

Decoy Follies

by Scott_Staats

Two bucks stood very still in a small clearing of the ponderosa pine forest. The hunter raised his rifle, taking aim at the larger of the two deer and squeezed the trigger. At only 50 yards, it should have been an easy shot but neither deer flinched. After two more shots, his partner also fired twice with the same result. Something wasn't right with this situation.

Oregon State Troopers set up elk decoy to catch illegal hunters. Photo by Scott Staats. Actually several things were wrong. First off, the hunter shot from inside his truck and his partner shot while leaning against the windshield. As the Oregon State Police vehicle drove up behind them, the officer introduced both hunters to the state's decoy operation. In Oregon, it's illegal to shoot from a vehicle or a road.

Although there is a lot of humor involved with many decoy operations, game officials take the work very seriously. Their goal is to apprehend violators before they illegally take game animals. The stuffed animals have fooled many would-be poachers.

Following are some humorous decoy stories from Oregon troopers who enforce the state game laws.

A pickup truck came down a Forest Service road at a fairly good clip when the driver spotted a deer decoy, thinking it was the real thing. He slammed on the brakes, slid into the ditch and the truck ended up on its side. The man then popped out of the passenger side door, opening it like a hatch, and began shooting at the decoy.

While a man stood alongside his truck and shot twice at an elk decoy, his wife slid behind the wheel and drove off, leaving him standing in the middle of the road in his shirtsleeves. It was late afternoon on a cold November day. After officers stopped the woman, she said, "I told that SOB it was a decoy and not to shoot it." She said she was going back to camp without him, about a 15-mile drive. She finally agreed to wait there while her husband walked to her, about 1/2-mile away.

During bow season, troopers saw a truck with two passengers drive by the decoys, a man behind the wheel. When it turned around, a woman now drove and the man stood in back of the pickup. After shooting a few arrows from the truck, once with an illegal arrow, he received two citations. They got ready to leave and discovered they had locked the keys in the truck. The man took a good-sized rock and tried to throw it through the window but missed and put a huge dent in the door. He then smashed the window with the rock. The pickup was rented and the couple was on their honeymoon.

The day before archery season, a driver stopped and began launching arrows at a decoy. The first shot fell short, the second long and the third just right " in the center of the chest. The sound of the arrow hitting the decoy sounded like a hollow wooden box. When he realized it was a decoy, he threw the bow down and started running back to the truck. As the officers arrived the man said he wasn't shooting at the deer, but at a squirrel instead. After careful consideration the man decided the judge wouldn't buy that story and paid the fine. He told the troopers he planned on going to college to become a police officer.

Once an officer came upon a man shooting so intently at a decoy that he had to grab the man's rifle and shoulder to stop him from shooting. The whole time the officer was shouting, "State Police, quit shooting!" When the man turned around, the officer said, "Welcome to the Oregon Decoy Program!" The man was too full of adrenaline to realize what had happened. He said, "Did I hit it, did I hit it?"

About 10:00 p.m. one evening, a pickup with a camper drove by a deer decoy placed only about six feet off the road in the borrow ditch. The driver stopped and walked behind the camper with an AK-47 wrapped around him. The taillights of the camper weren't bright enough for him to see the decoy about 20 yards off.

As another vehicle approached, its headlights illuminated the decoy and he shot two single rounds. In between rounds, he squinted to see if the deer was still there. Then he finally lowered the semi-automatic rifle to the hip position and opened up with five rounds. At that point he knew it was a decoy and ran for the truck.

This was more of a high-risk situation and troopers took the man into custody at gunpoint. The trooper said the man was a former Russian national and kept repeating, "I just stupid Russian." He was cited for hunting from a roadway, hunting at night and using an illegal weapon.

A fly fisherman was returning from a high Cascade Lake late at night during archery season and came across the decoy along the road. With the deer in the headlights, he got out in his chest waders and put the sneak on the deer. He got within 30 yards, pulled back the bow and noticed something didn't look right. An earlier violator hit the decoy with an arrow and left it slightly off kilter, so he didn't shoot. He was cited for hunting at night and using the aid of a light.

Two other bow hunters drove by at night and shot at the decoy at the same time, hitting it in the chest. The sounds of a twwwhhaaaackkkkk permeated the night then the two took off, only to be stopped a short distance down the road by an officer.

A truck came by with two guys inside and two standing in the back with bows. When the two in the back saw the decoy, they started pounding on the top of the cab and pointed back. The truck backed up, then the driver slammed the brakes and one guy toppled over backward, hitting his head on the tailgate and just about knocking him out. The other guy got about three shots off, hitting the decoy once. Hearing the vibrating

twanging noise, one of them said, "That's a decoy, let's get out of here!" Officers got the entire scene on video.

A former county sheriff was cited for hunting from his truck, after shooting at a deer decoy. The ex-sheriff sat behind the wheel when he fired his rifle out the passenger-side window with someone sitting in the seat. Earplugs anyone?

As a pickup approached the decoy site, two of the three passengers jumped from the truck. One began firing at the decoy from the road, the second used the pickup bed as a rest and began firing. In the meantime, the driver fired shots out his window. After a volley of shots, they soon became aware that they had been shooting at a decoy and took off. In his haste to leave, the driver left one of his buddies standing in the road. The excited man ran around in a circle in the center of the road two times, then tried to escape into the timber, running into the arms of the troopers.

One driver fired a round from his vehicle at a deer decoy, hitting it then realizing it was not the real thing. He then grabbed the butt of his rifle and threw it out the window and sped off. The man admitted to not having a deer tag and attempting to fill his wife's tag. He also admitted to being a convicted felon. He tossed the rifle because he obliterated the serial number. Besides the game violation and two felony charges, he was also cited for open container and possession of marijuana.

Three guys headed to a favorite winter range of deer and elk with three rifles, two shotguns, pistols, a gallon of whiskey and a spotlight. One of them told officers later “My buddy said there lots of things to shoot at up this road.” They came upon a deer decoy and were blinking their headlights trying to get it to move. All three got pinched by troopers.

For those hunters headed out after deer and elk this fall, be sure you really know your target and when you think about doing something illegal, you better look over your shoulder. You never know who may be watching.