

## Secrets of Bowhunting Deer Chapter 1

### WHERE DID TREBARK™ COME FROM?

*By John E. Phillips*

So, you've got a good idea to make a million dollars in the outdoor industry. You've developed a new camo pattern, a new fishing lure, a better tree stand, a secret deer lure or a better way to keep minnows alive. But millions of outdoorsmen every year have those same kinds of ideas and never make a dime from them.

What is required to take a good idea and make it into a multi-million dollar company? Where do you find someone who's willing to make you rich by promoting your idea, selling it to others and then paying you for it? The simple truth is the person who will make you rich doesn't exist. The people who make it in the outdoors are the boot strappers -- the men and women who bend their backs, grab their own boot straps and pull themselves up. They are hard workers, putting in an average of 12 to 14 hours a day, six and seven days per week. They're risk takers, who are willing to gamble their futures on their good ideas.

Jim Crumley, the president of Trebark Camouflage, headquartered in Roanoke, Virginia, is a man with an idea and the courage to follow his dream. When you look at Jim's story, you'll understand the road you must take if you have a good idea you believe can be grown into a major outdoor company. Jim's love of the outdoors, his entrepreneurial spirit and his willingness to take great risks to find and develop his dream charts the path others must follow for success in the outdoor industry.

Jim Crumley graduated from Virginia Tech in 1969 and took a job as a marketing-education teacher in Alexandria, Virginia. At about the same time he developed what was to become a lifetime love for hunting deer and turkeys.

Crumley had grown up in Bristol, Virginia. During his younger days, the area where he lived failed to support enough deer and turkey to warrant a hunting season. Not until after college when the deer and turkey populations in Virginia had grown and could support a season where Jim hunted did Jim begin to take up deer and turkey hunting.

Jim Crumley's initiation into deer hunting was as a bowman, because he decided his best opportunity to bag a deer would be during bow season. He learned to shoot a bow and began to take deer with his bow. At that time, Jim was wearing both forest-green and tiger-stripe camouflage but leaned more towards wearing the tiger stripe rather than the forest green. Tiger stripe was the third generation of a slowly evolving military camouflage. The first camouflage pattern to receive a patent was developed by a Belgian researcher. Primarily composed of large blotches of three or four shades of black and brown, the pattern was developed at the end of World War II and was generally known as WWII camouflage.

The woodland-green pattern and the tiger-stripe pattern were introduced at the beginning of the Vietnam War. These patterns featured more greens and not so much of the browns and blacks the WWII pattern had.

As Crumley remembers, "I noticed as I watched down the hollow from my tree stand for deer and saw the trunks of hickory, poplar and oak, the woods seemed to have a battleship-gray dominant color instead of green. When I looked down at the ground, I saw more brown color. I decided my tiger stripe camouflage didn't look like the woods where I was hunting."

Jim Crumley left the woods and went home to try and make himself a better suit of camouflage for his hunting. At that time in history, tie-dyeing, a process by which clothes were tied in knots, dipped in dye and allowed to dry and then the knots were untied, was a popular type of coloring clothing during this hippie generation. The colors were splotched on the clothes in various patterns.

However, Jim did not want to make a fashion statement. He was trying to color hunting clothes that more closely resembled the woods. He purchased a suit of gray work clothes and used brown and black dye to try and recreate the colors he saw in the forest when he was hunting. He tied the clothes in knots and dipped them in both black and brown dye. When Jim presented his new hunting suit to his buddies, they all agreed his new tie-dye camouflage looked terrible -- really terrible. But when Jim went into the woods, those same friends agreed that Jim was hard to find and difficult to see with his new, ugly camouflage.

Jim made his first tie-dye suit of camo in 1972. But this pattern had one problem Jim couldn't seem to overcome. It still was made up of splotches and patches of color that seemed to be more horizontal than vertical. Jim had noticed that not only were the colors in the woods more grays than black and browns, but that the lines in the woods, especially the lines of tree trunks and bushes, were vertical and not horizontal lines.

Once Jim had his colors right for the fall and early spring woods, he next thought about what a deer or a turkey walking through the woods saw. He realized in the clean, big hardwoods where the animals normally fed and moved, they looked at more tree trunks than anything else at their eye level. Jim reasoned if he could resemble a tree trunk, he would be harder for the animals to detect and would blend in better with the woods where he hunted.

Jim used odorless Magic Markers to add squiggly lines to his tie-dyed, camouflage work suit. The squiggly lines gave the camo a more vertical look and made the camo resemble a tree trunk more than the blotches of the forest-green and tiger-stripe camos did. Jim's hunting friends started to look at his weird, ugly-looking camo in a new and different light. They shot color pictures of him against trees and in the woods. From the pictures, they could tell Jim's new suit better hid him in the woods than the camouflage clothing they wore when they hunted. For six years, Jim continued to buy gray work suits, tie-dye them and draw squiggles on them, each time trying to improve his pattern.

However, Jim wasn't attempting to develop a new camouflage. He was simply trying to have a better suit of clothes for his own personal deer and turkey hunting. He believed by becoming more invisible, he could harvest more game. But a unique factor that added to the eventual success of Trebark camouflage was Jim's educational background. As a marketing-education teacher, Jim taught students daily how to find and recognize new products and sell them or how to take old products and sell them in a better way.

As Jim's friends encouraged him about the marketability of his new camouflage, his love of hunting, his newly discovered camouflage philosophy and his marketing background meshed together like the gears of a high-speed racing automobile. One day, Jim decided he could sell this new camouflage idea and pattern he'd been developing for six years. By 1978, the dream of selling a new camouflage pattern was so strong that Jim decided if he didn't try and sell the camo he'd developed, someone else would.

At that time and place, the only camouflage hunters could buy was the camo that had been developed by the military which contained splotches and horizontal patterns. Not only was Jim having to sell a color of camo no one ever had seen before with his grays and blacks, but he also was trying to sell a revolutionary idea -- a vertical camouflage pattern.

When camouflage meant the difference between life and death in a war, everyone assumed the government had the best ideas. Men had survived conflicts in foreign lands by wearing greens, blacks and browns in horizontal patterns. Now, this young Virginian was coming to the hunters of America with a pattern not only radical in color but that also went against the traditional horizontal lines that had helped men live through wars. Too, Jim Crumley was attempting to change the way people looked at the forest.

In 1978, turkey hunting was becoming more popular across the country as was bowhunting. Jim Crumley hoped to target these two markets with his new idea and unique clothing. However, Jim had another problem. He realized he couldn't hand-tie-dye gray work suits and then put squiggly lines on them with markers and produce enough suits to sell to the mass market. Although his process of making camouflage had worked well for him, he realized he'd have to change his pattern to have it printed onto fabric and then that fabric be cut and sewn into camouflage clothing. Therefore, Jim Crumley, the teacher, became an avid student, learning all he could about printing fabric and making clothing.

Jim drew his original pattern and shaded it the way he believed a tree trunk looked to a hunter at a distance. He also made slides of tree trunks, projected the slides on the wall, put paper on the wall and then traced the designs he saw on the trunks. Too, Jim shaded his designs from the colors he saw in the slides of the tree trunks. He then sent all of his sketches with the proper tree-trunk colors to his sister, Mary Beth, who had a Master's degree in Art and was a portrait artist. His sister refined the pattern and put it in a form the textile manufacturers could use to make a screen from which to print.

The pattern was finalized in 1979. Once Crumley had his pattern, he called Dan River Mills in Danville, Virginia, and told them about his idea for printing a new camouflage pattern. He explained to them he had his pattern on canvas in a form that could be utilized to make a screen from which to print the cloth. The people at Dan River told Crumley they'd be happy to print his pattern, if he ordered 50,000 yards of fabric at \$2.50 a yard. When Crumley totaled up how much buying and printing the fabric would cost, he quickly realized he didn't have the financing to pursue his dream. This point often is where many potential entrepreneurs in the outdoor industry give up. Jim had a good idea, his friends believed in what he was doing, and he had his pattern ready to be printed. However, the volume of fabric he would have to purchase to have Trebark camouflage material to build suits from was well out of Jim's financial reach.

But a bulldog-like tenacity that had the ability to turn defeat into victory continued to drive Jim Crumley. Rather than give up and quit, Jim continued his search for a fabric- printing company that would print small orders of fabric. Finally, his persistence was rewarded when he located Lida Manufacturing, a company in Charlotte, North Carolina, that specialized in printing small amounts of yardages of fabric for the fashion industry. The president of the company, Ralph Keir, agreed to print Jim's new camouflage pattern.

However, as with any victory, this one had a downside. The only way Jim's pattern could be printed was with a heat- transfer print. For this process to work, the material had to be at least 80-percent polyester. In the 1970s, polyester suits were the rage of the men's fashion industry. But hunters were buying either 100-percent cotton or 100-percent wool clothing. No hunter in his right mind would purchase a polyester suit for hunting.

Jim Crumley faced another major crossroad in the development of his company. He didn't have enough money to have his pattern printed on 50,000 yards of cotton cloth. But he could have his pattern printed on polyester cloth he felt sure hunters probably wouldn't buy. Most would-be entrepreneurs would have given up their dreams at this stumbling block -- but not Jim.

Jim recognized that unless he had his pattern on some type of cloth he couldn't produce hunting suits and wouldn't be able to find out if his idea would sell. He agreed to have his first Trebark pattern printed on 100-percent, polyester, double-knit cloth. Although polyester was soft and quiet, it would fray and fuzz when caught on briars and brambles. Jim decided to have 5,000 yards of Trebark polyester printed, and then he could begin to sew his hunting suits. The fabric cost \$2.10/yard for the printed 5,000 yards of fabric -- a total of \$10,050. Jim saw this money, which in the late 70's was considered a large amount of money, as only another obstacle to overcome if he was to test his new idea.

Jim went to the bank to obtain a business loan to pay for the fabric. However, the bank didn't believe that Jim's new camo pattern was a sound investment. Crumley was 32-years old, had never been in business for himself before and was trying to get a business loan on a camouflage pattern that was radically different from anything on the market. The bank required more security to recover its investment if Jim's idea failed. At that time, Jim, who was single, had purchased a townhouse some years earlier. The bank agreed to take a second mortgage on Jim's townhouse and loan him \$24,000. Jim believed this money would be enough to have his fabric printed, cut and sewn into suits and hats. Also enough money should be left over to buy an ad or two in national outdoor magazines.

Although this money was an enormous amount for Jim to go into debt for, he still had his job as an administrator with the Alexandria, Virginia, school system. He was convinced his income from his school position would provide enough money to pay back the loan if his idea failed.

Jim Crumley had the same fears and doubts that anyone launching a new business would have. He wondered if ... \* people would buy his camouflage or were his friends just telling him this idea was good to encourage him,

He could sell this new camouflage, á á he didn't sell all the material what would happen, á á he wanted to do something different for his life's work from what he had trained to do if his idea worked. á These fears are those experienced by everyone who launches a new business. But only by conquering these fears and continuing to believe in that idea could Jim Crumley or any other entrepreneur follow his or her dream.

When Jim received his first sample of fabric from the company, he hired a seamstress to cut and sew his first suit of Trebark camouflage that wasn't hand-painted. He showed the suit to all his friends and the men in his bowhunting club. He sold his first suit of clothing to a man he shot archery tournaments with -- Johnny Buck. Buck ordered the suit on his charge card before Crumley ever had suits for sale. The jackets and pants sold for \$19.50/piece. As soon as the first suit was made, Buck's order was filled.

Jim Crumley's marketing education and training had taught him that you first identify a product and then identify the market you want to take that product to, which was the bowhunter. Jim decided that to find out if the consumer was as excited about his new camouflage as he was, he should go straight to the consumer and by-pass the store owner.

Rather than having to convince a store owner or a sporting goods dealer to stock his line of camouflage, Jim felt if he could convince bowhunters to buy his product initially, then the store owners would be more willing to stock a product that already had been tested at the consumer level.

"I wanted to build a track record of performance by selling directly to the consumer," Crumley explained. "Then when I went to a store owner I could say, 'The consumers are already buying my product. It's to your advantage to stock it in your store.'

"I felt if I could show a store owner I had sold a large number of Trebark camouflage suits by running an ad in a national magazine and told him I had two more ads coming out the next year, the store owner would buy my products. Then he could sell a large number of camouflage suits in his store based on the two ads I was running the next year."

In July, 1980, Jim Crumley ran an 1/8 page ad in "Bowhunter Magazine" that stated simply, "TREBARK CAMOUFLAGE IS COMING."

According to Jim, "I ran the ad to establish the trademark name and logo of Trebark. I wanted to put a tickler ad in to establish some interest and to make people wonder what Trebark camouflage was."

Two months later in the next issue of "Bowhunter Magazine," Jim ran a full-page, black-and-white ad. But because he didn't have enough fabric to build a second suit to be photographed to show Trebark in the ad, Jim once again turned to his sister, Mary Beth, and asked her to draw a pen-and-ink sketch of a hunter wearing his new Trebark camouflage. When this first ad came out, Jim had spent all the money he'd borrowed from the bank to buy fabric, have a thousand suits cut and sewn and run his ad. Actually he'd spent more than the initial \$24,000 by dipping into his savings to support the idea of Trebark camouflage, which was yet an unproven product.

If Jim's idea was wrong, he not only would lose the \$24,000 he borrowed from the bank but also most of his savings would be wiped out. Jim risked not only what he had saved but also his future earnings on the idea that a vertical camouflage pattern that looked like a tree trunk would be bought by bowhunters. This type of risk taking is required for success, not only in the outdoor industry, but in the world of business as a whole.

However, Jim's first orders didn't come from the ad. They came from members of his archery club.

One of the problems with Jim's first ad was the only way people could order this new Trebark camo was by mail. Jim was still working for the school system, he didn't have an answering machine, and he didn't take Visa or Mastercard -- only cash or a money order.

After Jim received his copy of the magazine, he went to his post office box, and there were no orders. For the next two or three days, not a single order arrived. Jim wondered again if his camouflage would sell. Had he been extremely foolish? Was his idea really marketable after all?

A week went by but still no orders. By now, Jim was really worried. But on a Monday afternoon, a week after the ad came out, Jim's mailbox was bulging with 50 orders for Trebark camo waiting to be filled.

"I felt like one of the 49ers during the Gold Rush who'd spent his entire savings to go to California, looked for months in the hills and mountains for gold and finally stumbled on the right stream," Crumley said later.

Each day brought more and more orders. The orders never quit coming. Jim was so successful he had to have postcards printed up to send to his customers explaining that orders would be delayed because he had only a limited supply of camouflage. Since Jim couldn't have enough fabric printed and the fabric cut and sewn into hunting suits in time to get the suits to the customers who had ordered them before hunting season was over, on the postcard he gave his customers an option. They either could have their money back or receive their suits prior to the next hunting season. No one asked for a refund.

Jim Crumley received 2500 orders for that first Trebark camouflage. He made a profit and reordered fabric.

Jim's first year in business was 1980. In 1981, he gave up his position with the school system, which was another risky move. He lost his retirement program, his health hospital benefits and the security that comes with a steady job because of his belief that the camouflage business would continue to grow.

Although Jim Crumley's faith in his product was rewarded, his problems weren't over as his business grew. The first and most obvious problem was using the 100-percent double-knit polyester fabric which had a shine to it. Hunters preferred a dull finish to their camouflage clothing. By this time, polyester-double-knit was out of fashion. Some hunters just wouldn't wear the Trebark clothing because of the fabric from which it was made. In warm weather, this clothing was very hot. But too it was very quiet, stretchable, non-shrinking, and non-fading because it was heat-transfer printed. However, when a hunter walked through briars, he looked like a fuzz ball when he came out the other side of the briar patch. Jim had to change his cloth to cotton blend or 100-percent cotton. Originally Jim had thought once he proved that consumers would buy his product by mail order, he then would go to the retail stores, show them the orders he'd received and hopefully, convince them to stock his product on their shelves. However, Trebark was such a dramatic success that retailers began to call Jim and ask him if they could buy his products. Jim had created such a demand for this new camouflage through the vacuum system of marketing that this demand was driving the sales of the product. Now the demand to buy the product was greater than his ability to supply. Jim had to develop more innovative ways to make camouflage suits than he initially had considered.

In the beginning, Bristol Products, a company in Jim's hometown, had agreed to make Jim's first suits because of his friendship with Chris Horner, son of the owner of the company. But this company was primarily in the team sports business and had agreed to cut and sew the first suits to try and help Jim get his business started. Jim's second year of business required him to not only find a new textile manufacturer to print his pattern on 100-percent cotton or cotton blends but also a new cut-and-sew company that would take his fabric and sew it into camouflage suits.

Often novice entrepreneurs assume that as soon as their companies are successful, all their problems are over. However, Jim Crumley learned the more successful he became, the more problems he created. Even though Crumley had made back his initial investment, now he needed to borrow even more money to buy more cloth and to have more suits sewn. Once again Jim Crumley was willing to bet his future on Trebark camouflage.

He took the money he had received from his 12-year retirement program with the school system and invested it all in his company. He also contacted some individual investors from whom he borrowed \$5,000 each at 16-percent interest, because he was convinced he could make enough money in his second year to pay off his investors and still make a profit.

Fortunately for Jim, his second year in business, 1981, saw 7500 orders arrive -- a tripling of orders. Jim was able to pay off his investors, earn a profit and once again buy fabric and make suits to prepare for the third year of sales. At every crossroads where larger amounts of money had to be borrowed to build inventory in hopes the next year's sales would be enough to pay off the loans and make a profit, Jim demonstrated courage and bet the farm on his idea.

The third year Trebark was in business, Pat Snyder, a buyer at Cabela's decided to test Trebark camouflage in the Cabela's catalog. Cabela's gave Jim a programmed order. The first order of approximately \$35,000 worth of two-piece suits and coveralls was to be shipped to them by the end of June. The second order of \$35,000 worth of camouflage was to be shipped at the end of

July. About four orders of \$35,000 each were scheduled to be shipped at the end of each month during the summer.

But when the Cabela's Hunting Catalog came out at the first of July, the demand was so great that at the end of July the company called Jim and asked that all their orders be shipped immediately. The orders for Trebark were far greater than Cabela's had anticipated. Even in the first month, the company was backordering. Jim knew he couldn't meet the overwhelming demand Cabela's was asking although he was racing to produce suits. Trebark had created a nightmare for Cabela's.

"And I really believe they didn't think we knew what we were doing," Jim said. However, Cabela's and everyone else in the outdoor industry saw that Trebark camouflage pattern not only would sell but was in tremendous demand.

Cabela's was only one of Jim Crumley's problems. Sporting goods dealers were now calling every day wanting suits made of Trebark camouflage. The young man who had hoped he could sell 1000 suits three years earlier was now having to develop new and better ways to produce more suits to meet a demand he couldn't supply.

At that point, Crumley went to the Graniteville Company, a South Carolina textile manufacturer of woven fabric, to have more of his fabric printed. Jimmy Jones, of Greensboro, North Carolina, a representative for Graniteville, saw the tremendous demand for the Trebark camouflage and recognized the potential. He suggested that Jim and Graniteville consider a licensing agreement which would allow other clothing companies in the industry to buy the Trebark camouflage pattern on cloth and cut and sew their own suits for resale. Then, more consumers could buy the Trebark pattern from more companies. Jim and Graniteville would make a profit from selling these companies Trebark fabric.

The Graniteville deal was sealed in 1985. That same year, Precision Shooting Equipment (PSE) was licensed to use the Trebark camouflage pattern its on bows. The Trebark pattern now became established nationwide.

Towards the end of that same year, Jim Legette, the president of Fabric Distributors (now Intex) in Greensboro, North Carolina, entered into a licensing agreement to produce knit fabrics in Trebark camouflage. By 1986, all the makers of hunting garments were informed they could buy the Trebark pattern to make hunting clothes.

Although 1985 was a tremendously good year for Trebark camouflage, the year also had a downside. That same year, Jim had to invest a large sum of money in a lawsuit against a textile converter who was using the Trebark pattern without paying a licensing fee. In the past, the patterns known as camouflage, which were military camouflage, were considered to be in public domain. Anybody who wanted a pattern could print and use a military pattern without having to pay a licensing fee or without having to obtain the permission of the artist who had developed the pattern. But when Jim first invented his pattern, one of his hunting buddies who was a judge suggested that Jim hire an attorney and obtain both a copyright and a trademark to protect his pattern from being utilized by anyone without his permission. Jim realized if his pattern ever caught on, he would have competition. Jim went to the extra expense of hiring Burns, Doane, Surecker and Mathis, an Alexandria, Virginia, law firm specializing in patents and copyrights, to represent him in obtaining both copyright and patent protection on the Trebark pattern and trademark protection on the name. When the textile converter started using Jim's pattern on fabric and attempted to sell it, Jim decided he would fight for his copyright and his trademark.

No other camouflage company ever had taken a step like this. The court's decision would establish a precedent for all camouflage patterns that followed Jim's original design. Jim

successfully proved there had been an infringement on his copyright and that an artist's impression of bark could be copyrighted even though the other company argued that bark could not be copyrighted. But a Federal court agreed with Jim. Now no one can use a copyrighted camo pattern without the permission of the individual who holds the copyright.

Today, Jim Crumley's Trebark appears in several different original camouflage patterns and is the most widely distributed camouflage pattern in the U.S. No longer a cottage industry in the hills of Virginia and North Carolina, today the Trebark pattern is sold nationwide and in Canada, Italy, Spain and most countries that allow hunting.

When Jim Crumley first developed the idea of a vertical pattern for camouflage and broke the barrier which dictated that camouflage was made up of splotches and patches and color, mostly greens and browns, and of horizontal lines instead of vertical lines, he breathed new life into the hunting clothing market. Because of Jim's vast vision, boldness, and courageous entrepreneurship, he opened the door for many other camouflage manufacturers and garment makers and created a boom in camouflage that's helped produce a wider variety of patterns and colors than anyone ever would have believed in the 1980s.

