

# Reading Whitetail Body Language

There are a lot of things a buck will do, one of which is let you know exactly what’s on his mind. The catch is that you have to know how to pick up on his cues. Although some game animals will vocalize and therefore give you an idea as to what their state of mind might be, that is not something that happens with whitetail deer. Instead of using your ears to understand the mood and intentions of deer, you are going to have to use your eyes to recognize and understand their actions.

Deciphering the meaning behind behaviors and body language is important in calculating your next move. For example, if you can recognize signs of interest versus disinterest or even fear versus aggression, you can change your course of action in order to counter in such a way that brings the deer closer to where you want them. Though you may at times encounter an indifferent deer that shows no reaction whatsoever when you call, there are many other scenarios in which deer will have plenty to say via body language. Here are some behavior clues for which to watch:

The sign of an interested deer that heard your call is a raised head with forward ears. You have the attention of this deer but he may not yet be committed. Once you know he’s paying attention, give him time and watch to see his next move. You could call again but continued observation before doing so puts the odds in your favor. Oh the flip side, a deer with ears back is showing aggression. This is the deer to which you want to continue to issue calls as he will be very likely to respond.

Just as important as the front of the deer is the back of the deer. A tail that is tucked is a

sign of fear or nervousness. That deer will likely waste no time getting out of dodge because he feels that something is amiss. If you have a clear shot at such a deer, there won’t be much time to waste in taking it before a deer like this gets moving and calling will likely encourage him on his way. However, a tail that is flicking casually is an indicator of a relaxed state and such a deer is more likely to stick around.

Although we as human have the hair on the back of our necks stand up as a fear reaction, hair standing up on deer is a sign of aggression instead. A buck with hair standing stiffly is possibly trying to present as a bigger adversary, but one thing is for sure: he’s ready for a fight. Calling to this buck will likely yield results as he’s already revved up and ready to go.

The stomping of feet is another sign that a deer may be nervous. When you observe this, it is usually an indication that a deer is on edge for one reason or another and in such a situation, it is best not to push your luck by issuing calls. Watch and wait to see if the deer relaxes but be prepared as well that he may not stick around.

When taking body language and behaviors into account, it is important to look at the big picture. Though several small pieces of the puzzle can indicate one thing or another, it is the whole puzzle that really tells the story. You may see a deer that has hair standing on end, indicating aggression, but also has a clamped tail and stiff gait, both of which could indicate a bit of nervousness. It is in situations such as this that it is important to watch and wait so that you can play your hand at the most opportune time in the best manner possible, bringing home that sought after buck.

# Stalking Skills to Master

It is no secret amongst hunters that a whitetail that knows you’re coming is a whitetail on the move away from you. Whether it is sight, sound, or smell that gives you away, a whitetail deer is simply not going to sit around in the Missouri woods waiting to become prey. Instead these animals move their feet opposite of you, the perceived threat, in search of safe haven.

Though it can be very frustrating when deer evade to the point where you cannot get a decent shot, you should take these experiences apply them as learning tools. Just like with all other aspects of hunting, stalking and sneaking up on whitetail deer is a skill and mastering skills takes practice. If you are having trouble stalking deer then perhaps your skills need a little polish. Here are some suggestions as to how to apply some:

The number one adversary of a hunter is wind as it sometimes seemingly carries your scent right into the nostrils of your quarry. Sure, we all take great pains to eradicate as much of our natural human odor as possible but knowing wind behavior is equally useful. Things to remember are that hot air rises while cold air sticks close to ground level. Obstacles such as hills will redirect wind and a good way to find out where is to watch the movement of foliage. Base your movement on wind behavior in order to give your own movement the best possible chance of cover.

Once you know what the wind is doing, it is important to decide what you will be doing. Where are you planning to go? Do you know the topography in the area you are hunting? Which trails can you take that correlate with deer travel patterns? These are things you need to plan in advance so knowledge of your hunting area is vital for successful stalking. If you didn’t do enough scouting over the summer, be sure to incorporate scouting into your next off season so you will have nature’s nooks and crannies committed to memory.

# Tips For Hunting Deer

### BE SAFE

- Safety is your first priority. Nothing matters more than firearm and tree-stand safety.
- ALWAYS identify your target as a legal deer before putting your finger on the trigger. Never shoot at sounds in the brush.
- Never climb into a tree with a loaded gun. Always wear a safety belt or harness while in a tree stand.

### SPOTTING DEER

- Patience is mandatory.
- Talk to landowners about deer patterns as they are likely to know where deer gather and travel.
- Deer are active throughout the day during the breeding season (usually late October through November). Otherwise, morning and evening are the best times to spot deer.
- Deer are often found at the edges of fields or clearings in the woods.
- Snow-covered ground reveals a deer’s tracks and makes moving deer more visible.

