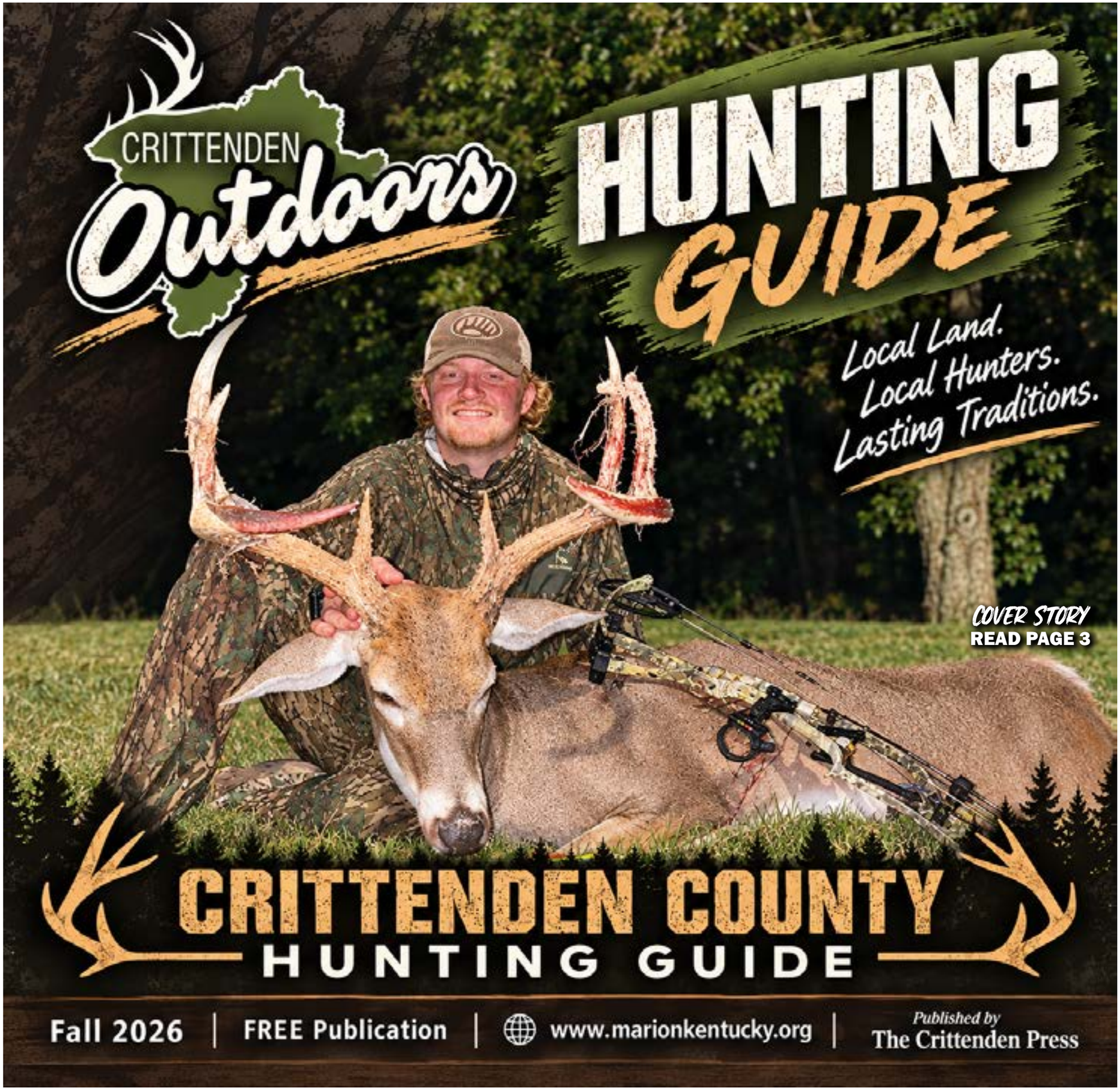
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HUNTING GUIDE
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Deer harvest of 145,000 fifth largest in Ky. history

By TOM LATEK
Kentucky Today

FRANKFORT, Ky. – The Kentucky Division of Fish and Wildlife Resources (KDFWR) announced that hunters harvested 145,433 deer in Kentucky during the 2025-26 season, the fifth-highest reported total in history and 3,000 above the 10-year average.

