

SPECIAL LATE - SEASON ISSUE

DEER & DEER HUNTING®

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Late-season hunting can be challenging, but very rewarding. Spending time with family and friends – with the potential bonus of a venison bounty – is what it's all about.

MITCH KEZAR/WINDIGO

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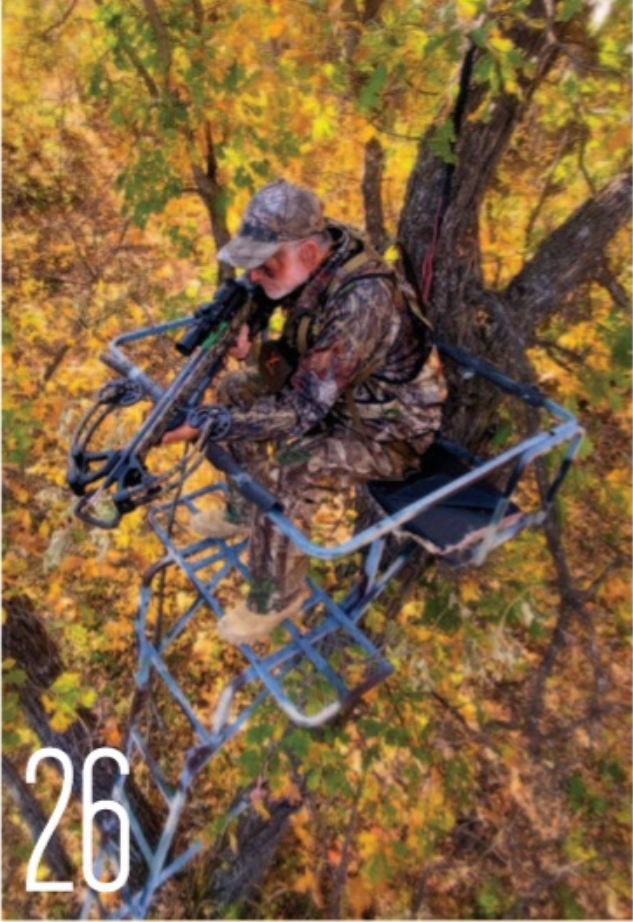
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BOTTOM RIGHT: CHARLES J. ALSHEIMER



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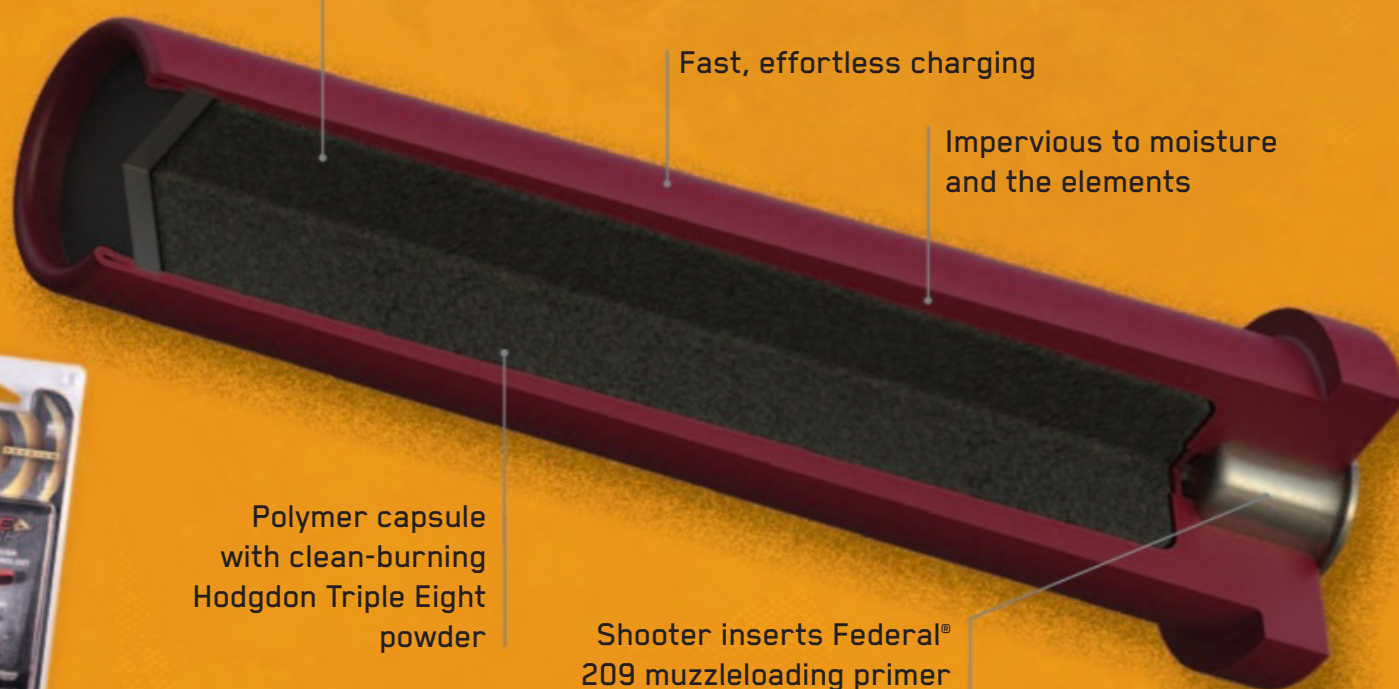
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SPIKE SCIENCE

DANIEL E. SCHMIDT



DANIEL SCHMIDT

Old-timers once declared, “Once a spike, always a spike!” Truth be told, they were mostly being facetious. Deer were scarce then, and doe tags, well, pretty much didn’t exist. To get venison, you mostly had to find a legal buck.

Enter the spike.

Most states had 3-inch rules on antlers. Spike bucks were commonplace, but hunters didn’t know why. We do today.

There are primarily three reasons why white-tailed deer grow spikes:

First, age, or lack thereof, is the key reason why a white-tailed buck will grow spikes as its first set of antlers. Key term there is, “first.” By and large, spikes are the result of late-born fawns from the previous season. By the time hunting season rolls around, they’ll be pushing 18 months old and will be sporting their first set of antlers.

Late-borns invariably have to put their energy into body growth. Anything else (antlers) is relatively unimportant, biologically speaking.

According to a scientific study conducted by Keith McCaffery, a deer researcher for more than 30 years, there are few deer older than yearlings with spikes. He tallied spikes in a subset of data and found 29 of 1,588 deer aged 2½ years old (1.8%) were spikes in forested regions. In the farmland where deer have access to better nutrition, only 12 of 1,826 2½-year-old deer (.6%) were spikes. (Incidentally there was a single 3½-year-old that was recorded to have spikes.)

Second, nutrition is huge when combined with age. A late-born fawn that doesn’t have unlimited, high-quality nutrition is further behind

the 8-ball. Without quality nutrition, especially in late winter, antler growth is going to suffer for those late-borns and, hence, a higher probability for spike antlers is present.

It’s important to note that nutrition goes far beyond our good-intentioned efforts of providing supplemental feed through protein (where legal) and food plots. Overwinter habitat is critical in Northern areas. Hence the reason why so many states have high percentages of spikes in their herds.

Genetics is **third**. Some Texas biologists will argue otherwise, and there’s some evidence to show genetics can play a role in spike development in Southern deer, but it doesn’t override the first two factors. What’s more, follow-up research has shown it’s futile to try to manage against spikes by implementing “green light” shooting missions. I’ve been to so many locales over the years that declare war on spikes in efforts to “weed them out” of the gene pool. You simply can’t do it. Remember, the mother is often responsible for 60% or more of her offspring’s DNA.

Long story short? If you want to fill your tag with some prime venison, by all means shoot the spike and wear a smile. If you do it for any other reason, you’re only fooling yourself.



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READERS RECOIL

IN LINE WITH DANIEL SCHMIDT'S EDITOR'S STUMP COLUMN IN THIS ISSUE, WE ASKED THE DEER & DEER HUNTING FACEBOOK FANS THE FOLLOWING QUESTION: "GIVEN THE CHANCE, WOULD YOU USE YOUR BUCK TAG ON A SPIKE?" HERE ARE SOME OF YOUR ANSWERS:

YOUR TAG, YOUR choice. I just like the racks and the free dinners that come with the record-book bucks. Spikes will grow heavier head gear they need the time to produce.
— Aaron Davis

THIS IS ACTUALLY pretty simple. If you have a legal tag, fill it. Not everyone has the time and money to pass on any deer. We meat-hunted for 30+ years. Because we loved to hunt and counted on the meat. We did not have land of our own. So, we hunted private farmland. Then for the last 25 years we have had access to 300 acres and can manage our herd. So, everyone has a different take and situation depending on access or time.
— Kirt Harris

ANTLER ADDICTION IS still an addiction. It ruins friendships, marriages and throws sportsmanship out the window.
— Todd Thunder

FOLLOW LEGAL GUIDELINES. Don't harvest more than you can use. Never let someone define what a trophy should be. Make that decision yourself. We all play on the field of our own. Mind your own business and don't judge others.
— Jed Dunning

I STOPPED HUNTING after the 13-inch rule started in Texas and deer leases got out-of-sight crazy. So, I'll just stick to beef ... it's a lot cheaper. After you pay the cost of a lease, that makes that meat over \$100 per pound. I can buy a lot of beef for that and don't have to put up with all the drama on a deer lease.

— Bobby L. Mann

MY VIEW IS I'd rather kill older deer that have had time to live and gotten bigger with more meat. Not some easy baby deer, that's an excuse for a bad or lazy hunter. Never shoot a spike if you want big bucks. Because they gotta start somewhere! They aren't born with wide spreads and 12 points.

— Peyton Black

HERE IN MAINE, a spike may be the only buck you see all season. It might be the only deer you see all season.

— Rusty Daley

WELL, WE CAN tell in the comments who read the article and who didn't. We all have our own ideas here. I am a meat hunter and I guess my term is different than most excuses. I don't see the point in killing immature animals. One, they lack meat. When I shoot a deer, I need to know I get at least a year's worth of meat. That is a meat hunter LOL. At least to me. Managing of herds is duty. There is a responsibility to being a hunter that many lack. However, some people just want to take the easy road and fill tags and not care about the bigger picture. I choose to not hunt this way. But I don't care anymore about what others think. I worry about myself and my own hunting. Good article.

— Chris Ruzsa



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HANK & MARK ZAKOSKI



It was an unforgettable October 3rd in Pennsylvania this season for the father-son duo of Hank (left) and Mark Zakoski (right) ... they both got their bucks that same day! Congratulations gentlemen!

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HUNTING & SOCIAL MEDIA: THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY

I used to jump when the phone rang, eagerly awaiting the news that my dad had harvested a deer. As I grew older, I could manage short texts on the flip phone my sister and I shared. It could receive pictures, but they were so tiny and hard to retrieve it wasn't hardly worth sending or receiving any. Nowadays, communication is easy. Though many hunting areas have zero or very spotty service, most hunters are connected some, if not most of the time.

Some say using electronics in the woods ruins deer hunting. The reality is, electronics have become an integrated and accepted part of hunting. Cellphones are no longer just a communication tool. Apps like onX Hunt have revolutionized the way hunters use their devices in the woods. Hunters can record important data points on a map as well as view property lines with overlays showing not only terrain but foliage. They can also share these waypoints and other data with other onX users, making it easy to hunt together and stay safe. This is only one of many apps hunters may reference in the field.

As far back as hunting goes, so does the sanctity of deer camp. While nothing replaces swapping stories in person by a campfire, modern technology makes communication immediate. I can send real-time updates from my stand, whether about my own success or observations that may assist a fellow hunter. I can also share them with the world.

Merriam-Webster.com defines social media as "forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content." On a very small scale, one could consider group chats a form of social media, especially when pictures and videos are exchanged. Even an obnoxious email chain may fit. More common today is sharing the first photos and videos of the hunt with a few close friends before posting them to a larger platform, like Instagram, Facebook or Twitter.

Each one of these sites has their own personality and people use them for different reasons. While Instagram resembles a virtual scrapbook, links are more easily shared on Facebook. Facebook also makes it easy to share information with a select group of people with similar interests through their groups function. Twitter is commonly called the "cesspool of the internet" largely due to its primarily political content. I can't disagree, but I've also realized the sum of my hunting texts could very well make an entertaining Twitter feed.

8:58 AM: TWO SQUIRRELS.
9:02 AM: SQUIRRELS NOW
CHASING ONE ANOTHER.
9:05 AM: BLUEJAYS ARE
AWFUL CREATURES.
11:38 AM: WELL...THAT WAS A
BRANCH IN THE WIND. OOPS.

You get the idea. Regardless of what social platform you use, it's a way to reach a lot of people at once. Rather than sending a photo of your trophy buck to every one of your friends, you post it in one place — saving time and effort. While some keep their social profiles private and limited to people they actually know, many others don't, which means sharing pictures, videos, and thoughts with complete strangers across the world.

A 2021 survey conducted by Pew Research Center revealed that approximately seven-in-ten Americans use some kind of social media. 81% of adults surveyed use YouTube while 69% use Facebook. YouTube specifically saw statistically significant growth from a 2019 Pew Research Center survey. With the growing popularity of video content, it isn't surprising that more and more hunters are looking to capture their harvests for their own viewing and the interwebs.

Companies like ATN and Tactacam offer products that make it easy for anyone to become a content creator by filming their hunts or capturing their shots through their scope. Cellphones also serve as convenient video cameras, with a variety of accessories available to make self-filming simple and more professional. Cellular trail camera manufacturer SPYPOINT recently released the FLEX, a cellular camera with photo and video transmission. Their app allows for easy shareability to social platforms, which the company encourages with use of the hashtag #whispypoint.

Hashtags are generally most used and popular on Instagram. Though this site only saw use by 40% of the adults surveyed by Pew Research, 71% of adults surveyed under the age of 30 use the platform. 73% of these young users admit to visiting Instagram at least once a day.

Products like Spypoint cellular trail cameras capture easily shareable photos. This amusing photo from the Micro-LTE shows a seemingly irritated doe trudging through snow that was not present the day before. I enjoy sharing moments like this.

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SPYPOINT LINK-MICRO

Given these statistics, many users aspire to share their lives with the world, particularly their successes. In keeping with this, generally only the “good side” of hunting is shown on social platforms — particularly trophy deer. Far less frequently represented are the long days seeing nothing or the shame and sadness that comes with losing an animal.

People tend to not want to admit their failures, but this leads to false perceptions and social comparison, known as “deer shaming” in the hunting world. I'll admit I've felt the pressure, and still do. I've talked myself out of posting pictures of does and have taken my glasses off for photos worried about how I look. I'm the first to admit it's stupid and try to be as real as possible with everyone. Hunting isn't glamorous, nor should it be if you're doing it right. Though there aren't specific statistics on it, I'm sure many hunters on social media have felt some tinge of inadequacy scrolling through post after post of successful harvests, especially if the season hasn't proven fruitful.

Passionate deer hunter and YouTube personality Chris Turek (@UpNorthAirGunner) says he stumbled into being a content creator and has been blessed with sponsorships, but is real and honest with his followers. “I share all of my hunting experiences. The good, the bad and the downright embarrassing,” he said. Though he's hunted with firearms and bows, his implement of choice are air-powered bows and guns. Turek noted that though he receives mostly positive feedback from followers, he does get some negativity from traditional archery hunters. “They have put in a ton of work (as have

I) practicing with their vertical bows to be proficient,” Turek said. “You can't just grab a vertical bow and head to the woods come Deer season like you can a scoped crossbow or airgun arrow slinger or rifle and hope to be proficient. Archery takes a lot of work and I too put in that work every summer pounding the bag with my BowTech Compound Bow. With that said though, as an American I believe EVERYONE has a God-given right to the woods as hunters and should be able to hunt how they want to hunt as long as their tool of choice is an ethical method of take.”

Method of take isn't the only thing people prey on. Many hunters are shamed for small deer, especially when there may have been a bigger one on camera. It's important to remember hunting is about the experience and it's not a competition as much as some try to make it one. There are certain ethics codes hunters abide by as well as personal rules. I have already made the decision I'll use my tag on a sick deer to take it out of its misery and I choose to leave the smallest deer so they can grow larger for the next year and have more experiences, assuming they survive. Everyone has a different set of circumstances.

An article on The Mountain Project.com encapsulated this entire topic in a first-hand account by Jay Park, a hunter who fell into and dug himself out of the social media trap after harvesting his first Coues deer. Upon seeing the harvest photo, an archery shop clerk cut through Jay's excitement, retorting, “You had a December whitetail tag, and that's the best you could kill?” After this incident, Jay found himself hunting for attention, spending thousands of dollars on

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ABOVE: Hunting content takes many forms. Memes are particularly shareable and connect hunters from all over.

RIGHT: Let's Go Hunting and the +One movement is an initiative by the National Shooting Sports Foundation to encourage hunters to mentor and encourage others in the outdoors.



gear and caring far too much about what other hunters were doing. He's since returned to hunting for the experience.

"Trophy photos are great," he wrote, "but they rarely tell the full story of the hunt, or the meaning of the adventure. And the size of the animal's antlers are a credit to the animal itself, and the environment that produced it. Not to the measure of the man." Continually working towards this goal, Jay and The Mountain Project film and share videos on Youtube to show that "Every trophy tells a story."

No matter what responses social media posts may elicit from fellow hunters, all need to be prepared for ridicule and personal attacks from anti-hunters. Famous hunters like Eva Shockey have publicly shared death threats they've received from anti-hunters as well as general slander, but this hate isn't limited to big names. Posting anything online opens the door to good and bad – you just have to be ready for it and use the opportunity to educate.

