The Georgia Deer Jacker[1]

Gary S. Green, *Criminal Justice Institute, Albany State College, Albany, GA 31705*

Hugh J. Phillips, *Criminal Justice Institute, Albany State College, Albany, GA 31705*

Steve K. Black, *Department of Natural Resources, Game and Fish Division, Law Enforcement Section, Suite 1366, 205 Butler Street S.E., Atlanta, GA 30334*

Abstract: "Deer jacking" is an illegal form of deer hunting. The poacher temporarily blinds a deer with a spotlight thereby incapacitating it and then shoots the animal. This research analyzes over 200 offenders involved in about 100 episodes of deer jacking from 1977 to 1987 in southwest Georgia. Data were extracted from field citations written by officers of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. Deer jacking is primarily a white young male phenomenon, often carried out in groups. Information on offender profiles, co-offending, and dispositions constitutes the bulk of the paper.

Proc. Annu. Conf. Southeast. Assoc. Fish and Wildl. Agencies 42:558–565

This work profiles "deer jacking" in southwest Georgia, in which deer are hunted by "freezing" them with a spotlight during nighttime. The purpose of our research is to profile offenders (e.g., age, race, gender, group participation) and their offenses (e.g., spacio-temporal factors, types of offenses) and dispositions. The authors would like to thank Terrence Carpenter and Ashley Darley of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (Albany District) for their help with the project. We are also indebted to Twala Mathis (supervisor) and students at Albany State College who helped to code and to enter data.

Comments on Determining the Incidence of Illegal Deer Hunting

The discovery of illegal deer hunters and their offenses by wildlife law enforcement agencies is the result of a variety of factors such as opportunistic discovery

[1]This research was supported by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and the Criminal Justice Institute of Albany State College; the opinions stated herein are the authors'.

(e.g., while on patrol for something other than illegal deer hunting, uninduced confession by illegal deer hunters, referral from non-wildlife law enforcement), reaction to citizen complaints, and purposeful proactive patrol against illegal deer hunting specifically (e.g., by air or ground, saturated or random patrol). Estimates of the ratio of discovered offenses to actual offenses have varied from 1:83 (Vilkitis 1968) to 1:30 (Kaminsky 1974), but it is clear that only small proportions of all violations and violators come to the attention of the authorities.

There have been several attempts to estimate the totality of deer violations (and perpetrators) in a given jurisdiction over a given period of time (Hardin and Roseberry 1975; Kaminsky and Giles 1974; McCormick 1968, 1970), including the simulation approach (Vilkitis 1968, Pursely 1977, Stoll and Hussain 1979) and the randomized response approach (Wright 1981). These methods for estimating total violations are useful to those interested in the effect of wildlife crime on deer populations. Estimating overall deer violation rates are also useful in the evaluation of the effectiveness of wildlife law enforcement. However, estimates of the raw frequencies of illegal deer kills and illegal deer killers do not provide important information about the characteristics of offenders and their offenses.

Although only a small proportion of all deer violators and violations are included in wildlife law enforcement agency records, one could still argue that such records are representative of the totality (or universe) of offenders and offenses (e.g., Hindelang 1979; Green 1985). If official records, such as those used in this analysis, are representative of the universes of deer offenses and offenders, then they can be used as direct measures of those universes. However, representativeness may be a problematic assumption because some violators may be more skillful at avoiding detection than others. Moreover, opportunistic, reactive, and proactive discovery may not be uniform across time and space. A source of information independent from law enforcement records is needed to ascertain the extent to which known offenses and offenders are representative of all offenses and offenders.

To determine the extent to which police records represent the totality of "street" crimes and criminals, criminologists have employed random surveys of victims in the general population to identify the characteristics of offenses and offenders that do not come to the attention of the police (e.g., Ennis 1967). Obviously, the "victims" of wildlife crime—wildlife itself—cannot be studied by such a survey method.

Questioning representative members of the general population about the extent and nature of their previous wildlife offending (self-report) may generate information that is independent of agency records. Such a sample must be representative of the population and respondents must be truthful about past activities before such a survey can be of value. For instance, Sawhill and Winkell (1974) have asked persons to self-report their past deer poaching activities. However, without validation by other studies, their sample can hardly be considered representative of the universe of violators because it was derived from violators known to students, friends, and associates of the researchers, and those who agreed to be cooperative with the research project.

