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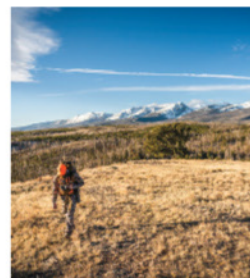
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Photo by Matt Hansen

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Doug Sinniger found these 200-class 5x5 sheds in Wisconsin in 2017, shown replicated here.
Photo by Shane Indrebo

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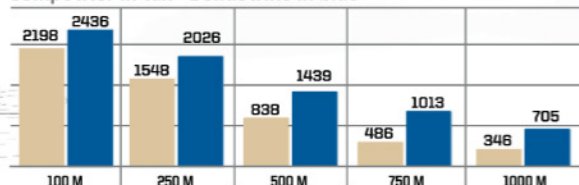
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This month on *NAW TV*, Haynes Shelton joins Anthony Villarreal and Intrepid Warrior Hunts for a December rifle hunt in South Texas. Together, they tell Intrepid Warrior Hunts' story and remind us of the sacrifices that have been made to protect our freedoms. Photo courtesy of Haynes Shelton

WEEK OF AUG. 7-13:

"Made for the Muzzleloader": Laden Force heads to Nebraska on a late-season muzzleloader hunt with the folks at Hornady, and Dale Evans chases whitetails and mule deer in Montana. In Build Your Own Deer Factory, we discuss the importance of access trails. Haynes Shelton profiles a giant velvet buck found dead by Hayden Jeffers.

WEEK OF AUG. 14-20:

"Once A Deer Hunter...": Haynes Shelton teams up with Intrepid Warrior Hunts and Veteran Anthony Villarreal to chase big Texas bucks. In Build Your Own Deer Factory, Dr. James Kroll talks the importance of mobile food plot equipment. Finally, Haynes Shelton showcases Mark Luster's giant typical from the Iowa Deer Classic for our Big Buck Profile.

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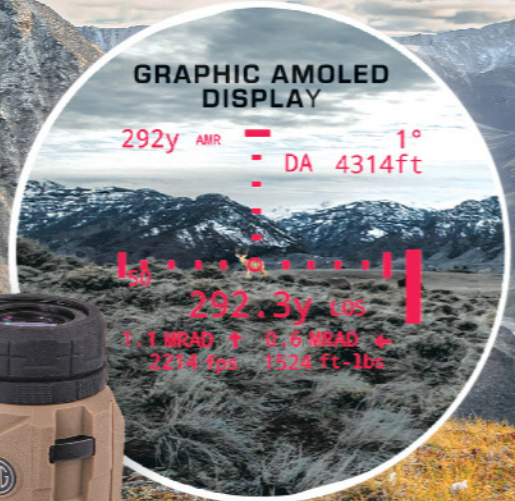
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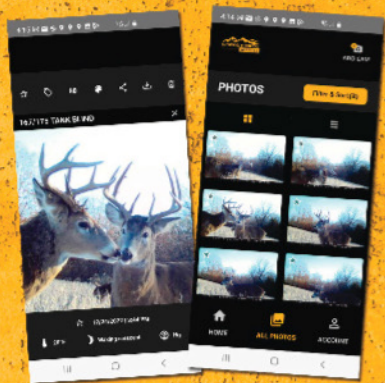
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In Build Your Own Deer Factory this month, Dr. James Kroll discusses why permanent blind placement is important when managing deer land.
Photo by Blake Garlock



WEEK OF **AUG. 21-27:**

"Texas, Like It's Supposed to Be": Blake Garlock and Dale Evans pursue West Texas bucks in late December with their Browning rifles. Dr. James Kroll gives us an overview on placing permanent blinds in Build Your Own Deer Factory, and Haynes Shelton delivers another great Big Buck Profile from the Iowa Deer Classic of the Anthony Sweeney buck.

WEEK OF **AUG. 28-SEPT. 23:**

"Show Me That One Again!": Haynes Shelton takes his muzzleloader to Missouri to target big bucks with Nathan Wilt of NW Land and Water. In Build Your Own Deer Factory, Dr. James Kroll gives us a lesson on warm season food plots. Finally, to celebrate NAW TV's 20th anniversary, we pull a Big Buck Profile from the archives of Adam Mentink's Wisconsin buck.

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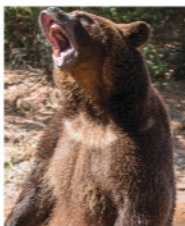
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It was a perfect late autumn day in the northern Rockies. Not a cloud in the sky, and just enough cool in the air to stir up nostalgic memories of my trip into the backwoods.

This year, though, was different. I was going it solo. My two buddies, pleading work responsibilities, backed out at the last minute. So, armed with my trusty knife, I set out for adventure.

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Well, what I found was a whole lot of trouble. As in 8 feet and 800-pounds of trouble in the form of a grizzly bear. Seems this grumpy fella was out looking for some adventure too. Mr. Grizzly saw me, stood up to his entire 8 feet of ferocity and let out a roar that made my blood turn to ice and my hair stand up. Unsnapping my leather sheath, I felt for my hefty, trusty knife and felt emboldened. I then showed the massive grizzly over 6 inches of 420 surgical grade stainless steel, raised my hands and yelled, "Whoa bear! Whoa bear!" I must have made my point, as he turned tail and headed back into the woods.

Our Grizzly Hunting Knife features stick-tang construction, you can feel confident in the strength and durability of this knife. And the hand carved, natural bone handle ensures you won't lose your grip even in the most dire of circumstances. I also made

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MISSING A FRIEND

It's the middle of summer as I write. There are lots of signs this is so. For starters, it's as "hot as Hades" here in North Carolina, a phrase you'd almost certainly hear from locals if you stopped at a gas station or barbeque joint and asked someone about the weather.

Right on cue for this time of year, once every three days or so a thunderstorm breaks out in the evening time. One recently left my pickup truck dented with hail damage from 2-inch-diameter "dingers" coming down at 30 miles per hour!

The summer flowers are on full display, and as usually happens, the deer in our backyard have eaten the vast majority of my wife's hosta plants — and just before they could bloom.

Speaking of deer, bucks in my neck of the woods are packing on antler growth by the day. Thanks to ample rainfall, there's an abundance of browse in the woods and fields. We beat the usual "knee-high by fourth of July" prediction for corn growth, and by a longshot.

There's another way I know it's summertime. All my buddies have been picking up deer heads from their taxidermists, and of course sending obligatory text messages with photos of how the mounts turned out. There are few traditions more fun than the coveted annual trip to see the taxidermist. Am I right?

Until recently, I didn't realize *just how* special an occasion it is to visit the taxidermist. Ironically, it's because I'm not able to go this year. Sadly, my local taxidermist, and great friend, Phil Helms passed away August 14, 2022, after losing his bravely fought battle with pancreatic cancer.

Some *North American Whitetail*

readers will recognize Phil's name, several of whom were also lucky enough to call him a friend. Phil was a self-employed taxidermist for 20 years at his home near Kannapolis, before earning a position with McKenzie Taxidermy Supply in 1996. Phil worked as a Tech Rep for McKenzie and traveled all over the country doing shows for them.

Phil was an absolute master at his craft. A passionate angler himself, Phil was especially skilled at fish taxidermy and would literally spend hundreds of

profession, often trading secrets and comparing notes with greats, like Tom Sexton, Rick Carter, Ben Mears, and many others I'm not acquainted with.

Phil was a gifted sculptor, always working behind the scenes to create some of the most popular poses you see in McKenzie's catalogues. In fact, there's a high chance that some of the deer heads hanging on your walls are forms that Phil helped sculpt.

Phil didn't compete nationally in taxidermy shows. I often asked him if he'd thought about doing so. He'd

sometimes reply: "Maybe when I'm retired, I'll give it a try." Since Phil's passing, I've talked to folks in the industry who believe he could've swept best-in-show nearly anywhere.

I can't help but remember my friend Phil during this time of year. I wish I could swing by his shop and visit one more time. I know re-runs of the *Andy Griffith Show* would be playing on his TV, and we'd share hunting stories for hours. He always watched my episodes on NAW TV. And Phil always wanted to hear my stories from those hunts.

I miss sharing stories with him. But I know it's possible to see Phil again someday. That's because he was a devout Believer and a man who walked with God. For it, he's now resting in Heaven eternal with our Creator.

Until then, I'll be carrying a memento of my friend in my hunting pack. His funeral program went with me on every hunt last season. Each time I punched a tag the program was a reminder that, even though I can't take my trophies to Phil to mount, I no longer need to re-live the hunts back at his shop. Because now, Phil Helms' spirit is right alongside me when the action unfolds.

Until we meet again, Phil! **NAW**



hours perfecting skin-mounts of striped bass, largemouth and crappie. His big game work was world-class, and he often completed large-scale projects for clients returning from African safaris, Alaskan hunts, or other epic adventures.

When Phil wasn't hunting whitetails (very skillfully, I'll add), mounting them occupied most of his time at his home studio. His work was second to none I've seen, and no other whitetail mounts on my walls compare to the ones Phil completed. "They look alive, Phil," I'd always tell him. "Like they're about to blink."

Phil's career led him to work alongside the other masters in his

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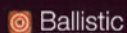
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PART 3

MANAGING WHITETAILS ON PRIVATE LANDS

One of the greatest tools in deer population management has been the trail camera. In this month's column, I'll explain how my colleagues and I use trail cameras to determine the following: fawn crop, true recruitment, buck:doe ratio and buck age structure.

At the Institute for White-tailed Deer Management & Research at Stephen F. Austin State University, we were instrumental in the development of this technology. In the early 1970s, we were investigating a natural mineral lick on the North Boggy Slough Hunting & Fishing Club, belonging to Temple-Inland, Inc. (the largest timber company in Texas). At the same time, the Wilderness Act was passed, and the U.S. Forest Service was busy converting managed forests to wilderness.

The National Forests of Texas wanted to know how many hikers were using the newly created wilderness trails and had adopted an instrument that put out an infrared beam to a reflector that returned the signal to the source. When a hiker walked down the trail, he or she would break the beam and a counter recorded the event. We decided to use this device on the natural mineral lick in a cutbank of a creek on North Boggy.

In no time, we had lots of events recorded, but being a doubting scientist, I wanted to find out how many events were deer and how many were other species, such as wild hogs. I learned of a company in California



Trail cameras are for more than capturing photos of shooter bucks during hunting season. They're a land managers No. 1 tool for conducting herd surveys to determine true fawn recruitment and buck:doe ratios.

Photo by Dale Evans

that had developed a trigger system for 35mm SLR cameras, and quickly called them. They sent me some, and we hooked one up to a camera outfitted with a 400-shot magazine and a motor drive.

Obviously, since that camera cost \$2,000 more than 40 years

ago, we did not put it out in the rain. We ended up with proof positive that deer indeed were gnawing into the dirt to get the mineral-rich soil! Later, we would work on

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a product called “StumpCam,” that controlled one of the “new-then” Sony HandyCams to record video. (There were no computer chips at that time, so we used tape recording).

Some years later, Dr. Harry Jacobson, Ben Koerth, Randy Browning and I conducted scientific research on the use of trail cameras for censusing deer. We used a marked (radio-collared) population of deer at one of Dr. Jacobson’s research areas in Mississippi to test the accuracy of population estimations. By then, biologists were using technical quality cameras for wildlife research and management applications.

At the Institute, we began looking into other applications of trail cameras in deer research and management. The addition of video allowed us to see what the deer were doing. Along the way, we worked with the folks at DeerChannel to place video cameras on the deer themselves; and, that’s when we really learned a significant amount about deer behavior. For one thing, we were somewhat surprised that the average deer really did not do much during a 24-hour period, other than eat and rest!

By the 1990s, we were routinely using trail cameras for a host of applications to deer management; and one of the most useful is the topic of this column. In 1991, we produced a best-selling video called “Aging and Judging Trophy Whitetails.” That year the Institute sold more than 10,000 copies. Later that year, we also published a book by that name, also a best-seller.

At first, professional biologists criticized our position that the average person could learn to accurately age deer (especially bucks). We used the following age classes: fawn, yearling and each year thereafter. I learned that we could teach folks to age with acceptable accuracy in a short time, given proper instruction and age clues. The greatest confusion among laymen was differentiating between 3 1/2 and 4 1/2-year-old bucks.

Our research, however, showed that accuracy increased significantly (80 percent+) when we used age classes instead of years. These are fawns, yearlings, immature bucks (2 1/2 to 3 1/2 years), mature bucks (4 1/2 to 5 1/2 years) and over-mature (6 1/2 years+).



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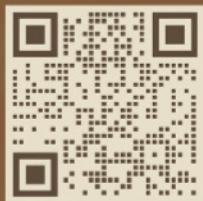


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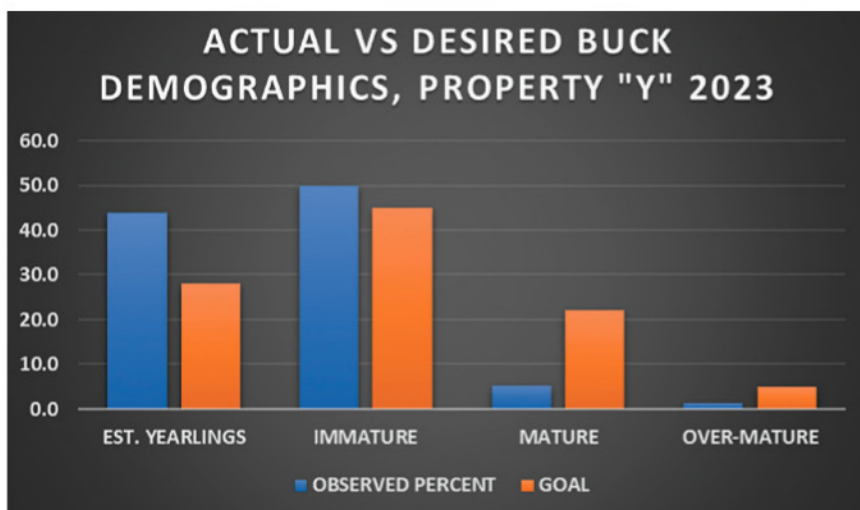
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Every year the author uses data from trail camera surveys to create charts on herd demographics. In the example shown here, the property surveyed has an overabundance of immature bucks and a shortage of mature and post-mature bucks. Keeping annual data allows you to track (and tweak as needed) your management plan. *Graphics courtesy of Dr. James C. Kroll*

The whitetail buck reaches his full body size and disposition at 4 1/2 years. And, where deer herds are allowed to reach a natural age distribution, the majority of breeding occurs within the "breeding pool," which is the mature age class. DNA studies on sires of bucks showed that all bucks contribute to the fawn crop, but they also show that, when mature bucks

are present, they contribute the most.

How do we calculate these metrics? In the fall, we conduct a camera herd survey, counting the number of photos of bucks (including repeats), does and fawns. Once this is done, we simply add up the number of total buck, doe and fawn photos and calculate the ratios and fawn crop. We also use the number of unique bucks (see Part 2

of this series) as the basis for a population estimate. In the fall, we also use the buck photos to obtain the number of yearling, immature, mature and over-mature buck photos in our sample.

From these data, we produce a demographic structure of the herd. Demographics can be defined as "statistics that describe populations and their characteristics." In the case of deer, the demographic categories are fawn crop, true recruitment, buck:doe ratio and buck age structure.

Notice I keep using the term "true recruitment" throughout these discussions. Why? It's because it is not correct to use the fawn crop as this metric; and, the persistence of some biologists to continue calling fawn crop recruitment is quite irritating!

