

PREPARE WELL,
AVOID SOME
COMMON MISTAKES

By Gabe Jenkins



TEN TIPS FOR ARCHERY ELK HUNTERS

KENTUCKY'S ARCHERY-ONLY elk hunting permits have proven popular among hunting enthusiasts across the country. This year, Kentucky received more than 16,000 applications for its 355 archery permits in the quota elk hunts.

This is the second year in a row that Kentucky has offered archery-only permits for a bull or a cow elk.

Archery hunting is a challenging way to take an elk. In Kentucky, the odds of success are outstanding: Approximately 45 percent of archery hunters took their elk last season.

Once you've won your permit, the real work begins. A successful hunt takes preparation and the right equipment. Read on for *Kentucky Afield's* 10 tips for archery elk hunters.

1 ELK HUNTING UNIT (EHU) SELECTION

If you're drawn for an elk permit, you have approximately two months to decide where you want to hunt. Kentucky's elk zone is divided into Elk Hunting Units, or EHUs. The EHU selection for this season has already been done.

You'll need to decide whether you want to hire a guide or do it yourself. Take some time to educate yourself if you're doing your own hunt. Visit the website of the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources at fw.ky.gov to learn more about elk hunting. Watch some of "Kentucky Afield" television's elk hunting segments on YouTube, review the elk harvest results, browse the elk pages and study the department's maps of wildlife management areas (WMAs).

If you want to hire a guide, do your homework and ask some essential questions: Which units do they guide in? What kind of access do they have? What experience do they have guiding archery hunters? What services – such as field dressing, meals or transportation – are included with the fee?

Finally, ask the guide for references from previous hunters, then check those references.

Ask yourself these questions if you are hunting without a guide and need help selecting an EHU: Do you have any family or friends who live in the elk zone? Do they have access to elk hunting property or know someone who does?

Do you know anybody who has previously

hunted elk in Kentucky? If so, take advantage and ask for any guidance or help that they might have. Do you want to camp or stay in a motel? Those are important questions to consider prior to applying for your EHU.

2 SCOUTING

Once you know what EHU you will be hunting, take one or more mid-summer trips to familiarize yourself with the hunting area. Don't spend too much time scouting prior to mid-August, because elk likely will be using a different area in September and October. However, once it's September, scout as much as possible especially if you have a bull permit. The archery-only bull season is Sept. 15 – Oct.

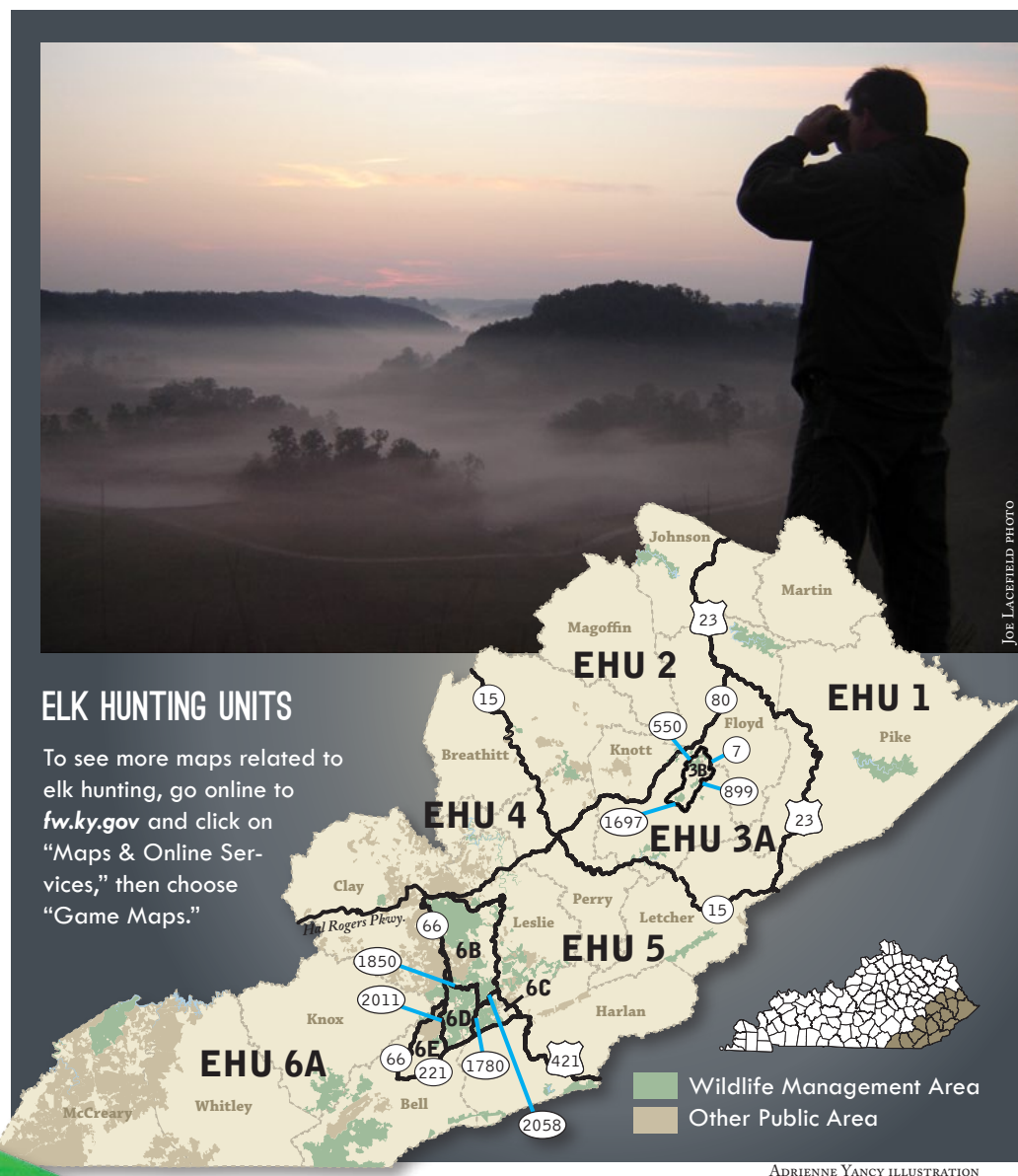
5 in 2012, with the either sex elk archery season opening Oct. 20.

