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DEER & HUNTING

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LEADING OFF





Never underestimate the athletic ability – and agility – of a mature white-tailed buck. This South Texas giant could have easily jumped over the fence, but he chose a lower route.

BOB ZAIGLIN

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Food plots and habitat work can do wonders for a property, but don't forget about the drawing power of a good fruit orchard. Planning is the key to orchard success. Maximize your efforts with the expert insights of Don Higgins in his article in this issue.

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EDITOR'S STUMP

DANIEL E. SCHMIDT

The VENISON TRAIL

WIKIPEDIA COMMONS

We all love venison, but these famed explorers took it to gut-busting extremes. How extreme? How does 6,500 calories a day sound?

Not much is known about the specific deer hunting exploits of famed explorers Lewis & Clark's team, but what we do know is they loved venison. That might be due to its great flavor, or it might be because, well, meat's meat and a man's gotta eat. And when you're lugging boats and supplies around the wilderness, well, you burn a lot of calories.

Their expedition started on May 14, 1804, when they left Wood River, Illinois. Their final stop was an area near what is now Astoria, Oregon. The entire trip took a little more than 28 months. They returned on Sept. 23, 1806, completing the nation's most famous Corps of Discovery Expedition.

The team consisted of Lewis, Clark and 31 other men. It was a grueling trip, but only one man died — Sgt. Floyd who passed early in the expedition from a burst appendix while the crew was traveling through Sioux City, Iowa.

According to Clark, the men loved whitetail venison (and presumably mule deer as well) as they traversed the 3,700 miles in boats and on foot.

"We eat an emensity of meat," Clark wrote, adding that a day's

food requirement — just 24 hours — required a successful hunt consisting of four whole deer; or one whole elk and one deer; or one whole buffalo. When game animals were plentiful, each man would eat up to 9 pounds of meat per day.

Venison was boiled, fried and made into jerky, but a favorite supper was simply to grill it fresh over red-hot oak coals.

Granted, the explorers found protein in fish and fowl along the way, but it's reasonable to assume the crew shot, butchered, and ate nearly a thousand deer along the way, which would have included whitetails, blacktails and mule deer. They were already familiar with whitetails, but everything else would have been new to them. They reported 172 "new" species, including pronghorn antelope, prairie dogs, bison, moose, elk, brown bears, and "jackass" rabbits (because of their long, donkey-like ears).

The trip took them through Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon.

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That excitement made my day. Great job!

RON FOURNIER: Yup! Just getting out there is half the fun! Tagging out is the icing on the cake regardless of how big or how small.

JEFF LOPER: I never apologize for putting meat in the freezer.

RANDY JOHNSON: Hey, it's all about those backstraps!

LORAIN ROBERTS:

Hooked for life and that's a good thing.

LARRY KINDLER: It only gets better !!!



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Deer & Deer Hunting salutes Wyoming's Moe Dampman on his lifelong dedication to the hunting lifestyle. Moe shot his first buck in 1957, and he's still going strong today, sharing many hunts with his son, Ralph, and family in the northeast corner of the Cowboy State. Here's to many more years of success!

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MOE DAMPMAN

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BLIND KENTUCKY HUNTER

*has
New Lease
on Life*

JOE SHEAD

Like a lot of guys living in rural Kentucky, hunting is life for Pascal Benson of Robards. From turkeys and deer to squirrels and rabbits, Benson, 83, has probably hunted it. He had a real passion for waterfowl hunting, owning a goose pit for many years.

Now imagine if changes in your body slowly took away something that you loved. That's what happened to Pascal.

"It started sneaking up on him," said Pascal's son, Tracy.



Pascal developed a condition known as optic neuropathy. At first it affected his peripheral vision, but he could still see objects in the center of his field of vision. Over time, the areas he couldn't see closed in on him, giving him just a small window of vision at the center.

"What he was seeing was like looking through a drinking straw," Tracy said.

About 10 years ago, he went totally blind.

"Now he has one of those red-and-white canes," Tracy said. "That's his eyes now."

Losing his vision was obviously a life-changing experience. Pascal lost his independence. He could no longer teach driver's education, which he had done for well over three decades. And he could no longer hunt. A real blow came in December of 2019.

"He went in the hospital with heart problems," Tracy recalled. "They said he needed a pacemaker. He said, 'I can't do nothing anymore, just let me go.'"

Pascal was at the end of his rope. He didn't want a pacemaker to keep him alive, given that he could no longer do the things he loved because of his blindness.

Tracy was understanding, but he wasn't about to watch his father lose his life.

"We started talking about it one night," Tracy said. "He said if he could still do something, he'd let them put it (the pacemaker) in."

"What do you want to do?" Tracy asked.

"Go hunting," Pascal replied.

That was no small request. But Tracy figured if that's what it would take to save his father's life, he would do it.

Tracy bought a Tactacam and mounted it like a scope. He's used it on his father's crossbow, shotgun and rifle. The red-dot scope pairs to Tracy's iPad. Once Tracy spots game, Tracy sits beside his father, monitoring the field of view on his iPad. Pascal's gun or crossbow sits on a special rest. Tracy instructs him to move left or right and up and down. When Pascal is on target, Tracy tells him to shoot.

"I actually mount his camera right where you would mount the scope," Tracy said. "Then I can look right down the barrel and I can see exactly what the scope is seeing. It's totally his shot. He's just got to listen to me."

In 2020, Pascal tried turkey hunting. A gobbler hung up on him and he tried a long shot but missed. He still got to enjoy a lot of the experience.

"He could hear him gobbling all the way in," Tracy said.

That fall, while deer hunting, five toms walked to within 15 yards and Pascal just missed.

He finally connected on a jake in the spring of 2021.

"I had him set up with a shotgun," Tracy said. "There were hens in the field, then two jakes joined. I hit the call a couple times and I had him lined up on one and he smoked it. We were high-fiving and jumping up and down!"

It was an incredible moment for a father and son who had hunted together for decades. But fast forward to gun deer season and things were about to get better.

"Opening day I was praying, 'Just let us see something,'" Tracy said.

Taking Pascal out hunting is no small task.

"We go out way before daylight," Tracy said. "I have

to drive him in with the UTV, then go park it. It takes a while to get set up and then we need to have enough light so the camera can see."

To take a shot, the animal has to stand still long enough for Pascal to line up on the target, allow Tracy to relay the information and then give Pascal time to take the shot. To further complicate matters, Pascal gets cold these days, even with a heater in the blind, so they can only hunt for a couple hours.

But on opening day, the stars aligned.

"Dad was ready to go," Tracy said. "I just happened to look out the window and said, 'There's a deer in the field.' It stopped at 55 yards. The deer could hear us talking. I finally got Dad lined up and said, 'Ok, you can pull the trigger.'"

Pascal fired his .243 and the deer disappeared. Tracy decided if he checked the video, he'd be able to see if the shot was on target, but unfortunately he forgot to record the video. So Tracy waited 15 minutes, then got out of the blind to look for the deer.

"Of course, he's yelling at me the whole time," Tracy said.

"Find any blood?" Pascal yelled.

"Nope, I didn't find any blood, but I found the whole deer," his son replied.

Tracy returned to his father and escorted him to the fallen 6-pointer.

Pascal immediately reached down to feel the deer.

"He started at the nose and the antlers and went down the neck and felt the whole deer. He wanted a mental picture of that deer," Tracy said.

"We were having a ball with it!" Tracy said. "It was just a little 6-pointer, but to him it was a monster."

It was more than a small buck. It was a life-changing experience.

"He went from talking about, 'Hey, get my coffin ready,' to 'Are you seeing any deer?'" Tracy said.

Tracy had the buck mounted and he made the deer into sausage.

"Dad loves to give away the sausage rolls," Tracy said. "He says, 'Yup, shot this deer when I was totally blind!'"

Hunting has given Pascal a reason to keep going. And he did get that pacemaker.

"It's probably added a little bit to his life," Tracy said.

It's been great fun for Tracy as well. Tracy monitors trail cameras and was chasing a big 12-pointer that stayed nocturnal during hunting season. But he's not disappointed he didn't bag the big buck.

"It's actually been more fun to me than if I'm out there hunting by myself," he said. "Just to see his face makes it all worth it."

As a board member of the state National Wild Turkey Federation, Tracy has taken a lot of kids hunting and feels very rewarded by the experience. Now that he has the equipment, he hopes he can take other blind hunters in the field, particularly Wounded Warriors.



DEER & DEER HUNTING

ALAN CLEMONS

notebook



Michigan Man Gets Prison For Poaching 9 Bucks

Justin Ernst, 33, of Decatur, Michigan, reached a plea agreement that included prison time and restitution for killing nine trophy bucks, felony firearms possession and other charges, according to officials with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

Ernst pleaded guilty in Van Buren County's 36th Circuit Court. A plea agreement resulted in a sentence of **18 months to 5 years** in a Michigan Department of Corrections facility, forfeiture of all seized items, **\$25,000** reimbursement and a lifetime hunting ban. The investigation began due to a domestic violence complaint. "We're satisfied this criminal will be imprisoned for robbing ethical hunters, damaging crops and endangering others by recklessly driving through fields and shooting deer at night," said

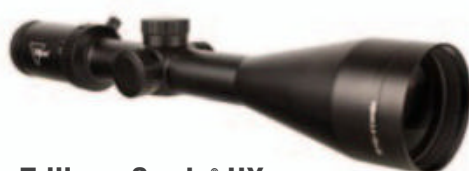
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David Shaw, assistant chief of the Michigan DNR Law Enforcement Division.

According to the DNR, on Oct. 17, 2021, Michigan State Police troopers were investigating Ernst's involvement in a domestic violence complaint. State police contacted DNR conservation officers after seeing several deer in a nearby barn where Ernst reportedly spent a significant amount of time. Conservation officers investigated and seized eight illegal bucks in the barn – five 10-pointers and three with eight points each.

Two days later, an anonymous tip to the DNR's Report All Poaching hotline stated that Ernst had

killed another deer. Conservation officers confirmed Ernst had killed another trophy buck – increasing his total to nine illegally taken deer.

Ernst pleaded guilty to:

- **Felon in possession of a firearm (one count).**
- **Obtaining a hunting license when ineligible (one count).**
- **Illegal taking/possessing whitetail deer (three counts).**

"We hope this serious sentence serves its intended purpose and are grateful for the strong message rendered by the 36th Circuit Court," Shaw added.

Bowhunters Win Case Against Long Island Town Banning Archery Equipment

A deer hunting group received a favorable ruling from the New York Court of Appeals in its lawsuit against a Long Island town that claimed bows and arrows could be defined as firearms and prohibited within its boundaries with limited exceptions.

Hunters for Deer (HFD) sued the Town of Smithtown on Long Island after town officials defined bows and archery equipment as firearms. The group and town have been at odds for years. In 2020, after reported complaints about hunting tree stands appearing on properties within 500 feet of homes, Smithtown officials announced that "With regards to the Ordinance Regulating the Discharge of Firearms in the Town of Smithtown, Chapter 160 of the Smithtown Code, the use of a bow and arrow within 500 feet of a home is strictly prohibited - unless the use is on one's own property or upon another's property with written consent of the owner."

The inclusion and definition of bows as "firearms" merited another lawsuit from HFD. The case moved through lower courts before ultimately reaching the Court of Appeals, the state's highest court. In February 2022 it denied the Town's attempt at that definition. The court cited Black's Law Dictionary, Ballentine's Law Dictionary and Penal Law for common definitions of a bow.

The ruling stated that "While the term 'firearm' is undefined in the Town Law, construing it in accordance with its 'usual and commonly understood meaning' (Yaniveth R. v LTD Realty Co., 27 NY3d 186, 192 [2016] ... the term 'firearm' does not encompass a 'bow' ... and we are unpersuaded that the Legislature intended otherwise when it used the term in the Town Law. Accordingly, Town Law § 130 (27) does not authorize Smithtown to regulate the discharge of bows." The court also said that, in the lower Supreme Court and the Appellate Division, Smithtown had "effectively conceded that, absent specific authority under Town Law § 130 (27), the Town Code provision would be invalid. Thus, Smithtown cannot now assert a contrary argument before us."

"We are pleased that the Court of Appeal vindicated our position that licensed deer hunters are entitled to take deer by bow, pursuant to state law, and thank the DEC for their amicus brief in this case," said John Armentano, Vice President of HFD, told Smithtown Matters. In a statement, HFD also said, "Smithtown's ordinance sought to circumvent the State's Environmental Conservation Law, which regulates the safe setback distances for long bows, by perverting the Town's right to regulate firearms to include 'bows' and 'slingshots.' If the Town's position was upheld, municipalities state-wide could outlaw hunting in their jurisdiction. The stakes could not have been higher."

Maine Hunters Kill Most Deer in 53 Years

Maine hunters killed more deer during the **2021** season than any since **1968**, according to the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, with **38,920** reported on the state's Big Game Harvest

Dashboard. That is **5,800** more than he **2020** season and the most in **53** years when hunters killed **41,080** deer.

"In order to harvest a lot of deer, there must exist a lot of deer to be harvested. Similarly, there must be a lot of hunters on the landscape to do the

harvesting,” MDIFW biologist Nathan Bieber told the Bangor Daily News. “The amount of available opportunity certainly factors in as well. With a lot of permits available to harvest does, especially bonus permits allowing hunters to take an antlerless deer and then continue to buck hunt, we’re hoping to see significantly more antlerless harvest.”

Louisiana Leans on Kids to Generate More Revenue for Wildlife Management

Louisiana hunters under the age of 18 are now required to have a “Youth License” to be able to hunt deer and turkeys, according to the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. The change goes into effect **June 1, 2022** and is mandatory for all youth hunters other than those with a lifetime license. It costs **\$5** and includes tags for both species.

The agency says the addition of the license is to reap more money from the federal excise tax allotment given annually to states. The amount is based on the number of licensed hunters. The mandate was included in a legislative bill that passed, but many hunters did not know about the youth license being included.

“The number we used in the fiscal note was an estimated **10,000** new hunters,” LDWF Undersecretary for Management and Finance Bryan McClinton told Louisiana Sportsman. “That would generate approximately **\$350,000** more in federal wildlife restoration funding. Louisiana averages about **\$35** per licensed hunter.”

The department gave out **153,910** any-deer permits last season as it continues attempts to control the population. The **2021** total was the **8th** highest since the state began recording data in **1919**. The top season for whitetail harvest was **1959**, with **41,735** deer killed.

Young hunters sitting in a stand with friends or family without a gun and no intent to hunt do not need the

license, McClinton said. The new license does not affect fishermen, either.



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COMING SUMMER 2022

SPYPOINT

HOW MANY, HOW MUCH, AND WHERE?

THE CASE FOR MONITORING DEER AND DEER IMPACT

Most deer hunters hunt on the land of others, be they public lands such as national and state forests, community watersheds, and parks and recreational areas or on private lands such as timber companies or individually-owned family forests. Very few hunters own forestland to hunt on. And all, to varying extent, want to know how many deer there and where they are on these forestlands. Monitoring provides the answers.



Monitoring deer has an entirely different meaning for owners and managers of the forestlands hunters use for deer hunting. These people have their own set of questions. Like hunters, they want to know how many deer there are, and where they are, but their goals for deer management differ from those of hunters. Landowners and managers monitor deer density and impact on forest resources to help them determine whether their deer management is helping achieve their goals for managing forest resources including deer. They are concerned there may be too many rather than too few deer, and they are far more concerned about the negative impact of deer on their forest resources than on the quantity or quality of deer.

Too many deer may mean landowners/managers will be less able produce valuable timber for harvest on a sustainable basis, and such properties may be less valuable. If enhancing biodiversity is a goal, too many deer will degrade vegetation and habitats which meet the basic requirements for other wildlife, resulting in fewer species, and lower overall wildlife abundance.

Why should deer hunters care about monitoring deer impact? Because it provides a way for them to understand how and why deer are managed on the forestlands of others and to interact positively with the landowners/managers of these forestlands.

Monitoring provides the data for answering hunters' and managers' concerns and questions. Collection of monitoring data involves the what, the where, the when, the how, and the by whom. Follow-up actions of analyzing and interpreting monitoring data produce the answers. Hunters and managers alike can benefit and learn from monitoring programs.

So, what is it that should be monitored, how is it to be done, what information is collected and by whom, and how is it analyzed and interpreted? An aligned question is—how can hunters become involved in monitoring in ways that benefit themselves and the owners of the lands they hunt?

ESTIMATING DEER DENSITY

There are many techniques available for estimating deer numbers and locations. Some are quite expensive, some are highly appealing (especially to hunters), and some are highly technical. In the end, however, the best technique is the one that is most reliable, most representative, easiest to use, least expensive, and with minimal requirement for special equipment. It is also one hunters can perform with little training or expertise with gadgetry.

What should a deer density monitoring technique do/provide? First, it must produce quantitative data such as total deer, or deer per square mile, rather than a few, just right, or lots. It must be accurate, meaning that it must closely estimate actual deer numbers. It must be representative, meaning that it samples an entire area including areas where deer feed, where they bed, where they seek cover, and where they travel between these habitat areas, and must reflect a season of occupancy by deer, rather than a one-day snapshot in time. And, it should be within cost limitations and abilities of typical hunters and landowners. There are many techniques, but only two techniques meet all requirement.

DEER DRIVES

The oldest technique is the deer drive which has been around for at least 100 years. The requirements are for: **1)** a fairly small area, perhaps one or two square miles at most; **2)** clearly identified boundaries to deer movement, such as a deer-proof fencing or roads or bodies of water such as a river, time of year when leaves are off; **3)** low vegetation such as shrubs and tree seedlings and deer visibility is high (helps to have a light covering of snow, but too much snow depth makes human foot travel difficult); and, **4)** a large number of people to count deer (100+). In a deer drive counters line up at 50 foot intervals along one boundary of the property and slowly walk to the other end, counting deer that run back past them. Counters are also lined up at the other end of the property and

along the sides to count deer that exit the area. If the area is enclosed by a deer-proof fence, most if not all of the deer are counted and these counts represent deer resident on the area full time rather than unsatisfactory snapshot in time frames of most techniques where the day deer are counted may not be representative of annual or seasonal density.

Minimal equipment is required, but the large number of counters required, and the time to set up and conduct the count can be extensive (and expensive). The area so counted must have clearly defined broad and completely open boundaries (roads and bodies of water such as rivers and lakes) where deer exiting the counted area are seen and counted

Deer drives can be performed only on small properties as the logistics and number of counters required excludes areas much larger than 600-1,000 acres. And, drive counts do not distinguish areas within a property where deer are most often found.

PELLET-GROUP COUNTS

Developed in the mid-50s, the pellet group technique relies on the assumption that deer poop out a uniform number of pellet groups every day regardless of the sex or age of deer or time of year. Pellet groups are similar in appearance but individual groups are identifiably different.

Researchers in Georgia identified that number as 15 pellet groups per deer per day. Turns out that number is spot-on. By counting number of deer pellet groups within plots along transects laid out across forested properties, managers can use a simple calculation to accurately and precisely estimate deer density within a forested landscape during the late fall-late spring period (so, unlike other methods they are not snapshot in time).

Briefly, circular plots 8 feet in diameter are located at 100 foot intervals along parallel transect lines spaced 1,000 feet apart over a forested landscape. Counters record the number of pellet groups detected within these plots (some

plots contain more than one pellet group, most are devoid of pellet groups) in spring after snow melt and pellet groups are visible but before spring and summer fern growth completely covers pellet groups, seedlings, and wildflowers. A simple calculation converts counts of pellet groups into deer per square mile.

Accuracy and precision of the pellet group technique was evaluated by comparing the estimate obtained from the pellet group count within a deer-fenced area with actual number of deer counted in spring deer drives (data collected from two different years). In both years deer density from pellet group counts was within 1-2 deer from the deer drive. Density estimates derived from pellet group counts were compared with estimates from aerial counts over two large separate areas (about 15 square miles each): aerial counts recorded 85-90% of numbers of deer from pellet group counts which agreed with the rule of thumb that aerial counts detect 80-90% of deer within a surveyed area.

Collection of deer density data from pellet group counts requires minimal equipment, minimal time (a one-person crew can count pellet groups along 5 one mile-long transect lines in a single day (or, a crew of 5 counters can count pellet groups along 5 transects one mile long in about 2 hours). In addition to low cost of equipment per counter, only costs are for reimbursement costs of observer time and cost of fuel to transport observers to and from surveyed sites. Recording, analyzing, and interpreting pellet group data is minimal and requires only a hand-held calculator. Pellet group counts are not a snapshot-in-time technique but rather accurately reflect deer density over seasons rather than one-day methods.

OTHER DENSITY TECHNIQUES

Other techniques for estimating deer density are attractive but are too expensive, or require unreliable gadgetry, or plain don't work. **Aerial flights with fixed-wing aircraft or helicopters** which count deer on transects flown over

entire area are very expensive, require snow cover and minimal tree cover for optimal visibility of deer, are restricted to large areas (hundreds to thousands of acres), are snapshot in time (only count deer on day of flight and may miss many if deer not on site that day), and generally only count about 80% of all deer. **Drones** are as unreliable as manned aerial flights and can be used only for small areas (hard to fly straight transects remotely). **Trail cams** attract deer to baited areas and do not cover areas representatively and may overestimate deer. They also require ability to differentiate among different deer so the same deer are not counted more than once. They do provide evidence of trophy deer and estimates of ratios of does to bucks and fawns. **Roadside/trail counts** are conducted along routes (roads and trails) where observers drive/walk slowly, counting deer they see and estimating the distance to deer spotted. Sighting distance is affected by density of vegetation and complicated formulas are needed to convert number of deer seen to actual number. These estimates are also snapshot in time and may not be representative of actual deer numbers.

The pellet group technique has a unique characteristic endearing it to landowners/managers: it can be used to collect deer impact data at the same time and on the same plots used for estimating deer impact on tree seedlings, thus killing two birds with one stone. Which leads to a discussion of methods for estimating deer impact on forest resources.

