THE OCTOBER LULL— IS IT REAL OR JUST A MYTH? P. 96

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OCTOBER 2023

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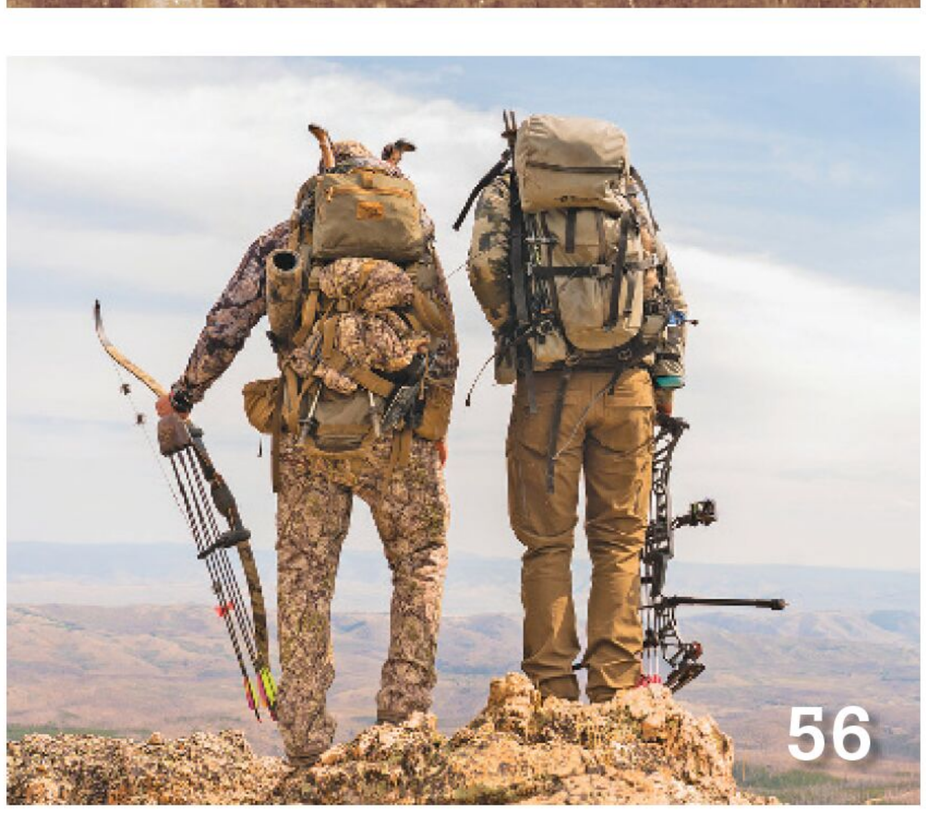

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EDITORIAL

Curt Wells | Editor

HOPE

SUCCESSFUL BOWHUNTERS MUST POSSESS CERTAIN SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES, BUT ONE RANKS ABOVE ALL THE REST.

A BOWHUNTER'S BRAIN is no ordinary assemblage of gray matter. We think differently. We are undaunted by the promise of failure. We knowingly, willingly, accept that our odds of notching a tag pale against the odds of going home empty-handed. We're good with it.

Whenever I ask someone if they're a bowhunter, there are only two answers: "No, I don't have the patience" or "I don't have the time." Time is a factor for us all and is based on priorities. But patience is something else and can be defined in several ways. You may not have the patience to babysit three screaming toddlers or wait your turn at the DMV, but from a bowhunting perspective, patience is a misnomer. It's not so much about tolerance. In fact, my imaginary Bowhunter's Dictionary says the top synonym for the word patience is "hope."

We are perfectly content bellycrawling for hours on a seemingly impossible stalk, as long as we have hope something will go our way. We will sit in a tree from dark to dark on a cold November day, just on the remote chance a particular buck will decide to walk within bow range. We maintain hope the buck will show up, however unlikely it might be.

I can remember back in the mid-80s, standing at the base of Montana's Crazy Mountains, thinking to myself, *How in the heck am I going to put myself within 30 yards of a bull elk?* The big picture was intimidating, but what motivated me to get up the mountain and work to make it happen was not patience. It was hope. Hope that, based on my preparation and experience-based confidence, I could manufacture an opportunity. Hope that despite overwhelming odds, good fortune was bound to smile on me at some point in the adventure. It's how I think. It's how all successful bowhunters think.

On some bowhunting adventures, the ones where it seems everything is going wrong and the world is against us, hope is all we have to cling to. It keeps us going, getting up early, hunting all day, and coming back late. There must be an opportunity out there…there *has* to be. We hope.

Sometimes, hope lies deep in the tiny, hidden draws and coulees of the bowhunter's brain. It has no identity just yet, but it's there, making us believe that something special could happen, unexpectedly, at any moment, as long as we're out there, searching, with our bow in hand.

In the pages of this issue, you will find two examples of what hope does for the bowhunter. On page 50, Darron McDougal tells the story of Blake Rice, a bowhunter who arrowed the buck of a lifetime. Then, on page 62, Frank Noska describes taking his personal best whitetail in Kansas. In both cases, these bowhunters had no clue the buck of their dreams even existed. And in our next issue, our *Whitetail Special*, you'll read the story of another bowhunter, Drew McCartney, who arrowed the best buck of his lifetime of deer hunting. This, too, was a buck McCartney and his sons never knew existed.

It is stories like these that serve to give every bowhunter hope. We are driven by the thought that, at any moment, during the long hours on stand and the grueling hikes, Lady Luck might reach out and softly place her hand on your shoulder. It's the way our brain works. We easily forget the challenges and difficulties, reserving memory space only for the exciting times. The good times. We must still do all the research and the preparation for every hunt, but we don't need patience. All we need is hope. **BH**

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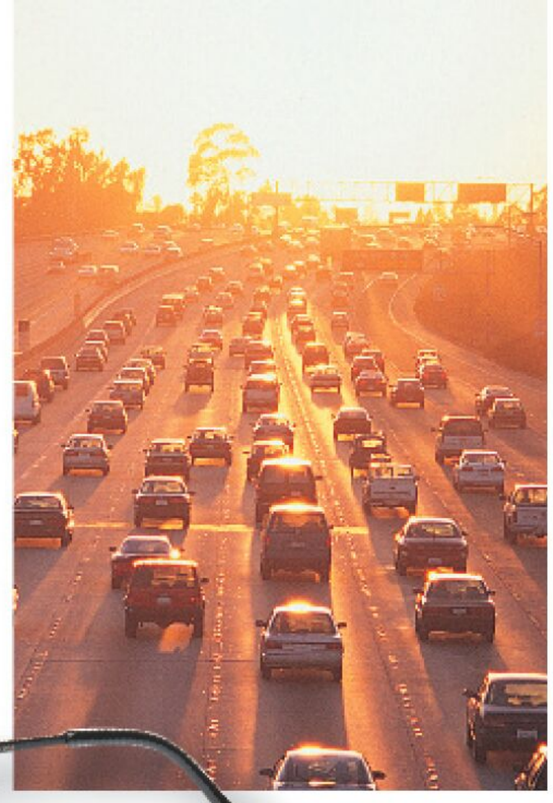

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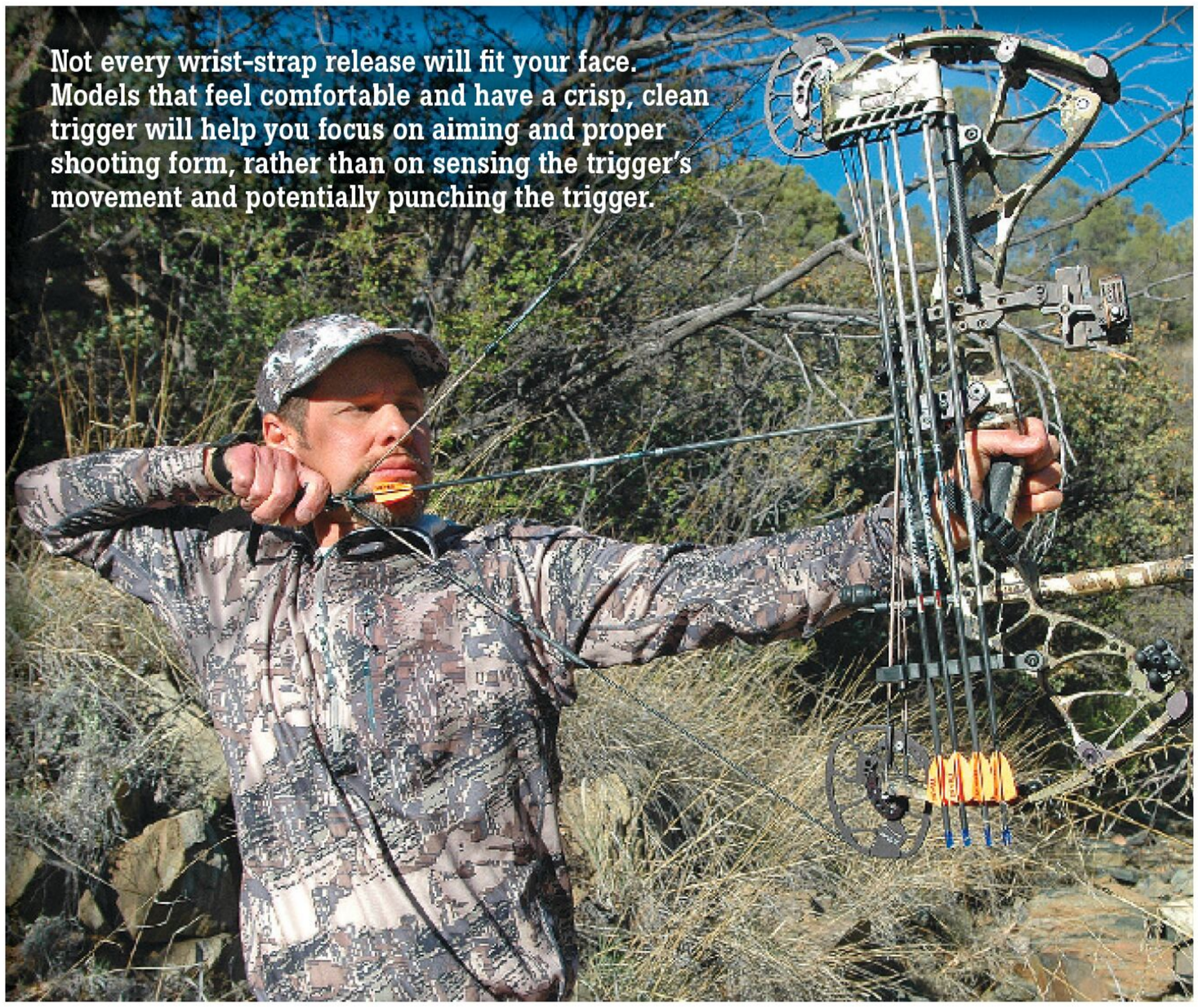


Not every wrist-strap release will fit your face. Models that feel comfortable and have a crisp, clean trigger will help you focus on aiming and proper shooting form, rather than on sensing the trigger's movement and potentially punching the trigger.

RELEASE-AID SPECIFICS

HERE'S HOW TO SELECT THE BEST WRIST-STRAP RELEASE AID AND THEN ADJUST IT FOR SUPERIOR SHOOTING RESULTS.

I HADN'T SEEN my two hunting friends for quite some time, and what better way to catch up and reminisce about the good ol' days than to grab our bows and shoot some arrows. Soon, my friends were uncasing their bows and launching arrows at distant targets in my backyard.

By the time I came on the scene, they were stretching the distance to 50 and 60 yards. In the weeks prior, I hadn't shot much, so I doubted my capability a little.

However, when I drew back and aimed at the Rinehart 3-D target, I felt at ease. My 60-yard pin glided smoothly to the spot and then rolled around ever-so-slightly as my index finger hugged the trigger almost as if it weren't there. I simply aimed and waited for the shot to break, while subconsciously tightening my rhomboid muscles. One arrow after another, it was the same result — smooth, effortless shooting, despite the pressure from nearby onlookers.

When I look back at that moment, it reminds me just how important it is to have your bow and release aid dialed-in to perfection. Mine certainly was that day. From the bow's silky-smooth draw to the solid anchor against my face to the surprise release of my arrow, my entire setup acted as an extension of my arm and prompted exceptional shooting. To be honest, I was sort of shocked with my overall performance.

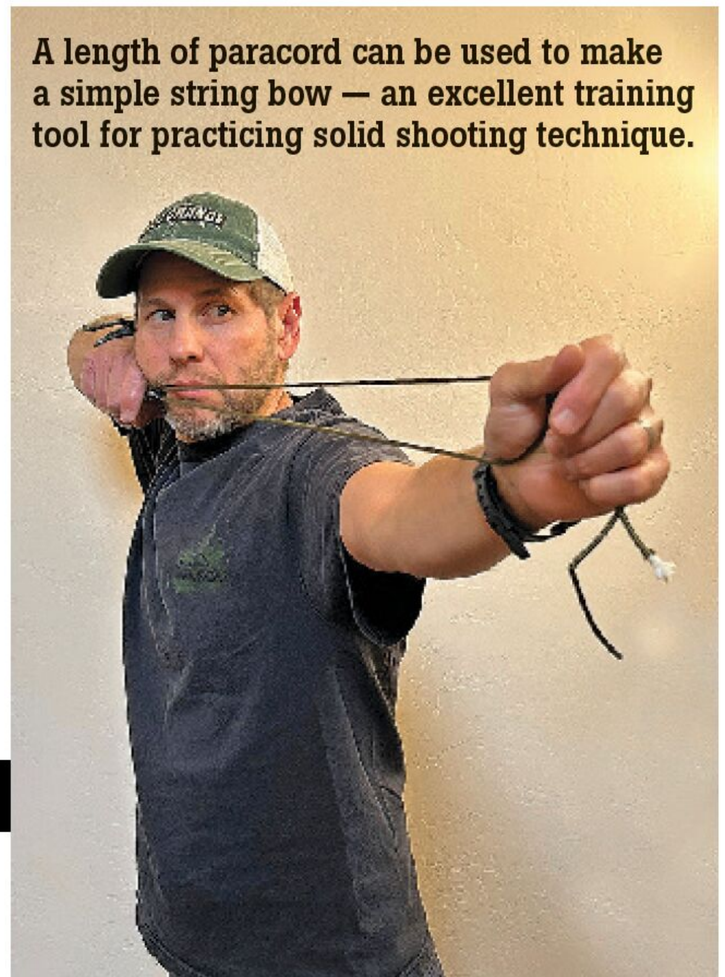
I attributed most of this smooth shooting to my release-aid setup. Let's examine three things you should look for when selecting a wrist-strap release, and how you should adjust it for superior results.

Fit & Feel

How the release fits on your wrist, hand, and against your face are critical components for consistency. To examine the fit and feel of a release aid, you'll need to test several models by using a "string bow." This is critical, as a string bow will allow you to enter any good archery shop and "shoot" a multitude of release aids while standing in the aisle. No fuss, no muss — simply test-shoot to your heart's content, without getting distracted or breaking down shooting form or muscles.

To make a string bow, simply take five to six feet of paracord, then tie an overhand knot using both tail ends, so its length accommodates your draw length. Be sure to allow ½ to ¾-inch length for the D-loop connection. Cinch it up nice and tight, then begin shooting by placing one end of the giant loop across your bow hand and the other to the release aid. It works like magic and serves as a great training tool for refining shooting technique.

When sampling releases, be sure to adjust the connecting rod or nylon strap, so the trigger rests between the first and second creases on your finger. This will



A length of paracord can be used to make a simple string bow — an excellent training tool for practicing solid shooting technique.

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help you "hook" the trigger peg solidly, to improve control and reduce the chance of punching the trigger. *(Note: I'll discuss this shooting method more at the end of this column.)*

Next, pay close attention to your hand's position against your face. Try "cupping" your lower jawbone by using the web of the thumb and index finger of your hand. Position the top of your hand (or fisted knuckles) perpendicular to your jawbone. Pay close attention to how the front part of your release feels against your jawbone. Does it press awkwardly into your face, forcing your hand to twist left or right to relieve the tension? Is your trigger finger completely relaxed and in a natural position, or does it feel like you have to reach outward quite a bit to engage the trigger?

Ideally, the release should feel like an extension of your hand — after drawing and anchoring, everything should line up perfectly, without you having to make a conscious decision about whether to move your finger/wrist a certain way to accommodate the release's body/trigger design. You may also want to look at specific models that come with either a rigid or nylon-web connector. Try both to see

Wrist-strap releases come with a rigid or nylon-web adjustment connector. Both styles have proven to work well.

which one feels best. Those with nylon-web connectors are more flexible and can sometimes provide a more natural feel.

Trigger Smoothness

Trigger quality is just as important as the release's fit and feel. A poor trigger is one that creeps as it's pulled. In other words, the shooter will perceive the trigger's movement (or slop) before the arrow is released. Eventually, this sensation leads to anticipating the shot and causes a breakdown of proper shooting form. This often comes through punching the trigger, "drive-by" spot shooting, and freezing below/above or to the side of the target — all debilitating factors.

In most cases, the most expensive wrist-strap releases come with polished-trigger mechanisms to ensure smooth, unanticipated shooting. However, you can't always trust just the release's price, or go by another archer's suggestion. Each release could have imperfections, regardless of the price or manufacturer. For this reason, test as many models as you can, before making a purchase.

A dialed-in release can yield tremendous shooting consistency, as demonstrated here with this 60-yard group.

Bowhunting pressure can be intense. I experienced a strong dose of adrenaline when aiming at this Wyoming pronghorn.

I say this because I have collected a giant box of release aids over the years, and even two identical models will sometimes shoot differently. My favorite index-finger releases are those made by Carter. I prefer the Like Mike (now Like Mike II) followed by the RX2. Both have ultra-crisp triggers and an overall design that fits my hand and face perfectly, providing exceptional shooting. I use the Like Mike exclusively, unless I want to extend my draw length by a half-inch or more. In this case, I use the RX2. I prefer the Like Mike the most because it features a no-movement trigger, which truly accentuates a surprise release.

However, I've also had great luck with other models, including the T.R.U. Ball Short-N-Sweet Swept-Back Trigger, Scott Echo, and TruFire Edge. I'm eager to shoot newer models with noteworthy features, such as the Scott S2, Spot Hogg Tuff Guy, T.R.U. Ball Execution, and TruFire Exert Flex.

Hook-Up Capability

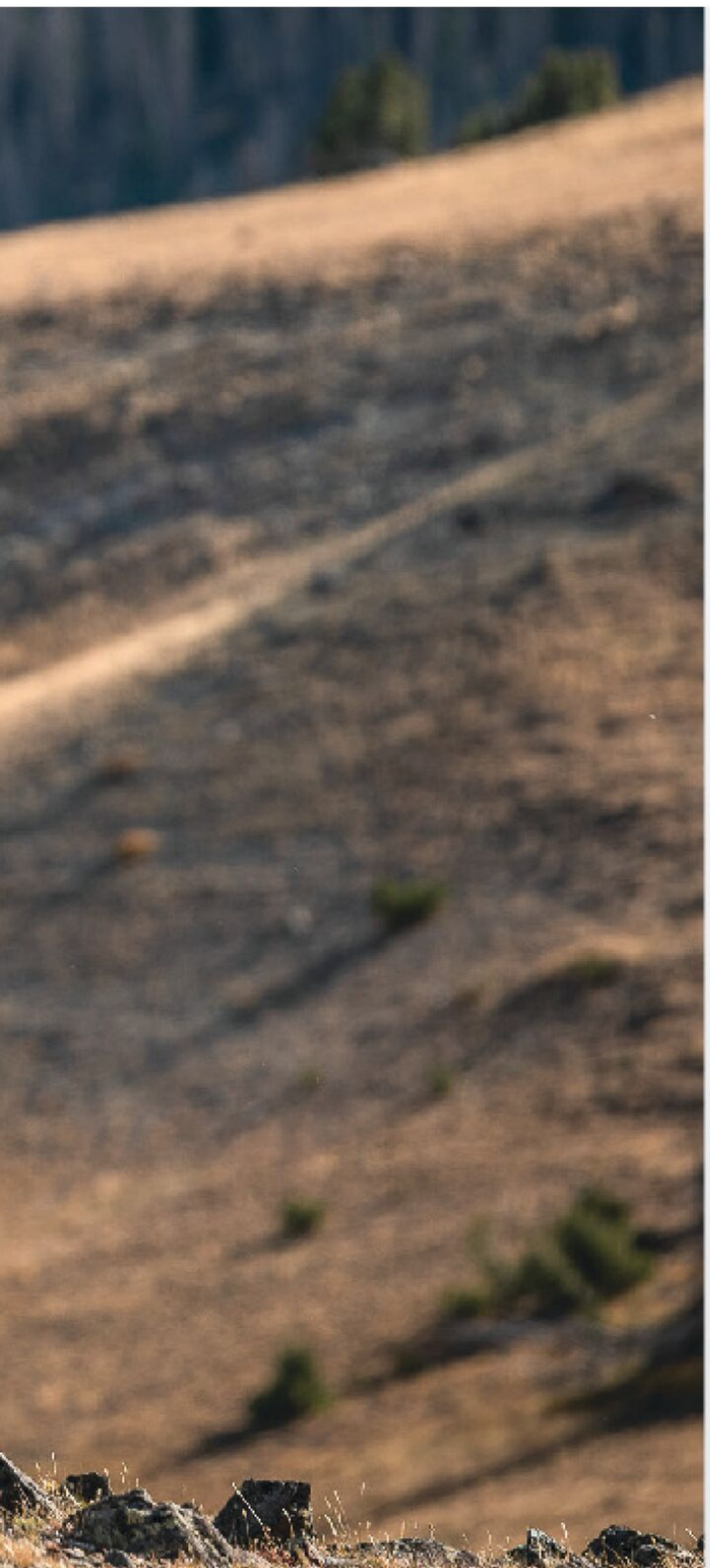
When testing different releases, you'll probably notice that each is different in the way it attaches to your D-loop — some grab on fast and smooth, while others do not. For serious bowhunting, you'll want a relatively fast hook-up, so you don't fumble when things count.

There are three design traits that tend to impact how quickly a wrist-strap release hooks up.

The first is the degree to which the trigger is mounted — is it far back or far forward? Triggers that are far-forward can make it hard to position the hook/jaw on the D-loop for a fast grab. This is true when the release is adjusted, so the trigger rests deep between your first and second knuckles.

The second trait has to do with stem adjustments. I prefer models with rigid stems over those with nylon-web adjustments, because they make aligning the release's hook/jaw with your D-loop easier, thus improving hook-up speed.

Lastly, releases with extra-large bod-



Either way, you're about to make the right choice.

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ies or cases are often easier to grab between your index finger and thumb, allowing for faster positioning of the hook/jaw — especially with gloved hands. This is particularly true for models using a nylon-web adjustment strap.

Keep these design features in mind when experimenting with different models. Also, if you hunt with thin gloves, I encourage you to wear them when testing out various models, so you'll know whether they will be a hindrance in a hunting situation.

Dialing-In Adjustments

In my opinion, the best way to trigger any release aid is by tightening your shoulder blades together until you feel a slight burn in the muscles located between them. This muscle contraction will cause your elbow, arm, and "hooked" finger to move straight back — effectively triggering the shot for you. This makes shooting more rock-solid, consistent, and very pressure-proof, as illustrated at the beginning of this column.

Dialing-in your draw and/or loop length, anchor position, and release-aid adjustments are critical for successfully shooting this way, so you engage the trigger just right and use consistent back-muscle movement.

One last point is this: The importance of trigger pull. Vary the trigger tension until you activate the shot in about four to six seconds. If the trigger tension is too light, the shot will break too soon, preventing good, unanticipated technique. Keep experimenting until you find the sweet spot in all these setup tunes. Once you do, you'll experience smooth, effortless shooting, with extremely accurate results. **BH**

To use back-tension to activate the release's trigger, adjust the trigger so it's positioned between your first and second knuckles. Then, tighten the shoulder blades together, which will cause the arm/elbow/hand unit to move rearward, activating the desired "surprise release."

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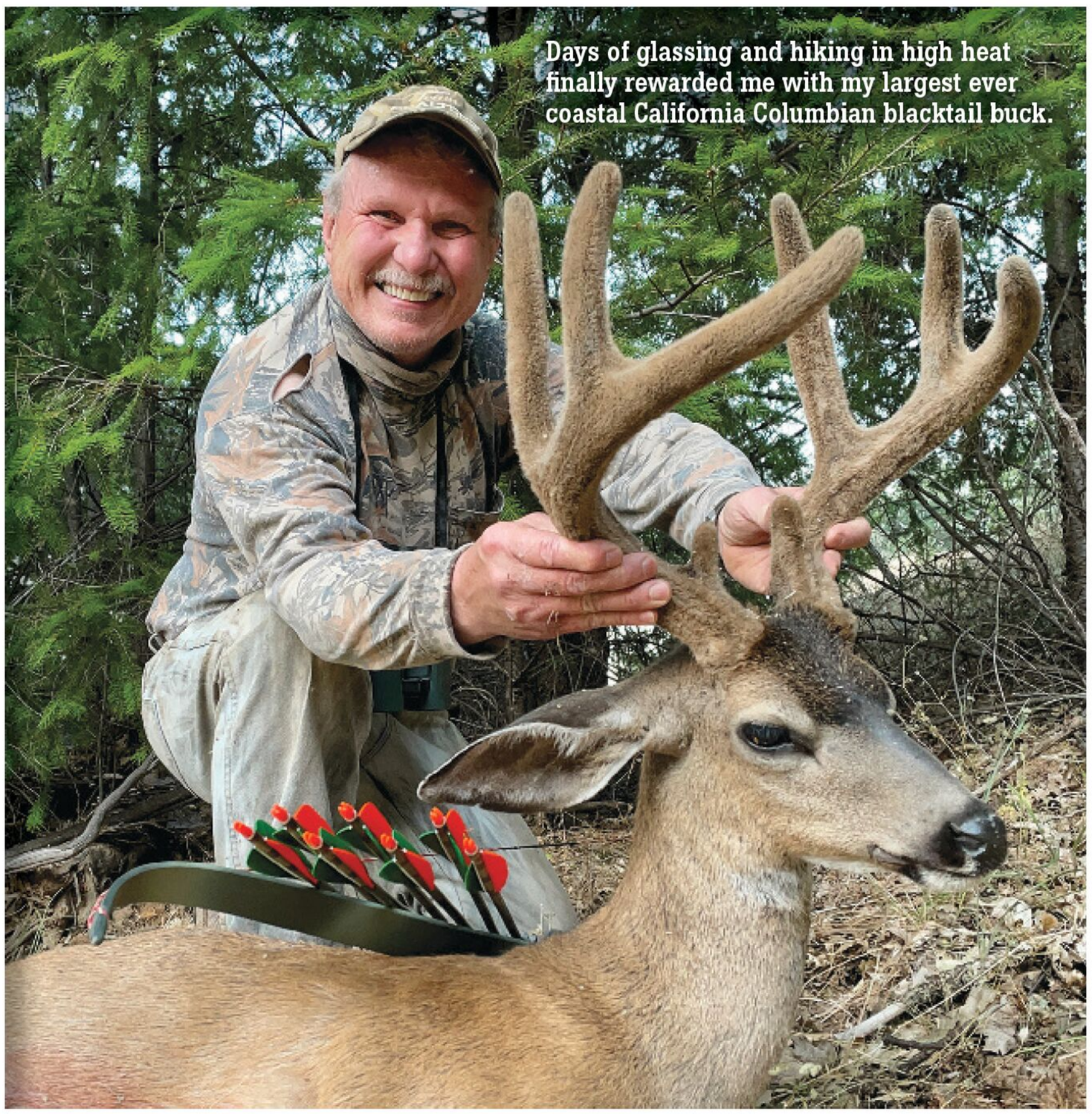


BLAST FURNACE **BLACKTAIL!**

APPARENTLY, THE GAL WITH THE RUBY SLIPPERS WAS RIGHT...