Recruitment is defined as, "the process by which new individuals are added to a population, whether by birth and maturation or by immigration." The does in your herd get pregnant

If a photograph is worth 10,000 words, the one shown here is worth 20,000! This photograph was taken by one of the Turtle Lake Club Members of the representative bucks he has taken since 2000. They show the progress made in management using the methods discussed in this installment. Photo courtesy of Wayne Sitton



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(pregnancy rate), and then grow 1 to 2 fetuses (average fetal count), then they fawn (birth rate); then many of these fawns die during spring and summer, arriving at early fall in much reduced numbers. When we calculate the percent of does with at least one fawn in fall, that is expressed as fawns per 100 does, or "percent" fawn crop. This is the acceptable method.

So, there is a reason deer are aged in half-year increments; they are not truly added to the population until they reach the next spring! That number, again as a percentage, is the true recruitment rate; determined at the point when they are added to the herd.

“When we include annual buck mortality, a deer herd with less than 40 percent recruitment is not going to have enough mature bucks to satisfy hunters!”

We have developed a series of "metrics" for assessing the health of a deer herd, and the ones you can obtain from trail camera surveys are the most important. Over the years, we have learned there is a reason why does have, on average, two fawns. That is the number the species has evolved to that assures some survive to recruitment. When we include annual buck mortality, a deer herd with less than 40 percent recruitment is not going to have enough mature bucks to satisfy hunters!

There is much debate about the "natural" buck:doe ratio, but I assert it is one buck to 1.5 does. Without hunting mortality, that is the buck:doe ratio a herd will attain under natural conditions. Just like humans, bucks do not live as long as does, accounting for the disparity in numbers. If you want to get into an argument either with a layman or a professional biologist, just throw out the comment that an area has a 1:4 buck to doe ratio!

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I must admit, I have seen ratios as high as 1:8; so, am I right or wrong? Most professional deer biologists include buck fawns in the ratio calculation, and that usually comes from fawn crop, not recruitment. Second, in herds that have been mismanaged for decades, we have what I refer to as a “stagnant” herd. In these herds, hunters seldom harvest enough does, but over-harvest the bucks. When you combine a very low recruitment with does that can live to be as much as 20 years of age, you have a stockpile of does and a deficiency of bucks.

When you conduct trail camera herd surveys year after year, you not only see what is happening to your herd, but also you can develop plans to “fix” problems clearly identified. I also like to produce graphs that show the actual buck demographics (based on camera counts) versus the demographics of the buck harvest from the same year and property. These comparisons can be quite telling about how you are harvesting your deer herd.

There are a number of great deer managers out there using the techniques I’ve described above to manage their herds. For example, Wayne Sitton (former QDMA Deer Manager of the Year) has used these metrics to manage the Turtle Lake Club near Hillman, Michigan, to completely turn a herd around; prior to 2000, the herd had almost no mature bucks. He accomplished this task by adjusting his management plan, not only in his buck harvest, but also in habitat management and nutritional supplementation through food plots.

Like Wayne, you too have the capabilities to learn more about your deer herd and adjust your herd’s ratios. Hopefully, some of the tips in this column, specifically related to using trail cameras to acquire valuable intel about your herd’s demographics, will assist in your management journey! **NAW**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Kroll is founder and director of the Institute for White-tailed Deer Management & Research in Nacogdoches, Texas.

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I like to think I am a fair deer hunter. I feel like my skillset learned from nearly 30 years of Midwest whitetail hunting is formidable enough to harvest at least one mature buck each season. I come to expect it as a yearly marker for success, but I also realize that my skillset is far from perfect! Of all my strengths, I have one glaring, pitiful, and often embarrassing Achilles' heel: blood trailing.

Over the history of mankind, of all the hunters to chase whitetails, I am unquestionably in the bottom 5 percent of the blood-trailing talent pool. And no matter how hard I try to improve, I never will; because I can't. I am a genetic fraud! I have a form of red-green color blindness that makes red shades blend in with greens, tans and browns. The result is wholly poor color discernment. Though I may be a decent enough trophy buck hunter, I can barely blood trail my



Although hunters focus heavily on the work leading up to them taking an animal, there is plenty of work to be done after the shot. Having the right tools makes the post-shot work go by much faster.
Photo courtesy of Mossy Oak

GEAR KIT



own shots if an animal I have arrowed doesn't go down in sight. The task is doubly tough after dark.

My second worst defect? I am the world's most impatient blood trailer. I find I want to hurry way too often on a solo blood trail. If it's daylight, I must go very slow due to my poor color vision and take longer to locate blood than most people. After dark, I must trail at an absolute snail's pace, and I have several lights with extra power sources. I also pack reflective trail marker tacks, reflective marker tape, my "Mess Kit," and some other essentials.

Likewise, I often rely on two pieces of technology when trailing after dark: the onX Hunt Maps application on my cell phone, and my Garmin watch with a working compass and a good nightlight. These two in tandem really help me stay on or near the trail, especially through rolling terrain and heavy cover where one is apt to get disoriented during a nighttime track.

THE MESS KIT

Once I locate a downed deer, I break out my "Mess Kit." This is a bit of a misnomer, but the dirty work is about to begin! I own a three-tool set made by Buck Knives, USA. The 141 Paklite Field Master Kit contains a stationary skinning blade with a sturdy, 420HC stainless steel blade, a thin caper, and a simple gut hook.

The trio is housed in a sheath sporting a pair of zippered storage pockets. In one pocket, you can find my hunting license and tags, zip ties for attaching tags to the animal, and a few pieces of reflective marker tape. In the other pocket, I house two veterinary OB sleeves, a pair of black nitrile gloves to go over my sleeved hands, and a pair of veterinary towel clamps used to keep my OB sleeves attached firmly to my shoulders. This prevents me from coming home with blood all over my outerwear and leaving half of it in my truck cab and the rest in the laundry.



Properly field dressing whitetails is important for ensuring your meat doesn't spoil. To help the field-dressing process go smoothly, the author likes to have a "Mess Kit" prepped and ready in his hunting pack. Photo courtesy of Clint McCoy



The author's Mess Kit that he uses for field dressing has a variety of knives, gloves and other game cleaning tools at the ready. Aside from guaranteeing the author always has what he needs to dress game, the Mess Kit keeps the gear organized. Photo courtesy of Clint McCoy

ILLUMINATION KIT

If I must track after dark, I usually need help. I'll come out of the woods, change into "work clothes," get some supper and grab my light bag. My light kit is full of everything I may need to recover a big buck under the stars while remaining color blind.

The pack houses two reliable headlamps and their spare batteries, a NiteCore LED flashlight with two spare batteries, and a Dewalt Spotlight with corresponding two batteries. I store these in an old range bag I repurposed. I also like to pack a few small disposable hand towels. I have some that pack down to about the size of a quarter, and when you add water, they become a handy little wet wipe. The bag also houses plenty of reflective marker tape and reflective marker thumbtacks, a 16 oz Nalgene bottle full of water, a small Sharpie marker and an old cattle rope halter I use as a drag line. When it's time to head back out to a dark trail, I simply take my Paklite knife kit out of my hunting day pack, add it to my light bag, and I'm ready for any curveball a tricky blood trail might present.

RECOVERY AIDS

Locating and field dressing a mature buck in rough terrain is often a chore. And if that big rascal made it deep into the timber after the shot, he often finds a huge patch of ultra-dense cover full of snags and obstacles. Sometimes the animal finds a deep ravine and comes to rest down in a slick creek bed with sheer sidewalls. Recoveries like this can test your mettle, but with a few extra tools one man can get most any buck back to civilization.

In the toolbox of my truck, I keep a few essentials for when the going gets tough. I pack a two-ton capacity "Come-Along," a 3-foot section of chain, a 40-foot veterinary



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Since the author is color blind, he uses what he calls an "Illumination Kit" for recovering deer in the dark. This kit allows him to effectively blood trail deer despite his vision impairment. Photo courtesy of Clint McCoy

lariat and a pair of small clevises. If my buck ends up in a ravine or I need help up a creek bank, I can chain the winch to a small tree and attach it to the lariat, which then is looped around the skull base behind the antlers. This method

isn't usually necessary, but it has proven useful on more than one occasion.

With the heavy lifting out of the way, it's time to drag that trophy buck. This sounds simple enough, but it can be quite a task with a mature deer weighing

between 240 and 270 on the hoof. Once dressed, to cut the dragging weight, my favorite way to move downed deer is by using a black plastic ice fishing drag sled. I use a cattle halter on the animal's muzzle, then I attach the nose end of the halter

to two separate 20-foot tow lines. If I'm lucky to have help, my helper and I can then line up single-file ahead of the animal loaded in the sled. By grasping the tow lines (one in each hand), two people lean forward and use forward locomotive force to move that sled. Say "mush!"

LESSONS LEARNED

The Mess Kit in my hunting pack is with me in every tree I climb during the fall season. It is a product of me being an unnaturally bad daytime blood tracker due to my poor color vision. In it is everything I need for a clean, efficient and legal daylight recovery. My after dark Illumination Kit is a product of blood trails gone wrong in the dead of night. After years of being terrible at navigating after-dark recoveries, I've learned to cope using my kit and extreme patience!

I must force myself to go slow, concentrate and be

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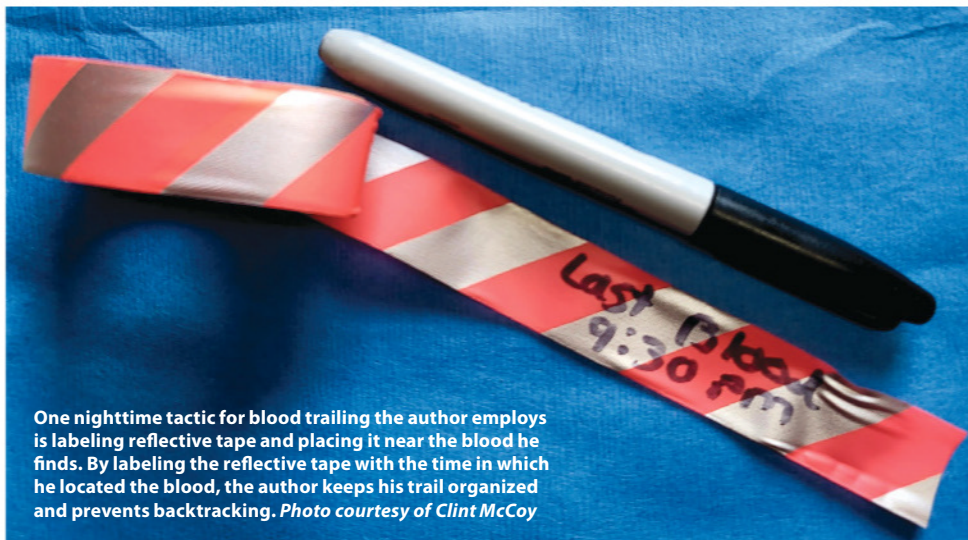
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meticulous. If I find myself stuck on last blood, I will break out that little Sharpie and a long ribbon of reflective marker tape, tie the tape at eye level

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as close to the fresh blood as possible, then write the time on the end of the ribbon. I then “pin” the spot on my onX app with a note of the time. If I happen to lose my way in the dark, I can use these strategies to get back on last blood quickly, and writing the time



One nighttime tactic for blood trailing the author employs is labeling reflective tape and placing it near the blood he finds. By labeling the reflective tape with the time in which he located the blood, the author keeps his trail organized and prevents backtracking. Photo courtesy of Clint McCoy

down helps me prevent unnecessary backtracking.

If there is ever any doubt in the shot placement or if I get hung up indefinitely on last blood, I will then usually back out, call an experienced houndsman, and set up a time to work the dog while the

track is still fresh.

With my color blindness and knack for being impatient, I have botched my share of blood trails; only to be bailed out by friends or family members that are better trailers than I am.

Sometimes I need a ton of gear to help, sometimes I

don't. I always try to get a fresh set of eyes with me, and if teamwork doesn't find that big buck, I'll call a dog handler if I must. With this system, I have had a near-flawless recovery rate, but it hasn't been easy hunting with a disability! **NAW**

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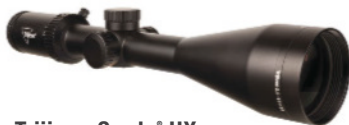
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IS THIS AN ALL-TIME TOP 10 SET OF TYPICAL WHITETAIL SHEDS?

BY DAN COLE

Wisconsin hunter Kevin McClain took a shot at this incredible whitetail during the 2017 hunting season. Unfortunately, high winds interfered with his shot and the hunter's arrow never struck the buck. Months later, Kevin's friend Doug Sinniger found both shed antlers lying atop a snowy field. A replica of the sheds is shown on the mount at left. When panel scored for the North American Shed Hunters Club, the gigantic antlers scored 95 2/8 (right side) and 95 5/8 (left). Photo by Shane Indrebo

I enjoy all aspects of large-antlered bucks, from hunting them on the hoof to hunting for their shed antlers. I also like the big buck chatter; whether through social media or friends in the outdoor industry, it's always fun to hear stories and see photos of some of the giant whitetails that roam our lands.

We get a fresh crop of big deer stories and photos to analyze yearly. Unfortunately, some of these stories are dead ends or maybe rumors. Sometimes, a set of antlers looks much more significant in pictures than they do in person, giving us a false expectation that something huge was taken. However, a true giant shows up every now and then and lights the whitetail world on fire.

These days, it takes a pretty big deer to get the whitetail world buzzing with excitement. However, long-time readers of this magazine have witnessed a progressive phenomenon where the headline bucks have slowly gotten bigger over the decades. For instance, 35 years ago, there's a good chance a 170-inch typical would make headlines.

Today a headline-worthy typical buck might need to clear 190 inches before it gets the full attention of the whitetail world. The same holds true for non-typicals; most early headlines were dominated by 200-inch bucks, and if something hit 250 inches, it was sure to receive good coverage. Slowly the anti was raised, and today we have headline bucks that are usually north of 270 inches. It's a great trend and one that many of us enjoy watching grow over the years.

Indeed, from year to year, the whitetail world is seldom short on news and rumors of giant antlered bucks to track down and feature. However, even with all the big antlered deer being produced

today, the true giant whitetails are few and far between.

Only around a dozen bucks, including shed antlers (with estimated inside spread measurements), are known to score over 300 inches non-typical. Giant typicals are slightly more common, with approximately two dozen known whitetails crossing the 200 net inches mark.

When you break that list down even further, you can separate the 10-point typicals from the 6x6s and 7x7s. It takes a fantastic set of typical antlers to net over 200 inches, but it takes a phenomenal 5x5 to cross that mark. Honestly, history has recorded only a handful of bucks as doing so.

Sticking with the largest 5x5s, we find a who's who in whitetail history when we look at known gross scores. Names such as Youngman, Van Lith, Breen, Bills, and Jordan pop out. Add shed antlers, and we get the names Fleming, Indiana Legend, and Elgin Ghost that lead the list.

The latest to the list, the Indiana Legend sheds, shocked the whitetail world when they made their way to the public eye in 2019. The wide-spreading antlers and long points made the buck look bigger than life, and it got the whitetail world talking. Unfortunately, there aren't many deer that can hang with the Breen buck for sheer overall size, but the Indiana Legend is one of the few that can.

But now, another set of shed antlers has recently surfaced that are equally big and impressive as the Breen buck! This buck first came onto the radar of Stoddard, Wisconsin resident Kevin McClain in 2014. Here's his story.

SHOOT YOUR SHOT

"I have a farm in southwest Wisconsin, and I first became aware of the buck through trail camera photos," Kevin

SHEDS

says. "He was maybe a 3- or 4-year-old at the time, but he had a deformed left antler. His right side was pretty nice, but I wasn't interested in hunting him because of the left side. After that, however, I did take notice of the future." Kevin notes that the buck spent most of this time between two small woodlots.

