



PINEYWOODS POST

*A publication of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
for landowners and outdoor enthusiasts of the Pineywoods.*

Fall 2014

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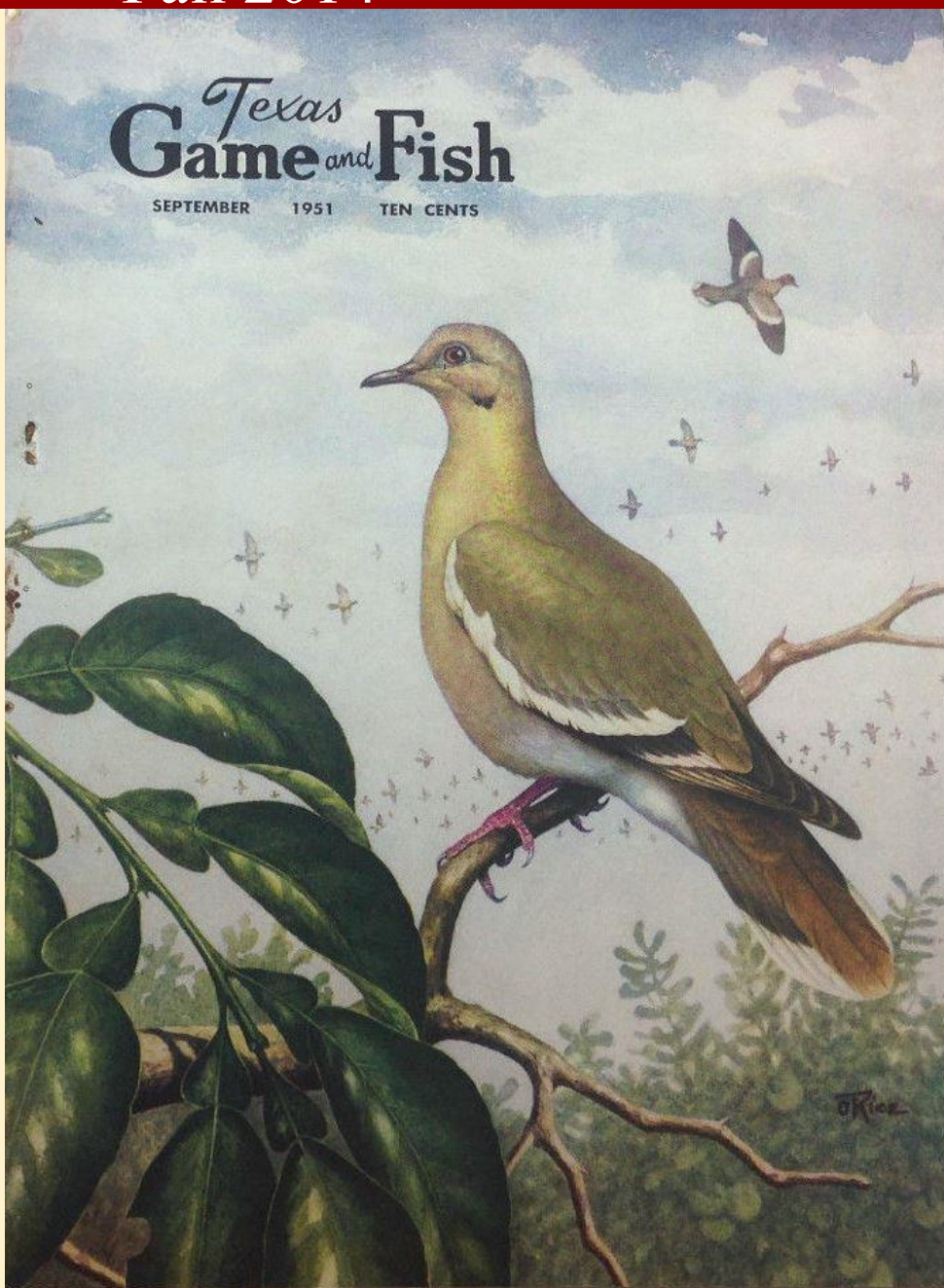
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The Buzz Over Honey Bees

Andrea Webb District 6 Wildlife Biologist

European honeybees (*Apis mellifera*), as the name implies, are not native to the United States. Brought to North America by the early settlers, honeybees are an important pollinator for many commercially produced crops such as blueberries, almonds, citrus, and a host of others. Native plants including persimmon, redbud, red maple, sumac, buttonbush, gallberry, blackberry and a wide assortment of showy flowered forbs also benefit from pollination by honeybees. It is estimated that approximately one third of all plants or plant products consumed by humans are directly or indirectly dependent on bee pollination. In almond groves and blueberry farms, honeybees are responsible for 90-100% of the transfer of pollen grains from one plant to another as they collect pollen to take back to their hive. In addition to their pollinating services, honeybees contribute a variety of products to the U.S. economy. Honey is the first to come to mind, but beeswax, bee pollen and bee glue are also sold as products or components of products that include candy, candles, cosmetics and human health supplements. According to the National Agricultural Statistics Service, the value of bee pollination, honey and other bee products was estimated at more than 16 billion dollars in 2007.



