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Weatherby introduces Weatherproof Wool clothing, a major addition to the company's technically-advanced Performance Outerwear line for 2002.

The Weatherproof Wool fine includes a full range of outdoor apparel including a parka, shirt jacket, vest, cargo pants and ice cap. All garments enhance the unsurpassed natural protection of wool with a windproof, weatherproof and itchproof lining.

All items in the new line use the High Desert Brown camouflage pattern.

The classic parka is cut extra long in the body for added protection and has articulated double-wool elbows for comfort and ease of movement.

The waist-length jacket features a thick elastic waist plus double articulated elbows to allow easier bending, stalking and climbing.

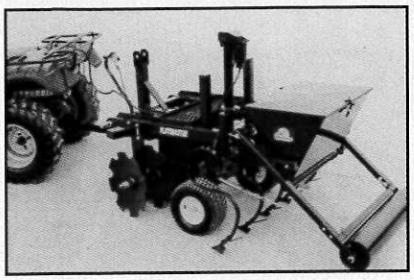
The extra-heavy shirt jacket is full cut to wear lumberjack-style with the tail out. Its long, square-cut front and rear tails plus double front and back yokes provide extra weather protection.

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The vest also includes fleece hand-warmer pockets.

The cargo pants offer extra-large gear pockets and integral "hitch" suspenders plus articulated knees and a generous crotch gusset for freedom of movement when stalking, crawling and climbing.

For more information, contact a local Weatherby dealer or Weatherby, Inc., 3 100 El Camino Real, Atascadero, CA 93422; (805) 466-1767. Or visit www.weatherby.com.



PLOTMASTER — THE HOTTEST NEW EQUIPMENT FOR SPORTSMEN

Many sportsmen have discovered an easier and more cost effective means of planting food plots using ATVs with the revolutionary ATV implement called the Plotmaster. The Plotmaster, designed and built by Woods-N-Water Inc., is a unique piece of equipment specifically designed for planting food plots. The basic unit comes with an electric or manual lift system, adjustable disk harrow, plow attachments, cultivator, electric seeder, cultipacker, drag and carriage unit. Seven additional attachments can be purchased separately including a compactor, aerator, rake, scrape blade, rolling basket, spreader and sprayer attachment.

The custom-designed electric seeder, included with the basic unit, features five settings, allows the planting of a wide variety of seed sizes.

Versatility, affordability, and durability set the Plotmaster apart from the rest of the ATV implements on the market today. First, it has both a one-point and a three-point hitch, allowing it to be operated with ATVs (300 cc or larger), small tractors (40 hp or less), lawn mowers, or even trucks.

Due to its compact design, the Plotmaster is ideal for planting food plots in a variety of areas including rough, hard-to-get places such as firebreaks, narrow power line rights-of-way, small forest openings, cut-overs and swamps.

The Plotmaster also is very economical and can be purchased at a fraction of the cost of a tractor and multiple pieces of equipment. Even with the cost of an ATV included, the cost is still far below the cost of most tractors alone.

For more information on the Plotmaster, call B-I-H Enterprises at (717) 656-3021. Dealer inquiries invited.



TEAM REALTREE TRUCK A REALITY IN 2002

The new Team Realtree® Truck is a concept vehicle that combines backwoods toughness with high style, exceptional detailing and an altogether classy look in a true outdoorsman's vehicle. The Team Realtree Truck prototype, completed in June 2001, is designed to be an all-around, all-purpose vehicle that will appeal to sportsmen, businessmen and families.

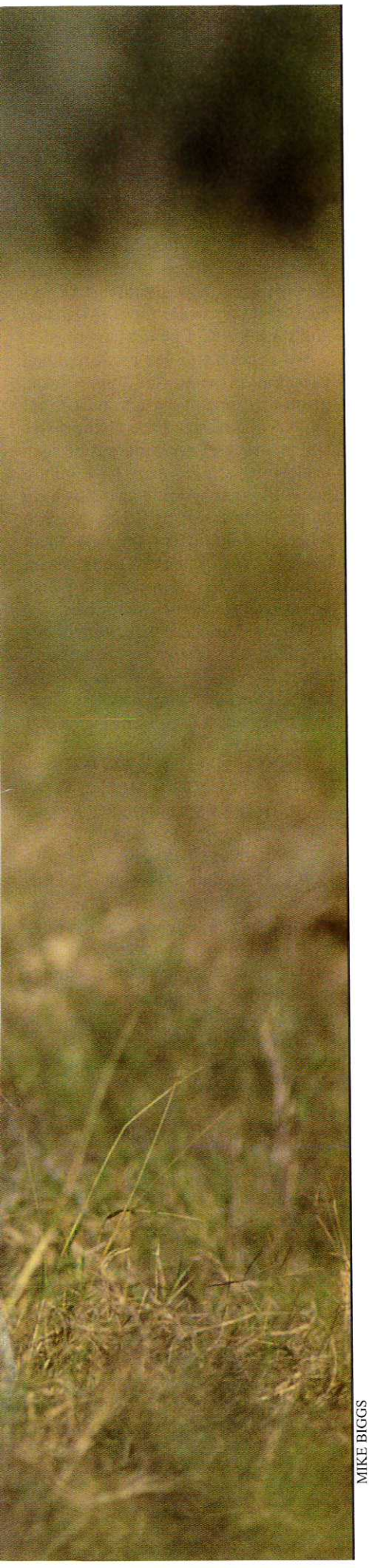
The Team Realtree Truck is based on the GM-Chevrolet 1500 Silverado Series trucks, and includes all normal option packages plus a special Realtree "touch" executed by Exposure Plus, of Brighton, Michigan.

