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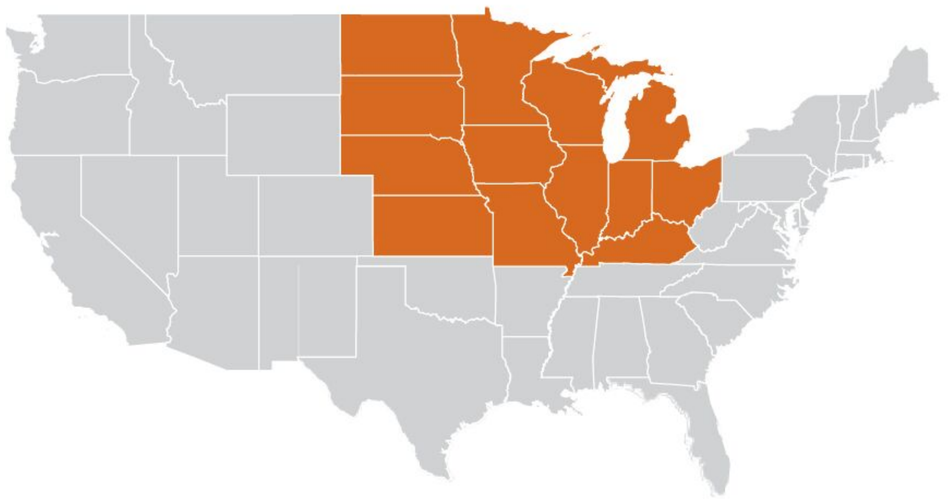
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STEVEN RINELLA

GAME & FISH MIDWEST
The Regional Outdoor Guide



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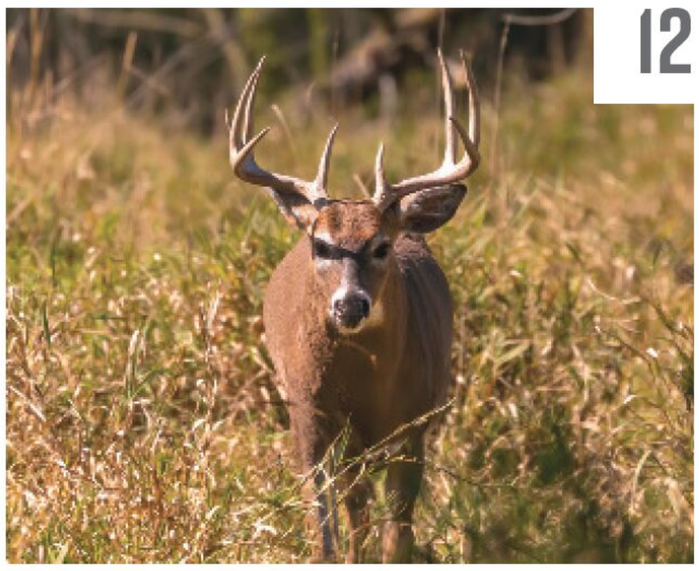
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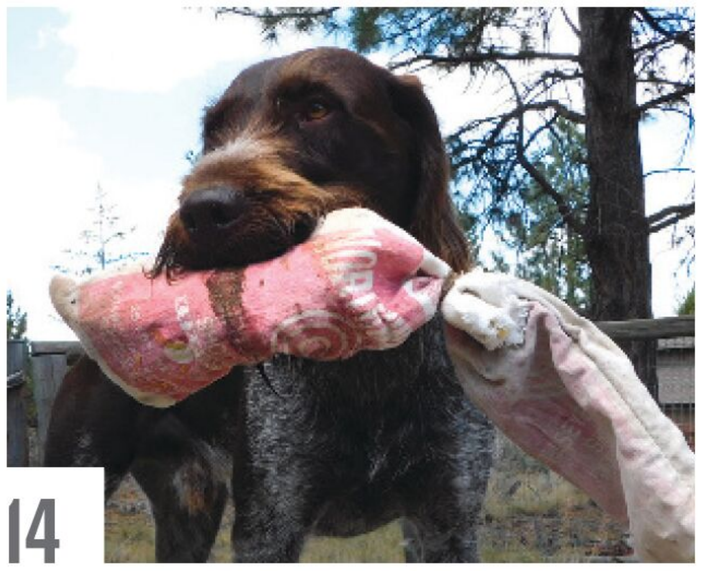
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RICHARD MANN (TOP LEFT); SHUTTERSTOCK (TOP RIGHT, MIDDLE RIGHT); SCOTT LINDEN (MIDDLE LEFT); MARK WEBB/MURRAY ROAD (BOTTOM)



IN MEMORIAM:

CHUCK SMOCK

(1964-2023)

Game & Fish lost a well-traveled angler, dedicated editor and sincere friend when Chuck Smock passed in June. Chuck first served on the Game & Fish staff as an editor for a brief time in 1997 before moving on to his role as communications specialist at Cabela's, where he worked with many top outdoor writers and served as editor of Cabela's Outfitter Journal. We were privileged to see Chuck return to the Game & Fish staff in 2021 as Western Regional Editor.

"I am an editor and a writer who just happens to love hunting, fishing and camping. I am not an outdoors enthusiast looking for a way to cash a paycheck working his passions."

That statement was at the top of the resume Chuck submitted when he applied for the regional editor position, and it embodies the personality of a man who was both honest and direct. Chuck didn't mince words, nor did he appreciate superfluous language and the overuse of em dashes in manuscripts. An eye for clear, succinct copy was no doubt a trait Chuck developed during his 12 years of working for newspapers in Texas, California and Nevada.

Born in Salt Lake City, Chuck moved with his family to Richardson, Texas, near Dallas, when he was a kid. "He revolved around fishing," his sister Stephanie remembered. "We had a boat while we were growing up, and he was over the moon for that. He was always cleaning it and taking care of it."

Chuck's passion for fishing only grew stronger, and his career path enabled him to fish around the world with family, friends and industry partners. In fact, Chuck managed to catch fish in 49 states, those in Hawaii being the only ones to escape his hooks—and only because he had not fished there. His favorite trip was fishing the wilderness of Alaska with his father, who preceded him in death just a year ago.

Cast well, Chuck. I pray the pristine rivers of paradise are full of fish you could have only dreamed of here on earth.

Adam Heggenstaller
Editorial Director

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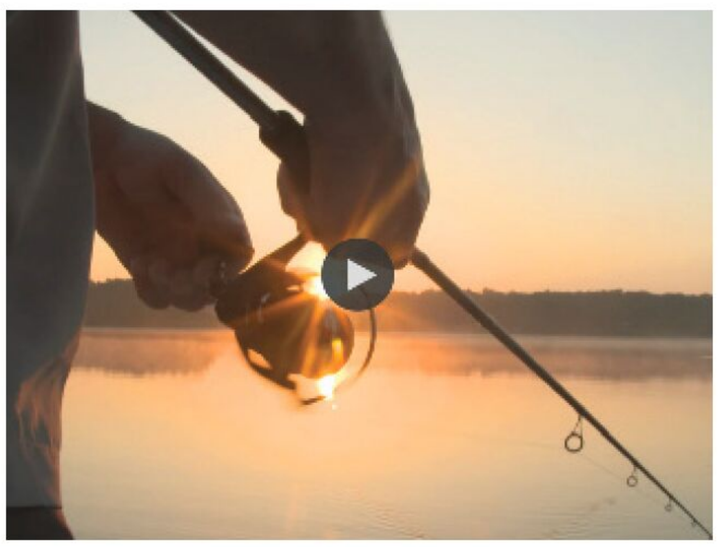
HUNTING HELP

Whitetail season is upon us, and your focus must be at its peak for success. Check out our "Whitetail" section to hone your tactics from now through the rut.



CLASSIC OLD-TIMERS

Craig Boddington names six classic (and still available) cartridges every hunter should try in "One Hunter's Short List of Old-Time Hunting Cartridges."



GO 'BEYOND THE BAIT'

Our popular bass-fishing video series with Editorial Director Adam Heggenstaller is back for a fourth season of detailing top lures for largemouths.



FORWARD-FACING GEAR

"Bass Crash Course" host Shane Beilue goes in-depth from ICAST 2023 on how forward-facing sonar impacts fishing gear. Learn more in "Beilue's Best."



DÉJÀ BLUE CATFISH

Micka Burkhart's state-record blue cat broke the record he set last year—at the same spot. Read "Déjà Blue: Tennessee Angler Breaks Own Catfish Record."



VENISON BRATFEST

Just in time for Oktoberfest and early deer seasons, learn how to turn venison into brats. Try our "Mouth-Watering Venison Bratwurst Recipe from Scratch."

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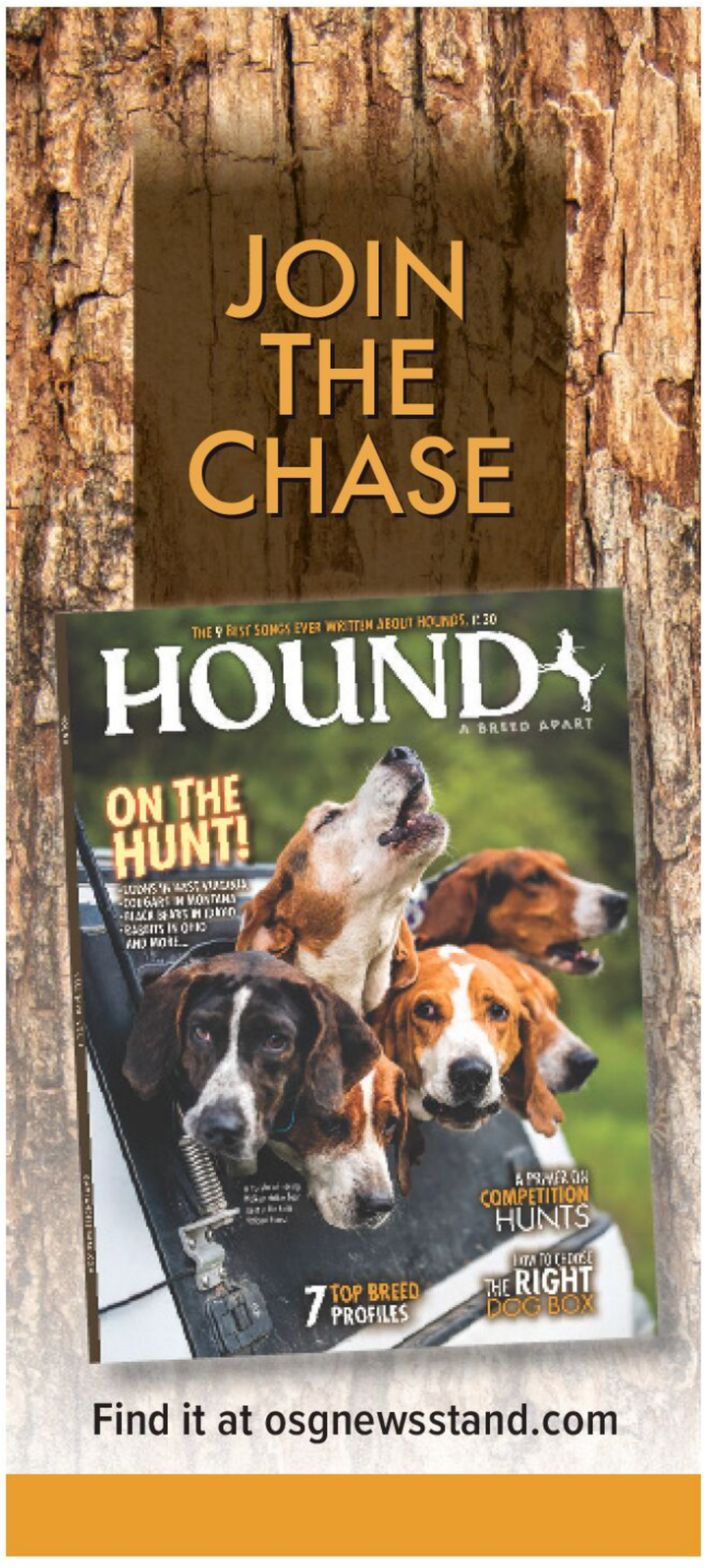


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17 am 2:06 to 4:06 / pm 2:30 to 4:30	18 am 2:54 to 4:54 / pm 3:18 to 5:18	19 am 3:42 to 5:42 / pm 4:06 to 6:06	20 am 4:30 to 6:30 / pm 4:54 to 6:54	21 FIRST Q am 5:18 to 7:18 / pm 5:42 to 7:42	22 am 6:06 to 8:06 / pm 6:30 to 8:30	23 am 6:54 to 8:54 / pm 7:18 to 9:18
24 am 7:42 to 9:42 / pm 8:06 to 10:06	25 am 8:30 to 10:30 / pm 8:54 to 10:54	26 am 9:18 to 11:18 / pm 9:42 to 11:42	27 am 10:06 to 12:06 / pm 10:30 to 12:30	28 am 10:54 to 12:54 / pm 11:18 to 1:18	29 FULL am — to — / pm 12:06 to 2:06	30 am 12:30 to 2:30 / pm 4:54 to 6:54

OCTOBER 2023

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1 am 1:18 to 3:18 / pm 1:42 to 3:42	2 am 2:06 to 4:06 / pm 2:30 to 4:30	3 am 2:54 to 4:54 / pm 3:18 to 5:18	4 am 3:42 to 5:42 / pm 4:06 to 6:06	5 am 4:30 to 6:30 / pm 4:54 to 6:54	6 LAST Q am 5:18 to 7:18 / pm 5:42 to 7:42	7 am 6:06 to 8:06 / pm 6:30 to 8:30
8 am 6:54 to 8:54 / pm 7:18 to 9:18	9 am 7:42 to 9:42 / pm 8:06 to 10:06	10 am 8:30 to 10:30 / pm 8:54 to 10:54	11 am 9:18 to 11:18 / pm 9:42 to 11:42	12 am 10:06 to 12:06 / pm 10:30 to 12:30	13 am 10:54 to 12:54 / pm 11:18 to 1:18	14 NEW am — to — / pm 12:06 to 2:06
15 am 12:30 to 2:30 / pm 12:54 to 2:54	16 am 1:18 to 3:18 / pm 1:42 to 3:42	17 am 2:06 to 4:06 / pm 2:30 to 4:30	18 am 2:54 to 4:54 / pm 3:18 to 5:18	19 am 3:42 to 5:42 / pm 4:06 to 6:06	20 am 4:30 to 6:30 / pm 4:54 to 6:54	21 FIRST Q am 5:18 to 7:18 / pm 5:42 to 7:42
22 am 6:06 to 8:06 / pm 6:30 to 8:30	23 am 6:54 to 8:54 / pm 7:18 to 9:18	24 am 7:42 to 9:42 / pm 8:06 to 10:06	25 am 8:30 to 10:30 / pm 8:54 to 10:54	26 am 9:18 to 11:18 / pm 9:42 to 11:42	27 am 10:06 to 12:06 / pm 10:30 to 12:30	28 FULL am — to — / pm 12:06 to 2:06
29 am 12:30 to 2:30 / pm 12:54 to 2:54	30 am 1:18 to 3:18 / pm 1:42 to 3:42	31 am 2:06 to 4:06 / pm 2:30 to 4:30				

NOVEMBER 2023

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
			1 am 2:54 to 4:54 / pm 3:18 to 5:18	2 am 3:42 to 5:42 / pm 4:06 to 6:06	3 am 4:30 to 6:30 / pm 4:54 to 6:54	4 am 5:18 to 7:18 / pm 5:42 to 7:42
5 LAST Q am 5:06 to 7:06 / pm 5:30 to 7:30	6 am 5:54 to 7:54 / pm 6:18 to 8:18	7 am 6:42 to 8:42 / pm 7:06 to 9:06	8 am 7:30 to 9:30 / pm 7:54 to 9:54	9 am 8:18 to 10:18 / pm 8:42 to 10:42	10 am 9:06 to 11:06 / pm 9:30 to 11:30	11 am 9:54 to 11:54 / pm 10:18 to 12:18

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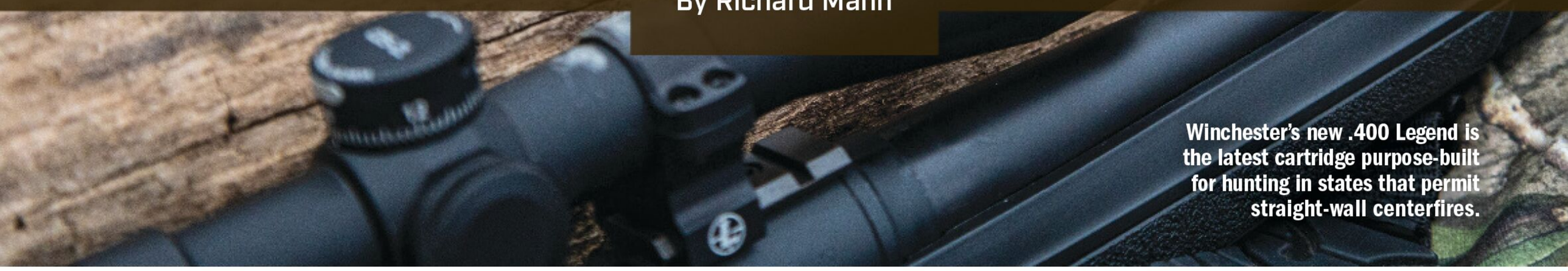
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STRAIGHT-WALL STRAIGHT TALK

WITH HISTORICALLY RESTRICTIVE SHOTGUN-ONLY STATES CHANGING THEIR DEER HUNTING REGULATIONS, STRAIGHT-WALL CARTRIDGES ARE EXPERIENCING A TRENDY RESURGENCE.

By Richard Mann



Winchester's new .400 Legend is the latest cartridge purpose-built for hunting in states that permit straight-wall centerfires.

Even as hunters seek rifle cartridges with more reach, some short- to moderate-range cartridges are trending. This is because several states have loosened restrictions recently on legal deer hunting cartridges. Some states that only permitted slugs now allow straight-wall cartridges with limited range. Ammo makers have responded with better loads for older straight-walls and new cartridges built especially for straight-wall laws.

A straight-wall cartridge is one without a shoulder. The case—though slightly tapering in diameter—is straight, from the rim or base to the case mouth. Common for old single-shot and lever-action rifles, it's also the case design for revolver cartridges. Recently, the concept has been applied to AR-15 compatible cartridges. And Remington debuted a new straight-wall cartridge for lever-action rifles, too.

If you deer hunt in a straight-wall state, which straight-wall cartridge is your best bet? Let's examine the newest options and see how they compare to the old-timers.

.350 LEGEND

When Winchester introduced the .350 Legend in 2019, it got some push-back. Hunters wondered how a brand-new cartridge could be a "legend." No matter. The .350 Legend was an instant success, offering hunters in straight-wall states a viable, light-recoiling option for bolt guns and ARs. Surprisingly, the cartridge gained acceptance nationwide due to its balance of ballistics and recoil. With a new upper receiver, it converts a .223 Rem. AR-15 into a great deer rifle for young or recoil-sensitive shooters. Nearly 20 distinct .350 Legend factory loads now exist in bullet weights from 124 to 180 grains, and Hornady and Winchester also offer 250- and 255-grain subsonic loads.

Like most AR-15 compatible cartridges, the .350 Legend is loaded to 55,000 psi. Supersonic load velocities range from 2,000 to 2,350 fps, depending on bullet weight and barrel length. The 100-yard impact terminal performance in 10 percent ordnance gelatin or Clear Ballistics gel often shows between 14 to 20 inches of penetration with bullets upsetting with a frontal diameter of between .60 to .75 inch. With a 100-yard zero, bullet drop is about 17 to 20 inches at 250 yards, with a remaining energy of around 800 foot-pounds.

.360 BUCKHAMMER

This cartridge may be the end of the .35 Rem. Currently, only Henry offers a rifle chambered in .35 Rem., but the company worked with Remington to design the .360 Buckhammer cartridge and already offers two rifles for it. The .360 Buckhammer basically mirrors the .35 Rem.'s ballistics, but since it's a straight-wall cartridge, it's legal to hunt with in more places. Also, only about five factory .35 Rem. loads exist. The .360 Buckhammer already has four. Although it will likely find its way into some single-shot rifles, the Buckhammer was made to offer a straight-wall-legal lever gun option beyond larger-caliber cartridges like the .444 Marlin and .45-70.

The .35 Rem. is loaded to a maximum average pressure (MAP) of 33,500 psi versus the Buckhammer's 50,000 psi. This lets the straight-wall cartridge compete with the bottlenecked .35 Rem. The factory 200-grain Remington Core-Lokt Buckhammer load has an advertised velocity of 2,200 fps, and Remington's 200-grain .35 Rem. load is listed at 120 fps slower. With 100-yard impacts in ballistics gel, both penetrate to nearly 20 inches with bullets upsetting with a frontal diameter of more than a half inch. With a 100-yard zero, expect nearly 2 feet of drop at 250 yards and about 700 foot-pounds of remaining kinetic energy.

.400 LEGEND

Winchester likely launched the .400 Legend, the newest straight-wall, earlier this year to capitalize on the .350

DREW WARDEN

Legend's success. It's loaded to 45,000 psi and is also AR-15 compatible. But, the .350 Legend is based on the .223 Rem. case and has the same rim diameter. Switch your .223 AR-15 upper for one in .350 Legend, and you don't need a new bolt. The .400 Legend has the same rim diameter as the 6.8 SPC and .224 Valkyrie cartridges, but its rim is rebated by .018 inch.

The .400 Legend fires a .40-caliber bullet, so it can be handloaded with 10 mm pistol bullets. The current Winchester load uses a 215-grain Power-Point at 2,250 fps. With a 100-yard zero, drop is about 18 inches at 250 yards, with about 950 foot-pounds of energy left. I've not tested the .400 Legend, but I'd expect terminal performance comparable to the .35 Rem. and .360 Buckhammer. There's also potential for wildcatting and necking it down to fire smaller diameter bullets for non-straight-wall applications.

OTHER, OLDER OPTIONS

Straight-wall cartridges have existed for ages, and many of the older ones are legal for hunting in straight-wall states. But just because a cartridge case doesn't have a shoulder, doesn't mean it's straight-wall legal in your state. Caliber or bullet diameter, case length and overall cartridge length may affect straight-wall legality. Check your state's regulations.

The .444 Marlin and .45-70 Govt. are popular choices, but currently almost no manufacturers offer a .444 Marlin rifle. Some revolver cartridges often chambered in lever guns are also straight-wall legal. The .357 Mag., .44 Mag. and .45 Colt work on deer out to about 150 yards or so. And then there's the .450 Bushmaster, originally conceived for the AR-15. In terms of performance, it's right on the heels of the .444 Marlin.

