

THE **LAND-MANAGEMENT** ISSUE

PETERSEN'S BOWHUNTING

The Modern Bowhunting Magazine

May 2022

PLOT YOUR SUCCESS!

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PLANTING SYSTEM p.22

HABITAT HACKS

4 PROJECTS GUARANTEED
TO DRAW DEER IN

TWICE AS NICE

PULL DOUBLE DUTY FOR
BUCKS AND GOBBLERS
THIS SPRING

ESSENTIAL

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IS OWNING "DEER DIRT" WORTH IT?

BOW TESTS

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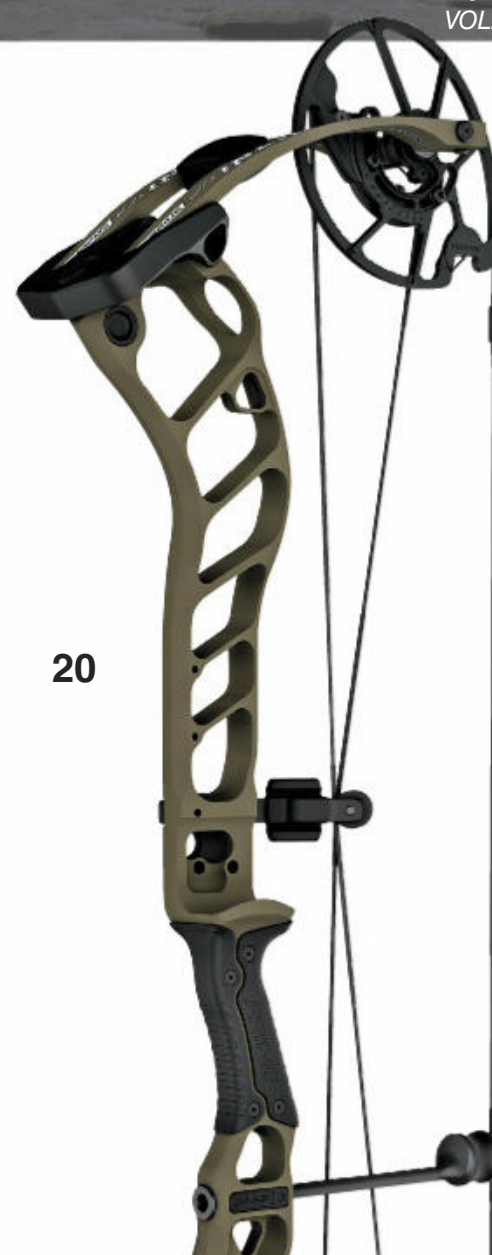


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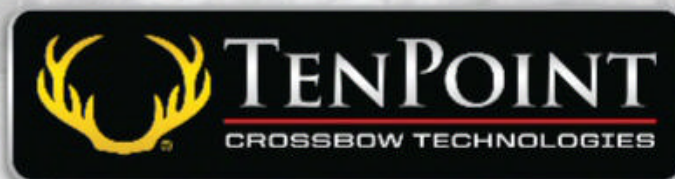
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By **CHRISTIAN BERG**

FIRST SHOT

IT'S THE HABITAT, STUPID!

BACK IN THE SUMMER of 1992, U.S. unemployment stood at 8 percent and the economy was on the verge of slipping into recession. The timing couldn't have been worse for then-President George H.W. Bush, who that November lost his re-election bid to a young, energetic Democratic governor from Arkansas named Bill Clinton.

During the runup to Election Day, Clinton strategist James Carville coined a phrase that has become one of the most repeated political axioms of the past 30 years. That's because

the truth of Carville's observation — "It's the economy, stupid!" — simply can't be denied. No matter what other issues may be debated on the campaign trail, people will always vote with their pocketbooks. Generally speaking, that means electoral victory for incumbent Presidents who preside over financial prosperity and defeat for those who do not.

As a whitetail bowhunting fanatic, I often think of a slightly altered version of Carville's phrase when evaluating potential hunting areas: "It's the habitat, stupid!" You see, as surely as voters support the candidate they believe is best for their bank accounts, deer will concentrate on properties that offer the habitat that best meets their needs.

Think about it; in winter, a field of standing corn or soybeans has the power to draw hungry whitetails from miles around, just as a reliable water source can do during summer droughts. As a bowhunter, I can tell you the best properties offer enough habitat diversity to attract and hold deer year-round. Doing that means

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

Editor Christian Berg, right, and David Forbes pose with the Missouri buck Berg took on Forbes' farm in October 2009. As you can see from the turnips growing in the background, the property is a whitetail paradise with second-to-none habitat quality.



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not only having enough food to keep deer fed and water to keep them hydrated but also sufficient cover to provide refuge from Mother Nature and protection from two- and four-legged predators.

While editing all the habitat-focused content in this month's "Land-Management Issue," I couldn't help but think back to a very special hunt I experienced in October 2009 on a Missouri farm owned by David and Carman Forbes, who at the time owned Hunters Specialties. The purpose of the hunt was "field testing" the company's scent-control products (spoiler alert, they work!), but my biggest takeaway from the trip was just how profoundly sound habitat management can improve the quality of your deer hunting.

I was awestruck the moment I arrived at the Forbes' sprawling grounds outside Kirksville, Mo. Way back in 1983, the family began purchasing property in the area, ultimately aggregating 1,800 acres and implementing an intensive food-plot program that includes a mind-boggling 400 acres planted annually in corn, soybeans, clover, rye, alfalfa, turnips, beets and other crops preferred by whitetails. Each food plot I saw looked greener and lusher than the last; and judging from the number of deer streaming out of the timber and into the plots each evening, it was clear the local whitetails considered the Forbes farm to be paradise. As a young bowhunter experiencing his first true Midwestern deer hunt (I had taken the editor's position the previous year), I agreed!

The sheer number of whitetails the Forbes farm harbored was impressive, but it was the quality of the bucks that really blew my mind. As a Pennsylvania bowhunter accustomed to scratching and clawing for any legal buck, I was mesmerized as I watched buck after buck stroll into the food plots and contentedly feed in broad daylight. *Man, I thought to myself, they sure don't do that back home!*

Several evenings into the hunt, I was perched in a hang-on stand on the edge of a clover plot. A handful of does and young bucks were happily

feeding in front of me when they all lifted their heads and fixed their gaze on the far end of the field. Slowly turning my head, I saw the biggest buck of my bowhunting life. My pulse shifted into overdrive, and at one point, I literally worried the deer would hear my heart beating inside my chest before this monster made it into bow range.

Somehow, I held it all together and made a perfect, 25-yard heart shot with my trusty Bowtech Admiral (still one of my favorite bows of all time). Sitting down to catch my breath and exult in the moment, I knew I had just taken my first world-class whitetail. Even now, 13 years later, recalling the moment *still* feels good!

A little while later, David showed up with some others to help look for the buck. The blood trail was heavy, and the tracking job was short. As I put my hands on the tall, non-typical rack, it felt as though everyone was throwing a party in my honor, and the accolades continued later that evening as we taped the antlers at 157 inches and change.

As you might imagine, bucks of that caliber are not rare on the Forbes' farm. In fact, 150-160-inch bucks are taken there every year, with deer scoring in the 180s not uncommon. And several seasons back, a hunter took a 207-inch buck off the farm — the largest in their 30 years owning the property and a testament to their unwavering commitment to sound wildlife management.

In the years since that memorable hunt, I've been extremely fortunate to hunt whitetails in many other wonderful places, tagging a handful of other big bucks scoring into the 180s. Looking back, quality habitat is the common thread that ties all my biggest bucks together. From Kentucky to Kansas and Illinois to Iowa, each one was taken on property owned by people with a passion for stewarding the land and allowing bucks to live long enough to show what the landscape is capable of producing.

As much as we bowhunters complicate it at times, perhaps the "secret" to killing big bucks isn't really a secret at all. It's the habitat, stupid! **B**

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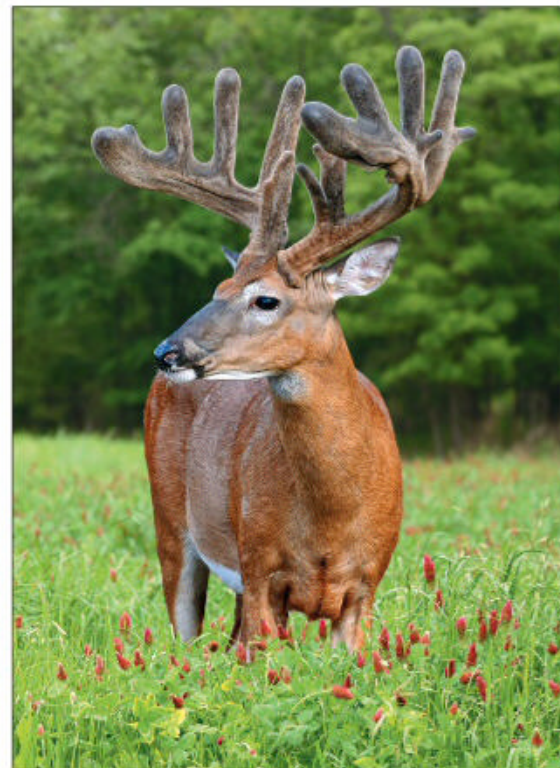
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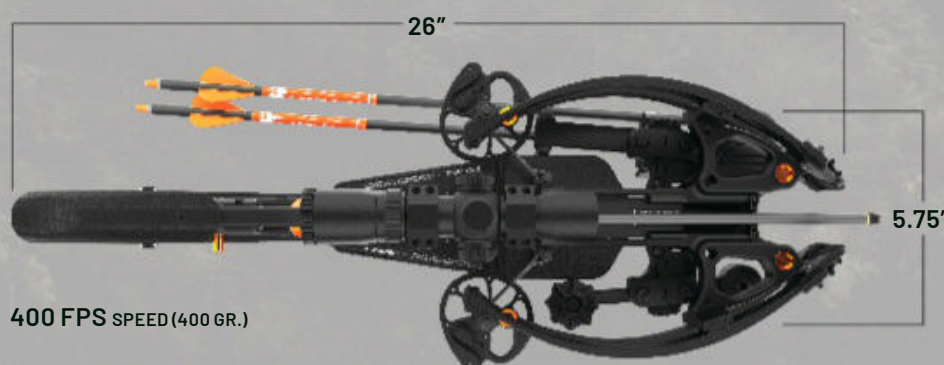
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By **CODY ROBBINS**

LIVE 2 HUNT



DEER SEASON STARTS NOW!

Get a jump on scouting to up your odds for success.

WE ALL CRAVE the limited time we get in our favorite deer stands each fall. For passionate deer hunters, that time is precious.

In fact, it's a shame our go-to pastime is squeezed down into just a few pages on the calendar. And once we reach those months, it can also feel like we need a miracle for everything to align. By the time a bowhunter juggles his or her work schedule, home life and the weather, quality hunting days can be few and far between.

Well, if you're truly eaten up with deer hunting, there are many things you can do at other times of year to improve your experiences on those rare and valuable days in the fall. When deer season closes, I can see hanging up your bow but certainly not your boots.

In early spring, hunting for shed antlers is some of the best scouting a person can do all year. You may not only find sheds off of a buck you want to target, but it's a great time to learn more about the topography of the country you're hunting. When I'm hiking around in the spring, I'm hunting for great stand locations, such as pinch points and or scrape lines, as much as I'm watching for tines.

I get really excited when I find good deer sign up against something that restricts travel. For instance, a body



Author Cody Robbins took this giant Saskatchewan velvet buck on opening day in 2010 from a location he discovered while shed hunting that spring. By setting up the spot early and monitoring it all summer with a trail camera, he was able to capitalize on a pattern and put a true whitetail giant on the ground.

of water, thick brush or maybe even a steep drop-off on a ridge. Setups such as these are special. They give you the opportunity to keep the majority of the deer movement on one side of you, thus giving you a chance to capitalize on certain winds. Such spots are rare but money if you can find them.

In early summer, I go back to those spots and use the information I gathered in the spring to set up and prep stand locations. At that time of year, you don't have to worry about disturbing any critters. You can make all the noise you want knocking down trees and trimming shooting lanes. One thing I like to do is use deadfalls and any brush I can to block off trails that may be behind my stand or in any of my blind spots. Obviously, when it comes to manipulating deer to travel on certain trails, it's far from foolproof, but every little bit helps.

Once I have everything prepped and ready, I set up a couple Stealth Cams on video mode, facing trails I think could be ideal areas for a shot. After a few weeks, I tiptoe into the area and check my cards. This gives me a good idea of how the setup is working, as well as time to adjust, if necessary, before archery season begins.

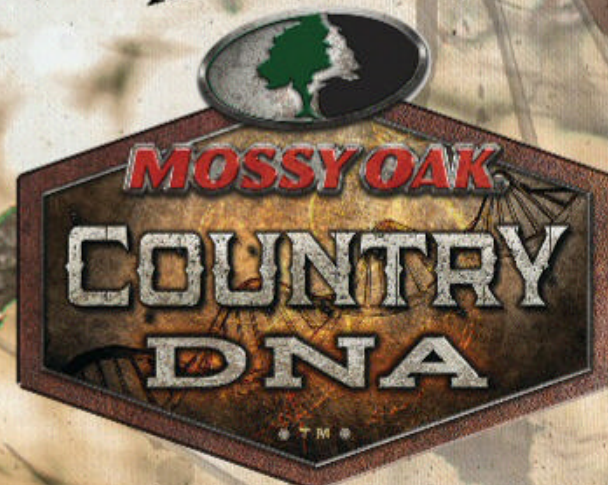
One of the first years I really put an effort into early-season "homework," I arrowed my largest velvet whitetail to date. The archery season here in Saskatchewan opens on Sept. 1, and this buck was in a steady routine coming past my blind more than a month before the season started. Had I not been prepared so early, who knows whether I would've been fortunate enough to get that chance.

That hunt was as fairy-tale as bowhunting gets. Walking in that evening, I knew I was going to connect. I set my blind up on a fence line with a bunch of old, tangled wire. Behind that fence line was a farmer's yard not too far away. I knew it would be very unlikely to have any deer travel behind me, and the wind was perfect. I found the spot while shed hunting in the spring. I returned a month later and got everything set up, just how I wanted it. Every few weeks, I checked the activity on my Stealth Cam. That's when I learned of this buck. The whole process earned me this velvet king.

Before you know it, all these little chapters of homework turn your deer hunting into a lifestyle rather than just one activity in the fall. For most, hunting is therapy. Why not treat your bowhunting malady all year long? **B**

AUTHOR'S PHOTO

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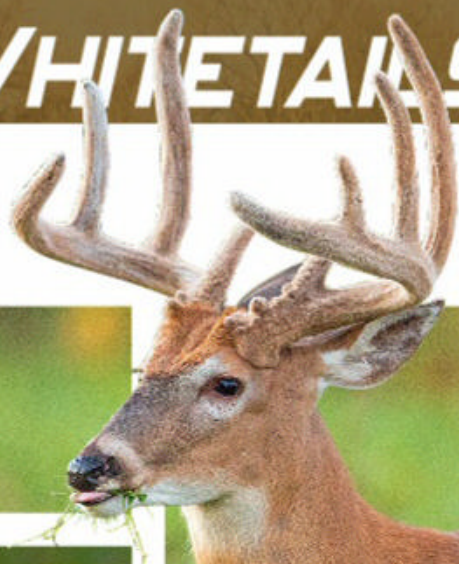
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By **JASON SNAVELY**

WHITETAILS



Food plots are just one of many habitat-management techniques bowhunters can employ to attract and hold whitetails on their property.

MAKE YOUR MARK AS A DEER MANAGER

Create the diverse, edge-filled habitat whitetails relish.

IF YOU ARE reading this magazine, you are a deer manager! Your harvest decisions have a lasting impact, for better or for worse, on deer-herd dynamics and habitat quality.

While this may sound complicated, it really isn't. In recent years, social media has fueled the popularity of many sexy — but unproven and unnecessarily complex — ideas about enhancing whitetail habitat. It's human nature to complicate and overanalyze concepts that are relatively simple in an effort to sell products or services; think fad diets and you'll understand what I mean. While visiting client properties around the country, I am often reminded of how little we focus on the basic components of quality whitetail habitat.

We have extensive evidence Native Americans managed the land with intentional fire and other vegetation-

management practices to enhance and attract wildlife populations. I'm sure it's hard for you to imagine they did all that in the absence of how-to YouTube videos. And way back in 1933, Aldo Leopold (the father of modern game management) noted, "The central thesis of game management is this: game can be restored by the creative use of the same tools which have heretofore destroyed it — axe, plow, cow, fire and gun." Of course, we prefer to swap the gun out for a bow. Nowhere did Leopold mention large diesel tractors with air-conditioned cabs and yield monitors, or even ATVs with all the implements. Let's once again apply the KISS (Keep It Simple Stupid) principle to managing whitetail habitat where we hunt; no shiny seed bags needed!

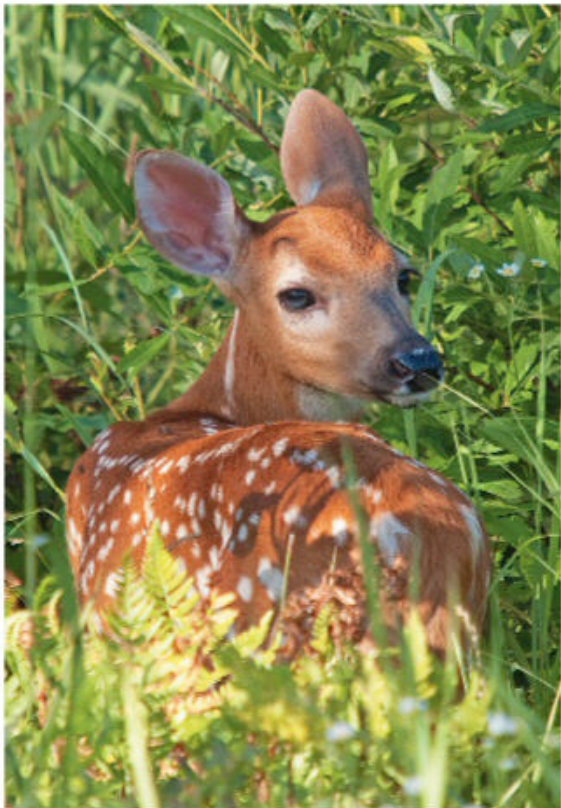
Living on the Edge

As a student of wildlife management in college, I instantly became a better bowhunter as I studied the attraction habitat *edges* have on white-

tails. Edges can be obvious (think field edges) or extremely subtle and only noticeable to the critters that rely on them (think areas of the forest where the tree species composition changes). The more complex you can make your property in terms of habitat diversity — with edges of all kinds and in different successional stages — the more time whitetails will spend on your property. As a bowhunter-manager, creating these edges is the best way to stamp your signature on your hunting grounds. To get started, I would simply grab an axe or chainsaw and begin a timber stand improvement project throughout your hunting property.

As I said, whitetails prefer extremely *diverse* habitats, well dispersed throughout their home range. It is often helpful to imagine all the desirable components of a whitetail property (forage, security/thermal cover and water) to be well-balanced on a scale. Once you tip the property in favor of one or more of these components, you

LINDA ARNDT PHOTOS



One of the best ways to improve a hunting property is by using a chainsaw to remove less desirable tree species and allow more sunlight to reach the ground. This will result in tremendous fawning cover as the sun's energy brings dormant seeds to life, creating thick, ground-level vegetation.

are taking away from the other components. Depending on the existing structure of your property, this may or may not be a problem. As a land manager, your role is to balance your habitat-management projects accordingly. As your signature on the landscape fades over time, it will be necessary to address the results of succession and re-apply your management activities in the required frequency and scale.

