

Field Dressing and Transporting Wild Game:

Field Dressing

Wild game meat, not unlike domestic meat, requires reasonable care while handling and processing. Proper handling and processing will help to preserve palatability and avoidance of food-borne illnesses. Steps taken while in the field are crucial to ensuring healthy and flavorful wild game meat. As with any meat, temperature is always a concern relative to preventing the build-up of bacteria. After harvesting a game animal, the entrails (*internal organs*) should be removed as soon as possible in order to facilitate cooling of the carcass. Field dressing does not have to be a complex ordeal and can be completed in just a few simple steps using a minimum of tools. The following is a few simple items used to field dress game:

- Sharp knife
- Disposable plastic gloves (*recommended*)
- Paper towels (*optional*)

Field dressing can be best accomplished with the game animal on its back. In this way, a hunter will have immediate access to internal organs. The following procedure is recommended for field dressing deer or other medium sized game:

- 1) Now is the time to put on the disposable gloves if you have them. Begin by making an incision just below the breast bone by pinching up on the hide and slowly cutting through until muscle tissue is observed under the hide. Slowly cut through the muscle until the interior body cavity becomes apparent. Make the cut large enough to insert two fingers into the body cavity. Some hunters make the first incision lower near the genital area. The advantage to starting near the breast bone is that there is less chance of cutting into the stomach or intestines as compared to other areas.
- 2) After the initial incision, position yourself so you are facing the rear of the deer (*Note: in this way you are cutting away from, and not toward, yourself*). You can place your feet at the sides of the deer in order to prevent it from rolling on its side. In essence, you are straddling the deer.
- 3) Insert the two fingers into the body cavity at the cut and slowly but carefully insert the knife blade (*edge up*) between your fingers (*Note: the goal here is to prevent the knife blade from puncturing the internal organs by keeping finger space between the knife and the internal organs. Fingers should be slightly apart and not pinching the knife blade*). Begin cutting in a straight line toward the reproductive organs and anus. If the knife is sharp, as it should be, it will glide along without the need to saw as you cut. Upon reaching the reproductive organs of the male deer, cut around them and

remove them from the carcass. Remove the udders of the female in the same way.

- 4) After reaching the hip bone, open the skin all the way to the anus then cut around the anus opening so that it can be removed along with the internal organs (*Note: you may need to reposition yourself by facing toward the head of the deer to accomplish this*). At this point, the majority of the internal organs (*below the breastbone*) can be removed from the body cavity. This can be accomplished by gently pulling them loose (*Note: do so carefully in order to avoid rupturing internal organs*). Some connective tissue attached to the body cavity may need to be cut in order to facilitate removal. Be careful not to rupture the bladder before removing it. The bladder will be noticeable within the pelvic area of the deer and will appear to be a fluid filled sack. You can avoid rupturing the bladder by first pinching it shut at the point closest to the carcass and carefully cut it loose. Then, in one motion, remove it from the carcass without spilling the contents into the body cavity.
- 5) Next, cut through the diaphragm to access the heart and lungs for removal as well (*Note: diaphragm may need to be trimmed from both edges just below the rib cage to access heart and lung area*).
- 6) Reach into the rib cage with the non-knife hand to the top of the body cavity near the neck and grasp the windpipe and other connective tissue. Then using the knife hand, slowly and gently reach up inside (*while keeping the knife edge away from the non-knife hand*) and slowly sever the windpipe and connective tissue just above the non-knife hand. After the cut, the lungs and heart can be removed easily.
- 7) At this point, any remaining blood and or excess tissue can be removed by flipping the deer over and or wiping the body cavity dry with paper towels. If internal organs are to be saved for consumption (*e.g., heart, liver, kidneys*) they should be placed separately in plastic bags for transport. (*Note: avoid rinsing the body cavity with water so as to avoid the build-up of bacteria*).
- 8) In warm weather conditions, prop open the carcass with a stick or place ice filled plastic bags in the body cavity to promote cooling during transport. Transport the carcass as soon as possible to some type of refrigeration. In cold weather, there may be no need for ice and or immediate transport as cooling will likely occur on its own. Cooling the carcass should always be of utmost concern to prevent spoilage and improve table quality of game meat.

Transporting

In recent years there has been some concern relative to transporting exposed dead animal carcasses on vehicles. Although common practice some 3 or 4 decades

ago, the continual transition of humans from farm to urban living has fostered a general public that views displays of dead animals as distasteful. Hunters may well like to show the rewards of the hunt, and rightfully so, but we must remain aware and respectful of others if hunting is to be accepted by society as a whole.

Moreover, and in the hunter's favor, wild game should not be exposed to the elements during transport. This explains the gradual voluntary transition from vehicle hoods to pick-up beds and trailer-hitch carriers over the years. Rain and or snow mixed with road grime can promote bacteria build-up and contaminate edible meat. To promote cooling, game animals should never be transported on vehicle hoods where engine heat can hinder the cooling process.

Instead, the animal carcass should be transported in such a way that it is both protected from the elements and away from any heat source. The back of a covered pick-up truck, tarp covered trailer-hitch carrier, or vehicle trunk, are far better ways to transport game animals. If outside temperatures are warm, placing bags of ice inside or around the body cavity can speed up cooling.