

THE **RUT GUIDE** 2023

PETERSEN'S **BOWHUNTING**

The Modern Hunting Authority

October 2023

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By **CHRISTIAN BERG**

FIRST SHOT

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ART DIRECTOR Mark Olszewski
ASSOCIATE EDITOR Mark Demko
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FIELD EDITORS

THE DIY GUY Eddie Claypool
GEAR TESTING Jon E. Silks
BETTER BOWHUNTING Randy Ulmer
BOWHUNTING WISDOM Bill Winke

ADVERTISING SALES

ADVERTISING SALES MANAGER Jeff Millar
(717) 695-8081 jeff.millar@outdoorsg.com

PRODUCTION

MANAGER Brittany Kennedy (717) 695-8089
brittany.kennedy@outdoorsg.com

ENDEMIC AD SALES

VP, ENDEMIC SALES
Mike Savino; mike.savino@outdoorsg.com

NATIONAL ENDEMIC SALES

Jim McConville (440) 791-7017

WESTERN REGION

Hutch Looney; hutch@hutchlooney.com

NATIONAL AD SALES

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Kevin Donley (248) 798-4458

NATIONAL ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE — CHICAGO OFFICE
Carl Benson (312) 955-0496

DIRECT RESPONSE ADVERTISING/NON-ENDEMIC
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SO CLOSE YOU CAN SMELL IT

A HUMAN'S sense of smell is nothing compared to that of a whitetail deer.

A deer's nose contains as many as 297 million olfactory receptors — tiny nerve sensors that detect odors and transmit them to the deer's brain. Compare that to the paltry 5 million olfactory receptors in the human nose and it's no wonder deer can detect our presence from great distances. In fact, under ideal conditions, scientists believe a whitetail buck can smell the sexual pheromones of an estrous doe from a mile away!

Despite noses that pale in comparison to that of our quarry, scents are among the most powerful triggers for our memories. Think about how a whiff of freshly cut pine can take you back to a Christmas morning from long ago or a particular perfume can make you think about an old, high-school flame and you immediately know what I'm talking about. In fact, the connection between scents and our emotional memories has been proven by multiple research studies, and as a result smells are actively employed as part of some psychiatric treatment protocols.

As bowhunters, there are many smells we associate with deer season. And as our pre-season preparations ramp up in advance of opening day, it is common to encounter various scents that take us back to hunts gone by.

For me, one of the most powerful is the classic Fresh Earth scent contained in Hunter's Specialties Scent-A-Way spray. You could mist me with that stuff at a Fourth of July fireworks show and I'd instantly be transported in my mind to standing outside my truck on a frosty October morning, donning my rubber boots and spraying them down in preparation for the walk to my stand. My wife says Fresh



A tumbler of hot coffee and a bottle of scrape scent are just two of the many smells of archery season.



Earth "smells like dirt," but to me it's a fragrant forest bouquet!

Another of my favorites — and I'm not kidding here — is estrous doe urine. I honestly enjoy the deep, musky odor inside a bottle of Tinks #69, and it's hard to inhale that acrid aroma without imagining a mature buck crunching across fallen leaves on its way to my tree.

I could go on and on, and I'm sure you could too. Think about the pungent, glandular odor a mature buck leaves at a freshly tended scrape, the crisp freshness of an autumn breeze, the nutty nose of steaming coffee wafting from your Yeti tumbler or even the foul stench of a steaming gut pile and it's impossible not to see certain visions of bow season dancing in your head.

As I write these words, archery season is still some weeks away. There is no doubt, however, that it's getting closer by the day. So close, in fact, I can smell it! **B**

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SENIOR DIRECTOR, PRODUCTION Connie Mendoza

DIRECTOR, PUBLISHING TECHNOLOGY Kyle Morgan

SENIOR CREATIVE DIRECTOR Tim Neher

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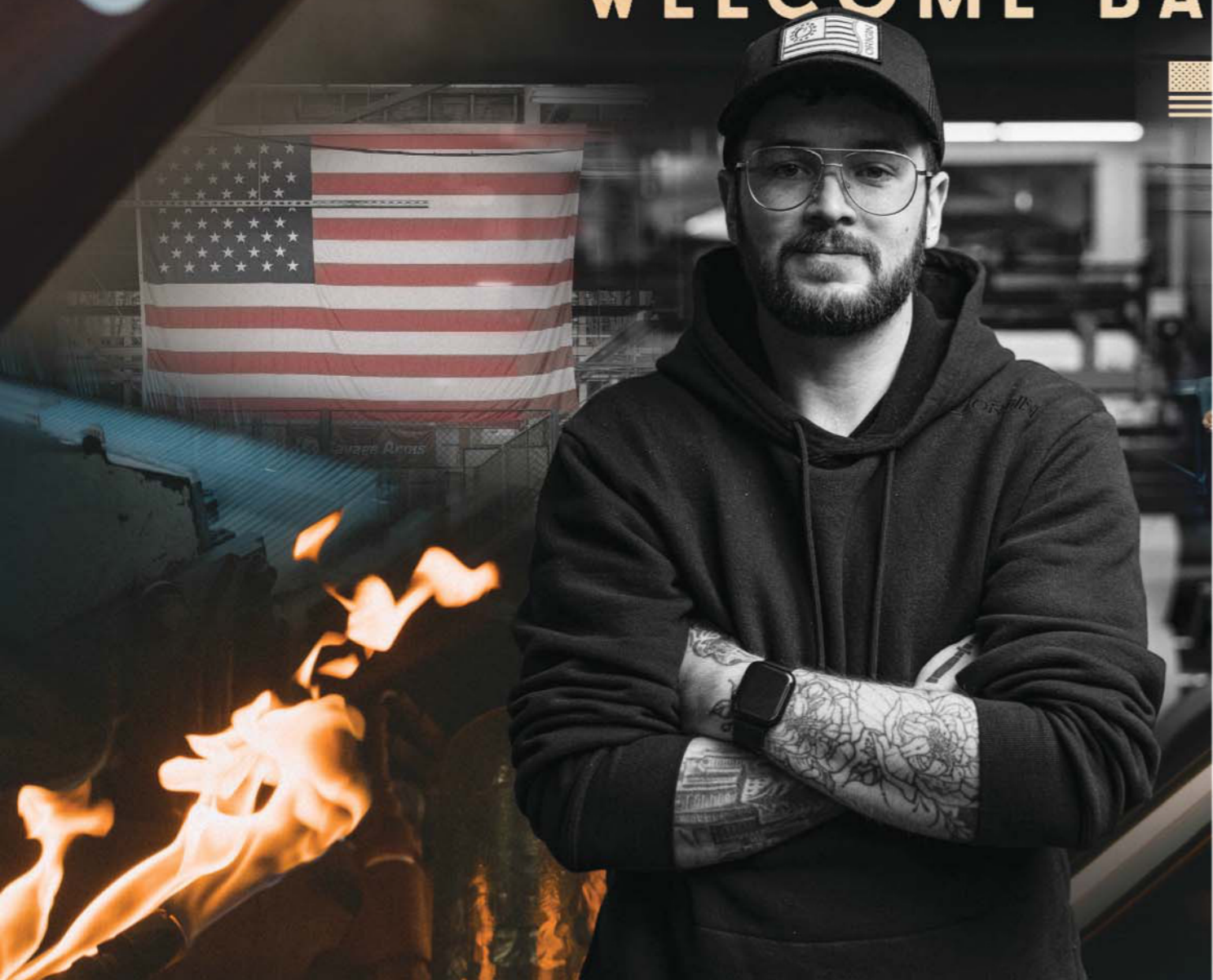
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By **JASON SNAVELY**

WHITETAILS

ACORN ATTRACTION PART 2: ENHANCING ACORN PRODUCTION FOR BETTER BOWHUNTING

The Chainsaw Just May Be Your Best Friend!



Research shows that the average oak tree produces just 29 pounds of acorn meat each fall. Furthermore, a deer needs to eat more than 300 acorns to consume a pound of acorn meat!

IN MY LAST COLUMN, I covered the basics about acorn production, the high nutritional content acorns offer deer and the distinguishing physical characteristics between red and white oaks. I also discussed that while acorn production is cyclical and never a guarantee, learning how to capitalize on boom years can take your bowhunting to the next level.

This month, I want to focus on things you can do, as a bowhunter and habitat manager, to maximize acorn production where you hunt. As a wildlife consultant, my income depends on how successful my clients are at maximizing the productivity of their land. Enhancing woodlands for optimal oak tree growth can really make a bowhunting client happy as acorns rain down in the fall!

Since science often guides how we manage our properties, I'd like to start by briefly discussing some acorn research. Then we can get into how to scout for better-producing oaks and

finally wrap up this two-part series with some management information highlighting the importance of managing your forests (think chainsaws) to maximize acorn production where you hang your stands.

The Research

While he was a graduate student at the Mississippi State University Deer Lab, Moriah Boggess simulated a mast crop during a year when there were no naturally occurring acorns. He did this by collecting 75,000 acorns from Shumard oaks (a red oak) and spreading them under non-producing

Shumard oaks in his test area over the course of several weeks. He also placed trail cameras on those trees to observe whitetail response to the presence of those acorns.

As I mentioned last month, conventional wisdom holds that deer prefer white oak acorns over red oak acorns due to the higher tannin level in red oak acorns that makes them taste bitter. However, Boggess' research indicates that rather than a straight preference for one type of acorn over another, perhaps deer have a preference for specific types of acorns at certain times of year — for a good reason! Since white oak acorns germinate rather quickly after they fall, whitetails eat them as soon as they hit the ground. On the other hand, since red oaks don't germinate until spring, peak acorn use by deer was later, roughly mid-January in Mississippi. In other words, the acorns sat on the ground for a couple months and the deer shifted to them when the cold kicked in.

Don't get caught in the trap of assuming that deer "prefer" white oak acorns across the board. Instead, consider the time of the year you are hunting and make the shift yourself. An astute bowhunter would realize that this equates to increased daylight deer movement near, or en route to, acorn-producing red oaks later in the season. Can you say post-rut hunt hack?

Acorn Scouting

Since the flowers of oak trees turn into acorns, there are many variables that can influence mast production each year. Chief among them is the weather during pollination in the spring. While scientists still attempt to predict the acorn crop based on all the environmental variables at play, one thing we know for sure is it's complex, and acorn production is highly variable from year to year.

The number and severity of spring frosts, as well as the amount of rain received during the growing season, seem to be highly influential on acorn production. Supporting this claim is the fact that there can be certain locations on a given property where the same

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WHITETAILS

species of oak outperforms others by producing significantly more acorns.

While scouting producers, keep in mind that the differences in acorn production between individual trees could simply be the result of the temperature differentials between altitude or direction the slope faces (i.e., south-west facing slope). These are the areas you should be scouting late summer/early fall when deciding on new stand locations. I've seen oaks flower much later further up a hillside or mountain-side than they do at the bottom of the slope. In this situation, you will want to scout this out before deciding on where to hang your stand. I like to record acorn production information in my onX Hunt app so I can return during archery season for a low-pressure, high-odds bowhunt. I'll note whether acorn production of a stand, or even a specific tree, is low, medium or high, and I'll be sure to label the oak species so I know *when* my odds are highest.

If you hunt the same property long term, you will be amazed by the amount of data and knowledge you

collect for individual trees, or stands of trees, over the course of a few years. This will allow you to improve your ability to predict which species will be most productive based on the given environmental conditions you are experiencing.

Production Boost

The best news of all is that bowhunters can boost the number of acorns produced by oak trees through select removal. Since oaks are a highly desirable tree species for most landowners and bowhunters, it can be difficult to convince landowners to remove them with a chainsaw! The truth is, *well-guided* timber stand improvement strategies can greatly increase the number of acorns that hit the ground each fall. Research on white oaks has revealed that only 30 percent of the trees produce 75 percent of the acorns. Habitat research specialist Dr. Craig Harper of the University of Tennessee reports that you could remove half the oak trees from your forest and increase the acorn production by releasing the crowns of the trees left behind. Larger tree crowns lead to higher acorn production. By removing the less produc-

tive trees, you allow more sunlight to reach the crowns of the trees left standing. Amazingly, Dr. Harper's research showed a 25 percent increase in crown size just **ONE YEAR** after the release cut and a 67 percent increase in acorn production! This is just one reason why I tell landowners one of their most valuable tools is a chainsaw.

Another benefit to thinning out the overstory is that more sunlight penetrating the forest canopy and reaching the forest floor equates to more food and cover *where deer can reach it!* It's a win-win! If you select your better producing oaks and leave them standing, not only are you selecting for better mast-producing genetics in the years to come but you're also managing for more acorns and more ground-level vegetation today!

Acorns are not the most important, or most reliable, food source for white-tails. However, knowing the role they play in your hunting area — and doing what you can to maximize their production — makes for a more successful bow season. Doing your acorn scouting homework in late August and September will result in more time at the skinning shed in October and November! **E**

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BOWHUNTING WISDOM

By **BILL WINKE**

MY TOP PRE-SEASON SHOOTING TIPS

Practice These Now So You're Ready When the Shot Really Counts



You can only focus on one thing for about seven seconds. So, it is critical to learn when to lock in your aim so you aren't mentally exhausted by the time the shot finally arrives.

AFTER 45 YEARS of bowhunting, I have compressed my pre-season prep to a short list of key checkpoints. If I focus on each one and get them right, I know I will be ready when the shot comes in the field. Here are the nine key shooting tips proven to get me ready for action:

Relax Your Bow Arm & Hand

A relaxed bow hand has become critical to my annual preparation. If I am seeing poor groups and maybe even slashing arrow flight, I first look to my bow hand. Actually, getting this right starts with eliminating tension in your feet and legs. That leads to your entire body feeling more relaxed. Everything should be supple — from the ground up.

Bend your bow arm just enough to unlock the elbow and let your fin-

gers hang naturally in a relaxed grip. The hand should be lifeless in order to shoot your best. It is just a cradle with no power to control the bow. Ideally, you move the bow by turning and tilting your entire upper body, not just your arm or hand.

Now focus on the hand itself during the shot to make sure it stays relaxed and lifeless all the way through.

Focus on the Spot

You have likely heard the old say-

ing that if you aim small you will miss small. Learn to maintain a sharp focus on a small spot you want to hit. When it comes into focus, you know you are ready to start executing the rest of the shot.

Learning to focus starts with your practice sessions. Twenty or 30 great shots with maximum concentration are much better than 100 mediocre ones. Shoot every arrow as if it is the only one you are going to shoot that day.

Aim Time

Studies done by the military have shown that seven seconds is the longest an average person can stay focused on one thing before their mind starts to wander. Maybe if you have a special knack or shoot year-round, you can stretch this for a second or two, but seven seconds of total lock-down aim time is a good rule of thumb.

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Granted, the animal will ultimately dictate the timing of the shot, but in the absence of a reason to rush or wait, strive for a shot within that seven-second window.

Generally, I pick my spot and start locking in on it as I am settling in at full draw. That gives me a total of about five seconds once I settle in to squeeze off the shot. If I have to wait for the animal to offer the shot, or for the wind to lay down, I will wait to lock in mentally until it is actually time to shoot.

A Surprise Release

I have struggled with target panic in the past, and still do if I am not careful. And this battle has gotten worse as I have gotten older. Target panic is the attempt, and the inability, to hold the pin steady on the intended target while taking a shot. The afflicted all issue a "Now!" command in their heads when the pin hesitates on the spot. Trying to time the shot eventually creates a mental gridlock resulting in very inconsistent (and unenjoyable) shooting.

The cure is simple: learn to create a surprise release. Discipline yourself to squeeze the trigger, or switch to a specially designed hinge-style release for off-season shooting. With no articulating trigger, these hinge releases eliminate the negative effects of anticipating the shot.

I find I can better create a surprise release with my index-trigger hunting release by pulling solidly into the back wall at full draw and getting a deep bite with my finger on the trigger (all the way up to the first joint). You do this by shortening the stem of the release so the trigger contacts your finger farther in.

If you want to learn what the correct release is supposed to feel like, hit full draw and have someone else trigger the shot. You just aim and keep your finger behind the trigger. At first this will freak you out, but if you do it several times, you will start to reprogram your central nervous system and this will feel a lot more comfortable. And, surprisingly, your shooting will improve!

Float Your Pin

Many feel the pin should settle rock-steady on the spot they want to hit. This is where target panic gets the

spark that turns into a flame. If you are releasing the string correctly, with a surprise method, you won't be able to time the shot, nor do you want to.

Just let the pin float around and over the spot. Your subconscious mind doesn't need much help here. Just focus on the spot and let the pin float around it in a small circle, trying to keep it close without trying to force it onto the spot. When the surprise release goes off, you will be amazed at

IF YOU WANT TO LEARN WHAT THE CORRECT RELEASE IS SUPPOSED TO FEEL LIKE, HIT FULL DRAW AND HAVE SOMEONE ELSE TRIGGER THE SHOT...AT FIRST THIS WILL FREAK YOU OUT, BUT IF YOU DO IT SEVERAL TIMES, YOU WILL START TO REPROGRAM YOUR CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM AND THIS WILL FEEL A LOT MORE COMFORTABLE.

how close the arrow impacts the center. Somehow, we have a natural centering tendency built into our central nervous systems and this just happens. It is kind of spooky, really, but it works. Floating the pin is one of the keys to good shooting.

