HOW THE **LATEST STRAIGHT-WALL CARTRIDGES** STACK UP, P. 10



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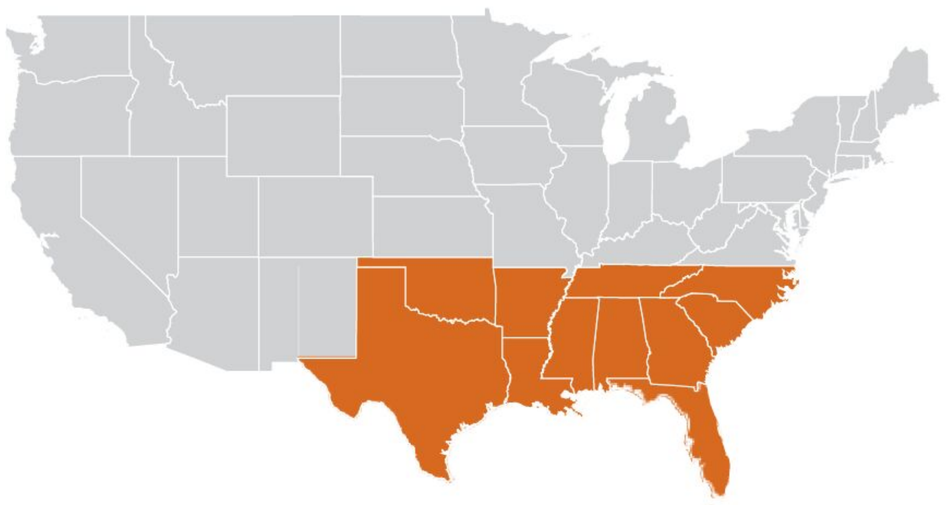
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STEVEN RINELLA

GAME & FISH SOUTH
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CONTENTS
OCTOBER 2023

38

HOW-TO

38 SCENT-SATIONAL
Do scented baits help or hurt your chances of catching bass? We dive into the scientific research.
By Craig Buddo

44 BLUE STREAKS
The evasive marsh rabbit, or bluetail, offers adventurous hunters fast shooting and tasty table fare.
By Mike Marsh

48 THE SCOOP ON SIGN
The right way to hunt whitetail scrapes and rubs.
By Bob Robb

54 DINNER-BELL BUSHYTAILS
Zero in on the foods that attract squirrels all season long.
By David Johnson



48



60

32 AROUND THE SOUTH
Tempt a trout, land a lunker and poke a porker this month.
By Colin Moore

FIELD SKILLS

34 METAL MANIA
When a cold front knocks out the bass bite, these baits revive it.
By Colin Moore

DESTINATIONS

60 CRYSTAL CLEAR
This Florida river destination turns back time for anglers searching for incredible action in the salt.
By Larry Larsen

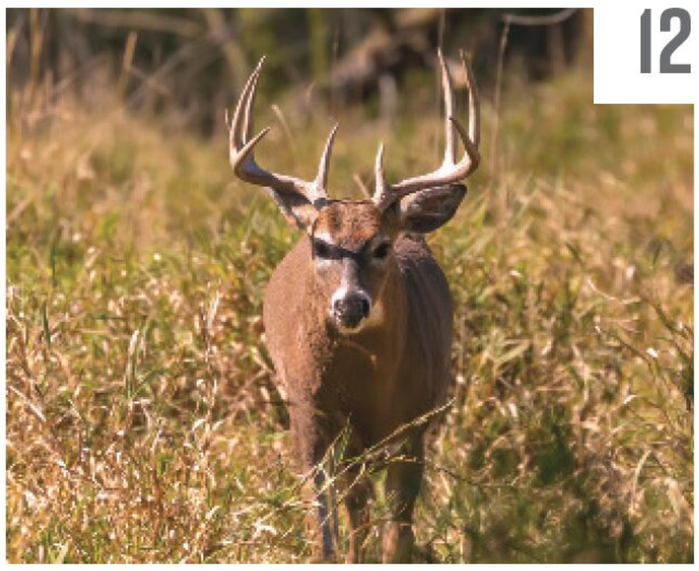
JESSICA HAYDAHL RICHARDSON (TOP); RYAN YODER (BOTTOM LEFT); LARRY LARSEN (BOTTOM RIGHT)

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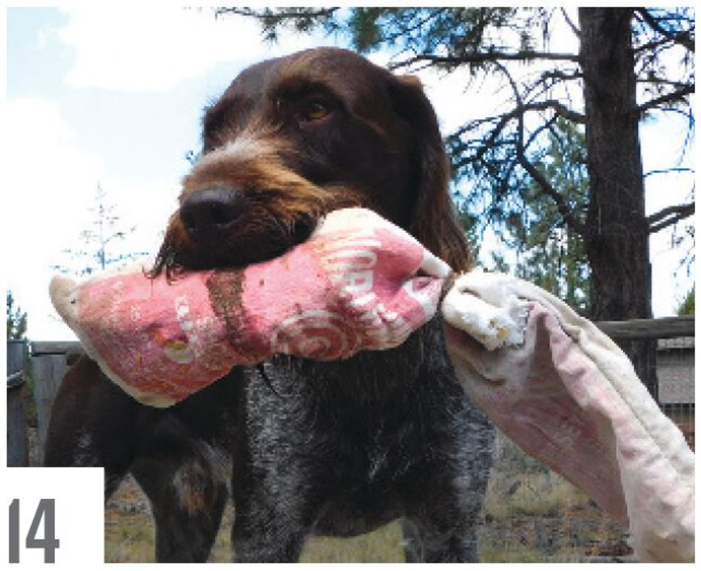
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10



12



14



18

DEPARTMENTS

10 SHOOTING
How do today's straight-wall rifle cartridges designed for deer hunting compare to the classics?
By Richard Mann

12 BOWHUNTING
Stop focusing on the November rut and instead take advantage of lower pressure in October.
By Tony Hansen

14 DO-IT-YOURSELF
Make a better training dummy for your dog with items you probably already have lying around the house.
By Scott Linden

16 CONSERVATION
The Endangered Species Act, which turns 50 this year, can both help and hinder wildlife management.
By Andrew McKean

FEATURES

18 THE STATUS OF SHIRAS
While the Shiras moose may not be as large as its cousins to the north, it is still one big animal. Come along as one moose hunter recounts his brushes with bulls in the Rocky Mountains over the years and offers insight into their pursuit today.
By Craig Boddington

66 CARRYING THE DAY
On Alaska's Kodiak Island, it takes more than a punched tag to define success. The hunt isn't over until the packout is finished, and reaching camp with a full load is typically the toughest part of the adventure.
By Adam Heggenstaller

GEAR

78 ZIPWAKE TRIM CONTROL
Want a better-handling boat? This ingenious system automatically adjusts lift depending on a host of variables to ensure the smoothest, not to mention the most efficient, ride on the water.
By Thomas Allen

IN EVERY ISSUE

04 EDITOR'S LETTER
08 MOON TIMES
80 RITES



66

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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The Regional Outdoor Guide

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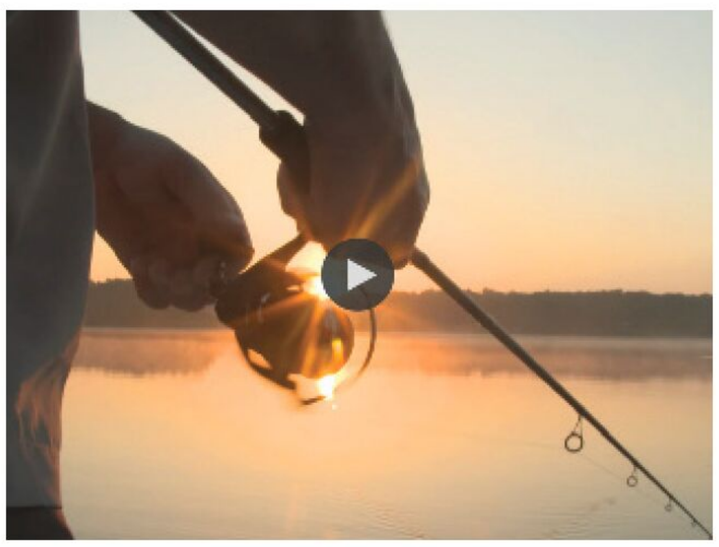
HUNTING HELP

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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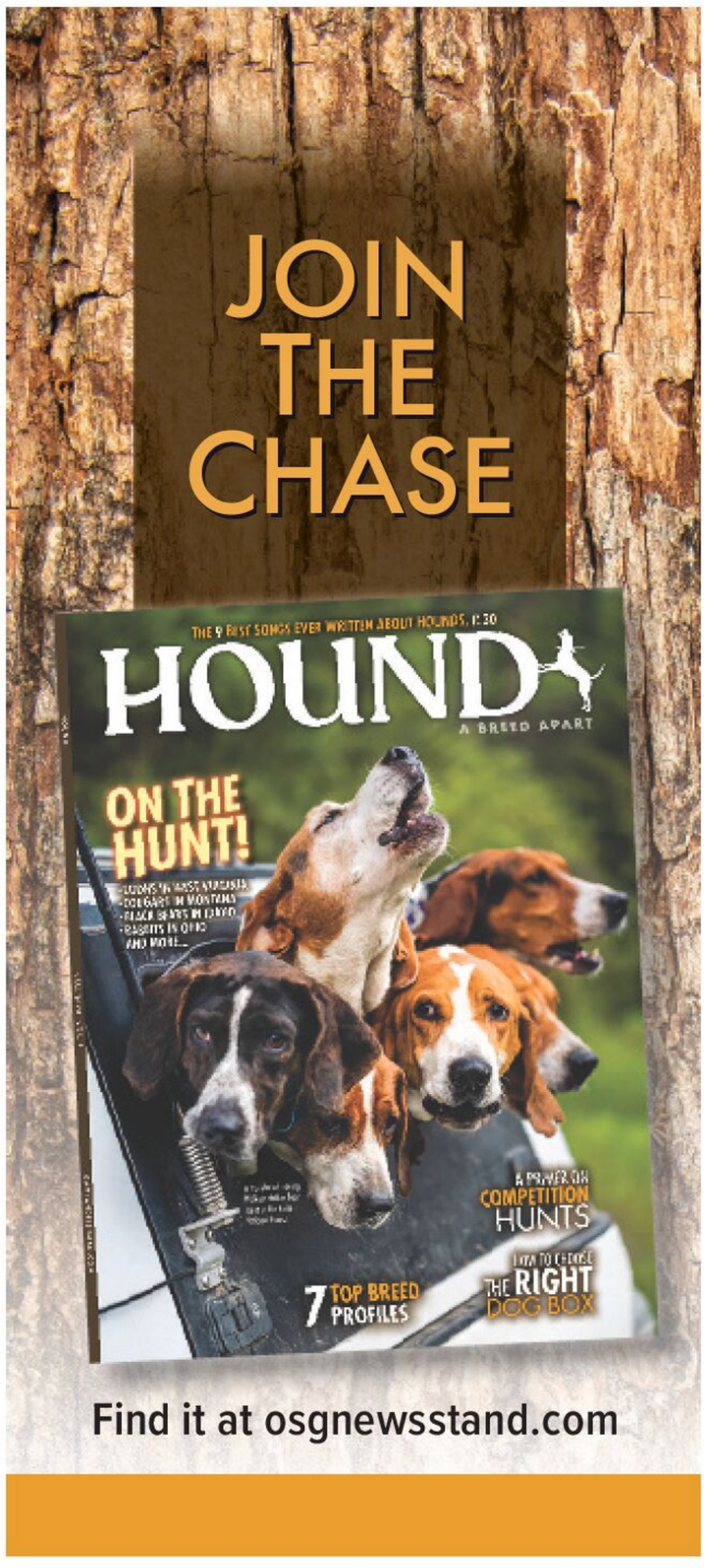