Last years season was noteworthy for a newly expanded October youth-only season, impressive success of hunters on public land, and a high percentage of harvested bucks estimated to be 2½ years old or older. However, doe harvest goals, aimed at maintaining a healthy and quality herd, were not met.

"In many ways, it was a great deer season – almost 105,000 hunters were successful in taking at least one deer, walking away with meat in the freezer, some with a rack for the wall and all stories to tell friends and family," said Joe McDermott, KDFWR deer program coordinator. "We are looking to substantially increase the female harvest over time."

Last year, KDFWR set doe harvest goals for Zone 1 and Zone 2 counties, but only one county – Simpson – met its goal. Eleven other counties met 80 to 90 percent of the department's goals.

McDermott said wildlife officials are discussing ways to increase doe harvest. More than 20 counties were reassigned to different zones to encourage more doe harvest in the 2026-27 deer season.

An overabundance of deer can result in increased deer-vehicle collisions and damage to agricultural crops and expensive landscaping. It can also increase the spread of tick-born and other diseases and lead to smaller body sizes and antlers due to competition for food.

"When there are fewer deer on the landscape, the remaining animals are better able to reach their full potential," McDermott stated.

Of the 104,595 successful deer hunters in 2025, 74 percent took only one deer, less than 43 percent took a doe and less than 3 percent filled their standard four-deer permit allotment, said Tommy Apostolopoulos, deer program biologist.

As a reminder, hunters who take more deer than they need can donate a deer to Kentucky Hunters for the Hungry or Boone Brothers, two organizations working together to fight food insecurity.

First deer sparked passion for bowhunting

By David R. Drennan
For The Crittenden Press

Crittenden County Middle School teacher Riley Jones has hunted with a bow for as long as he can remember. He took his first deer with one when he was 10, with his father beside him.

"My dad was hunting with me and I can just remember how excited he was for me," Jones said. "He was more excited than I was, I think."

Jones said he is grateful his father introduced him to hunting and for the time they have spent together in the woods. He hopes to share that experience with his son one day.

Jones and his father primarily hunt private land, but he respects hunters who find success on public land. Bowhunting appeals to him because a deer must come within close range, and many things have to go right before he can take a shot.

"I think that, to me, just adds an extra level of adrenaline and excitement that I have personally never had from gun hunting," he said.

Kentucky's 2026-27 deer archery season opened Sept. 5 and runs through Jan. 18. During the previous season, bowhunters took approximately 16,000 deer statewide, according to the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources. In Crittenden County, 361 of about 2,600 deer harvested were taken with vertical bows last year.

COVER STORY:

It never hurts to ask

Tyler Boone's early-morning trips to the gym turned into a little preseason scouting, and eventually the biggest buck he has taken with a bow.

Several mornings a week, Boone drove from his home in eastern Crittenden County to work out in Marion at the Launch Pad. His route wound through some prime deer country, and around daylight, one pasture repeatedly caught his attention.

A big buck was feeding there with two others nearly as large.

Boone knew the landowner, a longtime family friend and widow for whom he had done some work when he was younger. He had never hunted her property, but watching those bucks gave him a reason to stop.

He asked for permission. She said yes.

Getting access was the first step. Figuring out how to approach the deer was the next.

Although Boone regularly saw the bucks in the morning, plenty of does were usually in the field, too. He figured slipping into position without being detected would be difficult with so many deer nearby.

Instead, he chose an afternoon approach, hoping to get settled before the deer began moving toward dusk.

Opening day, Sept. 5, 2026, brought another challenge: a temperature of 97 degrees. An afternoon rain shower offered some relief, cooling things into the mid-80s about the time Boone headed to his stand.

His plan came together quickly.

About 30 minutes later, he harvested the buck.

Boone, 23, has hunted since he was 5 or 6, but the opening-day deer was only his second buck with a bow, and by far his largest with archery equipment. He has taken a couple of larger bucks with a rifle over the years.

This hunt began with something much simpler than a trip to the stand. A familiar road, a few daylight sightings and a stop to visit a family friend opened the door to an opportunity.

Sometimes, it pays to ask.