String Side Elbow

One of my main cues now is the direction the elbow of my string arm points at full draw. This translates directly into the direction I am pulling on the string. It is easy for me to make the mistake of pulling the elbow around behind me at full draw while creating the holding force with my back muscles. This causes poor arrow flight and (for me at least) misses to the left.

To shoot my best, I have to make sure I am pulling straight away from the target. I can't tolerate even the slightest bit of side force that takes the elbow around behind me.

Follow-Through

I know my shooting is getting on track when the bow jumps straight toward the target after the shot,

without any twisting or sideways movement.

Follow-through is both mental and physical. Done right, the follow-through can smooth over a lot of form flaws. It is the super glue that holds everything together long enough for the arrow to escape the bow. If the follow-through is the same on every shot, you are going to shoot very consistently no matter what else you are doing.

On the physical side, your grip-hand must stay relaxed until the arrow hits the target. As I have already mentioned, many bowhunters snap it closed when they release the string. This creates inconsistent shooting.

Your bow arm must remain as steady as possible. Resist the common tendency to drop it or move it to the side when you release the string. Try to keep your bow arm up and pointed toward the target until the arrow hits.

On the mental side, stay focused on the spot. Continue aiming until it disappears at the end of your arrow.

Mid-Flight Obstacles

Because your arrow has an arcing trajectory, it is easy to hit something you don't even see while aiming. Be aware that anything above your line of sight could potentially deflect your arrow. I have had this happen four times, costing me very good animals. I will never get those shots back. I could have been successful had I just been aware enough to check my arrow path when arriving at full draw.

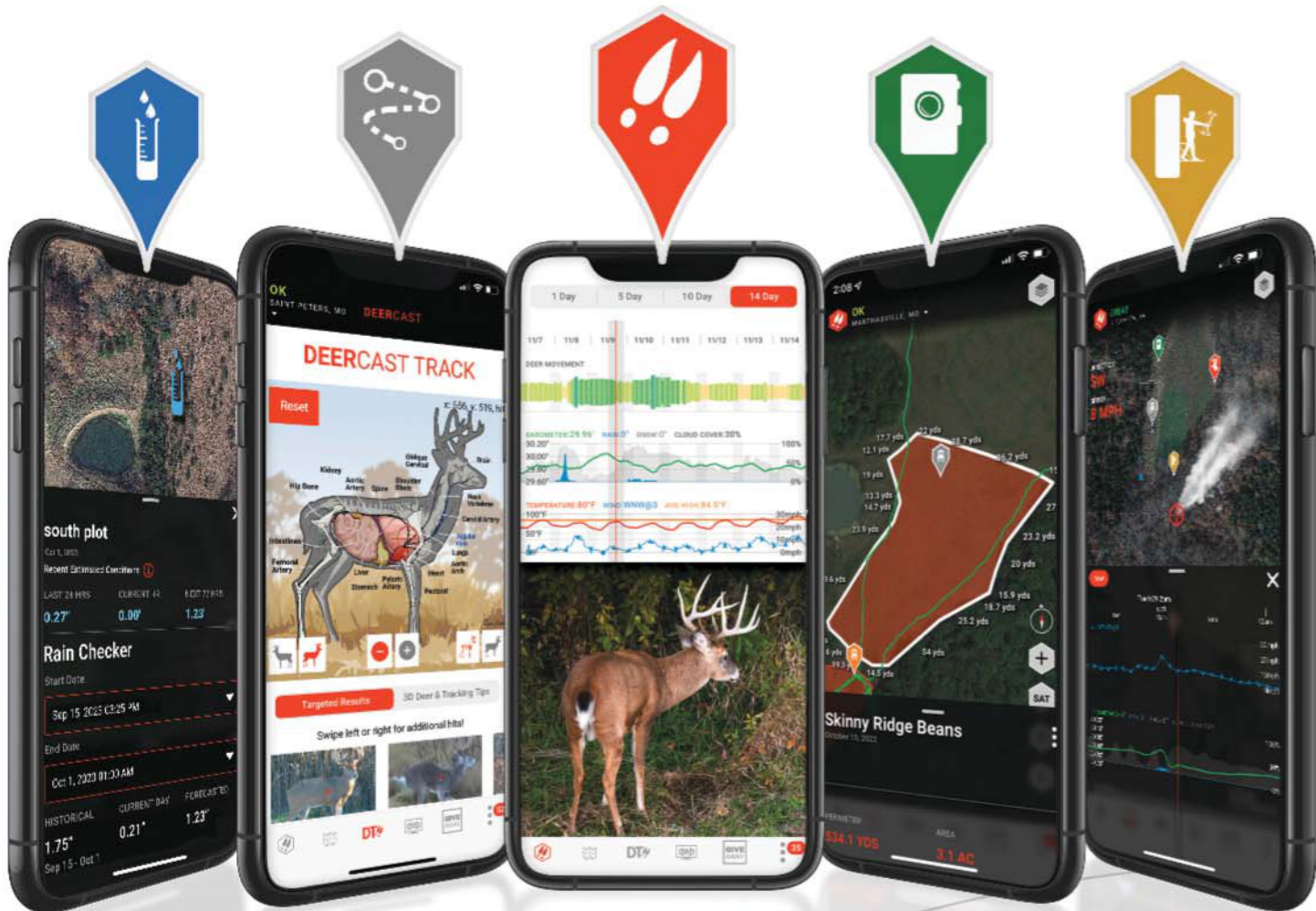
This pre-shot habit (like most of them) starts on the range or backyard. Even though you know the shot is clear when practicing, consciously look for any obstacles above the line of sight on every shot. Practicing this step in the backyard will make it a permanent part of your pre-shot routine while hunting.

In-Season Practice

Most bowhunters make the mistake of practicing less when the season starts. I am guilty of this too. We need to keep up our strength and maintain our form and focus throughout the season so we will still be sharp when the hard-earned shot finally comes. Find an indoor range where you can shoot every other evening after work, or after hunting. Better yet, carry a portable target in your vehicle and take a few shots whenever possible between hunts. **B**

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By **RANDY ULMER**

BETTER BOWHUNTING

Pressing your bowstring against your face at full draw can often lead to left and right misses, depending on the pressure you apply. The best way to avoid this issue is finding a consistent anchor point that allows you to keep your string from contacting your face.

WIN THE STRING GAME

Eliminate Contact with Your Face for Better Shooting

WHEN USING A RELEASE AID an archer's body should only contact the bow in two places — the hand on the handle and the tip of the nose on the string.

If you don't interfere with the bow in either of these places, the bow will shoot the arrow exactly where it is pointed on each and every shot. Unfortunately, most of us interfere with the bow in some way, and it causes the arrow to go somewhere other than where it was aimed.

One of the most commonly overlooked sources of interference is the archer's face. In this column, I will go over the basics of the bowstring/face/anchor relationship so you can fully understand how to make a shot free of interference. Hopefully, this discussion will help you to improve your shooting form.

Find the Right Anchor Point

Most writers and coaches teach that the most important reference point when setting up your shooting form is a solid anchor point. I do not believe this is true any longer. When we were all shooting without peeps, our anchor point was our rear sight, pure and simple. It had to be rigid and repeatable. However, the advent of the peep sight made a solid anchor point much less important.

The exact position of your release hand against your face is a matter of personal preference. Whatever method you use, there are fundamentals every archer should strive to follow. These

fundamentals revolve around consistency, alignment and comfort. You must be able to relax as much as possible at full draw in order to shoot consistently. Tension in any part of your body at full draw will result in inconsistency.

The anchor point should allow you to have perfect alignment of your release hand forearm with the arrow when you are at full draw. It should be repeatable under all conditions, including shooting uphill and downhill. It must also allow you to shoot your top and bottom pins equally comfortably, with no tendency to miss to the left or right as you move from close yardages to long yardages.

Most rock-solid anchor points tend to force the string into the archer's face and chin. Any change in pressure will cause the string's path to vary left or right as it is released. For right-handed archers, you'll notice that if you press the string harder than normal against the side of your face, you will tend to

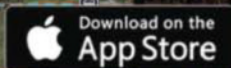
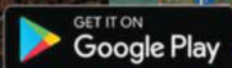
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miss left. Less than normal pressure will cause you to miss right. Small changes at the beginning of the shot will cause big changes at the target, especially with today's high letoff bows.

It is difficult to be perfectly consistent with string-to-face pressure, so I try to eliminate this variable completely by not allowing the string to contact my face at all, other than at the tip of my nose.

To find the right anchor that avoids the string contacting your face, have someone shoot a close-up video of your face when you are at full draw. Use your standard hunting release aid and your normal anchor point. Hold the bow at full draw, just as though you were going to shoot. Review the video and look closely at your bowstring where it crosses your chin/face. Check to see if the string is pressed tightly against your face. If it is, it will be a constant source of inconsistency.

As with any other aspect of archery, if you press the string against your face in exactly the same way every time, you will shoot well. However, it is difficult to apply the exact same

pressure on each shot, even for archers who practice many hours every week.

Breaking the Habit

If you feel like facial contact is impacting your shot, experiment with ways to get the string off your chin. All faces are shaped differently, so it is more difficult for some than it is for others. You can keep the string off your face by turning your head until you are facing almost straight at the target. Most right-handed archers, and even some good ones, turn their heads much too far to the right, causing the string to make solid contact with their face. I would rather see a shooter hold the string off to the side of the nose than to see them creating face pressure by trying to keep the string on the tip of their nose. Once you figure out how to anchor to avoid contact, make a conscious effort to keep the string off your face on every shot. It may feel awkward at first, and you may have to adjust your pins, but your left and right misses will become fewer and smaller.

One of the easiest ways to tell if you are interfering with the bowstring is to stand behind the bow with the arrow nocked and on the arrow rest. Line the

arrow up with the bowstring and look to see if the pins are lined up with the arrow and the string. With a perfectly tuned bow and no face interference, the pins should line up with the string and arrow. If the pins are to the left of the string (for a right-handed archer) you are probably pressing the string into your face.

If you like to center the pin in your peep sight when aiming (as opposed to centering the sight's housing), your anchor point will need to move as the shooting distance changes. For example, if on a 20-yard shot you center your 20-yard pin in the peep, and on a 60-yard shot you center your 60-yard pin in the peep, you must move your anchor point up or down your face.

It is acceptable to move your anchor point up and down a little to aim with different pins. This movement should only be vertical, never horizontal. If you move your anchor point back and forth horizontally it will change your form and adversely affect your shooting. To prevent your anchor's vertical movement from causing left or right misses at closer or longer ranges, it is best to keep your anchor point very light on your face, as discussed. **E**



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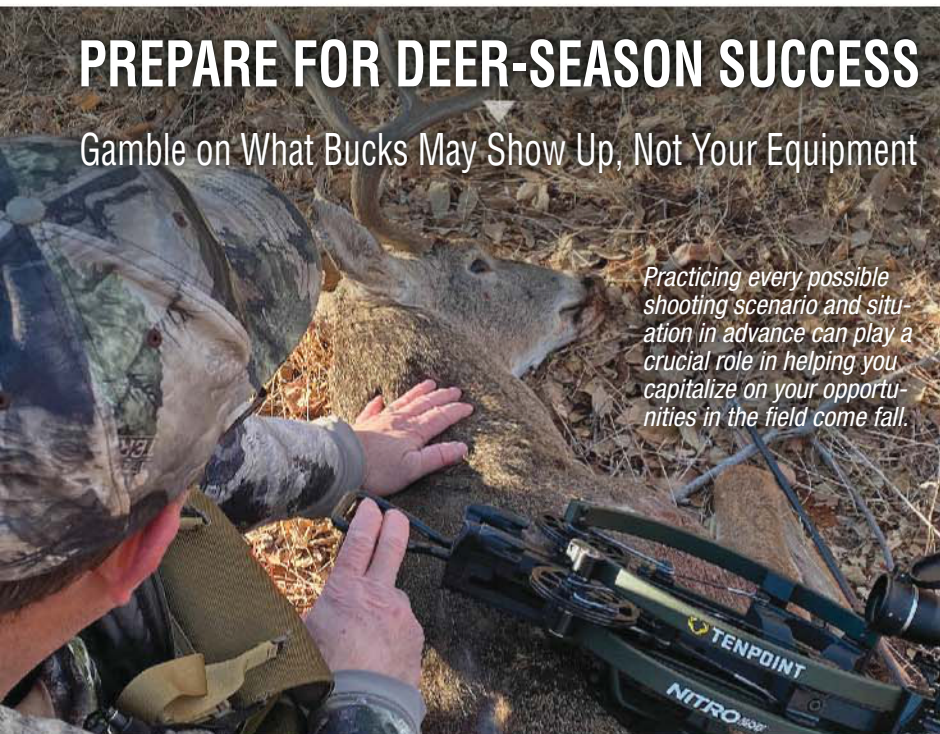


By **BRAD FENSON**

CROSSBOWS

PREPARE FOR DEER-SEASON SUCCESS

Gamble on What Bucks May Show Up, Not Your Equipment



Practicing every possible shooting scenario and situation in advance can play a crucial role in helping you capitalize on your opportunities in the field come fall.

Tuning broadheads and bolts will ensure consistent and true flight. To this end, an arrow spinner can be worth its weight in antler mass when used regularly.

It's also important to make sure your broadheads are sharp. Do you use mechanicals? If so, is the O-ring in perfect condition? If you are unsure, put on a new one. Check to make sure the vanes are glued tight for their entire length, and nocks need to be seated firmly and aligned with the cock vane. As you are going over everything, create a checklist to refer to during the season to prevent problems and increase confidence when a big buck finally shows up.

Use A Rest or Hanger

A crossbow does provide an advantage over compound bows when hunting, since a person does not have to draw. However, muscle fatigue will rob you of accuracy if you cannot hold your bow level for any length of time. To help with this, practice holding your crossbow level and still on a target for 30 seconds before shooting. Training yourself to breathe and build muscle memory can be your best practice all year. As part of this process, try tucking your elbow and raising it slowly when it's time to shoot.

Of course, it's always an excellent idea to use a rest whenever possible. A rest that allows your bow to stay on your shoulder also reduces movement when a deer appears. Monopods and bipods work great, but make sure to practice with them in a stand or blind before hunting to ensure your setup is stable and will not fall.

If you choose not to use a rest, it can be draining to hold a crossbow all day. Setting up a bow hanger is an alternative, but make sure you can remove the bow quietly and with as little movement as possible. Some crossbows require two hands to lift off the hook, and knowing how to remove a bow from the hanger without noise or excess movement is something that

BIG BUCKS CAN BE unpredictable during the rut, showing up when you least expect them. In many ways, it's like gambling, putting in your time and hoping that lady luck drops an unknown and huge buck right in your lap. The potential for opportunity, coupled with taking advantage of a deer's most vulnerable period of the year, make it worth throwing the dice and being in the field at the most critical time of the season.

And while the old saying goes, "Nothing ventured, nothing gained," it's wise to not leave everything to chance. Make sure you are ready as a hunter and that your equipment is checked and prepared for ultimate performance this fall!

Check and Double-Check

Before spending a week or two in a treestand or blind, ensure your crossbow, bolts and broadheads are in perfect working order. Consider it an annual physical for your bow and equipment and don't leave anything

out. Check the string for frays and broken strands, break out the wax and work it into strings and cables.

It's a good idea to refer to the owner's manual for guidance; proper maintenance is crucial to safety and proper working order. Screws and bolts need to be checked to ensure they are tight, and a little oil will prevent corrosion down the road. Check the cams and wheels for firm positioning, and always watch for play to indicate issues that may be brewing.

After attaching broadheads to your bolts, spin them to check balance.



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CROSSBOWS

should not be overlooked. If needed, add tape or padding to the hook to prevent metal-to-metal contact. Also make sure the bow hanger you intend to use has the strength to support your crossbow.

Another option is to try a tactical sling that can stabilize the crossbow across your chest and leave your hands free. The crossbow's weight will be distributed across your shoulders for long sits, and a sling can be beneficial as a stabilizer and rest when pulled into an elbow. Practice sitting with the crossbow supported on a sling, and make sure you can shoulder the weapon unencumbered.

Practice Shooting Scenarios

As part of your preparation, it's a good habit to practice shooting from your stand or blind. Knowing you have the correct chair height and proper clearance for limbs, bolts and fletching sounds like a simple thing. However, it's a safe bet that most archers have experienced issues with their hunting setup at one time or another.

It's also important to run through various shooting scenarios and practice aiming at all shooting angles and directions. Practice over the years has taught me that a far right or left shot angle always creates bow lean. Hence, I mentally check my level before shooting and have engrained this habit by practicing reaching shots and looking for level. How far can you swing your bow in any direction with the rest or shooting sticks? Are there any modifications needed? Can you move the sticks without losing a solid grip on the bow and without making noise?

Take a Load Off

Modern crossbows store an incredible amount of energy in small, compact limbs, but this high-performance equipment is not designed to be under load for long periods. If you take a break for lunch, make sure to de-cock the bow and take the pressure off the limbs. Nowadays, cocking and de-cocking devices make it easy to give your limbs a break whenever possible.

