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The days are getting shorter, and it won't be long until colorful sights like this will light up the woodlands across whitetail country.

CHARLES J. ALSHEIMER

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FEATURES

18 | WHAT HAPPENS TO ALL THOSE DEER HIDES?

North American hunters bring home millions of white-tailed deer every autumn. This begs the questions: What's become of the hide tanning industry, and why is it just a shell of its former self? by Steve Sorensen

26 | PUNCH YOUR BUCK TAG EARLY THIS SEASON!

Scouting and knowing the landscape is one of the keys to early season bowhunting success. Here's how to do it when bringing home a mature buck is your ultimate goal. by Steve Bartylla

34 | GAINING ACCESS

It's no secret that private land offers the best deer hunting opportunities. Short of winning the lottery, most hunters cannot afford to buy. Here's the next best option for securing a good hunting spot for years to come. by Al Raychard

42 | WHAT CAN BE LEARNED FROM PASSING UP BUCKS?

In a nutshell: A lot! The author explains how he went the entire four-month Alabama deer season without notching a buck tag, yet had one of the most enjoyable deer seasons in his 50 years of hunting whitetails. by Dr. Phillip Bishop

50 | SEE THE LIGHT

Here's a look at the most common service calls that hunting optics companies receive over the course of a year, and tips you can use to prevent yourself from losing valuable hunting time from something you could fix yourself. by Trent Marsh

59 | FOOD PLOT SPECIAL

Whether you want to create the best "kill plots," destination food plots or complete mineral program for your property, here is all of the information – and products – you'll need to get the job done right. by D&DH Staff

68 | GO LOW FOR GREAT RESULTS

You don't have to get high (in a tree) to outsmart the wariest bucks in the woods. In fact, some of the best ambush locations are low-hanging sets that take advantage of cover, terrain and prevailing wind currents. Learn how to locate these killer spots. by Glenn Helgeland

76 | SUCCESS IS IN THE WIND

The author shares the tips and tactics that he has used for more than a half century to consistently get the drop on mature bucks while bowhunting some of the trickiest topography Ohio has to offer. by Bob Grewell

82 | CAN YOU HAVE TOO MANY BUCKS?

Using radio-telemetry equipment, the author and his team of biologists learned some fascinating insights on how deer herd dynamics are positively and negatively affected by bucks at various ratios. by Bob Zaiglin

86 | THE AFFECT OF HD IN AMERICA

Whitetails face a great number of threats. Some of these include urban sprawl, habitat degradation, and expanding predator populations. However, diseases are more significant. While chronic wasting disease seems to be at the forefront, a big issue that commonly flies under the radar is hemorrhagic disease (HD). Take a closer look. by Josh Honeycutt

90 | RESEARCH: IT'S ALL ABOUT THE ALPHAS

Whitetail researchers didn't know a lot about alpha male behavior in whitetails until these research biologists classified them by category, including this most intriguing subset. by John J. Ozoga

95 | TWO-ON-ONE DEER HUNTING

Learn how two hunters can use three approaches to tag team deer this season. If you're serious about putting more venison in the freezer, these tactics will not steer you wrong. by Tom Carpenter

112 | ENDURANCE

Failure is the condiment that gives success its flavor. by Joel Spring

ON THE COVER – Photo: Dustin Reid/DDH | **Page 4** – Photo: Charles J. Alsheimer

DEPARTMENTS

- | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------|
| 6 EDITOR'S STUMP | 100 BOW SHOP |
| 8 READER'S RECOIL | 102 BUCK SHOTS |
| 16 D&DH COMMUNITY | 104 PURSUIT COMMUNITY |
| 18 DEER BROWSE | 106 NEW DEER GEAR |
| 90 DEER RESEARCH | 108 GROW 'EM BIG |
| 94 NOTEBOOK | 110 WHERE TO GO |
| 99 GUN SHOP | |

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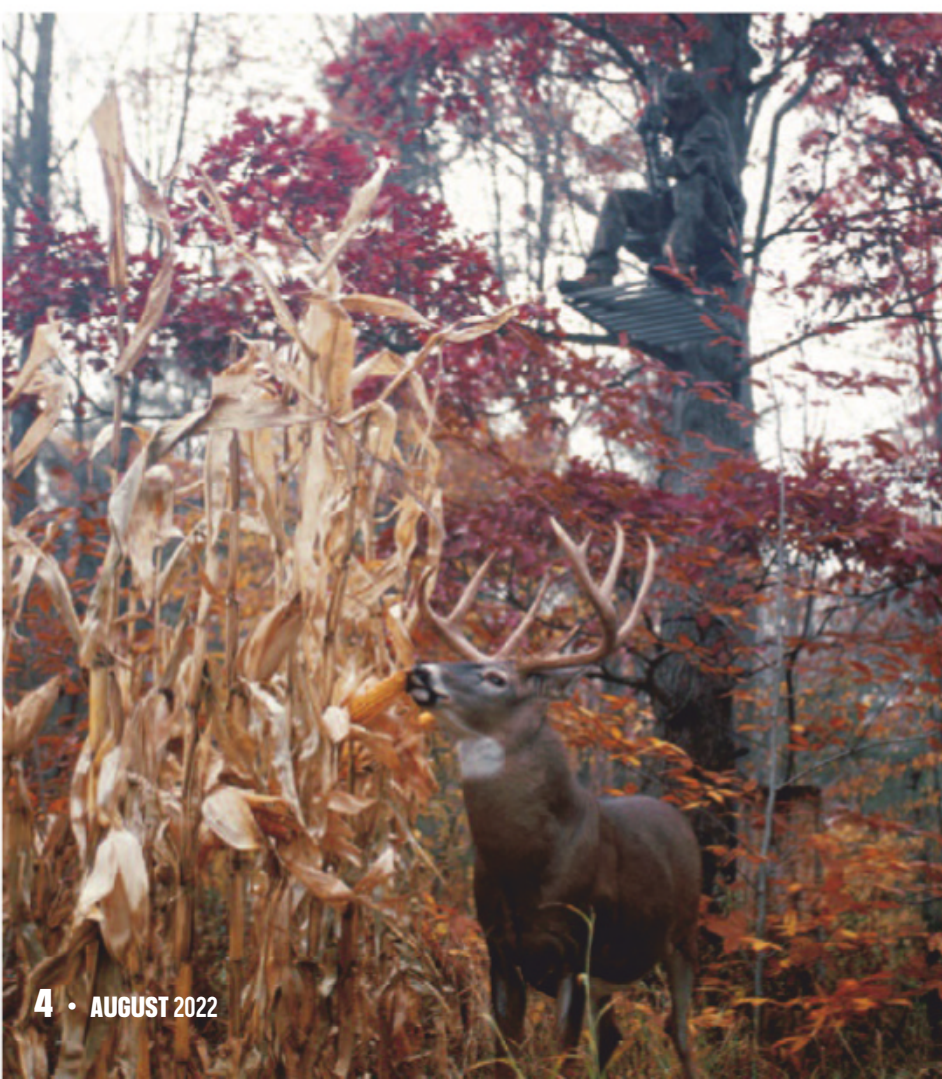
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DANIEL E. SCHMIDT

Meet Me AT COFFEE LAKE

Everything — big bucks or merely filled tags — seems more attainable when you're in your early 20s. If you work hard enough, you can succeed. Even when you're about as green as a June tomato.

And let me tell you, man, we were green when we were younger.

This is the story about the Coffee Lake Hunting Club, a self-appointed name we gave our small Big Woods deer camp in the early 1990s as we were feebly trying to waylay whitetails on the Dead Sea of all hunting properties — national forest land. The gun season was half over, and our six-man group had put just one deer — a 70-pound doe fawn — up on the meat pole. Deer sightings were few, and we were depressed beyond belief.

It was lunchtime when we headed to the cabin of a longtime family friend. You can only imagine the expressions on our faces when we pulled into the driveway and saw three mature bucks hanging from their meat pole.

Back then, we all possessed a little — OK, a lot — of apple-cheeked innocence. "Where did you guys get all of those bucks?" I gasped as one of the hunters stepped out on the porch. "Two of them came from right here around the cabin, and the big one was shot just north of the lake." Talk about an energy boost.

We wolfed down our sandwiches and sodas and immediately sped back to camp to analyze our plat books.

After a few minutes of deliberation, we decided to drive — yes, make a deer drive in a huge chunk of national forest — what we thought was a thin strip of cover alongside Coffee Lake. Long story short, there was fresh snow that day when my buddy and I (the drivers) set off through toward the standers. We walked for three hours across what was basically the moon's surface, sans the craters.

We made that drive two more times the next season with the same result: no deer tracks or sign whatsoever. The fruitless jaunts, despite giving us sore feet and nighttime charley horses, did provide some value.

We finally had a name for our camp and a specific location to tell people where we shot all of our deer.



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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Daniel E. Schmidt

SENIOR EDITOR

Chris Berens

CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Rebecca Vogel

ONLINE CONTENT SPECIALIST

Sara Gilane

DEER RESEARCH FIELD EDITOR

John J. Ozoga

FIELD CONTRIBUTORS

Steve Bartylla, Bob Zaiglin,
Dr. Stephen Ditchkoff, Steve Sorensen

COPY EDITOR

Taylor Grace Schmidt

ADVERTISING SALES

PUBLISHER

Brad Rucks

brad.rucks@media360llc.com

SALES ASSOCIATES

Casey Lenz

casey.lenz@media360llc.com

ADVERTISING COORDINATOR

Lisa Richter, lisa.richter@media360llc.com

OFFICE MANAGER

Susie Melum, susie.melum@media360llc.com

TELEVISION & ONLINE VIDEO

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

David Gilane

PRODUCER

Ian Sanchez

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1990 Godfrey Drive | Waupaca, WI 54981

Brad Rucks, **PRESIDENT AND PUBLISHER**

Daniel Schmidt, **VICE PRESIDENT**

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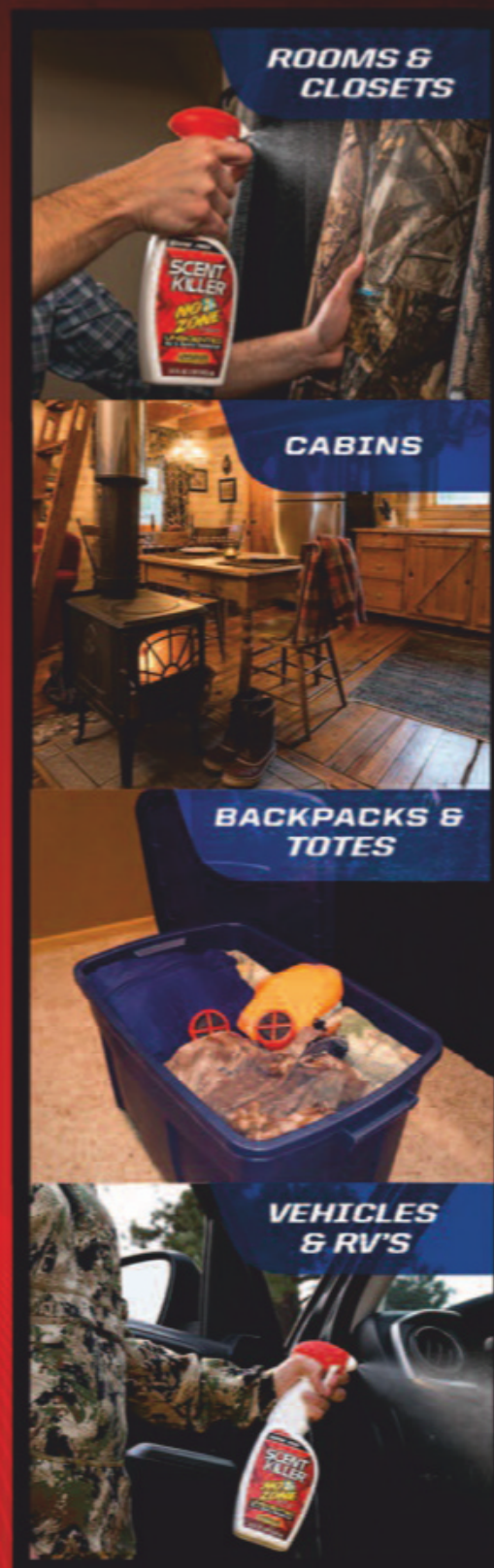
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Editor's note: In the Summer 2022 issue, Editor Daniel Schmidt asked readers for their input on today's deer hunting culture. Here's a sample of the replies.

THIS IS IN response to Dan Schmidt's "Have We Lost Our Way?" column in the Summer issue of Deer & Deer Hunting. We have. It's a way to make money now. That's wrong. Hunting whitetails, in general, is a sales pitch. When it comes to hunting shows, it's all about deer farms, food plots, clothing, etc. It's pitiful. Facebook is hunting's worst enemy. It used to be food for the family until the following season. Nowadays, it's a business.

— Steve Graves, via email

THESE ARE JUST my thoughts; the blame is on what we called QDM. I believe that ever since this came around things have changed a lot. I hunt deer at my camp, and I shoot any legal deer. I've hunted there for almost 40 seasons, and I don't get after the guy who only shoots big bucks. In fact, I'd be the first to congratulate him. But don't get down on me for shooting a spike, forkhorn, small 6-point, etc. We need to stop the arguing about what people should and shouldn't shoot, and just stop and enjoy it. Thanks for the great magazine. I've enjoyed reading D&DH for the past 25 years.

— Dan Halpin, Michigan

MANY OF US Texans have lost our way, no doubt. However, there are still those who enjoy the hunt far more than the kill.

— David Laney, Spring, Texas

TO EVEN MENTION deer-camp traditions on Pennsylvania hunting websites will get you ripped apart by these young kids today. To them, it's all about them, and screw everyone else.

— Timothy Meyers, Pennsylvania

VERY THOUGHT-PROVOKING ARTICLE. These are my thoughts, and mine only. Deer hunting is a vicious business. States try their best to please everyone. My state game department started opening roads in remote game lands and spoiled what was, to me, a wilderness experience. Then it got to where every 50 yards was an orange coat. Then I got married and we bought a house and 40 acres. Neighbors were awesome. Their land was mine, mine was theirs. Then something weird happened. Time. Neighbors sold land or died off, forests matured, the deer disappeared. No food, no cover. Then my epiphany. Talking to my dad as he was fading due to age, he said, "The deer hunting was amazing in the 1950s. It still is, you just have to tend to the garden."



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How I tend to “my garden” is based on the science that exists. God says we are to be stewards of our land. Call it controversy, but we don’t shoot trophies, we shoot mature deer. I have gotten to an age where pining for the good ol’ days is just that. These are memories I will cherish. Would I go back? Heck, yeah. Would I go back to my Little League days, Marine boot camp, college, years working in my hospital? Yes. But that was yesterday, and we ain’t going back. I have today and tomorrow. I have passed the tradition on. I enjoy seeing successful hunts by my nephew and soon-to-be grand-nephew. I thoroughly enjoy being a “steward.” I like that our deer, turkeys, rabbits and other game animals are healthy and available to the next generation. I believe I am fulfilling my purpose as it’s no longer about me. Just making it better than what I had. And it is.

— *Stephen Grazaitis, via email*

DAN, I READ your article in the Summer issue of D&DH, and you asked for input. Simply, deer hunting is definitely broken. I shared a North Dakota deer camp with you not too many years ago and admired your dedication and passion for deer hunting. Nowadays, I find myself only talking to a select few (mainly family) about deer hunting. Deer hunting has gone the way of youth sports, no longer fun and innocent but cutthroat and competitive. All I hear is “that deer needed another year, what did it score, how old was it.” It’s not a sport, no competition but we’ve turned it into one and are ruining it for most. Thanks for your dedication and keep on fighting to return deer hunting to its roots.

— *Bob Bennot, via email*

MR. SCHMIDT, I have more to say, thank you for this fine Editor’s Stump! I have been wrestling for months with a decision to not join my buddies this year in Ohio. Now I know what to tell them and why. I am frustrated, disenchanted, disappointed, and it’s not fun anymore. Another old hunting buddy, outside this group, said this, “I miss the days of shooting small bucks and does, it was fun.” Trophy hunting is stressful, often unsuccessful, and leaves one wondering how to make the tag soup taste better. I just can’t keep doin’ it. So, Mr. Schmidt, this year I will stay in Virginia, go back to my roots, and enjoy the heck out of deer hunting with my son. I will enjoy using my tags, like I used to. I will have fun and I’ll be smiling in my pictures!

Yes, tape measures and scorecards, passed bucks and tag soup, expensive leases and costly food plots, all work against camaraderie and steal our joy and fun.

— *Kenny Myers, Virginia*

DAN, THIS IS going to be a bit longer than one sentence. Have we, as hunters, lost our way? Yes, to an extent, I believe so. I was born in 1940, received my first bow and arrows at 5 years old (made by my father), and my first .22 rifle a year later. I shot my first rabbit when I was about 8 years old under the close supervision of my father.

The biggest buck deer I have ever killed (no, not harvested, killed) was a 4-point, but I have killed numerous does. You see, I am one of those hunters who believe that what is under the hide of a deer is far more important than anything it is wearing on its head, namely MEAT! We don’t grow cattle with huge horns, so why all the emphasis on the antlers of a buck? Why do we think it is preferable to always shoot a buck? If you kill a doe, you take the life of one adult deer and perhaps the fawns of the next year. Since bucks are going to mate with several does each year, if you kill a dominant buck, you not only take him out of the gene pool, but you also eliminate all the fawns he would have sired for several breeding years to come.

I have seen to it that my son is an ethical hunter with a thorough understanding of the comparative value of bucks and does. He is passing that knowledge along to my grandson and granddaughter, both of whom hunt. My son has become the proud possessor of two beautiful bucks on the wall, one a 10-point and the other a 12-point. However, he also has filled his freezer with numerous does over the years. When we value the antlers of a buck deer more than the sustenance its meat provides, and the value of its tanned hide, then we have TRULY lost our way!

— *Clete Davis, Illinois*

MY SHORT ANSWER is YES. Our family has owned a cabin in the woods for many years. I find Christianity is a seldom used word, and yet we claim to be a Christian nation!

I have found over the years if you treat your neighbors like the second commandment says we are to, you will really have good neighbors. I’ve made sure they have plenty of wood for winter or anything else I can do for them when I’m at the cabin. This has been a very rewarding experience.

But there are some people now that if they own land near someone else, they think that they can do whatever they want on the neighbor’s land.

Things sure have changed but I still love being in the woods in deer season. I don’t kill as many deer as I used to, but seeing the smiles on my grandchildren’s faces when they score makes it all worthwhile. Thanks for a very good article.

— *James Leonard, via email*

I WAS DELIGHTED and intrigued about your article “Have We Lost Our Way” in the Summer 2022 issue of Deer & Deer Hunting. I have rather sad and strong opinions about the issues that you bring up. This note will be a little verbose, I am indulging my opportunity to vet about these issues. I am a Marine Corps veteran, and I am disabled. I have been deer hunting for about 15 or 20 years. No one showed me the ropes, I was self-taught. The first two deer seasons I hunted 54 times



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(both morning and evenings) on what property I could find and never got a deer. Things are much different now; I bought my own property with my retirement money from the VA and I now have good results and I am much wiser.

When I began hunting, I was a member of the NRA and attended Friends of the NRA events. No more. I slowly soured on the NRA; their right-wing dogma became destructive, in my opinion. To me, they never offered any solutions to the terrible mass shootings, but always were strongly resistant to any commonsense changes in the gun laws. Once I quit supporting the NRA, they have been entangled in lawsuits, attempted bankruptcies, and charges of illegal financial irregularities. Their members, the good ol' boys and Joe Six Pack are more aggressive and certainly less responsible hunters. Many of my hunting friends and veterans have also soured on the NRA and have quit.

I see poachers, which I must chase off my property. I see dead deer left in the fields with heads and/or antlers removed. The obsession with trophy bucks sickens me. I hunt for table meat, but would also like a big buck should the opportunity arise, of course. I plant a deer plot and add supplements for them. I certainly agree that the hunting culture has changed.

Hunting and gun magazines focus on huge racks and trophies, TV documentaries and hunting shows only focus on the trophies. So the expectation is that it is rather easy to take a huge buck. Many feel entitled to that ego-driven desire to bag a trophy, and if that means being irresponsible and sometimes skirting the hunting regulations. Simply visit a gun shop and listen to the conversation. So, you are correct, hunting has diverged from being fun and adventurous, and it has morphed into a driven desire for trophy

and social adulation. Driven by the media, and gun-hunting publications, I am sorry to say. Just look at the cover of your recent summer edition. Got to be, or you wouldn't stay in business, but you and I can both lament about how things used to be. Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts with you. Happy hunting!

— D. Thomas Blair, via email

SINCE I DON'T do social media, I must respond to your request via email. The deer camp of yore that you described in your piece, "Have We Lost Our Way?" is alive and well at a place called "Goose Island." The camp has been around since it was founded in 1928. Many of us are the sons and/or grandsons of longtime members. Some of us have sons who hunt there and some have grandsons whose time is fast approaching. To us, killing a deer is nice; killing a big buck is better; but it is the time with friends and

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the time in nature that rules the day. The food is great, with venison being a primary staple of dinners and grace is always said prior to partaking. I'm a faithful *D&DH* reader.

— Mark Guerin, via email

DEAR DAN, I'M pleased to see a younger guy (you) commenting on many of the things that bother me about hunter expectations these days. It is not just me getting grumpy after 70 years of hunting deer! In the past I have tended to blame TV, videos and other media for elevating success expectations and trophy acquisition.

The so-called QDM movement has not helped to reduce a competitive atmosphere. Recent experiences with overabundant deer, even where unsustainable, have elevated hunters' expectation for seeing deer. Hunting practices have also changed the behavior of hunters and deer, thereby reducing deer-sighting rates.

Hunters now sneak into their stand (often over bait) for fear of chasing deer away. They sit until they sneak back to the car.

Meanwhile, the deer sit often knowing they have a reliable pile of bait waiting until after dark. Back when farmers drove each other's woodlots, some hunters would report having seen 50 to 100 deer on opening day. Now they complain bitterly that there just aren't the deer there used to be, when in fact there are more deer today in farm country than at any prior time. My family still has a deer camp where we have fun hunting public land. We may be throwbacks, but hunters need to rediscover the challenge and joys of hunting deer. My dad told me when I began gun-deer hunting that if I hunted hard for nine days, I would get to see a buck. He added that I might have only four seconds, so be ready! That anticipation and expectation kept us focused and excited during the hunt, and it still does.

I'd also like to add a note about Josh Honeycutt's "Antler Logic" article in that same issue. He and I agree about the science on the genetic effects of selective shooting of bucks. Culling is not an effective means for improving antler genetics, nor is high-grading going to drag down genetics. But Josh neglected to mention that Mississippi studies found that surviving cohorts of bucks subjected to antler-point restrictions in their first year had smaller antlers than bucks that were not subjected to ARs in their first year. This should be a serious consideration for managers.