### POSITION AND AIM

- A deer’s nose is its best defense; try to position yourself upwind of a deer trail.
- If you spot an approaching deer, try to remain motionless. Deer have keen eyes and ears.
- Aim for the “kill zone,” an area four to six inches behind the left elbow of the front leg. You are more likely to hit the deer’s heart, cause less trauma to the deer, and achieve a clean kill.



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## Hunting Other Game

Other game may be hunted during firearms deer season, but there are some restrictions. Please refer to the table below.

Species	Portion of Firearms Deer Hunting Season	Special Restrictions	Is Hunter Orange Required?
Quail and Pheasants	November portion Antlerless portion in open areas	Shot must be no larger than No. 4. This restriction does not apply to landowners and lessees hunting on land they own or lease.	Yes
	Alternative methods portion	None	No
	All other portions	None	Yes
Rabbits and Squirrels	November portion Antlerless portion in open areas	Only pistols, revolvers, rifles, or shotguns may be used. These firearms must fire .22 caliber or smaller rimfire cartridges or shot no larger than No. 4. This restriction does not apply to landowners and lessees hunting on land they own or lease.	Yes
	Alternative methods portion	None	No
	All other portions	None	Yes
Waterfowl	All portions	None	No
Other Migratory Game Birds	November portion Antlerless portion in open areas	Shot must be no larger than No. 4.	No
	All other portions	None	No
Crows	November portion Antlerless portion in open areas	Only pistols, revolvers, rifles, or shotguns may be used. These firearms must fire .22 caliber or smaller rimfire cartridges or shot no larger than No. 4. This restriction does not apply to landowners and lessees hunting on land they own or lease.	Yes
	Alternative methods portion	None	No
	All other portions	None	Yes
Furbearers	November portion Antlerless portion in open areas	Dogs may not be used during daylight hours from Nov. 1 through the end of the November portion statewide and the antlerless portion in open areas.	Yes
		In addition to a resident small game hunting permit or Nonresident Furbearer Hunting and Trapping Permit, <b>if you are hunting during daylight hours you must also possess an unfilled firearms deer hunting permit and only deer hunting methods may be used.</b>	
	Youth portions	None	Yes
	Alternative methods portion	None	No

### Tag, Check Your Harest

Using Missouri’s deer-hunting permits couldn’t be easier.

Just remember: Bag it. Notch it. Tag it if you leave it. Check it.

Protect paper e-Permits in a plastic sandwich bag while afield.

Immediately after harvesting a deer, you must notch your permit. To notch a paper permit, tear a small notch in the month and day of harvest on the permit.

New! To notch a permit using the MO Hunting app, simply select the permit you wish to use from the list in the app, and follow the short, easy prompts on the screen.

Once you notch your permit, you may transport your deer or turkey within Missouri.

As long as you stay with your harvested game, you don’t need to tag it. But if you leave your deer or turkey, you must attach a tag.

If you have a paper permit, you can simply attach your notched permit to the deer’s leg. We recommend sealing the permit in a zip-top bag and attaching the bag with string, wire, or tape.

New! If you’re using the MO Hunting app, you must attach a label with your full name, address, permit number, and date of harvest to the deer or turkey’s leg.

You must Telecheck your deer by 10 p.m. on the day of harvest, before processing your game, or before you leave the state, whichever comes first.

If you’re using a paper permit, follow the Telecheck instructions. Write the confirmation number provided by Telecheck on your permit.

New! If you’re using the MO

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### Qualifications for Landowner Permits


To qualify for landowner permits, you must be a Missouri resident. A Missouri resident is a person who does not claim any resident privileges (for example, hunting, fishing, trapping, driver’s license, or registered voter) in another state or country and whose legal residence or domicile has been in the state of Missouri for at least 30 days prior to obtaining a landowner permit.

In addition to being a Missouri resident, you also must meet one of the following criteria:

- You must own at least 5 continuous acres or be an immediate household member age 6 or older of someone who does.  
**Note:** Landowners do not need to live on their land to qualify for landowner permits; they must, however, be Missouri residents.
- You must lease and live on at least 5 continuous acres owned by others or be an immediate household member age 6 or older of someone who does.  
**Note:** Participation in a hunting lease alone does not qualify an individual for landowner permits.
- You must be a general partner of a partnership, an officer of a resident or foreign corporation, an officer or managing member of a resident limited liability company, or an officer of a benevolent association organized pursuant to Chapter 352 of the *Revised Statutes of Missouri* when the before-mentioned organization owns at least 5 continuous acres. In the case of corporate ownerships, all registered officers of a corporation can qualify, and they are not required to reside on the land. People who own stock in a corporation (shareholders) do not qualify.

**Note:** Immediate household member is anyone, related or unrelated, whose legal residence is the same as the qualifying landowner or lessee for at least the last 30 days. Family members whose legal residence is elsewhere do not qualify.

**To see if you qualify for landowner permits, visit [short.mdc.mo.gov/Zku](http://short.mdc.mo.gov/Zku).**



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