

For many sportsmen and sportswomen, this will be the best time of year to put venison in the freezer and maybe hang a trophy on the wall. Deer gun season will run through Dec. 6. Overall, the state's deer population is in good shape this year, said Big Game Biologist Dallas Barber with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. "Rutting activity has been reported on a statewide basis and is beginning to fall from its peak, which usually occurs during the second week of November. Hunters will still have the opportunity to see some chasing and tending, as bucks continue to search for remaining hot does." Deer hunters play a major role in the Wildlife Department's deer herd management strategy. This year, Barber is hoping hunters will harvest more does than they did in 2019. "It still remains as important as ever to place emphasis on doe harvest to keep a healthy, thriving population," Barber said. Antlerless deer harvest becomes even more important in the state's deer management plan when populations grow. So, the Department's "Hunters in the Know ... Take a Doe!" campaign has made a return this year. Barber praised hunters for their voluntary participation in the past, because every time a hunter makes a decision to pull the trigger, he or she is making a decision about deer herd management. And with about 95 percent of Oklahoma's land under private ownership, hunter participation is critical in order to effectively manage deer statewide. To encourage a greater harvest of does, the Department has put new rules in place that increase seasonal limits and open dates for antlerless harvest. It also started a program called Oklahoma Deer Share, which connects hunters interested in sharing venison to people across Oklahoma who are wanting venison. For details, go to www.wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/species/deer/deer-share. Make sure to make yourself legal in by getting the required licenses at license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Licensing/CustomerLookup.aspx. Other topics to be aware of include chronic wasting disease and new rules concerning importing cervid carcasses or carcass parts from outside of Oklahoma. To help hunters plan their opening-day outing in the deer woods, here are the most-recent regional reports from Wildlife Department field personnel.

NORTHWEST REGIONReported by Eddie Wilson, Wildlife Senior Biologist Current Buck Rutting Activity: Bucks been very active last week. Bucks are currently rutting, most mature bucks are with does.

Habitat Conditions: Habitat conditions vary, most of the northwest region is dry. Winter wheat condition is excellent to the east and fair to poor across the west. Vegetative cover is heavy in most areas due to good growing season rainfall. Hunter and

Landowner Reports: Mature buck movement has decreased some over the past few days. Mature bucks are with does. Deer are using wheat fields during early morning and late evening. Hunters are reporting that bucks are actively monitoring scrape lines. Public Land Best

Bets: Hunters need to consult regulations before hunting Oklahoma wildlife management areas. Some WMAs are closed opening weekend for controlled hunts, and some are closed to deer gun hunting entirely. Most WMAs are closed to antlerless hunting. If you have questions regarding hunting regulations on a wildlife management area, you can consult the Oklahoma Hunting and Fishing Regulations Guide or call the biologist or game warden responsible for the area you choose to hunt. Phone numbers are listed in the regulations under each WMA listing. Canton, Fort Supply, and Cooper wildlife management areas all offer deer gun hunters an opportunity at buck hunting. Advice for Deer Hunters: Be sure to sight in your rifle prior to the hunt. Open country in the northwest can make distances deceiving. Bring a rangefinder, and know your limits. Bring a deer cart, and be prepared to retrieve your deer. Be prepared for all types of weather. Hunt safe!

Biggest Mistakes to Avoid: Failing to check the regulations for the WMA you intend to hunt. Failure to scout the area you intend to hunt prior to opening day. Failure to use the wind to your advantage. Opening Morning Expectations: Deer are healthy and numbers are good. Hunter numbers will likely be high on WMAs open to public hunting. If the weather will cooperate, hunters should experience a good opening weekend.

NORTHEAST REGIONReported by Curt Allen, Wildlife Senior Biologist Current Buck Rutting Activity: The second and third weeks of November yielded many reports of high buck movement. Numerous

mature bucks were seen chasing and tending does during daylight hours, and bow hunters during this period reported good responses to grunt calls and rattling. Habitat Conditions: Habitat conditions across northeastern Oklahoma look good overall. Acorn production across the region had high variability ranging from good reports, to areas that were very spotty. Ample summer moisture produced good amounts of grasses and forbs that created beneficial cover and browse for deer, but may limit visibility in some areas. Hunter and Landowner Reports: Hunters and landowners in the Northeast Region have reported heavy buck movement at all hours of the day and night over the last week. Rubs and scrapes are being tended less, further indicating that bucks are traveling looking for receptive doe. Lots of mature bucks have been harvested over the last two weeks. Public Land Best Bets: Hulah WMA, Oologah WMA, and Eufaula WMA are all large WMAs with good deer populations and multiple access points, but don't forget small, local WMAs that may be overlooked because of their lower acreage. Be sure to check the 2020-21 Oklahoma Hunting and Fishing Regulations Guide for full details on WMA seasons and restrictions. Advice for Deer Hunters: Get out and scout. Always be thoughtful of wind when walking in and setting up. Be patient. Always keep your safety and the safety of others on your mind. Take advantage of times and days that will receive less pressure from other hunters. Don't be afraid to call and rattle. Biggest Mistakes to Avoid: Poor preparation: Take time to gather and check all equipment well ahead of time. Make a checklist if need be, and even go through mentally what you will need getting to the hunt area, getting in the stand or blind, hunting, harvesting and getting back out of the woods. Leaving early/getting in late. Not having a backup hunting location when hunting public land. Opening Morning Expectations: Expect a high volume of hunters in the woods Saturday. Current forecast shows mild weather opening morning with a chance of precipitation moving in that evening into Sunday. Heavy rut activity will be winding down in most locations though there will still be ample opportunity to harvest

