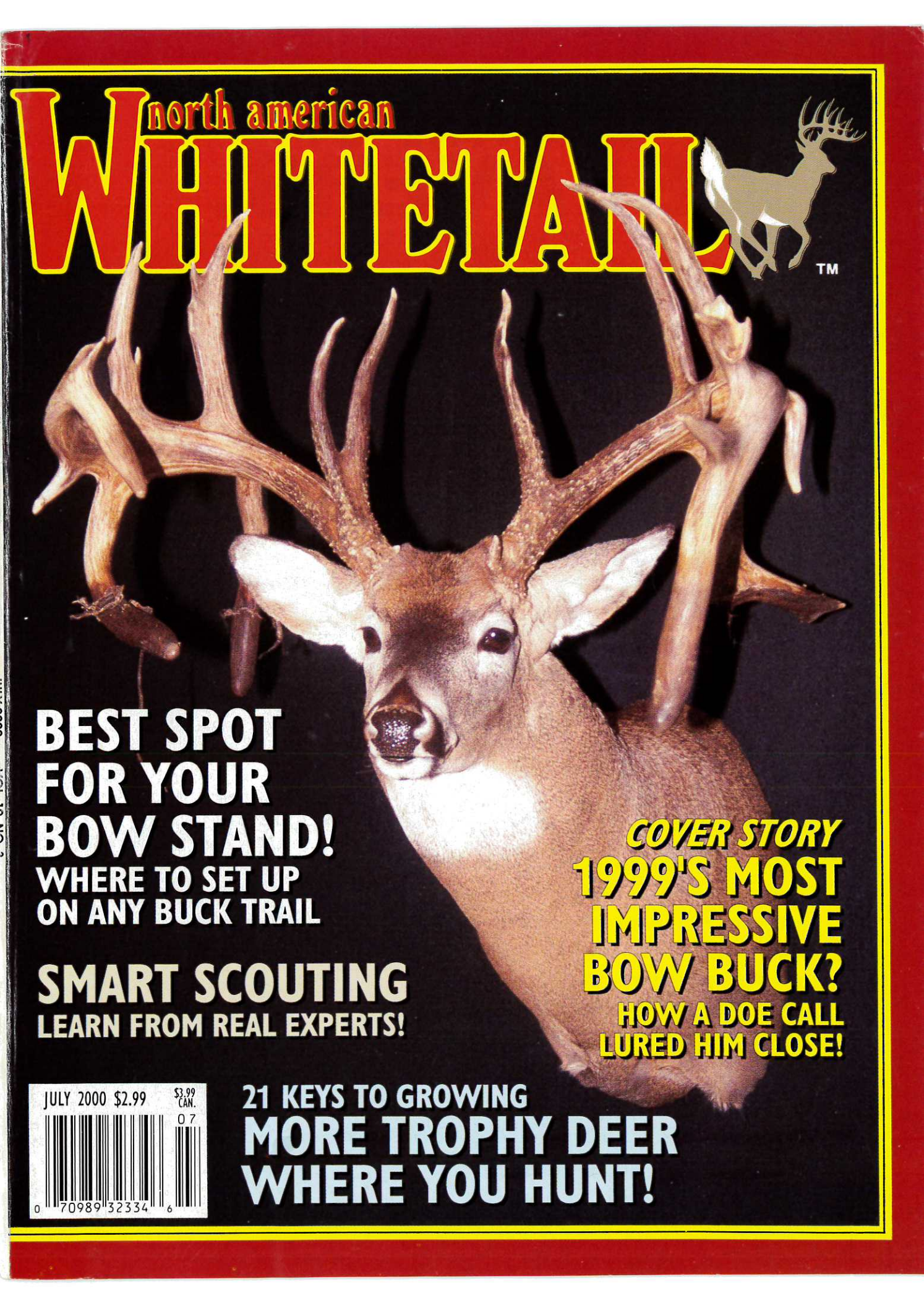

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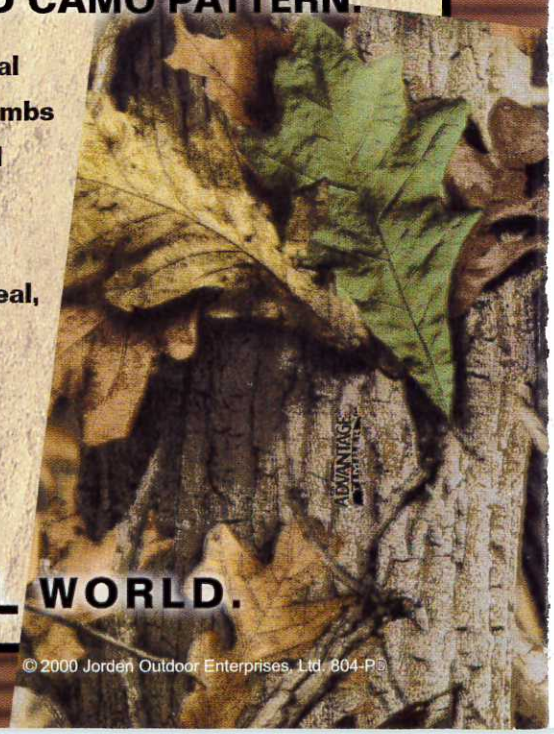
# BEWARE OF BEAVERS.



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## ENTER THE NATURAL WORLD.

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Interestingly, when Bill arrived at the meat locker, another bowhunter already was there with a huge buck he'd taken the evening before. Imagine: another Boone and Crockett non-typical bow kill from the same county, shot only 10 miles away and 16 hours earlier!

After getting his buck skinned out, Bill took the antlers and cape to taxidermist Locie Murphy of Bushnell, Illinois. One glance told Locie the rack was world class, and he quickly called me to come over for a look.

Following the 60-day mandatory drying period, fellow official measurer Tim Walmsley and I scored the Brown buck at 264 2/8 gross points, 251 6/8 net. As the score sheet on Page 28 shows, the rack is exceptional in every way one can be: beam length, spread, mass, points and uniqueness.

This historic deer is an example of what can happen when you combine proper management with the right mental approach to trophy hunting. It takes an extremely dedicated hunter to pass up smaller deer to the point of going several years without killing a buck, but Bill has proved willing to do



*Bill says the buck couldn't get his rack between the saplings lining his trail. It's easy to see why: His outside spread is 30 5/8 inches! Taxidermy by Locie Murphy; photo by Ron Willmore.*

just that. In fact, only six days after taking the non-typical, he sat in the same tree and let two P&Y-class bucks walk past — broadside at 15 yards!

Managing your hunting area might never give you a shot at a state-record deer, but it will improve your chances. And if you can get your neighbors to adhere to your philosophies, it will make the situation that much better for every hunter in the area. By continually expanding a land base in which all hunters and landowners work together, you can do away with the old argument most hated by serious deer managers: "If I don't shoot that immature buck, my neighbor is going to."