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117	WEBSTER
113	UNION

License and Permit Fees

License	Resident	Nonresident
Annual Hunting License	$28.54	$169.12
Senior/Disabled License	$12.68	N/A
Sportsman's License	$100.42	N/A
Youth Hunting License	$6.34	$10.57
Youth Deer Permit (4 Deer)	$10.57	$15 .86
Youth Sportsman's License	$31.71	N/A
Statewide Deer Permit (4 Deer)	$37	$248.40
Bonus Antlerless Permit	$15.86	$15.86
Additional Deer Permit (2 Deer)	$15.86	$15.86

Carry Proof

Hunters who buy their license or permit by phone or internet must carry while hunting:
a picture ID and proof of purchase (an authorization number, paper license or computer print out).
Paper licenses/permits must be signed and all information completed before hunting.

Hunting Seasons

Here are some of the most common hunting opportunities currently in season or coming up:

Squirrel	Aug 15 - Nov 13
Dove	Sept 1 - Oct 26
Deer Archery	Sept 5 - Jan 18
Turkey Archery	Sept 5 - Jan 18
Deer Crossbow	Sept 19 - Jan 18
Turkey Crossbow	Oct 1-18
Deer Youth	Oct 10-18
Deer Muzzleloader	Oct 17-18
Turkey Gun	Oct 24-30
Deer Gun	Nov 14-29
Turkey Crossbow	Nov 14 - Dec 31
Squirrel	Nov 16 - Feb 28
Dove	Nov 26 - Dec 6
Duck	Nov 26-29
Turkey Gun	Dec 5-11
Duck	Dec 7 - Jan 31
Deer Muzzleloader	Dec 12-20
Goose	Nov 26 - Feb 15
Dove	Dec 19 - Jan 10
Deer Youth Free	Dec 26-27
Bullfrog	May 16 - Oct. 31
Coyote daytime	Year Round
Ground hog	Year Round

The Crittenden Outdoors Hunting Guide is produced annually by The Crittenden Press newspaper and distributed free of charge in this community and beyond.

2025 DEER HARVEST RESULTS

County	Male	Female	Total	% Male	% Female	Male Visible	Male Not Visible	Archery	Firearm	Muzzleloader	Crossbow
Crittenden	1179	1215	2394	49.25%	50.75%	1060	119	327	1762	141	164
Livingston	781	816	1597	48.9%	51.1%	694	87	177	1137	128	155
Webster	810	819	1629	49.72%	50.28%	698	112	183	1174	104	168
Caldwell	858	840	1698	50.53%	49.47%	767	91	204	1267	116	111
Union	471	444	915	51.48%	48.52%	421	50	159	645	44	67
Lyon	460	393	853	53.93%	46.07%	414	46	144	588	30	91

2024 DEER HARVEST RESULTS

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

A place to hunt, a buck to remember

For years, Steve Hook loved deer hunting but struggled to find a place where he could go regularly. A lease on a small tract in western Crittenden County changed that — and last November, it helped him win a local big buck contest.

Hook, 50, of Clay won $1,000 in the 2025 contest sponsored by the Marion Tourism and Recreation Commission and Hodge's Sports and Apparel in Marion. It was only the second time he had entered.

"I have loved hunting all my life, but I have never had my own place where I could go," said Hook, who grew up in Madisonville. "We started leasing this place a couple of years ago. It has been difficult to find places to hunt."

Hook and his uncle lease just over 80 acres, mostly open field with a wooded bluff. Hook had seen the buck during bow season but never got a clear shot. Hunters on a neighboring farm also encountered it the day before his hunt and searched for it with a drone, believing it had been mortally wounded.

On the cold, sunny morning of Nov. 13, 2025, Hook was hunting alone from a small ground blind. About an hour after daylight, the buck chased a doe into view.

"He was hot on the trail," Hook said. "They were both running, and when the doe stopped, he did too."

Hook waited until the buck stood still before taking a shot of about 50 yards with his .308 Remington.

"I don't try to shoot one running. I want to make sure I get a good shot," he said. "When he stopped running, I was like, 'Yes!'"

The deer weighed 174 pounds field dressed. Its 10-point rack had a basic eight-point frame and triple brow tines. It was only the second buck Hook had harvested.

