

WHITETAIL SPECIAL

NOV/DEC 2023

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THE #1 BOWHUNTING MAGAZINE

A HUNT MADE IN HEAVEN

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OF AN IOWA GIANT P. 26

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Paige Skinner is all smiles over the 200-class buck she named "Cotton Eyed Joe."





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EDITORIAL

CURT WELLS | EDITOR

YOU KNOW YOU'RE A WHITETAIL HUNTER IF...

IF YOU'VE BEEN in this whitetail game long enough, you will exhibit symptoms of your addiction that can be both confusing to the public and confounding to those you live with. Most of those who know you will be able to complete this sentence: "We know you're a whitetail hunter if..."

✓You spend an inordinate amount of time and energy in August working to please your spouse and complete all her honey-do projects for the sole purpose of acquiring "points" for the hunting season.

✓You go through the options on your truck and eliminate all horns, beeps, flashing lights, and anything else that may give you away when you start, turn off, park, or lock your vehicle.

✓Your eyes fly open at 4:25 a.m., when your alarm is set for 4:30. This only happens on mornings when you're going bowhunting — never on workdays.

✓You're in the big city and you walk out of a skyscraper and immediately notice the wind is blowing from a different direction than it was when you went into the building...and it's not even hunting season.

✓Beginning in September, you start washing your own hunting clothing because you can't risk that your significant other might use scented soaps/dryer sheets.

✓You are careful about what you eat the night before you hunt, so you don't experience any sort of gastrointestinal anomalies while you're in your stand, saddle, or blind, especially on days when you plan an all-day sit.

✓You're perfectly comfortable walking through the woods in the pitch-dark while coyotes sing in the distance and other creatures go bump in the night.

✓You climb trees like a squirrel and love it, even though you never climbed a tree as a kid.

✓Your obsession with antlers borders on troubling, to the point your friends and relatives have Googled "Antlers Anonymous," usually after they've learned you will drive hundreds of miles in pursuit of sheds from bucks you'll never hunt.

✓On a frosty morning in early November, you have no problem sitting in a tree or blind from dark to dark, but if your boss at work asked you to do it, you would tell him he's crazy (I've never experienced this).

✓You've spent long minutes in a tree with an elevated heart rate, only to discover those rustling leaves are not being caused by a 150-class buck walking toward you but rather a squirrel, possum, or armadillo scrounging for vittles.

✓You spend a disconcerting amount of time studying the weather apps on your phone, looking at forecasted wind-direction changes and the timing of approaching cold fronts, and then cuss out the weatherman if the forecasts are wrong.

✓The monthly fees for operating your cellular trail cams are getting dangerously close to drawing attention from your spouse, mostly because you keep looking at your phone at all hours of the day/night, and then you show her pics of the bucks your cameras captured.

✓You suddenly get so grouchy that your family can barely stand to be around you and starts questioning your sanity. That's their problem — not yours!

✓You travel to three other states to hunt whitetails when there are plenty of deer around home. One buck per season is never enough, and the deer are always bigger somewhere else.

✓You know it isn't true, but you keep saying every year that venison chops are better than beef ribeyes. Deep down, you know it's the "self-procurement" factor that adds so much to the flavor of venison.

✓You are reading these with a half-smile on your face — the product of both pride and a bit of humility. **BH**

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Date 10/1/23

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BRIAN K. STRICKLAND | EQUIPMENT EDITOR

All bowhunters, no matter their skill level or experience, can use a little help at times.



WHITETAIL FRENZY

DON'T FORGET THESE PROVEN TOOLS WHEN HEADING TO THE WHITETAIL WOODS THIS FALL.

EVEN AFTER 25 YEARS, I can still vividly remember every detail of my first November buck. I froze when his 160-inch frame surprisingly appeared just 10 steps from the base of my old Kansas cottonwood. When he walked behind a screen of brush, I pressed my Hoyt into service, and the rest is history.

I still consider myself an old-school bowhunter, but without question, the gear we have at our disposal today has certainly made the process a whole lot easier. Take scent management, for example.

For over 15 years, **Ozonics** (ozonicshunting.com) has been changing the

way bowhunters think about scent-elimination, and the [1] **HR500** (\$499.99) is their latest version of this proven scent-management technology. The HR500 is 40% quieter than its predecessors in Boost mode while also giving users the additional "ozone juice" conditions sometimes demand. For added ease of

use, it also offers Bluetooth remote operation via the Ozonics app, and the same extended battery life we have come to expect from this ozone pioneer.

Keeping your duds and equipment as scent-free as possible can be a battle, but making the process easier is the [2] **+Plus Humidity Generator** (\$299.99) from **Scent Crusher** (feradyne.com). It generates a clean mist that engages Scent Crusher's Ozone Activated Technology to keep your clothes/equipment sanitized. Couple the +Plus with any of Scent Crusher's line of Halo lockers, bags, or trunks.

Although ozone has been proven to be extremely effective, don't discount scent-eliminating field sprays. Adding to their mix, **Dead Down Wind** (dead-downwind.com) introduces the new [3] **Black Premium Series w/NidorX** (\$15.99). This innovative 3-step formula traps/destroys odors for immediate and long-lasting protection. It's also offered in the **Premium Black Kit** (\$29.99), which contains DDW's Black 3-in-1 Body Wash and Laundry Detergent.

Turning tap water into an odor-killing mist in seconds is what **Scentlok's** (scentlok.com) [4] **NFuse Ozone Sprayer** (\$129.99) is all about. One press of a button is all it takes to infuse tap water with ozone to effectively destroy odor-causing bacteria. It's equipped with a rechargeable battery and a revolutionary InfiniCote 360 nozzle that delivers a fine mist for maximum coverage and spraying capabilities.

Adding yet another product to their popular Grave Digger line, **Code Blue** (codebluescents.com) introduces the [5] **Grave Digger Scrape Mate and Doe Estrus Drippers** (\$12.99, each). These unique disposable drippers feature adjustable nozzles for controlling flow rate. Each dripper is certified to contain buck/doe urine collected from a single deer.

Wildlife Research Center (wildlife.com) sets the bar higher with its [6] **Next Generation Bio-Synthetic Scent Series** (\$7.18–\$27.25). These advanced formulas are bioengineered to simulate real deer



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urine. This series is available in Ultra-Premium Estrus Gold, Ultimate Buck Lure, Synthetic Estrus, and Hot-Scrape in three spray sizes.

Makers of the original CWD-free deer scents, **Inventive Outdoors** (inventiveoutdoors.com) now gives hunters the [7] **FUZED Series** (\$12.97) of whitetail deer scents. Composed of natural urine collected from non-cervid animals, they are then treated with a neutralization/conversion process to eliminate the risk of CWD, making them legal in most states.

Tink's (tinks.com) [8] **Peak30 Heat Doe Estrus** (\$15.99) is pure doe urine collected during the 2-day window

when a doe is in estrus — and bucks know it! Every bottle is certified/tested to contain 30pg/ml of estrogen.

Operating on what they call “PureION” technology, **Wildgame Innovation's** (wildgameinnovations.com) [9] **ZeroTrace PureIon Field Generator** (\$199.99) generates plasma ions and dispenses them into the air from your tree-stand or blind. These positive and negative ions attach to human-scent molecules, effectively eliminating your scent. In addition to destroying odor molecules, it also kills viruses, bacteria, and even mold.

Calls are also a must once November rolls around, and I don't know how

many bucks I have coaxed into range with a **Hunters Specialties** (hunterspec.com) call. Their [10] **Buck Bark Deer Call** (\$24.99) is equipped with new internals that allow greater airflow, so users can “bark” enticing growls/grunts to passing bucks, while also producing an aggressive snort-whewee with the molded upper chamber. For rattling, check out their compact **Rack Jack** (\$29.99).

Flexitone (flexitonegamecalls.com) is another provider of can't-miss deer calls. Their [11] **WTF Grunt'r** (\$20.49) mimics the natural inflection bucks make when grunting. Its flexible material allows you to compress/expand/bend the



sound chamber to instantly change the call's volume/pitch. It also sports a snort-wheeze chamber and Tru-Touch buttons for quickly adding doe/fawn sounds into the mix.

The [12] **Buck Roar II Grunt Call** (\$22.99) from **Primos** (primos.com) combines crisp grunts with the ability to deliver realistic snort-wheezes. Its repositioned barrel and reed enhances airflow, while the updated snort-wheeze

tube is equipped with an internal baffle and flared exit port.

Tuned to emulate a middle-aged buck, **Phelps** (phelpsgamecalls.com) broke the mold with the [13] **Beta Pro Grunt Call** (\$74.99). It sports a machined acrylic barrel and a custom-designed rubber bellow with a hand-tuned tone board to guarantee perfection. Its specialized reed works in any weather.

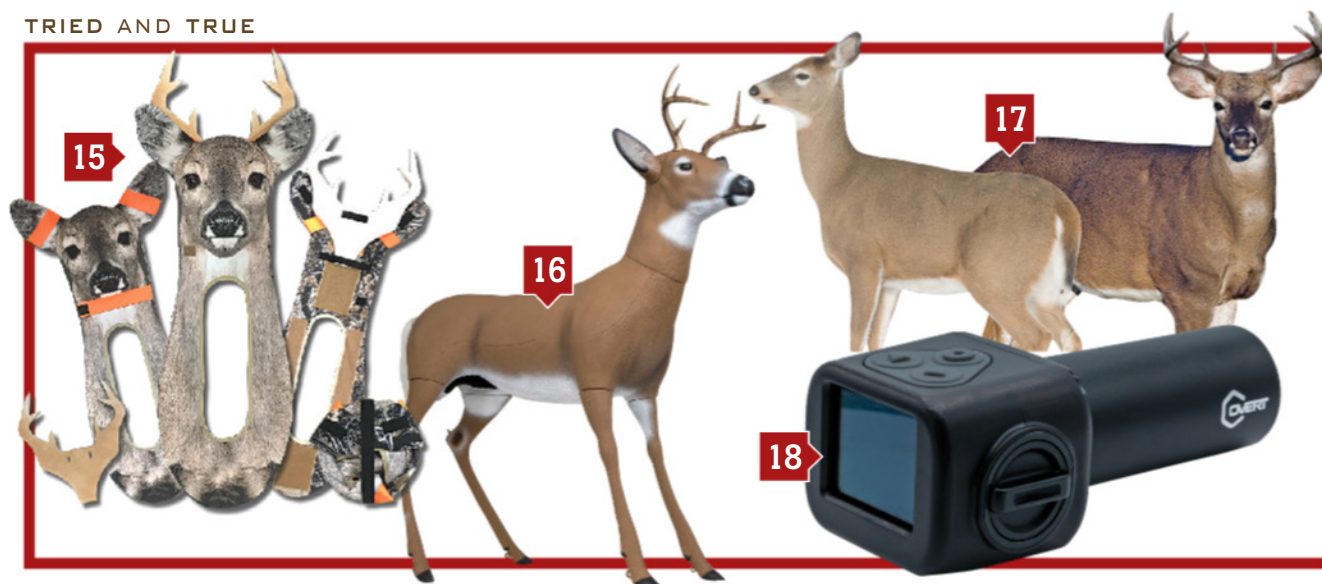
Tree Thrasher (treethrasher.com) teamed up with **Duel Game Calls** (duelgamecalls.com) to create the [14] **Tree Thrasher and Grunt Tube Combo** (\$54.99). By combining Duel's Double Back Grunt Call with the 3-in-1 Tree Thrasher Deer Call, you'll be able to take your November sounds to the next level.

Ultimate Predator Gear's (ultimatepredatorgear.com) [15] **Stalker White-tail Buck** (\$84.99) is perfect for mobile

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The [16] *Scrapper Buck* (\$149.99) decoy from **Flambeau** (flambeauoutdoors.com) represents the body size/rack of a 2-year-old buck looking to sow his oats. The ears can be adjusted, and its faux tail moves with the slightest breeze.

Sometimes, two is better than one. Enter **Montana Decoy's** (montanadecoy.com) [17] *Dream Team* (\$129) — another lightweight 2-D decoy that includes a buck and doe. Like all of Montana's 2-D dekes, it's constructed from a durable polyester fabric with a deer's image printed on both sides.

Making the all-important tracking job a little easier, **Covert Optics** (feradyne.com) thinks outside the box with the [18] *Thermx HS1* (\$769.99). The HS1

generates a high-resolution image displayed in real-time on a freeze-resistant OLED screen. A variety of thermal-viewing options are available to help your recovery efforts.

[19] *Capsule Feeders* (\$669.99–\$1,699.99) from **Feradyne Outdoors** (feradyne.com) are set up low to the ground, so you don't have to lug heavy feed sacks up a ladder, and they are constructed from materials guaranteed to provide years of supplemental-feeding

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use. A solar panel eliminates any worry of failure, and it's available in six sizes.

If you need to boost the edge of your food plot or just want a buck to pause in a shooting lane, **Moultrie's** (moultriefeeders.com) [20] **Deer Magnet** (\$14.99) is a can't-miss option. Simply make a pile and watch it go to work. It's available in Peanut Butter, Earth, Green Apple, Persimmon, and Acorn.