Bill firmly believes that while some hunters on lands around his do shoot young bucks, it still pays for him to let these deer walk. "I realize not all hunters can afford to buy their own land," he notes, "but all hunters can pass up young bucks."

It's a seemingly simple philosophy which, in this case, translated into the buck of a lifetime. But knowing Bill and his dedication to both management and bowhunting, this might prove to be only his *first* buck of a lifetime!

**(Editor's Note:** As hard as it might be to imagine, one non-typical arrowed last fall actually has an even higher P&Y entry score than the Brown buck. A feature on that great deer, which also was taken by a veteran bowhunter, will be in our September issue.)




BUILDING YOUR OWN
'DEER FACTORY'

# Manage Your Way To Better Hunting!

*The interest in managing private lands for whitetails has never been greater — and neither has our magazine's commitment to helping you do it right.*

*by Gordon Whittington*

Nearly three years have passed since ***WHITETAIL*** kicked off this series on managing private lands for deer. Back then, publishing detailed management advice was revolutionary, and to be honest, our approach to it still is; after all, we remain the only magazine with its own facility (Fort Perry Plantation in Georgia) devoted solely to deer-management research. The practical ideas we've been sharing since our October 1997 issue have been proved effective on Fort Perry's 2,000 acres, and we're confident they'll work on the land you hunt as well.

As we move into the 21st century, it's an appropriate time to review the principles we've been discussing since this series began. In doing so, we hope to help you assess where you are in your own management program and what your next step should be. And if you've not been trying to improve the herd you hunt, we'd love to help you get started. Once you've seen how easy and effective our program is, we really think you'll want to try it yourself.