But Jim Crumley has not finished his course. He's not someone who sits back on his laurels and talks about the good ole days. When Jim's company first began, he experienced the excitement that came with initiating a new idea. Today the Trebark Company is continuing to grow and to bring new ideas, patterns and research, into every area of the hunting industry where camouflage can and is used to aid the hunter.

With all the success Jim Crumley has had, you may wonder when he will slow down and take a well-deserved rest. However, you don't know the man if you think that. Jim Crumley will leave the hunting industry when he ceases to have new ideas and no longer is able to fight for market share and better products for the hunter. As an outsider looking in and from having known Jim Crumley for many years, I bet Jim will retire when he's looking up from a hole 6 feet in the ground.

## **Secrets of Bowhunting Deer Chapter 2**

### **ARE YOU A BOWHUNTER, OR DO YOU JUST HUNT WITH A BOW?**

*By John E. Phillips*

When you go into the woods with a bow, are you simply scouting for gun season? Are you taking the only weapon with you that's legal during that time to bag a deer and hoping to get lucky? Will you be as surprised as the deer if you do happen to bag him?

What does the term bowhunter mean? Does a code of ethics and a particular style and philosophy of hunting exemplify the words, "bowhunter" that doesn't include those who merely hunt with their bows? I believe the men and women who carry the mantle of bowhunter are a different breed from the average sportsman who takes up a bow for a special season to hunt deer and then forsakes the bow when gun season arrives.

Let's look at the criteria for the bowhunter and the differences between the men and women who are in this fraternity and those who merely hunt with bows.

### **WHAT IS YOUR PROPER DRAW LENGTH?**

Those who hunt with bows may have draw lengths that are almost correct. They pull their bows back to where the bows feel comfortable for them. But they may not always get to the back wall of the bow -- the point at which the bow is pulled to its maximum draw.

Bowhunting is an exact science. If you can pull the bow still further back or stop short of an exact draw length, you will shoot inconsistently. The bowhunter knows his or her exact draw length. He pinpoints the one spot where he must anchor his bow every time he shoots. He spends the time required to make sure his draw length is correct. If he changes from shooting with his fingers to using a mechanical release, he'll readjust his draw length to be certain his anchor point is consistent and that he can shoot the arrow in the same place each time he draws his bow back.

### **HOW DO YOU DECIDE WHICH ARROWS TO USE?**

Often someone who hunts with a bow goes to the sporting goods store and chooses several arrows to shoot for the upcoming season. If he decides to test three or four different broadheads, he'll pick out several to affix to his arrows. When you look in his quiver, you'll see a wide variety of broadheads, arrow lengths, vanes and feathers for fletchings. He's planning to shoot everything on the market. He wants to make sure he has one of each different style of arrow, broadhead and fletching to suit different situations. If the weather's bad and he hunts in the rain, he'll shoot vanes for fletchings. If the weather's pretty and clear, he'll shoot feathers with no consistency to the type of arrows, broadheads or fletchings he carries in his quiver.

However, the bowhunter will pay as much attention to details about his arrows as he does to any other piece of his equipment. Each arrow will be exactly the same length and spined the same. Every arrow will carry the same broadhead, because the bowhunter has tested several different types of broadheads and determined which broadhead flies best in his bow. Each broadhead has been painstakingly sharpened. Each arrow has been spun to make sure the shaft is straight. He doesn't have a favorite arrow he always shoots first because each arrow in his quiver performs in exactly the same way.

Once a bowhunter shoots an arrow at a deer, he either resharpens the broadheads or replaces them. He spins the arrow to make sure it's still straight. If he finds an arrow not straight, he

eliminates it from his quiver. The bowhunter knows that to increase his odds for taking game and to shoot consistently on every shot, every arrow in his quiver has to be identical and must perform the same way that every other arrow in his quiver does.

### **WHEN DO YOU PRACTICE?**

The person who hunts with a bow each season usually leaves his bow in his case during the off-season. The week before the season comes in, he takes his bow out and begins to practice and shoots almost constantly. But his muscles haven't had a chance to become strong, and his body's not accustomed to drawing and holding the bow steadily. He hasn't shot quite enough to consistently hit the target at under 30 yards each time he shoots.

But the bowhunter keeps his bow handy, handling it almost as often as he does his briefcase or his toolbox. He always shoots at least once a month. If possible, he shoots once a week, even during the off-season. He doesn't view himself as just a bowhunter. He considers himself an archer. Shooting the bow and arrow is his hobby. He likes to be able to test his skill with his equipment during the off-season -- perhaps by shooting 3-D archery.

Shooting accurately is much more important to him than taking a deer. He knows that consistency in shooting only comes from practice. When he shoots, he derives as much joy from shooting paper or life-size targets as he does from hunting. He doesn't just shoot to prepare for hunting. He shoots because he enjoys the sport of archery. Hunting is just one more facet of that sport.

During the off-season, he'll be testing new broadheads, various kinds of releases and any new or better innovations that will improve his accuracy and/or his consistency. One to two months before the opening day of deer season, he'll be shooting from a tree stand to adjust his shooting for the height of his stand. He will determine at what height he shoots most effectively and consistently will put his tree stand at that height when he's practicing or hunting. He realizes to continue to shoot accurately, the height of his tree stand is critically important.

He doesn't change his equipment right before the hunt. Any new equipment has been added and checked out months before hunting season. He generally shoots life-size targets at varying distances. If he's unsure of his range during practice, he'll use a rangefinder to better improve his skills at judging distance.

### **HOW DO YOU SCOUT?**

The person who hunts with a bow rarely goes into the woods after the season. He won't be interested in where he should set up his tree stand until the coming season. He's a short-term hunter. Once bow season is over, so is his enthusiasm for bowhunting.

The bowhunter is what the name implies -- a Bowman first but also a hunter. He enjoys twin sports -- archery and hunting -- and combines these two sports to become a bowhunter.

He goes into the woods after the season, before the leaves start to come out. He looks for trails, scrapings and rubbing signs and the best places to hunt the next season. He searches for the bucks that have eluded him. He hunts for the most productive spots to put up his tree stand the next year and derives his joy from finding those best places. He continues to hunt and learn about deer movement while determining the best point to intercept the deer. He's willing to hunt after the season without his bow to learn all he can about deer.

The hunt itself brings joy and excitement to him. He knows once he's located his tree stand site, all that's required for him to be successful is to have a favorable wind and shoot the same way

he's been practicing all year long. He enjoys the hunt without the bow as much as the sport of archery without the hunt.

### **HOW DO YOU PLACE YOUR TREESTAND?**

The person who hunts with a bow puts his tree stand up and hopes to see a deer, possibly even get a shot at a deer. He's found some deer sign that tends to indicate a deer may pass by that spot.

The bowhunter will put up several stands, two to four weeks prior to the season. He'll set up stands where he can hunt deer no matter what direction the wind is blowing on the day he hunts. Each stand he hangs will be for him to hunt from at a specific time of day. He'll have morning stands, which will face West. Then if he has a West wind or any variation of a West wind or a North/South wind, he can hunt from that stand. The sun will come up at his back. As the deer comes into the stand, the deer will be looking into the sun and will be less likely to see the hunter.

His afternoon stand usually will face East. Then the sun will be in the deer's face as the animal comes to the stand. He can hunt from this stand if he has an East wind or a North/South wind. The stands he can hunt from more often, either in the middle of the day or at any time of the day, generally will face North or South.

By having various stands facing different directions, then whichever way the wind's blowing on the day he plans to hunt, he still has a stand where he can hunt. If the wind changes direction while he's on his stand, he can move to another stand that will provide a favorable wind direction. Each of the stands he hangs will be in a spot where he's seen deer before.

The bowhunter will hunt from each of his stands before the season without his bow. He'll become familiar with the deer in the area. If he needs to reposition his stand to make sure he'll be within bow range of the deer, he does so prior to the season. From every stand site, he knows the deer he'll try and take that come into that region. He's seen most of the deer he feels will be utilizing that section of the woods during hunting season. When he goes out on opening morning, he understands from which direction the deer should come, about what time they should appear, how far the deer will be from his stand, and which deer he will try and arrow. As precise as the bowhunter becomes when practicing with his equipment, he's almost as exact with his hunting skills.

### **DO YOU PRACTICE HIT OR MISS HUNTING OR CONSISTENT HUNTING?**

The person who hunts with a bow will miss deer often or make poor shots. He'll probably be heard to say that he didn't have a good shot but threw an arrow at the deer anyway. He's not certain where he's hit the buck but is convinced he's hit the deer.

A bowhunter will take home almost every deer at which he shoots. He's developed a deep respect and admiration for the animal he hunts. He's learned what his effective range is and what a no-shot is. He's developed a code that dictates, "I won't take a shot if ...

- the deer doesn't walk within my effective area,
- I don't know for certain I can get a lethal hit,
- I have a marginal shot with a 50-percent or less chance I won't bag the deer or only will wound it,
- the deer doesn't present a good broadside shot,
- the light's too dim for me to see my sights and the spot on the deer I'm trying to hit, or
- a small limb is between me and the deer that may deflect my arrow."

The bowhunter realizes if he doesn't take a poor shot, he can return to that same site and hunt that same deer at another time. He also knows if he takes a poor shot or wounds or spooks the animal, he may not be able to hunt that deer from that place again.

When the bowhunter releases the arrow, he must be convinced he will bag the deer. He prefers to walk out of the woods without losing an arrow rather than to make a poor shot and possibly cripple a deer.

The person who hunts with a bow may fatally arrow a deer. After 1-1/2-hours of searching, he may give up the hunt.

However, the bowhunter rarely, if ever, loses game. He has learned to mentally record the events just prior to the shot, the time he releases the arrow and the deer's response until the animal is out of sight and hearing.

Once the deer has vanished, the bowhunter mentally replays what he has seen. He knows where the deer was standing when he took the shot and which trees the deer ran by after the animal received the arrow. He's identified a landmark where he has seen the deer last. He has watched his fletchings disappear into the deer's side. He understands what organs the arrow should have passed through and realizes how long he should wait before he begins to search for the deer.

Because he understands that even a lethal hit may not produce blood for 30 to 100 yards, even if he doesn't find a blood trail, he doesn't give up the search for the deer. If he can't locate the deer before dark, he'll return to the lodge, wait an hour or two and be back on the trail of the deer after dark with a lantern. If he doesn't pinpoint the deer that night, rather than hunt the next morning, he'll continue to look for the deer he feels he's arrowed. He usually can tell from the condition of the arrow and the blood on the arrow the type of hit he's made. He'll exhaust every possibility to recover the deer before he gives up the hunt for the wounded animal.

### **WHICH DEER DO YOU SHOOT?**

The person who hunts with a bow is anxious to take any deer that walks under his stand. He's not selective in his harvest. He'll shoot a button buck, a spike or a young fawn. To bag a deer with a bow is much more important to him than to select the animal he takes.

The bowhunter is very particular about which animals he releases an arrow at and won't shoot a button buck or a young buck. He realizes he may have an opportunity to hunt that buck the next season when the deer will be an older age-class animal. He shoots the large does that need to be taken out of the herd. He knows before he goes into the woods the kind of bucks and does he will and will not shoot. If the animal that appears under his treestand is not the size he has selected, then he won't shoot.

He's learned that selective harvest fits his code of ethics better than amassing a large number of bowkills. He chooses to be proud of each animal he bags rather than bragging about the number of animals he's arrowed.

### **ARE YOU A BOWHUNTER OR DO YOU JUST HUNT WITH A BOW?**

The person who hunts with a bow only hunts during bow season. He doesn't hunt with a bow during the firearm season. The bow is simply an implement to increase the days he has to hunt and possibly the number of deer he can take. The bowhunter hunts exclusively with a bow. He has learned that his chances for taking an older, more mature buck increase dramatically when the gun hunter is in the woods. The gun hunter prefers to hunt open woods and forces the deer to

concentrate in thick-cover areas where the sportsman may have 30 yards or less visibility, which is the ideal place for the bowhunter to hunt.

The bowhunter has learned the older, bigger bucks take to cover first and remain in cover longer when hunting pressure increases. He knows the more gun hunters in the woods who walk in the open places and leave their scent all over the woods, the greater his chances are for seeing and taking a buck during daylight hours be in thick cover areas.

### **WHAT IS THE CODE OF A BOWHUNTER?**

The person who hunts with a bow feels to be successful he must be able to loose an arrow, hit a deer and possibly be able to drag a deer out of the woods. He may loose four or five arrows in a hotspot where he's attempting to take a deer. If he's bagged a deer during bow season, when gun season arrives, he lays down his bow and picks up his gun, never to touch his bow again until next year's bow season.

The bowhunter has a strict code of ethics and realizes three things can happen when he looses his arrow. He can miss, he can wound, or he can kill quickly. For him to shoot, he must know for sure he can kill quickly.

He pays attention to detail. He derives pleasure from having his tree stand where he can see deer but they can't see or smell him. He finds excitement in the hunt itself whether or not he looses an arrow. He's had a successful season if he has the opportunity to take several deer but has turned those deer down and refused to shoot because the animal he wants to harvest never has come within range.

Bowhunting to him is an exact science. Everything about his equipment has to be tuned, tightened, silenced, sharpened and maintained. He enjoys working with his equipment as much as hunting. He's an archer who derives pleasure and satisfaction from shooting accurately -- whether his target is life-size styrofoam animals, paper bull's-eyes or a live deer.

He hunts all season long and enjoys being able to predict accurately where, when and from what direction deer will come to his tree stand. The hunt for him is to find the deer and predict when and where the deer will be within bow range. Actually taking the shot at the animal is just a continuation of sharpening his archery skills.

The bowhunter's season lasts all year long whether he's shooting targets in his backyard, scouting the woods during the off-season or sitting in his tree stand waiting for a deer to appear when the season arrives. The bowhunter is what the name implies -- both a bowman and a hunter.

## **Secrets of Bowhunting Deer Chapter 3**

### **EQUIPPING THE BOWMAN**

*By John E. Phillips*

I've always felt that buying and keeping up the equipment I bowhunt with is almost as exciting and as much fun as hunting itself. Most men are just great big boys with more expensive toys. I don't consider myself a gadget person, but I am interested in new bowhunting equipment that makes my hunting situations more comfortable or gives me a little one-up advantage in my bowhunting.

However, often newcomers come to the sport shop for bow equipment based strictly on price. When my buddy Harley came over to my house for me to help him get tuned up for his first bow season, I'd never seen so much stuff. He had a recurve bow, a compound bow, wooden arrows, aluminum shafts, four different sizes and types of broadheads, field points that weren't the same weight as his broadheads, a tab, a release, two different sights and a quiver that should attach to a compound bow but wouldn't attach to the compound he had. Harley was excited about only paying \$50 for his paraphernalia since he had priced better bows in the K-Mart store for more than \$200 apiece.

I didn't have the heart to tell Harley what a bad deal he'd made. To be a bowhunter, your equipment almost becomes a part of your body. Bowhunting is a part of my heart. One thing for sure -- if I were shopping for a body part, I wouldn't pick the first cheap product I found, and I certainly wouldn't buy it at a garage sale.

I didn't necessarily make all the correct choices in bows when I first began to bowhunt. But I suggest you visit an archery shop with an indoor range and consult an archery expert about the best equipment for you.

Rather than hurting Harley's feelings, I recommended he talk with my friend, Chuck Terrell. Harley didn't know Chuck. Because Chuck was an archery professional and not just a bowhunter and friend like I was, I knew Harley would believe what Chuck told him more than what I said. Chuck could put Harley on the right path with the correct equipment to help him become a better bowhunter. Here's what Chuck told Harley.

### **CHUCK TERRELL'S 10 KEYS FOR SELECTING BOWHUNTING TACKLE**

#### **Get A Bow That Fits You**

To shoot accurately, select a bow that has the perfect draw length for you. An archery-shop pro will help you determine your draw length. Then he'll watch you draw the bow to make sure you're not overdrawing or underdrawing. Every move in archery has to be performed the same way each time you shoot if you are to consistently shoot accurately. Therefore, when you draw the bow, the string needs to come back to the same spot and stop at that place when you're at full draw. You want to be able to pull the bow all the way to the back wall of the bow.

#### **Have A Qualified Instructor Teach You The Proper Form**

You need to know...

- what the proper stance is for you to take,
- how to draw the bow smoothly to the back wall,

- how to anchor the bow to a particular spot,
- how to aim the bow,
- how to release the arrow and
- how to follow through.

These steps must become mechanical for you to learn to be a good bowhunter. Repeated practice will help you combine these steps into a smooth draw, anchor and release. You'll also be able to perform these tasks subconsciously.

### **Match Your Broadhead And Arrows To The Bow**

To shoot consistently, have the arrow designed to shoot the number of pounds you're pulling in your bow. Also use the broadhead that best suits that arrow. Most archery pros use the Easton Arrow Selecting Chart to find the best arrow for their bows. Once you know the number of pounds you want to shoot and your draw length, the chart will recommend the type of shaft to shoot. However, if you're shooting a release, you probably can shoot an arrow that's slightly lighter than the chart suggests, because the chart is set up for archers who shoot fingers. Usually the finger shooters (archers who actually shoot with their fingers instead of allowing a mechanical release to hold the string) shoot a more stiffly-spined arrow.

If you don't want to spend time sharpening broadheads, then get a replaceable-blade broadhead, preferably a broadhead in the 100- to 125-grain range. Many different types of broadheads are available. Broadhead selection is as personal as the brand of bow you buy. The arrow needs to be somewhat heavier on the front of the shaft than on the back of the shaft. But again, if you have no experience, rely on the knowledge of the archery pro.

### **Tune Your Bow Properly**

The best advice I can give is for you to let the pro at the archery shop tune the bow for you. Easton's Technical Bulletin No. 4, "Tuning the Bow and Arrow System," written by Don Rabaska, is the best explanation on how to tune a bow. When the bow's tuned correctly, the arrow will leave the strings and come out of the bow without porpoising or yawing.

Once you believe your bow's tuned properly, most archery instructors will have you stand 6- to 8-feet away from a piece of paper and shoot through that paper. The way the arrow cuts the paper as it flies graphically will demonstrate how the arrow is coming out of the bow. You'll be able to see if the arrow's flying tail-high, tail-low, tail-left or tail-right. If the arrow has any of these problems, the archery pro can correct the arrow flight by synchronizing the wheels, altering the height and position of the arrow rest or possibly changing the arrow shaft you're shooting.

### **Decide On The Best Sight To Shoot**

The easiest sight to shoot if you're a tree stand shooter is a pendulum sight. This sight compensates and allows you to aim at unknown distances without having to guess the distance when you're hunting from a tree stand and the ground below the stand is flat. However, pendulum sights are ineffective if you're aiming up a hill. Pendulum sights can be very accurate if you climb to the same height in trees each time you hunt and the ground beneath those trees is always flat. Within those parameters, the pendulum sight can and will shoot accurately out to about 40 yards.

Another option many professional archers choose is a bead sight. These sights consist of beads held on wires or strings, and they don't tend to rattle as much as pin sights do. A good bead sight should have a master-adjustment system. Once you set the beads for the trajectory and velocity

of your bow at certain distances, if you need to make a major change in your sight, you can move all the beads to the left, right, up or down with the master-adjustment device.

But the most commonly used sight for bowhunting is the pin sight, which attaches above the handle of the bow. The pins in the sight can be moved left or right or up and down to correct your aim.

Whether you're shooting pin sights or bead sights, Mans bowhunter recommend you use them in conjunction with a peep sight. The peep sight attaches to the string. Most bowhunters prefer peep sights because they're easier to line up the shots consistently each time. A peep sight is to the bow what a rear sight on a rifle is to a rifleman. It allows you to more accurately line up the target. Most archers prefer the non-rotating type of peep sight that uses a rubber band.

When you're shooting a peep sight, remember to make sure the hole in the sight is large enough to allow enough light to pass through at dusk and dawn to be able to see your beads or your pins. Many peep sights aren't equipped with holes big enough to let the archer shoot in low-light conditions. Be certain the hole in your peep sight is between 1/16- and 1/8-inch in diameter, which should allow plenty of light to get through the peep for you to sight effectively during prime bowhunting times.

### **Practice Shooting**

Set your sights, whether they are beads or pins, at varying distances from 10 to 40 yards. Measure the distances you are from different targets. Then determine what your maximum effective range is. Most bowhunters abide by the rule that under hunting conditions that only try and shoot animals that come in at half of their effective ranges. In other words, if you can shoot very effectively at 40 yards at an archery range or in the backyard, then you should limit your range in the woods to 20 yards. The main reason for setting up these parameters is you can't control a live animal in the woods like you can a target in the backyard.

To determine your effective range, use these standards as guidelines. At 10 yards, you should be able to shoot a 1 - to 2-inch group. All the arrows you shoot into the target should fit in either a 1- or a 2-inch circle. At 20 yards, you should be able to shoot a 2-inch group. At 30 yards, you should be able to shoot a 3-inch group, and at 40 yards, you should be able to shoot a 4-inch group.

### **Shoot Under Hunting Conditions**

One of the biggest mistakes beginning bowhunters make is once they can shoot consistently in their backyards wearing T-shirts and shorts, they assume they'll shoot the same way when hunting season arrives. But you need to put all your hunting clothes on to practice effectively just before the season. Dress exactly like you'll be hunting. Also practice shooting from your tree stand, since many things change when you're shooting from a tree stand.

You'll realize you don't have the room to maneuver and get the shot when you're on a small platform as you do when you're on the ground. In the winter, you'll be wearing more and heavier clothes than you do when you practice in the spring and fall. Your string may hit your clothing, which can inhibit arrow flight. During cold weather, your muscles will not react the same way they do during warm weather and pulling the bow will be more difficult.

To check your draw weight, sit down on your tree stand, and try and pull your bow 10 times. If you can't draw your bow 10 times, then you're attempting to pull too much weight. You need to have the draw weight of your bow reduced. A common mistake made by many beginners is trying

to pull a bow that's too heavy for them. Do shoot all the poundage you can shoot effectively but not more than that amount.