The Team Realtree Truck is available in three standard paint finishes, Pewter Gray Metallic, Storm Gray Metallic and Medium Green Pearl Metallic. Accent detailing in the Realtree Hardwoods® camouflage pattern is applied to panels, bumpers and side mirrors using Realtree's new, proprietary High Definition™ (HD) Process that allows the direct digital transfer of the Realtree Hardwoods pattern and produces exceptional resolution and color.

The Team Realtree Truck interior option package features Realtree Hardwoods camo detailing on the dashboard, console and other select interior pieces. The distinctive Team Realtree logo is embroidered on headrests and custom floor mats.

Continuing the personalized and custom concept of the Team Realtree Truck, each new owner will receive a soft goods gift package of personal accessories, including a mud bag (for muddy boots), cooler, flashlight, coffee thermos and mugs, sunglasses and baseball cap, featuring Realtree Hardwoods camouflage and/or the Team Realtree logo.

To see and learn more about the new Team Realtree Truck, or how to order one, call 1-888864-CAMO or visit the new Web site www.realtreetruck.com.



MIKE BIGGS

Fair Chase Whitetails

Part 6

Does a fence that keeps deer from leaving a property eliminate any chance of a fair-chase hunt? Here's what you told us.

by Gordon Whittington

He says there's nothing fundamentally wrong with hunting whitetails inside a high fence. She says you can't call a hunt "fair chase" if deer can't leave the property, no matter how large the acreage or how thick the cover.

These diametrically opposed viewpoints aren't some new form of the old "he said/she said" routine. They're actual comments sent in by two Iowa readers who filled out the special survey we ran in our January 2001 issue. And not only are these two readers from the same state, they live in the same house. In fact, they're husband and wife.

Please — no jokes here about married couples' being expected to disagree about everything. The fact is, even among hunters who see eye to eye on all other issues, high fence can be a divisive issue, perhaps the most passionately debated practice in whitetail hunting today. That a husband and wife find themselves literally on opposite sides of the high-fence question shows just how hard it is to find consensus on this matter.

In our January 2001 issue we published a special survey, asking for reader views on 36 questions regarding the ethics of various hunting and management practices. A number of those questions, detailed below, were devoted to hunting confined deer. And perhaps not surprisingly, these generated more detailed survey comments than all other questions combined. Let's take a closer look at high fencing and how the voting went.

THE RECORD BOOKS

To some hunters, fair chase and record-book eligibility necessarily go hand in hand. None of the three major North American record-keeping organizations using the Boone and Crockett scoring system — the Boone and Crockett Club, the Pope and Young Club or the Longhunter Society — will accept as a hunter kill any deer shot on high-fenced land.

B&C and Longhunter always have had this rule, but P&Y's categorical rejection of such entries began only last spring. Effective on May 1, 2001, the following language was adopted as P&Y policy: "The term 'fair chase' shall not include the taking of animals . . . while inside escape-proof fenced enclosures."

Records Committee Chairman Glenn Hisey says, "Fenced animals and human manipulation of wildlife are subjects of great debate within, and outside of, the hunting community. These situations, and the subsequent debate, will only get worse and will, in the club's view, continue to be an increasing thorn in the side of our true hunting heritage and its future.

"Recent media coverage of 'canned hunting' situations, with their entire inherent emotional slant, only worsens the public's perception of the hunting community. We cannot

expect the media and the general non-hunting public to clearly differentiate these situations from 'real' fair-chase hunting. It is in our best interest to distance ourselves from those negative perceptions."

A statement on P&Y's Web site (www.pope-young.org) referred to the club's previous policy as "very sound — but admittedly somewhat confusing and misunderstood by some." And what was that policy? To meet P&Y's definition of a fair-chase kill, a deer or other animal could not have been taken "while behind game-proof fences where introduced and/or confined animals are held for commercial hunting purposes, such as game farms, shooting preserves or private hunting operations where (kill) fees are charged for the animals harvested."

Under its previous policy, if P&Y received a possible entry for an animal taken inside a high fence, the club would investigate the nature of that enclosure, looking at a wide variety of conditions, ranging from "whether or not the wildlife population was natural or had been introduced" to "whether or not the hunting was under the control, regulation and licensing of the state/provincial game agency" to "the size of the enclosure."

FENCING HISTORY

Despite a lack of official recognition for deer shot inside enclosures, high fences are becoming increasingly common. In fact, in many states and provinces, miles of such fencing are being erected daily.

Yet the idea of confining whitetails is hardly new. In fact, the town of Deerfield, Wisconsin, drew its name from a deer-holding structure built there in the late 1800s. A clever fellow used long logs to erect a fort-like pen, then built up a large mound of dirt just outside the tall fence. Some wild deer that went onto the mound would end up hopping over the log fence into the "deer field," from which they then couldn't escape.

The idea has evolved considerably since then. For starters, logs have given way to metal posts and wire. For another, many fence advocates say their goal isn't so much to keep deer in as to keep them *out*.

This is a common refrain in Texas, the traditional epicenter of high fencing. Across much of that state, deer numbers on unfenced ranches long ago outstripped their food supply. Ranchers who tried to reduce deer densities by shooting does typically found new deer moving onto their land, negating efforts to bring the numbers into line. High fences were (and still are) seen as one way to help control that problem.

Overall, these results suggest that approval of high-fence hunting is lower north of the Mason-Dixon Line.

Even before World War II, some landowners in Texas and the Eastern United States started building high fences because they wanted to develop hunting for exotic wildlife: fallow, axis or sika deer; blackbuck antelope; mouflon, Corsican or Barbary sheep; wild boars — you name it. In most cases, some native deer ended up being confined inside those fences as well.