Browning (browningtrailcameras.com) adds another gem to their

lineup with the new [21] **Dark Ops Full HD Extreme** (\$129.99). Featuring adjustable trigger speeds with 24MP image/1080p HD video capabilities, it provides definitive proof about the subject matter it captures. The new 55-degree field of view and HDR night images, coupled with Browning's invisible Radiant 4 LED system, translate to a camera that works flawlessly day/night. Other notables include an 80' detection range w/90' flash range,

and technology that automatically adjusts the IR's flash.

SpyPoint (spypoint.com) fitted the [22] **Flex-S** (\$189.99) with an integrated solar panel to charge its internal lithium battery. Eight AA batteries or the LIT-22 battery pack can be used for backups. Constant Capture takes photos/videos, even when in a non-transmitting mode. The Flex-S connects with the most substantial network available. **BH**





HUNTING WHITETAILS

C.J. WINAND



If you disagree with the science around the moon/weather, then stick with what works for you — especially if you've had success!

THE WEATHER, THE MOON, AND THE RUT

CAN ANYONE TRULY SAY THAT FACTORS OUTSIDE OF A HOT DOE INFLUENCE THE RUT?

YOU'VE WAITED all year for the rut, and it's finally here. Then you start hunting harder than ever but see nothing in comparison to what other hunters claim to be experiencing through posts on social media — some of them even hunting very close to where you are. As a result, you start questioning yourself.

Those hunters who find themselves struggling during the rut usually blame other factors such as the weather and the moon. The purpose of this column is to go over what science knows about these factors, and more.

Moon Phase/Position

Oftentimes, hunting scenarios simply don't match the science behind deer movements — especially if you kill a good buck. When that happens, all the scientific data in the world doesn't matter going forward, because most hunters will stubbornly refuse to give up on

those "proven" tactics that worked on that particular day (and in the past), hoping lightning will strike twice.

But with today's radio collars, we know so much more about bucks and does during the rut than ever before. Although you can depend on luck or chance while hunting the rut, many will tell you that you're most likely wasting your time if you don't listen to what deer biologists have been saying for years.

When I was a kid, my Pap would constantly say the following: "During a full moon, the deer will feed all night long because they can see better. Because they

now have full bellies, they'll bed for most of the following day to ruminate. It's a total waste of time to hunt the day after a full moon, because deer movements will be next to nothing." Sound familiar?

Although the moon can affect feeding patterns of various fish, there is absolutely no data within the literature that shows the moon's phase/position triggers deer to breed during the rut. Some folks believe rutting deer start breeding due to the Hunter's Moon in November or the Fall Equinox. Once again, this simply isn't true.

Others "know" when the moon is directly above or below the Earth, and therefore deer movements will increase. Again, no data exists. And remember, biologists have collars on these deer that can receive data on a minute-by-minute scenario throughout the rut.

Another point to remember is no full moon is the same. In fact, every moon phase has differing distances and declinations from the Earth. These two factors change every month as the moon circles the Earth in its oblong orbit.

Sorry, but the moon has nothing to do with the rut, its photoperiod, or the diminishing ratio of daylight-to-darkness hours.

Weather

What about when a cold front moves into an area? Pap would also tell us all the bucks will be on their feet right before and during a cold front. At the time, I believed Pap's word to be gold...but was he correct?

Believe it or not, various scientific studies have shown Pap's statement to be false. In fact, studies have shown movements of bucks 24 hours before, during, and 24 hours after a storm — plus data from no storm events — showed no significant changes in buck movements in any way, shape, or form.

If you're having trouble digesting this data, remember that deer are slaves to their guts. They will always move to and from feed sources, regardless of whether a cold front is approaching.

JOHN FORD PHOTO

If you aren't seeing deer during this weather situation, perhaps they are eating elsewhere?

As you dive deeper into the literature, another problem with movement studies and the weather shows contradicting evidence as to its significance. While some studies show no correlations between weather and deer movements, others do show relationships between various environmental conditions such as wind, barometric pressure, temperature, dew point, and relative humidity. The problem is, it's so hard to show impact in a scientific study because there's always a high degree of variability when it comes to the weather.

Where I hunt in my home state of Maryland, wind speeds in excess of 20 mph will ruin a full day of hunting for me — based on personal observations during those conditions. But in the Midwest, those same wind speeds are normal to deer living there, which is why hunter observations in that part of the country differ from mine. This is just one example of opposing weather data on deer movements during the rut.

Regional variations in weather conditions are probably more important than we realize, yet biologists are still

having trouble putting them together in some sort of scientific design. In other words, weather outside the norm can make deer move more, or less. The jury is still out.

Based on my personal observations over the years, I will tell you that I've noticed a few things regarding cold fronts with massive wind shifts.

For starters, deer will bed in locations where they can better use their noses than their eyes to detect danger, which is why bedding areas with good screening cover seem to be much more desirable to them. So, depending on the habitat where you hunt, don't be surprised if your local deer shift their movements to maximize screening cover during periods of high wind.

Although various media sources will emphasize the seeking, chasing, and breeding phases of the rut, I never liked this terminology because all three can happen at the same time, and in the same area. Timing might be a little early/late, but the majority of rut activity will occur around the same centralized time period every year.

I also scoff at those who say bucks are territorial. This is simply not true, because bucks will leave scent in multiple

scrapes/rubs. These signposts are not guarded. Therefore, I believe the only time a buck becomes territorial is when he's on the tail end of an estrous doe.

Hunting a specific stand during the rut every year may have some merit. Instead of running in a random pattern chasing does during the rut, some believe bucks have specific generational rutting areas where they know they can maximize their breeding potential. Can you enhance a specific area or corridor to make it a more attractive area during the rut? Good question.

The rut will forever be feast or famine. The most important thing you need to remember is this: It only takes one hot doe coming by your stand to change everything! **BH**

C.J.'s Summary:

Deer use specific habitat types to stay alive, which might be one reason why weather patterns and deer movements differ in various parts of the country. Whether it's a cold front or a drastic change in weather conditions, just go hunt. That's the best advice I can give you — and I'm a deer biologist!



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DEER SCIENCE

DR. DAVE SAMUEL | CONSERVATION EDITOR



Fawns will forever be at the mercy of natural predators like coyotes...until other food sources like blackberries and other fruits show up.

DEER MANAGEMENT 2023

"OUR GUY" IS BACK TO ONCE AGAIN REPORT THE LATEST FINDINGS ON WHITETAIL DEER RESEARCH.

THE 46th ANNUAL meeting of the Southeast Deer Study Group was hosted by the Wildlife and Fisheries Department of Louisiana in February. As always, the top deer researchers, professors, and graduate students were in attendance and presented a number of papers on the latest deer research. And, as always, **Bowhunter** Magazine was there.

This year, I am also including discussions of some of the many papers presented in Denver at the 4th International CWD Symposium. I believe you will find some of that information interesting.

First, to the Deer Study Group meeting. Alex Jensen, from Clemson University, presented a paper on coyote diets

in the Piedmont region of South Carolina. He noted that coyotes eat fawns in early summer — the first few months of a fawn's life. However, the availability of blackberries and other fruits can impact coyotes' eating fawns. He found that habitat management to increase blackberries lowered fawn predation by

coyotes, especially in the second month after fawns drop. Of course, a lot of fawns have already been eaten by then. One thought to save fawns is to trap coyotes before fawns drop. But this research also showed that almost every coyote eats fawns. You can trap coyotes, but you can't get them all. There will always be coyotes out there and they will eat fawns.

In Texas, cattle are a big deal. But so are deer. One question answered by a paper presented at the Study was: Does the amount of cattle in a pasture affect deer? The interesting results were that cattle numbers (up to a point) did not affect doe lactation status, or body mass of does and bucks. However, cattle numbers did affect antler size. As the number of cattle per acre increased, the antler size decreased. Note that this study was done on four South Texas ranches, and other studies show that results vary on other ranches, and the reason is that drought has a huge impact on habitat in that part of Texas.

PHOTO: JOHN PENNOVER



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DEER CONSERVATION

Texas rains are usually scattered, so you have drought areas, and you have areas that get some rain and impact the habitat. So, the number of cattle may impact antler size on one ranch, but 100 miles away, it may not.

Matthew McDonough and his co-authors at Auburn University assessed how wild pigs affect whitetail deer at the population level. They removed 1,851 pigs over a year and a half and used trail cameras to survey the response of deer populations. They found that removing wild pigs will not increase abundance of deer but could impact camera surveys and hunter satisfaction by increasing the ability to see deer in an area.

I found this next paper very interesting. The usual way CWD prions are found in the field is by surveying where hunters killed CWD-positive deer. If CWD-positive deer are killed in an area, then there are CWD prions there from the feces.

Miranda Huang, of the Mississippi State University Deer Lab, has found another way to determine if deer living in an area have CWD. She checked 98 scrapes for CWD prions in an area of southern

Tennessee that had a high prevalence for CWD in deer. She found that 54 of them (55%) had CWD prions in the scrape soil. She also clipped the ends of twigs on overhanging branches at the scrape where deer lick, leaving saliva on the twigs. Thirty-five percent of the overhanging limbs at the 98 scrapes had CWD prions. She concluded that deer scrape sites might serve as environmental sentinels to identify CWD present in an area, without relying on harvested deer. What isn't known is the percent of does and bucks that visit those scrapes that don't have CWD but get the disease from a visit. We know the prions are there, but we don't know the impact they have on other deer that come to the scrape.

Another CWD study examined possible prion transfer from deer carcasses that had CWD and were left in the field. A captive deer farm where CWD was found had been depositing (illegally) dead deer carcasses at a site. They found that 14 of 56 carcass samples had prions, as did fly larvae associated with those carcasses. My thoughts are that knowing that prions can be found on fly larvae is just another factor among many that makes eradication of CWD extremely unlikely.

New technology continually changes research methods on deer studies, just as it changes almost everything we do in our life. Heat sensors mounted on helicopters and low-flying planes have been used to census deer, but one recent study utilized thermal drones to survey deer.

In one 6,000-acre, high-fenced area in East Texas, thermal-drone surveys estimated 255 deer, while traditional camera surveys yielded 267 deer. These results suggested that thermal-drone surveys were a viable method for estimating deer abundance and closely compare to traditional ground-based camera survey estimates. But both methods likely underestimated the true population.

The 4th International CWD Symposium yielded lots of new information on CWD from papers presented by 50 speakers and an additional 84 poster displays. One presentation focused on the use of dogs to detect an odor in deer that have CWD. The researchers found that dogs (sample size was six dogs) can detect CWD prions in fecal samples from CWD-positive deer. The dogs could also detect prions from small intestine tissue of CWD-positive deer. The researchers believe that this means there is the po-

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HUNT IN STEALTH MODE

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tential for dogs to detect CWD by smelling the whole body of a deer — dead or alive. That potential will require further research to confirm whether it will work.

It appears we will always have speculation on whether humans can get CWD from eating animals such as deer or elk that have CWD. Several speakers addressed this question.

One long-term study done by the Center for Disease Control, looked at death rates for human prion diseases (e.g. Creutzfeldt Jakobs Disease) in Colorado, Wyoming, and Wisconsin — all hotbed states for CWD. Even though thousands have consumed CWD-infected venison in those states, the rates for human-prion diseases were similar to other parts of the country, even after many years. The Wisconsin study questioned 642 hunters who have eaten CWD-positive venison over the past 20 years, and none had a prion disease.

As you know, there are no known natural cases of CWD transmission to humans, and we have learned that CWD prions have been found in a number of non-cervid species. This means that a variety of animals that humans consume around the world, other than deer, carry CWD prions.

One study at the CWD Symposium reported on research done where different processed meats derived from a CWD-positive, free-ranging elk were analyzed. The products included filets, sausages, boneless steaks, burgers, ham steaks, seasoned chili meats, and spiced meats. All of those products contained CWD prions. They also grilled and boiled the various meat products and found that the meat still had prion particles, even after cooking. When it was all said and done, the Symposium presenters had significant concern that transmission to humans could occur through ingestion of contaminated meat products, even though it has yet to happen.

Deer and elk can get CWD prions from contact with infected animals or through contact with environmental prions, such as those resulting from decomposition of infected carcasses. Scavengers, such as bobcats, that eat infected carcasses may become vectors for CWD.

In a study done at the University of Wyoming, ground beef that contained cut-up lymph nodes from a CWD-positive elk, were fed to three captive bobcats. In other words, the bobcats were fed elk meat with prions in it. When examining the scats from those bob-

cats, they only recovered less than two percent of the CWD prions, indicating that bobcats do not pass such prions on into the environment (at least, not many). This doesn't mean that bobcats kill the prions in their gut, it just means that they sequester them in their body rather than pass them in scats into the environment.

Another researcher at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases in Montana fed CWD-infected ground meat from mule deer to a captive mountain lion. They found that only 2.8% to 3.9% of the infected prions were passed by the mountain lion. In fact, prions were only found in the first scats the cat passed, meaning that either the prions were eliminated, or they became sequestered in the lion and did not get dispersed into the environment. Thus, the results of these two "cat" studies were basically the same.