Even if such a representative sample is obtained, however, there may be a strong potential for underreporting response bias (that is, respondents will not tell the truth because of a fear of official reprisal, embarrassment, memory decay, etc.). To counteract underreporting bias caused by fear of reprisal and embarrassment, Wright (1981) randomized responses so that offenders in the sample would perceive that their answers could not be traced. By using a randomized response approach, Wright was probably able to increase respondent perceptions of anonymity, and thereby probably obtained more truthful answers than would have resulted from a nonrandomized response self-report survey (Fox and Tracy 1981). However, while Wright's sample may be representative of the population as a whole and reflect truthful answers, by definition of the randomized response method, there is no way to trace responses to individuals, precluding information about individual characteristics. Individual characteristics in randomized response studies are obtainable only by expensively drawing several samples, each with a different attribute.

Currently, then, data known to be representative of the universe of deer offenses and offenders are not available. Before presenting our analysis, which is based on official records, an explicit assumption must be made that the data used herein are, in fact, representative of the universes of deer jacking offenses and offenders, even though there is no independent evidence from which to substantiate that assumption.

Methods

The data comprise all officially recorded illegal deer hunting for the Albany district of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GDNR) for the years 1977 through 1986 (and a few cases from early 1987). Thus, the information constitutes the universe of known offenses and offenders in that district for that time period, and may or may not constitute a representative sample of all deer jackings in Georgia. Information was taken from the citations issued by GDNR, so in all cases offenders were charged with at least one offense. Not all offenders were cited for night hunting, but all were involved in night hunting incidents. The number of illegal deer hunting incidents is smaller than the number of hunters involved in them because more often than not, >1 violator was apprehended in a given episode. Frequencies of both episodes and violators varied considerably according to year, but this is probably due primarily to differential opportunistic, reactive, and proactive discovery over the years rather than a reflection of actual differences in the incidences of illegal deer hunting. For example, there were 3 episodes in 1978, 4 in 1977, and 17 each in 1980, 1983, and 1986. The analyses herein are based on a total of 223 violators involved in 117 episodes. The term "violator" refers to those cited for any alleged violation committed during a deer jacking incident, regardless of disposition ($<10\%$ of all offenses were dismissed or acquitted).

Results

Temporal and Spatial Aspects of Offenses

Three-fourths of all offenses occurred during the months of October, November, and December. Another 13% occurred during January. The remaining 12% occurred during the other 8 months.

For illegal deer killing, "time of offense" is misleading because the actual offending for a given episode may take place over several hours. The times represent the time of discovery, although the violation may have been ongoing for several hours prior to the time of discovery. In several cases, discoveries were made during the daylight hours even though the offending occurred during previous nighttime hours.

The most common time of discovery was between 2201 and 0000 hours, during which 40% of all violators were discovered. More than 4 of 5 violators (83.6%) were discovered between 2001 and 0400 hours. In Virginia, Kaminsky and Giles (1974) found that 68% of deer jacking cases occurred between 2055 and 0219 hours, which is exactly consistent with the Georgia data (67.7% of cases occurred during that interim).

Offenses occurred within all 16 counties of the district, ranging from a low of 4 violators to a high of 32 violators. A total of 4 of 10 violators (39.49%) were cited in 3 counties, and a total of almost 3 of 10 violators (28.63%) were cited in 4 other counties. Thus, almost 7 of 10 were cited in less than half the counties. The disproportionate numbers of violators caught in these 7 counties may be due to higher deer concentrations (which attract violators), concentration by law enforcement, and hunter group size. Fourteen (6.3%) violators did not live in Georgia at the time of their offense (13 from Florida; 1 from Alabama).

In those cases in which it could be ascertained ($N = 204$), two-thirds (68%) of the violators deer jacked in their county of residence or in an adjacent county. Of those found guilty for night hunting ($N = 186$), 45% jacked within their county of residence. These are important findings, because one infers that most offenders are likely to be familiar with the areas in which they deer jack and that offenders travel relatively short distances to commit their offenses.

Characteristics of Violators: Age, Gender, and Race

The average age of all violators was 28.16 ($N = 223$), which is consistent with Virginia data in which the average was 27.0 ($N = 505$) (Kiminsky and Giles 1974). The median age was 27, ranging from 13 to 64. Eighteen, or 8.1%, of the violators were juveniles ($\leq$17 years). About two-fifths of the violators (39.5%) were within the ages of 24–35 and 21.4% were older, which is highly consistent with data from an interviewed sample in New Jersey (40.5% and 21.4%, respectively) (Sawhill and Winkell 1974). Almost half (45.3%) of the violators were $\leq$25 years of age. Those 18–23 years of age constituted almost a third of all violators (30.9%). The interval comprising ages 18 through 37 accounted for 72.6% of all violators, which is similar to results from Virginia in which they accounted for 68% of deer jackers (Kamin-

sky and Giles 1974). Age is the best known correlate with "common" criminality such as burglary, robbery, and assault (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1987, 1988); those 15–30 years of age are most prone to commit these offenses. Deer jacking, too, supports this relationship. And, the high degree of consistency between the Georgia age data and those derived from different methodologies in other states (Virginia, New Jersey) lends external validity to the common conclusions about involvement in deer jacking according to age.

