THE BIG BUCK ISSUE

DEER & DEER HUNTING®

SCOUT MANAGE HUNT

NOVEMBER 2020
VOLUME 44 ■ ISSUE 6

BIG WOODS BUCKS

STEVE BARTYLLA'S BEST STRATEGIES

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LEADING OFF

Now is the time for all good bowhunters to deploy the tactics needed to take a rutting buck. Grunt calls, scents and rattling antlers are all in play during the magical time of the season.

COLE EBERLE/WINDIGO IMAGES

NOVEMBER 2020
Volume 44 | Issue 6

FEATURES

Cover photo: Dustin Reid **Page 5 photo:** Ralph Hensley/Windigo Images

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DANIEL E. SCHMIDT

Celebrate Life WITH HUMBLE APPRECIATION

DAVID GILANE

If you have followed our online videos or D&DH-TV on Pursuit Channel over the years, you might know that I am not shy when it comes to professing my faith. It's just who I am, how I was raised, and what I believe deep down in my heart. This is usually displayed in raw emotion every time I walk up on a downed deer. It's an incredibly humbling moment.

Over the past several months, many of you have written to us and expressed that you do the same — pray — when you're standing over a deer. These are blessed moments. A prayer I've been using over the years goes something like this:

Dear Father in Heaven,

Thank you for this wonderful day.

Thank you for this wonderful gift.

May this deer's body nourish our bodies.

And may its memory nourish our souls. Amen.

Every day we spend outdoors — whether it's deer hunting or hiking, or whatever — is a blessing. I don't know how many days I have left on this earth. None of us do. Only He knows, and this creation is filled with millions of reminders of our blessings.

Many of them are the gifts that He provides. It's the circle of life. It invigorates me, and I know it invigorates you. Everything about the hunt is special and worth noting. But ultimately, when a deer is on the ground, it's cause for celebration.

True, everyone has their own motivations for the hunt and for celebrations. I don't really view it as religion, per se. For me, it's not about celebrating some sort of accomplishment. It's about paying respect and celebrating life itself.

My dear friend Charles J. Alsheimer taught us these lessons years before he left us in 2017. I think he said it best when he penned these words in D&DH:

"Our time on God's green earth is but a vapor. Make no mistake; the day will come when all of our cycles are complete.

"As we approach another fall, work hard to seize the moment, work hard to make a memory with your children and loved ones. In the process of sharing your world with them you will come to realize that your deer hunting experiences can be far more than a rack to hang on the wall or meat for the freezer.

"Racks and meat can vanish in the twinkling of an eye but the lessons learned in the deer woods last a lifetime."

Amen, sir.

DAN.SCHMIDT@MEDIA360LLC.COM

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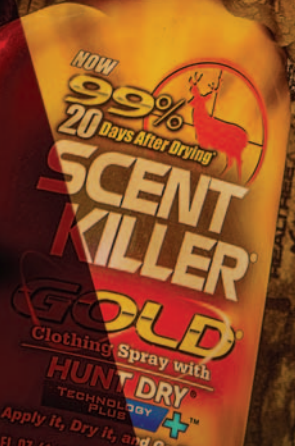

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DDH-TV Executive Producer David Gilane and Host Daniel Schmidt strive to keep it real when producing shows for Pursuit Channel's Saturday Night Deer Camp programming block.
PHOTO: ERIC DUNN

I RECENTLY READ the article "Top Mistakes Hunters Make During the Early Season," and I have to agree with all three main points.

Now ... add the stress of public hunting lands, and the guys who walk 10 feet into the woods, 25 minutes before sunset to set up their stands. Oh, and the occasional hiker who didn't know it was hunting season cause it's still 75 degrees out.

For those reasons and more, it's almost impossible to hunt my area during the early archery season.

— Sean Mabbitt

IF YOU DON'T pay attention to the wind, all that pre-season prep was just a waste of time. Having said that, if you don't pay attention to how and when you approach trail cameras, your season could be over before it starts. *— Jermy Baker*

IN BOTH YOUR print magazine and television show, I notice how Dan Schmidt is not shy to stop and say a prayer of thanks after killing a deer.

I find this very refreshing to see a mainstream hunting industry guy thank the Lord for the gift of venison. I was literally just explaining this to a friend recently — how it is important for all of us as hunters to take the time to give thanks.

— Greg N. Philadelphia

IN RESPONSE TO to Dan's commentary in the D&DH-TV episode "Fantasy vs. Reality" that aired on Pursuit Channel's Saturday Night Deer Camp.

Big or small, I love them all. I enjoy any time I'm out on a hunt. Whether see deer or not, for me it's about having the time. I work full time six days a week and still have a personal life to balance.

If I can fill my freezer with a 120-pound deer or a 200-pound deer, it's all the same. If I fail and have to wait for the season, that's OK.

Just get out when you can, enjoy nature, and just have fun!

— Craig Banach, via YouTube

YOUR TELEVISION TEAM did a great job with the recently aired episode "Fanstasy vs. Reality."

Keeping it real, keeping it simple and showing that this is by and large typical hunting scenario for the majority of the everyday schlubs out there is what will preserve hunting for future generations.

Just remember: Every buck doesn't need to be a Booner or 5½ years old.

— RDH, YouTube

STEVE BARTYLLA STATES we have common ground with the animal-rights activists. Some of what he says is true, but he left out the extreme animal-rights crooks.

They have destroyed numerous stands and stolen countless trail cameras in their so called fight for animal rights.

I know of no hunter who has destroyed their property or have stolen anything that they own.

These clowns never have approached me, they do this when I'm not around and are proud of it. In reality, they are cowardly anarchistic. Who will never agree that us hunters are doing more for conservation and the overall health of animals then they ever will do.

Here in New York, destruction of property, theft, and annoyance of hunters is their goal. There is no talking to them as Steve has stated.

— Chris Ryan, New York

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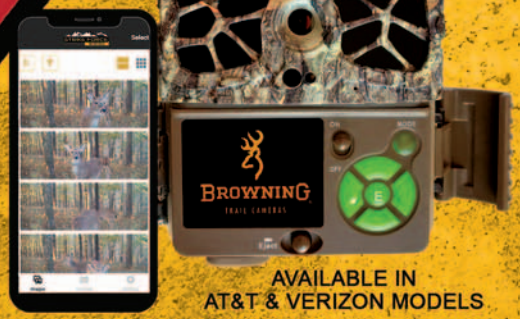

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SURVEY ON THE TENNESSEE DEER HUNTERS FACEBOOK PAGE

TENNESSEE "DEER" FRIENDS, SIMPLE QUESTION: DO YOU LIKE OR LOATHE THE VELVET DEER HUNT? JUST CURIOUS!

NO OPINION	129 VOTES
LIKE!	123 VOTES
LOATHE!	48 VOTES
LIKE IT BUT TOO HOT	16 VOTES
INDIFFERENT	13 VOTES

NATHAN KIMERY
I would be a fan of it if I felt people actually read and followed the rules of not hunting public land during velvet season since public is all I hunt. I hope I am wrong, but I have a feeling there are those that hunt public during the velvet season.

WILLIAM J. CLARK
I don't believe in it personally, but if other people like it, that's fine too and congrats to those who were successful this year.

GIL LACKEY
Never scored but tons of fun. It's a gift. Enjoy it. And anyone who tells you bucks in velvet are stupid has never tried to hunt them.

BAILEY NOAH
Best chance we have at taking a mature buck until later part of November. September and October are usually a bust unless extremely cold weather hits before Halloween.

ANTHONY HARRIS
America. Freedom. More opportunity.

Social Snapshot

*MONTHLY AVERAGES FOR JAN./FEB. 2020

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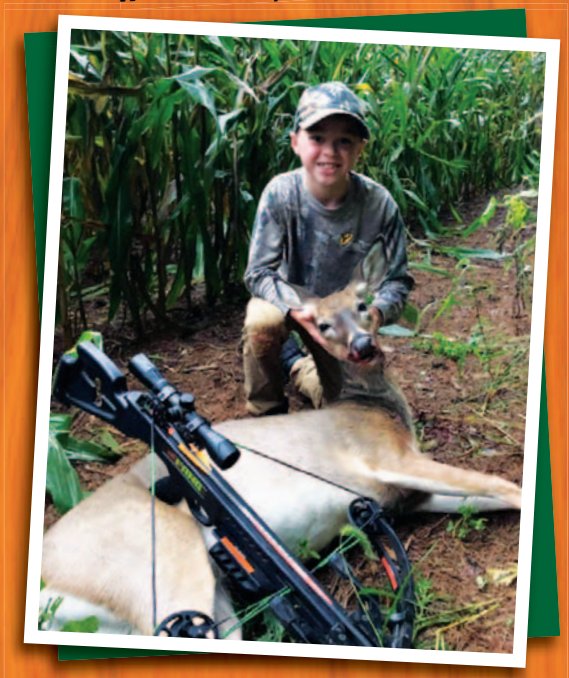
DDH Community Corner

A very special congratulations from all of us at Deer & Deer Hunting to 9-year-old Ryan Dueck on his first deer on his first time out with a crossbow! We love to see photos like this!



AL CORNELL

WEATHER TO HUNT

I wrestled a dead limb from the leaf litter and hurled it at the red fox. They brought $4.75 in bounty, and the pelt was worth a buck. For me, at 15, not much rivaled the dream of taking a fox. He jumped, quickly appraised the situation, and vanished into the pelting sleet storm.

The storm made it happen. Without the noise and motion of the sleet, I would never have gotten that close to the fox. I was less than 12 feet from the critter when I tried to deck it with a hunk of hickory. He had his nose in the leaves, apparently thinking he and a mouse were alone in the world.

WINDIGO IMAGES

Oh, to have had a gun! That happened during deer season many years ago. Back then, the law said you had to hunt with someone until you were 16. Dad obviously knew I would be off wandering the hills, so he didn't let me get a deer license. So, to the good fortune of that fox, I was unarmed and just attempting to stir up resting whitetails for my older brother.

DEFYING MOM'S ADVICE

Some folks fill their closets with rain gear. That's a sign that they don't like rain, because the gear usually stays as dry as they do. Others, myself included, own rain gear but leave it behind out of haste, habit or happenstance. In fact, I've soaked through my regular hunting clothes many more times than I've worn a raincoat.

Of course, Momma always said, "You'll catch you're death of pneumonia." I know it's not right to question Momma, but I sure hope she's wrong on this point. I stand by the conviction that cold, wet weather seldom has anything to do with catching the common cold ... or bubonic plague.

On the other hand, rust is a consequence. In the years since the fox incident, gun oil has been a loyal companion. Bolts, trigger mechanisms and bores need the salve that prevents the union of water, air and iron. So, upon re-entry to a controlled environment, liberally oil the gun.

And eat a bowl of hot venison chili.

A younger brother and I were shotgunning for grouse. We crested an oak ridge during a downpour. Eighty yards away, a buck crested from the opposite hillside and began eating acorns. Trying to keep a tree between me and him, I walked quickly toward the buck each time his head was down.

Although the understory was open, the buck did not detect my approach until I was within 19 steps. He never made it out of his bed.

I've read about those great still-hunters who can consistently sneak up on bedded whitetails. The extremists, I'm told, have actually touched bedded deer. If something makes a little noise underfoot, they stand still for five minutes. Take an hour to go 100 yards, etc.

I'm not one of them.

I like to still-hunt, but I need the right weather for it. You've heard of cover scent, but you haven't heard anything until you've heard the "cover sound" of a sleet storm. I've found it to be the perfect sound for still-hunting, because it gives me a chance against the wary whitetail.

When the sleet rolls in, I walk slowly through good deer cover, astutely searching the surroundings. After a few steps, I stand by a tree trunk for a few minutes. A few more steps, and I sit on a stump or log. Deer movement is what surprises me most in these conditions. They're frequently up and about ... feeding nonchalantly and walking throughout their home range.

I've read the annual statistics from opening weekend of gun-deer season, and I know that cold, rain, snow and sleet drastically reduce the harvest. There is a relationship between sunshine and longevity of the hunt for most participants. However, I like to plan my hunting days with an eye on the weather.

The other day I got the urge to type "hunting in the rain" for a Google search. The result: 11.8 million matches in just three-tenths of a second! While wading through all the pages of references, I found comments on everything from hunting ducks to bucks and rabbits to agate gemstones.

One of the more interesting links described how, in 1780, Empress Maria Theresa died from a cold she caught while hunting in the rain. I also learned how Teddy Roosevelt delighted in hunting in a good rain. There are also several good references to images, including an 1859 cartoon, "Hunting in the Rain," for sale on eBay.

"I LIKE TO STILL-HUNT, BUT I NEED THE RIGHT WEATHER FOR IT. YOU'VE HEARD OF COVER SCENT, BUT YOU HAVEN'T HEARD ANYTHING UNTIL YOU'VE HEARD THE "COVER SOUND" OF A SLEET STORM. I'VE FOUND IT TO BE THE PERFECT SOUND FOR STILL-HUNTING, BECAUSE IT GIVES ME A CHANCE AGAINST THE WARY WHITETAIL."

CONCLUSION

So it seems I am not alone in my adoration for cold, rain, sleet and snow. Indeed, weather to hunt is not a question; it's a prerequisite.

I'll live by that statement until...

"Cough."

— A longtime Deer & Deer Hunting *contributor, Al Cornell is a retired wildlife technician for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.*

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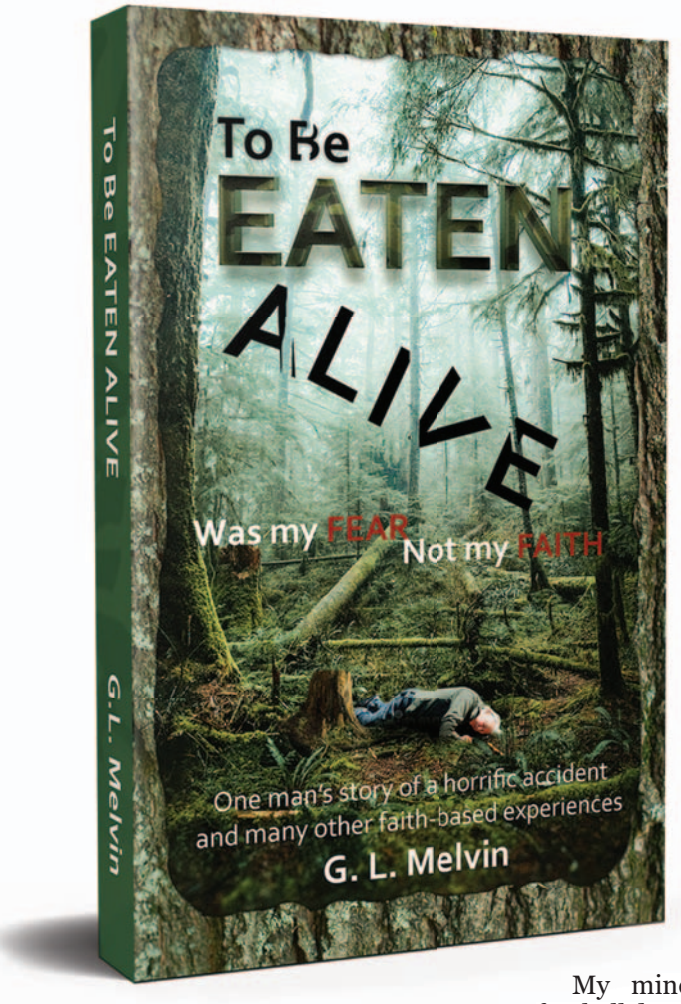
JUST ONE MISSTEP

A 77-YEAR-OLD MAN FEARS THAT WILD ANIMALS MIGHT EAT HIM AFTER HE SUFFERS GRIEVOUS INJURIES IN FALL FROM A DEER STAND.

I awoke early Sept. 22, 2016, with a doctor's appointment in 90 minutes. The sun was exceedingly bright as it shined over Lake Huron, appearing as though it was on the hood of my car.

I had a lot to do that day and believed my preparation for bow season had fallen behind, as I had spent most of summer repairing hailstorm damage to my home and garage. Further, my son-in-law and grandson were expecting their stands to be up and baited, which added urgency.

RUSSELL GRAVES/WINDIGO IMAGES



UNEXPECTED TURN OF EVENTS

The day was going smoothly, and it appeared everything would go as planned. I got a bite to eat, loaded my stand, saw and various tools in the car, and then headed for the woods. I had chosen the shortest and lightest of my stands, which was straight up and down on the tree.

Forty minutes later on state property, I fastened the first anchor strap and began to climb to the top. I used two guided ropes; one to cross at the top and one to hold my stand to the tree until I could strap and bind it. As I reached the top, I got on my knees on the footrest, which was made of expanded metal, and fastened the stand to the tree. I had a difficult time, and it took longer than it should have, as my knees were being cut by the expanded metal, and I was starting to lose feeling in my legs. When I was finally ready to get down, I pushed back to step onto the first rung. Even though I couldn't feel much, my mind told me I was touching the first rung of the ladder, so I let go with my hands and, to my surprise, stepped onto nothing and fell 12 feet backward, landing on a stump.

I immediately tried to get up but couldn't feel anything in my right leg, making me fall face down toward the ground. I tried twice more with a stick for support, which broke under my weight. I looked at my watch, knowing I would have to crawl out to my car before sundown.

I cried out to God and said, "Lord I can't do this." There wasn't a place on my body that wasn't screaming in pain. The most comfortable position was to lie face down on the ground.

My mind went back to my football days, when my coach would tell us to "walk it off" when we were injured. I found it difficult to crawl, much less walk.

I knew I had injured my neck, but I used my hands to drag myself from tree to tree for leverage. I also knew an injury of that magnitude would swell over time, making it harder and more painful to move. But by that time, I had barely gone 50 feet, with a long way to go.

REALITY SETS IN

When the fear started to kick in that I might not make it out alive, my mind wandered back to the many times my wife would request that I leave a note telling her where I had gone. My response was always, "Don't worry, if something were to happen, dying in the woods would be as good a place as any."

What I had not factored in was that I might die by being eaten by coyotes, foxes, crows, buzzards or insects, and the thought of my family finding my body was enough to keep pushing me forward. By then, my adrenaline had permeated my entire body, and I kept seeing the faces of my children and grandchildren. No matter what, I wouldn't accept any alternative but to get out of the woods alive.

I've been in the woods alone often my entire life and have gotten lost for six or seven hours to the point that no one would know where to start looking for me. Since I retired, I had scouted a lot; usually a section of land every spring and fall. I've seen my share of bones, feathers and fur, where a struggle to survive started and ended at death's door. I had a well-rounded education on the food chain and survival of the fittest. What I haven't mentioned is I bit through my tongue during my fall, leaving a blood trail for an animal to follow. My only defense was that this happened during daylight. When the sun goes down, a free-for-all occurs, and everything is fair game.

As I crawled, I knew I had to rule over my pain. Sometimes, I would talk to myself; sometimes to God. The more I talked aloud, the less I felt alone. I feared that friends and family would have to explain how their dad, grandfather or husband died in the woods, eaten by animals.

A LUCKY BREAK

Thankfully, my hip had hit the stump, not my head. That would have rendered me unconscious, possibly forcing me to get out of the woods after dark. I hadn't anticipated a three-and-a-half-hour crawl while racing to escape the darkness of night.

I found that setting a goal of 20 yards then resting worked, although sometimes the longer I rested, the harder it was to resume. My greatest challenge was pulling myself forward and finding sufficiently strong trees to grab, as some would bend or break. Overall, my upper-body strength saved my life.

Three times, I prayed for the Lord to take me home to heaven. Every time I prayed, I felt Him move away from me. It was not the right prayer, nor was it His will or my time to go. There would be another day for that.

Leaves are changing.

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The final 200 feet were the most difficult after reaching the trail at which my car was parked. I saw my car, and the trail had a slight embankment on one side. I tried to roll, but that didn't seem to work, and there weren't any trees to grab for support — just grass.

I laid for a long while, thinking how far I had come, but the most painful distance was ahead. After having crawled for three-and-a-half hours, I hadn't checked to see where my car keys were. What a relief to find them in the pocket of my pants. I shed a tear of gratitude, knowing the Lord had kept them safely in my pants after being rolled and drudged along the ground.

I finally made it to the car but had to figure out how to get in. How was I supposed to get the door open if I couldn't stand without something to hold onto? I went to the bumper and pulled myself toward the door. As I pulled the door open as far as I could, pinching my fingers in the process, I inched my way forward until it opened against the wind. I attempted to crawl under the steering wheel and lift it up as far as I could, but I didn't have enough strength, so I had to back up with my knees on the ground and lunge forward, getting as far onto the bucket seat as possible. I grabbed the steering wheel, hoping to pull my legs up and twist my imperative leg towards the gas pedal. Then I had to cross my legs to drive, as my right leg was paralyzed.

CONCLUSION

The road home was full of rocks, ruts, sand and water, and only wide enough for one vehicle. I prayed I wouldn't meet anyone head on. Thankfully, I didn't.

As I drove, and by the grace of God did not pass out because of pain, I hoped my wife would be home when I arrived. I pulled into the driveway and sounded the horn. She finally came out of the house to see me open my door and spit out blood. I had to get from my vehicle into hers, using the open doors as a crutch to pull my way in.

Eventually, we went to the emergency room, where I received a neck brace and an MRI. Then I was taken by ambulance at midnight, 45 minutes away, to Saginaw St. Mary's Hospital, where things went from bad to worse.