ESTIMATING DEER IMPACT

Techniques for estimating deer impact on forest resources should collect data specific to affected resources, including germination and survival of seedlings of desired tree species for timber production and wildlife habitat (such as nut-bearing trees) and habitat structural layers as habitat components for wildlife (ground cover, shrub cover, sapling pole thickets for hiding cover, and overstory trees) including plant

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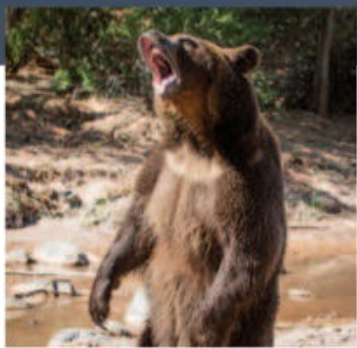
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It was a perfect late autumn day in the northern Rockies. Not a cloud in the sky, and just enough cool in the air to stir up nostalgic memories of my trip into the backwoods. This year, though, was different. I was going it solo. My two buddies, pleading work

responsibilities, backed out at the last minute. So, armed with my trusty knife, I set out for adventure.

Well, what I found was a whole lot of trouble. As in 8 feet and 800-pounds of trouble in the form of a grizzly bear. Seems this grumpy fella was out looking for some adventure too. Mr. Grizzly saw me, stood up to his entire 8 feet of ferocity and let out a roar that made my blood turn to ice and my hair stand up. Unsnapping my leather sheath, I felt for my hefty, trusty knife and felt emboldened. I then showed the massive grizzly over 6 inches of 420 surgical grade stainless steel, raised my hands and yelled, "Whoa bear! Whoa bear!" I must have made my point, as he gave me an almost admiring grunt before turning tail and heading back into the woods.

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I was pretty shaken, but otherwise fine. Once the adrenaline high subsided, I decided I had some work to do back home too. That was more than enough adventure for one day.

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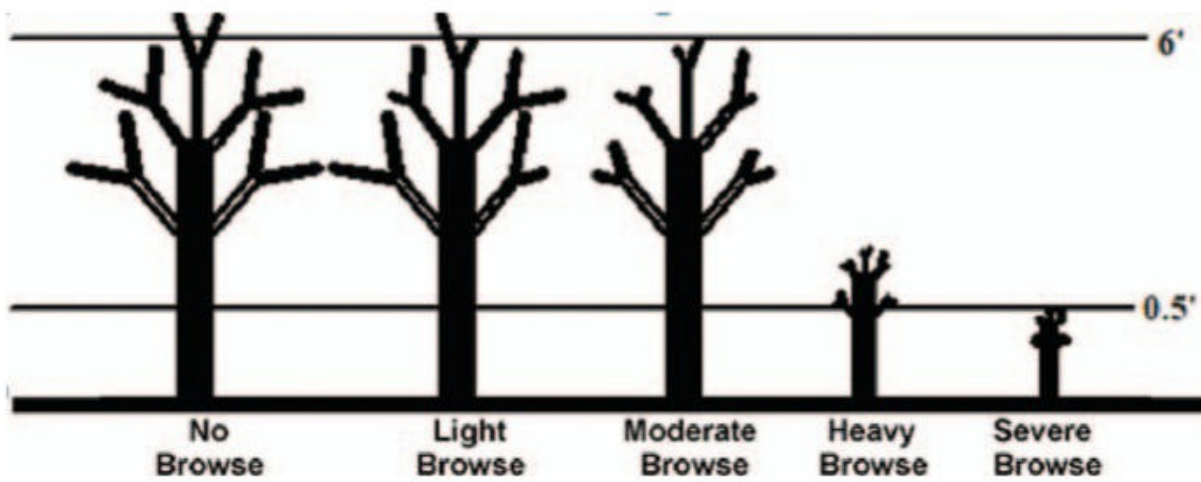


Figure 3. Portrayal of five levels of deer browse on seedlings.

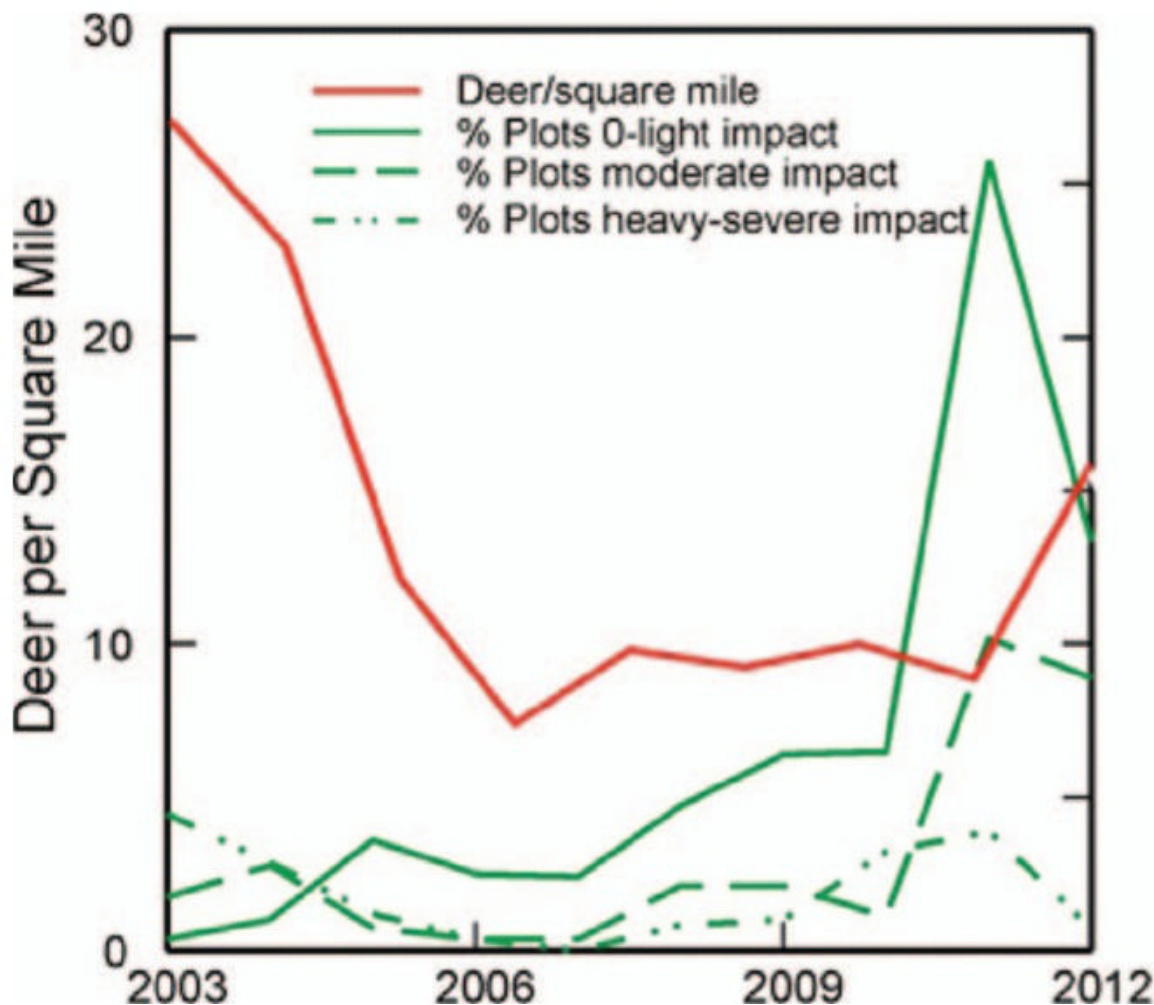


Figure 4. Relationship between deer density and level of deer impact on red maple seedlings.

species specific to habitat layers (wildflowers and grasses, shrubs, and trees).

IMPACT ON TREE SEEDLINGS

This method evaluates deer impact by assessing deer browsing damage on individual seedlings of identified tree species within plots. One or two species of high preference by deer (e.g., oak and red maple seedlings), medium preference (birches and black cherry), and low preference (beech, and striped maple) are selected for evaluation (selected species will vary, depending on species present within the area of study). Five levels of deer impact are assigned for seedlings less than 6 feet tall (exposed to deer browsing)

: **1)** no impact—no seedling twigs are browsed; **2)** low impact—less than half of twigs are browsed; **3)** moderate impact—more than half of twigs are browsed but seedling is not hedged; **4)** heavy impact—more than half of twigs are browsed and seedlings are hedged but taller than 6 inches; and, **5)** severe impact—more than half of twigs are browsed and seedlings are severely hedged and are less than 6 inches tall (see Fig. 3 for examples of deer impact level).

Deer impact data are collected at the same time and on the same pellet group plots used for assessing deer density, providing considerable savings of time, travel, and money. Within each plot, impact level for

each indicator seedling species is assessed (on some plots there will be no indicator species for assessment) and summarized over plots for areas monitored for deer density and impact. The relationship between deer density and impact is clear, indicating that pellet group counts and impact assessment are good measures of what landowners/managers want - reducing deer density reduces impact on tree regeneration. For example, on a 113 square mile demonstration forested area over a 9-year period, as deer density declined, impact levels on red maple seedlings (a preferred deer browse species) declined also (Fig. 4).

What about measuring deer impact on other forest resources such as wildlife species (e.g., songbirds, grouse and turkeys, rabbits, and reptiles and amphibians), wildlife habitat and plant species other than trees? Monitoring these forest resources calls for different methodologies requiring additional expenditures of labor and money.

Or, managers could rely on surrogate measures of deer impact. Years of research have shown that level of deer impact on the habitat of other resources is directly related to deer density and level of deer impact on tree seedlings (Table 1).

DOWN & DIRTY ASSESSMENT

Hunters can make quick and representative assessments of deer impact and density by walking transects in June through properties they hunt and noting abundance and impact level on forest vegetation. The transects should go through forested areas and through clearcuts or other openings because vegetation and deer impacts are different between areas with trees and areas recently opened by timber harvest or natural phenomenon such as wind shear or ice storms.

Appearance of two levels of deer impact (low and severe) is demonstrated by Figures 5a and 5b.

Landowners/managers who apply to state natural resource

DEER PER SQUARE MILE					
FOREST RESOURCE	5-10 NO IMPACT	10-15 SLIGHT IMPACT	15-20 MODERATE IMPACT	20-30 HIGH IMPACT	30+ SEVERE IMPACT
WILDFLOWERS	No impact	Less abundant lose some species	Many species gone	0 to few species	No species present
SHRUBS	No impact	Less abundant lose some species	Many species gone	0 to few species	No species present
SONGBIRDS	No impact	Less abundant, lose a few species	Some species gone, many less abundant	Many species missing, abundance in decline	More species missing, abundance low
GAMEBIRDS AND MAMMALS	No impact	Less abundant	Scarce	Some may be eliminated, rare	No longer present/ low abundance
SEEDLINGS OF DESIRED TREE SPECIES	No impact	Less abundant	Heavily browsed/eliminated	Eliminated	Eliminated
SEEDLINGS OF NON-DESIRED TREE SPECIES	No impact	No impact	Less abundant	Heavily browsed	Severely browsed/ eliminated
FERN COVER	Few ferns	Ferns widespread	Ferns begin to dominate understory	Understory mostly ferns	Ferns totally cover ground
DEER	No impact	No impact	Weigh less, antlers smaller	Scrawny, antler quality poor, fawn starvation	Low fawn production, starvation losses all ages

Table 1. Relationship between deer density and impact on forest resources (northeastern states).

agencies for permits for hunters to harvest more deer to reduce deer density on forestlands under their control must provide more quantitative data than that provided by the quick and dirty. They must rely on the pellet group technique to estimate deer density and on seedling impact assessments to justify the level of damage relief they are seeking.

Hunters can help forest landowners and managers by volunteering to participate in deer density and impact assessments described above. It takes minimal training to be able to collect density and impact data. Hunters who assist landowners/managers in this way can form meaningful partnerships with the landowners/managers and foster better relationships with them. They can see for themselves how much damage overabundant deer can cause to forest resources. And, walking through the woods in spring is a good way to find sheds.

Editor’s note: *Dave deCalesta* is co-editor of the book, **Deer Management for Forest Landowners and Managers**, which is available at www.amazon.com.



Figure 5a. Appearance of vegetation in forested areas at two levels of deer impact. Left image is forest at low deer impact (about 10 deer/square mile), right image is severe impact (more than 30 deer/square mile).



Figure 5b. Appearance of vegetation in open areas at two levels of deer impact. Left image is opening at low deer impact (about 10 deer/square mile), right image is severe impact (more than 30 deer/square mile).

Freelance HUNTING

IMPROVE YOUR ODDS FOR SUCCESS BY ADOPTING THIS AGGRESSIVE, TRANSIENT APPROACH. PLAIN AND SIMPLE: IT WORKS!

Grabbing my bow, backpack and freelance pack I set off through the public land timber to a patch of white oaks I'd hunted the previous season. To my disappointment none of the oaks had acorns, the two scrapes from the previous season were inactive, there were no nearby rubs and the heavily used runways from the previous season were barely noticeable.



It was late October and the mature bucks were beginning to break their nocturnal habits in search of early estrus does and because of that it was the first time in my hunting career that I had to improvise and search for a location offering doe traffic and henceforth, visual buck sign.

The breeding season concept in this big woods area was simple; find a white or red oak with acorns or other preferred browse which attracts does and that female traffic would attract the males.

After about a quarter mile walk I came across a large sprawling white oak. The ground was littered with acorn hulls, deer droppings and it was bordered by a cut-over consisting of dense eight foot tall poplar saplings with fresh rubs along its edge. There were also several well-used runways that fed into the feeding location.

About 10 feet from the oaks trunk the lowest branch hung low enough for me to jump up and grab. I pulled myself up onto it and crawled on the branch to the trunk and then climbed up another 15 feet to where I could sit on one branch and have my feet on another.

Within half an hour a doe and her fawns stepped out of the saplings moved in and began feeding on acorns. Several minutes later the unmistakable sounds of a buck chasing a doe in the saplings made the doe uneasy and she and her fawns left the scene in the opposite direction.

After a long period of quiet time I heard the chasing again, and as hard as I tried to see within the saplings, they were just too tall and dense. The sounds kept getting closer until a doe busted out of the saplings. With her mouth open, tongue hanging out, and panting with every breath, she was desperately trying to put some ground between her and her persistent pursuer. Within moments a huge buck for that area appeared with nose to the ground in hot pursuit.

I came to full draw and had to make three vocal doe bleats, each louder than the previous to get his attention and stop his hurried pace. As he stood looking over his shoulder to see where the other doe

was, I took the 25-yard quartering away shot. The shot was true and after about 80 yards of running at full stride the big 10-point fell to the ground.

If that hunt seemed archaic in terms of climbing and sitting on limbs, it was because it took place in 1975 prior to steps, stands, and all the other paraphernalia we have available today. What was not archaic was the beginning of what I refer to as “freelance deer hunting,” which I have done successfully on many occasions over the decades since that successful hunt.

FREELANCING DEFINED

To me, freelance hunting can be defined in three different styles or methods:

- 1. Going into a new piece of property with your hunting gear, searching for the best available deer sign and then immediately setting up on it and hunting.**
- 2. Hunting in a pre-set location for a while and sensing the location is not going to produce so you pull your set-up gear and search of a new and better location to hunt the remainder of that day's allotted time.**
- 3. When you get to your pre-set location and the sign doesn't warrant a hunt you immediately freelance for a better location.**

Let's take a look at these approaches in a bit more detail.

IT'S ALL ABOUT OPTIONS

The more stash of hunting options a hunter has the more dangerous and consistently successful they will be. Mid-morning to early afternoon freelance hunting is an aggressive hunting plan or a reactionary hunting method skill that every bowhunter with access to a large enough parcel of property should have in their arsenal and most public lands fall into the large parcel category.

Let's put the reality of freelance hunting into perspective when hunting pressured areas. The general landscape of the most heavily pressured states and areas is that the private properties have been fragmented into parcels that are simply too small for freelance hunting.

On the small, free-permission parcels I've had the opportunity to hunt over the years my post-season scouting ventures had familiarized me with every inch of the property so I already had hunting sites in every decent or potentially descent location.

If allowed, post-season scouting can be a double-edge sword with both positive and negative ramifications. Due to crop rotations or the annual changes in mast or fruit production, it's not uncommon during post season to set up at locations with lots of deer sign only to have it be devoid of sign next season. Once the obvious locations are prepared, if available I set up at other isolated mast and fruit trees that have no sign because they may be hot spots next season if they produce food.

Although I've found that freelance hunting doesn't work on small parcels it does work well on the large tracts of state or federal public properties (abundant in every state).

The common denominator of freelance hunting is it's always done without any previous knowledge of the final hunting location.

Just two bowhunting seasons ago, I went in to hunt from a red oak that had several scrapes beneath it the prior hunting season. The scrapes were inactive so I crossed a nearby river (with the waders I took in for that very reason) and bagged a 9-pointer from another pre-set location. Although I moved to another location, that was not a freelance hunt because it was pre-set location.

I bowhunt in Michigan until the gun opener at which time I travel west to bowhunt in a lightly hunted state and several of my freelance kills have occurred on those short-term trips where I had minimal time to scout, all day to hunt, and large tracts of either free walk-on, public or free-permission private lands to wander.

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BEST TIMES TO FREELANCE

Freelance hunting during the brief rut-phase periods (think early November) is an excellent exercise in judging and immediately reacting to fresh sign or distant visuals because you don't have the luxury of unlimited time to wait for things to happen at pre-set locations.

This is a good time to "go freelancing" because this is when mature bucks move more regularly during daylight hours and are more susceptible to tactics such as rattling, scents, grunt calls, bleats, decoys, etc.

When preparing to hunt a large area of public land, go online and print aerial photos and — if the ground is hilly — also print topographical maps. Most terrain features such as timber, funnels, saddles, draws, inside corners of crop fields, marshes, and swamps will be fairly obvious and you can pinpoint and mark areas on the maps where you want to concentrate your original scouting and location preparation efforts.

GEAR UP FOR THE HUNT

On freelance hunts or on hunts where I think I may end up freelancing once I check out or hunt a pre-set location, below my hunting pack I carry a pre-loaded freelance fanny pack containing:

- Climbing harness.
- 18 tree steps.
- Bow hanger(s).
- Folding saw.
- Reflective tacks.
- Bow rope and a compass.

I also keep my maps in a zip-shut plastic bags and carry them in my backpack for reference if needed.

On these hunts, I don't have the luxury of a pre-set, non-intrusive entry route so to keep from leaving human odor on any vegetation I might brush against, I wear the properly cared for ScentLok® suit (jacket, pants and gloves) and rubber boots that I'll wear while hunting. Once on stand, I put on my head cover with drop-down face mask to finalize the scent control regimen during the hunt.

KEEP SEARCHING FOR AREAS

This type of hunting is real-world pursuit. It requires hard work and an always adaptive approach. Search for active deer sign such as scrape areas, mast and or fruit trees that are dropping food, rub or scrape-lined runways within adequate security cover, funnels in transition corridors between either feeding or bedding areas and well-used runways along creek or river bottoms. There is not enough time on freelance hunts to explore every aspect of the property in detail and these specific target areas should yield opportunities.

While commonly seen on TV, hunting over exposed crop fields or open areas is not an option for most guys and gals. I'm certainly not one of them, as I have become so accustomed to hunting in Michigan where mature bucks rarely move into them during daylight hours. Even while hunting out of state, I've found that setting up locations with adequate perimeter and transition security cover to yield the most consistent results.

When freelancing, if possible pick a tree where the most sign is within shooting range and that requires the least amount of trimming and lane clearing, this will aid in keeping human odor to a minimum. When pursuing mature bucks in heavily pressured areas, you will find even the minimal odor of fresh cuttings at a destination location can alter the mind-set of any mature deer and cause them to alter their routine.

I laugh at TV commercials and ads where hunters are walking down nice, clear two-track lanes with their tree stands, backpacks and bows strapped on their backs. That scenario is far from reality and even more so when freelance hunting.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

By now you can probably tell that I'm a minimalist. In fact, since 1981 I've exclusively hunted from an arborist-style harness (some call it a "tree saddle") that I re-designed so it rolls up and easily fits in my backpack with all my layering garments and other gear. It negates toting around heavy, noisy and cumbersome conventional tree stands and it has many other advantages that are too innumerable to list here.

There is a new hunting harness on the market called "Mantis" and it weighs just 15 ounces and rolls up a bit bigger than a softball and can only be purchased online (www.Tethrdnation.com). And, no, I do not have any monetary reason for endorsing this harness. It's simply the lightest and most mobile hunting harness I've seen to date.

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JOHN EBERHARDT

LET THE HUNT COME TO YOU

Freelance hunting is exciting and does allow for bold moves at times, but I suggest keeping your first hunt “clean” — no calling or rattling unless you see a distant buck that’s not heading your way. If you’ve already selected a spot that’s loaded with deer sign, a clean hunt will allow the location to work on the merits you chose it for, whereas the improper use of noise or scents might unknowingly alter that traffic.

If you return the next day and you have confidence in your ability to perform tactics properly and at the right times of day ... go for it.

If a freelance site doesn’t meet expectations, pull your gear and reload your freelance pack for the next time. With a non-cumbersome, lightweight and mobile system it’s easy to adjust the next day as you can silently move in and prepare a new tree in a matter of minutes.

PROOF IS IN THE PUNCHED TAGS

The freelance hunting approach has served me well over the years. For example, during a recent out-of-state hunt in Iowa, I went

in for my Day 1 hunt fully prepared to sit all day. After a few hours, I had a sneaking suspicion the action was going to be taking place much deeper in the timber so I pulled up and freelanced about a quarter mile deeper into the woods. Once there, I found a very active scrape area and set up immediately. Just a few hours later I was happily wrapping my tag on a 180-inch 12-pointer.

During another all-day hunt a few years later, I sat an pre-selected spot for a full morning during the peak of the rut. Few deer were moving, so I climbed down and freelanced. I had only made it maybe 300 yards when I discovered a large active scrape area in a weed/brush-choked transition zone. I quickly set up and then arrowed a really nice 10-pointer as he cruised through early that afternoon.

CONCLUSION

This type of hunting takes time to master. I definitely do not recommend frequently adjusting your position, because you can spook deer quite easily if you’re not careful. However, if you chose a hunting location based on deer sign

and then realize it’s gone cold when it came time to hunt it, freelancing might be warranted.

Successful freelance hunting will give you pride in knowing that you have the ability to adjust to your hunting area’s current conditions.

The bottom line: If you feel the need to adjust, try this method. You might be surprised at how productive it can be on mature whitetails.

