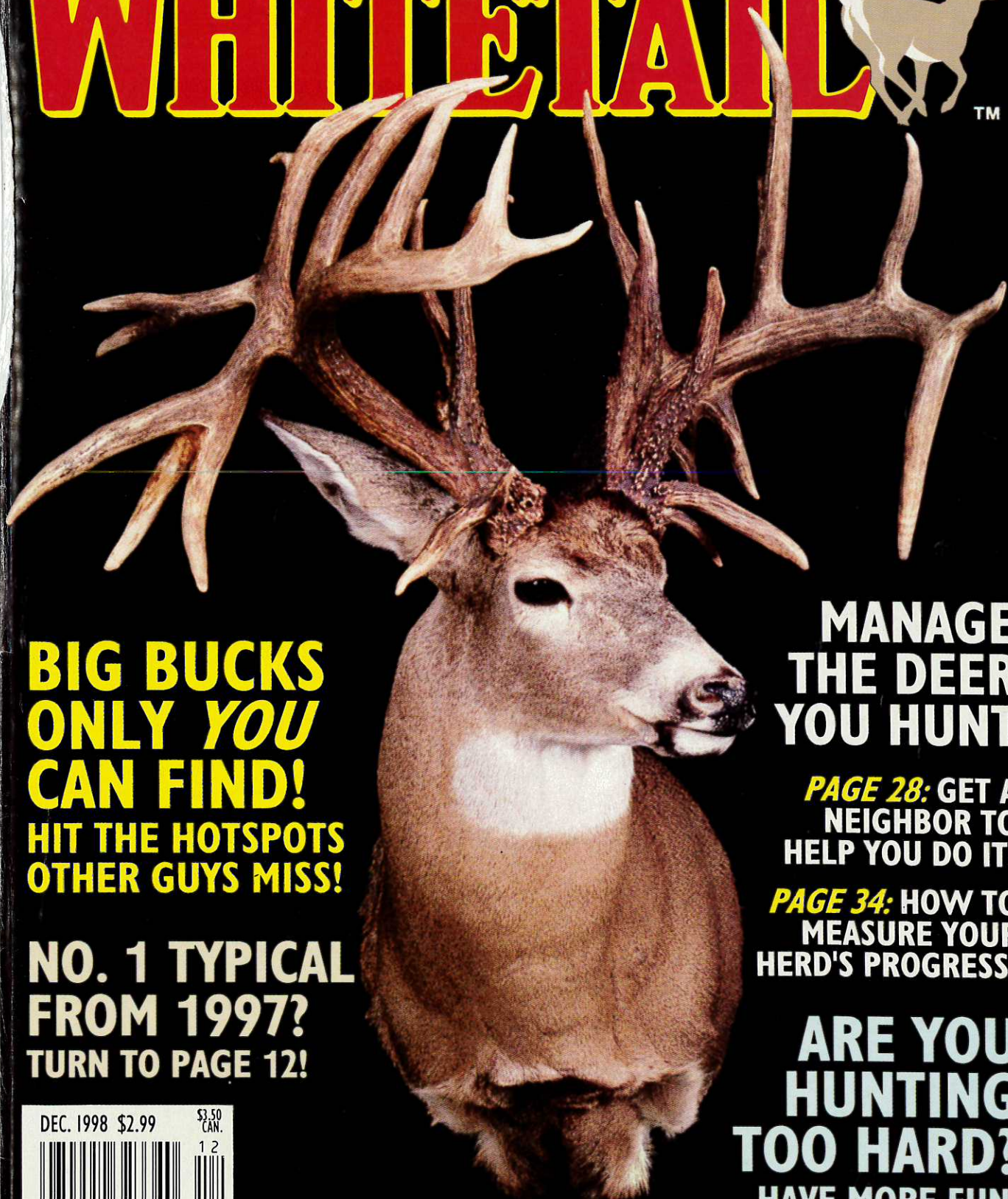


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Is Co-Op Management For You?

One of the biggest worries of private-land deer managers is that their neighbors will shoot the bucks they've produced. But if everyone works together, everyone will benefit!

by Gordon Whittington



deer's shoulder, the .270 barked. The buck bolted toward the beaver pond but made it only a few yards before a second shot put him down for good.

"When I climbed down the tree, I walked slowly toward the buck," Tony says. "At first, I thought his antlers were hung in a bush. When I saw just how big it really was, I just sat down. It was the kind of deer I had hunted for all these years."

Tony says he's confident the non-typical was the same deer he'd jumped in that vicinity the previous day. The dark, massive rack has 24 scorable points and nets 186 2/8 on the B&C system, true trophy antlers by any standard. At 225 pounds, the deer was also a real heavyweight.

"This just goes to show you that you don't need to get discouraged


Putting all of this pressure on yourself to get a giant deer is not only unrealistic, but also counterproductive.

and give up," Tony concludes. "You never know when your chance at your trophy will happen."