Editor's note: *Gerald L. Melvin suffered multiple injuries in his 12-foot fall from a tree. While being operated on in the hospital, he stopped breathing and had to be intubated. He was diagnosed with aspiration pneumonia and was put into an induced coma for 17 weeks. To read the entire story, along with other short stories of inspiration, you can find his book on Amazon: To be Eaten Alive Was My Fear, Not My Faith. He's actively hunting at the time of this article. He will be 81 on Nov. 15, 2020, the opening day of rifle season in Michigan.*

Secrets of a Billionaire Revealed

"Price is what you pay; value is what you get. Whether we're talking about socks or stocks, I like buying quality merchandise when it is marked down."
– wisdom from the most successful investor of all time

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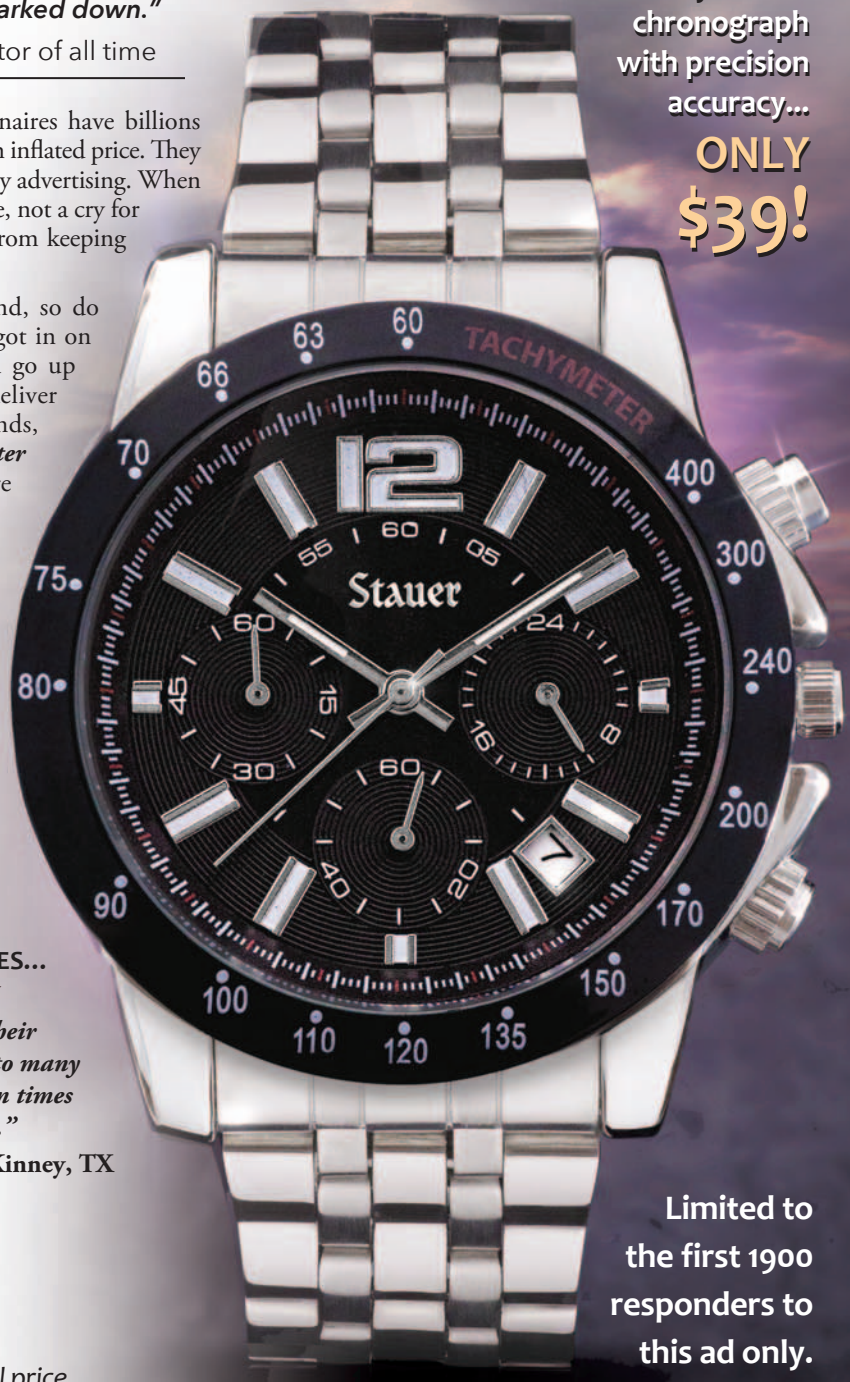

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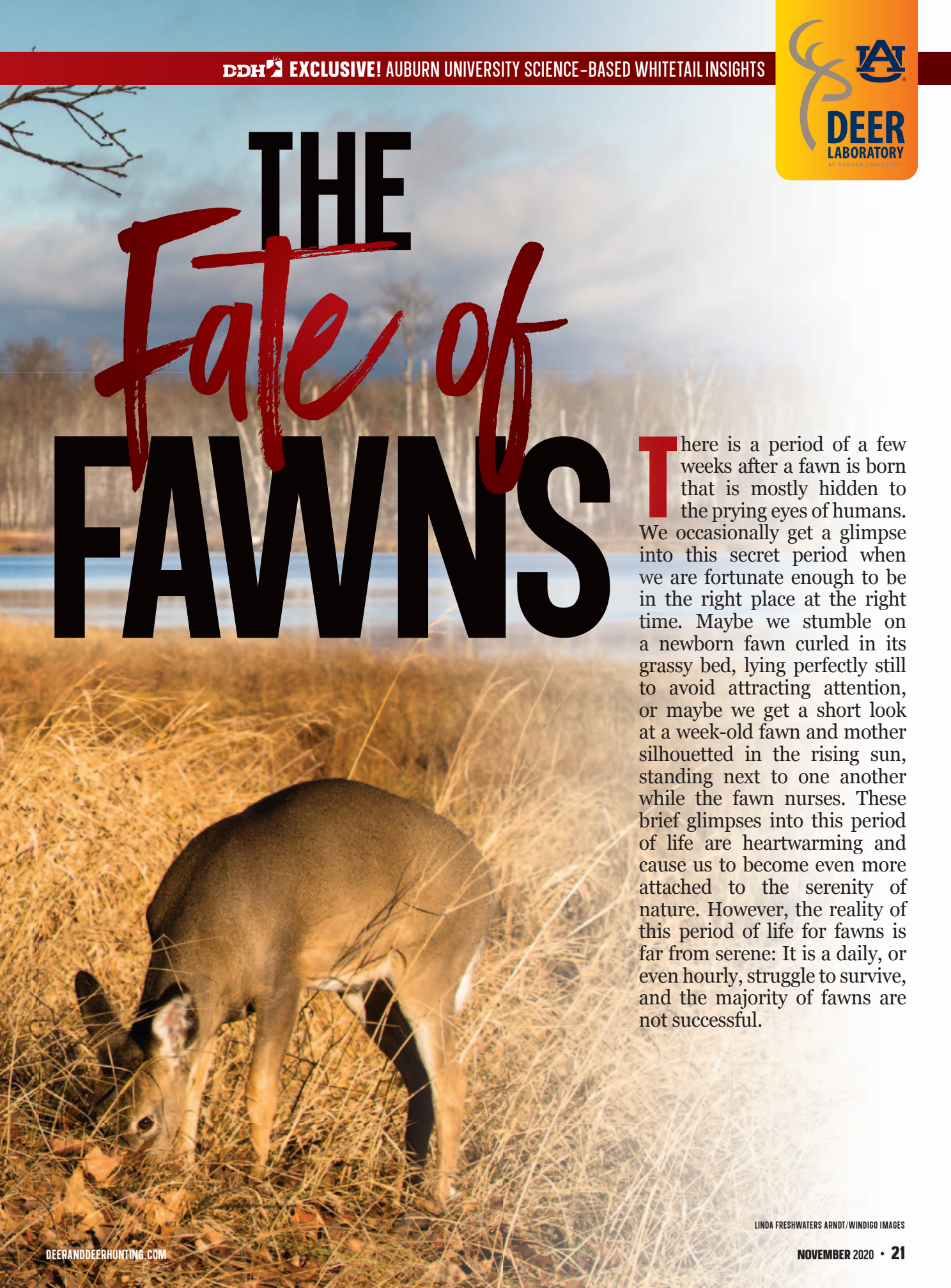
THE Fate of FAWNS



There is a period of a few weeks after a fawn is born that is mostly hidden to the prying eyes of humans. We occasionally get a glimpse into this secret period when we are fortunate enough to be in the right place at the right time. Maybe we stumble on a newborn fawn curled in its grassy bed, lying perfectly still to avoid attracting attention, or maybe we get a short look at a week-old fawn and mother silhouetted in the rising sun, standing next to one another while the fawn nurses. These brief glimpses into this period of life are heartwarming and cause us to become even more attached to the serenity of nature. However, the reality of this period of life for fawns is far from serene: It is a daily, or even hourly, struggle to survive, and the majority of fawns are not successful.

LINDA FRESHWATERS ARNDT/WINDIGO IMAGES

LIFE IS TOUGH FOR A FAWN

When a newborn fawn enters the world, there is a long list of challenges that must be overcome if it is to survive, and those challenges begin immediately. First, the fawn has to have the strength to stand and nurse. This is no small feat. During my career, I have been involved in three separate studies that examined the survival of white-tailed deer. Two of these studies, both in Alabama, involved the capture of fawns within hours of birth, enabling us to examine mortality patterns in the first few days of life. In these two studies combined, we captured and radio-collared 50 fawns shortly after birth and found that 28% of these newborns did not survive the first three days. While some of these (4 of 14) died due to predation, the majority were found dead and emaciated. Fawns found in this condition have died due to lack of nourishment, either because they were born too weak to nurse, the mother was in poor condition and could not produce sufficient milk, or they were abandoned by the mother. All three of these situations lead to a rapid decline in body condition, significant dehydration and a fairly quick death.

In situations where deer density is excessively high and the deer herd is in poor condition, the survival rate of newborn fawns can be even less. A prime example was described for an overpopulated herd of white-tailed deer in a state park in Oklahoma in the 1990s. The researchers who conducted the study out of Oklahoma State University described poor body condition at birth, and extremely high rates of parasitism (high parasitism is very common in animals with poor body condition) in newborn fawns. In that population, emaciation was the leading cause of death, and 10 of 11 cases of emaciation occurred during the first 14 days of life: Only two deaths due to predation occurred during the first 14 days of life.

ACCIDENTS HAPPEN

Unfortunately, emaciation/malnourishment and predation are not the only worries for white-tailed deer fawns during their first week of life. Accidents take their toll on fawns as well, and I am not referring to vehicle collisions. Mortality rates due to vehicle collisions are far less important for white-tailed deer fawns than other factors. Of the 260 fawns that have been radio-collared in studies that I directly participated in, zero have been involved in vehicle collisions. In fact, vehicle collisions rarely are considered to be an important factor in regulating fawn survival, no matter what region of the country, most likely because fawns don't travel much during the first 6 weeks of life. However, there are other types of accidents that do occur. At least twice during the three studies that I supervised, we have found fawns that died due to what can only be described as "accidents": something that happened to them that is not much different than us tripping on

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the stairs and falling. In both of these cases, we had fawns fall into natural holes from which they were unable to extricate themselves. We have all been walking through the woods, stepped in an unseen hole, and maybe tripped or rolled an ankle. It seems that these holes can be deadly for fawns. Two of our radio-collared fawns have died in these holes, but I cannot help but wonder how many fell into a similar hole, and then were essentially held captive until an opportunistic predator came by? Alternatively, maybe they began vocalizing in distress and attracted a predator. We will never know how often this occurs, but I speculate it is more frequent than we would surmise.

I hope that you are beginning to develop a picture of how precarious life is for a newborn fawn, especially considering that we have not really begun to consider predation. Most hunters, biologists, and managers consider predation to be the number one cause of mortality of fawns, and science backs up that belief in most cases. Reported rates of predation of white-tailed deer fawns generally range from 25% to 75%, or greater. In most cases, rates of predation for

white-tailed deer fawns are 40% to 50%, which is likely greater than what the public believes.

THE NO. 1 REASON FOR FAWN FATALITIES

Coyotes, without question, are the No. 1 predator of fawns across most of the range of white-tailed deer. During the first few weeks of life, fawns spend the vast majority of their time bedded in an attempt to avoid discovery by predators. During this period, fawns have difficulty outrunning coyotes, and thus they decrease their chances of predation simply by avoiding discovery. What is interesting is that we generally find rates of coyote predation during weeks 3 to 8 of life to be greater than during the first two weeks. Around 3 weeks of age, fawns begin spending more time with their mother, and thus are more likely to be visually detected by coyotes. While they are far more capable of eluding predators than they were just a few weeks earlier, their nutritional needs are changing, and they are beginning to supplement their diet with natural vegetation. This nutritional demand results in increased susceptibility to predation, and coyotes take their toll on fawns during this period.

OTHER PREDATORS

However, let us not forget the other predators that pose a risk to fawns. Bobcats are generally the second most important predator of white-tailed deer fawns across most of their range. Their impact on fawns is far less than coyotes, however. Where coyotes may predate 40% to 70% of fawns in a population, bobcats are generally in the 5% to 15% range. Bobcats are ambush predators and do not cover the amount of range in a night as a coursing predator such as a coyote, and thus they likely encounter fawns less frequently. Additionally, as an ambush predator they are dependent on fawns walking within a certain range for successful capture: unlike coyotes, they are not physiologically capable of running down prey over long distances. Additional common predators include the gray fox, red fox, and domestic/feral dogs. In regions where they are present, black bears, fishers, badgers, and other predators predate fawns as well. The rates of predation caused by these species likely do not affect deer populations in most cases (exceptions can include domestic/feral dogs and black bears), but the presence of these species makes life precarious for fawns.

Finally, from a predatory standpoint, we have to consider that wild pigs may be a factor. To date, no fawn survival studies have reported wild pigs predating a fawn. However, wild pigs are well documented as predators of newborn livestock, and in some cases their impacts are only exceeded by coyotes. Wild pigs are extremely opportunistic omnivores, and we are now finding that they commonly supplement their primarily vegetative diet with meat. In fact, in a study we were conducting on food habits of wild pigs in Georgia, we

found and documented a large boar consuming a white-tailed deer fawn alive. How often this occurs is still unknown, but this is not the only documentation of wild pigs predating fawns. Wild pigs have increased their density and range in North America in the last 30 years, and I speculate that their impact on fawns may be greater than we believe.

AVERAGE MORTALITY RATE

Without question, the life of a fawn is not all rainbows and unicorns. They have to deal with malnutrition, accidents, and predators. I did not even discuss inclement weather (particularly in more northern regions), flooding, disease, and other factors that directly or indirectly influence fawn survival. The combination of all these biotic and abiotic factors result in a relatively high rate of mortality among fawns: likely greater than you expect. Most hunters and landowners I speak with are astounded at how high rates of fawn mortality are. The average rate of mortality (all factors combined) for most studies is somewhere between 55% and 80% (these numbers describe the extremes). On average, 100 does will give birth to approximately 170 fawns in a year. This means that only 34 to 76 of the 170 fawns produced by those 100 does will survive to 6 months of age. Simply put, most fawns die each year. However, with the exception of rare circumstances, we are not there to witness when things go bad for fawns.

CONCLUSION

High rates of juvenile mortality are the norm among wildlife species. With the exception of long-lived mammals such as elephants that invest significant effort in each individual offspring, most newborns of the vast majority of species die before 6 months of age. However, if we were to put white-tailed deer on a continuum from high juvenile survival to low juvenile survival, they would more than likely rank in the top 5% - 10% in terms of juvenile survival. Remember, for a species to maintain itself, each individual in that population has only to replace itself once during its lifetime. This means that in a white-tailed deer population each doe will only produce 2 fawns (one to replace her and one to replace the buck) on average during her lifetime that survive to reproducible age. While predation, abandonment, accidents, and the like are not pleasant to think about, they are very important from a population management perspective. Without them, successful white-tailed deer management would be next to impossible.

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BILL KINNEY/WINDIGO IAMGES

FINDING NEEDLES IN THE BIG-WOODS HAYSTACK

DON'T BE INTIMIDATED WHEN TRYING TO FIND BUCKS IN A SEEMINGLY ENDLESS SEA OF TREES. HERE'S HOW THE AUTHOR FOCUSES HIS SEARCH TO LOCATE QUALITY BIG-WOODS BUCKS AND AVOID OTHER HUNTERS.

A young deer helped me arrow the big-woods Wisconsin buck.

Mr. Big passed within bow range several minutes after legal light, but I couldn't see my pin well enough and had to watch him pass. However, a little buck's antics outside the pocket where Mr. Big bedded were apparently too much for the older deer to tolerate. He soon passed my stand again, no doubt focused on schooling the youngster about leaving his area alone. By then, I saw the pin clearly. Watching the Easton vanish through Mr. Big's boiler room, I knew my next challenge would be getting him back to the truck. That wouldn't be easy. Still, who doesn't love those types of issues when hunting?

Though the picture doesn't show half the author's route in and out of the dry strip where he took his largest public-land buck, it's enough to reveal that difficult-to-cross barriers often create sanctuaries within even the hardest-hunted areas.

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

Big woods offer a unique romantic appeal. Growing up in northern Wisconsin and typically heading farther north to trap and hunt, I have a strong connection with large tracts of timber. I'm simply at peace when surrounded by miles of woods.

But as much as big woods attract me like a magnet, they present significant challenges. It can seem like you're searching for needles in haystacks when trying to find deer during a big-woods hunt. Big timber offers a ridiculous amount of cover for deer to hide in, and because the woods produce much less food compared to agricultural areas, deer numbers are usually lower. Further, most big-woods hunting areas are public, so anyone can pursue deer there. As such, the search for the needle in the haystack can be overwhelming.

Here's how I try to find those needles in big-woods haystacks while competing with other folks.

SETTING THE TABLE

Nowadays, people sometimes don't define the terms of a discussion. We won't fall into that trap. The term big woods is fairly relative. A property I manage contains part of a contiguous 3,000-acre chunk of timber. That wouldn't be considered big timber in northern Alberta or even Upper Peninsula Michigan. However, it's a huge tract of timber for a Midwestern farm belt state. Generally, if a chunk of timber is large enough that a deer can reasonably spend its life there without leaving, that's big woods to me.

Next, let's define hunting pressure. That Midwestern state with the big timber chunk offers ample public hunting grounds. I'm familiar with a 3,500-acre chunk of state ground that requires daily sign-ins from specific parking lots. It floors me every time I hear locals talk about the hunting pressure on that ground. According to them, it's overrun with hunters to the point of being unsafe. Sure, during a typical November weekend day, people will be hunting that ground. But about as many days as not, there isn't a hunter there, other than during the peak of deer action. Even some of those weekdays get a skip from hunters. To me, if you can spend all day

hunting public land and encounter fewer than five other hunters, that's not high pressure.

I defined those terms because grasping them will be critical. That's particularly true when it comes to pressure, as that greatly dictates how I hunt those areas.

LOW-PRESSURE BIG-WOODS HUNTS

It might seem counterintuitive, but the first task I undertake when figuring out how to hunt a chunk of big woods is determining how much hunting pressure the area receives. That has a huge impact on how I approach the area.

If the area lacks pressure, my job is actually more challenging in some ways. In such settings, I hunt 100% natural movement and simply set up at locations I believe offer the best odds of a buck's natural travels bringing him past the stand.

The most common setups aren't surprising. Early and late in the season, I typically focus on food, such as meadows, pockets of mast, clear-cut regrowths and pockets of superior deer browse. Often, I might set up some distance from that food, but typically the travel path I'm covering connects feeding and bedding areas. It's an added bonus when there's a pinch point along that path, as that increases my odds of picking up a stray buck that's not interested in feeding but just passing through a pinch.

During the rut, I usually set up at doe bedding and feeding areas and funnels between those spots. Big-woods bucks are hunting does at that time, so it makes sense for me to do that, too.

To find those locations, I study aerial photos and maps. As I do so, I sing the old Sesame Street song in my head: "One of these things is not like the other. One of these things just does not belong." I look for what doesn't belong — specifically, oddities in otherwise homogenous habitats. About 80% of the deer spend 80% of their time in about 10% of big-woods habitat. I'm trying to find that 10%.

I study water features closely. With lakes, ponds and swamps, I look for peninsulas of dry land jutting into the water feature, islands of dry land within the wetlands and spots where the wetlands combine with other wetlands or features to create funnels or pinches between them. I also note rivers and major creeks, as they are often the backbones of travel corridors through the big woods.

In addition, I look for pockets of food sources, various cover types, converging edges where deer like to travel and whatever else photos can reveal about habitat types. Topo maps show me the topographical funnels, such as saddles, benches, ridge travel paths, the tips of nasty erosion cuts deer must go around and other features. Then I add it up. That's how I create the checklist of spots to scout, versus randomly scouting in an endless sea of trees.

It's nice when such setups are paired with a funnel, as that helps when selecting stand sites. Ideally, several features funnel deer activity down to a small area. Sure, lower deer numbers still limit the action, but the more concentrated or funneled deer are, the better your odds of encountering them.

HIGH-PRESSURE BIG-WOODS HUNTS

Conversely, when hunting pressure is high, my approach

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changes. On the surface, adding increased hunting pressure to endless miles of timber would seem to make a challenging situation almost impossible. It actually makes it easier in some ways. Instead of trying to find one spot where Mr. Big spends time in all that timber, I seek areas that are overlooked — generally because they're too easy to access — or are too much of a pain for most of hunters to reach. This is easier for most hunters than trying to figure out where Mr. Big might naturally live. Ask yourself, what's generally too much work for someone to want to endure to hunt?

Distances of more than a mile in most settings will usually leave everyone behind. So will nasty, deep gullies or busting a gut to cross ridges. Get to the other side, and you're often alone. That can even apply to the backsides of thick clear-cut regrowths. Getting through even a quarter-mile of some of that stuff can test your sanity. Think of where you don't want to go, and head straight for that area.

That was the case with the hunt in the intro to this piece. Folks hunting deer, bears and birds had hammered that big-woods area. However, photos and a spring scouting revealed a strip of higher ground between a swamp-bordered creek and a large swamp. I had to slap on waders to cross a swamp and again to cross the swamp-bordered creek, not to mention walk for what seemed like forever, but that strip was torn up with rubs and scrapes.

Following trails from the previous fall, it was actually easy to discover the buck was bedding on a hump of trees in the center of a pocket of swamp grass. I prepped a tree on the swamp-grass edge that spring and caught the buck later in October coming back in the morning from oak-studded higher ground.

I got in extra early that day. I believed that if the buck slipped by me before shooting light — which he almost did — I'd catch him coming back out for a midday snack during late morning or early afternoon. Despite heavy hunting pressure in the general area, I wouldn't be surprised if I was the only person to ever hunt that strip. It was that much of a pain to access. No doubt, the buck I shot there felt as comfortable and safe in that micro area as mature bucks on prime management ground, and I'm certain he moved freely there during daylight.

CONCLUSION

Hunting the big woods has a romantic appeal that I'll likely never lose, but it also presents significant challenges.

But with some good photos and maps in hand, begin by determining hunting pressure levels, so you'll get a good idea of how to approach such spots. In low-pressure areas, hunt natural deer movements, using funnels where you can increase your odds.

In high-pressure areas, find where other hunters don't go, wait for a good hunting day, get in early, and sit until your tag is filled or the day is done.

— For more of Steve's tactics, check out our videos at www.YouTube.com/DDHOnline.

