



Deer Hunting 101



Why hunt deer in GA?

- The Whitetail Deer is a large, very abundant animal with no natural predators in Georgia, other than humans.
- Hunting is used primarily as a means of keeping the deer population within acceptable limits that keeps the herd healthy and strong, but also does not allow the herd to destroy habitat and overconsume food sources for other species; this is called carrying capacity.
- The revenues generated from licenses and equipment sales are a major source of funding for wildlife and habitat restoration projects.
- Projects include: habitat improvements on state owned lands and population studies, as well as hunter education.

Hunting Regulations

- GA DNR is responsible for setting and enforcing regulations for hunting whitetail deer
- Deer season starts in early Fall (September) and runs until mid-Winter (early January). The season occurs during the time of year where all fawns that were born in the Spring are now old enough to survive on their own and the removal of mature deer will not negatively impact the overall health of the herd.

Hunting Regulations

- While older deer may die of natural causes during the Winter, and some deer are removed from the population due to hunting, their numbers are replaced by fawns born the following Spring.
- Georgia regulations allow for the harvest 10 antlerless deer, including does (females) and button bucks (males whose antlers have only just begun to form and appear as “buttons” on the buck's brow) and two bucks (males), one of which must have more than four one-inch points to a side; some counties may have different antler restrictions, so make sure to check the regulations of the county you are hunting in. Due to the overabundance of deer in the state, more does can be harvested, as their removal from the herd has a larger impact on maintaining carrying capacity.
- Based on the previous year's harvest numbers, as well as population surveys and other scientific studies and observations, it may be recommended that the bag limit stay the same or change, either increasing or decreasing.

- To hunt Whitetail Deer in Georgia, a Georgia hunting license, along with a big game license must be purchased each year. A harvest record, used for reporting the number and kind of deer harvested by hunters, is also required, but is available for free.
- Every deer harvested must be reported on the harvest record; while this can be written on a physical record, reporting via 1-800-366-2661 or electronically by going to www.goutdoorsgeorgia.com, as well as using the GA DNR app on your smart phone is also available. The app also contains an electronic copy of all your licenses, making it a convenient tool to have in the field.

Identifying Gender and Species



Photo Credit: Steve Kyles

- Due to the wide variety of habitat found in the state, deer size can vary depending on where they are found, with mature body weights ranging from 70 to 250lbs.
- Whitetail Deer are sexually dimorphic, which means the males and females have different physical characteristics that can be used to identify them.

Bucks are the Big Boys With Antlers!



Photo Credit: Steve Kyles

- Males, called bucks, are typically larger in body size and grow antlers. Antlers are grown and shed every year, which makes them very different from horns, which are not shed and grow continuously. Bucks begin to grow their antlers in late Spring and early Summer. While they grow, antlers are covered in a soft tissue, called velvet. Antlers can be damaged when they are in velvet, often leading to stunted growth for that year, or deformations that cause a non-typical antler development.

Bucks Cont'd

- As Fall arrives, bucks' antlers are fully formed for the year and they begin to scrape off the velvet by rubbing their antlers against trees, creating the telltale sign that hunters scout for. Antler development in Georgia is largely based on age and nutrition; studies have shown that genetics does not play a major role in antler development for Georgia's deer herd. While very young and very old bucks may not display impressive antler growth, mature bucks in their middle years, with plenty of quality nutrition available, will typically develop antlers that most hunters seek.

Doe

- Females, called does, are typically smaller in body size and do not grow antlers.

