

**Hunting In  
Fall 2015**



**Proper  
Tree Stand  
Placement**

**STUMP  
SITTING  
VS.  
TRACKING**

**Lick My Branches  
Farm Country Whitetails**





**ODU'S 1ST  
HUNTING  
MAGAZINE**

after the season ends. Access, gun regulations, gun safety and managing the growth of our sport seem to be on the top of most lists.

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**Thank You All!**

**Photos:** Cover photo provided by Mike Borovic.

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Its here, OutDoors Unlimited Media's first Hunting Magazine. It is hard to believe it from our stand point. It was only a project idea for the last three years.

After our February 2015 reader survey, we knew we had to be move this project up and make it more than just and idea. We learned that not only has our readership grown, but those who are new to ODU Magazine and our website, more than likely consider themselves both anglers and hunters. If the hunters like this edition, next year we will produce three total hunting magazines for 2016, with more ranging coverage on deer, elf, ducks, coyote, geese, wild pigs and turkey.

Lets us know what you like and what you want to see by emailing us at [odu.media@odumagazine.com](mailto:odu.media@odumagazine.com).

Hunting is hot all over the country at this time and there are many issues that burden hunters before and

Access is a giant problem that seems to us as dads and veteran hunters gets worse and worse every year. What is causing these challenges to our hunter privileges and what can hunters do to help change the decrease in access to huntable lands? This hunting season is a great time to start.

1) After you are done hunting in a area for the season, make sure you leave no signs you were there. Pick up trash, remove your tree stand and blinds and close the gates that gave you access.

2) If you are hunting on private lands offer to help the land owner with something, if you haven't already. Bring a Christmas or Thanksgiving gift, help with some fencing or replacing posted signs, always thank them when hunting season is done. Be creative with your thank you, but by all means thank them.

3) Are you hunting public lands that attract a few more hunters than you would like? Meet with the hunters in the area before you hit the woods so you know where each of you are and help one another out.



4) Don't block access with your vehicle.

5) If you hunt an area where other hunters hunt, remember to remove the entrails and the carcass of the deer you take. You don't want anyone, hunter or outdoorsmen, to step in it and you don't want to attract predators to the area unless you plan to remove them. We know many hunters plan to leave entrails for coyote baiting, but in public hunting areas attracting coyotes to an area can ruin the hunting for others. If you are in bear country be careful.

6) Think out of the box when looking for new hunting grounds. Hunting public lands can be a drag and an exercise in patience that will run out from time to time. Change your approach to hunting and call on a local farmer or apple grove owner to see if they have a deer problem. Many of these businesses are allotted nuisance wildlife deer permits to thin a localized herd. What a way to fill a tag and put meat on the table.

7) Don't know a farmer, call your local conservation officer or game warden. Many of these officers know local land owners who have lost touch with hunters and are open to new hunters coming on their lands. It works and it also gives the hunting community a small opportunity to build a positive bond with conservation officers or game wardens.

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Please enjoy our 1<sup>st</sup> hunting magazine and be safe in the woods this season. Thank you to all who have worked with us to make this happen.

*And please, enjoy the outdoors.  
Larry Thornhill and William Schwarz  
Co-Founders of ODU Magazine*







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# A GREAT PLACE, AN OLD FRIEND AND A GREAT DOG

By Dana Benner



Upland hunting is part of Northern New England's rich rural heritage. Unlike other types of hunting, upland hunting is about friends and dogs. It is about missed shots, excuses and bad jokes. It is even about dogs getting frustrated with the hunters when shots are missed. More than anything else, it is just about being outdoors enjoying our woods and fields, and sharing the experience with friends.

While I have had the pleasure of hunting with many great people over the years, perhaps the times I cherish the most are those times that I have gotten to spend with my oldest friend, Jack. Jack and I go back a long ways. I first met Jack about 25 years ago. He was participating in a hunt at a game preserve, and I was there covering the event for an article I was writing. Jack told me I could tag along with him to get some photos and we have been friends ever since. One of our favorite places to hunt is the Franklin Falls Dam Area located in Hill, New Hampshire.

New Hampshire, though it is a small state, has some of the most diverse habitat I have ever come across. Unlike other areas of the country, all land, unless it is posted, is open to all manner of outdoor activities from hiking to hunting. Franklin Falls Dam comes

under the control of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and is managed for flood control. Covering 3,900 acres, this area is a wild mix of fields, river bottom and forests of both soft and hardwoods.





The state of New Hampshire stocks pheasants at a few different locations on the property which means it can be pretty crowded during the opening week of upland season. Jack and I prefer pursuing grouse and woodcock and we usually wait until the pheasant hunters to clear out. After the

first week of the season visitors to Franklin Falls Dam will usually have the entire property to themselves.

Wednesday night the phone rang; on the other end of the line was Jack. It seems he had taken the week off to do some upland hunting and for the past few days had been doing pretty well on the grouse and woodcock. He asked if I had any free time to go out. Looking at the calendar and seeing my wife hadn't written anything in, Jack and I made plans to meet up on Saturday morning.

The thing about upland hunting is that it can either be extremely hot, or you could go home without making many shots. Being an optimist, I planned for a day of many flushes. With that in mind I pulled two boxes of Federal 12 gauge shells out of the closet; one of #7s and one of #6s. As it was to turn out I'm glad I brought plenty of ammo. Joining us on this hunt were Jack's English setter "Spencer", one of the best grouse and woodcock dogs I have ever hunted over.

Spencer worked the cover in a zigzag manner, leaving no log unturned. All of a sudden Spencer was on a classic point. Where he was pointing was in a middle of a thick clump of evergreens along the edge of a field and surrounded by leafless aspens and birch. Jack and I worked our way through the thick cover; Spencer holding solid as a rock. When a dog goes on point you just never know where the birds may be. It could be right in front of you, or it could be a few yards off. In this case it was only a few feet in front of me and it was a very large woodcock. Both Spencer and I froze. There were only two ways out; either fly straight at and over me, in which case Jack would get a shot as it broke into the open, or to fly straight away from me through a tiny gap in the pines. I was hoping that it would fly out to Jack as I had very little room to get the gun up and take the shot. The woodcock flushed and headed for the little gap in the pines. I brought my gun up and a load of #7s followed it out through the gap. I was a tad late with the shot, the bird did not go down and the gap in the pines is a little larger.

People have often asked me, "Why do you spend so much time upland hunting?" Unless you have done it, it is hard to understand the answer. Grouse and woodcock hunting is a true test of patience. It is "true" hunting and for me, it is nothing like pheasant hunting. Grouse and woodcock hunting is about the teamwork between the dog and the shooter, both working together to outwit a wild bird.



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That is what makes it hunting. In fact the bird actually has the upper hand. Both grouse and woodcock will make the hunter work for every bird that is taken.

Spencer ranged up a ridge and then down the other side and then went on point. I went down the ravine with the dog and Jack stayed up on the ridge. I was in brush so thick that there was no way I was going to get any type of shot. It was all up to Jack. All of a sudden the woodcock flushed and was heading straight for Jack. Before he had a chance to shoot another woodcock flushed at his feet. I saw the second bird flush, but couldn't shoot as it was right in front of Jack. Needless to say neither bird was brought down. So far the score was birds 4: hunters 0.

ODU MAGAZINE VIDEO BLOCK  
([www.odumagazine.com](http://www.odumagazine.com))

Finally things started to turn around. The next woodcock flushed and Jack shot but got nothing but trees. The bird weaved right in front of me giving me a great shot and that is all I needed. One bird down. Another woodcock flushed and Jack was able to drop it before it reached me. My second bird busted out of a clump of grass at the edge of the trees and flew straight at me. I let it pass, turned and took the going away shot.

After six hours, and seven miles of walking (Jack was wearing a pedometer) all of us were pretty tired. At the end of it all it was a great day. Spencer pointed and we flushed 29 woodcock and I ended up taking three birds home. How many shots did it take me to get those birds? Who cares? Grouse and woodcock hunting is not measured by the number of birds you bring home or the number of shells it takes to do it. It is all about good friends, both two and four legged, getting out and making memories.



# Lick My BRANCHES

by Mike Borovic

***Yip, my buddies seem to think that's sorta funny, but I'm serious.  
That's exactly what I want the deer to do; lick my branches, and here's why.***

What is a licking branch?

Firstly, let's define a buck scrape and without getting into all the theories and opinions, let's just say it's simply a pawed away area free of leaves and ground debris, exposing the bare soil that is made with the



front hooves. Typically positioned about 4 feet below an overhanging tree branch, often referred to as a licking branch in which a buck may nibble, rub his forehead or other glands, leaving secretions of chemical scent behind. Usually made in the breeding season, which is also known as the rut and leading up to.

So is the licking branch just that?

Is it the most



important feature of a scrape?

I don't know.

What I do know, and absolutely for sure is that deer lick branches and despite everything we have perpetually read, watched or been told, there is not one person, in this whole wide world that can tell you or me exactly why.

Until we are capable of speaking whitetail or deer learn to voice to us, we will never be able to ask them the question, "Why do you lick branches?" And until then, we can only assume.

I've been hunting whitetail for nearly 30 years now, and I'm still learning. The reality is, we'll never know why things are the way they are. Something does will forever remain a mystery, but we can only hope to gain a better understanding of things through our experiences.

Now here's what I think I do know, the hunting industry and its marketing sector always seem to put the emphasis on bucks. Bucks making scrapes and associating them with licking branches when in actuality, the does use these branches just as much. Over the years, I've captured hundreds of photographs of does utilizing branches. The use of branches comes from every member of the herd, regardless of sex or age.

As I always thought or was led to believe they were only associated with bucks accompanying scrapes made during the rut, but my unexpected discovery now leaves me to believe otherwise. I wasn't so surprised that the does worked over the branches as much as I was to find out these branches existed all year long... just without the scrape.



**Old logging roads are notable places for licking branches. I zipper-tied this single branch on the way out of my stand the night before just for poop and giggles and the next afternoon... I found this.**





When I initially started to entertain my thoughts on licking branches; never in my life, did I expect to capture such a sequence of photographs on my first mock licking branch. Needless to say by my reaction, I was a believer.





Oh my... what brow  
tines you must have!

My trail cameras have been spying on deer using the same branches all year but I was even further awed to find out that if the branch remained untouched in the optimal position, the deer would use it year after year.

I think it's safe to say that a scrape does have everything to do with the rut, but the licking branch also has everything to do with something else and all year through. I can only assume that it's an important place of social interaction and communication but again, I can't be for certain. No one will ever know what whitetails are saying to each other, but it's quite clear of these branches and more so, these specific branches that for obvious reasons, are important for some reason or other, to these deer.

After seeing that magnetism to continually scent mark the same branch repeatedly, I realized I should be using this to my advantage. I started making my own licking branches wherever I needed them. To draw attention to my mock branches, I started spraying them with deer scent. And guess what? It worked like a charm!

The key to a successful fake is location. Just off of a well-used trail is good, but a great location would be an area of intersecting trails. Find yourself an intersection, and you'll have yourself one hot diggity dig dogity of a bumpin' good spot.

An often problem I have is not having a branch where I need it to be, so I have to make one. One way I do this is to find a good branch elsewhere and cut it off. I then bring it to where I want it and fasten it to a tree by way of wire, strap or screws. If I already have the right branch in the right location, and it's a bit high, I simply use wire to pull it down to where I need it to be and vice versa if it's too low.

After I have manufactured my branch in a promising location, I then trim most of the



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other overhanging branches in the area in hopes that mine attracts all the attention. And I don't think you need to know I do this well before the season starts, right? My cameras will tell me if the deer are using the branches, and if they are, as sugar is sweet, you can bet your last drop of deer pee I'll be mock scraping exactly under that stick!

As I've mentioned previously, I like to sweeten the branch when I've completed its construction with a little deer scent and each time I revisit the area, and every known natural licking branch made by the deer themselves. Synthetic or natural based, I've tried them all and they all have worked, but the one that stands out and has been my go-to is Paul

Pollick. Pollick's's Preorbital Gland Scent is crazy good, just take a whiff of it. My wife already knows I'm passionately, obsessive about whitetails (nuts) so chasing her around the house grunting into a tube may seem normal (totally whacked out) but I don't know how she would take it if I told her I like this smell over her Red Door perfume.



**It doesn't get any fresher than that, buck-rub shavings garnishing the leaves at the base of an oak! A pinch of this in the pocket is worth greater than 10 horseshoes, and a rabbits foot!**



In some states and provinces, it may be illegal to use commercial deer attractants made with urine or other natural parts of a deer, but most companies do offer a synthetic blend in place of. Just be sure to check your local laws carefully before you use these products.

Making a mock scrape is no hard task. Just before the pre-rut phase gets under way is when I'll start adding scrapes to some of my branches, and that is if a buck hasn't already beaten me to it. I always wear rubber boots when I'm in the deer woods so as not to leave any foreign odors behind. With the bottom of my boot, I simply scrape the ground creating a two foot-ish bare spot directly below the licking branch. I forgot to mention how extremely crucial it is not to touch the branch after making it and never touch a natural one either. Why take the chance in contaminating your area? As hard as it may be, you should refrain from checking your trail cameras at this time also.



After scraping the ground to bare soil with my foot, I will doctor it up with all kinds of scent, including my own! Yes, you read that right, my own. I tinkle directly into the scrape. I always have and will continue to do so whenever nature calls and I'm near a scrape. Deer are very curious animals, and as long as they do not associate a particular smell with danger, I believe they are attracted to it. Although I strictly keep Pollick's Preorbital scent for the branch, I do carry many types of scent with me, and I use a shot from each bottle for the actual scrape. I do this to replicate the sense of



many different deer visiting the site. In a pinch I've used, moose, fox, raccoon and even vanilla extract once. Yes, deer are very curious, just don't use a predator urine based scent.

What is a rub?

Again, without getting into all the scientific theories and further complicating the subject than it really is,





let's just say it's an abrasion caused by a buck by way of rubbing his antlers and forehead against the base of a tree after the process of shedding his velvet.

Finding scrapes and rubs are two things that really excite me. As I continue my search for that ever elusive talking deer... (You think finding big antlered bucks is hard), I can only speculate, why bucks truly rub trees. What I do know for certain is only bucks are capable of stripping away the bark of a young oak and not does, which is a definite sign that a buck has been in the immediate area, and that is something to get yodeling about!

Like the branches, when you're scouting for rubs you should never touch them because of the chemical messages left behind. Why be sloppy, and take the chance of contaminating everything? Instead, take photographs. Much like a shed-hunter, I enjoy looking and finding rubs after the season. It gets me out of the house and into the woods. Not only do I get fresh air; I get to scout around some more and find additional pieces to the puzzle as to what makes these whitetails tick.

When it comes to preferences in which trees they prefer to lick and rub, I can't exactly say. For the most part, deer are individuals just like you and I, and each will have it's own preferences, and that I believe will be based on what's available within the local geographical region. I can only tell you what I know from what I've seen. In Southwestern Ontario, bucks seem to like rubbing aromatic species such as cedar, lower limb-free pines, and on occasion I've found some young sassafras. Small oaks, alders, cherries, eastern juniper, sumac, willow and young

**Now if this doesn't excite  
you... than nothing will!**



beechnut are among some others I've seen. When it comes to the licking branches, sapling oaks and beech are used mostly in my hunting area.

Licking branches and scrapes are completely natural to whitetail deer, so why wouldn't you have one near your hunting stand? Who would have ever thought that something so simple could lure a buck in, such as the one on the cover of this magazine. Although, that buck was very interested in the does that were in the vicinity, he was also standing right at the licking branch that was recently sweetened by myself.

