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FEBRUARY 2022 VOLUME 45 ■ ISSUE 8
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Alabama has one of the longest deer hunting seasons in America. The archery season starts in October, and the gun season runs into February in some regions. Rut-hunting dates vary, with chasing occurring in mid to late January in prime areas.

JOE BYERS/WINDIGO

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THE STRANGEST DEER I'VE EVER SEEN

DANIEL E. SCHMIDT

What you're seeing is not a hoax. It is the weirdest whitetail malady I've seen in my 27 years of working here at D&DH.

I first reported on this bizarre fawn in the late 1990s. Even back then, some of the weirdest things I had seen were a doe that had five fawns; a deer that was born without ears; and a Texas buck that managed to live several years with a baseball-sized rock wedged firmly in its lower jaw. Yes, those were truly bizarre discoveries, but the one you're looking at right now surely tops them all.

I received this photo from Officer Brad Stoner of the LaCrosse Police Department (WI). Stoner's co-worker, Lt. Bob Lawrence, took the photos of this bizarre eight-legged fawn while investigating a car-deer collision during the second week of May of that year.

According to Officer Stoner, the doe expelled two fawns after being hit by a car that was being driven on a wooded road within the city's limits. One of the fawns was "normal," while the other fawn, shown here, appears to be a genetic freak. To the untrained eye, it appears that two fetuses fused together in the womb, creating the eight-legged fawn with a shared digestive tract. That's not totally true, but it's awfully close.

Such incidents are sometimes seen with domestic animals, especially

dairy cows. They are rarely seen in the wild, however, probably because the animals are never found. In this case, the doe most likely would have died while giving birth, or would have given birth to a stillborn.

Longtime D&DH readers might recall a similar article I wrote that described a Maryland buck fawn that was shot by Leon Jude during a special antlerless-only hunt. That deer had two well-developed legs, complete with tiny hoofs, growing out of its shoulder blades.

While writing that article, I interviewed Dr. Glenn Olsen of Maryland's Patuxent Wildlife Research Center. According to Olsen, multi-legged animal abnormalities are usually the result of a bizarre genetic coding, rather than the fusing of two embryos.

Other biologists told me they have seen similar cases where stillborn fawns had "extra parts," but nothing this extreme.

"You never know what will happen when cells start dividing," one biologist said. "The really amazing thing is for the deer to have survived that long in the womb and to have developed as well as it did."

Amazing indeed!



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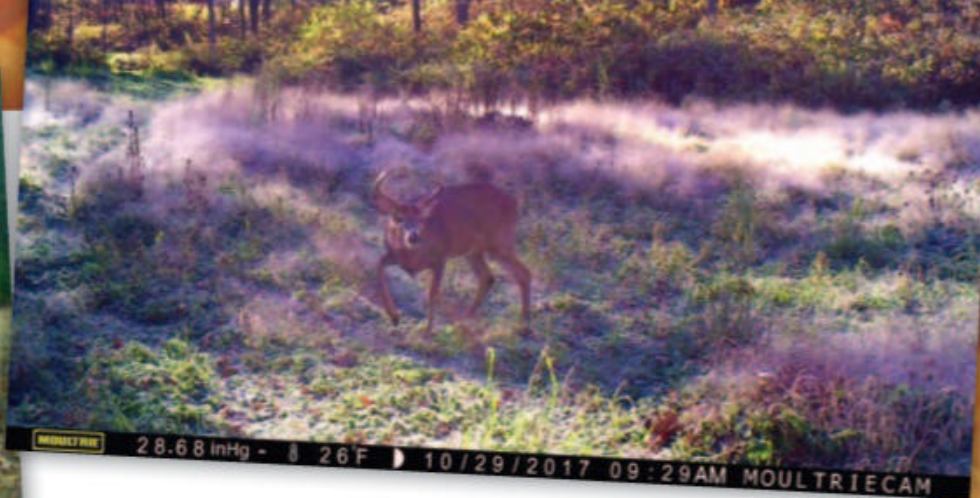
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WE HEAR ABOUT trail camera theft all the time, but I never for a moment thought it would happen to me. I tend to see the best in people, and would just assume that this couldn't happen where I live. I was wrong.

Let me set the stage for you. I live in an area where there is no hunting at all, a private community bordering a nature conservancy. I love watching the wildlife and I put up trail cameras in areas where I know there is a lot of wildlife traffic. I put two cameras way back in my swamp area that has what is called a hammock, a piece of dry land. I stack one camera set on video and a lower one set on still pictures. Closer to the house, I always feed the deer (legal) in two places to keep them as safe as I can. I have cameras set up at those sites, as well. I am retired, not hunting there, so I am still old school — no cellular cameras, which it turns out, was a good thing.

This year was a surprise to me; I saw more bucks stacking up on my land then ever before. I so enjoyed seeing them every two days around noon when I exchanged cards. I loved identifying bucks and how they would appear day after day. However this year, just after what was hunting season outside the conservancy, was totally different. When I checked the cameras closest to my house, they were smashed, the lenses broken. The batteries were removed and thrown around, and of course, the cards were gone.

I can't tell you how sick I felt at the vandalism of these two cameras so close to my house. I put my rubber boots on and went back to my hammock. For six years I have had those cameras there with unbelievable pictures of wildlife in their natural setting: a mother bobcat with

a squirrel in her mouth, on her way up the tree where she keeps her twins, and does with their fawns sleeping between their legs.

And yes, those two cameras were also broken the same way and the cards removed. That was \$1,200 worth of damaged cameras, not counting the cards and eight batteries each. I had to keep quiet about this, but I had my suspicions who it was. I decided to wait and see if something would come up.

A few weeks later at the mailboxes, I ran into the best people I had hoped to see. They know everything that happens in a 5-mile area. I played dumb and listened. Sure enough, the subject came around to the local bucks someone was bragging about poaching! I was told everything I wanted to know, and was not surprised by who they were talking about.

Just to be sure, I showed my friends the "live" big buck I saw, along with pictures I took with my cell phone of cart tracks and a bent fence where it was dragged across my property. They confirmed that was the buck that was bragged about (they saw pictures after it was killed). So that is the new and improved way thieves are robbing us of game and our hard-earned money. I cannot turn this person in; after talking to the police all I have is circumstantial evidence. I disagree. But that is the law, and because we live on private property, the game wardens won't come in.

This makes me sick, sad and angry all at once.

— Anonymous



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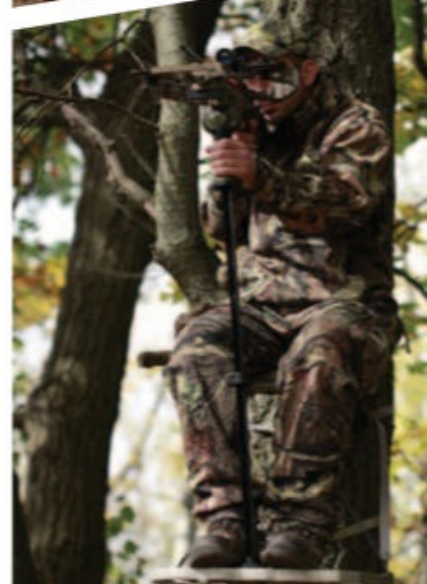
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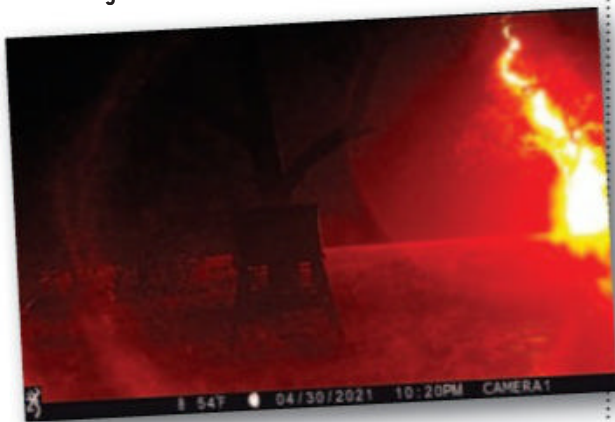
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Talk about a lightning-fast trigger speed! Check out this incredible image captured by Scott Stafford on his Browning Trail Cameras camera of a lightning bolt striking a tree!



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Maureen Tankersley: Cool!

Vincent Collins: That's wild!

Social Snapshot

*MONTHLY AVERAGES FOR JAN./FEB. 2021

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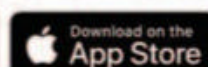


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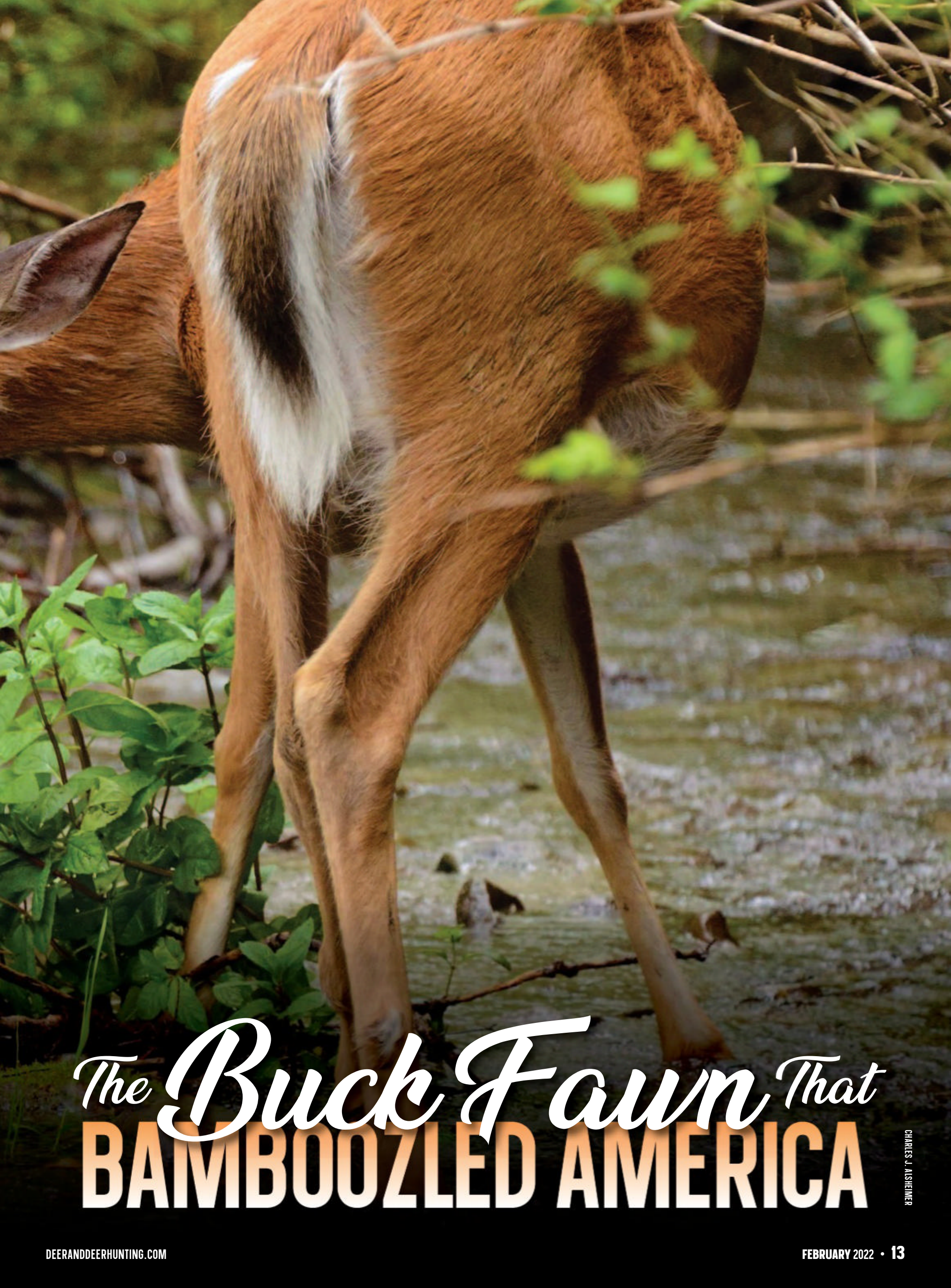




COMMENTARY

WHAT DEER HUNTERS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT 'BAMBI, A LIFE IN THE WOODS'

Maybe you imagine Bambi as a doe fawn, with big, friendly eyes, giant eyelashes, and beauty spots covering her adorable cartoon body. Maybe you're familiar with Bambi's little besties, a bunny named Thumper and a skunk called Flower. Maybe you thought Bambi was purely for children, a Disney creation that helped launch an entertainment empire of cartoon classics. Maybe you thought Bambi was a whitetail deer. And maybe you thought the author was a wonderful writer of children's stories.



The Buck Fawn That
BAMBOOZLED AMERICA

CHARLES J. ALSHEIMER



Disney's BAMBI

Walt Disney took countless liberties in tailoring the story of Bambi to a children's audience. In Disney's animated rendition, all the animals gather to greet Bambi at his birth and congratulate his mother. The owl is not only wise, he protects small animals rather than prey on them. Skunks hibernate. All animals mate in the springtime – birds, skunks, rabbits, even deer. The owl explains how they become “twitterpated,” overcome by human-like romantic feelings. Bambi's wears his first antlers in the springtime. Hunters invade the woods as winter turns to spring and the green grasses emerge. That's when Bambi's mother is shot and killed. Poachers are not differentiated from hunters and man is indiscriminate in what he shoots. Even worse, heartless hunters ignite raging forest fires and destroy wildlife habitat.

Clearly, man is evil, though viewers never see a man. The message is so powerful that some viewers remember being traumatized by watching a hunter shoot Bambi's mother, even though it's not shown. The shot is heard, and Bambi cries out for his mother with no response. His mother is simply gone and “The Great Prince” (his father) takes over parenting duties. No, this never happens in real life.

In January 2020, Disney Studios began work on a new rendition of Bambi, a “live-action” computer-generated remake for a modern audience. No release date has been announced and we can make no predictions, but it is unlikely to be favorable to hunters and hunting.

BAMBI – MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

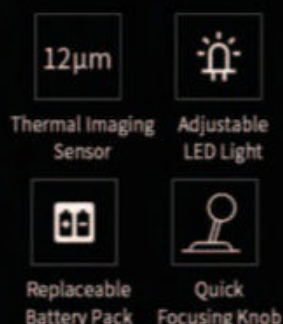
All of that would be wrong — all except for the beauty spots. Bambi was a buck, not a doe. Bambi, the cutest caricature of all forest friends, did talk to other woodland citizenry but Thumper and Flower were not among them. Absent from the original 1923 novel, Disney invented the bunny and the skunk for its animated 1942 movie. In the book only deer have names, with one or two inexplicable exceptions.

Bambi was no Disney creation, and the book wasn't written for children. It was originally written in German by an Austrian Jew whose books were banned and burned by the National Socialist Party of Germany. Yes, the Nazis hated it. They viewed it as sympathetic to Jews.

Bambi was not a whitetail. He represented the smaller roe deer species native to Europe. It was Disney that turned Bambi into a whitetail. Walt first conceived Bambi as a mule deer, but he had an animator from Maine who convinced him his audience would



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Bambi

A SYNOPSIS OF THE NOVEL

Bambi has a simple plot that lends itself to easy visualization. He is born in the spring in a thicket. His mother (in the novel she has no name) meets every need and educates Bambi in the ways of survival. Along the way he meets various animals. Soon Bambi meets his Aunt Ena and her twin fawns Faline and Gobo. The young ones encounter “princes,” bucks with crowns on their heads. The bucks are their fathers, but have little to do with Bambi, Faline and Gobo.

The animals refer to humans as “He” or “Him,” and credits humans with dangerous, god-like power. “He” has a terrifying third hand which can reach out to injure and kill with thunder. When Bambi grows his own crown “He” invades the forest and kills Bambi’s mother. Gobo disappears and is presumed dead. Bambi learns that being alone is necessary to avoid “Him.”

The next summer Bambi grows his second set of antlers and falls in love with Faline. It’s time for Bambi to learn advanced survival skills from “Old Prince” (his father) who teaches him to avoid the voices of deer because it may be a hunter’s trick. Gobo returns to the forest, having been raised by a man who found him collapsed in the snow during the hunt when Bambi’s mother was killed. Gobo, having been protected and raised by a man, now believes deer need not fear “Him.” Later, Gobo trustingly approaches a hunter in the meadow and is killed.

“Old Prince” teaches Bambi about snares and discourages him from using trails. When Bambi is wounded by a hunter, his father teaches him to confuse man and his tracking dogs and shows Bambi safe place to recover. Bambi ultimately learns that “He” is not all-powerful when they find the dead body of a poacher who was shot and killed by another man. Bambi finally understands there is “Another” who is over all creatures including “He.”

In the end, Bambi meets with twin fawns (likely his own offspring) who are bleating for their mother. He finds himself in the role of “Old Prince,” and scolds them for not being able to stay alone. The doe fawn reminds him of Faline, and the buck fawn reminds him of himself.



CHARLES J. ALSHEIMER

respond better to the more widely distributed whitetail deer.

Even though the author was an intellectual who wrote for a sophisticated audience, Bambi won the hearts of children. Felix Salten was a theater critic, an editor, and a writer on everything from the arts to politics to literary criticism. He produced plays, wrote operatic texts and published novels (including an earthy “adult” fictional memoir). He rejected being labeled as a children’s author.

A SLOW START

Deer hunters might like to know some of these things, so let’s begin at the beginning. Bambi, a Life in the Woods, got off to a sluggish start. It first appeared in serialized form in an Austrian newspaper in 1922, then as a 1923 novel in Germany. When Adolph Hitler came along (also an Austrian) he viewed it as a pro-Jewish political allegory and a threat to the Nazi party. In 1936 Bambi was banned, but eight years earlier it had already been translated into English by Whittaker Chambers while he was still a Communist. (Hitler hated communism, believing it was a Jewish conspiracy.)

Nazi officials couldn’t control what was published in the English speaking world. Bambi was a big seller in America long before it hit

the silver screen. The Book of the Month Club ordered a press run of 50,000 copies, and by 1942, 650,000 copies had been published.

In 1936 an MGM producer saw an opportunity for a film adaptation targeting a children’s audience, and bought the film rights from Salten for \$1,000. He hoped to make a live-action film but quickly saw the difficulty in that, and passed the rights on to Walt Disney. Disney went to work on it in 1937 and it opened in theaters five years later as an animated production in the middle of World War II when Hitler was at the height of his power. The timing wasn’t good for Der Führer, although Americans wouldn’t have noticed any pro-Jewish message underneath.

American readers loved Bambi. Ambitious American marketing of the novel was just the beginning. The film was Disney’s sixth animated motion picture, the first with a storyline told only by animals, and a gold mine generating box office success.

ACCOLADES FOR BAMBI

In the foreword to the first English edition (the Whittaker Chambers translation), John Galsworthy went overboard with compliments. “For delicacy of perception and essential truth, I hardly know any story of animals that can stand beside this life study

of a forest deer.” Galsworthy placed high value on the author’s feelings, “[Salten] feels nature deeply....” And on the reader’s, who “...feels the real sensation of the creatures who speak.” Never mind that fawns don’t speak, we know little of what they sense, and Bambi is hardly a “life study.”