See which straight-wall cartridges are legal in your state. Then pick the type of rifle you want and the straight-wall option that best suits your hunting needs. G&F

STRAIGHT-WALL CARTRIDGE BALLISTIC COMPARISON (FACTORY DATA)

LOAD	VEL (fps)	ENG (ft.-lbs.)	TRAJECTORY (yards/inches) 100	150	200	250
.350 Legend 150-gr. Winchester Extreme Point	2325	1801	-0-	-2.45	-7.58	-15.93
.357 Magnum 170-gr. Federal HammerDown	1610	979	-0-	-6.52	-19.35	-39.58
.360 Buckhammer 200-gr. Remington Core-Lokt	2200	2150	-0-	-3.11	-9.67	-20.53
.400 Legend 215-gr. Winchester Power-Point	2250	2416	-0-	-2.81	-8.67	-18.28
.44 Magnum 270-gr. Federal HammerDown	1715	1764	-0-	-5.36	-15.95	-32.72
.444 Marlin 240-gr. Remington Core-Lokt	2350	2943	-0-	-2.93	-9.35	-20.38
.450 Bushmaster 245-gr. Hornady Interlock	2200	2633	-0-	-3.25	-10.19	-21.82
.45 Colt 250-gr. Federal HammerDown	1400	1088	-0-	-8.92	-25.93	-52.12
.45-70 Govt. 300-gr. Buffalo Bore TSX +P	2350	3679	-0-	-2.74	-8.69	-18.75

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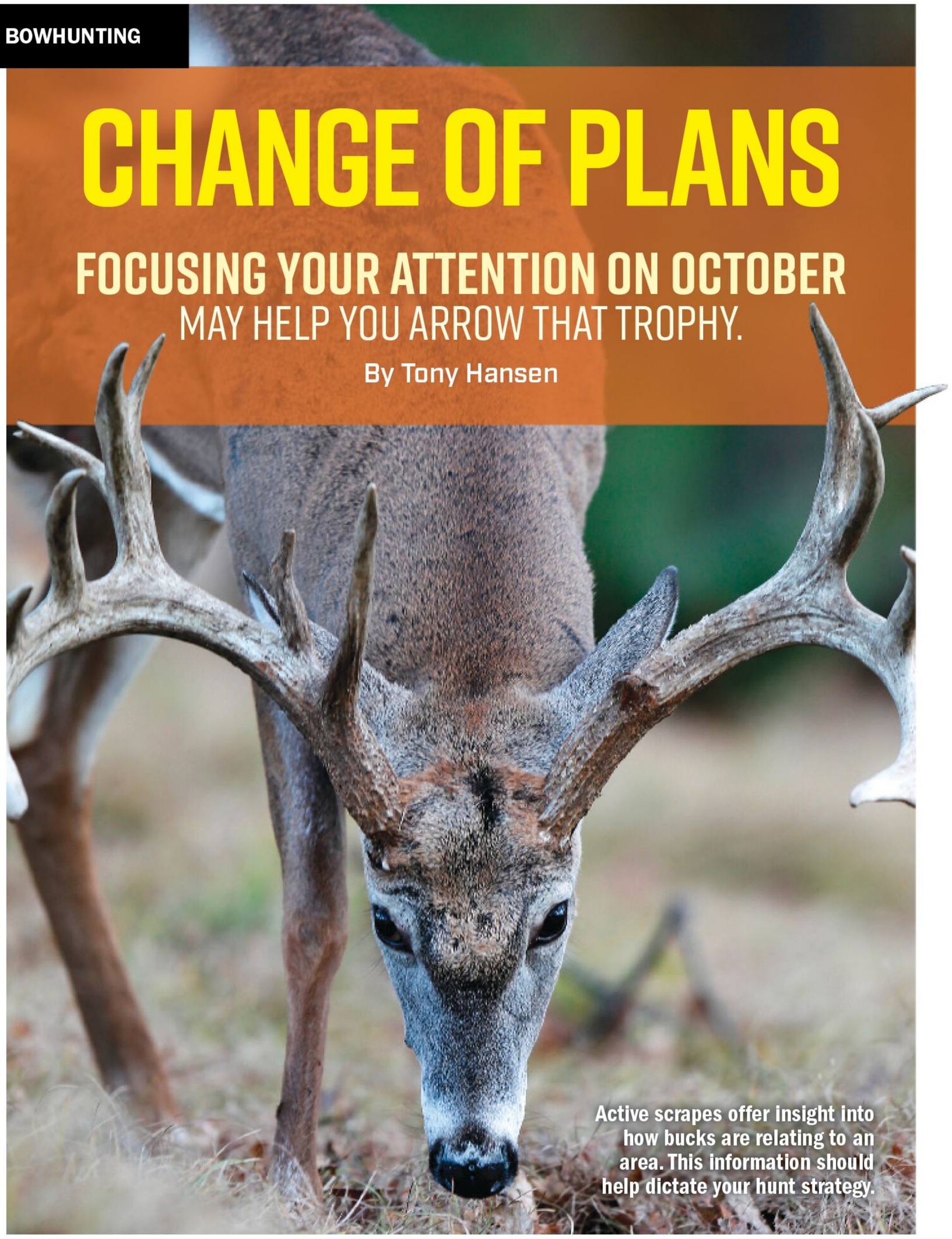
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CHANGE OF PLANS

FOCUSING YOUR ATTENTION ON OCTOBER MAY HELP YOU ARROW THAT TROPHY.

By Tony Hansen



Active scrapes offer insight into how bucks are relating to an area. This information should help dictate your hunt strategy.

On a perfect hunting world, there is little argument that the first week of November is the best time to be in the whitetail woods. Those magical days afford you the optimal chance of arrowing a buck as he throws caution to the wind and behaves carelessly.

However, we live in an imperfect world and things don't always go according to plan. When it comes to bowhunting, there are many variables that are beyond our control. For me, of all the variables beyond my control, hunting pressure most affects my hunting success.

INCREASED PRESSURE

The reality is, today there is no such thing as minimal hunting pressure, especially when hunting public land. Low-pressure hunting properties do still exist; however, these are almost exclusively private ground.

Because of the extreme pressure exerted on whitetails in November, I have made adjustments to my October hunting. In fact, my "Octobers" have now become what were once my "Novembers." Now I'll add a disclaimer here.

The latter half of October can be excellent, but it does not compare to the frenzy of activity around the first 10 days (give or take) or so of November. Again, in an ideal world, with limited hunting pressure and deer that haven't been pursued for weeks already, the first part of November is simply unbeatable. But, back to reality.

MAKE ADJUSTMENTS

As the popularity of public land hunting has exploded, the impacts I've seen on the areas I've hunted for years have been undeniable. Like most hunters, I have limited time to hunt and try to take advantage of the very best times of the season—which previously meant early November. However, as mentioned previously, a whole bunch of other hunters feel the same way.

The exponential increase of November hunting pressure has taught me some tough lessons. First and foremost, it does not matter how great an area looks—it will not hunt the way it did before the pressure ramped up.

The biggest adjustment I've made on public land is spending more time scouting. But this is not the kind of scouting you're thinking of. No, I spend time learning the habits of other hunters and less time focused on the deer themselves. I've found that when I figure out where the hunters aren't, the bucks are likely to be there. To avoid the heaviest pressure, I reluctantly began to make shifts in the times I focused most on hunting.

"BEST" NOT ALWAYS

Over the years, I've learned that the best-looking areas are almost always to be avoided. While I have mentioned this in other columns, it is worth repeating as plenty of bowhunters make the same mistake year in and year out.

If an area looks promising on a digital map, I now assume it will be hunted heavily and, in most instances, I don't even waste time checking on it. Instead, I focus on areas that look less desirable.

Once I've narrowed down my choices I'll spend time hitting every parking area around to check for human activity. If I see an overabundance of tire tracks and boot prints, I'm back in my truck and motoring to the next area.

This system, while seemingly rudimentary, allows me to find areas that aren't receiving an overabundance of pressure. However, on the flip side, this often means hunting areas with marginal habitat.

Often, I'll spend a day or two scouring areas before finding a location that appears to have limited hunting pressure. From that point, the race is on to determine whether the location is holding a buck I'd like to hunt.

JOHN ERIKKSON/IMAGES ON THE WILDSIDE

This is where the shift in timing has paid off. In early November, the focus was almost entirely on hunting funnels and terrain features. Sure, I wanted to see buck sign, but it wasn't mandatory. If I knew I was hunting a solid area with great habitat, odds are the bucks were there and the terrain features would send them my way.

In October, the best of the rut is yet to come and relying solely on terrain features is a risky proposition. Instead, I want a way to get a quick inventory of the number and caliber of bucks in an area.

SCRAPE FACTOR

As October creeps toward November, scrape activity increases. In my opinion, there is no more valuable piece of intel than that delivered by an active scrape. A freshly worked scrape leaves no doubt that there is at least one buck in the area (and often more), and that buck is nearby and intends to return.

What I look for is sizable scrapes paired with obvious licking branches. Finding a group of those scrapes in a confined area is the goal.

These active scrape areas are the total focus of my hunting plans now. Where I used to save vacation time and put heavy emphasis on time in the tree in November, I now focus on the second half of October and put all my eggs in the scrape basket.

These scrape areas make it possible for me to quickly determine what caliber of bucks are using them through the use of trail cams. This is another advantage of October hunts versus those in November. In October, when bucks are actively hitting scrapes, a trail cam will capture vital intel in literally a matter of hours.

In November, when bucks are cruising hard, there seems to be little rhyme or reason to their movement. While November can deliver incredible (but random) buck movement overall, October in contrast delivers defined buck movement in areas defined by scrapes.

NEW BESTIE

Again, I won't go so far as to say October is a "better" month to kill a big buck than November. However, today the hunting pressure on prime public areas is at an all-time high. As such, I've had to make a tough choice and focus more on October.

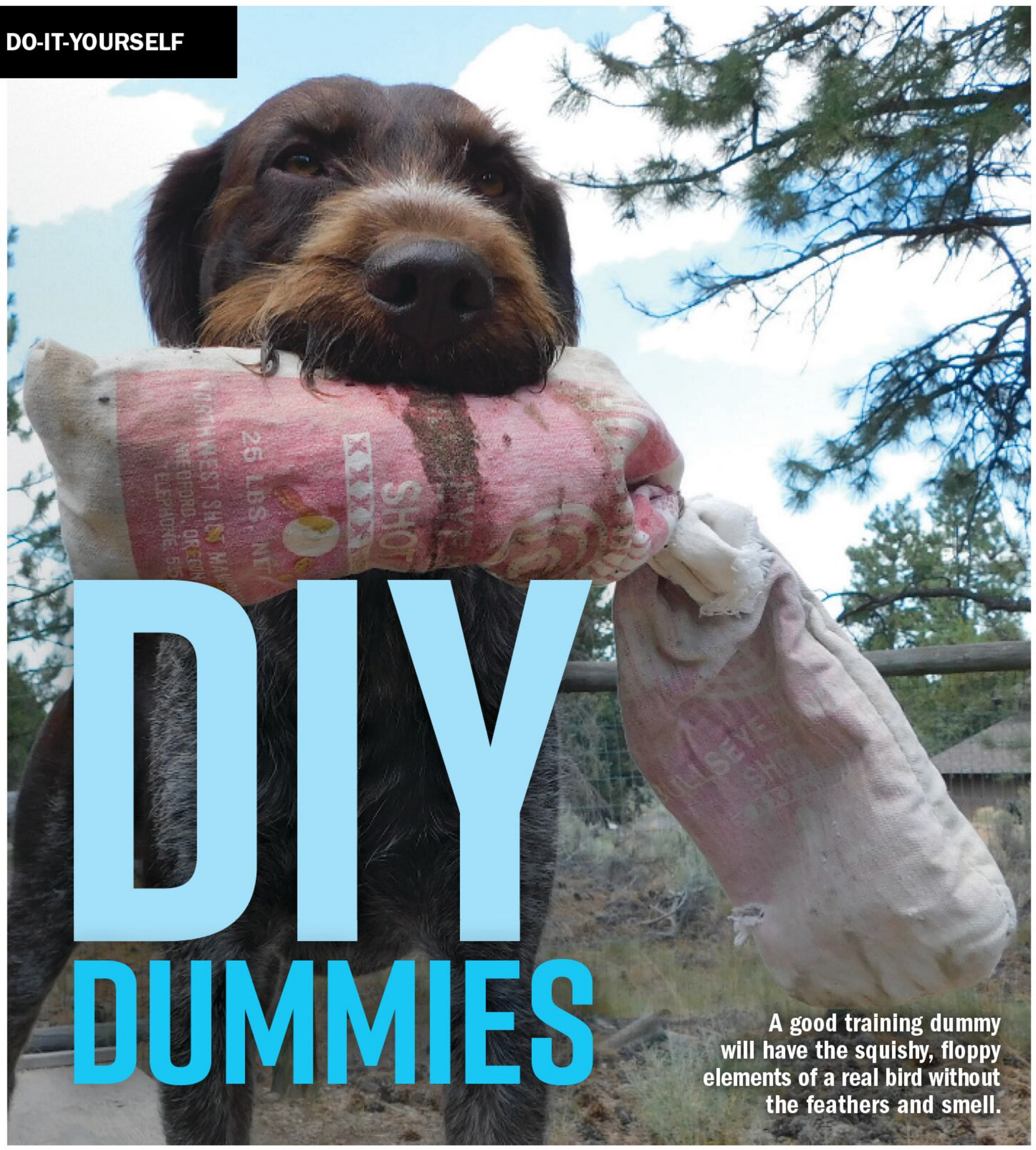
Turning my focus to active October scrapes has proven very productive for me. I know when I locate an area of active scrapes that has reduced (or none) hunting pressure I'm in the game. While my system works, it's not infallible.

By far, the biggest frustration I've experienced targeting scrape areas is the tendency for much of the activity to take place after dark. It's a given. If I see two bucks in daylight, there are likely to be three or four others that show up on trail cameras after dark. It's just the nature of the beast.

Again, I'm not implying here that October hunting is as good as that in November. While the deer are well on their way to the frenzy of rut, it's certainly still a few weeks away.

The moral of this bowhunting story is you should not discount bowhunting in October. It is now that you are afforded an excellent opportunity to hunt mature bucks that, for the most part, haven't been overpressured as they will be next month.





DIY DUMMIES

A good training dummy will have the squishy, floppy elements of a real bird without the feathers and smell.

MAKE YOUR OWN REALISTIC DEAD-BIRD ANALOGS TO GET YOUR DOG READY TO RETRIEVE THE REAL THING.

Story and Photo by Scott Linden

Have you ever met a game bird shaped like a cigar? Me neither! But until a critical moment in my first bird dog's life, I didn't realize how vast the difference is between the real thing and the retrieving bumpers we use to train our hunting companions. And, more importantly, how this can make—or break—your hunting season.

I'd stumbled, bumbled and faked my way through our first versatile hunting dog test, my wirehair doing his best despite operator error. For the last part of the test, he meticulously tracked a dead duck like a wire-guided missile. I was ecstatic, already buying the first round in my mind. He nibbled at the fat mallard, nudged it, pulled at a wing, sniffed, then trotted back empty-mouthed. Suffice it to say, the post-test celebration was rather muted.

I was flummoxed. We'd worked hard on retrieving for months. I'd throw the bumper, Bill would race for it, scoop it up and return to riotous praise. I'd sprinkle bird scent and drag it, then he'd vacuum up the track, latch on and race back for a head scratch. We were a team, destined for wirehair glory and incredible times afield. Until that fateful test.

REVELATION: SOFTER IS BETTER

On the long, quiet drive home I started thinking. Despite my abysmal shooting, even I knew that shot birds are limp, oddly shaped and "squishy," with parts that flop and flap. But, even the best training dummies are nothing like the real thing. Some have a floppy this or a wiggly that, but most are long, narrow, filled with air, the tubular body hard as a field-trial judge's heart.

Yeah, I thought, *a dead bird is the perfect training tool.* All I'd have to do is kill one of my prized homing pigeons or save a hard-won South Dakota ringneck, then freeze and thaw as needed. I could put it back in the freezer as the wife rolls her eyes and the kids run away screaming, repeating daily for a few months. At least it might keep dieting family members away from the frozen pizzas.

OK, OK, if you're "force breaking" your dog to retrieve, the rest of this discussion is academic. Your dog will ultimately be compelled to go out, pick up and bring back to you everything from a Canada goose to a pickup truck and anything in between. But for many it's a painful (literally), arduous process often involving rope, barrels, pliers, boards, electricity and hurt feelings.

Let's face it, most of us won't teach the "conditioned retrieve," or anything resembling it. And we should do just fine if our dogs are acquainted with the action, mouthfeel and logistics of picking up and carrying a dead bird. The devil is in the musty, slimy, decaying details. So why not train instead with less-stinky, more readily available analogs?

A more realistic feeling bumper encourages a dog to open wide, shift the load as needed and hold it—not easy when it's a pheasant-sized and weighted burden. But it's worth acquainting him with a softer, more giving "mouth feel," so you can train him not to chomp down (hard mouth) on real birds. It also jiggles and flaps as he runs back, imbalanced and distracting. Just like the real deal.

GOT FLOP

Here's what we're after: "floppability," squishiness, bird size, weight and shape. Each is easy enough to replicate with stuff you have in the garage, kitchen or garden shed. If you can tie a knot, you can do this project … and no power tools are required, so I can, too. Parts include:

- Two shotgun ammo reloaders' shot bags (or other tough bags, about the same size and shape ... roughly 6 inches wide, 14 inches deep)
- Scrap piece of foam (not rigid but rather "smooshy")
- Dry beans, rice, pea gravel or sand
- Stout twine (waxed is best, as it holds knots and wraps well)

IF YOU BUILD IT ...

First, recruit the kids to shred about three cups of foam. Go ahead, join in. How often do you get to build something by first destroying something else? Pieces about an inch or two square are fine. No extra points for neatness. This is a good time to thoroughly wash the formerly-lead-filled shot bags.

Then, pour about two cups of sand, beans, gravel or rice into one of the bags, adding foam bits gradually to distribute evenly. Tightly cinch the top closed with your twine (several wraps with over-hand knots, finishing with a square knot). Adjust the ingredients and size to match a quail, chukar or even pheasant in size and weight. (A ringneck weighs about 2 1/2 pounds.) Put your cinch "lower" or "higher" to enclose your fill and keep the resulting "body" firm, yet still floppy.

Shake the "body" to evenly distribute the two disparate ingredients. Do this periodically in your dog's training career. Occasionally, I'll also let all the heavy stuff concentrate so my dog learns to grab wherever he gets a secure, balanced grip.

Put a small handful of sand, gravel, beans or rice in the other shot bag, and cinch it closed, too. Overlay the closed ends and cinch the two bags together securely. You've now got a heavy, fat, squeeze-worthy "body" and, for good measure, a floppy, distracting "wing." Inspiration for this wing construction came from Missy, a bought-from-a-box half-Lab who retrieved an Oregon chukar one bitter cold day. During her retrieve, she'd been blindfolded by the bird's wing, and we had to vector her back to us with hoarse screams. This sort of wing-type component is just one more realistic aspect to have on training bumpers that can help with retrieving actual birds later on.

... HE WILL LEARN

Your dog will need some conditioning to this new "bumper," but that's the point. Fold the "wing" in, hold it, offer it up a few times. Get him excited about it with a waggle or wave, then lob it. Give him a few attempts to literally get (part of) his head around it. He'll soon be familiar with every aspect of retrieving a real bird except the funky smell. Don't waste birds, store, thaw, buy or smell them until later in the process. Save that for prepping for the finale ... in the field or at a test ... which I hope ends better than ours did! GD

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Reconsidering THE LIST

THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT TURNS 50 THIS YEAR, AND AGE HAS BROUGHT IT SOME UNEXPECTED FLEXIBILITY **EVEN AS IT REMAINS AS POLITICAL AS EVER.**

By Andrew McKean



Thanks to the Endangered Species Act, populations of gray wolves in many areas of the U.S. have exceeded recovery goals and should now be managed as game animals.

Mention the federal Endangered Species Act almost anywhere outside the beltway or its expanding orbit, and you can expect to see eyes harden and jaws tighten. The act, which is considered by many to be America's landmark environmental protection law, is intended as a backstop to prevent the extinction of diminishing populations of animals and plants. But its very purpose has demonized it in many of the places where these rare species live, as well as among the humans who hold the keys to recovery or disappearance.

Along with Internal Revenue Service agents, the Endangered Species Act (ESA) has come to symbolize unwelcome and intrusive expression of federal oversight. But the ESA, which turns 50 years old this year, is a lot more complicated, and a lot less draconian, than most hunters, anglers and land managers expect. It's worth considering how much the landmark law has both given and taken from American hunters, anglers and conservationists.

There's a well-worn sentiment that once an animal is "listed" it becomes a ward of the federal government and is never de-listed. That's simply not true. During the ESA's 50 years, 46 species have been declared recovered and removed from the list. They include the bald eagle, humpback whale, and at least for now and at least in many Western states, gray wolves.

Other species have been removed from ESA protection, but for the worst reason: They have gone extinct since being considered for the list. These include admittedly obscure species, some of which are eight species of freshwater mussels. But that list of winked-out species also includes the ivory-billed woodpecker, the largest and most distinctive American woodpecker and the symbol of the wildlands of the Mississippi Delta.

RECOVERED SPECIES

I actually got a chance to hunt a longtime occupant of the Endangered Species List. The Columbian white-tailed deer is a small, twitchy deer native to the lower Columbia and Willamette rivers, and other large waterways of the Pacific Northwest. It simply couldn't survive the sort of large-scale timber clearing, swamp draining and agricultural development that occurred in those fertile river valleys, and was listed as endangered as 1967, six years before the ESA was developed.

The ESA was established not only as a register of imperiled species, but as a toolkit to aid recovery of species like the Columbian deer. Federal oversight took management away from state agencies (unfortunate) but allowed federal resources to protect key habitats (fortunate) and to monitor population dynamics. Scattered herds on the Umpqua and Columbia rivers started increasing, and in 2003 the Douglas County, Ore., population of the deer was removed from the list. Population estimates hover around 6,000, and the state has a carefully managed hunting season for the species.

I drew one of the few tags for the Columbian whitetail in 2020 and killed a stud buck in an area of the Umpqua River

SHUTTERSTOCK

where the species originally thrived. Though the area was vacant for decades, it is now filling up with deer, thanks in large part to the ESA.

I'm tempted to offer the same credit to the ESA for the recovery of wolves in the West, knowing that's a hot topic for most of us big-game hunters. Regardless of how you feel about the swelling numbers and distribution of wolves, few hunters can deny that they make our landscapes more interesting. Without federal initiatives to restore—and then protect—wolves, there's slim chance they would have become re-established at their current levels.

But wolves are also a good example of how the ESA has become politicized. Nearly everywhere they exist—in the Great Lakes states as well as the Rocky Mountain states—gray wolves have vastly exceeded population benchmarks established by federal regulators. Just as the Columbian whitetail is being successfully managed by the state, so should wolves be declared recovered and managed by state agencies through regulated hunting. That same dynamic describes grizzly bear management in the Yellowstone and Northern Continental Divide ecosystems.

INTERNATIONAL REACH

There's another political expression of the ESA: its influence on wildlife management far beyond the borders of the U.S. The Endangered Species List totals more than 600 international species, including the African elephant, Thailand giant catfish and Asian wild ass. Given that U.S. law doesn't apply to citizens of other countries, or that the habitat loss, unregulated harvest and other factors that contributed to the decline of these species isn't under the authority of the U.S. government, you might ask why they're included on the list.

"The ESA requires the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to list species as endangered or threatened regardless of which country the species lives in," explains a USFWS spokesman. "Benefits to the species include prohibitions on certain activities, including import, export, take, commercial activity, and interstate and foreign commerce."

The ESA gives American authorities the grounds to regulate, say, the importation of elephant ivory. Still, it seems to many conservationists to be an overreach of authority into the affairs of sovereign nations. USFWS doesn't have the authority to prohibit hunting of a listed species outside the U.S., notes the agency spokesman, but "the ESA does regulate the importation of such species."

There is an exception, and it's one that international hunters should note, even though it's granted only under extremely limited circumstances. A listed species may be imported if "the import is for purposes that enhance the propagation or survival of the species" and the species "is taken from a well-managed and supported conservation hunting program."

