

Just where do you shoot a deer??

Grant Ubl

Here is a subject that is certain to bring out more than a few opinions. Everybody has their idea of where the best place is to shoot a whitetail to put meat in the freezer and I expect to hear them.

One undeniable fact that I will lay out from the onset of this article is that any creature that has ever existed on planet earth has died of exactly the same thing. As hard to swallow as some might imagine, it is a fact that all creatures have died from LACK OF OXYGEN TO THE BRAIN. Doesn't matter if it death was by car impact, a bullet, a plane crash or standing at ground zero of a nuclear detonation. The brain ceased function as the result of lack oxygen.

What I will lay out is based upon 50+ years of hunting all over the lower 48, more years of top-level competitive archery/rifle competition than I care to count, 35+ years of running hunter sight-in clinics and 10 years of culling urban deer under highly controlled conditions.

For whatever reason, far too many hunters feel that they are far better marksmen than they really are (I've seen their results at the range when they have no pressure and are firing from support). They would have you believe that they can execute shots that rival a national champion's abilities, while under stress and from all manner of field positions...every time without fail. What amazes me more is that I have never seen their names on state championship shooting trophies or seen them stand on the podium at national rifle competitions.

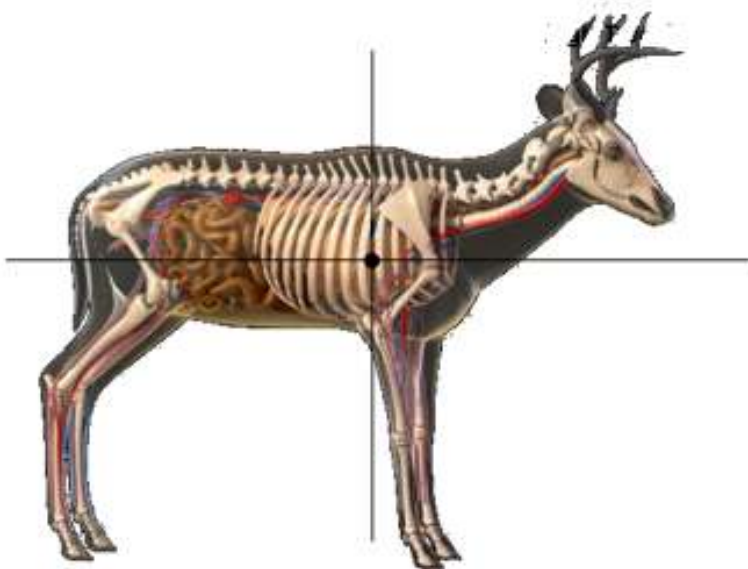
Even still, these precision marksman will tell you with absolute conviction that they can make instant-kill neck or head shots at will and you had better buy into their story at your peril. Not sure if it was a hand-me-down writ of manhood in their hunting clan or if they use these shots to impress upon their ability to save meat damage and cause instant death, humanely. There is no question that they can be instantly fatal, but it should also be pointed out that what produces the instant kill is the SPINE or the BRAIN being destroyed. Both are very small targets and most hunters cannot pinpoint exactly where they lie if you ask them to point exactly at them in a photo. There is a lot of "head" and "neck" that can be hit with a bullet that will simply maim a deer for the remainder of suffering life. These precision marksman will never tell you about the one's they maimed, trust me.

In the days when we were forced to hunt deer at very short range with stick bows, you soon learned how to get close. But, at the same time it was drilled into you to "aim for the vitals". Maybe these old masters (and occasional authors) like Bear, Pearson, Cardinale or Dougherty were onto something. Seems that when they shot their deer in the vitals using cedar arrows, the deer died fast. This should be a clue.

In my mind, any anatomy chart of a deer will show you that the single largest vital organ (besides the stomach) is the lungs. That bellows is what processes the oxygen that feeds the brain. Destroy those and the deer cannot live long because the brain is starved for oxygen. It is the largest vital organ to aim at and gives a lot of leeway in the event of a shot that does not go precisely on call. Recovery distances are

generally short (within 100 yards). That is the most humane spot to aim at and will produce the desired result.

Have I aimed at the brain? Yes, for urban deer under strictly controlled conditions (deer head down while they feed at a bait station, at very close distance). I have also employed it at inches from the rifle muzzle to finish deer that other people have wounded. Neck shots...not ever and under any circumstances. When hunting?? Always dead center in the lungs. With a rifle, muzzleloader or shotgun, I simply imagine the deer lungs as being a 3 dimensional object (which they are) and aim so that my bullet intersects absolutely dead center in them. In 50 years, it has never failed me, not one single time.



Grant is a former archery/hunting/shooting industry sales rep, former member of the US/NRA long-range shooting team, has held High-Master classifications in 3 NRA Highpower disciplines, is Distinguished Rifleman #1180, has won multiple NRA state/Midwest long-range rifle championships and holds the WI/NRA state long-range record since 2002. Has been actively hunting medium/large game for over 50 years and with muzzleloader since 1972.