



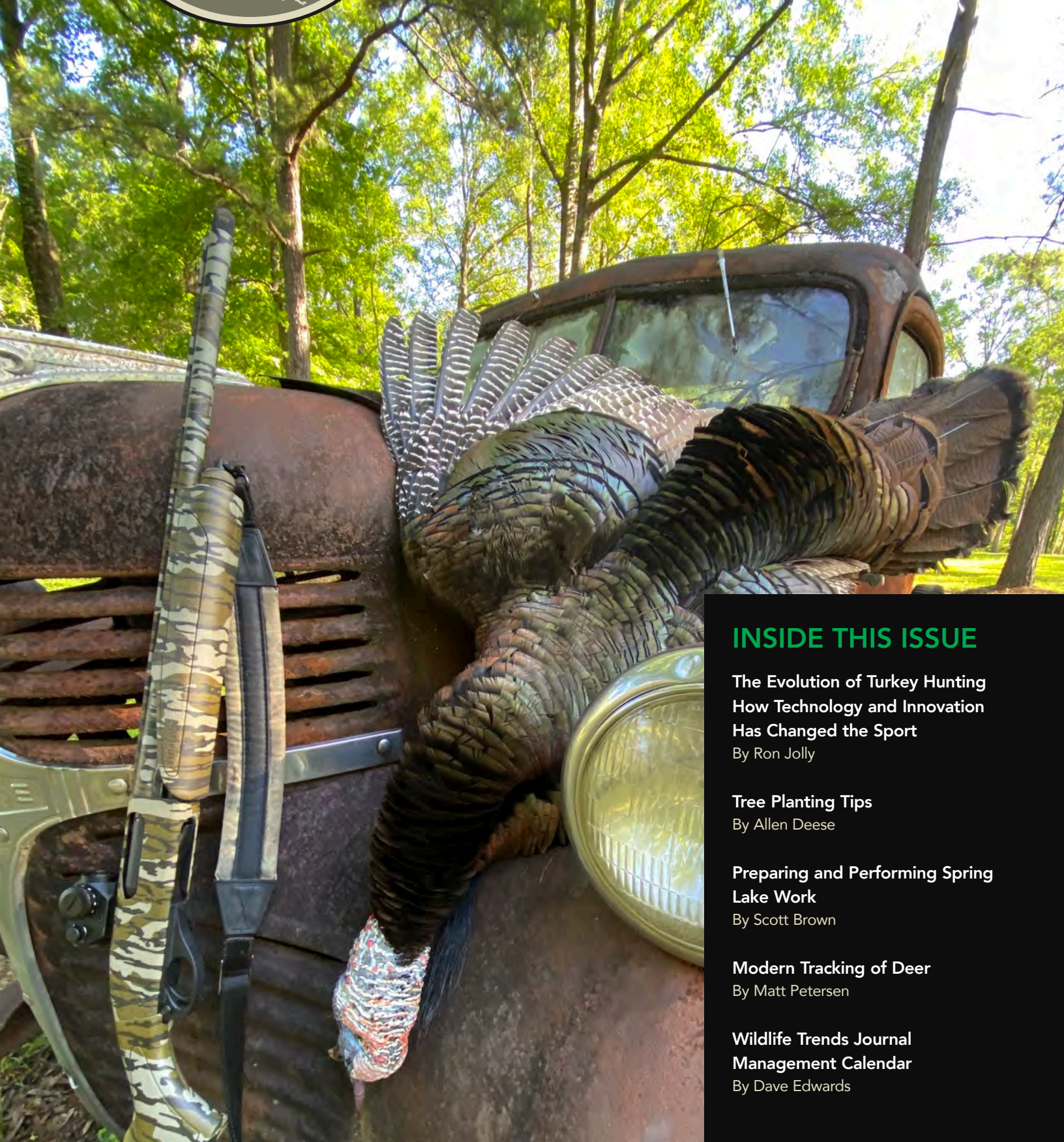
PRACTICAL WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT INFORMATION

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Earl Says...

Deer season has wound down for most of us by now and it's time to looking toward working on land management projects and turkey season! I've already started getting my turkey gear together and of course buying new stuff for this year.

I hope you enjoy the article on the new turkey shot loads article by Ron Jolly as much as I did. I learned a lot and plan to use that new knowledge this year. We as turkey hunters are always looking for the latest and greatest gear and info to bag that Tom.

And speaking of turkeys, I hope you all will be able to visit us at the **50th Anniversary** of the **National Wild Turkey Federation** at their convention in **Nashville, TN February 16 – 18**. We'll be exhibiting with the good folks of Plantra and The Wildlife Group. So, if you can make it, please stop by and say hello.



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The Evolution of Turkey Hunting How Technology and Innovation Has Changed the Sport

By Ron Jolly



Ron Jolly (ronjolly22952@mindspring.com) is an award-winning outdoor writer and video producer living with his wife, Tes, on their farm near Tuskegee, Alabama. Tes (www.jollysoutddorvisions.com) is herself an award-winning writer and outdoor photographer. You've seen lots of her work in past issues of Wildlife Trends Journal.

Modern camouflage allows today's turkey hunter to hide in plain sight of turkeys. Photo by Tes Randle Jolly

I saw my first wild turkey gobbler over six decades ago. He came to simple yelps produced by a hand-made mouth diaphragm call. I was lying on my belly behind a fallen log. I don't remember what I was wearing but the man I lay beside wore blue jeans, a khaki shirt and green cap. His shotgun was a Model 12 Winchester loaded with high brass shells stuffed with #6 lead shot. He trusted that set up out to 30 yards.

You may wonder how a boy of six years could remember details about a man all these years later. Easy, he did it the same way every time I turkey hunted with him until I left home for college. The man was my dad, and was considered a *turkey man* back in the day. In fact, he was one of only a few men who hunted turkeys in our area in those days. In

his wildest imagination he could never have dreamed how turkey hunting would look today.

He was a man of tradition and very hesitant to change his turkey hunting methods and tactics. After all, nobody he knew had the experience, knowledge or strategy to persuade him there was a better way. He was content with yelp three times, wait 30 minutes, yelp three times and wait some more. He was confident in the method but for a young boy it was pure torture.

After college I began hunting turkeys on my own. The old school tactic of yelp three times, wait 30 minutes then yelp three times was replaced with aggressive yelps, cuts, clucks, purrs and cackles. Waiting 30 minutes for a result became the

last resort as hunters learned aggressive calling and changing positions on a gobbler often put him in front of the gun. If you got busted so be it, there was usually another hot gobbler on the next ridge. It was during this evolution of turkey hunting that my addiction to turkey hunting became an incurable disease that afflicts me to this day.

Decades have passed since that morning with my dad and seeing my first wild turkey gobbler. The innovations and changes to the sport of turkey hunting are too numerous to list. There are, however, some innovations that have revolutionized how hunters outwit turkeys and give them a ride in a pickup truck.



Turkey decoys have become a popular tool for today's turkey hunter.
Photo by Tes Randle Jolly

The Glorious Decade

The decade of the 1980's was a boon for wild turkey populations across the United States. State wildlife agencies developed trap and release techniques that returned wild turkeys to areas where they had disappeared decades before. The National Wild Turkey Federation, established in 1973, gained popularity in the 80's and romanticized wild turkeys, turkey hunting and conservation of the bird and its habitat.

It was also during this decade that many innovative companies sprang onto the scene and introduced cutting edge products that literally changed how turkey hunters thought, talked and hunted. Everything from better calls, guns, ammunition and camouflage were introduced to the market place. Decoys, snake boots, copper plated shot—the list goes on and on. One of those companies was Mossy Oak® Camouflage. With the introduction of the original Bottom Land pattern, hunters were able to hide in plain sight of keen-eyed gobblers as they were coaxed into gun range.

Another company that shook up the turkey hunting world was Feather Flex® Decoys. Their introduction of light-weight, collapsible turkey decoys, crude by today's standards, added realism to a hunter's setup and distracted the attention of wily gobblers from the caller to the fake turkey in front of him.

Arguably, the company that had the biggest impact on turkey hunting during the 1980's was Primos® Hunting. This company manufactured innovative calls such as stack frame mouth diaphragms, friction calls and more, but that was not what propelled the company to national recognition. The introduction of the Truth Series videos changed the turkey hunting culture by sharing the turkey hunting experience while educating turkey hunters simultaneously. Primos became a household name with America's turkey hunters and developed a cult-like following that is still going strong today. Phrases such as *cut and run*, *limb hanger*, *the Rodney Shuffle*, *call too much*, *call too loud* and *roosted ain't roosted* are widely used today to describe some of turkey hunting's grandest moments.

I was fortunate to be a turkey hunter in the 1980's and affiliated with the aforementioned companies in some fashion. In 1984 I ordered, sight unseen, a Remington 870 Special Field shotgun with a 21-inch full choke barrel. When it arrived, I replaced the straight English stock with a standard 870 stock and applied a custom paint job. Loaded with 2 ounces of copper plated shot, it was devastating on a gobbler at 40 yards. It would be 35 turkey seasons before I considered another turkey gun.

Sherwood Tactical

I first met Jeff Sherwood while turkey hunting near Cleveland, MS. I was struggling and needed help. Jeff agreed to show me some new ground. We clicked and became close friends. Jeff is a hunter with uncanny abilities and suffers greatly from his turkey hunting addiction.

Jeff is a machinist by trade and his company, *Cleveland Hydraulics*, serves the farming community in the Mississippi Delta. His passion is hunting and building guns. His other company, *Sherwood Tactical*, (www.sherwoodtactical.com) produces custom-made, long-range rifles for hunters and target shooters and customized shotguns for turkey hunters.

In February, 2020, my old friend Jeff Sherwood insulted me for the first time in our 30-year friendship. We were talking turkey hunting and he bluntly told me my old 870 Special Field was obsolete; a dinosaur. "Jolly, I can build you a 20 gauge that will smoke your old 12 gauge 870," said Jeff.

My reply, "Prove it!"

When Sherwood says he will build you a shotgun, he actually takes a factory-built gun of your choice and customizes it to your specifica-



Reloading turkey shells with TSS is a popular trend among turkey hunters today.

