



# OLFACTORY FATIGUE

By Dr. James C. Kroll, Ph.D.

As I write this, I've just returned from the 2008 TTHA Fort Worth Hunters Extravaganza. It, and the shows in San Antonio and Houston, turned out to be some of the best for TTHA in its three decades of providing you with the latest information on deer and deer hunting. We meet some old friends and find new ones each year, and I always come away from the tour with new insights into what you're thinking about and your concerns. This season, however, I had concerns about what was on *my* mind!

Each year we set up the "Dr. Deer Presents ..." booth near the main TTHA display, and each year we try to add something to the booth that will catch folks' eyes. This season we included a replica of the Milo Hansen world record typical buck that scored a whopping 213 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches.

I have known Milo since the week he took this huge buck, and he epitomizes the type of person I would like to see shoot a world record. He is just an average guy, a grain farmer near Bigger, Saskatchewan.

"New York may be bigger," Milo chides, "but, Bigger is better!"

*North American Whitetail Magazine* followed Milo his first year after killing the buck, keeping track of everything that happened to him. And it turns out, killing the world record isn't such a fun thing after all. First, Milo had not become a multimillion-

fact his buck remains the largest ever killed by a hunter.

As I watched the thousands of visitors file past our booth, a staggering fact suddenly hit me: very few people even noticed the replica of Milo's buck! The few who did simply commented, "That's a nice buck. Where was he killed?" One notable outdoor writer even asked the same question, then asked who had shot it. My research partner, Ben Koerth, and I discussed the lack of attention paid to the big deer during a break. Here's what we came up with.

The title of this column, "Olfactory Fatigue," is a medical term referring to the phenomenon in humans and animals in which prolonged exposure to an odor, no matter how horrible, ultimately leads to the brain ignoring it.

Our conclusion regarding why the Hansen buck in our booth had been ignored was that folks today simply have "antler fatigue."

Ben and I walked around the hall, stopped at each that displayed a mounted head, then ended up at the antler contest display. When I first started working TTHA shows about three

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aire, as most presumed he would. And fame had its price. For two years Milo pulled a trailer holding the carefully protected head all over North America. He stood for hours at hunting shows, answering questions and listening patiently to others' hunting stories. Today, Milo is back in Bigger, back to pulling a plow, despite the



**Milo Hansen's 213% Boone and Crockett buck taken in 1993 in Saskatchewan, Canada. The enormous buck remains the largest typical whitetail ever killed by a hunter.**

decades ago, a 160-inch buck would have stopped *everyone* in their tracks. Now, better management and deer breeding have brought us to the point where no buck is a jaw-dropper! But is this a good thing or a bad thing?

The Lord has blessed me to be part of and a leader in the deer industry, and in my 35 years of professional work, I have seen a great deal change. From a positive standpoint, we have gone from landowners thinking deer just popped up out of the ground each season to planned programs that produce quality and/or trophy bucks. Too, hunters have gone from just wanting to kill a buck to actually taking the time to look at a buck before making such a decision.

It is human nature to want to improve one's surroundings. One indicator of this is seeing the Baby Boomers returning to the land in record numbers—you have no doubt heard me say this many times. Once rebelling against the materialism of the "greatest generation," we have turned into hyper-versions of our parents—and no one works longer and harder than Boomers! Our success in business these many years has been measured in quantifiable standards.

We make more money, have more things, and worry about more "issues" than any other generation. Now we are retiring, with the horrible realization that we are, after all, mortal. Our days are coming to an end, so we have shifted our focus to leaving something behind that lasts. In many cases, this translates to making a little piece of the earth better. Again, this all seems a win-win for the planet.

The folks interested in deer are a prime example of this.

There were folks like

me, talking and writing about big bucks to aid the cause, and we had the Boone and Crockett (B&C) Club before us, which had established what measures success for us. If a typical buck nets at least 170 inches, or a non-typical gets to 195, you're in the book. The bar is well established.

Jerry Johnston and I founded the Texas Deer Association in 1999. The purpose of the organization was to represent *all* whitetail enthusiasts—breeders, high- and low-fence landowners, hunters, and others. The focus of TDA so far has been primarily on breeders, but my hopes are that the other constituencies are not forgotten. When we were organizing TDA, we had a sign out front of every meeting that read, "We are here for the whitetail deer. Leave your personal agendas outside the door!" That is the admonition I have strived to live by all my career, and, I would include hunters in this charge.

So, where am I going with this column? What I wish to do with this one is to look into the future and ask, will we see all this antler mania result in a collapse of deer hunting? I really don't think so, and here's why. As I see it, we

simply are proceeding along the often-discussed "stages" most hunters evolve through, to wit:

1. Kill something, anything.
2. Kill a limit.
3. Kill more than your buddy.
4. Kill the biggest.
5. Have a good time doing it.
6. Help nature in the process.

We obviously are at the "kill the biggest" stage in this evolution (although we have added a second part to this, and that is to *raise* the biggest buck). For years, rich landowners and otherwise powerful men and women in the Lone Star State have had exclusive access to producing monster bucks. They had the large ranches and the money to do it. They were not so happy when TDA small landowners and Boomers started producing even bigger bucks. That, in my opinion, is what has led to the sizeable disagreements between the rich "conservationists" and the TDA.

Many of my valued colleagues have fought against intensive deer management. "We have put too much emphasis on antlers," they assert. Yet antlers are a part of the overall equation. The antler fatigue developing among hunters, I think, is actually a good thing. I hope it means we are in the transition from "killing the biggest" to "having a good time."

I have produced more B&C bucks on the open range than anyone. That's not meant to brag, just to emphasize a point. My experience with the landowners with whom I work has been, once they have lots of big bucks, to witness that their emphasis turns to what are the proper bucks to shoot and the most challenging way to do it.

I came home from the shows in a real funk about antler fatigue, but now I've had time to think, and I think we're on the right track, where we're making the transition from hunter-consumer to hunter-manager. And if that's the case, that's definitely a good thing. 🐾