Failing to put your tag on a huge buck isn't the end of the world; if it were, Armageddon would have occurred a long time ago. Putting all of this pressure on yourself to get a giant deer is not only unrealistic, but also counterproductive. If you can't learn to enjoy the more than 99 percent of the time when you're not seeing Mr. Big, you'll eventually burn out. And if that happens, you won't be there when he finally walks past your tree.

Ron Willmore claims that some of the best deer-hunting advice he ever got had remarkably little to do with either deer or hunting. It came from his buddy, Buster Greenway, whose words really hit home.

"In a nutshell," Ron says, "Buster's philosophy is, 'Every day you're hunting is the greatest day of your life. Enjoy all aspects of the hunt, maintain your sense of humor, don't put pressure on yourself, don't compete with anyone except the deer, enjoy your friends . . . and once in a while, you'll even get the icing on the cake and actually kill something.'"

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You say one of your neighbors is a low-down weasel who sits just beyond your fenceline and carpet-bombs anything wearing antlers? Well, don't feel alone. Plenty of other hunters would say that's exactly the problem on one or more of the tracts *they* border. Most of the hunting world isn't yet up to speed on the best ways to grow bigger, healthier deer, so it's not surprising that many of us have neighbors who still shoot every young buck in sight and do little to help the herd.

Fortunately, though, the world is changing, and every year thousands of landowners and hunters join the management movement. So, even if you have a neighbor whose views on management seem to be stuck in the Stone Age, there's reason to hope he eventually will come around.

Of course, the quickest and surest way to

get him to see things your way is to convince him that sound management can pay off in better hunting, less crop damage and/or whatever else trips his trigger. And in many cases, the best strategy for doing that — especially if you don't have thousands of acres of habitat under your control — is to manage the herd in tandem with one or more of the *other* folks whose land borders your own.

With the rare exception of hunting tracts surrounded by public parks, utility-company land, golf courses, etc., almost all of us share property lines with several folks whose *(Continued)*

The fact that whitetails often move freely from one tract to the next has led many hunters to join forces with their neighbors to manage the herd. Photo by Dwight King.

acres are hunted for deer. If at least one of your neighbors shares your management goals, you can pool your resources — land, labor and knowledge — to manage these separate properties with the same strategy, gaining the positive effects of controlling more acreage without any of you having to spend an extra dime to buy or lease more land.

This concept is most often termed *cooperative ("co-op") management*, and it's one of the most encouraging trends in deer hunting today. Co-ops are paying dividends for landowners, individual hunters and hunting clubs across North America, and the idea might work for you, too.

WHO NEEDS A CO-OP?

If you've been reading this series from the start, you know those of us at *WHITETAIL* enthusiastically endorse what we call "food source" management. It's a strategy based on providing the herd with plenty of nutritious food year 'round, in an effort to grow the maximum number of big, healthy deer.

Nowhere else has this concept been as highly refined as at Fort Perry Plantation in Georgia, our magazine's one-of-a-kind facility for



Passing up immature bucks helped Ron (left) and David Jilot bag these Wisconsin trophies last Nov. 23. Ron's deer scores 203 5/8 B&C points; David's deer scores 134 6/8. The more you work with your neighbors, the more effective such a strategy is. Photo courtesy of David Jilot.

management research. A decade of study at Fort Perry and elsewhere has proved conclusively that this management strategy can help any private-land manager grow more and bigger deer on his land.

The second advantage of food-source management is almost as

encouraging: It can hold those deer very near prime feeding areas the majority of the time. In fact, there's evidence that if the herd's most preferred habitat (year-round food sources, cover and water) is concentrated on your land, you can keep many of those deer from

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straying far, even without a high fence. This improves the odds of a big buck being taken by one of the hunters whose efforts produced him.

But does this mean that implementing a food-source management program will eliminate any worries about deer *ever* leaving your land? Hardly. A variety of factors can make "your" deer vulnerable to neighbor losses, even if you're managing the herd properly and hunters on surrounding lands keep themselves (and their bullets) on their side of the fence.

For starters, the property under your control might not be as large as the home range of a deer — even a deer that finds everything it needs inside your borders. Whitetails, like people, instinctively crave a certain amount of "elbow room." As a result, they like to roam a bit.

This is especially true of bucks, which have wanderlust programmed into their genes. At a year of age, they disperse to establish their home ranges, often settling into core areas some distance from where they were born. Then, at age 1 1/2 and every fall thereafter, they head out in search of does. Depending on the

deer density, sex ratio, etc., such forays can take a rutting buck on a daily route of several miles.

Another factor that has a huge impact on how much "your" deer roam is the uniqueness of your land's food sources and other features. If a standing corn field in the center of your property is easily the best fall forage within three square miles, local bucks will have relatively little need to roam far to find females or food during the rut. But if several of your neighbors have foraging areas just as attractive as that corn field, "your" deer might feel less of a need to stay home all of the time. And in the event that neighboring lands have *better* food sources and other habitat features than yours, along with lower hunting pressure . . . well, you get the idea.