So why share at all? Sharing hunting photos, videos, and stories can bring people together, educate, and encourage others to head outdoors. For example, Facebook hosts an abundance of virtual groups that connect hunters by gender, area, method, and more. The "Lady Bowhunters" group has

12,900 members and counting who share tips, ask questions and post pictures of equipment and harvests. The National Shooting Sports Foundation uses social media to promote their +One movement, to encourage current hunters to take someone new into the field and grow America's hunting heritage.

Harvest photos aren't the only things people share. Hunting shows, memes, and other content are also produced to entertain and connect hunters everywhere. The fact that I can send a hunting meme to a fellow hunter friend in Norway and he's already seen it is a testament to this. Some may say content like this doesn't matter. I argue that it does. It connects a group of people who relate to it through shared experiences.

Social media woes aren't limited to the United States. Canadian hunter Jordan Marsh makes a point of not sharing his hunting journey with the world. "Hunting is a passion of mine and is a family activity of ours," he said. "I personally do not share my hunting photos on social media because I don't want/need the world to see, it is a way of life shared with my close friends and family." Keeping experiences close is what makes hunting even more special for Marsh. For others, the opposite is true. "I have mixed feelings on social media posts," he admitted.

Marsh enjoys joining in his friends' successes and seeing the beauty of different locales through their lens. He pointed out that hunting brings people to beautiful, natural areas they may otherwise never visit.

Regardless of what you share, Marsh says social media is a double-edged sword. "It can make someone who enjoys hunting get very turned off from just a few photos or videos of those who don't respect the animal that has just been harvested. On the other hand, it can intrigue someone to a humbly rewarding passion that can be shared with friends, family or alone." In other words, all hunters have a responsibility to the animal, to themselves, and to the community to show respect and consider other perspectives. "Keep hunting social media pictures positive, simple, clean, and educational to all of us who are forever learning more and more about hunting," he cautioned.

— *Serena Juchnowski is an award-winning writer and competition shooter. To learn more about her firearms experience, check out our full-length Deer Talk Now Podcast with D&DH's Daniel Schmidt.*



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DEER & DEER HUNTING

ALAN CLEMONS

notebook

Study Shows Deer More Comfortable in Suburbia

A five-year study conducted by the University of Maryland and U.S. Department of Agriculture found that deer in suburban environments often bed down and spend the night within 50 meters of residential properties. The study, published in the journal *Urban Ecosystems*, is the first to detail hourly movements of white-tailed deer throughout different seasons.

"A big takeaway from this study is that neighborhoods are the home range of suburban white-tailed deer," said Jennifer Mullinax, assistant professor in the UMD Department of Environmental Science and Technology and senior author of the study. "Agencies monitoring and estimating suburban deer populations may be missing a huge part of the population if they focus their monitoring efforts only on deer in wooded parks and undeveloped areas, because a lot of the deer are actually living in the neighborhoods, especially at night and in winter."

The study results offer important guidance for suburban communities seeking to reduce the risk of tick-borne illnesses. An abundance of deer in residential areas serves as a reservoir for ticks, increasing their numbers and the risk of human exposure to diseases like Lyme disease and anaplasmosis. Reducing tick populations, by removing deer or treating areas where deer bed down, for instance, can help limit the spread of disease.

The study's other authors include Patrick Roden-Reynolds M.S. '20 and postdoctoral associate Cody Kent, both of the Department of Environmental Science and Technology, as well as Andrew Y. Li from the USDA Agricultural Research Service.

The researchers captured and collared 51 deer from five parks in Howard County, Md. The highly suburban study area included residential neighborhoods, schools, businesses and patches of open space or undeveloped land. The collars contained high-resolution GPS trackers that recorded deer locations every hour for 62-116 weeks.

The researchers found that deer tended to avoid residential areas during the day, but moved into residential areas nightly, especially in winter, often sleeping very near the edges of lawns and yards surrounding houses and apartment buildings. On average, 71 and 129 residential properties were found within female and male core ranges, respectively.

"We used to think people mostly got Lyme disease when they walked in the woods," Mullinax said, "But recent studies have shown they're getting Lyme disease in their own backyards, and now that we know the deer are living right there too, it makes more sense."

Florida Men Arrested for Poaching Deer

Two men were arrested for violating Florida hunting regulations after sheriff's deputies discovered them on a county road with three deer in their truck.

Collier County Sheriff deputies arrested Yoandry Quevedo-Ayala, 31, and Pedro Leal-Pavon, 40, on Sept. 22 for multiple hunting violations, according to WINKnews.com. The sheriff's office got a call about two men in a truck hunting from a road in Collier County, which is in southwest Florida. Deputies found the two men in a black Nissan Frontier.

According to an arrest report from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the officers watched the two men from a concealed area. The two stopped the Frontier and turned off their lights, then both got out; one dragged a deer to the truck and both loaded it before they drove away.

The deputy alerted a second deputy to stop them, and the second one found the three deer. The two men were taken to the Naples Jail Center for booking and processing.

Iowa Man Guilty of Multiple Hunting Violations

An Iowa man was found guilty of more than 20 hunting violations in connection to an investigation into a poaching incident in Taylor County.

Joshua Ray Snyder, 41, of Glidden, Iowa, was convicted on one count of failure to report a harvest, five counts of no deer license or tag, three rifle violations, three counts of violating over-limit restrictions, eight counts of restriction on taking game, and a violation of Iowa Code 483A. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources said online court records showed Snyder was found not guilty on one charge, interference with official acts, and the charge was dismissed.

Iowa DNR officials opened an investigation several years ago after a photo of Snyder with a whitetail deer killed in Taylor County was posted to social media. Further investigation identified numerous other violations and poaching instances.



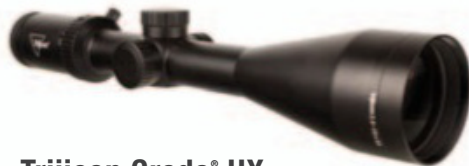
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A background photograph of a snowy forest. In the foreground, a rifle scope is visible, resting on a surface. The background shows snow-covered trees and branches, creating a serene winter scene.

5 REASONS WHY I LOVE THE LATE SEASON

Like most avid whitetail hunters, I start hunting on opening day. That means the start of archery season. I look forward to that day with enthusiasm, encouragement, high expectations and a “thank you” to God the day has finally arrived. Generally, archery season is my most successful hunting period. The woods are quiet and void of distant gun shots, there are fewer hunters, and deer have yet to be pressured and are still easy to pattern. Gun season comes next. If the archery season proves unproductive or if I still have bonus tags to fill, I still hunt every day — or just about every day, changing my tactics as weather and deer movements dictate. I enjoy the November gun season for various reasons but primarily due to the rut. It’s a time of change for both hunter and hunted, especially as the rut period intensifies and reaches its peak. Leading up to its height, surprises are always in store — no matter how well we strategize or how well thought out the game plan. It’s the time of the hunting season when I am often reminded I still have things to learn.

Don't be afraid to get off that stand and pursue deer in their bedding and feeding areas during late-season firearms hunts. Of course, make sure you pay utmost attention to safety and only hunt areas where you have sole access, and be sure to wear proper orange attire.

WINDIGO



As much as I cherish the bow season and enjoy the gun season due to the challenges it always brings, the late season ranks just as high. I can't say it is my favorite hunting period because I like and thoroughly enjoy them all for different reasons, it's just that I particularly like the late season. It can even be said that I love the late season.

FEWER HUNTERS

It's not that I'm a hog and like to have the woods to myself — actually I am and do but, putting that all aside, the late season offers just what I like: low numbers of humans in the deer woods or even their non-existence.

The late season in my neck of the woods comes in December and last two weeks of January. By then tags have been filled, shot opportunities have been lost, discouragement and frustration have won the day and many have called it a season. Cold weather keeps hunters close to their home fires, the holidays are just around the corner and there's lots to do; the list goes on. Whatever the reason or reasons there are far fewer hunters out there. For someone who prefers hunting solo and undisturbed, the woodlands are as close to perfect, idyllic as they get during a deer season.

Of course, fewer hunters and undisturbed woodland doesn't guarantee success. Nothing does in the deer woods. I know hunters who prefer sitting in elevated stands, blinds or at some strategic location and have the movements and various unintended disturbances of other hunters inadvertently move deer their way. "It keeps deer moving," I've heard more than once over the years, "and increases shot opportunities." Maybe so. But it can be counterproductive, too, and if an opportunity comes my way I want it to be because I did something right — not because of the antics of others.

This is a primary reason why I love the late season. On private land especially, but also on public, in many cases it's more of a one-on-one hunt. To put what you have learned and know to the test. It can be a challenging time no doubt. A time when stealth is often called for when entering hunting areas, of thinking outside the box and changing tactics. But it can also be a most rewarding time. Add in the solitude of having a patch of woods pretty much or completely to oneself and it is difficult to beat.

SNOW & COLD

I grew up in a Northern snow-belt state and winter has never been my favorite time of year but, when it comes to hunting whitetails, the colder the better. Some snow on the ground is an added bonus. Both typically come sometime in November. By the time the late season kicks off, bone-chilling cold is the norm and at least a few inches of white stuff blankets the ground.

Fresh snow is a great silencer, muffling the snap, crackle and pop of dried leaves and twigs allowing for stealthy mobility and when entering hunting areas. Deer also show up like a sore thumb against the white background. By moving slow and letting the eyes do the hunting, it's amazing what comes into view. Snow also makes it much easier to find fresh tracks and droppings, both indicators deer are in the area or are traveling through.



A lot has been written about the so-called second rut, but it's not everything it's cracked up to be. However, if you hit it just right, you can catch cruising bucks during daylight.

STEVE OEHLenschLAGER/WINDIGO

Tracks can lead to reliable food sources, bedding areas, travel routes and other prime ambush points. For those who want to take up the challenge, snow also makes it possible to strike a track and still hunt or stalk. Both are painstaking techniques but productive when done right, and with fewer hunters in the woods the chance of interruption or pushing a deer to another hunter is reduced.

After decades of hunting in northern climates it became apparent long ago that sustained cold temperatures induce deer to feed. After the rut, a buck's primary goal is to forage and put on as much weight as possible for

the long winter ahead. The same is true of does. This is especially true when the barometer starts dropping and a storm threatens, and for the period after when the pressure starts to rise again. This happens more and more frequently as fall transitions into early winter. During these periods, the urge to feed goes into overdrive. The heightened feeding blitz can happen at other times of the hunting season as well but is greatly enhanced due to the cold temperatures. It's a perfect time to be on stand, in a blind or to set up on the ground, especially near available food sources or along travel routes.

THE ONE-SHOT CHALLENGE

Killing deer is always a challenge; it's no different in the late season. In my home state and a good many others, the late season means hunting with a muzzleloader, which only adds to the challenge. Regardless of their design and ignition system muzzleloaders are reliable, accurate and deadly but they do have their limitations, the biggest being only one shot is available. Once the trigger is pulled, there are no second chances. The first shot has to count. Cold temperatures during the late season, as well as snow and other extreme and varying weather conditions, can also have adverse effects on a muzzleloader's overall performance, as well as a hunter's concentration.



River bottoms are prime spots for late-season hunts, but key in on the often-overlooked side trails and escape routes bucks use when pressured off of private lands. These are spots where you will find deer active during daylight.

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Whatever the case, hunting the late season with a muzzleloader includes challenges we don't normally have to deal with or worry about earlier on and puts everything in a whole different perspective.

THE SECOND RUT

I like hunting the primary November rut as much as anyone, but I'd just as soon hunt what is generally referred to as the second rut, that brief window about 28 days after the peak rut when does not bred in the first cycle come back into estrous. In most areas that means early-to-mid-December, even into early-to-mid-January in areas where late hunting season last that long.

Biologically, it is now believed the so-called "second rut" is a continuation of the first rut, a second peak if you will rather than a second separate rut. Whatever the case and technicalities involved, it is a period when bucks will be on the prowl of receptive does offering a prime late-season opportunity to fill tags.

Rather than concentrate on bucks during this period, concentrate on food sources—especially sources near cover. These are good bets because, odds are, that is where any does in estrous will be. River bottoms, hardwood ridges still producing late mast and protected woodlands near agricultural fields are all potential hotspots. The reasoning behind this is that does are looking to put on weight before winter fully sets in and, just as importantly, bucks are tired and still reenergizing after the primary rut and are as interested in food as the does.

While bucks are always willing to service a receptive doe, instead of the chaotic, unrestricted movements typical during the earlier rut, second-rut buck movements are limited more to home territories where there is food and cover and where does are most likely to be found.

Whatever the case the second rut during the late hunting seasons offers a prime opportunity kill

a buck or in jurisdictions where permitted to put venison in the freezer with a doe.

MORE TIME TO HUNT

My wife has never complained or suggested in any way hunting consumes too much of my time each fall, although I know she's thought it more than once. She hunts as well, but on days she stays home for whatever reason, I'm in the woods if open tags are still in my pocket.

Here's my thinking. Hunting, deer hunting in particular, is not my sole, all-consuming reason for living, but come each fall it's a big one, a mighty big one. Out of the 12 months in a year, the state I reside in says I can hunt whitetails in three. I figure that's my time to satisfy my addiction. The other nine belong to what can be called a normal life. I think that's fair. Thankfully, I guess my wife does, too, because she's still my wife.

The biggest reason I love the late season has little to do with fewer hunters in the woods, the

change in weather or the second rut and a last chance at a monster buck. It simply provides more time to hunt, to do what I love, to be where I love, to indulge my passion and stretch the hunting season as long as possible. It don't always work out that way. There are seasons when I get lucky, when things go as planned and tags are filled early. When that happens, I'm not really disappointed.

When all things are said and done, the late season is a bonus.

—For more late-season hunting tips, please check out our video library at www.YouTube.com/DDHOnline



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SHRINK YOUR FOCUS

**OFTEN, THE SECRET
BETWEEN SUCCESS AND
FAILURE IS A FEW FEET.**

As a vagabond whitetail hunter, I don't have a home farm I hunt year in and year out. At times I've been able to hunt the same farms or ranches several years running, and each year I learn a bit more about the nuances of the local deer herd. Often as not, though, when I travel to hunt whitetails I'm on unfamiliar ground, be it a private ranch or large tract of public land. That means I need to be able to ferret out *exactly* the right spot to sit rather quickly.



The use of smartphone apps like HuntStand, together with on-the-ground scouting, can help you quickly adjust locations.



Some excellent stand locations are only excellent during certain crop rotations. Corn's up? Good spot. No corn? No deer.

I've done it a lot, but it's always a slog. Here's one example that typifies the process, in general terms. Hunting in southwest Kansas, the property I had access to was cut by a giant cottonwood river bottom about a mile long and a quarter mile wide set among some low sagebrush-covered foothills. On one end was a large private ranch that grew corn and alfalfa and was totally off-limits, the other a government-owned riparian park that acted as a de facto sanctuary. During the rut, bucks came off both ends to chase does around the bottom.

Using aerial photos and a topo map, I began making a plan before I ever left home (this was before smartphone hunting apps and all the internet aids available today.) Once there, I spent an entire day glassing from afar, and spotted several deer moving about the bottom. Next day, after glassing for two hours and letting the deer head to bed, I went for a hike, wind in my face and covering ground like a bird dog, zigging and zagging looking for fresh sign. There was a lot of it. Midday I had an idea, and set a stand near the riparian tract, where I thought I might get a shot but could also see a long ways. That afternoon I had several does walk

close, but also saw two good bucks leave the sanctuary on a cruise about 200 yards to the east. Next morning, I hiked over to the spot, and boom! There was a tree within 25 yards of a well-worn trail. It was a crappy tree, leaning 30 degree, with gnarly branches and no way to comfortably hang my stand. So I went back to the barn, dug out an old ladder stand, gave it some TLC, and once I had it set up on that tree, it was only 12 feet off the ground. But I was able to hide the platform behind the trunk, sort of, and make it safe. Two days later I shot a 155-inch 8-point from that platform.

No big deal, right? Except that there were several large cottonwoods that would have made excellent stand trees, save for the fact that they were all at least 50 yards from where I just *knew* a buck would expose himself at a distance I knew he'd be dead. Had I not hunted from *the* tree, I'd have never shot that buck.

SHRINK YOUR FOCUS

Decades ago, I coined a phrase that described how I found killer spots in multiple states out West each year for all big game species – “shrink your focus.” It begins with a broad brushstroke – pick a state. Next, begin shrinking the size of that state down, from a region to a specific unit, to a specific drainage in that unit. This is all done well before the season ever begins, a requirement for choosing where to apply for a tag. Once on the ground, you shrink your focus even more by physically walking the ground until you find *exactly* the right spot to set your trap. Your focus and shrunk from a big state to down to one or two teeny tiny spots. You do the same thing regardless of the size of ground you can hunt.

These days, using trail cameras can be a big help, but to really find the right spot you have to hunt it. Over time on the same piece of ground you'll likely find the game will do basically the same things year in and year out in relation to the terrain features, and thus, the same stand location can be killer. With whitetails, you might find that a certain stand location is only

Scouting to find where mature bucks travel, and when they use a specific route, will put you in the right spot.



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When the acorns are falling, the question is, which tree is best for a stand?

great during a certain crop rotation, weather pattern, or time of year. For example, a couple of places I know of are fabulous when the oaks are dropping, but virtual deserts if there's no acorn crop.

