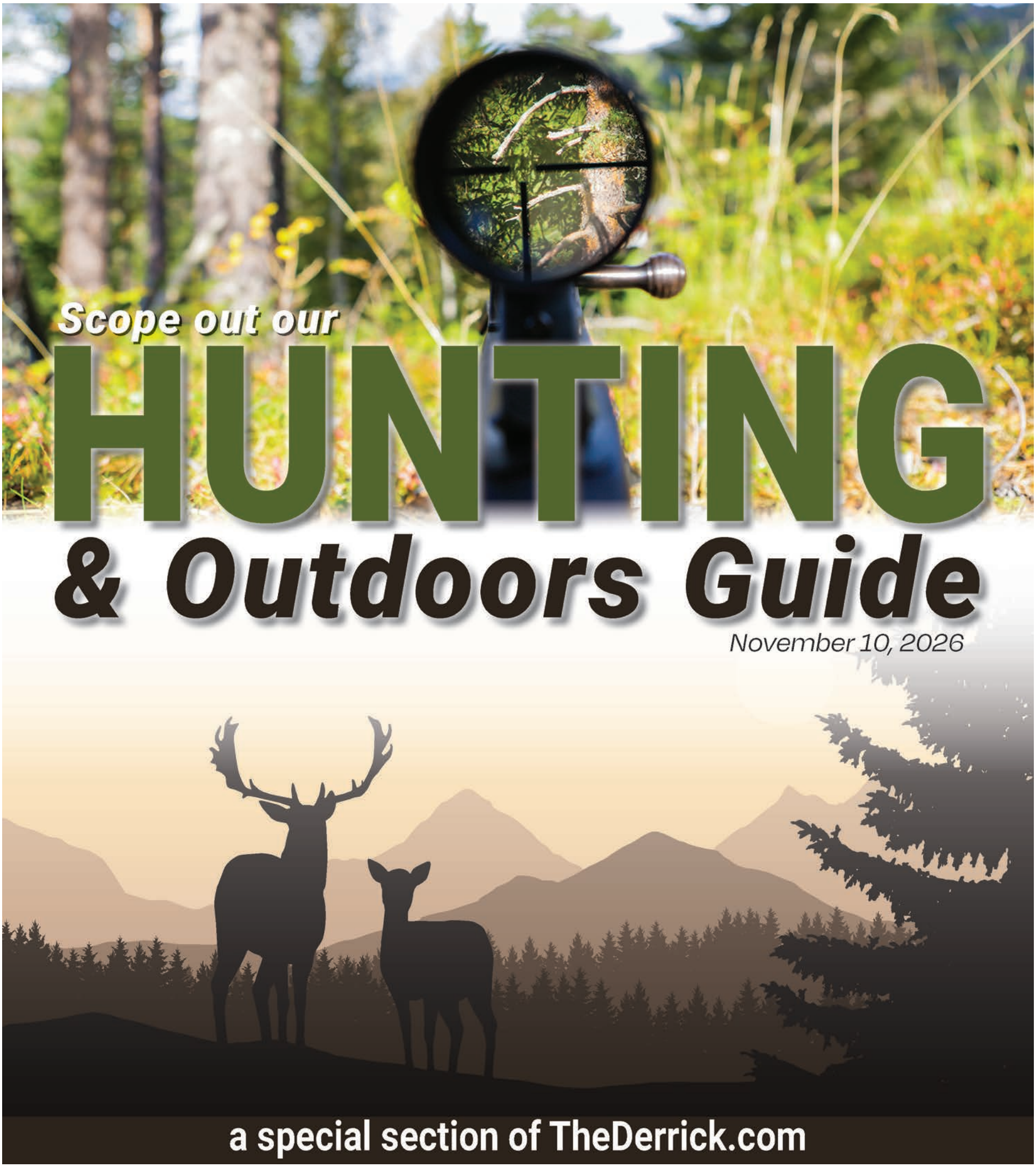


Scope out our

HUNTING & Outdoors Guide

November 10, 2026

a special section of TheDerrick.com

Sunday hunting expands in Pa.

6 changes for the 2026-27 season

(TNS) Lancaster — Pennsylvania's 2026-27 hunting season unofficially kicked off Sept. 1 with the opening of resident Canada goose and dove seasons.

The new hunting year actually starts every July 1 in Pennsylvania, but hunters generally consider the new season to start once goose and dove hunters hit the fields on Sept. 1.

Lancaster County, with its vast network of farm fields, streams, rivers and ponds, is a prime destination for hunting both bird species, so you might have heard some shooting the past several days since the seasons opened.

There are quite a few changes to Pennsylvania's hunting seasons this year, so let's take a look at what's new.

Sunday hunting

This is it.

This is the year when Sunday finally is considered like any other day of the week when it comes to hunting in Pennsylvania.

For nearly every species.

Pennsylvania hunters got their first taste of general Sunday hunting in 2020, when state law allowed the Game Commission to open general hunting on three Sundays per year.

Then last year, Gov. Josh Shapiro signed into law a bill that revoked the general ban on Sunday hunting in the state that had stood for decades.

Because that bill was signed late in the summer after hunting seasons had already been set, the door to Sunday hunting was only opened about halfway.

General Sunday hunting for most species was allowed through the end of 2025 only.

For the 2026-27 hunting year, however, every Sunday during nearly every open season is open for hunting just like any other day of the week.

The lone exception to this rule is waterfowl hunting.

Sunday is still a closed hunting day for ducks and geese.