— K.R.M., via email



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When I was a kid and a fledgling deer hunter, fur buyers would put out homemade signs that said “Buying Deer Hides.” Every November they popped up in every rural town. For a kid it was a big deal to cash in a deer hide after a successful hunt, and I got enough to break even on the cost of my hunting license.

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Then, fur buyers began trading a pair of deerskin gloves for your hide. It was a good deal for the hunter who can always use a nice, soft pair of gloves. And it was a good deal for the fur buyer because he bought the gloves wholesale and an average deer hide could make three, maybe four pairs of gloves.

Across North America today, hunters kill about 5.5 million white-tailed deer in a typical season. Most of those signs are gone, so what happens to those millions of deer hides?

That's the question Dan Schmidt, Editor-in-Chief of Deer & Deer Hunting, posed to me, so I set out to find answers. I checked with volunteer hide collection programs, taxidermists, butchers, a hide dealer, and even took to social media to ask what hunters were doing with this valuable raw material.

BRIEF HISTORY OF HIDES

Animal hides have been important in every culture as far back as we can trace. During our nation's formative years, hunting was important to survival, and trapping and tanning were serious business. At times, animal skins were traded as currency. In the

Jamestown, Virginia, settlement in 1607, the first permanent colony in America, it wouldn't have taken long for the first tannery to open shop.

Fast-forward to the mid-1800s. During the Industrial Revolution and the days of market hunting, the town of Gloversville, New York, formed around the cottage industry of glove making. Soon, the work shifted to factories. From 1890 to 1950, 90% of all gloves sold in the United States were made in Gloversville. Deerskin gloves, soft and high in dexterity, were a premium product.

Down in Pennsylvania, the little town of Sheffield was built around tanneries and timber. Sheffield had seven tanneries in operation. The dense hemlock forests in the area provided bark that was rich in tannin. Hides from deer and elk were processed there, but these tanneries dealt primarily in bison brought from the West on the new railroads. When tanneries struggled financially, they were bought out by competitors until only one remained, the Horton Crary Company with its world headquarters in Sheffield. In 1893, it consolidated with the

United States Leather Company. Sheffield's tanning industry declined in the 1900s.

THE MODERN ERA

Dan Schmidt recalls his high school baseball days when he played in the shadow of the W. B. Place tannery, a company founded in Harford, Wisconsin, in 1860 to serve hunters who wanted their deer hides made into garments. "They had been in business for a hundred years," he said. "You could still give them your deer hides and they would tan them and make gloves, jackets and other items. They went bankrupt about 15 years ago."

That's when the tanning business went global, but in America today it's smaller than ever. A big part of the tanning business is now overseas, mostly in Italy and China where shoes and purses are a large industry. According to the "Times of India," one reason COVID-19 devastated Italy was because of this industry, and the cramped conditions it tends to breed. It has been speculated that Chinese workers brought it to the Italian leather and textile plants, particularly because of the availability and frequency of direct flights between Wuhan and Italy. A

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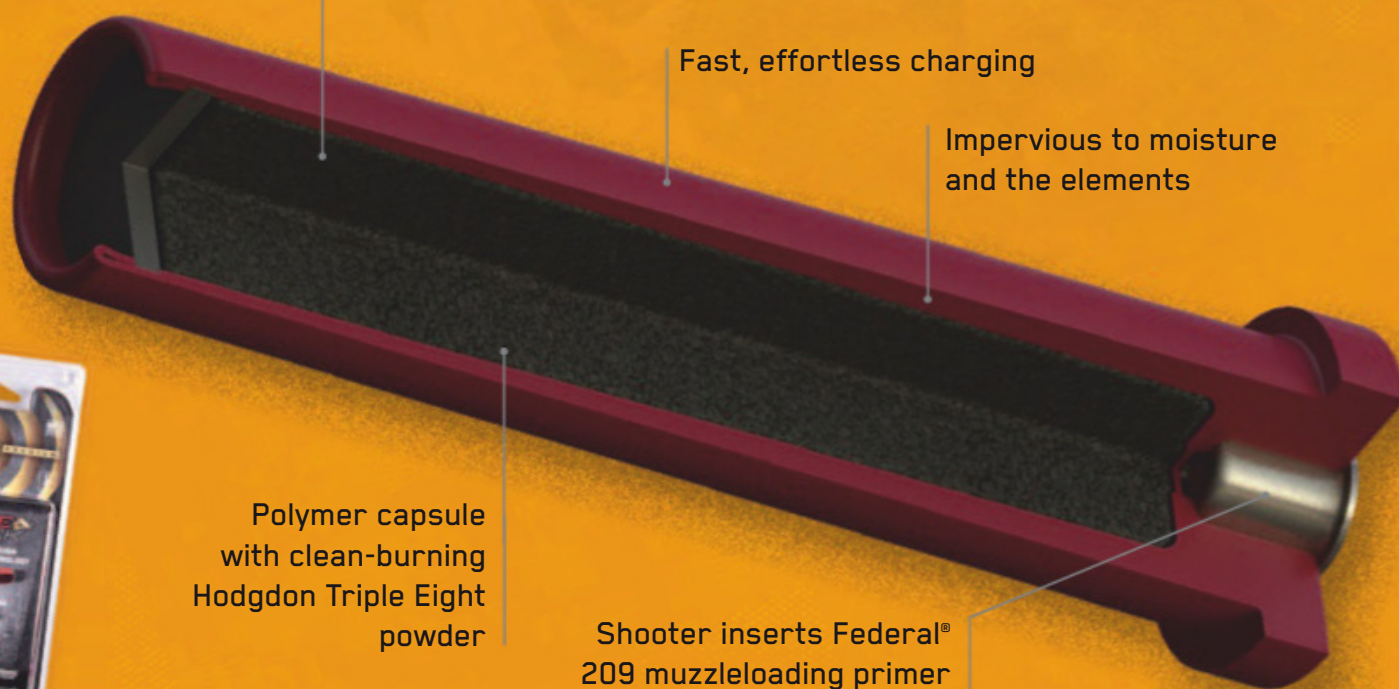
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global industry is always affected by global events.

Deer hides from the United States that find their way into the global market go mostly to Asia.

HIDES FOR HEROES

In 1999, Dave Hintz first began collecting deer hides to sell as a way to raise money to upgrade the Iola, Wisconsin, football field. Eight years ago he connected with the Wounded Warriors in a program called Hides for Heroes, and has since raised more than \$100,000 for that organization. “Probably 60% of the hides we collect would otherwise be thrown away,” he estimated.

Hintz said, “Of all the hides, northern whitetail hides are the best, even though individually they don’t bring much money. Mule deer hides are almost worthless because the leather quality isn’t as good and many tend to be all scarred up. Southern hides are thinner and not worth much.”

Where does Hintz get the hides? One method is that he advertises by driving a truck plastered with the decals of sponsors, and a phone number for hunters to call to learn

how to participate. They also put out collection boxes at key locations for hunters to drop their hides in.

He also gets some from butchers, and from taxidermists who contribute the back half, worth about a dollar. It’s a big job to get them ready to sell. Every hide is handled multiple times, beginning with salting. A volunteer group grades and sorts them for size and condition. Local hide dealer Paul Glodowski grades them again, and takes the hides to Wiebke Fur in La Crosse, Wisconsin, where they’re graded a third time.

Hides for Heroes goes hard for two months, then it’s over. In February, Hintz and his team turned in 4,113 hides and received a check for \$16,050 for Hides for Heroes. The math works out to \$3.90 per hide, and that’s after many, many people gave countless hours to the project. Those aren’t the numbers for a profitable business, but they are numbers that will make it possible for Purple Heart recipients to have a quality hunting or fishing adventure.

The Hides for Heroes program is more than a feel-good story. It’s meaningful, recovers thousands of

deer hides that would otherwise be wasted, and adds far more value than the \$16,050 it raised last year. But 4,000 hides are a small fraction of the 300,000 deer harvested in Wisconsin’s 2021 season.

WHAT ELSE HAPPENS TO DEER HIDES?

The Wisconsin Lions Foundation has a program similar to Hides for Heroes. They cast a wider net because there’s a Lions Club in almost every community. Their program raises funds to send kids with special needs or disabilities to camp. Other civic organizations, including Boy Scout troops, also collect and sell hides to raise funds. The Fleet Farm chain of stores in the upper Midwest collects deer hides and gives a \$5 store coupon for them. But these collection efforts still don’t add up to much considering the number of hides harvested.

If we can assume 60% of the hides collected would otherwise have been thrown away, and apply that percentage to the 300,000 deer taken in Wisconsin, that’s 180,000 hides wasted from just one state. That number certainly isn’t exact, but any other number would



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DAVE HINTZ HAS MANY PEOPLE TO THANK, WITHOUT WHOM THE HIDES FOR HEROES PROJECT COULD NOT WORK:

- First, the Wisconsin deer hunters for donating their deer hides.
- His truck sponsors, which help cover the overhead. The decals show there are many.
- Businesses that allowed Hides for Heroes to put out collection boxes.
- Waupaca Foundry, Hintz's employer, which donates wooden crates for packing and shipping the hides.
- Glodowski Furs for delivering hides to Wiebke Fur.
- Many volunteers. Without them, we couldn't do anything.

be pure speculation. On a national scale it's massive. So what happens to millions of hides?

To find out what average hunters of the whitetail world are doing with deer hides, I posted the question to a couple of Facebook deer hunter groups. Someone said he gives them to a taxidermist who occasionally needs a cape for a mount. A few are turned into rugs or wall hangings. Some hunters donate them to fundraisers like the ones mentioned. A couple of hunters have made hides into clothing or traditional arrow quivers or moccasins. But the majority of responses used the words "compost," "burn" or "trash."

THE MIDDLE MAN

In the hide business, the middle man is essential. Not far from where I live, a hide dealer operates out of Frewsburg, New York. For more than 40 years he has been buying beef and deer hides from across the Northeast to Minnesota, then shipping them to tanneries. He has bought as many as 150,000 to 200,000 deer hides per year. Last year he bought less than a quarter of that.

"It's a tough business," he said. "We get lots of skins from deer butchers, but not every hide is a quality hide because butchers operate on speed. Bullet holes, especially more than one, reduce the value, and some of the new broadheads make holes as big as your fist. Big holes reduce the value of the hide."

When hunters bring hides to a dealer, some haven't been handled properly or they're dried out. One of the worst things a hunter can do is put a hide into a black garbage

bag. It will hold heat and ruin the hide quickly. In a shrinking market, it doesn't make sense to buy inferior hides.

He deals with a few taxidermists who can provide the back half of hides, but an industry joke says, "That's the part of the deer that goes under the barbed wire fence last." The meaning? The back end is more scarred than the front end, so it's worth less. In the hide business, there's not much room between "worth less" and "worthless."

"The hide business is mainly a Northern business," he noted. "Hides are better quality north of Interstate 80. Dealers can tell by feeling the hide where it comes from. Michigan has the best hides. Wisconsin is good, too. Pennsylvania hides were better 20 years ago. They were mostly from yearling deer — not big, but also not old enough to be all scarred up. The older the deer gets, the more it gets scars from injuries and from biting bugs."

MORE FACTORS AFFECTING VALUE

Not everyone knows how to skin a deer for maximum hide value, many are shot up or knifed up, and by the time some are collected they're already rotting. It takes tons of salt and lots of work grading, palletizing and transporting. Even the current scarcity of shipping containers means the hide buyer must hang on to hides longer, increasing the risk of spoilage. It's tough to make a profit when there's so much work to do and so much to lose on a product where each piece isn't worth much.

The deer-hide market also varies regionally. Each state has only a handful of hide dealers and hundreds of miles of road between

them. Access to anyone off the beaten path means more time and more money, especially with today's inflated diesel prices.

The value of a deer hide also varies for market reasons. Size and condition are not the only factors. Prices can also be volatile because of demand and, in today's world, moralizing against fur and leather is part of the political climate. Left-leaning political groups — wokeism, veganism, the green philosophy and the animal-rights movement — all unanimously preach against using animal products. Some manufacturers "go woke," and others avoid the debate by replacing fur and leather with synthetic products.

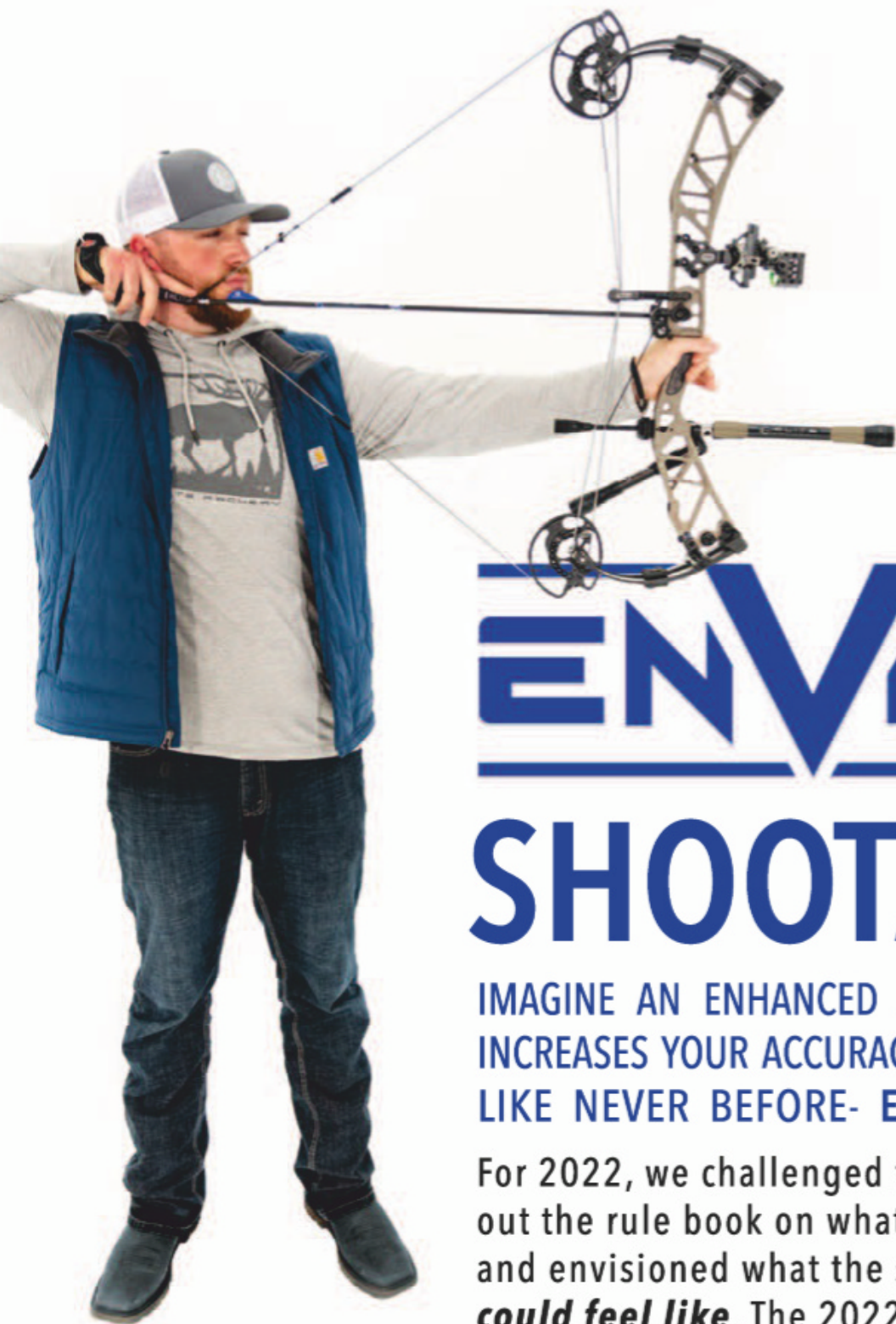
THE VALUE OF DEERSKIN

Good Northern white-tailed deer hides make some of the finest leather anywhere. It's soft and supple, versatile, durable and beautiful. Roughly 5.5 million deer harvested every year proves deer hides are sustainable, but in many places today it's hard to sell a deer hide, or even give it away. Those Facebook hunters I surveyed are doing what most deer hunters do — throw away, compost, burn or otherwise waste hides. Without a strong market for deer hides, untold numbers end up in landfills. In today's world, even many beef hides end up there, too.

A final word. Whether or not deer hunters can get a couple of dollars for their hides won't affect hunting. We will not stop hunting. We will not stop feasting on home-processed venison. We will continue to harvest millions of deer wearing millions of dollars' worth of deer hides, even if they do continue to be wasted. Although that doesn't sit well with any thrifty or conservation-minded hunter, it's no fault of deer hunters. It's a sign of the times, and it's a shame.

— Steve Sorensen is a longtime contributor to *Deer and Deer Hunting* magazine and speaks frequently at sportsman's dinners.





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SCOUTING AND KNOWING THE LANDSCAPE IS ONE OF THE KEYS TO EARLY SEASON BOWHUNTING SUCCESS. HERE'S HOW TO DO IT WHEN BRINGING HOME A MATURE BUCK IS YOUR ULTIMATE GOAL.

was amped. I'd already "wasted" most of my hunt, trying desperately to find a buck that I was interested in hunting. Then, merely 50 yards off the road, a truly gagger of a mainframe 8-point with over a foot-long droptine, stepped out. Then a 152-inch 10-pointer followed him out, and it looked like a baby in comparison, despite also being a mature buck. Sure, I absolutely wanted to meet the 8-point again, but I instantly decided that I'd arrow either one.



After setting a stand to cover where the bucks entered the field the day before, the first two sits were actually pretty slow. With just one day left to hunt, it was an instant adrenaline rush to see the 10 making its way to my stand. Mere moments later, I watched him topple within sight.

To me, early season success is all about finding and then setting up on Mr. Big. Frankly, I get a lot “luckier” during the rut. Early season success is all about making my own luck. What follows is how and why.

ALL IN

The zone I was hunting in Alberta to begin this article had a very brief opening bow season, which then transitioned into a several-month-long firearms season. My bow tag had a very short life.

To make matters more complicated, it was the last week of August and the area I was hunting was endless deer cover, pocked with a couple of farm fields. Since we were still in late summer, leafy growth and cool-season grasses and weeds, both great deer foods, were literally everywhere within the deer cover. The deer didn’t need to feed in the couple fields the area offered. They had all of the food they needed within the deer woods.

on the lesser-used, but limited alfalfa would offer much higher odds than the more heavily used, but near endless supply of in-woods food sources at that time of year.

I put my tag where my mouth was on this one, too. Despite having a very short season, I refused to even hang a stand until I laid eyes on a buck I’d want to tag. Instead, I invested the days before it opened and most of my short season into finding him and noting where he entered one of those couple fields.

WHY

So, why did I seemingly waste so many of the initial days of my hunting trip sitting in a truck? I can tell you that I wasn’t encouraged to do so. In fact, more than once during that stretch I heard the old saying, “You can’t get ‘em unless you’re out there.”

When it comes to early season, I haven’t been able to “get ‘em” unless I know they’re there and how they’re generally accessing food or water. I know plenty of others that have tagged bucks early that they hadn’t seen and didn’t know they used this or that trail. That has worked for others, but not once for me. If I don’t know, I don’t tag mature, early season bucks — period.

As you can see, it made no apparent sense to set a stand where the author killed the velvet buck from. All the impressive signs were located by the inside corner of the field, yet the author saw the only good bucks near the road, including when he was sitting the stand.



KEY

- RED DOTS = STANDS
- ↑ RED ARROW = WIND DIRECTION ON DAY OF HUNT
- ↑ LARGE BLUE ARROWS = SAFE WINDS TO HUNT
- WHITE DOT = WHERE BUCK WAS AT TIME OF SHOT
- | WHITE LINE = WHERE BUCK CAME FROM
- | BLACK LINES = ACCESS ROUTES TO STANDS
- | TAN LINES = TRAILS

Still, I knew that my odds of finding Mr. Big were way better on those couple of fields than within the endless miles of food and cover. Without a doubt, way more mature bucks were feeding in the deer cover than on those fields. It wasn’t even remotely close.

The woods still offered a near endless supply of tender and nutritious leafy growth, weeds and grasses, many rocking great nutritional content. Although it may surprise some, those small, tender aspen leaves are a considerably better draw than the lush alfalfa in the fields. That could be seen easily, since the deer had stripped every aspen branch in less than a day, that I had cut down when hanging the stand.

Here’s the rub, though. While the foods within the woods were in higher demand, the alfalfa was in extremely limited supply. So, despite the in-woods food being a bigger draw, I was betting on finding Mr. Big at the limited-supply option. After all, deer crave diversity in their diets, and finding Mr. Big in the endless miles of timber was truly like trying to find a needle in a haystack — without a magnet.

This was a case where I sincerely believed that focusing

A major part of the “why” in that is very likely because of my hunting style and the locations I’ve hunted early. Years and life have taught me that some things simply work better for some, while being dismal failures for others. No doubt it’s merely styles and circumstances in the area, but the reason doesn’t matter. What does is that the only way I’ve been able to tag mature, early season bucks is to find them and realize how they are accessing either food or water.

This makes sense to me, by crawling into Mr. Big’s brain. What’s going on in his world and what does he want most?

All deer need food, water and some degree of protective cover. They also want a feeling of safety, comfort and breeding opportunities. At the same time, the rut cycle isn’t ready to kick off, yet.

During the rut, Mr. Big is going to generally lose 25-30% body weight. Truly think on that for a moment. In a couple-month window, that animal will likely lose 25-30% of its entire weight! That’s shocking for a buck anywhere, but think about those in areas receiving true winters. When their weight loss from the rut is done, they are now facing winter, when many deer run negative energy balances,



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meaning they burn more calories each day to live than they get from their food.

Add all of that up and early season is one of the most peaceful times of a buck's life. Although the hierarchy within the deer's dominance structure is always being shuffled to an extent, it's pretty peaceful for bucks right now. The locals worked the hierarchy out during the summer bachelor group days, of which we are either at the tail end of or have just passed, but that structure is still established and in place. It's not until the

testosterone levels start ramping up and the occasional new buck shows up that things get super serious, in those regards. Heck, scraping hasn't even really begun in earnest yet.

This time of year is almost all about Mr. Big getting fat and sassy for what's just ahead.

WHERE

So, what does that all mean? It essentially translates to Mr. Big moving more exclusively between bedding, food and water. They have yet to start going out of their way to

work scrapes and sure aren't checking regularly on the doe bedding areas. They're essentially just trying to fatten up as much as they can to survive what's just ahead.

That lack of extra movement greatly reduces my luck factor. Frankly, the less they move the more important it is to my success for me to find them. If the nearest mature buck is merely a quarter-mile away from where I set up, unless I'm sitting on his food or water source, or a trail leading to them, I may as well be 20 miles away. The less he moves the more unlucky I tend to get.

That is, unless I know he's there and where he's feeding or watering. That's my magnet for finding that needle in the haystack right there. It's simply finding where a mature buck I want is feeding or watering.