A Plan of Succession

Sticking with Leopold's theme of applying your signature to your whitetail woods with axe (chainsaws) and fire, keep in mind that just as putting your autograph on paper fades over time, so do your management actions. Woodlot management techniques such as hack and squirt, half-cutting or timber stand improvement will eventually lead to the *successional* replacement of woody brush, saplings and pole timber, thanks to the sun's energy. As the vegetation naturally progresses from open, grassy meadows to mature timber, the value to whitetails declines dramatically. Since whitetails thrive in early successional habitats, deer managers are constantly fighting vegetative succession by reapplying their signature.

Ideally, vegetative succession of fawning cover would be maintained at or near your waistline. Whitetail managers also often accelerate succession by planting year-round, high-quality food plots. This strategy offers plant diversity by way of adding more forbs, legumes, cereal grains and brassicas to the existing seed bank that often fills in when the soil of the earth is disturbed. A successful manager must never forget that habitats continually change and mature until a form of disturbance is applied by man or nature. Whitetails thrive after habitat disturbances, such as hurricanes, tornados and timber cuts. So, if you want to maintain a high level of daylight deer observations from your stands, you better sharpen your saw!

No Wasted Space

An often overlooked aspect of land management for whitetails is to maximize all usable space on a parcel by identifying sections of your property that whitetails avoid. Developing these areas into desirable habitat features where whitetails can seek food, thermal/escape cover, water or a winning combination of these key ele-

ments will have a huge positive impact on your hunting success.

As I've noted in past columns, fawn recruitment drives a property's productivity. As a result, it often makes sense to develop these unused areas into fawning cover that leads to increased recruitment rates. In much of the whitetail's range, fawns are dropping, or soon will be, as you read this. One technique we use to evaluate fawning cover is to conduct the basketball toss test. Take a basketball to your managed fawning habitat and toss it backwards over your head. If you can turn around and see it, you better grab a chainsaw and get more sunlight to the forest floor!

Leopold was the first to liken man-induced conservation activities such as habitat creation to "writing his signature on the face of his land." I encourage you, as a bowhunter/deer manager, to determine the desirable habitat components your property lacks and address those deficiencies by signing your own John Hancock on the land. Nature is extremely dynamic, so your signature must be reapplied once it begins to fade. Now, keep it simple and sign on the dotted line! **E**





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BOWHUNTING WISDOM

By **BILL WINKE**



MY NO. 1 WHITETAIL TACTIC: STAGING AREA PLOTS

Get big results from these deer magnets.



Field Editor Bill Winke shot these bucks — one in 2016 and the other in 2019 — from the same, one-acre, staging-area plot on his former farm in Iowa.

MY CHARTER for this column is to crystallize as many life lessons as I can. I think the conversation with Editor Christian Berg, when he assigned this new format, went something like this: “Surely, after all these years you have learned *something!*”

As relates to land management, I definitely did learn something, and it is dynamite in a small package. I can offer one very useful tip that surpasses almost all other hunting strategies I have learned over the years. With this tip alone, you can shoot multiple Pope and Young-class bucks every season. Your hair will thicken, your biceps will get bigger and you will become noticeably taller.

Well, maybe I exaggerate just a tiny bit. But I will say that once I learned

this, it completely transformed my hunting method and greatly increased the number of bucks that I got within bow range.

I have written about this strategy before, but it’s worth repeating because this is the single most useful land-management feature I have ever encountered. There is almost no way I can write about this too much, because there is nothing else you can do — on land you own or even on land where you only have permission — that will increase your odds for a successful bow season more than creating a couple small, staging-area plots.

Why They Work

The idea is to find natural openings (or create them if you have the equipment) that lie between where deer bed and where they feed. They don’t have to be big. In fact, smaller is almost better for bowhunting; I recommend between a quarter acre and an acre. You plant them to either clover or brassicas (usually a rotation of the two works well), and the deer will hit visit them in the evenings shortly after they rise

and before heading out to the bigger feeding areas.

Deer will also hit them in the mornings, right before they go back into the deeper cover to bed. These are the best possible spots to catch deer on the move in daylight. The deer use these small openings as much for social hubs as they do as short-stop feeding areas. The edges will be rimmed with scrapes and rubs by the end of October. Bucks will check them at all times of the day during the rut. Literally, staging-area food plots are the best all-day stand sites I have ever hunted.

Like I said, no other terrain or cover feature I have ever hunted has produced more close-range encounters with good bucks than these small openings.

Plot Layout

Ideally, the openings are small enough you can cover most of it with your bow from one stand. Place that stand on the side of the plot closest to the bigger ag fields and hunt it with a wind blowing roughly from the bedding area toward you (a quartering or

crosswind is perfect). In this way, the deer work in your direction as the evening progresses, and no matter where they come out into the plot there is very little chance of them smelling you. That will ensure a close-range shot.

In the mornings, movement into these openings will be less structured, as the deer are apt to come from just about any direction. You will have to keep your head on a swivel, because the deer use them heavily in the mornings before bedding down nearby.

These small openings can be easy to find in agricultural country. The back corners of fields often have spots the farmer stopped tilling after he bought that last big planter. He can't turn around all the way back in those corners now, and they have grown to weeds and brush. That makes for an obvious opportunity for you as a bowhunter. While these back corners are great, and worth considering, it is even better if you can find (or make) the small opening just inside the cover from the larger feeding area.

Even old home sites make great staging-area plots. I have created them fairly easily with just a chainsaw to cut down encroaching saplings in old pastures

and homesteads. Actually, any small opening in the woods that you can convert into a small food plot will be great, but those that lie between bedding and feeding areas are by far the best and offer the most predictable action.

I have also had good luck making these small plots close to county roads, so I have an easy way to sneak in and out when hunting them. Even located close to active home sites will work fine. You can park right in the driveway (if the landowner is OK with it) and the deer won't pay any attention.

What to Plant

As mentioned, I recommend clover or brassicas (like turnips and forage radishes). These are affordable and easy to establish. You can usually get at least two years out of a clover plot and then rotate it to brassicas for a year and back to clover the next winter. Fertilizer is important, but even when you consider those added costs, small plots are not expensive and are a great investment in your upcoming season.

You can usually get by with little to no "farm equipment," assuming you can get a garden tiller in there. In a pinch, you can even plant on top of the

ground after killing the existing weeds prior to broadcasting the seed. Tilling the ground will produce better seed-to-soil contact and a more consistent plot, but even the "spray and pray" method will work if you get sufficient rain.

Get to Work!

Obviously, I am a big believer in these small openings. As many of you know, a couple years ago I sold the farm where I lived and hunted for 18 years and have been hunting a lease since. One of the biggest disappointments with my current hunting area is the fact I don't have the option to create any of these staging-area plots. On my old farm, I had nine of them, including the best stand I ever hunted. As the years went by, I kept trying to duplicate that blue-ribbon stand — finding more spots I could convert into prime staging-area plots. Toward the end of my years on that farm, I rarely hunted any other stands because these staging-area plots were so good.

If you are serious about improving your hunting area, then get serious about creating some staging-area plots. Take it from me — you'll be glad you did! **B**



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By **RANDY ULMER**

BETTER BOWHUNTING

The potential for game movement has more impact on a bowhunter's maximum effective range than his or her archery skill. Although there is no solution to this problem, there are steps that can be taken to mitigate the issue.

PART 1

COMBATING STRING JUMPING

You can't control game movement, but you can game plan for it.

THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY of this column, I have focused on the many things we as bowhunters can control, picking them apart and dissecting them to eliminate any and all variables. One thing, however, is beyond our control — animal movement at the shot — often called "jumping the string."

We can do little about this movement, yet it has a direct impact on our ability to deliver a lethal arrow. We can't ignore this part of our hunting accuracy simply because it is not eas-

ily managed. It is important that we recognize the uncontrollable factors involved in shooting at game, analyze the challenges they pose and do everything in our power to mitigate them.

No. 1 Reason for Missing

Over the last 25 years, I have been hyper-focused on hunting older age-class mule deer bucks. I spend all summer scouting to find the one buck I want to take and, after all this work, I refuse to take a marginal shot. The last thing I want to do is spook the deer or, worse yet, wound it. So, I limit myself to shots under 60 yards. This surprises some of my western hunting buddies, as they know my capabilities with a bow would allow for longer shots.

At the practice range, with my hunting bow and broadhead-tipped arrows, I can hit the vitals of a mule deer target almost every time at 100 yards. However, shooting at the range

bears little resemblance to shooting at a live deer under true hunting conditions. So, I refrain from taking long-range shots in the field.

If a deer is within 60 yards and the conditions are good — like fairly flat ground, little wind, an animal standing broadside and I'm in a stable shooting position — I feel I am more than 90 percent effective. The factor that is out of my control, and causes most of my misses, is a deer's ability to jump the string and move out of my arrow's path. Of the deer I have actually shot at, I have lost more deer to this phenomenon than all other reasons combined.

Seasoned whitetail hunters might scoff at the thought of a mule deer jumping the string, since whitetail deer are obviously world-champion string jumpers while muleys are supposedly slow and stupid. Not so, my friends; not so at all!

LANCASH MORGAN PHOTO

I have noticed that the older a muley buck is, the more likely he is to react quickly to the sound of the bow. I have often observed bachelor groups of bucks at the time of the shot. The younger bucks will stand still while the older bucks seem to turn inside out and are gone by the time the arrow arrives.

An Invaluable Lesson

My first verifiable incident of string jumping came 25 years ago while I was after my first 200-inch muley. At the time, I thought I had experienced string jumping before, but I often played it off as just my imagination since I had no substantial evidence to prove it.

On this particular hunt, a friend was sitting a few hundred yards from me. He was hidden in the trees across a large draw from the buck and was filming with a fairly powerful zoom lens. I had stalked to within 45 yards of the feeding deer and as the buck looked away, I drew my bow and fired the arrow at his chest, which was perfectly broadside to me. At the shot, the buck spun more than 180 degrees and bolted over the rise — in the opposite direction he had been facing.

After waiting half an hour, we went to where the buck had been standing. We found and followed a great blood trail for a few hundred yards and located the buck piled up. Interestingly, my arrow had entered the buck's neck on the opposite side of the side that was facing me at the time of the shot. This surprised me, because I felt I had made a perfect shot.

Baffled, we went back to camp

By the time the arrow had reached the deer, he had dropped down and spun well over 90 degrees.

and examined the video footage on a television screen. With a pointer, we marked the center of the buck's chest at the time of the shot. By the time the arrow had reached the deer, he had dropped down and spun well over 90 degrees.

My arrow hit exactly where the center of the deer's chest had been at the time of the shot. However, by the time the arrow arrived, that point in space happened to be occupied by the opposite side of the deer's throat patch. Fortunately, the arrow connected with the carotid artery just below the deer's jaw line and the results were fatal.

Is There a Solution?

It doesn't matter if you are a world-champion archer. If an animal moves a significant distance while your arrow is in the air, you will miss. For me, the potential for game movement has more effect on my maximum effective range than does my archery skill.

I have not yet found — and I probably never will — the perfect solution to this problem. However, I have studied the issue to exhaustion and want to share my findings with you.

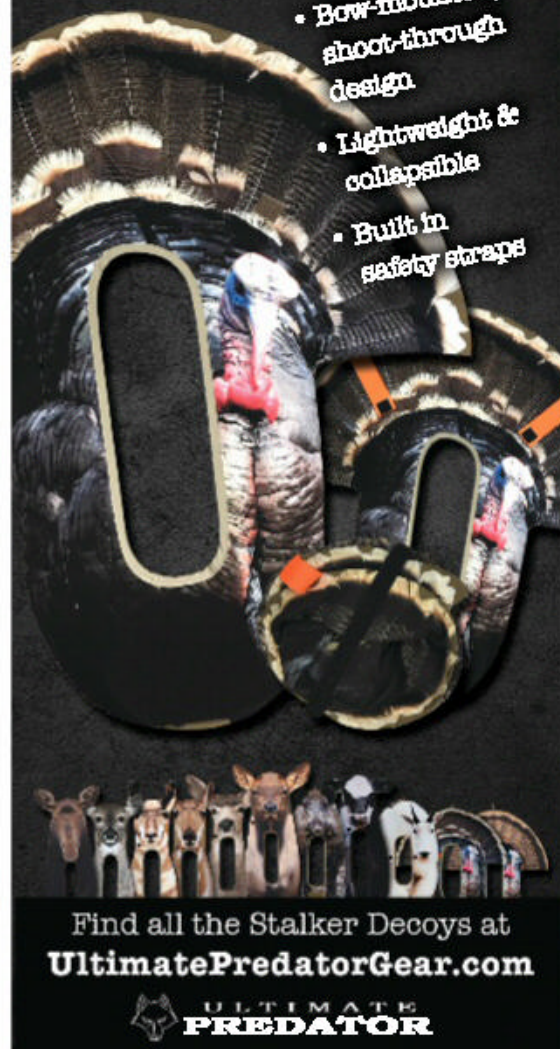
The logical remedy to this problem is to sneak closer. Unfortunately, this is not as clear-cut as it may sound. The closer you are to your target, the louder your bow sounds to the deer and the more it will react. Sound diminishes with the square of the distance. So, the volume of sound a deer hears at 20 yards is four times as loud as what it will hear at 40 yards.

Another issue with merely sneaking closer is that there seems to be a certain perimeter inside of which deer will absolutely not tolerate any disturbance without bolting. So, it's risky to try to get too close. My theory is that this is the distance a mountain lion must be within to pounce successfully.

In my upcoming columns, I'll address how animal movement affects your accuracy and what you can do about this. **B**

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By **BRAD FENSON**

CROSSBOWS

EDITOR'S NOTE: This month's column marks the debut of Brad Fenson, an accomplished crossbow hunter and outdoor writer from Alberta, Canada. We offer our sincere thanks and best wishes to longtime BOWHUNTING Field Editor Bob Humphrey, who recently retired after nearly two decades as a contributor, including the past 12 years in this space.



THE CROSSBOW'S EXPANDING ROLE IN DEER MANAGEMENT

It's responsible for a growing percentage of the deer harvest.

Author Brad Fenson with one of the many whitetails he has harvested with a crossbow over the years. Crossbows are a great tool for new and seasoned deer hunters alike.

THE POPULARITY of crossbow hunting exploded over the past two decades as more and more states legalized them for archery seasons. Twenty years ago, only three states allowed horizontal bows in archery seasons.

Today, almost all states allow crossbows in archery seasons or provide other opportunities for their use. As a result, crossbows are more accepted than ever — not only as a great hunting tool for personal enjoyment but also for the management of wildlife resources.

Let's start out by taking a big-picture look at the state of deer hunting in America. The National Deer Association (NDA) recently reported that

U.S. deer hunters took an estimated 6.3 million whitetails during the 2020-21 seasons. That is the highest total since 2011, and while both antlered and antlerless harvests were up last year, the estimated total buck harvest of 3.04 million was the most in 21 years.

Breaking the numbers down further, firearms hunters accounted for 65 percent of all deer taken during the 2020-21 seasons, while archery equipment accounted for 26 percent and muzzleloaders for 9 percent. So, we know roughly one in four deer were taken with archery gear. Trying to generate additional detail about the archery harvest itself is where things get hazy. That's because many states don't separate crossbow and vertical bow harvest data. However, some do; and in those places, the trends point clearly toward growing crossbow participation and success.

Crossbows in the Lead

Although there is no consistent, national database of crossbow-hunting data, we do know that crossbows are

accounting for a growing percentage of the overall archery harvest. This is backed up by state-specific data measuring both the raw number of deer killed with crossbows, as well as the success rate of crossbow hunters compared to vertical bowhunters.

The NDA reports that of the 30 states east of the Rockies that allow crossbows in archery season, 25 can distinguish crossbow from vertical bow harvest. In 11 of those states, the crossbow harvest now exceeds that of vertical bows.

Wisconsin is a good example of this. Current statistics are hard to find, but in 2018, bowhunters using vertical archery gear harvested 45,000 deer and crossbow hunters took 47,000. Crossbows only became legal in the Wisconsin archery seasons in 2014, which means a big jump in the use of and success with crossbows in four years.

In the Virginia 2018-19 season, for the first time since crossbows became legal in 2005, the crossbow harvest exceeded all other archers with 27,000 taken in total.

It's also interesting to note that we



Data shows that the annual crossbow harvest now exceeds the annual vertical bow harvest in at least 11 states.

can see regional differences here, with archery hunters in the Northeast embracing crossbows while vertical bows continue to dominate in the Southeast. In Connecticut, for example, crossbow harvest increased from 28 percent of the archery total when first legalized in 2013 to 58 percent in 2020. One possible explanation for this is the fact that the Northeast is more heavily urbanized, and using a crossbow may be more attractive when seeking to remove deer from areas with dense human populations. This is certainly a win for state wildlife managers charged with addressing deer-related complaints such as landscaping/garden damage and vehicle collisions.

In addition to raw harvest numbers, some state data indicate crossbow hunters enjoy a modestly higher success rate than their vertical bow-toting brethren. Ohio, for example, tracked bowhunting success over a seven-year period (2013-19) and reported that crossbow hunters posted a 23.5 percent success rate compared to 21 percent for vertical bowhunters. Missouri reported a 35 percent success rate for crossbow hunters and 31 percent success rate by vertical bowhunters for the 2016-17 season.

Societal Issues

Bowhunters and wildlife managers don't always share the same goals. For example, many bowhunters looking for big antlers would support increased restrictions on deer harvest to benefit them in the form of older bucks with larger racks. Meanwhile, wildlife managers are forced to juggle myriad interests that include not only hunting opportunities but the need to balance deer populations with available habitat and societal tolerance for deer-related problems such as the aforementioned vehicle collisions or Lyme disease.

The NDA report includes positive statements from deer managers in Maryland and Indiana who said, "Crossbow use had a positive impact, since it allowed hunters to control deer numbers in areas where gun discharge may be restricted." The NDA further noted that it interviewed wildlife officials in 19 states where crossbows are allowed to ask about the weapon's impact on deer populations and season structure. None of the 19 states reported shortening crossbow seasons or restricting their use since allowing them, though some have expanded opportunities for crossbow hunters.

What isn't clear is why hunters are

embracing crossbows. Are they looking for a tool that may require less practice? Are they new to the archery community? Or, are they making a switch from vertical gear hoping for better success? It would be interesting to determine how many bowhunters have and use both vertical bows and crossbows.

Given a lack of consistent, broadly available data, it is difficult to determine whether crossbow harvest is up nationwide or only in specific regions. We do know, however, that where crossbow participation and harvest have increased, wildlife managers view it positively. It also can't be denied that allowing crossbows in archery seasons increases opportunity for sportsmen. Horizontal bows are attractive to new and seasoned hunters alike, and they can be a great, ethical option to hunt with for those whose time to practice with a vertical bow is limited.

Given that, it seems clear crossbows are here to stay. And if the past is any indication of the future, crossbows are likely to play an ever larger deer-management role several years from now than they do even today. **B**

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"I have been guiding hunters for more than 50 years." —Andy Mosher



By **JON E. SILKS**

BOW TEST

PRIME INLINE 3

Takes accuracy and shootability to another level!

IT'S THE BEGINNING of a new era at Prime — an era of centricity, alignment and accuracy achieved through a single-body cam.

With the introduction of Prime's new Inline flagship bow series, we see a bold move forward with a new power system designed to achieve all the benefits of the company's Parallel Cams and beyond. The series includes three models — the 1, 3 and 5 — with those numbers correlating to the axle-to-axle length past 30 inches (31, 33 and 35 inches).

Now, let's take a closer look at the Inline 3.