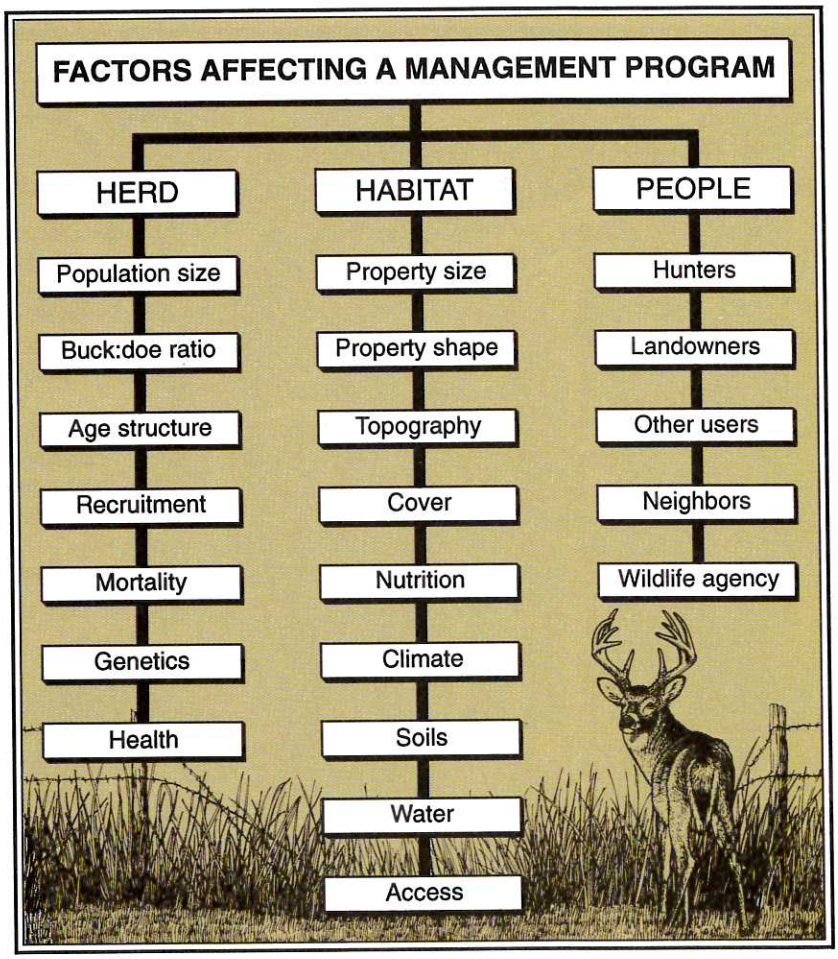
**READER FEEDBACK**

Among the most satisfying aspects of publishing this series has been the flood of positive response from readers everywhere. In the past three years, many of you have given us detailed reports on what you've been trying and the results you've seen.

This has been of great help to us here at ***WHITETAIL***. For one thing, your input has confirmed beyond any doubt that the interest in deer management is widespread and growing. For another, you've helped us fine-tune our ideas for future articles on this subject. The more accurately we can identify the challenges you face in managing your hunting land, the better we can focus our efforts on what matters most to you. We appreciate the feedback, and we hope you'll continue to provide it.

As this issue reaches you, we're not only between deer seasons but also between the spring and fall planting seasons for food plots. While this is seen by many hunters as a dead period,

*(Continued)*




*If the land you hunt is short on well-fed mature bucks, there are simple steps you can take to help the herd and your trophy prospects. Photo by R.E. Ilg.*

it's actually a great time to assess management goals and strategies.

How do we go about that? By brushing up on our knowledge of what a healthy whitetail population is, then identifying the variables involved in producing and maintaining such a herd.

### A WORKING DEFINITION OF "GOOD" MANAGEMENT

Whether you own a 2,000-acre farm in Iowa, lease hunting rights to 250 acres of Alabama timberland or hunt a neighbor's 18-acre Pennsylvania wood lot by invitation, you're already a deer manager. The choices you make in deciding how many of which deer to shoot — and perhaps in manipulating habitat as well — directly impact the health of the herd. And those effects, in turn, shape future prospects for you and whoever else hunts there.

As stewards of the environment, we hunters should make it a top priority to have a healthy deer herd. But what does that really mean? In our view here at ***WHITETAIL***, a herd can be called healthy only if it's made up of the *right* number of the *right* ages of bucks and does on the *right* long-term diet. Deer numbers and herd composition must be in balance with the forage supply and all other habitat factors.

It's reasonable to assume that before the start of the modern era, with its highly selective hunting pressure and relative lack of predators, our herds fit this description. They existed just as nature intended, which explains why we call them "natural" populations.

