

2006 Weekend Announced for Discover Louisiana Hunting

For the second year, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries has scheduled a Discover Louisiana Hunting (DLH) event whereby new hunters desiring to experience the outdoors of Louisiana can hunt without the need to obtain a recreational hunting license. The event is scheduled for Thanksgiving weekend, Nov. 24- 26.

The program requires participants to complete a hunter education safety course before they can receive a no-cost DLH permit.

The deadline to complete this course is November 15. Hunter safety courses are now available as a home-study program whereby students can study at their own convenience and then attend a six-hour field day for course completion.

The DLH promotion is available to residents and nonresidents, and participants must partner with a licensed Louisiana resident hunter who serves as the host hunter.

Quail, rabbit, squirrel and deer can be hunted by those in the program, and once the course is completed, applicants must purchase a valid hunting license for all future Louisiana hunting trips.

Commission Plans Spring Squirrel Season

At the September meeting of the Louisiana Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries, a notice of intent was passed to establish a 2007 and 2008 spring squirrel season. The dates proposed by the commission were from May 5 – 27, 2007 and May 3 – 25, 2008. The season would be closed in the Kisatchie National Forest, on National Wildlife Refuges and select Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). Bodcau, Boeuf, Clear Creek, Little River, Maurepas Swamp (east tract), Russell Sage and Sherburne WMAs would be open for the proposed season. Dogs would be allowed for use during this special season, but feral hogs could not be taken during this time. The proposed daily bag limit would be three with a possession limit of six.

Establishing Mineral Licks for White-tailed Deer

Although most hunters and wildlife managers have completed the annual ritual of establishing winter food plots for their deer herds, another critical part of the nutritional process should be considered. Mineral supplementation in the form of salt licks is a good way to assure that deer are provided the ingredients for health and productivity. Sodium, calcium, phosphorus, zinc and cobalt are lacking in many of our soils throughout the Southeast. Furthermore, calcium and sodium are highly sought after by deer, which utilize these elements for body maintenance and growth. The attractiveness that deer have for sodium chloride (NaCl or table salt) can serve as a carrier in providing other important (although less palatable) minerals into the diet of these animals. Studies have shown that deer need calcium and phosphorus in a dietary ratio of 2:1. The mineral composition of antlers and bone in white-tailed deer are composed of 20 percent calcium and 10 percent phosphorus. To provide this proper ratio, mineral licks should contain a concentration of approximately 16 percent calcium and 8 percent phosphorus mixed into a well-balanced trace mineral salt. Many commercial mineral blocks are available that have calcium and phosphorus as ingredients but few at these recommended concentration levels. For this reason, the distribution means for this proper ratio is best provided in loose granular form.

Commercially available granular trace mineral salts contain approximately 98 percent salt (NaCl) along with a number of important trace minerals such as zinc, iron, magnesium, copper and iodine. Trace mineral salt provides the salt that deer need and crave, while calcium and phosphorus are provided by two products easily obtainable from local co-ops and feed stores. Calcium carbonate and dicalcium phosphate are used extensively as a nutritional supplement in dairy cattle feed mixes. When these components are mixed with trace mineral salt, deer are provided one of the best mineral supplementation formulas available.

The method for constructing these mineral licks varies widely, from using rotten logs to simply pouring the mixture on the ground. A method that I prefer and one that I have seen widely used is to pile rotten logs up in a crisscrossing fashion up to a height of 3 to 4 feet. Among the layers of rotten wood, I add soil along with the loose mineral mixture. This mixture provides a stable base in which the salt and minerals slowly leach down into the loose soil and wood by rainfall and gravity. Deer will literally eat the soil and rotten wood over time to obtain salt. When doing so, they will take in the needed calcium and phosphorus. A simple rule of thumb in constructing salt licks is to mix 50 pounds each of trace minerals salt, calcium carbonate and dicalcium phosphate (total cost of around \$25). Suggested benefits from mineral supplements include better antler formation and growth among bucks, along with better lactation rates among does.