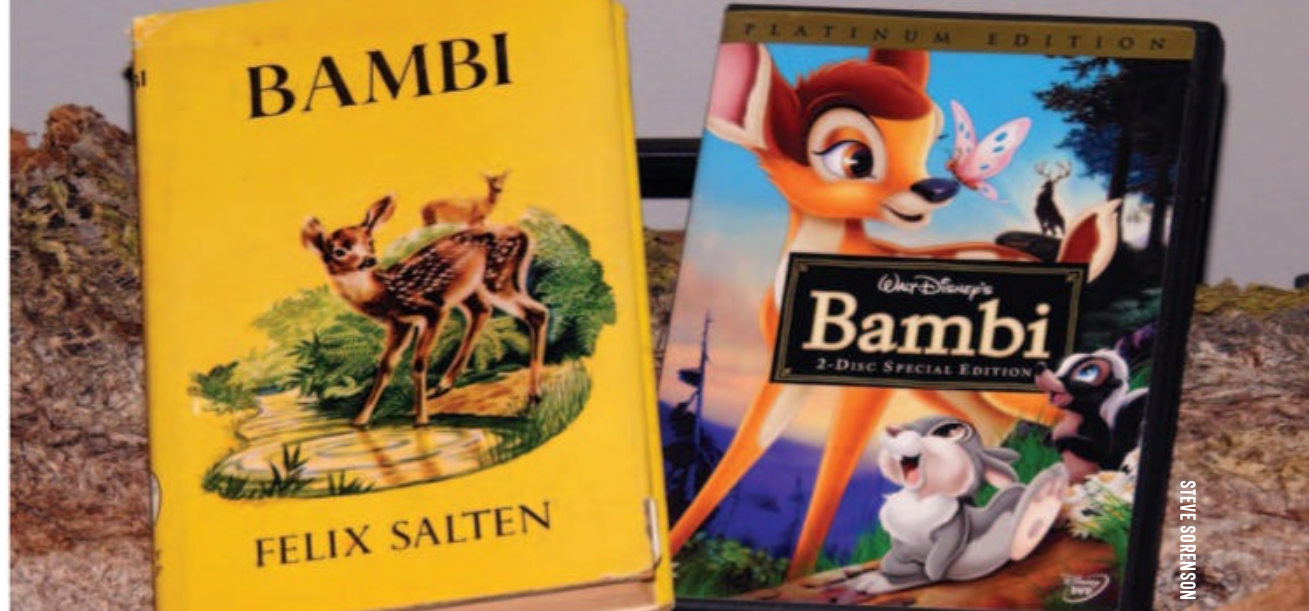
Gratuitous praise flourished. Major magazines and newspapers heaped tribute after tribute on the novel, extolling the poetic nature of Salten’s work, its sympathy, its comprehension, its allegorical relation to life. A reviewer in the Dallas Morning News (October 30, 1938) praised Salten for giving animals human speech consistent with “their essential natures,” adding that “The reader is made to feel deeply and thrillingly the terror and anguish of the hunted, the deceit and cruelty of the savage.” The “savage” is, of course, the hunter. Perhaps that is why the author of the Foreword ended his brief page saying, “I particularly recommend it to sportsmen,” rather than to children.

Few seemed bothered by the deceit built into the story itself, but while most reviews gushed with acclaim, some were more balanced. A reviewer for Catholic World gave it general praise but also a criticism for Salten’s “transference of certain human ideals to the animal mind.” That’s a start, but now having been a cultural phenomenon for more than 90 years, its overall effect has not been positive toward hunters and the system that has made whitetail deer thrive across North America.

THE BAMBI EFFECT ON HUNTERS AND HUNTING

The success of Bambi can be seen in the fact that when many Americans see a deer today, they think of this fetching fictional fawn and its sweet innocence. How can anyone not love Bambi? By extension, only the “savage” would want to harm this lovable creature of the forest which surpasses man in virtue. And besides, animals are cute! And hunters? If there’s any Nazi analogy, there is it! We should be rid of Nazis, and hunters too!

To naturalists of the time (and to today’s wildlife biologists), the gushing sentiments are reminders



TWO MORE THINGS YOU PROBABLY

Didn't Know About Bambi

Bambi and baseball icon Babe Ruth had something in common. Ruth was nicknamed “The Bambino,” the Italian word for baby which evolved into “Babe.” Bambi is a shortened version of *bambino*. Bambi and The Bambino were contemporaries. Bambi was published in 1923 and translated into English in 1928, right in the middle of Ruth’s career which spanned 1914 to 1935. But the Sultan of Swat had no connection to the fictional fawn beyond the similar names.

Felix Salten (1869–1945), the Austrian author of Bambi, was Jewish, born in Budapest, Hungary as Siegmund Salzmann and was the grandson of an Orthodox Jewish rabbi. He was a well-known political writer and social critic, so the Nazis had plenty of reason to be suspicious of his writing. He composed influential works both before and after the publication of *Bambi*, including *The Hound of Florence*, which became the basis for Disney’s 1959 movie, “The Shaggy Dog.” Its ending was rewritten to make it suitable for children.

of the earlier “nature faker” movement when nature writers habitually created life histories of animals that were audaciously anthropomorphic and shamelessly dishonest. Theodore Roosevelt firmly opposed nature fakers from the White House, yet the cultural effect of Bambi furthered that misleading practice. Despite its slanted message, Bambi, a Life in the Woods has been called the first environmental novel (Publishers Weekly, “A New Look for Bambi,” October 25, 1999). Never mind that it’s a distorted fictional story about talking animals. And never mind that concrete jungles across the land harm wildlife more than all the hunters in the nation ever could.

It’s time to say it — Bambi bamboozled America. Bambi became the most effective piece of anti-hunting propaganda America has ever seen. It depicts hunters as evil, not as wildlife management’s most important players and the best friends wildlife has. Because it became a children’s classic, it had far more success as anti-hunting indoctrination than it

ever could have had as an anti-Nazi message. Its theater premier came at a vulnerable time for the American psyche. By the end of World War II when the hunting population increased and the economy boomed, viewers thought of every doe as Bambi’s mother. It’s no wonder hunters returning home from the war were reluctant to shoot does. None of this was Felix Salten’s fault.

Salten himself was an avid hunter himself, with a hunter’s understanding of the habitat where Bambi lived. He clearly framed the dependent relationship Bambi had with his mother as a hunter would know it. Hunting has deep roots in Austria, where a hunter often honors the deer with a traditional “last bite.” He picks some grass and puts it into the deer’s mouth. In Austrian society hunters value ethics and understand their vital role in nature. In Salten’s 1939 sequel, *Bambi’s Children*, he casts himself as an ethical and responsible hunter. He could not have dreamed that his allegory would become anti-hunting disinformation in a way that far exceeds any

STEVE SORENSEN



SERENA JUCHNOWSKI

D&DH CONTRIBUTORS *Honored*

Two outdoor writers received high honors recently for articles they wrote for Deer & Deer Hunting Magazine.

STEVE SORENSEN, popular speaker, outdoor columnist and Deer & Deer Hunting Field Contributor recently won "Excellence in Craft" awards from the Pennsylvania Outdoor Writers Association (POWA) and the Mason-Dixon Outdoor Writers Association (MDOWA).

Both of Sorensen's first-place articles appeared in Deer & Deer Hunting magazine. "Buck Fever—How a Youngster Can Beat It" (September, 2020) was the top article in the Youth in the Hunting/Shooting Sports category from the Pennsylvania Outdoor Writers Association. "8 Reasons Why We Hit Deer" (February, 2020) won the Herb Blackwell Memorial Award from M-DOWA for the best magazine article.

In addition to his two top honors, Sorensen won a Third Place award from M-DOWA in the Outdoor Blog Category for "Minnesota Surf and Turf – Louisiana Style," which appeared at Deer & Deer Hunting online.

"The National Shooting Sports Foundation sponsors the POWA Youth Hunting/Shooting Award, and I want to thank that great organization for promoting hunting and shooting, especially its efforts to get young people involved. I also appreciate the newspapers and magazines that publish my work, and their readers," Sorensen said. "It's truly humbling to know that hunters and non-hunters alike read my work. Many of them follow me on social media and attend events where I'm invited to speak. If they weren't interested in what I have to say, the magazines and newspapers wouldn't be publishing it. I also want to thank the staff at Deer & Deer Hunting for making my articles look great in print."

Sorensen writes regularly for several outdoor magazines, as well as his own blog "Mission: Hunter." Besides being a Field Contributor to Deer & Deer Hunting magazine, he writes a newspaper column, The Everyday Hunter®, which appears bi-weekly in the Jamestown Gazette (NY) and the Forest Press (PA).

Sorensen lives in Russell, PA with his wife Barbara, and miniature groundhog dog Remy. For more information about Steve, his writing and his speaking, go to www.EverydayHunter.com.

Also honored was Ohio's **SERENA JUCHNOWSKI**, who received three awards for hunting content in the 2021 Association of Great Lakes Outdoor Writers (AGLOW) Awards in Craft (AIC) contest. This competition attracts entries from the best outdoor communicators across the country and spans categories from photography to broadcast and magazines.

Juchnowski's D&DH article, "It's Different for Girls" claimed first place in the Magazine/Hunting Category. This story, published in the February 2021 issue of D&DH, combines stories and statistics in exploring why women hunt, what it means to them and how many female hunters there are today. She also claimed first and second place honors in the online/hunting category for stories published on NRAWomen.com ("8 Things I Learned On My First Treestand Hunt" and "Choosing the Best Treestand and Harness for You").

"I shall forever treasure these awards because of what they represent: that people have read, learned from, and enjoyed my writing," she said. "This is the greatest compliment a writer can have, especially at the beginning of my career. I'd have to verify, but at 22 years old, veteran AGLOW members estimated I am the youngest to ever receive an AIC award, definitely the youngest to earn three awards. That is quite an honor!"

"We would like to extend our congratulations to both writers, and we look forward to publishing more of their work in future issues of the magazine," said D&DH Editor Daniel Schmidt.

metaphorical parallels to Jewish life in the first half of the twentieth century. To this day, the Bambi syndrome infects the worldview of many people. And no wonder. The novel has been published in more than 30 languages and more than 100 editions.

THE BAMBI SYNDROME

Thanks to Bambi, much of the non-hunting public sees the natural world as a blissful setting where Jupiter aligns with Mars, peace guides the planets and love steers the stars. They believe man is an intruder, he always spoil nature, and the natural world will take care of itself if only man leaves it alone.

They ignore the fact that man is an organic part in this system. They forget that as the world's most consequential species man and his interests must be considered. A segment of the public even opposes scientific management of wildlife and habitat by game agencies, favoring cartoonish depictions of nature in order to sway more people to their sentimental view that animals will be better off if man has a hands-off attitude. All of this is ironic considering the "Bambi Syndrome" is a caricature which imposes human emotions and intellect on animals and even on the forces of nature. Never mind the incongruity. Just get the message — hunters are incurably bad.

Bambi is an excellent work — that's undisputed — but much of its praise is misplaced. Deer hunters who read Bambi will be better informed about where a large part of the anti-hunting movement gets its steam, and will be better equipped to speak to those who have been buffaloes into thinking hunters are the bad guys.

— Steve Sorensen is an award-winning journalist and longtime D&DH contributor from Pennsylvania.





SCORING IN THE SECOND RUT

STEVE BARTYLLA

THE SECOND RUT IS REAL BUT OFTEN MISUNDERSTOOD. CUT THROUGH THE CONFUSION TO TAKE FULL ADVANTAGE OF LATE RUT OPPORTUNITIES.

almost hate to share this story, as it's a painful reminder of the sits I wasted and how hearing people say something doesn't make it true.

CHARLES J. ALSHEIMER



Unlike I was told years ago, mature bucks don't do all the breeding during the rut.

Many years ago, I was almost desperate to suck every drop of excitement from hunting. Though that desperation has waned somewhat, I still chase thrilling experiences. But along the way, I learned that some of my methods were working against that goal.

For example, I wasted time trying to find the adult does that purportedly comprised the proverbial second rut. I'd swallowed the then-popular belief that there were too many does to be bred during the main rut, and the glut of leftover adult does that were missed during their first estrus cycle became more desperate to breed, offering a tremendous yet poorly kept secret window to tag a rutting buck well past the main breeding season.

I've always promised to share the good, bad and plain ugly experiences readers have empowered me to live. Let's discuss how I messed up hunting the second rut for years and how I later made it a productive endeavor. Learn from my mistakes so you don't make them. In this

case, it might turn otherwise unproductive sits into thrills.

THE MYTH

Besides not being accurate, the long-held second-rut myth has another problem: It sounds logical. In natural populations, there are more does than bucks. A buck's life isn't as valued by Mother Nature as that of the birth-givers. A buck's life is considerably harder, as evidenced by mature bucks losing 25 to 30 percent of their body weight, on average, during the rut. Think about that. How hard does a deer have to push to lose 25 to 30 percent of its body weight in little more than a month? And watch a real buck fight sometime. You'll learn that even the winner is often an ultimate loser, as the cost of winning is extremely high. Then, add in all us yahoos running around with sharp sticks and chunks of lead, disproportionately targeting bucks. It's easy to see why there are fewer bucks than does in the wild.

Let's add another myth — that

mature bucks doing most of the breeding. That's a huge challenge, as many areas are lucky to have a 3.5-year-old buck that passes through now and then. I don't believe a buck is truly mature from a biological standpoint until it reaches 5.5 years old. How many 3.5-plus-year-old deer, let alone 5.5-plus-year-old bucks, are out there to breed? Obviously, with so many adult does and so few mature bucks, not nearly enough.

The myth concludes by saying many adult does are missed during their first estrus (heat) cycle, but those missed does cycle back into estrus 28 days later. Almost any deer farmer will tell you this is true. So, all you have to do is add 28 days to the peak of the first rut to determine when the second rut occurs, comprised of the glut of adult does Mr. Big missed the first time.

Because of that, from Dec. 1 through about Dec. 11, I used to hunt funnels separating doe bedding areas. Obviously, Mr. Big would be running around trying to score all those missed adult



Targeting food for afternoon sits in December makes sense because doe fawns will be there, and Mr. Big needs to eat to slow his weight loss and survive winter.

does. It happened a few times, but those were rare occurrences. Instead of thrilling sits, I had the strong tendency to burn tree time watching squirrels and birds. In fact, the deer woods were consistently, almost amazingly, dead of the rutting buck activities I'd been promised.

REFINING THE APPROACH

Looking back, my results actually make sense, mainly because the approach was built on a flawed foundation. Yes, does that weren't bred during their first estrus come back into heat 28 days later. Yes, mature bucks breed does. Where it falls apart is that immature bucks also breed does, as an estrus doe will stand for almost any buck. Minimizing inbreeding is why a birthing doe kicks her fawns out each breeding season. It's nature's way of minimizing incest. That also indicates is those buck fawns might be capable of breeding. In fact, DDH's John J. Ozoga has written about healthy, well-birth-timed nubbin bucks being able

to breed during their first year. I'm not pretending that buck fawns do most of the breeding, but they fill in some gaps in many settings. Toss in the 1.5-year-olds, which do a bunch of breeding in most settings, and it becomes far from one or two bucks breeding hundreds of does.

The reality is that it's messy. Many bucks are breeding as many does as they can, with most does actually being bred by more than one buck. That's clearly evidenced by the high percentage of does giving birth to twins with different fathers. If half or more of fawns are sired by different bucks, you can see that not many does are missed. Add in that some nubbin bucks can breed, which isn't unhealthy, and you start to see why those sits were mostly wasted.

The second rut is real. It's just built on doe fawns entering estrus instead of missed adult does. Ozoga wrote that healthy doe fawns can breed when 6 to 7 months old, but that range and weather quality play a role. The fawns must reach physical

and physiological thresholds to achieve estrus that first year. Because of the comparatively mild winters and a surplus of year-round foods, more than 70 percent of the fawns at good areas in states such as Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Iowa are bred each fall. Shift to Upper Peninsula Michigan, where a much smaller percentage of doe fawns typically enter estrus that first year. It typically requires a late or mild winter, but it happens — even in the U.P.

Here's the rub, though. Because of varying birth dates, we can't nail when those fawns will come into estrus. It will typically be later than adult does, but you can't just add a number to when they entered estrus and nail it. In my experience, the second rut is more like a trickle rut, with brief, isolated frenzies.

As a side note, for as much as we've heard about bucks running to points unknown during the rut, I don't see that much in my management duties, but I see it in December. I believe most



← The youngsters might hang it up by the end of November, but Mr. Big knows there will still be fawns to breed.

→ For late-season morning hunts, targeting scrapes around the area's most dominant doe group is a solid tactic.



bucks have more than enough adult does to keep them busy at home during the rut, but they eventually run out. Mr. Big realizes fawns will still be coming into estrus, but he doesn't find one in his home range. So he breaks off for parts unknown.

Because I've never learned to speak directly to deer, I can't swear my conclusion is true, but I know I have a lot more mature bucks show up or disappear in December than I do in November.

From a hunting standpoint, I alter my second-rut approach from the first rut. Instead of sitting at funnels and random doe bedding areas, I exclusively target the bedding areas of the most dominant doe groups for morning sits. The most dominant doe groups tend to have the healthiest fawns, which have the highest odds of entering estrus

their first year. That's what I want to target.

I don't see the all-day, bucks-running-ragged effect I see during the first rut. Instead, it comes in spurts and flurries, as bucks aren't pushing as hard as during the first rut. In fact, younger bucks don't do much more than nose a few nearby does, and Mr. Big has already been through nine layers of hell to get that far. He doesn't have it in him to run all day.

For afternoon sits, I target food sources the most dominant doe groups hit. That way, bucks are attracted by food and potential breeding opportunities.

CONCLUSION

The second rut isn't comprised of the glut of adult does missed the first time. Does that happen? I might have seen it once, but I've seen a glut of doe fawns enter

estrus their first year. Doe fawns drive the second rut, not adults.

With the healthiest, most dominant doe groups generally having the healthiest fawns, targeting them makes sense. The action isn't nearly as consistently intense or on a rigid time schedule, but it's concentrated on those doe fawns and is just enough to make for some productive sits, assuming you tweak your tactics accordingly.

— For more of Steve Bartylla's hunting tactics, check out our new TV show "DeerTopia" on Pursuit Channel.



