



Hunting
GUIDE
Fall 2025



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Legendary Frances buck finally falls

DeFreites tags 175-inch Boone & Crockett trophy

BY CHRIS EVANS
The Crittenden Press

By all accounts, the big whitetail roaming the fields, hills and hollows last fall near Frances was no ordinary deer. He was a heavy-racked nomad, rising across property lines, showing up on cameras more than a mile apart, and sparring with smaller bucks as if to remind every hunter who the king of the ridge truly was. For a couple of years, word of his heavy frame and high tines traveled just as fast as his hoofprints, and by the fall of 2024, he had become the obsession of two longtime friends. One of them would finally close the chapter.

For Jim DeFreites, a real estate broker who splits time between Kentucky and Alabama, deer season has always been more than a pastime. But last November it became the stuff of legend. On his 182-acre Frances farm, DeFreites tagged a 13-point, Boone and Crockett qualifier that green-scored 175 6/8. It was his first deer to ever reach the B&C standard. To the uninitiated, Boone and Crockett Club's record system is like a Hall of Fame for North American big game. Whitetails must gross over 160 inches to be listed, and any deer surpassing 170 inches can be entered into the club's all-time records. For DeFreites, finally breaking that mark after decades of hunting was the pinnacle.

The hunt nearly didn't happen. On the Monday before Thanksgiving, DeFreites left his Alabama home to return to Kentucky for business. He tossed his Browning .308 on the kitchen table when he arrived, only to discover he



Tony Travis holds the sheds of DeFreites' buck.



Jim DeFreites posing with his first Boone and Crockett qualifier.

had left the magazine behind down South. That meant one round in the chamber and a single loose cartridge in his pocket, hardly the setup a hunter wants when chasing a ghost buck. Still, he made time to hunt. On Wednesday, he crossed paths with his neighbor and longtime friend Tony Travis, who had a story of his own. Two weeks earlier, Travis had gotten a shot with his bow at the same monster but struck him high. After a lengthy search turned up nothing but a faint blood trail, Travis feared the deer might be lost.

Thursday dawned windy and still. DeFreites hunted all day without luck, spotting only a couple of small bucks. Around 4:30 that afternoon, the big deer stepped out of the woods at just over 200 yards. The does he had been shadowing were hidden in a creek bottom, but the buck stood tall, scanning for danger. DeFreites raised his rifle, knowing he had just one chance. At 211 yards, he squeezed the trigger. The deer bolted, fell, then scrambled back to his feet and disappeared over a rise. With no magazine to feed another round, DeFreites hurried to slide in the lone bullet from his pocket, but by then the buck was gone.

Racing against the fading light, he tracked quickly toward where the deer had vanished. Blood sign brightened his hopes. Just inside the timber he found him, a massive whitetail with beams stretching wide and heavy tines rising like antlers from a dream. Both lungs had been pierced, and the deer hadn't gone far. Relief washed over him. He called Travis, who lives about a mile and a half away, and told him the news.

When Travis arrived, he recognized the buck immediately. It was the same deer he had hit with an arrow two weeks earlier. The scar was still visible where the broadhead had entered high in the backstrap and exited. Tough as they come, the buck had survived the wound, chased does and carried on until DeFreites finally ended the saga. Travis had even saved sheds from the deer the past two seasons and kept trail camera photos of him in vel-



vet the summer before. DeFreites had a more recent trail camera photo of him, sparring with a smaller whitetail on his farm Oct. 28, a few weeks before he was harvested.

For DeFreites, the moment was surreal. The buck's rack tallied up to a score easily clearing the Boone and

Crockett all-time minimum. At an estimated 5½ to 6½ years old, the deer represents the quality of Kentucky's trophy potential. For two friends who had spent years chasing him, the story closed with both pride and respect. Travis, who had put in countless hours tracking and watching the deer, said

he was just glad his buddy tagged him rather than see the animal vanish into the timber forever, perhaps mortally wounded by his arrow.

