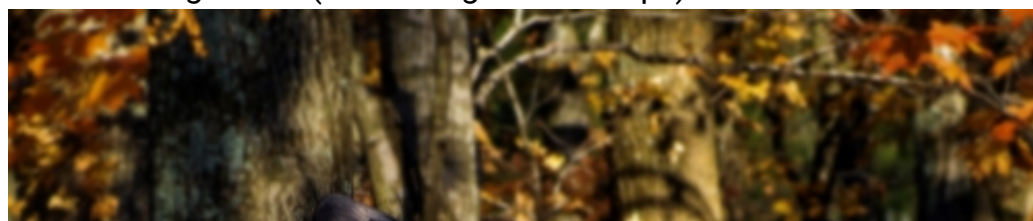


History of KY Deer Management

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HISTORY OF DEER MANAGEMENT IN KENTUCKY

*(**Please Note:** Former Kentucky Afield magazine writer J.B. Garland first published this story in 1998. Although some information may be dated and some personnel have changed, it provides a glimpse into Kentucky's deer restoration efforts.)*

Morning light had not yet pushed away the shadows when the deer trapping crew drove up to the tennis courts at Lake Cumberland State Resort Park. It was cold that January morning and the resort was closed for the winter, but Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Deer Coordinator John Phillips and crew had a special purpose for being there. Usually trapping crews used box traps, tranquilizer darts or net traps to capture deer, but the state park offered a unique opportunity.

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Today's crew had been baiting the tennis courts for several weeks, leaving both gate doors open. A week before the trapping was to take place, one of the doors was shut. Finally, this morning, the crew approached the courts and shut the other door trapping the feeding deer inside. The capture was made easily, but the deer still had to be tagged and loaded onto trucks where they would be transported to other counties and released to establish new viable

deer herds.

Greg Powers, a member of the trapping crew, cornered a young button buck. Grabbing the deer's front legs, he wrestled it to the ground so another member of the crew could tag it. Powers took a good look at the deer after it was loaded on the truck; it wasn't the last time that he would see it.

Six years later, Powers was bow hunting on the Paintsville Lake Wildlife Management Area when he took a monster of a deer. According to its ear tag, it was the same buck that he captured on the Lake Cumberland park's tennis courts. The buck was a non-typical that scored 200 7/8 on the Pope and Young scale, the second highest Pope and Young Club entry from Kentucky.

By the time Powers took his record deer, hunting had become a realistic pursuit all over the state. But fewer than 50 years before, Kentucky didn't allow deer hunting because of low populations, and just 20 years before it was still rare to bring home a deer from a hunt. Concerned sportsmen had taken action but deer restoration took time to be successful.

Concern for dwindling wildlife populations in Kentucky began before the turn of the century when, in 1894, the Kentucky legislature passed a law making it illegal to kill a buck, doe or fawn between March 1 and September 1. In 1912, sportsmen convinced the legislature to take further action and form a Game Commission. The commission recommended closing the state to deer hunting. Kentucky's General Assembly agreed - during the 1916 General Session, legislators closed the state to deer hunting. Deer hunting did not reopen until 1946.

The first modern-day deer hunt actually came because of one Isaac Bernheim. In 1929, Bernheim brought 15 red deer (a close relative of elk) from Europe and released the giants on his property, which he managed as an example of conservation in Bullitt County. The red deer herd grew so large that local farmers began complaining. In January 1946, it was red deer, not whitetails, that became the focus of the first legal deer hunt in Kentucky since before World War I.

It cost \$10 for hunters to participate. If they were lucky enough to kill a deer, they had to pay an additional \$15 for a tag. Although hunters took fewer than 30 deer, the hunt successfully scattered the herd.

However, scattering the existing herds of white-tailed deer would not be enough to establish a statewide deer population. So the Kentucky Division of

Game and Fish, now the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, received deer from Wisconsin to begin a white-tailed deer restoration program. Department personnel relocated most of these deer to Christian, Crittenden, Livingston and Ballard counties. Ballard Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and Mammoth Cave received stockings of Kentucky deer and Wisconsin deer, and later became trapping sites.

Stocking would be the method to establishing a statewide deer herd. Unfortunately, before 1945 there was little work done in the area of biological wildlife management. Wildlife management was largely limited to law enforcement. As a result, early deer hunting seasons were too liberal, ultimately undoing much of what previous stocking had established.

In the 1960s and 1970s, deer stocking intensified. Seasons grew more restrictive to protect the state's herd. Much of the state's current deer population originated from deer trapped at Ballard WMA and Mammoth Cave and moved elsewhere in the state between 1963 and 1974.