As you can see, between the Deer Study Group meeting and the CWD Symposium, there was a lot of information presented on CWD. As for the upcoming 47th Southeast Deer Study Group meeting, it will be held in February 2024, in my home state of West Virginia, so you know that I'll be there! **BH**



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TAG-TEAMING COTTON EYED JOE

IT'S HARD TO KNOW where to start on our story with the buck we call "Cotton Eyed Joe," because while we only knew of him for the span of two weeks, he's the type of deer that you spend all your efforts trying to catch up to, whether you know he exists or not. He's the type of buck that has made me brave single-digit temps, sit all day in a treestand, and put in extra time during the summer in preparation for the fall season. The type of buck that you always dream will show up — even when you know the odds are not in your favor. We may have only known of him for a couple of weeks, but in reality, the hunt for him had been much longer.

I've always looked forward to deer season, but over the past couple of years, between my husband, Nick, and I building our house and having a new baby together, neither of us had been able to put as much time into hunting as we would have liked. Going into this year, I really wanted to enjoy the season, take my time, and be a little extra picky about what I decided to shoot.

To help us spend more time afield, Nick and I flew my mom in from Georgia on



"WHERE DID YOU COME FROM? WHERE DID YOU GO?"

— LYRICS FROM THE FOLK SONG "COTTON EYE JOE"



BH 
FEATURES

BY PRIGE SKINNER

TAG-TEAMING COTTON EYED JOE



Above: One of our first photos of Cotton Eyed Joe from November 4.
Inset: Scar, my original target buck.

SKINNER8 M 11/04/22 16:46:00 41°F SLR AA5 L15

October 22. She would be staying with us for a couple of weeks to help us care for our son, Easton, while Nick and I were in the field. During that time, I had some really fun hunts, and even passed up a buck I would have strongly considered shooting had my mom not been there to give me more time to be patient.

Then, like any big buck will do, Cotton Eyed Joe showed up at an inconvenient time — just one day before my mom had to leave to go home.

It was November 4, and I was at home when Nick called to ask me if I had checked our trail cameras recently. It had been raining all day, so I hadn't paid much attention to the cameras since that morning.

Nick asked me to check the camera monitoring our clover plot. I did, and that's when we got our first glimpse of Cotton Eyed Joe.

The buck wasn't very close to the camera, but we could see a wall of tines going everywhere and knew he was a giant. Nick and I spent that evening excitedly trying to figure out a game plan for the next day. The weather forecast was for the rain to continue all night and into the following day.

The next morning, I walked to a ground blind at 9 a.m., with plans to sit there for the rest of the day. Nick sat in a blind just above mine, but neither of us saw any signs of Joe that day.

Nick and I alternated hunts over the

next week, so one of us could be home with our son while the other was in the woods. Our same luck continued, with no sightings of Cotton Eyed Joe or camera photos. It was then that Nick and I really started wondering if our one set of photos on November 4 was just a fluke, or the result of the rut.

At this point, I needed to decide whether to continue blindly hunting Cotton Eyed Joe or switch my focus back to my original target buck, "Scar." I chose to do the latter for a few days, since Scar was a mature and unique buck that was also pretty active during daylight. But to hunt Scar effectively, I needed a new stand for the wind directions that were coming.

On November 11, Nick and I hung a stand that I would be able to sit for the

next few days, based on the forecasted winds. The next morning, I rattled and, to my disbelief, Scar came in about 10 minutes later.

Scar was coming in on the main trail, and then turned to go right behind me. I drew my bow, shot...and completely missed him! I was really shocked and disappointed with myself, because it was a shot I should have made with no issue. But as every bowhunter knows, that's all part of the total experience, and it's the highs and lows that keep us in the field, doing what we love to do.

Shortly after, I got out of the stand and headed home to switch places with Nick, so he could hunt that evening. Nick was still planning to hunt the farm where Cotton Eyed Joe lived, in hopes of



Here's the blind where I shot Cotton Eyed Joe.



Cotton Eyed Joe was visiting scrapes the evening he reappeared on November 12.

11/12/2022 6:14PM - 007

seeing him. Sure enough, eight days after our one and only picture of him, Joe reappeared that evening.

Nick watched the buck and his does for a few brief minutes before darkness finally fell. The good news came later that night, when Cotton Eyed Joe started showing up on several of our cameras.

I had planned to go back the next morning to where I had flubbed my shot at Scar, but my plans quickly changed after Nick's sighting. Instead, I went to hunt the edge of the timber where Nick had seen Cotton Eyed Joe.

That morning, I too, saw Joe in person — only for about 20 seconds — but that was more than enough for me. He ran another buck off from a doe and then disappeared from there. I got down around 11:30 a.m., and then headed home again to switch places with Nick so he could hunt that evening.

The next morning, Nick's mom came to watch Easton so that both of us could hunt. Nick went to where I had sat the previous morning, and I sat in the middle of the timber where I'd seen Joe. I sat there all day and saw good movement but no sign of the buck we were both after.

Several days passed with no sightings of Cotton Eyed Joe. With the rut starting to wind down, Nick and I both hoped this wasn't an indication that he had left again — possibly never to return that season.

Then, on November 17, Joe started showing up again on our cameras. I hunted that evening with high expectations of his showing up, but I never saw him.

The next day, Nick had an auction to go to, so he wouldn't be able to hunt in the morning — or be back in time for either of us to hunt that evening. Knowing Cotton Eyed Joe had been moving in the area during daylight, and with good weather conditions in the forecast, Nick and I both knew we had a short window of opportunity on which to capitalize.

So, my mother-in-law came to our res-



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TAG-TEAMING COTTON EYED JOE

cue and made it to our house just in time for me to jump in the car and head down to the farm for an evening hunt. If you ask my mother-in-law about the situation she walked into upon her arrival, I'm sure she will jokingly tell you that I blurted out some incoherent care instructions for our son before rushing out the door!

The conditions were very similar to those of the previous evening. I had very high hopes of at least seeing Cotton Eyed Joe again in person as a result.

Several deer worked in and out of the field that I was watching. Then, around 4:15 p.m., I saw what appeared to be a buck crossing the field about 350 yards away. *Could that be Cotton Eyed Joe?* I thought, much like I had done with nearly every other buck I'd seen up to that point.

A look through my binoculars proved it wasn't Joe. I decided to scan the field edge to see if I could see any deer headed to the field through the timber, and much to my surprise, I spotted Cotton Eyed Joe about 400 yards away!

He was standing on the field edge, and all I could see was from his neck up.

Here's Cotton Eyed Joe cruising and pushing does in the field the morning of the day that I shot him, November 18.



I was excited to see that he was by himself for the first time, and I was hopeful he would work across the field toward the other deer, and me.

Within minutes, Joe came farther into the field. Then he turned and started walking away from me. This obviously wasn't the move I wanted him to make, but it was still early, so I kept a very close watch on the sidehill in the timber, just below where he went in, in hopes he would circle back around to me.

Ten minutes later, I saw a deer moving through the timber. A quick look through my binos was all I needed to confirm it was Cotton Eyed Joe...and he was headed right to me!

From my experience hunting that location, I knew there was a very good chance of the buck eventually making his way to within my effective bow range. When Joe closed to less than 350 yards, I shifted my focus from watching the buck to making sure I



Had I not flubbed my shot at Scar, Nick and I might not have been posing with the buck we both really wanted to kill.



was 100-percent ready — if he stayed his course.

I got my bow and rangefinder in hand, made sure I didn't need to move anything around, and then I took a few deep, calming breaths while also reminding myself to take my time and wait for the perfect shot opportunity.

As Cotton Eyed Joe continued toward me, I started ranging him at 36 yards, then at 30. Once he hit the 30-yard mark, my comfort level increased tenfold, because I had been shooting off and on throughout the season and had just shot multiple sets at 30 yards the prior evening.

All the deer in the area were still calmly feeding, so I let Joe continue to work in closer. The next time I ranged him, he was at 25 yards, and I decided that if he turned broadside right there, I was going to take the shot. He did exactly what I'd hoped he would do.

I drew my bow, took a moment to steady myself and aim, then released. As soon as my arrow hit the buck, my initial thought was that my arrow had impacted too high — possibly even too high to be fatal.

But my silent self-disgust over what I thought was a bad shot was short-lived, as I then watched Cotton Eyed Joe run roughly 60 yards, stop briefly, then fall over dead! I was shocked and completely overwhelmed with emotions — especially during my phone call to Nick and

my parents, to let them all know what had just happened.

Over the years, I'd spent a lot of time dreaming about a moment like this, and now that dream had become reality. Little did I know that it would be the calls of celebration and reminiscing about the hunt with the ones I loved that would be the most special part of all.

While some have said I might as well stop hunting after killing a buck of Cotton Eyed Joe's caliber, I think it's just the opposite. Accomplishing this goal and having this experience only fueled my desire for hunting even more, and I'm excited to carry this experience with me into future seasons as a reminder of what can happen to any bowhunter in the blink of an eye! **BH**

The author lives in Iowa with her husband, Nick, and son, Easton. She works as a stay-at-home mom and loves spending as much time outdoors with her family as possible.

Author's Note: My archery equipment on this hunt included a Mathews Prima bow, Carbon Express Maxima Red arrows, 100-grain Rage Hypodermic broadheads, and HHA Tetra RYZ sight. I shot Cotton Eyed Joe from a Banks Stump 4 Phantom Blind. The buck of my dreams scored 196% gross and 191% net, and that was after he broke off 10 inches of antler!



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200's ON REPEAT

By Bailey Pottin

WHEN IT COMES TO 200-INCH WHITETAILS, WHO SAYS LIGHTNING DOESN'T STRIKE TWICE?

When I was 12, my grandpa took me deer hunting with him for the first time. Since that day, I have always been obsessed with hunting deer — especially with a bow. I love the challenge that bowhunting presents, and as I have grown older, my addiction for these wonderful animals has only worsened. And, I've become obsessed with targeting specific, mature whitetail bucks.

These journeys can last multiple seasons, and they can really take a toll on you. My 2022 Kansas whitetail season was no different, as I was focused on a deer that I had nicknamed "Locus" in 2021.

In 2021, I was not targeting Locus, even though he was already very impressive at what we figured was a 4.5 or 5.5-year-old buck. The reason was, I had already set my sights on a different buck — "Hollywood."

As it turned out, I arrowed Hollywood in early October 2021. He was my first 200-inch buck, and the story appeared in this magazine's 2022 *Whitetail Special*. I had always dreamed of having the opportunity to hunt a 200-inch deer like Hollywood, and I am so thankful that I was blessed with that opportunity through hard work, patience, and dedication.

After tagging Hollywood, I figured there was no way I would ever get another chance at a deer of that caliber for many years, or even for the rest of my life. Little did I know, Locus, who we passed on in 2021, would blow up into another world-class whitetail that would push 200 inches all day long.

In the summer of 2022, I was counting down the days until I deployed my trail cameras. Once July 4 came and

went, I immediately started hanging trail cameras in hopes of getting some pictures of Locus.

To my surprise, he was one of the first deer that showed up, and I could not believe how much he had grown. In 2021, he had a large droptine, but he had lost it in 2022. Although he no longer had his drop, he had gained loads of mass, plus kickers flying everywhere off his gigantic 10-point frame. I don't think there was anything that could have knocked that smile off my face, and I immediately went to work on a strategy for intercepting Locus once the season came.

As the summer continued, Locus appeared less and less frequently on my trail cameras, and I started to worry. I knew that he was not living on the piece of property that I was hunting; I was just hoping to catch him on his feet moving between his core area and his food sources. With this intel in mind, I opted to not hunt him in September, as I wanted to keep the human scent and hunting pressure as low as possible.

The first time I sat for Locus was in early October, when we had an unbelievable cold front push through. I got into the stand early, by myself, and I was really treating it as an observation sit because I could see a long way from that stand.

As the night progressed, I ended up seeing over 50 deer — including about 25 different bucks — with the last deer of the night being Locus. He was across



(L to R): My mom, Gina, my youngest brother, Brock, yours truly, my brother, Blaine, and my dad, Jeff.

In spite of losing his droptine from the year before, Locus was still an incredible buck when I killed him in 2022.



200's ON REPEAT

a standing beanfield at about 600 yards, but even to the naked eye, I knew it was him because of his frame.

After confirming it was him through my binoculars, I began to worry that I was completely out of the game, since he was moving to a freshly cut cornfield about a half-mile from the property that I could hunt. I knew that if I wanted the best chance to get a shot at Locus, I would need to gain permission on the neighboring property.

I got in contact with the landowner, who was gracious enough to grant me permission to hunt, and I could not be more thankful for his act of kindness. I then instantly went to work using satellite maps to pinpoint a spot where I could effectively hunt Locus with multiple winds, while also having a solid entry and exit route.

My brother, Brock, and I nailed down a spot on a hedgerow between two cut beanfields that led straight to the cut cornfield that I mentioned earlier. With Brock's help, we hung a trail camera and a double-stand set (one ladder, and one hang-on for filming) that was practically bulletproof with the right wind.

At that point, we were so anxious to hunt the stand that we could hardly contain ourselves, but we also knew that we wanted to monitor the cameras and the weather, as it was early October and we didn't want to educate Locus to the fact that he was being hunted.

