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# north american WHITETAIL



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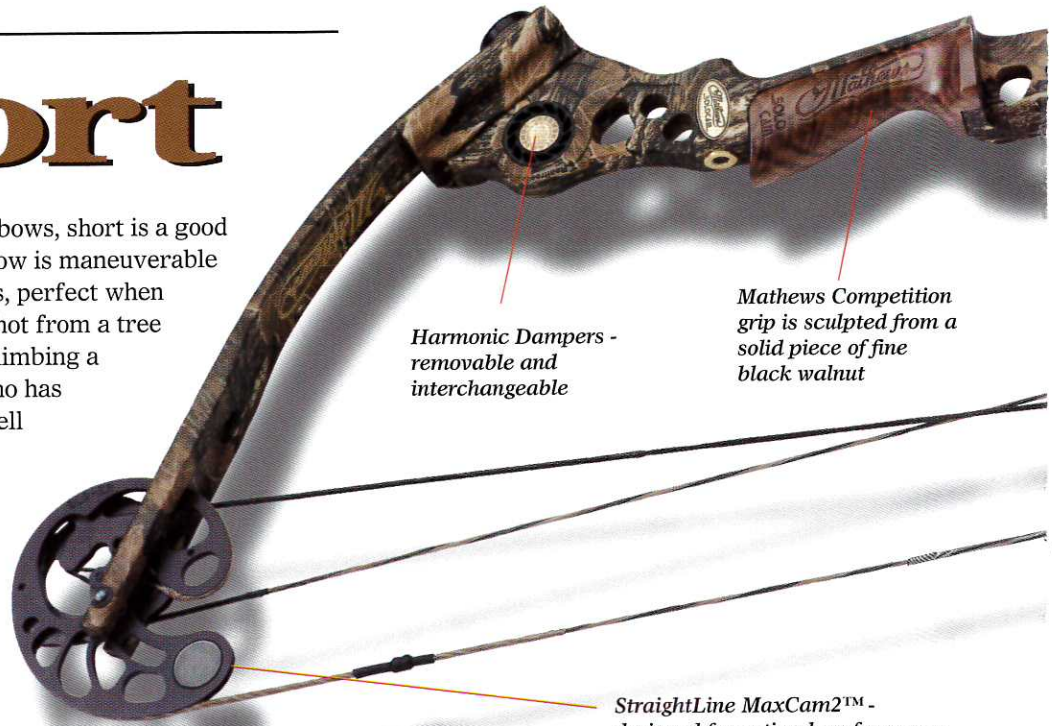
NORTH AMERICAN WHITETAIL SEPTEMBER 2001 VOL. 20, NO. 5

# "The New Mathews SQ2"

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## short

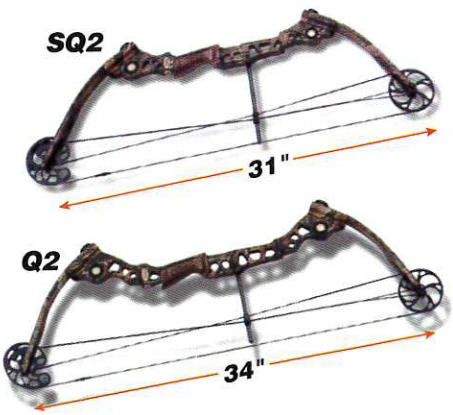
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deer. I hadn't hunted that morning, as I was packing for an afternoon flight to Alberta for a hunt, but he decided to join them in recovering Adam's trophy. By the time they got the deer back to the farm, I was running very late for my flight, but it was worth it, because Adam's buck was exceptional — especially for a bow kill made by a 14-year-old boy in a state with heavy hunting pressure. The buck had a 23-inch inside spread and 12 scorable points — including a long drop tine off the left beam!

The farm on which this trophy was shot is less than three miles, as the crow flies, from where Jim shot the "Airport" buck a few weeks later. Due to this proximity, the rarity of drop tines in the area and other similarities in the racks, there's been a lot of talk that the deer might have been genetically linked. Whether they were or not, for a man and his grandson to have taken two such great drop-tined deer a few weeks apart is really beating the odds.