If I know the trail he's using, I can put an even finer point on his location. Early and late season are two of the easiest times to pattern deer on food and water, simply because of their decreased movements overall.

I look at it this way. The less Mr. Big moves around, the more stable his patterns on food and water tend to be. The less he's moving, generally speaking, the fewer daylight core areas he has. So, he's typically coming from the same place. It only makes sense that, all else being equal, if this was the best route between the bed and food yesterday, it probably will be today, as well.

Remember, this time is all about the essentials: feeding, bumping up weight and prepping for the rut. Because of that, Mr. Big isn't going to be working the food source as he often does in November. In November, he'll often do some feeding at the food source, but he also wants to mosey around, check the girls, work some scrapes and check for competition.

This isn't November. Early season, even if he's only 5 yards out of bow range while feeding, he often isn't moving enough to close those 5 yards. Instead, he's parked and feasting.

That addition makes nailing the trail a biggie. I want to arrow Mr. Big as he is entering the patch of food or water. I can't bank on him coming out from 200 yards away and working deer and scrapes into range.

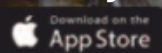
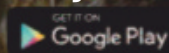
So, whether it's through observations, sign or Reconyx images, I need to know where he's entering.

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Despite the odds being stacked against him, the author killed this great velvet buck by formulating and sticking to a solid hunting plan.



PUTTING IN THE TIME UNDETECTED

We've now hit my final tip for early season success. Bucks almost always have a surplus of feeding options at this time of year. At the same time, the comparative lower levels of testosterone makes them easier to get along with. There's rarely anything tying Mr. Big to that specific food source.

That makes Mr. Big rather touchy. Why put up with pressure if he doesn't have to? Few of them really do, this time of the season.

On the flip side, perception is reality for deer every bit as much as

humans. If those deer do not see, hear or smell us while we're in or, in the case of odors left behind, after we've left the deer woods, we weren't ever there, as far as they're concerned.

Because of that, I'm willing to hunt early season bucks pretty hard. I just can't be seen, heard or smelled, to pull off repeated trips after Mr. Big, without spooking him myself.

I'm sure others can, but I simply don't know how to set up in a safe spot within bow range of where Mr. Big is entering a food or water source without having the sign, pictures or observations tell me where that is.

Once found, I merely look for stands within bow range on both sides of his trail that appear to offer safe winds.

With that, I now have at least a couple wind directions that will work. When I have them and can hunt, I'm in the appropriate stand until I tag Mr. Big or the place explodes after too much hunting pressure, whichever occurs first.

CONCLUSION

I tend to get luckier during the rut. With that being said, if I'm not making my own luck during the early season, the scales are probably not tipped in my favor.

In every phase, understanding what's going on in the deer woods and what Mr. Big wants is key to positioning myself for success. Early season is all about food, water and fattening up for the rut, with a surplus of foods typically available. If I don't find and set up right on him, I tend to be very unlucky in the early season.



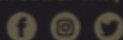
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There is an ongoing debate in recent years over which offers the best deer hunting: public or private land. Like everything else in life, there are pros and cons, advantages and disadvantages to both, but when push comes to shove it really boils down to the property in question. In general terms, public land is often construed as offering less desirable deer habitat, fewer deer, lower quality deer and higher hunting pressure. Private land is perceived to deliver just the opposite, but that isn't necessarily true. Some private properties have excellent deer habitat, plenty of deer, and offer equally plentiful opportunity, while others are not so blessed. The same is true of some public lands. It goes both ways.

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Whatever the philosophy or preference, one thing is certain. Access to private property, especially private property that offers good deer prospects, is growing more and more difficult. Some private owners just don't like hunting. Some are weary of guns being fired on their land, especially when there's livestock on the premises, and lease agreements are becoming more common.

Nowadays, private individuals and corporations own more than 60% of the land in the United States. In many states the percentage of privately held land is substantially higher, more than 98% in Kansas, 97% in Iowa, 95% in Ohio, Illinois and Indiana, and more than 94% in Maine. The bottom line is that not every deer hunter has a need or even a desire to hunt private land, but for those that do, knocking on doors is the only option. If we go about it right, the odds of gaining access can be turned in our favor.

START EARLY

Remember that old saying that goes: "The early bird gets the worm." That can be true when looking for private land to hunt. Chances are you won't be the only hunter searching, especially when it comes to prime properties, so the sooner you get started the better. Springtime isn't too early to start getting things together, forming a plan with the intent to start knocking on doors and making introductions by June, or July at the latest. It's not unusual to have other things on our minds at this time, maybe turkey hunting, doing some fishing or tending to things around the house after a long winter — any later than that, however, and the risk of losing out to other hunters rises exponentially with each passing week as the fall opener draws closer. Getting started well before the season also allows the landowner to think things over in case you don't get an immediate answer. If that's the case, there'll also be time to follow up a few weeks or months down the road.

Getting access to private land can take some time. It's not always immediate so get the ball rolling early.

CLOSE TO HOME

The best chances of gaining access to private property are close to home, in your hometown or those nearby. They also offer the biggest advantages. For one thing they are close and can be hunted before heading to work or after or whenever opportunity knocks. The more we hunt the greater the odds of success. Another reason is that local property owners are often far from total strangers. They might know, or know of, you or your family. That's a major advantage to gaining access.

Perhaps more importantly, properties close to home are easier to scout and get to know. Successfully hunting unfamiliar territory depends a great deal on how well we know it, and a property closer to home simply offers more time and opportunity to learn its secrets and lay out some plans.

While many hunters prefer certain types of properties, such as those offering a mixture of agricultural fields and woodland, and properties of

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a certain size, other properties offer great potential. This includes town parks, town forests, water district lands, conservation easements and the like. Public and private golf courses are another possibility. Technically, some of these properties are public lands. Others are owned by private companies that serve the public in

some way. Some are municipal, but access and hunting may be limited to a certain number of hunters or restricted to archery hunting only. This is particularly relevant to those in urban areas or in towns or cities that have firearm discharge ordinances. Because of that, many support high numbers of deer and

produce some quality bucks. The list of rules and stipulations can be lengthy and there'll always be paperwork and permits involved. But town managers, town clerks and recreation departments, in some cases police departments, water district and other office managers are all good contacts to start the process of gaining access.



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HOW TO FIND THEM

Fish and game departments or their district offices can be great resources for locating landowners that might be receptive to hunters. Some have state or federally funded programs that partner with landowners to open private land to public hunting. They can get you started in the right direction. Others maintain lists of landowners, especially farmers, apple and other fruit growers, that routinely report wildlife problems, mostly deer.

On occasion I've had success by stopping and knocking on doors. Even if land is posted, take notice and take a chance. Land posted NO HUNTING may be a tough sell. Generally, the owners are opposed to hunting. On land posted NO TRESSPASSING, the odds are better, and on lands posted "Hunting By Permission Only," the chances of access are better still — unless someone's beaten you there.

My personal experience has been there's no harm stopping in and asking. Sometimes a whim can work out. All the owner can do is say no, and when they do, most freely give a reason why. Sometimes those reasons can be discussed and worked out. If not, be polite, courteous, say thank you anyway and that you'll try again next year.

HAVE A PLAN

Whatever the case, posted, not posted or by chance, it is only common courtesy and a show of respect to find out who owns a particular piece of land and ask permission before you hunt it. City and town clerks and local property maps can be a big help. It also takes a plan.

Do some homework. Review Google Earth and other computer aerial mapping sites and mobile apps looking for properties offering a mixture of agricultural fields and woodlands, pinch points, travel corridors, available food sources, terrain variations, possible bedding areas, best access routes and possible treestand sites. While properties that might offer good hunting prospects

are the primary goal, consider properties on back roads, off the beaten path if you will, landlocked parcels with a right-of-way and other out-of-the-way locations. There'll be less competition for them, and landowners are more likely to allow access. Although they may require more time and a longer trek to access, it can be worth the effort.

Additionally, don't overlook smaller parcels of just a few acres. Small, hidden tracts are generally easier to scout and get to know. Deer often seek smaller bastions when pressured on surrounding properties and they have the potential of holding not only large numbers of deer, but quality bucks. It's also good planning to have several properties in mind. Chances are access won't be gained to all your options, even your first or second choice. Be prepared and have other properties to fall back on.

DRESS THE PART

The plan requires a face-to-face approach to be successful. Unless you know the landowner, cold telephone calls alone rarely bear fruit. I've found property owners like to know what a person looks like, put a face to a name, judge a person by his or her demeanor. If you look like a slob, chances are you'll be greeted like one. It doesn't mean you have to wear a tux and top hat. That probably wouldn't be well received, either. Just keep in mind there are no second first impressions and that appearances matter.

MAKE A PROPER INTRODUCTION

Even before a visit, go over in your head what to say, and what not to say. Plan your words and request carefully, always being courteous, respectful and polite. When introducing yourself, offer a handshake and a smile. They still mean something these days. Start with something off point, "How you are doing today?" followed with a sir or ma'am. Or "Beautiful place you have here." Break the ice by being human first before making your pitch as a hunter. Things will get there.

When they do, have your contact information handy, and be prepared to answer questions: How long have you hunted? Will you be hunting alone? How do you hunt, with firearms or a bow? Sometimes owners are leery of firearm hunters, especially when there's livestock on the property. After getting a general feel of how things are going, reassess your strategy. If the owners seem hesitant, making a point early on that you're willing to bowhunt can turn a no into a yes. Let the owner know when you would like to hunt, where, and ask about the best places to park. If your state has liability laws exempting landowners of accidents or injury while hunting, be familiar with them and able to explain what that means. If not, offer to purchase your own insurance. It's something that property owners do worry about.

In general, visits at mealtimes don't work well and can be considered somewhat of a nuisance, so try to pick convenient and nonintrusive times for a visit. Keep in mind that farmers and ranchers get up early and have long days. Just before lunchtime when many take a break, the early evening hours when folks are ending the day, and weekends are all good.

Seeking access to private land is always a hit-or-miss situation, but success is quite possible with the right approach. Just put yourself in the landowner's shoes and think how you would want to be approached, then be prepared and act that way. I've found that many property owners are accommodating if you bestow the courtesy and respect they rightfully deserve.

— Al Raychard is a longtime D&DH contributor from southern Maine.



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PASSING



A photograph of a deer with large antlers standing in a field. The deer is facing left, looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred forest. The text 'THEM' is in large white letters, and 'UP' is in large yellow letters.

THEM UP

WHAT WE CAN LEARN BY
NOT SHOOTING BUCKS

This past season, I found myself in an odd situation. In the spring of 2021, I helped a friend who worked for a guy who owns a beautiful deer hunting farm. My son and I had killed a lot of does at the place over the last four or five seasons and I had, two seasons before, seen there the largest buck of my life. This deer was bigger than any I had seen at hunting shows, in taxidermy shops, or in anyone's home. He was a whopper, but we only had permission to shoot does. So, despite the fact that the huge trophy had walked within 20 yards of my rifle, I could only watch him as he checked out the estrus status of the does in the field.

I helped my buddy free of charge, but the property owner was extremely grateful because he had a huge job to do and a hard deadline. As a reward for my help, he called me into his office near the end of the job and told me that I was now entitled to kill any buck I wanted on his place.

Wow! Considering the trophies I had already seen there, this was the equivalent of a \$5,000-plus paycheck, but tax-free. I was smiling ear-to-ear. I got in the woods the following fall as soon as I could. The Alabama deer season begins in mid-October, and gun season begins in mid- to late-November. Every hunt was flooded with anticipation. I had seen a very good buck with very white antlers in a remote field in each of the previous seasons. He was big last year, and might be worthy of harvesting this year.

While bowhunting a couple of weeks before gun season at a different spot, I saw another big buck that might be a shooter. This buck crossed the field at a bit over 250 yards, and I couldn't say for sure, but he was certainly a candidate for harvesting. When I mentioned him to my hunting buddy, he said he had a game-



camera photo of him and, indeed, he was worth taking.

The season was good, not as good as usual, but still better than any place I had ever hunted. On one hunt, I had nine bucks in one green field. The two biggest would have been shooters on any other property, but I had seen the potential of this land, so I just calmly watched them without seriously considering a shot.

WHITETAILS AND MATING AND CAUTION

I saw a lot of bucks, but in every case that I can recall, the bigger bucks were preceded by smaller ones. One evening in mid-January I was hunting a spot I had never hunted previously. The smaller deer emerged from the thick cover first. There were a lot of does and fawns. Due west of me, and almost downwind, I spotted a nice buck. He was a bit over 200 yards but didn't pick up my scent. He was a very nice 8-point with a nice spread and good G-2s. He was looking for estrus does I think, and he worked northward along the edge of a woodlot and disappeared. I thought he was gone when I spotted another 8, smaller but with a taller rack than the first one. I was watching the second one when the big boy stepped out of the woods near where I had first seen him.

I put the scope on him to get a good look at his rack. He was good, so I pushed off the safety. Should I

take him? He was broadside, and I had already killed a doe at 200 yards and another at 150+, so I was confident I could make the shot. He was an 8-point, though, and I guessed him to be 4.5 years old. He'd be bigger next year and would give me an incentive to hunt that spot again. I let him walk, and I am glad I did. His slightly smaller companion was chasing a doe. The bigger buck showed a little halfhearted interest before disappearing into the woods.

During this encounter I learned to be patient and that the biggest deer aren't always the most anxious to mate. I also learned that undisturbed bucks may give me more than one opportunity for a shot. I was a little surprised that these deer ignored the smell and sight of my truck, which was parked upwind and in sight. These deer had the opportunity to see, hear and smell vehicles because their woodlot was south of a paved farm lane that gets more traffic than any other place on the farm. I had heard about whitetails adapting to vehicles and machinery, but I saw it this time with my own eyes.

Our rut this year lasted a bit longer than 30 days. I didn't expect it to last so long, and I am not sure this happens every year on every local property. I learned that the smaller bucks seemed more engaged in pursuing estrus does than the bigger bucks. I saw some

very good bucks chasing does, but I also saw big bucks that seemed much less interested than the smaller bucks. This behavioral shift might be due to the particular deer herd's size and make up, but that's more speculation than anything.

TWO BIG BUCKS IN ANNA'S FIELD

Near the end of the season, my youngest daughter, married with two kids, wanted to hunt with my youngest son and me. At my 9-year-old grandson's (her oldest) request, I had killed a doe the hunt before, so my daughter was hunting with me and my grandson was hunting with my son, his uncle. As we got to the shooting house, I was careless and we ran four does out of the field in the early afternoon. I really wasn't expecting deer this early, but lesson learned. Again, never let your caution down. We wouldn't have shot any of those does, but on another hunt I might have. Don't assume deer aren't out and about at any time of day.

After this, a young solo deer eased into the field on the opposite side from where the first group had fled. As most DDH readers know, a lone, small, antlerless deer out during deer season is likely a button buck. Nevertheless, every season a lot of small bucks are mistaken for does. In my younger years, I did this twice in one season, but I haven't made that error in many years — and neither should you.



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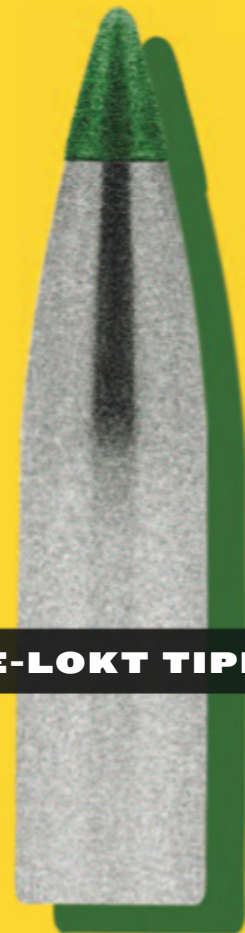


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Before dark two large 8-points were together in the field. The bucks were still interested in the does in the field, but the rut was winding down. They were among the last two deer to come into view, and they paid little attention to each other.

My family eats a lot of venison, and with five children I was happy to put does in the freezer. I wonder how many times I have messed up my chance to kill a nice buck by being in too big of a hurry to harvest a doe. I am sure I would be a better hunter if I had more patience.

FINAL LESSONS

I never saw the huge buck I had seen two seasons earlier. The big buck that I saw during bow season didn't reappear, either. There were a couple of bucks previously in the area that I never spotted. One of these was a buck I had seen the previous two seasons, and I hunted him more than any other, but I never saw him the entire season.

What happened to these bucks? They were all shooters for most hunters, so maybe they were



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REALITY CHECK

In the real world, 2½- and 3½-year-old bucks are about the best one can expect to find, at least for the majority of whitetail locales. Why? Because hunting pressure does not allow for older-class bucks in most herds. Hunters desiring to hunt truly mature bucks (4½ years old and older) have to go to areas where deer are managed for age or remote habitats where many bucks can survive to maturity.

Having only 2½- and 3½-year-old-class whitetails to hunt should never be viewed as a negative. Although both of these age classes are on the front side of full maturity, they can offer great hunting opportunities. Any hunter fortunate enough to harvest one should feel fulfilled.

Truth be known, a 3½-year-old buck is an incredible rutting machine and a tough creature to hunt. They are equivalent to an 18- to 20-year-old young man who is maxed out on testosterone. In every sense they are a whitetail herd's prime, fine-tuned athlete.

The bottom line is this: never feel slighted by not being able to hunt 4½-plus-year-old whitetails. There are many reasons why hunters take to the woods each fall, with perhaps the biggest being the enjoyment that comes from hunting a better deer than they have in the past. For many hunters, harvesting a 2½-year-old 100-incher is their goal, while others may want to hold out for a 3½-year-old buck whose antlers are knocking on the 140-inch door. Both are great deer and the experience of hunting them is a big part of the reason we sit for hours in rain, sleet and snow for a chance to harvest one.

— Charles J. Alsheimer



harvested. Maybe they were too cautious to show themselves to me. Who knows?

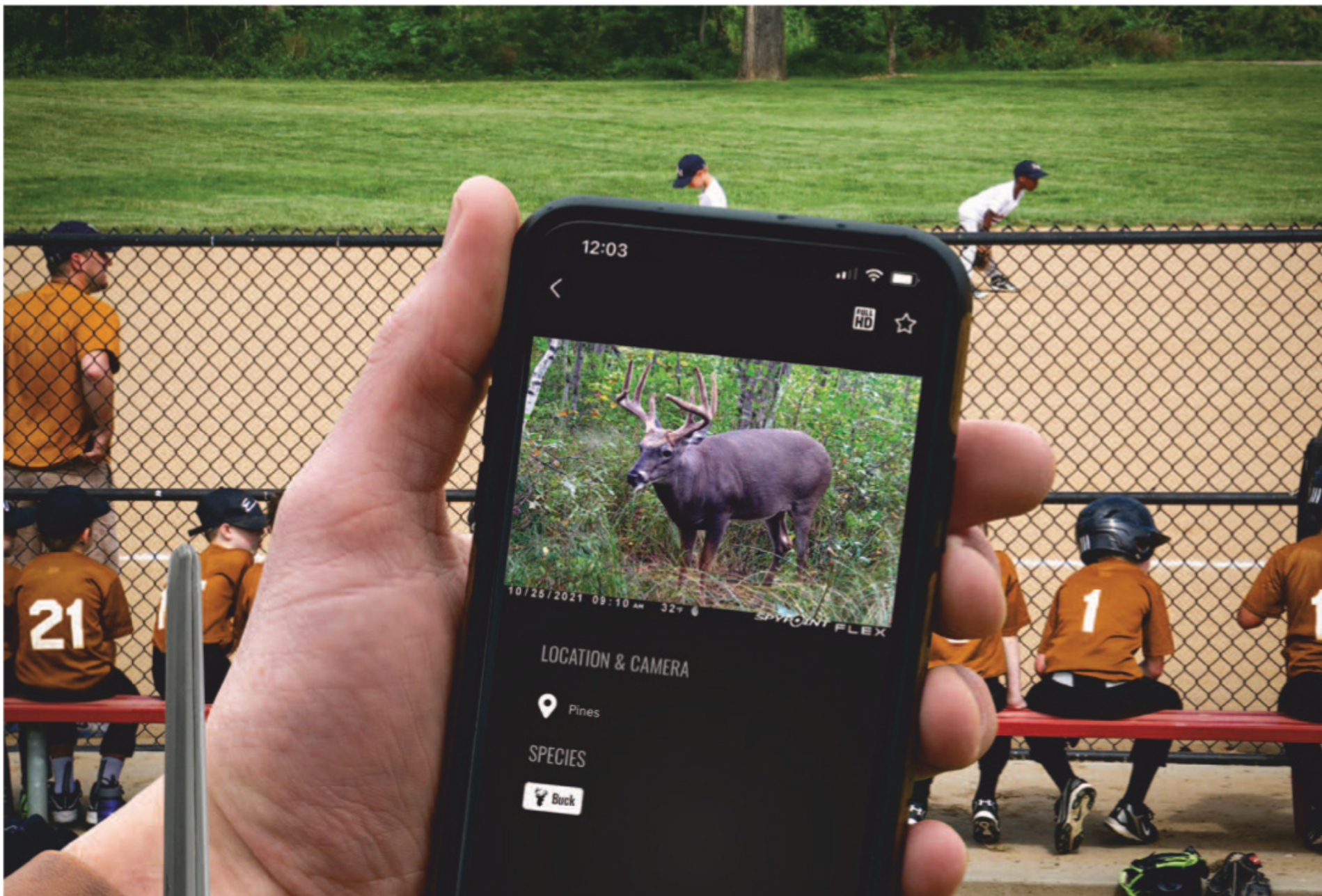
I wish I had kept count of all of the bucks that I saw, and of all the 8-points for this past season. Most seasons I keep records of every hunt and every deer seen. These records are so much better than my memory. Why I failed to keep records this season is a mystery to me. The records would have been a great asset as I plan for next season. I hope I learned my lesson on keeping notes on hunts.

I saw a lot of good bucks. Over the years I have had the great pleasure of harvesting a good number of 8-pointers. Adding another one, even a very good one, to their number would have been great — except when you know there are some bigger bucks available.

I went the whole four-month Alabama 2021-2022 season without taking a single buck. But I had one of the most enjoyable and educational seasons of my almost 50 years pursuing deer. Watching deer fight, seeing large numbers of bucks and does in a single field, watching young and older bucks' differences in manner and actions was an absolute thrill — and an education.

— Dr. Phillip Bishop is a former NASA scientist and professor at the University of Alabama (1984-2016). He has been a D&DH field contributor for nearly 20 years.





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SEE THE LIGHT

COMMON OPTICS
SERVICE CALLS AND
HOW TO AVOID THEM

Nobody likes dealing with customer service. Assuming the best, you still had to contact customer service because something went wrong. It doesn't matter what the product or service is, most of us do everything we can to avoid having to make that call.



I've been in and around service departments for a handful of products over the last couple decades, from UTVs to riflescopes, and I've talked to dozens of industry professionals about their service department, customers, and products.

