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# Deer season looking good

With deer hunting seasons that span four months, vastly different habitat types, and nearly four million acres of public land to be explored, New York State offers unique opportunities for hunters to pursue white-tailed deer.

For the 2021-22 deer hunting season, DEC expects another very productive year for deer hunters. Statewide, deer populations benefited from a relatively mild winter and favorable weather conditions during fawning season and early summer.

The deer food supply across the state is generally in good condition, though some portions of New York have been dry and gypsy moth caterpillars have taken a toll on forests in portions of the eastern Adirondacks and Finger Lakes, which will impact mast production in those areas.

Statewide, DEC anticipates the antlered buck harvest this fall will be similar to 2020. Of course, regional variations will occur as deer populations are managed separately within each Wildlife Management Unit (WMU).

For buck harvests, DEC anticipates only minor fluctuations,

probably unnoticeable to hunters.

However, doe harvests and availability of Deer Management Permits (DMPs; antlerless tags) may be noticeably different for some hunters, depending on location. DEC is decreasing the available DMPs across a large area of southcentral and southwestern New York, while in northcentral, northwestern, and much of southeastern New York it is maintaining similar or increasing DMP availability.

DEC sets DMP quotas by reviewing past harvest patterns and population trends relative to desired population trajectories (see Understanding DMPs).

Interestingly, across much of the state DEC saw a unique pattern of increased hunter effort and interest in DMPs in 2020 that influenced DMP quotas for this year, a sort of COVID effect on hunting.

In many WMUs, there were more hunters applying for DMP tags in 2020 than previously, which resulted in more tags be-

**Continued  
on next page.**

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# Deer season. . .

Continued  
from previous page.

ing issued than intended.

On top of that, data from the Bowhunter Sighting Log indicates that hunters, at least bowhunters, put in more time in 2020.

And that effort apparently paid off as hunters filled a greater proportion of DMPs than usual and harvest during bow and muzzleloader season also increased.

The result was that, in many WMUs, the 2020 antlerless harvest was greater than expected.

This was a welcome event for population management in many areas as it came on the heels of an undesirably low antlerless harvest in 2019.

## New hunting opportunities

Deer hunters will have several new opportunities this year, with a law change that allows 12- and 13-year old hunters to pursue deer with a firearm in counties

that opt-in to the program and the new holiday deer hunt, an extended portion of the late bow and muzzleloader season from December 26 to January 1 in the Southern Zone.

The primary purpose of these new opportunities is simply that, new opportunities for young hunters to be mentored by experienced adults and for families to be able to hunt together during the holiday season.

## Deer Population Objectives

Because deer can have profound and long-lasting negative impacts on forests and personal property, keeping these impacts at a sustainable level is a top priority of the deer program.

DEC recently completed a new process for determining desired deer population changes, using data on public preferences and deer impacts to forests.

**Hunters enjoying more older bucks**

The voluntary choice of hunters to "Let Young Bucks Go and Watch Them Grow" is shifting the buck harvest toward older, larger animals.

Though a mandatory antler

point restriction continues in a few WMUs, in the rest of the state where hunters can choose what type of buck they want to harvest, most are choosing older bucks.

Based on voluntary choice of hunters, buck harvest has shifted from more than 60 percent yearlings to 60 percent 2.5-year old and older bucks over the past decade.

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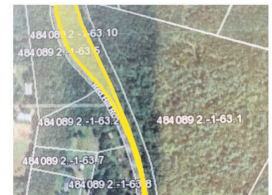
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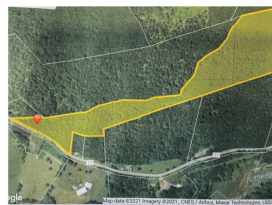
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# Fewer around, but pheasants still out there

Today, the wild pheasant population in New York is at an all time low.

Not to be dismayed, hunters can still enjoy days afield looking for those hidden pockets of wild pheasants or pursuing state-stocked pheasants raised on the Richard E. Reynolds game farm in Ithaca.

Annually, over 25,000 adult pheasants are released just prior to and during the fall pheasant hunting season.

Releases occur across the state on well publicized state and private lands open to public hunting.

Pheasant hunting in New York is sustained largely by stocking of birds by DEC and private game bird breeders across the state.

Check the Pheasant Release Sites page in early September for information on release sites in your area.

## Habitat

Most pheasant hunting takes place in open agricultural fields associated with grain farming or

on abandoned farmland covered in aster, goldenrod, and other early successional plants.