Unfortunately, when subjected to the above test, few herds today meet this standard. For starters, most populations now comprise too many does and not enough bucks. In addition, the average age of the bucks is nearly always too young. Thus, we're faced with unbalanced herds, particularly in areas with high hunting pressure biased toward buck harvest. Throw in the nutritional stress caused by too little year-round forage, and even the most dominant prime-age bucks tend to be smaller in antlers and body than their genetic potential would allow.

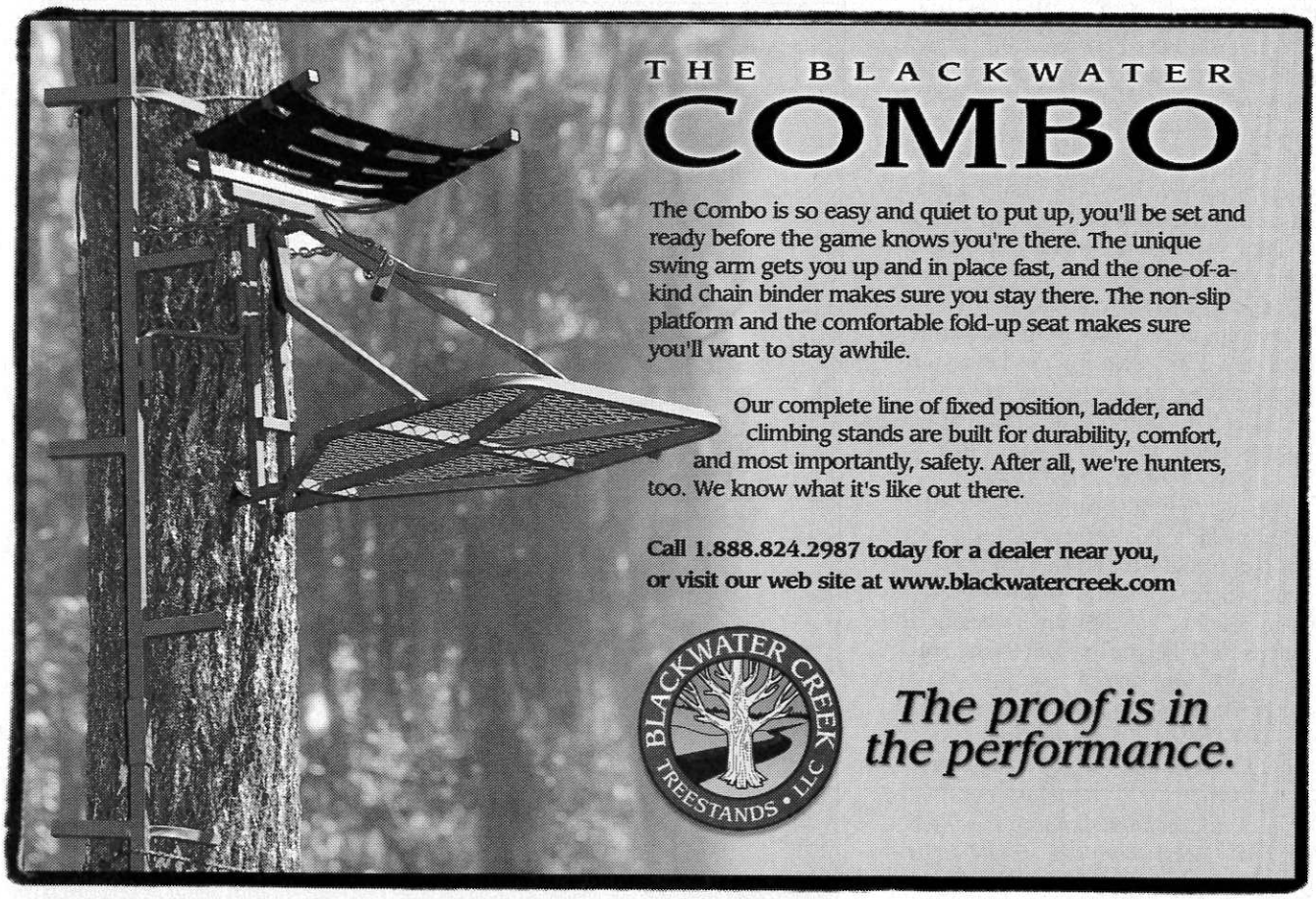
As responsible managers, we clearly should do what we can to rectify these problems. But how?

Job one is to achieve nutritional balance — in other words, give the herd enough of the right food. This is how we ensure every deer is healthy and thus able to reach whatever size its age and genetic makeup will allow.

We can do this just by lowering deer numbers to match the current food supply; however, as we'll explain below, ***WHITETAIL***'s unique forage-management strategy yields far more desirable results, by boosting nutrition so much that even a large number of deer can be well-fed.