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10 WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR ENTRY AND EXIT ROUTES

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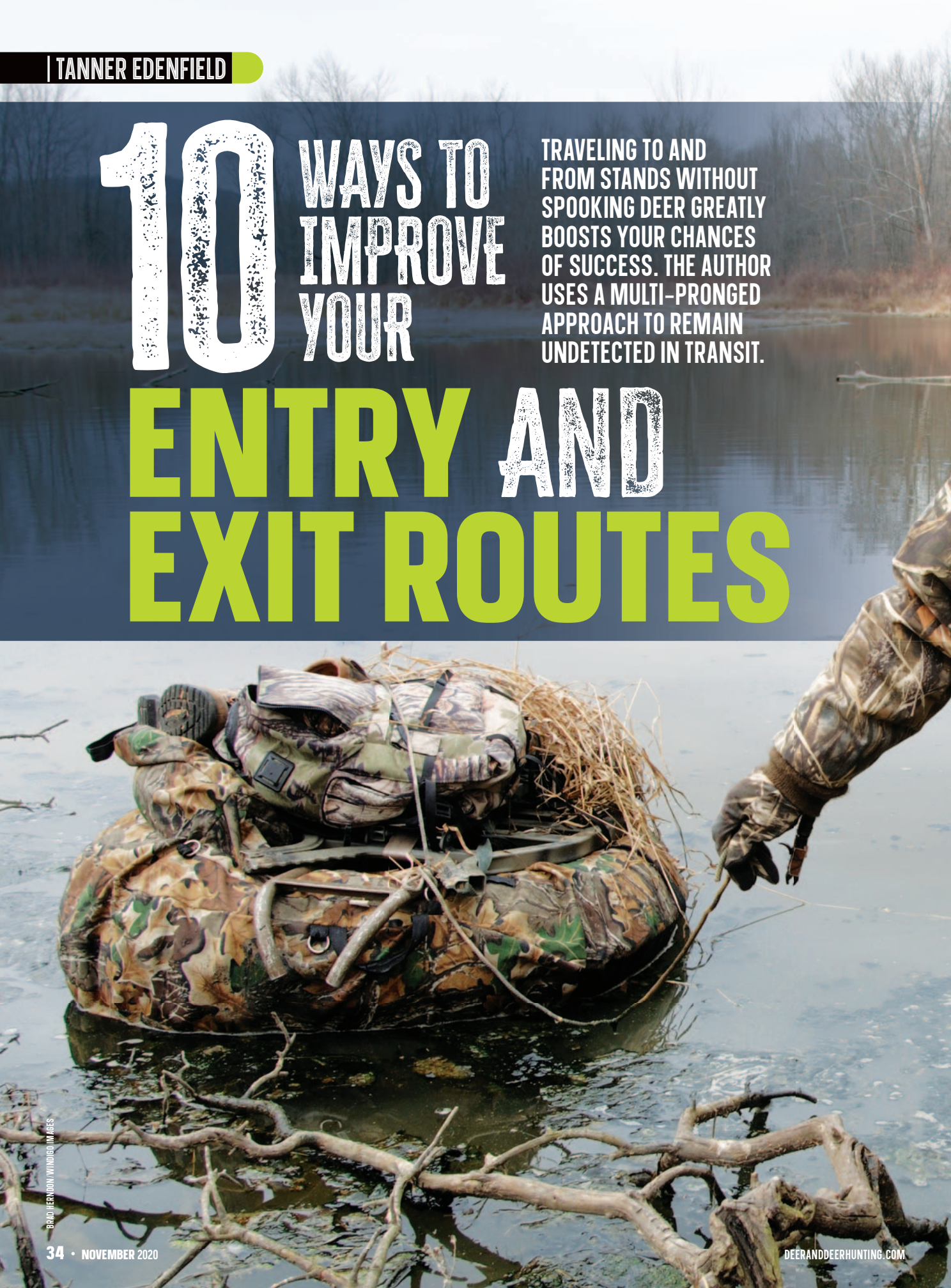

BRAD HERNDON/WINDIGO IMAGES

Having proper entry and exit routes is one of the most important aspects of a good hunting strategy. The best hunting location will diminish quickly if you spook deer between the woods and the truck.

I believe this is one of the biggest factors separating hunters who kill big bucks from those who kill time. Many hunters spend thousands of dollars on land and equipment only to mess up their chances by not determining the best way access stand locations. They cross deer trails, walk upwind of deer, make too much noise and lower their chances of success before reaching their tree.

Seems counterproductive, doesn't it? Getting from the truck to the tree undetected deserves as much or more attention as any other part of hunting. Here are 10 ways to increase your odds of doing so.

USE EXISTING TRAFFIC TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

In most areas, deer are used to some form of human traffic. It's beneficial to get as close to your stand as possible while mimicking that traffic. That might mean getting dropped off via truck or tractor or walking down the side of a public road, bow in hand. It could mean walking through a landowner's back yard in some situations or paddling across a lake in others.

STAND SELECTION

Some stand locations are simply more conducive to a low-impact entry and exit than others. If you can find those spots, you're one step ahead of the game. I've found success in many cases by beginning with the entry/exit route. That is, I analyze which areas are easy to get in and out of undetected and then find promising stand locations nearby. Generally, the edges of a property are good starting points because they are the least intrusive to reach. Travel routes between food and bedding cover are also great low-impact spots. I prefer to get as close as possible to a target buck's suspected bedding area. Because deer spend the most time at food sources or bedded down, there's less risk of spooking them on the way in or out of your setup. This approach won't always put you in the tree near the most sign, but it lets you hunt more without burning out your location.

KNOW YOUR NEIGHBORS

A good relationship with neighboring landowners can be beneficial, especially for folks hunting small properties. Neighboring properties can let you access your hunting area from many angles and get to spots that would otherwise be impossible to reach without spooking deer. I have a tract with six access points, as several adjoining landowners have granted me permission. This opens up possibilities for hunting spots that would be counterproductive to hunt if I were limited to front-gate access.

On the other hand, if you're hunting a high-pressure area and your neighbors aren't so friendly, it might be beneficial to use property lines as access routes. This lets deer feel pressure close to where the neighbors hunt, leaving the interior of your tract unbothered.

USE THE TERRAIN

Geographical features often help prevent deer from detecting you. Some spots I hunt have a lot of creek bottoms, and the deep, rugged ravines accompanying them are major factors in my route planning. Deer don't use those deep ravines frequently, so there isn't much chance of one crossing my scent trail. The ravines also hide me from deer at ground level and keep my scent from dispersing to some extent. That's just one example, but each location's layout can offer endless possibilities. Creeks, ditches and steep spots can be beneficial.

CLEAR YOUR TRAIL

A well-cleared trail offers several advantages. First and foremost, it lets you reach your stand without a flashlight (or with a dull one). In setups where I must use a flashlight, I place reflective tacks every 5 to 10 yards and use the dullest light I can find to reach my stand.

Further, an open trail dramatically decreases your ground scent. Every twig or leaf you bump into on the way to your stand increases your scent presence. The more vegetation around your trail, the higher the chances of a deer picking up on your ground scent. In my experience, a mature deer will almost always spook when crossing a human's fresh trail in unmodified woods but seldom when crossing where a hunter walked on a bare logging road. Therefore, I like to go in well before deer season and make a fairly open path along my entry routes.

STEER THE DEER

In some cases, it's impossible to find a route deer are not likely to cross. In those situations, you can "steer deer." One of the easiest ways is to tie string about thigh high parallel to each side of that part your trail. Deer hesitate to cross this and through time will learn to walk around it. You can also achieve this by cutting trees down parallel to your trail. In addition, I like to stack logs and other obstacles along my line of travel to discourage deer from adopting my trail as theirs. It's important to make these modifications well before deer season.

SWITCH IT UP

You're better off with more options. In many circumstances, it might be necessary to have separate entry and exit routes or different routes for various wind directions. For example, it's fine to walk near a crop field during the afternoon, but you'll likely run deer out if you attempt to do that after nightfall.

I once hunted a property with a

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pinch point leading to several mature white oaks a couple of hundred yards behind the landowner's house. I knew I couldn't walk into the white oaks before light without spooking deer feeding on the acorns, so I made a different plan. I walked about a half-mile down the edge of a public road that basically surrounded the property, eased into a narrow travel corridor and set up on the back side of that funnel in hopes of catching deer heading back to their beds.

BUCKLE IN

When the rut kicks in and I hunt my best spots, I try to sit all day as much as possible, even though that can be difficult. Sitting all day decreases the amount of scent I leave by half compared to when I leave at midday and return. Further, the scent has more time to dissipate the longer you're in your stand. If a deer crosses your path in the evening, it's less likely to spook if you got in the stand that morning compared to early afternoon. Besides, midday is a great time to kill a big buck.

Further, in agricultural areas with limited cover, deer often bed where they can see across the field at any time. Therefore, your only chance of getting in undetected is to walk in before daylight and get out after dark.

TAKE YOUR TIME

Patience is a virtue when it comes to getting to a stand without spooking deer. You should allow plenty of time for walking to your stand. A hunter who takes a step or two and then pauses for a while blends in with the usual noise in the woods much better than creating the rhythmic pattern a human typically makes when walking. In my terribly hot home state of Georgia, this has an especially important benefit: When going slowly, you won't sweat quite as much.

It can also be beneficial to bring a turkey call. Once, I slipped into a mature buck's bedding area, going slowly and yelping like a turkey every so often. As I approached my stand, the buck jumped up and ran off. However, he came back within an hour, investigating the sound, unsure of what he had heard. The one-eyed buck came to within 20 yards, presenting an easy shot, but he had already shed his antlers, so I let him walk. However, that illustrated the idea that my carefully planned entry route, slow pace and turkey calling created enough doubt in the deer's mind to make the difference between him leaving the area and returning, curious to see what had bumped him.

ADAPT

Pay attention to what works in your situation, and adjust accordingly. If you notice that your deer sightings in an area are diminishing, you might try something different or hunt that area less. It's not feasible to sneak into some spots at certain times. A journal helps you keep up with this. I keep records of where and when I spook deer on my entry or exit and use that info to plan future hunts. If I spook deer going to a stand at a certain time more than once, I know I need to re-evaluate my entry route or avoid going in at that time.

— Tanner Edenfield is an avid bow-hunter and DeerTech-TV contributor from Georgia.

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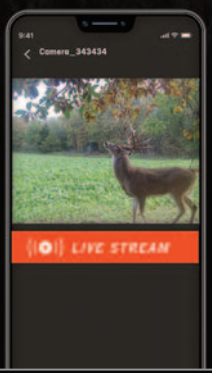

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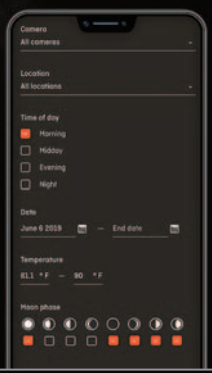

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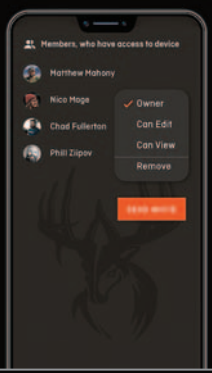

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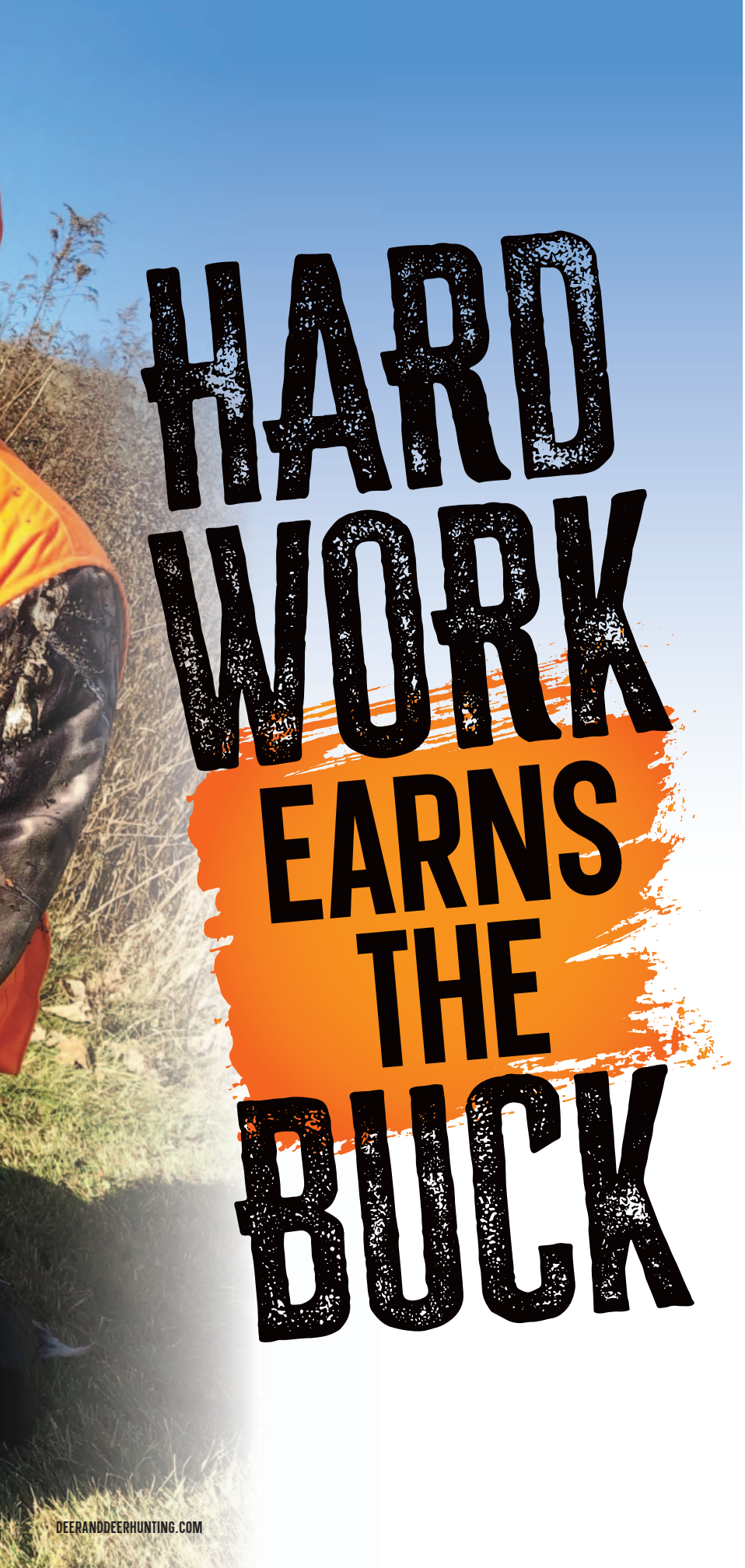

HARD WORK EARNS THE BUCK

SOMETIMES, THE PROCESS OF A HUNT MATTERS AS MUCH – AND IS JUST AS REWARDING – AS THE OUTCOME.

Work ranks among the many anchors of my life, along with family, nature, the outdoors and friends. Yes work, in the form of making a living (I'm fortunate to do things I love, though I'm not getting wealthy) and also effort expended doing things I love and for which I live.

For me, that's the outdoors, especially hunting.

I've tried to pass that ethic along to my now-20-something children, who also love the outdoors and are starting to make lifestyle decisions about who they will be. Nothing comes easy, but you get out more than you put in.

Wisconsin deer hunting is an outdoor anchor for my boys and me. I grew up doing it, plan to keep doing it until they have to carry me to my stand, and have worked to get my progeny to my native grounds to share the tradition with kind, generous folks who invite us to hunt their land and treat us like family.

When landowner Craig said he needed some help during summer managing his magical place, of course we said yes.

My youngest son, Noah, was the perfect recruit: strong back and a good attitude. We needed to get "down home" and put up a tree stand in a little valley Craig said would be a good spot for one of us.

I could relate the entire story — a couple of weekends of brush cutting

on trails, weeding some micro food plots, and helping cut, haul and stack a mountain of winter wood — but you get the idea. The community work with Craig and our friend Randy putting up that ladder stand — which was a process — led to Noah's sitting there when the sun dawned on the opening day of Wisconsin's gun season.

But I think the tale comes better from Noah. I'll let the outcome speak for itself. Hard work earns rewards. And in the case of hunting the magnificent white-tailed deer, you always get more rewards out of the process than the work you put in.

NOAH'S TALE

I navigate the dark forest path clad in heavy winter clothing, my .270 slung over my right shoulder, and my cold fingers buried in my coat pockets, squeezing the warm, soft handwarmers.

It's silent and still in the dark forest. The bright silver moon in the sky illuminates the path, making the dimmest shadows from tall trees in front of me.

As I walk, my eyes keep to the left: Where's the little path leading to the stand? It's easy to find in daylight, but the trees look the same in the dark.

There it is. I know a small, brushy bottom in a narrow valley with a tiny trickle of a "crick" (that's what they call it in southwestern Wisconsin) surrounds me.

I make sure the rifle's chamber is empty and begin to climb up the ladder. The cold metal nips at my fingers, but my nostril is so frozen I hardly notice the cold anywhere else on my body.

"Here we are," I whisper after settling in.

Rolling hills and leafless black tree silhouettes cover my line of sight, but the sun is putting a glow into the east. The sky goes from a silver-star-filled black to light blue and finally, as the sun clears the horizon, navy blue

I sit and wait, my eyes scanning left to right, back and forth, every so often glancing toward the forested hill behind me. And I think of the stand upon which I sit.

My father and I came to Green County in summer to put in some important work on the land and put the stand up. We'd assembled it ourselves, outside Craig's shop building, working under the hot summer sun for several hours. Putting the stand's pieces together, screwing in bolts and nuts, and then — just as with every big project — making some quick fixes after realizing a couple of pieces had been put in backward.

Our good friend Randy (an experienced stand putter-upper) arrived and we drive out on the utility vehicle, following the path I took on my way to the tree stand today: out the driveway, crossing the county road, splashing across the crick and then taking the first left up the forest trail.

My dad's French Brittany, Lark, small and roan, pranced in front of the vehicle. Reaching the spot for the stand, we went to a tree we initially targeted during turkey season but decided another was better. An hour of brush clearing ensued. Randy said it takes a lot of room to put up a stand.

Then we grunted and worked together to push the stand up. What a job. After a couple of more hours of running into problematic branches, cutting them down, changing the stand's angle because of uneven ground and shooting angles, and then cinching things down — just work, but good work — we were finished. It took much of the day.

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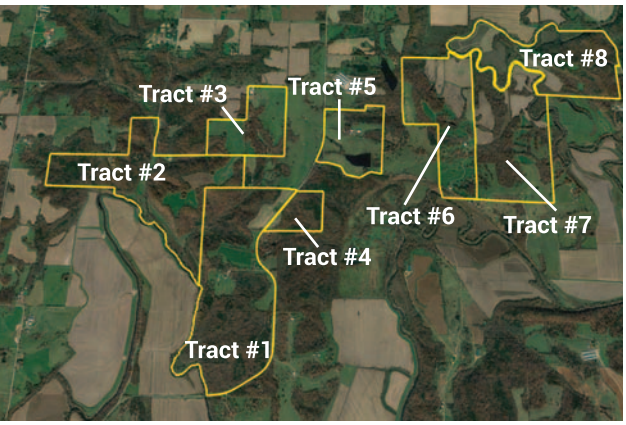

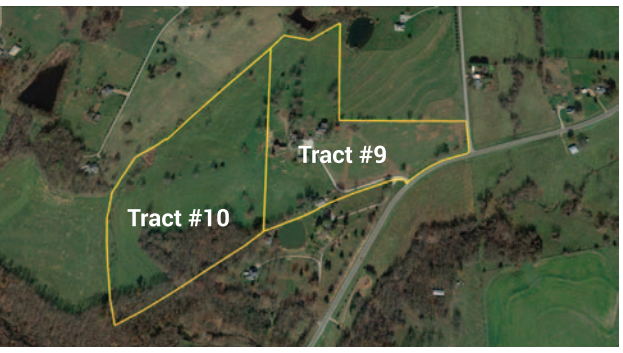

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I climbed to the top and scanned the green landscape. Oaks and walnuts stood over the tiny crick, a flowered meadow across the valley and a few pine trees hid the county road atop the other hillside. A bright blue sky blazed above.

I have that view this morning, but it's November. I can feel it. What made that snap? Off to my left, a doe's silhouette appears. My heart pounds. Well, at least I know there's one deer in these woods. I can shoot a doe with my tag, but the whitetail trots through, never giving me the chance for a good shot.

I'm thankful for the land on which I hunt. I think back to the day after we put up the stand. It was equally beautiful, with birds chirping and the sun watching over me. Dad and I worked with Craig to cut some new paths elsewhere, clear some brush and "make wood" — work to help our friend and earn our keep but also to say thank you.

I reflect on the work we completed during a couple of weekends. It was well worth it; fun and sweaty summer days, and the right thing to do.

Ultimately, getting outdoors — escaping school, worries, my iPhone and now my job — is good, whether you're working and dreaming of hunting or actually hunting.

More leaves crackle. A stick snaps. Two does run on the far side of the small valley, loping across a frosted meadow and turning toward the crick. A buck chases them.

I look through my binoculars, my cold fingers ignoring the frigid air. The buck is big, and I'm sure he has antlers: a 4-by-3.

Raising the rifle off my lap and studying the buck through the scope, I feel my heart bumping against the front of my chest. This is it.

The buck steps forward into a small opening. "Cheek on the stock," I remind myself. The cross-hairs meet the center of his front shoulder.

"Hard work earns the buck," I think, as the infinite echo of a gunshot rumbles across the countryside.

— Each year, the author and his son scout and hunt small private parcels and public deer hunting areas.

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LOOKING FOR THOUSANDS OF ACRES OF PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE LAND LOADED WITH DEER AND WAITING TO BE HUNTED? TURN TO THESE EIGHT STATES AND THEIR WALK-IN HUNTING ACCESS PROGRAMS.

WALK IN FOR HEARTLAND WHITETAILS

As an avid upland-bird hunter in one part of my soul and a committed whitetail fanatic in another, it's sometimes difficult to balance my passions in autumn. It's a good "problem" to have, and I always figure out a way.

The pursuits don't have to be mutually exclusive. While pheasant hunting but also legally licensed for whitetails during deer season, I've carried a handful of old-fashioned rifled slugs in my pocket to jam in my smoothbore bird-gun in case a whitetail happens past.

Bird hunting is also a good time to look for new deer hunting spots, even when it's not deer season.

A few autumns ago during mid-September, in the middle of Kansas, my little French Brittany, Lark, and I were hunting prairie chickens during that state's early season for those wonderful grassland birds. One day, we returned to a spot we had hunted the year before, hoping to again find a covey that had been in the area.

We didn't find the chickens, basically because the cover had grown up and was much too tall and thick for these open-country birds. The draws had especially dense cover, with tall grass and even some cattails in the bottoms.

But as we searched, thinking maybe we'd scout some pheasants for November or December, what we found was amazing. Or maybe not. Several whitetails erupted from pockets in the cover, including a big doe and her hefty fawns, an 8-pointer this any-buck hunter would have shot during deer season, and one rocking-chair buck I glimpsed sneaking out the side door.

South Dakota is known for its pheasants, but those same walk-in properties also harbor awesome whitetail hunting.

Most notable: That occurred on publicly accessible land. But it wasn't a wildlife management area, game production area, national forest or grassland tract, or any other classic public-land hunting opportunity. The land was part of Kansas' Walk-In-Hunting Access program, which leases private farm and ranch lands for public hunting access.

I haven't made it back to Kansas to deer-hunt on a WIHA, but I've hunted walk-ins in western South Dakota and on some of Minnesota's excellent program lands in the southern and western part of the state.

