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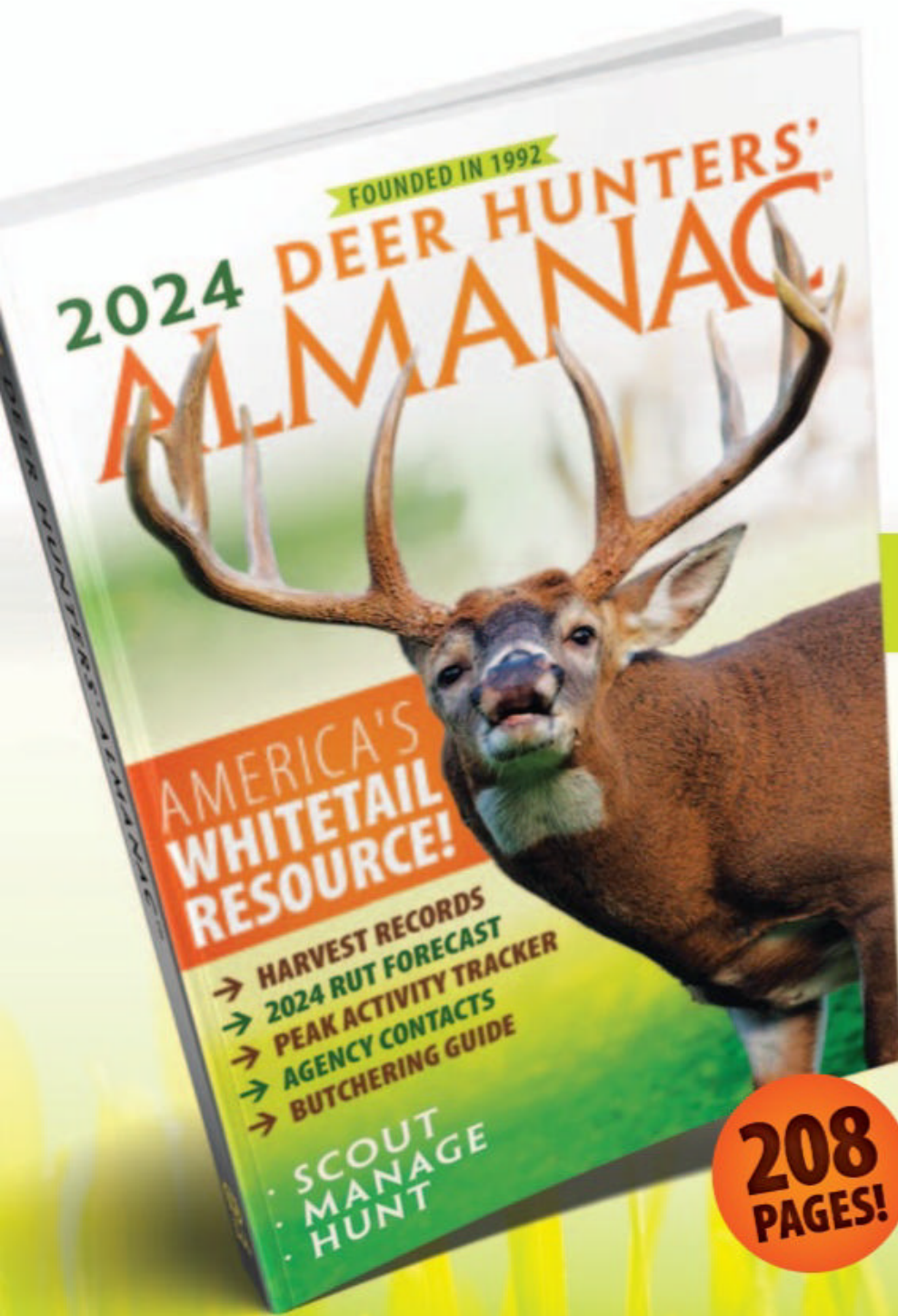
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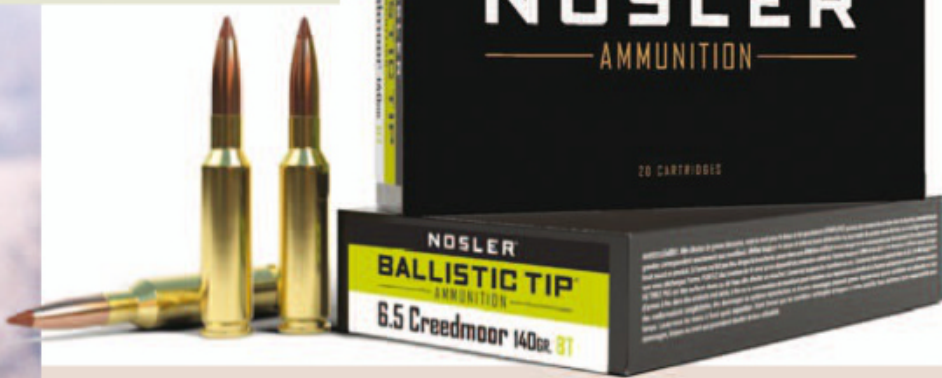
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DANIEL E. SCHMIDT

7



HARDEST STATES TO BAG A DEER

This has nothing to do with tough terrain, strict regulations, trophy-size bucks or any other arbitrary quantification. We are simply going by how many hunters are trying each year ... and how many are actually successful. We think the list will open a few eyes and even cause some debate!

7. FLORIDA

A limited whitetail population and modest overall harvest (about 75,000 deer per year) makes it slim pickings for the 180,000 (+/-) whitetail fanatics in the Sunshine State.

6. NEW JERSEY

Simply put, there's not a lot of deer. The state's overall herd is estimated at just 112,000 whitetails. Gun-hunters only take home about 13,000 deer a year.

5. MAINE

The state's vast woodlands are breathtaking and filled with critters. Problem is, most of those critters are not white-tailed deer. The state does have a whitetail population of some 200,000 head, but that's spread across 35,000 square miles. Only 22% of gun-hunters bag a deer in Maine.

4. VERMONT

We put Vermont on the list because one can't talk about the Northeast without mentioning the land of the Benois. Nearly 110,000 hunters roam the state's hunting grounds each year, but only 15% take home a deer. That's one of the lowest percentages in North America.

3. OREGON

In 2022, the state's 11,700 gun-hunters brought home just 1,168 deer (9.9%), and only 70 bowhunters were successful (not a typo!)

2. NORTH DAKOTA

The state's 110,000 whitetail hunters only bring home about 30,000 deer each year, a success rate of less than 23%.

1. MONTANA

Despite its reputation as a big-buck mecca, only 45,000 hunters are successful in bagging a whitetail in the Big Sky state each year.

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Tim Curnew: Absolutely!

David Gildemeister: Every animal, every time.

Tony Sferes: And love every second.

Jeffrey Willey: Yes and it's worth the effort.

Stephen Amelong: That's a big yes!

Britt Spiers: Absolutely. And enjoy doing it.

Laurie Piencikowski: Yes ... thank u to my dad, he showed me the process from beginning to end and do my own now!!



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DDH BUCK OF THE MONTH

RONNY LAMBETH

Here's a throwback to an incredible buck that was featured in our magazine several years ago. The nontypical was shot by traditional archer Ronny Lambeth in Oklahoma. The article we featured was written by his brother Mike. The incredible buck scored 201-4/8!



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A photograph of a herd of deer with large, velvet-covered antlers in a grassy field. In the background, there is a white structure, possibly a feeder or shelter, and a line of trees. The deer are running or moving quickly across the field.

CWD

BREAKTHROUGH?

HUMIC ACID MIGHT HOLD THE KEY TO COMBATING THIS DEER DISEASE.

ABOVE: Many bucks at Maple Hill Farms enclosure the night before Wisconsin state officials depopulated the entire herd after diagnosing some deer with chronic wasting disease. Many of these deer were CWD-positive, so owner Laurie Seale added humic acid to their diet to help them maintain healthy weight.

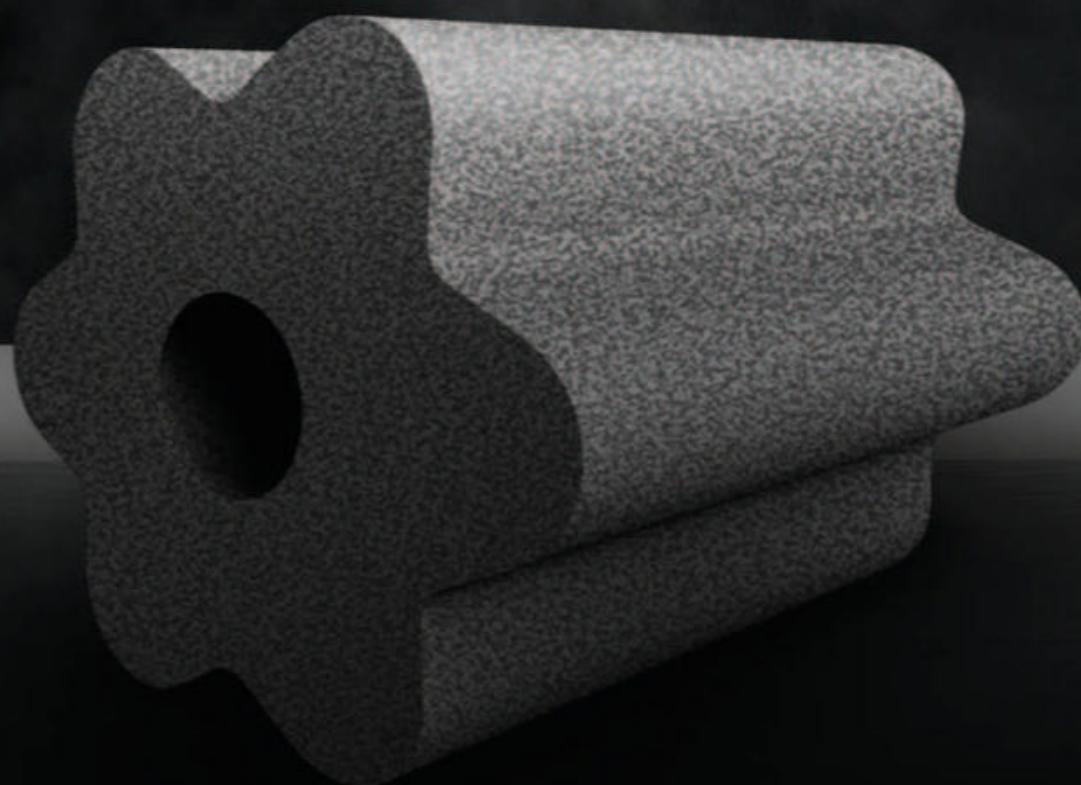
PHOTO COURTESY OF LAURIE SEALE

Ever since chronic wasting disease was first discovered in captive mule deer at a Colorado research facility in 1967, states have struggled to limit its spread in wild deer, moose and elk. To date, CWD has been found in 31 states and four Canadian provinces, and scientists have spun their wheels for decades trying to protect cervids from the deadly disease.

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Recently, University of Alberta researchers found that humic acid, a compound created from decaying organic matter, can reduce the infectivity of prions, the abnormally folded proteins many believe cause CWD. But before gleefully concluding that whitetails everywhere can be spared from CWD by a common mixture found in all soils, it's important to take a close look at the study and its findings. Because, like Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein," not all that's made in a lab works in the real world.

Scientists don't fully understand all the mechanisms by which CWD is transmitted. Evidence suggests that it's passed from infected to healthy animals through blood, feces, nasal secretions, saliva and urine. Scientists also have observed CWD prions living for years in soils, leading to potential disease transmission at scrapes, feeding sites and other areas deer frequent. It should be noted that a research team led by Dr. Davin Henderson concluded that urine is

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA RESEARCHERS FOUND THAT HUMIC ACID, A COMPOUND CREATED FROM DECAYING ORGANIC MATTER, CAN REDUCE THE INFECTIVITY OF PRIONS, THE ABNORMALLY FOLDED PROTEINS MANY BELIEVE CAUSE CWD.

one of the least-known vectors of transmission. A molecular biologist from the Prion Research Center, Department of Microbiology, Immunology and Pathology at Colorado State University, his studies concluded it would take 33,000 gallons of urine from a CWD-infected deer, and have that urine injected into the brain stem of a healthy deer to infect 1 gram of brain protein with CWD.

Other studies have indicated that CWD — if like scrapie in sheep — might be passed on to fawns at birth from placental fluids, but doesn't manifest itself as a disease for years.

University of Alberta researcher Judd Aiken, Ph.D., and his colleagues sought to find out if soils treated with humic acid could reduce prions, decreasing the risk of animals contracting CWD from soils. Researchers first collected samples from different soil types at six Alberta sites. Homogenous strains from either CWD-positive elk or white-tailed deer were added to the soils, which were then treated with different concentrations of pure humic acid. The researchers found that some humic acid concentrations disrupted the CWD prions.

"With increasing concentrations of humic acids, we saw less and less prion proteins," Aiken explained. "Lower concentrations had little impact on the infectious agents, but we observed a significant impact at higher than 2½ grams per liter."

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In other words, at higher concentrations, humic acid reduced both the number of prions in the soils and disease infectivity. While all of this sounds promising, it's important to keep in mind that none of the humic acid concentrations, up to 25 grams per liter, eliminated prions entirely – there were still infectious agents found in the soils. Put another way, very high concentrations of humic acid do not reduce the risk of CWD transmission to zero.

It's noteworthy that Aiken and his colleagues used purified humic acid, which isn't found in any soils in nature – nor is it found in deer supplements on the market that include humic acid in an effort to reduce the likelihood of spreading CWD.

Aiken cautions against assuming humic acid will prevent the spread of CWD outside of a laboratory, or even reduce infectivity.

"In the environment, prions interact with different soils, and they bind quite tightly to soils, so

these two factors mean we can't make any claims that this will work on game farms or for wild cervids."

In fact, quasi-experiments using humic acid to cure CWD-positive deer at two Wisconsin deer farms haven't had promising results. Apple Creek Whitetails added 30 pounds of humic acid per ton to the feed of 30 infected whitetails (CWD infectivity determined by rectal biopsies) and spread 300 pounds per acre on the ground in deer pens. All deer except for two does, both known to possess genetic resistance to CWD, died within two years.

"We weighed the deer every year, and only two of them had lost weight, but the humic acid didn't stop them from testing positive for CWD," said Laurie Seale, secretary of Whitetails of Wisconsin (whitetailsofwisconsin.com).

Seale also experimented with humic acid by feeding it to her own deer and spreading it in their pens at Maple Hill Farms. And while infected deer lived three times longer than a state veterinarian

predicted they would, they all died within two years of testing positive.

"The deer looked great on the humic acid I put in their feed, but once the disease is on your farm, humic acid isn't really going to do anything," added Seale.

More studies are needed to determine if humic acid could help reduce CWD transmission in the wild. But these studies would necessitate testing different humic acid concentrations on many deer that would have to be infected with CWD, bringing about ethical questions that, so far, no scientists are willing to tackle. Which goes to show that, while it might look good in a lab, it's doubtful that humic acid will tame the monster known as CWD.

— *Darren Warner is a freelance outdoor writer and avid whitetail hunter from Michigan.*



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Massachusetts Deer Fat, Happy Thanks to “No Hunt” Zones

More than 95,000 deer are estimated to live in tiny Massachusetts, according to the state Division of Fisheries & Wildlife, double a population of some 30 years ago thanks to myriad “no hunting” zones, laws and city prohibitions.

Boston.com reports that the state has fewer hunters, too, thanks in part to lack of access. Combined with the protected areas, development and suburbanization, and declining hunter numbers, the boom in white-tailed deer and their many problems — spreading diseases carried by ticks, accidents with vehicles, conflicts with humans — will continue.

Martin Feehan, the Deer & Moose Project Leader for MassWildlife, told the site that hunting license sales peaked in the mid 1980s and have declined by half since then. The numbers are smaller but stable, he said, with about 70,000 licensed hunters and 43,000 active deer hunters.

“Communities [maintain] local laws limiting or completely outlawing hunting and/or discharge of a firearm,” Feehan said. “Discharge setbacks under state statute limit hunting even on private property.” He called these issues “the greatest factor leading to increased deer abundance” and said even the hunter numbers of 40 years ago wouldn’t have places to hunt. Feehan said deer densities are about 10-15 per square mile in the northwest part of the state, to more than 80 per square mile in parts of eastern Massachusetts closed to hunting.

Feehan told the site that working with civic leaders and the public to help educate them about issues and the need for changes is the best path. But that often doesn’t net positive results.

“Ultimately, our efforts require complementary initiatives such as changes and updates to local and state laws and regulations to be effective in controlling deer populations,” he said.

Arkansas Puts Hammer on Deer Poacher

Night hunting and hunting out of season can be some of the toughest crimes for wildlife officers to catch, often requiring many nights patrolling areas of poaching activity. One such patrol on Bald Knob National Wildlife Refuge in August 2020 led to the arrest and successful prosecution of one of the worst cases of illegal hunting that many officers of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Arkansas Game and Fish Commission have seen in years.

In August 2020, Senior Federal Wildlife Canine Officer Cpl. Branden Kieffer and his K9 partner Timber conducted a traffic stop on a suspicious vehicle late one evening after observing several violations in Bald Knob NWR. The suspect was in possession of a suppressed, loaded .308 rifle equipped with a thermal scope, a forward-looking infrared handheld unit, an AR-style rifle with four loaded 30-round magazines and a 9mm handgun. During the course of investigation, all of the items were seized as evidence and a warrant was secured for the scope’s memory card to allow law enforcement to view electronic evidence contained on it. Upon review, the card held 57 videos and images of suspected illegal night-hunting activity.

Kieffer then obtained additional search warrants for the man’s residence and cell phone. A team of USFWS and AGFC law enforcement officers executed the warrants in late August 2020. Evidence obtained from those warrants indicated the man had illegally killed up to 22 deer during a three-year period. The deer were poached from private and public land, often at night. Of those 22 deer, at least 15 were bucks, including some in velvet. Some deer were killed

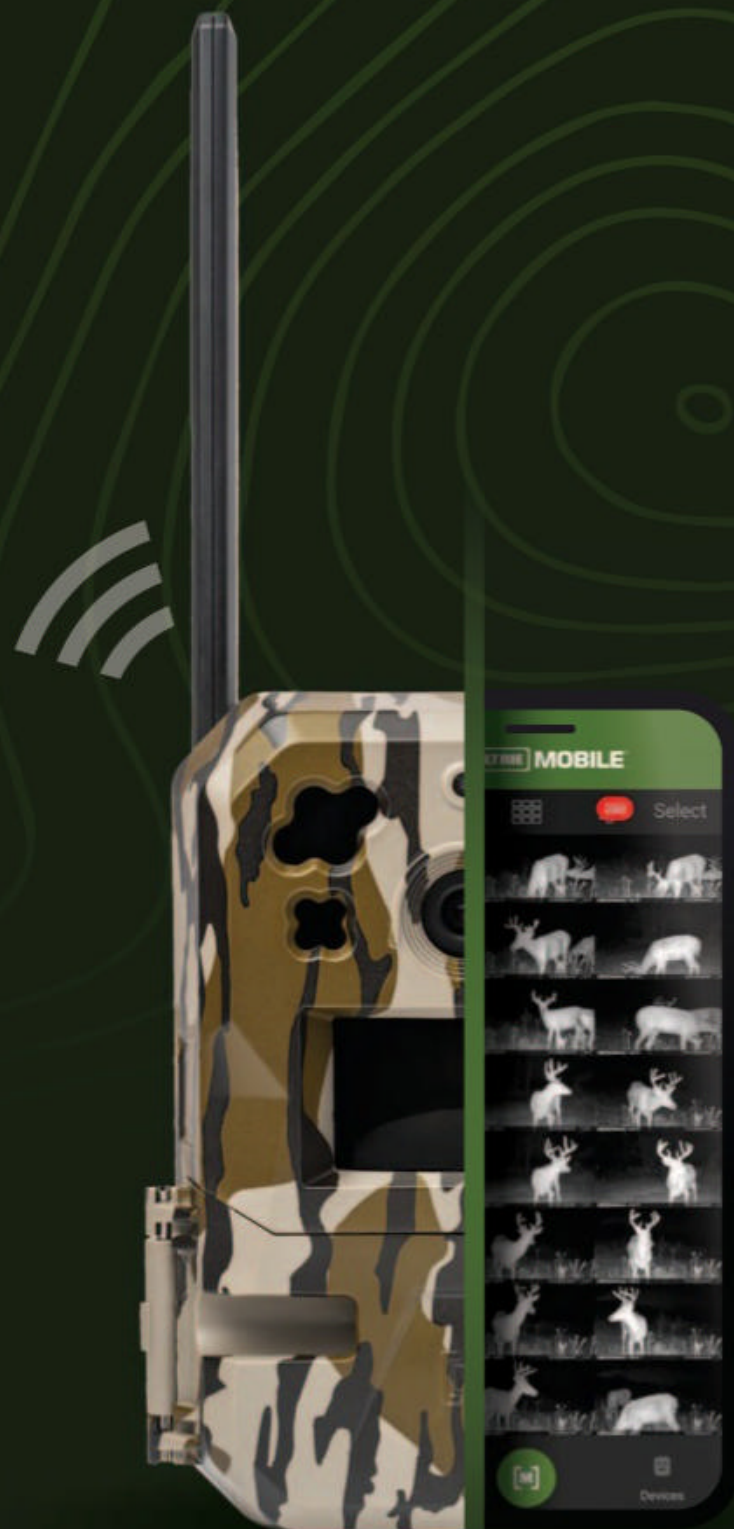
illegally under the guise of an AGFC depredation permit. Two of the bucks had been entered into a big-buck contest for which he received a monetary award from an entry.

The man was ultimately charged with 54 wildlife violations that collectively carried more than 900 potential AGFC administrative violation points on his hunting licenses, \$700,000 in potential fines and significant potential jail time.

In October 2021, he pleaded guilty to six counts of night hunting in White County District Court and was sentenced to pay \$15,000 in fines, forfeit the two confiscated rifles, suppressor, scope and forward-looking infrared. He also was sentenced to 30 days in jail, suspended, on each count. The suspect also was prosecuted in Woodruff County on similar charges, and he was convicted of five counts of hunting wildlife in a closed season and one count of night hunting. He was ordered to pay \$630 in fines and court costs in that county.

The conviction included 180 points being assessed to his hunting licenses, which resulted in a 7-year suspension in Arkansas and all other Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact states. He appealed the suspension, which was later upheld by an Arkansas Game and Fish Commission Administrative Judge who noted that this was one of the worst deer poaching cases he had seen in his tenure.





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7 WAYS TO KILL A *Rutting*

CHARLES J. ALSHEIMER



TO CONSISTENTLY SCORE ON RUTTING BUCKS, YOU NEED TO IDENTIFY THEIR MAIN WEAKNESSES.

I was in a bind. I had stands scattered all over the place and didn't know which one to hunt. However, when a family situation left me with only one day to hunt, I headed straight for the bedroom.

A doe bedding area, that is.

I was only in the stand for a few minutes when a family group of does appeared and bedded nearby. They eventually got back on their feet and browsed out of sight. Then I heard the unmistakable sounds of a chase.