The Frances Monster will soon hang on DeFreites' wall, a reminder of the November evening when luck, persistence and one bullet changed everything.



Lanham's back-to-back Big Buck sets the bar for young hunters

STAFF REPORT

As hunters across Kentucky prepare for another fall in the woods, last year's Big Buck Contest winner serves as inspiration for young sportsmen eager to get a jump on the season. With new opportunities this year, including an expanded youth-only modern gun hunt, more youngsters will have the chance to take aim at trophy whitetails.

One of them who knows the thrill all too well is Hutson Lanham, who etched his name into the local hunting lore by bagging nice bucks in consecutive seasons and capturing the 2024 Marion Big Buck Contest. Sponsored by Hodge's Sports and Apparel and the Marion Tourism and Recreation Commission, the contest annually rewards

hunters who bring in the best racks.

Lanham scored his winning buck on the opening day of rifle season last November.

"I was hunting with my dad Shawn," he said. "We went out to our shooting house deer stand on Saturday afternoon. My dad was watching for beavers in the creek behind us."

Around 4 p.m., Lanham spotted movement to his left.

"I said, 'Wow! That's a nice buck, dad can I shoot him?'"

Through binoculars, his father confirmed it was the 13-pointer they had tracked on trail cameras.

"I stood on my wooden box so I could aim my .223 easily," Lanham explained.

The buck had stopped to work a scrape where the

hunters had dabbed doe urine earlier.

"When I pulled the trigger, I was so excited and wanted to rush to my deer, but my dad said we needed to wait a little bit," Lanham recalled.

When they finally approached, they realized the prize was even better than expected – a 14-pointer.

"I just couldn't believe it. I love hunting, and I love deer jerky," he said with a grin.

Lanham's story underscores the excitement surrounding deer season's return. With archery season already underway and the expanded youth gun season giving kids more days afield, many are hoping to follow his lead and notch a memory that lasts a lifetime, and maybe even claim the next Big Buck title.

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CONFIRMATION # _____

Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife
Resources

Hunters required to keep updated harvest log

Kentucky hunters are reminded that a harvest log must be filled out immediately after taking game and before moving the animal. Required details include the species and sex, as well as the date and county of the

harvest. After reporting the kill through the state's telecheck system, hunters must also record the confirmation number in their log.

A harvest log is automatically provided with any paper license or permit purchased

from a license vendor, and a printable version is available online under the "Hunt" tab of the Kentucky Fish and Wildlife homepage.

Hunters who are license-exempt—including children under 12 and those using only

a license authorization number—may create their own harvest log using paper or an index card. State regulations require hunters and trappers to carry the completed log with them while afield during the season.

Landowner Permission

A person shall not enter upon the lands of another to hunt, fish or trap without oral or written permission of the landowner, tenant or person who has authority to grant permission. Those who fail to obtain permission are subject to arrest and prosecution. Railroad tracks and rights of way are privately owned property and permission to hunt, fish or trap must be obtained prior to entry. (KRS 150:192)

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Quick
Guide

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City of Marion Tourism
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2024 DEER HARVEST RESULTS

County	Male	Female	Total	% Male	% Female	Male Visible	Male Not Visible	Archery	Firearm	Muzzleloader	Crossbow
Crittenden	1332	1280	51%	49%	2612	1187	145	327	1922	178	185
Livingston	823	806	50.52%	49.48%	1629	727	96	152	1207	149	121
Webster	947	1145	45.27%	54.73%	2092	809	138	224	1518	140	210
Caldwell	901	873	50.79%	49.21%	1774	818	83	220	1300	137	117
Union	504	564	47.19%	52.81%	1068	451	53	232	691	49	96
Lyon	637	605	51.29%	48.71%	1242	557	80	213	833	62	134