**BIG BUCK NO. 3**

When Adam shot his buck, I was preparing to fly to Alberta for a week of hunting. Before I left, I shot a Polaroid of Adam's trophy. I kidded the young hunter that before I shot a deer in Canada, I'd pull out the photo and look at his, to make sure the one I got was even bigger! Of course, I knew there were no guarantees I'd even see a trophy buck, as I'd hunted twice in Alberta over the years and knew how challenging the hunting can be.



*The author's great Alberta buck from last fall rounded out what was an amazing deer season for his family. Photo courtesy of Brian Setree.*

Fortunately, on my fourth day of my 2000 hunt with Blair and Kathy Trout's Big Rack Adventures in Newbrook, I got my chance. My hosts' son, Jeff, had me in a portable tree stand overlooking a beaver dam in a snowy valley, where another hunter had missed a good deer three days earlier.

At 1:30 p.m., a buck stepped out at better than 200 yards. I immediately knew he was big, and within five seconds I'd touched the trigger of my .300 Win. Mag. After waiting the longest 45 minutes of my life, I followed the short blood trail to a wide 5x5 that grossed 164 5/8 points and netted 160 7/8.

**CONCLUSION**

Could any family possibly have more of a "dream" deer season than we enjoyed in 2000? Well, our year actually got even better. You see, during the final week of Pennsylvania's gun season, 92-year-old John Rowles filled his tag with a doe.

Yes, last fall will be tough to beat. But don't think we won't try!


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# *Fair Chase*
# WHITETAILS

## Part 2

*Deer hunting and management are full of practices not everyone agrees with. Here's how our readers voted on some commonly used methods of bringing whitetails into shooting range.*

*by Gordon Whittington*

As recreational hunters, we owe it to the animals we pursue to do so in an ethical manner, within the framework of what's often called "fair chase." But exactly what makes a hunt "fair" can be both vague and variable. The answer depends on a wide range of factors, not the least of which is the mindset of the person being asked. And that mindset is based largely on local hunting regulations and traditions, which can vary greatly from one place to the next and from one era to another.

Because this topic is so subjective, and because each state and province sets its own rules for ethical wildlife practices, there never will be consensus on every detail of fair chase. However, just discussing this subject has value, because it exposes us all to a wider range of viewpoints than we might get within our own hunting and management circles. As long as it's not done in an attempt to divide the whitetail community, expressing and debating opinions on fair chase should be a positive process.

In an effort to do just that, in our January 2001 issue we published a special survey to solicit opinions on this topic. We asked you about a range of hunting methods, categories of gear and management practices, to learn which of them you think are ethical today. The number of surveys we received showed us you really care about preserving fair chase in hunting and management.

This month, we'll begin to dissect your responses, starting with those related to hunting tactics. In addition to showing the percentage of respondents who voted for or against a particular tactic being ethical, we'll share some of the comments you provided.

*Using feed-type bait for hunting purposes is legal in a number of states and provinces, while in many others it's strictly forbidden. The results of our reader survey reflected that split. Photo by Bill Lerner.*

### WHAT THE NUMBERS SAY (& WHAT THEY DON'T)

Before we dive into the results, a few key points should be made.

First, very few of the 36 questions on the survey were answered by every respondent. As a result, the "yes" and "no" percentages on each question tend to total less than 100 percent.

Each of the practices we asked about is legal in at least one whitetail state or province, but not necessarily very many. We knew going in that this would affect response to certain questions. But we still wanted to put these practices on the survey, so you could express your views on them.

These results don't necessarily reflect the views of the total whitetail community. Our readers tend to take hunting and management far more seriously than does the average person in the deer woods. Were we to pollsolicit a random cross-section of hunters and landowners, we might come up with different numbers.

It's also important to note that a person is statistically more likely to fill out and return a survey if he or she has strong opinions on one or more of the questions asked. The person who thinks everything in deer hunting and management is "fine as is" probably wasn't as likely to send in the survey as was a person strongly motivated by an interest in change. This might have influenced responses on some highly contentious issues.