The following year, in 2015, there seemed to be a change within the buck. The deer grew taller and heavier that year, and his rack got wider, too. In addition, his left side had grown back nicely but had some non-typical growth. The buck's appearance changed so much that it took Kevin a while to recognize him.

Unfortunately, this was also the last year for daylight pictures of the buck. Nevertheless, Kevin was impressed by the buck's development from the previous year.

Kevin hunted the buck several times throughout the fall of 2015 but had no close encounters with the deer. He was learning, though, as the puzzle

pieces were slowly coming together. Kevin also noticed that as the buck aged, it grew fewer non-typical points. He hoped his observation was correct and looked forward to seeing and hunting the deer in 2016.

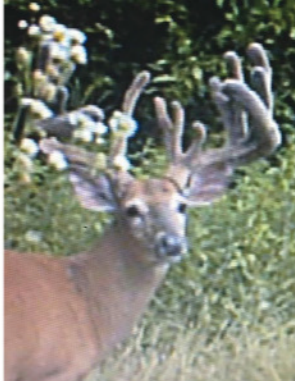
Kevin didn't get any trail camera pictures of the buck before the 2016 hunting seasons. In fact, outside of one dark photo of the buck, he was beginning to think the deer had been killed somewhere else. However, there was one spot on his farm where Kevin had not yet hunted; his gut feeling told him that's where the buck was bedding. "I thought the buck would bed there as long as I left him alone," says Kevin. "And I hadn't hunted in there all season. So, I waited until I thought everything was right."

When the rut kicked in, Kevin made his move.

One evening as shooting hours closed, Kevin got caught in his tree stand as the big typical sauntered nonchalantly through a ravine. Kevin could only watch as the big buck walked by at 30 yards. The giant whitetail had no idea he was being watched by the hunter.

Kevin had another encounter with the buck later in the fall and during a snowstorm. "It was snowing and blowing like crazy, so I took my crossbow that time," Kevin remembers. "I was hunting over a soybean field, and about the time I was going to leave, several deer entered the beanfield. They were spooky, though, and they ran back into the woods. But I figured I better stick it out after seeing that, and a couple minutes later, several more deer came out, including the big buck."

The group of deer was still acting spooky, and they weren't standing still very long. Within seconds, Kevin was looking down his bolt at the buck of a hundred lifetimes standing broadside to him at 30 yards. And then . . . he missed the shot.



Kevin McClain first became aware of this buck in 2014, thanks to trail cameras he'd placed on his farm in Wisconsin. The buck was suspected to be 3 1/2 years old in 2014. Over the next three seasons, the buck's rack grew increasingly bigger and more typical (losing some of his abnormal points). Photos courtesy of Kevin McClain



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"Yeah, I missed," Kevin admits. "The wind was crazy, and blowing towards the buck broadside. I watched as it pushed my bolt sideways and beyond the deer. But, in my eyes, it was a clean miss." That was the last time Kevin saw the enormous buck.

EPIC SHED ANTLERS

In January 2017, Kevin and friend Doug Sinniger drove to the farm to check trail cameras. Once reaching the farm, Kevin began driving across an open, snow-covered field. Within seconds Doug shouted, "Hey, look at that!" as he pointed across the field. Sticking out like a "sore thumb" and laying on top of the snow was the enormous right antler, freshly shed from the buck Kevin had missed!

To say the two were excited is an understatement. Kevin knew the deer was big, but until he got the shed antler in his hands, he didn't know just how big. Now he knew, or had a pretty good idea, and he was more impressed than ever. A couple days later, Doug returned to the same field and found the matching left side laying 10 yards inside a small, nearby woodlot. Now that they had the matched set of antlers, it was time to measure them.

Dave Boland was among the panel of measurers who officially scored the Sinniger sheds for official entry into the North American Shed Hunters Club. As follows, the final numbers are nothing short of astounding!

Both sides are typical 5-points, with each having one abnormal point. Both beams are of extraordinary length, 31 2/8 on the right and 30 4/8 on the left, accounting for a

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2nd point (G-2)	14 0/8	14 0/8	—
3rd point (G-3)	12 4/8	12 3/8	1/8
4th point (G-4)	8 2/8	10 6/8	2 4/8
1st circ. (H-1)	5 4/8	5 4/8	—
2nd circ. (H-2)	4 5/8	4 6/8	1/8
3rd circ. (H-3)	5 2/8	5 1/8	1/8
4th circ. (H-4)	4 7/8	5 3/8	4/8
Totals	95 2/8	95 5/8	5 7/8

Gross typical score 214 7/8
 Subtract side-to-side differences - 5 7/8
 Subtract abnormal points - 7 0/8
FINAL NET TYPICAL SCORE 202 0/8

The above score is calculated using an estimated inside spread credit of 24 inches.

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So what happened to this incredible Wisconsin buck after he dropped these massive shed antlers in 2017? That's left largely to speculation. However, Kevin McClain did hear from an elderly neighbor that her grandson killed a giant buck in one of the hunting seasons that followed. Could this have been the same deer, and will the world ever see it? Only time will tell.
Photo by Shane Indrebo

side-to-side difference of just 6/8 inches.

The right antler has a typical gross score of 95 2/8 inches. Subtract the 3 5/8 drop tine as an abnormal point, and the right antler has a net score of 91 5/8 as a typical 5-point. The left side has a typical gross frame measuring 95 5/8 inches. Subtract the 3 3/8 inch brow point sticker, and the 5-point typical antler has a net score of 92 2/8. Those are top-end numbers!

As a matching set, the antlers mea-

sure 190 7/8 inches gross typical, without any spread credit. The net score is 185 inches, again with no spread credit. Things get pretty interesting when we do add a spread credit. The replicated antlers that are seen mounted in the photos are set at 24-inches inside. Add those inches, and we get 214 7/8 inches gross typical and 202 net typical.

These are significant numbers and a set of antlers that should rank near the top 10 or 12 sets of whitetail sheds

ever recorded. If we look at numbers with the spread included, the buck had the potential to become one of the top 12 typicals in the world. The Sinniger sheds were found one year after the Indiana Legend sheds were picked up.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE BUCK?

Does Kevin McLain know whatever happened to the monster buck that carried the Sinniger sheds? "I'm not sure what became of him," Kevin explains. "I never saw him again after I missed him during that snowstorm. I spoke with an elderly neighbor who mentioned that her grandson 'was hunting a great big granddaddy of a buck.' When I asked her if he got the deer, she immediately replied that he had. The timeline fits, so I can't rule it out."

This leads to speculation that Wisconsin may have yet another 200-inch typical hiding in the shadows, just waiting to be brought out for the public to appreciate. Either way, it's the kind of thing that keeps the world of the whitetail chattering. **NAW**

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WHEN THE PLAN COMES TOGETHER

BY
CODY
LARRIMORE

Darin Williams (right) arrowed this incredible non-typical, taken by crossbow on Nov. 16, 2022. The buck net scores a whopping 230 inches Boone & Crockett. Darin's hunting buddy, Travis, spotted the buck the day prior chasing a doe towards Darin's hunting property. The next day, the buck was still around, and Darin got the shot of his lifetime. *Photo courtesy of Darin Williams*

Deer hunters aren't far and few between, even those that only chase trophy whitetails. Every season, millions of deer hunters take to the woods for a chance to harvest one. If you've spoken to a deer hunter, you're also aware that almost all of them have their own methods, tricks, and tactics that they believe are the key to success.

What's rare in the deer hunting community is coming across a deer hunter who constantly harvests mature, trophy-class whitetails. Darin Williams of Waverly, Kansas is one of those hunters.

Darin has a dozen or more deer mounts and racks hanging in his house, all between 150 and 170 inches. He's no novice in chasing, and more importantly harvesting, mature trophy-class whitetails. Darin started hunting when he was a sophomore in high school. Unlike others though,

he decided to teach himself. He didn't have a family member or friend to show him the ropes. He took it upon himself to read countless magazine articles and study all the information available.

Fast forward to the spring of 2022. Darin was in his tractor on a piece of ground he farms. He was spreading fertilizer when he spotted antler tips sticking out of the grass. It was a giant non-typical shed antler with a bladed brow tine.

As a farmer in Kansas, Darin's no stranger to picking up sheds while doing field work, especially since he's a big believer in cover crops like wheat and rye grass. These late-season food sources are especially attractive to whitetails during the months when they typically drop their antlers.

Darin was aware of the buck who dropped this particular shed prior to finding it. But he hadn't

Kansas farmer and avid whitetail hunter Darin Williams had his eye on a big, non-typical buck in 2022. A well-placed food plot and Redneck blind led to Darin's tag getting punched during the peak of the rut.





Darin's hunt started when he found this big shed antler lying in some grass beside an ag field. Darin spotted the bone from his tractor while spreading fertilizer. Several locals were chasing the buck, but Darin hatched a plan to lure the buck onto his farm with a food plot — and a strategically placed Redneck blind. Photos courtesy of Darin Williams

to be 4 1/2 years old when Darin found

the shed antler, based on all the trail camera photos eventually discovered.

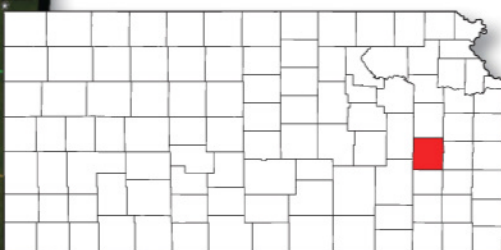
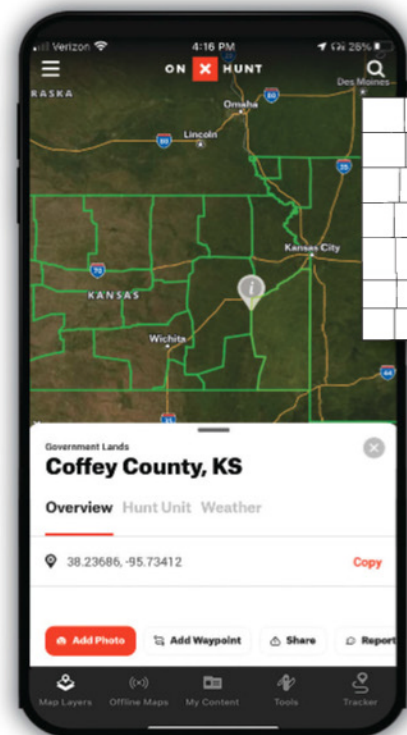
SETTING THE STAGE

Going into the 2022 season, Darin wanted to make sure his property stood out among the rest. "I put a plan together back in March, after I found the shed," Darin explains. "I decided right then that I was going after this deer."

An avid hunter and lifelong farmer, Darin knows what deer need to feel safe, but also what's needed in their

seen the deer in person or on camera. Instead, Darin's friend Travis had told him about the deer. In fact, Travis had hunted the buck during the 2021 season.

Come to find out later, Travis wasn't the only one after him. Many of their neighbors had the buck on camera, some for multiple years. Many were specifically targeting him as their No. 1 hit-lister. The deer was estimated



Darin Williams' non-typical came from Coffey County, Kansas. The 5 1/2-year-old buck is a great example of a mature whitetail reaching its peak.

diet to reach their maximum antler potential. He knew this buck had spent most of the hunting season on a neighbor's property, in years past. If the same held true in 2022, the buck would cross over properties while switching to his fall range. Only then would Darin have a chance at him during the pre-rut or rut.

To maximize the amount of time

deer would spend on his property, Darin knew he needed to make some improvements. So he planted oats in the spring as a food source during the antler growing period. Darin then harvested the oats in July, giving him enough time to plant a fall food plot.

Darin practices no-till farming, and he routinely sows his fields in triticale and peas for cool season crops, and Sudan grass, sunn hemp, sunflowers, cowpeas and tillage radishes for warm season food plots. This approach builds up the soil's organic matter and leads to better quality crops that are more attractive to whitetails.

He also planted Sudan grass for cover and security for the deer. The plan was for the extra-tall Sudan grass to serve as a privacy fence, as well as an access and exit route for hunting purposes. However, Darin's part of Kansas experienced a drought in summer 2022, and the grass only grew to a fraction of the height needed. Darin changed plans and decided to plant seven acres of triticale as his fall food plot in August.

After church a few weeks later, Darin and a few of his friends put together a Redneck hunting blind and hauled it out to "the spot" — a location that had been predetermined based on the location of the food plot, the timber edge and water source.

Darin says, "If you looked at this property, you would not buy it for hunting purposes. But, based on my experience planting food plots in this area, I thought I had a reasonable chance of catching this buck on my property."

RUT ACTION PICKS UP

On the morning of Nov. 15, Darin's friend Travis was hunting and spotted the big buck a few hundred yards from Darin's property, chasing and dogging a doe. Travis sent Darin a picture of the buck in the field. When he received the photo, Darin was busy in the combine harvesting soybeans



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Darin has a long track record of success taking mature bucks in his part of eastern Kansas, but none of his prior trophies score higher than this 230-inch bruiser. There's a reason so many hunters call Kansas the "land of giants." Photos courtesy of Darin Williams

on another property.

Darin, being the experienced deer hunter that he is, knows that a mature deer of this caliber doesn't make many mistakes, so he needed to capitalize on the opportunity. When Darin received a trail camera photo of the deer by himself the following morning, he knew he was no longer "locked down" with the doe. It was go time.

Putting the harvest on hold, Darin headed to his Redneck blind on Nov. 16 around 2:30 in the afternoon with his Raven RX29 Sniper crossbow. It wasn't more than two hours later when he was faced with the moment millions of deer hunters dream of, yet never experience.

Following another doe down a path to the food plot was the buck Darin was after, the deer of several lifetimes. There was no excitement, no panic. This is what Darin had planned for — the moment he had been searching for ever since he saw those tines sticking out of the grass back in March. He was mentally prepared and physically ready. It was time to execute. He checked the line of sight; there were no obstacles in the way.

Head down, safety off and squeeze; don't pull. The 8-yard shot broke, resulting in the giant tipping over into the food plot no more than 35 yards away!

"HEAD DOWN, SAFETY OFF AND SQUEEZE; DON'T PULL. THE 8-YARD SHOT BROKE, RESULTING IN THE GIANT TIPPING OVER INTO THE FOOD PLOT NO MORE THAN 35 YARDS AWAY!"

That's when Darin's cool, collected demeanor started to break down! The adrenaline started to flow. Darin had accomplished what he set out to do. His hands shook. He asked himself, "Did that really just happen?"

Darin had promised Travis that he would be the first phone call if he was able to harvest the buck, but Darin struggled to work his phone because of his trembling hands! Once he was able to get Travis on the phone, Darin's excitement started to explode.

"The more I talked to Travis, the louder I was getting," Darin laughs. "And I started yelling that we killed him, that we did it!" Travis drove out to the blind and helped in the recovery of the deer, and the two men celebrated together.

Pursuing and tagging a 200-plus-inch whitetail isn't a small feat. Just like Darin's situation, many people were aware of and hunting this deer. Having a friend like Travis, who was also hunting the deer but was willing

to share information and help Darin, is even more rare. All the way leading up to the successful hunt, Travis was genuinely happy for and encouraging of Darin. This puts Travis in a category of friends that's arguably more rare than the class of deer itself!

CRUNCHING NUMBERS

Comparing the shed antler and trail camera photos to the final antlers attached to the harvested buck, Darin and Travis estimate the buck gained roughly 38 inches from when he was 4 1/2 to 5 1/2 years old. Darin's Coffey County, Kansas buck was officially scored and entered into the Boone & Crockett Club Record Book at 230 inches net non-typical.