Photo by Pete Daugherty



Browning ammunition uses a blend of #7 and #9 shot in one of their popular turkey loads. Photo by Tes Randle Jolly

tions. In my case, he started with a black Remington 870 Youth model .20 gauge with synthetic stock and pump.

“You choose the gun. Doesn’t matter the brand or gauge. I take your factory-built gun and dip it in the camouflage pattern you choose. Once that is done, I install the optic of your choice or fit it with top-of-the-line rifle-style open sights. Now days most hunters choose small red dot optics for turkey hunting,” said Sherwood.

“The most important thing I do to a custom shotgun is make certain it fits the owner. Length of stock is very important. On most factory-built shotguns I have to raise the comb of the stock so your eye aligns perfectly with the optic. To do this I install a cheek piece on the

stock and adjust it to fit the owner. This ensures your cheek is anchored on the stock and full view through the optic. This enhances accuracy and comfort when shooting the gun. When that is done, I evaluate the trigger. Most shotguns have terrible triggers for shooting stationary targets. They are hard to pull and normally have slack or creep. On some guns I can fix that but on others I can’t. If I can’t fix it, I recommend replacing the factory trigger with an aftermarket trigger.”

“When the gun has been fitted to the owner, I begin the process of matching a choke and load. In my custom rifles I develop a round specifically for the rifle. This is a meticulous process but when you leave with that rifle you have the recipe for the perfect bullet

matched for that rifle. I don’t have to do that with shotguns,” said Sherwood.

For my gun, I chose Mossy Oak Bottomland for the camouflage pattern and topped it with a UDO red dot optic. Sherwood was able to work some magic on the factory trigger giving it a crisp break with no creep. I relied on Jeff to choose the choke and load.

“That’s the easy part,” said Sherwood. “I use a Carlson TSS Turkey Choke. It is designed to withstand the abrasive nature of super hard and dense tungsten shot. For the ammunition, I choose Browning TSS Tungsten Turkey. I don’t have to design a load for your shotgun. Browning has already done it, why re-invent the wheel? The shells are loaded with #7 tungsten shot or a #7/#9 blend. Both are devastating on turkeys at 50 yards or more.”

At this point I need to admit Sherwood was right about my old 870 Special Field. Compared to my Sherwood Tactical 20 gauge loaded with Browning TSS ammunition, it’s obsolete, a dinosaur. I am an old school turkey hunter who believes turkey hunting is about how close, not how far but it is good to know I have more options with this new gun and ammunition.

Tungsten Super Shot (TSS)

To learn more about TSS turkey loads, I contacted the experts at Browning Ammunition, (www.browningammo.com). There is a lot more to producing game changing shotgun loads than meets the eye. Here is what I learned.

TSS is the highest technology shot on the market. Bringing that technology to the Browning brand elevates the company as a provider of premium products that give hunters a competitive edge and



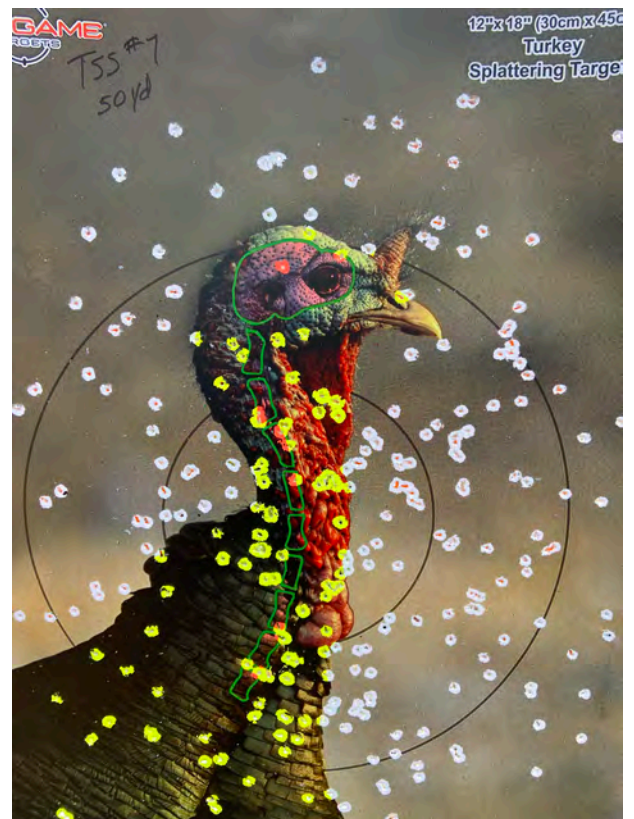
This .20 gauge Remington 870 Youth by Sherwood Tactical replaced the .12 gauge 870 I had carried for 35 years. Photo by Tes Randle Jolly

trust in Browning products.

TSS stands for Tungsten Super Shot and is reserved for the highest density tungsten you can get. The tungsten manufacturing process allows you to vary the density of the shot you are making from 18 grams per cubic centimeter for TSS all the way down to 11 grams per cubic centimeter, which is the density of lead. The high density of TSS shot allows for greater penetration at extended range with smaller shot sizes. Put simply, a pellet made of tungsten is 60% heavier than a lead pellet the exact same size. Browning offers two TSS loads for 12- and 20-gauge shot-guns. The first is a #7-#9 shot blend and the second is a #7 shot load. The blended round contains 50% #7 shot and 50% #9 shot and gives you more pellets per round. They offer the #7 load for hunters who hunt states where #9 shot is not legal. The .410-gauge load is

loaded with #9 shot. Most states that do not allow #9 shot for turkeys do not allow hunting with a .410 gun. Always check regulations before hunting.

There is a lot more to TSS Turkey Tungsten loads than just the shot. They use only premium primers in all their turkey loads. Internally it's called the *turkey primer* and it's designed to put as much energy into the powder as possible guaranteeing powder ignition. The powder is a very refined powder that is clean burning and designed to propel the shot at 1200 feet per second.



Smaller pellets utilized in TSS loads mean more pellets on target with devastating impact. Photo by Tes Randle Jolly



The introduction of TSS shot has allowed many turkey hunters to downsize to .20, .28 or even .410 gauge shotguns. Photo by Pete Daugherty

It is a double based powder that performs in all weather. The wad that holds the shot has thicker petals than a lead shot wad. It's designed to protect the bore of the gun from the super hard tungsten shot.

The price of Browning's TSS Tungsten Turkey loads is in the materials and the process of manufacturing tungsten shot. Tungsten is a rare metal and a large percentage of tungsten used today is recycled material. Browning justifies the price of TSS Turkey Tungsten by saying; "TSS Turkey Tungsten #7-#9 blend, in 12 or 20 gauge, will put three times more pellets on target and deliver 30% deeper penetration at 60 yards when compared to our BXD turkey shell loaded with copper plated lead #5 shot. TSS Turkey Tungsten shells loaded with #7 shot will put two times the pellets on target and deliver 50% deeper penetration."

What's Next?

Much has changed in the turkey hunting world since that day long ago when I saw my first wild turkey gobbler. We don't dress the same way, we don't call the same way and we don't hunt the same way. About the only thing that has not changed is the wild turkey. They are still wild, beautiful and challenging birds to hunt.

The restoration of the wild turkey to 49 of the 50 United States is one of conservation's greatest success stories. This tremendous accomplishment was achieved on the backs of state wildlife agencies, like-minded conservation groups and hunters. During this process much was learned about wild turkeys by the biologists who managed the restoration effort nationwide. This knowledge was

shared with hunters and land managers across the nation. Turkey populations flourished and so did turkey hunters.

There is a romance between wild turkeys and we who hunt them that is incomprehensible to those who don't hunt turkeys. Those who have never experienced a close gobble, heard drumming behind you, seen a loud-mouthed hen bossing the flock or watched the ritual of a gobbler in strut have no clue why turkey hunters are so fanatical. I am somewhat old school. I believe the real thrill of turkey hunting is how close, not how far.

There is an old saying, "You must be present to win!" I think that quote applies perfectly to turkey hunting. Just being there makes us all a winner.

If you have shot turkey shells loaded with tungsten super shot (TSS), you know the advantage they bring to your turkey hunting game. It is hard to believe smaller gauge shotguns shooting smaller pellets can be so devastating on turkeys but they are. Here is why:

1. Denser pellets maintain kinetic energy from the muzzle to the target
2. Smaller pellets means more pellets per load
3. More pellets means denser patterns with fewer holes

Pete Daugherty is retired military and an ardent turkey hunter. He started shooting TSS eight years ago. "I shot my first TSS loaded shells eight years ago. To say I was impressed is an understatement. I did some research and began reloading my own shells that same year. I quickly learned that I could get all the distance and knock down power I needed from a .20 gauge and have shot a .20 gauge ever since," said Daugherty.

Daugherty is not alone. There is a craze among America's turkey hunters that takes the TSS evolution to another level. There are a growing number of hunters who have chosen to level the playing field by hunting with .410-gauge shotguns and loads.

Pete Daugherty had one more point to make: "Turkey hunters are a passionate group and are willing to make sacrifices to improve their experience in the turkey woods. A box of five factory loaded TSS shells average around \$50 retail. I can reload those five shells for \$35. Loading my own increases my pleasure in the spring woods."

Tree Plot Planning, Planting, and Care

By Allen Deese



Allen Deese is the Nursery Sales Manager for The Wildlife Group. Contact him at 800-441-6826 or visit their website at www.wildlife-group.com.

Be sure the roots on your seedlings are moist and clean.

With hunting season approaching, many of you have already planted your food plots or are preparing to do so. It's also a great time to plan to add trees to your property this winter. As we are prepping our land and bushhogging, we often find areas that we constantly mow and can't seem to decide what to do with it. It's these areas that I would concentrate on getting some small orchards of mast-producing trees started. At our nursery, we've worked extremely hard all year to provide you, the landowner, with the best quality seedlings and trees. My hope is the following article will help you plan, plant, and care for your trees because we take great pride in providing you with great trees and

information. If you are not successful at growing trees, then we are not doing our job. The only way any nursery can be successful is if the customer is successful. We all need to plant more trees, and I need you to be successful, so you return and purchase more. Or at least tell someone how successful you were so that they will plant also. Below is a brief guide that will help you be more successful with your plantings.