But giving deer more and better forage doesn't magically make them older or turn does into bucks. To help the age structure and buck:doe ratio, we must use good *herd*-management strategies. In essence, what this comes down to is manipulating hunter harvest in a way that leads to a healthy herd.

Deer hunting is filled with decisions, and that's part of its appeal. But the cumulative result of every hunter's individual choices is a major impact on North America's overall whitetail resource. If the past half-century has taught us anything about deer hunters, it's that the average person who buys a license would rather shoot a little buck than a big doe. He might express a

desire to kill a trophy buck, but for various reasons — lack of hunting time, lack of skill, perhaps even the belief that there aren't any big ones around — he'll try to kill the first antlered deer that gives him a shot. Play out this scenario a few million times each fall and you'll see why mature bucks (age 3 1/2 years or older) are scarce in many areas.

But just as indiscriminate harvest is the way to throw a herd out of balance, selective harvest is the way to fix it. By developing a population model for a herd (as discussed in past issues), we can see how hunting pressure needs to be redirected in order to improve both the buck:doe ratio and age structure.

If you combine proper harvest with great nutrition, you get the best of all whitetail worlds:

- more bucks overall, owing to higher fawn survival and lower hunting mortality of young bucks;
- more *mature* bucks, as a result of greater carryover of immature bucks into older age-classes;
- bigger racks and bodies in bucks of all ages, thanks to their better diet;
- more daytime buck activity and better rut hunting, owing to higher buck numbers and more competition for does; and finally,
- better odds that the bucks you're growing and protecting will stay on your land during deer season, as a result of better year-round nutrition.



*By consistently passing up immature bucks, New York's Daryl Duffy helps his local herd while also improving his odds of taking mature trophies. That discipline paid off with this big 5x5 in 1997. Photo courtesy of Daryl Duffy.*

## THE FORT PERRY PROGRAM

When we began managing Fort Perry Plantation in the late 1980s, we were seeking practical methods for growing large numbers of healthy deer on private land. We didn't know if it could be done, given the area's poor soils and low nutritional plane. But we succeeded — thanks to specific forage- and herd-management strategies you can use on your own hunting land.

The Fort Perry program is simple: We gave our herd a proper year-round diet (more protein in the warm season and more carbohydrates in the cool season, by planting good food plots, improving native habitat and providing some supplemental feed), and then let bucks mature before harvesting them.

This hardly seems like a revolutionary formula. But look deeper and you'll be amazed at what we learned through our research. By significantly boosting the amount and quality of deer forage — primarily with food plots — we pushed the habitat's productive capacity to *far*

*Continued on page 64*




# Low-Impact Trophy Tactics

***You say you have some new ground to hunt this fall? Don't let your excitement lure you into making a regrettable mistake.***

***by Lee Lakosky***

When hunting trophy bucks on a new piece of ground, it's easy to start out too aggressively, alerting every deer to your presence before you get within range of the one you want. Of course, if you're too conservative, you risk failing to capitalize on chances as they arise. Whether you're hunting with a bow in Minnesota or a gun in South Carolina, you need a plan that falls somewhere between the two extremes.

No strategy is risk-free; even on land you know well, every time you hunt you risk spooking the buck(s) living there. But that risk is heightened on new ground, where your dream of taking a trophy can be doomed before you even know it.

Last bow season I found myself contemplating this dilemma not once but twice — first in Iowa, then in Illinois. Getting into this predicament certainly wasn't by design, but factors beyond my control forced me to quickly put a plan into action.



*Long-range observation of feeding activity gave the author the edge he needed to set up on this farm-country trophy last November. A decoy and grunt call then pulled the buck close enough for an arrow. Photo courtesy of Lee Lakosky.*

Hunting partner Lee Murphy and I had done some intense scouting in Iowa the previous spring and felt confident in our setups. As November rolled around, we took to the woods hoping that the good bucks we'd seen months before would now show up.

But true to form, they didn't. Two weeks of hard hunting without a single sighting of a shooter was all the reason needed to alter the plan. So I headed off some 20 miles to the west, to an area where a friend had seen several big bucks during the off-season. This was no guarantee, but it was all I had.

Studying aerial photos for promising areas, then using a plat book to see who owned them, I soon was knocking on doors to ask for hunting privileges. Before long, I'd been granted access to a piece of promising ground, but now what? The rut was already in full swing, and instead of heading out to a predetermined hotspot, I was playing a severe game of catchup!