2023 DEER HARVEST RESULTS

County	Male	Female	Total	% Male	% Female	Male Visible	Male Not Visible	Archery	Firearm	Muzzleloader	Crossbow
Crittenden	1334	1334	2668	50%	50%	1168	166	321	1941	167	239
Livingston	810	785	1595	50.78%	49.22%	710	100	177	1122	188	108
Webster	979	1050	2029	48.25%	51.75%	832	147	231	1498	85	215
Caldwell	891	816	1707	52.2%	47.8%	809	82	217	1265	136	89
Union	592	614	1206	49.09%	50.91%	521	71	248	800	43	115
Lyon	578	456	1034	55.9%	44.1%	521	57	216	680	35	103

2022 DEER HARVEST RESULTS

County	Male	Female	Total	% Male	% Female	Male Visible	Male Not Visible	Archery	Firearm	Muzzleloader	Crossbow
Crittenden	1297	1410	2707	47.9%	52.1%	1145	152	295	2066	142	204
Livingston	816	897	1713	47.6%	52.4%	711	105	154	1295	133	131
Webster	1006	1123	2129	47.3%	52.7%	835	171	239	1581	98	211
Caldwell	953	900	1853	51.4%	48.6%	863	90	203	1395	146	109
Union	527	599	1126	46.8%	53.2%	459	68	252	736	43	95
Lyon	655	513	1168	56.1%	43.9%	591	64	184	774	66	144

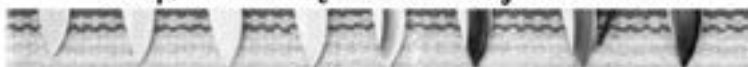


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Hunters face new rules in CWD surveillance zone

Staff Report

Hunters in Union, Webster and Henderson counties will face special rules this fall as part of Kentucky's ongoing effort to monitor and manage chronic wasting disease (CWD) in the state's deer herd.

The three local counties are part of a 14-county CWD Surveillance Zone that also includes Ballard, Breckinridge, Calloway, Carlisle, Fulton, Graves, Hardin, Hickman, Marshall, McCracken and Meade. The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources established the zone in 2021 after a positive CWD case was confirmed just across the river in Tennessee.

Two mandatory check periods are in place for hunters this season.

✓ First Weekend of Modern Gun, Nov. 8–10: Hunters in Union, Webster and Henderson counties must take harvested deer to either a staffed CWD check station or a drop-off site. Locations include the Henderson County Extension Office, Sloughs WMA



in Corydon, Union County Extension Office, Higginson-Henry WMA in Morganfield, Southern States in Sebree, Webster County Extension Office in Dixon, and S&S Salvage in Providence.

CWD testing is free, and results are typically available within two to three weeks.

Hunters should also be aware of other restrictions in the surveillance zone. Baiting is allowed with some limitations—contact-style

feeders such as troughs and gravity feeders are prohibited. Baiting remains illegal on wildlife management areas and other public lands, though scent attractants and deer urine products are still permitted.

Carcass transport rules are also in effect. Whole carcasses and high-risk parts from deer, elk, moose or caribou harvested out of state cannot be brought into Kentucky. Within the CWD zone, only deboned meat, clean skulls, teeth, hides, antlers and finished taxidermy mounts may be taken out.

Hunters of all ages and license categories—including landowners and youths under 12—are subject to these requirements. Deer given to another person during mandatory dates must also be checked properly.

Wildlife officials stress that these measures are designed to keep Kentucky's deer herd healthy. CWD is always fatal to deer and elk, and there is no cure. Hunters with questions can call the Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Information Center at 1-800-858-1549.

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Deer seasons underway, youth hunt next up

With archery season already in swing over a month, Kentucky hunters are gearing up for even more opportunities as fall continues to unfold. The state's new, longer youth-only modern gun season is just days away, followed quickly by the traditional modern gun season in November.

The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources reminds hunters to consult the 2025-26 Kentucky Hunting and Trapping Guide for full details on new season dates and regulations. Updates this year affect deer, bear, dove and waterfowl hunting, along with some changes on public lands.

