

MARYLAND CROSSBOW FACTS *by Allan Ellis*

Current Deer Bow Season: September 15 through January 31 statewide including Deer Firearms and Deer Muzzleloader Seasons.

- Bowhunters hunting during the Deer Firearms Seasons or Deer Muzzleloader Seasons are required to wear fluorescent orange.
- Deer Harvested With a Bow During Muzzleloader or Firearms Season:

Deer harvested with a bow during the antlerless-only second split of the early muzzleloader season in Region B must count towards the bow bag limit. Deer harvested with a bow during the first-split either-sex early muzzleloader or late muzzleloader season must count towards the muzzleloader season bag limit. Hunters must have a Muzzleloader Stamp to hunt deer with a bow during the first-split either-sex early muzzleloader or late muzzleloader season. Deer harvested with a bow during the 2-week firearms or 2-day late firearms season must count towards the firearms bag limit.

Current Crossbow Season: October 1-15 and January 15-30;

- September 15-January 30 in the Suburban Deer Archery Zone - Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Howard, Montgomery and Prince Georges Counties.
- Any hunter who is 65 years of age or older or possesses any Maryland senior hunting license can hunt deer statewide with a crossbow in all Maryland deer hunting seasons. Hunters with physical disabilities that prevent them from using a traditional bow may apply for a special crossbow permit to hunt deer during the bow season.

- ✓ **QUICK FACTS:** In the 2009-2010 Maryland hunting season, there were 51,343 resident and 7,529 non-resident bowhunting stamps issued. Roughly 12 per cent (12,959), of all 110,428 license buyers indicated at the time of license purchase that they would be using a crossbow. Only 3,200 individual hunters reported harvesting deer with a crossbow.

THE DEBATE - Crossbows vs. Vertical Bows

There is no question that the modern crossbow is a lethal device capable of harvesting whitetail deer and similar game animals in a safe, humane way. Although the stored-kinetic-energy 'bow' portion is mounted on a stock and fired from the shoulder, a crossbow's performance is more consistent with the attributes of a modern compound bow than with any firearm. The range at which they are effective and the kinetic energy they produce is similar to that of a vertical bow. Both devices require that an arrow (or 'bolt' in the case of the crossbow) fitted with a sharp broadhead be used. Arrows fired from both modern compound bows and crossbows begin to dramatically lose kinetic energy and effectiveness after about 30-yards.

- One difference between crossbows and compound bows is that the arrow/bolt is locked in place when the crossbow is cocked and does not require the bowhunter to draw the arrow into the shooting position when game is in range; he simply disengages the safety and pulls the trigger.
- Another difference is that because the cocked 'bow' portion of the crossbow is mounted on a stock, similar to that of a firearm, the crossbow can accommodate a telescopic sight to enable the bowhunter to acquire his target more easily.

Sadly, the points of contention between 'vertical' bowhunters and crossbow hunters are mostly found in the two differences stated. The vertical bowhunters who disdain the use of

crossbows find it somehow 'unfair' that because, in their opinion, there is less chance of movement on behalf of the crossbow hunter when game is in range that the 'fair chase' element of the hunt is somehow diminished. Their contention is that vertical bowhunters must draw the compound bow when the game is in range, perhaps allowing their quarry to spot the movement.

Another argument used by detractors against crossbows is that crossbows are 'easy' to become proficient with because of their construction; therefore, crossbow users are 'lazy' and not dedicated to the long hours of practice require by vertical bow users.

Crossbow enthusiasts disagree with these two points. On point one; crossbow hunters must be as competent as their vertical counterparts with the mechanics of the crossbow. Crossbows are heavier than compound bows, require more movement to cock and load and cannot be quickly re-armed with an arrow. When fired, they are noisy and can alarm game. Their horizontal profile is contrary to the more vertical composition of the wooded landscape and could signal the presence of a predator or something 'out of place' in the view of a whitetail deer. As much body movement to get into position is required by crossbow hunters and in the confines of an elevated treestand, the crossbow is more cumbersome to handle. In fact, the elevated position that most bowhunters assume, either vertical bow or crossbow users, negates the argument that the movement required by vertical bowhunters may be spotted by their target and causes it to run away.

As far as being 'lazy' is concerned, the point is conceded that the crossbow is easier to master with sufficient practice. However, the crossbow hunter must be equally as proficient in scouting, reading game trails and sign and selecting stand sites as the vertical bowhunter. The arrow/bolt must still be placed in the deer's vitals at close range to assure a quick, humane kill and the shot must be followed up to find the downed animal. Being an adept woodsman and an ethical hunter is mandated whether a bowhunter uses a crossbow or a vertical bow.

- Up close and personal deer hunting is a challenge no matter what tool is used to harvest the game. Whether the missile is launched from a crossbow or a vertical bow, there is no difference in the preparation, the challenge of the pursuit or the heart-pounding excitement of the hunting experience.
- ✓ **QUICK FACTS:** There were 21,760 whitetail deer and 428 sika deer harvested by vertical bowhunters in Maryland in the 2009-2010 hunting season. Crossbow hunters reported taking 5,056 whitetails and 129 sika deer. These numbers do not reflect the bowhunting harvest during the firearms or muzzleloader season.