will run horizontally along the side of a hill. You can give yourself an advantage if you are able

to post above known hillside trails, but below the crest of the hill to break up your silhouette.

► When disturbed, whitetails rarely run far – usually just out of sight – but they will be on high alert.

► Always be aware of other hunters in the surrounding area. Detecting movement or sounds are never reason enough to click off the safety of your gun or draw your bow. In heavily hunted areas, movement is often that of another hunter. Never use your firearm's scope to scan terrain – use binoculars. Never shoot without being sure of your target, and what is behind it. If you cannot take a safe, ethical shot, then pass on the opportunity. It may be difficult, but no deer is worth taking a dangerous shot.

► Avoid unnecessary movement; and when you do move, do so in a slow, deliberate manner.

## DEER HUNTER'S CHECKLIST



Photo by Michael Faw

Regardless of the type of hunting you do, it's a good idea to make a checklist of the items that you may need. Some hunters have a Master List with everything they could possibly use, and then assemble their gear based on when or how they are hunting. For instance, an archery hunt in early September may need different gear than a muzzleloader hunt in the snow in late December. When making your final list, always plan for the unexpected!

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> HUNTING LICENSE/TAG               | <input type="checkbox"/> KNIFE                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> HUNTING REGS BOOK                 | <input type="checkbox"/> MULTI-TOOL                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> IDENTIFICATION (DRIVER'S LICENSE) | <input type="checkbox"/> DEER ATTRACTANTS                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> HUNTING CLOTHING                  | <input type="checkbox"/> SCENT CONTROL                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> RAIN GEAR                         | <input type="checkbox"/> ROPE/TWINE/ZIP TIES             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> BOOTS/LINERS                      | <input type="checkbox"/> MATCHES/LIGHTER                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> HAT/GLOVES                        | <input type="checkbox"/> FLASHLIGHT/BATTERIES            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> GUN/AMMUNITION                    | <input type="checkbox"/> CAMERA                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> BOW/ARROWS                        | <input type="checkbox"/> FIRST AID KIT                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> TREE STAND/SAFETY HARNESS         | <input type="checkbox"/> EYEGLASSES/SUNGLASSES           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> GROUND BLIND                      | <input type="checkbox"/> GUN CLEANING KIT                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> FANNY PACK                        | <input type="checkbox"/> INSECT REPELLENT/DEVICE         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> HANDWARMERS                       | <input type="checkbox"/> HEARING PROTECTION              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> COMPASS                           | <input type="checkbox"/> TWO-WAY RADIO                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> MAPS                              | <input type="checkbox"/> WET WIPES/T.P.                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> GPS UNIT                          | <input type="checkbox"/> COOLER/ICE                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CELL PHONE/EXTRA BATTERY          | <input type="checkbox"/> FOOD/DRINK                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> BINOCULARS                        | <input type="checkbox"/> BOOT DRYER                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SPOTTING SCOPE                    | <input type="checkbox"/> BACKUP CLOTHES (IF YOU GET WET) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> RANGEFINDER                       | <input type="checkbox"/> MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS             |





**WHITETAILS  
UNLIMITED**

# 10 Commandments OF FIREARM SAFETY

**HANDLE ALL FIREARMS AS IF  
THEY WERE LOADED**

**1**

A firearm offers no guarantee that it is unloaded. Therefore, always treat each firearm with respect.

**NEVER PULL THE TRIGGER UNLESS  
YOU ARE SURE OF YOUR TARGET**

**2**

Always be positive of your target and what is behind it prior to pulling the trigger.

**WATCH WHERE YOU POINT  
YOUR FIREARM'S MUZZLE**

**3**

Control the direction of your firearm's muzzle at all times by pointing it in a safe direction.

**MAKE SURE THE AMMUNITION  
MATCHES THE FIREARM**

**4**

Double check your ammunition to make sure it matches the gauge or caliber of the firearm.

**ALWAYS MAKE SURE THE BARREL  
IS FREE OF OBSTRUCTIONS**

**5**

Before loading, check for obstructions in the barrel.

**NEVER TAKE CHANCES WITH  
A LOADED FIREARM**

**6**

Unload your firearm before attempting to cross over any fence, obstacle or hazardous terrain.

