

Getting Started Hunting!



Information for both new and
experienced hunters

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Hunting Matters!

From the coast to the mountains, year after year, North Carolina hunters anxiously await the coming hunting seasons. Most set aside a few days or a weekend and some reserve several weeks to a month or more. Rarely is anything else planned that would interrupt the hunting months. Some consider hunting as being part of a unique organic lifestyle. Hunters prefer to acquire fresh meat not unlike a gardener prefers fresh vegetables. Because of this, hunters and gardeners realize a feeling of pride and satisfaction that only comes from obtaining one's own food naturally.

For many, hunting also provides quality time with family and friends. For those participating in this timeless tradition, hunting is something far too valuable to ignore and, for many, matters more than anything else.

Although *Getting Started Hunting* was intended for the beginning hunter, all hunters can benefit because there are no experts in hunting. No matter how experienced a hunter becomes there is always room to learn more. Nature is the ultimate teacher and the course never ends. Our goal is to provide some basic hunting information relative to a variety of commonly hunted game species. Acquiring cherished personal outdoor memories is up to you!

Elements of the Hunt

Anticipation

A somewhat archaic, yet functional alarm clock ticks away as the night slowly succumbs to the wee hours of pre-dawn. All members present in the rustic camp on the edge of the pines have managed to fall asleep despite the eagerness that kept them awake late into the night. All hunting equipment and clothing has been accounted for, meticulously inspected, and readied for the day ahead. The barely audible reverberation of the ticking clock will soon be dominated by the boom of the alarm and the springing to life of family and friends sharing a week in the woods. Breakfast may be long or short, but strong hot coffee will not be forsaken. The annual hunting season ritual, and all the tradition and excitement that comes with it, will soon be reality.

Realization

While headed to the chosen hunting location, the seasoned hunter recounts past experiences and anticipates new ones. After settled in on stand, the comforting serenity of predawn allows the hunter time to clear the mind from what modern society has clouded. There is no rush, no schedule, and no deadlines. Nature moves

at a different pace and cannot be hurried intentionally or otherwise. There is something magical about this time of day that very few get to experience. The hunter may spend the entire day without harvesting any game yet is rarely bored. Nature, in its own way, provides unique entertainment. Once immersed in nature, the hunter realizes the role of life, death, and survival. Nature does not sugar coat reality confirming that life and death are fundamentally connected.

Reminiscence



As daylight turns to dusk, the hunter heads back to camp both emotionally and spiritually refreshed. Some camp members have taken game while others have stories of the one that got away. The events of the days hunt will be recollected again before all retire for the night. The harvest of game is never guaranteed, but when game is taken, it is always appreciated and celebrated by the ethical, law-abiding hunter. Day two of the hunt is not far ahead and is anticipated with as much vigor and excitement as the first. The hunting tradition lives on.

Anticipation, realization, reminiscence, family, and friends collectively represent the glue that keeps hunters actively participating year after year. It is the collection of memorable experiences over time that keeps us looking forward to each and every coming season. Hunting is a never-ending adventure and the memories never stop. It's no wonder why we joyfully look back, cherish the moment, and plan for tomorrow in the timeless tradition that is hunting!

**This information is provided by The North Carolina Wildlife Resources
Commission Hunting Heritage Program**

Good luck and Good Hunting!

Basic Equipment (Small Game Hunting):

Clothing

Small game hunting is enjoyed by many North Carolinians and is often the prerequisite to other forms of hunting like deer, bear, and turkey. Clothing for hunting small game can vary widely as compared to other types of game animals.

For example, a simple afternoon hunt for squirrels in a woodlot behind the home may include nothing more than jeans, sneakers, tee-shirt and a hunter orange cap. On the other hand, quail, rabbit, pheasant, or woodcock may require clothing designed to protect the hunter from briars, thorns or wet, swampy conditions. Camouflage clothing is often preferred for hunting squirrels, doves, or waterfowl, but, is not necessarily used for other types of small game hunting. The brown earth-tone hunting coat or vest with patches of hunter orange and matching brush pants has been used for many years and remain popular today.

Having the ability to shed or add layers of clothing can make any hunt more enjoyable. Layering clothing allows hunters to adjust to changing temperatures, weather conditions, or terrain features. Frosty fall mornings can turn into warm afternoons and flushing game yourself, without the aid of hunting dogs, will surely cause the hunter to sweat. Advance knowledge of weather conditions and terrain can make what to wear decision much easier. Although color of small game hunting clothing may be less critical than other forms of hunting like deer, turkey or bear, safety should always be of utmost concern. *(Note: the wearing of hunter orange, visible from all sides, is required by law while hunting certain species of game animals in North Carolina. Remember to always review a current copy of the North Carolina Inland Fishing, Hunting and Trapping Regulations Digest concerning laws and regulations in the area you'll be hunting).*

Footwear

As in all forms of hunting, adequate footwear is critical to comfort. Temperatures during small game hunting seasons tend to be warm in North Carolina. Therefore, a light-weight boot or shoe is preferred. Footwear fit is critical to minimize blisters and sore feet. Some hunters prefer the lower height, weight, and compact style of hiking boots over standard hunting boots. Waterproof footwear provides additional comfort in wet swampy areas or in rainy conditions. Some hunters purchase hunting boots one size larger than their normal shoe size. This strategy allows room for layering of socks. A good combination is a light polypropylene base sock followed by wool or acrylic. Unlike wearing a single pair of socks, this tactic keeps feet comfortable by wicking moisture (*sweat*) away from the surface of feet. This is especially important for hunters that do a great deal of walking during a hunt.

Color and style of footwear for small game hunting is not critical. It is important, however, to purchase footwear that can stand up to the punishment of briars, thick cover, and rough terrain. Comfort and the ability to fend off sore feet are critical for small game hunting.

Firearms

Rifles, shotguns, muzzleloaders, and pistols (*no restrictions on caliber and barrel length*) are legal hunting implements for small game hunting in North Carolina. Choice of firearm, caliber or gauge, and action is personal and varies depending on species hunted. Squirrels are often hunted with .22 caliber rifles but shotguns are also used. Many small game animals are taken after being flushed from thick cover making shotguns the firearm of choice. Shotguns produce a pattern of shot (*many spreading shot pellets*) whereas rifles produce a single projectile bullet. Therefore, the chance of hitting a moving target using a shotgun is much greater than that of a rifle. As a general rule, rifles are better suited to long range shooting or shooting at relatively still (*non-moving*) targets whereas shotguns are better suited to short range moving targets. Because most small game is taken in close quarters and thick habitat, a shotgun is preferred over a rifle.

Shotgun actions (*parts that load and unload the shotgun*) vary depending on the individual manufacturer and hunter's personal choice. The most popular shotgun actions for small game hunting today are the pump, break or hinge (*single shot and double barrel*), and semi-automatic.

Shotgun exterior finish for hunting small game is not critical and is based entirely on personal preference. Shot size for small game hunting varies depending on species hunted. For example, smaller shot sizes like #7 ½, #8, and #9 is usually preferred for smaller birds like doves and woodcock, whereas larger shot sizes like #4, #5, and #6 is used for squirrels, rabbits, pheasants, and grouse.

In order to make the choice easier relative to what shot size to use for different types of small game, some shot shell manufacturers provide recommendations on their packaging and product information websites. Individual hunters also have personal choices when it comes to preferred shot sizes for hunting small game. Overall, the shot sizes mentioned provide a pattern dense enough to cleanly kill small game at hunting distances up to 30 yards or so.

Shotgun Gauges

In order to provide some insight into the different shotgun sizes, it is important to discuss how shotguns are designated. To begin with, shotguns are measured in gauge. Concerning size of the shotgun, the smaller the gauge number, the larger the shotgun size and the more pellets contained in its shot shell. For example, a 12 gauge has a larger barrel bore diameter and contains more shot

pellets in its shot shell than a 20 gauge. It makes sense therefore that the 16 gauge is larger than the 20 gauge whereas the 28 gauge is smaller than the 20 gauge. Common shotgun gauges include the 10, 16, 20, 28, and .410 bore (*the .410 is not a true gauge but instead a caliber designation like the rifle*). Overall, the 12 and 20 gauge shotguns tend to be the most popular.

An important factor to remember when choosing a shotgun is to choose one that the hunter can shoot comfortably. All firearms, with perhaps the exception of the .22 caliber rifle and a few others, have “noticeable” recoil. Recoil is the process of rearward movement (*kick*) resulting from shooting a firearm. As a general rule the larger the gauge the more it will recoil. Hence a 12 gauge will recoil more than a 20 gauge. Some shooters and hunters are sensitive to recoil and therefore try to choose gauges (*or shot shell load combinations*) that recoil less. This is important to consider because fear of recoil can result in shooting inaccurately. Prior to purchasing any firearm, it is a good idea to try several different shotgun gauges first if possible. Seeking the help of a friend or relative that hunts or shoots is a great start, as is meeting people familiar with firearms at local shooting organizations (*Note: Always remember to review a current copy of the North Carolina Inland Fishing, Hunting and Trapping Regulations Digest for seasons and manner of taking for hunting in specific areas of the state as local regulations may restrict the use of some firearms*).

Bows and Arrows

Long bows, recurve bows, compound bows, and crossbows are legal hunting implements for hunting small game animals in North Carolina (*Note: blunt-type arrowheads may only be used for small game hunting. However, they are not the only arrowheads permitted as Broad heads may also be used*). Long and recurve bows must have a minimum draw weight of 40 pounds, compound bows must be of 35 pound draw weight, and crossbows must have a minimum draw weight of 150 lbs (*Note: refer to a current copy of the North Carolina Inland Fishing, Hunting and Trapping Regulations Digest for seasons and manner of taking for hunting in specific areas of the state*).

Bow hunting small game can be extremely challenging due to the small size and swift movement of many small game species. A bow hunter should practice a great deal before considering small game hunting with bow and arrow. Practicing at various ranges, utilizing moving targets, will prepare an archer for an accurate, lethal, and humane shot on small game.

Miscellaneous Small Game Hunting Equipment

The following equipment is based on personal preference and needs of an individual hunter. Not all hunters carry the same or all of the following: Hunting license (*required unless exempt*), HIP certification (*required for dove hunting*), field dressing knife, flash light, compass and map, handheld Global Positioning System (GPS), binoculars, camera, and extra batteries, toilet tissue, handkerchief, water bottle or water purifiers, snacks, thermos, hand warmers, insect repellent, sun screen, note pad or journal, ballpoint pen, first-aid/survival kit, utility tool, rainwear, small game vest, back pack, or fanny pack to carry items. (*Note: for information concerning exemptions to having a hunting license, be sure to review a current copy of the North Carolina Inland Fishing, Hunting and Trapping Regulations Digest*).

Hunting Methods (Small Game Hunting):

Scouting

Finding small game species can be accomplished by locating suitable habitat. The best way to find suitable habitat is through scouting the intended hunting area. Whereas gray squirrels can be found in almost any mast producing woodlot, some other species require specific habitats that, in many cases, are declining in North Carolina. Much of the briars, broom straw, weedy fields, and hedgerows that quail and rabbits prefer are disappearing due to clean farming practices and human development. Although abundant rabbit and quail habitat is somewhat of a thing of the past, it does not mean that hunting them is a waste of time. Many of the Game Lands in North Carolina are managed to provide habitat for these and other species. Therefore, doing some preseason scouting can prove valuable in finding places to hunt. Moreover, some private land opportunities may exist as well. The best way to find out is to pick an area of interest and then research Game Lands or private lands in the area. Always be sure to seek permission from private landowners well in advance of the hunting season.



No matter what type of small game hunting, preparing ahead of the season is critical to being successful. Reviewing, understanding and obeying laws and regulations are also important for a new hunter.

Squirrel Hunting Methods:

The four main methods for hunting squirrels include: stand hunting, still hunting, buddy hunting, and dog hunting. The following includes information on all four methods.

Stand Hunting Squirrels

Stand hunting involves sitting quietly in good squirrel habitat while waiting for squirrels to become active. Good squirrel habitat includes woodlots containing abundant oak, beech, or hickory mast, as well as areas adjacent to agricultural crops like corn. Like many other species of wildlife, squirrels are active during dawn and dusk (*crepuscular*) periods. During times when preferred foods are available, squirrels may be active into mid-day and spend the latter part of the day resting until beginning to feed again at dusk. Overcast days with a light drizzle of rain can be very productive times to hunt squirrels. Squirrels can be simply waited out and or hunted with the use of calls in to stimulate their curiosity.



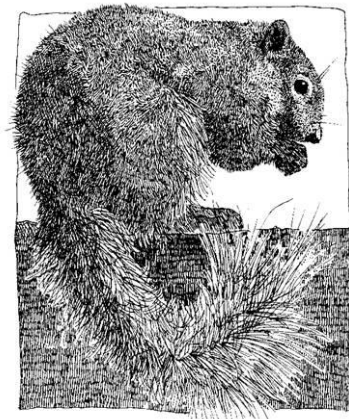
Squirrels bark, chatter, and use distress calls when alarmed or threatened. Learning how to mimic squirrel vocalizations, and using them while hunting, can be productive when feeding activity is minimal. Distress calls can be especially productive because squirrels routinely respond to a menacing situation. Another advantage to calling is that it sometimes causes squirrels to give away their location thereby offering a hunter a potential shot. Squirrels are typically hunted using a shotgun or .22 rimfire rifles. Most hunters prefer the .22 rimfire due to its low report (*muzzle blast*) as compared to shotguns. Unlike

the .22 rimfire rifle, the shotgun's muzzle blast has a tendency to spook other squirrels in the area after the shot. The .22 rimfire also allows a hunter the advantage of taking squirrels at longer ranges.

In addition, many hunters do not immediately retrieve squirrels they've shot, but instead commit all harvested squirrels to memory and retrieve them before leaving the woods. This can be a very successful strategy because it allows a hunter to remain still during the entire hunt thereby lessening the chance of being noticed by other squirrels in the area.

Still Hunting Squirrels

Still hunting squirrels requires that a hunter move slowly and quietly while occasionally stopping and watching for movement. The goal is to detect signs of



feeding squirrels before they detect the hunter. Feeding can be recognized by sounds of falling debris from squirrels feeding in the treetops or while scavenging on the ground. Once located, a hunter can slowly and quietly move toward the sound to get a shot at the squirrel. Slow deliberate movement is important in order to avoid spooking the squirrels into a leafy nest or tree cavity den.

To avoid being detected, squirrels use a strategy of trying to keep a tree or a limb between themselves and the hunter. A hunter can use this tactic to their advantage. Once positioned for a shot on one side of the tree, a hunter can throw an extra hat or other available item toward the opposite side of the tree. Oftentimes the squirrel will react to the movement by coming around to the hunter's side of the tree offering an opportunity for a shot.

Buddy Hunting Squirrels

Another squirrel hunting method involves the use of a buddy system. Once squirrels are located, the first hunter remains still while the second hunter moves toward, and then past, a "treed" squirrel. The squirrel will naturally focus on the moving hunter and not on the still hunter. Because a squirrel tends to respond by keeping a tree or limb between itself and the moving hunter, a still hunter may get an opportunity for a shot. Hunters take turns repeating the process with one physically moving and the other waiting and watching for squirrel movement.

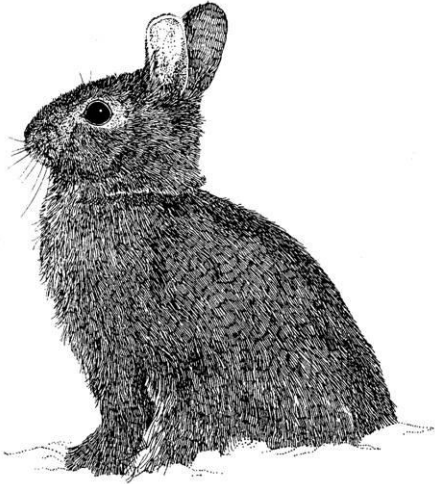
Dog Hunting Squirrels

Hunting squirrels with dogs is another tactic used by hunters. Any dog that adapts well to hunting squirrels will suffice. Cur and Feists are considered great squirrel dogs with both having excellent eyesight and keen sense of smell. Squirrel dogs hunt utilizing sight and smell while roaming the woods in search of squirrels. Once sighted or scented, the goal for the dog is to tree the squirrel so that the hunter can get a shot. Dogs that are well disciplined and hunt close to the hunter are preferred. This is a popular and traditional method for squirrel hunting in some areas.

Rabbit Hunting Methods

Finding rabbits, not unlike finding other game species, requires locating suitable habitat. For rabbits, suitable habitat consists of thick, weedy and overgrown cover adjacent to food sources like grasses, legumes, grain seeds, and various woody plants. Traditional rabbit hunting involved the use of dogs with beagles being a popular breed. A good beagle has the ability to quickly pick up a rabbit's scent trail and bark continuously while in pursuit. The continuous barking of the beagle lets the hunter know where the rabbit may appear in order to prepare for a shot. Because rabbits prefer to stay relatively close to their escape habitat

(e.g., old woodchuck burrows or thick brush piles), they tend to circle back to those locations after being flushed. Dog hunters use this to their advantage by listening to the bark of the dog and then position themselves for a shot as the rabbit



circles back with the dog in pursuit (*Note: the dog hunter should always be conscience of the dog's location prior to taking a shot especially in thick cover where visibility may be poor*).