What I've found over the years is that on any given piece of ground, the entire game almost always comes down to choosing one, or maybe two, specific trees in which I'll hang what I call my killing stands, and where I spend my entire hunt. And I spend my time there because, after all the planning, scouting, camera checking, watching the weather, hanging an observation stand or two, and thinking things over, my spider sense tells me this is where I need to be.

BUILDING CONFIDENCE

In my early years of hunting, I was horribly impatient. I'd arrive at a location and immediately start salivating, running out and hunting as fast as I could get up a tree. If that tree was near some fresh rubs and scrapes, or along a couple of well-worn trails, let me at 'em! Up a tree I'd go. Then, sure as the sun rises in the east, I'd see a good buck cruise down a ridgeline a hundred

yards away, or hear horns clacking over the crest of the hill, or watch a line of does parading along a field edge across the way. And I'd start to panic and lose confidence in my tree, and before you know it, I'd hop down and start looking for a new tree, wasting valuable hunting time. And 99 times out of 100, I'd realize that my first tree really wasn't that good of a spot.

I was doing it backwards. These days, before I pick a tree, I want to know everything about the area. I do that by scouting on the go. Then, when it's all said and done and I finally pick my killing tree, I will climb up and hunt it confident that, if I put in my time and only hunt it when the wind and other environmental conditions are right, I will be in business.

THE VALUE OF SCOUTING

Decades ago, the rule of thumb for hunting whitetails was to minimize human encroachment into the hunting area as much as possible. While that's still a good rule of thumb, I never did buy it completely. As a traveling hunter, I am not intimate with the land and local herd tendencies. I don't

know where the bedding areas and on public land, there are no sanctuaries where people are not allowed to go.

As a DIY hunter in a new area I have to find those places as well as the hot sign, so sometimes I need to aggressively take risks you might not do when hunting the back 40. And so I have always scouted, and hunted, with controlled aggression. While I don't run amok, I do cover lots of ground, keeping the wind right, being as quiet and unobtrusive as possible, and look for the keys that will help me find the killing tree. I know I'll probably bust some deer out of their beds, and while I hate that, it's inevitable.

As I go, I am cognizant of being as ghostlike as possible. I like to walk a creek bottom or along irrigation ditches, for example, as they keep me low, and are also often great ways to locate a crossing that can turn into a solid stand site. During days leading to the pre-rut and into the rut, I'll hang scrape drippers over scrapes and hang cameras near them, one quick and easy way to see what's going on.

OBSERVATION STANDS

Part of my aggressive scouting is the use of an observation post. This is not a new concept, of course. If I can get high and glass a lot of country from my truck or after a short hike in the evening, I will. If, after hiking about and finding what appears to be a good area, I may hang a tree stand or build a little brush blind on the fringe and sit there for a day, seeing what gives. I then let the deer tell me where my next move should be. Again, I am shrinking my focus, methodically tightening the noose before setting up where I just know I'll get a shot.

Here's an example. One year in mid-October in western Kentucky, my day hike led me to an oak ridge where the acorns were falling and the deer sign was plentiful for hundreds of yards. You couldn't observe deer activity here from afar, so I got the wind right and set a stand on the edge of the area where I could see for 150 yards through the trees down the ridge. That afternoon and evening I could

see where the majority of the deer coming from, and which little clusters of oaks they seemed to prefer. Next morning I moved the stand a hundred yards down the ridge, and two mornings later I arrowed the largest of three bucks that were slowly feeding their way along.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

If you are hunting a mature buck, always remember that, if he is moving about during daylight hours at all, he will be vulnerable at some point. This point will be where the killing tree is located. Your job is to find that tree. Of course, "that tree" might change during the course of the year, moving from an early season evening hunt to a different spot during mid-season, and a different tree for a pre-rut and rut mornings when bucks are out cruising, and another for the post rut. Regardless, the right tree will become the wrong tree if the wind is wrong.



*The author killed this dandy Kansas buck after adjusting his stand location three times in a week.
Buck movement: If a buck moves during daylight hours, he will be vulnerable at least a portion of that time.
Being in the right spot at the right time is key.*

When it's all said and done, consistent success begins with not settling for a good spot, but

choosing the exact right spot for your stand.



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SHOT SCIENCE

GUN-HUNTING ISN'T A GUARANTEED FILLED TAG. IT'S EASY TO MISS WITH A BOOMSTICK, TOO. HERE'S HOW NOT TO.

The buck you've watched on trail camera all season long walks into view. It stands broadside 150 yards away. You've waited all season for this moment, and all that separates you from big buck glory is a well-placed shot. Can you do it? Hopefully so. But if you understand everything that plays into a properly executed shot, and if you've set yourself up for success, the odds go way up. Here's some of what you need to know.

BAD SHOTS

Everyone wants that perfect heart or double lung shot. Strike these, and the deer likely won't make it out of sight. And if they do, not very far. But things don't always work out that way, even for experienced hunters who regularly practice with their craft. Sometimes, bullets go astray, and bad shots happen.

HEAD: Some gun hunters think a head shot is OK, but it isn't. It's far too small of a target, and too much can go wrong. A slight pulling of the shot, or minute movement by the deer, can lead to a long, painful injury. It isn't worth it. Don't take that shot.

NECK/SPINE: Some hunters advocate the neck shot. In most cases, I disagree. It's too small of a target and near misses can result in a negative outcome. Instead, anchor that deer with a well-placed shot to the heart and lung region. That said, if you do hit the neck or spine region, the deer will likely drop in its tracks. Still, a follow-up shot might be necessary.

LIVER: The liver is located behind the lungs, but in front of the paunch, within the diaphragm. This long, slender organ is vital, and lethal, if hit. Unfortunately, liver hit deer tend to react similarly to a deer struck in the lungs. However, it isn't one to hope for, as it can take deer up to five or six hours to die. Once on the trail, expect dark red blood.

PAUNCH: Also referred to as the paunch, the stomach and gut area is one of the worst bad hits you can make. This is a slow death that can take upward of 12 hours to succumb to – something no hunter wants. Oftentimes, when hit in this manner, deer will run a few yards and stop before hunching up. Then, they'll slowly move off. Generally, the blood is sparse, and if present, mixed with green and brown stomach matter.

SHOULDER: The shoulder region is a tricky area. You can strike vitals and recover the deer. Or, hit away from these and lose it. Generally, if the shot angle is good, you'll still hit the heart, lungs, or major arteries. The blood trail can range from bright pink (lungs) to dark red (heart or muscle). Otherwise, it's merely a flesh wound that most deer will recover from.

HAM: Strike a deer in the upper region of the back leg, and it can result in a quick death, or not at all. This area is blood rich, and if you strike a major artery, deer can bleed out quickly. This is especially true for the aorta, which runs along the spine and top of the ham, or the femoral, which runs down through the ham. Miss these arteries, and the deer will likely live. If you do hit these, the blood trail should be bright red, very heavy, and quite short. Otherwise, the blood trail might start out well, and eventually fade to nothing.

LOWER LEG: A hit to the lower leg is not a vital hit, even with time. There aren't any major arteries, so lethal blood loss is out of the equation. If presented with a safe opportunity, take an immediate follow-up shot. If that isn't an option, and circumstances allow, safely pursue the deer on foot. It likely won't go far, or very quickly, before stopping. Blood might look promising but will fade quickly. If given an opportunity, take another shot.

Step 1: Get the Right Gun

A clean, crisp trigger pull starts with selecting the right firearm. It's incredibly important to select a gun that fits you. Ensure that it has a length of pull that works for your body measurements. Choosing one that is too big, small, long, or short, will result in poor shooting.

Your hunting gun should also come equipped with a quality action. Think of a good rifle as a series of requirements with building blocks. A good trigger is dependent on a good action, and is less likely to perform well without one.

Step 2: Optimize the Trigger

Once you have a good gun, install a good trigger. As mentioned, a good action relies on a good trigger, and vice versa. Finding an aftermarket trigger that works for you and your firearm can seem daunting, but is much easier (and safer) with the help of a good gunsmith. Never attempt a trigger adjustment, change, or installation without the proper tools, knowledge, and expertise.

Chris Ellis, an expert marksman with Timney Triggers, understands the importance of making the shot. He's highly distinguished in each aspect of accurate shooting. He underscores the importance of elevating stock rifles to become the

best they can be, and one of the easiest ways to do that is with an aftermarket trigger. Oftentimes, stock triggers are gritty, and bring creep and overtravel into the equation, none of which are good. A clean, crisp trigger is much more desirable.

Furthermore, for those who plan to take longer shots, Ellis stresses the importance of tuning a trigger so that it does exactly what you need it to. As he puts it, chasing the trigger will result in poor shooting. So, ask your gunsmith to make the installed after-market trigger even better. Optimize it so that it fits you well. Of course, this requires understanding pull weights. Most hunters will prefer approximately 3 pounds. That's a light trigger, but it makes it easier to know exactly when that shot is going to break.

Ellis says this weight is especially good with slightly warmer temperatures, and when gloves aren't necessary. However, some might prefer a higher poundage. In addition to that, for those using a good rest, Ellis believes a lighter pull weight is better. In contrast, for those shooting free-hand or standing, a heavier weight might be more acceptable.



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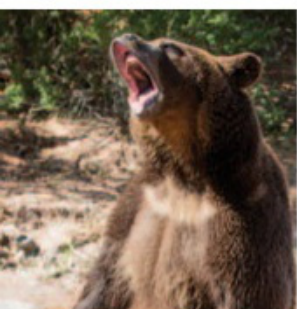
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It was a perfect late autumn day in the northern Rockies. Not a cloud in the sky, and just enough cool in the air to stir up nostalgic memories of my trip into the backwoods. This year, though, was different. I was going it solo. My two buddies, pleading work responsibilities, backed out at the last minute. So, armed with my trusty knife, I set out for adventure.

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

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

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IMPROVING YOUR ARCHERY SHOT

Not all deer hunters use a gun, and many who do also bowhunt. Fortunately, there are ways to improve the odds of making a great shot with bow in hand, too. This 15-step process can make you a better archery.

PURCHASE the best equipment you can afford. With older bows, purchasing a new set of strings can help it shoot much better.

USE an appropriate draw weight. If you can't slowly, smoothly draw the bow without moving your grip hand, it's too much weight.

SHOOT the correct arrows. Use arrows with the right spine. Most arrow companies have resources available to help select the right arrow for your setup.

USE a forgiving release aid. Hard shafts between the release and straps are less so, while tether-style connectors are more forgiving, resulting in less torque.

HAVE a consistent anchor point. Archery is about consistent repetition, and without it, good shots are more difficult to make.

LOCK down the peep sight. If it moves, your anchor point will, too. This will lead to less accurate shooting.

KEEP an open grip. Grabbing the bow with strength can result in unwanted torque, and can throw a shot off.

TUNE your bow. A well-tuned bow will produce better shots than one that isn't. Consider properly paper-tuning, French tuning, and other tuning methods.

TUNE your broadheads. Ensure these are flying properly and accurately. They don't always shoot exactly like your field points.

CONTROL your breathing. This is a major aspect of archery. If you don't control your breathing, it's difficult to execute a good shot.

PRACTICE at longer distances. Even if you don't plan to take longer shots at an animal, practicing at greater yardages will make shorter shots easier.

FOLLOW through. Keep the bow pointed toward the target after the shot. Don't drop the bow arm. Also, don't let the bow fall from your hands, but maintain the loose grip you started with until after the arrow reaches its target. Use a wrist strap to help keep a handle on it.

PRACTICE regularly. Following a routine will keep your archery muscles tuned and in shape. It will also improve your confidence, which is important.

PRACTICE appropriately. Never shoot too many arrows in one session. Once you fatigue, it's time to hang it up for the day. Shooting while tired creates bad form and habits.

CONSULT a professional. There are many archery coaches willing to provide useful advice on improving archery skills.



Waiting for a clean, ethical shot opportunity is crucial.

Step 3: Tune Your Muscles

It might sound odd to work out for shooting a rifle, but it can certainly help. Tuning the muscles in your shooting arm, hand, and finger can improve accuracy. This is even truer for those pulling a heavier trigger weight. Exercising regularly makes it easier to hold the firearm, and easier to pull the trigger itself.

Step 4: Master Your Stance

The weapon is only part of the equation. How you handle and use it is even more important. Shooters must implement a proper stance, grip, finger placement, breathing, trigger pull, and follow through (in that order). But more on these things later.

For now, focus on stance. Select a rock-steady option that is appropriate for your situation. Kneeling, prone, and sitting are the three best options. Then, grip the gun in a safe, effective manner that minimizes movement and improves stability. Of course, a steady rest, such as a good treestand cross bar, solid tree limb, or bipod, are all great choices.

Step 5: Perfect the Pull

Now, control your breathing. Your entire body works in unison, and if your breathing isn't right, the shot will be off. Breathe in and out

slowly. Don't hold your breath. Let the shot break at the shallow end of your breath just before inhaling again.

Your grip is important, too. Keep a firm handle on it, but not too tight, or it can throw off the shot. Find a happy medium. This is necessary for replicating the shot process and consistently shooting well.

When ready to fire, use proper finger placement. Position the meaty section of your pointer finger on the trigger face. Avoid using the very tip of your finger, or lower portions of it, which can result in a pushed or pulled shot.

Curling your finger can do the same. Instead, try to create a 90-degree angle with your shooting finger. This can help apply straight-back pressure on the trigger, which minimizes the odds of a pushed or pulled shot.

Once on target, pull the trigger back so the trigger travel is gone. Get it to the beginning of the resistance point, and then finish settling the crosshairs. Pick a hair to aim at, and once on it, continue applying pressure until the firearm goes off.

Finally, don't fear the recoil or report of the gun. Anticipation and anxiety creates bad habits and leads to bad shots. Wear eye



Bowhunters might look at gun hunting and think it's easy. While you don't need to get as close to deer, making the shot isn't much simpler. In many ways, it's just as (or nearly as) difficult to make the shot.

and ear protection, and use a good recoil pad, to minimize these things. Then, don't flinch, and don't close your eyes. Follow through with a good shot. Then, once you've followed this entire process correctly and safely, continue to replicate it until muscle memory takes over. Continue practicing with your dedicated hunting gun. Safe implementation of both dry firing and live fire can improve your shooting skills.

Overall, Ellis says to practice appropriately. Practice on the range what you plan to do during the hunt. Shooting from a bench is necessary for dialing in and developing good habits. But after that, mimic hunting scenarios and add some realism to the practice routine.

The Moment of Truth: Beating Buck Fever

While a good practice routine can prepare you well, it's difficult to simulate the real thing. Only experience can provide this, and beating buck fever is a hard hurdle for some hunters to overcome. Fortunately, while it's impossible to completely get rid of it, there are things hunter can do to minimize the influence buck fever has over shooting accuracy.

First, follow a good practice regimen. Practice real-life scenarios, such as shooting at a lifelike 3D target. Mimic hunting situations, such as from a treestand or ground blind. Do things to safely elevate your heart rate — which can simulate an adrenaline rush — just prior to taking a practice shot.

Next, develop a shot regimen. Settle in prior to the shot. Envision making a good hit. As the cliché

goes, aim small, miss small. Breathe properly, inhaling and exhaling slowly, which also helps control your adrenaline and emotions. It can even make it easier to focus and stay on target.

Then, execute the trigger pull. Stay on target and in safe control of your weapon, but once ready to fire, letting the shot “surprise you” can help prevent pushing or pulling the bullet off target.

Obviously, becoming a great shot is a process. It doesn't happen overnight. So, practice aplenty. Learn from your wins and mistakes. Grow as a marksman and hunter. Do that, and your confidence, freezer, and trophy wall will benefit from it.



MATERNAL MISHAPS

A LOOK INSIDE THE MYSTERY OF SUCCESSFUL,
AND UNSUCCESSFUL, WHITETAIL DOES.



A spotted newborn lies motionless in the timber. Instincts tell it to remain motionless as the much larger coyote sniffs the ground 10 yards away. Several tense seconds pass as the fawn continues its nature-driven duty to be still. The doe attempts to lure the coyote away from the fawn, but the seasoned song dog knows an easier meal awaits.

While the coyote hasn't located the fawn yet, it knows it's somewhere nearby. It spotted the fawn and its mother enter the woodlot minutes before, and only the latter exited. He also catches the slightest whiff of scent that suggests the youngling is still there.

With minimal ground cover to hide its profile, the inevitable unfolds. The coyote gets too close, the fawn bolts, and the coyote rushes in for the kill. A short fawn-in-distress bleat echoes throughout the valley, followed by a crushing silence. Another fawn is dead.

That's a sad, depressing depiction of spring — a season rich with birth, newness, and growth. But it's also a time of death, especially for the whitetail fawn, and the above scenario plays on repeat millions of times each year. Based on the research, it's in part thanks to habitually bad mammas, among other issues.

SOME DOES ARE BAD MAMMAS

The 2022 Southeast Deer Study Group Meeting (SDSGM) made it abundantly clear just how big of an issue fawn recruitment is becoming in parts of the country. Some areas are overrun with deer, but that's the exception, and not the rule, for most areas.

Numerous reasons culminate to produce declining fawn recruitment rates, including poor habitat, increasing predator populations, and more. Still, one thing that's been researched very little until recently is the effectiveness of whitetail does. Numerous SDSGM presenters hit on this, including USDA's John Kilgo Auburn University's Tristan Swartout, University of Georgia's

JOHN PENNOYER/WINDIGO

FEDERAL FAILURE

Edge has been working diligently in northern Georgia to understand the impacts of poor habitat, booming predator populations, and rapidly declining fawn recruitment rates. This research began, in part, because of deer hunters,” Edge said. “Steep declines in both deer harvest and hunter numbers on national forests in the Southern Appalachian region sends up a red flag to wildlife agencies whose mission is to provide quality recreational opportunity. A survey of northern Georgia public land hunters revealed that hunters were not satisfied with their hunting experience due to the lack of even seeing deer while in the woods. Our research backs up their claim, so we know there is an issue.”

