

# Happy Holidays from the Vermont Hunter Education Program!

## Thank you, Instructors!

Dear Hunter & Trapper Education Instructors,

Season's Greetings! I'm sure all of you have heard it a million times, but 2020 has been a wild year with many changes. While the world seemed to have slowed down a little, our work here in hunter education weighed much heavier with new challenges to overcome and the introduction of newly normalized health and safety procedures.

With these changes also came the introduction of online hunter education courses, which as you will read in the 'Year to year stats', gave thousands of students the opportunity to learn about hunter safety from the comfort of their home. We welcome change, but truly value the importance of our instructors and thank every one of you for the years of service you all have volunteered. From our instructors who have yet to teach a course, to our seasoned instructors and assistants who have been supporting Vermont hunter education for 50+ years, we thank you. Years of service awards for milestone years (5, 10, 15, etc.) will be mailed to the appropriate instructors by the end of this year.

Although we may not have been able to gather for our annual instructor banquet or start courses in early spring as we typically would have, we were able to resume in-person courses for those who felt comfortable teaching and following the new procedures set in place by the Department and the governor. We thank you all for your consideration for holding courses and for being conscientious of the health and wellbeing of the students, their families and yourselves.

As always, we thank you for your time with us and wish all the best to your families this holiday season. We look forward to discovering what lies ahead for us all in 2021.

Endless thanks and happy holidays from the hunter education team!

Be well,  
Olivia Bussiere



# 2020 Recap

You have heard it from everyone – 2020 is a year that has been like no other. Here at the Vermont Hunter Education Program, we have made monumental changes to our program to keep our students and instructors safe. Policies and program updates that would typically take months or years to put into place were instituted within days or weeks. Many difficult decisions had to be made including canceling in-person programs for a few months. There were so many changes so quickly that I thought I would take a moment to reflect on them here in a short timeline of 2020 for the Vermont Hunter Education Program. This summarizes only new or noteworthy work, not our everyday work (things like working with other divisions on outreach, grant reporting, class materials delivery, etc.):

**January:** Nathan Lafont starts full-time as our Hunter Education Training Coordinator in late December of 2019. He took the place of John Pellegrini, who retired in May 2019. Hunter Education Technician (temporary employee), Amanda Preston, starts with the program in January 2020.

**February:** Nathan and Ali hosted our last in-person instructor event until summer, the annual Chief Instructor Meeting.

**March:** Nicole comes back from maternity leave for two days. Everyone begins working remotely around Friday, March 13th.

In-person events are canceled, including the instructor training and recognition banquet, new instructor trainings, and a weekend-long Learn to Hunt Program at Buck Lake.

The Vermont Hunter Education Program adopts online-only certification for basic hunter education through Kalkomey. Vermont residents may complete the online homework and the virtual field day to obtain certification. Staff is manually entering all student certifications into the certified student database.

The Vermont Hunter Education Program begins working on developing a correspondence course for Trapper Education.

**April:** The Vermont Hunter Education Program rolls out the Trapper Education Correspondence Course. Vermont residents can now be fully certified trappers without attending an in-person course.

With the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) and Backcountry Hunters and Anglers (BHA), the Vermont Hunter Education Program hosts turkey hunting seminars on Facebook live.

With Rooted in Vermont, the Vermont Hunter Education Program begins planning a Facebook live cooking show called “Vermont Wild Kitchen.” The first episode goes live on April 30.

**May:** Green Mountain Conservation Camps make the difficult decision to close for summer 2020. Instead, staff took on work projects and thought of new ways to use the facilities.

New COVID-19 protocols are developed in anticipation of holding in-person events again in the future.

**June:** With Vermont 4H, the Hunter Education Program develops safe shooting protocols for in-person events.

The Vermont Hunter Education Program begins planning Learn to Hunt: Mentor Meet Ups with strict COVID protocols in place.