A big doe was the first to appear. She blew through the bedding area, hotly pursued by a no-doubt shooter buck. With the odds being so low of stopping him in my shooting lane, I allowed both deer to pass, hoping the doe would loop around and bring the buck with her.

Before she had a chance, I heard another buck approaching. Already prepared for the shot, I waited for him to hit my shooting lane. As luck would have it, this second buck stopped in the perfect position to sniff a doe's bed. The shot was true and the buck was mine. Although he fell well short of the bigger one, with just one day to hunt, I was thrilled that the doe bedding area had produced.

Experiencing a hot-to-trot rut is a thrill like no other in the hunting world. Unfortunately, for as many unbelievable hunts as the rut produces, it can yield many more completely forgettable sits. Luckily, seven tried-and-true methods of killing rutting bucks can be used to minimize the downtime and produce consistent results.

Buck

1. HARNESS WATER POWER

Water sources are one of the most often overlooked rut hot spots. The first step toward capitalizing on water is dividing it into two groups: flowages and watering holes.

Rivers, creeks and streams that run for miles through deer country are natural runways. When paired with cover, they're often the backbone of travel routes bucks use between doe concentrations.

When selecting stand sites, target locations covering as much deer activity as possible. A good example is where a bend in the river collides with a steep ridge or open area. In either case, the obstruction concentrates deer by forcing them to one side. Other examples would be where two bottoms connect, or even where a parallel trail intersects a heavily used crossing. In all of these examples, the concentrated deer traffic makes these great choices.

Although well-used watering holes are highly sought after early season stands, they also hold great drawing power during the rut. It's true that rutting bucks can rely heavily on fat supplies to fuel their increased movements, but they need water to cool their engines.

Due to that, many of the same prime early season water setups also become hot during the rut. This is particularly true when the watering hole is situated near doe groups or in the preferred connecting routes between doe concentrations.

2. FIND THE FOOD

Just because feeding might not be a high priority for rutting bucks doesn't mean that it isn't still a powerful draw. For one, I believe that most "experts" overly minimize the frequency and amount of rutting bucks' feeding excursions. Certainly, they run negative energy balances during the rut. However, if they ate nothing at all, the rut would likely kill them.

Even if one believes rutting bucks have no interest in feeding, the does do. Since does are what bucks seek, this alone makes a prime food source a powerful draw ... and good place to hang your stand.

Stand placement for this phase of the season requires a different mind-set than early or late-season tactics. In the early season, heavily used deer trails are usually passed up for the

fainter buck trails. However, during the rut, those pounded doe trails are one of the places you want to be.

Bucks will rely on their noses and eyes to find estrous does. When relying on sight, they obviously need to make visual contact. That's why pinch points and field corners are great ambush spots for rut-time hunts.

3. INSIDE CORNERS

Speaking of food sources, the inside corners of clear-cuts and open fields combine several attractive traits.

Bucks most often rely on their sense of smell to locate estrous does. In this case, one quick lap around the food source allows them to scent-check the estrous status of every doe that's been there. Although the distance varies, I've found that this paralleling activity most often occurs between 10 and 40 yards inside the woods.

Another plus is that almost all inside corners yield a beaten-down doe trail. With that, the hunter can now cover the doe trail and waylay most bucks that will be scent-checking the trails.

The real cherry on top is that inside corners create funnels. Any buck that wants to get from one side of the opening to the other has two choices. They can either expose themselves or skirt the edge, marching right passed the inside corner.

When placing stands for any phase of season, one should always strive to cover as many possibilities as practical. This increases your odds of connecting. With rutting bucks exhibiting somewhat unpredictable movements, playing the odds is even more important.

Placing a stand 10 to 20 yards off the inside corner does just that. With careful positioning, everything is there to be had: bucks using the corner trails, paralleling the field, funneling around the corner and even those walking just inside the field. The result is a stand that offers five chances for success.

4. CALLING ALL BUCKS

OK, if you are paying attention, you just noticed that I listed four choices, yet wrote "five chances for success." No, this wasn't a typo or some form of new math. You see, any time a rut-hunter can see a reasonably long distance, they have the possibility of calling in distant

bucks. That fifth option is one of the most under-used tactics I've seen hunters use when hunting the above-mentioned scenarios.

When it comes to calling techniques, there's really no right or wrong way. What it boils down to is what frame of mind the buck is in. The techniques that work on four bucks one day, may or may not work on the next 12 you encounter.

With that being said, there are two different approaches that I've used successfully when hunting areas that provide a good view. I rarely call "blind" in open areas. Instead, when a shooter buck is spotted at a distance and isn't naturally entering shooting range, I will attempt to call to him.

On the flip side, when hunting near heavy cover, I've found blind calling to be much more effective. During the rut, bucks not tending does are highly likely to be actively seeking their next opportunity. That inspires many bucks to be in a near constant state of motion, going from one likely doe hot bed to the next. Therefore, when blind-calling, I'll often call in 10-minute increments.

As obvious as it might sound, the goal of calling is to paint a picture with sound. Again, what works on one buck might not work on the next. If a buck just got beat up, he will be less likely to respond to a challenge than, say, the victor. However, it's possible that the loser might be even more desperate to respond to an estrous call.

That's why my calling sequences are elaborate. I begin with two or three estrous calls, trying to let the bucks know that a hot doe is in the area. Next, I toss out a handful of tending grunts, alternating at the end between a deep and medium grunt. It's as if I'm saying, "Guess what, the hot doe just found two pursuers!"

After a slight pause, I'll let out a grunt-snort-whheeze in an attempt to paint a picture that two bucks are about to square off. With both desperately wanting the hot doe, the 30 to 90 seconds of clashing antlers reveals the epic battle that follows. Another slight pause later, the estrous call and series of tending grunts shows the victor is back on the hot doe's trail.

Yes, I realize this all might seem a bit over the top, but it has worked for me on many occasions. Why? I believe the sequence offers something for the highest percentage of bucks.

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The estrous calls appeal to the more timid, as well as the possibility of sneaking off with the doe while the bullies duke it out. Of course, the snort-wheeze and rattling can trigger reactions in the dominant and more aggressive bucks. I also believe the entire package can even draw a curious response from any buck within earshot.

Hunters differ wildly in their approach to calling. As you can see, it's all or nothing for me. In other words, I either go aggressive or leave the toys at home.

5. PUT UP YOUR DUPES

Decoys are killer complements to calling rutting bucks. Add the appropriate scent, and the combination produces alluring sights, sounds and smells.

A brush with a true giant Wisconsin 8-point last season showed just how effective the package can be. After setting my buck decoy (with its 140-inch replicated rack) to observe my bedded doe decoy, I crawled into a ground blind and waited for first light. Sunrise was followed by an elaborate calling sequence. I saw the buck within seconds of finishing my calls.

Frankly, the 160-inch brute busted me cold. With the blind's screen up for filming, he caught the reflection of the camera, as I swung it on him. As strange as it may sound, I wasn't concerned. I was confident the allure of the decoys would seal the deal.

It did.

Several head bobs and hoof stomps later, he committed full tilt. Tracking his position with the camera, I snatched the bow from its holder. Needing to act fast, I shifted the

buck to the rear of the camera's frame, attached my release and came to full draw. I snap-judged the yardage and let the arrow fly.

As the arrow zipped harmlessly over the buck's back, I snatched the tripod arm in my right hand again and filmed his departure from my life. I had completely blown the shot. Still, the combinations of sights, sounds and smells had done their jobs flawlessly, even after the savvy old-timer had busted me cold. That's a powerful testament.

A key to effective decoying is making them appear natural. During the rut, what's more natural than a buck standing sentry over a hot doe? The pair sends the message that she's ready and can be stolen. That's a temptation few trophies can pass up.

As a side note, I believe most buck decoys use too small of a rack. A 70-inch rack is taken no more seriously by a mature buck than a seventh-grade boy hitting on your wife. However, a decoy sporting a 120- to 140-inch rack is another story.

6. HAMMER FUNNELS

No thorough rut-hunting article would be complete without covering how to hunt funnels. This may be the most heavily relied-upon rut tactic, and for good reason. It flat-out produces.

Hunting pinch points between doe concentrations is tailor made for this phase of the season. Furthermore, opening your mind to seeing hidden funnels reveals many gems previously left uncovered.

I believe that many funnel types aren't hunted hard enough. For most hunters with limited acreage, following

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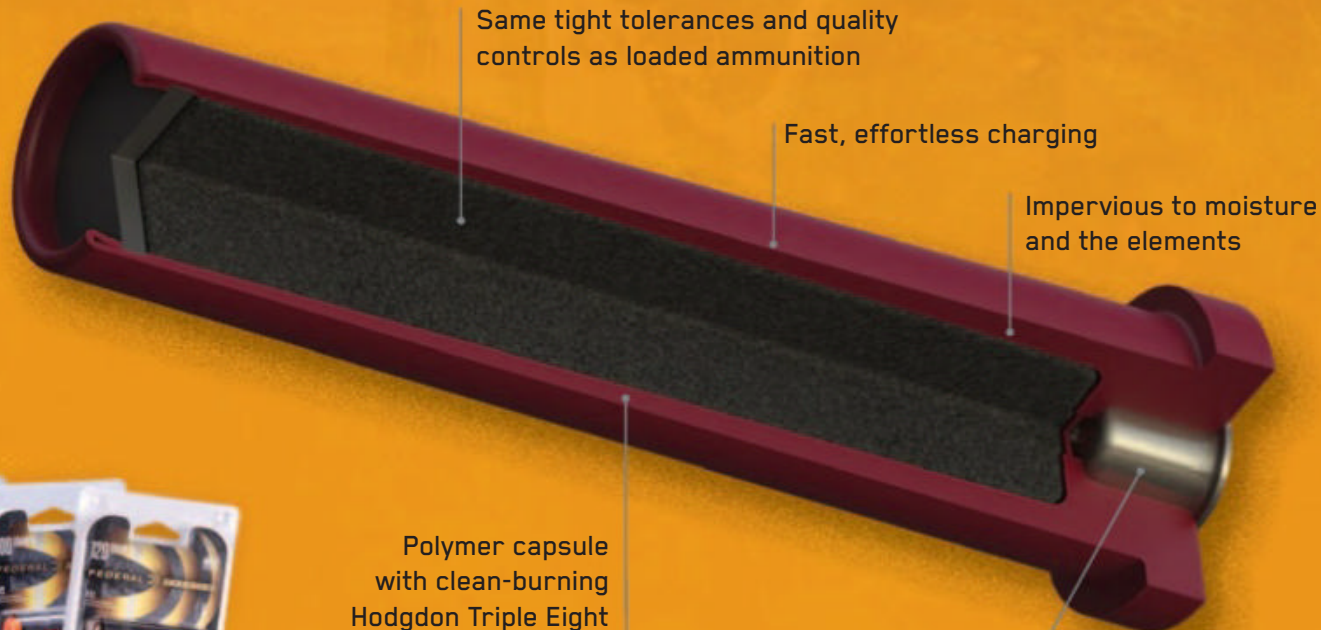
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the prescribed steps for keeping stands fresh sounds great in theory, but comes up woefully lacking in application. Many properties have one or two good rut stands. If not hunted more than once in a five-day period, that means the hunter sits at home a lot or spends way too much time in marginal stand sites. When access is good, place multiple stands for the wind and hunt those great funnels as much as possible during the rut. On many properties, mature bucks might only use that funnel in daylight two or three times throughout the rut. When one can get in and out undetected, being in that stand as much as possible increases the odds of being there at the right time.

Although educating bucks is never good, I believe the rut is the time to risk it a little more. With bucks putting on the miles, a buck you educate today might be 5 miles away tomorrow. That removes much of the value of giving the stand a break, particularly when a new buck is trotting through that funnel.

If you have several killer stands, you should rotate. However, unless access is bad or a certain wind can't be made to work, sitting marginal stands is a huge mistake.

7. GO TO BED

For as much attention as hunting funnels get, setting up on doe bedding areas can deliver even more rutting bucks. There's almost always more than one way to get from Point A to Point B. Funnels can almost always be avoided. However, because does spend most of the daylight hours in bedding areas, you almost always have to go them.

Playing the wind is a huge key to successfully hunting doe bedding areas for several reasons. First, setting up within shooting distance of the bedroom's door means that a wrong wind gets most hunters busted. Along with the stand providing good concealment, keeping the wind blowing from the bedding area to the hunter's position is critical in avoiding frustrating experiences.

Additionally, to most effectively scent-check the bedroom, the buck must skirt the downwind side. Both of those reasons most often make the downwind edge the place to set up.

Further adding to the appeal of these locations is that they can provide the best midday action of all rut stands. From the doe's morning arrival to their evening departure, there's no more likely spot to intercept a cruising buck.

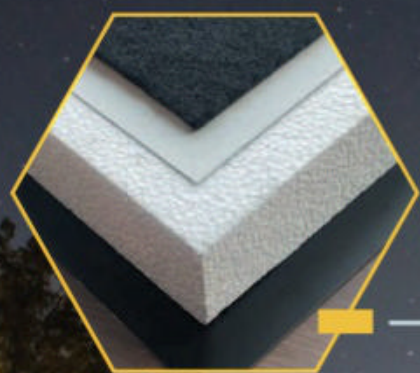
CONCLUSION

The rut can be a very chaotic time to be in the woods. To achieve a degree of consistency, analyze what bucks want, how they can most effectively get it and what chinks that leaves in their armor. Catering tactics accordingly will likely lead you to several ways to kill a rutting buck. In one way or another, each one plays on a vulnerability that the rut creates in mature bucks.

— Check out Steve Bartylla's "Grow 'em Big!" videos at www.youtube.com/DDHOnline



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Most bowhunters have experienced a deer that jumped the string. Or, they have at least heard of it. Regardless, most bowhunters that miss, miss high. And most bowhunters that make bad shots, hit deer higher than intended. In both instances, it's oftentimes due to a string-jumping deer, whether the hunter realized it or not.



ALL ABOUT THE STRING JUMP

PLUS, THE AUTHOR SHARES THOUGHTS ON THE
LIKELIHOOD OF THE HEAD-DOWN STRING JUMP.

For those still unsure of what this entails, when a deer jumps the string, its body moves downward and slightly forward. Sometimes, deeper into the process, the deer might even spin or turn away.

DEFINING THE STRING JUMP

Deer are jumpy critters. They have catty, twitchy reflexes, and they frequently use these. Due to this, most deer react to the sound of the shot. The arrow leaves the bow, and deer hear it. Deer don't always attempt to jump the string, even

when alert. But much of the time, they do.

Whitetails can react so quickly because of how fast they process data. They process visual data much quicker than humans do. It's believed they can process audible data faster, too.

According to NASA, under normal static conditions, sound travels at about 1,100 fps or 760 mph. According to renowned bowhunter Bill Winke, it takes about 0.056 second for the sound of a bow shot to reach a deer

20 yards away. The fastest of compounds sling arrows at 345-355 fps. However, most hunting setups hover around 310-340 fps. If you do the math, that allows a deer a lot of time to start moving. Even the fastest crossbows, which sling bolts more than 500 fps, can't always overcome the string jump.

So, once the deer registers the sound and/or sees the arrow, they start the drop process. This happens in phases. First, the animal's stiff legs suddenly and quickly bend. This causes their body to drop as they prepare to take off running. Then, with legs buckled and body dropping, they duck underneath the arrow (aka jump the string).

Just think of all the bowhunters who have spine-shot a deer. This is usually a direct effect of the deer jumping the string. Even a 6-inch drop can turn a lethal hit into a flesh wound. Oftentimes, perfect shots become subpar hits, or shot locations that aren't lethal.

HEAD AND BODY POSITION MATTER

Deer hunters have long believed that a deer with its head down was less likely to jump the string. After all, it's more relaxed, right? Perhaps, but that doesn't mean it's less likely to jump the string.

Furthermore, when a deer jumps the string, the head makes an upward motion. Starting with its head down allows it to throw the head upward as the body moves downward. This creates a bungee effect that slingshots the body downward quicker.

Due to these aspects, the head-down position isn't necessarily a great option for bowhunters. In fact, it's a poor one. If possible, and unless the deer is clearly going to offer additional shot opportunities, hunters should avoid it and wait for a better shot opportunity.

Whitetails are wily animals. They can be unpredictable and unruly. Even so, it's virtually impossible to predict whether a deer will try to jump the string, or not. It's also virtually impossible to determine how much or quickly a deer will drop, if it does.

Generally, the string-jump issue only becomes one when a whitetail is about 18-20 yards and beyond. Understanding just how much deer



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WHEN THE ARROW HITS ITS MARK

HAVING AN ARROW completely miss a deer is one thing. What about when the arrow hits its mark – how can you gauge what to do next? There are numerous reactions that a whitetail can make that provide useful information. One of the most interesting is the mule kick. If you haven't seen a deer give a mule kick, it looks just like it sounds. The deer rocks forward on stiff front legs, elevates its haunches and kicks back hard.

Will a broadside heart shot always cause the mule kick reaction? It's not guaranteed, and also isn't known exactly why deer kick like mules when shot. Some do, some don't.

Some hunters believe the mule kick is a response to a heart shot, but I have shot several deer through the heart with no such response. I am not totally sure what precipitates this reaction, but I suspect it has more to do with survival reflexes than where the deer was hit.

In the natural world, a deer's most likely predators are coyotes, wolves, mountain lions and dogs. These North American predators, except for big cats, often hunt in packs and all of them tend to, at some point, jump onto the deer's hindquarters to drag it down for the coup de grace. A terrific defense against this is for the deer to deliver a powerful, well-placed mule kick. So, in my view, the mule kick is not a response to an arrow or a bullet, but a reaction to a perceived attack – an automatic response they hope will fend off what they think might be a predator's attack from behind.

In my thinking, the sound of the bow or the gun is a key trigger telling the deer to reflexively respond to a threat. Over the years, I have observed that deer



A white-tailed buck "mule kicks" after being hit in the heart area with a broadhead-tipped arrow.

PHOTO BY DAVID GILANE

respond differently to the same noises at different distances from them. We have all observed deer ignore distant gunshots.

I have seen deer appear totally disoriented by a very close gunshot, say less than 30 yards. In the case of the very close boom, I suspect the deer's sensitive hearing is so overloaded that the location of the sound is indeterminate. The deer flees to maximize its safety, and sometimes part of that reaction is the mule kick. If the sudden noise were an attacking predator, attempting to sink claws and teeth into the deer's hams, the mule kick would help the deer escape. The deer's survival plan is mule kick, then run. Mule kick to separate from the predator – then run to complete the escape.

– Dr. Phillip Bishop

can drop is the takeaway here. A deer can drop 12 to 20 inches by the time a 25- to 50-yard shot makes impact, especially if starting in the head-down position.

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COMMON TAKEAWAYS

When analyzing the string jump, certain truths rise to the top. First, string jumping is almost always a non-issue for deer that are 15 yards and closer. That's even true for most deer with their heads down. In contrast, deer that are 20 to 40 yards and farther tend to drop the most. Beyond that, it's a coin flip.

Additionally, body language can determine whether a deer is likely to jump the string, or not.

Elevated surrounding noise levels, such as during windy days, produces lower odds of string jumping. The wind muffles or omits the sound of the arrow launch and flight.

Interestingly, according to most sources, and my personal anecdotal data, larger bucks tend to duck the string less often than smaller bucks and does. Therefore, does tend to duck strings more than bigger bucks (although they commonly do it, too). Plus, Northern and Midwestern whitetails seem to be less likely to jump the string than Southern whitetails. Overall, unpressured and lightly pressured deer tend to jump the string less often than pressured whitetails.

THE REMEDY

If string-jump flashbacks haunt your big-buck dreams, there are certain things bowhunters can do to minimize the negative possibilities. Sadly, it is very difficult to quiet down a bow enough to eliminate the string jump. Bows aren't silent. Deer will still hear the quietest of bows, even at 30 to 40 yards. Based on modern research, faster bows won't beat the string jump, either.

So, the first fix? Shoot a bow that is as quiet as possible. Quieter is always better. Second, take as much

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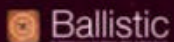
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speed as you can get. Regarding bow builds, these two qualities are often at odds with one another. And of course, neither of these things can beat the string jump, but they can minimize and shorten the drop distance, albeit slightly.

Third, wait for a lower risk of a string jump. This begins with taking

shorter shots inside of 20 yards. For shots beyond 20 yards, start aiming lower. If the deer jumps the string, the arrow might still strike the vitals in the center or upper region. In contrast, if the deer doesn't jump the string, you hit the deer in the lower regions of the heart and lungs.

Of course, aiming lower isn't always the right path, especially if the deer is unlikely to jump the string. For example, if a rutting buck is fixated on a doe. Or, if high winds keep deer from hearing the arrow launch, there's less concern. Even more, research suggests that cagey does are more likely to jump the string than the average buck.

In contrast, if there is a moderate to high probability the deer will string jump, bowhunters are better off to aim low and allow deer to drop into the path of the arrow. Plus, the farther away the target is, the more likely it will jump the string. Thus, longer shots tend to require lower aiming points to accommodate for this.

All things considered, with enough experience, and a proven track record, the best solution is to allow instinct to take over. If the situation seems to include a deer that will string jump, hold low and send it. If it isn't, and it's less likely to make a move, don't hold low. Just aim normally and touch off the shot.