According to his research, only 16% of fawns are surviving beyond 12 weeks of age. That’s shockingly low, and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources is worried. Hunters are, too.

“Evidence points to low fawn recruitment due to high predation rates as being the direct cause of population decline in northern Georgia,” Edge said. “Simply, not enough fawns are surviving to join the adult population. Predation accounted for 81% of all fawn mortalities, primarily by coyotes and secondarily by black bears. Bobcats took a few fawns, as well.”

Overly mature forest habitat is also to blame. Better, early successional habitat provides improved fawning cover where does can hide their young. A grossly lacking habitat diversity is partially to blame for such low recruitment percentages. Fawns lying out in the open stand no chance of survival.

“Where fawn mortality is high (due to predation) and habitat is of poor to moderate quality – like the southern Appalachians – antlerless harvest restriction is not enough to recover populations by itself,” Edge said. “As of 2020, antlerless harvest was completely restricted on most public hunting areas in northern Georgia, including national forest and wildlife management areas, due to deer population decline. Our study still projects deer numbers to decrease on national forest lands by an average of 3.5% annually.”

The fix(es) include active forest management, sustainable timber harvest, and increased predator control. Sadly, erroneous environmental regulations, as well as legal battles with stakeholder groups, prevent much of this from happening.

“This makes it difficult to get anything done to the detriment of forest health,” Edge said. “The result is national forests across the Southern Appalachians composed of predominantly mature forest conditions, lacking the habitat diversity important for deer and many other wildlife species. A stagnant forest with little understory makes for great hiking, but is not so great for wildlife habitat.”

Obviously, the epicenters of declining fawn recruitment rates can be found on federal lands. It’s highly difficult to conduct timber harvests and other land management efforts due to lawsuits and red tape. Still, there are opportunities to make a positive impact, but only if hunters speak up. Once hunters get loud enough, proper timber management will become more common, which will in turn benefit wildlife, such as whitetails.

“The U.S. Forest Service is required to submit their habitat management plans to public input and the feedback they receive can help push a project forward or stop it in its tracks,” Edge said. “Hunter input matters as a stakeholder group of high importance to wildlife conservation. Work with your state and federal conservation agencies to promote habitat improvement projects on our national forests. Become constructively involved in public meetings and share your thoughts.”

Adam Edge, and others. They all concurred that some does are bad mammas. Here’s what we know.

FAWN RECRUITMENT IS COMPLICATED

Upon raising numerous questions, pinpointing several hypothesis, and diving into various metrics, the data was abundantly clear — age can provide experience, but it is less important than originally believed.

“We know that most fawn mortality in the Southeast is from coyote predation, but we don’t know which doe characteristics affect their ability to get fawns through the first couple of months when they are most vulnerable to coyotes,” Kilgo said.

In addition to age, experience seems to be less of a factor than biologists originally thought, too. While it can help, it isn’t the overarching advantage long believed to be. “Some deer are routinely more successful than others at raising fawns and it doesn’t have anything to do with their age or experience level,” Kilgo said. “Simply being older and more experienced does not necessarily give them any better ability at raising fawns.”

Age and experience aside, while some does expressed consistent success, others produced more mixed results. Kilgo said that approximately 1/3 of the does in his study alternated between successful and failed fawn crop years. But approximately 2/3 were consistently successful or unsuccessful at keeping their fawns alive.

According to the most recent research, some yearling does are more successful than does with numerous fawn-bearing years under their belt, and continue to be their entire lives. Generally, older more dominant does take the best fawning cover, too, so it isn’t like these younger does are frequently inhabiting better ground. Generally, they aren’t. So, it must be another fact that makes them more successful. The research hasn’t determined what that is, though. Still, biologists have their suspicions. For Kilgo, it might be genetics.

“If traits of successful mothers are genetically linked, it could mean that Eastern deer

The research shows that some whitetail does are good mothers, and some aren’t.





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Some does tend to be more successful at raising fawns, and age doesn't seem to be a major factor.

populations, which have not dealt with coyote predation very long, would be able to adapt over time as successful mothers are favored and pass on whatever behaviors make them successful,” Kilgo said. “However, that possibility is purely speculative, and we have no data to evaluate it.”

Swartout believes body size and immune system might be influential. “While more research would be needed, it appears high-quality females are of a larger skeletal body size and have a lower number of ticks present on them, indicating these females have a better immune system and ability to provide energy to their fawns,” Swartout said.

Reasons aside, Swartout’s research realized just how compounding success is for does. Generally, if a doe recruits at least one fawn this year, she’ll likely recruit 1.4 times as many fawns next season. This reaffirms Kilgo’s findings that some does seem to have it, while others don’t.

“It’s interesting to see that 47% of our females recruited 75% of our fawns from 2008 to 2019,” Swartout said. “These 47% of mothers were consecutive recruiters and produced most of our fawns. We define “consecutive recruiters” as females who recruited fawns two

straight seasons at least once in their lifetime.”

Naturally, when analyzing a doe’s reproductive value, some are considered high-quality, while others are low-quality. For example, Swartout singled out three females that done exceptionally well. One doe recruited nine fawns in eight seasons, one recruited at least one fawn seven consecutive seasons, and one recruited five fawns in a two-year span (triplets, then twins).

Swartout and company discovered other things that were far more surprising, though. According to her, does that were more efficient at recruiting fawns into the herd had longer lifespans. “We found that our females that were consecutive recruiters (high-quality females) on average lived 4 ½ years longer than other females within the herd. They also, on average, recruited the last fawn of their lifespan 3 ½ years later than other females within the herd,” Swartout said.

IMPACTS ON DEER MANAGEMENT

Naturally, any subject with such magnitude has the potential to impact deer management. This is true here as well. According to Kilgo and others, this newfound knowledge can be used to impact deer management goals, and

hunters can do with it what they will. If fawn recruitment is low, hunters can boost deer numbers by protecting successful does during the season. Not shooting those with one or more fawns in tow will increase the deer density. In contrast, if the deer density is too high, shooting productive does can help bring numbers back down and balance the herd.

“Ultimately, hunters are the ones to implement doe harvest,” Kilgo said. “If their goal is to increase or reduce recruitment, more care and attention to which does they choose to harvest could affect recruitment.”

Still, in areas where fawn recruitment is very low, limiting doe harvests isn’t enough to prevent population decline. In these instances, habitat improvement and predator management are vital. So, while it’s clear some does are bad mammas, we can help them out by improving habitat and managing predators. It’s the least we can do for whitetails.

— For more on deer research and management, visit www.deeranddeerhunting.com.





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TO SHOOT OR NOT SHOOT DOES, THAT IS THE QUESTION

Want to get a passionate debate, possibly even fight, going? Definitely tell a large group of hunters that they either need to lay waste to does or not shoot any, as they are what's needed to rebuild deer numbers. Do that and it's pretty close to a lock that a passionate debate will follow, and more than a few will tell you you're nuts, regardless of which side you present.

Here's the rub, though. That debate will likely do absolutely nothing to truly reveal if you should or shouldn't shoot does on that property. It will merely get the pulse pounding and veins sticking out on necks, but no definitive answers are likely to emerge.

Well, let's see if we can find the correct one for you and your situation, together. Just remember, not worrying about it and just plain having fun hunting what's there is certainly an acceptable option. Trying to manage does isn't for everyone and only goes so far, on an individual basis. What follows is for those that truly enjoy what could be referred to as essentially herding cats in the most effective manner realistically and reasonably possible for many, but it's still essentially herding cats for the majority out there.





CHARLES J. ALSHEIMER



When deer numbers are around 50% CC, the increased reproductive success results in a dramatic increase in twins and even triplets. Combined with a dramatic reduction in natural mortality is why the same number of deer can be harvested annually from the same habitat at 50% CC or 100%.

SETTING THE TABLE

Quite honestly, it's super easy to understand why a group of diverse hunters won't agree if does should or shouldn't be shot. Frankly, it's the same reason one can't use the absence or abundance of doe tags offered

to hunters as an accurate gauge if does should or shouldn't be shot, on the specific property one hunts. Every property is different from one side of a fence line to the other, much less from township to township, county to county or state to state.

You see this crystal clearly in many of the deer management units in Northern Wisconsin, where there is a ton of public lands, compared to the rest of the state. It is not uncommon at all to hunt areas of the public lands where seeing a deer is an event. At the same time, there are very often pockets of private grounds that literally have way more deer than the habitat can support in a healthy manner. So, because the unit as a whole has too many deer, doe tags are given out like candy on Halloween, but that sure doesn't force those controlling the private lands to shoot more deer.

Heck, many private land owners in those situations won't shoot a doe if their family is nearly starving. They know the numbers on the public grounds are pathetically low and don't ever want to see that on their own grounds. So, they do all they can to protect said does, while the state gives out more and more and more doe tags, which mostly get used on the already low deer numbered public grounds, driving their numbers lower still, while the private ground's numbers remain high or grow even more.

The unfortunate reality is that deer numbers simply aren't evenly distributed over most any deer management unit. There are very often pockets of surplus deer numbers artificially bumping the deer per square mile figures much

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When numbers are around or below 50% CC, the benefits of reduced social stress and adequate nutrition is often expressed even in the younger bucks.

higher than it really is for large areas within the unit and far lower than in the higher deer number pockets. It's merely an average, often including wild extremes.

On the flip side, just because a management unit isn't giving out doe tags doesn't mean the property one hunts within that unit wouldn't benefit massively from removing does.

DEFINING THE SWEET SPOT

So, we know that deer aren't evenly distributed across management zones. Heck, when big woods hunting, I've found that somewhere around 80% of the deer spend the majority of their time in 10-20% of the big woods habitat. To the naked eye, that's fairly homogenous habitat, and there's still areas that offer way more than most of the rest, drawing deer to those hot spots, often due to the specific food and/or cover the area offers.

That means it's really up to us hunters and private deer managers to figure out if we need to shoot does or not, if doing our own hunting properties the max good is the goal. No, we shouldn't have to and it would be awesome if state biologists would come and inspect our properties and let us know if we need to shoot does or lay off. Some states have programs for private landowners to do just that, but what do those not enrolled in such programs do?

The first step is truly understanding why deer numbers are important and what their sweet spot is. That means we must agree on what Carrying Capacity (CC) means, before we go any further. CC is simply the number of deer a habitat can support.

Where things get tricky is that most would assume we want our deer numbers at or close to the habitat's CC. Nothing could be further from the truth, at least if one cares about the health of the deer and the long term health of the habitat. Remember that CC is the very max number of deer that habitat can possibly support. That means for every birth or deer that shifts onto that habitat, one has to leave or die. The habitat can not support a single extra deer, when at CC.

Think about that for a bit. That very often means that any healthy food that's produced is literally wiped out almost as fast as it gets out of the ground. Whereas deer food producing mast trees are browsed to death, before they even get a foot tall, all the garbage foods that deer won't eat are left to thrive, often with the good food competition gone, giving the undesirables even more room to thrive and spread. It further degrades the habitat's long-term CC every day deer numbers are at or close to hitting the habitat's CC.

The good food is being destroyed by the too high deer numbers, while the bad is increasing, spreading and left to literally thrive, further choking out the good. It becomes a vicious circle.

As it applies to deer health, these deer are barely hanging on. Remember, just 1 more deer on this ground and 1 HAS to die or leave. That means that the vast majority of those deer are hanging on by a thread. They are often on the very edge of literal starvation. Their body sizes are too small, antlers are stunted and their reproductive success rate is horrifically bad, all while being comparative skin and bones.

The sweet spot is actually around 50% of the habitat's CC. Seemingly amazingly, the exact same number of deer can be tagged annually off of the same property at half CC as when it is at CC. How in the world can a population half as big allow for the same harvest numbers every year? Well, the natural mortality rates are MUCH lower, due to decreased competition for most everything, as well as a huge reduction in the tremendously damaging social stress levels within the herd that next to no one ever talks about.

Remember, at 50% CC, these deer are not cleaning up all the best foods, as their numbers aren't that high. So, instead of picking for whatever literal scrap a deer can find



If shooting does is an option on your property, be aware that how many you should take will vary from area to area, and often will even vary from year to year, in the same area.

SMALL GROUND LIMITATIONS

All this said, I'd be doing a disservice if I didn't point out the great limitations of those hunting properties under 100 acres in size. Quite truthfully, if we control even a 240, we're going to be at the neighbor's mercy to a very great extent. On that 240, there will be very few deer that don't cross those fence lines.

When surrounded by neighbors that fill every tag they can get, we can often make our hunting grounds offer more safety, food and a comfort factor than the neighbor's properties. So long as we hunt super low impact, we can very often be hunting relatively good deer numbers, while the neighbor aren't, merely by sucking in a disproportionate number of the area's deer. That can help greatly in areas well below 50% CC.

The biggest problem for those control these more typical acreages is often when the neighbors don't shoot close to enough does. That hunter controlling a 40 can often shoot a doe a sit off his food plots, all season long, without ever dropping deer numbers on that specific property. When numbers are too high and no one else around is shooting does, there's often essentially a waiting line of deer, standing at the fence. The moment one is shot, the next in line jumps and we're right back to where we started.

I'm sure not suggesting that those controlling real world acreages shouldn't shoot does when numbers are too high and not lay off when too low. You should. Just realize that, if you're the only one in the area doing either, it will be much like spitting on your food plot and believing you just saved it from a harsh drought. Afraid that's really not the case.

— Steve Bartylla

in the max CC setting, these deer in the half CC habitat have a surplus of quality foods. Because of that, they are way physically healthier, their reproductive success is pushing twins and triplets, instead of being lucky to successfully rear a single fawn. Rack sizes are way bigger and the destructive social stress levels are greatly reduced.

So, at half CC, the deer are way healthier, happier and just plain all around bigger, while still allowing for the same number to be tagged every single year. THAT is our sweet spot, my friends!

DETERMINING THE MARK

Now that we have a target to aim at, how in the world do we know what percent our CC is sitting at?

Well, if you are enrolled in the previously mentioned state programs that offers it, that's the single best and biggest reason to enroll in one of those programs, IF available. A trained biologist will come out and take an inventory of your habitat and deer numbers, recommending the harvest goals for that property.

What about the rest of us? Well, I'm afraid we need to do some inspection, studying and learning on our own. What's the deer's favorite browses on your hunting properties? You know, the one's the deer are showing you they love by eating their leaves and nipping buds? Those are extremely likely the "good" deer foods. Those they ignore are very likely the "bad."

After the seasonal low point for the habitat's food production

for the year, which tends to be winter in any areas receiving close to true winters and summer in the hot and arid regions, inspect your property's food supply. You want at least 25% of the best deer browses to still be available AFTER the seasonal low point has concluded. If it's well less than 25%, it's very likely time to shoot does. If over 50% of the top end browse the deer can easily reach is still remaining AFTER the seasonal low point, you may seriously want to lay off the does, as odds are you're well under 50% CC.

Nope, that's not a perfect formula and it has flaws. An obvious one is that this simply can not be used in areas of overwinter yarding, for example. The deer yards will have next to nothing left, even on lower deer number years, while It's also really hard to browse a property overwinter, when the deer have already left, even if their numbers are ridiculously high.

As I admitted, there are flaws to this, but it's about the best method I've found for those of us that don't have trained biologists in our back pockets. This method has served me very well, in real world settings, for many years running, now.

CONCLUSION

The reason the debates over if one should or shouldn't shoot does pointless is because the answer is very often different for two neighbors, let alone one answer being right for entire deer management units. I do sincerely believe the DNRs and wildlife agencies try to do good in these areas, but they can't put out a number that will work for every property within a unit, as deer just aren't spread evenly and access isn't offered for all of that unit.

My best advice is to allow the habitat to tell you if more, less or no does need harvesting. It's not perfect, but it's worked pretty darn well for me over the years.

— Steve Bartylla is the host of "DeerTopia TV" on Pursuit Channel.



THE **SCIENCE** OF POPULATION MANAGEMENT

ESTIMATING UNIT-SPECIFIC
CARRYING CAPACITY FOR
WHITETAILS IN A DEER-RICH STATE.

DEER RESEARCH

KEITH R. MCCAFFERY

Maximum deer carrying capacity (expressed as KCC) is determined by habitat quality and weather and is difficult to predict from year-to-year. But knowing average KCC for an area is useful for population goal setting. KCC can be estimated mathematically or by using a couple of shortcuts or indices to KCC.