The more we learn about whitetail behavior, the more we realize how complex their world truly is and maybe poorly understood. Despite all the uncertainty, there still is no better education then experimenting and experiencing things for yourself.

Wishing everyone a safe and memorable Season of Harvest ever! Mike

Editors Note: We'll bet that Mike is probably sitting on stand somewhere among the timbers in the area of Southern Ontario taking a snooze right about now, but we know he can be reached at [vforvenison@outlook.com](mailto:vforvenison@outlook.com)







## OLD HATS OLD MEN AND MAYBE A DEER

*By O'Neill Williams*  
*"O'Neill Outside"*

Do you have a favorite fishing hat? In my days, I've worn all sorts of fishing hats. I'll bet you have too.

Around here I wear a fishing cap with various names on the front. Usually it's an O'Neill Outside logo. After all is said, advertising is everything. Too, I buy them in bulk so they don't cost much. I tell people that want one signed that the hat is worth about \$6 before I sign it and \$3 afterward. They accept it anyway. The hats are thin and comfortable. However, my ears get sunburned and stay crusty all year long. I don't think that's good. Does that happen to you? I like hats though. When you have follicle challenges like me, you tend to gravitate to hats. This challenge means I'm bald headed and have been since about the age of 23. Gail and I got married after I finished at Emory at 21 have been married over 50 years now. When she's not around, I blame it on her.

One of my Grandfathers wore a straw hat when we fishing in the small ponds around Loganville Georgia about 60 years ago. I

was 11, he was about 65. He was a primitive Baptist preacher and wore a starched white shirt and tie, black wingtip dress shoes, a vested black pinstriped suit and white gloves with the fingers cut out when we went to the local catfish ponds to catch a few. You'd think I'd have been embarrassed about that. I wasn't. I was just proud that he thought enough of me to take me fishing. My mother's father wore a fedora like Indiana Jones. When we walked to the river along the railroad tracks headed to the swift waters of the Tallulah River, we'd stop and drink the cold, clear spring waters flowing from the rocks. We'd tip the sweet drops from the brim of that old hat. Sure wish I had it now. I'd wear it. We use cane poles with black nylon line and red wigglers dug up from around the barn.


This was supposed to be a column about deer and deer hunting, so let's get to it and make it simple. I'm about to run out of room, so I'll be brief.

Whitetail deer are lazy critters that don't do much except, eat, sleep, look nervous, stay alive and are active only during the rut. That staying alive thing is a big deal and they're good at it. Did I say sleep? It's not my kind of sleep, no sir. Thirty minutes at a time max, usually only five or 10, and sometimes with their eyes open. Ears are always alert and hyper wary. Can you sneak up on one while he's asleep? No, you can't. You think you can but you can't. If he doesn't move and you think you're being extra sneaky, it's because he thinks he's hidden and you'll pass by. He knows you're there.

We supposed to include photos when we submit these columns so the one here is the largest Whitetail I ever took. He scored 167 inches. He was awake when I shot him.



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# THE ANNUAL EVOLUTION OF BOW PRACTICE

*If you're not careful, your bowhunting practice could be doing you more harm than good.*

By Luke Hartle

As hunters, we all have learned to change tactics with the seasons. It's a natural progression that leads to success, right?

For example, let's take whitetail hunting. For most locales, archery opener falls during the middle of September. Some places see it earlier than this and others see it later, but the national average is around September 15 every year.

During that timeframe, you know that bucks can be fairly patternable around their eating habits. Target a food source and the routes a buck takes to get there from his bedding area, and you're season might be very short and sweet.

But all that changes when October rolls

around, and you have to switch your tactics to keep on the deer. And then there's November, when savvy whitetail bowhunters know they have to target the does to find the bucks that are never far behind.

And when the rut is over and you've still got a tag in your pocket, you know that food is once again your best tactic to picking off a late-season bruiser.

## From The Field To The Target

I mention this seasonal evolution we all go through afield because taking that mindset to the practice range prior to the season will help you be more prepared than you've ever been. In fact, if you continue to





practice the same exact way during every session, the arrows you shoot could be doing you a lot more harm than good.

Practice doesn't make perfect. Practice creates habits, and they're not always good habits. To avoid brainwashing myself at the archery range, I mix it up ... or I evolve with the season, if you will.

### Think Big Early

During early spring, I like a big target ... or at least one with a big aiming point on it. I spend too much time each winter out hunting coyotes and not enough keeping my bow-shooting for in check, so I'm always rusty and my confidence is generally low during the first month or so of the practice season.

A slightly larger target catches those arrows that don't go exactly where they're supposed to go, and the larger dots give



me confidence as I re-tighten my groups with practice.

Archery is a huge mental game, and if I'm shooting a 6-inch dot and hit it every time at 20 yards, my confidence soars. And on the flip side of that, I might be working the edges of a 2-inch dot early during the practice season, but if I'm not hitting it, I start to get into my own head too much ... and that's never a good thing.

My personal favorite is Rinehart's 18-1 target for this stage because it has two sizes of sides to shoot at, and it has a myriad of dots sizes to pick apart, depending on how my shooting is going that particular day. It's also big enough to catch those flyers, but it's small and light enough to exceptionally portable.







## Going Mobile

During the bulk of the practice season, I like to switch to a throwable target. It seems that most archers I meet at the ranges or archery shops don't use a throwable target, but it makes up the biggest part of my training regimen in preparation for fall hunting.

For starters, a throwable target gives me a different look each and every shot, and that's a very big deal.

I'm convinced—and I've learned the hard

way on multiple occasions—that toeing the line at an archery range, shooting the same dot on the same target arrow after arrow, will brainwash a shooter. Think about it: You might be able to hit a 1-inch dot at 30 yards every single time, but are you training to hit a target, or are you training to kill an animal?

Starting at early July, I keep my bow and a throwable target in the truck nearly all the time, and I get out and use it as much as possible ... even if it's only a few arrows at a time. From shot-to-shot, the target never looks the same and the surroundings never look the same—just like hunting.

## It's Time To Get Real

Once fall hits, say ... the final few weeks before my first hunt of the year, I switch over to a deer target almost exclusively. The GlenDel is a solid target, as are many others, but the Rinehart Anatomy Deer generally receives the majority of my arrows.

Shooting this target not only helps my mind to naturally pick that aiming point on a whitetail, but I can view the internal organ layout on the opposite side of the target and get an anatomically correct “audit” of how I'm doing.

It's also during this stage that I switch to shooting 1-shot groups. I've rarely seen a whitetail stand around and give me an opportunity for a follow-up shot, so I train myself to make every arrow count by shooting only one arrow at a time. When I pair this technique with the Anatomy Deer, it's as close as I can get to make my practice look and feel like the real thing.

## Mastering Maintenance

I have also made the mistake of preparing myself for the archery opener and then not spending enough time maintaining by muscle memory and shooting skills during the season. And those lessons are hard-learned with “should-haves” and “could-haves” and big deer that got away.

As mentioned above, I shoot most of my fall arrows into a deer target, but I also take either a throwable target or my 18-1 with me on every hunt and launch a few arrows before each morning (truck headlights work quite well) and evening sit.

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# FARM COUNTRY WHITTETAILS

**By Jason Mitchell**

So much of the information written or said about whitetail hunting originates from big woods hunting. While there are lessons that can be learned or reapplied wherever deer roam, tactics and strategies can change dramatically as the terrain changes. What makes whitetails such remarkable animals is their adaptableness. What I found as I picked up a bow and pursued whitetails is that many of the concepts and information I absorbed as a beginning bow hunter was irrelevant because wide open farm country creates different challenges. There are a few things I wish somebody would have told me when I first started bow hunting Great Plains whitetails.

Further east where the landscape is much more wooded, the population's densities of deer are much higher. Deer live in a much smaller area and there are more deer per square mile. In many places, eighty acres is plenty of land to hunt deer on but as you get out into much more wide-open terrain, you typically need more land to hunt on as the deer roam so much more and the deer population





densities are much lower. Wide-open fields of cropland are broken up with wood lots; tree rows or slough bottoms that provide cover and the deer that live in this environment have a much larger home range.

Because of the terrain to the east, scouting is often done over foot plots cleared in the woods or using trail cameras on pinch points. Trail cameras are an invaluable scouting tool but in some ways all a camera tells you is that the deer is alive and you might be able to figure out what direction the deer is coming from at what time. There are still a lot of clues missing when it comes to trying to kill a particular deer.

One painful lesson I have learned is that I can never assume anything with deer in regards to where they are bedding or the route they are taking from point a to point b. I guess wrong ninety percent of the time. Now I have gotten into the habit of using cameras to scout and finding a specific deer and I also use a camera to monitor a specific spot when I get ready to hunt but the information I can gather from scouting with optics is really how I can put a solid plan together.

When I was younger and more inexperienced, a common mistake I made was assume a bedding area or travel route just from the Intel gathered from trail cameras and unintentionally hunting with wrong or compromised winds. Now I am a lot more methodical and patient. I don't move in on a deer until I know enough details and I bide my time until the wind is right and I can get in without any detection. A gamble I sometimes struggle with is whether I can get out or get winded by deer after they pass my location so there are times when there are high risk high reward situations where you have one good chance to kill a particular deer but if you don't kill that deer that night, you compromise the spot. When I am in doubt, I sit on a hill and scout. There are many challenges to hunting this wide-open terrain but





one advantage more hunters should capitalize on is to rely less on trail cameras and more on a spotting scope.

What is fascinating especially during the early half of the season is how much these bedding areas get influenced by bugs like gnats and mosquitoes. Much of the heavier cover is around water or is wet. An example would be a slough bottom or drainage. The cover can be really thick and look good but if the bugs are bad, deer will often bed up higher where the wind can blow through. Fascinating how deer have different personalities and preferences. Some specific bucks will prefer to bed in standing corn for example when it is really hot. Other bucks seem to be more sensitive when their antlers are in velvet and seem to stay away from anything that touches their antlers. These preferred bedding areas can change or shift through the season.

Food sources can also change but you really can't go wrong focusing on soybean fields if they are available at least until the leaves yellow. Small grains and crops that flower like canola can also get hit. Corn is sometimes used as a bedding area early in the season but what becomes really interesting is the travel routes deer choose. How deer move from point a to point b can be somewhat predictable in that they always take the path of least resistance and they like to feel hidden. Ravines or dips that hide deer in the terrain or edges that create easy walking are often the preferred route.

One thing I have found when checking trail cameras is that if I check the cameras too often and create a trail to my camera, I can actually disrupt the route I want the deer to travel because they begin to follow my route to the camera. This can create a few challenges when planning a fast and quiet route in and out of your stand or blind. If you make a trail, remember that deer will also begin to follow that trail. Because of the wide openness of this terrain, we do get our share of wind so the best thing I have found for getting into location is to go in during the middle of the day and use the wind to cover my noise and



stay away from the easiest route. Picking through heavier cover or taller vegetation without breaking or beating down the vegetation to form a trail has been my most effective strategy.

The age-old challenge of harvesting a mature buck is catching a deer on its feet during daylight or shooting time. The further you are away from where a buck beds, the later the pics are going to be. When I first started bow hunting, I would get pictures of impressive bucks on camera at night and hope that if I hunted that location long enough I would get a chance during the day. Far shot and the more you hunt a spot the worst it gets. What also happened was that I would get daytime shots of a buck during the summer scouting and then as the summer progressed, the deer would become “nocturnal.”

I don't believe that anymore. These deer that tease you in the summer and become nocturnal aren't changing their time line, they changed their bedding locations and one of the reasons deer often shift where they bed is human activity. If you want to make that deer go “nocturnal,” check the trail camera often and make your presence known. The deer still moves before dark but now instead of bedding one hundred yards away, he is now three hundred yards away or a mile away. This is why the spotting scope is so invaluable when scouting.

Mature bucks are self aware enough to know and detect human intrusion so the key to killing a deer in my mind is to hide your presence. With that being said, disguise your presence with farming and ranching activity. The worst thing to do in my mind is to try sneaking in and out on foot. If you do, spray down and wear rubber boots. What works best however is a loud obvious vehicle. Don't try to hide or be sneaky if you have to mow a shooting lane or check a trail camera. Drive up if you can and drive out. The less your feet touch the ground the better. The reality is that there are people spraying crops all summer. There are people driving ATVs checking fence, there is a certain amount of human

activity that deer get used to.



Remember that the landscape goes through changes. Don't over think the deer about clearing a shooting lane or trimming branches. Somebody could drive right by your stand with round bale hayer and deer will be walking by the bales the next day. Deer know what tractors are. If you try to sneak around too much, you smell



different and offer an intrusion that the deer aren't used to. Become more obvious and use a vehicle whenever possible. With that being said, I like to drive as slowly and as quietly as possible in areas that are really secluded and I always like to do my work in regard to setting up blinds or checking cameras in the middle of the day. Wind or rain makes the intrusion even more hidden.

The biggest challenge of this open terrain is the lack of trees. I hunt out of a tree stand whenever I can because there are many advantages. Good field of view, great for watching around you so that if you are in the wrong spot, you gather additional Intel as you sit and watch. Good for blowing your scent away from the area. Movement is out of the line of sight. With that being said, good luck finding the right tree in the right spot. So often, I have to rely on ground blinds.

The versatility of ground blinds makes them a valuable tool for farm country whitetails. Don't worry about hiding it or trying to make it blend in, just put it exactly where it needs to be to kill a deer. The deer see it and after passing the smell test, they determine that it is just another bale or anhydrous tank. I often leave ground blinds out for long periods of time so for that reason I like to use the heavier duty Clam Elite Hunter Blind.

This terrain creates some challenges but also offers advantages. There are great deer available in these habitats and while whitetails will always offer ample doses of humility, these deer can also be figured out with the right strategies.

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# From Hunting Whitetails To Elk

By Randy Newberg

**I was first a whitetail hunter. I took my North Woods knowledge and tried to apply it to elk. It turned out to be a blessing and a curse.**

For seven years after I moved to Montana, I hunted elk like a man possessed. My freezer was like a gleaming white coffin for my dreams of that first bull. How could someone so committed to elk hunting, in the most fit years of his life with a lifetime of hunting experience, struggle so mightily to find even one wapiti with the mandatory 4-inch brow tine?

After a frenzied search for the key to elk success, I grew frustrated. I abandoned my quest for elk and returned to hunting whitetails so I could fill my freezer. I knew whitetail hunting. I grew up hunting them in the North Woods of Minnesota.

Even out here in this vastly different landscape, it was intuitive. Nice bucks seemed to find their way to my bullets. So why not elk?

In an effort to understand why I excelled at whitetail hunting and failed to connect with elk, I wrote down everything I did right to make me a successful whitetail hunter, to see if it would show me







the path to bull elk. Surprisingly it did. I realized that while I was studying the best strategies and equipment, I had passed over the fundamentals of elk themselves. What they eat, where they seek shelter, how they react to pressure from predators, and where they go when the seasons and weather starts changing.



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I had learned all this stuff about whitetails and walleye intuitively because I grew up chasing them. I understood their seasonal needs and patterns. Knowing the preferences and tendencies of mature bucks, I didn't spend a lot of time thinking about the latest call or rattling technique or scent cover. But I did spend time sitting motionless in the places where those bucks were most likely to be. Unfortunately, when it came to elk, I didn't have a clue.

After experiencing this epiphany, I spent the whole rest of the summer reading. Elk behavior and habits are not common topics in today's hunting books, even rarer in hunting magazines. Instead, they focus overwhelmingly on tricks and tools. So I turned to books of biology. Elk Country, by Valerius Geist, was a great asset, and Elk and Elk Hunting by Hart Wixom had more good information than I could absorb. A lot of fine articles on elk biology and elk behavior have also appeared in the pages of Bugle, the magazine of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF).