Editor’s note: Over the past 50 years, John Eberhart has built a reputation of being one of the most successful bowhunters in North America. He primarily hunts public and free-by-permission small private parcels. He has bagged 50 record-class bucks from 32 different properties (31 bucks from his home state of Michigan). He’s never owned or leased hunting property, has never hunted over bait, and has never paid to hunt with a guide or outfitter.

For more information on John’s tactics, visit www.deer-john.net.



Scout on the go: Once on the ground I use the information gathered from home as the basis for covering maximum ground on foot, looking for the final puzzle pieces that will tell me where my stand should be set.

7 SUREFIRE TIPS FOR DIY PUBLIC LAND SUCCESS

HERE'S HOW TO CUT THE LEARNING CURVE ON NEW GROUND.

Growing up in the West, I had access to literally millions of acres of public land to roam. I started locally, then expanded my horizons to pretty much all the western states, then moved into some midwestern states, too. Fishing, hunting, hiking, backpacking — anything outdoors was good with me. Especially if I had the country all to myself.

I've been doing it since the late 1960's, and learned early on that isolation meant untapped fishing and hunting. Back then there were no cable TV or YouTube hunting shows, only the "Big 3" hunting magazines that were long on adventures in faraway places, but short on DIY tactics and techniques for guys like me. We didn't have Google Earth, Smartphones loaded with hunting and weather apps that provide instant and detailed information, scouting cameras, or even a GPS. Compared to today, the gear was bulky, heavy, and rudimentary. We did have topographic maps, and a lot of get up and go.

And so, I learned by the seat of my pants, making mistake after mistake that scarified a lot of game that I only saw the rear ends of. And, knowing now what I didn't know then, I am sure I terrified a lot more game that I never even knew was in the neighborhood.

Even today, every DIY public land trip I take is a learning experience. However, I've learned that there are some universal truths that, if followed, will up the odds for success dramatically.

HAVE REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

I, and others in the outdoor communications business, have done a poor job over the years when it comes to helping the average guy who doesn't

have the luxury of hunting as much as we do set realistic expectations for their hunting trips. Magazine articles, outdoor TV shows, internet videos that show big bucks dropping like flies all give the impression that it's not that difficult to do, and that if you don't shoot a whopper, you're a failure. Both are completely false.

Look at hunting new ground as an educational process. The more times you are actually on the ground and you accumulate more knowledge about the nuances of the land and how the animals use it, the better your chances. This process can literally take years. Dan Schmidt, Deer & Deer Hunting's Editor-in-Chief, has it exactly right when he tells you that it is, in most cases, at least a three-year process.

The first time you go to a new property to hunt, think of yourself as a rookie on a new team full of veterans. You have skills, sure, but you need to learn the ropes. If you shoot a buck, great, but if not, don't feel like a failure. If a legal buck walks by and you want to take some meat home, don't be afraid to drop the hammer. Or maybe you fill a doe tag. Don't make the mistake of letting the expectations of others dictate what you shoot or do not shoot. The key is to go into the hunt with realistic expectations. Even the best properties do not produce

a mature buck for even the best DIY hunters every year.

Ideally, over time you'll have two or more public land areas you've explored so you have options. I've always been something of a wanderer, so I tend to try new places a lot, even though I know that once I find a sweet spot I should stick with it if I want to eat venison, not tag soup. But I also know that, today, so many more hunters are doing the DIY thing than when I first started out that the odds are, sooner or later, somebody else will discover my little honey hole, which means it will be time to go to Plan B.

Have realistic expectations. And have fun. That's what it's all about.

DO YOUR RESEARCH

In hunting, as in life, basing decisions on information, not whim, is everything. Before you ever pack the truck, you should have a list of likely hunting spots chosen thru pre-hunt research. Using a combination of online aerial photos, smartphone hunting apps, topographic maps, and Google Earth help immensely in choosing potential honey-hole hunting sites. That said, when you get on the ground things that looked fabulous during your research are never exactly what they seemed, but combining your knowledge of how whitetails use cover and terrain to travel between bedding and feeding areas, you should be able to shorten the learning curve exponentially.

Combine that with information you can gather from a state game department about deer population and harvest trends, knowledge of historic weather patterns, adjacent private property and what crops, if any, are growing there, water sources, human pressure (hunters, yes, but how about hikers, bikers, or maybe even coon hunters running their dogs through the property at night,) and even if there have been any catastrophic occurrences like fires, floods, timber harvests, and so on, will all factor into the selection of the places you'll want to explore first.

SCOUT FIRST, HUNT LATER

You're chomping at the bit to hang a stand or build and blind and start hunting the second you arrive. Don't. Day one is all about boots on the ground, a euphemism for scouting. Talk a long walk, slowly and



Redneck stand: I once found this "redneck stand" scouting a public land tract. It told me the area was at one time a good spot to hunt. My scouting proved that it still was.



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deliberately, making notes about what you find. Are the oaks full of acorns? Is that a traditional rub line? Are those big, fresh tracks and droppings? Is that a runway trail coming up a brushy draw, leading to an adjacent ag field or water hole? If possible, spend the first evening glassing a feeding area from afar. Mark promising spots on your GPS or topo map. The value of first-hand knowledge of the property and how deer appear to be using it cannot be overstated.

SMILE FOR THE CAMERA

Using as many scouting cameras as is practical in a new area will give you so much information it might be difficult to process and act on it all. They'll tell you how deer are using the property, of course, including which direction deer are travelling and at what time, as well as where they're feeding and bedding. Just as important, they'll tell you where not to hang a stand. Just because the sign looks good, on a hunt of a week's duration if deer are using a particular trail, water hole, or food source right now, you best spend your time looking elsewhere.

Check cameras regularly during the hunt, preferably at midday, when deer movement is minimal. Also, take note of the buck age structure you see

on the cameras. If you're not seeing any 5 1/2- year olds, but lots of 2 1/2- and 3 1/2-year olds, no use passing one of them waiting for something bigger when it probably isn't there.

HUNT HARD, BUT SMART

One time in Kansas, before I knew better, I hunted right out of the gate, and saw diddly squat for two days. Frustrated, I packed a climbing stand and took off on a scouting trip, and bingo! Big tracks in a well-used trail from a brushy draw up a hill that passed right between a pair of 6-inch pines that had been rubbed near to death, before the trail crested the hill and headed down to an ag field a half-mile away. I climbed a tree 25 yards downwind of those goal posts and sat until near dark, when a huge-bodied 8-point emerged from the shadows and walked right between those trees. It was magical.

Had I done my walkabout on day one, I would not have wasted so much time. Having confidence in your spot makes it a lot easier to stick it out for long periods, and confidence in your spot comes from thorough scouting. There's nothing worse than sitting in a stand wondering if you are in the right place or not, as I did those first two days. Once you have a more

in-depth knowledge of the ground, it's easier to sit for long periods of time with confidence.

CONTROLLED AGGRESSION

I call my style of hunting "controlled aggression." By that I mean I do my research and scouting before picking a stand location, but if it doesn't pan out, I do not wait for the hunt to come to me. I stay aggressive and, knowing I have a very short time to make things happen, I don't spend time in one spot when I've lost the confidence in it.

You must remain aware of what's going on around you and be prepared to react quickly to changing conditions. Is there a weather front moving in? Did the farmer suddenly decide to harvest the field you're focusing on? Did another hunter show up, possibly altering movement patterns? You need backup plans for these, and other, possible conditional changes that can affect deer movement in a heartbeat. I always have a plan B, and plan C, just in case.

TAKE ENOUGH TIME AND WORK HARD

Hunting a local place might mean only getting after it on your day's off, or maybe an evening or three after work. On a DIY road trip, I like to be in the woods at least five days, with 7-10 even better. During that time you have to never stop working. You're checking and moving cameras, constantly analyzing conditions and deer behavior, moving stands, and hunting from before daylight until after dark, then trying to grab some food, reorganize gear, grab a few winks, and get after it again the next day. It can be exhausting.

If you're like me, a DIY, out-of-state hunt involves several hundred dollars for a nonresident hunting license and deer tag, a bunch of gas money, and maybe a motel room night or three, as well as all those days on the road. I am not going to commit to any of that if I am not ready, willing, and able to do the scouting work ahead of time and then hunt hard all day, every day.

— Bob Robb is one of North America's most traveled — and most successful — whitetail bowhunters of all time.



Fresh sign: If you find fresh droppings - especially together with a preferred food source - you've found a great place to set a trail camera, or a tree stand.



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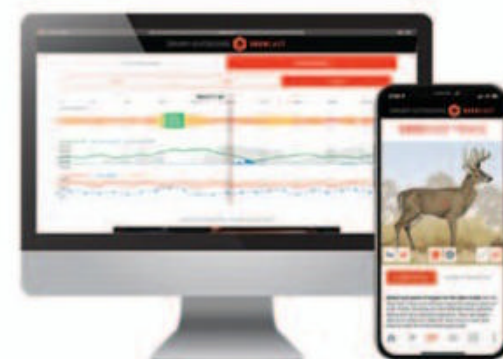


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6 STEPS TO BETTER STAND- HUNTING STRATEGIES AND PLACEMENT

I readied myself as soon as I saw the heavy-antlered velvet buck emerge. I had to — the tree holding my stand demanded it.

Scouting had made it clear that I needed to be in this spot to fill my August Alberta tag. Unfortunately, the trees didn't seem cooperative. My only choice was a spindly aspen with an alarming lack of cover. Although large enough to safely support a stand, any major shifts caused the tree to sway. That made it critical to be in shooting position well before the shot.

Now, it was the moment of truth. My early move had allowed me to be in position with the buck unaware of my presence. Sure, there were a few nervous moments as he approached, glancing my way several times. However, even as he did a mule kick and made a final dash through the field, his life ended without ever having a clue I was there.

We've all been in a similar situation. We find a spot we know we need to set up in, but the location doesn't provide a suitable tree. So we walk in circles staring at trees, attempting to will a good one to appear. Often, such as during my Alberta hunt, how we handle these situations determines the success or failure of a potential stand site.

Luckily, hunters can apply a few tricks and make almost any setup work.

SIX STEPS TO A PERFECT STAND

Hunters must first address several basics to consistently make stands effective.

I'll admit I am extremely demanding when it comes to what I expect from a stand location. For the most part, that's due to having so many things go wrong over the years. Because of numerous failures, I tend to see more potential downfalls in stand sites. Still, for the life of me, I can't grasp how many hunters believe they can kill deer from so many of the stands I find on public lands.

Although many variations occur, the most common type of stand placement I see consists of stands 12 to 15 feet off the ground, placed in telephone pole-like trees and located within several feet of the trail they're presumably covering. Either those hunters are vastly more skilled at pulling off the shot than I am, or a lot of hunters just haven't analyzed what they need from a stand.

I can't speak for what other hunters can get away with, but I know my ability to consistently make stands work requires six components:

1. There must be enough cover to hide my movement and break up my silhouette. Being 15 yards or more offset from the deer's line of travel is a big help in that. And,

when practical, remaining in the shadows also aids in this endeavor.

2. It's always easier to remain undetected if your movement is minimized. Think about this before placing a stand. For right-handed shooters, place a hang-on, ladder or tripod so that the most likely shot will occur to the left.

3. Using stands that are deadly silent is also a great help in remaining undetected. Test all stands for noise before putting them out in the woods. If they squeak, address it by tightening nuts, adding rubber washers, applying electrical tape or by any other means that doesn't sacrifice the stand's safety. If they squeak after hanging, re-seating them often corrects the problem. Keep in mind, the time to do that is the second you hear the squeak, not after you've already spooked your buck.

4. Ample shooting lanes are absolutely necessary. I still haven't met anyone that can shoot an arrow through a branch and not have its flight altered. When all else fails, you can often remain still to go undetected. But, when a buck provides a 5 second opportunity to shoot him, you flat out can't make it happen if you don't have an opening.

5. With the advanced state of technology meant to minimize odors, being downwind of deer is no longer as important as it once was. However, it's still wise to play the wind. Plus, many hunters don't take scent control to the extremes that I do. For that group, hunting stands with the right wind is an absolute must. That makes finding stand sites on the prevailing downwind side of the area key.

6. Finally, the most overlooked part of successful stand hunting is having low impact entrance and exit routes. If given the choice between an otherwise great stand site, offering poor access, or a good one with great access, I go for the good one with great access every time.

PERFECTING TREE STANDS

Outside of not having trees in the right spot, the biggest issue is often a lack of suitable cover. That's where flexibility and creativity come into play.

One way of beating a lack of cover is to go farther up the tree. I've never been a stickler for how high my stands are placed. I vary my height based on available cover. If my best back cover is at 12 feet, that's where I'll often put my stand. Being flexible is beneficial.

Most of my stands are 20 to 25 feet high. It's simple: Most trees don't provide the ability to set stands in the proper orientation for minimized movement, as well as providing great cover. Tree lean is often the problem.

Getting higher helps get you out of the deer's line of sight. In turn, it's a big help in hiding movement, not getting silhouetted and even carrying scent over a deer's nose.

Unfortunately, some trees are too small to break up your silhouette, or they lack cover. In that case, I'll often go 30 feet. I rarely, if ever, go higher than that. Higher means shot angles become so extreme that double-lung hits are difficult to achieve.

Of course, there are many trees that just don't allow the hunter to safely get that high. That was the case with the aspen I set my stand in north of the border. Instead, I made my own cover. I collected a dozen branches and wove them into the platform of the stand. I then stuck another handful in the gap between where the strap met the tree. By the time I was done, the stand had an abundance of natural cover, allowing me to blend in — at least to the eyes of deer.

Trees are rarely perfect for stands. That's why being flexible in stand height and creative enough to add cover come into play. Those two traits can make otherwise unhuntable stands productive.

MAKE LADDERS AND TRIPODS WORK

Until last season, I had not been a big fan of ladder stands or tripods. However, Rivers Edge's Jay Engstrom hounded me until I finally gave one of his 22-foot ladders a fair shot. I've become a big fan.

In some cases, ladders don't offer the flexibility of hang-ons. However, they can be deadly effective in many locations. The key? Ladders finally have the height

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that I believe is required for trees lacking a lot of cover.

Furthermore, because of their sturdy design, you can use ladders to hunt trees that just aren't big enough to safely support a hang-on stand. In fact, ladders are ideal for many cedars and pines that provide the ultimate in cover, but are lacking in diameter.

The same can be said for tripods. In fact, I snugged a River's Edge tripod into a cedar in Illinois and it turned out to be one of my favorite stands last season. In that case, I was able to get the platform to butt against the smallish cedar's trunk by encompassing the tree inside of the legs and bracing as I put it together. The platform served as an ideal media to slip the cut cedar branches into. The end result made me invisible.

Despite being set in a low wash, putting me at eye level with many passing deer, I was never even given a second glance.

As I learned this year, it's not wise to write off any style of stand. In fact, one of the biggest keys to getting the most from stands is a willingness and ability to have each major category of stands at your disposal. Each one has specific conditions in which it works best.

GET THE MOST FROM GROUND BLINDS

Ground blinds are another important tool to have at your disposal. The most serious ground blind hunters I know are Keith Beam and Brooks Johnson, the creative force behind Double Bull blinds. Both freely admit that blinds just aren't as effective in some mature woods settings as tree stands. However, they point out how amazingly effective a blind can be in overgrown meadows, brush-choked bottoms, open fields, swamps, cedar thickets or virtually anywhere else that tree stands don't work well.

Simply put; ground blinds are deadly effective, when used properly.

Following several steps will be tremendously helpful.

First, properly brush-in your blinds. This begins with placing the blind out of the approaching deer's line of sight and, when possible, in the shadows. Next, match the blind

to its surroundings. If the area is relatively open, simply snug it next to any available cover and lightly brush the roof and sides.

In thicker cover, always try to slip a blind next to a tree with overhanging branches. Cut just enough of the lowest limbs to be able to get the blind up. This allows the overhanging branches to effectively break the roof outline.

In either setting, stick some branches in the ground at various distances in front of the blind for better concealment.

Additionally, if the mesh doesn't affect arrow flight, keep it down. Shooting through the mesh eliminates the unnatural black holes created by open windows and helps hide movement inside. If your broadheads don't allow for using mesh, use cover to help blend the window outlines.

The inside of the blind also needs attention. To reduce the odds of being silhouetted and winded, close the windows on the back side of the blind. This encourages airflow from behind to wrap around the blind, as opposed to passing through. Packing debris around the bottom also cuts wind flow, as well as providing a natural, cover-scent air filter. When packing the bottom of the blind, use the debris from the floor area inside. Removing the debris inside the blind reduces the disturbances around the blind. Plus, creating a bare dirt floor provides more silent movement.

Being as quiet as possible is another important factor. Because slight shifts might be required, quiet clothing is a must. Speaking of clothing, black is the way to go. Camo serves no purpose inside blinds. A quality blind's interior is black. So, wearing black helps make the hunter invisible. Because the face and hands must be aligned with the window to shoot, it's most important to wear dark gloves and a face mask.

In addition, take steps to minimize movement. For bow-hunting, don't orient the chair so that it's facing the opening. That isn't a natural shooting position and will require a full body shift to pull off the shot. Since blinds place us at eye level to deer, often within

feet of our position, any excess movement can be disastrous. Instead, place the chair at a 90-degree angle to where the shot is likely to occur, just as described with tree stand orientation.

Never use hook bow hangers that are attached to some blinds. Removing the bow causes the blind to move. Instead, use a ground based bow holder. Place it just off your left knee — right knee, for left-handed shooters — and orient the bow to point in the direction of the shot.

Bow Jaws' ground blind bow-holder is really the only one out there I know I can rely on. All the rest fall over way too easily.

Finally, decoys and blinds are a marriage made in heaven. Decoys allow blind hunters to get away with much more by taking the deer's attention off the blind. Doe decoys can be oriented in the same broadside fashion as when hunting from a tree stand. However, I've found that quartering the buck decoy's gaze at a 45-degree angle toward the blind, but not staring right at it, is best. This orientation still provides for shots as a buck tries making eye contact, but does not make it appear that the decoy is staring at the blind.

For truly deadly action during or on either side of the rut, use a bedded doe and standing buck decoy pair. Mimicking a buck tending a doe can create exceptional results.

CONCLUSION

In many situations, hunters could spend eternity trying to find the perfect tree. However, a hunter who utilizes the full line of stands available — is creative in making them work — and addresses the small details in getting the most from them, can almost always get results from a good location.

— Steve Bartylla is an accomplished whitetail hunter and professional outdoor writer from Wisconsin. Check out his videos at www.YouTube.com/DDHOnline.



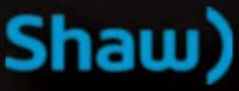
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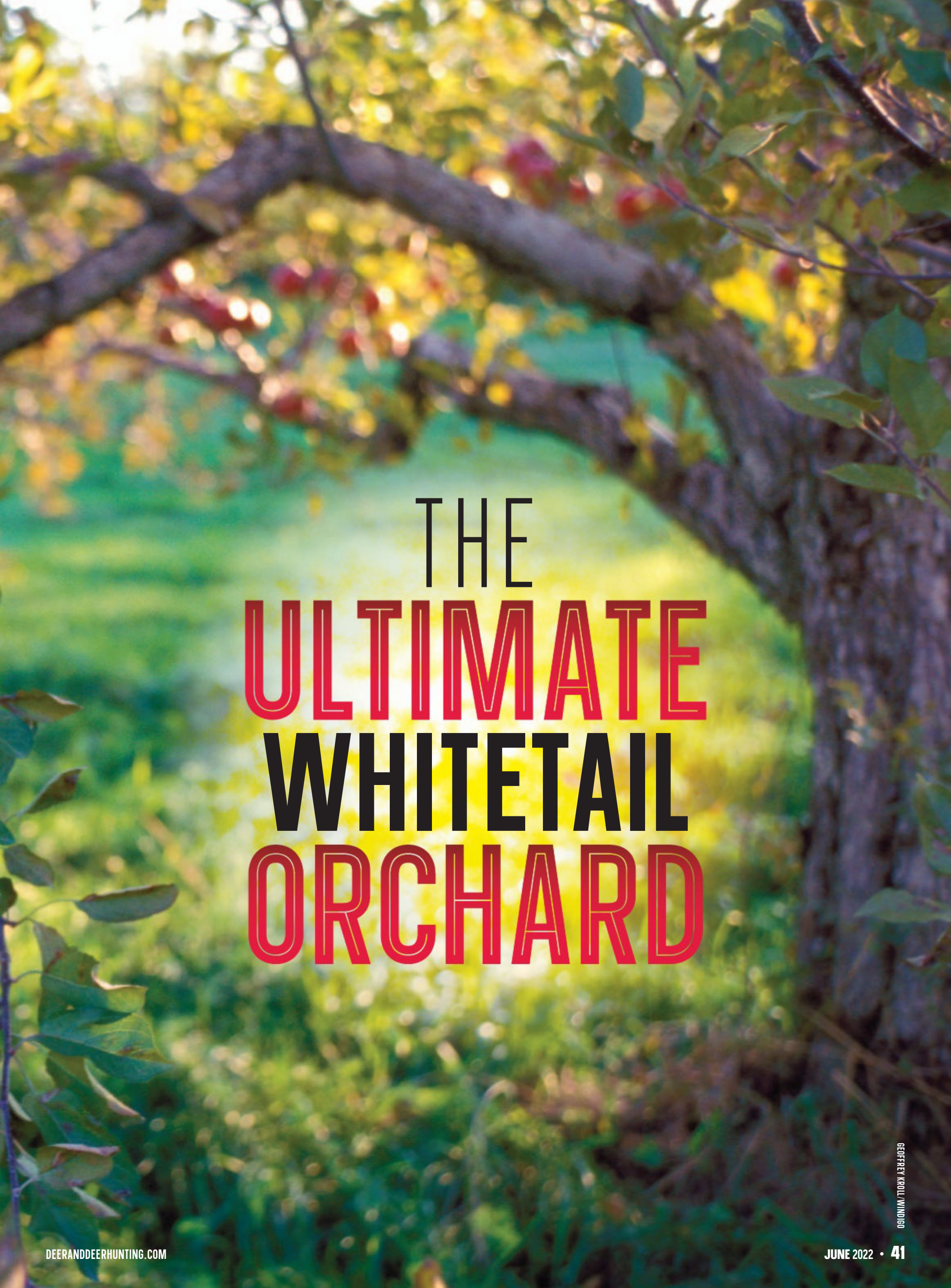
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The grizzled old buck stood at the edge of the cover and silently scanned his surroundings for any hint of danger. He had the wind at his advantage but still was not anxious to waltz out into the open food plot in daylight. Having survived several hunting seasons he knew that his life was always in danger and when he moved in daylight the danger level escalated noticeably.



