

The NewsJournal

Friday a red-letter day for hunters

Many area hunters are shifting work schedules, scouting hunting locations, dusting off years-old camouflage clothes and faded orange vests, and sniffing all the new deer scent attractants to determine which mysterious liquid smells the most like a doe that is hotter than the midday August sand on Dewey Beach.

All that is in preparation for Friday's opening of the eight-day November shotgun season – the Holy Grail for Delaware hunters.

Although Delaware's deer season officially began Sept. 1 with the opening of archery hunting, many view Friday as the true start of deer season.

Some took advantage of Delaware's special October antlerless deer season, when they were allowed to harvest antlerless



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COMMENTARY

deer (does or bucks) with shotguns. The October muzzleloader season allowed hunters to harvest antlered or antlerless deer.

However, you can bet that Nov. 14 has been circled on many hunters' calendars ever since the Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife published the 2008-2009 deer seasons.

John Koval, a lifelong deer hunter from Bear, has high hopes for opening day.

"I have several pictures of a monster buck captured on my trail camera," Koval said. "I think I have him patterned, so you can guarantee I'll be in my deer stand on opening morning come rain or shine."

According to weather.com, Friday's forecast calls for a few showers and a high of around 60.

John Massey, owner of Shooter's Supply near New Castle, said hunters he has talked to are looking forward to the opening of shotgun season.

"For the past several weeks we've been especially busy bore-sighting shotguns and selling slugs, deer attractant and tree stands," Massey said.

"Plus, a lot of guys have asked for deer butcher recommendations, so I guess they're pretty optimistic."

With approximately 14,000 deer harvested annually over the past four years, hunters have a right to feel optimistic.

In fact, according to the Historical Delaware White-tailed Deer Harvest Summary, almost half of the deer harvested were taken during the November shotgun season. This year looks to be no exception.

Delaware's estimated deer population is more than 50,000, and the number of licensed Delaware hunters is approximately 19,500.

With about 2.5 deer to every hunter, I'd say the odds of deer-hunting success look pretty good.

With rut activity nearing its peak and with favorable weather forecasts, deer will be on the move.

Steven Kendus' Hunter's Journal appears monthly in The News Journal. Kendus is the author of "Hunting The First State: A Guide to Delaware Hunting." Follow his blog at www.eastcoasthunting.blogspot.com. Contact him at skendus@HuntingTheFirstState.com.

DEER HUNTING LINKS

www.fw.delaware.gov/hunting
Delaware Division of Fish & Wildlife links to hunting seasons, guidelines, limits, maps and licensing information

www.dehip.com/deer Online deer harvest registration

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Depart from the usual game – try hunting woodcocks instead

For Delaware hunters interested in table fare other than venison steaks, Nov. 24 marked the opening of several waterfowl and small game hunting seasons.

With the majority of Delaware waterfowl and small game hunters opting to pursue ducks, geese, or rabbits during these seasons, I focus my hunting efforts on a lesser-known, frequently overlooked species of gamebird – the woodcock.



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The American woodcock, or timberdoodle, is about the size of a quail and is perfectly camouflaged to blend in with the forest floor. The birds are mostly shades of brown and gray with tan, rust, and black accents, and their eyes are relatively big and high on their heads so they can see their surroundings while they probe for food using their long, flexible bills.

Hunting the superbly camouflaged woodcock is no easy task. The birds are content to sit tight when approached by potential predators, so many hunters simply walk by them while rabbit, squirrel, or deer hunting. In fact, I would discourage any hunter from pursuing woodcock unless he or she has a good bird dog that will find and point the live birds and then find and retrieve any downed birds.

Because the woodcock's diet consists mainly of worms, they migrate south during the fall and winter months to find food in unfrozen ground. The Atlantic seaboard is a major migratory flyway of woodcock. Directly in the flyway is the Delaware Bay, which presents



Courtesy of Steven Kendus

A good bird dog, like Steven Kendus' trusty sidekick, Gus, is imperative for hunting well-camouflaged woodcocks. The dog will help find and point at live birds, while retrieving the downed ones.

Hunting calendar

- **Delaware woodcock season**
through Dec. 13, Dec. 23-Jan. 1

- **Delaware duck season**
Oct. 24-Nov. 11, Nov. 24-Dec. 6,
Dec. 19-Jan. 24

- **Delaware migratory
Canada Goose season**
Nov. 24-Dec. 6, Dec. 19-Jan. 26

the birds with a challenge due to the long, nonstop flights needed to cross from New Jersey to Delaware. Because the woodcock need to rest and feed before flying across the Bay, they frequently assemble in large groups in Cape May, N.J. Likewise, the woodcock need to rest and feed after they cross the bay, so Delaware is a prime location for hunting them.

With relatively few hunters pursuing woodcock, it is no problem finding public hunting spots. Since woodcock look for worm-rich, unfrozen

ground to feed on, focus your hunts on boggy areas, stream and river edges, flooded fields with some dry areas, and spots of thawed ground caused by underground pipes or springs. Woodcock can also be found in high concentrations in areas of new forest growth, where young trees are densely grouped and are no more than 10-15 feet high.

My bird dog, Gus, and I have harvested woodcock on both sides of the Delaware River and Bay. For New Jersey hunters, try Salem River Wildlife Management Area. For Delaware hunters, try Augustine Wildlife Area and Chesapeake and Delaware Canal Wildlife Areas in New Castle County and Blackiston Wildlife Area in Kent County.

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