

CALLING WHITETAILS & ADVANCED SCENT HUNTING TECHNIQUES

Welcome, friends and fellow hunters. The following is a detailed seminar on how to increase your odds of success using advanced scent hunting techniques. We hope you find it enjoyable and informative.

Attend one of our upcoming events to see our seminar in person. We go into even more detail with live whitetail footage.

Advice From Our Owner

Hi, my name is Dean Vanier with NWCS. I'm here to discuss how to increase your odds of success by using deer lures and advanced scent hunting techniques.

The name 'North Woods' comes from where I was born and raised: the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont. I started by making my own cover scents like earth, pine, cedar, and apple--all of which are common scents of the North Woods. Thus, NWCS came to be. I started hunting, fishing, and trapping at an early age. While trapping, I discovered that if I could beat an animal's nose, then I could catch them. I took it to the next level and thought that if it works with coyotes and foxes, then it should work with deer. I learned to hunt from a tree without a tree stand at the age of 13 and used cover scents to mask my scent.

There are many ways to hunt the whitetail deer: spotting and stocking, still hunting, deer drives, and, of course, tracking. I believe tracking to be one of the most consistent methods to take big whitetails in New England; however, conditions need to be favorable, and you need to be in reasonably good shape. I have used most of these methods with success, but the technique I enjoy the most is calling and scent hunting. Calling and scent hunting is totally different than any other method out there. You have the opportunity to see deer doing things you've never seen before, such as scraping, hooking, grunting, and sparring.

By using calls and scents to attract a whitetail deer, you are interacting with them and communicating with them; you are inserting a virtual whitetail deer into the woods to make deer believe that there is or was another individual of their species nearby. You are using the animals' biggest defense mechanism against them and to your advantage. You are intentionally attempting to get that deer's attention. They can hear an acorn hit the forest floor from 50 yards away and know precisely what it is. They can see you blink your eyes at 40 yards. They can smell you a quarter-mile away. These animals go from 0-

35mph in only three seconds through the thickest timber out there, and they have the ability to appear and disappear without being detected. Let's get this straight: we are getting their attention on purpose.

Once you have intentionally brought the deer close enough for a kill, you'll experience one of the hunting highlights of your life. I believe that if you bring a deer to exactly where you want him by using scents, then you have beaten that animal. Whether you kill the animal or not, you have beaten him, his ears, his eyes, and his nose. You have set that trap, and he has come to it. Therefore, this method allows you to be selective and interact with the deer throughout the entire season. A lot of people say that calling, rattling, and using scents doesn't work or hasn't worked for them. We have to remember that we live in the most heavily forested state in the nation (after Maine). We do not have the luxury of seeing deer react to calling or scenting at 150 yards while still being able to determine if that buck is a shooter or not. It can be difficult to pick up a deer at 40 yards in New England. We also need to remember that whitetail will sometimes hold up trying to confirm with their eyes what they are hearing or smelling. Turkey hunters know this very well. Typically it's a Tom that gets hung up and not a Jake. The same works for whitetail. Typically, it is a mature buck that hangs up and not a young buck.

Scent hunting is not the magic hat that went on Frosty the Snowman's head. A deer is not going to run up to you and say happy birthday. You will experience younger bucks coming in like a schoolboy to the prom though. To be consistently successful when scent hunting, you need to do your scouting. There is a difference between a lucky hunter and a hunter who is prepared. When you are done scouting, go back to the woods and do more scouting. I call it "Preparation for the Opportunity."

Preparation = (Scouting)

For the Opportunity = (Hunting Season)

Breaking news: whitetail will not come to scents if they are simply not there. You need to know the location of the deer, buck-to-doe ratios if possible, and the typical wind direction for that area. Also, remember your own scent control. If you can't beat his nose, the game is over. Scents are a tool, like vice grips in your toolbox. They can't fix everything, but they are sure handy to have if you need them. Scents are like any piece of hunting gear you have: if used properly, they will increase your odds of success.

Whitetail Senses

Now, I'd like to discuss the whitetail's senses for a moment. The whitetail has only one job in its life: to survive. It relies completely on its ears, eyes, and nose; not to mention its ability to disappear in order to survive. Each sense works in conjunction with the others to confirm what the other is picking up. Understanding that whitetail senses work independently and collectively will help you understand how to beat them.

The first sense I'd like to discuss is hearing. Whitetail ears are set high on the head and rotate 180 degrees. They never move in the same direction at the same time, and they are always searching for a sound that could represent danger. When they hear something, both ears lock in, the eyes focus in that direction, and the nose kicks into high gear. As I mentioned before, the eyes will always try to confirm what the deer is hearing. Be aware of this. A good example: while calling, a buck will pinpoint the exact location of the call. Any unacceptable movement or smell in that area will be picked up and determined to be a danger. Whitetail ears can be beaten by grunts, bleat calls, rattling, sounding like a turkey, or walking like something other than a human. Use this to your advantage.

The next sense I'd like to discuss is sight. The whitetail's eyes are set back and on the side of its head. They can see 300 degrees around them. A simple turn to the left or right allows the whitetail to see almost completely behind it. The eyes mainly focus on movement, and they cannot distinguish colors, with a few slight exceptions. The eyes can be beat. Simply do not move and have reasonably good camouflage and concealment. A common mistake that hunters make is to scratching their noses a few too many times. Another common mistake is attempting to skyline yourself in a tree.