CHARLES J. ALSHEIMER

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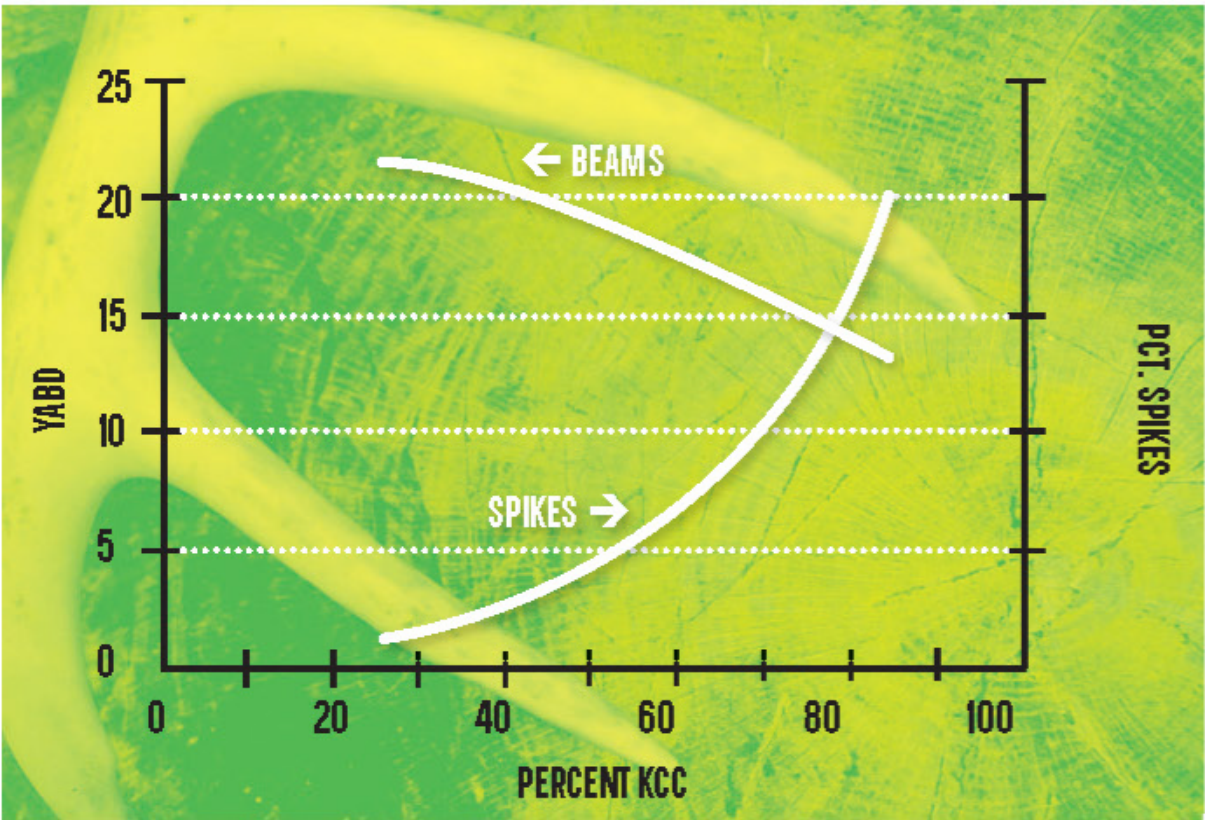


CHARLES J. ASHEIMER

For example, the incidence of fawn breeding is correlated with lower levels of KCC. In southern Wisconsin, more than 50% of fawns might breed in their first year of life as they did during the 1980s. This would suggest that deer populations then were maintained below 40% of KCC. In northern WI, virtually no fawns breed at 6 months of age

suggesting that populations there average above 60% of KCC. Also, antler development reflects deer herd physical condition and can be used as an index to KCC. Spike ratios on yearling bucks increase and beam diameters decline as herds approach KCC. Chronically poor antler development (>50% spikes on yearlings) suggests that

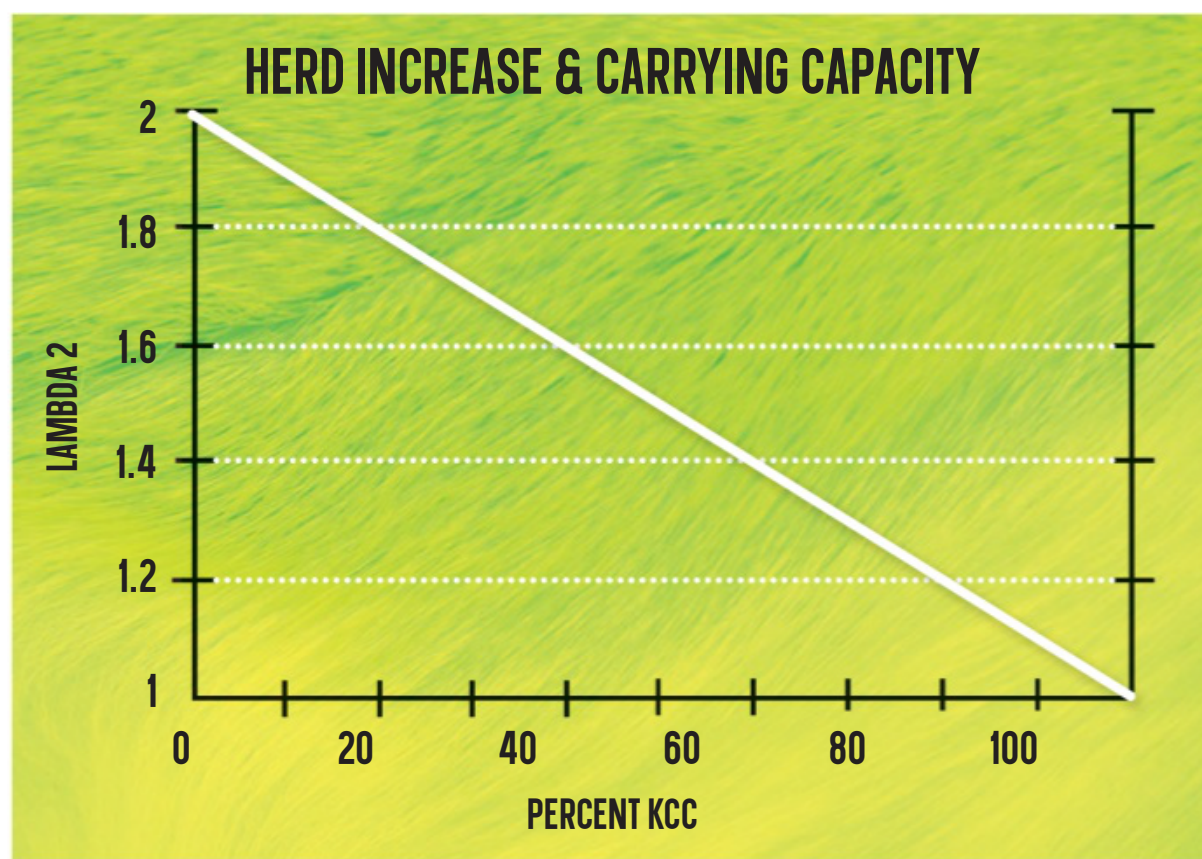
the population level is crowding maximum KCC. Unlike some states, Wisconsin has had the ability and luxury of maintaining both preseason and postseason deer population estimates each year for over 100 ecologically based DMUs (deer management units) statewide. In 2014 DMUs were changed mainly to counties. Wisconsin also maintained unit-specific measures of deer habitat (permanent cover plus a 100m buffer extending into agricultural fields) in each DMU. This has enabled analyses that may not be possible everywhere. KCC can be estimated mathematically by plotting the annual rate of increase post-harvest to pre-harvest (λ_{2}) over the winter population for a series of years. A University (UW-Madison) analysis used data from 1962 to 1984 to estimate KCC for a group of northern DMUs in WI. The resulting average estimate of KCC was 26-28 deer/sq.mi (Keith 1988). A similar procedure was used with 21 years of population data from the Sandhill Wildlife Area in central WISCONSIN forest and the estimate of average KCC was 54 deer/sq.mi (McCaffery and Rolley 2001).



Schematic showing what seems to be the relationship of antler development relative to KCC. Yearling antler beam diameter (mm) on the left axis.

In 1994, I was asked to estimate unit specific KCC for 43 Northern Forest and five Central Forest DMUs (KCC in farmland units was already known to vastly exceed responsible deer density goals). The linear regression method (plotting used above) was unreliable by unit due mainly to small changes in herd size (pretty good harvest management!). So, to provide provisional estimates of maximum KCC by unit, pieces were borrowed from the traditional model. The process involved some assumptions and five steps described below.

1. The first step involved calculating the average Lambda2, or average annual rate of population increase post-harvest to next pre-harvest, for each unit each year. For most WISCONSIN units, there was a 13-year history (1981-1993) upon which to draw. Note that this history is far less than the 30-years that would more accurately reflect weather patterns typical of our climate, and in fact the shorter period used here included the mildest decade of winter severity records since 1960. So, these Lambdas may have been inflated.



2. The second step was to accept a single regression model (Lambda2 over percent if KCC) for all units that assumed the maximum rate of increase would be 2 (doubling) at 0% of KCC, declining to 1 (no increase) at 100% of KCC. There is some support for this assumption in that Lambda2 for a UW-Madison regression maxed at 2.04 (Keith 1988). At Sandhill (McCaffery and Rolley 2001), it was

1.87 and at the George Reserve in Michigan it was 1.99 (McCullough 1984). Lacking better information, this model was chosen.

3. The third step was to estimate at what percent of KCC herds had been by using the average rate of increase (Lambda2) for each unit. For example, if the average Lambda for a unit (in Step 1) was 1.28, we can plot it on the model



(described in Step 2) and determine that the unit had been averaging 72% of K, or very simply $2 - 1.28 = 0.72$. This was done for each DMU.

4. The fourth step required calculating the average overwinter deer density that produced the average Lambda in each unit during the past 13 years. This mean was easily determined from records for each unit.

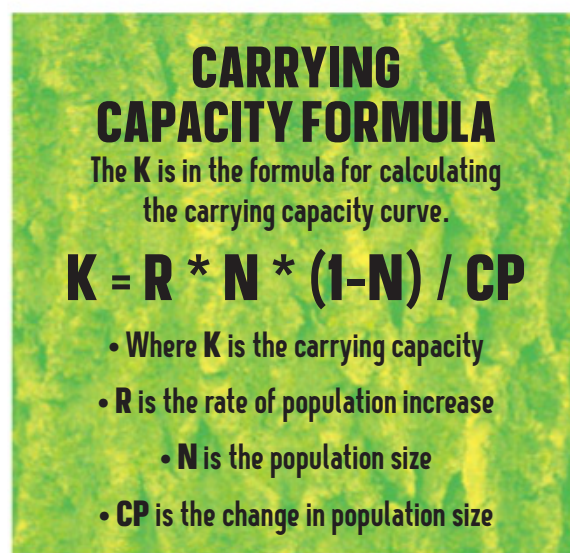
5. The fifth step was to estimate KCC by dividing the mean deer density in each unit (from Step 4) by the “percent of K” as determined in Step 3. This resulted in a provisional estimate of unit specific KCC. For example, if the average Lambda (1.28) indicated that the herd was averaging 72% of KCC and the average over-winter population density had been 20/sq.mi, simply divide 20 by 0.72 to get an estimated average KCC of 28 deer/sq.mi of habitat. The resulting KCCs by DMU in the 43 Northern Forest DMUs ranged from 16 to 47.

Obviously, this procedure required a fair number of assumptions. However, when viewed broadly, this procedure seemed to produce good estimates of KCC in the forested zones. In the Central Forest, average KCC by this method was 58 compared to 54 calculated by the regression method for the Sandhill Wildlife Area. In the Northern Forest, mean KCC for all DMUs was 30 compared with a previously calculated KCC of 26-28 by Keith (1988). Also, northern sandy units with high proportions of aspen, oaks, and jack pine tended to have higher KCC estimates than heavier soil units dominated by swamp and/or northern hardwoods. These results matched previous habitat-specific studies.

Now, there are a few problems with these provisional estimates. Even if procedures used were airtight, the calculated estimates apply only to the 13 years before 1994 which included the mildest decade on record based on the Winter Severity Index dating back to 1959-60. Hence, these KCC estimates could be high in relation to the normal climate for northern WI. But the climate is warming and there are likely some hunters who

will argue for higher goals on the assumption that the mild sequence of winters will continue. The folly in this is that the mild series of winters could end this winter (as it did in 1996 and 1997 and again in 2014).

A second problem in Wisconsin is the impact of baiting and recreational feeding of deer which had become increasingly prevalent beginning in the early 1990s but tapered after chronic wasting disease was discovered in 2002. These practices have added energy into the natural habitat which artificially raises KCC. The artificial infusion of energy into an otherwise mostly natural system should NOT be a part of KCC calculations or goals. But there is no easy way to factor-out this influence.



CARRYING CAPACITY FORMULA
The K is in the formula for calculating the carrying capacity curve.

$$K = R * N * (1-N) / CP$$

- Where K is the carrying capacity
- R is the rate of population increase
- N is the population size
- CP is the change in population size

Another problem occurred when this method was attempted in the farmland units. Here my estimates of KCC did not consistently match expectation. While there appeared to be a gradient of increasing KCC with decreasing latitude, there were many fliers. Some of the reasons may include short unit histories due to boundary changes, wider limits on estimates of deer range, unmeasured drain caused by high roadkill, or other factors. Obviously, farm fields were the major factor elevating estimates of KCC to well over 100 deer/sq.mi of habitat. Certainly, farm woodlots can tolerate far fewer deer than indicated by using KCC as a guide.

Sudden changes in KCC may occur as with artificial feeding and will result in quick (first year) response from deer. But the habitat has no way of quickly responding to elevated deer

densities and browsing. Studies on deer impacts on forest plants must be conducted before adjusting deer density goals upward.

Experience in Wisconsin suggests that a deer population goal should not exceed 65% to 70% of maximum carrying capacity in heavily forested deer management units if one wants to have an acceptable rate of seeing deer, a decent harvest, reasonably healthy and productive deer herds, and success growing and regenerating most timber species. There is evidence that 65-70% may be too high for overall forest health (composition, structure, and function:).

Goals above 25/sq.mi of deer range in farmland (where KCC likely exceeds 100 deer/sq.mi) have tended to cause social unrest due to crop damage, car-deer crashes, and requirements for nontraditional (WI) hunts to achieve necessary antlerless harvests. Herd control becomes very problematic at higher herd densities as has been recently demonstrated in Wisconsin when overwinter densities in farmland reach or exceed 40/sq.mi of habitat. Note that despite over 600,000 deer hunters in Wisconsin, they are unable or unwilling to shoot enough antlerless deer in farmland DMUs during “preferred” traditional archery and firearm hunts in the state.

— Keith R. McCaffery is a retired deer research biologist from northern Wisconsin.

CITED

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WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM LOST DEER

It was the biggest buck he had ever shot, but now it was gone. The big deer had appeared like a ghost just before dark at about 170 yards. He was quartering away, but that buck was too good to pass up. The hunter nervously got the scope on him, and tried not to jerk the trigger. The shot felt good, but the deer ran off without showing any sign of being hit.

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A pass-through creates two holes for blood to flow and because the arrow is no longer in the animal, there's nothing to plug the hole. All of this contributes to a better blood trail for you to follow. DANIEL SCHMIDT

The hunter hurried out of the stand to where he thought the deer was standing. He found no blood, primarily because he was 30 yards closer to his stand than the buck had been. Wisely the hunter circled the spot, and after 10 minutes which seemed more like 10 hours, he found a small pool of blood and a bit of brown hair. But besides the one spot, there was no blood trail that he could discern.

He was relieved that he had hit the deer, but his headlamp wasn't too bright at its best, and the batteries were weakening. He would meet up with his older hunting buddy and figure out what to do.

His buddy had heard his shot, and asked as soon as he saw his friend, "Is he down?"

"Afraid not," said the younger hunter. "I thought I got a good shot on him. He's a big one, and I did find some blood, but not a clear blood trail."

The two hunters went back to the small pool of blood with the weak headlamp and the slightly stronger flashlight of his buddy. They circled the spot for 20 or 30 minutes and failed to find another drop of blood. The darkness and the thick brush made the search tough.

"Hey, let's not make bad matters worse by jumping him," suggested the more experienced hunter.

"Yeah, I was thinking the same thing. Let's come back tomorrow when the sun will give us a lot better light," said the shooter.

"Well, if we don't find him ourselves, we can always call Grady. He and his dogs will find him. Don't worry, one way or another, we'll find him." The older hunter's calming assurance made both hunters feel better.

In the bright light of the next day, after an hour of futility, the young hunter turned to his buddy, "Let's call your friend with the dogs."

So just before 9AM Grady got the call. He quickly finished the task at hand, loaded his two dogs, Scout and Buckshot, into the back of his truck and headed for the site of that small puddle of buck blood.

Grady and his youngest son, Silas, unloaded the dogs which found the buck's scent in under 10 minutes. The two dogs took off and Grady, Silas and the hunters followed as fast as they could tear through the dense and tangled brush of a 3-year-old cut-over.

Grady and his two dogs recovered 28 deer in the 21-22 season, and 24 in the 20-21 season. Their longest track was a bit over 8 miles and took about 4 hours inside a 1000-acre high-fence area. Another deer went 4 miles and took an hour and a half. The biggest buck was a 21-point that scored 198. Recovering all these deer provides a lot of information that can be useful to us hunters. And the deer they couldn't recover can teach us a lot too. Let's take a look.

THE DEER RECOVERY PROCESS

Grady uses two dogs to find wounded deer. His more experienced dog is Scout, a Mountain Cur who is ten years old, and his younger dog, Buckshot, a Black Mouth Cur, is three. Grady's hounds are equipped with radio collars which allows him to keep track of his dogs, and the distance of the tracking.

Grady pointed out that his dogs are trained to find wounded deer. I was shocked to hear him say that his dogs would not pursue healthy deer. He related that on occasion he had unloaded his dogs with deer in sight, but the dogs focused solely on the blood trail. Wow, that's some well-trained curs! And on that point, Grady also noted that he had come in behind other dogs that weren't able to track and recover the wounded animals. Not every dog can find wounded deer.