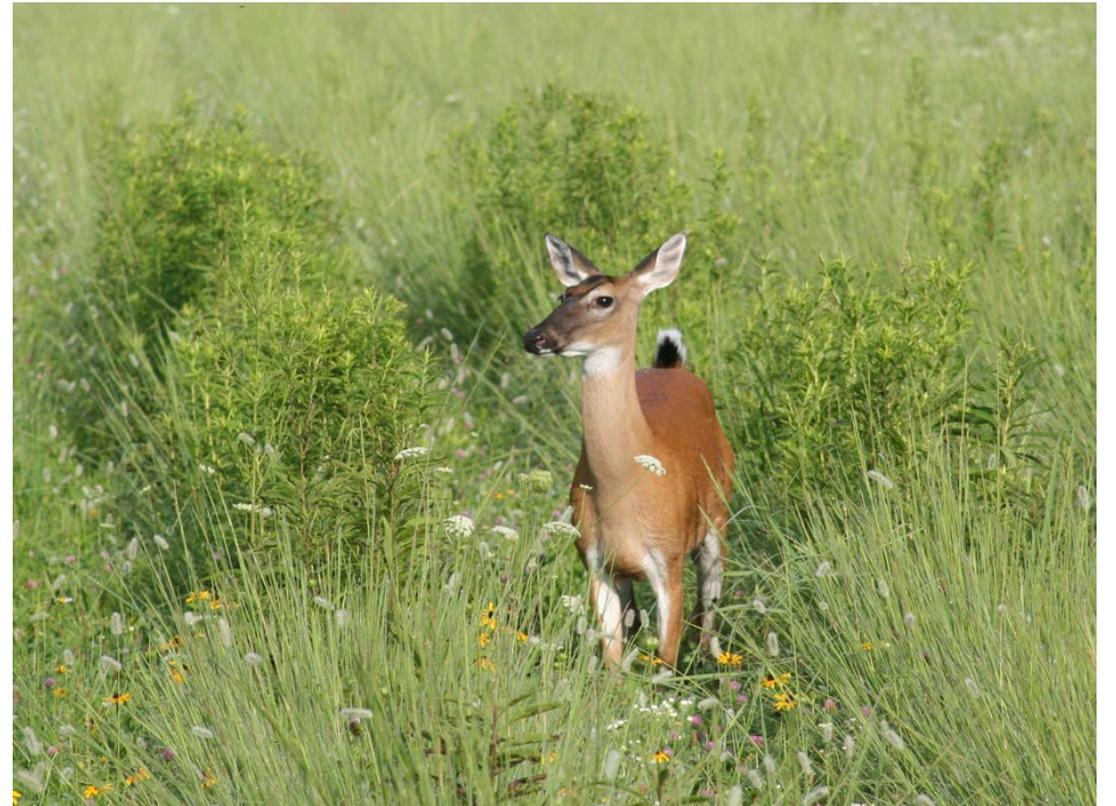


Photo Credit: Steve Kyles

Fawn



Photo Credit: Todd Schneider

- Baby deer, called fawns, are covered in white spots when they are born, which helps to hide them from predators. As fawns mature, they lose their spots.

Learn more about Deer

- You can find more information about Whitetail Deer management, biology, and more at: <https://georgiawildlife.com/deer-info>

White Tail Habitat

- Whitetail Deer are classified as “generalist,” which means they are highly adaptable and can live in many different habitats. Whitetail Deer are found throughout Georgia, from the mountains to the coast, living in oak and hickory forests, rural farmlands, suburbs, golf courses, pine forest, swamp and marshlands.



Patterns of Movement



- Whitetail Deer are crepuscular, meaning that they are most active at and around dawn and dusk.
- Typical ranges can vary depending on habitat and herd size, with does typically having smaller ranges than bucks.

Hunting sequence of events

- Scouting
 - Selecting your hunting location
 - Choosing your method of hunting

Scout your area to find:

- Long before the season begins, hunters should scout the area they plan to hunt, looking for signs that will help them develop a hunting strategy.
- This can include locating natural food sources, such as oak and persimmon trees; locating funnels and travel corridors (areas that deer will naturally want to walk through to stay concealed) and other topological features.
- This also means locating rubs (where a buck has scraped off the velvet from his antlers on a tree) and scrapes (a bare patch of ground cleared by the buck and used to leave scent markers).
- On private land this means locating and identifying areas where a food plot can be planted to supplement the deer's nutrition.
- Using game cameras is a great way to start identifying the deer in your hunting area and what times they typically are in certain locations.

Final location selection

- Based on the information gained from scouting, hunters should answer the following questions when deciding which locations will be best to hunt:
 - How likely are you to find deer at this location?
 - How easily can I get into this location?
 - How easily can I get out ... with an entire deer?
 - Will the wind patterns alert deer to my presence?

Blinds, Stands, and Spot and Stalk Hunting

- Once a location has been picked, hunters now must decide on the method of hunting that will offer the best opportunity to harvest a deer.
- There are several ways you can hunt whitetail. Hiding inside of specially constructed concealment called a “blind”, hiding in an elevated blind off the ground, in a “tree stand” that simply provides a platform high above the ground to stand on, but very little concealment, and Spot and Stalk hunting.