Out of all of these experiences and conversations, there has been one particular fact that has always struck me as both remarkably consistent and somewhat surprising. Regardless of the product, right around 80% of customer service calls and returns are directly related to customer error.

In my experience, this 80% number is never more than a percentage point or two off the actual number. Most people I talk to in the industry share the same number with alarming frequency. It's not that there aren't products out there requiring service or that are defective, but for the most part, four to one in fact, defective or broken products are due to user error.

Before we go any further, let me be crystal clear about something.

I am not blaming the customer.

Ignorance is often used as a dirty word, and at times it can be, but being ignorant isn't always the insult some people take it as. As a hunter you might be able to work on your gun, mount a scope, hang a trail camera, or put up a treestand. That doesn't mean you are a gunsmith, optical engineer, electrical engineer, or welder.

There is no reason to expect the average consumer will have the same level of expertise with most of the products they use, hunting or not, as the people that design, build, and sell them.

With that being said, some of us could do ourselves a lot of favors by reading the instructions. I promise, I am just as guilty of this as anyone else.

Optics and optics service calls are a particularly sore subject

for me. I would say that the 80% figure is underreporting the user-error number when it comes to optics. Most of these calls or service requests are related to just a few issues that you can solve yourself with a little bit of knowledge and understanding.



LINDA FRESHWATERS-ARNOLD/INDIGO

THE PROBLEM WITH OPTICS

There are a couple things that make optics an especially vulnerable product category when it comes to service calls.

The first is the nature of optics themselves, particularly riflescopes. Riflescopes have turrets because guns aren't perfect. I know that may be difficult to hear for some of you. Actions have variance. Crowns aren't perfect. Rails, bases, and the holes that have been drilled and tapped are subject to error.

How do these things get corrected?

You could spend a small fortune customizing every gun you have

with a professional gunsmith. Or you could do what most people do, and just put a scope on it.

How does a scope fix stacked tolerances in a rifle? With the turrets.

The turrets that you use to sight in your scope aren't there to sight in the scope. They exist to correct for the individual variance of each rifle.

You can also think of it this way.

If you took two identical rifles, shooting identical ammunition, and sighted a scope in on one, you should be able to take that scope off that rifle, put it on the other and have it be sighted in without making changes.

I don't think any of us believe we can do that. We might be close; we might also be way off. The individual variances of those two "identical" rifles are going to ensure that the scope isn't sighted in. And in that instance, most shooters would say it is the scope that is the problem. We just explained why it isn't.

Scopes only have turrets because rifles aren't perfect.

The other thing that cuts against optics is that I've never met anyone that didn't think they knew the perfect way to mount a scope. Most people can mount a scope in a way that works, but most do it how someone

who works with scopes every day would do. Of course, making it even more difficult is that if you ask five people who work for optics companies how to mount a scope, you will probably get six different answers.

Sorry. That part is on us.

Still, an unwillingness to accept that there might be something wrong in the mounting and sighting-in process also accounts for a significant part of the service issue with optics.

What are the most common optics service calls and how can you avoid them?

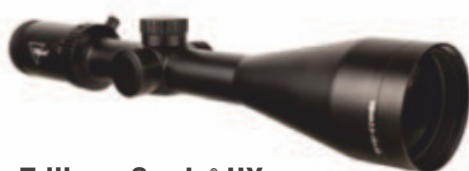
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CHANGING POINT OF IMPACT - "BOUNCING" SCOPE - IMPROPER TRACKING

"This scope is all over the place, it's junk." That's usually how these phone calls start. This is also the most common call for optics service issues.

It also accounts for most of the cases of user error.

What's the reason? How is user error making point of impact change? It is literally a one-word answer.

Overadjustment.

In more than 90% of the cases of changing point of impact I have seen, the culprit was a scope on which one or both turrets had been moved to such an extreme of their adjustment range that proper scope function was lost.

This can manifest as bouncing, or improper tracking.

When the scope bounces, or point of impact changes with each shot, it is because one or both turrets have been adjusted so far that they are no longer making proper contact with the erector tube (this is what holds most of the optical system and reticle). So then it is able to move around inside the scope housing.

It can also be the cause of a turret failing to track in a straight line up and down or left and right. If you move the turret and your point of impact moves in a diagonal line, it's because the erector tube is pinched along the curved scope housing, by the other turret, and adjustments on the turret you are moving is making the erector tube track up the side of the housing instead of in a straight line.

The first example is far more common.

So how do you fix it? Honestly, proper mounting is another article all on its own, but that's the answer here.

First, change your mindset. The goal when you sight in a scope should be moving the turrets as little as possible. Proper mounting procedures can help make this possible. For me, I refuse to use a scope that has to be adjusted more than one full revolution of a turret. If I must adjust more than that, I take everything back to where I started, take the scope out of the rings, the rings off the bases, and remount everything and try again. You would be amazed how often this fixes the issue.

I also don't recommend most people use bore sighting devices. Not because they don't work, but because they reinforce bad habits from shooters. When sighting in a scope, you should keep meticulous notes of the total number of clicks you adjust when sighting in. Using a bore sighter, too often people just start cranking on turrets and lose track of where they are.

Scopes arrive to you in optical center. This is the best part of the optical system and will provide the best image through the glass. It is also in optimal settings relative to the turrets we talked about earlier.

You want to be able to get back to optical center if you ever move that scope to a new rifle. If you don't know how far out you are, you can't do this without specialized

equipment. The Internet may say that you can look through the scope into a mirror. Or count clicks, divide by two and you are there.

These do not work.

Mount the scope, shoot a group. Verify that the rifle and scope can group, and then start adjusting, but never more than one full revolution. If that doesn't work, return to center, unmount, remount, try again. You can eliminate almost all issues of POI change with that process.

SIDE FOCUS WON'T MOVE

Side-focus scopes have become more popular in the last couple decades. It isn't really supposed to be used to focus your target, but rather to remove parallax error. Being in focus and removing parallax are usually close, but they aren't the same thing.

Regardless of that, many people mount their scope, and then go to turn their side focus dial, and it won't turn. They assume it's broken. It almost never is.

So why won't it move?

The rings are too tight.

Every scope maker has slightly different specs, but a good rule of thumb is that the ring screws coupling the rings around the scope should be tightened to 15 inch-pounds (NOT FOOT-POUNDS), and the screws securing the rings to the base should be tightened to 30 inch-pounds.

There are scope mounting kits that have inch-pound torque wrenches, which I highly recommend. If you can't justify that



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.

► **EXTENDABLE**

Pull the foot to extend length

► **ADJUSTABLE**

Adjusts from 8 to over 60 inches

► **AIMABLE**

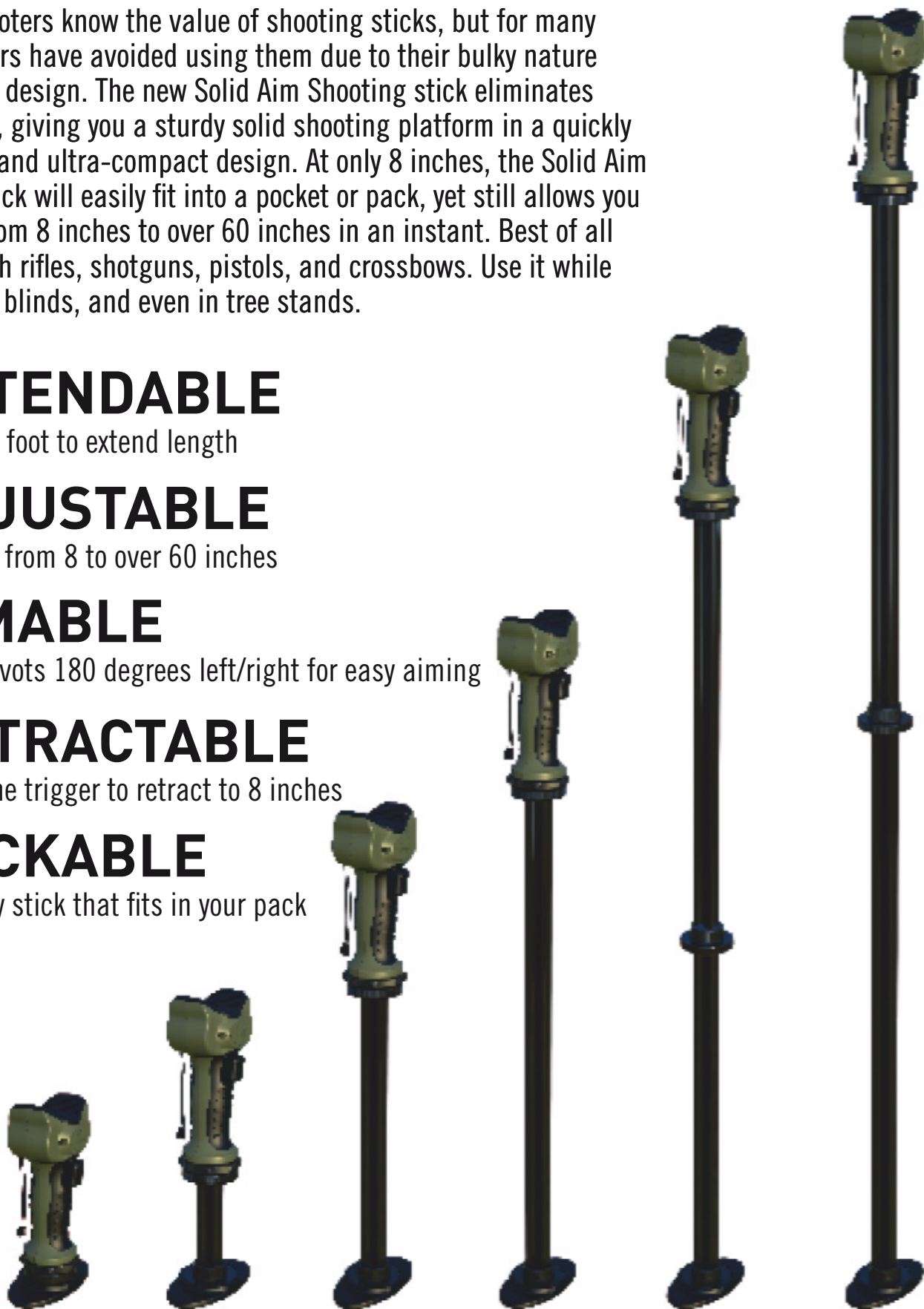
Head pivots 180 degrees left/right for easy aiming

► **RETRACTABLE**

Press the trigger to retract to 8 inches

► **PACKABLE**

The only stick that fits in your pack



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expense, here's a scope mounting hack for you. When using the included Allen wrench that comes with your rings, insert the bit end on the short run of the wrench when tightening to the base, and the bit end on the long run when tightening around the scope. The longer run gives you more leverage when tightening to the base, and the shorter gives you less when tightening to the scope. You'll get close to those suggested specs.

FOGGING

"I went hunting last weekend and my scope fogged up, it needs to be replaced."

This one is a little bit of a trick. You can't actually fix this one. You can, however, better understand the definition to avoid making this phone call.

Every modern scope is advertised as fog-proof. This claim is typically followed with a statement about being nitrogen or argon purged.

The purging process is done to eliminate moisture from inside the scope, so the internal lenses won't get condensation on them. This is called fogging.

Being fog-proof does not mean that the lenses on the outside of the scope won't get "foggy" or collect condensation. Scope makers have made huge strides in technology and product development over the last few decades. With that being said, they can't change the dynamics of the water cycle in an uncontrolled environment.

Inside the scope, purging the gases can keep this from happening. There is no moisture in the scope so no matter what happens to temperatures, water droplets, or fog, it can't form on the internal lenses.

Outside the scope, in a treestand, in the cool air of fall, that can't be helped. The glass on the scope will get cold. You will breathe warm, moist air onto the lens. When the moisture in the air hits that cold surface it will condense.

That doesn't mean your scope isn't fog-proof.

How do you know if the fog is on an internal lens? If you can't wipe it away with a cleaning cloth. When you clean and wipe the ocular and objective lenses, and you still see a haze on the lenses, a seal has gone bad in your scope, and it needs to be replaced. The same is true of binoculars.

But please don't call your scope maker if you breathed on your scope last November and water condensed on the lens. That scope is fine. Just try not to breathe directly on the glass and you'll be in good shape.

There are some products that claim to keep that process from happening, and you are welcome to try them, but my results have always been mixed. I just make sure to keep my breath away from my scope.

STARTING POINT

These three things don't account for all service calls, and they certainly don't cover the legitimate reasons and examples that a scope may fail. But understanding these issues and keeping them in mind when mounting or using your optics, will keep the majority of issues you are likely to encounter from giving you optics problems.

— Trent Marsh is an avid whitetail hunter and optics expert from Indiana.





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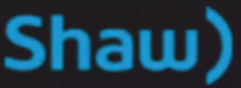
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FOOD PLOTS & MINERALS SPECIAL

BY D&DH
FIELD STAFF

VIEW TO A KILL PLOT

BARRICADING TACTICS FOR IMPROVED HUNTING SUCCESS

BY KYLE WIETER



BILL KINNEY

As I watched my target buck standing at the edge of an Antler King food plot, I could tell he was processing some hard decisions. I figured his thoughts were based around working his way to the downwind side of the does already in the plot and how he could do it while feeling secure, as they were feeding in the wide open on a mix of Honey Hole and radishes. My preseason planning paid off as his choice would ultimately end up costing him his life when he decided to work his way to within 18 yards along the Barricade that I had planted back in May.

Over the years, I've had several failed attempts at designing the perfect kill plot. I would simply plant a few rows of standing corn as blockers to divide an individual food plot into multiple sections. Each section would then have a different type of seed planted and from there I would study which section the deer preferred to feed in during that particular time of the season. It was a phenomenal way to get a solid grasp on my local deer herd's preferred feeding habits, and the standing corn blockers did help the deer feel like they had some security cover while in the plot. However, I was missing out on utilizing the blockers to manipulate the deer movement accordingly.

I finally took a step back and researched all of my data. While the lessons learned were hard ones with having mature bucks slip through my fingers, I did

notice a very similar pattern to their behavior while being in a food plot. The mature bucks were utilizing the blockers for security cover as they hugged the edges while they fed and to work downwind of does or any potential danger. It was now time to integrate my findings into the ultimate kill plot design by giving the deer the illusion of security while naturally funneling them to well within archery range at the same time.

Little did I know, Antler King's Barricade would soon become the ultimate solution for adding blockers in and around my food plots. This product allows for an annual cover screen consisting of a variety of sorghums that grows thick and up to 8 feet tall. As I mentioned before, in the past I was using standing corn blockers, eight to 10 rows wide. Unfortunately, as the season progressed, the corn stalks would slowly break down, leaving no blocker cover for me or the deer. Not to mention, corn is much more expensive to plant than Barricade.

Keeping in mind that some of my plots are 2 to 3 acres in size, I needed to give a mature buck a reason to work within range of my stand. As I went to work on these kill plot designs, I knew from past experience where the bucks entered the field, and this always determines my starting point for planting as the deer will naturally feed down the lane I provide. As an example: Starting where the bucks want to enter the



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plot, I will plant a strip of Honey Hole and radishes 10 yards wide and continue this strip past my stand (well within archery range) on the designated upwind side. Remembering how the deer will naturally exit the plot, I finish planting this strip of food about 30 yards past my stand. Both sides of this strip will get planted with Barricade as my blockers; generally, each blocker is 5 to 10 feet wide. We've just created a natural funnel within a food plot to bring the deer by us. That's just one small example of ways to utilize Barricade and Honey Hole to funnel deer within range.

Barricade is a true game-changer and can be used many different ways productively. This product works incredibly well to

block the view from road hunters, keeping them from poaching deer. I also utilize it to hide my entry and exit from the deer as I enter and exit certain stands.

Nowadays, each of my kill plots are custom designed to fit how the deer want to enter and exit that particular food source. These plots consist of several feeding lanes and blockers intertwined, but the results are the same — mature bucks naturally and regularly funnel past my stands.

In my experience, a kill plot designed correctly is as good as it gets for hunting throughout the entire deer season and Antler King's Barricade has made that task much easier.

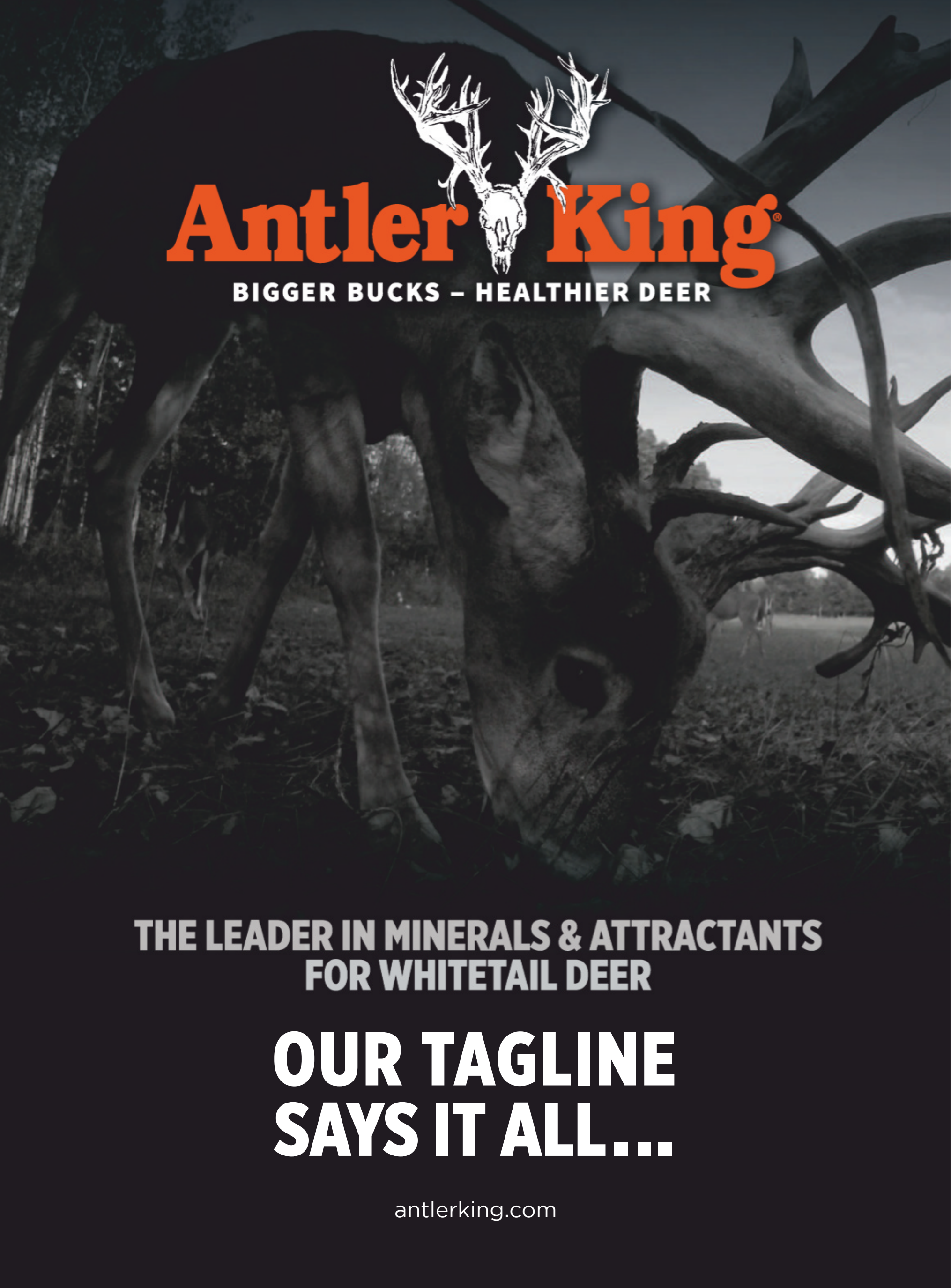


KYLE WIETER

— Kyle picked up a bow 30 years ago. Since then he has harvested over 20 giant bucks and record-book bears. His true passion is focused on hunting mature whitetails. He is president of Adrenaline Outdoors Productions.



DANIEL SCHMIDT



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MICHAEL LEE

Growing up in the South, one thing you can guarantee that you will run across at a family dinner is Southern greens. Now there is a fine art into making them like “grandma” use to make, and not everyone can pull it off. When they do, you add some pepper sauce and hot sauce then dive right in. Now that’s Southern as turnip greens as they say. Our good friends at Antler King have taken this to a different level. Not to make in grandma’s kitchen but to help your deer herd in the South thrive!

Southern Greens is an all-season drought- and cold-tolerant blend that includes multiple plant varieties that are palatable from early bow season to late gun season. These characteristics are VERY important here in the South but can translate to literally any part of the country. We roll the dice every year when we plant our food plots on our properties. We sweat and get them done, then pray for rain. Some years we get plenty, some years we just get by. That’s where Antler King seeds seem to thrive when you get enough to get by. This Southern Greens blend can handle it just like we need.

With a strong mixture of collard greens, clover, radishes, winter wheat and winter oats, this Antler King mixture is spot on for what our deer herd love to eat. It includes a large percentage of leafy collard greens that whitetails prefer, especially in cold weather. In fact, after a hard frost, the leaves become sweeter and even more attractive to hungry deer. Warning: You might have to run deer off to get in and out of these plots, as they will probably live there all season!

The clover in this blend will take off and “power up” the following spring along with the established winter wheat and oats, giving your herd the protein needed for putting body mass back on and does carrying fawns. Another bonus is that turkeys LOVE clover, and you’ll have some great plots to hunt during the spring season as well. This is just a heck of a mix that keeps giving to your critters over most of the year.

Our property in Georgia has some of the lowest pH levels I have ever had the privilege of dealing with to plant food plots. We battle very sandy soil that’s usually just good for growing pine trees. We are lucky to have a gas line and power line that runs through our property and intersects in the middle of the place. This is where we have been able to target our food plots. Over the past four to five years, we have grown our deer herd numbers greatly by providing ample food in these plots. One plot we call the “Buck Hole” is a 4-acre spot that got its name from us getting our first buck pictures on the entire 1,000 acres in that spot. Since then, we set out to make it an awesome spot and food plot.

The Buck Hole has become a favorite spot of ours to sit and watch, especially in the evenings. The deer really have come to this spot and hammer the 4 acres hard each year. We added Southern Greens into this spot during the fall of 2021 and man did it take off! It wasn’t uncommon at all to sit and see 10–20 deer every evening with 5–10 of them being bucks of all sizes. We added another



3-acre plot a few hundred yards away from the Buck Hole strategically to draw even more deer into the area with another large food plot. Through planting our plots and adding Southern Greens, the deer numbers have risen as well as the number of bucks we have on the property.