European honeybees are not aggressive by nature and will only sting when protecting their hive from an intruder. Bee hives are a highly organized



Can you spot the queen? She is typically 2X longer than the other bees.

able to reproduce. Although they live longer in the winter months, their lifespan is 6 short weeks in the spring and summer.

society that may contain 60,000 to 80,000 bees during the peak of the season. Each individual bee has a specific role during its lifetime and only the queen bee has the ability to reproduce within the hive. Her primary responsibility is to mate once with several different drones during her single mating flight, then lay eggs throughout her 3 to 5 year lifespan. She will produce up to 2,000 eggs per day and fertilized eggs will become female (worker bees) while unfertilized eggs will become male (drone bees). When the queen dies or becomes unproductive, the worker bees will develop a new queen by feeding a strict diet of a special substance known as 'royal jelly' to select larvae. It takes approximately 16 days for a new queen to emerge after the egg is laid. Worker bees are female bees that are not

The Buzz Over Honey Bees

A hive consists mainly of worker bees that are in charge of everything except for mating with the queen and laying eggs. Worker bees begin working in the hive as house-keeper, nurse-maid, construction worker, guard, and finally after 21 days, they work their way to a forager collecting pollen and nectar.

Drone bees are the only male bees found within a hive and their



Did you find her? It's a bit like Where's Waldo, but there she is hiding in plain sight inside the red circle.

sole purpose is to mate with a virgin queen. They will die once they have mated and drones that do not mate will be expelled from a hive in the fall and winter. There are only a few hundred drones in a strong hive during the spring and summer.

Beekeepers monitor their hives regularly as a number of parasites and diseases can affect honeybees. Various mites, beetles and moths as well as foulbrood, chalkbrood, and sacbrood can weaken and destroy a hive in a matter of weeks if left untreated. Beekeepers around the world must now contend with an additional malady known as Colony Collapse Disorder, or CCD. Several years ago more than a quarter of the country's 2.4 million bee colonies were lost to CCD, and research is ongoing to determine the exact cause. Mites, viruses, bacteria, poor nutrition, genetics, habitat loss and a class of insecticides known as neonicotinoids are all under review as factors contributing to CCD. If mitigating measures cannot be identified and implemented, the rate of decline may soon catch up to the survival rate. If that happens, both man and the animals that benefit from the bees will have a little less to eat.

What They Leave Behind

Laura Speight District 6 Wildlife Biologist

When we spend time outdoors we are always surrounded by signs of wild creatures. We use our senses to see, hear, and sometimes even smell their presence. As we walk across a pasture or through woods we may not realize the variety and abundance of clues along our path unless something more remarkable such as a brightly colored feather or antler shed catches our eye. Most outdoorsmen have learned to identify the common tracks left by favored or perhaps even not so favored wildlife and many have found tracking to be a fun and challenging hobby. Wildlife leave something even more obvious than a track behind, but in today's society the study of this kind of evidence to many may not only seem to be in bad taste, but down right disgusting.

If you haven't already guessed, what I am talking about is "scatology" or let's just say it, "the study of poop". Scat is a term often used by biologists although terms such as droppings, feces, and pellets are equally common. Once you allow yourself to get past any social taboo you might have, scat offers a wealth of information beyond just proof that a species lives in the area.

Anyone who has ever walked a dog knows that at least to a dog, scat holds an extraordinary amount of interest. So, just what does he smell? The most obvious answer would be his keen sense of smell is telling him what the "depositor" has been eating. So along these lines we often see indigestible matter such as hair, feathers and even bones in scat. If the scat is filled with seeds from berries, the observer will know how far the animal has traveled if no berry bushes are close by. Owl pellets, which are not scat but actually matter that an owl is unable to digest and has been regurgitated, often include the bones of its prey. By identifying the bones found in owl pellets, biologists have been able to identify species of rodents not previously known to live in the area because their behavior makes them difficult if not impossible to detect otherwise.

We have all heard the term DNA and it seems every detective show on TV uses crime scene evidence of DNA to link the suspect to the crime. This same kind of science is also used in wildlife research using such things as hair, feather and you guessed it, scat samples! From the analysis of DNA found in scat, researchers can identify what species it is from, the sex of the animal and even individuals. Hormone levels in scat can give a clue to things such as how stressed the animal may be. Collecting scat is much easier than trapping an elusive animal and removes the possibility of injury to the animal and in cases where trapping large mammals such as wolves and bear, potential injury to the trapper as well.