Of course, for many landowners and hunters who build high fences around hunting land, neither lower whitetail numbers nor exotic wildlife is the main motivation. They build high fences because they think doing so will help them kill more big bucks. Part of the rationale is that the bucks can't get out and be shot by neighbors; the rest of the rationale is that with a high fence, poachers will have a harder time accessing the herd.

But what do you readers have to say on the matter? Do you think high fences have a place in fair chase — and if so, under what conditions? Here's how you voted. (Keep in mind that not all readers answered all questions, so the responses don't always total 100 percent.)

IS FAIR CHASE POSSIBLE INSIDE A HIGH FENCE?
Yes: 40 Percent
No: 58 Percent

We wanted to know if you think fair chase is *possible* inside a high fence, regardless of the size, cover, hunter density, weapon type, etc. When the votes were totaled, almost three of every five voters had rejected high-fence deer hunting outright.

On our survey, the highest support for hunting inside enclosures came from Louisiana, where 73 percent of voters told us the practice doesn't necessarily violate fair chase. Next came Florida (69 percent), followed by New Jersey (62), Texas (61), Virginia (55), Mississippi (51) and Tennessee (50).

Overall, these results suggest that approval of high-fence hunting is lower north of the Mason-Dixon Line. Maine voters were the least supportive of fences, with just 17 percent in favor, while those in Kansas and Iowa gave 26 percent approval.

We expected to see great regional variation in views on high fence, given that fencing hasn't come to all regions at the same pace. Some states and provinces have hundreds of such enclosures, while others have only a handful. Some wildlife agencies have taken a hands-off approach to such fences, while others regulate them closely. And whitetail habitat can vary immensely from place to place, as can average home-range sizes.

"To me, fair chase cannot involve a (high) fence," wrote Saskatchewan's Murray Wild. "The deer can only go so far. I've picked up matched sheds five miles apart. I know of bucks that have moved 20 miles."

HAVE YOU OR ANYONE YOU KNOW EVER HUNTED IN A HIGH-FENCED AREA?
Yes: 23 Percent
No: 77 Percent

While less than 1 percent of North America's whitetail habitat is surrounded by high fence, nearly one-fourth of survey respondents reported having hunted on such land or knowing someone who had.

Texas readers had the highest positive response to this question; 72 percent answered in the affirmative. Louisiana was No. 2 on the list, at 46 percent, with South Carolina (42), Florida (39) and Michigan (33) also above 30 percent.

Meanwhile, just 5 percent of Vermont voters answered "yes" to this question. Kansas was next (7 percent), then Minnesota (9), Iowa (10) and Illinois (12).

IF YOU COULD, WOULD YOU HIGH FENCE YOUR LAND?
Yes: 24 Percent
No: 73 Percent

In his January 2001 issue feature, "Managing Whitetail Management," David Morris expressed his view that

most deer hunters would enclose their hunting areas with high fences if they could. However, among readers who participated in our survey, the overall vote was 3-to-1 against doing so.

Lowest support (8 percent) came from readers in Maine, followed by Kansas (13), Kentucky (15), Iowa (16) and Arkansas (20). Meanwhile, 63 percent of Louisiana voters told us they would fence deer land if given a chance to do so, and 56 percent of Florida voters came to the same conclusion. Among Texas readers, the voting was split exactly 50-50.

MINIMUM HIGH-FENCED ACREAGE FOR FAIR CHASE?

Average: 1,458 Acres

David offered that a high-fenced tract be of at least 1,000 acres (just over 1.5 square miles) in order to provide fair chase. As a group, voters expressing support for high fences came up with a minimum of 1,458 acres, or nearly 2.3 square miles.

The average varied widely. Votes in Kentucky came up with the highest acreage requirement: 3,275. Next were Maine (3,125), Iowa (2,895), New Jersey (2,326), Minnesota (2,109) and Wisconsin (2,031). The lowest average was in Vermont (855),

While less than 1 percent of North America's whitetail habitat is surrounded by high fence, nearly one-fourth of our survey respondents reported having hunted on such land or knowing someone who had.

followed by Maryland (950), Oklahoma (971), Indiana (1,007), Missouri (1,015), Arkansas (1,069) and West Virginia (1,075).

MINIMUM COVER FOR FAIR CHASE INSIDE HIGH FENCE?

Average: 833 Acres

When we asked for the minimum total amount of deer cover needed for fair chase inside a high fence, voters who had given a positive response to high-fence hunting came up with a broad range of answers.

On average, the highest minimum cover requirement was in Kentucky: 1,751 acres. Minnesota was next (1,572), followed by Texas (1,407), Florida (1,359), Louisiana (1,292), Georgia (1,241), Mississippi (1,159) and Iowa (1,155).

The lowest average cover requirement was in Maryland, at 475 acres, with Illinois (530), Missouri (554), Maine (585), Kansas (586), Arkansas (598), New York (602) and Michigan (634) also well below the average for all of North America.

MINIMUM ACRES/HUNTER INSIDE HIGH FENCE?

Average: 244 Acres

In only eight states or provinces did a majority of pro-fence readers tell us that fair chase could be experienced with a hunter density heavier than 1 per 200 acres inside a high fence. The lowest minimum acreage per hunter was in Vermont (134), with Missouri (147), Maryland (150), Arkansas (153), West Virginia (155), Pennsylvania (172), Virginia (185) and New York rounding out the list.

Meanwhile, in only five places did the average come out above 300 acres per hunter: Texas (648), South Carolina (637), Georgia (562), Iowa (484) and Florida (476).

MINIMUM ACRES/HUNTER ON UNFENCED LAND?

