Christa Hartsook 00:15
Hello, and welcome to the small farms podcast, a production of the small farms program at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Our podcast covers the opportunities and challenges associated with rural life.

Olivia Hanlon 00:29
In this episode I visit with Heidi Anderson, a naturalist with Polk County Conservation. Today we are talking about shed hunting. I'm Olivia Hanlon small farms extension specialist, and we hope you enjoy the show. Heidi, welcome. We're glad to have you joining us today. Yes, thank you. It's nice to be with you. Heidi, it has been a while since you've been on the podcast like we were talking. I think it's actually probably been about a year. So why don't we start with you telling us a little bit about yourself and what you do in your job with Polk County Conservation.

Heidi Anderson 00:58
Sure, so I'm a naturalist with Polk County Conservation. So Polk County Conservation manages over 20 plus different Parks and Trails and Conservation Areas in Polk County. I'm based out of the Jester Park Nature Center. And so my job is to educate others about our parks, our natural resources, the outdoors. So I do a lot of different things for my job. But sometimes I'm in the classroom teaching students sometimes we have students out in the park on field trips. And then we also do a lot of public programs and events in our parks where we're getting people outside, learning about nature, just making those connections and helping people feel more comfortable outdoors. So lots of different education pieces and in lots of different ways. And, of course it changes seasonally based on what's happening in our natural world. So I like that seasonality part of my job and what I do.

Olivia Hanlon 01:55
All right, Heidi, one of those things that can get folks outdoors, especially this time of the year is shed hunting. So why don't we first start with you telling our listeners what exactly shed hunting is and what it entails. For those who may not know.

Heidi Anderson  02:09
Sure this time of year is the time of year where a lot of people enjoy walking out in the woods and just getting out to look for shed deer antlers. So this is the time of the year where the male deer the bucks are dropping their antlers. And, you know, they land wherever so it's like looking for a needle in a haystack. trying to find the shed antlers. And so it's a lot of fun just to get out this time of year. You know, we're kind of getting stir crazy for being cooped up during the winter. And so it's a great excuse or reason to get out, get some fresh air and it just enjoy hiking. And the bonus part is if you're lucky enough to find one of those shed deer antlers, depending on where you are, but you can most likely just take that home with you.

Olivia Hanlon  02:58
It's been nice enough lately that now is a great time to be outside aside from a few days here. But what are some of the most common reasons that people are out shed hunting? Or what can you use those shed antlers for?

Heidi Anderson  03:10
Sure, so a lot of people that just like the challenge of being able to find some of these shed antlers, but some people are actually using the antlers to make some different things I was speaking with a gentleman a couple weeks ago, he likes to make knives and the knife handle. He likes to use for an antler as the handle. So, you know, he likes to go out and see what he can find so that he can use that to make some of the knives that he enjoys doing. But you know, other people like to just go out and get some exercise and fresh air and just kind of create a collection. One of our retired park rangers has done quite a bit of shed hunting and literally had just several boxes full of shed antlers that he was generous enough to donate to us so that we could share those and just with some of our educational programming that we do. And some people are making cool things, you know, whether they're lamp, you know, a lamp stand or, you know, some sort of a ceiling light fixture or whatever. Sure, you can find all sorts of crafty things on Etsy or whatever, with fun antler pieces. But you know, it's one of those things that you just can't buy at the store. You know, there's something that you get to go out and find so that can be a lot of fun.

Olivia Hanlon  04:31
Definitely. Heidi, you you mentioned that the bucks are the ones dropping these antlers, but why don't we talk a little bit about what causes them to drop their antlers this time of year.

Heidi Anderson  04:41
The purpose of an antler is for mating season basically it kind of dominance and fighting other
The purpose of an antler is for mating season basically it kind of dominance and fighting other bucks during that mating season and mating season is in the fall for deer and now that that has passed there's really no need for them to have their antlers. So not necessarily so. For protection or, you know, fighting off predators, that type of thing. So what happens in the deer, the bucks their testosterone levels are dropping right now, which causes the separation on the skull between the bone and the antler and the skull. And so because the hormones are dropping, its causes those antlers to drop and fall off. So kind of peak time for looking for shed antlers is early February through March. So that's the time to be out there looking for them. And you don't want to wait too long into the spring, because there's a lot of people out there that like to look for them. So other people could find them first, or what often happens as well as rodents, rabbits will actually gnaw and chew them and eat them, because it's good for their teeth, as well as they're getting some good nutrition and vitamins from eating those. So they're not going to stick around for a really long time once they drop and fall off. So the key is the timing to go out and find them. So I've got some tips on maybe where you might want to look for them.

Olivia Hanlon 06:10
Yes, we would love to hear those, Heidi.