Sitting back and looking at what Antler King and the great blends have done for us is amazing. Week one on our property, our trail cameras were sending one or two doe pictures a day. Now through

planting larger, better-producing food plots, and adding Southern Greens into this and a key puzzle piece, we have as many deer as we could hope for, and guess what? They are getting healthier and bigger! Our turkeys are too! We have food plots with scrapes all around them, bucks and does coming and going all day long, and turkeys full strut in them all spring. That’s about as Southern as one can get in this part of the country.

— Michael Lee is cohost of *Backwoods Life TV*. Born in Georgia, he has extensive whitetail management and hunting experience throughout the South. He is a graduate of Valdosta State University with a degree in computer information systems.



HOW TO PLANT IT

- 1.) Antler King®’s Southern Greens should be planted in the fall.
- 2.) Take a soil test to determine the pH level. If needed, apply enough lime to raise the pH level to a 6.0 to 6.5.
- 3.) Eliminate any existing weeds on the proposed plot, either by raking, mowing, disking or spraying with a contact weed killer, such as Roundup® (41% Glyphosate). Wait 7 days to plant after spraying with any weed killer.
- 4.) To maximize growth potential, spray Antler King®’s PLOT MAX™ on plot prior to working soil to help raise the pH, aerate the soil, increase organic matter, help with moisture retention and create an environment for the plants to thrive. Optimal results can be achieved by reapplying PLOT MAX™ in both spring and fall.
- 5.) One bag of Southern Greens will plant ¼ acre (approx. 11,000 sq. ft.). Spread 75 lbs. of 19-19-19 fertilizer per ¼ acre and till into the soil prior to planting.
- 6.) Plant Southern Greens seeds less than ¼” deep. Good seed to-soil contact is always needed and best achieved by rolling or culti-packing the soil after seeding.



1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



Hot Picks!

1. THE BE-ALL, END-ALL CLOVER MIX

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 hardest 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: 3.5 LB. BAG PLANTS 1/2 ACRE. \$29.99 YIELD: 40 LB. BAG PLANTS 5 ACRES. \$299.99

2. GREAT 8 ANNUAL BLEND

Great 8™ is a fall annual food-plot blend featuring eight specially selected seed varieties that mature at different times throughout the hunting season to help ensure your deer always have something good to eat. Great 8™ eliminates the guesswork of trying to figure out what to plant and is ideal for those who plant just one food plot. The winter peas, buckwheat and ryegrass will attract deer during bow season, while the radishes, turnips and forage rape attract deer during the rut. The winter oats and cereal rye mature from early bow season to late gun season and beyond. This forage can provide the protein and critical energy needed to sustain your deer herd well into the harsh, cold winter while also helping antler growth in the early spring season when other plants have yet to turn green. Great 8 keeps growing strong all hunting season long.

YIELD: AN 8-LB. BAG PLANTS 1/4 ACRE. \$19.99

3. FALL/WINTER/SPRING PROTEIN

While other plants like oats or clover die or become dormant during the winter, Fall/Winter/Spring Blend continues to grow and provide high protein. The special variety of fall rye (cereal rye) is a cool-season plant that stays green and palatable all winter long. This blend also includes winter peas, radishes and buckwheat. Other key benefits include:

- High energy and a high protein at 20%+.
- It stays green throughout winter and into spring.
- Grows 6" to 8" in only 10 days, making it a great early fall "kill plot."
- Highly digestible and can sustain intense grazing pressure.

YIELD: A 17-LB BAG PLANTS 1/2 ACRE. \$29.99

4. ATTRACTS DEER LIKE CANDY

Antler King's Cotton Candy™ is the first cottonseed deer attractant. Cottonseed provides a high percentage of protein, fiber and fat, a combination that no other grain can offer to deer. In addition to cottonseed, Cotton Candy™ contains corn, roasted soybeans, black oil sunflower seeds and protein pellets, which are packed with minerals and vitamins. Testing has shown that deer, both in the North as well as in the South, crave Cotton Candy so much they keep coming back to get more for over a week after it's gone. Also, because Cotton Candy is so new, the odds are your neighbors won't have any. This means deer will be on your property looking to get more of this powerful attractant.

YIELD: 5-LB BAG. \$11.99. YIELD: 24-LB BAG. \$24.99

5. NOSTRIL LICK'N GOOD

Apple-flavored Lick Magic® is loaded with essential minerals and vitamins. The heavy-duty bucket is easy to carry and is the perfect way to store Lick Magic®. The strong apple aroma carries long distances for maximum attraction power. Lick Magic® boasts several minerals and vitamins which are essential for maximum antler growth along with nutritious milk production for lactating does for their new fawns. Apply Lick Magic® year-round to maximize your overall herd health and to keep deer on your property.

- Loaded with essential minerals and vitamins
- Bucket makes for easy carry and storage
- Apple flavoring for long-range aroma and attraction
- Promotes antler growth and milk production

YIELD: 23-LB BUCKET. \$19.99



30.50"
30.00"
29.50"

WEATHER

Line graph showing the percentage of people using different modes of transport to work from 1990 to 2010. The Y-axis represents the percentage (0% to 100%) and the X-axis represents the year (1990 to 2010). The modes of transport are: Car (green line), Public transport (blue line), Bicycle (orange line), and On foot (red line).

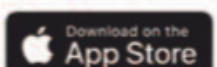
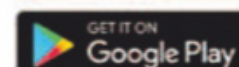
Year	Car	Public transport	Bicycle	On foot
1990	50%	30%	10%	10%
2000	60%	25%	10%	5%
2010	70%	20%	5%	5%



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PICKING THE **LOW-HANGING** (TREESTAND) **FRUIT**



I don't like heights. I don't like to climb into treestands more than 12' off the ground. Besides that, figuring my height (5'10"), if I were to stand in a treestand 12' off the ground, my movement (bending only my right knee because I shoot left-handed and only my arms to draw my bow and come to true full draw) would be about 17' off the ground if I were standing to shoot, and about 15.5' off the ground if I was seated. That's high enough for me and high enough to hide most movement. I will already have positioned myself or used some aid to negate any breeze that exists.

LON LAUBER/WINDIGO IMAGES

Therefore, the treestand I hung at the head of a deep draw, in a bit of a saddle, was well placed. It was just 9½ feet off the ground. I climbed into the stand by screwing in about five steps so that I could easily step from the top step onto the treestand. I had placed my stand about 18 yards off the trail that crossed the ridge through that shallow saddle.

There was no air movement. It was a warm, still, early-November Saturday afternoon — great time and conditions to tag a deer. I put the stand in place at 3:00 p.m.

Less than 15 minutes later, the buck came around the bottom of a hill just off the end of a standing corn field and started up the end of the draw, topping out about 20 yards before he got to my stand. He was, I'm sure, looking for love, but definitely in the wrong place.

The buck trotted past my stand and paused to look down an old logging trail that ran down the top of the ridge.

He never noticed me, because three low leafy branches hung between the buck and me. I was standing, not moving, and by this time already had my bow in hand.

When he paused, I drew and shot. The arrow double-lunged him. He ran out of sight down the steep north side of the ridge. I heard him crash shortly after he passed out of sight.

I was a happy camper.

My friend Byron Ferguson, in listing what he considered the 10 major bowhunting mistakes in his book "Become the Arrow" (www.targetcommbooks.com), listed "placing stand too high" as Number 2 on the list. He said, "The higher the stand, the tougher the shot. There are more obstructions and tougher angles, less chance of double-lung hits."

That is absolutely correct. A deer hit only in one lung will go a long distance, and there's no guarantee of recovery. A double-lung hit is a different story. Shooting from higher up, too, you may have more branches and other brush to shoot through even when you try to clear out shooting lanes. Deer don't always move where they're supposed to move.

There's another problem with a shot from a higher angle — the view is different. Most bowhunters practice broadside shots while standing on the ground. But when you get high in a tree, the deer's spine, normally at the top of the sight picture, is now much closer to the middle of the sight picture and can throw you off.

The bone structure is different, too, and much more protective. From a higher angle, you're trying to punch through the shoulder blade, rib bases and spine, all heavier bones, all offering more protection to the vitals.

SO HOW DO YOU FIND SUCH A STAND?

"When you're setting up your treestand, scope out the area around the tree thoroughly," Ferguson suggested. "This is especially important when you're hunting a couple or more trails, and/or you're in an area the first couple of times. In a new area, you never can be sure which direction the deer will come from. This can be even more critical during the rut, because bucks are all over the place as they check trails and scrapes, and as they sniff out the ready does."

Bob Fratzke, author of "Taking Trophy Whitetails" (www.targetcommbooks.com) notes: "Know the land. If you're going to be successful consistently, this is an important factor. You obviously need to know whitetails, too, but if you know the land that's at least half the puzzle, maybe more. You can know whitetails and have a very good idea of what to predict, but **the terrain almost always has small variations that you need to get to know.** Remember, the whitetail isn't as tall as we think it is. A little terrain change can hide it. 'Close' and 'almost' aren't good enough. You can be 50 yards away from an excellent position and not realize it until you go look for it."

How near/far in relation to the trail(s) being watched should the stand be?

Fratzke said, "A deer has a safety zone around it, often at about 20 yards. You don't want to be too close or its natural alarm bells go off. This isn't always true, but it's a good Rule of Thumb. I emphasize

the 20-yard distance because it's not too close and it's not too far. It's the distance at which you can be deadly accurate, and not so close that any tiny item will spook the deer, not so close there's too much tension."

BEST TIME TO SEE MORE AND BETTER DEER

Generally, your first time in an area is your best chance at numbers of deer or quality of deer. Be aware of this and keep it in mind.

Every time you go back into any area, no matter how careful you are, you're going to leave scent and give deer more opportunities to see, hear or smell you. It is hugely important to have enough stand sites ready that you can keep them fresh, using them only once a week at most. This will have you ready to hunt somewhere, if you have prepared properly, no matter which direction the wind is blowing.

LIMB COVERS? ABSOLUTELY

Another rule of thumb: Climb in cover or climb high, but only as high as conditions dictate.

A clear shot at a deer is great. But it also may leave us and our movement exposed to the deer. We need something to block a deer's view of us.

Ferguson noted, "For years I used climbing stands almost exclusively, because climbing into a tree is quick, easy and fairly quiet. Then Jerry Simmons told me he had found it productive to set his stand ABOVE at least the first limb because deer tend to look up to the first limb but no higher (unless you give them a reason to do so). **That has proven to be true 100% of the time.**

"So now, whenever possible, I strap a fixed-position portable onto the tree trunk ABOVE the limb, and there I wait. Deer seem to scan the tree up to that first limb, then turn their attention elsewhere if not alarmed."

Recall my opening anecdote and the branches that hid me.

If a deer notices you, shut your eyes and listen to its movement, or look far away from its eyes. I prefer shutting my eyes; a direct stare is a predatory move. The appearance of open, round eyes may be too much of a giveaway when it looks at you.



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Multiple-trunk trees, such as maples, hide you well and help hide your motion, too. Often you will be able to lean against trunks your stand is not fastened to, and thus be in a better position to shoot. The various trunks will, for the most part, hide your body outline.

Stands in conifers can really hide you — sometimes just one tree can do it. They generally have more branches and thus offer better background and surrounding cover as you nestle against the trunk. You most likely will need to remove a couple of branches to hang your stand, but this mass of cover can hide your movement, too. Don't figure on putting one foot on a branch, though, the branch movement may alert a deer as you move to shoot.

Whatever the tree, be sure the trunk is large enough that it won't shake when you stand up or change position while standing.

Ferguson adds a point for barebow shooters. He said, "I shoot with my longbow canted. When I'm setting up in a double-trunk or three-trunk tree, I have to be careful about the positioning of my stand to make sure I can shoot with my bow canted."

How about positioning your stand? Fratzke likes to hang his stand behind (farther into the woods) the perimeter trail that generally runs 10-20 yards into the woods, so deer are looking away from him when in position for a shot. But the wind has to be right, of course.

POSITIONING TREE IN STAND

Ferguson makes an important point when he said, "One thing that is constantly overlooked and is probably just as important as the placement of the stand is the positioning of the stand in the tree.

"I've hunted from numerous stands that were in a good place, in the right tree, but the stands were out of position in the tree," he said. "Sometimes it is something as simple as a right-hand shooter setting up a treestand, then a left-hand shooter attempting to use it. Or vice versa. The branches most likely will be trimmed wrong, or important ones not cut at all. The



new guy may not be able to hunt at all from such a stand because he can't shoot from it."

SHOOTING LANES AND NATURAL HOLES

Stand locations with thick cover may hide you well and have good deer movement past them, but be difficult to shoot from. However, with lower stands you may have faster set-up, less noise and commotion putting them up. This may be a minor point, but more than one bowhunter clearing limbs from a stand site has suddenly discovered a buck watching him work, attracted, no doubt, by what it thought was a buck fight.

So if you're clearing shooting lanes, do so very early, such as early spring or summer, but be minimal. The cut brush will have time to heal, and you don't want to clear such a path that deer may use the distinct new openings as travel lanes.

Ferguson does not cut shooting lanes. "I pick natural holes to shoot through. This further helps keep my movement and my scent at the stand site to a minimum. This is most important, of course, the closer to season, or even during season, when I'm scouting and find a spot I like.

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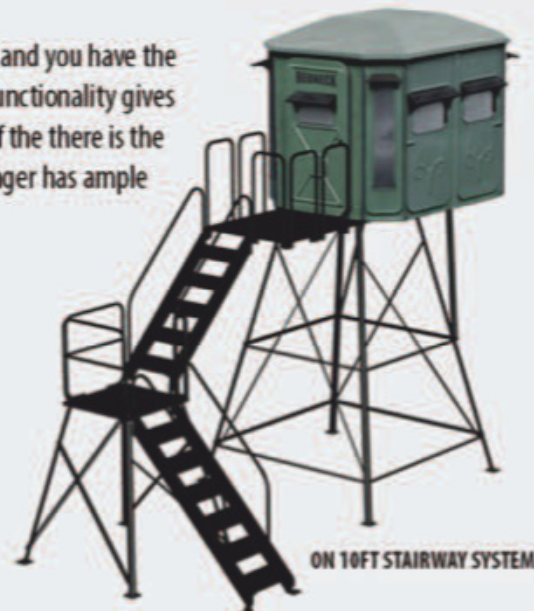
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“When you cut shooting lanes, in addition to altering the immediate landscape, you move around, you grasp vegetation, you may work up a sweat, you move to get rid of the cut brush and branches, etc. It’s too much.”

He adds this tip: “To check for natural shooting openings, focus your binoculars on the deer trail(s) you’re watching, then move the focus back from the trail toward yourself to see whether there are any limbs and twigs in the way of the arrow’s visualized flight path. This obviously also becomes good practice for visualizing and learning the arrow’s flight path. Do this as soon as you get on stand, not when the animal is walking down the trail toward you.”

• **IMPROVE A STAND’S POSITION**

1) Ferguson also notes that you sometimes can improve a stand’s position immensely simply by changing its angle to the target area by as little as 15 degrees. “A lot of times this can increase your field of shooting 30 to 45 degrees,” he said.

The best rule of thumb is to position yourself so that you can cover the most area without needing to stand up. Obviously, you’ll stand at times just to stretch your muscles and to give yourself the widest range of flexibility (turning at the ankles, knees, hips, waist and shoulder) for best coverage, but the seated-on-the-stand test is a good start.

He adds, “Too many bowhunters position their stand so it faces the middle of the area they want to cover. This is self-limiting. The stand ought to be positioned more to the right for a right-hand shooter and more to the left for a left-hand shooter. This will enable the shooter to turn his/her body farther to the left for a right-hand shooter and farther to the right for a left-hand shooter.”

Where you have multiple trees and multiple food sources, try to position the stand where you can see and shoot to several places, rather than singling out what may seem to be the best one.

2) Which side of the tree will you be on? Some bowhunters feel they remain more calm by

positioning their stand on the side of the tree opposite the direction from which they expect deer to approach and get a quartering-away shot as it moves past. This way they won’t be tempted to watch the deer as it approaches, and the tree trunk will do a better job of hiding their small movements from an approaching deer. By wearing a long-enough belt, they can draw and safely lean out to shoot around the tree.

Ferguson said, “I still like to see deer approaching. I’ve had too many deer smell where I’ve gone up the tree, even when using cover scents and scent eliminators.”

MINIMIZE YOUR SCENT

Ferguson noted, “When I find an area while scouting that I want to hunt, on the day I decide to hunt it I’ll go in an hour and a half to two hours earlier than I’d normally go in, set up my stand and stay there. Anything else is too much movement.”

• **DEER SMELL WHERE YOU CLIMBED**

Under what circumstances will deer smell where you climbed a tree? It will happen on cool, damp days, when scents can linger.

“It was either the tree I was in or the food tree, and the only time to be in a food tree is when there is no other tree available ... and for it to work, you’d better be on your very best behavior up in that tree. Deer approaching right at you have too many eyes, and a deer right under you is a poor shot angle,” Ferguson noted.

HANGING YOUR GEAR

Ferguson always has his drill and insertable steps in his pack.

“When I’m scouting, if I see an area I like I can set up instantly, or drill it and peg it so when I come back later with my stand I can get in and hang the stand quickly and quietly.

“To further minimize leaving my scent, I hang my gear about head high on a pull-up cord while installing climbing steps and placing the treestand. I wear cotton gloves. I think other gloves can carry just as much scent. Besides, I’m careful what I touch and don’t touch on the way to my stand,

careful what I touch and don’t touch at my stand site. Basically, I try to be a non-presence.”

BITS AND PIECES

• **What type of stand do you plan to use?** Ladder? Climber? Fixed? Tree Saddle?

“Fixed-position stands are easier to put in place and generally offer quieter access once the stand is in position,” Ferguson noted. “A fixed-position stand generally is more versatile — it can be put on larger or smaller trees, and in trees that would be too much work to get into with a climbing treestand.”

Ladderstands may be too visible, unless positioned far enough off the trail and camouflaged in some way without making it difficult to climb them. Tree branches work as camo, and so does various types of camo fabric.

Tree saddles let you move around the tree and hide yourself, yet you can move around for better shooting, and they are quiet.

• **Wearing acrylic gloves and rubber boots with pants cuffs tucked in is a good way to minimize leaving human scent at the base of the tree and as you climb.**

• **You can nail on leafy branches at proper heights so they hide you.** I believe fake branches are commercially available for strapping to a tree trunk, they once were. They won’t lose their leaves.

• **Where will you hang your bow, or rest it?** Can you move it with little movement? Some bowhunters use strap-on brackets for bows, daypacks, etc. Others nail Y-forked, short branches, with nails through both forks, to hold gear, or at least a bow. Still others sew small pockets on their pants above the knee to rest a lower limb tip in. This is great when you’re standing; arm movement will be minimal.

— *Glenn Helgeland is the former owner and president of Target Communications. He started his career as the editor of Archery World in 1970.*



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SUCCESS IS IN THE WIND

“ The buck’s head bobbed up and down, tail raised high in the air. He was alarmed, hair bristling, his head arrogantly lifted as his nostrils flared, instinctively licking his nose as he tried to get a sense for me. My scent didn’t belong in his home grounds, and it alarmed him. When he stomped his right-front hoof sternly, I knew he sensed he might be in peril. I was in trouble. I wondered what I did wrong? What happened?” This is what a veteran bowhunter explained.

“When the wind initially swirled in my favor, I thought I had my shot,” my friend shared with me. “Then, a sudden wind change cheated me and the buck bolted into dense cover.” My friend was gracious with his failure and shared his lifelong belief. “But that’s deer hunting. And the demon that ruined my hunt was unexpected wind change.”

My deer hunter mentor favors a 115-acre private woods encompassed with weed fields and annual agricultural crops. He sets up two treestands and one pop-up camouflage ground blind so that he can switch locations on any given day. Annual scouting allows him to favorably position his stationary stands in accordance with habitat foliage density and land contour, although I can’t share his name or where he hunts because he fears trespassers and poachers might locate his woods. Fortunately, three days after his failed hunt, he changed stands and tagged a mature buck.

Hunters don’t have to be magicians at reducing their intrusive odors. We must, though, recognize

the wind’s direction during our stand entry. The direction it blows will influence whether or not deer smell you as you enter your stand. Sometimes, we become so involved with every aspect of hunting that we overlook the importance of wind direction. Whenever hunters fail to respect current wind direction and how winds transfer our odors, these invisible conditions enable deer to pinpoint our location because wind direction and intensity offers deer the ability to detect scent interferences. Unfortunately,

hunters often become so involved with every aspect of hunting, we overlook one of our oldest and most simple tools: noting the direction of the wind.

It is, therefore, important to become a “student of weather” by monitoring daily conditions so you’re confidently aware of wind directions. Weather radios allow us to retrieve this vital information before hunting. Television and radio weather reports help, too. Cell phone weather apps constantly update weather activities for a wind direction estimation. Don’t

always rely on media weather summaries, however. Once you’re afield, hunters need to determine visual wind information from their own view of the landscape. Why? Thermals typically move upward during the morning as air is heated by the sun. During the evening, as the earth cools, air currents descend. These are vital facts because a weather monitoring station might be hundreds of miles away from where we hunt.

Wind-shift is a fickle demon for hunters. Sometimes deer smell us. Sometimes they can’t, but this is hunting. Hunters can never determine to what degree we are ahead of the game. This is a factual reason why whitetails are survivalists. They are, without a doubt, products of their environments.

Always, this invisible atmospheric condition will affect deer — and you. Make it a priority.

If there’s one physical element that can ruin any deer hunt, it has to be the exceptional sensitivity of a whitetail’s nose. There are multiple intricate behavioral and biological characteristics that factor into a deer’s sense of smell, all developed to aid in their survival. As they move around, they typically walk into the wind. If they are diverted from an upwind travel route by an intruder, they often run downwind, but will quickly shift to a crosswind route. When hunters approach known bedding areas, they usually find deer bedded with their backs to the wind. This way they can view landscape features downwind, yet detect odors rolling in from behind.

So, how well can deer smell hunters? Ask any learned deer biologist and they will explain how a deer’s nose works. Whitetails’ nostrils are lined with epithelium, which contains mucous membranes and sensory nerve endings. Responses to any chemical odors are carried by sensory nerves to the olfactory bulbs. (Note: A deer’s olfactory bulbs are larger than humans’.) Then, olfactory bulbs send impulses to the brain stem. This is where and how an odor is identified. Epithelium, which is tissue that lines the interior of their nose, then helps identify the odor. Scientists and biologists believe

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that many natural variables are monitored by a deer's nose. Wind, temperature, and moisture are just a few of these. Whitetails' scenting abilities and perceptions are also heightened by a warm, moist, still atmosphere. Both rain and snow carry scent molecules to earth and will dilute them. Light mist and heavy fog also block scent from moving long distances. On the other hand, humidity in the 50% to 70% range is optimum for deer to smell. High humidity seems to make deer skittish and alert. High temperatures cause air convection

and rising thermals carry scent molecules upward before they reach ground-level deer. That's why hunters need to become skilled at how to neutralize, or at least reduce, their human odors.

