

# The Basics of Deer Hunting in Rhode Island



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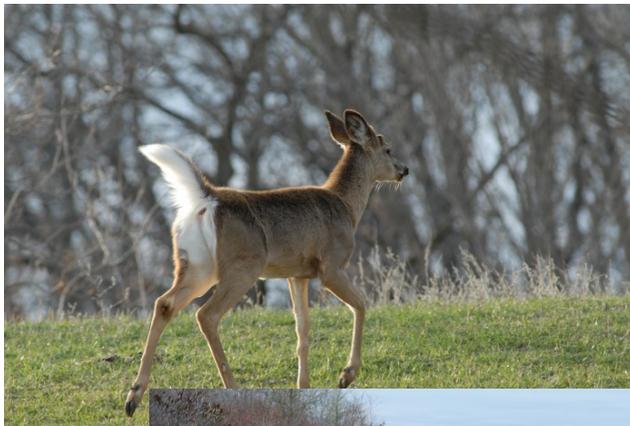
# Introduction

Welcome to deer hunting! This course should provide you with basic knowledge about deer hunting in Rhode Island and give you a general guide to be successful. It should also serve to help you in your hunting pursuits.

In our Basic Hunter Education course, we teach students how to hunt safely. This booklet is designed to give you an overview of the biology and habits of the white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) - aka "whitetails" and how to hunt them effectively. This guide will also help teach you about game handling, hunting equipment regulations and choices, correct shot placement, hunter reporting, and much more. These topics will help you become more knowledgeable as a hunter and make the animals you harvest become great table fare.

One thing to remember when pursuing any animal is that it is called hunting for a reason. You may not be successful in harvesting an animal every day, or every season. That's part of the enduring challenge and fun of hunting. Each season brings a new opportunity to hone your skills. To properly set your expectations, check the annual harvest statistics, which are posted on the RIDEM website at <http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/fishwild/pdf/deerharv.pdf>.

For most of us, hunting is about much more than a successful harvest. It's about spending time afield bonding with family and friends, watching the sunrise on a crisp fall morning, and having exciting stories to tell when you get home.



## Licenses & Permits

No person shall hunt, pursue, take or kill any wild bird or animal in the state without first having obtained a Rhode Island hunting license (RIGL20-13-1). Hunters must have a license in possession, on their person, at all times and shall present it for inspection on demand by any authorized person. Failure to present a license shall make a person liable to the same penalties as if he or she was hunting without a license (RIGL 20-2-9). Licensed hunters and trappers are subject to inspection of any boat, vehicle, game bag, blind, stand, or other paraphernalia used in conjunction with licensed activity (RIGL 20-2-32). Licenses may be suspended or revoked because of violations of hunting rules and regulations (RIGL 20-2-13).

Hunting Licenses are available from online at [www.dem.ri.gov/huntfish](http://www.dem.ri.gov/huntfish), DEM Office of Boating Registration and Licenses at 235 Promenade St., Providence, RI 02908 (401) 222-3576; most city and town clerks; and most sporting goods stores. Reprints of lost or damaged licenses are free through the online system. Purchases made at a full-service vendor carry an Enhanced Access Fee (EAF) to offset the cost of administering the licensing system. The enhanced access fees are as follows:

- **Resident:** \$2 per license and \$0.50 per permit
- **Non-Resident:** \$3 per license and \$1.00 per permit
- No EAF for Recreational Saltwater Fishing or No Cost Licenses and permits.

Deer may be taken using with archery equipment, muzzleloaders, or shotguns in Rhode Island. The hunting seasons for deer are broken down by equipment choice. Making hunters choose their season and equipment helps prevent overcrowding during the various hunting season. RI DEM sets the season length based on harvest rates and seasonal animal surplus projections. Hunters must purchase a Rhode Island hunting license as well as tags for each method, (archery, muzzleloader or shotgun) for each season they want to hunt. Tags may be purchased for either antlered or antlerless deer. Before entering the woods, a deer hunter must possess: Current year hunting license as well as deer tag(s) for the current year and season. Remember that you may only hunt in the season that matches your tag.

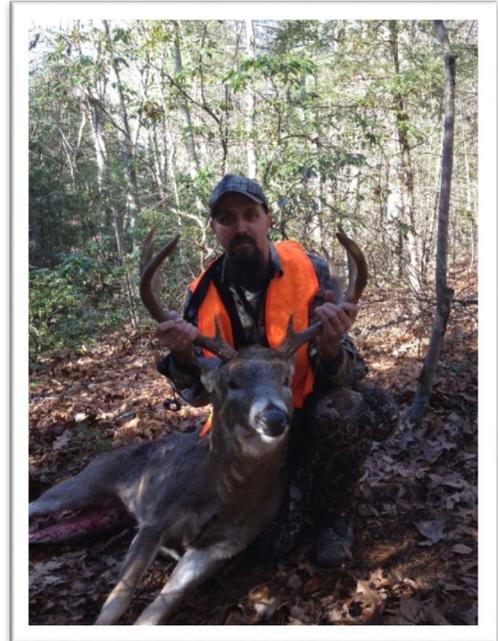
**Resident All Outdoors Package Permit:** Deer hunters may purchase one (1) resident All Outdoors Package Permit for the mainland deer seasons to take up to seven (7) deer during the established seasons. The All Outdoor Hunting Package consists of two (2) Antlered deer permits and five (5) Antlerless deer permits that may be used in any combination statewide during the Open Season. This package permit can be purchased online at [www.dem.ri.gov/huntfish](http://www.dem.ri.gov/huntfish), at DEM's Office of Boating Registration & Licenses in Providence, as well as participating sales agent locations across the state. A limit of 350 permit packages will be sold on a first come first serve basis.

Deer must be tagged in the field, with a valid deer permit (tag) for the appropriate season, immediately upon taking.



## ***White-Tailed Deer in Rhode Island***

Deer are a common sight in Rhode Island, with large populations all over the state, including many of the Bay islands. Some people enjoy watching deer from their backyard, while others are frustrated with constant damage to their gardens. Still others value deer as a game species and source of food. With deer so abundant, few realize that until recently, they were quite rare in Rhode Island. At the time of European settlement, hunting pressure and extensive clearing of land for agriculture reduced the once abundant deer population so greatly that deer hunting was made illegal. A Rhode Island game survey from 1941 lists the state deer population as 662, but with diminished agriculture, land returned to the mixed woodlands that deer favor and the population rose. In 1957, a limited deer hunting season was reinstated. The population continued to increase, and today, deer are more abundant than ever. Currently, the deer population in Rhode Island is estimated at 18,000 animals.



**Description:** As the only species of deer in Rhode Island, the white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) is unmistakable. In western regions it may co-occur with the mule deer (*O. hemionus*), but the white-tailed deer can be distinguished by its smaller ears and larger, white-tipped tail. The mule deer has a black or black-tipped tail.

Across their range, white-tailed deer females weigh 90-210 lbs. and males can range between 150-310 lbs. Individuals tend to be larger the further north they occur. The coat is reddish brown to bright tan in the summer and turns grayer and dull in the winter. Fawns are reddish brown with characteristic white spots. Males have antlers with smaller vertical points branching off the main beam. Antlers are first grown after a male's first year. In the spring, the new antlers are covered with "velvet", a soft skin that is filled with blood vessels. The velvet nourishes and protects the growing bones. In late summer, when the antlers are mature, the velvet dries up and is rubbed off. Antlers are then shed in the winter and re-grown over the summer.

Deer are creatures of habit, so knowledge of deer habits and movement patterns are valuable to hunters in finding deer during different times of the day and season. Deer are most active during the early morning and late afternoon-evening.



## General Deer Information

**Distribution and Habitat:** The white-tailed deer ranges from southern Canada to South America. In the United States, it is found in all states except California and much of the Southwest. In the Northeast and the Midwest the whitetail was nearly extirpated due to hunting and habitat clearing, but now thrives. The population is actually much larger now than

at the time of European settlement, due to the elimination of natural predators such as wolves and mountain lions. White-tailed deer may use a variety of habitats, including swamps, thickets, woods, and fields. Its preferred habitat is mixed successional stage forest. Suburban development, with its mix of trees, shrubs and lawns, is opportunistically utilized and harbors few if any predators.

Deer typically have home ranges of 40 to 330 acres. They may range even farther in winter, up to 1,285 acres. Bucks usually travel farther than does. Densities of 80 to 90 deer per square mile may occur, but not without resulting in problems. Populations of about 20 per square mile can coexist in balance with their habitat.

**Behavior:** As a prey species, white-tailed deer are stealthy, agile, fast movers. They can run up to 36 miles per hour, jump 8 feet into the air, and leap up to 28 feet. They are also excellent swimmers. White-tailed deer may be active at any time, but are most active at dawn and dusk (crepuscular). When they are not feeding, they spend their time bedded down in brush or other cover. Deer often spend time in social groupings. Fawns will stay with the mother for a year, and occasionally multiple does will group together with their offspring. Bucks also form groups, which disband before the mating season. Dominance is established by size.



*A browse line*

**Food Habits:** Deer tend to feed before dawn, and if undisturbed, continue until several hours after sunrise. After feeding, deer will bed down for most of the middle hours of the day. Although it is common for bedded deer to get up and feed for 30 to 60 minutes around noon, then bed down again. Deer will return to feeding late in the afternoon and continue until after sunset.

Deer eat a wide variety of plants, ranging from newly sprouted grasses and forbs in the spring to fir needles during the winter. In general, deer tend to be browsers, eating the growing tips of trees and shrubs. In late winter and early spring, deer eat grass, clover, and other herbaceous plants. Deer also eat fruit, nuts, acorns, grasses, herbs, and the leaves, buds, and twigs of woody plants. Look for areas where the trees and other plants seem to have a line of missing limbs or leaves from the ground to about deer height. This may mean

that deer are using this area as a feeding area. If you have a good vantage point, this may be a spot to try during the season.



*Examples of bushes browsed by deer*

**Reproduction:** In the late summer or early fall, when the antlers of the bucks are fully-grown, the rutting season begins. Bucks rub their antlers on saplings, removing the bark. They deposit their scent on these rubs. They also create scrapes, by thrashing vegetation with their antlers and scraping the adjacent ground with their front hooves. Other deer, as well as trackers and hunters, can recognize these signposts. Bucks begin to spar with others in their groups to establish dominance. Sparring begins when one buck lowers his antlers at another. The other may back away or accept the challenge. The bucks clash antlers, and each tries to push the other back. After 4-6 weeks of this behavior, the buck groups break apart. At this time the males begin to pursue the females. The doe keeps her distance as the males follow her around, but when she comes into heat, she allows the males to approach. During the 24-36 hour period when she is receptive, she may mate several times. The dominant males have first access; males may not be able to mate at all until their fourth year. Dominant bucks sometimes attempt to monopolize a number of does, and defend them against other males.