I began to realize that elk, like all animals, have specific needs based on the time of the year, and those needs affect their behavior. Feed, cover, and water are always on the needs list, with mating being a seasonal attraction that affected the previous three.

By the time opening morning rolled around on my seventh elk season in Montana, I was filled with anticipation, but also something new: confidence. My research told me that late-October bulls were going to be in post-rut mode, holed-up in tough spots where hunters did not want to go, where water and even marginal food could be found. Having identified such places on my maps (this was





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before Google Earth), I plotted my path. I would go where the elk wanted to be, at the time of year they wanted to be there, in terrain most hunters avoided.

I slept in my truck at the trailhead, and an hour-long climb in the darkness got me where I needed to be. By 10 a.m. on the very first day of

the very next season, I shot my first bull. With only five slender points on the largest beam, his rack still hangs in my shop as one of my greatest hunting accomplishments. Not because I killed a bull, but because I overcame what I had convinced myself was impossible.

Now, more than a decade later, I produce a hunting TV show called Fresh Tracks. All hunts take place on land open to you and me, without the helpful assistance of guides, and the great majority of the hunts are in country I have never hunted. When we go to film an elk hunt, we need to quickly sort out what those elk are doing and where they're doing it. Only then do we worry about what tactics and tools to use.

### How Whitetails Brainwashed Me

- Whitetail routines and habitual patterns are predictable—not elk
- Whitetail hunters can hunker down and wait for deer on small parcels of land—not elk
- It's often a 30-minute or less hike to whitetail hunting grounds—not elk





- Whitetail hunting terrain is generally easy to manage—elk terrain is not
- Dragging out a whitetail buck is easy—packing out an elk is not

To date, all but one bull has required game bags and a backpack. I have since invested in a great pack and the basic gear to convert a bull into manageable pieces. But my best equipment is the confidence that a middle-aged guy like me can handle the quartering and hauling process. No it is isn't easy, but it's plenty doable.

### How Whitetails Prepared Me

- Meandering whitetail tracks in fresh snow told me deer were ready to bed down—same for elk
- You have to be sneaky to get close to a whitetail—same for elk
- You must work with the wind to approach a whitetail—same for elk

Hunting whitetails has taught me many tactics that work on elk. There is no other hunting I can think of that better prepares one for elk hunting than still-hunting and tracking bucks in the North Woods. Little did I know that what I learned there in the spruce swamps would help me kill bull elk on a consistent basis once I finally went where they lived. Those swamp bucks had already taught me how to get on a track and follow it quietly and patiently, constantly scanning ahead.

My point to all this is—don't be afraid to study, adapt and learn. Sure you'll make mistakes. But that is part of the fun. Progress is not just learning what worked and why, but what didn't work and why not. Any whitetail hunter can become a successful elk hunter. Just start by learning all you can about the



animal. That will tell you where to find them. Once you find them, use that elk knowledge to sort out the best strategy. Biology may not be glamorous, but really knowing your prey is deeply fulfilling. It has a way of filling your freezer, too.

Find more information about elk hunting and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation at <http://www.rmef.org>.

Randy Newberg is an RMEF board member and host of Fresh Tracks, a TV show about self-guided hunting on public lands, airing on Sportsman Channel.







# Seaduck Hunting in New England

By Ty Leger  
Kettlebottom Crew Member

The Eastern seaboard of the United States is home to a variety of ducks that are highly specialized to thrive in the marine environment, known collectively as Seaducks. Migrating along the coast, following preferred temperatures and food availability, hunts can offer fast action and dazzling scenery during a time of year most hunters are in their Deer stands and fishermen are hibernating until the Spring season. While there are a variety of habitats, food sources, and daily patterns that the varied species utilize there are also enough similarities to ensure a day on the water will lead to a safe, successful hunt. Any waterfowl hunt should begin with scouting. Whether targeting Geese, Ducks, or Seaducks good scouting can make all the difference. Many Seaduck species, including King and Common Eider, primarily feed on mussels and are able to dive to upwards of 70 feet. Others, including Long-tailed Ducks (often called Old Squaw) and Scoter, rely more heavily on crustaceans, mollusks, and small fish. No matter what the food source, however, Seaducks tend to be creatures of habit, settling into



a specific roosting area and feeding area to which they return like clockwork until it's time to move on. Armed with a good pair of binoculars scouting should begin a couple weeks before the season opens and ideally should be done several times daily, giving the hunter a good, solid understanding of daily bird movement. Time of day is often less important than wind direction and tide stage so these environmental factors must be factored in to form a plan.

Once a location is selected there are several considerations for a Seaduck hunter before the hunt can begin. Seasons in most New England states run through the coldest part of the year, from October through late January. Air temperatures comfortable on land can feel drastically different on the water and layering up for the worst is advisable. High-tech waterproof outer layers, insulated waders, wool socks and hat, waterfowler's gloves, and chemical hand and foot warmers can be lifesavers once faced with open waters. There is a distinct possibility of becoming wet, whether by spray, weather, or submersion, so extra layers, preferably in a waterproof container, is a very smart thing to have on hand. The ocean temperatures during the season can be absolutely frigid, especially during the latter part of the season. When water temperatures approach freezing even the strongest swimmer will only last a



few minutes before hypothermia quickly leads to death. Weather can be volatile as well, with prevailing North winds blowing nasty weather systems through frequently. While it's true that approaching fronts usually gets birds moving there is a fine line between a safe hunt and one that can easily turn to tragedy. Personal floatation devices will increase odds of survival tremendously, even if

hunting from shore, and self-inflating devices such as SoSpenders can be worn without adding bulk and throwing off your aim. For shore-based hunts another huge consideration is how steep and slippery the shoreline will be, especially at low tide when black, algae covered rocks can be incredibly slick. Spike-equipped wading boots or slip-on crampons, such as Yak Tracks or Corkers, are essential. Even under perfect conditions it is incredibly important to keep tabs on possible weather and wind conditions that may develop and to plan heavily for safety. Whether hunting from land or at sea safety should drive each and every decision.

Once the weather cooperates and birds have revealed their patterns a hunt can be planned in earnest. Seaducks tend to be large and very tough to take down so a 12 or even 10 gauge is definitely not overkill



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and 3 ½ inch magnum loads are commonly used. Shot must be non-toxic in most locations and should be selected for maximum knockdown power, both to limit cripples and to allow shorter retrieves. BB shot is a great choice and any shot smaller than 2 should be avoided. With speeds that can exceed 70 miles per hour and the ability to shake off shots that would put any other bird down it is always a good idea to bring extra shells. The good news is that their poor eyesight and tendency to decoy very well usually leads to short-distance shots.

Decoy selection is also less important than with puddle ducks or Geese because of their poor vision and less hunting pressure. Solid foam-bodied decoys, made with Styrofoam or similar closed-cell foam, are common because Seaducks tend to fly very low to the water and will most often try to land right in the spread, leading to collateral damage among the decoys. Other alternatives that are all but free include buoy-shaped Styrofoam or used Chlorox bottles decorated with black accents. In general decoys are deployed using an anchor and a gang line containing 6 to 12 decoys in line, each attached to loops in the gang line by a clip attached to the decoy by about 3 feet of line. If hunting from shore, however, make sure to keep an eye on tidal stage to avoid setting a spread on a rising tide and being unable to retrieve the decoys after the hunt. With several of these gang lines out it is possible to very quickly create a large spread with relatively little effort. Flagging passing birds, often with a white rag or plastic bag, can be very effective to get their attention and turn them toward a spread. Once committed to a spread they rarely deviate and will often aim to land amongst the decoys.



Retrieving downed birds is not as straightforward as with other waterfowl due to the extreme cold and challenging environmental factors. If using a dog there should be a sheltered place to rest, out of the wind and insulated from the ground if possible. The dog should also be fitted with a good vest, offering



some thermal protection and extra floatation. It is also extremely important that the dog heed commands very well because wind and currents can easily take a bird further than it can be safely retrieved and it is imperative that the dog can be called off such a retrieve. In addition there is often wave action to contend with and a dog should only be sent when sea state allows. With cold comes increased risks for exhaustion and hypothermia and it is important to closely monitor a dog for signs of stress. A dog may be eager to go but may not understand its limitations and it is up to the hunter to maintain a watch and closely look after its welfare. If not hunting over a dog these same factors come into play and retrieves should only be attempted when danger is minimal. Environmental factors that could present a challenge must be taken very seriously and safety should take precedence when making

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any decision.

As table fare Seaducks are a challenge. They tend to be very gamey and fishy but can be made into excellent sausage, jerky, or chili. An overnight soak in milk can drastically improve the flavor but heavy spicing and creative recipes are usually still necessary. When mixed with equal portions of pork, bacon, or beef fat and run through a meat grinder the result can be substituted for ground beef in a variety of meals but care must be taken to attempt to mask the undesirable flavors. While certainly not inedible it can be a challenge to prepare.

New England's shores host an incredible array and huge numbers of Seaducks, allowing opportunities to bird watch or conduct hunts unique to our region. Hunting Seaducks can offer some of the best, fastest-paced waterfowl hunting in the world. Rafts of hundreds of ducks is common and they tend to decoy very well, often spotting and committing to a spread from great distances. Careful scouting, cooperation in weather, and planning for safety can lead to some of the best hunting New England has to offer.





# A DATE WITH A FRIEND

*By O'Neill Williams*

*"O'Neill Outside"*

I held the thermos cup with both hands trying to warm up a bit. The steam zipped over the rim and vanished in the dry air. 22 degrees! The trees were bare and bony and the tops whipped back and forth in the wind against a steel gray sky. I knew it wasn't a good idea to drink coffee from the stand, but I was freezing. The so-called sub-zero boots evidently had miscalculated the temperature. By now my ears were crimson, chin numb and eyes watery. What a day and not a deer in sight.

It's December at 6:15 pm and I could be home with Gail eating country-fried steak

with mashed potatoes, some fried Okra, a big glass of iced tea and golden biscuits covered with butter and gravy. Fresh Lemon pie would follow. Instead, I'm sitting on a crude stool in an old homemade wooden stand with a weathered canvas top. My back is to the wind and I'm vainly looking for the buck I've glimpsed on three other occasions. He's a prize. I've seen him only fleetingly; a rack held high above the brush, a rump disappearing in the darkness, the thick body quickly crossing a firebreak.

A grizzled old doe walks underneath me and nervously munches on what's left of the clover and wheat stems. I perk up a bit but remain still and silent. After a few moments she drifts up to stare directly at me, eye to eye. So much for the scent shield I liberally sprayed around.

I heard nothing, but her head snaps around and ears cup forward. She's heard or smelled something in the clear cut up the hill. In my frozen state, without movement, she dismissed me as being no threat. She stepped forward, raised her slender neck and sampled the air. I looked in the same direction trying to detect an antler or tail or leg, some motion. Was my buck there? The doe knew. I didn't.

After a long frozen moment, she quick-stepped into a thick patch of oak saplings off to the right and vanished. To be a herding animal, Whitetail surely do spend a lot of time alone.

Nothing! Thirty minutes later, a bitterly cold darkness enveloped my surroundings and I stiffly climbed down. Getting colder by the minute. At about 200 yards, my yellow beam of light picked up the heavy





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prints. There in the muddy roadway, my buck had crossed. The huge tracks said he'd stopped and stood there. Was he looking at me? But I had scanned so hard for him. How could he have avoided my watchful pose?

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Oh, well, hopefully he's still near the hillside and without a single thought of me, he's visiting the scrape lines he made in the leaves from under the overhanging limbs and marking his territory, with his heavy antlers, he's rubbing the small trunks bare along the paths and, as the temperatures drift downward with the falling leaves, he'll sometimes look to the edge of the small clearing for movement. Someday soon, in the waning light of an early winter afternoon, he may see an old friend. I'll be waiting and appreciating him and his talent for staying alive.









# STUMP SITTING VS. TRACKING

*When it comes to the pursuit of whitetails, every hunter has a favorite strategy. Each camp extols the benefits of its own approach – and wonders how other hunters could possibly want to do it any other way.*

**IN THIS ARTICLE, TWO VETERAN DEER HUNTERS DEFEND THEIR TURF.**

**BY TOM FLYNN AND MARK BEAUCHESNE  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY WILL STAATS**

Tagree on. But be perfectly clear – whatever style of deer hunting you choose, if you stick to your guns, you will succeed.

Over the last 30-plus years of hunting, I've tried many different tactics in the pursuit of the whitetail deer. At this particular stage in my hunting career, I'm sold on a tactic that has brought me great success. Though maybe not for everyone, if patience is one of your stronger traits, this is the technique for you!

The method to is what some in the hunting community refer to as "stump sitting." Though the term is familiar, I typically don't like the feel of a hard stump with no back rest! Whether I'm in a tree stand or on the ground, I like to lean against a large tree that gives me a comfortable spot in order to make it easier on my body and mind to sit from dusk to dark in the same spot. Yes, that's what I said,

## **DUSK TO DARK!**

Did I mention that this could mean staying in that same spot for several days? Some of my hunting buddies think I'm absolutely crazy to sit in one spot all day, but I say when it's not broke, don't fix it. Since adopting this new style of hunting 12 years ago, I've tagged a deer 11 out of those twelve years! So for those naysayers out there, don't knock it till







you try it. Those trackers may be covering a lot of ground, but are they bringing home the venison?

Now let's get to the nitty gritty of it all. How the heck can you sit that long without getting bored? How do you keep from going stir crazy? How do you keep comfortable? And most important, what do you do when nature calls? These are all great questions, so let's see if I can answer them.

The first one is a no-brainer for me; any time I'm in the woods is comparable to waking up on Christmas morning as a young kid! Bored? Never! I've found that when sitting still in one spot for such long periods of time, you actually become part of the landscape. This has meant making friends with some not-so-common critters over the years. I've had five years now of sharing my peanut butter and jelly sandwich with a family of field mice that live in the stone wall near my ground stand. There have been many occasions when the local owl or hawk made

frequent visits to check out the subtle movements they saw from a distance along the stone wall, only to be disappointed that it was me and not their next meal. I actually think the mice are using me as a bodyguard!

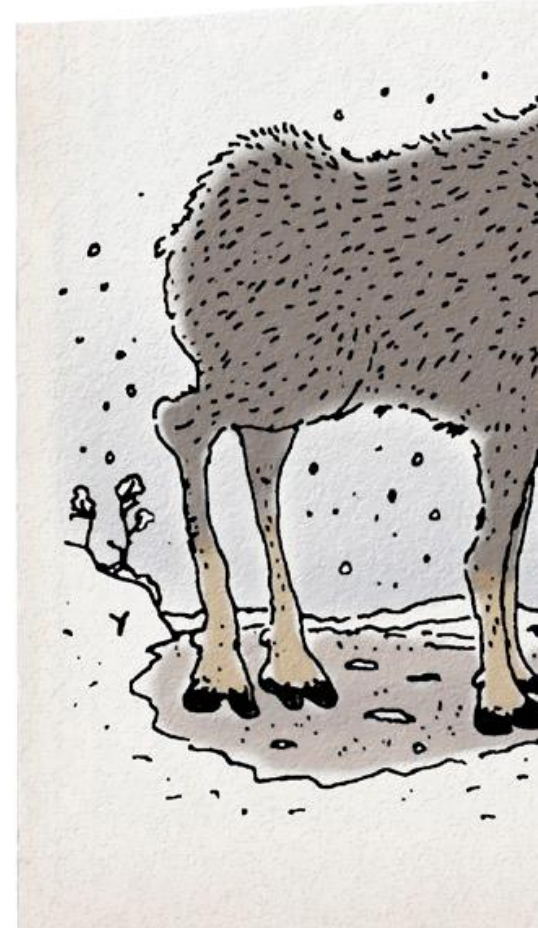
Keeping comfortable while "stump sitting" is definitely not an issue, as I pack in a nicely padded cushion and plenty of warm layers of clothing for when the temperature fluctuates throughout the day. I also bring enough food and water to feed a family for a week! I'm thinking stump sitters may have invented the term "comfort food." To be honest, there have been a few times where I've actually gotten so comfortable that I fell asleep for what seemed like an eternity. I literally had to take a moment to gather my bearings when I woke up. Meanwhile, those diehard trackers are beating their way through thickets and swamps as the deer circle behind them, snickering.