a mature deer. CENTRAL REGION Reported by Jay Rouk, Wildlife Biologist Current Buck Rutting Activity:

Bucks are entering their most active time of the year as we enter mid-November.

Historical statistics of fawn birth dates indicate that peak breeding occurs on or around

Nov. 15. This can create a "feast or famine" situation for hunters as many

bucks are "locked down" tending a particular doe. When these bucks break free and

go in search of the next doe, the action heats up fast as bucks

will be on the move and covering ground. Once a buck finds a "hot"

doe, the chase is on and hunters may witness the most exciting part of

rut hunting. One or more bucks will follow, chase, and compete for opportunity to

breed does entering estrus. This usually leads to some of the most exciting deer

hunting stories shared with friends later. Approaching and during gun season, receptive does become

harder to find, and bucks will become vulnerable as they venture farther and take

greater chances as they search and check does. The action will occur, but warm

weather tends to mute daytime activity. A cool front can be the trigger to

"turn on" daytime activity. Those big bucks pictured on game cameras in the middle

of the night will finally be on their feet during daytime hours. This is

a great time, if not the best, to be in your deer stand. Habitat

Conditions: Deer need food to fuel their intense rutting behaviors. While some of this

fuel will come from stored body fat, stomach examinations from harvested bucks and does

indicate they do make time to eat. Acorns (produced by oak trees) usually give

the most energy per unit effort to obtain. Hunters should check their area for

oak trees and verify if they are dropping good acorns. There are different varieties

of oaks and acorn production may vary each year depending on weather conditions. Acorns

should also be checked for effects from nut weevils, small beetles whose larva eat

the contents of the acorn. Deer can sense they are no good and will

not feed on them. Post oaks, black oaks and blackjack oaks are very common

in the central region but tend to be unreliable acorn producers. However, they can be a hot spot when producing trees are discovered. Red oak varieties located in riparian areas tend to be more reliable. Observations this year suggest there are plenty of acorns out there so deer may be less visible as they spend more time feeding in the timber. While wheat may not be the first choice over acorns, it is fast and easy for deer to eat. Many hunters supplement their hunting areas with wheat food plots or hunt large agricultural fields of wheat. In either case, deer are commonly sighted feeding in these fields and they make great places to view deer in the open. Wheat fields are especially attractive in the northern part of the region where oak trees are absent or less common. This is also the case for any area where oaks failed to produce acorns at all. There has been sufficient rainfall over the last month that most fields should be in good condition. Hunter and Landowner Reports: Reports from bowhunters and controlled hunts participants give the most recent information on deer activity as we approach deer season. Hunters have reported seeing bucks searching and checking scrapes and cruising field edges. In some cases, multiple bucks have been sighted chasing does. Several hunters from controlled hunts found success by hunting wheat plots where deer emerged for a quick snack or when a buck made a check for does. Relatively warm seasonal temperatures have dampened deer sightings this week compared to cooler temperatures earlier. Public Land Best Bets: Kaw WMA is always a top producer for the northern part of the region. Deer will have access to large agricultural fields of wheat and tall grass borders for cover. Deep Fork WMA, south of Bristow, was opened for gun season last year for the first time. This year will be its second year, and it may still be the best-kept secret until this report goes out. Hunters will find plenty of deer sign if they are willing to put on some boots and head to the river bottoms. The area has also has quite a bit of upland

habitat if hunters want to avoid the mud. The WMA is composed of several

properties spread over quite a bit of area so hunters should consult a map

before heading out. Down south there are several choices for hunters. Love Valley, Hickory

Creek, and Fobb Bottom are top WMA's that form a cluster near Lake Texoma.

In all cases, please consult the "Special Area Regulations" portion of the Oklahoma Hunting

and Fishing Regulations Guide before heading to any WMA. Many have special restrictions in

place that apply in addition to statewide regulations. It is the hunter's responsibility to

be aware of these restrictions. Advice for Deer Hunters: Be patient, deer activity this

time of year can change quickly and unpredictably. Gain the advantage by knowing where

acorns, wheat fields, or other food resources are located in your hunting area. When

the deer get moving, they will be making the most use of bottlenecks, saddles,

beaver dams or similar travel pathways. Position yourself to take advantage of these structures.