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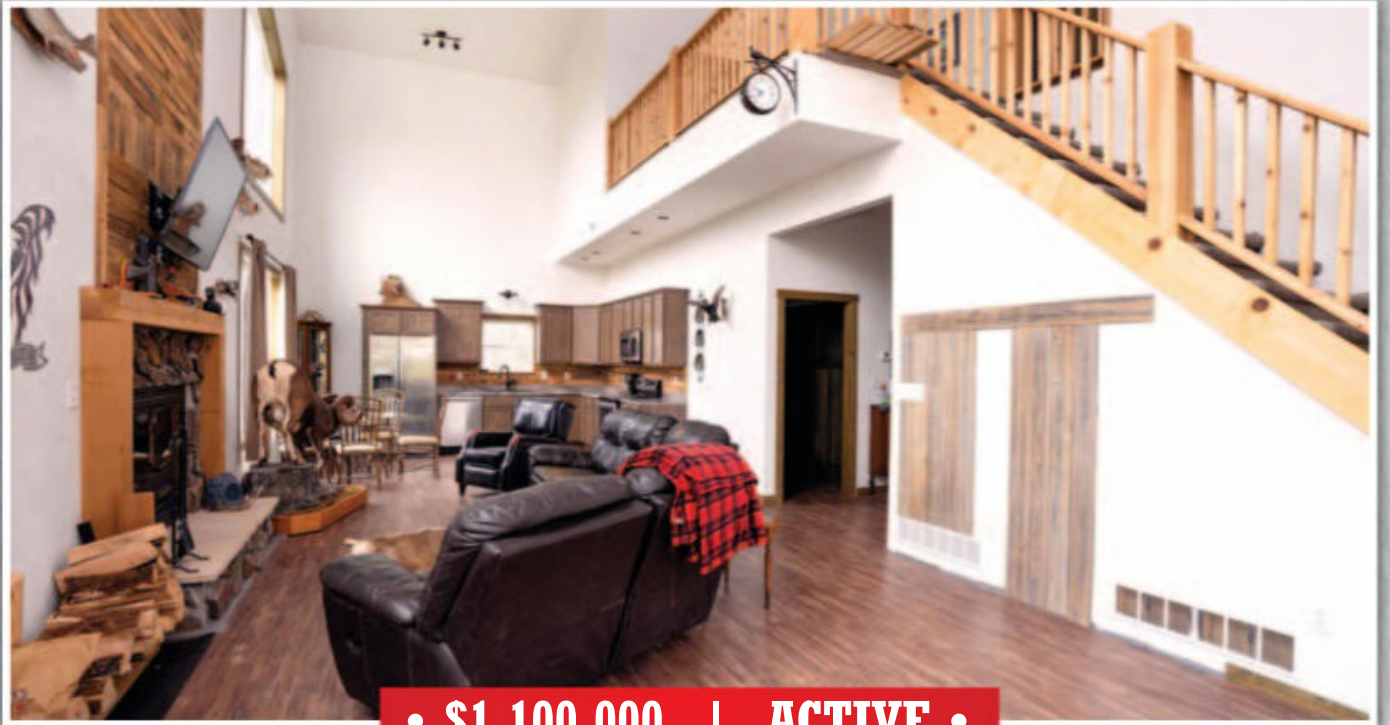
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MONET GOMES AND DR. STEPHEN S. DITCHKOFF,
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ANTLEROLOGY: DEER ANTLEERS AS A MODEL FOR SKELETAL TISSUE REGENERATION

Our take on this may be a little biased, but we feel like this magazine's readership may agree: the white-tailed deer is one of the most iconic wildlife species of North America. One of the most notable features of this species includes its breeding system: males in intense competition with each other, growing a new set of antlers each year, and using those antlers as both displays and weaponry. Among the myriad of curiosities we all hold about deer, antlers may be considered, quite literally, one of the crown jewels of the Cervid family. We love antlers and we know you do, too. However, the fascination we have with these structures extends beyond us deer fanatics and into the minds of the medical field. Grown and shed every year, antlers have been the subject of researchers seeking to understand more about mammalian tissue regeneration. By better understanding the physiology of deer antler regeneration, scientists may gain an understanding for the potential of tissue regeneration in humans.



TISSUE REGENERATION ACROSS THE ANIMAL KINGDOM

As humans, we lack the ability to regrow appendages or entire organs once they are lost. However, examples of tissue regeneration are widespread throughout the animal kingdom, ranging from replacement of small appendages to regrowth of neurons and in some cases, most of the body. Well-known examples of this can be seen in invertebrates such as starfish, which are capable of growing an entire body from as little as one severed arm. Worms provide another well-known example of regeneration. If a worm is cut in half, the portion containing the head can regenerate the entire tail end.

Among vertebrate species — those with backbones or spinal columns, regeneration is less common. However, this phenomenon is observed in some non-mammalian vertebrates, including: salamanders, lizards, and zebra fish. While lizards may lose and regrow their tails, these newly grown tails might lack a true spine. By contrast, axolotls (a type of completely aquatic salamander) can reform and replace almost

any limb, organ, or body part. Salamanders can also regrow many body parts including limbs, eyes, jaws, and hearts. Zebra fish are capable of regenerating portions of their nervous systems and entire organs such as the heart, pancreas, kidney, and liver.

Among mammals, examples of tissue regeneration are more limited. In human children and in mice, regeneration has been documented in the tips of fingers and toes. Additionally, small portions of the ears can be regenerated in some mice. Generally, tissue regeneration in mammals is limited to small, simple structures. However, deer antlers provide an interesting exception to this trend.

THE HISTORY OF ANTLER-LOGY

Any discussion of current research on antlers would be remiss without paying homage to the numerous foundational studies and experiments that have preceded research today. Antlers have been the topic of scientific curiosity for millennia, dating back as far as Aristotle's *The History of Animals*, written in 350 BCE. Since then, countless minds have devoted their

time to discovering what exactly antlers are and what allows deer to grow them year after year. It is because of these predecessors of deer research that we have come to understand that antlers are the fastest growing tissue in the animal kingdom, and that the process of antler regeneration is driven by a wide array of environmental, hormonal, and genetic processes.

Over the course of the last century, scientists have uncovered that the phenomenon of the antler cycle is largely driven by seasonal changes in the environment. Beginning in the 1970s, Dr. Richard Goss hypothesized that the changing day lengths associated with the seasons were the primary factor driving the antler cycle. In areas of the world outside of the tropics, this means that in the summer, day length increases leading up to summer solstice, then as fall and winter progress, daylight decreases leading up to winter solstice.

To test if seasonal changes in daylight were the primary driver of the antler cycle, Goss began a series of experiments conducted on Sika deer in an indoor captive facility. He began

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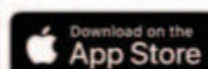
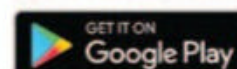


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these experiments by exposing the deer to the daylight cycle they would normally experience on an annual basis (summer solstice, fall equinox, winter solstice, and spring equinox). For these deer, the antler cycle was the same speed as their wild counterparts. Next, Goss increased the speed of the annual daylight cycle, meaning the deer experienced summer solstice, fall equinox, winter solstice, and spring equinox twice in a single calendar year. As a result, these deer grew and shed two sets of antlers in a single year. They grew their antlers during both “summers,” hardened them during both “falls,” and shed them during both “winters/springs.” Goss continued to experiment with the day-length cycle and found that deer could produce four full sets of antlers in a single year. Goss’ work provided scientists with a foundational understanding of the crucial link between day length and

the antler cycle, and was a huge first step to our understanding of how antlers grow and develop.

Seasonal changes in day length trigger a hormonal cascade in deer. Hormones, such as testosterone, drive the growth, hardening, and shedding of antlers in deer. Although this is well known by deer researchers today, we didn’t always understand the link between testosterone and antlers. We understand the importance of the testicles (which are the primary producers of testosterone) in this process through research conducted by German anatomists in 1913. In these experiments, male deer that were castrated following antler hardening shed their antlers and regrew new antlers that never developed past the velvet stage, because of the lack of testosterone. Additionally, ground-breaking work in the 1970s and '80s by Dr. Goss established the link between

testosterone and the antler cycle. In his work, he strategically castrated red deer stags at various stages of antler development, and then documented what happened when deer were then subsequently administered testosterone. These injections allowed castrated deer to fully develop their antlers. Even female deer that were administered testosterone developed pedicles. This research helped set the foundation for what we now know about deer and deer antlers, and how this process is driven in part by testosterone and other hormones.

THE ANTLER CYCLE OF WHITE-TAILED DEER

The process of antler growth is well understood at this point. The antler cycle is a 12-month period, but the period of antler growth lasts only three to four months. Throughout the cycle, testosterone briefly increases as antler growth initiates. As antlers develop in velvet, testosterone remains at low levels, deer antlers emerge from the pedicles and grow from the distal, or outer, ends of the antler. This growth pattern contrasts with that of horn growth. In horned animals, the newest growth comes from the base of the horn itself, and with each layer grown, the older horn extends farther and farther away from the animal’s head. With antlers, the first portions to be grown are the regions closest to the head, such as the burr of the main beam and the brow tines. Newer portions of the antler progressively grow onto the ends of the beam, and tines emerge from the beam. So, the newest antler growth is what we see at the ends of the antlers.

During growth, the antler is comprised of living tissue and contains extensive vasculature throughout, allowing blood to flow through the antler. The antler is made up of cartilage and soft tissue. Following this period of growth, testosterone increases and the antler calcifies, or hardens into bone. Once it is hardened, the outer skin (velvet) is shed from the antler, revealing this bone. Bony antler consists of multiple structures and bone types that help the antler be

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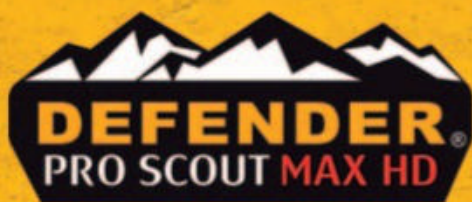
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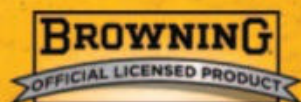
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other males. The components of hardened antler include a dense exterior of compact, or cortical bone, followed by a layer of more porous spongy bone in the core of the antler.

ANTLER STEM CELLS

Although deer species are among the most highly studied species in the world, scientists have only recently begun to understand the process of antler development at the cellular level. We now know that stem cells drive the process of limb growth and development. In short, a stem cell is a cell that is undifferentiated and has the potential to produce cells of many different types. Stem cells can vary in their degree of differentiation, or specialization, with the least differentiated stem cell being pluripotent stem cells, which includes embryonic stem cells. Pluripotent stem cells can produce cells of any kind — blood cells, bone cells, and brain cells — to name a few. These are only present during embryonic development. As an organism ages, and continues to produce new tissues and cells, other types of stem cells remain in the body. These stem cells are collectively referred to as adult stem cells, nonembryonic stem cells, or somatic stem cells. There are many types of adult stem cells including: hematopoietic (blood), mesenchymal (skeletal), neural (brain), and epithelial (tissue and skin) stem cells. Adult stem cells primarily work to repair and maintain the various tissues throughout the body.

While many different animals have the aforementioned stem cells, only members of the deer family, Cervidae, possess antler stem cells. There are multiple types of antler stem cells, and when together, the mass of these antler cells is referred to as antler blastema progenitor cells (ABPCs). A blastema can be described as a cluster of different cell types that amass around the site of an injury and help to reform damaged tissue or organs. If you

have ever seen a deer with freshly shed antlers, you have seen that there is a wound where the antlers once were. It makes sense then, that these stem cells in the antler-forming region would respond in a similar fashion to other forms of wound healing. All antler stem cells revolve around regenerating bony antlers, functioning similarly to other mesenchymal, or skeletal, stem cells.

Within the ABPC, there reside three different types of antler stem cells, all serving different functions in antler regeneration. The antler stem cells responsible for pedicle formation and the formation of a buck fawn's first set of antlers are called the antlerogenic periosteal cells and are located on the frontal crest of the skull. Pedicle periosteal cells are involved with orchestrating the annual regeneration of antlers year after year. Finally, reserve mesenchyme cells are responsible for the rapid growth of the antler, growing from the outermost tips. Altogether, the antler stem cells, or ABPCs, direct the entirety of antler regeneration, allowing a deer to go from antlerless to antlered in a matter of months. This process represents a case where a mammal can essentially regrow something akin to a limb, and the ABPC structure parallels the mechanisms involved in limb regeneration in other organisms, such as salamanders or lizards.

APPLICATIONS TO HUMANS

As deer enthusiasts, the phenomenon of annual antler regeneration may be old news or common knowledge. It may be easy to take for granted just how incredible antler regeneration is. This process involves the scheduled loss of a limb-like structure and regrowth of the entire structure within a very short amount of time. At various points, this structure will contain blood vessels, fur, skin, and bone. The cells that drive regeneration contain and execute the script to regeneration of an appendage with multiple cell types. Each set of antlers is entirely unique and generated based upon

each individual deer's genetic blueprint for antler size and shape. Although we are not closely related to deer, humans and deer are still mammals, and cells similar to ABPCs appear to aid in the limited degree of tissue regeneration observed in other mammals.

As mentioned previously, if severed, humans can regenerate portions of their fingertips. However, this process does not always result in the regeneration of a complete fingertip, and as we get older, our body's ability to do this diminishes. Scientists believe that improved knowledge of antler regeneration will lead to a better understanding of our own body's capacity to regenerate appendages. By understanding how antler stem cells initiate regeneration, researchers may one day develop technology that mimics aspects of antler regeneration with limbs or organs in humans. Even without losing an entire appendage, there are many ways humans could benefit from the ability to regrow tissues in the blood, skin, nerves, or bones.

Roughly 44 million Americans are affected by low bone density. Low bone density also puts people at risk of osteoporosis, a disease that affects approximately 10 million people in the US. During the process of osteoporosis, bones weaken, lose density, and may be damaged. The final stages of antler growth provide a great opportunity to further our understanding of bone formation and regeneration. In experiments with rabbits, transplantation of ABPCs into the femurs of rabbits with bone defects resulted in the rabbits regenerating cartilage and bone. As this research continues, one day it may be possible that ABPCs could be incorporated into treatments of other bone diseases.

Research on antler regeneration may also tie into cancer research. At its core, cancerous cells are those that exhibit unregulated cell growth and division. The cells have an "on switch" driving their constant replication, and over time, this replication of cancerous cells may proliferate throughout the body.

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Antlers grow at rates even faster than cancer cells, making good use of the “on switch” that induces cell replication. However, antler regeneration is halted upon completion of the antler, activating an “off switch,” so to speak. This “off switch” comes in the form of the expression of tumor suppressor genes. These tumor suppressor genes are activated by proto-oncogenes, present in the growing tips of the antler. Researchers have extracted these proto-oncogenes from antler tips and applied them to various forms of human cancers, such as glioblastoma and prostate cancer. When injected into these cancerous cells, or mice grafted with human cancerous cells, these proto-oncogenes have successfully reduced cell proliferation, reduced tumor volumes, and even promoted cell death. Because proto-oncogenes are

responsible for stopping the growth of all the cell types involved in antler growth, scientists believe they may be able to communicate with tumors in many different cell types in the skin, cartilage, bone, blood vessels, and nerves. This means that the mechanism involved with stopping antler growth might someday be utilized in halting the growth of cancer in people.

CONCLUSION

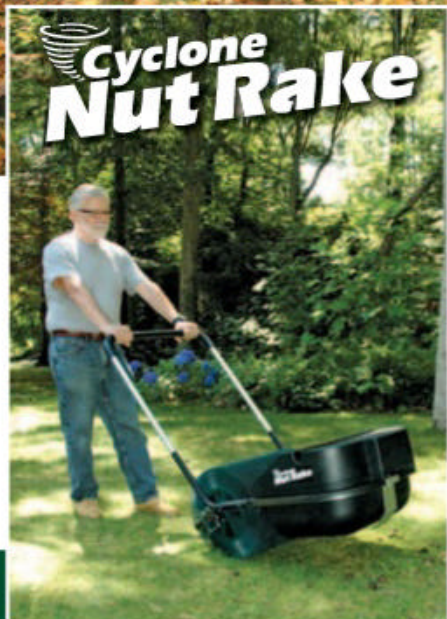
Although extensively studied, there is still so much about white-tailed deer that we have yet to fully understand. We know antler regeneration is controlled by many different types of antler stem cells, orchestrating growth, hardening, and casting of antlers year after year. If we could mimic the mechanisms used in white-tailed deer for antler regeneration, what could we grow? What could we stop from growing? Could deer antlers help scientists better understand

and treat osteoporosis, or even cancer? Next time you find a shed of your favorite buck, pause to appreciate the biological anomaly that is the antler. You might have a greater appreciation for just how much we as humans can learn from the biology of our favorite wildlife species, and how that knowledge might one day help us.

— *Monet Gomes is a doctoral student in the Auburn DeerLab and is examining relationships between antler characteristics and reproductive success for her dissertation research.*
Dr. Stephen S. Ditchkoff is a William R. and Fay Ireland Distinguished Professor at Auburn’s College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment.



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SHOULD WE **STOP** SHOOTING DOES?





A LOOK AT ALL THINGS ANTLERLESS HARVEST.

TEXT & PHOTOS BY
JOSH HONEYCUTT

Deer hunting is filled with hot-button issues. In some crowds, shooting does is one of those, and many hunters are found on one of two extremes. In some circles, it's more than expected to fill not one doe tag, but many. To them, it's a necessity for maintaining proper population densities and ratios. In other circles, killing a doe is akin to shooting an endangered species.



Harvesting does still has a place when implemented correctly.

MAKE A ONE-SHOT KILL

Killing an animal cleanly is a hunter's No. 1 priority when taking the shot. A one-shot kill is the goal, whether it's a whitetail buck, doe, or gray squirrel. But on highly managed deer hunting properties, hunters usually hope to fill doe tags in a manner that does not pressure target bucks. Because of this reason, too, making a quick, clean, one-shot kill is crucial.

BROADSIDE: Broadside is the ideal shot opportunity. This opens a clear lane to a heart shot or double-lung hit. This is true for compound bows, crossbows, and firearms.

QUARTERING-AWAY: The next-best shot opportunity, and the preferred opportunity by some, is the quartering-away option. This is when a deer's head is pointed slightly away from the hunter, which angles the deer's body. While this decreases the size of the double-lung kill zone, it opens a clearer lane to the heart, and minimizes the odds of hitting hard bone in the leg and shoulder region. This is a good shot opportunity for all weapon types.

QUARTERING-TO: Most hunters prefer to not take quartering-to shot opportunities. However, some crossbow and compound bowhunters with heavy arrow and broadhead setups can produce enough kinetic energy to make the shot. That's the minority of bowhunters, though. In contrast, firearm hunters can rest assured knowing a well-placed, quartering-to shot will likely put a deer down quickly.

OTHER SHOTS: Furthermore, while bowhunters should never aim for anything but the center of the heart or lungs, gun hunters have a couple other options. For example, people packing the boom sticks might try for a carefully placed neck shot, or a high-shoulder placement that can drop a deer in its tracks.

There are numerous reasons why antlerless harvest can spark such heated debates. At its core, shooting a buck removes one deer from the herd. Shooting a doe removes one doe plus any future offspring she would have produced.

Furthermore, in some parts of the country, deer numbers are declining. Of course, that isn't true everywhere. Still, should we consider a ceasefire on antlerless deer? The answer is yes, no, and maybe.

WHEN TO SHOOT DOES

There are numerous reasons and scenarios why hunter should shoot does. Not everyone finds each or any of these reasons to be true for their personal situations. With that being said, many hunters do.

The first and most obvious reason is if a hunter wants to fill the freezer with meat. That alone is plenty enough reason to pull the trigger on a slickhead. When that's the case, it's important to answer certain questions before doing so, though.

First, does the area permit antlerless harvest? Second, does the current season allow doe harvest? Third, is the current deer population density healthy enough to support doe removal? If the answer to all three is "yes," greenlight that slickhead and let it fly.

Of course, there are additional reasons and times to shoot does. Doing so helps maintain a healthy herd density and keep it below the area's carrying capacity. If the area is overpopulated, taking the proper number of does can decrease the number of deer to the desired level.

It also helps balance buck-to-doe ratios. In turn, that produces a more condensed rut timeline. Fewer does are missed during their first cycle. Plus, rutting behavior is more visible because bucks must move more and work harder to find estrus does.

Since the rut is more condensed, does tend to conceive during their first cycle, which produces a more consistent fawn drop. In tougher regions — whether climate or predator related — this helps more fawns survive to adulthood.

WHEN NOT TO SHOOT DOES

Just as there are reasons to shoot does, there are also reasons to not shoot does. Again, these situations might not apply to some. With that being said, an increasing number of hunters are finding themselves in these scenarios.

Of course, not so long ago, a lot of hunters couldn't remove enough does from the landscape. In some places, that isn't true anymore. Nowadays, the worry is too many does are being removed, especially on federal public hunting lands (such as national forests) where land management is virtually nonexistent. In such places, if the deer herd density is too low, hunters shouldn't shoot does. They should harvest bucks only.

Another reason to call off the doe killing is if the fawn recruitment rate is too low. The fawn recruitment rate is measured by the number of fawns per doe that reach maturity. If the fawn recruitment rate is 1.0, that means one fawn per doe survives to adulthood and is recruited into the deer herd. Likewise, if a recruitment rate is 0.5, it takes two adult does to raise one fawn to maturity.



In most states, fawn recruitment rates continue to decrease. As habitat quality declines, and predator populations such as bobcats, bears, wolves and coyotes increase, it's taking a significant toll on the fawn crop. According to 2017 data reported by the National Deer Association (NDA), the two states with the lowest fawn recruitment rates were Rhode Island (0.20) and Oklahoma (0.30). On the other end of the spectrum, the only state left with a rate higher than 1.0 was Kentucky.

According to more recent research by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and the University of Georgia, some parts of northern Georgia have fawn recruitment rates as low as 16% (0.16). "Evidence points to low fawn recruitment due to high predation rates as being the direct cause of population decline in northern Georgia," said University of Georgia's Adam Edge. "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."

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While reducing or completely halting doe harvests might be enough to offset poor fawn recruitment rates, once these rates get so low, it's no longer effective enough to prevent annual deer population decline. "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."

Obviously, once deer numbers get so low, and fawn recruitment rates plummet to certain thresholds, habitat improvement and predator management (along with a ceasefire on doe harvests) are necessary for stabilizing and eventually increasing deer population densities. When hunters find themselves in these scenarios, it's very important to not fill doe tags, even if they can.

MAKING THE CALL

Deciding to shoot a doe, or not, can be a difficult decision. But it isn't one to make in the field on a whim. Deer hunters should know what they plan to do when they trek into the outdoors.

Understanding when to shoot productive does, and when to shoot less-productive does, is an important decision.



REASONS TO SHOOT DOES BEFORE THE RUT



Most hunters prefer to shoot does before the rut. There are more reasons to fill antlerless tags prior to it. Some of these include the following:

1. Mature does are smart, and they get more difficult to shoot as the season progresses.
2. Earlier in the season, deer hunters still have more time to fill the tag(s).
3. Shooting does earlier in the season knocks off the rust and sharpens skills.
4. It fills freezers and food stores sooner.
5. This increases food sources for remaining deer throughout fall and winter.
6. The rut hasn't started yet, which conserves a bucks' energy and reduces herd stress.
7. The rut will be more condensed (and visible) if does are removed beforehand.
8. There is less risk of shooting a buck that already cast its antlers.
9. It is easier to differentiate between adult does and young button bucks.
10. The early season offers more cover, which makes it simpler to get shots off on deer.

TAKEAWAY: If a hunter is confident they need to remove does, doing so prior to the rut makes the most sense.

REASONS TO SHOOT DOES AFTER THE RUT



There are numerous reasons to shoot does after the rut, rather than before it begins, including the following.

1. Educating the local deer herd is less of a concern, especially if buck tags are already filled.
2. Bed-to-food patterns become even more distinct during the late season, making does easier to harvest.
3. There's no way to know how many does will die from predators, natural causes, and other deer hunters throughout the season. Therefore, halting doe harvests until the late season makes it easier to assess the herd before filling the appropriate number of doe tags.
4. It doesn't matter if a doe paired up with a low- or high-scoring buck. Antler genetics can't really be influenced in the wild, and so, removing a buck's offspring from the landscape won't really impact the area's genetics.
5. The meat is less likely to spoil due to colder weather.

TAKEAWAY: If a hunter is unsure if they will need to remove does, waiting until after the rut makes the most sense.



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SHOOTING THE RIGHT DOE

Pulling the trigger on the **RIGHT** doe might or might not be an important decision in most circumstances. However, if attempting to harvest does in a manner that decreases the deer population or keeps the status quo, shooting does within certain age classes achieves different goals.

MATURE DOES: Generally, this has the most effect on a deer herd. Oftentimes, this decreases the fawn crop, which can either lower the deer population density or maintain current numbers.

YOUNG DOES: Usually, this has minimal effect on a healthy herd. It can decrease the overall deer numbers, but usually, it keeps the status quo.