**DON'T RELY ON YOUR  
FIREARM'S SAFETY**

**7**

Because a safety is a mechanical device, it could fail at any time. Always remember to place the safety back on immediately after the shot.

**STORE FIREARMS AND  
AMMUNITION IN A SAFE PLACE**

**8**

Store firearms and ammunition separate from one another and out of the reach of children.

**NEVER LOAD A FIREARM UNLESS  
YOU ARE READY TO USE IT**

**9**

Don't load your firearm until you are ready to use it - and unload as soon as you are finished.

**NEVER MIX ALCOHOL  
AND AMMUNITION**

**10**

Alcohol and drugs impair judgement; never consume either before or during hunting or target practice.



# Opening Day



**It's time to hunt, so have a safe and memorable experience!**

Photo ©BillMarchel.com

**R**esponsible hunters today, as in the past, will continue to play an important role in determining the future of regulated hunting.

*Approach the sport of deer hunting with the right attitude. Understand the reasons why you hunt, and then concentrate on the fulfillment and enjoyment hunting can bring into your life.*

Opening day is finally here and you have been anticipating the challenge for months. It's time to test your prescouting, hunting area selection, marksmanship, and knowledge and understanding

of the white-tailed deer. It's also the time when millions of sportsmen and women participate in one of the greatest outdoor sports ... deer hunting.

## Have a Safe Hunt

Follow these safety tips:

- Understand and follow the 10 Commandments of Firearm Safety.
- Use a harness and lifeline if you use an elevated stand.
- Don't use your scope to scan terrain – use binoculars.
- Have a plan for your hunt and be sure to tell someone where you are hunting

and when you will be back. That way if you have a problem, they will know where to find you.

- Have a charged cell phone, backup battery, and a signaling device like a whistle in a place that you can easily access.
- Check the weather and prepare for the worst possible conditions.
- Be sure you fully understand current rules and regulations for the area you are hunting.
- Hunt within your physical limits; if you are too tired, cold, or uncomfortable, call it a day.



# Nuts and Bolts of **Deer Hunting**

Photo by Linda Arndt



**H**unting is an activity that requires a certain amount of tools, gear, and equipment. The list of things that are absolutely necessary is not long, but the list of things that are good to have or that will make your hunt more productive and comfortable is extensive. Asking any two hunters their opinion on brand, type, and necessity will usually trigger many hours of discussion. Ask for opinions, research as much as you can, and decide for yourself what your needs are. Your local conditions will have a great influence on what you use – hunting in thick woodlands in Upper Michigan is different from the open prairies of western Kansas. Outside of your required hunting license and/or tag, you will have myriad choices, so let your budget and personal preference be your guide. Buying a pile of expensive gear will not make you a better hunter, and the best gear in the world will not provide success if you don't understand how to use it.

Start with the essentials, and build your gear bag as you gain more experience. Here is a very brief overview of gear topics; remember that there have been many books and magazine articles written on every one of these topics. Don't be discouraged if you find com-

pletely opposing recommendations from different sources, because there is no single way to hunt.

**The Minimum:** You will need a firearm and ammunition (or bow and arrows), knife, 10-foot piece of rope, and anything required by law to hunt, like blaze orange clothing and your license. While that's the minimum, there is a lot more out there to think about. Here is a look at both the minimum gear, and what else is useful.

## Firearms

While a scoped rifle may be the most popular deer hunting weapon today, there are an array of options:

### **Weapon Type:**

Depending on local regulations, deer are commonly hunted with rifles, shotguns, muzzleloaders, handguns, airguns, or archery gear including compound

bows or crossbows, or the more challenging traditional recurve bow, or even ancient-design longbows.

**Rifles:** Rifles come in a variety of actions, including bolt, lever, pump, semiautomatic (including modern sporting rifles), and single-shot (bolt or break-action). The number of models, styles, and options such as weight, barrel length, finish, stock, and trigger are dizzying.