This exception was made to benefit waterfowl hunters, actually.

Waterfowl hunting is regulated by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

Under USFWS rules, states that do not allow Sunday hunting are permitted to extend their seasons later into the year than states where Sunday hunting is allowed as sort of compensation for the Sunday closures.

Hunting later usually is better for waterfowling, since that is likely to give more ducks and geese time to migrate South through Pennsylvania.

One spring turkey

One negative byproduct of expanded Sunday hunting is the elimination this year of the second spring turkey tag.

From 2008 through last year, Pennsylvania spring turkey hunters were allowed to buy a second spring gobbler tag in addition to the one that comes with every general hunting license.

That tag allowed them to take a second bird if they wanted.

With the Spring 2027 turkey season here scheduled for May 1-31, and Sundays opened to hunting, five Sundays will be added to the season, as compared to prior years.

With turkey populations unsettled in many parts of the state, the Game Commission was concerned about those additional weekend hunting days, coupled with hunters carrying two turkey tags, accounting for an unwanted increase in turkey harvest.

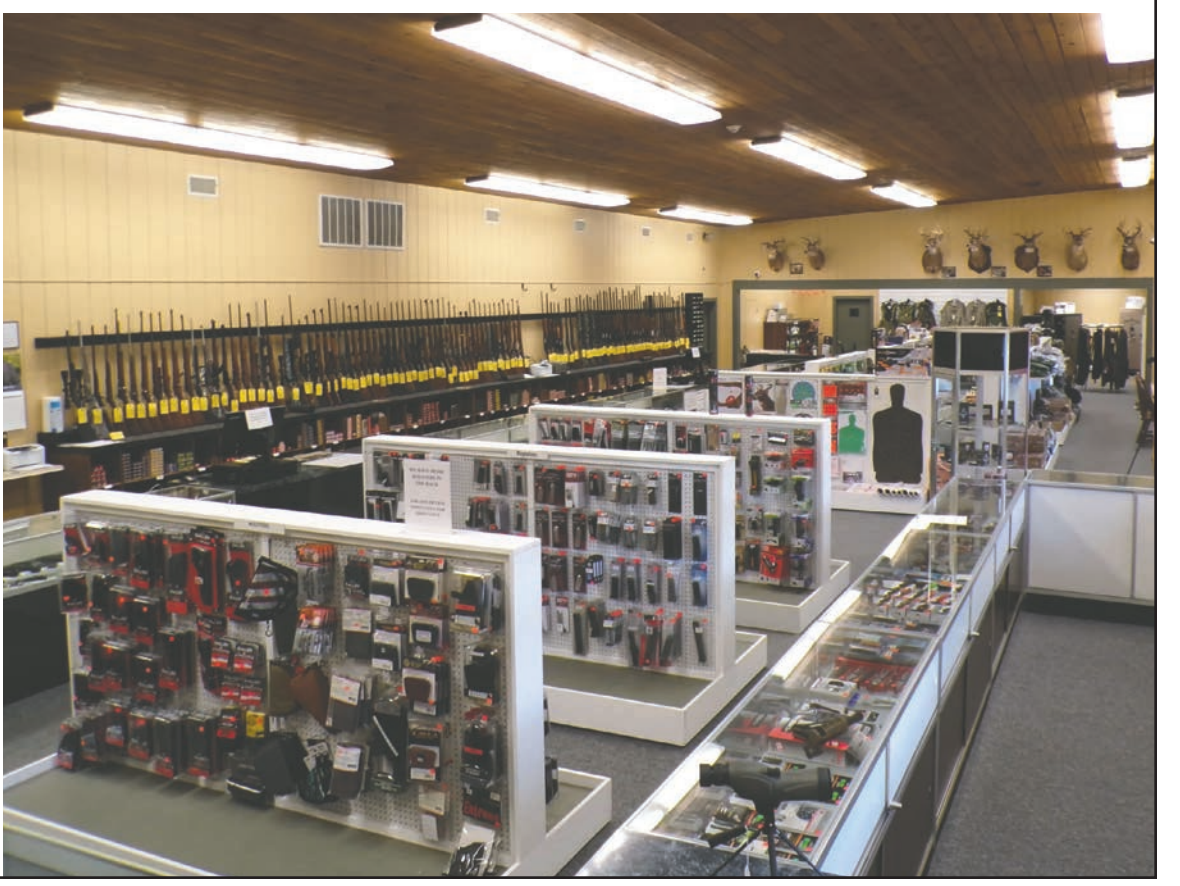
So the agency's biologists recommended eliminating the second tag to remove that potential impact.

More geese allowed

When it comes to managing Canada geese in Pennsylvania, the state is divided into two zones — the Resident Population Zone, which covers most of the state, and the Atlantic Population Zone, which covers the southeast corner, including most of Lancaster County.

Daily bag limits for geese in the RP zone have been liberal for years in recognition of the high numbers of non-migratory Canadas found across the state.

See **SUNDAY,** Page 4

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Hunting season safety tips

Hunting is a popular pastime across North America. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) reports there were 14.4 million hunters across the United States in 2022, noting those hunters spent a total of $42.5 billion. According to Statistics Canada, Canadians spent $678.6 million in the second quarter of 2023 on hunting, fishing and camping equipment. The B.C. Wildlife Federation found there were 1.27 million hunters in Canada in 2019.

Hunting is a popular way to enjoy the outdoors and is a carefully monitored activity that places strict limits on game collected. Safety protocols must be followed when hunting. The following guidelines can help hunters and non-hunters remain safe.