And as for the final question, let me just say to all you hunters who take the human scent issue over-board...when nature calls, I answer. If everything you read about needing to be in a scent free area were true, I would never shoot a deer!

So if you've never tried it, give stump sitting a whirl. Scout out a promising spot where you've seen sign, and station yourself there this season. I promise if you are patient and persistent, your chances are pretty good of putting venison in the freezer!

## TRACKING IS REAL HUNTING

My introduction to deer hunting came from my father, grandfather and uncle. All three men were walkers, trackers and stalkers. The woods we hunt are vast and wild. This is big country, so you're not going to sit and wait if you want to see game. You have to get on the move and track that game down. For me, sitting around all day bored out of my mind while





freezing off body parts just doesn't appeal.

Getting to put some miles on and see the woods— now that's my kind of hunting.

Tracking deer in the North Country brings many challenges, especially the weather. During one snowy November hunt, I was making my way up an old skidder trail. The snow in places was thigh high. With the snow still falling at a good clip, I pressed on. The snow makes things so quiet in the woods. If I were a stump sitter, the snow would have probably covered me up. I was nearing the top of the trail when just a few feet in front of me, the snow suddenly rose up six feet high! It took a moment for me to register what I was seeing, as a moose shook the snow off and trotted off up the hill. You're not likely to have those kinds of encounters while just sitting around on a stand.



Unlike the stump sitters, my style of hunting has one goal – to cover ground. The idea of spending the day sitting in one spot staring at the same piece of woods doesn't excite me in the least. Often a day of hunting will take me several miles from camp.

Besides the obvious equipment, I won't go into the woods without my trusty knee-high rubber boots. You could say it's all about the boots. They allow me to go right through just about any conditions I might encounter. They're completely waterproof, of course. But only to the top of the boot.

That's a factor because New Hampshire's woods are filled with terrain challenges, none more formidable than the famous "moose muck." I never saw it coming. I was sneaking along when the ground beneath me swallowed up my leg right up to my knee.

Now I am totally stuck. Pulling one foot out without getting the other buried any deeper is a tricky thing. As I yank, my foot comes loose from my boot, pulling my sock off at the same time. I'm forced to flop over on my side. My boot is now barely visible in the muck. As I reach to free my boot, it occurs to me that I'm





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going to have to roll through the mud to escape.

Finally free from the bottomless muck, I make my way to an area where I have seen deer and deer sign in the past. Once I get within a half mile, I slow down so I'm barely moving. The wind is in my favor as I enter the bowl, my steps so slow it's almost painful. I pause to look and listen. I have been so stealthy that the white-footed mouse at my feet pays no attention to me. In fact, the mouse scrambles onto my boot. Does the mouse know I'm there? I get my answer as we make eye contact. That was cool!

I have been in the bowl for about an hour and walked just 200 yards along the swamp. As I slowly step over a fallen log, I freeze as a brown figure emerges from the trees. She hasn't seen me; she can't smell me. If I move, she'll bust me for sure.

The doe is less than 30 yards away, eating and moving through a hilly area covered in brush. I wait for her to continue feeding before I move a muscle. Finally, I slowly plant myself onto the log I just stepped over. She still has no clue I'm there. I sit for a while and watch her. Minutes pass as she feeds and walks. My heart rate gradually returns to normal.

When I can just see her backside, the outline of a second deer catches my eye. All I can see through the brush is its body. This deer has sneaked in from the other side of the small hill. The two deer close the distance to each other – and me. Now both are moving beside me. I strain to get a better view, and then all I see is the light reflecting off a huge rack. That's all I can see – he's 30 yards away, and the brush is block-ing my view. Then it happens...the sound of a deer snorting. When you hear a deer "blow" at close range, your adrenaline goes through the roof. One of the deer stomps its hoof, trying to get me to move. I don't move, and the deer trot off up the brushy hillside. I better get going – stump sitting in this spot would only result in a much-needed nap! I waste no time – there's still more of these big woods for me to hunt.





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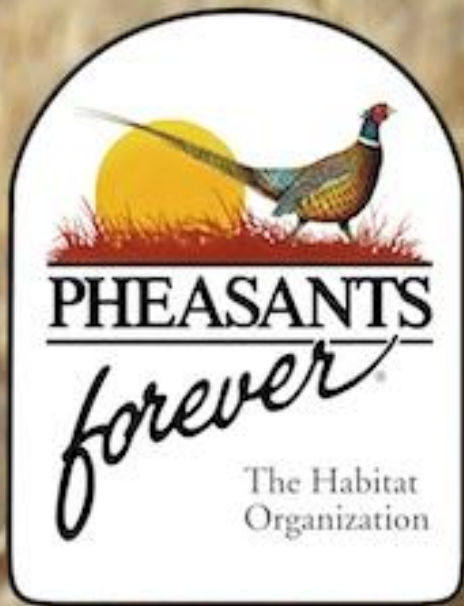
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# 2015 PHEASANT HUNTING FORECAST

Quality habitat is needed to sustain truly abundant, wild pheasant populations. But from year to year, pheasants live or die with the weather.

Fortunately, many pheasant strongholds in the northern and central plains and the upper Midwest dodged horrendous winter storms and bitter cold. Some western states found relief from a savage drought. Wildlife managers in many states, such as South Dakota, Iowa, Minnesota, Colorado, Kansas, and Nebraska, are reporting that pheasant numbers are up significantly from last year and predicting much better pheasant hunting. Just how much? Read our comprehensive state-by-state Pheasant Hunting Forecast to find out.

Good luck in the field this fall. If you're not yet engaged in the cause for conservation, help us continue the fight and become a Pheasants Forever member today.





## **CALIFORNIA—STILL DREAMIN' OF MORE RAIN**

Forecast: It's no secret California is experiencing one of its worst droughts on record. The extreme weather has had its effect on pheasants—and not for the better.

"Pheasant populations and production are spotty this year because of drought and water availability," says Scott Gardner, senior environmental scientist for the upland game unit of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. "The northern part of the state, Klamath Basin, is probably the best in the state. The Central Valley is pretty poor. The Imperial Valley does have some birds, but mostly on private lands." Go to the full Pheasant Forecast at this link: <http://goo.gl/i7525g>

## **COLORADO—BIRDS RESPOND TO END OF DROUGHT**

Forecast: Colorado pheasants—and hunters—are catching a break after a long drought. A wetter year has meant more abundant habitat for birds.

"Our crowing counts increased about 60 percent in our core area—a pretty healthy jump," says Ed Gorman, small game manager for Colorado Parks and Wildlife. Admittedly, that's a 60 percent improvement over some pretty low numbers because of a drought that began in 2012. "But it's still a significant increase from last year to this year," he says. "It's slightly above the long-term average." Go



to the full Pheasant Forecast at this link: <http://goo.gl/i7525g>

## **IDAHO—WITH MILD WEATHER, PHEASANTS HOLD STEADY**

Forecast: Depending on the region, Idaho pheasant hunting looks to be either holding its own this year, or improving for 2015. Winter was generally mild and timely rain made for good brood-rearing.

“This year should be similar to last year,” says Jeff Knetter, upland game and waterfowl staff biologist for the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. “Primarily, the best hunting is found on private lands.” The highest pheasant harvest typically occurs in the Southwest, Magic Valley, and Southeast regions. Go to the full Pheasant Forecast at this link: <http://goo.gl/i7525g>



## **ILLINOIS—HARD WINTER, WET SPRING HURT PHEASANTS**

Forecast: A hard winter and wet June pretty much obliterated any gains pheasants might have made during a good nesting season in 2014. For that reason, according to upland bird surveys conducted in June and July, the 2015 hunting season will probably be no better than last year’s—and perhaps a bit worse.

“In areas with good habitat, anecdotal reports and some current research show that birds were able to nest successfully despite the rainy weather,” says Stan McTaggart, agriculture and grassland program manager for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. “Areas with marginal habitat will likely see any gains made in 2014 slip away.” Go to the full Pheasant Forecast at this link: <http://goo.gl/i7525g>

## **INDIANA—POOR WEATHER SUPPRESSES BIRD NUMBERS**

Forecast: Weather has continued to hit Indiana pheasants hard. “Poor weather—either bitter cold, snow and ice in winter, or heavy rains in spring and summer—has been the biggest factor in holding down pheasant numbers in recent years,” says Budd Veverka, farmland game research biologist for the Indiana Division of Fish and Wildlife.

“In 2015, we had the wettest June on record and the fourth wettest July on record—not real great for nesting.” The effects of weather were exacerbated by a loss of grassland to agriculture and succession to woodlands.





“We saw a bounce back in our spring crowing counts from 2014, but they didn’t return to 2013 levels. Production is likely down this summer, which could lead to another season with record low harvests,” he says. “We saw our worst declines in Tippecanoe and Montgomery counties, and again had zero

birds along routes in St. Joseph and Porter counties,” he says. Go to the full Pheasant Forecast at this link: <http://goo.gl/i7525g>

## **IOWA—PHEASANT NUMBERS JUMP SECOND YEAR RUNNING**

Forecast: Iowa’s roadside count showed the second straight year of increasing pheasant numbers. The statewide index of 24 birds per route represented a 37 percent increase over last year and a 260 percent increase over the all-time low set in 2013. The highest concentration of birds occurred in the northwest.

“Several favorable winters have helped us recover bird numbers statewide,” says Todd Bogenschutz, upland game biologist and farmland coordinator for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. “The pheasant index in the northwest, central, and southeast regions is at or above the long-term average. So where pheasant habitat is available, hunting should be pretty good in these regions. Counts improved in most other regions, and hunting should be better than last year. But the number of birds will be less than the long-term average.” Go to the full Pheasant Forecast at this link: <http://goo.gl/i7525g>

## **KANSAS—MORE RAIN MEANS MORE BIRDS**

Forecast: Severe drought pushed Kansas pheasant numbers to record lows in recent years. The return of rain in 2014 and 2015 has helped restore cover, food crops, and insects (though rainfall in eastern regions was too heavy and hurt brood survival). Statewide, summer brood counts are 51 percent higher than in 2014.

With more birds, hunting should be better than last year. But recovery from the drought will require more time. This year’s harvest will probably remain below average, according to Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism. Go to the full Pheasant Forecast at this link: <http://goo.gl/i7525g>





## **MICHIGAN—LARGE BROODS POINT TO BETTER HUNTING**

Forecast: Field reports of crowing roosters and large broods this summer suggest pheasant numbers will be at least as high this fall as last year.

Weather during the nesting and brood rearing period has been good, without excessive cold and rain. This mild weather also produced an abundance of insects, which are an important food source for pheasant chicks.





Results of the hunter cooperator survey, spring breeding surveys and the mail harvest survey should be compiled and available later this year on the Michigan Department of Natural Resources website. Go to the full Pheasant Forecast at this link: <http://goo.gl/i7525g>

### **MINNESOTA—GOOD WEATHER BOOSTS BIRDS A THIRD**

Forecast: “The mild winter and good nesting season conditions helped give our pheasant population a boost this year, which should mean a good fall hunting season in many areas,” reports Nicole Davros, upland game project leader for the Department of Natural Resources. “The southwest, west-central, and east-central regions had the highest roadside indices, and hunters should have the best luck in those regions.”

According to Minnesota’s August roadside survey, the range-wide pheasant index was 33 percent higher than last year.

The roadside index showed the biggest increases in the southeast (138 percent) and east-central (126 percent). The southwest (23 percent), west-central (31 percent), and central (44 percent) regions also showed significant increases. The south-central region (-2 percent) remained similar to 2014. The best opportunity for hunting appears to be in the southwest, west-central, and east-central regions, where birds are most plentiful. Go to the full Pheasant Forecast at this link: <http://goo.gl/i7525g>

### **MISSOURI—PHEASANTS ARE UP, BUT STILL NOT PLENTIFUL**

Forecast: Missouri’s pheasant numbers are up 34 percent compared to last year, according to the roadside survey by the state Department of Conservation. That puts the population 65 percent above the five-year average, but still 36 percent below the 10-year average. “Numbers were up, but not a lot,” says Beth Emmerich, agricultural wildlife ecologist for the department. “In areas where we have them, people have been telling me they have been seeing more pheasants and quail this year.”

Despite the upward bump, hunters won’t mistake Missouri for South Dakota anytime soon. Missouri’s





pheasants have struggled for reasons mostly unknown, despite efforts to reinvigorate the population. Pheasants are largely limited to the northern tier of counties. “Pockets that support good pheasant numbers are found where there is suitable habitat for them,” says Emmerich. “Northwest Missouri is kind of the stronghold for them.” Go to the full Pheasant Forecast at this link: <http://goo.gl/i7525g>

## **MONTANA—PHEASANTS HOLD STEADY FOR 2015**

Forecast: Despite a loss of CRP acreage across the northern tier of the state, hunters should expect a good—not great—season this year, says John Vore, the game management bureau chief for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

Region 6 in the northeast provides much of Montana’s best pheasant habitat. There, says Ryan Williamson, region 6 upland game bird biologist, “pheasant crow count numbers have declined by about 11 percent from the 2014 survey period.” But the reality of the season may be better than that lackluster assessment. “Although we did see a slight decrease in 2015 from 2014, pheasants across the region are still 14 percent above the 10-year average. We have been hearing positive reports about the



number of broods observed this year on the roads as well as in the wheat fields being harvested,” says Williamson. Go to the full Pheasant Forecast at this link: <http://goo.gl/i7525g>

## **NEBRASKA—PHEASANTS RESPOND TO FAVORABLE RAINS**

Forecast: A mild winter and timely—but not excessive—spring rains have created ideal conditions for pheasants in Nebraska. Results from the July rural mail carrier survey show that pheasant numbers are up significantly in all regions of the state compared with last year. Statewide pheasant numbers increased 55 percent, according to the survey.

Best hunting will probably be found in the southwest region, which showed an 83 percent improvement over last year. Top counties, based on the survey and staff observations, were Hitchcock, Perkins, Furnas, Hayes, and Frontier. Go to the full Pheasant Forecast at this link: <http://goo.gl/i7525g>



## **NEW JERSEY—WILD BIRDS PERSIST IN LOW NUMBERS**

Forecast: Up to perhaps 2,000 wild pheasants make up New Jersey’s fall harvest. “We have some self-sustaining populations in the Meadowlands area (northeastern portion of the state), and I suspect there are also wild birds along the Delaware River south of Trenton in various

industrial park areas where hunter access is limited,” says Andrew Burnett, principal biologist for the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife. “As far as wild birds are concerned, I would classify the entire state as ‘poor.’”

Most of New Jersey’s pheasant hunting depends on the release of pen-raised birds on state wildlife management areas in the days preceding the hunting opener. This year, the state will stock 50,000 pheasants on two dozen WMAs. Hunters can view the pheasant and quail stocking schedule on the division’s website. Go to the full Pheasant Forecast at this link: <http://goo.gl/i7525g>

## **NEW YORK: HARD WINTER, WET SUMMER HURT WILD BIRDS**

Forecast: New York’s wild pheasants live mostly in the Lake Plains area of western New York (south of



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Lakes Erie and Ontario, and north of the Finger Lakes). Unfortunately, the region was hammered by winter snows and early summer rains.

