

# DEER HUNTING AND TELEVISION: ARE TV SHOWS CREATING EXPECTATIONS AMONG DEER HUNTERS?

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Joshua D. Agee  
Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources  
University of Georgia  
Athens, GA 30605  
ageej@forestry.uga.edu

Craig A. Miller, Ph.D.  
University of Georgia

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**Abstract.**—Throughout the past two decades new media outlets emphasizing trophy deer hunting have come to dominate hunting culture. Using data collected through a mail survey of Illinois deer hunters ( $n = 2,683$ , 78.5-percent response), we tested two hypotheses to determine factors that contribute to preference for hunting trophy deer. In particular, we examined the relationship between trophy deer hunting and: 1) watching television shows about deer hunting, and 2) frequency of viewing shows about deer hunting. Preference for hunting trophy deer was measured using three variables: hunting motives directed toward hunting trophy deer, preference for management programs emphasizing trophy deer, and management programs focused on producing bucks with large antlers. Results confirm a significant relationship between preference for hunting trophy deer and both watching hunting television shows and frequency of viewing shows about deer hunting.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1990s emphasis on hunting trophy white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) has increased throughout the United States (Miller 2004, Miller and McDonald 2004). Multiple new media outlets have inundated hunting culture with a focus on harvesting trophy animals, particularly white-tails. The main outlet for this focus has been television. The relatively recent introduction of the Outdoor Channel

and similar cable television channels has resulted in a greater number of hunting shows. These channels, combined with easy access to cable (or satellite) television, have allowed the idea of harvesting a “record-book” deer to reach countless hunters (Enck et al. 2000, Memood et al. 2003, Miller and Vaske 2003). Programs like “Whitetail Freaks” and “Buckmaster’s Classic” are two examples of shows that promote trophy hunting.

## 2.0 METHODS

Between March and May 2003, a self-administered mail questionnaire was sent to licensed deer hunters throughout the State of Illinois. A random sample of hunters was used ( $n=3,500$ ) and was stratified based on hunting permit type (shotgun, archery, or muzzleloader). The questionnaire was 16 pages long and examined hunting participation, estimates of deer harvests, attitudes toward hunting behaviors, and management opinions.

The purpose was to determine whether deer hunting television programs influence hunters’ expectations about harvesting trophy deer. We proposed two hypotheses: (H1), watching shows about deer hunting contributes to a preference for hunting trophy deer and (H2), frequency of viewing shows about deer hunting is related to preference for hunting trophy deer. We measured preference for hunting trophy deer using three variables: (1) hunting motives directed toward hunting trophy deer; (2) preference for management programs that emphasize trophy deer; and (3) preference for management programs focused on producing bucks with large antlers.

Respondents were first asked, “Do you watch deer hunting shows on TV?” Response choices were binomial (“Yes” or “No”). To measure frequency of viewing shows about deer hunting, we asked respondents to answer the question: “How often do

you watch deer hunting shows?” Possible responses were “Every week,” “About 3 times a month,” “5-12 times in the past year,” and “<5 times in the past year.”

The first variable “hunting motives directed toward hunting trophy deer” was measured by asking respondents to consider the statement, “The chance to harvest a trophy buck is an important part of why I hunt deer.” The second variable “preference for management programs that emphasize trophy deer” was measured by asking respondents to reflect upon the statement, “More emphasis should be placed on producing trophy deer.” The third variable “preference for management programs focused on producing bucks with large antlers” was measured by asking respondents to answer the statement “Deer managers should focus on providing bucks with larger racks.” Responses were measured using a 7-point Likert-type scale for all of these questions (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree).

To test our hypotheses, we used crosstab analysis with Pearson’s chi-square (SPSS v. 14). A p-value of less than .05 was considered significant.

### 3.0 RESULTS

The survey response rate was 78.5 percent ( $n=2,683$ ). Eighty-two members of the original sample were excluded because the surveys had incorrect addresses or duplicate names, or were undeliverable for other reasons, leaving 3,418 hunters in the sample.

Opportunity to harvest a trophy buck as a motive for participating in deer hunting was significantly related

to watching TV shows about deer hunting ( $\chi^2=66.87$ ,  $p<.001$ ) (Table 1). Of hunters who *did not* watch deer hunting shows, 19.9 percent somewhat agreed, 15.7 percent agreed, and 8.3 percent strongly agreed with the statement, “The chance to harvest a trophy buck is an important part of why I hunt deer.” By contrast, among hunters that watched deer hunting shows, 24.9 percent somewhat agreed, 20.7 percent agreed, and 18.5 percent strongly agreed with the above statement.

