Deer Hunting & Cleaning

By: Buckshot

I have been asked a few times to write something about deer hunting. I have been hunting since I was 6 and have bagged a lot of different game. The only thing I never really hunted a lot was ducks. I have jumped shot duck and hunted geese in cornfields, but that is about all my duck hunting experience. I have hunted caribou in Alaska, elk in Idaho, black bear in Michigan and Feral pigs in Texas. Besides, small game, the #1 large game animal I have hunted is the whitetail deer. In a couple of years I have logged over 80 days in the field deer hunting. I have hunted deer every way you can think of, from bows to guns to muzzle loaders. I have sat waiting for them, tracked them down and slowly walked through the brush for them. So, what I have to say is what I have learned over the years.

First, define the type of hunting you want to do. I break deer down into three categories

1. Deer hunting ~ this is does and small bucks
2. Meat hunting for legal deer
3. Trophy deer hunting.

Just like people, there are no hard and fast rules. What I have to say works for me, if you disagree, then do it your way.

For any animal you want to hunt, you should study them to find what makes them tick. All animals need food, shelter, and water to survive. Deer are nocturnal animals, meaning they are active during the night and sleep during the day. Deer breed in the fall and this is called the rut. Does come into heat once for 24 hours and have to be bred in that time. This is when bucks forget all their common sense and chase that doe in heat until they successfully breed with her. They must also fight off all other bucks in this time frame until the doe allows him to mate her. Where you are in the country, defines when the rut takes place. Here in the U. P. of Michigan, the peak of the rut is from Oct. 25 to Nov. 7, and I heard that the peak in Arizona is in Jan.

Where you are and what you want from your deer hunting defines how you will hunt. Say you want to just hunt deer with a bow. Set up between the feeding area and the bedding area along a trail. How fast your bow is and what type of arrow you use will determine your range. If your bow is under 210 fps you will want to be under 20 yards, preferably at about 15 yards. I can hit an apple at 35 yards. Why so close, you may ask? Because this is about successful deer hunting. Don't worry, once you get good you will get real close. I have been almost close enough to touch some.

Also, keep in mind that in the morning the air is warming and scent tends to be lifted up hill in a hollow, while in the afternoon the air is cooling down, so scent tends to drop down from a ridge. (Thanks Beavertrapper1 for the reminder).

If you are shooting from a tree stand, the important thing to remember is to have the stand facing away from where you think the deer will be coming. The reason behind this is, as the deer approaches he may see something wrong with that big blob in the tree that was not there last night or you may think nothing is around and scratch or shift your weight or something to tip off the deer to your presence. You also want the deer to head past you if you don't want to shoot the first one by, like a doe with two fawns, let them pass. Then the bucks know the area is clear to walk on out.

Now I am going to put a theory I have out on deer. The story I have heard a numbers of times is that the buck sent out the fawn and then the doe before he came out.

My theory is, bull deer can't talk, so they have no real plan. I feel it is just because bucks are most often shot at that they learn to wait to come out last. The fawn is like a teenager, impatient and in a hurry, so naturally it will be the first one out. The doe waits and then follows the fawn. The buck, seeing the doe made it out and appears safe, will then come out. Now, this is a mature buck. I have seen spikes and forkhorns rush out first because they have not learned to beware yet. The average 8 point buck in Michigan has been shot at 8 times in his life. This is my point, we teach the large bucks to be super cautions.

To cure this, do it right the first time. If you are bow hunting make sure you practice like you hunt. If you are shooting out of a tree stand, you should measure the height off the ground of your stand and have your practice stand up at the same height. I like my stand 15-20 feet off the ground and 15 yards from the trail. Practice, practice, practice until it becomes second nature to make the shot. When you practice shooting, shoot at a deer target. This forces you to aim behind the front shoulder.

What are the deer defenses ? First is their incredibly great hearing. Those large ears have developed over the years to protect the deer by hearing a tiny rustle of leaves, as the wolf or coyote stalks the deer. So, any little noise you make that is not natural (metal clank, etc.) warns the deer to find a safer trail. Their nose is the next defense. Many myths about deer only traveling into the wind has been passed down through the years. This is a myth because deer are moving for food or water or mating, so if the wind is wrong for the whole night, will the deer stay in bed and starve ? Of course not, the deer is going to go feed regardless of what the wind is doing. But, having watched 1000's of deer over the years, they walk, stop, look, listen and smell every few steps. So, pay attention to the wind. I use Bio shield myself it sells for $5.95 for 4 ounces. Spray it on your clothes and boots and your done. A 4 oz bottle will last a long time, -- for several hunting trips. Another way is, buy the surplus chemical suits. The suit is lined with charcoal that absorbs your odor. Sight is the next one and it is an easy one to defeat. Wash your outer garments in a UV stopper wash. The new color brighteners in detergent help to show the deer where you are. So wash what the deer is going see in these special detergents.

Deer travel the woods everyday. They survive by noticing little changes, like a large blob in a tree (yes deer do look up), a new blind or anything that is different. So, try to set up in a clump of small trees or a large pine tree. Cut a shooting lane or two or three. This is just removing any brush from between your stand to where you want to shoot the deer. It is best to do this a month

or more in advance. If you can't, then try to find a spot with natural shooting lanes. Clear the ground clutter away too, so if you have to stand or move there will be no noise.

When the deer approaches, sometimes you will hear them from 100 yards away before you see them. Now, don't move, your heart will start racing, your breathing will increase, you will hear your pulse in your ears. All this is normal, so calm down, remind yourself not to look at the whole deer, but look only at the spot you are shooting at. This is when you must decide (as soon as you are sure it is a deer) if you want to shoot this deer. If you are bow hunting or gun hunting it does not matter, your whole concentration should be on that one spot you want your bullet/arrow to hit. If you can see the whole deer, you will miss the whole deer.

