

HUNTING REPORT ARTICLE

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Free-Range Sika Hunting In Maryland

by Don Causey

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Now here's an interesting find. It's a hunt for free-range sika deer in Maryland. Subscriber Rex Baker came across the hunt while on a mission to collect all the free-range non-indigenous species found in North America. Sika deer were first released on James Island off the coast of Maryland in 1916. They soon appeared on Maryland's lower Eastern Shore and have since thrived in the marshes and wetlands found there. They are mostly concentrated in Dorchester County, where Percy Ransome operates Ransome's Chesapeake Retreats.

Ransome owns 700 acres right on Chesapeake Bay, next to the 27,000-acre Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, where he has some rental properties and where he offers stand hunts for sika deer. The hunts take place in the marsh, the surrounding wood lines and on the edges of adjoining agricultural fields. Stands overlook established travel corridors used by the deer. Ransome runs his hunts quietly to keep the deer on his property. Drives and stalking are not allowed.

Sika are largely nocturnal and challenging to spot in the tall marsh grass. Baker, an experienced international hunter who has hunted sika deer elsewhere, warns that it can be difficult to judge these small deer in the low light and heavy cover. Maryland's sika deer are the Japanese variety, which is the smallest race of sika. A trophy stag in Maryland is a six-pointer with a 12-inch main beam. A 16-incher is a large trophy, and eight-pointers are rare.

Ransome charges \$250 per day for a sika hunt. That includes lodging in either a small cottage or at his luxury vacation resort. There is a minimum stay of two days. Hunters who wish to have the entire property to themselves during their hunt can secure exclusivity with a \$1,000 fee. The sika deer season runs November 24 to December 8 for gun hunts; September 15 through January 31 for bowhunting; and October 18-20 and December 15-29 for muzzle-loader. The rut begins in September and lasts through October, with mid-October being the best period. As for licenses, nonresidents need only to purchase an over-the-counter deer license for \$130, plus a bow or muzzleloader stamp if you are hunting with one of those weapons.

Contact Information:

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