Never leave your crossbow cocked overnight! You can use it cocked for the entire hunting day, but it needs to be de-cocked at day's end by shooting

the crossbow or using a specialized de-cocking device.

Put the Odds in Your Favor

Having your equipment in perfect working condition stacks the odds for success in your favor. Knowing your equipment intimately and confidently prevents issues and allows you to rise to the challenge when a big buck appears, since you know how to avoid problems. There's no doubt that there is less gambling and more control when you take charge and spend time preparing.

There is a misnomer that crossbow hunters do not need to spend as much time practicing as vertical bowhunters; however, nothing could be further from the truth. The more time you spend shooting, practicing and getting to know every detail about your bow, bolt and broadhead, the better prepared you are for success and, more importantly, for overcoming any challenges.

Let Mother Nature roll the dice with a buck's desire to roam and rut. If you are fortunate enough to have a deer show up that you have never seen before, chances are good that you will capitalize due to your preparedness. **E**



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- 1 The design of the **OVAL STEEL TUBE** help to lighten the stand without sacrificing stability and comfort.
- 2 The Bowlite stands at **16 FT. TALL** and **WEIGHS 53 LBS.**
- 3 **COMFORTMAX™ CONTOURED SEAT** will give you all day comfort.
- 4 The **PLATFORM** is designed to allow you stand or sit to make most any shots that you need to.
- 5 The **ARMRESTS** on the seat allow for maximum comfort while sitting and are raised to enable swiveling to make shots behind you by rotating your leg through the armrest area from either side.
- 6 The stand comes with **2 ACCESSORY HOOKS.**

***TREE BRACE** included to support the stand.*



By **CABE JOHNSON**

FINE-TUNE YOUR ANCHOR POINT

Let your anchor lead, and your elbow will follow.

NOT LONG AGO, we found a secret to help us hold steadier on target. For many years, we didn't give a lot of thought to our release hand/arm position. We would just shoot the bow how it was set up.

We then learned that, at full draw, the back elbow is supposed to be in line with the arrow. So, we had someone stand behind us and eyeball our release arm at full draw for alignment. If it was close, we were on our way.

Years later, a Vegas tournament winner told us the elbow should be just shy of straight, as it needed somewhere to go during follow-through. We started playing with different elbow alignments and quickly realized our elbow and anchor point were directly related. Trying to align our elbow exactly the same every time was almost impossible, but having a consistent anchor point would lock our elbow into the correct position.

So, we tried various anchor points — up by our chin all the way to behind our ear. Initially, we didn't see much difference, but one of us eventually found a release he really liked. He analyzed the release and found it had a $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch longer neck than his old one. Essentially, it moved his hand back along his jaw by that same distance, meaning his elbow would also be a little farther back. There was no difference to the naked eye, but his sight picture and steadiness revealed the truth.

Wanting to know why this steadiness would just magically appear and disappear, he analyzed different anchor points. He found that when he was at just the right anchor point, his back muscles would more fully engage, which would help him hold the draw weight. Other alignments put more strain on his arm muscles. His arm muscles are small compared to those back muscles, so it made sense to let the back muscles do the work.

He had accidentally stumbled upon a magic alignment that helped him hold steady. Then, the thought occurred to him that a different anchor point might have really helped his old bows shoot better. He realized he had been missing out for a long time. He also wondered how many archers already knew about this.

So, at his next opportunity, he asked a national champion how he determined his anchor point/elbow alignment. The champion smiled, reached into his quiver and pulled out four D-loops, all cut to different lengths. He said that, when installed, each D-loop would be $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch different in length, and that when he got a new bow, he would use the D-loops to help him find that magic alignment.

We started studying the top archers and noticed they all had a very similar anchor point. Their big knuckles would be aligned right below/even with their ear. Sure, they would have different grips on their release and different D-loop lengths, but when they were settled in, almost all of them had their knuckles in line with their ear. We realized that with all the different body types out there, it isn't perfect, but it's a great place to start.

We found that proper muscle alignment was what we needed in order to hold steady. Different anchor points allow for that. Finding that proper muscle alignment requires a lot of experimentation; using different D-loop lengths makes it easier to change your overall draw length without needing to re-tune your bow. **B**

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By **JON E. SILKS**

BOW TEST

MATHEWS IMAGE

A Youth Bow with Flagship Bow Features

MATHEWS CATERS TO a wide range of archers by offering bows with different specs and configurations; however, the company never forsakes its mission or values to get there.

All bows, regardless of intended audience, are built with the same Mathews commitment to quality and performance. The workmanship is apparent, whether you're picking up a Phase 4, V3X, Prima or the subject of this review, the Image. This new rig covers a generous draw-length range but is aimed at providing a high-end bow experience in the low draw weight category, making it a perfect choice for the up-and-coming bowhunter.

Specialized Riser

Mathews outfits the Image with a dedicated version of its popular Extended Bridge Riser that features the Bridge-Lock Stabilizer mounting through-channel in its structure. It is located immediately below the standard threaded stabilizer mounting position and creates a direct connection to the riser's core, which is intended to significantly increase stiffness and enhance integration. Mathews Bridge-Lock Stabilizers have detents spaced out every half-inch along the bar and a stackable weight system at the end of the bar to make adjustment of your rig's balance quick and simple.

The riser also includes another riser channel that accepts Bridge-Lock Sights and the dovetail bar of many popular sights on the market. This brings the

The new Mathews Image is a low-poundage bow designed to provide a "flagship bow" shooting experience in a rig designed with up-and-coming bowhunters in mind.

THE SPECS

Manufacturer: Mathews Archery, 608-269-2728; mathewsinc.com

Model: Image

Riser: Reflex, Extended Bridge

Grip: Engage, molded composite

Limbs: Resistance Phase Damping, Split

Draw Weights: 40, 43, 47 and 50 pounds peak

Draw Lengths: 25.5-30 inches, in half-inch increments; modular

Cam System: Crosscentric Cam with SwitchWeight Technology

Letoff: 80 or 85 percent, adjustable; 83.2 percent (as tested)

String: Zebra, BCY 452X blend, 62.625 inches

Cables (x2): Zebra, BCY 452X, 30.0625 inches

Brace Height: 6 inches

Axle-to-Axle Length: 29 inches

Weight: 4.27 pounds (advertised), 4.37 pounds (tested)

Finish: Realtree Edge, plus seven additional camo and solid-color options.

Advertised IBO Speed: 335 fps

MSRP: \$1,299

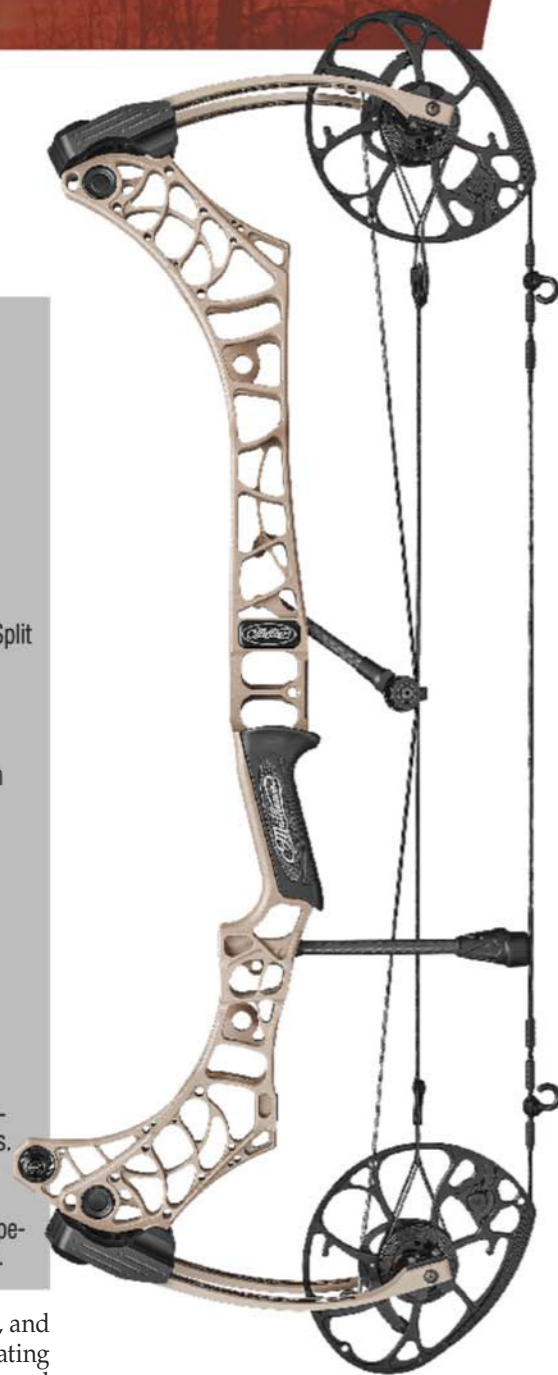
Comments: The full flagship bow experience in a low draw-weight package.

sight mount in direct contact with, and in the center of, the riser, eliminating the need for a side-mount bracket and opens up the outside of the riser's sight window when coupled with the built-in Integrate dovetail arrow rest mount on the back of the riser. Mathews also employs its 3D Damping Technology designed to decrease vibration in three axes from the point of the grip. Using the Nano 740 Harmonic Damper positioned at extended distances in all three axes, it works to reduce post-shot vibration and noise while its extended forward position adds balance at full

draw. The Engage Grip produces a neutral wrist position, offers comfort and, most importantly, encourages consistency in hand position.

Energy Management

The Image features the Crosscentric Cam system combining a smooth-drawing, perfectly circular profile on one half of the cam and a performance-generating, aggressive profile on the other half. Advanced Vectoring



System (AVS) Technology employs two small discs on each cam, mounted off-set to the axle. Anchored to the ends of the harness cable, the discs rotate non-concentrically during the draw cycle, shifting the force vector to store more energy on the front end of the draw and increase letoff on the back side.

Further, Mathews' unique Switch-Weight Technology allows the shooter to select peak draw weight, in 5-pound increments, through the module. Modules also dictate letoffs of 80 or 85 percent and draw lengths, in half-inch increments, from 25.5-30 inches. The Image has an advertised IBO speed rating of 335 fps on a 6-inch brace height.

The Mathews Stay Afield System (S.A.S.) uses two posts on each cam, one set closest to the string and the other closest to the cables, that work with the flo-orange servicing cable to allow your bow to be pressed enough to do string and cable work in the field.

A set of split limbs made from industry standard Gordon Glass material are heavily pre-loaded and sit at a past-parallel position at rest. Parallel and past-parallel limb positions at full draw are known to produce less shock, vibration and noise as compared to more up-

right limb angles. Pockets, which maintain consistent contact with the limbs during the draw-weight adjustment process, are machined from aluminum and black anodized.

Range Notes

With all the Mathews technology loaded into the Image, along with a physical weight of 4-plus pounds, it isn't surprising this bow barely reports much of anything in terms of shock, vibration or noise at the shot.

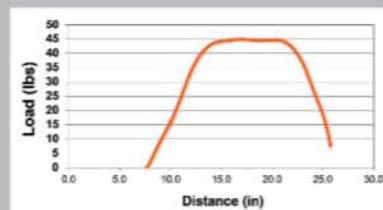
Because this is a bow aimed more at young or smaller-framed archers, we tested performance with the bow set at a 25.5-inch draw length and 45-pound draw weight. As such, it was hard to judge the draw cycle and feel of the bow at full draw, since it was several inches shorter than my normal draw length and 20 pounds lighter than my draw weight. However, you can see in the draw-force curve that the Image does indeed offer a smooth draw.

The Engage Grip is comfortable and functional, allowing my hand to return to the same position every shot. As we have come to expect from any Mathews bow, the Image was flawless in workmanship, fit and finish. **E**

SPEED & ENERGY

	350-GRAIN ARROW	400-GRAIN ARROW
ARROW SPEED	232.33 fps	219 fps
KINETIC ENERGY	41.95 ft./lbs.	42.61 ft./lbs.
DYNAMIC EFFICIENCY	82.93%	84.24%
SHOT NOISE	84.83 dBA	84.4 dBA

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EDITOR'S NOTE:

All of our Bow Tests are conducted using the same standardized procedures and professionally calibrated testing equipment. The Image is a low-poundage bow and was tested with a 25.5-inch draw length and 45-pound draw weight.

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2023 Whitetail FORECAST

I LIVE IN southeastern Pennsylvania, where open space and farmlands vanish at an alarming rate as properties are sold off for housing developments and commercial real estate projects. As a result, I need more than my 10 fingers to count the number of hunting properties I've lost access to over the years as the region's population has grown.

To combat this, 12 years ago, my wife Allison and I purchased a house with a few acres of woods adjacent to it. One of the reasons for the 8-acre parcel was for privacy; the other was so I'd always have a few acres to bowhunt (She does love me!).

The challenge with hunting this property is that it's bordered by a road on one side and usually an open field on the other. Hence, it took me a few years of hunting, running trail cameras, keeping a diary and doing plenty of scouting to determine when the best days of the year were to kill a deer on the property. In the end, I found the most concentrated buck activity on my land usually took place the days of Nov. 4-6, and my stand needed to be a ground blind set up in the lower corner of the property next to my woodlot — but not in it — for the best chance at success. While the end of October and first two weeks of November, in theory, should offer great deer hunting, the reality of my situation is that those three days typically provide the best chance for taking a buck.

Last fall, on a warm November day when the temperature climbed past 70, an 8-pointer made the fatal mistake of passing by me and my blind just after 9 a.m. The date was Saturday, Nov. 5, right in line with the three-day window noted above, just like clockwork.

The lesson here is that while any day is a good

day to be out bowhunting, there are absolutely some time frames that are better than others, depending on when and where you hunt. For many bowhunters, it can be the days heading into the peak of the rut, while for others it may be the first few days of the season when deer are still unpressured. Others still can often pattern a given buck in late season, ambushing the animal on its way to a preferred feeding area.

No matter your personal hunting situation, one thing is for certain — the vast majority of hunters have a limited number of days they can take off to go afield. So, in an effort to help you plan for the upcoming season, we're once again making our predictions for "can't-miss" days to be in the woods this year.

We began our research by combing through the DataSport Fish & Game Forecaster, the book and app that predict wildlife movement for every hour of the year. The forecast is based on a complex computer algorithm that compiles data such as sunrise/sunset times, moon phases, the moon's position relative to the Earth and more, while also factoring in other research and historical data. The end result is a comprehensive calendar of daily charts that suggest the best times for fish and wildlife activity every day of the year.

After reviewing the 2023 DataSport Forecaster, we asked our resident whitetail-hunting experts — Christian Berg, Clint Casper, Eddie Claypool and Bill Winke — to dive into the data while also incorporating their personal bowhunting experiences from over the years. In the end, we narrowed down our selections to the six days we feel you absolutely must be in the blind or stand this season. Here are our picks, along with some tips to help you maximize success during every part of the season.

Our Experts Predict 6 Top Days to Be in the Deer Stand!

By Mark Demko

MARK RAYCROFT PHOTO

The Picks

EARLY SEASON Sunday, September 3

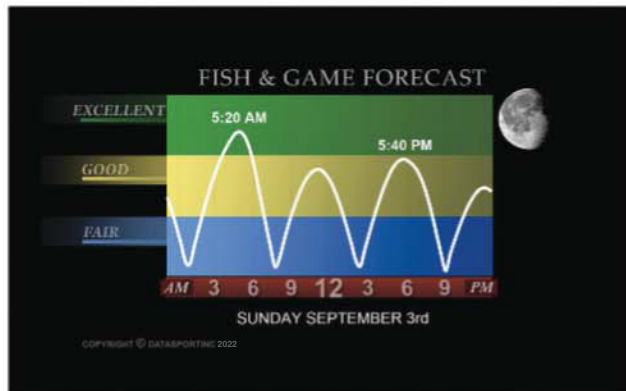
If you live or travel to a state where deer season opens early, you know how good the hunting can be, at least on evening sits as deer move to feed. Plus, early September offers the opportunity to take a buck in velvet, although more and more deer are shedding theirs with each passing day.

If you don't mind hunting in warm weather, this time of the year can be the perfect time to tag a buck you've been eying on the trail cameras in recent weeks, especially if he's a frequent visitor to the food plot, woodlot or farm field you watch over. The DataSport Forecaster suggests there may be decent wildlife movement periods the first few days of the month, but our pick is Sept. 3 due to a strong peak coinciding with the evening sit.

Bill: The bucks will start to shed their velvet and break up their bachelor groups and disperse into their fall ranges right about this time, making it a little bit unpredictable. But you can still fall back on summer patterns and hope they hold up for a few more days. Hunt the spots where your visual and trail-cam sightings have told you the bucks are feeding in the evenings. Forget morning hunting at this time. If it is really dry, waterholes are a great bet.

Christian: As someone who has often traveled to hunt the early season in states with Sept. 1 openers, I can't honestly tell you it is the most exciting kind of deer hunting. After all, most early-season bowhunts are "afternoon only," because deer feed all night in ag fields, and it is virtually impossible to approach these areas before dawn without spooking animals... That said, the rewards of early-season hunting can be substantial in the form of big, velvet-covered antlers, and some of the biggest bucks nationwide are taken in early September each year. Pre-hunt scouting, both via trail cameras and glassing, is critical here, as bucks will still be on a summer feeding pattern and can be expected to at least semi-reliably appear in roughly the same places at roughly the same time each day. However, this pattern won't last long, so it's critical that you, or your outfitter, have all the ducks in a row and strike while the window of opportunity remains open.