Robert Willis set up the first deer check stations in 1976. Willis and John Phillips, a biologist with the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, met at Kleber Wildlife Management Area the day after the deer season ended. Willis and Phillips hand-sorted all the deer check cards to tabulate the year's deer harvest.

By the 1980s, the western two-thirds of the state had enough deer to open a season. Statewide, more than 40,000 cards from check stations were compiled using a scanner. Still, many eastern counties didn't have viable deer herds. Deer transplanted to eastern Kentucky faced additional problems of rugged terrain and dogs. These elements, not poachers, were the major obstacles to the growth of the herd.

When Phillips became Kentucky's deer program coordinator in 1978, he began defining the differences in deer populations from east to west across the state. He determined that counties could have a season if there was more than one deer a square mile. So instead of putting 50 deer in a county, he proposed putting 500 deer in each county. His theory was successful. During the 1980s and 1990s, Phillips and his crews trapped and released around 12,000 deer.

Charlie Wilkins remembers the intensity of the program during those years. He came on as manager of the Ballard Wildlife Management Area in 1985.

During the winter months, deer trapping was a seven-day-a-week job for Wilkins and his crew, which consisted of 11 men. The object was to trap as many deer as possible and transport them as quickly as possible. The labor was time-intensive and work-intensive.

From the first restrictions on hunting in 1894, to nearly statewide seasons in 1997, the torch has been handed down. It took dedication to raise Kentucky's white-tailed deer population from fewer than 2,000 in 1945 to a statewide herd of more than 450,000 today. The state's last deer stocking will occur in Perry County in 1999.

Frequently Asked Questions

When can you hunt? (/Hunt/Pages/Deer.aspx#Deer-chart)

No place to hunt? (/Hunt/Pages/Public-Land-Hunting.aspx)

How many deer can you harvest? (/Hunt/Pages/Deer.aspx#Bag%20Limits)

What can you hunt deer with? (/Hunt/Pages/Deer.aspx#MODERN%20GUN%20SEASON)

What license do you need? (/Hunt/Pages/Deer.aspx#What%20license%20do%20you%20need?)

Where can you buy a license? (https://app.fw.ky.gov/solar/)

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What are the rules for baiting deer? (/Hunt/Pages/Deer.aspx#FeedingRestrictions)

Learn to process deer with Field to Fork class. (/Education/Pages/FieldtoFork.aspx)

Deer Season FAQs (/Hunt/Pages/Deer-Season-FAQ.aspx)

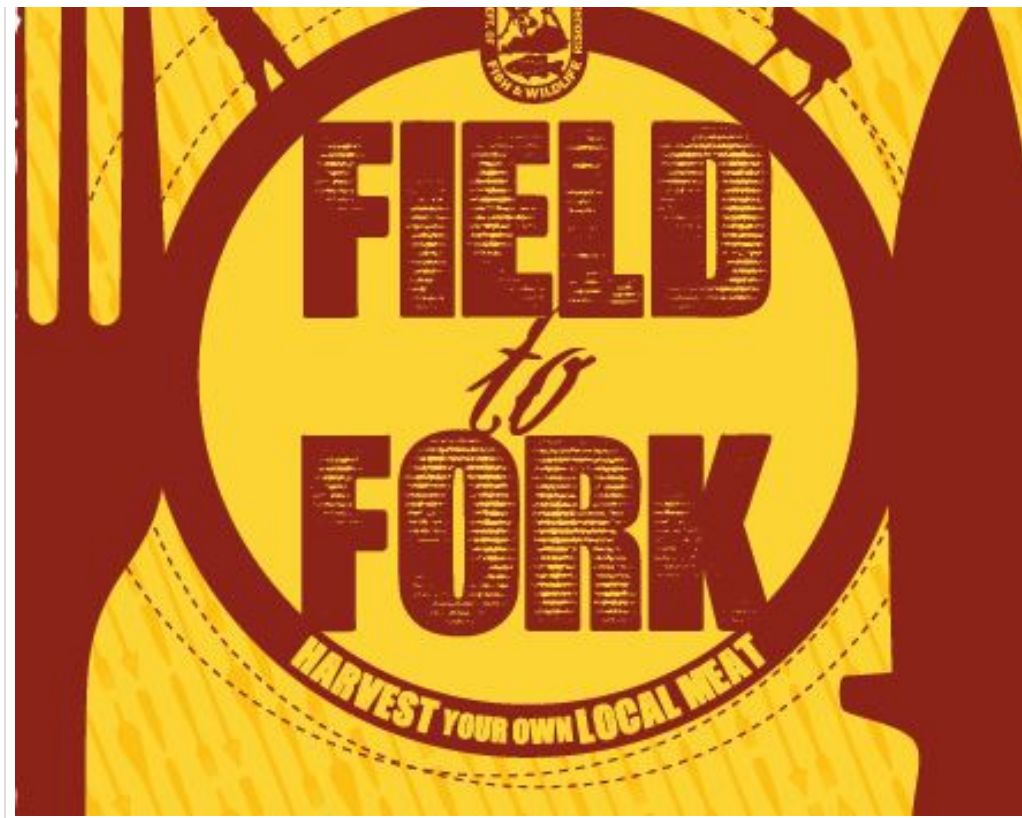
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TEST YOUR DEER