Ground Blind

- A ground blind can be made with natural materials, such as fallen trees and brush, or a portable commercially bought fully assembled.
- They enable a hunter the ability to stretch and move to some degree while staying concealed from deer.
- A ground blind also help to protect a hunter from the elements such as wind or rain.



Elevated Blind



- An elevated blind, sometimes called a tower stand, is similar to a ground blind, but situated atop a structure or platform.
- These allow a hunter to see farther over brush and other objects that would normally block their view from the ground.
- It also gets them above the sight plane of the deer.
- Most importantly, elevated blinds get a hunter above the scent plane, making it harder for deer to smell the hunter.

Tree Stand

- Tree stands are an elevated platform attached to a tree. There are many types including: lock-on stands, ladder stands and climbing stands.
- There are several safety precautions to take into consideration when hunting from an elevated stand, including purchasing and correctly using a full body harness/ fall arrest system.



Like tower blinds, tree stands allow a hunter to see further and get above the sight and scent plane of a deer.

Spot and Stalk



Some hunters prefer to utilize “still hunting” or “spot and stalk” method of hunting, which involves long periods of standing still and looking for game, with short periods of movement to a new location.

What can you use to hunt with?

- Rifles and Handguns
 - Shotguns
 - Muzzleloaders
- Crossbows, Longbows, Recurve and Compound Bows.

Rifles and Handguns



Rifles and handguns- chambered for centerfire cartridges .22 caliber or larger, with an expanding bullet; there is no magazine capacity restriction for modern rifles.

Shotguns



Shotguns- 20 gauge or larger loaded with slugs or buckshot. When hunting deer, it is not required to have a plug in the magazine of the shotgun and there is no magazine capacity restriction.

Muzzleloaders

Legal Muzzleloaders are:

- rifles chambered in .44 caliber or larger.
- shotguns 20 gauge or larger.
- Telescopic sights are allowed.



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Archery



- Crossbows, longbows, recurve bows, and compound bows may all be used.
- Arrows must be tipped with a broadhead.

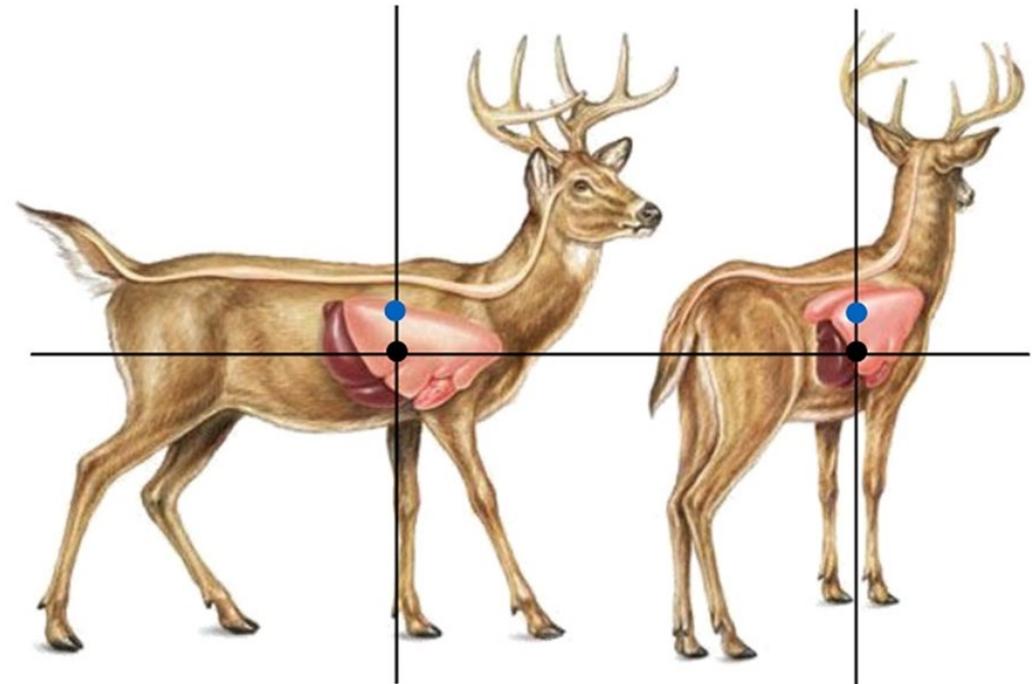
How far is too far for a shot?