I was also a bit surprised, at first, to hear that the dogs seemed to do very well in their tracking after, and even during, rain. Of course even a little rain makes following a blood trail very difficult. Some of you readers have probably noticed that wetness makes smells stronger. This seems to work for trailing dogs too.

LEARN FROM DEER TRACKERS

I asked Grady what created the most opportunities for his dogs. He quickly offered that leg shots that

did not hit the chest cavity provided the most trailing jobs. The hardest recoveries were for deer hit in the upper leg, brisket, and gut-shots with no exit wound. He estimated that 80% of his tracking efforts were for upper front-leg shots.

To my surprise, he noted that calibers smaller than .270 seemed to be over-represented in his recovery experience. But, more important than caliber to Grady, who harvests several deer every season himself, is that hunters sight-in their bows and guns before each season. He also recommends that hunters use a shooting "checklist" and focus on making an accurate shot on a vital area, and save the "Buck Fever" for after the shot. We D&DH readers already know this, but we may have hunting buddies who might need reminding.

He also stated that hunters need to wait a minimum of 30 minutes after the shot. He noted that pushing wounded deer makes recovery much harder. Likewise, Grady prefers to keep the deer search party to 4 or fewer people so as to reduce amount of disturbance of the trail and the likelihood of jumping the shot deer. That said, he knows the excitement that these searches elicit, so he doesn't strictly enforce any limit. His dogs don't absolutely need a blood trail to start their trailing, but it makes it easier if there is fresh blood and eliminates the need for guessing. He said hunters need to be especially careful to note exactly where the deer was standing when the shot was fired, and exactly where the deer was lost to sight. Noting unusual trees or other markers is very helpful in both of these endeavors, but it takes presence of mind and deliberate effort to establish the correct spot in the midst of high excitement.

Grady and Silas also shared how impressed they were with the amount of blood a deer could lose and still keep on its feet. I recall a veterinary medicine laboratory I took in graduate school. After a four-legged animal had lost about two-thirds of its blood volume, the animal could still maintain heart rhythm and blood pressure—that is, it could still live and move. In

IF YOU NEED A RECOVERY TEAM

If, despite your best efforts, you find yourself in need of a recovery team, you may be able to find one on, of all places, Facebook. Two Alabama Facebook listings are, “Alabama Blood Trailing Network” with 12,000 members and “Nose To The Ground Alabama: Wounded Game Recovery” with about 15,700 members. A Facebook search identified blood trailing operations in other states.

Depending on how close the deer was to your property’s boundaries, you may need to secure permission from neighboring land-owners to come onto their land in pursuit of your deer. Keep in mind that one of Grady’s recoveries was an 8-mile track!

contrast, we humans can’t lose nearly that much of our blood and survive.

As you would expect, most recovery calls come from hunters taking shots just before dark. Grady recommends that you always have a bright, dependable flashlight for evening hunts. Again, he cautioned against pushing wounded deer too hard at dark.

Season before last, my son Andrew shot a nice buck at 50 yards right at sundown (legal in Alabama). We found one small pool of blood, but I knew from scouting that the brush around this area was extremely thick and I didn’t want to accidentally jump that buck, so we backed out quickly. The next

morning we found his 130-inch buck in just a few minutes of search in the daylight.

I have always heard, and on a few occasions seen, that wounded deer will go to water. Grady confirmed that perspective. Indeed, in hearing him recount recoveries, I was impressed at how often creeks were crossed and how often deer were recovered from water. So if you lose the blood trail and water is near, start your search in that direction.

ONE MORE DEER RECOVERY STORY

Rob and his 12 year-old son, Parker, were bow hunting the afternoon of 5 December in a shooting house in Aliceville, AL. About four pm a doe worked into

shooting range. Parker squeezed off a shot from his crossbow and... missed. Rob got down from the stand and looked for blood, but the bolt sticking in the ground was clean. As for many of us serious hunters, Parker’s miss was frustrating and the young man told his dad he wanted to quit hunting. After a bit of persuasion by Rob, Parker agreed to stick it out until dark hoping for another doe.

About 5pm an 8-point buck emerged from the woods into the greenfield at about 400 yards. Parker calmly waited as the big buck worked down towards their stand. The buck walked within 25 yards of their position. With the deer at 30yards, Parker took a deep breath, put his scope on the buck’s mid-rib-cage and squeezed off his shot. There was no doubt this time that Parker had made a hit and it looked like a pretty good one. With darkness rapidly approaching, they got down and found blood and began to trail their buck, but the blood stopped just 20 yards after he had entered the woods.

Rob had used Grady and his dogs back in November of that season and he knew what to do. Rob recalled what a thrill it was to see Grady’s dogs do their work in finding wounded deer. He called Grady to one of his easiest recovery jobs. Parker’s deer had gone only about 300 yards total and was only about 40 yards from the field’s edge. The broadhead behind shoulder in the mid-chest had done well in dispatching the buck.

That season, Grady’s team had six calls for young hunters, and found all six of their deer! And Grady shared that this is what keeps him in the recovery business—seeing the smiles of the youngest hunters and their parents when they find a lost deer.

— Dr. Phillip Bishop is a former NASA scientist and a professor at the University of Alabama. He is an avid deer hunter and expert on physiology and suspension trauma.

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5 TIPS FOR HUNTING SUCCESS... WHEN IT'S TOO HOT TO RUT

was surrounded by fresh rubs and two good scrapes. The Iowa ridge top was torn up with deer sign. Without question, it was the peak of the rut. It was a day deer should be running everywhere. Unfortunately, it also was 83 degrees.

CHARLES J. ALSHEIMER



CHARLES J. ALSHEIMER

What do you do when the peak of the rut falls during a hot spell? That often happens to hunters all over the country. It is common in the South. Well, you can sit and sweat and cuss. A lot of us do that. You can stay home under the air conditioner. Some of us do that. You can go fishing. A few of us do that.

However, there is another option — you can go deer hunting.

If you are looking for a way to save your prime-rut hunt, thinking it is ruined by hot weather, you may be in luck. You have some choices in how you can handle this dilemma that just may be around for a while—global warming and all that. If you are locked into your vacation time during the usual November rut, then the first thing you have to do is use some logic.

Understand this: There is nothing different about the rut. It is still going on. The does are still coming into heat and the bucks are still breeding them. That is all that usually happens during the rut. The chasing is going on as it always has. The difference is, it is happening after dark. Personally, I too would rather make love under an air conditioner than in the hot sun...most of the time anyway. And that is all the bucks are doing. However, it may also well be that fewer does are actually getting bred. Keep that in mind.

Now I am not condoning night hunting but there is a way to hunt these bucks with some degree of success. To start with:

(1) There is a window of activity just at daylight and just at dark. In the mornings, you have about 90

minutes of good hunting time. About the time the sun really starts to warm things up, it is all over. Then again,

(2) For about 45 minutes before dark, you have a flurry of movement. But you knew that, didn't you? Nothing new or earth shattering about those two tips. The best time to hunt? In many instances, it is between

(3) 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. The heat of the day.

Use some logic. Hunters, frustrated by no activity after 8:30 in the morning, are getting hot and sweaty. At 10 a.m., they climb down and leave the woods, cussing the heat and the ruined rut.

About an hour later, the bucks, having rested for several hours, are starting to get hungry. They get up and move around freely. They know the hunters are gone. Usually they either saw or heard the hunters leave.

They run onto a hot doe trail and then, as bucks are wont to do, they follow it. They may not follow it at a run, but they do follow it.

In the process of all this following, they run onto a hot doe, and the chase is on. It won't be long and it won't be at breakneck speed because the doe will get overheated too. But it will happen. If the doe is ready to breed, she will. If not, she won't and that buck may not stay with her until she is ready.

So there you have a new, different option. Hunt in the hot midday. However...usually, that activity does not happen where you would expect. So, you have to think.

How do I know this happens? In 2001, during a really hot (air temperature-wise) November rut, I saw this happen. It was 12:01 p.m., one minute after noon.

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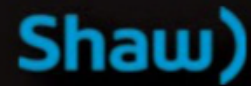
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Another guide and I were working a blood trail from a deer one of our hunters had shot that morning. The lightly wounded doe had made a loop that took her along the side of a food plot. As we walked, scouring the ground for blood sign, we heard a racket in the leaves ahead of us. A different doe, followed closely by a nice 10-point buck, ran into the food plot. She...and he... made several rounds in the field (does are bad about that for some reason.). I could tell she was not quite ready. As she skipped back into the woods, the buck just lay down in the shade at the field edge. His tongue was hanging out, he was panting and he had a disgusted look in his eyes. I know just how he felt.

The other guide mentioned that was the "...third time he had seen that happen in six days." One or two light bulbs went off over my head and I started to paw the ground.

The next morning dawned with a tinge of frost. In the river bottom, action started at daybreak and ended when the hunter arrowed a P&Y, nine-point before the sun was fully awake.

On the other hand, hunter number two stuck his good buck, also P&Y, at 11 minutes before noon. He was hunting from the ground in a makeshift blind that gave him a shot at a trail between a steep hardwood ridge and an open feeding area in a corner of a picked bean field.

It was an obvious travel/transition trail with access to open areas *where the does could be seen and romanced*. It was the right place to ambush a buck chasing a doe the buck had pushed out of a bedding area.

There is yet another factor to add.

(4) These bucks may well get thirsty. If you are hunting an area with scarce ground water, give some thought to a stand near a pond or creek. On two occasions, I have killed bucks in the middle of the day near a small pond.

So those are four tips or possibilities if you have to, or want to, hunt a hot weather, prime-time rut.

But here is another. You might have noticed that I did not say *I* killed a buck during that hot spell in

November. I did not even pull my bow back. Besides, I was getting paid to guide.

I knew that sooner or later it would get cold. So I saved my Iowa tag to use for a souvenir and waited until early December at home. I knew that 28 days after the rutting cycle in November, a second cycle, featuring all the does that did not get bred in November, would begin. My thinking being --

(5) There may be more un-bred does than usual, making for an intense, second rutting cycle.

I bought a Nebraska muzzle-loader tag and on 14 December, year of our Lord 2001, I was sitting and shivering in a hickory tree overlooking a hardwood ridge finger. It was 11 degrees and the ridge finger led to a picked cornfield on one end and picked bean field on the other. The 34th deer to come by me was a nice 10-point and I, being a hunter and dang near frozen to death, killed him.

It was 7:40 a.m. and deer were running everywhere. Rubs were fresh, scrapes were open and the rut was in full swing. It was just like a good November rut.

That afternoon, I arrowed an eight-point in Missouri. He was vigorously pursuing a fat doe. I guess it was 'pursuitus interruptus' because that was as far as he got. It was 3:20 and I then missed a big turkey gobbler at 4:05, which has nothing to do with this story.

So there you are. Those, as far as I can tell, are your options. Use some logic and try for a buck during the hot weather rut or save your time off until 28 days later. Of course, the most preferable course of action is to do both. Here is one thing upon which you can just about rely: If you see bucks chasing does in a particular place during the November session of "does are us" they will be chasing them there in December. And, the more does that go wanting in November, the more action in December.



GET OUT *The Grill!*

There's nothing better than firing up the grill and gathering family and friends to give thanks for what nature has provided. The "cook-out" tradition is one that lends itself well to celebrations and making life-long memories with those that mean the most to us, so why not take advantage of that as much as possible?

Venison Rocky Mountain Oysters



PHOTO & TEXT BY JACK HENNESSY

A lot of hunters may bridle at the concept of handling, let alone eating, buck gonads, but all deer-camp taboo aside, the truth is this: Prepping venison testicles is easy, and they actually taste very good and are good for you.

There are countless stories dating back centuries of various cultures eating the testicles from large animals as a boost to stamina and physical prowess. These organs are rich in vitamins, minerals, and protein, and some experts even suggest they do indeed offer a brief boost in one's own testosterone levels.

In our country, this practice of cooking these organs dates back to the Old West, when ranchers, wishing to utilize every part of the animal, marketed cooked testicles as an inexpensive source of food. Apparently they couldn't sell them when they called them what they were, so the substitute name "Rocky Mountain Oysters" was created. And yes, when properly cleaned, they do look like oysters and when fried, to me, they do indeed taste like fried oysters.

But you may ask: Is this one of those "Just to say you did it" recipes? Or one of those "Use every part of the animal" recipes? Yes to both, but as mentioned above, these things are actually delicious. If you served them to your friends at deer camp without ever letting them know what they were, your friends would likely gobble them down, smile, and give you the thumbs up. They don't taste funky or have any smells or flavor tones remotely similar to any scent you might put down while hunting.

This all may seem like a lot of effort for a couple oysters, but I can assure you it's this simple: Cut off the scrotum. Cut off any remains of the pizzle. Pull apart the scrotal sac to reveal testicles. Pull them out and rinse off under cold water. Using a very sharp knife, very delicately open a slit on the side of the hard membrane (which runs alongside side of gonad) and carefully open the gonad. Trim away any hard membranes. Your final product should look like an oyster. There may be a thin membrane attached to other side and that is fine. Your main goal is to carefully open up the sac and trim away any thick membranes that would lead to chewy textures when cooked.

Here is a quick and easy fried recipe, but there are several other versatile cooking methods you can use. Feel welcome to fire up Google as you fire up your grill.



DIP INGREDIENTS:

- + 1/2 cup mayonnaise
- + 1/4 cup sour cream
- + 1 tablespoon Frank's RedHot Original
- + 1/2 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- + 1/4 teaspoon onion powder
- + 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
- + 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
- + 1 pint heavy whipping cream
- + 8 ounces quartered button mushrooms
- + Optional garnish: Freshly chopped flat-leaf Italian parsley

FRY INGREDIENTS:

- + Buttermilk
- + 1 cup flour
- + 1/4 cup your favorite spice mix
- + Peanut oil for frying

DIRECTIONS:

Follow earlier steps for removing and cleaning buck gonads.

Once in oyster form, soak in buttermilk in the fridge for 3-6 hours.

Heat a fryer or pot of peanut oil to 375 F.

Thoroughly mix all dip ingredients and set aside in fridge until ready to serve.

Mix 1 cup flour and 1/4 cup of your favorite spice mix (I used The Provider's FOWL blend). When oil is at 375 and when ready to fry, take testicles from buttermilk soak and toss in flour and spice mix. Shake off any excess and add to oil.

Fry until golden brown. Remove and place on a stainless steel grate to cool for a minute before enjoying fresh.

Any questions or comments, please reach out on Instagram: @WildGameJack

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TERM (FRENCH)	DESCRIPTION	TEMPERATURE RANGE	(USDA RECOMMENDED)
EXTRA-RARE OR BLUE (BLEU)	VERY RED AND COLD	115-120 °F	
RARE (SAIGNANT)	COLD RED CENTER; SOFT	125-130 °F	
MEDIUM RARE (À POINT)	WARM RED CENTER; FIRMER	130-140 °F	(145 °F)
MEDIUM (CUIT)	PINK AND FIRM	140-150 °F	(160 °F)
MEDIUM WELL (BIEN CUIT)	SMALL AMOUNT OF PINK IN CENTER	150-155 °F	
WELL DONE	GRAY-BROWN THROUGHOUT; FIRM	160-212 °F	(170 °F)
OVERCOOK	BLACKEN THROUGHOUT; CRISPY	>212 °F	(>220 °F)

Not only is grilling the most social way to enjoy your venison; it is also the healthiest. Baking or frying your meat cooks away a lot of its nutrients and often adds an unhealthy dose of fat. The higher temperatures and faster cooking times needed for grilling allow meat to retain more of its natural moisture, nutrients and vitamins.

Grilling can also cut back on energy costs. This is especially true during summer, when turning on the oven to bake a venison roast forces your air conditioner to work harder while at the same time driving up your utility bill.

Because you deserve to eat the best tasting meat possible, it's extremely important to use the correct grilling techniques when you prepare your venison. This might mean changing up your routine depending on what's for dinner.

HOW DOES A GRILL WORK?

Some grills, such as electric barbecue grills and pellet or water smokers, slow cook meat using steam and smoke. However, the vast majority of grills in use today are either standard gas models or charcoal grills.

In the case of charcoal grills, the distribution of the coals on the charcoal grate determines the intensity of the heat. With gas grills, burners create heat and a system captures it and disperses it to the food. This system can be inverted v-shaped metal panels, lava rocks or ceramic briquets. However, the burners are what control the level of the heat.

Grills impart a unique flavor by adding smoke from the open flame. Also, when fats and juices from the food drip down to the hot coals or

heating medium, they sizzle and smoke, which imparts even more flavor to the food.

GRILLING VENISON

One of the biggest advantages of grilling your venison is that it is easy to do. It's also fun.

The first step in cooking your venison is deciding if your cut of meat warrants direct or indirect heat. Direct cooking means placing the meat directly over the heat source. It is used for steaks, chops and kabobs and is the most common method for cooking venison. The high heat sears the meat, creating color and flavor, and sealing the meat's juices inside. Indirect cooking means placing the meat off to the side of the heat source. This method is for cuts that require more than 20 minutes of cooking, such as roasts. It requires a cover on the grill — one that should stay in place the entire time.

For direct cooking on a charcoal grill, spread the coals evenly across the charcoal grate after they develop a gray ash coating. Place the meat on the cooking grate directly over the coals. Place a lid on the grill, and only remove it to turn the meat or at the end of the recommended cooking time.

When using a gas grill, preheat the grill with the burners on High. Then, adjust the burners to your desired temperature after you place the venison on the grate. Again, close the lid, and lift it only to turn food or to test for doneness.

