



#### About the Author:

Bill Heavey is a columnist and Editor at Large for *Field & Stream* magazine. This blog details his quest to feed himself for one year by hunting, fishing, cultivating, and gathering wild foods around his suburban Washington, D.C. area home.

#### Powered By:

**FIELD  
&  
STREAM**

June 18, 2008

## Suburban Deer Management Tryouts

This post may not reach the *Field & Stream* editorial offices for two reasons. One is that a gentle breeze blew for a moment yesterday, knocking out Comcast high-speed Internet, TV, and phone service, probably for the next six months. The other is that I'm filing from a neighbor's computer that warns me that FRAUD MONITORING IS NOW ACTIVE, always a problem for an outdoor writer.

I'd been shooting my bow daily for the last month or so in preparation for the archery part of the test to join [Suburban Whitetail Management of Northern Virginia](#), a group that provides a free deer removal service to private landowners with deer damage permits. To pass the test you have to put two of three shots using broadheads in a 6-inch circle at 20 yards and 30 yards. You also have to undergo an in-depth interview, a background check, and, for all I know, a colonoscopy. Knowing that it takes only a few jerks to queer the deal for everybody, SMNV sets high standards for skill, character, and general trustworthiness.

Here's the thing. I'm pretty competent in my own back yard. But after driving 25 miles down I-95 to the public range where qualifications were being held last Saturday, I found myself standing in a line of 10 guys, each clutching a bow and arrows and a paper target, each waiting his turn. There were lots more guys who, having already passed or failed, were hanging around to watch.

Let me note that the combination of an audience and the knowledge that I'd have to go through all this again at a later date if I failed had absolutely no effect on me. It did, however, flummox the heck out of my bow sight. Those pins were jumping around like Kirstie Alley at an all-you-can-eat buffet. I missed my second shot at 20 yards, and barely broke the edge of the circle with my third. This completely freaked my equipment.

At 30 yards, my first shot was low and left. My heart simultaneously sank and got revved up on a shot of cortisol, the well-known stress hormone. "Take your time," murmured a range officer behind me. I tried to. I took a few deep breaths, held them for a few seconds, and exhaled each to an 8-count. I tried to ignore my wandering pins and focus on driving the arrow forward with my bow hand while applying steady rearward pressure with my release hand. The second arrow lodged, improbably, in the center of the bullseye. "Nice one," a voice called.

I didn't feel relieved; if anything, a perfect shot just confirmed that I had lost my ability to influence things. One to go. For my last arrow, I repeated my two-deep-breaths ritual, drew, and tried once again to focus on form. The arrow hit just right of the one-inch bullseye. I had qualified.

Driving home, I was so proud of having prevailed over the stuff between my ears that I stopped for a Nutty Buddy ice cream cone and very nearly swallowed it whole.

I'll keep you posted on the interview.