The first bull elk firearms season opens Oct. 6, so bowhunters have an early advantage.

Take a good road map and print off the WMA maps of the areas you plan to hunt. Bring a pen and notebook to take notes. Record where you see elk and how many you see. The more time and effort you spend scouting, the better chance you will have at taking an elk.

3 GEAR

You may have to haul your elk out of a deep hollow or an inaccessible ridge; prepare for whatever your hunt may hold by bringing along some essential gear.



ELK HUNTING UNITS

To see more maps related to elk hunting, go online to fw.ky.gov and click on "Maps & Online Services," then choose "Game Maps."

Wildlife Management Area
Other Public Area

ADRIENNE YANCY ILLUSTRATION



HAYLEY LYNCH PHOTO

Start with a good heavy-duty pack to carry out the elk meat. It should be stocked with big game meat bags – available at your local sporting goods store – or cheese cloth to wrap around the meat. This will help keep the meat cool and protect it from flies.

A small tarp is useful to lay the meat on while you are field dressing the animal. If you have to make multiple trips getting the meat out, find a shaded area and hang the meat in a tree. The quicker you can get the animal skinned and quartered, the better the chances of not spoiling any meat.

A good sharp knife and bone saw are essential. An elk's hide is so tough that it will dull your knife's blade quickly. Pack several good knives for your hunt or bring a sharpener so that you can touch up the blade when needed during the field dressing process.

Finally, nothing is worse than sore feet and blisters on a hunt. A good pair of broken-in waterproof hiking boots can make or break your hunt. Your deer hunting boots

will usually be too heavy or too hot. A light pair of comfortable waterproof hiking boots is an excellent choice for the early season.

4 ARCHERY SETUP

Your bow setup is critical. A bow used for deer hunting will work fine for the majority of archery elk hunters. However, with such a variety of broadheads, arrows and bow types on the market today, consider tweaking your setup for the maximum advantage.

Heavier broadheads are best suited for elk hunting; the most popular weight is 100 grains. Any brand name fixed blade broadhead is a good choice. Be sure your bow is tuned properly and can accurately shoot a fixed blade broadhead.

If you decide to go with an expandable broadhead, read reviews and talk to other hunters who have killed an elk with a bow. There are many expandable broadheads on the market – and not all are good choices for elk hunting.

Your total arrow weight and bow poundage are also important. In today's bow world, many hunters are opting for lighter arrows to produce more speed. This is an advantage for taking fast animals such as pronghorn and white-tailed deer.

