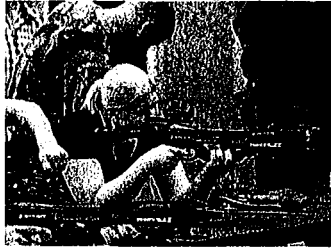


# Crossbow increasing in popularity as deer season approaches

Gary Garth 7:03 p.m. EDT September 27, 2015



(Photo: Photo courtesy of Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife)

Kentucky's crossbow deer season opens Oct. 1, which is good news for the handful of hunters dedicated to using the ancient weapons.

It's a relatively small group. Last year Kentucky's crossbow fraternity tagged 2,962 deer, including 69 taken from Jefferson County. That was about two percent of the 138,899 deer checked overall during the 2014-15 campaign.

Modern gun hunters account for the most deer, of course, last year sacking 102,893. Traditional archers bagged 18,369, and muzzleloader hunters accounted for 14,675.

It isn't that crossbows, which are looked upon with disdain by some traditional archers, aren't effective. They can be lethal in the hands of a skilled hunter. They just aren't widely popular.

That might change. This year Kentucky hunters age 65 and older are allowed to use crossbows during the entire September to January archery season. And there has been talk of expanding the crossbow user window for young hunters, which would be fine with Bryce Wallace.

Wallace is the crossbow technician at the Cabela's retail store at 5100 Norton Healthcare Blvd. He advises customers on the array of crossbows available and helps set them up for anyone who buys one.

"There's starting to be a lot more people interested in crossbows," he said. "They are not quite as popular with the young hunters as they are with older hunters."

The crossbow — essentially a horizontal arch platform from which a bolt (arrow) held under tension is released by way of a mechanical device — was originally a weapon of war that by some reports traces its history to the fifth century, although no one knows for sure.

Today's modern hunting crossbows are compact, lightweight, dependable, easy to use and fun to shoot. Entry-level x-bows start at around \$300 and can generate a bolt velocity of more than 300 feet per second.

Jamie Cook is a conservation educator for the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources. The bulk of his work focuses on hunter education, which is open to all and mandatory to those born on or after Jan. 1, 1975.

It's also a venue that focuses on youth. Cook zeros in on a specific youth group – although not one typically targeted for hunter recruitment.

College students?

"They're willing to try new things," Cook said. "They are generally willing to get involved, and they are already part of a strong social network on a university campus."

It's called the Hunter's Legacy program, and if you've never heard of it, you are not alone. There's no website, no regular news announcements, no hype. The reason, Cook says, is practical: He has limited personnel and resources available, but he occasionally visits college campus to seek out hunters and potential hunters.

Murray State, Eastern Kentucky and Morehead State are currently involved in the program, and Western Kentucky is scheduled to join in 2016. Eastern and Morehead program participants have crossbow hunts slated next month. The Murray State group has planned a muzzleloader hunt this year, after participating in crossbow hunts the previous two seasons.

"I basically let them know that I would be willing to come out, get them hunter (education) certified, get them trained properly and put them out on public land," Cook said. "There are no special privileges — it's land open to anyone — but they will get the use of one of our camps. So they can come in for the weekend and basically have a mentor hunt."

That's where the crossbows come in.

These hunts are typically in October, during the early crossbow season. They usually include 5-10 hunters. Cook's office supplies crossbows for the hunters.

"Crossbows fit, season-wise," he said. "It gives us three weekends to do these hunts. And it's a nice tool for newer hunters to be able to use and still experience a form of archery hunting."

For more information about the Hunter's Legacy Program, contact Cook at (502) 330-6305 (cq).

Kentucky's deer crossbow season is Oct. 1-18 and Nov. 14-Dec. 31 in all zones. Archery season is currently open through Jan. 18. The youth-only gun hunt for ages 15 and younger will be Oct. 10-11. Muzzleloader deer season is Oct. 17-18 and Dec. 12-20. The modern gun hunt is Nov. 14-29 in zones 1 and 2 and Nov. 14-23 in zones 3 and 4. Special regulations apply to some areas.

For more information check the current hunting and trapping guide or go to [www.fw.ky.gov](http://www.fw.ky.gov).