I TIPPED BACK my baseball cap and mopped my brow. My pocket thermometer said 102 degrees, and it wasn't even 10 a.m. *Welcome to early summer blacktail hunting*, I thought to myself while silently chuckling.

It was July 16, and I had been glassing and hiking the hills for nearly a week. Heatwaves danced like ghosts along the ridges, and ankle-deep leaves crunched like cornflakes underfoot. Even in the shade of giant oak trees, the air was stifling and hard to breathe.

I knew the deer would be tucked in the thickets of manzanita, madrone, chaparral, and poison oak until the cooler evening hours, so I hiked toward my vehicle for some lunch and a siesta. No point wasting time in the late-morning heat.

The weather on my 2023 bowhunt for Columbian blacktail deer was no surprise. I grew up hunting Northern California's A Zone, where I harvested quite a few bucks with my bow before I moved to the Rocky Mountain West. It felt like a true homecoming to once again sneak across steep, yellow-grass slopes dotted with ancient oaks. I was having fun, despite the scorching conditions.

Abundant deer trails with fresh tracks laced the hillsides like cobwebs. The fact that I was not seeing many deer meant nothing to me. Pacific Coast blacktails can be as elusive as whitetails and move mostly at night when daytime temps soar. With enough time, I was hoping I'd spot a good buck in a place where a stalk might be possible.

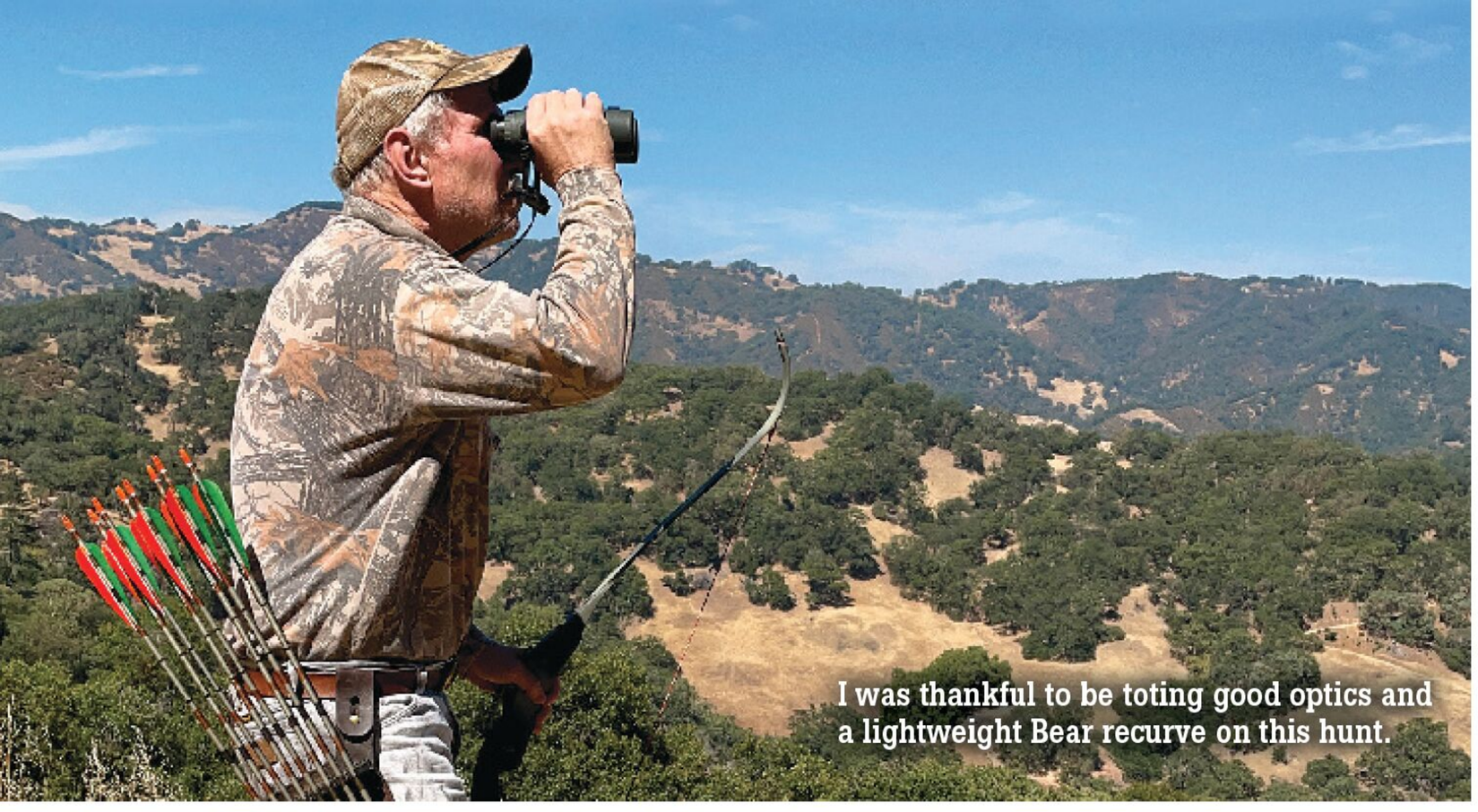
Pundits on the pickup radio were blathering about climate change as days on end exceeded 100 degrees. Five decades earlier, I bowhunted deer in this same area, and I knew from experience the mercury always spiked in July. I remember shooting one buck as a teenager with my recurve bow when the temperature was 113. Another year during that same decade, the temperature topped 100 degrees for 20 days straight during the early archery deer season. July 2023 was nothing new to me — and nothing new to the planet.

As a hat tip to old times, I decided to bowhunt California blacktails this time with a recurve bow. I owned a 50-pound Bear Mag-Riser takedown recurve in the 1970s, so I was delighted when Bear recently introduced a near carbon-copy of that same bow.

I ordered one with limbs that allowed me to pull 50 pounds, and this 64-inch beauty shot my Easton 2117 shafts and 125-grain broadheads perfectly. A little camo paint, and I was set for my 2023 hunt.

The key to bowhunting blacktails in July is persistence. There is a small window of opportunity between dawn and sunrise when deer are still actively feeding, and another as the sun dips low at the end of the day.

You climb high before daylight, glass hard, and hope to spot a buck in a place for a quick stalk. Morning deer sometimes bed briefly in yellow grass beneath oaks or madrones, but they usually vanish into heavy cover as the heat increases.



I was thankful to be toting good optics and a lightweight Bear recurve on this hunt.

One strategy is watching a buck enter a thicket in the morning and waiting near that spot in the evening. Blacktails sometimes emerge from cover near the place they disappeared at the crack of dawn.

In scorching weather, another tactic can also work. I call it "creek-sneaking"— slipping along canyon bottoms in midday. Deer sometimes visit deep draws in early afternoon to slake their thirst. Coastal California might be sweltering in the summer, but there are usually abundant places to drink in small creeks, spring holes, or seeps. Every ravine I followed on my recent bowhunt had trickling water or scattered pools.

California's July archery hunt is one of the earliest on our continent and offers two buck tags during a 23-day season. Both public and private property harbor plenty of deer, and any buck with a fork on one side is legal game.

In 2023, I was hunting land owned by a friend, but it was a place heavily pounded during the August and September gun season. Deer here are smart and skittish, and ones with decent antlers are few and far between.

During the first week of my bowhunt, I did not see one buck I wanted to shoot. The few I glassed were all forked horns — young animals with smallish racks and no eyeguards. All were in velvet, but as is the case with July blacktails in most parts of California, their antlers appeared to be fully developed. Unlike muleys and whitetails, Columbian blacktails usually shed their velvet in late July or early August.

Columbian blacktails are basically mini versions of mule deer. A big buck might weigh 130 pounds on the hoof and carry antlers 18–20 inches wide. The most impressive racks double-branch like those of muleys but are considerably smaller in tine length and score. The Pope and Young minimum for typical Columbian blacktails is 95, compared to the minimum for typical mule deer of 145. Many high-scoring Columbian blacktails are 3x3s plus eyeguards, and they never grow fourth points.

My goal on this hunt was to kill a buck scoring over 100 inches (net). With two tags in my pocket, a week of hunting behind me, and not one mature buck seen, I was beginning to wonder about my homecoming-week adventure!

July 18 dawned as warm and clear as all the others. I glassed distant slopes from a high ridge without seeing so much as one doe. The sun rose like a gi-

18+

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ant egg yolk, and the temperature leaped above 100 degrees.

As usual, I started creek-sneaking around 2 p.m. I surprised three small 2x2s beside a deep pool surrounded by clumps of poison oak. I am severely allergic to this awful plant, and I cringed as the bucks scampered uphill through all those shiny leaves. It's as easy to get poison oak off a deer's hair as it is from direct contact…something a blacktail hunter should never forget.

Sometimes things happen fast. I had barely begun tiptoeing along a ridge at sundown when fat antlers appeared above the waist-high grass 100 yards ahead. My heart leaped into my throat! The deer was feeding on an oak bush — his eyes completely blocked from view.

I had chosen this ridge because footing was reasonably quiet. I eased ahead one careful step at a time, remembering that blacktails always seem farther away than they really are because of their small body size.

The buck turned broadside, and I got my first clear view of his 3x3 rack. He had eyeguards — the sign of a mature animal — and all his tines were long and massive. This was the deer for me!

CHUCK ADAMS BIG GAME HUNTING TIP

COPING WITH POISON OAK

WEST COAST BLACKTAIL HUNTERS should beware of poison oak. Most people are allergic to this horrible and prolific plant. Leaves and stems are covered with urushiol oil, and even with a light touch, this will quickly penetrate the skin and cause painful swelling/blistering within 18–36 hours. Toxic oil transferred from deer hair can be just as bad, so it is wise to handle bucks with elbow-length rubber gloves.

It has been estimated that enough urushiol oil to cover the head of a pin can cause a massive outbreak. The best way to cope with poison oak is recognizing and avoiding the plant. Scrubbing with grease-cutting soap like Dawn within 15 minutes of contact can remove up to half the oil, but a high percentage immediately penetrates the skin. Commercial products like Tecnu perform the same as common soap. Outbreaks rarely clear up in less than 14–20 days and end with powerful itching.

Once you are afflicted by poison oak, modest relief might be achieved by covering the affected area with calamine lotion or over-the-counter hydrocortisone cream. With severe cases, especially around the eyes and mouth, you might need doctor-prescribed steroid pills or injections.

Unless you have suffered from poison oak, you have no idea how nasty it is.

The grass was tall but thin enough for me to see the buck clearly. I had cut the distance to less than 25 yards. I drew, released my feather-fletched shaft, and watched as my arrow thumped home just behind the buck's shoulder. He was mine!

My first Coastal California blacktail in decades was also my largest ever. His antlers gross-scored exactly 117 P&Y points, and later netted a touch over 115.

With 12 days left in the July archery season, I figured I might have a chance to fill my second tag. But that's another story for another time. No matter what the future might hold, I was one happy bowhunter on that hot summer day! **BH**

You can follow Chuck on Instagram and Facebook at Chuck Adams Archery. Visit Chuck's website at chuckadamsarchery.com.

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IF YOU ENJOY SHOOTING YOUR BOW AND THE TASTE OF WILD GAME, SOMETIMES YOU NEED TO THINK "SMALL."

I AM ALWAYS anxiously awaiting the start of the fall seasons. Like a lot of you, I chased some other stuff around this past spring and summer. Turkeys are fun to hunt, and bowfishing is a blast, but if I'm being honest, nothing quite compares to the fall.

I eased the string back slowly, trying my best not to make any hasty movements. I was on a moose hunt, and this was just the opportunity I was looking for. I picked a spot as I drew and released, and my Muzzy broadhead-tipped arrow flashed through the air, followed by a puff of feathers. The grouse fluttered straight down and stopped moving. I was elated, because I knew I was going to be eating good that night back at my wall-tent camp.

A moose would have been nice, but I hadn't seen one that day. I did, however, see lots of grouse, including the one I just described shooting. I also love to eat wild game, and sometimes it's small game, or no game at all — if you know what I mean.

In case you're wondering, I didn't get a moose, or even a shot at one on that trip. But I did get to enjoy some wild grouse, and I shot my bow a lot, which is always part of the fun of any hunt for me. So, did I consider that moose hunt a successful one? Heck yes! I was hunting moose and grouse, and I was 50-percent successful. Or, as I like to look at things, I was 100 percent on the grouse hunt…the moose were just lucky.

I find success in whatever I can get with my bow. I have realized over the

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I've made the most of difficult big-game hunts by taking advantage of coinciding small-game seasons for squirrels and rabbits.

years that I have so much success because I shoot at everything I legally can. Sometimes, that may be slipping out to a pond or along a creek or river and making frogs my main focus. It's lots of shooting, and if I can hit a frog consistently, it increases my confidence that I will make a good shot on a deer or other big-game animal. The bonus is that frog legs are also delicious.

I have some buddies who practice every day and shoot small game with me only up to when the fall seasons start. Then, they only shoot their bow if a deer, elk, or some other big-game animal comes by.

I am the opposite. Sometimes, I have been guilty of spooking deer I didn't even know were around because I couldn't help but try to shoot a squirrel to fry up for camp dinner. I can also turn a slow deer hunt into a rabbit, quail, pheasant, or duck hunt by just harvesting what is tasty, in season, and plentiful in numbers.

For gear, most of the time I use whatever I am using for big game. I usually have a practice broadhead in my quiver that may be a little duller than the others and that I wouldn't use on a deer. But for a squirrel, a dull broadhead doesn't make a difference, so long as the broadhead is the same size as the squirrel's chest. I will also sometimes carry a few Judo points in my pack, or even some fieldpoints. I like fieldpoints for frogs, and I usually only go with broadheads for larger birds like geese, grouse, ducks, or pheasants. For quail, I will usually use a Judo point, so my arrow doesn't disappear in the brush.

SOMETIMES, I HAVE BEEN GUILTY OF SPOOKING DEER I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW WERE AROUND BECAUSE I COULDN'T HELP BUT TRY TO SHOOT A SQUIRREL TO FRY UP FOR CAMP DINNER.

If I am going specifically for birds that I might be shooting in the air, or for squirrels where I am shooting from the ground up into a tree, I will often use flu-flu arrows, which by design prevent my missed shots from resulting in a lost arrow. I have built my own flu-flu arrows, but it takes some work, so I prefer to have the crew at 3Rivers Archery make some up for me.

Some people think of small game as being something to go after only when big game isn't in season. I prefer to hunt all year — so long as it's legal — to keep my shooting skills sharp, and tasty meat on my family's dinner plates!

Don't get me wrong, I'd shoot a deer over a squirrel if I had a shot at both at the same time. But I also won't hesitate to go after whatever is in season when I have my bow in my hand. **BH**

For more information, visit fredeichler.com, and don't miss Fred's new show, "Everything Eichler," every Sunday at 12:30 p.m. on Sportsman Channel.

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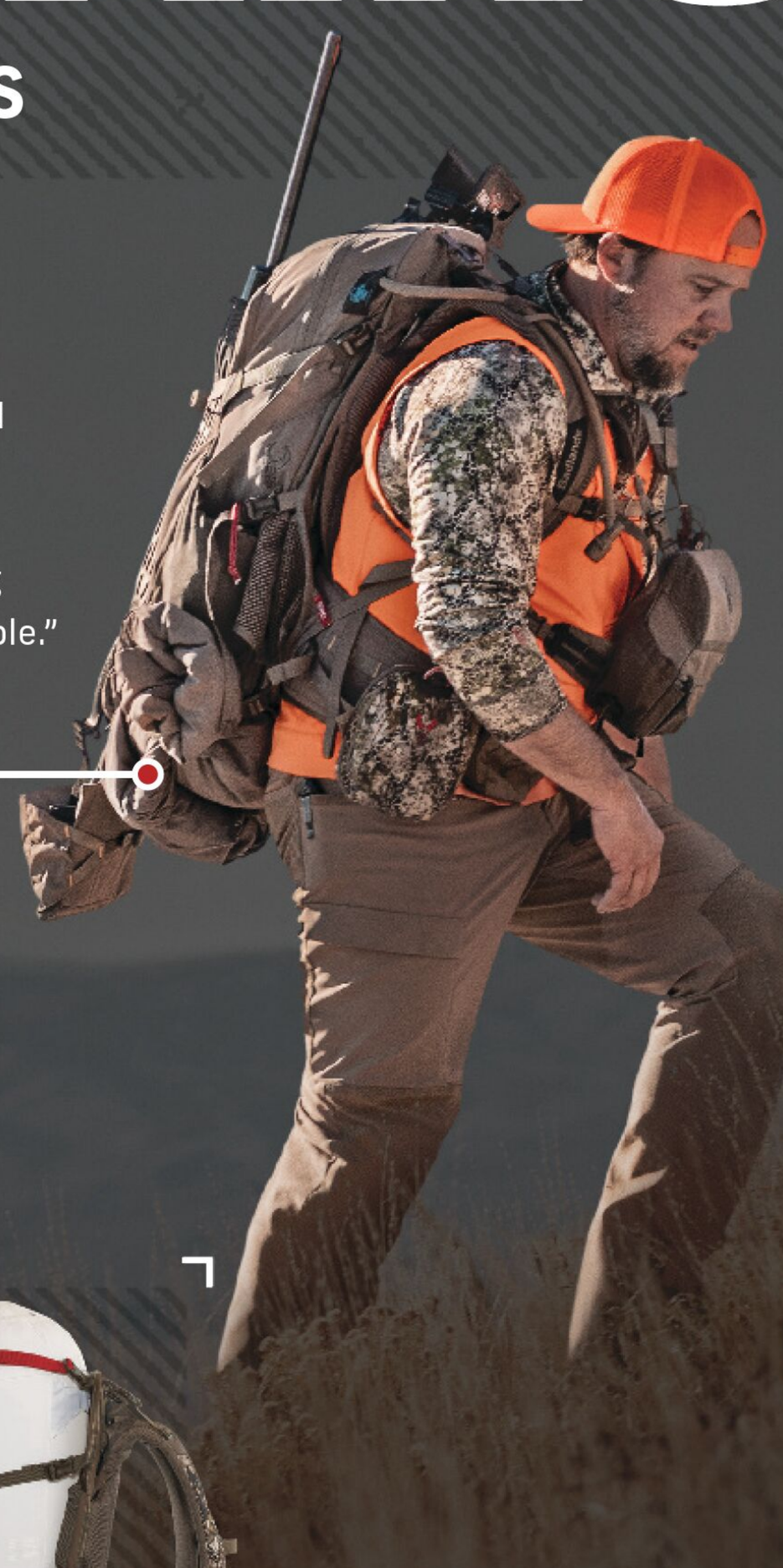

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BRIAN K. STRICKLAND | EQUIPMENT EDITOR

Mother Nature is a constant companion. Sometimes we get along; sometimes we don't. Know how to dress when she decides to get ornery.

THE TRANSITION

DON'T LET MOTHER NATURE DEFINE YOUR HUNT. WEAR THE RIGHT DUDS TO ENHANCE YOUR BOWHUNTING EXPERIENCE.

If I had to pick my favorite time of year to bowhunt whitetails, it would have to be the last week of October into the first few days of November.

The days are getting shorter, the weather is cooler, and in my experience it can be the best time to kill a mature buck. More than once it has been during this transition season when a particular buck made a mistake that sent him to my freezer well before winter's freeze had an opportunity to settle in.

As if it were yesterday, I can still see him slipping under the heavy cottonwood canopy in the fading light. It was one of those late-October evenings when I just knew a buck couldn't help but move early. A north breeze was blowing, and the temps had crashed over 25 degrees from the previous day.

The Kansas buck paused just 22 steps from the base of my tree. His heavy rack more than met my standards, and when my arrow blew through his chest in a flash I knew in an instant that my hunt was over.

It's no secret that second to the rut, nothing gets a mature buck on his feet faster than changing weather. Although I like to take advantage of a significant drop in temperature whenever I can, even mild changes of just 5 to 10 degrees during this transition season can cause a buck to make a mistake, especially when November nears.

Having clothes that are versatile during these changing conditions can certainly help our efforts as bowhunters, and there are plenty of options to choose from today. Take the [1] ***Elkins Series Jacket, Pants, and Vest*** ($169.99–$224.99) from **Huntworth** (huntworthgear.com). These ultra-quiet midseason layers consist of a triple-layer fabric that's comprised of a low-pile InVelvet fleece bonded to a windproof/breathable film and a grid fleece. The DWR finish ensures drizzling moisture beads off with ease. Antimicrobial technology in the fleece helps with scent control.

ScentLok (scentlok.com) is another one that never disappoints, and their new [2] ***Paradigm Jacket and Pants*** ($279.99, each) are engineered for warmth and versatility. ScentLok treated both with Carbon Alloy to adsorb odor, Fusix to destroy it, and Silver Alloy to help inhibit future growth. A soft, DWR-treated micro-tricot shell is coupled with a micro-fleece lining and wind-stopping WindBrake technology to ensure those midseason chills are locked out tight.

Building on the success of their popular StrongFleece lineup, **KUIU** (kuiu.com) adds to the mix a [3] ***190 Zip-T and 290 Pants*** ($129, each). Ideal as an outer garment on midseason hunts, or as a layering piece on colder excursions, this new lineup features an improved fit for high-output activities that offers extreme breathability. Its Hardfaced Karuishi Fleece design is more durable than traditional fleece, and water beads off thanks to the DWR treatment. They are available in an array of KUIU camo patterns and solids.

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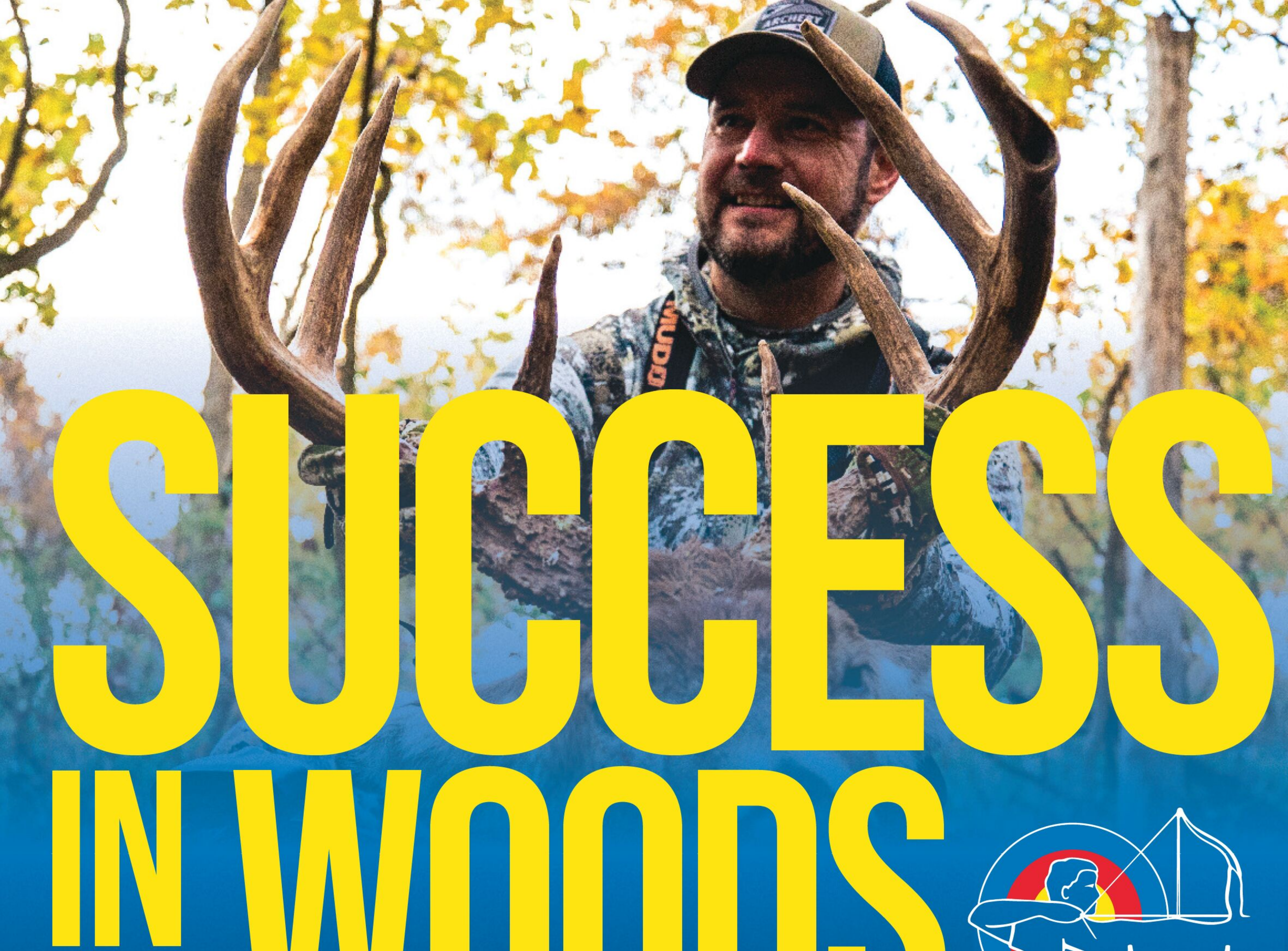
Defining midseason hunting apparel at an affordable price, **Blocker Outdoors** (blockeroutdoors.com) launches the new [4] ***Shield Solstice Series Jacket and Pants*** ($149.99, each). This combo boasts a smooth polyester outer shell with a warm Berber-fleece lining that is both quiet and warm enough to keep those midseason chills from spoiling a morning hunt. The DWR-treated fabric coupled with Blocker's proven S3 antimicrobial finish repels moisture while also preventing odor. The Lycra hood and cuffs on the Jacket lock in both heat and scent, and the Pants have articulated knees and an inner thigh gusset for enhanced mobility/comfort.