“We had a tough winter going into a tough nesting season,” says Michael Schiavone, wildlife biologist for the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. “Those two things combined resulted in farmers seeing fewer birds in the Lake Plains than they had the previous year.”

The number of broods observed by cooperating farmers in the area was a fraction of the number last year—0.09 broods compared with 0.4 broods in 2014 and 0.3 broods on average over the last five years. Go to the full Pheasant Forecast at this link: <http://goo.gl/i7525g>

### **NORTH DAKOTA—PHEASANTS RESPOND TO FAVORABLE WEATHER**

Forecast: With favorable spring weather last year and a mild winter, North Dakota’s pheasants are more plentiful. Roosters were 10 percent more abundant according to spring crowing counts, says Stan Kohn, upland game management supervisor. Increases ranged from about 2 to 12 percent in the primary regions holding pheasants.

“A much improved production year for pheasants in spring 2014, coupled with the mild winter, produced a healthy breeding population this spring,” Kohn said. “This spring’s weather hasn’t been ideal, but I don’t think it has been a cause for major concern yet either.” Go to the full Pheasant Forecast at this link: <http://goo.gl/i7525g>

### **OHIO—HEAVY RAINS MAY HAVE AFFECTED PHEASANT NESTING**

Forecast: Ohio’s 2015 roadside crow count results aren’t yet finalized, so the forecast for the upcoming season remains a bit of a guessing game.

Mark Wiley, wildlife biologist at the Olentangy Wildlife Research Station isn’t entirely optimistic. “I expect to hear mixed reports from pheasant hunters during the 2015–16 season,” he says. “Regional pheasant populations may be up or down dependent on local habitat changes and reproductive success. Many areas of the state had heavy rains and flooding in June. The effect of these rains on regional pheasant reproduction is largely unknown at this point.”





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### **OKLAHOMA—PHEASANTS EMERGE FROM SHADOW OF DROUGHT**

Forecast: Oklahoma, like a lot of western states, is just now recovering from a multi-year drought. “Loss of CRP acres, poor agriculture due to extreme drought, and loss of habitat due to several causes have been reasons behind the pheasant decline in our state,” says Scott Cox, upland game biologist for the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. “However, we have broken the drought, landowners are more conscious about habitat fragility, and our numbers are slowly improving each year.”

Biologists are seeing broods and a lot of young birds. Says Cox, “Reports I am hearing have comparable reproduction numbers from 2014 to 2015—nothing spectacular but not a total bust either. The weather has been cooperative with early spring rains, cooler temperatures, and sporadic rain events over the summer. Go to the full Pheasant Forecast at this link: <http://goo.gl/i7525g>

### **OREGON—NUMBERS UP, EVEN IN MARGINAL AREAS**

Forecast: Nearly 1,000 miles of road surveys during late July and early August turned up 4.7 pheasants per 10 miles of route—up 15 percent over the previous five-year average. And the number of chicks per hen was 28 percent higher than last year.



The increased numbers should mean better hunting than in recent years, says Dave Budeau, upland game bird coordinator for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. Go to the full Pheasant Forecast at this link: <http://goo.gl/i7525g>

### SOUTH DAKOTA—MILD WINTER BOOSTS PHEASANT NUMBERS

Forecast: South Dakota’s pheasant population appears to be roaring back. Even though roadside survey results in all but two regions lag behind the state’s 10-year average, the statewide average has jumped 42 percent over last year. According to South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks, the statewide index is similar to 2011 when hunters shot 1.56 million roosters.

Regions with the highest bird counts are perennial hotspots of Chamberlain, Winner, and Pierre. Yankton and Sioux Falls were the two regions that surpassed their 10-year averages. Regions lagging farthest behind the 10-year average are Watertown, Brookings, and Aberdeen. Go to the full Pheasant Forecast at this link: <http://goo.gl/i7525g>

### TEXAS—PHEASANTS POISED TO MAKE SLOW RECOVERY

Forecast: Texas pheasants continue to struggle through a severe drought. “Numbers in the past 3-4 years are well below the 10-year average because the severe drought led to poor nesting and brooding conditions,” says Calvin Richardson, District 2 leader of the Wildlife Division of the Texas

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Parks and Wildlife Department.

Will that pattern change this year? Many areas had good moisture last winter, spring, and summer. Spotting broods in much of Texas' Panhandle leaves biologists hopeful this year's hunting will be better than last year's. But it's too early to know for sure: The department won't complete its surveys of brood survival until October and November. Go to the full Pheasant Forecast at this link: <http://goo.gl/i7525g>

### **UTAH—BEST GUESS: BETTER HUNTING AHEAD**

Forecast: Utah doesn't conduct a late summer survey for pheasants, so a hunting forecast is a bit of a guesstimate based on last year's harvest and this year's weather. Utah's pheasant harvest has increased the last two years, suggesting a growing pheasant population. And with a mild winter and wet summer providing good brood cover, hunting should improve, says Avery Cook, upland game project leader for the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources.

"While private lands in the northern half of the state hold the best bird numbers, walk-in access properties and wildlife management areas in the northern half of the state are equally great options for hunters," says Cook. "Anywhere that is not an agricultural area is generally pretty poor." Go to the full Pheasant Forecast at this link: <http://goo.gl/i7525g>

### **WASHINGTON—PHEASANTS REBOUND WITH FAVORABLE WEATHER**

Forecast: After favorable winter and spring weather, Washington State biologists are predicting that pheasant hunters will find and shoot more birds than they did last year. Raw data from crow count surveys in portions of Whitman, Garfield, Columbia and Walla Walla counties in the southeast "suggest the population is about the same or a little above previous years," says Sean Q. Dougherty, acting section manager of small game, private lands and furbearers for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. "Based on field observations there was likely increased survivorship of pheasant broods due to a mild spring and abundant insects being available throughout the spring and summer."



Last autumn's harvest data shows the biggest jump in hunter harvest occurred in the Snake River Basin counties of Asotin, Columbia, Garfield, Walla Walla and Whitman. Grant and Whitman counties, usually the top producers in the state, should be good bets this year as well. Go to the full Pheasant Forecast at this link: <http://goo.gl/i7525g>

## **WISCONSIN—ROADSIDE COUNTS SHOW MORE BIRDS**

Forecast: Wisconsin pheasant hunting should be as good as last year or slightly better. Preliminary results from the 2015 statewide pheasant survey show an increase over last year—707 roosters seen along the routes, compared with 547 the year before. The number of roosters heard crowing during the first three minutes of each stop was also higher than the year before (0.45 compared with 0.30). Areas with the greatest estimated abundance of pheasants were along the St. Croix River Valley.

Pheasant numbers are also indexed by a rural mail carrier survey. This year mail carriers spotted 0.33 pheasants per 100 miles, the same as the year before and below the long-term average. Go to the full Pheasant Forecast at this link: <http://goo.gl/i7525g>

## **WYOMING—PHEASANT NUMBERS MODEST BUT GETTING HIGHER**

Forecast: Pheasant numbers appear to higher near Cody and the southern portions of the Big Horn Basin, the location of perhaps the state's best pheasant hunting.

"Based on this summer's observations of pheasant broods and chick numbers, I would say we are in for better hunting conditions than the last couple of years," says Bart Kroger, biologist for Wyoming Game and Fish stationed in Worland. "Last year was likely the worst in the last decade, so we have a lot to improve from. I've observed several broods of pheasants ranging from four to eight chicks per brood this summer. This is likely due to better nesting and brood rearing habitat the past couple of years because of increased spring moisture. It's amazing what rain can do for wildlife!" Go to the full Pheasant Forecast at this link: <http://goo.gl/i7525g>







# HUNTING WITH POZ BY LAND TAWNEY

The day was still. A new blanket of snow dampened all sound, creating ideal tracking conditions.

As I crept through the oversized boulders to a spot I'd seen game before, I noticed fresh sign everywhere. It looked like an elk and deer party gone wild. I slowed my pace to a crawl, hyper aware of my surroundings.

Then I saw him, a small whitetail buck, feeding uphill about 250 yards below me. I stopped and watched him feed. After what seemed like hours, I decided to make my move. I crept up on my belly to a smaller boulder, found a perfect rest, and waited. As he stepped

from behind a group of pine trees, it was automatic; I pulled the trigger and he dropped, 50 yards from where I shot him. After six days in the Bob Marshall Wilderness, a day down the Blackfoot, and three weekends in the Elkhorn Mountains, I had an animal down. All told, I covered over 150 miles in some of the most beautiful and wild country Montana has to offer – all on my own two feet.

As I dragged my deer the three miles to the truck – thankfully downhill – a flood of memories from this year's season came rushing back. The vistas and hunting amongst grizzly tracks. The snowshoe hare who had changed white a week early and stuck out like a sore thumb. The great horned owl that landed in a branch just 10 feet above my head, who I then followed as it flew silently through the lodgepole pines. The numerous close encounters with elk and deer. The chase was superb.

Driving back to town I called my good friend Jim Posewitz to give him the good news. I've known Jim since birth – he literally drove my mom to the hospital as I came weeks before my due date and my father was out gallivanting across the state. Since then, and especially since my father passed away, Jim has been my go-to mentor. He couldn't wait to hear the story and insisted we meet for dinner.

Jim came West on a football scholarship and remained in the state he grew to love. He founded Orion –



The Hunters Institute in 1993 after a 32-year career as biologist for Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks where he led the agency's ecological program. Jim is the author of three conservation/hunting ethic staples, "Beyond Fair Chase," "Inherit the Hunt" and "Rifle in Hand."



Both Jim and I had drawn coveted elk tags in the Elkhorn Mountains, his being the most sought-after bull tag in the state. Including a scouting trip, I'd been lucky to spend four weekends at La Casa Del Poz outside of Helena. Each evening Jim's wife Gayle would feed us hearty fare, and then we would retire to the living room, where Jim would hold forth on an array of conservation topics.

These conversations continued on our early morning drives, and they often drifted to Theodore Roosevelt, who set aside the very hills we were hunting over 100 years ago. Poz is steeped in Roosevelt history, which flows out of him like a cool mountain stream. I also heard stories about Granville Stuart, Cecil Garland, Lee Metcalf, Bud Moore and other conservation heroes from Montana and elsewhere. Jim loves to extol our conservation history, and I'm always eager to soak up his knowledge. This year was different, however. Jim was preparing for the inaugural Montana Outdoor Hall of Fame induction ceremony. Jim envisioned the HOF as a way to celebrate our great sportsmen leaders – and to remind us that the benefits we reap today didn't happen by accident. Every night, I would write down as much of his knowledge as I could before I turned in for bed.

Later that fall, I watched as Jim announced the initial 12 HOF inductees. The crowd was rapt. It was all the stories I had heard over the last month, with pictures to boot. As I sat with admiration of a man who continues to give so much, I was thankful not only for the knowledge flowing out of him, but also for the



process. Our conservation history in this country is still so young. By most accounts, it's roughly 150 years old. Countless players big and small have contributed to the great estate we have today, creating a legacy we are entrusted to carry forward.

Every state and every community has its own conservation heroes. Let Poz inspire you to do your own homework. Find out those visionaries in your neck of the woods who contributed to our great outdoor legacy. Be inspired and pass it on. It is now our time, our moment, to do our part.





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# CHILDREN ARE A BIG PART OF THE OUTDOOR EXPERIENCE

By Southwick and Associates

Many sportsmen have fond memories of special times outdoors hunting and shooting with a parent or grandparent. And it seems as adults, many are only too happy to provide those same great experiences for the younger generations. In a recent joint survey by ShooterSurvey.com and HunterSurvey.com, researchers learned as many as 50 percent of those sportsmen surveyed had taken a child shooting in the past 12 months, while 37 percent had taken a child hunting.

As one might expect, the majority of those children taken outdoors were the sons and daughters of those surveyed with 47 percent of those taken shooting being a son or daughter and 54 percent of those taken hunting a child of the respondent. Seventeen percent of hunters took more than one child out in the past 12 months and 24 percent of recreational shooters took a kid shooting. Interestingly, as many as 19 percent of hunters shared hunting with a young person not related to them, while 21 percent of shooters did. The remainder were grandchildren, nieces and nephews.

"Passing a love for hunting and shooting along to the next generation is a vital part of the total outdoor experience. Everyone has special memories of time spent in the woods or at the range with their parents or other mentors as a young person, and it is clear today's adults want to keep that tradition alive for their kids," says Rob Southwick, president of Southwick Associates, which designs and conducts the surveys at HunterSurvey.com, ShooterSurvey.com and AnglerSurvey.com.

To help continually improve, protect and advance hunting, shooting and other outdoor recreation, all sportsmen and sportswomen are encouraged to participate in the bi-monthly surveys at HunterSurvey.com, ShooterSurvey.com and/or AnglerSurvey.com. Every other month, participants who complete the surveys are entered into a drawing for one of five \$100 gift certificates to the sporting goods retailer of their choice.



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About AnglerSurvey.com, HunterSurvey.com & ShooterSurvey.com: Launched in 2006, AnglerSurvey.com, HunterSurvey.com and ShooterSurvey.com help the outdoor equipment industry, government fisheries and wildlife officials and conservation organizations track consumer activities and expenditure trends. Survey results are scientifically analyzed to reflect the attitudes and habits of anglers and hunters across the United States. Follow them on Facebook at <http://facebook.com/huntersurvey> and <http://facebook.com/anglersurvey>.