What's the benefit of a walk-in hunting area? Deer hunters often overlook or ignore them. By design, these tracts often focus on providing upland-bird and small-game hunting opportunities. But deer hunters are just as welcome.

States with such programs have specific rules — for example, there's no camping, and tree stands might not be allowed; certainly not permanent ones — but there's not much else to limit you, except where your legs can take you. I have placed pop-up blinds for a day at strategic spots on walk-ins, sat on a turkey stool next to a tree in a creek bottom or wooded draw, and teamed up with a hunting buddy or two to try and push a whitetail into one of our sights.

Some walk-in tracts I have seen in Kansas and western South Dakota are huge. They are prime for more of a pack-in-for-the-day scenario of spot-and-stalk hunting.

Whether you're dreaming of a whitetail hunting adventure in one of these heartland states, or if you live in one of them, don't overlook the excellent deer hunting opportunities on walk-in hunting lands.

SOUTH DAKOTA: WALK-IN ACCESS PROGRAM CONSERVATION RESERVE ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

Acres: WIA, 1.25 million; CREP, more than 110,000

Notables: South Dakota is a king of walk-in hunting, with more than a million acres in its flagship WIA program. Pheasant hunting is huge here, and access to birds is the program's biggest goal. There are also whitetails across South Dakota on these lands.

Tip: Look west of the Missouri River for big parcels of WIA, where you can really spread out and maybe find a mule deer, too (check regulations). As if that's not enough, almost 111,000 acres of CREP fields and land — all excellent cover in prairie grass, creek bottoms and wetlands — run up and down the James River Valley, from the North Dakota border to Yankton.

▶ habitat.sd.gov/access

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The author and his sons have had tremendous deer hunting success on public walk-in areas.

NORTH DAKOTA: PRIVATE LANDS OPEN TO SPORTSMEN

Acres: more than 800,000

Notables: North Dakota annually enrolls more lands in PLOTS and is steadily getting back toward the million acres the program used to have. This year's national Farm Bill, with its strong conservation provisions, will surely put more acres into wildlife lands, which is what drives enrollment from landowners. As with its neighbor to the south, you'll find more enrolled land the farther west you go in North Dakota, but acreage is good in all regions. The North Dakota Game and Fish Department does a good job enrolling high-quality lands in the program. Online mapping of these lands is excellent (see the link).

▶ GF.ND.GOV/PLOTS/GUIDE

MINNESOTA: WALK-IN ACCESS PROGRAM

Acres: more than 30,000

Notables: In a state known for its millions of acres of public land riches, Minnesota adds a nice chunk of additional acreage with its Walk-In Access Program. Like the Dakotas, bird hunting access (chiefly pheasants) is a No. 1 goal of procuring this access. As such, these lands concentrate along the state's western corridor and southwestern corner, also providing some good deer hunting access in those zones,

where public land is not as common as in the north and southeast. What's more, the habitat is prime.

▶ DNR.STATE.MN.US/WALKIN

WISCONSIN: VOLUNTARY PUBLIC ACCESS PROGRAM

Acres: more than 35,000

Notables: Although its neighbors to the west focus more on bird hunting for walk-in lands, Wisconsin is almost all deer and turkey country, so VPA lands here almost seem to be tailored for whitetail hunting. It's good countryside. Enrollment priority is given to properties greater than 40 acres with at least 25 percent usable wildlife cover. Grassland, wetlands, forest land and, in some cases, agricultural land are included in VPA. There are good concentrations of VPAs in south-central Wisconsin and also in the state's west-central reaches.

▶ DNR.WISCONSIN.GOV/TOPIC/LANDS/VPA

IOWA: IOWA HABITAT AND ACCESS PROGRAM

Acres: more than 20,000

Notables: A neat feature of IHAP is that in addition to fees received for opening their land to public hunting, landowners also get money and expert services for wildlife habitat improvements. These improvements often focus on pheasants and quail, as well as pollinator habitat, but that benefits whitetails, too. It's worth noting that many IHAP parcels are in Iowa's south-central and southwestern countries — classic big buck country — and the north-central area.

▶ IOWADNR.GOV/HUNTING/PLACES-TO-HUNT-SHOOT/HABITAT-ACCESS-PROGRAM

NEBRASKA: OPEN FIELDS AND WATERS

Acres: more than 346,000

Notables: In a state that's 97 percent privately owned but a hunting paradise, OFW offers more than 750 parcels that provide critical access to some fine outdoor opportunities in the Cornhusker State. Good concentrations of OFW lands exist in Nebraska's far southwestern corner, and there's an ample sprinkle of properties in the more populated northeastern corner. Nebraska Game and Parks has nice apps for finding these lands and other public places to hunt (see the link). It's also worth noting that OFW opens 560 acres of water to fishing, as well as 46 miles of river frontage.

▶ OUTDOORNEBRASKA.GOV/WHERETOHUNT

KANSAS: WALK-IN HUNTING ACCESS PROGRAM

Acres: more than 1 million

Notables: Kansas is a gold-standard of walk-in hunting: With more than a million acres open to public access, you could hunt there a lifetime on WIHA acres and never work the same ground twice. Much of this is good bird country, but you'll also find whitetails where you find game birds, and we all know about Kansas' trophy buck opportunities. Kansas offers world-class online tools and apps to locate these public lands (look for its digital hunting atlas and also the WIHA map).

▶ KSOUTDOORS.COM/KDWPT-INFO/LOCATIONS/HUNTING-FISHING-ATLAS/HUNTING-ATLAS

OKLAHOMA: OKLAHOMA LAND ACCESS PROGRAM

Acres: more than 50,000

Notables: Relatively new on the public-access scene (it began in 2017), OLAP opens thousands of acres of land to public hunting in a state that's largely privately owned. Like other walk-in programs, OLAP lands are wildlife havens that often sport wildlife habitat improvements. Enrolled landowners receive cost-share assistance to create that wildlife habitat, so OLAP is a big win-win for everybody.

▶ WWW.WILDLIFEDEPARTMENT.COM/LANDS-AND-MINERALS/OLAP/MAPS

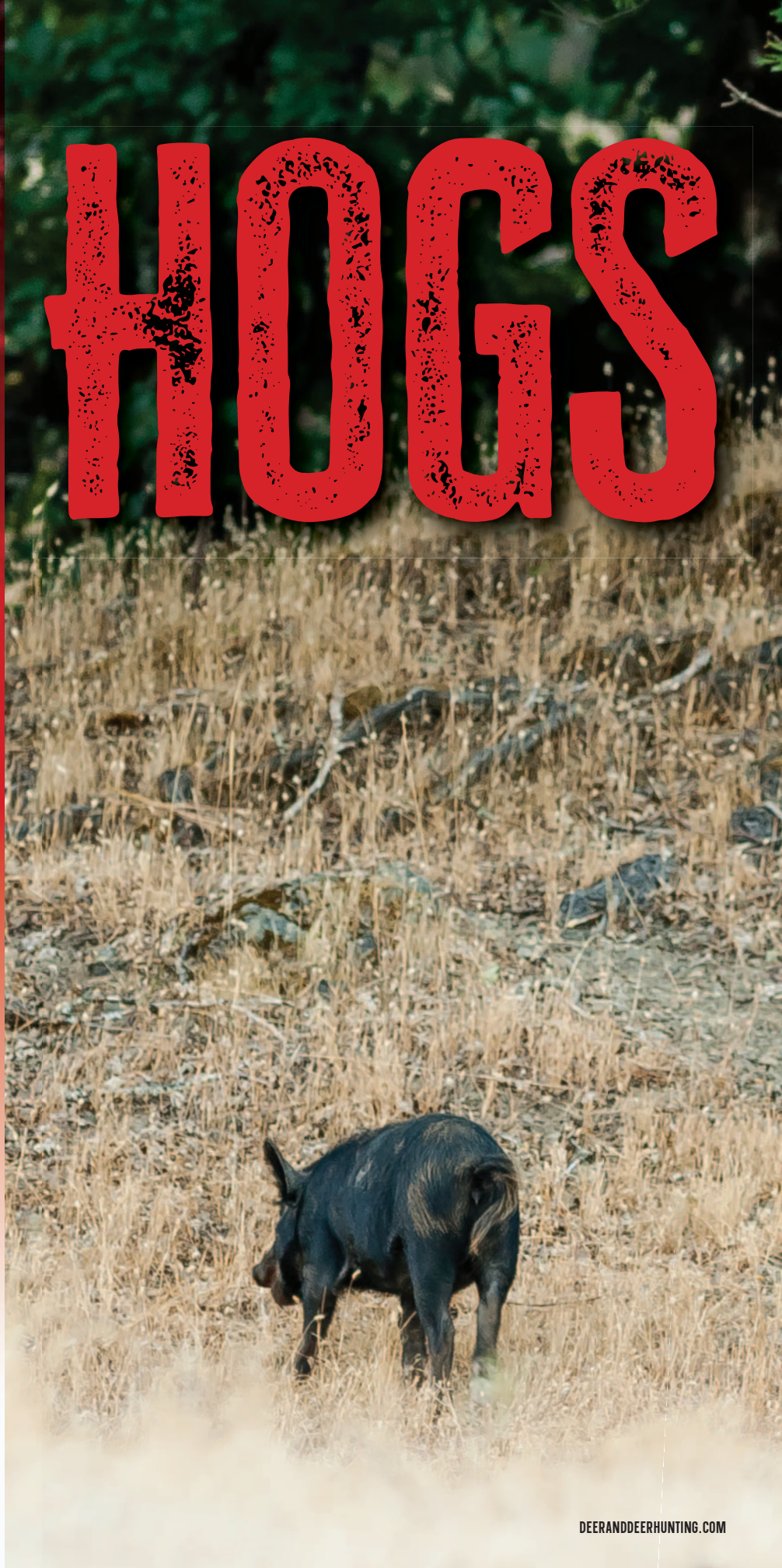
HOW WALK-IN HUNTING PROGRAMS HAPPEN

License dollars, surcharges and special fees support walk-in hunting programs, but federal funding is critical. Programs such as the Voluntary Public Access-Habitat Improvement Program, part of the Farm Bill, provide important money for those kinds of recreational opportunities. Also important are grants and funding from agencies such as the Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service. The Pittman-Robertson Act is an excise tax sportsmen asked for on outdoor gear, and it also helps pay the way. Finally, some states have dedicated funding initiatives for outdoors.

A final note: Treat any walk-in access lands like you would your own. No, treat them better than your own. The future of walk-in hunting depends on stellar behavior from hunters who enjoy the privilege of using these special lands.

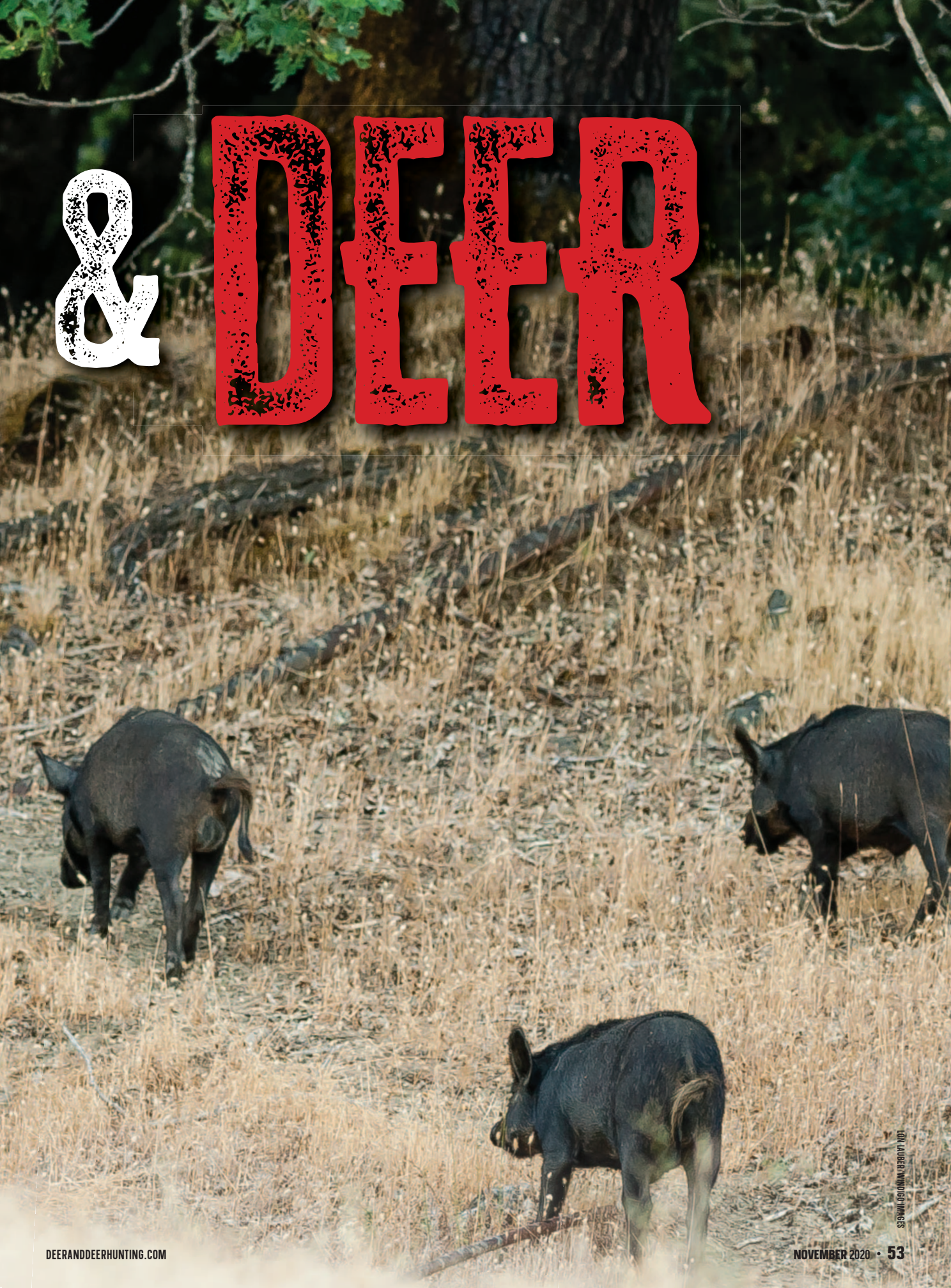
BOB ZAIGLIN

OF HOGS



FERAL PIGS HAVE CREATED COUNTLESS HEADACHES FOR LANDOWNERS AND MANAGERS. HOWEVER, THEY ALSO PROVIDE GREAT HUNTING AND TRAPPING OPPORTUNITIES, SOME OF WHICH MIGHT REDUCE HARVEST PRESSURE ON YOUNG BUCKS.

It was a comfortably cool mid-December evening in southern Texas as my good friend David Shashy and I stealthily approached the southern edge of a 30-acre grain field littered with oats. We were in Dimmit County, the heart of big deer country, where you never know what you might see at a grain field. I had observed a high-scoring 10-pointer feeding there a week earlier, so I anticipated encountering it again and hoped David might take the buck.



LON LAUBER/WINDIGO IMAGES

Feral swine, particularly older boars, are challenging if not dangerous to hunt, which is alluring to sportsmen.

With David behind me, we used the maze of thorn scrub to conceal our movement toward the southern edge of the field in an attempt to see the occupants without disturbing them. Within 30 yards of the edge, brush became sparse, forcing us to crawl. Taking our time, we meticulously negotiated through a minefield of sandburs, pausing often to remove the painful, prickly seed casings that permeated our lightweight camouflage gloves and flesh. After arriving at the field edge, we saw six does and several bucks in the 140- to 150-inch range feeding on grain, but the big 10 wasn't there. So, we got situated behind some goatsbeard entwined in the fence, forming a curtain and providing concealment to view the field.

As the warm rays of evening sun waned and the temperature dropped, our anticipation of seeing the big 10 escalated. But then the largest-bodied boar hog I'd ever seen entered the field and began grubbing mouthfuls of grain.

Suddenly, my attention focused on the dirty, tan-colored hog, which had thick ivory-white tusks extending about 7 inches out of both sides of its lower jaw. I couldn't take my eyes off the massive boar. I decided I wanted to shoot the animal, but it left the field. Confident we hadn't disturbed the pig, we rapidly returned to the truck and made arrangements for David's evening hunt. Then I grabbed my rifle and got situated in an elevated blind overlooking the field.

The attraction of hunters to trophy hog hunts shows promise for limiting the harvest of young white-tailed bucks.

With shooting light waning, I remained confident the boar would return. Just as the sun dropped below the mesquite-lined horizon, the hog reappeared. Fighting off a sudden rush of adrenaline, I placed my 7mm on the window sill, with the crosshairs on the hog's shoulder. I gently squeezed the trigger, shattering the quiet evening, and the animal plummeted to the dusty red soil. Dashing across the lumpy plowed field to my trophy, I was almost as excited as if I'd taken an incredible buck. It took four people to load the hog into the bed of my truck.

Many people believe hogs are pests, and no one can argue that pigs cause damage and create headaches for landowners. However, feral hogs also provide exciting sporting opportunities. That's good, because hog populations must be controlled, and hunters and trappers should play a vital role.

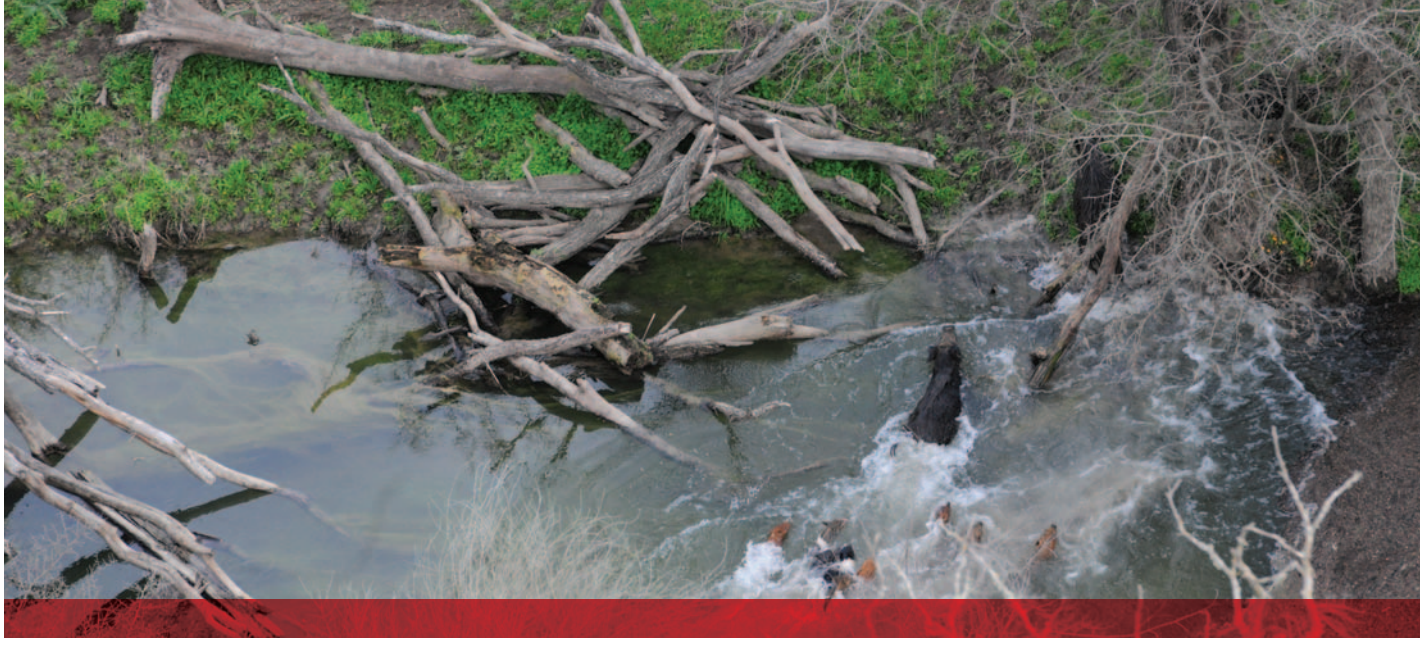
EXOTIC INVASIVES

Hogs arrived in Texas about 300 years ago, escaping from Spanish explorers who raised them for food. Today, biologists estimate that about 1.5 million hogs inhabit Texas. Two million might be more accurate, as hogs continue to expand, occurring in 253 of Texas' 254 counties. Based on the high reproductive success of hogs and their presence throughout the state, eradication attempts have been mostly ineffective, which is fine with hog hunters who like a lot of shooting.

Feral hogs are alluring to sportsmen because they're abundant and, more important, accessible. And because landowners disdain pigs, hogs represent an affordable hunt, providing more time afield and some exceptional cuisine. Hogs are so prolific in Texas that hunters are no longer required to have a hunting license to pursue them, and there are no seasons or limits. Therefore, hogs can be hunted by various means year-round, 24 hours per day. One of the most popular methods involves shooting hogs from the air in a helicopter, which might turn out to be one of the more effective control measures.

The ivory-white tusks of hogs, often referred to as cutters, attract sportsmen most. Those older "tusker" boars are challenging quarries and are considered dangerous when wounded or bayed up by a pack of dogs.

While managing a large eastern Texas ranch in the 1980s, I exploited feral hogs and made them more popular with hunters, which helped reduce the number of bucks harvested before their optimal antler growing years. Our No. 1 objective was to increase average rack size. But to realize optimal antlers, bucks had to survive the gauntlet of five or six hunting seasons, which was challenging, as the landowner's guests would often shoot the first good-looking 2- or 3-year-old buck that appeared.



Feral hogs are so abundant in Texas that hunters are no longer required to possess a hunting license to pursue them.

To divert hunters away from deer, we isolated several thousand acres of the ranch with hogproof fencing. Then, we established an intensive trapping program to reduce the number of hogs on the larger pasture, which was dedicated to whitetails. Hogs captured at the whitetail pasture were released into the hog pasture, but not before males were castrated. That aided in controlling the swine population and augmented their body weight and accelerated the growth rate of their tusks, equipping the bruin-sized hogs with long, razor-sharp tusks that were attractive to hunters.

Through time, we developed a unique opportunity for guests to pursue the extremely large-bodied hogs, which often breached 300 pounds, with boars exhibiting intimidating ivory-white tusks. As successful hunters enthusiastically discussed their adventures at night around the process house, it wasn't long before hog hunting became a celebrated event, representing

Considered a non-game animal, hogs can be hunted by various techniques, including helicopter gunning, which is extremely popular in Texas.

Possibly the most attractive feature of feral hogs occurs when males develop large, razor-sharp white tusks.

an effective method of controlling hog numbers and, more important, a way to dissuade hunters from killing young bucks.

TRAIL OF DESTRUCTION

Hog management is important because pigs are destructive. Searching for roots, tubers, grub worms and other food, they perforate the soil with metallic-like, callous-skinned noses, creating deep, expansive holes detrimental to vehicles, crippling to horses and almost devastating to crop lands.