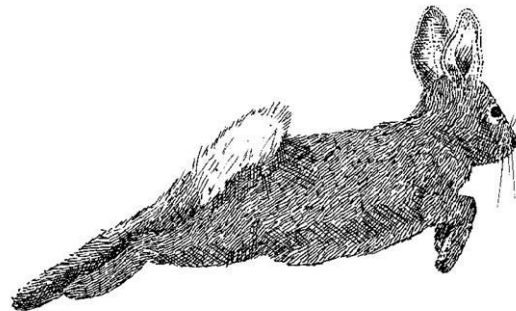
Hunting dogs are also valuable to the rabbit hunter because much of the thick habitat that rabbits prefer is usually impenetrable by humans.

For the new hunter, a dog may not be on the initial list of “things to acquire” and therefore, a do-it-yourself hunt might be in order. With a little extra effort the hunter can bag a few rabbits without the aid of dogs. In the

absence of dogs, a group of hunters can have success by forming a line in suitable habitat and slowly walking through while stepping on or in any thick cover or brush piles encountered. A lone hunter can also be successful by doing the same with the added strategy of zigzagging back and forth in an effort to cover more area than would be covered by walking in a straight line.

Another good strategy for the solo, or group hunter, is to stop occasionally for a few seconds every now and then while moving through thick cover. Often times a rabbit will “sit tight” and allow potential danger to pass by in an effort to remain undetected. Stopping occasionally can make the rabbit nervous causing it to flush and thereby offer a shot.

Remember to follow-up on all shots taken at game animals to make sure the animal was harvested, wounded, or missed. An ethical law-abiding hunter never gives up the search for game unless absolutely convinced that it cannot be recovered. In many states it's also the law.



Whether hunting alone, or in a party, safety should always be top priority, especially on public lands. Safe gun handling should be practiced at all times and knowing the whereabouts of other hunting partners is critical.

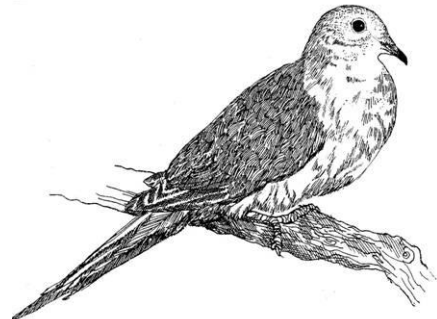
Dove Hunting Methods:

Two primary methods are used for hunting doves. The first and most popular method for hunting doves involves stationing oneself at flyway intersections between roosting, feeding, and or watering areas. The other method is flushing birds from cover.

Station Hunting Doves

Scouting definitely comes into play with the station method of dove hunting because knowledge of flyways is critical to success. Locating roosting, feeding, and water sources enables a hunter to observe flight patterns as doves move to and from these areas. Once located, a hunter can set-up and wait for birds to become active.

Station hunting could also be referred to as group hunting. For example, in North Carolina there is a long-standing tradition of hunters getting together for the Labor Day weekend, as well as several weekends afterward, to enjoy the camaraderie of the hunt and bag some doves in the process.



Hunting doves with the aid of decoys is favored by some hunters, especially solo hunters. Decoys are used to attract birds to a hunter's location by suggesting a potential food source and or a safe place to land.

If the weather is hot and dry, focusing on flyways to and from water sources can be highly productive. The same goes for situations where food supplies are limited. Areas close to roosting sites are good evening set-ups.

Doves are also hunted with the aid of dogs and retrievers tend to be the preferred breed. A big advantage to hunting with dogs is in situations where birds are downed in thick cover or for recovering wounded birds. The dog's sense of smell is second to none when needed for locating game. For hunters without dogs, maintaining sight of doves as they fall to the ground is important. After the shot, a hunter should move as soon as safely possible to the location where the bird was observed falling to the ground. Once there, a hunter can place a rag, extra cap, or preferably, biodegradable material like tissue or napkins and then begin searching the ground while walking in continually expanding circles until the bird is recovered. Ethical law-abiding hunters should never give up the search for downed game unless absolutely convinced that recovery is not possible. Retrieving dogs can make the recovery process much easier.

For safety sake, hunters should make an effort to be aware of other hunters in the area and always behave in an ethical, sportsman-like manner. If hunting in a

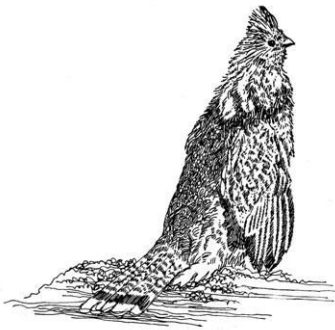
party, it is important to know the whereabouts of others when moving through thick cover to prevent accidents; especially on public lands. As always, safety should be of utmost concern.

Flushing Doves

Although station hunting is the preferred and likely most productive method, flushing doves is an option. Flushing, simply put, involves slowly walking through or alongside fields containing preferred dove foods and flushing doves feeding nearby. Slowly moving along a wooded edge that borders standing corn can be productive especially on windy days when birds tend to fly less. Flushing requires quick reaction from a hunter so remaining ready for a fast shot is critical. Recovery of birds is the same as for station hunting.

Grouse Hunting Methods:

Flushing and Hunting Grouse with Dogs



Huntible grouse populations can be found in the Appalachian Mountains and foothill regions of North Carolina. Grouse prefer early successional habitats containing wild grapes, acorns, green briars, dogwood berries, and other herbaceous plants. Hunters should focus their attention to areas where timber has been harvested in the last 10-20 years. Stand maps, and or information about recent forest management operations, can be acquired by contacting a local

wildlife agency forester, biologist, or the Department of Natural Resources. Locating good habitat is the key to finding grouse.

The use of well-trained hunting dogs is preferred by many grouse hunters with pointers, retrievers, and flushers being choice breeds. Not unlike most types of hunting, grouse can be hunted without dogs by moving slowly and methodically through choice cover in an effort to flush grouse. Not unlike when rabbit hunting, it is a good idea to stop occasionally while moving through thick cover because this can provoke a tight sitting grouse to flush. Grouse are explosive flushers and are known for catching the hunter off guard so remain ready for a shot at all times.

After the shot, maintaining sight of the grouse as it falls to the ground is important and a hunter should safely move to that location as soon as possible. Once there, the hunter can place a rag, extra cap, or preferably, biodegradable tissue and search by walking in continually expanding circles until the bird is recovered. Grouse have well camouflaged feather coloration allowing them to blend in to the forest floor very well so it is important to search carefully and

methodically. If still alive, grouse will seek out thick cover and have been known to crawl into hollow logs to escape danger. As always, an ethical law-abiding hunter should never give up the search for game unless absolutely convinced that recovery is not possible.

Grouse hunting can require a great deal of walking, especially when not hunting with dogs and good grouse habitat is usually found in steep and or rugged terrain. This requires that the hunter be in fit condition.

If hunting in a party, it is always important to know the whereabouts of others when moving through thick cover to prevent accidents. As always, safety should be top priority.

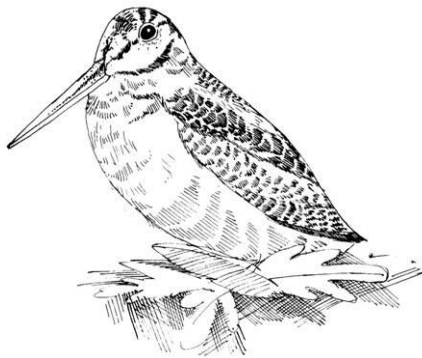


Credit: Robert Savannah, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Woodcock Hunting Methods:

Flushing and Dog Hunting Woodcock

Woodcock can be found in young regenerating forests interspersed with openings. Moist bottomlands with fertile soils provide ideal woodcock habitat. Woodcock are migratory birds that move from northern states to southern states during winter months. Woodcock migration is determined by unavailability of preferred foods like earthworms and various grubs associated with harsh weather frozen ground.



For those that hunt with dogs, Pointers are usually preferred but flushers and retrievers also suffice. The major advantage of hunting woodcock with dogs is their ability to scent birds that would otherwise be walked-over by a hunter. Woodcock are known for their ability to sit tight by remaining motionless and flushing unexpectedly. Woodcock blend well within their habitat and therefore are not easily seen by a cautiously moving hunter.

Woodcock, not unlike grouse, can be hunted without dogs by moving slowly and methodically through choice cover while remaining ready for a flush. Stopping occasionally while moving can cause woodcock to flush and flushes occurring underfoot of a hunter are common. A woodcock hunter should be ready for a shot at all times.

Maintaining sight of the birds as they fall to the ground is paramount. A hunter should move to the location as soon as safely possible and place a rag, extra

cap, or preferably, biodegradable tissue at the downed bird's location. Then begin the search by walking in continually expanding circles until the bird is recovered. Again, woodcock blend in to the forest floor quite well so search carefully and methodically. An ethical law-abiding hunter should never give up the search for downed game unless absolutely convinced that recovery is not possible.

If hunting in a party, it is always important to know the whereabouts of others when moving through thick cover to prevent accidents. As always, safety should be top priority.

Basic Equipment (Turkey Hunting):

Clothing

The market is flooded with an array of fabric types, styles, and camouflage patterns for turkey hunting. Turkey hunting clothing should be comfortable and not tight or extremely loose fitting. Light weight "non-noisy" fabrics are best because turkey hunting requires quiet movement while attempting to set-up on vocal birds. Any camouflage pattern available will do under a tight budget but a hunter should try to invest in a pattern that reasonably matches the habitat hunted.

Something else to keep in mind is as the season progresses so to will the habitat. A camouflage pattern that matches the early spring woods (*only buds on trees*) will differ as the woods green-up with newly sprouting foliage. Therefore, a pattern that mimics a range of habitat types or seasonality is best. A Camouflage hat, gloves, head-net or $\frac{3}{4}$ face mask, and earth-tone socks and shoes round out the attire. (*Note: avoid red, white, blue, and black when hunting turkeys because these are colors found on the body of the male wild turkey*).

In short, the goal of a turkey hunter is to "blend into" the habitat within the chosen hunting area. Keep in mind though; movement is what really catches the eye of wild turkey so being extremely still is a hunter's best asset.

Footwear

Sometimes overlooked, footwear choice is as important as the many other tools of turkey hunting. Ideally, spring turkey hunting footwear should be light, waterproof, breathable, and most importantly comfortable. A great deal of walking may be required in search of a gobbling turkey so proper footwear fit will help minimize the chance of blisters and sore feet. Some hunters prefer the lower height, weight, and compact style of hiking boots over standard hunting boots. Still others prefer the full-length rubber or snake boots. A boot that is waterproof provides additional comfort in wet swampy areas or rainy conditions.

In addition, some hunters purchase hunting boots one size larger than their normal shoe size. This allows room for layering of socks. A good combination is a

light polypropylene base sock followed by wool or acrylic. Unlike wearing a single pair of socks, this tactic keeps feet comfortable by wicking moisture away from the surface of the feet. This is especially important for hunters walking great distances while turkey hunting. Purchasing footwear that can stand up to the punishment of rugged terrain is a plus.

Lastly, and for safety sake, avoid boots, shoes and or socks that are black, blue, red or white because these colors can be found on the male wild turkey. Earth toned boots, shoes, and socks are a safer choice blending into the surroundings and camouflage styles are widely available.

Firearms

Shotguns are the only legal firearms used for turkey hunting in North Carolina. (*Note: muzzle loading shotguns are also legal, but rifles and pistols are prohibited*). Modern shotgun actions (*parts that load and unload the shotgun*) vary depending on the individual manufacturer and hunter's personal choice. Shotgun actions include the break or hinge (*single shot and double barrel*), bolt, pump or slide, lever, and semi-automatic. The most popular shotgun actions for turkey hunting tend to be the pump, break, and semi-automatic. Shotgun exterior finish is also a matter of choice but fully camouflaged and dull-matte finishes are popular for hunting turkeys. Turkeys have very keen eyesight and can quickly pick out anything that is not part of their natural environment. A highly polished firearm can reflect sunlight and potentially spook a turkey in the process.

Unlike rifles that are caliber designated and measured in bore diameter inches, shotguns are measured in gauges. Shotgun gauges used today include the 10, 12, 16, 20, and 28 gauges. Another shotgun, the .410, is not a true gauge but is instead a caliber designation measured in inches not unlike rifles. Although the .410 shotgun can legally be used for turkey hunting in North Carolina, it is not the best choice because of its small size and limited shot capacity in its shot shell. The 12 and 20 gauges are favored by most turkey hunters with the 12 gauge being the favorite.

Popular shot sizes for hunting turkeys includes # 4, # 5, and # 6. These shot sizes are chosen because they provide enough energy (*penetrating power*) at turkey hunting ranges, and provide adequate shot density (*amount of shot*) in order to accomplish a quick, clean kill on a turkey. Some hunters use smaller shot sizes than those mentioned to increase pattern density, but often at the disadvantage of lower energy and penetrating power compared to larger shot of the same type or alloy. Most hunters agree that the range distance for a quick, clean, humane kill on a wild turkey should be limited to 40 yards or less.

Shot placement for a quick, clean, humane kill on a wild turkey with the shotgun is the head and neck. A body shot on a turkey with a shotgun can result in

a crippling loss and should never be attempted except when using a bow and arrow where the goal is to aim for the vital internal organs of the turkey. Moreover, the shotgun should be patterned prior to the hunting season. Patterning a shotgun involves shooting at targets to determine pattern density and shot placement (*accuracy*). The goal with a shotgun is to accurately place as many shot pellets as possible in the head and neck of the wild turkey to accomplish a quick, clean, humane kill.

Another important factor to consider when choosing a shotgun is to choose one that a hunter can shoot comfortably. All firearms, with perhaps the exception of the .22 rifle and a few others, have “noticeable” recoil. Recoil is the process of rearward movement (*kick*) resulting from shooting a firearm. As a general rule, the larger the gauge the more it will recoil. Some shooters and hunters are sensitive to recoil and therefore choose gauges (*and or load and shot combinations*) that recoil less. This is important to consider because fear of recoil can result in shooting inaccurately. Prior to purchasing any firearm, it is a good idea to try several different types first if possible. Seeking the help of a friend or relative that hunts or shoots is a great start, as is meeting people familiar with firearms at local shooting organizations (*Note: Always remember to review a current copy of the North Carolina Inland Fishing, Hunting and Trapping Regulations Digest for seasons and manner of taking for hunting in specific areas of the state as local regulations may restrict the use of some firearms*).

Bows and Arrows

Long bows, recurve bows, compound bows, and crossbows are legal hunting implements for hunting wild turkeys in North Carolina. Long and recurve bows must have a minimum draw weight of 40 pounds, compound bows must be of 35 pound draw weight, and crossbows must have a minimum draw weight of 150 lbs. Broad heads for hunting wild turkeys must be of cutting edge design with a minimum width of 7/8 inch. (*Note: refer to a current copy of the North Carolina Inland Fishing, Hunting and Trapping Regulations Digest for seasons and manner of taking for hunting in specific areas of the state*).

Unlike a shotgun, where the goal is to aim at the head and neck for a quick, clean kill, most bow hunters aim for the turkey’s vital internal organs. Bow hunting shot placement on the wild turkey includes the heart and lung region or neck and head if a guillotine-style broad head is used. Knowing the anatomy of the wild turkey and having the ability to make an accurate and lethal shot is the bow hunter’s responsibility if a body shot is taken. Bow hunting wild turkeys can be very challenging because of the added movement relative to drawing the bow and releasing the arrow as compared to pulling a trigger on a firearm. Practicing at

various ranges prior to the season will prepare the archer for an accurate, lethal, and humane shot on a wild turkey.

Miscellaneous Turkey Hunting Equipment

The following equipment is based on personal preference and needs of an individual hunter. Not all turkey hunters carry all the equipment listed. Some carry less while others might carry more.

Hunting license (*required unless exempt*), turkey calls (*i.e., box, slate, and/or diaphragm mouth calls*), locator calls (*crow, owl, pileated woodpecker, hawk, coyote, etc*), gobble call, turkey decoys, field dressing knife, flash light, compass and map, handheld Global Positioning System (GPS), binoculars, pruning shears, camera, extra batteries, toilet tissue, handkerchief, water bottle or water purifiers, snacks, insect repellent, sun screen, ballpoint pen, note pad or journal, survival kit, first-aid kit, rainwear, turkey hunting vest, fanny or back pack for carrying items. Many hunters also carry and use a portable blind especially when hunting with a bow (*Note: for information concerning exemptions to having a hunting license, be sure to review a current copy of the North Carolina Inland Fishing, Hunting and Trapping Regulations Digest*).



Hunting Methods (Turkey Hunting):

Scouting

Whenever possible, turkey hunting should always begin with a thorough pre-season scouting of the hunting area. Through scouting, a turkey hunter can accomplish two specific goals. The first goal is to confirm the presence of turkeys. This will become known either by actually seeing turkeys (*direct sign*), or noticing the presence of turkeys (*indirect sign*). Indirect sign can include: tracks, scratching (*small clearings of leaves or other ground litter caused by turkeys searching for food*), dust bowls (*shallow depressions in dry dusty areas where turkeys dust their feathers to rid themselves of parasites*), and droppings (*scat*).