As a general rule, *the less land you have and the less uniquely attractive it is to deer, the more influence neighboring properties will have over your management program.* If your best efforts to improve the habitat and make deer feel safe on your land still don't keep them there all of the time, joining or forming a co-op might be your best option.

A VEHICLE FOR CHANGE

Most co-ops, like the vast majority of individual management programs, are born of frustration. This usually is the result of low numbers of mature bucks being available, which in turn is almost guaranteed to be a function of excessive long-term hunting pressure on young bucks in the area. Often compounding the problem is a history of too little pressure on does, keeping deer numbers higher than the habitat can support in good health. Mixing these problems is a recipe for hunter and landowner dissatisfaction.

But a co-op can help to break this depressing cycle. First, it brings concerns about herd health and the quality of the hunting experience out into the open, which at least gets everyone — hunters and landowners alike — to think and talk about what's needed to improve the herd.

Then, if the co-op's management plan is sound and properly executed, its positive results will be just that much more obvious than if they were confined to a single tract. If one piece of land is known for producing a big buck or two every year, it's impressive, but if multiple

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adjoining tracts each yield that many trophies, it's harder to dismiss that as the result of a single hunter's skill, persistence and/or luck.

Also, through peer pressure, a co-op often accelerates positive change in local views on deer management. Having several respected hunters and landowners work together to manage the herd sends a powerful message to the "wannabes" out there: If you aren't teaming up with your neighbors, you're not among the management elite.

Don't overlook the impact this can have on the psyche of other deer enthusiasts in the vicinity. If your co-op is successful, they're going to take notice, giving you a chance to educate them on the principles and details of management. Answer their questions in the right way, and they're likely to follow your lead.

This already has happened in some areas. In parts of Wisconsin, for example, passing up immature bucks is resulting in more true trophies being taken, which in turn is convincing even more landowners and hunters to give it a try. Herd health and the quality of the hunting experience are beginning to take

COULD A CO-OP WORK FOR YOU?

Before you try to set up a deer co-op, get accurate answers to the following questions:

1. Are "your" deer spending part of their time on neighboring properties?
2. Does one or more of your neighbors share your concern about managing for a healthy herd?
3. Are the landowners and hunters in the proposed co-op willing to take a long-term approach to herd improvement?
4. Can you deal with the occasional mistakes and misunderstandings that are likely to crop up in any co-op?

priority over just filling a tag.

Finally, the hunter-landowner unity growing out of a co-op can translate into greater political power for dealing with matters affecting the local herd. A group of constituents speaking with one voice has more clout than any individual.

GETTING STARTED

Rural landowners and avid deer hunters often are independent types

who like to call their own shots. This is fine for the most part, but it can be a barrier to building close working relationships with other landowners and hunters. To set up a co-op, someone must make the first move. If none of your neighbors has done so, maybe it's up to you.

There's no single best way to get the ball rolling. Land-ownership patterns, deer-hunting traditions and the human personalities involved vary widely from one situation to the next. But in general, a good first step is to find out as much as you can about all of the players involved.

Is everyone on your land willing to work with the guys next door to census the herd you share, establish harvest goals, pool harvest records for analysis (as discussed in Dr. James C. Kroll's feature on Page 34), and improve the habitat? You can't develop a co-op with the neighbors until everyone on *your* land agrees that something needs to be done.

Once that hurdle has been crossed, it's time to broach the subject with one or more of your neighbors. In many cases, it makes sense to start with the property owner, rather than the hunters. He'll get involved in the

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matter at some point anyway, and you don't want to make him feel left out of the loop. Then again, in some cases you might deal first with the hunters. This is likely to be true if the neighboring landowner is a stranger to you, as is often the case with many tracts now being under absentee ownership. You'll just have to feel your way through that part.

Regardless, present your case for co-op management as clearly and cordially as possible. Opening with "You guys need to stop blasting everything that moves and start managing the way *we* do" isn't the best way to break the ice. Express genuine concern for the welfare of the herd and the habitat but do so without criticizing anyone for what might have happened in the past.

Your neighbors might not know as much as you do about the benefits of management, so don't be surprised if an education campaign is needed. To that end, it might help to give them copies of management features from back issues of *WHITETAIL*. (This series began in October 1997.)

The first goal of most co-ops is to get everyone to pass up younger bucks and shoot the right number of

does. To that end, you'll want to stress the fact that nature's plan is for a herd with a healthy buck:doe ratio, a good age structure and a total deer number that's within the capacity of the habitat. Note the direct benefits — primarily, more big, healthy deer for everyone to hunt — that come from managing properly.

Point out that deer do move back and forth between the tracts, so it only makes sense to manage them in a single way. This should show them that the management strategy you propose is much better than having a different plan for every piece of hunting land in the area.