There's no doubt that human odors and wind direction are hunter priorities. We should constantly be mindful of wind corridors and landscape contours, as wind currents are often guided by landscape features. Flatland and mountainous terrain wind variances can fool us. Valleys, rock structures and heavy woods will alter wind


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directions. The wind might blow from a westerly direction on a hilltop, but as it sweeps down into a snaking valley it may be carried in a different direction. Wind will weave its way along and around uneven landscape features. As it funnels across the land contour, this can change the direction of flow. Wind can be our friend or our enemy. It simply depends on how we prepare for and interpret existing wind currents while hunting.

Monitoring wind direction is an endless process, but it starts by paying attention to the little things. Watch the movement of leaves and small branches, as well as tall grasses. If it's a blustery day, check the direction of your steamy breath as you exhale. I use one stand close to a rural home, and I can track the drift of chimney smoke as it rises from their fireplace. You can also bring things along to help you find the wind's direction. A single, short length of dark thread tied on your bow limb can be an easy visual indicator. Odorless powdered chalk can also be "puffed" into the air to indicate wind direction. These techniques provide a more accurate determination of wind direction at your location.

Hunters must invent methods that are defensive at confusing a deer's sense of smell in order to succeed. Make sure your hunting clothes are washed regularly with scent-eliminating detergents. Serious hunters refuse to use a clothes dryer and prefer to hang their hunting attire outdoors to dry. They attempt to keep their clothes as far away from human odors as possible. Dried clothing should then be stored in a large sealable plastic bag. Plastic totes work well, too, and they can be used to transport your clothing to your hunting location. Very important: Don't wear any hunting clothing while you're at home, or while driving to your hunting spot. Dress after you arrive, outside your vehicle. Also, never run errands before hunting, such as pumping gas, stopping at a convenience store, etc., because deer are very aware of even subtle human odors.

There are also traditional methods of minimizing human odors.

Commercial de-scenting products have come a long way, but there are other simple methods of masking human odors. When we stand-hunt within pines, we try to mimic natural odors associated with the habitat. For example, you can include pine boughs in your clothing container. A bowhunter who hunts a mucky creek bottom can walk through mud while approaching a stand for a similar effect. Never forget, your body constantly emits foreign odors. Deceiving any deer's nose is a constant battle, so proactively managing human scent accelerates success.

Before the popularity of commercial neutralizing sprays and soaps, hunters used baking soda to reduce the effects of human odor. Before the season, all clothing was washed with this odor-reducing powder. Hunters would then bathe with a baking-soda and warm-water bath just before hunting. The procedure helps to neutralize human odors, but only temporarily. Whether using commercial or traditional methods, one thing holds true: Every hunter develops confidence with prosperous techniques.

Before hunting, cleanse your body by showering with a de-scented soap. Make sure you thoroughly wash your hair, because hair is a scent-holding culprit. Don't forget to use towels and washcloths that have been previously washed with a scent-free solution, too. If you're primitive camping and don't have access to a shower, dilute unwashed odors with scentless towelettes. Fortunately, so-called old hunting methods still work quite well.

Basic techniques never seem to fail, such as washing hunting clothing with neutralizing soap to help eliminate most odor residues. It's imperative that hunting clothing isn't tainted with human odors, so wash clothing items with a de-scenting laundry soap. This includes socks, underclothing, gloves — anything you wear while hunting. When washing hunting clothing, use cold water to minimize color fading and material shrinkage. Equally, it's best not to dry hunting clothes in your dryer. It's more effective to air-dry clothing by hanging it outdoors or

within a seldom-used outbuilding or isolated wooded location. After your clothes are completely dry, mist everything with a neutralizing liquid and place all items in a scent-safe storage bag, or sealable container.

It's important to change into your hunting attire only after arriving at a hunting spot. If your location doesn't permit privacy, and you must wear hunting clothes while driving, thoroughly spray yourself with a de-scenting solution before walking to your stand. Our odds of success can be increased further by wearing rubber boots and using boot pads saturated with an appealing deer-associated scent. Don't hesitate to re-spray yourself with scent neutralizer before you step into a ground blind or climb to an elevated treestand, either. Dedication to scent elimination is the key to trip up a buck's sense of smell.

There's no doubt that wind direction impacts hunting success. Wind currents are usually responsible for deer pinpointing us. Worst of all, wind is not always constant and can shift within minutes. My often humbled bowhunting friend shared one more opinion.

"Hunters should position stands with regard to morning and afternoon thermal air movements and remain vigilant every second. In my opinion, analyze the wind wisely, because it can be your friend or enemy." His mature buck successes support his beliefs.

— Bob "Greenie" Grewell is an Ohio deer hunter and freelance writer. His *Deer & Deer Hunting* contributions date back to the early 1980s when he worked closely with the magazine's founders Jack Brauer and Al Hofacker.



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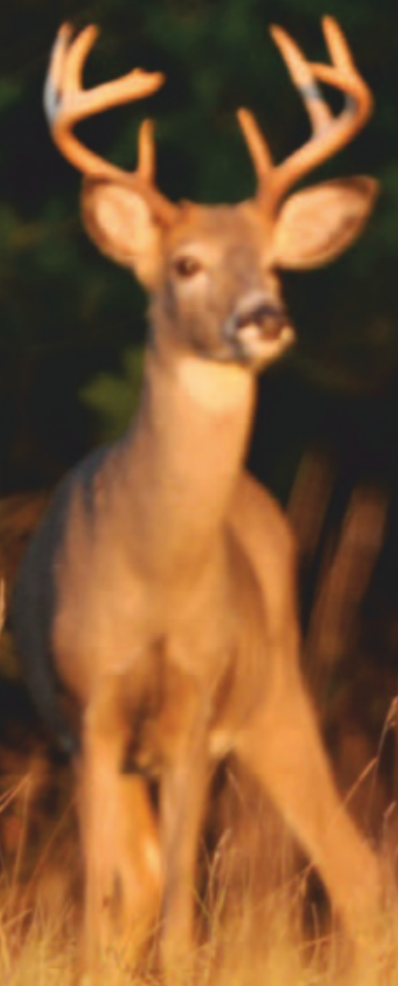


It was a hot, sultry summer afternoon. The humidity was so high it appeared as a light cloud at ground level. Other teenagers were swimming or somewhere more comfortable. They certainly weren't walking along a tree line that opened up to pasture.

But that's where the groundhogs lived.

Bow and arrow in hand, I eased along the woods' edge, pausing occasionally in hopes of spotting a woodchuck. Finding the rodents was never a problem, but hitting them was. After several unsuccessful stalks, I crossed over a small rise to see what was happening on the other side and scurried to the ground. Not 200

TOO MANY BUCKS?



REID/DDH

yards away was a magnificent 8-point buck in velvet.

The buck was feeding on white clover just 20 feet from the tree line. I watched the buck until almost dark and then left, knowing I had found a great deer to hunt in December.

But the season passed, and I didn't see a buck. I can't say the same for does; they were everywhere. At times,

I glassed groups of does so intently that I imagined seeing antlers — 3-inch-long legal spikes — hidden behind those long ears.

Growing up in a small deer-hunting community in Fayette County, Pa., during the 1960s, I learned early the effect deer sex ratios have on hunter success. Nowadays, after managing deer on several vast Texas

properties the past 27 years, I've seen the benefits of balanced sex ratios. I've even seen herds with more bucks than does.

LOOKING BACK

I learned about the balanced deer-sex-ratio principle while working on my master's degree in range and wildlife management at Texas A&I University in Kingsville in 1975. I was conducting deer research on a 6,700-acre ranch 18 miles south of Laredo, Texas, managed by Al Brothers.

Brothers, acclaimed as the "father of modern deer management," said a property only needs enough does to annually replace bucks killed during fall. Since then, I have managed and hunted land with more does than bucks and vice versa, and I've seen the effects of each situation.

Deer are born at almost a 50-50 ratio of males to females. Therefore, managing for a balanced sex ratio is closer to nature's way. As fawns age, females begin to outnumber males because of the males' inherent curiosity, which subjects them to various mortality factors, including coyotes.

In states with liberal buck limits and intensive buck harvest schemes, hunting has the greatest influence on the sex ratio. For example, in

Pennsylvania, does dominate the herd, and 6-to-1 doe-to-buck ratios are the norm — a problem the state hopes to rectify. The reverse is true on some larger private ranches in Texas where hunting has been restricted. On those deer sanctuaries, a 2-to-1 doe-to-buck ratio is considered high, and ratios of 1.5-to-1 aren't uncommon.

GETTING TO WORK

My first opportunity to adjust a deer herd's sex ratio occurred when I worked at a 10,000-acre ranch in the hickory/post oak region of eastern Texas. Initially, the doe-to-buck ratio was about 5-to-1.

As a result, the herd had few — if any — bucks older than 4½ years. To the dismay of hunters, antler rattling didn't work during the rut.

First, I implemented a very conservative buck harvest plan coupled with intense doe harvest goals. The plan didn't work overnight. In fact, it took three years.

The results, however, were impressive. Rattling became an effective, exciting tool to review the buck herd. In fact, it was the only way to measure success because we maintained strict rules on buck harvests. During the first year, I rattled up one or two young bucks. Three years later, I rattled up 10 or more mature bucks per day.

In 1983, I became the wildlife manager for Harrison Ranches, which included a 106,000-acre ranch spanning parts of three southern Texas counties. The ranch had experienced little to no hunting pressure. Not only was it in one of the premiere buck-producing regions of southern Texas, but its habitat was pristine — a natural outdoor wildlife classroom for an enthusiastic student of the white-tailed deer.

An initial aerial survey indicated the ranch's doe-to-buck ratio was 1.49-to-1. During the 1983 deer season, I established the first intensive doe harvest, which occurred in the ranch's 55,000-acre core. Equally intense doe hunts continued through 1987. During that four-year span, we reduced the doe-to-buck ratio to 1.05-to-1.

Things changed in a hurry. Although the doe population was reduced, the adult deer density continued increasing because bucks replaced the hunter-killed does. It was opposite to any harvest scheme to which I was accustomed.

By tightening the sex ratio, a higher percentage of does conceive during the first estrous cycle, thus reducing the preponderance of late births. There's even evidence that the breeding cycle occurs earlier. Since fawns are born earlier in



spring, they enjoy a nutritional advantage over late-born fawns, particularly in the drought-prone Southwest. That makes balanced sex ratios an integral part of any deer-management program.

Although rattling always worked at the ranch, it became apparently easier to lure in bucks as the sex ratio narrowed. The top benefit from tightening the sex ratio, however, was the accumulation of mature bucks (the age for peak rack potential), which in southern Texas is 6½ years, vs. 4½ years throughout most other areas of North America. At the time, I believed the more bucks we let reach 6½, the greater our chances for realizing optimal antler size.

With an initial doe-to-buck ratio of 1.5-to-1, it wasn't uncommon for bucks to break tines while fighting, especially after the does' second estrous cycle. Fights were common during the later period because fewer does were recycling, and they were invariably outnumbered by potential breeder bucks. Therefore, competition was often intense.

Possibly the most interesting aspect of the intensive doe harvest was its effect on doe behavior. Initially, does were easy to hunt. But during the four-year

period, they became extremely challenging to kill, particularly near the oat patches where we had most of our stands.

GOING TO THE EXTREME

During winter in 1987, I learned the major disadvantage of altering a deer herd's sex ratio so that it greatly favors bucks.

In mid-December, one of my hunting clients and his guide saw dozens of buzzards circling above a nearby ranch road. Inquisitive, they ventured into the brush to see what had attracted so many scavengers. Expecting to find a dead buck — which was not uncommon during the rut — they weren't surprised when they flushed several buzzards from a bloody-red rib cage.

But the men were astounded when the rib cage suddenly moved. They quickly discovered it was part of a carcass attached to another buck, which was still alive. Evidently, the two massive bucks had become locked together while fighting for position in the breeding hierarchy. How long their antlers had been entwined, or how far the victor had dragged the cadaver was uncertain. But the survivor, a 14-pointer that scored 170 inches, was emaciated. Unquestionably, he endured tremendous stress dealing with marauding coyotes that continually ripped meat off the bones of his dead opponent.

Big-racked bucks are rare enough, but discovering two locked together is quite uncommon. Amazingly, 46 days later — Jan. 26, 1988, to be exact — we found another pair of locked bucks. Again, only one remained alive while dragging his cohort through the brush in a futile attempt to escape coyotes. The two bucks sported 11- and 16-point racks that grossed 165 and 160 inches, respectively.

Why did something so rare occur twice in such a short time on one ranch? I believe it was a result of reducing doe numbers until bucks outnumbered them. As a result, competition for breeding privileges escalated to a level that increased the probability of all-out death battles. It also indicated that a sex ratio favoring bucks can result in increased self-inflicted mortality. There's no telling how many more

bucks incurred injuries from fighting and died days or weeks later.

The buck-heavy sex ratio in that free-ranging herd was undoubtedly the reason the phenomenon occurred. How often it happens remains a question. However, during that time, there was a major telemetry study at the ranch. Results indicated that deer perish from natural causes at a much higher rate than once believed.

In fact, a year earlier, ranch workers found two locked bucks, including a radio-collared buck. Because 15 bucks were collared at the time, with about 2,000 bucks inhabiting the ranch, the probability of one of the collared bucks getting locked up was less than 1%. Only the two pairs of locked bucks in 1987 were rarer.

LESSON LEARNED

We altered our deer-management program after witnessing the increase in self-inflicted buck mortality. Since then, we've scaled doe harvests from intense to moderate levels and have a doe-to-buck ratio of about 1.5-to-1. That ratio provides the best of both worlds, and we haven't found a pair of locked bucks since that two-year period in the mid-1980s.

I've read about how some managers promulgate the benefits of deer herds heavily favoring bucks. The benefits of such a ratio are obvious, but based on my experience, the potential increase in mortality of mature bucks — obvious or not — might erode the benefits of buck-predominant deer herds.

In reality, most management programs aren't close to realizing a balanced sex ratio, so I doubt a sex ratio favoring bucks will ever be a problem in most parts of North America.

— Bob Zaiglin is a college professor and professional deer biologist from Uvalde, Texas. He has also been the wildlife management coordinator for Southwest Texas Junior College for the past 18 years.



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Blood-soaked lungs draw in one last rugged rush of hot summer air. The buck savors that last labored breath, and then releases it back into the atmosphere. Life fades from its eyes, leaving behind nothing but a pair of cloudy-blue spheres. Then, nothing. All is still. All is quiet. The deer is dead.

That isn't the ending scene of a hunter's kill. It's the final moments of a whitetail that contracts a lethal dose of hemorrhagic disease — one of the deadliest illnesses in the world of whitetails. And sometimes, it just doesn't get its due. Hunters need to know about it, including the latest news.

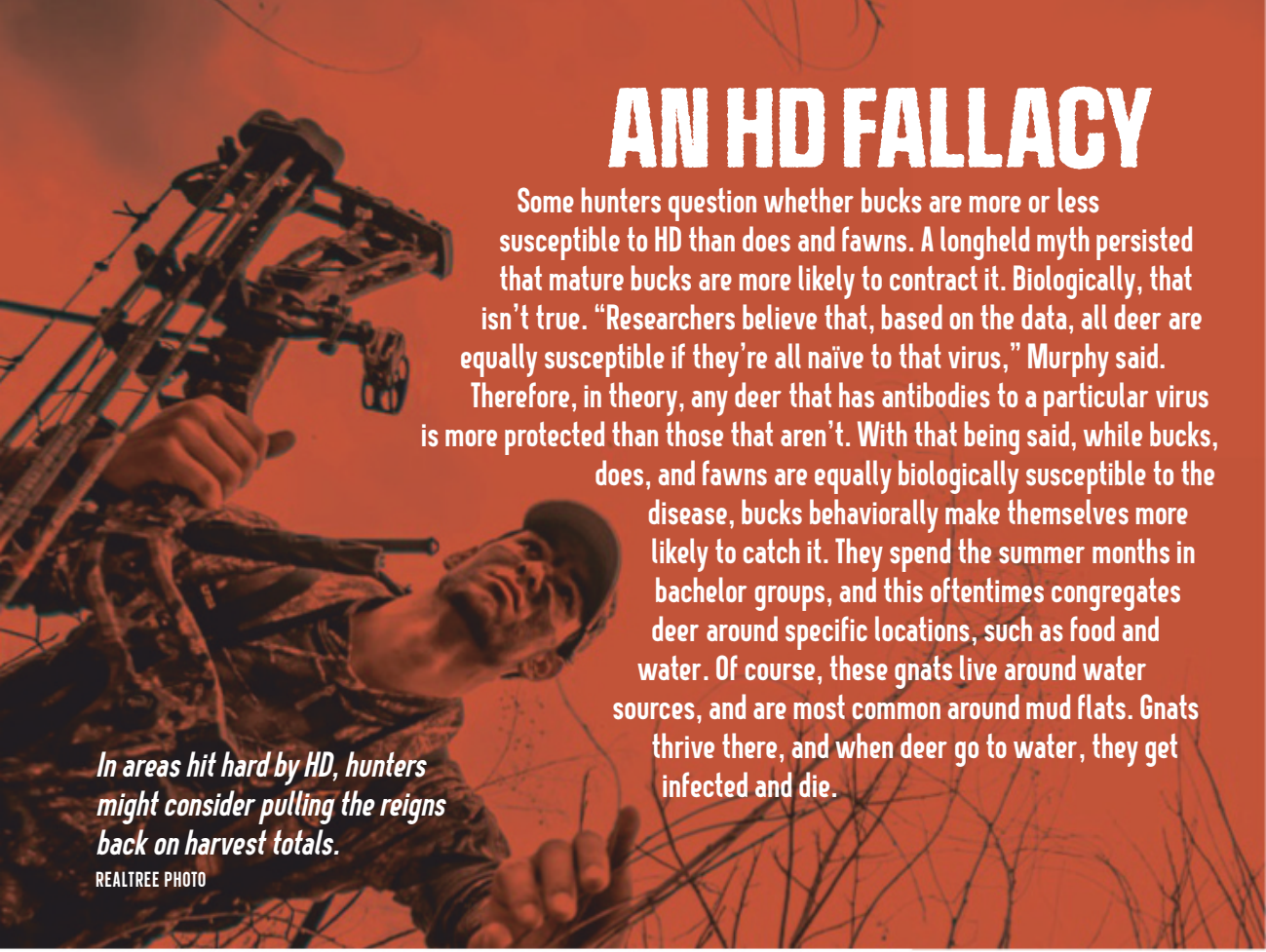
HD DEFINED

Whitetails face a great number of threats. Some of these include urban sprawl, habitat degradation, disease spread, expanding predator populations, and more. But disease is currently a significant issue for the whitetail herd throughout North American. While chronic wasting disease seems to be at the forefront, a big issue that commonly flies under the radar is hemorrhagic disease (HD). Currently, it comes in one of two forms, epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) or bluetongue virus (BTV). Both EHD and BTV stem from the Orbivirus genus, which is part of the Reoviridae family.

HD viruses are not spread from deer to deer. Culicoides, which are often referred to as biting midges, are the vectors. Not all midges carry HD viruses, but those that do can potentially infect deer. "The anecdotal name for them in the South is a no-see-um," HuntStand Wildlife Biologist Brian Murphy said. "It's a little biting gnat that flies from an infected deer with the EHD virus and takes it to an uninfected deer."

Generally, symptoms begin showing within seven days of contracting the virus. Once symptoms begin showing, deer can die in less than a day, or it can drag on for several.

"Researchers have known about the disease since the 1950s,"



AN HD FALLACY

Some hunters question whether bucks are more or less susceptible to HD than does and fawns. A longheld myth persisted that mature bucks are more likely to contract it. Biologically, that isn't true. "Researchers believe that, based on the data, all deer are equally susceptible if they're all naïve to that virus," Murphy said.

Therefore, in theory, any deer that has antibodies to a particular virus is more protected than those that aren't. With that being said, while bucks, does, and fawns are equally biologically susceptible to the disease, bucks behaviorally make themselves more likely to catch it. They spend the summer months in bachelor groups, and this oftentimes congregates deer around specific locations, such as food and water. Of course, these gnats live around water sources, and are most common around mud flats. Gnats thrive there, and when deer go to water, they get infected and die.

In areas hit hard by HD, hunters might consider pulling the reins back on harvest totals.

REALTREE PHOTO

Murphy said. "That's when they could identify and understand it. But it's probably existed ever since we've had deer. The virus doesn't hit everywhere every year, but it hits somewhere every year in the whitetail's range. Generally, some deer in the southern half of the United States get exposed to it every year to some degree. The region gets regular exposure to it. So, when we do have higher outbreaks, our mortality rates are low. We don't see it as a huge mortality issue in the Deep South."

When you find one case, there are generally more nearby. However, despite periodical widespread breakouts, this can be a very localized disease. It might be prevalent in one spot, and nonexistent in another. Just because one property is affected doesn't mean surrounding tracts will be.

THE NATURAL PROGRESSION

So, what exactly happens when a deer gets this disease? When a deer contracts HD, it isn't always fatal. Three different outcomes can occur, including the peracute form, which is rapid death. These whitetails experience rapid hemorrhaging, high fevers, and generally die within a few hours. These deer typically perish in water as they attempt to reduce the fever.

The acute form of HD is a longer battle. This form can take up to a couple weeks, but deer still die. If a deer survives long enough, visible symptoms can include dehydration, obvious fatigue, significant salivation, loss of appetite, increased respiration rates, bedding near water sources, swelling of the head and neck, lacking the fear of humans, and more. Internally, organs will show significant bleeding. Some might even be enlarged.

The third form is called the chronic form. It is survivable. Southern deer live through it with a high degree of success. A slightly lower percentage of Northern deer survive. "Deer that do live through it, hunters often see these come into the check station with what we call sloughing hooves, which is an interruption in hoof growth," Murphy said.

THE HD LANDSCAPE IS CHANGING

Historically, HD was an occasional issue that reared its nasty head very rarely. However, throughout the past decade, it's only increased in prevalence. Numerous states are seeing it where they haven't before. It's even creeping north of the northern border.

Obviously, the location of the viruses that have long been here are moving into new places, just as serotypes not previously located here are moving to America. Within

the two HD viral families (EHD and BTV), there are different strains, or serotypes, which have varying levels of lethality.

"There were only two types of known EHD virus and five or six BTV virus serotypes in the U.S," Murphy said. "However, there have been recent additions of new ones showing up. These are mostly from Central and South America. It's via ships, wind, or who knows what."

According to Murphy, serotype 6 is one of the more recent foreign strains to arrive. "That's a new one," Murphy said. "But we also had a couple of BTV virus serotypes show up. BTV is much more known in the cattle world, and there are some concerns with the interactions between deer and cattle, but it's a small player. It's EHD serotype 2 and 6 that cause most of the deer mortality. If you look across the whitetail's range, EHD serotype 2 is by far the most common culprit. If EHD killed 10,000 deer, probably 8-9,000 died from EHD serotype 2.