Secondly, scouting allows a turkey hunter to become familiar with the hunting area. This can be important when preparing to “set-up” on the wild turkey to call the bird into gun range. Familiarity with the hunting area’s habitat features may be the difference between calling the turkey into gun range vs. having the turkey “hang-up” (*stop*) just out of gun range. Turkeys sometimes hang-up because they choose not to cross woodland obstacles like thick brush, streams or creeks, or rock outcroppings. A turkey may also hang up because it prefers to stay where it is

during a particular time of day. Having an intimate knowledge of the hunting area, and movements of turkeys residing there, can be a turkey hunter's best asset. In fact, gaining knowledge about where the turkey "wants to go" is an excellent strategy for setting up once the season opens. Most times, hunting turkeys is largely a matter of being in the right place at the right time.

Locator Calls



Locator calls are primarily used for two purposes. Locating and/or keeping track of the male wild turkey (*gobbler*) while it is moving. During pre-season scouting, the goal is to locate the gobbler, not have the gobbler locate the hunter. In the springtime of the year, nearly any loud noise can cause the male wild turkey to gobble; the process is almost involuntary. Gobblers will respond by gobbling at various sounds and other species vocalizations including: crows, owls, hawks, pileated woodpeckers, and coyotes, just to name a few. In fact,

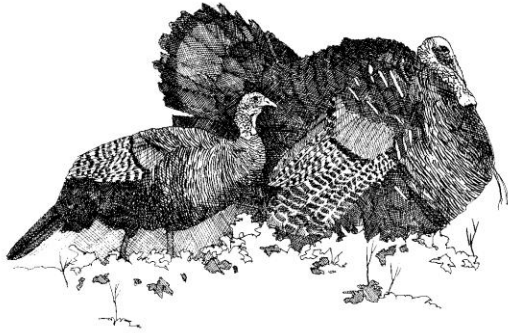
slamming a car door or sounding the car's horn may stimulate gobbling during the spring time.

It is not advisable, however, to mimic turkey calls during pre-season scouting to locate the gobbler. If a hunter were to use a hen (*female*) turkey call to stimulate gobbling during the scouting period, there is a potential that the gobbler will come to the call. During the hunting season this is the anticipated result, but not during scouting season. A gobbler called in prior to the hunting season can become educated, especially if the hunter is seen by the approaching gobbler. Should this happen, the gobbler may avoid coming to calls later on during the hunting season. As some hunters would say, gobblers can become educated and call shy coming to a call only if they can visually see a live hen. Worse yet, educated gobblers may stop gobbling altogether and come in silent when called to. Call shy turkeys create a difficult situation for a turkey hunter. More often than not, a gobbler that sneaks in silently will notice the hunter before the hunter notices the gobbler. In summary, locator calls may stimulate gobbling, but they will not cause the gobbler to come to the call. For this reason, turkey calls should not be used for pre-season scouting forays.



Calling Wild Turkeys

Calling is the primary method used for turkey hunting during the spring of the year. As springtime daylight lengthens, the focus of the gobbler is on mating. The wild turkey gobbler is receptive to the calling of the wild turkey hen during this time of year. Although it is good for a turkey hunter to know and be able to

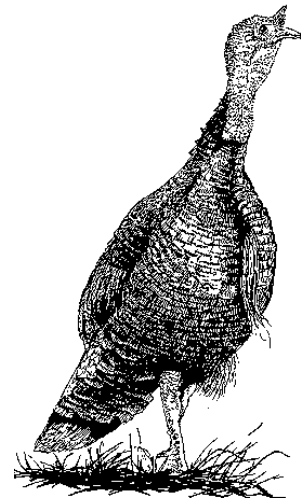


produce several different turkey vocalizations (*calls*), being an expert caller is not critical nor should it be the ultimate goal of an inexperienced turkey hunter. Wild turkey hens vary in pitch and resonance in their many vocalizations and seldom sound “perfect.” Sounding perfect in turkey calling is a product of judges in turkey calling contests and not by real turkeys. That said, a

turkey can be spooked (*scared away*) by a call that, “just doesn’t sound right” to them. However, if a hunter does make what sounds like a poor call, following up immediately with another call often remedies the situation. The mistake occurs when a hunter stops calling on a bad call. This can cause the turkey to spook. A turkey hunter should strive to be able to produce a variety of hen calls but not be concerned with perfection. The most common calls imitated when hunting turkeys are the yelp, cluck, and purr of the hen. Although there are other calls a hunter can learn and use in the turkey woods, the yelp, cluck, and purr represent a great start and enough to successfully harvest a wild turkey gobbler. Most importantly, successful turkey hunters get to know the wild turkey and how it moves through its habitat.

The real challenge for a turkey hunter lies in the fact that nature has designed the turkey mating season so that hens “naturally” go to the gobbler, and not the other way around. It is for this reason the gobbler is vocal in the spring time because gobbling is used to “attract” his harem of hens. Once gathered, the gobbler becomes silent and all focus is on the mating ritual.

Conversely, a turkey hunter attempts to call the gobbler by mimicking hen. Therefore, calling the gobbler to the hen represents a reversing of the natural order and can be difficult if not impossible at times. If done convincingly, however, hunters can call-in the gobbler by sounding like a hen interested in mating.

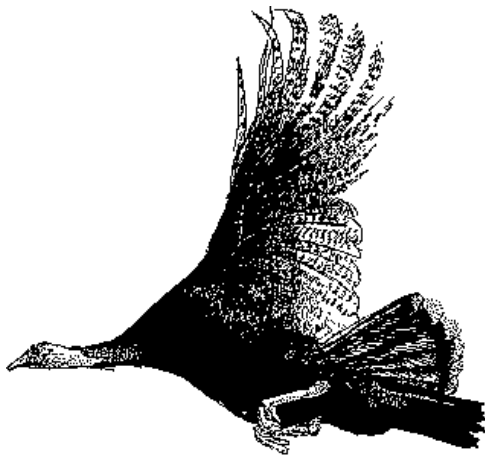


Credit: Robert Savannah, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Despite the natural order, young gobblers called jakes are usually very anxious to respond to calling. However, as the wild turkey gobbler ages, he becomes more cautious and more challenging to hunt. Adult gobblers are referred to as Toms.

The key to success with calling gobblers is to become somewhat proficient with a variety of turkey vocalizations and turkey calling devices. Woodsmanship, patience, and knowledge of where the turkeys want to be while engaged in the mating ritual are far more important than calling. In fact, if a hunter knows where the birds are going, and can be there ahead of time, calling may be minimal or unnecessary.

There are a variety of turkey hunting calling devices on the market including the diaphragm mouth call, friction or slate call, and box call. All provide their own distinctive sounds and methods for use. The advantage of becoming proficient with



a variety of calls vs. one call is three-fold. One reason has to do with the gobbler himself. A turkey gobbler may prefer the sound of one call over another call just like we humans prefer the sound of one voice over another. Therefore, the gobbler may respond to one call one day and another a different day, hence the reason for different calling devices and vocalizations. The other reason lies in the ability to sound like multiple hens at the same time.

Credit: Robert Savannah, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

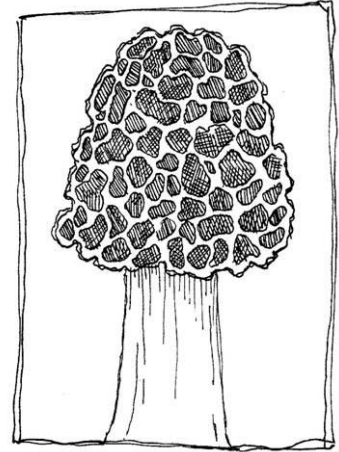
This strategy can boost a hunter's chance of coaxing the gobbler into gun range because most male turkey gobblers would prefer a harem of hens over a single, lone hen.

Yet another reason for becoming proficient with multiple calls lies in the "hands-free" advantage of the diaphragm mouth call vs. other "hands-on" calls like the box and slate. A gobbler coming to a call still out of range (*neither the turkey nor hunter can see one another*) is not going to notice the subtle hand movements caused by the hunter using hands-on calls.

However, once the gobbler is in visual range, but not yet close enough for a shot, movement associated with hands-on calls could spook him and end an opportunity for a shot. Conversely, a few soft calls produced with the diaphragm mouth call (*hands-off*), while at the same time remaining ready for the shot, can be the difference between going home with the gobbler and going home empty handed.

It would be reasonable to ask the question, "why not use the diaphragm mouth call universally and leave the box and slate or friction calls at home?"

Although this may sound logical, remember that the wild turkey gobbler sometimes prefers variety in calling and the sound of multiple hens. Having only one calling device limits the hunter; hands-free or not. *(Note: calls are also available that mimic the gobble of male wild turkey. Gobbling calls have the ability to challenge a male wild turkey's dominance, or in some cases, offer an opportunity for camaraderie especially for less dominate males. These calls, although sometimes effective, should always be used with caution, and or not used at all due to the potential of calling in other hunters. Therefore, safety should always be of utmost concern while turkey hunting and especially on public land or on property where other hunters may be present).*



An Example of a Textbook Spring Hunt

One of the most exciting aspects of turkey hunting is that no two hunts, just like no two turkeys, are exactly alike. Rarely does a turkey hunt go precisely as planned either. However, a textbook turkey hunt might proceed as follows.

After having scouted the hunting area, ideally the hunter has learned where the gobbler “roosts” for the evening. Turkeys sleep in trees, not on the ground, and these sleeping places are known as roosts. With the whereabouts of a roosted gobbler known, the hunter arrives in the pre-dawn darkness the following morning and gets set-up within 75 yards or so of the roosted gobbler *(In setting up, the hunter sits down, with back against a tree in an attempt to be ready for a shot at an approaching gobbler)*. Suddenly, the hunter hears the first whippoorwill of the morning. As light infiltrates bringing life to the spring woods, the barred owl



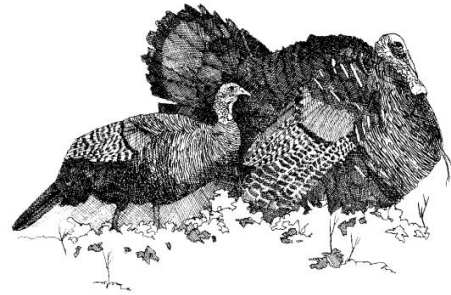
makes its contribution and the gobbler responds with a booming gobble. At the sound of the gobble, a chill runs down the hunter's spine and it is decided that three soft clucks are in order; just enough to let the gobbler know there is hen nearby. Even before the third cluck is released, the gobbler double gobbles in response.

Having gotten the attention and interest of the gobbler, the hunter will avoid any further calling until fly down *(flying off the roost to the ground)*. Continuing to call a gobbler on the roost may delay fly down because, according to nature's way, the gobbler waits for the hens to come to the roost tree and then joins them as they gather below him.

The gobbler begins to gobble in earnest while scanning the dimly lit forest floor wondering when the hen heard earlier will appear. At the same time, the

hunter patiently waits for the beating of wings signaling the gobblers decent from the roost tree. Finally, the impatient gobbler cannot wait any longer and he descends from the roost in a series of wing beats hitting the ground with an audible swoosh as the dry autumn leaves scatter beneath him. Almost immediately thereafter, the hunter yelps and clucks excitedly in an effort to lure in the lovesick tom. The gobbler triple gobbles in response. The hunter maneuvers the muzzle of the shotgun barrel in the direction of where the gobbler landed but will move it again only when the gobbler's vision is blocked by terrain features or some type of woodland cover. Moving otherwise may risk spooking the approaching gobbler thus ending the hunt prematurely.

As it turns out, the initial soft tree clucks were all that was needed on this hunt. The majestic silhouette of the adult gobbler appears in full strut about 50 yards away and is moving slowly toward the hunter's location. Despite being relatively motionless, the hunter's heart begins to beat as if under the conditions of a marathon. The spit and drum, a sound made as the gobbler goes in and out of strutting, seems deafening as the gobbler nears the hunter's location. Another gobble is emitted, and being much closer now, rattles the hunter's nerve.



Finally, the gobbler is within range and the hunter is in total awe of the size and beauty of the noble bird. The white, red, and blue hues adorning the gobblers head and neck along with the bronze and green iridescence of the breast feathers, is both radiant and mesmerizing.

As the gobbler extends its neck to search for the hen heard earlier, the hunter knows that the time has come. At the shot the gobbler drops and, in reflex action, the hunter puts the shotgun's safety back on safe, gets up, and rushes to the magnificent bird.



As the hunter stands before the gobbler admiring its beauty, many emotions are felt. There is a heightened elation from all the effort and preparation dedicated to this one moment including the knowledge that this fine bird will provide healthful sustenance. Conversely, there is also a sense of remorse for the taking the life of such a beautiful creature. However, hunters come to know that all creatures are part of the living and dying cycle of life and all must consume something that was once living in order to survive and thrive, be it plant or animal, and humans are no different.

The hunter sits beside the woodland prize while soaking up the morning sun, smells, sights, and sounds of the spring woods. Turkey hunting is extremely exciting, challenging, and rewarding. Time spent in the turkey woods is time well spent!

Turkey Hunting Safety

Because of the interactive nature of turkey hunting, safety should always be of utmost concern. Hunters must always keep in mind that any sounds heard in the woods could be that of another hunter either calling or walking about. Fluorescent orange is not required by law while turkey hunting in North Carolina. However, it is a good idea to display fluorescent orange material while moving, especially on public land or in places where the whereabouts of other hunters is not fully known.

In order to help keep turkey hunting safe and enjoyable, keep the following in mind:

- Be sure to always positively identify your target as a legal turkey.
- Never stalk a turkey or turkey sound.
- Assume every noise or movement is another hunter.
- Protect your back by sitting against a wide tree or other backstop at your calling location.
- Shout “STOP” to alert approaching hunters. Do not wave or make sudden movements.
- Eliminate red, white, blue, and black from your hunting clothing. All these colors can be found on the male wild turkey.
- Pre-select a zone of fire and do not take a shot outside of it.
- Choose only safe, law-abiding, and ethical hunting companions.
- Practice courtesy and self-control at all times.
- *Although not required by law in North Carolina, it is a good safety practice to wear or display some type of fluorescent orange material while moving and at your set-up location.*

Basic Equipment (Deer Hunting):

Clothing

Deer hunting is likely the most popular type of hunting today. Not unlike turkey hunting, there are a great many clothing choices to choose from. As in all forms of hunting, clothing for hunting deer should be comfortable and not tight or extremely loose fitting. A variety of light and medium weight fabrics exist as does some heavier wool type garments. Camouflage, although widely used and coveted by deer hunters, is not quite as critical as in hunting turkeys. Deer, unlike turkeys,

do not have as keen color perception, but like turkeys, do respond to movement.

Layering of clothing, however, is important to being comfortable in the deer woods. If a days hunt involves moving slowly and stopping as in still hunting, lighter is better. Conversely, if a deer hunt involves remaining in one place all day, as in a tree stand or ground blind, then heavier clothes and more layers may be necessary. Having the ability to shed or add layers can make any hunt more comfortable and enjoyable. Advance knowledge of weather conditions and terrain can make what to wear decision much easier. *(Note: The use of hunter orange, visible from all sides, is required while hunting deer during the firearms season. Remember to always review a current copy of the North Carolina Inland Fishing, Hunting and Trapping Regulations Digest concerning laws and regulations in the area you'll be hunting).*

Footwear

Having proper footwear is critical to comfort while deer hunting. Seasonality can be the deciding factor concerning footwear choice. Many hunters acquire a variety of hunting boots in order to match the season hunted in. For example, when temperatures are warm (*early season*) a light, waterproof boot fits the bill. As the season progresses and temperatures fall, a heavier insulated boot is preferred. All this depends on the amount and frequency of hunter movement and weather conditions. Pack type insulated boots are usually heavy, bulky and are not preferred for walking long distances. However, in cold weather, and little hunter movement, a quality pack boot cannot be beat. Footwear fit is also extremely important and will help to minimize sore feet and blisters if a great deal of walking is the order of the day.

Some deer hunters prefer the lower height, weight, and compact style of hiking boots over standard hunting boots. Waterproof footwear provides additional comfort in wet swampy areas or rainy conditions. In addition, some hunters purchase hunting boots one size larger than their normal shoe size. This allows room for layering of socks. A good combination is a light polypropylene base sock followed by wool or acrylic. Unlike wearing a single pair of socks, this tactic keeps feet comfortable by wicking moisture (*sweat*) away from the surface of the feet. This is especially important for hunters walking long distances during a hunt.

It is also important to purchase footwear that can stand up to the punishment of rough and or rocky terrain. Color and style of footwear for deer hunting is not critical, but, earth tones and camouflage are quite popular. Comfort and the ability to adapt to varying temperatures and weather conditions are very important when considering footwear for deer hunting.

