

# Outdoor Oklahoma

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2024 — ONLY \$10 A YEAR

**2023-24 BIG GAME  
HARVEST REPORT**

**Black Bear  
Season Hits  
New Record**

**Fish-catching Quest  
Spans Entire State  
For Edmond Youth**

**Where to Hunt?  
Public Alternatives  
To Private Land**

A PUBLICATION OF THE OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION





# PANORAMAS



Michael Bergin with sons Brooks, left, and Nash.

There's a new hunting license for all youths younger than 18. It's called the **youth annual super hunting license**, and it's similar to an all-season pass at an amusement park — except it's for hunting.

This youth annual super hunting license simplifies access for youths hunting in Oklahoma, making it easier and more affordable for parents to get (and keep) their

kids involved in the outdoors.

The youth annual super hunting license is part of a new hunting and fishing license overhaul known as the Oklahoma Wildlife License Modernization Act, a law that condenses about 50 hunting and fishing licenses down to about 14 and helps secure more funding for conservation. Before the law took effect July 1, there hadn't been any notable changes to the state's fishing and hunting licenses or fee structure in over 20 years.

This new license is for youths wanting to hunt deer, turkey, quail, waterfowl, elk, bear, pronghorn and furbearers, or for youths who want to trap. It is valid for 365 days from when purchased. And at a cost of just \$26 for residents and \$151 for nonresidents, it's quite a bargain!

Gone are the days of needing a separate license for each deer hunted or for each method of take. Gone are the days of having to choose an antlered or antlerless deer license (or both) before heading afield. Gone are the days of wading through youth license requirements for 16- and 17-year-olds vs. younger hunters.

Although a few federal permits are still required in certain situations, no other state hunting licenses are required. For example, resident and nonresident youths (those under 18) are required to have a youth annual super hunting license and Harvest Information Permit (HIP) to hunt waterfowl. They are exempt from the Oklahoma waterfowl license. But federal law requires that all waterfowl hunters 16 and older must have a federal duck stamp. Youths under 18 who are hunting migratory birds other than waterfowl (such as doves) are exempt from the Harvest Information Program (HIP) permit.

And talk about simplifying things. The youth super hunting license covers the hunter for all of the game allowed in their annual bag limit. No more individual youth licenses for each deer hunted. No more licenses for archery season only — or muzzleloader, gun or holiday antlerless seasons, too. No more individual turkey licenses. No more elk, bear or pronghorn licenses.

That's definitely convenience and value for youths and parents alike.

All licenses can be purchased online through your Go Outdoors Oklahoma account. And if you've never bought a license, you'll be guided through setting up your required profile.

Also, as part of the Oklahoma Wildlife License Modernization Act, youths under 18 are now exempt from the state fishing license requirement. So, get an annual youth annual super hunting license for the kids in your life and go hunting as much as possible. But don't forget to take time to enjoy some fishing with your youngsters, as well.

The quality time you'll bag is a trophy in itself. ♡

*Michael Bergin*

**Michael Bergin,**

Senior Communication and Education Specialist

# Outdoor Oklahoma

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## CONTRIBUTING STAFF

Dallas Barber, Michael Bergin, Jena Donnell, Darrin Hill,  
Matt Hensley, Jason Rockwell, Smokey Solis.

## PHONE

405-521-3856

## WEBSITE

www.wildlifedepartment.com


## E-MAIL

donald.brown@odwc.ok.gov

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## ON THE COVER:

The most recent big game hunting seasons produced great success for hunters in Oklahoma, especially those targeting black bears. The 2023 bear seasons were record-setting as a matter of fact. See all the stats about last year's deer, elk, pronghorn and bear harvests starting on Page 28.

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**OKLAHOMA**



# OFF THE BEATEN PATH

NOTES ON WILDLIFE • OUTDOOR TIPS • READERS' LETTERS • ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS  
COMPILED BY DON P. BROWN

## HUNTERS, ANGLERS, SPORT SHOOTERS HAVE \$5.7B IMPACT

Dedicated hunters, anglers and sport shooters share a commitment to help protect and enhance Oklahoma's natural resources. They are big players when it comes to supporting the state's economy while also supporting outdoor recreation and natural resource conservation.

A recent analysis by Southwick Associates concluded that outdoor enthusiasts created an impressive \$5.77 billion in total economic impact to Oklahoma's economy, based on the latest federal National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-associated Recreation. And these groups collectively shelled out about \$4.7 billion in direct spending across the state.

For more about the sizable impact that hunters, anglers and sport shooters have in Oklahoma, scan the code:



Hunting and fishing license sales make a sizable contribution to this economic impact. These revenues directly support fish and wildlife conservation efforts, habitat restoration, and sustainable practices that ensure future generations can enjoy these activities.

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation works diligently to conserve the state's fish and wildlife resources, manage habitats, and promote public access to the outdoors.

These activities come with their associated costs.

The Wildlife Department receives no state-appropriated tax money. Its operation is based on the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, in

which fish and wildlife management is funded as a user-pay, user-benefit system. That means hunters, anglers and other outdoor recreationists provide most of the funding for conservation. And much of that income is matched many times over with federal grant funding.

Every year, ODWC produces an annual report with details about agency operations. For fiscal year 2024, ODWC spent \$62,007,209 across its five organizational divisions and for capital projects. Revenues for the year totaled \$61,084,535, with about \$21.3 million of that generated by license sales.

For more about ODWC operations during FY 2024, scan the code:



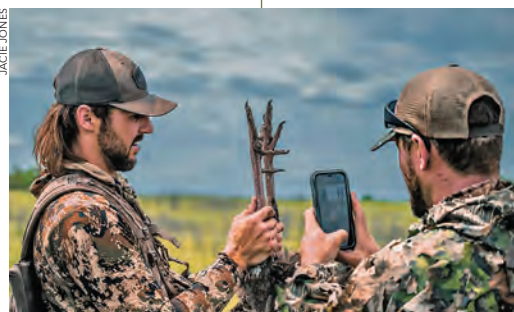
ODWC is grateful for the support of all outdoor enthusiasts and takes very seriously its mandate to steward the natural resources that belong to all of us. And ODWC remains committed to using our constituents' money in the most effective and efficient ways possible.

The next time you buy your hunting or fishing license, remember that you're not just taking part in a cherished tradition, you're also playing a crucial role in the economic vitality of Oklahoma. Together, we can continue to support our communities, conserve our resources, and ensure that outdoor pastimes remain integral to Oklahoma's identity.

For more about ODWC's commitments to strong oversight, better services and complete transparency, scan this code:



JENA DONNELL/ODWC



JACIE JONES



MASON ADAMS



# "MAMMALS OF OKLAHOMA" 2ND EDITION NOW IN PRINT

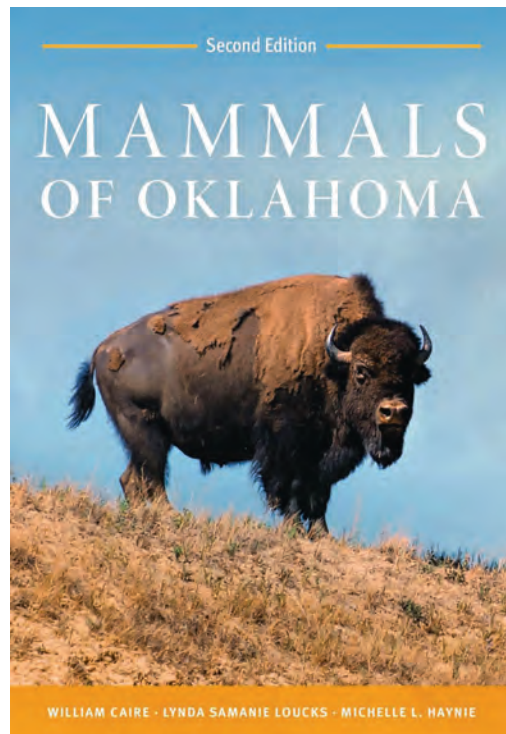
Available now is the second edition of "Mammals of Oklahoma," a clear, comprehensive, illustrated guide to Oklahoma's diverse native fauna, as well as introduced species, and extirpated and unverified mammals cited in the state's records.

Oklahoma is home to 117 known species of mammals, comprising one marsupial species, seven insectivore species, 23 types of bats, one armadillo, four rabbits, 51 rodent species, 22 carnivores, and eight artiodactyl types (including deer and pronghorn).


This accessible and authoritative 627-page volume marks a significant update and expansion of knowledge about mammals in Oklahoma. It will be the definitive desk reference and field guide to the state's rich mammalian diversity for professionals and amateur mammalogists alike.

Incorporating the latest data, this second edition includes up-to-date descriptions and identification keys; line drawings and full-color photos and distribution maps; life history information; and ecological notes on topics such as dens, nests, burrows, food habits, reproduction, pathogens and parasites, and predators.

Authors are William Caire, professor emeritus of biology at the University of Central Oklahoma; Lynda Samanie Loucks, collections manager at the UCO Natural History Museum; and Michelle



L. Haynie, biology professor at the University of Central Oklahoma.

For more information, go to [oupres.com](https://oupres.com). 

## KAW WMA TO HOST OPEN HOUSE IN OCTOBER


A day full of outdoor fun is planned for visitors Oct. 12 at an open house on the Kaw Wildlife Management Area. Cost is \$10.

Join experts from the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and Quail Forever from 9 a.m. to noon for programs about Oklahoma's public lands, hunting and fishing licenses and regulations, and plenty more. Also on tap are a small-game workshop and some time at Kaw's new shooting range, where experts will help sight-in rifles.

After lunch at noon, Quail Forever mentors will hold an optional squirrel hunt from 1 to 3 p.m.. Appropriate hunting licenses will be required.



Visitors to the Kaw WMA open house will be able to spend some time at the new shooting range.

To register, go to [license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx](https://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx) and search under the Events tab. 

# GAME WARDEN'S JOURNAL

ACCOUNTS FROM THE FIELD BY THE PUBLIC SERVANTS WHO ENFORCE THE FISH AND WILDLIFE LAWS OF OKLAHOMA.



In June, Game Warden **David Garrett**, based in Adair County, observed four anglers along Barren Fork Creek. Garrett observed three of the men using spearguns and the other one using a cast net. Both methods of take are illegal to use on Barren Fork Creek. The group was careful to hide their spearguns when kayakers floated by.

Game wardens **Cody Youngblood**, based in Cherokee County, and Lt. **Gary Wilcox**, based in Muskogee County, arrived to assist. Game wardens determined that the fish, 75 in total, were all taken illegally. None of the men possessed a fishing license. Multiple citations were issued.



In June, Game Wardens **Jason Adair**, based in Ottawa County, and **Chris Newkirk**, based in Delaware County, along with Michael Mullin, chief investigator of the Quapaw Nation Marshals, taught a hunter education class as one segment of the Tar Creek Apprenticeship Program. The six-week summer program included 30 students ages 16-21 from the Cherokee, Eastern Shawnee, Miami, Ottawa, Peoria, Seneca-Cayuga, and Wyandotte nations. The program fosters a deeper appreciation for the outdoors and outdoor-related activities. The Oklahoma residents in the class were to be awarded an Oklahoma resident lifetime combination hunting and fishing license purchased by the event's sponsors.

In July, Game Wardens **Jerry Henry**, based in Sequoyah County, and **Allen Couch**, based in Haskell County, observed anglers in the Lower Illinois River trout stream,

after receiving complaints of violations. This resulted in contact with a group in possession of 50 striped bass, putting them 25 over their limit. Anglers were cited for the over-limit of striped bass and stringer violations.

In June, District 8 game wardens helped with a fishing derby for residents at Beadles Nursing Home in Alva. Several largemouth bass and bluegill were caught from a stock tank. Despite the triple-digit heat, the residents fished for over three hours and weren't ready to give up.

District 7 game wardens helped at Clinton Public Schools "Summer Playground" at Crowder Lake Park. They presented a Skins and Skulls program, taught Archery in the Schools lessons, and taught aquatic education lessons to about 60 students.

Educating future generations about the outdoors is a vital part of the mission of Oklahoma game wardens. Our hunting and fishing heritage is something worth passing on.

Families gathered at Vinita City Lake to enjoy the Bass and Badges fishing derby. Game Warden **Austin Jackson**, based in Craig County, helps coordinate this popular all-day event. Over 160 kids registered, and all went home with a new fishing rod and reel. Archery was also a big hit, and top shooters receiving a new bow donated by a local archery shop. This community event allows residents to strengthen trust and bonds with law enforcement agencies while enjoying a day of fishing.



Game wardens use an airboat to patrol remote areas in Nowata County. ODWC's Law Enforcement Division employs several airboats across Oklahoma as tools to enforce state and federal wildlife conservation laws.

*(Reports from the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation-Game Wardens Facebook page.)*

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Please help make a difference! When violators break the law, they steal fish and wildlife from you! Report violations anonymously by calling Operation Game Thief at 800-522-8039. You could earn a cash reward.



# WELCOME TO THE DOCK!

Are the fish biting? You bet! Step onto **The Dock** and take a gander at some great catches made recently by Oklahoma anglers. Here's a few we thought you would enjoy! To see more or submit a photo of your catch, go to [www.wildlifedepartment.com/fishing/the\\_dock](http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/fishing/the_dock) or scan the code:



Karen Milam, largemouth bass, July 7, 2024, Dripping Springs.



Laken Snapp, blue catfish, June 9, 2024, Lake Overholser.



Brad B., walleye, July 25, 2024, Oologah Lake.

# TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

## Outdoor Oklahoma

MAY / JUNE 2024

LET'S CELEBRATE  
WILDLIFE DIVERSITY

Your Chance To See,  
Share, And Science!

SPECIAL PULLOUT SECTION

Review Foundation's  
Many Investments in



WE WANT TO KNOW  
THE OPINIONS OF  
OUR READERS!

