

Harvest the right animals for our hunting future

By Tim Gale, General Manager, NZ Game Animal Council

Without-a-doubt it is a great time to be a hunter in New Zealand. Opportunities exist across the country to hunt our seven different species of deer in a variety of different environments and with a good chance of success.

Deer populations in some areas, however, have increased above what is a desirable level to maintain a healthy balance with the environment. This means that as hunters we have a responsibility to help manage them and keep numbers at sustainable levels. The good news is that individual hunters targeting the right animals at the right time, can have a significant impact on managing population levels, producing more quality trophy animals and reducing the need for official control.

Hunters, particularly during the roar period, want to target stags. That is understandable and is what helps makes the roar such an exciting time of the year. However, with a growing deer population in many places it is really important that we do more to actively target hinds. Hinds are the breeding animals and their numbers and the number of fawns they have determines the future population and the impact on the environment.



Keeping on top of the number of hinds and ensuring the maintenance of a healthy habitat also has the benefit of producing better animals for the future. Its simple environmental science – a healthy environment with plenty of food supports healthy, strong animals that provide for good eating and grow into bigger and better trophies – in this way, managing hind numbers is a win-win for hunting and conservation.

If you are lucky enough to get a good stag during the roar then think about going back to where he came from and harvesting a few hinds at other times of the year. In this way you will be ‘paying it forward’ for the herd, for your hunting and your fellow hunters. A good rule of thumb is to try to shoot two-to-three hinds for every stag shot.

With the roar just around the corner, targeting older males (8-years and older) that have done their breeding will begin to provide for a better managed herd. This means being able to identify fully-mature animals from their younger, immature counterparts. Key indicators to look for are a filled-out body, low head position and no visible coronets. Don’t get caught up on the number of antler points as very immature animals can easily have 10-12 points.

The silly spikers and immature stags you will come across need to be given the opportunity to grow and fully mature in order to reach their full potential. We really don't want to be shooting tomorrow's trophies today!



If you are out hunting for meat, the golden rule is, shoot the hind, not the spiker or young stag. Not only does that allow the young male time to develop into a trophy animal, but as females are the breeders, managing their numbers is the most effective form of hunter-led management.

Finally, and most importantly, look after yourself and your hunting mates. Check the weather forecast, make sure your party has the right gear, carry a form of communication with you (distress beacon, inReach etc), be considerate of other hunters and outdoor users, identify your target beyond all doubt and consider wearing blaze if bush hunting.

Good luck and enjoy the roar!

The NZ Game Animal Council is a statutory organisation responsible for the sustainable management of game animals and hunting for recreation, commerce and conservation.