### **Learn How To Judge Distance Accurately**

Use a rangefinder to learn to determine distance. Then begin to practice judging distance without the rangefinder. When you can guess distance somewhat accurately, measure off 10 yards with a tape. Learn to be able to recognize 10 yards anywhere you see it. Then when you accurately can identify 10 yards, add another 10 yards to make 20, and another 10 yards for 30. By picking spots on the ground and judging 10- yard increments, you'll better know how to judge the distance you'll be from an animal.

Once you can judge 10 yards with your eyes, next learn how to step off 10 yards. Measure your gait. Then you'll understand exactly how many normal steps you must take to pace off 10 yards. Practice judging distances everywhere you go. After you've guessed the distance, pace off the yardage to see how accurately you've estimated. Learning to accurately determine distance is one of the most critical keys to successful bowhunting. You should be able to judge within 2 yards the distance you are from an animal to be able to shoot accurately.

### **Have The Archery Instructor Recheck Your Form And Your Equipment**

Oftentimes an archer will develop bad shooting habits that he cannot recognize by himself, but a qualified instructor can. Also be sure all your arrows are straight, and your bow's still tuned properly. Then you'll know you consistently will shoot straight during bow season.

### **Shoot 3-D Archery Courses And Tournaments**

By shooting a 3-D archery course, you can bring all the elements of your practice together. You'll have to judge the distance you are from life-sized animal targets in the woods and shoot a wide variety of different-sized animal targets placed in the woods under hunting conditions. If you shoot with a group of people, you'll understand the emotional pressure you'll feel when you have a big buck standing under your tree stand within range. Shooting 3-D archery allows the hunter to practice most of his hunting and shooting skills under actual hunting conditions.

If you begin to shoot with a club or a group of people who normally go to the same archery shop, by the time bow season comes in, you already may have shot at and accurately arrowed 100 to 1000 animal targets. Then when a live deer comes in and presents the shot, you'll be attempting to make the same shot you've made on the 3-D archery course many times.

After Harley learned these lessons at the archery shop, he sold someone else his bargain equipment for \$65 and made a profit. Today, he's deadly effective with his bowhunting equipment.

When you choose bowhunting equipment carefully, it should fit you as comfortably and be as useful as a quality pair of hiking boots. When you select bowhunting equipment incorrectly, you're much like a mountain climber who shows up at the slopes with a pair of flip-flops and a tennis racket.

### **WHERE AND WHAT**

To make the right decisions on your bowhunting equipment, consider where you'll be doing most of your hunting and what type of game you'll be hunting. If you're bowhunting in the East and primarily hunting from a tree stand, more than likely 80 to 90 percent of your shots will be made at

a distance of 30 yards or less. But if you're hunting in the West, the majority of your shots will be from the ground, which means you must be able to shoot accurately at 50 to 60 yards. The bow you choose for western hunting may be different from your eastern hunting bow.

In hunting close-encounter situations out of tree stands, I prefer to only set two or three pins. Usually I have two pins on my bow at 15 and 30 yards. I have some friends who only set one pin at 20 yards, which with the fast-shooting bows on the market today is a very effective way to set your bow. With one pin, you don't have the problem of getting into a situation of picking the wrong pin when you shoot. But I like to set at least two pins, which seems to help me keep my bow vertical when I'm aiming at a deer.

If I'm out West hunting, I'll set more pins, usually up to 50 yards, for the longer distance shooting at mule deer and elk. I like to use sight brackets for my pins. I set up one sight bracket for my whitetail and close-encounter hunting and another for western hunting and interchange them as needed without having to do much setup on my bow.

### **JIM'S PREFERENCES IN EQUIPMENT**

I began to hunt with a longbow when I was a youngster, because those bows were available in my area. Next I used a youth recurve bow for carp shooting. I still like playing with a recurve sometimes.

I admire how the Indians taught their children to be proficient hunters early. Boys made their own small bows and arrows, with which they had shooting contests. A bear's paw hanging from a branch was a common target. Or, one of a group of boys would shoot his arrow into an open field. Then the other would shoot, each trying to make his arrow land across the first. In some tribes, boys made hoops of vines, with smaller vines dividing the circle into sections of different sizes. Then they shot at the hoop as it rolled, each boy trying to send his arrow through the smallest section of the moving target. These games trained the Indian children for hunting fast-running deer and antelope.

### **Bows, Releases and Rests**

In 1970, I started shooting a compound Jennings bow and quickly discovered my ability to take game increased drastically. Today, I shoot a PSE Infinity bow because it seems to be a very forgiving bow for a finger shooter. I shoot with my fingers because I always have. But if I'm advising a newcomer to the sport, I recommend they shoot a mechanical release. They can become more consistent shots with mechanical releases.

All the bow companies' top-of-the-line bows are quality and time-tested. Bear, Martin and Golden Eagle, just to name a few, make tremendously efficient bows.

A hunting bow should be set for a comfortable draw by the bowhunter, which means different weights for various people. I've always felt that the proper weight for a bow is the weight at which a bowhunter can comfortably draw the bow at a 45-degree angle downward without moving his bow arm. If the bowhunter must raise his arms straight up or raise his bow arm in an upward position to get leverage to pull the bow back, then he is attempting to pull too much weight.

In bowhunting situations, movement is a critical consideration. Once the deer is in sight, and the hunter points his bow arm at the deer, he should not have to move that arm at all when he comes to full draw. When the bow is set at the correct weight, he'll have much less trouble drawing it.

Usually when I'm in a tree stand and have to sit for three hours or more, every hour or 1/2-hour I survey the area around my tree stand to make sure that there is nothing in the area I will spook. I'll pick up my bow and pull it back several times to keep myself limber. Then I know I can pull it back if a deer approaches.

I'm also careful with my bow during the off-season and keep it as cool as possible and in a dry place in the house. Too, I try to shoot my bow at least once a week. If I'm switching to another bow, I bring the weight down on the bow I'm retiring to protect the limbs. But I keep the bow I'll be hunting with the following year strung and the weight on it year-round. I occasionally put a drop of oil on the axles of the cams once a year to make sure the wheels are turning to the best of their ability. I check the strings for any fraying and the cables for any wear. They may need to be replaced.

When bow manufacturers first came out with cam wheels that allowed bows to shoot a flatter arrow than the round wheels, the first ones I tried were very uncomfortable because the breakover was so abrupt. I only started shooting a cam bow a couple of years ago when the technology on the cams allowed them to be drawn much more smoothly, which made when I released not as critical. I don't shoot an overdraw because seldom in my hunting do I use anything other than a full-length arrow.

I like a cushion-plunger rest. Because I finger shoot, I may flinch a little when I release. The cushion plunger allows the arrow to straighten out much more quickly. The fork type of rest is helpful to a person shooting a mechanical release.

### **How Jim Personalizes His Bow**

I buy my bows with a factory Trebark finish on them. Anything I add to the bow that is shiny, I either will paint or tape it to camouflage it more completely. I shoot the bow, listen carefully for any kind of noise and make the adjustments necessary.

I have found the high-efficiency bows on the market today shoot louder because they shoot harder. I cut 2-inch strips of 100-percent polyester fleece and wrap each limb of the bow from the wheel all the way down to and around where the limb enters into the riser. I wrap the bow just like I do a tennis racquet or a golf handle. I anchor the fabric when I begin wrapping with a piece of duct tape and then overlap it as I wrap all the way down and around where the limb enters the bow. This practice seems to mute the sound of a hard, fast-shooting bow and eliminates the psychological problem of a bow shooting too loudly. If you wrap a bow and add string silencers, but the bow still seems to shoot loud, break the bow down on a bow rack. Then insert some kind of a soft gasket or a cork between the limbs and the riser to soften the hard-shooting impact of the bow.

I also like a sliding pin sight that I can screw down to keep from making any vibration. On my pins, I use a Saunders T-Dot in the lime green color. This Saunders T-Dot inserts into the pin itself and is tremendously effective for shooting in low-light conditions in the early morning and late-evening hours. Because of the T-Dots, I don't have to use a lighted-type sight pin.

### **Arrows, Quivers And Broadheads**

I shoot an Easton XX75 2219, 28-inch long arrow shaft, because my draw is 27-inches long. I like that shaft because it allows for less critical release since I'm a finger shooter than a lighter shaft does and seems to have good, overall flight.

I fletch my arrows myself and use a left-hilac fletch with natural turkey feathers, which stabilizes the arrow more quickly when shot and seems to fly better for me, since I'm a finger shooter. Many

people don't like to use feathers because they may seem to be noisy and they will become wet if you're in a downpour. But the noise factor has not been a disadvantage in any of my hunting situations.

Treat the fletchings with a silicone-type boot spray or something similar that is put on trout flies for trout fishermen to keep the feathers from getting wet. Foggy Mountain Products has a silicone boot spray that has no odor to it when it dries. I saturate the fletches in this boot spray. Then even a downpour won't affect the fletchings.

I like an attachable bow quiver on my bow and usually carry four arrows when I'm hunting deer. I leave the quiver on my bow and practice like that. The quiver doesn't seem to be added weight to me, probably because I'm accustomed to it. I do anchor the fletch end of the quiver with a piece of decoy cord. Then there is very little vibration in the quiver at the release.

I use a three-blade-broadhead, generally the Thunderhead type, 125 grain, or the Rocky Mountain Razorhead. I sharpen some of my broadheads with a commercial sharpener if I've shot them into dirt when I miss and the broadhead hasn't hit anything solid. If I shoot an arrow that strikes a rock or goes into a tree, I don't use that broadhead again. I replace it.

## **Clothing**

Many Indian tribes stalked their prey in disguise, which was the first camo. Some western Indians covered themselves with animal skins, dropped down on all fours and crept close to herds of deer, antelope or even grazing buffaloes. When they were within range, they shot their arrows.

Among eastern tribes, deer were the usual prey of those who stalked in disguise. The Pamunkey Indians of eastern Virginia, the leading tribe of the Powhatan Confederacy, were particularly skilled in this method of hunting. Each member of a stalking party covered himself with a deerskin in which eyeholes had been cut. Clutching his bow and arrows and crouching so low he frequently moved on hands and knees with the skin's legs dangling to the ground and the antlers tossing overhead, he crept toward his deer until he was at a close enough range to shoot his arrows. Some hunters might take several deer before the deer all ran away.

Although I've never worn deerskin to camouflage myself, I know how very important camouflage is to my success as a bowhunter. I like to match my equipment to my clothing too.

Underneath my outer, camouflaged clothing I don't wear much bulky clothing, even when the weather becomes cold. I prefer to use Thermax underwear against my skin, since it wicks moisture away from my skin to keep me from getting cold. Then I may wear Thinsulate or wool-type undergarments underneath or polar fleece with a heavier pair of underwear like the Daymart Double Force underwear on top. I am a firm believer in wearing polar fleece as an undergarment over my underwear. Then I don't need to wear one large bulky garment that interferes with my shooting style.

Of the three Trebark patterns, I prefer to wear the Original Trebark for deer season in the states with a majority of hardwoods and light-barked trees such as white oak and even poplar and maple that have the grays and light- grays found in Trebark. I also like the Original Trebark in the late deer season after the leaves have dropped from the trees, mainly in the middle-eastern states and the Northeast.

If I'm deer hunting in the South, I wear the Trebark II pattern, which has no gray in it. The live oaks and chestnut oaks of the South are more of a dark or a mossy-green type of coloration. Southern states have greenery year-round but not many hardwoods. The Universal Trebark pattern, which has many tans, browns and greens in it, is a camouflage suitable for early season

in the northeastern states, all seasons in the southern states and all seasons in the western states where spruce and ponderosa pine grow.

You must match your camouflage to the foliage and terrain situation to be more successful with your bow. However, don't worry about matching your camouflage to the terrain that is between you and the tree stand or the area to which you will be shooting your arrow. Instead, notice the background where you will be releasing your arrow. When white-tail hunting, you'll generally be in a tree stand. If the background in early season is mostly green leaves, wear a Trebark II or Trebark Universal pattern. Once you're in a tree stand in hardwood, the Original Trebark works well in the northeastern states. I also sometimes mix Original Trebark, Trebark II and Universal pattern pants and shirts to help break up my outline, especially when I'm ground hunting.

## **Boots**

I wear rubber-bottom type boots because you can purchase them with a liner of Thinsulate that keeps your feet warm. But when the weather becomes very cold, I wear an uninsulated and liner-less rubber-bottom boot. Then when I get in my tree stand, I insert a hand-warming pack like those you shake up to provide heat into a boot-toe warmer, which has elastic straps that fit over the toes of my boots. The boot-toe warmer heats up the rubber in the boots.

But if I have a long walk to my tree stand in very cold weather, often I'll put my boots, heavy socks and inner socks in the boots in my pack and wear a lightweight tennis shoe to walk to my stand to keep my feet from getting sweaty. When I reach my stand, I'll take my tennis shoes off, put them in a plastic Ziploc bag in my backpack and put on my heavy socks and boots.

## **Optics**

I prefer a 10X, pocket-size binocular, which lets me zoom in closely before I shoot and after I've shot. I reach for my binoculars as soon after my shot as I can to determine what has occurred after I've hit the deer. While I'm waiting after making a shot on the deer, I study the ground where the deer has been hit with the binoculars without having to get out of the tree. I follow the blood trail with the binoculars, particularly when blood isn't found early in the trailing and I mustn't disturb the leaves.

I've also found that even people who don't wear glasses will see better in the woods if they'll invest in a pair of reading glasses like those sold at drugstores. Even if the glasses aren't high-magnification, they can aid you in picking out pin drops of blood and other things in the leaves.

## **Backpack**

In my backpack, I carry other equipment I use when I'm bowhunting. I believe in having what I may need with me. My philosophy is I would rather have the equipment and not use it than need it and not have it. Whether I'm hunting close to home, driving to some place and hunting or traveling out- of-state, my backpack goes with me. Constructed of polar fleece with an inner liner of waterproof nylon, my backpack has a main compartment and numbers of small side pockets.

### **Here's what I include in my backpack:**

- A set of Goretex rainwear
- An extra, small flashlight
- Two extra flashlight batteries
- A half-roll of toilet paper
- Some Ziploc bags

- Night tacks, which are small push-pins that glow in the dark when hit by a flashlight beam
- An extra skinning knife
- A knife sharpener
- A Swiss army knife
- An extra pull-up cord for my bow
- Another pull-up cord that has a modified S-hook attached to one end that I can use when I'm in my tree stand to pull limbs close to me that are in my shooting lane and trim them off.
- An extra shooting tab
- A battery-operated headlamp that has an elastic strap on it, because it keeps your hands free and allows you to look for a blood trail at night
- Insect repellent
- A butane cigarette lighter
- Chunks of commercial fire starter
- A small plastic bottle of bottled water
- A canteen of water too on hot days
- A rubber-style, hot-water bottle to use for urinating
- A roll of surveyor's tape to mark particular spots I may want to return to or need to find later. But I don't like to use this tape on a deer trail.
- A dog whistle like that used to train dogs to get the attention of other hunters in case of accident or if another bowhunter approaches where I'm hunting.
- A small 35 mm camera
- A tripod with a Velcro strap that if necessary can be strapped onto a tree limb
- An extra tree step for a place to hang my bow if no bow hanger is in the tree or on the tree stand
- Several granola bars
- A folding saw
- A quality pair of pruning shears -- a ratchet-type of shears that can cut hardwood or good-sized limbs
- A rangefinder
- A spool of thread to learn wind direction
- A 20-foot length of 1-inch nylon webbing for a deer drag or to use to hang a deer high in a tree to keep it away from animals when I don't find the deer until after dark An insulated vest
- An extra change of socks and underwear
- Outside straps on the backpack to strap heavier clothes to it when the weather is very cold

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, I'm not a gadget person, but I like to be prepared when I'm bowhunting deer.

## **Secrets of Bowhunting Deer Chapter 4**

### **FINDING LAND TO HUNT**

*By John E. Phillips*

The obvious answer to locating a productive place to hunt is to talk to your friends and other bowhunters. However, if you have a good deer hot spot, do you want other people hunting that site knowing there's a good chance they may take the deer you're trying to bag?

Wanting somebody to give you directions to a good place to bowhunt is much like asking someone to borrow his toothbrush or his best squirrel dog. The exception to that rule is if you have a friend with a good region to hunt who doesn't have a bowhunting buddy.

I believe in buddy bowhunting. When you hunt an area with a friend, not only do you have someone who's in the woods who can help you if you have a problem, but also two strong backs and four strong legs can drag out a deer better. Too, you can learn more about the woods and the deer's movement patterns through the woods when two brains are working instead of just one.

I enjoy buddy bowhunting because it's a safer, smarter and more enjoyable way to hunt. Often a bowhunting buddy will become the best friend you've ever had, and you can discuss the joys and the tragedies of life with him. If you do have a friend with a terrific spot to hunt and nobody to hunt with, you may be able to locate new land to hunt from this friend. But by summertime with bowhunting season approaching, betting on finding the right kind of bowhunting buddy in time for deer season is a gamble.

### **PUBLIC LANDS**

Realize your best chances for pinpointing a site to bowhunt will depend on your own resourcefulness and investigative powers. Make a list of all the public lands within driving distance of your home. Begin to talk to sporting goods dealers, other bowmen and conservation officers in your area to learn which of these public hunting lands seems to yield the most deer during bow season.

Also try to determine which public land has the most bowhunters. Often when hunting new lands, we only consider the number of deer harvested on that property and not the number of man-days required to harvest those deer.

For instance, if a public-hunting region near your home has 200 deer bagged during a two-week bow season, you automatically assume that region will be an excellent place for you to hunt. However, if you research the property more and learn 10,000 hunters required five days to bag those 200 deer, you quickly can see your odds of taking a Whitetail on that land are extremely low.

If another public-hunting property has 25 deer taken during a 10-day season, but 50 bowhunters hunted only for two days to take those 25 deer, your chances of bagging a Whitetail on this public region are much greater than the area that harvested 200 deer. When evaluating land to hunt and studying the statistics of an area and the harvest records, don't forget to learn how many hunter days were required to take the number of deer reflected in the harvest.

### **PRIVATE LANDS**

## People Who Can Help You

If you prefer to hunt private lands instead of public lands, or if you want a deer lease for you and a few good friends, you must go to the grass-roots people in the region you plan to hunt to locate land where bowhunters can hunt or people who are willing to lease land for hunting. In every country in every state of the United States, certain folks know just about all there is to know about everybody's business in that county.

The county conservation officer or game warden will know who in a county has land you either can hunt on for free, by paying a fee or by leasing the land. The conservation officer must patrol the land in the county and is acquainted with most of the landowners.

Another good resource person is the county's sheriff, who has knowledge of the landowners in his jurisdiction. Also he probably will be aware of whether or not these property owners will grant you permission to hunt.

The mailman is acquainted with just about everyone in the county or at least everyone on his route. He will be able to tell you who may lease land to you. Also because he passes by a property daily, he probably can give you a fair assessment of the numbers of deer you can expect to find on that land.

The county banker also is friends with most of the large landowners in his county. If the banker is also a hunter, he will have a good idea about the people you can contact if you're searching for somewhere to hunt.

Yet another fount of hunting information is the barber, who often is to the hunter what the hairdresser is to the hunter's wife. Usually hairdressers and barbers understand more about everybody's business than anyone else in a community. Too, the barber is aware of hunting opportunities and the personalities of the people you'll be asking to hunt their lands.

But you can locate the best private hunting land available in any county. First, cross-reference the leads you get with two or three different sources. For instance, if the sheriff tells you Mr. Sam Jones has some land he lets people hunt for free, then check out Sam Jones with the banker. The banker may tell you that yes, Mr. Jones allows people to hunt for free on his property, which has been a tradition in the Jones' family for many years. He also may say that Mr. Jones is a nice guy who welcomes hunters with open arms. Now you understand more about Mr. Jones and the property you may get to hunt. You'll also start to have a good feeling about hunting that property with your bow this season. But the wise hunter will talk to the barber about Mr. Jones by saying, "I understand Mr. Jones lets bowhunters hunt his property free of charge."

The barber may look up and observe that, "Yes, that's true. He's had that hunting policy for many years."

Then when you ask why Mr. Jones doesn't charge to hunt and why he allows people hunt there for free, the barber may explain that, "Bowhunters only have killed three deer on his place in the last 10 years." What has appeared to be an excellent hunting opportunity on private land at no cost has become a not-so-good hunting spot.

If you move into a new community, one of the best places to find hunting land is at church. A minister often may hunt and generally knows every hunter in his congregation. Also many ministers hunt. Anyone in that church who's also a hunter understands what a terrible problem a man has when he moves into a new town and doesn't have a place to hunt. Sometimes church folks will be benevolent and either share their hunting lands with you or aid you in locating lands

to hunt. You also can meet people and find individuals who will help you locate land to bowhunt on in service clubs like the Rotary, the Lions, Junior Chamber of Commerce, etc.

### **You Can Work With Landowners**

To find the best hunting land, attempt to pinpoint who has the best hunting in the county but historically never has let anyone hunt that land. When you know who these people are, make a list. Research why these folks never have permitted hunters on their lands. Once you understand their motives, you may be able to attack that problem and change the landowner's mind. These lands are the most productive to obtain permission to hunt, because generally that landowner will have a stable deer population that either never has been hunted or has been hunted very little. Your chances of taking an older-age-class buck will be much greater.

For example, if you learn a landowner doesn't allow hunting on his property because hunters in the past have torn down his fences, left his cattle gates open and littered his property, then go to that landowner. Offer to help mend fences, put in new gates, or do other chores to improve his property in return for permission to hunt. If you realize a landowner has stopped everyone from hunting his land because he has had a terrible poaching problem -- patrol his land for him. Or, pay someone to patrol his land when you're not there to help solve his poaching problem. If you can determine why a man won't let hunters on his land and solve that problem for him, oftentimes you may obtain permission to hunt lands where no one else has.