Please scan the QR  
code to provide  
feedback about  
Outdoor Oklahoma  
magazine.





# WELCOME TO THE TAILGATE!

Is the hunting good? You bet! Step up to **The Tailgate** and check out some great harvests during recent seasons by hunters in Oklahoma. Here's a few we thought you would enjoy! To submit your photo of a successful hunting trip, or to see what others have harvested, go to [wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/tailgate](http://wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/tailgate) or scan the code:



Donald Southerland, wild turkey, Seminole County.



James Foster, first deer, Custer County.



Max McKnight, beaver, Payne County.

## DEER ARCHERY BASICS: A VIRTUAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITY

Is this the year you want to try archery deer hunting? Or would you just like a refresher on the basics of the sport? Then mark your calendar to attend a virtual "Learn to Hunt" seminar from noon to 1 p.m. Sept. 25, just in time for the Oct. 1 opener of archery deer season across Oklahoma.

Join experts from the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and the National Wild Turkey Federation for an online discussion of deer archery hunting basics. Sign up to attend on the Go Outdoors Oklahoma website ([license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx](http://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx)) or mobile app. Just search under the Events tab.

This online opportunity is one of several similar

"Learn to Hunt" virtual seminars scheduled this fall. Others include:

- Sept. 4: Teal and Resident Goose Hunting.
- Oct. 23: Muzzleloader Deer Hunting.
- Nov. 6: Upland Bird Hunting.
- Nov. 20: Rifle Deer Hunting.
- Nov. 27: Trapping.

The Learn to Hunt virtual seminars are designed to impart knowledge to prospective hunters and anyone new to hunting, giving them added confidence to get out in the field and enjoy Oklahoma's outdoor traditions. 🍷



# GAME BAG

## A COLLECTION OF LETTERS TO THE WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

We'd like to hear from you! Send your letters to Outdoor Oklahoma Letters, P.O. Box 53465, Oklahoma City, OK 73152, or send e-mail to [donald.brown@odwc.ok.gov](mailto:donald.brown@odwc.ok.gov).

Dear **Heather Del Moral, Jena Donnell and Josh Richardson,**

Thank you for all the great Oklahoma nature posters and materials. We've got them hanging all over the room and enjoy them very much. You're all appreciated!



Josh Richardson



Jena Donnell

*Mrs. Thiessen, environmental science class teacher*

Dear Wildlife Department,

I just wanted to take a minute to send a big thank you to you gentleman. Our son attended the wildlife youth camp last week and came home with a drive to do more for his future! He hasn't stopped talking about camp since he got home!

As a family, we are very much lovers of the outdoors, but we were extremely excited for him to be given the chance to attend the week-long camp with our game wardens. This has been such a beneficial experience for him to be able to have hands-on learning and be around the game wardens who have so much knowledge and passion to share with our younger generation. It's absolutely priceless.

These young folks are the future, and to sow into each of them is world changing! This program is changing lives and futures for the



good of our state. Our family also has a greater appreciation and understanding knowing what it means to put oneself in harm's way. Thank you to you all for your service to our communities and Oklahoma.

*Sherry Lynn,  
First deputy, Creek County Court Clerk*

Dear Wildlife Department,

I wanted to tell you thank you so much for this camp. My son recently attended and had an amazing experience. He has been a hunter and fisher since he was little, and this was a great opportunity for him. He is 16 now and trying to plan for his future. So this was a chance for him to see if working in this field is good for him.

*Stacey Head, BSN, RN*

Hello Wildlife Department,

I want to express my gratitude to Game Warden **Brian Meskimen** and **Heather Del Moral**, Communication and Education specialist, for their captivating Skins and Skulls



Heather Del Moral



Brian Meskimen

presentation at the Incredible Kids Academy summer camp. The kids absolutely loved it and learned a great deal!

*Amber Lavalley, camp director*

Dear **Micah Holmes**, Communication and Education Division assistant chief,

On behalf of Youth Leadership Oklahoma and its 52 enthusiastic students, I would like to express our deepest gratitude for taking the time to share your invaluable knowledge and insights with us. Your participation as a speaker in our program has left a profound impact on our young leaders, and we are truly grateful for the experience you provided.



Micah Holmes

Your words resonated with them and sparked curiosity, inspiration, and motivation. The conversations that happened afterward showed the lasting impression that you left on Class 24.

As you know, our mission at Youth Leadership Oklahoma is to cultivate the next generation of leaders in Oklahoma, and your contribution played a significant role in fulfilling this objective. ... Your contribution has undoubtedly made a difference in their lives and has fueled their aspirations to become exemplary leaders in their communities.

*Jodi Lewis, president and CEO  
Vivian Le, program director for members and youths*

# WILD ABOUT COOKING

## BACON WRAPPED DOVE WITH FIGS – A WILD GAME DELIGHT

Dove hunters, this one is for you. Bacon Wrapped Dove with Figs is one great answer to the question: How do you make dove poppers taste fantastic?

I've experimented with many dove recipes over the years. Dove poppers or dove nuggets are always super popular, and this bacon-wrapped dove-with-figs recipe is a new favorite version. Tender dove meat, crispy bacon, and sweet figs create a harmonious blend of savory and sweet.

Dove meat is highly nutritious, packed with essential vitamins and minerals such as iron, zinc, and B vitamins. It is also a great source of lean protein, making it an ideal choice for those looking to incorporate more protein into their diet.

Dove meat has a delicate and slightly gamey flavor that pairs well with a variety of ingredients. The meat itself is tender and moist, with a subtle sweetness that enhances the overall taste. When cooked correctly, dove meat becomes incredibly succulent. The flavor of dove meat is enhanced when combined with other ingredients, such as bacon and figs. The saltiness of the bacon complements the mildness of the dove meat, while the sweetness

of the figs adds a delightful contrast. The result is a harmonious blend of flavors that will leave your taste buds singing.

Cooking with dove meat and other wild game has many benefits. First, game meat is often leaner than meat from domesticated animals, making it a healthier choice. Separate from whatever ingredients you combine it with, wild game is lower in saturated fat and cholesterol than grain-fed animals. Second, game meat provides a unique and exciting flavor experience. The rich, earthy taste of wild game adds depth and complexity to dishes, elevating them to a new level.

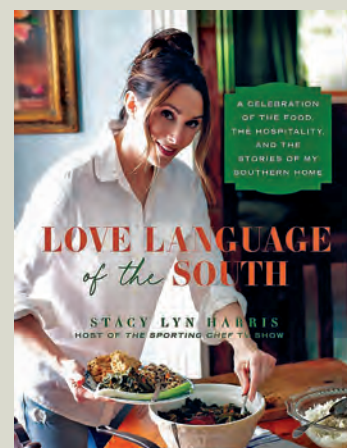
These dove poppers are versatile. They can be enjoyed as an appetizer, a main course, or even as part of a charcuterie board. The combo of flavors and textures makes it a crowd pleaser.

Cooking dove poppers requires some special considerations to ensure the best results. Here are a few tips to help you cook dove meat and other wild game to perfection:

**Proper Seasoning:** Game meats have a mild flavor, so it's important to season them well to enhance their taste. Use a combination of salt, pepper and herbs to bring out the natural flavors.



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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stacy Lyn Harris is an author, speaker, gardener, photographer, lawyer, and TV host, and also a wife and mother of seven children! With nine mouths to feed three times a day, a lot of thought, time, and energy goes into the food she prepares. Her blog, website, books and TV show "The Sporting Chef" are her ways to share the joy of healthy, happy living. Check out her latest book, "Love Language of the South." Stacy believes that old recipes are tried and true, simple food is better, and great ingredients make great meals.





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NICK DAWSON/FICKR CC-BY-NC



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**Cooking Time:** Game meats are leaner, so they cook faster. Be mindful of the cooking time to avoid overcooking and drying out the meat. Use a meat thermometer to ensure the meat is cooked to your desired level of doneness.

**Resting Time:** Allow game meat to rest for a few minutes after cooking. This will help the juices redistribute throughout the meat, resulting in a more tender and flavorful dish.

**Pairing Flavors:** Experiment with different flavor combinations to enhance the taste of game meats. Consider using ingredients like citrus, herbs, spices and fruits to add complexity and balance to your dishes.

## INGREDIENTS

### For marinade:

Juice of 1 lemon (about 2  
tablespoons) and zest  
.....  
3 T olive oil  
.....  
4 cloves garlic, roughly chopped  
.....  
2 cups cilantro, chopped  
.....  
2 t paprika  
.....  
2 t red pepper flakes  
.....  
2 t cumin  
.....  
1 t kosher salt  
.....  
½ t freshly ground black pepper

### For dove poppers:

12 dove breasts, or 24 halves  
.....  
12 medium jalapeno peppers,  
halved lengthwise and seeded  
.....  
8 oz cream cheese  
.....  
12 figs, halved  
.....  
1 lb bacon strips, thin sliced

## INSTRUCTIONS

- In food processor, blend all marinade ingredients. Place dove breasts into plastic bag and pour the marinade mixture over the dove. Remove air from bag, seal it, and leave in refrigerator overnight.
- With a meat mallet, pound dove meat into 3-by-4-inch rectangle.
- Add a teaspoon of cream cheese into cavity of halved jalapenos. Slice fig to fit width of jalapeno's cavity, and place fig on top of cream cheese. Wrap bacon around stuffed jalapeno and dove meat. Secure bacon with toothpick.
- On hot outdoor grill with coals on one side, place poppers bacon seam-side-down onto grill over hot coals. Once bacon is browned, move poppers to grill side without hot coals to finish cooking. When pepper is easily pierced, poppers will be done.

**Notes:** You can bake these poppers seam-side-down on a baking sheet in a 350-degree oven for 25 minutes. You can also cook them on the stovetop in a cast-iron skillet: start with the poppers seam side down, turn them to get the bacon completely done on each side, and then turn the heat down and cook until done.

If you don't like cream cheese, you could always use mascarpone or even gouda.

If you don't have fresh figs (they are very perishable), then dried figs, dates or dried apricots will work beautifully.

If you don't have any dove on hand, this recipe will work with any kind of meat, even chicken.

(Republished by permission from <https://stacylynharris.com>)

## SEVERAL FALL HUNTING SEASONS NOW UNDERWAY

This fall's hunting seasons kicked off Sept. 1 with the opening of dove hunting statewide. And the action only heats up as the weather cools down.

Teal and resident Canada goose seasons opened Sept. 7, providing hunters of all ages and experience levels the opportunity to get their feet wet ahead of the regular duck season. The early goose season will close Sept. 16, and the teal season will close Sept. 22.

Only teal are legal to harvest during this season, which is different than regular duck season. Hunters often see other species of ducks while teal hunting, such as resident mallards or wood ducks, along with some other early migrants. Be sure of your target.

The daily bag limit per hunter is six teal: blue-winged, green-winged or cinnamon teal, combined.

New this year, waterfowl hunters younger than 18 will require a youth super hunting license, but they will not need the Oklahoma waterfowl license. Youths ages 16 and 17 must buy the federal duck stamp and everyone hunting waterfowl must get a federal Harvest Information Program permit.

Also new this year: a land access permit is required for anyone using Oklahoma Land Access Program leased areas, and for Honobia and Three Rivers wildlife management areas. These permit fees are needed to help fund lease payments to landowners for public access.

Other hunting seasons open in September and October include squirrel, dove, rail, gallinule, coyote, raccoon, beaver, prairie dog, nutria, striped skunk, and some species of reptiles, salamanders and amphibians.

Ensure you are abiding by all the rules in the current Oklahoma Fishing and Hunting Regulations found online at [wildlifedepartment.com](http://wildlifedepartment.com), in the Go Outdoors Oklahoma mobile app, or in print across the state wherever hunting and fishing licenses are sold. ♡

### IT'S THE LAW:

#### OKLAHOMA WILDLIFE LICENSE MODERNIZATION ACT

Highlights of license changes in that went into effect July 1:

- Consolidation of more than 50 hunting and fishing licenses into 14.
- Defining "youth" as anyone younger than 18, whether resident or nonresident.
- Creation of a single youth super hunting license that will take the place of about 15 other youth licenses.
- Providing resident deer hunters one license for all deer they are allowed to harvest in a season (previously offered only to nonresidents).
- Increasing license costs for nonresidents hunting deer and waterfowl in Oklahoma.
- Adding black bear hunting to the privileges granted with lifetime hunting and lifetime combination licenses.
- Exempts residents and nonresidents ages 16 and 17 from the fishing license. ♡

## OUTDOOR CALENDAR

FOR THE LATEST UPDATES, GO ONLINE TO LICENSE.  
GOOUTDOORSOKLAHOMA.COM/Event/Events.aspx

**NOTICE:** Events were scheduled at press time; they are subject to change.

### SEPTEMBER 2024

- 1** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 2** Labor Day; state offices closed.
- 4** "Learn to Hunt: Teal and Resident Goose" online seminar, noon. Register: [license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx](http://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx).
- 7** Oklahoma City Free Fishing Day, no city permit required.
- 7-8** Free Hunting Days, statewide for residents, no license required.
- 8** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 9** Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission meeting, 9 a.m., The Cedar Gate near Kingfisher. Livestream: [YouTube.com/OutdoorOklahoma](http://YouTube.com/OutdoorOklahoma).  
Clay Shoot Fundraiser by Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Foundation, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., The Cedar Gate near Kingfisher, [colin@okwildlifeconservation.org](mailto:colin@okwildlifeconservation.org).
- 14** "All About Oklahoma's Amazing Spiders" seminar, 10 a.m., Hackberry Flat WMA. Register: [license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx](http://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx).
- 15** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 22** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 25** "Learn to Hunt: Deer Archery" online seminar, noon. Register: [license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx](http://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx).
- 29** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- **Hunter Education Classes** (date) in Norman (7); Atoka (7); Fort Gibson (7); Tahlequah (21); Woodward (21); Granite (28); Wayne (28). Register: [license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx](http://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx).
- **Quail Forever** events (date) in Guymon (12); Atoka (18); Guymon (28). Info: <https://pfqf.myeventcenter.com>.
- **Ducks Unlimited** events (date) in Shawnee (3); Stillwater (6); Edmond (12); Guthrie (14); Claremore (19); Muskogee (26); Norman (27). Info: [www.ducks.org/events](http://www.ducks.org/events).
- **Friends of NRA** event in El Reno (19); Enid (21); Tahlequah (26); Vinita (27). Info: [friendsofnra.org/events](http://friendsofnra.org/events).
- **National Wild Turkey Federation** event info: <https://your.nwtf.org/members/events>.

