

Shot placement plays important role in hunts

By JOHN JOHNSTON
Special Correspondent

Each hunting season, deer are shot and never found. In large part, this is due to poor shot placement, an inability of the hunter to put that shot exactly where he wants and/or using the wrong bullet.

Often hunters blame the problem on the caliber of their rifle and then go out and buy one of the super-fast Magnum rifles. In reality, most deer are not lost due to the rifle caliber.

Texas deer can be taken efficiently with a well-placed .22 center-fire cartridge. I have taken deer with everything from a .204 (not recommended) to a .45-70 to a .300 H&H Magnum.

Looking back at almost 50 years of hunting, I guess I have taken more deer with a .223 and .22-250 than with any other calibers. A lot of you probably are saying these calibers are just not enough for deer.

The advantages to the fast .22 caliber rounds are they have very little recoil and are so accurate. There is a caveat here I must mention: I use a bullet designed for deer, not varmints, and I wait for the right shot, usually in the lungs or heart. Normally this shot will not drop the deer in its tracks, but it should go down within 75 yards, with very little meat loss.

A few deer-hunting situations require a Magnum round. Most Mag-

nums are needed only for longer shots, where retained muzzle velocity is needed for taking large whitetails and other big game. The problem with Magnums is they have a tendency to kick like a mule, thus causing shooters to flinch. Flinching causes poor accuracy, which means poor shot placement.

The average hunter does not practice at any distance longer than 200 yards. Accurate long-distance shooting is an art form that needs to be practiced and studied before it is attempted because it can lead to wounded animals.

For me, the hunting situation and the rifle caliber dictate where I am go-

ing to place my shot. If I am hunting a large field, a lung shot is fine. But if the area is thickly wooded where tracking would be difficult, I will take the shoulder shot. If I am using a small-caliber round, I shoot the lungs broadside. Or if the deer is quartering away, I'll place the shot in the

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Study the illustrations in this story -- left, skeletal system and, right, organs. While in the field watching deer, try to visualize where the spine, lungs and heart are located.

GRAPHICS: TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE

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