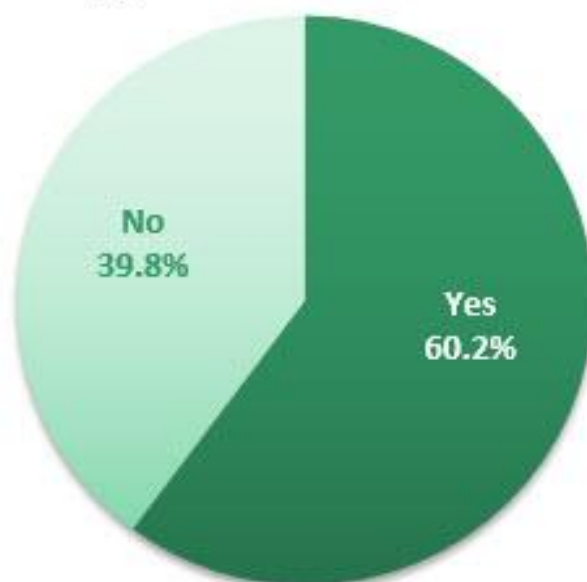




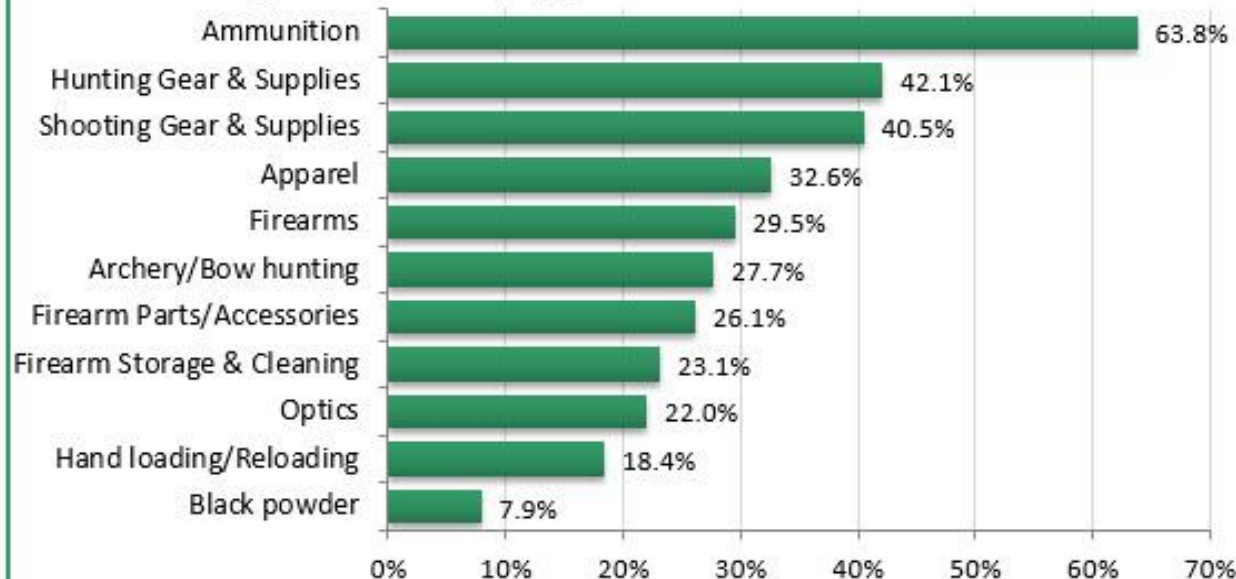
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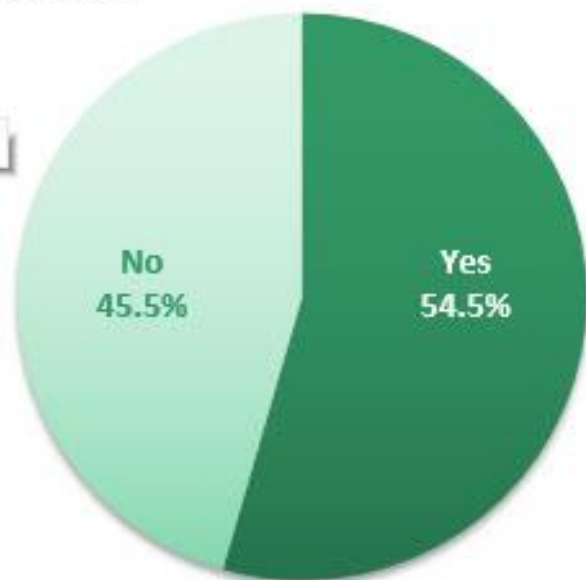


**Percent of purchasers by type of item**

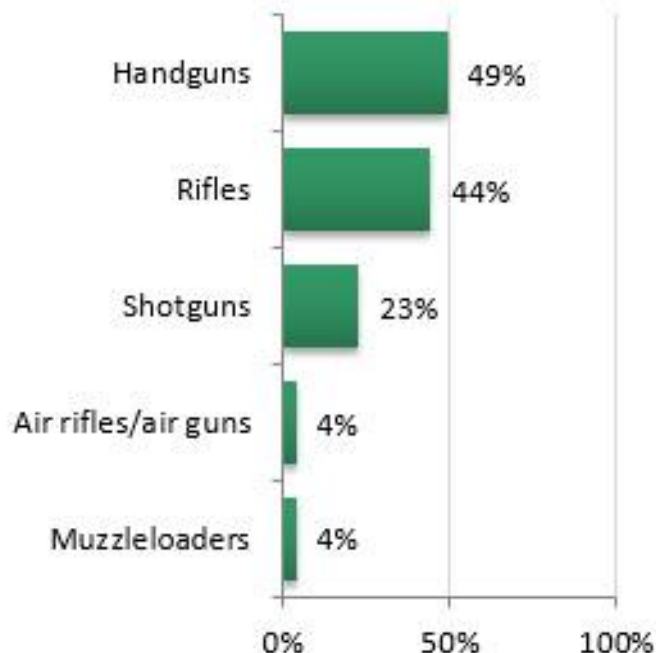




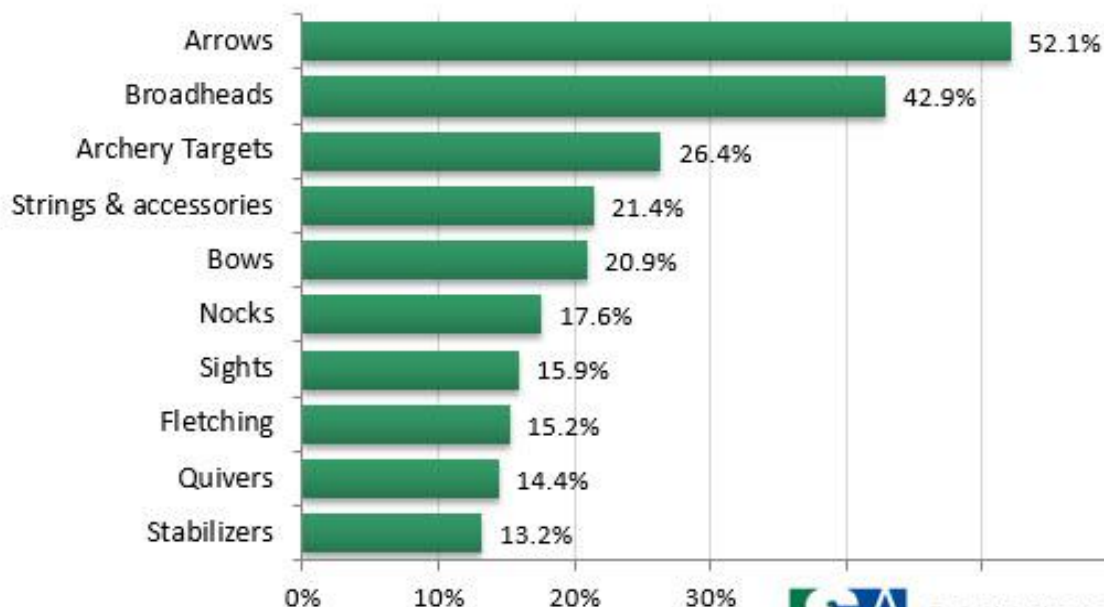
Did you purchase a hunting or shooting item in the past two months?



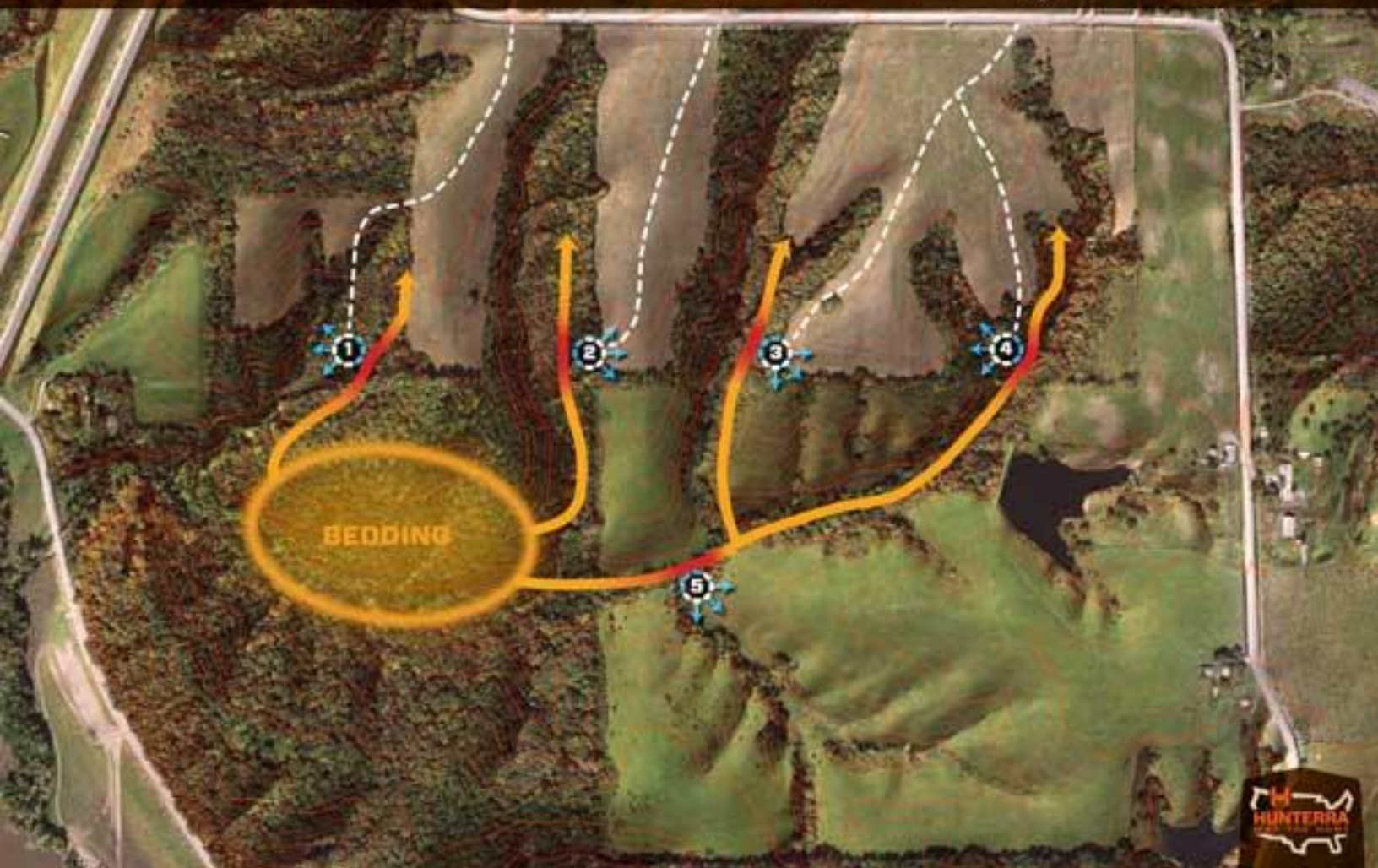
**FIREARM ITEMS** survey respondents reported



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# WHOOPING THE WIND FOR WHOOPING WHITETAILS

*It's impossible for whitetail hunters to completely ignore the wind, but there are ways to stack the odds heavily in your favor.*

By Dan Johnson

“What direction is the wind blowing from, and more importantly, which direction is it blowing to?”

This is the first—and most important—question I ask myself when deciding what treestand I plan to hunt from and how I plan to access that stand. I don't just ask that question because I'm concerned with what the wind will do with my scent; I also ask that question because I want to know how the deer will be using the wind to move in to the area I plan on hunting.

As we all know, deer live and die by their nose, and they make every move based on having the wind in their favor. It's that brief moment where they turn a corner and go from a quartering wind to a headwind that leaves them the most vulnerable.



At times, and depending upon the conditions, I take this tactic to the extreme and risk having the deer catch my wind by the time they walk in to my shooting lane. By that point, the shot is off or I end up passing the deer. The big risk to this tactic is that if I do pass the deer and it spooks, I might have ruined the hunt because the deer has alerted other deer in the area.

This is where Ozonics comes in to play. Because I am aggressively playing the wind, there's always a chance that the wind makes an unexpected shift past that invisible line and could hinder my hunt. With an Ozonics in the tree with me, I'm able to get away with a little more if the wind does go into the "danger zone."

Don't get me wrong: There is no product on the market that can or will eliminate 100 percent of human scent, but by having an Ozonics in the tree with me I've noticed I've been busted less times throughout the season. This product works best with a consistent wind speed and direction. Even a little variable in the wind direction is alright—just as long as it's not sporadic or swirling.

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Below is a detailed description of one of my hunting properties, why I chose to set my stands in certain locations and the best wind directions for hunting each stand.

***The Bedroom Stand***

This stand location is closest to the main bedding area and is awesome during the rut. The main trail that comes out of the bedding area on the east side drops off to the creek below and parallels that creek. As the creek takes a left turn toward the northwest, the trail continues to the northeast where there are several mature oak trees where deer like to stage before they enter the southwest corner of the CRP field.

My stand is located at the exact point where the creek bends and the deer start to head uphill to the CRP field. Because I don't have permission to hunt the property to the south where the bedding area is located, I can't access it from the south, and this limits what wind directions I can use to hunt that



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particular draw.

Any type of north or northwest wind will blow my scent directly into the bedding area and ruin the hunt before I even get to my stand. I've found that any wind out of the east tends to result in the best deer movement for an evening hunt, with a northeast wind bolstering the best and most aggressive deer movement.

### ***The Travel Corridor Stand***

On a steep draw that runs the entire length of the property and butts up next to some thick cover along a fence-line, the deer feel comfortable and loiter and browse in this area. My stand is located in a split maple tree that offers a shot to both sides of the draw.

Over the years this is where a majority of the deer sign is left by bucks. Several rubs and scrapes mark the transition from thick cover to more open timber. With a northwest wind blowing my scent into the CRP field, the deer think they have the advantage when working their way up the draw to some oaks and another small bedding area.

My access route is simple, and with a northwest wind I don't need to worry about getting busted walking to my stand. Historically, late October has been the best time of year for this stand, and throughout the past seasons I have passed several 3-year-old bucks and even had an encounter with a 190-class giant.

### ***The Transition Stand***

I killed a buck out of this stand in 2011. One of the reasons I love hunting this stand is because I can get away with hunting it on a straight north wind. Due to the terrain and the angle of the trail the deer use to enter the area, my scent stays just outside of the "danger zone." Plus, I am at a higher elevation and my scent can and does travel over their heads.

This stand location is a perfect example a transition area. It's located between bedding and a food source where the terrain dictates deer movement. Surrounded by a couple oak trees in some thick brush, deer also use this area as a staging area before they head to the CRP fields to graze on the clover that's scattered throughout the grasses.

### ***The 'Noreaster' Stand***

This is a tricky stand to hunt. Access to the stand is very easy, but a very rare east-northeast wind needed to hunt it has to be absolutely perfect. If the wind is too much out of the north it will blow out the draw to the south of the stand, and if the wind is too much out of the east or south the deer don't use this trail because they don't feel comfortable without the wind advantage. This stand is also



in a low spot, meaning the deer will be very close to me when I finally see them, which is another reason I have to mind the wind and make sure my scent profile is as small as possible.

### ***The Observation Stand***

More or less an observation stand, this location allows me to see a majority of the farm and identify where deer movement is concentrated. However, during the rut, bucks love to cruise the low ground in front of this stand during a northwest wind and scent-check the high ground in search of bedded does in the CRP.

This stand is easy to access, but because it's located in the middle of a CRP field, deer movement is all over the place. Although it's not within shooting range, deer have a tendency to cross behind my location in my scent profile, which is yet another reason an Ozonics in the tree with me can be an indirect safety net to killing a mature buck.

Whether setting treestands before the season starts or making mid-season adjustments, the next time you're deciding where to place your stands, keep in mind how deer use their nose to navigate their daily travel routes. By simply being more aggressive with the wind while you hunt, observing deer movement in your area and having an Ozonics as a backup incase the wind shifts into that dreaded "danger zone," you, too, will have that "Ah-ha!" moment that will get you closer to that deer of a lifetime.

# HR-200 Treestand/Blind

## HR-200 SED

The Ozonics HR-200 gives you two modes: a boost mode for treestand hunting (the entire human profile is presented to the wind and requires more ozone) and a blind or standard mode. It also comes with mounting systems for both versions.