Abandoned farmlands make great release sites for stocking game farm-reared pheasants.

Pheasants are not a woodland species.

They prefer to nest, roost, and raise broods in grassland areas nestled in among rows of corn, wheat, oats, and an occasional cat-tail marsh used for winter cover.

## Helpful Tips

You must possess a hunting license to hunt pheasants.

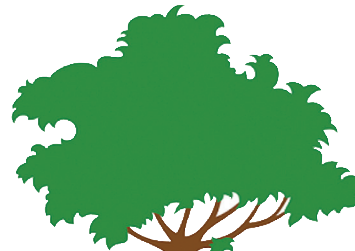
Thoroughly read the Department's Hunting and Trapping Regulations Guide to become familiar with pheasant hunting regulations.

Do your pre-season scouting and planning. Don't wait until opening day to decide where you

Continued  
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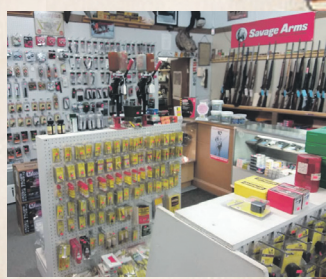


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## Pheasants. . .

Continued from previous page.

want to hunt.

Review the list of areas stocked with state-reared pheasants.

Ask permission from landowners to hunt.

Common courtesy will ensure you have a place to hunt next year.

Successful hunters employ trained bird dogs to help them locate pheasants and retrieve

downed game.

Popular hunting dogs include flushing breeds like the springer spaniel and Labrador retriever or pointers like the Irish setter, German shorthaired pointer, and Brittany spaniel.

Get yourself and your dog in good physical condition for a safe and enjoyable hunting season.

Respect other hunters' space. Don't crowd. Share the hunting areas and the opportunity to harvest a bird.

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# Take time to scout before turkey season opens

With turkey season just about here, it's a good time to get a sense of how large the flocks are as the staggered seasons open in October.

Many fields have had their final cut of hay, and corn is being harvested as well, so birds may be out and more visible.

Turkey season in Schoharie, Delaware and Otsego counties opens October 16, so there's time to do some scouting.

And scouting may be necessary, because while Delaware and Otsego counties saw upticks in birds taken from 2019 to 2020, Schoharie saw a decrease.

Hunters in the fall season took 133 turkeys last year in Delaware, compared to 86 in 2019. In Otsego, hunters took 76 turkeys in 2020 compared to 46 the year before.

However, in Schoharie, hunters took only 24 birds last year and 38 in 2019.

And even though Delaware and Otsego saw recent increases, turkey numbers have tumbled since 2014, when hunters harvested nearly 1,000 turkeys combined in the fall season.

## Turkey hunting tips

• Some hunters try to stalk turkeys, but it's difficult to come up on a bird undetected. Also, most hunting accidents occur when one hunter mistakes a stalker for a turkey. It's most effective—and safest—to call turkeys to you.

• Don't shoot unless you're sure it's not another hunter, and make sure you see the bird and recognize its sex.

• Never use a turkey call to signal another hunter.

• Turkeys are tough, and you need to be close—30 yards or so—and have a clear head and

neck shot. Don't try to shoot them in the body or while in flight.

• Smaller shot, numbers 4, 5, and 6 work better than larger shot because they have denser shot patterns.

• When calling, sit still with your back against a big tree to hide you from turkeys and other

hunters.

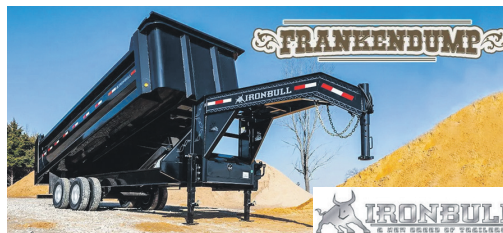
• Wear hunter orange when going into or out of the woods or walking around.

• Never wear the turkey colors—red, white or blue.

• When sitting still waiting for a turkey, hang hunter orange on a tree near you.