### OCTOBER 2024

- 5** Deer 101 Workshop, 9 a.m.-noon, Arcadia Conservation Education Center. Register: [license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx](http://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx).  
Oklahoma City Free Fishing Day, no city permit required.
- 6** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 7** Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission meeting, 9 a.m., Oklahoma City. Livestream: [YouTube.com/OutdoorOklahoma](http://YouTube.com/OutdoorOklahoma).
- 12** Kaw WMA Open House, 9 a.m., Register: [license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx](http://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx).
- 13** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 20** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 25** "Learn to Hunt: Deer Muzzleloader" online seminar, noon. Register: [license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx](http://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx).
- 27** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, 8 a.m., OETA.
- **Hunter Education Classes** (date) in Sallisaw (5); Blanchard (12); Enid (17). Register: [license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx](http://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx).
- **Quail Forever** event (date) in Pocossett (26). Info: <https://pfqf.myeventcenter.com>.
- **Ducks Unlimited** events (date) in Enid (3); Yukon (10); Duncan (22). Info: [ducks.org/events](http://ducks.org/events).
- **Friends of NRA** event in Dewey (5); Norman (24). Info: [friendsofnra.org/events](http://friendsofnra.org/events).
- **National Wild Turkey Federation** event info: <https://your.nwtf.org/members/events>.

\*\* FOR HUNTING SEASON DATES, GO TO  
[www.wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/seasons](http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/seasons) \*\*





# OKLAHOMA

DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

## FALL 2024 - SPRING 2025 HUNTING SEASONS

### BIG GAME

#### DEER & ELK\*

#### BEAR\*

#### ANTELOPE

#### ARCHERY

OCT. 1 - JAN. 15

OCT. 1 - 20

OCT. 1 - 14

#### YOUTH GUN

OCT. 18 - 20

#### MUZZLELOADER

OCT. 26 - NOV. 3

OCT. 26 - NOV. 3

#### GUN

NOV. 23 - DEC. 8

DRAWING ONLY

#### HOLIDAY ANTLERLESS

DEC. 18 - 31

### DUCKS

#### PANHANDLE

#### ZONE 1 & 2

(REGULAR SEASON)

OCT. 5 - JAN. 1

NOV. 9 - 24 & NOV. 30 - JAN. 26

(YOUTH, VETERAN, ACTIVE MILITARY)

SEPT. 28 & FEB. 1

NOV. 2 & FEB. 1

### TURKEY

#### YOUTH SPRING

#### SPRING

APRIL 12 - 13

APRIL 16 - MAY 16

#### FALL ARCHERY

#### FALL GUN

OCT. 1 - JAN. 15

NOV. 2 - 22

#### QUAIL

NOV. 9 - FEB. 15

#### PHEASANT

DEC. 1 - JAN. 31

#### DOVE

SEPT. 1 - OCT. 31  
&  
DEC. 1 - 29

#### SQUIRREL

MAY 15 - FEB. 28

#### RABBIT

OCT. 1 - MARCH 15

#### FURBEARER

DEC. 1 - FEB. 28

\* Bear Muzzleloader and all statewide elk seasons are quota hunts. Check quotas at [wildlifedepartment.com](http://wildlifedepartment.com) before hunting. The Special Southwest Zone for elk has season dates that vary from the regular statewide season dates listed above. Consult the most current Oklahoma Hunting Regulations Guidebook for the Special Southwest Zone dates.

**DISCLAIMER:** Equal Opportunity Statement - This program operates free from discrimination on the basis of political or religious opinion or affiliation, race, creed, color, gender, age, ancestry, marital status or disability. A person who feels he or she may have been discriminated against or would like further information should write: Director, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, P.O. Box 53465, Oklahoma City, OK 73152, or Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Civil Rights U.S. Department of the Interior 1849 C Street, NW Washington, D.C. 20240

Photo by: Carrie Allen-Cole



# BOY CASTS LINE ACROSS ALL OF OKLAHOMA

FISHING QUEST LURES SON,  
DAD TO ALL 77 COUNTIES

BY DON P. BROWN,  
COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION SPECIALIST





Most people have heard some rather unbelievable fish tales over the years. But just wait until you hear the one a 10-year-old Edmond boy tells. It's as big as all of Oklahoma!

Alex Turner, son of Neil and Usha Turner, recently finished a personal quest that is remarkable by any standard: He has caught a fish in each of Oklahoma's 77 counties.

The journey successfully concluded Aug. 8, 2024, when Alex reeled in a large-mouth bass from a private pond in Lincoln County – the county where he'd "gotten skunked at least six times before."

But on this try, Alex was fairly certain he would get his final county catch; after all, his mom had given him a kiss for luck that morning. A short time later, Alex was tossing a Texas-rigged worm from a boat in the pond, and it wasn't long before he felt a tug and set the hook.

It was time to celebrate with chocolate cake!

"I feel like I've done a ton. It's 77 fish plus extra fish, so I've done a lot of catching," Alex said. "We've met a lot of nice people, who helped me with my goal."

Dad concurred. "Our appreciation for the people and places in this state has skyrocketed", Neil said. "The things Alex has been exposed to and the people he has met have been a big part of his education and help make him a better student, seeing how class subjects get applied in the real world."

Alex, who happens to be autistic, is home-schooled in The Okie School of Adventure and Charm (the Turners' own creation). The "school" has a popular YouTube channel with more than 100 videos that document Alex's educational and fishing experiences.



NEIL TURNER/COURTESY

Alex landed this white crappie at Lake Eufaula and was able to check off Pittsburg County from his list.

**"I feel like I've done a ton. It's 77 fish plus extra fish, so I've done a lot of catching," Alex said. "We've met a lot of nice people, who helped me with my goal."**





ALEX WAS EXCITED ON THE RETURN TRIP HOME, RECALLING THAT HE'D CAUGHT WHITE BASS IN MAYES COUNTY, LARGEMOUTH BASS IN LE FLORE COUNTY, AND SEVERAL OTHER FISH IN OTHER COUNTIES. HE TOLD HIS DAD,

**"LET'S SEE IF WE CAN CATCH THEM IN ALL 77."**



"The outdoors has been one of the most effective therapies we have done with him. It's raised his confidence, pushed his bounds, increased his patience, fueled his natural curiosity, and been highly educational. Plus - it's been a lot of fun."

## HATCHING THE PLAN

Neil grew up in the Texas Panhandle, and the lack of public waterbodies in that region meant that he didn't know much about fishing. "But I always wanted to fish."

They moved to Edmond 12 years ago, and Alex was born. Neil decided he wanted to get into fishing in a good way, so he booked a fishing guide for a sand bass outing, and he took 5-year-old Alex with him.

"And he caught lots of fish." Father and son were now hooked on fishing.

Several more fishing trips followed, including trout fishing and plenty of bank fishing. Then, in 2022, they signed up for a Wildlife Department learn-to-fish class in Le Flore County.

Alex was excited on the return trip home, recalling that he'd caught white bass in Mayes County, largemouth bass in Le Flore County, and several other fish in other counties. He told his dad, "Let's see if we can catch them in all 77."

**"We thought that making this goal to catch fish in every county would help us explore the state at the same time as we improved our fishing skills. And with that, we were off."**



NEIL TURNER/COURTESY

At age 5, Alex caught his first fish, a white bass, on April 6, 2019.





Alex proudly displays the Citation of Congratulations he received from Oklahoma Lt. Gov. Matt Pinnell just days after he met his statewide fishing goal.

"My first reaction was to laugh," Neil said. "But then I began wondering, too. We thought that making this goal to catch fish in every county would help us explore the state at the same time as we improved our fishing skills. And with that, we were off."

At first, the strategy was to target the bigger lakes, but Alex said that quickly changed.

"Our new idea was we would just use the smaller ponds. Big lakes — how are you supposed to find the fish? They're massive. They don't have access everywhere. Meantime, in a small pond, fish are so limited. The only structure they know is probably a dock.

"That strategy worked out well."

Neil said they stumbled on ODWC's Close to Home Fishing ponds and found the fishing was a lot easier. "We were real excited to find ponds like that, and we used them a lot."

They also made good use of the public fishing areas under ODWC's management.

Over time, the every-county quest became more systematic. Educational field trips would also include a little time to catch a fish in a needed county.

"One of the great things that's happened from this is realizing there's such a wide variety of water in Oklahoma, and a wide variety of conditions that you get to see."

## REELING IN MEMORIES

Alex said his dad took him everywhere, on both dedicated trips and when traveling for other reasons. Catching a fish was easy in some counties, and other were quite difficult. He recalls Greer County being both.

On Day 1 at Doc Hollis Lake (Sandy Sanders Wildlife Management Area), the air was still, the water was crystal clear "and the fish could see us." No fish that day. But they went back for Day 2, and the wind had kicked in. "My dad hadn't even got his line out, and I caught a fish!"

Sometimes the fishing is tough. About 20 counties have required second or third visits to catch a fish.

Getting fish in Cimarron and Beaver counties in the Panhandle wasn't easy,



The Turner family: mother Usha, son Alex, daughter Ella, and father Neil.



and not just because of the long driving time from Edmond. “We needed two days but hung in there and got it.” They just kept trying and learned patience along the way.

Alex clearly recalls the day of the total solar eclipse, April 8, 2024. They fished for hours without a bite. “We came back after lunch and started catching them during the eclipse! We did catch a fish on the eclipse, and it actually went off the ruler.”

And in every county, the requirement was to take a photo of Alex and his fish.

As for method, Alex has caught the most fish using worms and a bobber. His favorite fish to catch is any fish that bites. “I like sunfish the best because they just bite anything.

“I consider myself really good, but not a professional.” Alex said he’s learned so much from his dad about angling, and that his dad is really the professional.

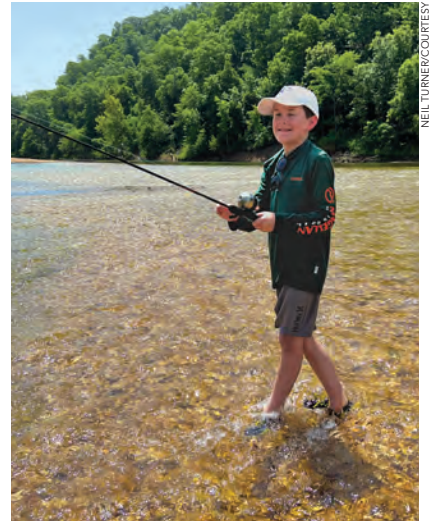
## PLENTY OF FISHING BUDDIES

One thing Alex and Neil realized is how Oklahomans from border to border are supportive and willing to help. “It’s just been overwhelming.”

“It’s fun to meet people,” Alex said.

To find leads on fishing spots, Neil joined online angler forums where he shared Alex’s mission and asked for suggestions in various counties. Alex received plenty of invitations to “come and fish my honey hole.”

Grant County was particularly difficult, as publicly accessible water mostly doesn’t exist there. But after putting out a request online, an invitation arrived



Alex said wading was among his favorite ways to fish.

**“We came back after lunch and started catching them during the eclipse! We did catch a fish on the eclipse, and it actually went off the ruler.”**





from a pond owner. "Nobody had basically fished there before," Alex said. "I casted out. Oh! Bite already! Wow! It was super easy," Alex said.

After several dozen counties were checked off the list, Neil began posting updates on Facebook and asking for suggestions in other counties. That's when several game wardens joined in to help.

"What a resource they were," Neil said. "And we would run into other Wildlife Department employees out in the field, and they would help."

**"Along the way, we have been students of your fishing tips, fished ODWC lakes, WMAs, OLAP ponds, traded e-mails with employees, called game wardens to ask for tips, talked with your field personnel, and taken advantage of other resources that you offer."**

He credits ODWC for a great deal of help and inspiration.

"Along the way, we have been students of your fishing tips, fished ODWC lakes, WMAs, OLAP ponds, traded e-mails with employees, called game wardens to ask for tips, talked with your field personnel, and taken advantage of other resources that you offer.

"Thank you for all the work you do for our state and how much it has benefited us on reaching this goal. I say thank you for all of it — not only as the dad of an aspiring fisherman, but as a citizen of this great state that you all make better."

So, with his two-year quest now a success, what's next.

Alex said he'd like to revisit some of his favorite fishing spots, including the Illinois River and Barren Fork Creek. But not anytime really soon. 🐟





# THE FINAL FISH

ALEX TURNER'S YEARS-LONG QUEST TO CATCH A FISH IN EVERY OKLAHOMA COUNTY SUCCESSFULLY CONCLUDED AUG. 8, 2024, WITH THIS LARGEMOUTH BASS FROM A PRIVATE POND IN LINCOLN COUNTY.

NEIL TURNER/COURTESY







Many WMAs contain rivers, ponds and some larger lake areas, which offer some great opportunities for waterfowl hunting on public land.

# THERE'S NO QUESTION

## HUNTING PERMISSION NO PROBLEM ON PUBLIC LAND

BY BRYAN HENDRICKS

For some people, asking a landowner for permission to hunt on their property is no big deal. But for others, it can be an ordeal.

Let's face it, some folks are better salesmen than others. There are those who have "never met a stranger," and they seem to easily get permission to hunt from nearly everyone they ask.

