

After the Hit

One of the biggest reasons why many animals are not recovered after being shot is that all too often bowhunters take up the trail too soon, simply bumping the animal away never to be found again. What you do following the shot can make or break a successful recovery.

When mortality wounded, 90% of deer will bed within 250 yards of the shot. If an animal dies beyond this most likely some outside factor pushed the animal. Think about all of the animals you've taken, found or lost. You've probably found at least one if not multiple beds within this distance.

One hunter know that he had placed his arrow too far back on the buck.. As soon as he saw the arrow hit further back than he wanted, he knew immediately not to take up the track until at least 6 hours later. He shot this animal at 7:30 am and returned to the area at 3:30pm and found the buck not 50 yards inside a woods at the last point he saw him. Had he not waited, there is a very good chance that he wouldn't have found him.

Binoculars are invaluable for archers not only to glass an animal post shot, but to watch for his movement once he moves off. Quite often we as hunters get caught up in the heat of the moment and become unsure of our arrow's point of impact. A good set of binoculars and some quick thinking can help you verify your shot placement and help you formulate the proper game plan for recovering your animal.

The following is a list of several tips that are invaluable for bowhunters to use when deciding what to do both before and after the shot.

- Use bright fletch. You need to be able to see your arrow in flight, in the animal, and on the ground afterward. Dark arrows don't do you any good if you can't see them. If bright fletchings aren't enough, try using lighted arrow nocks for better visibility in low light conditions.
- Binoculars - use them post shot! They may be the most important tool you have after the shot.
- Watch the animal after the shot. Quite often an animal's body movement will help indicate to you what type of shot you got. An animal that jumps straight in the air and bounds off out of sight is most likely mortally wounded and will not travel far. However, if the animal hunches up and walks off or moves off slowly there is a good chance the hit was too far back and you need to wait at least 6 hours before taking up the trail.

"I hit him, now what?"

Here are 7 surefire steps towards recovering your animal safely and securely:

1. Unless you witness a double lung pass through, let an animal go for a couple hours rather than the common misconception of half hour wait. Too many times a half hour isn't enough. The only shots that put an animal down quickly are double lung hits and heart shots. If you don't see your animal fall within site, your best bet is to wait it out.
2. If you are not 100% sure of your hit, simply put.... wait!!! The animal isn't going to go anywhere, he's dead, why hurry? Sit back, collect your thoughts, replay the shot, the hit, and where the animal went. Also, this gives you a chance to listen and relax. If your

arrow was a pass thru, get down and get the arrow and study it and wait. Mark the direction but don't pursue, if you wait, he'll be there or he'll live another day.

3. If you think it's a single lung hit because of angle, wait at least 4 hours. This includes shots that are just under the spine and because of the angle you might have caught the second lung but missed the first. Wait and let him expire. Many people believe in "the void" which they claim is an area between a deer's lungs and spine where no vital organs reside. This is a myth - if you place an arrow under the spine, you will catch at least one lung.
4. If you think you caught the liver wait and the animal will bleed out. Wait at least 4 hours to take up the trail - the animal will not go anywhere if given the chance to expire. Jump him and he may go forever.
5. If you catch the guts only, you're in for at least a 6 hour minimum wait with 8 hours being more preferable and overnight being the best case scenario. In case of rain or snow you should get down, find your arrow, find the blood trail, and wait for the next morning. If you know your property, you'll find him close.
6. Coyotes can and will give the location of your animal. If you're worried about them, get down, listen for them and move on them if you know they are on your animal. If they are there, your animal won't be so move on the coyotes and they may lead you to the animal.
7. Whether your shot hits lungs, liver, or guts the key to a successful recovery is to wait. The animal is going to die, just wait him out and your blood trail should be adequate a couple hours later.

Let's harvest and recover the animals we hit. We owe it to them, we owe it to each other, and we owe it to ourselves.