Testing samples for DNA and other things can be costly, so accidentally collecting scat from non-target species can blow the budget. In difficult terrain or thick cover researchers can spend countless hours in the search of scat, and still be unproductive. One interesting way researchers have dealt with this is to train dogs, in the same way they are trained to locate drugs, to not only find scat, but only alert the handler to scat of the target species. For instance, in Montana grizzly bear researchers often could not tell the difference visually between grizzly scat and the non-targeted black bear scat. Cost of testing scat only to find it was from black bear and not grizzly was going to force an end to the research, so the use of specially trained scat ID dogs to tell the difference solved the problem. For more on conservation canines check out the website, www.workingdogsforconservation.org

What They Leave Behind Cont.

Now it's time to leave all queasiness behind (I think that is a pun) as scat identification requires thoughtful analysis. Segment size, color, twists, tapering and yes, even smell, come in to play. Scat can be challenging to identify since things such as food availability, the animals health and age, the age of the scat and weather conditions can alter the way the scat appears. This is where other clues such as; was it covered with leaves and twigs, near a nest or den, on a raised surface such as a log, accumulated with many other scats in what is called a latrine, or on a trail or junction of trails, provide a species check list. Finding scat covered by leaves can indicate a feline, and coyotes and foxes are renowned for marking trails and roads with scat since trails and roads often are what they use to establish their territorial boundaries.



In the spring and summer when berries ripen I often get calls from people who have found scat and suspect they have a visiting bear. Fox, coyotes and raccoons all enjoy the taste of berries and will eat copious amounts of them which often results in larger than normal scat. Even on a bad day, a bear scat still dwarfs any of the three species mentioned. Black bear scat averages $1\frac{1}{4}$ - $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter and with segments measuring 5 – 12 inches in length. To help you visualize this see the picture taken in Alaska of black bear scat using my hand to help gauge size.

Finding tracks left by the elusive the eastern wild turkey can be especially difficult because of leaves and pine needles on the forest floor. Hunters are more likely to be alerted to the presence of wild turkeys by finding their scat. Turkey scat not only reveals their presence, but also indicates the gender of the bird. Scat about two inches long and shaped like a shallow "J" are from a gobbler. Hens, however, leave behind a small pile comprised of a single dropping.

I hope the wealth of knowledge our furred and feathered friends leave behind in their scat, piques your curiosity and any aversion you had to scatology has been replaced with an appreciation of nature's subtle way of leaving us clues. If you have an interest to learn more there are several field



guides available on animal tracks and scat. The Peterson Field Guide series has a book on Animal tracks by Olaus J. Murie which includes information on scat and is small and easy to carry in the field. My favorite book on this subject however is Mammal Tracks & Sign, A Guide to North American Species, by Mark Elbroch.

New Technology And Other Announcements

Free Mobile App Available for Texas Hunting and Fishing Regulations:

AUSTIN — The official *Outdoor Annual — Texas Hunting and Fishing Regulations* app is now available for free download on iOS and Android platforms, providing sportsmen with mobile access to information they can use in the field and on the water.

Once installed, the app enables access to the summary of the Texas 2014-2015 hunting and fishing regulations without having to be connected to the Internet. It can also utilize a device's GPS capabilities to access location-specific regulations, such as exceptions to fish size and bag limits and county-specific hunting regulations.

"We wanted to make it easier and more convenient for hunters and anglers to find out what they need to know about the season dates, bag and length limits and other important information when they are enjoying the outdoors in Texas," said Carter Smith, TPWD Executive Director. "We felt it was a priority to use this new technology to provide an added value to the sportsmen whose license dollars help conserve fish and wildlife for all Texans."

Check Station App For Eastern Turkey Hunters:

For the better part of 20 years Eastern Turkey Hunters have reported their harvest to mandatory check stations scattered across east Texas. Unlike most Texas game animals, each Eastern Wild Turkey harvested in Texas must be reported within 24 hours of harvest. For years that meant a drive to the local check station. That check station may be located right down the road or across the county. TPWD is looking to change that. Beginning this coming spring season (2015), Eastern turkey hunters can report their harvest on their Apple or Android smart phone or tablet by downloading TPWD's Wildlife Harvest Survey. The new app is available on iTunes and Google Play. The app will have links to game wardens, wildlife biologists, wildlife management areas and more. Use the app to report your harvest or for all the other functionality it offers.