Firearms

Rifles, shotguns, and muzzleloaders are legal firearms for hunting deer in North Carolina. Pistols (*.24-caliber or larger*) are also legal. (*Note: muzzle loading pistols are not legal*). Choice of firearm caliber and action is as personal as clothing and stand location. Some popular and widely used calibers for deer hunting include the .243 Winchester, .25-06 Remington, .270 Winchester, 7mm Magnum, .30-30 Winchester, .308 Winchester, and .30-06 Springfield just to name a few. Popular actions (*parts that load and unload the firearm*), include the bolt, pump or slide, lever, and semi-automatic.

Firearm finish also varies including full camouflage, dull-matte, high-gloss, and custom engraved models. The dull-matte finish tends to be a popular choice as compared to highly polished firearms. This is because some hunters claim that the sun reflecting off high-gloss firearms can alert game animals of the hunter's presence. Many hunters attach scopes to firearms for deer hunting to improve accuracy and shot placement especially at longer ranges.

An important factor to remember when choosing a firearm is to choose one that you can shoot comfortably. All firearms, with perhaps the exception of the .22 rifle and a few others, have "noticeable" recoil. Recoil is the process of rearward movement (*kick*) resulting from shooting a firearm. As a general rule, the larger and more powerful the caliber of the firearm the more it will recoil. Some shooters and hunters are sensitive to recoil and therefore choose calibers that recoil less. This is important to consider because fear of recoil can result in shooting inaccurately. Sticking with the smaller caliber choices, and or bullet/load combinations, is a good idea for those having issue with recoil. Prior to purchasing any firearm, it is a good idea to try several different types if possible. Seeking the help of a friend or relative that hunts or shoots is a great start, as is meeting other people familiar with firearms. This can be accomplished by visiting shooting ranges, local sporting goods stores, or gun clubs (*Note: Always remember to review a current copy of the North Carolina Inland Fishing, Hunting and Trapping Regulations Digest for seasons and manner of taking for hunting in specific areas of the state as local regulations may restrict the use of some firearms*).

Bows and Arrows

Long bows, recurve bows, compound bows, and crossbows are legal hunting implements for hunting deer in North Carolina. Long and recurve bows must have a minimum draw weight of 40 pounds, compound bows must be of 35 pound draw weight, and crossbows must have a minimum draw weight of 150 lbs. Broad heads for hunting deer must be of cutting edge design with a minimum width of 7/8 inch. (*Note: Always remember to review a current copy of the North Carolina Inland*

Fishing, Hunting and Trapping Regulations Digest for seasons and manner of taking for hunting in specific areas of the state).

Bow hunting deer is very popular and challenging. More often than not, the bow hunter hunts from an elevated stand. This not only allows the hunter to be “out of view” of an approaching deer, but also “out of scent” as well. Deer have an excellent sense of smell and getting close for a bow shot can be difficult especially at ground level. Practicing at various ranges and elevations prior to the season will prepare the archer for an accurate, lethal, and humane shot on deer.

Miscellaneous Deer Hunting Equipment:

The following equipment is based on personal preference and needs of an individual hunter. Not all hunters carry the same, or all, equipment listed.

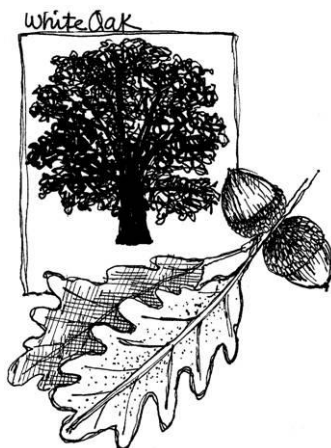
Hunting license (*required unless exempt*), tree stand (*Note: be sure to always wear a full-body harness while tree stand hunting*), deer calls (*grunt tube, doe bleat, fawn bleat, snort/whheeze call*), scents (*deer urine or other masking scents*), field dressing knife, flash light, compass and map, handheld Global Positioning System (*GPS*), reflective tacks/flagging tape (*marking location for pre-dawn entry*), binoculars, pruning shears or limb saw, camera, extra batteries, toilet tissue, handkerchief, neck warmer, water bottle or water purifiers, snacks, thermos, hand warmers, deer drag, insect repellent, sun screen, note pad or journal, ballpoint pen, survival/first-aid kit, utility tool, rainwear, and back or fanny pack to carry items. Many hunters also carry and use portable blinds especially when deer hunting with a bow (*Note: for information concerning exemptions to having a hunting license, be sure to review a current copy of the North Carolina Inland Fishing, Hunting and Trapping Regulations Digest*).

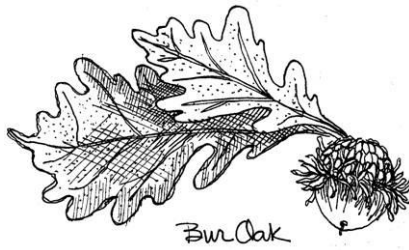
Hunting Methods (Deer Hunting):

Scouting

Scouting allows a hunter to confirm the presence of, and knowledge about, deer using the hunting area. Deer, not unlike other wildlife, leave sign indicating their whereabouts. A few examples of deer sign include: tracks, scat (*referred to as droppings*), beds (*places where deer rest during the day*), rubs (*the rubbing of trees produced by male deer before and during the breeding season or rut*), and scrapes (*pawed areas on the ground created by male deer for the purpose of attracting females and marking territory relative to other males*).

Deer utilize different habitat types during different





times of the day and year while encompassing a certain amount of habitat called home range. The size of a deer's home range varies and is determined by the amount and availability of food, water, cover and the special arrangement of all three.

During the spring, areas that are first to green-up with lush vegetation will attract deer. As spring turns to summer, a variety of other foods become available and deer can be found at these food sources throughout their home range. As fall approaches and mast becomes available, deer will focus their efforts to mast producing trees or any agricultural crops located within their home range. All things being equal, food and mating is the white-tails driving force and therefore will determine where deer are at various times of the year.

Deer in poor quality habitat may have larger home ranges, whereas deer in good quality habitat have smaller home ranges. Moreover, male deer tend to have larger home ranges than females especially during the breeding season. Gender home range differences are primarily due to breeding behaviors and the dispersal of young males in the spring. Adult female mothers will facilitate young male dispersion in an effort to prevent inbreeding within the local deer family. Habitat destruction caused by human development will also disperse deer even though deer adapt very well to these disturbances. Deer have the unique ability to live and thrive in close proximity to humans. Understanding the behavior and movement of deer throughout their home ranges is beneficial to scouting for the hunter.

Some hunters prefer to scout just before the hunting season (*pre-season*), while others choose to scout right after the close of the season (*post-season*). Pre-season scouting allows the opportunity to get current "up-to-date" information on deer within a given parcel of habitat. The drawback of pre-season scouting is that it introduces the human element (*presence and scent*) into the deer's habitat just prior to the hunting season. Some hunters feel repeated pre-season human activity in the deer woods has the potential to alter deer behavior. This can result in deer changing travel routes, bedding areas, and in extreme cases, cause deer to move out of an area entirely. Hunters scouting pre-season should do so sparingly so as to minimize the impact on deer behavior.

Post-season scouting is another alternative and is sometimes preferred over preseason. Post-season scouting



is best done right after the close of the deer hunting season because it provides a hunter with knowledge about how deer are utilizing the habitat during that time of year. This information is invaluable in preparing for the following hunting season.



For example, during the spring and summer, deer move freely through their home ranges and are less concerned about being concealed as compared to the fall and winter. By late-fall, most of the foliage has dropped from the trees making the woods more open in appearance. Because deer are a prey species, they seek the security of thick habitat for moving and resting. When most foliage is on the ground, deer will seek the thickest habitat available in order to remain hidden and out of sight of predators whether human or otherwise. Post-season scouting provides

information about “where deer will be” come the following hunting season. Many established post-season trails and bedding areas are utilized year after year by deer and remain in use unless the habitat becomes severely altered. Planning a hunt using this information can be helpful to a hunter months in advance.

In addition, scouting this time of year has less influence on deer behavior as compared to pre-season scouting. Jumping a deer out of its bed in early/late winter will have little impact come next fall. However, one drawback to post-season scouting is that the future hunting season is many months away. If a hunter has interest in a particular deer observed during the post-scouting period, the deer may or may not be in the area come next season. With the future hunting season months away, an individual deer could be involved in a collision with a vehicle or die of natural causes. However, that can also be the case during pre-season scouting as well especially when male deer become active during the breeding season in search of females. The important thing to remember is that scouting for deer is a great

way to get to know the habitat, population size, and activity of deer in the area chosen to hunt. Scouting contributes to hunter knowledge, and with it, hunter success.

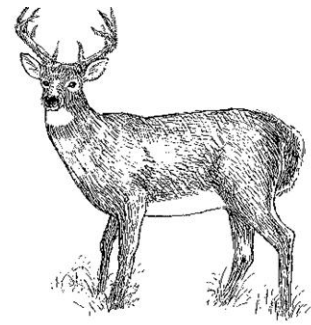


Stand Hunting Deer

Stand hunting is a popular form of hunting deer. Once it has been determined through scouting that deer are utilizing the hunting area, a hunter can make a decision as to where to place a stand. The stand can either be a location on the ground, or in an elevated position as in a tree stand. *(Note: review a current copy of the North Carolina Inland Fishing, Hunting and Trapping Regulations Digest for seasons and manner of taking for hunting because some counties and or local laws require the hunter to be elevated when using a center-fire rifle).*

Deer rely a great deal on their sense of smell to avoid danger. Therefore, an elevated stand is a good method in which to avoid being detected by a deer's nose. This is especially important for a bow hunter due to the limited range of archery equipment. Whether at ground level or elevated stand, the goal is to choose a location that is within close proximity to a trail frequently used by deer as they move between food, water and bedding areas. In essence, a hunter is attempting to ambush a deer as it moves through its habitat.

It is also important to note that deer are primarily a crepuscular (*active dawn and dusk*) species and nocturnal (*active at night*) and therefore are less active during daylight hours. The exception to this crepuscular behavior is during the breeding season or rut. During the rut, it is not uncommon for deer, especially males, to be active during daylight hours. This can be a great time to stand hunt deer and a good reason to stay in the woods all day long.



Credit: Robert Savannah, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Still Hunting Deer

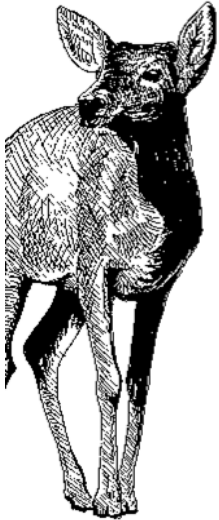
Still hunting deer is a challenging method of hunting because it requires extreme stealth and patience. In still hunting, the goal is to move as quietly as possible for no more than 50 feet or so then stop and scan the area for movement or signs of a feeding or bedded deer. Deer are quick to notice things that are out of place or moving within their habitat. Similarly, a resting or feeding deer is always on the lookout for predators. If spotted, a deer will put as much distance as possible between it and them. Concerning the deer's keen sense of smell, the best strategy is to still hunt into or across the wind whenever possible. Another strategy is to be as quiet as possible while moving as to avoid any noise associated with stepping on twigs and other woodland debris.

Small compact binoculars are excellent for still hunting because they provide added visual acuity for confirming the presence of game. A hunter should never use a rifle scope to identify game unless absolutely sure that a game animal exists. Otherwise, a hunter could unintentionally point a firearm at another hunter moving through the woods. Safety is of utmost concern because a hunter can become so focused on searching for "what appears to be" that it may cause the mind to create something from nothing. It has been said that this is due to a psychological phenomenon called "premature closure" and can cause a person to see something that does not really exist.

For example, a hunter could be moving along and all of a sudden notice a cluster of branches that appears to be the antlers of a deer. A brown clump of grass suddenly turns into the rump of a deer. Because of the potential for this to happen,

a hunter should always properly identify the target as a legal deer before attempting a shot and do so using binoculars.

Driving Deer



The method of driving deer has a long history and is still used successfully today for the purpose of moving deer during daytime hours. In states that do not allow deer hunting with dogs, driving is an excellent alternative. To drive deer, a group of hunters split themselves into two groups; drivers and standers or watchers as they are sometimes referred. Then a block or section of deer habitat is chosen. The habitat can be a large woodlot surrounded by farmland, a ridge, overgrown field, or any sizeable area that contains deer (*presence of deer would be known through pre-season scouting*). Standers position themselves ahead of where the drivers will drive (*push or move through*) a section of habitat. The standers do not move through the habitat before the drive begins. Instead, utilizing roads or trails, standers walk around (*skirt*) the habitat and position themselves so that the drivers push deer to them when the drive begins.

Credit: Robert Savannah, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Once standers are in place (*a certain amount of time is allowed for set -up*) drivers proceed to push deer to the standers. While moving through the habitat, drivers will often yell out or whistle for two reasons. One reason is to help get the deer moving. The other reason is to alert the standers of the coming drivers and to prepare for a potential shot. That said, silent drives are sometimes utilized and do not include yelling or whistling. Whether silent or vocal, drivers should always remain conscience of the location of other drivers especially when the habitat is thick enough to block visibility between drivers. Unlike silent drives, whistling and or yelling contribute to keeping the drive in line and in proper order.

There are two good reasons to drive deer. One is that deer are primarily a crepuscular species and therefore less active during daylight hours. Driving causes deer to move increasing the chance for hunter success. Another reason is habitat related. It can be nearly impossible to stand hunt in thick habitat due to poor visibility and thereby shooting opportunities. Deer that enter these areas usually do for the protection they offer and do not move into open areas until well after dark. By driving these thick areas, hunters have the opportunity to hunt deer they otherwise could not. Hunters that drive deer often begin the day stand hunting for the first few hours of daylight then get together and complete a series of drives. Oftentimes the last few hours of the day are reserved for stand hunting as well.

Safety, as always, is of utmost concern for those driving deer. Both drivers and standers should always be cautious when taking a shot at a deer to avoid accidents especially with silent drives where the sounds of a walking hunter could be mistaken for a sneaking deer (*Note: The use of hunter orange, visible from all sides, is required while hunting deer during the firearms season. Remember to always review a current copy of the North Carolina Inland Fishing, Hunting and Trapping Regulations Digest concerning laws and regulations in the area you'll be hunting*).



Credit: Robert Savannah, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Deer Hunting with Dogs

Some states allow deer hunting with dogs while others do not. In areas of North Carolina where legal, dog hunting has a deeply rooted culture and is highly coveted. Deer hunting with dogs is somewhat similar to driving deer except that dogs are the drivers instead of humans. Another difference lies in the size of area or habitat that can be covered while dog hunting. Dogs released at a given location have the potential to cover a great deal of ground in search of the scent of deer. Since great distances can be covered during a hunt, most hunters keep track of their deer dogs with radio telemetry equipment. Dogs are released from vehicles along roads or trails adjacent to the hunting area and begin searching for scent of deer. Once scent is encountered, dogs will continue trailing until they lose scent.

While on scent, dogs will bark and howl indicating that they're trailing deer. Hunters use the sound of the trailing dogs, along with available roads or trails and radio telemetry equipment, to intercept deer ahead of the dogs. Intimate knowledge of the hunting area is critical to accomplish this interception. Due to the amount of habitat covered, it is not uncommon for dogs to cover great distances while trailing deer. It is the responsibility of dog owners to properly train, care for, and recover deer hunting dogs after the hunt.

Basic Equipment (Bear Hunting):

Clothing

Bear hunting is enjoyed by many North Carolinians. The most popular places to hunt bears in North Carolina are the coastal plain and mountains. As in all forms of hunting, clothing for hunting bear should be comfortable and not tight or extremely loose fitting. A variety of light and medium weight fabrics are popular as are some heavier wool type garments. Camouflage, although widely used and coveted by deer and turkey hunters is sometimes used by bear hunters. As

with hunting deer, layering of clothing is a good way to adjust to changing temperatures or weather conditions. If a days hunt involves moving slowly and stopping, as in still hunting, lighter is better. If a hunt involves the use of dogs with minimal hunter movement, then heavier clothes and layering may be necessary. The exception to this is when a dog bear hunter needs to move towards a treed or stationary bear for the purpose of getting a shot.



Having the ability to shed or add layers can make any hunt more comfortable and enjoyable. Advance knowledge of weather conditions and terrain can make what to wear decision much easier (*Note: The use of hunter orange, visible from all sides, is required while hunting big game. Remember to always review a current copy of the North Carolina Inland Fishing, Hunting and Trapping Regulations Digest concerning laws and regulations in the area you'll be hunting*).

Footwear

Adequate footwear is critical to comfort while bear hunting. The greatest issue relative to footwear choice is temperature changes and weather conditions during the season. Because many North Carolinians hunt bears with dogs, the main concern is getting to the bear for a shot and getting the bear out of the woods after the shot. For a dog bear hunter, bulky pack boots may not be on the list of choices. Instead, a light insulated boot is preferred. However, if conditions are cold, wet, snowy, or involve little hunter movement, a heavier insulated waterproof boot is better.

Footwear fit is extremely important and will help minimize sore feet and blisters if walking long distances. Some hunters prefer the lower height, weight, and compact style of hiking boots over standard hunting boots. Waterproof footwear provides additional comfort in wet swampy areas or rainy conditions. Rubber high top boots or waders can be especially useful when bear hunting in the swamps of the coastal plain.