**Shotguns:** Some states restrict hunting with rifles and have shotgun-only zones. The reasoning for this is that a bullet from a high-powered rifle can travel more than a mile, and there is danger from this in areas that are highly populated. Shotgun slugs are much larger and heavier than rifle bullets, and travel at a lower velocity, and therefore do not have the potential to travel as far. Research has shown that there is no real-world difference in the relative safety of rifles versus shotgun slugs. However, these restrictions were established many years ago, and there have been vast improvements since then in both shotguns and slugs; today's slugs and slug-specific shotguns and scopes enable very accurate use to 200 yards and beyond.



Photo by Linda Arndt

*There are dozens of suitable firearms, calibers, and ammunition combinations to choose from. Protect yourself while hunting by using blaze orange (or other legal color) and hearing protection.*



In many areas, a shotgun with a rifled barrel and modern slugs is a very viable option for deer hunting.

**Muzzleloaders:** Most states have muzzleloader seasons, and muzzleloaders can usually be used during gun seasons. While muzzleloaders are rifles, they are single shot – with the powder and bullet inserted into the barrel from the muzzle and pressed into the breech using a ramrod. A primer is positioned in front of the hammer to ignite the powder, and the process to reload another shot can take 30-90 seconds, depending on the skill of the hunter.

Muzzleloaders are considered ‘primitive’ weapons, as almost all rifles made before the Civil War were muzzle-loading. Those rifles used a variety of ignition systems (flintlocks, matchlocks, etc.), but modern ‘in-line’ muzzleloaders use shotgun primers for ignition and premeasured blackpowder pellets. Modern muzzleloaders look and shoot much like modern rifles, and when using sabot bullets and scopes with reticles optimized for muzzleloaders, these ‘primitive’ weapons can be very powerful and accurate to ranges in excess of 100 yards.

Many hunters take advantage of muzzleloader seasons to gain extra time to hunt each year.

**Handguns:** Several states also allow hunting with handguns, which is a much more challenging way to hunt with a firearm (be sure to check local regulations). In general, the effective range of a handgun will be greater than archery equipment, but less than a rifle, shotgun, or muzzleloader. As with rifles, there are caliber, bullet, and power requirements. Sometimes they are legal to hunt with during the standard gun season, while some states have separate seasons.

**Archery:** After rifles, archery is the second most popular tool to hunt deer, and this includes compound bows, crossbows, recurve bows, and even some longbows. Again, check your local regulations as there are usually minimum requirements on the bow’s power, or ‘draw

weight,’ which is the effort it takes to pull the bowstring back. Arrows are tipped with razor-sharp broadheads for hunting, and ‘field points’ for practice. In general, this is the most difficult and intense way to hunt deer, because the hunter must

earnment, although these rounds are on the large end for deer-sized animals. (These calibers are appropriate for even the largest big-game animals in North America, so a hunter can hunt everything from deer to moose or bear with one rifle.)



Photo by Jeff Davis

*Many hunters enjoy the challenge of archery hunting. The biggest difference from hunting with a firearm is the effective range – archery requires the hunter to be much closer to the animal to be successful. Regardless of the gear you use – firearm, muzzleloader, handgun, bow, or crossbow – an ethical hunter needs to practice to ensure the first shot hits exactly where intended. Find your maximum range and do not take shots that may fail.*

be close to the animal to take an ethical shot. Where they are legal, crossbows are an increasingly popular archery option, due to the ease of learning, shooting, and power. Archery seasons are typically the longest, starting in some places in September and continuing through January (again, in some states).

In all, hunters pursuing the white-tailed deer could hunt for several months if they avail themselves of all seasons and weapon types. What works best for an individual hunter depends on their personal interest, budget, available time, and even how much space is available in the freezer.

## Selecting a Rifle Caliber

Restrictions often call for center-fire ammunition with a minimum caliber requirement. A common recommendation is that a .243 is the minimum rifle caliber for deer, and the .30-06 has been the most popular deer round for the last 50-75 years. Some hunters use larger, more powerful calibers including the .300 Winchester Magnum or the .45-70 Gov-

Smaller calibers, like the .243 and .30-30, have lighter recoil, making it easier for hunters who are smaller, or who prefer less recoil. Overall, there are dozens of potential calibers on the market.