Ensure you can be seen

Visibility is essential during hunting season. Wearing blaze orange can help minimize the chances of anyone being mistaken for game animals. Deer are not color-blind, but they lack the ability to distinguish colors like red and orange from green and brown, says the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. Wearing blaze orange will not make hunters stand out to deer, but it can make them visible to other hunters.

Be safe in tree stands

Perching above the landscape can give hunters a clear view of game below. Permanent tree stands are more likely to deteriorate over time due to the weather; hunters should use temporary tree stands only for the season. Falls tend to be the most common cause of injuries, notes the Mayo Clinic Health Systems. Hunters should pay attention to their surroundings to avoid being startled by animals while in tree stands. Also, checking equipment and using safety belts can help prevent falls. The average fall from a tree stand is 15 feet.

Acknowledge your own physical limitations

Activities inherent to hunting, which include walking over rough terrain, carrying and shooting a rifle and dragging an animal carcass push the body to work harder. This may increase the risk of heart attack in people unaccustomed to strenuous exercise. Take frequent breaks, and hunters may want to go out in pairs so that someone can call for help or administer first aid or CPR, if necessary.

See **SAFETY,** Page 5

Sunday

Continued from Page 2

The AP zone is set aside from the rest of Pennsylvania because it is where the bulk of the Atlantic Population of migratory Canadas pass through the state as they migrate South each fall.

That migratory population tends to be more volatile than the resident flock, and so hunting season lengths and bag limits fluctuate more in the AP zone.

For this hunting year, the daily bag limit on geese in the AP zone will climb from one bird per day to three, and the season will run from Nov. 21-27 and Dec. 4-Jan. 18.

That's an increase in both hunting days and the daily limit as a result of a strong population of migratory Atlantic Population geese.

More small game hunting

Small game hunting seasons for squirrels, ruffed grouse, rabbits, pheasants, quail and groundhogs will remain open during the firearms deer season.

In the past, hunting seasons for all these animals stopped during deer season.

Game Commission officials last year said the move to keep small game animals in season for deer hunters was made simply to offer the opportunity to take more and different game while hunters are already afield anyway.

Antlerless licenses

It's open season on antlerless deer licenses.

Hunters in most Wildlife Management Units can now buy as many as they need to get to a personal limit of six.

Hunters who hold the personal limit of tags can buy more tags wherever they are available as they harvest deer and fill the tags they currently hold.

The only restriction is they can never hold more tags than the personal limit of six or 15.

Pennsylvania's archery deer season opened Sept. 19 in WMUs 5C, 5D and 2B.

In the rest of the state, the season opened Oct. 3.





Safety

Continued from Page 4

Dress accordingly

In addition to wearing blaze orange, hunters should be dressed for the weather to avoid frostbite and hypothermia. Layering clothing can be helpful, as layers can be taken off or added to stay comfortable.

Be sure of your target

The FWS advises certifying a target before taking a shot. This can help ensure people, pets or other animals are not in the line of fire.

Recognize hunting seasons and lands

Non-hunters must practice safety during hunting season as well, even if they are not participating. FWS advises nature lovers to learn where and when hunting is taking place and plan recreational activities based on this information. Staying out of designated hunting areas is essential. It's also important for non-hunters to choose bright clothing to be visible when in the woods. A brightly colored bandana or piece of fabric tied around a dog's neck will help to protect the animal. Sticking to trails also improves the safety of the public and will reduce the likelihood of entering designated hunting areas.

Treat every firearm as if it is loaded

Hunters should treat every firearm as if it is loaded. The muzzle should be pointed in a safe direction, and the only time a finger should be on the trigger is when one is ready to shoot. Never assume a firearm is unloaded.

Fall is prime season for hunting, and hunters and non-hunters can benefit from a refresher course in hunting safety.







Hunting Season & Bag Limits

BIG GAME

Deer – Archery (statewide):
Nov. 10–20, Dec. 26–Jan. 24 2027
1 antlered per license year; 1 antlerless with valid tag

Deer – Regular Firearms:
Nov. 28–Dec. 13
1 antlered per license year; 1 antlerless per valid tag

Deer – Flintlock:
Dec. 26–Jan. 24, 2027
1 antlered per license year; 1 antlerless with general license tag or valid antlerless tag

Black Bear – Regular Firearms:
Nov. 21–24
1 per license year

Turkey (Fall – Male or Female):
(WMUs 1A, 2G, 3A, 4A, 4B, 4D)
Oct. 31-Nov. 15; *1 per season*
(WMUs 2A, 2F, 3B, 3C)
Oct. 31-Nov. 15; Nov. 25-27; *1 per season*
(WMUs 2B, 2C, 2D, 2E)
Oct. 31-Nov. 20; Nov. 25-27; *1 per season*

Small game

Squirrel (red, gray, black, fox combined):
Nov. 10–Dec. 24; Dec. 26–Feb. 28; *Daily: 6 | Season limit: 18*

Ruffed Grouse:
Nov. 10–Dec. 24; *Daily: 2 | Season limit: 6*

Cottontail Rabbit:
Nov. 10–Dec. 24; Dec. 26–Feb. 28; *Daily: 4 | Season limit: 12*

Ring-necked Pheasant:
Nov. 10–Dec. 24; Dec. 26–Feb. 28; *Daily: 2 | Season limit: 6*