However, elk present a larger, slower target. You need more kinetic energy – or knockdown power – than required for deer to bring a bull or cow elk to the ground. You can increase the kinetic energy of your setup by using a mid-weight or heavy arrow matched with a heavier broadhead.

It is also important to consider your bow's poundage. Try to pull as much weight as you can while maintaining good form. You should be comfortable holding the bow

at full draw for several seconds. Don't crank your bow past its recommended poundage, however.

Dial your bow back down if you are pulling too much weight. Proper form is more important than poundage in taking a good shot. A properly placed shot is more important for getting a clean kill than arrow weight, broadhead type and speed.

5 PRACTICE

Practice, practice, practice! Elk hunting can put you in shooting situations that you've never encountered while deer hunting. Be prepared. Practice how you plan to hunt, whether it's stalking, from a blind or in a tree stand. Practice while you're on your knees. Shoot uphill and downhill at steep angles. Sit and shoot. The more situations you can practice, the better. The most common mistake archery elk hunters make is not enough practice in a variety of positions.

6 SHOT DISTANCE

Judging your shot distance is essential. Elk are large animals and their size can cause you to misjudge your yardage. Also, the open areas that elk roam can play havoc on your yardage estimates. The solution? Visit your local sporting goods store and pick up a range finder to help judge your distance.

Your shot at an elk will likely be made at 40 yards or less. Practice the most at those distances. Also try shooting from beyond 40 yards to better hone your skills. Even if you are not comfortable shooting an animal at those distances, practicing at longer distances will make you a better archer. Practice helps you learn how far you can comfortably shoot; don't exceed that limit in the field.

7 SHOT PLACEMENT

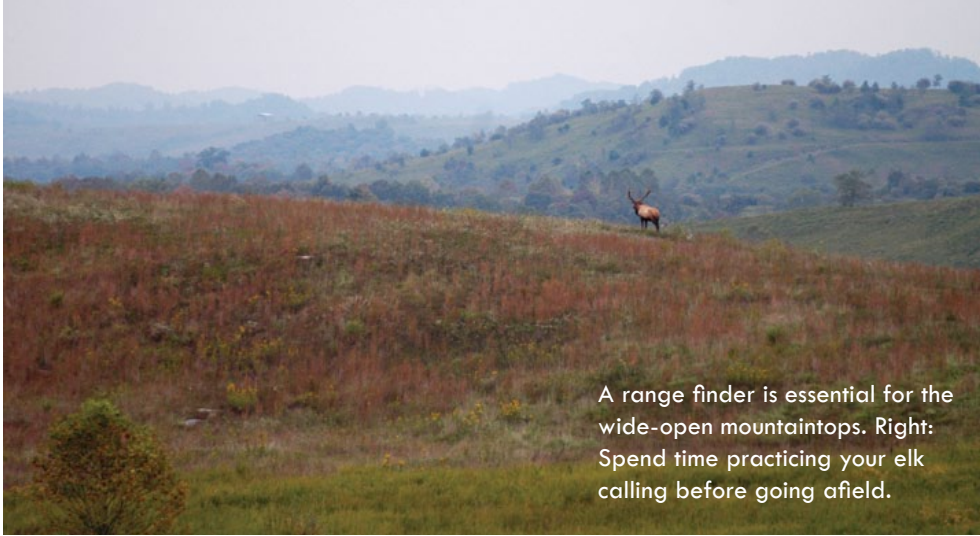
A common mistake hunters make is thinking that elk are so big that you just need to hit them to bring them down. However, shot placement is essential no matter what you are hunting.

Some of the shots that you might take on white-tailed deer are bad shots on elk. Never take a



Practice shooting from a variety of positions to help simulate hunting conditions.

JOE LACEFIELD PHOTO



A range finder is essential for the wide-open mountaintops. Right: Spend time practicing your elk calling before going afield.

HAYLEY LYNCH PHOTO



DAVE BAKER PHOTO

full-frontal shot or a strong quartering-to-you shot. An elk has a large scapula bone that is extremely hard to penetrate with an arrow. Wait for the elk to turn and take a broadside or quartering-away shot.

Otherwise, good shot placement is the same for an elk as it is for a deer. Aim for the top of the lower third of the body, right behind the leg for a high heart, double-lung shot.

Seeing a bugling bull at 30 yards is exciting. It is easy to get rattled. Remember to breathe and relax. Take a deep breath, exhale and pick a spot. Don't just shoot at the elk.