Darin Williams is a class-act, whitetail hunting enthusiast, who I'm honored to call a friend. I couldn't be happier for what he's accomplished, and I'm excited to see what the future holds for him in the whitetail woods. Congratulations, Darin! **NAW**



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ARKANSAS



Kyle Woodruff's main-frame 10-point sports an amazing 44 inches of abnormal points, pushing the tape just over the 200-inch non-typical mark. It is the largest buck taken in Benton County, Arkansas, and the fourth largest taken with a crossbow in the state. Photo courtesy of Kyle Woodruff

BY
CLIFFORD
NEAMES

A minor setback just before opening day of the Arkansas 2022 archery season led Kyle Woodruff to his biggest buck ever. He and his brother, Patrick, try to only take mature deer, 4 1/2 years

of age or older with 150-inch or better antlers. The caveat being that any deer they shoot gets mounted. "If I am going to spend the money for that, it has to be something pretty special," Kyle says. "And sometimes that means passing some nice bucks along the way!"

As the season was approaching, they had planned to hunt a tract of several hundred acres in northwest Arkansas, where each have had good success targeting older bucks. Kyle had his tag intended for a really nice 12-point buck that he had located



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**NEVER-BEFORE-SEEN
NON-TYPICAL
MONSTER BUCK
SHOWS UP JUST
AFTER OPENING DAY,
AND JUST IN TIME
FOR CROSSBOW
HUNTER TO STRIKE.**

With 28 points, including 12 on the right and 16 on the left side, Kyle Woodruff's 2022 crossbow trophy is a true giant. The rack scores 202 3/8 non-typical, with just a 16 6/8-inch inside spread. Photo courtesy of Kyle Woodruff

there. He felt the deer would be locked in on a food source early in the season. And he was confident that he might take that buck.

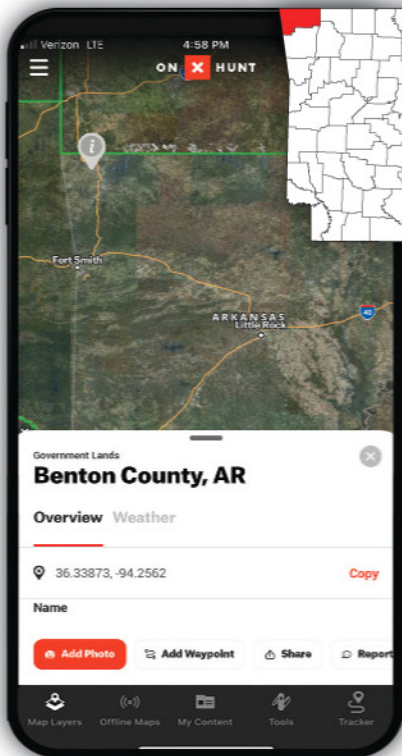
Then a timely cell camera photo, the night before his first hunt, changed everything.

The target deer had broken off one of his G2 tines, leaving Kyle scrambling. "I wasn't really expecting that," Kyle admits. "But I definitely would not shoot him with his rack broken that badly!"

With no real back up plan in place at that point, he decided to skip hunting on opening day. Missing the opener might seem brutal to most of us, but Kyle figured he would make up for it later in the season. And he got to spend the whole day with his family, banking up some points with his better half! When God gives you lemons, make lemonade, right?

The two brothers have several other properties they hunt in and around Benton County, some of which are very rural and some inside the city limits. One of these is only about 100 acres of rolling pasture and oak ridges. There had been cows on the property the previous year, and they had been a real issue.





Kyle Woodruff killed his incredible early-season non-typical in Benton County, Arkansas. Kyle had never seen the buck prior to the day he shot it.

Deer and cows are not always a problem. But cows can wreck a hunt when they find you. So, the two brothers had stayed away in 2021. But the cows were gone now. So, Kyle opted to try there the second morning of the season.

"I had been in there a few days earlier, putting out some rice bran, and there wasn't anything special showing," Kyle explains. "I was really just going to see what might show up."

Then, on his way in, the hunter got a real surprise. While walking through deep weeds, he startled a skunk. That confrontation only lasted a few seconds, and he managed to avoid getting sprayed. But it caused a delay, and Kyle took a much longer route to the stand.

"That was the beginning of my good luck that morning," Kyle says. "And there was a lot more coming!"

After rerouting his approach, Kyle climbed into the ladder stand at the top of a ridge. The whole area was filled with white oaks, and acorns were raining down. That had always



Kyle had been targeting a big 12-point typical leading up to the 2022 archery season in Arkansas, but that buck broke his antler just before the season began. This sent Kyle searching for a new place to hunt. His luck quickly turned when this mega non-typical showed up in bow range.

Photo courtesy of Kyle Woodruff

been the ticket on previous hunts. "I felt a lot more confident after seeing it," he relays.

Only 45 minutes later, Kyle's good luck continued when he spotted a buck moving his way. "It only took one glance, and I knew this was one I would shoot," Kyle says. "I put down the binoculars and grabbed my crossbow!"

The huge buck made it into 20 yards quickly and offered a perfect broadside shot. The buck lunged as the bolt passed through his chest and crashed just a few yards from the



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ARKANSAS AFTERSHOCK

stand. "I could see the bolt laying on the ground, and the giant rack right there," Kyle adds. "It was all over very fast, and right then I knew he was bigger than anything I had ever shot!"

After making some calls, Kyle loaded the deer and headed to the skinning rack where he was joined by his family. A photo session ensued as he recounted the story several times. "It all happened so quickly," Kyle adds.

Kyle's buck lived over a mile away from where he arrowed it. The deer relocated after another hunter wounded it. Photo by Kyle Woodruff

"There was really no time to get excited until it was over!"

Later that evening, Kyle sent his cousin a few of the photos and told him about the hunt. And as always happens, the cousin passed them along to other people. "I went to bed about as happy as a man can be," Kyle adds. "But the next morning, things took an unusual turn."

Kyle found a text on his phone, from a number that he did not recognize. The text had arrived at 11:00 p.m. the night before. The mystery sender was convinced that he had shot the giant buck on opening day and made a fatal hit, despite not being able to recover it. And he was suspicious that Kyle had found the deer and was claiming falsely that he had killed it.

"I wasn't sure how he even knew about the hunt, since I had only told a few folks about my success," Kyle says. "But I had noticed a deep gouge in the deer's back when I first walked up on it. So, I decided to hear the man's story."

After reaching out to the mystery texter, Kyle offered to meet him for

lunch to clear the air. It turned out that the other hunter had been seeing the buck in his back yard for quite some time. He had shot the deer there on opening day, over a mile away from where Kyle had killed it.

When he couldn't locate the deer, he called in tracking dogs to continue the search. The tracker couldn't recover the buck either, but also couldn't say for sure that it was not dead. The hunter had seen Kyle's picture, sent by someone who recognized the buck.

"He wasn't really happy at first," Kyle admits. "But once I presented my pics, showing the double-lung hit, he shared stories about the buck," Kyle relays. "I figure the extensive search they made pushed the buck all the way over to where I shot him. And his bad luck sure led to my good luck, oddly!"

The mainframe 10-point sports an amazing 44 inches of abnormal points, pushing the tape just over the 200-inch mark. It is the largest buck taken in Benton County, and the fourth largest taken with a crossbow in the state. By all accounts, the Kyle Woodruff buck is an incredible deer! And the hunt is a story that will be hard to top. **NAW**

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Tom Holzer likes hunting Minnesota when the weather is warm and bordering on hot for the time of year.

When the mercury rises, he focuses his efforts on making water readily available to any buck he's after, in a place where the buck will feel secure while drinking. Usually, that's somewhere close to a food source.

Tom began making hand-dug waterholes a main part of his hunting tactics about 15 years ago, because there is no natural water on the tops of ridges where he hunts and where the deer in his area spend much of their time. He digs water holes where you would expect him to dig them — in a location where the prevailing winds will not blow his scent to the water.

Entry and exit access is seldom a problem. In this ridge-and-valley country, morning breezes are mostly blowing down the slope, so he comes in from open fields at the top. Brush is seldom a problem. When Tom hunts low, he clears approaches to stands before the season.

The weather often is nearly 80 degrees, hot for Minnesota deer hunting.



It also can be humid, which makes deer even more reluctant to move much.

"Deer will be drinking a lot of water, even though they aren't anywhere near rutting or chasing," Tom says. "In that type of weather, you want to make it as easy as possible for deer to drink. They don't want to move much, and you don't want them to move much."

Tom had set up in a new area in 2019

about a half-mile from where he had previously spent much of his hunting time. This was where he had gotten a trail camera photo of an unusually big-antlered buck. The buck always seemed to be in velvet.

He also set up a tree stand there and dug a small water hole, just in case; because a neighboring farmer planted crops in a new part of his farm that



Tom Holzer arrowed this unique non-typical while hunting over a waterhole in Minnesota during the state's bow season. The velvet buck is one of several mature deer Tom has taken over his man-made watering sites. *Photo courtesy of Tom Holzer*

USE WATER TO DRAW BUCKS

BY
GLENN
HELGELAND

MINNESOTA WHITETAIL HUNTER TOM HOLZER HAS A PROVEN METHOD FOR BAGGING BIG BUCKS WITH MAN-MADE WATERHOLES.

HERE'S HOW HE DOES IT.

Bucks usually come to a waterhole alone, while does often visit in groups. Tom Holzer created this waterhole in the middle of a weedy field where deer liked to bed and sometimes feed. Deer felt secure here and really hammered the waterhole. Tom had a ground blind 20 yards away in some brush. *Photos courtesy of Tom Holzer*



year (2020), enhancing the area. He had enlarged the water hole this year; the smaller water hole had been heavily used its first year.

Tom places tree stands where deer are heading in and out from feed. “They like to stop then to drink water,” he explains. “This area had been in hay and CRP land. The farmer replaced them with soybeans, so I had set up to be near the beans.”

It was a wise decision. Deer generally

Tom prefers to place his waterholes about 10 yards off the main deer movement trail, about 20 yards from his tree stand. He places his stand sites according to prevailing winds, to avoid being detected by deer as they stop for a drink. Photo courtesy of Tom Holzer



prefer soybeans over hay and CRP. Tom vouches for his move: “The buck, and other deer, confirmed my decision by making the same switch of food sources.”

Tom had plenty of reason to be confident. He began hunting deer when he was 12, began bowhunting at 13, and shot his first buck at age 15. He’s now 43. Over the years he has tagged 13 bucks that scored higher than 140. Of those, four scored in the 150s and

two were in the 180s. All wore typical antlers, but he had no hesitation going after this non-typical.

“I figured as warm as it is, deer are going to be wanting water,” Tom says. “There’s a creek down at the bottom of the valley, but they don’t like to expose themselves. That’s why I usually put water holes near open farm fields on the nearly flat tops of ridges.”

How far will bucks travel for water?

“Across our property, maybe three-quarters of a mile,” Tom says. “Seclusion is the big thing. That’s why I had dug the water hole at an old logging staging area in the middle of the woods. The creek at the bottom of the valley also has a lot of trees, and deer feel secure there, but since they’re already up top of the ridge feeding, it’s less travel for them to come to the high-up water hole.

“They also seem to bed up high,” Tom adds. “That’s an important factor, too. Deer don’t often have distinct trails off a field. A hunter has a better chance to find where many faint trails meet, a pinch point back off the field.”

Some, but not all, of the water holes Tom digs are at pinch points.

“The big non-typical was coming out of a pinch point,” Tom explains.

“I didn’t need to fill the water hole tank because we had enough rain. The buck was coming toward me from a bedding area about 6:30 in the evening. It stopped first at the waterhole and offered a broadside 20-yard shot. After the shot, it turned and headed back where it had come from. I lost sight of it after 30 yards, but it didn’t go much further.

INTRODUCING WATER HOLES

Tom does double-duty on much of his early season hunting. “I hit it pretty hard early,” the hunter says. “But at times it is more of a scouting thing, trying not to disturb the deer, unless I have a plan to go after one.

“Deer in our area don’t feed down low much. They aren’t going to feed much on browse when farmers have good crops on the flat tops of the ridges,” Tom continues.

“I try to set up my tree stands about 50 yards from crop fields. Where my stand is set up decides where I will dig the water hole, considering the prevailing wind direction. I end up setting them at distances from the field that seem best for each situation. That’s just common sense,” he adds.

Generally, Tom decides to set up on a morning hunt near a bedding area. In contrast, he sets up near a feeding area for an evening hunt. “I get between where they are and where they’re headed,” he says.

Tom adds, “I play the wind, where I expect deer to come from, so I’m downwind of their anticipated approach. I’ll also have a second stand set up, so I can move when the wind is from a different direction. I don’t want them to pick me out.

“That’s not the only factor, of course. I need to be in a tree with backdrop branches, so I’m not skylined. In our ridge and valley country, the big thing is not being skylined,” says Tom. “It seems like sometimes I spend half the morning figuring out the best tree to be as close as I can to the perfect setup.”

LOCATION, LOCATION!

How does Tom select sites to create waterholes?

“I pick a stand where I think I’ll catch bucks running, especially early in the season, and needing water,” he says. “This works for rut timing, too, with all the extra moving they do then.

“The main concern when setting up high is to avoid kicking them out of the field where they’re feeding,” Tom adds. “When hunting low, I’ll be catching them coming out of a bedding area, heading down to water.”



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Tom is adamant about leaving at least three days between sits at a specific stand. "Sometimes I hunt a particular stand only one day a season. Wind direction decides what I do and don't do, but I have quite a few stands ready in some areas, so with a bit of a wind shift I may be only 30 yards from the tree I sat in four or five days earlier," he explains.

"I'll dig a hole that will hold about 100 gallons. It will be about two feet

into the water. Squirrels are my only problem," Tom says. "When the mud covering the edges of the liners gets washed away, squirrels chew through the liners."

Tom banks the dirt on the lower side of the hole to catch any overflow.

"In dry years, it seems like I'm constantly filling holes," Tom admits. "I monitor the local rainfall. I use 35-gallon barrels in the bed of my truck. They slide off with no problem.

I wear knee high boots to minimize my scent when I have to get out of the truck."

Two places Tom does not dig waterholes are in oak areas, particularly white oaks that are good acorn producers, and wherever there are crabapple trees. "Crabapples are like magnets for deer," he says. "Near acorns and crabapples, I don't need waterholes."

He digs waterholes about 10 yards off the trail and keeps them in brushier areas, because deer feel more secure in this setting. Tom prefers to dig his water holes about 20 yards from his stand.

How alert or wary are deer when they approach a water hole Tom made, you ask?

"Bucks mainly approach alone, although I have had five bucks at water at once in early October," Tom remembers.

"Does may visit more in groups. I have had as many as 20 does at a waterhole during one day of hunting. If 10 or more come in, they seem to take turns coming to the water hole. In drier years, of course, water attracts them more."

Tom doesn't do any digging down low; deer already have a main trail to the creek. "I hunt halfway down the hill when I'm hunting low," he explains, "as deer are getting to or from bedding and water."

The buck he shot in 2018 on Halloween was a low-land buck. He was chasing does and headed to the creek, taking a break from the does. Yet, Tom had seen the buck up high the day before.

"I got a heart/lung 40-yard shot around noon. He must have been really thirsty, because he continued heading down to the creek after I shot him," Tom notes.

IN CONCLUSION

Water is a must-have for all whitetails. It's a necessary and fundamental aspect of every deer's daily life. And that's a fact Minnesota bowhunter Tom Holzer realized a long time ago. After years of proven results hunting over his homemade water holes in the woods, it's hard to argue with his strategy. If you hunt similar terrain, perhaps a man-made water site is just the trick to bag your next buck! **NAW**



deep by five feet around. I line the hole with rubber pond liner," says Tom. "I use this because you never know what roots and debris will be in the way. I don't have rock problems, just roots. I try to find an area where water will flow into it after a rain, so I won't need to constantly fill it.