Whether you have container trees or bare-root seedlings delivered to you or you visit a nursery and pick out your trees, here is an excellent guide to go by on what to look for:

- Look for healthy one-year-old whips 3' to 4' tall, 1/2" to 3/4" in diameter fruit trees

- For oak or other trees that are grown from seed, look for 12"-36" saplings
- Plants grown in pots should be 4' to 8' tall and 1" to 2" in diameter
- Closely check labels to make sure of variety and rootstock on fruit trees
- Select trees that will grow in the soils that you have, wet, upland dry, alkaline all are significant and tree specific

Seedling Care

When you receive your trees, be sure to pay special attention when handling your plants that you not allow the roots to dry out. Planting



The hole that you dig will need to be deep and wide enough so you can easily place the seedling without J-rooting or smashing the roots together.

dates are fall, winter, and spring if you have to. We do not suggest any plantings during the summer months unless you plan to water them regularly. Plant your seedlings as soon as you can upon receiving them. If you plan to plant your seedlings within one week of receiving, you can leave them in the original package and store them in a cool place out of direct sunlight. Check the roots every couple of days to make sure they are moist, do not allow the seedlings to freeze or be left in an area that could get too hot. If you feel moisture could be a problem, wet some paper towels or newspaper and wrap around the roots in the box to retain moisture.

Another way to store your seedlings is to heel them in, this works well for longer storage. Dig a trench in the ground deep enough and wide

enough to insert the bundle of seedlings roots into the ground and cover with soil. Next, you would want to water the ground to settle the soil and to keep them moist. Water the seedlings at least once a week unless you have had adequate rainfall. The seedlings will keep much longer this way, and you can remove and plant as needed. Before planting, I like to soak the roots in some water for a couple of hours to hydrate the root system.

Site and Soil Requirements

If you are planting fruit trees, sunlight is the key ingredient in maximizing fruit production. Early morning sun is ideal in helping to dry the dew from the plants,

thereby reducing the incidence of disease. Choose a site on your property that is in the sun most of the day. Otherwise, expect reduced performance from your trees.

Well-drained soil is more important than soil fertility. If planting fruit trees, avoid soils where water is still standing 24 hours after a good rain. In these areas, the roots will die from a lack of oxygen and too much moisture. If you must plant in these areas, you will need to plant on raised or terraced beds. Or choose plants that are suitable for the wet area.

And lastly, never plant apple trees in high alkaline soils. Apples develop many minor element problems when planted in soils with a pH above 7.

Planting Your Trees

The hole that you dig is just as important as the seedling that you are planting. The hole that you dig will need to be deep and wide enough so you can easily place the seedling without J-rooting or smashing the roots together. Please make sure the hole is deep enough so that you can plant your trees at the same depth they were at the nursery. You will see a slight color change from the tree trunk to the root system. Plant at that depth, maybe slightly deeper, but **do not leave any root above ground.** Potted plants should be planted about 1" above the soil line.

All fruit trees will grow better on well-drained soils. Some oaks are suited for wetter soils and will do great. But keep in mind that not all trees will grow in moist bottomland. Sunlight is vital for most trees and plants. Plant in full sun where possible and remember that morning sun is more important than evening sun. So, if you will only be getting 4-6 hours of sunlight, **plant for morning sun if possible;** again, wets soils are not acceptable for fruit trees.

Most of all, take your time and plant your trees the right way. Rushing through this job causes poor plantings with poor results. I know this will sound crazy coming from a tree salesperson, but I had instead you plant fewer trees and plant them right. Set up a five-year plan for your property and plant in sections so that you can give your trees some extra care the 1st season and not be overwhelmed trying to keep them all alive.

Tree Spacing

Oak and Chestnut trees spacing should be at least 30-35 feet apart. Plant these trees in groups to ensure pollination and provide

more considerable food support in the area once the trees start to produce. Chestnuts typically start making within 5-7 years. Oak trees will vary widely depending upon the species. **Early producing oaks include Sawtooth, Gobbler Sawtooth, Chinkapin Oaks, Dwarf Chinkapin Oaks, Live Oaks, and Water Oak.** From my experience, you could have acorns within 5-8 years on the above species. Always use Plantra tree tubes and a quality fiberglass stake in ensuring survival and increasing growth.

Apples and crabapples planted at 15'-20' spacing is ideal. Most but not all wildlife nurseries either use semi-dwarf or standard rootstocks. Pears grow much larger and faster so the minimum spacing on them would be 20'-25' feet. It's best to plant fruit trees in groups mixing apples and crabapples to aid in pollination. Also, grow pears together and mix varieties for pollination. Combining different types of fruit in bunches not only gives you excellent pollination but also offers an extended drop of fruit. Keep in mind that some fruit trees will produce within three years. At the same time, this is not always optimum because heavy fruiting slows growth and can damage trees. **We recommend removing fruit from your trees for the first 3-4 years**, if possible, to allow the tree's energy to go to the trunk as well as helping to avoid broken branches from the heavy fruit. Most fruit trees will be large enough to withstand a good fruit crop around five-seven years after planting.

Fertilization

At the time of planting, dig a larger than average hole to soften the surrounding soils. Large soft holes will allow the root system to spread quickly; watering the trees

when planting will remove air pockets and settle the soil. The 1st season I suggest omitting fertilizer in the hole unless using a product such as 3-0-3 Bio-Nutrition or Nutri-packs with low nitrogen and great root boosting organics. If not, do not fertilize at the time of planting. Spring green-up is always tempting the 1st season to push the

tree and get quick, explosive growth. While this may seem like a great idea, that early boost may very well kill your trees in August/September. Early spring rain and lots of vegetative growth can mean big trouble late summer when the rain subsides and temperatures soar. Small newly planted trees need the root system to explode in



This is what a successful planting will look like later in the year!

the ground, not the tree above ground—this is why low nitrogen fertilizers and the correct PH are so important. If you are confident that you cannot supplementally water in times of need, I would wait until the second growing season for any top-dress fertilization. If you still feel the need to fertilize the 1st year, only add about one table-spoon of 10-10-10 around the tree's base about one foot from the trunk in early March and again in mid-June, and only if you are getting adequate rainfall. The 2nd year use about one cup at the same time of year, increasing each season by ½ cup. Use no more than one cup and no more than 5 pounds on a mature tree.

If you are in an area where fire blight is a problem or has been a problem, cut your application rates in half on apples and crabapples. Pears do not require a lot of fertilizer, so if you have any doubts about pears, do not fertilize at all. Treat persimmons much like you would pears. Be sure to soil test the areas you plan to plant. **Soil Testing is the most overlooked and essential aspect in any planting situation!!!!**

Weed Control

One of the most limiting factors for all newly planted trees is weeds. Weed competition can result in death or poor growth of young trees. It is essential to keep a 3'-4' circle cleaned at the base of each tree. You can do this by mulching, use of a weed mat, or use of chemicals. When using a product such as RoundUp, be careful not to get it on the tree. It is also beneficial to mix a pre-emergent with the RoundUp to prohibit regrowth for approximately three months. Again, **weeds are the most limiting factor for newly planted trees.**

Spray Schedule for Pest and Disease

- Read The Label! No matter what any article tells you or what we recommend, always read the label on any product you intend to use and follow the directions on the label.
- Wintertime is the ideal time for dormant spray. The month of February is a great time for winter pruning and applying a dormant horticultural oil. Using dormant season oil mixed with 1 ounce of Permethrin will protect all of your fruit trees, berry bushes, as well as pecans and chestnuts. Dormant oil will be the first spray of the season, and it's imperative to coat the entire tree or as much as possible to protect from overwintering pests. Adding Permethrin will contact kill any existing insects and take care of any overwintering borers that have established a home inside the tree's trunk. Be sure to get this done before spring bud break. Neem Oil is an excellent organic insecticide, miticide, and fungicide used as a dormant spray.
- Your next application is the only spray that you would ever apply to your fruit trees during bloom. The active ingredient in the spray is streptomycin sulfate for fire blight in apples, pears, and crabapples. Fire Blight is a bacterial disease that infects these species. Spraying during bloom is crucial for the complete protection of your trees. My advice would be to



spray early morning or late evening to avoid as many pollinating insects as possible.

- Copper Fungicide is excellent for fungus, leaf spot, leaf curl, and rots. Wait until petal fall to start applying copper fungicide.
- Pest and disease control sprays are to be used any time after the pollination period has ended. Once all flowering blooms (Petals) have fallen from the tree, you can then treat them. We recommend applying early morning or late evening to avoid killing any beneficial insects.
- Systemics work great for pest control over an extended period. But it's imperative to only apply after petal drop. Also, only use recommended amount and products specifically for fruit trees. (Bayer Citrus and Fruit) This one-time application can control Japanese beetles, aphids, thrips,

whiteflies, scale, termites, and other harmful insects.

Please be sure to read the label and follow all precautions and directions on any product that you choose.

Wildlife enthusiasts should be picking trees with the absentee landowner in mind. Try and select the most disease-resistant trees that you can get to help with the problems that may arise while you are gone. However, disease resistance does not mean immune, and some spraying will be necessary at times.

Pollination

Many trees are self-fruitful. But why take that chance? It is always best to plant two or more varieties of the same fruit type together with overlapping bloom periods. Doing so will guarantee pollination while also offering an extended drop of fruit. Some varieties bear heavy crops when pollinated by another pollen-producing variety. Keep in mind that I suggest always plant some crabapples with your apples to aid in pollination. The Whitney Crabapple, Chestnut Crabapple, Callaway Crabapple, and the Dolgo are all excellent pollinators and great producers. Plant pears with pears, persimmons with persimmons, and so on.

Pruning and Training

The day you plant your trees is when you should begin to prune and train them for future production. Neglect results in poor growth and delayed fruiting.

- **1st year** – Pruning a young tree controls its shape by developing a robust, well-balanced framework of scaffold branches. Remove or cut back unwanted branches early to avoid the necessity of significant cuts in later years. Remove

inside limbs as well as heading the central leader. Heading brings the top and the roots back into balance and causes buds just below the cut to grow and form scaffold branches.