However, some people feel uncomfortable asking a stranger for something as personal as permission to hunt or fish on their private property. Perhaps your work schedule doesn't permit you to scout the countryside and visit with landowners, or maybe you have too many other obligations. If, like a lot of people, you only hunt when you can, you simply don't have the luxury of planning ahead.



Or perhaps you've just procrastinated too long, and now it's the eve of hunting season and you have nowhere to hunt.

If any of these descriptions sound like you, don't despair. There's still hope.

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation owns or manages more than 100 wildlife management areas across the state that offer excellent hunting for a variety of species including white-tailed deer, wild turkey, waterfowl, squirrels, and rabbits. It is true that many of these areas can be heavily pressured during deer gun season, and sometimes during waterfowl seasons. But if you like to hunt squirrels, rabbits or doves, you can often have them all to yourself.

Even during the more popular seasons, these areas are less likely to be crowded during the week, so you might consider adjusting your schedule for midweek hunting. Here are a few suggestions to get you started.

Public access to most WMAs requires visitors to possess a state hunting, fishing or combination license, a Wildlife Conservation Passport, or a Land Access Permit.

Most WMAs have some special area regulations that outline differences from regular statewide seasons that apply on private lands. Be sure to check the latest Oklahoma Fishing and Hunting Regulations to learn what other restrictions are in place for the area you will be hunting.

## DOVE AND WATERFOWL HACKBERRY FLAT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

Covering 7,074 acres about seven miles southeast of Frederick, Hackberry Flat WMA features wetland and upland habitats that attract a variety of migratory birds and other wildlife species. Several hundred acres of food plots are planted annually that include millet and wheat. Strip-disking promotes annual sunflower production. About 3,000 acres may be flooded during a wet year, and a grid of well-maintained roads provides generous access to the entire area.

The entire WMA is a Wetland Development Area and is closed to waterfowl hunting daily after 1 p.m. All shotgun hunting is restricted to federally approved nontoxic shot only. Hackberry Flat WMA has a Waterfowl Refuge Portion that is closed to all activities from Oct. 15 to Jan. 31.



Hunters will find plenty of public hunting areas where ODWC habitat managers have prepared fields especially for dove harvest.



Hackberry Flat Wildlife Management Area





Hackberry Flat WMA is accessible from U.S. 70 to the south, U.S. 183 to the west, or State Highway 5 to the north.

For more on Hackberry Flat WMA, go to [wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/wma/south-west/hackberry-flat-wma](http://wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/wma/south-west/hackberry-flat-wma).

For more on dove and waterfowl hunting, go to [wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/seasons](http://wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/seasons).

## SQUIRRELS

### PUSHMATAHA WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

Squirrel season is one of Oklahoma's longest continuous hunting seasons, and one of the better places to enjoy squirrel hunting is at Pushmataha WMA.

Situated in the Kiamichi Mountains, the area commonly called "Push" covers 19,247 acres in Pushmataha County. The rugged terrain is forested with a mixture of pines and hardwoods, specifically oak and hickory. The habitat is managed with a combination of selective timber harvest and prescribed burning, and wildlife openings provide food and cover. The recipe is an ideal squirrel habitat for both fox squirrels and eastern gray squirrels. Look for gray squirrels on the ridgetops, and then double up on the fox squirrels in the draws and bottoms.



Pushmataha WMA is about 40 miles southeast of McAlester and about three miles south of Clayton. It is accessible via State Highway 2 to the north. Squirrel season at this WMA is open from May 15 to Feb. 28, but is closed from opening day of archery deer season through the first nine days of deer gun season. It is also closed several days for controlled deer hunts.

For more on Pushmataha WMA, go to [wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/wma/southeast/pushmataha-wma](http://wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/wma/southeast/pushmataha-wma). For more on squirrel hunting, go to [wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/resources/small-game/squirrel](http://wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/resources/small-game/squirrel).



*Pushmataha Wildlife Management Area*

## RABBITS

### OKMULGEE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

If you like hunting swamp rabbits, 9,445-acre Okmulgee WMA is the place for you. Within easy driving distance of Tulsa, Okmulgee WMA is popular with rabbit hunters because of its dense marshes, oxbows and



## ENTERING MANY ODWC AREAS REQUIRES A LICENSE OR PASSPORT

Unless exempt, all visitors to Wildlife Department-owned areas must have a current hunting, fishing or combination license, or a Wildlife Conservation Passport, which is a license that doesn't provide the holder with any hunting or fishing privileges).

All of these licenses help fund habitat management, fish and wildlife research, and enforcement of the state's hunting and fishing regulations. However, visitors are urged to choose to buy a hunting, fishing or combination license rather than a conservation passport because license sales have a greater impact on overall ODWC funding.

The primary objective on all lands owned or managed by ODWC is the sound management and use of fish and wildlife resources resident thereon. Public use of Department-managed lands is permitted according to the following priorities:

- **First Priority:** Hunting, fishing, trapping, running dogs for sport and associated activities.

- **Second Priority:** Other wildlife-oriented activities (nature observation or photography, and conservation education).
- **Third Priority:** Non-wildlife related activities (picnicking, hiking, backpacking, short-term camping, horseback riding) when such activities don't conflict with wildlife management objectives.
- **Fourth Priority:** Large group activities (military training, organized trail rides, etc.).

People who use department-owned areas for nonhunting or nonfishing activities, such as birdwatching or photography, may choose to buy a three-day or annual Wildlife Conservation Passport. But buying a hunting or fishing license can cost less than a passport. Plus, license holders are granted the privileges of the license they buy and can enjoy those activities during the license term.

Hunting and fishing license revenues are more important for ODWC funding because they can be used as matching funds for federal grant programs, sometimes returning as much as 90% of a project's cost to ODWC. License dollars generate more "bang for the buck" in helping ODWC pay for its wildlife and fish management and habitat activities.

People younger than 16 years old at the start of the calendar year, or students and instructors participating in bona fide education tours or activities sponsored or organized by an educational institution or any other organized event sanctioned by and approved in advance by the wildlife department, are exempt from the Wildlife Conservation Passport requirement.

Areas with the license/passport requirement are indicated in the "Special Area Regulations" section of the Oklahoma Fishing and Hunting Regulations. These areas have a "CP" inside a gold circle beside the area's name in the booklet.

Some publicly accessible wildlife areas are managed or maintained by several local, state and federal agencies or partnerships, and those areas don't require a license or passport to visit. 🍷



Are you game for squirrel hunting? A top-notch public area to try is Okmulgee WMA.





Friends Jim Gillham and Arthur Joe Young, along with a couple of hunting buddies, enjoy a rabbit hunt.



Okmulgee Game Management Area



sloughs bordering seven miles of the Deep Fork of the Canadian River.

If you prefer to hunt cottontails, try the uplands on the northwest side of the WMA, especially in the vicinity of the old Huckabee Ranch.

Okmulgee WMA is only about 30 miles south of Tulsa. Access the area from U.S. 75 to the east or State Highway 16 to the south. Other excellent WMAs in the Tulsa area for rabbit hunting include Fort Gibson, Heyburn and Keystone.

Rabbit seasons on WMAs often differ from statewide seasons, so check the Oklahoma Fishing and Hunting Regulations before going afield. If you hunt rabbits in wetland areas, you must use federally approved nontoxic shot.

For more on Okmulgee WMA, go to [wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/wma/northeast/okmulgee-pha](http://wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/wma/northeast/okmulgee-pha). For more on rabbit hunting, go to [wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/resources/small-game/rabbit](http://wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/resources/small-game/rabbit).

## QUAIL, WATERFOWL, DEER AND MORE OKLAHOMA LAND ACCESS PROGRAM

All state hunters also have access to hunt private lands through the wildlife department's Oklahoma Land Access Program (OLAP).



A core principle of OLAP is to increase walk-in access opportunities for hunting, fishing, stream access, and wildlife viewing. This is accomplished using financial incentives for landowners who allow the public these opportunities to recreate on their land.

With OLAP areas situated throughout the state, hunters can engage in hunting a variety of seasons and species. Signs posted at the properties, as well as current updates online and by email, keep OLAP users in the know about the status of every site.

Properties in OLAP aren't owned by ODWC, but are leased on behalf of the public. While ODWC receives some grant funds to help pay for these leases, some ODWC funds are still required as matching

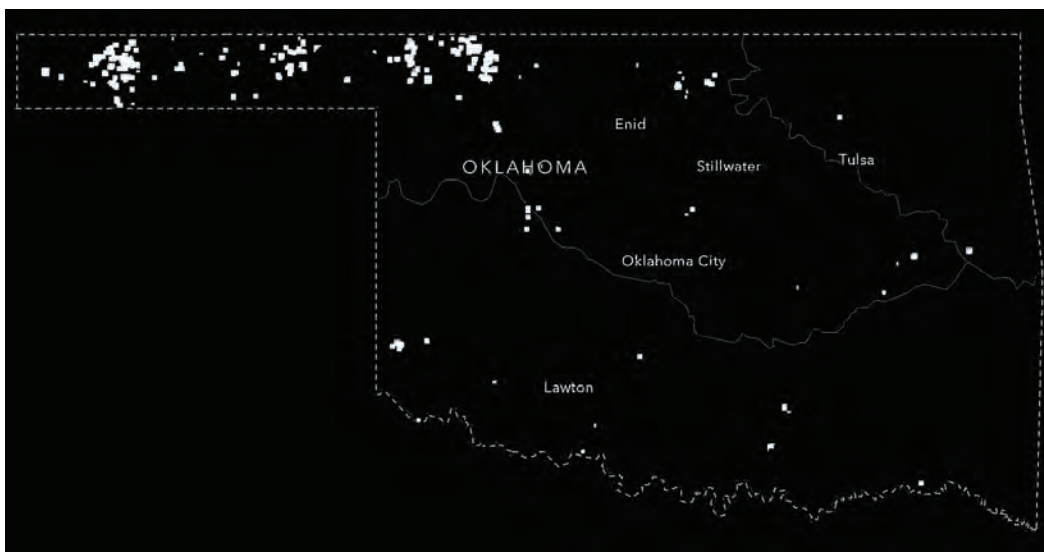
funds for these grants. To cover these matching costs, ODWC has started a Land Access Permit requirement for OLAP properties, similar to the requirements in place for Honobia Creek and Three Rivers WMAs (which are also leased properties). In addition, a hunting or fishing license is required for access, unless a person is exempt.

For details on OLAP, go to [wildlifedepartment.com/lands-and-minerals/OLAP](https://wildlifedepartment.com/lands-and-minerals/OLAP).

For more resources about hunting various game species in Oklahoma, go to [wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/resources](https://wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/resources). 🏹



*A variety of hunting and fishing opportunities can be found on walk-in areas enrolled in ODWC's Oklahoma Land Access Program.*



*Properties enrolled in the Oklahoma Land Access Program as of August 2024 are seen in white on this map.*



# Conservation

## Fun Outdoors!

Sitting around a campfire on a crisp autumn evening is one of life's simple pleasures. Double the fun by turning such an outing into a cooking lesson. Enlist the help of Mom or Dad to help you create a pot of savory chili that will cook over your campfire. Besides your favorite chili ingredients, you'll need a Dutch oven or a suspended steel pot to cook the chili. And don't forget the roasting sticks and marshmallows for dessert!

## Hunting Tip

When hunting teal, keep in mind their small size and high speed in flight. Adding extra lead into your shot might be the ticket to greater success.

## Fishing Tip

Autumn is a time of transition, and anglers would do well adapting to the changes. The smaller minnows that make up much of the forage base during warm months are now less abundant. Baitfish are now larger, and the predators are looking to feed heavily in advance of the cold winter. Don't be afraid to toss out some larger lures this time of year. And fish in areas where shad usually congregate, such as creek arms and coves.

## for Kids!

### Word Search: Things at Deer Camp

B	Z	Q	J	A	K	X	V	K	N	T	R	C	M	K	E
F	C	Y	A	G	R	Y	D	G	L	O	V	E	S	I	S
D	J	J	W	E	F	I	N	K	J	R	E	P	O	X	A
I	B	S	L	E	E	P	I	N	G	B	A	G	N	G	F
F	O	T	N	E	T	E	T	S	E	H	C	E	C	I	X
K	C	D	Y	S	B	J	V	A	B	S	Q	R	V	J	D
D	H	B	N	R	E	T	N	A	L	P	B	O	O	T	S
F	I	R	E	W	O	O	D	F	N	A	L	X	G	R	X
Q	S	G	I	K	S	Q	E	I	X	R	M	Q	I	Z	X
Q	D	Q	O	C	N	U	H	S	Y	T	A	A	M	M	A
M	S	Y	G	S	W	O	L	L	A	M	H	S	R	A	M
F	G	E	V	O	T	S	P	M	A	C	P	Y	V	X	I
E	R	I	F	P	M	A	C	F	P	P	B	I	H	B	Y
U	S	A	Y	R	D	Y	B	M	K	X	F	E	X	H	F
X	K	D	T	Y	Z	I	A	G	H	U	U	X	A	A	K
Q	M	T	L	T	T	C	T	C	T	A	Q	J	R	C	T

Find and circle the names of these things commonly seen at deer camp.

Boots  
Camp Stove  
Ice Chest  
Marshmallows

Camp Chairs  
Firewood  
Knife  
Sleeping Bag

Campfire  
Gloves  
Lantern  
Tent



## COOL FACTS About Blue-winged Teal:

- This bird is among the smallest of North American waterfowl, with a length of about 16 inches and a wingspan of about 23 inches.
- In flight, they reveal a bold, powder-blue patch on their upper wing coverts, and males have a green trailing edge feathers on the upper wings.
- During breeding season, males have a grayish blue head and a white crescent in front of the eyes, a light brown body, a small white flank patch in front of a black rear.
- Females and males not in breeding season (eclipse males) are overall patterns of brown.