Some hunters purchase hunting boots one size larger than their normal shoe size. This allows room for layering of socks. A good combination is a light polypropylene base sock followed by wool or acrylic. Unlike wearing a single pair of socks, this tactic helps keep feet comfortable by wicking moisture (*sweat*) away from the surface of the feet. This is especially important for hunters walking long distances during a hunt. It is also important to purchase footwear that can stand up to the punishment of rough and or rocky terrain.

Color and style of footwear for bear hunting is not critical, but, earth tones and camouflage are commonly used. Comfort and the ability to adapt to varying

temperatures and weather conditions are very important when considering footwear for bear hunting.

Firearms

Rifles, shotguns, and muzzleloaders, are legal firearms for bear hunting in North Carolina. Pistols (*.24-caliber or larger*) are also legal firearms (*Note: muzzle loading pistols are not legal hunting implements for big game hunting in North Carolina*). Some popular and widely used calibers for bear hunting are commonly used for deer hunting and include: .243 Winchester, .25-06 Remington, .270 Winchester, 7mm Magnum, .30-30 Winchester, .308 Winchester, and .30-06 Springfield. In addition, bear hunters sometimes favor larger caliber firearms like the .300 magnums, .35 Remington, .35 Whelen, .44 Magnum, and .45-70 Government just to name a few. (*Note: Although there is currently no caliber restrictions on rifles used for big game hunting in North Carolina, many hunters recommend larger calibers for bear hunting. A small caliber rifle is deadly in the hands of an expert marksman able to deliver a bullet with pinpoint accuracy to the vitals. This, however, is rarely the case with a new inexperienced hunter*).

Firearm actions (*parts that load and unload the firearm*) for bear hunting are similar to those used for deer hunting and include the bolt, pump or slide, lever, and semi-automatic. Firearm finish varies based on personal choice and includes fully camouflaged, dull-matte, and custom glossy and engraved models. Many hunters attach scopes to firearms for bear hunting but also use open sights due to close shots associated with hunting in thick habitat.

An important factor to remember when choosing any firearm is to choose one that you can shoot comfortably. All firearms, with perhaps the exception of the .22 rifle and a few others, have “noticeable” recoil. Recoil is the process of rearward movement (*kick*) resulting from shooting a firearm. As a general rule, the larger and more powerful the caliber of the firearm the more it will recoil. Some shooters and hunters are sensitive to recoil and therefore choose calibers that recoil less. This is an important consideration because fear of recoil can result in shooting inaccurately. Choosing smaller calibers, and or bullet/load combinations, is wise for those concerned about recoil. However, be sure that the caliber chosen is considered adequate for bear hunting in order to provide a quick-clean, humane kill.

Prior to purchasing a firearm, it is a good idea to try several different types and calibers if possible. Seeking the help of a friend or relative that hunts or shoots is a great start as is meeting people familiar with firearms. This can be accomplished by visiting shooting ranges, local sporting goods stores, or gun clubs (*Note: Always remember to review a current copy of the North Carolina Inland Fishing, Hunting and Trapping Regulations Digest for seasons and manner of*

taking for hunting in specific areas of the state as local regulations may restrict the use of some firearms).

Bows and Arrows

Long bows, recurve bows, compound bows, and crossbows are legal hunting implements for hunting black bear in North Carolina. Long and recurve bows must have a minimum draw weight of 40 pounds, compound bows must be of 35 pound draw weight, and crossbows must have a minimum draw weight of 150 lbs. Broad heads for hunting bears must be of cutting edge design with a minimum width of 7/8 inch (*Note: Always remember to review a current copy of the North Carolina Inland Fishing, Hunting and Trapping Regulations Digest for seasons and manner of taking for hunting in specific areas of the state).*

Bow hunting bear is very challenging and can be difficult with shots occurring in thick cover. A bow bear hunter should hunt in habitat adaptable to bow hunting and from an elevated stand to avoid the sensitive nose of the black bear. Practicing at various ranges and elevations prior to the season will prepare the archer for an accurate, lethal, and humane shot at a black bear.

Miscellaneous Bear Hunting Equipment: The following equipment is based on personal preference and needs of the individual hunter. Not all hunters carry the same, or all, equipment listed.

Hunting license (*required unless exempt*), tree stand (*Note: always wear a full-body harness while tree stand hunting*), field dressing knife, flash light, compass and map, handheld Global Positioning System (GPS), reflective tacks/flagging tape (*marking location for pre-dawn entry*), binoculars, pruning shears or limb saw, camera, extra batteries, toilet tissue, handkerchief, neck warmer, water bottle or water purifiers, snacks, thermos, hand warmers, drag rope, insect repellent, sun screen, note pad or journal, ballpoint pen, survival/first-aid kit, utility tool, rainwear, and back or fanny pack for carrying items. Many hunters also carry and use portable blinds especially when hunting with a bow (*Note: for information concerning exemptions to having a hunting license, be sure to review a current copy of the North Carolina Inland Fishing, Hunting and Trapping Regulations Digest*).

Hunting Methods (Bear Hunting):

Scouting

Gaining knowledge about the presence and habits of black bears is as exciting as it is important to hunting them. Unlike many other species, black bears occupy much larger home ranges and will travel great distances in search of food. Food items bears eat include nuts, acorns, fruit, insects, succulent vegetation, agricultural crops, and carrion just to name a few. Bears are opportunistic eaters, and aside from mating, obtaining calories is their main motivation. If a food source is exhausted in one area, they will move on in search of another. Because of this, intimate knowledge of an area's production of preferred bear foods is paramount to getting a shot at a black bear.

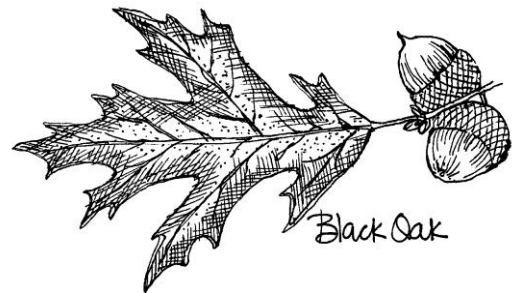


Mockernut Hickory

In addition, black bears are a reclusive species that prefer thick habitats with lots of vegetative cover. Thick cover provides security and relief from high temperatures during daylight hours, as well as places to den during winter months. Scouting objectives for a bear hunter include locating adequate food and water adjacent to dense vegetative cover. Preseason scouting in these areas should be a black bear hunter's main focus.

Stand Hunting Bears

Stand hunting for bears may be considered the least productive method for taking a black bear. Being mostly crepuscular (*active dawn and dusk*) and nocturnal (*active at night*) not unlike deer, bears spend most daylight hours resting. The exception to this might be when food sources become limited and bears become active during daylight hours in search of food especially late fall and prior to winter months. The other exception is when bears are being moved by hunters or hunting dogs.



Black Oak

A good method for the stand bear hunter is to locate preferred bear habitat and food sources and then hunt these areas during the crepuscular times of day. Not unlike deer hunting, the bear stand can either be a location on the ground, or in an elevated position in a tree stand. Bears are considered to have eyesight as good as humans and their sense of smell is second to none. The black bear's sense of smell is extremely sensitive to unnatural odors in its environment. Because of this, an elevated stand offers a greater advantage over a ground blind to avoid being detected. This is especially important for the bow bear hunter due to the limited

range of archery equipment and the need to get closer for a shot. In either case, whether ground blind or tree stand, the goal is to choose a location in close proximity to where bear activity is expected to occur. This includes locating travel routes to and from resting and feeding areas. Not unlike stand deer hunting, the hunter is attempting to ambush a bear as it moves through its habitat.

Still Hunting Bears

Still hunting bears is a challenging method of hunting because it requires extreme stealth and patience. Still hunting requires a hunter move slowly and deliberately for no more than 50 feet or so then stop and scan the area for movement or signs of a feeding or bedded bear. Bears, not unlike most game animals, are always on the lookout for danger and know their habitat much better than humans. Not unlike deer, a resting or feeding bear is always on the lookout for something out of place in the woods and will make every effort to put distance between it and themselves.

The best way for a hunter to deal with the bear's keen sense of smell is to move into or across the wind while still hunting. The other is to be as quiet as possible by taking only pre-determined steps to avoid the noise associated with stepping on woodland debris while moving.



Credit: Robert Savannah, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Small compact binoculars are excellent for still hunting because they give a hunter added visual acuity for confirming the presence of game. A hunter should never use a rifle scope to identify game unless absolutely sure that a game animal exists. Otherwise, a hunter could unintentionally point a firearm at another human moving through the woods. Safety is of utmost concern because a hunter can become so focused on searching for “what appears to be” a bear that the mind can create something from nothing. It has been said that this is due to a psychological phenomenon called “premature closure” which can cause a person to see something that does not really exist.

For example, a hunter could be moving along and notice a black object and think it's a bear. Upon closer inspection, however, the black patch turns out to be a charred log burned in a recent fire. What if a hunter was sitting on, or behind, that charred log? Because of the potential for this to happen, the hunter should always properly identify the target as a legal bear before attempting to take a shot and do so using binoculars first. *(Note: Always remember to review the North Carolina Inland Fishing, Hunting and Trapping Regulations Digest for seasons, harvest*

information, and manner of taking for hunting in specific areas of the state as local laws may vary).

Driving Bears

Driving bears is a very effective hunting method and is still used successfully today in states where dog hunting is unlawful. In order to drive bear, hunters split themselves into two groups; drivers and standers or watchers. First, a block or section of good habitat is chosen. This habitat usually encompasses a rhododendron covered ridge, vine tangled hollow, thick swamp, or overgrown agricultural field. Standers position themselves ahead of where the drivers will push (*move through*) the section of habitat. Standers do not move through the habitat before the drive begins. Instead, they walk around (*skirt*) the habitat utilizing roads or trails positioning themselves so that the drivers push bear to them. Once standers are in place (*a certain amount of time is allowed for set-up*) drivers proceed to push bear to the standers. While moving through the habitat, drivers will often yell-out or whistle for two reasons. One reason is to help get the bear moving. The other reason is to alert the standers of the coming drivers and to get ready for a shot. That said silent drives are also utilized where no yelling or whistling is done. For safety sake, drivers should always remain conscience of the location of other drivers in the group, especially when the habitat is thick enough to block visibility between drivers. On a positive note, whistling and/or yelling contribute to keeping the drive in line and in proper order.

There are two good reasons to drive Bears. One is because bears are primarily a crepuscular and nocturnal species inactive during daylight hours. Driving causes the bear to move thereby increasing the chance for hunter success. Another reason is related to habitat. Habitats that are very thick are nearly impossible to stand hunt in due to poor visibility and limited shooting opportunities. Bear that enter these areas usually do so for the protection they offer and do not move into open areas until well after dark. By driving these thick areas, hunters have the opportunity to hunt bear they otherwise could not.



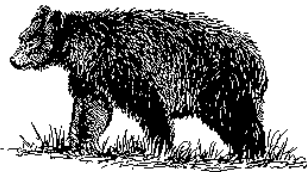
Credit: Robert Savannah, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Hunters that drive for bear sometimes begin the day stand hunting for the first few hours of daylight then get together and complete a series of drives. Oftentimes the last few hours of the day are again reserved for stand hunting. Safety, as always, is of utmost concern for those driving bear. Both drivers and standers should always be cautious when taking a shot at a bear to avoid accidents especially with silent drives where the sounds of a walking hunter could be

mistaken for a moving bear (*Note: The use of hunter orange, visible from all sides, is required while hunting deer during the firearms season. Remember to always review a current copy of the North Carolina Inland Fishing, Hunting and Trapping Regulations Digest concerning laws and regulations in the area you'll be hunting*).

Bear Hunting with Dogs

Some states allow bear hunting with dogs while others do not. Bear hunting with dogs has a deeply rooted culture in North Carolina and is very popular with bear hunters. Bear hunting with dogs is somewhat similar to driving bears except that dogs are the drivers instead of humans. Another difference lies in the size of the area or habitat being hunted. Bears can cover a great deal of habitat whether



Credit: Robert Savannah, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

hunted or not. Therefore, bear dogs can cover great distances in search of, or while pursuing, bears.

Because of this, hunters keep track of their dogs through the use of radio telemetry equipment. Bear dogs must first pick up the scent of bears, and then the goal is to “tree” or “corner” the bear keeping it in a stationary position until hunters arrive.

A bear may corner in an effort to fend off the dogs. Bear dogs are trained to tree or corner the bear to minimize distance covered. The sooner the dogs’ tree or corner the bear, the less time and distance required to chase and locate it by the hunter. The process is similar to dog hunting deer. Dogs are released from vehicles along roads or trails adjacent to the hunting area and begin searching for scent of bear. Once scent is encountered, dogs will continue trailing until they tree or corner the bear or lose the scent.

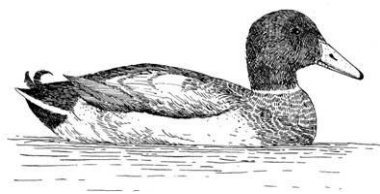
While on scent, dogs will bark and howl letting hunters know they are trailing. Hunters use radio telemetry equipment, along with available roads and trails, to intercept the moving, cornered, or treed bear. Intimate knowledge of the hunting area is critical to accomplish this interception.

If possible, hunters prefer to wait until dogs remain in one location for some time usually indicating a non-moving bear. Due to the amount of habitat covered, it is not uncommon for dogs to travel great distances. It is the responsibility of dog owners to properly train, care for, and recover bear hunting dogs after the hunt.

Basic Equipment (Waterfowl Hunting):

Clothing

Waterfowl hunting is a popular pursuit in North Carolina. Ideally, clothing for waterfowl hunting should match the habitat hunted being waterproof or water resistant. Unlike other forms of hunting, waterfowl hunting can be at its best when the weather is at it worst. A typical day in corn field stubble could begin cool and dry and end up cold and wet. Hunting the edge of a marsh may mean the feet and legs of a hunter remain immersed in water for extended periods of time. When boats are utilized, a hunter must also consider safety floatation equipment and clothing that repels wind and water. Clothing materials like polypropylene fleece, neoprene, wool and rubber can provide warmth, comfort and water proofing.



As with other forms of hunting, layering is a good idea for adjusting to varying temperatures and conditions. Many waterfowl hunters prefer to hunt with dogs. Dogs that retrieve downed game result in less hunter movement and therefore may necessitate more clothing. Wearing clothing that does not alarm incoming waterfowl to the hunter's set-up is critical.

Footwear

Like in all forms of hunting, adequate footwear is paramount to comfort. Many hunters choose waders made of rubber or neoprene for waterfowl hunting. Temperatures during waterfowl hunting seasons in North Carolina can range from warm and mild to cold and inclement so insulated varieties of boots and waders are preferred. If hunting without dogs, waterfowl hunters must recover game on their own making waterproof waders even more critical.

As with other forms of hunting, some hunters purchase hunting footwear one size larger than their normal shoe size. This allows room for layering of socks. A good combination is a polypropylene base sock followed by wool or acrylic. Unlike wearing a single pair of socks, this tactic keeps feet comfortable by wicking moisture (*sweat*) away from the surface of feet. Waterfowl hunters tend to be less active overall as compared to deer, bear, or small game hunters due to remaining still in a blind. Therefore layering of socks is important for keeping warm rather than fending off sweat. Color and style of waders or footwear for waterfowl hunting is not critical, but, camouflage or earth tones are preferred. A wader repair kit is good to have in case of leaks.

Firearms

Modern shotguns used for waterfowl hunting in North Carolina must be no larger than 10 gauge and plugged to a three shell limit by Federal Law. Popular shotgun actions (*parts that load and unload the shotgun*) for waterfowl hunting include the pump, semi-automatic and break or hinge (*single shot and double barrel*). Because waterfowl hunting opportunities occur on or near water, some hunters prefer shotguns that are camouflage covered and or corrosion resistant. The 10, 12 and 20 gauge shotguns tend to be the most popular with 12 gauge being a favorite.

Shot for waterfowl hunting must be of the non-toxic variety by Federal Law and size of shot depends on species hunted. Non-toxic shot types includes iron (*steel as it is commonly referred*), tungsten, bismuth and a few other alloys. Some, but not all, non-toxic shot alloys are less dense, and therefore lighter than lead shot. Lighter (*less dense*) shot pellets lose energy faster and penetrate less than heavier (*denser*) shot pellets. To make up for this difference, hunters use larger non-toxic shot sizes to get similar energy and penetrating power given denser shot like lead.

For example, if #6 lead is considered adequate for a particular species of waterfowl then #2 or #4 steel would be a good alternative. Since it is important for hunters to make quick, clean, humane kills on game and avoid wanton waste of wildlife (another Federal Law), proper shot choice is important.

Most manufactures of waterfowl hunting shot shells provide package labeling suggestions concerning shot sizes and species hunted. Shot sizes used for waterfowl hunting depends on species and also hunting ranges. For ducks over decoys some hunters prefer shot sizes #1 thru #5. For pass shooting ducks BB thru #2, and for geese BBB, BB, #1 and #2. If using one of the heavier alloys like bismuth or tungsten, a smaller size shot may suffice due the greater per pellet density, weight and energy associated with these alloys.