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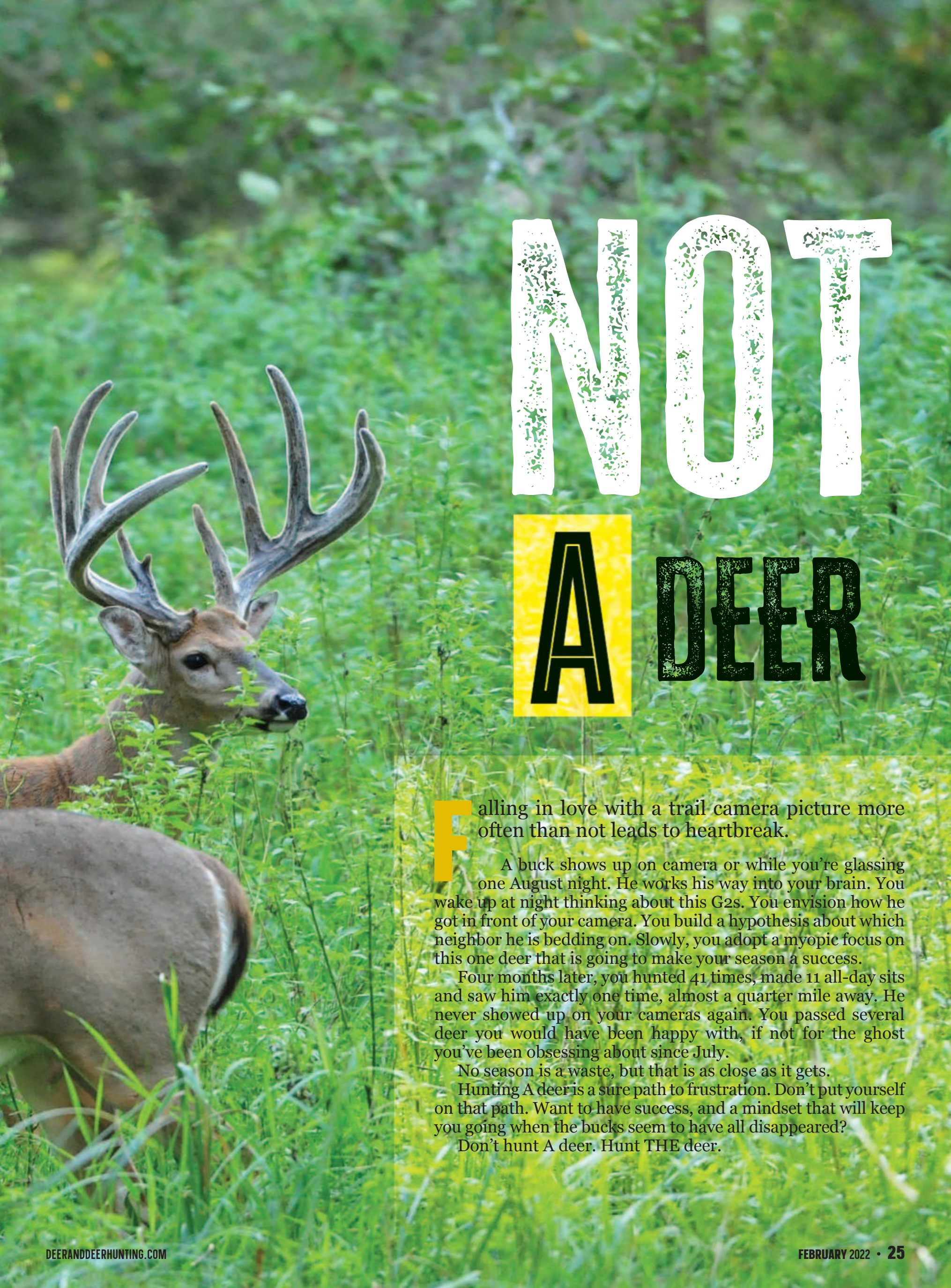
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HUNT

THE

DEER

A photograph of a buck with large, multi-tined antlers standing in a field of tall green grass and weeds. The buck is facing right, and its head and antlers are the primary focus on the left side of the image.

NOT

A DEER

Falling in love with a trail camera picture more often than not leads to heartbreak.

A buck shows up on camera or while you're glassing one August night. He works his way into your brain. You wake up at night thinking about this G2s. You envision how he got in front of your camera. You build a hypothesis about which neighbor he is bedding on. Slowly, you adopt a myopic focus on this one deer that is going to make your season a success.

Four months later, you hunted 41 times, made 11 all-day sits and saw him exactly one time, almost a quarter mile away. He never showed up on your cameras again. You passed several deer you would have been happy with, if not for the ghost you've been obsessing about since July.

No season is a waste, but that is as close as it gets.

Hunting A deer is a sure path to frustration. Don't put yourself on that path. Want to have success, and a mindset that will keep you going when the bucks seem to have all disappeared?

Don't hunt A deer. Hunt THE deer.



THINGS CHANGE

The studies are out there showing how a deer moves through the course of the year. The first thing we should all come to grips with when looking at these studies, is how few of us hunt the entirety of a buck's range.

The variables introduced by multiple properties, property owners, and hunters are too numerous to count. The simple truth is, we can't control everything in that deer's life.

Best case scenario, you watch this deer on cameras all summer and you have a good idea of where he is living. Worst case, you have one random photo that is keeping you awake at night. Either way, the conditions that brought him to you in mid to



STOMACH - GIRLS - STOMACH

The vast majority of us have a deer season that roughly covers October and goes into January. During that time a buck is either preparing for, recovering from, or in the throws of the rut. Not just the

buck you're targeting. All the bucks.

Even bucks bigger than the focus of your obsession.

During hunting season, bucks are essentially teenage boys. They care about their next meal and their next date.

In October, they know what is coming. The bachelor groups have broken up, alliances of the summer months are dead and it's every buck for himself. His focus is singular. Get himself in the best shape possible to defend his position with the does against other suitors.

He is focused on reliable food sources near his preferred cover, expending as little energy as possible and get himself up to his fighting weight.

During October, all the bucks are focused on food. Don't lose sight of this because of a photo you got months ago or a happenstance sighting in a spot you wouldn't expect. Early in the hunting season your best bet to see that deer and others, is to hunt the food.

As October makes way for November, the focus changes. As the peak breeding window approaches,

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bucks turn their attention to the does. Not just your target buck. All the bucks.

Hunt the doe bedding areas hard. Keep the wind in your favor. Focus on not busting deer on the way to or from your stand. Start on the edges and slowly work your way deeper and closer to the core areas.

The buck you've been targeting is looking for does. So are bucks even bigger than him that you didn't know was out there.

If by December you still haven't connected, abandon the does and find the best food source you can. The bucks, all of them that survived, have lost a lot of weight and expended a lot of energy. They need to replenish it.

Go back to that October mindset of hunting reliable or available food sources. His focus is once again his stomach, and yours should be too.

REALITY

The forecast for the 2020 firearms opener was odd. A light but steady southeast wind is not the kind of weather you expect in mid-November, even if the temperature was cool.

For months we had watched a true giant on one of our properties. We had nicknamed him Common

because of the matching common bases on his G3s. With his frame and mass, grossing 200" isn't out of the realm of possibility.

The massive 12-point buck was a regular visitor to the roughly 200-acre property, and with firearms opening up, more hunters in the field than any other day of the year, we really expected someone to see him and hopefully get a shot.

But then there was that darn southeast wind...

It's never a wind you plan for here, so the stand locations that made sitting that property feasible were limited. I hunt with another guy and his boys. All things considered, he and his son hunted the property Common was on.

Sure, I wanted a crack at that deer, but he and I both knew, we can't get so focused hunting A deer that we forget to hunt THE deer.

That southeast wind did open up another stand on another property. It sits just northwest of a core bedding area used regularly by three different doe family groups. The property is a core area for does, but we get very few buck photos until well into the season. I had seen a nice mid-130s buck two weeks earlier that I hoped I would see.

I felt pretty good about the prospect of a buck cruising that woodlot, scent checking the bedding area for a receptive doe.

It's what a buck, any buck, SHOULD be doing.

I didn't even have to wait for sunrise to see if my gambit would pay off.

Twenty minutes after shooting light, I heard a deer walking behind me. As I turned to see what it was, I stopped short and froze as I saw him raise his head to look at me.

I was peaking at him out the corner of my eye. I could tell it was buck, a good buck, but only that. He stared a hole in me for what felt like 10 minutes but couldn't have been more than 30 seconds. He glanced in the direction of the bedding area I was sitting on and started picking his way that direction.

I still didn't dare move as he had already seen me once. The sun wasn't up yet, I was in shadows, and I had good cover behind me, but he was on my most exposed side as he came alongside the tree. He stopped again at 11 yards, but still somewhat behind me so that I couldn't get a good look at exactly what he was.

All I could see was a lot of antler.





As soon as I could get a shot, I would take it.

As he stood at 11 yards, looking into the thicket, he turned his head one more time and looked right at me. I was certain with his new angle on me he would bust out of there. I was doing the math in my head.

"If he spins to go back the way he came I might have a chance before he busts out of here to get a shot," I told myself, only half believing it.

After a few seconds, he put his nose down and once again headed for the thicket. He had to clear a couple small trees, and at 24 yards, I had a quartering away shot.

He didn't take another step.

At this point, I didn't even know exactly what I had shot. I raised my binos to look at him, and all I could see was a kicker coming off his right beam, and a massive frame, half obscured by the scrub I'd had to wait for him to clear.

"What did I just shoot?"

I texted my buddy to let him know I had a good deer on the ground and kept looking through my binos, trying to get a handle on the quality of buck laying on the ground. I wanted to get down, but I was shaking so bad I was worried I would fall trying to get to him.

Eventually I made it out of the tree, and when my friend arrived to help me get him out, we realized we'd had a picture of this deer four days ago. We both saw that picture, and thought he was a good buck, but nothing like the quality of animal laying in front of us.

We never knew that deer was there. We weren't expecting him. We weren't hunting him. We ran four cameras on that property for eight months and only had that one photo, four days prior.

I wasn't hunting A deer. I was hunting THE deer.

That morning, he was doing

exactly what a buck should be doing in mid-November.

I didn't force the issue on Common, a potential 200" deer, and still came away with a buck for the wall that would make 180" if he hadn't broken off the matching triple brow tines on his left side.

I wasn't chasing trail cam pictures or summer scouting ghosts. I focused on where we were in the season and what those bucks should be doing, not hanging onto what I saw a deer do a month ago.

Stomach, girls, stomach.

Figure out what all the deer are focused on, and put yourself in a position to capitalize. It sounds simple, but all too often we forget, or get distracted by one-off encounters that convince us to make bad decisions, and cost us successful season.





Swamps and marshes are very difficult to figure out and hunt, but not impossible. REALTREE MEDIA PHOTO



THE **5** HARDEST (BUT BEST) PUBLIC-LAND DEER HUNTS

**SOME PLACES ARE CAKE TO HUNT. OTHERS
TAKE BRAWNS, BRAINS, AND LOTS OF GRIT.**

Public-land deer hunting is vogue now. That wasn't always the case, mind you. It was oftentimes regarded as a second-rate option for hunters who couldn't afford to own or lease land. Everyone wanted to hunt posh pieces of private, and if you didn't, some hunters looked down on you.

Today, the script is flipped, and public land is finally having its day. Hunters across the nation are excited about hunting ground that's open to all, and they aren't afraid to tell everyone. Many of these hunters will say those who hunt private land have it easier.

For starters, regardless of whether you're a private or public land hunter (or both), don't bash the other side. Neither public nor private land hunting is easy. And most importantly, we're all in this together. Hunting isn't a competition.

ESSENTIAL PUBLIC LAND GEAR

Certain gear items make public-land deer hunting easier, or safer. In addition to general gear, consider using these things:

- 📍 Lightweight weapon
- 📍 Lightweight treestand or saddle
- 📍 Quality hunting pack
- 📍 Compass
- 📍 Physical map
- 📍 HuntStand app
- 📍 Phone power banks
- 📍 Food
- 📍 Water
- 📍 First aid kit
- 📍 Good knives
- 📍 Game cart (or sled for marshy, swampy areas)

That said, for those who want a challenge, here are some of the hardest public-land deer hunts to consider. Deer call these places home for a reason: it's hard for hunters to access these. But if you have it in you, give it a try. You just might tag a stud.

1. BIG ISLAND SANCTUARIES

Whitetails have been inhabiting islands since the beginning. While it takes significant effort to get to these places, deer can easily get away from hunters and other predators. Water serves as a major deterrence to hunters, coyotes, wolves, and other toothy critters. Deer know this, and they take advantage of it for survival.

In some places, islands are well away from shorelines. In some cases, they're even out of site, and deer must swim great distances to reach these. Interestingly, deer do so anyway. That's the drawing power these places have on deer, especially mature ones. Some of it is passed down behaviorally from does to their fawns. That isn't always the case, though. Deer just like to live on islands.

Most hunters don't like to hunt these, though. And that's why they avoid them. Islands are hard to reach, and virtually impossible to access without a boat. Few hunters have one, and those who do oftentimes fail to approach tactfully. If deer see, hear, or smell you coming, it's over before it starts.

Tips to Achieve Success: Despite the significant challenges, hunters can do things to stack the odds in their favor. Large islands are almost always several miles from shore, making it necessary to use a safe, reliable boat with a good motor. You need to beach it (or anchor down) away from where you plan to hunt, and so it's important to bring a canoe or kayak along to make it the last short distance to shore.

Given the nature of smaller islands, it's hard to use a large motor due to its loud sound. Deer can hear you approaching from anywhere, regardless of the side you land on. This usually makes it necessary to use a trolling motor, canoe, or kayak, to reach smaller islands.

Place to Focus On: Islands can be found along most medium- to large-sized lakes and rivers. Where regulations allow, some of the islands along the great lakes offer incredible hunting opportunities.

Some of the best island hunting is located up and down the Mississippi River, especially from the Illinois side. Hunters looking to target really large public areas with the potential to get well away from other hunters might consider the Mississippi River Pool areas. Oftentimes, these areas are technically islands, and hard to access. This makes them prime for those who are willing to work to get there.

In Wisconsin, the Pine Island Wildlife Area has several tracts that are surrounded by water. These areas are very difficult to access, and deer know it.

Aside from the Lower and Upper Midwest, don't sleep on the East Coast, either. There are many islands off the coast of Maine. Not all of them are public land, but those that are hold some good deer hunting.

2. HUGE MARSH AND SWAMP GROUND

Sticking with the water theme, marshes and swamps offer security to deer, too. Deer find pockets of dry ground within these areas. Like river, lake and ocean islands, dry ground within marshes and swamps offer sanctuary. As deer get older, they realize these places protect them from hunters.

Generally, deer (and hunters) must wade through water to get to such places. Sometimes it's shallow. Other times it's deep. Regardless, most of the time, there aren't land bridges to these hidey holes. When there are, these become peninsulas rather than islands, which deer still use, but not as much.

These areas are difficult to hunt for several reasons. The most obvious is water. Sometimes it's shallow enough to wade, other times it isn't. But you don't know until you try, and it can be dangerous to wade through the sticky, muck marsh.

It's also very difficult to navigate, especially if you aren't familiar with the property or aren't good with maps and compasses. Visibility is poor in head-high cattails and swampy areas that perpetually look

Even in areas that are hard to hunt, hunting basics remain the same. Find the sign, find the deer. HONEYCUTT CREATIVE PHOTO

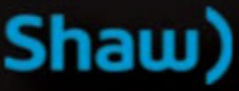
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the same. Fortunately, apps such as HuntStand, make it simpler to get back to the truck after the hunt.

These areas are also difficult to hunt because getting into position without spooking deer is extremely difficult. Getting the wind right is crucial, and hard when you have limited access. Plus, these animals see and hear well. So, if cattails start shaking and water sludging, they'll know something is amiss.

Tips to Achieve Success: Fortunately, if hunters take the time to scout in advance, it's possible to learn water depths in a safe manner. Scouting in pairs, hunters can determine where buck beds are located, what winds deer are likely bedding there on, and how to get into position to hunt them.

Of course, choosing the right entry and exit routes is important. If you can't access on food with rubber boots or waders, it's time to deploy a canoe or kayak. Learning how to load these with gear, and safely, quietly paddling into position, are important things to do long before the hunt.

Places to Focus On: In the Midwest, some of the best marsh ground can be found in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Other states in the region offer it, but on a lesser scale. In the Southeast, Louisiana, Mississippi, and parts of Alabama, Georgia, and Florida, have pretty swampy public, too. As for specifics, check out Florida's Apalachicola WMA, Louisiana's Maurepas Swamp (<https://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/page/maurepas-swamp>), and more.

3. BIG-TIMBER HIDEOUTS

Water isn't the only hinderance to hunters. Massive tracts of big timber make hunting more daunting, too. Hunters look at all the available cover and quickly become overwhelmed. It's hard to whittle down where and where not to focus on.

Even when you choose the right locations, that doesn't make them easy to hunt. It can take a mile or more to get to these areas, and to get away from hunting pressure. Being willing to put in that kind of effort isn't on the table for many hunters. It's too hard for them. Most hunters aren't willing to walk. Research

shows most hunters stay within a half mile of an access road. Among those, a large percentage stay within about 1/4 mile, or about 500 yards.

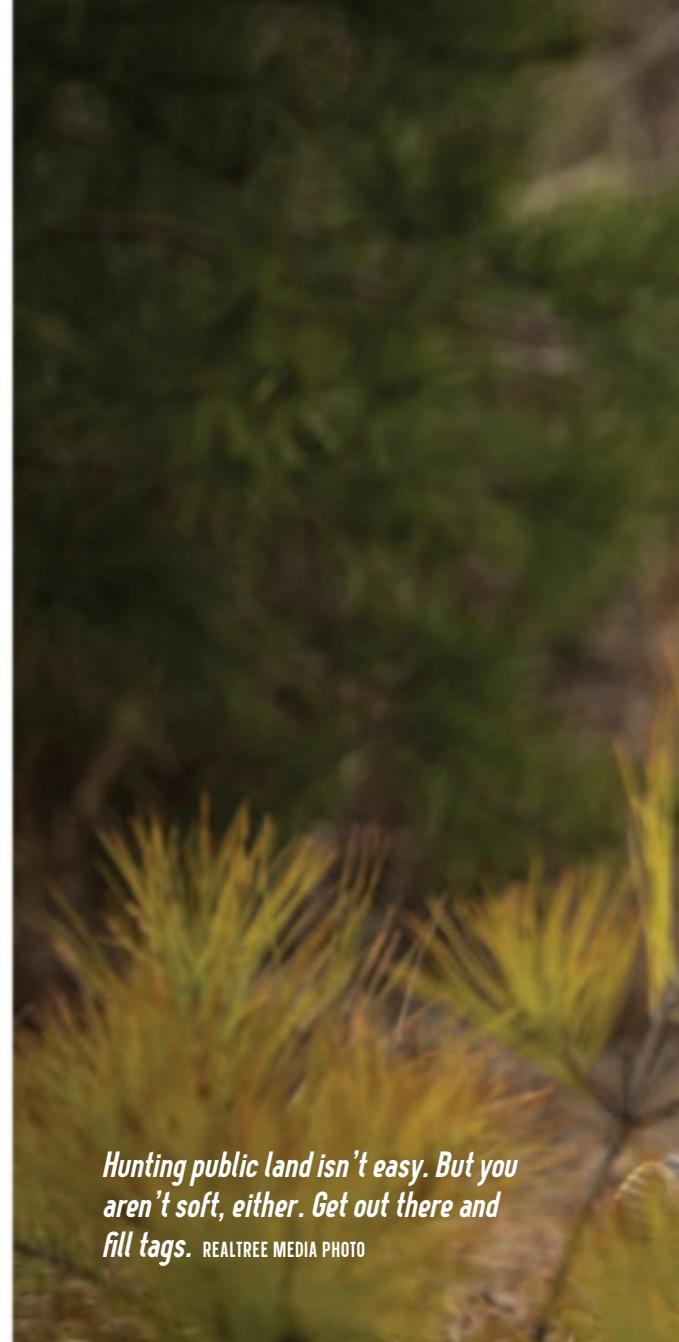
That might get the job done on young bucks and does. But unless it's an overlooked area hunters aren't touching, or unless it offers a buck premium bedding where it can see, smell, and hear danger coming, most mature deer are further from roads, and will be found 3/4 mile, to a mile, or even further, from the closest vehicle access. Generally, on smaller pieces of public, this means bigger deer are hugging close to private-public property lines.

If deer can't get that far away from access roads, they'll likely vacate onto neighboring private lands (if less pressured), find the thickest cover around, or get especially crafty in their bedding area selections. Regardless, these deer become very difficult to pursue.

Tips to Achieve Success: One of the best ways to break down a large hunting property is to use apps or maps. Aerial, topo, and hybrid maps are your best bets. These are very useful for finding bedding areas, food sources, water sources, travel routes, pinch points, etc.

Locating specific terrain features is especially important. In flatter terrain, pinpoint edge habitat, such as where hardwoods meet conifers (cedars, pines, and spruce), creek crossings, and other areas that deer tend to use. In hillier terrain, find benches, clear cuts, hubs, leeward (downwind side) ridges, ridge endings, saddles, and water seeps. Both solar (southeastern facing slopes) and thermal (conifers) bedding cover are identifiable via apps and maps, too.

