

Hunter Orange: a bright idea for hunters

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It's opening day and the rising sun is only a faint glow when the doe is spotted by the anxious hunter. He peers through his scope as the deer disappears into the brush 75 yards ahead, pausing only to look back over her shoulder as if being followed.

The hunter turns his head slowly to his left as he hears the movement of something easing through the brush. Surely it's the buck that the doe was looking back at. The hunter again raises his rifle and puts the crosshairs on an opening in the brush. The small opening offers his only shot, and it will have to be a quick one.

Slowly the grey form moves into the clearing, an indistinguishable hulk in the pre-dawn brush. The hunter's trigger finger inches backward, ever so slowly until . . . wait that's not a buck, it's a camo-clad hunter sneaking through the brush. He eases his finger off the trigger and his .270 back to his lap.

A cold chill grips him as he realizes how close he came to making his unannounced comrade an unfortunate statistic.

Hunting, by statistical measures, is a very safe sport. However, each year 5-to-10 Texans are seriously wounded or killed in a hunting accident.

Some accidents are unfortunate cases of mistaken identity. Hunters being mistaken for game can be completely avoided with two basic rules of hunting safety. First, positively identify the intended target. Never take 'sound shots.' Next, practice 'defensive hunting'. Wearing some item of blaze-orange clothing makes hunters easily identifiable to others. Blaze-orange clothing is a requirement only for those on public lands, but it's a good idea for anyone hunting, especially deer hunters during the gun season.

Wearing a blaze orange cap and/or vest is very cheap life insurance. We lose one or more hunters each year who probably would be alive today if they'd been wearing blaze-orange.

The high visibility fabric has been used for more than 30 years in many states, and all have witnessed a visible reduction in hunting accidents. Some hunters resist blaze- orange as a greater chance of being seen by deer.

We once thought that deer were color blind, and that they couldn't distinguish colors, only patterns. Today we know that deer do have limited color vision, but not to the degree that something like a wild turkey has.

The way most Texans hunt, from a blind or tripod stand, the deer's degree of color discernment is a moot issue. If nothing else, wear a blaze-orange cap and vest while traveling to and from your blind. It might mean the difference as to whether you have the chance to go hunting next year or not.

Quail hunters should always have a hunter orange vest or cap. In too many situations your buddy to the left or right of you forgets your position. In the excitement of a covey rise, you want to make sure you are highly visible.

There's absolutely no reason not to be wearing some hunter orange while quail hunting. Landowners need to make the requirement a clause in their quail hunting leases as a protection against liability. It's the kind of insurance we all can afford.