Happily, like most laws, the ESA is subject to periodic review, and any time a species is proposed for listing or delisting, a regulatory process allows for full public participation. Hopefully fewer species will be on the ESA in its next 50 years, a testament to the influence of both federal regulations and the broader wildlife conservation movement. G&F



A Matter of PERSPECTIVE

THE SHIRAS MAY BE THE SMALLEST OF NORTH AMERICA'S MOOSE SPECIES, **BUT HUNTING THEM IS STILL A BIG DEAL.**

By Craig Boddington

SHUTTERSTOCK



Shiras moose are mostly found in the Rockies of the American West, though pockets of them exist in the southern portions of Canada's western provinces.

We worked our way up the ridge through several inches of fresh snow. This was the kind of morning we hope for in early fall in the Rockies: everything clean and new, all tracks fresh, the calm after the storm. I'd spent a day with friends in Steamboat Springs, Colo., under clear blue skies. Clouds piled up in early afternoon, and the first snowflakes began hitting as I started up Rabbit Ear Pass. It was a near whiteout long before I got to the top. With almost no visibility and the road getting icy, I crawled down the pass and took it slower yet on the narrow, winding blacktop to Walden.

Although I'd never been there, I knew Walden was the epicenter of Colorado's Shiras moose population, and that was where my moose tag was valid come opening day the next morning. I didn't know the area, but old friend George Taulman did. It's not a good thing to go in cold with a special tag like that, but that's the way the dates worked. When I drew the tag, George promised to help me out, and we agreed to meet in Walden the day before the season. He didn't expect it to be a long hunt, but it didn't matter: Once we started, we had as long as it took. George came in from the south and beat the storm. It was well after dark before I stumbled in, snow slacking off.

We started at daybreak on a lower slope of a big ridge on public land south of Walden. A fresh set of big tracks led us down maybe a mile or so, through scattered timber that became thicker downslope. We caught the bull at the edge of thick stuff. He was a nice bull with thick paddles, but his antlers were narrow and didn't have many points. He stared at us for a few seconds, then moose-trotted into the trees. Not that one, not that day.

Leaving the bull to his moose pursuits, Taulman and I retreated to the main ridge and turned south again, following a clear but snow-covered hiking trail. We continued up the ridge, ignoring deer and elk tracks. On top the ridge was a flat, timber-covered mesa. Just over the crest, the hiking trail was crossed by the fresh, ski-like tracks of several moose, peeling off to the right into timber. These moose stuck to a meandering trail of their own.

The big tracks suggested at least four moose of varying size. George knew the area and knows more about Shiras



The author and guide Toby Johnson were met with impenetrable fog on the first day of their Bighorn Mountains hunt, making glassing prospective bulls all but impossible.

moose than I'm likely to learn. I don't think he knew for certain that there was a mature bull in the group, but it didn't take rocket science to figure we should follow them. They led us to the southwest through flat, relatively thick pine timber. Between trees and snow-laden boughs, there wasn't much visibility, but I assume the moose were following older, snow-covered game trails.

By late morning, the pale sunlight had chased some clouds away and was starting to peek into the forest. After a short hike of about a mile the tracks led us into a long, narrow clearing. At the far end, several dark forms stood at the edge of the next stand of trees. One was a bull—a good bull—and I was faced with a tough first-day decision. Well, maybe not so tough. This bull had wide upper palms with lots of points and multi-tined brow palms. No doubt the area held a bigger bull. Maybe we could find him, maybe not. Regardless, the bull at the end of the clearing had everything we look for in a Shiras moose.

I was shooting a Marlin lever-gun in the powerful .338 Marlin Express, probably the single most accurate lever-action I ever messed with. I'd shot a nice Colorado elk with it a bit earlier and had tremendous confidence in it and Hornady's FTX bullet. There was no rest in the thick trees, but the shot wasn't all that far. I dropped to one knee and tried to find the shoulder of the black bull in black shadow. At the shot the group turned, the bull trailing. We followed quickly and found him alone across the next, smaller clearing, still standing.

Moose are not especially tough, but they are big and often seem oddly impervious to "bullet shock," as we like to describe it. It's not unusual for a bull to stand motionless, seemingly unaffected, after a first well-placed shot. I shot him again in the same shoulder, and this time he went down hard.

This was a good bull, and I still think it was a good decision to take him, but who knows? Regardless, the permit was filled, and we had a whole lot of work to do.

SIZING UP THE SHIRAS

The moose is a creature of northern boreal forests that circumnavigate the globe in the Northern Hemisphere. There are Old World and New World moose. Collectively, they are the world's largest extant deer or antlered animals. The biggest of all probably come from Siberia; the Manchurian moose of northern China is said to be the smallest. In North America, the largest are the Alaska-Yukon giants, growing up to 1,500 pounds with antlers that can exceed 70 inches in spread. Canada moose are a bit smaller in body and antler. Some authorities (and record-keeping groups) distinguish between western and eastern Canada moose, while others do not.

Without question, our smallest moose is the dark, almost black, moose of the southern Rocky Mountains. He's called variously the Yellowstone or Wyoming moose, but his proper handle is *Alces alces shirasi,* after George Shiras III. George Shiras must have been a naturalist, right? No, he was a Pennsylvania

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congressman. The scientific name was generously given in his honor by his buddy, George Edward Nelson (1850-1934), a naturalist and an important figure in late 19th-century exploration and early wildlife conservation. Nelson's bighorn, the northernmost race of desert sheep, bears his name. Nelson described the Shiras moose in 1914 as being distinct from Northern and Eastern varieties.

The primary difference is size; a Shiras bull can weigh up to 1,000 pounds, with antlers downsized correspondingly. Depending on points and brow palms, a Shiras moose with a 40-inch spread is pretty good. Exceptional bulls can exceed 50 inches but are unlikely to reach the 55- or 60-inch spreads of excellent Canada moose. Visually, Shiras moose are usually darker than Northern moose, appearing almost coal black at distance. Up close, dark brown is more correct. They can and often do have lighter hairs, especially on their heads, necks and humps.

Nelson described this moose in Wyoming, which probably is still the core of the Shiras range. They are also widely distributed in Montana and Idaho, though there is suitable habitat in Utah and now spilling down into Nevada. Colorado's modern moose herd started in the 1970s, with one of the first introductions near Walden. According to science, the moose of southwestern Alberta and southeastern British Columbia are also Shiras moose. I've hunted moose in B.C.'s Kootenay region and agree completely. Small and dark, these moose are somewhat geographically isolated from the larger Canada moose of northern Alberta and most of B.C.

TOUGH TAGS

In our Western states, drawing the tag is typically the most difficult, and certainly the most time-consuming, part of a moose hunt. Shiras moose are generally not creatures of the densest forest. Rather, they tend to hang out along stream systems with some willow thickets. In mixed cover they are highly visible, the presence and general location of good bulls often known to local residents and hunters.

Unlike exceptional elk and deer, knowledge of big bull moose is of limited utility because the tags are scarce and difficult to draw. Beat the odds and draw a coveted tag, and just like with sheep permits today, you'll likely have all the help you need. True, you may not gain access to private land holding a big bull, but the majority of the West's moose roam public land.

Ever since Shiras moose populations opened to hunting, most permits have been allocated by public drawing. The odds are never good, but I believe in the permit application system. It takes faith, persistence and consistency, but somebody has to draw, right?

In our finite human life spans, none of us can claim perfect timing. We were all born too late for something we wish we could have experienced. My timing wasn't so bad for Western big game. I started applying for some tough permits in the late '70s when I was still young. Sheep came first, and I added states and species as I could afford them. So it was that I got in on the ground floor when several preference- and bonus-point systems started. A great permit might be drawn the first time, but they're usually a matter of patience.

In 1988 I threw my permit applications in with George Taulman's United States Outfitters (USO), the first computerized application system. Today there are several that are probably equally good, but I've stayed with USO. The advantage to a system: For little additional cost, it provides the consistency essential to preference and bonus points. Once you start building them, you can't afford to skip a year.



This is the largest Shiras bull the author has ever seen. Though he had a tag in his pocket, the moose was traversing a sagebrush flat on private ground that was off limits.

CRAIG BODDINGTON



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Applying for permit drawings is playing a long game, but it's been a great game for me. In just a decade (1999), it was a mathematical near certainty that I would draw a Shiras moose permit in Wyoming. A decade later (2009), it was an equal near certainty that I would draw a Colorado moose permit. In 40-some years, I've also drawn three sheep and two goat permits, plus various elk and deer tags. When I drew the Colorado Shiras permit, I was still in moose drawings in other Western states. I figured two was enough and quit applying. I'm still applying in some sheep drawings, still building points, but for Bullwinkle, you aren't competing with me.

Sadly, today's prospective Western moose hunters have other competition. My permits came in innocent pre-wolf days. For the record, I am not anti-wolf. We should hear the occasional wolf howling in the American wilderness … just not too many, allowed to increase without management. In Alaska and western Canada, moose are the wolves' traditional and preferred prey. Our wolf reintroduction in the Yellowstone ecosystem started with moose-hunting wolves from Alberta. They were good at what they did. As they expanded, they didn't just *decimate* many long-nurtured moose populations. That much overused word means to kill one in ten. No, wolves *destroyed* many pockets of Shiras moose. The end result: In traditional areas, especially around the Yellowstone ecosystem, there aren't

MOOSE MEDICINE

Choose tough, heavy bullets and bright scopes.

A bull moose is a big animal; even a Shiras bull is larger than most bull elk. Moose often show little initial reaction, regardless of velocity or foot-pounds. However, since they are big, it is essential to hit them with an adequate cartridge, using a bullet of enough weight and tough construction to guarantee penetration. I've taken various moose with everything from a .270 Win. to a .375 H&H Mag. and beyond. Any cartridge in that range will work just fine. Cannons are not necessary, but place the shot well and choose tough, heavy-for-caliber bullets.

It is coincidence that I took both my American Shiras moose with medium-caliber lever actions (.338 Marlin Express and .358 Win.). I do love my lever actions, and I was gambling on a shot at moderate range. Both worked perfectly, but with permits so rare and irreplaceable, I'm not suggesting similar gambles should be taken. The two Shiras-type moose I took north of the Canada border fell to a .338 Win. Mag. and .340 Wby. Mag. at 150 yards and something approaching 400 yards, respectively.

Moose are usually stalkable, but close shots are not a given. On that long shot, we couldn't close the distance, and it was our last chance on the last day. I was glad I was carrying a rifle that could handle almost any situation. Because of the size of the target, big scopes aren't necessary. However, don't underestimate the difficulty of resolving dark animals, especially in shadowed timber. The scope must be bright, and an illuminated reticle really helps.



.270 WIN. .338 WIN. MAG.



The author took his Colorado Shiras with a Marlin lever action in .338 Marlin Express, using a 200-grain Hornady FTX bullet.

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as many moose—or as many moose permits to draw. That's the bad news. The good news is Shiras moose continue to expand their range, especially outside of core wolf country. Permits will never be easy, but one thing is certain: If you don't apply, you will not draw.

Public drawings aren't the only way to get a Shiras tag. Some Western states have private-land tags, and conservation organizations sometimes auction governor's moose permits, though both are above my pay grade. These days, those same special-opportunity state permits are increasingly offered in raffles, sometimes raising more money for conservation and management than auction tags. No different than buying a lottery ticket, the odds are not good but the investment is small … and somebody will win.

Let's come back to those sort-of Shiras moose near the border in western Canada. Boone and Crockett draws the line at the Canadian border, only accepting moose from our Western states as Shiras. Safari Club International's record book includes moose from adjacent Alberta and British



The author's Colorado Shiras bull has everything moose hunters look for: good paddles and brow palms, decent width and lots of points.

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While the Shiras is a smaller moose, bulls are bigger than almost any elk, and packing them out of the timber is often the hardest part of any hunt.

Columbia as Shiras. This is an important distinction because permits in Canada are not by drawing; outfitters are required. But these moose are, well, Shiras moose, much smaller than the western Canada moose to the north. As such, these hunts do not carry the premium price of moose hunts in areas that produce huge bulls.

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I did several hunts in B.C.'s Kootenays for various game. I concur the small, dark moose that live there look like Shiras moose. I can't speak for extreme southwest Alberta; I've never been there. The Kootenays are mountainous, so hunting moose there is essentially the same as hunting moose in our Rocky Mountain West. It isn't easy hunting, though, and the moose population is not extremely high. I took a couple of these moose, one very average, one excellent. This area of Canada is an option if you get tired of rejections in the drawings and really want one of these apartment-sized animals.

BASIN BULL

I drew my Wyoming permit in the Bighorn Mountains. An isolated range, far to the east of primary wolf territory, the Bighorns were always and remain prime Shiras moose habitat. I hunted with veteran local outfitter Toby Johnson. He knew the moose, and the hunt was on his home turf; it was the perfect combination.

We started in the Bighorns up in the clouds. The tops, and all moose habitat, were cloaked in an impenetrable bank of fog. Glassing wasn't possible, and there was nothing to be done but wait it out. Sooner or later, it had to break.

When it did, we spotted a magnificent bull bedded in a high basin, his back to heavy timber. There was no way to get to him from above and no vantage point within possible range. We studied the area for a long time. Glassing from an adjacent mountain at distance, our perspective was uncertain, but the only way to get in on the bull appeared to be by climbing up a cut running from the bottom of the basin. It took a long time to get around, even longer to climb up, and I had no idea what I'd see when I got there.

When I crept past the last stunted pine and peered over the lower lip of the basin, it was one of those magic and unforgettable moments. The bull was still there in the same position, his head to the left and down, and he was much closer than I expected. Not 100 yards separated me from the very big and very black Shiras.

I pushed my pack onto a low berm, slid the rifle over it and crawled in behind it. Normally I avoid neck shots. My rifle, a reworked Winchester Model 88 in .358 Win., was very accurate. The bull's left shoulder was in an odd position, the angle uncertain, but that huge, black neck was gleaming in the sunlight. The 250-grain Sierra centered the spine where neck joins shoulder. Lights out, no movement. The real work began soon enough, but I had been looking forward to it for a long time. G&F

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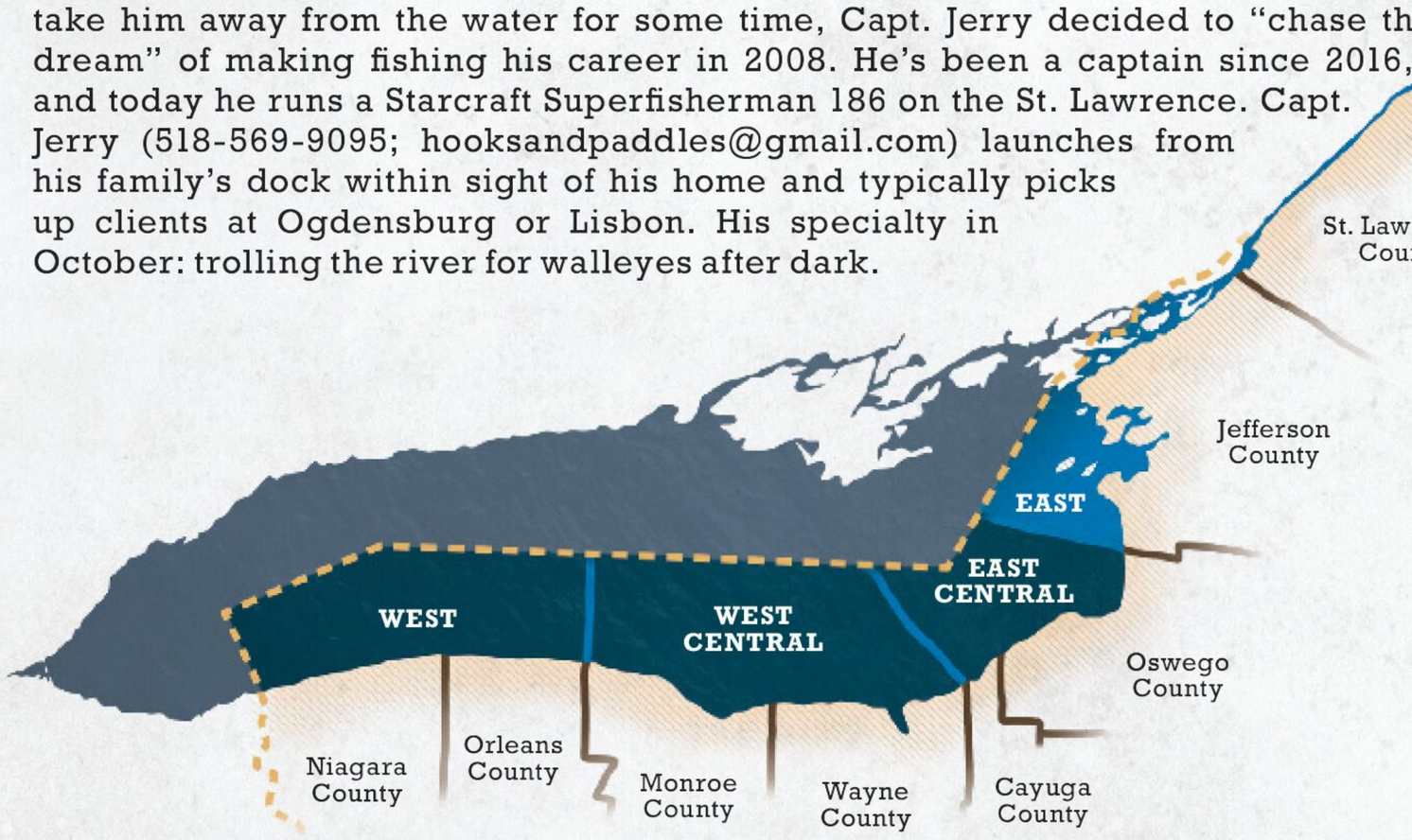
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Growing up on the St. Lawrence River near Ogdensburg, N.Y., Capt. Jerry Kroeger II spent his childhood fishing. He still lives on the river, near the spot where he caught a 22-pound muskie from a rowboat when he was 10 years old. That moment would seal his fate, and although a job in real estate would take him away from the water for some time, Capt. Jerry decided to "chase the dream" of making fishing his career in 2008. He's been a captain since 2016, and today he runs a Starcraft Superfisherman 186 on the St. Lawrence. Capt. Jerry (518-569-9095; hooksandpaddles@gmail.com) launches from his family's dock within sight of his home and typically picks up clients at Ogdensburg or Lisbon. His specialty in October: trolling the river for walleyes after dark.



ON THE WATER

with **Capt. Jerry Kroeger II** of Jerry's Outdoor Outfitters

Why fish at night in October?

I like to troll in the evenings because in my experience, that's not being done much on the stretch of river I fish. My trips go from 5 o'clock to 9 o'clock at night, and I don't see many others on the river then. It's a very stimulating experience. The sunset is almost always stunning. At night when the skies are clear, all the star constellations you can see just blows people's minds. The big ships going by all lit up adds to it. And because the water is getting colder, the walleyes are gorging themselves for the winter. On a good evening, we'll land three to six of them.

Does lure color make a difference in the dark?

If you ask 10 guys about their favorite color, you're going to get 10 different answers. But it doesn't really matter except under certain conditions. We're fishing more of a reaction bite. The walleyes are hanging in the current, and here comes this lure displacing water and making a racket, and the fish whack it. Boat speed is more important. I never want to troll upriver faster than 2 miles per hour.

What are some challenges of fishing after dark?

You need to make sure your lures run true, because you can't tune them in the dark. Another thing: you have to keep weeds from fouling the lure. There is a lot of boat traffic on the river during the daytime. Boats cut up the weeds, and they float on top of the water. They will catch on the line and go all the way down to the lure. I keep them from doing that by adding a split-shot 3 feet above the lure. It stops the weeds from reaching the lure and fouling it.

Should anglers bring anything special for a night trip?

I always tell people there is plenty of room on the boat for clothing. Always overdress. It might be on the warm side when we leave the launch, but lots of times people are freezing when we get home because they didn't bring enough clothing.





PHOTOS COURTESY OF CAPT. JERRY KROEGER II

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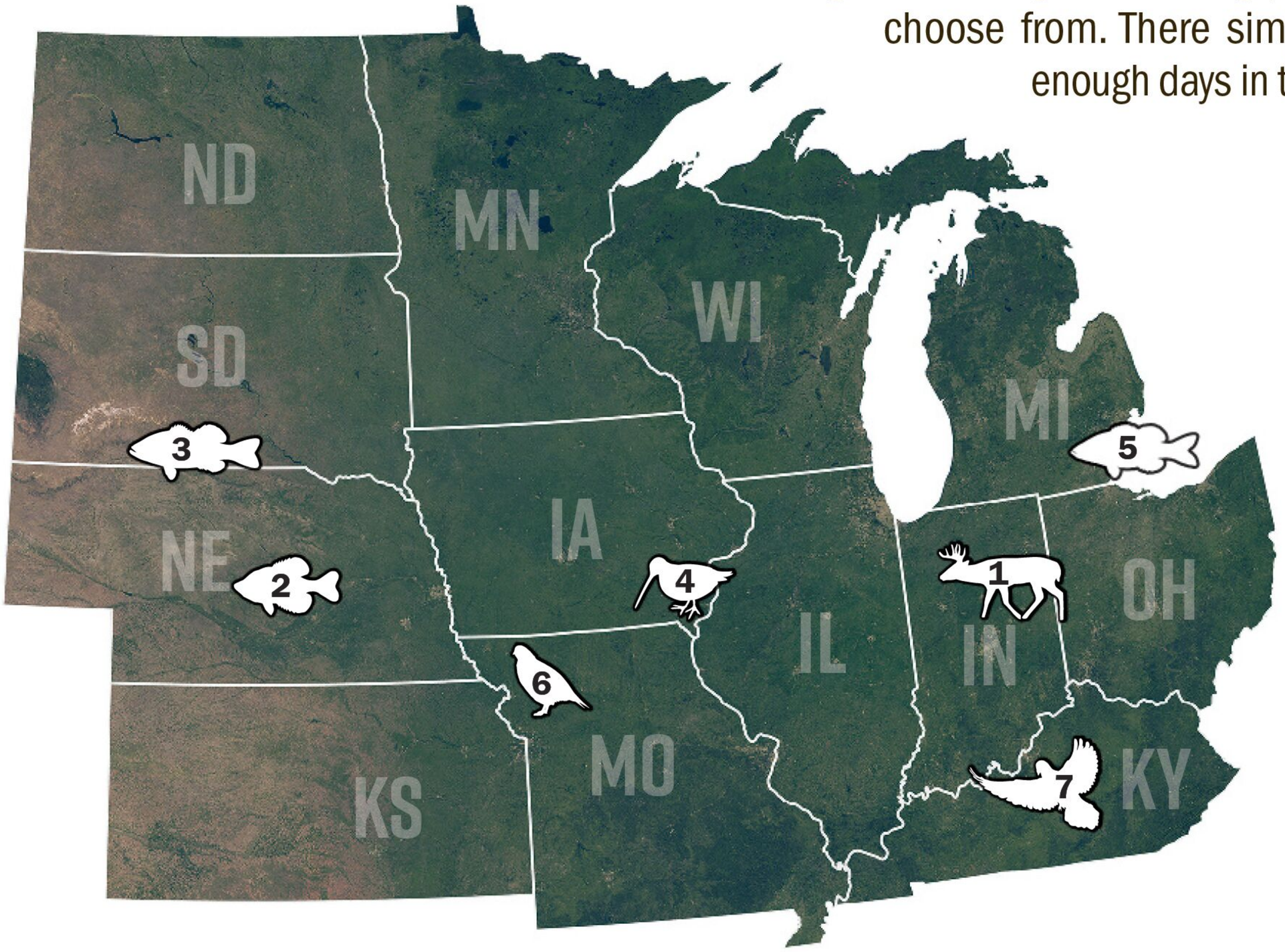
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AROUND THE MIDWEST

A SAMPLING OF THE REGION'S BEST HUNTING AND FISHING OPPORTUNITIES THIS MONTH

By Brandon Butler

Hunters and anglers wait all year for October, as few months compare when it comes to outdoor activities. Fishing is good throughout the Midwest, with most species feeding heavily in preparation for the coming winter. Archery deer seasons are open across the region. Small-game, fall turkey and waterfowl opportunities are abundant. Upland bird hunting for quail, pheasants, grouse and woodcock is another popular option. The only problem with October is the number of great hunting and fishing pursuits to choose from. There simply aren't enough days in the month.