- **2nd year** – Again, top the central leader to encourage another group of scaffolding branches. Remove all inside limbs and tip-prune all existing limbs. Limb spreaders are encouraged to get the desired limbs spread (45-degree angle with the main trunk). Doing so will ensure sufficient sunlight reaches the interior portion of the tree. Remember to always keep the central leader as the highest point of the tree. Keep the ends of the scaffolds and primary limbs below the top of the tree—**prune trees every year during the dormant season. Light summer pruning is ok to remove suckers and excessive growth.**

In Summation

>Purchase your trees from a reputable company. Remember that buying trees is a long-term relationship, much like purchasing a piece of land. The trees that you plant on your property will benefit you and your family for a long time.

- Soil Test!
- Diversify -plant varying species of Apples, Crabapples, Pears, Persimmons, and Plums not only for pollination but for a sustained fruit drop from early summer into late December.
- Spend a little time with your trees each season in late February, removing old dead limbs, crossing limbs inside the tree, and heading back the leaders. Remember to make pruning cuts above outward-

facing buds.

- Fertilization- always lean on the side of a little is enough. Remember that Pears and Persimmon do not require a lot of nitrogen, especially after about three-four years. Fertilization during the early years is beneficial in getting young trees established and soil testing for correct pH.
- Weeds – use weed mats, spray, mulch, or all of the above. Weeds are the most limiting factor to establishing newly planted trees.
- Dormant oil on a warm February day will help protect from insect damage. The best spray to apply and the least toxic of all sprays.
- Lastly, be patient! I repeatedly hear that someone at a nursery told them that they have trees that will produce in 2-3 years. We do, but in reality, even if buying large trees, you will still have about a 4 – 5-year window that the tree must develop a sound limb structure and a healthy thriving root system. Only then will you start to benefit fully from your orchard. So, plant with a long-term purpose in mind and only plant as many trees as you can care for each season.

Planting trees can be a gratifying project for you, your property, and your hunting buddies or as a great family outing. Seeing the results of your labor is very rewarding. When following our recommendations, we fully expect that you would have 85% survival or better. Things will happen out of your control, and you will lose some trees, it happens to all of us. Be patient and give them time, and you will be planting trees for years to come.

Preparing and Performing Spring Lake Work

By Scott Brown



As lake managers, the spring is our busiest time of year. It's the best time to evaluate waterbodies with electrofishing and or other sampling gear. It is also the time most hatchery fish are spawned or collected from the wild and stocked. As a company, we work from South Florida to the North Carolina/Virginia border, and the seasons work in our favor and allow us to do that, as largemouth bass spawning usually starts in late February in South Florida, and it gradually progresses north ending in May/June in North Carolina. We gradually move our electrofishing surveys north as time goes, following the start of fish spawning season in each region. Lake owners only need to identify their startup season, when things start happening on their waterbodies, to start working.

Lake owners in the South have the luxury of working on and enjoying their lakes in winter while northerners have cold weather and even freezes that deter winter lake work and/or recreation. My schedule is by far the busiest from late February through June. We start electrofishing in South Florida in late February to early March, and finish spring lake evaluations in the Carolinas in Late May/early June. Not all lake management companies work as large geographical areas and that would make it hard to service all our clients as well as we do all at the same time. Spreading out field work, data entry and analysis, mixed with office work allows us to service many more clients and provide them the best service possible.

Scott Brown is a Biologist and regular contributor to Wildlife Trends Journal with over 35 years experience in research and managing natural resources throughout the Southeast. Scott founded Southern Sportsman Aquatics & Land Management in 2007 and now has clients from Texas to Florida and into the Carolinas. Contact him at tazmanlabs1@gmail.com or (336) 941-9056.

Electrofishing in the spring is the best time to conduct a fish population evaluation with electrofishing and/or rod and reel. More big fish are near shore in the spring than any other time, with fall being the next best.

Once water temperatures get above 50o F, things start becoming active and alive in the water. Monitoring the severity of your past winter helps you determine what may need addressing in late winter or early spring this coming year. Did you have excessively warm or cold temperatures, or lack of/excessive rainfall this past winter? Colder than normal temperatures may have caused a fish kill you are unaware of in forage species such as threadfin shad and/or golden shiners. Threadfin shad have a cold-water threshold of about 45o F and golden shiners about 35o F. Species such as largemouth bass, bluegill and redear sunfish can handle ice covering the surface, but may have been affected by lower-than-normal Dissolved Oxygen (DO) levels. However, Copper-nose



Checking visibility about every two weeks with a Secchi Disk is mandatory once a fertilization program is initiated. This water looks pretty good and is probably in the desirable zone of 18-36 inches.



In spring, after evaluating the fishery, you may want to introduce a new forage species or restock a species already present that is depleted from over predation or a winter die-off. These threadfin shad are offspring from the previous year's stocking

bluegill and pure Florida bass may perish in extreme cold-water temperatures when stocked farther north than they can handle. On the opposite side of the spectrum, if it was warmer than usual, certain species of vegetation may not have died back and possibly grew during winter and is already becoming a problem before spring is here. Seasonal weather patterns of excessive hot or cold, flooding and drought affects your waterbody. Weather may also affect hatcheries making it harder or impossible to acquire certain fish species for spring stocking such as threadfin shad, mosquitofish, tilapia, and golden shiners.

Water Chemistry

During the spring, your water chemistry should be good from top-to-bottom, particularly Dissolved Oxygen (DO), unless you have major issues. Sampling water chemistry every quarter can help you

understand what kind of swings your waterbody has throughout the year and determine if any water quality issues are negatively affecting your fish population. Spring water quality issues can affect fish growth, overall health, reproduction, egg hatching success and fry survival.

We recommend testing water chemistry in the morning at various locations (depending on waterbody size and number of inflows) for water temperature, DO, pH, and conductivity one foot below the surface and one foot off the bottom in the deepest spot. Test for ammonia, alkalinity, carbon monoxide, chlorides, hardness and salinity (if close to the coast) at minimum in one spot near the middle of the waterbody. With the DO meter, determine if there is a line and at what depth that separates good DO levels and poor, or knowing if it is constantly good or bad from top to bottom is important for all seasons. This will change with the seasons. In a lake with good water chemistry and no aeration system, DO should be good top-to-bottom in spring and fall, with it stratified (layered like a cake) in the winter and

summer. The depth of this separation line will vary depending on algae blooms, water clarity and substrate makeup. The farther down this line is the better, as there are more surface acres for fish to occupy during these times. Checking only in the spring is a mistake, as it may look good, but during other seasons the poor water quality section may be large and hindering the success of your fish population. If you have a suitably fitted bottom aeration system the DO will be constant throughout the water column throughout the year and there should not be any issues.

If you conduct an annual fertilizing program or starting one is desired, begin fertilizing in late winter/early spring once water temperatures reach 55-60o F and continue throughout the growing season. Monitor the visibility every other week with a Secchi Disk and add fertilizer as directed on the product label. Desirable visibility with a fertilization program is 18-36 inches. Anymore and you can have submerged vegetation issues, any less can cause a catastrophic fish kill should the planktonic algae (causes green water) die off all at once. Do not over fertilize and do not stop the program mid growing

season once it is started. If the pH is not adequate (above 6.5 minimum), we recommend liming in the fall (preferably) or winter, allowing water chemistry to adjust so you can start fertilizing in the spring. A green lake can grow up to 400% more fish than a clear water lake. The largemouth bass can also be 10-15% more robust (Relative Weight) than a clearwater lake.

Adding an aeration system in the spring makes the startup easier than if done in summer or winter. The air temperature is not as hot while installing the equipment, and the water column DO and temperature should be fairly steady throughout, making it less likely to cause a fish kill during the startup process. Spring is also a good time to service pumps (replace gaskets

and air filter annually and possibly carbon veins should it have them) and clean bubbler stones every few years with Muriatic acid.

Habitat and Vegetation

Once shoreline and submerged vegetation begin to grow, immediately begin treating foreseen nuisance aquatic vegetation with herbicides to prevent excessive growth in summer and large amounts of herbicides being required later in the year. This may be determined by historical growth, the species of plant and the past winter temperatures whether plants die-off, growth was slowed or growth continued at a normal rate. The sooner in spring problem vegetation is treated, the more successful the treatment. Know your plant species biology, herbicide, applica-

tion rates and the effects from water temperature on the herbicides used. The more you know, the more effective the treatment is.

Some filamentous algae species will begin to grow underwater on the bottom before other terrestrial plants begin to grow. If treating filamentous algae is required, treat as soon as you see it appear. Like all other nuisance plant species, treating sooner than later is better overall for the lake and your budget. Other early growing species around the shoreline or in the water that has been a problem in the past should be treated as soon as the plants appear to be growing. A growing plant receiving foliage herbicide treatments responds much better than a dormant plant. Some plant species may be best

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— Will Primos

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Quickly treat plant species that are exotic or a nuisance. This water lettuce has covered the entire end of this lake in Central Florida, and it is only the first week of March. The quicker you treat in the spring, the less time and money it will cost you.

treated by mowing or burning first, then followed by an herbicide foliage treatment of the young new shoots sprout. Just mowing the shoreline, dormant or dead vegetation will open it up to sunlight and allow desirable plants present to grow.

Spring is the best time to transplant soft tissue aquatic vegetation in or around your lake. This allows it a full growing season before winter to root and become established. Make sure plant species chosen and locations around the lake are best for your area, easy to care for, allow bank access and are aesthetically pleasing. Plant species purchased from a nursery specializing in native aquatic plants or a nearby donor site can be sources for your

native species. When using a nursery or a nearby donor site, be sure you properly identify the plant to prevent introducing a nuisance or non-native species, creating a problem for you in the future.

Early spring is also a good time to add offshore fish attractors and gravel spawning beds to help by increasing bream and bass spawning areas and providing hiding habitat for newly hatched fish and increasing survival rates, especially in waterbodies lacking

good natural habitat. We have observed #57 gravel spawning beds being used in less than five days after installation by largemouth bass and bluegill.