STRUCTURING A CO-OP

Let's assume your neighbors like the sound of co-op management and are willing to try it. Now what?

A co-op usually is a handshake deal, not a legally binding contract. It's based on mutual trust and the free flow of relevant information among all affected parties, hunters and landowners alike. However you choose to structure things is fine, as long as those key tenets are upheld.


Many co-ops elect officers and hold regular meetings to discuss herd censusing, harvest data, habitat

improvements, poaching problems, etc. Such meetings also strengthen the bond among members and unite them in pursuing the goals of a healthier herd and better hunting.

Regardless of the acreage or number of tracts involved, making a co-op work ultimately depends far more on the people than on the deer. It's a team effort aimed at a common goal, one that must be stated clearly up front. Every participant should make a serious commitment to abide by the agreed-upon rules, however formal or informal those might be.

CONCLUSION

Whether it's hunger, thirst, love or fear that leads a buck off your land, you're helpless to protect him from persons whose actions you can't control. Reducing such worries, if not eliminating them, is the reason co-op management is catching on with hunters and landowners today.

Next month, we'll profile one of North America's pioneering co-ops to show you how everyone can pull together to help the herd. This co-op has operated for 15 years now, so its members must be doing something right. See our January issue to find out just what that "something" is! 



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There's no substitute for keeping accurate records if you want to produce more and bigger whitetails on the land you hunt.

When those of us at **WHITETAIL** were choosing a name for this series on managing private lands, we decided that including the term "deer factory" was quite appropriate. For a factory to be productive, there must be enough raw materials and you must have quality workmanship and an understanding of production goals. Progress then is measured by keeping records on input and output, with the difference being the factory's productivity. And so it is with a deer herd!

One of the biggest frustrations I have as a biologist is the reluctance of many landowners and hunters to keep adequate records of their management efforts. Most want to talk about the more exciting aspects of management (genetics, food plots, etc.), while such mundane areas as record-keeping fall by the wayside.

This is a serious deer-management mistake, because *good records are the only way to chart your program's progress*. And don't fall into the trap of thinking that you can keep all of this in your head. As my good friend and colleague Ben Koerth says, "A short pencil is better

by Dr. James C. Kroll

than a long memory anytime!"

Huge amounts of important data can be gathered by observing live deer on your land. In fact, as David Morris has detailed in recent issues, using such observations in estimating total herd size, buck:doe ratio, etc. is one of the first steps in forming a management plan. But this month, our focus will be primarily on what you can learn about your herd through *harvest* records. By combining your herd observations with solid harvest data, you can make good decisions about where your herd is and where it's going.

ASSESSING HERD HEALTH

The health of your herd is a direct indicator of the quality of your program. If your deer habitually have low body weights and high natural mortality, there clearly are problems. We don't have much luck in getting deer to tell us how they feel, so we must measure their health indirectly, using such indicators as dressed body weights, antler quality, fat storage, parasite loads and other observations of body condition.

Fall actually is the worst time to assess deer health, because that's when deer are in their best physical condition of the year. Unfortunately, because of the timing of hunting seasons, it's the only time most managers actually can get their hands on a number of deer to study. On the positive side, the significance of some important data — including a deer's age or antler measurements — isn't diminished by this problem.

Let's look at types of harvest data all managers should gather:

AGE-RELATED

ANTLER MEASUREMENTS

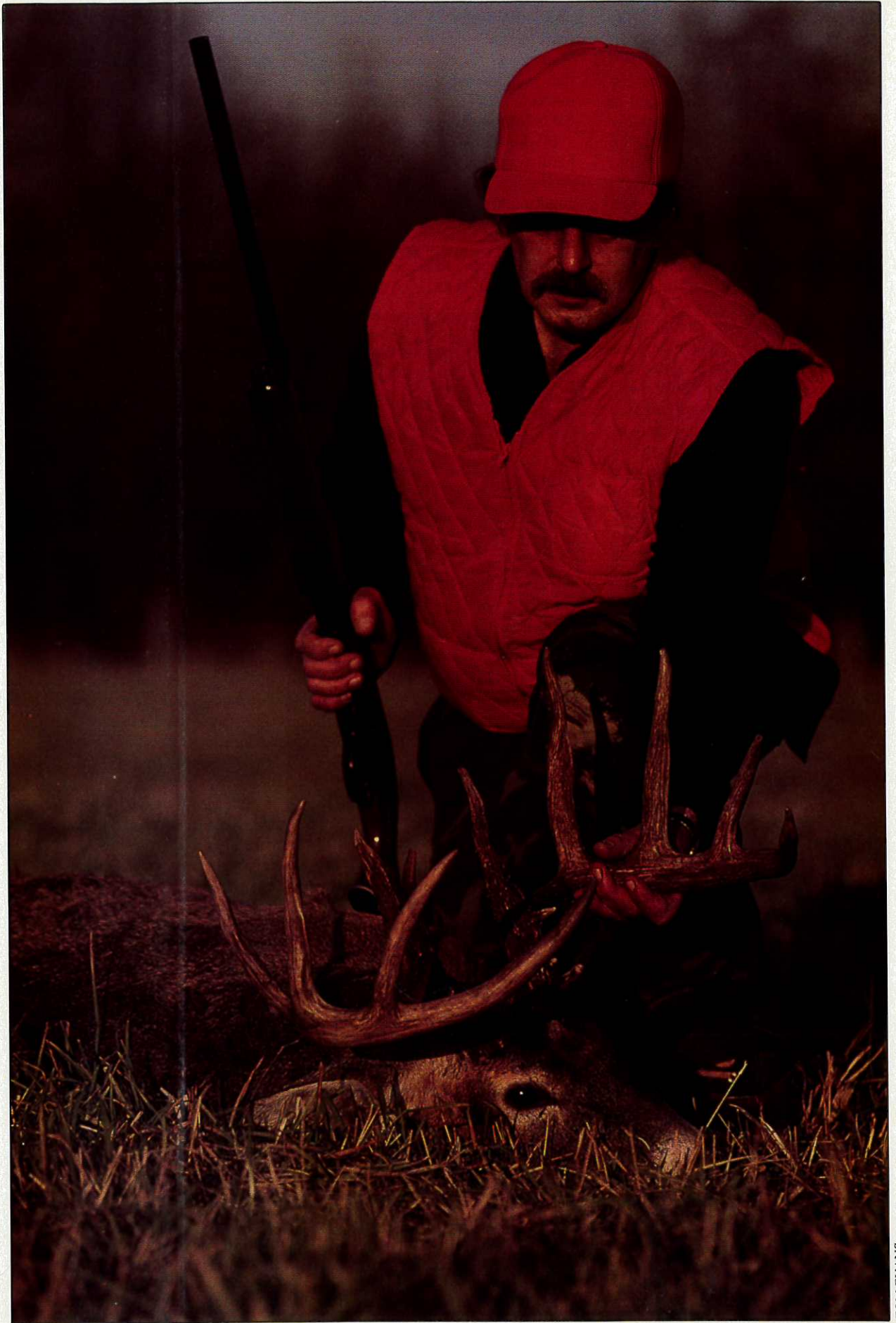
The racks on your bucks can tell you a great deal about your herd and the progress you're making with your program. Even so, on many managed properties surprisingly little of this information is compiled on a consistent basis.

Failing to record enough details about the bucks shot on your land makes it harder to be certain of trends in antler quality. Even if several years' worth of antlers from the property can be rounded up for measurements and comparisons, if the bucks' ages weren't recorded,

KEEPING HARVEST RECORDS

Deer #	Date	Sex	Age	Weight		Antler Measurements (Inches)						In Milk?	Hunter	Comments
				Live	Dressed	Points	R. Beam Circum.	L. Beam Circum.	R. Beam Length	L. Beam Length	Inside Spread			
1	11/5	M	2 1/2	148	118	8	3 1/8	3 0/8	14 2/8	14 4/8	13 5/8		Barnes	Chasing doe
2	11/8	F	3 1/2	116	91							Yes	Daley	Full of oats
3	11/14	F	1 1/2	81	63							No	Hansen	Piebald
4	11/14	M	4 1/2	188	143	9	4 3/8	4 2/8	21 1/8	20 6/8	17 0/8		Robbins	Lots of ticks
5	11/20	F	5 1/2	131	102							Yes	Daley	With 2 fawns

Harvest records can provide good data for comparing one year to another. Graphic by Polly Dean.



TOM EVANS

there's a limit to how much can be gained from a comparison of one season's racks to another's.

For example, if you put the big rack of a 4 1/2-year-old buck shot in 1996 up against that of a relatively small 2 1/2-year-old shot on the same managed property in '98 but you don't know how old one or both deer were, what will the comparison tell you? If you think both deer were the same age when harvested, you'd get the impression that antler quality is declining, when in fact it might well be improving!

What information should you record from the racks taken on your land? At minimum, write down the number of antler points (only those an inch or more in length), inside spread, antler-base circumferences and main-beam lengths.

Of course, when most serious hunters discuss racks, they like to talk in terms of Boone and Crockett score. The B&C system can be useful for recording data from bucks taken on your land — provided you use *gross* typical score.

This score, which consists of the total of all typical measurements on the rack, is a good indicator of antler size from a manager's perspective. It's based on the rack's main frame, so neither a lack of symmetry (as would show up in a net score) nor non-typical points (which tend to come and go) skew the results.

If you opt to use the gross B&C or P&Y score of racks, your records should include a standard score sheet for each animal taken, along with at least one photo of the antlers.

Of the various rack measurements you can take, the best indicators of progress with your management program are beam length, typical tine length, beam circumference and inside spread. If these values are increasing from year to year within an age-class, it's a good sign. While the number of points on a rack is of great interest to many hunters, it isn't a very reliable indicator of the buck's health or age.