On Sept. 3, the forecast shows peak afternoon deer activity coinciding closer to sunset than it does earlier in the week. Of course, if you're on a weeklong, early-season hunt, chances are you'll be out each evening. Just don't get discouraged if the first day or two is slow, as the evening action is likely to pick up as the week goes on.



PRE-RUT Friday, October 27

For many hunters, deer season doesn't begin in earnest until around the 24th or 25th of October. As the daylight periods grow shorter and the rut approaches, it usually means more deer will be on the move. Get a cold front passing through and you can really see an increase in whitetail activity!

With the moonrise only about a half-hour from sunset, and good wildlife movement predicted for both morning and afternoon, Oct. 27 is our pick for this month. That said, the DataSport Forecaster predicts solid movement peaks every day Oct. 26-29, so any of these days should be good options. Watch the weather closely and be prepared to sneak out if the temperatures drop sharply.

Eddie: This time can't be beat for killing a "local" mature buck, as they will not have begun traveling great distances from their core areas as of yet. Mature bucks will be engaged in huntable daytime movement now, patrolling nearby does, a few of which will have come into estrus in the previous week or so. Sneak into a travel corridor between thick cover and a doe feeding area, and be on full alert the first and last half-hour of daylight.



Clint: This time frame is statistically one of my absolute FAVORITES of the year, and for good reason. During this time, bucks are ramping up their daylight activity as the rut draws closer and closer. With the full moon present, expect increased buck activity in and around doe bedding and feeding areas as bucks are searching for that first hot doe. Good transitional zones from bed to feed, feeding areas and doe bedding areas will be great spots to home in on for the next few days. Rubs and scrapes will now be popping up everywhere. Be mobile and hunt the hottest sign available until you bounce into that buck of your dreams.

PEAK RUT Tuesday, Nov. 7; Sunday, Nov. 12

Survey 100 hunters in the Northeast, Midwest and Mid-Atlantic Regions, and it's a safe bet that more than 90 percent of them would say the first week of November is the best week to be in the whitetail woods all year long. Well, this year the DataSport Forecaster is predicting only average daytime wildlife movement during that week. However, we all know deer don't pay attention to prognostica-



tions, and local conditions on the ground will have much more of an influence on what whitetails will be doing and when.

For 2023, we're actually picking two "must-hunt" days. One is Nov. 7 since it falls within the traditional whitetail chasing phase that gets bowhunters so pumped up. Wildlife activity is predicted to be at its daylight peak between 9 and 9:30 a.m., making it a great day to stay in the stand all morning.

The other day is Nov. 12. Although many bucks may be locked in tight cover on hot does my mid-month, hit it right and you can have a spectacular morning or afternoon sit.

During these first two weeks of the month, it's also a good idea to plan for all-day-sits — unless the weather is atypically warm — because you never know when a big buck might finish with the doe he is with, or even cruise in from a neighboring area.

Bill: Nov. 7 has long been my favorite single day of the season because so many really good bucks are shot on — or very close to — this date. Funnels are always a good bet at this time. The bucks are actively looking for does early in the rut, so focus on hunting the downwind fringe of doe bedding areas in the mornings and close to places where does feed in the evenings. As the rut wears on, does will stop coming out in the open to feed, but for now you should still find them, and the bucks looking for them, near food in the evenings. This is the time to hunt all day.

Christian: When it comes to specific days to target during the rut, many hunters adopt a "set it and forget it" mindset and simply put in for vacation in the Nov. 5-7 time frame year after year. While there's no doubt these are great days to be in the woods, a closer look at the forecast for this fall indicates the end of that week — specifically the Nov. 10-12 period — may in fact end up yielding this year's hottest rut action.

Nov. 12, specifically, looks to be the best day of the week, with very good action predicted both morning and midday. Similar conditions are forecast for the 10th and 11th as well, which should be no surprise considering the approaching New Moon on Nov. 13 and moonrise and moonset times during this period that roughly coincide with peak morning and evening hunting hours. Add it all together with the whitetail's normal November agenda and you have the perfect recipe for all-day sits.

SECONDARY RUT Wednesday, December 13

By now, peak rut has come and gone — and firearms season may have too, depending on where you live — so bowhunting at this time of year can be tough. However, in some areas a number of unbred does and even early-born fawns may come into estrus, attracting the interest of at least a few bucks.



BILL WINKE

One of the most well-respected names in deer hunting, Bill has been archery hunting for more than four decades, taking numerous trophy bucks during this time. He also owned a farm in Iowa for 18 years, allowing him to observe a number of unpressured, mature whitetails during that span. In 2012, he harvested his biggest-ever buck, a monster that grossed 205.



EDDIE CLAYPOOL

An Oklahoma resident, Eddie specializes in public-land hunting. He has nearly 50 years of bowhunting experience, harvesting more than 80 P&Y-class animals during this time, including dozens of trophy whitetails. His largest buck is a bruiser taken in Kansas in 2009 that scored in the high 180s.



CLINT CASPER

Born and raised in Ohio, Clint cut his bowhunting teeth on whitetails and turkeys before his love for western game took off. He has been bowhunting for two-plus decades and has harvested some terrific bucks, including a 191-inch monster he arrowed in 2016.



CHRISTIAN BERG

A self-described whitetail nut who enjoys spending time in a tree anywhere big bucks roam, Christian has been bowhunting deer for more than 20 years. His largest buck to date is a 182½-inch Kansas brute taken in 2017.

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2023 WHITETAIL FORECAST

The trick at this time of the year is to hunt areas where deer feel safe and have access to good, preferably nearby, food sources. The DataSport Forecaster is predicting good afternoon movement Dec. 13, with favorable moonrise and moonset times that day. Factor in the New Moon the day before and everything sets up for what may be a great evening on stand.

Eddie: Find the primary food source for the majority of the local does (and pick multiple spots that will situate you downwind of said food source, where thicker cover transitions into more open cover that is leading to and from the food source. There can be intense flurries of rut activity during this time, so don't leave your grunt tube or rattling horns at home.

Clint: With the primary rut in our rearview mirror, we must now switch gears and start thinking about the second wave of rutting activity and food! Body weight has been cut down dramatically, so bucks will not only be seeking out the second wave of breeding action but also the hottest food sources available. The does will now lead the show, and your scouting efforts should consist of locating good food sources that are attracting lots of does, and the bucks will follow. With a New Moon present, I'd primarily focus on evening hunts during this time frame, as the action should be great with bucks heading to check food sources for does and a good meal for themselves.



LATE SEASON Saturday, January 13

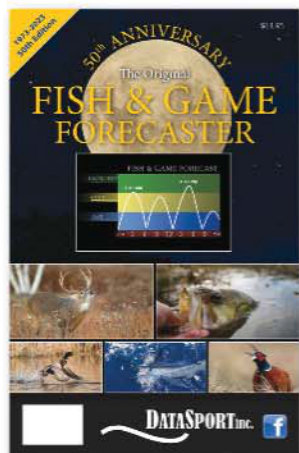
Most hunters have long since put away their bows by the time the New Year comes in, but dedicated archery enthusiasts willing to brave the elements in January know they can still capitalize on big bucks, which have shifted their focus to surviving the winter. Unless you have a honey hole with tons of deer and no pressure, it's best to concentrate efforts on evening hunts as deer move from bedding to feeding areas. Of course, this also allows you to avoid the bone-chilling cold that accompanies early-morning sits at this time of the year.

The DataSport Forecaster predicts wildlife activity should be very good to excellent on the afternoons of Jan. 12-14, so any or all of these days could be worth a trip to the stand, especially if weather conditions are in your favor. That said, we're going with the 13th since there's a strong afternoon peak that coincides perfectly with prime hunting time.

Clint: Late is great! With most hunters tagged out, or having hung the bow up for the year, the woods now belong to those who still want to grind it out. With cold and snow in the forecasts often, a smart bowhunter will be searching for south-facing slopes and available food sources. Due to the rigors of the rut, bucks have lost a ton of weight, so food is now king. Scout on foot and use cameras to your advantage to locate a good feed source and then set your trap. Inside field edges, corners and good transition zones from south-facing slopes, which get the most sunlight, to a good food source will be the hot ticket! **E**



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- By studying and documenting past wildlife patterns and statistics, you can identify trends that are likely to repeat themselves.
- There are many predictable factors (sunrise, sunset, lunar forces, etc.) that dictate these patterns of activity.

According to DataSport President John Lehman, a number of people actually contact him each year before the Forecaster is even published to ask for the best week to hunt the next fall so they can plan their hunting trips.

"Generally speaking, I feel that some hunters don't 'believe' (in the forecast) at all, while others are completely sold," Lehman said. "I try to get the non-believers to go out and just observe wildlife, whether they're scouting or actually hunting, and come back to see if the time they've seen most activity mirrors the prediction. So many times it is extremely close and, if it isn't, there's usually a weather-related factor (involved)."

In making its daily predictions, the Forecaster looks at a variety of short- and long-range factors such as the amount of daylight, moon phases, moon positioning and more that can influence game movement. And whether you are a sceptic or devotee of the forecast, one thing is for certain — it's an inexpensive tool that may help, and certainly won't hinder, your preparation and planning for the season.

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ONE DAY WONDER

LIKE MANY BOWHUNTERS, I don't have the time to do all my scouting during the winter and early spring. All too often I find myself in late October standing in an area I have never hunted, wondering where to start. I don't feel much like an apex predator at times like those — more like the guy who pulls a hamstring while running with the bulls in Pamplona. I'm going to get crushed!

But necessity is the mother of invention. So, we learn to adapt and overcome. Here are the short and dirty scouting hacks that have bailed me out when the season is on the line.

Start Off-Site

You have to start somewhere, and it's too late to walk everything. Not only is time a factor, but walking the entire area would put too many deer on red alert. If you are planning to hunt the spot in the very near future, that is a bad idea. I guess if you are looking a couple weeks out into the future, walking is an option. But even then, you won't see the big picture at first; there is a better way.

I had a material science class in college. In that class, we discussed destructive vs. non-destructive testing. In a destructive test, you attempt to learn all you can about a certain material, but in the process you destroy it, such as pulling it apart to see how much stress it can withstand.

In many ways, traditional scouting is a destructive test. In the process of learning all you can, you seriously damage the specimen. In other words, you may get some idea where the deer were bedding and feeding before you showed up, but more than likely they will be much more cautious in those areas after your visit.

Off-site scouting is the key. It gives you some hunches you can quickly confirm or debunk on-site later. You can be much less intrusive and come away with a very neat and clean big-picture strategy you can believe in. The real challenge then is gaining enough information off-site to form these important educated guesses. Here are several information sources you can rely on to make scouting more productive and less destructive.

By **BILL WINKE**



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Sometimes, you have no choice but to scout a hunting property in-season. If so, go the extra mile to keep your impact to a minimum.

HOW TO SCOUT A NEW PROPERTY—AND START HUNTING EFFECTIVELY—IN JUST ONE DAY

ONE-DAY WONDER

Aerial photos and topo maps: When it comes to aerial photos and topo maps, we have tons of online options, including apps that give us more information still. I have subscriptions to the two most popular land apps: OnX and HuntStand. Both offer customizable features that are super valuable when scouting — ways to mark likely funnels, trails, stand sites, entry and exit routes — the works.

Take full advantage of all the tools. Some of the land app packages even show what was planted in each field the year before and how things have changed from month to month. That is a big deal when trying to anticipate deer movement.

You can do a lot worse than spending several hours staring at your hunting area on one of these apps. Learn to visualize how deer will use the property — even if you are wrong, you are at least moving and learning — a key to eventual success. The better you get at seeing these things off-site, the less need you will have for actual on-site scouting.

I will venture to say the day will come when you don't need any on-site scouting to be successful. You will become so good at “seeing” deer movement based on your knowledge of how deer use various terrain and cover types that you can just study the app, walk in, set up a stand and eventually shoot a buck from that spot.

Look for potential stand sites. How deer use terrain and cover becomes obvious when you start thinking about it. Brushy fingers that deer can use to access feeding areas, narrow tree-lined creeks or brush-filled fences that funnel deer between areas of larger cover, erosion ditches between two ridges that force deer to cross at specific places, creeks with lots of bends suggesting high, cut banks with the possibility of well-used crossings. These are all obvious buck-movement corridors during the rut.

Long-range scouting is a great way to gather information, especially for an early-season hunt.



Studying online topographic maps before ever setting foot on a property will greatly enhance your scouting efforts. Topo lines show terrain features such as this deep draw that will more than likely hold at least one ditch funnel.



Modern mapping apps offers tons of useful information organized in “layers” that reveal details about land ownership, crops, annual deer harvests and more.

Only your study time and your creativity will limit the list of possible stand locations you can find from an aerial photo and topo map. Armed with six to eight such starting points, you can easily see your on-site scouting time is greatly reduced or even eliminated.

Aerial photos play another important role for the one-day scout: choosing the path of least impact. When verifying your hunches with on-site scouting, choose a path that keeps you from being seen, heard or smelled by the maximum number of deer. Aerial photos and topo maps can again help — allowing you to “see” these routes. Look for draws, ditches and creeks as obvious access routes.

If you can't find a good, low-impact route for checking a particular potential stand site, then you should take it off the list. Remember that no stand is a great stand unless you can get in and out without being detected. If you can't do it while you're scouting, you can't do it while you're hunting. These scouting trips become the dress rehearsal for the actual hunt. Better yet, carry a stand with you and if the spot looks as good for real as it did virtually, you hang and leave — all set for the sneaky return later.

Local landowner information: It doesn't matter whether he or she hunts, landowners know where the deer are. That is the gospel, and you need to be humble enough to ask. These people are on-site every day; they see patterns that would take years of hunting to piece together without their help. If the landowner says, “I always see that big 16-pointer crossing the ridge up by the old haystack” don't write him off as eccentric. Maybe it isn't a 16-pointer, but for sure it is a buck worth checking out. Get your fanny over to the haystack and find a place for your stand.

Landowners of neighboring properties can offer information that is often just as valuable as what you get from the person who owns the land you hunt. Try to spend a few minutes with each of them as well. If a sharecropper or cus-

ULTIMATE 20 23 SEASON

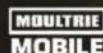
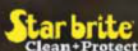


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ONE-DAY WONDER

tom operator farms your hunting property, take the time to talk to that person. With some luck, you can do all of this in a few hours. Carry your phone with the app readily available so you can nail down the *exact* locations of sightings — close doesn't count.

Tracks on roads: When hunting anything but big woods, you can learn a lot from tracks that you find on the sides of secondary roads. Usually there is some kind of trail through the ditch to give you a hint on where to look. When I used to hunt Kansas, I took advantage of rain days to zig-zag through the backroads looking for big tracks that went into a section but didn't come out. That's where I tried to hunt that evening, if possible.

These tracks can teach you two things: the number of deer in various parts of the hunting area and the size of the tracks. Of course, big tracks are the best. I usually don't hunt the crossings themselves, but at least this information gives you some idea where to start.

Long-range observation: This is the absolute best way to spend your first day of hunting during the early season. With deer still on feeding patterns, it does more harm than good to start throwing up stands without first verifying the trails the deer are using to approach their feeding areas.

This also works during the rut when you are not sure exactly how to approach a good spot. Rather than risk blowing it by being too aggressive, you can and should hang back and watch from nearby fence lines or edge cover. Avoid diving right in on the best spots until after you have gotten a better feel for the big picture. In other words, start conservative and get more aggressive as the hunting goes along.

On-Site Strategies

Once you've come up with a list of potential stand sites, it's time to put on your boots and grab a treestand. It is al-

ways the most efficient use of your time (and the best way to preserve the element of surprise) when you carry a stand while scouting and put it up while you are there. There's no advantage in spending more time than necessary (and taking extra trips) just to put up stands.

During the season: If it is hunting season, you'll need to be ready to put your plan into action by early afternoon on the first day. Otherwise, you won't have a place to hunt the next morning. Rank your potential stand sites in order of impact from the lowest to the highest. Start by scouting the ones with the lowest impact — the ones you think will be easiest to get to and from without spooking deer.

You can always scout and hang stands during the middle of the day as you are hunting. Start checking other stand locations (again, focusing on those with the least impact). Once you find another good one, put up your stand and hunt it. Continuing in this way, you will eventually cover all your potential stand locations while perfectly managing your impact in the process.

When doing this kind of spot-check scouting, you can't afford to get detail oriented or you'll waste time and leave too much scent. Once you get to the pre-selected area, slow way down and spend most of your time studying the subtleties of the terrain and cover without making a lot of tracks.

Don't try to get too analytical. Use your instincts here. Don't walk around looking for every piece of sign (the sign itself isn't always useful compared to the overall effects of the terrain and cover). You picked the spot for a reason; trust that process. Your mind will suggest general travel corridors if they are actually there. If it made sense off-site and now you can visualize a nice buck slipping through the area, it is probably a good place to hunt. Pick a likely tree and hang the stand. This kind of first-look strategy is surprisingly accurate. Trust your instincts.