If you stopped supplemental feeding for winter, begin feeding once per day when water temperatures get above 55o F. Feed during the warmest part of day in 4-6 feet deep water. Begin feeding twice per day when water temperatures are between 60 and 70o F. Increase to feeding four times per day when water temperatures reach above 700 F. In some areas the startup temperature may be reached in late February and other areas not until April. In late winter, clean fish feeders, check timers and recharge or replace batteries prior to restarting. If all feed dispensed is not consumed within 15-20 minutes, reduce times dispensed to reduce



This electrofishing sample is from a lake we have been working on a few years. There are bigger bass along with some small in the sample. The first visit to this lake rendered more bass in the sample, but none over 12 inches.

waste. Most feeding attracts fish, so feeding times throughout the day need to remain the same for long periods of time so the fish will be nearby when the feed is dispensed to ensure most is consumed and waste is reduced. Feeder locations can be points to sight evaluate catfish, bream and shiner populations while fish are at the surface consuming floating feed. We recommend feed with various sized pellets with floating and sinking mixed together. There are various

brands of feed on the market. Whichever you choose, make sure it has a minimum of 30% protein. Both Purina and Sportsmen's Choice offer a mixed size and floating with sinking feed in the same bag. Be sure the feed is fresh and not moldy, certain feed molds can be toxic to fish.

Fish

Order your stocked fish approximately two months prior to wanting them delivered. The hatcheries

and weather will dictate when they can bring your ordered fish. Some fish are not available all year long, and some may not be available until late spring or early summer, while some may not be available even when promised. Once they in or available, it is too hot to haul them, so you have to wait until fall for delivery. The farther north your property, the less you have to worry about it being too hot to haul fish. In some instances, getting to the lake to stock can become an issue



Adding submerged fish habitat can be done any time of year, but in the spring it is cooler for the workers, and before the next year class of fish are hatched.



Spring electrofishing around the largemouth bass spawn may yield ripe or spawned-out females. Either way, they get included in the data to help make the upcoming management recommendations.

due to heavy spring rains. The best made plans can become very fluid when it comes to stocking, so be understanding and flexible. But, getting your order in as soon as possible helps to get your fish. The later you get entered on a stocking list, the more people in front of you and the fewer fish for customers closer to the bottom than the top of that list, no matter the species. As stated earlier, some years there are no fish in certain species available due to winter die-offs at the supplying hatchery or natural waterbodies where the species are collected. If it does not look like your desired species will be available one year, consider selecting another good available species as a

hatchery.

Spring, just prior to or after the largemouth bass spawn, is the best time to conduct an electrofishing survey, followed by fall. Sampling near the largemouth bass spawn assures the most bass, all sizes, male and female will be in the shallower water and more likely to be included in the sample, which indicates how weak or strong the population is. Sampling at this time allows for your lake manager to compile the data, create a management strategy and get started on implementing the recommendations that may include stocking before the summer heat arrives.



Some largemouth bass fry inadvertently show up with a few late fall spawned fingerling bluegill in a spring electrofishing sample. That sample was about a month after a largemouth bass spawn.

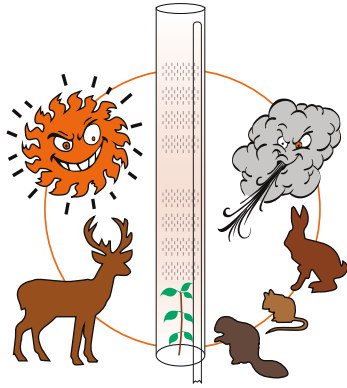
forage substitute. There are usually alternatives, but the cost and benefit may be more or less depending on the alternate species choices. Again, do your homework or consult your professional lake manager, know your fish species before you talk to the

The spring is a good time to remove largemouth bass with rod-and-reel or with electrofishing from the designated slot and numbers recommended for the year. This also alleviates predator numbers for post spawn survival of forage hatching during the spring. Most bass management strategies for largemouth have a bass removal component in it, and the bass are easier to catch in spring after a winter of eating very little and preparing to or finishing the spawn. Many clients do not use this opportunity and then find summertime fishing harder to catch the numbers that were prescribed. Again, for this task, spring is the best time, followed by fall then summer and winter, when it becomes harder to catch bass.

There is always lots to do as a lake owner, but spring is definitely the busiest time. Turkey hunting in the morning and performing lake work that can include catching and removing small bass is one way to have quite an enjoyable spring day ending with a fish fry at home or camp.

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Modern Tracking of Deer

By Matt Petersen



Imagine that if you polled every wildlife manager across the country on what has been the best tool developed in the past twenty years in regard to wildlife management, the vast majority would place trail cameras at the top of the list. Trail camera data was quickly realized to be superior to in-field observations due to hunters, and even managers, common mistake of over-estimating bucks' antler quality and ages. The fact that game cameras could be placed in areas where hunting isn't feasible coupled with 24/7 surveillance capabilities and it's easy to see why trail camera pictures often trump the need for intense in-field observation. With the marketplace providing standard trail cameras,

along with cellular game cameras, in all price ranges and quality spectrums, it's allowed all wildlife managers to be able to affordably monitor their properties and the game that live there. Trail cameras have become so popular that the folks who don't employ them typically do so by choice in order to keep their hunting more exciting by not knowing what type of deer or other game is living on their farm. Trail cameras are such a fantastic tool and have many uses on a property, but for the purposes of this article, the main use will be tracking individual bucks. Trail cameras allow a manager to keep up with unique bucks from day-to-day, month-to-month and year-to-year to allow you to make accurate

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assumptions about the age, antler quality, and body condition of the animal at the time of the picture. This article will cover why this tracking data of unique bucks is advantageous to a manager, what to look for in your pictures, and how to apply the knowledge you gain from them.

THE HOWS

When it comes to the "how to" on gathering the trail camera data on unique bucks, I've found that year-round, or nearly year-round trail camera monitoring to be best. I like to have cameras out any time that I can uniquely identify individual bucks based on body characteristics (unique markings, injuries, ear scarring or notches, etc.) or, more often

than not, by their antlers. Most of my trail cameras stay out year-round to monitor multiple game species but this often benefits my unique buck tracking by expanding my time to collect pictures, which often leads to more pictures of individual bucks. In preparation for this article, I looked over thousands of past trail camera pictures looking for unique bucks to illustrate my points here. What I noticed is that my best daylight pictures, (often close-ups), were taken in summer through the rut. My guess would be that the increased frequency of daylight would be due to the buck's more relaxed and stress-free state during summer due to the absence of hunters in the woods and hunting pressure. The same could be said about rut pictures with the likely driving force being increased testosterone levels and the increased mileage traveled by bucks searching for a mate. This increased frequency of daylight pics, and pictures in general, would be lost if you only ran cameras during the hunting season.

Another time I collect a large portion of my trail camera data of unique bucks is during trail camera surveys. Trail camera surveys are typically run in 2–3-week intervals and tend to focus on capturing pictures of deer over bait/mineral sites (where legal) or high traffic deer areas, such as AG fields or waterholes in areas where baiting is not permitted. Trail camera surveys are conducted to gather pictures that allow the manager to use an algorithm to gauge the number of unique bucks, antlerless deer, age structure, and overall deer numbers on one's property at the time of the survey. In the Deep South, these surveys are often done prior to the deer season to produce an inventory of deer to be harvested that fall or allowed to live another season. In the Mid-South and

North, it's often more important to have your survey after season to see what survived the hunting seasons and will be a year older next fall. Of course, you can have a pre-season and post-season survey if you so choose, and the NDA has a great resource on their website that dives deeper into this topic. All that said, I personally prefer a post-season trail camera survey on my farms in the Mid-South. By conducting these surveys directly after the deer season goes out every year, I can track unique bucks that made it through the hunting season and have pictures of them from year-to-year that were taken at the same time of the year. This is very important for one's ability to establish the age of a buck and also to have a snapshot of the age structure of the deer herd at the same time from year-to-year in order to build trend data. I found that many of my pictures were from this post-season trail camera survey, but they almost always were at night, and often of lower-quality due to, in my belief, deer coming off four months of highly pressured deer season and being weary of bait, and even trail cameras. With all this said, try to collect as much data/pictures as possible throughout the year on unique bucks but do so in a way that doesn't pressure them too much as to change their natural patterns. Also, establish a pre- or post-season trail camera survey that attempts to collect pictures of every unique buck on the property with a focus on high-quality, close-up pictures to help identify individual bucks.

ANTLER QUALITY

According to research conducted at Mississippi State University, bucks tend to fall into one of three categories when it comes to their genetic potential for antler growth – below average, average, and

above average. I would agree that this is what I see as well on properties that have year-round abundant quality food sources in place. The key to seeing this phenomenon is the year-round quality food part. I can't tell you how many times I hear that "all the bucks on this farm are only big 6's, 7's or 8's. Every now and then we get a 9 with a kicker". Or "none of the deer on this farm grow brow tines and are short tined". These sayings frustrate me to no end because they often are used as an excuse to shoot young deer, or a naïve reason given of controlling genetics. Even worse is that some respected deer managers spread this nonsense as well. More often than not, the reason that these managers and hunters can't see the distinctive categories of below average, average, and above average antler quality is simply that there isn't enough food year-round to allow individual bucks to express their genetic antler growing potential. Basically, what is happening is that all of the buck's antler quality is pulled down to a lower bar due to this shortage in nutrition. Of course, just like any other aspect of wildlife management, the answer, "It depends", often comes into play when talking about a certain states or region's ability to grow a buck with quality antlers. Across the board though, if a buck has access to the best nutrition possible year-round and throughout his life (ideally his mother had the same access), he will grow the best set of antlers his genetics and other outside determining factors will allow. To take this one step further I tend to break my bucks up into four brackets on my highly managed farms. Along with the 3 already mentioned, I add one more category that I call superstar bucks. On a well-managed property, you often will see this category of bucks begin to emerge and they are your highest

antler scoring group. Often times, even on intensely managed ground, you won't have a superstar buck

every year and often not every two years, but when you do, you'll be able to identify them immediately

due to their antler development being much higher than that of their peers.

