

Tree-stand deer accidents cause for alarm; pheasant season is under way

Three Michigan hunters have already died this fall in tree-stand related accidents.

A bear hunter in Schoolcraft County fell to his death on Sept. 26 while hunting from a climbing tree-stand. Officials surmise the hunter leaned over too far to one side after shooting a bear and fell out of his stand.

During the Sept. 28-29 special youth deer hunt, an unsupervised 12-year-old boy was killed when he dropped a loaded rifle while descending from a tree-stand. The rifle discharged upon hitting the ground and

the youngster was hit and killed by the bullet. State law requires youth hunters to be accompanied by an adult or guardian at all times during this special season.

Then, on opening day of the archery deer season, another hunter fell to his death, this time in Jackson County. Officials report that the hunter's safety strap apparently broke during the fall and he plunged some 20

feet to his death.

These three preventable tragedies illustrate the need for hunters to follow the rules and to take safety precautions.

STAND TIPS

- Before purchasing a tree-stand be sure it is right for you. Is the platform big enough so that you feel comfortable? Are there any weight limitations?

Most tree-stands have weight restrictions. If your stand is rated for a maximum load of 250 pounds, as many are, and you weigh 225, buy a higher-rated stand. Don't push the limit. Remember, you'll gain a few pounds when you put on your hunting clothing and strap on your gear, especially as the season progresses and the weather gets colder.

- Check your tree-stand and safety harness for wear and tear. Check all the stress points and moveable parts and replace any worn equipment immediately.
- Always wear a safety strap or safety harness. The harness-type setup is by far the best. Unlike a safety strap, which holds all your weight over a small area, a harness distributes your weight to several points. With a harness-type system your odds of internal injury from a fall that is broken by the harness is drastically reduced.
- Be sure the safety strap/harness you choose will not restrict your breathing if you do fall. If possible, choose one with a quick release system.
- Always use a haul rope to raise and lower your gun or bow from a tree.
- Always unload your gun when raising or lowering it from a tree-stand.
- Be extra alert when climbing up and down from a tree stand. This is when most accidents occur.
- Avoid hunting from a tree-stand if you are overly tired or on medication.
- Never hunt while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Always let someone know where you are hunting and an approximate time you will return.

All of these safety precautions are basic common sense, but, as most hunters will admit, we sometimes throw caution to the wind when pursuing the wily whitetail. That's something we just can't afford to do. Take the time to keep yourself safe.

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PHEASANT SEASON ON TAP

As I sit in my home office writing this column, my springer/German shorthair hunting buddy, Scooby, is intensely watching me with his soft hazel eyes. His ears are on alert as he studies my every move. It's past 6 p.m. and Scooby knows it's time to go for a run. We've been practicing our routine for the past couple months in anticipation of the Oct. 20 pheasant opener.

Bird numbers in Michigan are certainly not what they once were when Michigan hunters annually killed around a million roosters. However, some quality hunting can still be had, especially here in southern Michigan.

Good hunting can be found in Tuscola, Huron and Sanilac counties, but public lands there gets hammered on weekends. Mid-week and light hunter pressure are usually synonymous with each other.

Jackson, Washtenaw, Livingston, Ingham and Shiawassee counties should also provide pockets of birds.

Don't be afraid to knock on a few doors if you see some good-looking grassy habitat like switch grass or sorghum. Many farmers are more receptive to pheasant hunting than deer hunting because pheasant hunters are usually in and out in a few hours, rather than several weeks, or even months, for deer hunters.

It will take a little work to locate prime areas for birds, but my newest hunting partner, my 12-year-old daughter Kayleigh, Scooby and I will be out there stomping the brush until the regular season ends on Nov. 14.

Hope to see you in the field.

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(Bill Parker covers the outdoors for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. Hunters and anglers are urged to report their success. Questions and comments are also encouraged. Send information to: Bill Parker, c/o Outdoors, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009)