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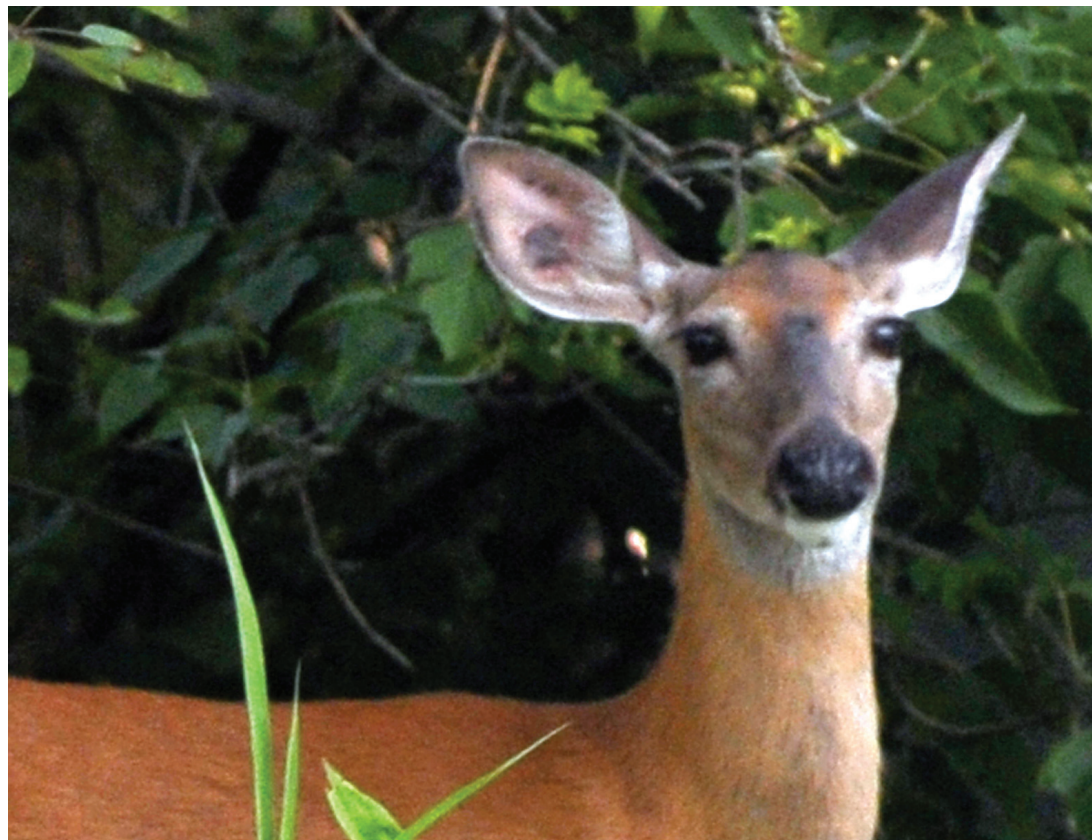
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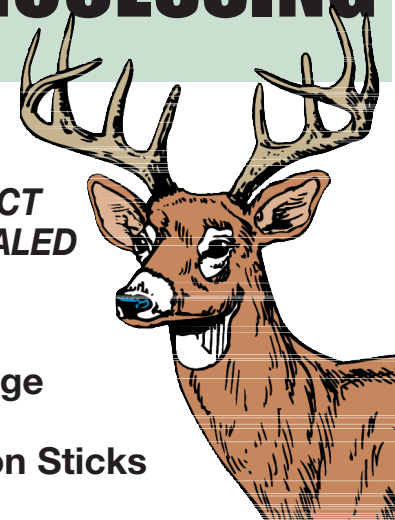


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# Grouse surveys yield info on population

Each fall in New York 25,000-30,000 hunters take to the field in pursuit of ruffed grouse making them the second most popular game bird behind wild turkeys.

Despite declines in their numbers over the past 40 years, ruffed grouse are still common, particularly in younger forests.

They provide excellent hunting opportunities.

DEC coordinates two survey efforts with cooperating hunters to help track grouse distribution and abundance:

- Cooperator Ruffed Grouse Hunting Log - this survey asks hunters to record their grouse hunting effort and the number of birds flushed. This allows DEC to estimate flush rates (grouse flushed/hour), which are used to monitor changes in grouse populations.

- Ruffed Grouse Drumming Survey - this survey asks turkey hunters to record the number of grouse they hear drumming dur-

ing the spring turkey season. The drumming survey provides a harvest-independent index of grouse distribution and abundance during the critical breeding season in the spring.

If you would like to participate in either survey, please download a survey form from the grouse log or drumming survey web pages, contact DEC by phone at (518) 402-8883, or send an email. **Ruffed Grouse Parts Collection**

DEC is requesting assistance from hunters in a study of ruffed grouse recruitment (the number of young produced per adult female).

DEC is seeking rump, wing, and tail feathers from birds taken during the season so they can identify the age and sex composition of the harvest.