New Cam System

Prime made a decision to add a new platform design to its popular bow lineup with the intent of not only maintaining, but also improving on the performance found in its Parallel Cam designs while also simplifying the entire operation. The new Inline Cam System is similar to a three-track binary cam, utilizing a string, power cable and take-up cable, all anchored exclusively to the cams. The difference is in how Prime manages the increased forces on the cables, specifically the take-up cable, during the draw cycle and at full draw.

Using the cable grooves, Prime shifts the take-up cable over the top of

Prime Archery's Inline Bow Series is an all-new venture by the company into single-body cam design. The Inline Cams, with their cable-shift grooves, preserve the company's cam-lean attacking reputation, while the Nano Grip, past parallel limb position and multiple limb/riser dampeners enhance the shooting experience.

THE SPECS

Manufacturer: Prime Archery, 810-392-8431; G5prime.com

Model: Inline 3

Riser: 82X aluminum, Reflex, Swerve

Grip: Nano Grip with Aerogel

Limbs: Split, Gordon Composites

Draw Weights: 40, 50, 60, 65, 70 and 80 pounds peak

Cam System: Inline, rotating module

Letoff: 85 percent (advertised); 88.33 percent (as tested)

Draw Lengths: 26-30.5 inches, in half-inch increments; rotating module

String: Prime Made, BCY 452X material, 59.25 inches

Cables (x2): Prime Made, BCY 452X material, 38.40 inches

Brace Height: 6.5 inches

Axle-to-Axle Length: 33 inches

Weight: 4.4 pounds (advertised); 4.6 pounds (as tested)

Finish: Realtree Edge, plus many other camo and solid patterns

Advertised IBO Speed: 337 fps

MSRP: \$1,099

Comments: Well balanced and a pleasure to shoot.



INLINE 3

the axle's center — basically centrally aligning the string and cable to focus the lion's share of the force on the centerline. As you might expect, this balances the load on the system to reduce efficiency-robbing cam lean. The Flexis AR cable-management system plays a critical role in this design as it uses a flexible arm to allow the rollers and cables to move toward the centerline of the bow and back again during the draw and shot cycles.

A rotating module on the machined aluminum Inline Cam adjusts draw lengths between 26 and 30.5 inches, in half-inch increments, with only two small screws (another significant simplification over the Parallel Cam system). Clear engraving/stamp marks on the module and main cam body ensure accurate adjustments. A series of different-sized spacers, included with your purchase, can be arranged on the axles to actually move the cams side to side in order to correct for left/right paper tears. Prime also moved to a single limb stop to produce a super solid back wall.

Curves of Consequence

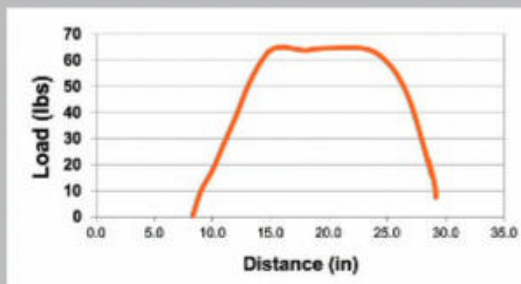
Prime's popular Swerve Riser technology is hard at work on the Inline 3, bringing harmony to the top and bottom sections of the riser. Swerve, which is a structural feature on the bottom half of the riser designed to mimic the sight window structure in terms of movement and flex, controls lateral movement of the cams during the draw and shot cycles. The bottom line is that less movement equals more consistency — to prove their design, Prime physically measured and found lateral cam movement was reduced by 50 percent.

Another riser feature, this one from the company's Project Centergy, is designed to bring superior balance and rock-solid aiming qualities by running the center of the overall rig through the throat of the grip rather than the nocking point. You'll notice the top cam is larger to compensate for the

SPEED & ENERGY

	375-GRAIN ARROW	425-GRAIN ARROW
ARROW SPEED	293 fps	277 fps
KINETIC ENERGY	71.5 ft./lbs.	72.4 ft./lbs.
DYNAMIC EFFICIENCY	82.46%	83.52%

DRAW-FORCE CURVE



EDITOR'S NOTE:

All of our Bow Tests are conducted using the same standardized procedures and professionally calibrated testing equipment. Bows are tested with a draw length of 29 inches and a draw weight of 65 pounds, unless otherwise noted.

offset nocking point. The Inline 3 riser is first forged and then machined from a block of a proprietary blend of 82X aluminum. To see the 15-plus riser finish options, visit g5prime.com.

Prime's Nano Grip found instant popularity on the company's Nexus Series and is back on the Inline rigs. The Nano uses NASA-developed Aerogel, which serves as a buffer between the riser and plastic overmold grip, blocking the cold temperature of the metal from transferring into the grip. This allows the use of lighter gloves — or even no gloves — in colder weather, which for many translates into better shooting. The contoured and textured Nano Grip is also designed to produce a neutral wrist position.

The Flexis AR feature joins a flexible mounting arm and a set of rollers to not only contain the cables but also control them during the draw and shot

cycles as well. During the draw cycle the arm bends toward the bow's centerline and then quickly moves back and out of the way of vanes at the shot. The mounting arm load can be adjusted for fine-tuning arrow flight.

A string stop and new set of dampeners located at the bottom of the riser near the limb pocket work to reduce vibration and shot noise, while a metal stabilizer-mounting insert takes the hassle out of repeated stabilizer attachment.

Shifted Limbs and Cups

A close look at the machined aluminum limb pockets shows a position just off center. This configuration works with the new Inline Cam System to shift the cables toward center while also maintaining the 7/8-inch center shot that customers have come to rely on when setting up their rigs. The pocket supports and controls each individual limb on all sides and ensures precision at the critical riser-to-limb interface. Prime outfits its Inline 3 with short and stout limbs that are set far apart to enhance stability through torsional rigidity. Limbs are available in peak draw weights of 40, 50, 60, 65, 70 and 80 pounds.

Impressions

The one characteristic I noticed immediately about this rig is just how well balanced it is, followed by the comfort and functionality of the grip. Shock, vibration and noise are all minimal at the shot, but they were made even better with a quality stabilizer.

The weight of the bow was higher than expected, considering the reduction in cam materials and parts, less string and the elimination of the string splitter.

The draw cycle is quick to peak, followed by an easy rollover into the valley that is generous enough to relax at full draw. The back wall is super solid as well. The Inline 3 is enjoyable to shoot and will certainly get the job done in the field or at the range. **B**

FOOD

B
P
D
FEATURES



Editor Christian Berg used his side-by-side and Master Series Cultipacker from Micro Food Plots to install his food plot last summer. As you can see, the results were outstanding, both in terms of the quality of the plot and the resulting doe harvest by his son, Timothy.

PILOTS FOR IDIOTS

Improving Hunting Habitat
Isn't Rocket Science!

By **CHRISTIAN BERG**

YOU'VE PROBABLY SEEN the long-running "Idiot's Guides" series of reference books. Their purpose is to take complex topics and explain them so clearly even those of marginal intelligence can understand. A quick search of the publisher's website shows at least 127 "Idiot's Guides" currently in print, covering everything from flipping houses and options trading to quantum physics and self-hypnosis.

As interesting as all that sounds, I'd rather stick with bowhunting and invest my limited mental capacity into endeavors that help me be more successful in the field. One of the best ways to do that is by installing food plots; yet for years, I made excuses for not doing so because I felt like an "idiot" who lacked the necessary skills. After all, if you watch outdoor TV or follow well-known hunters on social media, it's easy to conclude you need acres of open ground and high-dollar, commercial-grade tractors to build successful plots.

Thankfully, that couldn't be further from the truth! At its most basic level, building a food plot requires nothing more than putting some seed in the soil and allowing Mother Nature to do the rest via sunshine and rain. Sure, it's a bit more nuanced than that, but it certainly isn't rocket science. I'm a guy who regularly kills houseplants and can't even grow tomato plants in pots on the back deck, yet I somehow managed to invest a modest amount of time, money and effort to create a small food plot that has resulted in *five* filled deer tags over the past two seasons. That's pretty good for an idiot like me, and if I can do it, you can too.

FOOD PLOTS FOR IDIOTS

WISE UP!

They say necessity is the mother of invention, and that's true for my food plot. I don't own hunting property and do most of my local whitetail hunting on a farm owned by a family friend. The property is divided by a road, and on the lower side of the road is a large ag field that backs up to a swampy woodlot with a creek flowing through it. As you might imagine, those woods are fairly thick and a preferred bedding area for many deer that filter into the adjoining ag field at night.

For a bowhunter, this sets up an obvious ambush opportunity on deer transitioning between their daytime hides and nighttime feeding area. The problem, however, is that the field edge along the woods is nearly 400 yards long, and the deer can emerge from the woods just about anywhere. This presents a real problem for a bowhunter who can only cover 40 yards or so around a treestand. Naturally, I began to think about ways I might concentrate deer activity to my advantage.

In the southeast corner of the field is a half-acre "cove" surrounded by woods on three sides, with a roughly 40-yard wide opening that connects to the rest of the field. The soil in this area stays quite wet year-round due to the poor drainage adjacent to the swamp, leading to frequently muddy conditions that make it difficult for the farmer to

maneuver his equipment. It also tends to drown out corn and soybeans in wet years, resulting in little productivity. As a result, the farmer stopped planting this section of the field several years prior, leaving it to grow up into a thick patch of waist-high weeds.

It was the perfect place for a food plot, given its proximity to the bedding area and the fact that the cove is shielded by timber on three sides, helping deer feel comfortable venturing out in daylight before heading out into the larger field of corn and/or beans under cover of darkness.

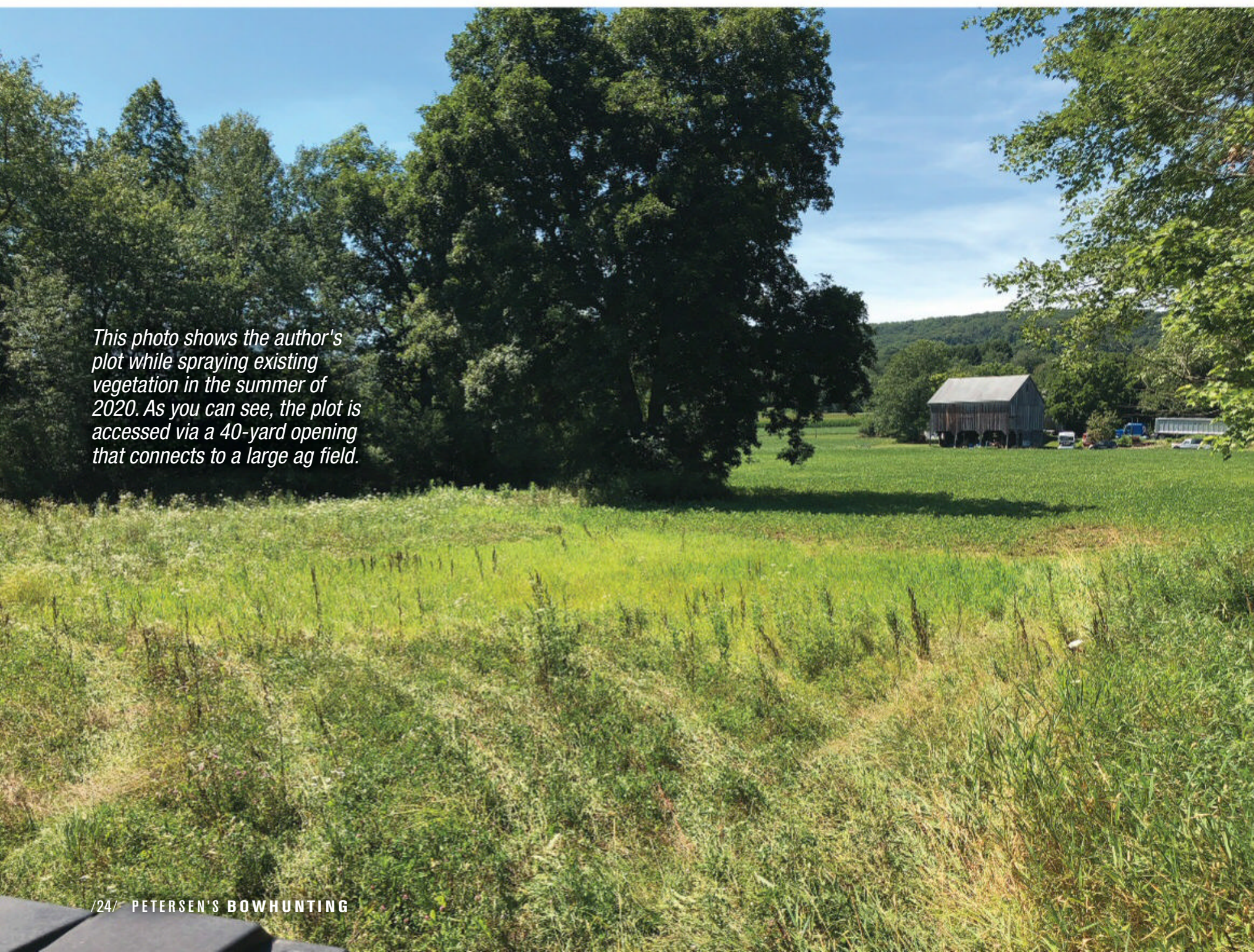
In the summer of 2020, I asked the farmer about planting the cove myself and was immediately given the green light. Now, all I had to do was make it happen!

IF YOU BUILD IT...

If I wanted to create a decent food plot, I knew the first thing I needed to do was deal with all the vegetation currently in the plot. In late July, I enlisted the help of a friend who has a small boom sprayer that fits in the back of his Polaris Ranger. Then, I spent about \$25 for a bottle of concentrated weed killer, filled that sprayer and emptied the tank in the cove.

Honestly, the brush in the field was so thick, and the amount of weed killer we applied was so little, I worried it would not work. By mid-August, however, the vegetation in the cover was brown and dead. It worked like a charm!

My next step was "preparing the seed bed." This is a



This photo shows the author's plot while spraying existing vegetation in the summer of 2020. As you can see, the plot is accessed via a 40-yard opening that connects to a large ag field.



Removing existing vegetation is a critical first step in creating a successful food plot. The author enlisted the help of a friend with a boom sprayer in the back of his side-by-side to prep his food plot for planting.



Once you've killed existing vegetation in the plot area, you need to prepare the seed bed. Although high-end equipment isn't necessary for completing this task, the author got extremely lucky in the summer of 2020 when his farmer friend offered to do the job with his tractor.

term you will hear often in food plot circles, and it basically means getting the soil ready to sow your seed. One very important factor for any food plot is good seed-to-soil contact, and it's hard to ensure that if you just throw a bunch of seed on the ground in a field full of dead plants. Sure, some of that seed is going to find its way into the soil and germinate, but you certainly won't get the results you're looking for.

Unless you have access to a no-till drill, this generally

means raking/turning the plot area by hand or using a small rototiller or ATV disc. In my case, I really lucked out when my farmer friend offered to hook up his giant disc to his Case International tractor and prep the cove for me. Honestly, I think he was just interested in seeing what I was up to back there, and the big tractor literally had the job finished in about five minutes. It's also worth noting here that I didn't worry about getting rid of any of the dead vegetation in the plot, as the discing process knocked it down nicely and integrated it into the dirt.

From there, I simply used a small, hand-crank seeder to spread a bag of Fall Reload seed blend from Drop-Tine Seed Co. It took me probably 30 minutes to hand seed the half-acre plot, and that was that.

Last year's food-plot process was quite similar to 2020, as we sprayed the field in early August and replanted later in the month. This time, however, we didn't have my friend's giant tractor but instead used the Micro Food Plots Master Series Cultipacker. This handy unit, which is easily pulled behind my side-by-side, includes a disc, electric seeder, pull-behind mesh rake and cultipacker roller all in one, allowing me to prep the soil, sow the seed and ensure excellent seed-to-soil contact in about two hours time. It was really slick!

In closing this section in plot installation, the only other thing I'd note is that both years, I really only had to work in the plot twice — once to spray it and a second time to prep the soil and sow the seed. Granted, we did use side-by-sides to lighten our loads, but I'd estimate our total investment of time for plot installation at roughly three hours total each year. And I estimate the total cost at roughly \$160 each year, which includes \$120 for the seed, \$25 for the weed killer and \$15 to gas up the side-by-side.

FOOD PLOTS FOR IDIOTS



Seeding a small food plot is easy to do by hand. In the summer of 2020, the author seeded his half-acre plot using a handheld, hand-crank spreader and was able to complete the job in less than an hour.

...THEY WILL COME

So, creating the food plot wasn't difficult, but how well did it work out? Well, on that front, I'm happy to report it was an overwhelming success, both in terms of how well the plants grew and how much the local deer herd used it.

Back when we first installed the plot in 2020, I couldn't wait to see the plants grow, and I remember returning a couple weeks after planting and feeling so excited to see fresh green growth sprouting everywhere. Drop-Tine's Fall Reload is a mix of more than a dozen species such as clover, barley, oats, turnips, peas and kale, and by the time Pennsylvania's archery season opened the plot was a smorgasbord of lush green that stood in stark contrast to the yellowing beanfield and drying corn in the adjacent ag fields. The great thing about Fall Reload is that it has things that will be attractive to deer throughout the season. For example, the clover and oats offer immediate attraction, while things

such as turnips and kale will keep coming back through the late season. For this reason, I'd definitely recommend choosing some kind of seed blend that is going to offer far more diversity than a single species.

Placing a single trail camera on a T-post in the plot allowed me to easily monitor deer activity, and it didn't take long to figure out this was going to be a dynamite spot for punching tags. Not only was the plot attractive, but its secluded location makes it easy for hunters to get in and out undetected as long as the wind is right.

To hunt the plot most effectively, I placed a 6-foot blind platform with a regular, hub-style popup blind on top, making for a prime observation and shooting location that can comfortably accommodate two hunters. Although the location of the blind was OK in 2020, my field observations helped me tweak it slightly for 2021 by moving it directly into the center of the plot, along its top edge, which repeatedly put deer within 20 yards of the front window.

CONT ON PG 31

For those with access to an ATV or side-by-side, the Master Series Cultipacker from Micro Food Plots is a great tool that includes a disc, electric seeder, drag rake and cultipacker roller all in a single unit featuring hydraulic wheels that can be raised and lowered at the touch of a button.



What About Soil Tests & Fertilizer?

SOME OF YOU reading this article have surely noted two glaring omissions from my food-plot installation process: namely, taking a soil test and then applying the prescribed amounts of lime and fertilizer prior to planting. While I'm not saying doing those things is wrong, I do contend they are not necessary.

Before you accuse me of heresy, hear me out. Much of my guidance while creating and maintaining this plot came from *Whitetails* columnist Jason Snavelly. Snavelly is a Certified Wildlife Biologist, owner of Drop-Tine Seed Co. (droptinseed.com) and professional habitat manager who assists clients across North America in improving their properties for the benefit of deer and other wildlife. I've also made numerous visits to Snavelly's personal farm in Pennsylvania, where he consistently grows great food plots and bucks that far exceed the quality the average Keystone State hunter can expect. So, when Snavelly talks about habitat and deer management, I listen.

In recent years, Snavelly has been at the forefront of a growing movement within the food-plotting community that seeks to do things in "nature's image." In a nutshell, the concept boils down to using carefully selected blends of plant species that complement one another in the short term while building long-term soil health.

"Nature is self-regulating and self-healing if we simply get out of the way!" Snavelly said. "We give the soil what it wants, with a consideration for wildlife nutrition."