They are also considered one of the most destructive creatures to the timber industry. In 1946, a researcher noted that hog damage on long-leaf pine seedlings was much greater than that caused by any other animal. Pigs have been documented to destroy 8,320 2-year-old long-leaf pine seedlings per acre at rates of 200 to 400 trees per day. According to the 1946 study, one hog could obliterate an acre of planted pines per day.

Feral hogs are particularly problematic for deer managers using supplemental feeding programs. Hogs have no competition for food. Deer rapidly relinquish ground, giving the rogues first choice of food sources. As a result, managers must construct expensive fences around feeding stations and grain fields to inhibit the entry of hogs. Someone who spends substantial time and money establishing a food plot only to see hogs rooting down each row won't be happy. I've witnessed it too often.

Although hogs are considered herbivores, they will eat meat. I shot a doe one freezing evening in eastern Texas, and within minutes, a large boar walked up to the dead animal, ripped it open with its razor-sharp canines and began consuming the animal before I intervened. Hogs can also kill newborn fawns and often root up quail and turkey nests. Another concern is the reservoir of diseases swine can potentially transmit.

The ultimate hog-control mechanism is harvest via hunting or trapping, which might represent some compensation to landowners. By taking advantage of a hog's voracious appetite, trapping can somewhat control hog numbers. A conventional hog trap is rectangular to circular, at least 4 feet wide and twice as long, and constructed of wood or metal. The entrance to a trap is hinged so hogs can root or push it open but cannot reopen it when inside, facilitating multiple captures. After being trapped, the animals can be sold to certified meat processors.

If the feral hog has a predator, it's the domestic dog. Hunting hogs with dogs might be the most effective means of hog control. Even if the pig population is not substantially reduced, hogs will leave an area when continually disturbed by canines.

CONCLUSION

Hogs are here to stay, and as detrimental as they are to the environment, they are attractive to sportsmen, representing a potential method of reducing harvest pressure on bucks that need time to express optimal antlers.

— Bob Zaiglin is a college professor, certified wildlife biologist and longtime D&DH field editor from South Texas.

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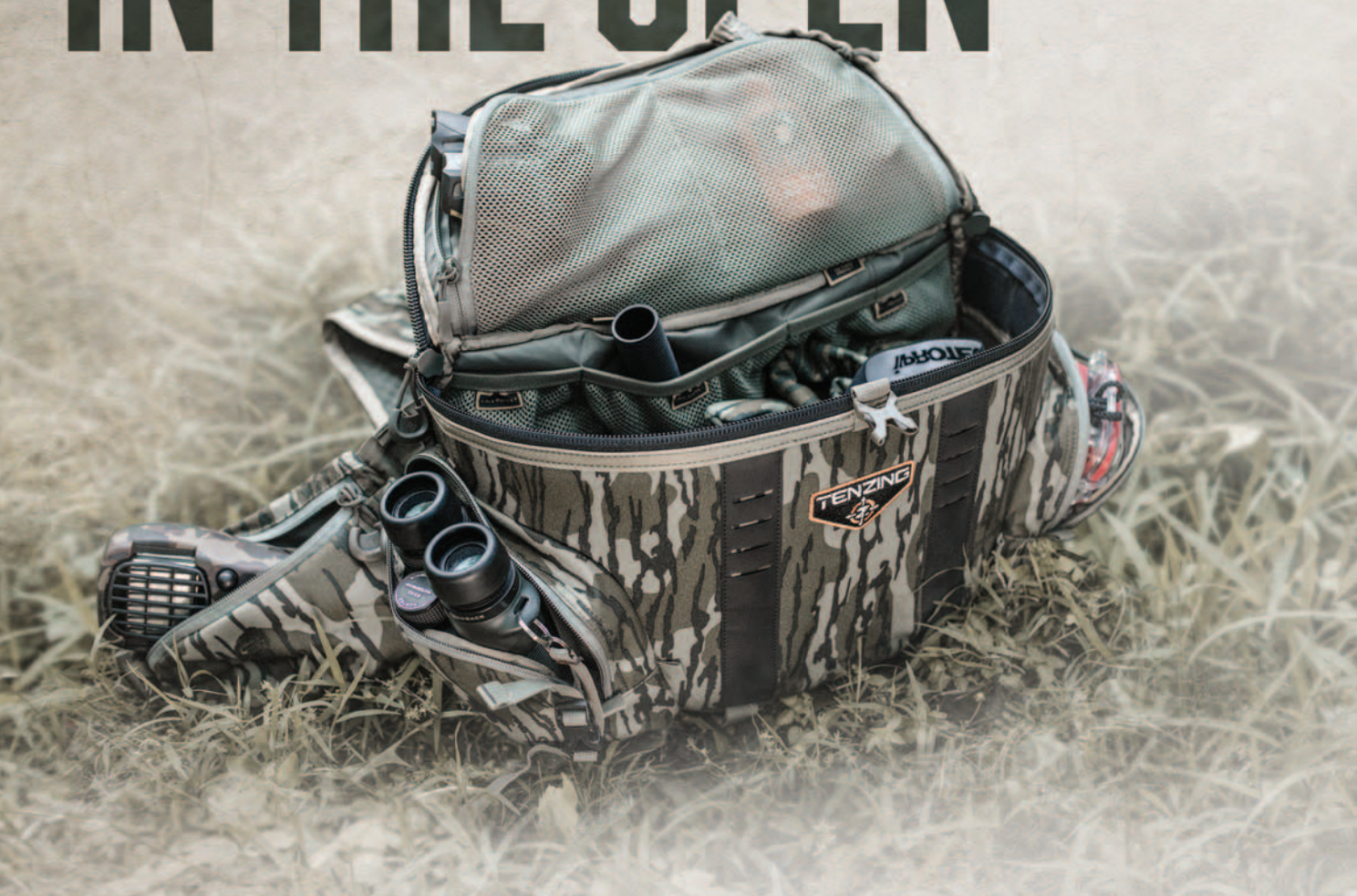

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JOHN J. OZOGA

BREEDER BUCKS COME IN ALL SHAPES & SIZES

DNA STUDIES SHED LIGHT ON WHITETAIL BREEDING BEHAVIOR.

The breeding system of white-tailed deer involves formation of a tending bond, through which a buck courts, guards and tends an estrous female. Traditionally, researchers believed a strict breeding hierarchy results, wherein relatively few of the most dominant males monopolized and bred nearly all of the estrous females. Generally, we thought bucks were not choosy regarding with which females they mate, but instead, maximized their reproductive success by mating with as many females as possible, despite intense competition for mates.

STEVE OEHLENSCHLAGER/WINDIGO IMAGES

Although we thought relatively few of only the highest ranking individuals sired most of the offspring annually, research indicates this might not be the case. Studies employing genetic techniques challenge this line of thinking, even when whitetail populations are unhunted and the male segment of the herd is well age structured.

BREEDING HIERARCHY

Typically, a buck's body size, antler size, fighting ability, sign-posting skills, courtship finesse and dominance rank increase with age. These traits and skills normally peak when he's between 4½ and 8½ years old. Hence, these prime-age individuals would be expected to do the bulk of the breeding, whereas smaller, younger and less skilled bucks would have little opportunity to secure mates.

Presumably, such a breeding strategy, through which male mating success is determined by individual rank on the dominance hierarchy, assures genetic fitness of the offspring conceived, because only the physically superior males would reproduce. For example, this has been proven to be the case for some ungulates, such as reindeer. And, based on observational studies, we also thought whitetails employed this type of breeding strategy. Although all this makes good adaptive sense — and tends to be supported by observational data — evidence based on highly sophisticated DNA testing techniques indicates we might have to adjust our thinking for whitetails. It appears that a large proportion of the white-tailed bucks 2½ years and older in any given deer population actively participate in the rut's frenzy and do some breeding. What's more, even some yearlings might not be excluded from mating, despite the presence of mature bucks.

DNA TESTING

Highly sophisticated DNA microsatellite techniques allow researchers to test many hypotheses pertaining to mammalian reproduction. These techniques enable researchers to identify the mothers and fathers of offspring and accurately determine relationships among individuals, whereas in the past such things were determined strictly by observations.

Genetic methods provided important breakthroughs in the study of animal mating systems. In fact, many studies — including several on whitetails — have revealed patterns of male mating success that are different from those derived from behavioral observations. Furthermore, there's evidence that individual male reproductive success might change depending on sex ratio, resource availability, herd density and other factors that can influence patterns of deer social behavior.

A TEXAS STUDY

One of the earliest investigations of whitetail mating success was conducted by Donnie Frels of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and Jim Ott of Texas State University. Their study was carried out in two high-fenced enclosures of 608 and 499 acres located in central Texas.

First, Frels and Ott removed all resident deer from the enclosures and replaced them with wild-caught deer. The experimental herd in one enclosure held 16 bucks and 28 does, and the other held 22 bucks and 47 does — a relatively high density. However, to compare the breeding success of young versus older bucks, only bucks 1½ years old (yearlings) and 4½ years and older were introduced. The study's objective was to determine how buck age and antler size influence a buck's breeding success.

All deer were harvested from both enclosures after one breeding season. Then, DNA determinations were made from the hair of all bucks and compared to that of the DNA of fetuses collected from pregnant does. This allowed the investigators to determine each buck's breeding success.

All does in both enclosures were pregnant; 27 of 41 does in one enclosure carried twins, and 18 of 49 in the other carried twins. One doe in each enclosure carried triplets. Some of the twin and triplet litters had more than one sire — a phenomenon reported previously by Randy DeYoung and his associates in studies conducted at Mississippi State University.

Generally, yearling bucks sired few fawns. Although they comprised 32% and 45% of the bucks in the two enclosures, they bred only two does in each enclosure.

According to an article published in Quality Whitetails, "In one enclosure, the 'high-antler-quality' mature bucks dominated the show when compared to the mating success of the 'low-quality' mature bucks. While high-quality males made up 27% of all bucks, they accomplished 81% of the breeding. The other enclosure revealed a slightly different story: High-quality bucks made up 33% of the buck population, but there was no significant difference in the proportion of does bred by high-quality and low-quality mature bucks.

"Interestingly, the buck with the largest antlers in each enclosure did not breed the most does. In fact, in one enclosure the largest-antlered buck (146⅝ Boone and Crockett score) bred only one doe, whereas a smaller buck (126 B&C score) of the same age (5½ years old) bred 16 does.

"Likewise, in the other enclosure, a low-quality (48 B&C score) 5½-year-old buck bred six does, while a large-racked (134⅜ B&C score) 7½-year-old buck bred only two does."

It's important to recognize, however, that this particular study did not represent a free-ranging deer herd, because there were no 2½- or 3½-year-old bucks present. Also, such things as a buck's body size and behavioral aggressiveness were not considered in the data analysis ... not to mention the fact this population was enclosed, which eliminated any deer movement into or out of the population.

Clearly, yearling bucks did minimal breeding, despite their fairly high numbers. However, because low-quality versus high-quality buck breeding success varied between the two enclosures, the investigators could not evaluate the importance of a buck's antler size in relation to his breeding success.

THE QUESTION OF MULTIPLE PATERNITY

Given the available evidence, it appears multiple paternity is fairly common among whitetails. It was first documented by DeYoung in 25% of twin or triplet litters produced by deer confined to small research pens. Likewise, multiple paternity was

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detected in 22% of the twin litters examined from the University of Michigan's 1.8-square-mile Edwin S. George Reserve, suggesting that such a phenomenon might be fairly common among free-ranging whitetails.

The Michigan study was conducted by Anna Sorin at the same enclosure where Dale McCullough carried out his famous studies that were published in book form in 1979. Sorin investigated reproductive success of white-tailed bucks using a microsatellite paternity analysis, and she found that adult males from all age classes fathered offspring. That is, the oldest males did not monopolize matings.

The George Reserve deer population is controlled by annual post-rut harvests conducted by employees and other wildlife professionals. Generally, a set number of unmarked deer are targeted for removal, regardless of sex or age.

In March 2001, every animal possible (103 total) was harvested from a known population of 127 deer (34 bucks, 67 does and 26 fawns). In addition, 20 deer were found dead, presumably as the result of winter stress. Many of these animals had been captured and marked previously and, therefore, were of known age. Tissue samples were collected and examined for DNA from all harvested deer and from fetuses carried by pregnant does in order to identify the sires.

Paternity of 67 fetuses (including 20 sets of twins) from 47 does could be assigned to 17 different bucks. The sires included three of 16 yearlings, two of four 2½-year-olds and 12 of 14 bucks aged 3½ years and older.

As demonstrated in the accompanying table, the number of does mated and the number of offspring fathered per buck were highly variable. While five of the 17 bucks mated only with one doe each, the others each mated with two to as many as seven different does. Likewise, each buck fathered from one to as many as nine offspring.

Multiple paternity (the fathering of individuals within a single litter by more than one male) was found in 22% of twins. In each case, the bucks that jointly sired twins were at least one year apart in age.

It's also noteworthy that while three yearling bucks mated and produced offspring, they mated only with 1½- and 2½-year-old does. By comparison, all other age classes of bucks mated with does from various age classes.

Several hypotheses might explain multiple paternity in whitetails. When one buck challenges a tending buck, a third buck could sneak in and mate with the doe. Or, a buck might actively tend and protect a doe but not mate with her. Admittedly, neither scenario seems quite likely with whitetails.

Researchers generally agree the best explanation for multiple paternity in whitetails is the displacement hypothesis. In such a case, a young buck is the first to find and mate with an estrous doe. Subsequently, an older dominant buck comes along and easily replaces the young buck. The older buck then also mates with the doe and tends her until the end of her receptive period. In this way, both bucks could copulate with the doe, and each could father her offspring.

Of course, it's unknown if does producing single fetuses also mate with more than one buck.

SO, WHO FATHERS THE OFFSPRING?

The George Reserve deer population closely resembled a natural (unhunted) deer population, in that bucks of all ages to 6½ years old were present and 41% of the adult bucks were 3½ years or older. Also, the adult sex ratio was one adult buck per two adult does, which can be considered natural.

Most yearling bucks were excluded from mating, but one-half of the 2½-year-old bucks fathered offspring. Once bucks reached 3 years of age, almost all of them successfully reproduced. Therefore, the presence of bucks from a range of age classes did not result in a strict breeding hierarchy, and the very oldest bucks did not monopolize all of the estrous does.

Sorin concluded the following: "Because male white-tailed deer can tend individual females for as long as 24 hours and because all females ovulate within weeks of each other, the oldest males appear incapable of finding, defending and mating with all receptive females. This situation indicates that when single-mate defense is the dominant male strategy and females have synchronized estrus, limited numbers of males are unable to monopolize the majority of females.

"These findings demonstrate that, contrary to previous thought, reproductive success of male white-tailed deer is unlike other polygynous species, in which a few dominant males monopolize access to estrous females."

WHY ARE SOME BUCKS SO SUCCESSFUL?

While a buck's dominance status is an important factor in determining his mating success, other factors must also be operating.

The doe obviously informs the buck that she is in estrus and ready to breed through chemical signals and her general behavior. When bucks can mate only with a limited number of does, and does exhibit reliable cues regarding their reproductive

condition, bucks would be expected to be selective.

Also, research with penned deer has shown that some bucks are much more adept at detecting these estrous cues than are other bucks.

It appears yearling does might respond more favorably toward the mating attempts of yearling bucks. Likewise, older adult does might respond more favorably to the highly ritualized courtship style of mature bucks and not tolerate the advances of young males. Mature bucks also might more actively seek mature does in estrus rather than chase shy yearling does.

Some researchers suggest estrus among all but the youngest of related reproducing does should be synchronous, because estrus can be induced by male-produced pheromones.

Therefore, if a dominant doe and a subordinate doe come into estrus at the same time, the dominant doe might displace the subordinate and copulate first. If so, subordinate does are more likely to delay mating or will more readily mate with a subordinate buck.

On the other hand, if adult does of a clan come into estrus only a few days apart, a mature buck might remain with the clan for several days and breed several does within a relatively short time span. This might explain how some bucks in the above studies managed to breed six to 16 individual does per season.

THE ROLE OF YEARLING SIRES

In the absence of older bucks, our studies in Upper Michigan's Cusino enclosure revealed that yearling bucks were capable sires. Although they lacked the sign-posting and courtship finesse of mature bucks, fought a lot amongst themselves and with does, and failed to form a strict breeding dominance hierarchy, yearling bucks bred the enclosure does on schedule and produced just as many offspring as when mature bucks were present.

Given their low position on the dominance hierarchy, it's not surprising that most yearling bucks are prevented from mating in the presence of older bucks. I find it more surprising that some of them were able to mate in these three enclosure studies when plenty of older bucks were present. Even when dominated by older bucks, these young bucks appear to be extremely alert to, and take advantage of, every possible mating opportunity.

In the George Reserve study, yearling bucks mated almost exclusively with yearling does, whereas older bucks mated with does of all ages. Because these young bucks were unable to compete with older, more dominant bucks, Sorin speculates that differing social behavior patterns among yearling versus mature bucks might have accounted for this apparent mate selection by yearlings.

Among whitetails, only yearling groups include both adult sexes. That is, there are matriarchal groups (related females and their young), fraternal groups (adult bucks) and yearling groups (that might include does and bucks, generally ranging in age from 12 to 16 months old.

Yearlings tend to band together in small groups when driven away by their mothers with new fawns, generally in June on Northern ranges. These young bucks and does associate closely until early autumn. It's this close association that might condition the young doe to the young buck, whereas young does sometimes appear intimidated by the advances of much larger mature bucks.

In our penned-deer studies at Cusino, for example, we used only mature sires in breeding trials. In doing so, we found that young does, mating for the first time, were apprehensive and delayed mating until late in their estrous cycle. By comparison, older does usually conceived much earlier in their cycle. One could argue that mating by yearling bucks is not adaptive. On the other hand, it might be better for a yearling doe to mate with a young buck and produce fawns on schedule in spring, rather than delay mating, recycle and have late-born fawns. Also, don't forget, yearling does tend to conceive several days later on average than mature does, which would increase their chances of mating with a mature buck.

CONCLUSIONS

Application of genetic techniques, employing DNA analysis, permits researchers to determine individual buck breeding success with a high degree of accuracy. Contrary to previous thought, white-tailed bucks apparently do not form a strict breeding hierarchy wherein only a few of the most dominant and physically superior bucks sire most of the progeny. Instead, the job of siring offspring is shared by most bucks 2½ years old and older. And, even in the presence of mature bucks, some yearling bucks are not excluded from mating and fathering offspring.

Therefore, the oldest bucks with the best antlers might not necessarily sire the most offspring. If this is the case, we'll have to re-evaluate our ideas concerning deer-herd management. Genetic engineering of free-ranging deer herds, as sometimes proposed, for example, to produce large-antlered bucks, might be tough to accomplish — if not totally impossible.

— John Ozoga has been D&DH's top research contributor for more than 20 years. He is a retired deer research biologist.

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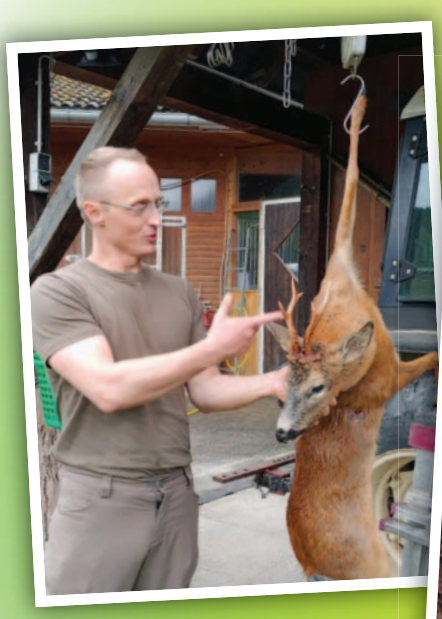
| CHRIS EBERHART

ROE DEER: EUROPE'S WHITETAIL

HUNTING FOR THE NO. 1 GAME ANIMAL ACROSS THE POND HAS STRIKING SIMILARITIES TO PURSUING BUCKS IN AMERICA.

Imagine a deer species that inhabits an entire continent. It can be found from the Arctic Circle to the subtropical shores of a warm sea, from high alpine to lowland swamps, in open plains to urban parks and gardens, and even in rocky semi-deserts.



THE OLDEST ROEBUCK, THE SHORTEST HUNT

I'd hunted six weeks without an opportunity at a roebuck. Then it rained all day, and conditions were right for one of my best spots: a triangular opening surrounded by three bedding areas.

To get through the bedding area undetected in the evening requires wet ground. The slow, silent sneak went well, and I carefully set up my hunting stool and sat. Glancing up, I noticed a buck coming toward me fast, already at 25 yards. My rifle was still in front of me on the ground, so I carefully picked it up, pushed the safety forward and put it to my shoulder. By then, the buck was just 8 yards away and looking at me. I pulled the trigger. The buck dashed 50 yards and collapsed. At 8 or 9 years, it's the oldest buck I have ever taken. The time elapsed from arriving at my spot and standing over the buck was less than a minute.

Does that sound familiar? Only two deer species are so adaptable and widespread: the white-tailed deer and the roe deer.

SIMILARITIES

The roe deer (Capreolus capreolus) is to Europe what the whitetail is to North America. The similarities don't stop at the vast range and adaptability. Roe deer are the backbone of the hunting community and hunting industry in Europe. The overall number of hunters in Europe is about the same as in North America, and almost every European hunter pursues roe deer. It's the meat-and-potatoes game animal of the continent; the deer that fills freezers.

In Germany, where I live and do most of my hunting, the annual roe deer harvest has been slightly more than 1.2 million for the past decade. Harvest numbers are similar in other countries. Across Europe, hunters take several million roe deer every year. It takes lots of hunting to produce such large harvests. The business side of hunting also focuses largely on products for roe deer hunting, including clothing, calls and stands. Hunting publications and videos always have roe deer as a recurring theme.

European hunters celebrate the opening day of roe deer season almost like hunters celebrate the opener of whitetail gun season in Michigan, Wisconsin or Pennsylvania.

In my primary hunting territory, along the edge of the Black Forest, opening morning, which is traditionally May 1, always begins with a group hunt. Typically, about a dozen hunters head out together. The group includes neighbors, friends and anyone who has anything to do with the territory, which is about a square mile. After the morning hunt, we gather at a farmhouse for a hearty breakfast and hopefully to celebrate some success. The opening morning average is about three deer.

Hunting techniques for roe deer are almost the same as for whitetails. Most hunting takes place from stands, which range from elevated wooden box blinds and traditional wooden highseats to more modern metal ladder stands. Tree stands have also been gaining popularity.

Bow-hunting is legal in 17 European countries, notably France, Spain, Italy, Hungary, Denmark and Finland. Roe deer are almost a perfect animal for bow and arrow. They are small enough that almost any broadhead placed in the body cavity will hit something vital. And because blood-trailing dogs are common in Europe, very few deer are lost.