Bobwhite Quail:
Nov. 10–Dec. 24; Dec. 26–March 31; *No limit*

Snowshoe / Varying Hare:
Dec. 26–3; *Daily: 1 | Season limit: 3*

Woodchuck (Groundhog):
Nov. 10–Dec. 24; Dec. 26–June 30; *No limit*

Crow:
Nov. 10–March 21; Thurs.–Sun. only; *No limit*

Furbearers (hunting)

Coyote:
Year-round; *No limit*

Opossum:
Year-round, subject to firearms deer restrictions; *No limit*

Striped Skunk:
Year-round, subject to firearms deer restrictions; *No limit*

Weasel:
Year-round, subject to firearms deer restrictions; *No limit*

Fox:
Nov. 10–Feb. 21; *No limit*

Raccoon:
Nov. 10–Feb. 21; *No limit*

Bobcat: (designated WMUs)
Jan. 9–Feb. 3; *1 per license year*

Porcupine:
Nov. 10–27; Dec. 14–24; Dec. 26–Jan. 31; *Daily: 3 | Season limit: 10*







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Cracks in your scent control plan deer can smell

A deer's sense of smell is its primary line of defense, so success on a deer hunt often means keeping a low odor profile while deer are nearby. Was it luck, or did you have a scent-control plan?

Many hunters use scent-control measures, but those who consistently bring home deer rely on multiple methods to limit their odor every time they hunt. This means developing habits rather than relying on one commercial product or tactic. It's especially important for archery and traditional firearm hunters who need to get closer to their targets.

While no single action completely blocks human scent, experienced hunters often develop effective routines through years of trial and error.

Here are 11 scent-control rules I try not to break. Based on nearly 40 years of field experience, college degrees in deer biology and advice from fellow hunters, these are strategies that have helped me harvest plenty of deer. Some may already be part of your routine, but others might surprise you.



DON'T wear hunting clothes while driving to hunt

I hunt mostly private land, with some properties requiring a 20-minute drive. Even for short trips, I prefer traveling in everyday clothes and getting dressed at the tailgate with the vehicle turned off to avoid exhaust odors.

If it's extremely cold, I'll wear my underlayers from home but save the outer clothing for the field. Trucks collect everyday smells from food, pets and passengers, and there's no reason to carry those odors into the woods.

DON'T make a pit stop

It's well-known that pumping gas before hunting is a bad idea. Its strong odor can cling to your hands and fingers, even after washing. I take that a step further by saving all non-hunting errands for after the hunt.

Even a quick trip into a grocery or hardware store can expose you to unfamiliar odors. My wife can often tell hours later if I've been inside a particular convenience store just by my scent. If she can smell it, deer certainly can, too.

DON'T store clothes where they can absorb off-putting odor

I keep my hunting clothes in dedicated containers to minimize exposure to unnatural odors. Purpose-built storage bags work well, but standard rubber storage bins are another option. I allow containers to air out before use, sometimes leaving them outdoors for months.

You can also add evergreen branches, crushed acorns, wild herbs or forest-floor leaf litter to a mesh bag with your gear during the season. My bins stay in the basement, with a separate bag for transporting clothes. Some hunters use cedar-lined closets or even bury their clothes to absorb the smell of dirt. The goal is to keep human-related odors away.

DON'T use scented detergent or body wash

Wash camouflage outer layers with scent-free detergent before and occasionally during the season, as well as before storing them for the year. I wash base layers and clothing worn against my skin after every hunt, but jackets and vests can usually go several hunts between washes. If field-dressing a deer doesn't leave a mess, I sometimes leave my outerwear unwashed since that natural odor may help on the next hunt.

Be cautious of laundry products containing UV brighteners, such as stilbene or biphenyl derivatives, which can affect what deer see. Always read labels and consider products specifically designed for hunters.

Body odor matters, too. Use scent-free soap or body wash when showering a few hours before hunting. I no longer feel the need to shower immediately before heading out unless I've been sweating. If I'm clean, I'm ready to hunt.

DON'T forget scent control for hunting accessories

Washing hunting clothes isn't enough if your accessories carry odors. Consider items like binocular straps, hunting packs and belts. My binocular strap gets used for family vacations, work trips and scouting, so it collects sweat and everyday smells. A colleague recommended soaking and hand-washing it before hunting season and a few times throughout.

The same goes for hunting belts and safety harnesses. Use washable materials when possible, and consider keeping separate equipment for scouting and hunting.

DON'T resist changing out of sweaty clothes

If you have a long walk to your stand and sweat through your underlayers, don't simply sit down and start hunting. Pack fresh clothing and change when necessary, including your base layer, hat, socks or gloves.

Fresh sweat is mostly odorless, but bacteria on your skin break down sweat's fatty acids and proteins, producing noticeable odor within about 30 minutes. Sweaty clothes quickly become smelly clothes.

See **SCENTS,** Page 9





Scents

Continued from Page 8

To prevent sweating, dress lightly, pack outer layers, wear breathable technical clothing and allow plenty of time to walk slowly to your location.

DON'T use everyday footwear

Although everyday sneakers or hiking boots can work, dedicated hunting boots help minimize the odors you carry into the woods. Rubber is especially useful because it doesn't absorb human scent like leather or fabric.

I've worn knee-high rubber hunting boots for nearly 25 years, including insulated and uninsulated pairs. They're easy to clean, low-maintenance and versatile for crossing shallow creeks or walking through tall grass. Their height also helps prevent scent from brushing off your lower legs.