DOE FAWNS: Oftentimes, this has the least effect on herd numbers. If wanting to fill a doe tag in a low-density deer herd, killing a doe fawn can still allow it to increase, or maintain current numbers.

Of course, there are markers that can help hunters gauge whether they should be harvesting more does, or not. Pre-season and post-season trail-camera surveys can help estimate a deer herd density and buck-to-doe ratio. Obviously, if hunters are struggling to even see deer, filling doe tags isn't advised.

When hunters *do* harvest deer (including does), they can weigh them and compare these to the average carcass weights of similar age classes. Generally, this data is produced and provided by state wildlife agencies. Hunters can use

that information as a benchmark to determine if their deer herds are healthy, gaining access to enough food sources, etc. If the deer weights are lower than the area average, it's time to remove more does. Plus, consider a plan to improve the habitat and increase available food sources.

All things considered, try to establish a game plan for the season. Determine how many does you should shoot, what age classes to focus on, when the right time is to fill tags, and anything else of importance.

Sometimes, the game plan might even mean identifying which does are better at producing fawns. According to recent research, doe maturity might have less impact on successfully raising fawns than originally thought. Usually, the most successful does are older does. Other times, these are younger ones. It seems that some young does are habitually more successful than even some adult does that have more experience.

"It's interesting to see that 47% of our females recruited 75% of our fawns from 2008 to 2019," said Auburn University's Tristan Swartout. "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."

Due to these factors, making the call on whether to shoot a doe, or not, isn't always an easy one. Answering whether we should stop shooting does, or not, isn't a clear-cut, surface-level decision. It takes extensive studying, thought, and planning. The answer is different in every situation. But in some situations, yes, we should stop shooting does.



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UNDERSTANDING CORE

There's nothing like a few crisp, close-up trail-camera photos of a big buck to get you pumped for bow season. Those were my exact thoughts late last summer as I studied some new images from a camera my friend Chad had placed on a piece of ground we planned to hunt during the early season.

THE TERM HAS BEEN TOSSED AROUND A LOT OVER THE YEARS. WHAT EXACTLY IS A BUCK'S CORE AREA, AND HOW CAN YOU HUNT IT EFFECTIVELY?

AREAS

Mature bucks are most at ease in their bedding areas. Knowing how they use this cover – and when they leave it – is perhaps the most important knowledge a hunter can acquire when devising hunting strategies.

BILL KINNEY/WINDIGO

Best of all, we had photos of not one, but two thumper bucks. And, although the bucks had been photographed in several locations, one spot in particular seemed to stand out as “the” place to be when bow season rolled around.

It wasn’t that this area produced so many more pictures than other areas. In fact, it yielded fewer. What it did offer was consistent photos of both bucks. That immediately told me that we had guessed right and placed that camera in a definitive core area.

The most encouraging part of all of this was that these pictures had been captured within a half-mile radius of a prime stand site I discovered the previous summer. Since this site served as an in-woods pinch point, I was certain the bucks were consistently using this travel corridor.

I was feeling quite confident when I walked to the stand for my first morning hunt. The morning was crisp and clear. It was one of the days where you think you’ll not only see deer, but you’ll see

bucks. My hunch was right, and it didn’t take long for the action to start.

It was shortly after daylight when I heard a twig snap. Out stepped a doe. Hot on her heels was an incredible triple-beamed buck. However, unlike the stories we so often hear about does leading Mr. Big around by the nose, it only took seconds to realize that the buck was dictating the doe’s travels. Each time she tried to veer off course, he would corral her and aim her back to where he wanted to go. Luckily, that was past my stand.

Several tension-filled minutes later, my dedication to hunting the big guy’s core area paid off handsomely.

CORE AREAS DEFINED

The term core area has been tossed around by many self-proclaimed experts in recent years. Frankly, many of these concocted definitions range widely. Unfortunately, there also seems to be a range of what some biologists use as an official

definition. I believe that leads to a lot of confusion, particularly when the “expert” doesn’t clearly define the version of the core area he’s talking about.

I’m certainly not arrogant enough to believe that my views of core areas are the true definition, but I will still strive to articulate them as clearly as I can. With that, at least you’ll be able to understand my views and how I apply them.

Simply put, I believe a mature buck’s core area can be summed up as the area where he regularly spends the daylight hours during the nonrutting portions of the season. At first thought, one might assume that means his bedding area. Although that certainly is included, there’s more to it.

Much more.

Bucks move during daylight far more than many hunter’s give them credit for. As D&DH’s own John J. Ozoga has shared in his writings and in my personal conversations with him, deer have five peak movement periods

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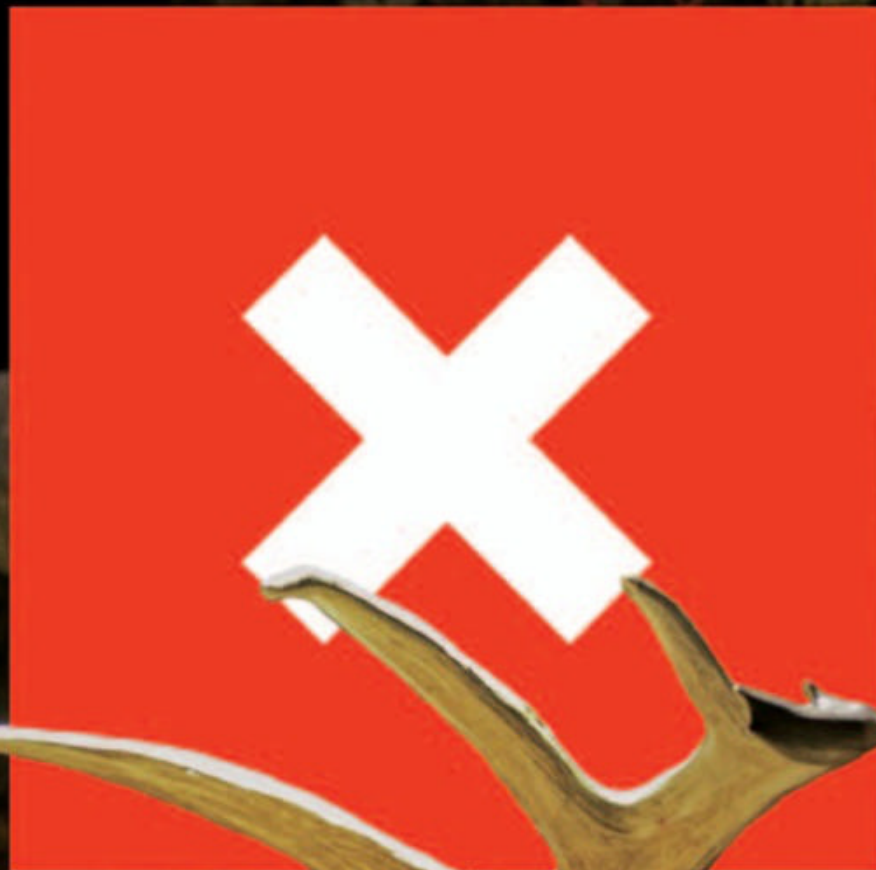
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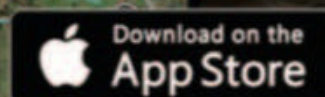
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Connecting trails are where bucks are both the most at ease and the least familiar with – and where hunters can get away with the most.

BILL KINNEY/WINDIGO

in a 24-hour cycle: dawn, dusk, twice during the night and once at midday.

For mature bucks, the midday movement can vary significantly. However, outside of the rut, I've noticed this movement most often consists of rising to urinate, traveling to a nearby food or water source, or relocating to a bedding area closer to the evening food source. By my definition, all of those areas would be included in the buck's core area.

Additionally, I include the staging areas near open food sources a part of a buck's core area. After all, staging areas are the locations where bucks hole up and wait for darkness. However, because mature bucks often aren't comfortable entering open fields and meadows or young clear-cuts until after dark, all areas that bucks use as staging areas wouldn't count toward core areas.

GAPS IN THE PATTERN

Unlike many core area representations I've seen, I don't view them as circular or oval in shape. Instead, I see them as a series of busted-up, old-fashioned wagon wheels. The major hubs represent bedding areas and daytime food and water sources, with the spokes of various lengths connecting these hubs and running toward the nighttime food and water sources.

As opposed to the more common oval or circular representations, many dead areas exist in the midst of this tangle of hubs and spokes. To me, this makes perfect sense. Anyone who has spent much time chasing mature bucks realizes that these deer don't spend much, if any, time within most parts of the oval area he spends daylight in. Instead, he spends the most time in relatively small areas and transitions between them. If you want to kill that buck, placing a stand in that oval does almost no good if you aren't covering one of the transition spokes or the hubs.

The other issue that isn't touched on much is that core areas can, and often do, change during the year. With changing food sources comes changing transition routes. After the acorns

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are gone, a post-rut buck has no reason to go out of his way to visit the oak ridge. On the flip side, after the corn dries, the apples start dropping, or the cool-season grasses and weeds start to pop, motivation to travel to these locations become obvious.

Bedding areas can also shift. The farther deer are forced to travel for new food and water sources, the more likely it is that their bedding areas will change.

The rut is the other complication during this time. When it hits, the buck's primary motivations change from simply eating, drinking, comfort and survival, to perpetuating the species.

During the peak scraping, chasing and tending phases, doe bedding areas will greatly influence how, when and where mature bucks move. However, not all doe bedding areas are included. The ones to watch are those that become littered with scrapes seemingly overnight.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Social activities will also cause shifts, especially during the off-season months. Does will stake out their areas by defending fawning grounds. This can cause a mature buck to temporarily vacate his core area. Bachelor-group behavior affects individual bucks in the same manner, as does the winter yarding behavior of mature bucks and does.

Still, for all of the challenges and nuances involved in this method of defining a mature buck's core area, I believe the tactics listed in this article make the most sense for the serious deer hunter.

Since our goal usually involves killing a mature buck, I want to know where he'll be during daylight. Therefore, I presume his core area consists of the specific areas where he spends most of his waking hours during hunting season.

CORE AREA DETAILS

A buck's familiarity with the habitat — especially the sense of security it provides — is the key component to a core area's configuration. What isn't quite as apparent at first glance is that all bucks have differing degrees of sensitivity throughout their core areas.

By my definition, a buck's core can be broken down into four subcategories:

- 1. Bedding areas.**
- 2. Daytime, in-woods food and water sources.**
- 3. Staging areas near evening food and water sources.**
- 4. Trail networks.**

Each of these groups have differing sensitivity levels.

Starting with the bedding area, it only makes sense that bucks are most familiar with this subcategory. After all, they spend more time here than all of the other subcategories combined. Furthermore, if there's any location where bucks place a higher premium on safety than

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in their bedding area I've yet to find it.

The result is that they know the immediate area surrounding their bedding areas better than anywhere else. That makes it far more challenging to get away with disturbances going undetected. I don't believe kicking a mature buck from his bed once or twice is the kiss of death to hunters. However, if one then goes on to create massive shooting lanes and leave odor all over the area, our odds do go down significantly.

Bucks can also know the details of their in-woods food and water sources very well. However, size has a lot to do with how tuned-in they are. For example, a hunter can often get away with far more while setting stands or hunting a large oak ridge than they could with a small pond. In either case, the buck is normally not as touchy as in his bedding area.

The same holds true for staging areas. It is my belief that this comparatively easier-going attitude in both of these locations

is due to the buck feeling more secure because it is on its feet.

Finally, the connecting trails are where bucks are both most at ease and least familiar — and where hunters can get away with the most. After all, the bucks aren't really lingering here and are far less likely to notice a few branches out of place. They're just getting from Point A to Point B.

Before I move on, I must point out that no matter what part of their home range they are in, bucks are still bucks. Sure, there are generally different tolerance and comfort levels in these groupings, but a buck still is most often going to slip away first and ask questions later if he senses danger.

WHEN TO MAKE YOUR MOVE

The tendencies for bucks to shift their core areas over the seasons comes in handy. With changing food sources and population dynamics — such as doe fawning areas, bachelor grouping and the rut — bucks commonly have very

differing cores with each season. Furthermore, food, the rut and hunting pressure often causes major and minor shifts during hunting season.

This simple fact is both the hunter's best friend and worst enemy. It works out very well in that during the off-season, we can slip into a buck's fall bedding area and make fairly major changes and still have it appear natural by the time he finally cycles back through the next fall.

On the flip side, when a hunter discovers an active core area during hunting season, if at all possible, he should avoid waiting for the next week to hunt it. Because core areas can be very fluid in nature, don't count on the buck continuing to do the exact same thing the entire season.

Hunters who assume a buck's routine will stay the same are often left hunting core areas that have been abandoned.

CONCLUSION

I view core areas as the locations where bucks spend most of their daylight hours on a fairly consistent basis. Since they often don't spend much time in most of the surrounding habitat, core areas can be fragmented.

The biggest challenge lies in finding the active areas, and there really isn't a simple formula for accomplishing that goal. Most times, it's some form of a combination of observations, scouting-camera pictures, buck-sign interpretation and, of course, woodsmanship. It can be very tough figuring it all out, but unearthing even a relatively small portion and piecing it into its grouping can put you well on your way to success.

— Steve Bartylla is a veteran outdoor writer, seminar speaker and big-buck hunter from central Wisconsin. For more information on his buck-hunting tactics, visit www.YouTube.com/@DDHONLINE and click on the Grow 'em Big tab.

The advertisement for WyndScent features a central image of a black vaporizer with a red tip, emitting a plume of white vapor into the air. The background is a soft-focus field of tall grass. At the top right, the WyndScent logo is displayed, consisting of a stylized white antler head with a red flame-like shape in the center, above the text 'WYNDSCENT' and 'WYNDSCENT.COM'. Below the logo, the text 'UP YOUR SCENT GAME' is written in large, bold, white capital letters, followed by 'WITH VAPORIZED HUNTING SCENTS' in smaller white capital letters. At the bottom left, the text 'EFFECTIVE UP TO 300 YARDS AWAY' is written in white capital letters. Below this text are three red circular icons: a flame, a clock face, and a shield. Under each icon is a white label: 'FAR TRAVELING VAPOR', 'SCENT RELEASED EVERY MINUTE', and 'DURABLE DESIGN'. At the bottom right, the text '30+ SCENTS AVAILABLE' is written in white capital letters. Below this text are several logos for different scents, including 'CODE BLUE', 'DECEIVER', 'VAPORSHIELD', and 'RAIDERS'.



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THE OAK CONNECTION

CHARLES J. ALSHEIMER



**ACORNS CONNECT OAK TREES –
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TOM CARPENTER

They go by the Latin name *Quercus*: the oak trees that we find across whitetail country. I think the name a funny one – it sounds like *quirky* – yet the bond between oak trees and deer (and myriad other forms of wildlife for that matter) is anything but.

Rather, the oak-whitetail connection is direct and straightforward. It starts with and revolves around acorns, yes. But the link reaches and runs even deeper.

A HUNT IN THE OAKS

It was the last day of a gun hunt in hill-country farmland of fields and woods, and my son Jeremiah still needed a deer.

The stand options on the farm we were hunting were ample enough, which was part of our quandary: where to conduct a best-bet sit for a few hours with one morning left. Ridgetop saddle? On a trail back into cover from feeding fields? A brushy bottom where a rutting buck might court a doe?

As we contemplated options, I settled on a recommendation.

"You know, there was a lot of deer sign in the south woods when I walked through yesterday," I said. "I think they are pawing for acorns there. The wind is light. It's going to be pretty cold. The deer will move. I'd just get up in that ladder stand in the oaks on the ridge and wait it out."

He agreed. We had a plan.

UNDERSTANDING ACORNS, KNOWING OAKS

Acorns are "power food" that deer will focus on when available. Acorns are excellent nutrition, and deer know it. Whitetails evolved with acorns as a key food source. Acorns are exceedingly high in carbohydrates and fats. That helps put mass and fat on deer, and that prepares them for winter. Acorns provide good protein, as well.

In short, acorns are a win-win-win food. They are simply a natural food that whitetails know is good, and flock to. Acorns are autumn's perfect deer food.

There are two basic classes of oak trees that deer hunters need to know — white oaks and red oaks. All oaks drop acorns, and whitetails will eat acorns from any kind of oak tree, but deer do have preferences.

White oak acorns are by far the whitetail's favorite. *Quercus alba*, or white oaks, are widespread and well-known. White oak acorns are low in tannins, which means they are not bitter tasting, and can taste palatable even to humans. (Peel off the shell and try one sometime; not bad!)

Oaks within the white oak sector produce acorns every year, which means the tree flowers, produces acorns and drops them

so that some acorns hit the ground annually.

Besides the classic white oak itself, other trees in the white oak group include the swamp white oak, bur oak, post oak, chestnut oak and chinkapin oak.

While higher in tannins, generally more bitter and not as tasty as white-oak-style acorns, red oak (*Quercus rubra*) acorns provide important whitetail forage, too. Good nutrition trumps flavor.

Oaks within the red oak sector produce acorns every other year, meaning flowers bloom one spring, acorns form and grow through that fall and hang on all winter, then finish developing the next summer and drop that fall. Interestingly, red oaks can have two year classes of acorns on the tree at the same time.

In addition to the namesakes northern red oak and southern red oak, other trees in the red oak group include the black oak, pin oak, turkey oak, blackjack oak and water oak.

HUNTING STRATEGIES, BOW AND GUN

All hunting starts with scouting, and if you have abundant oaks in your hunting area, it's smart to launch a late-summer oak-scouting mission to see what might be happening on the trees and where the acorn action might occur.

If you are scouting a new area, put oak trees on your "habitat check checklist."

Take a nonchalant midday wander. That won't bother the local

deer much, if at all. If lots of acorns are in a particular grove or woodlot, or on a certain ridge, this could even be a good time to set a stand or two.

Whether you're setting stands before the season or reacting to an acorn crop in-season, the key question is: Do you hunt right in



in one spring-to-fall cycle. But not all years are created equal — one year may see a tree produce a bumper crop, the next year next-to-nothing.

What you hope for in your hunting area is that different trees are alternating between good years and bad production years,

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the oaks, or on a travel corridor to or from them? It all depends on time of day, and the hunting tool you are using – bow or firearm.

For bowhunters, dawn hunts in the oaks can be tough, because the deer may already be there feeding when you arrive. Now is the time to hunt travel corridors coming out of the oaks. With that being said, don't be afraid to move right into the oaks after a couple of hours. A mid-morning stand right in there among the acorns can be a fine place to arrow a hungry whitetail on a mid-morning feed.

Another option is to set up right at the source – in the oaks themselves. That's why afternoon hunts in the oaks for bowhunters are great. Get there plenty early, set up, settle in, and be quietly waiting when the deer start moving.

For a gun hunt, watching a grove of oaks is not unlike hunting a food plot, hay meadow

or feeding field: Positioning is important – be off to the side but not out of the action – and pay attention to the breeze, keeping your scent away from approach trails and the feeding area.

OTHER OAK ADVANTAGES

The benefits that oaks provide to whitetails extend far beyond acorns as a food source.

Oak woodlands provide excellent cover for deer. Some oak forests can be dense with underbrush, which, of course, whitetails love. But even oak forests that are relatively open, as well as oak savannas, serve as good bedding areas; deer have some cover but can easily see danger coming.

Soil quality under oaks is often excellent, which means other plants that are good forage also grow there. Grasses. Clovers. Forbs (native wildflowers). Mushrooms. This is especially

true in spring and early summer, when the dappled sunshine below oaks can support better plant life than the dense shade that, say, a climax maple forest offers.

Young oak trees themselves make excellent forage for deer. That can be a good and bad thing. On the good side, it is part of the natural process, and every young oak can't grow up to be a mature tree, and fewer young oaks in a new grove mean the remaining ones have less competition. On the other hand, if you are managing land and trying to grow some oaks, take precautions against hungry deer.

Oaks love sun, and are often found on south-facing slopes. Those are places where the winter sun's angle can create a microclimate that gives whitetails a place (often out of the wind) to soften the impact of bitter winter weather. And if the snow isn't too deep, and the sun does just enough



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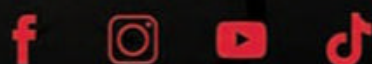
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One shot is usually a good thing. I waited a few minutes and then strolled that way.

As I climbed the last rise toward the stand in the oaks, I saw my young-man hunter on the ground, sitting on a log, and I don't know what brightened the day more — the sun now well up in the sky, or Jeremiah's smile. Beside him was a sleek young whitetail buck arranged in the russet oak leaves of the forest floor.

— Tom Carpenter has sat in or below many an oak tree in his 50 years as a whitetail hunter across the Midwest.



work on the ground, whitetails can paw for a few nutritious acorns without moving much.

And there we are — back at acorns.

CONCLUSION

"Good luck, sit tight," I said as Jeremiah and I parted ways at a tractor trail intersection in the dark, also offering: "They might not be there at dawn. I think that spot might get better as the morning wears on." He headed up the hill toward the ladder stand in the oaks.

I climbed the other ridge and sat against an old bur oak trunk, nestled into my jacket, and watched the glory of a clear November morning unfold via the buzz of chickadees, hammer of woodpeckers, *yank-yanks* of nuthatches and chatter of squirrels.

Finally, a shot sounded. My heart beat quickened. It had to be him! No more shots sounded.





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Ten days is a long time to go without seeing a deer, much less a buck. Maybe it was the warmer-than-average temperatures. Maybe it was the moon phase. Or it could have been the high winds. Whatever the reason, one fact remained: The bucks were not moving during daylight hours, and I was fighting to stay focused.

I decided to still-hunt that morning along the rim of a canyon where Jon Kayser had previously tagged a tall-tined 12-pointer and where I had shot a 120-class buck last year.

The canyon was surrounded by thick evergreens that made ideal bedding cover, while the bottom of the canyon sprouted a grown-over clear-cut complete with briars and knee-high grasses. A beaver dam was tucked into the north end, draining south along the bottom of the canyon to where it plummeted precipitously over rocks and boulders before joining a roaring river several hundred yards farther south.

I continued slowly along the rim, stopping often to peer through the brush to the clear-cut below. I reached a natural opening and stopped next to an odd-shaped spruce to survey the meadow. Suddenly, I spotted a deer moving in my direction along an old logging road. I raised my binoculars and saw a rack, but the brush camouflaged the antlers to such a degree I could not determine how many points were on either side.

I slowly raised my Remington pump and peered through the scope. I did not have a clear shot, so I waited for the buck to step forward a few yards. He had no idea I was crouched 75 yards above him along the perimeter. When he turned his head and ambled forward, I saw a wide rack with heavy beams. I centered the crosshairs behind his shoulder, held my breath and squeezed off a round. The .30-06 barked a second time as the buck bolted along the creek bed, but his dash to safety was to no avail. I heard him crash into some nearby dead brush and thrash about for a moment or two. Then all was silent.

I popped a fresh magazine into my carbine just in case my ears deceived

MITCH KEZAR/WINDIG



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me, and stooped down to pick up my spent casings. Much to my surprise, I not only found my warm brass, but my spent casings from last year that had been lost in the snow! I had shot a second wilderness buck from the exact same vantage point as the previous season!