Another option for reporting your harvest during the 2015 spring Eastern turkey season is through the TPWD website. The Wildlife Harvest Survey and links to the new app. can be found online at the line below. You can also find the locations for the physical check stations at this link.

http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/game_management/turkey/

TPWD plans to continue to run the physical check stations during the 2015 spring season. However, in the coming years the digital checking systems will become the standard. This system will also be available for hunters to voluntarily report any resident game animal harvested in Texas. TPWD is always trying to increase the amount of data we can get on how game animals are doing across the state. This is how many of wildlife decisions are made. Your support and participation is needed and greatly appreciated.

Last Thursday Of The Month Wildlife Seminars Continue At Jasper District 6 Office Complex:

On the last Thursday of every month TPWD hosts a wildlife seminar on a variety of subjects sure to be of interest to any outdoorsman. The wildlife talks will continue through the month of October, then take a short break during November and December due to holiday conflicts, and will resume in January. The talks are held at the District 6 Wildlife Office Complex located at 289 CR 098 Jasper TX. (the old fish hatchery) and begin promptly at 7:00 PM .

BIOLOGIST BIO

Daniel Price, TPWD Wildlife Biologist Rusk, TX.

PW Post: What is your job title and what are your main job duties?

I am a Natural Resource Specialist II – District Wildlife Biologist covering Houston, Cherokee and Rusk Counties. My office is located at the TPWD Rusk Law Enforcement office. As a District Wildlife Biologist, I have many job duties including assisting private landowners with wildlife management on their property, collecting data throughout my counties of responsibilities to monitor various wildlife species, public outreach and education, and habitat management such as prescribed burning on state owned lands.

PW Post: How many years did you spend in college and what are your degrees in?

I spent five years at Tarleton State University Majoring in Wildlife Management with a Minor in Biology.

PW Post: Can you tell our readers a little bit about your background and how you became interested in being a wildlife biologist?

As a kid growing up in the country on the outskirts of Ennis, Texas, I spent a lot of time outdoors. At the age of 15 I knew I had a love for animals and just like a lot of kids I wanted to be a veterinarian. So for about a year I volunteered at the local vet clinic every Saturday helping and learning. The main thing I learned is that I did not want to be a vet. Something I will never forget was when I was at a friend's house and we happened to be watching PBS. They had a show about these people who were out darting Hyenas; putting collars on them and collecting data from them, Wildlife Biologist. I told myself right then that that is what I wanted to do, I wanted to be a Wildlife Biologist.

PW Post: How long have you been a biologist? When and how did you start with TPWD?

I will have been in this position as a biologist for four years November 1st. My career with TPWD started November 11th 2009 at Huntsville State Park as a Park Ranger. Although I did not see myself as a Park Ranger when I graduated college, I am very grateful to have had that experience and opportunity.

PW Post: What is your philosophy as a wildlife biologist?

I strongly believe that the things we do today will impact our tomorrow, whether it is something big or something small. I try to think about how my actions and recommendations will impact the larger picture.

PW Post: What do you find the most challenging?

The most challenging part of this job is when I come across the occasional landowner who is not being a good land steward and is not willing to listen to our guidance.

PW Post: What do you enjoy the most about your job?

I can't say I enjoy one thing the most about my job; I feel there are many things I enjoy, such as the satisfaction of knowing the work that I am doing could potentially impact the future generations, assisting landowners and providing them the proper information so they can make good sound decisions when managing their lands or even making kids laugh and cringe all at the same time while they listen and learn from a presentation I am doing.

PW Post: What is the most amazing (or scary) experience you've had while working with wildlife?

I will say I think my most amazing experiences with wildlife in general is being part of my wife harvesting her first deer ever and hunting right beside her while she harvested her very first duck on her first duck hunt.

PW Post: Do you have any advice for students who want to be professional wildlife biologists?

I would tell any student who wants to be a professional wildlife biologist to get out and volunteer. By volunteering you are able to network with other wildlife professionals and get your name and face out there. I would encourage students to attend a college with a strong wildlife program and join the student chapter of the wildlife society.

PW Post: What are your personal interests?

Personal interests tend to come and go as your life changes or at least that is the case for me. Just like most people in the wildlife field, I love to hunt and fish as much as I can but I also have learned that I like hunting and fishing not just for the kill or catch but for the experience and opportunity to be in the outdoors. Going out to my shop to build something is just as relaxing as sitting in the deer blind for me. As I mentioned before personal interests tend to change and mine changed about two years ago when my daughter was born. That year I didn't hunt a single time and the only time I went to the shop was to work on something that we absolutely needed. It wasn't because my wife didn't let me but that the relaxation I got from sitting in the deer blind and working in the shop came to me when holding my daughter. I grew up in a strong, close family and it is important to me to spend as much with them as I can. I can say without a doubt my personal interest now is to spend time with my family and to one day incorporate our family time into the outdoors.



