

## What is Hunting Pressure?

In this article I want to give you some examples of what we consider hunting pressure. These are by no means the only things that may be considered hunting pressure. These are just the main things that we have run into throughout our years of hunting. I am covering things that we hunters may do and not pressure put on by other predators such as coyotes, bobcats, wolves, mountain lions etc. A pack of coyotes or wolves can certainly affect a deer population and maybe even influence them to relocate.

**Shoot at a Deer:** One of the more obvious things that most people consider pressure is shooting at a deer. An arrow that misses a deer may not send the deer running a great distance but a loud gunshot can certainly scare them off in high gear. I've seen a couple of deer freeze after they were shot at and missed but usually they run off without hesitation. This not only scares the deer that you were shooting at but also any other deer with them. I've seen a deer running so hard after they were shot at that I was wondering how many miles they were going to run. What happens to that deer next is totally dependent on that deer itself. I have seen deer leave and they were never to be seen again and then I've seen deer leave and return at a later time. (Maybe hours, days or weeks later) There's not a lot you can do with this scenario other than make sure you don't miss the deer that you are shooting at. But this still doesn't help if there are other deer with this deer. They will probably still run off scared.

**Human scent:** I will break this down into a few different scenarios.

I want to share a couple of stories that describe actual events that happened to me. My first experience happened many years ago. I had walked into my deer stand just before daylight. Four hours later I watched a Doe come across the trail that I had walked in on. I noticed her stop a few inches before the trail that I had walked and she obviously smelled that something wasn't right. (Like my scent on a leaf that I brushed up against) She immediately went on alert and slowly made a 180 degree turn to go back the same way that she had just come. She made no noise. I knew that deer could wind me from a distance but I had never thought about the scent trail that I was leaving when I walked to and from my stand. Now I could only wonder how many times a deer was crossing one of my trails and then turning back because they scented my trail. In this example I was able to see her pick up my scent but if she had been further away I would never have known that a deer had come across my trail. The next situation which also happened many years ago involved a Buck. Again I had walked to my stand before daylight. After being in the stand for over three hours I had a Buck coming right towards the tree I was sitting in. He was walking towards the trail that I had walked in on which was going to be 10 yards upwind from the tree I was in. He literally got a few inches from my trail with his head down and while working his nose he froze in place. The hair went up on his back and I could see the look of fear in his eyes. He knew that he was in trouble. This was a Buck that I wanted to shoot so I was able to get my gun up quickly and squeeze the trigger. I believe that again I must have brushed up against a leaf or a branch. Needless to say that after these two encounters I have made a conscious effort to minimize the scent that I am leaving on my trails into the woods. Even though I wear rubber boots, shower in non scent soap and wash my clothes in non scent soap I make a strong effort to clear my

trails so I will not brush up against any branches, leaves, weeds etc. A pair of pruning shears works fine when I clean out my deer stands prior to the season. This includes clearing the trail that I will be walking on so I don't brush up against anything. Unfortunately if you are walking for miles then this may not be possible or even necessary to do. As a result of these experiences I determined that just my walking through the woods can put pressure on the deer.

Since walking through the woods may in fact pressure the deer consider the following. We have 1100 acres that we hunt. Today we average one hunter per 200 acres. What if we were to have approximately one hunter per 50 acres? We would go from averaging 5 hunters in the woods to 22 hunters in the woods. There would be over four times the amount of pressure versus when we had 5 hunters. Unfortunately most hunt groups need to have a certain number of hunters in order to afford the lease or property payments. It may also be a family property where there are a certain number of family members that want to be able to hunt. If there are 200 acres and 10 family members then there isn't much you can do about it. It is what it is! You may create your own limits on how many hunters can be in the woods at one time so as to minimize the pressure but that is strictly your decision to make. In most cases the property and its deer are just going to have to accommodate all of the hunters. This may result in some deer moving off of the property and/or some deer going nocturnal. A deer that is totally nocturnal is impossible to shoot during legal hunting hours.