Drop off the head of your harvest for free CWD testing at designated drop-off sites (/Wildlife/Pages/CWD-Sample-Drop-off-Sites.aspx) located across the state.





(/Education/Pages/FieldtoFork.aspx)



(<https://kyhuntersforthehungry.info/>)

DEER RESTORATION TIMELINE

1750

Explorer Dr. Thomas Walker reports that deer are “plentiful” in portions of what is now southeastern Kentucky.



1775

The Virginia Colonial Legislature (which governed the Kentucky territory before statehood) passes laws regulating the take of deer for the hide trade; they prohibited the use of fire to drive and harvest deer.

Settlers at Fort
Boonesborough
enact game laws and
name Daniel Boone
to head their game
committee.

1810

Naturalist John
James Audubon
notes that the vast
numbers of deer that
once roamed the
Ohio River valley of
Kentucky had already
“ceased to exist.”

1894

Kentucky’s legislature
outlaws the killing of
any deer from March
1 to September 1 due
to depletion of the
herd.

1915

J. Quincy Ward,
Executive Agent of

the Kentucky Game
and Fish
Commission, reports
deer are being raised
at Pine Mountain and
the state fairgrounds
in Louisville for
release in the state.



1916

White-tailed deer
likely number less
than 1,000 animals.
The majority are
found in Caldwell,
Christian, Lyon and
Trigg counties.
Kentucky's General
Assembly bans deer
hunting.



1919

The Hillman Land
Company acquires 30
white-tailed deer and
20 fallow deer from
Showalter Deer Farm
in Wisconsin and
releases them on its
holdings in Lyon and
Trigg counties (now
Land Between The

Lakes). The area later becomes a state wildlife refuge.



1927

The Courier-Journal newspaper reports private owners release 25 deer kept at Dishman Springs into the mountains of Knox County. The owners bred, raised and developed the animals. The paper reports the existence of two state deer preserves, one in western Kentucky and the other in Bell County.



1929

According to the Courier-Journal newspaper, a “large herd” of deer in Bourbon County is shipped to a game agency in another state. Complaints

arise about shipping
deer out of state
when they are needed
in Kentucky.



1931

The Courier-Journal reports the Hillman property contains an estimated 1,000 deer. An April 10 article notes that deer were stocked at the Bernheim preserve in Bullitt and Nelson counties “a few months ago.” The Kentucky Game Commission Bulletin reports 88 deer released at Bernheim Foundation property in Bullitt County, the Hillman property and the Jones-Keeney Game Refuge in Caldwell County.



1935

The Hillman property, which has now become the Lyon/Trigg County Refuge, is closed. Game wardens protecting the refuge are fired. Poaching reduces the deer population to 100 or fewer animals. The U.S. government (Rural Resettlement Administration) purchased Hillman and some surrounding land. The area is renamed the Coalins Forest Game Preserve. At that time, the Works Progress Administration took over control of the property.

1938

Coalins Forest Game preserve is transferred from the Rural Resettlement Administration to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife

Service; the area is renamed the Kentucky Woodlands National Wildlife Refuge. The Courier-Journal newspaper in Louisville publishes a story about four estates in Jefferson County with private deer herds, including one near Jeffersontown with Japanese Sika deer acquired from the Belle Isle Zoo in Detroit.



1945

Deer numbers in Caldwell, Christian, Lyon and Trigg counties estimated at 2,000 animals.



1946-1952 - DEER RELEASE PROGRAM

Deer releases total 534; sites include Beaver Creek (106 deer), Robinson Forest (59), Ford area (56), Kentucky Ridge Area (44), Three Forks Area (110), Mammoth Cave Area (47) and the Pennyrile Area (27). Kentucky purchases 50 deer from Showalter Farm in Wisconsin for \$150 each then releases them at three locations in Laurel County.