Only 5 (2.2%) of the violators were females, and in all cases there was only 1 female in a group. In Virginia, females constituted 14.3% of those known to be present at deer jackings and 8.6% of arrestees for the offense (Kiminsky and Giles 1974). The ages of the Georgia females ranged from 19 to 47.

Only 11 (4.9%) of the violators were nonwhite and they were all male. The average age of black violators was 33.1 years, about 5 years older than the average age of all violators. Four (36%) blacks were under the age of 30; none were juveniles.

Deer jacking, then, is predominated by young white males. Because the composition of the area's general population has many more blacks than are found in the deer jacker population, one could say that whites are highly disproportionately overrepresented among deer jackers. However, if one uses the rolls of hunters and big game licensees as a general population which are dominated by whites (93% according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), then white representation in the deer jacking population can be seen as more commensurate.

Group Involvement

Regarding group involvement, some persons may have escaped discovery at the scene, and the extent to which this is true is the extent to which the information about group size is incorrect. The average number of violators discovered in a given episode was 1.9, which is somewhat lower than the average found in Virginia (2.81) (Kaminsky and Giles 1974). Eighteen percent of violators (41) jacked alone, accounting for about 1 in 3 episodes (35%) ($N = 115$). Fifty episodes (43%) involved 2 persons. Thus, single and double jacking parties accounted for almost two-thirds of the violators and more than three-fourths of the episodes. Eighteen episodes (16%) involved parties of 3, and 5 episodes (4%) involved 4 jackers. One incident involved a party of 6. These results show a rather different picture than that painted by Sawhill and Winkel (1974) in which 10% of the respondents claimed to have hunted alone, 84% with 1 or 2 others, and 5% with ≥ 3. However, this difference may be attributable to different methodologies (their interviewees were asked about overall previous companionship, whereas the Georgia data are based on a given episode).

Two-thirds of offenders (151) hunted only with other adults (age ≥ 18) and 39 adult offenders hunted alone. Only 3 juveniles hunted alone and 13 (5.8%) hunted in groups comprising juveniles only. Seventeen (7.6%) hunted in a party comprising adults and juveniles. All of the females hunted with at least 1 male. Six offenders hunted in interracial groups and 3 nonwhites hunted intraracially. As one would

expect from the aforementioned individual demographic data, the vast majority of the parties comprised white adult males.

Cited Offenses, Pleas, and Dispositions

The average number of game-related violations per offender was 2.45. Sixteen offenders (7.1%) were charged with crimes that were not game-related (e.g., driving while intoxicated, possession of controlled substance, resisting arrest), so there is a little serendipity involved in pursuing deer jackers. About 90% of the violators were fined ≤$1000. The average total fine per violator (including non-game offenses) was $458 ($N$ = 222).

Eighty-eight percent (198) of the violators were cited for night hunting (Georgia Statutes 27-3-2). Pleas could be ascertained for 96% of those charged (190). Ninety percent of known pleas were either "guilty" (160) or "nolo contendre" (11). Thus, in 9 of 10 night hunting citations, the defendant admitted wrongdoing. Eleven night hunting cases were not prosecuted. Of the 8 known to have pleaded "not guilty," 1 was convicted.

Disposition was ascertained for all offenders charged. Ninety-three percent (184) were convicted. Of those convicted, only 4 (2.2%) received a jail sentence. Almost a quarter (44 or 23.9%) of those convicted were put on probation (35 of whom also received a fine). About three-fourths (136 or 74%) received a fine only. The range in fines for night hunting was from none to $1,000, averaging $322.41 (median = $300; mode = $500; SD = $237.51).

Almost three-quarters (162 or 72.6%) of those cited were charged with "hunting from a vehicle" (Georgia Statutes 27-3-13), 80% of whom pleaded "guilty" or "nolo contendre"; the remainder were either dismissed or acquitted. Over 90% of those found guilty were fined, ranging from none to $770, and averaging $125.

About half (115 or 52%) of those cited were charged with "hunting from a public road" (Georgia Statutes 27-3-10), 88% of whom admitted their offense by pleading "guilty" (96) or "nolo contendre" (6). Almost all were fined (96%), averaging $99.98 (median = $50), range none to $770.

Other game-related offenses included "hunting without a license" (Georgia Statutes 27-2-1) (N = 7), "hunting while intoxicated" (Georgia Statutes 27-3-7) (N = 2), "hunting without permission" (Georgia Statutes 27-3-1) (N = 14), and other miscellaneous deer offenses ("killing anterless deer," "hunting deer out of season," etc.). Two of these offenses are of particular interest.