- Mounts above you in tree or to roof brace on ground blind (mounts included)
- Silent-touch switches for quiet operation
- On-demand battery level indicator features 4 LEDs for easy monitoring
- 12-volt rechargeable battery (gives you 5 hours run time; 4 hours in boost mode) and charger included
- Product dimensions: 7 3/4" wide x 3" tall x 5 3/8" deep
- Product weight: 1.70 lbs with battery



HR-200 SED  
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**Our Price \$399.99**  
\$472.99 MSRP



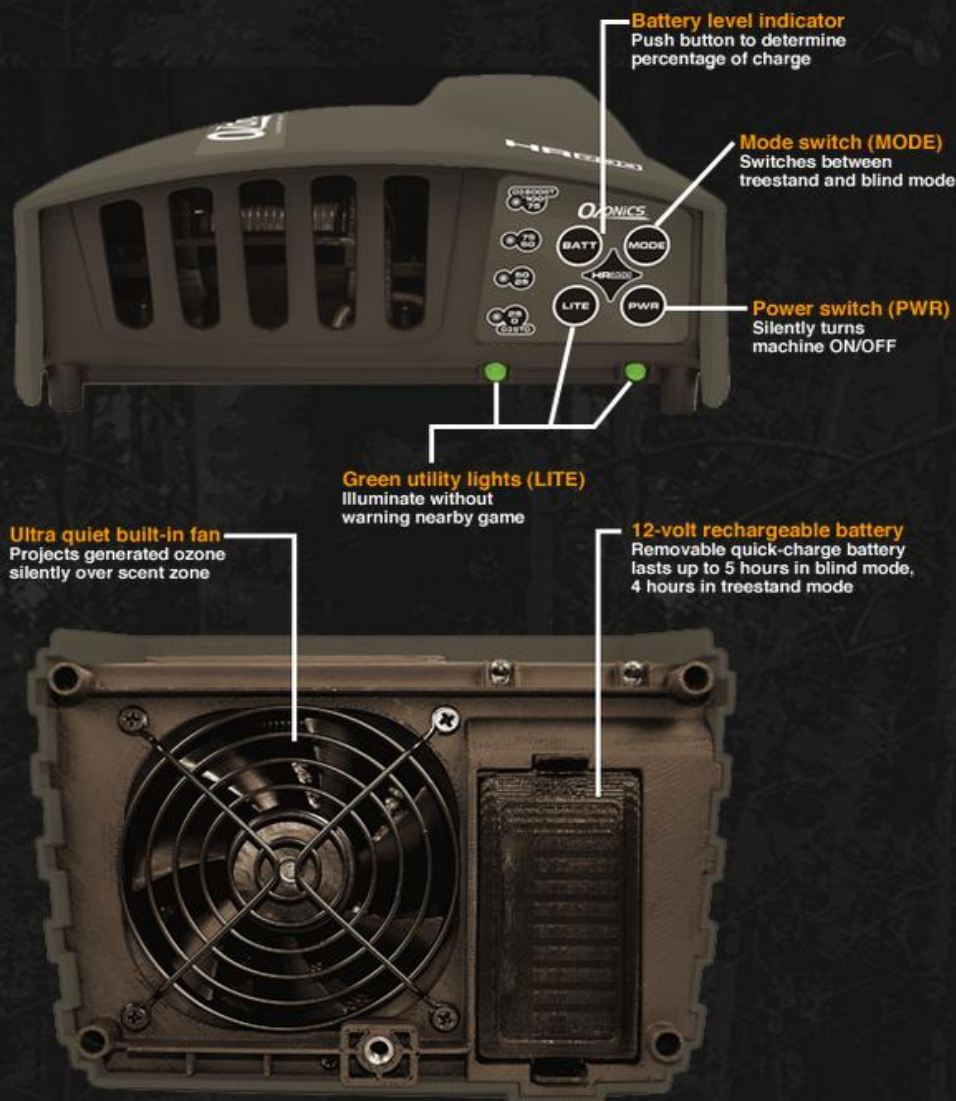
HR-200 TS  
Mossy Oak - Treestand

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HR-200 LC  
Mathews - Lost Camo

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# PROPER TREE STAND PLACEMENT



*By O'Neill Williams*

*"O'Neill Outside"*

Beyond the choices of the country, state and land where and on which you seek Whitetails, the placement of your treestand may be your next most important task.

Where you place your stand means you're stuck there for the morning or afternoon. If it's not working, you can get down and walk around, but that's never worked for me. It rarely will for you. I'm the dedicated type and will stick it out to the end of the hunt wherever that may be and will always think that's the best bet. If you start changing your mind about things, it'll become a habit, a bad one in my thinking.

Okay, let's get started.

Early in the Whitetail season, place your stand near food plots where you'll see the greatest number of deer. They're together and not roaming to and fro, not being chased, etc. so let's make a plan to see the greatest number. Place it off to the side of a game trail going in and out. What about the sun? Taking this into consideration, if you can't be at either the northern or southern end of the plot or trail, you'll need two placements, each with the sun to your back. It makes a huge difference. If you're always having to shade your eyes, you may not get a good quick look at your buck at the far end of the plot.

I remember a prize buck a couple of years ago that made a brief appearance at about 170 yards against the backdrop of some shading trees. I had to pass him up as I couldn't get a good look at him with the fading light in my eyes. As it turned out, a fellow hunting partner took him ten minutes later. He measured just over 150. Had I been with the sun at 170, he'd been mine instead.

When the scraping begins, it's a great temptation to place your stand right on and high up over the scrape lines. Don't do it. It's always a better to set your stand off to one side preferable on the up side, that is, so you'll be higher up and further out of sight. Too, you don't want to deposit your scent on the line. Stay off and don't ruin your valuable find. It's unlikely that the sun comes into play now as you're in heavier cover deeper into the forest. I know it's difficult but look for shooting lanes and brief open areas leading over to the scrape line. It may be your only way of getting a shot. After all, you've found a



precious treasure in the scrapes. Don't louse it up.

The rut has begun. The action has started. It's prime time. So how do you adapt? This is the most simple and easiest decision at hand other than the country, land, etc. (See first paragraph) Answer? Hunt where the does are, food plots. Use the buck's natural instincts, desires and purposes against him. You know quite well what he's after so go there. He's hunting the does so you do too. Texas hunting is the best example I know of. There, with the cover so deep and thick, hunters seek out the feeders. Why? The does go there to eat and the bucks show up to check out the does. You be there too. Now, however, the sun comes into play again. Get a northern or southern view if you can. It's self explanatory.

The season's almost over. What now? It's back to the game routes the lead into and out of the food plots between the bedding areas. Your guy is all tuckered out now and is back to the easy life. The excitement is over. Your stand placement now is 25 to 40 yards off the trail and off the edge of the plot. The hunt as shortened too and while your productive time in the stand is likely to be short, early and late, it doesn't mean you can meander in after sun up and just before dark. Be a woodsman. Be smart. Give yourself lots of time going in and out at least an hour before you expect the time to be right.

So how long do you plan to spend in the stand? What about staying all day, packing a lunch, stay there and take a mid-day nap, not leaving to talk to your buddies about how the hunt

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went? When does that have application? I always plan to stay all day during the first weekend and when I've found the rut to be in full swing. Why? In the first instance, I'll let the other hunters' activities, getting out of and into their stands, traveling to and from camp, push the bucks around and keep them moving. Often all that movement will advance a desirable buck right in front of me while I'm just sitting there in my stand. How many times have you heard of a giant buck being taken right at mid-day when everyone else was in camp? Happens all

the time during opening weekend and during the peak of the rut. You and I have been told of guys being 'hard hunters'. Sometimes 'hunting hard' is just being patient and just sitting all day in a well placed stand. If you live in a state where the season is short, staying in the stand all day might or can be your regular routine. If heavy pressure from other hunters matches up with your area, staying all day can be extremely productive. The second application for an all day stand is when the rut is on. With the bucks ranging all day, you need to be there too.

My second best Whitetail came at 11 AM opening day many years ago from one of the Wildlife Management Areas in Georgia. Other hunters were moving and I could even hear someone shouting to a partner when I took my shot. I was deep in the woods about 100 yards off a field and 50 yards from a well used game trail. It was classic tree stand placement.

I guess the overall strategy is not to make it necessary to 'over hunt' your stands. Why? Whitetail Deer can tell when humans are routinely invading their space. They become more shy and wary. They become elevated. You are diminished. The point is for you to be so adaptable and knowledgeable that you're always hunting in a way that makes your hunt pristine. To make the most of your chances, become a better woodsman, a better hunter. Does it require more attention to detail? More work moving stands around according to the periods of the season? Yes and yes. Can you? Should you? Yes and yes again.

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So when should you take this approach? When the season begins? No. It'll require more planning than that. Have you an aerial view of your area? That would help. Otherwise, it means time in the woods a month or more before the season begins. I'm not talking about a leisurely stroll. No, a purposeful approach with tree stand and strategy in mind will work.



# SHARING A MOMENT

By Andi Cooper

Nearly everyone in this great nation has a personal connection to someone in the military. Perhaps you have served, or maybe you have a friend, a brother or sister, a parent or child, or a niece or nephew that has committed to serving in the armed forces. Our military men and women risk life and limb each day in service to those at home. And those they must leave behind have to cope with their absence and the fear that they may come to harm. For one father at home and one Marine in Afghanistan, focusing on a moment shared in the pursuit of waterfowl has been a means for maintaining their connection.

Alex Hilburn had always been extremely passionate about waterfowl hunting. At 20-



years-old, inspired by his dad's career with Ducks Unlimited, he was considering becoming a waterfowl biologist. He had his first retriever trained, and as many dog owners can identify, Canvas was his pride and joy, his inseparable companion, and in many ways his "child." But something even deeper than his passion for waterfowling stirred in Alex. In January 2008, he







informed his parents that he intended to join the Marine Corps.

“My wife and I asked him to wait and think about it until February,” Alex’s father, Craig Hilburn, said. “Obviously, we had concerns about his safety and welfare. I asked him, ‘what about Canvas?’ He just looked me in the eye and told me she was mine to hunt now.”

February came, and Alex still wanted to enlist. It took them a while to get used to the idea, but his parents supported his decision. He left for basic training Sunday, May 18, 2008 at 5:30 in the evening.

“I’ll never forget when the recruiter came to pick him up. He called us from California Monday morning to let us know he’d made it there. We didn’t hear from him again for six weeks,” Craig said.

Alex’s leave worked out so that he had the opportunity to return home to Arkansas during the 2008-09 duck season. In January of 2009, a friend of Craig’s, Mick Checkett, invited the pair to hunt his lease near Stuttgart, Arkansas, the last weekend of the season.

“Alex and I were already gearing up to hunt a spot on the river when Checkett called, so we just pointed the truck in the other direction and went,” Craig said.





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Checkett had invited them to hunt a flooded rice field known to them as Oliver Fields. There is a reservoir rest area behind Oliver Fields, one of the oldest green tree reservoirs in the country. The three men hunted Saturday afternoon, enjoyed their time together, and went home with three limits. On Sunday afternoon, they hunted the same pit in that rice field. After filling their bags, the Hilburns helped Checkett collect his decoys, marking the close on another season. Checkett headed on the ATV to the truck with the first load of decoys, and the Hilburns remained behind to finish picking up the rest.

“I’ve often said that my two favorite times of duck season are opening morning and the last afternoon. Everyone understands why opening morning is one of them, but many people wonder why the close of shooting hours, the end of duck hunting for another year, is another of my favorites. It’s because you get to see the survivors, the ones that have made it through the gauntlet,” Craig said.

Waiting for Mike to return, Alex and Craig lay down on top of the pit blind and gazed into the sky as thousands of ducks and geese flew over them. It was an incredible experience, watching the full skies colored by the setting sun and underlined by the rising full moon.



Craig was dealing with the reality that his son, his favorite hunting buddy, was soon to leave the country and have his life very much in jeopardy. He knew that this would be the last time for several years that he and his son got to duck hunt together. He feared that it may well be the last time ever.

They talked about the possibilities of what was to come in Alex’s time in the Corps. They did not know then that Alex would be doing route clearance – locating improvised explosive devices and removing them along the roads.

“We just lay there, listened to those birds going over and shared one of the most magical moments I’ve ever had duck hunting,” Craig said.

Laying there beside him, gazing at the incredible sight before them, Craig told his son, “Remember, Alex, wherever you are next duck season, what this was like. And for all time, wherever you are, know that all you have to do is look up at that moon and know that



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I'm looking up at it, too, and thinking about you."

Craig took comfort in knowing they had that that connection, no matter what happened.

Alex left for Afghanistan in Oct. of 2009, and spent that duck season there. It was the first time that he missed a duck season since he'd begun hunting with his dad. Without his favorite hunting partner, Craig found it more difficult to find the motivation to go.



"Duck season of 09-10 saw me hunt less than I ever have since Alex and I started hunting together. It's just not the same without him," Craig said. "I'd wake up in plenty of time, thinking I should get up and take his dog hunting. But then I'd get up, and Canvas and I would sit on the back porch, drink coffee and think about him."

The last day of duck season in January 2010, Craig went to Point Remove,





Rollie Rimmel Marsh— a Ducks Unlimited project – with Canvas. As he sat at sunset watching ducks come into the marsh and looking at the moon, Craig felt connected to Alex even though he was half a world away and it was the middle of the day there.

Craig says he'll never forget laying on top of that pit blind with his son, thinking that this time next year he'd be in a war zone somewhere, and not knowing when or if he'd ever be back to lay on top of a blind with him again. Thankfully, Alex made it through his tour of duty and returned to the U.S. in October 2011.

But this is not a story about one man and his son or about one son's sacrifice.

This is the same story that thousands of mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, sons, daughters, husbands and wives live. To our troops, we fervently and sincerely thank you for serving and thank you for sacrificing precious time with your loved ones. To those with loved ones in the field, please know that

we recognize your sacrifice as well, and that we hope your service member returns home safe and soon.

For many of you, waterfowl hunting, the camaraderie, the beauty of nature shared with loved ones, is a sustaining memory and a bond that cannot be broken by time or distance. This is one of the many reasons Ducks Unlimited volunteers and staff are absolutely dedicated to the mission of conserving wetlands and waterfowl habitats sufficient to fill the skies with waterfowl today, tomorrow and forever.

### ***Photo Credit***

***1st image - Alex and Max 2014 – Craig Hilburn***

***2nd image - Canvas and Hilburn in blind – Canvas and Craig Hilburn hunting the pit blind without Alex – Andi Cooper***

***3rd image - Hunter silhouette with snows overhead – flights of birds over hunters in a rice field pit blind – Andi Cooper***

***4th image - Craig Hilburn and Canvas the lab – Andi Cooper***

***5th image - Alex with mallards – Craig Hilburn***

***6th image - Hilburn and Alex in blind – Jerry Holden (this is l-r Craig and Alex Hilburn)***

***7th image – Drakes – Alex Hilburn***





# ***What Argentina Doves Taught Me About Wingshooting***

**By Don Sangster**

Although it might be a bit backward to make your first dove hunting trip a high-volume shoot in Argentina, there's no question that this trial-by-fire provided me with a wealth of experience that might have otherwise taken years to acquire. Here's a few lessons I learned that could save you some shells this season:

## **Adjust Your Lead Until They Drop**

Although I'd never hunted doves before, I was aware of how difficult these speedy little birds can be to



hit. For years I'd read about how hunters might expend 3-5 shotshells for each dove bagged, and this stuck with me.

With my first several (and then some) shots, I was actually leading them too much. This is unusual, as most misses are generally behind the bird. At first, I believed



that I too was shooting behind, so I increased my leads. Obviously this didn't help.

When the other shooter in my blind started to connect with regularity, I had to see what he was doing. I crouched down behind him and stared over his shoulder and down his shotgun barrel as he shot. To my



amazement, he was giving the birds only about 18-24 inches of lead.