An important factor to remember when choosing a shotgun for waterfowl is to choose one that you can shoot comfortably. All firearms, with perhaps the exception of the .22 rifle and a few others, have “noticeable” recoil. Recoil is the process of rearward movement (*kick*) resulting from shooting a firearm. As a general rule, the larger the gauge the more it will recoil. For example, a 12 gauge will recoil more than a 20 gauge because the 12 gauge has a larger bore diameter and is carrying a heavier shot charge than the 20 gauge. Some shooters and hunters are sensitive to recoil and therefore choose gauges (*or shot shell load combinations*) that recoil less. This is important to consider because fear of recoil can result in shooting inaccurately. Prior to purchasing any firearm, it is a good idea to try several different types if possible. Seeking the help of a friend or relative that hunts or shoots is a great start, as is meeting people familiar with firearms. This can also be accomplished by visiting shooting ranges, local sporting

goods stores, or gun clubs (*Note: Always remember to review a current copy of the North Carolina Inland Fishing, Hunting and Trapping Regulations Digest for seasons and manner of taking for hunting in specific areas of the state as local regulations may restrict the use of some firearms*).

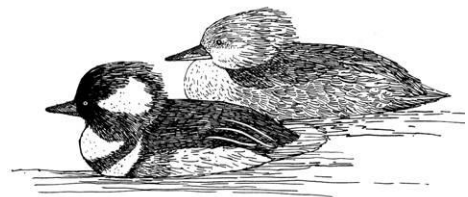
Bows and Arrows

Long bows, recurve bows, compound bows, and crossbows are legal hunting implements for hunting waterfowl in North Carolina. Long and recurve bows must have a minimum draw weight of 40 pounds, compound bows must be of 35 pound draw weight, and crossbows must have a minimum draw weight of 150 lbs. Blunt-type arrowheads are used for taking waterfowl in North Carolina (*Note: Always remember to review a current copy of the North Carolina Inland Fishing, Hunting and Trapping Regulations Digest for seasons and manner of taking for hunting in specific areas of the state*).

Bow hunting waterfowl is extremely difficult due to the inherently small size and swift movement of many waterfowl species. Moreover, waterfowl is often hunted over, or within, a body of water making bow and arrow hunting difficult at best. The bow hunter needs to become proficient before considering waterfowl hunting with the bow and arrow. Practicing at various ranges utilizing moving targets will prepare the archer for an accurate, lethal, and humane shot on waterfowl.

Miscellaneous Waterfowl Hunting Equipment: Much of the following equipment is based on personal preference and needs of the individual hunter. Not all hunters carry the same, or all, equipment listed.

Hunting license (*required unless exempt*), Federal Duck Stamp (*required*), field dressing knife, flash light, compass and map, Handheld Global Positioning System (GPS), binoculars, camera, extra batteries, toilet tissue, handkerchief, water bottle or water purifiers, snacks, thermos, hand warmers, insect repellent, sun screen, note pad or journal, ballpoint pen, survival/first-aid kit, utility tool, rainwear, vest, back pack, or fanny pack. Some hunters also include a dry bag with extra clothes (*especially important when hunting from a boat and you can't easily get back to your vehicle quickly*). Also a fully charged cell phone is a must when hunting from a boat in case of emergencies (*Note: for information concerning exemptions to having a hunting license, be sure to review a current copy of the North Carolina Inland Fishing, Hunting and Trapping Regulations Digest*).

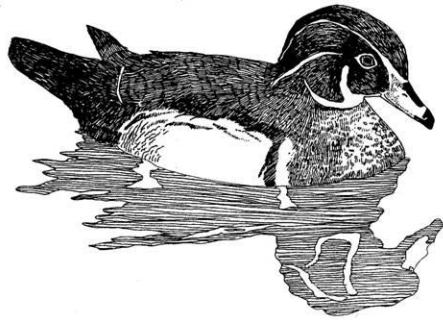


Hunting Methods (Waterfowl Hunting):

Scouting

Waterfowl hunting is very popular in North Carolina. A variety of waterfowl species can be found in the numerous rivers, marshes, swamps, and assorted ponds and lakes throughout the state. Simply put, finding water is critical to finding waterfowl. Water provides the required food elements and protection from land based predators waterfowl need to survive and thrive.

North Carolina waterfowl seasons begin in early fall and extend into the winter months. Waterfowl are migratory birds that leave breeding grounds after raising young and winter in southerly climates.



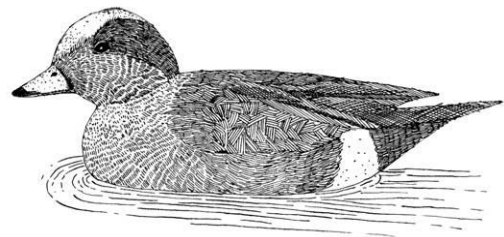
Acquiring knowledge about feeding, resting and roosting areas is important in order to be a successful waterfowl hunter. Of equal importance is in becoming proficient at identifying waterfowl species in flight. Some very important waterfowl identifying factors include size, shape, coloration, and flight patterns. Waterfowl identification is extremely important to successful hunting. Being

able to properly identify waterfowl in flight will prevent the possibility of misidentification. The responsible waterfowl hunter acquires an identification guide and spends time preseason with binoculars studying ducks at or near hunting areas.

Waterfowl seasons, bag limits and shooting hours are established within frameworks designated by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (*Note: for additional information on waterfowl hunting, be sure to review a current copy of the North Carolina Inland Fishing, Hunting and Trapping Regulations Digest*).

Habitat and Food Requirements

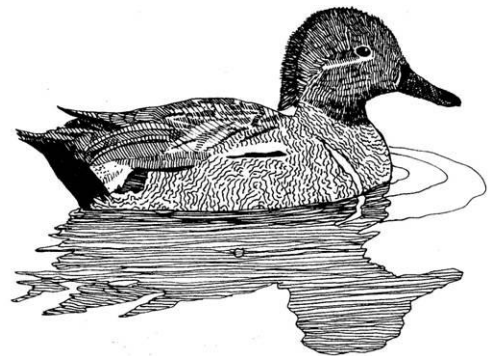
Waterfowl include various species of ducks, geese and swans. Ducks can be further classified into two main groups: Dabblers and Divers. Dabblers are commonly referred to as puddle ducks and include species like wood ducks, pintails, mallards, and green and blue winged teal. Divers include species like canvasback, scaup, bufflehead, ruddy ducks and mergansers. Both categories of ducks have their own preferences for habitat and foods. In North Carolina, puddle ducks are found in a variety of locations statewide including creeks, beaver ponds, marshes and flooded waterfowl impoundments. Some dabblers prefer wooded



areas such as wood ducks and mallards, while pintails prefer open habitats with scant cover. Despite being capable of diving, puddle ducks feed near the surface of the water by dabbling or tipping instead of submerging entirely like divers. The newly sprouted vegetation and insects associated with increasing water levels is a favorite of puddle ducks. Conversely, divers prefer more open water habitats and entirely submerge themselves in search of desired foods. A notable exception to this generalization is ring-necked ducks that may be found in good numbers on smaller bodies of water. Divers eat a variety of aquatic plants and prefer large lakes, rivers, coastal bays, and inlets. Divers also prefer more protein in their diets including a variety of fish, shellfish, and mollusks. As a general rule, if the water dries up or freezes, waterfowl will seek areas in search of open water. In general geese and swans will be found on larger bodies of water where there is ample room for these larger birds to take flight and land. Geese and tundra swans both readily utilize cropland for feeding and hunting for these birds is very popular in these areas. Canada geese can be found in good numbers statewide and in a variety of locations including ponds, reservoirs, rivers, cropland (*including harvested corn and wheat fields*) and pasture.

Waterfowl Hunting Methods:

Waterfowl hunting typically involves the use of shotguns, blinds, decoys, calls, and sometimes dogs. Knowing the travel routes between feeding, resting, and roosting areas can aid a hunter in locating a good set-up position. The general hunting method is for a hunter to conceal themselves in a blind and use decoys and calls to attract birds to the hunting area.

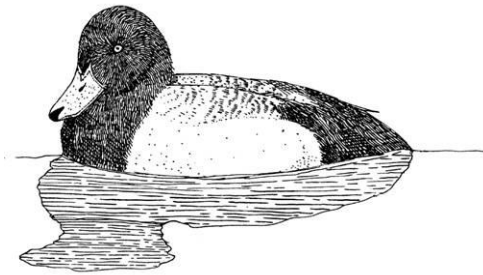


Success in attracting birds includes choosing a good site, becoming proficient with calls and calling, learning how to arrange decoys, and remaining concealed. Because bag limits for individual waterfowl species varies, identification is critical. If a hunter cannot routinely identify the species of interest in flight, the hunt should be delayed or cancelled until identification is possible. The only exception here is if a new hunter is hunting with a mentor that is experienced in identifying waterfowl and can assist with identification. New hunters should always be aware of what species are likely to be encountered in a particular area. While not foolproof, this is an important first step to assist with identification. For example, the hunter would not expect to see canvasbacks, scaup or redheads while hunting a relatively small wooded creek or beaver pond.

Once the waterfowl species of choice comes into range, a hunter attempts to get a shot before being detected. A blind that allows minimal movement for taking a shot is ideal because birds are more likely to approach the set-up if danger is not readily apparent to them.

Blinds

Waterfowl blinds can include anything from an elaborately designed boat blind to a simple ditch within corn field stubble. Some blinds may be temporary and transportable while others are permanent structures. The purpose of the blind is to allow a hunter to remain undetected by approaching waterfowl. The blind must also enable a hunter to react quickly when an opportunity for a shot exists. It is also important that the blind blend into the surrounding habitat as much as possible.



Some blinds are designed so that the camouflage pattern has the ability to blend in with most habitat types. If the blind does not appear to match the habitat well, the use of existing natural materials such as reeds, grasses, or woodland debris may be used to provide additional camouflage.

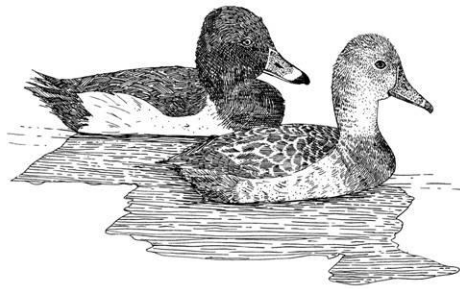
Before attempting to construct any permanent blind, be sure to have permission from the landowner. In most cases, a temporary movable blind is the better option because it allows the flexibility to hunt in various locations. Experienced hunters will position their blind set-up location so that the sun is in the eyes of approaching waterfowl and not them. This provides better shooting visibility and lessens the chance that approaching waterfowl will detect a hunter or blind.

Pass Shooting

Pass shooting is probably the easiest for a new waterfowl hunter lacking an abundance of gear and calling skills. Pass shooting involves intercepting waterfowl as they move from one location to another and is easiest when birds are moving along a well-defined watercourse such as a relatively small river or creek. Scouting and prior knowledge of bird movements in a given area are key to successful hunts. Decoys and calls may be helpful but not necessary for a successful pass shoot hunt. Pass shooting for wood ducks is a popular form of hunting for these birds as they are not overly responsive to decoys or calling.

Jump Shooting

Jump shooting is another waterfowl hunting technique that requires a minimum amount of gear. In North Carolina, most jump shooting occurs from a

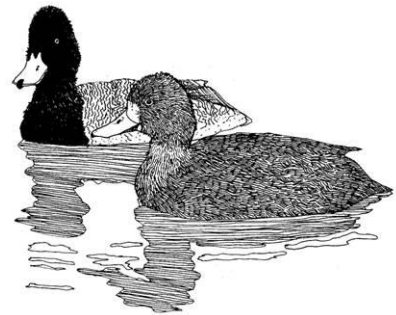


canoe or similar craft. The technique involves slowing paddling the canoe along a creek or small river and flushing waterfowl at close distance. Shots are taken when birds are “jumped” by the slow, stealthy approach of hunter(s) and boat. Decoys are unnecessary and calls are not required. For hunters to be consistently successful, good paddling skills are at a premium. Unnecessary

movement and noise generally forces birds to flush too far from shooting distance. A camouflaged canoe with brush attached along with hunter(s) being completely camouflaged is very important. A note of caution: Quickly mounting and firing a gun from a small boat can be tricky and may make the boat unstable. While very productive, hunters should not attempt jump shooting unless they feel very comfortable with their boating skills. Jump shooting is preferred when one person is dedicated to paddling from the rear while the shooter sits in the front. Everyone participating should wear a comfortable life vest at all times and a dry bag with a change of clothes is highly recommended.

Decoys

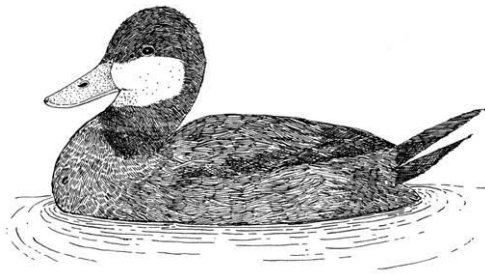
Decoys are used for a variety of hunting purposes and are especially useful for waterfowl hunting. The proper species, amount of decoys and placement is a continuous subject of debate. A new duck hunter will likely want to purchase or borrow at least 6 to a dozen decoys to get started. Because mallards are found statewide and many duck species will respond to the generic mallard decoys, mallards are the best choice for the new hunter. Other species should be added to the decoy mix especially if it is known that large number of other species frequent the areas hunted.



The amount of decoys to use and proper placement is best learned by discussions with avid waterfowl hunters, reading appropriate books and articles and the time-tested technique of trial and error.

The following are some guidelines. As a general rule, fewer decoys are needed when hunting on small bodies of water such as a small creek or beaver pond. Larger numbers of over 100 may be necessary when hunting large bodies of water such as North Carolina coastal sounds and or when hunting certain species such as scaup or sea ducks. When placing decoys, they should be close enough to the blind so that when birds approach they are within shooting distance. In addition, forming an opening or pocket in the decoy spread is important as it allows the birds a place

to land within range of the hunter. Hunters should always be aware of the wind direction. Waterfowl will most always land into the wind, so anticipating how birds will approach the decoy spread and placing decoys accordingly will contribute to a successful waterfowl hunt.



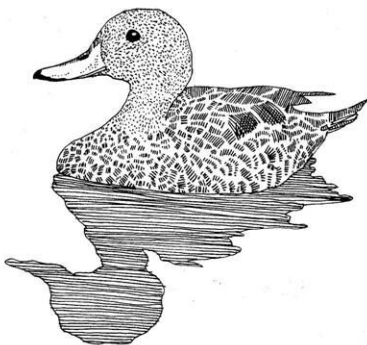
The ability to add motion to decoys increases realism. The hunter can use a jerk string, typically fishing line or another type of thin cord to provide movement to individual decoys in a set-up. Motion decoys can be purchased specifically for this purpose and utilize the wind for movement.

A new waterfowl hunter wishing to pursue geese also has many options when purchasing decoys. Although most new waterfowl hunters in North Carolina will be pursuing Canada geese, goose decoys come in a variety of styles suited for either field or water hunting. A hunter should decide where most of the hunting will take place and then purchase accordingly. As with duck hunting, the ideal number and placement of goose decoys can vary with location. A few goose decoys used in an area where a hunter expects geese to arrive may be all that's needed for a quick hunt. However, several dozen or more goose decoys may be required when hunting in large fields and when trying to lure birds from long distances. To avoid a large initial investment in goose hunting gear, it may be preferable to combine forces with other goose hunters by sharing resources.

Calls

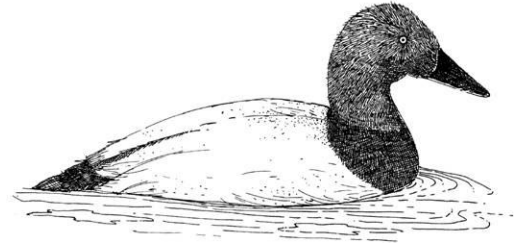
The use of calls for waterfowl hunting serves several purposes. One purpose is to calm birds that are approaching the hunter's blind and another is to add realism to the decoy set-up. Yet another is to call birds in an attempt to lure them in. Not unlike humans, waterfowl vocalize for a variety of reasons beyond simple communication. Whether alarmed, annoyed, or in varying stages of motion, waterfowl use vocal cues.

Waterfowl hunting calls come in wide variety of styles and prices. For duck hunters, the two principal calls include those that mimic mallards and those that mimic ducks that whistle or peep (*e.g., widgeon and pintail*). The mallard call is a good first purchase because many different duck species will respond to the call of mallards. The prices of calls vary from \$10 to over \$100. In the hands of an expert, an expensive call sounds better than an inexpensive one, but to the beginner an expensive call is no better. When purchasing a first call, hunters



should buy what they can afford and practice-practice-practice. To be an effective caller, a hunter doesn't need to be an expert or expect to win competitions. The following are a few calling guidelines for a new waterfowl hunter.

1. Practice-practice-practice
2. Don't over-call. Many times, calling non-stop can hinder success.
3. Learn the basic calls well, that is: practice-practice-practice
4. Calls for diving ducks are available; however, whether these are truly needed is debatable.
5. Invest in a whistle type call. They can be very effective and most are very reasonably priced.
6. When hunting public lands where other waterfowl hunters are in close proximity, this is not the time to open the package to your new call and start practicing. Poor calling may not only impact your hunt, but others surrounding you as well.
7. Practice-practice-practice



With practice, anyone can become competent enough to hunt using calls. Visiting a local sporting goods store is a good way to view a variety of waterfowl hunting calls. In addition, there are countless websites available that offer a wealth of information on calls and calling.