Once the mating season is completed, deer may again form buck and doe groups. In northern climates, they sometimes form large mixed winter herds in sheltered evergreens around food sources. These areas are called deeryards. The does separate from their groups in late May or early June, when they give birth to their fawns. Young does typically have one fawn, while older females have twins. The newborn is already covered in fur and stands up within an hour of being born. The fawn begins to nurse, and at three weeks, begins to graze. The fawn is weaned at four to ten weeks. Although the fawns do not stay close by the mother's side—they choose separate bedding sites—they remain as a family group at least until the fall and more commonly until spring. When the doe

is ready to give birth again in the spring, she usually drives the previous year's offspring away by chasing them and striking at them with her hooves. Males are always driven off; however, females sometimes remain with the mother for two years. Deer typically live to be about 4-5 years old in the wild.

**Predators:** Historically, wolves and mountain lions preyed upon deer, but these large predators are no longer present in Rhode Island. Today predators such as coyotes, bobcats and black bear are the main wild predators. Many of these predators impact natural mortality of deer by killing fawns, especially during the first few weeks after birth in June when young deer are incapable of escape. Some studies suggest that the impact of predators, especially coyote, on fawn survival and recruitment may be significant. Humans are another cause of deer mortality, through hunting and auto strikes. In the Rhode Island 2015-2016 hunting season, 1883 deer were harvested and 1,085 deer were killed by cars. Nevertheless, the white-tailed deer's reproductive capacity exceeds mortality.

**Droppings:** Looking for deer droppings is another way of determining if deer are present and using a particular area. Deer droppings vary greatly in size and shape, but are easy to identify. Most of the year they are deposited in a group of 20 to 30 dark cylindrical pellets with one flat or concave end and one pointed end. Individual pellets are one half to three quarters inch long and individual piles are four to six inches in diameter. When deer are feeding on moist vegetation, the pellets stick together and form clumps. New droppings have a shiny, wet appearance for a few days and then lighten in color as they age. Just because you see droppings does not necessarily mean that there are animals in the area unless the droppings are fresh. However, seeing a lot of droppings indicates animals are using the area frequently as a feeding area or travel corridor.



**Bedding areas:** Deer seek areas that provide security from disturbance when bedding. An area of flattened vegetation three to four feet long and two to three feet wide indicates where a deer has bedded down. Deer sleep in dense cover or tall grasses and may return to the same spot over many days. Since deer often travel in small groups, there may be several "deer beds" in the same vicinity. During winter, similarly sized depressions in the snow, often littered with old hairs, characterize bed-sites. If you know about these sites, it can be effective to set up near the site and watch for deer coming back to bed down after feeding.



**Rubs:** Bucks rub off some of the velvet covering their antlers by rubbing them against young trees and shrubs. These rubbing sites also communicate their presence and breeding readiness to other deer. This communication has several facets: the visual sign left by the buck's rubbing, chemical signals left from glands on the buck's face, and the sound of the buck thrashing branches of the tree on which it is rubbing. Although antlers are bone white when the velvet is first removed, they become stained various shades of brown as plant compounds accumulate through constantly being rubbed by brush and trees. The color results from a chemical reaction of the plant compounds with the air, in a process known as oxidation.



**Scrapes:** Bucks make scrapes during the pre-rut period by scraping the ground with their hooves near the base of a tree or under lower hanging branches. Bucks commonly urinate on scrapes and rub their orbital glands (located just below their eyes) on any branches that hang over a scrape. Scrapes serve several functions, including marking a buck's territory, providing a signpost of their presence, and advertising a place for does to find bucks during the rut.

**Tracks:** Deer will often have regular routes they use to travel through their home range. These travel corridors may become well-worn trails that look a little like narrow human footpaths. The trails may be clear of low vegetation, but are not bare unless they are in shade or are heavily used by deer and other animals. These trails are also known as game trails. Looking at muddy areas of the trails will help you identify the animals using the trail. Sandy areas generally do not hold tracks well. Dirt areas generally hold a track better than sand but not nearly as well as slightly moist mud. Deer tracks are easy to identify. In a normal hoof print, the two roughly teardrop-shaped halves print side by side to form a split heart. When a deer is walking on a slippery surface, such as mud or snow, its hooves are likely to be spread into a V, which helps keep the deer from sliding forward. Deer tracks are 1 ½ to 3 ¼ inches long. The smallest prints belong to fawns and the largest to adult deer.



## Deer Hunting in Rhode Island

The white-tailed deer is the most important game species in the United States and Rhode Island. Deer provide food and sport for hunters, and permit sales generate funds for state wildlife management. In addition, revenue from federal excise taxes on sporting arms and ammunition is distributed back to the states in the form of grants. The grants are used for land acquisition, land maintenance, and wildlife management.

Hunting is a vital tool for managing deer. It has proven to be the most cost-effective, efficient, and successful method of controlling deer populations. Deer are currently overabundant in many parts of Rhode Island, and have been for many years. Wildlife managers can influence population growth by encouraging the taking of female deer. Thirty-five to forty percent of does must be taken every year just for the population to remain stable. Predators such as coyotes do not take sufficient deer as they consume a wide variety of prey. In the absence of hunting, overabundant deer die of starvation and disease. Hunting is highly regulated, has a high safety rating, and can be tailored to meet the needs of individual communities. In densely settled areas where firearm use is not appropriate, archery has been used to control deer safely and successfully.

Today, Rhode Island deer hunters have access to approximately 55,000 acres of public wildlife management areas and hunting cooperatives during the deer season. Many private landowners welcome hunting on their land as well. Some management areas and towns have Sunday hunting restrictions and firearm restrictions, so local regulations should be consulted prior to hunting. Please refer to the current Rhode Island Hunting and Trapping Abstract, or contact RI DEM Division of Fish & Wildlife, for more information. 401-789-0281



# Deer Hunting Techniques

There are four basic hunting techniques used in deer hunting: stand hunting, still hunting, spot and stalk, and driving.

**Stand hunting** is best described as waiting in ambush, where a hunter gets in position at a place along a trail, feeding site, or other deer use area and waits for a deer to present itself. Ground blinds or tree stands are commonly employed in stand hunting. Although many stand hunters just lean against a tree or sit on a stump near a likely area or travel corridor.

**Still hunting** requires the hunter to move very slowly and quietly through deer habitat in hopes of seeing a legal deer before the deer reacts to the hunter's presence. Although all forms of deer hunting are challenging, still hunting is perhaps the most challenging. Successful still hunters move at a snail's pace, taking 3 or 4 steps at a time, and then stopping to look and listen. It is important that the hunter move into or across any prevailing wind so as not to be smelled by a deer.



**Spot and stalk hunting** is where a hunter surveys areas likely to be used by deer, usually aided by binoculars or a spotting scope. Once a legal deer is spotted, the hunter then sneaks to within range of the deer in hopes of getting a shot. Spot and stalk is commonly used in more open deer habitats where deer can be spotted at a distance. It can also be used when deer have been observed by a hunter and the hunter has not been detected by the deer.

**Driving** is a combination of stand hunting and still hunting. It requires a group of hunters that are divided into drivers and blockers. The blockers are positioned at locations where deer are likely to move through when the drivers have been detected. The drivers advance toward the blockers through likely deer habitat in hopes of seeing deer or moving deer toward the blockers. Driving deer by parties of over five (5) people is prohibited in Rhode Island.

*In a recent survey of RI deer hunters, tree stand hunting was found to be the most widely used method for hunting by 73% of all successful hunters.*

## Clothing and Concealment

In hunting as in everything else, if you are not comfortable you won't enjoy your experiences as much as if you were comfortable. Below are some suggestions on choosing clothing, hunter orange vests/patterns, blinds, and tree stands and finding what works for you is the key. Remember to obtain permission from the landowner prior to placing ground blinds or tree stands and if you are on public land, check the regulations of the agency that owns the land.

**Boots:** Hunting boots will help support your ankles and also keep your feet dry and warm. Wet and/or cold feet when hunting can make for an uncomfortable day. Some boots have insulation in them to help combat the cold. When choosing a boot, think about the kinds of hunting you will be doing and the temperatures in which you will be hunting. You may want to get the boots with 2000 grams of insulation to help on those frigid mornings in Rhode Island. But you also may have some hot foot issues when hunting early season in mid-October.

**Layering:** When dressing for any hunt, make sure to take into consideration what you may be doing. Dressing in layers will allow you to regulate your body temperature more efficiently. The idea is to wear only the layers that you need to stay warm and dry at the time, but have the option to take a layer off or put another layer on if conditions change. In cool weather, for instance, you'll probably want to wear fewer layers to hike up a steep incline, but will want to put another layer or two on once you are setup at your hunting spot and likely to be sitting for a while. A tough pair of jeans or brush pants may also be a good idea to help protect your legs when working in brush.

**Camouflage** :The number of camouflage patterns and manufacturers is dizzying. Just remember to try to match a pattern with the kind of habitat and climate you are going to hunt. Several of the bigger camo pattern companies have all purpose patterns that will work in a lot of different locations. These can be effective if you are unsure of where you may be hunting. If all else fails, you can use the old style of green, brown, and black camo that is common in popular culture. Remember to camouflage your face with a face covering or face paint and your hands with gloves. The basic idea of camo clothing is to break up the outline of your silhouette and get you to blend into the habitat. Animals are instinctively afraid of humans and if they see the shape of a human, they will not stick around for you to possibly get a shot at them. **(See Hunter Orange requirements on page 14.)**



## Hunting the Wind

You can't ignore the wind. Period. You can often get away with a little noise. A deer might even stick around if it catches you moving. But if it smells you, the game is over, every time. Learning to hunt the wind is among the most fundamental skills for a deer hunter to learn.



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Carry a wind-checker and use it often.

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- **Plan your hunting wind.** Check and re-check the forecast wind direction for the day you're planning to hunt. When you're on stand, your wind cannot be blowing toward where you expect deer to come from, nor can it be blowing toward where they're going. This can seem problematic when you're set up between a feeding and bedding area, but keep in mind, the wind doesn't have to be in your face to be favorable. A stout crosswind blowing your scent into a "dead area" near your stand is often best.
- **Plan your entry wind.** The wind may be perfect for your stand setup. But it does no good if you alert all the deer while walking in. If you can't access your stand without sending your scent into the bedding area in the evening, or out into your food plot of a morning, consider an alternate route of approach or a different stand for the day.
- **Consider the thermals.** A deer can bust you on a calm day. In hilly country, warming and cooling air causes thermals to rise and fall. Although your wind direction may seem favorable, understand that certain areas, like river bottoms, are notoriously difficult to hunt due to thermals and swirling air currents. That's not to say you should avoid hunting these areas, but proceed with caution. In general, thermals rise in the morning as it warms up and fall in the evening as it cools down.