The downside is that rubber boots can puncture easily and offer less ankle support than hiking-style boots. Choose footwear that provides the support and protection needed for your terrain.

DON'T (over)use scents

Cover scents attempt to mask human odor, while attractants mimic food, territorial or reproductive smells to draw deer into an area. Although many hunters use them, I generally don't.

I've experienced success with attractants, including my first solo buck as a teenager. I used a drag rope coated with commercial doe urine, and the buck arrived shortly after I reached my stand. It's still one of my favorite hunting memories.

However, I've also seen these products backfire, with deer becoming alert and fleeing after catching a scent. Because of those experiences, I no longer use either method.

If scents consistently work for you, follow the directions and apply small amounts. Also, remember that natural deer urine products are illegal in many states because of disease-transmission risks, so synthetic alternatives may be necessary.

DON'T eat smelly foods prior to hunting

Two words: garlic breath. Enough said.

DON'T overlook scent control for access

Avoid touching unnecessary vegetation while walking to your stand, since it can leave scent behind. At the same time, choose concealed routes that keep you out of sight, especially when deer are active or bedded nearby.

Planning ahead may mean clearing a footpath with a chainsaw, brush saw or garden shears while leaving enough vegetation for visual cover.

Use natural terrain to your advantage. Ditches, creeks, hillside benches, rocky shelves and bluffs can conceal your movement. I especially like walking through shallow creeks because I believe it helps minimize the scent trail I leave behind.

DON'T ignore wind and thermals...most of the time

Wind can be your best friend or worst enemy when hunting whitetails. Experienced hunters often agree that keeping the wind in your face is one of the most important tactics when targeting mature bucks. This includes considering thermals and wind direction when planning access routes.

I generally avoid hunting a stand unless the wind is favorable, especially during early and late seasons. If conditions change unexpectedly, I may move locations or adjust my access route. A real-time wind indicator is more reliable than simply checking a weather app.

However, I make exceptions. During peak rut, deer movement becomes more unpredictable, so I'm sometimes less concerned about wind direction. I also take fewer precautions in dense cover where deer can approach from multiple directions. Other exceptions include opening weekend, periods of heavy hunting pressure, long-range rifle hunting and enclosed blinds.

Wind direction is important, but don't stay out of the woods simply because ideal conditions aren't available. Prepare multiple stands for different wind directions or use a mobile setup when possible. Sometimes, you just have to know when to set aside the scent-control plan and hunt.

I don't claim to be the best deer hunter around, and there's always something new to learn!

Matt Ross of Saratoga Springs, New York, is a certified wildlife biologist and licensed forester and NDA's Director of Conservation

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Field to fork: Safe handling tips for venison

Safety of home preserved venison begins as soon as the animal is killed and continues throughout the preservation process.

Food safety

Safe preservation of venison begins in the field. Avoid contamination of the meat while dressing, handling and transporting it. Field dress the deer as soon as possible.

Quickly cool the carcass to 35 F to 40 F. Transport the carcass to a processing facility as soon as possible; keep it cool during transport.

Practice cleanliness; wash your hands, knife and cutting boards frequently with warm, soapy water.

In Pennsylvania, chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a concern. The Pennsylvania Game Commission provides information for hunters about this disease and recommendations for the safe harvesting of animals.

In general, the recommendation is to avoid eating the eyes, brain, spinal cord, spleen, tonsils or lymph nodes of any deer.

Freezing venison



As hunting season progresses, successful hunters may be interested in preservation methods for venison, bear or other game that doesn't involve freezing or drying.

Catherine Cutter, professor of food science at Penn State, suggests freezing venison, the easiest preservation method.

Cut and package into meal-size portions. Wrap the meat tightly in heavily waxed paper, freezer wrap, heavy-duty aluminum foil, or plastic freezer storage bags.

Remove all the air from the bag or wrap before sealing. Space packages in the freezer to allow proper air circulation so that the meat freezes quickly.

After packages are solidly frozen, restack them to save space. Properly wrapped venison can be stored in the freezer for nine to 12 months.

Do not refreeze thawed products to avoid quality deterioration. Thaw all frozen meats in the refrigerator or microwave and use immediately.

Cook venison, including jerky, to a minimum internal temperature of 160 F to reduce the risk of food-borne illness.

Ground venison

Ground venison may be canned, although freezing gives a higher quality product.

Add one part high-quality pork fat to three or four parts venison before grinding. Shape the ground meat into patties or balls and cook until lightly browned. It may also be sautéed without shaping.

Remove excess fat. Pack hot meat loosely into hot jars, cover with liquid, and process the same as for ground meat.

Fresh venison

Venison that you plan to use fresh must be refrigerated and used within two or three days. Marinate all meats in the refrigerator and not at room temperature.

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Wild game recipes to try for this year's harvest

Fried venison backstrap

1 (2-pound) venison backstrap, cut into 1/4-inch thick slices
2-1/2 cups milk, divided
2 tablespoons hot pepper sauce
3 cups vegetable oil for frying
3 cups flour
2 tablespoons salt
1 tablespoon ground black pepper
2 eggs

Place venison slices into a shallow bowl and pour in 2 cups milk and hot sauce. Stir to coat; then cover and marinate for 1 hour.

Heat vegetable oil in an electric fryer or skillet to 325 F. Set up a dredging station. Stir together flour, salt and pepper in a shallow bowl. Whisk eggs and remaining 1/2 cup milk together in a separate shallow bowl.

