

Making Ripples

Stay Safe During Hunting Seasons

by Amanda Bancroft

Outdoor sports like hunting can be an important part of conservation, although arguing that hunting is necessary to reduce out-of-control animal populations is a bit misleading. Hunting is important today in controlling populations because we killed off most of our apex predators like mountain lions and wolves, disrupted ecosystems, and altered habitats in ways that favor certain species like deer. Among other benefits, hunting can be a part of fixing this imbalance. But is hunting dangerous to hunters and others who enjoy the outdoors during hunting season?

Our human perception of risk is based on emotion, whereas risk itself is measurable with facts. Just one story of someone who knows someone whose kid was injured doing something is enough for us to perceive that the activity is terribly dangerous and everyone should stop doing it (except, for some reason, driving in cars). Earlier this year in Pennsylvania, a ban was considered, then dropped, on hiking within state game lands during hunting season, which lasts 130 days per year in that state.

There are some reckless hunters who shoot at movement, or who deliberately fire at “no hunting” signs, vandalizing property, littering, and endangering human life. But these instances are the result of a few bad apples. Headlines such as “shooting hikers is perfectly legal” are probably not reporting the full truth, since federal regulations do not permit shooting hikers and there are many laws to protect people in the woods during hunting season (although enforcing these laws is difficult due to lack of proof and understaffing in some parks).

There are dozens of hunting regulations that hunters must follow to keep themselves and others safe, and a hunter safety class is required. According to the Arkansas Game & Fish Commission, “Anyone born on or after January 1, 1969, must complete a hunter education course and carry a valid hunter education card to hunt in Arkansas.” Visit www.AGFC.com to enroll.

Hunters who are not using guns safely may present a risk to other people as much as criminals do, but the existence of criminals shouldn't keep us indoors. Instead of hiding at home, here are some safety tips for outdoor recreation during hunting season:

1. wear blaze orange (this can be a hat, vest, or jacket)
2. let someone know where you will be going
3. be aware of the hunting seasons and locations
4. get to know local hunters, don't provoke them or interfere with their hunting
5. whistle while you walk, or talk – it's safer to enjoy the outdoors in pairs or groups

It's understandable to be nervous about hunting season, but remember our human blindness for risk assessment: the facts show that far more people are injured or die in car accidents than in hunting accidents, and that plenty of drivers text or drive under the influence of alcohol and drugs, yet few of us fear cars despite knowing people who have died in them. We can enjoy the outdoors year-round and minimize risk by employing some safety strategies.

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