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17 am 2:06 to 4:06 / pm 2:30 to 4:30	18 am 2:54 to 4:54 / pm 3:18 to 5:18	19 am 3:42 to 5:42 / pm 4:06 to 6:06	20 am 4:30 to 6:30 / pm 4:54 to 6:54	21 FIRST Q am 5:18 to 7:18 / pm 5:42 to 7:42	22 am 6:06 to 8:06 / pm 6:30 to 8:30	23 am 6:54 to 8:54 / 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

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			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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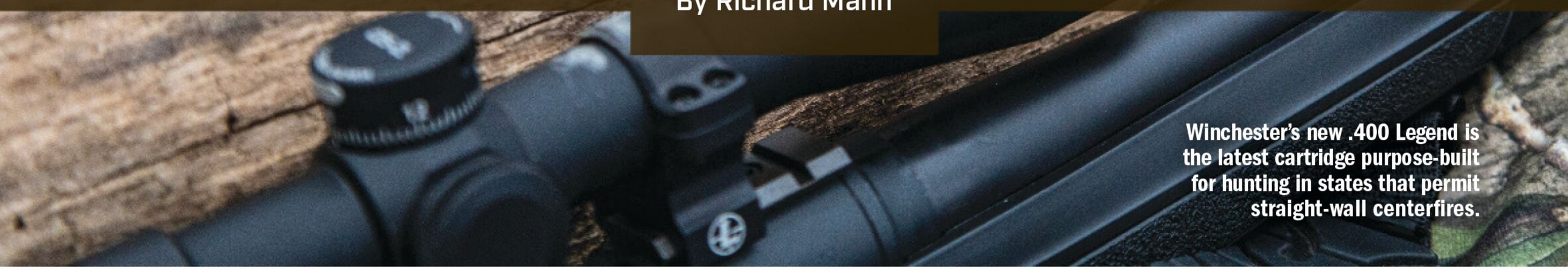
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STRAIGHT-WALL STRAIGHT TALK

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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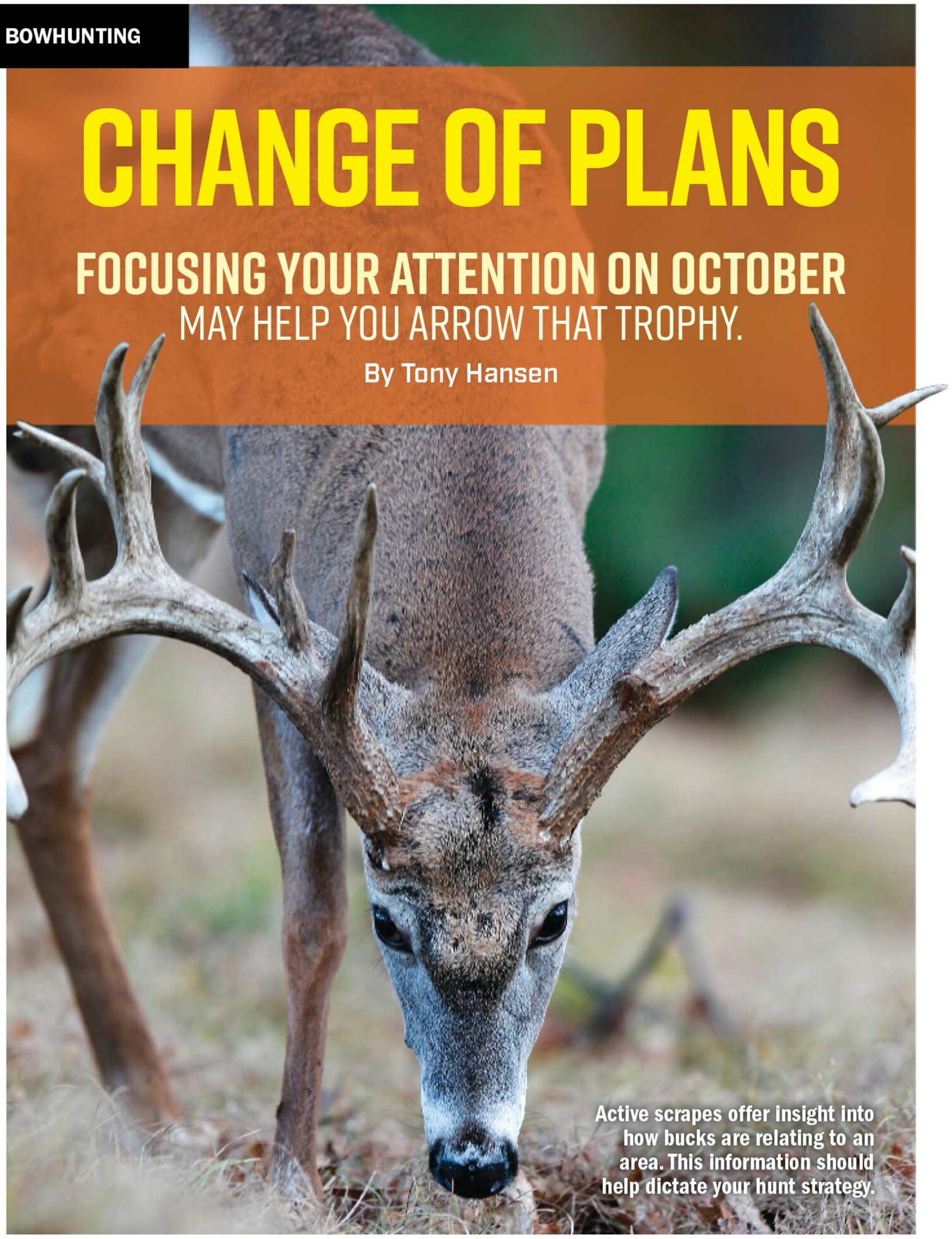
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CHANGE OF PLANS

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.

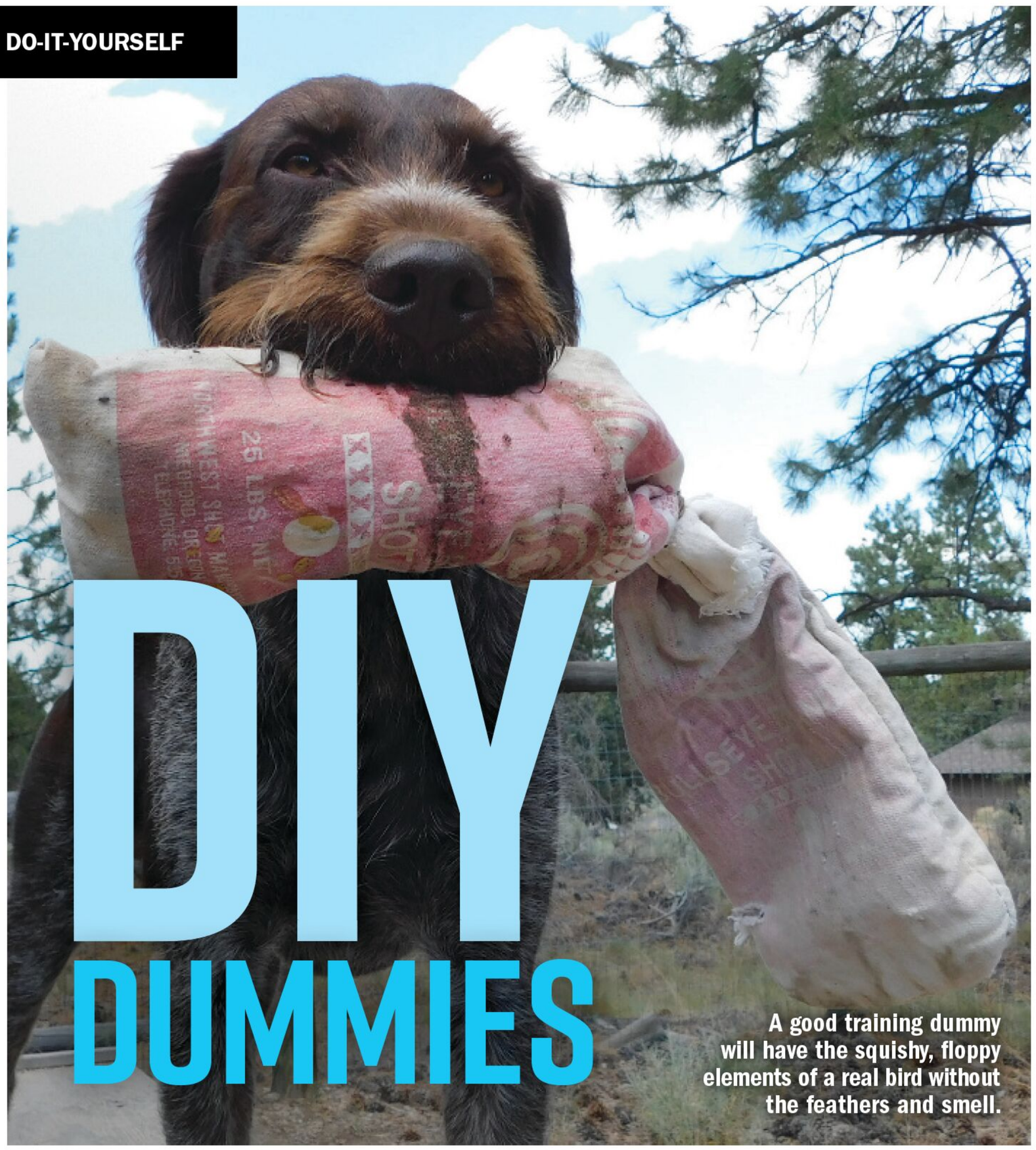
Turning my focus to active October scrapes has proven very productive for me. I know when I locate an area of active scrapes that has reduced (or none) hunting pressure I'm in the game. While my system works, it's not infallible.