His first came during the late muzzleloader season in 2024, after he had passed on several deer. That non-typical 15-pointer received a shoulder mount. Hook planned a European mount for his contest-winning buck.

After the hunt, Hook checked the deer through the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources' Telecheck system, then called his uncle with the news. He had not had the rack scored under Boone and Crockett standards, but securing a place to hunt had already given him something he had wanted for years.

Jason Hook of Clay scored $1,000 from the Marion Big Buck Contest with the second buck he's ever taken.

Chasing rabbits, making memories: Simple joys of rabbit hunting

By David R. Drennan
For The Crittenden Press

Writer Gene Hill once said, "I can't conceive of hunting without a dog. I just don't enjoy a day in the field without seeing the fun that a dog has in working. If I have to choose between leaving the gun home or the dog, I'll set out with the dog." This sentiment is something that local pastor and hunter Kirk Greenfield might agree with. His memories of rabbit hunting bring up a myriad of thoughts and feelings.

Greenfield's first stories are about the people he hunted with. "I grew up rabbit hunting with my dad. He was not an avid hunter, but he liked rabbit hunting with dogs. We always had a couple of beagles," recalled Greenfield. The beagle's compact 20- to 30-pound frame lets it slip through tight briars and brush piles after its quarry. Greenfield also continued, "We enjoyed many early mornings walking fields and thickets. When I was younger, we often just walked from our house and hunted nearby."

An old truck is also what makes any Kentucky hunting story complete. "We also had an old truck in which we would load the dogs and explore new places on surrounding farms. I had a truck when I started driving," he explained. He brought his dogs along in a homemade dog box.

As Greenfield grew older, he also hunted by himself or with his best friend from high school. "He lived on a farm with many thickets that held rabbits," he explained. He also explained that he hunts even today with a friend "who has a bunch of dogs." "That adds a whole different dynamic to the hunt," Greenfield explained.

The tradition of hunting is often a rite of passage passed down from generation to generation. Outdoor novelist Robert Ruark penned the importance of such relationships in his bestseller "Old Man and the Boy." In the novel, the wise grandfather teaches the young boy patience, responsibility and respect for nature while pursuing everything local to the region, including rabbits. Just as his dad took Greenfield hunting, he now takes his own three daughters.

Greenfield's stories of rabbit hunting then shift to the main stars: the dogs. His mind immediately went to the excited whine of the dogs waiting in the box early in the morning. He recalled watching them bound away into the fields after they were turned loose.

The sounds of a rabbit hunt are all about what the dogs are doing, Greenfield explained. "The sound of that howl as they strike the first 'hot' trail is beautiful," he described. He added that the dogs continuously bark and yip as they are in full pursuit. He also noted, "When they break from cover, their tails are beating a steady rhythm and their noses glued to the ground."

It is this simplicity that draws Greenfield to the rabbit hunt. "It reminds me of a simpler time, a time when a young boy was thankful to walk with his dad behind a couple of beagles," he stated. Greenfield also explained that rabbit hunting has not been overcome with gadgetry like other types of hunting. "Otherwise, it does not require special clothing or gear. Nearly any kind of shotgun will do," he noted.

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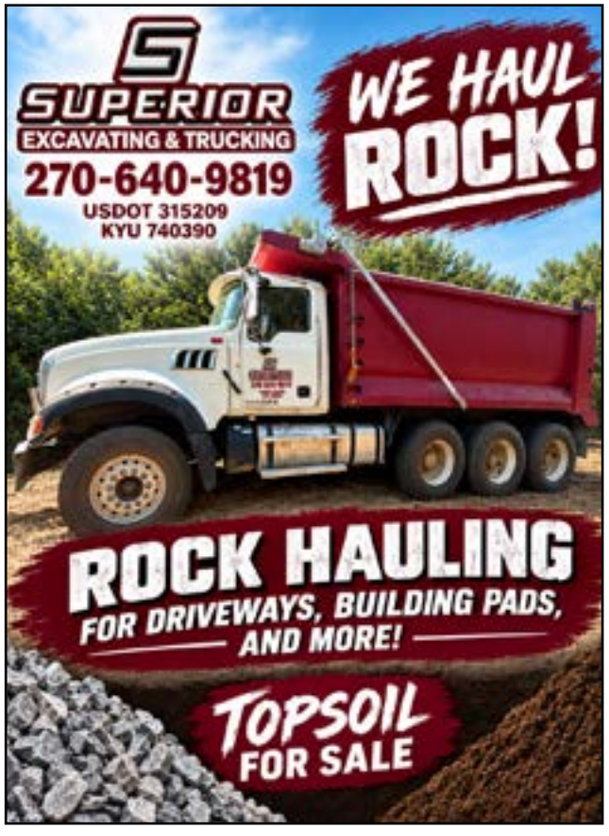
No later than May 1, send the completed and signed score sheet with a photo to Kentucky Hunting & Trapping Guide, #1 Sportsmen's Lane, Frankfort, KY 40601.
Include the county in which the deer was taken, and the equipment used to harvest the deer. Please send a copy as score sheets and photos will not be returned.
Emailed submissions to info.center@ky.gov also will be accepted.
To get a list of official Boone and Crockett Club scorers in Kentucky visit
www.boone-crockett.org.
For more information, visit www.boone-crockett.org.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Crouse family builds a legacy with field dogs