Average: 126 Acres

We asked all voters — including those who don't think high fences can be part of fair chase — to give their views about appropriate hunter densities on unfenced deer land. When we totaled all of the responses and divided them by the number of entries, we came up with an overall average of 126 acres per hunter. And again, the averages were highly variable — not just from reader to reader, but from place to place.

The lowest average was in Kentucky (47 acres per hunter), with several other locations also at 80 acres or less: Virginia (49), Missouri (52), Michigan (53), Minnesota (62), Ohio and South Carolina (69), Illinois and West Virginia (70), New York (73), Pennsylvania (78) and Arkansas (80).

The average was highest in Louisiana, at 317 acres of unfenced land per hunter. Vermont was next (264), then Florida (244), Maine (225) and Texas (189).

IS IT FAIR CHASE TO HUNT WHITETAILS ON AN ISLAND?

Yes: 87 Percent

No: 8 Percent

Because we wanted to gain more insight into reader views on the ethics of hunting "confined" deer (not necessarily limited only to those inside high fences), we also asked about hunting on islands. We didn't provide any specifics regarding island size, shape, cover or hunter density; we just wanted to know if readers think it can be ethical to hunt deer where there is no overland escape route.

That 11 of every 12 votes were cast in favor of island hunting sends a clear signal that many readers regard it as fair chase.

That 11 of every 12 votes were cast in favor of island hunting sends a clear signal that many readers regard it as fair chase. And there were no apparent regional trends in the voting. Tennessee, South Carolina and Maine tallied unanimous votes in favor of island hunting, while support was almost as high in Indiana (98 percent), Florida and Virginia (97), Oklahoma (96), New Jersey (95) and Kansas (94).

In no state or province did a majority of voters reject island hunting. In fact, the lowest support, from readers in Alabama, still was a strong 68 percent in favor.

North Dakota voter Ryan Wollan apparently summed up the sentiments of many of his fellow island hunters when he noted, "The deer got on . . . they can get off." And T. Scott Forbes of Maryland pointed out that "water's no boundary (to a deer)."

But even among many supporters of island deer hunting, there was a view that details factor into the equation. For instance, Alan Reekie of British Columbia opined that island hunting is fair chase only if you hunt "by yourself, no drives." Florida's Bob Adey claimed that island hunting is only ethical if there's at least 100 acres of land per person.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Next month, in the finale of this series, we'll print some readers' personal definitions of the term "fair chase" as it applies to deer hunting, and we'll recap the voting on all 36 questions on the survey.



BUILDING YOUR OWN
'DEER FACTORY'

Are Predators Really Hurting Your Herd?

Deciding whether or not predator control would yield benefits for a deer-management program requires an honest appraisal of the situation.

by Ben H. Koerth



Predators kill deer. Thus, if you want to protect your investment in the deer herd where you hunt, you should reduce the number of predators, right?

In a simplistic world, that is exactly what you would do. However, the issue of predator control is not as black and white as it might seem. As in management of most other biological situations, there are many varying shades of gray.

We biologists have long been ingrained with the concept that predators are responsible for only minor deer losses and that any mention of lethal control is virtually sacrilegious. Others contend that some predator control is nearly always necessary to maintain a balance between predators and prey. Depending on the situation, both sides can be right . . . or wrong.

My position is not to specifically advocate one side or the other, but to present some of the pros and cons of predator control. Perhaps this will help you decide if controlling predators on your deer land actually would have positive benefits or simply make you feel good about having done something to help the herd. In the end, the decision about the particular role it should play in your management program is up to you.

THE PREDATOR IN HISTORY

Most people just like to hate predators. This notion probably stems from somewhere in our ancestral heritage. Prehistoric people presumably killed predators, at least in part, because they competed with them for food. There was little question that predators were a threat, either directly to the person's safety or to the availability of food.

With the efficient food-production capabilities in today's world, wildlife often is valued more for recreation and enjoyment than as a survival concern. Yet, there might be times when controlling the number of predators can enhance the production of what we consider to be a more desirable species of animal. The trick is determining when predator control will have a beneficial outcome.

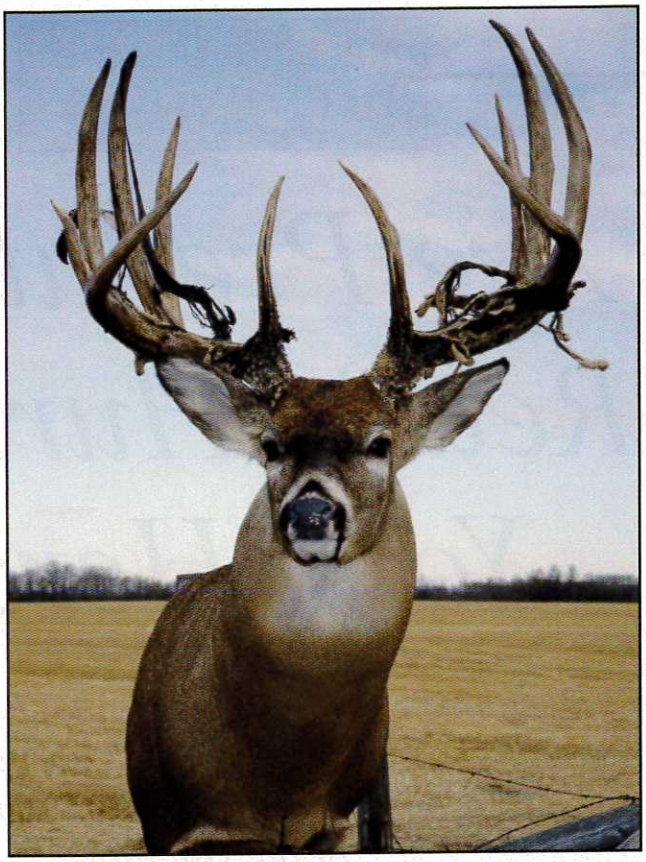
TRUE DEER PREDATORS

In regard to the white-tailed deer, I think there would be little argument that the coyote is the main predator of concern. Mountain lions certainly can have a localized influence, but because of their limited numbers and distribution, they probably are not an important overall threat to whitetail populations. Bobcats and lynx kill some fawns and an occasional adult deer, but likewise do not appear to be a major threat overall.

