

# Illinois Wheelin' Sportsmen Held First Archery Deer Hunt

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On Saturday, November 6th, the Illinois Wheelin' Sportsmen held it's first archery deer hunt in Godfrey, IL. We were graciously invited to hunt the John M. Olin Nature Preserve by Mark Maggos, President of the Board of Directors, and John Sommerhoff, Executive Director of The Nature Institute. The John M. Olin Preserve is a 293 acre property contains steep limestone bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River, sink holes, ravines, bedrock outcrops, small streams, a waterfall, upland forest and loess hill prairie. John M. Olin's presence is still felt on the property at the skeet shooting area. Here the original trap houses, shooting platforms and stonewall have been maintained by The Nature Institute. Sitting 150 feet above the river valley, the skeet range offers visitors a

spectacular view of the Mississippi River Valley. The Nature Institute runs summer camps and an educational series for kids pre-K through 6th grade. The Talahi Lodge (pictured right) acts as the main educational venue for TNI, and today it acted as our meeting area prior to our hunt.

Kent Adams, Regional Biologist for the NWTF, and I guided our two lucky hunters on this event. The TNI staff had set up Double Bull ground blinds for our hunters in the weeks prior to our hunt. Kent and Randy Green were located at "the wash house", which is an old barn in the middle of the tall grass prairie on the property. Shooting lanes had been mowed as it would be impossible to get off an effective archery shot through the dense grass stand. Kent and Randy settled into their ground blinds 30 minutes prior to legal shooting time on a very chilly November morning. They were rewarded for braving the cold almost instantly upon the sun rising. It was very evident the rut was in full swing as they had close encounters with many bucks chasing does throughout the prairie. A little later in the morning, Kent heard a buck snort-wheeze directly behind them. As he turned they found a buck Randy described as the "biggest deer I've ever seen", standing less than 40 yards away! The heavy horned 14 pointer and his running mate ignored Kent's calling attempts and stayed just out of range for a shot. After breaking for lunch, Randy decided to try out his new buck decoy, thinking that may be the extra motivation these bucks needed to come within bow range.



That evening, the guys heard a buck chasing a doe grunting and heading towards their location. Once the buck caught site of the decoy, he suddenly became agitated and abandoned his doe. The bucks hair bristled on his neck and he walked almost sideways very aggressively toward the decoy. Randy was able to get off a shot at the mature buck at 25 yards, but the loud crossbow caused the buck to "duck the string" and Randy's arrow sailed just over the buck's back.

Dick Miller and I were sent to a ground blind in an area known as "the sink hole". This property is riddled with these large sink holes as over the millions of years, water has found the cracks in the limestone bluffs creating these sink holes. They look like crater holes in the middle of the timber. Our blind was located on a small saddle between two of these sink holes, one of which held the only water on the property. As soon as we could see, Dick and I heard the unmistakable sounds of deer walking through the dry leaves behind us. Five does were being pushed by a small buck in our direction. Due to the vortex created by the sink holes, the wind was in a constant swirl around our location. Once the deer got to within 40 yards, they were able to catch just enough of our scent to become nervous and leave. Over the morning, Dick and I had close encounters with three beautiful bucks and several does, but no shots. As we broke for lunch, we discussed moving the blind to the opposing hillside, where the majority of the bucks had gone, but eventually I decided against this idea. In the end, this was my fatal mistake for the day as that evening Dick and I watched multiple deer walk the same route as in the morning. The evening was made even more entertaining by watching multiple wood ducks maple leaf into the sink hole holding water next to us. After hitting the water, the wood ducks walked in a single file line right in front of our blind to feed around a pin oak tree, then splash back into the water after having their fill.

Although we did not come home with any deer meat, the day spent in the woods of the John M. Olin Nature Preserve will be etched into all of our memories for years to come. All together, we estimated the two groups saw 12 different bucks and numerous does. It was an amazing morning on a beautiful property. Thank you John and Mark for the invitation, and thank you Kent for helping me guide. I would also like to thank my parents Martha and Allan for providing us an awesome lunch of chili and cookies! I look forward to this hunt again next year. Good luck to you all this fall!

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