We got responses from every U.S. state and Canadian province in which whitetails are hunted. As you might imagine, the number of responses from an area was a general reflection of the number of readers there, which is to some extent a function of magazine distribution and the number of deer hunters/managers in the area. Thus geography was another form of survey bias.

There were two general categories of questions on the survey: (1) those having to do with the methods and gear used in hunting whitetails and (2) those having to do with methods used to manage the herd. As this series continues, we'll get into the management questions. But with deer season just around the corner, let's start with factors that usually are seen as having the most impact on "fair chase": hunting methods and gear.

### HUNTING METHODS

In the broadest sense, there are only two basic ways to hunt whitetails. You can wait for them to come to you, or you can go to them. All hunting methods fall into one of these groupings, though deer drives really are in both.

Many avid hunters claim that sta-

tionary methods, which rely largely on natural deer movement, are as a group less objectionable than methods utilizing forced movement. But what about stationary methods that lure deer to the shooter? Certain of these are widely practiced, while others are actually illegal in places. Here's how you voted on their use:

**HUNTING NEAR FEED BAIT**
**Fair Chase: 37 Percent**
**Unfair: 58 Percent**

Putting out food for deer and then hunting near it is unlawful in many states and provinces. In others, it's widely practiced and has the full blessing of the wildlife agency. Given this lack of uniformity, it's no surprise that ***WHITETAIL*** readers are divided on the ethics of using feed bait.

Among states and provinces from which we received at least 20 votes on this question, highest approval of baiting was in Arkansas (78 percent), followed by North Carolina and South Carolina (73), then Oklahoma (70). Lowest approval came from Maine (12), with Tennessee (15), Illinois (16) and Iowa not far behind.

But the survey showed that you don't have to cross state lines to find disagreement on this issue. For example, take Michigan and Wisconsin, two states in which some form of deer baiting is legal. In Michigan, 58 percent of respondents who answered this question told us that baiting is fair chase, while 42 percent claimed it isn't. In Wisconsin, 42 percent voted in favor of bait, 58 percent against it.

"Where I hunt, there are only five to 10 deer per square mile," wrote Erik Hajek, who hunts in Michigan. "If I didn't bait, I wouldn't see a deer."

"We use feed bait on bears," pointed out Wisconsin's Keith Rumisek. "How does that make bear hunting not fair chase?"

Fellow Wisconsin hunter Thomas Parkos and a number of other readers suggested that baiting could be "fair chase" if the amount of bait at a site was limited.

The issue apparently is no less contentious outside the traditional strongholds of baiting.

"Put a stand over corn, put a worm on a hook — same thing," claimed R.B. Waddell of New York, where hunting deer over bait isn't legal.

"Not natural" was how Illinois reader Tony Fidanzo characterized baiting on his survey, and he said that's why he doesn't think it has a place in ethical deer hunting.

Many respondents said they oppose baiting because they believe it forces a deer to compromise its natural defenses. "Deer are less wary at bait," said New York's Bill Lahue in explaining why he doesn't see a place for this hunting method.

Interestingly, though, some readers argued that this method is consistent with fair chase because they think it actually makes deer — mature bucks in particular — *harder* to hunt.

"Big bucks will learn to visit the bait only at night," claimed reader



*Rattling and calling were seen as fair chase by 98 percent of readers who responded to our survey. No other means of luring whitetails received such high marks. Photo by Gordon Whittington.*

Cale Stancil, who hunts in Georgia, Virginia, South Carolina and Alabama. (Some of these states allow baiting; others don't.)

A number of respondents expressed that whether or not baiting was fair chase depends on other factors. For example, Rawlins Reed of Delaware said he didn't think it was right to hunt over bait immediately following a blizzard. Presumably, the idea is that deer must be given options for feeding, so that they aren't in any way forced to visit bait when a hunter might be waiting nearby.

"It's OK to bait if you have the bait out there year 'round," Brian Hoblick of Florida wrote.

"Baiting is 'fair chase' as long as the deer have plenty of natural food," stressed Ohio reader Joshua Barr.