Each shot will be different depending upon flight angle, speed, and range, but the lesson is to not keep doing the same thing and expecting different results. These birds may not need as much lead as you think, so if lengthening your lead isn't working, try shortening it. If you're still missing, ask a friend who's doing better to try to quantify the necessary lead, or request to look over their shoulder as they shoot a passing bird.

### **Don't Forget to Follow Through**

The follow through, or lack thereof, is another factor that causes a lot of misses. If you stop your swing as soon as you slap the trigger, perhaps to take aim at a second bird, you'll greatly shorten the lead and usually miss.

It's imperative to continue a nice smooth swing, at the same speed as the bird, until after the bird has either crumpled or continued on. If you fold it cleanly, there will often be time for a shot at another bird.

Although there are different shooting techniques that can be used for doves, the most popular is the sustained lead. This simply involves establishing and then maintaining what you think is the proper lead, pulling the trigger, and then following-through by maintaining the lead after the shot.

### **Pick a Bird, Any Bird**

As tempting as it can be, especially in a situation where a large flock of birds is in range, shooting at the flock as a whole will invariably just result in misses. No matter how many birds are above, there's still a lot more empty air up there than feathers. Instead, pick out a single bird as your target. Doing so will result in far more accidental doubles than flock shooting.



## Select Your Shots

When there are few birds around, you may have to take all shots as they come, including the most difficult ones, or ones that are giving you trouble. Whether it's a high crosser, a low head-on, or something in between, we all have our weaknesses, and they can vary by the day.

When there are lots of birds in the area, however, you may have the luxury of choosing just those tough shots, in order to finally get the hang of them. But if they continue to frustrate you, don't dwell on these misses, and instead focus on the shots that you're more comfortable with. After all, birds in the hand are the goal, and you can work on your shooting at the skeet range.

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My mixed-bag wing shooting trip was arranged by the Outdoor Vibe. To call it extraordinary would be an understatement. If you're an avid wingshooter, you owe it to yourself to sample what Argentina has to offer.

This article was produced by [Don Sangster](#) for [Bass Pro Shops 1Source](#), where it appeared first. Don Sangster hails from Mississauga, Ontario, and is an avid multi-species angler and hunter; he describes one as his passion and the other as his obsession — which is which varies with the seasons. He's been a professional outdoor writer and photographer since 1999, and is a frequent contributor to numerous North American print and web publications.





# Bow hunting From Blinds

By Tracy Breen

In the last decade, more bowhunters are realizing there are many benefits to hunting deer from a blind. The tricky thing about hunting from a blind is outsmarting the deer. Bill Winke from Midwest Whitetail TV knows all about hunting whitetails from a blind. Winke spends over 70 days a year chasing big bucks and although he enjoys hunting out of a treestand, he believes every hunter should have a blind or two on their property. “I love hunting from a treestand but there are times when hunting from a tower blind or bale blind makes sense. As long as the blinds are set up properly and in the right location, bucks can be killed from a stationary blind like a tower blind, Winke explained.

Winke spends a fair amount of time in Redneck tower blinds. According to him, blind placement is everything when hunting out of a tower blind, especially when bowhunting. “It is difficult to kill a buck with a bow in a tower blind if you are hunting a large food plot or crop field because the deer have too many places they can come and go out of a field. I like placing my tower blinds on food plots that are an acre in size or smaller. I have a couple Redneck Blinds on a 7-acre food plot but I have two on that plot so it increases the odds of success. Putting a tower blind over a small plot is a great option. With a smaller plot, deer can typically only enter the field in a few places and if a bowhunter knows where



those places are, that is where you set the blind,” Winke noted. Winke says another option is to put the blind in a central location in the food plot where the deer typically pass by. The downside of this is that eventually deer will get downwind of you. “When I am hunting in a location where I know the deer are going to come down wind of me, I take every precaution I can to stay scent free. I keep all the windows closed until it is time to shoot, I use an Ozonics machine to help reduce odor, and I wear scent eliminating clothing. By doing everything I can to stay scent free most of the time, the blind contains enough of my odor that the deer don’t wind me. A Redneck Blind has gaskets on the door and windows so they work well at containing human odor.”

One reason Winke likes hunting out of tower blinds is it gives him options he doesn’t have when hunting out of a treestand. “There are plenty of places you can’t hunt because of the swirling wind or lack of good trees to hang a stand. Some farms have deep valleys where the wind is always swirling. These places are perfect for a Redneck Blind because of the amount of human odor the blind contains. The blinds give us more options we didn’t have ten or twenty years ago which is nice,” Winke explained.

One challenge that hunters can face when hunting from a tower blind is getting in and out of them without being detected because the blinds are often in the open. “The simplest solution is to have a person drive into the field I am hunting to spook off the deer. Deer never seem to be spooked by a vehicle entering a food plot. The reason I know that is because the next night I will see the same bucks in the field. Deer are accustomed to seeing farmers and seeing vehicles so they tolerate them. Some of our blinds are placed on the fringe of a field where there are crops, cedar trees or other cover that can keep us hidden as we enter and exit the blind. I suggest anyone who is putting up a tower blind really think about where they are going to put it and weigh all the options before they put the blind up. After a blind is in a certain location, moving it can be difficult so think ahead and put the blind in an area that has some cover if it is possible.”

Of course one of the greatest benefits of using a a tower blind is the comfort factor. “ I love hunting from a treestand, but the older I get the more I like hunting from a Redneck Blind. I can stay warm and dry regardless of what the weather outside is doing. My kids love hunting out of them as well. Both of my kids have taken





numerous deer out the Redneck blinds. They can play on an iPad, move around and when a buck comes in, they get serious and hunt. There have been many times over the years that I would have been inside the house not hunting at all when we killed deer out of tower blinds because we can sit all day long when the weather is nasty. There is something to be said for comfort. When you are comfortable, you can hunt harder and longer and the more hours you spend in the woods, the better odds you have of success. Comfort is one of the main reasons to hunt from a tower blind like a Redneck,” Winke said.

Winke uses tower blinds and bale blinds. “I like hunting out of tower blinds but bale blinds have their place as well. The Redneck Bale blind is fairly easy to move. Sometimes we put them on trailers and move them from one farm to another. Because they look like a hay bale, deer don’t pay much attention to them. With the bale blinds, I put them out in a field when a farmer starts to cut the corn. Since the deer haven’t seen the field without the corn in it for months, they don’t pay attention to the blind if it is in the field when the farmer harvests all the corn. They assume the blind has always been there. Even when I put a bale blind in a field that is wide open and hasn’t had crops in it for awhile, the deer get used to it fairly quickly because the blinds are made of natural material and look like a bale of hay. The bale blind is perfect for bowhunting and has enough room in it to hold a couple people comfortably,” Winke said.

Some may think that a tower blind isn’t really made for the bowhunter. Winke and serious bow hunters from across the country are figuring out that tower blinds can be a secret weapon when the weather is bad or when you want to sit all day during the rut. When placed in the right location, a tower blind and a bale blind can be a highly effective way to harvest a mature whitetail.







## ***Pick Your Pack***

***A tale of five hunting pack designs: Which is right for you?***

***By Josh Lantz***

A hunting pack is a fundamental piece of gear. Even the most spartan hunter has a bevy of core equipment and supplies they need to transport to and from the field. A gadgeteer has even more gear and will require much more from a pack in terms of its capacity and organizational capability.

In addition to one's proclivity for gadgets and technology, what and how he or she hunts also plays a significant role in determining their ideal hunting pack.

So, where does one begin?

Look at hunting pack selection as a three-step process. First, consider five fundamental hunting pack designs. Choose the style that best suits the way you'll hunt. Next, factor in your needs as they relate to overall capacity and choose the right size. Finally, but equally important, consider features that increase comfort and functionality.



## Traditional Backpacks

A traditional backpack is what most envision when thinking of a hunting pack. It's worn on the back and is supported with shoulder straps, which should be fully adjustable to modify the pack's fit based on the wearer's unique physique and the particular load being carried. The best models also have a fully adjustable waist belt system and at least one chest strap for increased comfort and load balancing.

Traditional backpack-style hunting packs come in many sizes, from less than 1,000 cubic inches to over 6,000 inches of total capacity. They typically contain at least one main compartment, which may include additional sub compartments to keep gear organized. Additional pockets or pouches may exist on the front and sides of the pack for added utility. Other additions may include D-rings, compression straps or other mechanisms for attaching additional pieces of gear to the pack's exterior. The best hunting models will also include a dedicated spot to safely carry a firearm or bow.

Traditional backpacks may be constructed over a rigid frame of aluminum or, in some cases, carbon fiber. Packs lacking some kind of interior frame or internal stiffening components are less expensive, but will also be less comfortable to wear, as a frame helps support and distribute whatever load is being carried. Frame packs, or those supported with stiffening splines, are a necessity for backcountry hunters who use their packs to carry an abundance of gear, game quarters or capes.

Traditional backpack-style packs are the kings of capacity and load carrying, and are typically favored by big game hunters. The design is one of the most restrictive with respect to upper body mobility, however, and may hamper the wearer's ability to shoulder a firearm or draw a bow. This may be of little consequence to the tree stand or blind hunter, however, who typically takes his or her pack off when settling in and hangs it on a nearby limb or hook.

## Waist Packs

A waist pack is a great grab-and-go option for the stand or blind hunter, for archers, or for anyone who wants to travel light without an abundance of unnecessary gear or supplies.

By definition, these packs are worn around the waist and include at least one main compartment. They may also include side pockets, D-rings, or other specialized pouches for carrying knives, rangefinders, ammunition or other essentials.

The waist pack's belt system is of critical importance, as it's the sole means of support for the pack's weight. Look for models with a wide, padded and fully adjustable waist belt and durable buckle that won't loosen under a load.





Some waist packs offer additional functionality beyond load carrying. The TZ 721 model from Tenzing is designed for core warmth; with an integral hand muff and built-in pockets inside the waist belt to accept chemically activated hand-warmer pouches – a thoughtful and welcomed feature for stand and still hunters.



## Lumbar Packs

A lumbar pack can be described as a hybrid of the traditional backpack and waist pack designs, and is a superior option for bowhunters, horseback hunters, or anyone who needs or appreciates full upper body mobility.

A lumbar-style hunting pack carries its load low around the waist like a waist pack, but is also supported by shoulder straps or a shoulder yoke. The design minimizes binding between the shoulders and allows archers a comfortable and unrestricted draw.

Capacities are generally significantly larger than those of waist packs, with most models providing a variety of compartments and pockets with up to about 1,500 cubic inches of total interior space.

Lumbar packs are a relatively complex design. Key features to look for include full adjustability of all waist, shoulder and chest straps, along with quality components and materials that improve durability and comfort.

## Vests

A traditional preference for upland game and turkey hunters, the hunting vest is more garment than pack. Nonetheless, it's designed to carry ammunition, electronics, calls and other essential gear, in addition to harvested game, and is a mainstay in most hunters' wardrobes.



Standard upland hunting vest features include front pockets with built-in shot shell loops and a large rear game pouch. Turkey models may also include specialized pockets for calls and other gear. Materials cover the gamut, from inexpensive Nylon to oiled cotton to modern Dyneema-reinforced ripstop cotton.



As with other types of packs and hunting accessories, prices rise as features increase. Premium models are available in multiple sizes, include high-tech materials, fully adjustable waist belts and chest straps, and various pockets and compartments for specialized gear.

## Chair Packs

Chair-style packs represent a relatively new hunting pack category, ranging from simple but well-engineered folding chairs with built-in shoulder straps to more advanced hunting backpacks with fold-out legs and drop-down, padded seats.

Chair-style packs are exciting options for turkey, predator, hog and even deer and elk hunters – anyone who hunts from the ground, needs to remain mobile and set-up quickly.

Capacities and designs vary, but two of the more advanced are Tenzing's TZ TP14 Turkey Pack and TZ PP15 Predator Pack. Both utilize an aluminum frame stay backpack design with adjustable, foldout aluminum legs and a drop-down padded seat. The Turkey Pack incorporates a variety of specialized call and accessory pockets on its front and a large, expandable turkey pocket on its back. The Predator Pack is more generalized, sporting 2,200 cubic inches of storage space in a true backpack with primary and sub compartments, a separate detachable electronics or accessory pack, and zippered front/side compartments with centerfire cartridge and shot shell loops, and a foldout boot to carry a firearm.

## Pick Your Pack

Regardless of design category, today's hunting packs range in price from as little as \$30 to as much as \$900. As one can imagine, price is a direct reflection of features, size, comfort and quality of construction. Packs with quality zippers, thread, advanced high performance materials, full adjustability and extra features like hydration systems, compression straps and rain covers represent the top of the market. Plan on spending \$60 to \$220 for a quality traditional hunting daypack that will hold up and

perform for several seasons. Quality backcountry hunting packs capable of carrying capes, quarters or a week's worth of gear start at around \$200.

At least two truths become evident when researching and shopping for hunting packs today. First, the range of styles, features and choices has never been better. More options are available across multiple price points than ever before. Second, no single hunting pack excels in every hunting situation. Most avid hunters have multiple packs, so save your pennies, buy the highest quality, best-fitting packs you can afford, and take care of them. They'll take care of you, and you'll be money ahead in the long run.





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# Gamo Outdoor USA Big Cat 1250 DX Airgun

Gamo Outdoor USA ([www.gamousa.com](http://www.gamousa.com)) introduced the rebirth of a legend this year. The all-new Big Cat 1250 DX features its famous heavy duty powerplant capable of producing 1250 FPS (with .177 PBA Platinum pellets) and 4x32 magnification scope for target practice, and large, medium or small pest control. The new Big Cat 1250 DX includes many of the top features from Gamo's premium air rifles such as Gamo's polymer over molded jacketed precision rifled steel (fluted) barrel for climate protection combined with a new lightweight and durable Non-Slip All-Weather synthetic stock. The New Big Cat 1250 DX has a single cocking system and features the new S.A.T (Smooth Action Trigger) and S.W.A (Shockwave absorber) recoil pad.

## Big Cat 1250 DX SPECS

- .177 Cal.
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- SAT™ Smooth Action Trigger™
- SWA™ (Shock Wave Absorber), with up to 74% recoil absorption
- 4x32 rifle scope
- MSRP \$204.95



## CVA OPTIMA™ Muzzleloading Pistol

Make your cold weather hunting tip even more challenging and pick up a unique, but extremely reliable pistol. Try the muzzleloading type from CVA. The OPTIMA PISTOL is built using the same frame as the popular CVA OPTIMA muzzleloading rifle. “The compact and lightweight design of the Optima frame lends itself well to use in a handgun,” said Dudley McGarity, CEO of Blackpowder Products, Inc., owner of the CVA brand.

McGarity's rundown on the new CVA OPTIMA PISTOL begins with the ergonomically designed stock that comfortably fits the hand and balances perfectly for two fisted shooting. The OPTIMA PISTOL comes with the Weaver compatible DuraSight® scope rail as standard equipment. Barrels are fluted and are only offered in Stainless Steel – and this is REAL STAINLESS STEEL (416 grade), not the nickel plated or painted finishes that only look like the real thing. But most important, says McGarity, the new OPTIMA PISTOL features CVA's Quick Release Breech Plug system, or QRBP – the only easy removal system that



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really will remove without tools after the gun has been shot. CVA even has a video on their website that shows the QRBP being tested against competitive systems.

“Handgun hunting with a muzzleloader adds a whole new element of challenge to the sport,” McGarity says. His favorite load is one 50 grain IMR White Hot Pellet and a PowerBelt AeroLite 250 grain bullet, and he says that with this load the gun only kicks about as much as a .44 Magnum. “And with a starting retail of under \$400,” McGarity concludes, “the OPTIMA PISTOL is by far the highest value and most feature-packed middle price-point hand cannon on the market.”







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