"Adult deer come right in to the pond. They seem comfortable," Tom explains.

Deer don't punch holes in the liner with their hooves. In fact, "Mostly fawns step in the holes. They are smaller; maybe they have trouble reaching the water. Adults seldom step

Tom's success bowhunting over his home-made waterholes is hard to argue with. He has consistently taken mature bucks during the early season when temperatures rise as high as 80 degrees. Bucks are forced to drink often during strings of hot, humid weather. Photos courtesy of Tom Holzer





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THE BEST TREE STAND LOCATIONS

BY SEASON

A WHITETAIL'S NEEDS CHANGE SEASONALLY. SO IF YOU WANT TO CONSISTENTLY STAY ON BIG BUCKS, YOUR TREE STAND LOCATIONS MUST SHIFT, TOO.

BY
JOSH
HONEYCUTT

Whitetails are smart animals. Give one several seasons to learn the ropes, and they become downright difficult to hunt. Outwitting mature bucks on their home turf takes critical thinking, serious forethought, situational interpretation and accurate reaction. Of course, there are certain locations where mature bucks are more vulnerable to deer hunters. What

follows is some of these locations and why they qualify as the best places to ambush big bucks.

THE EARLY SEASON

The off-season of sadness and withdrawal from tree stand therapy is over. Deer season has arrived, and it's time to release some bullets and arrows. Of course, the latter begins first, and early archery seasons offer late summer and early fall opportuni-

ties at whitetails that are focused on predictable bed-to-feed patterns. Just as much of the year is, the key focus is food.

The Best Summer Bedding:

Whitetails need different types of bedding throughout the season. When it's warm, deer seek areas that are cooler and offer reprieve from the harsh sunlight. This is commonly on north-facing slopes, bottomlands and areas that receive consistent wind flow.



Buck behavior during the rut is vastly different from that of the early season. Because of this, your hunting locations for each season should specifically be geared to deer activity during that time period.
Photo by Matt Hansen

Early Season Food Patterns:

Whitetails are creatures of habit. That said, individual patterns can last a few days or a few weeks. Generally, early-season patterns last longer; and as the season progresses, they shorten. Finding an early season bed-to-feed pattern that target deer are using is a great way to catch a buck off guard.

Isolated Water Sources: A mature buck can consumer between 3 and 5 quarts of water per day. They get some

of this from moisture-rich food sources, but this is more so during the spring and early summer. Once deer season arrives, whitetails must get more of their water intake from direct sources. This makes an isolated watering hole close to bedding an excellent place to find success.

Pockets of Falling Fruits: Whitetails love diversity, and fruit trees offer an element of that. Apples, crabapples, pears, persimmons, plums and other

fruits are excellent food sources. Deer target these heavily when they begin falling. Because fruits go so quickly, I've seen increased daylight movements as deer attempt to consume these great foods before they are gone.

First and Last Acorns: The first acorns to drop are generally members of the white oak family. This is good for two reasons. First, deer prefer white oak acorns over those of the red oak variety. Secondly, deer start hitting

THE BEST TREE STAND LOCATIONS BY SEASON

these as soon as they begin falling. Hunters who focus on these have higher odds of intercepting a target animal, especially if the acorns falling are concentrated in a specific area. Of course, once acorns start falling, the early season is fading, and pre-rut is near.

THE PRE-RUT

The pre-rut is the early season with a shot of B12! The focus is still food; however, many of the bedding area and food source locations have shifted since the early season. And now, with testosterone levels on the rise, bucks are beginning to feel some starkly different feelings about the deer around them.

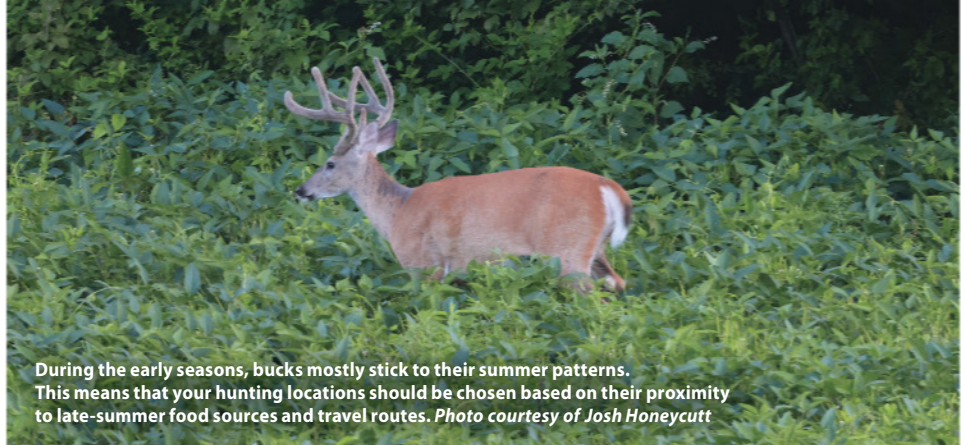
The Thick 'N' Nasty: As the early season gives way to the pre-rut, things change. Hunting pressure is mounting. Food sources are shifting. Bedding needs are altering, too. This leads deer into new areas, and these are commonly full of thick, nasty cover. Here, they get mast, browse, good bedding and security.

Heavy Buck Sign: Hunting over scrapes isn't always advisable, especially on field edges. But don't ignore rut sign. An abundance of rubs and scrapes indicates frequent travel. If it's likely to be daylight movement, certainly keep that in mind for stand locations.

A Secluded Snack Bar: Whitetails are lovers of seclusion. They like being away from everything. This makes a

Hard mast is essential to a whitetail's diet, so deer hunters must factor the mast crop into their hunt plan. Focus on the first and last falling mast to find the most concentrated deer activity.

Photo courtesy of Josh Honeycutt



During the early seasons, bucks mostly stick to their summer patterns. This means that your hunting locations should be chosen based on their proximity to late-summer food sources and travel routes. *Photo courtesy of Josh Honeycutt*

small, secluded food source close to bedding an excellent daytime interception point, especially for mature bucks. Oftentimes, these become staging areas that deer feed in during afternoons before moving on to larger food sources closer to dark.

The Oxbow Bed: Whitetails select bedding areas that offer quality bedding cover. Oftentimes, water adds a layer of security to certain bedding areas. This includes oxbows, which are peninsulas of land created by a U-shaped bend in a creek, river, stream or lake. Deer generally bed toward the base of the U. Rarely do predators come from the water side, but if they do, whitetails easily escape on land out of the mouth of the oxbow. If predators come from land, they bound across the water to safety. With the right wind direction, hunters can set up closer to the mouth of the oxbow and wait for deer to leave their bedroom.

Leeward Ridge Lines: A leeward ridge is best described as the downwind side of a ridge line. Here, the prevailing wind comes over the top of the ridge; in the morning, thermals rise from the valley below. This creates a wind tunneling effect that allows deer to catch scent from multiple directions. This

HOW TO PICK THE RIGHT TREE

Choosing the perfect tree stand location is almost as important as hunting at the right time. If a shot opportunity comes, you don't want poor tree choice to ruin the hunt. Remember to choose a tree that is healthy, straight, wider than your shoulders, offers additional cover, is the right height and has the sun at the rear.

Furthermore, don't discount the effectiveness of giving the buck the wind (sort of). This is called hunting a just-off wind, where the wind is technically in the deer's favor, but it's off just enough to keep the animal from smelling you. Oftentimes, these conditions give bucks a false sense of security to move during daylight hours.

helps bucks to detect danger as they return to their bedding areas. It also helps detect estrus does, which brings us to the rut.

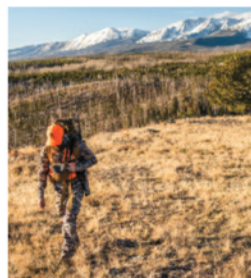
THE RUT

Ah, the one time of the year that whitetails actively seek love. It's a period frustrated bucks have been waiting for, and most of them aren't about to miss it. However, if hunters use the wrong tactics and stand locations, they will miss the bucks.

The Rut Funnel: Deer usually travel the path of least resistance. Funnels allow deer to easily navigate from A to B without crossing over or through adjacent obstacles that are difficult to traverse. During the rut, when whitetail bucks are covering more ground, these can be excellent spots to intercept cruising bucks.

The Sensical Crossing: Certain terrain types discourage or prohibit deer from crossing. Other times, deer merely establish a good point of crossing that is adopted by the herd. Some of these locations include bluffs, rivers, ditches, fences, walls of vegetation





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Hunting whitetails in the late season is all about the food. If you're still holding a buck tag when late season arrives, you can find calorie-depleted deer hitting the last quality food sources available. Photo courtesy of Josh Honeycutt

and more. Crossings that are likely to be used during daylight quickly become solid stand locations.

The Best Doe Bedding: Bucks and does sometimes bed in the same areas, but generally they are segregated. During the rut, doe bedding areas become more attractive to bucks. They move from one doe group or family to the next in search of receptive females, making these doe bedding areas solid options for the rut.

The Best Buck Bedding: Just because it's the rut doesn't mean bucks won't continue to use their preferred bedrooms. Uber-mature bucks commonly rut and move only at night, and if they aren't with an estrus doe, they'll return to their proven sanctuary of bedding cover. So, don't overlook the best buck bedding in an area just because it's the rut. Deer will still be there.

The Weird Rut Spot: The rut is a time when deer do things they don't throughout the rest of the year. This includes inhabiting areas that are virtually void of deer at other times. There's a rhyme to the reason, though. Mature bucks understand the rut, and they commonly push does to oddball spots to get estrus females away from competing bucks. Spots that check this box include brush piles, fence rows, small pockets of timber deer usually avoid and more.

THE LATE SEASON

The early season, pre-rut and rut are over. The late season arrives, and with

it the heavy focus on food sources returns. Whitetails are recouping weight loss from the rut, and remaining food sources are dwindling. Hunters should spend ample time scouting for these last pockets of attractive grub.

The Marsh or Swamp Perch: By this point, deer are quite pressured. Marshes and swamps offer added security in multiple forms. First, water prevents many hunters and predators from entering. If they do, deer tend to see, hear or smell them coming from land pinch points or through the water. Islands of land amidst large swaths of cattails or flooded ground serve as shielded bedding locations. Hunters can study the area and set up accordingly.

Big Timber Clear-Cuts: Large areas of clear-cut timber leaves a mess of downed logs, limbs and freshly regenerated plant life. Not to mention the high volume of eye-level browse suddenly on the ground floor. Within a short time, these areas serve as a cobweb of bedding cover, too.

The Late-Season Solar Bed: In winter, when it's very cold, certain areas better serve as bedding than others. One example is solar bedding cover. This is defined as bedding on southern-facing slopes. These receive more sunlight due to the sun remaining in the southern sky. This allows deer to receive maximum warmth from the sun throughout the day.

Winter Thermal Bed: Another late-season-centric bedding type is

thermal bedding. This is described as dense stands of coniferous trees. These include cedars, spruce and pines. These evergreens shield deer from rain, snow, sleet and wind. These areas are also generally a few degrees warmer, because conifers help hold heat closer to ground level.

The Obvious Escape Route: By the late season, deer are scared critters. They react quickly and often. Furthermore, many rifle, shotgun and muzzleloader seasons take place during the late season. This causes a lot of deer to cut and run when hunters hit the woods. Those who are very in-tune with how deer use their hunting properties (private or public), and how deer escape incoming hunting pressure, can set up along these routes and intercept fleeing deer.

CONCLUSION: FIND THE X

Overall, there are many different habitat and terrain features that serve as good stand locations. From one phase of deer season to the next, hunters can key-in on in-the-moment needs and patterns of deer to stay in the action. Remembering the basic needs of food, water and cover will point the compass in the right direction.

But security is almost as important. If mature target bucks are the goal, this comes in the form of overlooked pockets of deer habitat. If other hunters are avoiding it, this is where deer will be. And that will almost always be a great tree stand location. **NAW**

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OVERLOOKED APP FEATURES

MANY WHITETAIL HUNTERS USE HUNTING APPS TO AID IN THEIR SCOUTING, HUNTING AND LAND WORK PLANNING, BUT ARE WE GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THESE TOOLS? HERE ARE THE MOST VALUABLE OVERLOOKED APP FEATURES FOR DEER HUNTERS.

BY
JACE
BAUSERMAN

There have been some massive whitetail-oriented gear advancements in recent years. None, though, have impacted my success like digital and cellular scouting cameras and top-tier digital mapping apps.

What started as apps showcasing 3-D aerial imagery and private/public boundaries has certainly evolved. Today, top-end digital mapping apps like HuntStand, onX, Base Map, HuntWise and others, include up-to-the-minute weather data with future forecasts to help us plan our next deer-chasing mission. Many apps have wind-direction imagery that shows the current and expected wind directions with a cone or a computer-simulated graphic that mimics wind. It's impressive.

Many apps have features related to moon data, barometric pressure, etc. Some are going the extra mile to help those chasing North America's most beloved game animal be even more prepared with advanced, formulated-for-whitetails features.

Here are some of my favorite apps and what I think makes them great.

HUNTSTAND

I have used HuntStand for three years, and when it comes to whitetail hunting and land management, I believe it is the best digital hunting app.

Why do I think so?

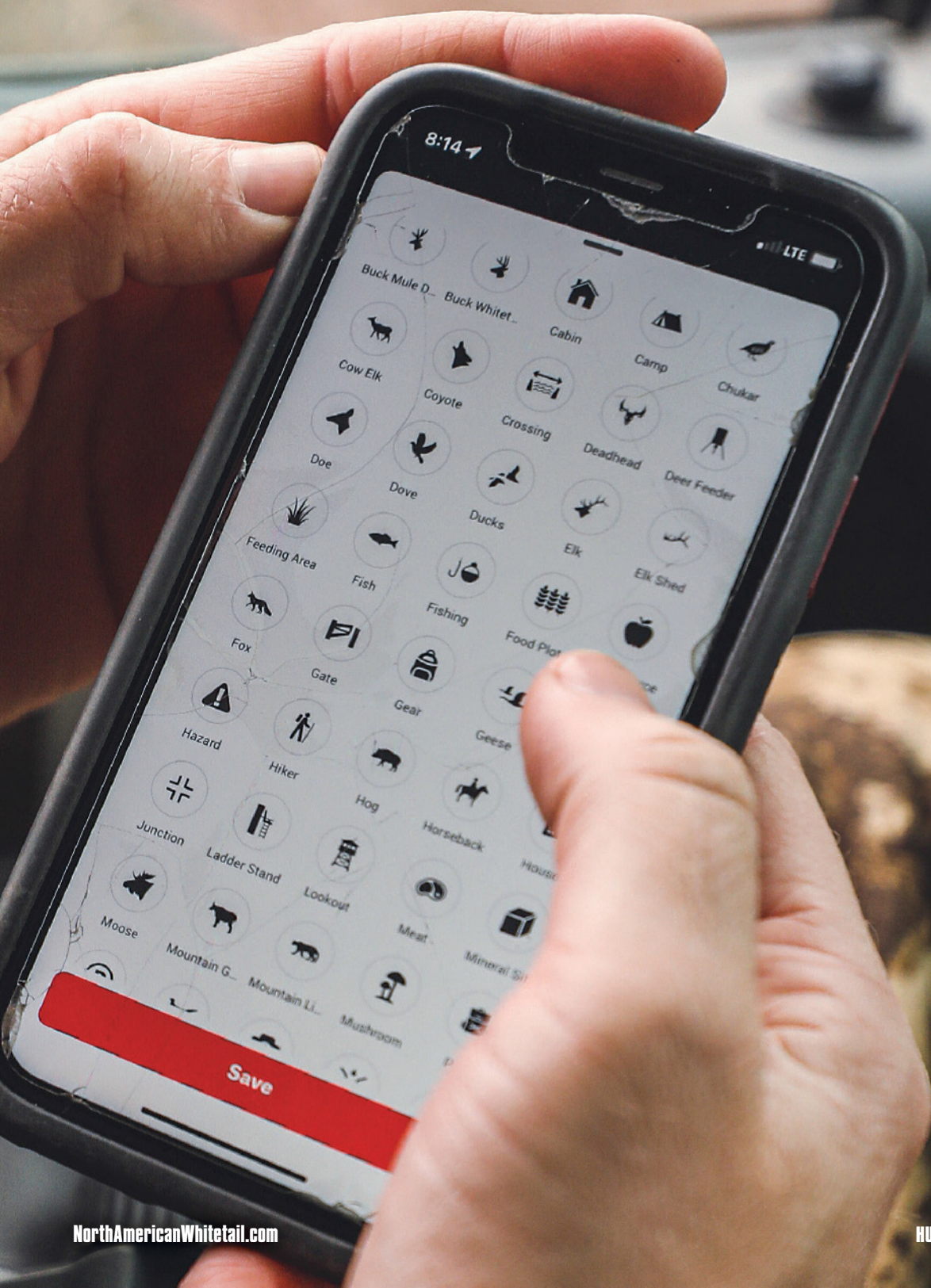
For starters, HuntStand added Pro Whitetail, a \$69.99 per year feature that gives whitetail goers all the excellent benefits of HuntStand with a 7-day Whitetail Activity Forecast

designed around your hunt area.