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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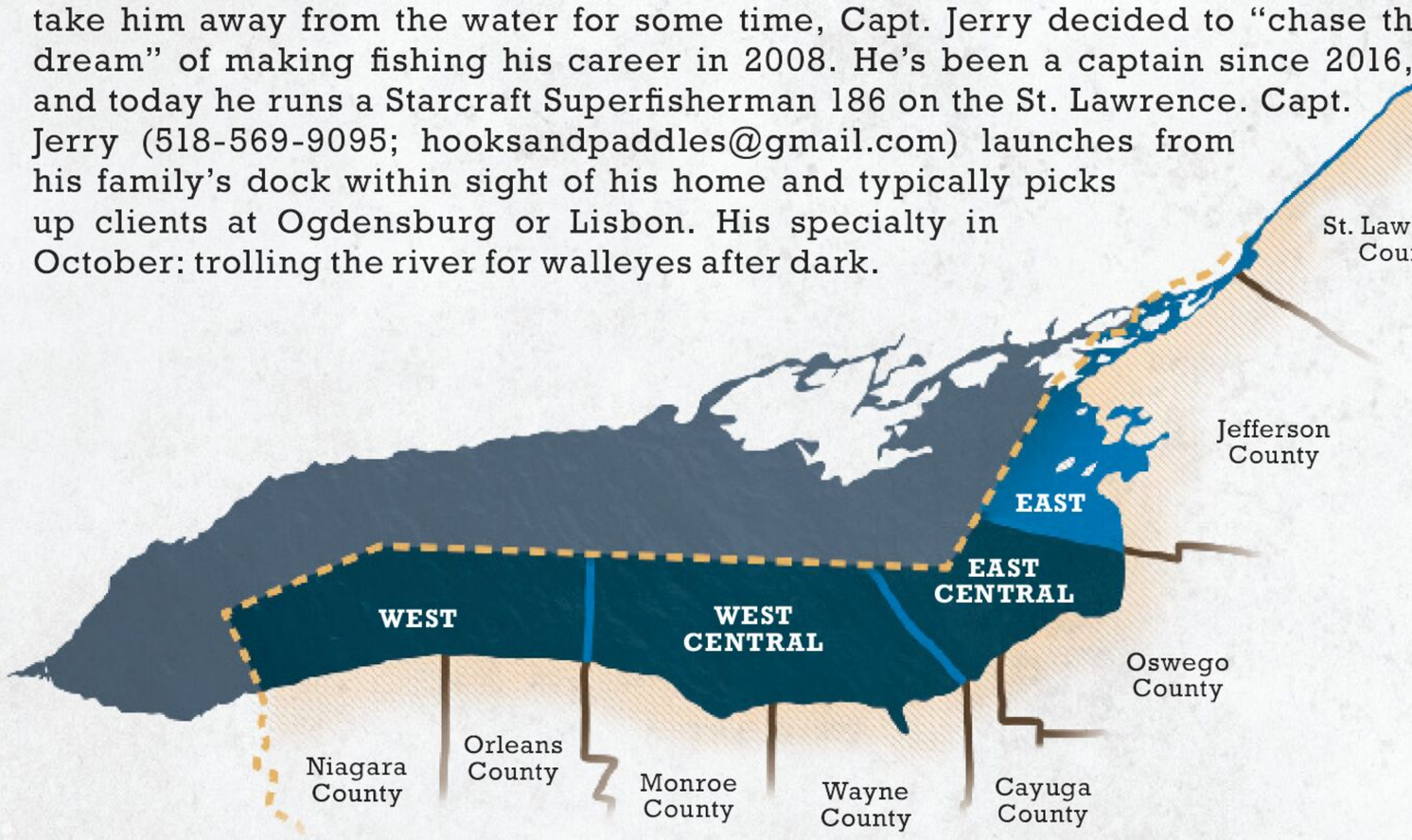
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Growing up on the St. Lawrence River near Ogdensburg, N.Y., Capt. Jerry Kroeger II spent his childhood fishing. He still lives on the river, near the spot where he caught a 22-pound muskie from a rowboat when he was 10 years old. That moment would 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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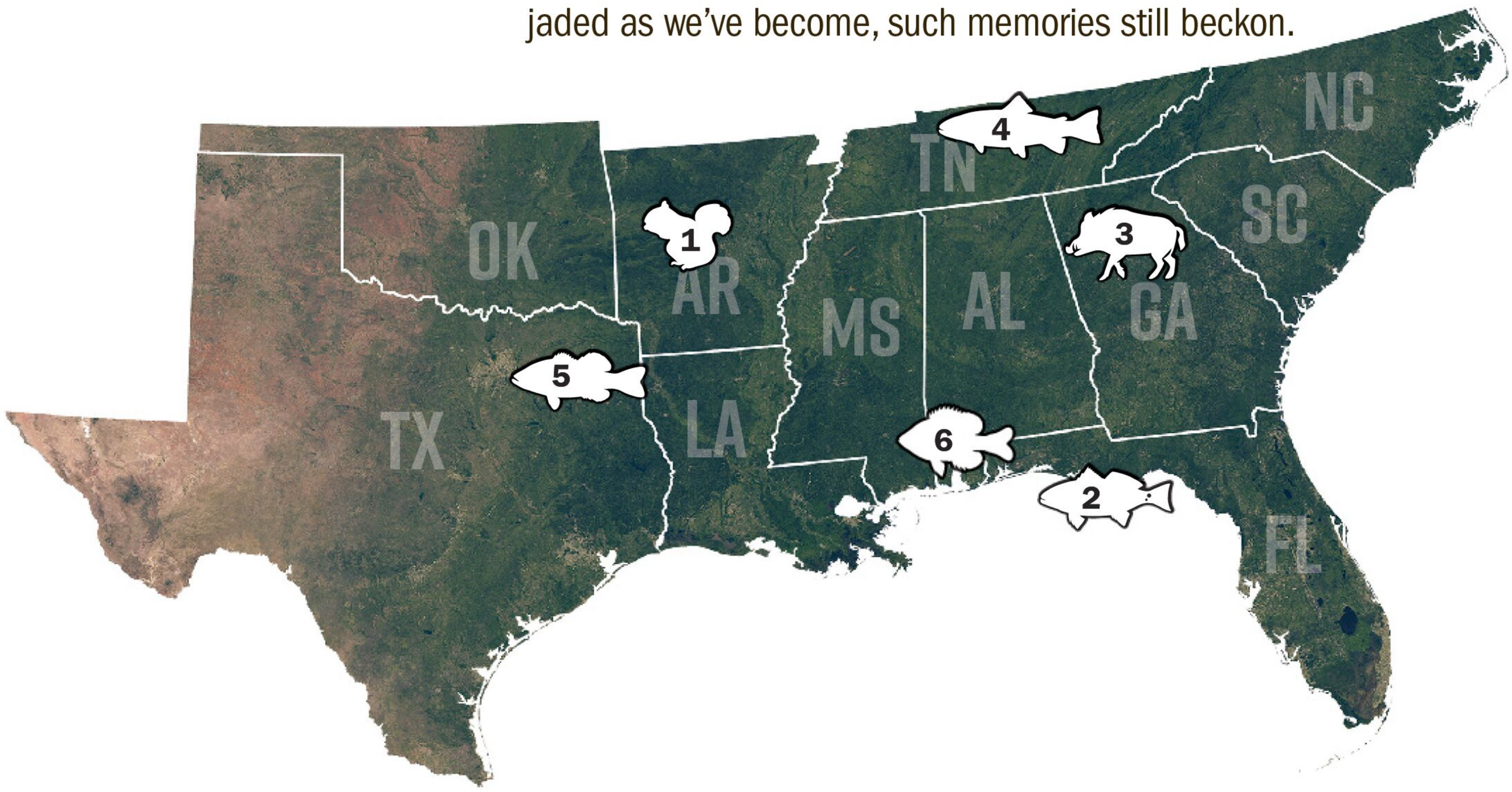
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AROUND THE SOUTH

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

By Colin Moore

October marks the opening of squirrel season in many Southern states. With all of the electronic distractions today, it's hard for many youngsters to imagine that these humble critters are what initiated most of us into the hunt game. It wasn't so long ago that squirrel hunting engendered the same sort of anticipation as whitetail and turkey seasons. There's something alluring about the sound of hickory nut cuttings sprinkling the forest floor in an otherwise quiet woods, or the swish of a gray squirrel jumping from one tree to the next in the twilight of a chilly autumn morning. For many of us, even as jaded as we've become, such memories still beckon.



1

ARKIE WMA EXPANSION

Arkansas small-game hunters who frequent the Maumelle River Wildlife Management Area northwest of Little Rock will have more land to stalk this year. The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission amended its 99-year lease agreement with Central Arkansas Water to expand the size of the WMA, where small-game hunting is allowed. Prior to the new agreement, small-game hunters could access only 1,279 acres. Now they'll have an additional 6,864 acres, most of which is borderlands that surround 8,900-acre Lake Maumelle. For more information on hunting and fishing opportunities there, visit agfc.com.

2

PANHANDLE REDS

Fall weather signals the start of the bull redfish season along the region's beaches and in its estuaries and bays. Pensacola Bay and its pass into the northern Gulf offers some of the finest drum fishing to be had. Cool nights and incoming tides are favored by redfish regulars, whether they're fishing from an anchored boat over a deep-water shelf or on the beach with surf-fishing gear. The waters around St. George Island near Apalachicola, Padre Island and Galveston Bay in Texas and the Mobile Bay system in Alabama are other favorites. The annual redfish run hits its peak in November.



SHUTTERSTOCK (3)

3

PEACHY PORKERS

For hunters who want to hone their shooting skills before gun deer season kicks in, Georgia's abundant supply of wild hogs offers a lot of opportunity. The 96,500-acre Cohutta WMA in northwest Georgia, the Altamaha WMA on the coast, the Oaky Woods and Ocmulgee WMAs in the Ocmulgee River bottoms and any of the WMAs in the southwest corner of the state are rated high among hog hunters. In some WMAs where deer season overlaps with hog season, hunters will get a crack at a venison-pork combo. A valid hunting license is required. For more information, visit georgiawildlife.com.



4

TENNESSEE URBAN TROUT

Think of Tennessee trout fishing and you're likely to visualize the 845 miles of streams in the state's eastern mountains. But that's not how the people who live near the Shelby Park rivers and lakes in Nashville or Fountain City Lake in North Knoxville see it. While the trout fishing is plenty good now in Volunteer State, it really gets hot next month when the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency will release thousands of rainbow trout in park waters, and they're fair game for bank fishermen. At Shelby Park's Lake Sevier (nashville.gov), the daily limit is seven; at North Knoxville's Fountain City Lake (gofishtennessee.com), it's five per day. A valid fishing license and trout stamp are required.

5

SCHOOLS ARE IN

Fall is a time when many Texas anglers trade their rods for bows, opening an abundance of unpressured bass opportunities for the diehards. Texas' 27,000-plus acre Lake Fork is heating up as schools of big shad are being hammered by equally large schools of big bass. Both trophy fish and big numbers can be caught now by focusing on humps, points, pond dams, roadbeds and ridges in 15 to 25 feet of water. Early morning topwaters excel, with walking baits like a Zara Spook drawing aggressive strikes from angry fish. If a cold front heads your way, don't worry, the bite will turn back on within 24 hours post-front.

6

DELTA PANFISH

Bream are starting their autumn feeding binge in the vast Mobile-Tensaw River Delta of south Alabama. Though bluegills and redears go for worms and crickets, grass shrimp are popular substitutes in the 260,000-acre fishery. The tiny crustaceans can be scooped out of aquatic grasses with long-handled, small-mesh dip nets or purchased from bait shops scattered around the Delta. Fish the shrimp under bobbers, or yo-yo them on long crappie poles or fly rods. Tie on a bream hook, then add a split-shot about a foot above it. Once the rig is baited, it's a matter of vertically fishing the many dock and bridge pilings, cypress trees and other natural cover.



Moving METAL

WHEN SUDDEN COLD SNAPS STUN BAITFISH, **DROP BASS A BLADE BAIT OR SPOON.**

By Colin Moore



Their profiles and ability to fish almost any depth—with either a vertical or horizontal presentation—make spoons and blades tough baits to beat during cold fronts.

With a few exceptions, the same lures that catch bass at other times of the year will produce in chilly autumn weather, too. However, metal lures can be particularly effective in the fall when sudden drops in temperature leave baitfish stunned and more susceptible to foraging bass. When bass are stoking up on baitfish, try blade baits like the Silver Buddy and spoons like the Hopkins Shorty. Anything that looks like a baitfish is fair game, especially if it appears to be distressed by a sudden cold front. Here are some important factors to consider when dropping metal to ravenous bass.

JIGGING SPOONS

Once cold weather has set in and baitfish become more susceptible to temperature swings, slow-motion strategies are called for. A vertical presentation is standard with spoons that mainly work in an up-and-down fashion. Slab spoons that weigh about 3/4 ounce are the average, but heavier spoons are more practical in deep water.

BLADE BAITS

Made of flattened metal with multiple rigging holes that change the lure's action depending on which one you tie your line to, blade baits such as the Heddon Sonar or SteelShad can either be fished vertically or retrieved horizontally like a lipless crankbait.

Typically, they have a tight, pronounced vibration when ripped upward. They are most effective when jigged in deep water along ledges or rock bluffs, when retrieved in a yo-yo fashion through suspended bass or when retrieved along flooded points and similar structure. If bass are aggressive, snapping or ripping the lure upward and then letting it flicker back slowly can draw jarring strikes.

FLUTTER SPOONS

Quarter- or 1/2-ounce spoons such as the Johnson Sprite or Nichols Lures Lake Fork in white, silver or shad variations usually are fished horizontally when a steady, wobbling retrieve produces best. One tried-and-true winter retrieve is to turn the reel handle quickly four or five times, then stop and let the spoon settle back for a few seconds, then repeat.

Often, the sudden movement triggers strikes. Sometimes bass want a lure that's moving vertically in slow motion. For example: If you're fishing in water that's 40 feet deep and your electronics show bass or structure at that depth, cast or drop the spoon that distance and let it wobble down to the fish on a controlled

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fall. Most strikes will come on the initial fall so pay attention. Use your rod tip to make the bait flutter and draw strikes.