Places to Focus On: While big timber can be found throughout most of the country, the Northeast is king. Give Connecticut's Mansfield Hollow Lake, Maryland's Dan's Mountain WMA Rhode Island's George Washington Management Area, and others a try. Don't sleep on the Midwest either. Indiana's Clark State Forest is 24,000 acres and Ohio's Shawnee State Forest is 60,000 acres. The Southeast is full of it, too. Arkansas' Muddy Creek is 150,000 acres and Louisiana's Maurepas Swamp is 61,000 acres.



Hunting public land isn't easy. But you aren't soft, either. Get out there and fill tags. REALTREE MEDIA PHOTO

4. HIGH-ELEVATION HAUNTS

Higher elevations often present multiple challenges. These are mountainous or hilly lands, and much of their makeup is challenging, and even unforgiving. Dangerous overhangs, outcroppings, and sheer bluffs pose problems and risks.

Higher elevation takes significant energy, too. Climbing several hundred or thousand feet isn't for those who are weak or out of shape. Exercise aplenty before embarking on these hunts.

Exercise aside, higher elevations can be difficult even for fit hunters. Higher elevation means less oxygen. The only way to overcome this challenge is to acclimate to it. That takes time, not just exercise.

Finally, finding deer isn't easy, either. Determining what elevation deer are spending the most time at begins with an educated guess, but it takes effort to confirm what you believe. And if you're wrong, it takes even more time.

Tips to Achieve Success: Spend several months getting in shape prior to the hunt. Then, arrive well before your hunt starts



to get acclimated to local oxygen levels. This also provides extra time to scout, which is necessary when determining what elevations deer are spending time at. These areas are vast, and large swaths of land see minimal action. Deer tend to congregate.

Places to Focus On: When most think of higher elevations, the West immediately comes to mind. Places like Colorado, Idaho, and Montana reign supreme. Public lands are literally everywhere.

Consider the Southwest for Coues deer hunts. Arizona's Units 36A, 36B and 36C are great. The Buenos Aires NWR is too. So is New Mexico's Lincoln National Forest.

And don't sleep on the East. There are some great places to hunt up and down the Appalachians.

5. STANDING CORN COUNTRY

People say ag country is easy to hunt, but vast acreages of standing crops is anything but that. I'll take a big timber hunt over massive lands full of standing corn any day of the season. Deer literally disappear in these large

standing corn fields and killing them becomes extremely difficult.

This is true for several reasons. Deer oftentimes bed and feed in these areas, never really needing to come out, especially if water borders or cuts through fields. Sure, deer do come out of the standing corn, but they don't have to, and if pressured, they won't.

Fortunately, rarely does standing corn last more than a month or so into the season. It's usually limited to the early season and pre-rut. Nonetheless, it's challenging for those who find themselves in such a situation.

Tips to Achieve Success: Hunting along edges where corn fields meet high-traffic areas is the ticket. Inside field corners, ditch crossings, thick staging areas, water sources, and other travel routes are great spots to try.

Places to Focus On: The Midwest is corn country. Virtually all states have corn fields, even on public lands. Iowa, Kansas, Illinois, Missouri, Indiana, Ohio, and others are popular ag states. Drilling

down, give Ohio's Dillon Wildlife Area a try.

UNIVERSAL TRUTHS

All things considered, several things can make public lands more difficult to hunt. Obviously, hunting pressure is factor No. 1. The more there is, the harder the hunting, especially if you can't find overlooked pockets of ground.

Subpar access makes properties harder to hunt, too. As does dangerous terrain, difficult topography, and long hikes in. All of these and more pose challenges, which deter most hunters. But not you. You won't back down. You'll prepare, charge ahead, tackle the elements, and just might fill a tag. But you'll have fun regardless. I know I will.

— For more information on public-land hunting, visit www.YouTube.com/DDHOnline.





IN THE BLO



DOES DEER HUNTING COURSE
THROUGH OUR VEINS FROM
THE START? OR IS THE
PASSION PLANTED THERE
AND NURTURED ALONG?

How did you become
a deer hunter?

Raising or creating a deer hunter has never been harder. Or easier.

On the one hand, life has gotten crazier and busier for every one of every age. Funny how technology has given us less free time and made it harder to truly get away for some of the most important matters in life, like deer hunting. We work harder and longer than ever. We slow down less, and we play shorter when we do.

It's hard to find the time to hunt for ourselves sometimes, let alone take a new hunter out to the field and introduce them to the joys of deer hunting ... and create a future license buyer and wildlife conservationist in the process. And we all know how important those goals are, period.

On the other hand, factors such as youth deer seasons, special hunts, learn-to-hunt programs, and modern gear and technology that make hunting more fun and provide more chance for success, break down many of the aforementioned barriers.

OOD

My father made me a deer hunter.

By that, I mean, he took me out, taught me what he knew, gave me the opportunity. He loved hunting deer, but was primarily a squirrel, rabbit and pheasant hunter. Deer hunting was just what you did in mid-November in Wisconsin, when the woods and fields were full of orange – or, more aptly in those days, red.

So I learned a lot on my own. By doing. By trying. By trial and error.

Sure there were books to help (old Outdoor Life Book Club, bless you) and magazines (though the fine publication you are reading was not even yet going yet, and how I would have loved and learned from it so). It was probably a good thing there were no TV hunters to skew one's expectations, though occasionally you might have seen a pleasantly G-rated deer hunt on The American Sportsman. (Look that one up if you don't know what it was.)

But in all of that there is one word, one theme, that made me a deer hunter: Opportunity. I frequently contemplate -- because there is plenty of time to contemplate while on a deer stand or on the road there – this:

Is deer hunting in our blood? Or is it getting the opportunity to go that puts deer hunting there?

I don't think I slept for three nights before my very first deer hunt at 12 years of age.

Other than the excitement that must have been in my blood, I think an equal part of the angst was that the jury of one (my father, a rightfully safety-conscious man) was still out on whether I really was going to go.

You see, the old Winchester single-shot 12-gauge shotgun I had been bequeathed had a hammer, and I had to be able to cock that gun and let the hammer down soft so that if no shot was taken, the gun wouldn't fire on the letdown.

How many times I cocked and uncocked that thing I will never know. But on our evening tests (one chance a night on the 5 days leading up to opening day), I passed each time.

It rained. I got wet. It was cold. It could have all been on the verge of misery. I missed a nice doe at maybe 20 yards: shot her right in the ear, poor thing. That gun shot about two feet high and to the left. Frustration.

And I was hooked. It had to have been in my blood. But I got the opportunity to do it.

As my father shared the wonders of hunting whitetails with me, so I did my best to share that passion with my three sons. I've tried to do a good job. No one is perfect, and few plans work to perfection. But sometimes they work well enough.

I planned their first few years of hunts around youth seasons and antlerless deer, in places where hunting pressure was low and deer populations strong so that there was a good chance for success. We found it, and somehow I hooked them all.

Could they have plowed through one, two, three hunting seasons before finally shooting their first deer in the fourth year, like I did? I don't know. But as a father in a different age and time, I knew the equation had to be different than the one from my own boyhood.

Deer hunting was in their blood. But in each, that blood runs different.

They all like to shoot deer.

But one focuses on the camaraderie of the hunt – just being there with me and his brothers. Social time, watching a deer camp football game in the evening, a shared stand, boisterous meals and euchre games ... these are the rewards of his hunt. So wonderful to see.

One centers his time on wildlife -- what songbirds he sees, waterfowl flying overhead, the turkeys yelping over in the next hollow. What joy that is to witness.

One just wants to shoot a deer and he will sit on stand all day do it. He is there to do a job. He does not gauge the hunt's success on meat on the pole, but he enjoys doing the work and displaying the fortitude it takes to shoot a whitetail. I admire that.

Each found what was in their blood. I gave them the opportunity. That feels good.

Now, these boys – well, young men -- of mine are in a dangerous time of life for keeping or losing hunters: their 20s. This is the time we can lose hunters as their jobs get bigger and their responsibilities grow and life takes them down new paths.

I think we are still doing a good job. I manage to get us all together for at least one hunt a year. Last season it was Nebraska for a winter antlerless hunt.

We stayed in a wonderful old farmhouse in the middle of nowhere, ringing in the New Year while sleeping deep under comforters against the chill outside, resting up for an early morning rise.

It was my best New Year's ever.

By lunchtime we had a couple whitetails twirling on the meatpole, and it felt good just to take a break and make lunch with the short-lived January sun streaming in the kitchen windows and us laughing and eating and re-living the morning's action.

Life had slowed down. The hunt still mattered. We had work to do on the deer that were down, and work to do bring a couple more in.

And we of shared blood were together.

By now you have figured out how I feel. For those of us who hunt, the hunt is already in our blood. But how is someone ever going to know if deer hunting is in their blood unless they get the opportunity to go?

Making a deer hunter isn't easy. I bet you have made a few yourself, or perhaps you will. It's important work, and it takes time and commitment, but the rewards – to them, and to you – are great indeed.

Whitetail hunting is in your blood. Help someone else find it in theirs.

— Tom Carpenter's first found deer hunting in his blood in Wisconsin's Lafayette County in November 1974.





USE THESE TESTED TIPS TO FIND BIG-BUCK
SUCCESS AT SMALL HUNTING TRACTS.
THE AUTHOR'S 2020 10-POINTER
PROVIDES A PERFECT EXAMPLE.

BACKYARD BUCKS

Many hunters don't have access to large tracts of private land. Leases can be too expensive for the average hunter, and the ability to gain landowner permission has declined sharply the past few decades.

BILL KINNEY/WINDIGO

“Being successful on small tracts, hidden woodlots and even backyards is more relevant now than ever, and it’s possible with the right plan and a few critical factors.”





Being successful on small tracts, hidden woodlots and even backyards is more relevant now than ever, and it's possible with the right plan and a few critical factors.

But does your small tract, with obvious limitations, have the ability to produce a quality whitetail? The answer might surprise you.

THE 6.5 PLAN

I bought my house in Spring 2019 with the goal of having some land and possibly a small place to hunt. I was hoping for about 10 acres of woods surrounded by fields and other ideal whitetail habitat. I signed papers on 6.5 acres, only 2 to 3 acres of which were potential whitetail cover, as the lot is surrounded by three other houses.

There were few trees on the property, but thick briars, autumn olive and a goldenrod field comprised most of the huntable area. Signs of old rubs and a few dried tracks indicated that deer at least passed through the backside of my property, and a raised hunting blind with an old, weed-choked food plot showed some potential. It was just 60 yards behind the pole barn and 100 yards from the back porch of my house, so I had work to do. The silver lining, however, were the surrounding ag fields and 40 acres of untouched whitetail bedding area directly behind my yard.

In 2019, I tilled two large portions of my backyard grass near my fence line in an attempt to expand the area deer would use and feel safe on at my property. I spent days spraying Roundup and tilling the yard plots and overgrown food plot by the blind until they were finally ready to plant. In both plots, I planted a mix of beans, winter peas, clover and oats sure to make any whitetail salivate. Soon, however, the record rains of 2019 wiped out my work.

After weeks of drying, crabgrass overtook the clover that survived in my backyard plot, and I decided to do a late-summer turnip plot by the elevated blind. It came in nicely as summer turned to fall, but with neighborhood noise increasing by

the day, the challenges of building a buck honey hole became soberingly real. As with most of my best spots on public land, I ran a trail camera at mock scrapes and checked them every three to five days.

To my surprise, five good bucks, including a 12-pointer, a couple of 8s, a 10 and a heavy half-horn older buck appeared during daylight. They visited at random times, usually in the morning, when the neighborhood was quiet, but that told me the potential was there. With two bucks already in the freezer elsewhere by mid November, I turned my attention to 2020.

The arrival of COVID and the spring quarantine of 2020 allowed me extra time to prep my backyard honey hole. From 2019, I had learned deer needed a reason — good food — to enter my property, but they needed excellent cover even more. For instant cover, I arranged a ring of Egyptian wheat around the raised blind plot to shield it from the houses, and then planted rows of Egyptian wheat in the backyard to segregate it and build a wall from my house. For improved long-term cover, I planted strategic pines and spruce at various places on the property, and also plowed a ring around a good bedding area just south of the plot, where I planted a tall, growing switchgrass screen.

I discovered my elevated blind, although looking nice, had fatal flaws. It was noisy, and too much light entered it. To solve that, I brushed in a ground blind in the secluded corner of my plot, mowed an easy path through the goldenrod directly to it, and made five mock scrapes within easy shooting distance of the blind. The plot began growing nicely, with the Egyptian wheat forming a nice barrier, and I patiently waited to see if any good bucks would show again in early November.

As October progressed, I started getting a few smaller and then medium-sized bucks hitting my scrapes. These were not what I wanted to shoot. After shooting a nice 9-pointer Oct. 15 and a giant 16-pointer in Ohio later that

month, I returned home to try for a big buck near home to fill my second Michigan tag.

At daylight Nov. 7, a heavy-antlered, thick-bodied 10-pointer with unmistakably tall brow tines wandered through the plot and hit my scrapes. He was a great buck and obviously felt comfortable in my backyard. And he was active during daylight. All the pieces were in place, and I decided that my father and I would hunt the plot every chance possible from Nov. 8 until the Nov. 15 gun opener.

Before church the next morning, I slipped out to the ground blind. I had a perfect approach. After all, it was just 100 yards behind my house. A half-hour before daylight, I eased out the side door of the garage and sneaked behind my barn to the path I mowed to take advantage of the screening. Then I waited.

At first light, I heard a noise behind me — crunching in the dry goldenrod and switchgrass just a few yards away. The unknown animal (I assumed it was a skunk or opossum) moved just 2 yards beside the blind making its way to the plot. It finally appeared, and I was shocked. Ten tall tines emerged ominously through the Egyptian wheat. Casual and relaxed, the buck stepped out just 5 yards in front of my blind and stood broadside. I watched as he nibbled on some oat shoots, his huge neck and body dwarfing his rack.

Clipping on my release, I realized it would be impossible to shoot him that close. Then, he turned his gaze into the blind, and we locked eyes. Seemingly unalerted, we stared at each other for several long, tense moments. Eventually, he saw something he didn't like, as he snorted and took several quick bounds into the plot, letting me draw as he stopped broadside at less than 20 yards. Looking back at the strange new object in the blind, he presented a perfect shot, and I made it, sending him bolting up a path toward my neighbor's sanctuary. The blood trail ended about 100 yards later with a piled-up bruiser backyard buck.

FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

That's the story of my 2020 backyard buck, but I want to spell out several factors I believe were critical. Anyone can replicate them to help make their small acreage a potentially big honey hole.

The big draw: There needs to be a large reason for deer — particularly a good buck — to come into your backyard or small tract. Is it the best food? The best cover and least pressure in the area? Both would be good, and you should set a goal to have the best whitetail habitat in the area. Remember, you're competing against the land and other hunters.

Research and acquire the best food — stuff deer will go out of their way to access, even if it means coming closer than they want to houses. Look at nearby fields and mast crops, and fill the void. Planting something different that deer like will increase your attraction power.

Incredible cover: If attraction is the No. 1 reason, cover must be No. 2. They must both be in place to get deer to use your small acreage during daylight. Increase the cover in your small tract so it feels bigger and safer to deer. My Egyptian wheat and tall switchgrass barriers helped accomplish that, along with the thick existing brush. Plant hedges, thickets and trees, and map out bedding areas for short- and long-term structure solutions. The 40 acres of prime bedding sanctuary behind my land was also critical, and if you're buying property, look for neighboring lands that fit that mold.

Shoot for does: I didn't think big bucks would necessarily bed in my backyard or routinely peer in my windows. My goal was to get the low-hanging fruit — local does — to frequent my plot. If I could do that, cruising bucks would also swing through at the right time of year. My setup revolved around that concept, and it's the easiest goal to attain in most areas. In doing so, however, realize it's easy to make an impact on small tracts, and your plan must be executed flawlessly so deer see your parcel as a sanctuary all year.

Perfect timing: In my setup, it was futile and unproductive to hunt my backyard until the right time. I had other spots with better immediate sign, so I hunted them. Meanwhile, I kept an eye on what was happening in my backyard by checking my trail camera. I knew it wasn't my No. 1 spot, but if intelligence indicated, it could become that in an instant.

With backyard plots and small hunting tracts you meticulously manage, it's about surgical precision and a strategic strike, not persistence in hunting. By treating yours similarly and hunting it strategically, you will have the best luck catching deer off guard in your backyard.

Perfect approach: The last piece of the puzzle was the entry and exit routes to the plot. Being incredibly stealthy was critical. With the paths mowed, approaching silently was easy, but planning visual barriers was also important so nothing could see me coming and going. Only hunting when the wind was perfect made for a bulletproof and ultra-low-impact hunting situation. That's what you need to plan for.

The morning I shot the big 10-pointer was a testament to that, as he was somewhere near or in my backyard when I slipped into the blind that morning. He didn't have a clue the owner of that comfortable backyard was waiting just 5 yards away.

CONCLUSION

Small backyard tracts can produce big hunting opportunities. It's not easy. It takes persistence, and you must make and stick to a good game plan. But it works, provided you work hard and use a smart approach.

— *Whether you're hunting small-private parcels or public land, check out our "Pressured Land Deer Hunter" video series at www.YouTube.com/DDHOnline.*



IF YOU CAN'T SEE THE CAR, YOU'VE GONE TOO FAR

The sun was high, and the sweat was starting to drip. It was nearing 9:30 and what little deer movement I had seen had stopped. Time to head back to camp and get something cold to drink. It was early October, hot as an early October day in Tennessee can be, and we were camped on a 21,000-acre wildlife management area (WMA).

Less than 200 yards into my slow drive down the rutted, dirt road, as I rounded a sharp curve, a better than average buck crossed the road in front of me and vanished into the thick, still green woodland. That was quite a while ago, and I began asking myself some questions.

RALPH HENSLEY/WINDIGO

1) WHY DID THE BUCKS CROSS THERE?

What was it about that particular spot that made him cross the road there? Some thinking and a little looking gave me the answer. By crossing in the curve, he was exposed for a limited amount of time. In addition, he crossed where the roadside cover was thick and it was flat -- no bank to jump. And of most importance, he crossed from, and to, a long, sloping point, leading to a thick bottom.

2) HOW DID HE GET TO THAT ROADSIDE POINT?

Did he come by helicopter? Of course not. He came as any deer or human would; he walked there from somewhere else. Therefore, at some point, he was exposed to an arrow from a well-placed tree stand. My job was to find the right place.

3) WHY DID HE CROSS AT ALMOST 10:00 IN THE MORNING WHEN IT WAS HOT?

That took some thinking. I came up with two possible reasons, maybe three. First, he had probably held tight in thick cover, waiting, watching and listening for the hunters to leave the woods. Second, maybe he was just changing cover for a better afternoon, hiding place. And third, maybe he just wanted to. Maybe he was going to feed for a while before going back into hiding. Maybe he was going to water. Finally, I concluded, it did not make any difference *why* he crossed, only *that* he crossed.

I killed that buck the next morning at 8:40. He dropped less than 60-yards from where I had seen him cross.

Headlights dot and crisscross in the pre-dawn. Truck doors slam. Tree stands rattle and clank. Hunters whisper and stomp sticks as they head into deer woods. In an effort to get away from the competition, they walk as far from the road as they can get. Many, maybe most, walk past better deer than they will see.

As hunters scramble to get deep into the woods, they leave a safety zone, unbothered by hunters, within sight of the road and maybe even within sight of their truck. *A disclaimer. This may not be true of all public land.* As a result, the deer, quickly adapt, wait until it all settles down, then adjust or even feed.

I wish I had kept count of the deer I have killed within sight of a road since then. I know this: From that tree out of which I killed the buck at the beginning of this story, I and my hunting partners killed over 30. It was the subject of a story I wrote for a magazine, titled, "The Magic Tree." I had four of them.