A proprietary model created from decades of data from North America's top whitetail biologists, this feature analyzes over a dozen variables to estimate deer activity by the hour.

Last season I lived and died by the Whitetail Rut Map, which predicts peak rut activity, and the 7-day Whitetail Activity Forecast. I harvested my Colorado buck on Nov. 10 at 10:42 a.m., an expected peak movement time with an activity score (whitetail movement score) of 87.

Another HuntStand feature I can't get enough of is the updated-monthly satellite imagery. The first app to offer updated-every-month satellite images, this feature proved ideal for looking at current agricultural practices and finding clear cuts. On a public-land



...

If you want to get the most from your hunt apps as possible, you need to explore all the features the app offers. By doing so, you'll discover previously unknown features that can help you be more successful.

Photo by Identical Draw

...

OVERLOOKED APP FEATURES

hunt in Kansas, where an out-of-state hands-on recon mission wasn't possible, I used the Monthly Satellite Imagery option to see crop rotation; and upon my arrival, I knew right where I wanted to be.

Other HuntStand features I use regularly are the many symbols and lines that allow me to create habitat plans and map out my hunt area. With this app, I can quickly develop shapes by drawing lines to create bedding areas, food plots and other habitat improvements.

Another whitetail gem that HuntStand offers is the Trail Camera Management feature. Most whitetail hunters are trail camera fanatics, and with this feature you can drop a trail cam marker for each camera. Then you can import and sort photos into the app for each camera. I love this feature. This way, I can keep all my pictures in one place and track buck movement over time. HuntStand automatically tags photos and provides weather and lunar data based on the image capture time.

ONX MAPS

Another winner of an app is onX, and while many of its features appeal to the western hunter, onX recently upped its whitetail game.

Like other top-tier mapping systems, onX lets you download maps offline to pull up created-ahead-of-time maps when you don't have service. You can view property boundaries and get access to land ownership. Plus, with its many symbol-marked pins, onX allows you to build maps and save essential waypoints. When you drop a waypoint, you can name it and enter notes, which is handy because the more waypoints you place, the easier it is to forget why you placed them.

A great whitetail feature new to onX is the Tree Species and Habitat Layer. This feature is shown in colored pixels on the map layers, each pixel represents a 30-yard by 30-yard area, and each pixel displays the dominant tree species and age in that pixel. Now you can identify acorn-producing oaks as well as thermal deer cover.

Research shows when temperatures



Features that show tree species, thermal cover and habitat features are assets to whitetail hunters. Make sure you have the layers turned on in your app's settings. Photo courtesy of Jace Bauserman



Every whitetail hunter knows that understanding which oak trees are dropping acorns is important while chasing mature bucks. onX Hunt's Acorn Producing Oaks Layer helps hunters identify where productive oaks are and which oak species are present. Photo by Blake Garlock

dip, deer utilize sheltered bedding areas. Typical fall and winter habitat requires a dense canopy, and the Thermal Deer Cover layer quickly identifies coniferous species like hemlock, fir or cedar via a purple color scheme.

Another Tree Species feature I lean on heavily is the colored separation of deciduous and coniferous forests. The Deciduous/Coniferous Forest Layer has a trio of sublayers that can be turned on and off individually. Deciduous forests have red pixels, coniferous forests have brown pixels, and mixed forests have orange pixels.

Knowing what tree species are where can help you plan the perfect whitetail strategy.

HUNTWISE

Though I have the least experience with this app, it benefits the whitetail hunter. My favorite feature is WindCast. Users can enter every tree stand and

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ground blind in their hunt area into this app. When doing this, HuntWise asks you to enter the most favorable wind for each stand. I recommend doing this while sitting in your stand or blind after setting it up. That way, there is no guessing.

After entering your data, HuntWise will rank your stands from the most ideal to the least based on the current wind direction. When you're having trouble picking the right location to hunt, this app can make the process much easier. I also applaud that a computer-generated graphic that looks like tiny green specs show wind direction on your smart device.

Another app feature, RutCast keeps you keen to various phases of the rut. And I have found HuntWise's forecast predictions to be remarkably accurate.

BASEMAP

Do I like BaseMap? Yes! Why, and why for the whitetail crowd? While this map has way more western-oriented features that will appeal to elk, mule deer, pronghorn and sheep hunters, there are aids for whitetailers, too.

Hunting apps give hunters the ability to blueprint their hunting or habitat plans before they head afield. By dropping pins, drawing lines and measuring areas, deer hunters can better plan projects before they start working. *Photo courtesy of Jace Bauserman*

I applaud BaseMap's HuntWind feature, which uses a white powder-mist windstream to show current and future wind forecasts. The 3-D Maps are another win, and in my opinion, they provide some of the most precise and detailed aerial imagery possible.

Whatever digital mapping app you decide to download, it will be money well spent. While most platforms have free trials and even free memberships that limit the number of features you can unlock, I highly recommend doing your app research, finding the app

that's right for you and getting a Pro, Elite or whatever top-end membership the app offers.

It's also essential to spend time playing with your app. We spend a lot of time on our phones, and while most of that time is not well spent, learning the ins and outs of your new digital mapping app is ultra-important. You want to know about every feature the app provides and then figure out how those features blend with your hunting style, so you can have the best whitetail season of your life! **NAW**



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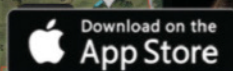
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ILLUSIONS NIGHT

OF THE

Sometimes the hottest-looking deer sign is irrelevant to hunters because it was laid down by a buck after dark. This guide to identifying *daytime* vs. *nighttime* sign will make you a more efficient hunter.





Without knowing the difference between buck sign made during the day and sign made during the night, hunters risk wasting time by sitting in locations that won't produce during legal shooting light.

Photo by Ryan Yoder

BY JOHN KIRBY

As a young man, some of my very first memories are of scouting whitetails with my World War II veteran grandfather. He stressed to me the importance of reading deer sign to understand how the whitetail herd used a specific area. I was experiencing mild hunting success as a pre-teen and well into my teenage years, but the big bucks eluded my efforts.

I was putting in the work, cobbling together deer stands from scavenged scrap wood, scouting, strategizing and scouting some more. I routinely situated myself among the freshest deer sign. Although I perched myself just below the canopy overlooking fresh rubs still oozing sap from the previous evening's antler attack, daytime encounters with big bucks continued to elude me. What I had yet to understand was the difference between deer hunting and hunting deer sign.

Discovering and interpreting deer sign is something humans have been doing for centuries. It's a huge part of whitetail hunting, and reading deer sign correctly is often a direct path to success. The bad news is that translating deer sign is complicated because much sign is made after dark. Like many critters, deer are crepuscular, moving more freely from dusk until dawn. In fact, most whitetails spend 75 percent or more of daylight hours within their bedding area.

Understanding the difference between daytime and nighttime deer sign is not something I thought about as a young hunter, which also caused me to chase my tail on many occasions. And to be honest, I still do from

time to time. The bottom line is that deciphering between day and night deer sign can increase your odds of tagging a trophy animal.

DECIPHERING DAY & NIGHT

Nighttime deer beds have thrown me off more than a few times. Under the cloak of darkness as deer feed and their stomachs get full, they will lie down and digest their food. Deer can pack away food quickly. In an hour or two, a deer's stomach becomes full, and they will lie down very close to their food source, sometimes even on top of it.

Once bedded, they begin ruminating, which is chewing their cud. Deer often repeat this process several times during the night; in doing so, they can leave behind massive amounts of fresh sign. Even big, mature animals will bed on top of food sources throughout their nighttime feedings, and they also will leave behind deer sign that often throws off hunters.

Every deer in the herd has its own personality and tendencies, which is especially true for mature bucks. In my experience, some older bucks become reclusive and prefer to isolate themselves from other deer. These introverted bucks frequently seek out nighttime digestion by bedding in the nearest cover away from feeding deer or those ruminating nearby. The nighttime whitetail deer sign far outnumbers the daytime sign in such areas.

Rut sign also gets laid down in and around the nighttime destination food sources. Big, fresh rubs and newly pawed-out scrapes litter the perimeter of food sources and can create an illusion of daytime activity.



With modern trail cameras, hunters can often discern the difference between night versus day sign. However, even with technology on our side, it can be challenging to determine the difference as some overlap generally exists between the daylight and nighttime lines. The nighttime deer sign bleeds over into the daytime deer sign and vice versa, creating even more variables.

Staging areas are another zone with a likelihood to have both day and night deer sign. Both bucks and does frequently move into staging areas as darkness approaches. These staging spots allow the deer to browse while remaining relatively safe before they slink into their preferred nighttime feeding areas.

Does and young bucks are typically the first deer to migrate from daytime bedding into these staging areas, but this, like most things in whitetail hunting, is not set in stone. Mature bucks use staging areas, too. In fact, mature bucks sometimes use the very same staging areas as the rest of the herd, but they may arrive well after the other deer have vacated and headed to the buffet line.

In my experience, many staging areas double as nighttime loafing locations that deer use for digestion purposes between feedings. As a result, staging areas become littered with heavy deer sign that fools many hunters, including me. It's important to remember that all deer sign means

This photo shows a staging area where deer can hold up and browse before heading out to a primary food source. Staging areas are places where you can find overlap of daytime and nighttime sign. Photo courtesy of John Kirby

very little to a hunter if it is made after the sun has dropped below the horizon.

Rub lines can be a roadmap from a buck's bedding area to his feeding location. These rub lines are another place that holds both day and night sign. In theory, as a buck exits his bedding location, he will make rubs as he strolls toward a staging area before hitting his preferred food source.

The rubs made in the late afternoon will generally face toward the location where the buck beds during daylight hours. The following day as the buck sneaks back into his bedroom, his rubs will face toward the food source most recently used. Another generality is that the closer the destination food source is to the rub line, the better the chance that the buck made the rub or other sign under the cover of darkness. Conversely, as you near a buck's daytime bedding area, it is more likely that he made those rubs during legal shooting light.

Daytime mature buck bedding will

This rub line was made deep in the timber near a mature buck's bed. With lots of quality browse around and plenty of security cover, chances are these are daytime rubs. Photo by Blake Garlock

contain deer sign made mainly during the day. Along with large beds, it's common to find deer droppings, rubs, tracks and trails within buck bedding areas. When I locate these areas, I work backward to find the buck's travel routes, tendencies, staging and feeding areas. If I know where a buck spends most of his daylight hours, I can reverse engineer his patterns based on sign, trail camera intel and personal encounters. This process often provides hunters with hints about where to set their ambush points to cut off a big buck.

The earlier a buck starts his evening feeding cycle, the further away from his bed we can position ourselves for a shot opportunity. Another variable here is the buck's daytime bedding proximity to his preferred food source. The closer he beds to his feeding area, the more likely he will arrive with daylight remaining. Of course, this doesn't always ring true, but if a mature whitetail is bedding close to a destination food source, he likely isn't feeling much hunting pressure.

Conversely, when a buck beds a long way from his favorite meal, it could be caused by hunting pressure, habitat, predators and/or temperature. Just because a certain buck frequently arrives well after last light does not always mean he is bedding far away. Some bucks simply do not make many daylight movements outside of the rut, which often misleads hunters





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Although this crossing leading deer from the timber to the corn field is littered with sign, it most likely is all nighttime sign. This area is too exposed and easy-to-access for mature deer to frequent during daylight.
Photo courtesy of John Kirby

into believing their quarry is living further away than he actually is. He also could already know he is being hunted or maybe the buck is actually bedded a mile away.

NIGHT SIGN EPIPHANY

The best example of me being fooled by nighttime deer sign happened in the mid-1990s. My childhood friend and I leased 50 acres of mixed hardwoods and row crops that was littered with deer sign. We first stepped foot on the property in mid-summer and spent the day scouting, trying to ascertain whether the property was worth leasing.

The number of heavy trails was unreal, as were the copious amounts of old rubs and the previous year's rut sign. We found deer beds scattered across the landscape, and by the end of the day my buddy and I could not pay the landowner fast enough. We could barely contain ourselves on the ride home. We had just spent the day among the most deer sign we had ever seen, and we knew the promise

Understanding and interpreting deer sign can provide a huge advantage for hunters. Additionally, distinguishing daytime from nighttime deer sign further facilitates success.

of big bucks in our future was finally a reality.

The anticipation of bow season weighed on us heavily, and by the time archery season opened, I was beginning to foam at the mouth in anticipation of the large buck I would be harvesting soon. Unfortunately, that did not come to fruition because of my inexperience reading deer sign.

Nearly 30 years later, I still remember every deer encounter I had on the property that year, and I can count them on one hand. Looking

back with the clarity of hindsight and many more years of experience, it should have been obvious that we were looking at nearly all nighttime sign. The issues plaguing us began with less-than-ideal entry and exit routes combined with very open and mature timber. Nearby farms had much better and more diverse habitats with abundant food. Yes, deer used our property, but it was nothing more than a nighttime crossing; a stepping stone, of sorts, that rarely held deer or experienced daylight activity.

Understanding and interpreting deer sign can provide a huge advantage for hunters. Additionally, distinguishing daytime from nighttime deer sign further facilitates success. The underlying issue, however, is that deer patterns change fast. Also, the bulk of deer sign in many areas is created after legal shooting hours, further complicating the equation. Hunters who rely solely on deer sign can find themselves surrounded by the comfort of rubs, scrapes, tracks and trails – but without deer in sight. **NAW**



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LEGENDS OF THE BADLANDS **PART 2**

The Old West was a wild place, and the names of many who helped tame it are steeped in legend. But for every Meriwether Lewis, Hugh Glass or Wyatt Earp, there's someone whose own heroic exploits never fully captured the public's imagination. Historians and movie producers have a way of celebrating the deeds of certain achievers while all but ignoring those of others. And so, largely lost in the fog of time have been the names and achievements of many other people who helped "win" the West.

Howard Eaton was one such figure. His name might be obscure, but during a long, colorful career spanning the late 19th and early 20th centuries he wore several impressive hats. And he wore them all well.