THE ULTIMATE WHITETAIL ORCHARD





After several minutes of standing still as a statue, he eased out of the brush and fed on the fruit which had fallen from a pear tree on the plots edge. For the next 10 minutes he remained there feeding on the ripe fruit until darkness gave him the cover he needed to walk out into the more open plot. I watched the show from my perch a short distance away with the buck never knowing I was there.

I had plenty of opportunities to shoot this 5-year-old 14-point buck but I wanted to give him one more year. His 5x5 main-frame had enough extras to give me hope that he might one day become a world-class trophy, not that he wasn't already a very admirable buck.

At this point this story could go multiple directions as I did kill this buck the following season when he was 6 years old scoring 176-inches. What I want to focus on however is that pear tree the buck fed under.

I have developed a strategy for incorporating fruit/mast trees into my whitetail land management

system that I think can help anyone better utilize fruit and mast trees on their whitetail property to meet their hunting and management goals.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

There are several different ideas regarding where one should plant fruit trees on their property. In my travels as a whitetail land consultant, I have seen them all. Often these trees are randomly placed here and there on a property without regards to hunting strategy or thought given to how well the trees will actually do.

I personally prefer to have limited feeding areas on my property but I like to have multiple food sources within those feeding areas. When it comes to fruit trees, I like to plant them around the edges of my plots. This gives me multiple food sources at one location, which in turn increases the drawing power to that plot.

I will also on occasion plant a few fruit trees around select stand

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sites to give the deer another reason to pass by that stand. The key here is that the location must be suitable for growing fruit trees. For example, a stand site within a wooded timber is not going to work as fruit trees need plenty of sunlight and space to grow.

DON'T MIX THE FRUIT

I have walked many properties where different species of fruit trees were randomly mixed. This might seem like a great idea at first but in reality, it is much better to group trees by species. In other words, plant apple trees with other apple trees, pears with pears, etc. When trees are grouped by species in aids in pollination which can increase fruit production. An apple tree cannot pollinate a pear tree, or vice versa.

Another benefit of grouping trees by species is that it can help create more huntable deer patterns. For example, when the pears are ripe and falling, deer will concentrate around your pear trees. If your pear trees are scattered all over the property, the deer movement

related to that crop will be more randomly spread out. On the other hand, if all of your pear trees are in one or two locations, travel patterns will be more defined.

So, let's look at a real-world situation where maybe you have one bigger food plot on your property and you want to enhance the plot with fruit trees. I am not suggesting that you only plant one species of fruit trees around the plot. Instead, just group the species so that maybe on one end of the plot you have chestnut trees and on the other end you have persimmon trees. Multiple species of fruit trees can be planted around a single food plot but I encourage you to simply group them by species.

GROUND COVER UNDER YOUR TREES

Fruit trees need freedom of competition from other trees and vegetation to best produce abundant fruit. If your trees are growing in weeds and brush, fruit production will be adversely affected. Prepare your tree planting site just as you would a food plot by removing all vegetation. Your

fruit trees will not only need plenty of sunlight but also plenty of space in the root-zone to establish and become productive.

Often when I am going to establish a fruit orchard, I will first establish a "clover plot" where the trees will later be planted. I will then simply plant the fruit trees within the clover. Clover is the ideal cover crop within an orchard for multiple reasons. First clover is a fairly shallow-rooted plant that will not impede the growth of a healthy root system on your fruit trees. Secondly clover is a legume which means it produces nitrogen that the trees will utilize. Finally, the clover growing around your fruit trees will serve as yet another food source at that location.

I prefer to plant a white clover or ladino clover around my fruit trees. It should be noted that this clover should be maintained as if it were a food plot. I mow the clover around my fruit trees about once a month during the late spring and summer. I will also spray it with clethodim about once every other year to control any grasses which may be starting to establish.

Another step to maintaining a good cover crop of clover in your fruit orchard is to frost seed more clover seed into the orchard every couple of years in early spring. Finally, take soil samples every 2-3 years and fertilize for maximum production.

SPECIES SPECIFICS

One area where I see whitetail land managers fall short with their wildlife orchards is in specific variety selection. In other words, they often plant varieties of fruit trees which are not well-suited for their application. Planting the wrong variety of a fruit tree species can actually be worse than not planting anything at all as it wastes your time and money while putting human intrusion on your property with no benefit. With that said, let's look at some specific varieties that are good options for wildlife.

APPLES

There are literally several dozen different apple tree varieties, with some being much better than

others. As whitetail land managers we want varieties that are later ripening and disease resistant. I also strongly encourage you to plant "standard" sized trees rather than dwarf or semi-dwarf.

Some of the better apple varieties I have found are Enterprise, Liberty, Freedom, Yates, and Arkansas Black. There are likely other varieties that might work well in your region. I like to mix several different varieties in each planting for better pollination and also to create a broader window when apples will be available to your deer.

It should also be noted that there are several varieties of crabapple trees that can be planted within your apple tree orchards for improved pollination. A couple of good crabapple varieties are Dolgo and Chestnut crabapples. Deer and other wildlife will eat these smaller crabapples just as readily as they will bigger apples.

PEARS

Over the years I have planted about every variety of pear available

in the U.S., including some exotic Asian varieties. Today the only commercial pear that I will plant is Kieffer pears. These are self-pollinating and ripen later than any other commercial pear.

Pears, in general, are not an easy tree to establish. Kieffer pears were developed in Pennsylvania in the 1870s, formed from an accidental cross between a sand pear and a Bartlett pear. Today, these trees grow in a remarkable range of climates because of its hardiness, ranging from New England to the Southern U.S. There are other pear varieties, so be sure to do some homework on your area before planting a specific strain.

It should be noted that there are some nurseries that focus their efforts on growing trees for wildlife. These nurseries offer some varieties of pears which are certainly better suited for our application than what can be found at a local farm and home store. Among their offerings are pears which are much later ripening and more disease resistant than the commercial trees.



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CHESTNUTS

It seems that in recent years the chestnut tree craze has taken over the whitetail land management arena and with good reason. From my experience, whitetails love the “meat” inside these fuzzy-husked mast trees. With that said, we need to be really careful about the chestnut trees we plant.

Many chestnut trees are grown at nurseries in Southern states and these trees will often not do well in Northern regions, if they even survive at all. It is worth your time to learn where the chestnut trees you are buying originated.

Today, when I plant chestnut trees, they are Chinese chestnuts. These have proven to be the hardiest and do extremely well in my region of the Midwest. I also will only buy them directly from a Northern nursery. They are hardy and disease-resistant.



PERSIMMONS

If you have never hunted around a grove of persimmon trees, you have no idea what you are missing. When these squishy yellow-red-purple-orange fruits are falling, the deer will flock to these trees and keep the ground picked clean.

With persimmons there will be female trees and male trees. Only the females bear fruit. For this reason, I would only plant grafted female trees purchased from a specialized wildlife nursery.

Besides the native American persimmon, there are also some varieties of Asian persimmons. I have planted these exotic varieties in the past with no success. I strongly encourage you to stick with grafted-female American trees.

SUMMARY

Fruit trees are a great way to diversify your land’s food sources. Once an orchard is established, it will provide food for decades to come.

— For more info on trees and habitat management, visit www.higginsoutdoors.com



FOOD PLOTS & MINERALS

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BY TODD STITTLEBURG

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Before the first steps were taken, the inspiration behind Antler King was straight forward. Sure, it was important to me that it made enough to help support my eventual family, but the equally or even more important missions were to create products that truly both drew deer in like metal to magnets, while significantly improving their health. Those are the two primary goals that drive every product we create.

Many believe that all it takes to become a successful deer seed and nutrition business is designing a bag with a big buck on it, grabbing some cheap seeds and throwing them in a bag for sale. I can't speak for others but being the one that created Antler King from the ground up, I can tell you that's not the case with us. What follows is what really goes into each bag of Antler King Products.

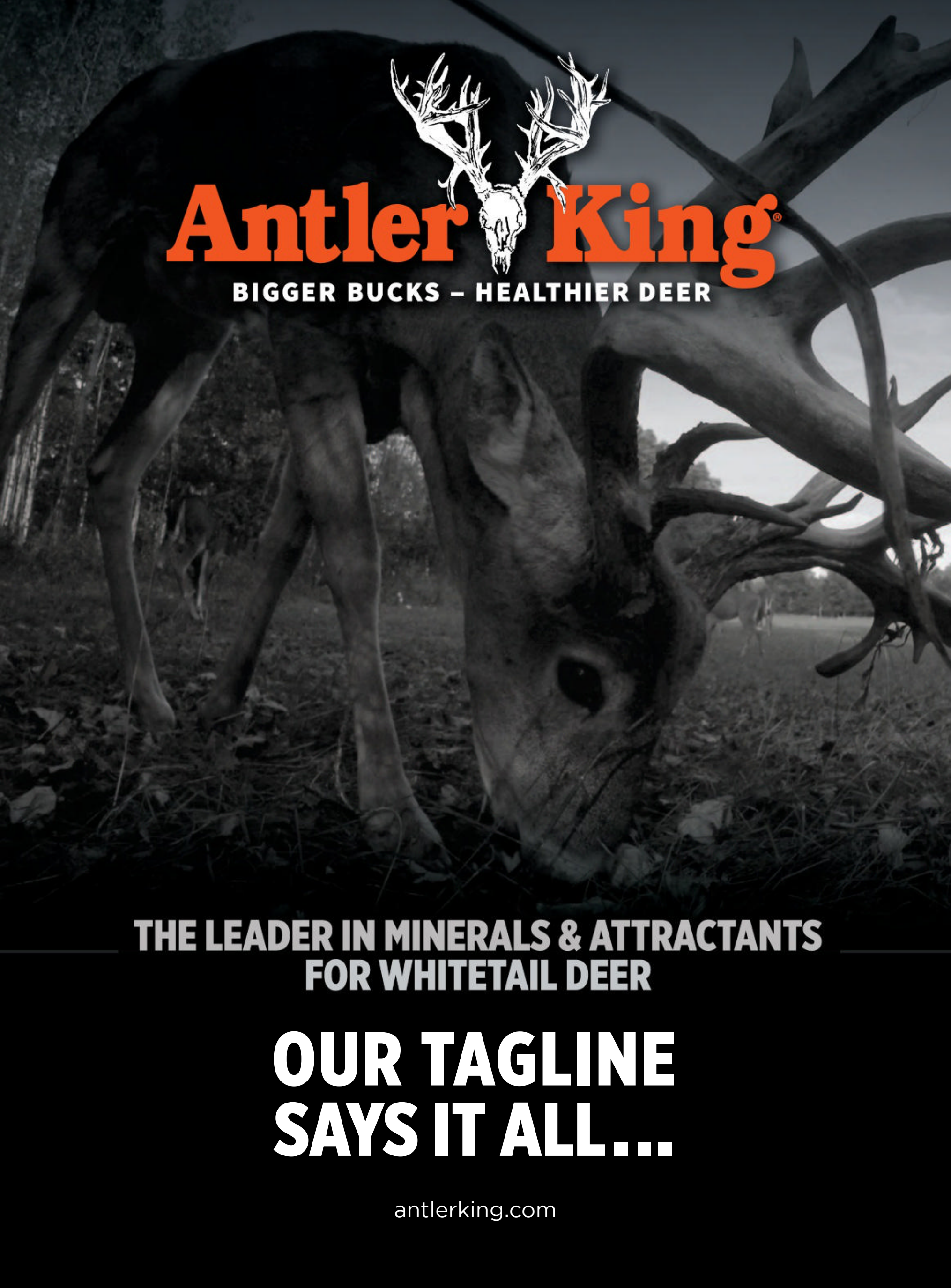
It begins with my mind constantly thinking about new seed varieties and new feed products. For example, just this past year, I did due diligent research on seven "new" seed varieties and nearly a dozen different feed and liquid products all to try to grow Bigger Bucks and Healthier Deer.

When looking at seed strains to possibly add to the Antler King lineup, I run the varieties through very stringent test procedures. One of the first tests is to establish an enclosure cage in the seed strain I am testing. What I want to figure out first, is simply do the deer really love this variety? If the deer do not consume this "new"

variety, it really doesn't matter how high the protein content is or highly digestible this variety is.

If you are not familiar with an enclosure cage, it simply is a small cone shaped fence around a small portion of the test food plot. If the plants inside the cage (where the deer can't get at the plants to consume them) are significantly taller than those outside the cage, then I know that we do have a very palatable variety. A great example of this would be the 25 years that went into researching our **BOONER BUFFET** seed mix. I tested literally hundreds of varieties of alfalfas before I found the 2 multileaf varieties that are included in the Booner Buffet. Palatability of many varieties was a real concern.

If the "test" species survives this test, then I will try planting that seed in several ways. I will try planting with a drill in a no till situation, plant with a drill after tilling and preparing a firm seedbed. I will also plant this variety in different types of soil. Sandy soil, clay based, and fertile loamy soil. Next, we will try the variety in a minimum till situation, basically killing the weeds with a chemical and then broadcasting the seed and monitoring the number of plants that will germinate and grow. The reality is that not everyone has a whole line of tilling and planting equipment to be able to prepare the greatest seedbed to have maximum germination. So, I want to determine how "user friendly" this variety really is. If we are looking for a mix that will grow well in shady areas or low light areas,



Antler King®

BIGGER BUCKS – HEALTHIER DEER

**THE LEADER IN MINERALS & ATTRACTANTS
FOR WHITETAIL DEER**

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then of course we will be planting species on logging roads or other low light areas.

I also monitor the “test” species all year long. For example, this past year, all seven types of seed mixes made it through the tests I described above BUT they all failed the final test. This final test was to see how they would handle cold temps and snow. In this situation, all the plants had virtually collapsed by the end of November. Their stalk did not hold up and after a series of cold days and snow the whole plant was laying on the ground. I do not want that to happen because these varieties were to be late season food sources, and if they collapse, they will get covered with snow and will inhibit the deer being able to consume these species.

For our new seed blend, **SOUTHERN GREENS**, we coordinated testing with our team members in southern states to perfect the specific blend of collard greens, radishes, oats and winter wheat, to be certain it would exceed expectations from north to south. We continued adjustments and wide-ranging field trials until we achieved just that!

One other test I have been focusing on is how digestible and how high is the protein content on plants in February, March, and April. This is so important as a very highly digestible protein and energy source is soooooo important in maximizing antler growth and overall health of the deer family in these 3 critical months. During tough and trying winter months these 3 months are critical in keeping deer alive and healthy. The Good Lord made these animals so that they can sustain the early winter with cold temps and deep snow, but by February, March, and April their reserves are running very low and that is when deer pass away. So, ten years ago when I tested our **HONEY HOLE** varieties and an independent laboratory found that the protein content of those plants in late February were around 26% protein and the energy content was close to the energy content of corn,

I knew this was a winner! I have had this same lab test our **FALL/WINTER/SPRING** blend with very similar results.

One other area I have been working on for the past 15 years is to build soil fertility naturally without relying so much on granular fertilizers, but that is a subject for another time.....That said, now you do have a better understanding of what goes into each Antler King Products. If only it were as easy as slapping seeds in a bag with a big buck on it. For those that are serious about delivering top end nutrition, that’s a bad joke.

— Todd Stittleburg started his career as a ruminant nutritionist for

*one of the largest feed companies in the World. He did nutritional work for some of the highest producing dairy herds in the state of Wisconsin. Growing up on a farm and being an avid hunter, Stittleburg decided to do research on deer nutrition and Antler King Trophy products Inc. was soon born. The first product that was developed was **TROPHY DEER MINERAL**. That was 35 years ago, and dozens of feed products, blocks, attractants, and food plot seed mixes have been developed and brought to market since 1987.*



TODD STITTLEBURG

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THE POWER OF CLOVER

BY STEVE BARTYLLA

CHARLES ALSHEIMER

The first week of March, 2012 saw me actually working dirt and planting Antler King Trophy Clover. Little did I realize that the worst drought I'd ever face was merely a couple months away from starting. By that fall, all farm crops and fall planted food plots ranged from horrific to nonexistent. One needs rain to grow crops, but the early planted clover received just enough to limp through and literally feed the resident deer.

Repeatedly, Antler King's **TROPHY CLOVER** has bailed me out. With traditional fertilizer costs sky rocketing, it's about to bail me out again. Here's how.

COSTS

Clover is typically a forgiving crop. If one merely gets the pH to 6.2-7, though we'll cover some cost effective techniques of doing so, we really don't have to apply fertilizer to most soils in order to grow most clovers. Of course, ensuring proper soil fertility increase tonnages and is advised, but I've grown somewhere north of 200 acres of Antler King Trophy Clover without applying granular fertilizer, just using cheap lime to hit the pH sweet spot.

At the same time, the seed costs per up to 10 tons of forage per acre produced is a steal. Adding seed, lime, fuel and chemicals we'll discuss, we're still looking at under \$100 an acre, and that plot can last a ridiculously long time!

LONGEVITY

Speaking of which, Antler King states that one can get 6 years out of a single planting. Though true, there's easy ways to get way longer than that.

To do so, I frost seed these existing clover stands plots, at a 50% suggested seed rate, each spring. I also spray twice with grass only killers, once in spring and again about 2 weeks before season. I also mow twice, with both mowings being about a week before the sprays.

The herbicide I use are contact only herbicides, meaning they must be applied directly to living plants for them to intake the chemicals. This works best on greens that are actively growing and relatively early in their life cycle. As they mature they tend to get a lot harder to kill. Giving the plants a mowing and then a week of fresh growth primes the plant to maximize the chemical's effectiveness.

CHEAP BOOSTERS AND NAILING TIMING

Deer like green plants to be relatively early in their life cycles and rapidly growing. Greenery in general is both more easily digestible and higher in nutrition in the rapidly growing stage.

With that in mind, I time the spring mowing for when the cool season grasses start getting thick and/or they start seeding, which ever comes first. About a week later, I'll mix a grass only contact herbicide with Antler King's

JOLT, which is a foliar fertilizer, just as the grass only herbicide I'll use is, as well.

This accomplishes two main goals. First, including a fertilizer causes most all plants to absorb more, as they want that nutritional boost that's applied with the herbicide. That gives a legit bump in effective kill rates.

Conversely, it's also giving the clover a nice "jolt" of growth for about 2 weeks. Not only does this increase the clover production for fawns, nursing does and bucks developing antlers, but that further aides the incredible root development of the varieties of clover contained in this mix, which reportedly already is the highest protein content and yields of any clover mix on the market, proven true by my own field trials. The combo of selecting clovers with great root depth and giving them a "jolt" of growth before the summer months all but eliminates plots going dormant over summer, in all but the very worst conditions. Even in 2012, the newly planted **TROPHY CLOVER** plots merely went dormant for a bit over a month, only

to pop back with the cooling temps and AM dews. The combo of Trophy Clover and Jolt make established plots darn near drought proof.

To ensure the most powerful clover draw over season, mowing 3 weeks before the opener reboots the green's growth cycles, shifting them



to the desirable rapidly growing stage. So, when season opens, the clovers will be at an ideal growth state for deer usage.

The spraying follows a week later, again containing a grass only contact herbicide, only now mixed with Antler King's **CLOVER FUEL**. Where as Jolt is a powerful,

more generic fertilizer, Clover Fuel is specifically designed to provide all legume based plantings – clovers, alfalfas, soybeans – the fertility boost they need to thrive.

By taking this approach, we minimize weeds through the mowings, grasses through the spraying, and it's timed to give the clovers the growth and nutrition boosts they need, when the plants and deer need it most: withstanding summer droughts and maxing its attraction during season.

CONCLUSION

Yes, I do still apply a 0-0-60 most years, as it can give the tonnages another bump, but, in my experience, one doesn't have to. As I said, I have well over 200 acres that never saw granular fertilizer. All else being equal, did they thrive to the point those with traditional fertilizer did? Not quite, but close enough that when fertilizer costs sky rocket, I don't lose a second's sleep on using that cash for more desperately needed projects.



Food Plot Mix	Life Cycle	Planting Time	pH Required	Seeding Rate/Acre	Seed Depth	NPK Fertilizer	Fertilizer Option with Jolt™ or Clover Fuel™
Booner Buffet®	Perennial	Spring or Fall	7.0 & above	12 lbs	1/4 inch or less	5-15-30 300 lbs./acre	200 lbs./acre plus 2 Applications of Clover Fuel™
Trophy Clover Mix™	Perennial	Spring or Fall	6.2 & above	7 lbs	1/4 inch	5-15-30 300 lbs./acre	200 lbs./acre plus 2 Applications of Clover Fuel™
No Sweat®	Mix of Annual & Perennial	Spring or late Summer	5.5 & above	18 lbs	1/4 inch or less	13-13-13 or 19-19-19 300 lbs./acre	200 lbs./acre plus 2 Applications of Jolt™
Game Changer Clover™	Mix of Annual & Perennial	Spring or early Fall	5.5 & above	10 lbs	1/4 inch or less	5-15-30 300 lbs./acre	200 lbs./acre plus 2 Applications of Clover Fuel™
Great 8™	Annual	late Summer to early Fall	6.5 & above	32 lbs	1/4 inch or less	19-19-19 400 lbs./acre	Spray twice w/Plot Max™ monthly w/Jolt™
Barricade™	Annual	late Spring through Summer	5.5 & above	12 lbs	1/2 inch	19-19-19 300 lbs./acre	Spray twice w/Plot Max™ monthly w/Jolt™
Honey Hole™	Annual	late Summer to early Fall	6.0 & above	6 lbs	1/4 inch or less	19-19-19 or 13-13-13 300 lbs./acre	200 lbs./acre plus 2 Applications of Jolt™
Siam Dunk®	Annual	late Summer to early Fall	6.0 & above	14 lbs	1/2 inch or less	19-19-19 or 13-13-13 300 lbs./acre	200 lbs./acre plus 2 Applications of Jolt™
Southern Greens™	Annual	late Summer to early Fall	5.5 & above	18 lbs	1/4 inch or less	13-13-13 or 19-19-19 300 lbs./acre	200 lbs./acre plus 2 Applications of Jolt™
Lights Out®	Annual	late Summer to Fall	6.0 & above	48 lbs	1/2 inch or less	19-19-19 or 13-13-13 300 lbs./acre	200 lbs./acre plus 2 Applications of Jolt™
F/W/S Blend™	Annual	Fall	5.5 & above	34 lbs	1 inch or less	19-19-19 or 13-13-13 300 lbs./acre	200 lbs./acre plus 2 Applications of Jolt™
Red Zone™	Annual	Spring, Summer, Fall	6.0 & above	40 lbs	1 inch or less	19-19-19 or 15-15-15 300 lbs./acre	200 lbs./acre plus 2 Applications of Jolt™

1.