There is a tree I can be in in less than 15 minutes after leaving my house. In 15 years, I killed 40 deer from it, most with archery equipment. I can easily see through my truck windows from the ladder stand I had placed there. I can hear kids and parents arguing and dirt bikes running. One morning a few years ago, in 20 minutes

"DON'T WALK BY MORE DEER THAN YOU WILL SEE ALL DAY. ASK YOURSELF THE QUESTIONS, THEN GET THE ANSWERS. DEEP IN THE WOODS IS NOT ALWAYS BETTER. SOMETIMES, IF YOU CAN'T SEE THE CAR, YOU HAVE GONE TOO FAR."

I killed three deer from it. Many mornings, I could have doubled that.

Deer adapt almost instantly. They pattern hunters far faster than hunters pattern them. That is why I do not use trail cams. It doesn't matter if I am hunting public or private land, I look for where the deer feel comfortable.

4) WHAT ARE THEY ACCUSTOMED TO?

Deer do not fear man. They fear man the predator. Deer pay little attention to a man on a tractor. They ignore a truck driving by. On one rifle range I frequent, they ignore gun fire. So, I try to place stands in areas where they ignore certain things and are comfortable.

Then, I try to blend in. I want to be just another part of the daily routine.

Hunting the ladder stand I mentioned earlier, I could almost set my watch by the kids leaving on the school bus. Bus leaves...I stand up and get the bow ready. Once dad, mom and the kids are gone, the deer began to move. By that time, I have been sitting there quietly for about an hour...blending in.

5) ASK YOURSELF: WHAT IS MY HUNTING AREA LIKE?

Do you really know? Have you analyzed what your area provides, the terrain, the deer movement, the pressure? Pressure is the number one factor affecting deer movement. It outranks even the rut. What do pressured deer do where you hunt? Do you really know? It could well be they are hiding right under your nose, maybe right behind an old barn.

One last example. It's opening day of Alabama's bow season. It's a full moon and the low temperature for the night is 76 degrees. The afternoon before, between a three-year old clear-cut and a new one, in a strip of oaks, I hung a stand. It was less than 40 yards from the edge of either clearcut and no more than 60 yards from a road. Using nothing but the bright moonlight to show the way, I slipped into that stand just before dawn. I waved at the driver of one truck as he went by. At 7:30, on that blistering hot, full moon morning, I shot the seventh buck to come by. He scored 142 and change and was 5.5-yrs old.

Don't walk by more deer than you will see all day. Ask yourself the questions, then get the answers. Deep in the woods is not always better. Sometimes, if you can't see the car, you have gone too far.

— John Sloan was a prolific outdoor writer from Tennessee. Born in Illinois, he graduated from college in Wyoming and eventually became a full-time outdoor writer with more than 5,000 articles to his credit. He passed away in 2020 at the age of 75.



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ROOFTOP *Deer Camp*

IT'S ABOUT DEER HUNTING

This article isn't about rooftop tents; it's about deer hunting. You don't subscribe to Deer & Deer Hunting because you're curious about camping – you read this magazine because you want to learn about deer, their habitat, and how to hunt them successfully. Those are the same reasons I've been reading this publication since the early 90's. Those, along with how Charlie Alsheimer's photos snatched me from my Lazy Boy in Nebraska, put me in treestands in northern New York, and made me feel like I was about to release arrows on massive whitetails.





This is my truck/RTT parked in my favorite hunting spot along the Platte River in central Nebraska.



lot of great rooftop tents (RTT's) out there, hard shell and soft shell, and most are quick and easy to setup. I did a lot of research before choosing the Evolution hard shell tent made by Freespirit Recreation. There are three reasons I chose this tent and company, two of which will likely matter to you. The reason that may not apply to you as it does me is that the company is a family-owned business from... wait for it... Nebraska! (Go Big Red!) In the Cornhusker state, we support our own, and that's certainly one of the reasons I initially considered Freespirit Recreation.

Another reason I chose this tent is because it has a hard shell. Hard shell tents cost more, they just do, and you should prepare yourself to through the same experience of sticker-shock that I went through when I started researching tents. A hard shell RTT is clearly a long-term investment, cheaper than an RV or fifth-wheel, but more expensive than a ground tent or soft shell RTT. What leaned me toward the hard shell was a statement I kept hearing from people in the RTT community: "Most people start with a softshell tent, and then sell it after one season in order to buy a hard shell."

In general, hard shell RTT's last longer, breakdown less often, stay warmer in cooler weather, and most important to me, are quieter in the wind. I'm a light sleeper, and the winds that sweep across eastern Colorado and Wyoming pick up momentum when they cross the Nebraska state line, hitting some of my favorite deer hunting areas without abatement. I've spent dozens of sleep-deprived nights in soft shell tents only to wake up and hunt deer all day exhausted. When you put a soft shell tent on the top of your vehicle, things get louder, not quieter.

The third reason I chose this hard shell tent is because I can leave all my bedding inside the tent while I travel. When I'm ready to call it a day, I pull into a parking spot, push up on the gas-strut-assisted top, and the tent is setup in less than five minutes.

Comfort: Again, RTT's are not memory foam or Sleep Number

We read Deer & Deer Hunting to learn about deer and deer hunting, and so this article about rooftop tents is merely another strategy, perhaps a new tool for your deer hunting toolbox.

THE PLACES WE STAY

I hunt a couple properties within thirty minutes of my house, and when I do, I sleep extremely well the night before the hunt, snuggled under my weighted blanket, on top of my Tempur-Pedic mattress. Can anything beat the comforts of home? No, absolutely not. How did Dorothy say it? Oh, yeah... "There's no place like home."

The challenge is that my cozy bed is four hours away from my favorite place to hunt in the Pine Ridge of northern Nebraska, six hours away from the land in central Iowa where I shot my first archery buck, and fourteen hours away from the river bottoms of Montana where I'm hoping to connect on a Big Sky whitetail this fall. If my goal for deer season is to sleep as comfortably as possible, I'd never

go anywhere. But that's not my goal, and I'm guessing it's not yours either. Our aim is to hunt hard and put some big bucks in the backs of our trucks and in our freezers.

For an out of the area hunt, our goal should be, not only to get there, but to enjoy staying there. If we don't sleep well, we're going to hunt tired. If we hunt tired, we're likely not going to stay as long. Our choice of where to sleep is critical to a successful deer camp. Like many of you, I've stayed in hotels, cabins, and lodges. I've also turned nylon tents in deer camps. I have a few friends who stay in their RVs or fifth-wheels, and I know one die-hard bowhunter who just sleeps in the bed of his truck. There are a lot of options out there for setting up a deer camp, but I discovered my new favorite last year: rooftop tents. I'll share several reasons why I love this strategy, as well as a few challenges and setbacks to RTT's for you to consider.

BENEFITS OF RTT DEER CAMP

Ease of Setup: There are a

beds, and for that reason they're not going to rival home-sweet-home, or even a well-setup RV. Comfort-wise, they're below those options, but they are immeasurably above the option of ground tents, no matter what pad or cot you use. In large part, the comfort comes from how RTT's get you off the ground. Once you set up your tent the way you want it – with the padding, sleeping bags, and pillows you prefer – you'll never feel a rock, root, stick, or puddle below your tent. As long as the truck is level, you'll be sleeping on a flat, horizontal structure.

Safety: The most sleepless night I've ever spent in a tent happened about six years ago. My wife Jamie and I took our three kids camping and fly fishing in Colorado. The camp hosts stopped by our tent just as we were tucking the kids into their sleeping bags. They told us about the "camp bear," this gentle giant that has been wandering through the park at night. They said, "Perhaps you'll see him tonight. He's harmless."

My kids either didn't hear the phrase, "he's harmless," or they chose to ignore it, because their terror kept them awake. All. Night. Long.

My RTT sits on top of a Leitner Active Cargo System which is secured to the bed of my truck. Once I climb the ladder, turn off the light strip along the top of the tent, I'm sleeping over six-feet off the ground. Not that a bear couldn't turn me into a midnight snack in my RTT, but he'd have to be fairly committed to acquiring a Zeke-sandwich. Whether it's bears, coyotes, mountain lions, snakes, or spiders, when you're elevated, you're that much safer.

Saves Space: When you put your tent on the roof of your car or truck, you don't have to put a tent in your cab, trunk, or truck bed. What's more, when you store your bedding in a hard shell tent, you don't have to put sleeping bags, pads, and pillows in those precious storage areas either. When I do an out-of-area deer hunt, I take my bow-case, two coolers (one for meat, one for drinks and produce), camp chairs, a portable generator, a duffle bag for my camp clothes, one or two scent proof bags with my

hunting clothes, and a camp table. That's a lot of gear to fit into the bed of my truck, but now it all fits because I'm not trying to cram a tent and bedding in that space as well.

Mobility: If you're like me, I choose deer hunts by states. Once I pick a state and acquire a tag, I start looking at public land options. When I book a hotel, I tend to hunt land options that are within driving distance to my room. My reservation locks me into certain properties. What if the property isn't what I hoped it would be, or it's overrun with other deer hunters? With a RTT, I can choose another public land spot, drive to it, and set up a new deer camp without losing money on a new reservation. When your home-away-from-home is situated directly above your

favorite four wheels, you can chase deer anywhere you want to go.

CHALLENGES TO RTT DEER CAMP

These are some of the reasons I like RTT deer camps, but there are some downsides to this strategy to consider:

Wind and Weather: Sleeping outside is never going to be as quiet, temperature-controlled, or windproof as sleeping inside a hotel, cabin, or lodge. My RTT is considered a four-season tent, but there are certainly weather conditions that will drive me out of my tent and into a hotel or cabin.

Extra Steps or Extra Vehicle: If you're RTT camping in one place, and hunting in another, you'll need to either collapse the tent so you can drive your vehicle, or you'll need to tow an ATV or UTV, or



It might not look like much from the outside, the tent setup is clean, dry and comfortable.





Proper planning allows us to stay scent-free even during week-long hunting adventures.



pack a battery-operated or fat-tired bike. Most RTT's are designed to close and lock within a matter of minutes, making it possible to use your vehicle throughout the day, but it is an extra set of steps. What's more, if you're packing up your tent and driving your vehicle away from your other campsite gear, you'll need to figure out a way to protect your camping spot and the items you leave behind.

Mid-night Bathroom Trips:

If you're in your twenties or thirties, you can probably skip this concern. But for those of us north of forty, who tend to wake up once or twice a night to "water the ground," exiting the tent becomes a bit more of a challenge when you're six-feet off the ground. Again, aside from taking a wide-mouth water bottle with a tightly sealing cap into the tent with you (not suggesting that idea), you're just going to need to trek up and down the ladder.

Gas Mileage: My Toyota Tundra's miles per gallon (highway) went from seventeen to thirteen, when I added the Leitner system and my RTT. That's still better mileage than I get when I pull a trailer or boat, and it's still less

expensive than staying in hotels or lodges, but that change in gas mileage is significant enough to mention as a downside.

Smaller Camping Space:

The tent I went with has a footprint of 55" x 83" – it sleeps two full-sized hunters comfortably. Two, but probably not three, and absolutely not four. I love the guys I deer hunt with, but not enough that I'd ever invite a third person to ascend the ladder into my RTT. If your plan is to hunt with three or four buddies, you're going to need a second vehicle/tent or find different sleeping options.

Scent: This challenge isn't unique to RTT's, but it's worth mentioning. Whenever you live outside for a few days, you pick up the smells of camping. Whether that's the scent of a campfire, bacon sizzling in a cast iron skillet, or a gas-powered portable generator, you'll need to plan well for preventing and eliminating odor. My advice? When using an RTT as a deer camp, don't make campfires, and if you do, sit up wind of them. Also, pack and use scent-control and elimination products, including field wipes, sprays, and deodorants. Pick

up a camp-shower, if the weather is warm enough to use it. Personally, I use an Ozonics Dri-Wash bag, and then take the Ozonics into my stand with me. I also set up my cook-table down-wind of the truck, tent, and camp chairs, and I wear rubber gloves whenever I cut onions, peppers, or handle anything pungent. Just some food for thought. (Pun intended.)

YOU Are Your Best Strategy

Will a super comfortable RTT lead to more success in the deer woods? Yes, and no. Yes, perhaps, if a RTT keeps you in the deer woods longer, better rested, and more enthused. In that sense, it certainly won't hurt your success.

But at the end of the day, a tent's a tent, no matter where it's located. It's what you and I do when we exit the tent that makes us successful or not. You are your best deer hunting strategy, and I wish you great success this upcoming season.



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HOW TO

IT'S A LONG, WILD RIDE
WHEN YOU CHASE
RUTTING BUCKS IN DIXIE

CHASE THE SOUTHERN RUT

Every fall, deer hunters dream of November, but these are northern hunters, and a select portion of southern whitetail enthusiasts. In the South, most whitetails rut outside of what many refer to as the magical month. In reality, millions of deer do the deed during months some hunters might find surprising, ranging from July to February.

REASONS FOR WIDE RUT RANGE DATES

Some might not realize why rut ranges vary so much throughout the country. Of course, in the northern half of the country, these are very defined. Deer need to rut in a tight window to drop spring fawns within the most favorable (and survivable) timeframe. They need to be born late enough to avoid cold weather, but early enough to gain strength for their first winter. It's a delicate balance.

Due to warmer temperatures, this is not as necessary in the South. Still, while genetics play a role in the rut, environmental factors seem to be the biggest drivers, even in the South. While deer don't deal with cooler weather, they do have other things to worry about, such as drought, flooding, and more. But since they don't have to worry quite so much about colder temperatures, there's less of a need for a concise rutting period.

Thanks to college research centers and DNR data, we have a very comprehensive list of rut range dates throughout the South. No state is left unanalyzed. Here is a progression of the southern rut, which surprisingly spans more than half the year.

JULY-AUGUST

Most people are thinking about traveling to Florida in July and August. The beach and ocean waves call their name, and the allure carries them southward. Interestingly, deer hunters do the same, but for other reasons.

Florida: Parts of Florida see peak-rut action range from late July to the end of August. This area includes parts of Monroe, Miami-Dade, Collier, Broward, Palm Beach, Hendry, Lee, Charlotte, DeSoto, and Glades counties.

SEPTEMBER

In some states, the month of September is the traditional kickoff of bow season. That said, most places must wait until the end of the month or beginning of October to begin their season. Regardless, these hunters are thinking about velvet or bucks not long removed from it. Again, parts of Florida and Louisiana are way ahead of the game.

Florida: Other areas in Florida see peak rut action throughout September, ending in early October. These include parts of Sarasota, DeSoto, Highlands, Glades, Palm Beach, Martin, Okeechobee, Citrus, Levy, Nassau, Duval, St. Johns, and Flagler counties.

Louisiana: A few parishes in the southwestern corner of the state, including small parts of Iberia, St. Mary, Vermillion, and others, see a peak rut in late September, trickling into early October.

OCTOBER

Speaking of October, the rut continues in parts of the South. While northern deer are still on strict bed-to-feed patterns, some southern deer are running with their noses to the ground. It isn't just Florida and Louisiana seeing the action, either.

Florida: Other areas in Florida see whitetails breed throughout the month of October. This includes most of the counties (include parts of some already mentioned) in the northern two-thirds of the peninsula, except for a 75-to-100-mile radius around the Winterhaven area, which we'll talk more about momentarily.

Texas: While not all do, most of the coastal counties in Texas see a rut sometime in October.

Louisiana: Numerous pockets within parishes in southwestern Louisiana see a peak rut occur between October 10-20. Some of these same parishes see a peak between October 20-31.

Being successful and filling multiple tags throughout numerous states is hard but understanding rut timelines makes it a little easier.

REALTREE MEDIA PHOTO



*Spending short amounts of time
(at the right time) in each location
can maximize your odds of success
while road tripping the southern rut.*

REALTREE MEDIA PHOTO



Georgia: Much of the coastal county ground — Camden, Glynn, McIntosh, Liberty, Bryan, and Chatham — sees a peak rut around October 10-20. The counties nearest these to the west as far as Lanier, Atkinson, Ware, Pierce, Wayne, Long, and Effingham, will see their peak rut a little later, likely around October 20-30.

South Carolina: The southern half of the coastal counties should peak around October 15-30.

North Carolina: Southeastern coastal counties peak between October 23-30, with some counties experiencing the rut earlier or later

NOVEMBER

Finally, it's time for the northern rut, which usually takes places during the middle two weeks in November. That said, contrary to popular belief, pockets throughout the south experience their annual rut hunts occur at similar times.

Florida: A small portion of the Florida panhandle sees rut activity throughout November, including parts

of Jefferson, Leon, Madison, and Taylor. Some counties in central Florida do, too, including parts of Marion, Lake, Sumter, Orange, Osceola, Polk, Hillsborough, Pasco, Hernando, and Citrus.

Texas: The vast majority of central and northern Texas sees a rut fall sometime during the month of November.

Georgia: Aside from the southeastern corner of the state, most of the remaining eastern counties should see peak conception dates sometime during November 1-15. Then, virtually all the northern and western counties see the rut peak from November 15-30.

South Carolina: Approximately 95% of the state sees its rut peak November 1-15.

North Carolina: Northeastern coastal counties peak November 1-5. Aside from coastal counties, the eastern half of the state should peak around November 10-20. The easternmost counties in the western half of the state should see a peak around November 15-25. The westernmost counties should peak somewhere between November 25-30.

Kentucky: The entirety of Kentucky whitetails tend to produce peak conception dates around November 10-20. That said, some westernmost and easternmost counties are a little earlier or later than that.

West Virginia: Most deer throughout West Virginia peak from November 10-20.

Virginia: November 15 is the peak in Virginia, perhaps a little earlier in certain counties.

Tennessee: Average conception dates are November 15-20 in central counties, November 20-25 in eastern and western counties.

Arkansas: Most statewide average conception dates fall between November 10-25, but some are slightly earlier, but especially later. More on that momentarily.

Louisiana: In the western half of the state, the remaining areas that haven't already experienced rut

THE CRAZIEST STATES

While most southern states have significant variations from region to region, and even county to county, others see very wide ranges from first to last estrus doe. For example, **GEORGIA** is spotty, and ranges from early October to early January. **TEXAS** is spotty, too, and starts in early October and ends in late December. **ALABAMA** is even spottier, and spans late November to early February. Louisiana has the spottiest rut of all and runs from late September to late February. **MISSISSIPPI** has a long rut as well — although it at least shows a geographical progression that begins in the northwestern corner of the state and slowly moves southeastward — and runs from early December to early February. Finally, **FLORIDA** has the longest rut range, begging in late July and ending in early February.

activity should do so between November 1-30. That's a broad window, but Louisiana is one of the most difficult states to give ranges for.

Alabama: A few counties see peak-rut activity during the last week of November. These include parts (but not all) of Lawrence, Calhoun, Cleburne, Randolph, Chambers, and Lee counties.

DECEMBER

While most synonymize Thanksgiving with the tail end of the rut, it just gets things started in others, with the bulk of the action spanning the month of December, then wrapping up around Christmas.

Florida: While we said portions of Marion, Lake, Sumter, Orange, Osceola, Polk, Hillsborough, Pasco, Hernando, and Citrus counties see a November rut, other parts of these very same counties see peak-rut activity sometime in December, or even early January.

Texas: The west central parts of Texas generally see peak rut activity from December 1-15. Then, the southern counties see the most action from December 15-31, and on into early January.

Georgia: Very small portions of Catoosa, Whitfield, Murray, Fannin, Union, Towns, Rabun, Early, Miller, Seminole, Decatur, and Grady counties see a peak rut during the first couple weeks of December.

Alabama: Other parts of Alabama experience peak rut activity between December 10-25. These include parts (again, not all of), Winston, Franklin, Cullman, Morgan, Lawrence, Franklin, DeKalb, Cherokee, Bibb, and others.