1946

Kentucky Division of
Game and Fish
initiates



comprehensive white-tailed deer restoration. Efforts include refuge establishment and habitat improvements, followed by trapping and relocation of deer from existing populations. Twelve big game refuges totaling 125,000 acres are set up across the state, with two more planned.

At Bernheim Reservation in Bullitt County, 175 hunters pay \$10 apiece to hunt European red deer. A newspaper article on the two-day hunt does not mention white tailed deer.



1947

Kentucky Game and Fish employees capture 77 deer at Kentucky Woodlands and Jones-Keeney Wildlife Management Area (WMA). Deer are released on Beaver Creek WMA (McCreary and Pulaski counties), Kentucky Ridge State Forest (Bell County), Mammoth Cave National Park (Edmonson and Hart counties) and Pennyryle State Forest (Caldwell and Christian counties).

1949

Kentucky's Game and Fish Commission votes to suspend deer hunting for the year due to a significant decrease in whitetail numbers.

In August, disease sweeps across the Woodlands Refuge and continues until



the first killing frost.
Biologists estimate
that more than 300
deer die from the
mysterious disease,
which is now believed
to be epizootic
hemorrhagic disease
(EHD). Trapping is all
but suspended.



1951

Kentucky Woodlands
opened for fallow
deer-only archery
hunting. Statewide,
vehicles hit and kill
five whitetails.



1952

Kentucky Woodlands
National Refuge
opens its second
archery season for
fallow deer and
white-tailed deer. The
season lasts from
Nov. 24-Dec. 6; 190
hunters register.
Archers take two
white-tailed deer and
one fallow deer.

Bernheim opens for an archery-only red deer hunt; 200 archers participate, none take a deer.



1954

Deer restoration emphasis switches to private lands throughout the state. Department releases deer trapped at Mammoth Cave and Pennyrile Forest to refuges in Estill, Jackson, Lee and Menifee counties.



1956

Kentucky resumes deer hunting in 27 counties for a three-day season in November. Hunters may only take bucks. While a handful of special hunts for whitetails, red deer and fallow deer were held in the state prior

to 1956, this signals the start of modern-day deer hunting in Kentucky.

State deer herd estimated at 25,000. Employees release deer trapped at Kentucky Woodlands onto Ballard WMA for several years.



1962

To date, Kentucky has stocked 3,069 deer and released them in 55 counties. Deer hunting expands to 43 counties. Nearly 14,000 hunters participate, taking slightly more than 5,000 deer.



1964

Kentucky Woodlands
National Wildlife
Refuge,
encompassing
65,000 acres, is
transferred from the
Department of the
Interior to the TVA
(Tennessee Valley
Authority) for
inclusion into the
Land Between The
Lakes National
Recreation Area.



1965

Mammoth Cave National Park becomes the sole in-state source of animals for Kentucky's deer restoration effort.



1966

Nearly 25,000 hunters take approximately 8,000 deer statewide.



1967

The number of deer purchased in Wisconsin for stocking in Kentucky now totals 307.

1979-81

Kentucky's deer population estimated at 149,000 animals. Kentucky adopts a zone system to manage individual counties; restoration efforts end in all regions of the state except for southeastern Kentucky.



1984

Department begins a high-density stocking program in eastern Kentucky, where poaching, lack of suitable habitat and free-roaming dogs have kept deer

densities low. The effort includes 500 whitetails released in each county with a stagnant or slow population growth of its deer herd. Employees trap approximately 150 deer each year at Ballard WMA, while a mobile trapping crew of seasonal employees trap additional deer at state parks and military bases.

1986

Department begins using the DEER CAMP computerized deer population simulation program to help estimate herd numbers in the coming year. Biologists use this program, along with harvest information, crop damage complaints and deer collision data, to formulate county



zone
recommendations for
the coming deer
season.

Approximately
175,000 hunters take
nearly 40,000 deer.
The herd size is an
estimated 207,000
deer.



1989-1991

Kentucky phases in
its one-buck limit.
This cap helps build
the state's trophy
deer base in coming
years.

Deer trapping ends
on Ballard WMA
(Program started in
1974). The mobile
trapping team
continues catching
deer for the
southeastern
Kentucky restoration
project at state parks

and military bases.

1999

Active deer restoration ends in March with the release of 66 deer from Owen County into the mountains of Perry County.

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- Boating Statutes (<https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/law/statutes/chapter.aspx?id=38379>)
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