Archery season opened Sept. 6, followed by crossbow on Sept. 20. Both run through Jan. 19. A major change this

- ### YOUTH DEER HUNTING CHECKLIST
- ✓ Hunters under 16 may hunt during any open season.
 - ✓ Adults may accompany but cannot hunt (except during muzzleloader season).
 - ✓ Hunter orange required for all.
 - ✓ Youth-Only Gun Season: Oct. 11-19.
 - Ages 12-15: Need license & permit
 - Under 12: No license or permit required.
 - ✓ Free Youth Weekend: First weekend after Christmas.
 - Ages 15 & under hunt with an adult
 - No license or permit required.
 - ✓ Legal hunting methods only; bag limits still apply.

year is the expansion of the youth-only modern gun season from two days to nine. The special season for young hunters will run Oct. 11-19, giving them more opportunity in the woods.

The most popular season remains the modern gun hunt, set for Nov. 8-23. "The vast majority of our deer harvest comes from the modern gun season," said Joe McDermott, Kentucky Fish and Wild-

life's deer program coordinator. "With the additional youth opportunity, we are looking for more antlerless deer to be harvested, especially in Zone 1 counties."

Other fall seasons are also

underway. Squirrel season opened Aug. 16 and runs through Nov. 7, then re-opens Nov. 10-Feb. 28. Dove season opened Sept. 1 and the first segment continues through Oct. 26, though hunters should note that decoys are prohibited on department-managed public lands during September. Waterfowl hunters will also see changes this fall, including a shorter teal season, new pintail limits and revised standby hunt procedures at Ballard and Boatright WMAs.

All hunters born after 1974 must complete hunter education certification unless exempt when hunting on their own property. Schedules for safety courses can be found on the department's website.

REPORT GAME VIOLATIONS

Anonymous tips about suspected illegal activity related to fish, wildlife or boating can be submitted through the KFWLaw smartphone app.

For non-smartphones with texting capability, text the keyword "KFWLAW" along with your tip to 847411 (tip411).

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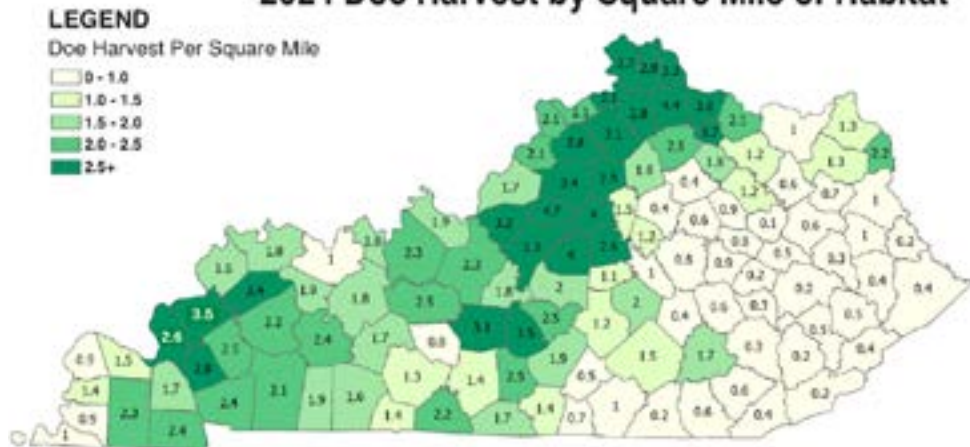
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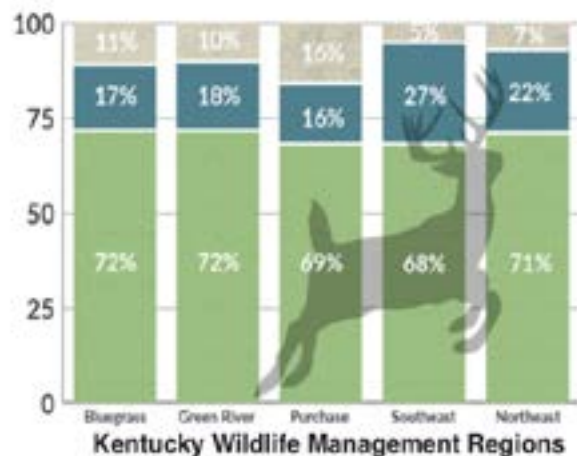
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2024 Doe Harvest by Square Mile of Habitat