Drop-Tine offers a complete line of Reload seed blends designed to be rotated seasonally. Plant species in each blend are chosen both to attract deer and provide them with good nutrition while also adding nutrients to the soil that can be used by current and future plants in the plots. For example, clover is a "nitrogen fixer" that literally pulls nitrogen from the air and adds it to the soil through its roots. Rather than paying good money for synthetic nitrogen fertilizer, using clover in the Reload blends results in "free" nitrogen that can be used by other plants in the plot while the clover simultaneously provides tons of forage to deer.

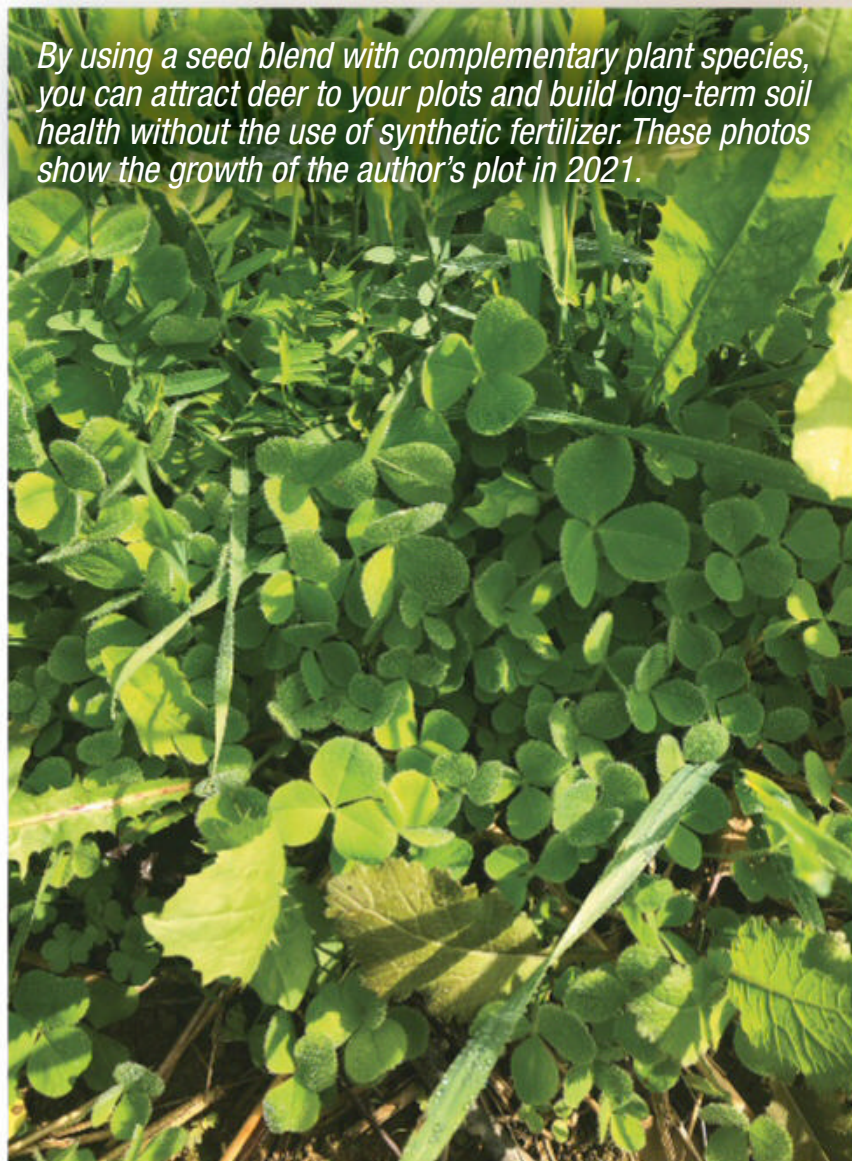
Other plants species in the Reload blends perform similar functions, and when taken as a whole, work in tandem to gradually build soil health and increase microbial activity in the soil, leading to even more available nutrients as those microbes break down organic compounds in the soil. This is not only beneficial to the environment but your wallet, as the cost of synthetic fertilizer has risen dramatically over the past couple years.

"This efficient, symbiotic, mutually beneficial system is how the 'economy' below our boots works," Snavelly said. "When we apply synthetic fertilizer, it interrupts the relationship between plant roots and beneficial soil microbes."

"The reason you get away from testing and applying fertilizer is because you are priming the biology and getting out of nature's way. This takes longer for some food plotters than others, depending on many variables. But once you get there, your ecosystem is free from expensive, syn-



By using a seed blend with complementary plant species, you can attract deer to your plots and build long-term soil health without the use of synthetic fertilizer. These photos show the growth of the author's plot in 2021.



thetic inputs. Yes, this works everywhere the sun shines!"

I don't claim to be an expert on the science behind Snavelly's program, but it's hard to argue with the results. My plot has looked great for the past two years without adding a single bag of fertilizer, and I have no idea what the pH of the soil is because I've never tested it. What I do know is that the deer absolutely love spending time in the plot, and that means I do, too. The proof is in the freezer!

— Christian Berg

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THINK SMALL FOR BIG-TIME BOWHUNTING

With Minimal Investment of Time and Money, Micro Plots Can Yield Giant Results.

Micro food plots are relatively easy and inexpensive to create but can be a huge draw for deer. They are also ideal for bowhunting, because you can often cover the entire plot from a single, strategically placed stand.

OVER THE YEARS, Field Editor Bill Winke has covered the topic of the "Poor Man's Food Plot" on several occasions, noting that creating a small deer smorgasbord, especially if it's in the woods or other cover, can often lead to some sensational bowhunting. The best part? It doesn't take a ton of money and high-end farming equipment to make it happen. In fact, investing only a few hundred dollars and a few hours of work are all that are needed. If you've thought about creating your own food plots, but aren't sure where to get started, this is for you:

PICK YOUR SPOT

The first step is finding a quality location for the plot, preferably near thick cover deer might use for bedding. That way, you can capitalize on deer movement later in the morning, earlier in the afternoon and possibly even midday in a place where deer feel more secure traveling or getting up and browsing for food. Another solid location for small food plots is the edge

between fields — whether native grasses or crops — and the woods.

If you're thinking about installing a plot or two, keep in mind the site can be as small as a quarter-acre, which is roughly the equivalent of about 25x50 or 30x40 yards. This is ideal for bowhunters, since you can cover most of the area from a strategically placed stand. In an ideal world, the plot would be established where there's a natural opening in the woods or cover, minimizing the amount of clearing you'll need to do, but the reality is it may not always be that easy.

One important thing to keep in mind when selecting a location is that you need to be able to get in and out of the food plot without the deer smelling or seeing you. So, pay careful attention to things such as the prevailing wind direction, entry and exit routes and any natural terrain features that might help conceal you as you approach and leave the plot.

CLEAR THE SITE

A chainsaw is your best friend when starting a food plot, since the first task is cutting and removing all the trees and brush (remember to cut as close to the ground as possible). Once this is complete, kill any grass, weeds and thin undergrowth using a weed killer, a job that can be done fairly quickly and easily with a sprayer. Winke, who has created a number of these plots over the years, recommends backpack sprayers as they are inexpensive and can also be used for other tasks such as plot maintenance.

After applying the weed killer, you'll need to wait about two weeks to ensure all the vegetation is dead. While you can probably clear the grass and debris with a large garden rake, it's not the most efficient option, especially if you have to deal with pulling through roots, twigs and other debris. Where legal, Winke said you may instead want to conduct a controlled burn to rid

Building micro food plots in openings surrounded by thick bedding cover is ideal, since deer will feel comfortable visiting such spots at various times throughout the day.



Before you can plant your plot, you'll have to remove existing vegetation from the site. With enough sweat equity, you can accomplish this task with hand tools such as rakes and a machete.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HOOYMAN

the spot of debris. Obviously, watching the fire carefully and having a safety plan in place are essential. Depending on where you live, you may also need to obtain a burn permit.

PREP THE SOIL

If you want to up your odds for growing success, you'll likely need to add both agricultural lime and fertilizer to the soil. The first step is conducting a soil test to determine pH and nutrient levels (the most important nutrients are nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium), helping you develop a game plan for amending the soil. In general, forest soil has lower pH (acidic). So, you'll want to raise the pH by adding lime, as a pH between 6 and 7.5 provides

Your food-plot seed needs good soil contact to germinate. If you don't have access to a disc or rototiller, you can get the job done with a metal rake and sheer physical effort.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HOOYMAN

most plants with the best opportunity to maximize nutrients in the soil. A soil test can be done by the local county extension or farm bureau. Mossy Oak's Biologic (plantbiologic.com) and Whitetail Institute (whitetailinstitute.com) also conduct soil tests, while Antler King (antlerking.com) sells an at-home pH test if you don't want to wait for your test results.

When it comes to liming, if you own or have access to a small tractor/ATV and spreader, and a way to get them into the plot site, that's the best option. If not, you can get the job done with a walk-behind spreader you purchase from your local hardware store. As for applying fertilizer, there are a number of granular and liquid options available. ATV-mounted, walk-behind or handheld spreaders and sprayers can all get the job done. Biologic is a great starting point for this equipment, since it offers all three options (\$24.99-\$209.99).

Once your seed bed is prepped, sowing the seed is a job made much easier with the help of a hand-crank seed spreader such as this.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HOOYMAN

TILL AND SOW

When you begin your first food plot, the variety of seed options might seem endless, but don't fret. A solid starting point is clover and/or a clover mix, as they are easy to establish and most are perennials. In most cases, the best time to plant clover is the spring or early summer, when rain and soil moisture are usually more than adequate.

Once you get a couple of years of planting food plots under your belt and your experience and comfort level grow, you may want to try other crops such as brassica blends (turnips, radishes, kale, rape) or beets, especially if you're looking for hardier, late-season varieties.

Unless you have access to a no-till seed drill — unlikely if installing a micro plot on a budget — tilling before planting is important because it breaks up the soil and helps turn the fertilizer into the earth. Having an ATV-mounted disc or even a walk-behind rototiller for this task is ideal, but if you don't have access to one, using a garden rake can also get the job done. Just keep in mind that hand raking can be time consuming and frustrating, since you'll likely encounter roots and rocks.

Once done with this part of the process, sowing the seed can be accomplished by using a hand-operated bag seeder or a broadcast seeder that straps onto your torso. Of course, other more expensive options are also available, depending how much you want to invest in the overall project.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Once your food plot takes hold, you'll need to maintain it. In the case of clover, periodic mowing will greatly reduce the invasion of grasses and other weeds. In some cases, you can even use specialized herbicides to kill the weeds without destroying the plot itself. If you take this task seriously, you should be able to keep your perennial food plot productive for several years.

Remember, if your goal this year is to see more deer on your property and up your odds of harvesting a buck, one of the best ways to accomplish this is by establishing one or more micro plots. Through a rather minimal investment of time, money and sweat equity, who knows — you might even end up shooting the buck of your dreams! — *Associate Editor Mark Demko*

Editor Christian Berg killed this great Ohio buck in November 2021 along the edge of a micro food plot.

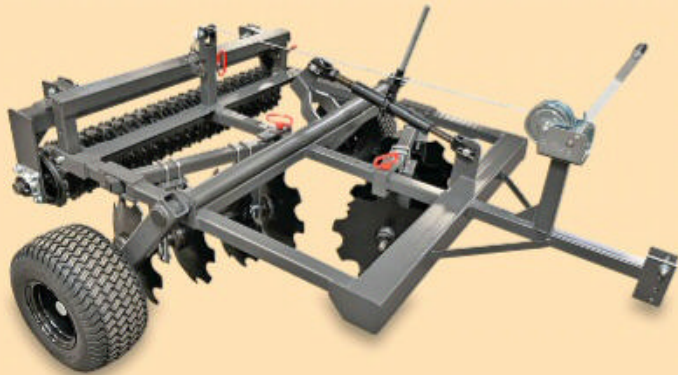
PROVEN FOOD-PLOT PRODUCTS

BY JACE BAUSERMAN



The *Firminator G-3* ATV from **Ranew's Outdoor Equipment** is designed to work with your ATV or UTV to make discing, seeding and cultipacking your food plots easier than ever. This handy unit combines 12-inch, ground-eating disks with a precision accu-seed delivery system and an agricultural-grade, cast-iron cultipacker. Sized for ATVs, the frame is constructed of 3-inch square steel tubing, and the seed box sports an all-steel make just like the Firminator 3-point models. The ATV model comes with a tow bar sized for a 1½-inch ball, but also boasts the 3-point hitch just in case you want to use the unit on a small tractor.

\$6,500, plus shipping | thefirminator.com



The *Micro Food Plots Disc/Cultipacker Combo Unit* is a great implement that will help you create pro-grade food plots with your ATV or UTV. The Disc/Cultipacker Unit attaches via a 2-inch ball hitch and includes an eight-blade disc and 22 independent and adjustable cast-iron packer wheels. A quick turn of the load binder on top of the unit adjusts disc depth, and you can easily raise and lower the cultipacker with a heavy-duty front-mounted winch. This innovative food plot tool is made in the USA and weighs approximately 725 pounds.

\$2,229 | microfoodplots.com



The new **Hooyman 24V Lithium Ion Chest Spreader** makes seed scattering faster, easier and more comfortable than ever. An adjustable throttle gives you full control of your throwing pace, and the proprietary throwing disc features curved fins married with the upward-angled disc to maximize throwing distance for a more even spread. Seed everything from large soybeans to microscopic alfalfa seed via the adjustable feed rate.

Price unavailable | hooyman.com

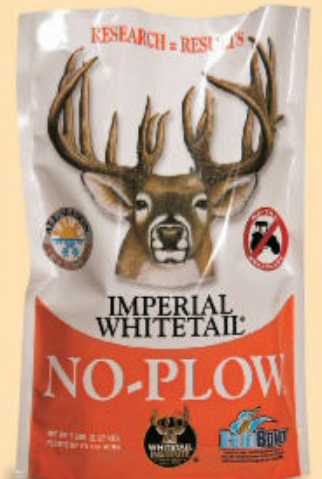


Clover is staple food-plot planting, and **Mossy Oak Biologic Non-Typical Clover** features a blend of specially selected clover species that will establish quickly and provide an excellent forage yield throughout the year. One of the easiest Biologic blends to grow, Non-Typical Clover is also very cold tolerant and produces large, palatable leaves whitetail deer crave.

\$69.99 (8-pound bag) | plantbiologic.com

Some of the best places for small "kill plots" are in off-the-beaten path locations where heavy equipment can't go. **Whitetail Institute Imperial No-Plow Annual** is designed for just such setups. This high-protein annual blend can provide up to nine months of attraction, and all you'll need to help it grow is a few hand tools. As long as the area receives three to four hours of sunlight per day, this quick-growing mix featuring clover, brassicas, radishes and more will keep the deer coming in.

\$40.98 (9-pound bag) | whitetailinstitute.com



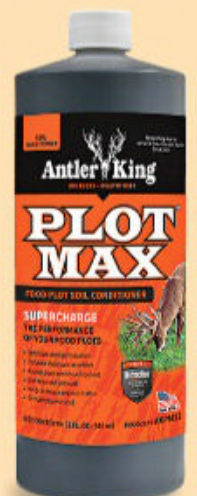
The **Wicked Tree Gear Ultra Light Pole Saw** is a must-have tool for clearing overhanging limbs around your food plots and erecting those stand setups for your next ambush. Available in 10- and 14-foot extended lengths, the curved, arborist-style, high-carbon-steel blade cuts through limbs quickly and smoothly. The rubber grip on the handle ensures an excellent feel, and the saw head removes so you can use it as a compact hand saw. Blade length is 11 inches on both models.

\$99.99-\$129.99 | wickedtreegear.com



Antler King Plot Max is a humic-based, organic liquid carbon product that will help take the productivity of your food plots to a higher level. Plot Max will increase the pH of the soil, making nutrients more available to plants and resulting in increased seed germination, strong root development, faster growth and an enhanced ability to retain moisture. Plot Max is designed to be diluted with water and sprayed onto plots in spring and fall for maximum results. It can even be mixed with weed killer in the same sprayer to accomplish both jobs in a single pass.

\$24.99 (treats half an acre) | antlerking.com



In areas with high deer densities, keeping them out of your plot until plants establish can be critical. **Deer QuikFence** from **Premier 1 Supplies** helps you do just that. This portable, temporary electric fencing system is designed to condition deer to avoid fenced areas, giving your plots time to grow until you decide to remove the fence and let deer in. The Deer QuikFence system offers a variety of fencing, installation posts and plug-in or solar-powered electrification options to meet your individual needs.

Price varies based on components | premier1supply.com



HUNT SMART

In addition to encouraging you to create a food plot of your own, the other thing I want to stress is that you *must* hunt it carefully! My plot proved more effective than I even hoped, with multiple deer visiting almost every morning and evening. However, having a location that is attractive to deer is still no guarantee of success. You need to protect a spot like that carefully by only hunting it when conditions are right. Otherwise, you risk burning it out in a hurry and finding that deer will only visit under cover of darkness.

In the case of my plot, it is strictly an evening hunting location, as there is no way to travel across the large ag field — either on foot or ATV — before sunrise without bumping deer out of the field and food plot before you get there. You also need a south or southwest wind, which keeps all human scent out of the bedding area where the deer will be coming from.

By only hunting the plot under perfect conditions, I have been able to see deer on virtually every sit and post a very high success rate for both shot opportunities and harvest. As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, my friends and family have taken five deer off this plot over the past



A hub-style blind, either set on the ground or on a raised platform such as this, is a great way to hunt food plots. The blind helps conceal your movements and contain your scent, and you can place it strategically to cover as much of the plot as possible.

two seasons, with the average shot distance being roughly 30 yards. Even after successful harvests, deer continue to feel comfortable in the plot, allowing us to return days or weeks later and fill additional tags.

For example, in 2020, my oldest son took two does off the plot in October, while a good friend added a third in December. And last fall, my younger son took a big doe off the plot on the opening evening of the archery season, while my father-in-law took a doe of his own later in the month. Truth be told, I am confident we could have taken even more deer off the plot if we wanted to, but we just didn't want to risk overhunting the location.

WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

If you're reading this article, chances are you are a bowhunter with a place to hunt. Ask yourself, would that place be better with a strategically placed food plot or two? The answer is almost certainly a resounding yes!

So, what are you waiting for? You don't have to be an Einstein to create successful plots. Join the idiots like me who — for less than the cost of a top-end bow sight, release aid or dozen arrows — are having fun improving habitat while seeing more deer and punching more tags. **B**

4 TO SCORE!

USE THESE CHEAP & EASY HABITAT ENHANCEMENTS TO TAG MORE WHITETAILS WHERE YOU HUNT.

BY JACE BAUSERMAN

PHOTO BY MARK RAYCROFT

As a Western bowhunter used to roaming endless tracts of public land in search of mule deer, elk and pronghorns, I didn't get it. Truth be told, it drove me nuts. My goal when chasing critters out West has always been — and likely always will be — to arrow the first legal animal that presents a good opportunity. Naturally, I took this same mindset to the whitetail woods, and for a while I was content.

Then, in 2016, I started hunting whitetails with Teron Bauer, who I now refer to as my personal whitetail Yoda. You see, Bauer's bowhunting roots are much different than mine. He grew up hunting his father's farm in south-central Nebraska. Although the farm isn't that

big and doesn't include vast acreage of timber, it does hug the Blue River and has plenty of corn and soybean fields — and that means whitetails.

"For me, it was all about management from the start," Bauer said. "I wasn't concerned, ever really, about killing deer. Instead, I wanted to create habitat, plant food plots and do everything in my power to grow and hold big deer."

The first time Bauer invited me to hunt, I got annoyed by his approach. He sent me pictures of 3-year-old deer I would have, at the time, cut off my left arm to shoot. Along with each photo was a caption that read, "Too young. Not a shooter." Some of the bucks had names,



which drove me crazy, and I often heard about how he had “history” and numerous “encounters” with a particular buck. I couldn’t have cared less.