- Effective ranges will vary with equipment used; it is best to make sure that you have a complete knowledge of how your firearm or bow works and assess your personal ability to ensure an ethical harvest and to reduce the chances of wounding loss. Spend time developing your marksmanship skills. Most deer harvested with a firearm in Georgia are shot at less than 100 yards and most deer harvested with a bow are shot at less than 25 yards. Always strive for the clean shot.

Recommended Shots

Broadside and Quartering Away shots are highly recommended, as they provide the best possible chance of an ethically and successfully placed shot.

Black Dot shows where to Aim on a broadside shot!
“straight up the back side of the front leg” or top of the heart
The **Blue Dot** is where to Aim from a **15’-20 feet high Tree Stand**



Special Considerations for Hunting

- Proper attire
- Camouflage
- Hunter orange (Blaze Orange)
- Safety gear and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Proper Attire and Camouflage

- Hunters should dress for the weather: lighter clothing for early Fall when the days can still be very warm, and thicker, heavier clothing for later in the season as the days turn cool to cold. Dress for the weather and prepare for weather not forecast.
- Camouflage patterns are used to help break up the hunter's outline and make it harder for the deer to see them.

Hunter Orange



Photo Credit: Michael Sellers

All hunters are required to always wear as an outer garment at least 500 square inches of hunter orange above the waist when hunting during primitive weapons and modern firearms seasons.

There are many commercially available safety vests that can meet this requirement. A head covering can count towards the 500 square inch minimum.

Additional Aids and good ideas

Other than your firearm or bow of choice, a hunter does not necessarily have to have anything else.

As skill and confidence increase, hunters may try using scents and other attractants to help set up an advantageous shot, or using calls, rattle bags/antlers, or decoys.

A pair of binoculars can always be helpful.

Safety items including: a compass, or GPS; a map of the area you are hunting; an emergency whistle; first aid equipment etc., are always recommended.

Where can I hunt?

- Private Lands
- Public Lands
- Outfitters who run hunts and manage land especially for hunting

Private Land

- Requires Permission in order to Hunt.
- Includes regular landowners and hunting clubs.
 - Permission must be gained in writing.
- Private lands offer exclusive opportunities to hunters that are sometimes not offered on Public Land.

Public Land

- There are many opportunities to hunt public lands in Georgia. A full list of the WMAs and other government owned properties where deer hunting is allowed can be found in the Georgia hunting regulations.
- It is important to note that some WMAs and public lands have specific rules that pertain to them, and it is the hunter's responsibility to know the rules ahead of time and abide by them while hunting.

Outfitters

Outfitting services manage properties for deer hunting and provide opportunities to hunters for a cost.

Pittman Robertson Act & U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

- Pittman Robertson Act is an excise tax on hunting and fishing equipment
 - This money goes toward Wildlife Restoration only

Pittman Robertson Act

- The excise tax is set by law at 11% of the wholesale price for long guns and ammunition and 10% for handguns. It is paid by manufacturers, producers, and importers and applies to all commercial sales and imports, whether their purpose is hunting, sport shooting, or personal defense. This tax is handled by the Department of the Treasury, which turns the funds over to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for apportionments to states.

How are Pittman-Robertson Funds distributed to states?

- 1) \$8 million is dedicated to Enhanced [Hunter Education](#) programs, including the construction or maintenance of public target ranges.
- 2) \$3 million is set aside for projects that require cooperation among the states.
- 3) One-half of the excise tax collected on handguns is set aside for Basic Hunter Education programs.

The remainder of the trust fund is then divided in half with 50 percent apportioned to states based on the land area of the state in proportion to the total land area of the country. The remaining 50 percent is apportioned based on the number of individual paid hunting license holders in the state in proportion to the national total.

Wildlife and Sport Restoration Program

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program (WSFR) works with states, insular areas and the District of Columbia to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, their habitats, and the hunting, sport fishing and recreational boating opportunities they provide. Insuring they will be available for generations to come.

How can you learn more?

- There are many books, websites and podcasts dedicated to the subject.
- Find a friend or family member who is an experienced hunter and talk to them or see if they will be a hunting mentor for you.
 - Videos and shows on television and online.
- By visiting <https://georgiawildlife.com/LearntoHuntFish>