Badlands (badlandsgear.com) designed the [5] ***Silens Series Hoodie*** ($199.99) and ***Pants*** ($299.99) to eliminate the slightest noise when it's time to draw your rig. Whether you're hunting in frigid conditions or more moderate ones, this series does its best to keep you in the woods longer. The odor-resistant Hoodie combines an extremely quiet, high-pile fleece outer shell with a wind-resistant lining and a large handwarmer pocket, making it an ideal layering piece in ultra-cold conditions, or as an outer garment when temps are more tolerable. The Pants enhance the top's same quiet and warm qualities with even warmer 80-gram PrimaLoft Silver Hi-Loft insulation.

Taking fleece and putting it on steroids, **Kryptek** (kryptek.com) designed the [6] ***Vellus Jacket*** ($249.99) and ***Pants*** ($229.99) for bowhunters wanting functionality for mid and late-season conditions. Windproof, waterproof, seam-sealed, and highly breathable, its ultra-quiet fleece design adds Thinsulate Platinum XTS Insulation with X-STATIC silver odor-control engineered to keep you dry and comfortable.

Sure to be a hit this season, **Sitka** (sitkagear.com) offers up the [7] ***Intercept Hoody*** ($249) and ***Pants*** ($289). The carefully developed fabrics, such as odor-controlling ArmorSpun Merino wool and stretch-nylon, are not only designed to be



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extremely comfortable but also eliminate noise from arm, thigh, and leg movements when drawing your bow or slipping in close to bedded game. A stalker's dream, both sport removable elbow and kneepads, while the top has an integrated Merino wool mesh facemask, plus many more beneficial features.

A popular choice for Western bowhunters, the **[8]** ***Hardscrabble Jacket*** ($229.95) from **SKRE** (skregear.com) would also be a good midseason crossover option for whitetail enthusiasts. The interior microfleece lining is bonded with a quiet/durable MTN-X2 face fabric with a Teflon Shield+ DWR finish to provide an excellent water-resistant barrier. Other notables include dual pit zippers for ventilation, anatomically positioned pockets, and a fully adjustable storm hood.

If you tend to favor the qualities that wool provides, you'll love the overhauled **[9]** ***Sportsman's Two-Pocket Hoodie*** ($329) from **Voormi** (voormi.com). Designed in Colorado, it features the newest generation of their patented CORE Construction, which integrates a weatherproofing membrane into the core of the fabric during the knitting process. This enhancement results in a soft, single-layer, sweater-like fabric that is both breathable and weather-resistant. It features both high/low kangaroo pockets and a three-panel hood for ultimate protection.

Another wool option for the midseason is **L.L.Bean**'s (llbean.com) **[10]** ***Waterfowl Sweater*** ($119). Don't let the name fool you, because it works equally well

for whitetail hunters. Its Merino-wool qualities are not only ultra-quiet but also naturally repel water to provide reliable protection in cold, wet conditions.

A good base layer is invaluable, and the moisture-wicking **[11]** ***Midweight Base Layer Top*** ($59.99) and ***Pants*** ($54.99) from **ArcticShield** (arcticshieldoutdoor.com) have been proven winners for many seasons. Designed with a fabric that's the ideal thickness to take that midseason nip off, both feature X-System Plus technology for odor control.

Designed specifically for the whitetail bowhunter, the popular **[12]** ***Verdigre Hoodie*** ($140) and ***Pants*** ($130) from **Code of Silence** (codeofsilence.com) give wearers active breathability and warmth before the harsh late season sets in. This combo has a quiet, 75/25 polyester/wool fleece blended outer shell with a flatter fleece design that is paired with an anti-odor lining. The top has tapered sleeves that move with you, a lined kangaroo pocket, and an adjustable hood. The bottom's articulated knees enhance mobility, and leg panels make them easy to tuck into your boots.

A packable jacket is always welcome when the weather suddenly turns on a dime, and **Browning**'s (browning.com) new **[13]** ***Packable Puffer*** ($209.99) would be a wise choice for the backcountry. Ultra-light and durable, it features a polyester micro-ripstop fabric with a water-repellent 650 PrimaLoft Silver down-blend fill. The result is a garment that doesn't take up much space in your pack, while also ensuring maximum

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warmth when you need it most. Other highlights include odor-fighting Silvadur technology and finish options of two solid colors and Browning's unique Ovix camo pattern.

Water and wind-resistant, **Nomad**'s (nomadoutdoor.com) **[14]** ***Harvester NTX Gloves*** ($40) and ***Beanie*** ($40) will keep the edge off when it's chilly. The Gloves are warm yet thin enough to ensure full use of your hands. The matching Beanie sports the same three-layer design that features a Sherpa-fleece interior ear panel, and a wind/moisture-repellent design.

When the temps start to dip and you need a little extra on your hands, the **[15]** ***Muff Oak*** ($39.99) from **Hunter Safety System** (huntersafetysystem.com) is hard to beat. Its ergonomic design allows you to slip your hands in/out with ease, and the polar-fleece lining keeps them warm and dry, regardless of the conditions. The dual outer pockets are meant for storing must-haves like rangefinders and calls close and quietly available for when they are needed. **BH**

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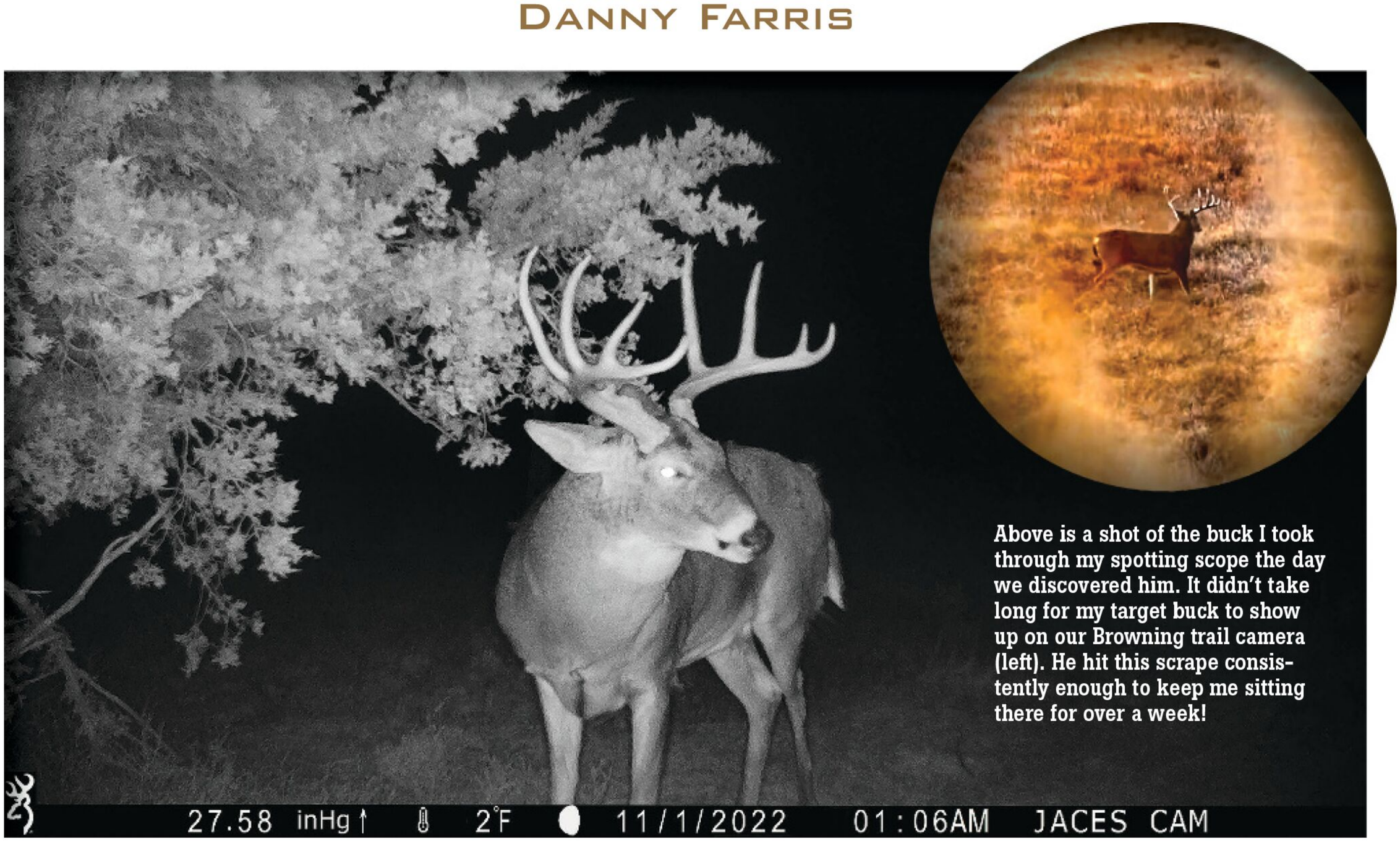

Above is a shot of the buck I took through my spotting scope the day we discovered him. It didn't take long for my target buck to show up on our Browning trail camera (left). He hit this scrape consistently enough to keep me sitting there for over a week!

THE REST OF **THE STORY**

THE CAMERA DOESN'T ALWAYS CAPTURE THE REAL STORY!

I WAS IN A FOUL MOOD as I scrambled to set up that afternoon. When I left my camper early that morning, I realized I was low on propane, and unless I wanted to deal with frozen pipes, I had to find some during the middle of the day. By the time I found a place to refill, I was running late.

My DIY Kansas deer hunt is one I always look forward to, and I've been pretty successful there over the last decade. If you're a fan of ***Bowhunter TV***, you've probably watched a few of those hunts on past episodes. We were filming again this year, but this hunt had been a grind. The region had been devastated by the worst drought in over 100 years, and the lack of cover had destroyed some of my best spots.

Because I seldom get a chance to take a scouting trip prior to the season, I often spend the first day or two checking properties and looking for deer. My cameraman, Olin Wimberg, and I were fortunate to locate a great buck on the first day. It was a wide 10-point with broken brow tines on a piece of Walk-In next to some private land I had permission to hunt. With most of my other spots ravaged by drought, I immediately decided to target this buck.

The private ground I had access to featured a small row of cedars that were the only trees in the vicinity, so I decided to check them for sign. When I did, I discovered so many scrapes and rubs it looked like a bulldozer had run through them. I quickly hung a game camera on the biggest scrape and backed out.

It didn't take long for the 10-pointer to show. He hit the scrape that very night, and I felt certain if we spent enough time there, I'd get a crack at him.

The cedars weren't large enough to support stands, so Olin and I built a natural blind near the primary scrape. It seemed like an ideal setup.

With photos of our target buck on camera almost every night, Olin and I spent over a week hunting him in those cedars, but he never showed. We did get a chance though — two of them, in fact.

AUTHOR'S PHOTOS

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Both came when we spotted the buck locked down with a doe out in the wide open. We donned bow-mounted Stalker Decoys on both my bow and his camera rig — a tactic that has worked well for me in the past. But as we approached the buck the first time, his doe stood up unexpectedly and spotted us.

A few days later, we managed to slip in perfectly, but just before we were ready, the doe stood up and started feeding our way. When the buck followed, I ranged him at 30 yards, but the doe caught movement and went on alert. The Stalker Decoy allowed me to draw my bow, but when I let the arrow go he jumped the string and my arrow flew harmlessly over his back.

Before I knew it, time ran out and Olin had to leave to film elsewhere. If you're a fan of ***Bowhunter TV***, you might have watched this hunt when it first aired about a month ago, but the real story happened after the camera was gone!

Olin left on the afternoon of November 11. I planned to leave the next day,

but when I went in to pull my camera, there was a daylight photo of the buck from just after Olin left! I immediately decided to stay a couple more days.

The next morning brought no action, which brings us back to when I finally got my propane tank filled.

Frustrated that I was late, I slipped in quickly. With a cold front rolling in, I just knew the buck was going to show, and I was more determined than ever.

After sitting motionless for three hours, I heard something to my right, but it didn't sound like a deer. It sounded like a varmint slipping along under the cedars, and it was coming toward me. The thought of getting sprayed in the face by a startled skunk popped into my head, so I sat up to look.

Peering into the tangle, I spotted what I thought was a shed antler under the cedars about 10 yards away. Sitting up a little higher, I saw hair attached to that antler! I froze, thinking to myself, *There's no way a deer could slip in there without my hearing it.*

Slowly rising to my knees, I realized it was indeed a buck — a dead buck. *What the heck*, I thought, as I stood and took few steps closer for a better look. Then the realization hit me — it was my buck!

Sure enough, someone had killed the 10-pointer I'd been hunting. In my haste to get set up, I had somehow walked right past him, and sat there on the ground for three hours with him lying dead right next to me!

As far as I knew, I was the only one with permission to hunt that property, so I immediately pulled out my phone to call the landowner. When I had no signal, I started for my truck to go get him.

Topping the hill, I spotted another truck parked next to mine. And when a bowhunter stepped out and asked if

AUTHOR'S PHOTO

I knew who owned this property, I saw red!

"Ya, I know who owns this property," I aggressively responded! "Do you know who owns it?"

The young man responded calmly and professionally, "No, Sir, I don't. But I believe he lives in the house down the road. I went and knocked on the door to ask if I could have access to search for a deer I shot on the Walk-In property across the road, but no one was home."

I suddenly realized that I'd gotten so wound up when I found the buck that I didn't even take time to look around to see where I thought he had come from, and the Walk-In property across the road was right where I had just stalked the deer a couple of days prior.

"Well, I think I just found your buck," I told him. Then I asked him if he could show me where his blood trail crossed the road.

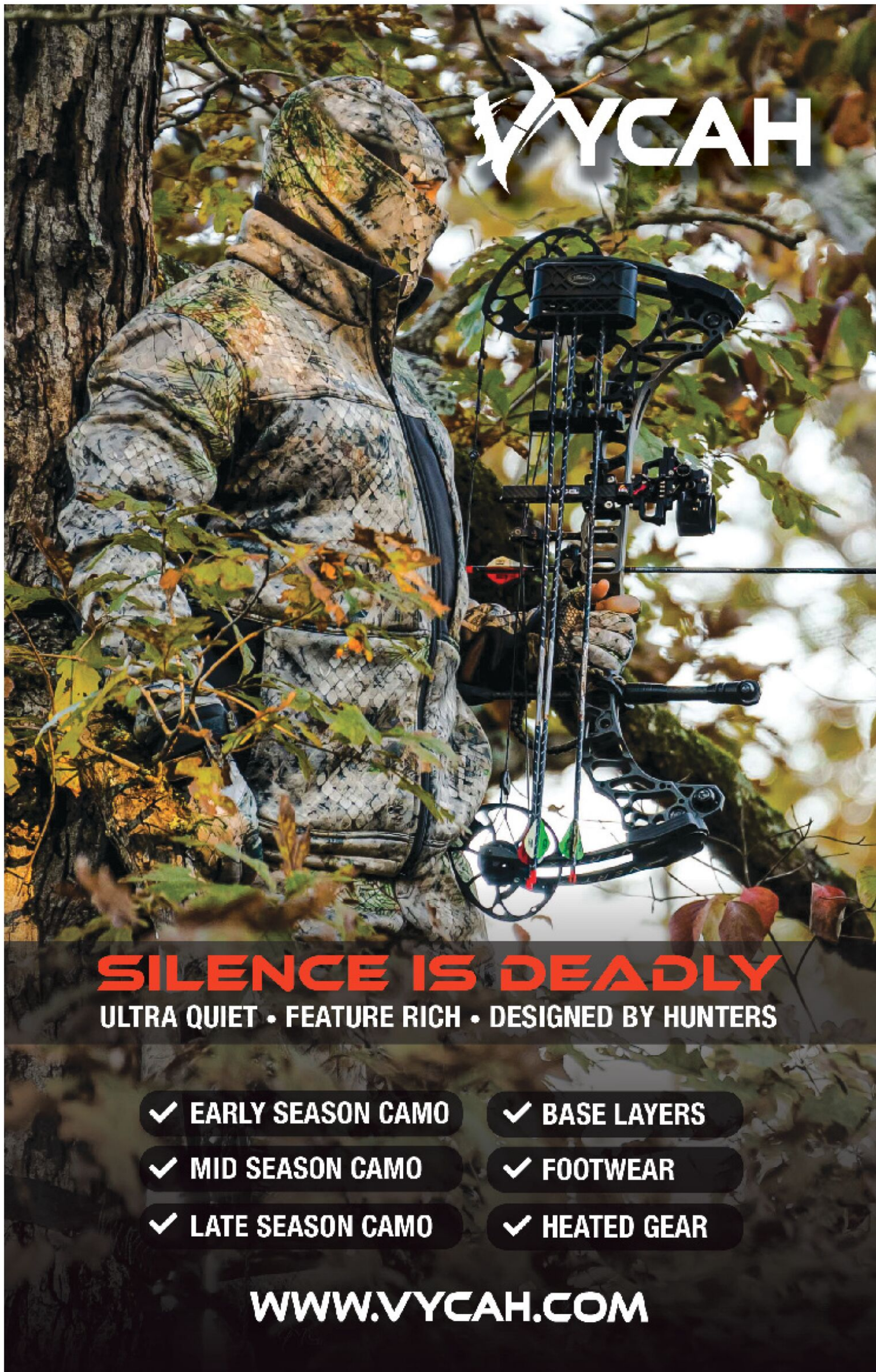
"Yes, I can," he responded.

I felt like a jerk and apologized to him. I then called the landowner, after which I offered to take the young man to his buck. The young man had handled the entire situation perfectly and even had enough respect to wait for me to come out, rather than try to get my attention and ruin my hunt.

As we drove in, I begrudgingly congratulated him and asked how he managed to get an arrow into the buck. He explained how he had spotted him locked down with a doe from the road, watched them bed, and then snuck to within about 80 yards. The big buck had suddenly jumped up to run off a smaller one, and as he made his way back to the doe, a quick flash of a buck decoy caused him to charge in to 20 yards for the shot.

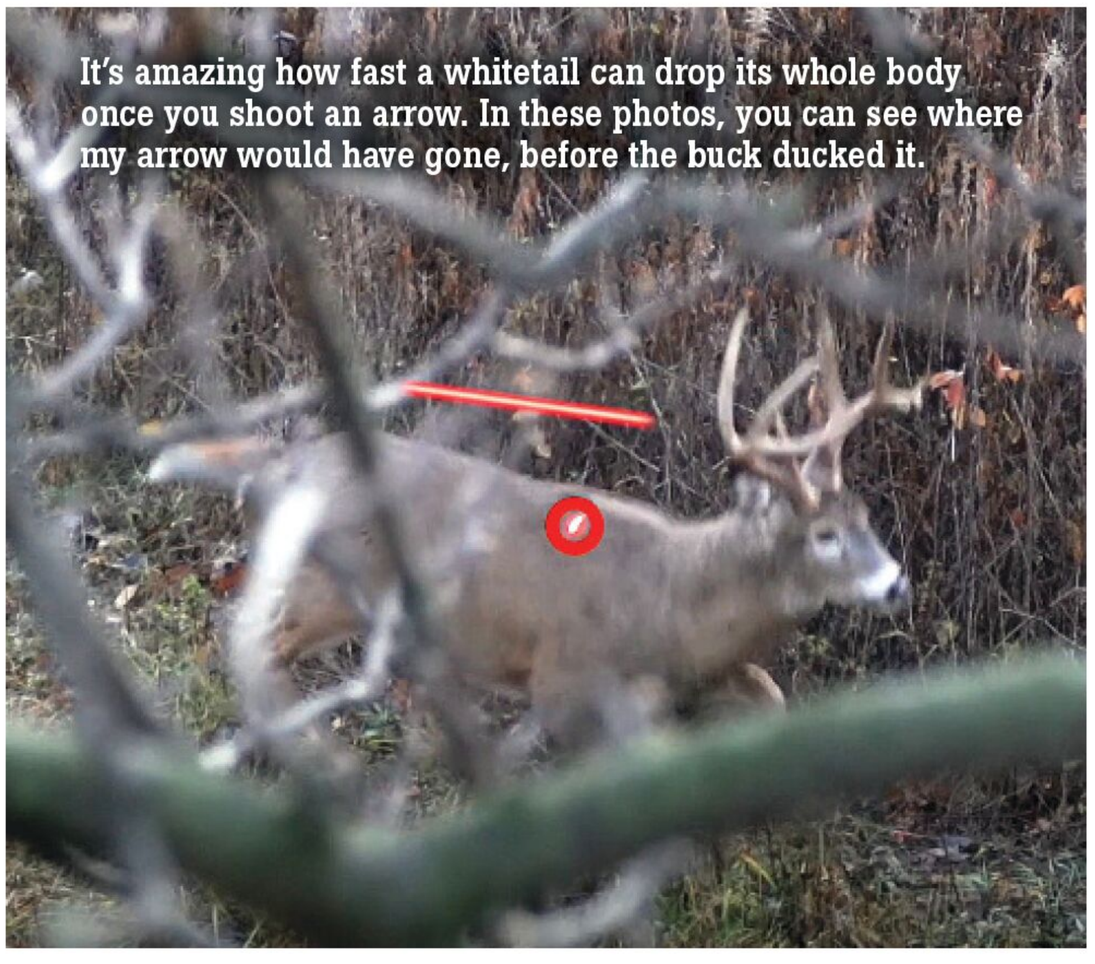
Are you kidding me? I almost said it out loud but managed to restrain myself. The young man used the same tactic I had tried twice during the week. He was rightfully very excited, explaining that this was by far his biggest whitetail.

It has taken some time for me to digest how this all went down. It's a little embarrassing to admit I sat there, almost on top of the buck, for so long that evening. Finding him was the biggest shock of my entire bowhunting career. However, even the worst hunts seem to have a silver lining, and the fact is, I came away with one heck of a story. Thank goodness the camera wasn't there to capture the look on my face! **BH**



HUNTING WHITETAILS

C.J. WINAND



DEER **JUMPING** THE STRING

THE TERM "JUMPING THE STRING" IS EXACTLY THE OPPOSITE OF WHAT DEER ACTUALLY DO WHEN REACTING TO YOUR SHOT.

WHEN I STARTED bowhunting in the late 1970s, I missed more deer than I care to admit to. I was very proficient at the bow range but terrible when it came to real-life shooting opportunities. Because I was typically missing high, I always assumed it was because I was flinching upward right before my shot.

For many bowhunters, missing deer is simply a case of eating humble pie. And many just point to themselves, like I did, as the main source of error. But is this correct?

Luckily for me, and everyone else involved with ***Bowhunter TV***, (now entering its 20th year on Sportsman Channel and Outdoor Channel), we have topnotch cameramen who do a great job of filming our shots and provide us with footage that we can review later back at camp when things go awry. Trust me when I say that being able to watch your "uncertain" arrow frame by frame, and in slow-motion on a TV screen, is priceless!

All that said, the purpose of this column is to educate you on what we have learned over years of viewing deer "ducking the arrow" on video.

A number of years ago, fellow wildlife biologist, Dr. Grant Woods, produced a very informative show on "Growing Deer TV" about this very subject. Woods teamed up with an engineer from Pennsylvania to produce a one-of-a-kind machine — with a sensitive microphone — to see how deer reacted to the sound of a bow being shot. Woods and his buddy shot arrows at 20, 30, and 40 yards, with two compound bows shooting at 258 and 306 fps.

Woods then used the speed of sound to calculate the time between when the bow was shot and when the arrow reached the target at those three distances. Woods and his engineer friend then calculated the time it took the sound of the bow shot to reach the deer for them to start responding. Then Woods used the speed of gravity to determine how fast a deer should drop at the various distances.

In short, Woods learned that bowhunters can get away with bad shots at 20 yards but not 40 yards, because deer have way too much time to react to the sound of the bow going off at the longer distance. In fact, Woods made a graph that showed deer would drop 10-plus inches at 40 yards with the slower bow, and 5-plus inches with the faster bow. At 30 yards, deer dropped 6 inches with the 258-fps bow, and 2 inches with the 306-fps bow. At 20 yards, deer dropped 2.5 inches and 0.25 inches, respectively.

Years ago, I'd always wait until a deer had its head down to release my shot because I assumed it was calm or eating something. After viewing many shots on video, it became very apparent the opposite is true.