One of the best ways to build trust with a particular property owner who doesn't like hunters is to ask for permission to only hunt a small portion of his land the first year. If an individual owns 2,000 acres and has had a bad experience with hunters in the past, ask if he'll allow you to hunt a 200- to 500-acre tract. Then you'll begin to gain the confidence of that landowner. Explain to him that you understand his reluctance to allow hunting on his property, but that if he'll let you hunt a small section of his land for one season, you'll prove to him you are a good steward of the land. Tell him you'll help protect the land, keep his property clean and treat his land as though it is yours. Often by offering a reluctant landowner the opportunity to let you prove you are a good sportsman and a faithful steward of his land, you'll find a small, good place to hunt. Then each year, as the confidence and camaraderie between you and the landowner grows, you may gain the right to hunt more of that landowner's property.

If the land you want to hunt is used for grazing livestock, by meeting the landowner and asking if he will allow you to hunt the predators on his land, you can get a foot in the door, which may enable you to bowhunt there later in the season. If you live in cattle country with a high coyote population, offer to hunt and take the coyotes off the land for the property owner in the off-season. Don't ask permission to hunt deer with your bow until later in the year. Usually if you've gotten rid of the predators that have been creating problems for the landowner, he'll give you permission to bowhunt his land for deer.

When I was younger, I was able to have use of some excellent hunting land because immediately after deer season, I became a predator hunter for the owners. I shot groundhogs around the fields and the pastures and pigeons out of the tobacco barn. Landowners gave me permission to hunt during the season because I solved these problems for them.

When you offer to find the solution to a problem for a landowner and become concerned with his problems, then later on in the relationship, he generally will be willing to solve your problem of needing a place to hunt. Establish a year-round relationship with a landowner whose land you're hunting by keeping in touch during the off-season too. An occasional visit, a phone call, a card or even a small Christmas gift will let the property owner know you're privileged to hunt his land and his friendship is important to you. The two of you can help each other and in so doing, help yourselves.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF MAPS**

Once you decide where you want to hunt, obtain a topographical map and/or an aerial photo of that land. These maps usually are available from either the U.S. Geological Survey or the USDA Soil Conservation Service. If you're hunting in mountainous terrain, the topographical map will be more beneficial because it will show the relief of the land. You'll quickly and easily be able to spot where the hills, the valleys and the ridges are. You'll be able to locate the bottoms between the ridges and see the low spots where the deer must travel to cross the mountains.

If you're hunting in more flat terrain with very few hills and mountains, the aerial photo may be more beneficial than a topo map. On an aerial photo, you'll be able to see the lay of the land better as well as the types of trees on the land and the drainage system. Utilizing the maps that are available to study the property you plan to hunt will save you many hours of scouting time -- particularly if you're hunting public land. With the maps, you can select the areas on the hunting lands where you can concentrate your scouting to be the most productive.

Some states have maps available that show all the lands where the public can hunt. These maps are a tremendous resource for the bowhunter. Most state departments of conservation and information and education sections can tell you where to obtain maps of all the public-hunting lands in your state.

A company that makes maps for many states across the nation that shows all the roads and backroads in outdoor recreation areas is the DeLorme Mapping Company, P.O. Box 298, Freeport, Maine 04032, phone 207-865-4171.

## **Secrets of Bowhunting Deer Chapter 5**

### **LOCATING A MAGIC 60-ACRE DEER LEASE**

*By John E. Phillips*

Intensively hunting small tracts of land can yield more bucks for you when bowhunting than hunting great expanses of woodlands will. I believe a 60-acre lease can provide all the land you and your friends need to bowhunt on -- if it's the correct 60 acres. Actually all the land you need to consistently take whitetail deer is 40 square yards -- if plenty of deer are passing through it and if you can shoot accurately for at least 20 yards in every direction.

But that 40-square yards must be the best 40-square yards. The land around that 40-square yards even can be posted or belong to another hunting club. What's more important than the amount of land you lease is the habitat and food surrounding the area you hunt.

I've never thought the size of land anyone leases for bowhunting is critical to his ability to take deer. However, the amount of land you have leased is important when you want to control the buck/doe ratio. For instance in Virginia where I live, most of the land you can hunt is farm land. Each parcel will be in 100- to 500-acre tracts, like most of the land in the East. In the South with its plantation system of farming and in the West with its very large ranches, 6,000 to 10,000 acres is considered a good bowhunting lease. But most eastern hunters rarely will find that much privately held property they can lease for bowhunting.

### **WHAT IS A MAGIC 60 ACRES?**

The first piece of property I owned and used for hunting was only 60 acres. Twenty acres of the land was old pasture, 20 acres was in thick cedars, and 20 acres was composed of mature oaks - which was the perfect combination of land habitat for bowhunting.

The first year I had the property, I hired a man to bushhog the old pasture and drag a rock rake over it. We planted clover on the pasture in September. By the second week in October, the clover was up. By the middle of bow season in November, we had deer coming from everywhere to my lease.

The property around this magic 60 acres had been timbered five or six years before and now had very dense cover. Hunted only by the landowners' families, the property was not overhunted. The clover drew deer like a magnet to my property. Each evening I'd see 15 to 20 deer standing in the clover. Friends and I consistently took five to 10 deer every season from this property.

### **HOW TO HAVE YOUR OWN MAGIC 60-ACRE LEASE**

The 60-acre bow lease can support good hunting for two to four hunters if you have the right combination of land types, hunting pressure, deer management and limited access. The first thing to look for when you're considering a 60-acre lease is how much hunting pressure is exerted on the property around that 60 acres. If the land surrounding the 60 acres you want to lease is hunted heavily, then more than likely the number of deer you have to hunt will be reduced greatly. However, if the surrounding region has moderate to light to no hunting pressure, you may be able to concentrate a large number of deer on your lease. The second thing to determine when you're looking at a 60-acre lease is, does the area contain a large deer population? You usually can check with close-by landowners or conservation officers to learn this information. The third critical ingredient is the type of habitat on the land. The ideal, magic 60 acres must have a field or an opening you can plant to attract wildlife and deer. To be successful, the land needs a thick-cover

area where the animals can bed and hide and also a region of hardwoods where the deer naturally will feed.

Any time you ...

- can find three converging habitats in a region where the access is limited,
- have the opportunity to manipulate that habitat by planting and
- know very little, in any, hunting is done around the property you lease,

then you have an excellent chance of developing a magical 60-acre bow lease you can hunt throughout the season.

## **WHAT TO PLANT AND HOW TO DEVELOP THE MAGIC 60 ACRES**

Often we tend to overkill on our planting. My magic 60 acres had plenty of wild blackberries and some raspberries in 20-acre pasture. When I mowed the pasture, I intentionally did not mow down the blackberries or the raspberries.

Wild berries provide ideal cover and habitat for deer, and the leaves of the berry bushes are a reliable food source for them. By fertilizing blackberry and raspberry patches with commercially prepared fertilizer, you not only increase the amount of food the pasture will produce for the deer, but also the quality of the food improves.

Blackberry patches also provide thick-cover corridors the deer can use to move in and out of open fields. Bucks do not like to walk through cleared fields to feed but instead prefer to move through thick cover into a feeding site and have thick cover close by if they need to escape danger. You may plant commercially grown raspberries and blackberries to supplement the wild berries to insure the deer a continuous food source, even if the mast crop is poor. In the rest of the pasture, plant rye, winter wheat or clover.

When you're creating the best bow lease possible, remember if all the available food on this property is the highest quality food in that region, you can and will concentrate deer. Also fertilize the wild honeysuckle naturally occurring on your property and any of the forbes you find.

Too, you can fertilize the nut trees on your lease. Dig holes 3-feet apart and 3-feet deep, starting at the base of a nut tree and extending out to the outermost branches of the tree on all four sides of the nut tree. Fill the holes 2/3 of the way full with 13/13/13 fertilizer. Put the dirt back on top of the hole. When the rains come, that fertilizer will go down into the tree's root system and not only help the tree produce more and bigger nuts but also sweeter tasting nuts than any other trees in the area.

By fertilizing, you also can improve the taste and the quality of bushes and shrubs as well as acorns on your bow lease. The deer tend to feed off the highest quality and best-tasting food they can locate.

Once you pinpoint the best 60 acres for bowhunting, catalog the deer's food sources. Then increase that food source's value to the deer by using commercially prepared fertilizer. Look for briar patches, honeysuckle thickets, acorn trees, apple trees or any other type of naturally occurring food deer historically have utilized. Use the money you have available to spend on the land first to fertilize these deer foods, because these areas and these types of food are what the deer have been feeding on before you leased the property.

Next clear and plant your field, taking special care not to destroy the plants already providing food for deer. If you have the permission of the landowner to cut the trash trees (trees with no timber value) less than 6 inches in diameter in the mature hardwood stands, you can create ideal deer habitat and increase the browse on which the deer have to feed.

I go into the woods during mid-winter before the sap starts to come up and cut the tops out of the trash trees less than 6 inches in diameter, leaving about a 2-foot high stump. I'm really pruning the trash trees. I don't cut any nut trees. I'm only cutting the trees with no timber value that normally don't produce food for deer. I also fertilize these pruned trees to encourage them to put on more leaves and branches than they may otherwise.

During the spring when the sap comes up, that small tree will become a bush and put on leaves and branches about shoulder-high to a deer. These 2-foot high stumps will produce cover and food for the deer at a level where they can feed. Many times in large mature hardwood tracts, you'll find very little cover and little food after the acorns are gone. But by using this system of pruning, you create more food and cover for the deer.

If hunters manage their deerherds and improve the availability of food and cover on their 60-acre bow leases, they can increase the number of animals they have to hunt on that 60 acres.

### **HOW TO PROTECT YOUR PORTION OF HEAVEN**

Unfortunately, unscrupulous people everywhere will try and take advantage of your hard work. As you begin to create your magic 60-acre bow lease, remember, the more deer you concentrate on this land, the more likely you are to attract poachers.

Be sure and post your land. Too, put up a sign that reads, "Danger, Hunting in Progress, Firearms Being Used." I have caught poachers on my property before, taken the license numbers of their cars and turned them in to the sheriff. You must be willing to go all the way through the court system to prosecute the poachers if you want to protect your land as well as the money and the hard work you've invested to have your magic 60 acres.

The more remote your lease is and the more difficult it is to reach, the fewer problems you'll have with poaching. However, if you increase the food available and the number of deer on the property you're hunting, and you don't have a plan to protect your land from poachers, then you may be producing deer for unscrupulous people -- I won't even call them hunters -- to take.

### **HOW MANY PEOPLE CAN HUNT A MAGIC 60 ACRES?**

I'm convinced if three people together lease 60 acres with the correct factors present and prepare the land for hunting through planting a field, fertilizing naturally-occurring trees and plants and improving the habitat, this land can support up to six or eight hunters hunting one or two days a week. Idealistically I believe if you have three hunters involved in a lease, each can bring one guest and not overhunt the property. But you can't hunt the property every day of the season, and you must have strict limits on the number of the deer that can be taken.

### **HOW MANY DEER TO TAKE**

I have found that one-third of all the deer on the property can be harvested on this amount of land without detrimentally impacting the herd. If 30 deer, both bucks and does, are using this property, then the hunters may be able to harvest about 10 animals a season. If only three people hunt the land, and the state permits the bagging of more than one deer per hunter each season, then each

hunter will be able to take three animals. If each hunter brings a guest, the hunter and his guest each can take one or two deer a season.

However, I never try to harvest one-third of my bucks. If the property around your magic 60 acres is not hunted or is hunted very little, then limit the size of bucks each bowman can take. You may want to invoke either a six or better or an eight or better rule. Then only the bucks with six points or eight points are available for harvest.

If you'll let the young bucks walk unmolested, you can produce some quality deer on your magic 60 acres. You probably will have the opportunity to bag plenty of does. By restricting your diet of bucks, each of you should see a shootable buck each season.

Be sure to consider restricting the harvesting of spikes. From the latest research I've read, wildlife biologists seem to agree that we can't determine what the genetic potential of a spike may be. If you shoot a 1-1/2- year old spike, you may be taking a young buck that has the potential to be a six or an eight point the next year.

When I hunted public lands, I shot spikes. But now that I have my own lease, the only spikes I shoot are the cow- horned spikes with antlers 24-inches long. I never harvest the spikes with 4- to 8-inch long antlers because they may be 18-month old deer that may be trophy bucks late on in life.

## **HOW TO DETERMINE DEER NUMBERS**

To have your magic 60 acres consistently produce 6 to 10 deer per season for you to harvest, you must know how many deer are on the land or are living on your 60-acre bow lease. Here's two methods to determine deer density and develop a harvest prescription.

The scientific way is to ask your wildlife biologist to come to your land and evaluate the deerherd on your magic 60 acres. He will give you an approximate number of deer on the property and make harvest recommendations to sustain or increase that number. Keep a log of the weights of the deer taken each season and the deer's jaw bones for aging. Then the biologist can determine how well your harvest prescription is working. He will make adjustments if needed to either increase or decrease the number of deer on the 60 acres.

Many states have a deer management assistance program, whereby the state provides this service for free. Another option is to engage the services of a consulting wildlife biologist. This man becomes an employee of the members of the lease and helps to manage and recommend management strategies for increasing the number of deer on the property and the quality of deer on the property.

The other system of determining how many deer should be harvested is what I call the "best guess philosophy." Before deer season comes in, count the number of deer you see coming to your greenfield late in the afternoon or at night. Assume you're only spotting half the deer on the property when you count the deer on the field. For instance, if you consistently watch 15 deer on the field, then assume 30 deer live on the property.

I have found about one-third of the deer can be harvested without adversely impacting the resource on a well kept lease. But plan to take no more than 10 animals during a season. Remember this technique is not an exact or a scientific way to decide how many animals to harvest from your magic 60 acres.

## **WHY BE A BENEVOLENT DICTATOR**

The most critical ingredient to success with a magic 60- acre bow lease is having a benevolent dictator -- a man who makes all the rules, settles all the disputes and initiates the management program -- in charge of all the hunting that occurs on the lease. The worst system of lease management is a democracy. All the participants in the lease usually think they know better about how to manage the land than any one individual does.

To have consistency in lease management, hunting regulations and deer production, one man must be in charge. If he establishes the hunting philosophy of the lease and the management systems by which the lease will harvest and produce game, usually there's less bickering and more enjoyable hunts for everyone.

If you decide to lease 60 acres for your sole use, then you can be the benevolent dictator. However, if three bowhunters come together to lease the land, one man should be designated as in charge.

The good news for the bowhunter is you don't have to have 10,000 acres leased to have quality bowhunting. You can be successful with only 40-square yards. If you'll spend the time required to find land that has the potential of being a magic 60 acres and develop that land to help it produce deer for you and some of your friends each season, you can have the finest quality bowhunting for deer available anywhere. Before hunting season starts, begin your hunt for a magical 60-acre bow lease.

## **Secrets of Bowhunting Deer Chapter 6**

### **SCOUTING THE PRE-SEASON**

*By John E. Phillips*

One of the problems associated with pre-season scouting is most of the time you spook the deer you're trying to find. The more time you spend in the woods scouting one to two weeks before the season, the more likely you are to spook deer.

### **BE CAREFUL NOT TO SPOOK THE DEER**

To bag a buck with your bow on opening day, surprise that buck by being in a place at a time when the deer least expects you to be there. If you walk through the woods the week before the season leaving your human odor in all the sites where you see deer signs, then you've notified the buck you're coming after him. An older-age-class buck realizes his best chance of survival is to avoid the regions he usually frequents when he starts smelling human odor there.

If you get up one morning, walk out your front door, see a stick of dynamite lying in the bushes set to go off, move on to your car, spot another stick of dynamite ready to explode, find yet another stick of dynamite set to go off at the first stop light you come to as well as where you stop for coffee, more than likely you won't take that same route the next day to work. That same scenario is what a buck experiences as he moves along the route he normally has taken all year and never has spotted danger there before. When that buck smells human odor in all his familiar places and hasn't smelled a hunter since the last hunting season, he will become extremely wary. Generally if he's an older-age-class buck, he will change the route he's been walking since the end of deer season.

I do my scouting in the woods four to six weeks before bow/deer season begins. Then starting two weeks before the season starts, I do most of my scouting with binoculars. I go to agricultural fields and openings in the woods just before daylight and immediately before dark to look for deer. I stay well-away from the animals and use my binoculars to learn where the deer are coming into and going out of the fields and openings. I want to be able to see about how many deer are moving to the fields and openings and hopefully spot the buck I want to hunt during the opening of bow season.

When I was a parttime goose guide in Maryland while I was still working for the school system in Alexandria, Virginia, I spotted a nice, 8-point buck coming into a soybean field one day before deer season arrived. Over a 10-day period, I watched this buck enter the field about four times in exactly the same spot late in the evening. The first afternoon we hunted during bow season, a friend and I sat on the edge of that soybean field and waited for the buck to enter at the same site where he had before. Not only did the buck come into the field at the same place, but he also appeared within five minutes of the time I'd estimated.

I was in my tree stand 15 yards from the deer. However, when I readied for the shot, I only had a small window between two beech limbs through which to shoot. I drew my bow and released the arrow. The buck went back on his haunches. I heard a resounding whack! and assumed I'd hit the deer in the shoulder bone. The buck ran out into the middle of the field, stopped, looked back, snorted, lifted his tail and ran out of the field.

Everything about my pre-season scout plan had worked. My shot was right. I'd heard my arrow hit the deer. I'd seen the deer rock back. However, I couldn't understand why he ran out into the field and didn't fall over but instead snorted and lifted his tail as though he'd never been hit and kept on running out of the field.

I climbed down out of my tree stand and went to look for my arrow and the blood trail. When I arrived at the spot where I expected to find the arrow, there was no arrow or blood. I walked back towards my tree stand, looking up as I walked. Then I saw a terrible sight. My arrow was lodged solidly in the middle of one of those beech limbs.

My pre-season scouting was absolutely perfect. I had been able to pattern my buck without getting any closer than 300 yards to him. The buck never saw me and never smelled me until I was ready to hunt him. I had been in the best place on a day at the right time to take a nice 8-point, but I shot a limb instead of a buck. Although my shooting was in error, my pre-season scout plan was accurate. I never had followed the buck's trail away from the field during my pre-season scouting, nor had I given the deer any indication I would be anywhere near him on that first day of the season. Therefore, the buck did exactly what he'd always done prior to the season's opening.

Deer are creatures of habit and usually do what they've done in the past as long as they're not disturbed. However, when a deer feels hunting pressure, the older the buck is, the more likely he will be to change his routine when he determines a hunter is getting too close to him.

I believe the best time to harvest a quality buck is the first time you hunt from any stand. When you walk to that stand, hunt from that stand and walk away from that stand, you've left enough human odor in that area to notify the buck of your presence.

I prefer to use portable tree stands rather than permanent ones. By using a portable tree stand, once I've hunted from a stand site, I can move the stand and hunt the deer in another place at another time where he won't expect me to be.

## **LEARN THE LAND**

If I'm hunting property I've never hunted before, as soon as I obtain permission to hunt that land, I spend as much time as possible in the woods. I want to learn as much as possible about the woods I'm going to hunt well in advance of deer season including where ...

- all the potential food trees and other food sources are,
- all the agricultural fields are and
- the deer are likely to approach those fields.

If bow/deer season comes in at the first or the middle of October, then by the first of September, I'll already know if this region will have an acorn crop by seeing the green acorns on the trees. I will have learned when the farmer plans to cut his crops on which the deer have been feeding as well as where the deer will be feeding after their early food sources are gone. For a pre-season scout plan to be effective, pinpoint not only where the deer will be feeding and bedding during the opening week of bow season but also where and what the deer will eat once that food supply is depleted. If you stock your freezer for a month, you have an idea of what you'll eat first, what food is available in your freezer mid-way through the month and what you'll have left to eat at the end of the month. You will set your menus accordingly.

Deer generally follow that same timetable. When a primary food source is gone, they already have other food sources identified that they can eat. By understanding the different types of foods the deer will feed on as they deplete their primary food source, you can pre-predict where and when deer may be each week of bow season.

If you don't know the deer's food timetable, talk to your local department of conservation's district wildlife biologist where you plan to hunt. This wildlife specialist will be able to tell you the deer's food sources and the order in which the deer will feed on those food sources in the area you plan to hunt. Once you have that information, then look for those food sources on the property you'll

be hunting. Set up tree stand sites to hunt over those food sources each week of bow season. If you're hunting private lands, you may want to go ahead and set up your tree stands six to eight weeks before the season to hunt over those particular food sources for the entire season.

## **CHOOSE WHERE YOU'LL HUNT**

During my in-the-woods pre-season scouting six to eight weeks before opening day, I pick the trees from which I'll hunt. I'll climb those trees with my stand and trim the limbs I need to eliminate to provide shooting lanes for me when I'm in my stand. I prepare numerous stand sites before the season. Then on any day, I'll have several, different stand sites for hunting set-up. I also know when I go up those trees during deer season I won't have to waste time cutting limbs and making noise in the tree before I start to hunt. Preparing stand sites for hunting six to eight weeks before bow/deer season arrives is an important key to opening week bowhunting success.

In my state, bow season opens in early October. By the first of September, I plan to have just about every stand site I want to hunt trimmed and ready to put up a tree stand if and when I have to use that stand site during the season.

Also for the most bowhunting success in the early season, look for the trails leading to the agricultural fields. Try to discover where the deer are bedding. Pick the trees you'll hunt from when you'll be hunting bedding areas. Trim the trees. Select trees along the trail and trees near the fields for hunting. Study the acorn trees or the apple trees in your region that deer will utilize later in the season for food sources.

For example, if you see a white-oak tree in the woods with plenty of acorns on it that hasn't begun to drop its acorns yet, you will know that as soon as those acorns start to fall, the deer will come to that tree to feed. Search for a tree near that white-oak tree where you can put your tree stand. Trim four trees on different sides of that white-oak tree. Then you'll have the option of putting your tree stand in any one of those four trees when the deer start moving towards that white oak to feed. Regardless of which way the wind blows or the deer move to that tree to feed, you will have a stand site with a favorable wind close to the trail the deer are utilizing. If at all possible, I prefer to hunt from a stand where the sun rises from my back. Then if the buck looks in the tree to see me, he will be gazing into the sun. The chances of his spotting me will be reduced greatly. The ideal stand site has the sun at my back, the wind in my face and the deer approaching down a trail parallel to me. However, rarely does anyone find all those ingredients at any one stand site. The direction of the wind is the most important factor determining which stand site I use to hunt in any area.