"We now have a world that moves all the time," Murphy continued. "We're moving product to people. Just as human communicable diseases are moving around the planet quicker, animal and plant diseases are moving quicker."

It's still unknown just how many serotypes of EHD and BTV there are globally. However, it's certain that not all of these have arrived in the United States yet. Still, it doesn't change how lethal those we already have can be. "Each of these serotypes have different levels of virulence, or how problematic they are for deer herds," Murphy said. "Not all EHD and BTV viruses are the same. They cause different levels of sickness or death."

Geography plays a role, too. The farther north you go, the less resistant deer are to HD. "As you move northward in the whitetail's range — places like Kentucky, Ohio, and central states — there we have intermediate responses where we can have low mortality, but in severe outbreaks, we see significant mortality," Murphy said.

Both 2007 and 2012 were large outbreaks. There have been subsequent years with lesser outbreaks, such as 2017 and 2018, but these were nothing compared

to 2007 and 2012. In some places in 2012, certain locations had 30% mortality and higher.

The Milk River in Montana was one of those. It is known for large outbreaks with large die-offs. Deer have little resistance to the disease this far north and west. When it hits such populations, you can see nearly 50% mortality in the worst-hit areas.

"The farthest north I'm aware of is southern Ontario," Murphy said. "It finally jumped the U.S. border a few years ago. So, we've had a few isolated cases in Canada. This was unheard of 15-20 years ago. It never passed southern Michigan. But we think it's due to climate change. It's simply because the vector — the biting gnat — gets to overwinter. Wherever they can overwinter, they can maintain a population. They can continue to transmit the virus."

Whereas historically, they couldn't survive Northern climates, increasing temperatures are allowing these gnats to expand northward. This keeps the cycle moving, bringing it to places it's never been before.

"The best guess is that climate change is causing a northward expansion of the disease," Murphy said. "We're also seeing an increased frequency of different serotypes of the disease. These two things are going on, neither of which are good for whitetails."

CAN WE STOP IT?

HD is very difficult to prepare for. In reality, you can't. You can only react, and you can barely do that. Perhaps in time there will be additional tools at land managers' disposal. Still, one way land managers can combat HD is to monitor waterways. Encourage deer to avoid muddy areas. Do this by blocking off access to such areas. Simultaneously, offer them clean water sources via troughs that are well away from muddy areas that might harbor gnat populations.

Water management aside, some land managers have attempted to spray the grounds where these gnats abound. This will likely require an industrial-size operation, though. Also, in controlled, high-fence environments, some deer managers are attempting to use a vaccine,

but I could not verify the degree of effectiveness. It's certainly not an applicable solution for wild herds.

"The good news is there are no human health implications whatsoever from HDs," Murphy said. "These deer are perfectly fine to eat. There's nothing to worry about."

Interestingly, hunters who use trail cameras in summer can see this disease occur. It's very seasonal. In general, it happens from July to October. Once signs of it appear, you can get out and start seeing just how bad the situation is.

"If it's a severe outbreak, unless you had too many deer to start with, you might have to back off your deer harvest," Murphy said. "But if you have a balanced deer herd, and you take a 15% haircut from HD, you might just have to back off your doe harvest. You might have fewer bucks to harvest."

Fortunately, deer herds bounce back quickly, even in hard-hit

areas. If you slack the harvest totals a couple of years, and predators don't abound, herds should rebound quite well. Plus, deer that survive HD receive short-term immunity against the serotype they contracted. That tends to last approximately 12 months, sometimes longer. Does also provide short-term immunity to their fawns, but it only lasts about six months.

All things considered, unlike CWD, if EHD hits your area, you won't have to worry about it remaining in your herd for years to come. At least, that's our hope.

— Josh Honeycutt is an avid whitetail hunter and outdoor communicator from Kentucky.



THE FUTURE OF HD RESEARCH

Emma Kring, a graduate student at the University of Georgia, Mark Gruder, a Ph.D. assistant professor at the University of Georgia, and Gino D'Angelo, also an assistant professor at the University of Georgia, each recently conducted a study to model the annual HD occurrence throughout the Great Plains. It was introduced at the 2022 Southeastern Deer Study Group Meeting.

"The project involves analyzing temporal and spatial trends from the last 40 years of reported HD," Kring said. "We are looking for trends and patterns of reported HD in free-ranging deer populations to help improve communication of disease risk, while contributing to the robust narrative of HD in the United States."

According to Kring, Gruder, and D'Angelo's research, it seems that "recent changes in the spatial and temporal distribution of HD in the Eastern United States have been reported and may be linked to changes in environmental conditions that may increase vector populations and/or virus transmission. However, both historic and recent patterns of HD in the Great Plains remain poorly described."

Therefore, the team's objective is to assess the relationship between climatic and environmental conditions and the distribution of HD. To accomplish this, they are using data from 1982-2020, and the preliminary results suggest that climate and ecoregion characteristics may both be contributing to the increase in HD reporting frequency over the last few decades.

"Across all states, increasing mean temperature, decreasing average precipitation, and the timing of the precipitation increased the frequency of HD reports in the Great Plains," Kring said. "Overall, this model will help explain the changing HD patterns in the Great Plains and determine climate factors that may serve as predictors for increased HD risk across North America."

Hunters can do few things to combat an HD outbreak. However, attempting to prevent deer from using muddy water sources is one good way.

HONEYCUTT CREATIVE PHOTO

AWESOME



IN NATURAL DEER POPULATIONS, ONLY SUPERIOR BUCKS REACH THE PINNACLE ROLE OF HERD SIRES. WHILE MANY ARE CALLED, FEW ARE CHOSEN. THIS BREEDING SYSTEM ASSURES THE PERPETUATION OF ADAPTIVE TRAITS AND PHYSICAL FITNESS WITHIN THE WHITETAIL'S POPULATION.

A white-tailed buck requires about six years to reach its maximum body size. During the interim, he becomes somewhat stronger each autumn while growing larger in body and antlers. He's a little wiser, too. He advances accordingly in the male society, gaining social status each year as he matures and rises in rank over his peers.

ALPHAS



CHARLES J. ALSHEIMER



In other words, with each fall's resurgence of rutting behavior, the buck develops physically, physiologically and psychologically in a step-wise fashion. Such a pattern produces social maturity classes among males that are more pronounced than those of female whitetails.

There are numerous categories for bucks in the wild, but one of the most intriguing applies to those of a certain maturity — “dominant floaters.”

Dominant floaters — a term most aptly coined by deer researcher Bennet A. Brown Jr. — are the alpha bucks. These are the most dominant males in the population, and the true social governors of the male society. Brown first used the term when describing whitetails in a peer-reviewed research article titled “Social Organization in Male Groups of White-tailed Deer,” that appeared in “The Behavior of Ungulates and Its Relation to Management,” which was edited by renowned researcher Dr. Valerius Geist and F. Walther.

In a socially well-balanced society, dominant floaters are generally 5½ to 9½ years old, fully grown and mature in all aspects. Typically, they are superb physical specimens. They are the largest-bodied, largest-antlered and most physically fit males of their species. They possess highly polished competitive skills that were gained through years of sparring, and fighting when necessary.

Most importantly, alpha bucks exhibit finely tuned, ritualistic threat patterns and dominance displays, and have elaborate signposting capabilities. Such talents frequently enable them to bluff and intimidate younger bucks, thereby eliminating the need to risk injury by physically proving their superiority.

Dominant bucks tend to be wide-ranging travelers. They move freely, and float uncontested over a relatively large breeding range occupied by several fraternal groups, whose members are dominated year-round by the alpha male through stereotyped threat patterns. The dominant floater is a master at producing numerous, strategically located rubs and scrapes to advertise and communicate his superior social rank and presence to other bucks and does. These scent-marked signposts convey long-lasting messages that carry the maker's distinct odor and special pheromones, which have strong suppressor effects on younger bucks, while being highly attractive to estrous females.

The longevity of a dominant floater depends on many factors, but hinges primarily on his general health and the amount of competition from up-and-coming bucks. Should he become injured, show weakness or falter in the least when attempting to confirm his supreme social rank during the pre-rut or rut, he will likely be challenged repeatedly by younger bucks. These repetitive challenges will probably terminate his superior

status. Even under optimal conditions, I doubt any buck can hold the alpha rank beyond 10½ years of age when faced with competition from prime-age bucks.

Another category would be “seniors.” These are aged bucks who are past their physical prime. Some might be as young as 8½ or 9½ years old, but most will be 10½ years or older. Obviously, few bucks achieve this old age in hunted populations. I once calculated that less than one buck in 360,000 individuals ever reaches such an old age in heavily hunted lower Michigan. In some ungulate species, senior males reportedly retreat from society, and no longer compete with other males for social rank or breeding opportunities. They live out their final years peaceably as hermits. Having observed white-tailed bucks for many years, however, I find it difficult to believe that an alpha buck will relinquish his supreme social position so graciously. Bucks who struggle unsuccessfully to hold their dominance generally enter winter in wretched physical condition and die before winter's end. Others might not even survive the onslaught of competition from younger bucks during the rut.

Some senior white-tailed bucks can survive for a few years where the climate is not so severe. However, they show their age. Their faces become gray, and they lose the firm, well-rounded bodies they had in their prime.

Senior bucks also exhibit decreased testosterone secretion, and they're more likely to grow stunted and malformed antlers. The oldest free-ranging buck that I know of was 17 years old when he was live-captured in northern Minnesota. Few bucks live beyond 12½ years, however, because most old deer suffer from arthritis and badly worn teeth. They normally die of malnutrition or predation during winter.

— *John J. Ozoga is North America's preeminent deer research biologist. He spent his career of more than 30 years working for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Now retired, he has been Deer & Deer Hunting's research editor since 1994.*





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ALAN CLEMONS

Bird in Hand Reveals Multiple Wildlife Violations

What began as a check by Wyoming Game and Fish Department game wardens about wasted game birds turned into convictions of two men for multiple wildlife violations.

Justin Chewning and Steven Macy were convicted in Sweetwater County, Wyo., for numerous violations committed in 2019 and 2020, including illegal taking of a buck mule deer and mature bull elk. The two were fined nearly \$15,000 and lost their hunting and fishing privileges.

During the course of a wasted game bird investigation, wardens learned that in early October 2019, both Chewning and Macy illegally killed mature bull elk within Elk Hunt Area 100 during the closed season. They tagged them with general elk licenses. Wardens found the location of the kill and the carcass taken by Chewning. DNA confirmed the location and carcass were a match to the skull and antlers Chewning had in his possession.

The pair were hunting in Sublette County in October 2020 when Macy killed a buck mule deer. Chewning illegally tagged it. Later in the day, they hunted elk in an area with improper licenses. Macy killed two mature bull elk; Chewning tagged one of the two with an improper license.

Chewning was charged with 10 violations. He pleaded guilty to three counts of intentionally taking antlered bull elk without a proper license, one count of taking a buck mule deer without a license and one count of transferring a license. His hunting and fishing privileges were suspended for 15 years. He was ordered to pay fines of \$1,585 and restitution of \$7,000. The other charges were dismissed.

Macy was charged with five counts of intentionally taking antlered big game without a license or during



a closed season, and two counts of transferring a license. He pleaded no contest to one count of taking a buck mule deer without a license and two counts of intentionally taking a bull elk without the proper license.

His hunting and fishing privileges were suspended for two years. He was ordered to pay \$5,640 in fines, restitution of \$1,500 and to forfeit his Browning .338 rifle used during the crimes.

Fewer Mule Deer Tags in Wyoming This Year

Drought and disease impacted mule deer and pronghorn numbers severely enough that the Wyoming Game and Fish Department reduced the number of tags for the upcoming season.

Mule deer tags decreased by 3,300 and antelope tags by 8,000. Tag numbers were reduced in 2021, also, to help the population rebound. Continued severe drought and a spike in deaths from epizootic hemorrhagic disease further impacted the two species this year.

"This year's reduction signals that populations haven't bounced back as quickly as wildlife managers hoped," Cheyenne Stewart, WGFD's wildlife management coordinator for the Sheridan region, told the Buffalo Bulletin.

New York Harvest Declines, Youth Hunting Increases

New York's white-tailed deer harvest declined 17% in 2021 due to an outbreak of EHD and fewer Deer Management Permits issued. Still, New York DEC officials said 211,269 deer were harvested overall, including 110,839 antlered bucks and 100,430 antlerless deer.

This was a 5% decrease in antlered buck harvest and 25% decrease in antlerless harvest from the 2020 season. The latter was believed due to a reduction in Deer Management Permits and a natural correction from the 2020 season when antlerless harvest hit 30%.

On a good note, youth deer and late-season harvests increased 36%. Additionally, hunters took advantage of a mid-September antlerless-only season in some Wildlife Management Units. The seasons were added because numbers were up. Hunters killed almost 2,000 deer in the special WMU season.



3-2-1

WHITETAILS

**3 APPROACHES FOR 2 HUNTERS TO SHOOT
1 WHITETAIL. TEAM UP AND MOVE OUT
TO LAY IN YOUR WINTER VENISON.**

“What’s that they say is the definition of insanity?” my brother Chuck pondered. “You keep on trying the same thing and hoping for different results?”

He had a good point.

We were sitting on the old station wagon's tailgate eating a noontime sandwich on a gravel road in good deer country that on this hunt happened to be in Wisconsin. The terrain consisted of rolling farmland with thick woodlots, tangled creek bottoms, crop fields and pastureland, some of which was coming back to brush.

As you can imagine, there was no shortage of deer there. And we wanted one on our meatpole.

But it was late muzzleloader season now. The whitetails had been pressured pretty hard — some archery hunting, plenty of regular firearms season pursuit, and now the hardy smokepolers.

So deer weren't moving much. Dawn and dusk sits were unproductive because the whitetails had gone nocturnal. We had been working late morning and early afternoon pushes back and forth through thick cover, trying to move a deer out of its bed and into our sights. But the whitetails were giving us the slip pretty easily. No, make that giving us the slip almost effortlessly.

"Well, they're just being sneaky," I thought out loud. "Nothing wants to run out of cover and cross a field. They're circling us, or letting us pass by and sneaking away."

"So what we do?" he wondered back aloud.

"Well, let's not try and steer them," I said. "That ain't workin'. The deer I saw or heard this morning looped back. How about this. One of us hunts slowly, perhaps he can get a shot. The other sneaks behind him, maybe 50 yards. Maybe he can surprise one sneaking away."

Older brothers don't often listen to younger brothers, but he had to admit we had nothing to lose. Heck, we could hunt back through a couple woodlots where we had seen or heard whitetails earlier, and knew some were still holed up.

I even gave him his choice of jobs — leader or trailer. "I'll be the one ahead," he said. I could

tell he was skeptical and figured jumping a deer for a snapshot was his best chance.

"You can only shoot to the side or behind you," he said. "I can only shoot to the side or ahead." Older brothers think of safety things like that.

The first woodlot was a bust. Nothing seen by either of us. But on our second hunt, a little magic happened.

I was stooping down to duck under a vine when I saw movement coming my way. A deer was sneaking along, head down, and I inched my muzzleloader to my shoulder as the whitetail approached. At 20 yards there was one lane through the brushy oak woods, and the deer paused.

All deer were legal during that season, my sights were lined up, and venison is venison: So I let fly.

It was pretty sweet, a couple minutes later, as we followed the ample blood trail together for maybe 30 yards and found the doe stretched out gracefully in the oak leaves, having fallen in the middle of her last stride.

"I jumped and about yelled when you shot," my partner told me. "You know, I didn't hear or see anything before that. Then you shot. Man, they are sneaky."

The moral of our story? When it gets to nitty-gritty time toward the end of firearms or muzzleloader season and there's a tag to fill, take the hunt into your own hands and make something happen. An autumn filled with hunting pressure makes deer hunker in and move little. Head out with a trusted partner and nudge a whitetail into your sights.

Our tactic that day was just one approach to fill a tag. In all there is a trio of approaches. There are plenty of ideas with each approach or tactic here to get you conducting it in the whitetail woods. Tailor the concepts to your own terrain, cover and conditions ... or take one of these ideas and riff off a better one.

WOODLOT TRAILER

If they could laugh, whitetails in woodlot country would do just that at a lone hunter entering a woodlot. Deer just sneak off and circle around behind, never even bothering to leave the cover. And when you try team up and push them a certain direction, deer don't want to leave cover, either. They just skulk and circle and sneak. That's why you need to employ a silent trailer.

Approach the woodlot together. The first hunter heads into cover, working slowly into the wind and hunting a zig-zag course to cover more territory. This hunter doesn't bother much with stealth. He may get a shot at a jumped deer, but the main job is getting whitetails to skulk or sidle off.

The trailing hunter moves with silence and stealth, as much as possible, watching off to the sides for whitetails sneaking out the back door as they evade the lead hunter.

How far should the hunters be apart? That all depends on how thick the cover is. One good rule of thumb is, the leading hunter goes at his or her own slow pace, while the trailing hunter keeps his or her partner ahead at the limit of vision. An occasional glimpse of the hunter ahead is about perfect.

RIDGETOP FLANKERS

In really hilly country, it can be challenging to employ a trailing hunter. That's where the Ridgetop Flanker maneuver comes in.

Pick a ridge and a day when the breeze blows along the spine. One hunter still-hunts slowly along one side of the ridge, pausing frequently, while the other hunter follows the same process on the other side.

The hunters cannot see each other in this scenario. But they pause often near saddles, drainages, side draws and other natural travel funnels. Whitetails will sneak up and over to avoid one hunter or the other.

It is essential in this maneuver to take some time to look behind

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you, too, during pauses, to spot whitetails circling behind your partner on the other side of the hill.

There's no way you can coordinate one hunter's movements with the other's pauses, so hunt independently but know there's someone on the other side moving deer to you ... or benefitting from your movements.

FLATLAND ROUNDUP

In big-woods areas where it would be impossible to move a deer predictably for any distance, conduct small circle pushes in the cover. Sometimes I call this "the circle drill." Here's how to conduct it.

One hunter sets up at an area with decent visibility. The other hunter moves out to still-hunt a slow circle around that spot. Whitetails evading the moving hunter may wander past the posted hunter, who must pay close attention in all directions for sneaking deer.

The radius of the circle depends on the thickness of the

cover. In dense timber or cutover brush, the circling hunter may be only 50 to 75 yards away. In thinner, more mature timber, the distance of that "spoke" may be 100 to 150 yards. Just beyond the limit of vision, with occasional glimpses of each other or flashes of orange, is about the right distance to be apart.

After one circle is complete, move on, trade duties if you wish, and hunt the next section of cover in similar fashion.

CONCLUSION

When sitting still isn't producing deer sightings, it may be time to take the hunt to the whitetails. Big groups are not needed to get the job done. Armed with the right maneuvers tailored to your hunting grounds and situation, you and one hunting partner can team up and get the job done better.

The challenge is great, yes. The sneaky-smart nature of the white-tailed deer always makes

it so. These maneuvers help you take advantage of that trait.



CORRECTION

The Summer 2022 issue of *Deer & Deer Hunting* had a typographical error in the article on Page 50 of the article, "Q+A: Food Plot Basics."

The article incorrectly quotes Antler King's Todd Stittleburg as saying deer mineral blocks should have "at least 60% phosphorus," when, in fact, the figure should read "not less than 6.5% phosphorus."

Phosphorus is just one of many important components in a quality deer mineral antler. To be effective, mineral blocks need major minerals, trace minerals, vitamins, amino acids and additives. For more information on specific levels, please refer to Antler King's Trophy Deer Mineral at www.antlerking.com.

We regret the error.



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HOW TO CLEAN YOUR DEER RIFLE

After every trip to the shooting range, and after each day's hunt, thoroughly wipe the exterior of your rifle from receiver to muzzle with a lightly oiled rag to remove all moisture and fingerprints. Once a year, one day during the off-season, you ought to thoroughly clean the interior, or bore, of the barrel. Here's how to do it right.

- **CHECK TO MAKE** sure the rifle is unloaded, then double and triple check that it's empty. Remove the bolt and look down the barrel to confirm it's clear.
- **LOCK THE RIFLE** in a vise on a workbench.
- **YOU'LL NEED A** cleaning rod, brush, jag, patches and solvent. The best rod is a spring-steel model with a plastic or nylon coating and a swiveling handle. Always use a cleaning-rod guide to protect a gun's receiver from the sharp jag, and also to protect the rifle's throat from damage.
- **FIT THE CLEANING** rod with a jag of the proper caliber, and insert a clean patch in the jag. Soak the patch with a bore cleaner like Hoppe's No. 9. Run the first wet patch through the barrel, working from breech to muzzle, the same way a bullet travels.
- **RUN A DRY** patch through the bore and see how much carbon is deposited on the patch when it comes out of the muzzle. It might be quite a lot if you haven't cleaned the rifle in a while. If the patch is really dirty and black, it's time for the brush.
- **FIREARMS EXPERTS RECOMMEND** you remove with a brush excessive buildup from a barrel after every 20-40 shots. To do so, run another soaked patch through the bore. Remove the jag, install a bore brush of the correct caliber and soak the brush in solvent. Push the brush through the bore until it exits the muzzle; pull it back until it exits the chamber. Repeat this in-and-out brushing 10 to 15 times.
- **PASS ANOTHER SOAKED** patch through the bore, and then another. Remove the rifle from the vise and set it aside in a horizontal position, with the muzzle pointed slightly down to keep the solvent from running back into the action. Allow the bore to soak for at least 30 minutes; two hours are better.
- **AFTER THE SOAK** period, run a clean dry patch through the bore. Repeat with dry patches until the bore is completely dry, and the last patch to come out of the muzzle is pure white.
- **WIPE ALL EXTERIOR** metalwork of your rifle with a good oil like Rem Oil, taking care not to put too much oil around the trigger assembly. If you'll store the rifle until next deer season, run one patch with a very light coating of gun oil down the bore to prevent rust. When you break the rifle out again before next season, run a couple of dry patches through the bore before sighting in.





TON LAUBER, MINDIG

KINETIC ENERGY AND MOMENTUM

When discussing the penetrating ability of a hunting arrow, the two most commonly referred to factors are kinetic energy and momentum.

The term kinetic energy is derived from the Greek word for motion, *kinesis*, and the Greek word for active

work, *energeia*. Thus, the term kinetic energy means “through motion, do active work.” Energy can exist in many forms, and each form of energy can often be converted to other forms. When it comes to bows, energy is stored in the limbs and cams when the bow is drawn, then transferred to the arrow shaft at the shot in the form of kinetic energy, or K.E.

Because the speed of the shaft is reduced due to both gravity and air resistance, K.E. changes along the flight path. Thus, the K.E. you measure a few feet in front of the bow as the arrow is released is nowhere near the K.E. delivered downrange on the target. The formula for K.E. as measured in ft.-lbs. is: Mass x Velocity-squared divided by 450,240, with Mass the total arrow weight and Velocity the arrow speed. So let’s say you have an arrow that weighs 400 grains that flies at a speed of 290 feet per second. Your equation would look like this: $290 \times 290 \times 400 / 450,240 = 74.72$ foot-pounds of K.E. at the shot.