## Hunter Orange

Fluorescent orange safety clothing is required during the hunting season statewide for all hunters. To meet this requirement, safety clothing must be solid daylight fluorescent orange. **Fluorescent camouflage does not meet this requirement.** The hunter orange must be worn above the waist and be visible in all directions. Examples that meet the orange requirements are a hat that covers 200 square inches or combination of hat and vest covering 500 square inches. The following orange requirements apply:

- Two hundred (200) square inches by small game hunters during the small game season.
- Two hundred (200) square inches by fall turkey hunters while traveling.
- Two hundred (200) square inches by muzzleloader deer hunters during muzzleloader deer season.
- Two hundred (200) square inches by archers when traveling to/from stands during muzzleloader deer season.
- Five hundred (500) square inches by all hunters and other users (including archers) during shotgun deer seasons.
- Those hunters using Pop-up blinds during the firearms deer season must display 200 square inches of fluorescent orange visible on the outside of the blind from all directions. Hunters must also wear orange in accordance with the rules for the specific seasons while in the blind.



Fluorescent orange safety clothing is required during the hunting season statewide for all hunters. See next section for exemptions

Exempt from fluorescent orange requirements are:

- Waterfowl hunters hunting from a boat or blind, over water or field, when done in conjunction with decoys.
- Archery deer hunters (except during muzzleloader and shotgun deer season).
- Hunters crow hunting over decoys.
- Spring turkey hunters and
- First segment dove hunters.
- Archery deer hunters in areas limited to Archery only by regulation.

## Blinds

Deer have outstanding vision, so minimizing movement and being totally concealed is the key. Ground blinds are becoming more and more popular. Commercial ground blinds are designed to pop up and provide total concealment on the ground. Just popping this blind up does not guarantee

concealment, so try to place brush and cover around the blind to help conceal it. Make sure to keep the windows in the back zipped up so as to not silhouette yourself. Ground blinds should be set out in advance of your hunt, if possible, so the game become accustom to the blind. Blinds can also be constructed with burlap, 1 x 1's, spray-paint, and some string. Cut the 1 x 1's to about a four-foot section. Drill holes in the 1 x 1's and lace the burlap to them. Spray paint the wood to be a dark color and put streaks of green, black, and tan on the burlap. You will then have your own blind that is easy to transport.

Depending on the surroundings, you may be able to fashion a very functional blind from available materials such as tree limbs, grass, cattails, or sagebrush. Be sure to "brush up" any blind with whatever natural vegetation occurs at the site you're hunting. Where you build or place your blind may well be as important as how it looks and how well it hides you. As a general rule it's best to be situated with the wind in your face for deer. If you are not sure of the wind direction, there are wind indicators that can be purchased from sporting goods stores. One of the most used is a powder in a squeeze bottle that will create a puff of smoke and drift with the wind. Also you can use the old standby of picking up some dry grass and dropping that from about eye height and it should give you an indication of the wind direction.

## Tree stands

The use of elevated stands can be a great option for hunters, as they offer several advantages over hunting from the ground. These advantages include a wider field of vision and decreased chance of detection by game. The hunter in an elevated stand is often able to see game animals approaching at a greater distance than at ground level, this provides more time for the hunter to plan the best possible shot. The position above game animals also places the hunter out of the animal's field of view and movement is less noticeable. The hunter's scent may also be more difficult for the animal to detect. Hunting from a tree stand also makes the hunter more visible to other hunters, and less likely to be in their line of fire. This position also creates a natural backstop, as the hunter is shooting in a downwards direction.

**Types of Tree stands:** There are four types of elevated stands recommended by the Tree Stand Manufacturer's Association (TMA). They include fixed position (hang on) stands, climbing stands, ladder stands, and free standing (tripod, tower) stands. The TMA recommends home-made stands be avoided as commercially available stands, like those mentioned, are manufactured, certified, and tested to certain standards. Of course, a hunter should always follow the manufacturer's instructions and practice installing, entering, exiting, and removing an elevated stand before using it in the field.



**Where to place your tree stand:**

Elevated stands should be placed near food sources, water sources, travel routes, and breeding sites. However, bedding areas should be avoided. Make sure you select a tree large enough to cover your body outline. The stand should be placed no higher than necessary, 8-16 feet in height. Remember, the higher the stand is placed, the further away the vital area will be. Only select straight trees. A tree that is “leaning” toward you can be uncomfortable and unsafe to hunt from. Also check the tree for large overhanging branches which may be a hazard.

*Reminder! Treestands may not be installed on state owned and co-op properties prior to August 15th and must be removed prior to February 15th annually.*

When selecting a site also be sure to select a tree that is a distance from the trail or potential shooting area, but within the hunter’s effective shooting range. Do not place your elevated stand directly on the trail! Keep changes in elevation in mind as well. If an elevated stand is 15 feet off the ground in the front, but level with the ground to the rear, the hunter may be placing himself/herself in the line of sight of the game animal.

The TMA also recommends that elevated stands not be left in trees for more than two weeks. This is to protect both the hunter and the tree. We all know trees grow. When elevated stands are left in trees for extended periods of time the trees grow in diameter, potentially damaging nylon webbing, ratchets, or other attachments wrapped around them.



Did you know that falls from tree stands are Rhode Island’s number one hunting related incident?

**Safety First!** Remember, whenever using an elevated stand a hunter should **always use a fall arrest system, or full body harness**. Safety belts and/or chest straps from years ago are no longer safe to use! Also, as with everything else synthetic, full body harnesses expire over time due to UV exposure and other factors, causing their materials to degrade. If your full body harness shows signs of wear, has been used in a fall from an elevated stand in the past, or has an expiration date that has already passed, it needs to be replaced! Also, whenever using an elevated stand, a hunter should have one or two haul lines to bring their bow, firearm, and/or pack into the elevated stand after securing themselves into the stand.

# Hunting Equipment

## Knives

There are about as many knives available in today's sporting goods stores as there are people to buy them. They have many different shapes, uses, designs, and materials. One thing to keep in mind is a sharp knife is a good knife. Some knives are designed specifically for different jobs. When picking a knife, you will want to find something that works for you. It is recommended that you keep a knife sharpener on hand for touching up the blade when needed. You also may want a bone saw because it will help when field dressing a deer and cutting through the pelvis. Any knife can be used to care for your game.

**Skinning knives** have a deep belly in the blade to help you not cut through the hide. Some of these knives also come with a hook that is commonly referred to as a gut hook. This is designed to be used to easily cut open the chest cavity of big game animals to remove the entrails.



**Boning knives** are straighter knives with a thinner blade. They are designed to cut the meat from the bone. This process is called deboning.



**Caping knives** are shorter blades that are used to remove the skin from a big game animals head region. They allow for more fine detail work so a hunter can have the animal mounted.



**Bone saws** are great for cutting through big game animals pelvises. This allows the lower intestines to be lifted out of the body cavity rather than having to pull it through the pelvis and into the body cavity.



## Optics

High quality optics, especially binoculars, may be one of the most useful pieces of equipment you can have in your deer hunting toolbox. These pieces of equipment can be a great asset in locating deer. They allow you to search vast stretches of habitat without having to hike. Optics will also allow you to verify the animal is legal before harvesting. You should never use your rifle scope to glass because it could be a safety issue. If there was an accidental discharge when glassing with your rifle, you could harvest an animal that is not legal or harvest an animal that is not a game animal.



You will notice optics have a designation similar to 8 x 42. These numbers correspond to the construction. The first number is magnification. In the 8 x 42 example, the image is magnified eight times. The second number is the diameter of the objective lens of the optic. In the 8 x 42 example, the objective lens is 42mm wide. The higher the objective lens, the bulkier the optics can be. However, the larger the objective lens, the clearer the image will be, due to more light entering. You may want to go into a sporting goods store and test out some of the optics before deciding on a specific size or model.

With regards to optics, you get what you pay for. If you buy the cheapest pair of binoculars, they will work, but they may not last for very long. If you are going to spend a lot on one piece of equipment, it should probably be your optics. They can be used for wildlife viewing at other times of the year as well.

## Decoys

Deer decoys may be used on private lands in Zone 1 between September 15 and October 31, and in Zone 2 between October 1 and October 31 while archery hunting only. However, deer decoys may be used throughout the extent of the open archery season on private lands in towns where hunting with a firearm is prohibited but used of archery equipment is permitted. When transporting deer decoys for the purpose of hunting, persons must wear 500 square inches of fluorescent orange visible from all sides as is currently required for shotgun deer hunting.

## Calls

The key to drawing a wary whitetail buck into bow range can often hinge on downright deceit. Calls to make grunts, bleats, and rattles can all play on a buck's sense of hearing and his natural curiosity.



### ***Doe Bleat and Grunt***

Deer are far more vocal than many hunters believe. It's just that the sounds are often so quiet that hunters never hear them unless the deer is directly under the stand. A doe bleat and grunt is most effective from late pre-rut to post-rut. Remember, the secondary rut occurs a month after the peak of the first rut. The reason doe sounds are effective now is simple -- bucks are looking for does with which to breed.

Follow the normal deer calling rules when using doe bleats or grunt calls. A tip-over call or mouth-blown doe bleater should be used sparingly. Produce a couple of bleats



every 20 or 30 minutes at most, and watch downwind for bucks to sneak in and attempt to smell the doe.

Use synthetic doe estrous urine (**see inset\***) set to both sides of your stand, and hunt as scent-free as possible. Anytime you call you can position the deer downwind, and if it smells you instead of the hot doe he heard, that buck is out of there. When using a mouth-blown doe call, practice at home or in the truck on the way to your deer hunting spot so you can consistently produce the proper "baaaawwl." Use it sparingly to avoid letting a buck pinpoint your exact location, and if using in the early morning, wait until good shooting light to produce your first bleat.

\* The use and/or possession of deer scents/ lures that contain natural cervid (including deer, moose or elk) urine, gland oil, feces, tissue, blood or any other bodily fluids while taking, attempting to take, attracting or scouting wildlife is prohibited. Instead, use (synthetic) products that do not contain cervid parts.