ANDREA CARPIO/NATURALIST CC-BY-NC4

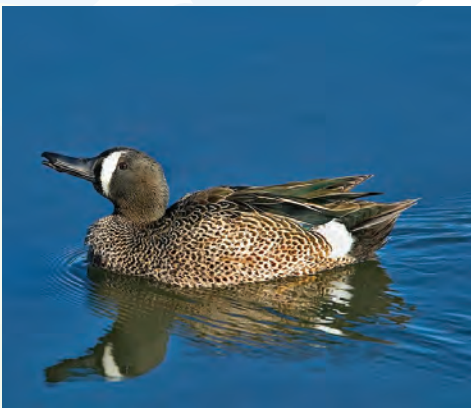


- These birds don't tolerate cold conditions well and are among the earliest to migrate south as winter approaches.
- They associate in flocks and are swift in flight, reaching 45 mph.
- They forage in shallow water and primarily eat seeds and aquatic vegetation.
- Blue-winged teal are the second-most abundant duck in North America, behind the mallard.
- Average lifespan is 10-17 years, but a banded green-winged teal harvested in Cuba in 2005 was at least 23 years old.
- Oklahoma has a two-week hunting season in September only for teal due to their earlier migrations.

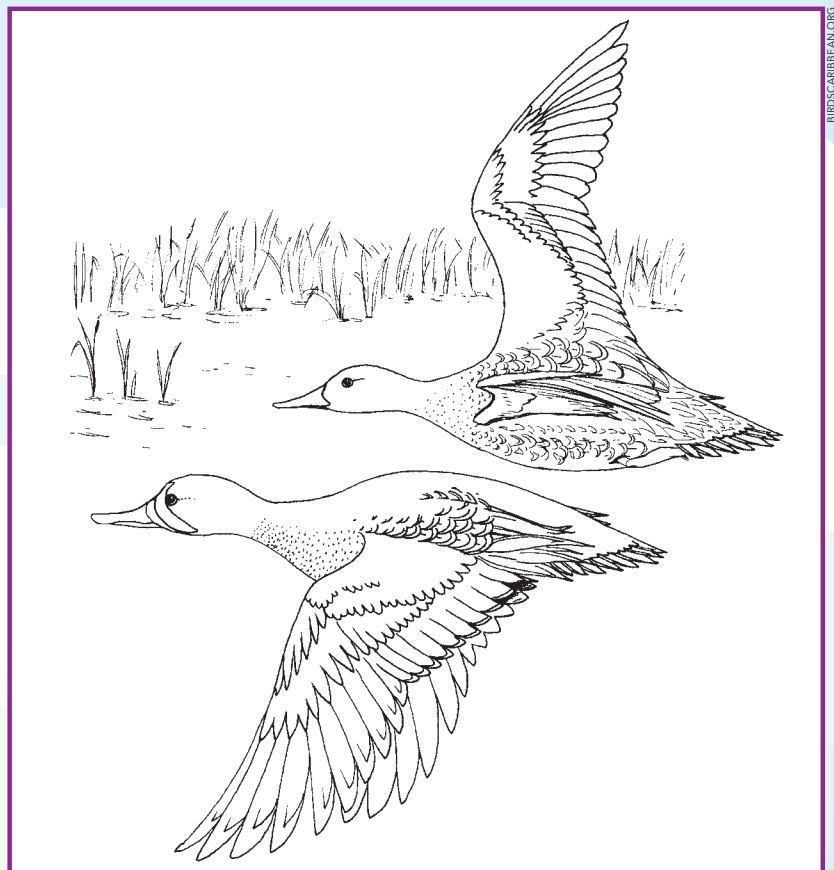
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## Color a Critter: Blue-winged Teal



BIRDS-CARBEEAN.ORG



# 2023-24 BIG GAME HARVEST REPORT

A photograph of a white-tailed deer with large antlers standing in a field of dry grass. The deer is facing the camera, and its antlers are prominent. The background is a field of dry grass and brush.

## STATE'S BIG GAME SEASONS ARE BIG WINS FOR HUNTERS

### Record Black Bear Harvest Adds to Overall Success

By Dallas Barber, big game biologist, ODWC

N. LEVINSKY/USFWS NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



Oklahoma's 2023-24 big game seasons continued to ride the trend of great success for many of those participating in the various seasons for white-tailed deer, elk, pronghorn, and black bear.

Healthy habitat and healthy populations across much of the state resulted in a total reported harvest of 124,833 deer for all methods of take. While not a new harvest record, that total put Oklahoma's seasonal deer harvest over the 120,000 mark for just the third time in the modern era.

Hunters continued to make management-minded decisions to benefit the state's deer population, with 44% of last year's harvest being made up of antlerless deer.

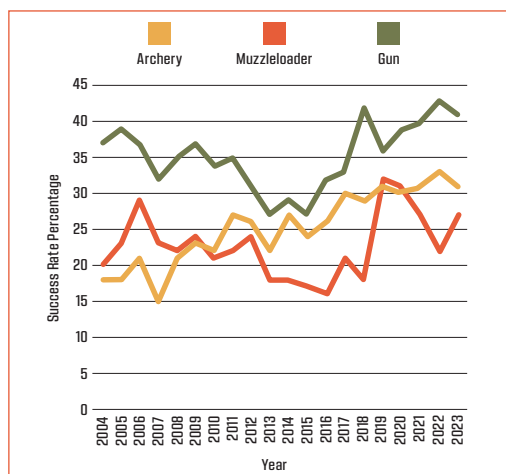
**Figure 1** shows total deer harvest from 2004 to 2023-24.

Oklahoma's various gun seasons, including the 16-day modern firearms season, youth gun season, and holiday antlerless season, yielded 74,137 deer being harvested. Hunters choosing to participate in the nine-day

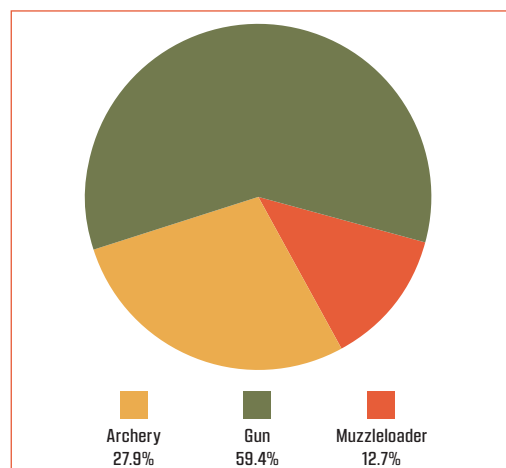
muzzleloader season managed to tag 15,898 deer, while archery hunters managed to harvest 34,798 deer. **Figure 2** shows success rates among those hunting methods. **Figure 3** represents each individual method and their percentage of the total 2023-24 harvest.

Oklahoma is unique in its diversity of habitat. No other landlocked state comes close. From the swamps and pine mountains in the southeast to the short-grass and sage-filled prairies in the far northwest, Oklahoma has a hunting style for anyone who enjoys chasing deer in their free time. With that diversity in habitat comes varied diversity in populations and the availability of public property for those choosing to hunt in that county.

**Figure 2: Hunter Success Rates 2004-Current**



**Figure 3: Harvest by Method 2023-24**



**Figure 1: Harvest Totals 2004-Current**

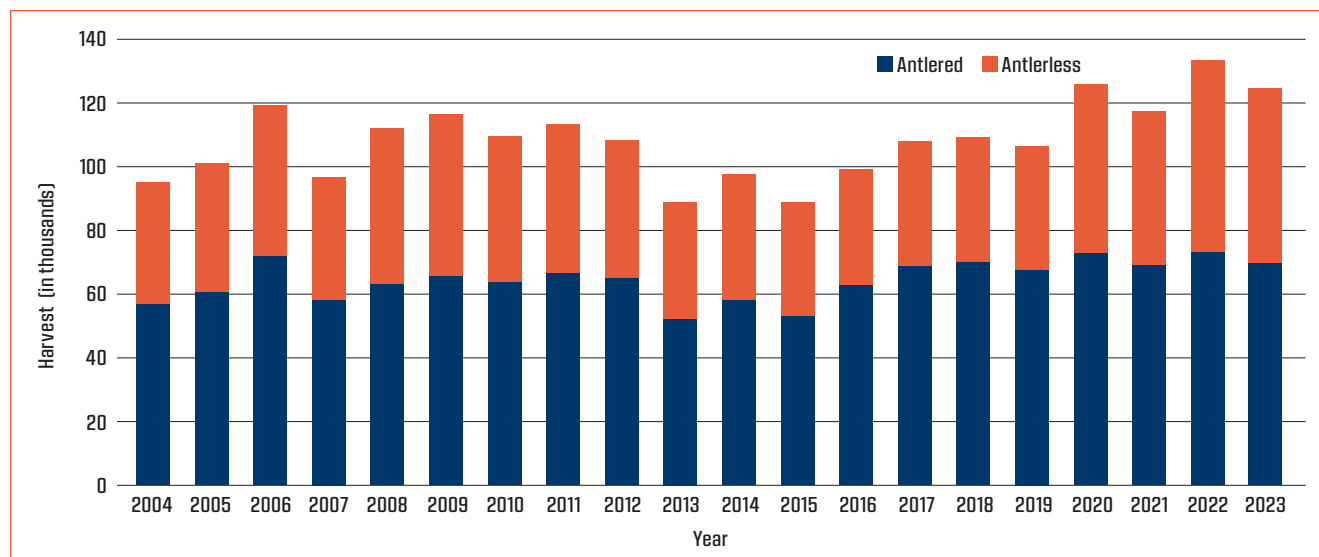




Table 1: Harvest by County, Sex, and Method

County	Archery		Gun		Muzzleloader		Total
	Antlerless	Antlered	Antlerless	Antlered	Antlerless	Antlered	
Adair	174	195	444	465	101	239	1,618
Alfalfa	112	153	354	373	27	92	1,111
Atoka	367	350	597	716	87	307	2,424
Beaver	13	27	57	222	6	40	365
Beckham	122	145	495	653	49	76	1,540
Blaine	48	79	240	433	17	54	871
Bryan	256	241	416	457	41	99	1,510
Caddo	212	263	614	850	59	129	2,127
Canadian	133	203	309	390	28	57	1,120
Carter	134	226	332	538	31	105	1,366
Cherokee	419	416	687	724	118	366	2,730
Choctaw	259	231	350	383	77	147	1,447
Cimarron	2	14	9	86	1	7	119
Cleveland	262	304	356	405	63	116	1,506
Coal	195	257	360	454	30	139	1,435
Comanche	117	158	179	326	23	52	855
Cotton	58	91	191	240	11	30	621
Craig	168	211	480	554	57	114	1,584
Creek	376	402	827	858	94	236	2,793
Custer	60	88	241	415	20	27	851
Delaware	363	391	608	739	72	238	2,411
Dewey	53	97	269	524	22	48	1,013
Ellis	37	81	252	400	18	40	828
Garfield	83	123	356	395	20	74	1,051
Garvin	172	226	383	574	41	114	1,510
Grady	228	249	606	715	64	123	1,985
Grant	129	191	539	628	67	107	1,661
Greer	83	88	189	320	23	38	741
Harmon	64	74	175	202	11	33	559
Harper	15	46	60	207	4	33	365
Haskell	170	208	328	343	77	192	1,318
Hughes	224	267	454	669	47	182	1,843
Jackson	110	121	278	309	19	40	877
Jefferson	112	250	281	359	20	55	1,077
Johnston	133	161	301	393	34	106	1,128
Kay	119	162	386	468	57	75	1,267
Kingfisher	89	123	327	441	27	68	1,075
Kiowa	73	101	212	339	14	42	781
Latimer	127	176	249	233	62	169	1,016
Le Flore	292	279	519	533	159	340	2,122
Lincoln	343	332	840	980	103	200	2,798
Logan	280	366	629	710	78	143	2,206
Love	118	159	197	244	16	43	777
Major	67	114	307	479	20	83	1,070
Marshall	54	72	92	143	15	33	409
Mayes	303	269	456	485	90	200	1,803
McClain	153	179	281	370	26	78	1,087
McCurtain	424	374	783	689	168	327	2,765
McIntosh	159	160	272	343	52	117	1,103
Murray	47	93	160	242	18	66	626
Muskogee	194	211	392	384	68	161	1,410
Noble	168	162	457	568	42	73	1,470
Nowata	155	155	439	548	43	68	1,408
Okfuskee	155	167	348	449	44	127	1,290
Oklahoma	394	545	378	424	50	89	1,880
Okmulgee	146	202	420	369	56	150	1,343
Osage	461	541	1,284	1,683	168	242	4,379
Ottawa	205	227	381	483	69	138	1,503
Pawnee	245	217	746	685	66	120	2,079
Payne	239	327	802	797	61	123	2,349
Pittsburg	494	571	698	796	137	507	3,203
Pontotoc	246	314	499	647	51	157	1,914
Pottawatomie	355	379	731	775	86	200	2,526
Pushmataha	324	334	524	491	127	289	2,089
Roger Mills	73	99	454	633	31	68	1,358
Rogers	431	446	708	641	88	160	2,474
Seminole	234	229	550	598	68	195	1,874
Sequoyah	301	286	649	598	125	357	2,316
Stephens	157	312	377	543	37	111	1,537
Texas	1	5	9	62	0	5	82
Tillman	96	133	228	294	14	18	783
Tulsa	203	226	244	223	20	51	967
Wagoner	278	273	441	388	69	121	1,570
Washington	160	189	405	503	33	69	1,359
Washita	47	61	183	283	10	28	612
Woods	45	150	182	449	11	69	906
Woodward	54	119	246	521	18	46	1,004
<b>County Total</b>	<b>13,972</b>	<b>16,466</b>	<b>31,102</b>	<b>37,853</b>	<b>3,976</b>	<b>9,581</b>	<b>112,950</b>
<b>Tribal</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>317</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>312</b>	<b>686</b>	<b>688</b>	<b>2,424</b>
<b>WMA Total</b>	<b>1,688</b>	<b>1,548</b>	<b>1,641</b>	<b>1,664</b>	<b>859</b>	<b>802</b>	<b>8,202</b>
<b>OLAP Total</b>	<b>666</b>	<b>591</b>					<b>1,257</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>16,626</b>	<b>18,922</b>	<b>32,864</b>	<b>39,829</b>	<b>5,521</b>	<b>11,071</b>	<b>124,833</b>



To represent that vast difference, **Table 1** shows deer harvest by county with public lands such as wildlife management areas (WMAs) excluded. The top three counties by harvest are Osage County, with 4,379 deer harvested; Pittsburg County, 3,203,; and Lincoln County, 2,798 deer.