With BHA and NWTF, the Vermont Hunter Education Program hosts a virtual pint night with a focus on mentoring.

**July:** In-person hunter, bowhunter, and trapper education courses are authorized to restart and quite a few are offered with strict COVID-19 protocols in place.

The Vermont Hunter Education Program begins working on a virtual bowhunter education course – this was built totally by our staff, mostly Amanda Preston, our temporary employee.

Vermont’s online basic hunter education certification is updated to be streamlined – students now only need to visit one website to complete their hunter education certification.



Mentors and new hunters do a socially-distanced “speed meeting” activity during Learn to Hunt: Mentor Meet Up at Buck Lake. Photo credit: VT Fish & Wildlife

**August:** The Vermont Hunter Education Program hosted two Learn to Hunt: Mentor Meet Ups – one at Kehoe and one at Buck Lake. These events followed strict COVID guidelines.

The Vermont Hunter Education Program hosted two socially distanced instructor training “refreshers” for Vermont Game Wardens. Wardens begin assisting/teaching courses on a larger scale.

The in-house created online bowhunter education course goes live. Students may now obtain their bowhunter education certification online.

**September:** The Vermont Hunter Education Program assists the Wildlife Division in creating videos to explain the new deer hunting regulations.

**October:** The Vermont Hunter Education Program institutes a minimum age for online-only certification (12 years old). In-person courses still have no age restriction.

The Vermont Hunter Education Program hosts virtual a Backyard Food Webinar for the Kellogg-Hubbard Library.

Online bowhunter education certification updated to be streamlined – students now only need to visit one website to complete their bowhunter certification.

**November:** Amanda Preston’s hours run out for the year.

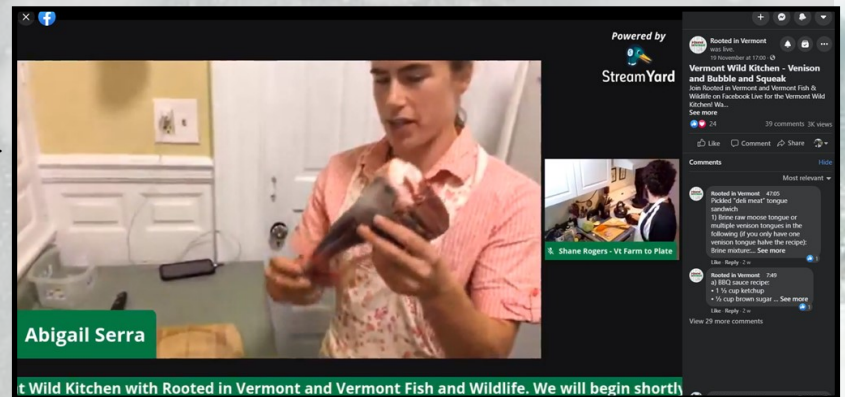
With Rooted in Vermont, the Vermont Hunter Education Program hosts another Vermont Wild Kitchen on Facebook live and plans to host one episode per month through at least February.

No in-person courses should be given until further notice.

All staff are expected to work remotely through the end of March 2021 (at least).-



Showing unsafe handling of a crossbow on the deer hunting regulation video.



Warden Serra demonstrates what to do with a deer shank on Vermont Wild Kitchen. November 2020.

A lot of big changes for our program in a short period of time. We appreciate your resilience and cooperation during this year. We loved hearing from all of you – it made the year feel a little bit easier.

It is our hope that 2021 sees us hosting even more in-person classes. We will continue supporting you as best we can, and hope that you will stay safe and healthy. If you have a question about where the program is at, if you have ideas for programming or ways to stay safe, please reach out. We love hearing from you.

In 2021 our instructors will be more important than ever. Newly certified hunters may have the knowledge to get started in hunting safely, but now they need social connection and advanced preparation to continue. As a program, we hope to offer new seminars, especially for those who may have taken their certification online and want some extra hands-on experience. We hope to connect even more new hunters to the woods, and we hope that you will help us in that endeavor. The backbone of the Vermont Hunter Education Program is our volunteer force. Students comment on the online courses, but it is the lasting connections they make in-person that keeps them coming back to the woods each year. Thank you.