GOT MILK?

If your doe harvest is large enough for you to draw valid conclusions from it, you can use harvest data on *lactation*, or *milk production*, to help you estimate the fawn crop.

Lactation is an important term for hunters to know, but it apparently is foreign to many of them. In fact, I

once developed a harvest-record form that included a column marked "Lactating?" To my dismay, many of the hunters who used the form marked "yes" for bucks! I changed the column heading to "In milk?"

In dressing out a doe, you can hardly avoid noticing if she was producing milk, because you must cut through the udder. If a whitish or brownish liquid is present, she probably was lactating, which means she produced and weaned at least one fawn that year.



Even if you age your deer right after the kill, it's a good idea to save the lower jawbone for further study. Photo by Tom Evans.

At the end of the season, add up all the does harvested and divide the total into the number "in milk" to produce the lactation rate (percent lactating). For example, if 13 does are taken this fall, and seven were in milk when shot, the lactation rate would be 54 percent (seven divided by 13).

What we don't know from this, of course, is exactly *how many* fawns a lactating doe weaned that year. But because it's wise to be conservative in estimating the fawn crop, we'll assume that she raised only one.

Even if you have plenty of deer on your land, you want high fawn survival, so that the "pipeline" stays full of bucks for the future. In most situations, a fawn crop of at least 60 percent should be your goal.

AGING DEER

Age every deer taken on your property, without exception. I suggest using the "tooth wear and replacement" method, which involves studying the number and

wear patterns of jaw teeth in the lower jaw. (If you don't know how, don't worry. We'll discuss this method in detail in future issues.)

Aging deer by tooth wear and replacement is more an art than an exact science. But while some studies have questioned the accuracy of this method, it remains the most practical way for most persons to get a reasonable estimate of a deer's age. Years of study at our Institute for White-tailed Deer Management and Research have shown that its error rate is plus or minus one year (on average) for deer older than fawns. The greatest potential for making a serious aging mistake is with deer at least 5 1/2 years old.

Even if you don't get the age exactly right, you need to be able to determine in which of the four most basic age groups a deer belongs: fawn (6 months); yearling (1 1/2 years); immature (2 1/2 years); or mature (3 1/2-plus). I think the tooth-wear technique is at least accurate to this level.

Once you've aged all of the deer harvested in a given year, calculate the percentage — bucks and does separately — in each age-class. By noting year-to-year changes in the numbers, you can monitor your progress toward having older bucks and younger does.

HEALTH

To the educated eye, a harvested deer is an open book of information. Once you have a deer on the ground, take the time to have a good look at it. Even if you must register your kill at a public check station, it's a good idea to establish a private check station where everyone hunting on the property brings their deer for recording vital harvest data.

Look carefully at the deer's coat and overall external condition. Is the animal fat and fully fleshed? Is the coat rough and of odd color? Are there numerous external parasites, such as ticks and keds (tiny insects that scurry around among the body hair)? Write all of this on your record form.

Once you've opened up the deer for dressing, just don't rip out the insides and discard them as trash. Check the amount of internal body fat (kidney, body and intestinal). We rate the amount of body fat by general category: "very fat"; "fat"; "moderately fat"; "lean"; and "poor."

Some managers with whom we work even use our scientific method to calculate *kidney fat index* (KFI). This is done by weighing the kidney with its clump of fat attached, then removing the fat and re-weighing the kidney. The kidney-only weight is divided by the total (kidney plus fat) weight, then multiplied by 100 to get a percentage. For example, if you have a total weight of 8 ounces and a kidney-only weight of 6 ounces, the KFI is $6/8 \times 100 = 75$ percent. Again, year-to-year comparisons of these data can tell you a lot about your herd.

There are other valuable indicators of health as well, the most important being *dressed body weight*. Again, though, it must be related to age if it's to give you much insight.

Many hunters talk about a deer's live weight, but that's not as valid as its dressed weight. The deer could have just taken a drink or filled up on forage prior to being shot, significantly distorting its live-weight measurement. Using dressed weight removes this bias and thus yields more useful data. In addition, it might not always be feasible to get a deer to a check station before field-dressing. Using dressed weight in all cases ensures that you're always comparing "apples" to "apples."

You also might search for internal parasites, such as stomach worms, but most folks don't want to get that involved, given the unpleasantness of looking for them. Besides, there's still debate as to the relevance of high internal parasite loads. While some researchers have indicated a correlation between stomach worms and deer density, others (including myself) haven't found such a link.

WHAT'S TO BE LEARNED?

All of the above information is most useful when compared from one year to the next. Some of the deer managers we work with now have some 25 years of records on their herds, and these records speak volumes about their programs. The sooner you begin compiling data on your herd, the sooner you'll be able to start spotting trends as well.