By selecting stand sites before the trees drop their acorns, you can plan your hunt to be where the deer will show up. You will have set up your tree stand sites without spooking any deer since they won't come to those spots at that time because the acorns aren't falling.

Determining where a deer will feed at certain times of the year before the deer are feeding in those places is a critical key to the success of your pre-season scouting and your bowhunting. Remember, deer often will feed under certain trees every season at specific times of the year.

If you pinpoint where deer are feeding on acorns late in the season and the next year before the season go to the late-season feeding site, pick out a place for your stand, and trim the limbs to give you a clear path to shoot through, then when the deer do come to that tree to feed, you know the exact tree for your tree stand. Using this tactic, you can surprise a deer at that tree and drastically increase your odds for being successful the first day you hunt from that stand.

Also during the pre-season, choose stand sites you can hunt from in the morning and different stand sites you can hunt from in the afternoon. For the most productive morning stand sites, I

want to be in a tree and able to see a deer along the trail the deer will take moving away from his feeding region and going to his bedding area. Because I believe deer feed primarily at night, I want my morning stand to be closer to the bedding region than to the feeding area. Then I may be able to see the buck just at daylight when he's left his feeding spot and just before he arrives at his thick-cover bedding site.

Another key ingredient to having a successful morning stand is for it to be where I can get to it before daylight without spooking the deer. Oftentimes a hunter will put up a tree stand where he expects deer to appear but doesn't consider how he will reach that stand and whether or not he will spook them as he's walking to his stand.

Sometimes I'll locate great stand sites I'd love to hunt from but can't place a tree stand at that site because I realize that walking to or away from that stand may mean I'll spook the deer I'm hoping to hunt. The wind may carry my scent to the deer before I arrive at the stand, or I may make so much noise getting to the stand that these sounds will spook the deer.

When I'm looking for an evening stand site, I make sure I won't spook the deer going to or coming away from the stand. I also want this stand to be further away from the bedding area and closer to the food source. Late in the afternoon, the deer will walk from his bedding site to where he plans to feed.

Pre-season scouting will pay buck dividends for the diligent bowhunter.

## **Secrets of Bowhunting Deer Chapter 7**

### **SCOUTING DURING THE SEASON**

*By John E. Phillips*

*I begin my scouting for the middle of deer season when I'm hunting the early season . . . Jim Crumley*

### **LOOK FOR SCRAPE LINES AND RUBS**

On my way to and from my tree stand, I look for old scrape lines and new rubs. If I see a rub, I notice how big the tree is the deer's rubbing, how high the rub is off the ground, and what type of tree the deer has used to rub up against. Most hunters and wildlife biologists generally agree that bigger bucks usually will rub bigger trees that offer more resistance than trees young bucks rub. By looking at the size of trees the deer are rubbing, you can begin to develop an idea about the size of the bucks available on the property you're hunting.

I've also determined that bigger bucks generally rub higher up on the tree than younger bucks will. If you'll locate and watch old scrape lines, often you'll see these old scrapes being used by bucks as the rut begins. Even though I'm not going to commit a stand to these rubs or these old scrape lines at the beginning of the season, I'll still make a mental note to check these areas in the middle of the season. Then, I can put a stand there if the buck activity seems to have increased in these regions.

### **SEARCH FOR OTHER DEER SIGN**

If I'm not seeing as many deer a week or two into the season as I have been at the first week of the season, then I'll get out of my tree stand in the late morning and scout. In the middle of the season, I'll walk through the woods quite a bit, midday, although I know I'm leaving plenty of human odor. But walking through the woods and studying the signs the deer are leaving are the only ways I can tell when the deer change their feeding habits, start to rut or alter their movement patterns. Therefore, I'm willing to sacrifice notifying the deer that I'm in the woods hunting them. I want to be able to understand where the deer are, when they're moving, and most importantly, where they're moving to.

I'll also go into other areas on the property during the middle of the season that I haven't seen since the first time I scouted the property. I'll be looking for deer sign and trying to determine how, where and when the deer are moving in these regions since I've seen them last.

### **IDENTIFY WHERE THE DEER ARE EACH WEEK**

Often a bowhunter is reluctant to give up a stand that's been productive in the first part of the season just because he's seen or taken deer in that stand before. However, when the deer deplete the food source that has made that stand productive or hunting pressure has caused bucks to avoid that stand site, then the quicker you can stop hunting the area you have been hunting and search for new regions the deer are now using, the greater your chances for success will be.

After the first week or two of bow season in sections where deer experience intense hunting pressure, they often will change the routes they take to and from feeding and bedding areas. When they deplete a food source, they will not return to a place where the food source once has

been abundant. When a new preferred food source begins to drop its fruit, then the deer will migrate to that food source.

Successful, mid-season hunting depends on your understanding when to leave the area where the deer have been and instead hunt the sites where the deer now will be.

By the middle of the season, you'll also know how much hunting pressure is being exerted where you're hunting. Most bowmen hate to hunt in crowded woods because they believe the more hunters in the woods at one time, the fewer opportunities they will have to take deer. However, if you know how, when and where most bowhunters hunt, you can use that hunting pressure to your advantage.

For example, on most public-hunting lands, bowhunters will hunt less than 250 to 300 yards from the roads they utilize to come into the woods. Avid bowhunters often arrive at the woods just before or at first light, walk to the trees they've chosen, put their stands up, and then sit still. Other archers may come into the woods later and will push deer away from the roads and deeper into the woods. Therefore, if you're in the woods ahead of the other hunters and more than 300 yards from any road, you naturally think the hunting pressure will push deer towards you, and it will.

However, we often overlook one factor. If you arrive at least an hour before daylight and set up a stand 400 to 500 yards (1/4-mile) from the roads, then the deer the other hunters entering the woods spook towards you will pass by your stand while the woods are still dark. You won't be able to shoot. More than likely a deer will walk 100 to 200 yards away from hunting pressure in the dark.

Instead, put your stand 3/4-mile to a mile away from the nearest road. The hunters coming into the woods will push deer towards you. Then when the deer walk by your stand, you will have enough light to shoot. To take advantage of this mid-season hunting strategy and increase your odds of seeing a buck, go another 200 to 300 yards deeper into the woods than the spot you originally pick.

But hunting deep in the woods creates two more problems -- locating a productive stand site a mile away from the nearest road and being able to return to that spot in the dark well before daylight. To accomplish this feat, you must be able to follow a compass from your truck to your stand site and from your stand site back to your truck. If you don't know how to use a compass, you probably will get lost.

***Mark your stand tree with reflective tape to find it more quickly.***

To solve this navigation problem and not have to find your stand in the dark, go into the woods in the middle of the day while most hunters are eating their lunches. Climb into your stand a mile away from the nearest road before the other hunters re-enter the woods. Then you'll have two hunting opportunities. You may get a shot at a buck that's spooked around 2:00 p.m. when the hunters come back into the woods, or you may have a shot at a buck just before dark when he's moving from his remote sanctuary to the woods closer to the road when the other hunters leave the woods.

However, you create several new problems when you hunt at dusk. If you arrow a buck, you may have to blood trail him after dark. If you blood trail him after dark a mile from the nearest road, you may become lost. If you find the deer, then you'll have to drag the deer out after dark with little or no help that mile or so to the nearest road. If you don't arrow a buck, you still may get lost if you don't know how to use a compass to return to your vehicle. Although I understand how to take deer in crowded woods during the middle of the season with my bow, if the woods are so

crowded that I have to hunt a mile away from my truck, I prefer finding another place to hunt where the woods aren't so crowded and I can take a stand closer to my truck.

### **BE ADAPTIBLE TO ARROW A BUCK**

On a hunt in West Virginia a few years ago, I found tremendous amount of buck sign right on top of the mountain at the edge of an old mining reclamation site. Unfortunately to reach this area required a hard, uphill, two-hour walk from the cabin, a trip that I did not relish making too many times. Solving this problem would have been easy for the western hunter but overlooked by most easterners.

Because I only had one day left to hunt, at midday I packed my sleeping bag, and enough to eat and drink for dinner and breakfast and off I went. I pitched my spike camp as they're called in the West several hundred yards downwind from the stand. I hunted that evening, spent the night, hunted the next morning and then packed out. I cut my trips in half and had a great time hunting a secluded region. Use this method if you find a good spot way, way off the road.

### **USE GUN HUNTERS TO FIND DEER**

In many states, bowhunters have an early season for hunting deer and can continue to bowhunt throughout gun season. Some sportsmen believe they drastically increase their opportunities for bagging deer, especially bucks, by laying down their bows and using guns instead. But I have learned that hunting with a bow often actually helps me bag a big buck because of the gun hunter. If you understand how, when and where the gun hunter hunts, you can increase your odds of taking deer with a bow while hunting during gun season in the states where you can both bowhunt and gun hunt at the same time.

The gun hunter believes his most productive chance of bagging a buck is in an area where he can see at least 100 to 200 yards in the eastern U.S. and possibly 100 to 300 yards in the western part of the U.S. Remember though that just as hunters pattern deer, deer pattern hunters. Older-age-class bucks have learned that as soon as they feel hunting pressure, especially gun-hunting pressure, their best opportunities for survival will be in thick cover. However, if a gun hunter has an option to take a stand where he can watch 50 to 300 yards or a stand where he only can see 10 to 30 yards, he probably will select the stand that gives him the longest view. If the bowhunter who prefers to have a deer at 30 yards or less to make an accurate shot penetrates thick cover and takes a stand where he can only see 10 to 30 yards, then often he will have a shot at the buck in the thick cover that is dodging the gun hunter.

I'm convinced that during deer season the gun hunter helps to shrink the woods for the bowhunter and concentrate more deer -- specifically more older-age-class bucks -- into thick cover where the bowhunter waits. I hunt at Portland Landing Hunting Lodge near Selma, Alabama, in January each year. From October 15 until November 20, bowhunters are permitted to hunt these lands. From November 20 until January 30, primarily gun hunters hunt this property. The bucks experience intense hunting pressure and must concentrate in the thick-cover areas to survive.

Also during January in Alabama, the bucks are in rut -- chasing does and working scrape lines. But if the bucks expose themselves at anytime in the open woods, they probably won't live to see the oncoming of summer but instead will be hanging from a meat pole.

I have discovered the older-age-class bucks must remain in thick cover during daylight hours to survive and breed. They also must make scrapes and find and breed does in thick cover during daylight hours when the rut occurs. By hunting at the end of gun season, during the rut in thick cover with my bow, I drastically increase my odds for locating and bagging older-age-class bucks.

Even though there is a great temptation to lay your bow down and pick up a gun when gun/deer season arrives, the true bowhunter has learned he has just as good a chance as the gun hunter for taking a nice-sized buck when the two hunters compete for the bucks at the same time. Too, the gun hunter actually increases the bowhunter's odds for bagging an older- age-class deer in the middle and towards the end of deer season.

Scouting during the season and using the information you learn to know where to hunt with your bow will help you have opportunities to bag more deer with your bow.

## **Secrets of Bowhunting Deer Chapter 8**

### **SCOUTING AFTER THE SEASON.**

*By John E. Phillips*

*During the season, I want to move through the woods as little as possible. Every time I walk through the woods, I notify the deer I'm there, which means I have a very good chance of spooking the deer I'm trying to take.*

### **STUDY DEER SIGN CAREFULLY**

However, after the season, when I'm grouse hunting in February or when I'm just strolling through the woods looking for deer sign, I study what's happening in the woods. I look for where the deer have been all season long and attempt to learn as much as I can about the deer's late-season movement patterns. I don't really care if I spook deer at this time of year because I'm not hunting them. If I know a good buck lives on a property, but I haven't seen him all year long, then I'll use the late season to find where he's been living. Although I enjoy walking through the woods just looking for deer sign, I prefer doing much of my scouting during the early part of turkey season. At that time I also search for scrapes and rubs and the rutting activity that still will be visible. I also look for white-oak trees I may not have found before or during deer season.

If I pinpoint a spot I believe will be hot the next year where I find numbers of scrapes and rubs or perhaps a white-oak tree with a well-defined deer trail coming to it, I make note of these places on a map. Then the next deer season I can return to these spots. I also look for trees where I can hang my stand. I know that more than likely I won't hunt this area until the very end of the next deer season. But I already begin to plan my hunt.

If you scout thoroughly after the season's over, you'll locate signs you won't find at any other time of the year. Also pre-plan your late-season hunt for the next deer season at this time. However, keep in mind that you can't always depend on your after-the-season scouting program to give you an absolutely foolproof late-season hunt plan for the next year.

A few years ago, I found a bench on the side of a mountain after deer season full of white-oak trees. Every sapling on that bench -- at least 35 to 40 trees -- seemed to have been rubbed. The deer were feeding and working in this area because of a very heavy acorn crop on this bench. Although this spot was on public land, I didn't see any sign of anyone else having found it. I thought I'd discovered a honey hole about which most bowhunters only dream.

The next fall I returned to my secret honey hole -- excited about my opportunity to bag a buck. However, that year the acorn crop failed. Not a single white-oak acorn was on the ground in that region. No deer showed up. Even though scouting after the season could show you a buck hotspot, that spot only would be productive if all the conditions that were present when you found the site were there the following year.

One of the best signs to look for after the season is a scrape line, especially a scrape line you can see that has been used year after year. Search for not only fresh scraping activity but also for trees that have been scarred by antlers and then have healed-over. Oftentimes, deer will use the same scrape line each year for many years. Even if the buck that has made the scrape line is harvested, often a subordinate buck will work that same scrape line the next year. That subordinate buck knows that's where the dominant buck has met his does the year before.

### **LEARN THE CONDITION OF THE DEERHERD**

Another advantage to scouting after the season is often you can get a good indication of the condition the buck population on the land is in and how many bucks have made it through the season. If you scout for antlers, especially in heavily-populated deer woods, you'll be able to tell how many older-age-class bucks and the numbers of younger-age-class bucks that have lived through the season. Although finding antlers can be difficult, if you discover a big dropped antler, then you reasonably can assume you'll have that same trophy buck to hunt the next year. Not all the big bucks are bagged during the season. Some of the older-age-class bucks may have been wounded during the season and die after the season. Too, some of the dominant bucks may die of natural causes after the season.

If you're hunting in a place with a high buck population, remember the dominant buck experiences intense stress at the end of the season. Not only is he chasing does day and night, breeding as much as possible and eating very little, he may be fighting regularly. The dominant buck is much like the bully on your block. He can whip any other boy in the neighborhood on any given day. But he can't defeat every boy in the neighborhood every day.

Because bucks may be run down from lack of food and the stress they're under during the rut, they may be injured when they fight with other bucks and eventually die towards the end of the season. Finding the remains of a dead trophy buck after the season is a terrible feeling of loss. However, at least then you know the buck's no longer on the property, and you'll need to look for another big buck somewhere else.

If you continue to watch greenfields on your hunting property after the season, you'll notice more and more bucks will show up on them as the hunting pressure is less. Also this after-season scouting of the greenfields will give you a better picture of the size and number of bucks you'll have to hunt for the coming season.

### **FIND OUT WHERE OTHER HUNTERS HUNT**

Too, when you return to the woods after the season, you learn where the deer have been holding during the season and where the other hunters have been hunting. If you've had a tree stand site in an area that should have been a buck hotspot all season, but you've failed to see a buck there, then when you scout after the season, you may find candy wrappers or cigarette butts at the side of a tree 100 to 200 yards from your tree stand. You'll know another hunter who is out of sight of you has been trying to bag the same buck you've been hunting.

When you locate a site that looks like a buck hotspot after the season, begin to search for trees where you can put a tree stand. Then go to those trees. Look at the base of them for candy wrappers or other litter that may have been left by hunters. Also study the trunks of the trees for scars left by tree stands and holes made by tree steps. If you assume another hunter may have found this buck hotspot, and you look for his signs just like you search for deer signs, not only will you be able to tell if deer have been coming into this area, but you'll also know whether or not other hunters are utilizing this region.

### **WATCH WHERE THE DEER ARE**

Also, when you're scouting after the season is over and there is no hunting pressure, you'll see many more deer and often many more bucks. In many southern states, the bucks still will have their antlers during early spring turkey season, which makes bucks easy to identify. But even in the North during the spring, if you jump a big deer, most hunters can tell by the size of the animal whether or not he's a large buck. You may jump the deer in a section of land you've never considered hunting before. Being in the woods and moving around helps you to see and learn more about where and when to hunt bucks later. Although I'm an avid turkey hunter, I'm not so tuned in to hunting turkeys that I'm not scouting for deer at the same time I am hunting turkeys.

## **TEST NEW TACTICS AND PRODUCTS**

In between deer season and turkey season, you can extend your deer season by trying out new products, calls, lures or other hunting aids. I prefer not to use new tactics or new products for the first time during deer season. I'm afraid I may spook the deer. I know what will make deer come to me and what won't before the season starts.

However, I never want to be closed-minded. Deer hunters get set in their ways. We develop a hunt program that consistently has produced bucks for us. Then when we're successful, we often close our minds to new ideas, innovative hunting tactics and unique hunting aids. After the season, you can take these new techniques, hunting aids, scents and lures into the woods and test them to find out whether they work and if they'll produce for you where you hunt.

If a new way of hunting or a hunting aid spooks the deer rather than calling or attracting him, you're not concerned because you can't hunt that deer for another 11 months anyway. However, if that new product or strategy causes a buck to come to you, then you'll have confidence in that product when deer season arrives the next fall. You'll be willing to use that product or technique without any fear of spooking the deer.

Hunting without a gun or a bow after the season to test hunting methods is important. Have you always wanted to learn to stalk a deer? Then why not go into the woods after the season, look for deer in feeding, bedding or rutting areas, and test your stalking skills?

A bowman can learn many beneficial new strategies after the season if he'll continue to learn when he can no longer shoot deer. Remember, the more you learn about where deer live, feed, move and bed, the more you'll increase your odds of taking an older-age-class buck during the next season.

To test your hunting and stalking skills after the season is over, carry your camera or your video camera into the woods. See how many deer you can bag on film. You'll be a better hunter the next season because of this experience.

A successful bowhunter consistently fills his or her tags each season because he can shoot a bow and arrow accurately and continues to learn more about deer and where to find them each season. Hunting is the process you use to find a deer. Once the deer appears, all you have to do to take him is depend on your shooting skills.

## Secrets of Bowhunting Deer Chapter 9

### FINDING DEER FOOD

*By John E. Phillips*

#### WHAT IT IS, WHERE TO FIND IT AND HOW TO HUNT IT

I believe a deer is much like a goat in that it'll eat almost anything. Even though most of us tend to believe that deer like certain foods throughout the year, they do eat a wide variety of foods. Deer are browsers. As they wander through the woods, they eat different plants and shrubs. During the summer months, if crops are available, the deer will feed on the crops primarily at night. When the acorns begin to fall, primarily white-oak acorns, the deer seem to concentrate around these trees. However, remember even while the deer are feeding on acorns, they're still eating bushes, grasses and other shrubs.

#### TYPES OF FOOD

The white oak particularly is to the deer much like ice cream is to a youngster. When a deer has a chance to eat the white-oak acorn, it will. But even during the time the acorns fall, the deer still will utilize alfalfa, wheat and rye fields. In the North, deer will look around old homesteads with apple and crabapple trees for these tasty treats when they begin to fall.

In old pastures, deer will find broadleaf forbes. Deer prefer to feed in old pastures, even if it has grown up 2- or 3-feet high in weeds. If you part those weeds and look close to the ground, you'll notice all types of interesting-looking broadleaf plants, which deer eat year-round. Persimmon and paw-paw trees are other fine deer foods that have short-lived possibilities for a deer hotspot.

Yet another honey hole for locating deer food is clearcuts. In a clearcut, a deer not only will find forbes like it does in a pasture but often locate blackberry bushes and Japanese honeysuckle and across much of the South, greenbriar (Smilax). Also in thick-cover areas like pastures and cut-overs, the deer will discover plenty of food and an abundance of cover to hide from predators.

Remember when searching for deer food to find a place to bag a buck, that deer food only may have a short life, especially if it's a preferred food source. For instance, if deer are feeding on persimmons or apples on Monday and you decide you'll hunt near that tree on Friday or Saturday, by the time the weekend arrives, the deer may have consumed all the food in that area and be feeding on another food source. Be careful to notice how much food is left. In one night, four or five deer can eat all the food that's available on a small persimmon tree.

If there's a shortage of white oak acorns, a herd of eight or 10 deer may move in to feed under a white oak tree and completely clean out the available acorns in a short time. Usually, when you locate the deer's preferred food source, you'll probably only have a few days to hunt it or perhaps a week or two.

Therefore your best and most dependable deer food to hunt over may not be a preferred food source but rather a preferred feeding area, such an old pasture or a clearcut where there's an abundance of food deer can feed on throughout the year. But don't get me wrong. I'm not saying hunting pastures or clearcuts is better than hunting under a white-oak tree when it's dropping its acorns or an apple tree when the fruit's falling. However, I believe deer will feed in a clearcut or an old pasture throughout most, or all, of deer season -- especially when their preferred food sources are depleted.

## **WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST**

One of the best sources of information on deer food will be the wildlife biologist in the area you hunt. The biologist will be able to tell you what the deer's preferred food sources will be throughout the length of hunting season and to give you the order in which the deer prefer each food. Once you learn from the biologist what naturally occurring foods the deer seem to favor each week of bow season, you can locate those different food sources in the woods and more accurately predict when the deer will be feeding on each type of food.