Flipping the Switch

On my first trip to Bauer Land, on the final afternoon of my hunt, I missed a 40-yard shot on a respectable, 3.5-year-old 8-pointer Bauer had greenlighted for me. I was sick. At the time, the buck would have been my biggest.

The following summer, in late July, Bauer sent me a picture of that same buck. Yikes! Though still an 8-pointer, the deer had added significant tine length and mass. This time, the caption read, “See what a difference a year makes?”

By early fall, we had a lot of pictures of the big 8. He was very fond of a mock scrape along a trail that went through a gate Bauer had purposely opened to increase deer travel. For the first time in my bowhunting life, I went on a trip after a particular deer. I didn’t tell a soul, but I even named him the Great Eight. What was happening to me?

On the third morning of my hunt, my arrow found its mark. My buck came in and worked a created-by-Bauer scrape just in front of the open gate. It was an incredible feeling, and after the recovery, Bauer and I drove around and he showed me what he planned to do to make different parts of his farm better in the coming years. Suddenly, I saw the light — my whitetail mind had been transformed.

FOUR TO SCORE!

1. RUBBING POSTS

Between 2016 and 2020, I became consumed with all things whitetail. I spent oodles of time on the phone with Bauer, and during spring turkey trips to the Cornhusker State, I learned all I could about what this whitetail mastermind did to enhance his properties. Why? First, because it was fun, and second, because I planned to take a break from my Colorado mule deer pursuits to chase whitetails along the Arkansas River near my home.

The ground I'd gained permission to was perfect. Mostly ag (corn and alfalfa), I had 70 acres of sprinkled timber and a 5-acre section of native grass to hunt. Things started small. First, I visited the canyon land south of my home and cut three cedar posts. Based on map study and knowledge of the property, I placed each trunk in areas I figured to be popular travel corridors. Each post was buried three feet in the ground, and then, using a flag-pole attachment system or by drilling a hole through the center and using a cord, I attached an overhanging licking branch. I blazed the cedar with a saw to simulate a rub and let the cedar aroma waft. Last, I made a mock scrap under the licking branch. Terron has these post/licking branch systems set all around his property, and they are great for several reasons.

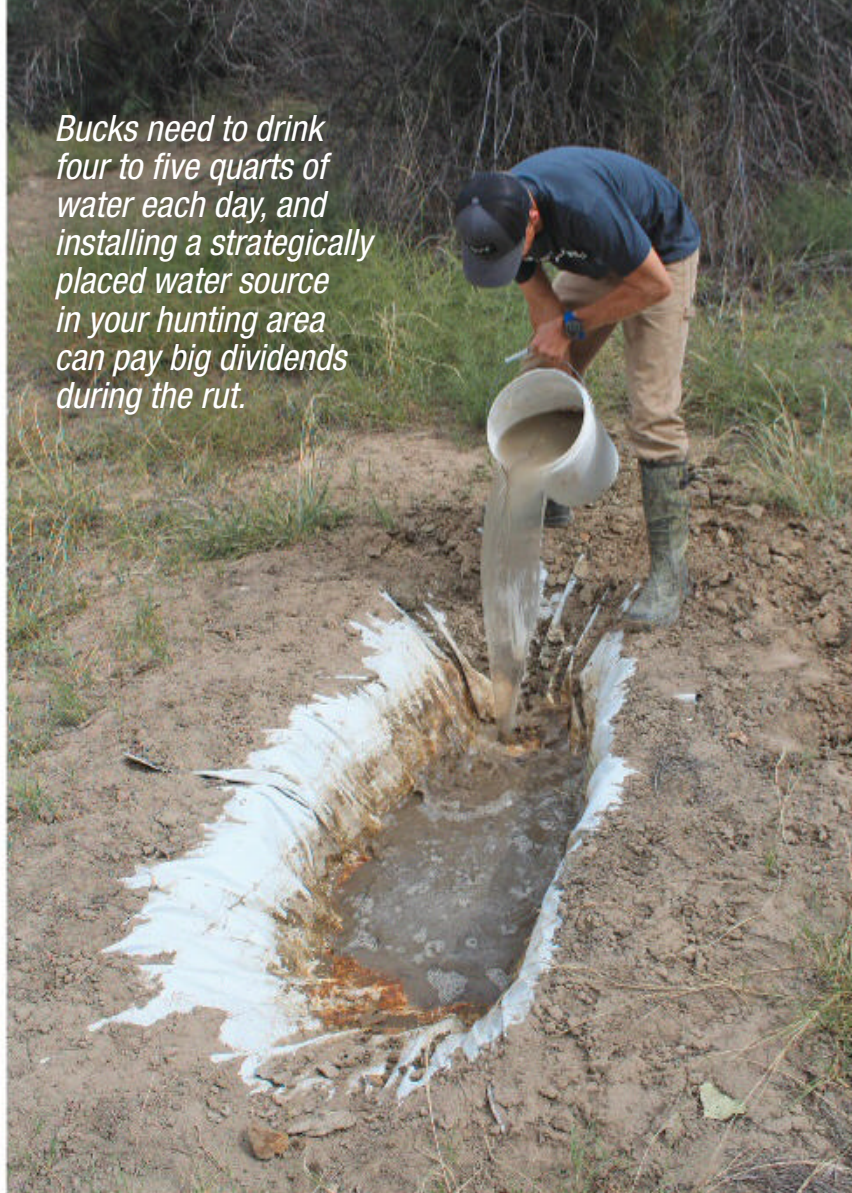


Author Jace Bauserman has found that adding rubbing posts in tandem with licking branches and mock scrapes is a highly effective way to put bucks in front of his trail cameras — and his treestands!



"Putting in a post/licking branch combo takes minimal effort and is super inexpensive," Bauer said. "Plus, they work exceptionally well. Pine and cedar posts are great options — deer love the softness and aromatic nature of them — and they hit them year-round. Anybody can add these. They are not as complex as putting in a food source and are great for getting pictures for inventory. Plus, they're a signing location bucks can't ignore when passing through."

Bucks need to drink four to five quarts of water each day, and installing a strategically placed water source in your hunting area can pay big dividends during the rut.



2. STRATEGIC WATER

I knew things weren't going to happen overnight. The plan was to keep enhancing and adding while hunting other ground, and I didn't want to slip up. Though I was killing mature deer in Nebraska almost every year, I still had an itchy whitetail finger. The last thing I wanted to do was go against the plan and shoot a Colorado up-and-comer.

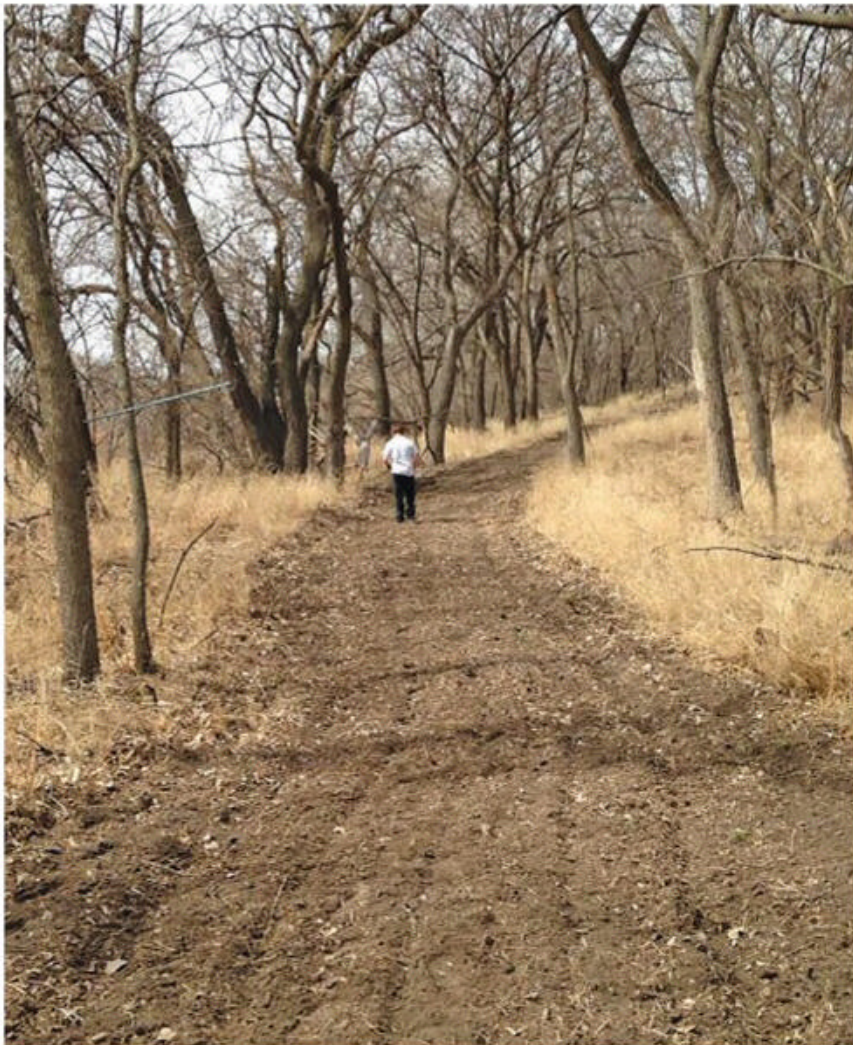
Next, I added a pond. Terron had taught me the importance of water, and though my ground hugs the Arkansas River, I decided to give it a go. Like the posts, my initial investment was small. I found some heavy-duty plastic barrier at a farm auction; then, I dug a hole that would hold 55 gallons of liquid. After bedding in the liner and sloping the edges, I used 5-gallon buckets and an ATV to fill it.

Not only did it work, it quickly became, from July through November, the most visited spot in the area by bucks and does alike. Sure, I had to keep it filled, but driving my four-wheeler to and from a nearby drainage ditch a few times each month was zero hassle.

"People overlook water," Bauer said. "This is especially true when a natural water source is nearby. However, just like the posts, location is everything when it comes to a water source. A whitetail buck must consume three to five quarts of water per day, and during the rut, when he's chasing, knowing where to slake his thirst is critical. Putting in a small water source is a great way to enhance any property."

3. CONTROL THE TRAVEL

The next significant addition I learned about was on a spring 2021 turkey trip. Bauer had used a small tractor and brush-eating implement to cut travel paths that connected stand sites with bedding, food and the like. We walked several of the trails, and the deer were pounding them.



You can do a lot to control deer movement in your hunting area by working to improve access in the places you want deer to go and block access in areas you don't. The author has had great success by mowing preferred trails and blocking others with brush.



In July, I traded a day of farm labor to use a friend's tractor and brush-hog unit. After studying my property on an aerial map and labeling stand sites and other features such as rubbing posts, ponds and bedding areas, I worked. In less than an hour, I'd swathed 8-foot-wide paths through my deer ground, and all it cost me was one day of farm labor. In addition, I located river crossings and went the extra mile to make a few — ones that would drag deer past one of my stand sites — much better. All this took was a little elbow grease. I used a pair of landscaping loppers and a scythe to clear and widen paths through the heavy brush and tamarack. I also used a chainsaw and dropped some small cottonwoods to block travel. The basic idea is to make deer walk where you want them to and stop them from going places you don't want.

"Anybody can better their property quickly by enhancing travel," Bauer said. "If I could do nothing else, this would be my top tactic. Deer will take the path of least resistance, and when you provide manicured trails, even if all you do is go pick up sticks and cut out log jams, you can steer those deer where you want them. Blocking travel is equally as effective. I block just as many trails as I create. When deer have too many travel options, they will get downwind of you and you won't see them at all."

4. PUT 'EM TO BED

I haven't quite got to my bedding enhancement yet; it's in the works for this year though. Bauer, however, is a bedding area master. He hinge cuts trees at a 45-degree angle and lets them topple. A downed tree provides browse and immediate cover, which does love. In addition, Bauer creates "buck beds," and I'm positive my 2017 Nebraska buck came off one of the beds we'd created.

"The hinge cutting is easy," Bauer said. "Get a chainsaw, and I do recommend a habitat hook, which keeps things safe and allows you to pull trees down where you want them. I like to position rut stands between hinge cuts. Bucks cruise my hinge cuts hard starting in late October, and the action gets nuts during the rut. Put the does where you want them, and the bucks follow."

"As for buck beds, they are a bit different. I look for elevation — a small hill or rise in the terrain — and then I create an entrance and exit in the existing cover. Use a hand or chainsaw to clear branches away from trees so bucks can lean against them without getting poked. Give it a try this year, and then, during the spring, go and look at those buck beds. I bet you'll find white belly hair."



Building buck beds will not only help hold more bucks on your hunting property, it will also allow you to use trail cameras to pattern buck activity over the course of several years. This will reveal patterns that will help you be in the right place at the right time during various portions of the season.

What About Food?

It's kind of crazy that I've gotten almost to the end of this article without ever mentioning food plots. Well, Bauer's plots look like something out of a *Mossy Oak Gamekeepers* magazine. They are beautiful, and of course he has an

FOUR TO SCORE!



Although the author doesn't have extensive experience with food plots, he has learned that even a small plot planted with the right food at the right time can be highly attractive.

excellent selection of perennial and annual plots — clover, soybeans, rye and brassicas, to name a few. Though the plots are small, each is set in a prime area. The annual rainfall in Bauer's neck of the woods is double that of my geographic location, and the soil is black as coal.

Adding food, for me, was difficult. I tried several times, but the lack of rain mixed with sub-par sandy soil thwarted my best attempts. My biggest problem, though, as it applied to food was that I didn't first consult my doctor. After my failed attempts, Bauer quickly pointed out I needed something extremely drought tolerant that would grow on concrete. His idea was to plant a small rye section mixed with

winter wheat near the pond. He also told me to plant it in September. I heeded his advice, and though small — created with a four-wheeler and attached plow and planted when temps were cooler — the green was over four inches tall come early October.

"Everybody wants to plant a plot," Bauer said. "I love them, and while food is excellent, it's not 100 percent necessary. Don't fret one bit if you can't add groceries to your small property. Things such as rubbing posts, water, enhanced travel corridors and boosted bedding will do you just as much good. Also, it may be possible for you to spray and kill your brome and plant native grass. In some locations where native grass already exists, you can kill the brome, and the native (grass) will come up, making incredible bedding and allowing browse to grow."

The Result

My property was ready to rock going into the 2021 season. During October's second-to-last week, I'd identified three shooters on the property. All were on the kill list, but my main target was an old 8-pointer my cameras had captured the previous two years. I had a history with him, and he was very mature. As you can see, my entire mindset has changed.

On the evening of Oct. 24, I hunted my tiny slice of Colorado whitetail heaven for the first time. With 10 minutes of legal light remaining, I turned to my right and spied my 8-pointer walking down the trail I'd created. He came and slurped water out of my pond, and at 18 yards, I put a SEVR-tipped Easton through his lungs. A first-time-in kill on the deer I was after. Yep, I'm hooked for life! **E**



Bauserman poses with his 2021 Colorado buck. The deer walked down a trail Bauserman created and was shot while drinking from a pond he built — and it all went down on his very first sit of the season!



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A man with a beard, wearing a camouflage shirt and a tan baseball cap, stands in a forest. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. In the foreground, a large turkey with its tail feathers fanned out lies on the ground. To the left of the turkey, a compound bow with a black frame and orange and yellow accents is visible. The background consists of many trees with green leaves, suggesting a spring or summer setting. The ground is covered with dry leaves and some green grass.

One of the most effective tactics author Clint Casper employs on turkeys is remaining patient when the woods become quiet shortly after flydown. Midday is a great time to fire up a gobbler in search of hens and coax him into bow range.

Bagging Birds & Busting Bucks

By CLINT CASPER

Use Spring Gobbler Season to Prep for Fall Whitetail Success

LAST SPRING found me hunting turkeys on a Central Nebraska farm I had never visited before. I had been invited on the trip by my good friend and *BOWHUNTING* Editor Christian Berg, and I couldn't wait to hit this new-to-me ground running!

The first day of the hunt was extremely windy, making it difficult to hear birds gobbling and almost impossible to call them in. Given the conditions, our group decided our best bet was to split up and cover ground in search of turkey sign. Hopefully, at least one of us would run into some action and could help the others refine their plans for the remainder of the week.

As I set off across the vast prairie landscape interspersed with brushy draws, it wasn't long before I discovered a gorgeous, wooded ridgeline loaded with oaks and turkey sign! From the amount of droppings under the big oaks, it was clear birds were roosting here. And considering how much scratching could be seen in the leaves, they were feeding here too.

As I considered the turkey-hunting possibilities, I couldn't help but notice how much deer sign littered the area as well! Rubs and scrapes were plentiful, and given the south-facing slope of the terrain, I knew it was probably a well-used deer bedding area to boot. I had traveled many miles from home to hunt gobblers, but suddenly I found my mind drifting, with visions of big bucks dancing in my head. Only minutes later, as I continued along the ridgeline, the unmistakable white color of antler caught my eye. There on the ground was a big main beam sticking up from beneath the grass. My heart skipped a beat as I ran over and bent down to grab my prize. To my disbelief, both sides of the buck's shed rack were lying on the ground at my feet! Regardless of the outcome with the turkeys, this trip had already been a success, and I had a trophy to take home with me to Ohio.



Casper poses with the heavy, 11-point whitetail rack he found during his spring 2021 turkey hunt in Nebraska. Turkey hunting is a great time to scout for whitetails and make fall plans as you work to bag your bird.

While walking back to our RV turkey camp that evening, with the sheds held firmly in my hands, I couldn't help but feel grateful for the opportunity to chase turkeys and scout so much great deer sign all in a single day. That's the kind of double duty a bowhunter can get used to, and in this article, I will focus on how you can find turkeys for this spring and big bucks for this fall at the same time.

Double-Time Scouting

As far as I am concerned, there isn't much better than finding an antler from a mature buck that eluded me last season, all while listening to some gobbles echo through the timber! In the days leading up to the spring turkey opener, scouting your local flocks will really boost your odds for springtime success.

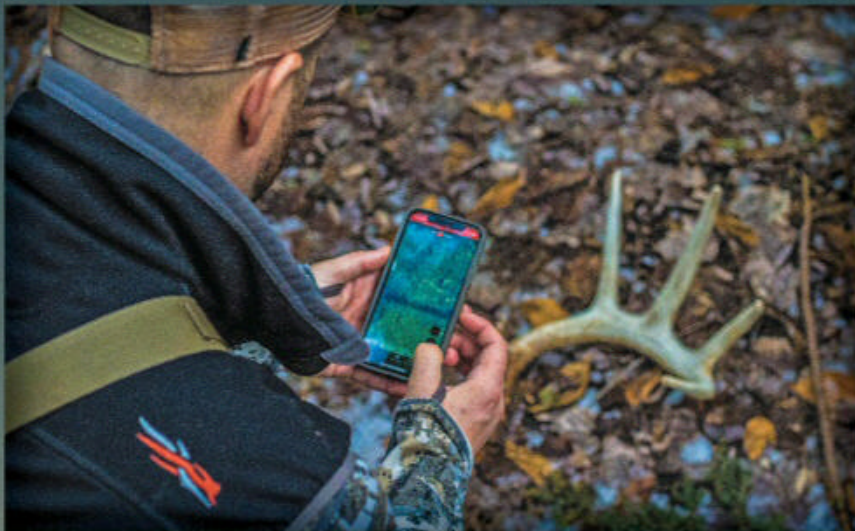
At this point in the year, you'll likely still find birds congregated in large groups, and that gives you a great starting point for figuring out where the birds will be during the first few weeks of the season. Although turkeys will undoubtedly disperse over the course of the spring, this pre-season scouting will give you valuable intelligence on the size of your local turkey population and help you set realistic expectations for the season ahead.