Have a safe and healthy holiday season.

Warmly,

Nicole Meier

# Hunting to Preserve Vermont's Forests

“Several years ago I made a decision that came as a surprise to many of my friends and family. I was going to start hunting deer here in Vermont. As a lifelong animal lover and considered the family “tree hugger,” this desire to hunt seemed to some to be at odds with my dedication to conservation. As a child growing up in Massachusetts, it was very rare to see a deer and even when I first moved to Vermont over 20 years ago, a deer in the yard was a special sight. But in the last two decades, with few predators, warmer winters and declining numbers of hunters, the deer population has rapidly expanded in many parts of Vermont—resulting in negative impacts on our landscape.

I have had the privilege to steward lands that have been conserved by The Nature Conservancy for the past 13 years, and in that time I have witnessed our forests change. The forests now appear more open and park-like, if they are not infested with invasive plants such as honeysuckle, buckthorn and barberry. They are composed of widely spaced mature trees, with few saplings or seedlings growing in the understory. While not always apparent at first glance, what is missing is the next generation of trees and the complexity and diversity of species that used to be typical of our northern hardwood forests. This altered landscape is primarily due to the overpopulation of deer that are over-browsing a vital ecological stage that promotes healthy forests.

I've always felt a strong connection to nature and the lands around me, a land ethic which has grown over time. Therefore, I have devoted my personal and professional life to nurturing the natural communities that sustain us. I do this through the actions both big and small, like picking up roadside trash, planting flowers and shrubs that provide food for pollinators and wildlife, and through my work restoring wetland and forest systems that have been impacted by past human use. Witnessing the change in our forests inspired me to take even further action and that led to my becoming a hunter.

After listening to local foresters, ecologists and wildlife biologists, I learned that deer hunters provide a valuable service to our lands by restoring a system of checks on a population that has been disrupted by the absence of predators, and a changing climate. Just as I hit the roads to clean up litter on Green Up Day in the spring, I retreat to the woods with my crossbow during hunting season and if I am successful, as I was earlier this season, I have a freezer full of sustainable and local meat to feed my family through the winter.”

-Lynn McNamara in a November 8 article in VT Digger.

## What's New?

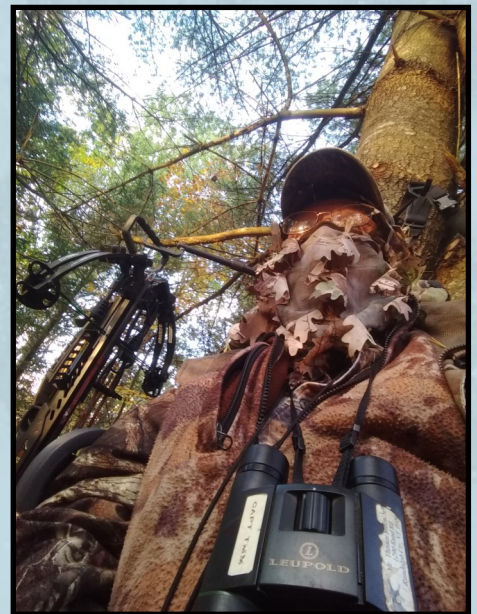
**Bow season continues:** Vermont's bowhunting season resumed on November 30th and will continue through December 15. This is two days later than the regular muzzleloader season end date, which typically would have been the final day of bowhunting in prior years.

**Online Big Game Reporting:** the Department of Fish and Wildlife has made online deer and turkey reporting available this year as to prevent crowding and reduce potential exposure to COVID19 at reporting stations. You can report your deer at <https://vtfishandwildlife.com/online-deer-harvest-reporting>

**Online Hunter Education Courses Remain Available:**

Although big game hunting season is nearing an end, the 100% online hunter education courses will remain available to Vermont residents, 12 years of age or older.