GEAR UP

A 7-foot, medium- or heavy-action baitcasting rod is popular for fishing metal baits. The ideal action depends on how deep the water is and how much force is needed to set the hook. For casting blade baits and spoons, a medium-heavy spinning outfit will do.

Water depth is a key determining factor in the best line to use. Braided line in 12- to 20-pound test doesn't stretch and is the top choice when working baits and setting the hook in deep water (15 feet and deeper). Many anglers combine braid with a fluorocarbon leader, as the latter also has limited stretch. For other applications, a fluorocarbon or monofilament main line in 14- to 20-pound test is a good choice. Finish with a dependable swivel connector to guard against line twist.

WHERE TO FISH METAL

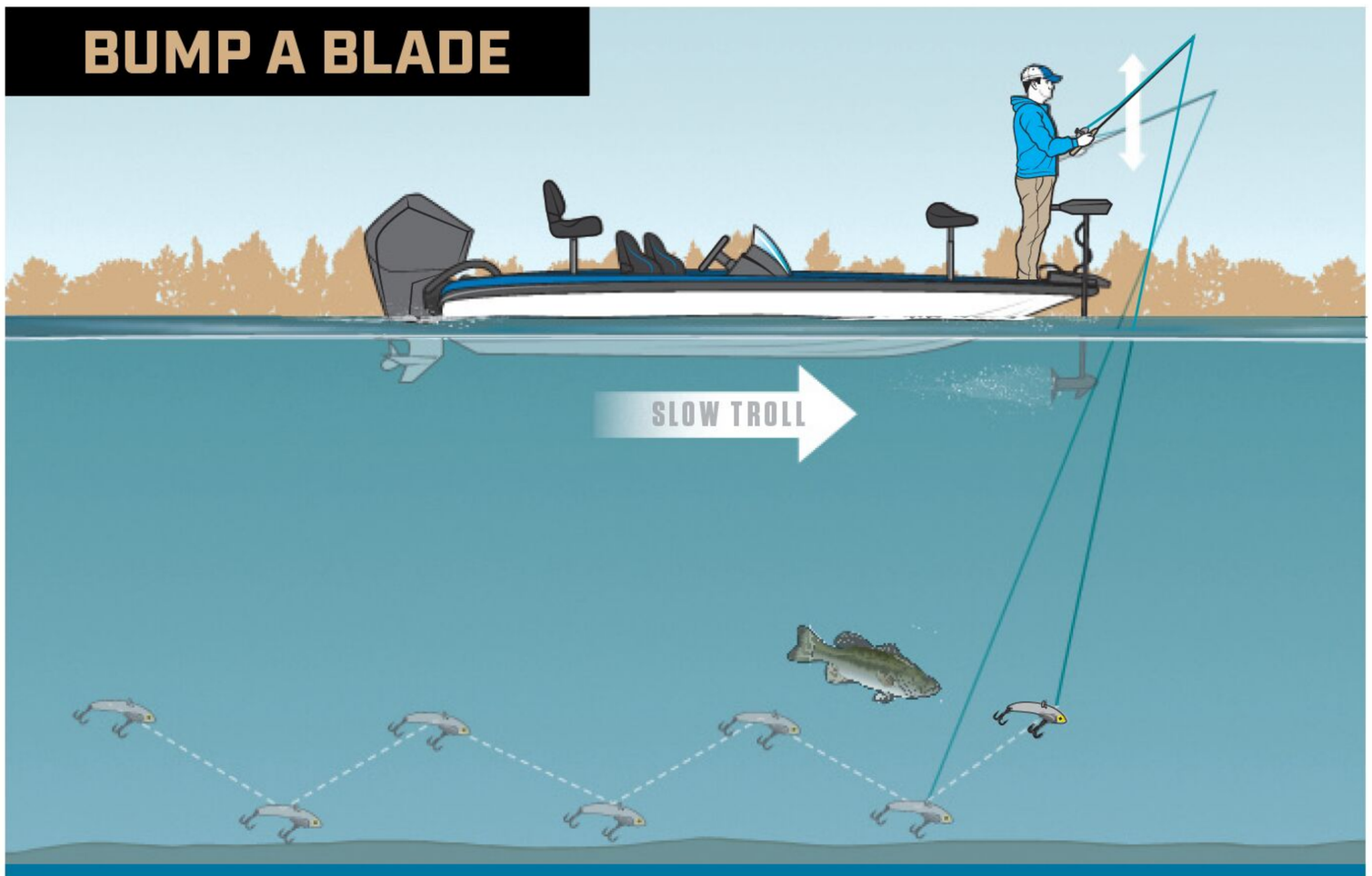
Metal baits are particularly effective when shad and herring move inshore and start to bunch up along the edges of flooded creeks, feeder rivers or in deep standing timber. As the water cools into the 40s and 50s, fish will be driven deeper.

Prime targets include flooded timber, transition structure, deep points wrapped in riprap, under or in front of floating docks, around bridge pilings and along rock bluffs, ledges and brush piles.

When baitfish are moving up creeks or during drawdowns, they use docks as waypoints. There's no one retrieve that works best. If fishing a lure horizontally, cast it out, let it sink to the bottom and then use a repetitive pump-and-fall retrieve. If fishing a jigging spoon or blade bait vertically under the boat, snap the lure up a few feet, then let it settle back down.

ON THE FALL

It's often difficult to detect a strike when a spoon or blade bait is falling. If there's slack in the line, the only indication of a strike might be when the spoon or blade bait stops falling or your line "ticks." Typically, bass are triggered by a falling lure. Being a line watcher helps detect strikes that might otherwise go unnoticed. As far as bait colors go, you can't go wrong with any shad pattern. G&F



Blade baits are one of the most productive cold-weather bass baits. Their unique, streamlined profile and keel weighting allows them to be cast extra-long distances. Additionally, their compact, shad-like shape mimics one of a bass' favorite forage species. When the bite turns tough and fish are difficult to locate, drop your bait down and troll slowly through water that has been productive previously. "Yo-yo" the bait by raising and lowering the rod tip. This presentation attracts fish at almost any depth in the water column. Allowing the bait to bump the bottom occasionally will add to its attraction. Most strikes come as the bait is falling.



Like their blade-bait cousins, spoons are perfectly suited for cold-front fishing. Their oblong shape and associated flash allow them to perfectly mimic many common baitfish species. A spoon's unique flutter presents bass with what they believe is a wounded or stunned baitfish. Working a spoon vertically affords you the ability to fish structure in a concentrated fashion. Once candidate fish-holding structure is located, position the boat over the target. Allow your spoon to fall on a semi-slack line. Pull the spoon upward with the rod tip and allow it to then free-fall back down. Often, it takes more than one "lift" to coax lethargic bass.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY PETER SUCHESHI

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Common SCENTS

DO SCENTED BAITS REALLY CATCH MORE BASS?

By Craig Buddo



Bass are predominantly sight feeders and rely on their vision to locate prey. However, their sense of smell often first alerts them to the presence of a nearby meal.

The debate about whether it's worth applying scent to bass lures and soft plastics has been raging for decades. Results from testing done by scientists and researchers vary depending on who is doing the research. Test-tank results often seem contradictory to actual on-the-water experiences. Mix in a bit of folklore and a sprinkling of overly optimistic marketing promotion, and you're left with a confusing, malodorous mist. Let's try to cut to the quick here.

DR. SCENT

Dr. Keith A. Jones, the former Director of the Berkley Fish Research Center literally wrote the book on the subject: "Knowing Bass: The Scientific Approach to Catching More Fish" (Lyons Press, 2002). Though unfortunately now out of print, the book is still the standard reference material for understanding the science behind bass senses and behavior, and how to use that information to improve bass fishing success—whether using Berkley products or not.

Dr. Jones, considered the top expert on fish olfaction, wrote in his Ph.D. dissertation at Texas A&M that there is a huge genetic diversity among gamefish. Bass are unique predators, and understanding how they use their senses to hunt is key to gaining confidence with scent.

It's well understood that bass are primarily sight feeders, but it's a big mistake to know that and then dismiss their sense of smell and taste. Smell, for example, is the sole function of their nostrils and is the only one of the bass' senses with a direct path to the brain, all others being processed to some extent. That alone should tell you it's important to them.

NEED TO FEED

Dr. Jones lays out in his book that bass are in a more neutral state when holding near cover or suspending. They aren't constantly scanning their surroundings looking for prey; they're powered down in something akin to a mental fog.

If a positive food scent washes into a bass' nostrils for a long enough period, in a strong enough concentration to separate itself from all the other scent in the water, it can begin to wake the bass from its idling state.

If you're now visualizing the bass pushing forward to sniff out the source of the scent trail like a bloodhound, you need a re-think. Scent in lakes and ponds doesn't disperse in anything like a straight line, it slowly blooms out and mushrooms and is pushed around by current. In addition, a bass' nostrils are only a small distance apart, making it difficult for them to locate smells directionally. They're also unable to gauge how recent or fresh a smell is.

Alerted to the possibility of a meal close by, they begin to wake from their torpor and then switch to their most developed sense—their acute eyesight. They scan the environment around them with their wide peripheral vision, looking for the possible food source. If the water is murky or dark, they'll use whatever combination of senses they can for location.

If the bass is able to lock onto the food item, it may simply accelerate towards it and strike, bypassing any other sensory assessment. Bass can be ferocious feeders, but they often proceed much more cautiously. It all depends on their hunger level or whether the prey item is slower moving or behaving erratically.

As it tracks its target, the bass will use all its senses, including smell, to analyze the attractiveness of the potential meal. If it doesn't pass the "smell test," the strike will frequently be called off. If it passes that test and doesn't trigger any other alarms, the bass will approach closer or make contact.

The taste system now kicks in. Humans only have taste buds on our tongues; bass have them on their lips, throughout their mouths, down their throat and even on their gills. The initial contact may only be a bump or very quick nip, or the item might be sucked loosely into the front of the mouth while it undergoes a more focused taste and "mouthfeel" test. Bass don't even need to make physical contact, as they can taste food in the literal sense from a short distance away, as water flows across the taste buds in the mouth and gills.

If everything checks out, the food item is taken into the mouth and passed to the last set of taste buds in the throat for a final sign-off before swallowing.



As a bass tracks a target—say a soft-plastic worm—it uses all of its senses to quickly analyze the potential prey.

COURTESY OF PURE FISHING (OPPOSITE); WINDIGO IMAGES (RIGHT)

If it fails either the mouth or throat taste test, a bass can eject the item within about a quarter of a second.

After attraction, the primary benefit of realistic scent and taste applied to a bass lure is that it encourages the bass to hold the bait in its mouth just that little bit longer.

GOTTA BE MEATY

Jones categorizes this smell-taste feeding sequence as arousal, attraction, assessment and acceptance. But what are the smells and tastes we can apply to our lures that are most likely to fool bass into following the path to acceptance and a successful hookset?

Logically, a baseline for any successful scent or flavor should be derived from the things that bass normally like to eat. Dr. Jones says in his book, "Bass are predators. They eat meat, mostly prey fish, crayfish and other aquatic prey, although as opportunistic feeders they will take just about any small animal that comes their way. As such, they savor a wide variety of meaty flavors, especially those high in protein."

Not on that list, note, is anything sweet, peppery or vegetable-based; no anise (licorice oil), no salt or garlic. That isn't to say those flavors can't provide a



Baits with realistic scent and taste encourage bass to not only strike, but also hold the lure longer, which leads to better hookup success.

SWEET SCENTS

These products promise to help you catch more fish.

Several companies add scent to their soft plastics or offer spray-on additives for masking and attraction. These include Big Bite Baits, Z-Man, SPRO and Bass Assassin among others. Here are a few products from companies that have taken a deep dive into the science of scent and bass attraction.