Mississippi: Seven to eight counties along the northwestern border see a rut that falls between December 1-15. Most of the remaining counties in northwestern Mississippi see the rut sometime between late December and early January.

THE BEST TIME TO HUNT THE RUT

It's commonly said that hunters want to hunt the peak rut. That's not the best time to hunt rutting whitetails. Those who plan to chase the rut will see much better results by hunting the week to **10 DAYS LEADING UP TO PEAK CONCEPTION**. This is the window when bucks are the most active, cover the most ground in daylight, and occurs just prior to the lockdown phase.

While the rut timeline provided offers a ballpark timeframe for each southern state, it's still important to contact local experts for fine-tuned rut dates. Local DNR biologists assigned to your county, game processors, taxidermists, and other professionals have a great grasp on when the big bucks start falling, which generally coincides with the days leading up to peak conception. Of course, always check season dates to ensure a season is open during peak rut. That said, most states have season dates that span or coincide with the rut.

Louisiana: As alluded to, Louisiana has one of the spottiest ruts in the nation. It can be on fire in one location, all while a property a few miles down the road doesn't see rutting activity for months (literally). That said, in the eastern half of the state (northern and southern parishes), some areas see a peak rut between December 1-31.

Arkansas: River-bordering counties, such as Arkansas, Ashley, Crittenden, Chicot, Desha, Lee, Phillips, as well as a few other random counties, see a peak rut between December 1-15.

South Carolina: The northwestern corner of the state sees a late rut fall around December 1-15 in parts of Oconee, Pickens, and Greenville counties.



Analyzing the data on when the rut takes place in each southern state can help map out a timeline for chasing the southern rut.

HONEYCUTT CREATIVE PHOTO



Southern whitetails are susceptible to calling and rattling, too.

REALTREE MEDIA PHOTO

EXCEPTIONS

In the South, the rut isn't hard and fast as it is in the North. This leads to variations in peak conception dates, even in areas that are close to one another. You can see rut action on one property today, and another property down the road might not fire off for a week or two, if not longer.

Of course, rut dates don't follow county lines, either. So, there are exceptions when counties are mentioned, especially regarding their average peak conception dates. In some states, single counties can see rut activity span two or three months before it's all over with.

JANUARY

The calendar rolls over to the new year. While most whitetails are back to bed-to-feed patterns, and the rut is a distant memory, other deer are just getting started or still going strong.

Florida: As mentioned, a 100-mile hot zone around Winterhaven, Florida, sees a much later rut than the remainder of the peninsula. As already detailed, some of these areas see a November or December rut, but the northern stretch of Polk, eastern part of Pasco and Hernando, southern stretches of Sumter and Lake, and southwestern corner of Orange counties generally don't see much rut action until January, and it oftentimes carries over into February, too.

Georgia: A miniscule pocket of ground in southwestern Georgia sees a rut that starts at the very end of December but carries over well into January. This small area includes the southern half of Seminole and Decatur counties.

Alabama: Most of the north central counties see a peak rut from January 1-15, including parts of Jackson, Morgan, Marshall, Etowah, Blount, Cullman, St. Clair, Talladega, Shelby, Jefferson, Walker, Fayette, Tuscaloosa, Pickens, Greene, Hale, and others. Other counties see a rut peak from January 16-31, including parts of Lauderdale, Limestone, Madison, Colbert, Franklin, Marion, Lamar, Pickens, Sumter, Choctaw, Mobile, Clarke, Marengo, Wilcox, Dallas, Perry, Autauga, Chilton, Coosa, Elmore, Tallapoosa, Lee, Macon, Barbour, Dale, Coffee, Henry, Houston, Geneva, etc.

Louisiana: Some areas see a peak rut fall sometime during the month of January. These parishes include parts of West Carroll, East Carroll, Madison, Concordia, Catahoula, Avoyelles, St. Landry, St. Martin, Pointe Coupee, West Feliciana, Ascension, Assumption, St. James, Tangipahoa, St. Helena, Washington, St. Tammany, and more.

Mississippi: Most southwestern, northeastern, central, and east central counties might see the rut kick off in late December, but it doesn't really get going until January 1-15. Then, the far northeastern and southeastern corners of the state see the festivities begin in late January, and in some instances, carrying over into early February.

FEBRUARY

While most deer are merely struggling to survive, and deer hunters have hung up their gear for the season, some bucks are still in search of estrus does. This is limited to only a few areas, but it still happens this way each season.

Alabama: A defined region in south central Alabama doesn't see peak rut activity until February 1-15, including parts of Baldwin, Escambia, Monroe, Conecuh, Butler, Crenshaw, Pike, Bullock, Montgomery, and more.

Louisiana: Previously unmentioned parishes (and parts of some already mentioned) within eastern Louisiana see their peak rut fall sometime throughout the month of February.



DRIFT & DROP

IAN MCMURCHY |

THE MUZZLELOADING HUNTER'S DUAL CHALLENGE

The big whitetail buck slips along the edge of a clearing on his way to check a scrape. He is big, easily pushing the book with six long tines per side, heavy mass and almost 2 feet of antler width. This is the buck of a lifetime. He slowly starts the age-old ritual, rubbing his forehead on an overhead twig, pawing and urinating. He stands still as the urine runs down his legs, offering you a perfect shot.

REAL-WORLD TESTING

Ian McMurchy’s conclusions about long-range shooting and the wind’s effects aren’t based on theories. He is often commissioned by manufacturers to develop information on new guns and loads and their performance characteristics at various distances. While developing this article, he spent countless hours recording data. Here are two tables showing examples of his findings on drop and drift at long distances. All shots were fired against a full-value (90-degree) wind of exactly 10 mph. McMurchy’s test area allows him a 360-degree field of fire. This means

he doesn’t have to wait for the wind to be from a certain direction before shooting. He needs only to wait for times that provide a 10 mph wind. Equipment used in this test included a .50-caliber Thompson/Center, a 4-16x Tactical scope and T/C Shockwave (SW) bullets. All shots were propelled by three 50-grain Pyrodex pellets. As shown in these photos, the aiming point was the orange dot in the corner of the large steel plate. Hunters will find these tables helpful when developing their own long-range loads, but are meant only for reference. Your particular load and circumstances may yield different results.



300-YARD GROUPS

BULLET	DRIFT (INCHES)	DROP (INCHES)	GROUP (INCHES)
200 SW	23	23	6.5
250 SW	32	28	7.5
300 SW	22	28	5.0

WIND DRIFT AND DROP TABLE

DISTANCE (YARDS)	BULLET	DRIFT (INCHES)	DROP (INCHES)
200	200 SW	8.5	8.5
300	200 SW	23	23
200	250 SW	13	8.5
300	250 SW	32	28
200	300 SW	14	12
300	300 SW	22	28

Sitting in your ground blind, you watch spellbound as every black-powder hunter’s dream unfolds. This is why you sat in the cold, not daring to move for several long hours. Your rifle rests on shooting sticks as you stare through the scope. There’s only one problem:

He’s much farther out than you expected. You know that the far side of the clearing is about 300 yards. Plus you’ve been battling the chilling northern winds angling across the clear-cut. You know the wind is going to affect the bullet at this distance.

Let's imagine two ways this scene might play out. In the first situation, panic takes hold as you place the cross-hairs above the buck's back. You have no idea where to hold. The buck suddenly raises his head. He's alert and about to run. Your cross-hairs wobble about his chest, then back to his hips, then up into the trees above his back. Your finger tightens ... but you don't shoot. You know you can't risk wounding such a beautiful creature. And then he's gone.

In the second scenario, you know he's standing 295 yards out. When you got into the blind you spent a few minutes drawing a simple little map of what you could see, including a big stump a couple of yards from where the buck is standing. Your laser range finder indicated the stump was 295 yards and you put that on the map.

You had tied a couple of feet of light wool twine to a nearby twig and you quickly check to see that the wind is still pointing it across the clearing. A couple of times during your wait you had checked the windspeed with the little windmeter that you keep inside your coat. The wind has been steady at 9 to 10 mph, with gusts to 14 mph, since just after dawn.

After a quick glance at the chart taped to the side of the rifle you crank the elevation knob almost a complete revolution to the 9-minute marking. Then you do the same with the windage turret, only you take the knob four more clicks. The chart indicates you need slightly more compensation for this amount of wind than you do for bullet drop. He is working the scrape so you take the time to make exact adjustments. If you were rushed you would simply use the mildots in your reticle. The third dot up and three dots over would do almost the same job.

You settle the cross-hairs onto his chest and slowly break the trigger. Your 250-grain bullet falls nearly 30 inches on its way to the buck. It drifts almost the same amount to the right and finds the center of the buck's

chest. He lurches forward as you hear the solid smack of the bullet. He doesn't go far.

Those are two vastly different results, and the difference is fairly simple: Learning some basic skills provides the confidence to make a long shot in wind. There is no magic; it's all based on mathematics. Granted, good marksmanship skills are important for longer shots, but without knowing where the bullet will fly, such skills don't do much good. As muzzleloading components improve and we learn how to wring the most accuracy from black-powder rifles, such scenarios become closer to reality for more hunters.

PREPARING FOR THE LONG SHOT

Let's examine what goes into preparing for a long shot in wind. First, you must determine the capabilities of you and your equipment. This is quite easy. How far out can you consistently hit a 12-inch paper pie plate? Practice and knowledge will extend that distance remarkably. The accuracy potential of your particular muzzleloader will obviously influence this distance — some rifles are simply more accurate than others. Let's start

by saying that 100-yard groups should be 3 inches or less to ensure lethal field accuracy out to 200 yards or more.

Bullet drop is actually the easiest part of the long-distance shooting equation. Gravity pulls bullets down consistently — so once you determine the drops they will stay constant. The trick is to record these drops so you can use that information in the field. Bullet drops are influenced by the distance from you to the critter because gravity has more time to pull the bullet down over longer distances. Determining distance used to be tough, but not anymore. The advent of laser range finders has eliminated that problem. Now we simply zero at 100 yards and confidently hold for much longer shots because the range finder shows you the distance within a yard or so.

Wind drift is the tougher challenge on long shots. Wind pushes bullets sideways but usually without any degree of consistency. You need a baseline to work from; a wind speed of 10 mph has become the standard. Unfortunately, speed isn't the only wind influence — its direction has a significant effect on the bullet. First, if the wind is directly



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behind or toward the line of bullet travel, there is no effect at all. That sometimes happens and we can occasionally make it happen by moving our firing location.

More likely the wind is at an angle. The best way to imagine where the wind is coming from is to use the face of a clock — 9 and 3 o'clock represent a 90-degree wind from the left or right. This is called "full value" wind. A wind that intersects the bullet's flight path from an oblique angle is called "partial value" wind — 12:30 to 2:30, 3:30 to 4:30, 6:30 to 8:30 and 9:30-11:30 positions. Partial value wind effect is one half of full value wind for all practical purposes. And again, 6 and 12 o'clock winds have no influence.

You need to know the wind's velocity and direction to determine its effect on your bullet. This requires becoming more aware of wind. The military has developed a wonderful field reference guide for estimating wind speed:

GUIDE FOR ESTIMATING WIND SPEED

0-3 MPH	BARELY FELT, SMOKE DRIFTS.
3-5 MPH	CAN BARELY BE FELT ON FACE.
5-8 MPH	TREE LEAVES IN CONSTANT MOTION.
8-12 MPH	DUST AND LOOSE PAPER MOVES.
12-15 MPH	SMALL TREES SWAY.
15-20 MPH	LARGE TREES SWAY.

Another excellent wind-velocity determination technique is as follows. Hold a piece of paper, grass, dry leaves or other light material at shoulder level with the wind directly at your back. Drop the material and point your arm directly at the spot where it lands. Estimate the angle formed between your arm and body. Divide that angle by 4. This provides wind velocity in miles per hour with surprising accuracy.

USING THE INFORMATION

Knowing wind speed and direction, plus the distance to the buck of your dreams, doesn't help much if you can't use that information to precisely place the cross-hairs. This is where drop

“PERHAPS A BETTER QUESTION IS, “HOW FAR CAN THE AVERAGE MUZZLELOADER HUNTER SHOOT ACCURATELY?” I BELIEVE THE ANSWER IS ABOUT 150 YARDS. THE POTENTIAL IS THERE IF HE BUYS GOOD EQUIPMENT AND USES GOOD LOADING TECHNIQUES.”

and drift tables come in. How do you create an accurate drop table for your rifle and load? There are nifty computer programs that will provide good info, but the best method is to simply shoot and keep good records of the results.

I happen to prefer actual drop data for both my muzzleloading and centerfire hunting. My friends and I use large targets (at least 2 feet by 4 feet), which ensure we catch each shot. We shoot at known distances and in known winds. We measure and record our results, and then develop our drop and drift charts.

the emphasis on more efficient bullets, we are looking out to 250 yards and beyond.

Perhaps a better question is, “How far can the average muzzleloader hunter shoot accurately?” I believe the answer is about 150 yards. The potential is there if he buys good equipment and uses good loading techniques. Unfortunately, most people don't have the time to learn how to confidently use the full capability of their rifles. That is a simple fact.

THE TRUE CHALLENGE

Remember the true challenge of muzzleloading: hunting with one bullet. The closer we are to the buck the more accurate we can place that bullet. I enjoy the challenge of making longer kills but nothing beats getting in close enough to see the whites of their eyes. There's no such thing as minimum shooting distance.

True sportsmen make every effort possible to prevent wounding. If someone can confidently kill at longer distances, more power to him. Your mileage might vary from mine but we are both muzzleloader hunters. Clean kills are the bottom line.

— For more muzzleloading tips, tactics and reviews on guns, powder and accessories, visit www.YouTube.com/DDHOnline and type, “muzzleloading” in our page's search bar.



IS IT *NECESSARY* TO **BLEED OUT** A *DEER?*

A question that often becomes part of deer camp discussion around the campfire is whether it is necessary to bleed out deer after the deer is down. Some hunters believe that it is important to slit the throat after the kill to remove as much blood as possible. Hanging the carcass from the hind legs is also thought by some to be helpful. This line of thinking is most likely based on experience or observation with home butchering of livestock where the animals are first stunned, then hung from the hind legs and the throat cut to allow blood removal. This is also the process followed in commercial meat processing plants so, on the surface, it seems to make sense for deer as well.

RECIPE OF THE MONTH

Reverse-Seared Backstrap

WITH JALAPENO CILANTRO DRIZZLE

TEXT & PHOTO BY JACK HENNESSY

I think we can all agree backstrap is perfect when cooked correctly using nothing more than salt and pepper. But it never hurts to give it a slight edge, a small bit of dipping sauce or drizzle, to spice things up. This Smoked Jalapeño Cilantro Drizzle does just that.

In regard to reverse-searing wild game, it is my go-to method for perfectly medium-rare venison. The process is simple: A slow roast until meat internal temp hits 110, followed by a hot and fast sear to create a crust and raise temp 10-15 degrees, followed by a 15-minute rest before carving which raise internal temp another 10 degrees for that perfect medium rare cook. Yes, you can start and finish a backstrap on a hot grill, but then your outer edges are gray and dry by the time your center hits medium rare. All this to say: Invest an oven-safe internal meat probe and try your hand at reverse-searing some venison.

INGREDIENTS (TWO-FOUR SERVINGS):

- + Half a backstrap
- + Kosher salt and freshly cracked black pepper
- + Olive oil, mixed use

DRIZZLE INGREDIENTS:

- + 1/2 pound jalapeños (approximately 6 normal-sized peppers), smoked
- + 1 bunch of cilantro (just leaves mostly, not stems)
- + 1/2 lime, juiced
- + 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- + 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
- + 1/24 cup olive oil
- + Garnish: thinly sliced green onions (optional)

To make jalapeño cilantro drizzle ahead of time, smoke whole jalapeños at 200 degrees Fahrenheit for 1-1/2 to 2 hours until soft and smoked. Remove stems and add to food processor along with one bunch of cilantro leaves, juice from half a lime, 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt, and 1 tablespoons brown sugar. Blend thoroughly, then slowly add 1/4 cup olive oil while continuing to blend. Add to squeeze bottle via funnel. Set aside until ready to serve.

To prep backstrap, pull thawed backstrap and dust all sides with kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper. Let sit outside of refrigerator for 2 hours to allow to come to room temperature.



Pre-heat oven to 200 degrees Fahrenheit.

On an oven-safe stainless steel mesh rack or something similar that allows ample airflow to all sides on backstrap, add backstrap and very lightly coat in olive oil. Cook in oven at 200 until internal temperature reads 110 (use internal meat probe or thermometer). This usually takes 50 minutes in my oven using the larger half of the backstrap. For the narrower half of backstrap (portion that attaches below neck), it might take 35-40 minutes. Be certain to test internal temp after 35 minutes.

Make sure to have a (preferably cast-iron) skillet piping hot for when you remove backstrap, once it reaches internal temp of 110. (Skillet should be 600 degrees Fahrenheit or a little above.) Upon removal, add backstrap to piping-hot skillet and sear all sides thoroughly to create a crust, approximately 1 minutes 30 seconds to 2 minutes per side.

Once all sides have been seared thoroughly, remove backstrap and add to a grate of some sort that allows juices to drip versus pooling below backstrap. Lightly tent with aluminum foil and allow to rest 15 minutes prior to carving. Turn after 5-7 minutes to allow liquids pooling on top to drip down. Maintain that good crust is mission.

When service drizzle over jalapeño cilantro sauce and perhaps some thinly sliced green onions.

Enjoy! Reach out to me on Instagram (@WildGameJack) with any questions or comments.

However, any close observation after cutting the throat of a downed (and dead) deer will make it obvious that very little blood flow occurs which means that cutting the throat does not accomplish a significant amount of blood removal and, consequently, is not necessary. That is not to say that removal of blood is not important. A 150 lb. deer has about 8 pints of blood so there is potential for a significant amount to remain in the carcass after death. The reason that bleeding is an important practice for home butchering and commercial slaughter plants is because excess residual blood in meat is a potential source of undesirable flavor and color changes, and results in shorter refrigerated or frozen storage time before flavor or color change becomes an issue. Blood has a high iron content due to the iron that is part of hemoglobin. Iron is a strong pro-oxidant that is well-recognized as a source of chemical changes that result in off-flavors and loss of color in meat products. This is noticeable in the “warmed-over” flavor that occurs in left-over steaks and roast that have been cooked, chilled in a refrigerator and reheated a day (or more) later. Typical warmed-over flavor following cooking is not necessarily a strong objectionable flavor but rather is a mildly stale, sometimes described as a “cardboardy” flavor that is less desirable than that of fresh meat. Increased blood content in meat will result in faster development of off-flavors and will increase the intensity of those off-flavors.

The cardboard-like, less-than-fresh flavor is the result of iron released from hemoglobin during cooking that catalyzes the breakdown of fatty acids to change the flavor profile. Obviously, if there is more iron present in the form of residual blood, the potential for flavor changes is greater. These flavor changes will also occur in uncooked refrigerated and frozen meat as well, though at a slower rate than for cooked meat. However, that also means that refrigerated or frozen meat storage time will be less before significant loss of flavor occurs if there is excess residual blood in the meat.

So, the question becomes; why doesn't cutting the throat of a deer that has been killed in the field help to reduce the residual blood in the meat? Keep in mind that there is a big difference between what happens in animal harvest during home butchering or in a commercial slaughter plant, and what happens in the field during hunting. One of the biggest differences is simply blood pressure. For animals in commercial plants, stunning is done specifically to render the unconscious (also required by humane slaughter regulations), but to also retain an active heart beat. In that case, cutting the throat results in an outpouring of blood due to the active pumping of the heart and the resulting blood pressure. In the case of home butchering, retaining an active heart beat may not always occur but the immediate hanging from the hind legs before cutting the throat will still accomplish significant blood removal from the pressure derived from gravity flow of the blood. In all cases, it's important that cutting the throat also severs the jugular vein/carotid artery vessels to assure good

blood flow. Simply slashing the throat of a down deer may not reach those blood vessels because they are located well inside the neck close to the esophagus and a relatively deep cut is necessary to reach them.