2024-25 KY Antlered Deer Harvest



High doe harvest puts Crittenden county at top of Kentucky rankings

The above map from the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife shows that Crittenden County had one of the highest doe harvest densities in the state last season, with 3.5 antlerless deer taken per square mile of habitat in 2024. That figure ranks the county among the top producers in Kentucky and the leader in western Kentucky, where most counties ranged between 1.5 and 3 does per square mile.

Neighboring Livingston County reported 2.6 per square mile, while Webster was closer to Crittenden at 3.4. Densities in other border

counties were 2.5 or less.

The Purchase and Green River regions as a whole show stronger harvest densities compared to eastern Kentucky, where many counties reported less than one doe per square mile.

Despite the high take locally, biologists are urging hunters to continue focusing on antlerless harvests to better balance herds and prevent habitat strain. Insurance companies are also pushing for a bigger harvest. Wildlife officials say managing the doe population is key to long-term deer health and maintaining sustainable

hunting opportunities.

The chart above from the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources shows how buck age classes broke down in the 2024-25 deer harvest across the state's five wildlife management regions. Crittenden is in the Purchase Wildlife Region. In the Purchase Region, 16 percent of the harvest were buck fawns, 16 percent yearlings and 69 percent adults. The data provide insight into herd structure and hunting pressure, offering wildlife officials tools to guide deer management strategies.

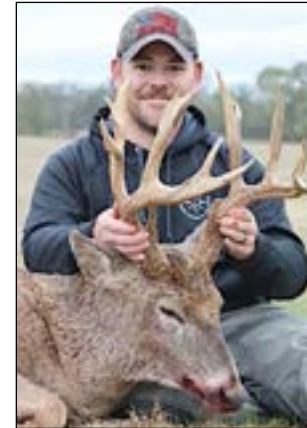
Rainy-day gamble paid off for last year's Big Buck Contest winner

As hunters gear up for a new season, it's worth remembering how last year's Big Buck Contest came down to grit, patience and a little faith in the rain.

Despite a torrential downpour that would have kept most hunters at home, Travis Carswell pressed on—and it led him to claim the \$1,000 grand prize in the annual competition sponsored by the Marion Tourism and Recreation Commission and Hodge's Sports and Apparel.

"It was pouring rain, and I about didn't go that day," Carswell recalled. "On a whim, I decided to head out despite the weather!"

The gamble paid off. By midafternoon, after spotting a series of smaller bucks, Carswell's persistence was rewarded when a tall, narrow-racked buck he had nicknamed "HighTower" stepped



Travis Carswell braved a driving rain to harvest "HighTower," a tall, narrow-racked buck that earned him the grand prize in last year's Big Buck Contest.

into view. The deer had eluded him the year before, but this time he didn't get away.

At 175 yards, Carswell squeezed off a shot, watched

the buck stagger, then fired again to seal the deal. HighTower, believed to be seven years old, was the biggest deer Carswell had ever harvested.

"I feel blessed and very humbled to have taken this old warrior," he said after the hunt. "The good Lord blessed me years ago when I first came up from North Carolina and started hunting Crittenden and Livingston counties. The deer hunting here is second to none, and the deer population is phenomenal."

The kill capped off years of effort, proving once again that hunters who weather the elements often come away with stories worth telling.

Carswell's win was celebrated by fellow outdoorsmen across the county, and his advice still rings true as a new season begins: "You can't kill them at the house."

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Moon phases and deer hunting: Timing your hunt in western Ky.

For hunters in Western Kentucky, understanding the moon can be just as important as knowing the wind. Deer activity often rises and falls with the lunar cycle, and paying attention to moon phases can give hunters an edge.