## Scent Control & Deer Attractants

Deer use their noses for a number of tasks, and protecting themselves from predators, including humans, is the primary job. Running an important second is finding a mate. If you can control and reduce your human scent and present odors that are attractive to deer, you will be a more successful hunter.

Deer constantly check the air for danger, and they are fast to respond if they find anything they think is a threat. The sense of smell in a deer is much more sensitive than a human’s – the olfactory area of their brain is 1,000 times larger, there are many times more nasal receptors, and the nasal passage is eight times longer than ours.

It is almost impossible to completely eliminate your scent, but if you can



reduce your smell to a small amount, the animal will not be alarmed because it will think you are far away.

The first time you hunt in an area or on a stand is often the most effective, and one reason is that human odor molecules can build up around a stand, and increase the human scent every time it is used. In addition, your walk to and from the stand can contaminate the trail, alerting deer to your presence. Your boots, pants, and body parts brushing against foliage can leave human scent as you walk through the woods. The more often you are in one area, the more likely it is that deer will detect your odor.



Wash all of your hunting clothing (not just your coat and pants) with a detergent designed to leave no human scent. Then store and transport it in a clean, airtight container or plastic bag. Hang clothing outside, away from car exhaust, camp fires or barbeque grills. When you shower before hunting, use scent-free soap and shampoo designed for hunters, and use a washcloth and towel washed in scent-free detergent. Don't use your normal shave cream, deodorant or aftershave; there are deodorants designed for hunters and you really don't need to shave.

Ozone generators are very effective in destroying odor molecules, and a number of products are available to 'de-scent' your clothing, or even use in a stand.

Use an anti-scent spray on all your clothing (gloves, hat and boots, too), and avoid tobacco smoke and food odors. Start looking at everything as a potential odor problem; the nuttier you are about cutting odor, the greater your chance for success.

The method used to dispense the scent can improve success. There are a wide variety of wicks, drippers, foams, and solid scent dispensers. Scrape drippers can be set up to drip only during specific parts of the day, forcing bucks to visit during daylight.

Cover scents imitate plants, food, urine of other animals, or earth. Their smell is fairly strong, but not offensive to deer. Some common cover scents include fox or coon urine, or plant extracts like pine or cedar.

It is often productive to hunt over natural scrapes that you locate, or where you create mock scrapes. When creating mock scrapes, use a stick from that area, rather than scraping with your feet. Your boots can impart odor to the earth that deer can easily detect.

There are many scent and scent elimination products out there, and they all have instructions on how to use their products.

## Understanding Rubs & Scrapes

Having an understanding of scrapes and rubs can help you find deer in the fall and increase your chances of success. Deer behavior is driven by elevated hormone levels as the days begin to shorten in August, September and October, depending on the part of the country.

A scrape is an area on the ground created by a buck as a signal to other deer, where the forest litter and vegetation is literally scraped off, exposing the dirt. Scrapes range in size from a square foot to the size of a car hood. A scrape is typically positioned below an overhanging branch; there may be just one scrape or a series of scrapes created by a single buck.

The scrape is a signpost to mark territory to all of the deer in an area. Scent

from saliva and the pre-orbital gland on the top of the deer's head are deposited on an overhanging branch, and urine and glandular secretions may be deposited on the scrape. Other deer analyze these scents, and often leave their own markings when visiting scrapes.

An older buck will usually scrape more often, have larger scrapes, and will typically start this activity earlier in the year than younger, less-dominant bucks. Dominant bucks will also be more vigilant in maintaining scrapes over time and will often maintain them after the peak breeding period. Preferred scrape areas tend to be used year after year. At a scrape, deer can tell doe urine from buck urine, when does are nearing estrus, and decipher dominant bucks from less-dominant bucks.

An area with a lack of scrapes may have an out of balance buck-to-doe ratio or age structure, with too many does providing for less competition for the available bucks. These bucks do not need to continually define their breeding territory. While active scrapes are a good indicator of deer in the area, a lack of scrapes does not necessarily mean a lack of deer; also pay attention to active game trails and rubs.