Heidi Anderson 06:13
All right. So some things to think about is knowing where deer are spending their time, particularly in the winter months, because where deer spending time and then winter may not be the same spots that they're spinning they're at in the summertime. And so thinking about where are they bedding down at night? Where are they feeding during the day, and then the trails in between. So deer kind of creatures of habit. So they tend to follow the same paths and hang out in the same areas daily. So finding and knowing where those bucks have been spending time and then looking for those areas. So thinking about places where they're crossing if they're having to jump over a fence. So anytime they're jumping it's that jolting action can sometimes jar the antler loose or if they're having to jump across a creek bed or something like that. So finding those deer trails and thinking about even where they're bedding down, sometimes the southern facing slope, where it's a little bit sunnier, might be areas where they're bedding down. So thinking about looking at south facing slopes, but grassy areas, field edges, those places are all good places to be looking.

Olivia Hanlon 07:28
Okay, Heidi, if we've got an acreage or even just a large backyard, is there a way to attract deer that may increase the chances of them dropping their antlers on our property. I know this flips once we put our garden and then we want them to go away. But for now.

Heidi Anderson 07:44
Not necessarily. I really don't encourage folks to feed deer in their yard to put out you know, assault block, I really don't encourage that. Anytime you're encouraging animals to congregate in an area, there's a higher chance of disease to spread amongst those individuals in a confined
or smaller area. So that's not generally a good thing for the animals health. Also, it can reduce a deer's fear of humans. And that's not necessarily a good thing either. But you know, in general, there are deer pretty much all over Iowa. And if there is some sort of wooded area creek bed, grassy area field, you know, nearby and even in our urban areas as well. They're there. I know I live at an acreage in in my yard, I have several young trees. And I've never had a problem with the bucks rubbing their antlers on our trees in the past. But this winter, I did. So I'm really really sad about that. But it's kind of my fault for getting complacent and thinking oh, the deer aren't going to bother my trees. But they did so they ripped the bark off of several of our young trees. And so the spring will be interesting to see if they bounce back or come back. So like I said, I wouldn't necessarily encourage them to your property. But if you want to look for antlers, there's plenty of public parks and areas to go to. And if you know some other private landlords that would be willing to let you wander around on their property. You know, by all means, ask away.

Olivia Hanlon 09:25
Certainty, Heidi, if we do get lucky enough to find sheds out there. Do they require any special care or is there anything that we should do to them once we bring them in?

Heidi Anderson 09:33
Oh sure. I would just know, rinse them off with water maybe do a little gentle scrub brush, but usually they're pretty polished and they don't really need a whole lot of care. And you know we've got some that we've had for many many years and haven't really done anything to and they haven't deteriorated any way because they are nice solid bone so they hold up really well. So not a lot of care needed.

Olivia Hanlon 09:59
Perfect. Another important thing, what kind of regulations are we looking at around shed hunting? Obviously, hunting is pretty well restricted. But things around this are a little bit looser. So could you just kind of lay out what exactly those rules look like?

Heidi Anderson 10:14
Yeah, absolutely. So if you find shedding antler on public property, public land of some kind, you're welcome to keep that. So there aren't any regulations that would prohibit you from taking that. So you know, and of course, if you're on private property, you just asked the landowner if you could keep that. So you know, the only caveat of if you find something on public property, if you're using it and making cool things and selling your items for a cost, that's generally prohibited, but otherwise, it's something that you can take home with you.

Olivia Hanlon 10:47
Okay, Heidi, I know this doesn't happen very often. But should we find antlers still attached to the skull? Is there a certain protocol that we need to follow there?
the skull? Is there a certain protocol that we need to follow there?

Heidi Anderson 10:57
Yes, really, if you find a skull, you know, let's say you come across a skeleton or something somewhere, and the antlers are still attached. At that point, you would want to contact a DNR Conservation Officer for a salvage permit to be able to harvest part of that deer's body. So in that case, yes, contact the DNR conservation officer. They're really great folks, and be happy to answer any questions about that.

Olivia Hanlon 11:26
Perfect. If anyone is wanting any more information on shed hunting, Heidi, where should they look? What are some good resources? Or who should they get in contact with?

Heidi Anderson 11:34
Yeah, some great folks to be talking to would just be some deer hunters, you know, are really into deer hunting. Those types of folks. Whitetails Unlimited, I believe has some great information on their website. And you know, even talking with DNR conservation officers, they might be good resources well, as well as your local county conservation board too. Usually has someone on staff that might be able to help you and answer some questions, but Whitetails Unlimited would be a good resource to check out.

Olivia Hanlon 12:08
Great, Heidi, is there anything we didn't cover today that you would like to add? Or do you have any last pieces of advice for those headed out to look.

Heidi Anderson 12:16
The last piece of advice would be not to get discouraged? Because it can be going out looking you don't, find anything, but just keep looking and keep you know, hitting the same spots over and over again. Just because you might not find them one day doesn't mean they might not be there in a week. So try not to get discouraged. Keep looking and you never know what you might find.

Olivia Hanlon 12:41
Alright, thank you so much for joining us today, Heidi.

Heidi Anderson 12:44
Yes, you're welcome.
Yes, you're welcome.

Small Farms  12:46

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