Berkley's PowerBait MaxScent (berkley-fishing.com) is incorporated into a wide range of its soft plastics, with the standout product being the Flatworm, now the company's best-selling softbait. Mark Sexton, the current head of Berkley's fish lab, says the design goal for MaxScent was to combine the best scent and flavor elements of PowerBait and Gulp! with advances in material science to maximize scent dispersion and taste/texture without sacrificing durability or ease of use.

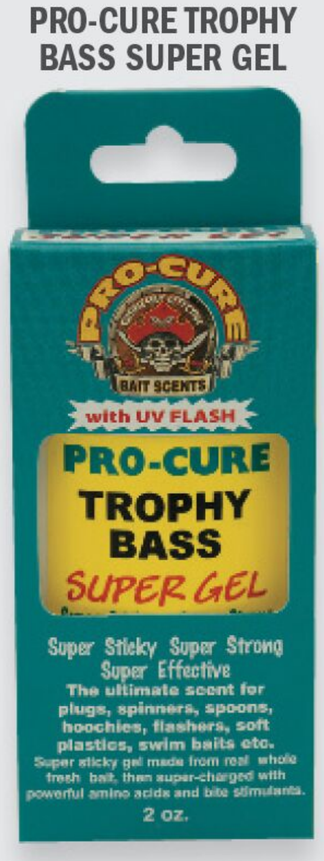
Pro-Cure (pro-cure.com) has spent 20 years developing successful products primarily for West Coast and Great Lakes salmon and trout anglers, though the company also offers scent products for largemouth and smallmouth bass. The scent products are mostly blends of natural food items developed in-house that have been tested extensively by a roster of pro anglers. **Trophy Bass Super Gel** came out in 2004 and is a mix of threadfin shad, crawfish, minnow (Tui chub) and nightcrawler.

Bass Assassin (bassassassin.com) uses a unique rendering process to produce natural, concentrated oils of prevalent bass forage species for its **Bang** spray. The special formulation is advertised to draw more strikes and make fish hold onto the bait longer than baits bot treated with an application of Bang.



BERKLEY POWERBAIT MAXSCENT FLATWORM

PRO-CURE TROPHY BASS SUPER GEL





BASS ASSASSIN BANG

COURTESY OF PURE FISHING (TOP)

FUEL FOR THE HUNT

- Naturally Smoked
- Tender and Delicious
- Great Source of Protein
- Clear View Package



OLD TRAPPER
SINCE 1969

WHAT'S YOUR BEEF?

valuable masking function, helping to neutralize otherwise repellant chemical and contaminant smells and tastes, but the science indicates they aren't effective "attractants."

This was studied at Berkley and more recently at Queen's University in Ontario, Canada, in the lab of Dr. Bruce Tufts, Professor of Fisheries and Conservation. Dr. Tufts' lab was contracted by American Baitworks to develop an effective bass attractant based on scientific data. After reviewing all the previously published literature and conducting more than 5,000 videotaped tank tests, they came up with a formula that was released by the company last year called BaitFuel.

JUST RIGHT

Dr. Connor Elliott, who was then a graduate student under Dr. Tufts, conducted the majority of those tests and is confident that BaitFuel can improve fishing results. Creating something that attracts bass and stimulates their sense of taste, as opposed to a simple masking agent, is no small undertaking, though.



"The most important thing when trying to mimic natural prey items in artificial baits is identifying which components are providing stimuli to the predator fish," says Dr. Elliott. "There are a lot of compounds that can be found in natural prey items that don't actually provide any benefit and act as 'filler' in an artificial scent. Once the proper compounds are identified, the next challenge is determining the correct ratio of these components. If too much of some of these compounds are added, they can be overstimulating for the fish and actually become detrimental."

Not only does the formula have to attract bass, it also has to be effectively applied to the lure. It's the original sticky design problem. The solution should ideally be quick-acting and highly water soluble to dispense the most scent into the water. It also must be slow-acting and gummy enough to stay on the lure and convince the bass to hold onto it. If we accept that no lure or solution can completely achieve both of those aims, we can start to think about scent in a more strategic fashion.

There might be situations where water solubility to achieve the widest field of positive food signals is the best approach—for instance, murky water or a small bay that could be thoroughly seeded with attractive scent through repeated casting. And there might be times when bass have no problem locating a lure visually but are just bumping it or short-striking. A scent-infused bait chosen for its mouthfeel and taste might be what gets a fish to commit. Or maybe you double up, with an infused bait and a water-soluble dip.

No matter what your opinion of scents may be, extensive research and observation have shown that they can help draw more strikes when bass turn tight-lipped. And at the very least, they certainly cannot hurt. G&F



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MARSH MADNESS

CHASING MARSH RABBITS IS FUN AND CHALLENGING ... FOR TWO- AND FOUR-LEGGED HUNTERS ALIKE.

By Mike Marsh



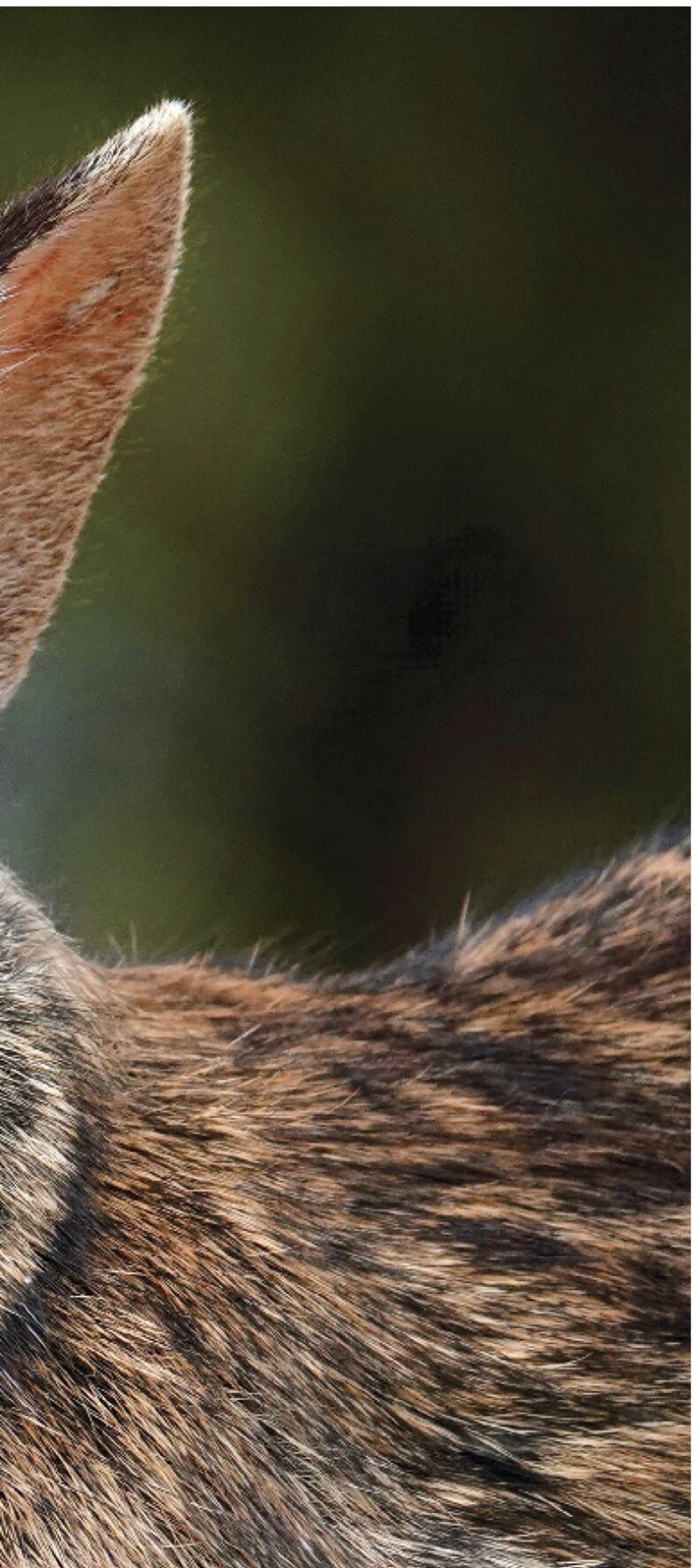
A dark brown blob slunk through the brush. I hesitated for a moment, then flipped off the safety and brought the shotgun up to my shoulder. Unfortunately, that nanosecond of indecision had run me out of time to trip the trigger.

The furry, ovoid shape looked more like a fumbled football than a rabbit. The lack of a high-bouncing, white powder puff of a tail allowed the marsh rabbit to escape my aim. Nevertheless, following a few shots from other positions, a hunter finally hollered, "I got him!"

Holding the marsh rabbit high and shaking it until its ears wiggled, Terrial White teased his beagles, letting them know the chase had ended while keeping the rabbit well above their teeth. Once they were satisfied the race had been run, they were off into the Carolina Bay thicket again, White and other hunters urging them ever deeper into the cover with shouts of "Here, here! Get him up! Find him!"

While any rabbit makes a sweetly heavy lump in the back pocket of a hunter's game vest, the weight of a marsh rabbit dangling and bouncing against a hunter's hips may be the sweetest of all. Its unique habits and habitat combine to make it one of the most, if not *the most*, challenging rabbit species to hunt.

SHUTTERSTOCK



Marsh rabbits thrive in environments like swamps and lowland thickets that are mostly unsuitable for other creatures.

MIKE MARSH

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Marsh rabbits are also known as "bluetails," for the grayish-blue color of their tails, which are smaller than those of cottontail rabbits. Another name is "mash" rabbit. This one is common to the Coastal Plains region, home to the Horsemen Club to which White belongs.

Most of the members live in Duplin and Pender counties of North Carolina, but they also travel to South Carolina and other states to hunt. Their motto is "Strictly Rabbits."

"We used to shoot about 75 percent cottontails," White says. "Now, in recent seasons, we are shooting 75 to 80 percent bluetails."

The club has bagged 150 to 500 rabbits per season for more than three decades. That number has steadily declined, however, due in large part to a fall-off in cottontail numbers, which can be attributed to three factors. The first is the loss of upland farm fields due to the conversion of producer lands to forest lands. The second is the frequent flooding by hurricanes and the excessive rainfall that has plagued several Southern states for years. The third is the arrival and increasing abundance of coyotes.

"Coyotes can catch cottontails more easily than they can catch bluetails," White says. "It's hard for anything to catch bluetail rabbits because of the places where they live."

Cottontails are creatures of regenerating clearcuts and fallow fields that munch happily on native grasses and farm crops. By contrast, marsh rabbits are denizens of lowland thickets and swamps, where they are content to chew on woody plants that would appear more suitable to a beaver's palate.

Still another marsh rabbit nickname is "cane cutter," because its teeth make clean, diagonal cuts in switch cane and other cane species that are among its favorite foods. They also eat tree saplings, bark, greenbrier and other thorny fare that would choke a cottontail due to differences in their digestives systems. Signs of their feeding help hunters identify which species they and their dogs are about to engage in pursuit.

Other signs hunters should look for include buckshot-sized droppings in cane thickets and on high spots such as ant mounds, logs and stumps. Check swamp mud and the soft sands and clays of forest roads for tracks. The footprint of a marsh rabbit is likely to show widely spaced claw marks, whereas cottontail tracks will have little to no claw marks showing and compressed toes.

SWAMP SURVIVORS

When the swamps they live in are inundated, marsh rabbits simply haul out and cling to a tree limb with their claws, nibbling bark, twigs and whatever else is handy while waiting for the water



The marsh rabbit goes by many names, including bluetail and cane cutter, the latter for the diagonal cuts its teeth leave in switch cane.

TOP SHOTS

These shotshells excel for grounding bluetails.

It doesn't take much gun to drop a marsh rabbit, but you do have to hit it. Hunters mostly use semi-automatic shotguns for the fast follow-up shots they allow. They also hunt with guns unplugged in states where it is legal to have more than three shots available.