Later when I recounted the morning's events to Jon, I learned that he also had shot his tall-tined buck from the same natural opening. Three bucks in two years rifled near that old twisted spruce. What were the odds?

COMMON DENOMINATORS

Every so often big-woods hunters stumble upon an ambush point that allows them to tag bucks year after year. Indeed, in three years we have killed three bucks ranging from 120, 130 and 160 class from the same wilderness location, and have glimpsed several others that rocked our eyeballs.

In fact, we've killed buck after buck from one precise location in many of the woodland settings we've hunted. It just seems that every chunk of timber has one spot that's a perennial producer.

A common characteristic of such a killing tree is a good field of view. In wilderness settings, high points overlooking clear-cuts, swamps, avalanches, slides or wildfire burns, or a knoll peeking over power lines, gas lines or other rights of way that slice through large sections of whitetail habitat are ideal posting sites. Under these circumstances you can spot bucks prowling about well before they are even remotely aware of your presence. The fact that you can see over a wide area increases your chances of catching a racked buck flat-footed — a buck you would probably not see if you stayed in the thick stuff.

Of course, your field of view from a killing tree can also be restricted. A good example is in farm country where a stone wall, hedgerow or fence line bisects a long-abandoned brush-choked farm field. Smart bucks will move through the thick brush that grows along the wall, row or fence line, making a treestand hunter armed with archery tackle or an open-sight shotgun deadly for as long as the cover provides maximum protection to roaming bucks.

A second common characteristic of a killing tree is easy access. If you must wrestle your way through brittle tangles of dry brush or slosh through thick reeds to get to and from that treestand, ground blind or posting site, then you must do so without disturbing any nearby deer. This means you must play the wind and practice noise and scent control as you work your way into position. And once you are settled in, you must be reasonably comfortable so you can remain stationary and out of sight for long periods of time.

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

Many killing trees are only hot for a short period of time. In other words, you have no more than a modest window of opportunity to kill one or more bucks before the setup goes cold until next season. And even then, weather patterns, hunting pressure and crop rotation can wreak havoc on a good killing tree.

For example, food is the key to locating early season bucks. In farm country, that means cash crops like corn, beans and alfalfa, whereas mast such as acorns, beechnuts and apples are the primary food sources in wilderness regions. After these food sources are harvested or gobbled up by forest residents, bucks will feed elsewhere, and a nearby killing tree loses its effectiveness.

Food is not the only draw. One fall I located a natural spring near the top of a mountain where cold water bubbled up through the root system of several large trees. The weather had been hot and I found where deer were drawn to the seepage for a drink before descending to the valley below to feed in open farm fields after sunset. There were so many deer tracks in the soft mud around those trees that it looked like every deer within a mile radius was visiting the site.

We killed three bucks off that seepage that season, and one more the following year. To date, if water is scarce on the mountain we can count on seeing bucks around the seepage. If it happens to be a wet autumn, however, the bucks are scattered and this particular killing tree isn't productive.

Timing isn't as critical when the killing tree is located near the intersection of two or more ecotones. For example, in wilderness areas, the



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thin line that separates a hardwood ridge from a stand of bottomland softwoods often attracts deer year round. A string of rubs and scrapes should be evident, and you can find bucks moving along this magic line at almost any time during deer season. A tree overlooking that thin line and a cluster of scrapes, or a deadfall uphill from a natural bottleneck along that line (such as a saddle between two steep ridges) can be another devastating ambush site.

On another property I hunt there's a half-mile block of woods bordered by abandoned farm fields to the north and east and a lush hay field to the northeast — all laid out in checkerboard fashion. I can count on seeing bucks at the apex all season long. Over the past couple years, I have tagged five whitetails within sight of where these distinct types of vegetation merge. I have also blown two opportunities at two behemoths, including a borderline Booner.

TRAVEL ROUTES

Another characteristic common to killing trees is a nearby terrain feature that funnels bucks past your setup. Ravines immediately come to mind, as do gentle slopes that lead up and down steep hillsides, shallow stream crossings and the tips of inland bays that force bucks close to the shoreline as they go around the "horn."

The trick is to look for that one spot, high point or tree that allows you to overlook these features without being picked off. I have a secret location in the Adirondacks that overlooks a creek as it winds its way through one end of a hemlock swamp. Bucks will work the edges, especially during the pre-rut when they are laying down scrape lines. The first year we discovered the site, we took two magnificent 8-pointers from behind a dead log that overlooks the swamp's edge.

These killing trees generally catch bucks as they travel between bedding and feeding grounds during the early season and pre-rut periods.

However, when the chase phase kicks in and bucks go on the prowl 24/7 searching for does about to enter estrous, then all bets are off. It is time to zero in on terrain features does use as conduits to and from their own preferred feeding and bedding grounds.

If I am hunting unfamiliar territory, I scan local topographical maps until I locate a hillside ravine. The best ravines have several slopes that lead downhill to the head of the ravine. Bucks and does will often bed nearby and use these energy-saving passageways to reach the head of the ravine that then leads to the valley below. A tree that features good visibility is a natural-born killer in these spots, because it allows you to capitalize on deer movement up and down both sides of the ravine, as well as traffic descending from farther up the hill.

PRESSURED BUCKS

Hunting pressure can certainly ruin a good killing tree, but it can also be used to your advantage when that tree is situated along an escape route, such as a narrow wooded ridge that leads into a thick swamp or a brush-choked beaver dam that bisects two land masses. In either case, mature bucks will use these conduits as a safety net, especially on opening day or weekends when the woods are full of hunters.

I know a Montana outfitter who helps his clients kill wilderness bucks by placing them in stands downwind of a string of beaver dams that connect a heavily wooded peninsula to a marshy flat. At first light he puts on a slow drive along the peninsula, bumping bucks out of the woods, across the beaver dams and into the flats. It works so often that he considers this tactic his ace in the hole should he have any hunters not tagged out by week's end.

This is, of course, not just a Western strategy. Several years ago I was traveling through Pennsylvania on opening morning, and came across a family of five hunters, each tying a buck to the roof of a 4x4. I stopped to take a gander at the bucks and learned from the father that they have been "lucky" on opening morning for several years in a row by sitting on narrow ridges that lead from valley farmland to the tops of nearby steep hillsides.

The opening morning pumpkin-orange army invariably pushes hordes of bucks along those ridges to the waiting family members, a strategy the father had been employing for 20 years with one particular killing tree accounting for 11 racked bucks!

DOE BEDDING AREAS

If you have your sights set on a real wall-hanger, however, then the best killing trees can be found along the edges of bedding areas used by several family groups of does, yearlings and fawns, much like the location Jon Kayser and I tagged those three bucks.

During the rut, bucks will be visiting these bedding areas all day long, especially in the morning after a cold front has passed through the region. Your chances of tagging a buck from a killing tree during the peak of the rut are quite good, but the best time to be in position is just as the rut is winding down.

Mature bucks will be patrolling these doe bedding sites looking for one more hot doe — bucks you probably have not seen all season long. Indeed, these doe bedding areas can draw bucks that for one reason or another have been off-limits. That's because as the numbers of available estrous does dwindle, bucks expand their search by several miles.

Where have these monster bucks been hiding all season long? Some resided miles away deep in the wilderness, while others were holed up nearby on golf courses or in residential housing tracts. Still others are those nocturnal giants that have managed to stay hidden from view right under your nose since late summer. Finally, they begin moving about during legal shooting hours.

If you locate a killing tree, my advice to you is to keep it a secret. Do not mark the killing tree with surveyor's tape, and do not leave other evidence behind such as candy wrappers, or as I did, shell casings. These killing trees are just too productive to share!

— *For treestand hunting tips and tactics, please check out our video library at www.YouTube.com/DDHOnline.*



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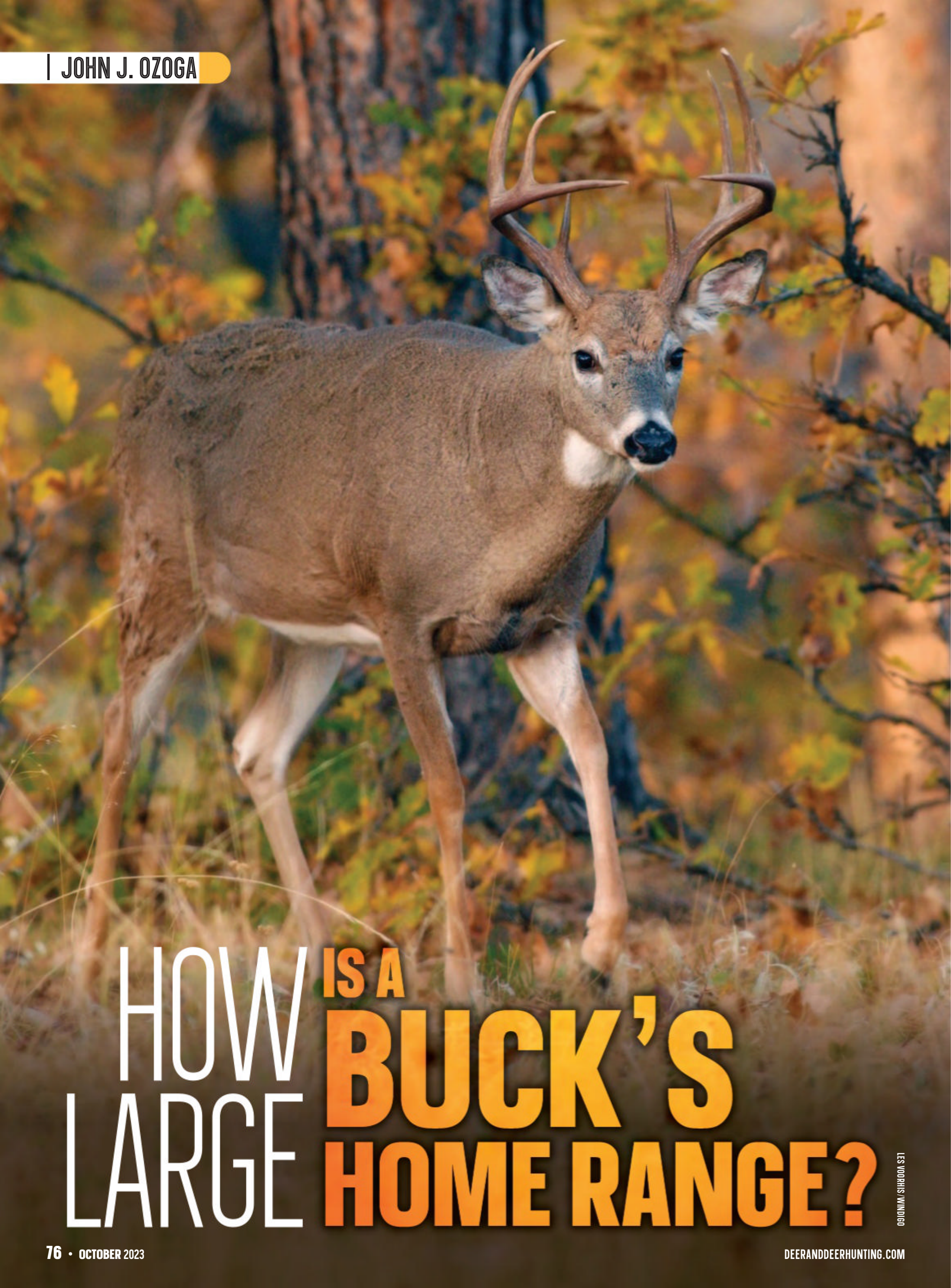
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HOW IS A **BUCK'S** LARGE **HOME RANGE?**

LES VOORHIS/WINDIGO

RESEARCHERS EXPERIENCE SOME ROADBLOCKS WHEN TRYING TO PIN DOWN ANSWERS TO ONE OF THE WHITETAIL'S BIGGEST MYSTERIES.

As I discussed in the October 2007 issue of D&DH, the dispersal behavior of young bucks has received considerable research attention. However, we know very little about range use by mature bucks; how large of an area (home range) they travel; how strongly attached they are to their established ranges; how their movements and use of core areas change with the seasons; or how such behavior changes with herd composition and deer density.

Likewise, there is scant published data concerning regional differences in mature buck movements; how environmental factors impact buck travel patterns; or, more specifically, how the behavior of mature migratory bucks differs from that of nonmigratory individuals.

Most of the information we have concerning movements of mature bucks involves the radio-tracking of relatively few individuals. Marking a large sample of mature bucks for study is difficult because bucks tend to be intensively harvested — hence, scarce. Even when a large sample of young males is marked, only a few them are likely to live to maturity for study.

In South Texas, management for mature bucks is widely practiced, wherein bucks are protected from harvest until 5½ years old or older. This type of management allowed Caesar Kleberg researcher Stephen Webb and his associates to capture bucks after 4½ years of age and monitor their movements for two years.

The objectives of this study were to:

- 1. Document dispersal after 2½ years of age.**
- 2. Determine home-range size for mature bucks.**
- 3. Determine how strongly attached bucks were to their established home ranges.**
- 4. Develop a model to determine the scale at which management for whitetail bucks will be effective.**

For comparative purposes, we'll examine similar data for seasonally migratory bucks in northern Minnesota and for bucks that inhabit the productive, but highly fragmented, farmlands of Illinois.

BACKGROUND AND LOGIC

In nonmigratory deer populations, as occur in South Texas, dispersal is the primary form of long-distance movement. In whitetails, yearling (1½-year-olds) bucks are the age and sex class most likely to disperse.

The dispersal process consists of three phases:

- 1. "Emigration," when an animal leaves its birth range.**
- 2. "Transfer," travel in search of an adult home range.**
- 3. "Immigration," or termination of dispersal, when an animal settles into an adult home range.**

DEER RESEARCH

Buck home range, as used here, is the area traversed by an individual (annually or seasonally) in its normal activities of food gathering and mating.

Therefore, the animal's home-range size during the dispersal phase is expected to be large as compared to its birth home range and even its adult home range. The best evidence indicates that male whitetails should establish a stable adult range by 3½ years or 4½ years of age.

BUCK HOME RANGE IN SOUTH TEXAS

The Texas researchers captured and radio-tracked a total of 48 mature bucks, 26 during year one of the study and 22 during year two. Thirteen of the bucks were of known-age (5½ years old) because they were originally captured and radio-collared as yearlings (in 1998) as part of a study on dispersal. In addition, 35 bucks were judged to be 4½ years of age or older when they were captured and radio-collared for study.

Thirteen of the bucks did not survive an entire year, leaving 35 for study. They ranged in age from 4½ years to greater than 8½ years of age.

Depending upon the analytical method (the researchers used two methods) and the year of study, average annual home-range size for mature bucks in the South Texas study ranged from 512 acres to 683 acres. Their core area of activity (where they spent 50 percent of their time) ranged from 72 acres to 84 acres in size.

By comparison, home-range size of the 13 deer surviving from 1998 decreased from 1,029 acres as yearlings to 450 acres at 5½ years of age. Meanwhile, their core-area size decreased from 249 acres as yearlings to 55 acres at 5½ years of age.

Six of these 13 bucks (tagged in 1998) survived to the second year of study, when at 6½ years of age, their home-range size averaged 473 acres and core-area size averaged 76 acres. There was no significant difference in these areas of activity from 5½ to 6½ years of age.

In other words, this study showed that the buck's annual home-range and core-area size decreased from 1½ to 6½ years of age and stabilized when bucks were 5½ years of age.

The researchers found that 15 percent of the bucks dispersed after 2½ years of age, which is slightly higher than dispersal rates of 2½-year-old bucks in Minnesota (9 percent). However, 10 percent of the Texas bucks did not disperse during six years of tracking.

Shifts in home range boundaries were minimal after dispersal. On average, middle-age bucks (2½ to 4½ years old) shifted their centers of activity about 650 yards, whereas mature bucks (4½ years and older) shifted about 350 yards, each year.

Given the buck home-range size calculations made during this study, the authors concluded that properties greater than 38.6 square miles were needed to manage more than 50 percent of the original yearling bucks found on the property. By comparison, properties of about 17.4 square miles would maintain 50 percent of the older bucks.

Other studies, employing different analytical techniques, found that more than 55 percent of middle-aged bucks and 83 percent of mature bucks could still be found on

properties less than four square miles after annual movements.

BUCK HOME RANGE IN MINNESOTA

Studies conducted by Michael Nelson and David Mech in northeastern Minnesota produced contrasting results. Deer in this northern area typically live at very low densities and migrate six to 25 miles from summer to winter ranges.

Five adult bucks used summer ranges that averaged 788 acres in size, compared to 269 acres for five yearling males. During the rut, adult bucks covered an average of 1,850 acres (2.9 square miles) compared to 556 acres for yearling bucks. One adult buck covered a rutting range of 6.2 square miles — which is almost six times larger than that recorded for the average mature buck in Texas.

The Minnesota researchers were able to track one yearling buck annually for three years. During that time, its autumn range increased from 405 acres, to 479 acres when 2½ years old, then to 806 acres when 3½ years old.

According to Nelson and Mech, “As might be expected, adult and yearling males expanded their ranges during fall. Adult males at that time moved extensively [3 to 5 miles] in, and/or adjacent to, areas used in summer, whereas yearlings moved much less.” This is just opposite of what was reported for mature versus yearling bucks in Texas.

“Moreover, home-range formation appears to extend over a two- to three-year period,” explained Nelson and Mech. “The dispersers we studied continued to visit their birth ranges and reassociate with their mothers when 22 to 27 months old. One male used his birth range for three months when 2 years old, even though he had established a new range the previous fall. The only male we followed to 4 years of age was still making short visits to his birth range.

“Whatever the case, none of the male or female deer we tracked at 2½ or 3½ years of age or older changed summer range from one year to the next. Therefore, it appears that the first range a young deer decides to occupy becomes its lifelong range.”

BUCK HOME-RANGE SIZE IN ILLINOIS

Charles Nixon and his colleagues from the Illinois Natural History

conducted extensive studies of whitetails on the intensively farmed lands of east-central Illinois during the early 1980s. Deer in this area have an almost unlimited and nutritious diet, but they must adapt to the fragmented nature of existing cover.

The authors characterized deer in this “relatively benign climate” as being “well fed, healthy, fertile and short-lived.” Most females breed at 6 to 7 months of age, but adult males are especially vulnerable to hunting due to their extensive movements during the rut and lack of hiding cover.

Although most males in other areas disperse when they are 16 to 18 months old, 51 percent of the male fawns in the Illinois farmland disperse when they are 10 to 12 months old. Only two marked males older than 18 months dispersed; each when 22 to 23 months old.

While some adult males were known to move one to two miles from summer to winter range, none displayed lengthy migratory movements, as is more typical of deer farther north. Therefore, most males remained faithful to the home ranges selected when they were 10 to 12 months old.

Nixon and his cohorts determined the home range size of yearling versus mature bucks before, during and after the rut. Breeding ranges (October-December) of yearling and older males were similar (1,213 acres and 1,186 acres, respectively), as were their ranges during summer (741 acres and 798 acres, respectively), and in winter (1,208 acres and 1,087 acres, respectively). One adult male traveled over a fall-winter range of 4.5 square miles, the largest of any deer studied.

The Illinois researchers classified all bucks 3½ years of age or older as “dominant floaters.” That is, they had large ranges and continued daily and weekly movements throughout their ranges, except during summer.

WHY THE DIFFERENCES?

One of the most frequently asked questions by deer hunters is: “How large of an area does a mature buck cover during the rut?”

Unfortunately, as these data demonstrate, there is no pat answer. Some rutting bucks might cover less than a square mile, while others might

cover more than 6 square miles. The best information suggests that the seasonal home range of a mature buck varies according to range quality, degree of fragmentation of habitats, nutrition, herd density and composition, and probably a bunch of other factors yet to be identified.

For one thing, it is especially difficult to compare home ranges of bucks from one study to the next because investigators often use different methods for gathering and analyzing their data.

Normally, dominant bucks, which tend to be mature individuals, are the “primary breeders” and use larger areas than subordinate bucks. Subdominant bucks are usually young animals that are more likely to be “nonbreeders” (see “Moving On” in the October 2007 issue of D&DH). And this was found to be the case in northern Minnesota, but not in South Texas.

On the other hand, in areas where bucks are heavily exploited, as in the Illinois farmland study, even large-bodied, large-antlered yearling bucks probably serve as “marginal breeders,” if not primary breeders. Hence, this could account for their large home-range size during the rut.

Also, the Illinois yearling bucks were probably behaviorally, as well as physically, more advanced for their age because many of them dispersed and likely joined buck groups before they were yearlings.

Deer density can also affect buck home-range size. Generally, high deer density suppresses buck home-range size, as might have been the case in South Texas. Extremely low deer density could also account for the extensive wandering of mature bucks in northern Minnesota.

Other studies have shown that deer become more attached to their established home range at high versus low population density. However, all three studies reviewed here concluded that mature bucks tend to be faithful to their established home ranges.

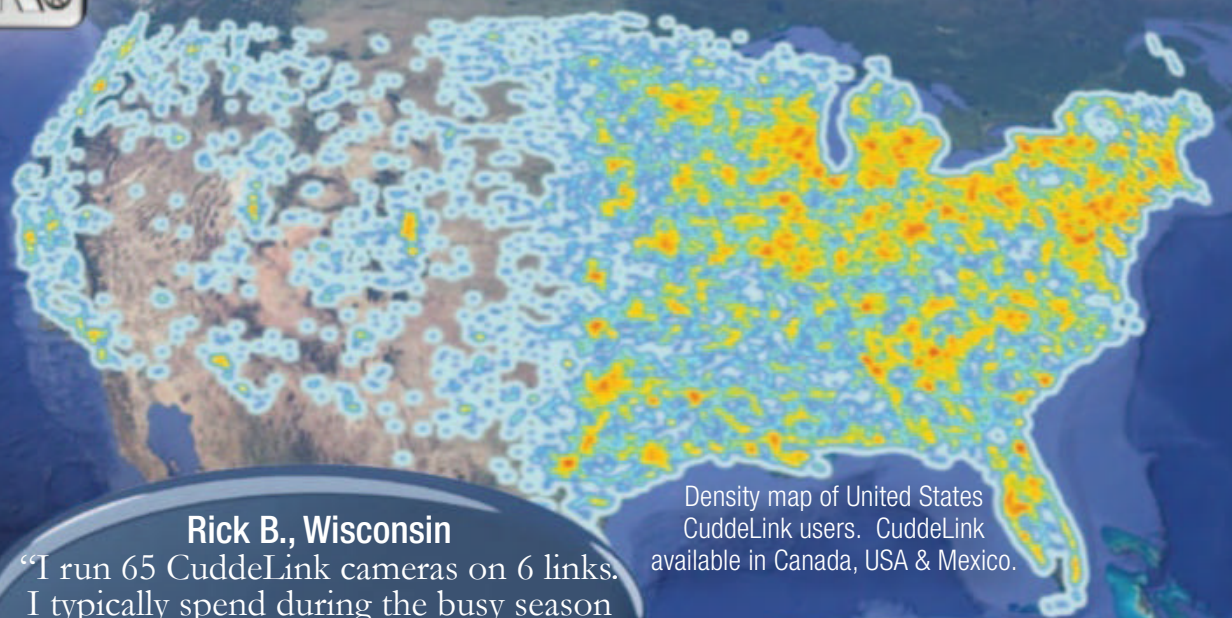
An alternative effect of high deer density might result in home-range shifts due to forage depletion. However, I’ve not seen any such study evidence confirming this for mature bucks.