Just because turkeys are next up on your kill list, however, don't forget about those whitetails! In addition to keeping your eyes peeled for shed antlers, early spring is a perfect time to read and evaluate the deer sign from last fall, as all the trails, rubs, scrapes, beds and other sign will be extremely visible without any green foliage to conceal it. Study this sign carefully and take mental notes — better yet, take written notes or log sig-

It's not often that you can score on a mature whitetail buck during spring turkey season, but that's exactly what Casper did last spring when he stumbled on this awesome set of sheds during a Nebraska gobbler hunt.



Early spring is arguably the best time of year to scout your whitetail hunting areas. One of the main reasons is that the lack of vegetation makes it very easy to see rubs, scrapes, trails, beds and other sign.



Various smartphone apps such as onX Hunt offer an easy way to log scouting information in the field. Casper does this throughout the spring turkey season, recording significant observations that can help him be a more effective deer hunter come fall.

nificant finds in your favorite hunting app as you traverse your hunting areas. From sheds to beds and rubs to travel corridors, I use onX Hunt to mark all my important findings.

Early spring is the absolute best time to scout a property for deer, not only because the sign is so visible but because your physical intrusion means nothing to the local deer herd at this point; you'll be long forgotten by the time archery deer season opens seven months later. Again, this is also a great time to scan the ground for sheds. South-facing slopes, bedding areas, feeding areas and trails leading between those areas are all great bets to snag some bone!

In addition to scouting new land, putting boots on the ground during this time period is a great way to re-think properties you have hunted for years, and the whitetail information I glean during my spring turkey trips really helps me connect the dots when buck hunting in the fall. It is often said that when maximizing the use of your time, you can "kill two birds with one stone." In this case, however, I think it's more accurate to say you can "kill one bird, and one buck, with one rock!"

Turkey Tips

Once the turkey opener arrives, it's time to shift your focus to locating a hot tom that wants to play the game! Early in the season, many gobblers will be "henned up" on the roost, meaning they are in a flock that includes numerous females that have not yet been bred.

Given this, your morning setup is critical. My favorite

In addition to evaluating deer sign, spring turkey season is also a great time to freshen your mineral sites and begin running your trail cameras to collect inventory of your local herd.

TIM KENT PHOTO



strategy is to locate roosted toms in the evening and then make a plan to quietly slip into the area well before daylight and set up where I think the gobbler is likely to fly down. It doesn't always work, but when it does, you'll be home in plenty of time for breakfast!

If you aren't lucky enough to kill your gobbler as soon as he flies down from the roost, it's quite likely you are in for a slow morning until the tom breeds some of those hens and then starts wandering around in search of new girlfriends. As a bowhunter, you have two choices; go find another gobbler to hunt, or wait him out. Personally, I am a big advocate of staying patient, as experience has taught me that if I bide my time, my odds of getting the tom fired up later in the morning are high. This is when gobblers are most vulnerable and willing to come to your calls.

Lots of my turkey hunting occurs close to my Ohio home, so it's not unusual for me to leave the field if I don't kill a bird right off the roost and then return several hours later. Upon my return, I slowly work my way around the perimeter of the property, softly calling from time to time to mimic a real hen feeding her way through the area. Once I get a tom to respond to my calls, it's "game on." And if I don't? Well, that's where the whitetails come back into the equation.

Deer on the Brain

There are many times when it is not practical to leave the field during those slow morning hours. For example, maybe the property where you turkey hunt is too far from home to leave and come back again the same day. Maybe you only have one or two days each week to turkey hunt and need to maximize your time afield on those days. Or maybe you're on an out-of-state turkey trip and you have nothing else to do all day. Regardless of the reason, the long hours of hearing no gobbles in the spring woods are a great time to slip back into deer-hunting mode.

In addition to shed hunting and studying sign, turkey season is a great time to re-active your existing mineral sites or start new ones. I keep bags of minerals, a shovel and a supply of trail cameras in my truck throughout turkey season, and during slow periods, I'll often return to my vehicle for these supplies as I freshen previously used mineral sites or start new ones when I stumble onto an area that looks particularly promising.

As deer come out of their winter patterns and begin to feed heavily on the newly emerging green vegetation, they will also welcome the opportunity to replenish depleted mineral

BAGGING BIRDS & BUSTING BUCKS

reserves that will aid in the development of antlers on bucks and production of milk for does that will soon be giving birth to fawns. Of course, this also gives you some great camera locations as you begin the yearly process of inventorying your local herd and figuring out how many mature bucks survived the hunting seasons and harsh winter weather.

Putting It All Together

It's really hard to beat springtime in the woods. The op-

portunity to chase turkeys, hunt for shed antlers and run trail cameras all at the same time is pretty much my definition of the perfect day. Doing this not only makes you more efficient with your time, it will save you money! Let's face it; gasoline and diesel fuel aren't getting any cheaper, so finding ways to make our gallons go further is something we can all appreciate.

This spring, pull double duty on the turkeys and the deer to make the most of your valuable time afield. You'll be happy you did, both now and this fall when it's finally time to go chase that big buck! **B**

A full-page photograph of a hunter in camouflage gear and a black cap, seen from behind, carrying a large wild turkey on his back. The hunter is walking through a forest with green foliage and trees. A bow is visible hanging from his waist.

It's hard to beat springtime in the woods! On the most successful days, you can head home with a bird on your back and new strategies for intercepting big bucks in the fall.



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THE **BIG** PICTURE

Explore all the angles before purchasing your 'dream' hunting property.

BY EDDIE CLAYPOOL

MY 50-plus year journey to bowhunting maturity has been a wild ride — and hopefully it isn't over yet! Even now, I stand amazed at the never-ending, constantly evolving montage of my life as an outdoorsman. And if there's one big thing about it all that has never changed, it's that everything changes.

This stark reality has really hit home hard with me over the past few years as I've left the middle-aged hump behind. No longer goal orientated, I've gone from being one of the most hardcore bowhunters to one of the biggest goof-offs imaginable — a metamorphosis I never thought possible. Nowadays, without an insatiable ego no longer leading me around by the nose, it has finally become all about relaxation, fun and solitude. So, if you'll kindly give me a few minutes to ramble, I'd like to give you my take on a grand, new opportunity I've been afforded lately — land ownership.

Making the Big Purchase

For more than 40 years, I scrapped and fought hard for places to bowhunt. I trekked all over our Western public lands and knocked on a thousand Midwestern doors. And for about three decades, this line of pursuit served me well. Yet, all this time, a small voice was crying out inside my head, longing for a hunting place of my own. I dreamed of working the dirt, enhancing the habitat and watching my big-buck dreams come to fruition. I was certain of how it would all turn out!

When Peg and I signed our names on the dotted line a couple years ago and took possession of 320 acres of prairie

PHOTO BY VIC SCHENDEL

THE BIG PICTURE

in the Flint Hills of Kansas, I still had visions of large-antlered bucks bouncing in my head. Little did I know, but my “old ways” were about to fade fast. A lifetime of running and gunning was about to give way to a sense of settlement. Unbeknownst to me, my fetish for big antlers would soon be replaced by compassion for the animals that grow them. I never suspected I would soon be experiencing emotions that had never flowed through my heart before. Soon, my very definition of “success” would be upended.

When I first hit the ground on our new property, I was still functioning on past ideas. All my thoughts, hopes and plans revolved around attempting to make the place a big-buck utopia. Tackling the tasks at hand, I began to add and subtract from the habitat. A few food plots went in and some water sources were created; old growth timber was thinned and new trees were planted. Yep, I was going to “grow a few big ‘uns.” Soon, I’d be partaking of the fruits of my labor.

As I meticulously explored every nook and cranny of my private haven, I set my sights on spots where Peg and I could harvest big bucks. Soon, however, a new and exciting metamorphosis began. I was falling in love with this entire place, this entire experience. Suddenly, the pursuit of another set of big antlers became much less important. Yep, I was getting into this “thang” real deep.

One September day, I sat in quiet stupor under the shade of a hillside oak. In a moment forever frozen in my mind, I finally wrapped my head around the fact my bowhunting future was going to be far more about the means than the end. A peace settled into my spirit. Yes, going forward everything was going to be different. I’d finally exorcised the big-antler demons that had yanked my chain for decades. Lightheartedly, I headed for camp, anxious to share my spiritual experience with Peg.

Over lunch, I attempted to move my wife with my epiphany, but I only received a blank stare in return. Realizing my efforts to touch her were getting nowhere, I jokingly inquired as to whether she might have had a stroke.



After 40-plus years of hunting public land and other people's properties, Field Editor Eddie Claypool and his wife, Peg, bought their own hunting land in Kansas' Flint Hills in 2020.



"Not at all," Peg said. "I've known that forever. Your revelation is exactly how I've always felt about bowhunting. Big antlers mean little to me and never have. Us girls just want to have fun."

From that day forward it seemed a heavy load had been lifted from my chest. There would be no more pushing myself, no more stressing over big antlers and no more big plans. The upcoming hunting season was going to be a riot — a little bit of hard hunting, a lot of goofing off and even more so, a take-it-as-it-comes sense of satisfaction. The winds of change that were now blowing through my soul had provided a fresh, light air in my life. Even our dog, Lulu, could sense as much.

Peg smiled more and life was better. This was what property ownership was supposed to be all about.

Asking the Right Questions

As I write these lines, two full bowhunting seasons have come and gone on our Kansas property, and not a single large-antlered buck has been harvested by Peg and I. For most of my previous days, this sort of result would *not* have been acceptable. I simply demanded more productivity. As a matter of fact, prior to purchasing our hunting property, I'd rarely gone a season without harvesting a trophy buck — or three — and I'd *never* gone two consecu-

tive seasons without gripping big antlers. So, how was I going to handle this strange, ironic reality I now found myself in? Well, let me tell you a few things that I've learned about land ownership.

In my humble opinion, purchasing land solely for the purpose of having a place to bowhunt big bucks is starting off on a flawed foundation. Ask yourself, "Is it really worthwhile to spend your life savings on a piece of ground in order to attempt to kill big bucks?"

The answer is, "Probably not."

If big bucks are your primary motivation for purchasing a property, maybe you'd be better served to simply consider going on a top-end guided hunt each year. After all, there's certainly a lot less time, effort and greenbacks involved in that line of pursuit. Need proof? Do the math!

But what if you've made your mind up, and you're all-in on the land ownership idea? Well, let me ask you a few more questions:

- *Can and will you supply the tremendous amount of time, effort and extra money necessary to accomplish growing your own big bucks?*
- *When and if you accomplish your goal of growing and harvesting trophy bucks consistently, will you be happy?*
- *Just how long do you think that warm and fuzzy feeling will last?*
- *After that, what's next?*

You can always tell yourself you've made a good investment and that you can always get back all the time, money and effort that you put into the place. But, then again, is that really the reason you started all this work?

From putting in food plots to conducting controlled burns to enhance habitat for wildlife, the work of owning your own property never ends — make sure you're up for it!



THE BIG PICTURE

Coming at it from a different perspective, allow me to ask a few more questions:

- *Have you considered buying a place simply for the recreational value that it will supply you, your family and friends over many lifetimes?*
- *Can you be happy with this being the foundational reason to consider becoming a landowner?*
- *And besides, doesn't it make much better sense to have such a firm starting point anyway?*

Think about all this. Then, if you are still moving forward, ask yourself whether the property checks off most of your desires as the perfect outdoor destination. Would you love to spend your retired years on the place?

If you can answer “yes” to these last two questions, then you are finally and definitely on the right track. As a matter of fact, you just defined the place as a trophy property in your mind. And you just established the absolute best reason to move forward in the pursuit of your dreams.

But wait! That old issue of bowhunting just reared its ugly head again, didn't it? After all, you are still a bowhunter, and you want this to factor in to how you select your property. The big question, however, is how much should deer-hunting potential and trophy potential influence your overall decision to buy?

Well, only you can answer that one. Ask yourself whether you'll be happy bowhunting the place for the rest of your days, and whether you'll be satisfied hunting for the types of “mature” bucks that are typical or average for that area. Can you handle and enjoy taking on all the challenges involved in managing a property for wildlife? Can you accept the fact that mature whitetail bucks are transient creatures that are prone to finding ways to die away from the sanctuary you provide them? Can you accept that no matter how much you desire to harvest a

trophy whitetail buck each year, or what steps you take toward achieving that goal, such a reality probably isn't going to come to fruition?

Again, if you can answer “yes” to all these questions, you've not only found yourself a trophy property, you've acquired a trophy attitude and outlook about the endeavor. Go for it!

The Sum Total

For Peg and I, the learning experiences and changing emotions tied to land ownership continue. Certainly, in our book, we are winners. We no longer feel pressured or hurried by other hunters or landowners; we no longer feel the need to kill the first big buck that appears. Rather, we now find ourselves talking about everything *except* big antlers. Incredible solace has been found in simply watching the local deer herd instead of fretting over how to kill a big buck. More importantly, we have developed a personal attachment to the land and its inhabitants, and that can and will change your perspective on the entire outdoor experience.

As we began to view the animals — everything from deer and badgers to turkeys and quail — in a totally new light, they became something much more than quarry to be pursued. Now, we enjoy and appreciate them for the gift that they are — we feel a sense of stewardship toward the wildlife that calls our land home.

Finally — and it still amazes me to admit this — but I honestly get more satisfaction out of working and piddling on my land than I do from bowhunting on it. Working on my tractor makes me happy, and building up a sweat while doing a habitat-improvement project does my heart and soul much good.

So, am I still a bowhunter? You bet! Has this old man finally gone soft? Probably. But that's OK with me, because I'm sure loving this new adventure called land ownership! **B**

An important factor to consider when investing in land is the many ways the property will be used by family and friends. Peg and granddaughter Annie often spend time fishing on the creek and pond located on the Claypools' new property.





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Over the first few years of our marriage, my wife and I lived in Minnesota. Our trips back home to Illinois were spent with family and friends, particularly at her parents' home in the northern part of the state. We would frequently hike their property, which sprawls along the Rock River and features trails that are cut wide enough for a four-wheel drive pickup to pass through without a scratch. It was obvious that this wasn't your ordinary piece of property and the more time I spent there, the more I fell in love with it.

A Day to Remember

When it comes to bowhunting, Dec. 14, 2019 is a day I will never forget. With a 13 mph wind blowing, the 20-degree temperature felt more like 10 degrees and I was ready to get down out of the treestand I'd set up on my in-laws' property. It was 11 a.m., and I had a doe down that I needed to field dress and get hung up. I also had dinner plans that night and a one-hour drive home. But, for reasons that are still unknown to me, I decided to sit for 10 more minutes.

A short time later, I noticed movement to my right and squinted through the trees. Squinting wasn't enough, however, so I slowly reached for my binoculars to get a closer look. A pair of small bucks and three does were heading away from me. I continued to watch as they disappeared over the hill and into the brush, then grabbed my phone to check the time. It was now 11:12.

As I slid the phone into my pocket, I looked up to see a deer

The first buck taken off the family plot in more than 40 years is one for the books.

By **GRANT OLDENBURG**



HE WAIT!

A man with a beard, wearing a camouflage jacket and a matching cap, is sitting on the ground in a forest. He is smiling at the camera. Next to him lies a large deer with a white patch on its side. Several arrows with colorful fletching are stuck into the ground near the deer's head. The background is filled with trees and fallen leaves, suggesting an autumn or winter setting.

Waiting until the conditions were absolutely perfect, Grant Oldenburg snuck into a 22-acre pinch point on his in-laws' Illinois property on a cold December day, downing both a doe and 160 class 11-pointer — the first buck taken off the land in 43 years.

trotting straight toward me. He was 60 yards away and all I could see was a rack bouncing across the woods; it was high and well outside the ears. There was no need to think about this deer any longer — it was a shooter.

I slowly reached for my bow as the buck was now directly in front of me, only 40 yards away. If he went to my right, I would have to stand. If he stayed to my left, it would be an easy sitting shot.

The Back 40

Between the late '70s and early '80s, my wife's family purchased 260 acres of mature oaks sitting between two 600-acre tracts of river bottom land. Although the land had been grazed by cattle, only 10 acres of it stands tillable.

This property is a sportsman's paradise, with ridges, hills and pastures of native grasses all sitting on the bank of one of the longest rivers in the state, allowing for some of the best deer, turkey, upland game and waterfowl hunting in the country. Stories are told of hundreds of deer pouring out of the woods into the family's backyard to squeeze their way into a bunk full of corn during the winter of '78. The family watched from a wall of floor-to-ceiling windows as one herd staged in the woods and then rotated in as the other herd returned to the forest. About 750 pounds of corn a week was consumed as the deer were kept healthy and strong through one of the harshest winters ever recorded.

Legends of 180-, 190- and 200-inch bucks chasing does

WORTH THE WAIT!

on the property in November make my mind wander as I compare these tales to stories told of the famous King Ranch in Texas. You see, up until 10 years ago, nobody in my wife's family had hunted a single rut here!

Entering the 'Sanctuary'

On Dec. 14, the wind direction, temperature and time of the year were all in my favor. Thus, it was time for me to go to the Sanctuary, an untouched, 22-acre pinch point high on a ridge above the river and along a property line holding an abandoned pasture. Mature oaks standing 100 feet tall create a canopy that prevents even the wickedest of weeds from growing. I hadn't set foot in the area since mid-July, when I'd hung my set and cut shooting lanes with my father-in-law.

This was my second season hunting the property and I had done my homework. My trail cameras, scouting and experience from the previous season had led me to believe that if I could withstand the elements until 10 a.m., I would have a great chance at a mature buck.

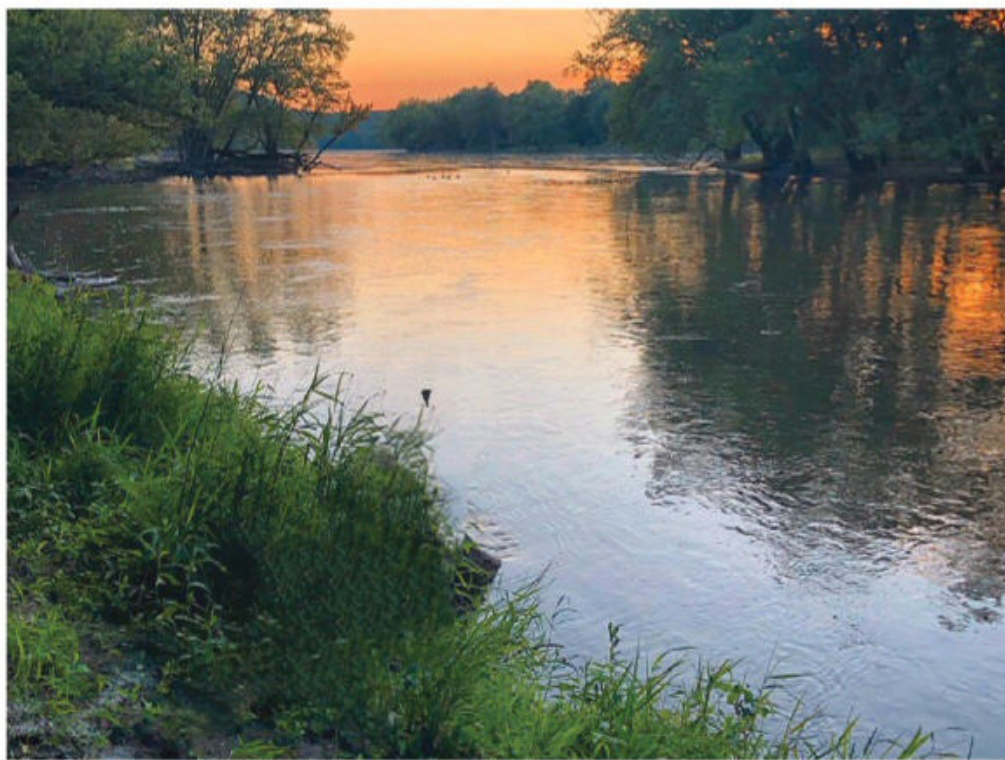
I got up earlier than normal that day as I knew I had a long hike ahead of me. I also had a new strategy that I would implement as I sneaked across the open forest floor — leave my headlamp on the entire way to the tree. This wasn't something I would normally do, but I compared this to the "deer in the headlights" look that allows someone to be within feet of a deer before they run off. My thought was that if a nearby buck bedded on the ridge heard my footsteps, it would see my light and recognize the threat was far enough away and stay put.