1

INDIANA ARCHERY DEER

Indiana's bow season begins October 1 and is the official start of deer season for Hoosier hunters. Right now, deer are still on feeding patterns. If you see a mess of acorns in the timber, hang a treestand nearby. In ag country, intercept deer entering and exiting crop fields at dawn and dusk. Northern Indiana doesn't have as much public land as the state's southern half, but the recreation areas surrounding Salamonie Reservoir and Mississinewa Reservoir are full of whitetails. Indiana is a one-buck state, and tags are over the counter.

2

DAVIS CREEK CRAPPIES

When the October crappie bite is on, anglers can stay busy filling freezers with fillets on Nebraska's Davis Creek Reservoir. As main-lake water temperatures continue to drop, crappies are drawn to the warmer shallow water along the shore and in the back of bays. Cast small jigs toward the shore and you should connect with slabs. Minnows under bobbers are also solid bets. Davis Creek is just south of North Loup and is known as a consistent producer of good-sized crappies. The recreation area offers a nice campground and fish cleaning station, and there is an ADA-compliant fishing pier.



TOM MARTINEAU (LEFT) AND STEVE OEHLENSCHLAGER (RIGHT)/WILDFRONT IMAGES

3

ROSEBUD BASS

South Dakota's Rosebud Reservation is well known for its hunting, but it drew attention for a different reason in 2020, when Matthew Dunham, of Rosebud, caught the new 9-pound, 5-ounce state-record largemouth bass on Indian Scout Lake. The fish measured 23 inches long and had a girth of 19 7/8 inches. The Rosebud Sioux Tribe Game, Fish and Parks Department regulates all fishing and hunting on the reservation, which lies in south-central South Dakota, just north of Valentine, Neb. An annual non-member license is $30.

4

IOWA WOODCOCK

Woodcock are migratory game birds found from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico. They migrate through Iowa in October and November, and the woodcock season runs Oct. 7 to Nov. 20, with a daily limit of three. The birds live in new-growth forest, so dive into small trees and thick brush and plow ahead. Shimek State Forest's 9,448 acres offer good ground to pursue these tasty birds.

5

DETROIT RIVER SMALLIES

Michigan's Detroit River runs for just 28 miles between Lake St. Clair and Lake Erie but has great smallmouth fishing. A regular stop on tournament trails, the river offers shots at trophy smallies, especially in fall. Bass are aggressive, and Rat-L-Traps, spinnerbaits and even umbrella rigs mimicking small baitfish schools work well. Wyandotte's Bishop Park Fishing Wharf is solid for shore anglers, and boat anglers have the entire river.

6

SHOW-ME YOUTH QUAIL

The glory days of Missouri quail may be gone, but good hunting still exists on public lands in northern and western Missouri. Quail Forever has a large presence in the state, with local chapters hosting workshops and youth hunts. A quick search of their website helps you connect with youth quail hunting opportunities. Missouri's youth quail season is Oct. 28 and 29 and is open to hunters age 6 to 15. The daily limit is eight quail. Hunting over dogs is common, but walking stands of native grasses near woods and agriculture edges can also produce coveys at any time.



7

BLUEGRASS STATE DOVES

Dove hunting is great for new wingshooters. The weather is nice, and there's lots of action. Kentucky's season began Sept. 1 but remains open until it temporarily closes Oct. 27. Almost any shotgun is fine, but take ample shells. Lead birdshot in No. 7 1/2 or 8 works, but non-lead shot is a must on some public lands. A chair or bucket is helpful, as are decoys. Doves roost at night and travel to water in the morning, and they love sunflowers and grains. Many wildlife management areas have managed dove fields, and the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife website offers a comprehensive list.

FLIP THE SWITCH

BRING A TACTICAL MINDSET AND TECHNIQUES TO YOUR UPLAND HUNTING.

By Mike Keleher



When nearing a dog on point, keep your shotgun at high ready. Anticipate potential flushing routes and get into the best position possible.

People often view hunting and tactical shooting as being separate disciplines. However, there's more crossover between the two than one might initially assume. In fact, many of the same principles of defensive firearm training translate very well to hunting. As a retired federal agent and federal agency firearms instructor, I've seen this firsthand.

As a diehard upland hunter, I've often adapted some of the various lessons learned from tactical training to the field. Below, we'll discuss some aggressive gun handling, potential target identification and reloading techniques I've picked up during my career that can benefit upland hunters. But first, I want to talk about elevating your mental game while afield.

HEIGHTEN MENTAL AWARENESS

Wherever you're hunting, always be mentally switched on in the field. That means moving and thinking with a heightened level of awareness of yourself, your gun and the situation at hand.

Use active mental engagement. An example is something I call "Jack's Last Five Yards Rule," named after my father, a lifelong pheasant hunter. The way the thinking goes, you'll often put up more birds in the last 5 yards of a field than in the first 100. So, as you approach the end of a drive, remain hyper aware rather than let your guard down, assuming that the field was a bust.

Col. Jeff Cooper, originator of many of today's combat shooting techniques, used colors to describe different levels of mental awareness. "Condition white" is a relaxed state in which the person does not anticipate anything changing. This is the normal daily state for most people. Soldiers, police and, yes, hunters, however, should remain in "condition yellow," in which the person is more aware of the conditions and prepared for something to change.

If flushing birds are imminent, ramp up to "condition orange." This means you're excited, very alert and ready to switch off the safety. "Condition red," meanwhile, is the action state; you are preparing to shoot or are actively shooting.

There's one more condition beyond red that we must try to never enter—"condition black." This is a complete fog, in which you are overwhelmed and unable to engage flying targets, operate the safety or reload. A failure to mentally prepare leaves you unable to participate.

ANTICIPATE TARGET VECTORS

In the field, orient yourself to the location from which birds are most likely to appear, and always evaluate the ground ahead. Move toward superior positions or more open sky, and use creative visualizations. *If they do this, I'll do this.* Anticipate action; don't stare at a dog on point like you're watching TV. Tell yourself to get ready.

Can you quickly move to a more stable and tactically superior shooting position? Always angle past trees or momentary obstructions to a better shooting spot. Also, remain aware of "no-shoot" areas around you. These are places where you cannot point your gun or shoot toward,

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such as areas where dogs or other hunters are present. Call out to others to let them know exactly where "no-shoot" zones occur by saying something like, "Hunters at 9 o'clock!"

AGGRESSIVE GUN HANDLING

With birds likely, are you ready to shoot? Get the gun barrel off your shoulder. Cover your gun's safety with a finger or thumb. Hold the shotgun in a high-ready position with the muzzle pointed straight up. You need a solid platform, with one foot 12 to 18 inches in front of the other and your shoulders leaning slightly forward. This forward-biased position greatly helps disperse recoil and manage follow-up shots.

Push the safety off only when you have a bird in the air. It takes a fraction of a second to do so while shouldering the stock and pointing toward the target.

At the flush, bringing your gun to your shoulder from a muzzle-up position is like pivoting the middle of the gun around an axle. Bring the toe of the stock to your shoulder and extend the muzzle toward the target. Properly done, there's no wasted motion. Leave both eyes open; if you close one eye, you lose a lot of visual space. Shotguns are pointed, not aimed like rifles.

Every shotgun recoils. Think of the energy as pushing backward first then forward toward the target. If you have a pump shotgun, use recoil as part of the motion to pump out the empty shell and then push a live round into the chamber while settling back on target.

Most misses occur by shooting behind and below a flying bird. This is often partly due to a hunter's delayed reaction to a surprise flush. Being mentally prepared cuts your reaction time in half. Also, be ready for a follow-up shot. Shoot, assess for damage (feathers or leg drop) and adjust your lead for a second shot.

A follow-up shot should be steadier and more deliberate than the first, as air speed and angles change rapidly in the first 3 to 4 seconds of bird flight. How much lead do you use? In the first 10 to 15 yards, pull the trigger on the moving target about a muzzle's width ahead while swinging with the bird. Beyond this range, aim 2 to 3 feet ahead. Past 40 yards, your lead should be maybe 4 to 6 feet in front of the bird depending on angles and flight time.

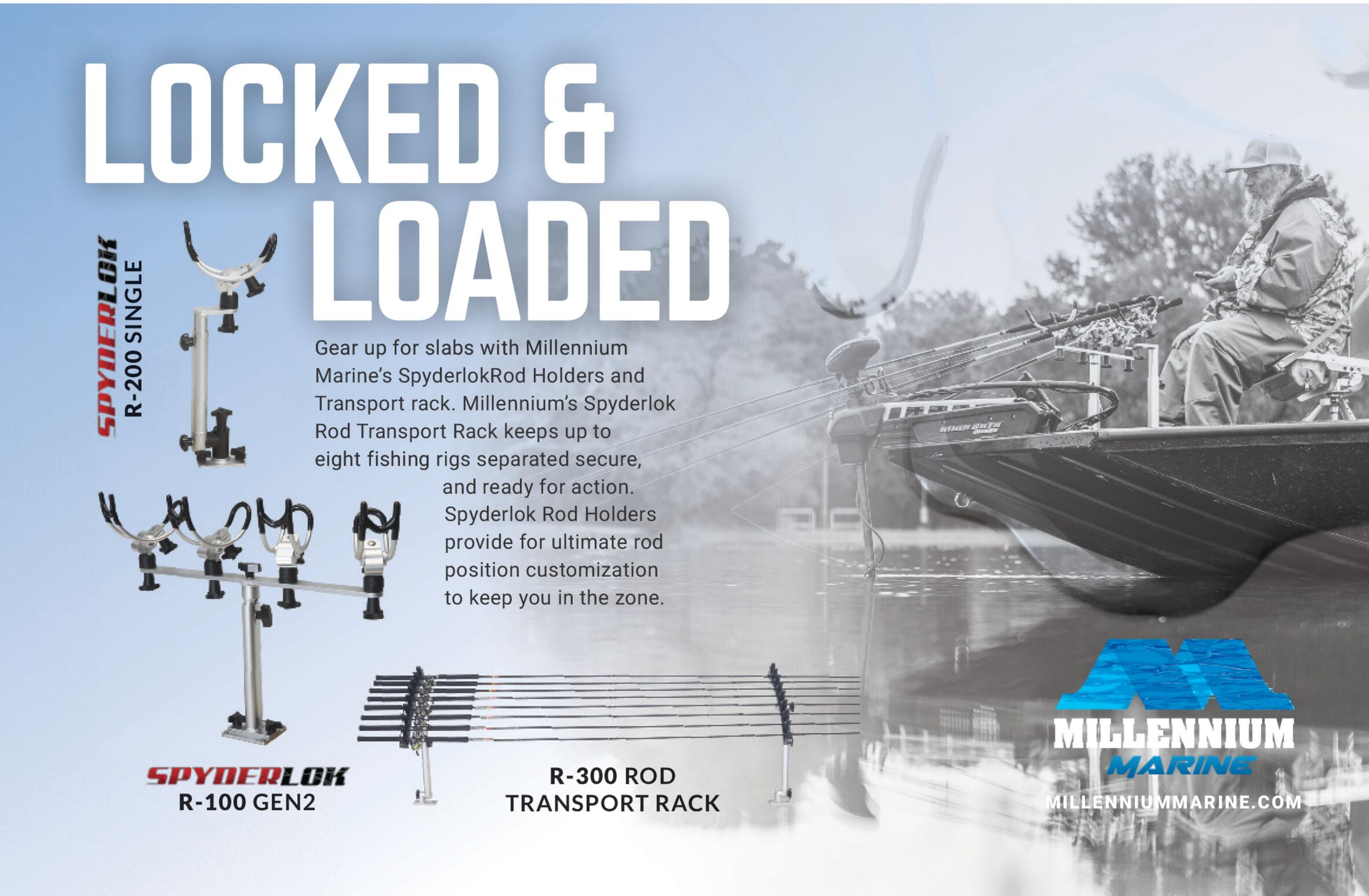
Shooters who miss with their first two shots have often done something (or multiple things) wrong. It's rare to self-correct and make a hit with a third shot.

IMMEDIATE RELOADING

Reload now; reminisce later. In law enforcement training, when a gun is empty you do an emergency reload. An empty shotgun is a tiny hunting emergency. Drop a shell into the chamber and put it back into battery before doing anything else.

Learn to reload without looking at the gun so you can keep your head up and anticipate more birds. Keep shells in both right and left front pockets so you can reload with either hand.

The next time you walk a field of milo or a patch of CRP, adopt a tactical mindset. Try some of these mental adjustments and tactics this season. Look for the shot before it happens, be situationally aware and capitalize when birds flush. G&F



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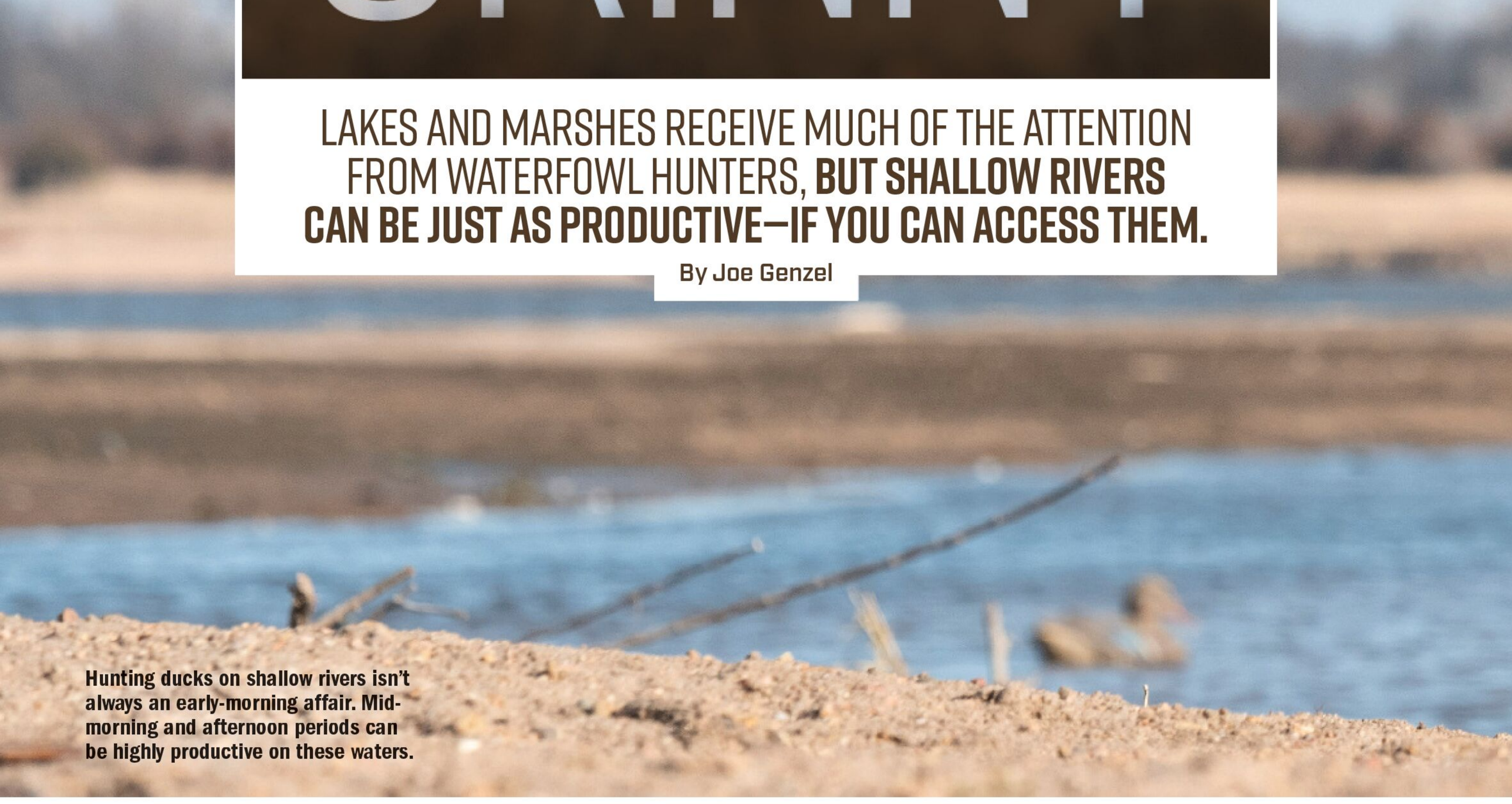
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GETTING SKINNY

LAKES AND MARSHES RECEIVE MUCH OF THE ATTENTION FROM WATERFOWL HUNTERS, **BUT SHALLOW RIVERS CAN BE JUST AS PRODUCTIVE—IF YOU CAN ACCESS THEM.**

By Joe Genzel



Hunting ducks on shallow rivers isn't always an early-morning affair. Mid-morning and afternoon periods can be highly productive on these waters.

Soaked in sweat from brushing in a panel blind with scraps of driftwood and sandy Johnson grass, we peeled off waders and coats, hoping the wind would cool us before the evening flight began. A long-time friend was finally showing me a coveted spot along one of the many fast-moving, shallow river systems that cut through the Central and Mississippi flyways. Several of these rivers offer hundreds of miles of public access.

Depending on where you go, competition from other hunters is often non-existent because finding groups of waterfowl—mainly mallards, wigeon, gadwalls, the odd pintail and Canada geese—is hard. There are so many bends and breaks and hidden pockets on these rivers that locating birds can be tough.

Navigation is also usually treacherous due to the low water depth and the speed at which the river is moving. It's easy to beach your boat running wide open if you don't know the river well. And even if you do, there's a good chance that at some point you'll run out of water and find yourself stuck in the mud. You'll also dodge floating debris, such as large tree logs, and sunken obstacles (I motored past a half-sunken Oldsmobile once). But if you're willing to work, and learn the river, hunting shallow water will become your next obsession.

BOAT TO GREATNESS

Zach Simon is admittedly addicted to hunting skinny rivers. A few years ago, he invested a serious amount of money in a custom boat he designed to navigate Kansas' shallow-water areas (see sidebar, page 40).

"I just enjoy hunting a smaller setting with good buddies, so a couple of years ago I sold my goose rig—1,200 full bodies," Simon says. "I had a manufacturer in Texas build me a boat that is perfect for navigating rivers and getting to places only an airboat could probably get to."

He learned quickly that you don't need to go out on the river at first light to kill limits of greenheads. In fact, you're better



MIKE CLINGAN

off catching birds later in the morning as they fly back to the roost or a day loaf. It's just a matter of scouting and making sure your setup is under a good flight line.

"If you know they are roosting on the river, maybe then go early, but most of the time we like to get between the refuge and a feed," Simon says. "The ducks are going to start coming back around 9 or 10 o'clock for a drink of water. Birds get pressured at shooting light and get wise to that, plus we don't have to get up early. Maybe that's lazy; maybe that's smart."

Showing the birds something different is key. In fast-moving current, it's easier to set big numbers of silhouettes on sandbars and in the shallows. You can also haul more of them in the boat compared to full-bodies, which weigh more (boats have weight restrictions after all).

"Everyone is in on the silhouette craze right now, but we used them 20 years ago and flocked them ourselves," Simon says. "I usually run about 10 dozen goose silhouettes and put three to four dozen mallard full-body floaters in the kill hole. Then we put four to five dozen goose sleepers on the sandbars."

Even experienced hunters run aground on shallow rivers, so Simon had an electric winch built into the front end of the boat. He keeps long pieces of PVC pipe handy, too, which can be used to roll the boat across sandbars.

"I'm not going to recommend this, but there are places on the river where ducks are that you would need an airboat to get to, but my boat has a slick polymer bottom, so I can run it hard over a sandbar and lift the motor up to get across," Simon says. "If I don't make it, the PVC keeps us from getting stranded."

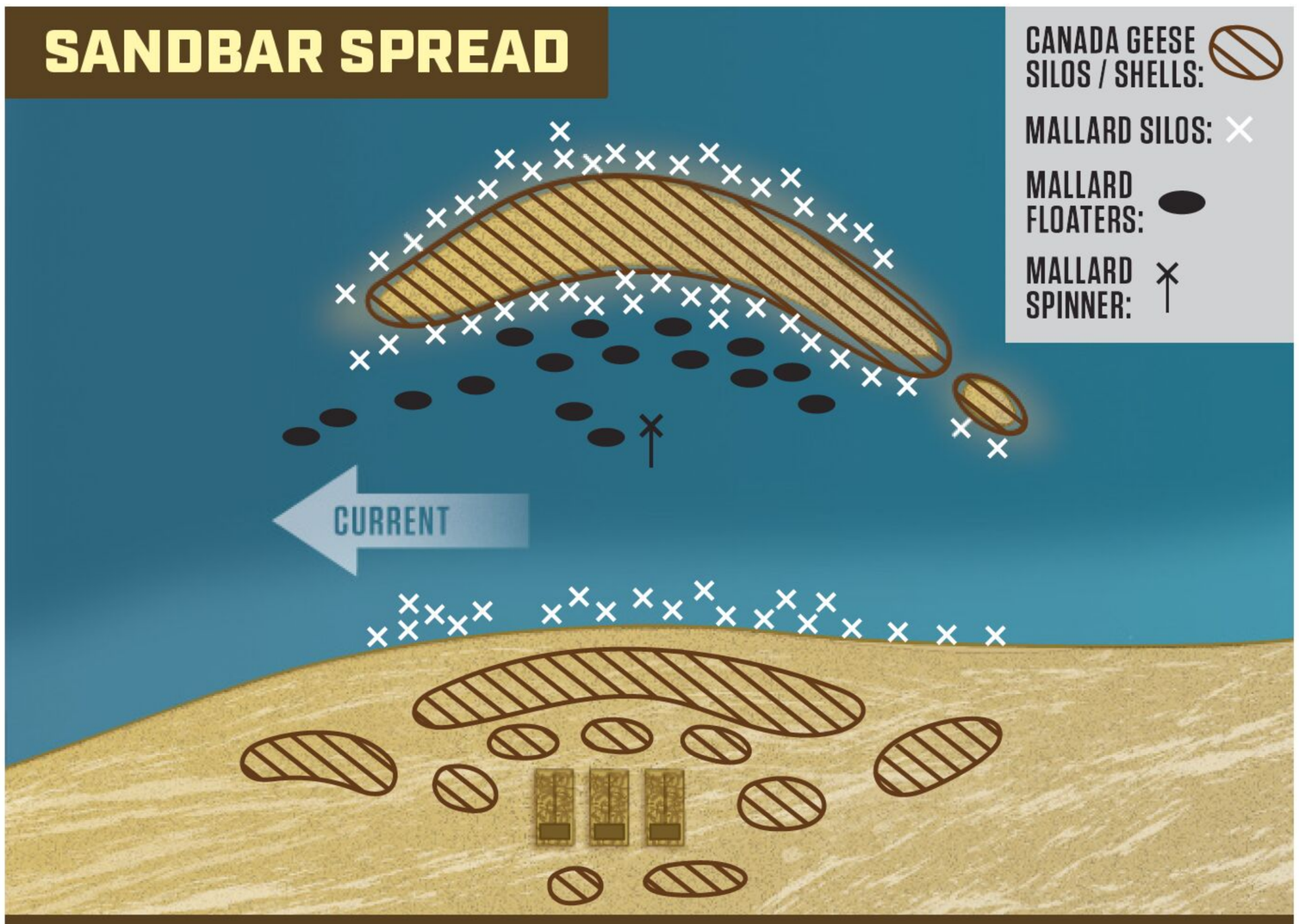
DRIVE TO DREAM HUNTS

Brad Harris, who operates an outfitting business in Kansas, cut his teeth hunting the timber lines and rock bars of Midwestern rivers. He doesn't boat to them, though. Instead he accesses them by land with a side-by-side after securing permission from private landowners.