By David R. Drennan
For The Crittenden Press

Mike Crouse grew up hunting wild quail with his father, brother and their English pointers and setters. At his Webster County kennel, that family connection to dogs now spans three generations.

As wild quail numbers declined, the family turned to field trials, where dogs and handlers compete in tests of their hunting abilities. Over the kennel's 50-year history, Crouse said, its dogs have earned 900 field trial placements, including 30 field championships.

Crouse's daughter, Mary, has been part of the work since childhood. She attended her first competition before she was a year old and was riding her own horse at trials by age 4 or 5. Today, she helps prepare the kennel's next generation of dogs. Her daughter, Anna Katherine, has joined the family at competitions.

The kennel has raised English pointers, English setters and field-bred English cocker spaniels. Crouse prizes the cockers for their scenting ability, drive and willingness to work with people.

"A cocker will figure it out, as he wants to make you happy to the best of his ability," he said.

Crouse said his dogs have gone on to serve in many roles, from hunting companions to narcotics detection dogs. He and Mary also take pride in hearing about the dogs' lives with their families.

At field trials, Crouse sees the results of years of breeding, handling and training. He calls the competition "a great game, never permanently won or lost, but only played."

The family also mentors other handlers and hosts trials at its Webster County farm. It held its first there in 2023 and two more in 2024, passing along the skills and traditions that first brought Crouse into the field with his father and brother.

WHEN IT HAPPENS

- Peak in Western Kentucky is usually mid-November to early December, but can vary by year and weather.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- Increased movement (especially mornings and evenings).
- Bucks chasing does.
- More vocalizations - grunts, bleats and snorts.
- Bucks traveling new areas.

HOW TO HUNT THE RUT

- Focus on does bedding and travel routes.
- Be in the stand early and stay late.
- Use rattling, grunting or doe-in-heat scents (with caution).
- Be patient - the action can come in waves.

Local farm opens to public dove hunters

By David R. Drennan
For The Crittenden Press

A 43-acre cornfield off Cave Springs Road in Crittenden County gave dove hunters a place to hunt on private land during September.

The field, owned by Matthew Hardesty, was part of the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources' co-operator field program. Under the program, landowners lease fields to the state for public hunting.

"They came to us and asked us if there was an interest in leasing for the month of September," Hardesty said. His family has participated in the program nearly every year for the past four or five years.

Hardesty planted corn in the field earlier this year. Doves are drawn to the chopped silage and grain left after harvest, he said. Hunters could find the field's size and planting information on the state's interactive dove field map.

The opening weekend brought 12 to 15 vehicles, Hardesty said. His house is within sight of the field, and he heard a few shots. Activity tapered off after that as doves spread out and more cornfields opened during harvest.

Hardesty said he has not hunted doves in years. He usually spends September in a combine.

Kentucky's daily dove limit is 15 birds. Their speed and small size make them challenging targets, and hunters may fire several shots for each bird they take.

STAND PLACEMENT & WIND

THE RIGHT SPOT — AND THE RIGHT WIND — CAN MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE.

