

## **Buck Fever** *The Psychology of Hunting*

Some outstanding target archers lose it all when they go hunting. When that big buck steps out of the swamp at 20 yards, target shooters who can drill dimes at that distance on a range will miss a live deer by a mile. Buck fever is like target panic because it is performance anxiety, but it is definitely different because the target is alive.

Here again, personality types will influence bowhunting success. Logical-mathematic types who are drawn to sight shooting may experience anxiety if they can't accurately judge distance. Those who are used to a fairly cool, mechanical style of target shooting will lose it on wild game because they can't control the target, let alone the distance or the conditions under which a shot takes place. But there are often other reasons why buck fever may strike those who do not suffer from target panic.

Every ethical bow hunter should study the anatomy of his target and develop X-ray vision to know where to shoot, or not to shoot, to make an effective, lethal shot in the vital heart-lung kill zone from above in a tree stand, quartering away, or broadside. One of the most common reasons that people miss is by forgetting about that kill zone spot and shooting at the whole deer. Regardless of your learning style, all archers are aiming at a target. If you keep the kill zone spot always in mind when you see a deer, it will help you focus on when and where to take your shot.

Buck fever may also be associated with feelings about killing an animal. A deer shot with a bow dies of hemorrhaging. A shot to the heart-lung kill zone will generally result in a deer traveling less than 50 yards and dying very quietly in 30 seconds or less. Keeping that kill zone spot always in mind will provide a mental anchor to reduce distraction, and offer an assurance that if you hit the spot, you will be successful.

Some of the deepest human emotions are touched in hunting. Some people feel closest to God while hunting. Feelings of sadness, even guilt, are quite possible if you kill a deer. If you deny those feelings, chances are they will eventually influence your marksmanship, or result in your dropping away from hunting.

To quit hunting is fine, so long as you really want to quit and are not quitting because you can't deal with the feelings that it brings up. If you quit but really want to keep hunting, you may become bitter.

If you look historically, hunting has deep roots with culture and religion to acknowledge the profound experiences that can occur when the spirit of the hunt runs hard and fast. Most religions have special ethical teachings and guidance about hunting ethics. Many have special prayers, ceremonies and rituals to honor the animals. From the earliest days, man hunted as a means of survival. Scriptures are replete with references to prophets who have hunted with the bow and arrow.

Regardless of your beliefs, the deep feelings stirred by the hunt ultimately move hunters to become conservationists because they come to cherish and respect the animals whose lives they take. This is not paying off guilt, but showing reverence for life.

You may not want to hunt, and that is just fine. But if the spirit of the hunt calls you, know that

major psychological theorists of the 20th century - Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Erik Fromm, Karl Menninger, William James, Marie-Louise von Franz, etc. - are in agreement that hunting is instinctual in man. We know this to be true from our dreams, for the symbols of bears, cats, and birds of prey that may appear in the dreamtime are the archetypal images of the hunter. Hunting, especially bowhunting, may be so much a sport, but a ritual for acknowledging one's roots in the history of the world. Modern hunters do not hunt so much for food for the table as nourishment for the soul. That makes hunters appreciate nature, feel humble and become more conservation oriented.