During new moons, the nights are dark, forcing deer to move more during daylight hours. This often makes early morning and late afternoon hunts particularly productive, as deer are more likely to be feeding in the open. Hunters taking aim during these quiet, moonless nights often see increased daytime movement in their stands.

By contrast, full moons light up the night, allowing deer to feed under bright conditions. While this may mean less activity during the day, deer are still on the move at night, and trail cameras often capture more movement. Full moons also coincide with heightened rut activity, so bucks are roaming, searching for does—sometimes making for thrilling encounters if hunters can predict where deer will be traveling.

Quarter moons—waxing and waning—offer a balance. Deer move in and out of cover with less predictability, providing opportunities for hunters during standard morning and evening windows.

HUNTING WINDOWS BY MOON PHASE



NEW MOON

Increased daytime activity

BEST HUNTING:

Early Morning/Late Afternoon



FULL MOON

More nighttime activity, heightened rut

BEST HUNTING:

Dawn/Dusk



QUARTER MOONS

Balanced movement

BEST HUNTING:

Morning/Evening

Timing hunts around moonrise and moonset can also matter. Deer are crepuscular, favoring dawn and dusk, and when these times align with moonlight, movement patterns can shift. A rising moon at sunrise may find deer already on the move, while a setting moon at sunset can keep bucks active longer into the evening.

In Western Kentucky's mix of timber, fields, and creek bottoms, the interplay of moonlight and cover is key. By paying attention to the lunar cycle, hunters can plan their stands, set up trail cameras, and anticipate deer movement, turning a subtle celestial rhythm into a powerful hunting strategy.

3 reasons to wear hunter orange

Prevent Accidents – Bright orange makes you highly visible to other hunters, reducing the risk of being mistaken for game.

Stay Trackable – Partners and emergency responders can find you more easily in the woods.

Safe Without Sacrificing Success – Deer do not see hunter orange the way humans do, so it won't hurt your chances of a harvest.



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Carry firearms safely

Kentucky law allows hunters who are legally permitted to possess firearms to carry them while hunting. However, it's important to remember that only legal methods may be used to take game.

Carrying a firearm safely is critical. Always keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction, keep your finger off the trigger until ready to shoot, and be aware of your surroundings, including other hunters. Even while carrying legally, improper use or handling of a firearm can lead to accidents or legal trouble.

By following these rules, hunters can enjoy the outdoors safely, respect wildlife regulations, and protect themselves and others in the field.



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Flight path of tradition: Western Kentucky sits at the heart of North America's waterfowl highway

For many in the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys, the sight of Canada geese in V-shaped formations over harvested fields marks the seasonal rhythm of migration. Those flocks are part of a larger pattern that spans the continent. North America is divided into four major flyways — Atlantic, Mississippi, Central and Pacific — the primary corridors waterfowl use each year as they travel between northern breeding grounds and southern wintering areas.

Origins of the Flyway System

The flyway system emerged in the early 20th century after passage of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, which gave federal protection to migratory birds. Biologists began banding ducks and geese in the 1930s, and by the 1940s enough data had been collected to formally define four migration routes. Organizing management around these routes allowed states to coordinate regulations, set bag lim-

its and monitor populations across jurisdictional boundaries. Each flyway now has a council of state and federal representatives that relies on banding data, harvest reports and habitat surveys to guide hunting frameworks.

The Mississippi Flyway

The Mississippi Flyway is the most heavily traveled corridor, stretching from the Arctic tundra through the central United States to the Gulf of Mexico. Roughly 40 percent of North America's ducks and geese use this flyway, guided by the Mississippi River and its tributaries.

Western Kentucky and southern Illinois sit at the heart of this path. River bottoms, sloughs, oxbow lakes and flooded agricultural fields in the region provide ideal resting and feeding habitat. Southern Illinois refuges such as Horseshoe Lake and Union County Conservation Area are critical stopovers, attracting tens of thousands of birds during peak migration. On the



Kentucky side, hunters pursue mallards in flooded timber or set up in harvested cornfields for Canada and snow geese. Waterfowl hunting is available on area lakes and rivers, and at the Big Rivers Wildlife Management Area in northern Crittenden County.