### ***Fawn Bleat***

Fawn bleats can be effective all season long for one reason – a doe's maternal instinct. The mournful bleats of a lost-fawn will bring any doe within earshot in to investigate. If you're hunting does, have at it. But this does not mean that a fawn bleat will only work on does. During late pre-rut to late post-rut, the doe that investigates may have a buck in tow, so while all of the other hunters are blowing their best grunts at every buck in the woods, a fawn bleat can be your ace in the hole. This is comparable to calling to a gobbler with hens. You can't call the gobbler away, but you may attract the hen and she pulls in the gobbler.



Another way to use a fawn bleat call is to call in a distressed manner. The payoff is that the hunter never knows what will approach the sound of the deer call. It could be a buck or a doe, or it could be one of your local predators looking for a free meal. When using a fawn-in-distress call, begin quietly for a minute or so before cranking up the volume. Remember that fawns have smaller lungs than you do, so keep your breaths into the call short. The fawn-in-distress call is excellent for bringing does in to investigate.

### ***Snort Wheeze***

The snort-wheeze is a sound bucks make that is interpreted as aggression. It's a fantastic call to go to when your grunts are being ignored. The snort wheeze is a call that can be effective all-season long.

Snort wheeze calls often are used in association with grunt calls and rattling. Use the "fffttt, fffftttt, fshhhhhhhh" of a snort wheeze call to add another component to your rattling/grunting sequence or to top off a grunt to a visible buck. Often the snort wheeze call is more than a buck can take.

### ***Rattling Devices***

Rattling calls evoke the sound of two deer clashing, and if used correctly, can be effective all season long, but really shines from the late pre-rut to the post-rut. It's the sound of two bucks fighting, and brings in bucks for several reasons. First and foremost, everything loves to see a good brawl.



Another reason rattling works is its volume. A good clashing of antlers can be heard much farther away than a grunt or snort-wheeze call. Don't be shy when rattling. Ensure there are no deer in view prior to producing a sound, then really go at it. Buck fights can go on for more than a minute, so don't be afraid to get into it. Quick slams and hard grinding of the antlers or Rattle Bag can reproduce the sound of two bucks really going at it.

Add in a few grunts and maybe a snort wheeze at the end (or even during, if possible) of your rattling sequence provides the realism you need to pull in a buck. Again, watch downwind for bucks sneaking in and trying to get a whiff of the bucks it hears.

## **Deer Hunting Methods**

### **Shotgun**

Limited to 10, 12, 16, and 20 gauges, plugged to 5 shells maximum. Ammunition permitted for shotgun deer season is limited to a single lead or alloy projectile, including rifled slugs or sabot round. Buckshot is PROHIBITED for deer hunting. Muzzleloader may be used during shotgun season with a valid shotgun deer permit.

### **Muzzleloader**

Firearms are limited to single or double barrel flintlock, caplock, inline ignition system muzzle-loading shotgun or rifle only. Muzzle-loading rifles are limited to .45 caliber or larger. Smoothbore firearms limited to .50 caliber or 20 gauge or larger. Ammunition is limited to single lead projectile of the same caliber as the firearm. Sabot rounds either lead or jacketed permitted on .43 caliber or larger. Powder limited to black powder or approved substitutes. A muzzleloader is considered unloaded when cap or pan powder is removed.

### **Archery**

Archers may use a long bow, re-curve bow, compound bow or crossbow for hunting deer. Long bow, re-curve bow and compound bow must be set at not less than forty (40) pounds for archers using fixed blade broadheads, and a minimum of fifty (50) pounds for archers using mechanical broadheads. Only broadheads tipped arrows with at least two (2) metal cutting edges are allowed. All broadheads must be 7/8 of an inch or greater at the widest point including mechanical broadheads measured in the "open" position. Crossbows must be set at not less than one hundred twenty five (125) pounds minimum draw weight. Expandable broadheads are permitted.

One (1) field point arrow may be carried in the quiver for the safe discharge of the crossbow; the field point arrow must be made distinguishable from the crossbow arrow by a color difference. All Archery deer hunters must have taken and successfully completed a bow hunter education class or hold a prior year Rhode Island archery deer permit in order to archery hunt.

# Hunting Ethics

All hunters should be hunting ethically. There are many interpretations on ethics and what they mean, but before starting your hunt, think of what you believe is ethical and put it against what the public as a whole may think is ethical. Being ethical hunters will improve public perceptions of hunting and will benefit the sport. RI DEM encourages you to raise your ethical bar to the highest level.

Some things that are considered un-ethical regarding hunting are:

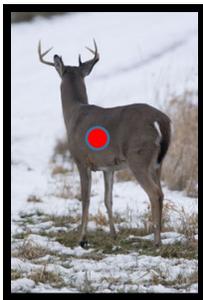
- Hogging all the shots from your hunting party
- Shooting a deer at 1000 yards
- Using a bow or firearm that is not properly sighted in

# Shot placement

Shot placement is crucial when trying to harvest an animal. As ethical sportsmen and women, we should strive to only take good shots and make the most humane kill. This can be achieved by only shooting when you are 100% confident in the shot. Part of being confident is practicing with your hunting equipment before the hunt. Another way to be confident would be to know exactly where to put the shot. Also, be sure to note if there are any obstructions between you and the deer when shooting. A branch or twig can significantly impact a projectile's trajectory. Below are the shots that may present themselves when you are in the field. The dots on the pictures show where the shot will be most effective. When taking the following shots from a tree stand, remember to aim slightly higher on the animal than indicated due to the angle that the projectile will take.

## Broadside

This is by far the best shot that you can have. Since the vital organs are easier to hit with this shot, most inexperienced hunters should wait until this shot presents itself. The projectile will most likely go through both lungs and possibly the heart when taking this shot.



## Quartering away

This shot is also fairly effective for harvesting but can be a challenge for some hunters. The object of this shot is to hit the tail end of the lung that is towards you and the middle or front of the lung that is away from you. Aim for the opposite shoulder of the animal.

## Quartering to

This shot is getting more difficult because there are more bone areas that can be hit. Archers **should not take this shot** as the probability of hitting a rib or shoulder is increased. Also the animal may see you draw and release and "jump the string." This refers to when the animal moves when the bowstring is released and can change the point of impact of your arrow. Muzzleloader and shotgun hunters may not have an issue since the bullet should go through bone.



Continued next page



### Head on

This shot shouldn't generally be taken. The chance of hitting vital organs is considerably less than the above three shots. The only really viable shot would be a heart shot. However, a shot from this angle would also most likely rupture the intestines, stomachs, and other areas of the deer that have digestive juices or worse. Archers should not take the shot because the sternum will most likely deflect the arrow.

**This shot shouldn't be taken!** The chance of hitting vital organs is considerably less than broadside, quartering to, and quartering away shots. A shot from this angle would also most likely rupture the intestines, stomach, and other areas of the deer that have digestive juices or worse.

### Rear end



## Tracking

This is probably the most difficult skill to learn on the fly. However, it is a necessary skill to be successful in retrieving big game animals. At some point, every big game hunter has an animal hit well but run off into the brush and they lose sight of the animal. You will have to be able to follow a blood trail to find your big game animal. Give the animal about 30 minutes after the shot to lie down and expire. Watch and listen for any indications the animal may be down. Go to the spot where the animal was standing at the time of impact. If there are two hunters, have one stay at the spot that you shot from and have the other go to the spot of impact. Look for any blood or hair in the immediate area. Once you find some blood, examine it to see what kind of hit the animal took. If you are an archer, look at the arrow to help determine what kind of hit it was. Bubbly blood means a shot to the lungs. Dark red blood means a heart shot. Black blood means a liver shot.

Slowly make your way towards the last place you saw the deer running but keep your eyes on the ground sweeping left to right looking for blood. If you cannot find any, you can walk in slow circles until you find some blood. There are lighted tools that will make the blood stand out better, but they will only work at night. Mark the spot of last blood or have one hunter stay there and make a slow circle at about 10 feet. If you cannot find blood at 10 feet, adjust your distance. Remember that this is SLOW and METHODICAL tracking. Continue on until you find the animal. If while you are tracking you hear the animal gets up and run off again, wait another 30 minutes before starting to track the animal again. When you find the animal, approach it from behind and make sure to poke it with a stick or your hunting equipment to verify it has expired. If not, dispatch the animal as humanely as possible.

**NEW for 2018-19**

# How to Tag Your Deer and Report Your Harvest

The new online licensing system has brought changes to tagging and reporting your deer harvest that all hunters should be aware of. Before you leave the house or license vendor sign your hunting license and deer tags! Now you will not need a pen until you report your harvest online or over the phone! Before heading afield, grab a zip tie or string along with a durable plastic bag and put your license and tags inside the bag to protect them from the elements!

## 1. BAG IT!

Congratulations on your successful deer harvest!

## 2. TAG IT!

Your tag must be notched (day, hour and month of harvest) before moving the deer for photos, field dressing or to leave the woods.

Per Rhode Island Law, the notched tag must be affixed to and remain with the deer. Use care to securely affix the tag so that the tag will not be lost when removing the deer from the woods or transporting to a check station, butcher or your home.

**HELPFUL TIP:** It is recommended to place your tag in a durable, clear plastic bag (Ziploc bag) to make sure your tag will not rip, tear, or become illegible from water, blood or dirt. Consider rolling up the bag with the tag inside, and placing it inside the deer's ear and tie the ear shut with a piece of string or zip tie. Reminder: The notched tag must remain affixed to the deer at all times until the deer has been prepared for taxidermy or consumption.



## 3. Report It!

Use your QR reader on your smartphone to scan your permit, or go to:

[www.ri.gov/dem/hunfish](http://www.ri.gov/dem/hunfish)

- You must report your deer harvest within 24 hours. If you do not have internet or cellular data access to report your deer harvest, you may call the Division of Fish and Wildlife at (401) 789-0281 between 8:30 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. Monday-Friday to report your harvest.
- Once on the harvest reporting site, you will be asked a few questions to determine the age and sex of the animal, the location and method of harvest and information about your time afield (effort).
- When you are finished reporting your deer online or over the phone, you will be given a harvest report confirmation number. This number confirms that you have reported your harvest. Write the number on your tag and keep the tag affixed to the deer until prepared for taxidermy or consumption.

**REMINDER: Physical checking of deer required November 3 – 6 at a biological check station!**

- **All deer taken during the period Nov. 3 – 6 must be physically checked, except those taken on Patience, Prudence and Block Islands.**



*Above: Deer tag securely fastened inside ear with zip-tie.*

*Below: Deer tag protected in plastic bag and securely fastened to leg with electrical tape.*



## Hunters: Take your harvest reporting responsibilities seriously!

Biologists rely on the deer data provided by hunters to set season lengths and bag limits each year. Without reliable, accurate data, biologists cannot correctly determine many factors related to the size, age, and health of the deer population, which is needed to establish how many deer can be taken to provide a sustainable harvest of healthy animals. This directly affects the sportsmen in how many days you can hunt, how many deer you can take and the quality of the deer that you harvest during your hunting season.