Dip venison slices into the flour mixture, then into the egg mixture, then back into the flour mixture. Shake off excess flour.

Fry in the hot oil until lightly browned on each side, about 3 minutes. Remove with tongs and drain briefly on paper towels before serving.

Venison stew

2 tablespoons oil
2 pounds venison stew meat
3 large onions, coarsely chopped
2 garlic cloves, crushed
7 potatoes, peeled and quartered
1 pound carrots, cut in 1-inch pieces
1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
1 bay leaf
1 teaspoon dried oregano
1 tablespoon salt
1 teaspoon pepper
3 cups water
1/4 cup flour
1/4 cup cold water

Heat oil in Dutch oven. Brown meat. Add onions, garlic, Worcestershire sauce, bay leaf, oregano, salt, pepper and water. Simmer, covered, 1-1/2 to 2 hours or until meat is tender. Add potatoes and carrots. Continue to cook until vegetables are tender, about 30 to 45 minutes. Mix flour and cold water. Stir into stew. Cook and stir until thickened and bubbly. Remove bay leaf.

Yields 8 to 10 servings.

Venison curry

1-1/2 pounds cubed venison
1 large onion, chopped
3 garlic cloves, minced
3 tablespoons olive oil
2 cans diced tomatoes, drained
1 tablespoon Thai red curry paste
1 tablespoon curry powder
1 teaspoon turmeric
1 teaspoon chili powder
1 teaspoon cumin
2-3 cups beef broth
Fresh spinach or kale
1/2 to 1 cup coconut milk

Brown venison, onion and garlic in olive oil. Add tomatoes, spices and beef broth. Simmer for 45 minutes to 1 hour or until meat is tender and liquid has thickened. Add fresh spinach or kale and cook until soft. Stir in coconut milk before serving. Serve over rice.

Slow cooker venison roast

3 pounds boneless venison roast
1 large onion, sliced
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
1 tablespoon garlic salt
1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
1 (1-ounce) package dry onion soup mix
1 (10.75-ounce) can condensed cream of mushroom soup

Clean venison roast and place in a slow cooker. Cover with onion slices, then sprinkle with soy sauce, Worcestershire sauce, garlic salt and pepper. Stir onion soup mix and condensed soup together in a small bowl. Pour mixture over venison. Cover and cook on low setting for 6 hours.

Bulk venison breakfast sausage

6 pounds ground venison
2 pounds ground pork
1/4 cup sugar-based curing mixture
1/4 cup packed brown sugar
3 tablespoons dried sage
1 tablespoon crushed red pepper flakes
1 tablespoon fresh-ground black pepper

Place venison and pork in a very large bowl or plastic tub; sprinkle with curing mixture, sugar, sage, red pepper flakes and black pepper. Mix well until evenly combined.

Divide into 1-pound portions and freeze.





Pa. officials detail new CWD rules for hunters

The Pennsylvania Game Commission is alerting deer hunters to updated chronic wasting disease regulations for the 2026-27 hunting seasons, implementing changes designed to mitigate risks related to the fatal animal disease.

The revised regulations include shifting how hunters must handle deer carcasses statewide. Hunters can now transport harvested deer and their parts between locations, but must dispose of high-risk deer parts through commercial trash services. Previously, transportation of these parts outside of an established Disease Management Area was prohibited.

High-risk parts may remain at the harvest site, but any parts moved from that location must be discarded in the trash.

"If high-risk deer parts are disposed of in the trash stream, it eliminates the possibility they will introduce CWD to a new area, and otherwise limits the disease's spread," Andrea Korman, Game Commission section supervisor for chronic wasting disease, said in a news release Wednesday. "That's the real key, making sure that all high-risk parts, from deer harvested everywhere in Pennsylvania, are disposed in a safe manner."

The agency reported four new CWD positive detections. Three cases were found in captive facilities in Butler, Warren and Lycoming counties, while one case was detected in a road-killed deer in Pringle Borough, Luzerne County.

Geographic spread of the disease remains a concern.

"We had a few positive captive facilities that were new this year. So one in Butler County, Warren County and Lycoming County," Korman told the Board of Game Commissioners at its meeting Sept. 25. "We also had a new free-ranging roadkill detection that was in Luzerne County. And that was a little over 20 miles from any other wild detection that we have had."

Korman told commissioners that while the agency detected 487 positive cases in the 2025 season compared to 530 in 2024, the prevalence rate in south-central Pennsylvania's Wildlife Management Unit 4A has risen significantly.

"While we may have had fewer detections than the previous year, prevalence in 4A has continued to increase. It was 41%, is now 46% in adult, hunter-harvested deer in 4A," Korman said during her presentation.

The decline in total detections may be misleading, Korman explained, as samples from the high-prevalence 4A area have been declining each year, potentially masking the disease's growing foothold in that region.

Statewide, the agency tested 13,909 samples during the 2025 season, nearly identical to the 13,927 samples tested in 2024. Of those samples, approximately 8,500 came from hunter harvest, with over 5,000 voluntarily submitted by hunters to collection bins and more than 3,300 collected from processors during annual deer aging activities. Another 4,800 samples came from roadkill, and just over 500 came from other sources including sick deer reports.

In response to the evolving situation, the Game Commission's regulatory changes for CWD move beyond Disease Management Area boundaries that "were becoming very large, complex and changing every year," according to Korman.

"Changes were made to essentially eliminate those boundaries and keep the regulations, but just apply them at different scales," she explained.