To learn more about these efforts or to sign-up to receive materials for submitting feather and blood samples, please contact them via e-mail or call (518) 402-8929.



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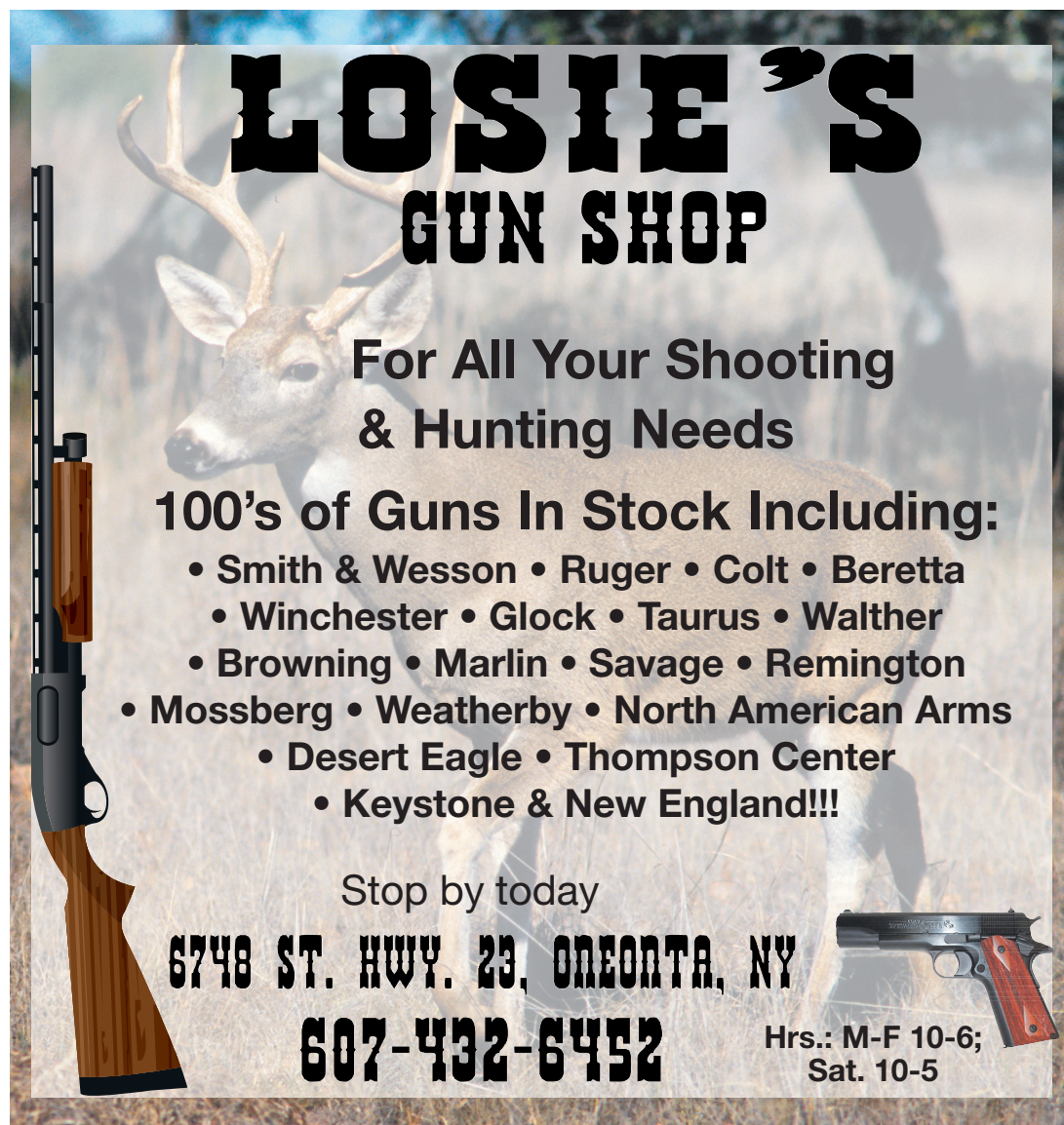
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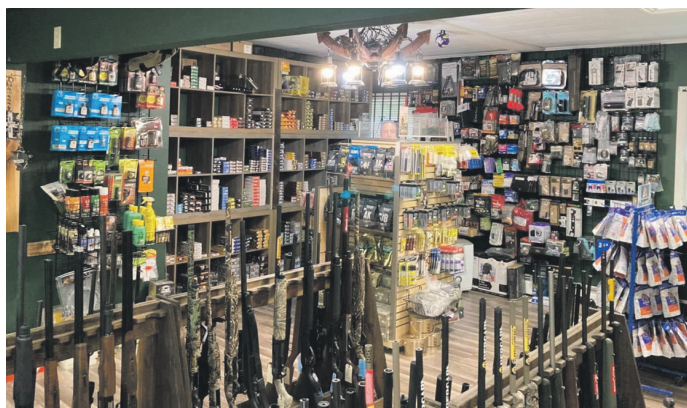