After you have made the shot, give the elk plenty of time to expire. Wait at least 45 minutes to an hour before looking for the animal. If you think your shot was marginal, wait a couple of hours before searching for your elk. Your success in finding your elk depends on shot placement and the amount of time you give the animal to expire.

8 HUNTING STYLE

Be flexible in how you plan to hunt for your elk. Elk archery season runs from September through January and encompasses a variety of weather conditions.

Setting up a ground blind by a waterhole in the early fall can be an excellent tactic. Some hunters use tree stands to hunt

elk at pinch points or areas where elk are going in and out of the timber.

The most common style of elk hunting is the spot and stalk method. Pick a high spot, then use your binoculars to locate a herd of elk. Determine which way the animals are moving and plan a route to intercept them.

9 CALLING

Because elk hunters use a variety of calls to entice the animals to come within shooting range, many first-time elk hunters liken their experience to turkey hunting.

As with turkey hunting, it is possible to call too much. Most novice elk hunters over-use the bugle call. Imagine a bugle

call as a turkey gobble tube; use it only when you need to locate or challenge a bull. Use a cow call much like you would use a hen turkey call.

Many calls, such as a push-button call, are easy to use. Other calls, such as a latex mouth call, are trickier. Most calls come with directions. Spend time practicing your call and you will be ready for your hunt. Be flexible on when and how you use your calls. Remember that elk can become call shy – just like turkeys.

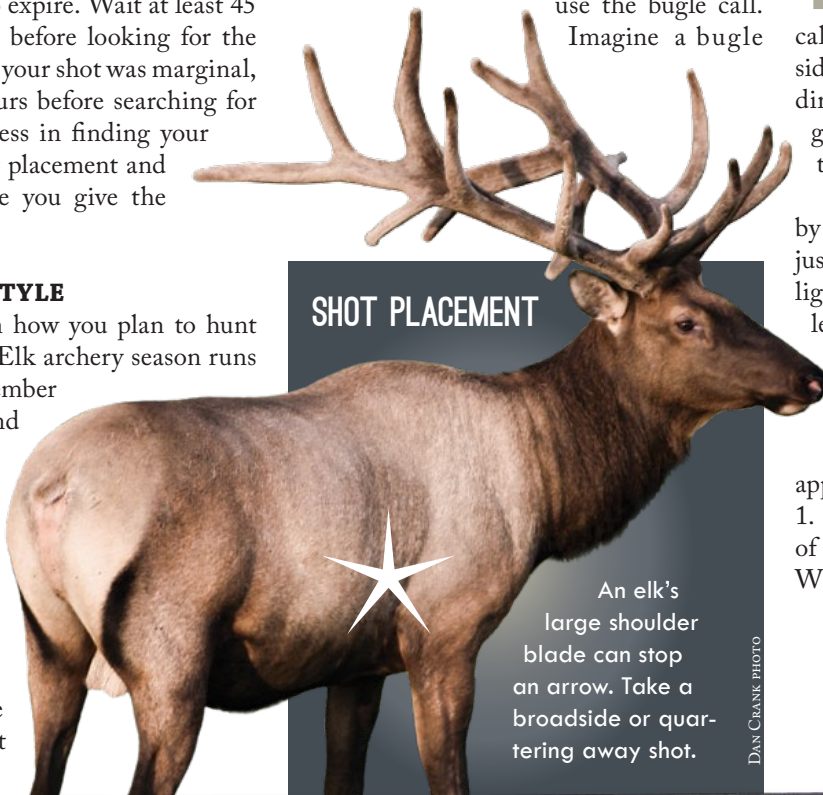
10 CALLER PLACEMENT AND DECOYS

Many elk hunters take a couple of friends on the hunt. If someone is calling for you, set them safely off to your side and have them call. Most elk will come directly to that call. Hunters will not have a good shooting angle if the caller stands by their side, however.

A decoy can be useful tool if you are by yourself or your animals are hanging up just out of shooting range. There are many lightweight packable decoys that are excellent tools for a spot and stalk hunt. Set them opposite you in a visible place and use them like you would a caller.

Although the deadline for the 2012 quota elk hunt has passed, you can apply for next season's hunts beginning Dec. 1. Apply online at fw.ky.gov, the website of the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources. ■

SHOT PLACEMENT



An elk's large shoulder blade can stop an arrow. Take a broadside or quartering away shot.

DAN CRANK PHOTO

Expandable broadhead

Fixed blade broadhead