A host of other predators, including foxes, alligators, feral hogs, eagles and bears, have occasionally been known to prey on whitetails, particularly fawns. However, their effect on the size of a deer population is minimal at best.



For 36 years, the Mel Johnson buck has withstood all challenges to his ranking as the world's top typical by bow. The basic 6x6 rack is wide, tall, heavy and symmetrical. Photo by Larry L. Huffman, Legendary Whitetails.



The Zaft buck apparently will outscore the Johnson buck, despite having to be measured as a basic 5x5. He could even become No. 2 in Boone and Crockett, which includes deer taken by gun. Photo by Kevin G. Wilson.

Illinois' Johnson Buck

Scorable points 13 (7R, 6L)
Tip-to-tip spread 22 5/8
Greatest spread 26 1/8
Inside spread 23 5/8
Total length of abnormal points: 1 1/8

Areas Measured	Right	Left	Difference
Main Beam	27 5/8	26 6/8	7/8
1st point (G-1)	5 4/8	7 2/8	1 6/8
2nd point (G-2)	11 3/8	12 0/8	5/8
3rd point (G-3)	12 6/8	12 0/8	6/8
4th point (G-4)	10 1/8	9 7/8	2/8
5th point (G-5)	5 7/8	4 4/8	1 3/8
6th point (G-6)	—	—	—
1st circ. (H-1)	6 1/8	6 2/8	1/8
2nd circ. (H-2)	5 0/8	5 0/8	—
3rd circ. (H-3)	5 1/8	5 1/8	—
4th circ. (H-4)	4 6/8	5 1/8	3/8
Totals	**94 2/8**	**93 7/8**	**6 1/8**

Gross typical score 211 6/8
Subtract side-to-side differences . . . . . – 6 1/8
Subtract abnormal points . . . . . – 1 1/8
FINAL NET TYPICAL SCORE 204 4/8

Taken by: Mel Johnson **Date: 10/29/65**
Where taken: Peoria County, Illinois

Alberta's Zaft Buck

Scorable points 14 (8R, 6L)
Tip-to-tip spread 11 6/8
Greatest spread 24 0/8
Inside spread 21 0/8
Total length of abnormal points: 5 0/8

Areas Measured	Right	Left	Difference
Main Beam	28 4/8	27 5/8	7/8
1st point (G-1)	9 1/8	10 0/8	7/8
2nd point (G-2)	13 1/8	13 4/8	3/8
3rd point (G-3)	14 5/8	13 6/8	7/8
4th point (G-4)	12 4/8	10 6/8	1 6/8
5th point (G-5)	4 3/8	—	4 3/8
6th point (G-6)	—	—	—
1st circ. (H-1)	5 4/8	5 5/8	1/8
2nd circ. (H-2)	5 2/8	5 1/8	1/8
3rd circ. (H-3)	8 6/8	6 2/8	2 4/8
4th circ. (H-4)	5 1/8	5 1/8	—
Totals	**106 7/8**	**97 6/8**	**16 7/8**

Gross typical score 225 5/8
Subtract side-to-side differences . . . . . – 11 7/8
Subtract abnormal points . . . . . – 5 0/8
FINAL NET TYPICAL SCORE 208 6/8

Taken by: Wayne Zaft **Date: 10/8/01**
Where taken: Edmonton Bow Zone, Alberta



PAUL T. BROWN

Where wolves exist, they can be a different story. They are considered a major historical predator of deer and can have a tremendous impact on local populations. (**Editor's note:** See our "Forum" department.) However, the limited range in which wolves and deer now exist together makes these predators minor players over most of the whitetail's range.

THE COYOTE PROBLEM

In most cases, then, if predation of whitetails is occurring, it primarily will be limited to coyotes. And it will have one of three possible effects on the deer population.

The first possibility is that the predation is having no effect at all. Now, I think we probably can dispense with this one right away. We don't have to dig through the literature to know that coyotes kill and eat deer.

Predation, by definition, is individuals of one species killing and eating those of another species. Thus, any removal of animals will affect the prey population in some way — "good," "bad" or otherwise.

The other possibilities are that coyotes are either regulating or limiting deer populations. This might seem a game of semantics, but there are real differences in the two, and those differences indicate whether predator control actually would benefit your deer-management program.

If the role of a predator is *regulation* of a prey species, the predator is helping to stabilize that population over time. In this case, coyotes and other predators are unwittingly giving us a helping hand. As hard as this might be to accept, it's true. Their role is helping to keep deer from exceeding the herd's food supply.

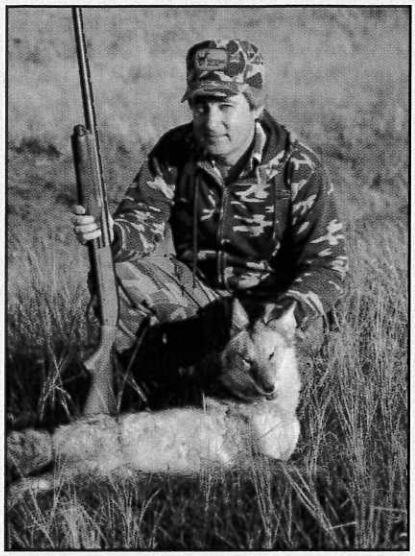
Coyotes normally can't control deer numbers on their own. At best, they provide a dampening or suppressing effect on the population. In areas where the deer herd is near or exceeding the habitat's carrying capacity, where deer are depredating crops or where you have to plead with hunters to harvest more does to control the

population, it would be foolhardy to attempt to reduce predator numbers. To do so only would heighten the negative habitat effects the deer already are having. And as much as we might hate to admit it, this is the case in most of the whitetail's range today.

