



To Catch a...Deer?

Capturing and marking deer for research

Catching a thief may, in fact, be easier than catching a white-tailed deer. But the Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC) regularly captures and marks deer for research. By marking deer, we can learn survival and harvest rates, identify mortality causes, and monitor deer populations. Since 2000, more than 4,000 white-tailed deer have been captured and marked throughout the Commonwealth for various research projects.

How are deer captured?

Deer are captured during winter using drop nets, rocket nets, and Clover traps. The PGC has used these capture methods for the last decade, and all have been approved by Pennsylvania State University's Animal Care and Use Committee.

Tampering with nets or traps is prohibited. Nets and traps are safe to animals and people when handled and operated by trained personnel.



A drop net set-up for deer capture.

Drop and rocket nets are used only when PGC personnel are present to trigger the net and handle any captured animals. Drop nets are 70ft x 70ft nets supported by 4 corner posts. It is dropped when deer are under the net. A rocket net is literally that, a net with rockets attached. Rockets carry the net into the air to capture deer under the net.



A rocket net set-up for deer capture.

Clover traps are a passive capture technique. Once the trap is set, it is unmanned. Deer enter the baited trap and hit a trip wire. A net door falls down capturing them in the trap. PGC personnel monitor set Clover traps daily, but a captured deer may have to wait a few hours to be processed.



Deer under a drop net.



Deer at a rocket net.



A Clover trap baited with corn.

Are deer drugged when captured?

Deer captured with drop and rocket nets are blindfolded and given a sedative to calm them down. This makes the capture process safer for the deer and PGC personnel. The drugs used will naturally clear the deer's system – including meat – after a month. Marked deer are safe to consume if harvested during hunting seasons.

If a tagged deer is killed by a vehicle and a citizen wishes to consume the deer, they should report the ear tag number when they call the Game Commission for a road kill permit.



Deer captured in a drop net.

How will deer be marked?

All deer will be marked with ear tags. Some deer will be marked with radio collars. Researchers use radio collars to track deer specific movements and survival.



Can marked deer be harvested?

Marked deer are legal for harvest by properly licensed hunters.

If I harvest or find a tagged deer, how do I report it?

All ear tags and radio collars are marked with a toll-free number, 1-877-778-3637 (1-877-PSU-DOES). If you find or harvest a tagged or radio-collared deer, please call the toll-free number to report where, when and under what circumstances you came across the marked animal.



For more information on deer and deer management in Pennsylvania, visit the Game Commission's website, www.pgc.state.pa.us