The best chokes are improved cylinder, skeet 1 and skeet 2. Optimal shot sizes are No. 6 and 7 1/2 lead in a 1-ounce load, providing dense patterns for shooting through thick cover. For areas that require non-lead ammo, steel loads in shot sizes No. 4 through 7 1/2 get it done.



A great marsh rabbit load is **Remington's Express Extra Long Range** ($26.99; remington.com), loaded with 1 ounce of No. 6 or 7/12 lead shot. The muzzle velocity is 1,220 fps.

Federal's Prairie Storm FS Steel ($34.99; federalpremium.com) ammo with No. 4 shot is excellent for hunting marsh rabbits in areas that require non-lead ammo.



Another excellent choice, **Fiocchi Field Dynamics Upland Steel** ($17.99; fiocchiusa.com) has a proven reputation for dependability and consistency. The 2 3/4-inch 12-gauge shells in No. 4 or No. 6 steel are a great option for non-lead scenarios.





Terrial White shows a young hunter the difference between a marsh rabbit or "bluetail" (left) and a cottontail rabbit.

to subside. In areas prone to floods, bluetails are vastly quicker to return to pre-flood numbers than cottontails due to this adaptability. In prime lowland habitats, they are always more numerous, accounting for as much 100 percent of the rabbit population in many river floodplains and associated islands, marshes and swamps.

Marsh rabbits are abundant in tidal salt marshes, where oyster shells can cut beagles' feet at low tide. Bluetails are native to the Southeastern U.S. and distributed throughout the Coastal Plain from southeastern Virginia to southeastern Alabama and the Florida Panhandle. My experiences with them have occurred in the Carolinas.

In 2014, I invited the Horsemen Club to release their beagles at Bladen Lakes State Forest Game Land in North Carolina. During a pre-hunt scouting trip, I showed White a deer food plot of winter peas and wheat that was so utilized by cottontails we could not put our feet on the ground without standing on their droppings.

Schedules being what they are, the club did not find time to hunt the Bladen Lakes area until three years later, in the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew. The hurricane had flooded the entire tract and, indeed, most of the county in 2016. The cottontails had all but disappeared from the inundated area, though marsh rabbit sign was fairly prevalent. Two years later, in 2018, the tract was flooded again by Hurricane Florence.

In the 2022–23 season, while I was hunting Bladen solo, I met other hunters there who were having excellent luck, with 90 percent of their bag being marsh rabbits. These instances demonstrate the resilience and adapability of the marsh rabbit versus the cottontail.

While a cottontail may, at its worst, run into a hole in the ground to escape a pack of beagles, a marsh rabbit can swim and dive like a muskrat and hold its breath for a long time underwater. It

can also claw its way high inside a hollow tree like a squirrel and, of course, disappear into a stump hole in the flick of a whisker just like a cottontail.

It is these additional traits that make marsh rabbits so maddening to hunt. Beagles with no experience sniffing them out can have difficulty staying on the line. The hunt becomes a frustrating stop-and-go event as the marsh rabbit simply swims back and forth across a stream or ditch with ease, leaving the dogs befuddled. However, with experience, dogs can learn how to cast for lost scent farther up and down the banks and locate diluted scent in the water and on overhanging vegetation.

TOUGH TARGET

Another frustrating attribute of the marsh rabbit is that they can have small territories and seldom need to flee them to escape predators. When flushed, a cottontail might run for considerable distances, crossing wide openings that allow hunters good shot opportunities at favorable ranges. Conversely, once a marsh rabbit knows it is in front of the dogs, it tucks tail to scamper in tight loops and figure 8s all day long. The total linear distance it may cover can be less than 100 yards. Since the dogs may never be able to exert enough pressure to make a marsh rabbit burst into the open, it is up to the hunters to claw their way into the thickest cover imaginable to try to head it off.



The claws on a marsh rabbit's feet (bottom) are more exposed than those on a cottontail's, allowing them to access inhospitable habitat.



White holds a marsh rabbit just out of reach of his beagles, letting them know the chase has ended in success.

MIKE MARSH (3)

Shots usually come at distances measured in feet, not yards. While the goal is to try to concentrate on placing the shot pattern on the head, it often doesn't happen that way. When that characteristic blue tail is centered in the pattern, the best eating parts—the hind quarters—may have to be discarded.

If there has been lots of recent rainy weather, the coursing can be so poor that hunters should call up their beagles and head to another spot. Hunting wet, mucky ground punctuated with humps and hummocks is darn near impossible. When the going gets tough, no matter how fit the hunter and eager the beagles, it's best to remain safe.

"Sometimes, you have to know when to give up the chase and move to another place," White says. "But that's okay. While we might put so much pressure on a spot with cottontails that we can't go back there the same season and still expect to have a good hunt, that doesn't happen often with marsh rabbits. It's so hard to shoot too many at one spot. It is so difficult to get deep into the cover and hunt them where they live." G&F

SIGN LANGUAGE

DECIPHER THE LOCATIONS AND **CONCENTRATIONS OF SCRAPES AND RUBS INTO AIRTIGHT HUNTING STRATEGIES.**

By Bob Robb

On October 2019, National Deer Association (NDA) biologist Kip Adams wrote: "Whitetails don't have cell phones or social media accounts, but they are far more social than most hunters realize. They surf the information highway at rubs and scrapes to stay in contact with locals as well as travelers. During the rut, rubs and scrapes are primary communication locations for deer."

Truer words have not been written. However, it does not mean that scrapes and rubs are great places to set stands. After all, research shows that the majority of buck scrape visits occur at night. And rub lines indicate favored travel routes bucks use regularly between bedding and feeding areas more so than any single rub. Locations where two or more rub lines intersect may also have scrapes, and these areas are great places to hang stands. Here's how to decipher the important clues whitetails leave behind during their travels to vector in on bucks during the pre-rut and rut period this fall.



Scientists postulate mature bucks produce pheromones that younger bucks cannot. When these are deposited at rubs and scrapes, they may trigger breeding activity.

RYAN YODER

SCRAPE SCIENCE

Have you ever set up on a fresh scrape only to sit for days and not see a thing? Well, wildlife researchers have shown that most scraping activity (nearly 85 percent) occurs at night. So, hunting directly over a scrape may not be the best strategy. A hot scrape or scrape line is certainly a sign of a good area, but it shouldn't be the sole focus of your hunting effort.

Some interesting conclusions about deer activity with regard to rubs and scrapes were outlined in the NDA's 2012 Deer Report. The report stated that pheromones deposited at signposts (rubs and scrapes) by mature bucks may have a "bio-stimulating" or trigger effect on the breeding season. Older bucks may also produce "controlling" or "priming" pheromones that yearling bucks are not physically mature enough to produce. Areas with mature bucks can have 10 times as many rubs as areas without them.

They further reported mature bucks make about 85 percent more scrapes

and 50 percent more rubs than yearling bucks. They found that bucks of all ages use scrapes, and any given scrape is likely to be used by many individuals. Lastly, scrapes only a couple hundred yards apart may be used by completely different groups of bucks, which brings into question the idea of a "scrape line."

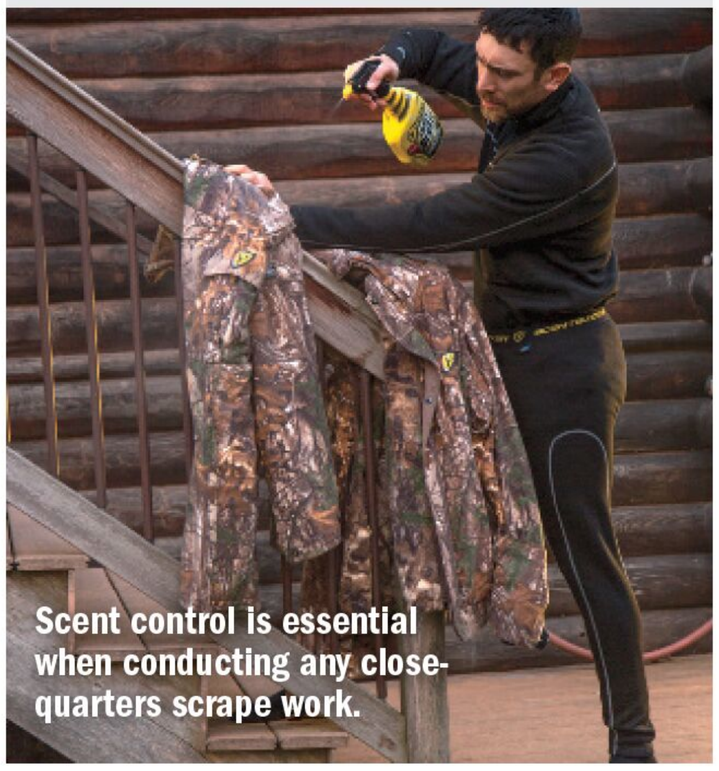
MIND YOUR STINK

Deer communicate via scent. Don't add yours to the mix.

When hunting near scrapes—and especially when freshening up a natural scrape or creating a mock one—following a meticulous scent-control program is critical. After all, information passed from deer to deer at scrapes is basically all done via scent, so not contaminating the place with your own is crucial.

First of all, don't touch anything with bare skin. Disposable nitrile gloves are the ticket, as are knee-high rubber boots. Be sure to douse yourself and your gear with a scent-eliminating spray and use a stick to make or widen a scrape. If you use scent wicks, don't touch them with bare skin, and store them in zip-top baggies.

Sometimes, running a drag line downwind of your stand to the scrape from several hundred yards out can draw a cruising buck to the scrape, which should be located within shooting range of your stand.



Scent control is essential when conducting any close-quarters scrape work.



Active rubs and scrapes can and should be monitored with trail cameras to get a sense of the quality of bucks visiting them and the times they are frequented.

SCRAPE HUNTING?

Basically, bucks make scrapes in areas with lots of doe activity, including near mast and fruit trees, crop field perimeters, funnels through transition zones and along edge lines between two distinct types of cover. The problem for hunters is that they often fail to ask the right question when deciding whether to hunt a specific scrape location.

The right question is: Does this particular scrape location have adequate security cover that will allow a buck to feel safe enough to visit it during legal shooting hours? The answer should be based in no small part on the amount and type of hunting pressure the area receives. The more pressure, the less likely a mature buck will visit the scrape(s) during daylight hours.

Furthermore, I have learned over the years that sitting over a big, solitary scrape is often a fool's errand. Instead, I use them primarily as a way to inventory a particular area's deer herd. Starting in very late summer until early fall, bucks visit scrapes and use the licking branch as a way to communicate with other deer. To sweeten scrapes—both fresh and mock scrapes—I use estrous doe urine. These spots draw cruising deer, and trail cameras positioned near them give me a good idea of what's living in the area.

Rather than focus on a single scrape, I look for what many now refer to as a "primary scrape area"—a zone featuring clusters of concentrated scrapes inside some form of thick cover. If, as the research suggests, 85 percent of scrape visits happen after dark, this is where the 15 percent of daylight activity happens. Clusters of scrapes in thick cover are also strong indicators that you're close to bedding thickets—another great reason to focus your efforts there.

Creating a mock scrape freshened with urine-based scents is also a great way to "sweeten" a stand location. During the pre-rut and rut, for example, I like to create a little mock scrape upwind of my stand and hang a scent wick liberally doused with a doe estrous scent. The belief is that it might be enough to nudge a passing buck over to take a quick look—and give me a shot.

LON LAUBER PHOTOGRAPHY (TOP); WINDIGO IMAGES (BOTTOM)

WHAT ABOUT RUBS?

Rubs—and especially rub lines—are great indicators of good places to set stands for the simple reason that they suggest preferred deer travel corridors. Mature bucks will often take a moment as they travel between feeding and bedding areas to rub trees and let others know they're in the neighborhood.

They rub trees to remove velvet and in mock battle. Thus, the best places to find rub lines are along the edges of cover where deer are most likely to travel. Follow them until you find natural pinch points, and you're well on your way to having a killer stand location.