When a deer has its head up, it drops its vitals less than when its head is down. So, the next time you draw on a deer, re-

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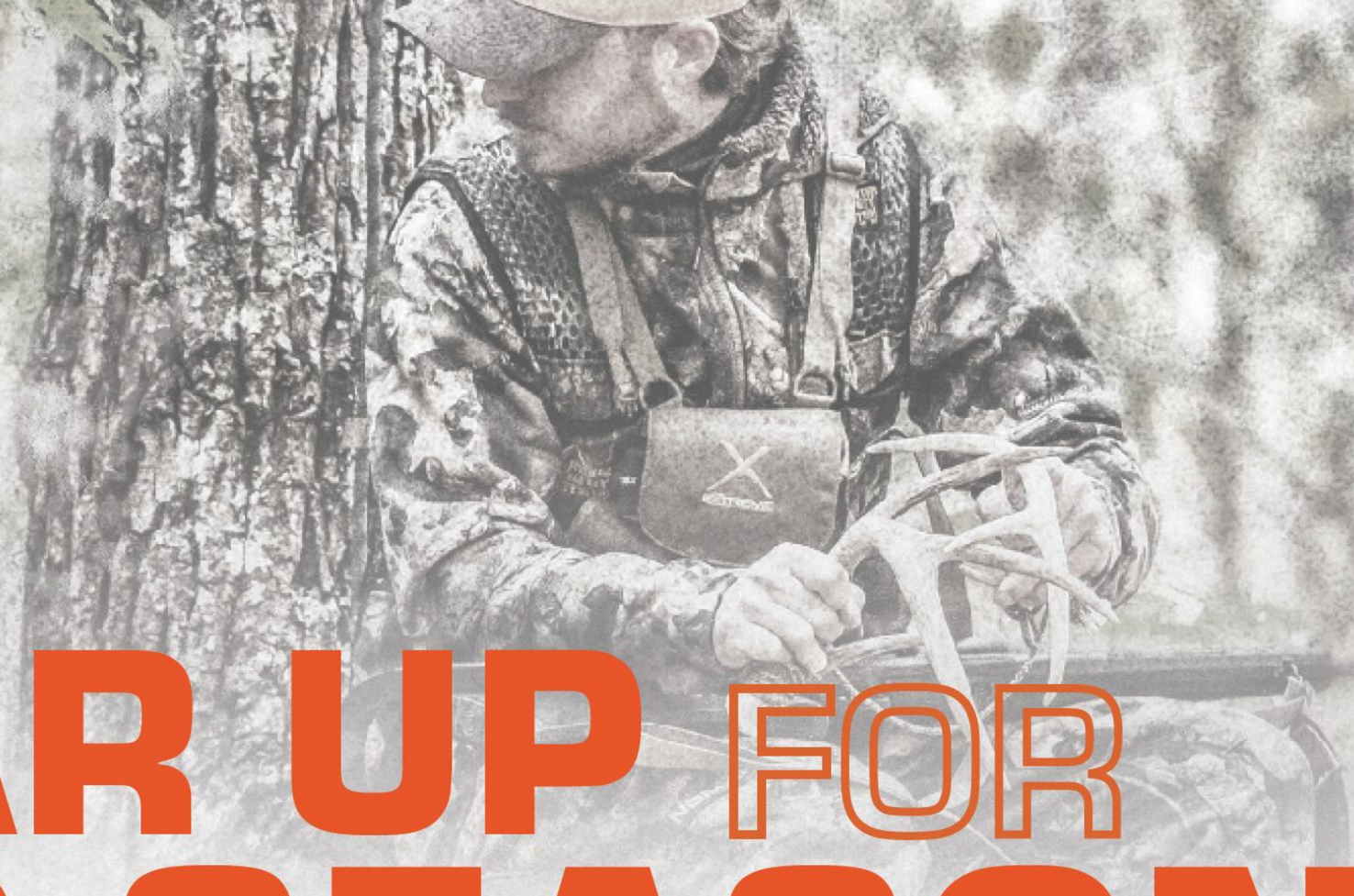

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member what I just said — video footage never lies!

One reason this occurs is because a deer can't drop its head faster than the speed of gravity. If a deer has its head down and it hears something, the deer will throw its head up, which acts like a fulcrum and serves as leverage to push its chest down.

We have all seen deer drop so fast that it looked like their chest hit the ground before they ran away. This happened to me when a deer literally had its head in water and I released my arrow from a ground blind. I could not believe it when I watched my arrow fly over the deer's back. Again, if I would have waited for it to raise its head, I may have punched my tag.

Additionally, many forget about how the angle of ground surface can affect how far a deer will drop. For example, a deer coming downhill will drop further than a deer going uphill or while standing on flat ground.

Bowhunters will often make some type of noise in an attempt to stop a deer that's walking within their effective range. Although this practice works, you must be ready to shoot as soon you make the sound. Wait a half-second longer after your sound and the deer may react even quicker.

Through the years, I've learned to grunt with my mouth without moving any cheek muscles. This ensures my anchor point doesn't change and my shot will be perfect — that's my theory anyway.

There is another factor that might cause a deer to duck your shot: The sound of your arrow in flight.

What many bowhunters don't realize, is that their arrows can and do make noise while traveling downrange. You might not hear the arrow from your point of view, but it can get very loud once it gets to the target. And although I have no quantitative data to support this, I believe deer are reacting more to the arrow noise than the sound of the bow — especially at longer distances.

Years ago, feather fletching was the norm. Nowadays, shorter/stiffer plastic vanes help us stabilize our arrows much faster than feathers, which in turn leads to better accuracy at longer distances. But compared to feathers, vanes are very noisy. If you don't believe this, try standing downrange (behind a safe structure) and have someone shoot an arrow with feathers, and one with plastic vanes. The discrepancy of the "whistling" sound between the two is significant.

Considering how quiet today's bows are, I truly believe it's more the sound of the arrow in flight, and not the bow, that results in deer ducking. Granted, every bow setup is different, but for shots 30 yards and longer, I believe the arrow's noise trumps the bow's when it comes to deer reacting to the shot. I could be wrong, but I'm entitled to my opinion (though some disagree, including the Editor of this magazine).

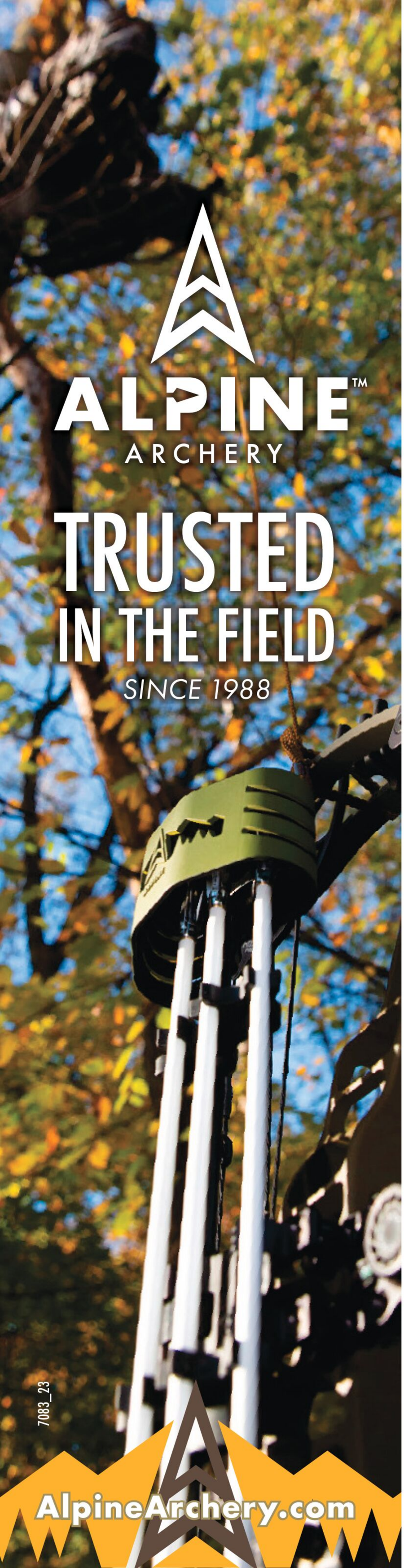
And what about front-of-center (FOC) with heavier arrow weights? FOC describes the percentage of the arrow's total weight located forward of the midpoint of the arrow. Having an FOC of 15% or greater can help dampen the vibration of your bow, because heavier arrows absorb more energy than lighter ones coming out of the bow upon release. Potentially, this could help reduce the sound of a bow and the total number of inches a deer drops. Think about it, the speed of sound of the bow would be the same with a high or zero-percent FOC arrow, but the intensity of sound could certainly change a deer's reaction time.

Granted, not all deer will jump the string, but it's impossible to determine which deer will duck and which ones won't. If there is any advantage, my personal experience has shown fewer high misses on deer I've shot at early in the bow season, than those I've shot at with each passing week of archery season.

Assuming most bowhunters shoot around 275 fps, a good rule of thumb on aiming is the following: Aim a third of the way up from behind the deer's front leg and two-thirds down from its spine for shots less than 30 yards. Doing so gives you a safety buffer for any errors in your shooting form, or the deer's reaction to the shot. And, depending on your draw weight/arrow speed, I recommend aiming directly below the belly line for shots 40 yards and longer.

Obviously, you can reduce the impact of deer jumping the string by staying within your effective range (say, within 20 yards), targeting only calm deer, practicing at distances at least 10 yards farther than you would shoot in the field, and by shooting a well-tuned bow. **BH**

C.J.'s Summary: If you're interested in subscribing to GrowingDeer.TV episodes, Dr. Woods sends out new videos every Monday morning. His episode on deer jumping the string can be found at https://youtube.com/watch?v=IWXWUBWSszk.



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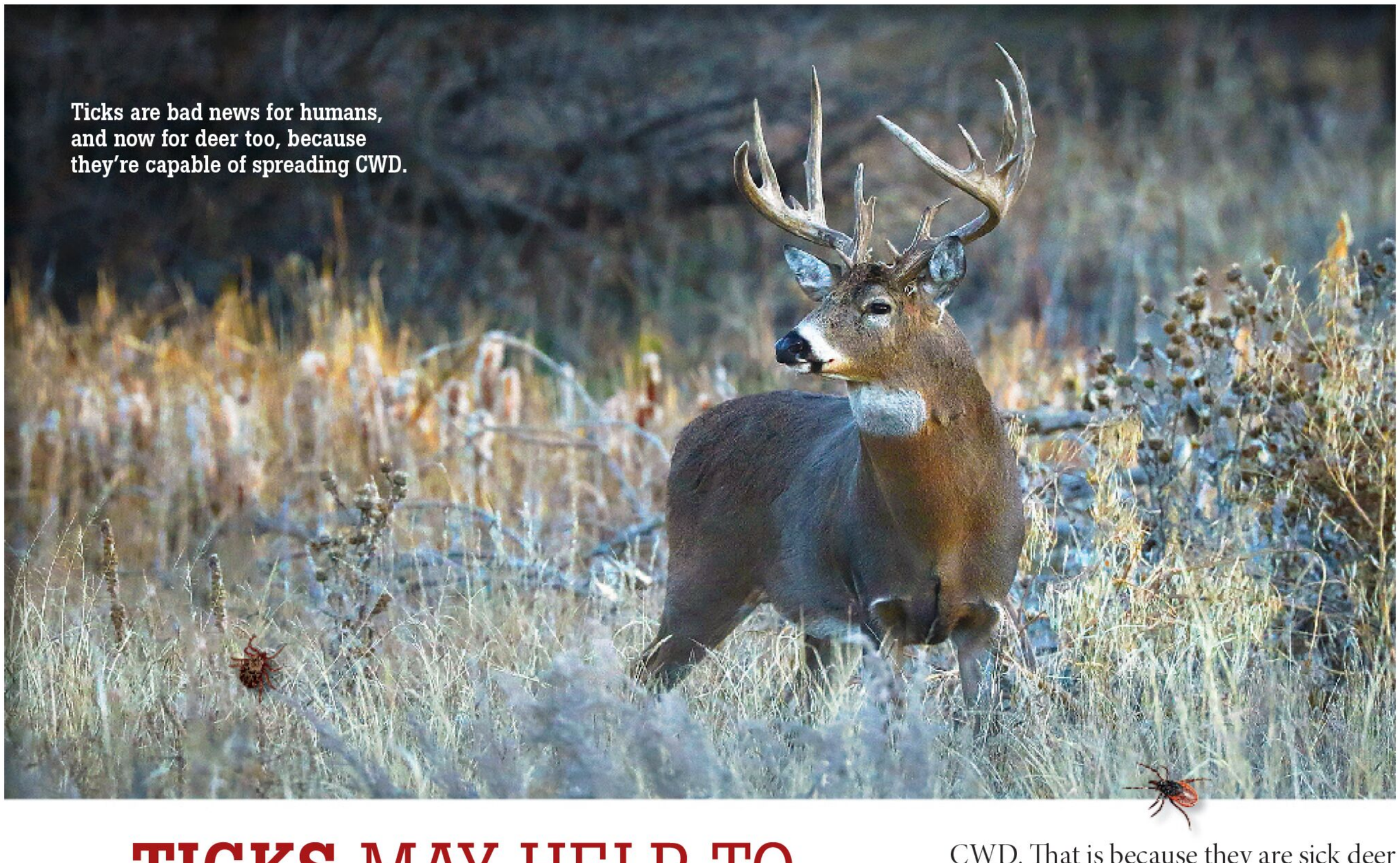

Ticks are bad news for humans, and now for deer too, because they're capable of spreading CWD.

TICKS MAY HELP TO SPREAD CWD IN DEER

JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT THESE BLOODSUCKERS COULDN'T CAUSE MORE DAMAGE...THEY DID!

WE ACTUALLY KNOW a lot about CWD and its impact on deer. I've reported on some of this in previous columns. We know from a study done in Wisconsin that deer with CWD had a 75-percent annual mortality rate, while those that did not have CWD had a 24-percent mortality rate. That does not mean that you'll find CWD-positive deer lying all over the woods, because CWD impacts other forms of mortality.

If a deer has CWD, it has a higher chance of being shot by hunters because infected deer are less aware. If a deer has CWD where there are mountain lions, it has a higher chance of being caught and killed by the big cats, because the deer with CWD are less wary. If a deer has CWD, it has a higher chance of being hit and killed by a vehicle on a highway because they are less aware. No matter what the cause, deer with CWD die at a much higher rate than deer without CWD. That is because they are sick deer and not as alert as healthy deer.

I do not want to be the bearer of bad news, but the more we learn about CWD and what happens to deer that get this disease, the scarier the future sounds. Consider another study done in Wyoming that showed a 68-percent annual death rate for CWD-positive deer, and only 24 percent for CWD-negative deer. This tells me that CWD has the potential to eliminate whitetail deer.

Hunters love to get older, bigger bucks, but research shows that older bucks are more susceptible to getting CWD. The data in one computer study showed that when a high percentage (let's say 40 percent and above) of the deer in an area had CWD, lots of deer will die. Even with hunting mortality eliminated in the model, the deer population will drop year after year. By the way, there are lots of areas in the country where more than 40 percent of the deer have CWD.

Now let's talk about how ticks may be helping to spread CWD in deer. We

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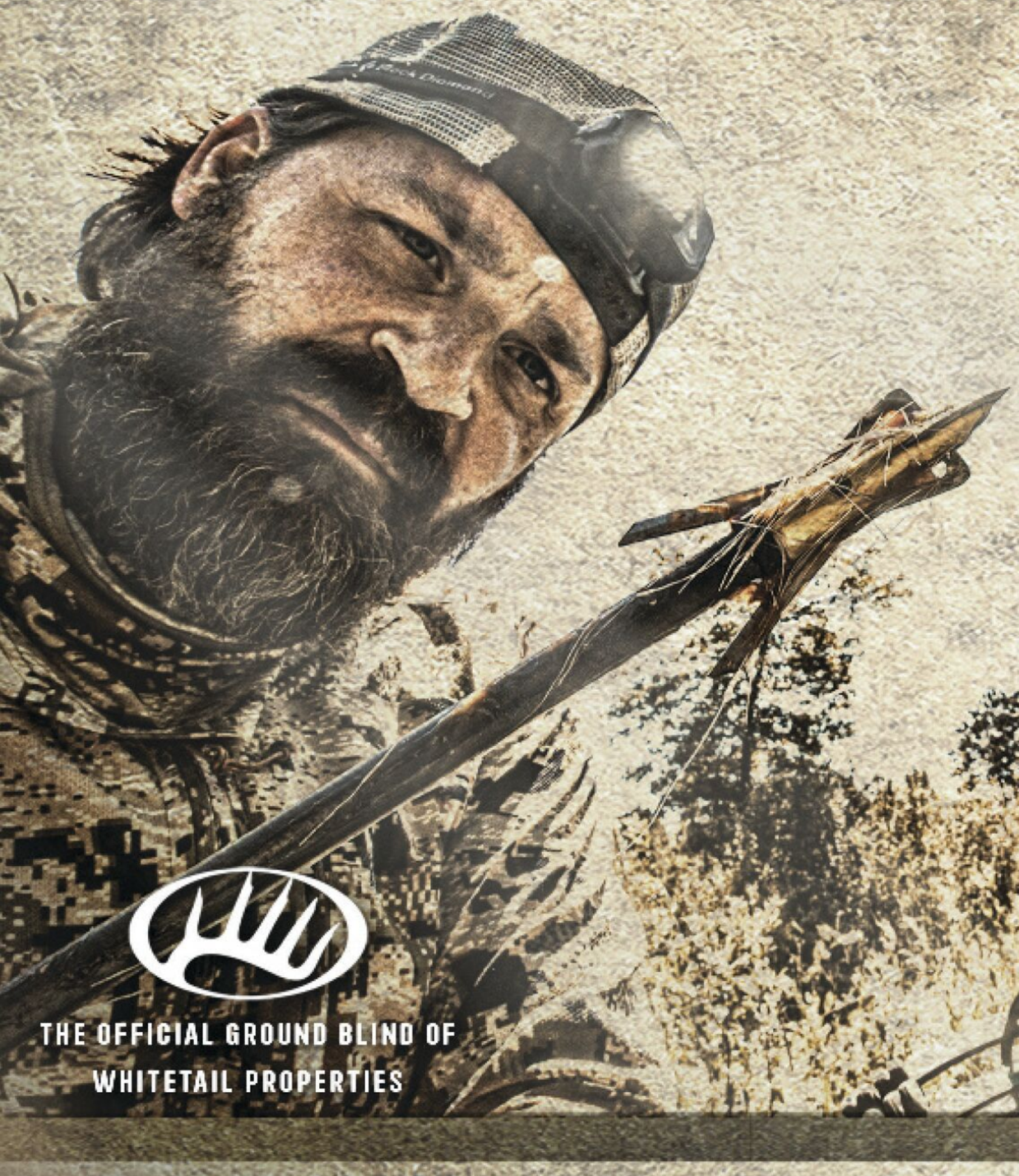

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already know there are several ways that CWD is transmitted from one deer to another. Prions that cause CWD pass from infected deer via mucous, urine, and feces. So, when another deer contacts any of those things, it can get the prions. If an infected deer urinates in a scrape and another deer licks that scrape, it can get CWD. If a deer licks a branch that is over a scrape (and they do that all the time), and another deer licks that branch (and they do that all the time), they can get CWD. If a deer licks the mouth, eyes, or anal area of a deer that has CWD, it can get CWD. Plus, when urine or feces end up on vegetation and a deer eats that vegetation, it can get CWD.

Obviously, we don't need any more ways to spread CWD in deer, but new research has found one that is linked to black-legged ticks. Here is a little background on black-legged ticks. They have a two-year life cycle and spread a number of diseases including Lyme's disease to humans. They go from eggs and larvae in one year to nymphs and to adults the second year. Female adult ticks take a blood meal in the fall, then drop off onto the forest litter where they overwinter. In May, they lay about 2,000 eggs and then die.

Warmer temperatures up north have allowed black-legged ticks to expand their range, even into Canada. That's a problem for humans, because it exposes us to several tick diseases, including Lyme's disease — a disease that is going through the roof in humans in many areas this year. Expanding its range also puts black-legged ticks near deer everywhere.

Part of this new research was a lab study where they set up an artificial membrane made out of silicon for black-legged ticks to feed on blood. They were then able to control the amounts of prions in the blood the ticks were feeding on. The end result of this study showed that this tick could take up prions from the blood and excrete them.

The second part of the study involved collecting ticks from the ears of deer shot by hunters in an area of Wisconsin where CWD is very common. Some of those ticks had CWD prions in them. Although the final data is not out yet, the researchers speculated that those infected ticks can lead to infection in other deer.

They further speculated that grooming might be a pathway for the transmission of CWD. Here's how that might happen.

Deer with CWD have prions in various body locations, including their blood. When this tick takes a blood meal from a CWD-positive deer, it ingests infectious prions. Deer groom each other. It is common among does; also does will often groom their fawns. Ticks on the bodies of deer increase grooming behavior. They lick and can ingest ticks by accident. If the deer being groomed has CWD, then prions are going to be in the ticks on its body.

Such research is important, because we need to know as much as possible about potential transmission pathways for CWD. Now we know that at least one blood-obligate parasite plays a role in prion transmission.

There is one other piece of bad news about this situation: Ticks concentrate infectious prions. Thus, one tick might have many more infectious prions than would be found in a deer's urine or mucous. A tick's excrement puts many prions on the ground. Not good, and it's just another reason why eliminating CWD in deer may be impossible. **BH**

If you have questions about topics covered in this column or on any wildlife-management issues or wildlife species, contact Dr. Dave at drdave4@comcast.net.

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BH FEATURES

JUST WHEN YOU THINK THINGS AREN'T GOING TO HAPPEN... THEY DO!

y's Buck

THE STORY OF "JOHNNY'S BUCK" starts back in 2019, when my friend, Johnny Walker, accidentally ran over the then 2½-year-old buck's right-side shed antler when he was tilling his fields. This ended up being an every year occurrence, because over the next two years we again found the right side from the buck, but never his left side.

After finding his 4½-year-old side in the spring of 2021, we knew that this was a buck that would be on the top of our hit list for 2022, since we estimated him to be around 165–170 inches. But we had no idea that he would turn into what he did.

In early July 2022, we started putting out our trail cameras. On this property, I had a good mixture of cell cameras and non-cell cameras. I like to put the non-cell cameras out during the summer in spots that are on field edges or are easy to get to, so I not only save some money on the cellular plan but also add in that "element of surprise" since you never really know what you're going to get on camera until you start pulling cards.

I remember the first time Johnny's Buck appeared on one of my camera's cards. My heart dropped and I yelled for my dad to come over and check out the picture. We both just stared at the screen in awe of this massive buck. The character that this deer had added from the previous year was incredible: Multiple points off his right brow, long tines, an inside point on his left side, and excellent mass. He had it all!

After seeing those pics, I knew that this was the type of buck worthy of dedicating my whole season to. So, over the next couple of weeks, I started moving cameras from other farms, where we don't have a lot of summer activity, to the property where the aforementioned pics were taken, in an attempt to better pattern Johnny's Buck for the early season.

By Mitch Stamm

Johnny's Buck

Surprisingly enough, the early season — up until late September — ended up being the one time when it seemed like this buck was living on the property and using it consistently almost every day. The only problem was that he was most active during the first hour of the morning, and hunting mornings at that time of year can be challenging.

Opening day of bow season arrived, and with it came unseasonably warm temperatures. So, I decided to hunt a different farm and patiently wait for the first good cold front to come through, and the right wind, before climbing a tree in pursuit of Johnny's Buck.

Despite the warmer weather on opening day, I ended up having an incredible night of hunting. I saw several bucks, including a beautiful 150-inch 10-pointer that came within 10 steps of me. I had already made up my mind that it was either Johnny's Buck or bust for the year, so said 10-point got to live to see another day!

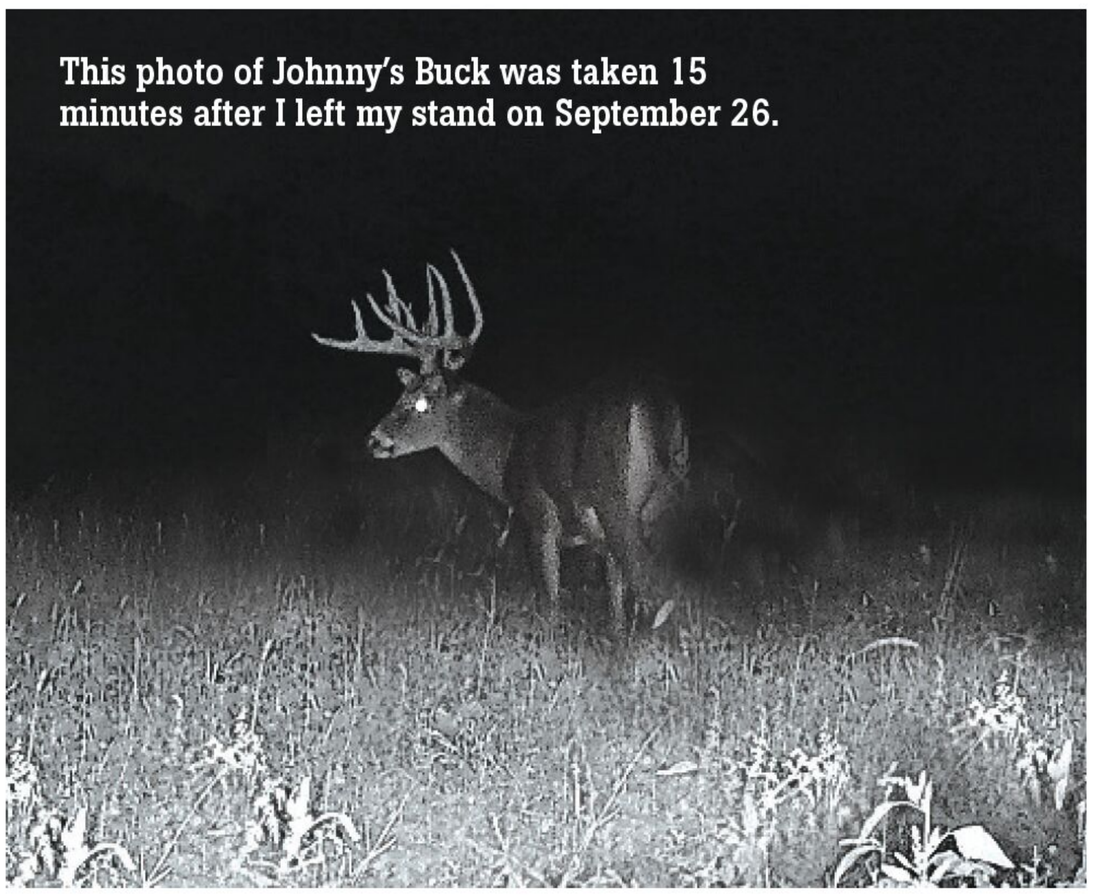
A couple of days later, the temperatures cooled by 15 degrees, which made conditions perfect for my first sit for Johnny's Buck. My buddy, Jake Ede, came along to film, and we had an awesome night. We saw 10 different deer, including a beautiful 3½-year-old buck we called "Warty," but no encounter with Johnny's Buck.