I decided to concentrate my efforts on a picked corn field dissected by a small stretch of gravel road that deer were crossing as they moved from one side of the field to the other. Heavy wooded draws pointed toward both ends of the field, offering deer low-profile travel to and from the food source. The field edges and soft roadside held several sets of huge tracks, reinforcing the farmer's claims that several good bucks had been seen crossing there.

I didn't want to go busting into the

# SHOW US YOUR BUCKMARK



**BRIAN VANLEER, 36, ST. PETERS, MISSOURI**

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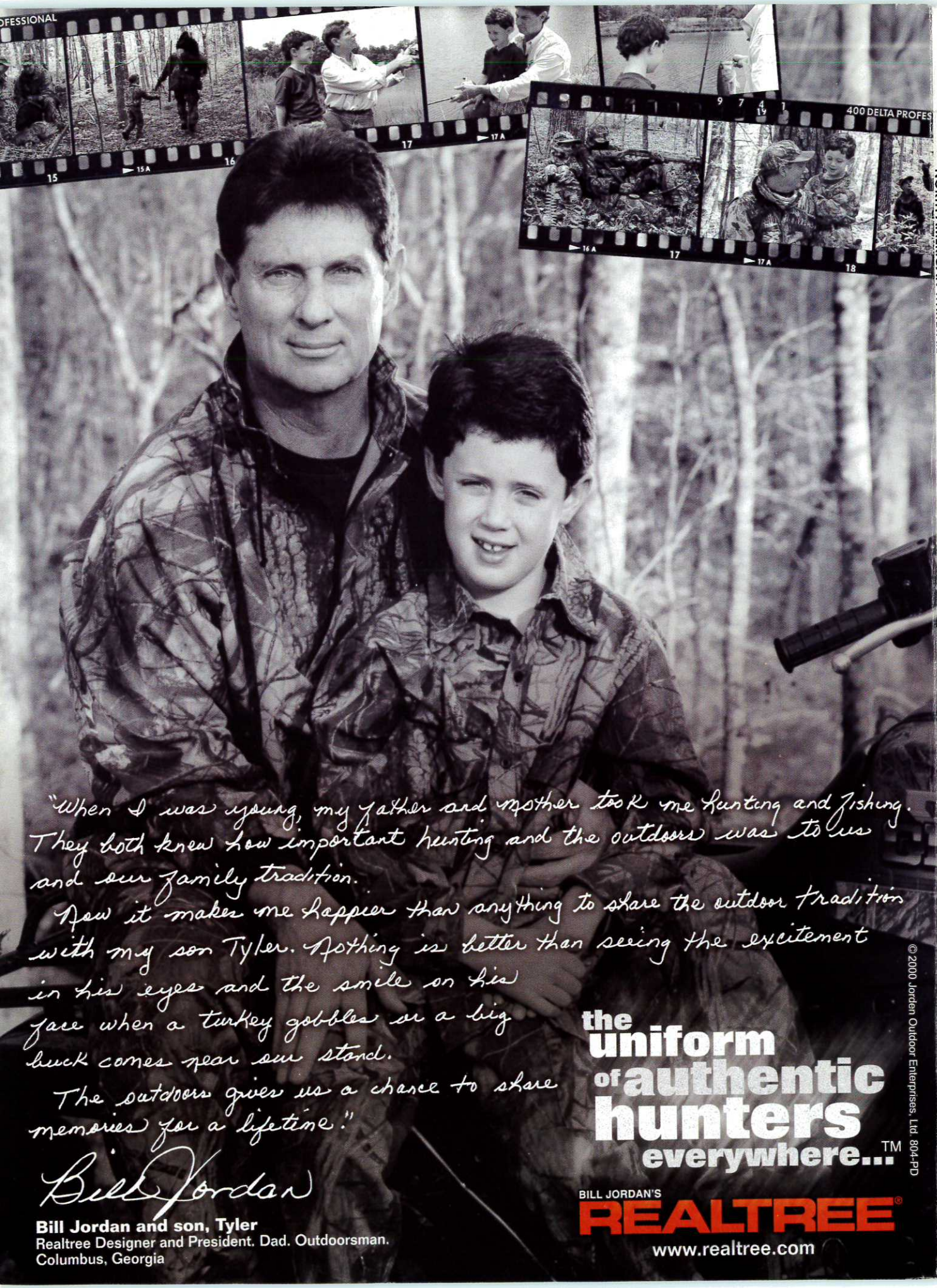
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