Stalking and glassing are also popular techniques. When conditions are right, I like to slowly walk mountain trails and glass for deer in one of my territories. Most of my hunting, though, is done from the ground, sitting on a small stool with a rifle while practicing strict scent control in pre-prepped areas. Calling in roebucks during the rut is considered the pinnacle of roe deer hunting skill. The calls sound like a slightly higher-pitched cow elk call. It's similar to using a whitetail doe bleat to get bucks to respond. There isn't much more exciting than watching a roebuck bounding in to a call. Hunters who are skilled at this technique have a repertoire of calls that range from a bleating fawn, a doe being chased or a pushing buck. In November and December, driven hunts are common and an important cultural aspect of European hunting.

THE DEER AND ITS BEHAVIOR

Some roe deer characteristics and behavior are similar to that of whitetails, but some differ greatly. The first difference is that roe deer are much smaller. In my hunting territories, a big mature buck will have a dressed weight of 40 to 50 pounds. That's a normal size range. In the more northern areas, such as Sweden, or in areas with fertile soil and agriculture, bucks will be a little bigger. Mature does are only slightly smaller than bucks; usually by about 5 to 7 pounds.

As a small deer species, roe also tend to have small home ranges. In areas with high-quality habitat, some home ranges have been documented at just 40 acres. In

Roe deer are territorial, and they offset high mortality with high reproduction.

more open landscapes, such as the agricultural plains, home ranges might be as large as a few square miles. However, an average roe deer's home range is about 200 acres. Also, because of their size, roe deer can seemingly disappear. I have watched them bed down in 10 inches of grass and vanish. A bedded roe deer will let you walk past within yards. They are tolerant of human activity, such as hikers, dog walkers and mountain bikers.

That brings us to the rut, when things get unusual from a North American perspective. Roe deer have a different yearly rutting and growth cycle compared to whitetails. The most striking difference is that the rut occurs in summer, generally starting the last week of July and extending through mid-August. That varies slightly from region to region. It occurs a bit later in the far north and at altitude in the mountains. Bucks grow their antlers through winter, with growth starting about the beginning of December. Mature bucks lose their velvet in early to mid April, with

There are two subspecies of roe deer: European and Siberian. The European species (shown here) is about half the size of their cousins.

Roe deer are one of only three species of deer (moose and reindeer are the other two) that adapted from extreme cold-weather origins.

younger bucks following about mid-May. In most countries, the hunting season for roe deer starts about this time.

Just after losing velvet, mature bucks begin staking out rutting territories, which they defend. An older buck might tolerate a yearling but drive off other mature bucks. The resulting fights can be intense — to the point of causing death. Early in the season, it's common to see bucks chasing each other. At that time, rubs and scrapes appear, and roe deer use these in similar fashion to whitetails. Roebucks don't use scrapes quite like whitetails, but finding several large scrapes close together is almost a sure indication of the core area of a mature buck.

Does drop their fawns from mid-May to mid-June. From then until the rut begins, things get fairly quiet in the forest. Does feed often and take care of their fawns, and bucks have their territories mostly sorted out.

Interestingly, roe deer are a selector species when feeding, sort of like moose. Watching roe deer does feed in summer is fascinating. I have watched them stand in a tiny area, maybe 10 inches in diameter, a pluck individual leaves from certain plants for more than an hour. Because of how roe deer feed, they are almost impossible to keep alive in captivity, much like mule deer.

When you see bucks chasing does, you know the rut has begun. The actual rutting behavior parallels that of whitetails fairly closely. True to their small territories, does often run in circles, with bucks giving chase. Sometimes, does run in very tight circles in fields and leave noticeable rings, which are known as "witches rings" in German hunting lingo. However, the roe deer rut isn't quite as intense as that of whitetails. I think that's because does are still nursing young fawns at the time and simply don't expend as much energy. This brings up a unique aspect of the roe deer rut: embryonic diapause, or delayed implantation. Although breeding occurs in summer, the fertilized egg does not implant in the uterus until late November or early December. That's a reproductive strategy found primarily in weasels and bears. I've read some studies that claim delayed implantation is an adaptation from previous ice ages, and that it allows roe deer to focus on feeding and gaining weight before winter, which increases their chances of surviving.

Another aspect of the summer rut is that fawns are never bred. That means does always give birth to their first fawns during their second year. Twins are the norm. That has an effect on hunting regulations. In the early part of the season, hunters can take bucks and yearling does. Mature does are only allowed in fall and winter. After the rut is finished, roe deer bucks become quite nocturnal while recovering from the stress of the rut. Does with fawns become more visible.

Roebucks, like whitetail bucks, reach their peak potential at 5 or 6 years old and then decline. Some areas just produce bigger antlers than others. The area near my home is mountainous, with poor, sandy soil. Correspondingly, the bucks are average. Some of the premier roebuck areas in Europe include Sweden, southern England, central France and Hungary. However, just like whitetails, enormous bucks are occasionally taken from areas where you least expect them, especially in suburbs or industrial areas.

Scoring a roe deer is different than scoring whitetail racks. In fact, 35% of the final score comes from the overall weight of the skull and antlers; 45% is from the volume (measured by water displacement); and the remainder is from various antler measurements.

HUNTING SEASONS AND BAG LIMITS

It's important recognize that hunting regulations vary across Europe, not only from country to country but also state to state and region to region, and even between individual hunting territories. That isn't much different than in North America. There are some generalities, however. I hunt mostly in Germany, so I'll describe the situation there. Because of the roe deer's yearly cycle, hunting season is long. In southwestern Germany, the season starts May 1 and ends Jan. 31. From May until September, hunters can only take bucks and yearling does. After that, does and fawns are also open until the end of January.

Bag limits also differ. Every hunting territory is micro-managed and has its own quota based on forestry and agricultural use. An important aspect of that system is the leaseholder is financially responsible for crop damage, especially if the quota isn't met. That's enough incentive for leaseholders to comply with established harvest goals. One territory might have a quota of 10 deer, but the neighboring area might have a quota of 20. There are no tags, and the leaseholder decides who shoots what and grants hunting permission to other hunters on the lease. That sounds more restrictive than it really is. Because roe deer are wary and shy, it's difficult to fill a quota, and most leaseholders allow anyone hunting an area to take any legal animal. Further, finding a place to hunt is relatively easy. For example, I have free permission in three territories and am a minor leaseholder in a fourth. That means I have access to a couple of thousand acres for less than $500 a year, all within a half-hour drive from my house.

Here's a major difference from hunting in North America: The deer killed belong to the leaseholder, and commercial sale of game meat is standard. The money received helps recoup the cost of the lease. If you kill a deer and want to keep it, you simply pay for the meat. To put that in perspective, the price for venison is reasonable and far less than a non-resident tag would be. Currently, depending on the territory, I pay $1.50 to $3 per pound for a whole roe deer, minus the head and hide. The hunter always has the first option of buying the meat, and the antlers automatically belong to him.

A FINAL WORD

North American hunters hold many misconceptions about hunting in Europe. The most common is that hunting is only for the very rich. That's not true. Hunting is accessible to anyone with even a lower middle-class income. Hunters must jump through more hoops regarding classes and training to get an initial hunting license, but even those aren't as difficult as often claimed, and when someone achieves them, they're good for life.

— Michigan native Chris Eberhart has authored numerous whitetail hunting books, and he has also hunted deer extensively in Europe.

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READING THE RUB

A WHITE-TAILED BUCK'S RUBBING BEHAVIOR IS COMPLEX AND FASCINATING. BETTER, IT CAN GIVE YOU INSIGHTS ABOUT HOW TO HUNT A MATURE DEER.

Oct. 6, 2012: Dawn arrived cool and overcast, just the right conditions for photographing autumn whitetails. My plan that morning was to set up near a prime clover field in hopes of photographing any deer behavior that might occur. I didn't have to wait long. A half hour after shooting light, a mature 10-pointer inched his way across the field, eventually working to a patch of goldenrod and staghorn sumac saplings, close to where I was set up.

Every few feet, the buck paused to smell some of the goldenrod stems and blossoms. When he came to the first sumac, he paused and then began rubbing his moist nose up and down the 2-inch sapling, leaving a smear of saliva on the bark. Within seconds, he began to gently nibble on the sumac's tender bark with his incisor teeth. When two small strips were removed, the big buck started rubbing his antlers on the sapling, slowly at first, but 30 seconds into the rubbing ritual, his pace grew intense. As the buck leaned into the sapling, he feverishly thrust his antlers up and down the sumac's trunk, causing the swaying tree's leaves to rain down around him. Through the camera's lens, I saw shreds of bark flaking off and falling to the ground What didn't land in the grass clung to the buck's antlers. Every 10 seconds or so, the buck would stop rubbing long enough to smell and rub his nose against the scarred sapling to deposit scent. After five minutes of rubbing, smelling and licking the rub, the 10-pointer walked off into the woods, his antlers covered with shredded bark.

Quickly, I hit the camera LCD screen's review button to see the photos I'd taken. Before I could finish, I picked up movement of something coming through the goldenrod cover. It was another deer — a mature buck. Cautiously, the buck made his way to the tattered rub and peered in the direction the big 10-pointer had gone. Sensing there was no threat of the dominant buck's return, the other buck smelled the skinned-up rub and then began rubbing. For almost five minutes, the buck followed the same ritual as the 10-pointer by going from rubbing to licking to smelling. When he finally finished shredding sumac, he wandered off in the opposite direction of the 10-pointer. Needless to say, by the time the two bucks had done their rubbing, the sapling was destroyed.

Though I have seen multiple bucks work the same rub in the past, I've never seen two mature bucks trash a tree so fast during my years of photography. When I examined the site, I was struck by the amount of bark shavings on the ground and the way the sumac's branches had been broken. What I had witnessed in little more than 15 minutes is only one example of a whitetail's rubbing behavior.

Here's what I've learned about the whitetail's rubbing behavior from more than 50 years of hunting and photographing whitetails.

RUBS SEND A MESSAGE

Humans learn by seeing. Deer do, too. When a hunter comes upon a big rub, his heart skips a beat. When a whitetail buck encounters a rub of any size, it has different thoughts. Our excitement has to do with hunting possibilities. A buck's has to do with identifying who made the rub, because their world is all about competition.

When a buck makes a rub, he deposits liberal amounts of scent from his nasal, preorbital and forehead gland on the sapling or tree. The number of rubs a buck makes in his home range depends on several factors, such as how sexually active he is, the number of adult does in his core area and the number of bucks in his home range (especially 2½-plus-year-old bucks). Simply, scent drives a buck, and the more scent they leave in their travels, the greater the possibility for an intense rut.

I've learned from more than 20 years of raising whitetails that every deer has its own distinct odor, which is identifiable to other deer living in their core area. So when a buck makes a rub, other bucks and does can identify which buck made the rub by the scent left on the rub. Because of this, it's not uncommon for several bucks to work the same rub within hours of each other to share their identity and dominance.

SIZE MATTERS

Few things get a hunter more

excited than seeing a huge rub on a tree more than 4 inches in diameter. In more than 90 percent of the cases, such rubs are made by a mature buck. I say this because in more than 40 years of photographing whitetails, I can count on one hand how many times I've seen a yearling buck rubbing a tree more than 4 inches in diameter. Given a choice, yearling bucks opt to make rubs on saplings and trees smaller than 2 inches in diameter, with a heavy preference to trees less than 1 inch in diameter.

Mature bucks rub to leave scent on anything from pencil-sized saplings to 1-foot-diameter trees. Some of the rubs mature bucks make on bigger trees will develop into what are called traditional sign-post rubs. These are rubs normally 4-plus inches in diameter (at waist level) along habitat edges and trails and are worked by bucks year after year, usually until the tree dies from being rubbed so much. In nearly every place I've ever hunted or photographed, I've found such rubs, and most are very impressive.

During my career I've photographed bucks making rubs on goldenrod stems, corn stalks, fence posts, telephone poles, a variety of tree species and even a photographer's tripod.

PREFERENCE AND LOCATION

During the past 40 years, much research has gone into the species of trees bucks prefer to rub. My experience has revealed that species preference is region specific. Here in western New York, bucks tend to prefer smooth-bark trees, which also happen to be their preferred browse species. As a result, apple, aspen, cherry, hemlock, black locust, red cedar, red oak, staghorn sumac and soft maple make up most of the rubs in my area. In addition, saplings and trees with no branches for the first four feet are preferred most often.

In 1995, my family built a 35-acre enclosure on our farm to study deer behavior. Since then, I've conducted several studies to see if the enclosure bucks have a rubbing preference for certain tree species. By cutting 7- to 8-foot saplings (2 inches or so in diameter, of various tree species) and placing them 1½ feet in the ground, I've determined that the aroma given off by a tree species plays a significant role in rubbing preference. When given a choice, the bucks in our enclosure almost always rub, in this order, staghorn sumac, apple, black locust, hemlock, red cedar and aspen before rubbing on maple, red and white oak, or American beech. However, it should be pointed out that if a buck is in the mood to rub, it will rub on any tree species, regardless of whether it is alive or dead. For example, there are several wooden fence posts in the enclosure that are rubbed each fall. And one of the biggest rubs I have ever seen in the wild was on a 6-inch diameter fence post in Saskatchewan.

Most rubs will be found in travel corridors, along field edges, next to fence openings or logging roads, or along breaks in habitat, such as where a swamp butts up to open hardwoods. An exception might occur during a fall in which there is a heavy acorn crop.

COMPETITIVE SIGN-POSTING

When their velvet is peeled, bucks begin making rubs randomly throughout their home range. As the rut nears, rubbing frequency intensifies along trails, ridge lines or areas through which bucks commonly travel. If an area's antlered-buck-to-adult-doe-ratio is balanced, competition will be great for breeding rights. In such locations, rubbing sign will seem to explode during the two- to three-week period before peak breeding. During this time, bucks have a tendency to check out fresh rubs to determine who made it, and it's not uncommon for them to rework the rub. Also, it's not uncommon for does to check out rubs and smell, lick and rub their foreheads and necks on rubs during the weeks leading up to breeding.

When the breeding phase of the rut explodes, breeding parties form when several bucks are vying to breed the same doe. Such a setting might find an estrous doe bedded, with a dominant buck standing or bedded nearby, while subordinate bucks circle the pair from a distance. Throughout the doe's 24-hour estrus period (when she will be bred) the breeding party might not move 100 yards. During this time, many scrapes and rubs will be made by dominant and subordinate bucks as a way to show each other their dominance. Every time I've photographed such an event or checked the sign left behind, I'm amazed by how torn up the area appears and how many rubs have been made in a relatively small area.

GATEWAY TO SUCCESS?

When looking at a rub, check it for any interesting characteristics that will reveal something different about the buck that made it. How high are the gouges on the bark? If they are higher than normal and some higher branches are broken off, a mature buck was obviously working it over.

Not all rubs are candidates for hunting. Rubs along field edges were probably made randomly at night, especially if your hunting area receives a lot of hunting pressure. Rubs made a distance from feeding areas will be hunting candidates. In addition, you might be able to determine a buck's travel route by the rub's position. In most cases, a buck will rub on the side of the tree from which he approached. This reveals the direction he was most likely traveling. Rubs can also tip you off about the time of day they were made. A rub that faces a bedding area was probably made in the evening, when the buck was heading toward a feeding area. If the rub faces away from a bedding area, it was most likely made in the morning as a buck was traveling back to bed.

Last, don't rule out hunting close to a traditional sign-post rub. In areas where mature bucks are prevalent, finding sign-post rubs can increase your chances of hunting a slammer buck come fall.

— Charles Alsheimer was a mainstay D&DH contributor from 1979 to 2017. His insights into deer behavior helped educate generations of whitetail hunters.

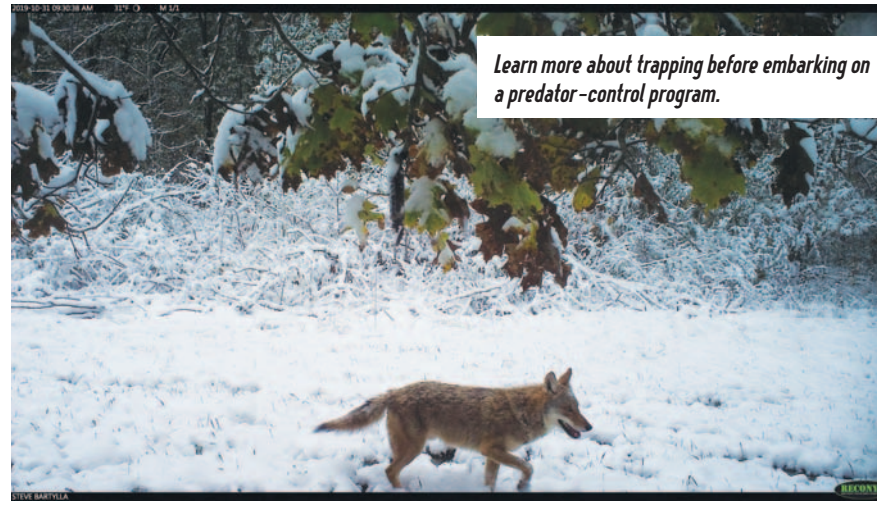
DON'T UNDERESTIMATE TRAPPING

DEER HERDS AREN'T THE ONLY POPULATIONS THAT NEED TO BE MANAGED. FURBEARERS AFFECT THE LANDSCAPE, TOO.

STEVE BARTYLLA

A lot of habitat managers are either just getting into trapping or seriously considering it, and for good reason. With each year, the results of the anti-fur push from the late '80s are becoming clearer. Unfortunately, the animals they were "protecting, trappers, the habitat and all sorts of other animals greatly suffered for those mostly well-intentioned, ignorant actions.

One of the tragedies are pockets of furbearers literally out of control. Between food sources getting leveled and reproduction rates of game birds, waterfowl and deer being drastically reduced, many are searching for answers. There's only one I'm aware of, that's both legal and effective, and that's trapping.



Learn more about trapping before embarking on a predator-control program.

TRAPPING

Simply put, trapping is a powerful management tool and very often required to create a habitat that's balanced with the species it supports. Frankly, having so many raccoons that they level a 10-acre cornfield, before it even dries, isn't healthy on any level, as well as massively stressing the raccoon population!

Truth be told, our current furbearers situation just isn't working for anyone or anything involved. If there's any doubt, drive some country roads looking at all the carcasses left to rot along its sides, as well as likely having to run an obstacle course of road darters, to not add to the carnage on that drive. The lack of actively managing those species is the cause and the problem.

Trapping is the only realistic solution I'm aware of. As is too often the case with habitat management, I'm afraid it will be left up to us to solve this problem. For those wanting or needing to be part of that solution, it's time to start thinking about getting that trapping license, and joining your state and national trapping associations.

That said, your results will likely be ridiculously better if you understand the animals you are trapping, as well as solid trapping techniques. That's important for success.

It's also critical, as one can actually do more harm than good if you don't know some basics of trapping for management. Finally, we flat out owe it to the animals we're trapping to do so responsibly. Of all the seemingly barbaric and apparently cruel things I've seen in trapping, the overwhelming majority have been done by the inexperienced that simply didn't know any better.

MANAGEMENT DIFFERENCES

Understanding one's prey is a huge key to success on a bunch of levels. Frankly, there's also a big difference between trapping for profits and to manage your habitat.

For example, I paid for my education by trapping the same 60ish beaver colonies every year. My goal was to take out the breeding pairs of adults, leaving the youngsters alone to repopulate the colony. My trapping techniques were geared specifically for that goal and it worked beautifully.

That said, if one is trying to remove a colony due to damage, the methods I used won't produce the results we're after. Heck, if one catches the alpha female coyote, it can actually inspire far more breeding than if the alpha hadn't been caught. As it applies to proper management techniques and so much else, properly applied knowledge truly is power.

CONCLUSION

How can you educate yourself? The best way I know of is to spend a couple days with an experienced trapper, running their lines with them. The next best is reading, and starting with the November issue of The Trapper, I'll be running a column in each issue on trapping for habitat management. Regardless of how you educate yourself, please do before setting that first trap. It will pay off in a bunch of ways!

— For more tips and tactics on how to Grow 'em Big, check out Steve's videos at www.YouTube.com/DDHOnline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TOM CARPENTER

SKILLET SENSE

No cooking tool does as much, as well, as the good old-fashioned cast-iron skillet.

Cast iron has been a preferred choice for cooks around the world for centuries, beginning with the horsemen of ancient Mongolia (a culture which knew something about simple, straightforward cooking), expanding during the industrial revolution in England and Holland (where the first forges created pans that look much like today's models) and continuing on the American frontier, where the black skillet was a staple of every cook set, kitchen or hearth.

From quick-searing thin and delicate strips of tenderloin for one minute to simmering a tough flank steak all afternoon, or from building a hearty pan stew for a hot meal on a cold winter's evening to browning ground venison for taco meat or spaghetti sauce, and almost every imaginable use in between, a cast-iron skillet truly is the one venison cooking tool every home chef must have in his or her kitchen.

IF YOU HAD TO CHOOSE ONE VENISON COOKING TOOL, TAKE THE GOOD OLD BLACK CAST-IRON SKILLET. HERE'S HOW TO CHOOSE A SKILLET, MASTER ITS UNIQUE CARE REQUIREMENTS, AND TAKE ADVANTAGE OF ALL THE VERSATILITY IT OFFERS.

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Let's explore the cast-iron skillet in detail — how to choose one, how to take care of it properly (it's not difficult, but the process is unique to be sure), and explore the cast-iron skillet's extreme versatility with venison in the kitchen.

CHOOSING A CAST-IRON SKILLET

There are many reasons cast iron has been a preferred cooking vessel material for millennia.

First, cast iron is simply an ideal material on which and in which to cook. Cast iron holds heat well, distributes heat evenly across the cooking surface, resists "hot spots," and is highly durable. That last trait is especially important: A well-maintained cast-iron skillet will serve you well for a lifetime.

Second, cast iron is extremely durable, and very easy to take care of if you follow a simple cleaning and maintenance process (which we will cover) after every cooking session.

Third, cast iron offers incredible versatility, and works well for almost all kinds of cooking. You can take cast iron from stovetop to oven, or use it on a grill grate or over the coals of a campfire. A cast-iron skillet can sear, brown, fry, simmer, sauté, bake, stew, boil, steam ... and perform almost any other cooking technique you can imagine.

When shopping for a cast-iron skillet, take these considerations into account:

*The heavier the skillet, the better. A thick base and walls distribute heat better, eliminate hotspots, and hold heat longer.

*Opt for a one-piece unit constructed of a continuous piece of iron. This means the handle and everything is one solid unit. This traditional form is virtually indestructible, as opposed to flimsy units using an attached handle of different material.

*Avoid enamel-coated cast iron. Enamel coating gets in the way of transferring heat directly to what's being cooked, and coatings also wear out. Better to go with the real, pure thing.