Deer calls may attract or repel deer at this time depending on the situation.

Good luck! Biggest Mistakes to Avoid: Losing confidence, which results in behaviors that reveal

your presence to deer. For example: moving spots, walking, leaving too early etc. Be

prepared and know your equipment. Do not be foiled by variables under your control.

For example: squeaky stand, unloaded gun, forgot safety, gun not sighted in, need a

gun rest, etc. Scent control is paramount. Always try to approach your hunt area

from downwind and avoid "scent bombing" the deer. Opening Morning Expectations: Warm weekend tempera

may dampen rutting activity, hang in there. Public lands can attract many hunters on

opening morning. Please be cooperative and, if possible, have a secondary spot to head

to in the event someone has the same plan as you. Opening day is

a spectacular event because of all the excited participants and their great expectations. Be

sure to soak it in. Take time to share stories with your friends. Go

ahead and stop at the store where you see the orange-clad hunters looking in

the back of the truck. Have a delicious coffee or soft drink and candy

bar. Take a kid hunting. Don't be in such a hurry to haul that buck or doe out of the woods, enjoy â€œdragging it out.â€• These memories are the most cherished part of deer hunting. SOUTHWEST REGION Reported by Ron Smith, Wildlife Senior Biologist Current Buck Rutting Activity: Rut activity increased sharply the week of Nov. 9. Many active scrape lines have been found. Bucks are sparring with others and pushing does. Rattling has been effective in some cases. Deer movement has been good in morning and evening. Habitat Conditions: Habitat conditions vary widely across the southwest. Much of the region has been impacted by severe drought, though moisture received during the ice and sleet storm has provided just enough to germinate winter wheat crops. Deer are beginning to take advantage of wheat since other vegetation was quickly pushed into dormancy with the hard freeze. Overall cover in the far western portion of the region will be much below average. Native mast production has been severely impacted by late spring freezing weather and drought. Hunter and Landowner Reports: Both hunters and landowners are reporting increased activity with good numbers being seen early and late. Bucks are becoming much more active chasing does. Fawn recruitment in 2018-19 appears to have been very good. Many hunters have reported seeing solid numbers of all age classes. Overall deer numbers have maintained or increased in all but the worst drought-impacted areas. Public Land Best Bets: Black Kettle, Packsaddle and Ellis County WMAs continue to be the most productive areas open for gun season. Altus-Lugert is open for shotgun with slug only. Advice for Deer Hunters: Safety first! Remember there will be many people in the field during gun season. Be prepared to hunt all day. As rut activity increases there will often be opportunity throughout the day. Always consider wind direction and possible changes when you enter and exit your hunt area. Be informed of special regulations for public hunting land vs private. Be respectful of other hunters, landowners and property lines. Biggest Mistakes to Avoid: Leaving the field early can greatly reduce your chances. Failure to consider wind direction will give instant advantage to the deer. Don't have

your eyes on the phone when the trophy makes his one and only daylight

appearance. Opening Morning Expectations: Hunter activity may be higher than past seasons. Stay aware and be flexible if hunting public land. Healthy deer numbers across the state and

continuing rut activity should put hunters in great shape for opening morning. SOUTHEAST REGION

Reported by Eric Suttles, Wildlife Senior Biologist Current Buck Rutting Activity: Southeast Region is

currently experiencing major rut activity. Bucks are chasing does throughout the day. Scrapes are

growing and being visited often. Habitat Conditions: The acorn crop in the region is

spotty. Focus on finding Red Oaks, Blackjack Oaks, Water Oaks and White Oaks. These

species are not always in the bottoms, so keep a lookout for them in

higher elevations. The weather has been great and forecast looks favorable for great hunting

opportunities of all ages. Hunter and Landowner Reports: Landowners are reporting a good yearling

crop of young bucks. They are also seeing a good buck-to-doe ratio over much

of the region. It seems very few hunting trips go without seeing a deer.

Hunters are seeking the "one" that is right for them and their management goals.

Public Land Best Bets: Three Rivers WMA, Ouachita WMA (LeFlore Unit), and Atoka PHA.

Advice for Deer Hunters: If hunting public land, take with you some extra patience.

Not only is this good for deer hunting but also when interacting with other

hunters. Finding a good spot and hunting that spot with patience is better than

walking around disturbing the woods and other hunters. Biggest Mistakes to Avoid: A hunter

needs to avoid quitting too early in the day. Plan on hunting until noon.

A lot of deer are ready to stretch their legs about the same time

you are. Another big mistake public land hunters need to avoid is not reading

this year's hunting regulations. Regulations change from time to time, so review and stay

informed of the latest changes. Opening Morning Expectations: Expect more hunters in the woods

than years past. People are wanting to get outdoors and enjoy a little stress

relief. And The Outdoors Are Always Open! So enjoy this year's deer season but

do so with safety and patience.