"At one of my go-to spots, there is a main gravel bar that runs for about a mile and is 100 to 125 yards wide," Harris says. "The water goes from a couple inches deep to about a foot. Our birds are roosting on big lakes and strip mine pits and are coming to the river to loaf."

Harris doesn't typically go out before sunrise because huge groups of mallards hit the river at first light for a drink before they head out to feed. He discovered long ago that birds would stick around if he didn't shoot into the big flocks at the opening bell. Instead, he opts to set up around 8 a.m. and wait for the steady trickle of greenheads looking to wash down breakfast.

"We could have 10,000 birds coming to the river almost all at once, and that means we could shoot into 2,000 or 3,000 ducks," Harris says. "You kill a few, but you educate many more. You don't have to follow the tradition of setting up first thing in the morning for river mallards."



Sandbars are prime loafing areas on rivers. Place Canada goose silhouettes and shells on the sandbar and on the bank around your blinds. Put mallard silhouettes in the shallows around the sandbar and the bank, and set out floaters and a single spinning-wing decoy between the sandbar and bank.

SHALLOW RUNNER

How one diehard waterfowler built a specialized duck boat for shallow rivers

Zach Simon has one of the most unique—and functional—custom duck boats built specifically for shallow-river hunting. Loaded down with 10 dozen duck and goose silhouettes, three to four dozen full-body mallard floaters, blinds and guns, the 16-foot boat can transport two hunters and a dog. It's powered by an electronic, fuel-injected Mercury Jet outboard. If you're not familiar, jet-drive motors have no prop, so there's no chance one can get caught in underwater obstructions, making for a smoother ride. The ribs of the boat, located on the underside of the sled, are longitudinal instead of the traditional horizontal you see on most v-bottoms and jon boats. This adds to the overall durability because duck boats undergo so much punishment.

An electric winch, operated by pressing a button under the front deck, and a light bar are located at the bow of the boat. The winch allows Simon to pull the boat out of or over a sandbar, as long as there is a large tree or solid object to serve as an anchor point. There are also steel grab bars welded to the boat at all four corners. We used these to shake the boat loose when it ran aground in a tight river channel during a morning commute.

Metal storage boxes on either side of the deck can be used as seats. The trailer is just as inventive as the boat. It rides on a set of Toyo off-road tires so that Simon can put the boat in anywhere (he doesn't need a traditional concrete ramp). The tires float the trailer in the water, so if there is a steep drop-off in water depth, there's no issue.



Zach Simon's boat utilizes a Mercury Jet outboard to avoid snagging obstructions. The trailer has off-road tires that float, so he can launch the boat anywhere.

ILLUSTRATION BY PETER SUCHESKI (TOP); JOE GENZEL (BOTTOM)

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Early in the season, Harris runs 15 to 25 dozen duck decoys, 90 percent of which are floaters. The rest are full-body field mallards. Calling can be aggressive. As the season progresses deeper into January, he knocks the spread down to 1 to 4 dozen Avian-X Topflight Backwater series mallards and puts them in small feeding groups. Warmups after a freeze are profitable as well.

"During late-season we pull the spinners unless it's sunny, run high-quality decoys and take an extra 30 minutes to brush in the blinds, which can make all the difference," Harris says. "I love a bitter, nasty cold day on the river, but you can't beat 50 degrees, sunshine and a south wind the day after a cold snap."

CAMP OUT ON CREEKS

Imagine shooting a greenhead cutting air, back-pedaling into a 6-foot-wide, spring-fed slough at 20 yards on a cold January day. That's a dream for most of us, but Spencer Holzfaster has done it season after season on small river systems that look more like creeks.

"All our sloughs and rivers have their own characteristics," says Holzfaster, a farmer and cattle rancher in Nebraska. "Some are mucky, some sandy. Some are warm-water-fed and wouldn't freeze if it were 100 below [zero]."

He mostly hunts out of permanent blinds that have been strategically placed between roosts and feeds. However, he can also go mobile, using Tanglefree panel blinds or hiding in the timber along the bank when mallards become educated and seek new resting areas.

There are various types of waters to hunt, ranging from diminutive sloughs that can be thigh-high to belly-deep and bigger, faster-moving water that will barely rush over your ankles. The typical early-season spread consists of 3 dozen mallard floaters, 3 to 4 dozen mallard full-body field decoys and around six individual goose floaters or field decoys. But, as it gets closer to January and the greenheads begin to court their Suzies, Holzfaster changes it up.



Portable panel blinds are great for quick setups on shallow rivers. Brush them in well, though, especially as it gets later in the season.

"Later in the season, some hunters like to run giant rigs, but as these birds get more pressure, I am apt to take six or a dozen mallard floaters—more greenheads than hens—and pair them up," Holzfaster says. "You might not get the big bunches of 30, but you will shoot three-packs, twos and singles. I've taken buddies and four decoys into small river cuts, and we've killed a two-man limit in the snap of a finger."

If you are a hunter who likes to turn on the motion decoys and just let them eat the entire hunt, Holzfaster has a few tips that will change your mind. If the wind is blowing hard, particularly out of the north, he will turn the Lucky Duck Lucky HD loose, allowing it to spin constantly, as birds are looking for any safe place to dodge a stiff breeze. But in many cases, he utilizes the remote control to turn it on and off at opportune times.

"I'll run the spinner at first light, and sometimes you can tell the birds are uneasy or spooked,'" Holzfaster says. "So, I will turn it on when birds are at a distance, turn it off as they get closer, then back on as they are making a turn and off again when they start banking in and finish them with the call."

Ducks also finish differently into a river than they do an impoundment or dry field. You still play the wind in fast-moving shallow water, but it doesn't always determine how Holzfaster sets up.

"They are still going to use the wind to get down, but as they get closer to the water, they will land in the current no matter what direction the wind is blowing," Holzfaster says. "I don't know why they do it, but they do." G&F



The author (left) loves hunting ducks on shallow rivers, especially later in the season. Setups can require relatively few decoys, and the results are often outstanding.

MIKE CLINGAN (TOP); JOE GENZEL (BOTTOM)

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

IT'S BEEN SAID THAT THE WAY TO A MAN'S HEART IS THROUGH HIS STOMACH. **UPLAND HUNTERS SHOULD HEED THIS SAME ADAGE WHEN SEARCHING FOR RUFFED GROUSE.**

By Mike Gnatkowski

Grouse seasons open in mid-September across the northern tier of Great Lakes states—Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan—but hunters eager to jump into the new season will find difficult hunting conditions then. Foliage is thick and abundant. Temperatures can still be summer-like. Cover abounds, and anywhere you can find second-growth forest, it will harbor grouse. If you're lucky, you'll encounter some broods that are still intact, but otherwise you'll hear a lot more birds than you'll see.

With the abundant habitat and cover, an alternative is to hunt food sources likely to concentrate birds. Grouse have a diverse palate, but they especially love fruits and berries over other forage types when they have their choice. Regardless, they'll often home in on the most abundant resources no matter the time of year. To get a better sense of where ruffies spend their time, let's look at their most frequent food sources throughout the hunting season.

EARLY SEASON: Berry Bonanza

Wild strawberries, blackberries, raspberries, wild blueberries, huckleberries, chokecherries and more are readily available during the early part of the season. When these fruits are abundant, grouse will key-in on one to the exclusion of others. Wild strawberries, blackberries and raspberries produce thorny coverts where grouse feel safe foraging.

Fortunately, these fruit-bearing plants flourish near edges. Grouse use thick stands of aspens or poplar for brood cover, but they realize food sources are typically on the edge where penetrating sunlight allows plants to flourish. These same types of edges are the one place where you might have a chance of seeing and shooting an early-season grouse. Fields that abut forest edges, trails that allow sunlight to penetrate, hedgerows

AARON HITCHINS/WILDFRONT IMAGES



Double guns allow hunters to use two different choke constrictions. Go loose (skeet, improved cylinder) for the first shot, then something tighter for the follow-up.

and even solitary or small clumps of fruit-bearing trees in marginal habitat can be a draw when the harvest is ripe.

Fruit-bearing vegetation is also common along rivers and streams where moisture and nutrient-rich soils are prevalent. The transitional habitat found along waterways is a good place to raise a brood, too. Where riverine habitat blends into upland coverts is an ideal location to search for early-season fruits and grouse.

A friend and I were hunting in mid-September not long after the season had opened. We pounded the best coverts we knew of that had held grouse on previous occasions, but the birds were nowhere to be found. Sweaty, tired and defeated, we decided to take a shortcut to the truck through some marginal jack pine forest. We'd barely gotten into the pines when we flushed a covey of grouse, managing to down a couple of birds. As we made our way toward the truck, we flushed two more coveys and collected several more birds. The grouse had stubby tails, indicating they were this year's hatch. The face on each bird was stained purple from gorging on the huckleberries found in the jack pines in habitat that you normally wouldn't even consider hunting. Abundant fruit sources have a way of displacing grouse, which makes finding them even more problematic.

You'll often find grouse in more open cover than you might expect when they're keying on early-season fruits. Grouse will eat both the fruit and leaves of wild strawberries. Wild strawberries flourish in edge cover and field boundaries far from where you'd normally expect to find grouse. Grouse will forage mid-morning and later in the afternoon along edges where they can feast on wild strawberries and then retreat to more typical grouse cover. A bonus for grouse feeding in more open habitats is that they might find dessert in the form of grasshoppers. Up to 30 percent of an adult grouse's diet is insects, and grouse chicks survive almost entirely on insects during the first few months of their lives.

MID-SEASON: More Fruity Feasts

About the time the leaves start to fall and the supply of plentiful, early-season fruit dries up or is consumed, a whole new bounty of fruits is on the grouse menu. The list includes witch hazel, wild grapes and gray dogwood. These vegetation types are not only important food sources but also provide overhead cover when grouse are foraging. The lack of foliage now leaves them more vulnerable to avian predators, so they take advantage of the overhead cover these vegetation types provide.

Witch hazel produces a nut-like fruit that grouse love. The understory of witch hazel is also fairly open, so grouse can easily grub in the leaf litter to find the tasty morsels. The dense canopy shields them from their main avian predator, goshawks. Find witch hazel near thick stands of aspen and the odds of finding numbers of grouse go up substantially. Witch hazel can grow from 10 to 15 feet tall. The open understory is the perfect place to turn your canine partner loose and position yourself in more sparse cover and hope for a shot.

Gray dogwood ranks right up there with witch hazel on the grouse menu. This forage source does better in moist habitats and during wet years. Other birds love the fruit, too, so the bounty is short-lived. I once found a pothole that was loaded with gray dogwood, and



Trails and two-tracks can be good places to find grouse once leaves start falling. Birds pick up grit to aid in the digestion of nuts and eat acorns crushed by passing tires.

GARY KRAMER



The author likes using bells to keep track of dogs in the grouse woods. Many breeds of dogs are suitable, just as long as they work close to hunters.

GROUSE GETTERS

Gun and load pairings, as well as other gear, to bag more ruffies this season

Grouse aren't as fast as many think, but they reach max speed quickly and often in thick areas. Shots are reflexive; taking time to swing through a bird is rare. Quick-handling over-under shotguns, like the 20-gauge Ruger Red Label I bought years ago, are great.

When I ordered the firearm, a friend convinced me to get an English stock. I'm glad he did. An English stock cut some weight, and the smooth, straight grip lets me hold the gun in one hand and fend off brush and thorns with the other arm.

Over-unders work well because they offer options with chokes. Early season, use No. 8 shot and skeet and improved cylinder chokes or two skeet chokes for grouse in thick cover. Later, when leaves are gone, shots can be farther. Skeet/improved or improved/modified combos can shine. I also up my payload to high-brass loads of No. 7 1/2 shot or even No. 6 shot in the tighter barrel.

Because grouse live in some nasty stuff, you also must protect yourself. Glasses are essential to protect your eyes from sharp sticks, and those with a yellow tint improve contrast and help you separate fleeing grouse from trees. Leather gloves are nice, too. Thorns, briars and other sharp culprits can poke and scratch when you least expect it.

The best grouse dog is up for debate. Some like setters and pointers. Others prefer Labs. Regardless, they must be under control. Grouse get conditioned by coyotes and have learned if they run, they have better odds of survival. They've almost become pheasant-like.

I don't want a big-running dog with a beeper collar announcing my arrival, but I still need to keep track of my dog. Ken Lowe, a former editor of an outdoors magazine, once gave me a bell with a deep chime that he bought at a hardware store in Ishpeming. Seven different Labs have had the honor of wearing it.

the purplish-white berries that grouse love, around the edges. Grouse numbers were low that year, but it seemed every grouse in the county knew about this juicy cache. All I had to do was stand by the edge of the depression and wait. Grouse would fly in from the surrounding habitats to gorge on the bounty. It's rare to pass-shoot ruffed grouse, but prime fruit sources can concentrate them at a time of year when going in after them can be an act of frustration.

Other mid- to late-season fruits that attract grouse include a variety of domesticated and wild apples and wild grapes. Never pass up an old homestead or abandoned orchard without checking for grouse. Grouse will peck at larger apples and swallow whole smaller varieties like crab apples and thorn apples.

I spied a lone crab apple tree in the middle of a field one time, far removed from the woods we had been hunting. I'm not sure why, but I had a hunch I should check out the lone tree. As the dog approached, a mature ruff exploded from the opposite side of the tree. It was probably the easiest shot I've ever had at any grouse.

Grape vines, meanwhile, provide an impenetrable hide where grouse have been known to get a little drunk on fermented grapes. Wild grapes can last into the winter if the cache is not discovered and consumed.

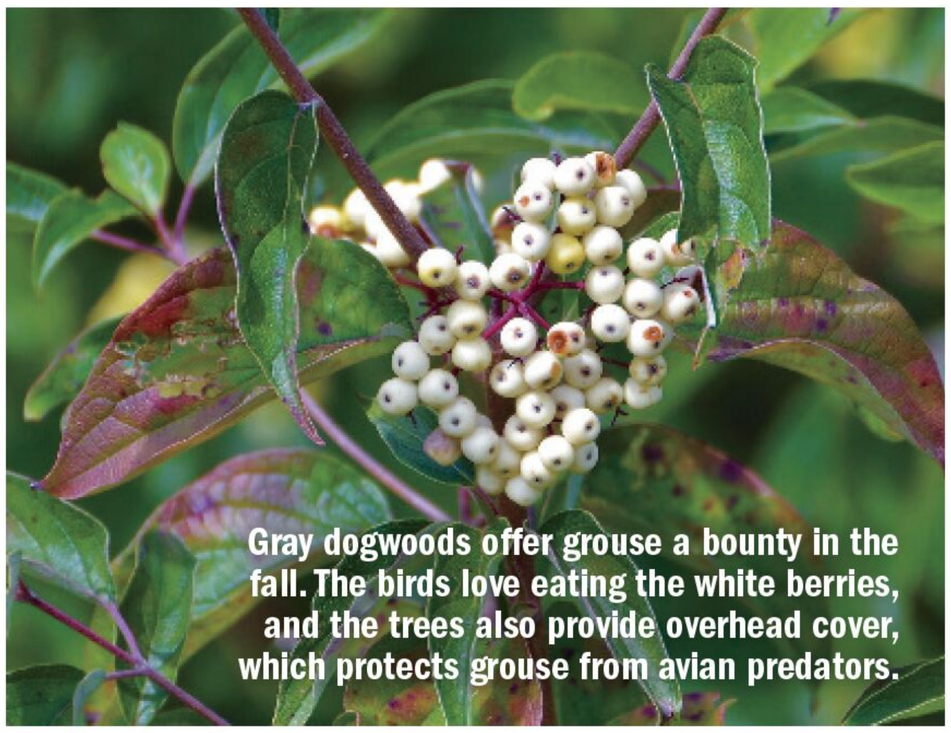
LATE SEASON: Acorns and Browse

Once the leaves are gone, food choices for grouse become scarcer. Nuts and acorns are at the top of the menu then, and grouse aren't particular about the type of nut. They'll gulp hickory and beech nuts and smaller acorns whole, quickly filling their crop to digest later.

That's one reason you'll often find grouse on the sides of trails, where they can find grit or sand to aid the gizzard in the digestion of the nuts. Grouse hang out near trails for another reason, too. Larger acorns that are too big to swallow often get crushed by passing trucks and ATVs. Grouse can then get at the acorns' succulent meat.

Once snow blankets the ground, grouse look up for food. Cover becomes a priority, and grouse spend as little time as possible exposed while gulping buds, catkins and tender twigs. They quickly fill their crops and return to the safety of cover to digest them.

Considering the diet of ruffed grouse, it's no wonder they're quite possibly the best-tasting game bird in North America. They might be the most difficult to hunt, too. Figure out the fruit de jour, and you might be able to stuff a few more thunder chickens in the gamebag. GAF



Gray dogwoods offer grouse a bounty in the fall. The birds love eating the white berries, and the trees also provide overhead cover, which protects grouse from avian predators.

WINDIGO IMAGES (TOP); SHUTTERSTOCK (BOTTOM)



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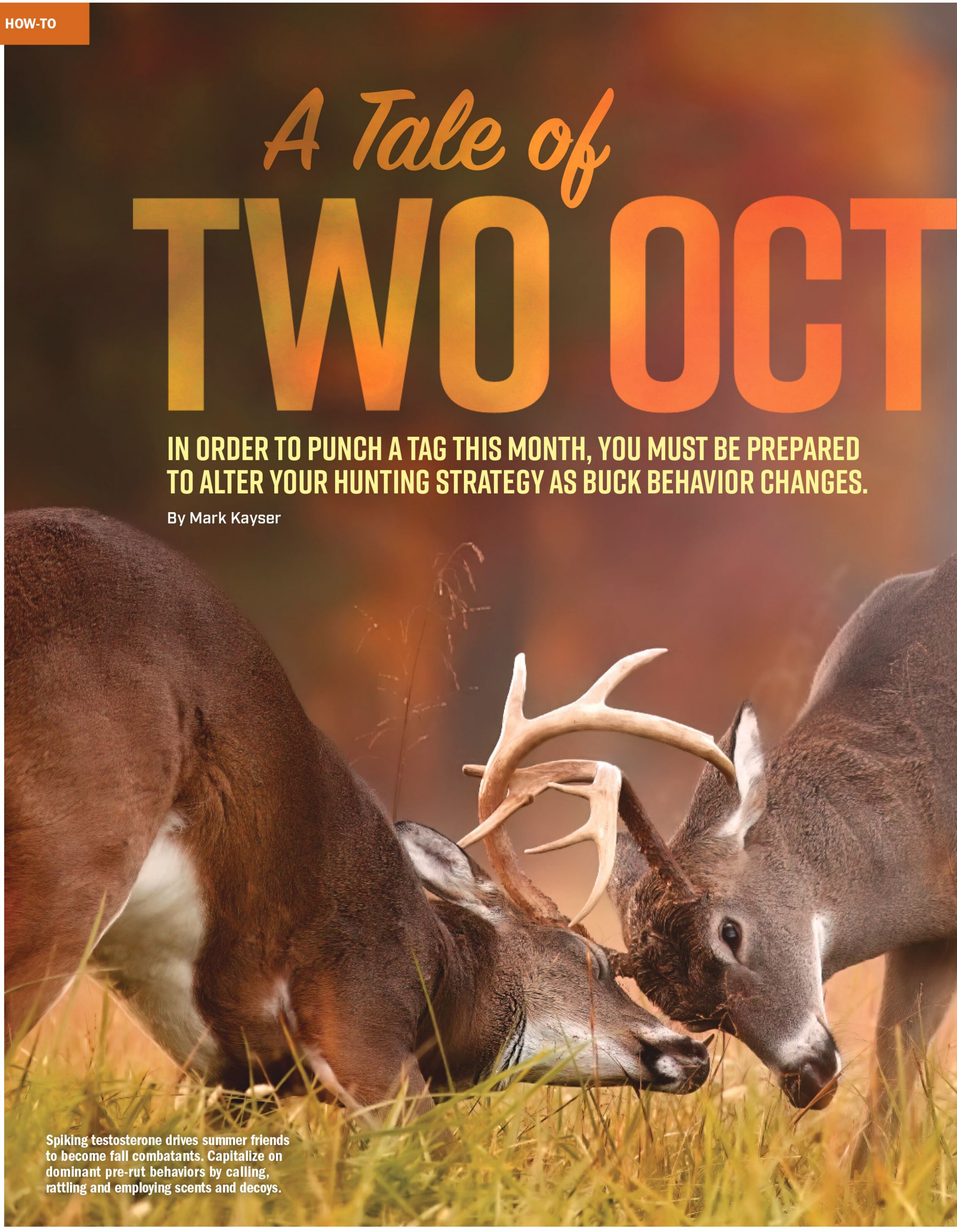
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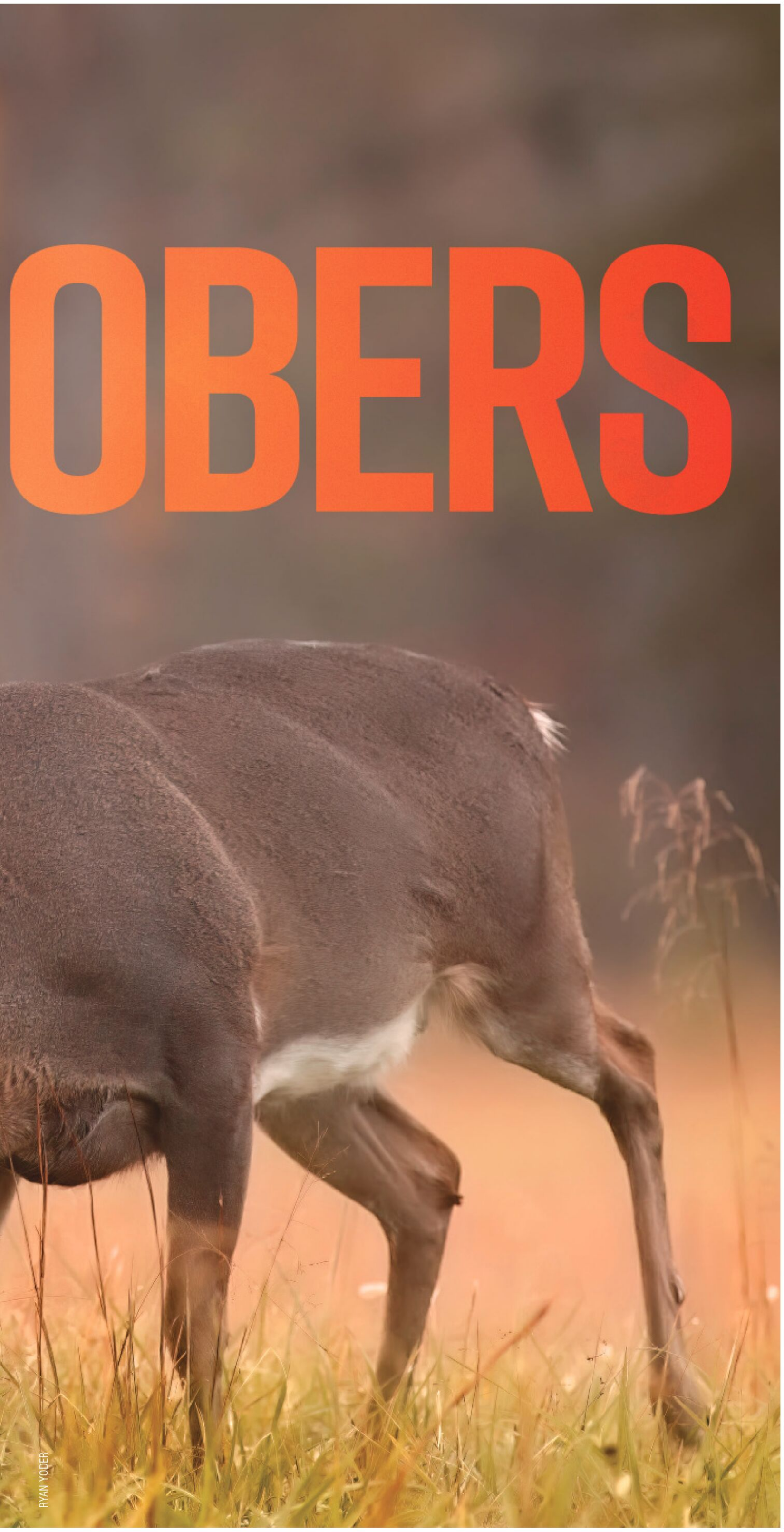
A Tale of TWO RUT

IN ORDER TO PUNCH A TAG THIS MONTH, YOU MUST BE PREPARED TO ALTER YOUR HUNTING STRATEGY AS BUCK BEHAVIOR CHANGES.