## **THE VALUE OF FERTILIZING DEER FOOD**

There are some ways to increase your odds for finding deer feeding at particular food sources each time you hunt. If you plant two apple trees in your yard and fertilize one tree but not the other, you'll notice that the apple tree that's been fertilized will ...

- tend to grow stronger and healthier,
- put on more and bigger fruit than the tree that hasn't been fertilized and
- produce a much sweeter apple than the unfertilized tree. Although this is a basic principle of farming, most bowhunters tend to forget how effective fertilizer can be in producing quality deer food.

Many hunting clubs plant greenfields with winter wheat, rye and clover for deer. If you plant two greenfields within 200 yards of each other and fertilize one and not the other, the crop on one field will grow healthier and more lush foliage than the other. You'll also notice the deer will concentrate and feed on the field that's been fertilized much more than they will on the field that hasn't been fertilized.

I probably haven't told you anything you don't already know so far. However, if you take this same principle of fertilization and apply it to wild deer food, you can expect the same results. For instance, if you know the deer prefer the white-oak acorn at the beginning of bow season and you hunt in an area that has several white-oak trees in it, you may have a difficult time deciding where to put your tree stand. The deer will feed under all the trees that are producing acorns. For the bowhunter who likes to have the deer at 30 yards or less, having too much deer food available is as much a problem as not having enough deer food.

Deer tend to congregate in areas where the preferred food source is in the shortest supply. Therefore, if the preferred food source is abundant, then concentrating the deer can be difficult. If you're hunting in a region with 12-white oak trees all bearing acorns, at the end of the season go back to that place. Fertilize one of those trees with 13-13-13. Then you can cause the deer to concentrate under that one tree instead of under other trees that are producing the same acorns.

The best way to fertilize an acorn tree is to take a posthole digger into the woods with you. Start at the base of the tree, move 4-feet away from the trunk, and dig a hole 3-feet deep. Then 4 feet from the first hole, dig the second hole. Continue digging holes at this distance and depth out to where the limbs of the tree end. Return to the trunk, and repeat the process in four directions from the base of the tree. Once you have your holes dug on all four sides of the tree, pour 13-13-13 fertilizer within 1 foot of the top of each hole. Then cover the fertilizer level with the ground in each hole. Leave the tree, and wait for the following bow season to check the results of your fertilizing.

For fertilizing smaller trees like persimmon or paw-paw, commercial-fertilizer spikes can be used. They are also handy if the oaks you're fertilizing are too far from a road to carry in bags of fertilizer.

Trees that are fertilized annually like this will produce more and sweeter acorns than trees that aren't fertilized. The deer will be able to tell the difference in the taste of the acorns under the fertilized trees and will congregate under those trees.

But if you live in a state with a long bow season, remember that fertilizing one or two trees will not create a hotspot for the entire season. Instead, fertilize several white-oak trees in different sections for an early-season hotspot. Also fertilize a couple of red-oak trees to hunt near after the white-oak acorns are gone.

Then fertilize blackberry bushes, greenbriar and Japanese honeysuckle to hunt at the end of the season. By fertilizing specific trees and plants on the land you hunt, you can better concentrate the deer into a small area where you can bag them with a bow. However, don't tell everyone what you're doing or specify the areas and plants you're fertilizing. Just because you've increased the palatability and perhaps the availability of the deer's natural preferred food source does not mean the whitetail will disengage its brain. The more hunting pressure that's exerted in the region where the deer converge, the more you increase the odds of the deer becoming nocturnal and utilizing those food sources only after dark. Fertilize after the season when no one else is in the woods and before the spring green-up when the trees and plants will be able to use the fertilizer to produce more nuts, fruit and leaves.

When fertilizing shrubs like blackberries, honeysuckle and greenbriar, hand-spread the fertilizer near the plant and let the rain carry the fertilizer down to the plant's root system. You can utilize this same process to fertilize plants along the edge of a clearcut or field where you're trying to attract deer.

Another factor affecting the selection of which wild plants to fertilize is to remember that the later in the season you plan to hunt a food source, the closer that food source should be to thick cover. If plenty of blackberry bushes are on the property you hunt, primarily fertilize the blackberry bushes on the edges of thick-cover areas. Then the deer that come to feed on the blackberry leaves will feel much more secure and will be more likely to feed during daylight hours when they have that thick-cover escape area close by.

## **IDEAS FOR MORE PRODUCTIVE HUNTING OVER FOOD**

When you're hunting, don't place your tree stand in the trees above the preferred food source or in the tree that's producing the acorns the deer are eating. I don't want to be in sight of the region where the deer are feeding. I prefer to take a stand well-away from the food source along a trail the deer will use to go to the feeding area.

If you shoot at a deer and miss, or, if the wind shifts and spooks a deer that's coming to the food source, then you're not actually spooking the deer where it feeds. More than likely that same deer will continue feeding at that same food source even though it's been spooked on its way there. If I'm setting up to take a buck on the way to his dinner table, I'll probably be hunting in that stand in the afternoon. If my tree stand is within sight of the food source and several deer are feeding on that food source at dark, when I come out of my tree stand to return to my car, I'll spook all the deer feeding in the area.

Another problem you'll encounter when hunting over food sources is there may be several trails leading into one feeding region. Then you must play a guessing game as to which trails the buck will use. But if you move 100 to 200 yards down two of the trails, you will leave your human odor on them. Or, you can hang a shirt or a hat at eye level to the deer to cause the deer to avoid those trails. Then the deer will utilize only the trail that's free of human odor and human clothing. This strategy concentrates most of the deer coming into one feeding spot onto one trail.

Also to make deer use a trail, bushhog trails through thick-cover sections like an old pasture or a clearcut. Seed that trail with winter wheat or clover. The deer will use that trail to move through thick cover specifically because of the food.

## **Secrets of Bowhunting Deer Chapter 10**

### **MATCHING STANDS AND BLINDS TO THE TACTICS AND THE TERRAIN**

*By John E. Phillips*

#### **TREE STANDS**

Different terrains and various strategies will dictate what kind of tree stand is best for your type of hunting. Although I've hunted from a variety of stands, my favorite is the hanging stand. I use a minimum of 12, screw-in or strap-on steps to get to my stand. I want to be 15- to 20- feet high in the tree to keep my human odor well away from the ground and above the deer's nose if at all possible.

Remember when you climb up in a tree stand not to get so high that when you take aim you're shooting straight down on a deer. You need to be high enough so the deer can't wind you but low enough not to be shooting vertically at the deer.

Another advantage of climbing higher in the tree is to lessen the chance of a deer seeing me. When a deer walks down a trail, it looks up as well as around. Although many hunters believe deer don't look up, if you've hunted long enough, you know they do. Also if you're hunting in areas with intense bowhunting pressure, you realize how quickly the deer adjust to that hunting pressure and seem to search for bowhunters in the trees.

#### **EQUIPMENT AND TACTICS JIM PREFERS**

I mostly hunt in the mountains of Virginia where I live. The hardwood trees there are much more conducive to using a hanging stand rather than a climbing tree stand because many hardwoods have limbs too close to the ground and too large to saw off, which keep you from going up the tree in a climbing stand. If I'm fortunate enough to find a poplar tree, then I can use a climbing stand instead of a hanging stand. But when I hunt in the South, especially in pine plantations, then a climbing or a ladder stand becomes very convenient because big pines don't have limbs close to the ground.

However, I think the hanging stand is much more versatile than either a ladder stand or a climbing stand. You can put the hanging stand in many more trees than you can the climbing stand. With the hanging stand, you don't have to cut as many branches. You even may be able to use low- hanging branches as steps to get into your stand. Usually a hanging stand is also smaller and lighter, making it much more portable and allowing me to go further into the woods without having to carry so much weight. Most climbing stands are two-piece systems and weigh more than the hanging stands do.

I prefer utilizing screw-in steps in the states where they are permitted, because I believe they're much more stable than the belt-on steps. I've never had a screw-in step break. As long as the tree's not rotten, I feel very safe using screw-in steps.

I like to drive as close as I can to the place I'm going to put up my tree stand, especially if I'm hunting in farming country. If at all possible, I prefer to have someone drive me to my tree stand site and drop me off. Or, I'll drive my buddy to his tree stand and drop him off. Then he doesn't have to take more than a few steps to reach his tree.

At first, you may think I'm lazy, don't want to walk or like to hunt close to the road. But I want to drive as close as I can to my tree stand to eliminate as much of my human odor as possible. Also

I'm replacing the sights and the sounds of a hunter with the sights and sounds of a vehicle. I'm convinced hunters parking their vehicles on a road and then walking several hundred yards to their tree stands are making a mistake.

If you hunt in an area where logging activity or farming takes place or human activity already is in the woods, you'll notice you usually can drive close to deer without spooking them. As long as you don't stop your vehicle and get out, the deer just will stand still and watch you. Deer in many areas are conditioned to vehicles and have learned that danger doesn't come from a vehicle. Therefore, when they hear a truck or a car rolling through the woods, they're not frightened of it or at least not nearly as frightened as they are if they smell and see a human.

Not only do I prefer to be dropped off from a vehicle when I go to my stand, I also want to be picked up by a vehicle at dark. Otherwise I'm leaving more human odor in the area I want to hunt when I climb out of my stand and walk out of the woods.

Also if you're in your stand at dark and deer are around your stand, then when you start climbing out of that tree stand, the deer will be able to spot you. They know where you have been and will learn to avoid that region. However, a vehicle will run the deer away from your stand, which allows you to come down the tree without the deer's seeing you. By using the truck to spook the deer away from your stand before you climb down from the tree, the deer won't realize you've been in that stand. You will increase your odds for success when you hunt from that stand again.

If you can drive to your tree stand and get relatively close to it, then a ladder stand and/or a permanent stand will provide you with a definite advantage. Generally when you use a permanent stand or a ladder-type stand and hunt from that stand several times a year, the deer soon will pattern you by smelling the trail you follow to go to and from the stand. However, by driving to ladder stands and permanent stands, you'll leave less scent in the woods than if you carry a stand in or go back and forth to a hanging stand.

I believe permanent stands can be particularly effective when placed on the edges of agricultural fields that are planted each year and in bottlenecks or funnels to which you can drive up close. My rule of thumb on using permanent stands and ladder stands is if you can drive to them, they're often better to hunt from than either hanging stands or climbing stands in certain areas. But if you have to walk to permanent or ladder stands, they're often the least productive stands you can utilize.

Always be aware that the more human odor you put in the woods, the more you decrease your odds for bagging a buck. The less human odor in the woods, the more you increase your chances for taking a buck. Ladder stands and permanent stands do have advantages for hunters who have difficulty climbing with either a climbing tree stand or a hanging tree stand. The permanent and or ladder stands are helpful for older hunters and handicapped hunters because they solve several problems. If you can drive near the stand, you can eliminate a long walk for an older hunter. Also climbing up a ladder drastically reduces the chances of an older hunter or a handicapped hunter falling.

As with all types of tree stands, a safety belt is a must. When a hunter starts to climb into his tree stand, he should wear a safety belt.

When you use permanent stands and ladder stands, you set up these types of stands in sections deer use year after year. Deer are creatures of habit and often each year will ...

- utilize the same funnel areas as long as nothing changes at the site of the funnel or on either end of the funnel,

- enter and leave an agricultural field at the same point unless the field's not planted or until the crop's harvested,
- cross a creek at the same point and
- run the same scrape line.

Any place you find in the woods where deer show up in the same region each year is a productive place to put either a ladder stand or a permanent stand if you can drive to that stand. If you can't drive to the stand, then each time you hunt it, you'll decrease your odds for seeing deer. Deer won't necessarily quit using that section of land but more than likely will frequent that area only at night.

I also use a ladder stand for bowhunting when I'm hunting a clearcut. Often when hunting a clearcut, you'll find young pines around the edges of the clearcut that aren't strong enough to support either a hanging stand or a climbing stand. However, you can lean a ladder stand up against those young pines without damaging them. Thick-cover hunting is where you'll find older-age-class bucks, and clearcuts are one of the best types of thick cover in which to locate these mature animals.

However, when finding a tree in a clearcut to hang a tree stand on or lean a ladder stand against is impossible, I will use a tripod stand. Tripods usually are the preferred stands for hunting the arid, desert states like Texas where you set up a tripod on the edge of a fence line with no trees anywhere and can watch 200 to 500 yards in all directions.

If you hunt in the East where the brush and trees generally are more dense, in many places you can't see for very far. Therefore, tripod tree stand hunting has not been very popular. But as timber-management practices in the eastern U.S. have gone more towards clearcuts, I believe that a tripod set up in a clearcut gives the bowhunter the opportunity to pinpoint and bag the older-age-class bucks using these thick-cover spots.

You can carry a tripod into the center of a clearcut, set the tripod up and cut your path through the clearcut, being careful not to cut any of the young pines. Rather than leaving the tripod standing in the clearing and looking like a telephone pole, I put brush up around it to camouflage it somewhat.

You can walk into the clearcut to your stand without making much noise. Be sure the path is wide enough to keep your pants legs and equipment from brushing up against bushes as you go to your tree stand. Also consider wearing rubber waders when you move to your stand. The waders encapsulate the leg and prevent human odor from escaping. Too, you can cut shooting lanes from the tripod stand through the clearcut to help you be more accurate with your bow. But do this at least a month prior to the season opening.

Using this system, you'll often find and take plenty of deer you otherwise may not see. However, utilize this tactic only on private or leased land. Otherwise, hunters not as careful as you may go to your tripod on a bad wind or in tennis shoes or boots, leave their human odor all along the trail to the tripod and have their human odor blown from the tripod into the clearcut. Employ this technique only when you can control the access to the land and hunt where you can leave your tripod up without fear of someone else hunting from it or taking it.

Climbing tree stands can be used when you know numbers of straight trees with no branches or little branches near the bottom of the tree are available. Poplars and pines are the best types of trees for using climbing tree stands. Climbing tree stands probably are more popular in the South than in the Midwest and the North, probably because more pines are in the South. However, they also are effective in birch and poplar forests. When you're choosing a tree stand that's best for you, first look at the terrain you have to hunt.

One of the problems associated with a climbing stand is the noise hunters tend to make with them, which is far more noise than they do with ladder stands, permanent stands or hanging stands they have put up days or weeks before they hunt.

To use a climbing stand effectively, allow 15 to 30 minutes more to go up your tree slowly and quietly and let the woods forget you're there. Also try to set up farther away from the area where you think the deer may go to or come from with a climbing stand than you will if you're hunting with a ladder stand, a hanging stand or a permanent stand. Then you won't spook the deer as it comes to the region you're hunting. I want to make sure the deer's out of hearing when I start going up the tree. I may go up a tree an hour before daylight with a climbing stand and hope not to see the deer until 8:00 a.m. to be certain I'm not spooking the deer with my stand.

A good rule of thumb is the noisier the stand, the farther away from the deer you should set up and the later in the morning you should expect to see deer. The more quiet the stand, the closer you can hunt to the deer, and the earlier you can expect to get a shot in the morning. However, another major mistake many hunters make is to place their stands so close to where they expect the deer to come that the deer pass by their stands while the available light is too little for them to shoot. Set up your tree stand in an area far enough away from where you think the deer will come to enable you to get a shot during daylight hours.

Having a shot in daylight hours is not only a morning-stand problem but also an evening-stand problem. If you place a tree stand on the edge of a field the deer are coming to and hunt that field in the afternoon, the deer may not show up until there's too little light to shoot. Instead of putting your stand on the edge of the field, set up 200 to 300 yards down a trail the deer will utilize to move to the field. Then you'll have an opportunity to see and take the deer while enough light is present to shoot.

## **GROUND BLINDS**

Some hunters don't like to climb trees, and/or physically can't climb trees. For these hunters, ground blinds can be very effective. Also you can use ground blinds when an area has no trees large enough to hang tree stands or where a tree stand will be so obvious you'll spook deer. Set up a ground blind in a place where you know the deer will show up like the edges of fields, funnel areas, creek crossings, etc., weeks before you plan to hunt it to allow the deer to become familiar with it

## **WATCH WIND DIRECTION**

To hunt successfully from a ground blind, whether it's made of natural foliage or cloth, be aware of wind direction. Because you're on the ground, you're hunting at the same level as the deer's nose, which means you're much more likely to spook deer with your human odor than you will when you're up in a tree stand. Never hunt from a blind on a day when the wind direction is wrong.

## **CAMOUFLAGE A BLIND**

If you're using a cloth ground blind, be sure to put brush around and on the top of the cloth. Cloth blinds move in the wind and present a solid wall of material. Very few things occur naturally in the woods that are as big and as flat as a ground blind or that move like a ground blind sways in the wind. However, if you break up that solid wall of material with brush, then you'll be better camouflaged. Too, the deer is less likely to spot you. Even if the blind does move in the wind, that brush on the outside of the blind will mask the blind's movement.

## **CONSIDER WHERE TO PUT A GROUND BLIND**

Ground blinds also are productive when hunting in clearcuts by giving you a place to hunt and a way to hunt when no trees are available for a tree stand. Another advantage to using a ground blind is comfort. You can go into your blind before daylight and stay until after dark. Ground blinds give you much more freedom to move without being seen than tree stands do. A ground blind particularly is suitable for young hunters who often have difficulty sitting still for a long time in a tree stand. Also ground blinds are excellent for hunting water holes in the West. Anywhere you can't set up a tree stand, more than likely you will be able to put a ground blind, if the wind's dominant direction is right.

Although occasionally I must hunt from a stand immediately after putting it up, especially on public lands, I much prefer setting up stands or blinds days or even weeks before hunting. Then the deer will become accustomed to the stand or the blind's presence.

Once on an Alabama hunt, I set two stands near a live- oak feeding area to allow me to hunt it according to wind direction. The next morning I watched a buck feed toward one stand, look up at it and spook from the stand that I was not in at the time.

To sum up using tree stands and ground blinds for bowhunting, I believe you should consider many factors before you decide on which you will use. Look at the terrain. Determine what type of tree stand or ground blind fits the terrain best. Study the kinds of trees in your hunting area to decide which type of tree stand will be the easiest to attach to those trees. Learn the deer movement patterns on the land you hunt to determine if you can drive to a productive stand site and whether or not you need a ladder stand or a permanent stand. Or, if the deer are holding in thick cover like a clearcut, you may be more successful with your bow by using a tripod, a ground blind or a ladder stand.

In your pre-season scouting, not only look for a place where you can get a shot at a deer, but study the area and the trees available there to decide which what type of tree stand or ground blind you can use to hunt that region the most efficiently. Often I need at least two and sometimes three different kinds of tree stands to hunt one region with my bow. However, if I don't have an option of utilizing several types of tree stands and only can take one stand with me from which to hunt, I prefer my hanging stand and tree steps because of the versatility these products give me.

## **Secrets of Bowhunting Deer Chapter 11**

### **MAKING SENSE OUT OF SCENTS**

*By John E. Phillips*

Deer lures, attractants and cover-up scents can be effective helps for bowhunters. However, they're like any other hunting aid. On any certain day, a specific lure will attract deer. But on a different day, even under similar conditions, that same attractant may not lure in deer. Each deer has its own personality and moods and is very much an individual. What may lure in one buck may repulse and run off another deer.

### **COVER-UP SCENTS/ODOR ELIMINATORS**

Before you can lure in a deer close enough to your stand to take a shot with your bow, you must first make sure you don't run that deer off. Remember, the wind is the biggest enemy of the bowhunter. I'm convinced that keeping your clothes and your body as clean as possible through using non-scented soaps for washing is very important.

The American Indian recognized the importance of eliminating his human scent when he hunted. Many times tribes bathed thoroughly before hunting. Some rubbed their bodies with leaves found in their hunting area. The Abenaki Indians of the Northeast used the sweet-smelling ferns of their forests to crush on their bodies to cover their human odors. Also when Indians set traps, they were careful to remove all traces of man. The dirt from pit traps was carried far away. Anything the hands touched was washed or smoked to remove human scent.

A mistake bowhunters often make is they take showers, put on clean hunting clothes and then stop on their way to the woods to fill up with their cars with gas. Those gas fumes permeate their boots and hunting clothes. If they also go into convenience stores where biscuits may be baking, bacon and eggs are frying and other odors are produced, their clean hunting clothes are like sponges collecting all those odors. They carry those human odors with them into areas where they're hunting. I believe in utilizing odor-eliminators and odor-neutralizers and doing everything I possibly can to kill the odors I collect in my clothing and on my body.

However, I realize no product absolutely destroys human odor. As long as you're breathing, your body will produce odor. But by eliminating as much odor as I can and hunting with the wind in my face, I'm convinced I increase my odds for bagging a buck with a bow.

I also believe in the use of cover-up scents. But I don't depend on cover-up scents to mask my odor instead of hunting with a favorable wind. I think the cover-up scents and the odor-neutralizers offer some protection for hiding your human odor as you go into the woods and masking or eliminating the odor downwind of you. But I never expect an odor-neutralizer or an odor cover-up to completely mask my scent with the wind at my back.

Another advantage to using the cover-up scents is if the wind does change just as you're preparing to draw and shoot, which often happens, then the odor-eliminators and a cover-up scent may give you a few more seconds to get your shot off. Or, these products may prevent the deer from smelling you immediately if you need him to move closer for a shot. Consider cover-up scents and odor eliminators insurance. You hope you never have to depend on them. But if you do, you'll be glad you're wearing them when you need them.

### **LURES**

I also use the doe urine-based deer lures and especially the doe-estrous types of lures. I wear doe urine on the soles of my rubber-or synthetic-bottomed boots as I walk into my stand. I don't believe that rubber-bottomed boots allow as much foot odor to reach the ground as leather-bottomed boots do. When you put an estrous lure on a rubber-bottomed boot, then no human odor is there to mix with the lure and decrease its strength. I've found rubber-bottomed boots allow the lure to come off the boots more naturally and lay down a better trail for the buck to follow than other kinds of footwear. Several times I have seen bucks come across my trail, smell the doe urine, pick up my trail and follow it to my tree stand.