If you have not done so already please make sure you watch our video "The Buck we nicknamed Piebald". We actually got video of him for all five seasons of his life. The reason I mention Piebald is because I want to tell you what I did when he was 3 ½ and 4 ½ years old. We did not want to shoot Piebald at this point. I had spotted Piebald a couple of times when he was 3 ½ years old. Because of the sightings I was certain he was bedding in a 30 acre section that was part of an old clear cut. I had two tree stands in this area and I refused to hunt them for fear of scaring Piebald out of the area and onto the neighbor's property. I certainly can't prove that this made a difference in keeping Piebald on our property but just knowing that it might keep him on our property was good enough for me. I had no problem not hunting either of those stands for both seasons.

Anyone who has been hunting for any length of time has been winded by a deer. Even though I shower in non scent soap, wear rubber boots and wash my clothes in non scent soap if the wind swirls the right direction these deer can still smell something. This absolutely amazes me. I remember my nephew washing up like I described and he even used a cover up scent as well. I smirked when I heard a deer blowing at him during our afternoon hunt. I've come to the conclusion that we are practicing scent reduction and not scent elimination. There's nothing more frustrating than being winded by a deer. I have had a deer wind me and simply walk away without making any noise and I have had a deer wind me and start blowing at me relentlessly. I have had a couple of encounters where I had a Doe stand and blow at me for several minutes. In one particular situation I had 3 Does and 3 Fawns walking by me. The last Doe (which appeared to be the oldest Doe) was very uneasy and was working her nose real hard because she was definitely winding something. (Me of course) She finally caught enough of my scent that she blew and started running with the other deer joining her. In this particular case I never saw these deer again from this same stand.

**Pushing deer:** Whether you are doing a push hunt with several hunters or running dogs (**where legal**) deer definitely don't like this kind of pressure. How the deer react to this kind of pressure is totally dependent on the deer themselves. Some may return to the same area hours, days or weeks later and some may never return. I know some people that enjoy doing a push hunt with several hunters and they really aren't concerned about pushing the deer away. They are just hoping to force some deer movement so one of their shooters will have a shot at a deer. If the deer on their property are totally nocturnal then doing a push hunt may be the only way to get the deer to move. Of course one might ask if the deer have become nocturnal because of these push hunts or for some other reason.

Running dogs can also create pressure on the deer. I also know some guys that enjoy hunting with their dogs. They would much rather run their dogs than sit in a tree stand or slip hunt through the woods. (To each his own) As long as the dogs don't go running onto their neighbor's property then they should be able to hunt their own way. The problem is that the dogs don't know where the property line is so the hunters have the responsibility of preventing their dogs from leaving their own property.

**Illegal night hunting:** I wish this wasn't happening anywhere but unfortunately there are people (I refuse to call them hunters) that will go out at night with a spotlight and shoot deer illegally. The one time that deer feel safer is at night. Yes, there are other predators lurking at night but the deer are largely safe from the human hunter. If a deer gets shot at night the other deer around it will certainly be running for cover. If the shot misses then this deer will be running as well. I would think that this night hunting would be the ultimate pressure on the deer. If they can't feel safe at night then I'm sure they will be relocating to other areas where they can feel safer. My blood boils when I think about this situation and I assure you that if we catch someone night hunting on our property they will face the consequences.

In summary, we should all at least consider what kind and how much hunting pressure we are each putting on our own properties and deer populations. In discussions with other hunters I am surprised at how many of them don't even think about the pressure they are each putting on the deer on their property. In one case there were four guys hunting 100 acres and a couple of them liked slip hunting through the woods. They say they hunted hard but were lucky if they ever saw a deer. As a friend of mine told me a while back "It's good to hunt hard but better if you hunt smart". If you are able to set some guidelines for your hunters which may alleviate some of this pressure then maybe your deer sightings and harvests will improve. If your neighbors are putting an extensive amount of pressure on their property then maybe use this to your advantage and do your best to minimize the pressure on your property. As a result of doing this you just might influence some of these deer that they pushed to stay on your property instead. Many hunters are willing to follow guidelines if they feel that their hunting experience will improve in the future. So, if you haven't been thinking about the pressure you put on your own hunting property now is a good time to start!