



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DOMINIC AIELLO

Blacktail deer are difficult to hunt in Oregon, but they can be had.

Up your chances of snagging a quite elusive blacktail deer

DOMINIC AIELLO
STATESMAN JOURNAL

Arguably one of the most difficult deer to hunt in North America, blacktail deer are reclusive and often nocturnal during the hunting season. With the average success rate of Western Oregon rifle deer hunts hovering around 20 percent and the season less than a month away, here are a few tips to help you make the most of your time afield this fall.

Pre-season scouting

No matter how you intend to hunt, pre-season scouting is the best way to increase your odds of success.

If you don't know where the deer are, then you're automatically giving the advantage to an already difficult prey. Scouting gives you the basic information of where to and where not to go and is worth spending time on during the limited season.

Try to scout the area you intend to hunt at least two or three times during dawn or dusk to get an idea of the deer activity. You might be wondering about trail cameras. Without question, they are another effective method of scouting, but with such a short time before the season starts, it might be best to save that for next year.

Practice and confidence

Don't tell the story of the one that got away; tell a story over a venison dinner while gazing at the one on the wall! The story of the one that got away happens to us all at some point — we all eventually miss. However, you can minimize the chance.

Whether you're hunting with a bow, muzzleloader, shotgun or rifle, you need to make sure you've practiced and feel confident with your weapon or you could fail to capitalize on your opportunity.

Dress appropriately

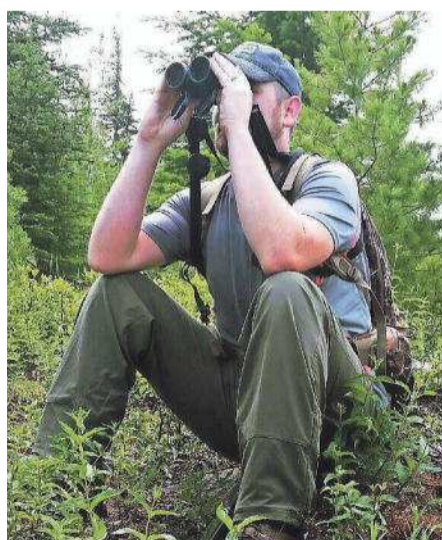
There's not much worse than spending time scouting and practicing with your weapon only to have to head back to camp early because you're cold or too wet.

Plan your clothing around the expected weather. If it's going to be freezing temperatures, know what you'll need to stay warm. If it's going to be pouring rain, know what gear will keep you dry, or at least still keep you warm and then dry quickly when you take it off.

Other important clothing factors to consider are fit, durability and quality — don't sacrifice these features for sav-



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ings.

Mental endurance

At some point, you'll likely second-guess yourself or want to give up; you'll get cold or wet and want to go home, but don't.

On Day 8 of the hunt when my wife

tagged her first blacktail buck, she asked, "How do you hike all the time, so slow and cautious, without seeing deer and not get frustrated?"

I responded with, "I just do. That doesn't mean I don't get frustrated at times, but you can't focus on it. You take a break — hydrate, have a snack, let it pass and get back after it."

Hunting strategies

When rifle hunting blacktails, there are two common methods: using your binoculars to search clear cuts for bedded or feeding deer and slowly hiking along animal trails in the timber.

While I use both methods, my preferred tactic is stalking game trails.

If you're going to glass clear cuts, be sure to invest in quality optics. Not only will you be able to spot more animals, but your eyes will thank you after a long day. Also, don't be in a hurry to move onto another area; look and look again. Missing a bedded deer can be easy.

When planning to stalk game trails, focus on the most comfortable footwear. I'm known for saying, "You can only go as far as your feet will take you." After hiking several miles, your feet are bound to get tired, but good boots will give you the comfort and support to keep going.

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Safety for hunters and hikers

Here are some tips from the **Lincoln County Sheriff's Office**:

Hunters

» Check weather reports before visiting the forest. Dress properly.

» Tell someone where you will be hunting and when you will return. Leave a written plan at home and in your vehicle.

» Be familiar with the area you want to hunt.

» Avoid wearing white or tan during hunting seasons. Wearing hunter orange, viewable from all directions is recommended. Research reveals that orange and reds appear as darker subdued colors to deer and elk.

» If accompanied by a dog, the dog should also wear hunter orange or a very visible color on a vest, leash, coat or bandana.

» Check hunting equipment before and after each outing and maintain it properly. Familiarize yourself with its operation before using it in the field.

» Carry a spare set of dry clothing. Use layering techniques to prevent moisture while retaining body warmth. Always bring rain gear.

» Carry a first aid kit and know how to use its contents.

» Clearly identify your target before shooting. Prevent unfortunate accidents or fatalities.

» Be alert when hunting near developed areas and trails. Other recreationists are in the forest as well.

Hikers

» Wear bright clothing. Make yourself more visible. Choose colors that stand out, like red, orange or green, and avoid white, blacks, browns, earth-toned greens and animal-colored clothing. Orange vests and hats are advisable.

» Don't forget to protect Fido. Get an orange vest for your dog if he/she accompanies you.

» Be courteous. Once a hunter is aware of your presence, don't make unnecessary noise to disturb wildlife. Avoid confrontations.

» Make yourself known. If you do hear shooting, raise your voice and let hunters know that you are in the vicinity.

» Know when hunting seasons are occurring. If you choose to hike during a hunting season, learn about where and when hunting is taking place.

» Know your own comfort level. If hunting makes you uneasy, choose a hiking location where hunting is not allowed, such as a national or state park.