First in Dakota Territory and later in Wyoming, Eaton was a successful rancher who made money not just from livestock but also by hosting "city slickers" eager to sample the cowboy lifestyle. Yes, he, along with his brothers Alden and Wilbur, literally invented the dude-ranching industry.

At around the same time, Eaton blazed an epic 150-mile trail through Yellowstone National Park. What's more, we mainly have him to thank for the fact there are still plains bison not only in Yellowstone but elsewhere. With the species facing possible extinction, Eaton traveled to northwestern Montana to relocate most of the stock from which today's park herd sprung. He also provided bison, elk and other Western wildlife to many zoos and parks across North America. He once roped an open-country bighorn ram from horseback, and

for the right price he even was known to deliver grizzly bears – alive.

So this was a man's man with a thrilling life story. Yet none of the above accomplishments makes him an obvious subject for the pages of *North American Whitetail*. What does is



As a groundbreaking rancher, trail guide and hunter, Howard Eaton left indelible marks on the west. He was highly respected by his peers. Photo courtesy of Yellowstone National Park

the fact that along the way, he also managed to shoot a world-record buck.

WESTERN WANDERINGS

Eaton was born into an affluent Pittsburgh family in 1851, and he enjoyed a comfortable childhood there. But when "Go west, young man" became a popular rallying cry right after the Civil War, the teenager heeded it. In 1868, the 17-year-old left his family behind, hopped aboard a train and headed west to start a new life.

Details of Eaton's early years on the Great Plains are frustratingly scant. According to at least one report, his destination after leaving home was somewhere in Nebraska. What we do know is that at some point, he made his way to the Little Missouri River drainage in vast Dakota Territory. By 1879 he'd settled near Medora, in what would officially become North Dakota a decade later.

At the time Eaton arrived, ranching in this region might more accurately have been called "squatting." Most of the land was then unoccupied federal or railroad property. With the bison all but wiped out, cattlemen were moving in to run their herds on the open range.

For several years after arriving in the area, Eaton made at least part of his living selling wild game to railway work crews and providing prairie hay to a nearby army post. By 1883, he'd coaxed his brothers into traveling west to help him establish Custer Trail Ranch. The cattle operation's name commemorated the fact that seven years earlier, Lt. Col. George Custer and his 7th Cavalry had camped there on the way west to Montana, where they suffered devastating defeat in the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

As the Eatons were settling into the Medora area, Theodore Roosevelt was heading there for his first taste of Western hunting. As noted in Part 1 last month, when the future president arrived, Eaton was among the local men greeting him at the railroad station. In fact, according to one report, it was a letter from Eaton himself that had inspired Roosevelt to travel there in the first place. The men remained good friends for life.

MYSTERIES ABOUND

So what about this world-record buck? How does he fit into the Eaton saga?

Let's start with the information published in the Boone & Crockett record listings. Howard Eaton is listed as the hunter. The narrow rack has an official net score of 250 6/8, thanks to extraordinary mass and 31 scorable

points. The year of kill is shown as 1870, and the place “Dakota Badlands, South Dakota.”

B&C officials evidently felt the hunter identification was sufficient. But can we be sure the kill occurred in 1870? Not really. All information about the deer was provided much later by the family. Official measuring of the rack didn’t occur until 1988, after antler collector John Stein had acquired the smoke-blackened original mount from Eaton’s descendants. By then, 63 years had passed since the hunter’s death.

Despite the lack of a field photo, taxidermy receipt or newspaper story confirming the year of kill, no one disputes that 1870 is accurate enough. Roosevelt is known to have admired Eaton’s trophy while visiting Medora, and all the trips he made to the area took place in the early to mid-1880s.

Of course, not only were there no hunting seasons or licenses back then, no big-game records existed. B&C wouldn’t publish any such materials until well after both Eaton and Roosevelt had passed. Yet on the basis of eventual score, this buck was a no-brainer world record.

In the 1890s the so-called “Brady buck” from Texas (284 3/8 net) was either killed or found dead, depending on the story you accept. B&C lists that deer as a pickup from “prior to 1899,” but all information suggests no earlier than 1892. The Eaton buck thus was the top overall non-typical in the world for perhaps better than 20 years, and for much longer than that was the biggest whitetail accepted as a hunter kill.

But where, exactly, did Eaton’s hunt take place? This is the point at which our deer story starts

going seriously sideways.

“Dakota Badlands” is a nebulous placename. Within what was at that time Dakota Territory are two distinct, widely separated areas each known by that name. This wouldn’t be such a big deal except for the fact that when the eastern part of the territory was split into North and South Dakota in 1889, each state ended up with one of those areas.

The expansive South Dakota Badlands region lies southeast of Rapid City. There you’ll find Badlands National Park, a 244,000-acre expanse of windswept grasslands and colorful, heavily eroded landforms. But north from there about 250 miles lies the North Dakota Badlands region. This similarly dry, rugged terrain is along the northeastward-draining Little Missouri River, and parts of it now are within 70,000-acre Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

To my knowledge, Eaton never

visited the South Dakota Badlands. Perhaps he did so early on, especially if he headed north from Nebraska as a teenager in 1868, but I’ve found no records or even rumor to that effect. (I even tried to find him



Boone & Crockett lists Eaton’s 250 6/8-inch whitetail buck as an 1870 kill from the Dakota Badlands. But which Badlands? Photo courtesy of Jack Brittingham; map by Rainer Lesniewski

somewhere in the region in the 1870 federal census, but only males of at least age 20 were listed as heads of household then . . . and Eaton would have been 19).

Contrast all this with what we know about Eaton’s long history

in current North Dakota. Again, he supplied game meat to local railway crews, so perhaps he shot the huge whitetail on one such foray. Regardless, Eaton is listed as having at least one official B&C-qualifying trophy from there. In fact, that 196-inch bighorn sheep, entered as an 1880 kill from the Little Missouri River area, remains the North Dakota record. For all I know, that sheep might well have also been a world record for the species at the time taken.

My hunch is that when Eaton's whitetail finally was entered into B&C as a "Dakota Badlands" kill, the location was erroneously assumed to have been in South Dakota. That state is home to the larger and better-known of the two Badlands regions, so such a mistake could have been made easily. And with no living hunter around to dispute the information, any inaccuracy might have remained undiscovered.

Of course, this isn't proof anyone got it wrong. Maybe the Eaton buck really is a South Dakota deer, as shown not only in the record book but also on

the plaque with the life-sized remount in the Rapid City Cabela's store. The deer is on public display there as the state's all-time No. 2 whitetail. (The current No. 1 in South Dakota, shot by Francis Fink in Day County in 1948,

REGARDLESS OF WHICH OF THE DAKOTAS REALLY HAS THE BETTER CLAIMS TO THIS TREMENDOUS TROPHY, ONE FACT IS INDISPUTABLE: HE WAS A WORLD RECORD EVEN BEFORE THERE WAS A RECORD BOOK.

nets 256 1/8. Coincidentally, if the Eaton buck really is from North Dakota, he'd also still be the No. 2 non-typical there. Roger Ritchie's 254 6/8-incher from Stanley County has been No. 1 since 1968).

Regardless of which of the Dakotas really has the better claim to this

tremendous trophy, one fact is indisputable: He was a world record even before there was a record book. And he remains one of the most elite deer from the Northern Plains, one of our top whitetail regions.

A LASTING LEGACY

Had Howard Eaton ever written the memoirs his friends hoped he eventually would, we'd know far more about his time in the West. Maybe he'd have noted where and how he shot the immense buck that still bears his name. But the man never stopped long enough to write that book, or even any hunting stories for magazines of his day. As a result, we'll always be left to speculate as to the time, place and other details of his most historic deer hunt.

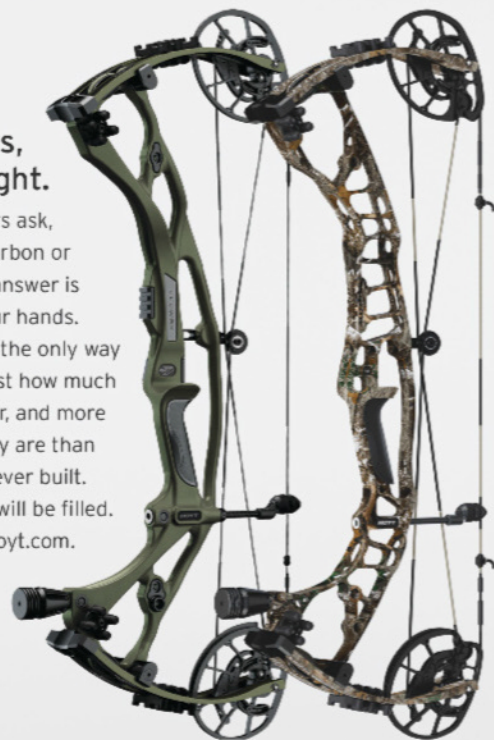
Even so, enough is known of Howard Eaton that we can comfortably call him a true legend of the West. His impact on the region's rich history can't be denied, and that would be true even if he never shot one of the greatest, and most mysterious, whitetails of all time. **NAW**

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GET OUT THE GUNS!

BY JACE BAUSERMAN

FOR OUR 2023 HUNTING ANNUAL ISSUE, we feel it is our duty to gather the industry's best deer gear for gun hunters. Nothing beats the tradition of entering the whitetail woods with gun in hand, blaze orange on your back, and the hope to bag a big buck. In the event you're looking for some new gear to help you do so, we've got you covered.

FIREARMS



BROWNING

■ Trusted by the *North American Whitetail* TV crew as high-quality deer rifles, Browning's X-bolt series has something for every gun-toting whitetail hunter. And for the deer hunter looking for a rifle that's easier on the ears, you can't beat Browning's X-Bolt Speed Suppressor Ready. The Speed SR comes with barrel lengths that are four inches shorter than the ones normally paired with calibers. This means that when you pull your X-Bolt Speed out of the box and add your suppressor, you don't have to worry about the rifle being too long to maneuver. (browning.com)



MOSSBERG

■ It's a honey of a bolt-action, and while some may argue that the long-action centerfire cartridge is too much for deer, it's not. When paired with the correct round and put in the right place, Mossberg's Patriot Predator 7mm PRC is an excellent open-country whitetail rifle. The gun comes with a top-mounted picatinny rail for quick and easy scope attachment, and the fluted barrel and spiral bolt reduce weight and cooling time. The rifle has a 24-inch barrel, and the removable magazine has a 3+1 capacity. (mossberg.com)



WINCHESTER

■ When the rules call for a straight wall, and even if they don't, it's hard to beat Winchester's XPR Strata MB in .350 Legend. An accurate bolt-action that doesn't break the bank, the barrel and action feature a Perma-Cote FDE finish. The composite stock is perfect for the whitetail hunter, and the 22-inch barrel length and 6-pound 12-ounce build make this rifle ultra-maneuverable and a joy to tote. The receiver is machined from solid steel, the magazine is detachable, and the rifle has a two-position thumb safety. (winchesterguns.com)



SPRINGFIELD

■ Lightweight and sure to put your round where you want it, Springfield's Model 2020 Waypoint is an excellent choice for sit-and-wait and spot-and-stalk missions. Shooters can choose between a steel or carbon-fiber barrel, and the premium carbon-fiber stock is hand-laid and pillar bedded to create a perfect marriage with the action. With an impressive MOA of .75, the rifle, at 6.9 pounds, handles like a dream. And the integrally machined recoil lug and electrical discharge machining (EDM) of the bolt lug raceways ensure precise dimensions and smooth cycling. (springfield-armory.com)

FIREARMS

TAURUS

■ Listening to customer requests is one of many attributes that makes Taurus great. For 2023, the Raging Hunter is available in the 500 Magnum — considered by many to be the most potent factory revolver round ever. Available in barrel lengths of 5, 6.75 and 8 inches, each barrel is fitted with custom barrel ports to reduce recoil and keep the shooter on target for faster follow-up shots. The target barrel crown boosts accuracy, and the top Picatinny rail makes optic and accessory mounting easy. The cushioned grip provides maximum surface area contact, and the double lock system keeps the cylinder secure. (taurususa.com)



NOSLER

■ At 6.9 pounds, Nosler's CCH blends competition-level accuracy with a rugged build that will handle any whitetail pursuit you dream up. The CCH's magnesium alloy frame with a carbon pistol grip and foam carbon-fiber foldable buttstock ensure maximum precision. The action is Nosler's well-known and uber-popular Model 21, and the carbon-fiber wrapped barrel boosts accuracy while helping this 6.5 Creedmoor remain extremely lightweight. (nosler.com)



SAVAGE

■ Savage's Impulse Mountain Hunter will serve you perfectly in the whitetail woods and in the Rockies. Offered in several whitetail favorites like .270 Win., .308 Win. and 6.5 Creedmoor, this shooter is fitted with a Proof Research carbon-fiber-wrapped stainless steel barrel attached to a polymer frame. The three mentioned-above calibers come in barrel lengths of 22 inches, and the overall length is 44.75 inches. The design of the straight-action pull ensures rapid follow-up shots. (savagearms.com)



WEATHERBY

■ For 2023, Weatherby launches its first bolt-action centerfire rifle in 50 years. Dubbed the Model 307, a gun inspired by those that call the Cowboy State home, this rifle's 2-Lug, fully cylindrical design was built to ensure customization. And it will accommodate the many stocks, triggers, rails, mounts and magazines on the market. The bolt is a three-piece toolless takedown, and the bolt release button is above the receiver stock line to ensure stronger, safer and quicker bolt removal. The magazine is compatible with many 700 platform bottom metal options, and the Triggertech Trigger promises zero creep and an excellent break. (weatherby.com)



BENELLI

■ Sleek and streamlined, Benelli's B.E.S.T. Lupo Camo bolt-action is now available in a whitetail favorite — the tried-and-true .308 Win. All metal parts are covered in Benelli's Surface Treatment, a coating that provides unparalleled corrosion and abrasion resistance. The trigger is remarkably crisp, the short-action throw is immediate, and the 22-inch barrel combined with a weight rating of 6.9 pounds makes this rifle very maneuverable. The stock features a pair of recoil killers — the Combtech cheek pad and Progressive Comfort recoil reduction system, which tackles recoil at three stages. (benelliusa.com)

OPTICS



SIG SAUER

■ Ideal for the whitetail hunter, Sig Sauer's Sierra6 2-12x40mm riflescope places the benefits of the BDX system into a compact platform perfect for hunting deer from a tree stand or blind. Compact and lightweight, this optic is great for any deer rifle, muzzleloader, shotgun and even crossbows. With up to 95 percent light transmission, the Sierra6 ensures you'll be able to get a clear view of your target in the final minutes of legal light. If you're looking for a modern optic for the deer woods, this is one to strongly consider. (sigsauer.com)

LEUPOLD

■ When it comes to top-tier rifle toppers, few do it better than Leupold. Everything you need and nothing you don't, Leupold's VX-5HD is a winner. Available in powers of 5x (1-5, 2-10, 3-15, 4-20 and more), the VX-5HD promises remarkable light transmission and industry-leading glare reduction to help you acquire and kill that big buck in the waning minutes of legal light. Protected by a Guard-Ion coating, the lenses resist dirt, water and always provide ultra-clear images. Lightweight, rugged and built for the hunt, this series of riflescopes has proven its salt time and time again. (leupold.com)