"Absolutely not," claimed Rick Leonard of Wyoming. "You might as well shoot a cow in a barn."

Suffice it to say that the issue of using feed baits is far from resolved.

**HUNTING NEAR A FOOD PLOT**
**Fair Chase: 88 Percent**
**Unfair: 11 Percent**

No matter how split our readers might be over baiting with feed, when it comes to hunting food plots, the vast majority appear to be in agreement. Those in favor outnumbered those opposed by an 8-to-1 margin.

Survey respondents from Kansas and South Carolina voted unanimously that hunting near food plots is consistent with fair chase. Kentucky (98 percent) and Oklahoma (96) were right behind. Meanwhile, easily the lowest support came from Maine, where only 67 percent of respondents voted for this practice. Georgia and Pennsylvania hunters tied for second-lowest support, at 82 percent.

"All farm fields and orchards and natural forage are in one way or another food or bait, so it shouldn't matter if it's supplemental," wrote Dr. Greg Caldwell of Pennsylvania.

"Even if you hunt a feeder or food plot, you still must beat the deer's nose and know its feeding cycles," noted Texan Ken Merrill in explaining his support of food-plot hunting.

Illinois hunter Del Prather told us that size matters. He said that he'd call this practice ethical only if the planted area was at least 10 acres.

Iowa's Duane Smith offered a unique perspective on why he doesn't think food plots are ethical for hunting. "They pull too many deer from surrounding properties," he commented. "They should be illegal."

Of concern to some of you was our definition of hunting "near" a plot (or feed bait, for that matter). Did we mean hunting right on it, or a short distance away? It's impossible to say how this phrasing might have affected the voting, but it didn't keep more than a handful of respondents from answering the question.

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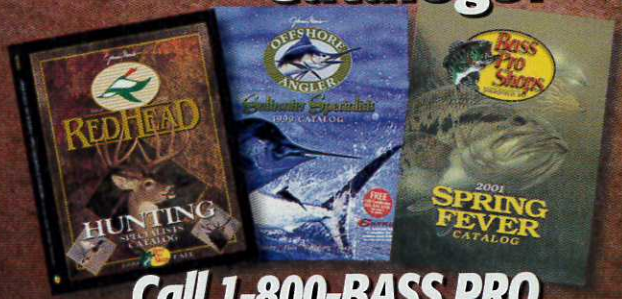
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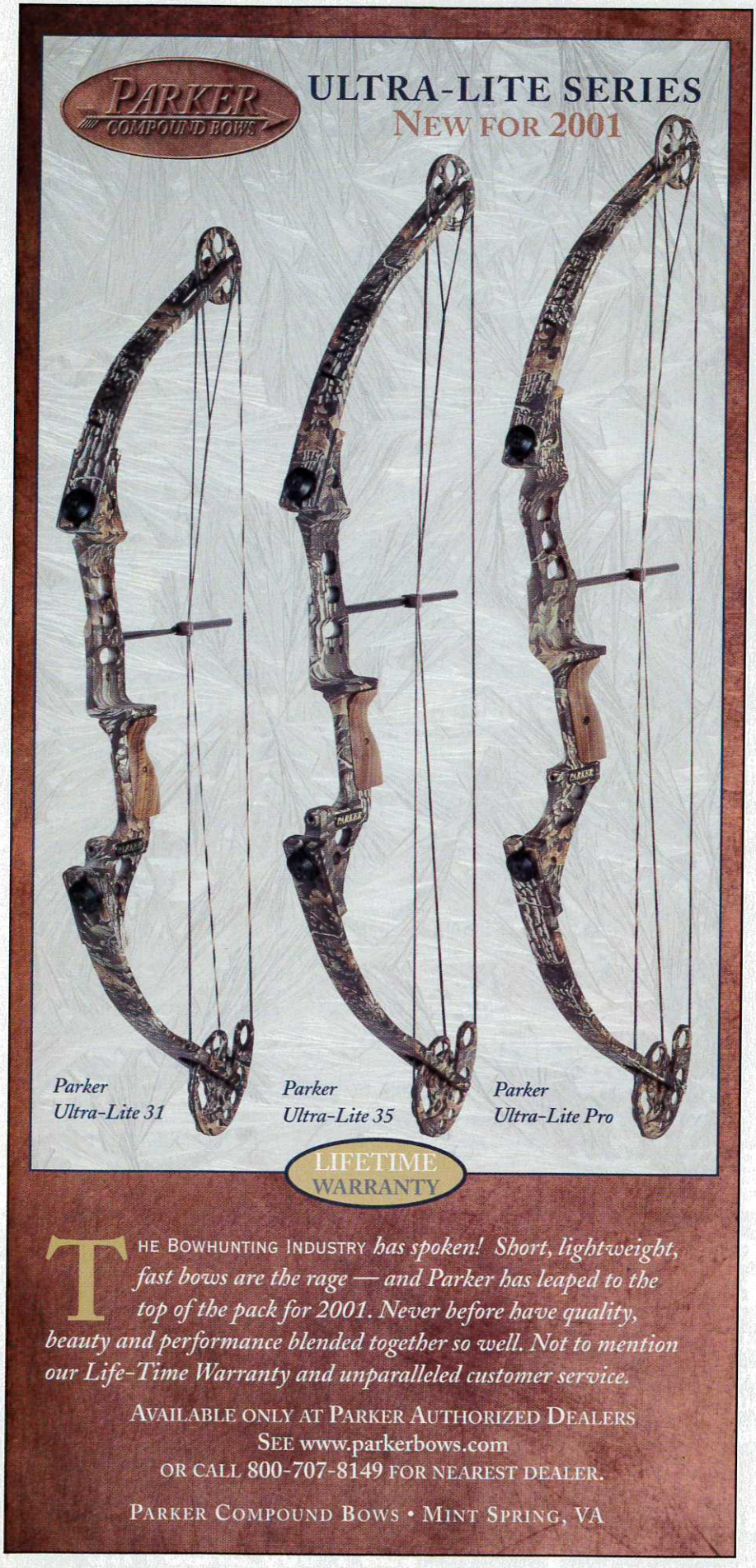
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**USING DOES AS BAIT**
**Fair Chase: 54 Percent**
**Unfair: 41 Percent**