Waterfowl Hunting Dogs

Some waterfowl hunters would not hunt without the companionship of a good dog. In fact, the relationship goes far beyond hunting. A good dog can be a valued member of the family both inside and outside the hunting blind. Dogs are primarily utilized in waterfowl hunting for retrieving birds. This can be especially important when hunting open water areas and or during some of the coldest times of the year. Hunting dogs have a keen sense of smell and visual acuity that makes them especially valuable for preventing the loss of wounded birds on land and water. The Labrador retriever is a favored waterfowl hunting dog but other breeds will suffice in some cases.

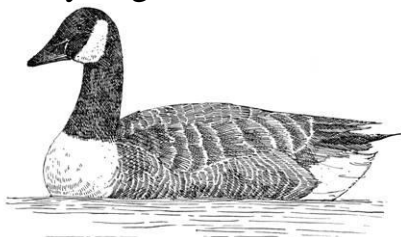


Undeniably, one of the most important factors is that the dog is well behaved. Dogs that misbehave can ruin a hunt by causing problems with other hunters, or by being unable to remain still and quite in the blind. A well trained dog can make for a most enjoyable and memorial hunt. If interested in acquiring a

good hunting dog, it is important to seek the advice of someone familiar with various breeds and knowledge on where to obtain them.

Duck Boats

The advantages of investing in a boat for waterfowl hunting are limitless. The disadvantage is cost. In fact, it can be one of the biggest investments a hunter can make. Obviously, the main advantage to having boat to hunt waterfowl is the ability to gain access that would otherwise not be possible. Waterfowl will often seek out secluded coves and tucked away places on lakes and waterways that provide security beyond what is afforded at easy access hunting areas. The opportunity for a hunter to get to these isolated areas can be highly productive.



Considerations for purchasing boats for waterfowl hunting include ease of access to marginal areas, engine adaptation, seating and storage areas, camouflage adaptation, and safety features to name a few. The boat should be easily maneuverable in tight timber situations yet have enough power for open water and swift currents. Since there may not be a perfect all-around waterfowl boat, hunters should consider all the potential uses they may encounter and then search for one that fits those uses.

For a budget minded hunter, a used fishing boat may serve many purposes. For a serious waterfowl hunter, many thousands of dollars could be invested. Regardless of price or style, safety and obeying boating rules and regulations should always be top priority when hunting from watercraft.

Wild Game Recovery: Before and After the Shot:

Introduction

Recovering wild game after the shot is the responsibility of all hunters. In many states it is law referred to as the Wanton Waste Law. Under this law, stiff penalties can be applied in cases where hunters do not make reasonable efforts to recover wild game. The goal of law-abiding ethical hunters is to place a shot in the vital organs thereby increasing the potential for quick, clean, humane kills. Modern hunting equipment (*firearms/bows and arrows*) are designed to provide quick, clean, humane kills at reasonable hunting ranges. Reasonable hunting ranges are distances at which a hunter should become familiar by practicing prior to the season with hunting equipment of choice. Generally speaking, bows and arrows and shotguns do not shoot as far (*short range hunting equipment*) as compared to rifles (*long range hunting equipment*). Knowing the limitations of hunting

equipment, as well as hunter, lessens the chance of crippling or wounding wild game.

Before the Shot

Through pre-season practice, hunters can minimize crippling and wounding by becoming familiar with shooting at various distances. Knowledge of distances to trees, rocks, depressions, etc. in the hunting location can give hunters an added advantage. For example, as wild game approach these objects during the season, the hunter is better prepared to make an accurate and lethal shot. This is common practice and a goal for bow hunters due to the limited range of archery (*bows and arrows*) equipment. In addition, hunters can also improve wild game recovery by becoming familiar with trails and escape routes within their hunting area. Wild game species prefer predetermined routes when moving between feeding, watering and bedding areas or when escaping from predators. Knowing these routes, and practicing with hunting equipment prior to the hunting season, will aid hunters in being successful by avoiding crippling or wounding losses.

After the Shot

Following-up after the shot is critical to successful wild game recovery. After the shot, it may be unclear as to whether the shot was accurate, poor, or resulted in a clean miss. Wild game animals will sometimes act or behave a certain way when hit and these visual cues can be valuable prior to tracking.

For example, a well-placed shot on a deer may cause it to drop instantly, or result in an immediate bolting (*fleeing*) reaction. In some instances, there may be little if any reaction at all. Stumbling or crashing sounds as the deer exits usually indicates a fatal hit. In most cases, a fatally wounded deer will prefer to run downhill rather than up for two reasons. One, it is the path of least resistance, and two, the deer will seek water sources in an attempt to quench thirst brought on by decreasing blood volume.

Some knowledge into understanding how hunting implements dispatch a deer can offer insight into what to look for after the shot. Firearms like rifles and shotguns, shooting high speed single projectile ammunition, cause massive tissue damage, blood loss, and trauma. Often, but not always, a well-placed shot from a rifle or shotgun immediately immobilize a deer on the spot requiring no tracking or trailing. Bows and arrows, however, rely much more on promoting massive blood loss caused by the razor sharp cutting edges of the arrowhead. Deer taken with bow and arrow must first bleed-out and are rarely immobilized on the spot unless the spine is severed. Any shot that does not result in immediate immobilization requires that hunter's follow-up and track. The ability to make well-placed shots into the vital organs will go far toward quick recovery and the prevention of

crippling losses. Ethical law-abiding hunters make every attempt to follow-up after the shot in order to avoid wanton waste of any wild game.

Tracking

How long a hunter waits prior to tracking is also important. With a well-placed shot in the vital organs, a deer may expire within visual distance. If not, a minimum 15 to 30 minute waiting period is usually recommended. If a hunter is not sure the shot was well placed, a longer waiting period may be necessary. The goal is to allow a deer to lie down, stiffen-up, and expire without being pushed or flushed prematurely. If unsure of the accuracy of a shot, a good idea is to at least proceed to the location and look for signs of a hit. This way, a hunter can determine whether a waiting period is required and, if so, how long.

Immediately after the shot, a hunter must rely on two very important cues; visual and audio. Visual cues provide known locations just prior to and after the shot. Likewise, audio cues help determine direction of travel when visual cues are no longer available. After the shot and immediately following the last visual location of a deer, a hunter needs to listen carefully in an attempt to follow the path of a deer by sound alone. This is because mortally wounded deer may run wildly causing crashing sounds that help to indicate direction of travel. This is important because it provides yet another option in which to locate sign when tracking. Prior to tracking, a hunter needs to visualize three very important locations to mark while searching for sign. They include:

- The hunter's location.
- The location of a deer at the shot.
- The location where a deer was last seen before disappearing into woods or brush.

Looking For Sign

Before attempting to search for sign, it is important to mark the location with a biodegradable material like tissue or napkins before proceeding to the other locations mentioned. Using a biodegradable material, rather than clothing or equipment, helps to avoid loss of items, while at the same time won't contribute to littering. Types of sign encountered at the shot location may include: tracks, blood, tissue, hair, skid marks in dirt or forest debris, marks on trees from the bullet or arrow (*the arrow itself*), or absolutely nothing.

Many hunters prefer to go immediately to the spot where a deer was last seen before disappearing into the woods or brush. This is because the shot location often contains little or no sign at all. In fact, it may take 5-10 yards or more for a deer to begin expelling blood from the wound and or nose and mouth if mortally

wounded. The following is a general list of what a hunter may expect to find when trailing after the shot:

- Bright crimson blood (*arterial blood/high oxygen content*).
- Bright bubbly or frothy blood: (*lung blood/high oxygen content*).
- Dark blood: (*venous blood/lower oxygen content/could be associated with liver or muscle hit*).
- Partially digested vegetative material with minimal dark blood (*stomach/abdominal hit*).
- Dark brown hair/no blood (*high on body/could be a non-fatal graze*).
- Medium brown hair/no blood (*mid-body/could be non-fatal graze*).
- White hair/no blood (*under belly/under neck/could be non-fatal graze*).
- Nothing (*potential miss*).

A hunter should bear in mind that there may, or may not, be combinations of sign and therefore will need to determine a required waiting period before tracking based on available sign. Even if no blood or hair is discovered initially, an ethical law-abiding hunter will make every effort to thoroughly check the area before assuming a clean miss or non-fatal wound. When beginning the search, a hunter should avoid stepping onto or into the trail. Doing so could erase or cover up sign making back-tracking if necessary difficult or impossible. Instead, a hunter should walk alongside the trail being careful as not to step into it. The trail should also be marked at regular intervals just in case backtracking is necessary. In this way, a hunter will not need to backtrack all the way to the initial shot location. As mentioned earlier, utilizing biodegradable materials like tissue or napkins for marking the trail will avoid littering and or the need to collect clothing or equipment after tracking is completed.

Although ground level may be the logical place to search for sign when tracking, a hunter should also scan low-lying brush, especially in heavy cover. This is because a fleeing deer may brush blood against vegetation that could easily be missed if sole focus is at ground level. Whenever possible, it is a good idea to enlist the help of hunting partners when tracking. Several sets of eyes scanning for sign are far better than one set alone.

Remember, it is very common to have little, if any, sign at the initial shot location. This is where visual and audio cues become extremely important. In many cases, bleeding tends to increase and become most obvious where a deer was last seen before disappearing into the woods or brush.

Allowing Time before Tracking

As a general rule, if large amounts of bright frothy-blood are found quickly, the pre-tracking waiting period may be short (*15 minutes or less*) or unnecessary

and a hunter can usually expect a short tracking distance (<50-100 yards). If minimal dark blood and stomach contents are apparent, the opposite is likely requiring a longer waiting period (*from one to several hours or more*) and tracking distance increased.

If a hunter begins tracking a poorly hit deer too soon, the chance of recovery diminishes due to a variety of reasons including:

- Deer could be pushed onto property where a hunter does not have permission making recovery difficult if not impossible.
- Deer might be claimed by another hunter in the area.
- Deer may not be recovered due to loss of sign.
- Deer may die without being recovered.
- Deer may recover and survive if shot was non-fatal.

Because it is possible that a deer may flush or jump from a bedding or resting area while being tracked, a hunter should be prepared for a follow-up shot. If a flush occurs, and shot not offered or missed, it would be wise not to push any further. A hunter should approach the vacant bed or resting location, and depending on available sign, decide whether to continue or allow more time before tracking. Again, the goal is to allow a deer to lie down, stiffen-up, and expire. Lying down promotes the movement of blood to concentrate at the wound site thus promoting bleeding in that area. If a hunter continues to push a deer, blood is transferred to the extremities and used for movement lessening the chance for bleed out at the wound site. This process may be prolonged if tracking begins too soon on a poorly hit deer.

Tracking Issues Related to Weather and Time of Day

Another consideration when tracking is weather and time of day. If it is raining or snowing, waiting to track an animal may be counterproductive. Blood, hair, and other sign might be washed away or covered up making tracking difficult if not impossible. The presence of light snow may increase the ability to track sign, but heavy snow or a snow/rain mix might eliminate or cover up sign in a very short period of time. In this case, it may be best to give up tracking altogether until conditions improve or wait until the following morning. This may also contribute to the deer lying down sooner thereby increasing the chances of a shorter tracking distance.

Time of day is also a factor. Early in the day there is little concern because daylight is not a limiting factor. If tracking near or at dusk, the situation worsens. It is much more difficult to track a deer in darkness even with the aid of a flashlight.

Unless the sign suggests a good hit and possible short tracking distance, it may be better to wait until first light to resume the tracking effort.

It is also critical to follow-up tracking as soon as possible especially during early season when temperatures are warm. Prolonged tracking in warm weather does not help to promote good table quality of deer meat (*venison*). The last thing a hunter wants is to end up with a deer not fit for human consumption and wanton waste of wildlife.

Safety should always be number one when tracking, especially at night. Crossing obstacles like fences, logs, or streams can be dangerous during the day let alone in total darkness. The best advice may be to resume the search early the next morning (*Note: for safety reasons, firearms should be unloaded and arrows should be placed in quivers when crossing obstacles and always remember to review a current copy of the North Carolina Inland Fishing, Hunting and Trapping Regulations Digest for seasons, manner of taking, regulations concerning firearms, and legal shooting hours*).

Approaching Downed Game

Caution must be practiced when approaching downed game animals; especially big game like deer or bear. With deer, it is best to approach from behind and, utilizing a stick or branch, touch the area near an eye in an effort to promote a response. If a deer blinks and or moves, another follow-up shot may be necessary to dispatch it. Most hunters prefer to place a finishing shot in the neck or lower chest area. Doing so minimizes damage to edible meat and results in a quick-clean kill as compared to shots placed elsewhere (*Note: a head shot for finishing off big game at close range should be avoided due to the chance of a ricochet off the animals skull plate*).

As a general rule, if the eyes are open and breathing appears to have ceased, the animal is likely dead. If the eyes are closed, and or breathing apparent, the animal may still be alive. Approach the animal with caution and follow-up with another shot if necessary. Never attempt to use a knife to finish off a big game animal.

Field Dressing and Transporting Wild Game:

Field Dressing

Wild game meat, not unlike domestic meat, requires reasonable care while handling and processing. Proper handling and processing will help to preserve palatability and avoidance of food-borne illnesses. Steps taken while in the field are crucial to ensuring healthy and flavorful wild game meat. As with any meat, temperature is always a concern relative to preventing the build-up of bacteria.

After harvesting a game animal, the entrails (*internal organs*) should be removed as soon as possible in order to facilitate cooling of the carcass. Field dressing does not have to be a complex ordeal and can be completed in just a few simple steps using a minimum of tools. The following is a few simple items used to field dress game:

- Sharp knife
- Disposable plastic gloves (*recommended*)
- Paper towels (*optional*)

Field dressing can be best accomplished with the game animal on its back. In this way, a hunter will have immediate access to internal organs. The following procedure is recommended for field dressing deer or other medium sized game:

- 1) Now is the time to put on the disposable gloves if you have them. Begin by making an incision just below the breast bone by pinching up on the hide and slowly cutting through until muscle tissue is observed under the hide. Slowly cut through the muscle until the interior body cavity becomes apparent. Make the cut large enough to insert two fingers into the body cavity. Some hunters make the first incision lower near the genital area. The advantage to starting near the breast bone is that there is less chance of cutting into the stomach or intestines as compared to other areas.
- 2) After the initial incision, position yourself so you are facing the rear of the deer (*Note: in this way you are cutting away from, and not toward, yourself*). You can place your feet at the sides of the deer in order to prevent it from rolling on its side. In essence, you are straddling the deer.
- 3) Insert the two fingers into the body cavity at the cut and slowly but carefully insert the knife blade (*edge up*) between your fingers (*Note: the goal here is to prevent the knife blade from puncturing the internal organs by keeping finger space between the knife and the internal organs. Fingers should be slightly apart and not pinching the knife blade*). Begin cutting in a straight line toward the reproductive organs and anus. If the knife is sharp, as it should be, it will glide along without the need to saw as you cut. Upon reaching the reproductive organs of the male deer, cut around them and remove them from the carcass. Remove the udders of the female in the same way.
- 4) After reaching the hip bone, open the skin all the way to the anus then cut around the anus opening so that it can be removed along with the internal organs (*Note: you may need to reposition yourself by facing toward the head of the deer to accomplish this*). At this point, the majority of the internal organs (*below the breastbone*) can be removed from the body cavity. This can be accomplished by gently pulling them loose (*Note: do so carefully in*

order to avoid rupturing internal organs). Some connective tissue attached to the body cavity may need to be cut in order to facilitate removal. Be careful not to rupture the bladder before removing it. The bladder will be noticeable within the pelvic area of the deer and will appear to be a fluid filled sack. You can avoid rupturing the bladder by first pinching it shut at the point closest to the carcass and carefully cut it loose. Then, in one motion, remove it from the carcass without spilling the contents into the body cavity.

- 5) Next, cut through the diaphragm to access the heart and lungs for removal as well (*Note: diaphragm may need to be trimmed from both edges just below the rib cage to access heart and lung area*).
- 6) Reach into the rib cage with the non-knife hand to the top of the body cavity near the neck and grasp the windpipe and other connective tissue. Then using the knife hand, slowly and gently reach up inside (*while keeping the knife edge away from the non-knife hand*) and slowly sever the windpipe and connective tissue just above the non-knife hand. After the cut, the lungs and heart can be removed easily.
- 7) At this point, any remaining blood and or excess tissue can be removed by flipping the deer over and or wiping the body cavity dry with paper towels. If internal organs are to be saved for consumption (*e.g., heart, liver, kidneys*) they should be placed separately in plastic bags for transport. (*Note: avoid rinsing the body cavity with water so as to avoid the build-up of bacteria*).
- 8) In warm weather conditions, prop open the carcass with a stick or place ice filled plastic bags in the body cavity to promote cooling during transport. Transport the carcass as soon as possible to some type of refrigeration. In cold weather, there may be no need for ice and or immediate transport as cooling will likely occur on its own. Cooling the carcass should always be of utmost concern to prevent spoilage and improve table quality of game meat.