Regardless of other factors, Northern bucks might inherently



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travel larger home ranges, as compared to their nonmigratory, more sedentary Southern cousins. On Northern range, bucks are accustomed to traveling long distances between their summer and winter ranges. In the process, they become somewhat familiar with rather large landscapes.

CONCLUSION

How much area does a mature rutting buck cover? Well ... it looks like somewhere between a couple hundred acres to as much as 6 or 7 square miles! It all depends.

— John Ozoga is a retired deer research biologist from Michigan. He has been D&DH’s research editor since 1994.

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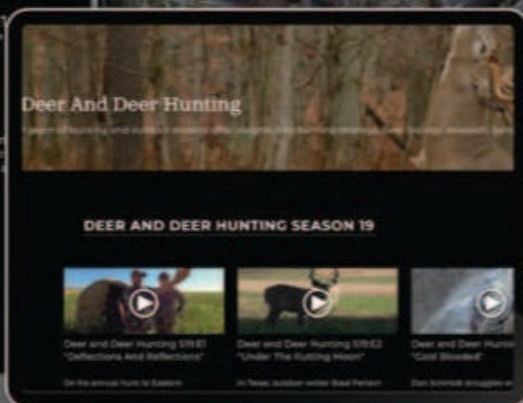
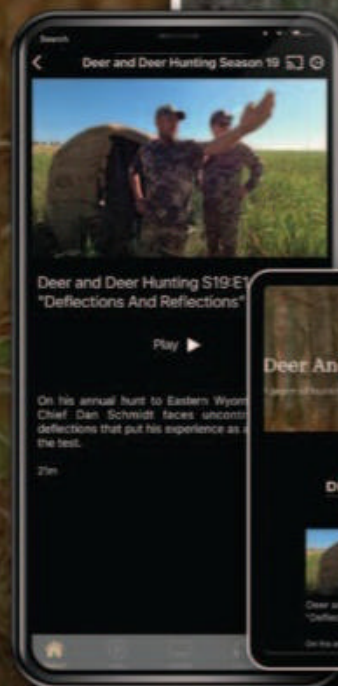
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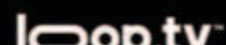
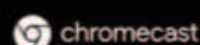
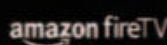
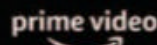
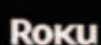
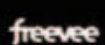
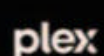
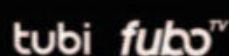
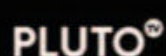
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A BRIEF HISTORY OF
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Clothing specifically for hunters has evolved markedly over the centuries. For North America's whitetail hunters, that evolution can be tied in part to our understanding of the biology of the whitetail and how its senses of smell, hearing and vision help it survive, as well as evolving technologies that have made everything we use smaller, lighter and more efficient. At the same time, clothing development is experiencing something of a "Back to the Future" renaissance, with a resurgence in the importance of natural fibers.

MITCH KEAR/WINDIGO



The author with a giant Alaska brown bear, 1991, early Browning Gore-Tex/fleece outerwear. BOB ROBB

The author with a huge Oregon Columbia blacktail buck, 1993, early Cabela's Gore-Tex hunting rainwear. BOB ROBB



WAY BACK WHEN

As far back as the late 1700s, hunting was a popular pastime in America, and hunting clothing was a variation of typical wool and cotton civilian clothing of the period, with an additional layer of hunting-specific items. The outer layer included a hunting frock and a sash or belt to close it. Beneath this layer were the normal breeches, shirt and waistcoat. Full-length gaiters were worn to protect the legs, and shoes or moccasins protected the feet.

Fast forward to 1830, when Woolrich began making pants, shirts and jackets from wool for work and the outdoors. When the Great Klondike Gold Rush sent thousands north to the Yukon Territory in 1897, the need for rugged outerwear was met by C.C. Filson's wool Mackinaw clothing, blankets and knit goods. Pacific Northwest loggers wore Filson's Cruiser shirt – patented in 1914 – and soon hunters began wearing wool garments from these, and other, manufacturers. At the same time, denim, cotton and canvas garments were becoming popular. Waxed canvas was invented by

British sailors who soaked their sails in linseed oil, then used extra pieces of fabric from cutting sails to make windproof and waterproof clothing. Modern waxed canvas is produced when canvas fibers are impregnated with wax.

War has always spurred innovation, and for modern hunters, those innovations can be seen in everything from guns and ammunition to optics to machinery and, yes, outerwear. At the end of World War II, returning GIs took to the woods in army surplus clothing. The Vietnam War helped popularize lightweight cotton garments and boots, as well as jungle camouflage. But for the vast majority of whitetail hunters who hunted with rifles during the late fall, when weather was often bitter cold and wet, wool remained the top fabric choice to stay warm, comfortable and quiet.

THE CAMO REVOLUTION

Up until 1980, the only camouflage options for hunters were military surplus patterns – WWII brown and tan, woodland's light and dark greens, Vietnam-era Tiger Stripe,

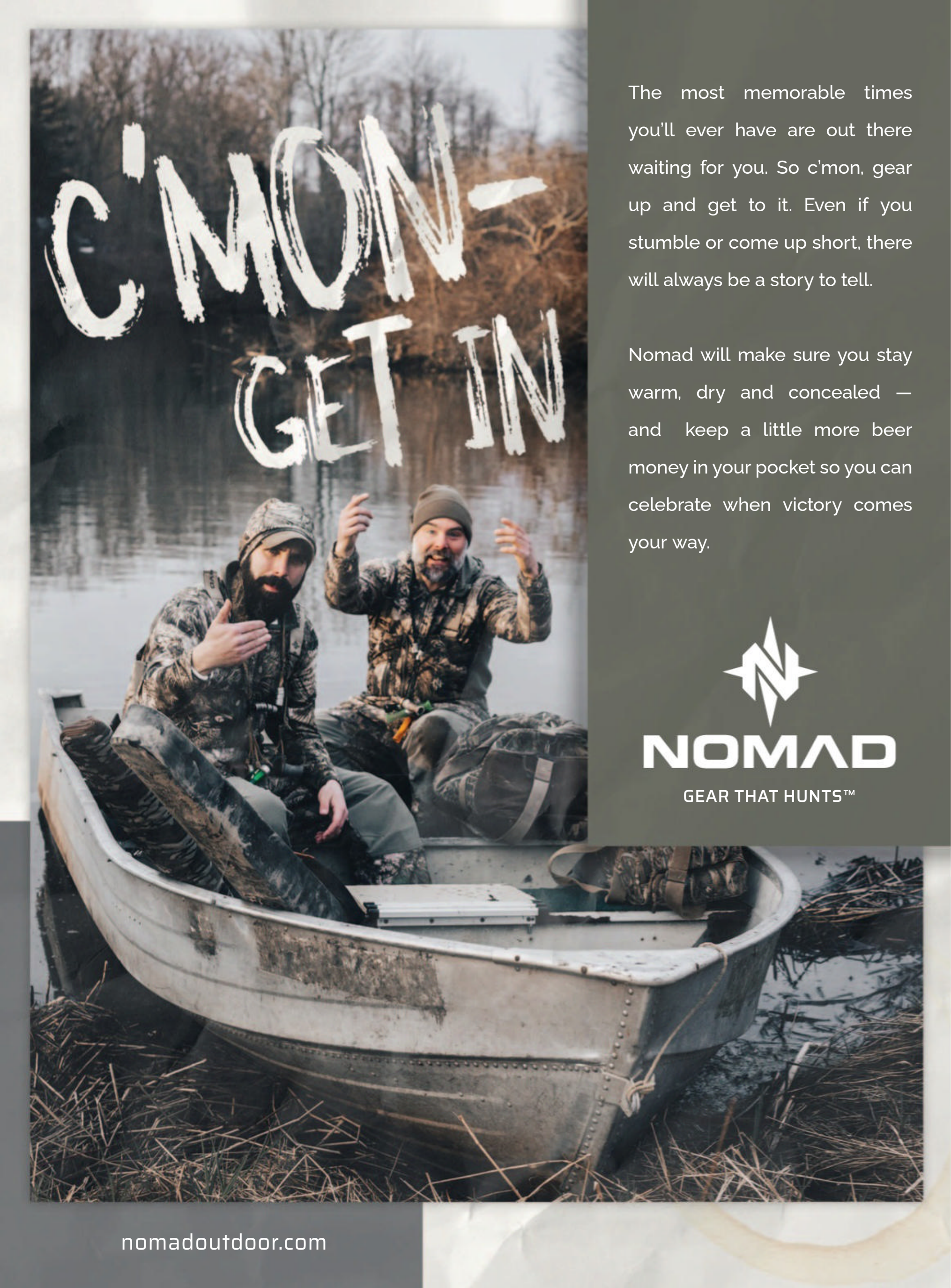
and an army snow camo pattern. Then in 1980 a schoolteacher and avid bowhunter, Jim Crumley, invented Trebark, the first pattern designed specifically for hunters. In 1986, both Realtree and Mossy Oak were founded, and the revolution was on.

Today, of course, there are more different camouflage patterns available than you can shake the proverbial stick at.

HUNTING CLOTHING GOES HIGH TECH

The evolution of hunting clothing follows a pattern familiar to many industries. That is, make products that are more efficient, smaller, lighter and more durable. Two key developments had nothing to do with hunting per se, but another did.

In 1969, Bob Gore created expanded polytetrafluoroethylene (ePTFE) and, somewhat by accident, invented the waterproof, windproof and breathable material known as Gore-Tex. When laminated to certain fabrics, this created a whole new class of outdoor clothing, footwear and accessories, which in turn spawned popular specialty companies like



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SITKA, KUIU and others that have developed a cult-like following. Later, the Gore-Tex membrane was stretched even further to create Windstopper, which while not waterproof, is windproof, yet still breathable. These membranes allow you to wear less bulky layers to stay warm.

Beginning in the early 1990s and stretching more than 20 years, I was a consultant to W.L. Gore, and heavily involved in the design and testing of Gore-Tex outerwear created by several different manufacturers specifically for hunters. It was a constant process to try and achieve the ultimate combination of waterproof, windproof and quiet demanded by the most discriminating whitetail hunters.

Another key development in the evolution of hunting outerwear occurred in 1979, when Malden Mills (now Polartec LLC) and Patagonia developed a fabric called Synchrony, a lightweight, very strong pile synthetic fabric meant to mimic and, in some ways, surpass wool. It was called polar fleece. It is hydrophobic, holding less than one percent of its weight in water, and retains much of its insulating quality even when wet. It is also machine washable and dries quickly.

These developments helped address a key need for whitetail hunters – staying warm and dry while eliminating weight and bulk without making noise. But what about defeating a deer's sense of smell?

In 1986 Greg Sesselmann, a passionate whitetail bowhunter and metallurgical engineer working in the automotive business, was thinking about this. To try and keep from getting winded, Greg immersed himself in cover scent. "I tried acorn and apple scents but they never really worked for me," he said. "Then I got really technical and tried using baking soda and spray scent eliminators. I got to where I was storing all of my undergarments in a trash bag filled with baking soda, and all my outerwear in another bag. When I reached my hunting spot I would change clothes, spray down and powder down, and head for my stand."

With many entrepreneurs, the real solution to the problem just sort of comes to them in a vision. "On the job I was working with auto filters," he said. "We looked at membrane filters, dry-cleaning filters and so on. I had been designing a cartridge-style dry-cleaning filter that would replace the use of clay beds with activated carbon beds to pull the lint, odor and dyes out of the cleaning fluid. This is where I learned about carbon and how it adsorbs odors. My wife and I had just had our first child and I got a video camera to record the birth. Soon thereafter a buddy and I went out to film some bachelor bucks. That day, when I drug out an old hunting suit, it hit me like a brick – why not build a suit out of the same carbon we use in automotive filters? In a blink of an eye I had a vision – a clothing system where every layer contained activated carbon, and every hunter was wearing it." It was 1992 when that now-famous green undersuit made its first appearance, and Scent-Lok was born. And Sesselmann's vision spawned a scent-eliminating clothing craze that goes on to this day.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

I first met Ev Tarrell decades ago when he was with Cabela's, where he spent more than 30 years, most of it in charge of the hunting clothing categories where he was



*The author and a dandy southwestern Kansas whitetail, 2002,
Gore-Tex outerwear. BOB ROBB*



*The author packing out a big Dall sheep ram, Yukon territory, 2006,
Windstopper mountain climbing pants, Gore-Tex hunting jacket. BOB ROBB*

responsible for numerous patents, dozens of camo introductions (including the Zonz Camo franchise), dozens of fabric innovations that included Microtex, MT050, Wootimate, Outfitter Berber and many more successful innovations. He's also a passionate hunter who loves chasing big whitetails. His latest project is Code of Silence, a company dedicated to producing cutting-edge clothing designed for hardcore whitetail hunters.

"Most hunters ask three basic questions when it comes to clothing," Ev said. "Is it quiet? Is it warm?

What's the camo pattern? In my experiences both at Cabela's and as a serious whitetail hunter, I've always felt that clothing systems have always fallen short in delivering this package of benefits in totality. I believe in ergonomics, camo and function over style. With Code of Silence, we've created a holistic system that, we believe, delivers the full performance we've been seeking for decades."

Code of Silence was designed primarily with the needs of the treestand whitetail hunter in mind, combining the quietness and natural insulative properties of

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fabric – either Berber/wool or fleece/wool – together with high-tech WindSeal TC-3, Windsulation and QuietLoft insulation options. Plus the company's own Neutral-LR technology and S18 Visual Silence Camo pattern, which together add up to a modern solution to age-old problems for whitetail hunters.

"I believe the best thing we're on to with Code of Silence is on the camo side," Ev said. "It's not what we initially set out to do, but where we ended up. In our camo, I just don't get spotted by deer like I do when wearing more traditional stuff, and if I do get seen, I get forgiven."

"Why is that?" Tarrell asked. "Our system has a light absorbent camouflage; it's not reflective."

"The woods are a high-texture environment; with products with flat surfaces, how do you expect to blend in when you're not three dimensional like everything you see in the woods? For decades, hunting outerwear has used camouflage printed on flat surfaces. We are trying to increase a garment's texture as much as we can. This is why things like flocked heads on turkey and goose decoys have become so popular, and why snipers favor ghillie suits."

"Our fibers are dyed, then knitted, which greatly reduces ink on the surface, which softens the footprint and the look. It's the difference between looking at a roughly-textured burlap sack and a flat plastic bag. Light absorption is the third leg of the camouflage stool (along with color and pattern), and that's what we've found to be the most important factor in staying hidden."

Tarrell also believes that when hunting savvy old whitetail bucks, the little things are key. "When we developed the S18 camo pattern, we first surveyed dozens of hunters across the country and arrived at an average stand 'mid-height' of 17.8 feet," he said. "We then analyzed over 100 trees of the most predominant species found in the heart of whitetail country and arrived at an average branch size and density at this 18-foot mark for the base of the S18 camo design. The core elements and foreground shapes in S18 closely mimic this average limb size and frequency."

WHAT'S THE FUTURE HOLD?

When I first started seriously deer hunting 50-some years ago, nobody could have predicted the changes in all of the gear we take afield today. There's little doubt that more revolutionary advancements we can't foresee today are coming. When it comes to hunting outerwear, it's so much easier to stay dry, warm and quiet today than ever before. Which helps make our days afield more enjoyable, and us more efficient deer hunters.

— *Bob Robb is one of the most experienced whitetail hunters in America. His professional career as a writer, editor and outdoors communicator has spanned parts of six decades. His award-winning work has appeared in every major hunting and fishing publication.*



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IF YOU HAVE NEVER TRIED DECOYING RUTTING BUCKS, YOU'RE MISSING OUT ON ONE OF THE GAME'S DEADLIEST TACTICS. **HERE'S A GUIDE TO MAKING IT WORK.**

BOB ROBB |

Here are two scenarios. Tell me which is more plausible.

No. 1: I'm in a tree in Kansas during mid-November, and a young buck decoy is 25 yards away. A big 8-pointer cruises through, and I get his attention with a grunt tube. He sees the decoy from 100 yards and immediately turns and comes to it. He swings around to go nose to nose with the decoy, but before he can start the fight, he begins running out of air, courtesy of a well-placed Thunderhead.

HOW TO USE **DEER** **DECOYS**



No. 2: I'm in a tree in Kansas during mid-November, and four does come into a small food plot, where they see the decoy. Instantly, the girls are on red alert, stiff-legged and terrified by the sight of the new kid on the block. They immediately turn tail and race back into the tree line.

OK, they're both plausible. Deer decoys. Sometimes I love 'em, sometimes I hate 'em.

There's little question that during the right conditions, decoys can help you kill mature bucks. It's also true that, sometimes, a decoy will scare the pants off some deer — maybe all of them. I've used decoys enough to understand that when I set one out, it's a roll of the dice. I've also learned that there's a right and wrong way to use them, just as there's a right and wrong time.

Here are some tips to help get the most out of deer decoys this season.

KNOW THE LOCAL DEER

You should understand something about your local deer herd before using decoys. It seems decoys are most effective when buck-to-doe ratios are not skewed heavily in favor of does. The more bucks, the better.

There are also some areas where I have tied decoying with poor results, but others where it seems to work. For example, I seem to have better luck with decoys when heavy rut activity is compressed into two or three weeks. Areas where the rut lasts a long time — the Deep South, for example — do not seem to be ideal for aggressive decoying. But again, you must try it to see if it works in your area.

SETTING IT UP

There's no doubt that proper decoy placement is critical to getting deer where you need them for a good bow shot. Typically, when a buck approaches another buck aggressively, he does so head on. Place your buck decoy angling or facing directly toward your stand, 15 to 20 yards away.

That will give the buck enough room to approach a bit to one side or directly between the decoy and the stand, with his attention focused away from you.

A buck decoy will generally only attract other bucks close. If you're hunting an area with lots of does, think twice about using a buck decoy, because it might terrify the local matriarchal does. Conversely, a doe decoy can attract does, fawns and bucks. During the pre- and peak-rut periods, most bucks that see a lone doe decoy, or doe and fawn decoy, might come in for a closer look.

I prefer to place decoys at the edge of an open field or clearing that provides maximum visibility. A buck will often approach the decoy along the edge of the field or woods and then circle into the woods to approach it head-on. Try to keep the wind in your favor from the

most likely route of approach, and set up so a buck approaching the decoy downwind will still give you a shot. In addition to a buck decoy, set a doe and fawn decoy closer to the stand at the edge of the woods. A full-bodied buck in the open and a couple of decoys at the edge of the woods is a deadly combo.

Also, try to keep your decoys positioned where an approaching deer will not be looking over the decoy directly at your setup.

REALISM

All game animals are more readily attracted to a decoy that shows some motion. I've tried several tactics to give my deer decoys the appearance of movement, including hanging toilet paper, fluffy white cloth or strips cut from a white garbage bag on the ears and tail of my full-bodied decoys.

Nowadays, of course, manufacturers offer decoys with built-in motion. Some of it is imparted simply, with parts that flap and sway in the breeze. Others have electronic motors that let the tail and neck move on command from a handheld control. These are not legal in all states, so check local regulations before using one. Some decoys even have heads and tails that can be moved with a string pulled by the hunter. However you do it, adding motion adds realism, which translates into more effectiveness.

ODOR CONTROL

Deer will not tolerate a decoy that smells like a human, no matter how real it looks. Always wear rubber gloves when handling your decoy. When hunting season starts, clean your decoys, and spray them with a liquid odor neutralizer.

Some hunters like to use scent products with decoys, but others do not. I use a small scent bomb with the appropriate scent, whether it's doe estrus with doe decoys or a territorial buck scent with a buck decoy. Scents add a touch of realism — but don't overuse them. This is definitely a case of less is more. Rather than put

the scent directly on the decoy, it's better to place a small scent bomb on the ground between the decoy's rear legs.

Don't leave your decoys in position overnight. When I leave mine in the woods, I carry them away from the stand and stash them in a blowdown, brush pile or small depression. If it's cold enough for frost, cover the decoys with brush, an old sheet or burlap sack. I tried plastic tarps, but they're too noisy. A decoy glistening with frost in the morning will spook deer.

WHAT TIME OF DAY, SEASON ARE BEST?

My late friend Gary Clancy knew as much about deer decoying as anybody, and he experienced his best luck early in the day.

"Decoying is usually best in mornings as bucks return to bedding areas after an unsuccessful night of seeking





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does,” he told me once. “Bucks often willingly approach a doe decoy and often aggressively approach a buck decoy then. However, in the evenings, placing decoys in the corner of a field will sometimes draw in does, which can draw in bucks — assuming the doe decoy doesn’t terrify the local does,” he added.

Without a doubt, decoying is best during the pre-rut and rut. Although I generally believe in the silent approach to whitetail hunting, I do a complete 180 when I use decoys. Depending on conditions, I do a lot of calling and even some rattling. The purpose is to attract a buck close enough to see the decoys. When my calling gets their attention and brings bucks closer, I count on the decoys to do the rest of the heavy lifting.

When it happens, don’t rush the shot. One of the advantages of using a decoy is that deer will parade around and give you plenty of time to make a good shot.

Of course, that’s easier said than done. When a big buck is bristled up, staying calm is not easy. Attach your release, and get ready, but don’t dawdle. I once had a buck doing

the dance around my decoy and then, without warning, he viciously attacked it, knocking it to the ground. When that happened, he was so startled he blasted off to the woods, never to be seen again.

FOUR KILLER SETUPS

Decoys work best when set up in areas of high deer travel. Before and after the rut, set them along major trails, near bedding areas or at the edges of fields where deer feed. During the rut, set them near scrape or rub lines, but use caution near bedding areas to avoid polluting the area with your scent, sight and sound. Here are four killer setups for using decoys during the pre-rut and rut periods:

1. Corner them: When hunting a field, check the corners first. Bucks like to cut corners when searching for does. Also, even if bucks are cruising back in the timber off the edge of the field — which they often do — a corner gives you twice the odds of a buck passing near your decoy. Corners are also favorite entry and exit points for deer using a field.

2. Make your point: A lot of prime deer country consists of creek

and river bottoms. There are usually gullies built by rain runoff that create a series of points jutting into the fields. You’ll often find that deer crossing the field usually cross from one point to another, often using the two points that jut farthest into the field. By doing that, deer reduce the amount of time they are exposed. The cool thing about those points is that no matter what direction the wind is from, one point will be huntable. If there are no huntable trees, a ground blind can work. Try to set it up so you can maximize visibility.

3. Use intersections: The place where two logging roads cross can be an excellent spot for a decoy setup. Big-woods deer use logging roads as travel lanes, and bucks frequently scrape along the edges of the roads. I like to find scrapes and rubs along the edges that indicate a rut travel corridor. You must be able to see at least a football field or two down at least two of the four roads leading from the intersection, so that cruising deer can see the decoy far enough away that it won’t startle them.