In the case of hunting harvest of deer, there are also several other factors at work that make it unnecessary to cut the throat of a downed deer. First, there is a significant (often great) amount of animal stress involved in reaction to the hunt itself. Deer are programmed to react quickly to perceived danger and the associated response is an increased heart rate, increased blood pressure and a peripheral vasoconstriction of blood vessels. This results in a shift of blood flow from muscles to other organs and, if bleeding occurs at this point as a result of a bullet or arrow wound, the amount of blood remaining in the muscles is greatly reduced. In the case of wild game, and especially for deer, there is also a short burst of intense muscle contraction in response to being hit, including a typical kick, jump and/or run for at least a short distance. These muscle contractions exert additional pressure on the circulatory system to push blood away from the muscles to whatever exit point that bleeding may be occurring. The increased blood pressure combined with an active heart beat will result in extensive blood loss, with the rate of bleeding dependent on the type of wound involved. In reality, the cause of death for many harvested deer is simply excessive blood loss. For example, when dressing out a lung-shot or heart-shot deer, the chest cavity is often filled with blood. For a head-shot or neck-shot deer, there may not be much bleeding that occurs but because the heart has stopped beating, cutting the throat is not likely to accomplish very much blood removal unless it can be done quickly and the deer immediately hung from the hind legs to facilitate blood flow. Of course, if one gets lucky with a neck shot that severs the jugular or carotid, then bleeding will likely be profuse.

Research studies have shown that for commercially harvested livestock including farmed deer, about 50% of the blood remains in the carcass, even after controlled bleeding as practiced by commercial plants. Because blood makes up about 5% of animal weight, the blood remaining in a carcass after bleeding can be significant. However, less than 5% of that blood remains in the muscles because most of the blood is located in other organs. When adding in the stress factors that occur with wild deer harvest, the resulting increase in blood pressure combined with the extensive bleeding that typically occurs from wounds before death makes it likely that even less blood remains in the muscles, and there will be virtually no impact of blood on meat quality. Consequently, there is no need to cut the throat of a downed deer harvested under these circumstances.

— Dr. Joe Sebranek is a distinguished professor of animal science at Iowa State University.



DEER BEHAVIOR

TEXT AND PHOTO BY
CHARLES J. ALSHEIMER

Every deer on your property requires at least one to two tons of nutritional food a year to meet their needs. If you don't provide it for them, they will go elsewhere. For this reason, a minimum of 5% of a property should consist of good food plots, both feeding and hunting.

The difference between the two is that feeding food plots are larger, so they provide the tonnage deer need

FOOD



to thrive and stay on the property. Hunting food plots are smaller and located in thick cover, between the bedding/sanctuary and large feeding area. Hunting food plots should be narrow, irregularly shaped, and less than 1/2 acre in size so that bow shots can be taken across them.

The beauty of hunting food plots is that they provide deer with a fast-food stop as they travel between their bedding and feeding plot. Because hunting food plots are small, with security around them, deer will hit them during daylight. Feeding food plots on the other hand are intentionally large so they can produce the tonnage needed. Deer will normally use feeding food plots under the cover of darkness because of their size and layout.



for all

SEASONS



BUCK SHOTS

JOSH HONEYCUTT

There are different types of deer hunters in this world. Some are passive, and others are devout. Neither is right or wrong, but simply a matter of passion. As part of the latter crowd, Ryan Alexander is a hunting guide in Colorado, Texas, and is the owner of Urban Buckeye Outfitters in Ohio, which has been in business since 2011.

"I started shooting a compound at 5 years old, shot my first deer at 8 years old, and I have been bowhunting for 22 years," Alexander said. "My father got me into hunting. And being a guide is one of the best jobs in the world. As an owner and operator of an outfitting business, I live and breathe deer. It's a year-round hobby, job, and lifestyle."

Given the nature of his work, he's seen plenty of big deer hit the ground. However, most of the time, he's helping others bring them down. But last season, he decided to bag a Booner of his own.

You see, he's been hunting one particular area of Stark, Ohio, for about seven years. And the last three of those was consumed by one particular giant. With encounters all three of those seasons, it regularly graced his trail cameras, both during the velvet growing phase and after it shed.

Determined to finally tag the monster, Alexander spent an untold amount of time pouring over new and old trail camera photos, glassing from afar, and hatching a game plan. Finally, the archery season opened, but the first afternoon was a bust. The giant didn't show.

All of that was destined to change, though. On the afternoon of September 29, Alexander and his father went afield for the second sit of the year. Choosing separate stand locations, they hoped one of them would encounter the big non-typical.

Odds were good, too. It was overcast with a south-southwest wind. The weatherman forecasted a storm front to arrive later that evening. The anxious bowhunter hoped it'd get the giant on its feet during daylight.

Settling into his treestand, he scanned his surroundings, which consisted of big oaks, open hay fields



Buck Green Score::
210 3/8 inches
Date Harvested:
September 29, 2020
Location: Stark, Ohio
Compound bow
PHOTO BY JOEY DOMBROSKI

THIRD TIME IS A CHARM

AFTER THREE ENCOUNTERS IN AS MANY YEARS, RYAN ALEXANDER FINALLY CONNECTED ON THE BUCK OF HIS DREAMS.

and swamp bottoms. A small food plot reached skyward in front and to the left of the treestand. To the rear, a steep cliff dropped off down into the swamp. And to the right, water rippled with the slight breeze.

After a while, a doe and fawn walked out from the right. They fed in the food plot for several minutes. Then, all of a sudden, their mood changed. Something was happening, or coming. After several intense seconds of them staring back over their shoulder, the giant finally stepped out.

A couple of minutes felt like forever as he patiently waited for the giant to continue walking into the food plot. The buck eventually breached bow range, and Alexander slowly grabbed his bow. Slowly coming to full draw, he had to remain so for almost a full minute before he could settle the pin over the vitals. Then, he took the broadside, 19-yard shot. His arrow struck true, and the buck dashed out of sight.

While the shock was still setting in, he knew the rarity of what had just happened. It isn't often that you see a 200-plus inch deer, and he'd just killed one. That's something.

"After spending all the countless hours and days to pattern this deer the last 3 years, it finally paid off,"

Alexander said. "That is very rewarding."

After descending the tree, he met up with his father, girlfriend, and girlfriend's father. They all returned to the timber for the recovery, which didn't take long.

"After I found the deer, we all had our moment together," Alexander said. "Once the reality sank in, I started calling up my buddies. Most everyone was in the same amount of shock and excitement I was in. Everyone congratulated me, and then patiently waited to hear the rough score."

Overall, this Ohio monarch is estimated to be 6 1/2 years old, and scores 210 3/8 inches (green score). It's one of the coolest bucks of 2020. Few have as much character as this one.

Looking back, he credits the successful hunt to careful scouting, strategic stand locations, and being mindful of scent and wind. "I also used cellular game cameras to help pattern this deer and keep it low pressure," Alexander said. "I believe consistency plays a huge part also."



CURIOSITY KILLS THE CANT

There's an old quip that, "Can't couldn't do anything." While this saying bares some truth, when it comes to shooting, cant can certainly make you miss.

Cant is defined as, "Angular deviation from a vertical or horizontal surface or plane." With our firearm's sights or scope being mounted directly over the bore of our gun, it is that angular deviation from the vertical plane that we, as marksman, are most concerned with. How far off target this angular deviation or cant causes our bullet to strike is dependent upon several factors, among them are distance to the target and how high above the bore line our sights or scope are mounted. The greater the distance to the target, the larger the effects of cant error become.

For long-range shooters, this quickly becomes a double-edged sword, as the optics needed for long-range shooting will most likely necessitate a high mount. Whether our goal is a 500-yard match, or we just want to shoot the best we can, it is wise to get cant under control.

There are three parts of a bullet's trajectory that we must gain control of to hit our intended target. Cant introduces an unwanted fourth, and while it may be impossible to eliminate, we certainly need to minimize it.

Line of sight – This is a straight line as we look through our sights or scope and place them on target.

Line of bore – This is a straight line through the center of the bore and is directly below the sights or scope. It is the path the bullet will initially take, and it is the relationship between line of bore and line of sight that the unwanted angular effects of cant come into play.

Bullet path or trajectory – With the barrel level to the Earth's surface, the bullet will depart from the line of bore and begin to fall to the Earth's surface immediately upon exiting the muzzle. To engage targets at distance, the bore angle must be increased. This increased angle (angle of departure) allows the bullet to travel farther. Our sights or scope are thus adjusted to increase the angle of departure, placing the line of sight and the bullet's trajectory on target at a given distance.

The first intersection occurs near the muzzle as the bullet is fired on an upward angle. The bullet, after reaching its peak, will begin to fall and intersect the line of sight again. This second intersection is the range the rifle is zeroed at. After this second intersection, the bullet will fall more quickly to the earth's surface as it loses momentum.

Here, we are behind our rifle with everything setup properly. The line of sight is straight through our scope and on target. The bore line will continue a slightly upward angle

above the target. The bullet will exit the bore on a slightly upward angle, rise above the line of sight, and continue its upward path until reaching its peak, where it will begin to fall to the earth, crossing the line of sight once again at our 100-yard (zeroed range) bullseye. Easy enough, provided we do not introduce that fourth element — cant.

There are two sources of cant. Rifle cant is simply how we hold our rifle. We should hold our rifle the same each time and as vertical as possible, meaning the bore line should be directly below the sights or scope.

When rifle cant is introduced, things go awry very quickly. With the bore line canted to the left, the bullet begins its flight from the left of the line of sight. As a result, the bullet can no longer cross the line of sight twice as intended. Instead, it will intersect the line of sight only at the range in which it was zeroed.

Scope cant comes from improper installation. A scope not mounted square to the bore line isn't going to work as intended not only because it will be frustrating to adjust, but it will also likely induce rifle cant since the natural inclination is to hold the reticle level. Do this and the bore line is no longer vertical to the line of sight because rifle cant is now introduced as soon as the reticle is leveled.

It doesn't take much cant to create a problem. Looking at the hands of a watch that is one minute past 12:00 illustrates a 6-degree angle. Depending on several other factors, such as scope height and distance to target, that 6-degree cant can place a bullet impact 55 inches left or right at 1000 yards. Thus, a mere 6 degrees of cant can have a shooter chasing bull's-eyes or missing prairie dogs all afternoon.

The only way to tell is by employing a scope alignment tool like the Level Right Pro from Real Avid. This system uses a leveling device to ensure the rifle is secured vertically in a vise and a projector to cast a shadow of the scope's reticle onto a leveled alignment grid. The tool finds the vertical centerline of both the scope and barrel. Once in place, the rifle can be precisely leveled in a vise. The LED projector directs light through the scope and onto a tripod-mounted alignment grid.

Projecting the reticle image onto the grid reveals any misalignment of the scope. Simply rotate the scope until the reticle aligns with the grid and secure the scope rings. The scope's vertical line is now in vertical alignment with the rifle bore centerline, effectively eliminating scope cant.





FOC:

BOB ROBB

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

A finished hunting arrow is completed with many components – arrow point insert and broadhead on the front end, nock and fletches on the back end. Each adds weight, which affects the position of the shaft's balance point. With arrows, you want a higher percentage of weight in the front end. Where the balance point lies is called FOC, or Front of Center, balance.

And this is important why? Simply stated, the FOC position on the arrow shaft is a key factor in determining the shape of the arrow's trajectory and accuracy potential. The right FOC is especially important in long-range shooting. An arrow shaft with a FOC that is too high can fly like a laser beam, but will tend to nose-dive at distance. Conversely, an arrow with a FOC that is too low will fly with a more stable trajectory, but may fly erratically. The accepted standard for the correct FOC for a hunting arrow is 10-15 percent FOC for optimum accuracy potential -- especially at long distances.

Calculating your shaft's FOC is simple.

THE STANDARD FOC FORMULA IS

$$\text{FOC \%} = 100 \times (\text{AL}/2),$$

L

WHERE L IS THE CORRECT ARROW LENGTH, AND A IS THE DISTANCE FROM THE NOCK GROOVE TO THE FINISHED ARROW BALANCE POSITION, INCLUDING THE ARROW POINT/INSERT WEIGHT, NOCK, AND FLETCHING.

First, build your hunting shaft using the exact components – broadhead and insert/outsert, vanes, nock, and cresting if desired. Then measure your arrow shaft from the nock's throat to the tip of the arrow shaft. Divide this number by two. Now, find the balance point. I balance the shaft on my index finger, since it's simple, though obviously not as precise as using a narrow edge to balance the shaft on. Mark that spot with a Sharpie. Now, measure from this mark to the throat of the nock. Next, simply subtract

the center of the arrow measurement from the balance point, and multiply this number by 100. Lastly, divide the resulting number by the arrow's overall length. Boom! This number is the FOC percentage of your arrow.

MANIPULATING F.O.C.

You can change the balance point of an arrow shaft by simply adding or subtracting weight to the front or the rear of the shaft. Heavier vanes and a lighted nock, for example, will add weight to the back end of the shaft, decreasing FOC. Trading out a 100-grain broadhead for a 125-grain head is a simple way to increase the FOC. You can also use a heavier arrow point insert or add a metal weight insert. One arrow maker, Carbon Express, has a patented Built-In Weight Forward design that gradually shifts weight to the front two-thirds of the arrow, which incorporates a lighter, stiffer back end that improves recovery out of the bow while putting additional weight in the front end.

AN EXAMPLE

One of my Victory Archery VAP Elite 350 shafts, which weighs 7.8 grains/inch, is built with three 2-inch MAXHunter vanes, a Nockturnal lighted nock, SHOK aluminum outsert, and 100-grain arrow point, is cut to 28 1/2-inches. Half of that is 14 1/4 inches. The balance point is right at 18 1/4 inches. 18.25 minus 14.25 equals 4.0. Multiplied by 100, that equals 400. 400 divided by 28.5 equals 14.26, which is the FOC of this finished shaft. Total arrow weight is 384.9 grains, which leaves my PSE Evoke 35 at 280 fps. This bow is perfectly tuned with this shaft and produces tight groups, even at extended distances. I used this combination to take The Big Six, a cool old 6-point buck, in NE Wyoming last September, at 42 yards. You can read all about that hunt in the XXX issue of this magazine.



INSTINCTIVE SHOOTING

A Traditional Bow

Focus. It's key for shooting a traditional bow.

As I draw my longbow, I lose sight of the tip of my arrow and focus on my target. Before I can second guess myself, I let the string slip through my fingers and release. The thud of the arrow hitting precisely where I was looking is extremely satisfying.

I am an Instinctive shooter. Many people assume that everyone who shoots a traditional bow shoots instinctively. However, this is only true to an extent. There are several different methods of shooting a traditional

bow, and instinctive is just one of them -- and a controversial one I may add.

Shooting instinctively is fairly self explanatory. The archer shoots purely by instinct and intuition, without using any type of sights, shooting aids, or focusing on the arrow itself. You simply concentrate on the spot you want the arrow to go. The process itself happens in one smooth motion, without stopping to think about where you are aiming.



I became an instinctive shooter by default, not necessarily by choice. Years before I ever started shooting a traditional bow, I bowfished with a compound bow that had no sights. Bowfishing is also an instinctive game for most, as you don't get much time for anything else once you spot a fish. In the split second you draw your bow, you'll want to release your arrow in the same motion, before the fish is gone. When I first picked up a traditional bow, I naturally shot instinctively. Over the years I've tried other methods, but none have been successful, or felt natural to me.

A HUNTERS INSTINCTS

The crunch of dried leaves under my boots reminded me that Fall was coming to an end. The November breeze felt good against my face as I made my way up a hill to a clear cut where I knew deer usually crossed. Although I had made a later start than usual this morning, the sun had yet to make it's full appearance over the horizon and the woods were just starting to wake up.

As I got to the top of a small rise, I bumped a few deer that were bedded down about 15 yards in front of me. I stood frozen, watching them bound off, white tails waving like flags over the tall grass. Mentally I was kicking myself for not getting in the woods sooner, when another deer stood up

in front of me. I hadn't spotted her bedded in the thick underbrush, and suddenly there she was.

She was looking in the direction the other deer had gone, her tail flicking, and I knew that I only had a small window of opportunity.

I had a slightly quartering away shot and I took it. I raised my recurve, drew my arrow, anchored and released. The arrow met its mark deep behind her shoulder blade.

I made a quick and successful recovery of the doe on that beautiful November morning. Looking back, I often wonder if shooting instinctively had led to my success in that particular instance. I'm not sure how long I could have stood there watching that deer and went unnoticed...I could have stood there and over thought the whole situation and failed.

In the traditional archery community, the debate between shooting methods can be very heated and opinionated. Everyone is convinced that "their method" is the best method, whether it's gap shooting, instinctive shooting, string walking or something else. I personally feel that an archer should simply use whichever method works best for them, and ignore the noise of others. After all, over complicating things tends to make them more difficult than they actually are. I know there will be several traditional

archery shooters coming after me with pitchforks for sharing my views on this subject, but it is just that -- my views and personal opinion.

The arguments against instinctive shooting are many. It takes a lot of practice to make it become second nature. Many argue that you can never be as accurate as other methods, as there are too many variables. Instinctive shooting is a game of training your mind, and any wavering by the archer can result in a bad shot. It can take years to become truly accurate if you aren't persistent, as well as leading to snap shooting and target panic. Instinctive is not considered an accurate formula, and is looked down on by many archery coaches, particularly for target archery.

Although I am not much of a bird hunter, I do enjoy dove hunting with a traditional bow, as well as shooting the occasional 3D target tossed in the air. You have to be quick on the draw and release with both of these, many times I don't even reach full draw before I see my ideal shot. This is called snap shooting, and less than ideal. It can lead to lots of bad habits and bad shots. However, it does have it's time and place where it comes into play.

As I'm not a target shooter, I have concentrated purely on the bowhunting side of things. I don't shoot distance, and rarely shoot paper targets. I got into traditional archery for the simplistic way of hunting, and to get close to my prey. I concentrate purely on bowhunting situations, as well as adapting to a "one arrow" mind set. In bowhunting, you generally only get one shot, one arrow. So, when I practice, I solely focus on one arrow at a time. One shot, one kill. Little else matters.

Much like other techniques, you still have to be consistent and maintain proper form with instinctive. Yet, it is the technique that relies mainly on the archers mind, thus making it less reliable in a way. You must quiet your mind to make a good shot.

The history of instinctive shooting itself is vague. It is something that has been around far longer than we know, and used by many before us. Whether our ancestors thought it a derogatory method is highly unlikely. One of the greatest bowhunters of all time, Fred Bear, was said to be an instinctive snap shooter. As soon as he came to full anchor, his arrows were gone.



Traditional archery takes a lot of time and practice to become proficient. To stay sharp, the author targets small game when deer season is over.

There are many books written on shooting instinctive, controversial though they may be, I always go into a book with the mindset that I will use what knowledge I can and ignore the rest. Each individual will take different techniques from books that will help make them a better archer, no two archers are exactly the same. Bowhunter and writer G. Fred Asbell is very well known, and has written three books on Instinctive shooting. Not only do they cover the technique, but how to overcome flaws. These books in themselves prove that instinctive isn't something to be written off, or tossed aside as a thing of the past.