For indirect heat on a charcoal grill, light your charcoal and heat the grill with the charcoal in the center. Then, use your tongs to arrange the charcoal into equal piles off to each side of the required cooking area.

On a gas grill, simply turn off any burners that are directly below the meat, or place it as far off to the side as possible.

MEAT RESTING PERIOD

After desired cooking temperature is reached, remove the meat from heat source and let stand 10 to 15 minutes before carving. The amount of time required for resting varies with the size of the cut of your meat. During this resting time, the meat continues to cook (meat temperature will rise 5 to 20 degrees after it is removed from the heat source) and the juices redistribute. This is the key to juicy, sumptuous grilled venison.

DONENESS

Venison doneness (or gradations, such as rare, medium rare, etc.) is a touchy subject.

The United States Department of Agriculture recommends a temperature of at least 145 degrees for beef, veal, lamb steaks and roasts in order to prevent foodborne illness. However, being a very lean meat, venison is at its juiciest and most flavorful when it is not overly heated.

Above is a table of gradation and USDA recommendations.

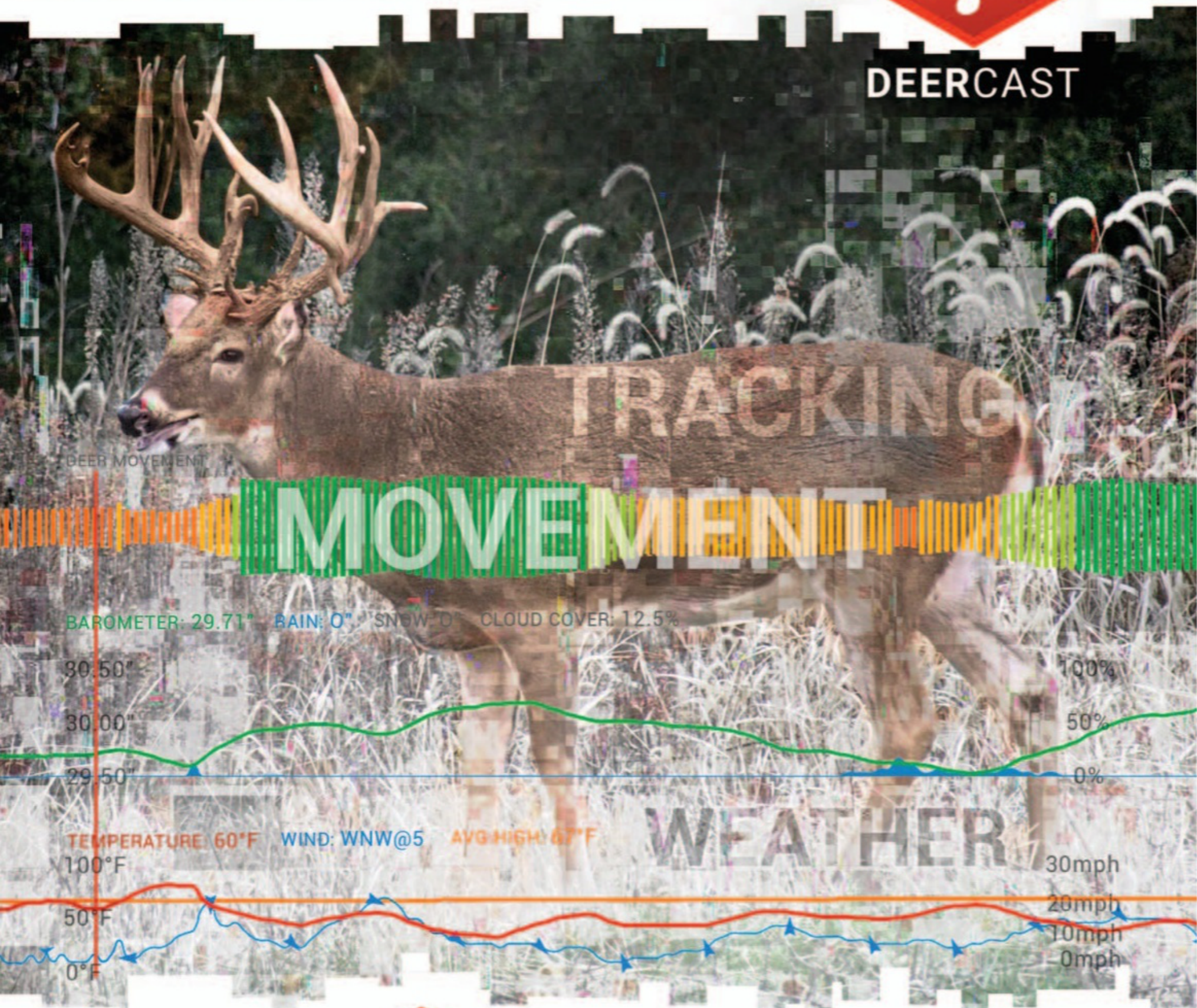
— *We have numerous videos online that show proper butchering, processing and even some recipes. The “Deer Camp Butcher Shop” series with Brad Fenson is especially helpful for those looking for more efficient ways to use their venison. Check them out on our channel at www.YouTube.com/DDHOnline.*



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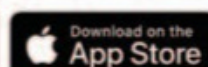


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STEVE BARTYLLA

Prepping licking branches early helps make them a normal part of a deer's life, well before it even matters.

3 THINGS THAT'LL PAY OFF NEXT SEASON

There are many reasons that some are done hunting for the year, some good and some not so good. In either case, here are three things one can do now, to make next season even better still!

FIND NEW SPOTS

Want to know a couple secrets that most that consistently kill slob bucks have? There are exceptions to everything, but most either hunt ridiculously good ground or they work extremely hard at continually finding new spots to hunt, as the more spots they can access and already know, the better the odds of one or more of them offering a Mr. Big to hunt.

We all want to have pristine, private grounds to ourselves, and be sure to acquire permission for it, when or if you ever get that chance. That said, many hunters in many states prove every year that more than a few great bucks come from public lands. Some public grounds certainly are overrun with other hunters. Luckily, way more aren't than we may believe.

There's no better time to find where other hunters aren't going than during season. In fact, it's super easy right now to figure out what public grounds to avoid, as they're being actively pummeled, and which ones are the somewhat undiscovered gems. Find the spots within those gems that others aren't going and you likely found where Mr. Big will

be drawn to, once the more limited pressure starts mounting.

PICK NEXT YEAR'S SCRAPES

Since we're find new lands to hunt, we may as well find new stand sites. For me, now on up until spring green up is when I nail which scrapes I'll be hunting next season, as most serious scrapes occur in the same spots year after year.

Mature bucks can literally make hundreds of scrapes in a fall. Most of them aren't consistently revisited and even fewer are during daylight, making it seemingly impossible to predict which will be hot and which are duds.

Getting out there now gives us the chance to inspect the scrapes for usage levels. The small, barely scratched earth scrapes are to be ignored, but those the size of car hoods or shaped like bowls scream repeated workings.

Now, cut that list even further by focusing only on those within protective cover or in small, protected food sources, as those have the highest odds of repeating as consistently worked, with daylight visits.

SCRAPE UP NEXT SEASON'S ACTION

Speaking of scrapes, mock scrapes don't have to cost us a cent and are one of the most ignored, effective tools we have. Every scrape Mr. Big is working on our hunting ground keeps us in the game a couple minutes longer. Every

scrape Mr. Big works off our hunting grounds keeps us out of the game that much longer, and that's scratching the surface.

Now is a great time to bend, tie and wire existing branches into place. By doing so, we're getting a jump on the deer population making them regular stops.

At the very least, get lick branches positioned in the shooting lanes around stands, with the lick branches pointing back at the stand.

This will remove a lot of needless grunts, shouts and whistles to stop them, as well as focus their attentions away from the stand, at a known shooting distance, giving us all day to pick our spot and shoot.

To really juice them up, add a Magnum Scrape Dripper, filled with Golden or Active-Scrape, above one of the lick branches positioned around the stand, but leave the rest as merely lick branches with a little scuffed dirt under them. It's a great trick for inspiring a bunch of scraping around the stand, while keeping them on the ground we hunt, just that much longer.

CONCLUSION

Though seasons are still rocking, we can also use this time to make our 2023 seasons that much better, right now! All three of these acts are great starting points.



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BOW SHOP

ALAN CLEMONS

HOW TO MAKE BOWHUNTING Fun!

OFF-SEASON IS A GOOD TIME
TO INTRODUCE NEWCOMERS.

I'm unsure what wild bug crawled into our son's shirt this past autumn, but when he announced he'd like to shoot one of my bows and had an interest in deer hunting, I tried pretty hard to scratch that itch.

He's always been interested in mainstream sports, notably basketball and golf, and has never had much interest in hunting or shooting. We've been to the shooting range with some of my firearms, which he enjoyed. But I've never pushed. I've never said, "You're coming with me today," or, "You need to learn to do this because you're going to be a hunter!"

I told him and his sister if they're interested in something, I'd be glad to take them, show them, encourage them or whatever. But I wasn't going to pressure them into anything. I also wasn't going to label him "my hunting buddy" simply because of his gender and ignore any interests our daughter might have. She, by the way, is a pretty crack shot with the rifle and enjoyed the archery range but prefers dance. So, we're all good.

Our son and I went to the nearest archery shop, which has an indoor range and selection of bows. It's about five minutes from our house, so that's pretty convenient. Good facility, product selection and folks, too. They picked out a Mission Craze, cranked it down a bit — remember, he's a first-time shooter — and we went to the range.

Within five minutes, he was comfortable with the bow, had adjusted his stance and was feeling a little cocky even with nothing but a release and arrows. No sight, no peep or anything on the raw bow. At close range, confidence is a good thing for a newbie, so we upped the challenge: Hit that red, dime-sized sticker on the target.

Whap! He drilled it. We laughed, and he shot for another 10 minutes or so. We've been back since then and also have been shooting in the yard with my Block target, so it looks like another archer and, possibly, bowhunter, might be added to the ranks.

What are you doing this summer to stay in tune with your bow skills or get someone interested in archery? Shooting in the yard? Perhaps at a local range one or two times a week? Maybe competing in a 3-D league with fellow

Youth bows like the Mission Menace are ideal for backyard practice. What's nice about these bows is they can also be used for hunting when the youngster is ready to make that step.



shooters? Many possibilities exist to stay in shape and, perhaps, get a family member or friend involved, even if they don't pursue hunting.

If you're a yard-shooter, the first thing to consider is safety if you live in a neighborhood or have other houses nearby. A good target is critical, of course, but look past it at potential arrow flight. You don't want an errant shot flying or skittering toward someone's house or outbuildings. Distance might be a consideration, too. You might be limited to 10- to 20-yard shots, so concentrate on your form, breathing and release.

Range and 3-D leagues offer great competition, camaraderie and the chance to practice on targets at various distances. Check into your state bowhunting association to see if they have leagues. Most do, some of them with regional competitions leading to a state championship. An online search should provide information on other associations, competitions and ranges near your home. Most provide different age levels for competition, so your youngster, wife or girlfriend might be less skittish about competing against "the men" if they have classifications for themselves.

As for equipment, new shooters diving in head-first can get dizzy with the array of choices for bows, arrows, releases and gear. This is where your archery shop or friends come into play. Ask for advice, check into used bows that might not hit the budget too sharply, and go with your instincts. If your young or new shooter progresses well and wants better equipment, decide what you should do. Plunking down several hundred bucks for all new gear, only to have a youngster or spouse decide they're not interested later, means you might have to take a hit on your investment. Start slowly and build up, just like with practice.

Summer is a great time to keep your mind and body in tune with your bow, whether you're a new shooter or an old-timer. Practice smartly, have fun and get ready for the season that will be here in just a few months.





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BRYCE M. TOWSLEY



The first gun I hunted deer with was an Iver Johnson single-shot 20 gauge. My uncle loaned it to me and my grandfather gave me two “pumpkin ball” shells. Those had a single round ball and being a kid I cut one open to see the ball. That left me with one shell to hunt.

Gramp was peeved, but he swapped out for an old 1892 Winchester in .38-40. He handed me 10 shells, which turned out to be important. The gun was a wreck, so worn it jammed every time I cycled the action. It had been cut to kid’s size by a guy who was either drunk or blind, maybe both. But, I loved it because I shot my first deer with it in 1966. It was a big doe and I used eight of the shells. I guess I was pretty excitable at 11 years old.

I baled hay all summer in 1968 to buy my first real deer rifle. It was the first year the .243 Winchester was offered in the Model 788 Remington. I was too poor to buy a scope so when I shot another doe that fall I used iron sights and one of my very first handloads.

That gun was extremely accurate and I cleaned out a lot of woodchucks from the local farms, even with the crude sights. Once I managed to scrape up enough to buy a Weaver K-4 scope I felt I couldn’t miss.

I shot a few more deer with that rifle, including my first buck, but once out of high school and with a real job, I bought a Remington 760 pump action rifle in .30-06 and semi-retired the .243 to coyote hunting. I still took it to the deer woods at least one day every year, just to maintain the deer rifle certification.

I was fitting a fiberglass stock to the gun when I broke off the stud that holds the trigger to the action. I sent it to Remington for repair and what followed was a disaster. By then the 788 had been discontinued. They destroyed my rifle and sent me one I suspect came from the reject barrel. Several phone calls and letters later, they replaced it with a Model 700 rifle. A more expensive gun, but not my rifle. I have since bought another 788 from that same era in .243, but it’s just not the same.

The Model 788 came out as a low cost alternative to the Model 700. It featured nine locking lugs located at the back of the bolt, a round receiver without bolt

MY FIRST DEER RIFLE

TOP: A recently restored Remington Model 788.

RIGHT: Bryce M. Towsley at 13 with a doe he shot with his 788 Remington. Also, as evident, the first deer ever field-dressed alone.

LEFT: Bryce M. Towsley with his first buck. Shot with a Remington Model 788 in .243 Winchester and using handloaded ammo.

raceways and a detachable center feed box magazine. The stock was plain hardwood and the metal was roughly finished. Ugly? Sure, but those guns would really shoot. It’s been speculated that the reason the Model 788 was dropped was because it was outshooting the more expensive Model 700 rifles.

I also have a 788 in .308, but my collection pales compared to my friend Dean Wetherby’s. He has Model 788 rifles in all nine cartridges offered. I am even converting his “extra” .243 into a .358 Winchester.

Remington’s toe dip into the world of inexpensive rifles resulted in a homely rifle that performed like a beauty queen, and the legacy of the Model 788 is seen in the high prices they currently demand.

I miss mine every day.



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PURSUIT ADDS MORE DISTRIBUTION

Pursuit Media LLC announces new streaming distribution for PursuitUP channel with major provider.

Pursuit Media LLC has reached an agreement with TCL that will bring the network's popular content to millions of new users via the Pursuit UP streaming channel.

TCL is one of the largest brands in the TV world and has a significant and growing reach in the U.S. with units being sold all over the country by major retailers. The Pursuit UP channel will come standard with the Smart TV in the TCL Channel lineup easily found on the unit's menu. Best of all, there is no additional subscription cost to owners of TCL televisions to watching PursuitUP and all of the content on it.

"Another tremendous accomplishment for Pursuit Channel," said Rusty Faulk, Founder and CEO of Pursuit Media. "Our team works tirelessly to find more distribution for Pursuit content and the addition of the TCL platform is a huge addition for us. We are so proud of our network and programming partners that help us promote conservation and celebrate the outdoors lifestyle that we love so dearly. Having PursuitUP available to the millions of users on this major platform continues to show our commitment to achieving market penetration, wherever we can, to share that message," he said.

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PURSUIT MEDIA STRIKES EXCLUSIVE PARTNERSHIP WITH TED NUGENT

Pursuit Media, LLC, in partnership with Ted Nugent and his brand, Spirit of the Wild, announce an exclusive partnership in the outdoor entertainment industry. The announcement was made by Founder and CEO of Pursuit Media, Rusty Faulk. Ted Nugent has a storied history in the outdoors space and continues to be an industry-leading content provider for audiences across the country. Known for his enthusiastic and entertaining personality, Uncle Ted is beloved by millions as an entertainer and tireless advocate for the hunting and shooting sports.

His show, "Spirit of the Wild," is a true depiction of the hunting lifestyle and highlights the brotherhood and sisterhood of hunting, while also providing world-class production and entertainment.

Faulk observed, "Nobody in the history of the great American outdoors lifestyle has celebrated and promoted the truth about hunting, fishing, trapping and our sacred Second Amendment like Ted Nugent. For more than 50 years Ted has used his household name global celebrity to crush the anti-hunters, anti-gunners and animal-rights scammers to literally billions of people in a sincere, knowledgeable and believable way. We are proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with this great American conservation and freedom hero." The partnership is an exclusive, multi-year arrangement between the two entities and includes the development of new and exciting content and marketing initiatives.

"The Nugent family is thrilled, excited and genuinely inspired for Spirit of the Wild upgrade alongside our American Spirit BloodBrothers at the Pursuit Network," stated Ted. "Only the Pursuit team has met the challenges of a changing market and developed a long-term model that reaches viewers wherever they prefer to get their outdoors content. Pursuit is hands down the best option for our beloved outdoors community. It's our honor to promote and celebrate without compromise the wonderful hunting, fishing, trapping and Second Amendment perfection of this wonderful American Dream with people equally dedicated and passionate."