So please, all hunters, take your harvest reporting responsibilities seriously! We appreciate your efforts in helping us to maintain a quality deer hunting season for Rhode Island.

### Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) - Quick Reference *Information for Rhode Island Hunters*

- **Chronic Wasting Disease** is a fatal brain disease that affects the behavior and physical condition of deer, moose, and elk. This disease has not been documented in Rhode Island; however, surveillance for the disease is ongoing and essential to the health of our deer herd.
- **Transmission** – CWD is transmitted through physical contact (nose-to-nose contact and decaying carcasses), environmental contact (the area where a carcass decomposed), or through infected feed. CWD may persist in the soil after a carcass has decomposed.
- **Chronic Wasting Disease Endemic Areas:** Any county or state bordering a county where CWD has been documented, including the following states – Colorado, Wyoming, New York, West Virginia, South Dakota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Minnesota, New Mexico, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Montana, Utah or the Canadian provinces of Saskatchewan or Alberta.
- **Symptoms of CWD in Deer**
  - ‡ Poor body condition with ribs showing and drooping ears and head.
  - ‡ Excessive drooling and thirst; sick deer may be found close to water.
  - ‡ May also walk repetitive courses, have sluggish behavior, and isolate itself from the herd.
  - ‡ If you see a sick deer, document the location of the animal and report it to DEM Fish and Wildlife at 401-789-0281. Do not attempt to contact, disturb, kill, or remove the animal.
- **Human Risk and CWD** – Hunters have been eating deer from the infected areas of Colorado and Wyoming for more than 30 years. There has *never been* a verified case of someone contracting the human variant from exposures to CWD. However, there has *not* been significant research to conclude humans are immune.
- **Why shouldn't I eat certain parts of my deer?** Research shows that the disease accumulates only in certain parts of infected animals – the brain, eyes, spinal cord, lymph nodes, tonsils, and spleen. Based on these findings, hunters are recommended to bone out their animals and consume only muscle tissue from animals harvested in CWD areas.

- **Rhode Island Surveillance Plan:** Rhode Island’s plan is to continue annual surveillance for CWD to insure early detection and disease-free status by sampling deer tissues (deer heads). This plan also include education for hunters and the public about Rhode Island’s live deer and carcass importation ban to ensure disease prevention.

### **Recommendations for Hunters**

- Wear latex or rubber gloves. Bone all meat. Don’t saw through bone. Removal of fatty tissue will remove all lymph glands.
- Disinfect butchering equipment (knives, saws) with a 50/50 solution of chlorine bleach (household bleach works well).
- Commercial operators should bone the deer, and keep your meat separate from other deer. Lymph glands should be removed prior to grinding the meat.
- If you use a saw to remove the antlers, it should be cleaned and disinfected afterwards. This saw should not be used on any other part of the carcass. If you keep the entire skull (for a European mount), you should insure that all meat is removed, wear rubber or latex gloves while doing this, and soak the head in chlorine bleach.
- Bones, hides and waste should be double bagged in strong garbage bags and disposed of at a landfill with an approved dead animal pit, or buried.
- Minimize the handling of brain and spinal tissues.
- Avoid consuming brain, spinal cord, eyes, spleen, tonsils and lymph nodes of harvested animals

**Donate your harvested deer’s head for CWD testing by contacting Fish and Wildlife at 401-789-0281**

- **Regulations for the importation of deer parts:** No person shall import or possess in Rhode Island the brain, eyes, spinal cord, lymph nodes, tonsils, or spleen of any cervid (defined as a member of the family Cervidae, including white-tailed deer, mule deer, black-tailed deer, elk, moose, caribou, and reindeer) taken in or originating from a CWD endemic area, or such parts from captive or captive-bred cervid obtained from outside Rhode Island, except that: such parts and carcasses may be transported through Rhode Island as part of an interstate shipment.

### **Permitted Carcasses and Parts:**

- **CWD Endemic Areas:** Meat may be imported and possessed provided that all such meat from an individual animal shall be boned, cut up, packaged and wrapped, and such meat shall not be commingled with the meat of any other:
  - The hide or cape;
  - The skull-cap with antlers attached;
  - The antlers;
  - Finished taxidermy;
  - Tanned hides;
  - The upper canine.

**Non-CWD Endemic Areas:** All parts and carcasses may be imported into the State, following guidelines set forth in the following section.

- All carcasses and parts of any cervid imported into Rhode Island, or packages or containers containing such carcasses or parts, shall be affixed with a legible label bearing the following information: the species of animal, the State, Province or County where the animal was taken or where the shipment originated, the name of the person who took the animal or the name of the shipper, the address of the taker or shipper and, for transport through the State, the destination of the shipment. Hunter harvested carcasses, parts or meat taken outside Rhode Island shall also bear the marking, tagging or labeling required by the State where the animal was taken.

**Advice for landowners: Do not feed Deer, it is illegal and spreads disease.** Feeding wildlife, either directly or indirect, can generate artificially high densities which increases the potential for disease spread through infected feed and/or close contact among individuals.

**What you can do to help:**

Please report any sick deer exhibiting unusual symptoms to:

- **Rhode Island Environmental Police 401-222-3070**
- **DEM Fish and Wildlife (Great Swamp) 401-789-0281**

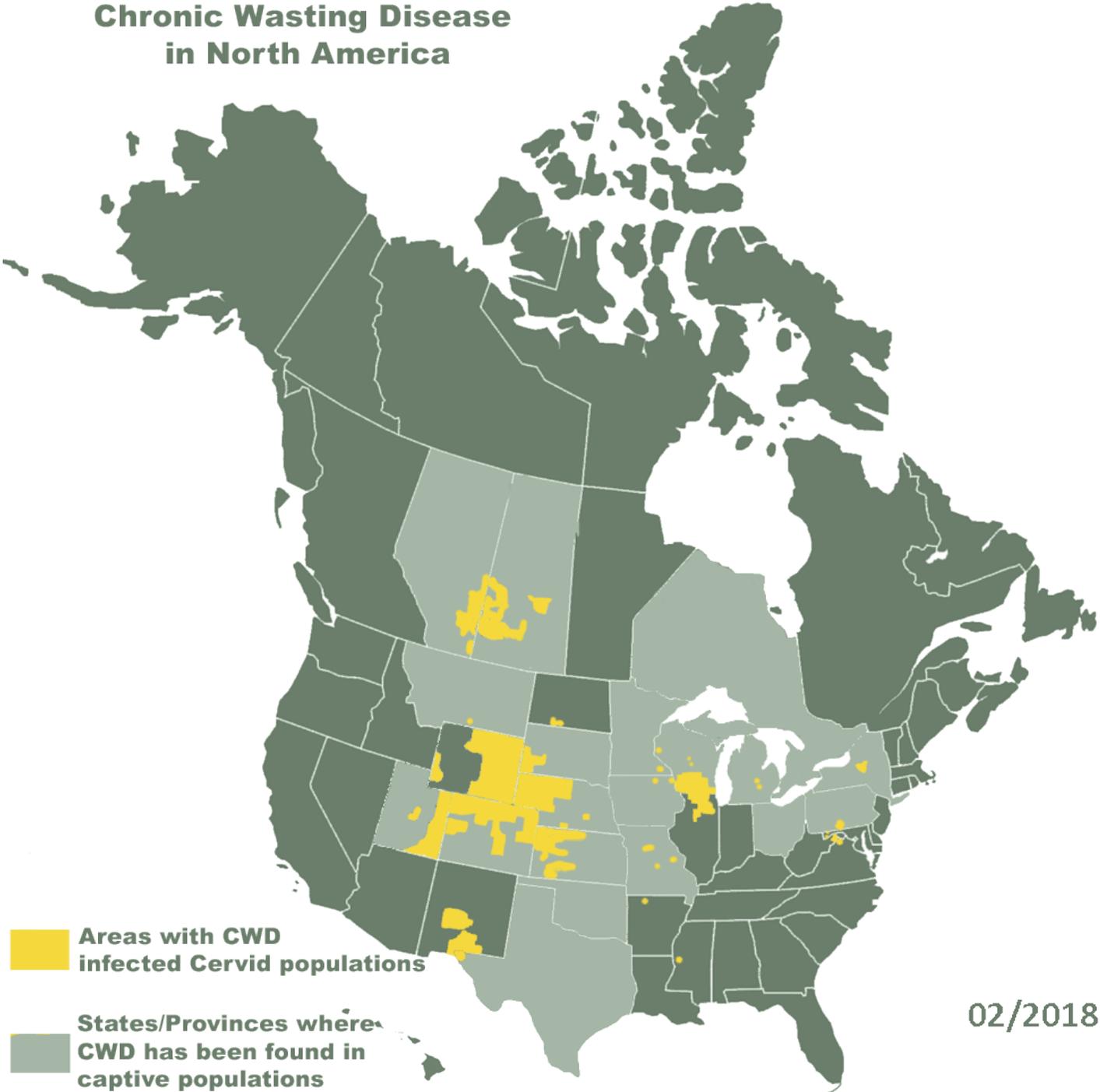
For more information please visit:

<http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/fishwild/pdf/cwdbroch.pdf>



*Rhode Island state biologist taking samples of harvested deer to check for Chronic Wasting disease.*

# Chronic Wasting Disease in North America



02/2018

## Tick-Borne Diseases

Tick-borne diseases are transmitted through the bite of an infected tick. These include [Lyme disease](#), [Anaplasmosis](#), [Ehrlichiosis](#), [Babesiosis](#), [Powassan \(POW\)](#), and [Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever](#). Ticks can be infected with bacteria, viruses, or parasites. When an infected tick bites the human host, the human may become infected.

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*High deer populations may lead to high tick populations. [Lyme disease](#), [Anaplasmosis](#), and [Babesiosis](#) are spread by the Deer Tick. [Ehrlichiosis](#) is spread by the Lone Star tick. [Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever](#) is spread by the American Dog Tick, Rocky Mountain Wood Tick, Lone Star tick, and Brown Dog ticks. Powassan virus is spread by the Deer Tick and rarely bite humans.*



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[Lyme disease](#), [Anaplasmosis](#), and [Babesiosis](#) are the most frequently reported tick-borne diseases in Rhode Island. In addition, in recent years there has been an increase in the number of cases of Powassan virus in the Northeast, including the identification of Rhode Island's first case in 2016. The ticks that carry these diseases are endemic to the northeastern and upper midwestern United States. The greatest risk of being bitten exists in the spring, summer, and fall. However, ticks may also be out searching for a host during the winter, any time temperatures are above freezing.