By Mark Kayser



Spiking testosterone drives summer friends to become fall combatants. Capitalize on dominant pre-rut behaviors by calling, rattling and employing scents and decoys.



Like an urban commuter contemplating which exit to take to avoid a traffic jam ahead, the whitetail buck paused on the sandy riverbank to mull trail options. Dawn was breaking, and the deer had been feeding all night on a lush alfalfa field just across the river. As the leader of a trio of bachelor bucks, his decision would either lead the group away from my stand or right into the trap.

Although bachelor groups were disbanding as the October days passed, this group remained intact, albeit with dominance on display. Their prevalent sparring, pushing and laid-back ears all pointed to a brotherhood ending as they traveled from the field to the bedding cover entrance where I waited. Then, as if on cue, a younger buck took the lead and started down a path leading right to me.

All three deer slowly began working my way, with each taking a different trail through the brushy cover. Fortunately, the most mature of the trio selected the trail that ran right below my stand. As my heart rate accelerated, he walked by at 15 yards and I silently drew my bow. The arrow hit home, and a few minutes later I was tagging another whitetail in the most transitory period of the hunting season.

OCTOBER EQUALS CHANGE

Whitetails live a life of transition that sees them alter their behavior continually throughout the year. When hunting pressure surfaces, for example, instinct directs them to make lifesaving changes to survive, and these behavioral tweaks occur almost constantly throughout the hunting seasons.

Out of all the months, October probably features some of the biggest transitions for whitetail bucks. Why? Well, whitetails begin the month living a frathouse lifestyle with a band of brothers. Midway through the month, though, they slowly begin changing from gluttonous brothers to oppressive dominators as they finalize the pecking order before the rut. By month's end, whitetail bucks, particularly mature bucks, shun most other males and focus on procreation.

To successfully tag an October buck, your focus and hunting strategies must be as fluid as a whitetail's changing lifestyle. Failure to modify along with transitioning deer could mean less venison in your

freezer this winter. Take an analytical look at your hunting area as you digest the following information. It could help you zero-in on the transformative lifestyle of an October whitetail buck.

EARLY GLUTTONOUS WINDOW

Whitetail bucks gorge on food sources from late summer into early fall. Shortening daylight hours signal many things to deer, but especially the oncoming rut and the guarantee of winter. In early October, some bucks have rut stirrings, as testosterone production begins increasing in their bodies. However, food still ranks as the top priority for both males and females.

Males take it a tad more seriously, though, as instinct prepares them for breeding. During the rut, they'll rob their body of 20 to 25 percent of its mass as they try breeding as many females as possible. Take your own weight and subtract 25 percent. That simple calculation clearly shows how run-down a buck can become and why beefing up supports their survival when transitioning from breeding season straight into a harsh winter. Winter may not be as harsh in a southern zone, but northern whitetails need every ounce of fat to make it through a ruthless winter.

For hunters, that means targeting high-value food sources now, especially those with a strong fat component. Constantly monitor whitetail nutrition sources, which vary depending on location, food palatability and whitetail preference. Whitetails often abandon agricultural food, such as corn or soybeans, once acorns begin dropping. The high fat content in mast like acorns adds more pounds per bite than natural browse and many food plot plantings. Keeping tabs on dropping acorns, particularly from white oaks, could mean the difference between action and stagnation at a clover plot.

Spotting early-October whitetails on food plots and in shorter crops like soybeans is easy. But if your locale sports oaks, be prepared for a disappearing act. That's why constantly monitoring deer food sources each week—via surveillance or trail cameras—is so important in October.

Also, set up as many ambushes leading to oaks, food plots and any large agricultural fields as possible. Take into consideration predominate winds, edge opportunities and stealthy entries and exits from stands. This can be a challenge, as fields fill up with deer at night. A better option to reduce your human footprint is setting up just inside cover. That way, when shooting light evaporates you can slink out behind a veil of hardwoods.



Pre-rut bucks are highly receptive to calling or rattling and decoys. Set an immature buck decoy broadside for the best shot angle.

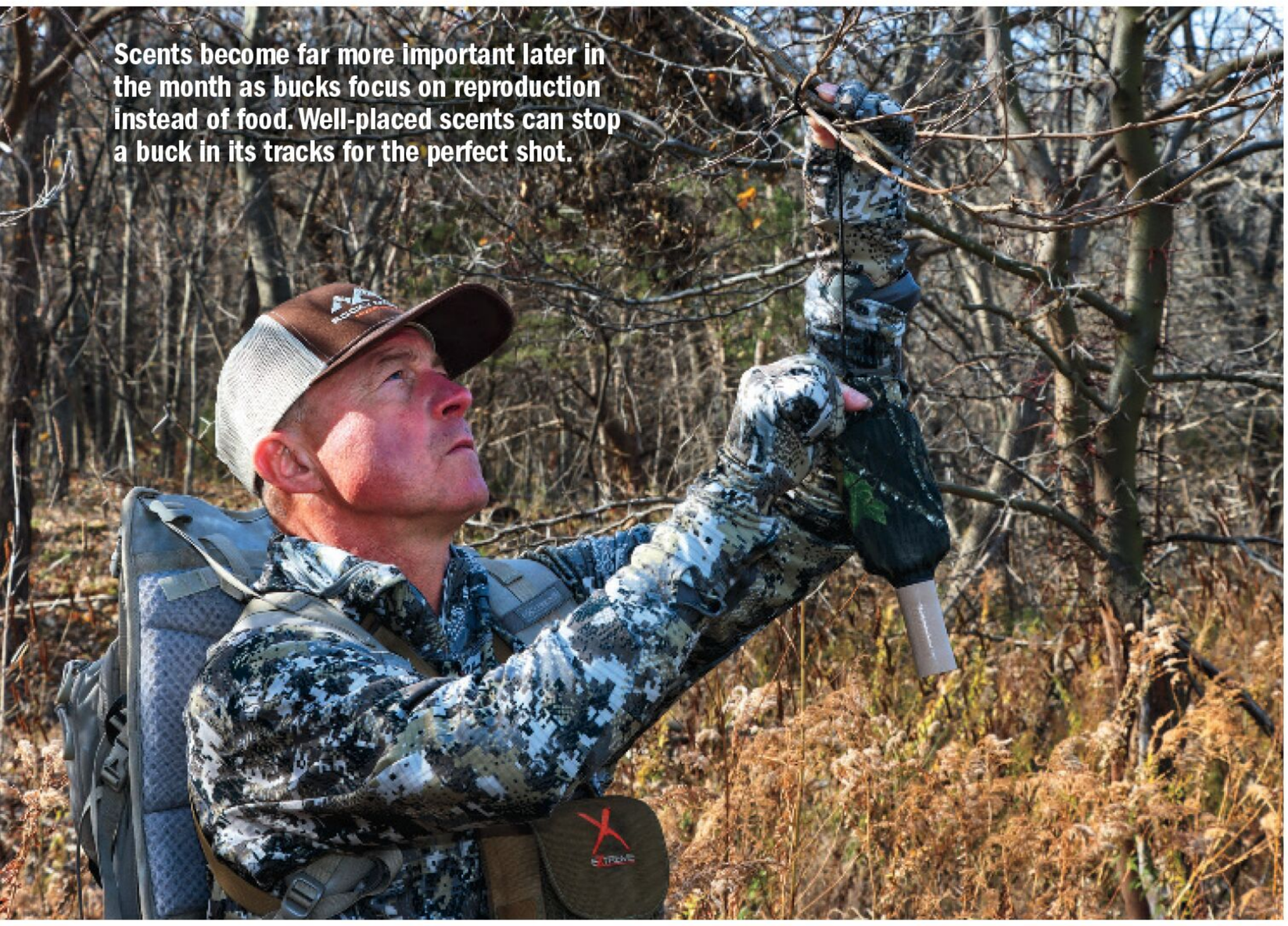
PRE-RUT PERIOD

Uncover Patterns

As Halloween approaches, the upcoming breeding season becomes a bigger priority to bucks. With testosterone surging and nearing full capacity by October's end, bucks change their routine. Some studies suggest that bucks that may have gone into the underground acorn bunker are now daylighting again, adding as much as five more minutes of daylight movement per day as November nears.

Besides moving more during daylight hours and not supersizing their meals, bucks also release more of their pent-up energy by making fresh rubs and scrapes, which start appearing seemingly overnight. Typically, bucks max out on testosterone approximately 2 weeks before does begin cycling. To relieve their anxiety, males hound females relentlessly, rub trees and tend scrapes.

Trail cameras will undoubtedly reveal more daylight movement, and if you follow the real-time clues of rubs and scrapes, you may pinpoint buck lairs. Identify a pre-rut pattern, and you've stacked the odds in your favor as high as possible. Right now, bucks frequently repeat their visits and refresh primary scrapes. Look for the most rubs leading to the largest, most active scrapes, and your whitetail season could easily end before the rut's randomness kicks off in early November. Consider marking every new rub and scrape on a hunting app (HuntStand is my preferred choice) to reveal patterns right on the satellite image.



Scents become far more important later in the month as bucks focus on reproduction instead of food. Well-placed scents can stop a buck in its tracks for the perfect shot.

WINDIGO IMAGES (TOP); MARK KAYSER (BOTTOM)









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Play the Game

Beyond establishing patterns, whitetail fakery strategies shine now. Primarily, we're talking mock scrapes, scents, decoys and deer vocalizations (aka calls).

Scents play an integral role in whitetail survival, not only from predation, but also in finding suitable mates. Accentuating real scrapes or creating mock scrapes in the shooting lane of your choosing has more merit now than ever. Even if you don't believe in the attracting power of a mock scrape, merely misting scent across a trail or on vegetation in a shooting lane has serious stopping—and distracting—qualities to set up the perfect shot. I have stopped more deer than I can count with a good misting of Golden Estrus scent on nose-high vegetation.

This time is also one of the most productive for calling deer. Bucks are restless and intensively searching, so they're eager to investigate the sounds of fellow deer. Grunts (aggressive and tending), bleats and the sound of clashing antlers can lure deer into range as they seek out their first tryst. During the frenzy of breeding, bucks busy chasing may ignore calls, but a solo buck on the hunt doesn't miss many vocal or antler-clashing cues. I prefer using real antlers (I'm an avid shed hunter) when I'm hunting a box blind or stand to which I don't have to hike very far. When I have a longer hike or I'm carrying a lot of stuff—or walking through thick brush where a pair of antlers might get hung up—I'll use Rocky Mountain Hunting Calls' Mini Rattle Cage for its simple backpack convenience.

When you combine those calls with decoys and scent, it creates a deadly pre-rut ruse. If a deer hears grunts, bleats or rattling, and then spots a decoy when visually inspecting the area, they'll swing downwind and you may get an easy 20-yard shot. Immature buck decoys have traditionally been used the most, as bucks project dominance in their home range.

Remember to study the evolutionary meet-and-greet behavior of rutting bucks. They always pass each other in a parallel fashion to display a huge stature with raised body hair. Set your decoy up in a broadside fashion for the best shot angle. To keep things simple, I utilize Montana Decoy Company's folding, photo-realistic decoys. Adding a wick of quality buck scent to the site presents another sensory certainty for realism.

TIME OF TRANSITION

While the month of October poses its share of challenges, it can still be a great time to harvest a mature buck. Hunters near and far may bemoan the dreaded October lull, but much of this perceived slowdown may be due simply to changing patterns. Deer may be moving from predictable (and highly visible) food plots to secluded hard-mast hot spots. Or they may move to thicker cover areas to evade increasing hunting pressure. Be prepared to make your own changes to be successful. And be ready for when the pre-rut hits, because everything will change once again—hopefully for the better. G&F

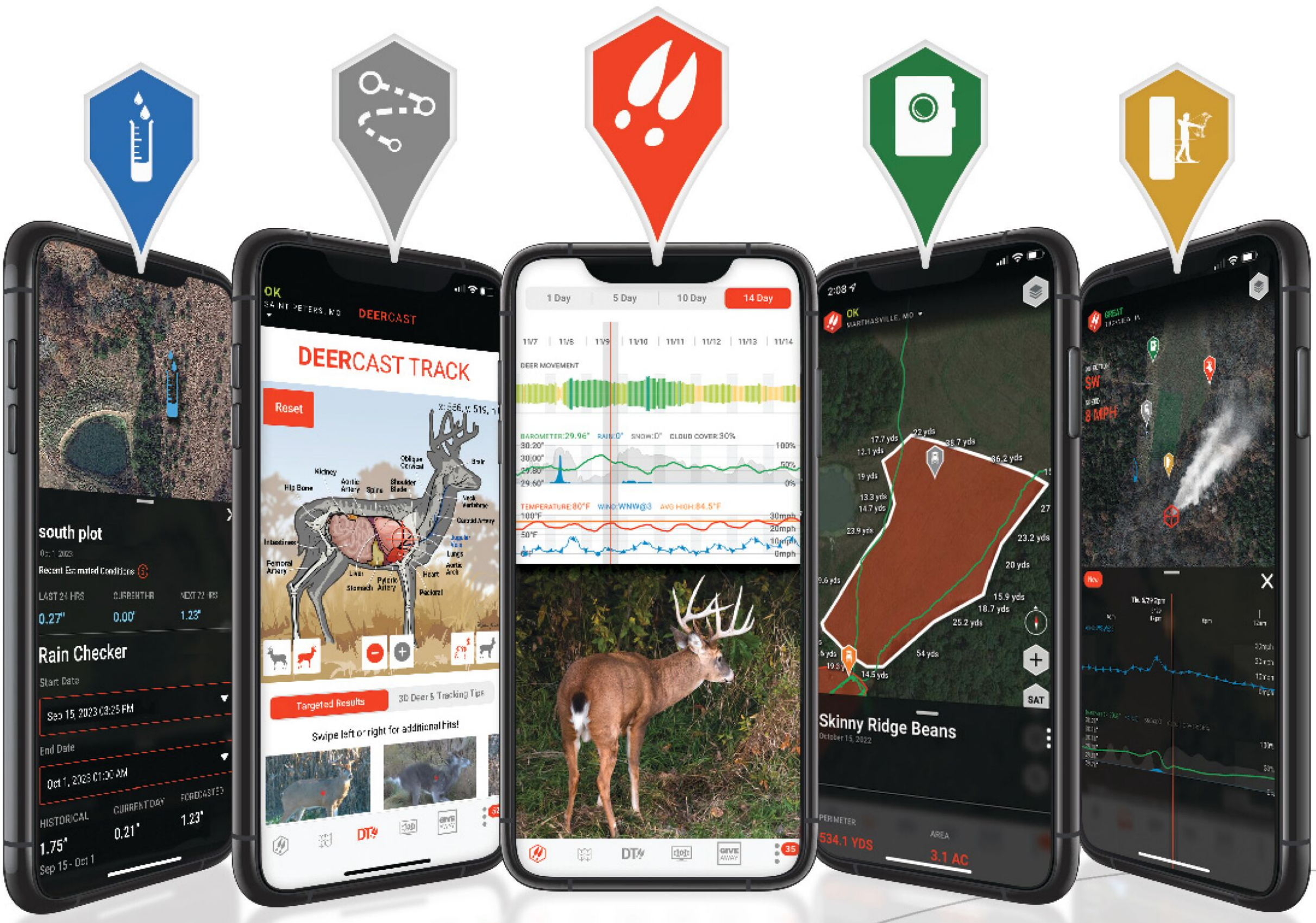


Keep an eye out for fresh scrapes and rubs throughout October as bucks feel the effects of increasing testosterone. These signposts can be great ambush sites.

RYAN YODER

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ROLLING ON THE RIVERS

EVEN AS TEMPERATURES COOL ACROSS THE MIDWEST, THE ACTION FOR RIVER WALLEYES AND SAUGERS HEATS UP. LUCKILY, THERE ARE SEVERAL WAYS TO CATCH THESE FIRED-UP FISH.

By Dr. Jason A. Halfen

Although dry leaves are now falling from the trees and many anglers are swapping rods and reels for rifles and bows, fishing is not over yet—not by a longshot. Some of the most consistent walleye and sauger fishing of the season is happening right now on major river systems across the Midwest. Although the spawning period is many cold months away, our favorite perciform predators must build substantial fat reserves now to help their reproductive tissues mature during the lean, icy period ahead. As a result, they are driven to feed—heavily—before water temperatures bottom out in early winter. The savvy angler recognizes this annual window of opportunity and builds in a couple more trips to places like the Mississippi, Missouri, Rainy and Wisconsin rivers before putting the boat to bed for the year.

FINDING FISH

As much or more than any other environmental factor, current determines walleye and sauger positions within riverine systems. Frequently, early-fall rains can cause water levels and flows to increase in September and early October,which can concentrate fish along well-defined current seams—boundaries where there is fast current adjacent to substantially lower flow.



Gently working blade baits in 6- to 12-inch increments off the bottom is often more productive for fall river walleyes than ripping the baits.

BRAD RICHARDSON/GET N BIT PRODUCTIONS

Subsequently, current moderates as air and water temps cool in November and December. This lets fish disperse and associate with primary structural elements, especially main-channel rock and wing dams. Although substantial overlap exists, walleyes and saugers often partition themselves according to water depth. Walleyes frequent shallower water, while saugers often inhabit deeper haunts along current seams and rocky structures alike.

TROLLING TACTICS

Anglers can leverage a broad spectrum of presentations in the pursuit of late-fall walleyes and saugers inhabiting rivers. Trolling techniques usually excel for covering water and establishing the most productive patterns, whereas casting or pitching presentations can allow anglers to saturate specific fish-holding cover or current seams and extract biters with extreme efficiency.

The Deadly Dubuque

The Dubuque rig is one of the most important weapons in my arsenal when chasing fall walleyes on rivers. This is a fishing system that perfectly fits my style. It allows me to present a pair of baits in tandem, at two different depths, with speeds that range from a dead stop to a steady upstream troll. In my opinion, the Dubuque rig is one of the most productive ways to find active fish and get them in the boat.

The Dubuque rig is a modification of the venerable Wolf River rig and has a simple piece of terminal tackle—a three-way swivel—at its heart. In the Dubuque rig, two 12-pound-test fluorocarbon leaders are tied to the three-way swivel, with the third eyelet reserved for connection to the braided main line. A short dropper leader is tied to a jig, often a 1/2-ounce jig but up to 1 ounce depending on current speed. Dress this heavy jig with a soft-plastic bait, like a 4-inch paddle-tail or ringworm. A longer leader can be tied to a much lighter jig—usually 1/16 ounce—but it can also be terminated with an Aberdeen hook or a trolling fly. To quickly determine the most productive pattern, be sure to experiment with different colors and profiles of soft plastics on the two jigs, or even fold a live minnow into the mix.

The Dubuque rig is best presented from a boat moving slowly upstream, with GPS speeds ranging from 0.2 to 0.5 mph. Deploy enough line to have the lower jig touch the bottom. As the boat moves forward, raise the jig to allow it to swim off the bottom. Repeatedly point the rod tip back toward the lure to ensure that the bottom bait makes bottom contact regularly, and adjust the amount of line that you're pulling to keep the Dubuque rig in the strike zone. Avoid situations where the bottom jig simply drags across the bottom, as this is a recipe for repeated snags and breakoffs.

My favorite place to fish the Dubuque rig is along well-defined current seams, where I can work the boat side-to-side across the seam and sample the fish holding on either side of it. I use my kicker motor to provide most of the requisite thrust and leverage my bow-mount trolling motor for steering and precise boat control. The Minn Kota i-Pilot Link system is an invaluable ally when Dubuque rigging. When a fish

strikes and a battle ensues, I can stop forward progress by reducing throttle on the kicker. Then, I can simultaneously activate the i-Pilot Link's Spot-Lock feature to hold my boat in place while fighting, landing, photographing and releasing the fish.

Stick-Bait Strategies

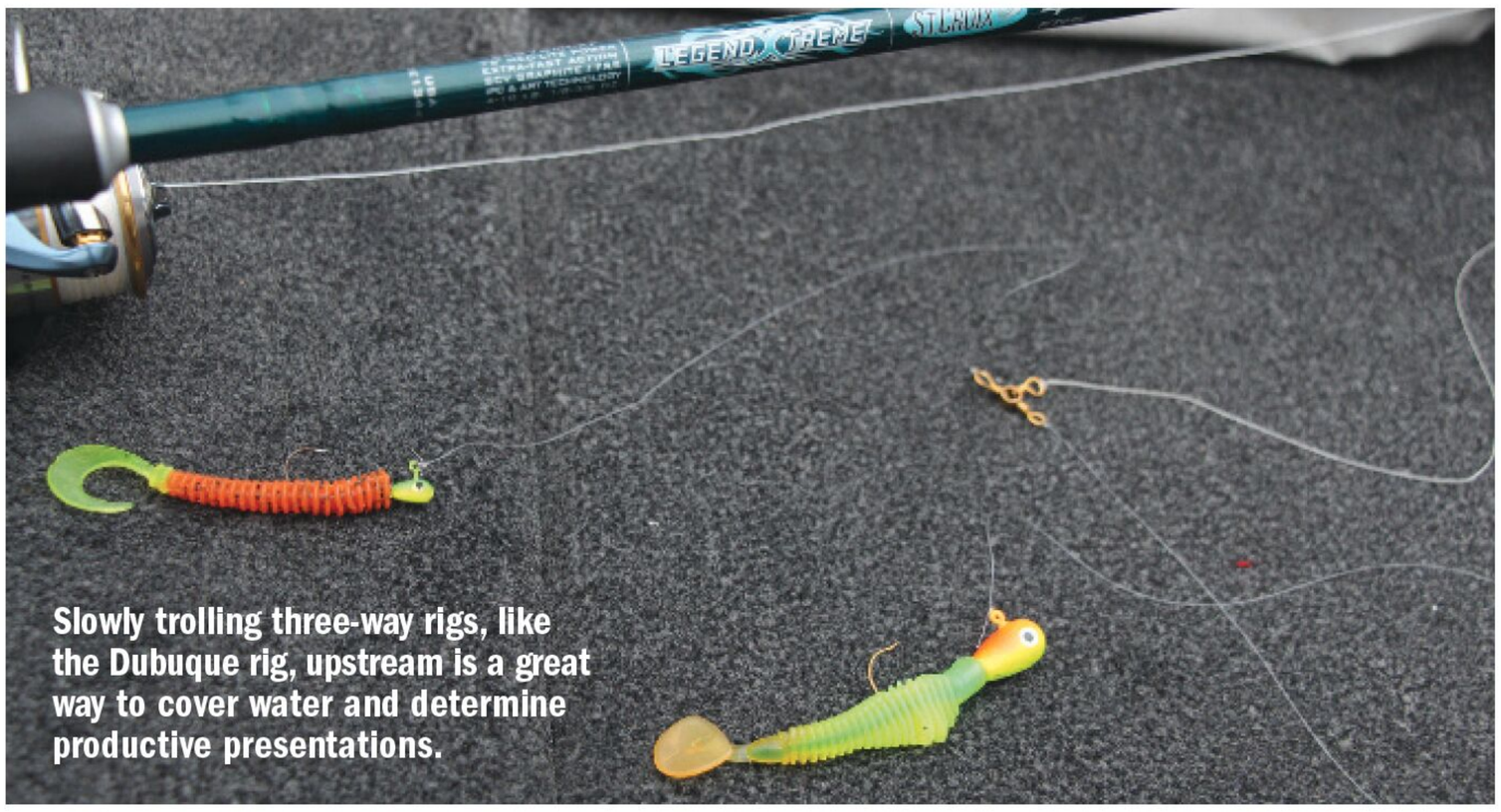
As the water cools throughout the fall, walleyes also become quite responsive to simple stick baits, like classic Rapala floating minnows, pulled upstream on three-way rigs. In its simplest version, a three-way swivel is tied to two 12-pound-test fluorocarbon leaders. One is 12 to 16 inches in length and will terminate at a tapered or pencil-shaped lead sinker typically 2 or 3 ounces in weight. The second is 36 to 40 inches in length and ends at a cross-lock snap for connection to the lure.