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# Want more older bucks? Let the young ones go

Every year, tens of thousands of New York hunters enjoy the opportunity to bring home a handsome 2.5-year or older buck, while about half of the antlered bucks taken in New York are only 1.5 years old (yearlings).

Yearling bucks generally weigh about 20 percent less and have 50 percent smaller antlers than they would as a 2.5-year-old.

According to DEC, the primary reason New York doesn't have more older, larger-antlered bucks in the harvest is because many get taken as yearlings.

Hunters can continue to push the harvest ratio solidly toward



Are those two in back young bucks? Maybe. . .

older bucks simply by choosing to let young bucks go.

For New York bucks to get bigger bodies and larger antlers, they simply need to get older, DEC stresses.

Older bucks are more challenging to hunt and yield more meat for the successful hunter.

These bucks create more rubs and scrapes and vocalize more – all things that add to the hunting experience.

As more hunters choose to pass young bucks, all hunters will enjoy the opportunity to see and take more older bucks.

**What can you do to see more older bucks?**

- Choose to let young bucks walk.

- Improve the habitat by creating young forest and enhancing natural forage and cover for deer.

- In many areas, taking an antlerless deer instead of a young buck would help meet overall management goals and bring the deer population into better balance with the habitat, which in turn improves deer condition.

- Work with your neighbors and hunting partners to cooperatively reduce harvest of young bucks, meet your antlerless harvest goals, and improve habitat conditions.

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Continued  
on next page.



# Young bucks...

Continued from  
previous page.

with four points or less are only 1.5 years old.

In Central and Western New York or other high quality habitat areas, about 30 percent of yearlings have five-six points and 15 percent have seven-eight antler points.

However, the overall size and shape of their antlers remains small, with antler spreads generally less than 12 inches, well inside the ear tips.

While many hunters want the opportunity to take bigger bucks, the bucks frequently shown in magazines, on TV shows and on hunting-related products are rare in the wild.

To help hunters better understand what buck populations look

like in New York and have realistic expectations of what they might encounter afield, in 2015 and 2016, DEC collected additional antler measurements from 2,176 bucks across the state.

The picture is clear; when hunters choose to let young bucks go, they do grow – with antlers nearly doubling in size from 1.5 to 2.5 years of age.

In recent years, some hunters have expressed strong interest in increasing the number of older, larger-antlered bucks in our deer population.

This could be accomplished through a variety of regulatory and non-regulatory approaches. New York hunters have divided opinions about buck hunting and many greatly value having the freedom to choose what type of buck to harvest.

DEC worked with experts at

Cornell University to evaluate various buck hunting strategies (e.g. mandatory antler point restrictions, 1-buck-per-hunter rule, shorter season, voluntary restraint) in a way that accounted for regional variation in hunter values and the impacts on harvest, population management and hunter satisfaction.

Based on that study, DEC concluded that regulatory changes are not appropriate or most compatible with hunter values.

Encouraging hunters to voluntarily pass up shots at young bucks best balances hunter interests across the state and is now DEC's management direction.

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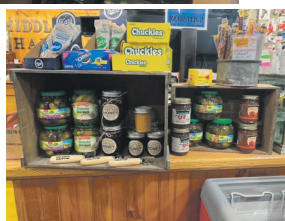
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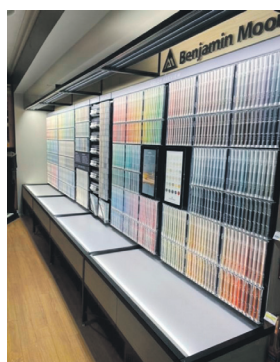


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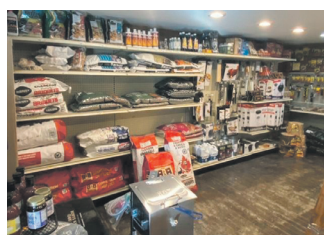
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