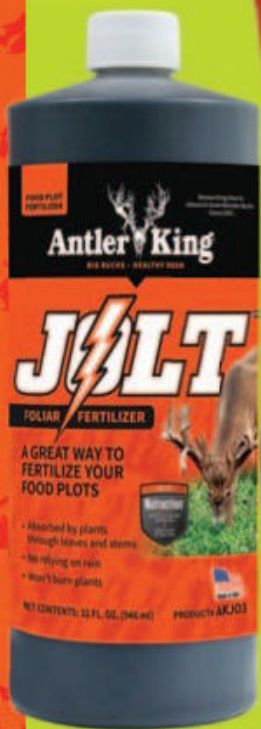


1. ANTLER KING TROPHY CLOVER

Trophy Clover is a mixture of four perennial varieties of clover, a unique variety of chicory and a variety of rapeseed that is Antler King's hardiest and longest lasting perennial mix. Trophy Clover Mix can be planted in the Spring or Fall and provide your deer herd a 30% protein diet during the Spring, Summer and Fall. Because it is a hardy perennial, Trophy Clover can last six years on a single planting. Offering high protein food sources like those found in Trophy Clover are critical to your herd during the growing months. The hand-selected varieties of clover and chicory were chosen specifically because they are highly nutritious, palatable, digestible and attract more deer and turkeys than generic clover varieties. At maturity, Trophy Clover Mix can grow 2-3 feet tall and provide up to 10 tons of high protein forage per acre. For best maintenance practice, mow trophy clover down to 6-8 inches once it has reached 24 inches tall or begins to flower.

YIELD: ONE 40-POUND BAG WILL COVER 5 ACRES.

2.



2. ANTLER KING JOLT FERTILIZER

Fertilizer can make or break your deer hunting food plots, and traditional means aren't exactly convenient or precise. Liquid foliar fertilizers help remove the guesswork – and manual work – from boosting a plot's potential. Antler King's Jolt™ is a 9-17-8 (N-P-K) fertilizer designed to do just that. Simply add Jolt™ to water in your sprayer and spray your food plot. Jolt is absorbed through the leaves and stems of plants, and because it is a liquid, it doesn't require rain to dissolve and won't burn or kill the plants. Jolt can be mixed with other herbicides using only one pass.

YIELD: A 32-OUNCE BOTTLE OF JOLT COVERS 2 ACRES.

3.



3. ANTLER KING BOONER BUFFET

Whitetails love both alfalfa and clover, but traditional strains don't fare so well in cold weather. That is changing with new seed blends that are mixed specifically for wildlife food plots. New for this year from Antler King is Booner Buffet, a specialized mix of a top-performing, cold-tolerant clover mixed with two cold-tolerant strains of multi-leaf alfalfa, along with chicory and rape. The result is a deer forage that thrives from spring through early winter. Booner Buffet is designed to withstand heavy grazing yet keeps on growing. The seed varieties are also drought and disease resistant, making this a preferred choice for food plots from the extreme north to the deep south.

YIELD: A 3-POUND BAG OF BOONER BUFFET COVERS 1/4 ACRE.

5.



4. ANTLER KING BARRICADE

If you're seeking to screen views, direct deer or create instant cover, a specialized blend of grain sorghum, forage sorghum and Sudangrass is a top choice for desired results. This blend of cover and food is included in Antler King's Barricade™ – an annual cover screen that serves multiple purposes. For deer, it provides thick cover for bedding, while offering an easy food source in the grain sorghum within the bedding area. For hunters, the thick, 8-foot-high stalks planted in strategic locations provide a cover screen, allowing easy undetected access to blinds and treestands when hunting. It also creates perfect funnels by simply leaving openings for deer to walk through near your treestand or blind. For food plots, Barricade allows the hunter to plant barriers between fields, plots and woods, creating safe and secluded areas where mature bucks feel comfortable feeding. Plant it near roads to eliminate road hunters, poachers and others from viewing and harassing deer on your property.

YIELD: A 3-POUND BAG OF BARRICADE COVERS 1/4 ACRE.

4.



5. ANTLER KING CLOVER FUEL

Antler King's Clover Fuel™ is the safest, fastest and easiest way to fertilize any legume. Simply mix with water and spray on soil when planting. After plants are 3 inches high or taller, spray again to increase growth and tonnage. It can also be mixed with Antler King's® Plot Max™ soil conditioner and any herbicide for a one-pass application. Since Clover Fuel only benefits legumes, it won't benefit weeds and other competitive plants. Unlike granular fertilizers that require rain to dissolve and absorb through their root system, Clover Fuel immediately gets absorbed through the soil or as a foliar fertilizer through their leaves and stems.

YIELD: A 32-OUNCE BOTTLE OF CLOVER FUEL COVERS 1 ACRE.

Hot Picks!

Fly THE AREA

LET YOUR SCOUTING TAKE WINGS ...
AND CREATE AN UNEXPECTED BONUS.

GLENN HELGELAND AND BOB FRATZKE

A lot has changed since we wrote this article for Bob Fratzke's book (Taking Trophy Whitetails, (www.targetcommbooks.com), mainly: **1) the development of things like online services** (HuntStand and Onyx, to name two) to scout hunting land, find public land, look up private landowners and boundaries, **2) the development and use of drones to check out on-site details**, and **3) the dramatic changes in camera gear.**

The online programs, however, are not full replacements for flying an area, but they certainly can be complimentary and do most of the work. However, this “old dog” trick of flying still has plenty of good points, so don’t discount it, Fratzke says.

“Systems like ours can be complimentary to fly-overs,” notes Tim Kent of HuntStand, “not a replacement. You can get certain information from our system that you can’t get from a fly-over, and vice versa.”

He points out that some people will be able to use drones to check deer trails. “That reminds me ... I should do a drone check on winter trails where I hunt. Warmer weather will melt some packed-down trails, making them more visible.”

“Google Earth will do some work for you, too.

“Basically, cobble through the areas with our system to check what you can. But you can’t assume what deer will do month to month, so use whatever works best for you. If this involves fly-overs, so be it.”

Jared Larsen at OnXmaps said that combining satellite photos with 3-D mapping will give you the same view as from an airplane, but for a lot less cost. However, getting the lay of the land, so to speak, might be best from an airplane. It is live and in color, and it is personal. The things you can learn, and learn fast, will offset the dollar cost. He, too, mentioned drones for photography.

However, we have heard that some states are looking into restrictions on drones for photography during hunting seasons. Deer and the sport of hunting don’t need that harassment.

Dan Schmitz, the editor of this magazine, said this: “Most of these apps include so many features that it can overwhelm us older guys. You needn’t worry about how complicated they seem to be. Me, personally? I use the bare minimum features and find they really shorten the learning curve on new properties and help me better understand properties I’ve been hunting for years.”

Actually flying over an area is one of the most overlooked, one of the most hands-on, one of the most effective, and can be one of the least expensive ways of scouting, Fratzke notes.

Flying time, on a per-hour basis, is expensive, probably around \$125 per flight hour including fuel, plus around \$57 per flight hour for the services of a qualified pilot. (SE Wisconsin rates for both.) Prices where you hunt may be more or less, but when you think of all the terrain you can cover in detail in that short time, all the details of that land (and the deer living on it) you can learn about, all the auto and truck gas you save, it becomes cheap.

Flying doesn’t take as long either. For instance, think of all the habitat and feeding areas and such that a plane can fly over -- and you can take photos of -- in a couple of hours. Even at \$125/hour, those two hours become inexpensive, considering all that you can get done in that time frame.

My brother-in-law Don Volland, a member of the Wisconsin Aviation Hall of Fame and a veteran of many deer-count flights for the WI DNR, notes the hourly rate should be for plane and pilot.

“When you start your search for a pilot,” Don says, “don’t look for the lowest qualified pilot just because he may be cheaper. The emphasis is on safety, flying skills and overall qualifications. There’s no room for error. Do your homework.”

One flying height tip -- “fly 600-700 feet above the trees,” Don says, “not above the ground. In addition, the pilot needs to pay attention to low objects such as cell phone towers, power lines and other obstructions.

“The survey speed would be below that used for normal cruise to allow time for proper observation and/or photos. Set the camera shutter at 1/1000 to minimize any movement from aircraft vibration,” he added.

“The survey area is usually flown in the form of a grid pattern, moving from the downwind side to the upwind side to capture any deer movement created by aircraft noise.” Fratzke notes, “I prefer flying with pilots who don’t hunt, for obvious reasons. If I can’t find one like that, I don’t make evaluative comments in flight -- I might find him in my stand next fall.”

Fly all the area, over standing corn, over other agricultural crop fields or other feeding areas (oak ridges can be good until the snow gets too deep). Fly over bedding areas and all areas between feeding and bedding. In short, look over the whole country. You would be surprised how, even from the air, you can see the trails between these areas.

Take photographs of everything; analyze the photos later. When you’re flying, have the pilot tip the plane a bit so you can take a better photo. You can shoot right through the window on most planes. If not, the pilot probably will let you open the window.

(EDITOR’S NOTE: Be sure you have a camera with adjustable shutter speeds. Point-and-shoot and cell phone cameras are NOT good here). You will need to take photos with a shutter speed of at least 1/500th of a second and 1/1000 of a second is better, otherwise you will have a large collection of blurred photos. If you can do so, bracket your exposures -- shoot at three or four f-stop settings to be sure you have something, or at least try a shutter speed of 1/1000th of a second.

Photography over snow is a lot like photography over water, because there is extra light reflection coming off the surface of that water or snow, and thus light readings can be tricky.)

Flying cuts down on scouting time, and every time you move through snow on foot, it takes time and energy. There’s nothing wrong with getting a little fresh air while you do some snowshoeing or cross-country skiing, but it can be colder than cold at times. Windy, too.

WHAT CAN YOU SEE?

“Plenty,” Fratzke says.

- 1) You’ll be able** to see where the deer moved to a wintering location. File that information, because next year you may be able to set up along a migration route and do alright.
- 2) This also** is an excellent way to discover all the terrain changes and get the best over-view of the entire terrain to see the relationships of why



THE SHOOTING STICK THAT GOES FROM **8 INCHES TO OVER 60 INCHES** (and everything in-between)

Serious shooters know the value of shooting sticks, but for many years hunters have avoided using them due to their bulky nature and clumsy design. The new Solid Aim Shooting stick eliminates these flaws, giving you a sturdy solid shooting platform in a quickly deployable and ultra-compact design. At only 8 inches, the Solid Aim shooting stick will easily fit into a pocket or pack, yet still allows you to adjust from 8 inches to over 60 inches in an instant. Best of all it works with rifles, shotguns, pistols, and crossbows. Use it while stalking, in blinds, and even in tree stands.

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deer may move from one area to another. Small changes in terrain or cover may seem insignificant to you, but they won't be insignificant to deer. This gets back to seeing instead of just looking.

"For instance," Fratzke notes, "my area has a lot of ridges that are farmed at the top. Ridge sides are wooded. Valley bottoms are farmed. Sometimes a little gulley will begin at the top of a ridgetop field. That erosion is inevitable. This erosion also changes deer routes. If they want to parallel a hillside they don't like to go through these deep depressions. They either will cut down below one or break out over the top just before the gulley.

"If you're hunting halfway between, you're missing the whole ball game.," he says.

These things usually are visible from the air. Then you can check them in your photos and double-check by inspecting them on foot.

When you're flying, take a map with you, preferably a topographical map. Mark the map with each photo number on your photo disk. You'll need these keys, because a handful of photos can sometimes be deceiving. Some will be easy to pinpoint, but some won't.

ANALYZING YOUR PHOTOS

- 3) **You'll be able** to mark the perimeter trail following around the opening, back in the brush 20 yards or so.
- 4) **There will be** depressions or thickets which will be points of emergence for deer onto the field, to feed there or to cross it.
- 5) **There will be** approach trails and bedding areas back behind the perimeter trail.
- 6) **Since you know** where the deer are and will be before and during pressure situations, you can analyze the terrain and see where they will be most likely to go when pushed.

"They generally go the route of least resistance. They like to travel in the semi-open, such as right along a thicket or swamp, or just below a ridgetop so their body will be hidden yet they can see quite a distance. This is easier moving for the deer, yet it is right next to instant dense cover.

"Easier moving also means quieter moving," Fratzke adds.

- 7) **The pressure situations** change things, force the deer to choose. That's where your scouting and analyzing skills come into play.

"On a ridgetop, for instance, the direct route over the top may be exposed -- as I noted earlier -- but it also may mean less traveling, very brief exposure, less predictability (if the hunter figures they will stay in the brush and circle the ridge), and fastest means to heavier cover" Fratzke says.

You sure aren't going to follow those deer anywhere -- their legs are an excellent defense here. They can be across a hundred-yard field in just a few seconds, and they will be moving fast. Even for a rifleman that may not present much of a shot.

- 8) **Wide open ridgetops** have more dips and shallow depressions than you believe, until you

stand back and take a clear look. One of those little dips can cover a deer for a long way, especially if you are out of position.

- 9) **Often this isn't** enough, though, even in shotgun-only areas. Fratzke adds, "**I think nowadays the deer that are runners are dead. The ones that are sitters and hiders are survivors.** They're letting you walk right by them. The ones with the best nerves win."

What happens is that deer are harassed from the time the hunting season starts by bowhunters, grouse hunters, squirrel hunters, hikers, gun hunters and so on. **We have patterns too, so it stands to reason that deer know basically what to expect. They know how and where to stay put.** If they had to run every time someone stepped into the woods and they detected it, they wouldn't ever have time to rest.

Fratzke adds, "I'd guess we're probably walking past 90 percent of the deer we eventually get a shot at. In the mornings, I won't hesitate to go out to my stand in the dark. As long as they don't smell you, and you're taking your time and not crashing through brush, they don't know what you are. Since you keep moving and aren't directly threatening, you soon move out of their area of concern and they relax again." **Every time that happens to a deer, it becomes more certain that that is the best way for it to survive.**

"I feel very comfortable going into the woods in the dark and getting set up on stand. This comes back to the need to get there early enough," Bob points out.

MAIN PART OF WINTER

This is the time to do your homework and research. Reintroduce yourself to your family and friends. After you've done that, here's a list of things Fratzke suggests you consider:

- **Check-up flyover**
- **Talk to farmers**
- **Scout new terrain**
- **Get herd information from the DNR and study it**
- **Read magazines and books on whitetail hunting to see if there's anything that will add to your knowledge, answer questions, fill in gaps**
- **Check on wintering herd health, available food supplies**
- **Check out stand locations for next late season**
- **Get out and enjoy the outdoors**

"Remember, the more work you do, the more time you spend in the woods, the more effectively you see what you're looking at and analyze what you're seeing, the luckier you'll get." Bob notes.

- 10) **This time of year** will be ideal for check-up flyovers. Take the camera and shoot some more photos. Those memory cards are cheap compared to all the other time and expenses you devote to whitetail hunting.

"Then, compare these photos to any you might have taken in the late season," Bob advises.

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LANDOWNER RELATIONSHIPS

Here's a bonus.

"I start right with late season scouting" Fratzke notes. "I ask permission from the landowner to go on his land to scout. I tell him I've looked at it on maps and from the air, and that it looks interesting. I tell him that if subsequent checking shows as much potential as early checking, I'd want to bowhunt for deer on his land next season. I explain that I will be buck hunting." (Some people are still opposed to shooting does.)

"The fact that I've devoted that much effort to scouting almost always interests the landowner. When I show him photos from my flyover, he usually becomes even more interested. Not many of us have seen aerial photographs of our home turf, so naturally that's going to be interesting.

"IF THINGS WORK OUT WELL, I'LL OFTEN GIVE THE LANDOWNER AN ENLARGED COLOR PRINT OF THE BEST AERIAL PHOTO OF HIS BUILDINGS AND NEARBY SURROUNDING LAND," FRATZKE ADDS.

"I tell the landowner that I will inform him every time I plan to be on his land-- even when just scouting -- and where I plan to be. If he objects to some or all of my plans, we can work out a solution with friendly discussion.

"Once I have permission, or as extra inducement to get permission, I give the landowner my business card and home phone number and address, make and description of my car and license plate number. It stands to reason that if you voluntarily give someone all that information, you are serious and aren't planning to goof yourself up. You and he both know he will be checking with you first if something is wrong on his land."

He concludes, "the fact that I've devoted so much effort to scouting always impresses the landowners I talk to."

WINDY

Flyover will give you the best look at the terrain, as I've noted earlier and want to emphasize, Fratzke says. Now you can check herd size, degree of yarding, yarding effects, amount of movement to feeding areas. If you have DNR data on deer density in that area before the hunt then compare that to herd sizes now, you can get a good idea of the kill percentage, and by looking at the severity of the winter and amount of food available you can also get a decent idea of fawning for next spring and next year's herd size and strength.

11) When you're noting available food and its location, you can check this next summer against crop locations and know whether deer will or will not be likely to be in the same area or move slightly (or a lot).

This can be a clue as to whether you will have good results hunting the area in next year's late season.

"I use this time to combine looking at new land and talking to farmers. First, though, I'll go over topographical maps and plat books -- **this was before today's new systems of online checking land boundaries and ownership** -- so I know what the country looks like comparing photos to topo maps to pin down details and who owns the land I want to inspect on foot."





WIN THE **CLOVER WAR**

CLOVER CAN BE A MAGICAL ADDITION TO ANY FOOD PLOT PROGRAM. WATCHING IT GET OVERRUN BY WEEDS DOESN'T NEED TO HAPPEN! HERE'S HOW TO MAINTAIN A CARPET OF WONDERFUL WHITETAIL CLOVER THIS SEASON WITHOUT EVER TILLING THE SOIL.

If you keep up with the hunting world or read whitetail social media forums, you roll your eyes when you see the standard food plot question that's been asked a thousand times, "what should I plant in this field?" Invariably, a hundred different responses demand the author of the question to 'plant this or else', implying that it would be an epic failure if he or she planted anything different.



If you ask any hardcore, whitetail-crazed food plotter, they'll tell you clover is a staple in a whitetail's Autumn diet and should be a part of your whitetail food plot program. I can't disagree. Clover provides nutrition throughout 75% of the year for most states in the U.S.

Clover is easy to establish without large equipment and stays green deep into November for many of the best whitetail states such as Wisconsin, Iowa, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. In fact, I have seen deer paw through snow to reach green clover. The positives outweigh the cost of upkeep when it comes to clover, but don't be fooled into thinking you can plant it and forget it. Perennial clover plots need attention. If you provide it nutrients and keep weeds at bay, you will be greatly rewarded. Here's how to plant and maintain your best clover yet.

DON'T TILL THE SOIL

No, I am not anti-disking or tilling the soil. My family and I own a tiller, and we utilize it for food plots. However, when planting clovers and other small seed such as chicory or alfalfa, tilling is unnecessary in a lot of situations and will only present more weed control challenges. Here is the ideal Springtime scenario for establishing a new clover plot without tilling.

If you have a food plot that was previously planted in an annual such as soybeans or brassica plants such as turnips, rape, or radish—rotating this into clover the following Spring by frost seeding clover is a great

idea. Frost seeding is usually done in late Winter when the daytime temperatures are above freezing, and the nighttime temperatures are below freezing. For much of the Midwest, late March is an excellent frost seeding period. The freezing and thawing of the ground soaks in the tiny clover seeds. Seed at a higher than suggested rate. If the bag says 4lbs per half acre, sow at least 5lbs when frost seeding to ensure the germination success of as many seeds as possible. I like to use a hand seeder when frost seeding. Many can be purchased for under \$50. When planting clover, always be sure to plant a blend of at least four different clovers. Red, white, ladino, and alsike are good varieties that mature at different rates and do well in various soils.

Don't worry if your clover gets snowed on after you seed. In fact, this usually sinks the clover into the soil even more. Clover seeds are very hardy and easily withstand the cold before optimal germination temperatures arrive. Ideally, 50% of the soil would be exposed and have that nasty Spring mud appearance. If you get done seeding your clover and your boots are covered in cold Springtime mud, your clover will sink in nicely.

If you won't have a previous year's food plot to frost seed into, spray an area with Glyphosate (RoundUp) during the Fall months of September or early October in preparation for Spring frost seeding. If the area has tall grasses, mow it first, then spray Glyphosate so the area stands a better chance at having exposed soil come Spring.



BEFORE SPRAYING



AFTER SPRAYING

If you didn't frost seed in early Spring, don't fret. You can still establish clover without machinery in early Summer if you get precipitation. In 2019, I planted a half-acre brassica plot. The plot was very successful, but I knew I would rotate this into a perennial the following year.

June 6th 2020 arrived and I was still undecided of what I was going to do with the area. But a few days later, I sprayed the grasses and weeds that had grown up in the field and seeded down clover immediately after (Glyphosate will NOT harm seed) and watched rain come down on the plot the next day. The grass and thatch I sprayed died and laid nicely over the seed so the soil could maintain a cool temperature which provided optimal June growing conditions for the clover. This plot currently stands as the best clover I ever planted! The initial planting of this clover cost me two hours of work, \$25 for seed, and about 16oz of Glyphosate.

MAINTENANCE IS KEY!

About two months after planting, you will visit your clover plot and it might look ugly. Like, real ugly. For a second you will wish you hadn't listened to me. I've been there. Don't worry, as those little clover seeds will explode when you take care of the early broadleaf weeds that appear in late April through May.

To take care of the broadleaf weeds, I sprayed Butyrac-200 which has the active ingredient of 2-4DB,

not to be confused with 2-4D. Clover will not be harmed by spraying 2-4DB. Knock out these broadleaf weeds at spring green up before they reach 8-10 inches tall.

Once we get into early or mid-June, grasses such as foxtail and Johnsongrass may begin to take over. Clethodim is an excellent grass specific herbicide that kills many annual and perennial grasses. Clethodim works slowly, so don't expect results within a week or ten days. Give Clethodim a full two weeks or more to kill the grasses. Be sure to read labels for mixing rates. If sprayed correctly, Butyrac-200 and Clethodim will allow your clover to explode with good rainfall! I sprayed these chemicals with a pump hand sprayer. Time can be reduced greatly with the use of an ATV sprayer.

