The Killing Zone

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The Kill Zone is the area on an animal that when presented to the hunter using the correct calibre, bullet weight and construction the animal will be killed quickly and humanely.

There are lot’s of shots on animals that will drop them to the ground, spine, neck, rump, hip etc but they are not always efficient and are not always quick killing.

The pictures presented examples in the next few pages provides an insight into where a hunter should be aiming to perfect a Kill Zone shot at various angles on medium to large game.

Of course animals are not always stationary for a long time so patience and being prepared will go a long way to being presented with that Kill Zone shot.

The Heart Lung is the most sought after zone, using moderate expanding projectiles on animals like Deer or Goats the Lungs or Heart can be sufficiently damaged to render an animal unconscious within seconds and in some instances immediately. Most animals will simply never wake up.

Some head and neck Axis shots are presented, these are difficult shots and should not be attempted without a lot of experience or if very close and with a stable rest.

Shooting without a rest should be avoided although at close range on large animals is often impossible to avoid.

Rear quartering shots are also tricky as it is likely that both lungs are not hit resulting in a single lung shot, thus the animal could be sustained with one lung and able to travel many kilometers.

Killing an animal, not hitting an animal should be the focus of your instincts. Knowing where the vital organs are and the capability of your firearm, point of aim, distance and accuracy should all be part of your hunting knowledge when you pull the trigger.

Memorise these pictures and remember the ethics of hunting, quick instant kills are paramount. A rest and a stationary animal is a must.

Please note the photos in some of these examples have been taken out of season and in velvet, they are for construction and educational purposes only.

In some States such as NSW, hunting begins well after Red and Fallow deer have stripped.

Contact the Game Council NSW for further information.

Anatomy drawings are courtesy of the Bow hunting web site and worth a visit.

Information from "Elk of North America; Ecology and Management" Thomas & Toweill (Stackpole Books)
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This animal's position has only one option for the Killing Zone: the neck Axis joint, where the spine meets the skull. This is not an option for a long shot and needs to be planned; any movement of the head and the bullet could hit an antler or cut the throat, ending in a wounded animal that could run for a couple hundred meters.

These shots are generally performed at close range and when meat harvesting.

Well constructed bullets put you in a position to take this shot; do not hold high as all vitals will be missed; again a firm rest and no more than 150 meters will be in the Killing Zone providing you are using a medium to Big game hunting projectile.

Few opportunities present a better Killing Zone as the square on shoulder shot. A well constructed expanding bullet from a .270 or .308 up will rupture the shoulder, smash both lungs and break the offside shoulder, some major blood vessels will also be ruptured, dropping this stag on the spot. Most flat shooting rifles will work on this shot out to 200 meters.
Another square on shot providing the same result as the shot above, animals square on provide a 25CM tolerance on a large Deer like this and providing the hunter has a good rest and steady hands, shots can be taken quite comfortably at 200 meters.

This qtr front on shot can be tricky and is not for long range shooting, a drift to the left and it is a gut shot, to the right and it is an off shoulder shot both of which are not Killing Zones. Hit wrong and this Stag could be lost and could travel a long way. The other major issue here is that there is an animal behind him, bullets can deflect off bone and exit at many angles, high potential of wounding an animal standing behind. Only take this shot at no further than 150 meters and if no animal is behind using a firm rest.

This Fallow Buck is a smaller target and therefore has about one third less shoulder than a Red Stag. Always hold on the animal regardless how far away you are. A poorly placed shot will send a buck like this into the timber behind and make tracking very difficult.
A goat is a relatively small target for a game animal, at short range and when meat hunting the head shot is desirable but not recommended for the novice.

This big Goat has a significant portion of the vitals covered by the head. In my book there is no shot here other than a head shot or front heart/lung shot.

I think it would be better to wait for a side on shot.

Bracken has all but covered this buck’s vital Kill Zone. Using a .30 calibre + bullet travelling less than 2,800ft/sec would be safe to take this shot, do not aim high, the bracken is close to the animal therefore any deflection would be minor.

Projectiles travelling over 3100fps could deflect, often the distance of grass and branches is deceptive. I have seen a .300 win mag deflect off grass and clean miss a meat harvest Doe.

Both of these young Billies are presenting the Kill Zone. When feeding, goats bounce about and move quickly through the bush, clear shots like this are not always available so once presented the hunter should be ready for the shot.

Keep in mind the heart and lungs; the heart sits low, forward and between the lungs. The objective is to puncture both lungs to exercise deflation and massive bleeding. If in luck the heart and major blood vessels will be hit.
This is the rear Qtr shot. This position is often screwed up as the bullet either hits gut or breaks a shoulder but does not get to the vital organs. The margin for error here is not worth the chance, better to be patient and wait for a better Kill Zone to be presented.

In these Skeleton and circulatory systems outlines you can see the reason for the heart lung shot, just behind the shoulder. Go high hit the spine, go low hit lung and heart, go right hit shoulder and neck spine, go left and hit lung and liver.

http://www.bowhunting.net/naspecies/elk2.html