The most significant change involves high-risk deer parts — including brains, spinal cords and lymph nodes — which contain extremely high concentrations of infectious prions.

"A rice-size piece of brain can have 70,000 or more infectious doses," Korman noted.

The Game Commission's release this week on CWD updates reminds hunters that urine-based attractants derived from deer and other cervids are legal in outdoor settings, following a 2025 state law change that lifted a ban on their use.

Feeding bans, previously applied at the Disease Management Area level, now operate at the county-township level, making them easier to communicate to non-hunters who may be unfamiliar with wildlife management unit boundaries.

Deer rehabilitation is now restricted to the wildlife management unit level in areas with free-ranging positive detections.

The agency is also expanding access to testing through a developing self-sampling kit program. Free testing through head collection bins also remains available in areas with CWD detections. Hunters can submit samples and check results online.

"Every year people ask us how to get a deer tested if they don't live near a head bin," Korman said.

The program, now in its fourth year of development, provides hunters selected by the Game Commission with free kits containing materials and prepaid shipping envelopes to collect and submit lymph node samples.

"Everything, the kit, materials, shipping would all remain free to the hunter. This program also has the potential to shorten turnaround time," Korman told commissioners.

The pilot program has seen steady growth. This year, the agency contacted 750 hunters per county and received over 5,300 kit requests — exceeding initial estimates of 5,025 due to media attention.

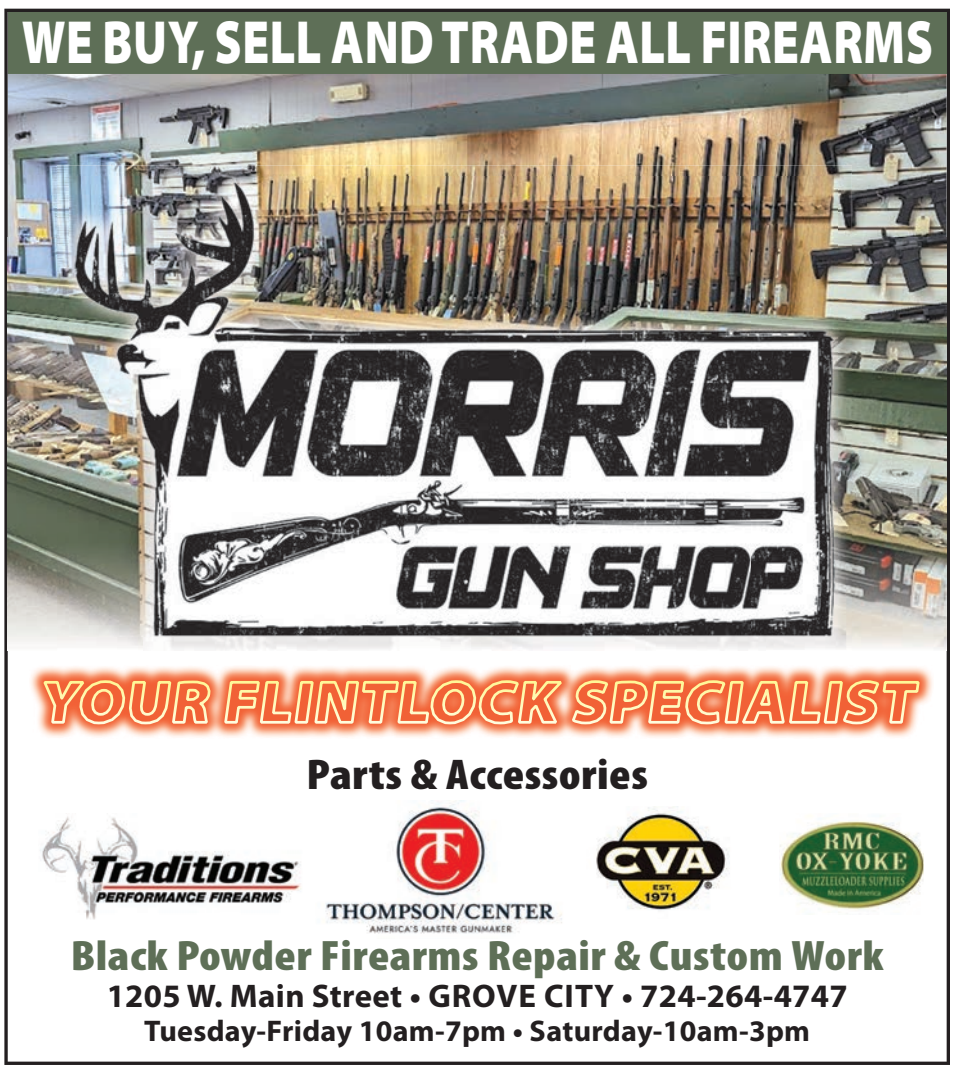
"As long as things keep going well, our hope is that within the next year or two, we'll be able to make this available statewide," Korman said.

The agency is also planning sampling workshops this fall to teach hunters and processors how to collect samples and use the kits, with attendees expected to serve as ambassadors to their hunting communities.

Chronic wasting disease affects deer, elk, moose and caribou. It was first detected in 1967 in Colorado and confirmed to have spread east of the Mississippi River in 2002.

The disease hasn't been shown to infect people, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Scientists continue to study whether having contact with or eating meat from infected animals could affect people.





Understanding white-tailed deer behavior and habits

For generations, the white-tailed deer has held a central place in the hearts of American hunters. More than just a game animal, the whitetail is a symbol of the wild — elusive, adaptable, and full of mystery. For hunters, success in the field often hinges on one key factor: understanding deer behavior.