Hunting Seasons in Western Kentucky

For hunters in Kentucky's western zone, early September offers teal and wood duck opportunities, but the main

waterfowl seasons open later in the fall when northern birds push into the region. This year's dates include:

■ **Youth Waterfowl:** Nov. 22 and Feb. 14

■ **Duck:** Nov. 27-30 and Dec. 7-Jan. 31

■ **Canada Goose:** Nov. 27-Feb. 15

■ **Snow and Ross' Goose:** Nov. 27-Feb. 15

■ **White-fronted Goose:** Nov. 27-Feb. 15

These seasons reflect migration timing. By late Novem-

ber, freezing conditions to the north send large concentrations of ducks and geese into the Mississippi Valley. The season extends through January, giving hunters access throughout the winter.

Why Flyways Matter

Defined flyways provide more than a framework for hunting. They allow for coordinated conservation across international borders. Adaptive Harvest Management, implemented in 1995, uses annual surveys, habitat assessments and harvest reports to adjust hunting regulations and ensure long-term sustainability. Data gathered from bird banding remains critical to tracking migration routes and population health.

"The flyway system provides states with the information they need to assign birds, regulate hunting and claim stewardship over their share of the population," Delta Waterfowl scientist Chris Nicolai said in a recent interview. "That data has been essential

to balancing opportunity with conservation."

Looking Ahead

Habitat loss, urban expansion and climate change continue to threaten migration corridors. Conservation groups and hunters play an important role in protecting wetlands and supporting programs funded through license sales and federal duck stamps. The cooperative approach of flyway councils, paired with local investment in habitat, has helped sustain North America's waterfowl populations for nearly a century.

For residents of western Kentucky and southern Illinois, the Mississippi Flyway ensures the tradition of waterfowl hunting remains not only a seasonal pastime but also a link to a continental system of conservation. Each fall, as flocks funnel down the rivers and fields of the region, hunters and bird watchers alike are reminded of the unseen order that guides millions of birds across thousands of miles.



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Venison Stroganoff – A comfort food classic with a wild twist

Venison's lean, rich flavor pairs beautifully with creamy sauces. Stroganoff transforms it into a comforting meal that highlights tenderness without overpowering the natural game taste.

Ingredients (Serves 4):

- 1 lb venison steak, tenderloin, or backstrap – trimmed of silver skin and sliced thin
- 2 tbsp butter + 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 8 oz cremini or button mushrooms, sliced
- 1 tbsp all-purpose flour (thickener)
- 1 cup beef broth (wild game stock works well)
- 1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- ½ cup sour cream (full fat for creaminess)
- Salt and cracked black pepper to taste
- Fresh parsley, chopped
- 8 oz wide egg noodles, rice, or mashed potatoes

Method:

Prep the Venison: Trim silver skin and slice across the grain for tenderness. Season with salt and pepper.

Sear Quickly: Heat butter and olive oil in a skillet over medium-high. Brown venison slices for 1–2 minutes per side (don't overcook). Set aside.

Build Flavor: In the same pan, cook onions and garlic until fragrant. Add mushrooms, sauté until browned.

Make the Sauce: Sprinkle flour over vegetables, cook briefly. Slowly whisk in broth, then stir in Worcestershire and mustard.

Finish: Return venison to pan, reduce heat, and simmer gently for 5–7 minutes. Remove from heat, stir in sour cream, adjust seasoning.

Serve: Spoon over egg noodles, rice, or mashed potatoes. Garnish with parsley.

Wild Game Tips:

Avoid toughness: Venison is lean; quick searing keeps it tender.

Flavor balance: The sour cream sauce softens any “gamey” notes.

Make ahead: Cook sauce in advance, add venison just before serving.





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