By the middle of summer, your food plot should be lush and green. If it doesn't look perfect, keep in mind this is a first-year clover plot. Most clovers have deep roots that take time to establish. If you notice your plot is flowered out, or pesky weeds are returning, you can mow the plot. Year two is where you will really see a jump in thickness of the plot!

Clover can be planted using many different strategies, but the tactics I laid out in this article are by far the easiest and cheapest way I have found.

— Paul Annear is a whitetail hunting fanatic from Wisconsin.



As whitetail hunters, we all see it as summer turns its corner and begins to go on the wane. The sun seems to start angling in just a little bit lower as each week passes. Grasses start going brown. A few sumac leaves turn red. The air goes drier. A deer hunter's guts just start feeling it and knowing it: Hunting season really is marching toward us.

It's easy to think *Ah, there's plenty of time yet to get ready*. But it's just as easy – and smarter – to take stock of what's on your Deer Hunting To-Do List and start checking items off. We all could use a little kickstart ... and taking care of important preparations now is, after all, part of the hunt. So take a browse through Deer & Deer Hunting's 11 summertime chores, projects, jobs, checks and fixes, and consider what tasks you want to add to your own list. Then get busy! We know you've already got some shooting – long bow, crossbow, firearm, muzzleloader, you name it – in the plan. But it's never too early to be getting everything else ready for deer season.

11

TO DO BEFORE

CHORES, PROJECTS, JOBS, CHECKS & FIXES

DEER SEASON



1. REVIEW AND SHARPEN KNIVES AND BUTCHERING TOOLS



Field dressing and meat processing are keys to the do-it-yourself deer hunters' practice, but it can get easy to muddle through a season's jobs, put everything away, and plan to take care of maintenance jobs and tasks later. Later is now. Sharpen your field, skinning and butchering knives, as well as well as cleavers or any other tools you employ. Is your vacuum sealer working? Got bags or material? Better to get prepared on all these fronts now rather than get caught shorthanded when you bring a deer back to camp or home

2. EXAMINE, REPAIR AND MAINTAIN FOOTWEAR



When in the field, we deer hunters live in our boots. You probably own an array of footwear: Light hikers for early-season, waterproof boots for mucky days, pacs and thermals for frigid late-season hunts. If you have leather, take time now to oil and treat it to prolong life. Any leaks to repair? Is it time to replace this or that set of boots that just don't feel right anymore or are wearing out? Any loose seams to sew up, or soles to replace, at the cobbler's? Think about your feet now. Bonus: If you get new boots, you have time to break them in.

3. CONSIDER CLOTHING AND COATS

This is another one where it's easy to try and make a few mental notes of repairs or replacements needed at the end of the season, then put everything away. Every summer I end up taking jackets and pants to my local seamstress (she is well-versed in hunting clothes thanks to me) for buttons, zippers, sewn-up crotches, patches and the like, to "get another season" out of them. My pre-season checkover process also includes a look-at and try-on of inner layers, mid-layer thermals, and socks.



4. CHECK AND RE-SET STANDS

My boys and I largely hunt from stationary ladder stands on established runways and crossings. Summer is the perfect time for any hunter to get in the woods and take care of necessary tune-ups, re-positions and safety adjustments on all types of stands. If you have permanent blinds, get out there and give them an annual checkover and make any repairs now. This is also a good time to cut approach lanes and shooting lanes. If you use portables, take them out and give them a run-through for operation and safety issues now, while there is still time to secure parts and make adjustments.



5. TAKE A HAT AND GLOVE PATROL

Did all your hats make it through last season in serviceable shape? Got camo and orange for a variety of environments and conditions? Are your stocking caps still snug for warmth, or all floppy and loose? How do you like your glove selections? Do you even have them all? (I seem to have a real penchant for losing right-hand gloves, as evidenced by my extensive left-hand glove collection.)

Better to discover any replacement needs now. Noteworthy: Make a handwarmer order now, if you like and use them.

6. INVENTORY YOUR AMMUNITION

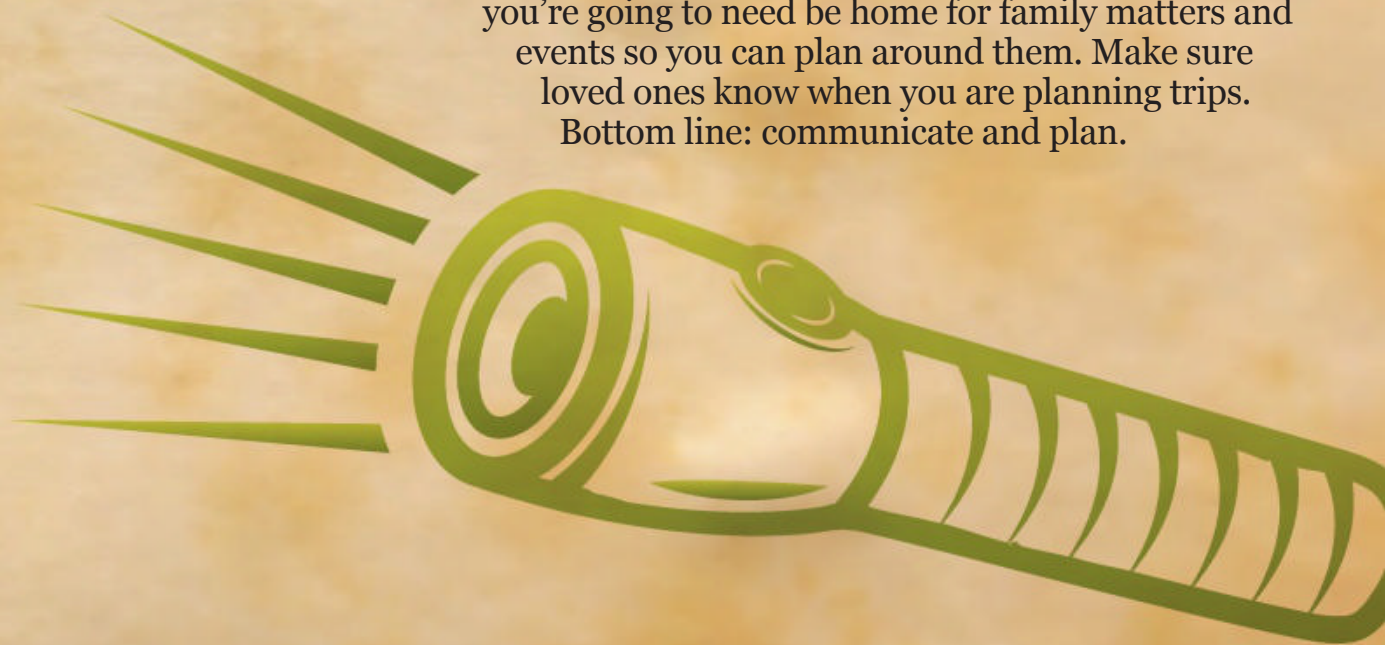
If you don't know about the contemporary challenges related to securing ammunition of almost any type, you must have a pretty good stockpile going. Take a gander at your ammunition (and that includes any muzzleloading supplies) now, and get busy working to buy new, while you have a little time. Waiting until you really need it probably won't work in the current environment.

7. GUARANTEE BATTERY POWER FOR LIGHTING

Getting into a stand and getting set in the morning. Fixing a gun jam in the dark. Finding something you dropped. Taking care of field dressing chores after dark. Lighting that operates is critical to a deer hunter's operation. This tip is pretty granular, but it involves accessories that, if they aren't working, can make a hunt downright challenging. So, inspect your headlamps and other field lights. Replace old batteries in any units. No matter how good you think your batteries are, store replacement batteries in your daypack.

8. MARK UP THE CALENDAR

One of the best feelings of all in late summer for me is when the calendar is laid out with what hunts are happening when, and the rest of the family knows. Communicate now on all these fronts and lay out the season's flow to prevent surprises later. Know now when you're going to need be home for family matters and events so you can plan around them. Make sure loved ones know when you are planning trips. Bottom line: communicate and plan.



9. INVENTORY (AND EAT) LAST YEAR'S MEAT

Nothing makes me hunt harder than having a freezer empty of last year's venison. And that's a good thing. Summer is the perfect time to finish off what's left from last season. Even with vacuum sealing and good freezing, approaching 12 months is the outside window for when red meat will keep good flavor. Get out the grill, make lots of burgers, put the smoker to use, or grind some cuts and make brats, sticks or sausage.

10. RESEARCH LICENSE / TAG / DRAW DEADLINES AND REQUIREMENTS

There's no sinking feeling in the world quite like realizing you missed the deadline for a license application or draw hunt.

Sit down on the computer or your phone browser now and make sure you're set for licensing and tag needs for the hunts you want to do. If you know you are going and the license is over the counter, why not get that taken care of now? Better than a last-minute scramble or outright forgetting.

11. PACK THE DAYPACK

Start gathering back together the contents of your daypack kit. Everybody's list is different, but here's a starter list of possible contents. The contents will change between bow and firearm hunts, and from early season to the rut to late season. Take a look and see what you have, what you might need to replace, and what you want to add.

- Safety harness
- Pull-up rope for bow or firearm
- Bow/gun/gear and gear hanger
- Binoculars
- Rangefinder
- Headlamp / flashlight / lighting
- Spare batteries for above
- Odor-eliminating spray or device
- Insect repellent or device
- Facepaint or facemask
- Tree saw/pruner tool
- Multitool for gear fixes
- Compass (for backup if phone dies)
- Grunt tube, bleat call, rattling antlers
- Scents and lures
- Field-dressing kit / tools
- Small first-aid kit
- Pee bottle
- Toilet Paper



THE BIG 6

FROM THE FIRST MOMENT
WE SAW THIS OLD BUCK,
WE WERE ALL IN.

When I was young, had someone called me a neophile, I would have taken great offense. A neophile is described as “a personality type characterized by a strong affinity for novelty.” In other words, one who likes strange stuff. When it comes to big game animals, that describes me to a “T.”

Bob Robb and guide Larry Compton with The Big Six.



TROPHY RIDGE OUTFITTERS

Longtime DDH supporters Ralph and Lenora Dampman of Trophy Ridge Outfitters have been successfully guiding archery and firearms clients for whitetails, mule deer, elk, pronghorn, prairie dogs, mountain lion, bighorn sheep, and Merriam's turkeys for more than two decades. Based in Carlile, WY, on the Belle Fourche River near the historic Devil's Tower National Monument in the state's northeast corner, the region is loaded with game. There are so many deer you have to be extremely cautious driving after dark for fear of hitting one! They have tens of thousands of acres of private land leased and do not overhunt their ranches. Ralph is also a skilled taxidermist. After a successful hunt, they'll transport your meat to a nearby processor (I recommend C&A Meats in nearby Sundance.) They will also assist you in applying for the required licenses and tags. A small 3D archery range and place to sight in your rifle are on site. I've hunted with the Dampman's off-and-on for decades, and have never been disappointed. Accommodations are comfy, the food plentiful, the guides excellent, and the chances for a successful hunt extremely high. DDH Editor-in-Chief Dan Schmidt has had a successful whitetail hunt here every year for the past 11 seasons - but then, when it comes to whitetailing, Dan always seems have a 4-leaf clover in his pocket.



Below: The blind we used to ambush The Big Six, overlooking the twin oaks under which the old buck was arrowed.



For decades I've been drawn to unusual antlers and horns, like a sailor who's drawn to the sea. Trashy whitetails, nontypical mule deer, gnarly old bull elk, pronghorn with crazy horns, you name it. I even once shot the only "non-typical" Dall sheep ram anybody - sheep biologists included - have ever seen. So when we first laid eyes on a buck we called The Big Six, I immediately knew that this was going to be all or nothing week.

In many ways, The Big Six reminded me a lot of myself. He was older, and a loner. And though he moved slowly and cautiously, like his knees hurt and back ached, he was constantly checking the neighborhood for signs of trouble. His 6-point antlers were not the usual 8-point configuration, but a big forked-horn with tall eye guards. Growing up on the coast of California, a big forked horn California mule deer was considered a real trophy buck for us, another subliminal factor in my attraction. He never traveled more than a half mile from his bedding area, which was conveniently located in a brushy oak-studded creek bottom next door to a large alfalfa field.

Getting a shot was not going to be easy.

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

I saw him first on David Gilane's video footage, taken when he and DDH Editor-in-Chief Dan Schmidt filmed him as they hunted a hay bale blind in an alfalfa field. This was morning one of our 5-day hunt in late September, 2021, but The Big Six never gave them an opportunity. An evening rain/hail storm changed movement patterns, and this - plus, I think, a bit too much human activity - pushed the buck back up the creek toward his bedroom and away from the blind. Immediately I thought, "I'd really like to hunt this buck!"

Meanwhile, videographer Ian Sanchez and I hunted several different locations morning and evening that guide Larry Compton suggested had promise. Larry, a retired career law enforcement officer - thank you, sir! - and lifelong hunting fanatic, is both a lot of fun and an excellent guide, whose friendly demeanor masks an intensity about the hunt I admire greatly. Over the next couple of days

we hunted morning and evening in different spots, always seeing lots of deer and plenty of bucks but nothing to write home about.

Then on day three, Dan and David tried a new spot that Trophy Ridge Outfitters owner Ralph Dampman suggested. The weather was hot, and the blind was near an isolated water source. As Ian and I sat a transition zone in the oaks and saw little, Dan texted us a photo. Big 10-pointer on the ground! When Larry gathered us up midmorning, we had a quick chat, that went something like this: Bob: "Larry, I want that big six-pointer. Bad. Now that Dan's punched out, he's available, right?" Larry: "Funny you should mention him, he was standing right by the road a little while ago. In fact, he walked maybe 100 yards from where my truck was parked." Bob: "What are we waiting for??"

GAME ON

So we took the truck over by the spot, and guess what? There he was, at 0900 standing under a pair of large oaks along the brushy creek bottom, all alone and not 20 yards off a dirt county road, with a large alfalfa field on the other side, about 300 yards from the blind. Are you kidding me?

That evening, Ian and I sat the hay bale blind that Dan and David had sat previously. We saw deer, and a flock of 21 Merriam's turkey hens walked within feet of the blind, but there was no sign of The Big Six. Larry had posted up where he could glass the area, and when he picked us up after dark said the buck was right under the same twin oaks where we'd seen him that morning.

We decided the best plan was to forgo a morning blind hunt, and do some mobile scouting. We would park his truck an hour before first light right where it had been when Larry had seen the buck, and patiently see what developed. The idea was to locate him and, if we could, make a stalk. If not, we'd try and put the puzzle together and plan an ambush.

Two hours after first light we hadn't seen much, so we fired up the rig and went for a cruise. Bob: "You think he might be under those oaks again?" Larry: "Well, let's see ... holy buckets, there he is!" Sure enough, there he was, all alone, pounding the

acorns. So we slowly drove by, parked up high 600 yards away where we could glass. About 10:00 or so, he ambled across the road, around a fence that bordered the ranch alfalfa field and past a pile of dozens of huge alfalfa bales, before disappearing in the head-high grass. There was no doubt we'd found his bedroom.

THE PLAN COMES TOGETHER

What to do? At first we thought, maybe I could build a brush blind along the route he'd taken to bed, and hope to waylay him that evening. Not a bad plan, except for two things – the addition of a cameraman makes this extremely difficult, plus, it's illegal to shoot across a county road. Also, the thick cover plus the fact that we didn't know exactly how close he'd bedded to the two story tall hay bale pile made it super risky.

So I had an idea, the kind of dice roll that either comes up "7" or snake eyes. This was day 4, so we were essentially out of time. Bob: "Why don't we see if we can make a blind within range of those twin oaks we've seen him at every morning and evening all week? Rather than push it, Ian and I can sit someplace else this evening, and if a whopper comes by we'll take him. If not, we'll be in the new blind well before first light, and hope he keeps doing what he's been doing." Larry: "I just happen to have a blind in the truck. Let's do it!"

So we brushed in the blind across the creek channel up against a cut bank exactly 42 yards from the twin oaks. In the morning we'd be in the deep shadows, and the wind would be good. The Big Six had been at these oaks every morning on his way back to bed. On paper, it sounded perfect. But was it?

We saw nothing but does that evening at the new blind, and I slept fitfully. At 0545 -- a full 90 minutes before first light -- Ian and I were bundled up in the blind, nervously waiting.

HERE HE COMES

At 0615 it was still quite dark when a doe started feeding under our trees. Then another, and another. None showed any interest in our blind. Thinking we still had lots of time, I saw a deer through some thick trees

near the road. My goodness, it's The Big Six, at 0630, and he's coming! He came slowly, and stopped for minutes, sensing. Instead of turning left to the twin oaks, he turned right and nibbled leaves in a thick patch of young trees for 15 minutes. Even though he was under 50 yards, there was no shot through the branches. Then he walked off, down the creek bottom. Or so I thought.

"Ian, we'll just be patient and bet the farm he'll be back under his oaks in a couple of hours." I tried to hide the disappointment in my voice. Two minutes later: "Ian, here he comes!" The Big Six had spent time in the tree cover, making sure all was well, before strolling to the oaks for his breakfast.

He was 40 yards, as we'd anticipated. The 100-grain SEVR Max Cut crashed through his right scapula, and as he ran off the shaft was kicked back out. Ian thought he heard him crash, but we weren't sure. We radioed Larry, and when he arrived we reviewed the video. The green Nockturnal nock showed a solid hit, so we found the shaft -- broken off right at the ferrule, but the blood showed deep penetration -- gave it an hour, drove two hundred yards above the hay bales, and began a painstakingly slow grid search backwards through the creek bottom. We found his old beds before Larry found him. He not gone 150 yards.

THE BIG SIX WAS OURS.

As I looked at this magnificent buck, with his gnarly bases, long tines, and big body, my usual chattiness was reduced to silence. "Ours" is the correct term for this hunt. This was a total team effort, with Larry, Ian and I melding together as a unit focused on achieving success. I gave silent thanks for being blessed for being a free man living in a country where the game belongs to the people, not the king, and we are allowed to hunt as our forefathers did.

We made memories to last a lifetime.

For more information, visit www.trophyridgeoutfitters.com, email them at trophy@rtconnect.net, or call 307-756-9776.



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Look for old treestands while scouting. These clues can help you determine historical travel routes.

HOW TO *Speed Scout* A PROPERTY FOR DEER

THE FIVE-STEP SCOUTING PLAN FOR THOSE WITH LIMITED TIME TO DO SO.

I had 30 minutes to decide. That's the average online listing time Ohio leases are on the market before getting gobbled up. I didn't have time to pack the truck and get out of the driveway, let alone drive the five hours to go inspect the property.

That said, it's best to at least see and walk a property before leasing or buying it. There are too many unknowns and potential downsides. But I didn't have that luxury with my latest Ohio lease. Fortunately, I was able to remote speed scout (e-scout) well enough that I was confident it'd be a good property. And it has been. In three seasons, my lease buddy and I both filled two of our three buck tags.

Generally, the most successful hunters are prepared ones, though. Private or public land. Purchased, leased, or hunting by permission. No matter the type of access, the most successful hunters know very well the properties they hunt.

Of course, we don't always have a lot of time to learn a property before making a decision on it, or even much time to learn it before hunting it. That leaves us with one thing — speed scouting. Fortunately, there are three types available to hunters.

OPTION 1: REMOTE SPEED SCOUTING

It's best to complete all three types of speed scouting, but it begins with remote speed scouting from afar. Fortunately, there are many tools available to those who wish to E-scout, and hunters should use each of these.

If you haven't already located a property to focus on, you need to start from a high-level perspective. Begin with a state, region, or county. Use harvest records, trophy records, and other available data to select a general area.

Once you've selected one (or more), drill down on specific properties. Use an app or mapping service to study tracts of interest. To begin with, zoom out to study larger swaths of ground. This can help identify likely hotspots, and cross off obvious places to avoid. Once this is complete, zoom in on areas you're most interested in.

Whether searching from a high-level perspective, or zooming in for a detailed look, you're looking for potential food sources, water sources, and most of all, the best bedding cover in the area. Regarding food sources, try to pinpoint crop fields, food plots, possible mast-producing trees, early successional habitat (heavy browse), and more.



Where regulations allow, cellular trail cameras are perfect for speed scouting.



Where water is scarce, isolated water sources are great areas to focus on.

For water sources, search for creeks, streams, rivers, ponds, swamps, etc. Some places to find buck bedding include benches, brushy flats, cedar thickets, CRP, CREP, cutover timber, leeward (downwind side), oxbows, ridges, marsh islands, ridge points, swamp interiors, and anywhere with thick cover.

Once you've pinpointed likely whereabouts of these basic needs, try to connect the dots between these. This will help identify possible trails and travel routes. While these could be located anywhere within cover, these oftentimes follow certain terrain features, such as benches, funnels, pinch points, etc.

Another key thing when E-scouting is to avoid very homogenous terrain. Not to say deer don't live in such places. If their basic needs are met, they can. However, it's nearly impossible to remote scout these areas via a map and scouting them on foot takes a lot of time.

Instead, focus on areas with more abundant habitat and topographical change. Since deer are edge animals, there's a higher likelihood of deer inhabiting these areas. Furthermore, it's much easier to identify these with apps and maps.

Overall, look for benches, clear cuts, hubs, ridges, points, and other



The hottest deer sign is usually close to edge cover, which is where different types of habitats meet.

key areas. Other hotspots include funnels and pinch points, which can be created by terrain or habitat. Hills really influence how, where, and when deer use given areas of the landscape.

When studying public land, don't forget about access. Multiple access points is great when trying to find the best entry and exit routes. That said, it can also increase hunting pressure. Therefore, look for public properties that are walk-in only, or that require boat access due to being land- or water-locked. Such tracts of land discourage most hunters, which translates to less hunting pressure and more deer.

OPTION 2: OFF-SEASON SPEED SCOUTING

The second phase is all about confirming expectations from E-scouting efforts. You won't get everything right from studying an

app or map, but seasoned remote scouts can do so with a high percentage of accuracy.

Once in the area, it's important to talk to locals, but take words with a grain of salt. You might not always receive accurate information, but sometimes you will. This is worth the extra effort. Sometimes, it can even lead to access, information, or tips that you never expected.