CAST-IRON CARE AND MAINTENANCE

A well-maintained cast-iron skillet will serve you for a lifetime. You need to clean and season a skillet after every cooking session. Here's the process to follow:

*Pour or stream hot water in the emptied, still-sizzling skillet if you've fried or seared. If you've simmered, or used the skillet as a serving vessel, you can do this step later.

*Use only a sponge, dishcloth or paper towel to wash the pan with the running hot water. You may need to use pure, fine steel wool or a stiff bristle brush to clean off stuck material. One rule: No soap, ever! It will impregnate the open pores of the cast iron and taint future cooking.

*Now put the skillet that's still hot back on the stovetop on a burner turned to low-to-medium heat (say, 3 to 4 on a scale of 10) and let the pan heat up and dry off until the water droplets are gone and the pan is hot.

*Place a few generous dollops of vegetable oil on the still-hot skillet and rub the oil in all surfaces (inside and out) with a paper towel. The "open pores" from the heating process will absorb the oil and season the pan for next time.

*Set the clean, seasoned pan in a warm place (perhaps the stovetop, turned off now) to air-dry completely before putting it away.

12 VENISON CREATIONS IN CAST IRON

A cast-iron skillet is durable, versatile and simple to take care of. So how can you put this almost perfect cooking tool to good use when working through your annual supply of venison? Here are a dozen concepts to get you started.

Seared Tenderloins or Chops

With a light layer of oil and some fresh-crushed garlic, cast iron quick-sizzles prime venison cuts to medium-rare perfection. Keep cuts thick — an inch-and-a-half is about right — to assure you get an inside that gets warm but stays pink and juicy. Cook only until the blood just starts beading out; go much beyond that and the meat will be dry and tough.

Skillet Steak Strips and Sautéed Mushrooms

Quickly sear steak strips from any venison cut in a little oil and garlic, then add sliced mushrooms.

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3 WILD TURKEY CREATIONS

Since many Deer & Deer Hunting readers extend their hunting season into the spring woods for turkeys, it's worth noting that the cast-iron skillet is a wonderful tool for cooking up your gobbler. Here are three options.

PAN SEARED TURKEY TENDERLOINS OR CUTLETS

With a light layer of olive oil and some fresh-crushed garlic, cast iron quick-sizzles prime wild turkey cuts to perfection. Keep pieces about a half-inch thick, and cook through fast, just until the pink is gone.

BREADED AND FRIED TURKEY STRIPS

Cut turkey breast meat into strips. Roll in seasoned flour or fish coating mix. Pan-fry in an inch of sizzling hot vegetable oil. Simple! Variation: Dip the turkey pieces in a milk/egg combo, then roll in a "flour" crushed from walnut or pecan pieces before searing.

TURKEY STEW

Cut two turkey thighs/legs into 1-inch-or-so chunks, being sure to remove all bone and sinew from the lower leg pieces. Roll the chunks in breadcrumbs, brown in oil, add a can of beer or 12 ounces of red wine, and two 14-ounce cans diced tomatoes. Simmer for one hour. Add cubed carrots and potatoes and simmer another half hour to hour.

Skirt or Flank Steak in Sauce (Swiss Steak)

Coat any steak cut or venison portion in seasoned flour or Fry Magic, brown in oil with some crushed garlic, and add red wine to the pan to pull up the drippings and crumblings. Then add a couple cans of diced tomatoes and simmer for an hour at low heat. Season to taste. This is a great approach for tougher cuts of meat, such as shoulder meat from the font leg or steak chunks from the lower back leg.

Chicken-Fried Steak

Pound steaks with a meat mallet to tenderize, dust with flour then dredge in batter (2 cups flour, 2 teaspoons salt, 2 teaspoons black pepper, 1 teaspoon garlic powder, 1-1/2 cups whole milk). Fry to crispiness in an inch of oil. Get a good, fast sear/browning on each side, then turn heat down to medium or so and let the inside meat steam-cook for a few minutes.

Fajitas

Get two pans going: one for steak strips, the other for sliced peppers and onions. Start the peppers-and-onions pan earlier, and do the steak strips only for the last couple minutes in the other pan so as not to overcook them.

Pan-Cooked Brats

Venison brats don't have to be just grilled. A cast-iron skillet heats up pre-cooked/smoked brats just fine and provides good flavor from the browning process. Pre-boil uncooked (fresh) brats in beer, then sear in cast-iron to give that color, flavor and final push of heat.

Sausage, Peppers and Onions

Cut brats or polish sausage in half, sear both sides in a little cooking oil, then add sliced red, yellow and green peppers, and onions and sauté. A colorful delight!

Skillet Stew

Brown venison chunks (coated in seasoned flour) in some oil, add a can of beer and two cans of diced and/or stewed tomatoes, and simmer for a few hours. For the last hour, add vegetable chunks (potatoes, carrots, green beans). "Stew in a skillet!"

Hamburgers

Sear burgers in just the slightest coat of oil in a cast-iron skillet. The flavor rivals grilling any day.

One-Skillet Breakfast

Fry venison summer sausage slices, push to the side, crack eggs into the resulting grease and scramble or fry over-easy. Alternatively, stick the whole skillet with uncooked eggs in the oven at 350 F and bake for 20 minutes.

Unstuffed Peppers

Brown venison burger, push to side, sauté diced peppers and one onion, mix meat back in, add cooked rice.

Meatballs with Cherry Tomato Sauce

Brown a pound of venison meatballs (make 12 to 14 of them), add three tubs of cherry tomatoes that have been halved, cook down and liquify for a natural spaghetti sauce.

CONCLUSION

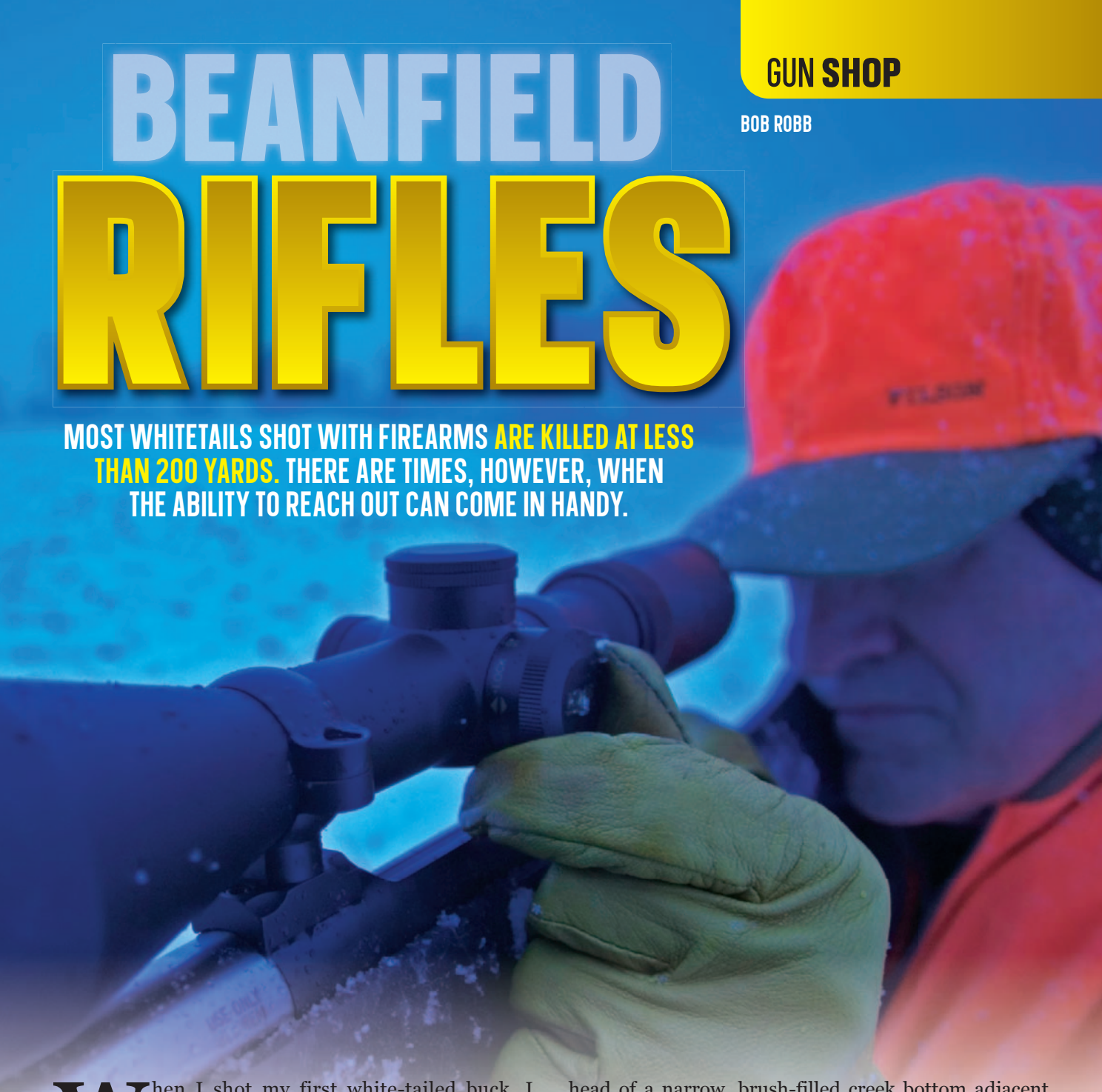
Cast iron's durability and versatility is unmatched. Make a traditional cast-iron skillet part of your venison cookery tradition.

— Tom Carpenter is a longtime D&DH contributor from Minnesota.

BEANFIELD RIFLES

BOB ROBB

MOST WHITETAILS SHOT WITH FIREARMS ARE KILLED AT LESS THAN 200 YARDS. THERE ARE TIMES, HOWEVER, WHEN THE ABILITY TO REACH OUT CAN COME IN HANDY.



When I shot my first white-tailed buck, I really had no clue how to hunt America's favorite big game animal.

Back in the late 1970s, I lived in Southern California where I was editor of a weekly outdoor newspaper. I grew up hunting mule deer and their secretive coastal cousins, the Columbia blacktail, and although I'd read a bit about whitetail hunting in Outdoor Life and Field & Stream, I had no clue what all the fuss was about. Then some friends with family in eastern Montana invited me deer hunting. Back then you were allowed a buck of either species, so I thought, "Maybe I'll try and get one of those whitetail things."

So, one crisp October morning I took a stand at the head of a narrow, brush-filled creek bottom adjacent to a scraped cornfield and waited while some pheasant hunters worked their way toward me. They flushed a few birds and banged away, and out of the draw raced a deer.

"Buck!" I gasped to myself. "White-tailed buck!"

I made a quick move and went prone, resting an old Browning BBR in .25-06 over my daypack, placed the cross-hairs on the buck's shoulder, and squeezed the trigger. Down he went in a heap. I have no idea what that old 10-pointer scored, nor did I care. He had split eye-guards and gnarly bases, and his left front hoof was slightly deformed, the result of having to walk funny after taking a bullet in the leg the year before.

WINDIGO IMAGES

KENNY BARR/WINDIGO IMAGES

When my buddies arrived later that morning, they were both amazed that I'd shot such a nice buck, but also that I'd shot him at 443 steps. Yet when I made the shot, I had no doubt that buck was mine. This rifle was supremely accurate, placing three 117-grain Sierra boattail handloads into a ¾-inch cluster at 100 yards all day long. It was my pet open-country mule deer and pronghorn rifle. At the time I didn't know whitetail hunters called such guns "beanfield" rifles.

WHAT IS A BEANFIELD RIFLE?

I love accurate deer rifles. I know I can cleanly take whitetails pretty much any place I hunt with a rifle/load combination that produces three-shot, 100-yard groups of 2 inches or less. But being an obsessive kind of guy, I don't hunt with them if my rifles don't give me 1-inch, 100-yard groups — and preferably less.

That's why I love beanfield rifles. The term came to be to describe ultra-accurate rifles designed for Southern hunters who take shots at whitetails that emerge from thick cover into the region's massive soybean fields. Older bucks usually do not come into fields until it is nearly dark, meaning rifles need to be topped with high-quality riflescopes with large objectives lenses that soak up as much light as possible.

Throughout the years I've used my own "beanfield" rifles when hunting the prairie country of western Canada, over huge Midwestern cornfields, and even when hunting Coues and Carmen Mountain whitetails in the wide-open canyons of the Southwest and northern Mexico. Many years ago, the kind of accuracy required for this long-range shooting — 300 to 500 yards — meant buying a custom rifle. Today many factory rifles can produce minute-of-angle accuracy when matched with the right ammunition.

THE RIFLES

Bolt-action or single-shot rifles, generally speaking, are the most accurate action types you can own and thus are the only way to go here.

Decades ago, the kind of quality you needed in a rifle to achieve the accuracy required for long-range hunting needs was really only available from custom gun makers or by taking a factory rifle and tweaking it. That's what I did with my old Browning BBR.

The first thing I did was replace the factory trigger with a custom trigger from Timney Manufacturing, Inc. (www.timneytriggers.com), which opened its doors in 1946 and has remained in business simply because its products are outstanding. Other solid aftermarket trigger sources include Brownells Inc. (www.brownells.com), one of the largest gunsmith supply outlets in the world with a superb reputation, and Huber Concepts (www.huberconcepts.com), another popular outlet for match grade anti-friction ball triggers. Another good source of trigger manufacturers and gunsmiths can be found in the index pages of Gun Digest (www.gundigest.com), which lists more than 100 companies that offer trigger building, repair, upgrading or fine-tuning services.

The other significant thing I did was glass-bed the action and free-float the barrel using a kit obtained from Brownells. This kind of work isn't that difficult, but it does take a bit of time and a strong desire to get it right.

If you have a favorite rifle you'd like to wring more accuracy out of, the first stop is your local gunsmith. A gunsmith can replace and adjust triggers, bed or replace barrels, and all the other little things needed to get Ol' Betsy performing her very best.

If you are in the market for a new rifle, there are many different makes and models from the major gun makers that come with accuracy guarantees of producing three-shot, 1-inch-or-less groups at 100 yards. If you plan on killing deer cleanly at distances of a quarter mile or more, such accuracy is the basis for everything else, making these rifles worthy of consideration.

THE OPTICS

A beanfield rifle is no place to try and save a few bucks on your riflescope. You need a variable scope with a top-end power of at least 10x, but I prefer an upper end magnification of 12-16x. The glass must be clear in all light conditions and the scope must be impervious to weather and typical field abuse.

Today many major riflescope manufacturers are producing — and vigorously promoting — reticle scope designs that feature a ballistic grid or mil-dot-marked reticles that purportedly allow you to make long shots with ease. Each manufacturer — and these include well-known

companies like Burris, Bushnell, Nikon, Swarovski, Trijicon and Zeiss — has their own system, but all are based on computer programs that factor in specific caliber, bullet weight and muzzle velocity. The different marks on the vertical crosshair indicate bullet impact at various ranges, usually in 100-yard increments from 100 to 500 yards (Bushnell) and 200 to 600 yards (most everybody else). On some, the various horizontal hash marks also supposedly tell you how far the bullet will drift in a crosswind.

I have done a fair amount of range work with several of these scopes to try and answer the basic question: Do they work? The answer: yes and no.

Here are some things you have to know before you go shopping for one of these scopes. First, you must zero the top crosshair where the scope maker tells you. In Bushnell's case that is dead-on at 100 yards; with most others, it is dead-on at 200 yards. Not doing so negates the system. Second, because reticles in American scopes are located behind the second focal plane — put there so when you adjust scope power up or down the size of the reticle remains the same — the ballistic compensation system will only work when the scope is turned up to its highest power. Third, you must know the exact range to the target, which means using a precision laser rangefinder before settling in for the shot.

All this takes time. Say you're hunting a huge bean field in the Deep South. A dandy buck walks into the beans on the opposite side of the field. You quickly evaluate him with your binocular or spotting scope, then have to use your laser rangefinder to find out exactly how far away he is — 400 yards. Now you have to settle in behind your rifle (and for long shots you must be shooting either prone or from some sort of bench rest-like sitting position) and find him in a scope that is cranked up to maximum power, pick the right crosshair or circle or dot on the vertical crosshair, and make the shot — hoping all the while the deer hasn't moved much from the 400-yard mark.

To make these scopes work, you must be shooting one of the cartridges for which they have been designed ... and while they are designed for many common cartridges and bullet weights, there are more for which they have not been designed than those for which they have. For example, while most scopes work with my .300 Win. Mag. and 180-grain bullets, none have been designed to work with my .257 Weatherby Mag.

Also, you need to know the muzzle velocity of your rifle. That means shooting through a chronograph, not assuming what an ammo maker tells you.

I've tested several of these scopes. Currently my custom Brown Precision Pro Hunter in .300 Win. Mag. — an extremely accurate rifle when fed Winchester Supreme ammo with the 180-grain Nosler AccuBond bullet — wears a Nikon Monarch 3-12x42 BDC scope. I sighted it in to be dead-on at 200 yards and found that when using the 300- and 400-yard crosshairs, my bullets hit right where they needed to. At 500 and 600 yards, though, the bullets hit a bit low. That's OK, because after shooting at those ranges I know where the bullets hit and can adjust my sight picture accordingly.

And that's the key. You must shoot enough at longer ranges to both become a proficient shooter at distance with a specific rifle/load combination, and learn where your bullets strike when using the multi-crosshair system. These systems were originally designed for military snipers who have a skilled and trained spotter dope range and wind for them and call their shots.

THE LOAD

You must make a commitment to finding a load/bullet combination that produces minute-of-angle accuracy or better in your rifle. This holds true if you shoot factory ammo or handloads. For example, my own pet beanfield rifle is a Weatherby Vanguard chambered for the .257 Weatherby Magnum cartridge. This rifle shoots my handloads using a 115-grain Nosler Ballistic Tip bullet at 3,500 fps and gives me a three-shot, 100-yard group of about ¾-inch all day long. To get to that point, however, I burned up several boxes of factory ammo and tested about 20 different bullet/powder combinations built at my loading bench. I have also shot about 100 rounds on the range from 300 to 500 yards to learn exactly how much the bullets drop.

You do not have to be a handloader to achieve the required accuracy for whitetail hunting. Today's factory ammunition is the best ever produced, and unless there is something going on, the odds are you should be able to find a factory load that gives minute-of-angle accuracy in one of today's fine deer rifles.

My .300 Win. Mag. is a prime example. I've put perhaps 20 different factory loads through it and found two that shoot the lights out. No handloading is needed here!

THE SKILL SET

Just because you have an accurate rifle loaded with ammo that can produce sub-MOA accuracy does not mean you are ready to start blazing away at deer at extended ranges. Being able to make these shots every time require a lot of range time. There is no way to fake it. You must make the commitment to burn a lot of powder to both hone your own shooting skills — and shooting is an athletic movement requiring lots of practice — as well as learn the nuances of your rifle and trajectory of your load. You must also spend some time shooting in the wind to fully appreciate how much even a light 10 mph crosswind can move even a fast a bullet to the side.

Such skills will not only help you be able to make the shot, but also tell you when the conditions are such that you should not chance it.

Knowing when not to shoot is perhaps the most important skill of all.

— Bob Robb is one of America's most traveled deer hunters and published outdoor writers. He lives in Washington State.

PATRICK MEITIN

AIM IS THE GAME

MAKE BETTER SHOTS UNDER PRESSURE BY MENTALLY TRAINING YOURSELF TO AIM PROPERLY.


WINDIGO IMAGES

Successful archers develop routines to get them through stressful shooting scenarios, whether it's winning a 3D-tournament shoot-off or an opportunity at a season-making buck. These are checklists of sorts, step-by-step checkpoints to assure you do everything correctly during anxious moments, because the mind under pressure tends to lose its sense of time — hurrying and cutting corners in the process. As a former big game guide, one of the most common mental short circuits witnessed was failure to aim, or at least aim properly.

The basic problem is most bowhunters view aiming as a one-step process — put the pin where you want to hit and let 'er rip, explaining why they also miss so many slam-dunk shots. In reality, there are three discernible steps to proper aiming, represented by three A's. Instilling a proper process allows you to function reliably under pressure and make misses on big bucks rarer. Let's take this one step, or A, at a time to learn more.

Acquire: The first step in the aiming process is ACQUIRING the target. By this I mean doing nothing more than shifting focus onto the target — the general area you want to hit — and drawing your bow and getting ALL of your pins into the general vicinity of the kill zone. You're not aiming yet! You're shifting focus onto the target and getting through the basic necessity of the draw cycle (which in the real world includes the all-important process of shot timing; drawing your bow undetected by your quarry). That's all.

Align: In the second step, the goal is to ALIGN the shot and any part of shooting form pertaining to aiming. In general terms, you're getting the appropriate pin (according to range and shot angle) into the basic kill zone. But you're not yet aiming! Part of this step also includes double-checking anchor consistency, proper shooting form (bending at the waist on steeply downward shots, instead of simply dropping the bow arm, for instance), assuring a loose grip, while also squarely aligning your peep with the sight's aperture-alignment ring. Only when everything is a go should you move forward. Make executing a perfect shot more important than simply firing an arrow.

Aim: OK, now you get to AIM. But there's a little more to truly aiming than just aiming. After everything is ALIGNED and you're going through the final steps of assuring shooting form is solidified, you should have picked a spot. This spot, obviously, should be the spot where you want your arrow to hit, based on shot angle and how that correlates to vitals. This spot should consist of the smallest detail you are physically able to discern; a single hair, a burr the deer has picked up along the way, a part or cowlick in its hair, a wrinkle or shadow on its hide, according to how acute your eyesight is.

As the actual aiming process begins, you should concentrate on that single, tiny spot with every ounce of your being, burning a hole through it as if you possess Superman's laser vision abilities. Don't glance at the buck's antlers, or split concentration on the other deer following your target animal. Those things don't matter right now.

Now an interesting thing occurs. You'll find you don't need to consciously AIM at all, because by simply concentrating mightily on that tiny spot your pin will have automatically floated onto that spot. Don't fight it, don't try to control it, or allow any conscious thought be a part. Burn a hole through that spot; allow the proper pin to float on it, around it, in and out of it. Make little figure eights or clover leaves if you can't keep your conscious out of things — and begin to squeeze the release trigger, or allow the string to slip from your fingers like snow dropping from a pine bough, pulling shoulder blades together — aiming while allowing the shot to explode and continuing to aim, i.e., follow-through.

CONCLUSION

Aiming in this manner, I'll guarantee you when that shot goes off you will soon be trailing a deer dead on its feet. You might miss your spot, but I'd bet you don't miss it by much, and you certainly won't miss the vitals.

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FACEBOOK

We all have our strengths.

ADAM MUNCY: Hahahahah yea I'm guilty
VERNON CASTLE: At 70 mph down the highway.
DANIEL RIVERA: Priorities.
MARY TEGTMEIER: Yep.
MICHAEL MCCLURE: About sums it up, huh.

