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CROSSBOW HUNTING IN

IOWA A BEGINNER'S TUTORIAL

BY SEAN WULLER

FOR THE first time ever Iowa hunters will have the opportunity to use a crossbow to harvest deer this late muzzleloader season. Unlike years past only disabled and handicap hunters were able to use a crossbow if they had consent from the DNR. Throwing the debate aside for this article, as some see the crossbow as an unfair advantage, this will be an introduction on familiarizing yourself and hunting with a crossbow.

Crossbows date back to China around the 5th Century BC, some would state that they were used even prior to this, and have been used ever since. One of the main reasons that in earlier times crossbows were preferred in lieu of their predecessors, long or re-curve bows, was that within a week, a person could be shown how to operate & shoot a crossbow with better accuracy than that of a longbow, in which their skills were honed over years of practice. Albeit crossbows of that era had less penetration and covered less of a distance, the ease of use is what turned the times for army's and forces to come even through modern day wars.

The use of crossbows today has taken a once dated defense mechanism, and turned it into an accurate and ethical way of harvesting wild game for all persons with the proper training. The recent outbreak of crossbow manufacturers around the globe all date back to the original design of the crossbow which was a laminated "so to say" recurve limb design strung with a high tensile bow string, cocked and loaded with an arrow. I have had the privilege of getting my father into the sport of hunting

over the past few years, and as of last year, a crossbow hunter. When deciding what crossbow to buy him, I researched ease of use, weight, moving parts, etc. and came up with the Excalibur Brand due to its simplistic design of the recurve limb platform as well as the new compact recurve limb design. The recurve style of crossbow still delivers amazing speed & knock down power, while keeping accuracy its main focus. It is also very simple to work on if need be, or when replacing strings, taking the bow apart for travel, etc. Nevertheless the important thing to do is find a crossbow that fits your needs and budget. I could get into all the technical jargon, but that really doesn't do a whole lot of good. Research as much as possible and ask to shoot as many crossbows as you can. Let the feel and comfort of the crossbow be your deciding factor. Once you have your crossbow of choice there are some things that will help you along your way to being successful in the field.

• **Becoming familiar with using your crossbow:** As most persons will attest, reading all of the instructions is just a pain

in the rear, but I will tell you, they can save you down the road. Make sure that you read and review all information in your startup manuals provided by your manufacturer, there is a lot of good information in there that can keep your crossbow working for years to come. Make sure that even before firing your crossbow for the very first time, that you have gone through the checklist on how to operate your crossbow in any given situation. Ensure you are using the correct bolts/arrows & broadheads recommended by your manufacturer prior to firing your crossbow for the first time as well. Keeping your crossbow clean, oiled & lubed as well as regular string maintenance will keep you in the field, and should be reviewed after every time you use your crossbow as a preventative measure.

In order to give you a better understanding of the crossbow mechanics, you need to know the anatomy of a crossbow if you've never used one before:

A). Limb assembly: This model, Excalibur 405, depicts a recurve limb assembly mounted to the rail and stock assembly.

B). Foot stirrup: This is attached to the



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■ Crossbow Hunting In Iowa



limb assembly and used while cocking the crossbow by putting your foot into the stirrup to create the down force pressure needed to pull the string into the firing position on the rail.

C). Butt stock: As with firearms, making sure that this is positioned into your shoulder properly will result in proper firing technique. The addition of a butt stock pad can be used to help with proper positioning but is not needed due to recoil.

D). Scope mount & scope: This model comes with a scope that mounts to the rail & stock assembly, and gives you yardage indicators for proper sighting in of the unit.

E). Pistol Grip and trigger assembly: This is the firing mechanism for the crossbow. The safety mechanism is above it behind the rail assembly.

F). Bolt Quiver: This model comes with a bolt on offset bolt quiver to hold your hunting bolts below the crossbow for easy access.

G). String: This model, again utilizes the recurve limb and string assembly.

H). Cocking Aid: This nifty device allows you to rapidly and accurately cock your crossbow, as well as de-cock your device once finished with it unless you are using a de-cocking target.

• Practicing with your crossbow: Depending on where you hunt and how you hunt will determine on how you practice with your crossbow. Make sure that when you sight in and practice shooting your crossbow, you are using the same shooting position and equipment that you will use while hunting. This step is key in being successful & safe while hunting with your crossbow. Let's say you are mostly a ground blind hunter, it would be beneficial that you practice and sight in using a ground blind as well as the same chair that you will be sitting in. You may also want to use a steady stick, or trigger stick to support your crossbow in the field. Making sure that you practice how you hunt will ensure your time in the field is well spent. This will also allow you to see how much clearance room you have in the blind or stand as not to have your limbs hitting anything that could affect the shot and or operation of the crossbow.

I recommend that you only shoot broad heads during the sighting in process, and that you are using a crossbow target that can withstand the use of broad heads over and over. This will lead to that dead on accuracy in the field.

• Here are a few items that I recommend using with your crossbow:

- Rinehart xbow 2 go crossbow target.
- Excalibur arrow puller.
- Primos Trigger Stick Bi-Pod.