Once I watched a buck that was out of my bow range pick up my trail and backtrail me towards where I had parked my truck. In about five minutes, he returned. Apparently the buck had determined he had made a mistake and was going the wrong way when he saw my truck. He came right back to where I was in my tree stand on the same trail. He is now on my wall.

I have learned over the years that laying a scent trail is more effective if I walk a circle all the way around the tree where I'll be hunting once I'm 15 yards from my stand. I try to specifically remain about 15 yards from the base of the tree as I walk the circle. Once I've completed that circle, then I walk into the base of the tree, climb my steps and get into my stand.

If you don't make that circle around the tree, then when the buck comes in, he'll be walking straight towards you and present a very poor shot. Also if he moves straight in to where you are, he may smell your tree steps, look up and see you.

When the deer comes in to your stand from the opposite direction from how you've walked in to the tree and doesn't move down your scent trail, you won't have a shot at him, because he's coming head-on to you. Or, if he moves in behind you, you don't have a shot.

However, no matter from which direction the deer walks, if he hits that scent trail 15 yards out from your tree and begins to walk that circle, he eventually will give you the good, broadside shot you're looking for at 15 yards out. The deer's walking the circle around the tree not only gives me a better shot if the buck follows my trail into the tree stand but also offers me an opportunity to pull any buck that comes into my tree stand from any direction to within broadside bow range of my stand.

Another reason for walking the circle around the tree is deer rarely walk straight into where they'll feed on acorns or apples. Most of the time when a deer comes to a food tree, it will meander around that tree searching for acorns and/or fruit under the tree. By walking the circle around the tree, you more naturally simulate what a doe that is looking for food will do and where her trail will go if she is moving to that tree to feed. I never, ever walk straight into my tree stand.

On this particular day when the buck followed my trail to the truck and back to my stand, my circling around the tree proved to be his undoing. The buck followed my scent trail to my stand like a bird dog trailing quail. The buck had his nose to the ground, smelling the lure and walking where I had walked. The deer was coming in so fast he passed by where I was in my tree stand before I could get off a shot.

Because the buck started going away from the stand, I didn't think I would get a shot. The deer had lost the trail. Then he returned, picked up the scent of the deer lure I was using and immediately walked the circle around the tree. When the buck moved around from the back of the tree on the circle scent trail I had laid, he stopped in front of me at 15 yards. That buck proved beyond any doubt, at least to me, that using a doe-in-estrous kind of deer lure could and would make a buck follow you to your tree stand and not only come in close enough for you to get a shot but also circle the tree and allow you to pick the shot you wanted.

I've seen deer come to my trail, smell it, tuck their tails and run the other way. I don't understand why a deer lure works on some days and not on others. Many hunters think when deer lure doesn't produce that more than likely that particular brand is not good deer lure, or, perhaps the lure has been sitting on the shelves of a store for so long that it has too much alcohol in it and is repelling rather than luring deer.

But I believe when a reputable deer lure doesn't work properly that probably you have a foreign odor on your boots or on your clothing. When the deer smells that odor either before or at the same time as the lure, he'll be gone. Even though that deer wants to come to the lure, his alarm system goes off when he smells the presence of humans. That alarm system supersedes his sex drive or his desire to socialize with other deer.

I'm convinced more and more that when deer lure doesn't attract deer that it is due to hunter error not because of bad deer lure. I believe the deer lures that have been on the market for several years and have been time-tested to be effective will lure in deer instead of spooking deer when used properly.

Yet another method I utilize -- but only during the rut -- is to dip cottonballs in deer lure. Then I suspend them on branches of trees within 15 or 20 yards of where my tree stand is. I want the smell of the lure to waft out through the woods for the deer to smell and for them to come in to learn what that odor is. If scent is that high off the ground and putting out that strong an odor, I believe you will spook deer at any other time of the year other than during the rut. I don't think does produce that strong a smell except during the rut. Also when you use deer lure above the ground, more than likely when the buck comes in, you only will get a quick shot when he gets close to the cottonball.

### **AN EFFECTIVE TEST**

If you want to see how effectively you are covering your scent, shut your dog up in the house or truck to keep him from seeing you leave. Dress and cover your scent as if you're going to your tree stand. Or, actually go to a tree stand and get into it. Have a friend release your dog at a predetermined hour that allows you time to get to your stand, and have the friend tell the dog to find you. See if the dog shows up under your stand. Most dogs will.

Using scents makes sense as a tool for bowhunters who understand their limitations and effectiveness.

## Secrets of Bowhunting Deer Chapter 12

### WINNING WITH THE WIND

*By John E. Phillips*

In most sections of the country, often there will be a specific direction from which the wind usually blows. In Virginia and Alabama where I hunt the most, the wind blows from the West, Northwest. Therefore, I set up most of my tree stands East, Southwest or downwind from where I expect the deer to approach allowing me to walk towards the Northwest to those stands to keep my odor blowing away from the region I'm hunting. Although you won't know for sure which way the wind will blow on any specific day, if you set most of your stands downwind, you will be able to hunt from those stands more often than if you don't consider the prevailing wind.

I also set up some stands in other directions so I can hunt on the days when the wind is not blowing from the Northwest. The wind always dictates where I'll hunt. The stand most often will be placed facing northerly to keep the autumn/winter sun at my back.

Often bowhunters who are careful to hunt with the wind may place their stands facing the direction they expect the deer to approach. However, a more-productive method, especially in more open areas or on a well-used trail is to put your back to the deer's probable approach -- 10 to 20 yards to the side of a trail. You will have to wait patiently for the deer to walk past you. But there will be less chance of the deer's seeing you draw. Also you probably will have a good quartering-away shot.

If I catch a glimpse of a buck from a stand where I've been hunting and know if I return to that stand the next morning my odds for bagging that buck will be extremely good, then I won't go to that stand if the wind will carry my human odor in the direction from which I expect the buck to come. If the wind direction changes when I'm in a stand and blows my human odor into the region where I assume the buck will come from, then I'll climb down from my stand. I'll move to another stand where I can hunt with a favorable wind.

The only exception to this rule of hunting with a favorable wind is if I'm hunting on a cool morning when the day before has been warm. Early in the morning, air currents (thermals) move from the ground to the sky. When I'm in a tree stand in the morning, even though there may be a slight breeze, my odor probably will move up and away from me rather than fall down on the ground for the deer to smell it.

If you can blow a cloud of fog from your mouth on a cool morning, you'll notice your warm breath tends to rise. So will your body odor. If you blow that same breath of fog in the afternoon, you will see that your breath seems to sink down towards the ground. Your human odor will too. If you're hunting from a tree stand when the wind conditions change, and a favorable wind is not present, you are less likely to be detected by the deer in the morning than in the afternoon.

Most of the time, I position my stand high enough in a tree -- about 12 to 18 feet off the ground, depending on the height of the tree -- to try and keep my odor above the deer. Then the deer is less likely to smell me. However, the higher I climb in a tree, the more I'm shrinking the target at which I have to shoot. I'll be shooting in a more vertical direction at the deer than in a horizontal direction. The further up a tree I climb, the more I'll be shooting at the deer's back, which is a smaller target, than at his sides.

One of the worse wind conditions is a variable wind, which changes directions almost constantly and will blow your human odor all over your hunting area. If you discover you're hunting with a variable wind, that is constantly changing directions, you will be more successful if you leave that

area immediately and plan to hunt from that stand site on another day when the wind is more constant. A canyon or a bowl-shaped region often will produce a variable wind since the wind blows into a place like this and swirls around. This kind of wind condition often occurs in the western United States but also happens in mountainous sections of the East.

When the wind is variable, hunt in the morning on a very cold day. Climb very high in a tree, which may keep the buck from smelling you. Then your scent may move up instead.

Keeping a constant watch on the wind lets me know when to move and when to remain in a stand. When I'm hunting, I use two white threads to determine wind direction. I tie one thread onto the end of the stabilizer on my bow and attach a second white thread on a branch in front of me. Then I can watch the thread without having to turn my head. Because I may hang my bow on the tree or place it in a holder when I'm sitting in a tree stand, I actually depend more on the second thread tied to the limb in front of me to give me the direction of the wind rather than the thread attached to my stabilizer. However, when a deer is moving toward my stand site, and I pick up my bow, I concentrate more on the thread on my stabilizer than the thread hanging in the tree. I'll be pointing my bow at the deer. If the string on the stabilizer moves in the direction of the deer, I know I will have less time to get off a shot.

One of the problems associated with having a string tied to your stabilizer is the string may pull off as you walk through the woods to your tree stand. I always carry a spool of white cotton thread with me. Then if and when I lose the string on my stabilizer, I can replace it. Some bowhunters prefer to use dental floss to tie on their bows, since this material is stronger than thread and is less likely to break off your stabilizer. However, because dental floss is heavier than cotton string and requires more of a breeze to move it, I think the cotton thread is a more accurate indicator.

If you hunt in the West where the wind often is variable and stalk deer, the string on your stabilizer may be even more critical to your success. Each time you stop, you can look at your string to make sure you're walking into the wind and not spooking the deer.

I believe that being conscious of hunting with a favorable wind and keeping your odor away from a deer is often an overlooked aspect of successful bowhunting. Paying attention to the wind and the direction it's blowing is as important as your being able to shoot accurately and using sharp broadheads to take deer with your bow.

## Secrets of Bowhunting Deer Chapter 13

### HUNTING THE RUT

*By John E. Phillips*

#### SCRAPES

When do deer scrape? What is a scrape? Although some hunters seem to think they have the answers to these questions frequently asked by outdoorsmen, from observing deer all year long, I'm not sure if anyone knows for sure why and when deer scrape and which bucks are responsible for those scrapes.

The general belief held by most hunters is that the dominant buck makes a scrape during breeding season to attract does to that spot to be bred. Scrapes are also believed to be territorial markings made by a dominant buck to define the parameters of his territory. Most hunters think that bucks other than the dominant buck that made the scrape will come to the scrape and leave their scents at that scrape.

However, after spending many hours sitting in the woods while studying deer and their habits, I've observed some forms of scraping activity that seem to not fit with these patterns. I've watched before as a button buck has pawed the ground, clearing the leaves and limbs away from an area all the way down to the earth, and then has urinated in that spot. I've seen scrapes appear as early as August in Maryland, especially around agricultural fields. I've also spotted scrapes as late as March in other states, particularly those in the South.

But I don't necessarily believe that these early and late scrapes have anything to do with the rut or mean a site is a dependable place where you consistently can see a buck. However, as I pinpoint where these scrapes are, I make notes of their locations.

#### Why Hunt A Scrape

Oftentimes I have found that during the breeding season a buck may use these same scraping areas. If he does, then these early and late scrapes you've found may be productive places to hang a tree stand or build a ground blind to try and bag a buck with your bow.

Field scrapes often can be deceiving. When you discover a scrape on the edge of a field and can tell the buck is using it regularly just prior to and during the breeding season, the buck probably is utilizing that scrape only at night. But as ...

- breeding activity picks up,
- a buck becomes less cautious and
- a buck must spend more time looking for a receptive doe

you may get a shot at a buck just at daylight or dusk near that field scrape. I'm convinced the best place to hang your tree stand is on the trail the buck uses to come to that scrape late in the afternoon or to go away from that scrape early in the morning.

However, I think the most reliable scrapes to hunt are not field scrapes but rather are the scrapes you find farther back in the woods, especially on the edges of thick-cover areas. These thick-cover scrapes will show up just prior to or when the breeding season starts. The closer to the time of the rut you hunt, the larger the size of these scrapes seems to become. Also the scrapes will be utilized more frequently.

I believe scrapes on the edges of and in thick cover are the most reliable for the bowhunter to hunt, especially if you're interested in taking an older-age-class buck, because thick-cover regions offer bucks protection they don't get if they're working scrapes on the edges of fields or along logging roads. If a buck works a scrape in thick cover and spots danger, he can be away from the danger, into the cover and out of sight in one, quick bound. Mature bucks have learned that thick cover provides them with protection. The more time they spend in or close to thick cover, the less vulnerable they'll be to hunters.

### **How To Hunt A Scrape**

One mistake bowhunters often make when hunting scrapes is to walk up to the scrape and look at it to try and determine how fresh it is. Several years ago in almost every article you read on scrape hunting the writer would state, "To be able to tell how fresh a scrape is, walk up to a scrape, pick up a handful of dirt out of the scrape, and smell the dirt to distinguish a strong urine odor. If you can detect a strong urine smell, then you know the buck has used that scrape recently. You then should hunt at that site."

But what the writers who advocated this kind of scrape hunting didn't tell you was that your action set off a line of alarm clocks for any buck that came anywhere near that scrape. Not only could the buck smell your human trail going up to the scrape, he also would smell human odor in that scrape if for some reason he got close enough to smell the scrape. Often hunters were ruining potential hotspots through their actions.

I prefer to stay away from a scrape. If I can't see the scrape well enough to decide whether or not the scrape is fresh, I'll utilize my binoculars to look at the scrape more closely.

Once I spot a scrape, I don't want to set up my tree stand close enough to be able to shoot my bow to the scrape. Instead I put my tree stand up 50 to 100 yards downwind from the scrape along the trail I think the buck will take either going to or coming away from the scrape. When hunting scrapes, you never know when the buck will be there. By staying away from the scrape, I hope I won't spook the buck as I go into my tree stand in the early morning hours or climb down out of my stand after dark.

I also will lay a scent trail of buck lure from the trail the deer will take to the scrape back to my tree stand. I'll walk a circle around my stand to leave buck lure all the way around my stand. Then if the buck does come in, he will walk the circle and offer me several opportunities to take a shot. I also leave a scent trail from my truck to my tree stand to catch bucks that cross my trail downwind of me. My tree stand is in the center of two scent trails -- one from my truck to the stand and the other from the scrape trail to my stand.

I may use a lure that smells like another buck to pull the buck off the trail he is using to move to his scrape and make him come to my tree stand. I want the scraping buck to think another buck is in the region and come and investigate this other buck he has smelled close to his scraping area.

Some hunters believe a buck will come in downwind of a scrape, test the air with his nose to determine whether or not a doe or another buck has been at his scrape and then make the decision about coming in to the scrape. But I've learned when bowhunting for deer that there are no absolutes. Although I have seen bucks circle downwind of a scrape before they come in to it, I've also watched a buck come boldly into a scrape on a trail he apparently has made earlier to the scrape. I believe this buck may be the dominant buck in an area.

Too, I've observed bucks come in shyly and timidly to a scrape. Perhaps they've approached the scrape in this manner because they know a bigger buck is in the region and don't want to chance

getting into a fight at the scrape. I think a buck can come in to a scrape for many different reasons.

But if I find a hot scrape, I don't want to stop a buck from utilizing that scrape for any reason. By laying a scent trail from near the scrape to my tree stand and making sure my tree stand is not within bow range of the scrape, then if I do pull a buck off the trail he has been using to move to his scrape and miss him or spook him, he won't have been spooked at the scrape site. The buck still may continue to use that scrape during daylight hours. However, if you spook the buck at his scrape, he may keep on using that same scrape but more than likely will use it after dark.

### **When To Hunt A Scrape**

Also remember when scrape hunting that this form of hunting tends to be the most effective just prior to and immediately after the peak of the rut. I believe the buck leaves a scrape line to try and lure in the first does that come into estrus during the rut and the last does that go into estrus just after the peak of the rut.

During the peak of the rut when most of the does in an area will be coming into estrus, I don't think scrape hunting is nearly as productive. All a buck has to do at that time of the year to find a doe ready to breed is walk through the woods and pick up her trail. In the peak of the rut, you'll see bucks chasing does and frequenting places where does seem to congregate rather than the bucks being along scrape lines. When I'm hunting during the peak of the rut, I'll usually hang my tree stand in an area where I've seen numbers of does and may or may not have spotted any bucks there before this time. To breed does, the buck must go to where the does are. That's why I don't think scrape hunting is nearly as effective during the peak of the rut as it is just prior to and just after the peak of the rut.

Another observation I've made about scrapes is that the better the acorn crop in my hunting area, the more scrapes I tend to see. The poorer the acorn crop, the fewer scrapes I generally find. One reason for this phenomenon may be that when more acorns are available the does are more well-distributed throughout a region since they can find food in a wide variety of places. A buck may have to leave more sign to let more does know where to find him.

When there is less food in the woods, the buck understands where the does must be because of the more limited food supply. Therefore he has to scrape less to tell the does where he wants to meet them. Too, when the acorn crop is poor, determining the peak of the rut may be difficult. The bucks already know where the does must be if they're hungry. Then they go to those spots to meet the does and breed them.

Just prior to the rut and during the rut are my favorite times of the year to bowhunt for deer. But one other time of the year when I've been very lucky in bagging older-age-class bucks with my bow is after gun/deer season has ended in the states where bowhunting is permitted after gun/deer season. Although not as many bucks are available to be taken at this time by the bowhunter, usually the bucks that are left are generally some of the bigger and better bucks of the herd.

### **Why Buddy Hunt Scrapes**

Buddy hunting scrapes increases your odds for taking deer with your bow and also enables you to learn twice as much about the area you're hunting. If you and a buddy set up 50 to 150 yards from each other, generally one hunter will have a great hunt while the other hunter will have only a mediocre or a poor hunt.

A few years ago I was bowhunting in Maryland with a friend. We each had taken a stand on the opposite sides of a scrape along the trail that went to the scrape. We had agreed that we would remain in our trees from before daylight until dark or until one of us bagged a deer. We could not see each other in our tree stands but were only 50 to 60 yards apart. Occasionally I looked over to see what my buddy was doing. I had not seen a deer all morning long.

At noon, I saw my friend get out of his tree, walking around for a few minutes and then climbing back up his tree. I assumed he either had to go to the bathroom or had dropped something he was trying to find. I continued to watch the trail to the scrape for the rest of the day. But at nightfall I still had not seen a deer. However, my buddy had missed an 8-point buck and a 10-point buck and seen 15 other deer. He had gotten out of his tree to check his arrows.

I would have believed this area didn't have a deer around all day, although I had seen good deer sign there before. But from his experience, we realized this particular place was loaded with deer. I just had failed to see or hear them, only 60-yards away.

### **RATTLING OR GRUNTING**

Rattling or grunting are techniques that work well for the bowhunter during the rut. I've discovered two tactics I believe provide the best opportunity for the bowhunter to get a shot when the rut is happening.

I like to go up a tree in an area with plenty of scraping activity or where I've spotted numbers of does. I like to have a buddy in a tree about 50 yards from me and facing me.

One of the biggest problems associated with rattling is that most of the time, especially in the East, a buck will come in behind or downwind from your stand. But when two archers face each other, they watch behind each other as well as in front. Then they can spot deer for each other and not have a buck sneak in to their rattling site without his being seen. We use hand signals to let each other know when we spot bucks behind one another.

Another advantage to using this type of set-up is that both hunters alternate as rattlers. One hunter rattles or grunts while the other hunter looks for deer. After waiting 15 to 20 minutes after the first hunter rattles, the hunter who hasn't rattled will begin to rattle, and the other will search for deer. By alternating calling sequences, you can cover more territory with the sound of the rattling. Also any buck that can hear both hunters rattle may assume that a buck fight is taking place in the area and that when the two bucks have moved away from the site, they've begun to fight again.

Another method that is very deadly when using rattling antlers is to place one bowhunter 100-yards downwind of the hunter who is rattling. Oftentimes when a buck hears rattling, he'll circle downwind before he comes in to the sound of the antlers. By having the other bowman downwind 100 yards, if a buck circles downwind before he comes to the antlers, the hunter who is not rattling will be the one to get the shot.

I was fortunate enough to watch a nice-sized buck cross a soybean field some years ago and rattle to him. Because I was 20 yards in the woods, the deer couldn't see me. The buck would stop, look and listen, waiting to hear the antlers rattling once more. While I watched, the buck made a wide circle and then came in downwind of my rattling.

I think several things may make a buck circle downwind before he responds to the antlers.

- He may believe that an estrous doe is with the two bucks that are fighting. If he can sneak in and pick up that doe, he'll let the other two bucks butt heads while he slips off with their girlfriend.
- He may be an older-age-class buck, perhaps even the dominant buck, but wants to slip in to find out who these bucks are and what size they are before he commits himself to the fight. If he's been beat up recently by another buck, the buck coming in downwind may want to determine if he can bluff the other two deer away by showing them how big he is and how heavy his antlers are before he commits to a fight.

These two rattling and grunting strategies will bring in deer during the rut.

## **Secrets of Bowhunting Deer Chapter 14**

### **USING OTHER BOW TACTICS**

*By John E. Phillips*

*Certain strategies will help you see more deer and allow you to have more shots with your bow.*

#### **GRUNTING UP BUCKS**

One of the reasons I believe in utilizing a grunt call is it gives you something to do in your tree stand when you're not seeing or hearing a deer that possibly may bring in a buck. I grunt a lot with my deer call when I'm bowhunting for whitetails.

Wayne Carlton, a good friend, is an advocate of aggressive grunting. Instead of grunting two or three times with almost a burp-type sound and then waiting for 15 minutes before grunting again, Wayne goes through a series of both long and short grunts. Then he waits a few minutes and goes through the same series. I have learned that the more you grunt, and the more often you grunt, the more you increase your odds for luring in bucks.

There are several kinds of calls you can blow on the deer grunt call. Although I don't know the vocabulary of a deer well enough to tell you what the deer sounds really mean, I've learned there's not just one set pattern of calls a hunter blows with a grunt call that always works.

In November of 1991, I watched a buck come in to my tree stand chasing a doe. While I tried to get off a shot at the buck, I noticed the buck had his nose outstretched at the doe as he gave almost a growl with a loud, shouting-type grunt at the end of his call. At the end of each growl and grunt combination, the buck would jump at the doe. The doe would jump when the buck jumped. The actions of those two deer caught me so much surprise that I jumped when they jumped. I had a difficult time waiting on the buck to get into a position for me to take a shot with my bow without my jumping every time the buck and the doe jumped. However, finally I was able to get my bow back and the shot off to bag the buck.