Transporting

In recent years there has been some concern relative to transporting exposed dead animal carcasses on vehicles. Although common practice some 3 or 4 decades ago, the continual transition of humans from farm to urban living has fostered a general public that views displays of dead animals as distasteful. Hunters may well like to show the rewards of the hunt, and rightfully so, but we must remain aware and respectful of others if hunting is to be accepted by society as a whole.

Moreover, and in the hunter's favor, wild game should not be exposed to the elements during transport. This explains the gradual voluntary transition from vehicle hoods to pick-up beds and trailer-hitch carriers over the years. Rain and or snow mixed with road grime can promote bacteria build-up and contaminate edible

meat. To promote cooling, game animals should never be transported on vehicle hoods where engine heat can hinder the cooling process.

Instead, the animal carcass should be transported in such a way that it is both protected from the elements and away from any heat source. The back of a covered pick-up truck, tarp covered trailer-hitch carrier, or vehicle trunk, are far better ways to transport game animals. If outside temperatures are warm, placing bags of ice inside or around the body cavity can speed up cooling.

Preparing Wild Game for the Table:

Butchering

Some hunters prefer to take their deer to a local processor for butchering. By doing so, they forgo the work in favor of paying someone to do it. In situations where the hunter does not have time, an adequate location, or familiarity with the butchering process, a processor may be the logical option. However, with minimal knowledge and tools, a hunter can easily accomplish the task, save money, and be sure of eating their own deer.

There are many retailers today offering low cost butchering kits containing all the necessary items for the budget minded do-it-yourselfer. In fact, a deer sized animal can be adequately processed utilizing a tree or two, some rope, and a knife. Butchering can also be accomplished on the ground or on a large table by skinning and butchering one side at a time. Simply skin one side, remove all edible meat, flip the carcass over, skin and remove the meat again. Hanging lessens the chance of contaminating the carcass with ground debris, but that can be minimized by processing on a tarp or plastic sheeting.

Utilizing a sharp knife along with some basic knowledge about cuts of meat, a deer can be processed from field to freezer in a few hours or less. The critical need is a place to do the processing, and weather permitting, can be accomplished outside or inside a small shed or garage.

Although any knife can be used to butcher a deer, a boning knife is more suited to the job. Many butchering kits also contain skinning knives and a simple hand saw for cutting bones (*Note: cutting through bone is optional and is not necessary to adequately process a deer*).

Another relatively inexpensive tool critical to the process of butchering is a sharpening steel and no novice should be without one. The ability to maintain a sharp knife is important and sharpening steels are much easier to use than a sharpening stones.

The following simple steps will allow a hunter to butcher a deer for the minimum cost of a few hours utilizing the hanging method:

- Attach a piece of rope or cord to each of the rear legs of the deer by making an incision in the skin near the tarsal glands at the knee joint (*Note: Be very careful not to cut the large tendon because it provides support for hanging!*) Use a separate knife, or be sure to wash the boning knife, after cutting near the tarsal area, especially on male deer, to avoid tainting the meat when butchering (*Note: the tarsal area contains a nasty mix of urine and other secretions occurring during the breeding season which have the potential to alter the table quality of the meat*). Prop open the back legs of the deer by inserting a piece of rope in each leg at the tendon, make a knot, and tie each leg to one, or separately to two individual trees. If inside a garage, ceiling rafters can be utilized. Many hunters butcher a deer head-down positioning the pelvic area at head-height, or slightly above, to the person doing the butchering. In this way, the deer will be off the ground and not too high for the person butchering. If you can afford it, an inexpensive game gambrel holds the deer legs apart and can be easily attached overhead according to the manufactures instructions. Many gambrels also have a system of rope and pulleys that adds the convenience of being able to hoist and lower the deer carcass if needed. (*Note: a deer can be butchered head up or head down and is based on personal preference*).
- Some hunters prefer to age a deer prior to butchering in an attempt to improve tenderness and overall table quality of the meat. However, temperature conditions must be ideal for this process. Ideally, aging can be accomplished with the hide intact for 2-3 days as long as the temperature remains <32-38 degrees Fahrenheit. Otherwise, the risk of bacteria build-up and spoilage increases. Table quality of wild game meat is more a matter of proper handling and of preparation than of aging.
- Begin skinning at the rear legs by making a slit in the skin where the large tendon meets the leg muscle (*Note: do not cut the tendon!*). Work the skin off by carefully pulling and gently cutting where needed to facilitate removal. Work by taking turns skinning both legs simultaneously toward the pelvic area and then down the sides and back of the deer in the same process. The front legs will require some maneuvering of the knife to get around arm pits and elbows and down the neck. A warm freshly-killed deer is much easier to skin than a cold one and, in warm weather especially, skinning aids in the cooling process.
- The head can be removed as skinning reaches the deer's jawbone (*Note: if the deer is to be mounted, skinning should be done by a competent taxidermist in order to prevent damage to the cape*).

- Once the skin is removed, and the temperature above 40 degrees Fahrenheit, the deer should be butchered immediately, or cut into sections and placed in a cooler or large refrigerator overnight to prevent spoilage. If below 40 degrees Fahrenheit the deer may hang overnight but steps should be taken to prevent wild animals or insects from getting to the carcass if outside. Covering the carcass with a plastic tarp or placing it inside an unheated shed or garage is usually adequate for that purpose. Some hunters use commercial game bags or cheesecloth to cover game to protect the meat from insects during transport or while hanging. Sprinkling black pepper on the carcass has been said to keep insects off the meat until ready to process.
- Once skinned, meat can be selectively cut following the same charts used for cutting beef, or simply cut from the skeleton in chunks and either cubed for stews or ground into burger or sausage.
- Due to ongoing concerns for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD), it is always a good precaution to remove and discard lymph nodes and avoid brain and spinal tissue. Lymph nodes are located behind the front shoulder blades and in the hind legs (*Lymph nodes are grey to brown and oval in shape*). Hemal nodes are located in the neck near the trachea and inside the body cavity near the back bone (*Hemal nodes are pea shaped and maroon or black in color*). Hemal nodes can be found in fat tissue and are often discarded before they are ever seen (*Note: if nodes are cut with the knife while butchering, it is good idea to wash the knife before resuming the butchering process*). Since CWD is commonly found in brain and spinal tissue, removing meat from the skeleton without cutting bones decreases the chance of CWD transmission (*Note: to date, no deer has tested positive for CWD in North Carolina nor has CWD been found to be transmissible to humans*).
- Purchasing an inexpensive meat grinder is a good investment offering many options for the do-it-yourselfer. Some hunters prefer to mix varying amounts of domestic meats (*beef and or pork*) with venison burger or sausage as a way to add flavor or increase moisture content for cooking. Efforts attributed to keeping the carcass clean, cool and dry during transport and butchering go far toward providing nutritious high quality table fare.

Game Birds: Plucking vs. Skinning

Whether to skin or pluck game birds depends on the individual hunter's preference. Skinning a bird is much easier than dealing with having to remove feathers. For someone planning to grind or cube the meat, skinning is a good option. On the other hand, if the intention is to roast or fry the bird whole or simply separate into parts, leaving the skin on retains moisture.

Skinning game birds can be easily accomplished by making an incision starting at the breast bone and peeling the skin off the breast ending at the legs and wings. In this way, the breast, legs, and wings can be utilized separately or ground together.

Plucking, on the other hand, typically sets the stage for roasting or deep frying. Birds can be either dry plucked or scalded first then plucked. Scalding facilitates easier feather removal and less feathers floating in the air. Some hunters also prefer to singe the skin slightly after plucking to aid in removal of small pin feathers associated with dry plucked birds.

Lastly, some hunters field dress birds (*remove internal organs*) while in the field while others wait until after the hunt to do so.

Freezing/Storing

When it comes time to cook game, it is far easier and more appetizing if the meat has been properly cared for before freezing. All meat prepped for freezing should be cleaned and trimmed of fat and excess connective tissue. Fat left on game meat, especially venison, turns rancid in the freezer over time and can reduce the table quality of the meat.

All damaged meat near and around the wound channel should not be consumed. Recent research has shown that badly bruised and bloodshot meat may contain trace amounts of lead associated with the fragmentation of high speed rifle bullets. Therefore, in an effort to avoid ingesting lead, all damaged meat should be removed and discarded. This can be accomplished by cutting away all bruised and bloodshot meat at the wound channel and surrounding areas. Making well placed shots on game animals minimizes damage to edible meat.

It is also a good idea to freeze game meat in meal-sized portions. Doing so prevents the need to cook more than can be consumed in short periods. Wild game should be frozen using heavy duty freezer paper, aluminum foil, or freezer bags. When wrapping, try to remove as much air as possible to prevent freezer burn and mark packages so older ones can be consumed first. Some manufacturers offer reasonably priced vacuum sealing devices that keep frozen meat fresh for longer periods than simple wrapping or bagging.

Ideally, utilizing typical wrapping or bagging, wild game can remain frozen in a deep freezer (*0 degrees Fahrenheit*) for 8-10 months or longer without sacrificing table quality. All meat should be thawed in the refrigerator and not on the kitchen counter because slow thawing aids in tenderizing the meat. Once thawed, it is wise to cook the meat within 2-3 days or table quality may suffer. (*Note: be sure to check rules and regulations in the state you plan to hunt concerning bag limits, season limits, and consumptive use terms*).

Cooking/Canning/Smoking/Dehydrating:

Cooking

Cooking wild game properly will add to its palatability and enjoyment. Wild game, unlike domestic meats, is leaner and can become dry and tough if overcooked. For those preferring meat well done, game meat can become very dry if not basted or marinated prior to cooking. Crock pots are excellent for tenderizing very lean, low fat game meats as compared to simple grilling or pan frying. As a general rule, a slow low-temperature cook is better than a fast high-heat grilling when preparing game meats. The exception is in the case where medium rare is preferred over well done. Medium rare can be accomplished with high heat and a fast cook but it is important that the internal temperature is at least 160-170 degrees Fahrenheit in order to prevent food-borne illnesses.

Some wild game meat should never be eaten rare or medium rare, especially black bear and feral swine, due to the chance of contracting the intestinal parasitic infection known as trichinosis. Black bear and feral swine meat should always be cooked well done containing no traces of pink remaining in the meat before consuming.

There is a great deal of wild game cook books as well as countless recipes available in various sporting magazines and hunting related websites. Eating wild game meat that you have harvested yourself is a rewarding accomplishment that contributes to both a healthy diet and organic lifestyle. Moreover it's delicious!

Canning

Proper preparation and handling is important for preventing food-borne illnesses when canning meats. Game meat intended for canning should be of good quality, cool (*not frozen*), and trimmed of any fat or connective tissue. Game meat, not unlike domestic beef and poultry, are low-acid foods and therefore should always be processed in a high temperature pressure canner and not in a water bath canner. The higher heat generated from pressure canning kills the food spoiling bacteria that can cause illness and or food poisoning.

Canning is an excellent way to preserve game meat for long-term storage (*up to 18 months*) and for providing quick ready-to-eat meals. The following NC State Extension website provides information about various preparation methods for cooking and canning meats.

<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fcs/Preservation/>

Smoking and Dehydrating

Smoking and dehydrating (*drying*) of game meat is an age old process that is still widely used today for preserving meats. Game meat meant for smoking or dehydrating should be lean and free of all fat and connective tissue.

Smoking meat is accomplished with the aid of a wood fire utilizing hardwoods like hickory, oak, maple, apple, or chokecherry whereas dehydrating can be accomplished with the aid of a kitchen oven or commercial dehydrator. The number one concern is temperature both for the removal of moisture and proper cooking. Smoked meat should reach an internal temperature of at least 165 degrees Fahrenheit in order to kill any bacteria. Ideally, smoked or dehydrated meat should have a texture that is dry (*not moist*) and should bend but not break as break is an indicator of over drying. Meats meant for jerky are usually maintained for several days at a temperature of 38 degrees Fahrenheit while soaking in marinating brine prior to smoking. The following NC State Extension website provides information about proper preparation, handling, drying and smoking meats.

<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fcs/Preservation/>

Wild Game Recipes

One of many satisfying aspects of hunting is the reward of excellent table fare a hunter procured for themselves. Many people in North Carolina, both hunters and non-hunters alike, are interested in living a healthy lifestyle which may include consuming organically-grown food. Locally grown is becoming an increasingly popular way to enjoy fresh fruit and vegetables and backyard gardens are seeing a resurgence. One of the driving forces for the “going organic” movement is related to concerns about chemicals and pesticides associated with mass production of food.

Therefore, what could be more organic and healthy than hunting for meat rather than buying it in the grocery store? Wild game meat is much leaner and healthier than many types of domestic meats and contributes overall to a healthy diet. Meat from hunting does not go through the chemical-related processes of grocery-store domestic meats. Hunting and eating wild game provides a lean, free-range protein product similar to that of other organic foods. Moreover, for those who hunt, fresh meat procured through hunting embodies a do-it-yourself pride and satisfaction similar to that of growing your own vegetable garden.

The following NC State Extension website offers a variety of wild game recipes <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/martin/wildrecipes/>

Care of Self and Equipment

Hunting is a very natural and rewarding activity that provides both healthy eating and exercise as well. Some forms of hunting require minimal physical activity while others can be quite strenuous. A squirrel hunt in the woodlot behind the home requires little physical activity other than a simple walk in the woods. Conversely, a hunt requiring long distance walking and packing or dragging out big game animals from steep and rugged terrain can be very taxing. A strenuous hunt for a normally inactive and or overweight person could result in a very miserable day, or worse.

Staying fit is the key to enjoying the hunt no matter what age a hunter is, terrain features encountered or game hunted. Staying fit can be accomplished by simply eating healthy, maintaining proper body weight, and getting regular exercise. A simple exercise routine including walking and light weight training several times per week can make spending time in the outdoors enjoyable and safe. Sedentary or older folks should always seek the advice and guidance of their doctor before beginning any exercise routine.

Wearing proper fitting clothing and footwear that protect a hunter from the elements also contribute to a more enjoyable hunt. Many forms of hunting require that a hunter remain still and quiet for long periods. Hunters cannot remain still and quiet if they are shivering from wet and cold. Worse yet, improper clothing and footwear can contribute to becoming hypothermic which can be deadly.

It is also very important to stay hydrated and nourished while hunting, especially if a hunter plans on being out for the entire day. Having ample water is important, especially in warm temperatures or in places where water is not readily available. The hunt will also be more enjoyable if it begins with a good breakfast and maintained throughout the day with high energy foods like whole grains, fruits, granola and nuts.

Safety should always be a top priority when hunting especially handling firearms and using tree stands. Hunters need always remember to point the muzzle in a safe direction (*firearms safety rule # 1*) and always wear a full-body harness while tree stand hunting. Although there are other safety rules, the two mentioned can go a long way toward preventing severe or fatal injuries.

A thorough checking of oneself after the hunt is also good practice. Simple scrapes, cuts, and abrasions should be treated promptly to prevent infection. Removal of insects and ticks helps to avoid or lessen the chance of infectious diseases. If hunting with dogs, they should be inspected and treated as necessary. Hunting dogs become family members; not merely hunting companions. Hunting dogs, not unlike their owner, should receive regular exercise both pre and post-season and fed a proper diet toward maintaining suitable health and weight. Seeking the advice and services of a good Veterinarian is a great way to care for

your valued hunting companion. Not unlike most things in life, when the time to act has come, the time to prepare has past. Preseason planning will contribute to an enjoyable and safe hunting season.

Care of Equipment

Inspecting equipment prior to the season, maintaining it during the season, and preparing it for storage afterwards is a hunter's responsibility. Firearms, bows and arrows will only be reliable and functional if they are properly cared for. This includes cleaning firearms after shooting to remove fouling from the barrel and action, as well as regular maintenance and lubrication to avoid malfunctions and prevent rusting.

Tree stands including hang-on, climbers, and ladders should never be used without first given a thorough pre-season inspection. This becomes more critical for tree stands remaining outdoors permanently, especially those made of wood. Rust and rotting due to exposure and the elements can permanently damage tree stands creating a potential safety hazard if not inspected on a regular basis.

Hunting clothing and footwear can easily be maintained by keeping it clean and dry. Storing wet or damp clothing or footwear encourages damage from mold and mildew. Washing hunting clothing in non-scent detergents and either line-drying, or in a dryer at low settings, will contribute to preserving your investment for many years. A great way to both manage and protect your hunting equipment is to create an inventory and maintenance list for pre and post-season inspection. In this way, there is less chance that something may be overlooked, lost, unsafe, or unprotected.

Hunting Trip Plan:

Whether hunting alone, or with others, it is a good idea to leave a hunting trip plan. A hunting trip plan left with a family member or friend can provide valuable information to emergency personnel in case a hunter does not arrive during the time specified. A simple hunting trip plan would provide the following:

- 1) Hunters name
- 2) Name of companions (if any)
- 3) Date and time of departure
- 4) Departure and return route
- 5) Destination (if remote area leave detailed map)
- 6) Plan B alternative destination
- 7) Expected date and or time of return
- 8) Vehicle make/model/color/license plate #
- 9) Cell phone #
- 10) Emergency contacts