• Know your range of accuracy:

As with any hunting arm that you use, practicing & knowing your range of accuracy will increase your chances of taking an animal with an ethical shot. Most crossbows today can launch arrows 500 yards or more depending on the FPS, yet accuracy and knock down power falter past 80 yards. Honesty most shots will with a crossbow will be 40 yards and under. That being said, knowing your location and where the animals frequently pass will help you decide what your range should be. You should always practice shooting your crossbow, as mentioned before, in as close to the same position as you would while hunting. This not only insures that your physical mechanics are the same, but also that your mental mechanics can make slight adjustments in a split second. As with rifle/gun or archery hunting, shooting your crossbow with all the accessories you will use hunting on it while practicing will keep you accurate down the range. I recommend sighting your crossbow in out until the point of failure, same as with a compound bow. As I start to sight in, I start at 20 and work my way out until my groups are not what I would call "accurate". Once I find my non-accurate zone, I work backwards until I find my longest accurate range that I feel comfortable shooting. Over time this range may increase or decrease depending on shooters ability, but it gives you a good comfort zone as to where you feel you can harvest an animal within. Once this range is known, it's good to go and scout out your hunting location and make mental and physical indicators that you can refer



to while in the field as to where your range starts and or stops. The use of a range finder with help with this during sighting in and or hunting, but knowing your range and those boundaries without the use of this equipment will help you in the heat of the moment.

• **Setting up your hunting location:**

Whether you will be hunting from a tree stand, ground blind, elevated enclosed tower blind, or your favorite ground & pound ambush location, you need to make sure that you know what your immediate surroundings and clearances are, and what you need to be successful in the firing of your crossbow. The firing of the crossbow typically involves the movement of either the limbs and or the cams, depending on your device. With the Excalibur brand of crossbows, the limbs, once fired will propel the bolt down the firing rail, during this the limbs will extend back out to the un-cocked position. The width of your limbs at the resting position (un-cocked) should be verified prior to hunting out of any location. Doing this will make sure that once fired, your limbs will not hit anything during the process, which could ultimately affect the shot and or cause harm to the end user or others. Keeping small branches, shooting rails, back packs, binoculars, shooting windows, and other persons out of the way of the limb travel will ensure a proper bolt release and safe operations of the crossbow.

• **Heading to the field:** When the time comes and you are ready to take your crossbow on its maiden hunting voyage, making sure that you have everything with you prior to starting the trek is important. Creating a simple mental or physical checklist that you can refer to will help you along the way. Cocking your crossbow prior to heading to the field, whether once you get out of your vehicle or you are leaving the lodge, will make sure you are ready on the way in, it will

also be much easier than in the field due to muddy or dark conditions. Keeping your bolts in the quiver until needed is recommended not only for your safety, but also for others around you. Carrying your crossbow in the down position at all times, unless ready to fire is just common sense and the safest way to get from point A to B. Once at your location, getting all of your gear to the stand or into the blind prior to bringing in your crossbow will help to minimize the risk of inadvertently dry-firing or affecting the limb & string assembly by hitting it on items. Once in the stand or blind, and having all of your other items in their place, getting your crossbow and or shooting sticks (recommended) in place and reviewing your clear space is a must. Making any slight adjustments to your shooting chair, rail and or other items prior to shooting your crossbow will help you be successful in the end. Enjoying the hunt, and the time spent in the field is the

RULES & REGULATIONS

Crossbows can only be used in the State of Iowa to harvest large game during the Archery season dates, as well as during the late muzzleloader season for all persons permitted due to handicap or unpermitted during the late muzzleloader season. Following all state regulations and having all permits and or licenses prior to hunting as outlined by the Iowa DNR is mandatory.

To Use A Crossbow in Iowa:

- In order to hunt with a crossbow in the state of Iowa, you must be handicap and have filed an application found at www.iowadnr.gov, allow up to 2 weeks for processing. Currently you can still submit the application for residents of the state of Iowa. In addition to having your approved crossbow permit, you must also be in possession of your Iowa hunting license, habitat stamp and either your deer or turkey permits in order to hunt & harvest the animals.
- New this year to the state of Iowa is the use of crossbows during the late muzzle loader season. This does "not" require an application, and is open to all persons.
- You may also use crossbows to harvest small game in the state of Iowa.

main goal, being safe and prepared is what gets you there.

I hope that this initial look into crossbow hunting can be of help to you or to those that you know who may be looking at using a crossbow for whatever reason for the first time this season. The addition of crossbow hunting to the state of Iowa, I feel will be a great aid to some of those that may not have the opportunity, or the physical means to use traditional archery equipment, thus, putting more qualified hunters into or back into the field, pursuing their passions as we do.

Keep Calm & Hunt On! 🏹

GENERAL CROSSBOW SAFETY INSTRUCTIONS PER EXCALIBUR CROSSBOWS:

- Always remember to treat your crossbow with the same respect given any sporting arm. It can be dangerous & deadly if mishandled.
- Always keep your crossbow pointed in a safe direction. Never point at people, property or anything you don't intend to shoot.
- Treat a cocked crossbow the same as a loaded gun, with or without an arrow loaded.
- Always place the trigger safety into the "safe" position before removing your foot from the stirrup when cocking.
- Never place anything or any part of your body in the path of the crossbows string when cocked, serious injury or death may occur.
- Before shooting always make sure nothing is in the path of either cocked crossbow limb.
- Never climb a tree stand with a crossbow loaded with an arrow. Do not pull a loaded crossbow up into a tree stand with a rope.
- Never attempt to cock or un-cock a crossbow in a tree stand while standing. Cock the crossbow on the ground and pull it up into the tree stand utilizing a pull rope.
- Do not place the safety into the "fire" position until you are ready to shoot.
- Do not attempt to modify the safety or trigger mechanism in any way. Doing so could be dangerous or deadly and will void manufacturer's warranty.
- Always check your crossbow thoroughly for worn, loose, damaged or missing parts prior to shooting. This will help avoid malfunctions and possible injury or death to you or someone else.

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