Whether you're a seasoned whitetail hunter or just stepping into the woods for your first season, learning how deer think, move, and react to their environment is essential. In this article, we'll explore the most important aspects of white-tailed deer behavior that directly influence hunting strategies.

The whitetail's survival toolkit

White-tailed deer thrive in a wide variety of habitats, from thick southern swamps to northern hardwood forests and the prairies in between. Their ability to adapt has made them the most abundant big-game animal in North America.

At the core of a whitetail's behavior is its instinct for survival. They rely heavily on keen senses of smell, hearing, and vision — but smell is their strongest defense. A deer's nose can detect human scent from hundreds of yards away, and they're quick to react to odors that seem out of place. For hunters, this means scent control and wind direction are non-negotiable.

Deer also rely on memory and pattern recognition. They learn from past encounters, remember where food and water are found, and avoid areas where they sense danger. Breaking through their survival instincts requires understanding how they use their environment on a daily basis.

Seasonal shifts in behavior

One of the most fascinating aspects of white-tailed deer behavior is how dramatically it changes with the seasons. Each period of the year influences their priorities — and therefore their patterns.



Early season (Late summer to early fall)

In the early season, deer are focused on food. Bucks are still in bachelor groups, their antlers freshly hardened after shedding velvet. They frequent feeding areas such as agricultural fields, food plots, or mast-producing trees. Early season hunts often succeed by targeting these predictable feeding-to-bedding travel routes.

Pre-rut (Mid to late fall)

As daylight shortens and testosterone rises, bucks become more restless. They begin sparring to establish dominance, make rubs on trees to mark territory, and lay down scrapes as communication hubs. This is the time when scouting pays off. Locating fresh rub lines and scrapes can reveal where bucks are spending their time and how they're preparing for the rut.

Rut (peak breeding season)

The rut is the most anticipated time of year for hunters — and for good reason. Bucks that were cautious and nocturnal weeks before suddenly move more during daylight hours in search of receptive does. Their focus shifts almost entirely to breeding, which makes them more vulnerable to well-placed stands near doe bedding areas or travel corridors.

Post-rut and late season

After the rut, exhausted bucks retreat to recover, often becoming more nocturnal again. As winter approaches, food becomes the main driver of movement. Late-season hunting often means targeting areas with the best remaining food sources, whether it's standing crops, food plots, or remaining acorns.

Daily patterns and core areas

Understanding daily routines is just as important as knowing seasonal shifts. Deer generally follow a cycle of bedding, feeding, and traveling.

Morning and evening movement: White-tailed deer are crepuscular, meaning they are most active around dawn and dusk. This is why most hunters see more deer during early and late hours of the day.

Midday lulls — with exceptions: While deer are less active at midday, the rut can change that. Bucks may cruise at any hour during peak breeding periods.

Core bedding areas: Deer typically bed in areas that provide cover and safety, often on ridges, thick brush, or swamps where wind and thermals help them detect predators. Mature bucks, in particular, use small, hard-to-access bedding areas close to food or water.

Hunters who identify these core areas — and set up carefully without disturbing them — greatly increase their chances of seeing deer.

Communication and signposting

Whitetails communicate through a variety of visual and scent cues. Understanding these behaviors can give hunters an edge.

Rubs: When bucks strip bark from trees with their antlers, they leave both visual and scent markers. Rubs are signs of territory, strength, and presence.

Scrapes: These are pawed areas on the ground, often under a low-hanging branch. Bucks deposit scent from their forehead glands and use the overhanging branch to leave scent from their preorbital glands. Scrapes act as message boards for local deer.

Vocalizations: While quieter than other species, deer do communicate through sounds. A doe bleat, a tending grunt, or even the clash of antlers can signal breeding activity. Hunters often use calls and rattling to imitate these behaviors during the rut.

Pressure and adaptability

White-tailed deer are incredibly quick to adapt to hunting pressure. In heavily hunted areas, they become nocturnal, change feeding times, or avoid certain fields altogether. Mature bucks, in particular, are masters at detecting patterns.

This is why hunters benefit from:

Rotating stand locations: Avoid overhunting a single spot.

Quiet entry and exit: Deer often pattern hunters as much as hunters pattern them.

Using natural cover: Blinds and stands should blend into the environment.

Adjusting tactics mid-season: If pressure increases, deer will alter their behavior — hunters should too.

Final thoughts

White-tailed deer hunting is as much about understanding the animal as it is about skill with a bow or rifle. Every step a hunter takes — from choosing a stand location to deciding when to hunt — should be informed by deer behavior.

By paying attention to seasonal changes, daily patterns, communication signs, and their remarkable adaptability, hunters can not only increase their success in the field but also gain a deeper appreciation for this incredible species.

In the end, the whitetail challenges us to be more than just hunters; it challenges us to be students of nature. And with every hour spent observing and learning, we become not just better hunters, but better stewards of the wild places that sustain them.



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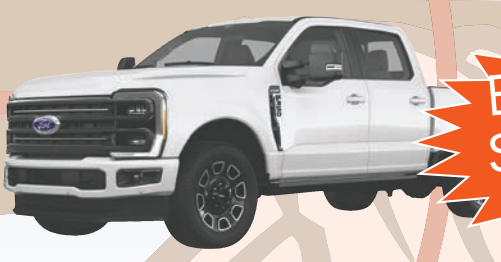
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