WHAT TO WATCH
TEAM 200 TV

The TEAM 200 concept was born from a personal goal of harvesting the biggest whitetails that North America has to offer! Taking it a step further, the TEAM 200 concept is to teach fellow hunters no matter where they live, what species they hunt or class of animals they have to pursue, how to consistently harvest the biggest, most mature animals their area has to offer, no matter what the score! We will also highlight the best areas in the country for the trophy of a lifetime and where to go to find the best gear available to ensure the hunt is a successful one. Our diverse team has been very fortunate to enjoy and gain more than 150 years of experience in the field, and with over 30,000 inches of antler to our credit, we have a wealth of knowledge to share with everyone.

WATCH ON TUESDAYS AT 8:00 P.M. EST, THURSDAYS AT 3:00 P.M. EST AND SATURDAYS AT 9:30 A.M. EST.

DEER & DEER HUNTING TV

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10 P.M. EST ON SATURDAYS,
9:30 A.M. EST SUNDAYS,
12:30 A.M. EST WEDNESDAYS,
6:30 A.M. EST THURSDAY.

NOVEMBER 7: NUTRITIONAL NEEDS
A look at how nutrition plays a role in whitetail health, but also how bucks and does live differently on the landscape and why bucks, as a result, grow larger based on the physiological needs and differences.

NOVEMBER 14: THE BEST SHOT
The best shot for both bow and crossbow hunting all depends on the situation. Dan Schmidt provides expert insights on how to get the most out of your archery equipment when the moment of truth arrives ... and is just yards away from your bootstraps.

NOVEMBER 21: WHITETAIL DISPERSAL
Deer dispersal is both complex and fascinating. The more you know about this scientific phenomenon among whitetails, the better prepared you will be when it's time to manage the herd. Dan Schmidt provides in-depth insights.

NOVEMBER 28: ON THE GROUND
Mark Kayser let's us in on his tips and tricks for hunting from the ground in Wyoming.

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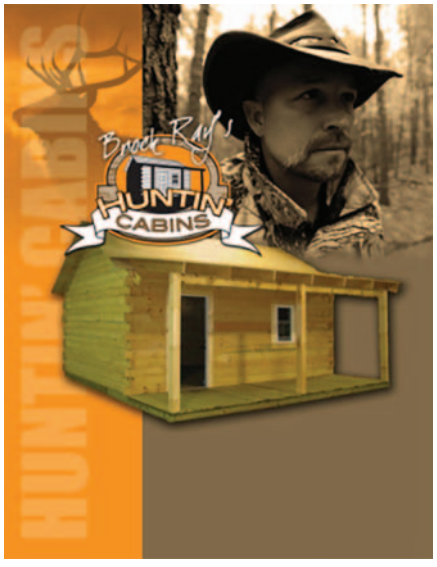
BROCK'S HUNTIN' CABINS ELK SERIES CABIN KIT GIVEAWAY



Pursuit Channel and Brock's Huntin' Cabins have joined forces to bring you this amazing giveaway. One lucky winner is going to be taking home an Elk Series Cabin Kit worth $19,200 ... and it could be you!

The Elk Series Cabin has 320 square feet of living space. The open floor plan gives you the flexibility to tailor your cabin to fit your individual needs. The Elk Series is the perfect hideaway for the weekend, and we want it to be yours! Visit PursuitChannel.com to enter, and be sure to head over to the Brock's Huntin' Cabins Facebook page and give them a like to see all they have to offer. Good luck to all who enter to win this amazing giveaway from Brock's Huntin Cabins!

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1 HUNTWORTH GEAR MEN'S HEAVYWEIGHT SOFT SHELL JACKET

Designed especially for late-season hunting, this heavyweight parka is as warm as it gets when temperatures plummet. The quiet Tarnen™ camo triple-layer shell is equipped with InVelvet® fleece bonded to a windproof breathable film, and a soft Sherpa lining for the ultimate in comfort and flexibility. A chin guard, drawcord adjusters and a longer design help to seal in the warmth. The parka is also treated with Microban® antimicrobial product protection to control your scent. Equipped with multiple pockets and harness access, this durable coat will keep you comfortable in the hunt for as long as it takes. The jacket also features a Durable Water Repellent (DWR) finish on the fabric face to shed moisture and light snow. Two zip hand pockets, two zip chest pockets and two interior stash pockets. MSRP: $149.99. **INFO: HUNTWORTHGEAR.COM**

2 ALPS OUTDOORZ PURSUIT PACK

The Pursuit hunting day pack is now available in Coyote Brown, in addition to Realtree Edge and Mossy Oak Country. The Pursuit is a multi-function pack developed for the needs of the "out-all-day" hunter. Boasting a 2,700-cubic-inch capacity and an ergonomic design for maximum comfort and load-bearing adjustability, the Pursuit incorporates multiple features that serious hunters demand in a full-function day pack. A quiver holder on each side of the pack and a dropdown pocket with front-panel lashing system allow bowhunters to carry their bow and quiver safely, while leaving their hands free for climbing or dragging game. The dropdown pocket also accommodates long guns. There are also multiple storage solutions that provide convenient access and intelligent organization of essential gear and supplies. Small items stow easily into a multi-compartment front pocket with an integrated shelf system, and the large main compartment is sized to carry everything needed for an all-day hunt. Additional features include a D-ring for hanging the pack while on a stand, padded waist belt with dual zippered pockets, lower side mesh pockets, a hydration pocket and port, additional webbing loops for lashing gear and an integrated blaze orange rain cover. MSRP: $99.99 **INFO: WWW.ALPSOUTDOORZ.COM**

3 REDMOND HUNT TROPHY ROCK CHERRY BOMB

Cherry Bomb is a super-effective, long-range deer attractant. Its enticing aroma pulls deer from afar and its highly palatable protein ingredients, including vitamins and minerals, also make it a great supplement. After selecting a site, evenly spread Cherry Bomb on the ground. This will allow Cherry Bomb the chance to dry out if it happens to rain. Cherry Bomb can also be used in gravity feeders and some spin-cast models. It can be mixed 50/50 with corn for extra attraction. MSRP: $14.99 for a 6-pound bag. **INFO: REDMONDHUNT.COM**

4 HAWK ELEVATE LITE SAFETY HARNESS

More comfortable than any HAWK® harness before it, the Elevate Lite Safety Harness keeps you safe and comfortable up in the treestand. Utilizing form-fit technology, this harness features padded waist and shoulder straps for ultimate comfort. Quick-release leg buckles with adjustable leg straps ensure a comfortable fit and help you slip into or out of this harness quickly. The Elevate Lite also features a flexible tether for 360° movement, one-hand quick-set carabiner, lightweight silent bino cables, and an adjustable and durable elastic chest strap. It also comes standard with a lineman's belt, tree strap, suspension-relief strap, one carabiner and has a maximum weight capacity of 300 pounds. Weight: 1.8 pounds. MSRP: $109.99 **INFO: WWW.HAWKHUNTING.COM**

5 RUGGED UTV TOPPERS

Rugged's UTV cargo toppers are the only fiberglass UTV cargo bed enclosures on the market. The toppers add an additional 38 cubic feet to your UTV's cargo storage capacity. Crafted with 1/4-inch thick, UV-resistant fiberglass capable of withstanding immense pressure, these UTV toppers are incredibly strong and can handle extreme conditions during activities like hunting, ice fishing, property management, construction and farming. The impact-resistant windows, weather-resistant seals and locking door make the Rugged topper a safe and dry choice to protect your tools, gear, game, pets and property. Also features custom shelving and easy installation. Models are available for Polaris and Can-Am UTVs. 38.5" L x 59" W x 30" H. Weight: 100 pounds. MSRP: $1,699.99 **INFO: RUGGEDTOPPERS.COM**

6 FLEX-FLETCH SILENT KNIGHT ARROW VANES

Independent sound studies show that the Silent Knight™ arrow vanes make half of the sound of any vane around. That's an astonishing improvement that will dramatically reduce misses and high hits due to deer ducking the arrow. These are also 30% thinner and much smoother for drag-free flight. Plus, 3-inch vanes have 41% more surface area and let you shoot fixed-blade broadheads accurately. Test results also show the Silent Knights are faster than 2-inch vanes on average, and less drag means less wind drift. Their low-profile design also means better arrow rest clearance, and the Sliqtra™ cured memory resin used to make Silent Knight™ vanes has a very high memory or bounceback factor, meaning it will always quickly return to its original shape, so it has no built-in lean like thermoformed vanes. The vanes also have extremely tight weight tolerances for consistent shooting performance. MSRP: $19.99 for a pack of 18; $29.99 for a pack of 36.
INFO: SILENTKNIGHTVANES.COM

6

7 HORNADY® SUBSONIC AMMUNITION

Hornady® Subsonic Ammunition is designed for accuracy and performance below the speed of sound – now in new rifle loads: 175-grain .30-30 Win., 395-grain .450 Bushmaster and 410-grain .45-70 Gov't. The Sub-X bullet used in all of the Subsonic Rifle loads features a lead core. Long grooves in its gilding metal jacket combine with the bullet's flat profile and the patented Flex Tip® insert within its hollowpoint cavity to help it expand reliably at low velocities. These cartridges don't have the loud report of a supersonic round, and paired with a suppressor, they're even quieter. Unique powders optimized for subsonic use result in a low flash signature, ideal for either suppressed or unsuppressed performance. With high-quality cartridge cases and primers, Subsonic Ammunition offers the performance and accuracy shooters have come to expect from Hornady. MSRP: $26.99 to $35.99 for box of 20 cartridges. **INFO: WWW.HORNADY.COM**

7

NEW FROM QUIETKAT, INC.

QuietKat continues its innovation in the world of e-bikes, and here are a few of their new 2020 products.

8 **TANNUS ARMOUR TIRE INSERT:** Tannus Armour is the ultimate in tire protection and performance for all levels and styles of riding. Sitting between your tire and inner tube, the Tannus Armour provides 15mm of puncture protection on the top, as well as 2mm of sidewall protection from sharp objects and rocks. Tannus Armour gives you increased grip and vibration dampening for a smoother, more comfortable and enjoyable ride. At the heart of Tannus is the patented Aither Technology, a multi-cell foam compound that forms the structure of the Armour. If you're tired of carrying spare tubes and worrying about flat tires, then it's time to upgrade to run-flat technology. MSRP: $45.00 **INFO: QUIETKAT.COM**


8

9 **APEX E-BIKE:** QuietKat's most popular electric fat bike has been overhauled for 2020 with an all-new integrated battery and motor system. The new 2020 Apex also features updated frame geometry, paired with focused weight distribution to optimize ride quality and handling. It also features a 12mm thru-axle on the rear and sealed bearings in both front and rear hubs for smooth operation in all weather conditions. The Apex includes QuietKat's top build kit, including adjustable air suspension, 4-Piston Hydraulic Brakes, and a 9-speed drivetrain. Powered by a mid-drive motor paired with wide-range gearing to provide maximum torque for climbing steep hills. The Apex is designed for the most rugged and advanced off-road terrain, including steep mountain ascents and descents on singletrack trails. MSRP: $4,629.00 to $5,377.00 **INFO: QUIETKAT.COM**

10 **ONE-WHEEL CARGO TRAILER:** The 2020 QuietKat Cargo Trailer is perfect for packing in large gear items and packing out elk, deer or anything else up to 100 pounds on your QuietKat electric bike. The cargo cart is only as wide as the bike itself, making it easy to maneuver in tight areas. The trailer comes with BOB axle attachments. More features include a Pannier Rack that increases cargo load and provides additional stability, a solid mesh cargo liner and dual-post kickstand that ensures your trailer is secure while parked, loading or unloading. MSRP: $369.00 **INFO: QUIETKAT.COM**


9


10

11 BLACK HILLS AMMUNITION

Black Hills Gold is handcrafted from the finest components, put through the ringer by the inspection team and tested rigorously in ballistics. Currently the U.S. Military, law enforcement agencies nationwide and many firearms manufacturers use ammunition from Black Hills. Every round of ammunition leaving the factory is hand inspected by the company's quality control staff. The company's hottest new round is the 6.5 Creedmoor with a 120-grain Hornady GMX bullet, with a velocity of 2,900 fps and 2,241 foot-pounds of energy. MSRP: $39.99 per box of 20. **INFO: BLACK-HILLS.COM**

11

12 VORTEX VIPER HD BINOCULARS

The new Viper HD binoculars deliver stunning resolution, color fidelity and edge-to-edge clarity. Lenses fully multicoated with XR™ antireflective coatings provide critical low-light performance, turning waning light into game-spotting opportunity. A super-wide field of view promotes fast subject acquisition and more efficient glassing. Exterior lenses are protected by ArmorTek® – an ultrahard, scratch-resistant fluorine compound that repels oil, dirt and the corrosive salts of fingerprints. The smooth center-focus wheel dials in your image for sharp viewing. Soft and comfortable twist-up eyecups are perfect for extended glassing and provide customized eye-relief for the viewer. A short-hinge design and rubber armoring with perfectly placed thumb detents make the new binos a dream to hold, protect against impacts and ensure solid purchase – no matter the weather conditions. The binos are also 100% waterproof, fogproof (purged with Argon gas), dustproof and shockproof. Lifetime, unconditional, no-fault, transferable, VIP Warranty. MSRP: 8X42, $639.99; 10X42, $649.99; 10X50, $729.99; 12X50, $739.99.
INFO: VORTEXOPTICS.COM

12

13 WILDGAME INNOVATIONS INSITE CELL CAMERA

The new Insite Cell™ trail camera lets you take your favorite hunting spot with you wherever you go, by pairing with your cell phone to send automatic photo updates anytime, anywhere. Hunters can remotely check prime locations from the comfort of their home. This trail camera integrates with the all-new HuntSmart™ app to automatically analyze trail cam captures and help you plan your next hunt. The Insite Cell also features Adaptive Illumination, invisible Lightsout™ illumination and 32-megapixel image clarity. It works nationwide on any network. The camera also features Silent Shield™ to quiet camera operations, Tru-Dual Cams™ for enhanced day and night images, and Adaptive Illumination™ that adjusts with changing distances. While images and videos will look bright, the units won't. The 42 black infrared LEDs mask illumination to keep your camera location completely hidden. MSRP: $149.99 (plus image transmission plan). **INFO: WILDGAMEINNOVATIONS.COM**


13

14 DRYSHOD SOUTHLAND HUNTING BOOT

The Southland Men's Hunting (hi-calf) boot considers all the necessary features a hunter asks for in reliable footwear. The WIXIT Cool-Clad™ lining provides all-day comfort and breathability for hunting in warmer climates. Micro-dot perforations combine with the breathable air mesh lining to reduce moisture buildup for a drier, more comfortable interior. A removable EVA sock liner is also included. Featuring a DS1 molded outsole with a double Achilles heel, instep reinforcement and a nylon shank to enhance ankle stability, the Southland allows hunters to tackle the most rugged terrain. The boot is made with hand-laid rubber overlays. In addition to its performance and comfort, the Southland comes dressed in VEIL® Whitetail camouflage. The DENSOPRENE® foam insulated bootie delivers 100% waterproof performance, while the HYDROKOTE® exterior treatment prevents the upper from becoming soggy and allows it to easily shed mud. Other features include a roll-down calf pipe, four-way stretch material, a large heel kick and sturdy pull tabs for on/off convenience. MSRP: $169.95. **INFO: DRYSHOD.COM**

14

15 EASTON® 6.5™ HUNTER CLASSIC

The new 6.5 Hunter Classic is a USA-made carbon arrow that uses Easton's proprietary Acu-Carbon™ resulting in tighter groups and consistent shot placement. The Acu-Carbon™ Uniform Spine process is a continuous-fed, single-die manufacturing method that results in the most reliable shafts and eliminates the need for the spine-alignment and weight sorting. Easton's Acu-Carbon™ production line produces the most consistent spine and weight from dozen to dozen and lot to lot. This benefits the bowhunter with truer flight and reliable accuracy in the field. The 6.5 Classic includes upgraded 6.5MM inserts that are made using a 4X-larger shoulder to add strength and boost valuable FOC. Hunter Classic comes complete with lightweight Microlite Nocks installed. The Hunter Classic has a straightness of ±.003. Spine sizes: 300, 340, 400, 500. MSRP: $49.99 per pack of six.
INFO: EASTONARCHERY.COM

15


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CHAD LYTLE'S NOT-SO LITTLE BUCK

OHIO HUNTER BAGS THE BUCK OF A LIFETIME.

Chad Lytle took this brute nontypical while crossbow hunting opening weekend in Ohio in 2020.
PHOTO COURTESY OF CHAD LYTLE

Buck Score:
262-4/8" (gross)
Date Harvested:
September 2020
Location: Ross County, Ohio
Weapon: Ravin Crossbow

Chad Lytle hunts at home in Somerset County, PA, but before the season opened he drove to Ohio to hunt his new 400 acre lease in Ross County, where he had been seeing a massive buck on three trail cameras since July. Roughly a picture a day gave him confidence that he, or one of his three buddies, might get a chance at it.

The four hunted opening day and Sunday morning without luck. Two guys had to leave at noon. And after some Steelers football Chad and the other hunter headed back out. At about 6:30 Chad was in his climbing stand high in a black walnut when he spotted the buck. "He was 30 to 40 yards away when I first saw him, coming in from my left, behind me. He stopped behind some brush where I couldn't see him, then made a sharp right to give me a good shot."

With the deer only 10 yards from his tree, it was a steep angle. The bolt from his crossbow hit the upper back part of the shoulder, went down through the heart and out the other side. Lytle lost sight of the buck and began second guessing himself. "I kept playing it over in my head, wondering if the shot was as good as it looked. The brush was too thick to see if the deer fell, so I decided to back out and return Monday morning."

After a sleepless night, Lytle followed the blood trail only 71 yards. The monster carried a giant non-typical rack that would green score at 262-4/8 inches. A trail camera photo 24 hours earlier showed drop tines off both antlers, but the deer's left drop was now missing. Chad returned on Friday and found the 5-inch tine snapped off where the buck fell.

— Steve Sorensen (aka "The Everyday Hunter®") is an avid deer hunter from Pennsylvania and is a frequent sportsman's dinner speaker.

WHERE TO GO

HUNTER'S CLOSET

WHERE TO GO

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I came to the woods as a young man and immediately knew they would be a friend forever. I trust the woods. From the get-go, they invited my curiosity and satisfied my inspirations. Without any conscious effort, time in the woods instilled and fostered a pervading spirituality. I'm aware that some of my friends worry about me for things I don't believe in. But they never need worry about me for things I believe in. To know me best means to also know what the woods have meant to me. I have good friends that way — a few.

When I came here more than 40 years ago, I remember calling a rub a scrape and a scrape a rub. True story. I recall, too, accidentally loading my 12-gauge shotgun with No. 6 birdshot rather than slugs one opening morning of deer season. Call it good fortune that no deer appeared that day. Whew. As you might surmise, I had no real introduction to deer hunting. My dad, having lost an arm at war, was a small-game enthusiast, unwilling to trust his aim with one bullet. He'd go after deer, but only on the first day, the first Saturday and maybe Thanksgiving. As far as handing down knowledge, that was left to me, and it was a slow process, I'm afraid.

I'm still kickin', as they say, but for the first time, I'm beginning to feel what I figured would come — a tinge of sadness that will probably settle in permanently. I won't try to fight it; I would rather say I've earned it. I've never feared aging and resolved all potential midlife stuff in my 20s, when I should, so I'm adeptly philosophical when it comes to favoring the definitive scars of character over the insipidness of youth. Growing old, particularly having done much of it here, is a badge of honor. I'm only sad about knowing time is short. I am otherwise quite satisfied about getting to this point.

I came here to say something certain and am dragging my heels.

All these things here — the animals, the smell of deep pines, the shiny twisted laurel, ferns of every kind, the hickory smell from woodstoves, the timbre of a soaring hawk, sudden nearby shots ringing out, the streams that tumble rhythmically down the ravines, the breeze whispering through dense hemlocks or whistling through the naked deciduous canopy, and the steady cadence of your boots scuffing freshly fallen leaves on your way in or out — and millions more are gifts of time. You can see why I'm often accused of being rhapsodic, but I don't care. In my heart, I have learned to allow whatever arrives to enter and exist unabated. I don't direct the words. I follow them — something that took years.

As a young hunter, I measured the woods solely via animals. Eventually, I developed ample proficiency at killing them and for the longest time honed that proficiency as all encompassing. I guess you couldn't allege much rhapsodic about those days.

But here's the deal: Times are changing — rapidly. There is ample evidence suggesting that much of the world as we have known it is collapsing in our midst. Even the woods are not exempt. From where I am sitting, on a sawed-off oak stump more than 30 inches across, I wouldn't otherwise recognize these as the same woods that first invited me. At that point, this stump would have supported a towering ancient monarch of the forest, but it also grew old. No longer here to shed acorns and provide shade, it has likely moved on in the form of housing, furniture or something else, but the evidence promises it's still worthy somewhere.

A dear friend locals knew affectionately as Ol' Ralph has moved on, too. Ralph owned this property, and I always feel his presence when I visit. Recent logging has altered the land dramatically, and nowadays, you have a clear view to the busy throughway a mile below. Bright sunbeams bounce from polished pastels, and the pace is an orchestrated rush. Inside the speeding vehicles, minds cluttered with current sociological flux, political chaos or whatever governs their cloned haste seems intrusive up here, where I seek and find the opposite. Petting Audrey, thinking of Ralph, secretly glad he isn't here to see it this way, and watching the mindless disorder below, I'm happy to have put my faith in the woods. I'm happy to have found a quiet stronghold overlooking reminders that we are not born for a maddening pace — not at all. A maddening pace ruins everything.

The new deer season is close. I long for it as much as ever, but in more complete ways than when I was young. The animals still thrust my pulse into overdrive, and I guess in honesty I love their presence more than anything else out here. I'm only human. But other than knowing rubs from scrapes now, and to arm with proper ammo, my expanded expertise has less to do with proficiency and more to do with opening the gifts of time. In an unsettled world, be thankful you're a hunter. Be thankful to know a place immune to social distress, politics and whatnot — a place immune to most everything except age.

But if age we must, be thankful most of all we have a place to do it well.

— Roger Page is an avid whitetail hunter and frequent D&DH contributor from New York.

ROGER A. PAGE

Gifts Of TIME

GETTING OLD ISN'T SO BAD, PROVIDED YOU HAVE A PLACE – SUCH AS A FAMILIAR DEER WOODS – TO DO IT WELL.

Usually, the woods bring out my youth and always have. But today, I'm 65 and admit to feeling it a bit — you know — my age. The woods have always been a place to deliberately feel young; the invigorating hike, the chaste air. And with nothing yet in season, I can bring along a scrambling hound. But today, Audrey, who's turning toward 9 years old, seems agreeable to a more casual pace, even stopping for a few seconds to sit next to me while I pause for a breather. That's opposed to the crazy pup that grew into her years racing blissfully about and tearing the hillside up as if time might be pliable. But now look at her: round, bubbly eyes engulfing me, panting tongue contentedly pulsating, aging without regret. But yeah, it seems to have happened fast.

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