In scouting, just like in all other phases of the hunt, the cardinal rule is as follows: Never let 'em know they're being hunted! **B**



Above: Don't try to sneak around when scouting bedding areas. Instead, drive as close as you can and make some noise before heading in. This will help you avoid spooking deer at close range.



Right: Field Editor Bill Winke shot this buck on a ridge he never scouted in person. Just using the aerial photo and topo map, he selected a stand site that funneled this buck right past his stand.

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TWILIGHT

GRINDING IT OUT PAYS OFF AS SEASON'S END LOOMS LARGE

WHEN PEG AND I returned from our Arizona elk hunt in late September, filling our freezer with red meat was the agenda of the moment. Butchering, unpacking Western hunting gear and shifting our thought process over to Midwestern whitetails helped us bring September to a close.

By early October, we were visiting regularly with our good friend and bowhunting buddy Travis Keith, laying plans for some fun times to come in November. For more than 20 years, Peg and I had shared bowhunting camps with Travis and we had no intention of breaking such a longstanding tradition. We'd camp together along the Kansas/Oklahoma line, and we'd split up at other times to pursue personal agendas. Overall, however, our seasons would overlap in many good ways, with each party sharing victories and defeats.

As October slowly slid past, Peg and I spent most of our time on our land in Kansas, simply enjoying the solitude of the area and the first cool breezes of autumn. Travis was busy making weekend forays to his Kansas and Oklahoma public-land haunts. Hanging treestands in old, dependable spots, he was leaning on past experience to provide himself with productive hunts to come. His spots had been dependable for many years and there seemed to be no reason to expect anything different going forward. In the back of his mind however, Travis knew that "resting on old laurels" could get you burned in the whitetail world. Only time would tell!

By **EDDIE CLAYPOOL**

HIT TIME



A Solid Start

By mid-October, I had begun to spend some time in a treestand. The bucks were starting to move about in daylight as an early-season cool front had brought the first frost of the season. On the 17th, I had actually passed a 140-class 10-pointer that had been frequenting our land for the past few years. The satisfaction derived from simply watching such a nice buck patrolling through my property gave me a peaceful, easy feeling.

When I returned to camp and shared my pleasurable sightings with Peg, she informed me that she was not going to bowhunt this season. Peg had blown a close shot at a 150s-class buck the previous season — wounding the deer — and she was still suffering from the disappointment and frustration that experience had brought her. I understood her situation well, as I'd suffered through many similarly hard times throughout my years. Nodding to her wishes — much to my chagrin — I quietly went along with her choice to remain on the sidelines. After all, I knew everyone had to work out their own redemption in such matters.

By the time Halloween neared, I'd made note of a serious lack of rutting action in my area. By this time the previous two years, rutting had been intense as I'd actually witnessed bucks breeding does by late October; not so this year. Stunned and amazed at how different one season could be from the next, I found solace in the fact that such variance was what made this the inspiring pursuit that it was. Matching wits with the elements, the terrain and the wily whitetail was what put the "hunt" in hunting. It was bound to get funky soon!

Vacation Time

As November arrived, Travis began his "hunting vacation," starting out on the 5th. Beginning all-day vigils, in proven spots, my friend started the grind that was a labor of love. Conversing each evening, Travis, Peg and I were like little kids in a candy store. Peg was watching bucks strolling across the prairie below our camping trailer, while Travis and I were having close encounters with them from treestands. All the way around, it was a winning hand for everyone involved.

On Nov. 11, Travis had a close encounter with a 140s-class buck, resulting in an "education" for both parties involved. After the smoke had cleared, there were some dirty, bloodless arrows strewn about and a long-gone, unscathed buck. Later that evening, Travis — with his tail between his legs — lamented the story of his vigorous encounter. And after a few good-humored gouges, it seemed that his spirit was lightened. Hey, you can't win 'em all!

After his helter-skelter encounter, Travis settled into a much less entertaining run of luck. Day after day, he

TWILIGHT TIME

rotated among his stand locations as the prime time of November rolled past with little action to report. Clearly, Travis' dependence on past years' experience in his area was not going to carry him through this season. Something was vastly different this year — few deer were present in the area. Locked into a narrow time frame, feeling unable to completely pull up roots and start over, Travis toiled on.

One midday, as he was moving from one treestand to another, Travis quietly paddled his canoe down a creek. Spotting something out of place in the nearby woods, he carefully glided toward the creekbank. As the nose of his canoe landed on the sandy shore, he dismounted the craft and eased up the bank. Slowly peering over the crest of the berm, he found himself face-to-face with a mature buck — with his bow back in the canoe!

Slowly dropping out of sight, Travis stealthily retraced his footsteps, grabbed his bow and skulked back up-slope. Coming to full draw just as a large set of antlers appeared on the horizon 10 yards away, it seemed that



As his 2022 vacation neared its end, Travis Keith was able to arrow this Oklahoma 7-pointer.

redemption was at hand. Apparently no fool, the big buck peered over the bank at maliciousness personified and instantly blew out of the area.

Letting down his string, my friend could only shake his head in disbelief. He'd been 10 yards from a trophy, but close doesn't cut it. Dejected, Travis paddled on up the river to yet another uneventful stint in a treestand. Oh, well, you can't win 'em all!

The Action Heats Up

As Travis' vacation time faded, so did his hopes for a large-antlered trophy. Finally, just before having to return to work, a nice Oklahoma buck made the mistake of flitting by...only to flit no more. Travis made a perfect shot on the 7-pointer, and just like that, everything changed. Better spirits, meat in the freezer and hope for future redemption in Kansas.

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TWILIGHT TIME

Author Eddie Claypool had this 12-pointer in bow range twice during Kansas' 2022 archery season, letting it walk both times before the deer was taken by a neighboring hunter during the firearms season.



In the meantime, amid Travis' escapades and adventures, I was having the time of my life. Bucks were bounding about on my Kansas dirt, rutting to and fro. A particular 12-pointer that had caught my attention the previous year had reappeared, and his antlers had grown significantly. A 130-class buck the previous season, he was now packing well over 160 inches of gross antler. Excited about my prospects, I wondered what I'd do if this fellow graced me with his presence. On the morning of Nov. 7, I found out when I let him walk. As the bruiser strolled away from my location, I was in shock.

Had I just done that? How was that going to turn out?

Little did I know, but in a few short weeks, I'd have the answer.

As the remainder of November rolled by, I spent a lot of time enjoying the solitude of the Kansas prairie. Numerous nice bucks were seen — some closely — and my bow remained hanging. After passing the big boy earlier, I simply could not bring myself to flip the string on a lesser one. My mind spun, slightly confused. What were my goals? Did I even have "goals" anymore? Having accomplished more than I could ever have dreamed of as a bowhunter, I now found myself quite content to simply enjoy nature. Inside, I knew that my "killing days" weren't entirely over, just fading. Only time would tell how my spirit would shake it all out.

On the morning of the 21st, I sat quietly in an oak, in a pinch point. At 9:30, a left turn of my head shocked me into instant excitement. Large antlers were ghosting my way!

Grabbing my bow, I was on full alert. As the buck approached, I soon realized that it was "my" 12-pointer of earlier. *Now what?* Was I to pass him again? Could I bring myself to kill him? A few minutes later, as I sat in stunned silence thinking about having just passed the bruiser again, my head was spinning off of its axis.

How was this going to work out? A few, short days later, I'd have the answer.



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Claypool arrowed this 11-point buck in early December.

Gun Season Brings Changes

As November came to a close, both Travis and I had Kansas tags still in our pockets. Now what? The firearm season was upon us, cold weather was entrenched and attention spans were waning.

How was this going to shake out? I wondered.

On the first day of the Kansas firearms season, I got the answer to the question that had been nagging at me for some time when a gun hunter on a neighboring property killed "my" big

12-pointer. With shattered hopes, I realized my place would be much lonelier now. The big buck would not grow another rack or breed another doe. He would not be around for me to appreciate/anticipate another year. Oh well, you can't win 'em all.

On Dec. 3, I found myself loosing an arrow at an older buck that had frequented my property for the past few seasons. He'd been mature for a few years, so I decided to take something tangible from nature, and I was blessed to have his backstraps for dinner.



Keith sneaked within bow range of this Kansas whitetail on Dec. 24, taking a hard-earned Christmas trophy.

The End Draws Near

Dec. 24 found Travis back in Kansas, scouting and hunting some new country. On a day when the temperature was 4 degrees, with snow on the ground, as he was making his way through a WIHA (Walk-In Hunting Area), he spotted some distant deer in a weedy slough. Grabbing his binos, he soon determined that some late rutting activity was occurring in the remote thicket and good antlers were present.

Examining his surroundings, Travis noted a small creek nearby. Dropping into the creek bottom, he found the creek frozen solid — perfect! Sneaking down the frozen surface, Travis soon



Keith used this frozen creek to sneak close enough to get a shot at his 2022 Kansas buck.

had shortened his distance to the deer significantly. Peering over the lip of the creekbank, he spotted a few does and a nice buck. Nocking an arrow, Travis began to sneak from tree to tree, narrowing the distance. At about 80 yards, the cover ran out, so he simply waited.

Shortly, a nice buck began following a doe that was headed in his direction. When it became clear that the two animals were going to pass at moderate range, Travis ranged the buck at 55 yards. After coming to full draw, a carefully launched arrow was sent on its way and hit paydirt. Making a short, looping run, the buck expired within sight. After all the effort and obstacles, an excellent Kansas buck was finally down and our friend couldn't have been happier, or more relieved.

When Travis' Kansas buck hit the dirt, Peg and I were already in Arizona in pursuit of Coues deer. But that's a story for another day. **E**

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OCTOBER

FOR MANY AMERICANS who love both bowhunting and sports, the month of September signals the arrival of two great pastimes — white-tail season and football! As whitetail season kicks off, we are all excited and eager to start hunting. But I've noticed a lot of folks quickly shift their focus back to football once the so-called "October Lull" takes place and deer movement, in their eyes, almost is at a standstill. To many, early and mid-October is the time to sit back, relax, crack a few cold ones, throw some hamburgers on the grill and turn on the football game. In this article, however, I'm going to make the case that now is the time to turn up the heat, go find your target buck and make something happen.

In my opinion, there is no such thing as the October Lull. The deer have simply shifted their patterns, and that requires shifts in our hunting strategies if we want to be successful in October. During this time, if you're not hunting close to where a buck calls home and where he is feeding, the October Lull can seem very real, because you are no longer hunting in the hot zone.

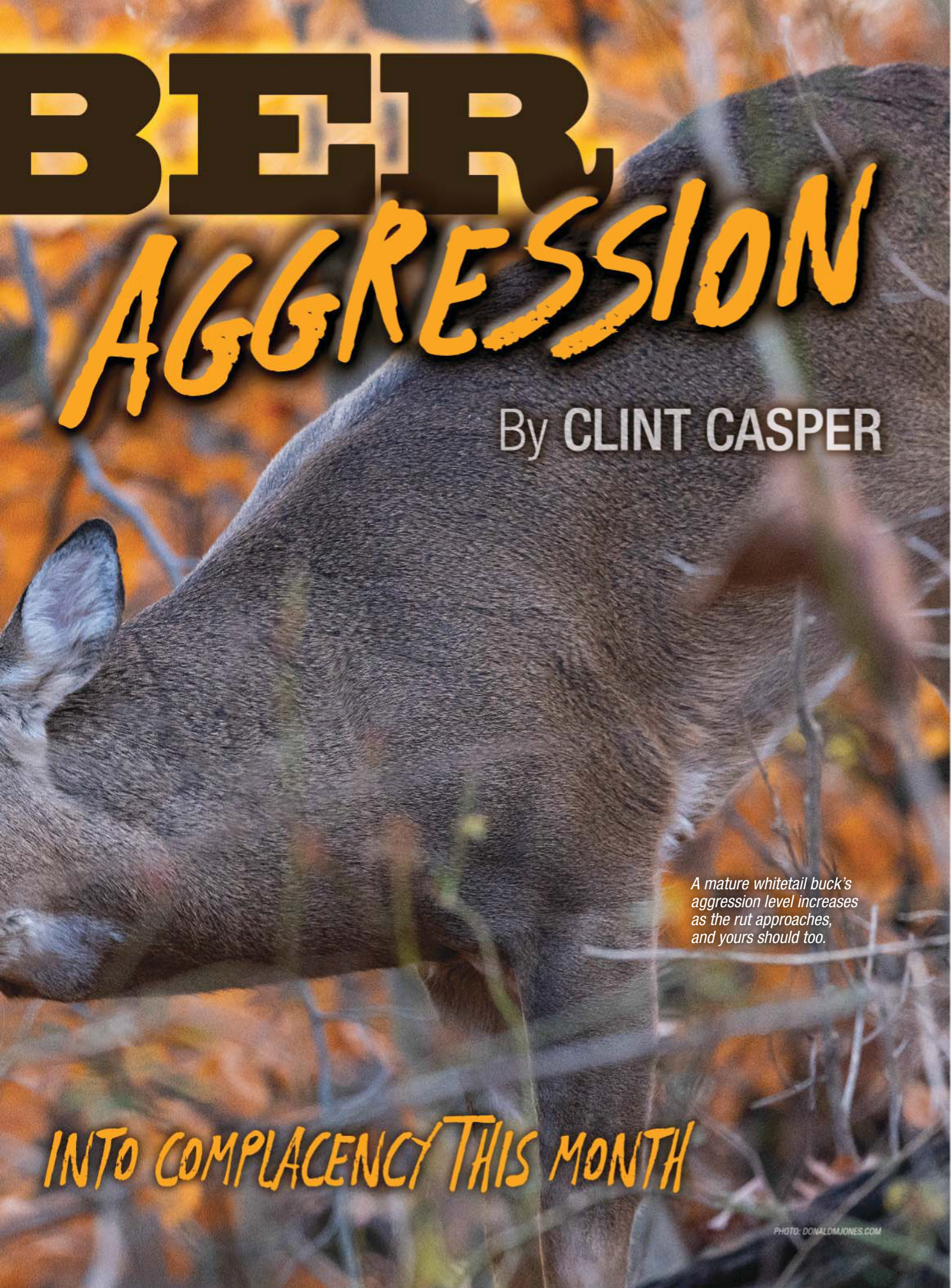
When hunted correctly, however, October can produce the best and most consistent daylight buck activity of the year. To hunt these bucks correctly, a smart bowhunter must stay ahead of the game by being mobile and aggressive!

Ch-Ch-Changes

For a whitetail buck, October is the pre-game before the big show in November. A lot has changed in the bucks' life in recent weeks, as velvet was shed and bucks dispersed from their summer ranges to new core areas where they will remain through the breeding season. Although the rut is growing closer by the day, food remains the top priority for now, as it won't be long until bucks will be running wild in search of that first, receptive doe. As such, it is critical to prepare for the frenzy by taking in as many calories as possible and starting the race in peak physical condition.

Of course, food sources are also changing rapidly during this time, as farmers harvest crops and acorns drop in various parts of the forest. This presents some tremendous, but short-lived, opportunities for bowhunters. A

DON'T BE 'LULLED'



BEER AGGRESSION

By CLINT CASPER

A mature whitetail buck's aggression level increases as the rut approaches, and yours should too.

INTO COMPLACENCY THIS MONTH

PHOTO: DONALDMJONES.COM



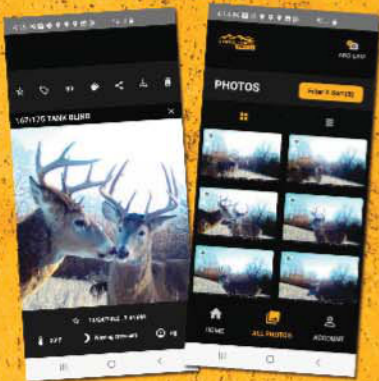
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Scraping activity picks up dramatically throughout October. By late in the month, bucks are eager for the rut and advertise their availability by making many scrapes throughout their core area. These scrapes can help savvy bowhunters know where and when to hunt a buck before the rut kicks in and things get completely unpredictable in the whitetail woods.

prime example would be a freshly cut cornfield that attracts most of the local deer. This will only last a few days as deer scavenge what's left behind. Then, more fields will be cut and a new location will be the hottest food source. Although staying on top of these rapid changes can be a challenge, an aggressive bowhunter who takes a risk and comes up empty doesn't lose much, because it won't be long until another field heats up and the patterns change once again.

Similarly, bucks feel an increased need to mark their territory in October, as evidenced by the dramatic increase in rubbing and scraping activity that occurs as the month wears on. You can bet that bucks will be making most of these rubs and scrapes in and around their bedding area and along the travel corridor to their preferred food source. That's why, during this portion of the season, scouting every few days and then hunting over the freshest buck sign you find is critical. Again, these



Bucks typically move from their summer range to their fall range in September. A combination of in-person scouting for fresh buck sign such as rubs and the use of trail cameras is critical for relocating target bucks that leave the areas where you've been seeing them all summer long.

patterns aren't likely to last for long, so capitalize while you can.

Two Scenarios

For many, all these changes mean that our target buck has moved and is no longer showing up in front of our trail cameras on a regular basis. This is a real shock to the system, causing anxiety and sleepless nights for countless bowhunters each fall. During this period, it is not unusual to become obsessed with questions such as, *Where has he gone? Is he nocturnal now? Did I pressure him too much? Has he been killed?* Quickly, we jump to the conclusion that our target buck has LEFT THE BUILDING, and now we need to give him time and space, in hopes that he comes back and gives us another opportunity!