BELOW AVERAGE BUCKS



2017



2018



2019

The buck in the pictures above is a great example of a below average deer when it comes to antler quality for his area. I believe this buck to be 2.5 in the first picture, which would make him 4.5 in the last. I had him on camera for three years and to my knowledge he never had an injury or was in poor body condition. This buck lived on a highly managed farm throughout his life in which nutrition was never in short supply. His mother would have carried him in the same conditions. Each year he took a small jump in antler size, but a large jump in body size, which would allow us to discern that he was getting all the food needed for him to grow a nice rack, if he had quality antler growing genetics. If a manager were making decisions of which deer to remove based on antler growth potential, this buck would certainly be taken to allow room for bucks with better antler quality to have more space and food on the farm. Notice I didn't say to control genetics in the deer herd. Many studies have shown that controlling genetics in a wild deer herd based on antler quality of individual bucks is a futile exercise and I agree. The best method is to forget about genetics and to remove unwanted individuals that don't meet management goals based on multiple years of history with the buck in order to free up more space and resources to the remaining deer.

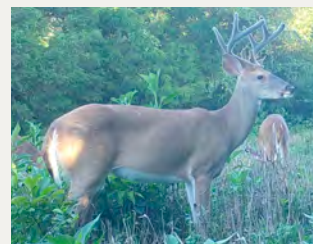
AVERAGE BUCKS



2017



2018



2019



2020

The buck above is a great example of an average buck for his area. This deer was believed to be 1.5 in the first picture captured of him and 4.5 in the last. This buck lived on the same highly managed property as the previous buck with the below average antler growth. Again, if a manager was looking to manage for antler quality and didn't have a surplus of bucks, an average buck like this would be a good candidate to be allowed to reach older age classes in order to reach his full antler growth potential.

ABOVE AVERAGE BUCKS



2018



2019



2020

This buck is a great example of an above average, and even a superstar, buck in his area. I believe this buck to be 2.5 in the first picture and 4.5 in the last. This buck was harvested at 4.5 and a cementum annuli test aged him at 4.5 also. These bucks typically and often separate themselves from their peers in each age group with their high antler quality. If a manager is managing for antler quality, you would definitely want to be sure to protect these bucks at all costs and allow them to reach maturity.

SUPERSTAR BUCKS



2013



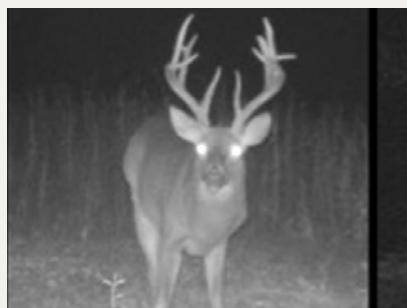
2014



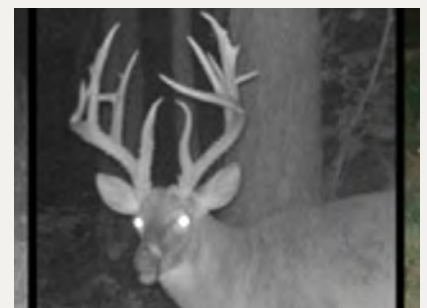
2015



2013



2014



2015

This category of bucks often makes itself known at 1.5 and typically always by 2.5. These bucks will be easy to identify and tend to have 8 pt. plus racks at 1.5 and have been known to have unusually long beams, tines, and kickers at 2.5. These bucks, along with above average bucks, are very susceptible to being killed before maturity due to their large racks. This effect is similar to high grading timber where folks take the best and leave the lowest quality allowing these bucks to make it to next season where they often express that same low antler quality. Steve Demarais and Bronson K. Strickland have a fantastic book – Strategic Harvest System: How to Break Through the Buck Management Glass Ceiling – that goes into great detail on this subject.

INJURIES

Another great reason to monitor bucks with trail cameras year-round is to keep an eye on injuries and/or poor body condition. Often times, injuries sustained throughout the year from car wrecks, injuries related to the rut (such as eye gouges or battle wounds), and wounds from bullets or arrows can lead to poor body condition and often end up resulting in poor antler development or deformities the following year. In areas of the whitetail's range that deal with brutal winters, deer can often die from the rigors of the rut followed by extreme cold temperatures and winter weather. By tracking these unique bucks via your trail



2019



2020

cameras, you can set your harvest goals accordingly by seeing individual bucks' body condition and antler growth.

The buck at left is a good example of a slightly below average buck in his area in the first picture. As you'll notice, he has an obvious injury to the shoulder area of his front left leg. This deer sustained this injury during November that same year, so the injury had no effect on his current set of antlers. I would have wagered 10:1 odds that this deer would have taken a slight jump in antler growth, if any at all, the following year. I was amazed to see the jump in antler growth from this buck the next fall and this goes to show that you have to judge each buck as an individual case and not make blanket statements about whitetails. If you're not keeping up with unique bucks from year-to-year, this is impossible to do.

The buck pictured at right is an average buck in his area. As you can see, he made steady gains in antler growth from 1.5 – 3.5 years old. He was very easy to track due to his distinct white "V" shaped marking on his snout. This buck was shot through his lower neck and brisket area in early November in 2019. The buck appeared healthy overall that winter and shed normally in early February, which is common for bucks in his area. I fully expected this buck to heal up over the spring and take another jump in antler growth in 2020. To my surprise, this buck took a huge step back and was unrecognizable the following fall. Had it not been for the white "V" on his snout I would not have believed it to be same buck as the year before. This buck, along with all the other bucks shown in this article, had year-round high-quality nutrition, so food was not a factor in their recovery. Again, it goes to show that



2017



2018



2019



2020

each deer is unique and, although this buck's injury seemed mild, it greatly affected him the next year. If a manager was selecting for antler size and quality, he would pass this deer for another year and see if they could bounce back from his injury. Often times, they do but if they don't after two growing seasons and the property has a

surplus of bucks, this deer can be harvested.



2017



2018



2019

The buck pictured above was an above average buck for his area. At a young age he had 10 points and the following year he showed long beams, tines, and kickers. This buck was set to take another large jump the next year, but he sustained a bad injury to his back right leg in early December. The following year, he grew a small brow tine and a long, tineless beam on the same side as the injury. This lopsided

rack is common in the whitetail world and often comes from an injury to a buck's legs, a dirty shed (shed with a portion of skull plate attached), or damage to the skull plate from fighting that leads to a brain abscess. I see these types of antler deformities blamed on bad genetics constantly. More often than not, these growths are simply an injury and bucks can bounce back from these injuries and grow a balanced set of antlers the following year. Again, it's wise to give a buck 2 years to improve before harvesting based on an injury.

ADVANTAGES OF MONITORING

The advantages of monitoring unique bucks throughout the year that have been covered so far are to establish the age of the buck, to look at antler growth from year-to-year and place him in one of the quality categories listed, to set harvest goals for unique bucks, and to monitor injuries. One glaring advantage that we haven't covered is the intel provided in respects to hunting, and ultimately harvesting, these unique bucks with the years of history with these deer. You can see yearly patterns emerge and figure out where these bucks frequent during certain conditions at different times of the year. For hunters that collect and study past trail camera data, they have the advantage of knowing what area that buck was frequenting last year under certain conditions and can often predict where he'll be during the current season. Also, just flat out knowing that the deer is alive and healthy with a balanced rack can be a huge time saver during hunting season. I'm sure many folks have spent time hunting a buck or looking forward to hunting him the next fall, only to find out he was killed the past season or killed by a car or some other injury before the

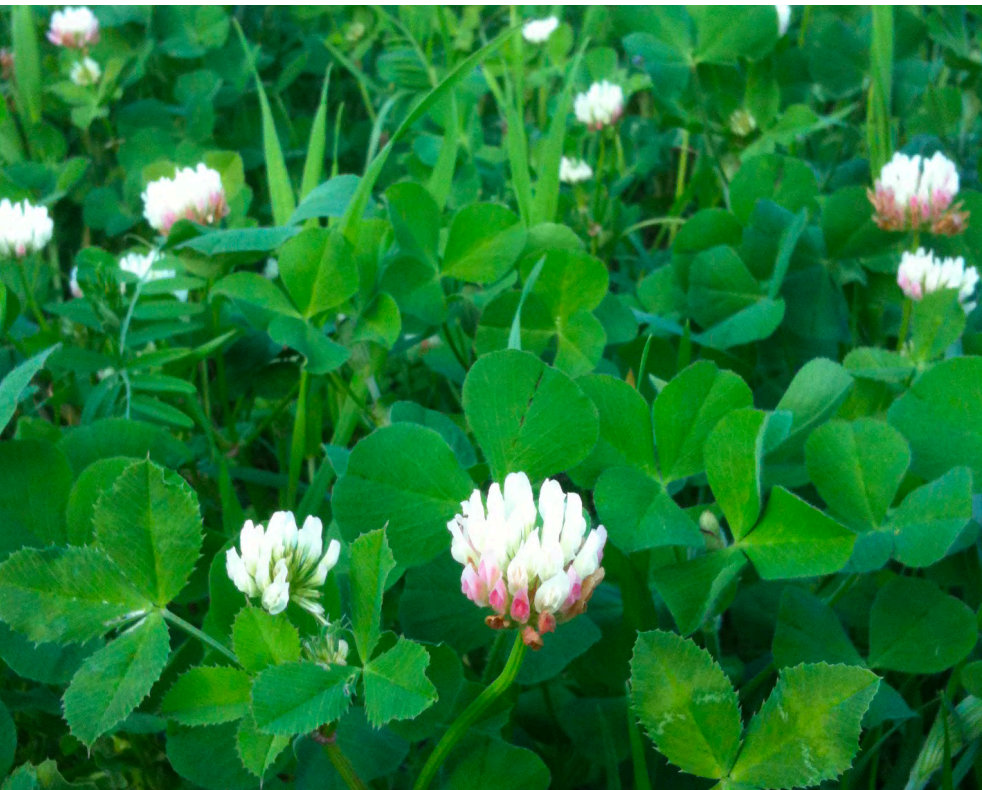
current hunting season. In short, the more data you have on an individual buck, the better off you are.