*Frequency* of viewing television shows about deer hunting was significantly related to harvesting a trophy buck as a motive for deer hunting ( $\chi^2= 54.04$ ,  $p<.001$ ) (Table 2). There was little difference among responses of those watching such shows “Every week,” “About 3 times a month,” and “5-12 times in the past year.” A greater difference is evident in the responses of viewers watching “Every week” compared to “<5 times in the past year.” Of those who watch hunting shows weekly, 24.7 percent somewhat agreed, 21.1 percent agreed, and 21.7 percent strongly agreed with the statement, “The chance to harvest a trophy buck is an important part of why I hunt deer,” whereas of those watching shows less than five times in the past year, 24.4 percent somewhat agreed, only 14.0 percent agreed, and only 15.0 percent strongly agreed.

Preference for management programs that emphasize trophy deer management was also significantly related to watching hunting shows ( $\chi^2=54.92$ ,  $p<.001$ ) (Table 3). Of hunters who did not watch deer hunting shows, 14.1 percent somewhat agreed, 9.1 percent agreed, and 5.5 percent strongly agreed with the statement, “More emphasis should be placed on

**Table 1.—Importance of potentially harvesting a trophy buck vs. watching hunting shows on TV**

The chance to harvest a trophy buck is an important part of why I hunt deer	Do you watch deer hunting shows on TV?		
	% No (n=362)	% Yes (n=2,267)	Total (%)
Strongly Disagree	17.7	8.6	9.8
Disagree	25.4	17.8	18.9
Somewhat Disagree	10.2	8.0	8.3
Unsure	2.8	1.5	1.7
Somewhat Agree	19.9	24.9	24.2
Agree	15.7	20.7	20.0
Strongly Agree	8.3	18.5	17.1

( $\chi^2=66.87$ ,  $p<.001$ )

**Table 2.—Importance of potentially harvesting a trophy buck vs. frequency of watching hunting shows on TV**

The chance to harvest a trophy buck is an important part of why I hunt deer	How often do you watch deer hunting shows?				Total (%)
	% Every Week	% About 3 times a month	% 5-12 times in the past year	% <5 times in the past year	
Strongly Disagree	9.0	6.9	6.8	13.7	8.4
Disagree	16.5	19.8	16.7	20.8	17.8
Somewhat Disagree	5.8	8.7	9.5	8.1	8.0
Unsure	1.3	1.0	0.9	3.9	1.5
Somewhat Agree	24.7	25.2	25.6	24.4	25.1
Agree	21.1	21.8	22.4	14.0	20.7
Strongly Agree	21.7	16.6	18.1	15.0	18.5

( $\chi^2=54.04, p<.001$ )

**Table 3.—Emphasis on producing trophy deer vs. watching hunting TV shows**

More emphasis should be placed on producing trophy deer	Do you watch deer hunting shows on TV?		
	% No (n=362)	% Yes (n=2,267)	Total (%)
Strongly Disagree	10.2	6.4	6.9
Disagree	26.6	16.1	17.6
Somewhat Disagree	14.4	13.3	13.4
Unsure	19.9	16.3	16.8
Somewhat Agree	14.1	20.9	20.0
Agree	9.1	16.2	15.2
Strongly Agree	5.5	10.9	10.1

( $\chi^2=54.92, p<.001$ )

producing trophy deer.” Among hunters who did watch hunting shows, 20.9 percent somewhat agreed, 16.2 percent agreed, and 10.9 percent strongly agreed.

A significant relationship was also found between preference for management programs that emphasize trophy deer management and *frequency* of watching deer hunting television shows ( $\chi^2=44.48, p<.001$ ) (Table 4). Percent responses were similar to the first variable (opportunity to harvest a trophy as a primary motive). There was little difference between hunters

watching “Every week,” “About 3 times a month,” and “5-12 times in the past year,” though greater differences existed between those who watched these shows every week and those who watched them less than five times in the past year. Hunters who watched hunting shows every week answered “Somewhat agree” less than those who watched shows less than five times in the past year. However, those who watched more frequently constitute a higher percentage of responses for “agree” and “strongly agree.”

