

Staying safe in hunting season

BY AMANDA LARIVIERE · FRIDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2021

It's the most wonderful time of the year—for hunters. The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife estimates that there are over 100,000 deer in the state. Since overpopulation can lead to environmental damage, Harvard's Conservation Commission in 2019 approved a deer management program that allows controlled archery hunting for deer. Although deer hunting season with "primitive firearms" (shoulder-fired muzzleloaders) comes to an end on Saturday, Dec. 31, hunters and bystanders should be aware of general safety tips for ongoing and future seasons.

"Of any sport, hunting is one of the most highly regulated," said Linh Phu, who manages eight National Wildlife Refuges in eastern Massachusetts and Cape Cod, including the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge. While Phu could not recall any hunting-related accidents, she said incidents are most commonly due to falls from treestands.

Residents who neighbor the Oxbow are generally aware of hunting seasons and take precautions when going on walks in the area. "My companion and I make sure to wear reflective vests, and I'd be hesitant to go off the established trails," said Nick Browse, who takes a daily walk down the nearby hill. While hunting season does not affect his daily habits, Browse avoids areas where there are hunting blinds, or small shelters where hunters can conceal themselves. "There are deer and a bunch of turkeys down there. It's up to you to keep yourself safe."

Kate Lucey, who also walks the Oxbow a lot, said in an email to the Press that she gets a little nervous during hunting seasons. However, she makes sure to wear safety colors when she is outside.

"I think it is important to know that there is no hunting on Sundays," said Phu, adding that the firearm season for deer hunting is very short. "If anybody is ever super nervous about it, then Sunday is the perfect day." (For more hints, see "Tips for staying safe," below.)

Since 2015, statewide deer harvest numbers have increased, along with the opportunities to hunt in Harvard. According to the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, 10,102 deer were harvested statewide in 2015, and 14,766 were harvested in 2020.

“At Oxbow, deer season is certainly popular,” said Phu. The Oxbow also has bears, coyotes, foxes, and turkeys available to hunt during permitted seasons. “We limit the number of permits we issue so that it’s a quality hunt and it’s not overcrowded.”

In addition to hunting at the Oxbow, the controlled program run by the Deer Management Subcommittee, which started in 2020, opened up 13 parcels of conservation land to archery hunting for deer. Hunters in the program are required to post entries in a hunting log that tracks their locations and field observations. While gun hunting is permitted at the Oxbow, the program by the Deer Management Subcommittee permits only bow and crossbow hunting.

Tips for staying safe

Safety tips for bystanders

- Be seen. According to the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, bystanders and walkers should wear brightly colored orange vests or hats. By avoiding “earth-toned or animal-colored clothing,” chances of a hunting-related accident may decrease.
- Keep an eye on pets by ensuring they are leashed and wearing a brightly colored orange vest or bandana.
- People should speak loudly, whistle, or wear a bell to make their presence known.
- For more information, visit www.mass.gov/service-details/safety-tips-for-non-hunters.

Safety tips for hunters

- Be seen. According to the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, hunters should wear blaze orange on their chest, back, and head.

- Treat all firearms as if they are loaded. Unload firearms when climbing trees or crossing slippery or steep land.
- Do not place treestands higher than 16 feet, and practice with equipment before using it.

For more information, visit www.mass.gov/news/hunting-safety-tips .



Source: Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife

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