Our first sit in the new stand was our first morning hunt of the year, and it was October 13, 2022. We got into our stands well before shooting light. It was cool and crisp, with a slight breeze blowing in the right direction, which gave us optimism, even though we knew it was still a bit early in the season for a morning hunt.

I saw a handful of does that morning and ended up passing on a solid 4.5-year-old buck, but Locus was a no-show. As Brock and I sat there that morning, checking the weather forecast, we both knew that we needed to be back in that tree come evening because of an approaching cold front.

That afternoon, Brock and I made our way back to the freshly hung stand set with very high hopes. It was sunny at first, but then the clouds started to move in — indicating the approaching cold front.

Immediately after the temperature started dropping, deer started pouring out

of the timber into the field that we were overlooking. Brock and I were on pins and needles, just trying not to be picked off by any of the other deer in the field.

With about an hour of daylight left, we were focused on filming a solid 10-pointer that was 125 yards across the beanfield. As we were working to get some footage of the 10-point, I looked down and to my right along the hedgerow...and spotted Locus trotting in while also pushing a yearling buck around. I could not believe my eyes, as Locus was almost in bow range, and Brock and I were by no means ready!

"There he is! Get on him," I whispered to Brock.

Brock did his best to get his camera on Locus as quickly as possible. Meanwhile, I grabbed my bow, hooked onto

my D-loop, and came to full draw as fast and quietly as I possibly could.

At this point, Locus was at 25 yards but moving quickly through our shooting lane. It was then that I made the decision to verbally stop the deer, which I am normally not a proponent of doing, but I felt like if I didn't try that tactic Locus would have walked right through my shooting lane.

When I tried to stop Locus with my mouth, he paused briefly — broadside while looking up at us. I settled my pin, and then I squeezed off the shot.

I instantly knew my shot was marginal — more forward than I would have liked. After watching Locus exit the field, Brock and I then replayed the slightly out-of-focus footage (due to how quickly the situation had unfolded).

Based on the video footage, Brock and I could tell my arrow had hit Locus



My 2021 Kansas buck, "Hollywood," was featured in the article I wrote for last year's *Whitetail Special*.



My mounts of Hollywood and Locus were done by Herschell Taxidermy in Lecompton, Kansas.

in his front shoulder. Upon impact, it looked like Locus kind of sunk down and pulled his body together — almost into a sprinting position — most likely further altering my arrow's impact point. I got solid penetration, but we

knew that we still needed to give him plenty of time.

After backing out that evening and getting almost no sleep that night, Brock, my other brother, Blaine, and I were extremely anxious to start tracking Locus the next day.

We went right to the last spot where Brock and I saw Locus leave the field. There we found my broken arrow, and it indicated I had achieved good penetration.

The blood trail we were following slowly started to diminish, but it was headed straight downhill toward the bottom of a pond dam, where it turned into a creek. Blaine was slowly following the creek when he suddenly spotted Locus bedded in a brushpile — but he was still alive.

Given how close Blaine had got to Locus, we knew that the buck was not doing well. We also knew that I needed to get a follow-up arrow into him as quickly as possible.

After sneaking up to within 10 yards, I was able to finish the deal on Locus. That's when the emotions started piling up. We couldn't get the smiles off our faces, and we were absolutely blown away at the sheer size of this deer. The trail-camera pictures, and the post-hunt

pictures that we took, simply do not do this deer justice.

The amount of mass that Locus carried all the way through his beams and tines was unreal, and it was such a cool experience to celebrate that moment with my family. Locus ended up having 19 scorable points, with a whopping 48 inches of mass. He grossed 203½ and is just flat-out impressive in every possible way.

I feel extremely blessed to have been able to chase two world-class deer, in back-to-back seasons. I could not have done what I did without my family and friends, and amazingly enough, I have no doubt that my addiction to chasing big Kansas whitetails is still only in its early stages. **BH**

The author works at Garmin HQ in Olathe, Kansas, as the New Product Introduction Planner for their Outdoor Segment.

Author's Note:

On this hunt, I used a Hoyt RX-7 bow, Easton Axis arrows, Garmin Xero Ali PRO sight, Ramcat Diamondback broadheads, Nockturnal lighted nocks, and clothing from Badlands.

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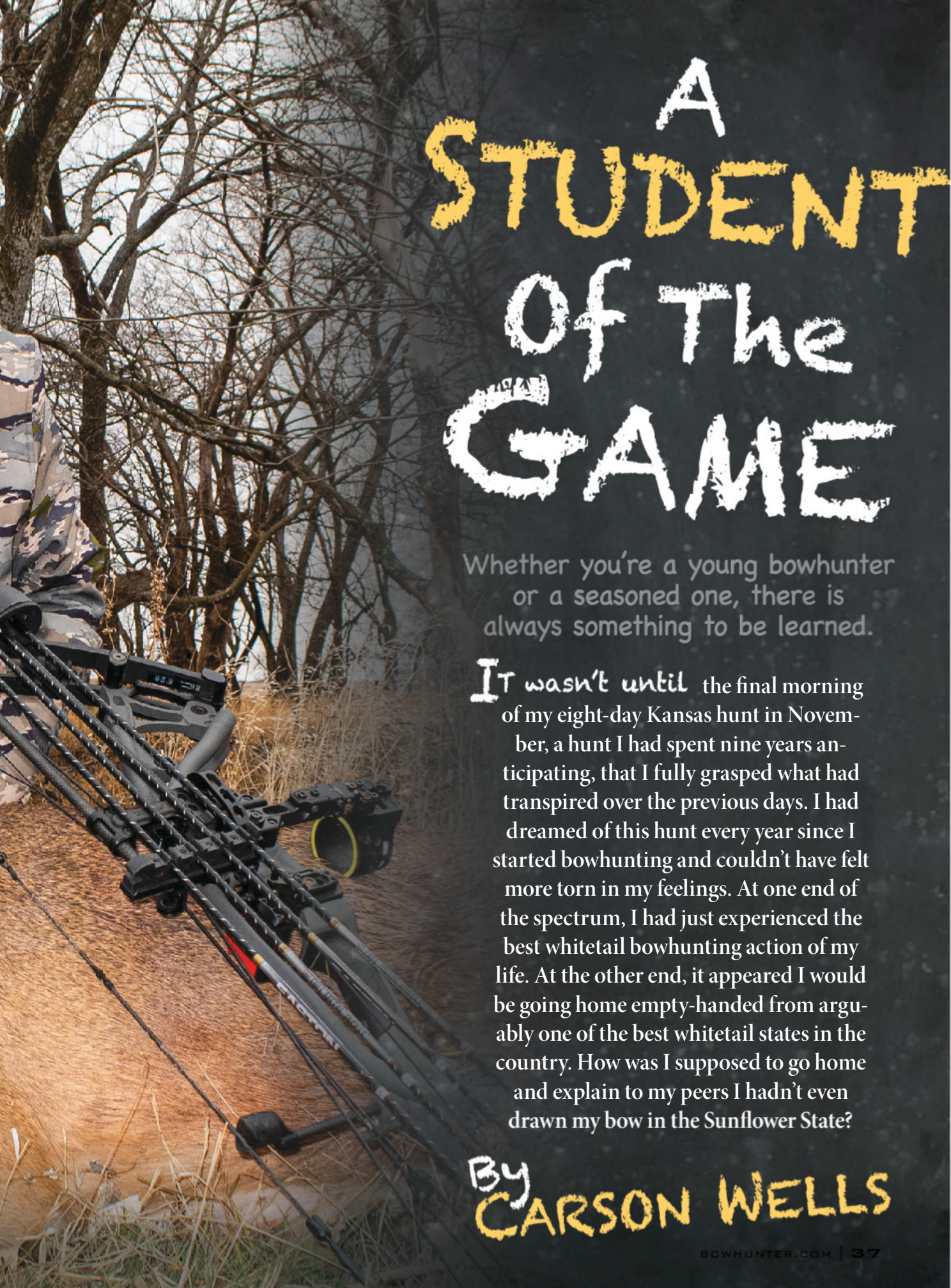


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The rut wars were hard on this buck's antlers, but he was still the same old, heavy-beamed buck when I met up with him again in December.



A STUDENT Of The GAME

Whether you're a young bowhunter or a seasoned one, there is always something to be learned.

It wasn't until the final morning of my eight-day Kansas hunt in November, a hunt I had spent nine years anticipating, that I fully grasped what had transpired over the previous days. I had dreamed of this hunt every year since I started bowhunting and couldn't have felt more torn in my feelings. At one end of the spectrum, I had just experienced the best whitetail bowhunting action of my life. At the other end, it appeared I would be going home empty-handed from arguably one of the best whitetail states in the country. How was I supposed to go home and explain to my peers I hadn't even drawn my bow in the Sunflower State?

By
CARSON WELLS

A STUDENT of the GAME

This had been a three-generation hunt with my dad, Jason Wells, and my grandfather, Curt Wells. Every day was filled with action as the whitetail rut was on, but I was determined to be somewhat fussy because of all the good bucks we'd seen on our Browning cell cameras all summer.

I passed on several nice bucks and felt good about it. Then, halfway through the hunt, my dad arrowed a well-earned, mature buck and then turned his attention to filling his doe tag. The next day, my grandfather missed a good buck. Before I could blink, our November hunt was over and we were on the way home with only my dad's buck in the truck.

I learned many valuable lessons during that hunt, but I knew I had to learn more and be ready to act on those lessons, because my grandfather and I decided to return to Kansas for a late-season hunt in December.

Going into the second hunt, I knew I had to maintain a more positive attitude. In the world of bowhunting, there is a limited number of variables you can control: how you prepare, putting yourself in the best situations for success, maintaining mental toughness, etc. What most people focus too much on are the uncontrollables, such as weather, moon phase, and deer movement in general, all of which seemed to be against me during our November hunt. I wasn't going to let those factors affect my enjoyment for the sequel. I was going to have fun, like I do any other time I'm hunting with my grandfather, and I couldn't have been more excited.



It was cell-camera photos like this one taken in August that got me really fired up and ready to be a little fussy on our November hunt.

We knew the late-season hunt would be predominantly over food sources, and that more than likely we'd be hunting mostly evenings, with early morning access being next to impossible without detection. Upon arrival, we had a bit of preparation for the week ahead, but lurking in the back of our minds was the possibility that our hunt may be cut short due to a massive winter storm forecasted to hit our route home.

The first morning of our hunt was spent tucking a blind into some brush on a field edge, adjacent to a Browning cell camera we had been watching for months. We were hoping one of the handful of bucks captured by the camera would prove his existence to us.



My dad started our three-generation Kansas hunt off with this mature buck he arrowed during our November rut hunt.

ON  HUNT

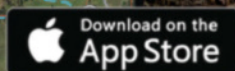
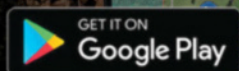
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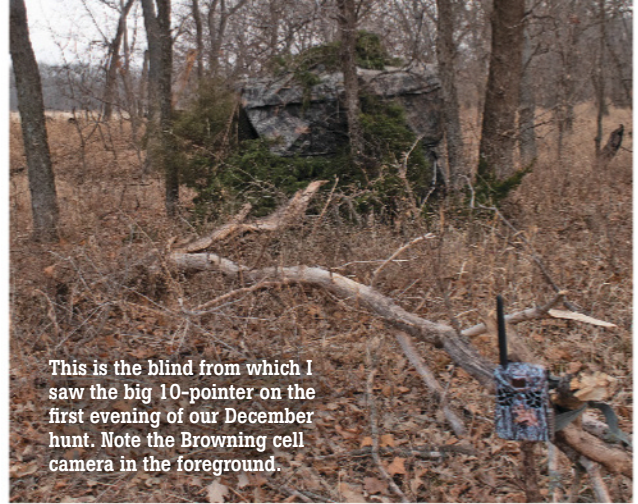


A STUDENT of the GAME

Once the sun started to touch the tips of the trees on its way down, a beautifully large, symmetrical ten-point buck seemingly appeared from underground. He cautiously made his way through the field, keeping a cushion between us. I knew it would be challenging to hunt out of a blind the same day, even with ample efforts to disguise the blind, as deer are typically nervous about anything new. But Father Time was not on our side.

Although that buck never came into bow range that night, just seeing a deer of that caliber was enough to feed my whitetail addiction, and it was amazing to witness. Going into the second day, we came up with a plan for hunting that buck in the same field, weather permitting. I would sit in a well-placed blind inserted in the cedars where the buck had paraded by the night before, and my grandfather would sit where I had been, in case the buck, or a different one, appeared at the main field entrance. That night we barely saw any deer, which was quite disappointing, considering how confident we had been in our plan. At the end of the day, mature whitetails never come easy.

On our fourth day, the wintry weather forecast had begun to creep up on us, basically guaranteeing that our six-day hunt would be reduced to five. The pressure began to mount. We also came to the realization we could not afford to focus our



This is the blind from which I saw the big 10-pointer on the first evening of our December hunt. Note the Browning cell camera in the foreground.

efforts on one inconsistent buck, however big, since we were running out of time. We both chose different scenery that evening. I switched to a completely different property, while my grandfather went to one of his November stands where there was some action being recorded by one of our cameras. As much as I wanted a Kansas buck for myself, I was rooting for my grandfather as well.