4. Multiples: Many hunters are discovering that a gaggle of decoys can be better than just one. In fact, I think a lone decoy during the pre-rut is more apt to spook deer than two or more. The most I have ever used? Five — a medium buck, a bedded doe, a standing doe and two fawns. Because of the number of decoys, that was really an evening-only deal best used on a field edge. You must get to the stand early enough to set the decoys up an hour or more before you expect deer to arrive. And it’s important to set the decoys where approaching deer can see them as far away as possible.

CONCLUSION

Give these killer decoy strategies a try this season. Fakes just might help you kill the biggest buck of your life.

— Bob Robb is a veteran whitetail bowhunter and professional outdoor writer and editor.

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HERE ARE THE REASONS WHY YOU CAN'T HOARD KINGS OF THE HERD.

One of my fondest memories of photographing whitetails occurred in 1989 when I traveled to Texas and visited three incredible ranches. While there, I had the opportunity to meet and interview Al Brothers, one of whitetail management's true icons. I had known of Brothers since 1975 when I purchased the book "Producing Quality Whitetails," which he co-authored with Murphy Ray.

4

REASONS WHY YOU CAN'T STOCKPILE BUCKS

After reading the book, I wondered if it was possible to produce quality bucks on our nondescript farm in western New York. Frankly, I had my doubts it could be done because of our area's small property sizes and the intense hunting pressure we receive during our firearms season. However, after spending time with Brothers, I believed it might be possible to raise bigger and better deer on our farm.

When several local landowners and I began chasing the QDM dream in the early 1990s, we strongly believed that if we passed up yearlings and 2½-year-old bucks, we'd soon be up to our ears in 4½- to 6½-year-olds.

That didn't happen.

However, we've held on to the dream for more than 17 years. The ride has surely had its ups and downs.

From my perspective, our QDM experience has been exciting and fulfilling. However, it has also been a real eye-opener because

the deer behavior I've observed throughout these years has caused me to question the possibilities of producing and holding mature bucks on relatively small properties.

Two things have helped me sort out why it's so difficult to keep bucks on small properties.

1. Our 200-acre farm has been a special laboratory to study deer behavior. It is part of a friendly, like-minded relationship between several local landowners who are trying to produce better bucks, does and fawns, while at the same time experience better deer hunting. There is no question that the hunting we've all experienced is a great improvement from what it used to be. During the past 17 years, every landowner has not only received a great education, but also had the opportunity to harvest bigger bucks, which has helped keep us motivated.

2. The process has been personally fulfilling in that I've operated a 35-acre high-fence whitetail behavior research

facility during much of this time (no hunting takes place inside the enclosure). So, having both free-ranging whitetails and semi-habituated whitetails to study has provided me a unique view of the whitetail's world.

The enclosure has allowed me to study nearly every whitetail behavior, while at the same time compare it to what takes place within the free-ranging population. The setup has provided some amazing insights, and the end result is that I've been able to see why it's so difficult to hold bucks on any given piece of property.

CAN YOU KEEP 'EM?

There's no question that high-fence operations can easily stockpile mature bucks. However, in the free-ranging world — where whitetails can wander and live wherever they want — the prospects of growing and holding mature bucks on properties smaller than 600 acres are poor. And, in many cases, it's nearly impossible.



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SASKATCHEWAN'S PREMIER BEAR OUTFITTER

In most parts of North America, hunting pressure and land management policies make it extremely difficult to have many bucks live past their 4th birthday. Generally speaking, there are four factors that prevent this from happening: changing food sources, terrain/natural habitat, deer population and a buck's personality.

1. FICKLE FOOD SOURCES

Free-ranging whitetails are driven by their stomachs. Food sources, or lack thereof, will determine where they call home. In fact, food trumps sex when it comes to determining where a white-tailed buck lives.

Although bucks cover a lot of ground during November, food dictates their zip code the balance of the year. Food also drives where a doe lives, so it is essential that the doe population has the right types of food choices throughout the year if you want any chance of keeping them from wandering. If you can keep a doe from leaving

a property during the rut, you will have a much better chance of holding some bucks.

It's not difficult to offer good forage options during the warm months. However, providing bucks and does with the food they need during the nongrowing months is much more difficult, especially in snow country.

Addressing the whitetail's winter food needs is something I've always struggled with because of our long winters. I've improved our deer feeding program in recent years by planting a variety of late-season food plots. In addition to the warm-season forages (like clover and chicory), we now plant cold-season foods like purple-top turnips and brassicas. This has not only helped provide deer with the nutrients they need to survive, but it has also helped decrease winter dispersal that used to take place when all of the forage was gone.

Although our QDM program is ever-changing, we've been able to temporarily hold bucks on our

property because of the variety of food we offer them. However, even with the program we currently have in place, we are not able to hold our bucks the way we thought we could when I first dipped my foot into the QDM waters. This is because deer in our area have much more to choose from on neighboring properties.

With more landowners doing aggressive food-plot management, the chance of keeping multiple mature bucks on our 200 acres isn't that great.

Deer populations are very transient on lands in our area that do not practice food-plot management. Therefore, it is very difficult for these landowners to hold any mature bucks on their properties.

2. VARIED TERRAIN

Although food is a critical component to holding whitetails, the lay of the land and its habitat play an important role in keeping deer from wandering to greener pastures. Whitetails spend 70% of their time bedded, so it's important



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to have the best possible bedding area on your property.

If the natural habitat is open (meaning you are able to easily see farther than 50 yards in the woods) don't expect many whitetails to use such cover as a bedding area. Whitetails prefer jungle-like conditions and the thicker the cover, the greater the holding potential will be. Other good bedding spots include ravines and irregular terrain, especially if above-average hunting pressure is the norm. Deer prefer these locations because wind currents typically shift frequently, making it easier for bedded deer to detect danger.

Mature bucks will constantly venture away from their core areas. If they find a location that is more attractive than their current home range, they will often relocate to that new spot. Although you can never totally eliminate the possibility of deer leaving your property, you can enhance the possibility of keeping them by developing the natural habitat through habitat improvement programs.

3. POPULATION DYNAMICS

The size and makeup of the deer herd also plays a major role in determining whether bucks will disperse to set up a new home range.

Mature bucks tend to be secretive and keep to themselves. They also like "elbow room," so if there's an overpopulation of deer, bucks will often move to where there are fewer deer, providing there is adequate food and cover. It's not uncommon for bucks to disperse many miles before settling on a home range that appeals to them.

It should also be noted that excessive deer numbers can cause does to seek areas that meet their food, cover and preferred fawn-birthing conditions. So, the size of a deer herd can play a major role in how, when, where and why deer move.

4. BUCK PERSONALITIES

A buck's personality is perhaps the biggest factor why it's difficult to stockpile bucks. Their ever-changing hormone levels drive how often and how far they move.

Bucks are relatively calm, cool and collected for the first nine months of the year. However, when October rolls around (in the North) this all changes, and bucks begin to move. Rutting bucks sleep and feed very little and continually cruise an increasing number of acres in their search for does.

It seems as if rutting bucks have attention deficit disorder — an out-of-control attitude that also gets them into fights with other bucks who seek to be the area's alpha male. Such fights are often ugly and, on some occasions, deadly.

In nearly every case, the fight's loser moves on to the next ridge, valley or township in his quest for breeding rights. It's a very unstable time for all bucks. During the rut's seeking and chasing phase, it's not uncommon for some to cover more than 2,000 acres. A buck's movement pattern during the rut is so unpredictable that the thought of holding him on a small property is wishful thinking at best, at least until the rut is over.

LESSONS FROM THE PAST

Technology has allowed deer hunters to become much more knowledgeable about deer behavior. Through the use of trail cameras and year-round scouting, I've been able to document many bucks in our area that illustrate why it is so difficult to stockpile bucks.

Here are two examples.

Buck 1: This buck's home range was roughly two miles from our farm. During summer and into September, a landowner had several encounters with him and was even able to videotape the buck. The buck disappeared by October.

As it turned out, the buck made at least one trip to our farm, which is where our paths crossed. On Nov. 17, he and an estrous doe came within gun range of my treestand, and I harvested him. I had never seen this buck until we met in November. Had it not been for the rut, I never would have seen this giant, much less had a chance to kill him.

Buck 2: Throughout one year, this buck lived on a large dairy

farm, a little more than two miles from our farm. Several people had seen this buck on that farm throughout summer and early fall. In November, he was still there, and on Nov. 11, a close friend of mine photographed the buck in one of the farm's fallow fields. After the encounter he called me to share what had happened. I can remember my friend commenting that whoever hunted the farm when gun season opened was going to be in for a treat.

Although I knew of this buck, I thought he was living too far from our farm for me to ever get a glimpse of him. I was wrong. On Nov. 20, the second day of our firearm's season, he walked by my treestand. That night, many locals gathered in our barn to take a look at the buck. My friend who had photographed the deer nine days before my successful hunt, brought his photos with him to see if it was the same buck. Needless to say, when the photo match was made a lot of discussion took place concerning the amount of territory that buck was covering.

CONCLUSION

I love to discuss whitetail behavior as much as anyone, and the subject of whether you can or cannot stockpile bucks is one I love to address. I'd like to think it's possible to stockpile bucks. Unfortunately, after nearly 50 years of observing and pursuing this great animal, I'm of the opinion that the majority of hunting properties are simply too small (< 600 acres) to allow a landowner to stockpile bucks older than 2½ years old.

The winds of November and a host of other factors cause bucks to wander so much that stockpiling them is indeed wishful thinking.

— Charles Alsheimer was a longtime *Deer & Deer Hunting* contributing editor and the original host of *D&DH-TV*.



GREAT VENISON

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Deer season is upon us, and hunters throughout the country are in the woods or making final preparations before their respective states open for the glorious autumn hunt. From southern Florida's early August season to those opening in some northern Midwest states now, we're alternately gushing with enthusiasm about getting back into the woods with a bow and crossbow in hand, while cursing the heat, bugs and humidity that come with our early seasons.



REID/DDH

PHOTO & TEXT BY JACK HENNESSY



Deer tenderloins (sometimes called “inner loins” or “fish”) are a favorite for many hunters. While they seem simple enough to cook, I’d argue there’s more than meets the eye. They aren’t exactly symmetrical. You could say they’re almost a triangle shape, but they really aren’t, at least not from end to end. They’re also fairly small, sometimes thin, and will overcook easily.

I have been searching for the absolute best way to cook these cuts. I’ve experimented with various methods. I won’t say frying is the best and perfect method for everyone, but it is a very solid option. A quick fry in hot high-temp cooking oil will create a great crust without overcooking the middle, assuming you let the tenderloins come to room temp ahead of time. I don’t add breading to the tenderloins, but you can if you want to. The end result, I feel, is that great mouthfeel with each bite. Good oil options include peanut, avocado, grapeseed or canola oil. Your choice may depend on food allergies and budget, although a better oil (read: more expensive) does indeed create a better end product.

You may have heard me say this before: Venison is perfect the way it is. Garnishes or sauces are a way to supplement that flavor without masking it. Eventually, some of us want a bit of variety beyond just S&P seasoning. This chipotle chimichurri is a fresh, zesty and tasty option for pairing. Feel welcome to add more chipotles in adobo sauce for a spicier result.

Heat is of great concern to hunters in these early weeks. Temperatures in Southern climates, and even up North, aren’t into the, “Hmmm, it’s chilly” stages yet. So, when we’re out for an afternoon hunt or even some morning excursions, killing a deer means two things: enjoying the success of the hunt and then

FRIED TENDERLOIN

With Chipotle Chimichurri

INGREDIENTS (2 SERVINGS):

- + 1-2 whitetail tenderloins
- + Freshly cracked black pepper
- + Kosher salt
- + Peanut oil for frying

CHIPOTLE CHIMICHURRI:

- + 2 bunches Italian parsley (2 cups-ish)
- + 1/4 cup red wine vinegar
- + 1 bunch cilantro (1 1/2 cups-ish)
- + 1/4 cup olive oil
- + 1/2 lime juice and zest
- + 1/4 cup fresh basil
- + 3 tablespoons from adobo and chipotle can
- + 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- + Suggested garnish: Freshly grated parmesan cheese
- + 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- + 2 large cloves fresh garlic

DIRECTIONS:

1. PULL fully thawed tenderloins and lightly salt and pepper all sides. Leave outside of fridge for 2-3 hours so tenderloins can come to room temperature.

2. TO MAKE chimichurri, add approximately 3 tablespoons of adobo and chipotle to food processor or blender. Blend thoroughly until puréed. Remove stems from bunches of cilantro and Italian parsley. Add mostly leaves to food processor or blender with puréed chipotle. Add fresh basil, salt, black pepper, fresh garlic, brown sugar, red wine vinegar, lime juice and zest, and pulse to mix. Do not over-purée, as you want a bit of texture to chimichurri. Once contents are blended, but not mushy (ideally), add contents to a mixing bowl and, while stirring with a fork, slowly drizzle in olive oil. Stir until you have a consistent texture throughout. Set aside until ready to serve. If placed in fridge, you may wish to reheat or leave out to bring to room temp prior to pairing with cooked tenderloins.

3. TO FRY tenderloins, heat peanut oil to 450 degrees Fahrenheit. Add enough oil in pot or fryer so the tenderloins can be fully submerged. Add tenderloins to oil once at 450. Try to maintain 450 temp. If using a pot over a burner, you may need to turn burner up as adding meat will cool oil. A deep fryer should auto-regulate. Fry for 1 minute for tenderloins on the rarer side (likely rare). Fry for 1 minute and 30 seconds for a medium-rare cook. (You can add 30 seconds per cooking stage, so 2 minutes for medium finish, and so on.)

4. PULL TENDERLOINS and allow to rest on a stainless steel grate so oil can drip down. Allow to rest for 5 minutes prior to carving. Serve with chimichurri below, on the side, or on top. Crack fresh black pepper otop.

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

getting down to brass tacks to get the deer out, cooled down and into a cooler so the meat doesn’t spoil.

In temperatures warmer than 50 degrees Fahrenheit, you need to get a deer or field-dressed carcass in a cooler within three to four hours. With early season temperatures often hitting the 80s or

higher, that period is reduced. Time is of the essence in tracking, recovering, removing and cooling your deer for the best meat and flavor possible.

We've all heard tales of venison or other wild game that tastes gamey or strong. Natural meat has a different flavor than farm- or commercial-raised meats, of course. It's delicious. The taste of that wild, natural flavor should not repel you at the dinner table. It can, though, if you don't take the proper steps to quickly retrieve your deer, clean it, open the body cavity to allow internal heat to escape, get it into a cooler and then process it.

You might want to show off your deer to your family and buddies, but during the early part of the season, take a bunch of photos, and then get to the cooler or processor.

KEEP IT SAFE

Spoilage is excessive deterioration of meat as a result of bacteria, molds and yeasts. When the population of these ever-present microorganisms grows large enough, meat is spoiled.

In contrast, aging meat is deliberate, controlled deterioration that is stopped before it reaches the spoilage state. Controlled deterioration breaks down some of the connective tissue, and the meat is more tender and perhaps more flavorful.

The factors that cause meat spoilage are pretty simple. The four critical factors in spoilage of a deer are moisture, temperature, time and condition. Of these three factors, temperature is the most important.

A deer's living temperature at rest is about 101 Fahrenheit. Deer, like hunters, heat up if they use their muscles more, so a deer's temperature at the time of its death depends on what it was doing just before. A deer that has been chased by dogs for the previous 20 minutes will have a higher temperature than one calmly browsing when shot and dropped on the spot. I would guess that a hard-running deer's temp could increase about 5 degrees, so a healthy deer's maximum living temperature would be a bit warmer than 106.

Four or five degrees might seem like a small increase, but warm-blooded creatures — humans included — live within a very tight range of body temperatures. Our bodies use mechanisms such as shivering, panting or sweating to control temperature variations, much like a thermostat.

The ideal temperature range for bacterial growth is 70 to 120 Fahrenheit. During ideal conditions, bacteria can double about every 20 minutes. So, the entire time a dead deer's meat is warmer than 70, microorganisms are multiplying rapidly. That diminishes from 70 to 40 degrees. When meat temperature falls to 40, bacteria reproduction drops drastically. Meat (not air) temperatures between 30 to 40 are perfect for fresh-meat refrigeration.

SHOT PLACEMENT

Several factors affect venison quality and safety before you pull a trigger or release an arrow. Disciplining yourself to only take shots that cause

quick, clean kills improves meat quality and reduces risks of spoilage and contamination with pathogens. Poorly placed shots often stimulate a deer's adrenaline release mechanisms to generate energy from muscle glycogen, a process that produces lactic acid.

If an animal is stressed by injury or pursuit before death, high levels of lactic acid might accumulate in the muscles. This acid buildup can cause poor-quality meat. On the other hand, an extended chase can deplete muscle glycogen, and, while the animal is still alive, accumulated lactic acid will be removed from the muscle by circulating blood.

When the animal dies, the meat will be much less acidic, allowing for quick spoilage and bacterial growth. This also typically results in dark meat and unusual flavor and tenderness. Therefore, hunting ethics calling for quick kills have practical implications for meat quality.

TEMPERATURE IS KEY

Many hunters relish making their own sausage and smoked venison, and hundreds of quality recipes and formulas are available. However, while making cured venison, follow directions exactly. Some curing ingredients, such as sodium nitrite, can be toxic at high concentrations. Therefore, tweaking recipes is dangerous.

Be sure heat-cured venison reaches 160 degrees to kill pathogens and ensure safety. A well-regulated heating unit and an internal temperature check of the product with a calibrated thermometer or thermocouple are necessities. Finally, don't allow any recontamination of cooked products. Placing cooked products on tables or trays after those surfaces were used for raw meat allows pathogens to recontaminate the cooked product.

Conventional venison recipes require similar safety measures. This doesn't mean chops or roasts have to be vulcanized to be safe. Any one-piece chop or roast has virtually no contamination below the surface, so cooking such cuts to medium-rare with a 145-degree internal temperature is safe. Ground or reassembled meat should be heated to at least 160 degrees. Use a thermometer to ensure proper internal temperatures are reached, not grossly exceeded. Overcooking venison results in toughness and lost flavor. Finally, avoid recontamination after cooking by using clean plates and utensils.

For more venison safety tips, visit our website: www.deeranddeerhunting.com.



TEXT & PHOTO BY STEVE BARTYLLA

The author shot this central Wisconsin public-land buck, as it was slipping away from rattling action.



WHEN TO *Call* AND *Rattle*

It was surreal. The hunters' dueling rattling sequences that morning weren't bad. I'd even questioned for a second if the first hunter's sequence was real. The returned, more frantic volley of rattling and calling from the second hunter removed any doubt. Sitting in the pocket of cover, within easy viewing distance of both the road and public parking lot, it was easy to determine the commotion coming from the big timber belonged to the drivers of a couple of the trucks in the overflowing lot.

As the battling banjos started winding down, I spotted the buck, slipping through the swamp grass away from the other hunters. I had him loaded in the truck before the first hunter got back to the lot.

Calling and rattling can make us heroes or zeros in the deer woods. Here's how I try to fall on the right side of that line.

TRAINING

For me, this starts by understanding that we train deer almost as effectively as we train our pets and livestock, through positive and negative reinforcement. The difference is that deer aren't rewarded with treats, pets or loving words. They're rewarded with life and punished way more severely.

Every time deer react to something that hunters do, positively or negatively, we are literally training them. The more training they receive and the more consistent it is, the more effectively it tends to stick.

The more one thinks about it, the clearer it becomes that our actions result in positive and negative reinforcement training, extremely similarly to how we train our pets or even milk cows when to come to the barn two or three times a day.

PRESSURE

In this case, hunting pressure is what I key in on. What follows is why.

Calling and rattling are very well-known techniques and, according to the TV ads and shows, can almost promise to deliver success, in return for often a less-than \$20 purchase. Nope, not every hunter out there has calls and some form of antlers they drag to the stand with them, but an awful lot of them do. They aren't carrying them for grins or to add a smidge of weight to their packs.

To me, that means that odds are extremely good that any buck 3½ years of age or older, in heavily hunted grounds, has all but certainly heard multiple calling and rattling sequences in its life. If they worked, he'd be dead already, many times over.

On the flip side, bucks on moderate- to low-pressure grounds, and most all TV shows are filmed on very low-pressure grounds, may well have never heard hunters calling and rattling, ever. Even if they have, odds are they haven't heard anywhere near as much as the heavily hunted ones have.

That jacks the odds of it working way higher!

CONCLUSION

Whether I blind call or rattle has everything to do with it being close to, during or right after the rut, as well as being on moderate- to low-pressured grounds. Outside of that window of the season and on low- to mid-pressured grounds, I'm not blind calling or rattling.

In fact, the only time that I do either on heavily pressured bucks is when they are going the other way and I believe that I have absolutely nothing to lose. Experience has taught me that I'm really scaring away more pressured bucks than attracting them, or they'd already be dead.



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MEDIA360

Hot on the heels of the V3 (above) and Phase4, Mathews introduced the Image low-poundage bow this year. It comes in draw weights of 40, 43, 47 and 50. DANIEL SCHMIDT

DRAW WEIGHT CONSIDERATIONS

BOB ROBB

OLD-SCHOOL DOGMA SAYS THAT THE HEAVIER YOUR COMPOUND BOW'S DRAW WEIGHT, THE MORE EFFICIENT BOWHUNTER YOU WILL BE. IF YOUR QUARRY IS THE WHITE-TAILED DEER, THIS COULDN'T BE FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH. HERE'S WHY.

In the overall scheme of things, even the largest whitetails are thin-skinned, and do not require an inordinate amount of kinetic energy for a medium-weight broadhead-tipped arrow to completely pass through their chest cavity. Much more important is being able to place the broadhead precisely on target, something that is hard to do under stressful and fluid hunting situations. If your bow's draw weight is set too high, you might find it difficult to hold the bow at full draw for a lengthy period of time while waiting for the deer to present the proper shot angle. You might even find it impossible to draw back smoothly in cold weather, when seated, or if a deer's approach forces you to twist your torso and draw the bow with your body contorted.

Many bowhunters want a high draw weight thinking that it will provide flatter arrow trajectory, which will help them be more accurate. And this was true back before the laser rangefinder, which makes knowing the exact distance to the target quick and easy. Shooting a bow with a draw weight that's "just right" for you – not too heavy, not too light – that has been tuned so the arrows are flying like laser beams, is the ticket to consistently accurate arrow placement. Another way to aid deep penetration when turning the poundage down is to use small-diameter 4mm, 5mm or 6mm carbon

arrow shafts, which create less friction from their small shaft diameter and low-profile fletches than large-diameter shafts.

Adjusting a compound bow's draw weight is as simple as turning each limb's bolt. When doing so, make sure you turn each bolt the exact same. I mark mine with an indelible marker so it's easy to make precise changes. All compound bows have adjustable draw weights that range 10-15 pounds; 50-60 lbs., 60-70 lbs., etc. A rule of thumb is that one revolution will adjust the bow's draw weight about 2 lbs. I have a handheld draw-weight scale that lets me monitor the process.

Compound bows are most accurate when set at or near their maximum peak draw weight, so if you find that you need to dial your current bow down near the bottom of its draw-weight range, it might be time to buy a new bow with a lower draw-weight range. Regardless, always remember that any changes in draw weight will affect the bow's tune, so after making an adjustment, be sure to shoot your arrows through paper, retune it if necessary, and adjust your sight accordingly.