Scrapes are often found near transition zones, bedding areas, trails, and corridors and can indicate territory borders that are used by multiple bucks. For bigger bucks, look for scrapes that appear early, are larger, include clusters



*When you see active rubs, you know there is a buck (or bucks) in the area. A line of rubs can be used to identify travel corridors; a good hunting spot is where travel corridors intersect.*

Photos by Jeff Davis





*This well-used deer trail is just outside a tree line, and connects a small stream (water source), a corn field (feeding area), and large conifers (bedding area). It is obvious that multiple deer are using this trail every day.*

of multiple scrapes, and scrapes that are freshened repeatedly (many scrapes are freshened during the night).

After finding a good active scrape, you can make your own scrape using artificial scents to make it appear that another buck is moving into an established territory. You will need to research and plan this well in advance of your hunt, and don't overdo application of the scent. Remember, a deer's sense of smell is much better than ours.

Rubs are trees or areas of trees that are worked over by a buck's antlers, and bark removal or defoliation occurs. Rubs are not locations where deer have removed their velvet (which happens earlier in the year), but are more of a "sparring partner," where bucks release excess sexual frustration and energy, and leave scent marking from glands on the head. Usually young males use small, whippy saplings and larger bucks use small trees.

After you see a couple of rubs, you will learn to spot them more easily, and sometimes it is surprising how many are

in an area. Just like scrapes, rubs are often found along trails and travel corridors and can indicate where deer are moving. When you find a rub, take a close look and try to determine if it was made recently or if it is an old rub.

Positioning your hunting spot in an area with large, active scrapes, multiple recent rubs, well-traveled trails, and between a bedding area and a well-used food source is ideal. However, a perfect location is often difficult to find, so use your preseason scouting to try to find as many potential hunting positions as possible.

## Knives

For a deer hunter, the most important use of a knife is field dressing the deer, and as with all things deer hunting, your personal preference is what matters. Many novice hunters think a large knife is the right one, but often a smaller knife is better.

The closer the cutting point is to the hand, the more controllable it is, and the chance of an errant cut is much reduced. A long, heavier blade is useful when cutting the rib cage to open the chest, and many hunters carry a larger knife for this purpose, but use

Folding knives are typically smaller, general purpose knives with multiple blades that are carried in your pocket. Most deer hunters use fixed blades or lock backs for field dressing; this is heavier work and folding knives can sometimes fold when you don't want them to and injure you.

Pay attention to the handle. Field dressing a deer can be a messy job, and no matter how careful you are, you will get your hands bloody. Find a handle that feels good in your hand, provides a solid grip in any condition, is durable, and fits your budget.

## Be Safe While Hunting

Using an elevated stand to hunt deer is a popular technique across the country, and there are many options available. However, gravity is always waiting between an elevated hunting position and the hard ground. Always hunt safely when using an elevated stand of any type. Get, and use, a full-body harness (that fits you) and lifeline whenever you are in a tree stand. Just buying the gear is not enough – use it, every time!

In addition, if you hunt with a firearm, you should use hearing protection to protect your ears. Every time a trigger is pulled, the noise will cause permanent hearing loss, and this damage accumulates over time. There is no excuse to not use eye and ear protection while at a range, but many hunters rationalize



*A solid knife is an essential tool for a deer hunter. It does not need to be large, but it does need to be very sharp. Shown are a fixed-blade (right) and lock back model from Case. Some hunters prefer clip point (which these knives have) or drop point knives for general use; skinning knives typically have shorter, more rounded blades. A good quality knife will easily outlive the owner.*

a shorter blade for everything else. The most important thing that will make the field-dressing job easier is to be sure your knife is sharp.

There are literally thousands of options when selecting a knife type, material, and manufacturer. Fixed-blade knives have the blade anchored in the handle, are larger and more durable, and are used for heavy tasks. Lock backs are more robust and safer than pocket knives, but are not as rigid as fixed-blade knives.

that not protecting their ears and firing a round or two while hunting is OK. It is not. No hunter would shoot a box of 20 rounds of ammunition without hearing protection at a range, but if you shoot just two rounds a season while hunting without protection, after ten seasons you have the same damage to your ears as that entire box of ammunition. Find hearing protection that works for you (earplugs, muffs, or electronic devices), and use it when in the field hunting. 🐾



OUTDOOR PERFORMANCE ENERGY & NUTRITION

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