About halfway through my evening sit, I was happy to receive a text that my grandfather had arrowed his own deer. I could not get out of my blind fast enough that



My grandfather's December buck was also a mature animal with heavy bases and double browtines.



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A STUDENT of the GAME

night to go help with the recovery and congratulate him on another well-deserved animal. After all, he is the reason I have had the opportunity to do anything archery related in my life, and I owe him endlessly.

After a short recovery, photos, and a victory meal at the local restaurant, I went to bed that night feeling a sense of motivation, as our three-generation Kansas deer hunt was now reliant on my completing the trifecta.

The following morning brought a

complete transformation in weather. Our semi-mild December hunt had turned cold with a bitter wind. And the forecast in the northern Great Plains threatened to block our path home. It could be our last day to hunt.

At breakfast, we discussed our predicament, and that is when our gracious outfitter and long-time friend, Miles Willhite, offered to let me hunt one of his personal parcels of land. I'm still not quite sure what was in his coffee that morning that prompted him to let me hunt there, but I am forever grateful and appreciative of it.

That morning, the consensus was that the action should theoretically be the best yet, with the major cold front arriving overnight. Still, I knew I could not be too cautious with time winding down. I decided to get into the blind earlier than usual that day, believing that a buck could be on his feet all day searching for food. I knew I wouldn't kill one from my motel bed.

Almost immediately after getting settled, deer began to enter the field, starting with a few does and yearlings. I had hunted the same property in November, so I had somewhat of an idea of where a buck may enter the field and had been keeping my eyes peeled. I had my heart set on a buck that had slipped away from me on the final evening of my November rut hunt. He was a heavy beamed, dominant buck with a few extracurricular tines and he'd evaded my double-decoy ambush when his doe decided something wasn't quite right with the fake deer. The buck danced his way just out of range that night as the final minutes slipped by, concluding that hunt. When that buck walked out of my life, it stuck with me.

Fast-forward to December 19, as I used my binoculars to look out into the far corner of the field. A buck emerged, curious to see what the commotion was all about in front of my blind. Unlike the November hunt, when this buck was only thinking about does, he was now intrigued as to why multiple does were gathered in front of my blind, feeding.

By this time, there was close to two-dozen deer in front of me, making it extremely difficult to verify if the buck closing the distance across the field was the one I thought he was. Regardless, I had been mentally preparing for a shot since the moment I sat down, going through all the motions like it was any other hunt. I had ranged a few landmarks in front of the blind, knowing my movement would have to be limited and that any shot opportunity could be brief.

After confirming it was indeed the buck I was after, the waiting game began for him to feed his way into range. I had to be sure not to spook the herd, and ultimately alert the buck. It seemed like ages for the buck to cover several hundred yards, but light wasn't fading yet, so I knew I had ample time to settle down and be patient.

Once the deer had cracked my comfortable range, I was now gambling as



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to how close I would allow him to get, or even whether I should wait for a different buck. That second thought lasted all of two seconds. This buck had been through a tough rutting season — breaking off multiple tines on his rack and sporting a noticeably thinner body — but he was still the same mature, heavy-beamed buck.

Once I saw a good shot opportunity, I ranged the buck one final time while assuring there were no other deer behind him that could suffer collateral damage. As I drew my bow, I had to remind myself of all the preparation, help, and guidance that had got me to this point — not just on this hunt, but in my hunting career in general. While I settled my pin on the deer, I took one last breath, erased my thoughts, and released my arrow.

The buck, jittery after a long season of hunting pressure, heard my bow go off and dropped, resulting in a higher-than-anticipated shot. To my surprise, the buck barely made it 20 yards before tipping over and expiring, all in a matter of seconds.

It was arguably my fastest archery kill (except for a black bear in Saskatchewan). A wave of emotions rushed over me. I didn't even know what to say to the *Bowhunter TV* camera that was rolling behind me. I've hunted on camera multiple times and haven't been speechless before this. I had just harvested my first Kansas whitetail, completed the three-generation trifecta we had hoped for, and did it just in time.

After gathering my thoughts for the camera, I sent off the magical text and waited for what seemed only minutes before the recovery party, consisting of my grandfather and Miles, to show up. They couldn't possibly have been more excited than I was, but it was close. We posed the buck for a bunch of photos, loaded him up, and then went to have another victory meal. We could all rest easy that night knowing our mission was complete. And it was a good thing, too, because we had a blizzard to drive through on the way home.

I will always cherish every minute spent in the outdoors, for no one moment is like any other, and there will always be a lesson to be learned. This trip did not stray from that theme, and it served to remind me that I will always be a student in the world of bowhunting. No matter how big or small you set your bowhunting goals, you will always learn more ways to handle situations — even

those you believe you have already mastered. The drive to gain never-ending knowledge is what keeps all of us eager to learn and experience more. The one piece of advice, one that I have instilled into my own bowhunting routine, that I would pass along, would be to ask yourself every time you leave the woods, *What did I learn today?* **BH**

The author is the grandson of this magazine's Editor. He lives in Fargo, North Dakota, is a former bow technician, and is in his senior year at NDSU. This is his first feature for the magazine.

Author's Notes: My equipment on this hunt included a Hoyt RX-4 Ultra bow, Easton 4mm arrows, Rage Trypan broadheads, and Browning clothing in the company's Oviv camo pattern. My grandfather used a Hoyt VTM bow, Easton Sonic 6.0 arrows, Rage Trypan broadheads, and Browning clothing in Oviv camo.

I also want to mention my appreciation for our friend, Miles Willhite. Our family has hunted with Miles many times for deer and turkeys. You can contact Miles at willhitemiles@gmail.com or (316) 648-3601.

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A LONG TIME COMING!

A physically challenged bowhunter connects on his best buck ever in Kansas.

BY DREW MCCARTNEY

The unmistakable sound of brush breaking from across the river startled me to attention. A fat doe suddenly exploded into a clearing like she was fleeing for her life. She crossed the river about 100 yards from my stand and headed into an open pasture as she continued her escape.

Although I was a little disappointed that she crossed the river so far away from the trail I was sitting above, I wasn't too surprised, because 15 minutes earlier two fork-horned bucks had crossed the river from my side and just underneath me.

I was just starting to relax from the short encounter with the doe when an extremely loud crash came from across the river in roughly the same place where I'd seen the doe. I still wasn't too excited because I figured it was probably the two young forkies. Then I caught a glimpse of antlers — big antlers!

I grabbed my bow, bit down on my mouth tab, and pushed my compound to full draw. The big buck stopped in the middle of the river 25 yards away from me, frantically looking for the hot doe.

Dawn on November 10, the prime period for the Kansas whitetail rut, broke just as the weatherman had predicted — clear and brisk. The sun rose as a bright ball of fiery red, without a cloud to be seen in any direction. A light northwest breeze blew just enough to make a few stubborn, dark-brown cottonwood leaves rattle to keep the otherwise silent riverbottom woods alive. It was an absolutely beautiful morning to be in a treestand.

My youngest son, Bob, along with our good friend, Mark Kruse, were a few miles away on another farm that we had permission to hunt. Mark and I met many years ago when we were both members of the Physically Challenged Bowhunters of America. The PCBA was a group of people — able-bodied as well as disabled members — whose mission was to get people with severe disabilities or illnesses to experience the best therapy there is — bowhunting.

Although Mark has no use of his right arm, he is one of the best bowhunters I've ever met. Mark uses a release fastened to his shoulder and triggers it by using pressure from his chin. Although Mark has an extensive list of trophies, you'll never hear him carry on about them. Mark used to live in Alaska, where he worked as a government timber cruiser, and he has just recently moved to Oregon. While he lived in Alaska, Mark helped me, my two sons, and a good buddy of ours hunt Sitka blacktail deer. While the first hunt resulted in each of us seeing a nice buck, we all came home with some great memories and a pledge to go back again. A few years later, the same group of us went back to try our luck again, and each of us came home with a nice buck.

Now, back to Kansas. The big-antlered buck stood in the middle of the river 25 yards from me, frantically looking for that hot doe. I stood there with my bow at full draw, and the buck had no idea that I was anywhere in the county. My shot looked perfect, but the buck's only reaction to it was to flinch





The reality of shooting a buck of this caliber was far better than my dreams about doing so.

A LONG TIME COMING!



I've been shooting with a mouth tab for many years.

slightly. Dumbfounded, I then watched the buck walk straight underneath me and back toward the river. He stopped about 10 yards away, still looking for the doe, so I nocked another arrow, bit down on my mouth tab, pushed out on the bow to draw, then opened my mouth to release the arrow. My second shot entered the buck's flank and came out his opposite shoulder, at which point he mule-kicked and bounded away. As I sat in the tree regaining my composure, I looked for my first arrow but to no avail.

About that time, Bob called to tell me they were headed back to town. I told him he might want to come back because I had shot a small buck. Bob called BS on me and told me to just stay in the tree until they got there.

I showed Bob where the buck was standing when I shot the first arrow. He reached down, picked up the arrow which was stuck in the riverbed. It still had blood on it. He blood-trailed it to the second shot and picked up that arrow, also covered in blood. From there, it was an easy tracking job to where we found the buck lying dead in the river. He was by far my biggest whitetail. Either arrow would have done the job on him, but it sure didn't hurt to have a second one in him for good measure.

When we first saw the buck, strangely it looked as though his whole head and body were lying on top of the water. It turned out to be his reflection, with his top half making a mirror image of itself. It made for an awesome picture!

We dragged the heavy buck up the riverbank, where we took many pictures, including some really good ones. After all these years of dreaming what it would feel like to shoot a buck of this size, the real event was way better than I ever imagined. The way the morning all played out was just pure luck. Not only luck in taking this tremendous buck, but also luck in never giving up on hunting this spot. I just knew it would produce if I hunted it long enough. You don't have to wonder very long where I'll be next year when the Kansas rut rolls around.

As we stood there admiring the buck, we got to thinking that none of us had ever seen him in person or on camera. And to our knowledge, none of the other people in the area had seen him, either.

I've hunted this area for a long time now, and I've seen my share of good bucks, but I could never get them in close enough for a shot. Not only is he my biggest whitetail, he's also the first buck I've ever shot in this particular area. By Kansas standards, my buck isn't all that big. He scored 167%, but I couldn't be

prouder. My goal throughout these many years has always been to shoot a buck that will net 150 P&Y inches, and this fellow soared past that magic number. Much to my surprise, my buck later took first place as a typical whitetail at the Kansas Bowhunter Association's awards banquet.

Years ago, we had a 180-class buck that we saw numerous times on another piece of property that we've hunted for years. We simply called him the "Big 10," and both of my sons and I, along with another close friend, all had several extremely close calls with this buck, but the big deer evaded us every time.

The closest opportunity I ever had at the Big 10 occurred one afternoon as I was walking to my stand. I heard a commotion in some cedar trees, so I nocked an arrow and waited. I was caught in the wide open when the Big 10 stuck his head and the front of his shoulder out from behind a very large cedar tree, yet he didn't even notice me standing there with my bow at full draw. Just one more step and he would be mine.

Suddenly, everything blew up, and deer were running everywhere. I thought at first that one of them either saw or smelled me, but then an old coyote came walking into the opening where the Big 10 had been standing. I was so surprised and upset that I didn't even think to shoot the darned coyote!

The truly sad thing happened the following summer, when we saw the Big 10 on the cover of a hunting brochure with a rifle hunter standing over him. To make matters even worse, we have a trail-camera picture of the buck standing under one of our feeders after dark on the last day of the previous rifle season. Poaching was such a sad ending for that magnificent patriarch.

The old saying about a big whitetail buck hiding behind every tree in Kansas is purely fictional — at least in our part of the state. In all my years of bowhunting, the Big 10 and the nice buck I was lucky



(L to R): Here I am with my son, Bob McCartney, and my very good friend Mark Kruse.

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A LONG TIME COMING!

enough to have killed this past year are the only two that any of us have been up close and personal with. It seems like we have a few 140-inch bucks, but very rarely do we see any of them make it to 150 or better. I don't know what it is that keeps us from producing that next step up. We seem to have increasing numbers of out-of-state hunters coming in for other seasons, but I'm just not sure that is the biggest contributing factor because we see a few real monsters from other parts of the state where there's increased hunting pressure as well. Personally, I feel like our overall numbers and quality are down from the good old days. With that said, I don't have any plans of slowing down. I'll be chasing whitetails for as long as I'm physically able to do so. **BH**

The author lives in Gorham, KS, with his wife, Mary, who also bowhunts.

Author's Note: On this hunt, I was using a New Breed BX32 bow with a Ripcord rest, an IQ Bowsight, and Black Eagle Outlaw arrows tipped with 125-grain Magnus Stinger Buzzcut broadheads.

A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR:

Just a little about myself. If my memory serves me correctly, I've been bowhunting for 49 years. In 1990, I was hurt in an electrical accident that caused the loss of my right arm and my left index finger, and required many skin grafts over my body.

I was fortunate enough to be a founding member of the PCBA and served as its President for 13 years. I am also very proud to have served as President of the Kansas Bowhunters Association for two terms. One of my proudest achievements in bowhunting was to be selected as one of the "45 Unforgettable Bowhunters," a book which was written by **Bowhunter** Founder M. R. James.