CONCLUSION

To sum up this article, there are many benefits to tracking individual bucks throughout the year over their lives and trail cameras are the best tool available to most deer managers. Put your cameras to use all year and be sure to conduct at least one trail camera survey each season. Try your best to build trend data on unique bucks from year-to-year and establish your best guess on age and potential antler growth quality as well. Watch for injuries that often affect antler growth and never base a harvest decision on one year's worth of pictures and history. Deer don't always grow larger antlers from year-to-year. In most cases, this is due to injury, but it also can be due to other stressors such as years of bad drought or extreme winters. Not all bucks have the genetics to grow large antlers, but this should be documented over multiple years. One major point to take away is that before you can see the differences in the averages of whitetail antler growth potential, your habitat needs to be in top shape. This means your deer need unlimited access to high-quality forage year-round. Remember that trying to control genetics in a wild deer herd is pointless and the best method of selective harvest is based on history with individual bucks and keep the complete deer herd well within the carrying capacity of the local habitat. Base your harvest goals on the data acquired from your observations in the field and collected by trail cameras and enjoy following one of God's greatest gifts to man – whitetail deer!

Wildlife Trends Journal Management Calendar

Dave Edwards



Make preparations for spring turkey season.

One of the best ways to ensure you have gobblers in the spring is to manage your property throughout the year to promote quality nesting cover. I have worked with many landowners that had gobblers on their property most of the year, but they disappeared during the spring. After closer inspection, their property didn't have good nesting habitat and the hens had moved to adjacent properties carrying the gobblers with them. Quality nesting habitat is created by maintaining a patch work of early successional habitat throughout your property. Burning, herbicide applications, strip disking, timber harvest, and roadside management strategies are all tools that can help you create quality

nesting habitat for turkeys. Besides the key element of creating nesting habitat, creating strutting zones in strategic areas near nesting cover around your property will help put turkeys where you want them to be. February or early March is a good time to create strutting areas. A mower, disk, fire or combination of these are the tools of choice for this task. Fire is my preferred tool if it can be used. Strutting areas are simply areas that have relatively little or open ground cover that will be attractive to turkeys for breeding courtships. I often create these areas between roosting and nesting areas and preferably near a food source such as an old field, chufa patch, or food plot. Areas that often lend themselves well to creating strutting areas are powerlines, thinned pine rows, and roadsides. Lastly, mowing hunter access trails will help you slip

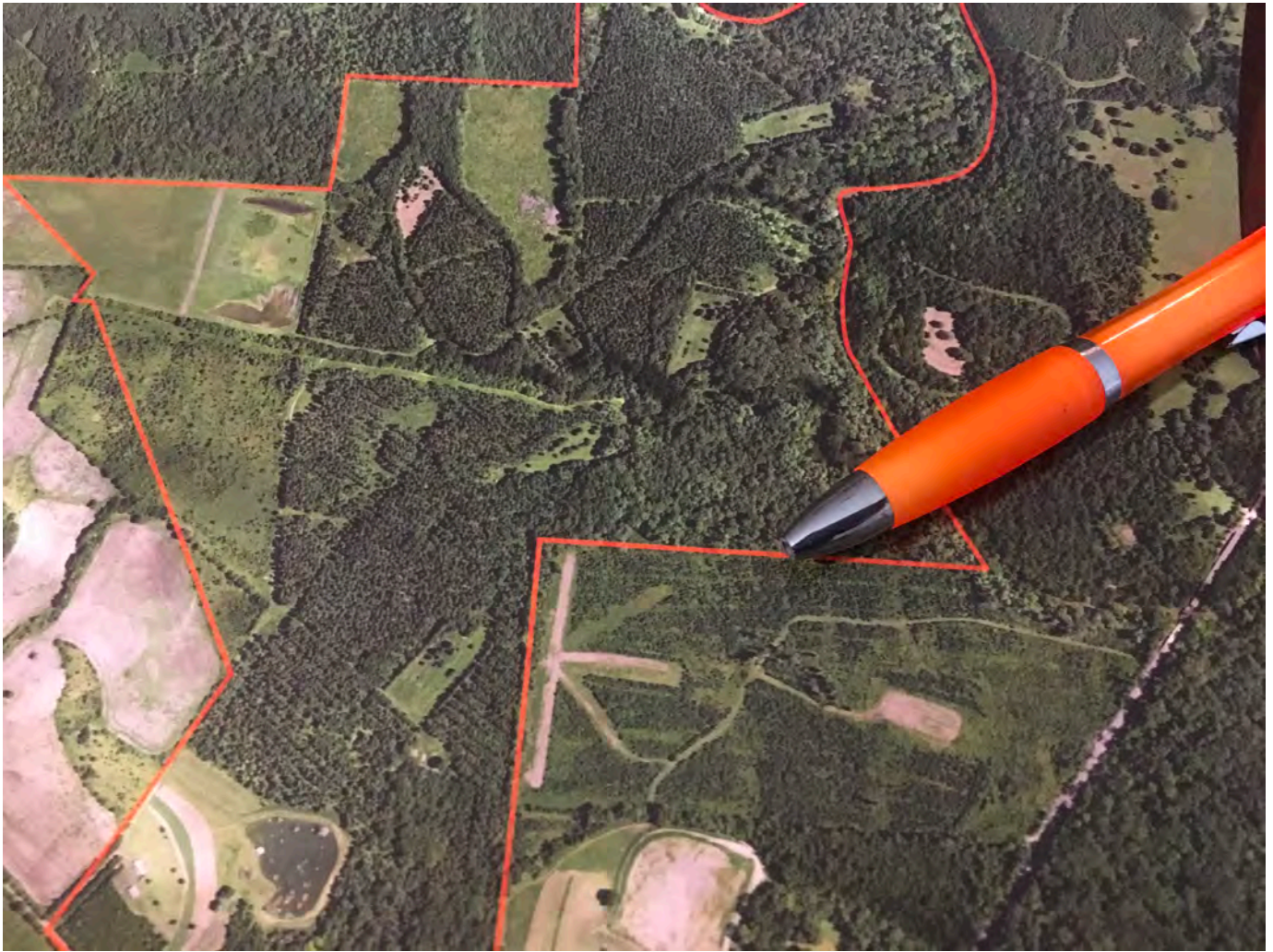
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Ensuring deer have access to quality food sources during late winter ensures they enter spring green up in good condition.

into areas to hunt without making a bunch of noise. If these trails go through thick habitat, don't be surprised if turkeys use the same



Now is the time to mow and clear trails that allow stealthy access to areas you plan to turkey hunt.



Updated aerial photographs are an invaluable tool in land/wildlife management

trails. Speaking of mowing, if you have areas that need mowing before summer arrives, do so before turkeys start nesting.

Now is the time to scout for next hunting season.

How many times have you heard (or said to yourself) “Those dang deer know when deer season starts – we’ve been seeing them all summer and now they have gone into lock down”? Deer do not have deer season on their calendar. Hunters are their alarm clock. It happens every year and we have all been guilty of it. The woods have been quiet with no humans walking around, no ATV’s, no chainsaws, no trucks or tractors, no loud voices

or other odd noises and then a month (or week) before the season the woods are inundated with LOTS of these unnatural disturbances – Hunters busting through the woods doing lots of things associated with preparations for hunting season. This is the alarm clock that triggers deer to alter movements to avoid these disturbances and potential dangers. All these things are described by two words – disturbance and pressure. I have spent most of my career helping hunters manage for better deer and better hunting. Generally speaking, growing “big bucks” is relatively easy when hunters follow management recommendations. However, getting these bucks in front of

hunters is often the most challenging task I have. One thing that I have learned and have seen play out time and time again is that hunting pressure (which is a culmination of all the unnatural disturbances described above) plays a significant role in hunting success. So, if you want to see and harvest more deer (i.e., improve your deer hunting experiences) intensively manage hunting pressure (and other disturbances) on the property you hunt. One of the best ways to reduce pressure is to be ready well before hunting season. Late winter, or just after hunting season, is one of the best times to learn more about your property, find areas that could be improved, and figure out how deer or other wildlife use your property. Learning these things will help you maximize the value and use of your property. As I have

mentioned in past calendars, February and March is my favorite time to learn how deer use a property and strategize on new stand locations. Because deer have been exposed to a great deal of hunting pressure over the past few months, they are using areas that they are most comfortable in and feel safe. If you find out where they are “hiding” now, you will know where to find them next season once the hunting pressure builds and deer seem to disappear. During this time of year, buck sign such as trails, rubs and scrapes is still fresh. Erecting or relocating stands now reduces that amount of “pressure” you will need to apply just before deer season and allows deer to get used to seeing them over the summer. Although you will have to touch them up before the season starts next year, late winter is also a good time to trim shooting lanes around deer stands. Having done all this in late winter, you will significantly reduce pressure just before the season starts next year which will enhance your opportunities to see and harvest the big bucks you’ve worked so hard to grow.

Ensure deer have quality nutrition during late winter through spring green up.

Late winter through spring green up is a nutritionally stressful period for deer in most regions. Deer have spent much of the fall going through the stresses associated with breeding activities which have worn them down, does are pregnant, much of their quality food sources have dwindled, and energy demand increases with a colder climate. By ensuring deer have access to quality food sources during this period will ensure they enter spring green up in good condition. Doing so gives them a jump start as they enter the spring green up period (one of the highest natural nutritional periods due to an abundance of fresh new

growth of plants). As such, deer can use the high nutrition from spring green up for body growth verses maintenance. Healthy deer entering spring results in bigger antlers, healthier does, increased fawn survival, etc. which is the goal of most deer management programs. Although this is within the February/March management calendar, strategies that ensure quality food sources are available this time of year are the result of management implemented months ago or over time. These strategies may include things such as thinning timber, managing natural habitats, including perennial crops in food plots, and properly managing deer herd conditions. Something that can be done now, however, is providing deer with supplemental feed which can certainly offer deer a quality food source. But before thinking about starting a supplemental feeding program for deer, you need to take care of the “more important” things first (such as items listed above). In other words, you cannot hang shutters if you do not have a house – and you will not grow big bucks and a healthy herd with supplemental feed alone. It is a supplement to other management strategies and activities. However, when done in combination with other core management practices, supplemental feeding can be valuable for deer. Be sure to check your local game laws before providing feed on your property. Many states do not allow the use of feed during hunting season. Ideally, providing



Late winter is the best time to scout for deer sign to help you have successful hunts next season.

supplemental feed throughout the year is best, but supplemental feed will be most used and most valuable for deer in late winter and late summer. These are periods when natural food availability is at its lowest. So, if you have a limited budget and cannot or do not want to feed throughout the year, provide it during the periods deer need it most.