How to Properly Tag a White-tailed Deer

Micah Poteet, Technical Guidance Biologist District 6-

When a hunter successfully harvests a deer, one of the first dilemmas he/she faces is how to properly tag the deer. Depending on the circumstances, every deer harvested must be tagged with either a license tag, OR appropriate permit (LAMPS, MLDP, USFS antlerless permit, etc), but never both. If the deer is harvested under the authority of a permit, no license tag is required. However, all other deer must be tagged with the appropriate tag from the hunting license. These two scenarios will be described in greater detail below.

1). **A hunter kills a deer in which no permit is applicable.** This deer (buck or antlerless) must be tagged with the appropriate (white-tailed deer) tag from the hunter's license. Hunters should read the tag descriptions carefully as some of the tags can legally be used on a buck or antlerless deer. However, using one of these tags on an antlerless deer potentially limits the number of bucks a hunter could harvest. In order to be properly tagged, the month and day must be **CUT OUT**, and the property name and county must be written, in ink, on the back of the tag. In addition, the hunter must properly **complete the log on the back of the hunting license**. Every time a deer tag is used, the license log must also be completed. Failure to complete all of these steps results in a deer that is not properly tagged/logged.

2). **A hunter kills a deer under the authority of a permit.** The appropriate permit (buck or antlerless) must be placed on the deer, but no license tag is required. In this case, the hunter is not required to complete the license log on the back of the hunting license. The month and day must be **CUT OUT** and all other information on the permit must be completed. Failure to complete all of these steps results in a deer that is not properly tagged (permitted).

Other important points to remember:

- A "buck deer" is a deer with a hardened antler protruding through the skin. All other deer are considered antlerless deer.
- The tag/permit should remain attached to the deer until the deer reaches its final destination and is quartered
- If the head is removed from the carcass, then the appropriate tag or permit must remain attached to the carcass
- It is unlawful to possess a deer with proof of sex removed unless the deer is at a final destination and has been quartered
- Proof of sex is: the head of a buck deer with antlers attached, the head of an antlerless deer, or a completed Managed Lands Deer Permit, Landowner Assisted Management Permit, TPWD Drawn Hunt Legal Deer Tag, or Antlerless and Spike-buck Control Permit
- A deer can only be tagged with a tag from the hunter's license who killed the deer

A deer tag can only be used once

It is important to remember to place the tag on the deer immediately upon kill and to complete the harvest log. Failure to complete the harvest log is one of the most frequent violations that law enforcement officers encounter. Without a complete harvest log, there is no way to verify that the statewide and/or county bag limits are being adhered to.

Although the tagging/permitting process may seem confusing, if the hunter reviews and understands the requirements prior to harvesting a deer, many of the common mistakes can be avoided. For additional information please refer to the current Texas Parks and Wildlife Outdoor Annual that is available anywhere hunting licenses are sold or online at: <http://tpwd.texas.gov/regulations/outdoor-annual/>. Tablet or Smart Phone users can also download the Outdoor Annual for free using the new TPWD app.

Infrared-Triggered Camera Surveys for White-tailed Deer

Charlie Muller– District 6 Private Lands Biologist

White-tailed deer are the most hunted big game animal in Texas. Folks that hunt deer are generally very serious about it. For the past 8 to 10 years deer hunters in East Texas have become increasingly involved in deer management. With the state antler restrictions in place throughout East Texas many hunters have come to realize that there is more to deer hunting than just going out and shooting the first buck you see.

Collecting reliable biological data is the backbone of a white-tailed deer management program. In order for a deer management program to be successful, the manager must diligently monitor trends in population density, herd composition, body condition and habitat quality. Collectively, these data allow deer managers to make informed management decisions that will help maintain a stable and healthy population.

Since, the early 1930's, researchers, biologists and land managers have used drive counts, pellet-group counts, aerial surveys, track counts, winter harvest surveys, vehicle mortality surveys, thermal infrared imagery, spotlight surveys and remote sensing to estimate the age, sex and number of deer in local populations. Due to their relative low costs and relatively high precision, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has primarily used spotlight surveys to estimate statewide deer densities for decades. Spotlight surveys have also been the most recommended method for density estimation on private lands. However, spotlight surveys are most accurate in habitats with high visibilities and lack of forested cover. In most parts of East Texas visibility is low and forested cover is the norm.

With recent advances in technology and in the innovative ideas of wildlife biologists, the use of infrared-triggered cameras (a.k.a. game cameras or trail cameras) has emerged as an acceptable alternative to spotlight surveys for estimating herd composition and density of deer populations. This method can be especially useful for surveying deer on relatively small tracts of land, properties with poor roads and in densely forested habitats. In addition to estimating herd composition and density, the camera technique allows hunters and managers to determine the age structure and antler quality of bucks in order to decide which bucks should or should not be harvested.