**No Changes Proposed for the 2021 Hunting Season**



Captain Tom Malanchuk in his tree stand.

# Year to Year Stats

2020 has brought a lot of changes to our lives, and for thousands of Vermonters, it brought the introduction of hunting. This year was the first of many to come with a novice hunting weekend. This season is like the youth weekend for kids under 16, but instead offers a similar opportunity for new hunters 16 years of age or older to hunt with a mentor and harvest their first deer. This opportunity is only available for the first year after a person buys their first hunting license. With the introduction of online hunter education, generally more free time to pursue new hobbies, and the possibility of food insecurity, Vermont had an unprecedented increase in sporting license sales. A large portion of these went to those who were brand new to hunting and/or fishing. That led to the acquisition of 1,096 Novice Weekend tags, of which 62% went to women! We are very excited to see this increase in new mentored hunters as well as hunters from non-traditional or minority groups. We are already exploring ways to keep these new hunters for years to come, possibly they will eventually become mentors themselves!

I urge each of you to read an article about the Novice Weekend published in the Times Argus titled: "Youth aren't the only new Vermont hunters". It can be found on their website with a quick search.

We still have a lot of data to sort through but here is a first look at the Hunter Education certification numbers for most of 2020:

Year	Students Certified in Hunter Education Courses	Students Certified in Bowhunter Education Courses	Students Certified in Trapper Education Courses	Total Students Certified in All Class Types
2020	Across all platforms: 5228	Across all platforms: 2460	Across all platforms: 99	7,786
2019	Traditional: 1,144 Homestudy: 1,036 Combo: 775	Bow: 488 Combo: 775	182	3,625
2018	Traditional: 1,066 Homestudy: 932 Combo: 625	Bow: 445 Combo: 625	194	3,262
2017	Traditional: 1,088 Homestudy: 1,022 Combo: 756	Bow: 643 Combo: 756	184	3,693

Vermont also had an incredible turnout for our first ever novice season. Check out the stats here:

## Sales

	Sales
Resident	1039
Non-resident	57
	1096

## Gender

	Count	Percent
Female	639	62%
Male	399	38%
Other	1	0%
Total	1039	

# Paul Noel Writes to the Editor of the Chronicle

"I feel compelled to respond to a recent opinion piece "wildlife governance is in crisis" along with other articles due to the many inaccurate and misleading statements. The idea that the VT Department of Fish and Wildlife has a biased beholding to hunters, trappers, and anglers is simply false. The F/W Dept. is composed of many multi-disciplined biologists offering an array of tasks that serves all species and all woodlands that all outdoor enthusiasts can enjoy. Several full time ecologists work on the management of diverse and healthy landscapes that benefits warblers to whitetails and everything in between. We have a non-game species program of several biologists that are involved with numerous projects and species of special concern. There are staff available to help private land owners optimally manage their woods for overall health and wildlife diversity. That is just a few examples. In fact 60% to 70% of biological staff time is directed toward habitat and conservation efforts that manage and benefits all native species along with all forest and aquatic ecosystems.

There were comments directed toward the Fish and Wildlife Board. This group is comprised of an individual from each county and is charged with overseeing hunting, trapping, and fishing regulations. It is true and inherently logical that most of the board members have some experience in these activities and/or natural resource conservation. To have knowledge of a subject matter you are helping to manage is intuitively helpful. You would not want a medical board comprised of members with no medical knowledge or opposed to the medicine and science that has been learned and evolved over the last 200 years. Again the F/W Board has a very singular purpose and is not involved with any other general Department policies. The Board meetings are public and accept input and opinion. Regulations are modified every year based on sound management biology and social concerns.