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Critter Corner

American Beaver (Castor canadensis)



The American beaver ranges throughout North America, except for the arctic tundra, most of peninsular Florida, and the southwestern desert areas. Beavers are the largest rodent native to North America, and their distinctive broad, flat tail and webbed hind feet are among several features that make them well-suited for an aquatic environment. Their eyes possess a thin nictitating membrane, capable of extending across the eyeball while under water, along with valvular ears and nostrils. After a gestation period of approximately 128 days, a female beaver gives birth to three or four kittens between March and June. Sexual maturity is reached at 1 ½ years of age, and adults have an average live span of approximately 10 years. Beavers are territorial, with colonies consisting of four to eight related individuals who resist additions or outsiders to the colony or pond. For this reason, young beavers often move great distances from their place of birth to inhabit new water bodies.

Beavers served as the driving force in spurring the westward expansion into areas that would eventually become part of the United States. Their popularity in the early 1800s was for pelts that brought great wealth to fur buyers in the eastern United States. Demand for beaver pelts led to their extirpation or greatly reduced numbers in many parts of their former range. Beaver distribution in Louisiana by the late 1930s was limited to small areas of the Amite and Comite river basins in East Baton Rouge, East Feliciana, St. Helena, Ascension and Livingston parishes. From these areas, transplanting of animals began in 1938 that by the late 1950s led to the establishment of 75 colonies in 21 parishes west of the Mississippi River. Popularity turned to problems when prices for beaver pelts began to fall and populations quickly expanded in the absence of trapping control measures. Prices in recent years have averaged slightly more than \$3 per pelt, leading to a loss of economic incentive for pursuing these animals. Timber interests lose millions of dollars each year from beavers flooding timber stands, and state and government agencies spend additional millions to control beaver damage near roads, bridges and other transportation facilities. In recent years the number of nuisance beaver complaints has risen sharply from homeowners living in subdivisions near lakes and ponds. Beavers in these situations have a strong tendency to use cypress, willow, crape myrtle and many other woody ornamentals as a food and dam construction material.

Control measures. Beavers are classified as outlaw quadrupeds in Louisiana, allowing for year-round legal take during daylight hours. Currently, no toxicants are labeled for use by private landowners to use in controlling beavers, making trapping and shooting the best available options. The strength and size of beavers makes trapping with either Conibear No. 330 kill traps or large No. 3 double spring leg-hold traps the best options. Shooting, where local laws permit, is legal, although most beaver activity occurs in the evening after legal shooting hours. For this reason, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries will issue special permits to allow beavers to be taken one-half hour after sunset to one-half hour before sunrise for a period of three consecutive calendar evenings from the effective date of the permit. The tremendous economic liability that beavers have in our state is further indicated by the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry employing trappers to remove nuisance beavers for private landowners.

Wildlife Species Profile:

White-tailed Deer (Odocoileus virginianus)

The on-set of another hunting season is an opportunity to discuss the most charismatic big game animal in Louisiana and throughout much of the United States. White-tailed deer are found throughout North America, ranging from southern Canada to South America. California, Nevada, Utah and several other western states are the only areas within the lower 48 states where they are lacking or present in isolated locations. White-tailed deer are a great success story considering how they have rebounded from past population lows. Historically, populations have been estimated to be around 15 million individuals when Europeans first arrived. The clearing of pristine eastern forests led to slight population increases throughout the early to mid 1800s, but this was followed by tremendous exploitation from year-round harvest and market hunting.

Early 1900 population estimates have placed white-tail numbers as low as 1 million individuals nationwide. The initiation of game laws and sound management practices lead to a period of recovery in which numbers quickly rebounded. Louisiana initiated its first doe season in 1959 on several game management areas. Current population nationwide is estimated in excess of 30 million individuals with Louisiana populations estimated between 750,000 and 1 million. The reason that deer have rebounded so successfully is their ability to live in close proximity to man in a variety of early successional habitats. In Louisiana, most white-tailed deer breed from September to mid-January depending on the geographic locality within the state. This date of "peak rut" is an important management tool in setting season dates throughout Louisiana. The nature of the estrus cycle in female deer make some populations with high doe-to-buck sex ratios experi-



ence much later births because of females failing to successfully breed in their first cycle. Herds are monitored to assure that proper numbers of does are harvested to lower this occurrence.