If any single question among the 36 on our survey caused confusion in readers' minds, this apparently was the one. Consequently, we don't have high confidence in the results.

In asking whether or not it's fair chase to use does as bait, we meant hunting in the vicinity of wild does. But because we didn't spell out precisely what we meant, it's understandable that many of you wondered if we meant using pet does or restrained wild does to lure in bucks. Some of you even asked if we were talking about doe decoys. As an apparent result of this confusion, fully 5 percent of respondents left the question unanswered.

***No matter how split our readers might be over baiting with feed, when it comes to hunting around food plots, the vast majority appear to be in agreement.***

But there was a wide range in support from place to place. Respondents in North Carolina (78 percent), Michigan (73), Florida (72) and Vermont (70) showed relatively high support for this method, while those in Missouri (40) and Iowa (43) gave it the least support.

Typical of responses to this part of the survey was one from Arkansas' Nicky Scrivner. "I'm not sure of the question," he wrote. "If you mean wild does, I vote 'yes.' If you mean tame does, the answer is 'no.' "

Our apologies for not having been more clear. On the positive side, Nicky and many other readers did indicate their view on using wild does as bait, which is what we meant. (It's almost universally illegal to use tame or captive wildlife to decoy in game.)

Using does as bait is simply "a good rut strategy," wrote Ricky Hall of Texas. "Find the does, and the bucks will follow."