Rapala's Original Floating minnows in size 7 or 9 are the gold standards in this presentation. With turbid or stained water being the norm in the fall, I run lots of bright color patterns, including orange over gold, firetiger and hot steel.

An enhanced version of this classic rig presents two Rapala lures in tandem, with one following the other. After attaching the first Rapala to the cross-lock snap, remove that lure's rear treble and split ring. To the metal hook hanger on the back of that lure's body, attach another length of fluorocarbon leader, typically around 18 inches long, and add another cross-lock snap. Now, clip on a second Rapala floating minnow and get that rig in the water.

You'll notice that the two Rapala minnows have very different actions with this rig. The rear lure swims and wiggles as it would normally, while the forward lure's action is much subtler, as it is tethered to other objects in both the front and the back. With the Double Rapala rig, you can mix and match color patterns, lure sizes and even positions within the rig—front versus back—to optimize your catch rates.

Like the Dubuque rig, trolled stick baits are best presented from a boat moving upstream. Typical speeds are around 1 mph as measured by your fish finder's onboard GPS receiver, although hovering in place in high-percentage areas can be equally effective. As with the Dubuque rig presentation, using a Minn Kota i-Pilot Link system or similar GPS-locking trolling motor to hold the boat in place while fighting a fish is helpful. It can also allow you to consistently follow productive contours and generally help reduce your boat control workload and allow you to focus on catching fish.



Slowly trolling three-way rigs, like the Dubuque rig, upstream is a great way to cover water and determine productive presentations.

CASTING COUNSEL

When fish are localized on rocky structures, especially main-channel rock piles, riprap shorelines or wing dams, holding the boat in place and casting to those fish often produces more action than mobile, trolling presentations. With the boat's position fixed using Spot-Lock or

PITCH PERFECT

Essential setups for pitching baits to river walleyes and saugers on key structures

Versatility is key when selecting a tackle configuration for pitching plastics, blades or hair to fall walleyes and saugers. I generally run two separate combos—one for lighter baits presented in relatively shallow water, and one for heavier jigs fished deeper. The primary difference between these two is the rod.

For baits up to 1/4-ounce, including both jigs and blades, I select a high-quality 6-foot-10-inch to 7-foot-6-inch rod with medium-light power and fast or extra-fast action. The **St. Croix Legend Tournament Walleye LWTS70MLF** ($280; stcroixrods.com) is a terrific choice. At 7 feet in length, this rod has no trouble launching light lures far away from the boat, and its high-modulus graphite engineering expertly telegraphs light pick-ups. For heavier lures, I select a slightly shorter rod with a heavier power, like the 6-foot 8-inch, medium-power, extra-fast-action **St. Croix Legend Tournament Walleye LWTS68MXF** ($280).

Equip either rod with a 2500- or 3000-series spinning reel, like a **Daiwa BG2500** ($129.99; daiwa.us) or a **Shimano Miravel C3000** ($129.99; fish.shimano.com), spooled with 20-pound-test **Seaguar Smackdown** braided line ($29.99/150 yards; seaguar.com) and finished with a 4-foot leader of **Seaguar InvizX** 12-pound-test fluorocarbon ($28.49/200 yards). With fluorocarbon providing near-invisibility at the lure, I use high-visibility braids to assist with visual strike detection. Plus, the braid offers a measure of abrasion resistance against sharp rocks and Zebra mussels. Tie the leader directly to a jig-and-plastic or hair jig, and use a cross-lock snap when connecting to a blade bait.



DR. JASON A. HALFEN

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MOMENTUM ELITE

a shallow-water anchor, anglers can test a library of lures to identify those that fall walleyes and saugers find irresistible.

Soft plastics, bucktail jigs and blade baits are all good when pitching baits to fall walleyes and saugers. Rig 4-inch flukes, ringworms or paddle-tail-style plastics on 1/4- or 3/8-ounce jigs, using just enough weight to keep the lure near bottom during the retrieve. Select jigs with long-shank hooks and wire plastic keepers to pin the soft plastics against the



Fall saugers often prefer deeper areas than walleyes. Look to current seams and rocky structures in deep water when trolling or casting baits.

jig head over many casts (VMC Sleek Jigs are solid here). Depending on water temperature and the overall mood of the fish, your retrieve may be a simple, rhythmic lift-and-drop when the bite's a little off, or a more aggressive snap-jigging approach when fish are really biting.

Bucktail jigs are strong fall performers, too. Resist the temptation to add live bait—the allure of hair is the subtle, undulating motion of the unrestricted bucktail fibers triggered by the current. Likewise, forego a stinger hook as three extra—and frankly unnecessary—points are simply a recipe for more snags and lost lures. Jig weights between 1/4 and 1/2 ounce are typical, with lighter jigs best in shallow water and heavy jigs reserved for deep current seams and the base of main-channel breaklines. Keep your color selection simple: Black, purple and forest green are all excellent choices.

Blade baits are the unsung heroes of fall pitching presentations. The key to blade bait success is subtlety. Don't aggressively rip the blade many feet off the bottom. Instead, use the rod tip to gently raise the blade up 6 to 12 inches, then let it fall back to the bottom on a mostly slack line. This gives the tumbling blade a little side-to-side freedom.

Once you feel the first few vibrations of the blade as you pull it off the bottom, let it fall. Keep the bait moving, pausing only briefly after it hits bottom. If you feel any resistance on the rise, turn that gentle lift into a hard hookset, as both walleyes and saugers will often pin the blade to the bottom when its fall is complete.

Late fall offers some of the most consistent fishing of the year for walleyes and saugers on major rivers throughout the Midwest. Be sure to tap into this bounty before you put the boat to bed. First ice will be here soon enough. G&F

DR. JASON A. HALFEN



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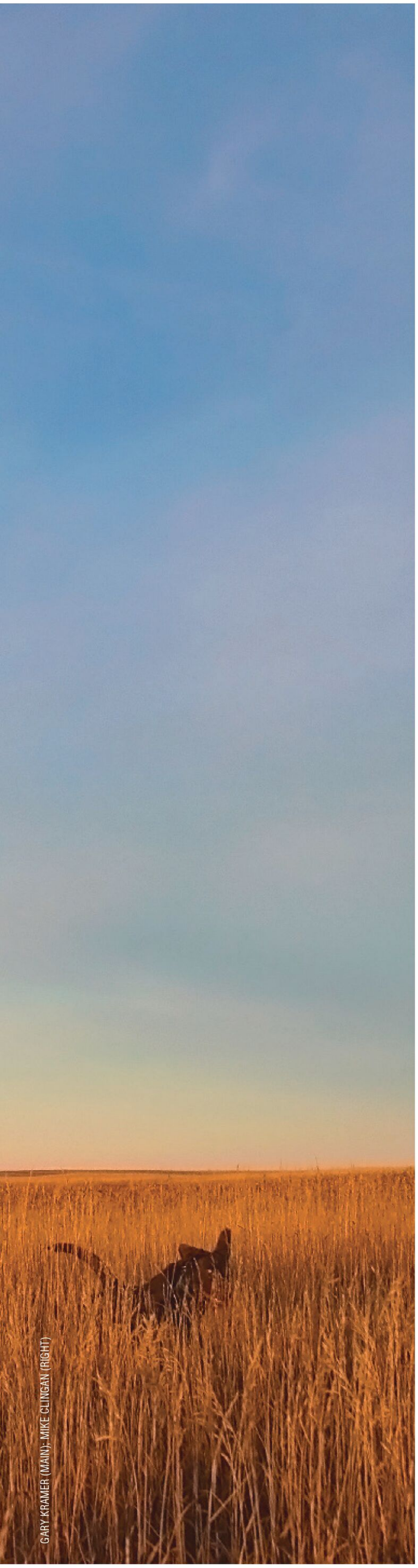
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PHEASANT PARADISE

SOUTH DAKOTA IS THE MIDWEST'S UNDISPUTED RINGNECK MECCA, AND IT SEES LOTS OF HUNTING PRESSURE AS A RESULT. THOSE WHO PUSH FARTHER WEST IN THE STATE CAN FIND FIELDS TO THEMSELVES AND PLENTY OF BIRDS.

By Mark Kayser

Western South Dakota has ample public and private ground to hunt. However, finding the best places requires a bit of research.



GARY KRAMER (MAIN); MIKE CLINGAN (RIGHT)

South Dakota stands alone in the world of ring-necked pheasant hunting. Last season, hunters harvested 1,158,000 roosters in the Mount Rushmore State. In this same time, its northern neighbor reported 286,970 birds harvested. To the south, hunters in Nebraska and Kansas shot an estimated 122,016 and 258,729 birds, respectively. Meanwhile, during the 2021-2022 season (the most recent figures available at the time of this writing for some states) hunters harvested 373,000 and 210,275 roosters, respectively, in Iowa and Minnesota. All solid numbers, for sure, but none approach South Dakota's.

The state holds a special place in my heart. My first rooster came from a right of way on a desolate stretch of road in eastern South Dakota. At 12, I could not have been prouder showing off the bird to my grandpa. Those early days chasing pheasants opened a universe of hunting to me.

Although you can still hunt most rights of way in South Dakota, gaining access to private lands becomes more difficult as the trend of private wildlife management grows. Still, public pheasant hunting opportunities abound in South Dakota, as long as you're willing to do the research to identify them. Much of the best pheasant hunting occurs in the central and east-central portions of the state. However, this area also has some of the higher population densities and features lots of intense farming. To get away from the crowds, consider hunting farther west.

GET PLANNING

South Dakota is approximately 80 percent privately owned, meaning most of its pheasant hunting is found behind locked gates. While that sounds like certain doom for do-it-yourself hunters, it does not have to be the end of your pheasant hunting dreams.

South Dakota offers an array of hunting options, from high-end hunts marketed to the Gulfstream crowd to trespass-fee hunts where you pay a landowner a few hundred bucks for a few days of bird hunting. I've found Facebook Marketplace and Craigslist to be effective ways to find private-land hunting opportunities; you may discover some affordable options out there. If you have good deer or turkey hunting where you live, consider advertising your willingness to do a hunt swap;



On pressured public lands, find interior escape-cover areas birds might seek out after being spooked by other hunters. A good, close-working dog can help in these situations.

some membership-based sites offer this capability, as do a few forums. Trading out professional services for hunting opportunities is another option. Calls to local chambers of commerce could also lead you to landowners who do not outfit but will allow hunting for a trespass fee.

Stay clear of the primary pheasant range, move away from the population centers of eastern South Dakota and focus on the region west of the Missouri River and east of the Black Hills, Badlands and sagebrush. This area holds fewer pheasants but traditionally fewer upland game hunters, too. Plus, it includes the bonus of sharp-tailed grouse.

WALK-IN AREAS

South Dakota's Walk-In Area program opens private land to public hunting. Started in 1988 with 23,161 acres, the program has grown to include approximately 1.2 million acres annually, and many of the largest parcels lie west of the Missouri River.

Property owners enroll Walk-In Areas annually, but because this list is subject to change, it is on you to confirm that any given property is still open to public hunting before you step foot on it. Start your search in the counties of Corson, Dewey, Perkins, Stanley and Haakon. Other counties to the south also hold potential but are nearer to the hot pheasant range surrounding the community of Winner, which sees lots of hunters.

A map is helpful in researching Walk-In Area parcels in these counties, but a hunting app can provide even more detail. Look for areas leased near current agricultural activity and along riparian zones and wetlands. I like HuntStand above other apps because it has a satellite image feature that updates each month with new images. Although images are at a lower resolution, they provide ample clarity to note all cornfields (yes, they grow corn in western South Dakota) and allow you to see if wetlands are full or arid due to drought. Dryer wetlands provide ideal cover for pheasants.

The plan for the larger Walk-In Area properties is to find any interior habitat that pheasants would seek as escape sanctuary. Next, assemble your hunting partners and push toward the center with safety in mind. Only shoot well above the horizon and away from the group as pheasants flush to escape the closing circle. As you near the best habitat, flatten the circle to a semicircle with more people on flanking edges. As you slow down, paranoid pheasants will begin to flush.

Mobridge, Fort Pierre and Bison offer accommodations and camping opportunities. You may even want to expand out and utilize the Game, Fish and Parks campground system, including the Little Moreau State Recreation area just outside of Timber Lake.



South Dakota has highly variable fall weather. Bring clothes for extreme cold, heat and wind alike.

NATIONAL PROPERTIES

Falling under the management of the National Forest Service are South Dakota's three National Grasslands, two of which are worthy choices for pheasants. A bonus with these prairie treasures is the possibility of coming across a flock of sharp-tailed grouse to add to your bag.

In the northwest, consider the Grand River National Grassland, which includes around 155,000 acres of preserved prairie habitat near Lemmon. Along the Missouri River, look at the 116,000-acre Fort Pierre National Grassland southwest of Fort Pierre. A bonus to hunting the Fort Pierre National Grassland is that in addition to pheasants and sharptails, you may also flush greater prairie chickens, which are true North American trophy birds.

Use your hunting app to discover corners, allotments and checkerboard ownership that lies adjacent to agriculture. Also, scout for brushy creeks and consider calling the office of the National Grassland you wish to hunt to inquire about pastures that are in rest that year. Grassland managers routinely rotate grazing to give the land a chance to recuperate between grazing seasons.

This is big ground, which is why you should look for allotments adjoining

STEVE OEHLENSCHLAGER

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Tips for planning a SoDak pheasant adventure

South Dakota's traditional pheasant season opens on Oct. 21 and extends through Jan. 31, 2024. Prairie grouse season opens Sept. 16 and runs through Jan. 7, 2024. Nonresident licenses cost $121 and are good for two, five-day periods or 10 consecutive days of hunting. Validate your license with a $25 habitat stamp.

Most small towns in western South Dakota do not have many amenities, so check ahead of time. You'll likely find fuel at smaller stops, but lodging and dining could be in short supply. Favorite dining outlets include Rick's Café in Mobridge, The Cattleman's Club in Pierre and the R Bar in Lemmon.

South Dakota lies north enough in the country that snow can fly up to nine months out of the year. It is also prairie country and notorious for winds. Expect to lose a day or two due to weather craziness. Pack for all conditions, but bring along rugged hunting boots capable of knocking out 3 to 6 miles comfortably each day. Wild pheasant flushes are often on the long side, so magnum loads of No. 5 shot are recommended.

Lastly, plan an extra day or more to visit the sights. Mount Rushmore lies a couple hours west in the Black Hills, and Badlands National Park might only be an hour from your hunting area. Sitting Bull is buried just west of Mobridge, and the entire Missouri River includes historic landmarks of the Lewis and Clark expedition.

UPGRADE YOUR EQUIPMENT AND YOUR SKILLS

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harvested or grazed private ground. A pheasant's rounded wings excel at short flights but not long-distance travel. The birds typically fly short hops between cover and avoid open country. You want to prod birds between small drainages, creek bottoms and dense grass stands, but use the defoliated ground as a barricade. Several repeated flushes should wear down pheasants, and they'll eventually hold in the thickest cover they happen upon during an escape.

Lemmon, Fort Pierre and the capital city of Pierre offer an array of lodging and campgrounds, including Shadehill State Recreation Area outside of Lemmon and several state campgrounds along the Missouri River near Pierre.



Wild pheasants often flush at a distance, especially if they've been pressured. Bring magnum loads of No. 5 shot to reach out.



OTHER STATE AREAS

You can also find a small patchwork of public properties in the form of Game Production Areas, Waterfowl Production Areas and trust properties listed as School and Public Lands. Some of these range beyond 1,000 acres, but many of the School and Public Lands are smaller sections—640 acres—set aside throughout the state. South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks prints an updated Public Hunting Atlas annually and posts it online. This directory showcases these opportunities in the vast stretches of South Dakota.

Finding a hot spot will likely take more research, a call to a conservation officer and often a drive-by when you arrive to check its "pheasant worthiness." Take your time. If you find the right section of land, it could be a spot you hit multiple times during your trip.

As for lodging, campsites are common in South Dakota's more remote regions. Utilize the state campground index to explore nearby options and reach out to chamber of commerce offices for farm or ranch house rentals. Some small towns have motels, but call ahead, as they may be booked by big game hunters who also frequent this side of the state come fall.

Hunting these smaller parcels requires thorough scouting, and it's best to find backdoor access, like a county road right of way, as every pheasant living on a property likely knows the direction from which most hunting pressure originates. Quietly sneak to the edge of the thickest cover and wait for any hunters on the opposite side of the property to push birds your way. You can also divide your hunting group and execute a similar drive.

Even in a down year, South Dakota has more pheasant hunting opportunities than any other state. Head a bit farther west, and you might discover a small slice of pheasant heaven all to yourself. G&F

MIKE CLINGAN

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HUNTING ALASKA'S KODIAK ISLAND FOR CARIBOU AND BLACKTAIL DEER IS PART ADVENTURE, PART WORKOUT.

By Adam Heggenstaller

A Kodiak Island hill may not be high, but it's steep, and a load of blacktail only complicates the descent.


MARK WEBB/MURRAY ROAD

The cool rain lands squarely on my upturned face, runs across my forehead and sluices along my eyebrows, sheets over my cheeks and finally trickles down my neck, diluting the sweat soaked into the shirt beneath my rain jacket. I don't care enough to turn my head. I only shut my eyes and try to ignore my aching shoulders and back. The ocean is in sight, but I've learned the views on Kodiak Island are deceiving. There is still a mile of alder and tussock to go, and as I lie surrounded by 2-foot-tall yellow grass, I question whether I am going to make it.

I can think of no better way to invite a brown bear into my lap than by slowly carrying who-knows-how-many pounds of bloody caribou on my back as darkness falls. Signs of the giant bears—fresh tracks on the beach this morning, worn trails through the undergrowth, the pile of scat I passed a couple hundred yards back—are all over this land. Yesterday I saw two of them. I remember the words of a friend who hunted Kodiak a few years ago: "Whatever you do, make sure you're on the beach before it gets dark." I realize with growing trepidation that's not going to happen.

The narrow beach below the hill on which I'm resting is, hopefully, where I'll meet Capt. Gabe Linegar of Alaska Hunting Pros (alaskahuntingpros.com), the transporter who brought four other guys and me to a remote bay on the island the day before to begin our hunt. Being a transporter and not a guide, by law Gabe cannot help hunters locate—or recover—game. He and his partner on this trip, Capt. Gregg McGaha, will provide transportation and accommodations by way of two 36-foot Armstrong catamarans, but the hunting and the packing out and the processing is up to us. The task ahead of me literally rests squarely on my shoulders.

CLOSING ON CARIBOU

Four hours ago, I was feeling—perhaps stupidly in hindsight—mighty proud of what fellow hunter and writer Mike Herne and I had accomplished, considering this was the first trip to Kodiak for both of us. Our group had split in two halfway through the day, and Mike and I, along with photographer Mark Webb, crossed an alder-choked valley and climbed the ridge beyond in search

of game. We were looking for Sitka blacktails, but we also had aspirations of finding caribou (or feral reindeer, depending on who's describing the animal).

We had been side-hilling along the ridge 600 or 700 feet above the muskeg for about an hour, enjoying the wildness of this new country despite not seeing any deer, when Mike stopped and flipped his bino toward the back of the valley. Bracing against the wind on the steep slope, he dropped his elbows to get a steadier view through the glass.

"Caribou," he said, in the mix of surprise and urgency that comes when wanting to capitalize on an unexpected opportunity. "There's a bunch of them bedded on the flat."

I pointed my bino in that direction and soon saw the light-colored animals against the dark browns, greens and reds of the muskeg. The herd was about a mile away, and we counted 30-some animals in it. They were tucked behind a slight bend in the ridge that kept them out of the wind. Through the binos at that distance we couldn't tell the size of the antlers on any of them, but it didn't matter. We were pumped that we had found caribou.

After a quick consultation with OnX, we dropped down the slope a bit and side-hilled along the ridge toward the herd. A secondary spine near the bend in the ridge hid our approach. Reaching it cut the distance between us and the animals in half, and we stopped for a closer look. Now we could clearly see



PH PRECISION

The Burris Veracity PH enables heads-up elevation corrections.

I took game on Kodiak Island at ranges that averaged a little less than 250 yards, but the chance exists for shots at twice that distance. Wise hunters will take a reliable scope that permits quick, precise adjustments in case the blacktail buck of a lifetime appears on a hillside several football fields away. After spending a couple months getting to know the new Burris Veracity PH, and then hunting with the scope for a week on Kodiak, I was impressed with the ease at which it enables fast and accurate elevation corrections.

The main features of the Veracity PH are a digital heads-up display (HUD) in the upper sixth of the scope's field of view and an elevation knob that combines a digital sensor with a mechanical turret that permits 1/10-MOA corrections. Pairing the scope with the BurrisConnect app via Bluetooth allows hunters to input rifle-load profiles and enviromental factors, which the app uses to determine ballistic solutions before sending them to the scope. When a hunter dials the elevation knob, the HUD displays the range, in yards, at which the correction is applicable. There is no counting clicks or looking at predetermined hash marks on the knob. Simply dial until the range to the target is shown on the HUD. Other information displayed in the HUD includes a range-accurate wind hold, rifle cant and angle, and battery level.

The 4x20-50 mm Veracity PH has a footprint and weight (28 1/2 ounces) similar to typical hunting scopes in that configuration. It's powered by two CR2450 batteries. Remove them and the Veracity PH functions like a conventional riflescope. The scope offers 70 MOA of elevation adjustment, 37 MOA of windage adjustment and side parallax adjustment from 50 yards to infinity. And yes, I can attest that after a week on Kodiak, the Veracity PH is waterproof. ($1,199; burrisoptics.com).



Two catamarans serve as transportation and camp, ensuring a dry, warm spot to eat and sleep after a hard day's hunt.