Signpost rubs are important to consider when planning your hunt. A signpost rub is defined as a primary rub tree—usually a large-diameter tree that's often used year after year—where mature, socially high-ranking bucks deposit a variety of glandular secretions. Rubs are both visual and olfactory signalers to other deer.

Because rubbing is done primarily with the antler base and forehead, each rub carries the maker's identifying odor. Multiple bucks often rub the same tree. Signpost rubs are usually located in high-traffic areas, often at the intersection of multiple trails. Bucks cruising an area from all points of the compass will end up passing by on a regular basis as they seek the last estrous does of the year. Rub densities are generally highest in areas with abundant food sources, including wooded cover near agriculture and oak motts during high-mast years.

Other important locations include areas near forest openings with lush herbaceous growth, and even feeder locations, which provide a regular and concentrated food source. Rubs can also be concentrated at trail junctions, along old roadbeds and, in hilly or mountainous country, along trails, ridgetops, stream courses and old two-track roads.



Instead of focusing on a single scrape, seek out a primary scrape area, where several scrapes are concentrated in close proximity within thick cover.

RICK SMALL



The author arrowed this buck as it worked its way along a rub line between an agricultural field and a bedding thicket.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

Some of the very best pre-rut and rut hunting locations I've ever found combine both fresh rub lines and scraping activity. Here are two examples. In a small patch of woods, a half-mile from a big ag field, was an old, ramshackle barn where a pair of ancient, broken-down barbed-wire fences intersected.

Two long, traditional rub lines met at the intersection, and one of the thick wooden gateposts had been rubbed to an hourglass shape over decades. There were fresh rubs up and down both lines, and several scrapes clustered nearby. The place reeked of big-buck action. I sat it for 6 days and saw no fewer than 15 different bucks pass by until, on day 6, one of the largest bucks I've ever seen showed up. That I did not arrow him is a tale for another day.

Another time I was hunting a new property, running and gunning until I found a rub line leading up out of a deep hollow and over a steep hill, the trail passing under a barbed-wire fence at the top of the hill, then down into a cornfield in the adjacent valley. The rub line was marked with a handful of scrapes.

I chose a tree at the top of the ridge near the fence where the wind was constant and the afternoon thermals carried my scent up and away. The tree was 25 yards downwind from a big rub tree on the trail. At slap dark a huge-bodied 8-point ghosted up out of the bottom. When he stopped to rub that big tree, I was able to make the shot.

Additionally, rub lines tying bedding areas together or connecting preferred food sources with bedding thickets can be great places to set up and catch a rut-crazed buck cruising for a doe at any hour of the day.

After decades in the woods, I've found that rub lines and scrape clusters—not individual examples of either—to be excellent areas to focus on. Where both are present in or adjacent to thick cover that offers deer a sense of security are top-notch places to set up. G&F

BOB ROBB

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

THERE'S MORE TO HUNTING SQUIRRELS THAN SITTING UNDER AN OAK TREE.

By David Johnson

A mix of preferred food sources in close proximity keeps squirrels well-fed throughout the year and concentrates a population for improved hunting.

Squirrel hunting seems easy enough, at least in theory. Squirrels live in the woods and eat acorns. So, you might think all you have to do is find a section of woods with oak trees, sit down somewhere comfortable and wait for a bunch of them to run around on the tree branches. You could be in for a long wait if that's your plan.

Squirrels are not evenly distributed throughout their habitat. Like deer, they are more apt to be in certain places than others, and successful hunters learn to recognize where these animals are most likely to be. In the case of squirrels, where they will be boils down to the location of their favorite foods and the availability of those foods. Of course, there are some food sources they value even more than acorns.

ACORN LIMITATIONS

Acorns do provide squirrels with a baseline of food in the fall that largely predicts how many squirrels a given block of woods will be able to support over the winter. But from a squirrel's point of view, acorns have three limitations, and understanding them will help you figure out where the squirrel population is highest and the hunting is best.

First, acorns are seasonal, so from spring through early fall, squirrels must have other sources of food or their population suffers. Given a choice, squirrels will not travel long distances to get food, so a mix of other food sources nearby will always promote higher squirrel populations than monoculture blocks of oak trees.

Second, oak trees do not produce uniform crops each year. While squirrels enjoy higher rates of survival and breeding success during years with big acorn crops, their populations diminish just as fast in years with low acorn production—if acorns are the primary source of their nutrition. Again, a varied habitat with a mix of food sources provides the best hunting.

Third, even during the fall, squirrels like some foods, notably hickories, better than acorns, and these food sources will concentrate the squirrel populations. We'll take a look at three types of food aside from acorns that you should look for when hunting squirrels.

The presence of these foods interspersed with oaks means there will be more squirrels supported by the habitat than can survive on acorns alone.

PINE PREFERENCES

Before acorns are ripe, squirrels in densely wooded areas will eat pine cones. For reasons known only to squirrels, the cones of some trees taste better than those of other trees. To figure out which ones the squirrels like, don't overthink things. Walk around in the woods until you see a pine tree that has a pile of pine cone stems around its base.

To get at the pine nuts, squirrels start at the bottom of the cone and cut, or "strip" the hard spines off, eating the pine nuts and then dropping the pale central stem of the cone at the base of the tree they are in. Usually, it will be a large tree, but not one that is old or falling apart.

If you are stalking through the woods slowly and quietly, you will sometimes hear squirrels cutting and dropping pinecones before you see the cones. Set up



There's no denying that squirrels love acorns, but they will abandon them in favor of hickory nuts when the latter are readily available.

LON LAUBER PHOTOGRAPHY (LEFT); WINDIGO IMAGES (RIGHT)

close enough to the tree that you have confidence in shooting at that distance, and so you can see several of the limbs of the tree. Then, wait for a squirrel to move along a limb or to feed on one.

Don't fall into the trap of ignoring pine trees after acorns start to mature. While squirrels will generally move to nut trees as soon as they can, they won't go any farther than they have to. If you are hunting in October after the white oaks have started to bear, and you see pine trees with plenty of eaten cones left over from late-summer feeding, hunt the oaks or other nut trees close to those pines. Mixed forests will hold more squirrels than uniform, closed-canopy oak forests.

HICKORIES AND WALNUTS

In closed-canopy forests dominated by oaks, productive hickory and walnut trees will congregate squirrels. Hickory trees have a far wider distribution, but both will pull squirrels off oak trees. Hickories are my favorite place to hunt squirrels because they are so productive, and if you locate a mature hickory tree, you have a place to hunt for years. For public-land hunters, hickory trees are particularly important because hickories are a high-quality food common on public lands that are not intensely managed (i.e., they are not routinely harvested for their wood).

In October, trees will still be in leaf, which means that you are likely to hear squirrels in the tree before you see them. When you set up, do so as quietly as possible. The best way to get set up without having to wait for the squirrels to forget you are there is to arrive before morning's first light. Hunters who have previously scouted productive hickory trees will kill more squirrels if they can get in the woods before dawn and set up on the targeted tree before the squirrels come out to feed.

It is worth taking care on a morning hunt to sit somewhere east of the tree so that when the sun rises it won't be directly in your face (and your scope). The reverse is true for late-afternoon hunts.

When you set up on a tree, also consider whether you are hunting early or late in the season with respect to the nuts ripening. On most nut trees in the



Squirrels prefer not to travel great distances to feed. Oaks located near stands of pines, which can support squirrels before acorns drop, are prime spots to hunt.



BUGGY BONUS

Cicadas are a tempting treat for squirrels.

Squirrels eat far more insects than most hunters realize. Insects are rich sources of fat and protein, both of which can be critical for the growth of young squirrels and for the general condition of adult squirrels, which must go into the winter in good shape or face starvation.

The granddaddy of all insect hatches in the South is that of the periodic cicada. Cicadas form broods that hatch either every 13 or 17 years, depending on the brood. The 17-year brood in the South hatched in 2021 and the 13-year brood will hatch next year. Cicadas hatch in June and spend only a few weeks mating and laying eggs.

Most cicadas are dead by September. In some places hatches result in more than a million cicadas emerging per acre of forest. To say that squirrels have enough to eat in these summers would be an understatement. Squirrel survival rates and litter sizes increase in response to such a huge source of food during cicada hatches.

By fall, the increased numbers of squirrels will be even more intensely focused on competing for the best food sources they can find. That should be the case in the fall of next year, after the 13-year brood emerges.

But the long-term influence of cicadas on squirrels is complex. These insects lay eggs in the root systems of forest trees, which can cause a decrease in nut production in the following year. That means that in years like this fall, two years after a cicada emergence, habitats with a variety of foods—not just oaks—will be very important in supporting any lingering increase in the squirrel population.

LON LAUBER PHOTOGRAPHY (TOP); SHUTTERSTOCK (BOTTOM)

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early season, squirrels are more apt to be higher in the tree than they will be later in the season. You'll do yourself a favor early in the season by setting up so that you can see at least some branches on the upper part of the tree. And, of course, once the nuts fall, squirrels will come out of the tree to forage on the ground.

Finally, a productive hickory will almost always host more than one actively feeding squirrel, so if you do shoot one, avoid the impulse to move immediately. Instead, mark where the first squirrel fell, but hold still until the other squirrels forget the disturbance and go back to feeding. A patient approach will yield multiple squirrels from one hickory tree.

SOFT MAST

Anyone who has had a backyard bird feeder has probably had to fight off waves of ravenous squirrels. Not all of the favorite foods of squirrels grow on forest trees. The edges of agricultural fields growing seed crops or corn, as well as fruit trees, are attractive to squirrels.



Edges separating timber and ag fields or orchards offer squirrels cover and a wide variety of foods to choose from.

Squirrels need trees for cover and to nest in, but trees on the edges of fields growing these crops will hold concentrated populations of squirrels. The same is true of trees adjacent to food plots planted by hunters and, for that matter, corn feeders used by deer hunters where baiting is legal.

Many plantings for dove fields contain food that squirrels like, and the edges of any dove field that is managed so that food is available for doves well into the fall is worth scouting. Squirrels open themselves up to danger when they are on the ground and spend as little time as possible out in the open. That means a shot at a squirrel running into a field is not common. However, there will be a strong squirrel population in any mature oak trees or even pines that line the edge of the field.

The key is to find habitat where the food sources are both mixed and desirable for squirrels. These will provide a way for them to make a living during the months of the year when acorns are not around. Finally, locate an intersection of several of these elements close together, and you'll have a top-notch squirrel hunting spot. G&F

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FINE CRYSTAL

THE OLD-WORLD FLORIDA FISHING VILLAGE OF CRYSTAL RIVER **HAS ALL THE TRAPPINGS FOR A RELAXING FISHING TRIP.**

Story and Photos by Larry Larsen

The bite is always on in the grassy, white-sand flats and shallow estuaries of Florida's Citrus County. Areas where the spring-fed rivers meet the Gulf of Mexico are ideal for tackling several different salty species. Most anglers target inshore fish in the backcountry islands and marshes that have made the massive area from the Crystal River Preserve south to Chassahowitzka Bay famous for its fishing.

I'm what the locals would call a "regular," having fished this area more than a dozen times over the years, and the catch always impresses me. The shallow waters and flats continue to produce some of the state's best angling in the fall months.

I've been fortunate to fish with several guides out of Crystal River and Homosassa. My wife and I recently spent time with two of the best, Glen Touchton and J.C. Livingston. Both guides are native to the area and know how the fish relate to the islands, flats and rivers like few others. While there, we encountered less-than-ideal conditions; however, our expert guides knew what to do to optimize our time on the water time. We battled cold frontal winds, a minimal tide and white caps one day, and dense fog and 90-degree temperatures on another. Our catch over about 10 hours total those two days included a dozen trout, six redfish, eight snook, three groupers, a sheepshead and a few other species.

You never know what the weather is going to do, but we found active fish both days in spite of it. With Touchton, we discovered a mangrove pocket holding three or four dozen nicely sized snook.



Snook have made an impressive comeback in the Crystal River region. Once merely an afterthought for most area anglers, they are now highly sought after.