First we will deal with a bow hunter. After you shoot, 99% of the time the deer will run off like you never touched it. Stay put, don't make any noise, watch as long as you can as the deer runs off. Mark the spot in your head where you last saw the deer; like he ran own the trail next to the pine tree that has a funny bend or something that you can pick out later. Force yourself to stay still. A lot of times the deer will only run 40-60 yards and stop to listen for pursuers. If there are no pursuers, the deer may lay down and bleed to death right there.

If you spook it now, you will be tracking that deer for a long time. So don't move, wait 30 minutes. Walk up to the place you shot, look for blood and hair, a lot of times the arrow will have zipped through the deer and be laying there covered with blood and hair. Once you have blood, start tracking slowly. When a deer bolts off after being hit, sometimes there isn't any blood for 30-100 yards. Relax, go to the spot you last saw the deer. Mark this spot with a piece of toilet paper or something so you have a mark to come back to. Now, slowly follow the trail, if you are alone, mark the blood spot with a piece of toilet paper. If someone is with you, have him/her stand at the last blood spot as you find the next one, then the person moves up to the next one, and so on until you find the deer. The reason behind this is that a deer can go a mile with a bow hit, so slowly track and mark the blood spot because the deer will do some tricks to try and lose you.

When you lose the blood trail, make half circles until you find the next blood spot. THIS is where it is vital to have the last blood spot marked so you can come back and start all over.

When deer are going to lay down they sometimes make a large jump to one side and crawl under something, watching the back trail. I have found many deer curled up under a small pine, dead.

A lantern at night for tracking is the best to see those little blood spots with. The toilet paper is really good at night because you now have a marked trail right back to your hunting blind/stand. It is also a good idea to take a compass reading before you start tracking and every half hour you track so you have an idea on how to get out.

Always be ready to shoot as you track. Once in a while you will catch up to the deer and see it stand up from where it was laying down. A quick, well placed follow up shot can put the deer down.

Remember, the second you hit that deer you took responsibility to give that animal a quick humane death. If it was a poorly placed shot, it is your job to finish the deer off so it doesn't suffer.

What do you do if you lose the trail at night ? I mark the spot. If the temp is 45 degrees or colder that night, the deer will still be good the next day. Go home, get a good night's sleep, then just follow the toilet paper back to the place you lost the trail. Once it is daylight, you can slowly do half circles around the last spot looking for the dead deer. Sometimes, a wounded deer will climb into a creek, pond, river or lake. The water will reopen the wound and the deer can bleed to death and die right in the water, so if there is water, around look for a brown clump laying in the water.

Now, gun hunting is different. Sometimes you shoot and the deer falls over dead, other times they run off like they have never been hit and sometimes you knock them down and they get back up. So, what to do anytime you shoot: Be ready for a follow up shot. But remember, 90% of all deer are killed with the first shot. If you are new, hunting with a semi-auto, you tend to think "I can shoot 3 - 4 more times." Wrong thinking. Your whole concentration should be on placing that first shot in the heart - lung area.

Now, if you knock the deer down and he gets back up, quickly place another follow up shot in him. If he runs off, you can try for a follow up shot. I have done this many times and it works for me. If I shoot a deer and he runs off, I run over and get directly behind him as he is now running straight away from me. I place my sight on the left side of his neck so I am aiming at the skin on the far left and jerk the trigger. This works because I am right handed and when I jerk the trigger it brings the bullet to the right and nails the deer perfectly centered in the neck. This breaks the deer's neck and puts it down for the count.

Again the same tracking technique is used. Remember, you may not see blood for 30-100 yards. I have heard of a heart shot deer bleeding internally, so the hunter only saw 1 spot of blood every 20 yards. Then 400 yards later, finding the deer dead. This isn't TV, when you shoot the deer, it gets knocked back about 12 feet. Just be careful when you approach a downed animal, approach from the backside away from the sharp hooves. Check the eyes, if they are closed the deer is still alive, you can place one shot at the base of neck just below the head (don't do this on a trophy you want to mount) If the eye is open place the gun barrel up to the eye and touch it. Once it's dead you will then have to gut the deer.

Gutting the deer is a simple technique, just remove the heart, lungs, guts. Tip the deer over on his back, I place one leg on each side of my legs so that I am standing in between. You gut a deer with about 1 inch of a knife. So, carefully open the deer up from the pelvis to the rib cage. All you are cutting is the skin and membrane that covers the guts.

Once you have the guts exposed there is a membrane that separates the guts from the heart and lungs. Cut around this membrane and reach way up and cut the wind pipe. Holding the wind pipe, you can now pull all the guts out.

Next step is to cut out the anus. From behind the deer, cut all around. Then from the inside, pull the tube out. Sometimes this is difficult and you have to cut around the tube more. Just take your time. Be really careful around the bladder, you don't want to puncture it and contaminate the meat.

With the guts removed, haul the deer up a small incline with the head facing up and allow the deer to bleed out. If the temperature is above 45 degrees F, you have to butcher the deer. If it is legal in your state, skin the deer right away. It is much easier.

I will do a gutting deer and butchering video this fall. Remember, my Muskrat lure poured into a 35 mm film canister, stuffed with cotton balls, will bring the deer in. Just remember, place the lid back on and take it home with you every night. The reason for this is once the deer find out they can't eat it, they will not come back for a second look.