To my surprise, I made it to the stand without busting a deer that I knew of. And as the light began peeking into the Sanctuary, I heard something coming from my right and downwind of me. I initially thought it was a pair of does that I spotted and that they would soon bust me. They continued on, however, and I realized they must be just outside of my scent cone.

Once the deer got to within 50 yards, however, I saw that they were not does. In fact, they were actually two shooter bucks. Now, a "shooter" is different to everyone, but to me it's a buck that gets me excited and these deer had my heart beating so hard that I thought they were going to hear it thumping.

As I reached for my bow and prepared for a shot, I noticed a gnarly, blade-shaped brow tine on one of the deer. It was the 6-year-old buck with a 20-inch spread that we called Lumpy. He was a mainframe 10-pointer, with trash on both brow tines and a crab claw at the end of each handlebar. I had 50-plus pictures and at least three encounters with him the season before, all occurring only 70 yards from where I was currently sitting.

The other buck was named Pretty Boy. A 4-year-old, it was a beautiful 8-pointer with a tall, typical rack. Ten minutes into legal shooting light and I couldn't believe what was happening; my plan was coming together, or so I thought. But as they stood in front of me in the dim light, pawing at the frozen ground 40 yards away, I just couldn't find a hole through the small oak branches between us. The two shooters stayed out of range and moved off the edge of the ridge, leading me to believe I had blown my chance for the day. Feeling defeated, I hung my bow back up.



Nestled along the Rock River, the family's 260-acre tract of land features pastures, native grasses and mixed hardwoods including mature oaks, providing excellent habitat and cover for whitetails.

Suddenly, something caught my attention out of the corner of my eye. Turning my head slowly, I saw a basket rack 8-pointer walking in the opposite direction of the other bucks. As I watched him, I heard rustling in the leaves behind me and soon thereafter another shooter emerged, just 30 yards behind my tree.

This time it was a buck I didn't recognize. He was tall, wide and a stud of a 10-pointer. He walked slowly along the ridge and I was kicking myself for hanging my bow up. As the deer started walking through my shooting lanes, I managed to grab my bow and attach my release without him seeing me. He was behind a clump of brush upwind



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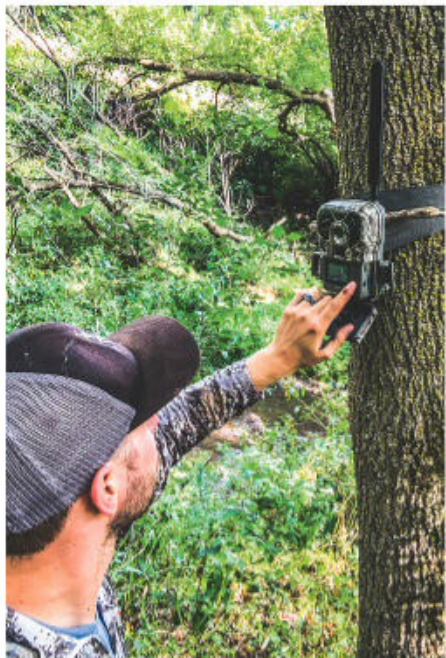
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WORTH THE WAIT!

(Below) Pre-season scouting helped Oldenburg determine which ridges the property's big bucks were bedding on. Hauling a 200-plus pound buck out of the woods can be a challenge for one person. Thankfully, Oldenburg's brother-in-law, Eric Nicholson (on left), was able to lend a hand.



of me when he stopped and looked directly up at me, and I knew there was no possible way he winded me.

I must be sticking out like a sore thumb, I thought. It was mid-December and there was not a leaf on the tree, so I sat as still as I could.

After what felt like minutes, the buck put his head down and turned back on the same path from which he had come. I was able to come to full draw and put my 30-yard pin right behind his shoulder. As he entered a shooting lane, I made an “errrp” sound to try and stop him, but the deer continued on.

“Errrp,” I said louder.

The buck stopped and presented a clear shot to the vitals. As I watched my green nock in flight against the early morning light, there was no mistake — it was on line. Then it made a hard left turn halfway to my target.

Deflection. Deflation. Disappointment!

Only 15 minutes into my morning and it had been a hunt of a lifetime, but it hadn’t ended in success. It was this misfortune that had me thinking I should walk to the edge of the ridge and throw my bow into the river. Nonetheless, I continued my sit, certain the day wouldn’t get any better.

Two hours later, however, I redeemed myself when a group of does came in. I was able to make a great shot on a big doe and 40 yards from my stand laid venison for the freezer.

A Chance at Redemption

When that “shooter” buck from the beginning of my story showed up around 11:15 a.m., I knew that it may be my last chance at a buck of this caliber. To date, I had spent more than 150 hours in the tree during deer season, hunt-

ing more than I had the past three seasons combined. With a newborn baby at home, my brownie points were dwindling, so it was likely now or never.

As the buck approached, I decided to remain seated and luckily it was the correct choice. The deer continued left, passing behind a monster oak and cluster of small maples, giving me a window to draw my bow.

As I sat at full draw, staring down the biggest antlered deer I’d ever seen, I was relying on muscle memory; buck fever was at 100 percent and there was no time to think. When the deer entered a gap between trees, I tried to stop him with an “errrp.” He didn’t respond and continued at a near trot.

“Errrp,” I said again. Nothing!

The buck was now in my largest shooting lane, 45 degrees to my left.

“Hey,” I said, and he stopped dead in his tracks.

Thwap.

I let the arrow fly, with the shot hitting right behind the deer’s shoulder. I quickly hung up my bow, reached for my binos and as the buck sprinted off, he stopped within 20 yards of the doe I had shot earlier. I could see red covering his fur on the opposite side of where my arrow had hit him and I knew it wouldn’t be long.

Seconds later, all I could see was a massive rack between tree branches. Then I saw the greatest sight of all — the buck tipped over on its side, hooves up!

I’d done it; I had finally defeated a big, mature whitetail. This deer — an 11-pointer that officially scores 161½ — was the first buck taken on the property since the family purchased the land. It was the deer of a lifetime, and it was 43 years in the making! **E**

SCI's 2022 Convention Celebrates 50 Years of Supporting Hunting



A record number of people attended the 50th Annual Safari Club International Convention in Las Vegas this past January.

Thousands of sportsmen joined Safari Club International (SCI) Jan. 19-22 in Las Vegas as SCI celebrated half a century of protecting our hunting heritage and promoting wildlife conservation during its 50th annual convention. The event, held at Mandalay Convention Center, featured more than 700 vendors from across North America and around the globe.

Formed when Safari Club of Southern California evolved into Safari Club of Los Angeles in 1971 and then merged with Safari Club Chicago, SCI has grown into an international organization with approximately 50,000 members and 200 chapters representing all 50 states and 100-plus countries.

The 2022 SCI convention featured outfitters and guides showcasing world-class, once-in-a-lifetime hunting opportunities throughout the United States, Canada and beyond, as well as a wealth of new products and gear from many of the biggest brands in the outdoors industry, including firearms, ammunition, optics and archery manufacturers.

Among the speakers and special guests during the convention were pro-hunting supporters such as Tucker Carlson, Donald Trump Jr. and Edward Byers, as well as entertainers such as Larry the Cable Guy, J. Alain Smith and Craig Morgan. The event also included a wide range of educational seminars and presentations focused on hunting, shooting and other outdoor pursuits. Perhaps most importantly, the convention and its auctions raised more than \$15 million for SCI and SCI Foundation (SCIF) advocacy and conservation efforts.

Over the past two decades, the SCI Foundation has helped put more than \$70 million hunter dollars into 100-plus conservation projects and education programs in 30 countries. In the U.S., SCI has a team of lobbyists, legal experts and others in Washington, D.C., and reportedly administers the largest hunter-led Political Action Committee in the country, all in an effort to promote and support legislation, legislators, initiatives

and programs favorable to sportsmen and wildlife conservation.

Just a few examples of the many initiatives and programs SCI has supported or been involved with recently include SCIF's Beyond BOW (Becoming an Outdoor Women) program and pronghorn hunt in Wyoming, efforts studying the impact that expanding predator populations have on various game species, and backing federal efforts to expand hunting and fishing opportunities on U.S. wildlife refuges.

"On behalf of everyone at SCI, I would like

to thank everyone who attended and supported the world's Ultimate Sportsman Market and our 50th Anniversary Convention," said SCI CEO Laird Hamberlin. "Your decision to join us in Las Vegas...in record numbers is the reason we can continue to fight for your right to hunt year in and year out."

Although the 2022 SCI convention is in the books, sportsmen can look forward to the 51st annual convention, set for Feb. 22-25 in Nashville. For more information on SCI, its programs and the convention, visit safariclub.org. **B**

—Associate Editor Mark Demko



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SCI is the only major hunting group that takes the fight to Washington, D.C., state legislatures, courthouses and the public arena to expose the lies of those who want to cancel our freedoms. Our freedoms to hunt and fish are constantly under attack. Whether we hunt big game, deer, upland birds or waterfowl, the anti-hunting crowd wants to destroy our freedoms. They're opposed to ALL hunting – and they're better organized and better funded than ever before. We need your help.

Please join SCI Today to Continue the fight to protect our hunting rights.



By JON E. SILKS

CROSSBOW TEST



TenPoint's new Nitro 505 is the fastest production crossbow on the planet. Built with Reverse Draw Technology and RX-8 Cams, the 505 boasts a long, 17-inch power stroke and ACUslide cocking device that is second to none in ease of use and safety.

TENPOINT NITRO 505

Able to launch bolts 505 fps, it's the fastest crossbow in the world!

THERE'S A SPEED race underway in the crossbow realm, and TenPoint is currently leading the pack with its new-for-2022 Nitro 505.

With an advertised speed rating of 505 fps (with a 400-grain bolt), this insanely fast rig is available in three models, depending on the type of scope shipped with the bow. In this test, we focus on the base model that includes TenPoint's EVO-X Marksman Elite Scope. Upgraded laser-rangefinding scope options include the Garmin Xero X1i and Burris Oracle X.

The Nitro 505 also features Gordon Composites Dual Flex limbs that combine with the RX-8 cams, Reverse Draw technology, X99 string/cables

and a 17-inch power stroke to generate eye-popping speeds. Meanwhile, TenPoint's ACUslide cocking/de-cocking mechanism is on a level all its own and is built into the two-piece Tech-X stock complete with cheek piece, butt stock, pistol grip and flared foregrip.

Built for Speed

There is much that goes into developing a champion racehorse, and it is no different when designing the fastest crossbow on the planet. TenPoint put its 27 years of experience and innovation to work and came up with a combination of high-tech features that sits at the head of crossbow speed class. It all starts with the company's Reverse Draw Technology that flips the bow end for end, placing cams toward the front of the bow and forcing the string to be drawn through the riser. This results in a longer power stroke and also helps TenPoint achieve an impressive 404 degrees of cam rotation during the draw/shot cycles, storing added energy to go along with that longer string travel. An added benefit of keeping the string in contact with the nock longer is enhanced downrange accuracy.

THE SPECS

Manufacturer: TenPoint Crossbow Technologies, 330-628-9245; tenpointcrossbows.com

Model: Nitro 505

Safety Features: Dry-Fire-Inhibitor, auto trigger safety, safety wings

Riser: Center-mounted, machined aluminum, black anodized

Cam System: RX-8, Dual, Spiral Groove

Axle-to-Axle Width: 12.375 inches (at rest); 6.5 inches (cocked)

String: BCY X99, 33.75 inches

Cables (x4): BCY X99, 12.75 inches

Limbs: Dual Flex, Split, Gordon Composites

Draw Weight: 300 pounds

Power Stroke: 17 inches

Grip: Pistol grip, with built-in rangefinder button

Stock/Forearm: Tech-X Stock, injection molded polypropylene

Finish: Veil Alpine Camo or Moss Green

Advertised Speed: 505 fps with a 400-grain bolt

MSRP: Starting at \$2,999.99

Comments: Extreme power, top quality, incredible cocking mechanism.

Finally, the Reverse Draw configuration also places the riser in the structural center of the rig, which results in excellent bow balance.

Another major player in the Nitro 505's speed equation is the all-new RX-8 Cam System. Built with deeper grooves to accept the beefed-up string and cables necessary to handle the new rig, the RX-8 cams feature spiral cable grooves to allow for the 404 degrees of rotation. This system also employs Sling-Shot Technology that compresses the string through a slightly narrowed path and boosts speed by approximately 10 fps. Vector Quad Technology furthers performance and efficiency by independently anchoring four individual cables, two on each side of the rail, in perfect alignment with their corresponding cam tracks, resulting in a balanced cam load, true tracking cam movement and straight nock travel.

TenPoint's Dual Flex limbs are 12 inches long and are made with Gordon Composites material. The 300-pound draw weight makes a cocking aid necessary. The machined aluminum, Tri-Lock limb pockets precisely align limbs to the riser at this critical interface to ensure consistency and efficiency.

Release, Rail and More

The Nitro 505 also features TenPoint's Micro-Trac fluted rail/barrel, built with a shallow channel on each side of the center that guides the sliding trigger box during the cocking/de-cocking process while also reducing the rail's surface area by 50 percent to reduce friction and string wear. TenPoint advertises increased accuracy and the longest string life available as a result of the rail design.

An upgraded Dyneema cocking strap rated at 2,000 pounds connects to the sliding trigger box and retrieves it to the docking station during the draw cycle. An auto-engaging trigger safety and Dry-Fire-Inhibitor work alongside the match-grade, two-stage

SPEED & ENERGY

	BOLT SPEED	KINETIC ENERGY
420-GRAIN BOLT	504.3 fps	237.3 ft./lbs.
500-GRAIN BOLT	469 fps	244.3 ft./lbs.
453-GRAIN MFR. BOLT	488.7 fps	240.3 ft./lbs.

BOWHUNTING Test Measurements:

Maximum Width: 15.3 inches (at rest); 10.25 inches (cocked)

Maximum Length: 30.75 inches (bare); 34.375 inches (w/foot stirrup)

Mass Weight: 8.62 pounds (crossbow only); 10.89 pounds (w/all included accessories)

Average Trigger Pull: 1.68 pounds

Length of Pull: 14.625 inches

Average Shot Noise: 106.5 dB w/420-grain bolt

Maximum Shot Deviation at 35 Yards: .563 inch

S1 trigger linkage inside the trigger housing. A bolt-retention brush, scope mount and manual safety lever complete the assembly.

Shooter's Connection

The shooter is connected to the Nitro 505 primarily through the stock, cocking aid and scope. TenPoint's two-piece Tech-X Stock is injection molded using polypropylene material known for its strength and durability. A pistol grip, flared pass-thru foregrip, rubber butt stock and raised cheek piece offer comfort and control, while the Zytel 80G Safety Wings remind archers to keep their fingers/thumb below the flight deck and out of harm's way.

TenPoint's ACUslide cocking/de-cocking aid is a critical component in the Nitro 505 crossbow assembly, since

it reduces the 300-pound draw weight of the limbs to a mere 5 pounds of cocking effort. The ACUslide mechanism is enclosed within the stock and is completely silent from start to finish, offering complete control via an internal braking system. That means the user can crank forward and back, or even let go at any point during the cocking/de-cocking process with zero loss of control. A telescoping crank handle easily attaches to the ACUslide interface and also stores conveniently at the bottom of the stock.

What's in the Box?

The Nitro 505 package included the crossbow with integrated ACUslide cocking mechanism, foot stirrup and string stops, along with the EVO-X Marksman Elite Scope, six EVO-X CenterPunch bolts with fieldpoints and a six-bolt Tech Quiver.

At the Range

While testing the Nitro 505, with its 300-pound draw-weight limbs, I found confidence in TenPoint's extreme testing protocol of more than 25,000 shots. The ACUslide is all that and a bag of chips with reliable, smooth and complete control in either direction. Balance is off-the-charts good, as the rig can be supported and even shot with one hand.

While the Nitro 505's overall footprint is very compact, beefed-up construction does result in a crossbow that weighs nearly 11 pounds ready-to-hunt. I personally appreciate the audible click heard when the cocking sled engages the string and docking station. Even with the significant pressure on the string, the trigger remains light and crisp.

Shot noise reported in at more than 106 dB, which was not unexpected for a crossbow generating unbelievable speeds that even exceeded TenPoint's advertised spec. Accuracy is excellent; pick your targets carefully, or you may very well break a bolt! **B**

MATHEWS BRIDGE-LOCK FIXED 5-PIN SIGHT:

LOCKED & LOADED WITH FEATURES

AN INNOVATIVE NEW
mounting method changes
the sight game.

One of the hottest archery trends these days is bow makers developing dedicated accessories designed to create a unified “shooting system” for better bow balance, a more streamlined profile and superior accuracy. The all-new Mathews Bridge-Lock Fixed 5-Pin Sight is a prime example, helping take performance of the company’s 2022 flagship V3X bows to new heights.

Developed in partnership with Axcel Archery, the sight is designed to work with the new Mathews Bridge-Lock Sight Technology that debuted with the V3X. Rather than mounting with a pair of screws on the side of the riser like conventional sights, the Bridge-Lock Fixed 5-Pin Sight features a dovetail mounting bar that slips directly into a dovetail-shaped cutout in the V3X riser. The sight is then locked securely in place with a single setscrew recessed into the riser



\$349.99 / Mathews Archery
608-269-2728; mathewsinc.com

above the mounting bar. The end result is a dramatically more streamlined interface between bow and sight, along with what Mathews says is improved overall bow balance and reduced felt vibration at the shot.

Although Mathews says the new Bridge Lock mounting system in the V3X riser will accept many popular, dovetail-style sights from manufacturers such as Axcel, Spot-Hogg and HHA, the company believes many customers will choose its Fixed 5-Pin because it offers just about everything a serious bowhunter could want.

For starters, the sight is quite compact, protruding just 4.5 inches from the front of the riser. It is also relatively lightweight, coming in at just 7.4 ounces on my test scale thanks in part to the mounting bar that is machined from ultra-high modulus carbon fiber. The sight is also extremely durable thanks to a machined aluminum sight frame. I’ve bowhunted around the world for decades, and I am confident this sight will take just about anything you or Mother Nature can dish out in the field.

In addition to an appealing, bowhunter-friendly form factor, the Bridge-Lock Fixed 5-Pin Sight offers toolless, micro-adjust windage and elevation dials, along with a third dial at the top of the pin housing that allows for individual fine-tuning of each of the .019-inch fiber-optic pins. All you have to do is loosen the pin you want to adjust and turn the dial to raise

or lower it. And, of course, the sight allows for adjustment of first-, second- and third-axis settings, as any serious bowhunter would demand.

Other highlights include an integrated bubble level, dual shooter’s rings (outer and inner) to help center the pin housing inside your peep sight, threading to accept an optional sight light and long, fully protected pin fibers that wrap around the exterior of the pin housing to maximize light-gathering capability. Another interesting and useful feature is a plastic sunshade on the outside of the pin housing. In dim conditions, the shade can be rotated to the bottom of the housing to allow more ambient light to hit the fibers, thus brightening the pins. And in bright sunlight, the pins can be dimmed by rotating the shade to the top and reducing the amount of light hitting the fibers.