AIM SMALL

In the cold days of mid February, when everything is brown and barren, there aren't many things that make me as happy as rabbit hunting. That short

time after deer season, and before the first hints of spring in Southern Ohio, we chase bunnies. It is a lost art to some, and highly underrated. Little compares to the sound of a baying beagle on a fresh track right after a dusting of snow. Even without the beagles, it's hard to beat.

And, if you want to step up your game, you use a recurve. Simply put, rabbit hunting was invented for instinctive shooters...or maybe it's vice versa, it doesn't really matter. The two go hand in hand.

My beagle doesn't make a sound until she is right up on a rabbit, I often have to watch her tail as she works over the trails, her tail wagging faster as she gets closer. Once she starts bellowing, I know I'm about to see a white cottontail bouncing out of the brush. As quick as you see the rabbit, you have to draw and release. There is

no waiting around, or you'll miss your opportunity. It's a true test to hand and eye coordination as well as reflexes, and seeing the arrow connect always brings a sense of pride. Holding your bow at full draw until you see a rabbit is hardly a viable option, so shooting quickly will be the most rewarding.

Despite the fact that it is a debatable topic, I don't hesitate to claim myself an instinctive shooter. There have been many before me, and I'm sure there will be many more to follow. There is no perfect way to shoot a traditional bow, it's simply a matter of picking what works best for you as an individual.

— Beka Garris is a bowhunting fanatic from Ohio.



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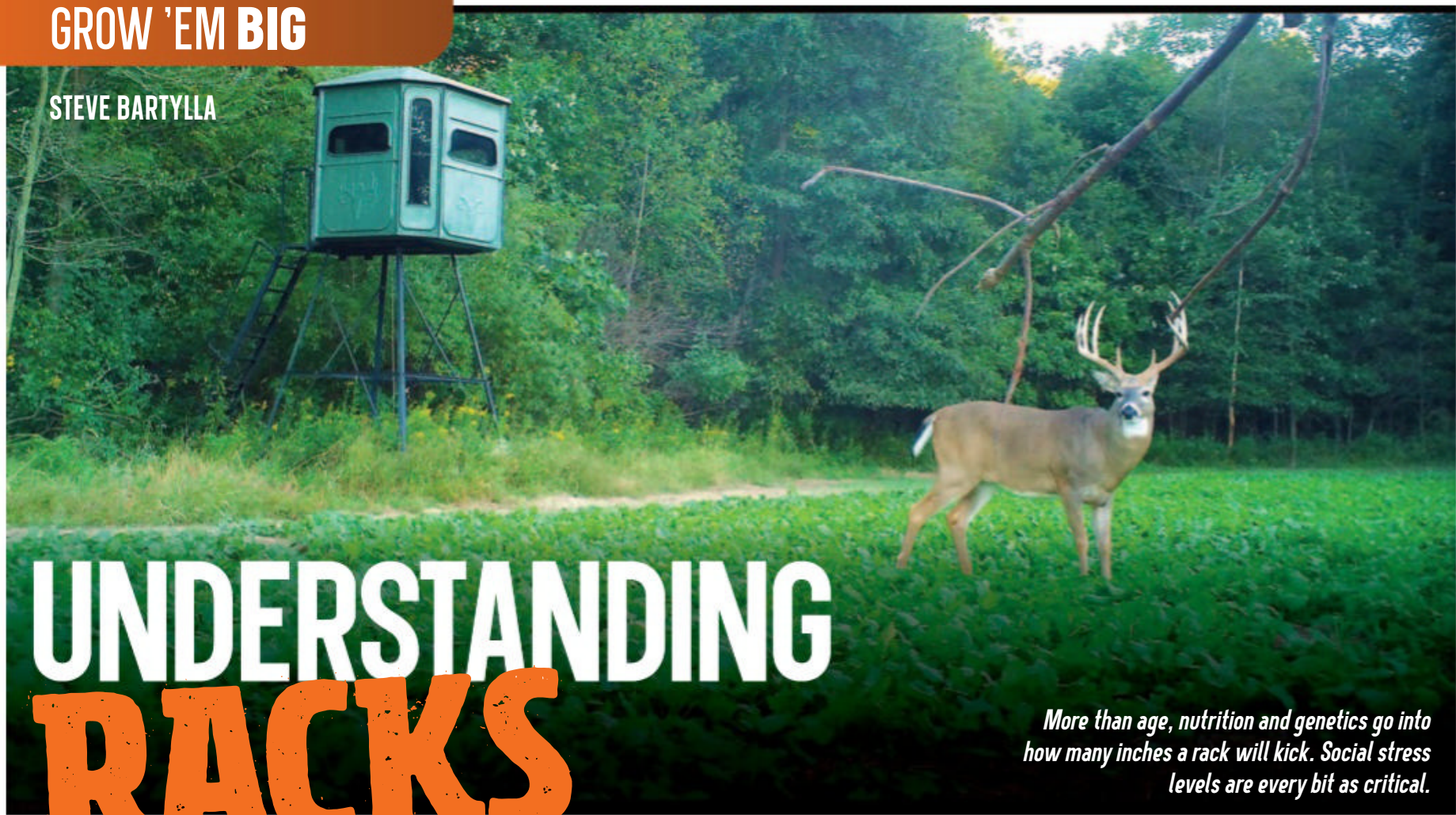


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STEVE BARTYLLA



UNDERSTANDING RACKS

More than age, nutrition and genetics go into how many inches a rack will kick. Social stress levels are every bit as critical.

Today, let's start talking antlers. Specifically, what tends to have the greatest impact on their development. "Let em go so they can grow," is a real snappy catch phrase. Unfortunately, as we'll eventually cover, it doesn't play out that way an awful lot of times for a bunch of reasons.

However, before we jump in, I must emphatically stress, none of this is meant to be a pro or anti QDM piece. What legal deer each of us chooses to shoot are personal choices and I personally find it extremely icky when others try to dictate our personal choices for us. They belong to us, as it is our hunt and passion, not anyone else's, and I mean that incredibly sincerely.

With that, let's jump in.

MAIN FACTORS

As we most all realize, genetics, age and nutrition are the three main reasons cited for producing quality head gear. Frankly, all three I've found to be legit and critical factors in growing impressive inches of antlers.

Age is easy to understand. There aren't many six foot grade schoolers in this world, just like there aren't many free range 1.5s that will break 140 inches. They simply need time to grow, just like human children.

Sticking to human analogies, we can understand genetics and nutrition easily enough, as well. Neither of my parent were overly tall. Because of that, my genetic cap on height is likely quite low. Unless I use unnaturally substances, I can never exceed the height that my genetic cap at birth dictates, but I sure can fall short.

That's where nutrition comes into play. If you feed a child nothing but french fries, I suspect they'd survive, but odds are their diet isn't nutritionally diverse enough to come close to reaching their physical potential. Same would

occur if we fed our child high quality food, but not in the quantities they need.

All of this is easy to grasp. So, all we need to do is let them live and be sure there's a surplus of quality nutrition and we'll allow our resident deer to achieve their full genetic potential.

Not so fast. We need to majorly slow that roll, here.

My experiences at attempting to manage free range deer have taught me that there is a fourth factor that's next to never discussed, but every bit as important as the other 3. That'd be overall stress levels. These can come from over hunting, being ran ragged by large predators and a host of other factors, but social stress levels within the deer herd does appear to easily be the most severe.

Social stress is a very big impactor on deer health and overall rack sizes. In areas where the deer numbers are well below carrying capacity, it becomes a more manageable issue. That said, in areas much over 50% carrying capacity, it can be a big deal. Get to somewhere over 75% and it can be impactful enough that racks often actually go down for a year or more, as they age, mainly due to the social stress of competing with so many bucks for such limited resources, which is far more than just food.

CONCLUSION

In the next issue, we'll be diving in deeper. That said, we need to understand that three reasons we're given for rack sizes is missing an equally big one and that letting them go doesn't mean they'll be bigger next year. A whole bunch won't be in a whole bunch of settings. Understanding all that allows for better decision making on our parts.



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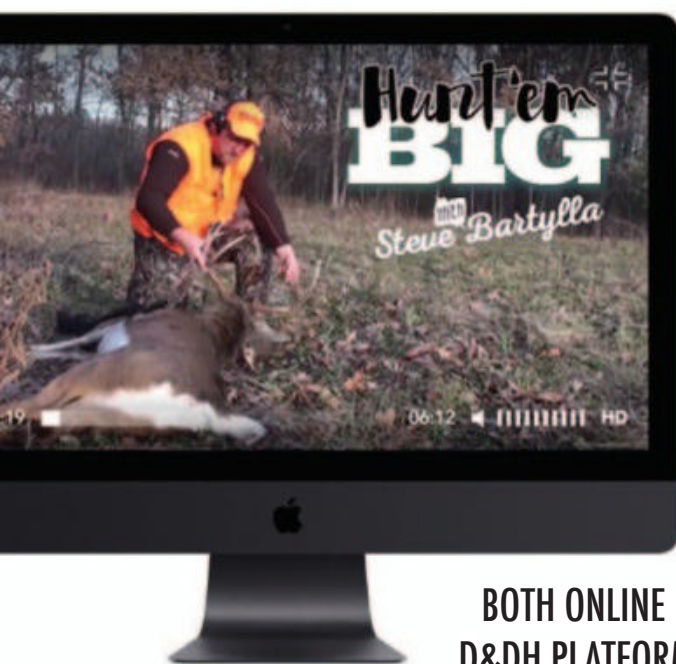
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WHO WISHES THEY WERE 20 FEET UP IN A TREE HUNTING TODAY? #WEAREPURSUIT

JAY STEELE: 26 feet up wind blowing about 20 mph in Tennessee.

Donny Farabaugh: Sure as hell beats being at the VA, good luck out there peeps.

J.R. WATSON: I'm 8 feet up in a shooting house but it's HOT in Louisiana!

WADE MIDDLETON: J.R.

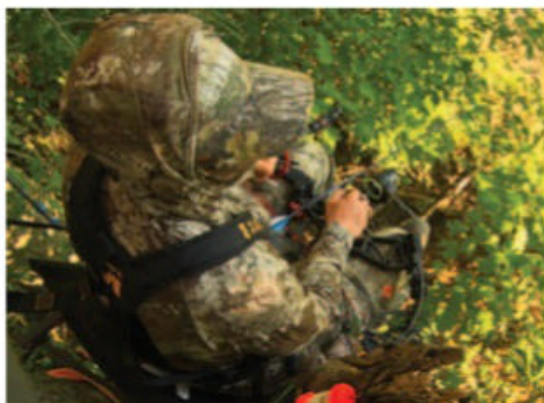
Watson good luck!

COREY JONES: First time in a tree blind this year, thought this is pretty cool, kinda trendy, then a pair of deer walked out of the brush with no clue I was there. Needless to say, I filled my tag with one perfectly placed shot.

RODNEY PEACOCK: Will be in two days!

RICK WOJTKOWIAK: Not me. I don't hunt in trees anymore.

RYAN BUJAK: Rainy and 40 mph winds in Wisconsin.



Congrats to Mark Kayser on this giant buck! Whether you're in camp or not this weekend, you can join Mark, Dan and crew for Deer & Deer Hunting's Saturday Night Deer Camp.

It starts at 10 p.m. ET every Saturday night. The four-show lineup includes Deer & Deer Hunting TV, Deer Tech TV, Land of Whitetail and DeerTopia. It'll send you to bed dreaming of big bucks like this one!

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WADE MIDDLETON: Congrats

RUSTY FAULK: Nice!!!

Congrats!

ALICIA COLE-COOK: Congratulations

CHUCK HARTLEY: WTG!



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PURSUIT CHANNEL ADDS MORE DISTRIBUTION

Pursuit Media, LLC has announced a new partnership with FreeCast's SelectTV, that adds Pursuit Channel to their Smartguide line up.

Pursuit Media LLC and FreeCast have reached an agreement that will bring the popular outdoor network, Pursuit Channel, to SelectTV's SmartGuide. The aggregated streaming service has been rapidly adding Free Ad-Supported Television (FAST) channels, creating a digital dial of channels to rival even large cable packages. These linear channels are paired with thousands of on-demand shows and movies, as well as the ability to integrate other subscription video services, to create a one-stop shop for streaming.

Catering to the outdoor community and America's heartland, the Pursuit Channel features programming related to hunting, fishing and shooting. Created in 2007, the channel is currently carried by several major cable and satellite TV providers and enjoys a strong following on several OTT platforms as well.

"This is such a tremendous opportunity for Pursuit Channel" said Rusty Faulk, Founder and CEO of Pursuit Media. "We are so proud of our network and all of our programming partners that help us promote conservation and celebrate the outdoors lifestyle that we love so dearly. Being a part of SelectTV's amazing platform to reach even more people with our message is truly a blessing," he added.

FreeCast's Executive Vice President of Digital Content and Channel Distribution, Tracy West, discussed the addition of the channel to SelectTV: "We know our customers enjoy outdoor channels and shows. Adding the Pursuit Channel to our already strong outdoor line-up is a great addition."



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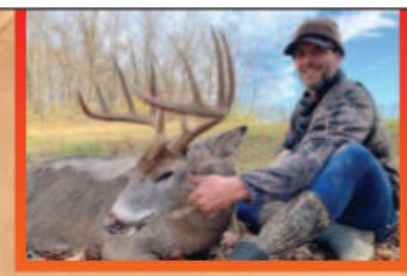
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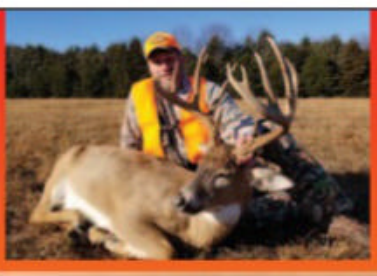
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(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 80)

Here is how the elephant trumpets.

Imagine a social media post where a wild doe has jumped off course into a rural backyard somewhere in Michigan, and you cannot peel your eyes from its merriment as it is videoed galloping about in a fervent game of chase with the hound that lives there. How long will it take, do you think, for someone to predictably comment, "How can people kill such wonderful and beautiful creatures?" thereby dragging an otherwise enrapturing video to the dirt to be mangled by an emotional aggregation tyrannizing hunters?

But what if a similarly endearing video went viral; say a video in which a toddler attempts to manage his first hotdog but makes such a gleeful mess you would have to "laugh-out-loud"? Would you expect any outcry

in the comment section? Why not? Wouldn't such conclusive evidence of a human being fed meat from a slaughtered animal warrant the same angst as a hound playing with a deer somehow ignites an essay about hunting?

I speak as a man in constant harmony with a hound lazing on the sofa. I love hounds to no end. But when you open my freezer there is venison. To whom should I apologize? As a human I am absolutely in synch. Some animals are born to lounge on furniture and perch upon window sills, some are born in pastures, barns or pens, and others are born in dens, vast grasslands, swamps, nests or holes in the ground. All are born to be responsibly governed by humans — and our first order of business is to weed out naivety.

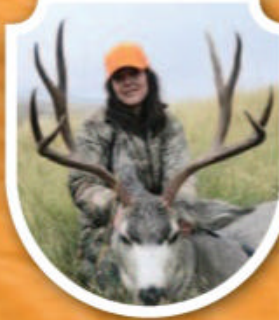
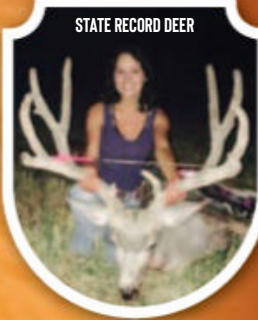
I saw it put best by a grizzled old hunter in some magazine or book years ago, and it was not one bit hard to sense his frustration.

His "explanation" when pressed went simply: "I eat meat and want to kill some of it myself." It is perhaps the most surgical sentence ever recorded to expose the daftness required to oppose hunting. While it should never be demanded of humans to hunt and kill some of their own meat, in fact, choose not to eat meat at all if you say so, it should remain equally fixed that humans stay forbidden to leverage their own peculiarities. Humans are born omnivores, implying meat eating so implying predation. While the desire to hunt remains solidly centered within the parameters of normal human behavior, the act of opposing it does not. Eating meat and wanting to kill some of it yourself is as honest as human behavior gets.

Structured hunting of wild animals is not a bloodbath, it is not a massacre, it is not murder, and it is certainly not a celebration of any of those; it is a parring with nature done as

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best as we know how. That we consistently adjust our approach, that we perpetually advance the conversation to meet changes in conservation on one hand and society on the other are examples of employing intellect. On the other side of the coin, critics repetitively shrieking in hysteria about animals dying, as if that depicts an honest assessment of hunting, are brandishing nothing but emotional ire.

So when critics leap from the woodwork screeching, "How

could you — how could you?" be slow to trust what they know. America is sadly caving to an increasing sociological dumbing of accountability wherein those who hastily accuse hunters to be deranged are the same ones exonerating themselves as having nothing to do with animals dying as long as they don't personally pull the trigger. To call them short-sighted is not mean, it is unavoidable.

It is rudimentary that hunting satisfies an honest role in nature.

We who hunt share a common urge to exercise a natural relationship with wild animals and no further explanation is required. It is an honest role in nature, not a perversion, when a hunter takes up the chase. Regardless of who pulls what trigger, humans remain universally attached to the reason animals die. No human is exempt, regardless of how peaceful some might champion themselves to be.

Laws put forth regarding treatment of animals are made prudently, and there is no question that humans seek to treat animals sensibly. Most of us are not evil. For those who have decided to hunt, and especially youngsters chomping at the bit to reach the age to get started, your urge to walk in step with nature's order should serve you a lifetime. When you wind up old and gray but with a heart still young for the chase, and you glance back at eager faces and honest hearts advancing in your own footsteps, you will exit what we old-timers have learned to call a trail lined with decency. Along your way, know to anticipate frugal intrusions, and know, whenever mandated, to do your part in keeping it clear that the elephant in the room has no business lurking there. Mother Goose and Mother Nature are distinctly different mothers. Never take a backseat in defending the difference. Hunters live on the correct side of that equation and although we needn't be overly nasty about it, we absolutely owe it to ourselves to educate our critics in whatever manner it takes to keep the knees of the elephant in the room buckled.



THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

I hesitate to get political, I doubt I'm the best at it, but I feel OK here among friends where any hunter should agree to become practiced in contesting what could be called the elephant in the room. Left unchallenged, this elephant pesters away until, heaven forbid, one might envision solving it with a baseball bat — a solution I am sometimes inclined to vote yes on. It consists of critics who conveniently marginalize hunting as an all or nothing tug-of-war in which one side celebrates death while the other condemns it. Convinced to have concisely diminished hunting in that manner, they feel quite good about themselves to condemn death, but their hysteria is hushed whenever more sensible humans enter the debate.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 78)



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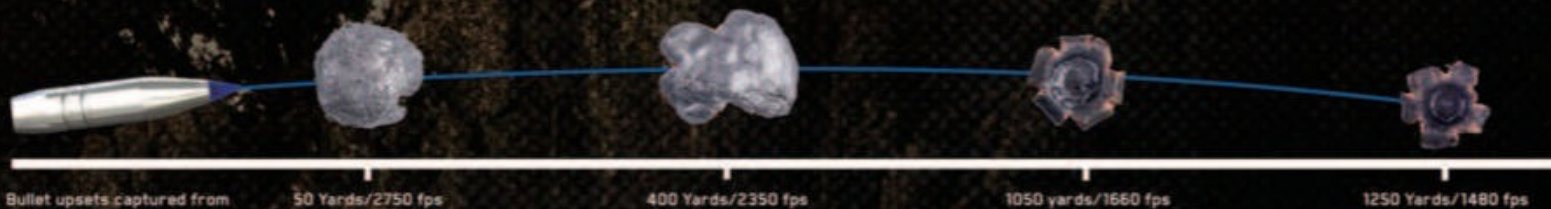
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