For years, the following have been the recognized minimum initial kinetic energy values for hunting game of all sizes: small game (rabbits, squirrels, etc.), up to 25 ft.-lbs.; medium-size game (deer, pronghorn, sheep, etc.), 25-41 ft.-lbs.; large-size game (elk, black bear, wild boar, etc.), 42-65 ft.-lbs.); toughest game (brown bear, grizzly bear, large African game), 66 ft.-lbs. or more.



My 28½-inch Easton 4mm FMJ shaft tipped with a 100-grain broadhead weighs in at 380 grains - a medium-weight shaft that will produce enough K.E. and momentum when shot from my 70-lb.-draw compound bow to penetrate deeply on whitetails.

Momentum (from Latin *movimentum*, “to move”) is defined as “mass in motion.” All objects have mass, so, if an object is moving, then it has momentum. The formula for calculating momentum is: p (momentum) = m (mass) $\times$ v (velocity).

Because both involve calculations of mass and weight, K.E. and momentum are often used interchangeably, but that’s not right. Simply stated, K.E. can be thought of as a big hammer and the arrow shaft as a nail, with K.E. driving the nail through the animal. On the other hand, think of momentum as downrange energy retention, or penetration potential. Both values can be adjusted by altering either arrow speed, arrow weight or both.

Another way to look at it is that, because velocity is squared, K.E. favors arrow speed, while momentum, which gives both mass and velocity equal bearing, favors weight. And, all things being equal, the heavier arrow — even one flying slightly slower — will penetrate deeper than the lighter shaft. The key is finding the sweet spot. You can go to a lighter arrow to increase your speed and flatten trajectory, which might give you a K.E. value increase — but that will reduce momentum, and the depth to which your arrow and broadhead will penetrate larger, tougher animals. For me, for short- and medium-range whitetail hunting, a medium-heavy shaft at a quick, but not ultra-fast velocity, strikes the perfect balance.



John Brown with a dandy Indiana buck taken using a medium-weight shaft at close range.



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BUCK SHOTS

JOSH HONEYCUTT

DREAM SEASON!

BURT ANDREW HAD THE DEER SEASON OF HIS DREAMS!



Burt Andrew poses with his 2021 buck from Buffalo County, Wisconsin, which scored a whopping 165-2/8 inches.

Few hunters ever harvest a 160-plus-inch whitetail. Burt Andrew of Buffalo County, Wisconsin, killed two in one season, one of which surpassed 170 inches.

He harvested the first one during archery season. “We believe Slice to be at least 5½ years old with three years of trail camera photos dating back to 2019,” he said. “He was only an 8-point back then, but we were able to identify him year to year due to a large cut in his right ear.”

Despite years of encounters, October 9, 2021, was the day they met for the final time. It was hot, especially for October. The high was in the 70s. But Buffalo County is a magical place. It’s known for big bluffs, long ridgetops, and vast ag fields. The place just seems to defy odds, even when conditions aren’t great.

Andrew knows this, and he set up in a known hotspot about 40 yards into the woods off the edge of a standing corn field. The location is between two ridgetops with a long valley in the middle. It creates a bowl in front of the stand that deer frequently travel through. A thick point that’d been recently logged, which deer commonly bed along, tapered down into the bowl.

It wasn’t long after he settled in before deer began moving. A yearling buck walked down the logging road and exited the timber into the field. Shortly after, a group of does and fawns pushed through, fed on the underbrush, and did the same.

“I was on a freezer-filling mission,” Andrew said. “So, when the first doe presented a shot, I took it. The arrow passed through and stuck in the ground right where she stood.” The shot was a little farther back than he’d like. The doe bolted, ran a few yards, and bedded down. It was looking straight toward him, so he couldn’t get another shot off.

About five minutes later, he heard a twig snap down the hill. A slow turn of his head revealed a buck with a massive rack. It stood broadside only 30 yards away.

“Still holding my bow, and anticipating a follow-up shot on the doe 15 yards from me, I turned and drew my bow,” Andrew said. “He was sticking his neck out sniffing my first arrow I shot the doe with. He was staring straight at the bright blue Lumenok.”

The buck started to get nervous, so Andrew aimed and released the arrow. It struck the vitals, and the deer ran full speed ahead.

“I reached for another arrow, knocked it, and pulled back,” he said. “He was running full speed past me at about 15 yards when I was fully drawn. Being an active bowfisherman, I took a follow-up shot without looking through my sight picture. Like bowfishing shots I’ve taken hundreds of times, my (arrow) flew at the buck and hit him 6 inches in front of my first shot. The buck continued to run away before piling up in sight, not 40

yards away.” Immediately after the buck fell, he nocked another arrow and shot the doe a second time, which got up from all the commotion.

Incredibly, this was the second year in a row that Andrew shot his biggest buck to date with a bow. Even more, he was able to hit both bucks with a second follow-up shot at full speed. It’s a great example for always bringing enough arrows to the deer woods. You never know when you will need them.

“I returned to the shack to tell my hunting crew that I had shot two does,” Andrew continued. “We followed the blood trail to the second ‘doe,’ and it had a massive set of antlers attached.” Andrew, his father, brothers, cousins, and family friends were present for the recovery. They were all smiles when they spotted the 165-2/8-inch whitetail.

Nearly a month and a half later, Andrew was back in the Buffalo County deer woods. Rather than toting his bow, this time, he had his Savage Axis II 6.5 Creedmoor in hand. Just as with the buck he called Slice, he was destined to cross paths with another target buck. This deer was nicknamed “Boss” — a 5½-year-old buck they had three years of history with.

“We first took note of this deer in 2019 when he showed up on our trail cams with a nice frame that came very high off his head,” Andrew said. “I knew based off his small body that this deer had the potential to blow



Andrew is all smiles with his 170-1/8-inch buck, which he tagged later in the 2021 deer season.
PHOTOS COURTESY OF BURT ANDREW

up. During a deer drive in 2019, my brother pushed this deer to me and being able to recognize him, I elected to pass. My brother, the driver, also passed him at the same time.”

On Sunday, November 21, 2021, the day brought stiff 15- to 20-mph winds and 35-degree temps. It was quite brisk in the fall timber. Andrew was sitting on a ridgetop that’s about 100 yards wide and 300 yards long. A steep drop-off stretched out in front of and behind him.

The goal was a successful deer drive. And that’s what he got. His brother started the push, and it wasn’t long before Boss squirted out of the timber and entered the open. He started running down the length of the ridge. A hundred yards or so into the trot, Boss turned and angled toward Andrew’s location, who was tracking him the entire time. Eventually, the buck slowed to a walk, and he took the 60-yard shot. The blast rang out and the buck dashed over the hill and out of sight.

Unsure if the shot was true, they walked over and looked for blood. “I prayed my shot was true and confirmed this when the driver found blood right where I had shot him,” Andrew said. “We followed a heavy blood trail about 40 yards down the hill to where he piled up. Adrenaline was pumping so much so that I did not see his rack at first. He had expired right next to a downed log and his antlers were so high off

the ground I thought they were part of the log.”

He truly couldn’t believe his eyes when he reached down and hoisted the 170-1/8-inch rack. It was even more surreal that he’d harvested his two best bucks ever in the same season, especially after tagging two whitetails in the 150s the year before. Topping that feat with 165- and 170-inch bucks was a true blessing.

“I was in complete shock,” Andrew said. “My oldest brother was so pumped when we brought the deer back to camp. He ran out celebrating.

“This deer means so much to me and our hunting group,” Andrew concluded. “It is the largest deer we have harvested off our property. It is a testament to land maintenance, as we have really tried to grow our deer over the last five years. Running 20-plus cameras and keeping tabs on the deer that frequent our farm has been a highlight for me. It has paid off in a big way.”



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MISTY-BRIAN SMITH: Sunny Pressler I have made it several times! It's fantastic!

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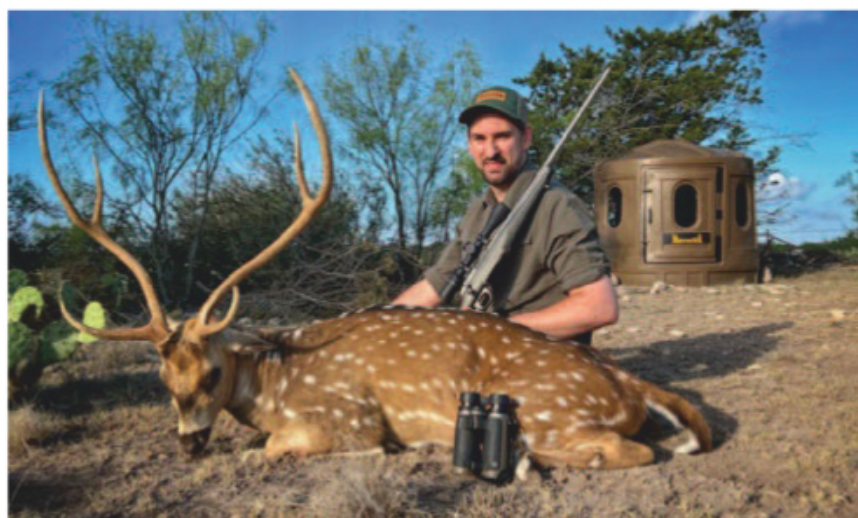
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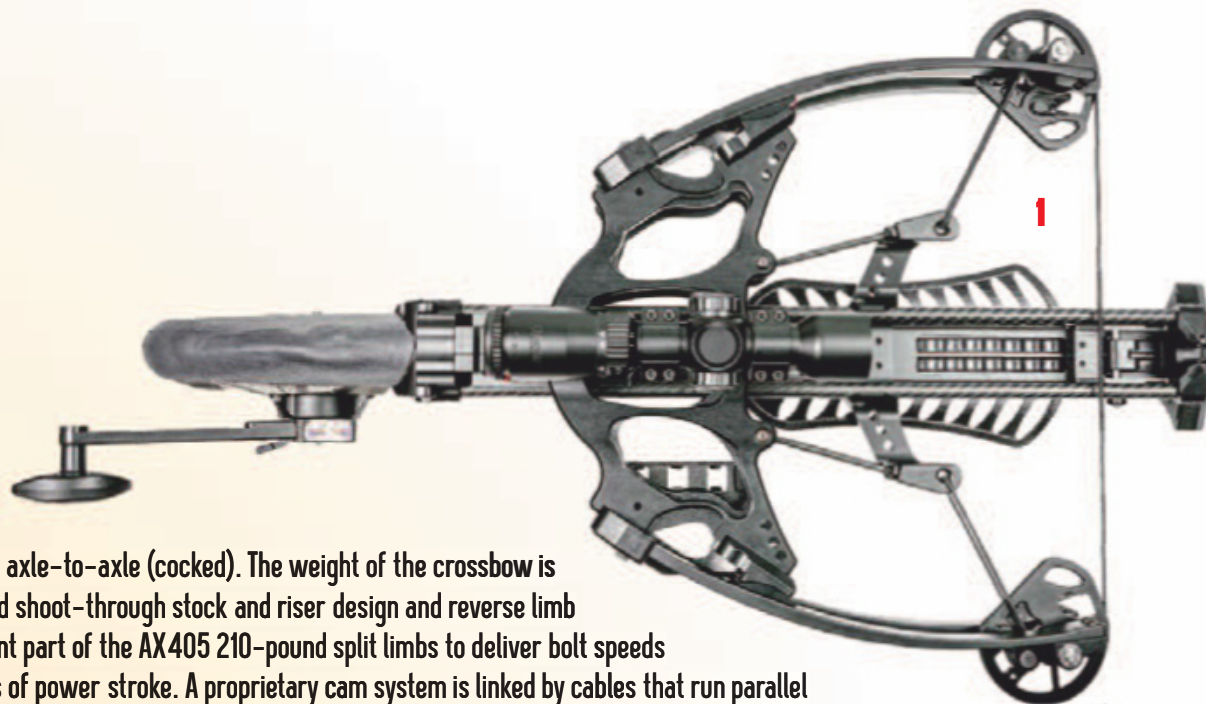
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STEVE BARTYLLA



UNDERSTANDING & REDUCING SOCIAL STRESS

Well-used screening is a powerfully effective way of reducing social stress, as well as to help funnel deer right near stands, by using the edges and gaps appropriately.

There's literally tons of talk about age, genetics and nutrition, as it applies to deer closing the gap on meeting their genetic potential. That makes sense, as all three have very large impacts on the size of the headgear a buck may grow.

What doesn't make sense is that social stress levels aren't listed right along with the other three, as elevated social stress can be every bit the negative factor as age, genetics and nutrition rolled into one. I've actually seen racks reduce in size, despite surpluses of nutrition, their genetic caps not changing and them being a year older, a ridiculous number of times. Why? Simply due to elevated social stress levels.

Here are some things we can do about it.

THE PROBLEM

Social stress levels are typically elevated when deer are forced to compete for limited resources. Although we often think of that in terms of food sources, realize that the same plays out fighting over any of the deers' basic needs: food, water, protective cover, as well as their wants for safety, comfort and breeding opportunities.

Really, we see it most often when deer are fighting over food, as we have our cameras and stands on food more than we typically have them covering bedding areas. With that being said, the competition over bedding areas is equally fierce, particularly for bucks. When squeezed out of prime bedding, Mr. Big very often leaves that area near completely, assuming he can find a pocket within his home range with superior, available bedding.

Like it or not, every property has a cap on how many deer it can hold. When bumping carrying capacity limits, deer die, as the subordinate deer simply don't have the nutrition needed to survive. On the social stress side, deer also can and often do die as a result of the extra physical stresses that fights and running from social stress cause.

With that being said, there are often pockets of lower

deer densities within their home range. Those properties that aren't managing the habitat and are hunting in high-impact manners typically have far fewer deer than the neighbors that hunt low impact and have maxed out their habitat. That's where many of the not-quite-dominant-yet bucks head, and often die by other hunters' hands.

SOME PARTIAL SOLUTIONS

Luckily, there are a few things those that manage habitat can do to help offset social stress levels. In fact, here's a list:

If practical, increase the limiting factors of food, water and deer cover, whichever is needed most. As opposed to offering one main food source, water hole and bedding area, try to offer multiples of each, in distinct areas to help spread out the deer more, assuming it makes sense.

Use screening to further divide larger food sources, allowing more deer to feed more comfortably, as out of sight, out of mind has a lot of truth to it.

With the same premise in mind, thicken up those park-like, no-understory, can-see-for-100-yards woods. Reduce deer numbers to more tolerable levels for the resident whitetails.

CONCLUSIONS

Luckily, the methods of reducing social stress within the whitetail world are pretty straightforward and easy to understand. The problem isn't grasping social stress or figuring out what to do about it. The issue is that none of us know what we don't know, until we know it. One must identify and discuss issues for most to be able to act. Social stress is real and can have a outsized impact on the health and quality of life of resident deer.



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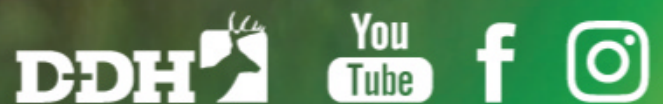
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(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 112)

up, there were suddenly five deer in front of me. Each was broadside at only 35 yards. Calmy feeding among the beeches just below me, they all saw the movement of my head coming up. Hunting on the ground, in the open, there is none of the cushion of comfort that hunting in a treestand allows. One wrong move, and it's over. I had made the one wrong move. Two of the larger does bobbed their heads at me. I'd have been happy to drag either one of them out of the woods. If, however, I made a move to snap the rifle up at this short range with their eyes on me, it would be all over but the cursing. I waited. Gradually going back to their feed, the deer moved a bit more quickly down the nearest trail. I looked out ahead of them for options. They'd soon pass

a half-dozen beech saplings with a small opening after that. While they would be quartering away, it would be doable. I held my breath until I couldn't any longer. When the group of does passed behind the trees, I raised the rifle and focused on the opening they would pass through. I kept the crosshairs trained on the opening, and my own eyes trained on the deer. I selected the largest doe and noted that she was fourth in line. The group was perfectly head-to-tail and picking her out of the lineup would be easy. One by one, the first three does crossed through the narrow opening, now only 30 yards from me. At the nearly soundless click of the safety, all their heads came up, staring in my direction. The next minute was an eternity. Eventually

though, they returned to walking down the deer trail. When the doe I wanted finally stepped into the opening, my heart had been pounding for what seemed like an interminable amount of time. One more step. When her shoulder was squarely in the opening, I squeezed the trigger.

Nothing happened.

Working the bolt, I ejected the shell and replaced it with another. Not having time to fish the round out of the leaves with five sets of eyes on me, I didn't know if the bullet had lodged in the barrel, or it was a straight-up misfire. In my younger and more foolish days, I may have shot again. The deer certainly hadn't moved. But, with the knowledge that many hunters have blown up their guns by shooting when another projectile is already lodged in the barrel, I didn't tempt fate.

Did I have a bad box of shells? No, I didn't. Part of my system of deer season superstition is the last time I go to the range with a deer rifle before the season, I sight the gun in with a half-box of shells. The other half of the box, now proven to be reliable, is used during the season.

Although only half the morning was over and the deer were on the move, I couldn't concentrate. I hiked out and drove to a place next to the river and took a few shots at a dirt bank. Everything seemed fine. Perhaps my new rifle was just cursed?

At my nephew Porter's suggestion, after a short lunchbreak, I made a hike deeper into the woods to look at a place we had scouted a week earlier. Passing my morning ground blind, I muttered quiet curses in its general direction. Deeper into the woods I went, finally rounding a bend to a sweeping view of the creek below. Porter suggested I cross at a bend in the creek and hunt the ridge beyond. It seemed like a plan until I realized the water was about six inches deeper than my high boots. I retreated, taking a different route back toward more familiar territory. Following a heavy deer trail, I found where it intersected another. Scanning the ridge above me for a good hideout, I came up empty. The brush between the ridge and the creek was too thick to afford any semblance of a clear shot. Too bad, the area was littered with deer sign. Story of my day.

After finding a new spot, I climbed a hill, looking for a good vantage point, then I realized that I had returned to my morning

hunting location. While I had two trails at 35 and 50 yards, I hadn't realized that just a short distance away, mere yards, they intersected several more trails. The aggravation from the morning misfire was compounded by the knowledge that I'd now stomped all over the woods only to return to my original ground blind.

Stewing in my own annoyance, I was not on high alert. It's not as if I expected a deer to come trotting along one of the trails I'd so recently violated with human scent. So, when that happened, it was more than somewhat unexpected. Neither huge nor tiny, the doe paused at the five-way intersection and sniffed where I had stood off to the side. Here we go again, I thought, as her back twitched and she showed some concern. I checked the trail behind her to see if other deer were coming. Maybe even a buck. Nothing came along. As she stood in the opening, through just enough timber not to be shootable, I decided I would shoot. On some unseen cue, she turned and trotted up the second trail I'd watched. When she paused at 50 yards, broadside, I placed the crosshairs on her shoulder. This time, thankfully, the rifle roared just as a deer rifle should roar and the doe dropped in her tracks.

After the morning's misfortune, I'd be lying if I didn't say that medium-size doe didn't bring me a lot of satisfaction. I can assure you there was no silly fist-pumping or any of that nonsense, but I was very happy. On the heels of bad luck, good luck often feels fantastic.

After taking a few photos with my hard-won doe, I texted Porter, who met me at the truck. Together we carried my deer cart down into the big woods and extricated the doe as quickly and quietly as possible.

In the evening, Porter got a text that his friend's girlfriend had shot a big doe in the nearby woods and he asked Porter for help. I'd run into the young couple earlier in the season and they seemed like nice people. Porter dismissed me, knowing that I had a long drive home, but I wanted to stay and help. For me, that's all part of the hunt. I think helping others trail

and retrieve deer adds an extra bit of good karma to your own hunting luck. While I haven't always found that to be the case in practice, it still makes me feel good.

Bouncing down the muddy trail in Porter's pickup, I was mildly alarmed with the speed at which he hit the old wooden bridge over the creek. We, the truck, and the bridge all survived. I remained quiet, digging my fingers into the seat.

At one point, it didn't look as if we were going to get through a particularly muddy patch and I thought uh-oh, here we go. However, the truck dug in at the last moment and bounced up the road. I tried not to think about the fact we'd have to go back that way.

We saw the beam of a small flashlight near a secluded pond and skirted the pond to find the young couple kneeling over the deer. The doe was enormous, and the young man was exhausted from dragging it up the bank to the trail. His girlfriend excitedly relayed the story in the dark. Porter reminded her to fill out her tag while he and I tried hoisting the big doe over the tailgate. We couldn't do it. She was big. Porter's tailgate, in a state of disrepair, took some effort to get open. Porter didn't realize that the young woman had been filling out her tag by the light of his taillight and promptly dropped the tailgate on her head. Oh my God, I thought, he just knocked her out. I'll give her credit; she was a bit dazed for a moment but snapped right out of it. I was thankful. It looked and sounded bad.

With no room in the cab of the truck, the young couple volunteered to ride in the back of the truck with the young woman's doe. They had no idea of the ride they were in for. I supposed that the jarring and mud-flying experience they were about to endure would at least make her forget about her head trauma.

It had just been that kind of day.

— Joel Spring has been a D&DH contributor for more than 30 years.



“FAILURE IS THE CONDIMENT THAT GIVES SUCCESS ITS FLAVOR.” – TRUMAN CAPOTE

ENDURANCE

LINDA FRESHWATERS ARNDT/WINDIGO

Sunday of opening week of deer season found me in the same area that I called home on opening day. I'd seen enough deer to keep me interested. There had been no bucks, but with two doe permits in my pack, I found the steady parade of distant deer agreeable enough to keep me interested. It was just a matter of time before one of them walked down the three intersecting trails 50 yards below me in the brushy river bottom. It was deer season day two, and I had not lost a bit of enthusiasm — yet.

In my lap, I cradled the first new deer rifle that I'd bought in many years. Once I find something I like, I tend to use it and use it up. My 25-year-old deer rifle still worked, and had taken more than its fair share of deer and bears, but it was time for something new. The checkered stock was beautiful in the growing orange twilight. The same model and caliber of the rifle it was replacing, it looked like something else altogether. The old gun had been dragged through the brush, dropped in the mud, rained on, snowed on, coated in layers of ice, and its ugly black plastic checkering had from time to time been stained with deer blood and impregnated

with tallow. The new gun's bluing shone beautifully, the walnut stock was without a blemish, although I would fix that before this week was out. No scratches from overuse adorned its length. To be sure, the new rifle was a thing of beauty. Although I'd put it through its paces at the range, I did not have the faith in it that I did in my old deer rifle. It would have to earn that honor.

I don't typically doze in the deer woods, but the morning sun and lack of activity caused me to close my eyes for a few moments, perhaps overly comfortable in my many layers of cold-weather gear. I wasn't asleep for more than a minute, but when I snapped my head

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 110)



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