



International deer hunters at camp near Barry State Game Area, from left: Craig Denovan, Mauri Nylund, Darren Hastings, Jorma Touvinen, Clare Newman, Jukka Ringman and Petri Kokkinen. Photo by David Kenyon, Michigan DNR

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Finns, Canadians Enjoy Michigan Deer Hunting

One of the criticisms leveled at Michigan's deer management policies by some hunters is that Michigan is not a destination state for deer hunters, as are some others.

The reality, however, is different. Last year more than 18,000 nonresidents purchased at least one deer hunting license in Michigan. Hunters came from all over the country – and in fact, the world.

Mauri Nylund, whose company manufactures hockey pants in Finland, has been coming to Michigan to bow hunt for deer for the last six years. This year, he came for a two-week hunt in October, bringing three of his hunting buddies from Finland and inviting some Canadian friends to meet up with him for part of the hunt. The Canadians stayed for four days.

The group rented a cabin not far the Barry State Game Area, where they hunted.

A long-time hunter, Nylund said he was a rifleman all of his life, but he was turned on to bow hunting when he spent some time in Canada on business.

“As a Finn, I didn't really realize that people hunted with a bow and arrow,” he said. “In Finland, we have deer, but they've been introduced. It's mostly moose and it's all rifle. The bow and arrow has been forgotten.”

Nylund made annual bow hunting trips in Canada and it took him five years before he successfully arrowed a deer. Over the course of his bow-hunting career, Nylund progressed from a compound bow to more traditional recurves and long bows. And it was when he ordered a bow from the Great Northern Bowhunting Company in Nashville, that he made his Michigan connection.

When Nylund expressed an interest in hunting in Michigan, the guys at the bow company contacted Mark Bishop, who recently retired from the Department of Natural Resources as a wildlife technician.

Bishop knew right where he wanted to take the Finns: Barry State Game Area.

“I pretty much devoted my career to the area,” Bishop said.

Bishop arranged for Nylund and his buddies to stay at Yankee Springs State Recreation Area in Middleville, where they could rent a cabin, and got them started hunting at Barry State Game Area. They have since found another cabin to rent in the area.

The Finns had some success their first year and have been coming back ever since.

“It’s very, very good here,” Nylund said. “This area is so beautiful. The people are very friendly – everybody we meet invites us to hunt their land, but we don’t need it with the state land.

“And I like the fact that it’s foot-traffic only. That’s a beauty in itself.”

Jukka Ringman and Petri Kokkinen – a couple of guys who have come to Michigan to hunt with Nylund previously – as well as Jorma Touvinen, a newcomer to Michigan, made up this year’s hunting party.

Within four days, the party had already filled three tags.

“We see lots of deer,” Ringman said.

“Two years ago, we came in the first week of November and all four of us killed deer,” Nylund said.

Darren Hastings, a manufacturer of hockey jerseys in Guelph, Ontario, said he was delighted when Nylund invited him to join the party in Michigan. And he wasn’t disappointed that he didn’t take a deer during his hunt.

Michigan is “extremely well known in Canada for its deer,” Hastings said.

“This place is great,” he said “The forest, with its hemlocks and pines and the mix of hardwoods, the tall trees, is just excellent. The locals here are unbelievable – very friendly, very hospitable people. And deer tags cost less than half of what they do in Canada.

“I’m happy here. I’d come back in a minute.”

Nylund said he thinks too many deer hunters fail to appreciate the opportunity in Michigan, from the availability of public land to the easy-to-understand hunting regulations. But he acknowledges he’s not worried about killing bucks with trophy antlers.

“In nature, it makes sense to make sure the population is right. I like to see things the way nature sees things. And that means take the deer that is available, as nature presents.

“My trophy is a hunt-able deer that is good to eat. I don’t care at all if they have antlers.”

When pressed, however, Nylund admits he is looking for one quality in the deer he kills – a large, full tail.

“This is my trophy,” he said, showing off the tail from a deer he’d taken. “I tie salmon flies from the tails. Bucktail is preferred for the wings. The best.”

While Nylund was showing off his trophy bucktail, Kokkinen – who works in the shipping industry – was meticulously carving the sinew from a leg bone of a deer he took.

“In the old days, they used this sinew to sew buck skins together,” said Kokkinen, who the others look up to for his knowledge and woodsmanship. “I use it on my bows – it’s like fiberglass.”

Kokkinen said he was amazed by the access Michiganders have to public land.

“And we know just a small piece of this place,” he said. “It’s huge.”

Both Kokkinen and Nylund expect to be back, but for different reasons. Kokkinen wants to further explore the state game area. And Nylund? He feels a cultural commitment to Michigan.

“Lots of Red Wings like my pants,” he said. “Steve Yzerman played in my pants.”