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POST-RUT WHITETAILS

TEXT & PHOTO BY CHARLES J. ALSHEIMER

There is no doubt that many hunters question a buck's decreased desire to breed in December in the North, especially when magazines tout the virtues of the so-called "second rut." A buck's ability to keep up the rutting chase in the post-rut moon is possible, but in most cases highly unlikely. Why? Research (Lambase 1972) shows that a buck's sperm count in December is about half what it was in November. So, physically, the drive isn't there. As a result, bucks are calmer, more collected animals when the post-rut moon arrives.

Because survival is now his main objective, a buck becomes a different creature in December and early January. Oh, he will still breed, and often does, but generally he isn't out looking for does the way he was in October and November. Rather, he feeds, rests and takes what comes his way.

When December arrives in the North, the entire deer family group gravitates toward known food sources, such as cornfields in farm country or cedar swamp yarding areas in wilderness regions. The

main objective of bucks and does during this time is food, food, food. As a result, trying to hunt rub and scrape lines as you did in October and November is, for the most part, a waste of time.

MAN'S INFLUENCE ON THE POST-RUT

In addition to being worn out and hungry, the whitetail has another thing that keeps him from moving about: the constant presence of man. The hunting pressure incurred during September, October and November causes many bucks to become nocturnal. When formulating a hunting strategy for nocturnal post-rut bucks, it's important to understand that all white-tailed bucks are not the same. They fall into two categories, yearlings and adults. This is especially evident in areas where hunting pressure is heavy.

Yearling bucks are much easier to hunt, and it takes a lot of pressure for them to become truly nocturnal. The sex urge in November's prime breeding season overwhelms most yearling bucks, keeping them constantly on the move. This

makes yearlings huntable even in the post-rut. However, if a buck is lucky enough to survive his yearling season, he becomes a totally different animal the second season when he is 2½ years old. These deer, as well as older bucks, really go underground in the post-rut.

Contrary to popular belief among hunters, bucks do not move out of the country when hunting pressure increases. Telemetry studies conducted throughout North America indicate that whitetails do not abandon their core range during hunting season. Bucks simply hunker down, find the thickest cover possible, and limit their movements to nighttime or the fringes of daylight. Couple this with a buck's weakened, rut-ravaged body and it's easy to see why hunting the post-rut is the most challenging time to bag a buck.

— Charles Alsheimer was an authority on whitetail behavior for more than 40 years.



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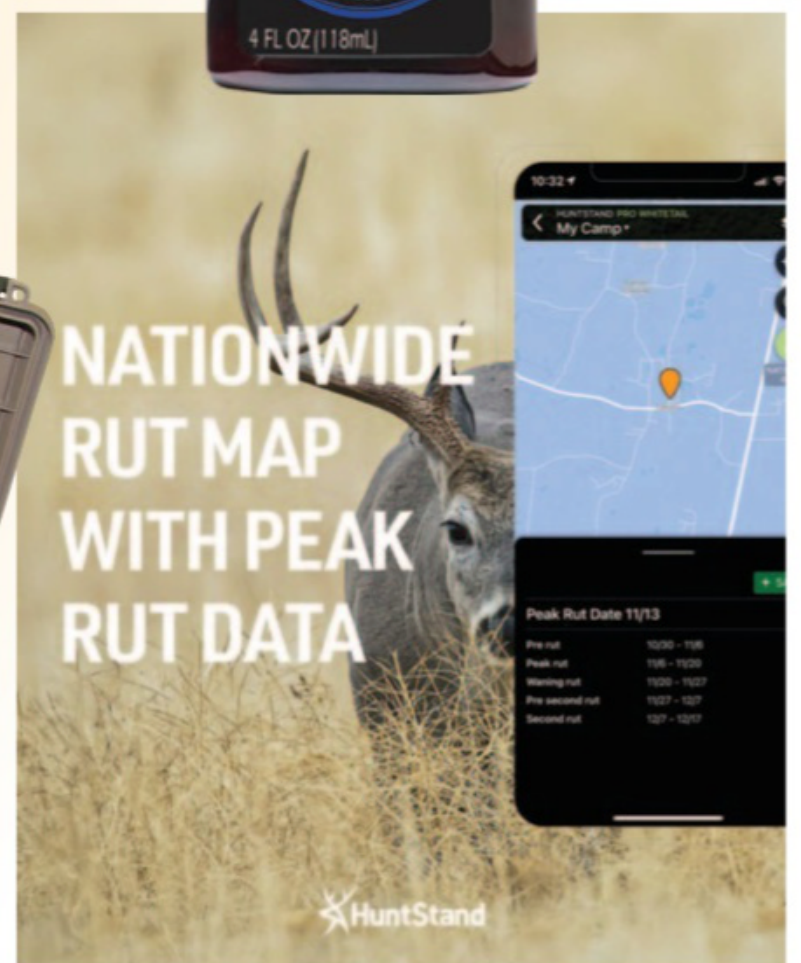
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BUCK SHOTS

BUCK: 184-7/8 INCHES

DATE OF HARVEST:

SEPTEMBER 4, 2021

LOCATION OF HARVEST:

**SHELBY COUNTY,
KENTUCKY**

WEAPON OF HARVEST:

MATHEWS V3 BOW

PHOTO BY BRANDON WILLIAMS



BRANDON WILLIAMS TAGS THE BLUEGRASS BUCK OF HIS DREAMS

JOSH HONEYCUTT

Kentucky deer hunter Brandon Williams started following a big deer in 2019. He captured trail camera photos of it that season, and again in 2020. He even passed the deer at 30 yards the second season, hoping it would return in the future.

It did. The summer of 2021 produced an abundance of trail camera photos of this deer. The mature, 4½-year-old deer was bigger than ever. It spent much of its time on the 39-acre farm, and Williams hoped for an encounter. He pushed his chips to one treestand location, which had relinquished a 162-inch buck in 2020.

September 4 arrived, and it brought cool temperatures and overcast skies. The evening forecast showed rain soon after dark, so Williams hoped the approaching front would encourage deer to move. Hunting flat ground on the fringe of a small bedding area, the buck didn't have far to go to make it into bow range.

"Behind me was a bean field on the next property, and in front of me were woods with a power line running through," Williams said. "I had deer in front of me from about 5 minutes after I got in the stand until the buck came in."

That latter happened about 20 minutes before dark. Does and small bucks had been parading by throughout the afternoon. But around dusk, mature deer started moving. First, a 140-inch 10-point buck entered the open, and the bigger deer followed soon after.

"He came from almost directly downwind," Williams said. "He almost made a complete circle around me before I got a shot at 12 yards."

It wasn't an easy one, though. Williams had to hold at full draw for nearly 2 minutes while waiting for an opportunity.

The big buck quartered to him at a severe angle. It was a shot he couldn't take. After several minutes, the deer offered an ethical opportunity, and he loosed the arrow. It struck the vitals, and the deer dashed out of sight.

"I was thrilled to kill my target buck on the first hunt of the year," Williams said. "I spent all summer preparing for the hunt. It worked to perfection."

Williams waited about four hours before beginning the blood trailing process. It took little time to recover the massive deer, though. It ran about 75 yards and piled up in the power line.

His father and close friend tagged along for the recovery, and they were thrilled for Williams. They recognized the hard work, and the reward.

"They couldn't believe the size of the deer," Williams said. "The mass was unreal. [There were] a lot of high-fives and fist bumps. I've hunted my whole life in hopes of killing a deer of that caliber."

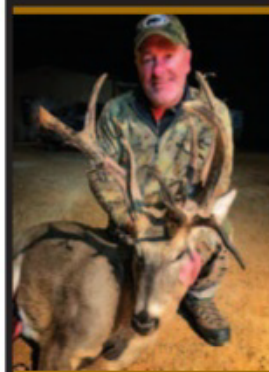
Looking back, he attributes his success to several things. "I kept close tabs on the deer throughout the summer and fed corn heavily," he said. "[And] I use HuntStand every time I hunt. I use it to pick stand locations as well as [monitor] wind directions."

All the effort ended with this 184⅞-inch velvet buck. That's a dream-come-true kind of day in the deer woods.

"Deer hunting is a big part of my life," Williams said. "My dad taught me to hunt and this past season I've begun to teach my two sons. It's a tradition I hope is passed down through the generations of my family."



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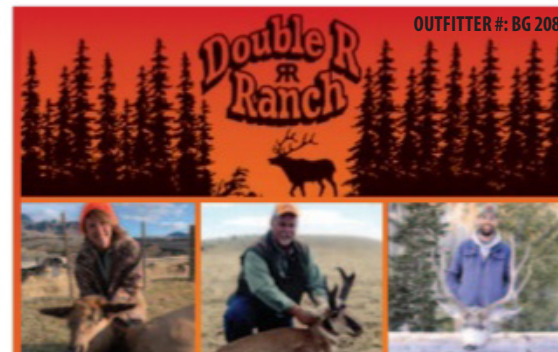


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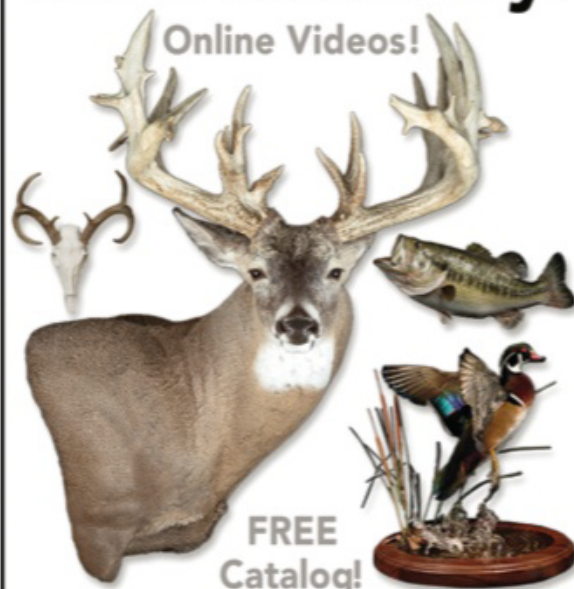
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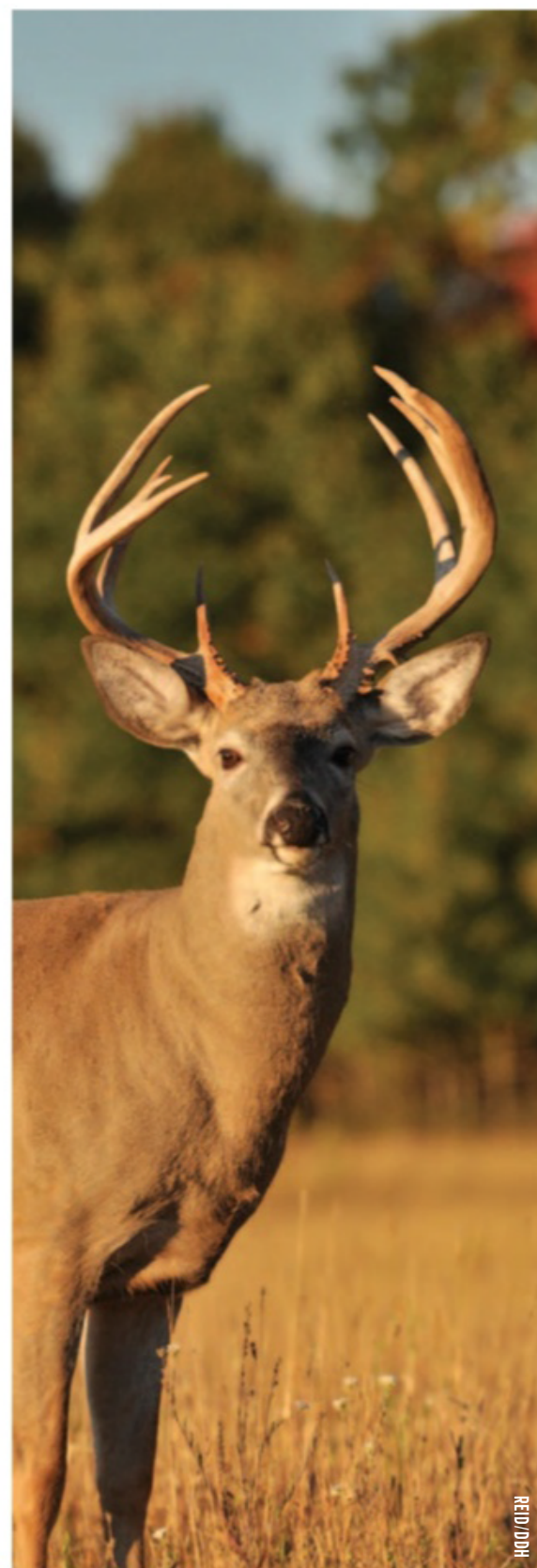
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REID/DDH

A teenager gets just as pumped about his 16th birthday. In most states it means a new measure of freedom. With a driver's license, the most immature 16-year old feels adult-y.

And a hunter can't forget opening day. It's way better than Christmas or birthdays. In the weeks and months leading up to sunrise on that first day, preparation is necessary and scouting is obligatory. For me, opening day anticipation hasn't diminished since the time I began hunting in Dad's shadow. On opening day I'm raring to go, but last year I forgot something.

I forgot that on March 13 I was in the deer woods looking for shed antlers and monitoring trails, beds, and feeding areas that jump out after snow melt and before green-up. The brush on the north-facing hillside below a favorite bench is as thick as good venison chili, but I discovered one spot where I could see more than a hundred yards. I set a location pin on my phone app, labeled it "Check this out," and let it slip out of my mind.

Nine months later, the middle Saturday of the firearms season, I noticed the saved location on the app. Why had I marked it? What made this spot worth noting?

On Tuesday conditions were perfect for still-hunting. When I left my truck at 1:00 PM, the snow was soft and light, and consistent breezes came out of the west. I climbed the hill on unhurried legs and worked my way to that bench to face into the wind. I began walking in semicircles taking me 40 or 50 yards from the slope, and advancing me 40 or 50 yards along the bench. Each time I circled back to the edge I scrutinized the thick brush hoping to see a leg, the horizontal line of a deer's back, the flick of an ear or a tail — any indication of a deer.

I was 40 yards from the edge when I noticed a spike buck with 10-inch antlers working his way through. He wasn't eligible for a bullet so I froze and watched him as he nibbled on browse and occasionally stopped to stare. I let him pass before I resumed my silent, confident advance.

Soon I was at the spot I had marked, and approached the slope at a snail's walk. No wonder I intended to remember this spot. Here, the hillside was wide open, with rocks the size of bedded deer scattered on the ground and grapevines hanging from the trees. I could see everything.

Ninety yards away a buck was oblivious to my presence. Two tines rose from his tightly curved right antler. He was legal. And he was a trophy, not because of the size of his antlers but because I had executed the perfect still-hunt. I settled my crosshairs high on his shoulder, pressed the trigger, and he fell in his tracks. For nine months I had forgotten this moment could happen.

Still-hunting isn't for every type of terrain or weather, and not for every day. Some woods are better for a treestand. Some for a ground blind. The size of the property, the cover available (for the deer and the hunter), whether the habitat is cropland, swamp, hardwoods, or brush all play into the method a hunter chooses.



A buck I shot last season (2021), on the hunt described in this story. I'm wearing my dad's worn-out jacket. And the pants were my grandfather's pants. There might be another story in them.

Whenever and wherever it can be effective, I still-hunt.

When I was a teenager, Dad encouraged me to still-hunt, but I seldom saw deer before they saw me. I couldn't adjust my strategy as needed. I didn't understand when and why to make a turn, to stop and watch, to go fast, or to go slow. When

I needed to slow down, I couldn't slow down enough. I botched so many attempts. And since things seldom happen the same way twice, I saw few opportunities to benefit from my mistakes.

As Dad got into his senior years, I started figuring it out. I don't know whether my success matches Dad's, but today I'm as confident as he was at still-hunting. Of all the bucks I've killed that 7-point isn't impressive, but he's one of many bucks I owe to Dad.

Maybe the reason still-hunting is difficult is that in the twenty-first century we don't live life at a still-hunter's pace. Christmases, birthdays, opening days, graduation days, wedding days, more birthdays, they all fly by at top speed, and we frantically spend our time chasing. We race forward trying to "grab the gusto," and rush on to the next thing. It's hard to slow down, as still-hunting requires.

And then we watch our aging parents slow down. We learn life isn't about moving so fast. We grab real value from life by slowing down.

Christmas mornings no longer hold childish anticipation, and the gifts matter little. Birthdays through the years become mostly insignificant. And that driver's license — someday they might take it away like I had to take Dad's away.

Only a few events are momentous. One that happens only once happened in January last year. Dad passed away at 91. A still-hunter is gone.

I now walk in Dad's place. As I scouted those woods on March 13, I was contemplating his recent passing. Not everyone is so blessed to have a dad, especially a great one who teaches how to hunt. Nine months later, when I shot that buck, I was wearing Dad's worn-out jacket. Today, as I ponder that hunt again, I thank Dad for making me a still-hunter and for teaching me a snail's walk. It will be fast enough to get this still-hunter where he's going.

— Steve Sorensen, AKA "The Everyday Hunter," is an avid Pennsylvania hunter who speaks frequently at sportsman's dinners, and is trying to learn the difference between the urgent things and the important things.



A Snail's Walk



This is Dad on one of his last hunts. He was no longer able to still-hunt, and I'm now coaching him.

Can a kid forget Christmas? Can a teenager overlook his 16th birthday? Can a hunter forget opening day? A resounding “NO!” answers all three questions.

My little brother got so excited about Christmas he could think of nothing else. One Christmas morning he went downstairs early, separated everyone's gifts into piles, opened all his own, and told our littler brother what was in each of his.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 79

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