



# TWO DEER *in* TWO MINUTES

Dave Spier

By George Steele

Photos by Anita Sanchez (unless otherwise noted)

I hunt.

Some of the students and teachers I meet in my environmental education programs are surprised by this. But I don't try to hide it. When kids ask where'd I get that deer skin, or where'd I get the deer skull, I tell them I got it from a deer I hunted for food.

As an educator, the most important fact I share is that people are *a part of* nature, not *apart from* it. Eating a deer connects me to the land, plants, sunshine and water that make up my world. Eating that deer connects me to a food chain that I understand and experience firsthand. There are no feed lots or antibiotics, and no overcrowding or manure runoff hidden from view. It's just a wild deer walking through the woods that I am lucky enough to shoot.

Of course I "hunt" other things, too. Not to kill, but to observe and study. I agree with the famous biologist, E. O. Wilson, who said that we each have an innate desire to connect to the natural world. This is something I am able to fulfill when I hunt. In my outdoor exploration, I search for birds, wildflowers, insects, fungi; nothing is too small or insignificant. To me, nature study is one

marvelous hunt, a treasure hunt of wonder and mystery. I've even hunted ticks along a trail observing how they'd sit perched on the edge of grass stems waiting for their prey—me—to pass by.



When deer hunting, one's fortune can change quickly.

*New York State Conservationist, October 2013*

Many's the time while deer hunting I've done more bird watching than deer hunting. More often than not there aren't any deer to be seen. Not so with birds. Sitting in my deer stand I've seen: northern shrikes hunting from a tree limb; a great horned owl flying ahead of a friend on a deer drive; and black-capped chickadees landing on my tree stand, responding to my "spishing" sounds.

But I do go deer hunting hoping to get a deer. I'm not really looking for big antlers; I'm hunting for meat. In my family, venison is the primary red meat we eat. If my deer hunting is successful, we seldom buy beef.

This put me in somewhat of a bind last fall. In my experience, hunting requires some skill, but there's even more need for a little luck. I'd been unlucky in 2011, and the '12 season was shaping up to be a repeat. I was scheduled for shoulder surgery in the middle of the southern zone regular deer season, which would cut short my opportunity to get a deer.

The first weekend had looked so promising, but that's always the case. I think that might just be human nature. I don't know any deer hunter who goes into the woods thinking, "I'm not going

to get a deer." In fact, I did see a deer but it was too far off for me to get a shot. It had actually walked past another of my tree stands, leaving me to second guess my choice of where to set up. The next weekend, with my surgery only a few days away, I headed out for what would be my last Saturday of hunting.

I decided to use the other tree stand this time, fighting the urge to think that deer would now pass my first stand. On the way to my stand, I spotted a doe coming across the field on the other side of some thick brush. She was headed right toward me. When I spotted her, she stopped and looked right at me. I stood still. She wasn't alarmed and turned to her right to follow the hedge row, and disappeared behind some brush. As I waited for her to come back into view, I picked out a spot where I would have a good shot. Moments passed and she didn't appear.

I began to wonder if she might have turned around and gone back in the direction she had come from. In my impatience I chose to move slightly to get a better view into the field. As I did, I saw her standing out in the open, looking at me. I took aim and shot.

Nothing happened. I missed, but the doe didn't panic. She just turned slightly, giving me an even better angle, and my second shot hit the mark. She went down immediately, but made a noise. I thought, "Oh no, I've just wounded her. I'd better get up there." I reloaded and began my way into the hedgerow.

As I got to the hedgerow I looked up and saw a deer looking right at me. My first thought was, "Uh-oh, she's back up," but when I looked more closely, I realized it was a buck. It looked like a fine four-pointer. The buck was facing me at a slight angle, which is not ideal, but I was close, so I took aim and shot. He immediately went down. I made my way to where both deer lay dead; the doe about 20 feet from the buck. I had gotten two deer only moments apart. That's how deer hunting is sometimes: all or nothing. To top it off, the buck wasn't a fork-horn after all, but a nice seven-pointer.

My freezer is full of venison. My shoulder is repaired, healed and working again. And I'm still on the hunt. As a matter of fact, I just lead a night program hunting for beautiful large silk moths that can only be found flying on early summer nights.

You see, good hunts don't always end with something to eat.

Consulting environmental educator **George Steele** lives close to the land on his farm in rural Montgomery County.



An environmental educator, the author tanned his deer hides and cleaned the buck's skull for use in his programs.