This is not to say you can't affect the deer population if you remove enough predators. However, if you do, you'd better be ready to step in and make up the difference in deer production with increased doe harvest. Otherwise, your management program might suffer some consequences you weren't expecting.

Take, for example, a study conducted on the Rob and Bessie Welder Wildlife Refuge in South Texas. In this study, a 966-acre pasture was surrounded with a predator- and deer-proof fence and all predators inside it were removed. The deer herd inside the fence was monitored and compared to the herd outside the fence, which was still exposed to predation.

Initially, deer numbers inside the fence greatly expanded, primarily as a result of increased fawn survival.



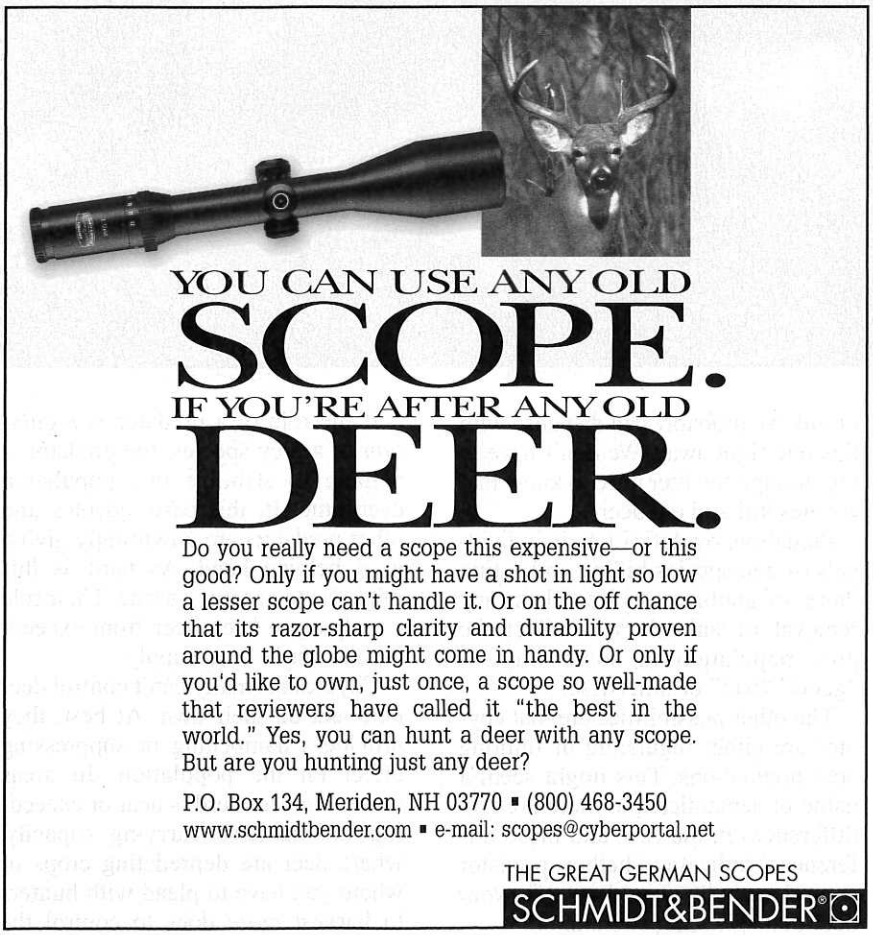
Many hunters pursue predators during the off-season. But it takes real effort to kill enough of them to boost deer numbers. Photo by Tom Evans.

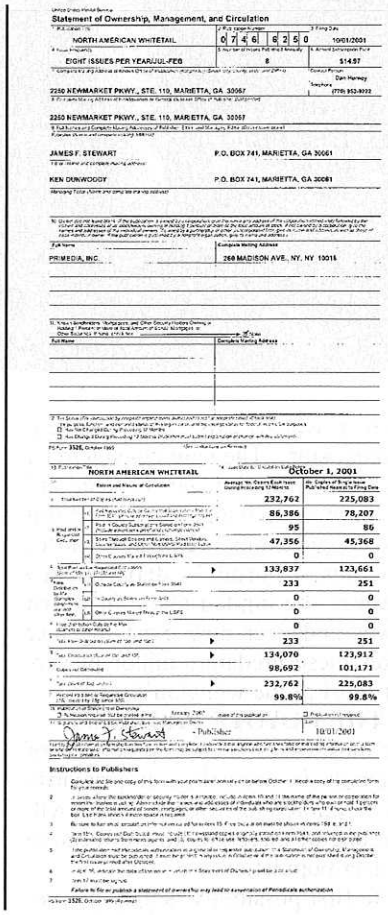
However, after a couple of years of this elevated population, forage availability and deer health began to decline. Parasite loads increased, does began conceiving later, and overall reproductive performance decreased. Eventually, the population declined to levels comparable to those outside the enclosure, but with the individual deer in less healthy condition: not at all a situation we would like to see on our own hunting grounds.

In this example, coyote predation was not limiting but *regulating* the deer population. In essence, it was serving to help maintain a healthy deer population within bounds of the habitat. In the long run, deer mortality rates remained about the same as before, but the specific cause of the mortalities changed.