It turns out Jake should've come to film the next night, because the deer movement was even better. I ended up seeing more deer than the night before, with an hour and a half of light left!

At around 6:20 p.m., I looked to the edge of the clover food plot where I was sitting…and there stood Johnny's Buck at the edge of the woods and slowly making his way to the food plot. He ended up eating in the food plot for 15 minutes but never got closer than 65 yards.

With the number of eyeballs that were in the field, I knew that it wouldn't be long before a doe got nosey and picked me off, so I contemplated shooting, but 65 yards is about 15 yards outside of my comfort zone.

This is a photo of Johnny's Buck when he was in velvet.


This photo of Johnny's Buck was taken 15 minutes after I left my stand on September 26.

I could hear more deer entering the food plot, but my eyes were locked on Johnny's Buck the whole time. Eventually, I could feel the thermals dropping across my face, and minutes later a doe caught my scent and promptly made my presence known — clearing the field — and my heart sank.

Was this the only opportunity that I was going to get at this once-in-a-lifetime buck? I wondered. I sat there pretty discouraged for the rest of the night, but eventually I came to realize that even seeing a buck like this one in person should be considered a victory, so I left the woods that night in a much better mood than I'd been in when the sharp-eyed doe ruined my hunt.

The previous year, Johnny's Buck disappeared in early September, and he didn't come back until late November. So, I hunted the same stand from which I had the encounter with him for five out of the next 10 nights — with no luck. The closest I came to seeing him walking around in daylight by my stand was on September 26, when he appeared on camera 15 minutes after I'd exited my treestand.

The next month, Johnny's Buck showed up even less frequently on my camera, and I was getting discouraged as a result. I continued to hunt that farm, but with no daylight pictures and no encounters with him, I began to wonder if I would ever lay eyes on him again before the season ended.

On October 27, a month later, I finally had another encounter with this buck. I got to within bow range of him, but this time he came in right after legal shooting light, at which point he stuck around me for 20 minutes, drinking at the waterhole!

Not wanting to spook the buck, I waited until he got out to the bigger field before texting my dad and asking him if he could call Johnny Walker to see if he would be able to come pick me up with his truck. This ended up working like a charm, because Johnny went out to combine that night and later told me that the buck was back out in the field right next to the waterhole not even a half-hour after I'd left.

Seeing Johnny's Buck for the second time reignited my fire, and I knew that if I just stayed the course I would eventually get my opportunity. Luckily, I own a videography/photography business, so I can work varied hours, which allowed me time to hunt that same farm hard over the next couple of days.

When October 30 rolled around, I got the idea to go check some non-cell cameras and move some of my cellular cameras to get ready for the grind that was ahead. It had also been insanely dry for weeks, so my dad, Johnny Walker, and I decided we should go fill up our waterhole that day as well — knowing

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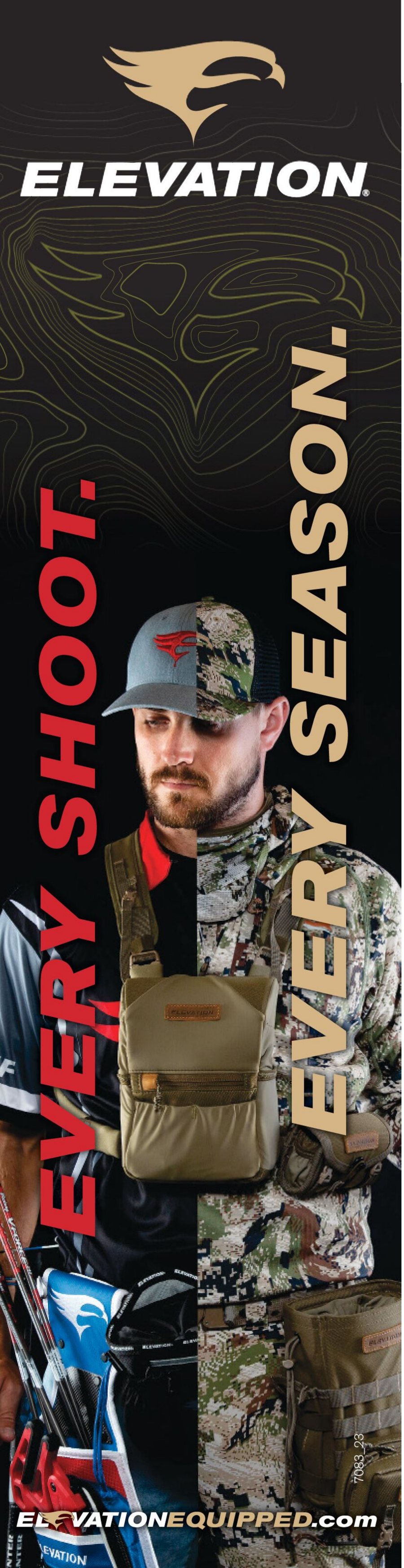


Hydration is important during the pre-rut and rut, so here I am filling up the pond, five hours before I shot the buck.

that hydration is key for deer at this time of year, due to all the chasing that they would be doing.

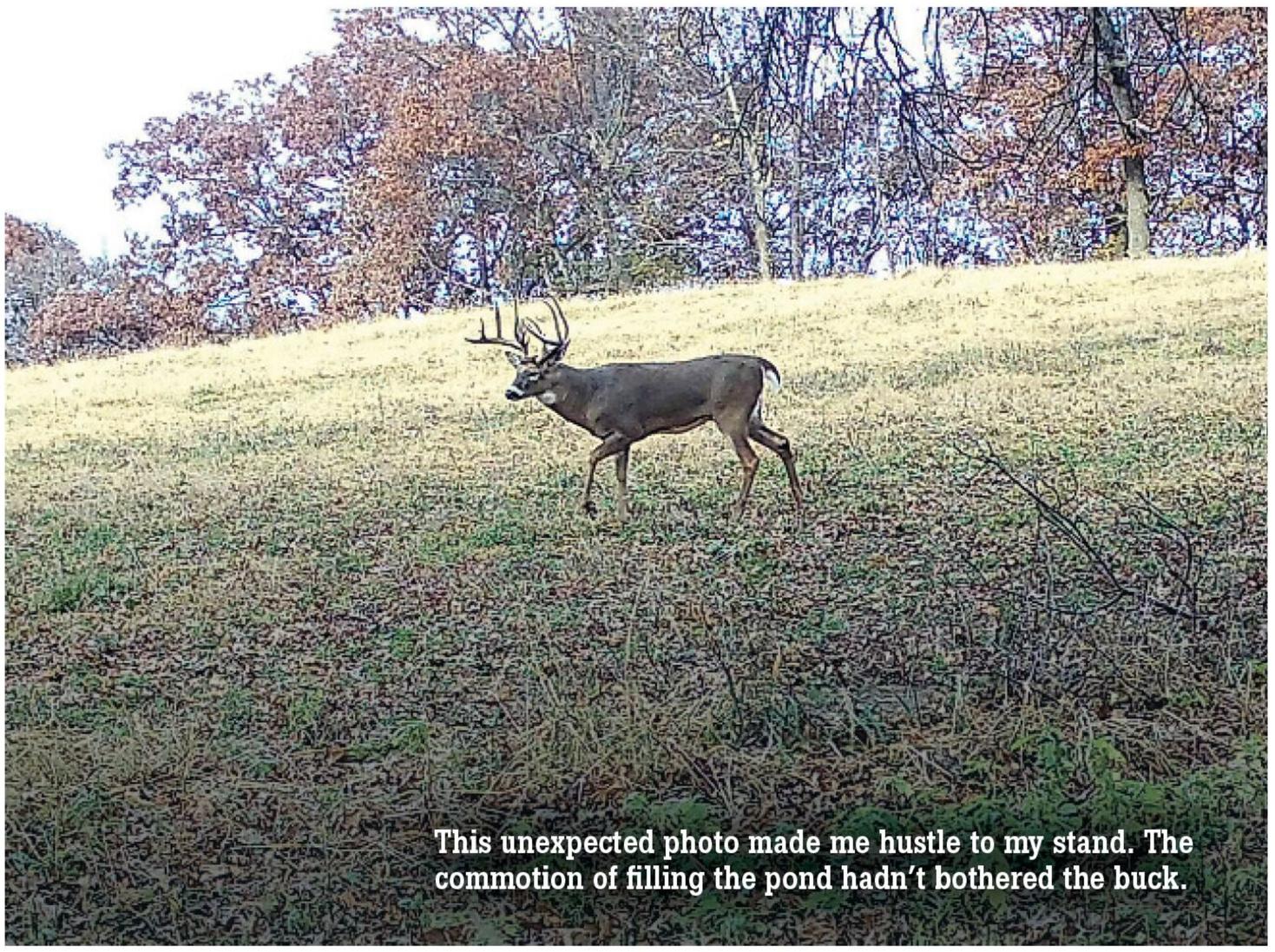
After all the commotion that we made on that farm during the midday hours, I decided to take the night off to let the farm rest, watch some football, and spend some time editing pictures I'd taken the week before.

My dad wanted to hunt a different farm that night, so after editing for a while, I went and dropped him off. When I got back from dropping him off, I checked my phone and Johnny's Buck was out with a doe in the same cloverfield where I'd encountered him on September 22.

As soon as I got the picture, I went into total panic mode, as I did not expect to see him on camera that night. I grabbed my bow, hunting clothes, and camera, and drove to the farm.

Once I got to the farm, I literally jogged to my stand. After the mad dash, I climbed into my treestand and got settled in.

An hour later, I heard some deer up on the ridge, so I immediately grabbed

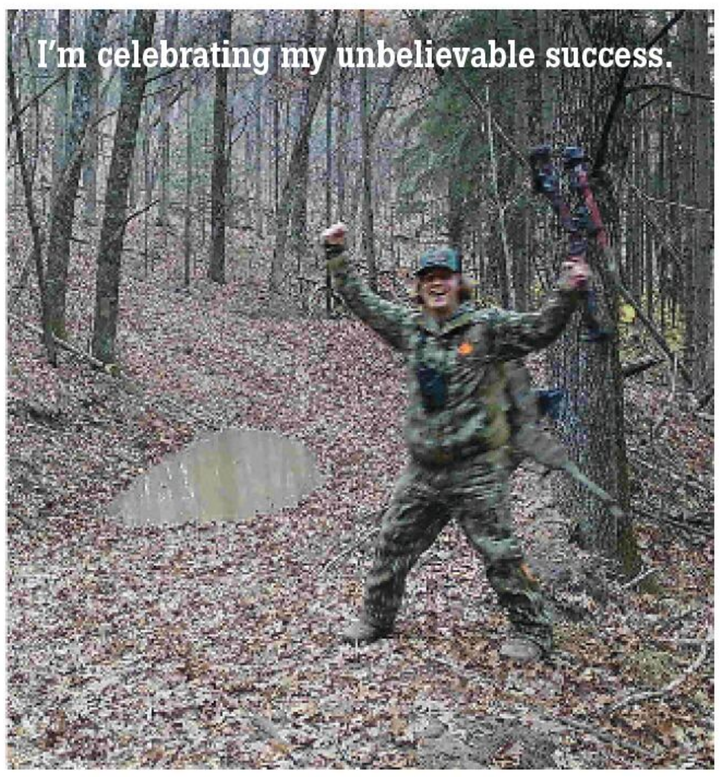


This unexpected photo made me hustle to my stand. The commotion of filling the pond hadn't bothered the buck.

my bow and turned my camera on in case it was him. After a couple of minutes, I could see a doe and a buck fawn. Seconds later, Johnny's Buck appeared!

He was just slowly walking behind the doe, grunting, and working his way toward me. The buck fawn made his way down to the pond for a drink. Then, Johnny's Buck and the doe worked their way toward me, but the doe stayed high and didn't come to the pond.

Johnny's Buck stayed in the middle of the two and worked his way from the ridge to within 35–40 yards, at which point I stopped him in a shooting lane and squeezed off the shot. Luckily, my arrow flew true. Johnny's Buck turned on a dime, ran 25 yards, and tipped over. I couldn't believe what had just happened… I had finally done it!


I'm celebrating my unbelievable success.

I immediately called my dad and told him the buck was down and that I needed him to come to the farm ASAP! After calling quite a few friends to give them the good news, I climbed down and patiently waited for my dad, my brother, and Johnny Walker to arrive at the farm. To have them there with me when I first put my hands on this magnificent buck's antlers meant the world to me! **BH**

The author lives in Altoona, WI, and is the owner of Mitch Stamm Visuals — a freelance videography/photography business.

Author's Notes: On this hunt I used a Mathews Triax, Carbon Express Maxima Red arrows, Rage Hypodermic heads, a Trophy Ridge sight, Bushnell rangefinder, Vortex Diamondback binos, and various cell and non-cell cameras.

The video of my hunt for Johnny's Buck will be posted on my YouTube channel "Bluff Country Outdoors," if you would like to see the story come to life as well.

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Blake Rice hunted in Illinois for more than 20 days with a specific 160-class nine-pointer in mind. Fortunately, that buck didn't give him an opportunity, but this 200-class buck did!

PHOTO COURTESY OF MATT TURPIN/MT MEDIA

One Warm November Evening

By Darron McDougal

EVEN WHEN THE WEATHER IS UNSEASONABLE, THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE THE MIDWEST DURING NOVEMBER.

Georgia's Blake Rice affectionately says that he "works to hunt." What exactly does that mean? Well, he tackles most work projects — he's in construction and runs a tungsten shotshell company with a few partners — during the summer and early fall, so that he can focus on hunting all fall and winter. As long as he has cell service and can connect to Wi-Fi regularly, he can keep the lights on and the wheels turning from wherever he happens to be.

"It's very important to me that I hunt a lot," he said. "They say you'll lose your ability to hunt before you'll lose your love for hunting. A few years ago, I decided that I'd better hunt as much as I can while I can. I don't want to waste opportunities."

That brings us to Rice's 20-plus-day Illinois hunt from last fall, during which he was chasing a specific nine-pointer. Taking that buck would've been a dream come true for him, but a 200-class whitetail appeared and blew away his wildest dreams. Here's how it all went down.

Cat-And-Mouse

During Rice's three-week hunt at Land of Lincoln Outfitters — he had purchased a membership with year-round access — he'd been moving around on a big farm with a river on the property's northern reaches. Deer weren't crossing the river because the banks are so steep. There is CRP to the west, and to the east is a woodlot. So he focused most of his hunting efforts in a long treeline bordering a cut beanfield.

"I'd been bouncing around in that treeline," Rice told me. "In the southeast corner, there's a gap in the trees. No matter where I hunted, I observed deer cutting through that gap. Often, I was 700–800 yards from it, but I saw some good bucks over that way. Finally, on November 8, I got a south wind and was able to hunt there."

Rice said that temperatures were in the 60s that day, so he had low expectations for deer movement. Nonetheless, he selected a tree to hunt from and then did some cutting with a chainsaw so that he'd be able to shoot from his tree saddle out into the bean field.

"I'd never used a decoy in my life," Rice explained. "But I decided to give it a whirl because the deer had been somewhat sporadic with where they'd enter the field. The guy who put me out pulled away at about 3:45 p.m. A half-hour later, I looked up and saw the big nine-pointer I was chasing 800 yards away on the opposite end of the field. He was moving around and doing his thing. He saw the decoy, and he didn't exactly beeline toward it, but he did slowly start working toward my end of the field."

When the 160-class bruiser broke within a couple hundred yards, Rice grunted and snort-wheezed. The buck bristled up and started walking toward

One Warm November Evening

the decoy. Rice remembers thinking, *This is it! This is the deer I've been chasing for three weeks straight.* He ranged the buck as it came, and the last time he did, the buck was at 125 yards and closing.

A Dream Come True… Almost

"I dropped my rangefinder and clipped my release onto my string because I knew that my decoy was 17 yards away," he remembered. "When the buck was about 80 yards out, he froze in his tracks. He was staring straight at the road that enters the field. I couldn't tell what he was looking at, so I leaned forward and noticed that the neighboring landowner had pulled up and got out of this truck to glass the buck. The big deer bolted right back to where he'd come from."

Obviously frustrated, Rice called the farmer and asked to be picked up. The farmer explained that it would be an hour before he could arrive. With about one hour of daylight remaining, Rice said that he'd hunt until dark as originally planned. Good thing he did.

Back At It

"A little bit later, I looked up into the neighboring field to the south and saw a big eight-pointer that I hadn't seen previously," Rice said. "He was a couple hundred yards away. Immediately, he started responding, but he circled and got downwind. He was about 100 yards behind me. He grunted and snort-wheezed, and he was walking back and forth but wasn't coming to the decoy. Legal light was fading fast. I was really set on shooting the eight-pointer. He was a great deer."

Last-Light Encounter

With about 10 minutes of shooting light remaining, Rice glanced back in the direction where the eight-pointer had first appeared. Unexpectedly, a massive deer was standing there in the neighboring field. Unsure of just how big the buck was, he couldn't identify it as any of the bucks he knew were roaming the farm.

"All I knew was that he was much bigger than the 150-inch eight-pointer I'd been watching," Rice explained. "I grunted twice and looked back his way. I thought he'd disappeared, so I snort-wheezed. I was anxious and thought maybe he'd gone into the treeline, so I repositioned in my saddle.

"I looked back out into the field and noticed some does darting left and right," Rice continued. "Then, I saw the buck, and he came running right at me before stopping at the base of my tree. I could see bits and pieces of his antlers between my legs. He snort-wheezed and then growled, and I barely held myself together."

Rice was hunting right on the property line and was facing toward the beanfield. The buck had come in from behind Rice and wasn't where he could legally shoot him.

"He turned and took about four steps away from my tree into the neighbor's field," he said. "I turned and was looking over my shoulder at him. Then, he saw the decoy and jumped the fence. He landed right at the base of my tree and got tangled up in the limbs I'd cut earlier. He whipped his head back and forth and was stomping around."

As the buck shook his head, a branch came out of his antlers. Rice used the commotion as cover to draw his bow. Then, the buck walked straight at the decoy.

"When he was about eight yards from the decoy," Rice said, "he turned broadside, and I put my pin right behind his shoulder and shot. He whirled and ran toward some timber. I had heard deer walking through the leaves in that timber all afternoon, but I didn't hear him hit that timber, which made me think he was down. It all happened so fast that I wasn't sure, so I quietly sat there for an hour. I knew it was the biggest buck I'd ever seen in my life, and I didn't want to mess anything up."

Rollercoaster Ride

Time was Rice's worst enemy. The longer he waited, the more the doubts and questions loomed in his mind. Finally, he climbed down, didn't even look for his arrow, and then walked the long way out where outfitter Levi Wilson was waiting. As Rice explained what the buck looked like, Wilson was surprised that Rice didn't recognize the buck, since he'd been hunting there for the better part of a month and knew practically every buck on the farm.

"Back at the lodge, Levi asked me to tell the farmer, Robert, what the buck looked like," Rice recalled. "Robert was scrolling through his phone, and I honestly thought he was ignoring me. Suddenly, he turned his phone toward me to show me pics of the buck his trail camera had taken on another property, almost a mile away."

PHOTO COURTESY OF MATT TURPIN/MT MEDIA

A neighboring landowner had sheds from the buck and brought them over to the Land of Lincoln hunting camp.

"Is this the deer you shot?" Robert asked.

"That's him!" I replied.

"He's a 200-inch deer," Robert said.

Rice admits that he got really nervous at that point. Robert queried Rice, asking if he'd made a good shot. Rice said that he believed he had, but the doubts were still dancing between his ears. Interestingly, a neighbor had found the buck's sheds the previous spring, and they scored 197 inches.

"Before I knew it, the neighbor stopped in with the sheds," Rice said. "There were 12 other people standing around watching, and some of them shouted, 'Let's go look for him!' Given the circumstances, I was either going back alone, or with one other person."

"At about 10 p.m., Robert and I returned to look for the buck," Rice explained. "I had a small light with me, and we looked all around the decoy. We found my arrow, and it was covered in bubbly blood. I felt a thousand times better. It confirmed that I'd made a good shot. However, we couldn't find the blood trail. I anxiously kept scanning back and forth."

"Robert had a big spotlight and was shining it everywhere," Rice shared. "There were deer jumping up and running away. I told him to quit shining that thing around, and he said, 'Those aren't your deer.' I was sick to my stomach; we were looking for the deer of a lifetime, and I felt like he wasn't treating the situation as seriously as I was. He was walking all over the field and shining the light everywhere. I whistled and told him to come back to me. When he did, I told him that I wanted to back out. Temps were down in the 40s, so I wasn't worried about the meat spoiling."

One Warm November Evening

Meanwhile, Robert had already found the buck, but he was holding out on Rice because he wanted him to find it. So Robert walked toward a hump in the field, and Rice reluctantly followed.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MATT TURPIN/MT MEDIA

Blake's tried-and-true Mathews Triax delivered a perfectly placed arrow.

Words Cannot Explain

"I was looking around with my little light, and Robert was shining the spotlight pretty much in my face," Rice said. "That's when I noticed that his light was fixed on my buck. He'd found it 20 minutes earlier but hadn't told me. It was unreal to see my deer lying in the grass along the cut beanfield. I ran over to the deer, dropped everything, and fell to my knees. Robert and I were hugging and celebrating."

They called back to the lodge, and soon everyone else arrived. A photographer shot photos, and then the buck was hauled back to the lodge.

"Levi is an official measurer, so he green-scored the buck," Rice said. "Still in shock, I was just sitting on the truck tailgate when Levi came out and said that the buck grossed right around 208 inches. I was floored!"

As I wrap this story up, I want to highlight one aspect of Rice's hunt that could've yielded the opposite outcome. Because the nine-pointer had spooked, he called for a pick-up. Fortunately, his ride was unable to come until nearly the end of legal shooting light. That one thing

PHOTO COURTESY OF MATT TURPIN/MT MEDIA

Rice has been using Iron Will broadheads for quite some time and has a lot of faith in them.

kept Rice in his stand for the remainder of the evening. To that end, I say, don't give

Georgia bowhunter Blake Rice traveled to Illinois to hunt whitetails. With a year membership at Land of Lincoln Outfitters, he was able to hunt several weeks before this buck of a lifetime came to his decoy.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MATT TURPIN/MT MEDIA

up. You never know what might happen, even on a warm November evening. **BH**

Author's Note:
Blake Rice killed his world-class buck with a Mathews Triax rigged with an HHA 3-pin sight and Mathews Ultra-Rest. He wore Mossy Oak Bottomland turkey apparel because the temps were so warm. He hunted from a Tethrd saddle and used a Vortex Razor rangefinder and Razor binoculars. A 125-grain Iron Will broadhead on the front end of his Black Eagle Rampage arrow yielded fast results.

HUNTING WITH A BOW AND ARROW IS TOUGH, BUT ADDING EVEN MORE CHALLENGE CAN CREATE DOUBTS.

NO DISADV

ANTAGE

BY GAVIN VAUGHN STEELE

PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

BEING A SOLO ELK HUNTER for most of my bowhunting career, I have benefited from the clarity of having one interpretation of success or failure, as well as the ability to confidently make decisions while truly testing my own intuition. However, one decision continued to pose doubt — the decision to hunt with a recurve.

I had embraced traditional archery the previous year, killing a fine bull, but on the very first day of hunting. I could hardly argue against there being some luck involved. The real question was if my style of hunting truly lent itself to doing so with a recurve. Could I continue to get the close shots needed for success, or was last year's 12-yard bull an oddity? Would I continue to capitalize on each opportunity, or would more bulls than ever slip by because of the constraints of my weapon choice?

It was 6 a.m. when I pulled into my usual hunting spot on the mountain. As typically happens when I feel like I'm late, I was slightly panicked as I threw my pack together.

A truly terrifying thunderstorm had just broke, and the elk were bound to get fired-up soon. Suddenly, I heard a voice and looked up to see a figure approaching.

The young hunter was very polite, extremely excited about the prospects of the day, and maybe scared of the dark. He explained he was new to the area and elk hunting in general, and that he didn't want to interfere with my hunt.

The last minutes of the sun's cooperation were a gift, as a severe storm, once again, threatened to interfere. Although I have come to appreciate the familiar struggle of dressing game on solo hunts, I was thankful for a helping hand on this pack out!

No Disadvantage

Perceiving his eagerness to learn, and knowing that he planned to hunt there for several days, I invited him to tag along. After all, I was really there for two reasons: Some cloak-and-dagger to determine if a bull from last season had made it back to this drainage, and to more actively scout for a chance at an elusive resident timber buck. My attention would turn toward elk later in the week when two friends, Bryant and CJ, were to arrive. For now, I was content to compare my self-imposed "disability" to my new friend's latest compound — just how much advantage was I to lose? (Plus, by educating this young hunter on some basic dos and don'ts for the area, there might still be elk to hunt when my friends arrived.)

Now, this was no limited-entry or secluded hunt. This was public land in a heavily pressured over-the-counter unit, and although some fine bulls could be found, success was low; facts clearly understood by the novice elk hunter judging by the number of questions he posed about our purpose.

As we navigated the mountain, he learned the pace of hunting that consistently allowed us to walk into elk: The seldom-used calls that lower a pressured bull's defenses, and the best ways to set up for a high-percentage shot. Additionally, I got my intel on the bulls I wanted to hunt later, with the bonus of practicing caller/shooter setups (a seldom enjoyed luxury for a solo hunter).

Over the course of the day, the opportunity to compare the pros and cons of our weapon choices left me pleasantly surprised to find that there seemed to be no loss of opportunity for either of us. But that couldn't possibly prove consistent, could it? Time would tell.