Charges were made that the F/W Dept. embraces biased activities that support sportsman. I will use trapping as an only example due to brevity. And using a slanted survey question to achieve a desired answer of non-public support for trapping is not helpful. The use of foot hold traps (often erroneously called leg hold traps) is intensely regulated and of vital importance in managing furbearers to keep populations in alignment with sound, compatible cultural and biological numbers. An exhaustive study group of biologists, wildlife managers, veterinarians, university personnel, and trappers themselves was formed many years ago to examine ways to improve all aspects of trapping such as humaneness, selectivity, practicality, safety, and regulations. The resultant report called Best Management Practices has become the standard for modern day trapping methodology and instruction. This important wildlife management practice of trapping is governed by many rules such as land traps being checked daily.

Finally I want to address the fiscal concerns raised. The F/W Dept. certainly is among the thousands of public and private entities facing financial challenges. Hunting and trapping

license sales are down but not totally unexpected. The baby boomers, a major population segment, are now moving through the life cycle. They are getting older and not as active now in the sporting community and those numbers are not being replaced. But that only illustrates the important reality that hunters, trappers, and anglers provide the lion's share of funding needed by the F/W Dept. through license sales and excise taxes on sporting equipment. Sportsmen are the founding fathers and backbone of the modern day conservation model and have historically and happily shouldered most of the financial burden. Maybe an excise tax on hiking boots or kayaks or binoculars would drive home this fact to many unknowing outdoor personnel. I do agree more public funding is needed for the F/W Dept. since so much of their work benefits all. In the meantime we are expanding avenues and programs to recruit and retain new hunters/trappers/anglers. And not only to increase needed funding but more importantly to increase the numbers of good all-around natural resource citizens that will become impassioned stewards of our woods and waters.

We are now celebrating 100 years of Wildlife Management Areas. WMAs are public state lands open to everyone including hikers, bird watchers, photographers, etc. but funded by the aforementioned excise tax paid by sportsmen and women. If you run into one of them, feel free to say hello and thank them. Better yet buy a Habitat Stamp and/or a hunting, trapping or fishing license. Everything from a wood frog to a moose will thank you too."

Thank you Paul for your support and for taking time to educate members of the public; hunters and non-hunters alike!



Paul with a 151lbs opening day six pointer.

# Notes From Our Instructors

**Murphy Robinson:** Murphy wrote in to the team to give feedback on their experience with our novice mentorship program from this fall.

“I just wanted to write and express my big enthusiasm for the new Novice Season! I took my landmate out both days and we had a really great time. While he didn't actually take a shot (because of practicing excellent care for ethical shooting), we saw 6 different deer and had a pretty exciting hunt! He is a Navy veteran and very comfortable with firearms, but is new to hunting, and the opportunity to hunt both does and bucks on his first weekend was a really big incentive to take the plunge. He attended the Hunter Safety class I hosted at Mountainsong Expeditions earlier this year, and is already making enthusiastic plans for rifle season and investigating turkey hunting. I think he'll be reliably purchasing hunting licenses for years to come! The warmer weather in October was super helpful for easing him into the Vermont hunting experience (he did get chilled and has since purchased new boots and mittens to be prepared for rifle season!). Being a mentor was incredibly fun, and I'm looking forward to the potential for guiding professional clients on this weekend after the pandemic is under control.”

Murphy also noted the online deer reporting is a great alternative to reporting your deer in person if you are trying to social distance.

**Eli Favro:** Eli is a new instructor with us and reached out to tell us about his first successful hunt! Mr. Favro hunted a farm field in Chittenden county for about a week and a half. In that time, Eli saw deer daily and was able to pattern the deer activity. On October 25th, Eli harvested his first deer ever; a 70 pound doe!

“it was a hunt of ups and downs, and I learned so much!”

Congratulations Eli!

**Captain Tom Malanchuk:** Tom had a student approach him in 2019 who was interested in bowhunting. The student, a 68 year old woman named Gail, passed with flying colors and was able to get out on her first bow hunt this year. She reported her success to Tom.



