

It's great to be a bow hunter

Archers enjoy earlier, longer seasons and more hunting places in Alabama

BY JOHN N. FELSHER

Bow hunters get an earlier crack at deer than gun hunters and can hunt longer in more places. Archery season opens on Oct. 15 in all three deer zones across Alabama. Bow season in all zones lasts through Feb. 10, 2020, although some public properties might allow different season dates.

"In early bow season, deer haven't been hunted and they don't know any better," explained Chris Cook, the Alabama Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division deer studies leader. "At that time, they are usually pretty predictable. Wherever people can find deer, they should have good success in early bow season."

Quiet and without the range of rifles, archers can hunt deer in places that nobody would ever think to fire a shotgun or high-powered rifle. Willy old bucks living in those small patches of habitat might die of old age without most people ever knowing they existed.

In addition, some public lands only permit archery equipment for hunting deer. This includes the Jacinto Port Tract of the Mobile-Tensaw Delta-W. L. Holland Wildlife Management Area near Saraland and some U.S. Army Corps of Engineers properties along the Alabama and Tombigbee rivers. Some national wildlife refuges and small Forever Wild properties also only permit archery equipment for deer.

Therefore, these bow-only places receive considerably less pressure than most public hunting properties that hold firearms seasons. In fact, when neighboring tracts receive too much pressure from gun hunters, smart deer might wander into these archery-only properties where they don't hear gunfire.

Several public properties in southern Alabama provide good deer hunting. Many people in the greater Mobile area hunt the two WMAs in the Mobile-Tensaw Delta, which combine for more than 93,000 acres of public hunting property. More known for numbers, the upper delta can produce a few bucks in the 120-class or larger on the Boone and Crockett scoring system. The more marshy lower delta also holds deer, but generally not as many because much of it



Photo by John N. Felsher

Joella Bates, a world champion archer from Waverly, Tenn., stalks a deer with her bow in hand.

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