This causes a human health risk, because the ticks that feed on deer can transmit diseases to humans. Initial symptoms vary, and can include a red circular rash around the tick bite, and flu-like symptoms. Early treatment with antibiotics is critical. If untreated, symptoms may progress to include arthritis and neurological problems. If you suspect you have Lyme disease, contact your physician. Other diseases transmitted by ticks to humans in Rhode Island include babesiosis, a malaria-like disease, and ehrlichiosis, a feverish illness caused by a number of different bacteria.

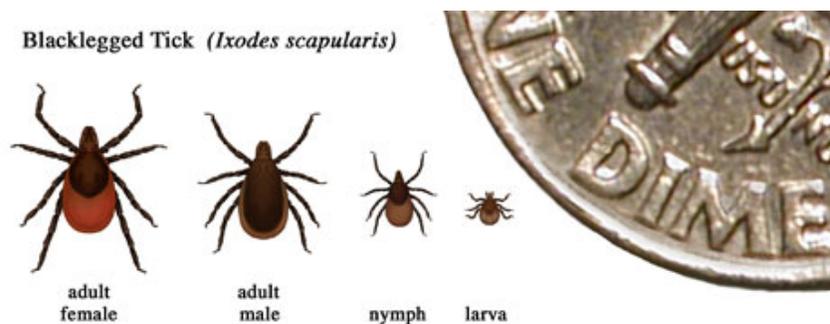
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*Ticks feed on small wild rodents, deer, pets, and humans. When a tick becomes infected and continues to feed on various hosts, the bacteria, virus, or parasite can be transmitted. Ticks that are located in the brush and on tall grasses come into contact with humans as we pass through these environments. The ticks can then crawl up sleeves and bite the skin, typically around warm areas on the body.*

*-Health.ri.gov*

## Check for Ticks

- Bathe or shower as soon as possible after coming indoors (preferably within 2 hours) to wash off and more easily find ticks that are crawling on you.
- Conduct a full-body tick check using a hand-held or full-length mirror to view all parts of your body upon return from tick-infested areas. Parents should check their children for ticks under the arms, in and around the ears, inside the belly button, behind the knees, between the legs, around the waist, and especially in their hair.
- Examine gear and pets. Ticks can ride into the home on clothing and pets, then attach to a person later, so carefully examine pets, coats, and day packs.
- Tumble dry clothes in a dryer on high heat for 10 minutes to kill ticks on dry clothing after you come indoors.
  - If the clothes are damp, additional time may be needed.
  - If the clothes require washing first, hot water is recommended. Cold and medium temperature water will not kill ticks effectively. If the clothes cannot be washed in hot water, tumble dry on low heat for 90 minutes or high heat for 60 minutes. The clothes should be warm and completely dry.



## Remove Ticks

To remove an attached tick, grasp with tweezers or forceps as close as possible to attachment (skin) site, and pull upward and out with a firm and steady pressure. If tweezers are not available, use fingers shielded with tissue paper or rubber gloves. Do not handle with bare hands. Be careful not to squeeze, crush or puncture the body of the tick which may contain infectious fluids. After removing the tick, thoroughly disinfect the bite site and wash hands. See or call a physician if there is concern about incomplete tick removal. It is important that a tick be removed as soon as it is discovered. Check after every two or three hours of outdoor activity for ticks attached to clothing or skin.

More information on tick-borne diseases can be found at the Rhode Island Department of Health website: <http://health.ri.gov/disease/communicable/diseaselist.php>



# How to Field-dress a White-tailed Deer

## STEP 1: BE PREPARED AHEAD OF TIME

Before you leave your vehicle, make sure you have the following materials with you:

- Kill tag with string already attached
- Flashlight
- Knife that has been recently sharpened
- Small rag (any color other than white) to wipe off hands
- Rope to tie legs and/or to drag the deer
- Blaze orange material to hang on a tree above the field-dressing site
- Several small pieces of string or twine
- Large plastic bag (self-sealing) for heart and/or liver.

## STEP 2: GET ORGANIZED

Once you shoot a deer you may become very excited. You may forget important laws about the tagging of deer. Remember that handling a sharp knife requires attention and patience.

**A. Approaching a downed deer.** Do not excitedly run up to a downed deer. The deer may not be dead and may injure you by thrashing about or it may get up and run away. Instead, cautiously approach a downed deer from the side away from its legs. Be ready to discharge a finishing shot with your bow or firearm. However, do not do so unless absolutely necessary; some muscle contractions can be involuntary and may not be a sign that the deer is still alive. Look to see if there are any signs of chest movement from breathing, eye blinking, or quivering of muscles. If so, remain about ten feet away, ready to fire a finishing shot if the deer begins to get up, and wait for the deer to expire. If there is no sign of movement, and the eyes are “glazed,” you may still want to carefully touch the eyes softly with a three to four foot long stick to make sure the deer is dead. If the deer is not dead this will cause it to react (e.g., blinking, moving, etc). You do NOT have to cut the throat of the deer to drain blood. Normal

field dressing procedures will “bleed out” the deer. Also, do not cut the scent glands from the legs of the deer; this may contaminate the meat.

**B. Unload.** When you are sure the downed deer is dead, unload your firearm, un-nock and put your arrow away, or take the cap off the nipple of your muzzleloader. It is not safe to have loaded firearms and sharp broadheads in the vicinity of a field-dressing site.

**C. Attach your kill tag securely on the deer.**

**D. Photograph your deer.** The best photos are often taken before field dressing your deer. In most cases, you may want to reposition the deer to be in the best light, make it look more “natural,” and/or be on clean ground or snow. If the deer’s tongue is hanging outside its mouth, push it back in its mouth. Wipe any debris or excess blood that is visible to the camera off the deer

**E. Move the deer to a nearby spot where you will be able to field dress the animal comfortably.**

Whenever moving your deer, be sure to use care in preventing lower back or abdominal injuries. If the animal is heavy or difficult to move, enlist the assistance of a friend or hunting partner. When you are about to move your deer, try to find a nearby opening where you will be visible to other hunters. When field-dressing a deer in thick under-brush it may be difficult for other hunters to identify you while you are bending over the deer. Place the deer on its back with its head uphill, if possible.

**F. Hang something blaze orange on one of the nearby trees or above your head.** You may want to remove your hunting jacket to prevent getting blood on the sleeves (or to prevent overheating in warmer temperatures). In this case place your jacket on a limb of a nearby tree so other hunters can easily identify your location. However, remain wearing something that is blaze orange, such as a hat or a vest. If you are bowhunting in camouflage, it is still wise to hang a piece of blaze orange fabric on a nearby branch.

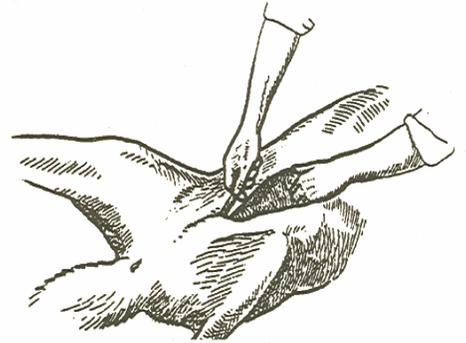
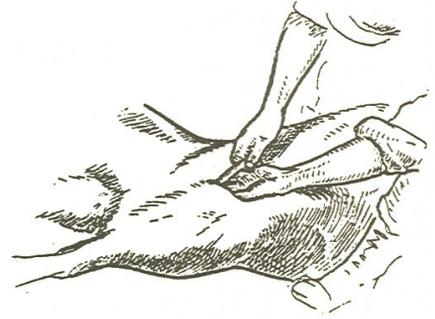
**G. Organize your equipment.** Designate a specific area at the field-dressing site where you can monitor and easily locate your knife and other equipment. A surprising number of hunters lose (or spend an unnecessary amount of time trying to relocate, knives, gloves and other equipment in the snow and leaves at their field dressing site.

**H. RELAX!** Safety should be your highest priority while field-dressing a deer. Many hunters cut themselves with their knives because they are hurrying or not paying attention to what they are doing. In addition, cold temperatures can cause wet hands and fingers to become numb. Such conditions require extra care when handling a knife. You should take breaks while field-dressing your deer to allow yourself to warm-up or relax.

**STEP 3: MAKE AN INCISION FROM THE BREASTBONE DOWN TO (BUT NOT THROUGH) THE ANUS OR VAGINA. DO NOT CUT SO DEEP THAT YOU SLICE INTO THE INTERNAL ORGANS.**

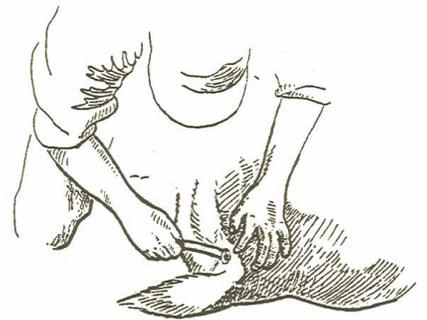
**A. Locate the sternum (breastbone).** Insert your knife at the bottom of the sternum. Keep the blade edge pointing upward when making the first cut. (Although there are other methods to begin field-dressing, we recommend the initial incision be made at the breastbone to reduce the possibility of cutting internal organs.)

**B. Cut through the abdominal wall (not just the skin and hide).** Keep the edge of the knife blade positioned upwards toward the hide (from the inside), not down toward the organs. Cutting upwards through the hide helps to prevent cutting the internal organs and aids in maintaining blade sharpness. Cutting downward through the deer's hair quickly dulls a knife's edge. Insert your index (second) and middle finger of your non-cutting hand into your original incision. Forming the shape of a "V" with these two fingers, gently pull up on the hide. Insert the blade into the incision between the two fingers, using it simultaneously as a guide for your knife and a way to keep your knife blade away from internal organs while cutting. Continue cutting to the penis of a buck or to the udder of a doe.