STAND PLACEMENT TIPS

- Look for travel corridors - trails, field edges and creek bottoms.
- Hunt the edges - where cover meets open areas (food sources).
- Consider elevation - higher ground often gives you a better view and more wind options.
- Use natural cover - trees, brush and terrain features help you stay hidden.
- Be patient - the best spots aren't always the most obvious ones.

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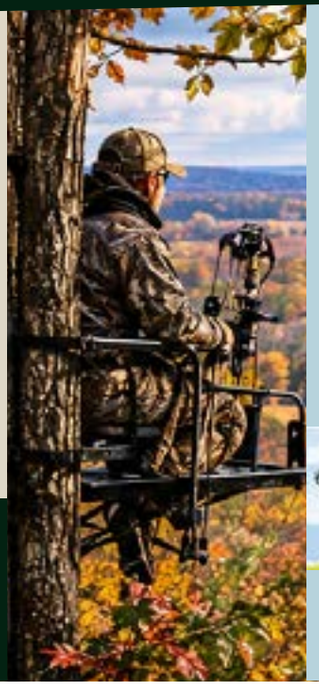

WIND MATTERS

- Always hunt with the wind in your face
- Check wind direction throughout the day - it can change!
- Use a scent control system and minimize human scent.
- Set up downwind from bedding areas.
- Pay attention to thermals - especially in the morning and evening.

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Drones offer another way to find deer, lost pets

Thermal imaging drones are giving hunters and pet owners another way to search when an animal disappears into fields or woods.

Trey Hutchison of Sturgis began using a drone to find deer after hunts. He and his brother-in-law, who are certified to fly drones commercially, now also search for lost pets. Hutchison said his own experience tracking deer, sometimes unsuccessfully, led him to try the technology.

A thermal camera detects differences in heat, allowing a pilot to spot an animal that might be difficult to see from the ground. An aerial view can also help searchers cover brush, fields and other areas without walking through them.

For hunters, the goal is to locate a deer that ran after being shot. Hutchison said a drone may help determine whether the animal is still alive, giving the hunter more information before deciding when to continue the search.

Marion-based Superior Whitetail Habitats also specializes in drone recovery for deer recovery. Pilot Brandon Shaw said the view from above can complement other tracking methods, including the use of dogs. The company has used drone flights to survey deer on private property as well.

Trey Hutchison guides his drone carefully, looking for a harvested deer.

Finding an animal still depends on conditions and where it has traveled. A drone does not replace careful tracking or the judgment needed after a shot. It offers another perspective when a search on foot becomes difficult, particularly as daylight fades.

The same ability to scan an area from above can be useful when a pet goes missing. Fields and wooded areas that could take hours to search on foot may be checked more quickly by a drone pilot, helping owners focus their efforts.

Drone operators must follow applicable flight and wildlife rules, and hunters should check current regulations before arranging a search. For those looking for a deer or a lost pet, the technology adds one more tool to a search that can otherwise come down to patience and luck.

1 FIELD DRESSING
- Keep the meat clean and cool.
- Remove the guts as soon as possible.
- Avoid puncturing the intestines.

2 GET IT COOL
- Hang the Deer in a shaded, cool place.
- Get it to a processing facility or cooler withing a few hours.

3 PROCESSING
- Have it professionally processed or do it yourself with clean tools.
- Trim all fat and silver skin.

4 PACK & FREEZE
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Game warden trades lake patrols for fall hunting season

As fall hunting seasons move into full swing, Kentucky game warden Dakota Lamb is trading summer days on the lake for patrols through the forests, fields and river bottoms of Livingston and surrounding counties.

The 22-year-old Livingston County native began his career earlier this year after earning a college degree and completing 34 weeks of law enforcement training. He is assigned to Livingston County but also helps patrol neighboring Crittenden and Lyon counties.

Lamb spent much of his first summer checking boaters on Lake Barkley and Kentucky Lake for safety violations, registration issues and alcohol use. His work now shifts toward deer and waterfowl hunters, along with fishing compliance checks and other wildlife-related duties.

Lamb graduated from Livingston Central High School in 2021 and attended the University of the Cumberlands, where he played baseball and earned a bachelor's degree in criminal justice.

He originally considered becoming an athletic trainer but decided at age 18 that a career protecting Kentucky's fish and wildlife was a better fit.