MARK WEBB/MURRAY ROAD (TOP); ADAM HEGGENSTALLER (BOTTOM)

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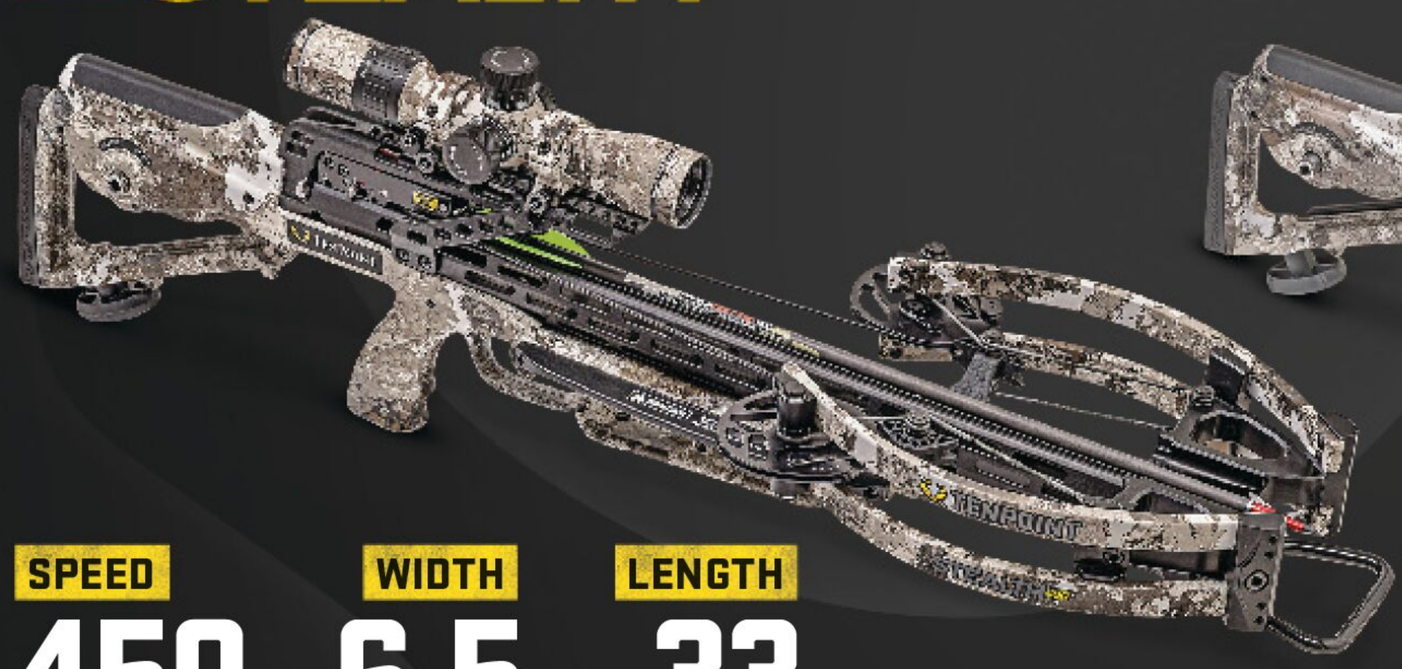
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several caribou wore towering headgear, and a few of them sparred with one another while we watched. Most were resting, and looking over the patchwork of alders and grassy areas that separated us from the herd, it seemed like we had a good chance of getting within range.

"Let's go get us a couple caribou," said Mike confidently.

"We can get off this ridge here and stalk up the creek," I replied. "The alders should give us good cover."

"I'm with you on that," Mike said with a fist bump. "Let's get 'er done."

The alders were above our heads in many places, and luckily we were able to skirt their edges for the most part while keeping several thick patches of them between us and the caribou. But when we neared the end of the last patch and crawled behind a slight rise in the open, we ranged the herd at still more than 450 yards away, too far for a shot in terrain and vegetation that mandated a kneeling or standing position.

We were considering an attempt at circling the flat, an endeavor that might have put us within 200 yards of the caribou but likely would have taken at least an hour to accomplish, when the animals started to rise from their beds and feed. Slowly but steadily they began moving to our right. If they continued on that path, the caribou would pass by a couple fingers of alders several hundred yards to the west of our position.

The three of us backed out on our bellies, regrouped behind the alder patch and began a fast hike to intercept the herd. We were out of sight of the caribou until we reached the final 30 yards of alder, but the view we got through the tangled branches toward the end of the finger showed us the plan had worked. The caribou were 150 yards away and heading in our direction.

Carefully clearing the last of the vegetation, Mike and I knelt beside each other and prepared to shoot. He made a narrow X with his trekking poles to serve as a makeshift rifle rest while I placed my rifle on a tripod. We first thought we could each pick an animal, do the 3-2-1 countdown and fire simultaneously, but with the animals grouped closely together and constantly moving, waiting for two to get clear of the herd at the same time was futile. The caribou were approaching 100 yards when Mike said he had a clear shot, and I told him to take it.

The report of his shot, deadened by the Banish Backcountry suppressor on his rifle, seemed to confuse the caribou more than spook them. A few seconds after Mike squeezed the trigger, the caribou he had picked from the herd toppled to the ground. A few seconds after that, the animals spotted us and ran about 200 yards, stopping in a bunch. When I noticed a nice one standing alone toward the back of the herd, I took the shot. Moments later, Mike and I each had a caribou lying on the soggy tundra.



The author took his caribou with a Savage 110 Ultralite in .308 Win. equipped with a Banish Backcountry from Silencer Central.

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A WEIGHTY MATTER

"Whose stupid idea was it to pack out in one trip?" I ask Mark, trying to make a joke through gritted teeth. "Can you help me up again?"

This is probably the fifth time I've made the request. Mike and I have decided to take all the meat, the cape and the antlers of each animal all at once. He's packing his caribou, and I'm packing mine. We figured it was about 2 miles to the beach from where we had killed the caribou and we had three hours of daylight left. With the presence of bears heavy on our minds, neither of us wanted to return to the kill site in the dark. Right now, though, I'm thinking it may not have been such a terrible risk.

I have no idea how much the load weighs, but I know I can't stand on my own. Mark crawls over, hugs my pack, leans into it with his shoulder and bears part of the weight till I get my feet under me. I would have never made it this far if not for his assistance and the pair of trekking poles that keep me from falling over. Mike, on the other hand, more than a decade younger and used



Standing up was the toughest part of the packout. The Kuiu Pro 3600 pack handled the load of caribou better than the hunter carrying it.

MARK WEBB/MURRAY ROAD

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New Libido-Powering Pill Helps Men Enjoy Long-Lasting Intimacy - At Any Age

Men across America are raving about a newly enhanced potency supplement that helps achieve healthy blood flow on demand

After age 40, it's common knowledge that performance begins to decline in many men. However, a new, performance empowering pill is showing that any relatively healthy man can now enjoy long-lasting, and frequent intimacy – at any age.

This doctor-designed formula, created by leading anti-aging expert Dr. Al Sears, has already helped men overcome low and sinking libido -- and has recently undergone a potency-enhancing update – with remarkable new results.

When the first pill -- **Primal Max Black** -- was first released, it quickly became a top-selling men's performance helper, promoting intimacy across America.

It worked by supporting healthy testosterone levels. However, Dr. Sears soon realized that this isn't the only challenge men face with performance. That's when he turned his attention to blood flow.

And this became **Primal Max Red**.

PROBLEM IS, RESULTS ARE MORE MECHANICAL THAN HORMONAL

Truth is, once blood flow slows down for men, no matter how exciting it is, it won't be enough without the necessary amount…

So enjoying intimacy without healthy blood flow becomes difficult for most men.

Luckily, a Nobel prize-winning scientist discovered the simple answer to help support performance strength and confidence -- by boosting vital blood flow -- and enhancing this essential performance function.

Using this landmark Nobel Prize as its basis, **Primal Max Red** enhanced healthy blood flow for untold millions of men around the world with the use of strong nitric oxide boosters.

While **Primal Max Black** helped maintain optimal testosterone, **Primal Max Red** tackles a lesser-known challenge.

Director, Al Sears MD, who has authored over 500 scientific papers and has appeared on more than 50 media outlets including ABC News, CNN, ESPN, Discovery, National Geographic, Lifetime, and many more say, *"Less than optimal blood flow can be part of a huge problem that affects a lot of men. And it needed to be addressed once and for all, so men would not dwell on it. Then, once we optimized it and had a great deal of success, we set out to see if we could do even better."*

The former formula had excellent results. However, new research showed that for even faster, anytime, anywhere results, increasing the dose of a key compound was needed.

So, one of the three nitric oxide boosters in the new **Primal Max Red**, L-Citrulline, was clinically boosted to 9000 mg, and the results were astounding. Which is no surprise considering that 5000 mg is considered a "normal amount" -- giving the new version nearly doubled the blood flow boosting power.

Men who had previously been unsure about their power and stamina were overjoyed to be back to their old selves and to get and maintain a healthy bloodflow when they needed it.



A new discovery that increases nitric oxide availability was recently proven to boost blood flow 275% - resulting in improved performance.

BETTER BLOOD FLOW, STRONGER RESULTS

The best way to promote healthy blood flow throughout the body is with the use of **Primal Max Red**. By using it, when exciting signals leave the brain, blood flows much faster like it used to.

This critical action is how men across the country are enjoying full and satisfying performance at any age. No need to bother with testosterone-boosting shots, blue pills, or shady capsules that have no effect.

Primal Max Red can effectively promote healthy blood flow that most men can use for maximum intimacy. This is leading to more greater capacity and satisfaction, coupled with long-lasting performance.

"There was a time when men had little control when it came to boosting their blood flow," Dr. Sears said. "But science has come a long way in recent years. And now, with the creation of nitric oxide-boosting **Primal Max Red**, men can perform better than ever, and enjoy intimacy at any age."

Now for men across America, it's much easier to stay at their performance peak as they get older.

HOW TO GET PRIMAL MAX RED (AND FREE PRIMAL MAX BLACK):

To secure free bottles of **Primal Max Black** and get the hot, new **Primal Max Red** formula, buyers should contact the Sears Health Hotline at **1-800-276-6109** TODAY. "It's not available in retail stores yet," says Dr. Sears. "The Hotline allows us to ship directly to the customer." Dr. Sears feels so strongly about **Primal Max**, all orders are backed by a 100% money-back guarantee. "Just send me back the bottle and any unused product within 90 days from purchase date, and I'll send you all your money back."

Call NOW at **1-800-276-6109** to secure your supply of **Primal Max Red** and free bottles of **Primal Max Black**. Use Promo Code **PMAXGF923** when you call. Lines are frequently busy, but all calls will be answered!

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to doing nearly impossible things as an active-duty Airborne Ranger, seems to be almost enjoying the struggle—if it's a struggle for him at all. He has gone on ahead and is now out of sight, swallowed by the folds in the terrain and the alders—and hopefully not by a bear.

I go another 200 yards or so and flop over on my side. Now off the hill where I had last rested, the footing is trickier at this lower elevation. Tussocks of grass require stepping up, checking my balance, bracing with the poles and stepping down. Sometimes I slide off a tussock and nearly topple. Twice my knees bend in odd positions.

This continues for another 45 minutes, and now it is full-on dark. I watch the beam from Mike's headlamp disappear around the last hill that borders the beach. He's made it.

"Come on," says Mark after another break that's much too short. "It's not that far now."

"Sure seems like it," I reply.

"We'll be there in half an hour."

"You're lying."

"Maybe, but it sounds good."



Twelve-foot tides left the boats grounded for part of the day, but hunters returning late had to wade through thigh-deep water.

MARK WEBB/MURRAY ROAD

Turns out that Mark has made a pretty good guess, but the last 50 yards to the beach is a special treat that slows us even more. Our path brings us to a shallow pond surrounded by dozens of logs that have washed into the depression on a huge tide. They are old and slick, and we must either make our way over and around them, side-hilling above the pond, or wade through the water not knowing what obstacles lie hidden underneath. We choose the former. It may be the lesser of the two evils, but it's still evil.

I am as ecstatic to hit the beach as I was when I shot the caribou nearly four hours ago. Soon Mark and I are back on the boat, with dry clothes and a hot meal making the trek seem like it wasn't that bad. But when I try to move my still-loaded pack to the spot in the back of the boat designated for hanging meat, I realize it's a small miracle that we aren't still lying out there among the soaked tussocks and alders.

LIGHTER LOAD

After the forced march I sleep in, enjoying the luxury of having a foam mattress on my bunk. When I look out the window, I see the tide has left us on dry ground. It's no cause for alarm, as 12- to 14-foot tides are common on this



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part of the island. The water will return soon enough and float the boat.

Breakfast is eggs and fresh halibut, which Mike caught two days earlier during the boat ride to our hunting spot. He cranked the 60-pound fish up through more than 200 feet of water. Kodiak provides bounties of all kinds, but almost none come easily. Mark and I spend the day around the boats, shooting photos and video, drying out clothing and reorganizing gear. The boats are equipped with heaters and fans in the sleeping quarters, which are a necessity in a land inundated with water.

With a full day of rest, I'm up early the third morning to join Kevin Jarnagin and cameraman Don Lagarde in pursuit of a blacktail buck. We spend most of the day hiking and glassing, seeing several bucks but none large enough to get us excited. It's past 2 o'clock in the afternoon when Kevin spots a buck that warrants a closer look. The deer is bedded on a distant hillside near a patch of alders, and its long second points have our interest. We quickly hike down a hill and around another until we're within 250 yards of the buck. Try as we might, though, we cannot get a good look. Most of the buck's body is in the open, but the alders obscure much of his rack.

Kevin tagged a big-bodied buck yesterday, and he offers me the shot if I want to take it. I accept, but I'm in no hurry to kill a buck and want to make sure the one lying on the hillside is a good representative of the area. We come up



Capt. Gabe Linegar fries fresh chunks of halibut on the covered deck of the boat.



It took most of the day for the author and his hunting partners to find this buck, but they arrived back at the beach before nightfall.

with a plan that might allow us to make that call. I'll stay in the prone position with my rifle trained on the buck while Kevin slides down the hill to get a different angle with his bino. If the buck is a shooter, he'll signal. It might work. It might also blow the buck out of his bed before either of us gets a better look.

I nestle the rifle into my pack and steady the crosshair on the front half of the buck's shoulder to allow for the angle. The Burris scope is dialed for the range. All I need is the go-ahead. It comes from Don, who has stayed with me to watch for Kevin's signal so I could keep my eyes on the buck.

"Kevin's waving," says Don. "I think he wants you to shoot."

"You sure?" I ask. I take a quick glance down the hillside, and the answer is obvious. I can see Kevin mouthing "SHOOT!" more than 50 yards away.

At the bullet's impact, the buck makes one lunge and rolls into the alders below him. He's dead not 10 feet from his bed, and we drag him downhill to quarter him for the pack out. It's late in the afternoon when we finish, Don standing guard for bears while Kevin and I share the duty of breaking down the deer. We split the quarters between us for the hike out. The sun hasn't quite set when we reach the final descent to the beach, and this time I feel much lighter on my feet carrying a piece of Kodiak Island on my back. G&F

KEVIN JARNAGIN (BOTTOM); ADAM HEGGENSTALLER (TOP)



Actual size is 38.1 mm

New for 2023–the Morgan Silver Dollar Is BACK!

99.9% Silver, Legal Tender, Extremely Limited Availability!

The Morgan Silver Dollar—originally minted from 1878 to 1904, then again in 1921—is the most popular vintage Silver Dollar in the world. Coin experts estimate that as few as 15% of all vintage Morgans still exist, due to the ravages of time, along with mass-meltings by the U.S. Government.

The entire market was thrilled when the U.S. Mint brought the Morgan Silver Dollar back in 2021, in honor of the popular, vintage coin's 100th anniversary.

Legal Tender, Struck in 99.9% Fine Silver

The program was a huge success, and the relatively small mintage instantly sold out at the mint. Buyers loved the fact that these new coins were the first legal-tender Morgans in 100 years, and that they were struck in 99.9% fine silver—instead of the 90% silver/10% copper alloy of the originals.

But with only 175,000 coins struck, many buyers were left empty-handed, and frustrated by the instant sell-out. If you were able to acquire a 2021 for the 100th anniversary—congratulations!

Then—An Unplanned One-Year Hiatus

Then last year, the *entire market* was left empty-handed because—although these modern Morgans were intended to be an annual release—the U.S. Mint was caught off-guard by the global shortage of the silver blanks required to strike the coins, and cancelled the 2022 release! No silver? No Morgans!

NOW for 2023—Legal-Tender Morgan Silver Dollars Are Back. But Mintages Are Low!

Now this year, 99.9% silver, legal-tender Morgan Silver Dollars are once again available to silver buyers, Morgan enthusiasts and collectors—while they last! Though somewhat larger than last year, this year's 275,000 authorized mintage is still a crazy low number—especially when you consider all the pent-up anticipation and demand caused by the quick sell-out of the 2021 Morgans, and the fact the program was cancelled last year.

Very Limited. Don't Miss Out!

Add these bright, shiny, new legal-tender 2023 Morgan Silver Dollars, struck in 99.9% Silver, to your collection now! To secure yours, call 1-888-395-3219 right now, or scan the QR code below to order online, because these—WILL NOT LAST!

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PRECISION BOAT PERFORMANCE

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THE ZIPWAKE DYNAMIC TRIM-CONTROL SYSTEM OPTIMIZES A BOAT'S RIDE AND EFFICIENCY.

By Thomas Allen

Zipwake automatically adjusts to driving conditions, interior weight, speed, pitch and roll to provide a comfortable ride.

Hard-core anglers spend tens of thousands of dollars on electronics, rods and reels—not to mention a bait collection that would impress most tackle-shop owners—in the name of performance. Whether it be sonar that helps them more easily find fish or a scientifically developed lure with a look, action and feel that makes it difficult to distinguish from the real thing, the most devoted anglers are constantly on the lookout for the latest advancements.

Of course, dedicated anglers' boats are among the most expensive investments of their lifetimes. Many spend more than a little extra money to get top performance out of their rigs. As the multi-species fishing boat increases in popularity, tackle collections grow and so does the need for cutting-edge chart plotters and other accessories. That in turn means more battery requirements to power these items.

What do each of these things have in common? Weight. And weight affects performance.

The Swedish-built Zipwake (zipwake.com) is an interceptor-based dynamic trim-control system designed to sense weight and running displacement, and automatically adjust to maximize boat performance. If a rig lists one way or another, the built-in gyro in the Zipwake system senses the imbalance and corrects the ride automatically. Unlike standard trim tabs where a hydraulic arm adjusts a small platform up and down in the water to achieve the desired ride, the low-profile Zipwake interceptor system simply creates lift by sliding the blade deeper into the water directly beneath the boat on the same plane as the transom.



ZIPWAKE S SERIES INTERCEPTORS AND CONTROL PANEL

"The standard 300-S kit is perfect for fiberglass or aluminum multi-species fishing boats, and it features one 12-inch

COURTESY OF ZIPWAKE (2)

interceptor installed on either side of the boat's transom base," explains Jamie Simmons, Zipwake product manager. "It's a fully automatic system that not only adjusts to pitch and roll, but also features a built-in accelerometer, GPS and gyro sensor. In other words, it does all the calculations on the fly to create the most comfortable ride possible."

Simmons notes that all the boat operator needs to do is input the boat's length, beam and displacement, and the unit will calculate a "pitch curve" throughout the boat's entire throttle range. That means the unit knows how much of the interceptor's blade needs to be in the water while under countless driving scenarios.

"Not only does it maximize efficiency during the hole shot and provide adequate lift generation, but it also accounts for interior weight offsets while the boat is on plane to provide a level ride," he says. "The Zipwake system will automatically adjust to numbers of driving maneuvers to create the most level and stable ride possible, including sharp turns while at speed. The gyro senses when it's off-center and applies different blade positions for an instant change and a perfect ride."

Simmons points out that while the system is automatic and basically hands-off, anglers can adjust it manually to perfect the ride in any condition. Not only does the Zipwake dynamic trim control create a comfortable ride, but it also maximizes fuel efficiency and reduces stress to the drive components, adding life to the rig.

Zipwake offers the system in two product lines to cover a wide range of boats. Most anglers will find the S Series, which is made for boats up to 50 feet long and speeds of up to 60 knots, most applicable. The E Series is designed for larger boats up to 100 feet long. A complete S Series system starts at about $2,700 and includes one pair of interceptors, a distribution unit that supplies the system with power, and either a standalone control panel or an integrator module to seamlessly connect the system to a boat's multifunction display.

It's a simple fact that getting the most performance out of a boat requires investing in top electronics and gear. Each angler has a different budget, of course, but the Zipwake trim-control system is an affordable add-on that makes a real difference on the water. Zipwake will not only impress and assist anglers, but also make boats happier, too. G&F







BY JEFF JOHNSTON

THE ART OF THE ZERO

EXPERT SHOOTING ADVICE DEPENDS ON THE EXPERT.

Deer season was still a few weeks out when Shane asked his father if they could shoot their rifles. He'd saved his money to buy a box of Federal Premium ammo for his .308, and he wanted to check the gun's zero. Shane's father liked to shoot, too, and so they loaded up a portable shooting bench, their rifles, ammo and targets before driving to a makeshift range behind a pond dam.

"I read some articles that explained why zeroing 3 inches high at 100 yards is best," said Shane, matter of factly. "I'm going with that this year."

"Why?" asked his father.

"So I can hold on the target from 0 to about 265 yards and hit it without adjusting the scope."

"Yeah, I've heard of that—it's called maximum point-blank range—but let me ask you a question."

"Shoot," said Shane, giggling at his own pun.

"What's the farthest shot you or I have ever taken on a deer where we hunt?"

"*Hmmm*, let me think," said Shane. "A couple years ago I shot that 8-pointer a pretty good way through the woods."

"How far was it?" asked Shane's father.

"Maybe 60?"

"Try about 40. I know because I've shot a few from that stand. But let's call it 50 just to be fair."

"OK, 50. Why?"

"Because the farthest shot I've ever taken over all these years of hunting the oak woods was about 70. But my average I figure is about 35. So I'm sighting in at 35."

"All the magazines say either 100 or 3 inches high at 100," Shane reminded him.

"That works for some hunters," said his father, "but I don't see why you wouldn't zero your rifle for the range you'll most likely shoot at."

"I see your point," said Shane, "but I still think I'm going to shoot some three-shot groups at 100 yards."

"I've got another question for you," said Shane's father. "Why three-shot groups when it's your first shot, from a cold bore, that matters?"

"Well," said Shane, "I want to see what my rifle can do with good ammo."

"What you can do with your rifle is also good to know."

Shane began setting up sandbags on top of the shooting bench.

"Shane, have you ever seen a shooting bench and sandbags in the woods where you hunt?"

"Not that I recall," replied Shane, trying to figure out what his father was up to now.

"So why would you shoot from them for practice?"

"I don't know, Dad," said Shane. "I'm just doing what the experts in the magazines say I should do."

"Do you not think I'm an expert, son? I've only been hunting deer and shooting for about 50 years, you know."

"You're not an expert—you're my dad!" said Shane, jokingly. "How come you're asking me so many questions today anyway?"

"I just want you to think for yourself sometimes," said his father. "Here's one more: Do you know at what distance Europeans zero their rifles?"

"Let me guess," replied Shane, faking concentration. "35 yards?"

"Nah, 100 meters," said his father. "You know, the metric system."

"Oh, yeah," said Shane as he smiled and snugged down his hearing protection before racking a round into his rifle's chamber. "So how many yards is that, Dad?"

"109 point 361," said Shane's father with a wink. "I read it in a textbook when I was about your age and wondering how to best zero my rifle." G&F



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