This is what we biologists mean when we talk about *compensatory* mortality. If a coyote kills a deer that was doomed to die by other means anyway, is that necessarily a bad thing? In other words, if by killing one individual the survival or productivity of another individual is enhanced, there are no long-term harmful effects to the prey population.

Also, most managers seldom look past the initial impacts of predator control. In deer management, preda-





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tor control normally is initiated in an attempt to increase fawn survival and, to a lesser extent, reduce predation on adult animals. However, other detrimental effects might cascade through the web of creatures farther down the food chain. Coyotes prey not only on deer, but also on a host of other species. As such, they can influence the abundance and distribution of other animals in the ecosystem.

For example, experimental removal of coyotes in a West Texas study resulted in drastic changes in small mammal diversity. Whereas 12 species of rodents previously could be found in the study area, after coyote removal only one species remained. Jackrabbit numbers increased threefold. Such midlevel predators as skunks, foxes, badgers, bobcats and raccoons also gained in numbers.

Whether or not these changes in return for higher fawn survival are considered "good" is a value judgment. However, there is little doubt the dynamics of the ecosystem have been changed in such an instance.

The last scenario is one in which a predator population actually *limits* deer numbers. In this case, predation would be the primary reason deer numbers cannot increase. In fact, this predation might even be causing a *decline* in deer numbers. This situation has led to coining the term "predator pit," wherein a prey population simply cannot increase because of predation, no matter how much food is available in the habitat. It's as if the deer are in a predator-lined hole and cannot get out and expand.

This scenario is a possibility where deer are at very low densities relative to the habitat's carrying capacity. It can occur when otherwise normal deer populations suffer a debilitating setback of some sort (such as disease) or are colonizing new habitat.

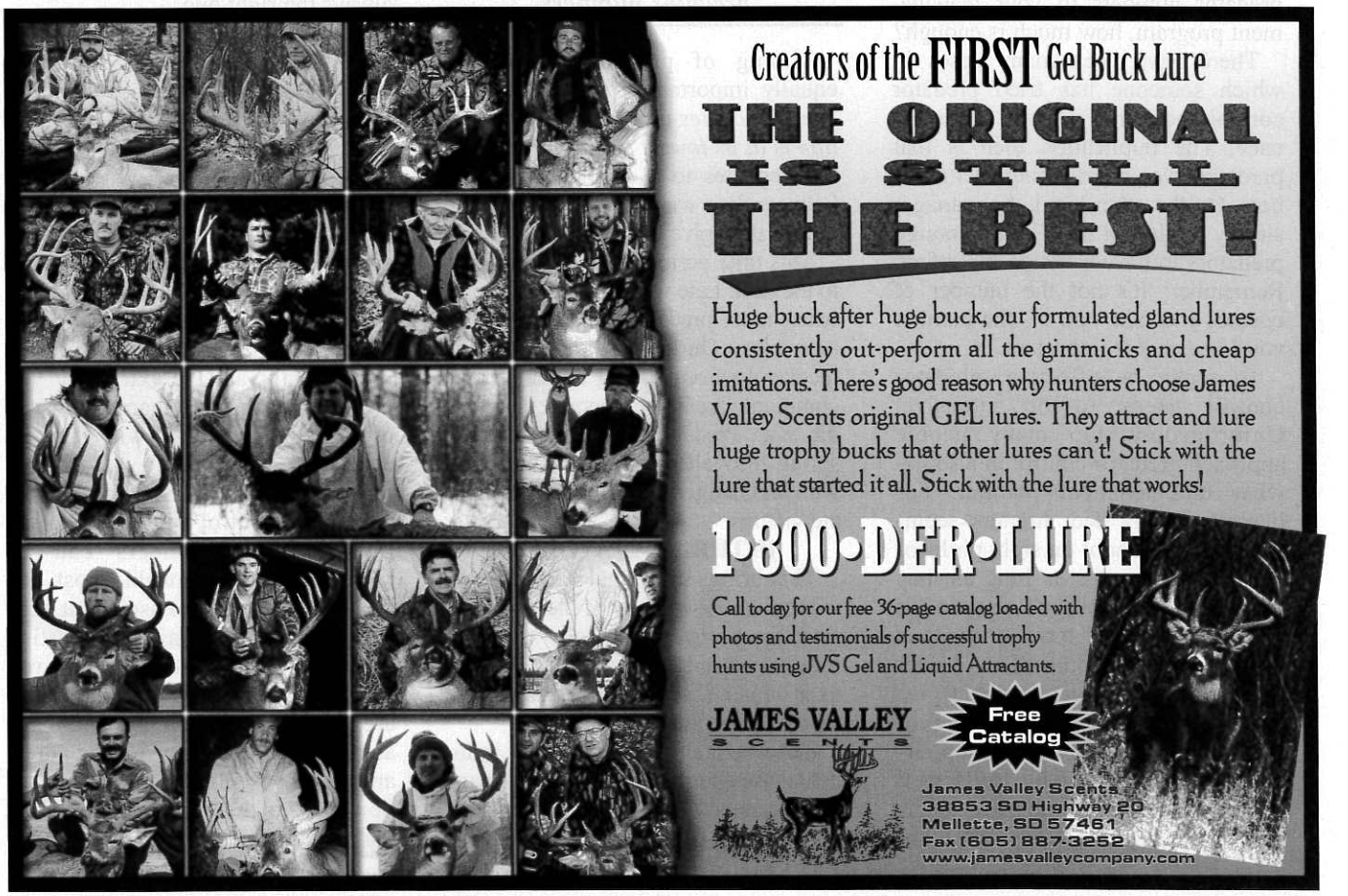
In such scenarios, predator removal can greatly enhance deer production in the short term. However, while a predator-removal program can provide a quick fix to get a herd on the road to recovery, eventually the deer will saturate their range and become limited more by nutrition, as in the predator-regulated example above.