WMAs and other public lands managed by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation make up for a small percentage of the total acreage in Oklahoma — about 3%. However, those public lands more-than pull their weight considering that 6.5% of the total deer harvest can be attributed to them. Details on those public land harvests can be seen in **Table 2**.

With the diversity in habitat comes diversity in species that live there. Oklahoma deer hunters heading “out west” are afforded an opportunity to harvest a mule deer. These populations are fragmented across the western one-third of the state and it can be a tough task to tag one. But hunters managed to harvest 242 Oklahoma mule deer during the 2023-24 season, a sizable increase from last season’s 209.

Such fluctuations in the mule deer population led ODWC to start a first-of-its-kind research project. Using collars, ODWC biologists along with university helpers are studying Oklahoma’s mule deer. There will be more to come on that research in the future. Details on mule deer harvest can be seen in **Table 3**.

**Table 2: WMA Harvest by Sex and Method**

WMA Name	Archery		Gun		Muzzleloader		Total
	Antlerless	Antlered	Antlerless	Antlered	Antlerless	Antlered	
Acadia CEA	30	13	3	0	1	1	48
Altus-Lugert WMA	26	13	1	9	9	8	66
American Horse Public Fishing Area	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Arbuckle Springs WMA	12	18	6	2	0	0	38
Atoka Public Hunting Area	3	2	6	7	6	10	34
Atoka WMA	17	28	2	5	2	1	55
Bamberger WMA	0	4	0	0	0	0	4
Barren Fork WMA	1	0	4	0	0	0	5
Beaver River (McFarland Unit)	0	2	0	5	0	0	7
Beaver River WMA	2	1	0	3	1	5	12
Beavers Bend State Park (Golf Course)	1	0	2	0	0	0	3
Beavers Bend State Park (River Bend)	1	0	0	0	2	1	4
Black Kettle WMA	19	18	95	112	38	25	307
Blue River Public Hunting and Fishing Area	13	16	2	9	0	0	40
Broken Bow WMA	5	0	5	1	4	8	23
Burtschi PFA	6	5	1	0	1	0	13
Candy Creek WMA	10	5	1	2	1	1	20
Canton WMA	35	14	8	27	26	14	124
Canton WRP	0	0	2	3	0	0	5
Cherokee WMA (GMA Portion)	24	20	11	36	7	2	100
Cherokee WMA (PHA Portion)	21	25	4	30	30	23	133
Chickasaw National Recreation Area	17	19	27	12	7	7	89
Cimarron Bluff WMA	0	3	0	0	0	0	3
Cimarron Hills WMA	1	3	0	1	0	0	5
Cookson WMA	26	32	6	10	1	3	78
Cooper WMA	1	3	0	27	0	1	32
Copan COE Parks	12	6	0	4	0	1	23
Copan WMA	31	39	40	42	10	9	171
Cross Timbers WMA	50	48	8	3	0	1	110
Deep Fork National Wildlife Refuge	15	22	5	3	12	5	62
Deep Fork WMA	9	6	32	15	18	8	88
Dewey County WMA	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Drummond Flats WMA	3	7	2	0	0	0	12
Ellis County WMA	4	3	3	20	8	3	41
Eufaula WMA	32	40	40	45	20	17	194
Fobb Bottoms WMA	11	4	10	15	0	2	42
Fort Cobb State Park	4	1	4	3	7	0	19
Fort Cobb WMA	29	10	12	12	10	5	78
Fort Gibson Waterfowl Refuge	6	3	0	0	20	9	38
Fort Gibson WMA	149	94	26	71	51	60	451
Fort Sill	51	60	38	49	32	21	251
Fort Supply WMA	15	17	5	18	3	5	63
Four Canyon Preserve	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
Fort Gibson WRP	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Gary Sherrer WMA (Bolen Hollow)	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Gist WMA	2	2	0	0	0	0	4
Grady County WMA	3	3	1	5	0	0	12
Grassy Slough WMA	2	1	0	0	0	0	3
Great Salt Plains State Park	3	1	4	0	3	1	12
Gruber Training Facility	17	15	6	49	45	59	191
Hackberry Flat WMA	1	3	0	0	5	8	17
Hall PFA	0	1	1	0	0	0	2

Table 2: WMA Harvest by Sex and Method (continued)

WMA Name	Archery		Gun		Muzzleloader		Total
	Antlerless	Antlered	Antlerless	Antlered	Antlered	Antlered	
Heyburn COE	2	0	1	4	0	1	8
Heyburn WMA	12	7	11	13	9	3	55
Hickory Creek WMA	8	8	8	17	0	6	47
Honobia WMA	9	12	38	39	15	27	140
Hugo Lake COE	18	10	15	9	2	4	58
Hugo WMA	32	40	34	38	17	32	193
Hulah WMA	36	23	50	94	34	16	253
James Collins WMA	53	55	9	18	0	0	135
John Dahl WMA (Osage)	0	2	8	8	0	1	19
Kaw Lake COE	17	21	18	12	14	5	87
Kaw WMA	48	66	119	66	55	27	381
Keystone COE	12	9	12	5	2	0	40
Keystone WMA	55	32	104	45	19	23	278
Lake Thunderbird State Park	35	34	0	1	0	0	70
Lexington WMA	22	17	38	9	14	27	127
Little River NWR	15	4	12	16	1	1	49
Love Valley WMA	3	6	39	33	7	5	93
Lower Illinois River WMA	0	2	3	2	0	0	7
Major County WMA	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
McAlester Army Ammunition Plant	84	99	12	0	0	0	195
McClellan-Kerr WMA	29	17	32	17	11	12	118
McCurtain County WA	3	2	14	12	3	11	45
McGee Creek WMA	16	16	2	1	0	5	40
Mountain Park WMA	2	4	1	0	7	2	16
Nanhi Waiya PFA	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Neosho WMA	12	14	2	0	0	1	29
Okmulgee WMA (GMA Portion)	4	3	7	8	0	1	23
Okmulgee WMA (PHA Portion)	3	2	2	3	5	7	22
Oologah Lake COE	16	18	35	24	6	6	105
Oologah WMA	46	35	81	72	34	18	286
Optima National Wildlife Refuge	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
Optima WMA	0	0	0	4	0	0	4
Osage WMA (Rock Creek)	11	5	3	11	5	0	35
Osage WMA (Western Wall)	11	14	0	1	2	0	28
Ouachita WMA (Cucumber Creek)	1	0	3	3	1	1	9
Ouachita WMA (McCurtain Unit)	14	13	26	29	15	18	115
Ouachita WMA (Le Flore)	13	7	34	32	21	29	136
Ozark Plateau NWR	3	1	0	0	0	0	4
Ozark Plateau WMA	0	1	5	2	0	0	8
Packsaddle WMA	2	1	3	42	10	2	60
Pine Creek COE	8	3	3	1	3	2	20
Pine Creek WMA	7	3	13	18	7	8	56
Pontotoc Ridge Preserve	0	0	12	0	0	0	12
Pushmataha WMA	21	37	11	11	7	6	93
Red Slough WMA	25	26	0	0	0	1	52
Rita Blanca WMA	0	1	0	1	1	1	4
Robbers Cave WMA	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge	2	2	34	17	4	0	59
Salt Plains NWR Wilderness Area	1	1	18	7	1	0	28
San Bois WMA	2	3	1	2	1	2	11
Sandhills WMA	2	6	0	0	0	0	8
Sandy Sanders WMA	1	12	3	1	7	5	29
Schooler PFA	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Sequoyah NWR	8	5	0	1	21	3	38
Sequoyah NWR (Refuge Island)	3	0	0	0	1	1	5
Sequoyah Resort Park	4	4	0	0	13	5	26
Skiatook COE	1	3	5	2	0	0	11
Skiatook WMA	4	4	21	29	5	6	69
Sparrow Hawk WMA	2	4	3	1	0	0	10
Spavinaw WMA (GMA Portion)	21	24	17	11	1	5	79
Spavinaw WMA (PHA Portion)	0	2	7	8	4	6	27
Stringtown WMA	2	2	0	2	0	1	7
Tenkiller COE	4	6	19	5	5	4	43
Tenkiller Big Cabin WMA	1	2	9	2	0	2	16
Texoma COE	38	41	23	29	3	8	142
Texoma COE (Burns Run)	13	2	9	3	0	0	27
Texoma COE (Lakeside)	6	8	5	1	0	0	20
Texoma/Washita Arm WMA	3	3	11	17	1	5	40
Three Rivers WMA	40	27	89	78	51	71	356
Tishomingo National Wildlife Refuge	2	1	27	15	0	0	45
Tishomingo WMA	3	7	6	9	1	2	28
USDA Grazinglands Research Lab	0	0	22	7	0	1	30
Vanderwork PFA	1	0	1	0	0	2	4
Verdigris River COE	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Washita County WMA	1	1	1	1	0	0	4
Washita NWR	0	0	16	1	0	0	17
Waurika Lake COE	10	12	0	0	1	0	23
Waurika WMA	45	43	1	1	6	7	103
Webbers Fall WMA	2	1	3	1	0	1	8
Wichita Mountains WR	2	3	1	1	0	0	7
Wister WMA	25	16	40	31	23	25	160
Wister WRP	1	0	0	0	1	1	3
Yourman WMA	4	1	3	3	1	4	16
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1,688</b>	<b>1,548</b>	<b>1,641</b>	<b>1,664</b>	<b>859</b>	<b>802</b>	<b>8,202</b>



Table 3: Mule Deer Harvest by County, Sex, and Method

County	Archery		Gun		Muzzleloader		Total
	Antlerless	Antlered	Antlerless	Antlered	Antlerless	Antlered	
Beaver	3	5	0	56	0	20	84
Cimarron	0	10	0	58	0	6	74
Ellis	1	2	0	7	1	6	17
Grant	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Greer	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Harper	0	3	0	9	0	2	14
Jackson	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Roger Mills	0	1	0	9	0	1	11
Texas	1	0	0	33	0	3	37
Woodward	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
Grand Total	6	22	0	174	2	38	242

## DEER ARCHERY SEASON

Archery hunters continue to find success in the field, with total reported harvest reaching 34,181 deer. While not a record-setting year like we've seen the past four years in a row, bow-hunters continue to pull their weight when it comes to antlerless deer, which made up 46% of the total archery harvest.

Figure 4: Archery Hunters and Harvest 2004-Current

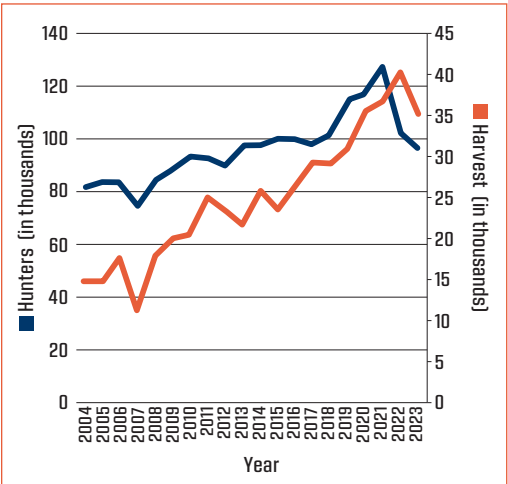
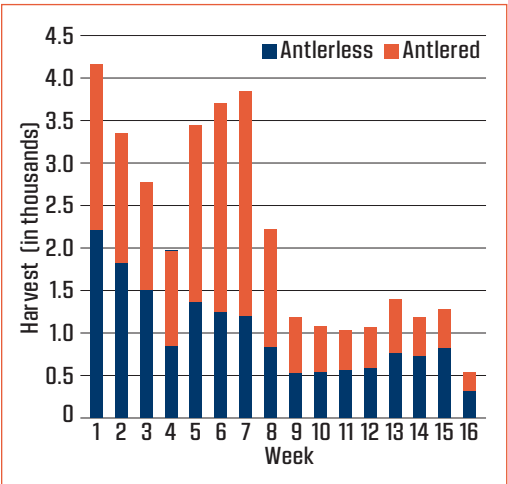


Figure 5: 2023-24 Archery Harvest by Week



The annual Game Harvest Survey (GHS), a scientific survey conducted by ODWC, has been tracking hunter participation metrics for decades. The GHS estimated that 95,384 hunters were afield at some point during the season with archery tackle in hand. This is lower than in years past, which included the tribal license compact that is no longer in effect. This will be the case with each methods hunter estimate numbers.

Archery season length remained unchanged, running uninterrupted from Oct. 1, 2023, to Jan. 15, 2024. The bag limit included a total of six deer, with no more than two of those being antlered. **Figure 4** shows harvest and hunter trends over the years, while **Figure 5** represents archery harvest by week.



## DEER MUZZLELOADER SEASON

Oklahoma's nine-day muzzleloader season ran from Oct. 28 to Nov. 5 for the 2023-24 season. Bag limits remained unchanged, with hunters allowed four deer, only one of which could be antlered. Additional antlerless harvest has been encouraged through liberal antlerless bag limits in various antlerless zones, which are mapped out in **Figure 11**.

