



QUALITY DEER MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

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Kip's Korner The "Modern" Deer Hunter June 2007

Webster's dictionary defines modern as "characteristic of recent times." With respect to hunting, then what is a modern deer hunter? Is it a hunter who wears the most recent camouflage patterns? Is it a hunter who shoots the latest sporting arm or bow? Maybe, but modern hunters also have other attributes. They are more likely to wear scent-blocking clothing than hunters of one or two decades ago. Modern hunters also tend to have more gadgets and treestands than hunters of the past. Of all their characteristics however, the most important is that modern hunters are much more knowledgeable about deer biology and management than hunters at any point in our history. I'll acknowledge that some of our forefathers had exceptional hunting skills, but as a group, today's hunters are in the honor society with respect to deer knowledge.

Brian Murphy, QDMA's executive director was the first biologist I heard use the term. Brian described the modern deer hunter as a passionate, knowledgeable and engaged deer enthusiast who views his/her role as more than just a deer hunter, but rather an enlightened deer manager and a necessary contributor to the future of wildlife management and conservation. As a hunter for more than 30 years, a biologist for nearly 20 years, and executive director of North America's foremost whitetail educational organization Brian is well positioned to establish this definition. As a hunter and biologist for slightly fewer years than Brian, I agree with his assertion and add that this is good for wildlife populations and the future of hunting. Whether you're a QDM advocate or not, all hunters should rejoice in the fact that we're more knowledgeable in our deer hunting and managing endeavors. This fact is not surprising as public surveys indicate deer hunters have slightly higher average education and income levels than the general public. It is logical that this segment of our population is also more knowledgeable about their favorite pastime. This also shows the impression of "Bubba" and "slob" hunters that anti-hunters use to portray the average hunter is clearly not accurate.

Modern deer hunters attend deer seminars, habitat field days and workshops. They read books, magazines and journals for information on deer and habitat management. In the past, most hunting magazines offered mainly hunting stories. Today, you'd be hard pressed to find a hunting magazine that didn't offer at least one management article. In fact, the Quality Whitetails Journal is dedicated solely to educating hunters and managers on all aspects of deer management and habitat improvement. Modern hunters share information on-line in chat rooms and on internet forums, and likely the most significant difference from our predecessors is they are interested in more than just pulling the trigger or releasing an arrow. Modern hunters are interested in being a part of the management process, and state agencies aren't the only ones recognizing this.

Others in the hunting industry are talking and writing about modern deer hunters. Scott Bestul's recent article in *Deer and Deer Hunting* titled "Equilibrium – can deer doctors and deer hunters find a state of balance?" did an excellent job explaining how the relationship between state wildlife agencies and their respective deer hunters must adapt to current deer management issues and account for hunter knowledge. In a nutshell, Scott stated there was a time when state agencies could dictate policy to hunters without being questioned. However, Scott contends those days are gone forever as more and more hunters understand the principles of deer biology and management and ask their state officials to explain or defend their management recommendations.

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*The QDMA is dedicated to ethical hunting, sound deer management
and the preservation of the deer-hunting heritage.*

The modern deer hunter discussion even has a comparison in the wildlife profession. The Wildlife Society (TWS) is an educational and scientific organization that represents the wildlife profession and certifies individuals as professional wildlife biologists. In their recent *Wildlifer* publication, Michael Hutchins, TWS executive director/CEO wrote an article titled "Who is a 'Wildlife Professional?'" In the article Michael described that traditional wildlife professionals included only those individuals with a degree in wildlife biology, ecology or management, and who were working in a job in which they: (1) conducted scientific studies of wildlife biology or ecology; or (2) actively monitored and managed wildlife populations and/or their habitats. Michael went on to state that the time has come for those of other disciplines to be considered wildlife professionals. His partial listing included individuals working with a wildlife focus in the fields of human dimensions, psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics, urban planning, architecture, landscaping, education and public policy. Michael also included wildlife technicians and animal behaviorists. The point of listing these disciplines is not to debate whether they are wildlife professionals but to acknowledge that the profession and its constituents are expanding into new arenas.

As a biologist trained and certified in the traditional manner I understand the reluctance of some biologists to accept changes to our profession. As a former state agency biologist I also understand how unsolicited questioning from hunters can raise the hackles of a state deer biologist. However, open and respectful dialogue among all invested parties will prove most helpful to the resource. Regardless of which road brought you to the discussion, we're all interested in productive wildlife populations, healthy habitats and quality hunting opportunities. Whether you're from a state agency, conservation organization, hunting group or other discipline we need to acknowledge that hunters are the most important piece of the puzzle. They drive the industry by contributing more than \$67 billion annually to the U.S. economy and supporting over 575,000 jobs. Deer hunters are leading this charge. According to the National Shooting Sports Foundation's 2007 Industry Reference Guide, three out of every four hunters are deer hunters and there are more than four times as many deer hunters as turkey hunters, the second most-hunted species.

Without hunters, and deer hunters in particular, wildlife conservation and management would cease to exist. We should embrace the fact that the "modern" deer hunter has arrived and thank him/her for their support, commitment and service to the resource.

Kip's Korner is written by Kip Adams, a certified wildlife biologist and Director of Education and Outreach for the Northern Region for the Quality Deer Management Association (QDMA). The QDMA is a non-profit wildlife conservation organization dedicated to promoting sustainable, high-quality, white-tailed deer populations, wildlife habitats and ethical hunting experiences through education, research, and management in partnership with hunters, landowners, natural resource professionals, and the public. The QDMA can be reached at 1-800-209-DEER or www.QDMA.com.