Once you've talked to available locals, take all that you've learned and prioritize your plan for spot scouting. You don't have to walk the entire property. Focus on the best areas first. Then, go down the list. If time permits, start on the fringes, and work inward, to cover more ground.

While scouting, it's important to look for old and new deer sign. Both are valuable information. Be on the lookout for beds, rubs, scrapes, tracks, and trails. It's also crucial to look for human sign. This can help determine hunting pressure levels. Either way, mark what you find on an app or map.

Regulations permitting, it's also good to post cameras in good spots as you scout. Scrapes, mock scrapes, isolated water sources, funnels, pinch points, and other focal areas can be great camera locations. If allowed, cell cams paired with battery life lengtheners can provide beneficial real-time information.

After you've scouted, consider what the current activity looks like, but try to envision how things will



be once deer season opens during the phase of deer season you'll be hunting. Then, create multiple game plans for when you return to fill that deer tag.

OPTION 3: IN-SEASON SPEED SCOUTING

Hunters who scouted during the off-season will want to conduct in-season scouting, too. This can be solely a scouting effort on foot or via trail cameras. Or it can be a hunting-scouting hybrid approach where you're hunting observation treestands, or using a very mobile hunting method, such as still-hunting.

Check the most promising areas you discovered when E- and off-season scouting. Check cameras you posted. Find the areas of interest. Of course, if you never had

APPS 'N' MAPS

Apps and maps, such as HuntStand, can be used for speed scouting. Obviously, the app is a more powerful tool in a much smaller form. Furthermore, it provides an abundance of layers, data, and other useful assets hunters benefit from. Maps certainly have their place, too, though. This is especially true for properties you plan to continue hunting year over year. There's just something cool, and useful, about a large map of your hunting grounds hanging up on a wall or rolled out on the tailgate.

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While it's good to hang your treestands in advance, it's generally discouraged on public lands.



The author with a big Ohio buck he arrowed after speed scouting. The lease has produced for him two filled buck tags in three seasons, and would have relinquished three if not for an errant arrow during the 2020-21 season. HONEYCUTT CREATIVE PHOTOS



PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE

The primary concepts of speed scouting are mostly the same for public and private land, especially if others have access to the private land, or it's a small acreage with pressure around it. That said, there are some differences.

For example, there are more regulations to consider on public lands. Some public properties don't allow trail cameras, and if they do, only at certain times of year. Similarly, some don't permit leaving treestands in the field overnight, and if they do, it must be tagged with your info, and can only be left out at certain times of the year.

Furthermore, if you have sole access to private land, scouting for hunter activity isn't as important. That said, it's vital on public properties. It has greater chances of effecting deer.

the option to off-season scout the property in-person, now is the time to do so. Do everything outlined under the previous option now.

Then, once in-person scouting is complete, make necessary hunt plan adjustments. Then, get after it. Continue to fine tune your stand locations, entry routes, and exit paths throughout the hunt as you continue learning the area. Listen to your gut. Stick to your plan. But be mobile and know when to call an audible. Filling tags isn't easy, and adaptation is everything.

THE ANTITHESIS

The antithesis of speed scouting is soaking your trail cameras for extending periods without checking them. I do this on properties that I hunt each year. I'll post cams just prior to deer season, or soon after it begins, and let them run the entirety of it. I use non-cellular cameras that have very long battery life.

Their purpose isn't to provide real-time information. Instead, these cams are placed in more sensitive locations, such as bedding areas, are pulled after deer season, and help me understand how deer historically use such areas. This is helpful information, as these behaviors can be carried over year after year by specific deer, or the herd in general.



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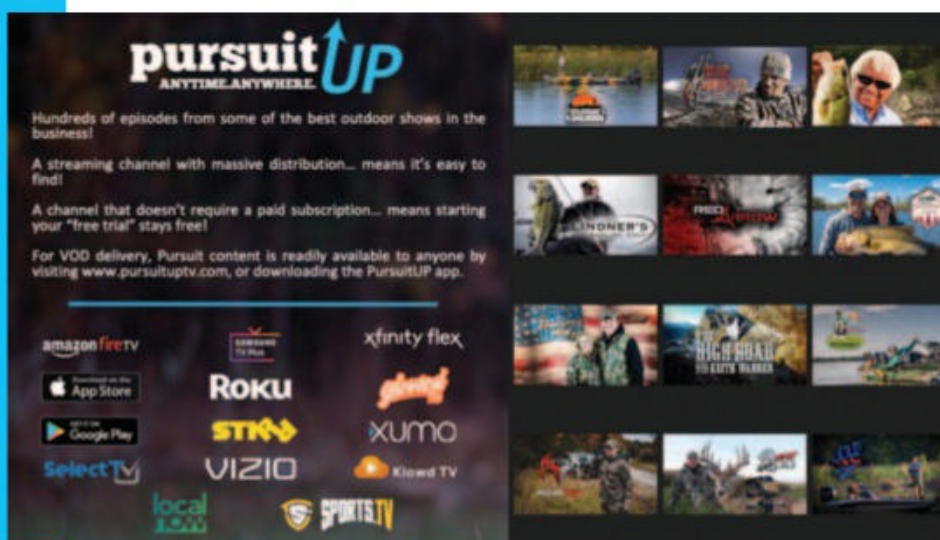


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PURSUIT CHANNEL AND CARECO TV RENEW MULTI-YEAR DEAL

Pursuit Media, LLC, Careco TV, LLC and Careco Multimedia are pleased to announce a multi-year extension of their programming and marketing services agreement. For over 12 years, Pursuit Channel has been a home base for dozens of Careco-produced and recruited original episodic series that support the hunting, fishing and tournament trail categories. For the past two years, Careco has also assisted the network in various marketing, promotional and creative services areas.

"We're so proud to have a company like Careco at our side as a like-minded and genuine partner," said Rusty Faulk, Founder and CEO of Pursuit Media. "The mixed bag of content they bring to the network provides a tremendous amount of diversity to our programming lineup. Careco also brings the messages of many of the industry's largest and most respected brands to the Pursuit audience. We couldn't be happier with this affiliation as we look ahead to many more years of success together," he continued.

Careco's President, Wade Middleton, knows all too well what Pursuit has meant to their business. "We've been alongside Pursuit on many fronts for many years ... primarily having Pursuit as a key distribution platform for our programming," he said. "Over the years we've seen Pursuit evolve and grow like few other networks in regard to both response and distribution opportunities. Every time you look up, there's another distribution platform onboarding Pursuit or Pursuit UP, and as a company that has always believed in maximizing reach and impressions, we feel there's no better place to reach the outdoors enthusiasts with our content. The growth they have achieved, and the flexibility provided for our content is so vital to our business, and any producer in the space that desires to maximize reach and impressions for their content should be airing on Pursuit and Pursuit UP, and we can help with that, as well."

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THE ROLE OF **MYOGLOBIN** IN MEAT & MUSCLE



FUNCTIONS OF MYOGLOBIN AND HEMOGLOBIN

Myoglobin is located within muscle cells, both in cardiac and skeletal muscles, while hemoglobin is located in red blood cells. The two pigments have similar, yet different, functions. Both have the primary function of binding and transporting oxygen but, obviously, do so in different locations. They also differ in how firmly they each bind oxygen. Hemoglobin provides the transport of oxygen from the lungs to muscles via circulating blood in the capillaries around muscle cells, then hands off the oxygen to myoglobin, which is located inside the muscle cells. This means that myoglobin binds oxygen more firmly than hemoglobin, which is necessary to accomplish the oxygen transfer at the cellular level. Myoglobin then stores oxygen in the muscles and transfers the oxygen to the mitochondria for energy production as needed, both during rest and during exercise. The binding of oxygen is reversible in both cases because the transfer of oxygen is a very important function of both pigments. This comes into play when considering the development and loss of meat color. Fresh meat binds oxygen very well, and forms a bright, cherry-red color as a result when exposed to air, but slowly loses the oxygen as time goes on with a loss of the red color.

Many people assume that the red drip or purge that occurs in packages of raw meat, or when frozen meat is thawed, is residual blood. However, there is very little blood remaining in meat following animal harvest because of the thorough bleeding and removal of blood that occurs during commercial harvest and processing. In the case of wild game, typically there is also very little blood remaining in muscles following harvest (see previous Butcher Shop column in the February, 2022 issue of DDH). The red color that is visually obvious in drip or purge is due to myoglobin, which is the pigment present in meat that is responsible for meat color. It is very similar to hemoglobin, which is the pigment in blood, both of which generate essentially the same color when exposed to air. However, myoglobin and hemoglobin are different, and have different functions in living animals.

The reason that myoglobin “leaks” away from fresh or frozen-thawed meat is because myoglobin is a water-soluble protein, and any water separation that occurs is likely to contain some myoglobin. This is especially true for meat cuts such as steaks and chops where some muscle cell walls on the surface have been cut, and the cell interior exposed as a result, thus allowing easier escape of intracellular water and myoglobin. In the case of frozen meat, some cell wall damage occurs due to the expansion that occurs when ice is formed during freezing and this results in increased water loss when the product is thawed.

RECIPE OF THE MONTH

Beer Cheese Backstrap

TEXT & PHOTO BY JACK HENNESSY

Every deer hunter worth his or her salt in the kitchen understands amazing backstrap requires little more than—you guessed it—salt. I personally am not one for marinades or rubs and I firmly believe anything past the S&P is borderline sacrilege for most cuts of venison.

However, on the behalf of others gathering around the table, I will advocate for supplementary sauces—whether pouring overtop or providing as a side for dipping.

This beer cheese will pair incredibly well with basically everything you serve. I myself cannot think of any game—or even vegetable, for that matter—that could not benefit for a little beer cheese. The choice of beer and cheese is up to you, but I suggest paying a little extra for quality. If you're going to enjoy to drinking that beer, eating that cheese, it belongs in your beer cheese. Don't skimp and pick up Busch Light and the pre-shredded Kraft bag. Invest in a cheese grater; invest in a better brew.

Include here are also straightforward instructions on how to prepare a better backstrap. Similar logic applies to any cut of venison you would serve medium-rare (and I recommend never serving past medium-rare): low-and-slow smoke or roast followed by a hot-and-fast reverse sear produces the best product.

INGREDIENTS (FOUR SERVINGS):

- + Half whitetail backstrap (approximately 2 pounds)
- + Kosher salt and freshly cracked pepper
- + Olive oil
- + Half medium onion, finely diced and caramelized
- + 3 tablespoons melted salted butter
- + 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- + 2 teaspoons freshly minced garlic
- + 1 cup your favorite beer
- + 1/2 cup chicken stock
- + 1/2 teaspoon Kitchen Bouquet browning sauce
- + 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- + 12 ounces freshly shredded, quality cheese

To prep fully thawed backstrap, allow it to come to room temp by leaving outside of fridge for 2-3 hours. Upon removing from fridge, lightly salt and pepper all sides.

After backstrap has come to room temp, heat either pellet grill, smoker, or oven to 200 degrees. Place backstrap on a stainless steel grate—or something similar to allow for ample airflow—ideally at least a foot from heat source, and cook until internal temp reads 110. This could will take approximately 50, though perhaps a little north or south of that depending on your setup.



To make beer cheese, in a medium to large skillet, add a thin layer of olive oil followed by finely minced onion. Heat to medium to sear onion bits then turn to medium low and stir occasionally until onion is caramelized (should take 20 to 35 minutes). Remove onion and set aside.

In that same skillet, melt butter in skillet on medium heat then add flour. Stir in thoroughly and cook for 5 minutes to create a roux. Add garlic and stir for couple more minutes then add beer and chicken stock and continue to stir to work out clumps. Add browning sauce, Dijon mustard, then cream. Stir in thoroughly. Turn heat to low and slowly add freshly grated cheese, stirring well and careful not to burn. Turn to very low once melted in and ready to serve.

Meanwhile, as backstrap nears 110, heat a grill, cast-iron, or mild-steel flat-top or skillet to minimum 600 degrees Fahrenheit. Once backstrap hits 110, pull and sear all sides for 1 minute to apply crust and caramelize meat (this is your reverse sear).

After reverse searing, allow to rest on a grate so juices can drip down. Flip after 5 minutes so juices do not accumulate on top of meat. Do not over. Allow to rest for total of 10 minutes prior to carving.

Carve backstrap and either top with beer cheese or serve beer cheese on the side for dipping. Enjoy!

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


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COMMERCIAL APPLICATIONS FOR MEAT COLOR CONTROL

Myoglobin is called a conjugated protein which means that it is composed of a typical protein chain of amino acids (globin portion of myoglobin), plus a nonprotein structure called the heme. It is the heme structure, which contains iron, that makes myoglobin unique because the heme is where oxygen is bound for transport. The heme iron can also bind other compounds such as nitric oxide (NO) and carbon monoxide (CO). In fact, both NO and CO bind to the heme much more firmly than oxygen, and will displace oxygen if they are present. Both of these compounds are used commercially to improve meat color and color stability. Nitric oxide is utilized for the development of cured meat color, where curing agents (nitrite and/or nitrate) release NO when added to meat. The NO is bound by the heme iron and forms the stable reddish-pink color of cured meat.

For fresh meat, CO gas is used in some packaging applications because CO binds very tightly to heme iron and produces a bright red color that is very similar to that produced by oxygen. In fact, the binding of CO to the heme in hemoglobin is so strong that it is the basis for carbon monoxide poisoning when excess CO in the air is bound by hemoglobin and displaces oxygen. Obviously, if the concentration of CO in the air is high enough, the results can be fatal for anyone exposed because the blood will be unable to transport oxygen. There were concerns about the safety of CO-packaged meat when the process was first developed but the amount of CO used in packaging is far too small to be hazardous. The advantage of CO packaging is that, because of the strong bond between CO and heme iron, the red color will last 3-4 times as long as the color that results from oxygen.

MYOGLOBIN AND COLOR

Myoglobin affects meat color in two ways. First, the concentration of myoglobin determines the intensity of color, and second, the compound attached to the heme determines the perceived color. Myoglobin concentration varies a great deal between species depending on muscle function. For example, whales, which need a large muscle storage capacity for oxygen when they dive, have an extremely high myoglobin concentration, and a muscle color that has been described as very dark and almost black. Whale muscle has about 50 more myoglobin than most other mammals. The difference in color intensity between chicken breast meat and venison is another example of differences in myoglobin concentration. Myoglobin content is also increased by muscle function which means that muscles used for greater exertion such as running

(as in the case of venison) or lifting will have more myoglobin. This also means that muscle myoglobin content can be increased by exercise and training. Marathon runners, for example, will have greater muscle myoglobin concentration than the average person. People who live in mountainous regions at high altitudes have also been found to have increased muscle myoglobin content because of the need for greater oxygen storage capacity in those environments.

The visible color of myoglobin, regardless of concentration, is determined by what is bound to the heme iron. Following animal harvest, oxygen in the muscles is quickly depleted, and the color is best described as reddish-purple. However, the ability to bind oxygen is still very active, and exposure

to air for 30-60 minutes will result in oxygen binding to the heme and a bright, cherry-red color on the surface (commonly called fresh meat "bloom" in the meat industry). The interior of the muscle will remain reddish-purple because oxygen penetration below the surface is very limited. Over several days, or a few weeks, depending on temperature, raw meat will slowly lose the ability to bind oxygen and the meat will slowly turn grey/brown. Cooking

denatures the protein portion of myoglobin which changes the ability of the heme to bind oxygen, and, in this case, the color will also change to grey/brown.

For cured meat, the NO bond to heme iron is strong enough to withstand the protein denaturation that occurs with cooking but, in this case the color is modified from cherry red to a reddish-pink. Research has demonstrated that the NO is still present on the heme iron of cooked, cured meats. This color will also fade with time because of the reversible nature of the heme-NO bond so proper packaging of cured meat products is critical for preventing color loss.

Myoglobin has been one of the most thoroughly studied proteins in nature, and was the first protein for which the 3-dimensional structure of the molecule was determined and displayed. As a result of the basic research on myoglobin, meat color is now very well understood, and this information has been very useful for controlling meat color to the best advantage. So, the next time someone comments about the "blood" that pools around fresh or frozen-thawed meat, you can provide an appropriate explanation.

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



DEALING WITH MAST CROPS

MATT HANSEN/WINDIGO

Most serious hunters realize that soft and hard mast crops are essentially deer candy. Deer flat out love Dunstan Chestnuts, white oak acorns, apples, persimmons, pears and more than a few others. All the deer and their sign around them in the deer woods makes that pretty obvious.

What may not be as obvious is how truly important they often are to the deer's survival. The fats, carbs and sugars various masts provide are often not small factors in if northern deer make it through bad winters and how good of shape many other deer hit spring in.

Let's talk what we can do to stack our odds of our existing mast crops kicking serious deer food.

UNDERSTANDING OAKS

We all discuss the acorns from members of the white oak family simply because their acorns are what deer seem to want worse than most

others from the red and black oak families. To put in perspective, I look at white oak acorns as a prime steak and the rest as hamburgers. No doubt, I love a great steak, but I'm sure not going to pass on a hamburger, when steaks aren't an option.

A beautiful thing about white oaks is that they are capable of producing acorns every year, with about every third year being a truly bumper crop. Black oaks can do the same, though their acorns are comparatively smaller and generally more acidic and every fourth to tenth year bumper crops are likely. Then, members of the red oak family take two years to produce acorns, with bumper crops every fourth year.

Ideally, Mother Nature is setup to allow for one of those families to be producing a bumper crop every year. That allows for a mat of deer feeding to be on the ground every fall.

Unfortunately, high wind events during flowering, early frosts,

droughts, insect infestations and a host of other factors can wipe out entire mast crops. This is every bit as true for soft mast crops as it is for the hard crops.

INSURANCE

Luckily, mast crops are like any other in that we can plant them, cultivate them and impact how impressive their crop is. Frankly, the premise behind increasing corn production isn't much different than increasing mast production.

The plants can't shade each other out and benefit greatly from weed control. They also are allowed to flourish with fertility, water and sun.

It doesn't matter if we're talking a Northern Red Oak, a Dunstan Chestnut or an apple tree, removing competing trees to allow more sunlight is often key. In fact, just doing that can get trees that have stopped producing mast to start again. In areas like New York, where old apple trees are near everywhere, removing competition alone can result in tremendous jumps in mast production.

We can also fertilize our mast crops. Fruit tree fertilizer spikes are good, but tend to cost way more. Slow release, granular fertilizers are a lot cheaper and can be found merely by talking to a nursery. Just be sure it's applied in spring, as summer and fall applications can do more harm than good.

We can even increase soil moistures by spreading straw around the base and out just a bit beyond the drip lines, same as we apply the granular fertilizer. Additionally, for smaller trees, some spring pruning when required is helpful, as well.

CONCLUSION

Mast trees are very important to deer and other wildlife. Because of that, Mother Nature does her thing to try to keep mast on the ground during fall and early winter. Luckily, we can help Mother Nature in her attempts and often benefit from it with increased mast crops.





WHITETAILS & WEATHER

CHARLES J. ALSHEIMER

Unlike humans, whitetails and other wild creatures have built-in mechanisms to alert them of impending weather changes. Whitetails can detect when barometric pressure is falling, even if the sky is clear. They know when conditions are changing and their feeding habits can increase dramatically prior to the arrival of bad weather and after a front has passed.

Through the years I've observed that whitetails typically move more when the barometer is moving, either up or down, than when it is steady. During this time, you'll usually find periods of high humidity with fog, haze, rain or wet snow making up the weather system. When this happens, whitetails become secretive, especially in periods of dense fog. The sudden drop in temperature that often accompanies these fronts doesn't cause whitetails to head for thick cover. Rather, it is caused by the unsettled weather associated with the leading edge of low-pressure fronts. The greatest movement occurs if barometric pressure drops rapidly. With few exceptions, there will be little or no deer movement once the front arrives and the weather becomes nasty. Then as the front passes and the weather returns to normal, whitetails and other wildlife start to move again.

When the storm ends and the barometer rises, deer activity often increases dramatically, provided that air temperatures match the whitetail's comfort zone. Several studies have been completed regarding the effects of barometric pressure on whitetail activity. Illinois biologist Keith Thomas found that most whitetail feedings occurred when barometric pressure was between 29.80 and 30.29 inches. When the barometer is falling or rising through this range, deer activity should be greatest.

TEMPERATURE.

Unseasonably warm temperatures shut down deer activity in a heartbeat. Of all activity suppressors, air temperature is perhaps the most powerful influence on daytime deer activity. Other suppressors work with temperature and might sometimes override the influence of temperature on deer movement. However, unless temperature matches a whitetail's comfort zone, movement will halt during daylight hours.

For optimal deer activity during hunting season at the 40th to 45th latitude north, I had always felt that daytime temperatures should not exceed 55° F. My feeling was based primarily on observation, journal notes and selected temperature readings I had kept.

As you will see in Chapter 8, I no longer hold this belief due to a fascinating research project I've been involved in since 1995. One aspect of the research looks at how temperature affects the way deer move. The data has shown a definite decrease in deer movements when daytime air temperature rises above 45° F. It should be noted that this project is being conducted in western New York, at the 42nd latitude. The bottom line is that when air temperature rises above the seasonal norm for a region, deer activity will decrease in direct proportion to how warm it gets.

WIND VELOCITY.

Down through the years I've heard and read much concerning the impact of wind on deer movements. This coupled with personal observations has made me aware that there are certain times when wind definitely affects deer movement. However, I've never been able to pinpoint what the "magic" wind velocity suppressor is. There have been times when I thought 10 miles per hour was the suppressing point and other times when it was 15 or even 20. The effect of wind on deer movement always seemed to be an elusive ingredient.

It's my belief that the amount of wind velocity required to suppress deer activity has much to do with the region of the country. For example, in prairie states such as Kansas, Nebraska and the Dakotas high winds are a common everyday occurrence, so whitetails in these states don't seem to be as affected by moderate to high winds as they are in the Northeast.

On several occasions I've observed whitetails in Montana and South Dakota freely moving around

throughout the day when wind gusts were well over 20 miles per hour. Outside of the hot-to-trot rut, when a buck is chasing other bucks away from his estrous doe, I've seldom seen such a sight in the part of the Northeast where I live.