Nevertheless, there are a couple of other situations in which predator control might prove to be warranted. The first is one in which predators are new to the prey population.

Historically, coyotes were denizens of the Western and Southern United States. Deer and coyotes evolved together there, so normal predator-prey relationships were developed long ago. However, within the past 50 years, coyotes have greatly expanded their range to include the Southeast and East Coast regions. They have been found as far to the northeast as Nova Scotia and New Brunswick within the past 30 years.

At least theoretically, it is likely that predators could have a far greater influence on a population where predator-avoidance strategies have not had much time to develop. In this case, the "rules of the game" and the "playing field" have been changed.

Still, coyotes might not be the demon many whitetail managers think. In light of the burgeoning deer populations throughout much of this range, coyotes apparently are not a limiting factor overall. However, predator control in localized areas where deer populations remain low



could prove to be fruitful. It still remains to be seen if the deer in this area can sustain the current rate of hunter harvest in addition to predation by an unchecked and apparently growing predator population.

Also, with continued human manipulation of the landscape, we could be developing another situation in which predator control plays a significant role. Highly fragmented habitats essentially create islands of deer habitat surrounded by country that provides little for deer. Even when these islands are connected by fencerows or brush strips, the narrow, linear shape of the strips makes predators much more efficient hunters.

The same goes for some areas that have been high-fenced for deer management. As with island habitats, small tracts surrounded by high fences essentially present coyotes with a captive audience and lessen the search time necessary to find prey.

EFFECTIVE CONTROL

Predator control will continue to be a divisive issue, and not all of the answers can be provided by anyone. But if you decide you need to reduce predator numbers in your management program, how much is enough?

There have been many cases in which someone has tried predator control and found it made no difference. The implication then is that predators weren't affecting deer numbers. On the other hand, the manager simply might not have killed enough predators to have a noticeable effect. Remember: It's not the number of coyotes you take out, it's the number you *leave* that is important.

To really be effective, predator control needs to be intensive. Unfortunately, too many people approach predator control in a somewhat lack-adaisical manner. For instance, many deer hunters seemingly have a "shoot on sight philosophy" about coyotes as long as they feel the disturbance of shooting a coyote would not have a negative effect on the outcome of their deer hunt. While this practice might give the hunter a temporary feeling of accomplishment, in reality opportunistic shooting usually falls well short of removing the number of animals necessary to effectively curtail coyote populations.

Even recreational calling and shooting of coyotes after deer season will have little lasting effect. Effective control takes more than a superficial effort that simply skims off the easy ones. *Computer simulations conducted by experts on coyote-population dynamics suggest you could remove up to 70 percent of the coyote population each year and have no effect on their long-term number. You have to remove more than three-quarters of the coyote population annually to begin to see any substantial reduction in their number.*

The key word here is *annually*. Coyote control is not a one-time deal. Short-term efforts to control predators usually do little more than aggravate the situation.

In areas where the deer herd is near or exceeding the habitat's carrying capacity, where deer are depredating crops or where you have to plead with hunters to kill more does to control the population, it would be foolhardy to try to reduce predator numbers.

Timing of predator control is equally important. *The best time to control coyotes is when their population is at its lowest point for the year.* This equates to a couple of months between late winter and early spring before they give birth to their young.

This time period also has direct ties to the deer. Late winter, after the rut, is when most predation on adult bucks takes place. During this time, bucks are recovering from rutting activities and commonly are in their poorest shape of the year. Predator control during late spring also allows fawns to be born with less danger of becoming immediate victims.

IS THERE A PAYOFF?

This brings up a final item of consideration: How many of the deer you save from coyotes actually make it into harvestable age-classes? Do you as a hunter really get to take advantage of a surplus?

Unfortunately, most studies indicate that in herds already near the carrying capacity of the habitat, any surplus deer saved from predation have a much higher chance of succumbing to other factors long before they reach the hunter's bag. Deer can become more vulnerable because of their own success. Too many animals in a finite habitat can lead to more disease, increased parasite loads and/or other stress-related conditions that ultimately diminish their health and reproductive success.

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

Predator control certainly has a place in deer management. However, it's not a cure for poor management. In deciding if predator control can be effective on your land, you need to consider several questions:

(1) What are your deer numbers, relative to the habitat's carrying capacity? Is there really room for more healthy deer?

(2) If there *is* more room for deer, why are deer numbers currently so low? All possibilities need to be explored before placing the blame on predators. Yes, coyotes kill deer, so that seems the obvious answer. But coyotes have been killing deer for thousands of years, and we still have plenty of both. The easy answer is not always the right one.

(3) Is effective predator control even feasible? With your skills and resources, can you remove enough predators to actually help the deer herd? This is where the record-keeping discipline we have written about so many times comes into play. If you have been monitoring deer numbers and reproductive success, you can use your numbers before and after predator control to determine how effective your efforts might have been.

(4) Lastly, are the extra deer you produce worth more than the cost of producing them, and will they be utilized?

CONCLUSION

Predator control might be justified if your deer numbers can be increased at a reasonable cost and the extra deer will be used. But such control likely will have little lasting effect on deer herds that are well established, have adequate nutrition, are actively reproducing and have ample cover so that fawns and adults are not exposed to excessive predation. You, as the deer manager, must make that decision.

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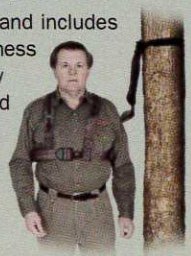
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