**Table 4.—Emphasis on producing trophy deer vs. frequency of watching TV shows about deer hunting**

More emphasis should be placed on producing trophy deer	How often do you watch deer hunting shows?				Total (%)
	% Every Week	% About 3 times a month	% 5-12 times in the past year	% <5 times in the past year	
Strongly Disagree	7.4	6.1	5.2	7.1	6.4
Disagree	13.6	14.0	16.9	21.8	15.9
Somewhat Disagree	12.2	14.6	13.0	15.3	13.4
Unsure	14.7	16.5	17.3	17.5	16.4
Somewhat Agree	19.0	23.2	21.5	20.1	20.9
Agree	18.0	16.5	16.1	12.0	16.2
Strongly Agree	15.1	9.2	9.8	6.2	10.8

( $\chi^2=66.16, p<.001$ )

Preference for management focused on producing deer with large racks (trophy bucks) was significantly related to watching deer hunting shows on television ( $\chi^2=66.16, p<.001$ ) (Table 5). Among hunters who did not watch deer hunting shows, 17.8 percent somewhat agreed, 11.1 percent agreed, and only 1.4 percent strongly agreed with the statement, “Deer managers should focus on providing bucks with larger racks.” Of hunters who watched deer hunting television shows, more of them agreed with the statement: 27.6 percent answered “somewhat agree,” 13.6 percent answered “agree,” and 7.5 percent answered “strongly agree.”

There was also a significant relationship between preference for management focused on producing bucks with larger racks and the frequency of watching deer hunting shows on TV ( $\chi^2=50.756, p<.001$ ) (Table 6). There was little difference in responses between those who watch the hunting shows “Every week,” “About 3 times a month,” and “5-12 times in the past year.” However, when comparing “Every week” and “<5 times in the past year,” we found larger differences. Of those who watched the shows

every week, 27.2 percent somewhat agreed, 15.0 percent agreed, and 9.6 percent strongly agreed with management focused on producing bucks with larger racks. Those who watched less than five times in the past year did not agree to the same extent: 22.5 percent somewhat agreed, 9.5 percent agreed, and 6.2 percent strongly agreed.

#### 4.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Results of this study suggest that hunters who watch hunting television shows, especially those who watch them more often, are more likely to have a preference for hunting trophy white-tailed deer. These hunters are also more likely to have expectations of harvesting a trophy animal. Hunting shows have recently been introduced to the hunting culture and continue to grow in popularity. More recognized sponsors and outfitters are joining this growing form of entertainment and it does not appear that hunting shows will be going off the air any time soon. This trend can be viewed by deer managers in two ways: first, they could see this as an increase in pressure from hunters to produce trophy deer, something that cannot be completed

**Table 5.—Emphasis on managers providing trophy bucks vs. watching hunting TV shows**

Deer managers should focus on providing bucks with larger racks	Do you watch deer hunting shows on TV?		
	% No (n=362)	% Yes (n=2,267)	Total (%)
Strongly Disagree	9.2	3.7	4.4
Disagree	20.9	13.7	14.7
Somewhat Disagree	16.2	15.6	15.7
Unsure	23.4	18.3	19.0
Somewhat Agree	17.8	27.6	26.2
Agree	11.1	13.6	13.3
Strongly Agree	1.4	7.5	6.6

( $\chi^2=66.16, p<.001$ )

**Table 6.—Emphasis on managers providing trophy bucks vs. frequency of watching hunting TV shows**

Deer managers should focus on providing bucks with larger racks	How often do you watch deer hunting shows?				Total (%)
	% Every Week	% About 3 times a month	% 5-12 times in the past year	% <5 times in the past year	
Strongly Disagree	3.9	2.7	3.0	6.5	3.7
Disagree	13.7	10.3	13.8	17.0	13.5
Somewhat Disagree	13.1	15.9	18.8	13.7	15.7
Unsure	17.5	19.5	16.2	24.5	18.4
Somewhat Agree	27.2	30.4	28.7	22.5	27.7
Agree	15.0	15.3	12.9	9.5	13.6
Strongly Agree	9.6	5.9	6.6	6.2	7.3

( $\chi^2=50.756, p<.001$ )

overnight and could lead to disappointment among deer hunters. State agencies can have difficulty with this pressure due to the nature of their organization (funding, supervisory approval, and other constraints). The second way in which managers could perceive this trend is as an educational opportunity. With so many hunters watching these television shows and basing ideas and management opinions on them, managers could use the shows to promote sound management techniques. As of this writing, there are a few television programs on the air that discuss deer management techniques that benefit the landscape, trophy deer, and other wildlife. One example is Quality Deer Management Association's "Quality Whitetails." This show portrays hunters hunting quality deer and provides advice about land management practices and deer herd management. Such education programs could encourage hunters to do more on an individual basis to meet their own goals and expectations.

Further research regarding the media's influence on hunters and anglers should be conducted to help managers understand and respond to new demands and developing trends. As our society becomes more technologically advanced, mass media is assailing the public from all directions. This study provides one example of how media can influence our perception of those things we enjoy most.

## 5.0 CITATIONS

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