Days later, three eager hunters were shadowing elk in dark timber just after sunrise. I knew elk had taken refuge in the thick north-facing old growth, but I also knew hunting pressure had moved them there, so we kept our distance as we battled conspiring winds.

After a midday nap/gear check, CJ

When the wind is wrong for a stealthy approach, it's best to sit back and relax. A gear check adds organization, and helps you pass the time.

Waiting for a steady wind can take some time, so you might as well get comfortable and break out the snacks. There was a fine bull holding his cows in a bench below us, but given the fickle winds, we elected to wait until he moved them that evening.

and Bryant agreed that we should use the semi-steady thermals and stalk into the bedded herd, so with as much stealth as three hunters could muster, we tiptoed into the suspected bench. Much to my surprise, we walked right into the feeding herd.

We were studying the cows, not 60 yards away, when CJ harshly whispered, "Bull, bull, bull!"

From this, I knew the bull had backdoored us and the woods were about to blow…and blow they did, but not before we got a good look at the fine bull that walked 25 yards from us without making a sound. Had I been hunting solo, this would have been hard. But staring at two more depressed and confused faces forced enough laughter to ease the pain. I thought about this missed opportunity for some time, and however naive, it occurred to me that had I been solo, I might have been able to swing on the bull faster and get the shot with my recurve.

After a lengthy discussion, we declared the defeat to be by way of bad luck; a theme that would come back to visit us often, despite our being on top of bulls every single day of the hunt. Either a cow busted us, the wind switched, or one of us would pass on a bull the other would have shot.

Two days later, Bryant and I were dropping down a ridge to intercept one of three bulls engaged in a screaming match, when suddenly, another bull seemingly busted us and violently crashed away through the timber, nearly 100 yards out. I thought it was odd because we had the wind in our favor and there was little chance we had been seen, but soon the reason was revealed.

After looping around the head of the drainage and returning, both of us passing bulls that CJ would have shot had he not split up (believe me when I say it was only with great difficulty that I let the young bull walk), we found another hunter dressing a bull close to where we had entered the drainage. The hunter had arrowed the bull 400 yards farther up the ridge, and it was this bull that had run past us earlier while on its death run. Did I mention this was heavily hunted public land? I'm not making excuses here, but that begged the question: Just how many times had this happened to us?

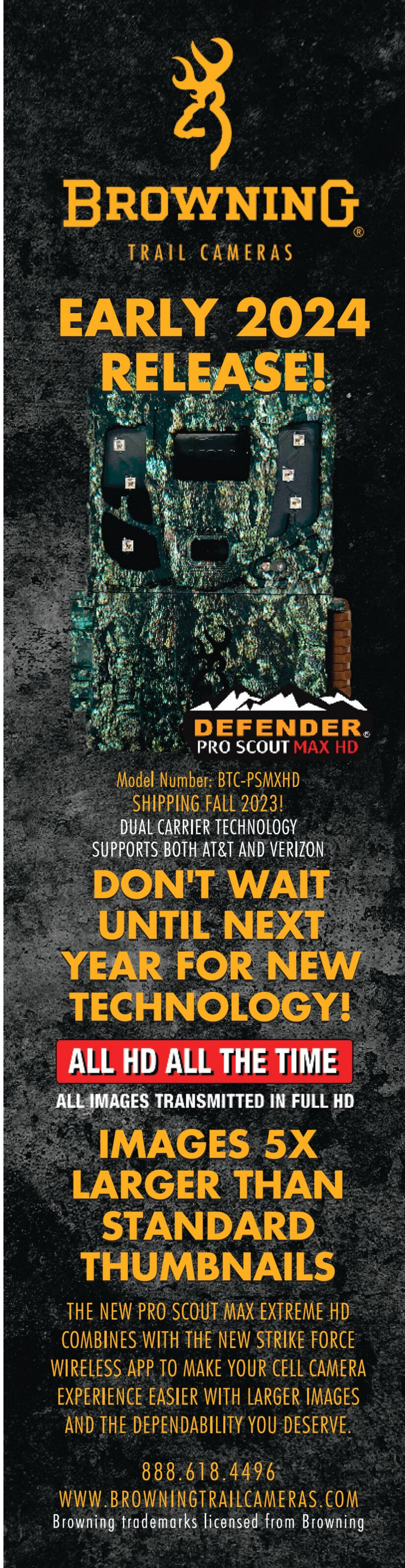
Thankfully, there was stump-shooting to break up missed opportunities, and on that note, I had the advantage. My choice of traditional tackle made for an acceptable means of rejecting most failures by executing successful stalks and shots on unsuspecting stumps. However, Bryant would not be left out and involuntarily joined the fun with his compound.

We had just seen a cow elk walk by, passing us by mere feet; and thinking that a bull could follow in her tracks, we waited until the soothing comfort of the midday sun overtook us. I woke up first, and I'm not sure how I missed it before, but 40 yards out there was a log that bore a striking resemblance to a bull elk's side with his head hidden behind a big cedar. You could even see hairlines!

I woke Bryant, joking that a bull had walked in on us, and before I could say another word, his arrow was on its way! The result was a heart-shot log, a few choice words, and enough laughter to basically end our hunt within a half-mile radius.

Finally, we managed to locate a monster bull, and to my surprise, we had the same idea of how to make a play at him. The old warrior was holding his cows in a bowl with nearly impregnable winds, so Bryant would enter the bowl from the bottom, and I would start on top and slowly still-

A major benefit to traditional tackle is the ease of stump-shooting, which keeps your shooting skills honed and confidence high.



No Disadvantage

hunt toward their escape route, should Bryant blow them out.

About 9 a.m., I heard a bull bugle softly below me and concluded that he was alone and had intentions of retreating to a bench and wallow that I had the right wind to approach. I eased to within 200 yards of the area and waited for several hours until I could take it no longer, at which point I made a short loop into the fringe of the timber that held him. Finding nothing but knowing he was there, I waited some more and soon fell into a semiconscious, midday nap.

For the second year in a row, a fateful bugle roused me from sleep. I quickly nocked an arrow and moved forward to the edge of a killing wind; a wind that is almost wrong but right enough to get it done — animals know when they have a bad wind, too, you know.

I expected him to appear below, but he did not. I threw a soft cow call to simulate an unimpressed lady already on her way out, and he responded in earnest but still several hundred yards away. Then came a bugle that was so bad, I was almost certain it had come from another hunter and the result would be the end of this encounter. Even though I was certain, I waited 20 minutes in the silent woods for reasons only experience can answer. I turned to leave with my head low, my arrow returned to my quiver, and thinking toward the coming day's temperature change that might just swing things in my favor and yield more opportunities.

I stopped. It felt wrong. I turned around to see the big 6x6 bull walking through the timber toward me 80 yards away. Realizing that I had not yet been seen, I ripped an arrow from my quiver again and prepared for a steep, 30-yard shot below me.

A few moments later, I caught movement hard to my right. Somehow, the bull had slipped in to 15 yards and was turning his head sideways to pass between two tight trees. I dropped one foot down the mountain and drew quickly, knowing the wind was about to tell all.

Just as the bull's head leveled, I noticed his eye widening, as if he was receiving that revelation. But it was too late — my arrow had already buried over 20 inches deep into his side.

As he whirled, I saw the back end of my arrow pitch high and back, ensuring that the business end had sliced stem to stern his offside lung. I stood there in disbelief, as the bull unleashed a truly impressive death run that sounded more like a team of draft horses than a single elk.

I knew what I had seen, but giving time is never foolish, so I called CJ to discuss the details of the slightly back and upper-third shot. We both agreed there would be little blood, but that he couldn't have gone far. An hour would suffice before taking up the track — and what a track it was!

I had no need to spot blood with the trail that had just been blazed, and only eight minutes from the start of the tracking job found me admiring his beautiful

I'd taken a stab at traditional archery the previous year, but early success left me wondering whether I'd be able to score with a stick-bow again. So I pushed hard for a repeat, and that's just what I got!

The morning of the pack out was far too gorgeous to allow for good hunting, but it did give us the perfect window to navigate the mountain with heavy packs. However, with cast-iron seared tenderloin on our minds, I'm sure the weather wouldn't have mattered.

headgear and ivories! Now able to get a good look at him, I knew instantly that this was the same bull that had snuck in behind us on the first day.

Once again, I replayed the course of an opportunity and its outcome, confirming my previous suspicions. I doubt that I could have changed my stance and swung on the bull as efficiently had I been using a compound bow. Maybe more than luck was on my side with this traditional venture after all — it just works!

I stepped into camp that night missing an arrow, and Bryant noticed. We exchanged stories over tailgate burgers until we finally had to take cover from another storm that blew in the moment I'd arrived. The next day was a treat compared to elk hunts of years past, because elk are heavy, and now I had a buddy chomping at the bit to load his pack, too!

I started the season questioning whether my recurve was a handicap and how much it would affect my success. But with more days afield and two bulls taken, I realized my doubt was unfounded. Woodsmanship and an educated hunting style replaces the need to shoot far, and a recurve is no disadvantage. **BH**

The author is a Wyoming elk hunter who truly enjoys chasing bulls on public land.

Author's Note: My equipment on this hunt included a Toelke Chinook recurve, Victory arrows, VPA broadheads, Zamberlan boots, clothing and other essentials from Badlands, Vortex binoculars, and Mile High Note Game Calls.

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THE WHITETAIL WINS

YOU NEVER KNOW WHETHER THE WHITETAIL BUCKS WILL COME HARD OR EASY, AND THAT'S THE FUN PART.

BY FRANK NOSKA, CONTRIBUTOR

Last fall's buck scored 166⅞" net as an eight-point. He was taken out of the same stand as my 2021 buck, and on both hunts it was the first time I sat in that tree. He is my largest whitetail to date, and he will be hard to beat.

CLIMBING UP into my treestand in Kansas, I already had a smile on my face because of how excited I still get about hunting whitetails. It's no secret that I began my bowhunting obsession in Texas, where I grew up and started shooting a bow and bowhunting while still in high school. And it was in Texas where I started hunting my first big-game animal — whitetails. Bowhunting has been a major part of my life ever since.

THE WHITETAIL WINS

Three years ago in Kansas, I hunted every day for well over two weeks, during some of the best November conditions, and I still didn't harvest a deer. As good as Kansas is, and the ground I hunt is primo property, it's still hard to believe that I did not put my tag on a buck. I wasn't even after a particular target buck that I had on camera — I was just hunting for a good, mature buck. Yes, there were multiple opportunities to shoot bucks, but never the "right" buck.

One morning, a 150-class buck came to my decoy and stayed within 20 yards for several minutes. He had a G-2 broken off at the main beam, and I didn't want to shoot him with a broken rack. A few days later, on a foggy morning hunt on the other side of the farm, the same broken-racked buck lingered less than 20 yards from my ground blind, tempting me again. The fun I had hunting and watching deer that year was awesome. All that I learned about the farm and deer movement made that hunt a success in its own way, even though I never tagged a buck.

Then, in 2021, I pulled into my Kansas farm with the same whitetail excitement and anticipation that I look forward to every fall. Having several days to hunt and work on the farm, I would not have wanted to be anywhere else.

Not having unpacked my hunting clothes yet and wanting to quickly get into a stand, I just grabbed my bow and headed to my favorite elevated perch wearing my green Carhartt work jeans. I barely got my bow pulled up into the tree and my headnet on when I saw movement through the woods. Seeing flashes of antlers through the trees, I knew it was a buck. Not getting a good look just yet, I could not tell exactly how big he was, or how many points he had.

As the buck made his way closer to me, he appeared to be a typical 10-pointer. With a short window of shooting opportunity about to open and my previous "deer-less" year in the back of my mind, I was ready when the buck stepped into my shooting lane at 22 yards.

Soon, my arrow was on its way. When I saw him go down, I couldn't help but chuckle that my 2021 Kansas deer hunt was already over. He wasn't a giant by any means, but he was a buck I would have been happy to shoot the year before after the countless hours and days I spent on stand. My 2021 Kansas whitetail buck scored 131⅛ inches.

As anyone who has bowhunted whitetails knows, arrowing a mature buck is never easy. There are seasons when everything seems to work perfectly and a deer is taken in almost textbook fashion. Then there are seasons when you can't catch a break and everything seems to go wrong.

In 2022, it was the same scenario. I couldn't wait to get back to Kansas to hunt those Midwest whitetails in November.

Having planned my whitetail schedule months prior, I had ample days ahead of me to enjoy this special time of year. After arriving at the farm, the wind wasn't right for me to slip into my favorite stand that evening, so I hunted a different spot and saw a few deer, but no mature bucks. Looking at the weather that night, the wind was forecasted to be what I needed to hunt my favorite treestand the next morning.

I got up extra early the next day, and it appeared that the wind was going to be perfect for where I wanted to hunt. It was a particularly quiet and still morning, and something told me to grab my rattling antlers and take them to the tree with me.

Using my headlamp to walk along the edge of the beanfield toward my stand, I

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This is my 2021 Kansas "quick" buck — a 131⅛" 10-point.

was at the base of my big cedar tree in no time. This was going to be my first time hunting this great stand that year. After I got settled in, I slowly pulled my bow up, nocked an arrow, and hung my bow on a hook.

I could already see a doe through the woods, about 100 yards away. She was feeding and appeared to be alone, so I reached around and got my rattling antlers off the top of my backpack, and then hit them together as hard as I could to start.

When I finished my rattling sequence, I hung up my antlers. Facing uphill and into the wind, and concentrating on the main deer trail, I heard some leaves rustling behind me. Looking over my left shoulder, I spotted a nice young 10-pointer standing 25 yards away. Appearing to have no idea I was perched above him, the buck was keenly focused on something down through the woods. It was at about this time that I saw more movement off to my left and in the direction that the young 10-point was staring.

The first instant that I saw the antlers on the other buck slowly walking my way, I took my eyes off him and started trying to get my bow into position to shoot. I had no idea how many points this second buck had; I just knew automatically that he was a shooter!

Both bucks stood and stared at each other. I needed the bigger buck to take just a few more steps, so I would have a clear shot. Unfortunately, this would also take him almost directly downwind of me…and that made me nervous. My heart was about to beat out of my chest!

Finally, the big buck took the necessary steps. I concentrated, and as slowly as I could, I squeezed the trigger on my release. The sound of the hit and the way he ran off gave me a positive indication of a good hit. I heard some branches breaking nearby, and then the woods went completely silent.

Sitting there, I was in some sort of whitetail shock. I had only been in the treestand maybe 10 minutes! Both of those bucks had responded to the rattling antlers at about the same time. They came from downwind, and when the bucks saw each other they evidently thought the other one was responsible for the fighting noises they'd heard.

THE WHITETAIL WINS

It was then that I began pondering just how often bowhunting action like that happens so quickly. I still didn't even know exactly what kind of buck I had shot, as I had no time to really look him over with my binoculars, or even use my rangefinder before I released my arrow. At first glance, I just knew he was a good one.

Slowly, I climbed down the cedar tree, and when I got to where the deer had been standing, I immediately found blood. Then I found a piece of my arrow. Following the blood trail another 15 yards or so, I looked ahead and could see the deer lying dead, just 50 yards away.

It is difficult to describe the feeling I had when I walked up to this buck. I have arrowed a lot of whitetails in my life, but nothing like the one that now was lying on the ground in front of me.

I sat down, stared at the buck, and soaked-up the entire experience for a long time that morning. It will be a long time, if ever, before I arrow a buck better than this one — he later scored 166⅞ net as a typical eight-pointer.

People have heard me say hunting whitetails is sort of a gentleman's type of hunt for me. Not like some of the extra-tough, life-threatening situations and hunts I get myself into bowhunting in my home state of Alaska.

Even after completing two archery Super Slams — getting close to my third one — whitetails are still near the top of my list of favorite animals to bowhunt. Not only do I have an addiction to bowhunting, but I also have an addiction to whitetails.

My late friend and whitetail guru, Roger Rothhaar, titled one of his books, "Whitetail Magic." It cannot be said any better. The experience and feeling of being in the whitetail woods, with a bow in hand, is just magical. If you bowhunt whitetails, and most of you do, then you truly understand what I'm saying.

I also think that the majority of you will agree with me when I say that more times than not the whitetail wins! **BH**

My fallen 2022 Kansas buck was my best-ever whitetail. Inset: I heart-shot this buck, and this is the piece of my arrow that went through the middle of the heart, broke off, and stayed inside the buck's chest cavity.

The author is one of North America's most accomplished bowhunters. He lives in Wasilla, Alaska, with his wife, Millie.

Author's Note: On this hunt, I used my Mathews VXR bow, Victory arrows, Rage broadheads, Schaffer Archery sight, TightSpot quiver, Side Hill bowstrings, B3 release, and KUIU gear and clothing.

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Return To ROY'S SADDLE

†

WE'VE ALL BOWHUNTED IN SPECIAL PLACES,
BUT SOME PLACES ARE MORE SPECIAL THAN OTHERS.

†

By Bob Ameen

PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

ROY ROTH was my bowhunting buddy. Upon his untimely death in a sheep-hunting accident in 2015, I recalled watching Roy arrow what would be his final Sitka blacktail deer the previous fall. After the shot, Roy's buck ran off, and then rolled down a steep mountainside before coming to rest just above a tight saddle.

The following fall, when I returned to my Buck Shack in Bumble Bay on Kodiak Island, I wrote "Roy's Saddle" on my wall map as a memorial to my friend. I also brought an actual memorial to place in the saddle — a cedar-post cross with "Roy's Saddle" printed across the cross member. Several of Roy's hunting buddies signed the memorial, and I placed it in Roy's Saddle a year after his death.

RETURN TO ROY'S SADDLE

When the local brown bears finally destroyed Roy's original memorial, I replaced it with this aluminum one.

Ironically, the critters we hunted there — Sitka blacktails and brown bears — both took a liking to Roy's memorial. The bucks seemed to take pleasure in rubbing their antlers on it; the brown bears had a different, seemingly vengeful attitude, since Roy was so hard on them. He'd guided brown bear hunters and had taken nine brown bears with his bow. The bears tore the memorial apart, chewed on it, and finally dragged the remnants off so the monument could no longer be found. I wasn't sure what exactly had happened, and as hard as I looked, I couldn't find any part of the marker. I think the bears ate it.

When I told Roy's brother-in-law, Al Stringer, the monument was destroyed, we came up with an idea for a more permanent version of the memorial that I would reinstall in the saddle. Al knew a guy, Gary Feaster, who I had met before. Gary agreed to fabricate a new memorial out of aluminum, which the bears would have a harder time destroying.

In October 2022, before I headed back to the Buck Shack, I had several phone conversations with Roy's widow, Jill, about the new memorial. When Gary called and said he was done with the project, I packed it up for my annual trip to Bumble Bay.

On this bowhunting trip, I was accompanied by Craig Mitton, and we packed the two sections of Roy's new memorial up to the saddle, put it together, and installed it. The cross member — with black lettering on polished aluminum — stood out in contrast to its

wild surroundings. In this remote part of Kodiak Island, it is much more likely to have a brown bear walk through the saddle than another human being. It's the kind of place Roy loved to be.

Craig and I had a good trip, and Craig killed a nice buck during our time at the Buck Shack. Deer numbers are down on Kodiak, so the hunting wasn't as good as it usually is. Because of other bowhunting commitments, I had to leave prior to the rut — a normally action-packed time — so we didn't see many deer overall.

Two Pennsylvania bowhunters, Tom Walker and Dan Callahan, would be bowhunting out of the Buck Shack after we left. I hoped that since they would be there during the peak of the rut, they would have better luck than Craig and I had experienced. The rut, along with less foliage on the alders, gives bowhunters a better chance because of the increased visibility.

Afterwards, Tom and Dan sent me a description of their hunt. Here are Dan's words about his experience at Roy's Saddle:

Cooking up Roy's favorite snack, fried peanut M&Ms (actually slightly warmed), in the Buck Shack, located in Bumble Bay on Kodiak Island.

On Day Two, after getting weathered in on Day One, Tom and I headed to Roy's Saddle. Glassing from the flat, we spotted a number of deer, including two bucks — one large and one average. The larger one was moving toward the saddle; a narrow pinch-point that acted as a literal highway for deer traffic.

We hoofed it up there and saw the gleaming new cross monument to Bob's good friend, Roy Roth. We decided to hunker down and watch, knowing deer would be passing through. Crouching in a small depression on the sidehill, approximately 20 yards from the cross, we spotted some bucks milling about up high on Roy's Ridge. Soon, a good buck started working his way down toward us.

The closer the buck got, the more our heart rates increased. To our complete shock, the buck worked all the way downhill until he was right in front of us, rubbing his antlers on the cross! In our hunts across the American West, we've seen deer rub trees, shrubs, and fenceposts, but this was a first!

Coming to full draw, I settled my pin on the buck's front shoulder and released, a 20-yard shot. My arrow flew true, and after a short wait we followed a good blood trail to the expired buck. What an incredible experience!

As we butchered my buck, a silver fox

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RETURN TO ROY'S SADDLE

Dan Callahan killed this buck after watching him rub his antlers on Roy's memorial cross.

kept us company, watching us from a distance. Hiking back to the Buck Shack with heavy packs in a light drizzle and dwindling daylight, we were tired but elated. Pan-fried blacktail tenderloins, potatoes, and onions for dinner that night — no meal ever tasted so good!

Tom Walker also wrote about the same experience:

As Dan and I worked up a remote saddle above Bumble Bay, we came upon the strange, six-foot aluminum cross. Standing at the cross and discussing the meaning of it and the difficulty of the hunt, we saw a buck coming down the ridgeline above the saddle.

We scrambled 20 yards and then dropped into a very small depression on the open saddle. To our amazement, the buck continued downhill and within two minutes was standing at the cross. Then he began rubbing his antlers on the cross, providing the distraction Dan needed to come to full draw. His arrow flew true, and we had our first blacktail. Dan was jumping with joy, and neither of us could believe our good fortune.

"Roy gifted us this buck," I told Dan.

Tom may be on to something. There

Roy's son, Justin, killed this blacktail in a bowl below Roy's Saddle.

Roy's other son, Taylor, also killed his buck in the bowl below the saddle.

I took Roy's children — Justin, Taylor, and Ellen — to the original monument on Roy's Saddle.

does seem to be something about Roy's Saddle. This wasn't the first time that fortune smiled on a hunter in that location.

I remember the day I took Roy's three kids on a hike toward the first monument — the cedar one, in the saddle. There seemed to be an abundance of deer activity, so I suggested to Ellen, Justin, and Taylor, that we should maybe sit there for a while.

All three of Roy's kids had bows and deer tags, and each was wearing a deer decoy hat…as was I. The four of us sat in the open bowl just below Roy's Saddle, and within a half-hour the boys had each killed Sitka bucks. Ellen had an opportunity but missed.

I'm hoping the new aluminum memorial in Roy's Saddle holds up better than the original one. The deer may rub on it and the bears may gnaw on it, but if they knock it over, I'll put it back up.

For me, trips to the Buck Shack haven't been the same since 2015. I miss my friend, but maybe, if there is something magical about this special place, he's still out there glassing for deer above Roy's Saddle. **BH**

The author hails from Wasilla, Alaska.

After missing an easy shot at one of the shooter bucks on the Iowa property I was hunting, I was tickled to redeem myself with this buck.

BOWHUNTING AFTER TWO MAJOR INJURIES

BACK IN 1984, I was at Officer Candidate School in Quantico, Virginia. My Drill Instructor (DI) was Gunnery Sergeant Scruggs. He was a short-statured man, and one of the ugliest and meanest human beings I've ever had the displeasure of meeting.

Within no time, I found myself on the obstacle course. As I was finishing up with a 20-foot rope climb, my body was physically spent, and about halfway up the rope I stopped to rest. Evidently, DI Scruggs was not pleased with my "timeout" on the rope, and he promptly swung over and planted his boot square in the middle of my chest, causing me to fall. While flat on the ground, all I wanted to do was punch DI Scruggs. But my attitude quickly changed when two other DIs came over to "encourage" me to finish the final rope climb. Although humbled, I learned that no matter what, you always have something left in the tank.

Fast-forward 40 years. I was putting together a sizable, homemade American chestnut kitchen table. While picking up the table to move it from one side of my shop to the other, I fell and heard both my shoulders pop. Instantly, I knew something wasn't right, so I made an appointment with an orthopedist, who then immediately ordered an MRI.

The results indicated that I had torn my rotator cuff and labrum on both sides. The doctor suggested surgery on both shoulders to relieve pain and improve how they function. Since this was January, my first question was, "How will this surgery impact my spring turkey season and, more importantly, my fall deer season?"

The doctor explained it could take up to eight weeks for the tendon to heal to the bone. He further explained, "Although the MRI is a pretty good indicator for surgery, you never know how bad it is until you're inside."

My left shoulder was worse than my right, so surgery on the former was scheduled for March. My goal was for my left "wing" to be healed by spring turkey season, then have the other shoulder operated on and healed by bow season.

COVID restrictions delayed my surgery until April. The good

BOWHUNTERS NEVER QUIT!

BY C.J. WINAND

PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

CAN BE TOUGH...BUT NOT IMPOSSIBLE.

news was my left shoulder quickly healed, and my right shoulder was operated on in July. Although the doctor decided to work on the bad shoulder first, once inside my right shoulder, it became apparent the tear was much worse than the MRI had indicated. The upcoming deer season wasn't looking good, but I was hoping to still salvage some time in the woods during the rut.

In between the surgeries, I got some exciting news: I drew a coveted Iowa deer tag. But after waiting four long years to draw this tag, I realized my shoulder may not be functional to hunt. Since this was a use-or-lose tag, I contacted the Iowa DNR with my medical records and received a $2 crossbow tag. Once I had the tag in hand, the stress of not knowing if I would hunt was finally lifted off my chest. The problem was, I'm not a crossbow hunter, so I vowed to do everything I could to hunt with my Hoyt. After many painful physical therapy sessions and daily workouts, I still couldn't draw my bow. Like many readers, bowhunting is who I am, and this was the first time in my life it was being taken away from me.