Another scenario in October is the bowhunter who is getting pictures of a target buck, including some in daylight. The buck is definitely there, but the hunter is not sure how to effectively hunt it. So, he instead chooses to wait in hopes the rut will be the golden ticket. Year in and year out, I watch numerous people make this vital mistake! I hear things such as, "He's here often, but I don't want to spook him off the property by hunting him right now. So, I'm waiting until the rut!" And every year, I have to watch one or more of my friends go through the agony of someone else shooting "their" buck in October, before they even started hunting!

Take Some Chances

My theory on October bucks is quite simple: focus on a buck that you know is somewhere around you and hunt hard before the rut makes him the most unpredictable he'll be all year! If you mess up and don't kill him, or alert him to your presence, have no fear, because much is changing in the woods and he will be changing too! Bumping a buck in October is the least worrisome to me, because with food and cover changing all the time this month, he will be changing his routines and habits anyway. In my opinion, October allows a bowhunter to get away with more mistakes on a specific buck than any other month! Think about it; during the late season, a buck has been hunted for months. One small mistake could send him into hiding for weeks. But a buck in October is accustomed to change hap-

pening all the time and also has the rut on his mind more and more each day. All this works in your favor!

Every year, I see many hunters fall into the previously mentioned "wait on the rut" trap, and when they finally start hunting they have absolutely no clue where their target buck has gone. This happens so easily because in November all bets are off. A buck will go where the hot does take him; that could be five miles away or three farms over! Nobody really knows, and this is why waiting on the rut is so unpredictable. But with some previous

knowledge and in-season scouting, in October we can get aggressive and make some calculated moves to put ourselves in position to score.

Blowing in the Wind

In my experience, the wind is a key factor to relocating your target buck in October. Because of my summer scouting and trail-cam photos, I will key in on the wind directions he has shown me he favors. In other words, what wind direction does he prefer to use when traveling between bedding and feeding areas. I can then look at

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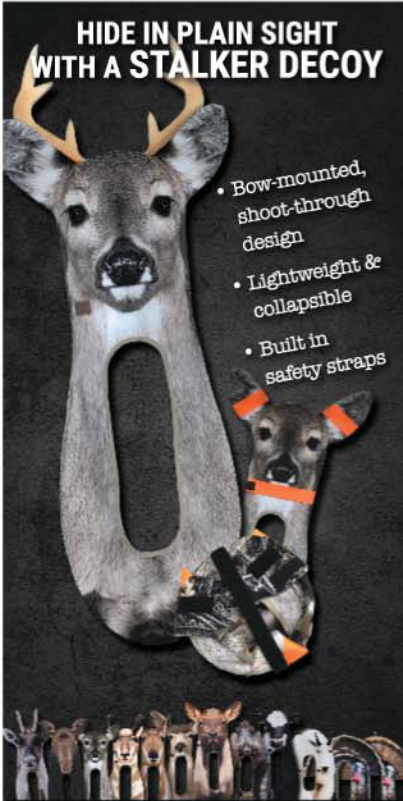
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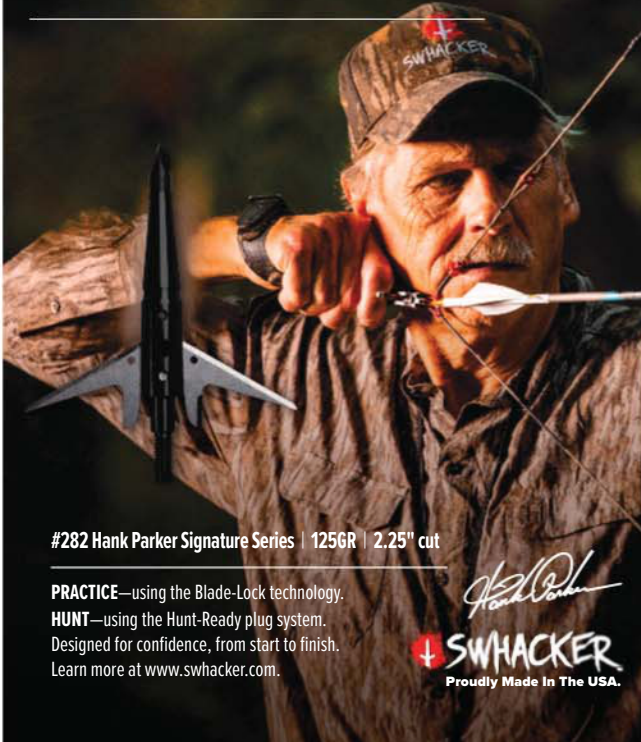
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the hottest food sources around and put together a plan based off of those key factors. Once I've located a hot food source, I'll then look for a bedding area where the wind is to his benefit.

For example, if the neighbor cuts a soybean field, I'll look at what areas of timber are close by that I can hunt. I'll then base my best efforts on an area that allows the buck to use his preferred wind to his advantage. So, let's say our buck favors a south wind; I'll immediately go to my maps and look for good bedding that allows the buck to move from there to the field with the south wind in his face to detect danger. Then I can place trail cameras along that corridor and even start hunting. If I just wait until the rut, I'll really have no idea where this buck could be.

Yes, I could bump him! But I believe the risk is worth the reward, because this buck is on the move during this

The author's friend, Ryan Bertsch, targeted this giant 8-pointer last fall in Ohio. By using aggressive scouting and hunting tactics, he was able to relocate the buck in mid-October and get a shot his first night hunting the buck.



time anyways. Even if I do bump him, chances are it is not a major mistake.

Be Fearless

Another common October scenario is when we know our buck is in the area, but we are scared to dive in! A good example is the huge 8-pointer my friend Ryan Bertsch was hunting last year. Ryan first saw the buck during the summer and monitored him into early fall. Around Oct. 1, the buck disappeared, and Ryan quickly made the decision to get aggressive with his efforts. Ryan moved trail cameras to fresh scrapes and a freshly cut bean field and relocated the buck on Oct. 8. Trail-cam photos solidified that he was moving close to daylight and probably not bedding far off, based on his preferred west wind that Ryan knew he liked from summer scouting and carefully analyzing trail-cam data.

On Oct. 13, a cold front with a west wind blew in, and Ryan knew it was time to dive into this spot for an evening hang and hunt! With a stand on his back, Ryan sneaked into a transition zone between the buck's expected bedding area and the bean field where the recent daylight photos were taken. Two trails led from the bedding cover through this area, and by 3 p.m., Ryan was settled into his tree and ready for action. Around 6 p.m., Ryan caught movement and saw the giant buck making its way toward the bean field.

Ryan got his shot opportunity at 37 yards, but unfortunately his arrow deflected off a limb, preventing him from punching his tag that night. Despite the disappointing ending, the encounter is a testament to Ryan's aggressive tactics and his refusal to just sit back and wait for the rut. It was the perfect scenario to put a move on a buck showing all its cards, and although it didn't end the way Ryan hoped, he is a better bowhunter for the experience, and I have no doubt that what he learned will pay off for him again in the future.

As you can see, October is perhaps the best month of all to dive in after a mature whitetail buck. Be confident and take some calculated risks. They won't always work out, but even if they don't, the rut is just around the corner to reshuffle the deck for you and give you a fresh start.

Be aggressive this month, and you just might get to sit back and watch football in November! **B**



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Up A CREEK!

PADDLING AWAY FROM THE PRESSURE LEADS TO PUBLIC-LAND BOWHUNTING SUCCESS

By Jacob Emery

Most bowhunters set out each fall with a goal in mind. For some, it may be tagging their first deer ever with archery equipment, and for others, perhaps it's passing a couple Boone and Crockett-caliber bucks to break that magical 200-inch mark. Either way, it's normally all relative to that individual based on location, experience and determination. For me, it was all about paddling out a hard-earned buck on public land.

Escaping the Masses

I grew up in the small town of Calhoun, Ken., in a family that had very little experience in being "serious" deer hunters. We were not poor, but definitely not wealthy, so an expensive lease or hunt club was out of the question. We had little to no properties to hunt, and what we did have permission on normally wasn't holding anything over the top rack-wise, so most times the first racked buck to stroll by was what was hanging from the skinning tree a few hours later. It was apparent as I grew older that if I wanted opportunities at more and bigger deer, I was going to have to join the crowds on the public. That's not because it's apparently the cool thing to do now, but rather that's honestly all I have.

Fast-forward to Nov. 18, 2021, and I woke up at 3 a.m. to grind out another tough morning after six full days in a row of hunting daylight to dusk. I was surprised as I opened my front door to a cold, hard rain. After a tough, five-second decision, I decided to head back to bed and keep checking the radar until it was closer to passing by. Besides, a little extra sleep sounded pretty dang good after the prior few days of hunting my tail off. At 5 a.m. the rain was almost gone, so I loaded up my kayak once again and hit the road knowing I would arrive at my destination around sunrise.

Truck after truck lined the roads at the walk-in access points along this popular stretch of national forest and, as expected, nobody was at my ditch that I normally drop my kayak in. It's one of those spots that ages like fine wine as the season progresses. The increasing pressure applied from foot traffic pushes the deer further and further back, with the animals swimming to seek refuge on what some might call "islands" later in the year. After a week of gun season, I figured this spot would be prime and ready to hunt as I'd tried my best to keep myself out of it for the first 48 days of the Indiana deer season.





Author Jacob Emery took this 10-point buck — one of his best ever — while hunting pressured public land during Indiana's 2021 firearms deer season.

UP A CREEK!

I decided since I was already racing the clock, it was best to go minimal gear-wise, get on hot sign and head up a tree quickly. I grabbed my Trophyline Covert saddle, Wingman one stick, climbing gear and, of course, my bow and a few essentials. I then started on my paddle, which ended up being just a hair over a mile by the time I found a good place to beach my kayak. It took longer than normal since there was a bit more current in the water from the hard rain before I got there. I was also doing my best to stay quiet and listen for chasing bucks, but all I heard were distant gunshots. Surprisingly, they lifted my spirits!

Climbing out of the creek, I gathered my gear and set myself on a beeline for a slough about 50 yards in front of me. The bucks in this particular area tend to cruise in between the creek bank and the sloughs, especially on days when they're catching wind coming out from the sparse dry spots out in the wetland areas where the does tend to bed this time of year, hiding from annoying young bucks and flying lead. Using the shallow slough to cover my ground scent, I made my way through the water about 20 feet from the dry land until I was able to cover a few hundred yards and ended up perpendicular to a heavy creek crossing I'd found in prior years. It only took a moment to find a good tree, unload my gear and in less than 12 minutes I was 32 feet high, nocking an arrow and ready to kill. There's no doubt the quick climb is one of the many benefits to the one-sticking method.

Settling In

My setup was as close to perfect as you could imagine. I had managed to be set up exactly an hour after official sunrise and the clouds had just started to break up from the previous hour's storms. I had a steady, brisk wind in my face, and both the slough and the sun to my back. My thermals were being pulled away hard in the perfect direction. With my careful access to the tree through the water, and the oh-so-rare perfect wind, there was no way I could get busted. Right?

The first hour of the hunt was rather slow, with the most eventful things being a couple of raccoons duking it out and a pair of wood ducks nearly tak-



The author often paddles away from the crowds to get into secluded spots that rarely see another hunter.

ing my head off as they cut through the timber like the Blue Angels. All the dullness was soon to change as I heard a loud splash out in front of me that I assumed came from the creek crossing. Minutes later, a mature doe appeared and made her way through the bottomlands, picking up an occasional acorn here and there. I noticed she was dry so I wrote it off in my mind that the splash I heard was probably a big beaver diving in the creek. She made her way to the base of my tree and eventually wandered off to my left cruising down to the edge of the water. Turning around, I caught movement in a cane thicket 60 yards to my right, and after throwing up my binos, I saw a wall of tines and the adrenaline set in!

Reading the buck, I could instantly tell he was searching for a doe. But not just any doe — the one that had just made her way by me minutes earlier. I panicked as he raced off in the other direction with his nose to the ground, making too much noise to hear my loud grunts I was throwing in his direction. He eventually stopped on his own 100 yards away on the edge of the cane thicket. Instead of using my grunt tube, this time I picked up my bleat call and softly hit it a few times. The deer's ears perked up as he glanced somewhat in my direction. The stage was set, and I knew it would be too much for him to handle as I picked up my grunt tube again and sent a series of soft tending grunts. I started in his direction and moved the tube in the opposite direction, giving him the illusion someone else had found his girlfriend and was leading her off for a little romance on the other end of the slough.

A Second Chance

The next few seconds are still a blur to me even to this day, as the old swamp buck covered 100 yards, to the base of my tree, in no time at all. I was able to draw my bow on his reckless sprint in and stay on him until he finally stopped. It wasn't an ideal shot as he was facing straight at me, almost straight down, with his rack nearly touching my tree. So, I decided to be patient, let him slip past me and, hopefully, shoot him quartering away as he was following the same trail the doe took earlier. The one problem was that he nailed my ground scent seconds later and came absolutely unglued. It almost sounded like someone had opened the gates to the Kentucky Derby by the way that he took off.

I felt sick to my stomach thinking my opportunity had slipped right



Emery relies heavily on his scouting, both in-season and from previous years, to place himself in locations where he has a good opportunity to hunt mature bucks.

Hunting Pressured Public-Land Bucks

There are several things I feel helped me be successful on my Indiana public-land bowhunt, which just so happened to take place during the state's firearms season:

1. Know your gear like the back of your hand. Make everything as quiet as possible and practice your climbing method until you're sick of it.
2. Never kayak/boat in the dark on water that you're not familiar with. There are so many issues and concerns that you might discover with some daylight. These include log jams, rising/dropping water levels, other vessels, underwater obstacles, angry beavers, etc.
3. Learn where pressure is applied from other hunters and use that to your advantage. Sometimes it's almost best to burn a morning discovering where everyone is parked and stinking up the woods.
4. Never assume just because you're far from the road that you're in a honey hole or that you'll be the only one there. Sometimes an overlooked spot or hard-to-reach area can be just out of sight of your vehicle.
5. Don't get discouraged when your season has been slow or things haven't gone your way. In the whitetail woods, it only takes a few seconds for luck to change and all that sweat and hard work suddenly pay off. So, keep grinding!

Check out Jacob Emery's video on this deer, "Kayaking for a Big Mature Indiana Public Land Bow Kill Buck," on his YouTube Channel, DO3 Outdoors. **B**



After downing his deer, Emery hauled it back to the kayak to begin the one-mile paddle to get the deer out to the road.

through my fingers, but all of a sudden it was quiet again. A quick glance around the tree revealed the buck had stopped seven yards out in a confused state, wondering whether he should find his "woman" or get the hell out of Dodge. Somehow, some way, this old buck let me raise my bow, still at full draw, to the sky and bring it back down on the opposite side of the tree in a matter of seconds.

Settling my top pin just behind the crease of the shoulder, I was able to release my arrow and execute a perfect quartering-away shot. In disbelief, I hung my bow up and watched him fall over seconds later, with a flood of emotions setting in.

I struggled for the next 20 minutes as I tried not to drop my phone and steady my fingers to dial my grandfather and a few friends to break the news that I had possibly just shot my best buck to date miles deep in a public swamp. Gathering up my gear, I was able to safely rappel down the tree in just a few minutes and take up the blood trail. It happened to be the best blood trail I had ever followed in 21 years as a bowhunter and I was able to walk at a steady pace and recover the buck only 75 yards away. Nothing, and I mean nothing, can beat the feeling of a quick, ethical kill.

An overwhelming feeling of gratitude set in as I sat with the buck in disbelief that it had all come together. Sure, I had gone the extra mile to get away from the crowds. I had scouted hard, I had shot my bow in the blistering summer heat and I had stayed up late staring at maps, wondering what

my next move should be time and time again. But it didn't feel real to me that I had taken another one of those mystical creatures we call a mature public-land buck.

I laughed at what my 8-year-old self would think of a buck like this back then and realized it's probably not much different than how I felt that day. See, over the years I've come to love the memories over the inches, and I feel that making your hunt an adventure adds so much value to the animal, the process of the entire hunt and the core reason we all do it. Besides, working hard for something feels better than having it handed to you, at least in my opinion. I am forever grateful for the memory of that deer and will never forget the feeling of success as I was paddling that hard-earned buck back to my truck.