All in all, I believe the Bridge-Lock Fixed 5-Pin Sight is a great option for any bowhunter who prefers a fixed, multi-pin setup. Not only does it look great and integrate seamlessly with the bow, it is compact, rock solid and delivers the excellent overall quality you’d expect from a collaboration between Mathews and Axcel. It has found a permanent home on my V3X 29, and while there are no guarantees in bowhunting, I am quite confident it is going to help me notch a few tags before the year is out. **B**

— Editor Christian Berg



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WEDNESDAYS
9:30^P_{ET}

SPORTSMAN

SCHEDULE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

MORRELL YELLOW JACKET
KINETIC 1.0:

STOPS ANY SHOT!

ALTHOUGH IT MAY have been hard to imagine even just five or six years ago, a number of crossbows today now launch bolts well over 400 fps.

In fact, two horizontal bow manufacturers — Ravin Crossbows and Ten-Point Crossbow Technologies — actually make models that send bolts flying more than 500 fps, a speed that was once unthinkable.

As bow and especially crossbow technology and speeds have advanced, so has the need for high-quality practice targets capable of withstanding repeated assault from ultra-fast, hard-hitting arrows and bolts. Backyard targets that were once capable of handling shots from any compound or crossbow may no longer be up to the task, especially when they're stacked against a high-end horizontal bow.

That's why Morrell Targets' Yellow Jacket Kinetic 1.0 caught my eye. New for 2022, this heavy-duty, incredibly sturdy bag target is advertised as having no fps maximum. Essentially, it's designed to handle the impact of any arrow or bolt, even bolts traveling 500-plus fps.

We recently put the Kinetic 1.0 through a workout, testing the target against several different bows and crossbows, and it stopped every shot with ease, including micro-diameter bolts. As a matter of fact, in most instances, the arrows and bolts were only embedded a few inches into the target, an impressive feat to say the least.

Bag targets are, of course, known for allowing easy retrieval of arrows and bolts and the Kinetic 1.0 is no exception, with every projectile sliding out easily using just one hand.

The secret to the Kinetic 1.0's incredible stopping power is in its rock-solid



\$149.99 / Morrell Targets
479-632-5929; morrelltargets.com

construction and base. Measuring 20 inches tall by 20 inches wide and 15 inches deep, the cube-like target features an impressive foundation and it is hand-stuffed with nearly 65 pounds of premium fill, making it more than capable of withstanding the energy and force of high-velocity arrows and bolts.

As far as what you'll see when you're aiming, the Kinetic 1.0 features high-contrast graphics on both its front and back faces, making it easy to focus on the bull's-eye and other aim points. The target is also weather-resistant, with a tough polypropylene cover. And, in the event the bag cover wears out from repeated use, or it fades due to prolonged exposure to the sun and elements, Morrell also sells a replacement cover for \$28.99.

If you are in the market for a new target, there are a few important points

about the Kinetic 1.0 worth noting. First off, the target isn't designed to handle broadheads, so all practice should be done with fieldpoints. Second, using outserts or fieldpoints that are larger than the arrow or bolt shaft is not recommended and will make retrieval difficult.

Although the Kinetic 1.0 checks in at just over 65 pounds, don't let that weight fool you. The target is actually fairly easy to move short distances, or carry indoors if you prefer to keep it out of the elements between practice sessions, thanks to the carrying straps on its sides.

If you practice year-round, or you regularly shoot a high-speed bow or crossbow, the Kinetic 1.0 is a target that needs to be on your radar. In fact, no matter what you send its way, this is one arrow- and bolt-stopper that's guaranteed to stand up to the task. **B**

— Associate Editor Mark Demko

BOWHUNTER TV



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BROOKS RANGE BULLS 1 & 2

► **Bowhunter TV** Host **Curt Wells** holds up the broken left antler of the Alaska barren ground caribou he arrowed on a DIY hunt with hunting buddy **Jeremy Eldredge**. The pair hunted in the Noatak National Preserve in NW Alaska. Their transporter was **Jared Cummings** at **Golden Eagle Outfitters** in Kotzebue, alaskawildernessexpeditions.com. Tune in the TV week of March 21.

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By **MARK DEMKO**

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Covert Optics; feradyne.com/covert-optics

Billed as the world's first thermal rangefinder, Covert Optics' ThermX TRF detects anything with a heat signature out to 1,600 yards and can be operated as a handheld unit or mounted to a bow/crossbow to serve as a thermal sight (where legal). Powered by a Lepton 3.5 micro core sensor with 160x120 resolution, with a 9Hz frame rate, the ThermX TRF quickly displays images and offers a wide range of functionality, reticle options and palette and brightness choices to accommodate different lighting and temperature situations. Imagery and aim points are viewed via the 1.5-inch color OLED display. Other highlights include an easy-to-use control system for navigating features and options, integrated visual laser to help with windage and elevation adjustments for precision zeroing, and a 7-degree field of view to enhance target acquisition. The compact rangefinder checks in at 3.4x3.25x1.5 inches and weighs only 7 ounces.



A SOLAR CELLUCORE

\$179.99

Bushnell; bushnell.com

The CelluCORE 20 Solar Cell Cam delivers quality images of game right to your computer or cell phone, while the integrated solar panel and rechargeable, lithium-ion battery greatly extends battery life. As long as the camera receives four to six hours of sunlight each day, it can maintain a full charge even after transmitting 70 images. Cam highlights include high-output IR LEDs for better night range, .2-second trigger speed and 1080p, 30FPS video.



DEADLY DECOY DUO

\$64.99

Primos Hunting; primos.com

A killer duo that no tom can resist, the Gobbstopper Decoy Combo features both jake and hen decoys at one great price. The decoys are lightweight, with collapsible bodies that make them easy to carry. The HD paint scheme boasts lifelike colors and plenty of detail, helping fool even the wariest gobblers. The hen can be used in three different poses, while the jake comes in a three-quarter strut posture to provoke toms into taking action.



INERTIA-DRIVEN ASSASSINS

\$39.99-\$49.99

VIP Archery; viparchery.com

Compatible with compound bows and crossbows, the 2-blade Ranger and 3-blade Commander mechanical broadheads use VIP's innovative inertia technology to open upon impact, with the sharp, stainless steel blades delivering a deadly, 2.4-inch-wide cut. The Ranger comes in 100, 125 and 175 grains, while the Commander is available in 100-, 125-, 150- and 175-grain versions. They're sold in 3-packs, except for 175-grain heads that come in pairs.



EXCEPTIONAL BASE LAYERS

\$105-\$115

Ibex; ibex.com

Early spring mornings in the turkey woods can be downright chilly. That's why a good base layer such as Ibex's Woolie Techs is essential. Woolie Tech crews and bottoms feature Pro-Tech Fabric, crafted from an 81 percent Merino wool/12 percent Nylon/7 percent elastane blend that not only helps keep you warm but wicks away moisture to keep you dry. They're incredibly comfortable and offer exceptional flexibility, even when hiking steep hills.

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MATHEWS V3X BOW CASES

\$179.99 (ELEVATION);
\$105.99 (OCTOBER MOUNTAIN)
Elevation; elevationequipped.com
October Mountain; october-mountainproducts.com

Designed exclusively for Mathews' V3X, the Elevation bow case is 39.5x18x3 inches and has a waterproof shell, adjustable cam cradles, bow tiedowns and compartments for storing arrows and accessories. The October Mountain case is 39.5x17x3 inches and has fleece-lined, padded walls, numerous accessory pockets, full-size arrow pocket and more. It features a ripstop exterior shell.



ADDED LEVEL OF SAFETY

\$75.99
Primal Treestands;
primaltreestands.com

Safety harnesses have been life savers when treestand hunting. Primal's Descender emergency descent device adds an extra layer of safety and security to the stand-hunting experience. In the event of a slip or fall, even if the person is injured or unconscious, the Descender automatically and immediately lowers him or her to the ground. The device weighs 2 pounds, fits easily in a pocket, handles weights to 300 pounds and descends up to 25 feet.



A NEW DEADMEAT

\$49.95 PER 3
G5 Outdoors;
g5outdoors.com

G5 has taken the original Deadmeat broadhead and upped its effectiveness by improving the blades' edge and sharpness. Available in 100- and 125-grain options, the Deadmeat V2 3-blade mechanical features 100 percent stainless steel construction and delivers a 1.5-inch cutting diameter, resulting in a hard-hitting broadhead that promises heavy blood trails and quick recoveries. Comes with a BMP practice tip.



THE X FACTOR

\$2,024.99
Ravin Crossbows;
ravincrossbows.com

Ravin's R26X features the same exceptional performance as the popular R26 while sporting a new black finish and silent cranking capability. This sleek, powerful crossbow includes HeliCoil technology that results in an ultra-slim profile while still sending bolts downrange at 400 fps. It's 26 inches long and 5.75 inches wide axle-to-axle when cocked (9.25 inches uncocked), with a weight of 6.5 pounds.

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By **EDDIE CLAYPOOL**

THE DIY GUY

THE DUFFER

Big bucks show up when you least expect them!

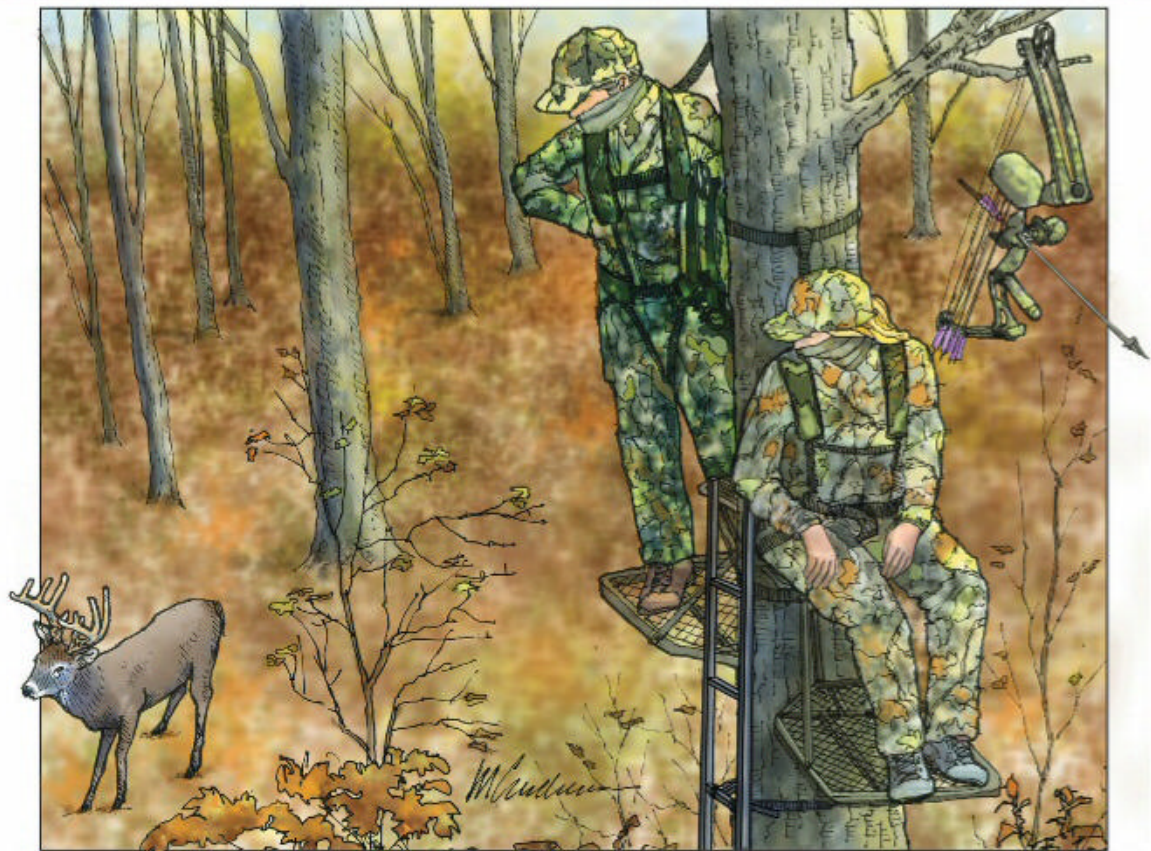
PEG AND I had only been married a little over a year.

She'd never harvested a deer with a bow in all of her hunting lifetime, and the previous autumn — our first together — had been no exception. Thus, as we began our second season together, I was determined to "help" her overcome her misfortunes; you know, Captain Claypool to the rescue!

I'd drawn a Kansas either-sex whitetail tag, and since Peg wasn't really ready to tackle the thought of a large-antlered buck, we'd simply purchased her an over-the-counter white-tail doe tag. With the passing of the month of October, our efforts at securing her a doe had gone unrewarded. There'd been a couple close encounters for Blondie, but the excitement had gotten the best of her. Buck fever — on does, no less — had been her nemesis!

With a couple dulled broadheads to show for her efforts, Peg's confidence was at an all-time low. True to my nature, I'd been quick to offer *expert* advice; it just didn't seem my coaching was having any positive effect. Always ready to "take one for the team," on the evening of Nov. 1 I offered to sacrifice one of my buck hunts to sit in a tree with my girl; hopefully, my presence would help accomplish a seemingly impossible task.

Previously, I'd hung a pair of stands in an elm that stood in a brushy draw leading off an oak-rich hillside. It was, in my magnificent estimation, the perfect place to intercept does on their way to an evening acorn smorgasbord. So, as we headed afield that fateful day, hope was in the air that Blondie's



luck was about to change for the better. Surely, we'd encounter many does, and with a 7-arrow quiver, she could shoot at them to her heart's content. I'd sit back and enjoy the show, offering helpful advice as needed.

Inside, I wondered whether Peggie really appreciated the caliber of guide she was getting this afternoon. Biting my tongue, I decided to keep her good fortune unspoken, opting instead to remain my gentle, humble self.

Climbing into our respective stands, we were soon sitting back-to-back, surveying the Kansas landscape. An unusually cold north breeze was fluttering across our perch, and I prayed for quick action so my partner wouldn't get cold before her quarry showed up. Early on in my illustrious bowhunting career, I'd learned how a cold body seemed to magnify the effects of buck fever. So, I made it a point to quickly master the art of remaining calm under duress. Whispering my findings to Peg, I was certain she'd benefit greatly from my advice. Feeling smug, I settled back to revel in my position as master guide.

As the evening progressed, not a deer was to be seen. Camouflaging my insecurities, I told Blondie to remain confident because, "I know a good doe corridor when I see one." Coaching her on the responsibility of remaining constantly prepared for the unknown, I assured her that opportunity would

soon present itself. Yet, by sunset — still without a single deer sighted — I sensed insubordination creeping into the ranks. Realizing I needed to deflect my insufficiencies as a guide, I pulled a deer call from my pocket and let out a couple loud grunts. Thinking I might call a buck for Blondie to see, I was sure that such a distraction would renew her confidence in me while at the same time getting her heart pumping faster to ward off the invading cold.

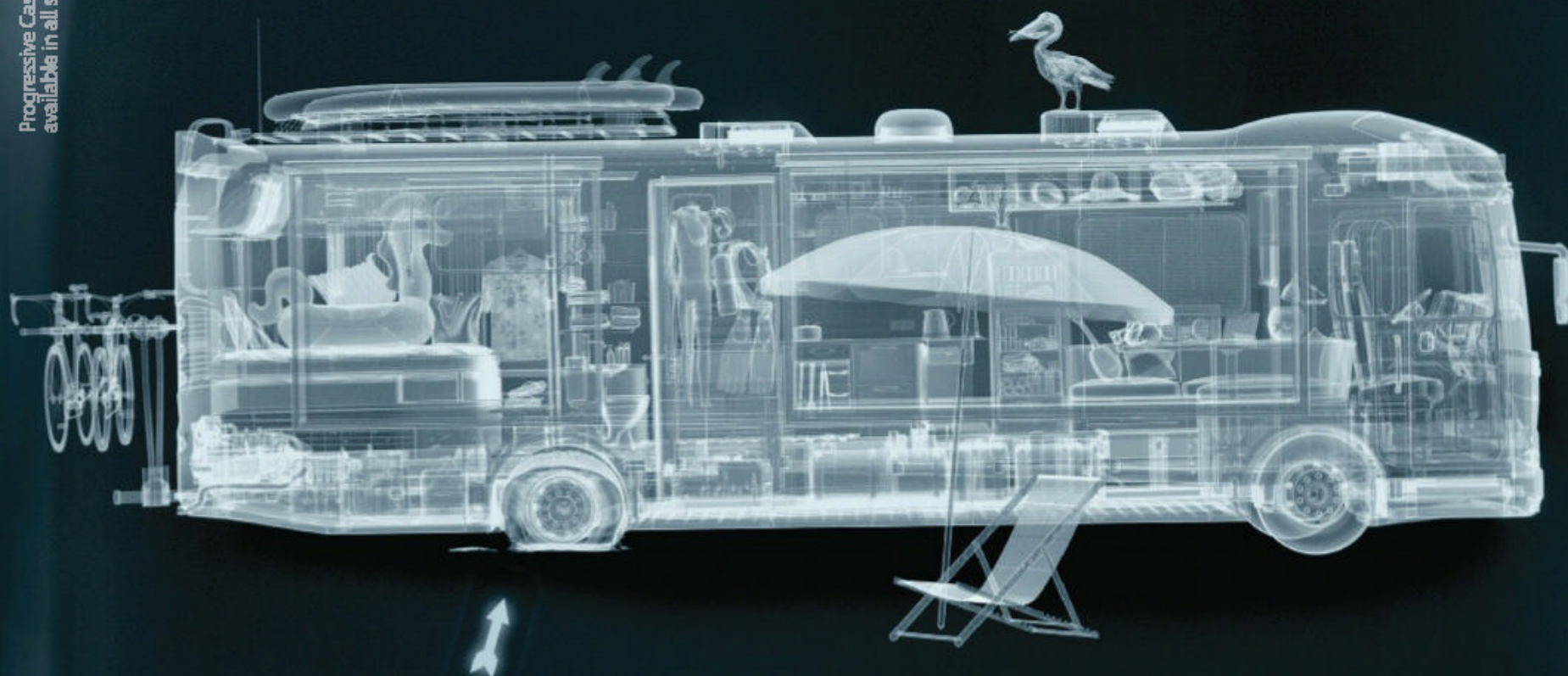
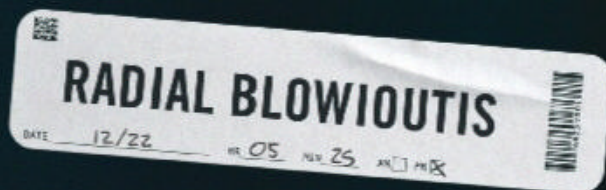
Turning toward Peg to inform her of my intentions, the sound of breaking brush snapped my attention back to my front just in time to see a GIANT buck trot up to our location. Passing closely under our tree, the monster stopped directly in front of Blondie. Grabbing my bow, I realized I'd not nocked an arrow, and by the time I did, the once-in-a-lifetime trophy was long gone.

For the first time in a long time, I was speechless. As I choked on what had just happened, Peg turned to me and asked rather simply, "Why didn't you shoot that? It was bigger than anything else you've ever killed." From the mouth of babes...

With that, I quickly ushered Blondie back to the heated truck. I then hurriedly headed over the hill for a private moment to *use the bathroom*. Actually, I've never liked for girls to see me cry, or change my shorts. I needed some privacy. **B**

MARK ANDERSON ILLUSTRATION

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