The accuracy of infrared-triggered camera surveys depends upon the ability to attract deer from all age and sex classes to baiting stations. This is best accomplished using whole, shelled corn in late winter, after breeding season has concluded, and before antlers have dropped. However, in order to determine the number of does and bucks which need to be harvested, density, age and sex ratio estimates are often desired prior to the fall hunting season. In East Texas, relatively precise survey results can be obtained by conducting surveys during the month of August. Surveys conducted during this time will increase the chances that fawns will be accompanying the does to bait locations and that acorn drop has not yet occurred.

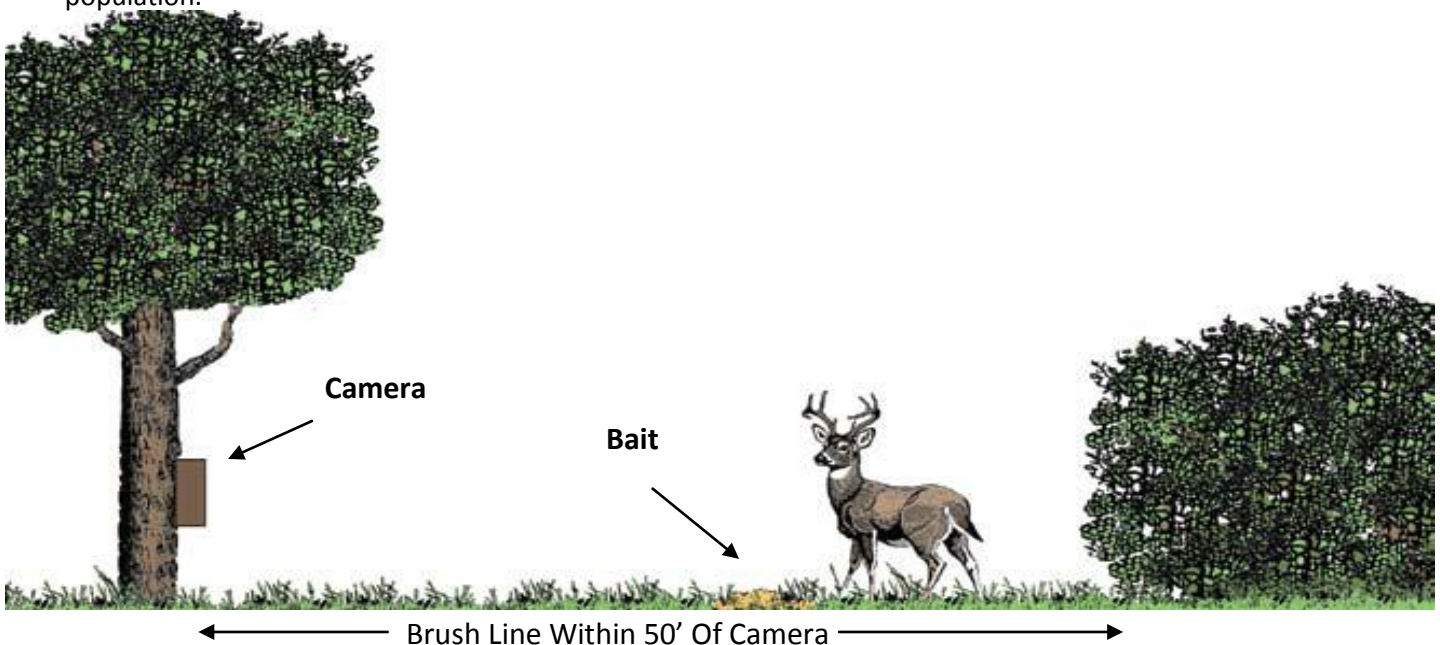


Infrared-Triggered Camera Surveys for White-tailed Deer

Continued

The following information will provide the step by step process for conducting an infrared-triggered camera deer survey:

1. Conduct the survey during the month of August to obtain population estimates, sex ratios and fawn recruitment prior to the hunting season.
2. Position cameras near high deer use areas such as food plots, natural food sources and deer trails. Disperse them evenly across the property at a rate of one camera per 100-160 acres.
3. Install cameras on a post of some type facing a solid-colored backdrop such as heavy brush to reduce background movement. Backdrop should be 50-100 feet away from camera. Face the camera either north or south to avoid sun glare.
4. Remove any standing grass, tree limbs, debris and any other possible obstructions that may interfere with a complete photograph of a deer.
5. Place corn on the ground approximately 10 feet from the camera. Turn off all automatic feeders during the survey period. Bait sites can be near pre-existing feeders but not under the feeder. Pre-bait the area 4-6 days before you begin taking photographs.
6. Install and set the camera to record date and time. Set the sensor unit to a 5-10 minute delay.
7. Photograph deer at each station for 10 consecutive days. If cameras are limited, cameras can be rotated to a new unphotographed station each 10 day period.
8. Check stations on a regular basis to ensure bait is available and cameras are functioning properly.
9. At the end of the survey period, analyze all of the photos and tally the number of bucks, does and fawns. Only tally a deer one time for each "visit" to the bait station even if there are numerous photos from that same visit. Then use antler characteristics, hair color and body traits to identify the number of individual bucks photographed. Do not include any unidentifiable deer.
10. Enter the data from step 9 into the appropriate formulas and perform calculations to determine the estimated population.



Infrared-Triggered Camera Surveys for White-tailed Deer

Continued

SAMPLE: Acres surveyed=600 Camera sites=6 Consecutive days=10

Total # of deer photographed=196

Bucks=36 Individual bucks identified=11

Does=108

Fawns=52

Use the ratio of individual bucks identified (11) to the number of bucks photographed (36) as the population estimate multiplier: $11/36=0.31$

Estimated Populations:

Bucks = 11

Does = $108 \times 0.31 = 33$

Fawns = $52 \times 0.31 = 16$

Total Population = 60 deer

Acres per deer: $600/60 = 10.0$

Doe-to-Buck Ratio: $does/buck=33/11=3.0$ or 3:1

Fawn Production: $fawn/doe=16/33=0.48$ or 48%

Recent research suggests that camera surveys may underestimate the number of does and fawns in a population. Where this occurs, using camera surveys alone may incorrectly estimate doe-to-buck and fawn-to-doe ratios (herd composition) and underestimate the total population. Incidental deer observations should be collected in addition to conducting camera surveys each summer. Data collected through these methods provide additional herd composition data which can be compared with those collected through camera surveys. If warranted, adjusted herd composition ratios may be applied to camera survey data to obtain "adjusted" population estimates. Remember, regardless of the survey method used, the result is a population estimate and not a true count.

Credit: Jesse G. Oetgen, Billy C. Lambert, Jr. and Jay Whiteside; TPWD Publication "Surveying White-tailed Deer Populations Using Infrared-Triggered Cameras."



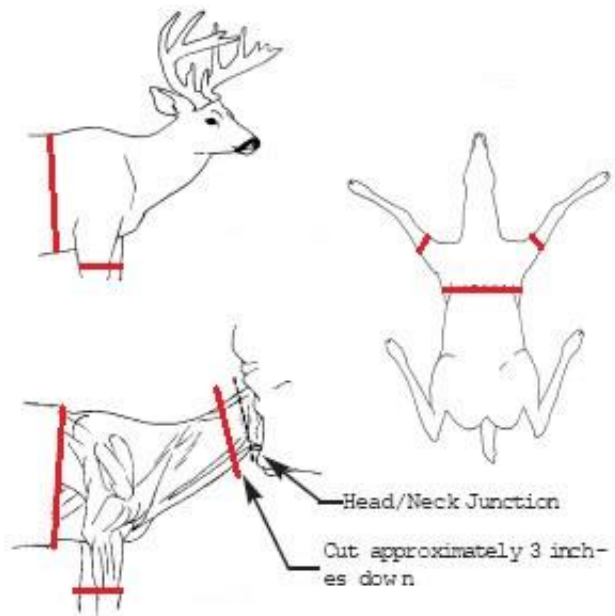
How To Preserve Your Trophy

Bob Baker, District 6 Wildlife Biologist

Many people want to make their hunt last a lifetime by preserving a part of their trophy through taxidermy. The two most popular methods of displaying a wildlife trophy, especially deer, is a shoulder mount or a skull mount (also known as a European mount). This article will discuss how to do some of the work to ensure that your trophy is preserved correctly.

The first step after harvesting your trophy is to make sure that your harvest has been properly tagged (make sure to cut out the date and fill out the back on the back of the tag) and the harvest log on your license is filled out completely. Proof of sex (a skinned or unskinned head of a deer (antlers attached if buck), unskinned head of a pronghorn, or a completed permit including MLDP, ADCP, LAMPS, or TPWD drawn hunt tag) must accompany the meat until final destination and has been quartered. Once the meat has been taken care of a wildlife resource document should be filled out and attached to the part that is taken to the taxidermist. The parts of the animal that should be taken to the taxidermist will depend on what type of work is being done. If doing a shoulder mount, the entire head and cape should be taken in. If doing a European mount, the head (skinned or unskinned) is all that needs to be taken in.

