

# The Gun Hunt 2009

## Looking for Deer

Terry Bitz of Outdoor Convergence

Two Saturday's ago, my son Devin and I joined approximately 600,000 other deer hunters who headed off to their hunting locations looking to bag a deer.

Our expectations for the hunt were somewhat diminished with the DNR already talking about a smaller herd statewide. The management unit we were hunting in near Tomah had few antlerless permits and those few were scooped up shortly after becoming available to the public. This meant both Devin and I were on a buck-only chase, which was not an issue since we still some had some venison in the freezer.

The excitement of opening morning was soon replaced by frustration. Heavy fog greeted us on our way to the woods and it hung around for hours after sunrise. The normal cacophony of gunshots heard in years past was replaced by mostly silence, save for the scurrying of squirrels and the honking of flocks of geese.



Finally, late in the morning shortly after the sun finally poked through the overcast, I caught a glimpse of a deer. It was about 120 yards away in some thick brush. Though I patiently waited, it stayed distant and mostly hidden in the brush. Because of the distance and the thickness of the cover, I could not clearly make out if it was a buck or doe. The only thing I was certain of was that it did not have a large set of antlers.

Within minutes, the deer disappeared and left my spirits a bit buoyed by just seeing a deer. However, by the end of the day, my state of mind was not nearly as positive.

Sunday was a repeat of Saturday without the fog; few gunshots and no deer activity. Besides a few brief rain showers, it was actually a nice day in the woods with the 50 degree temperatures. Too bad the deer did not cooperate.

Devin looking for deer up a steep hill late in the gun deer season

That lone deer I spotted on Saturday was the only one that Devin and I would see over the entire opening weekend.

It turns out that our experience was being repeated all over the state. As we returned back to Kenosha Sunday evening, I was hearing from friends and family that they had seen few if any deer.

Monday morning the DNR issued a preliminary report that said the deer harvest from opening weekend had fallen about 25 percent from the 2008 opening weekend. Though the buck harvest had declined slightly, the doe harvest was down significantly.

The hunters at my workplace reported similar results as my own. A total of two deer were seen between four people. All expressed frustration over what was clearly turning out to be a substandard season.

Devin and I returned to the hunt on Thanksgiving morning, but the days following turned out to have the same results as opening weekend; hours spent in the woods with nothing to show. We finished the season only seeing the one deer.

The day before the ending of the nine day hunt, I stopped by Roscoe's Live Bait, the lone deer registration station in Tomah to get a hunting report. Owner Don Roscovius reported that registrations at his store were down about 40 percent.

"Our season has been pretty slow"; said Roscovius. "We normally register about 1400 deer over the season. If we get 800 (this season), I will be happy."

Roscovius reported similar news as other registration stations in the state, hunters were claiming to have seen far fewer deer than previous seasons. He noted the warmer weather and fields with large amounts of standing corn were likely impacting the hunt as well.

Roscovius did report that he was seeing a good number of decent sized bucks registered with the largest being a 14 pointer with a 21 inch spread. He also noted that many bucks had busted up racks. He speculated that reduced doe population was causing bucks to fight over the smaller pickings that were available.

With the DNR announcing early this week that the deer harvest for the 9-day season had fallen 30 percent from 2008, hunters are predictably grumbling that there were far fewer deer to shoot at relative to previous years.

"Whether you see 100 deer or just a few, all it takes is seeing one, if you can shoot it"; said Roscovius.

That statement is certainly true. I just wish the one deer I had seen during the gun season would have clearly been a buck.