"I always kind of considered it, but when I started looking into it more, I realized this was the fit for me," Lamb said. "Growing up hunting and fishing, especially right there in Livingston County, you've got more water than you do anything else."

After college, Lamb completed physical fitness testing, interviews, background investigations and other evaluations before beginning the academy. His training included 18 weeks at the Department of Criminal Justice Training Center in Richmond with other law enforcement recruits and 16 weeks of specialized conservation training.

His arrival also provides additional coverage in Crittenden County, which has been without a resident game warden since longtime Conservation Officer Randy Conway retired in 2025.

Although based in Livingston County, Lamb expects to spend considerable time in Crittenden and other nearby counties this fall and winter.

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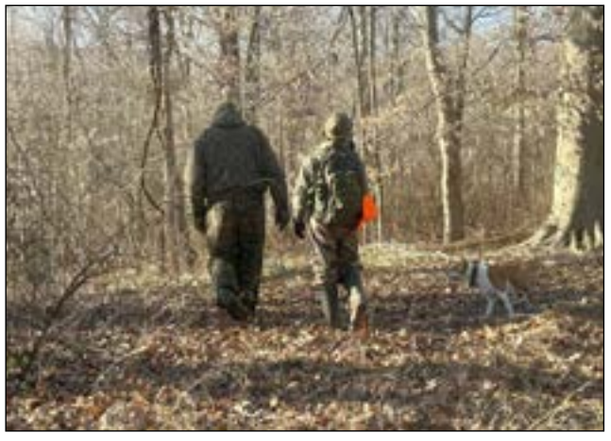
Sturgis ministry shares faith through hunting, outdoor activities

By David R. Drennan
For The Crittenden Press

Naturalist John Muir once wrote, "No wonder the hills and groves were God's first temples." Muir, who often spoke of the connection between his faith and his love of nature, would have found a kindred spirit in Pastor Troy Black of Sturgis. For 30 years, Black has shared his faith through God's Backwoods Disciples while teaching young people about the outdoors and hunting. As pastor of Woodland Baptist Church in Sturgis, he also takes that message to his congregation.

Much of Black's ministry involves taking young people hunting, often for the first time. Many do not have a parent who can go with them. "I developed a love of the outdoors because someone took me as a young person," Black explained. He uses their time in the woods to teach about the outdoors, explain safety measures and share his faith. As a hunter safety instructor and pastor, Black is well versed in what young people need to know, and their common interest gives him an opportunity to share.



Black and his team of volunteers also host youth camps and mentored hunts, giving students a chance to learn alongside a trusted adult. During a weekend camp, students and volunteers study the Bible together in campfire devotionals, go hunting and share meals. Sunday includes what Black calls "Camo church." While each camp has only about six students, Black said about 30 people, including volunteers, attend the devotionals or participate in some way. "God's Backwoods Disciples hosts several youth hunts throughout the hunting season," Black added.

Black also seeks volunteers to assist with mentored hunts during youth hunting seasons. "God's Backwoods Disciples supplies the place and weapons for the hunt," he said. The hunts give seasoned hunters a chance to teach ethical practices, create memories and share their faith with a younger generation.

Black sees value in mentoring young people throughout the season. At least 10 students take part in the mentoring program each year, reaching personal milestones along the way. One student harvested his first two deer, his first rabbit and his first squirrel through the program. He now volunteers with the ministry to help others.

Students from Crittenden, Union, Henderson and Caldwell counties have participated in Black's mentored hunts. Some have come from as far away as east Tennessee and Illinois. Supporters also help the ministry by purchasing raffle tickets and participating in contests. Black has planned a mentored squirrel hunt in which teams of two compete to see who can bag the most squirrels.

Black's role as a mentor and teacher extends to Youth Outdoor Days, an event centered on outdoor activities. At one event, more than 75 students learned about those activities and heard a message of faith. "My heart has always been the same — to use God's creation as a bridge to introduce people to Jesus Christ and encourage them to develop a personal relationship with Him," Black said.

At Woodland Baptist Church, Black continues to build relationships with his congregation through outdoor activities. The church has held a clay pigeon shooting contest as a family outreach event and themed its vacation Bible school around archery. "It wasn't just about shooting clay targets or eating together — it was about building relationships and creating opportunities for people to experience Christian fellowship," Black said.

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