Start the process of caping the deer by splitting the skin from the breast bone to the anus (being careful not to cut into the guts or the skin over the rib cage). Next, cut around the entire body of the deer using the start of the rib cage as a start and end point of the cut. This will create a front half and a back half of the animal. Then remove the skin from the back half as normal. On the front half, cut a slit in the back of the front legs to the arm pits then back to a point at the start of the rib cage. Then use a sharp knife to peel the hide from the body all the way to the neck. Be extremely careful not to cut any holes in the hide. Holes cut in the hide must be sewn up and may be visible on the completed mount. In addition, the taxidermist may charge more based on the amount of work needed to repair the cape. Once the animal has been peeled up to the top of the neck simply cut the neck off. Rinse the cape with water to remove blood, dirt, leaves, and other such things. Roll up the cape and place on ice. Ice should be covering the cape and not just some on the bottom. If the cape is not kept cold, problems such as the hair coming out can start to occur. Transport the cape and skull promptly to the taxidermist of your choice.



European mounts can be done at home with very little training. The drawbacks to doing it yourself are the bad smell and the amount of work involved. There are pros and cons to each of the several methods available to clean a skull. Cold water maceration is a method using soapy water to soak a skull until the flesh has been broken down and can be removed easily. First, the skull needs to be skinned. Second, fill a container with enough water and soap (I use liquid dish soap) to cover the skull. Add a few good squirts of soap per bucket of water. The soap serves to degrease the skull and to a lesser extent break down the flesh. Third, let it soak for several weeks changing the soapy water every so often (this keeps down some of the stench and will help to make sure your skulls are not discolored). Fourth, remove any remaining flesh from the bone (a pressure washer and a small knife work well for this job).

How To Preserve Your Trophy

The benefits of this method are that it is easy and does not require much effort. The drawbacks are that it takes some time soaking, smells extremely bad, and most likely the teeth will fall out (teeth can be glued back in easily). Boiling or hot water maceration is a method that basically cooks the meat off the bone. The first step is to skin the skull and place it in a pot with plenty of water. Then boil the skull for at least 45 minutes, adding water as needed to ensure the skull remains fully covered. Larger skulls may need to be boiled longer. After boiling, any remaining flesh can be scraped easily from the skull. The drawbacks to this method are it requires a pot large enough to hold the head (don't use someone's best kitchen pots and pans for this) and the use of a heat source. The benefits are it is quick and fairly easy. The use of dermestid beetles is a method used by universities, some taxidermists, and those that do large amounts of cleaning projects. This method entails placing a skinned head in a container housing a colony of flesh eating dermestid beetles until the beetles have cleaned the skull. Some final clean up may be required. Skulls will need to be degreased using this method. To degrease the skull, soak it in a bucket of soapy water with enough liquid to cover the skull. Liquid dishwashing soap is used most often, but laundry soap can also be used. Change the soapy water daily until the water does not get cloudy after a day of soaking. This degreasing process may take several days. The benefits are that this method is the easiest and gives the best results. The drawbacks are that the beetle colony must be taken care of and the cost of starting a beetle colony.

A cleaned and degreased skull can then be whitened by a soak in hydrogen peroxide. A 2-4% solution used in first aid applications works well and higher concentrations of peroxide solution are also available at any beauty supply store. Fill a container with enough hydrogen peroxide to cover the skull but right below the antler bases and cover the container with a lid or plastic material to minimize evaporation. The length of the soak will depend on the size of the skull and the desired color. The container of hydrogen peroxide can be used repeatedly on a few skulls before it needs to be replaced. Household bleach should not be used as a whitening agent since bleach will cause structural damage to the skull and turn the outer layers of the bone to chalk. During the cleaning process it is not uncommon for teeth to fall out and need to be glued back in place. Many different types of glue will work, but the best glues are thick enough to fill the pores in the bone and set up fairly quickly. Construction adhesives work well but often do not dry clear. Quick set products that are thicker work well and most dry clear. Many people like to apply a finish to the whitened skull. The quickest and easiest way is to buy a clear non yellowing spray polyurethane finish. Apply multiple very light coats to accomplish the job. Another way is to obtain a finish from your local taxidermist or taxidermy supplier.

Taxidermy can be a good way to make outdoor memories last. If you take your trophy to a taxidermist, make sure to have a wildlife resource document, get it cold quick, keep it cold, and get it there promptly. If you plan to do it yourself, make sure to have the proper supplies. Have fun and life is more fun outdoors.

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Carter P. Smith

Editors, *Pineywoods Post*
Chris Gregory
Rusty Wood



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PWD LF W7000-1680 (09/14)

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