From this encounter, I learned you didn't have to give short, hog-like grunts on your deer grunt call to lure in bucks. The buck I took gave a much longer growl with a short grunt on the end than I'd ever heard before.

Perhaps the way individual bucks grunt and growl has to do with their particular voice, personality and level of sexual arousal. But I don't guess we'll ever really know what the bucks are communicating to other bucks and does until we get those deer to speak English. Until then, what a buck is saying when he grunts is anyone's guess.

November 19, 1992, I called in an 8-point buck from over 300 yards across a grown-over pasture with a series of aggressive, loud grunts from a grunt call. Nearly 30 minutes passed before he covered the distance, stopping to look and listen every few steps. He was still looking for me when I put him on the wall at 18 yards. Learn to use a grunt call, and don't go to your stand without it.

#### **WORKING WITH WATER**

In many sections of the country if you hunt along a flood plain, sometimes during deer season you may have an opportunity to hunt in flooded timber. However, the hunt for flooded-timber bucks begins well before the season. If you can go into an area before it floods and locate the

trails the deer normally use to move from thick-cover areas to feeding regions, you drastically can increase your odds for taking flooded-timber bucks.

Also look for ridges and high ground in flooded-timber regions and beaver dams that cross streams. Unless the water gets very high, the deer will follow those same trails and walk on those same ridges and high ground, even though the water has covered the area. If the water crests over the top of a beaver dam, the deer still will cross the creek at the beaver dam. If you know the land you hunt will flood, learn all you can about the deer's moving and feeding patterns before the water comes up. Often the deer will use those same travel trails, which may be underwater.

If the deer are moving through water, often they are much easier to hear than if they are walking on wet leaves or even semi-dry leaves. Flooded timber also draws waterfowl. Many times when deer move through flooded timber, the waterfowl in that region will be frightened, which lets the bowhunter know the deer are coming.

Flooded timber gives the bowhunter many advantages he doesn't have before an area floods. When a hardwood bottom is flooded, acorns float to the surface, if there has been an acorn crop at all that year. Because generally some type of current moves through a newly inundated woodlot, the acorns will be forced to the bank and often may congregate in eddy pools or in slack-water areas just off the current -- resembling a bathtub ring of acorns around the edge of the water. This ring of acorns provides a food trail for deer to feed on during high-water conditions.

Most bowhunters will take stands on land close to the water's edge so they can shoot at the deer feeding on the acorns. However, then they've left scent trails from their vehicles to their stand sites. The deer probably will realize where the hunters' stands are.

Instead, try to go to your stand by water. In flooded- water conditions, the more time you spend moving through the water and the less time you are walking on the land, the more opportunities you will have to surprise a buck and get a shot within your bow range. If you can walk to your stand site through the water, you'll leave very little if any human odor to announce your presence to the deer. In most regions, deer are conditioned to expect danger to come by land -- not by water. If you watch deer feed on the edge of water, notice they usually look straight ahead or back towards the land to attempt to spot danger. They rarely gaze out towards the water.

If you place your tree stand out in the water, 15- to 20-yards away from the land when the depth of the water permits, the deer is much less likely to see or smell you. Another advantage to having your stand over water instead of over the land is that most of the time you'll get a broadside shot at the deer as it feeds down the edge of the water. Since the arrow will enter the deer from the side the water is on, generally the deer will bolt and run towards the land, leaving a visible blood trail. If you take the shot from a stand over land, the arrow will come from the land side of the deer. Then he'll usually bolt, run out through the water and won't leave a blood trail.

If you're hunting deer in flooded timber, make sure you don't release the arrow until you are absolutely sure you can make a lethal hit. Even though a buck may run towards land if you take the shot from a tree stand over water, he may cross water several times before he falls. The more lethal a shot you make, the easier your job will be to recover the deer.

Once you release the arrow, listen for the deer to run and fall. Generally he will be easier to hear in flooded- timber areas than on land.

### **Big Bucks In Water**

If there is a high ridge with cover on it out in the water, this newly created island may become a big-buck sanctuary. Older-age-class bucks have learned that by crossing water and going to

thick-cover regions that are above water yet surrounded by water they rarely will be disturbed by the hunter.

Often if you can find a site like this and get to that high ground before daylight, you'll be able to see and take a buck as he comes into his thick-cover island just at daylight. If you take a stand near that thick-cover region just before dark, you also may spot a buck as he leaves his sanctuary and then have a chance to get a shot off.

If you find a green-tree reservoir where a pond is created because of flooding and take a stand on the downwind side of the pond at the end of the pond, often you'll be able to see and bag twice as many deer. Deer generally will walk along the edge of a pond to get from one spot to another. The water affords them access to safety in the event of danger. By taking a stand on the end of the pond, you'll be in a position to take shots at deer that come down both sides of the pond. If a peninsula sticks out into the pond and you take a stand in the middle of the peninsula where you can see deer moving down both sides of the peninsula, then you also may find this place to be a deer hotspot.

When the woods flood and the water becomes more than knee-deep, most hunters won't wade the water to bag a buck -- at least not without good reason. You easily can step into a stump hole and sink down over your waders, not only causing you to get wet but also very cold. Probably your hunt will be ruined.

Therefore when ...

- islands are created by flood waters,
- the water is over knee-deep and
- hunters must walk more than 1/2-mile to reach an isolated piece of land, most hunters will decide that if there are bucks on that island in the flooded timber then the deer will remain there unmolested. However, the bowhunter who is willing to pay the price to take a big buck with his bow can carry a johnboat or a canoe through the woods to the flooded timber area, paddle to the island and have a successful hunt.

An important key to taking big bucks with a bow is to remember the more difficult an area is to reach, the less likely another hunter is to go there and hunt. The odds will be in your favor for finding a trophy buck in that place.

## **HUNTING BEDS**

A good friend of mine often bowhunts cornfields successfully by finding where deer bed around them. Once when the corn just had been cut, he watched a big buck leaving the cornfield at daylight and moving back into the woods. From scouting, he knew the buck was headed to a thick briarpatch about 1/2-mile into the woods away from the cornfield to bed down.

The next day an hour before daylight, he went to his stand site, a poplar tree that stood 15 yards from the trail the buck was using and about 100 yards from the briarpatch. He had put his tree stand in the poplar the afternoon before to keep from making any noise the next morning.

However, at daylight, no deer appeared. Not until 55 minutes after daylight did my friend see antlers slowly bobbing down the trail as a nice 9-point headed for his bed.

Although the deer soon was within range, he presented no shot except a poor one because he walked directly towards where my buddy was. Then the chattering of a squirrel distracted the

deer, which stopped, lifted his head to look, took two steps to his right and offered a full, broadside shot to my friend, who then bagged the buck.

Hunting bedding sites often will produce the biggest bucks of the season, especially in areas of high hunting pressure.

### **What A Bedding Site Looks Like**

Deer bed in all types of terrain and cover. In Mississippi, sometimes bucks bed in the middle of open cotton fields where few believe bucks will be. Deer bed in these fields because there they can dodge hunting pressure, see in all directions and hear hunters approaching. Like many who bowhunt, I believe a buck's primary consideration when he's selecting a bedding site is that it be a sanctuary from the hunter.

A dedicated bowhunter who has vast experience with hunting different types of terrain told me that, "The state of Iowa literally has no cover. Most of the land is cropland. In these open fields, the deer generally will be on the fenceline -- lying very tight to the ground. A deer there protects itself more with its ability to see rather than its ability to smell."

Also in some states, hunters tell of bucks bedding down in open sage fields, which breaks with tradition yet allows the bucks to look in all directions without being seen themselves.

Bedding areas vary with each terrain you hunt. In most parts of the country, the deer will bed in a secluded region away from where they feed -- if possible. But, in Florida for example, often the bedding, feeding and watering areas are in the same location. Bucks also may choose to bed in briar thickets, near camphouses, close to dog pens, or on the sides of heavily traveled roads that lead to hunting camps. A bowhunter also must know when and where the deer in his region will bed to determine what he needs to do to hunt those bedding areas.

To begin your search for a bedding site, obtain an aerial photo of the lands you want to hunt. Mark the area where no one else hunts -- particularly noting the thick- cover sites that are virtually impossible to hunt as well as isolated patches of land that may be surrounded by water or some other natural barrier.

Then to actually locate bedding regions, look for thick- cover areas with a definite deer odor, because deer urinate heavily in the region where they bed. Also you'll find impressions in the leaves where the deer have been lying. Shed deer hair and an unusual number of deer droppings also indicate that deer may have been loafing at a particular site.

### **How To Prepare A Bedding Site To Be Hunted**

Wait six to eight weeks after hunting season before going into the bedding site you've found. Even if you spook a deer, at that time of the year you haven't committed a cardinal sin. Then determine how you're going to hunt that bedding region. Evaluate the possibilities of hunting from a ground blind and how effective you can be if no tree is large enough for attaching a tree stand.

The area may be so thick that even if you have a tree to hunt from, no opening will exist that's wide enough for you to get a shot. Plan to cut shooting lanes with small hedge clippers or a saw in the thick cover -- being careful not to damage good timber. A shooting lane 3- to 4-feet wide that runs for 20- to 25-yards away from the tree you plan to take a stand in may be sufficient. Or, for best results, you may want to cut three shooting lanes that spoke away from the tree to give you three opportunities to bag a buck in that cover.

## **What Tactics Are Best For Hunting Bedding Sites?**

Most bowhunters set up to take deer as they go to their bedding sites -- believing that when bucks reach their bedding areas they lie down and wait for dark before they move again. But especially in thick-cover regions, bucks may get up, stretch, feed, walk around and/or even breed and fight in the thick places where they also bed.

To learn the truth about what bucks do in their bedding areas, find a clearcut with a high bluff over it. Go to that bluff during the peak of hunting season, and glass the clearcut with binoculars. Watching the deer in their bedding area and learning their habits may give you an opportunity to get off a shot at a deer on another day. To hunt deer in the beds, pick the best times, wait on the best weather, and don't hunt the bedding site unless you have a favorable wind. Be sure to avoid leaving your scent around a bedding area. Oftentimes when you see a buck standing in a bedding site just out of bow range, blowing ever so slightly on a grunt call may lure him in to where you can shoot.

Realizing what not to do when bowhunting bedding areas is important, too. Don't hunt ...

- a region close to a bedding site when the wind will carry your scent to the bedding site,
- a bedding site with a tree stand that will make a racket when you put it up,
- an area while using flashlights to go to or from it,
- the edge of a swamp, a clearcut or a briarfield where deer may bed in the morning, because your silhouette may give you away when the sun comes up. Instead, move deeper into the woods away from the bedding site along the trail the deer will take, making sure you have back cover. Then if the deer does look up, it won't be able to spot you in your tree stand. However, you can hunt an edge in the afternoon when the deer are leaving the thick cover since you'll have the entire woods behind you to shield you from their sight.

## **UTILIZING MAN-DRIVES EFFECTIVELY**

Funnels Two bowhunters effectively can drive and take deer. To be successful with this type of hunting, the driver must move the deer slowly enough for the stander to get a shot. The drive doesn't need to cover more than 200 to 300 yards at a time and should be through an area that creates a natural funnel. For instance, if you can find a thicket with a creek on one side and a mountain or a hill on the other side, then more than likely the deer will not jump into the creek or run up the mountain or the hill. The logical place for the deer to go is into and out of the thick cover between the hill and the creek.

The stander either can climb into a tree stand downwind of the cover or take a position on the ground. The driver then goes to the upwind end of the cover and begins to slowly and quietly walk a left-to-right or a right-to-left pattern through the cover. The driver is not trying to spook or scare the deer with noise. Instead he uses his human odor to waft through the cover and notify the deer of his presence. By walking from one side to the other side of the cover, the driver insures that all the area in front of him has been saturated with human odor.

The wind always must be at the driver's back and in the stander's face for this tactic to be productive. By utilizing this technique of hunting, a buck usually will sneak out of the cover, walking very slowly and looking back rather than bolting and running without offering a shot. Often on this type of man-drive, the stander will be able to take a shot at the deer at close range when the deer is standing still and looking back to see where the driver is. If you know the escape routes deer take out of thick cover through funnel areas or woodlots, this strategy can be very effective.

However, don't use this method during the rut when bucks are moving all day in search of does. The man-drive seems to pay the best dividends for the bowhunter prior to or after the rut when the bucks hold in thick cover, especially during the middle of the day. Utilizing this man-drive strategy allows you to hunt early and late from your tree stand when the bucks naturally should be moving. Then in the middle of the day when the bucks may not be moving, you can drive the thick-cover regions to produce some hot bowhunting action. Beds Another time of the year when driving is the most productive is in the late deer season. I don't like to drive a bedding area where I know a big buck possibly may be hiding in the early part of the season. If the buck is in that bedding area and I put on a man-drive, then the buck may leave that place, and I never may see him again. But at the end of the season when the number of hunting days is dwindling, I don't mind using a man-drive to move a buck from his bed to within bow range. Fields Another similar system of driving can be utilized to take deer holding in an agricultural field. If you know the location of the trail the deer use to consistently leave the field, then let the stander go to his stand along that trail while the deer are in the field.

At an appointed time, the driver begins to walk toward the field slowly and quietly. When the deer spot the driver, they either will begin to carefully and deliberately move out of the field and onto the trail, or they will bolt out of the field and run to the trail. Most of the time the deer won't run more than 50 to 60 yards once they enter the woods. That's why the stander needs to be in a tree stand along the trail about 150 to 200 yards from the field. By being this far from the field, the stander can get into his stand quietly without spooking the deer in the field. If the deer do bolt and run out of the field when they spot the driver, then by the time they reach the stander they will be walking down the trail and will be within bow range.

Grunting, working with water, hunting beds and utilizing man-drives are all tactics that will aid you in being in the best place to take a shot. But remember, any time a deer that you intend to shoot is within range and then suddenly looks up at you, or even without looking at you becomes alert as if ready to bolt, prepare to draw immediately. If the deer has not smelled you, most times it will bolt only a few yards and then stop to listen. If you will draw the instant the deer bolts, you will have an opportunity for a good shot when the animal stops to listen.

## **Secrets of Bowhunting Deer Chapter 15**

### **TRAILING SECRETS**

*By John E. Phillips*

The key to successfully recovering deer when you're bowhunting is to not shoot if you can't make a lethal hit. I've passed up bucks before because I wasn't certain I could make killing shots on them. Remember, if you pass up a buck you're not sure you can make a good hit on, then you can hunt that deer again another day. However, if you take a risky shot and wound the deer, that animal may be lost and wasted. If you're not 100-percent confident that you can hit a deer in its kill zone, let the animal walk. By making the decision before you see the deer not to shoot unless you get a killing shot, you will recover the deer that you arrow.

### **WATCH THE ARROW'S FLIGHT**

The search for the deer begins as soon as the arrow is released. Some bowhunters use white fletchings on their arrows to help watch its progress through the air and see the shaft as it enters the deer. By seeing the hit and watching the reaction of the deer, I usually can determine how far the deer will travel and what I'll probably have to do to recover it.

A deer jumping straight up in the air usually indicates a good hit. If the deer stands still after I see the arrow hit him, then I've probably made a good shot. If the deer drops down or his knees buckle, I also know I have a well-placed arrow. If a deer arches his back, I may have made a gut shot.

Often if you miss, the deer won't move and may provide an opportunity for you to nock another arrow, which is why seeing the hit is so important. If you don't see the flight of the arrow, and the deer is still standing, you really don't know if you've hit the animal or missed it. More than likely, you'll assume you've missed.

When a deer breaks to run, I watch the way it's moving and try to identify a tree or a landmark at the point where I last spot it. Not being distracted by other game and concentrating on that place to mark it well in your mind's eye will be vital to your recovery attempt.

### **EXAMINE THE ARROW**

Once the deer has vanished, remain in your stand for 10 to 15 minutes. Don't pursue the deer and cause it to run any further than necessary. When you come down the tree, try to be as quiet as possible so as not to spook the deer if it's close by. Then when you reach the ground, immediately begin to look for your arrow at the spot where you've shot the deer.

If you find the arrow, you can learn more information about the shot. If pink blood is on the shaft, then you can assume you've made a lung shot, which will put the deer down quickly. Also you probably will have only a short search. If the shaft has dark blood that's almost black on it, more than likely you have made a liver shot. Bright red blood will mean you've shot the deer in the chest.

Also look for stomach matter on the shaft. Even if you don't spot any stomach content on the arrow, smell the shaft. If the arrow has a strong odor to it, then you've probably made a gut shot -- whether the stomach matter is on the shaft or not.

If the arrow has fat on it, generally you haven't gotten a very good shot but have hit the brisket or grazed an area that's not a vital hit. Realize you'll have a long search for the deer and that if you do locate the animal you may have to take a second shot. If fat is on the arrow, wait a longer time before beginning your search than you normally will to give the buck an opportunity to lie down.

## **RECHECK LANDMARKS**

Once you've examined the arrow, recheck the landmark where you've last seen the deer to be certain you can pinpoint that site when you return to search for the deer. With the knowledge you've gained from the arrow, you then can leave the woods.

When most hunters leave their stands after arrowing deer and plan to return to that same area, they mark their trails with flagging tape or toilet paper, but I don't. A marked trail will show other hunters where you're hunting and possibly allow others to go back in and pursue your deer while you're gone. Instead, leave the woods with no trace of ever having been there, and read landmarks to enable you to return to your hunt site.

Oftentimes leaving a wounded deer in the woods is one of the most difficult elements of recovering a deer for most bowhunters. Most of us seek the instant gratification that comes from finding the deer we've arrowed. However, if we go in search of that gratification immediately after our shots and chase the animals, we may drive the deer out of the region and not recover them.

You may want to return to your vehicle and take off some clothing, since you'll be walking and working hard to drag the deer out. Heavy clothing will hamper the job of getting a downed deer out of the woods. Also attempt to get some help from others in tracking and trailing the deer.

When you return to the site, climb into your tree stand if some light is available and try to spot the landmark you've used to identify the last place where you've seen the deer. Then come down the tree, and start searching for the blood trail.

## **LOOK FOR THE BLOOD TRAIL**

If you reach the region where the arrowed deer is after dark, immediately start looking for the blood trail. Having a hunting buddy helps you trail, track and find the deer much quicker. One hunter can remain at the spot where you've located the last blood while you search for the trail. Also if someone is with you at night, if you lose the trail, you can return to the last drop of blood and utilize a flashlight to look into the woods to pick up the line of travel the deer has taken.

You may want to trail deer at night with a propane camping lantern, which gives off a bright light and makes the blood easy to see. Too, several products are on the market which can be sprayed on a trail that cause deer blood to almost glow in the dark.

If you lose the blood trail, return to the last two or three drops of blood. Try to line them up straight with your eye. By walking in that direction with a compass reading, you may pick up the trail or find the deer. Normally a buck will take the line of least resistance. Keep in mind that when a buck is arrowed, he wants to get away from the place where he's been shot by the easiest route possible.

When you can locate no more blood, then follow the deer's tracks if there are any. If no tracks are present comb the area. Don't assume that all the trail is on the ground. Many times if the arrow doesn't penetrate the deer, the blood will be on the deer's side. The only way you'll ever see that blood is when the deer brushes up against trees or bushes as it runs. Look above the ground for the blood trail as well as on the ground.

While moving through the woods trailing and tracking, flag the trail. Then you easily and quickly can see the direction the deer has traveled and also get an idea as to the intervals at which you're discovering blood.

Often if the blood trail runs out, and you search but can't find the deer, you can walk back down the trail you've come up and look for blood to the side of the trail where the deer has backtracked and perhaps gone in another direction. This occurrence is not common but does happen.

Too, when the trail runs out, you can make a wide circle, return to the starting point, retrace the trail and look for trails leading off the main trail. Then you may locate your deer.

If you're hunting deer in hilly terrain, and the blood trail runs out, search for your deer down the hill in thick cover. Many times a buck will pick a thick-cover bedding site when he's hurt and injured. If he has the choice of exerting less energy or climbing uphill, he'll go in the downhill direction.

To learn if the deer is running or moving quickly, examine the drops of blood. If the animal is moving when the blood falls, the drop of blood will hit and slide forward. The little end of the blood is where it hits the ground or the leaf. The bigger portion of the blood will point the direction in which the deer is traveling.

## **RECOVER DEER FROM WATER**

Recovering deer around water can be very difficult. Oftentimes when the trail or the track goes into the water, the hunter assumes he's lost the deer. However, leave a piece of flagging tape on the bank where the trail enters the water. Next go to the other side of the pond or creek, and search for tracks directly across from or just downstream from where the trail enters the water. You often can pick up the trail again and/or find your deer.

But if you fail to discover your deer, tie a piece of flagging tape at eye level directly across the water from where the deer has gone into the water. Return to the spot where the deer's trail enters the water. If this water is flooded timber and/or a shallow beaver pond, often you can wade from where the trail enters the water to the flagging tape you've put on the opposite bank and find your deer just under the surface. Although you'll get wet recovering a buck like this, you won't lose your game.

However, before you get wet, look out into the water. Often a deer will not sink, or if it does die in the water, perhaps a portion of its head will be just above the surface. Look for something that appears to be a white stick in the water, which may be a deer's antler, the inside white of his ear or the white underside of his tail. Use your binoculars to study the water before you wade in and get wet.

## **TAKE A SECOND SHOT**

All bowhunters hate to trail deer they know they've hit and find the deer alive. Attempt to get in front of the deer after you determine the direction it is traveling. Have a buddy do the actual blood trailing. Then if your buddy jumps the deer, the deer should come close enough to you for a second bow shot. Even if your buddy doesn't jump the wounded deer, it probably will be moving slowly through the woods, looking toward its back trail, watching for your buddy and not looking for you in front. Then you may get a second shot that will put the deer down.

## **WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS**

Go to the nearest water or thickest cover, no matter which direction that may be in or which direction the deer has left the area. If you still don't find the deer, check the region in several days for buzzards, ravens or crows. You at least will know whether or not the deer has survived.

By taking your time and working the trail slowly, you can recover the deer you arrow.