

# Bowhunting

## THE BACKYARD

Archers Have Answer to Abundant Urban Deer



Safety is a primary concern when hunting and it's vital to the success of urban hunts. Photo by Marty Allen.

BY RANDY ZELLERS

Everyone loves watching deer browse along the edge of a field. There's just something deep inside the soul that makes a person shut down and stare for a moment as deer silently work their way through a patch of clover and fade back into the scenery.

But most people have a totally different feeling when they see a herd of young deer chomping on home-grown tomatoes, or a worse feeling after they hit a deer with their car.

In some cases, Arkansas's healthy deer population is too much of a good thing.

## Overcrowding Options

Brad Miller, deer program coordinator for the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, says conflicts between people and deer are relatively new in Arkansas, although many northern states have been dealing with it years.

“Other states have looked at a variety of methods to control deer populations,” Miller said. “But they are usually expensive, and typically not very effective in the long term.”

Good fences can be effective, but they are very expensive and impractical for most situations. Contraception has been looked into, but the animals often need to be treated multiple times (which increases cost and time), and it prevents only the growth of the herd. Sharpshooting is effective, but costs money, too.

“Hunters are the first choice wildlife agencies try to use to control nuisance deer, and it’s usually the most appropriate action,” Miller said.

## Archery Opportunity

The AGFC has worked with city governments and sportsman’s organizations, such as the Arkansas Bowhunters Association, to develop urban archery hunts – an efficient solution that reduces deer numbers quietly and offers new opportunities to hunters.

“So far, the AGFC has held managed hunts in Bull Shoals and Heber Springs,” said Miller.

“They’re effective, cost-efficient and safe. The response has been extremely positive.”

In fact, Cherokee Village has recognized the effectiveness of the hunts and will have an urban bowhunt this year to control a growing deer population.

Miller says setting up an urban bowhunt can be difficult and requires full cooperation from city governments. Many cities have some sort of ordinance that prevents people from firing a gun or shooting a bow within city limits. Social factors must be overcome; many people feed deer and think of them almost as though they were pets.

“We can’t tell someone to have a hunt; we have to wait for city officials to come to us,” Miller said. “Once someone comes to us about the problem, we can assess their situation and give them the options.”

When a town decides to have a hunt, it has two options – the AGFC can issue nuisance deer tags to the city for distribution (which means work for city officials) or the AGFC can conduct a draw open to the public and allow the Arkansas Bowhunters Association to coordinate the details of the hunt.

“Heber Springs distributes the tags on their own, while Bull Shoals and Cherokee Village use the second option and take advantage of letting the AGFC distribute the tags and the ABA do the ground work,” Miller said.

Conflicts between people and deer are increasing with Arkansas’s population. Photo by Marty Allen.





ABA member Karen Payne has participated in two Bull Shoals urban hunts and is ready to sign up again. Photo courtesy of Karen Payne.

## Wild in the Streets?

**H**unting deer in an urban setting may conjure images of someone sitting on a rooftop or telephone pole waiting for a deer to cross the sidewalk. But Karen Payne of Yellville, a member of the Arkansas Bowhunters Association from Yellville, says it's much like hunting wild country.

"At the Bull Shoals hunt, we asked around and tried to find areas that were close to the lake and undeveloped land," Payne said. "Some hunters did try to drive roads and scout for areas where the deer were easily visible, but those deer were seen by everyone and hunters wound up bumping into each other on opening morning."

Brad Miller, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission deer program coordinator, says deer are still wild in the city.

"Hunting them still can prove difficult," Miller said. "Even in urban settings, deer can find small patches of refuge that hunters cannot access because of safety or ethical reasons, and pressured deer get wise very quickly."

Payne agrees.

"My husband and I scouted one group of does that had a strict routine. We mapped out a plan and set up an ambush point. The first day of the hunt, we both took a doe from that group. Those same does walked down the trail the next day and looked straight up at me and my husband. They bolted and completely changed their patterns. We never got another shot at them."

Interested hunters may start their scouting with a call to city officials conducting the hunt. They can point out possible hunting locations and landowners to contact to get access to property. They also can point out anyone opposed to the hunt and areas they'd prefer people not park car or place a stand. It's also good to find a local butcher participating in Hunters Feeding the Hungry in case there's extra meat from the hunt.

"I have been hunting for at least 20 years and the urban hunts were my most memorable to date," Payne said. "The meat was put to good use and a lot of people benefited from the hunt. It is a lot of time and work but the rewards are great."

— Randy Zellers

## Responsible Regulations

Although most hunters place safety as the highest priority in the woods, hunting within an urban setting requires extra precautions. Hunters must attend an orientation where they complete additional safety training. They must pass a shooting proficiency test to ensure they are able to make a quick, humane kill when the opportunity arises.

"The ABA gave an international bowhunters education class, a treestand safety course, a blood-trailing course and the shooting test," said Karen Payne of Yellville, who took part in the Bull Shoals hunt. "I only know of one person who did not pass the tests, but they were not allowed to hunt."

## Keeping Up Appearances

There's a big difference between knowing hunters are in the woods and children watching strangers with bows walking through the neighborhood. Hunters must display a special permit on their vehicles, case their bows until they are in their stands and cover deer with a game bag when taking them out of the woods. No field dressing is allowed until after the deer is checked.

"The rules are more about common courtesy," Payne said. "Most ethical hunters won't flaunt their kill in front of everyone in town anyway. The residents are letting us hunt their property; it's the least we can do for them." **AW**

## Deer Damage

While they're pretty to look at, deer can do serious damage when populations grow out of control. According to the Insurance Information Institute for Highway Safety, there are more than 1.5 million deer/motor vehicle collisions annually in North America, resulting in up to 150 deaths per year.

While most money lost to deer is in the form of crops, urban deer wreak havoc on flowerbeds, gardens and ornamental shrubs. According to a West Virginia University survey in 2002, deer damages throughout urban areas of that state totaled \$3,135,945. That's \$61.95 of damage per urban household in one year.