First, only 2 hunters were cited with "hunting while intoxicated," which is much less than we would expect, given the New Jersey-based findings of Sawhill and Winkel (1974) that >40% of their interviewees drink immediately prior to or during deer jacking episodes. Although the New Jersey figure was arrived at through interviews and although it is possible that GDNR officers are either less likely to detect alcohol use or less likely to cite people for it (or both), alcohol seems to be less integral to the Georgia deer jacking episode than elsewhere.

Second, only 7 hunters were cited with hunting without a license, which implies that the majority of night hunters can be found among those issued hunting

licenses. However, it is possible that many unlicensed hunters were not cited. Further, it is possible that among those who were cited for hunting without a license, some were, in fact, licensed but did not have it in their possession at the time of citation. If it is true that the overwhelming proportion of deer jackers are licensed, then samples for the previously discussed self-reported poaching surveys should be drawn from the frame comprising licensed hunters. And, the fact that most deer jackers are licensed implies that they enjoy legal deer hunting, and therefore they can be targeted for ethics campaigns (e.g., through mailings, classes).

Concluding Remarks

This research has attempted to augment the few existing studies about deer jackings. There were several findings in the present work (e.g., age distribution, time of occurrence) that agree with previous studies that utilize different methodologies, which adds a greater degree of external validity to all of the research. However, as useful as basic profiling data may be, there is a need for interviewing a representative sample of deer jackers regarding the processes associated with their participation in the offense (e.g., age of onset, learning of techniques, in-group support, frequency and duration of deer jacking activities) before the wildlife law enforcement community can begin short- and long-range programs to reduce this particularly cruel form of poaching. The authors are currently conducting such interviews with convicted deer jackers and validating responses by polygraph.

Literature Cited

Ennis, P. 1967. Criminal victimization in the United States: A report of a national survey. U.S. Gov. Print. Off., Washington, D.C., 111 pp.

Fox, J. A. and P. E. Tracy. 1981. The validity of randomized response for sensitive measurements. Am. Sociol. Rev. 46:187–200.

Gottfredson, M. and T. Hirschi. 1987. The methodological adequacy of longitudinal research on crime. Criminology 25:581–614.

——— and ———. 1988. Science, public policy and the career paradigm. Criminology, 26:37–56.

Green, G. 1985. The representativeness of the Uniform Crime Reports: Ages of persons arrested. J. Police Sci. Adm. 13:46–52.

Hardin, J. and J. Roseberry. 1975. Estimates of unreported deer loss resulting from a special deer hunt on Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge. Proc. Annu. Conf. Southeast. Assoc. Fish and Wildl. Agencies 29:460–466.

Hindelang, M. 1979. Sex differences in criminal activity. Social Problems 27:143–155.

Kaminsky, M. A. 1974 Analysis of the spatial and temporal occurrence of deer spotlighting violations in Virginia. M. S. Thesis, Va. Polytechnic Inst. State Univ., Blacksburg. 171pp.

Kaminsky, M. A. and R. H. Giles, Jr. 1974. An analysis of deer spotlighting in Virginia. Proc. Annu. Conf. Southeast. Assoc. of Fish and Wildl. Agencies. 28:729–740.

McCormick, J. B. 1968. A procedure for evaluating the effectiveness of wildlife law enforcement. Proc. Annu. Conf. West. Assoc. Fish and Wildl. Agencies. 48:626–639.

———. 1970. An evaluation of wildlife law enforcement effort. Proc. Annu. Conf. West. Assoc. Fish and Wildl. Agencies 50:517–540.

Pursely, D. 1977. Illegal harvest of big game during closed season. Proc. Annu. Conf West. Assoc. State Game Fish Comm. 57:67–71.

Sawhill, R. and R. Winkell. 1974. Methodology and behavioral aspects of the illegal deer hunter. Proc. Annu. Conf. Southeast. Assoc. Fish and Wildl. Agencies. 28:715–719.

Stoll, G. D. and N. Hussain. 1979. An estimation of illegal deer losses in Michigan. Mich. Dep. Nat. Resour. (mimeo). Lansing. 31pp.

Vilkitis, J. R. 1968. Characteristics of big game violators and extent of their activity in Idaho. M. S. Thesis, Univ. Idaho, Moscow. 202 pp.

Wright, V. L. 1981. Use of randomized response technique to estimate deer poaching. Pages 26/1–26/3 *in* K. Beattie, ed. Environmental law enforcement theory and principles: A sourcebook, Vol. 1., Coll. Nat. Resour., Univ. of Wis., Stevens Point.