“She scouted and set up her tent blind on her own, and passed up several does, and finally got a shot at a nice buck with her crossbow. Gail made an excellent shot and tracked her deer finding it approximately 70 yards away. It was a decent four-pointer that dressed out 157 lb! She called me as soon as she found it...”

**Eric Nuse:** Eric participated as a mentor in our mentorship program this fall. The new hunter he had mentored reached out to us to share their experience with Eric.

“I had a wonderful experience hunting this fall with my mentor Eric Nuse. Eric is highly knowledgeable, friendly, and I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to learn from him. He took me shooting once and hunting three times. While there is still a lot to learn, I feel confident in my new hunting abilities and I'd say that this program has successfully made me a hunter not just for the season, but for life...I've wanted to learn about this stuff for so long and felt like that would maybe never happen because I didn't have anyone to show me how it's done. I am so thankful for the work you all put in to teach us newbies, and I hope to one day pay the favor forward and teach someone else what I've learned.”

**Success to hunters can be measured in many different ways. We thank all of our instructors for playing an important role in the education and success of new hunters.**

# Send Us Your Pictures and Stories!



Above: Chief Instructor Paul Noel with a fisher trapped earlier this month.



Left Top: Tom Malanchuk's archery season doe from opening day.

Left Bottom: Kal, a novice hunter who participated in our mentorship program with Paul Noel.

Below: Chris Strafford and family with their limit of bucks for the year.



We love to hear from you! If you have comments, stories, or photos you would like us to share with the hunter ed team and your fellow instructors please send them to Nicole, Nathan, or Olivia. We would love to include you in our newsletters!

## Butter-Basted Venison Steak

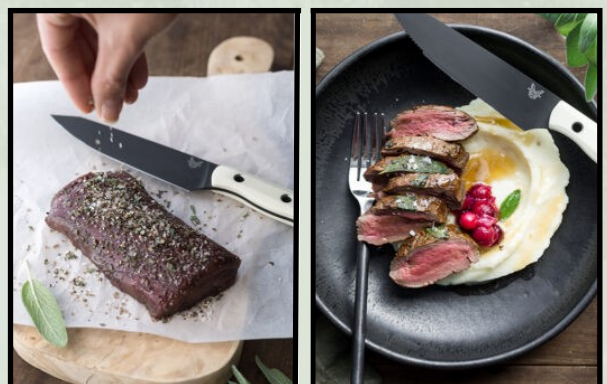
Mince 4 of the sage leaves and reserve the rest. Blend the salts, pepper, and minced sage together. Rub the mixture over the venison steaks. Note that you may not need all of the spice rub; reserve what you don't use. Either do this step hours before you plan to cook or immediately before you plan to sear.

Heat a large frying pan over medium-high heat on the stovetop or use a cast iron pan over a charcoal fire. You'll need a pan big enough to accommodate all of the steaks without overcrowding, or you'll have to work in batches. Once the pan is hot, add a glug of oil and swirl to coat the bottom. Lay down each steak and cook for 2 to 4 minutes. The steaks should sizzle, but not fry and sputter oil. Flip the steaks when brown.

Top each piece of meat with one or two sage leaves. Drop the butter into the pan and let it foam. Tilt the pan to the side and use a spoon to scoop the melted butter and baste it over the top of each steak. The hot butter should gently fry the sage leaves and coat the venison.

Repeat this process for a few minutes and start to feel the steaks for doneness. Use a meat thermometer if needed and remove the steaks at 125 degrees internal for rare, 130 degrees for medium-rare, and 135 degrees for medium.

Transfer to a cutting board and let the steaks rest uncovered for 5-8 minutes. Serve with buttery mashed potatoes and cranberry sauce.



Find this recipe and more at <https://www.themeateater.com/cook/recipes>



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Instructor discounts can be accessed at: <http://ihea-usa.org/>

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