Estimates of the fawn crop tell you more than anything else. High fawn survival indicates healthy, well-fed does and suggests the potential for good deer number in the future; low fawn survival suggests problems of some kind.

At season's end, summarize your productivity data. Calculate the observed fawn crop by compiling incidental sightings, then calculate the lactation rate by dividing the number of does "in milk" by the total harvested. You'll be surprised at how similar these numbers are, even though, as noted, the lactation rate often is a tad conservative.

Long-term comparisons of other health and condition indicators, such as dressed weight and KFI, also are useful. You need to use your harvest record forms to determine average dressed weight, KFI and antler measurements for each age-class.



Check the field-dressed weight of every deer taken on the property. Such records will tell you much about the herd's health. Photo by Gordon Whittington.

As long as these measurements don't decline over time, you can assume you're at least not making "bad" management decisions. If the values increase, as they should under the type of food-source management and sound harvest strategy we at **WHITETAIL** endorse, you can be sure your program is moving in the right direction. In future issues, we'll get into more specifics on how to interpret your data.

HARVEST BIAS

In order for harvest records to portray your deer herd with unerring accuracy, those records must be representative of the herd as a whole. This is seldom the case, for two reasons. First, in some instances, the harvest isn't large enough to provide reliable data. There's only so much you can learn about the whole herd

by studying one or two deer shot there. The bigger your sample, the more reliable your data set will be.

Also, there's always some built-in harvest bias. For starters, mature deer are far more adept at avoiding hunters than are younger deer, so a lack of older animals in the harvest doesn't always mean they aren't present. Also, hunters might choose to take only the fattest does, or only those traveling without fawns, rather than taking them at random. And many hunters have become quite selective in their buck harvest.

Such factors obviously can affect how accurately your harvest records reflect the herd's health and makeup. Is there a way around that?

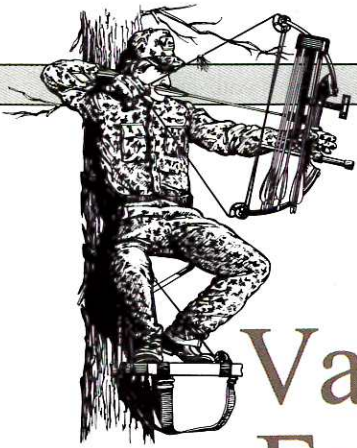
Well, if your deer kill isn't high enough to give you much confidence in your harvest data, you can start pooling your records with those of neighbors. (This goes hand in hand with the valid concept of cooperative management, as Gordon Whittington notes on Page 28.) By combining the harvest records of several adjacent properties, you can develop a more reliable data set on the overall herd. Of course, the more difference there is in the management strategies on the various properties involved, the less uniform the results will be.

You can try to minimize harvest bias by encouraging your hunters to be non-selective on does. Have them shoot the first one they see, rather than seeking out only big, fat does and/or those traveling alone. But it's tough to get a non-selective harvest, particularly year after year. That's why a smart manager blends harvest records with census results and herd observations to assess his program.

IN CONCLUSION

You don't *manage* a deer herd as much as you *fine-tune* it. That is, you try something, then monitor the response. If the results are positive, you continue what you're doing; if they're negative, you make a change. Good records are a must for telling you what's working and what isn't.

A friend once compared whitetail managers who refuse to keep records to the drunkard who always drinks with a paper sack around his bottle. Why? Because neither one wants to see the end coming! If you'd prefer to be in control of your herd's destiny, rather than simply at its mercy, keeping good records can help you do just that.



Vary Your Approach For Farmland Bucks

By mixing things up, Wisconsin hunter Dave Dilley keeps the deer guessing where he is. And that, in turn, keeps his favorite stand setups productive hunt after hunt.

“Just after first light, I saw a nice 10-pointer bird-dogging his way through an opening in the middle of the strip of trees I was hunting,” says Dave Dilley of Madison, Wisconsin. “He was obviously onto a hot doe that must have come through before I got to my stand that morning.

by Bill Winke

“As if he were on a string, the buck angled across the opening and was heading straight toward my stand. I got pretty excited, because I

could see he was a good buck and figured I’d soon be getting a shot. Then he went behind a pine tree and just disappeared. He may have bedded down, or maybe froze there or made a 90-degree turn, but he was gone.

“I had pretty well given up seeing him again when he suddenly came out from behind the same tree 30 minutes later,” Dave says. “He was coming at a fast walk right up the trail toward the stand. It really shocked me, and I stood up quickly and raised the seat on the stand too fast, which made a ‘clink’ sound. It didn’t seem to bother him at all, but it flustered me. When he hit a narrow opening, he was only 12 yards away but still walking fast.

“I took the shot and hit him just a little too far back,” Dave continues. “I watched him disappear and marked the spot in my mind. But instead of following right away, I waited 20 minutes and then sneaked out and went home. I had a lot of nervous energy built up and kept myself busy by doing some vacuuming and other work around the house.