My doctor knew what I was up against and suggested a six-day pack of steroids. At this point, I was willing to do anything, and after the second day of steroids, I was able to draw my bow without significant pain. Although I had to reduce my draw weight down to 55 pounds, my new attitude was that of a rookie hunter waiting for the first day of the bow season. Better yet, we would film this hunt for an upcoming episode of ***Bowhunter TV.***

The long-awaited Iowa rut hunt started off with five days of afternoon temperatures in the low 70s. But, because I had waited so long for this tag, my decision to spend two weeks in Iowa was starting to pay off with some colder temperatures moving in. And sure enough, various mature bucks started to show up.

Finally, on Day Eight, one of the target bucks, called "Crabclaw," was standing broadside, no more than 20 yards from our treestands. As I watched the green-colored Lumenok fly over his back, I was crushed as the 150-class 4x4 slowly walked away. While reviewing the footage, my cameraman showed me the

arrow was true, but the buck significantly jumped the string.

As I was debating about doing something irresponsible, another 4½-year-old buck came in directly below our stands and started to mark an existing scrape. At less than 10 yards, my arrow nailed his shoulder, with only a few inches of penetration. The buck then ran off into the brush and stopped at 40 yards. Luckily for me there was a small hole in the brush to shoot a second arrow. Although I just missed at 20 yards and shot poorly at 10 yards, my 40-yard shot was true, and I watched the buck crash. The buck scored exactly 125 inches, and I was more than proud of him after everything I'd been through that year.

Little did I know, the worst was yet to come!

The following spring, I headed out to Kansas to turkey hunt with good friend, Dirk Dietrich, from Texas. Our plan was to hunt in the morning, then assemble and reposition some deer stands in the afternoon. As Dirk was strapping in a new ladder stand, I started to take down another stand about 20 yards away. After climbing up and removing the 30-foot lifeline, the stand suddenly gave way. Instantly, I clutched onto the now completely bent-over stand and felt myself falling. My 18-foot fall was interrupted halfway down as I bounced off another tree that had fallen the previous year.

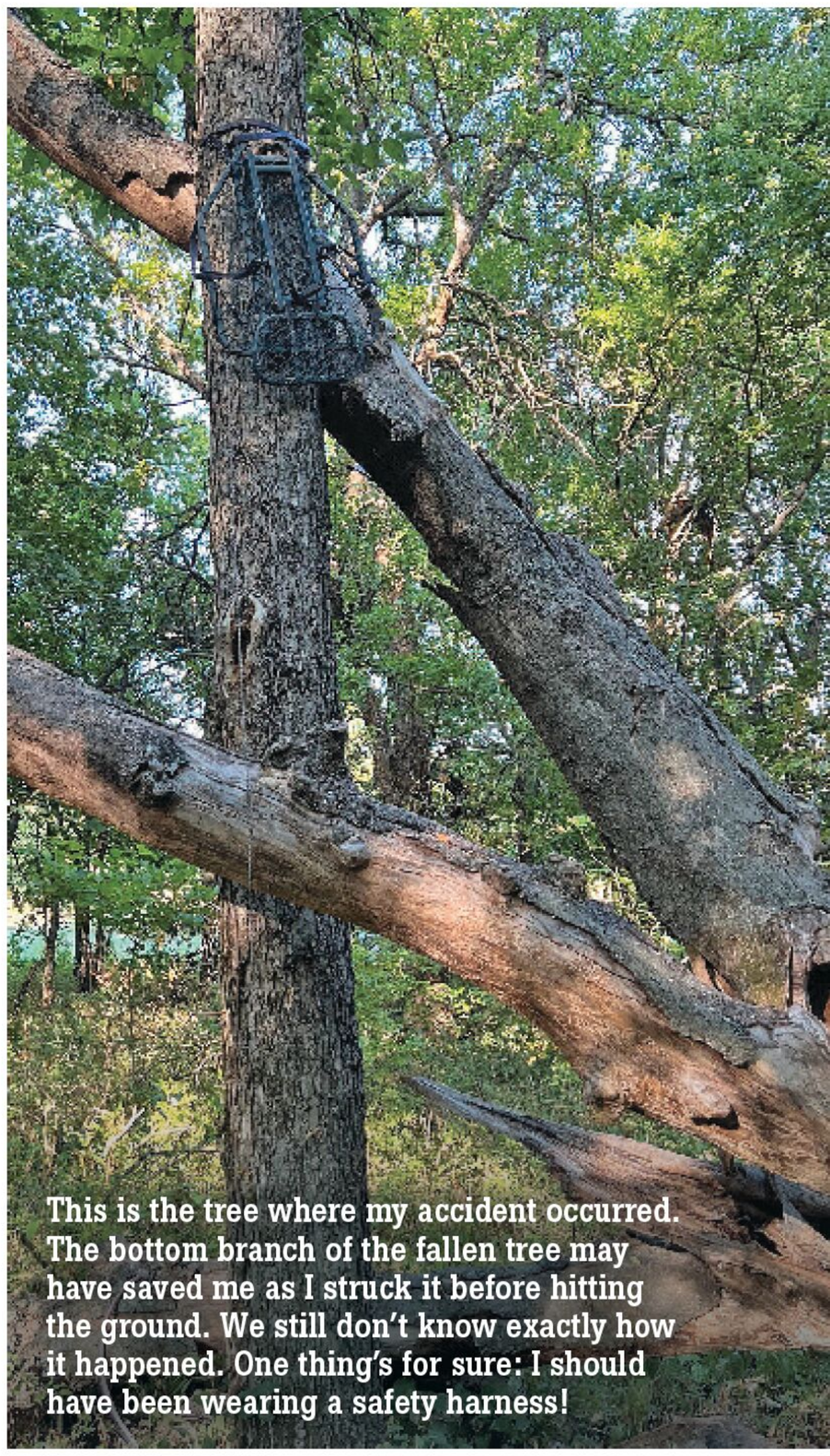
Within no time, Dirk was by my side asking, "C.J., are you okay? Can you move?"

My answer was clear and distinct, "Yes, I'm fine. I'm not dizzy or anything, but can you help me up?"

As Dirk helped move me out of the brush, he grabbed my right arm. Evidently, the sound that came out of me was not human! It sure didn't take a doctor to diagnose my condition — my left arm was broken.

I have no excuse; just massive amounts of embarrassment. In fact, wearing a safety harness is like a religious ritual for me. If you don't believe me, just ask my daughters, or anyone I hunt with. The problem was I didn't have a harness while turkey hunting, and never really gave it a thought because I've taken down so many treestands. Sound familiar?

After Dirk took me to the hospital for X-rays, the doctor showed us that I had broken the top, or ball, portion of my humerus (arm). In fact, it was in



This is the tree where my accident occurred. The bottom branch of the fallen tree may have saved me as I struck it before hitting the ground. We still don't know exactly how it happened. One thing's for sure: I should have been wearing a safety harness!

In addition to the broken arm from the fall, my chest was also badly bruised.

eight pieces. Because this injury would require multiple visits to a surgeon, I decided to fly home with a broken left arm. And once again, because of COVID, my emergency surgery was delayed until June — four weeks after the accident!

Thankfully, the painkillers helped somewhat, but once again I had to learn to sleep on my back. Multiple times during the night I'd wake up in severe pain. I'm not a doctor or an alcoholic, but my remedy was drinking a small amount of bourbon before going to bed, which helped me sleep through most of the night.

After the surgery, the surgeon explained how my recovery may hinder the upcoming deer season. This bad news was made worse when I drew a Kansas deer tag!

The X-ray shows the titanium plate and 11 screws needed to repair my arm.

Although I thought the previous rotator cuff and labrum surgeries were tough, breaking your arm is 10-times worse. My favorite friend was the ice machine, which helped reduce the swelling and pain. The only positive from the injury was that I could now use my right arm for certain necessary activities.

Soon enough I was visiting a physical therapist twice a week. In an attempt to heal faster, I doubled-up on my exercises. Although the pain was severe at times, I was going to hunt the Kansas rut!

I started drawing back rubber exercise bands to increase strength and muscular endurance. I then tried to do a push-up, and I thought my arm was going to break (again). There's no way to describe the pain I was dealing with, without experiencing it yourself. Even-

tually, I worked up to a kid's bow, and then a 35-pound recurve.

Obviously, I knew I needed to reduce the 70-pound limbs on my bow, so the folks at Hoyt sent me limbs in the 50- to 60-pound range. By October, I could draw back my daughter's 54-pound bow, but the problem was the draw curve on my bow was just too much. The harder I tried, the more pain I experienced. Worse yet, sometimes the pain would last for days. Clearly, I was not ready to hunt.

With less than a week before my November Kansas rut hunt, I still couldn't draw my bow. The many years of wear and tear were starting to catch up to me. Instead of giving up and taking a crossbow to Kansas, I went back to the doctor and received a cortisone shot to help with the pain in drawing.

The following day was like Christmas morning, as I was able to draw my bow. The only problem now was the unorthodox way in which I was drawing my bow. Completely opposite from someone who is over-bowed, I had to start by pointing the arrow toward the ground, and then drawing on the way up. Although I had

After two rotator cuff/labrum surgeries, I didn't think breaking my arm would be that bad. I was dead wrong! The true blessing was I didn't break my neck and was able to walk out of the woods.

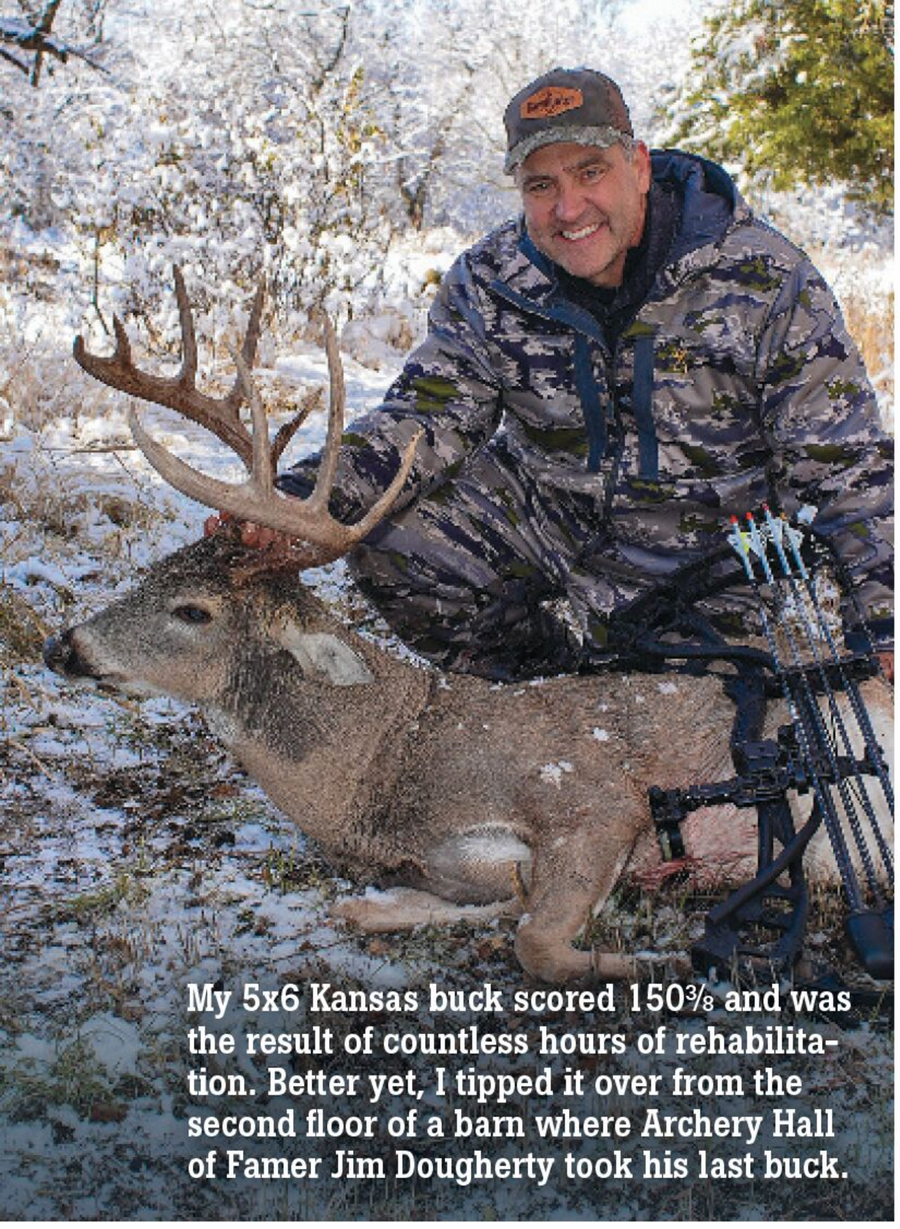
an unconventional draw, and excessive movement, I would be hunting in Kansas with my beloved 52-pound Hoyt.

The first day's hunt had me right back at the location of my accident. For some reason, I had to prove to myself that fear of falling again would not prevent me from hunting from a treestand. Within no time, a small buck showed up and I went into a "practice" draw scenario. The buck busted me drawing my bow, and I quickly realized I would have to draw long before a deer showed up, or try to draw on the opposite side of the tree.

The following day, a doe and two fawns headed my way. Although it was the rut, I had to prove to myself all my hard work in physical therapy was going to pay off. This time, I drew way early and waited about a minute until the adult doe was within range. At 20 yards, I smoked the doe and watched her fall. As most experienced bowhunters know, it's not the poundage, but the shot location. My double-lung hit elevated my confidence big time!

A few days later, my cameraman and I decided to hunt from a ground blind. Another doe showed up within 15 yards, and once again problems developed. I was demoralized to find I couldn't draw from a sitting position. Although I was still regularly stretching and doing my exercises, the cold weather and heavy clothes made drawing very cumbersome. Once again, my confidence sank.

The weather forecast called for snow the following day, so we decided to hunt out of the second floor of a barn located near the lodge. We woke up to a picturesque landscape covered by three inches of snow. With the moon reflecting its light off the snow, we entered the barn



My 5x6 Kansas buck scored 150⅜ and was the result of countless hours of rehabilitation. Better yet, I tipped it over from the second floor of a barn where Archery Hall of Famer Jim Dougherty took his last buck.

and went upstairs. Although barely visible through the side window of the barn, we saw a decent buck trailing a doe with two fawns in the winter wheatfield, no more than 50 yards away.

As the sun appeared in the eastern sky, another doe showed up directly below our window at 15 yards. Since I'd already purchased another antlerless tag, I killed her with another double-lung shot. For whatever reason, seeing red in the snow is something all hunters like, and I couldn't pass up the opportunity for some more backstraps.

With two does down, I started to think about the shooter buck we'd seen at first light. And just like magic, the same group of deer slowly moved back into the barn area. By this time, my cameraman and I had the shooting sequence down. Because of the limited floor space by the window, I'd get up and move my chair off to the side. Then, I'd turn sideways to draw my bow and quietly move two steps forward so my cameraman could film over my shoulder. But a major problem suddenly developed — I couldn't get my bow back.

With the buck now standing broadside at 20 yards, once again I tried to draw. It's amazing the power of adrenaline, and although the pain was real, I finally came to full draw. At this point, the thousands of perfectly placed arrows took over, and I watched the 5x6 typical buck drop no more than 40 yards from the barn. The blood trail in the snow was now even brighter, as both deer took the same trail across the winter wheatfield. We found both deer lying dead, no more than 20 yards apart. There's no better feeling than success, and the triumph of reaching my goal was now complete.

Do you think I learned anything about safety harnesses? You bet. For the past two years, I've experienced the highest of highs and the lowest of lows. Just like DI Scruggs taught me so many years ago, bowhunting teaches you to accept and conquer your challenges until victory is assured. I learned what it takes to never give up mentally or physically, nor surrender. And after all these years, do I still want to kick my DI's butt? Of course not . . . oh, who am I kidding, you bet I do. . . Oorah! **BH**

The author is this magazine's "Hunting Whitetails" columnist.

Author's Notes:

On these hunts, I used a Hoyt Carbon Defiant bow, Easton FMJ arrows, T.R.U. Ball Max Pro 4-finger release, 100-grain Rage Hypodermic broadheads, Spot Hogg sight, Trophy Taker arrow rest, TightSpot quiver, and clothing from Browning.

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BY KEVIN BROWN

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This is the Michigan buck I killed on November 1.

It was October 26, and my son, Jacob, and I were hunting our 30-acre woodlot behind our house in southeast Michigan. The sun had set, and we had entered that magic time of the evening when deer just seem to appear out of nowhere.

I was set up in the southeast corner of the property, along a ditch that separated our woodlot from a standing cornfield. Jacob was in a ladder stand in the middle of the woodlot, with a standing cornfield to the north and a cut beanfield to the south.

Suddenly, my phone started buzzing in my pocket. It was a text message from Jacob that read, "I just shot Clubber!"

"Clubber," as Jacob called him, was the dominant buck on the farm, and my son had just arrowed him. Jacob was not 100-percent sure of his shot placement, so we snuck out of the woods and left the buck overnight.

Jacob had to work the next morning, so shortly after sunrise I headed out to take up the track. Jacob clearly explained where the buck had been standing when he shot, and where he had last seen him after his shot.

TO REMEMBER

My son, Jacob, with the buck he named Clubber.

Sticker had good height and width, and also great mass.

It didn't take me long to find Jacob's blood-covered arrow. The trail was easy to follow, and I found Jacob's buck exactly where he told me he had last seen him — and Clubber was a giant!

The buck was a fully mature nine-point with a huge body. He didn't have great tine length, but he did have a 19½-inch inside spread and great mass. His right main beam was long, bladed, and forked at the end. It was this beam that had earned him his moniker. He really was a great deer!

Six days later, on the morning of November 1, I was sitting in one of my best stands. Said stand was located in the northeast corner of the woodlot, in a treeline that separated two standing cornfields and butted up against the woods. It's an inside corner on the edge of a traditional bedding area, with great access from the north along the treeline.

I got into the stand undetected, well before daylight. Just before sunrise, I spotted movement in the thick bedding cover 100 yards southwest of my stand. It was a buck — and a good one!

The buck was moving away from me, so I grabbed my grunt call and let out a single grunt. That got the buck's atten-

A SEASON TO REMEMBER

ABOVE: In early August, I planted this long, rectangular food plot between the woods and corn in Whitetail Institute's Pure Attraction. BELOW: I watched these two young bucks sparring on the edge of my food plot.

tion. A second grunt sealed the deal, and the buck was now headed my way.

A few minutes later, I was at full draw. My shot was true, and I watched the eight-point go down quickly.

My buck was nowhere near the size of Clubber, but he was a good deer, and knowing Jacob had taken the dominant buck on the farm less than a week prior, I was happy to put my tag on him.

In early August, I had planted a long, rectangular food plot with Whitetail Institute's Pure Attraction seed. This plot was located on a thin strip of open ground between the edge of my woods and the standing cornfield to the north.

On November 8, at 3:19 a.m., I got a picture from one of my Cuddeback cellular trail cameras of a great buck in that food plot. I immediately recognized the buck: He was a big 10-point with a very distinct rack. His G-2s were shorter than his G-3s, and he had a sticker point on his right G-3. I had numerous camera pictures of this deer in August, but none since September 7. Based on this intel, I figured the 10-pointer had relocated — possibly because of Clubber.

The next morning, the wind was out of the south/southeast. I knew I needed to be in the "Killing Tree."

The Killing Tree got its name for a reason, as I've taken several bucks from that stand over the years, including a 142-inch buck in 2007 that I wrote a story about for **Bowhunter** Magazine titled, "A Third Time Charm."

The stand is on the north edge of the woods at the eastern end of the woodlot, not far from the house. There was a cornfield to the north, and the deer tended to move in and out of the woods around that stand.

This photo shows Stickers back when he was in summer velvet. I shot him on November 9.

Big rubs like these throughout the property told me there was a mature buck spending time there, even though I didn't seem to be getting any camera pictures of him.

I was in the Killing Tree well before daylight. Just before dawn, I caught movement in the woods. I immediately recognized the deer as the big 10 I'd

It was 18 degrees the evening I shot my Kansas 10-point buck in late November, and the winds made it feel even colder!

named "Stickers," and he was heading my way!

Stickers walked to within 18 yards of my stand. My shot was true again, and Stickers ran 50 yards before tipping over. He, like Clubber, was a huge deer. Stickers was a mainframe 10 with incredible mass. His antler bases were over five inches in circumference, and he maintained over four inches of mass between his G-3s and G-4s.

It had been a very successful archery season in my home state of Michigan, but I wasn't done quite yet.

I had drawn a Kansas deer tag and would be bowhunting in northeast Kansas with Tony Bell's Bullets and Bowstrings Outfitters, November 17–23. I met Tony while bowhunting elk in New Mexico several years prior, and this was the first time I had the opportunity to hunt whitetails with him in Kansas.

The first morning of the hunt, Tony set me up in a ladder stand in a strip of woods well before daylight. As the sun rose, I could clearly tell that I was sitting in a heavily used funnel. There were rubs everywhere, and I saw several deer

that first morning, including a mid-120s 10-pointer, which I elected to pass on.

The wind wasn't quite right for that stand in the evening, so Tony moved me to another stand on the same farm. Unfortunately, the wind almost blew me out of the stand that evening, and I only saw a few does and fawns.

The next morning, I was back in the ladder stand in the funnel. I had a beautiful, dark-horned 10-point come through that I considered shooting, but the buck never presented me with a good shot.

That evening, the wind was again poor for my stand, so Tony decided to move me to a different farm. My evening hunt was incredible. I was covered-up in deer almost the entire time, and I saw two bucks I would have definitely shot — a wide 150-inch nine-point that was chasing a doe, and a 10-pointer that I figured was roughly 140 inches. Neither buck gave me a shot.

The next morning, I elected to return to the stand I had hunted the previous evening. Much like my last sit in this stand, I was covered-up with deer. I saw several bucks, including the 140 10-pointer, but once again I couldn't get a good shot opportunity.

That evening, I returned to the same stand…but this hunt was very different from the previous two. It was as if someone had flipped the "off" switch — I didn't see a deer!

Just as the sun was setting, I caught movement. There was a deer heading my way, and it was a good buck!

As the buck closed the distance, I made two observations. While this 10-pointer probably would have made book and was a shooter for sure back home in Michigan, he was not the deer I came to Kansas to kill.

I could also easily see that the buck was limping badly. There was definitely something wrong with his left front leg. I was now faced with a decision to make, and I did — if the gimpy buck gave me a good shot, I would take him.

The buck came in to 18 yards and stood slightly quartering-to me. I was confident I could make the shot — and I did! I watched the buck go 50 yards before collapsing in a heap.

When we recovered the deer, we noticed a fresh wound on his left front shoulder. While skinning the deer, we recovered a four-inch piece of a crossbow bolt with a 150-grain broadhead wedged between his shoulder blade and his spine. The "autopsy" made me happy with my decision to shoot him.

My son had taken his best buck, and together we had killed three mature deer on our little 30-acre farm. I had also taken my first Kansas deer, and he was a good buck, too.

It was truly a season to remember! **BH**

The author and his son are avid bowhunters from the great hunting state of Michigan.

Author's Notes:

I used a Bowtech Prodigy bow set at 60 pounds, Carbon Express Piledriver DS arrows, 125-grain Magnus Stinger broadheads, HHA single-pin bowsight, QAD Ultrarest, Tree limb quiver, Leupold binoculars, and a Bushnell rangefinder. My clothing was from Browning, Cabela's, and NOMAD, and I wore Cabela's boots.

My son used a Mathews Triax bow set at 70 pounds, Gold Tip Airstrike arrows, SEVR expandable broadheads, QAD rest, Trophy Ridge sight, and Vortex optics.

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Moosie

By Ken Cottrell

IT'S FUNNY THAT I DIDN'T RECOGNIZE A WHITETAIL BUCK OF THIS CALIBER AT FIRST GLANCE.

It was forecast to be another warm and windy day on our family farm in northeast Missouri. My plan was to hunt from one of my favorite ladder stands on the edge of a draw leading to a big hollow on the north end of our place.

Due to a late start, I got in my stand a little after daylight but in time to see the sunrise, which illuminated my one-acre rye food plot about 50 yards to my right. The wind was supposed to be due south, which is usually pretty good for this stand, but I quickly noticed it was coming more out of the east-southeast that morning. I was cussing under my breath as it carried my scent directly down the draw and into the big hollow. I pulled a couple milkweed seeds from my pack and released them — confirming my fears. I sat another hour, hoping the wind would get better, but it didn't, so I climbed down and made my way back to the house.

It was November 10, 2022, only two days before rifle season, and I needed to check the scope on my rifle, so I drove over to my buddy Tim's house. We shot the bull for a while, and then I fired a few rounds to make sure my rifle was good to go Saturday morning.

Around 2 p.m., it was 80 degrees with 15 mph winds — not my kind of hunting weather — but I did notice the wind direction had changed to south-southwest, which was even better than due south for my ladder-stand spot, so I headed back to the farm for an evening sit.

I was in my stand by 3 p.m., and the wind was good. It was hot, so I was only wearing a short-sleeved camo shirt and lightweight pants. I had my camo pullover in my pack, in case it cooled off enough that evening that I needed another layer. I wasn't really expecting to see much that evening, so I didn't even bother to pull my grunt call out of my pack.

Fifteen minutes later, I saw movement to my left. One deer came up out of the hollow just south of the draw, then another trailed behind it. The first deer silently ambled closer, and I saw it was a buck. He looked pretty good, but he was too far away and the brush was thick I wasn't positive at that moment.

The deer trailing 10 yards behind the buck was a doe. They were silently moving in my direction, so I slowly stood up and pulled my bow off its hanger, without taking my eyes off the deer. I looked down to clip my release to my string, and when I looked up, I could see the buck closing ground. I glanced back at the doe, just in time to see her bed down, facing right at me, 50 yards away.

The buck kept coming. He was within 40 yards of me when he, too, suddenly decided to bed down. So, now I'm standing on the small platform of my ladder stand with bow in hand with two deer facing my direction. I forgot to mention that I'd been battling a hip problem, so standing for over 30 minutes on this platform was not an option.

The wind was still good, so I patiently waited for something to happen. Finally, the buck started moving his head around to rub his forehead on some nearby brush. I think a fly or bee must have been buzzing around the buck and was keeping his attention, so I took the opportunity to sit back down ever so slowly, sliding my back against the tree. I got away with it, as neither deer busted me.