Gestation in white-tailed deer averages 202 days after which young females (1½ years of age) will usually produce a single fawn. Older individuals in good condition will often give birth to twins. Under good habitat conditions, fawns (6 months of age) will occasionally successfully breed. The size of white-tailed deer varies with sex, age and habitat. Bucks 1½ years of age will weigh less than 100 pounds in many coastal marsh habitats, while in high quality bottomland hardwood habitat, weights will average close to 150 pounds.

Quality of native forage is the biggest factor determining body condition of deer at any specific age. Agricultural areas of soybeans and corn, along with mass producing red

and white oaks tend to produce the heaviest animals. Managers often use food plots to mimic these agricultural areas, but often these plantings are too small to affect the nutritional needs of a herd. Managing native habitat to provide preferred browse plants is often the key to improving quality.

To better manage the deer herd in Louisiana, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries has initiated a more liberal harvest of antlerless deer throughout all of the deer hunting season while lowering the allowable harvest of antlered bucks. The desired results of these management decisions are to bring deer numbers more in line with the carrying capacity of their available habitat and to allow for older-age class bucks to enter into the population structure. The deer season in Louisiana extends from early October through most of January, making it a recreational activity that people have ample opportunity to enjoy.

Plant species profile:

Austrian Winter Pea (*Pisum sativum*)



Austrian winter peas, while native to the Mediterranean region, have developed a strong niche among cattle ranchers and deer managers in the United States. The plant, often referred to as simply winter peas, is a viney winter annual with stems 2 to 4 feet long, alternate leaflets with toothed margins and flowers that are pink, purple or white. The plant has become a favorite in many commercial winter food plot mixes for deer, but bulk seed is available at local seed stores and farm co-ops for approximately 34 cents a pound. When planted in pure stands for cattle grazing, recommended seeding rates are 30 pounds per acre. The preferred method when used in plantings for white-tailed deer is to mix Austrian winter peas with two or more cereal grains such as wheat or oats. Other additives can include any of a variety of red or white clovers along with a brassica variety if desired. When mixed in this manner, seeding rates for winter peas can be dropped as low as 15 pounds per acre. Broadcasting the seed mixture followed by a 1/2-inch covering will generally assure a successful stand if moisture is adequate for germination. These cereal grains and other seed additives are important in serving as a nurse crop, aiding in the early establishment of the peas themselves. Plantings should be established from mid-September to mid-October. Proper pH in the mid 6- to 7-range is essential, because, like all legumes, winter peas are intolerant of acid soils. They are quite tolerant of southern winter temperatures, however, doing well even when subjected to continued heavy frosts. Dry weight yields from test plots of winter peas and wheat grown at the Idlewild Experiment Station have been as high as 1.3 tons per acre with protein levels as high as 32 percent.

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One mineral lick per 300 acres is generally thought to be sufficient, and the greatest use occurs in early spring, declining in the summer and fall. Although not used to a great extent during the winter, licks should be constructed in the fall to give the mixture time to soak into the soil and rotten logs for spring. High salt concentrations are not necessary, as indicated by natural licks that are known to be very attractive to deer when concentrations of sodium are only 200 to 300 parts per million. Salt will leach through the ground, however, especially when licks are constructed on sandy soils or slopes. For this reason, licks should be recharged every fall after their initial construction with the same 150-pound mixture. The benefits of mineral supplementation in white-tailed deer management, nevertheless, are still much debated. Most biologists believe maintaining high habitat quality and controlling deer density are the most important factors in maintaining a quality deer herd. Mineral licks, however, are an inexpensive link in the management chain to improve quality of antlered bucks and lactating does within that herd.

Louisiana Wildlife News

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