Earlier in this article, I wrote about how I shoot a bow. I have a nylon tab attached to the bowstring, and I bite down on this tab with the molars on the right side of my mouth and just push out on the bow to get it to full

draw. When I'm ready to shoot, I just open my mouth to release the arrow. It is not nearly as hard to do as it sounds. My bow is set at 72 pounds.

I have been fortunate enough to help hundreds of people learn to shoot a bow this way. I even got my good friend, the late Dwight Schuh, shooting with a mouth tab when he had rotator cuff surgery. He actually was so good at it that he shot a musk ox and a moose that year. I teased Dwight that he took all the thunder from the rest of us one-armed bowhunters.

One accomplishment I'm most proud of, or I should say honored by, is to see my wife, Mary, and our two sons, Boyd and Bob, deeply involved in bowhunting. Mary has been fortunate enough to have taken several species of animals with a bow. And Boyd and Bob appear regularly on the "American Archer" TV show with our good friend Tom Nelson.



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Outdoor

SCHEDULE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

A Memorab FAL

THIS WISCONSIN BOWHUNTER had high hopes for the '22 bow season. Having drawn both a Wyoming mule deer tag and a Montana elk tag, I headed out west on August 27 to prepare for the September 1 opener. But when we arrived in Wyoming, we were met with temps near 100 degrees, and the weather outlook called for more of the same — not the best hunting weather, to say the least. While we hunted hard over the next 10 days, we couldn't find any mature bucks; only small bucks and does, and a lot of moose.





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WHEN THE SEASON'S
FIRST HALF DOESN'T
GO AS PLANNED, ALL
YOU NEED TO DO IS
MAKE HALFTIME
ADJUSTMENTS.

This Illinois buck, the first mentioned in this story, was one I didn't even know existed until my camera told me he did.

By SCOTT MCILVOY

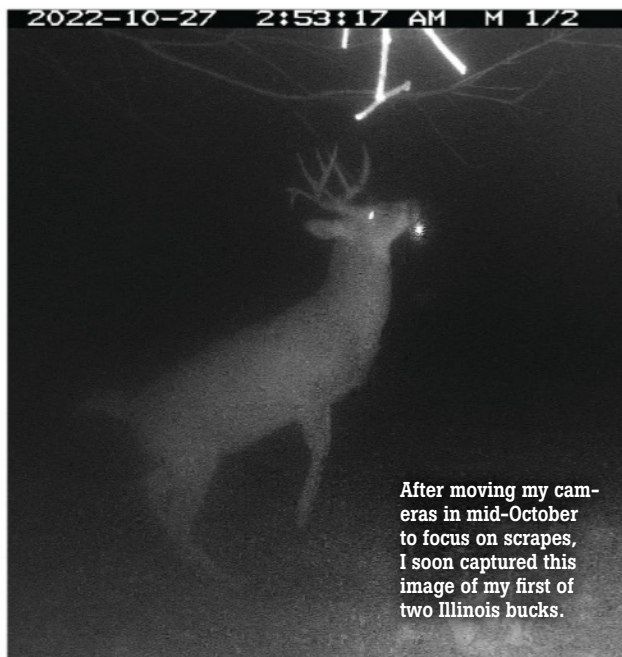
A Memorable Fall

So, we shifted gears and headed for Montana in hopes of getting into the elk. But the high temperatures followed us to Big Sky Country — the day we arrived it was 93 degrees and extremely dry. We unpacked everything and decided to make a quick scouting trip before dark. But we hadn't been on the mountain for more than an hour when we caught the first glimpse of smoke rolling in from our north. The air remained smoked-filled the entire time, and temperatures remained in the 90s. After seeing very few elk, we headed home feeling like our season was literally going up in smoke!

Once back in the Midwest, and with two deer tags in my pocket — and a bonus turkey tag — I repacked, refocused, and then headed for my “home away from home” in central Illinois.

When I pulled several trail-camera cards and noticed a large flock of turkeys with a couple toms traveling by one of my Redneck blinds, I decided my first sit, the morning of October 6, would be in that blind with hopes of shooting a Thanksgiving turkey — if the deer hunting was slow.

Sure enough, around 7:30 a.m., a flock of turkeys came by, so I picked out one gobbler and then put an Easton FMJ arrow through him. He ran 30 yards and tipped over. As I slung the



turkey over my shoulder and headed for the truck, I was thinking that the second half of my season already was better than the first. But the warm and windy weather slowed down the deer activity until later in the month.

By mid-October, I began moving cameras over scrapes to start taking inventory. I found a new scrape on October 23 that was being used regularly, so I put a camera on it to see what I'd find. On the morning of October 27, I stopped by the scrape to pull the camera card and noticed a very large track with what appeared to be chunks missing out of the hooves. I couldn't get home fast enough to see the animal that had made those tracks.

As I looked through the photos, I spotted the deer. It was a huge buck that made the rest of the deer in the photos look small — and he was a buck I'd never seen before. He had a unique flyer coming off his G-2, and he was in the scrape three different times that night. The last time he was in the scrape was at 6:30 a.m. Hopefully, I could use that to my advantage. Since he was visiting the scrape in the morning, I figured he was bedded somewhere nearby. The wind would be perfect for a treestand I'd set up between the presumed bedding area and the scrape.

That afternoon, I was in my stand by 2:30 p.m. By 3:15, I already was seeing deer, but mostly does and small bucks. Then, at 5:25 p.m., I heard a stick break. When I looked in that direction, I immediately recognized the buck from the photos. The first thing I noticed was his size, with legs that looked like they were only about 12 inches long because his body was so big.

I needed to turn around slightly, which was tricky because I didn't want to startle any of the other deer around me. When I finally eased into position, the big buck was facing me at 17 yards. For several minutes he stood perfectly still, but then he turned broadside. I was ready, and I quickly sent an arrow that sliced through his heart. The buck immediately charged off about 40 yards, but then he tipped over and rolled down a steep ravine, all the way to the bottom.

I waited roughly 15 minutes before getting down and heading for the ravine where I knew he'd crashed. The buck was even bigger than I'd originally thought, and I immediately looked at his hooves. Sure enough, there were chunks missing from both



With a turkey tag in my pocket, deer movement still questionable, and Thanksgiving approaching, I made the most of an opportunity.

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A Memorable Fall

of his hooves, confirming that it was his tracks I'd seen in the scrape.

I needed help moving this big boy, so I excitedly called a couple of friends. Thanks to their help, and a four-wheeler with a winch, we were able to get the deer loaded up and out of the woods. We had decided not to field-dress him so we could get an accurate live weight when we got back to my friend's shop. The scale doesn't lie, and at 310 lbs., the buck proved to be a true giant. A smile crossed my face as I marveled over the big buck



Scales don't lie. This photo shows the live weight of my first of two Illinois bucks.



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This photo confirms that my first Illinois buck was the one that left his track in the scrape.

and how a season can turn around in the blink of an eye — and I still had another tag!

In early November, the forecast showed a big warmup with strong south winds coming in, so I decided to take care of a few projects and just



I finished my season strong by filling my second Illinois buck tag with this big buck.

keep checking cameras. My plan was to get back on stand once the weather cooled. I had a bedding area in mind that required a north wind to hunt it correctly, and I was just waiting for the opportunity.

On November 7, the winds finally shifted, so I quickly made plans to hunt my new stand setup. I thought the bucks might be checking the bedding area for does, as the rut was heating up. When I walked out of the house to head to my tree, I thought about what a perfect morning it was, with a good frost on the ground and just a light wind.

It was dark as I settled into my stand, but shortly after daylight, I began seeing some young bucks and does. Then, a nice four-year-old buck came in from my right. I watched him and thought what a nice deer he'd be next year.

Suddenly, a grunt sounded just over my left shoulder, and I immediately knew this buck was a shooter. He walked directly below my stand a couple yards from my tree, and I waited for him to move away for a better shot angle. My Hoyt was at full draw when the buck came into an opening about seven yards

from my tree, and my shot was perfect. The buck ran off but tumbled less than 50 yards away. After a few minutes, I climbed down. Everything had happened so fast, I wasn't sure what I'd find. But as I checked the deer over, I quickly recognized him as a buck I'd passed up two years earlier. At that time, I'd thought if he made it just one more year he'd be a good deer, but two added years made him even better!

As I stood over my second mature whitetail and reflected on how my season ended up, I just had to shake my head. Early on, I thought my '22 season was

going up in smoke, but the second half proved it to be a season to remember. **BH**

The author is a longtime friend of Bowhunter Magazine & TV and hails from Oxford, Wisconsin.

Author's Note: My equipment on this hunt included a Hoyt RX-5 bow outfitted with a Hoyt Ultrarest, Spot Hogg sight, and a Fuse stabilizer and quiver. I shot Easton FMJ arrows tipped with Rage Hypodermic broadheads. Other gear notables include SIG SAUER optics, an HSS full-body harness and lifeline, and clothing from Browning.

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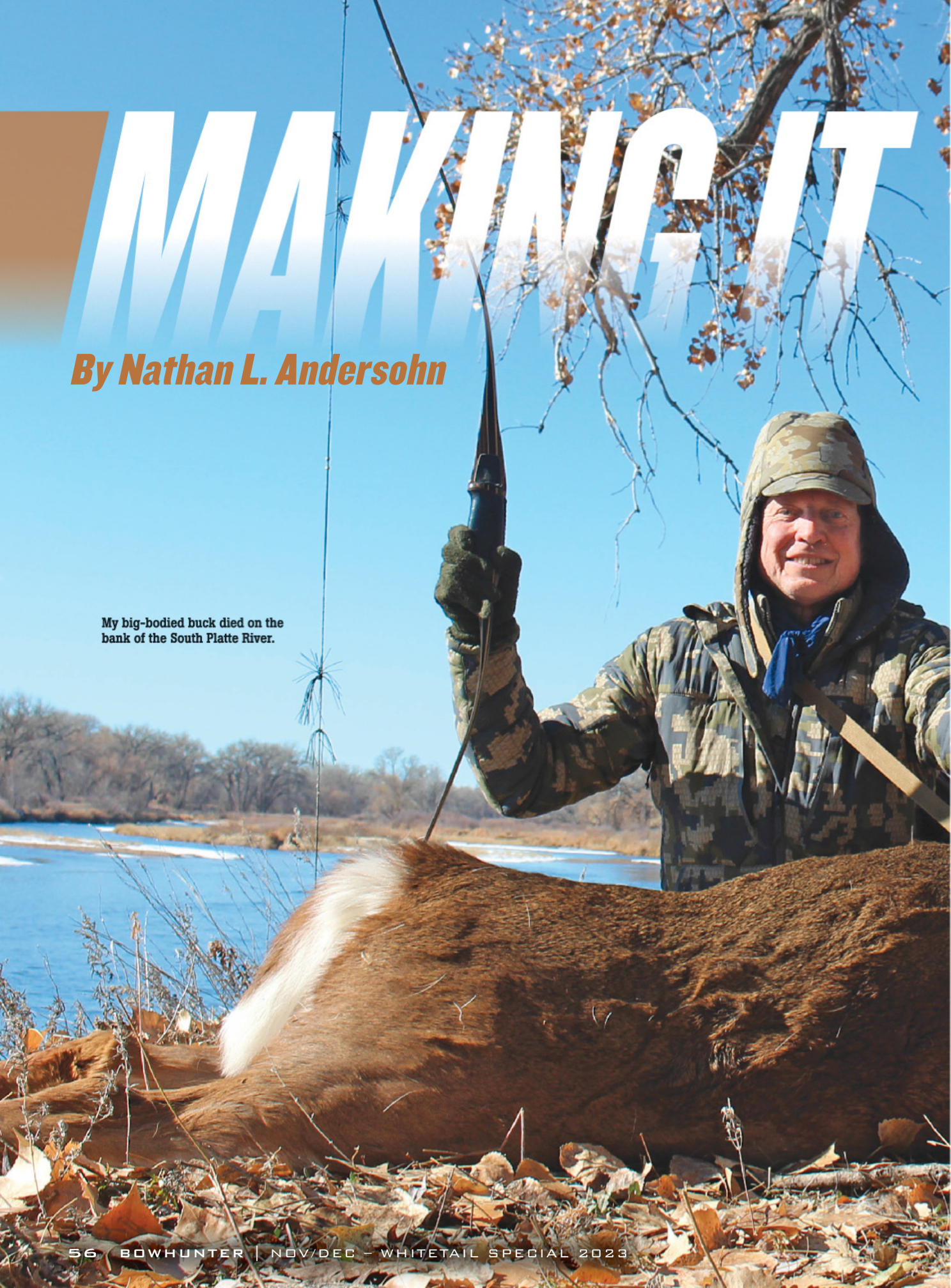


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MAKING IT

By Nathan L. Andersohn

My big-bodied buck died on the bank of the South Platte River.

HAPPEN!!!

**CALLING TO RUTTING
WHITETAIL BUCKS
DOESN'T ALWAYS WORK,
BUT IT'S AWESOME
WHEN IT DOES!**

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Three bucks meandering down trails bordering the bedding area had passed within 20 yards of my perch atop the ladder stand, all within five minutes. The sun in the west shined above the horizon, 30 minutes prior to sunset, as I scanned the riverbottom brush for bucks. Movement north of a slow-moving, cattail-choked creek, caught my eye. The huge-bodied buck moved steadily along the edge of a mowed field, surely in search of does on this chilly evening in late November.