Most of those we caught were in the legal slot (between 28 and 33 inches in length), so we each kept one beautiful 32-incher for a fish fry. A bonus at the spot were a couple of similar-sized redfish that we released. The snook catches are more abundant now than ever, according to Touchton.

"Flats water temperatures vary from the low 50s in the winter up to 92 in the summer, as they always have," says the 54-year-old guide. "But 20 years ago, anglers didn't target snook here. Today they do as they have become more prolific."

UNIQUE INDEED

The Crystal River and Kings Bay area is blessed with a limestone karst topography, a consistent water temperature and the clarity of groundwater escaping through spring vents. There are 70 springs that feed into the local waters, discharging about 580 million gallons of 72-degree clear water each day. As a result, the inshore and nearshore waters and their inhabitants are uniquely affected by weather.

In October, schools of the big redfish and snook are still hanging around the outside islands on hard points. Swift tidal currents moving around corners and near deeper trenches and troughs draw them here. You can often locate a school of small reds and occasionally one that is full of 27- to 35-inchers. Both Livingston's and Touchton's clients have caught redfish up to 40 inches in length. They agree that October is one of the best months for redfish, which can be caught year-round.

Trout fishing is best in cooler weather when the fish are moving into cover like kelp and grass. The maximum size of trout caught in this area on most days will be 18 to 23 inches. The daily limit is 5 trout per person measuring 15 to 19 inches in length. The average length of redfish here ranges from 17 to 26 inches, and the legal limit is one fish per person between 18 and 27 inches.

"In the fall, fishing is best when the cooler water temperatures are stable, instead of fluctuating due to cold fronts," says Livingston. "During the late fall and winter months, however, the water temperature on the flats may get too cold to sustain the fish."

That's when the fish seek habitat that will warm up quickly, such as hard banks, rock outcroppings or oyster bars. Redfish, trout and snook will work their way into the spring-fed rivers where the water temperature is more stable. That is usually the best place to find them.

Another fall option exists depending on the weather, according to Touchton. For clients on a full-day charter, he can usually include a few hours of shallow-water grouper fishing. Grouper season this year runs from Sept. 1 to Nov. 10. The guide typically finds them in 5- to 8-foot depths thanks to his accumulation of thousands of waypoints of rockpiles and ledges from 5 miles on out.

"A severe cold front will shut down most species like trout and redfish," Touchton says. "However, it won't have as much effect on grouper. During the pre-front, lots of fish are active, but when high pressure sets in, fishing can be tough."



Plantation Resort on Crystal River, located on the shores of King's Bay, is ground zero for anglers wanting full-service accommodations.

MINING SILVER

Oversized tarpon often concentrate in the shallow flats off Citrus County's coastline more than anywhere else along the Gulf. Silver kings of more than 100 pounds in the relatively clear waters between Yankeetown and the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge are always a possibility, according to Livingston. Tarpon are the guide's favorite fish, and he specializes in guiding fly fishermen to battle with these elegant giants.

There are year-round "resident fish" in the Crystal River/Homosassa area, as well as the Gulf's migratory tarpon, which are around primarily during the spawn from about mid-April through June. The best months to tangle with resident fish are December and January and then again in August and September, according to the guide. The largest migratory tarpon are easiest to locate when they are spawning. The migratory fish, though, may be moving in different directions in early June.

"Some could be moving north, while others may be south-bound," says Livingston. "In late June, most of the north-bounders are heading home, and resident fish may move out to slightly deeper waters. We still catch record-size fish, like the 180-pounder that my client landed on his fly rod."



Guide J.C. Livingston nets a solid redfish, one of numerous sportfish species that swim the waters of Citrus County.



Capt. Glen Touchton holds a gag grouper caught while fishing one of his thousands of nearshore, shallow-water waypoints.

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Tasty sea trout are plentiful on the grassy flats of the Crystal River and in King's Bay. Several area restaurants will cook your catch.

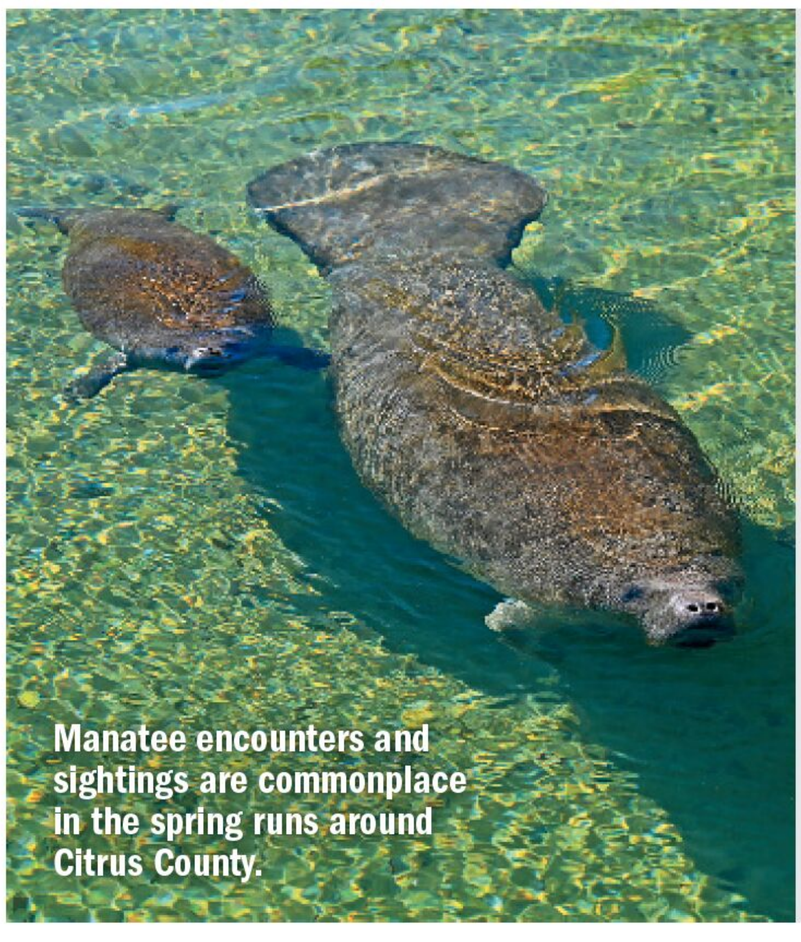
While the waters are very clear, the depths, which vary from 3 to 7 feet, occasionally make it difficult to see even the biggest tarpon as they blend in with the bottom. A good guide who is used to sighting the tarpon pods and easing the boat into casting range is invaluable.

TRIP TIMING

The busiest months for the area's guides are October through December and again in February through May, so booking early is wise. As mentioned previously, both Capt. Glen Touchton and Capt. J.C. Livingston were born and raised in the area. Touchton owns Southern Fishing Guide Service (crystalriverfishingguide.com). Livingston owns Nature Coast Fin and Feather Outfitters (fishnaturecoast.com).

A great place to headquarter while fishing Citrus County's flats and backcountry is the Plantation Resort on Crystal River (plantationoncrystalriver.com). Located on the shores of King's Bay in the Crystal River Wildlife Refuge, the full-service resort features a marina and adventure center offering anglers boat rentals, charter fishing for trout, redfish, snook, grouper and tarpon, and personal seawall boat mooring (at no charge to guests). Several guides, including Livingston and Touchton, pick up their clients at the resort's marina.

The 50-year-old resort, with serene waterfront surroundings and plentiful oaks, is close to everything onshore, inshore and offshore. The 196-room resort, spread out in several three-story buildings and villas, offers a full-service spa, three restaurants and a golf course. Try the "catch and cook" option at the West 82 Grill. Drop off your fillets, select a preparation and make a reservation for a wonderful dinner. GAF



Manatee encounters and sightings are commonplace in the spring runs around Citrus County.

ALL NATURAL

Citrus County is "Nature's Coast."

Citrus County, with its spring-fed rivers, pristine marshes, wildlife refuges, lakes and several state parks, is considered a must-see area. The population is just 154,000 people, but for anglers and nature lovers, the minimal development and extensive waters allow maximum enjoyment of several special places.

The area includes the 177-acre Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge within Kings Bay, Three Sisters Springs and Homosassa Bay and River just to the south. In the fall and winter months, the largest U.S. herd of manatees migrates to the sheltered springs to join up with a resident, year-round population. On extremely cold days, the refuge boasts up to 1,000 manatees.

As a result, manatee encounters are the most popular natural attraction in the county's spring runs where visitors can swim, observe or snorkel with the gentle, endangered "mermaids" in their natural habitat. In fact, most marinas in Citrus County offer monitored boat tours with organized interaction.

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KODIAK *on my* BACK

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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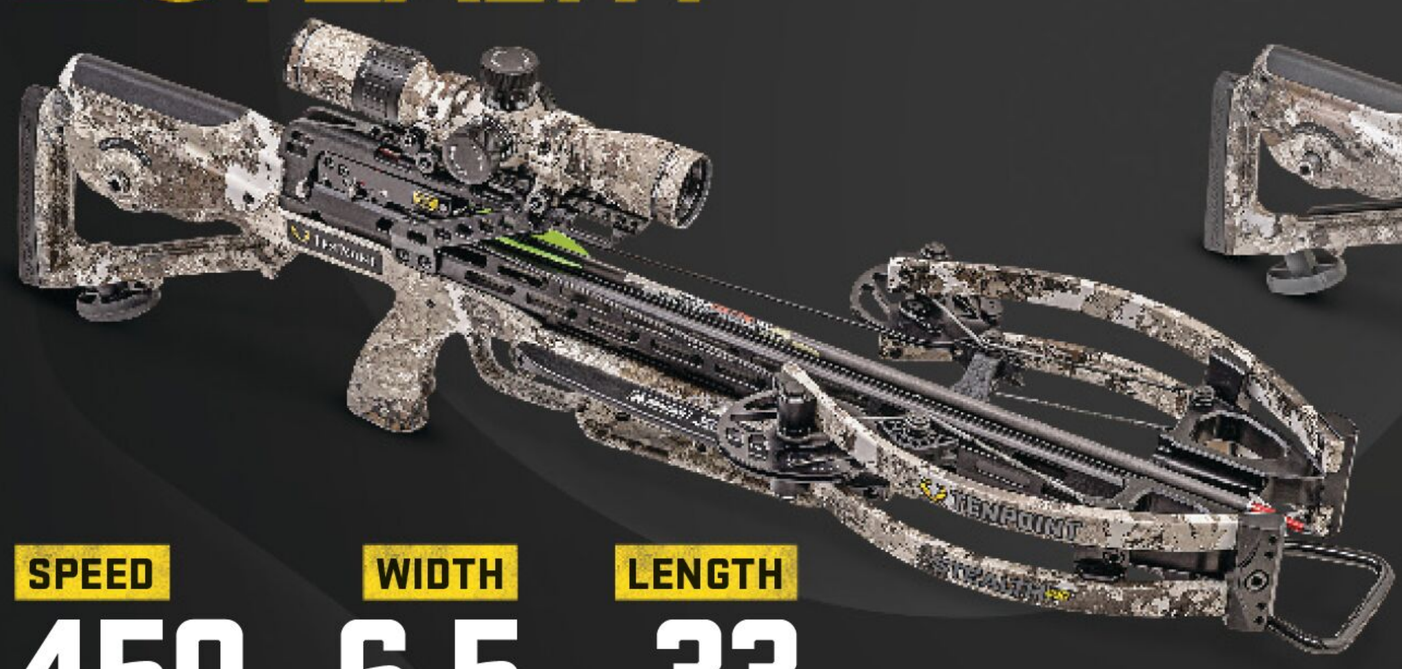
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several caribou wore towering headgear, and a few of them sparred with one another while we watched. Most were resting, and looking over the patchwork of alders and grassy areas that separated us from the herd, it seemed like we had a good chance of 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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Men across America are raving about a newly enhanced potency supplement that helps achieve healthy blood flow on demand

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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.

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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!

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PRECISION BOAT PERFORMANCE

MADE EASY

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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