“After waiting a couple of hours, I went back and, with the help of my nephew, found him in his third bed,” the hunter notes. “He hadn’t gotten very far from the stand. I’m just glad I didn’t push him sooner.”

Dave’s 10-pointer, arrowed on Oct. 27, 1989, had a gross score of 139 Pope and Young points and a



Dave Dilley's classic Wisconsin funnel setup has produced a wallful of big bow bucks, including this hefty 9-pointer on Oct. 9, 1994. The spot pays off on a feeding or rutting pattern. Photo courtesy of Dave Dilley.

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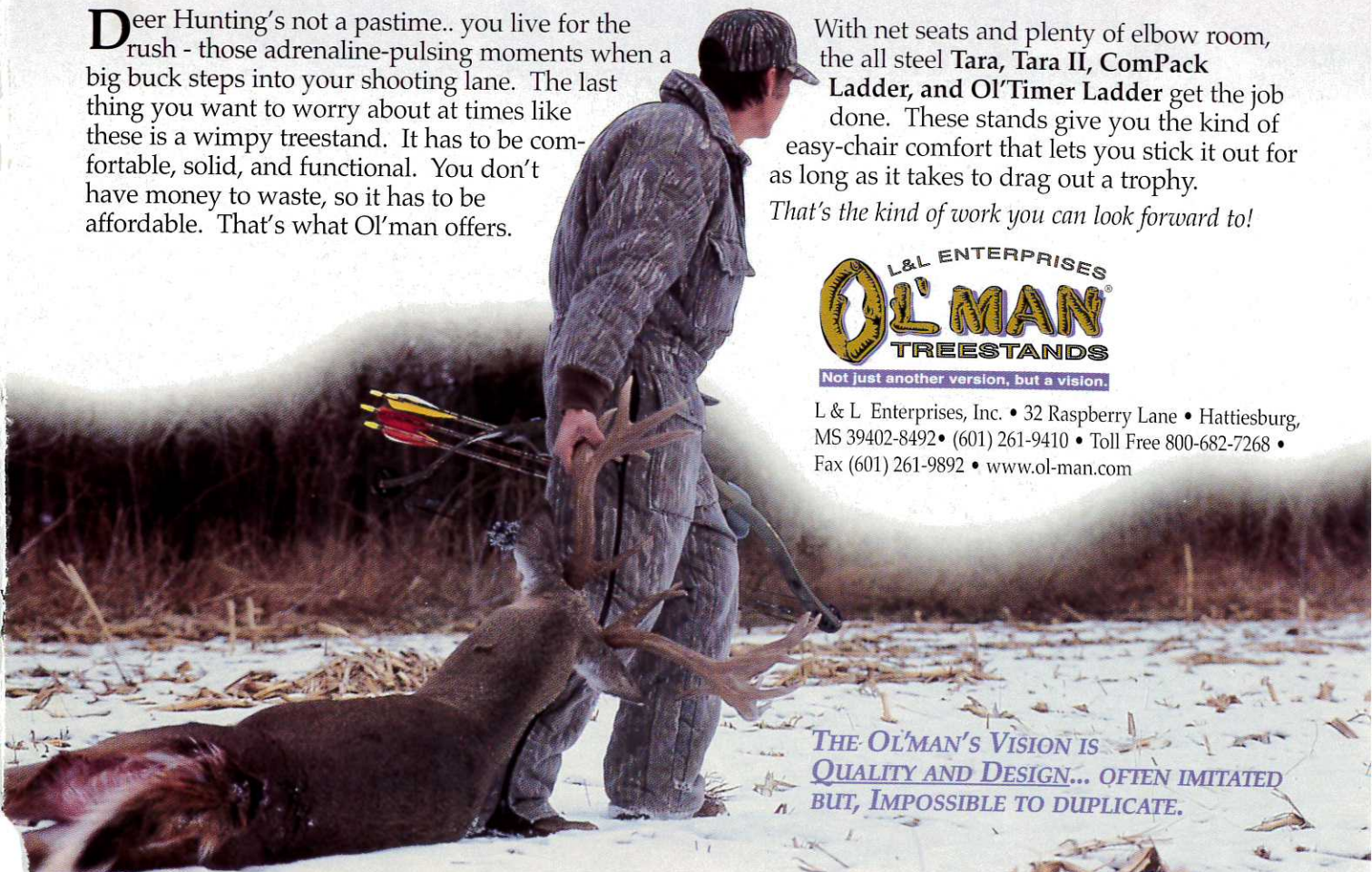
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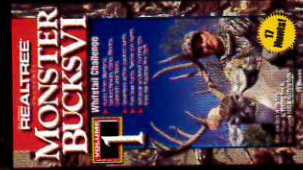
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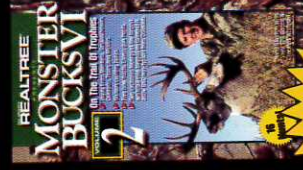
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