— Bob Robb is a longtime D&DH contributor and archery expert from Washington state.



1 MOULTRIE MOBILE EDGE PRO CELLULAR TRAIL CAMERA

Moultrie Mobile unveils the Edge Pro Cellular Trail Camera with all-new False Trigger Elimination capabilities powered by artificial intelligence (AI).

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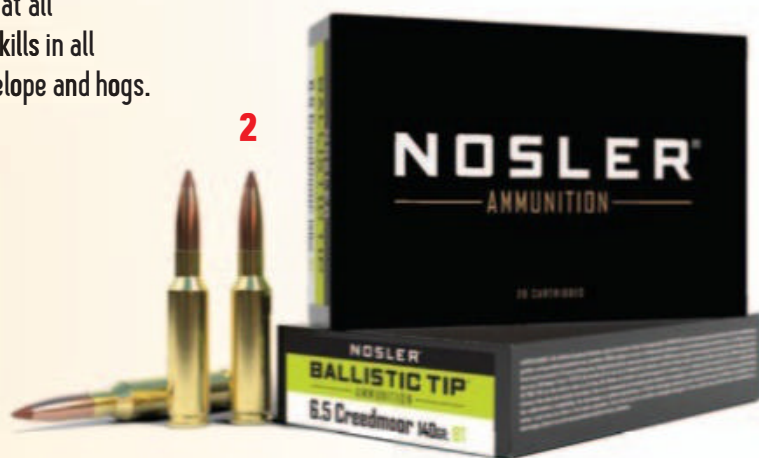


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3 ZEISS DTI 3 GEN 2 THERMAL IMAGING CAMERA

With the introduction of the DTI 1 and DTI 4, ZEISS is unveiling two new thermal imaging cameras for hunting. The ZEISS DTI 3 GEN 2 builds upon the DTI 3 thermal imaging camera, which was first introduced in 2020. The ZEISS DTI family has several features in common including intuitive ergonomics and ease of use, an exceptional viewing experience, as well as sophisticated power management, and seamless connectivity with the ZEISS Hunting App.

Thermal imaging cameras are an essential piece of hunting gear that help make hunting safer and more successful. The entry-level model, the ZEISS DTI 1, is a compact and lightweight thermal imaging camera with features such as Transition Zoom, which enables uninterrupted observation thanks to the continuous zoom effect, as well as personalized settings. The camera comes with a new detection mode and eight color modes for your customization. With 0.5 zoom increments, it offers the ideal combination of zoom and detail recognition for reliable identification. The new ZEISS DTI 1 is available in two different focal lengths: the DTI 1/19 with a field of view of 72 feet at 100 yards, and the DTI 1/25 with a field of view of 55 feet at 100 yards.

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POPULATION MANIPULATION

Nearly every serious deer hunter and manager strives to create a better deer herd. This includes providing them food and cover, but also involves manipulating the herd itself. From older age bucks to more balanced buck-to-doe ratios, manipulating the herd is a management practice that receives a lot of attention. But what managers fail to acknowledge is that by doing so, they might be increasing the natural mortality of bucks in their local herd.

As a population recruits more bucks into older age classes, the intensity within the herd increases. As a buck ages, its testosterone level continues to increase until it's 5 to 6 years old. This means that as a greater number of older bucks appear in the herd, more intense fighting and interactions occur during the rut. For the hunter, this seems like exactly what we want! However, there is an underlying issue.

We often see half-racks or busted-up antlers as the rut drags on. As two bucks lock antlers, there is an immense amount of force

generated between the two. This often causes breaks in main beams or tines, but can also cause a break at the base or pedicle. When this occurs, the break is typically not nearly as clean as when a buck sheds its antlers along the abscission line. Instead, the force also breaks off some of the pedicle, or growing platform for the antlers. Not only can this cause deformed antlers the following year (and years after), but it can also open a pathway for bacteria to enter the brain cavity. This can lead to a fatal illness called a brain abscess.

A brain abscess forms when bacteria enters the cavity and causes a severe infection, leading first to abnormal behavior, and then potentially to death. The more intense the fighting, the more likely these injuries are to occur.

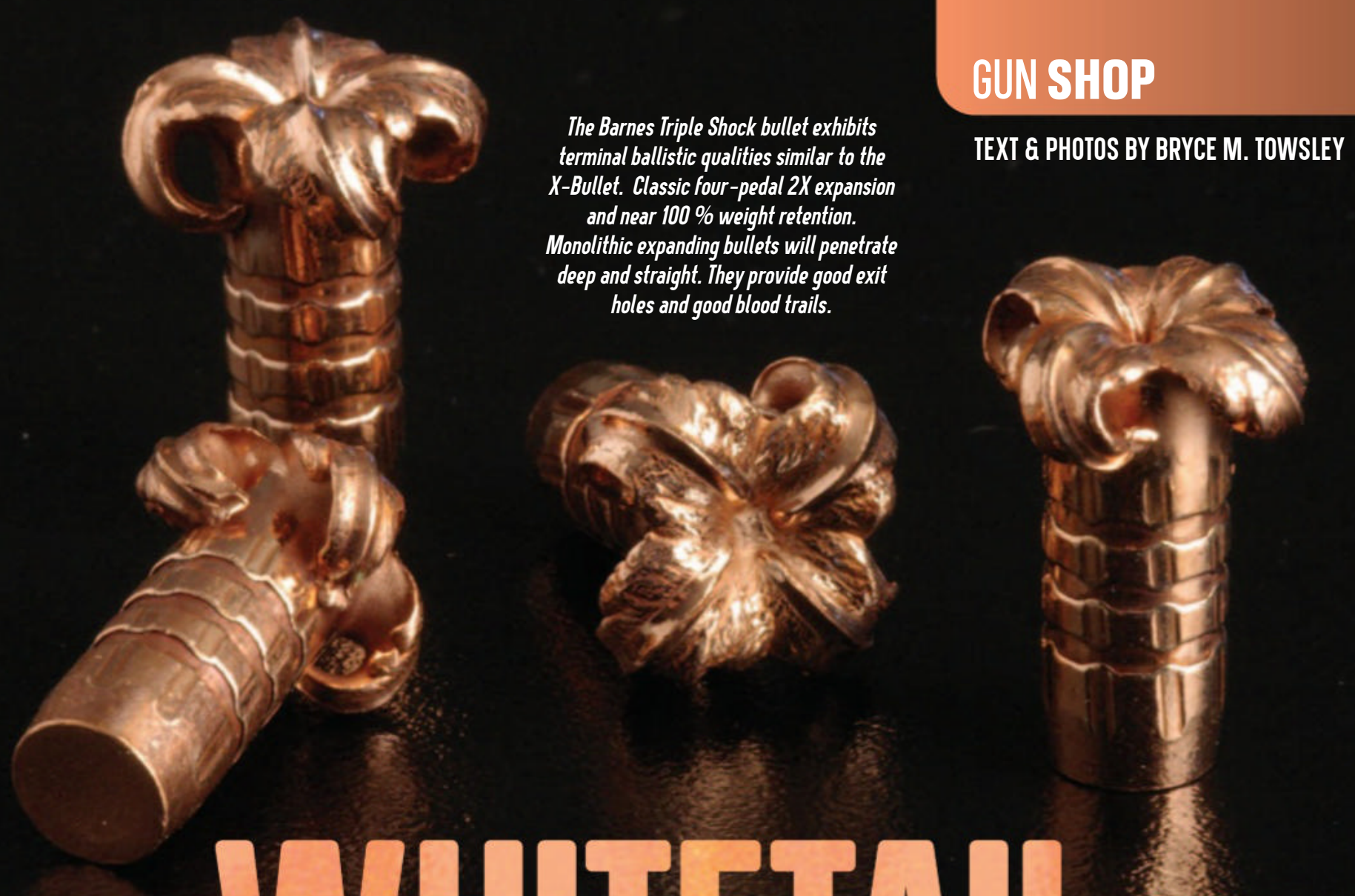
Buck-to-doe ratios can influence the level of intensity in fighting among bucks. As the pre-rut approaches, does begin going into estrus. The closer to the peak breeding season, the more does that are available to breed. However, when the buck-to-doe ratio is balanced, bucks have fewer options, so they are more likely to

interact and fight for a potential girlfriend. The more fights that occur, the more frequent the chance for antler injury leading to a potential brain abscess.

So what does this all mean? Should we manage for older bucks and tighter buck-to-doe ratios? Absolutely! But it needs to be conducted with utmost attention and care. It is critical to harvest mature bucks, regardless of antler size, in order to keep a balanced buck age structure. A great target sex ratio for a free-range population is two does to one buck. This helps ensure that breeding, and subsequently fawning, is happening at the right time of year for the right length of time.

It takes a cooperative effort to affect a deer herd's demographics, so it is important to communicate with your neighbors the goals and reasons why you are trying to manage the local deer herd.





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WHITETAIL CONNECTION

In the early days of self-contained rifle cartridges, velocity was restricted by the use of blackpowder. So, to increase power, the bullets were made bigger and heavier.

Then, in the late 1800s, along came smokeless powder. It was discovered that smaller bullets could be used, and to increase power, velocity could be increased. The lead bullets didn't do well with the higher velocity because they were too soft to hold the rifling. That led to jacketed bullets; a lead core, wrapped with a guiding metal jacket. These would expand on impact and create

a larger frontal area, often matching the diameter of the big blackpowder bullets. Things stalled there for a while.

The early cartridges using smokeless powder were still pretty slow velocity, in the low 2,000s. Then in 1915 Savage broke 3,000 fps muzzle velocity with their .250-3000 cartridge. In 1935 the .220 Swift cracked the 4,000 fps mark.

Bullet design was not keeping up. The simple cup-and-core bullets didn't like those high velocities. Even as late as the '70s and '80s it was common for hunters to bad mouth any "magnum" because of meat



Swift bonded bullets. Left is the A-Frame and right is the Scirocco. All of Swift's bullets are bonded.

destruction. It wasn't a cartridge problem; it was a bullet problem. Using a bullet designed for 2,000 fps and driving it faster than 3,000 fps caused the bullets to fragment and to dump the energy quickly. This caused meat destruction. How many savvy hunters do you hear talk about excessive meat destruction from magnums today? That's because we have much better bullets and those in the know choose to use them.

The only physical connection to the deer we have is the bullet we choose. The outcome of the entire hunt depends on how well it does its job. Why risk all of that time, effort and emotion invested in getting to that point by using anything other than the best?

If you are shooting a .30-30 or some other old-time cartridge, then a cup-and-core bullet is fine. But if you have a modern cartridge with a muzzle velocity higher than 2,600 fps you should be using a more modern bullet.

Back when I started writing about guns it was in vogue to advise, "Leave the bullet in the deer and dump all the energy." Like so many good ideas, it sounds good if you don't dig too deep. Without going into a long diatribe on why it's wrong, I'll boil it down to this. Energy does not kill deer. Tissue destruction kills deer. It's only

good if the destruction is in the right place. The "leave the bullet" crowd liked soft bullets that didn't penetrate well. They created a short, football-shaped wound channel with a large peak diameter. That's fine, if it's in the right place. Remember the penetration? If you stuck the bullet in the ribs of a broadside deer and the wound channel peaked in the lungs, it was impressive to see. But, if you had to shoot from a different angle and the bullet didn't make the lungs, or was out of steam by the time it did, the results were less than desirable.

Fortunately, with the outstanding bullets today we don't need to do this anymore. The best approach is to use a bullet that expands early after contact, then with a full-diameter frontal area, retains its weight and continues to penetrate, holding a lot of energy until it exits. The high-speed exit keeps the wound channel a large diameter right to the end. So now we have a large, sausage-shaped wound channel that is penetrating all the way through the deer. It can be much longer than the explosive, football-shaped wound channel, and so actually causes more total damaged area. If you take the shot from a different angle, the bullet will penetrate much deeper and reach the important stuff in the deer with plenty of damage for a quick kill.

I am a big advocate of two holes with every shot, one in and one out. This is for a couple of reasons. First is as I just explained, I want a big, long wound channel and this is how it happens. Second, I want a big exit for a blood trail. Today's pointy bullets make a small entry hole. The skin dimples in and stretches over the bullet until it pokes through. The elasticity in the skin seals up the small hole and little blood leaks out. If there is a big exit, the blood will run out. Sure, we all want the deer to drop in sight, but that doesn't always happen in the real world. Far too many recoverable deer are lost due to a poor blood trail and hunters giving up too soon. Punch a big exit hole and there will be a good blood trail with a dead deer waiting at the end of it.

So which bullets? There are so many good choices. But, to simplify it, use bonded bullets or mono-metal. They both retain weight and penetrate deeply. I am a big fan of Barnes bullets and I have used them all over the world on game from coyotes to elephants. There are some who say mono-metal bullets are no good for deer, but they don't know what they are talking about. The bullets do not "pencil through" as you hear so often from the know-it-all in deer camp or at the gun shop. High-speed cameras have proven that they expand in the first inch or so of penetration. If they are running low on energy by the time they exit, they make a smaller hole. They also exit far more often than other bullet designs. The key is to look at what happens in between the holes. There is always a path of destruction that results in a dead deer.

Many bonded bullets tend to have a larger frontal area than mono-metal. Some can grow pretty large if driven fast. Others control the expansion so the leading edge doesn't grow too large. They don't have the petals and tend to be a more rounded shape in the frontal area.

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Pursuit Media, LLC invites viewers to tune in to catch great whitetail content from Media 360's Deer & Deer Hunting crew, including new shows joining the lineup for 2023.

Media 360 has been bringing Pursuit Channel viewers great whitetail content for nearly a decade now. The shows can be found on a variety of days and times throughout the week, and their programs are also wrapped up nicely in a late-night Saturday block called "Saturday Night Deer Camp ... brought to you by Deer & Deer Hunting."

The block starts at 10 p.m. EST with their long-running show, "Deer & Deer Hunting TV" that has been on air for 20 seasons, followed by two new shows, "Modern Hunter" and "Deer & Deer Hunting Properties," with Steve Bartylla's "DeerTopia" closing it out in the 11:30 p.m. slot.

"Consistent and long-term partnerships are everything in this industry, and we're so proud to call the crew at Deer & Deer Hunting not only a great partner and promoter of Pursuit, but also good friends," said Rusty Faulk, Founder and CEO of Pursuit Media. "We've counted on this partnership, and the Pursuit viewers counted on the great content they have provided for so many years now. They are without a doubt the best authority on whitetail hunting and management in the space, and we sincerely thank them for airing their great content with us and for all they do to help support us," he continued.

Deer & Deer Hunting's Vice President and TV host, Daniel Schmidt, said the relationship with Pursuit has been a perfect fit. "In my 30 years in the outdoor industry, this partnership is one of the most exciting things I've been a part of. From the Pursuit Channel staff to the extended TV partners, we could not have found a better match for the distribution of our content and assets. The two companies complement each other so well; it's one of those unique situations where every single person is on the same page. It's quite special, and we are proud to be a part of it."

Here's a closer look at the four Media 360 shows:

- **"DEER & DEER HUNTING TV"** – This highly regarded show was started 20 years ago as the video extension of America's First and Foremost Whitetail Source®. Led by host Daniel Schmidt, our team of contributors cover all things relative to the science of hunting and the behavior of the white-tailed deer. Every episode is produced with one goal in mind: To make the viewer a better hunter by providing comprehensive and practical information.
- **"MODERN HUNTER TV"** – "Modern Hunter" is designed to inform and entertain the new generation of multi-species hunters by encompassing the wide and varied hunting landscape, including bowhunting, AR rifles, handguns, bow-fishing, crossbow hunting, the locavore movement, women's hunting, nontraditional species and layering for optimum comfort and scent control.

- **"DEER & DEER HUNTING PROPERTIES"** – This television series takes the viewer into the dream homes, cabins and, most importantly – swamps, woodlands, fields and forests – of the best whitetail hunting grounds in America. Whether you're a prospective land buyer, seller or merely want to learn more about the process, we line up the real-estate and land-management experts to show you how to improve all types of properties for maximum outdoors enjoyment.
- **"DEERTOPIA TV"** – Whether you lease, own or just have access to a small piece of private land, you can improve it to make it more deer-friendly. "DeerTopia" is a spin-off of the wildly popular YouTube program "Grow 'em Big with Steve Bartylla." An expert land manager with 25-plus years' experience, Steve provides real-world advice and techniques that will shorten your learning curve to producing bigger and healthier deer, while also offering proven hunting tactics.

Reach out today to learn how Pursuit can help your business. #wearepursuit

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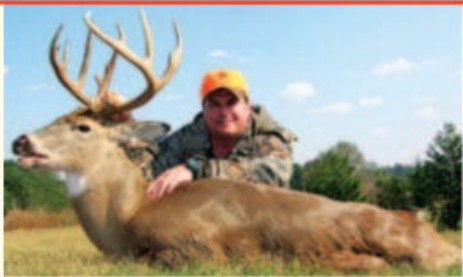
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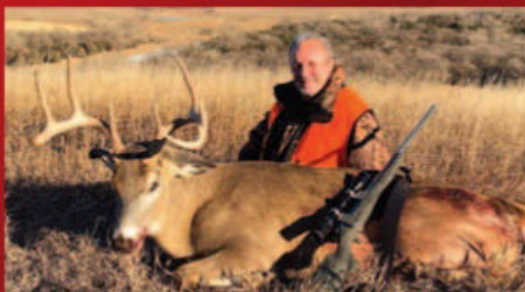
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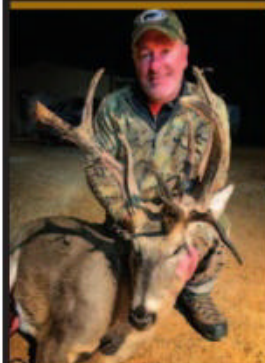


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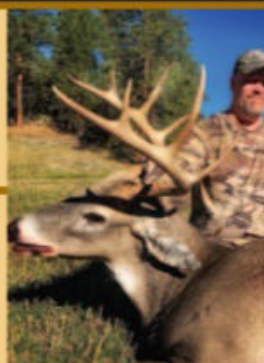
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FROM PAGE 112

He was a jock ... he enjoyed football and baseball. But he enjoyed, even more, fishing, hunting (deer and pheasants, particularly) and spending time in the woods, often alone, or sometimes with just his dog, a big, pale-haired golden retriever named Chip.

He was a linebacker on the high school football team, a very good tackling machine. His coach had told him the previous season, "Helgeland, if you live life like you play defensive football, you will be

lucky to make it to 30." Jon took that as a compliment.

In baseball he batted left-handed and had a knack for hitting a high, inside fastball — about level with the bill of his cap — over the right-field fence.

Jon didn't like to work unless it had something to do with conservation and the outdoors. Dad, one time when fully exasperated, said, "Jon, you can stand there and look at work longer than anyone I know."

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This explains why youngest brother Lee and Dad often did field work while Jon and I fed the cows and did the milking. I needed help and he was the only one available. In the summer, when many of the cows were dry (not giving milk) and not too many months from freshening (having a calf), this was a two-person job for a 44-cow herd, which was a big herd back then.

When we needed grain and corn milled for cattle feed, usually just one or two of us took a truckload to the feed mill in town while two or three of us worked at home. When Jon drove, he often took his dog with him.

One fall Saturday, he drove to town while Dad, Lee and I did some physical labor in the cow barn. Jon had volunteered to drive. Dad agreed, because at least it would keep Jon doing something needed and productive.

At the mill, Jon and a mill worker unloaded the truck. The mill was beside the railroad tracks near the edge of town. Then Jon decided to drive down Main Street for a look-see and to kill some time waiting for the grain and corn to be ground. His dog was already in the truck, the only place he should be while the truck was being unloaded.

Jon made the 12-block round trip, loaded up at the mill and drove home and went on with life.

The following Monday, he was startled when, at lunch, one of his hunting buddies asked him, "Who was that redhead I saw you with?"

Jon was startled.

"What?" was his only response. He had forgotten about the drive to town for grain, and he knew he hadn't gone anywhere Saturday night.

"The redhead with you. She had her head on your shoulder ... close," one buddy said, hesitated, then added, "I didn't know you were dating anyone. You could have told us."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"You were in town Saturday ... about noon?"

The light began to go on in Jon's mind, but he didn't change

his facial expression. He was beginning to enjoy this question-and-answer grilling, and they obviously were confused. He decided to play dumb and hesitated, for effect, before replying.

"Yes."

"Shortly before noon? That's an odd time to have a girl with you," one of his buddies said.

"We sometimes go for a drive then on Saturdays," Jon said. "Saturday noon often isn't all that busy. As long as we're both home for lunch."

"You drove down Main Street?" another buddy asked.

"Yes."

"You were driving your old pickup truck?"

"Yes."

You had a long-haired redhead sitting right beside you?"

"Yes, but the hair was more amber than red."

"Picky, picky, picky," from one.

"She sure had her head on your shoulder," another repeated, emphatically.

"... usually sits that close," Jon said.

"How can you drive?" one asked.

"Didn't a cop stop you for inattentive driving?" another asked.

"I was driving within the speed limit and watching where I was driving. And keeping enough space behind the car ahead of me," Jon defended himself. "A cop would have had no reason to stop me. So they didn't."

"Besides, it's long nose was behind my shoulder. My vision wasn't blocked at all."

"Long nose?"

"What do you mean ... it?"

"It wasn't a girl."

"What-t-t-t-t?!" He had all of their puzzled attention now. "Then what was it, or she? An extraterrestrial?"

"It was a dog," Jon said.

"You were necking with a dog?"

"No," Jon said. "I wasn't necking with anyone."

A chorus of, "You sure were! We're not blind," enveloped him.

"You may not be blind," Jon said. "But you sure weren't seeing what was there."

"So what were YOU seeing?"

"My dog, Chip. Chip is a golden retriever. He is long-legged, so he can sit on the truck seat and his head is level with mine. Dogs often sit close when they like you, especially golden retrievers, and especially when riding in a car or truck. His nose fits between my shoulder and the back of the truck seat. His chest leans against my shoulder. He's comfortable and out of my way."

"You ought to see Chip when we get out of the pickup to go hunting. He almost knocks me over."

"He weighs 105 pounds, and there's no fat on him, so he's a load. I have to open my door first; he wants out now, so sometimes he scrambles over me before I can get out of his way."

"He's 4 years old and fully grown. I got him for my 13th birthday. He likes me, and I like him. Dad says that when we're pheasant hunting in a corn field and flush a rooster, it's easy to tell where Chip is. All you have to do is listen for snapping cornstalks. He doesn't bark."

"We never have gotten him well trained," Jon said, somewhat apologetically.

He changed the subject. "I told you I wasn't dating anyone."

"Sure had us fooled," came a chorus of grumbled replies.

"I know. Fooling you was fun, but you actually fooled yourselves."

— Glenn Helgeland has been an outdoor magazine editor since 1968, an outdoor book author since 1972, and an outdoor book publisher since 1983. To see his "On Target" series of outdoor books, go to www.targetcommbooks.com.



WHO WAS THAT REDHEAD I SAW YOU WITH?



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My brother Jon wasn't dating anyone, and neither were any of his friends. They were not the most socially active group in high school.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 110

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