I blew a doe bleat call, followed by a grunt. With no indication of the buck hearing me, I increased the volume of the next two grunts. At 200 yards and with a breeze rustling the plentiful cottonwood leaves, I doubted he could even hear me. Then he stopped and looked in my direction. I blew another grunt, waited 20 seconds, and then blew another. He turned and started walking toward me. Pushing through cattails and dropping into the crotch-deep stream, he disappeared behind the creekbank. I quickly scooted to the edge of my seat, lifted my longbow from its hook, and mentally prepared for the coming action. He climbed over the dirt bank with his 4x4 rack held high, extending well past his ears, and with heavy bases. My heart pounded — it was a shooter!



Ending up on the far side of the river required the use of a canoe to transport the meat, antlers, and my gear.

Like many bowhunters heading to the woods in November, it's rare when I don't have a grunt call handy. When I was a novice, I tried just about everything to up the odds: Rattling horns (fake and real), deer scents of every brand, and numerous styles of calls. I had enough early success with calls that I kept at it. The deer weren't exactly running me over, but a few showed some interest.

Enough of my bowhunting buddies were reporting action as a result of grunting, that I knew I was onto something. It started out pretty intimidating: between my pounding heart and rushing adrenaline at the sight of a big buck, it was hard for me to confidently blow a decent-sounding grunt. Since a majority of the bucks I called to didn't initially respond, self-doubt raised the issue that maybe I wasn't doing it right. Too soft, too loud, too long a grunt, or maybe not long enough? Should it be deeper and raspier, or softer and cleaner? Everybody wants a quick-fix, easy answer that produces immediate results. Calling deer isn't a science. There isn't a perfect call that works every time. There are endless reasons for calling to fail.

The purpose of using a grunt call is to imitate the sound a buck makes when he is pursuing a hot doe. Theoretically, this sound will make a lonely buck come to investigate what's doing. The buck a hunter tries to call to may not be lonely; he may be on the trail of a doe. The lone buck may have just bred a doe, he might be thirsty or hungry, or just too tired to even give a rip about what he heard.

Another obvious issue is that rushing in on another buck's girl might result in a rumble with a pissed-off adversary. That may be worth the risk early in the rut, but later in November, the busted racks, cuts, and scars observed on rutting bucks reminds hunters that half the deer are losing fights. After several butt-kickings, many bucks would



This buck was searching hard for receptive does.



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MAKING IT HAPPEN

prefer to avoid other rutting bucks. There are passive rutting bucks — think big, perfect racks on December 1. One way to not get busted up is to use caution before charge in on another buck and his loving girlfriend.

Sound is a huge issue. Not every hunter is a good singer or has perfect hearing. Likewise, not every hunter is capable of delivering the perfect call in a sequence that a buck finds believable. Another factor during the rut in the northern half of the U.S., is the ground

is covered in leaves. A buck plowing through four inches of oak leaves probably couldn't hear a car door shut at 50 yards. A stiff wind in the woods may be noisier yet. Timing is everything; when a buck pauses, it's time to let loose with a grunt.

The number-one reason that bucks don't come to a grunt call is that the hunter is in a treestand or ground blind in an open area with little ground cover. The buck hears the grunt, looks toward the sound, sees nothing, and keeps on

going. Sticking with the theory that a buck in the rut is interested in a hot doe, upon hearing the grunt, said buck expects to see deer. The best setup is to call from a blind or treestand located in a thick, nasty tangle of brush. Another angle is to use a decoy, which gives the buck visual confirmation of what he is hearing.

After several years of hunting the rut, I heard a buck grunting as he chased a doe. Finally, I heard a noise that I could try to replicate. Once I heard the real thing, my calling confidence increased. After several more encounters with the real thing, I learned that not all bucks grunt the same way; however, there is a pattern of grunts all rutting bucks make when on a hot doe.

I started blowing three deep grunts, spaced 10–20 seconds apart. The volume varied, based on my perception of the distance and the external factors of wind and leaves. Once a deer indicated it heard my grunt, I'd shut up — but I'd keep the call on my lips. If a buck turned his head toward me, I'd lock up and not move a muscle. A deer can see any movement at 150 yards. If a buck turns away, I immediately call again. If that doesn't work, I quit grunting. If the buck starts in my direction, I go crickets. The buck knows exactly where I am, and there is no benefit to continuing to play a broken record.

A few years ago I started throwing a doe bleat call into my calling mix. I figured if the buck is looking for a doe, a bleat couldn't hurt. That year, on a mid-November day, I had two different bucks come my way in response to my bleat call followed by three grunt calls.

The first buck was walking along the edge of a picked cornfield. He skidded to a stop at the bleat call, and then came on running after two grunts. He was a year or two younger than I wanted, and the young buck got a pass as he milled around under my ladder stand.

The second buck was a monster I saw back in the trees at 150 yards. The creekbottom, with its uneven ground and big cottonwood trees, blocked my view. I blindly did my series of calls, without the benefit of being able to observe his reaction. Through a mental lapse, I gave up and sat down in the stand just when the big guy popped out close, and I spooked him.

Calling blind is necessary if a hunter only catches a glimpse of a good buck in thick cover or in hilly terrain. When doing this, it's imperative to be ready



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for action. Make sure you have an arrow nocked and your bow in hand after calling, and make sure you are in a good position to shoot if an opportunity presents itself.

I don't think there is a downside to attempting to call to a buck that's obviously not going to pass by within range. As long as a hunter is well concealed and not moving, I don't think a grunt call will spook a buck.

The reality is that most bucks will act as if they cannot hear the call and just keep doing whatever they're doing. The majority of deer that stop and look in the direction of the caller will then keep on walking without changing direction. However, just like in the movie "Dumb And Dumber," when Mary tells Lloyd that there's a one in a million chance they'll end up together, Lloyd pauses and says, "So you're telling me there's a chance." Be like Lloyd!

One of the keys to success is to have a grunt tube handy. Calling opportunities are oftentimes brief moments. A call buried in the bottom of your pack isn't going to do you much good in the heat of the moment.

Back to my 2022 hunt. The buck was closing in, and I was in the scenario of when to shoot. Just like calling in elk, it was all happening fast, but patience had to trump excitement.

At 25 yards, he turned almost broadside while following a trail through the willow brush. I fought the urge to shoot — no reason to rush when he was still coming. Again, like elk hunting, he was walking toward me, and frontal shots aren't the way to go.

Now, things were really amping up. My bow, with a nocked arrow, was pointing right at him, and my shooting fingers were on the string. I made several slight adjustments of my shoulders as first he turned right, and then to his left.

Hours earlier, I had snapped off several small branches in a willow tree next to me, to create a hole through which I could shoot the trail to my right at nine yards. The advanced preparation paid big dividends when the buck turned on the trail and his shoulder appeared in the cleared shooting lane.

My longbow's limbs arced with ease as I drew while staying focused on the center of his ribs. The feathered fletchings on my arrow streaked forward and were instantly visible on his rib cage. He turned to run, and I saw my three-blade broadhead poking out the buck's far side — a bit low.

The buck ran 50 yards in a panic, stopped, and looked back in my direction. He wobbled, then walked briskly through some seven-foot-high cane and disappeared out of sight at 100 yards. With 30 minutes of light left before darkness would engulf the riverbottom, I decided it was a single-lung hit and silently left the area. Aside from not sleeping well, it was the right call. With temperatures dropping to 10 degrees Fahrenheit overnight, the meat was just fine the following morning when I recovered him.

I doubt that I will hit the woods in November without a grunt call for many

years. You never know when you might have a chance. **BH**

The author is the only bowhunter to complete an archery Super Slam with a longbow. He practices real estate and probate law in Broomfield, Colorado.

Author's Note:

My equipment included a 47# ACS longbow (stalkerstickbows.com), Carbon Express Heritage 150 arrows, Razorcap broadheads, clothing from KUIU and King of the Mountain, Muck boots, and an Extinguisher deer call.

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COUNTLESS HOURS AFIELD, AN UNDERSTANDING WIFE,
AND A BIT OF GOOD FORTUNE RESULT IN TWO BIG BUCKS.

THIS WAS my second trip to the ranch. On the first trip, we set up six ground blinds, two tree-stands, and numerous trail cameras on tanks that we suspected held big bucks. We did this in hopes that the deer would get used to the blinds and come in close enough to ensure a high-percentage shot when we came back in January, which was now.

In spite of that, here I was sitting in a blind that we popped up just yesterday afternoon, right after we arrived on the ranch for an eight-day hunt. That's the beauty of trail cameras. Even though we thought this tank was too large to hunt effectively, we found that some big bucks were drinking on one end of the tank, and I was going to sit there for the day to see if I could get a shot. Little did I know how soon that would happen...

By **JIM WILLEMS**

QUEST



This heavy-horned eight-point was exactly what I spent 15 years trying to find!

THE QUEST

My quest to find a world-class Coues buck began 15 years ago, and now I was on my sixth different Sonoran ranch, hoping this one would be the ticket. When my friend, Mike Lutt, called me seven months ago and said he had found a ranch that he thought was worth hunting, I jumped at the chance.

Supposedly, this ranch had not been hunted for eight years, which sounded too good to be true. My last two ranches had not panned out, so this place seemed as good as any for me to try once again to achieve my goal of taking a top-shelf Coues buck. I accept that committing to a ranch, sight unseen, is no more than a crapshoot, but I was willing to keep trying, knowing that eventually I would find THE spot. After all, resilience is the precursor to luck, and I have been blessed with plenty of both over the years. You also have to accept that you are dealing with people who intend to profit from you and your fellow hunters. Sometimes you get what was promised; sometimes, not so much.

The good news was that this ranch was easier to get to than any other ranch I had hunted. In the past, I relied on oth-

er people's intel and showed up on the scheduled hunt dates. That only worked well when I was returning to a ranch that I had hunted before. Based on past experience, I was determined to make the best of this property, and the only way to do that was to take the time and expense to scout the property ahead of time.

I hunt a lot, but I also spend considerable amounts of time looking for good hunts. I've been blessed to find some great spots — both private and public — that have resulted in many once-in-a-lifetime experiences. I'm not sure how many said experiences one person is allowed, but I hope to have a few more during my lifetime.

If this ranch had top-quality bucks on it, the only way to make the best of it was for me to invest the time to make it pay off, which is why Mike and I planned a one-week scouting trip for mid-December. I live about 800 miles from the ranch, so I planned to drive from home, pick up Mike at the airport in Phoenix, Arizona, and then cross the border the next day — loaded with blinds, stands, and supplies.

SCOUTING

Mike and I had several goals we hoped to accomplish in December. The first was to get a good look at the ranch to deter-

mine what was there. We also wanted to prepare for our January hunt by setting up blinds and stands on what looked like the best spots. Without trail-camera intel, we had to rely on tracks and gut instinct. Mostly, we set our ambush sites on the smaller tanks, with the primary focus on those spots that had fewer cattle.

Once we had our blinds, treestands, and cameras set up, we decided to hunt our last two days of this trip.

On the first day, Mike shot a 5x6 that was over 100 inches, and I missed a big eight-point that bolted as I shot. Did I mention that these spooky little deer are not easy to kill? Aside from my miss, we were off to a great start.

The ranch was large enough to facilitate up to four hunters, so we convinced fellow Pope and Young Club members John Borlang and Bob Ameen to join us for eight full days of hunting, starting mid-January. Once again, I would drive, bringing two ATVs as well as more blinds and stands, and the rest of the group would fly.

Mike arrived a day before everyone else, but unfortunately, the bag containing his bow wasn't there when he landed. Since Mike couldn't hunt until his bow arrived, he spent a full day checking cameras and scouting more spots. John

It always helps to be afield during the rut — for obvious reasons. Inset: When you find the right spot and have good conditions, you can pass up bucks like this one.





Ground blinds are essential, but it's hard to beat a treestand for Coues deer, which aren't normally used to danger from above.

and I arrived just after noon, and we spent the rest of the day putting up more blinds and a tripod stand based on new information. We had pictures of some really good bucks — at least one at every tank — and we were ready to get serious about the hunt.

... So, there I was, sitting in one of the aforementioned blinds from earlier in my story. We had brushed it in well, but even that doesn't mean the deer won't be leery of something new in their environment and drink as far away from the "new thing" as they can. If that proved to be the case, I was looking at a 50-yard shot and one that I wouldn't take with my trusty old Bighorn recurve.

One waterhole-hunting tidbit that I've learned over the years is when a dirt tank is drying up and getting low, most of the surrounding area is still muddy. Deer and antelope don't like this one bit, and they will try to find a place with firmer footing from which to drink. So, I covered the farthest hard-packed spot with cut branches and was hoping that the closer ones, one at 38 yards and one at 26, would be where they chose to drink.

My first morning in the blind yielded decent activity. I saw a few small bucks, multiple does and fawns, and two bucks that would probably measure in the mid to high 80s — P&Y minimum for Coues deer is 70 inches.