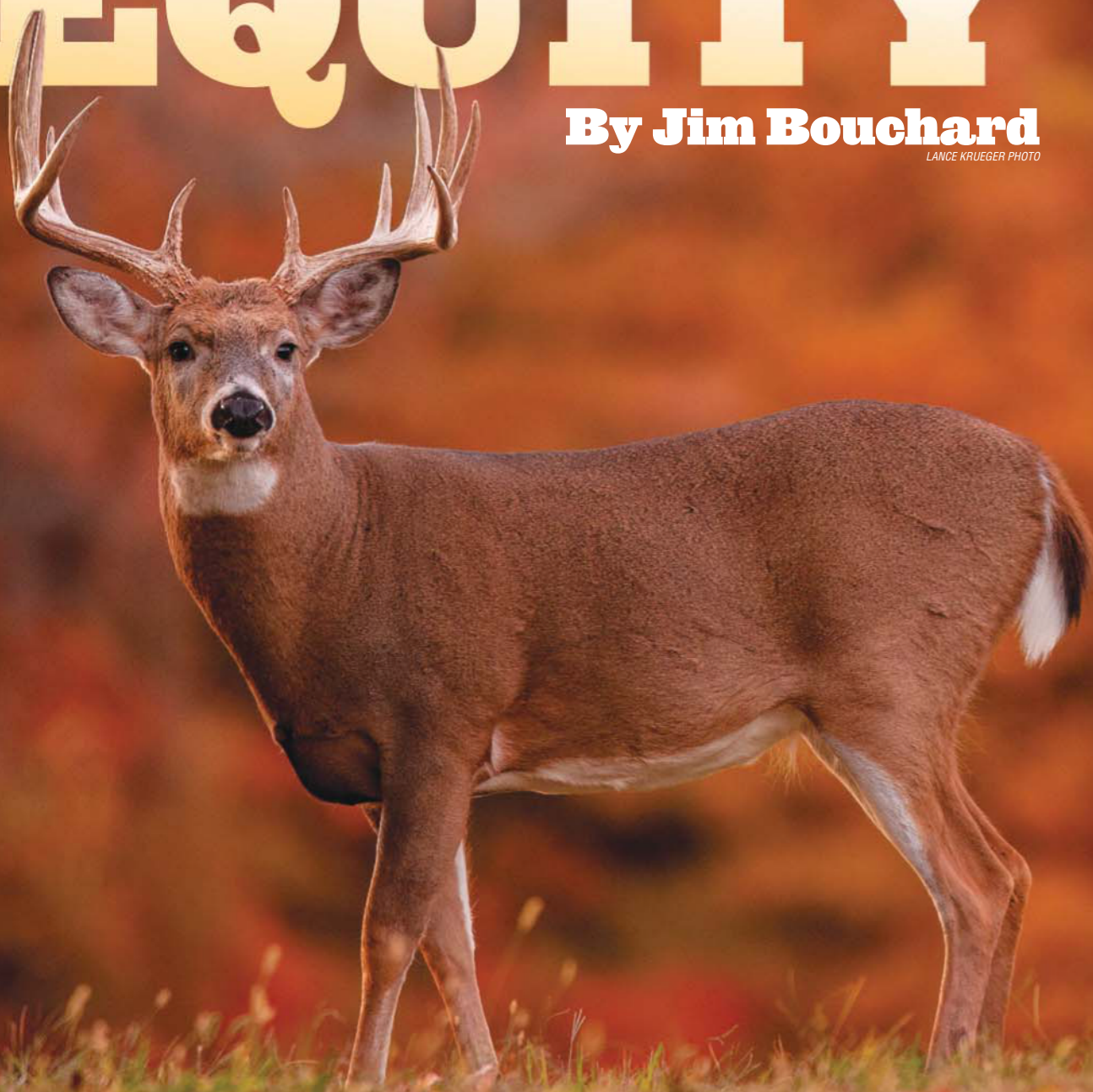


The paddle out is always sweeter when you have a nice whitetail on board.

SEAT EQUITY

By Jim Bouchard

LANCE KRUEGER PHOTO



There's Much to Be Learned by Simply Spending Time in the Woods

It's all about the reps. This slogan is one I have lived by for many years in regard to all the endeavors I have ever chased. Baseball, golf, archery, guitar playing, fitness, etc. With each of these, it is impossible to be successful without performing particular acts countless times. There are definitely ways of perfecting this repetitive practice; however, it will always come down to performing these acts many different times with the most efficiency possible.

While listening to a podcast earlier this fall, I realized that sometimes people can get a little too "scientific" regarding their analysis of hunting philosophy. Sometimes getting your butt out there as much as possible is the best way to learn. It was then that I thought of the concept of "seat equity."

The individual in the podcast I was listening to was doing his best to destroy the concept of "You can't kill them in camp." He was talking about being more meticulous with your time and only going out when the conditions were absolutely perfect. He also stated he plans on having a good buck killed in one to three sits each season.

While the speaker did make some good points, he also was omitting the large majority of the hunters out there. If you are an individual who is basically a professional hunter with acres of private land at your disposal and limitless time for pursuit, the idea of being very methodical with your attempts at deer is a great idea. However, having control over all of the variables is a luxury not many hunters have. Trying to control these variables will never hurt, but if you are a weekend warrior who hunts heavily pressured land, you have to get while the getting is good. If you only have a weekend to hunt and the wind isn't perfect, sitting it out and

waiting for another day that may not come will lead to many unfilled tags and lost opportunities. It's much more important to get out there, adapt and learn as you go.

Nothing Beats Experience

Growing up, I immersed myself in hunting magazines and read them religiously. Eventually, I started renting the few hunting videos that would show up at the local store, but my main source of hunting information came from magazines and books. The information sounded so easy and straightforward on the pages, but when I put it to use in the woods it never seemed to work out as planned. The lessons that stuck the hardest with me were always the ones I learned by getting out there and trying. For years, I was winded at the bottom of valleys and skunked on field edges, and when the occasional opportunity came, I would whiff on my shots. The biggest solution to all these early failures was immersing myself in the woods and learning from my mistakes. The more time I spent scouting and looking for the spot, the more things started to make sense. The more times I got pinned down while drawing, the more I realized what I could and could not get away with.

The great golfer Ben Hogan famously stated, "The secret is in the dirt." Hogan was one of the best ever to strike a golf ball and was also known for his extensive practice sessions. When he wanted to figure something out, he went out and found it in the dirt of the practice range. He took his knowledge of the golf swing and made it happen in real time by figuring out what worked and what didn't.

Hunting is much like a golf swing — you can be successful in many dif-

ferent forms. From the way you set up your bow, to the way you set up your treestand, it's totally up to you. Of course, there is a reason this particular magazine sells — it is key to exchanging tried-and-true information. The sharing of tips and tactics will always lead to advancements. However, nothing makes it happen like "doing." I know of many quirky things I do with in my hunting tactics that may or may not be essential to my success; however, at some point they made a difference. As a result, many of these have stuck with me.

"You can't kill 'em in camp" has always been the mantra that has gotten many hunters out of bed, and I believe it lends a huge part in the success of many accomplished hunters I know. Sometimes you just gotta go out. No matter if it's rainy, hot, windy, post-rut, low pressure, a full moon or you're tired. Sometimes you just have to get your butt in the seat.

I will never forget one of the first good bucks that I ever shot. It was a



Author Jim Bouchard says "Seat Equity." Author Jim Bouchard says "Seat Equity," putting time in the stand no matter the conditions is one of the best learning experiences a bowhunter can have.

SEAT EQUITY

result of purely getting out and trying. I had access to a 5-acre chunk of private property while I was attending college. I sat in this particular location three times with no encounters at all. I was driving out to this property with the task of studying for my midterm. I simply wanted to get out somewhere quiet and sit in my truck, possibly see some deer in the neighbor's field and skip the hassle of a busy library. After an hour of studying, I decided to check my spot out and see if there was any activity. Sure enough, there was a new scrape 10 yards away from the stand.

Against my better judgment, I ditched studying, put on my camo clothes and headed back to the stand. With a guilty mind, I watched the sun go down and realized I had wasted a couple of hours of study time for nothing. It was then I saw the small sapling in the distance rocking back and forth. Within minutes, I was watching my arrow pass through the buck's lungs at a mere 15 yards. I would have never had that opportunity if I didn't just get out there and try. It was the first deer I had seen from this location after four attempts, and he ended up wearing my tag for that season.

Don't Make Excuses

It is very easy to talk yourself out of heading to the woods; this goes with anything difficult, for that matter. For

example, how many people have said they'd start a new diet "tomorrow?"

The bottom line is getting out in the woods will never truly hurt you. Of course, it is advised that you keep all of the variables in check such as ensuring quiet access to the stand, maintaining an advantageous wind direction, etc. However, sometimes the craziest things can happen if you are just simply *there*.

Witnessing cool stuff in the wild is directly proportional to the time in which you spend in it. I have had many failed hunts totally turn around with an amazing wildlife sighting and, in some cases, a bloody arrow. There was one occurrence where I had limited options to hunt and decided on a rut funnel that had a very questionable wind. Immediately upon getting to my stand I jumped a bedded buck and doe. Even though I was tempted to call it quits, I climbed in my stand and within minutes enjoyed some of the best rutting action I had ever witnessed, ultimately resulting in me killing the same buck I jumped at the base of my tree upon my entry.

I don't know how many guys I have heard say that they got down from their stand early because they spooked a deer or had a doe blowing at them relentlessly for the first half-hour of their sit. I say, "Don't do it!" Crazy things have happened. For example, one of my best bucks came into my stand just 20 minutes after a doe wore her nasal passages raw snorting at me for the

first 15 minutes of daylight. If you only get to hunt for a limited time, what choice do you have than to stick it out?

Become a Closer

Bowhunting is a difficult endeavor, and that is the reason most sportsmen love it. Every bowhunter who is consistently successful has put in the reps or developed some "seat equity."

Not only have they put miles and miles into scouting and understanding how deer interact with their environment, but they have also put in multitudes of reps to perfect their ability to close the deal. Special forces put hundreds of hours in high-stress situations so that it becomes second nature when the "real deal" happens. The same needs to be done as a hunter. I am not putting a bowhunter at the same level as a Navy Seal; however, we all know the difference between those hunters who get it done occasionally and the true "closers." The closers have developed the skill of not only putting themselves in the right situation, but also closing the deal in the most stressful of circumstances. This can only be accomplished by doing it countless times.

I am far from cool as a cucumber when it comes to the moment of truth. I depend on my practice and experience to get through the times when my brain isn't working properly. It is no different than when I used to play baseball. You don't think your way through hitting an 85-mph slider; your body simply reacts. The best hitters in the world first develop solid fundamentals, and then they dig in and repeat over and over again until the body knows how to react when all the chips are down.

The next time you are letting your bow collect dust in the corner, or thinking about sitting out a morning hunt because it is too windy, go pick that bow up. Get out of bed and get after it. If you want that taxidermy bill you have to put in that "seat equity."

There are no cheat codes in the real bowhunting world. Time spent in the field will return dividends. Even on those days when you see nothing and have rain pouring through your supposedly "waterproof" gear, you are building experience that will make the successful hunt that much more special. Each moment spent perfecting your craft is a step in the right direction. And, with time, the littlest thing could end up making the biggest difference. **B**



Even if a sit seems lost, sometimes you need to soldier on and remain vigilant. Bouchard tagged this 10-pointer shortly after a doe had detected him on the stand.

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By **JON E. SILKS**

CROSSBOW TEST

BARNETT HYPER RAPTOR

A feature-packed crossbow at a really nice price.

BARNETT'S first North American manufacturing facility was started in 1976, followed by its first U.S. plant in 1980.

The company has produced many firsts in the industry along the way, including the first crank-cocking device, and it continues to forge ahead with new designs, features and attractive price points.

Barnett introduced the all-new Hyper Raptor for 2023 and equipped it with a full complement of features and technologies. The rig is home to a patented Step-Through riser, self-timing Infinity Cams, TriggerTech trigger, Soft-Lok Bristle Bolt Retainer System and much more.

Custom Connection

Much of the overall experience when shooting a crossbow comes down to those few touchpoints the shooter has with the bow — the cheek piece, foregrip, butt stock, grip and trigger. With that in mind, Barnett outfits the Hyper Raptor with a lever-activated, tactical, telescoping butt stock that offers 2 inches of length-of-pull adjustment across five positions. Further, a thick, soft, rubber butt pad with soft-touch diamond texture is coupled with a rubber-

wrapped cheek piece to offer comfort. The cheek piece size and position are designed for optimal eye positioning in reference to the scope. A pass-through foregrip is home to the multi-position, rubber wrapped, Verti-Grip palm rest (a front tactical grip that folds up into the foregrip). Molded safety wings sit above the foregrip and are bolted to the rail where they encourage the shooter to keep their digits below the flight deck and out of harm's way. A tactical pistol grip with front and back rubber inlays sits just behind the large, red-anodized trigger guard.

Trigger Action

Mounted to the top rear of the black-anodized, machined-aluminum rail is a trigger box that is home to several features. First, a Gen 3.5 TriggerTech trigger is advertised to break at 3 pounds, while the Frictionless Release Technology driven by a free-floating roller between the sear and trigger is designed to produce a smoother, lighter trigger pull with zero creep.

Barnett's ADF (Anti-Dry Fire) System with Nock Sensor prevents the bow from being fired without a bolt properly loaded. An auto-engaging trigger safety requires the shooter to move the generously sized safety lever to the fire position before shooting. A scope mount is bolted to the top of the trigger housing and a patented Soft-Lok Floating Bristle Bolt Retainer is

Barnett's budget-friendly Hyper Raptor is comfortable to shoot, packed with high-tech features and shoots 400-grain bolts at speeds up to 410 fps.



THE SPECS

Manufacturer: Barnett Crossbows, 800-237-4507; barnettcrossbows.com

Model: Hyper Raptor

Safety Features: Pass-through foregrip, finger reminders, anti-dry fire, Nock Sensor and auto-engaging trigger safety

Cam System: Infinity Cams

Riser: Step-through, composite

Overall Length: 32.5 inches

Axle-to-Axle Width: 11.375 inches (at rest); 7.25 inches (cocked)

Advertised Weight: 7.1 pounds (crossbow only)

String: DF97, 32.875 inches

Cables: X-99, 14.375 inches

Limbs: Parabolic Raptor Split Limbs

Draw Weight: 214 pounds

Power Stroke: 14 inches

Stock/Forearm: Structural composite, multi-part

Finish: Matte gray stock with black-anodized metal components

Advertised Speed: 410 fps

w/400-grain bolt

MSRP: \$599.99

Comments: Many features and technologies packed into a budget-friendly package!

included to consistently position and secure bolts for takeoff. The cocking rope groove at the rear of the trigger

box features new Rope Hold Roller Ball technology that keeps the RCD rope in place.

The "Bow" in Crossbow

The Hyper Raptor bow assembly is built on Barnett's patented Step-Through Riser (STR) that eliminates the need for a typical foot stirrup, making the bow more compact. Rubber bumpers on the STR protect it when placed on the ground. An injection molding process shapes the lightweight composite material into its final form, including limb pocket fixtures, a broadhead clearance scoop and structural support for the new Halo System.

A set of wide-stance split limbs are compression molded from a fiberglass composite that features continuous fibers to eliminate stress points and maximize energy distribution. Limbs team up with the machined aluminum, Self-Timing Infinity Cams to generate bolt speeds advertised to reach 410 fps and 142 foot-pounds of kinetic energy when shooting a 400-grain bolt. The Halo System is supported by, and wrapped around, the back end of the riser where it creates a platform to eliminate cable cross-

ing and aligns cables to cam grooves, thereby eliminating efficiency-robbing torque, cam lean and limb twist. A set of string dampeners are pre-installed on the Halo system. When cocked, the Hyper Raptor's axle-to-axle width is just more than 7 inches.

What's in the Box?

The crossbow comes with a 4x36mm illuminated multi-reticle scope; three 20-inch HyperFlite Bolts with fieldpoints; a lightweight, side-mount quick-detach quiver; sled-style rope cocking device; and rail lube.

SPEED & ENERGY

	BOLT SPEED	KINETIC ENERGY
420-GRAIN BOLT	387.33 fps	139.95 ft./lbs.
500-GRAIN BOLT	359.67 fps	143.66 ft./lbs.
398.6-GRAIN MFR. BOLT	398 fps	140.24 ft./lbs.

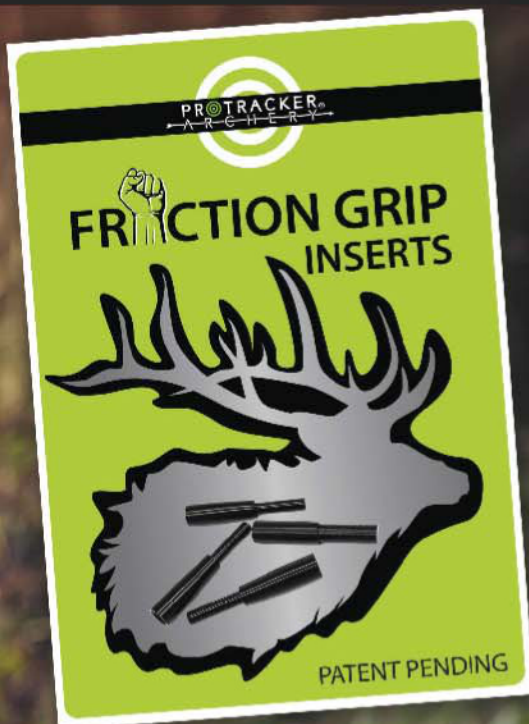
BOWHUNTING Test Measurements:

Maximum Width: 15.56 inches (at rest); 11.06 inches (cocked)
Overall Length: 32.06 inches
Mass Weight: 7.07 pounds (crossbow only); 8.07 pounds (with accessories)
Average Trigger Pull: 3.5 pounds
Length of Pull: Adjustable from 12.81-14.81 inches, across five positions
Average Shot Noise: 110.5 dBA with 420-grain bolt; 103.5 dBA with 500-grain bolt
Maximum Shot Deviation at 35 Yards: .875-inch

Range Notes

You will be hard pressed to find another crossbow on the market that can match the Hyper Raptor when it comes to a combination of high-tech features and an affordable price. We also took note of the crossbow's design — it's one of the smallest and lightest we've tested this year. Measured bolt speed was just a bit under the advertised spec, and shot noise was a little above average. That said, I found the Hyper Raptor comfortable and easy to control and had a positive and enjoyable overall shooting experience. **B**

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MYSTERY RANCH TREEHOUSE 9:

SADDLE-HUNTING SPECIAL

A NEW minimalist pack that's perfect for the saddle hunter.