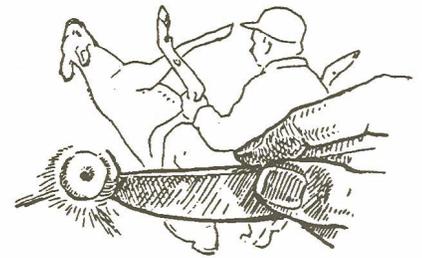


**C. Cut around both sides of the penis and testicles or udder.**

Be careful not to cut the urinary bladder, which will be removed in a later step. For bucks, reach inside the body cavity and cut the base of the penis and testicles so they can be removed. For does, cut around both sides of the udder and remove it from the carcass. Check the udder for signs of milk. This can be done by cutting through the fatty portion of the udder with your knife. If the doe has been lactating, milk will seep from the cut



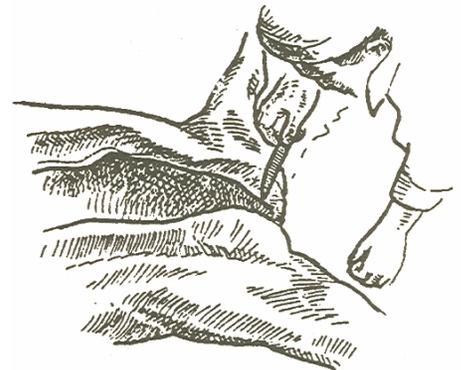
**D. Cut deeply in a circular motion around the anus of a buck and the anus and vagina of a doe.** The circle should be about two inches in diameter and your knife should be inserted about four inches deep, between the rectum and pelvis bone. DO NOT cut the rectum. Instead, pull it sideways in a circular motion, so you are cutting around the outside of it. If there are pellets or other fecal material present, you may want to tie the intestine in a knot above the rectum or use a piece of string to tie the rectum shut.



**E. We do not recommend splitting the pelvis in the field.** Instead, push the tied-off rectal and reproductive tracts through the hole in the pelvis and toward the abdomen. Be careful that you do not puncture or burst the urinary bladder.

**STEP 4: REMOVE THE URINARY BLADDER AND TRACT.**

The bladder is a pear-shaped translucent sac in the lower abdomen that may or may not be filled with urine. Be especially careful in handling the bladder so that urine does not spill and taint the meat. Pinch off the bladder with one hand and slowly cut it free and remove it with the other hand. Another method is to use a piece of string to tie and then cut the urinary duct about an inch beyond the base of the



bladder. Once the bladder and urinary tract is free, place it some distance away from the carcass so that urine will not get on the meat.

### **STEP 5: ROLL THE INTERNAL ORGANS OUT OF THE ABDOMINAL CAVITY OF THE DEER.**

The carcass can now be rolled onto its side so the entrails will roll out onto the ground. Some cutting will be necessary to free the organs from the back of the deer and to cut the esophagus and blood vessels near the diaphragm. The esophagus should be pinched or tied off prior to cutting to prevent spilling stomach contents into the abdominal cavity. (Although there are other methods to remove internal organs, the RI DEM recommends that hunters first empty the abdominal cavity and then work to empty the chest cavity.)



### **STEP 6: RETURN TO THE UPPER PART OF THE DEER AND CUT THROUGH THE EDGE OF THE DIAPHRAGM, WHERE IT MEETS THE RIBS.**

**A. Cut the diaphragm away from the ribs on both sides of the deer.** The diaphragm is a tough membranous muscle that separates the chest cavity (containing the heart and lungs) from the abdominal cavity (containing the intestines, four-chambered stomach, liver and other organs).

**B. Reach into the chest with your hands. With your fingers forward, follow the esophagus as far as you can. Cut through the windpipe and esophagus as far up as you can reach.** Be sure to use care with your knife in this position. Without being able to see exact location of your hands and your knife, it can be very easy for you to accidentally cut yourself during this step. If you have no plans doing a taxidermy mount of your deer, you can first use your knife to cut the cartilage and hide along the breast bone before cutting the esophagus and windpipe.

**C. Pull the windpipe downward, while cutting any attachments to the back of the carcass.** Roll the deer on its side to empty the heart and lungs from the chest cavity.

### **STEP 7: CLEAN THE BODY CAVITY**

Roll the deer carcass all the way over so that the opening to the body cavity can drain. However, don't contaminate the meat with dirt and debris. After a few minutes, roll the deer over on its back and remove any debris. The use of snow or water for cleaning the inside of the cavity is not recommended in most cases. Rinse out the body cavity with water or snow ONLY if the carcass has been tainted by contents of the digestive or urinary tracts. If this is done, dry the excess water in the cavity as quickly as possible.



### **STEP 8: REMOVE THE DEER FROM THE FIELD**

**A. Dragging a buck by pulling the antlers or a doe by pulling the front legs is acceptable for only short drags.** For moderate drags a rope may be used to tie the forelegs together and through the base of both antlers. Do not place the rope around the neck of the deer, especially if plan to have a taxidermy mount

prepared. For long drags, deer should be placed on a plastic sled or taken out of the field on stretchers, poles, wheelbarrows, deer carts, ATVs, or other devices. Some hunters have suffered heart attacks while dragging deer. In some cases, those could have been avoided by concealing the tagged carcass in heavy cover and coming back to the site with a partner or vehicle to help drag the deer out of the field.

**B. Don't forget the heart and liver.** These are excellent cuts of meat that many hunters leave in the field. If you do not have a plastic bag to carry these organs, place them inside the chest cavity for transport while carcass is being removed from the field.

**C. Hang the deer in a shady area to drain the carcass and cool down the meat.** We recommend that the animal be hung with the head down. Hang the deer high enough to be out of reach of animals and pets. Make sure that air is capable of circulating through the chest cavity to facilitate cooling. Some hunters use one or two sticks placed sideways in the chest cavity. It is not necessary to hang deer for much time other than to drain the blood. Bacterial growth increases when carcass temperatures reach above 40 degrees Fahrenheit and venison spoils quickly when ambient temperatures reach above 50 degrees Fahrenheit. **Aging and curing the meat is not necessary.** RI DEM recommends the deer be processed as soon as possible.

## Skinning

Skinning the animal will help cool the meat faster. You can decide to skin the animal on the ground, or you can hang it and skin it while it is hanging. You can purchase a gambrel and pulley to hoist the animal up but you do not have to.

- Make small vertical cuts in the hind legs just below the ankle area inside the ligament that controls the lower leg.
- Put your gambrel hooks through those cuts.
- Hoist the animal up.
- Make a cut in the skin but not into the meat around the hind leg just below the point the deer is hanging. Go slow and make sure not to cut that tendon.
- Make a cut from the previous step to the pelvis area where the meat is exposed.
- Make little cuts along this line to create a flap you can hang on to.
- Pull the skin away from the meat and cut the connective tissue. Try not to cut into the meat.
- Once you have skinned the entire leg, repeat the previous four steps for the second hind leg.
- If you are skinning at home you can now cut the tail off.
- Pull down on the skin to help separate it from the meat.
- While holding downward pressure, cut the connective tissue sometimes referred to as silver skin. Just run the knife along the edge where the meat and skin meet as you pull.
  - If you are going to want the skin tanned, try not to nick the hide.
- Start working around the carcass and making the cuts as needed.
- Once you get to the front legs, cut around the knee joint.
  - There is very little meat in the lower leg.
- Once you have severed the tendons, if you bend the leg to the side it becomes easier to remove.
- Do this on the other leg as well.

- Now that the legs are off, continue skinning down the legs and onto the neck.
- Skin down to about 4 inches from the skull.
- Use your bone saw to cut through the spine just above where the skin is still attached to the carcass.
  - A hack saw could also be used but make sure it is a clean blade.
- At this point you can process the carcass yourself or you can check with a local butcher shop that may be able to process game animals for a fee.

## Processing

Processing the carcass is the final step before you can enjoy some of the deliciousness that waits. To process the carcass, you can break it down yourself or you can take it to local butcher shop that processes game animals. There is a fee to have the carcass processed by the butcher shop, but it is cut just like beef.

If you process it yourself, you may not get the beautiful steaks and roasts that come out of a butcher shop. Videos of how to process deer can be found on you tube or can be purchased at local sporting goods stores and online stores. However, if you do choose to process yourself, remember that the meat has to be protected from the freezer and freezer burn. A vacuum sealer is a great way to make your game last for many months to come.

## Where to Go

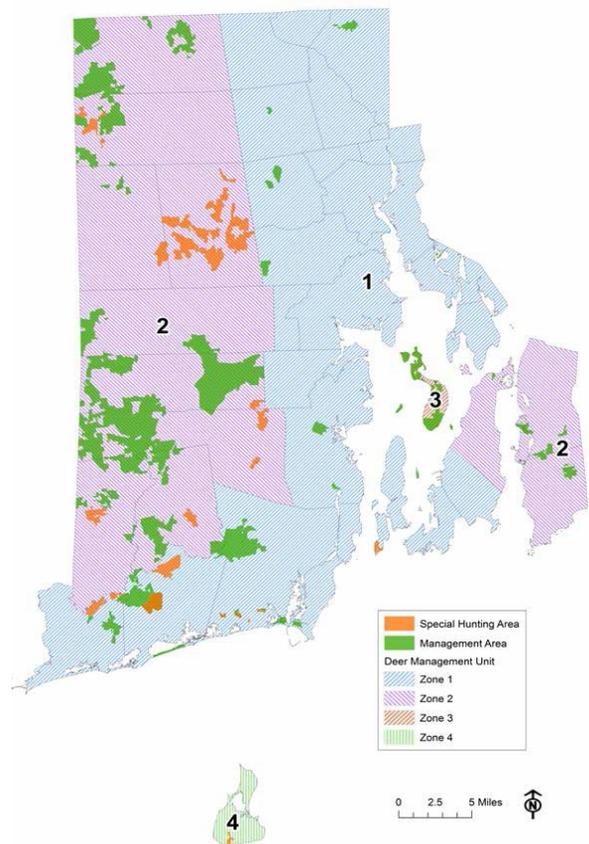
### State Lands

There are over 55,000 acres of land designated as state management areas in Rhode Island. Maps of management areas are available from the Rhode Island Division of Fish and Wildlife at the Great Swamp Field Office or online at:

<http://www.dem.ri.gov/maps/wma.htm> . Regulations

are designed and enforced to allow all outdoor enthusiasts to safely enjoy these land holdings. Hunting and trapping is allowed during the open seasons. In order to effectively manage and safeguard these open areas for people, wildlife, and habitat, the following regulations are to be followed:

- Except for fishing, hunting, launching, and/or mooring of boats, all management areas are closed ½ hour after sunset to 5:00 a.m. except by written permit. (RIGL 32-2-4)
- Camping is prohibited on all areas with the exception of portions designated at Arcadia and George Washington Management Areas. Contact



the Division of Forest Environment for camping information (539-2356).