Bucks in that 85 to 90-inch range are hard to pass up. But I knew this was going to be a great hunt, so I vowed to hold out for something really special.

Sure enough, about 11:30 a.m., a big buck headed toward the tank right in front of me. A quick look through my binos told me which buck it was based on scouting intel, and that he was most likely going to drink at the 38-yard spot.

That's a long shot for me, especially on deer that tend to no longer be where you want them to be by the time your arrow gets there. With that in mind, I aimed low behind the buck's shoulder. The shot felt good, and my first thought was maybe a little low. But as the buck turned to run, I could see blood gushing out both of his sides, and I soon watched the heavy, Boone and Crockett-class eight-pointer drop within 30 yards.

Licensing in Mexico is different than in the states. A ranch owner applies for and purchases tags depending on the size of the ranch and available habitat. This ranch had five Coues tags and there were four of us hunting, so there was an extra tag.

It rained most of the next day, so hunting was a bit slow for a while. Once the rain stopped and the warm temps dried things out, the hunting returned to normal. John shot a great eight-point, Mike killed a solid muley buck, and Bob shot his own good eight-pointer.

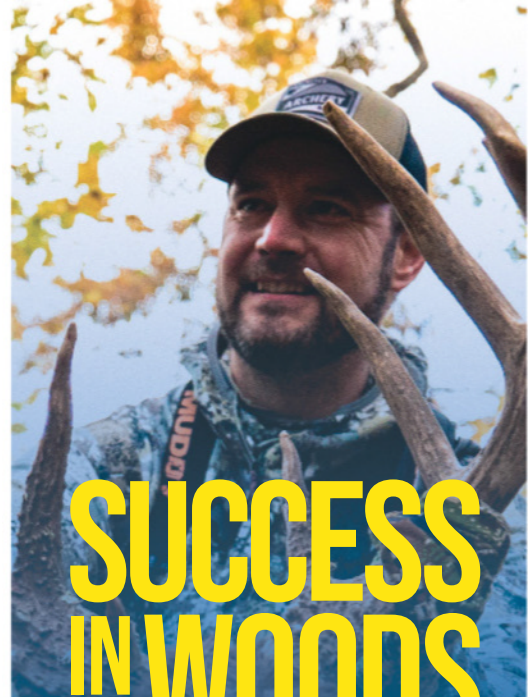
Toward the end of our eight-day hunt, I was still hoping to fill that last tag.

On that final day, I saw a big 10-point buck, but didn't get a shot. Mike had already left, and Bob and John were scheduled to leave early the next day. I was their transportation, which meant I had to leave as well.

As I was driving back to Phoenix to drop John off, something in my gut told me I needed to go back for one more try at the big 10-pointer. I knew my wife wouldn't be happy with my change in plans, but I figured by now she was *hopefully* used to my obsession — or maybe she just wanted a few more days of peace and quiet. She told me to get back down there and get the job done, so I could come home happy if things worked out the way I hoped they would. Never one to argue with my wife, I found myself back on the ranch two days later.

I was going to give it another four days, with my focus solely on that 10-point.

Sure enough, he came to water at 9:30 a.m. the next day. This time, he watered broadside at 26 yards, and I concentrated on the shot.



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When I didn't get a shot at this buck on the first hunt, I vowed to return. Persistence is often more important than luck.

The buck whirled at the shot, but my arrow centered his spine — dropping him where he stood. I had taken two B&C-class Coues bucks on the same hunt, and I was ecstatic!

Sometimes, we make things look easier than they truly are. All told, it took me a total of 23 days, including travel, three border crossings, 4,200 miles of driving, and lots of planning and scheming for me to accomplish what I did.

Remember what I said about resilience? **BH**

The author, a former president of the Pope and Young Club, is an avowed traditional bowhunter who lives in New Mexico.

Author's Note:

On this hunt, I used my trusty old 56-inch, 52-pound Bighorn takedown recurve, Thunderhorn quiver, and handmade cedar arrows tipped with old Bear Razorhead broadheads. My optics were Leica's 10x42 rangefinding bins. My blind was the Barronett Big Mike, because its height is perfect for recurve shooters like me. My clothing consisted of Denim-style pants and cotton shirts.

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Popular CoQ10 Pills Leave Millions Suffering

Could this newly-discovered brain fuel solve America's worsening memory crisis?

PALM BEACH, FLORIDA — Millions of Americans take the supplement known as CoQ10. It's the coenzyme that supercharges the "energy factories" in your cells known as *mitochondria*. But there's a serious flaw that's leaving millions unsatisfied.

As you age, your mitochondria break down and fail to produce energy. In a revealing study, a team of researchers showed that 95 percent of the mitochondria in a 90-year-old man were damaged, compared to almost no damage in the mitochondria of a 5-year-old.

Taking CoQ10 alone is not enough to solve this problem. Because as powerful as CoQ10 is, there's one critical thing it fails to do: it can't create new mitochondria to replace the ones you lost.

And that's bad news for Americans all over the country. The loss of cellular energy is a problem for the memory concerns people face as they get older.

"We had no way of replacing lost mitochondria until a recent discovery changed everything," says Dr. Al Sears, founder and medical director of the Sears Institute for Anti-Aging Medicine in Palm Beach, Florida. "Researchers discovered the only nutrient known to modern science that has the power to trigger the growth of new mitochondria."

Why Taking CoQ10 is Not Enough

Dr. Sears explains, "This new discovery is so powerful, it can multiply your mitochondria by 55 percent in just a few weeks. That's the equivalent of restoring decades of lost brain power."

This exciting nutrient — called PQQ (*pyrroloquinoline quinone*) — is the driving force behind a revolution in aging. When paired with CoQ10, this dynamic duo has the power to reverse the age-related memory losses you may have thought were beyond your control.

Dr. Sears pioneered a new formula — called **Ultra Accel II** — that combines both CoQ10 and PQQ to support maximum cellular energy and the normal growth of new mitochondria. **Ultra Accel II** is the first of its kind to address both problems and is already creating huge demand.

Over 47 million doses have been shipped to men and women across the country and sales continue to climb for this much sought-after brain fuel. In fact, demand has been so overwhelming that inventories repeatedly sell out. But a closer look at **Ultra Accel II** reveals there are good reasons why sales are booming.

Science CPnirms the Many Benefits Pf PQQ

The medical journal *Biochemical Pharmacology* reports that PQQ is up to 5,000 times more efficient in sustaining energy production than common antioxidants. With the ability to keep every cell in your body operating at full strength, **Ultra Accel II** delivers more than just added brain power and a faster memory.

People feel more energetic, more alert, and don't need naps in the afternoon. The boost in cellular energy generates more power to your heart, lungs, muscles, and more.

"With the PQQ in Ultra Accel, I have energy I never thought possible at my age," says Colleen R., one of Dr. Sears's patients. "I'm in my 70s but feel 40 again. I think clearly, move with real energy and sleep like a baby."

The response has been overwhelmingly positive, and Dr. Sears receives countless emails from his patients and readers. "My patients tell me they feel better than they have in years. This is ideal for people who are feeling old and run down, or for those who feel more forgetful. It surprises many that you can add healthy and productive years to your life simply by taking **Ultra Accel II** every day."

You may have seen Dr. Sears on television or read one of his 12 best-selling books. Or you may have seen him speak at the 2016 WPBF 25 Health and Wellness Festival in South Florida, featuring Dr. Oz and special guest Suzanne Somers. Thousands of people attended Dr. Sears's lecture on anti-aging breakthroughs and waited in line for hours during his book signing at the event.

Will Ultra Accel II Multiply Your Energy?

Ultra Accel II is turning everything we thought we knew about youthful energy on its head. Especially for people over age 50. In less than 30 seconds every morning, you can harness the power of this breakthrough discovery to restore peak energy and your "spark for life."

So, if you've noticed less energy as you've gotten older, and you want an easy way to reclaim your youthful edge, this new opportunity will feel like blessed relief.

The secret is the "energy multiplying" molecule that activates a dormant gene in your body that declines with age, which then instructs your cells to pump out fresh energy from the inside-out. This growth of new "energy factories" in your cells is



MEMORY-BUILDING SENSATION: Top doctors are now recommending new **Ultra Accel II** because it restores decades of lost brain power without a doctor's visit.

called mitochondrial biogenesis.

Instead of falling victim to that afternoon slump, you enjoy sharp-as-a-tack focus, memory, and concentration from sunup to sundown. And you get more done in a day than most do in a week. Regardless of how exhausting the world is now.

Dr. Sears reports, "The most rewarding aspect of practicing medicine is watching my patients get the joy back in their lives. **Ultra Accel II** sends a wake-up call to every cell in their bodies... And they actually feel young again."

And his patients agree. "I noticed a difference within a few days," says Jerry from Ft. Pierce, Florida. "My endurance has almost doubled, and I feel it mentally, too. There's a clarity and sense of well-being in my life that I've never experienced before."

How To Get Ultra Accel II

This is the official nationwide release of **Ultra Accel II** in the United States. And so, the company is offering a special discount supply to anyone who calls during the official launch.

An Order Hotline has been set up for local readers to call. This gives everyone an equal chance to try **Ultra Accel II**. And your order is backed up by a no-hassle, 90-day money back guarantee. No questions asked.

Starting at 7:00 AM today, the discount offer will be available for a limited time only. All you have to do is call TOLL FREE **1-800-714-1368** right now and use promo code **UABH1023** to secure your own supply.

ImpPrtant: Due to **Ultra Accel II** recent media exposure, phone lines are often busy. If you call and do not immediately get through, please be patient and call back.

BH WHERE TO GO/MARKETPLACE

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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 (in italics). Check out our pages for future questions and other content.

The moon plays a part in everything on our planet, but it isn't the be-all and end-all with whitetails.

Q DOES THE MOON PHASE matter during the rut?

A Yes, it does. When the moon is full, deer don't move a lot in the daylight. I started hunting by the Moon Chart, and I'm a believer in it. (Gregory Stanton, Facebook)

Sometimes you have to follow the "science of your eyes" when it comes to hunting. The science may contradict what you are witnessing in the field, but you must follow your gut. If something is working for you and you're objective about what is happening, then go with it. Confidence is everything.

A No. When they're rutting, they're rutting. (Bill Travis Crites, Facebook)

Bill makes a great point here. The gestation period of whitetails is fixed at around 200 days. In northern latitudes, fawns must be born in early June to grow large enough to survive the winter. That puts the peak of the breeding activity in early to mid-November. In other words: It's happening, regardless of the moon phase.

A Every tracking-collar study I've read has proven the moon phases to have zero effect. (nomansland4404, Instagram)

This is where science clashes with per-

ception. Many a deer hunter has cursed the full moon during November — even to the point of avoiding it when choosing hunt dates. Many outfitters also despise the full moon but avoid speculation, because they have to book clients every week in November — regardless of the moon. This goes back to the fact that the rut is on every year at the same time — give or take a few days — so all you can do is keep hunting.

A I believe moon phase does play a roll, especially when paired with the warmer temperatures during that time. Last season, when it was a full moon through peak rut with 50-degree midday temperatures, there was a lot of activity at night on my cameras with bucks chasing and hitting scrapes. I watched two bucks come back to bed early morning and stay bedded until midday. Years when there wasn't a full moon, there would be a lot more activity in the morning, and that would carry on into the midday hours. I think a buck prefers to do his chasing in the moonlight when it's cooler, so in my experience, it 100% does play a roll. (___troy_lusk___, Instagram)

A lot of factors determine what could be

called the "apparent" rut. Rest assured that breeding is taking place in November, but it is only apparent if it takes place in the daylight — when we are hunting. As mentioned, warm weather and a bright moon may cause a buck to move nocturnally, leaving bowhunters wondering why the deer aren't rutting. Or, if the rutting action is taking place elsewhere, the moon gets the blame.

A No. Multiple deer studies show that the amount of daylight is what triggers deer movements throughout the year. During the rut, bucks are on their feet 16 hours a day, no matter what. The reason people might stop seeing a specific buck during this timeframe is because their home range rapidly expands to find hot does. (Theeverydaybowhunter, Instagram)

Photoperiodism is a major biological trigger for most wildlife. It is also what triggers a doe to go into estrus in November. Every bowhunter will agree that if a hot doe is nearby, you'd better be ready for what happens next. All the more reason to make sure you're in a tree or blind. You can cuss at the moon all you want, but the best advice is to hunt hard. **BH**

AUTHOR'S PHOTO



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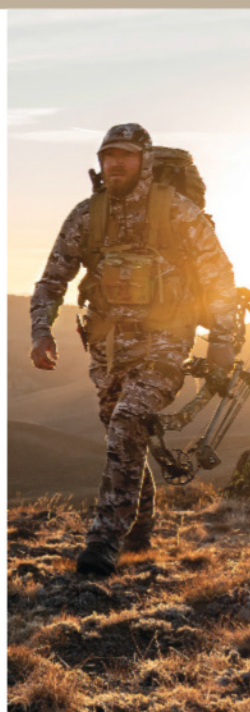
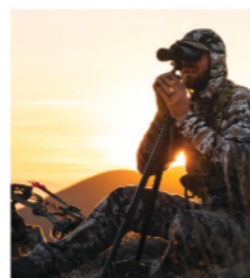
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