Obtain an updated aerial photograph of your property.

Updated aerial photographs are an invaluable tool in land/wildlife management. In fact, it is the first thing I want to see when someone asks me to help improve their property for wildlife or create a management plan. I prefer aerial photographs taken during the dormant



Although lime can be spread any time of year, applying it at least 4-6 months before planting will allow time for it to properly change the soil pH to desirable levels.

season when deciduous trees have lost their leaves (i.e., late winter or early spring before green up). This allows you to distinctly see differences in pine or evergreen habitats and hardwoods. Infrared images taken during the growing season can do this as well, but I prefer color photos taken during winter. An aerial photo puts everything into perspective by allowing you to see the various habitats and how they are situated across the land-

scape of a property. While this may sound odd, it also allows you to see habitat diversity and layout of your neighbor's land which may play a role in how you manage your property. For example, if your goal was to manage for turkeys and you see on an aerial that your neighbor's property is primarily mature timber, increasing nesting habitat on your property will likely attract nesting hens (and gobblers) from the surrounding property in the

spring (not that you want to “steal” turkeys from your neighbor! Ha). Also, aerial photographs often become my “drawing board” when devising plans to improve a property. That is, having a map of the entire property in front of me, I can see everything, where various habitats are on the property, where food plots are located, etc. Having this, I can visualize how hunters, deer or other wildlife use the property and/or how we can improve the property to not only ensure quality habitat is provided across the landscape, but where habitat management can be used to direct wildlife to areas for improved hunting. There are many companies that specialize in taking aerial photographs, adding geographic features (roads, property lines, habitats, etc.), and providing a custom aerial map to the customer's specifications. While using these companies is obviously more expensive than pulling your property up on something like GoogleEarth, the resulting map/photo will be of high quality, up-to-date, customized to your liking, and can be uploaded into GIS type programs that allow you to enter and retrieve useful information about your property (e.g, number of acres of each habitat type) and create detailed habitat management plans. While I prefer professionally flown custom maps to work with, I must admit I use free online satellite imagery (e.g., GoogleEarth Pro, Bing Maps, etc. more often than in the past. They are simply fast and easy to use. The downside of these images is that they are often out-dated, particularly if you are actively managing timber and habitats.

Mow early or wait until early summer.

If you have areas that need to be mowed, mow them before turkey nesting season (which is generally March-May in most of the

Southeast) to prevent destroying nests. Unless necessary, I recommend leaving as much of roadsides, fields, and other openings un-mowed to provide additional nesting habitat for turkeys and other birds. Much turkey nesting research shows that these areas are valuable and heavily used for nesting by hen turkeys. Even if turkeys do not use all the un-mowed areas, these areas will host an alternate food source (small mammals – rats, mice, and rabbits) for potential turkey nest predators. Having this “extra habitat” also increases the “search area” and reduces predator success in finding turkeys and their nests giving turkeys of a better chance of producing a clutch and surviving. This strategy is more valuable for landowners whose property has limited nesting habitat.

Spring is a good time to check soil pH and apply lime to food plots if needed.

To check the soil pH, simply collect soil samples and send them to a soil laboratory (see previous Wildlife Trends articles on how to properly collect soil samples). Your local farmers cooperative will often have soil collection bags which normally have directions on how to collect soil samples and where you can send the soil to be tested. Although there are exceptions, most crops grow best in a relatively neutral soil pH of 6.5 – 7.0. Thus, lime is often needed to enhance the soil. Because it can take several months for lime to effectively change the soil pH, checking the soil in late winter or early spring will give lime ample time to enhance the soil before the fall planting period. Incorporating lime during late winter (Jan/Feb) will likely enhance soil pH for summer plantings. Remember, ensuring proper soil pH is often more important than

what you plant or how much you fertilize. In fact, proper soil pH is essential for fertilizer to be available to the plants. Although lime can be spread any time of year, applying it at least 4-6 months before planting will allow time for it to properly enhance the soil pH to desirable levels. Lime can be broadcast directly on top of the soil where rain can work it into the growing zone of the soil, but disking it into the soil profile will speed the process up and is recommended.

Manage water in duck ponds.

Although duck season may be over, leaving duck ponds flooded will benefit migrating waterfowl by providing energy rich foods for their flight back north. Pond draw-down rate and timing is important and will vary depending on your management strategy (natural moist soil management or agricultural plantings). If you are planting agricultural crops for waterfowl, leaving the pond flooded through early summer will help control weeds. Just be sure to drain the pond early enough to allow adequate drying time before planting time. However, if you are managing for natural moist soil plants, such as in a beaver pond or waterfowl impoundment, you will need to start pond drawdown in the spring to allow desirable native moist soil plants to germinate and grow. Slow drawdowns (over a 2-3 week period) are often desired because they will result in diverse emergent wetland species and invertebrate composition. Quick drawdowns result in decreased plant species diversity and are often composed of undesirable species. If you are managing a GTR (Green Tree Reservoir or flooded hardwood area), use a slow draw down process but ensure water is off the area before spring green up to protect/ enhance growth of oaks in

the GTR. Some oaks, particularly the more desirable ones for generating duck food, do not do well if left flooded after they begin growing leaves in the spring.

Transplant native shrubs or trees to add aesthetics or screen unnatural structures or objects.

While this has nothing to do with wildlife management, it may enhance experiences around the property you hunt. Late winter is a great time to install or transplant shrubs or other plants to add aesthetics or hide unnatural objects around your camp or property. Examples of such items may include electric boxes, AC units, pump houses, clay target throwers, etc. While purchasing shrubs or plants is always an option, consider transplanting natural plants that exist on your property. These plants are well adapted for the soils and climate of your property and best of all they are free. Choose shrubs/plants that are evergreen or will provide the “cover” needed to do the job. A few plants I have had great success with include wax myrtle, broomsedge grass, and various holly and ferns. When digging up plants, keep as much of the root ball intact as possible. That is, leave plenty of room around the base of the plant and cut a circle around the plant with a shovel working deeper and under the plant until the root mass (full of dirt) breaks free. Handle the root mass with care while transporting to its new home. The goal is to keep as much of the existing soil around the roots in place as possible – which protects small feeder roots of the plant. A large plant container (black pot that shrubs or trees are grown in) is useful to have when transporting to protect the root ball. Dig the new hole larger than the original and loosen soil in and

around the hole. After placing the plant in its new home, use soil from the hole to pack around the root ball. Ensure no air pockets exist and firmly pack the soil (firm not compact) around the plant. If possible, water the plant in. During its first year of life (particularly the first summer), the shrub may need a little TLC. Make sure it has plenty of water and keep competing vegetation under control. Depending on the situation, native shrubs can provide great screen along property lines where needed.

Trap and remove predators.

Hunters are quick to blame predators such as raccoons, opossum, skunks, coyotes, fox, or bobcats where populations of game wildlife are declining. However, in most cases the cause for game species population decline is often the

result of reduced reproductive performance or survival of their young due to poor habitat and/or harvest management strategies. That is, it's foolish to blame predators for poor quality deer hunting if your deer herd is "crashing" as a result of being overpopulated and is experiencing poor fawn production due to poor overall herd health. Or blame predators for a declining turkey population if you are not managing or providing quality nesting and brood rearing habitat to promote good poult survival. So before initiating efforts to remove predators, consider habitat quality and/or strategies you are applying to improve it. If habitat quality is not good, your time and money may be best spent managing habitat verses predator control. Having said this, on properties where habitat quality is generally

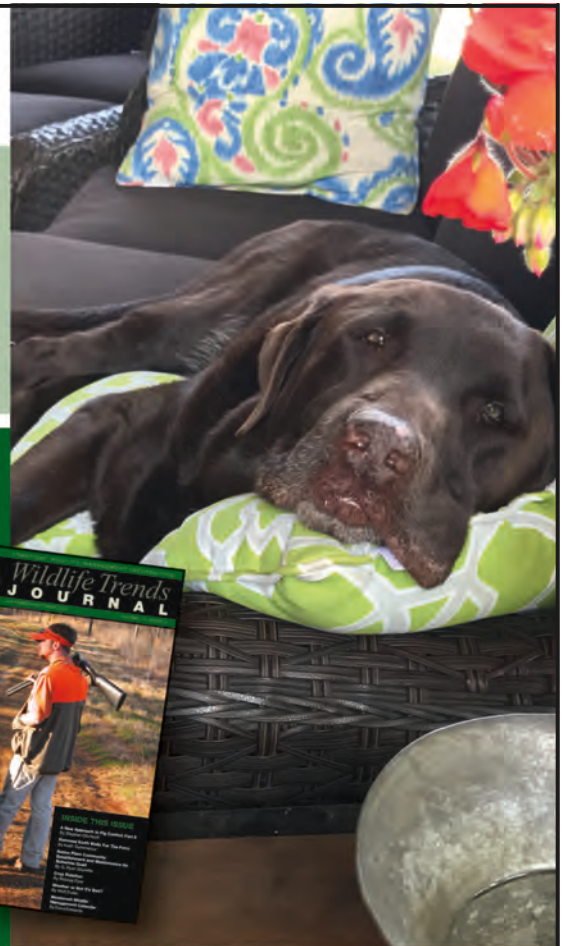
good, intense localized predator control can increase survival/recruitment rates of species such as rabbits, quail, turkeys, and deer. Intense is the key word here. Simply throwing a few traps out on the weekends will not have much effect on predator populations. Having a significant impact will require intense trapping over a period of time that results in many predators being removed. It is also worth noting that predator populations can re-bounce quickly. Like the response of a deer herd after an aggressive harvest, a reduced predator population with less competition for quality resources will have increased reproductive rates. Thus, trapping efforts need to be applied every year to be most effective and produce the best results.

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