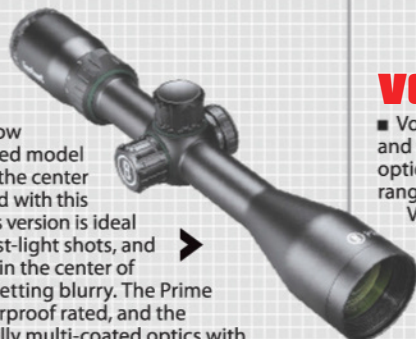


ZEISS

■ The Conquest V4 3-12x44 riflescope from Zeiss is the ideal size for whitetail hunters chasing bucks in various habitats. By being lightweight, compact and hitting the "sweet spot" in magnification range, this Conquest V4 is the do-all optic for deer hunters. It comes standard with capped elevation and windage turrets, and the scope lets in plenty of light, allowing you to always properly identify your target. (zeiss.com)

BUSHNELL

■ Bushnell's Prime 3-9x40 is an in-the-field winner, and it now comes available in an illuminated model that provides a glowing dot in the center of the Multi-X reticle. Combined with this reticle's thick lines, the luminous version is ideal for those early-morning and last-light shots, and far-sighted hunters can maintain the center of the crosshairs without things getting blurry. The Prime Illuminated model is IPX7 waterproof rated, and the HDOA optic system includes fully multi-coated optics with ultra-wide band coatings for optimal clarity. (bushnell.com)



LEICA

■ Leica makes fantastic optics, and if you're looking to pair your favorite deer killer with a top-end scope loaded with Leica technology that doesn't break the bank, the Amplus is an excellent choice. Some features you can't ignore include the sharp illuminated dot, 6-power zoom, a large exit pupil and an impressive field of view. Built like a tank and with 80 MOA elevation adjustment, this scope provides 90 percent light transmission, and the thicker outer lines of the reticle give way to finer lines with the red dot in the center. (leicacamerausa.com)



BURRIS

■ Burris dubs their VeracityPH 4-20x50 riflescope as "the fastest and most precise aiming solution in a hunting optic, ever." Designed for the whitetail hunter shooting longer distances in open country, the VeracityPH features dial-to-the-distance technology, allowing you focus solely on making a good shot. With a great blend of reliability, quality and technology, the VeracityPH is a great optic for gun hunters. (burrisoptics.com)



TRIJICON

■ We love when a manufacturer builds a product specifically for the whitetail deer hunter. Enter Trijicon's Huron — a four-model scope lineup engineered with durability and pinpoint precision. Ranging from 15.9 to 18.2 ounces and providing up to 100 MOA of adjustment from either a 30mm or 1-inch main tube, the Huron packs a lot of punch into a lightweight package. The Easy-Focus Eyepiece and extra-wide field of view boost situational awareness, and fully multi-coated broadband anti-reflective glass provides second-to-none light transmission. Reticle options are many, each with an uncluttered design that ensures fast and accurate shooting. (trijicon.com)

VORTEX

■ Vortex makes excellent glass, and we love that they provide optics at every price point to meet a wide range of budgets. A great whitetail-getter is the Viper HS 4-16x44. The advanced optical system blends with the 4x zoom range for maximum versatility — the scope works as well in the timber as it does in open crop fields where midwest whitetails love to dwell. Built on a robust 30mm one-piece aluminum tube, the Viper provides increased windage and elevation travel. And ArmorTec is a resist-the-elements coating that protects the lenses. (vortexoptics.com)



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AMMUNITION

HORNADY

■ The 7mm PRC is on the rise to power, and if you've taken the plunge or are considering the caliber, Hornady's new-for-2023 Outfitter Line 7mm PRC is hard to beat. Filling a void between the ultra-popular 6.5 PRC and the 300 PRC, the 7mm PRC is a long, ballistically perfect make that comes in a 175-grain ELD-X load, a 180-grain ELD-M, and a 160-grain CX load in Hornady's Outfitter line. Our favorite is Hornady's 7mm PRC 175-grain ELD-X Precision Hunter, which has a muzzle velocity of 3,000 fps and a G1 ballistic coefficient of .689. That is remarkable! (hornady.com)



REMINGTON

■ Straight-walled calibers are required in many locales if you step in the woods with a rifle and hunt white-tailed deer. And even if bottle-neck cartridges are allowed, many whitetail gurus prefer a good straight-wall design. Enter Remington's 360 Buckhammer, a bullet optimized for lever-action rifles with ballistics that ensure buck-dropping ability beyond 200 yards. The round is lethal, and according to those who've tapped a Remington 360 Buckhammer primer, it produces low recoil, which is excellent news for small-framed shooters. This round is worth a look in Remington's Core-Lok SP in weights of 180 and 200 grains. (remington.com)



HODGDON

■ If you like to take the smoke pole for venison, consider Hodgdon White Hots 50/50. A .50 caliber 50-grain pellet, White Hots make for rapid reloading in charges that slip down the barrel and pack without the need for measurers or funnels. White Hots are super-clean burning, so cleaning between shots isn't required. White Hots can exceed speeds of 2,600 fps and create incredible contact energy. (hodgdon.com)



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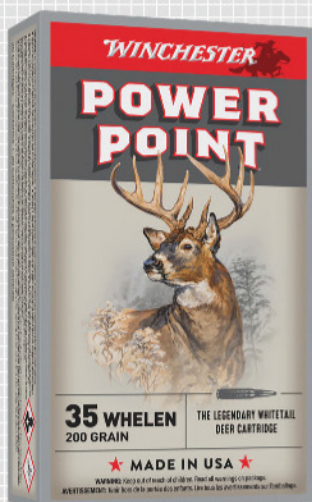
FIOCCHI

■ Offered in about every whitetail-killing caliber you could imagine, Fiocchi's Hyperformance Hunt family will help you fill the freezer and add memories to the photo album. Tipped with Sierra's GameKing High-Quality Hollow Point Boat Tail, Hyperformance rounds promise remarkable accuracy, controlled expansion and weight retention across various velocities. (fiocchiusa.com)



WINCHESTER

■ A classic caliber that's a nightmare for big bucks, the 35 Whelen needs no introduction. Branded by many as the poor man's magnum, Winchester adds the 35 Whelen to its tested-true Power-Point line for 2023. Winchester built the round to give the shooter downrange precision and maximum lethality. Power-Point bullets showcase a copper jacket with strategically placed notches around the jacket's mouth to initiate rapid and uniform expansion. Mr. Big won't be able to handle one put in the lungs. Winchester's Power-Point 35 Whelen is offered in a 200-grain bullet option, which is designed to drop bucks where they stand. (winchester.com)



AMMUNITION

BROWNING

■ Browning makes great firearms, and they make quality ammo, too. For 2023, pair your favorite deer rifle with Browning's Max Point — a round explicitly designed for whitetail. Designed to transfer on-impact energy quickly to guarantee dropped deer, the Max Point is worth sending downrange. Offered in a pile of favorite deer calibers, Max Point is also great for any medium-sized game. (browningammo.com)



FEDERAL

■ Available in an array of popular calibers, this match-grade accurate bullet hits like a tank and guarantees expansion across a range of velocities, meaning terminal performance will be achieved whether that buck is 50 yards or 500 yards out. The bullet's tip is a non-standard polymer tip, and it has been specially crafted to resist deformation, maximize ballistics and initiate extreme-range expansion. Other call-out features include the concentric copper jacket, robust shank, boat tail and nickel-plated brass. (federalpremium.com)



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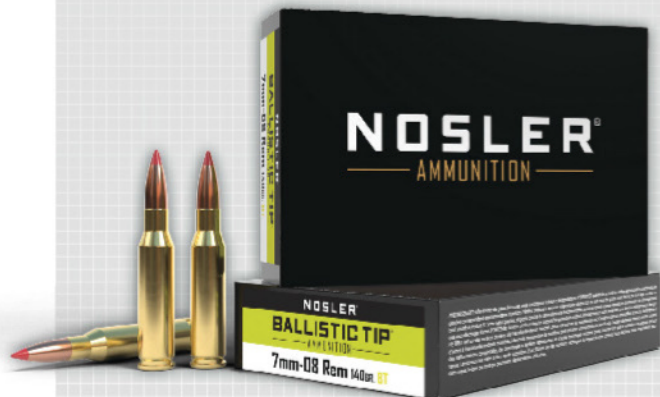


WHAT'S NEW

AMMUNITION

NOSLER

■ Nosler's Ballistic Tip ammunition is tipped with the hard-hitting and reliable Nosler Ballistic Tip bullet. The bullet's heavily jacketed base is ideal for forming large-diameter mushrooms, and its boat-tail design ensures accuracy and devastating performance. With this level of accuracy and consistency, Nosler's Ballistic Tip ammunition is a must-see for deer hunters. (nosler.com)



NORMA

■ Blending a streamlined polymer tip with a match-grade style boat tail for a ballistic win that wreaks havoc on whitetail, Norma's BondStrike is a tried-and-true deer downer. The round is designed to provide terminal performance at all distances and deliver a bone-shattering shock. The BondStrike bullet's thinner front jacket expands at all ranges. Power Bonding technology ensures high residual weight and penetration. BondStrike is available in multiple caliber configurations. (normashooting.com)



THE BUCK STOPS HERE

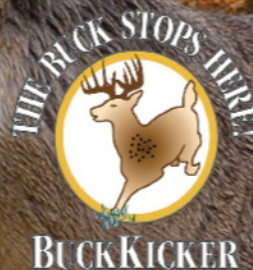
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JANUARY-DECEMBER	ANI-SHIELD X ⁴											
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WHAT'S NEW

SUPPRESSORS

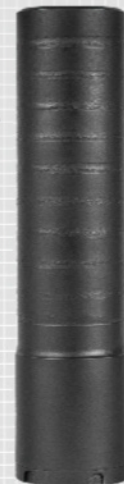
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■ A best-seller and the most versatile silencer in the Banish line, the Banish 30 will work on any of your threaded coyote killers from .17 to .30 caliber magnums. The top-tier all-titanium alloy construction boosts durability and noise reduction, and internal baffles handle gasses exceptionally well to reduce noise and recoil further. Can-clean Technology means no special tools are needed to take the suppressor apart, making cleaning a breeze. The Banish 30 is available in a 7- or 9-inch model (depending on whether the tube extension is on), and weight is 10 ounces for the 7-inch suppressor and 13 ounces for the 9-inch model. (silencercentral.com)



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■ The Harvester EVO is compatible with .223 Rem. to .300 Win. and is a standard silencer that provides ultra-impressive sound reduction and second-to-none reliability. Perfect for the deer woods, this can is rated down to 16-inch barrels, and the EVO is shorter and lighter than many on-the-market models. (silencerco.com)



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LOOK WHO'S COMING TO OUTDOOR CHANNEL

Now celebrating its 20th Year as a national TV show, *BuckVentures* has found a new home — on Outdoor Channel. Hunting icon Jeff Danker, along with family and friends, will continue the show's well-earned legacy with an action-packed lineup of world-class, fair chase hunts.

THURSDAYS
7:30 P ET

Outdoor

SCHEDULE SUBJECT TO CHANGE



1

At just 7 years old, Easton Himler shot this beautiful buck in Derry Township, Pennsylvania. Easton bagged the buck in October 2022, and it was his first deer.

2

Owen Whitaker tagged this mature buck on Oct. 29, 2022, during Missouri's youth season. Owen was hunting with his dad, and he used a .243 Win.

3

Reagan Mithum took this Wisconsin typical during the state's 2022 youth season. She made a great shot with her Savage Axis chambered in .350 Legend.

4

Brett Hershberger bagged this big 10-point in Ohio during October 2021. He shot the buck with a TenPoint crossbow his father-in-law bought him before he passed away.

5

Sommer Newton scored on this great Maryland buck during the state's 2022 youth hunting day. She shot the 11-point at 80 yards with a .350 Legend.

HAVE YOU SHOT A TROPHY BUCK?

Please submit a clear photo and full details of the hunt to: North American Whitetail, 2 News Plaza, 3rd Floor, Peoria, IL 61614 or email submission to: whitetail@outdoorsg.com. Photos cannot be returned.



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FAMILY IN THE FIELD

In the fall of 2019, my friend Ryan called me; he was ecstatic and fumbling for words. Finally, he got it out that he and his wife, CJ, had closed on a new 80-acre property. Raw and unpolished, it had the potential to become a hidden gem in upstate New York, an area not given much thought by most serious white-tail hunters. Unbeknownst to them and their two sons, it was the start of an epic journey to develop their own whitetail retreat.

It's always been Ryan's desire to own this piece of land. Growing up in the 1990s, he was fortunate enough to hunt most of the surrounding areas throughout the 600-plus-acre block. He knew the locale was special, because he had seen numerous mature bucks harvested on and around the property. However, it wasn't until a few weeks after his mother passed away that the dream turned to reality. After a tough day, Nolan, Ryan's oldest son, and Ryan went for a drive to clear their minds. Passing by the property, Nolan noticed a handwritten for-sale sign clinging to a wooden post. The two turned around and sought out the opportunity.

The piece of property is hilly and covered with terrain features, such as fingers, saddles, ravines and creek bottoms. While the top agricultural fields are tillable, they do have power lines running through the property. Since the land was purchased, the family has made it their playground. They focus on improving habitat for all wildlife, not just whitetails and turkeys. They have also made it a priority to improve old field habitat, allowing for a wide array of food options and eliminating the monoculture of woody browse and golden rod that had been prevalent.

The creation of five strategic white clover kill plots established communication hubs for does. There are three locations that doe groups spend most of their time on the property. Having a history

of knowing where these doe groups travel played an important role in helping CJ succeed in harvesting a buck they nicknamed "Twinner." For the last few years, he has been a homebody on the property.

In 2021, he was a wide 3 1/2-year-old. And despite being a great buck for the kids to possibly harvest, he was

passed on several occasions. After CJ harvested a mature 10-pointer with her bow, Twinner began to frequent certain areas on the property. This led to more trail camera photos and the family realizing he could be their target in 2022. At 4 years old, he blossomed into an incredible 10-point. They noticed that his antlers were almost identical to the buck that CJ had arrowed the year before, and that's where the name "Twinner" came from.

The whole family had encounters with Twinner in 2022, but none of them worked out. Archery season in New York came and went, and as the first week of firearms season passed, it looked like Twinner would evade them. But that was about to change!

On Thanksgiving morning, the family headed to the woods before feasting on turkey. On their way to the woods, they received a trail camera photo of Twinner at a scrape. It was the same scrape that he had visited almost a year ago. Ryan knew there was one of two doe bedding areas that Twinner would head towards.

With a good wind, clean access and fresh intel, they had a plan, so CJ headed to a box blind a short walk from where they were.

She didn't have to wait long. Around 8:15 a.m., a couple of does trotted through the food plot, and CJ knew she needed to get her muzzleloader ready. The data collecting from the last two years was about to pay off, as Twinner was right behind the does.

Twinner came to within 25 yards of the blind, and CJ steadied the gun on the rest, putting her sight on him and squeezing the trigger. After the cloud of smoke cleared, she thought she briefly saw him run off. Despite not hearing him crash into anything, her confidence remained high. She quickly called Ryan, who along with Nolan and Chase had already heard the shot.

CJ told Ryan through the phone: "I just shot a really big deer!"

After waiting for almost an hour, the family met up. Despite knowing which deer it was, Ryan and the boys couldn't believe that CJ had harvested her second biggest buck ever almost a year after taking her biggest one.

Twinner's rack increased in size as they walked up on the impressive buck; there was no ground shrinkage on this one! CJ had done it again, and both Nolan and Chase gleamed with excitement at what their mother had accomplished as Ryan snapped photos. It was a moment they will remember for the rest of their lives. **NAW**



CJ and her family hunted this buck hard before she finally tagged it on Thanksgiving morning of 2022. She shot the buck on her family's land where they work to improve wildlife habitat and have developed hunting traditions. Photo courtesy of Joel Herrling



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