**HUNT NEAR A WATERHOLE**
**Fair Chase: 92 Percent**
**Unfair: 6 Percent**

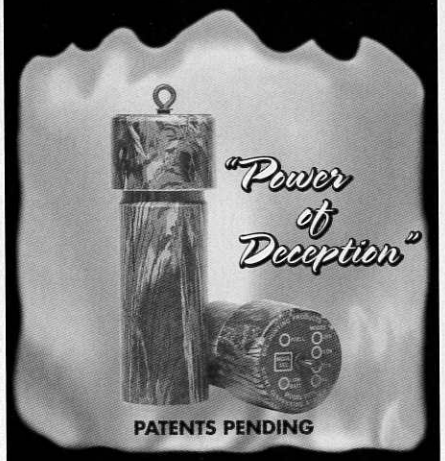
Many predators, including man, view the waterhole as a prime place to ambush thirsty prey. Is it ethical to do so when hunting whitetails?

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A strong majority of respondents said "yes." In fact, readers in four places — Iowa, Tennessee, Oklahoma and South Carolina — voted 100 percent in favor of this type of hunting as fair chase. Even where support was the lowest, in Pennsylvania and Texas, it still registered 90 percent.

"Rivers and streams are where the deer are," stated Mark Patten of Iowa in voicing his approval.

"It's enjoyable to watch all the different wildlife that show up," added Manitoba's Tim Hurley.

***"I think it would be OK to hunt near a waterhole unless there would be a drought condition and the game had a very limited water supply," wrote Louisiana's Glen Stroud.***

Among the few respondents who gave this hunting tactic a thumbs-down vote, the most common reason was a fear that deer might be forced to utilize limited water, making them overly vulnerable. This concern even was voiced by some readers who said hunting waterholes is fair chase.

"I think it would be OK to hunt near a waterhole unless there would be a drought condition and the game had a very limited water supply," wrote Louisiana's Glen Stroud.

"In the Midwest, I'd vote 'yes,'" noted Indiana's Doug McKinney. "In the desert, I'd vote 'no.'"

You might imagine that climate and habitat would affect hunter support of using waterhole ambushes. However, on our survey no clear regional trends could be discerned. Even so, we did see that the *source* of the water mattered to some readers. A number told us they think it's fair chase to hunt near a natural waterhole, but not if the water was placed there by man.

Perhaps the view was that hunting near an artificial water source puts a deer at too much of a disadvantage, by forcing it to visit a hunted location. However, several readers noted that if the water is available around the clock, the deer has the option of not getting a drink until nightfall, and that eliminates any ethical concerns.

Reader Steve Poulson said waterhole hunting is fair because prey species are aware of the dangers associated with getting a drink. "Most wild animals know predators are prevalent around water," wrote this Connecticut resident. "Watch a little TV on Africa."

### CALLING & RATTLING
**Fair Chase: 98 Percent**
**Unfair: 2 Percent**

Only a handful of respondents had a problem with the ethics of luring whitetails with sound. In fact, among major states and provinces, this practice got unanimous approval in Indiana, Missouri, Kentucky, South Carolina, Florida, Iowa, Kansas, Oklahoma and Louisiana.

A few readers, including British Columbia's Matt Gorrigan, did note that electronic calls (including recordings) shouldn't be used, but such calls are almost universally illegal for deer hunting already.

### DECOYS
**Fair Chase: 84 Percent**
**Unfair: 14 Percent**

Kansas and South Carolina readers gave 100 percent support to decoying, with Arkansas (96) and Tennessee (94) right behind. Easily the lowest support was in Texas, with 74 percent approval, followed by New York and Pennsylvania (80 each).

Among respondents who told us they disapproved of decoys, the most frequently cited reason was concern over hunter safety, not fair chase. A few readers also suggested there's an ethical difference between decoying birds and decoying deer, though no one elaborated on why that might be.

### ATTRACTANT SCENTS
**Fair Chase: 94 Percent**
**Unfair: 5 Percent**

Kentucky, Tennessee, Oklahoma and South Carolina respondents fully approved of this method. Again, the low score was in Texas (86 percent).

A typical comment was made by Pennsylvania hunter Ray Schmude. "Attractant scents still offer no guarantee," he noted in approving of them.

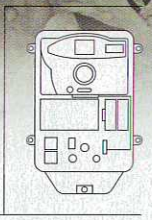
### NEXT MONTH

In the October issue we'll examine the ethics of mobile hunting methods, including driving deer with people, driving them with dogs and tracking them in snow. These topics elicited many interesting comments from readers, and we're sure you'll want to hear what some of them had to say.