Personally I find that it's difficult to determine the wind's impact during the rut because sexually active bucks "throw all caution to the wind" during this time. When a buck's testosterone levels max out and mix with odorous signals from an estrous doe, nothing short of being at ground zero when a bomb goes off seems to stop a rut-crazed buck. However, it should also be pointed out that not all bucks run around helter-skelter during the rut.

It definitely appears that whitetails are affected by higher than normal winds. As with temperature, the key to remember is what takes place when environmental factors are out of the norm for a region of the country. This has been borne out in the research discussed in Chapter 8. By collecting wind data and comparing it to our timer data it is evident that when wind velocity goes much over 12 miles per hour deer movement is suppressed in western New York State – the higher the wind, the less the activity.

It's my firm belief that wind alone doesn't totally shut down whitetails, unless it's gusting over 20 to 25 miles per hour. Rather, it's other factors, such as a rapidly falling barometric pressure or heavy rain or snow, working in concert with the higher than normal wind that cause whitetails to lay low.

Having raised whitetails and spent literally every day for the last ten years around them, I've seen first hand that they rely on their sense of smell more than anything else. When there is too much wind, or wind gusting in irregular patterns, deer don't feel comfortable moving around. Whitetails do one of two things when they are spooky. They either get away from what is making them uneasy or if they know they cannot escape they will hit the ground and wait for conditions to return to normal.

The key to knowing the suppressing effects of wind velocity is being aware of what deer in a given area will tolerate. Here, in western New York, the breaking point appears to be 12 or more miles per hour. It's a regional thing and one all hunters should become aware of.

— Charles Alsheimer (1947-2017) was America's foremost authority on white-tailed deer behavior. He served as D&DH's top field editor for nearly 40 years.



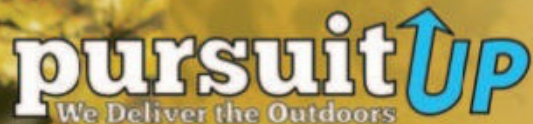


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The more all of us shoot and fine-tune our rifles, scopes and loads in the off-season, the better our chances of one-shot buck kills this fall. Hit the range as much as you can and keep these 3 things in mind.

SAVE-MONEY SIGHT-IN

Rather than sighting-in the old-school way—firing a bunch of bullets at a target and cranking your scope's windage and elevation knobs until you finally walk the holes to the bull's-eye—try this method. You can do it alone, but it works best with a buddy.

First, get rock-solid on a shooting bench. Rest both your rifle's fore-end and the toe of the stock on sandbags. Crank your scope to 9X or higher. Aim, lock the scope's crosshair on the target's bull's-eye, load a round, take a deep breath and fire.

Now, don't move the rifle or scope, regardless of where you hit. Eject the spent casing and flip the safety back on. Forget that first bullet hole in the target, no matter where it is, and align the crosshair on the bull's-eye again. It is extremely important that you don't move the rifle/scope from your original point of aim.

Hold the rifle firmly and stay locked on the bull's-eye while a buddy, standing behind the muzzle for safety, turns the scope's knobs—first the vertical and then the horizontal—until the crosshair moves over and up or down and intersects your first bullet hole in the target, again regardless of where it is.

Once the crosshair is aligned on the bullet hole, guess what? Your rifle is zeroed! Load and fire a second and third shot to confirm it, and then make the following slight adjustment for elevation.

MAX ZERO

Whether you shoot a .270, 6.5, or .30-06, adjust your point of impact so that bullets hit 1½ to 2 inches above a target's bull's-eye 100 yards. With most any modern hunting cartridge, a zero of 2 inches high at 100 will put you dead-on or thereabouts out to 250 yards. Most of the bucks you shoot at will be inside 200 yards, simply hold the scope's crosshair on hair and take 'em. If you have to push a shot to 250-300 yards, move the crosshair a tad up on a deer's shoulder and press the trigger.

MAKE A CHEAT SHEET

If you hunt around large fields or clear-cuts, or in big country out West, prepare for potential long shots. As mentioned, most of the deer you shoot at will be inside 200 yards (many of them 100 yards or less) but it pays to plan ahead.

After zeroing your rifle and load, type up a 1"x3" chart with bullet trajectory and wind drift (10 and 20 mph) at 150, 200 and 300 yards. (Any farther, try to stalk closer or pass the shot.) Tape the chart to the side of your rifle stock, and check it before taking a long poke at a buck. This will give you not only the needed ballistic info, but also the confidence to make the one-shot kill.

Think a stock chart will make you look like a greenhorn? Forget it. Some of the best gunsmiths and hunters I know, guys who have shot more game than you or I ever will, tape "cheat sheets" to their stocks for reference in big country.

— Mike Hanback is the host of "Big Deer TV."



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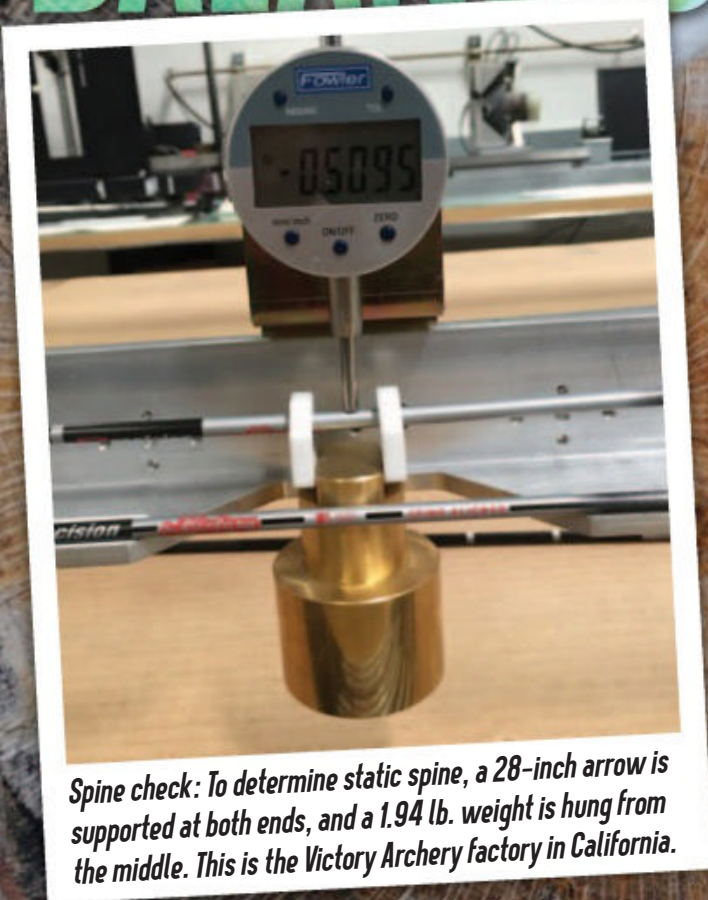
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BALANCED



Spine check: To determine static spine, a 28-inch arrow is supported at both ends, and a 1.94 lb. weight is hung from the middle. This is the Victory Archery factory in California.



Weigh finished shafts: I weigh all my finished arrow shafts both for quality control and to know how much K.E. will be generated.

BOWHUNTING

BOB ROBB

The foundation for accurate bow shooting is to create a bow-and-arrow set-up that balances all the required elements for precise arrow placement downrange. If any one is out of kilter, accuracy will suffer.

First and foremost, the draw length of your compound bow must be set exactly to your own body morph. If your draw length is 28 inches, your bow must be set at 28 inches – not 27 1/2, or 28 1/2, but 28 inches. Also, the bow's draw weight should be one that you can pull with a modicum of strain, but not one that forces you to “cheat” when pulling the string back under hunting conditions.

Choosing the right arrow shaft comes next. You must use a shaft with the correct arrow spine for your draw length/draw weight combination. Spine is a measure of stiffness, gauged by how much the arrow flexes when weight is applied to the center of the shaft. To determine static spine, a 28-inch arrow is supported at both ends, and a 1.94 lb. weight is hung from the middle. The amount of flex that is induced on the arrow shaft by the force of the weight is then measured, giving the “static” spine rating. For example, if an arrow bends .340-inch at the center, then the shaft has a static spine deflection of 340. A shaft's spine is indicated by a number on the shaft and charts created by arrow manufacturers. The higher the number, the easier the shaft to bend. For example, an arrow with spine number 340 is stiffer than a 400 spine arrow.

Arrow shafts come in varying weights, measured in grains/inch, in the same spine size. Thus, you can choose how heavy an arrow you want to shoot and still use the proper spine. All the elements of arrow flight are controlled

by your bow's draw weight/draw length combination, the weight of your finished arrow shaft, and what the FOC (Forward Of Center) balance of the shaft is. This, in turn, will determine how much kinetic energy and momentum the shaft has when it reaches the target.

You must also be able to tune your bow-and-arrow combination so the arrows fly like laser beams, without unnecessary wobble that will destroy accuracy. All arrows flex when they leave the bow, but a properly-tuned set-up minimizes this wobble. You can check the tune by shooting the shaft through paper, checking the tear made by the fletches, and make adjustments to your arrow rest position. There are online charts that will walk you through the process.

For most bowhunting, balance means settling somewhere in the middle of the extremes between ultralight and super-heavy arrow shafts. An ultralight shaft will leave the bow faster and initially have a flatter trajectory than a heavy shaft, but will shed its velocity faster at longer ranges and not have as much penetrating power. The heavier shaft will not fly nearly as fast, but it will produce more penetrating power downrange. A medium weight shaft will create a balance between raw arrow speed, trajectory, and penetrating power. So, you can select the right shaft for any specific bowhunting adventure. For most whitetail hunting, this means shafts in the medium to medium-heavy range. Shy away from the extremes, and you'll be good to go!



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BUCK SHOTS

JOSH HONEYCUTT

Killing a mature, 6 1/2-year-old buck is no easy task, but Jason Lucas stared down the challenge and made it happen in central Illinois during the 2020 deer season. The journey didn't start that year, though. "My son, Michael, and I passed this deer five times in 2019 when he was 162 inches," Lucas said. "We called him 'Colorado' because of his mule-deer-like split G2s."

After the season ended, they recovered the buck's sheds, and that fired them up even more for the following fall. But it all came to a screeching halt.

"I had to have rotator cuff surgery in June of 2020," Lucas said. "I was unable to pull my bow all summer. In late September, as soon as the doctor released me, I started shooting my bow daily. I was only pulling 56 pounds, when I normally pull 70."

It was enough, though. The deer returned, and the hunt was on. However, the buck wasn't a regular, and didn't spend a lot of time on the property. At least, trail cameras weren't suggesting it. "We had only a few trail [cam] pictures of him, but nothing recent to the day I harvested him," Lucas said.

On October 23, 2020, the weather was nice and cool. It was exactly what you hoped for on a mid-to-late October day in the deer woods. The temperature started out around 50 degrees and kept falling throughout the day, tanking about 12 degrees by afternoon's end.

He saw a few bucks and does that morning but knew the afternoon would be better. Around lunchtime, he hopped on his e-bike and went off toward another location. "I chose that stand because I had passed him there three times in 2019," Lucas said.

He jumped three does along the way. About 75 yards from the stand, he got off the bike and walked the remainder of the entry route. Four more does jumped up and bounded off down into the ravine below.

After they cleared out, Lucas settled into his second treestand location of the day, which was in a narrow strip of timber that connected two larger



ILLINOIS GIANT!

blocks of cover. In front of him, to the west, was a ravine full of timber. Fields opened to the north and south. More timber stretched out to the east.

He carefully assembled his gear, and then turned around to settle in. "I took my backpack off, pulled my bow up, knocked an arrow, turned around, and there was Colorado standing about 60 yards away coming up from the ravine where the does had just ran," Lucas said. "I still had not put my release on. I waited for him to get behind a large tree, quickly put my release on, and prepared for a shot. I saw an opening in front of him and ranged it at 32 yards. He slowly walked right to the opening and stared directly toward me. I froze and waited. I thought he had spotted me. I thought he was going to bolt."

After a couple minutes, the giant buck looked directly away, and that's when Lucas drew his bow. He settled his 30-yard pin a hair high, took one final pre-shot breath, and envisioned making the 32-yard shot. "I focused my pin and released," Lucas said. "I heard the arrow hit but did not see it."

The giant buck whirled and ran back toward the ravine it had come from. Lucas did not see or hear the deer crash. Thinking he'd give the buck some time, he immediately looked at his watch. It read 2:05 p.m.

There was still plenty of daylight, so he decided to wait an hour before climbing down. Then, he descended

the tree, walked over to the site of impact, and searched for sign. He couldn't find blood, or the arrow.

"This made my heart sink," Lucas said. "After 15 minutes of looking, I found I was off his exit path by 10 yards."

Then, he found a heavy, solid blood trail. The buck only ran about 65 yards, which was about 20 yards out of sight from the stand. He immediately called his friend, Zach, who helped recover the deer and get it back to the truck. By the time he got home, numerous friends, and strangers, were waiting in the driveway.

"Everyone looked at Colorado and were guessing his score," Lucas said. "My guess was low 180s. Everyone else said higher. After a group scoring effort was done, he came out to a gross score of 196 6/8. I was shocked and amazed. We celebrated in my garage as we stood around telling hunting stories."

"This was my biggest buck to date," Lucas continued. "Colorado is special because of the history we had with him the year before, and eventually taking him from the same tree I passed him. My largest whitetail with an amazing story and hunt. He was mounted on a pedestal, which I built myself."





1 WICKED RIDGE RAIDER 400

Wicked Ridge introduces the **Raider 400 De-Cock**. This forward-draw crossbow also incorporates the ACUdraw De-Cock, effectively allowing you to silently cock the crossbow with an easy 5 pounds of force, and safely de-cock the crossbow by backwinding the handle. It comes built with the two-stage, zero-creep trigger design featuring a DFP (dry fire prohibitor) that delivers a crisp, 3.5-pound pull. It comes with a compact, 8.5-inch-long 3X scope that comes fully coated and has three duplex crosshairs calibrated for 20, 30, and 40 yards, and a fourth partial line for 50-yard shots. It has a 15.5-inch power stroke, measures 15 inches axle-to-axle when cocked, 19 inches axle-to-axle when uncocked, and 31.5 inches long overall. It shoots up to 400 fps. It has a draw weight of 185 pounds and weighs 6.5 pounds. It comes with a scope, cocking device, quiver, and three arrows. **MSRP: \$799.99 | WWW.TENPOINTCROSSBOWS.COM**

2 POWERFUL DEER ATTRACTANT

Wildlife Research Center unveils **Buck-Nip** – a plant-based curiosity scent that white-tailed deer cannot resist. Although the scent attracts deer all year long, it is especially effective on bucks during the early archery season. Buck-Nip is comprised of secret plant derivatives. It does not contain urine. Perhaps the best way to describe it is works like cat-nip works on cats: triggering receptors that stimulate the olfactory bulb of the brain. The olfactory bulb sends the information to multiple areas of the brain. The amygdala, a region of the midbrain, is triggered and causes a physical reaction. **MSRP: \$4.99 | WWW.WILDLIFE.COM**

3 BLAZING NEW COMPOUND BOW

The new **Elite EnVision** checks in at 334 fps (IBO). It is 31 inches axle to axle and has a 6.875-inch brace height. The bow has a draw length range of 23.5–30.5 inches and peak draw weight range of 40–75 pounds. This bow is made for micro adjustments, and even can change the draw length in quarter-inch increments. That's something other bows don't have. Other areas of the bow are adjustable, too, including the let off. **MSRP: \$1,200 WWW.ELITEARCHERY.COM**

4 TRUGLO, INC. ARCHER'S CHOICE® RANGE ROVER™ M4 BOW SIGHT

One of the leading manufacturers in archery equipment and accessories, introduces the new **Archer's Choice® Range Rover™ M4** bow sight to the existing Range Rover™ bow sight family. The Archer's Choice Range Rover M4 bow sight combines the reliable adjustability of the Range Rover™ sight models with the most popular multi-pin sight giving the benefits of a long-range single-pin sight with those of a traditional multi-pin sight. Locked, the Range Rover™ M4 can be used like any familiar multi-pin sight. Unlocked, the sight can be dialed in for precise long-range accuracy. With 80+ pre-printed yardage tapes included, the sight can be calibrated using either the top pin or the bottom pin. The M4 is ready to install out of the packaging and includes a TRU-LITE Pro Rotary Sight Light. The Range Rover™ M4 is also compatible with the existing Range Rover™ series accessories such as the 2x Lens Magnification Kit (TG70A), Bow Sight Sunshade (TG71A), and The Range Rover™ Replacement Yardage Tape Set (TG6401RT). **MSRP: \$148.99 | WWW.TRUGLO.COM**

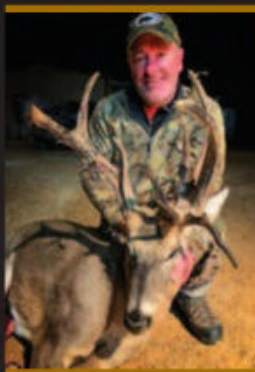
5 TRADITIONS UNVEILS .45-CAL. OPTIONS

For 2022, Traditions Performance Firearms is adding .45-caliber muzzleloader and accessory options into their product line. While already carrying the largest line up of muzzleloading products and accessories, the addition of .45-caliber options is a need Traditions has seen in the marketplace. Traditions will have .45-caliber models available in both the popular Vortek StrikerFire series and the mid-level Pursuit™ XT series. Both series have been part of the Traditions line for several years and have evolved as new technology and options have been added. To support these models, Traditions will also be offering accessories in .45 caliber.

MSRP: PRICES VARY BY OPTION | WWW.TRADITIONSFIREARMS.COM



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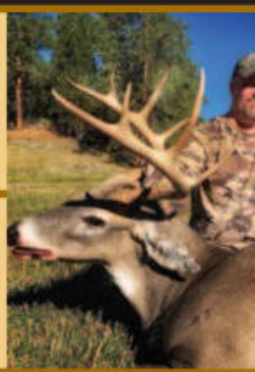


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(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 96)

This past year, 2021, was my 75th year of deer hunting, without missing a year. Even when I was in the army, I was still able to be home for deer hunting season. In my family, nothing was more important. No weddings were scheduled during deer hunting season. No birthday parties were held. Deer hunting, even more important than the opening of fishing season, was on the calendar and stood above all other happenings in order of importance.

In 1946 there were few deer in Waushara County, Wisconsin where our home farm was located, so after the barn chores were finished on opening day that year, my dad, our neighbor, Bill Miller, and I traveled to the wilds of Adams County a few miles to the west. My dad was born not far from the Roche a Cri River. They dumped me out on a bridge that spanned the river with instructions to walk along the river to the west, driving out any deer may be hiding in this mostly wooded area. They would wait a half mile away in

a little open field, with their deer rifles at the ready, they told me.

I walked no more than a dozen yards, when I noticed something swimming in the river. It was a beaver, and it along with other beavers was busy building a dam across the Roche a Cri. I had never seen anything like this, so I leaned the old double-barrel against a big white pine tree and sat down and watched the busy beavers work. After a half-hour or so of watching, I realized I'd best get at what I was supposed to do. I continued my half mile walk along the beautiful Roche a Cri River, seeing nary a deer but having a good time nonetheless. Finally reaching the open field I spotted both Bill and my dad. Upon seeing me, Pa said, "You get lost? You see any deer?"

"Nope," I said. "I didn't get lost, and I didn't see any deer." I didn't fess up that I'd spent a half hour sitting on the river bank watching beavers build a dam.

Over the 75 years I've hunted, I bagged a good many deer—there were years when my income was small and my young family was hungry, so I made sure I got a deer. My wife, Ruth, had a

handful of tasty venison recipes, which we all enjoyed.

After three or four years of toting that monster of a double-barrel shotgun, I was able to buy a used Winchester Model 1894, 30-30, lever action deer rifle. It is the rifle I use to this day. The only modification, I added a scope to it.

Over the years I watched deer hunting change. By the 1960s deer had arrived in Waushara County in substantial numbers, so we could hunt deer as close as the woodlot just north of our farm house. We also hunted on the neighbor's farms—there were no big red signs shouting "No Hunting."

In those days, no one used a deer stand. We organized deer drives—not dissimilar to what I was supposed to do on my first hunt in Adams County. The younger guys did the driving, the older guys did the standing—and the shooting. We walked for miles, sometimes crossing three or four farms.

And then the "No Hunting" and "No Trespassing" signs began appearing. And the big, rather fun, organized deer drives disappeared. Deer hunters hunted on public lands, on leased lands, or on land they owned. And they hunted from deer stands, often stuck high up in a tree. Deer hunting became watching and waiting—and hoping a

THREE-QUARTERS OF A CENTURY OF OPENING DAYS
HAVE TAUGHT JERRY APPS A THING OR TWO ABOUT
THE WAYS OF THE WHITETAIL.

PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVE APPS



ten-pointer might stroll under your stand. Sometimes they did. More often, in my experience they didn't.

In 1966, my two brothers and I acquired an old, abandoned farm some two miles from the farm where we grew up. It is where I have hunted every year since that time. But never from a tree stand—my son, Steve has good success with his tree stand. As have my nephews. My brother, Don has a little elevated, and heated deer hunting stand.

I have resisted. I sit out in the open, usually in a different place every year. For me there is something special in being outdoors, on a cool, November morning. One year I wrote in my journal following opening day of deer season, "As I sat with my rifle

watching and listening, there was an explosion of silence." There is something special about silence in the out-of-doors, especially for those of us who spend most of our lives in a city.

For me, there has always been more to deer hunting than bagging deer—although I am certainly not opposed to venison in the freezer. For years, three generations of my family hunted—my dad, who hunted into his 90s, my son and me. Today, my brother, his son, and his grandson hunt deer on our farm.

It is only during deer hunting season that I get to see some of my relatives—a nephew in Phoenix returns each year for the hunt. We all gather for a big meal at the end of opening day and the deer hunting stories of earlier

years are told over and over again. I'm proud to say, that for 75 years, without missing a year, I have enjoyed the "big hunt" as one of my relatives described deer season.

— Jerry Apps is a retired college professor, rural sociologist and award-winning author from Wisconsin. His "A Farm Story" video series is one of the most popular PBS documentaries of all time.



75 YEARS AND COUNTING

I will always remember the fall of 1946. I was 12 years old, and I could go deer hunting with my dad for the first time. Dad said I could use his old, 12-gauge double-barrel shotgun, with a barrel nearly as long as I was tall, and so heavy I had to keep shifting it from one arm to the other when I carried it.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 94)

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