- The use of ATVs is prohibited in management areas statewide.
- The blocking of any gate, road, or access in State Management Areas is prohibited and subject to fines (RIGL 8-8.2-2).
- Galilee Bird Sanctuary is open for Archery deer hunting.
- Hunting is permitted in these Undeveloped State Parks: Cocumcussoc and Washington Grove. Burlingame North Camp is open to deer and turkey hunting only (special permit required). Snake Den is open to archery hunting only. Ningret Conservation Area/East Beach is open to small game hunting and archery deer hunting only. J.L. Curran is open to shotgun and archery hunting only, only within the posted designated areas; this area is closed to Mourning Dove hunting.

### Private Property

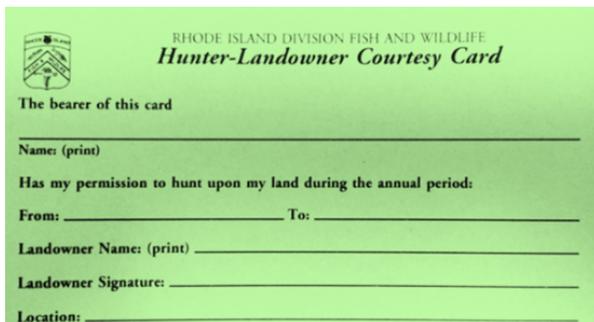
**Written Permission:** Annual written landowner permission is required for deer hunting on private land (RIGL 20-15-1) during the deer season. It is not required that deer permits (tags) be signed by the landowner, provided the hunter has other written permission in possession. Deer permits (tags) must be carried while hunting. Annual written permission must be shown to any authorized person upon demand, and must be presented when checking a deer.

**Landowner Rights & Liability:** Written landowner permission is required to hunt deer on private property. Hunters are urged to gain a landowner's permission prior to hunting for all other hunting activities as well. To maintain good landowner- hunter relations, always treat the landowner's private property with respect, and know and respect the property boundaries. It is also unlawful to shoot upon the land of another without their permission. Hunting on private land is a privilege not to be taken lightly.

To encourage landowners to make their lands available for recreational purposes, the RI General Law (32-6-3) limits the liability of persons making private land available for recreational activities, including hunting and fishing.

Liability of Landowner: an owner of land who either directly or indirectly invites or permits without charge any person to use that property for recreational purposes does **not** thereby:

- Extend any assurance that the premises are safe for any purpose;
- Confer upon that person the legal status of an invitee or licensee to whom a duty of care is owed; nor
- Assume responsibility for or incur liability for any injury to any person or property caused by an act of omission of that person.



The form is a green-bordered card with a white background. At the top left is the Rhode Island Division of Fish and Wildlife logo. The title is "RHODE ISLAND DIVISION FISH AND WILDLIFE Hunter-Landowner Courtesy Card". Below the title are several lines for text entry: "The bearer of this card", "Name: (print)", "Has my permission to hunt upon my land during the annual period:", "From: \_\_\_\_\_ To: \_\_\_\_\_", "Landowner Name: (print) \_\_\_\_\_", "Landowner Signature: \_\_\_\_\_", and "Location: \_\_\_\_\_".

The Hunter-Landowner Courtesy Card is available online at [www.dem.ri.gov](http://www.dem.ri.gov). All information should be filled out and is valid for only one year.

## Co-op Hunting

Certain areas open to deer hunting require additional permission in the form of site-specific Special Permits (deer tags). These areas have site-specific regulations that hunters must be aware of. Special deer hunting permits must be obtained through the DEM Division of Licensing (401-222-3576).

### Co-op Hunting opportunities include:

- Prudence and Patience Islands
- Block Island (New Shoreham)
- Block Island State Land (Black Rock / Rodman Hollow)
- Block Island and Ninigret National Wildlife Refuges
- Northwest Cooperative Hunting Area (Glocester)
- The Nature Conservatory Deer Hunting Co-Op: No Permits Required
- Beavertail (Jamestown)
- Grills Preserve I (Westerly) and Grills Preserve II (Hopkinton)
- Youth Archery Hunting Weekend

## Archery Proficiency Testing

Most mainland archers do not need an archery proficiency card. Individuals who wish to hunt deer with bow and arrow on Prudence Island, Patience Island, Block Island, Beavertail or in the Town of Lincoln must hold an Archery Proficiency card. Please check the DEM website for more information on Archery Proficiency testing schedule. [www.dem.ri.gov](http://www.dem.ri.gov)



# VENISON RECIPES

## Rolled Venison Roast

- 4lb. piece of venison (rump or top of round, rolled and tied)
- 4 cups of milk
- ½ t. pepper
- 1 bay leaf
- ½ t. onion salt
- ½ t. garlic powder
- 1 can cream of chicken soup
- 5 T. shortening
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup
- 1 C. water
- 1 onion (chopped)

Soak meat 1-2 hours in milk. Remove meat from milk and sprinkle with pepper, garlic, and onion salt. Brown meat in shortening over high heat. Put meat in a covered roasting pan, add soups, bay leaf, onion and water. Roast 2 ¼ hours at 300° F.

## Slow-cooked Venison

- 2-3 lbs venison
- 29 oz. tomato sauce
- 1 stick butter
- 1 can tomato paste
- 1 onion (sliced)
- pepper and salt to taste
- ½ t. baking soda
- 1 green pepper (sliced)
- 2 T. Italian seasoning
- 1 clove garlic (minced)
- 1 T. beef bouillon

Melt butter in skillet. Brown venison, onion, and green pepper in a skillet. Put half of the tomato sauce and remainder of other ingredients in a crockpot. Add venison, onions, and green pepper to crockpot. Add remainder of tomato sauce to crockpot. Cook on high until it boils. Turn to low and cook 5 to 7 hours. Serve with rice.

## Venison Soup

- 2½ lbs. venison
- 2 T. chopped parsley
- 2 qts. Cold water
- 3 C tomato juice
- 1 C. diced carrots
- 2 T. salt
- 1½ C. diced potatoes
- ¼ t. pepper
- ¾ C. diced celery
- ½ t. savory
- ½ C. chopped onions
- 1 T. sugar

Simmer meat in salted water for 2 to 2½ hours, skimming occasionally. Let broth stand overnight (or until fat has congealed). Remove congealed fat. Add vegetables, juice, and seasonings. Simmer slowly for 2-3 hours.

## Venison Stir-fry

- 2 lbs. venison (sliced thin)
- ¼ C. sesame oil
- ½ C. baby pea pods
- ¼ C. chopped green pepper
- ½ C. sliced carrots
- 6 large mushrooms (sliced)
- 8 oz. water chestnuts
- ½ C. chicken broth
- ¼ C. diced celery
- ¼ T. dry mustard
- ¼ C. chopped onions
- 3 to 4 C. cooked rice

Heat pan or wok to 375° F. Add oil. Cook venison until browned and remove from pan. Cook vegetables, chicken broth, and mustard until vegetables are nearly tender. Add cooked venison. Simmer 5 to 10 minute or until vegetables are tender. Serve over rice.

# TEN COMMANDMENTS OF FIREARMS SAFETY

1. Treat every firearm with the same respect due a loaded firearm.
2. Control the direction of your firearm's muzzle: Carry your firearm safely, keeping the safety on until ready to shoot. Keep your finger off the trigger until ready to shoot.
3. Identify your target and what's beyond it. Know the identifying features of the game you hunt.
4. Be sure the barrel and action are clear of obstructions and that you have only ammunition of the proper size for the firearm you are carrying.
5. Unload firearms when not in use. Leave the actions open. Firearms should be carried unloaded when traveling to and from shooting areas.
6. Never point a firearm at anything you do not want to shoot. Avoid all horseplay with a firearm.
7. Never climb a fence or tree, or jump a ditch or log, with a loaded firearm. Never pull a firearm toward you by the muzzle.
8. Never shoot a bullet at a flat, hard surface or water. During target practice, be sure your backstop is adequate.
9. Store firearms and ammunition separately beyond the reach of children and careless adults.
10. Avoid alcoholic beverages or other mood-altering drugs before or while shooting.



# Harassment of hunters, trappers, and fishers prohibited

**§ 20-13-16 Harassment of hunters, trappers, and fishers prohibited.** – (a) No person shall obstruct or interfere with the lawful taking of wildlife by another person at the location where the activity is taking place with intent to prevent the lawful taking.

(b) A person violates this section when he or she intentionally or knowingly:

(1) Drives or disturbs wildlife for the purpose of disrupting the lawful taking of wildlife where another person is engaged in the process of lawfully taking wildlife;

(2) Blocks, impedes, or otherwise harasses another person who is engaged in the process of lawfully taking wildlife;

(3) Uses natural or artificial visual, aural, olfactory, or physical stimuli to affect wildlife behavior in order to hinder or prevent the lawful taking of wildlife;

(4) Erects barriers with the intent to deny ingress or egress to areas where the lawful taking of wildlife may occur;

(5) Interjects himself or herself into the line of fire;

(6) Affects the condition or placement of personal or public property intended for use in the lawful taking of wildlife in order to impair its usefulness or prevent its use; or

(7) Enters or remains upon private lands without the permission of the owner or the owner's agent, with intent to violate this section.

(c) A violation of this section is a civil violation for which a forfeiture of not less than one hundred dollars (\$100) nor more than five hundred dollars (\$500) may be adjudged.

History of Section.  
(P.L. 1994, ch. 312, § 2; P.L. 1998, ch. 441, § 17.)

Call the Environmental Police at **401-222-3070** if you are being harassed.





# Hunters

## Feeding the Hungry



The new **Hunters Feeding Hungry Program** will allow the Division of Fish & Wildlife to join with RI hunters to provide food for impoverished citizens in the South East Asian Community (CSEA). The program gives hunters the opportunity to donate a portion of their harvested game to those less fortunate helping to create good relations between hunters and the community. The pilot program this year will focus on donation of deer but we hope it will grow to include other donations such as birds and fish in the future. The program is unique in that the CSEA will accept donations of legally tagged whole field dressed deer

### General Procedures:

Hunter harvests RI deer and legally tags and checks the animal as required by DEM hunting regulations.

CSEA is ready to accept hunter donations of whole deer from hunters by calling one of two numbers:

**Monday through Friday (8:30AM and 4:30PM) – call 401-274-8811**

**Weekends and after 4:30 PM - call (or text) 401-871-5633**

*Please call ahead to allow sufficient lead time for CSEA personnel to arrange for travel and pick up of the deer carcass (allow 3 to 5 hours).*

CSEA will provide a brief donation form that the hunter will be asked to fill out upon donating the deer to CSEA and will also be given a copy of the form as a receipt of the deer donation. The second copy will be retained by DEM as a record of the donation.

For additional questions regarding Hunters Feeding the Hungry Program please call RI DEM Division of Fish and Wildlife at 401-789-0281 (M-F 8:30AM-4PM)

**Thank you for donating to this charitable program and good luck**