The GHS showed a large increase in both participation (62,899 hunters ) and harvest (15,898 ) compared to the previous year. **Figure 6** shows muzzleloader season harvest by day. **Figure 7** dives into harvest trends since 2004.

Figure 6: 2023 Muzzleloader Season Harvest by Day

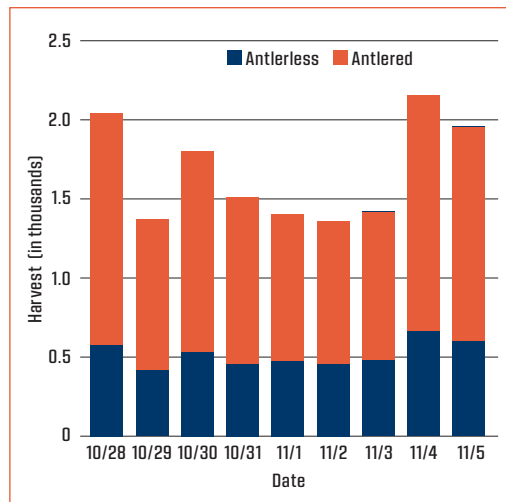
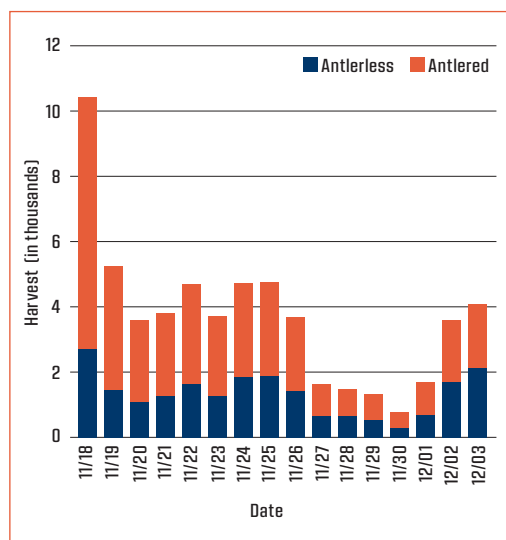


Figure 8: 2023 Gun Season Harvest by Day



## DEER GUN SEASON

A staple tradition in Oklahoma comes during the 16-day deer gun season, which ran from Nov. 18 through Dec. 3. Bag limits remained unchanged from years prior, with hunters allowed four deer with no more than one being antlered. Hunters bagged 74,137 deer in those 16 days, 36% of which were antlerless deer. Youth deer gun season accounted for an additional 3,490 deer, and holiday antlerless deer gun season added 9,305.

**Figure 8** and **Figure 9** break down gun harvest both by days of the season and trends over the years. **Figure 10** shows holiday antlerless season harvest since 2015.

Figure 7: Muzzleloader Hunters and Harvest 2004-Current

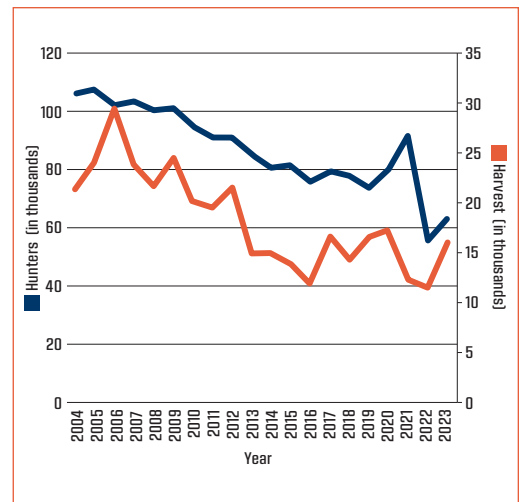
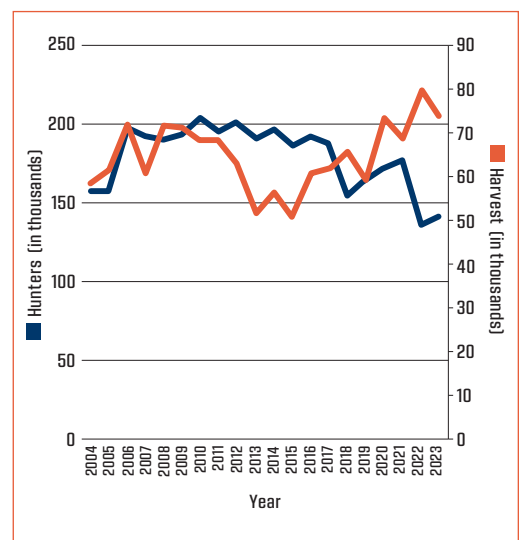


Figure 9: Gun Hunters and Harvest 2004-Current





## DEER AGE STRUCTURE

The ODWC works with multiple sources to obtain age data from our annual deer harvest. The data come from ODWC's Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP) cooperators, local meat processors, taxidermists, ODWC controlled hunts, and ODWC's online *Age My Deer* program. The age data provide biologists with necessary information about the age structure and overall health of Oklahoma's deer herds. **Figure 12** and **Figure 13** represent age at harvest for antlered and antlerless deer.



Figure 10: Holiday Antlerless Deer Gun Season 2015-Current

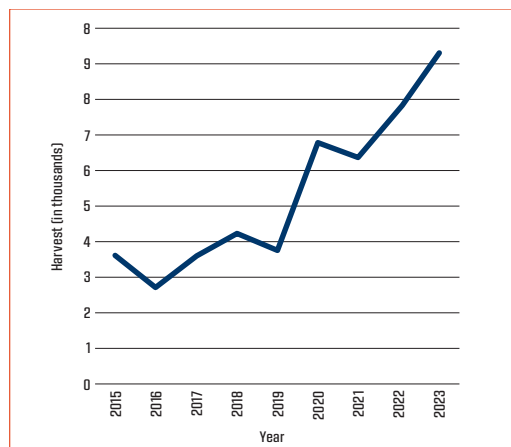


Figure 11: Deer Antlerless Zones

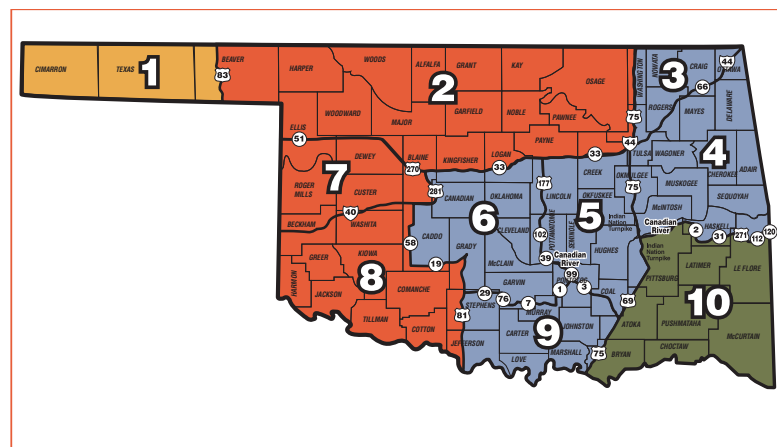


Figure 12: Doe Age at Harvest 2023-24

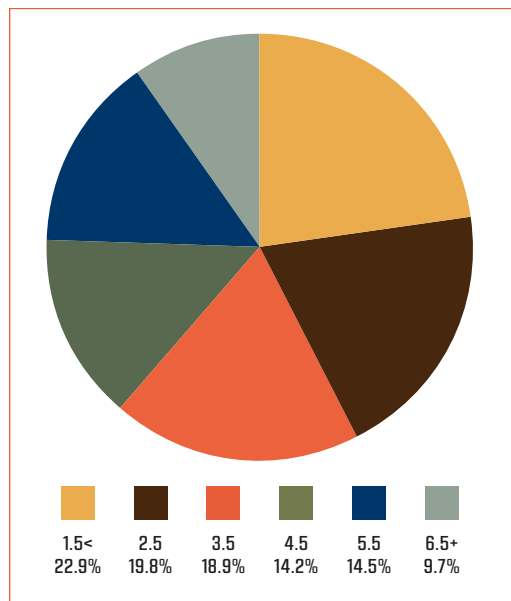
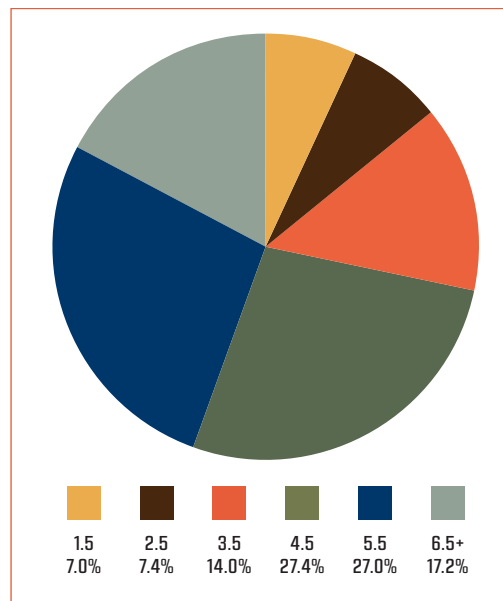


Figure 13: Buck Age at Harvest 2023-24





## ELK SEASON

Oklahoma's elk herds continue to enlarge and expand. While the most dense populations are still in relatively small pockets, elk continue to be taken in areas where large herds aren't typically located. Hunting is allowed on private land with written landowner permission during statewide elk seasons, along with drawn hunts via ODWC's controlled hunts program.

At the end of the season, 627 elk had been harvested across the state. A large majority of those came from the Special Southwest Zone of Kiowa, Comanche, and Caddo counties.

A breakdown of harvest by county, sex, and method is found in **Table 4**.

**Table 4: Elk Harvest by County, Sex, and Method**

County	Archery		Gun		Muzzleloader		Total
	Cow	Bull	Cow	Bull	Cow	Bull	
Adair	0	0	1	0	0	1	2
Beckham	1	1	9	0	0	0	11
Caddo	0	3	15	5	0	0	23
Carter	1	3	0	0	0	0	4
Cherokee	1	0	5	2	1	0	9
Cimarron	4	4	15	6	1	4	34
Coal	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Comanche	38	8	314	81	3	0	444
Custer	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Dewey	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Garvin	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Grady	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Greer	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
Harper	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Hughes	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Kay	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Kingfisher	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Kiowa	3	1	49	23	0	0	76
McCurtain	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Muskogee	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Texas	1	3	0	1	1	1	7
Grand Total	54	24	417	119	7	6	627





PRONGHORN SEASON

Yet another benefit of Oklahoma’s vast diversity in habitat is an opportunity to hunt North America’s fastest land animal: the pronghorn.

Oklahoma lies on the easternmost fringe of suitable habitat for these unique animals. With such a small and fragile population,

hunting is limited to over-the-counter archery permits, controlled hunt drawings, and land-owner-drawn permits.

Total harvest for the 2023 season was 87. **Table 5** provides a breakdown of harvest by county, method, and sex.

Table 5: Pronghorn Harvest by County, Method, and Sex

County	Archery		Gun		Total
	Female	Male	Female	Male	
Cimarron	1	12	30	23	66
Texas	1	3	6	11	21
Grand Total	2	15	36	34	87



U.S. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

## CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE UPDATE

The big game seasons of 2023-24 were the first that hunters had been afield since discovery of chronic wasting disease (CWD) in Oklahoma's native, wild herds. The always-fatal disease affecting cervids was discovered first in Texas County and shortly after in Woodward County.

Those who hunted in the far northwest portions of the state had some additional rules placed on the movement of carcasses after harvest to ensure no unnatural movement of highly infectious material was being done.

Hunters in those areas also had the opportunity to have their harvested deer tested for CWD by using one of five voluntary dropoff freezers within Selective Surveillance Areas (SSAs). Multiple hunters chose to have their deer tested, and all test results showed that CWD was not detected.

Rules and regulations pertaining to carcass movement will remain in place for the coming 2024-25 season, with testing dropoff sites being available for those who wish to have their harvested wild deer tested.

## CONCLUSIONS

Sometimes when writing the Big Game Report each year, I feel like a broken record. Times are good. Oklahoma deer hunters continue to put into action the mind-set of being deer managers. This can be seen in efforts to continue adequate antlerless harvest.

The 2023-24 season marks the fourth year in a row of meeting the antlerless harvest goal, that being 40% to 45% of total harvest. That level of antlerless deer harvest leads to healthier populations and all the good things that come with that.

Deer age at harvest continues to increase from seasons past. Hunters are truly adopting the "Hunters in the Know, Let Young Bucks Grow" motto. It's become a regular occurrence to see Oklahoma bucks gracing the cover of magazines such as North American Whitetail.

Considering that in the not-too-distant past, it was the talk of deer camp just to see a deer track, let alone a real live deer. Conditions now are better than ever. These are the glory days

of Oklahoma deer hunting, and it's all been accomplished via education instead of regulation.

There will continue to be challenges in the big game world. Urban expansion, disease, overpopulation, and a shrinking hunting community all will play roles in the future. If the past has taught me anything, it is that Oklahoma hunters will rise to the occasion and "grab the buck by the horns," so to speak. I wish you the best of luck in your 2024-25 outdoor adventures. Take someone new. Pass the torch. And remember that every time you pull that trigger or release that arrow, you are making a management decision in the area where you hunt.

Good hunting. 🏹



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS CCO



# BEAR HUNTERS TAKE STATE-RECORD 86 DURING 2023

By Matt Hensley  
Senior Wildlife Biologist

Black bear hunters had a record-setting season in 2023, taking 86 bears, which was 26 more than the year before and the highest recorded since Oklahoma's first bear hunting season in 2009.

Archery hunters took 82 black bears, while muzzleloader hunters bagged four bears this past year. Oklahoma's black bear hunting zone includes all or portions of 12 counties in south-eastern Oklahoma.

Oklahoma's previous record harvest for black bears was in 2018, when 85 bears were taken.