I can't believe I'm actually writing this, but I am super-excited about a new *fanny pack* I'll be using this fall for my saddle-hunting adventures. I've always despised the fanny pack and consider it one of the most egregious fashion faux pas in history. However, the moment I saw the new Treehouse 9 from Mystery Ranch, I knew it would be the perfect saddle-hunting companion, allowing me to comfortably carry my saddle gear and access it easily and quietly.

Oh, and for the record, Mystery Ranch calls the Treehouse 9 a "hip pack" worn using a waist belt (or carried via the removable shoulder strap). Available in Wood (pictured) or DPM Canopy camouflage in sizes S-XL, the Treehouse 9 weighs just more than 3.5 pounds and offers nine liters (545 cubic inches) of storage volume designed with the minimalist whitetail hunter in mind. Although Mystery Ranch does not specifically mention saddle hunters in its description of the Treehouse 9, one look at the pack and I knew it was a marriage made in heaven — starting with the two, cylinder-shaped, drawstring side pockets perfect for storing a lineman's belt, tree tether and other climbing gear. In between those pockets is a main compartment more than adequate for holding binoculars, rangefinder, calls and other essentials. This main pocket features what Mystery Ranch calls a "magnetic rip-zip top flap" that allows one-handed, zipper-free access. And within the main pocket are several small elastic pouches and one large, zippered, interior pocket.

Rounding out the storage options on the Treehouse 9 are a large, front zippered

pouch with two smaller elastic pockets inside; a pair of small zippered pockets on the waist belt — left and right — perfectly sized for holding your release aid, wind checker, headlamp, snack bag and other small items you want to keep handy; and a pair of lashing straps underneath the main compartment that allow you to attach a set of climbing sticks, spare clothing or other items.

I also must mention the extremely quiet, soft, fleece exterior of the Treehouse 9 polyester fabric, offering a level of stealth that matches its functionality. Meanwhile, a 210D laminated nylon backing and coated YKK zippers ensure the pack keeps all your stuff protected from foul weather.

As for comfort, the Treehouse 9's generously padded, adjustable hip belt does a great job of supporting the pack's weight. And the absence of shoulder straps means that I can easily wear the pack facing backwards as I walk from my vehicle to my tree, then simply rotate the pack to

my front side and have easy access to everything inside while climbing. Testing with my saddle confirms I can use my lineman's belt without interference as I scale the tree. The pack makes it really easy to access everything I need without having to twist sideways to access gear pouches on my saddle. In fact, thanks to the Treehouse 9, I've removed those pouches from my saddle, reducing its weight and allowing me to clip my saddle platform to the saddle while walking and climbing.

Oh, and once you are at hunting height, you can remove the pack and easily attach it to the tree using the integrated tree strap or, if you prefer, by using a tree hook and hanging the pack by the grab handle in front of the main pocket.

I haven't been this excited about a fanny pack since 1985, and I can't wait to strap the Treehouse 9 around my waist and strike out in search of big bucks! **B**

— Editor Christian Berg



\$229 / Mystery Ranch,
833-548-1999; mysteryranch.com



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EASTON GENERATION 2 BOWTRUK:

PEACE OF MIND FOR TRAVELING BOWHUNTERS

WHETHER YOU'RE DRIVING to hunting camp or flying to a far-off destination for your dream hunting excursion, having a high-quality bow case to protect your precious cargo is more than just a "good idea" — it's essential if you want to ensure your bow and related accessories reach their final destination in good working order.

I learned this the hard way last year after returning home from a western trip only to discover two of my arrows had somehow been snapped in half during transit. Apparently my case, even though it had built-in arrow holders, wasn't able to withstand the double whammy of the flight and the baggage handlers.

Thankfully, Easton Archery has a long-lasting, versatile, new option that covers almost every travel need — the second generation of its popular BowTruk travel bow case. Even more durable than the original BowTruk, and sporting some new features, this innovative bow case provides ample room for safely storing not only your bow, but also arrows, accessories and other gear and apparel.

The case, which comes in three sizes — 47x16x9, 40x17x9 and 36x16x9 — has a large main compartment that allows you to envelope your bow in soft, protective padding, with cushioning on all sides. An adjustable Velcro anchor system

then lets you strap the bow securely in place. Thanks to the BowTruk's deep interior, there's also space to add hunting clothes, providing even more cushioning around your bow and bow sight.

The BowTruk also features a very large arrow compartment (we recommend using a hard arrow tube to protect your arrows) and two spacious accessory compartments that are accessible from the inside as well as the exterior of the case. That's a great feature, especially if you want to add something at the last minute without opening the entire case. Plus, the large exterior pocket that provides access to these compartments can also be used to store additional items if need be.

If you're hunting with a bow that has a longer axle-to-axle length, you may want to go with the 47-inch-long BowTruk, but for my needs I opted for the medium size (40x17x9) and have plenty of room for everything I want to pack. It's also worth noting this particular size is actually two inches wider than its predecessor, allowing the case to better accommodate longer bow sights.

Anyone who has ever flown for a hunting trip knows how draining it can be to have to carry your bow case into and through an airport, especially when you're also pulling a suitcase filled with clothing and personal items. Well, one of the major pluses to the BowTruk is its heavy-

duty, sealed-bearing, soft-rubber wheels. These smooth-rolling, skate-style wheels are a dream compared to the wheels that are on my current luggage, making pulling the bow case a breeze. In addition, the BowTruk comes with a "Trailer Hitch" strap that allows you to secure an additional duffel or travel bag to the case, if you choose to do so.

Although it's not a true hard case, the BowTruk's hard/soft hybrid shell is designed to be extremely tough and durable. The case sports a hard perimeter and reinforced corners, as well as a main zipper that's woven in rather than stitched to the case. The outer shell is comprised of tough, TPU-coated, 1680D ballistic nylon, which Easton notes was originally developed for military body armor. Put it all together and this case is built to stand up to wear, tear and abuse, yet it only weighs about 15 pounds, much lighter than many hard cases.

While I'm no longer a huge fan of flying due to all the issues associated with airlines and flight cancellations nowadays, I actually can't wait to head out on my next trip to put the Generation 2 BowTruk to the test. Easton packs 100 years of quality design and engineering into all of its products, and based on my "testing" around the house, I am looking forward to putting this bow case through the wringer on my next flight. **E**

— Associate Editor Mark Demko



\$499.99 / Easton Archery,
801-539-1400; eastonarchery.com

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NEW GEAR

By **MARK DEMKO**



EVEN BETTER BINO CASE

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Badlands Gear; badlandsgear.com

Badlands has taken an exceptional bino case and made it even better with the release of the Mag 2. This lightweight, quiet case features an improved, magnetic opening that stays open when you need it to but also remains well-sealed when shut, protecting your expensive optics from dust and damage. Other features include rear magnetic suspension pocket, bino tethers and quick-release carabiner rings, a bow hook and side and bottom accessory attachment points.

The Mag 2 is available in small (6.125x5.25x2.75 inches), medium (7.25x6x3) and large (8.25x6.5x3) sizes in four solid-color and camo patterns. Plus, it's designed to be compatible with Badlands' new modular accessories, including the RF Mag Case, a magnetic-closure rangefinder case and the Everything Pouch, ideal for anything from your cellphone to a GPS unit and light snacks.



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*Smokey's Deer Lures;
smokeysdeerlure.com*

Help draw an unsuspecting buck by your stand or blind with Smokey's new Doe Interdigital Gland Lure, featuring 10-percent doe-in-heat additive. Smokey's recommends using 3-5 full eye droppers on a rag or scent pad as you make your way to and from your stand. For best results, reapply a full dropper every 150 yards to keep the scent strong. Comes in a 1.25-ounce bottle.



SUPER SCOUTER

\$189.99

*Covert Scouting Cameras;
covertscoutingcameras.com*

The WC32 features a .2-second trigger speed; 48 infrared, No-Glow LEDs and a 100-foot flash range for nighttime photos; and silent image capture to avoid spooking game. The 32MP camera, which delivers high-quality images and 1080p video, measures 5.7x4.5x3 inches. Setup and reviewing images are easy via the 2.4-inch screen and app, and users can customize sensor sensitivity, image resolution, video quality and more.



DEADLY WORK OF ART

\$100

*Duck Creek Custom Calls;
duckcreekcc.com*

Unable to find mass-produced game calls that he really liked, Duck Creek owner Chris Riggs set out to design calls that truly mimicked the sounds he heard in the wild. The result is a line of custom waterfowl and game calls, including all-wood grunt tubes for deer. Designed to grab a buck's attention, the grunt tubes are capable of making a range of sounds. No two calls look or sound exactly alike, and they all come with a lifetime guarantee.



FASTER, QUIETER, SMOOTHER

\$1,049

*Gearhead Archery;
gearheadarchery.com*

The P30 features a rotational limb support system in the shoot-through riser design, taking stress off the limbs throughout the draw cycle, resulting in a smoother draw, faster shooting and less shot noise. The bow has a 30.625-inch axle-to-axle length, adjustable brace height (5-6.75 inches) and draw length that can be adjusted, in half-inch increments, over a four-inch range. It comes in 55-, 65- and 75-pound peak draw weights.



PEAK ATTRACTANT

\$15.99
Tink's; tinks.com

Described by Tink's as the "ultimate whitetail deer attractant," the new PEAK30 features pure doe urine captured during the peak of the estrous cycle. The company guarantees PEAK30 contains 30 pg/ml levels of estrogen, the peak level for a doe that's ready to breed. Use this attractant during the rut to entice bucks into shooting range by applying it to the ground, over a scrape or mock scrape, or even adding it to low-hanging branches. Comes in a one-ounce bottle.



WHISPER-QUIET & HANDS-FREE

\$599.99
Ozonics; ozonicsshooting.com

Ozonics continues to enhance its ozone-generating technology with the HR500, a model that boasts even quieter operation and hands-free adjustment. Thanks to the reconfigured fan placement and new circuit board, the unit is quieter in the Boost and Hyperboost modes than previous models. Plus, it's Bluetooth compatible, working in tandem with the Ozonics app to allow the user to change settings on his or her cell phone instead of having to reach out to the unit, potentially spooking game in the process.



IMPACT & PENETRATION

\$15.99 EACH
SEVR; sevrbroadheads.com

SEVR's rear-deploying Ti 1.75 broadhead features a swept-back blade angle and two 420 grade, .032-inch-thick stainless-steel blades that open to a 1.75-inch cutting diameter, delivering lethal results on game. The Lock-and-Pivot Technology keeps blades contained in the ferrule in flight, while allowing them to open upon impact and pivot as needed as they pass through game. The heads also have a Practice Lock mode, allowing you to practice with them without dulling the blades. Available in 100- and 125-grain options.



LURE 'EM IN

\$84.99
BuckStik; buckstick.com

Help lure in wary bucks with the BuckStik All in One Licking Branch, Rubbing Post and Mock Scrape System. This easy-to-use setup, which is designed to present three main gland secretions that deer use to communicate (preorbital, forehead and interdigital), at the proper height for interaction, comes with a long-lasting fiberglass rod, leaf assembly and a 5ml spray bottle of all three deer gland secretions. The BuckStik, which can be set up without any tools, is also available in branch and vine versions.

WHERE TO GO/MARKETPLACE

For more information or to place an order, call Jeff Millar at **717-695-8081**. Visa, Mastercard and American Express accepted. Write: **Where To Go or Marketplace** section, *Petersen's BOWHUNTING*, 6385 Flank Drive, Suite 800, Harrisburg, PA 17112; or email at jeff.millar@outdoorsg.com.



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- bowhuntingmag.com
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By **EDDIE CLAYPOOL**

THE DIY GUY

ETCHED

One of Those Days
You'll Never Forget!

OVER THE COURSE of a bowhunting lifetime, you will experience some moments that remain forever etched in your mind.

One September day in the Gila country of southwestern New Mexico, I made just such a memory. Allow me to share one of my greatest days afield.

In 1988, I was 29 years old. I'd been bowhunting elk for the previous eight years, mainly in Colorado, and I'd become quite proficient at harvesting mature bulls. It was time for some change.

Moving to the Mogollon Rim country of the Gila National Forest, I was now in the *land of the giants*. Arriving a week before the season opened, my first few days in-country were a learning experience extraordinaire. Elk were everywhere I looked, and antlers were larger than I'd dreamed of. To top it all off, I'd encountered numerous trophy mule deer bucks and a huge black bear. In a mind-melt of ecstasy, I was spending every day exploring new country and seeing new sights.

Opening day found me along a remote stretch of the Continental Divide that shaded the Plains of San Agustin. Toward evening, a hoarse bugle drifted to my ears from a nearby canyon. Making my way down the ridgeline I was following, I soon found myself peering into a short, steep drainage that ran toward the vast plain that stretched to the horizon to my north. Sitting down by a huge pine, I grabbed my binos and scanned the canyon below me. In short order, a large herd of cow elk began to materialize, all head-



ing downhill toward the open country. In a moment forever frozen in my mind, a monstrous herd bull strode onto the scene. The second my eyes saw his antlers, I knew I was looking at a world-class specimen!

As I visually and mentally measured the tines, width and mass of the bull, I reached the conclusion this guy would easily break the 400-inch mark, net. And as the world record at the time was well below that mark, I knew that I was looking at a potential Pope and Young world-record animal. In shock, I couldn't think clearly. My head was spinning. Finally putting together a plan for my approach, I stuffed glass, grabbed bow and headed down the canyon. With a couple of hours of daylight left, I was determined to take my time and make this stalk work.

As I soon found out, it was going to be all I could do to simply keep up with this traveling herd, as it was clearly headed for a pond I'd seen about a mile away. Boy, I sure wish I'd simply posted up at that sucker earlier! Finally making it within 100 yards of the tail-end of the herd, I sprinted from tree to tree in hot pursuit. Catching glimpses of the huge, 7x7 antlers of the bull as he pushed his herd toward an evening drink, I was stoked. At any moment, I might close the distance and get a shot.

Our travels began to spill out onto the Plains of San Agustin, and the tree cover I'd enjoyed thus far began to peter-out. Becoming panicked, I knew I'd have to push my luck or the herd would be in open country. Trying desperately to gain 50 yards on it, I darted between sparse junipers. Nocking an arrow as I slid behind a bushy evergreen, I peered around the other side of the tree. About 80 yards distant, my trophy of a lifetime trotted along behind the last cow. They might as well have been a mile away, as I couldn't — and wouldn't — shoot that far.

As I sat watching my opportunity fade into the distance, movement to the left caught my eye. Glancing that way, I spotted a pronghorn buck about 200 yards, slowly making its way to me. As with the bull elk, the moment I spotted the buck I knew I was looking at a potential world-record specimen. As I wrapped my mind around this reality, I could only smile. I had been in the presence of not one but two world-class animals of different species at the same place, at the same time.

A few minutes later, the giant pronghorn walked past me at a mere 30 yards. As sure as I live and breathe, he was all of 90 inches, and I didn't have an antelope tag. What a day! **B**



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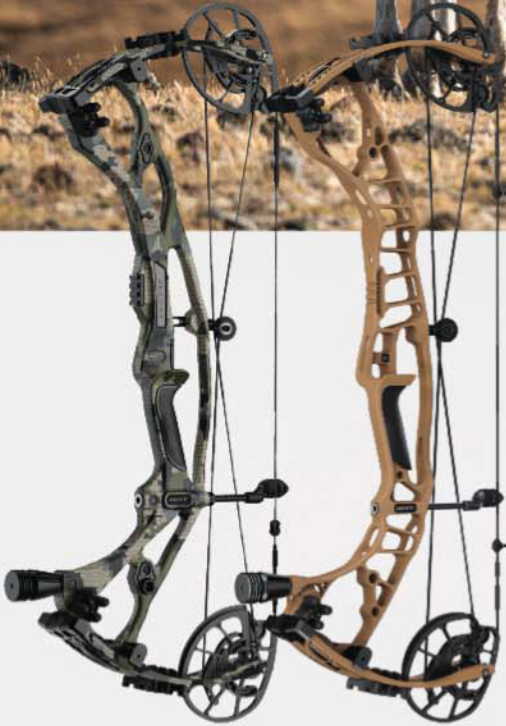
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A photograph of three hunters on horseback, viewed from behind, standing on a rocky ridge. They are wearing camouflage gear and have bows mounted on their backs. The background shows a vast, hilly landscape under a clear sky.

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A close-up photograph of two Hoyt bows. The bow on the left is a carbon model with a dark, sleek finish. The bow on the right is an aluminum model with a light-colored, textured finish. Both bows are shown from the side, highlighting their complex limb and pulley systems.

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