

Iowa's archery deer hunting season begins Oct. 1

September 29, 2020 Iowa DNR News

An estimated 60,000 hunters will be heading to the timber in the next few weeks as Iowa's archery deer season gets underway Oct. 1. For hunters in the derecho corridor, this year will not be like seasons past.

"Scouting is always important, but if you're hunting in the area damaged by derecho, it will be particularly important this year," said Tyler Harms, deer program leader for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Deer are habitual animals, Harms said, but in the area impacted by the historic August storm, deer travel lanes, food sources and even some bedding areas – their habits – have likely been changed.

Hunters should spend time getting reacquainted with the new landscape and to pattern deer habits and identify the locations of any downed trees as hunters are most likely going to be walking out there in the dark. They may also need to reset or rebuild tree stands or move the tree stands to new travel corridors or to new cover.

Deer movement will likely be increasing with the activity in the field, between the crop harvest underway as well as fields being chopped as part of the damaged crop removal requirement for insurance.

"The current weather pattern and crop removal will make for an interesting start to the season, especially for the first weekend," Harms said.

In a typical year, deer tend to focus on existing food sources, then turn to green browse as the harvest continues. Given the amount of waste grain in the derecho fields, bow hunters may need to rethink their strategy.

Iowa deer population down slightly

The results of Iowa's annual spring spotlight survey indicate the population is 3 percent lower than last year, said Harms, who coordinates the project. Part of the decline could be related to last year's outbreak of epizootic hemorrhagic disease in certain locations.

“What we know is that the population can recover,” he said. “While we were in a pretty significant drought this year, we haven’t received any reports of the disease. That may change as the crops come out, but so far, so good.”

Bowhunters hunt a lot

Bowhunters wait all year for November when they cash in a large chunk of their vacation hours so they can spend time in the tree stand during the rut waiting for that hormone charged stag to come along. The rut is the deer breeding season, when deer, especially-bucks, lose their usual cautiousness and become active and aggressive during all hours of the day.

Bow hunters fall on the avid range of the participation scale. Based on the annual bowhunter survey, they go out an average of 12 trips per year and spend an average of 3-1/2 hours per trip. They tend to be more selective and harvest fewer does than other regular deer seasons.

CWD sampling

While chronic wasting disease sample collection is often associated with the shotgun seasons, the Iowa DNR does collect deer tissue samples during bow season as part of its statewide annual effort to monitor for the fatal disease.

“Those adult bucks harvested early in the fall by bow hunters are the best samples for us when looking for the disease in new areas,” Harms said.

The DNR has a goal of collecting a minimum of 15 samples from each county, with higher quotas assigned to counties where the disease has been found in wild deer or have high risk of the disease due to adjacent counties with positive animals. Hunters willing to provide a sample are encouraged to contact their local wildlife biologist to arrange for the collection.

In the event that the county quota has been filled, or if the hunter is interested in testing a fawn or other nonpriority deer, hunters may choose to pay for their own test through a new partnership with the Iowa State University Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory.

Hunters will need to contact their local wildlife staff and ask how they can get their deer tested through the new hunter submitted option. The DNR will collect and submit the sample on their behalf. There is a \$25 fee for the laboratory to run the test. Results should be available within 2-3 weeks.

Changes to deer seasons

- The antlerless deer quota has been adjusted in 23 counties.
- The January antlerless deer season will not be offered this year except in certain zones for chronic wasting disease management.
- The early muzzleloader and first shotgun season buck-only restriction has been removed in Winnebago, Worth, Hancock, Cerro Gordo, Franklin, Hardin and Grundy counties. The early muzzleloader buck-only restriction has been removed in 20 additional counties in northwest corner of the state.

Deer donation program

The Iowa DNR, the Food Bank of Iowa and 39 meat lockers are participating in the Help Us Stop Hunger program for 2020. Hunters are encouraged to contact a participating locker before they harvest a deer to see if the locker has any additional drop off instructions.

Hunters may also sign up as a deer donor with the Iowa Deer Exchange at www.iowadnr.gov/deer then scroll down to Iowa's Deer Exchange Program link. There, donors can provide their information on what they are willing to donate. The database creates a map and table with information deer donors and deer recipients can use to get connected. There is no cost to participate. It is illegal to sell wild fish and game in Iowa.

Text to harvest

Hunters who harvest a deer are required to report their harvest by midnight on the day after it is tagged or before taking it to a locker or taxidermist. The hunter whose name is on the transportation tag is responsible for making the report. If no deer is harvested, no report is necessary.

New this year is the option to report the harvest via text message. Simply text the registration number to 1-800-771-4692 and follow the prompts. Hunters are still able to report their harvest online, by phone, or using the Go Outdoors Iowa app.

Don't Veer for Deer

The combination of cool fall weather and tractors and combines removing crops in fields across Iowa will likely get deer moving early this year. With the peak of the deer breeding activity still more than a month away, drivers need to remain vigilant with their defensive driving skills.

“Try to minimize distractions, like cellphones or eating while driving, and, if possible, avoid driving during dawn and dusk which are when deer are most active,” said Harms. “Slow your speed, look fencerow to fencerow and for the reflection of their eyes. If a deer jumps on to the roadway, don't veer or try to avoid it, but use a controlled braking technique.”

Drivers passing through the storm damaged part of the state need to be aware that deer may not be traveling through the usual corridors, Harms said.