Here's a photo of Moosie and me taken just before getting him out of the woods.

Moosie

I had a feeling that I was in for a long sit due to the time of day and the heat, so I started to relax a bit. There was a lot of brush and small trees between the buck and me, so I still didn't know how good he was, but I had a gut feeling that he was one worth shooting.

Not even 10 minutes had passed when I saw the buck start to stir. Then I noticed that the doe had got up and was now browsing on the underbrush. To my dismay, she was also slowly moving away from me.

The buck wandered over to her vacated bed, where he then started sniffing and pawing at the oak leaves. I now had a clear, straightaway view of him, which left me with no doubt my gut feeling was right. His rack was wider than his ears — as well as his body — and his mass was very noticeable, even from that distance. I took the opportunity to slowly stand and turn to my left, to get into shooting position.

I had just about convinced myself that the doe was going to lead him away from me, when she circled back around and started heading in my direction. There was a lot of thick brush between us, so I knew my shot opportunities would be limited until the deer got to within 15 yards.

The doe kept coming, and the buck followed her. There was a cedar tree 20 yards over my left shoulder that a well-used trail led past and out to my food plot. If they took that trail, I knew I'd have a nice shooting lane just this side of the cedar.

The doe stopped just before the cedar and turned to her left, bringing her path to a 45-degree angle past the front of my stand — at close range. The buck followed suit, and I adjusted my feet accordingly. *Is this actually going to happen?* I wondered, as my heart thumped wildly in my chest.

I concentrated on my breathing, while telling myself to focus on the doe and not the buck's antlers. I plotted her path and started looking for holes in the cover that I could get an arrow through, assuming he would follow the exact same path.

The doe moved through a triangular opening big enough for me to get an arrow through, where she then stopped to squat and urinate. The buck paused to watch her,

The sunrise showed promise, but a changing wind spoiled my morning.

and when she continued, he lowered his massive head and stealthily approached.

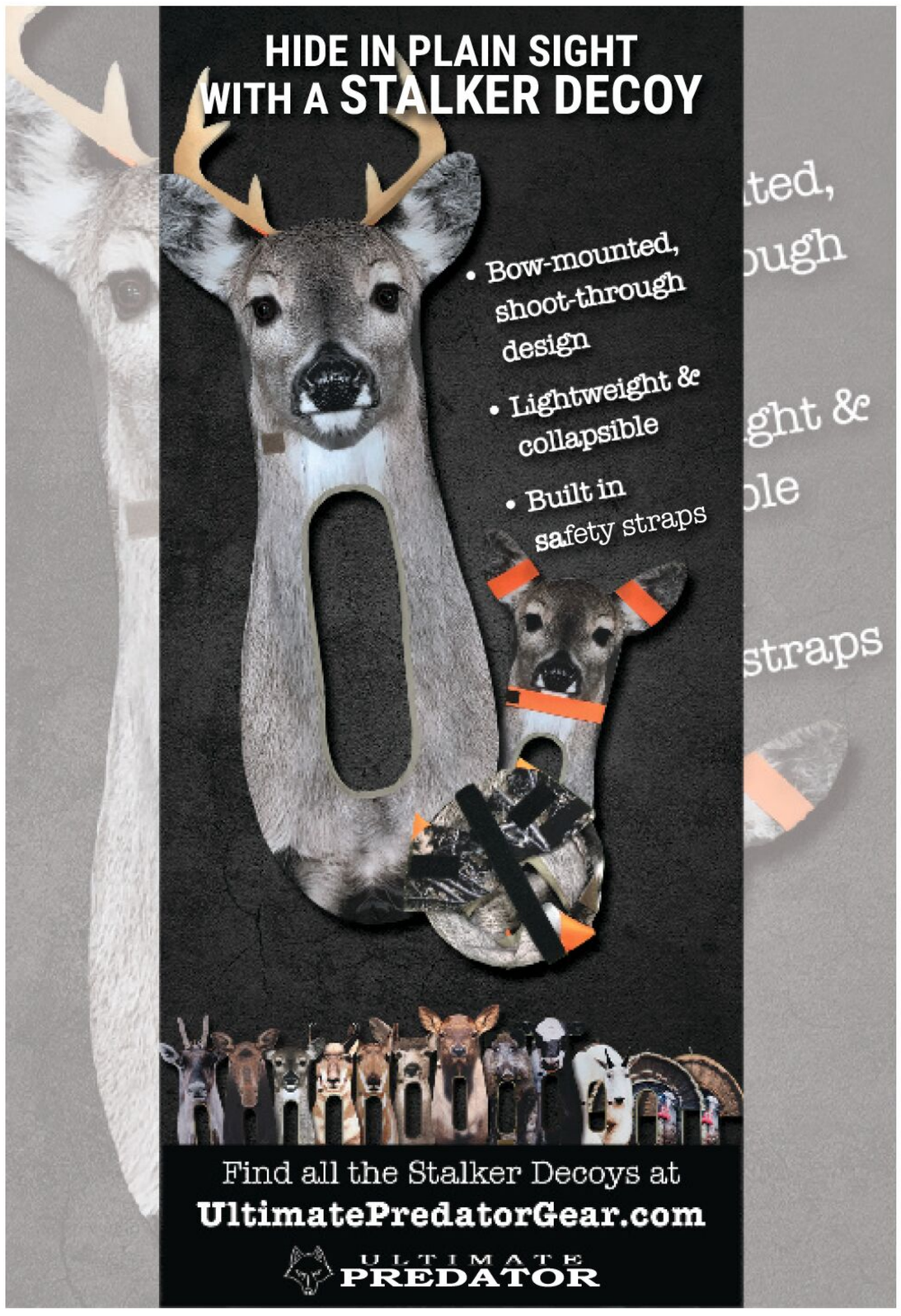
I drew my bow just seconds before he got to the triangular opening and then hurriedly found my pin through my peep sight. *Don't look at his rack, breathe, pick a spot, smooth release, follow through,* echoed in my head.

There was too small of a shooting window, not enough time, and he was too close to stop him, so I let my arrow fly as soon as his shoulder entered my triangle window. The shot felt good, but I was unable to follow my arrow's flight due to the close distance.

Both deer bolted for about 20 yards, at which point the buck slowed to a walk. I frantically looked for blood or signs of distress, but did not see anything.

The buck then slowed further and stopped behind a large white oak. I quickly nocked another arrow, as he was only about 30 yards away, thinking he might give me another shot.

The doe had already crossed the draw below me and was headed up the steep bank on the other side of the draw. The buck then took off in her direction. At this point I noticed his tail was tucked, which gave me some hope.



Moosie

This photo shows my arrow stuck in the ground after passing through the buck. You can also see my ladder stand in the background.

As he made his way upslope, he paused to look back over his shoulder…and I saw a large stream of blood pumping out behind his shoulder. He turned back uphill, took one more step, wobbled, and then fell on his side and rolled back down the slope toward the draw.

It was hard to contain myself. My heart was racing, my body shaking, and I wanted to jump off the ladder and run across the draw to put my hands on this buck.

I checked the time and then texted my buddy, Tim, to tell him what had happened. I couldn't see the buck's location very well through the brush, so I found a tree to use as a landmark to recover him after giving him sufficient time to expire.

I told myself I'd wait 20 more minutes before climbing down, but the best I could do was 15. I quietly descended from my stand and then went to look for my arrow. I did not immediately see it, so I had to search for my shooting window from below and lined that up with my stand, and there it was — half-buried in the soft dirt.

I pulled my bloody arrow from the ground, and then slowly made my way over to the white oak where I had watched the buck stop. There I found a pool of blood, which gave me further relief as to the outcome of my shot.

From there, I made my way down into the draw and up the other side, where I found my buck lying dead in a thick

bed of oak leaves. I took a minute to catch my breath and have that thankful moment that respectful hunters have after taking an animal. I'm sure my mouth was wide open as I looked at his heavy, wide rack, which seemed to minimize the size of his body.

When I looked at him from the front, I immediately recognized him as a buck I'd named "Moosie." I only had one video clip of Moosie — taken by a camera I'd placed in a travel corridor on the south end of our farm back in early October.

When I field-dressed him, I found that one of my broadhead's three blades had sliced the buck's heart down the side about three inches in length. I have never seen or put my hands on a buck with such mass from the bases all the way through his main beams and his points. One base measured 6 1/8 inches, the other 5¾, and the spread was over 20 inches. He was a heavy eight-point with two kickers.

Fortunately, Tim called me back and offered to come help me get the buck out of the woods. I'm not sure how I would have got him out otherwise — with my bad hip and all.

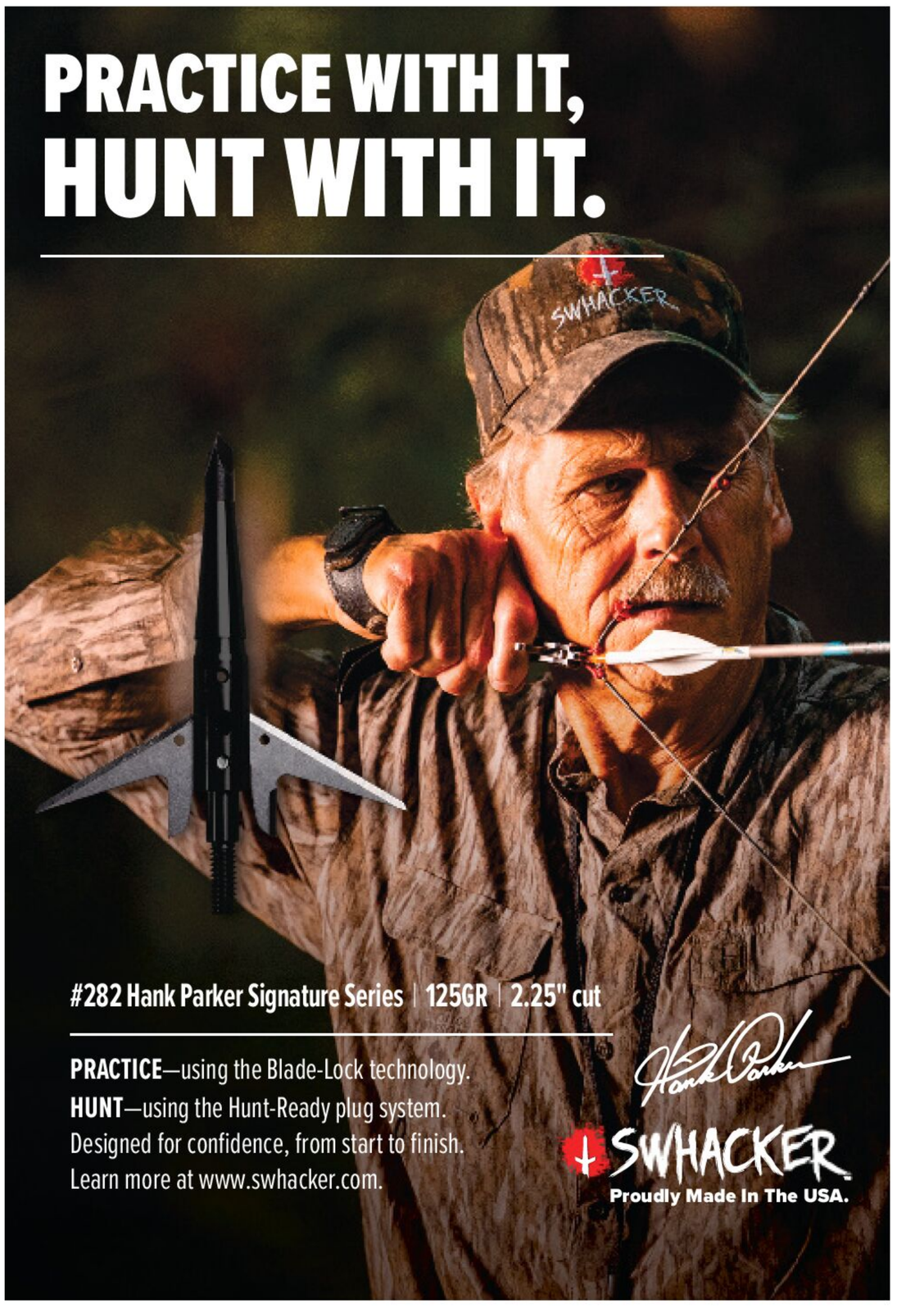
Tim and I hung Moosie in a machine shed, just a little after dark. The weather decided to switch back to winter that night, and the temperature dropped to the lower 40s. It stayed below 45 for the next seven days, allowing me to let the buck hang in a machine shed to age a bit.

This was one of those rare hunts where everything that could have gone wrong went right. And it's one that I won't soon forget. **BH**

The author lives in St. Louis, Missouri, with his wife, Angie. He is a retired IT infrastructure engineer who enjoys the outdoors, RV travel, hunting, and fishing.

Author's Note:
My equipment on this hunt included a Bear Mauler bow, Easton Axis arrows, 100-grain Muzzy fixed-blade broadheads, TruFire release, Primos grunt call (not used on this adventure), and a Polaris Ranger XP UTV.

I'll never forget walking up on Moosie!



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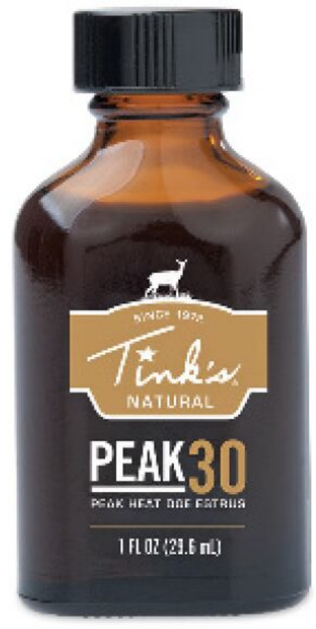

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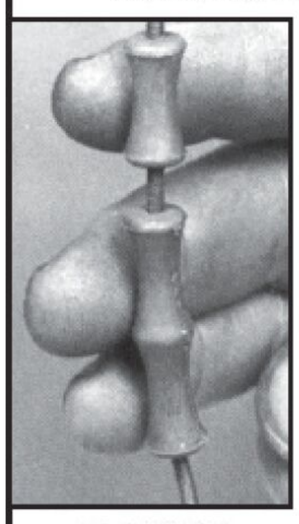

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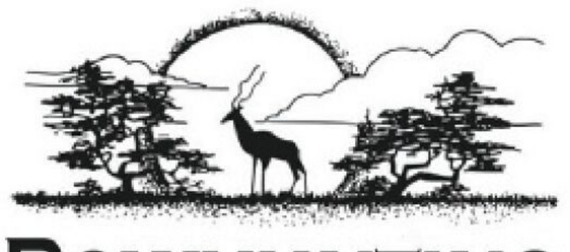

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Yet in a study published in the International Journal of Medical Sciences, 60 patients with stiff knees took 100 mg of Indian Frankincense or a placebo daily for 30 days. Remarkably, Indian Frankincense "significantly improved joint function and relieved discomfort in as early as five days." That's relief that is 10 times faster than glucosamine.

78% Better Relief Than the Most Popular Joint Solution

In another study, people suffering from discomfort took a formula containing Indian Frankincense and another natural substance or a popular man-made joint solution every day for 12 weeks.

The results? Stunning! At the end of the study, 64% of those taking the Indian Frankincense formula saw their joint discomfort go from moderate or severe to mild or no discomfort. Only 28% of those taking the placebo got the relief they wanted. So Indian Frankincense delivered relief at a 78% better clip than the popular man-made formula.

In addition, in a randomized, double blind, placebo controlled study, patients suffering from knee discomfort took Indian Frankincense or a placebo daily for eight weeks. Then the groups switched and got the opposite intervention. Every one of the patients taking Indian Frankincense got relief. That's a 100% success rate—numbers unseen by typical solutions.

In addition, BMJ (formerly the British Medical Journal) reports that Indian Frankincense is safe for joint relief — so safe and natural you can take it every day.

Because of clinically proven results like this, Dr. Sears has made Indian Frankincense the centerpiece of a new natural joint relief formula called **Mobilify**.

Great Results for Knees, Hips, Shoulders and Joints

Joni D. says, "**Mobilify** really helps with soreness, stiffness and mild temporary pain. The day after taking it, I was completely back to normal—so fast." Shirley M. adds, "Two weeks after taking **Mobilify**, I had no knee discomfort and could go up and down the staircase." Larry M. says, "After a week and a half of taking **Mobilify**, the discomfort, stiffness and minor aches went away… it's almost like being reborn." And avid golfer Dennis H. says, "I can attest to **Mobilify** easing discomfort to enable me to pursue my golfing days. Definitely one pill that works for me out of the many I have tried."

How to Get Mobilify

To secure the hot, new **Mobilify** formula, buyers should contact the Sears Health Hotline at **1-800-675-0570** TODAY. "It's not available in retail stores yet," says Dr. Sears. "The Hotline allows us to ship directly to the customer." Dr. Sears feels so strongly about **Mobilify**, all orders are backed by a 100% money-back guarantee. "Just send me back the bottle and any unused product within 90 days from purchase date, and I'll send you all your money back."

Use Promo Code **MBBH923** when you call to secure your supply of **Mobilify**. Lines are frequently busy and due to heightened demand, supplies are limited. To secure your suppy today, call **1-800-675-0570**.

THESE STATEMENTS HAVE NOT BEEN EVALUATED BY THE FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION. THIS PRODUCT IS NOT INTENDED TO DIAGNOSE, TREAT, CURE OR PREVENT ANY DISEASE. RESULTS MAY VARY FROM PERSON TO PERSON. NO INDIVIDUAL RESULT SHOULD BE SEEN AS TYPICAL.

ASK BOWHUNTER®

WITH CURT WELLS | EDITOR

*Our Ask **Bowhunter** question for this issue was posted on both our Facebook and Instagram pages, and below are several of the responses, followed by my comments. Check out our pages for future questions and other content.*

Q DO YOU BELIEVE in the October Lull?

Whether you believe the October Lull to be myth or fact doesn't matter. Just get out there and keep hunting as often as your lifestyle allows.

A The only time I see an October Lull is if we don't have a cold front coming through. Otherwise, the first three sits after a front are always good. *(Bob Krueger, Facebook)*

A No. I hunt thick woods adjacent to a residential area and see deer all October. Field and food-plot hunters might think there's a lull, but the deer are always moving, just not out in the open all the time. *(Hannah Young, Facebook)*

A I think it's caused by hunting pressure and the changing of food sources. *(Stick_bow, Instagram)*

A Not at all. I do enjoy the fact that the majority of hunters believe in it. *(Whatdoeshuntingmeantoyou, Instagram)*

The existence of a so-called October Lull — a slowing of whitetail deer activity in early October — has long been debated. In my early years of bowhunting in North Dakota, my experiences seemed to support the concept. The first couple weeks of September were always pretty good hunting. Then, about the third week of September, the action gradually slowed to a standstill that lasted through the first couple weeks of October. It seemed like a waste of my time, so instead I went after waterfowl during that time period. But, as with all things outdoors, there are no absolutes, which is why I eventually arrowed a nontypical swamp buck on October 3 — a date I've always remembered — smack in the middle of the perceived "lull."

It's important to first define the cause of a reduction in deer activity. Some believe there is a biological root cause — possibly a buck going through some sort of transformation as the rut approaches — that keeps him nocturnal and less active for several weeks. I can tell you that four different scientific radio-collar studies have shown that there is no appreciable decline in activity during these weeks. In fact, the studies show an increase in movement.

So, if a slowdown isn't biological, it must then be environmental.

In farm country, the crops are changing, as some are harvested and others become more attractive to deer, so the deer change their movement patterns as a result — frustrating bowhunters. But then, why is there still a perceived lull in areas where there are no ag fields or harvest activity?

Some believe the cause is hunting pressure: The deer have spent all summer with no intrusion and suddenly there are bowhunters skulking through the woods, so deer curtail their daytime movement. But what about places where there is little to no hunting pressure?

Nonbelievers say the harvest, changing food sources, and hunting pressure cause the deer to alter their patterns and locations.While those are reasonable explanations, are they not also reasons why bowhunting gets more challenging in that timeframe? So, is the debate over whether a lull even exists, or simply over the causation?

One thing is certain, the deer on the property you hunt don't simply disappear as October approaches. They don't go into an underground tunnel system (although I'm not so sure at times). Consequently, the only solution is to buckle down, scout other areas, deploy some trail cameras, figure out where to redirect your focus, and then move your stands accordingly.

To be honest, I still don't spend much time in a treestand in early October. But I am glad I sent two grunts across that cattail swamp those years ago on October 3. Otherwise, that clueless white-antlered buck would never have walked right into my ambush.

The takeaway is, hunt when you can. **BH**

DEER: TONY JENNIGES/AUTHOR'S PHOTO

E-mail your ASK **BOWHUNTER** questions to bowhunter_magazine@outdoorsg.com

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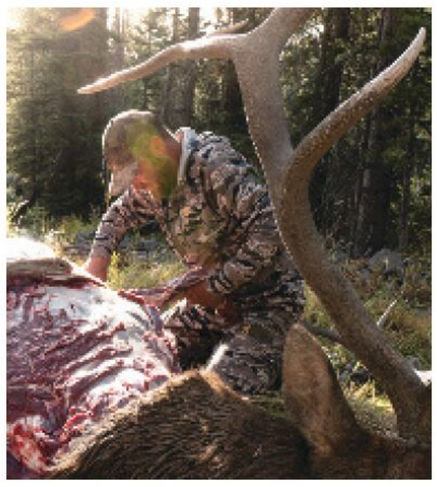

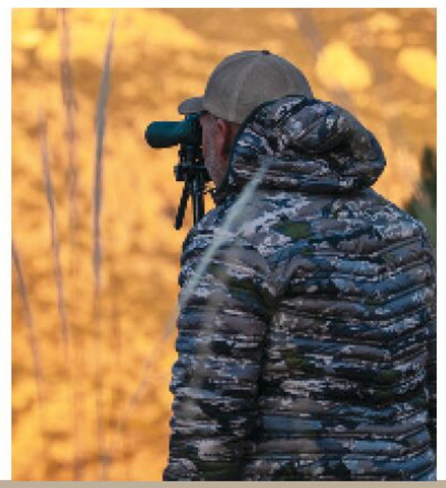

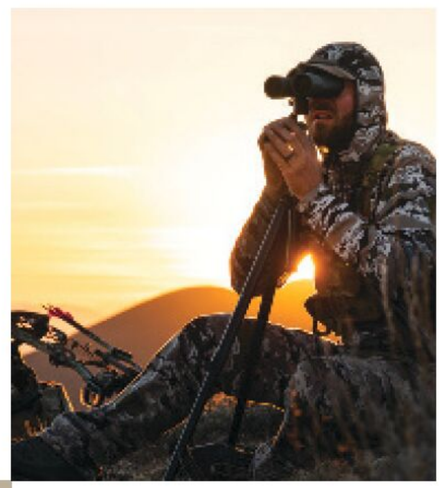

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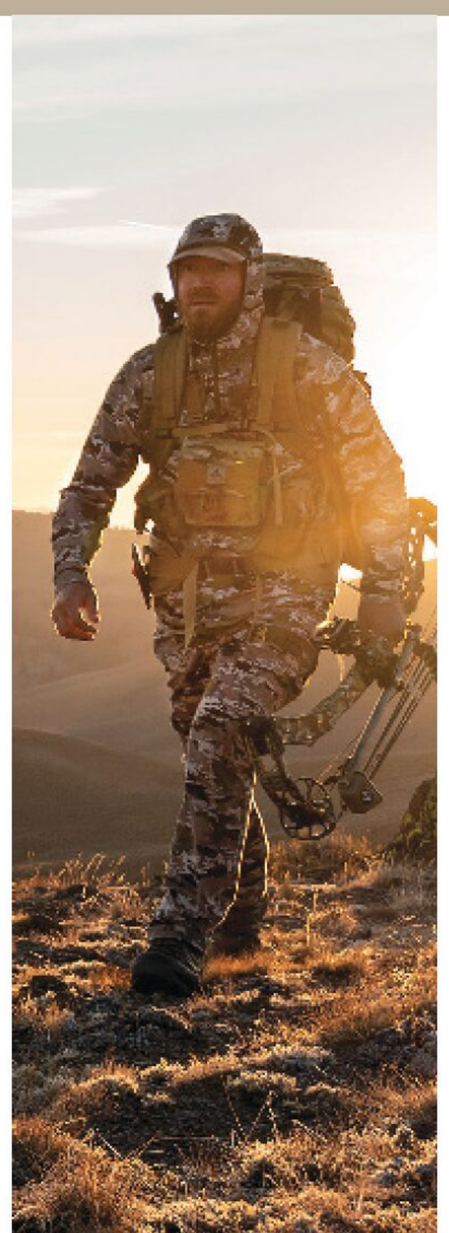

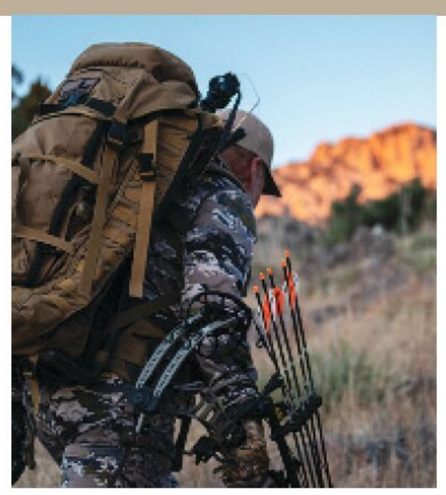

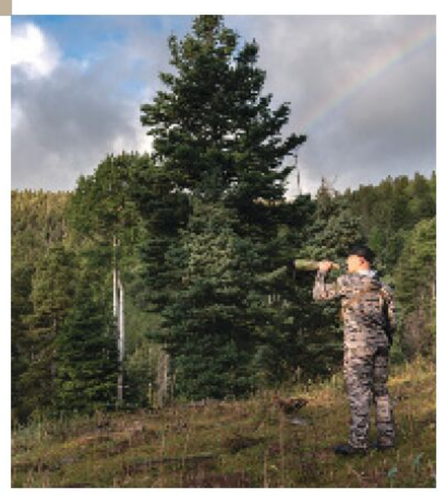

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