The 2023 season was the second time that

Choctaw Nation authorities handled bear check-in for tribal members only. They checked 10 (all archery) of the 86 bears har-

vested. The average

age of the bears harvested in 2023 was 4 years. Hunters who took a black bear in Oklahoma last year hailed from eight states: Arkansas, Texas, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Louisiana, Wyoming, and Oklahoma. This fact supports the assertion that Oklahoma is a true hunting destination for a variety of species.

Hunters should expect this fall's bear seasons to be similar to last year's, based on weather conditions so far this year.

However, hunters who hunt over bait may find it more challenging to compete with the mast crop of white oak acorns during the upcoming season. In 2023 the white oaks in some of the core harvest areas did not produce as well as they usually do. Consequently, many bears continued to visit hunter bait sites more frequently, allowing for more harvest opportunities.

Hensley offers these tips for increasing your chances of taking a black bear:

- Locate an area with fresh bear sign and stay there; you might have to sit all day or hunt multiple days.

- Start hunting as early in the season as possible.
- Stay weather-aware. Cold and wet conditions make bears less active.
- If the weather is hot, consider hunting near a water source.
- Bears will return to whatever food source is helping them gain the most weight. Acorns, especially from white oaks, are preferred by bears in non-bait areas.
- Start scouting for hunting spots in September.

## 2023 Oklahoma Bear Harvest

County	Archery		Muzzleloader		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Le Flore	23	29	1	0	53
Latimer	3	3	1	0	7
Pushmataha	8	4	2	0	14
McCurtain	6	4	0	0	10
Pittsburg	2	0	0	0	2
Grand Total	42	40	4	0	86

All hunters wanting to pursue a black bear must buy either an archery or muzzleloader bear license before the opening dates of each season. Archery bear season dates are defined in statute, running from Oct. 1 until the third Sunday in October. In 2024, archery bear season will close Oct. 20. Archery bear season has no harvest quota.

Muzzleloader bear season will be Oct. 26-Nov. 3, but the season will close as soon as a quota of 20 bears has been reached. Before they hunt, muzzleloader hunters must call for the latest bear quota information at 888-901-3256.

For details on black bear hunting, consult the Oklahoma Fishing and Hunting Regulations online, in the Go Outdoors Oklahoma mobile app for Apple and Android, or in the printed version free at license dealers statewide. 🛡️



NIGEL/FICKR CC-BY2

# THE CASE OF THE VANISHING RACK

BY KYLE WRIGHT

**"Dude, your  
deer head  
disappeared!"**



The author holds proof of his rattlesnake encounter.

PROVIDED

An early afternoon run-in with a rattlesnake made the hunt interesting.

Shooting my best black-powder buck to date an hour later made it memorable. But it's the story of the deer's mount that made my 2023 season truly unforgettable.

As soon as he saw pictures of my black-powder buck that I'd posted online, my nephew, Nolan, who lives and breathes deer hunting, called with his congratulations.

At some point in our conversation, Nolan asked what I was going to do with my buck's rack. I told him I didn't have the money to spend on a shoulder mount, and I intended to find someone to boil the skull to create a European mount. He asked if he and his girlfriend could have a chance at doing it. Because nothing says romance like scraping gray matter out of a brain cavity, right?

I left the buck's head with him when we visited my brother's house for Thanksgiving, and I got a text from Nolan two weeks later that read, "Hey, I'll give you that head back at Christmas. Should have it done this weekend."

But Christmas came and went without mention of the mount. Before I knew it, we had rung in the New Year, and I still hadn't heard anything from Nolan. I kept telling myself that I needed to call and ask for an update, but then I'd get busy and forget. So, when my brother called in the middle of January sounding as if someone had died, my skull mount wasn't even on my radar.

But then out of his mouth came the words, "Dude, your deer head disappeared."

Apparently, Nolan had left the head in a five-gallon bucket in the driveway of my brother's place and walked into the house to grab something. When he came back out, the bucket was empty, and the head was gone.

I thought perhaps a dog had probably carried it off. When I suggested as much to my brother, he said that dog would have to have been a big one. I'm sure he was trying to make me feel better, but it didn't work.

Nolan called that night and apologized profusely. He'd had a banner year in the deer woods, killing a great buck with his muzzleloader and then an even better one with his bow. And he offered me my choice of their shoulder mounts as repayment for losing my deer head.



I declined, of course, and tried to laugh it off. Actually, I had accepted the loss easier than I had expected to, but there's no denying that it still stung. I don't kill just a whole lot of nice deer, and I treasure those that I do. But I had made up my mind to be content with the pictures and the memories I did have. Easier said than done. Time heals all wounds, though, and when my nephew called two months later sounding like he'd just won the lottery, my skull mount wasn't even on my radar.

He blurted out that my deer head had been located, but I had to slow him down to get the story.

Turns out, a neighbor had found the buck's head on his property and when he picked it up, he noticed it had a zip tie around its main beam. There had been a carcass tag attached with my personal information on it, and that would have made returning it to me a much easier task. But the tag had been lost in the shuffle.

So the neighbor called Michael Zimmerman, an ODWC game warden based in Grady County, and asked what he should do. Fortunately for me, Zimmerman remembered a Facebook post he'd seen wherein my nephew had poured out his heart pleading for the safe return of my missing deer rack.

After comparing pictures and questioning Nolan about the rack, Zimmerman had the confirmation he needed to put my nephew in touch with the neighbor who had found my deer head.

As soon as Nolan finished telling me the story, I hung up and dialed Zimmerman myself. He was as shocked as I was that my deer head had been found, and he sounded genuinely happy to hear that it would be returned to its rightful owner. In his line of work, I doubt many stories like mine have happy endings.

But my story's ending was a happy one. Losing and then finding that deer head allowed me to celebrate the buck a second time, and I made as many phone calls to share the news that my deer head had been found as I had the day I shot the buck.

There was, however, a small problem. I had been telling everyone I knew that the deer I'd lost had most certainly been a record-book buck, and that it might have even challenged the state's top spot. But since the buck had now been found, I didn't know how I was going to explain myself! 🍷

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** The son of a retired fisheries biologist, Kyle Wright was raised in Holdenville, where he spent his springs and summers baiting hooks and falls and winters waiting on whitetails. Now, he's an avid hunter and lazy fisherman, and writing about his hunts allows him to relive his times in the field.



***I had made up my mind to be content with the pictures and the memories I did have.***



Game Warden Michael Zimmerman





# YOUTHS AND DEER CAMPS CONTINUE TO THRIVE



*This year, the kids took off on their own for solo hunting.*

**STORY AND PHOTOS BY REED BOETTCHER  
GREAT PLAINS LIVING MAGAZINE**

There's a saying I've referenced many times in my outdoor articles. The saying goes, "Teach your kids to hunt, and you won't have to hunt your kids."





*Good times around the campfire at deer camp.*

**A**s I reflect on this past season's deer camp, the understanding of this saying becomes even clearer to me. This wasn't the first year that the kids hunted alone, but it was the first year I felt like I was hunting with fellow adult hunters. And even though my girls — as well as my nieces and nephews — aren't adults, I'm confident in their abilities to hunt like one. My brother and I have always taken our kids along on hunts and camps.

Now, the efforts and teachings we've given to our kids over the years have paid off. This year when we split up in the field, I didn't worry while the kids independently hunted on their own time. The progression of setting them up at a spot and checking in on them to letting

them decide when and where they go hunt has brought their hunting life cycle full circle. As my children are nearing the end of their teenage years, it makes me feel old.

My kids started coming to deer camp as babies.

Deer camp is a perfect getaway from everyday life, and it always provides opportunities for life lessons.



*Time for some shut-eye at deer camp, even as anticipation builds for the morning hunts.*





Deer camp brings friends together every autumn.

Hunting teaches many things, but if nothing else it teaches respect: respect for life and for your surroundings. My brother and I set up a deer camp every year near Ardmore, and it's inspiring to have more kids in camp than adults. Our little camp by the creek is almost like hallowed ground.

It's where campfire stories of the past blend with the rustling leaves of the present. And it's all brought to life with the energy of our young hunters. Kids not only bring a level of energy to camp, but their role of passing on hunting values cannot be overstated.

At camp this past year, two kids harvested their first buck, and I can only hope that the excitement of their harvest will burn long and bright enough to inspire them to share our hunting culture with their peers.

Our deer camp is more about traditions and time spent together rather than the killing of a trophy animal. It's not typical to find kids running around deer camps. At ours though, it's how we connect generations. For the older



The youngest ones wait with others at camp while the hunters are in the woods.



kids in our camp, they have already begun preserving this hunting heritage, which is a way of life shaped by respect, patience and a deep connection to nature.

In a world that races toward instant gratification, I see youth hunters as stewards of a legacy that predates smart phones and social media sites. Hopefully the crisp autumn air and the echoes of laughter and shared wisdom remain etched in their hearts. Because not only do these kids have to navigate the woods, but the ever-changing views on hunting ethics as well.

Our camp is like a classroom where respect for wildlife, land and fellow hunters is taught. Our kids must carry this ethos forward, for in doing so, they contribute to the preservation of this sport. As they hone their hunting skills, they are also growing in responsibility as both hunters and humans.

Our deer camps are a shared experience of backgrounds, a place where friendships are strengthened over shared passions for the great outdoors. As the future torchbearers, youth

hunters have the power to create lasting bonds that extend beyond the confines of the hunting season. By nurturing a community rooted in mutual respect and the love for the outdoors, they ensure that the camaraderie of deer camp remains an enduring force, weaving a tight-knit fabric that withstands the tests of time.

The importance of youth deer hunters safeguarding and fostering the traditions and values of deer hunting at deer camp is paramount. It is not merely about carrying on a legacy, but about shaping a future where the science of the hunt goes beyond the pull of the trigger. As the sun rises on each new season, may the woods echo with the laughter and tales of a generations that honor the past, cherish the present, and will pave the way for a future where the spirit of deer camp lives on in all its timeless glory. ♡

*This article originally appeared in the Winter 2024 edition of Great Plains Living magazine produced by Great Plains Kubota was reprinted with permission. For more, go to [greatplainskubota.com/magazine](http://greatplainskubota.com/magazine).*

**AT CAMP THIS PAST YEAR, TWO KIDS HARVESTED THEIR FIRST BUCK, AND I CAN ONLY HOPE THAT THE EXCITEMENT OF THEIR HARVEST WILL BURN LONG AND BRIGHT ENOUGH TO INSPIRE THEM TO SHARE OUR HUNTING CULTURE WITH THEIR PEERS.**



Another young hunter downs a buck for the first time.



Getting that first buck is a priceless memory made at deer camp.



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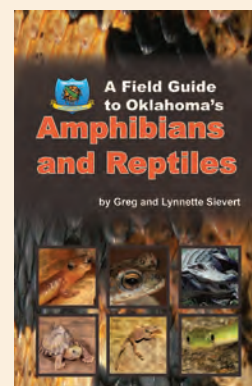
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# COACHWHIP

BY KAYLEEN SUGIANTO, OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY STUDENT

The coachwhip, one of the fastest snakes in Oklahoma, has a long, thin tail that bears a resemblance to a braided rope. Two subspecies occur in Oklahoma: the eastern coachwhip and western coachwhip, each with respects to their names occurring found east or west of Interstate 35 and having variable coloration across the state.

*The coachwhip is a shy species that will most likely retreat into rodent burrows, shrubs or under rocks if frightened. When cornered, it may produce a sound similar to a rattlesnake's warning by shaking its tail in vegetation.*

The smooth scales of eastern coachwhips are dark, almost black on the back closest to the head that fades into a tan to reddish-brown near the end of the tail. Narrow crossbands are noticeable on the

neck when coloration on the back is pale tan. Western coachwhips have a fairly uniform color of light tan, light brown and pink across the entire length of their body. The reptile has a beige colored belly with a double row of dark spots running along it and either has long crossbands along the side or short crossbands on the front half of their body. While there are little to no distinguishable characteristics between males and females, juvenile coachwhips have a speckled pattern on their back with narrow or wide crossbands on their neck.

One of the largest snakes in North America, adult coachwhips vary in size from 36-82 inches and weigh about a pound at 6 feet in length. Coachwhips hunt by using their well-developed sight to pursue prey with their head hovering above the ground in

search of movement. Their main diets consist of small rodents, insects, bird eggs, lizards, and other snakes. It is known to be active during the daytime on hot, summer days while most snakes are nocturnal. When the weather cools, the coachwhips take to burrows or under any good hiding spots such as under wooden boards.

This species is found across the southern half of the United States and within the entirety of Oklahoma. Coachwhip populations extend westward from North Carolina to eastern Colorado, northward through southwestern Utah, and southwestward through central and southern New Mexico. Their ideal habitat tends to vary, but coachwhips seem to prefer dry and warm areas. Coachwhips may be found in grassland prairies, rocky hillsides, woodlands, and in sandy terrain.

After emerging in the spring, coachwhips find mates, and females lay a clutch of 4-16 eggs in the early summer months. She leaves the eggs hidden in spots such as beneath logs or loose soil for about one to three months. The young snakes are about 12-16 inches long after breaking out of their leathery eggshells and, if they survive to maturity, may have a full lifespan of 15 years or more.

The coachwhip is a shy species that will most likely retreat into rodent burrows, shrubs or under rocks if frightened. When cornered, it may produce a sound similar to a rattlesnake's warning by shaking its tail in vegetation. This is similar to the rattling of a rattlesnake's warning when cornered. Though nonvenomous, the coachwhip will strike quickly at what it believes to be a threat if greatly pressured. 🐍









NEIL TURNER/COURTESY

During the past few years, Alex Turner has experienced fishing in Oklahoma as no other has before. The Edmond boy and his dad reached the pinnacle of their angling endeavor in August. Read about the incredible journey inside this issue of Outdoor Oklahoma.

# Outdoor Oklahoma