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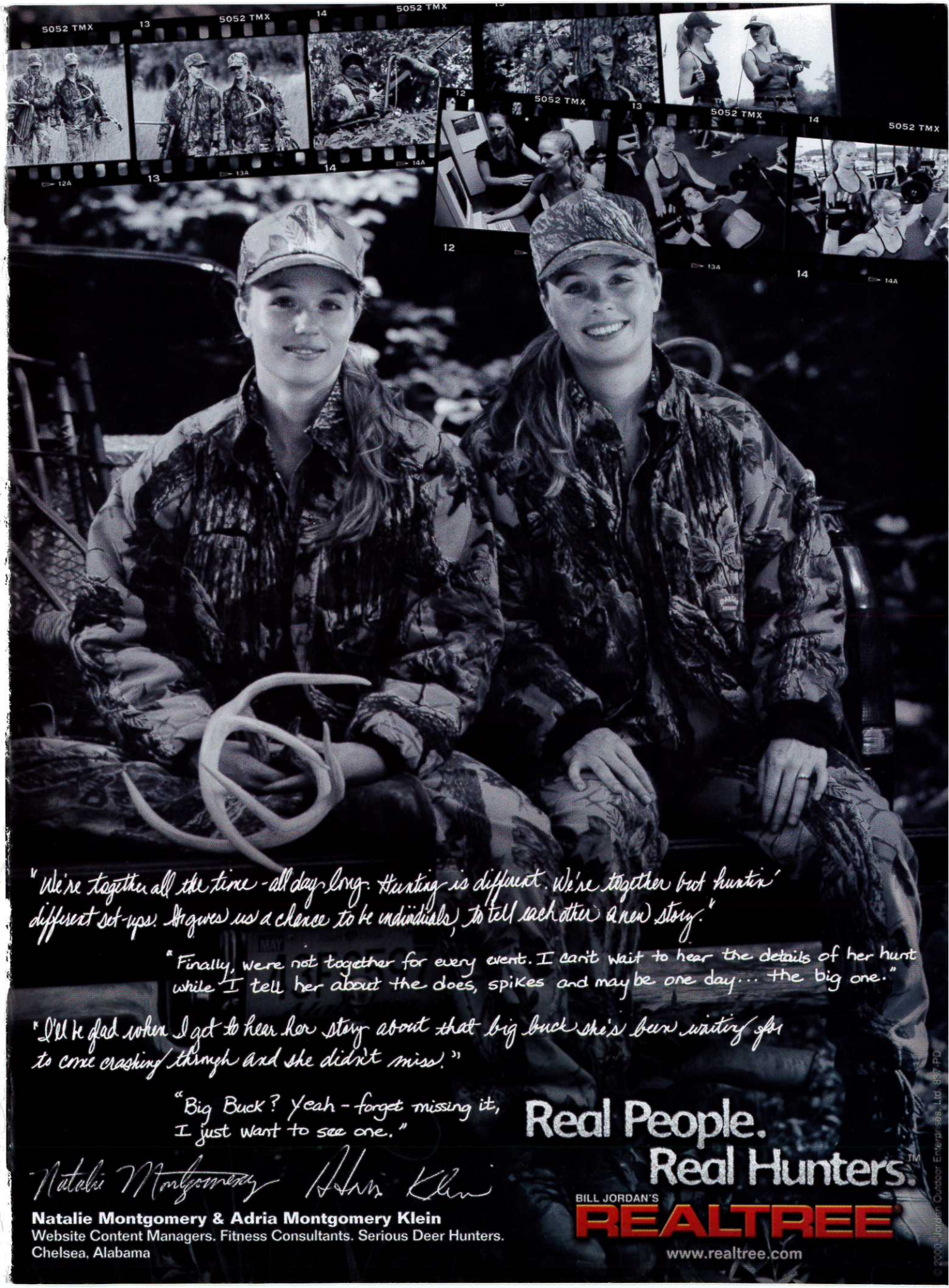
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