Additionally, keep in mind that a deer coming into scent is looking for the virtual deer that is or was there. It will be searching intently with its eyes to confirm what its nose is telling it. When that whitetail gets within 40 yards, I would highly suggest avoiding eye contact with the animal and focusing on the target area. One blink of an eye can cause a deer to hold up, start head bobbing, stomping, or snorting. If it's a buck, you most likely won't get that show; he will simply bolt. So, remember to avoid eye contact at short ranges.

The next and most important sense I would like to discuss is smell. The whitetail nose is second to none. It depends on its nose for identifying friends, foes, dangers, other deer, food, and for reproduction purposes. Experts say a whitetail can smell up to a half-mile away (or more) under the right conditions.

This is his best defensive mechanism. The whitetail lives by his nose, but it can be beat. Whitetail are very curious animals, and so a curiosity scent such as 'Doe Urine' or 'Buck Urine' works well to attract deer early in the year. Food scents, such as apple or acorn, can attract deer as well. 'Buck with Tarsal' and 'Doe in Heat' are scents that attract bucks during the rut. Understanding scents and when and where to use them is the key to improving your odds of success, particularly during the rut phase. Bucks become predictable and that is when you set the trap.

A trap line has multiple traps, with each one being called a set. I do the same with deer hunting. I call each stand location a set because it functions as a trap. Each stand is located in an area where I know deer (preferably a buck) will pass through. I certainly enjoy filling my freezer with a nice butterball doe; however, I also enjoy the challenge of outwitting a nice buck. The set consists of multiple runways, either natural or mock scrapes, in combination with licking branches. I try to make these sets as desirable as I can, thereby tempting bucks to come in, activate, and maintain these scrapes. I locate the sets near bedding and feeding areas where I know I can access my stand without being picked up. I also know the wind currents will bring my deer scent to the deer. Remember, a Whitetail can smell a far distance away--an incredible advantage to have on a long west-to-east oak ridge. Set your trap on the west side of the ridge as the wind typically blows from the west to the east. If it's a long ridge, odds are that the buck will be checking for feeding does. Setting up is the key. Keep your stand location downwind from where your scent product is. While bow hunting, if your scent product is 30 yards upwind from your stand, and a buck locks up 50 yards downwind, you have a 20-yard shot at him downwind. Mature bucks will hang up. Please note that you should increase those distances for firearms.

The Rut

Understanding which scent to use and when to use it is based on the three phases of the rut: pre-rut, peak-rut, and post-rut. I try to classify the three phases very simply. October is the pre-rut phases, November is the full-rut phase, and December is the post-rut phases. I'm not a biologist; I'm a deer hunter. We could discuss at length the variables of this timetable, including the phase of the moon, temperature changes, mass crops or the lack of, and many more. What we have to remember is that each phase starts gradually and slowly blends into the next, until peak-rut is achieved. For example, spring turns to summer, summer to fall, and fall to winter. It's a gradual process. In the pre-rut (late September and early October), I use plain 'Doe Urine' on my boots. This is both a cover scent and a curiosity scent. Whitetail deer are very social and curious animals, and it is not unusual to see deer

following each other. Usually, if you see one deer, you're bound to see two or three. What you are actually doing by using 'Doe Urine' on your boots is inserting a virtual whitetail doe into the woods. Generally, deer find the scent to be normal. Does and young bucks alike get very curious as to who the new visitor is and choose to investigate. One of my favorite scents that I like to use in late September and early October is 'Buck Urine.' A lot of people ask me, "Why Buck Urine?" My response is, "How many people have grunt calls and why? Do you see how the two can work together very effectively to fool the senses?" Again, we are trying to paint a picture for that deer. The bucks are in bachelor groups and are in the process of determining stack rankings for dominance. By using 'Buck Urine,' you are inserting a virtual whitetail buck into the deer woods. Bucks in the area will be very curious about the new guy on the block and will investigate.

Remember to use a spray bottle to disperse the scents. This technique is much more effective and makes the product last longer. A great early-season technique is spraying doe urine on your rubber boots and dispersing a little 'Buck Urine' in an area that you know holds bucks. If they are there, they will respond. Throughout October, rubs and scrapes start to appear and continue to increase. I stay very focused on these areas during the pre-rut phases. It is now that the scrapes will be the most active as the bucks maintain them through the pre-rut period.

Let me briefly run down how the scrape process works. When a buck opens a scrape, he clears a patch of ground approximately three feet in diameter, depending on how dominant or aggressive he is. Typically, there is a licking branch 4-6 feet off the ground directly over the scrape area. The buck urinates down his tarsal gland into the scrape in the anticipation that a doe will find it and deposit her urine as she comes into heat. At this point, the buck will track her down until she is ready to breed. Through October, I look for scrapes and create mock scrapes as the bucks are known to maintain them. I also start gradually blending 'Doe in Heat' scent into my 'Doe Urine' and 'Buck with Tarsal' into the 'Buck Urine.'

By doing this, you are inserting two virtual whitetail deer that are progressing as other deer would during the rut. Remember, testosterone levels in the bucks and the does' estrus cycles do not happen overnight. Both levels increase gradually. The tarsal gland of the buck actually secretes a clear sticky liquid that initially has very little smell. The liquid from the gland is actually designed to absorb urine during the rut phase. As the rut progresses, the glands become more pungent and musky due to the

buck maintaining his scrapes. Again, this is the best time to doctor up a real scrap or mock scrape. To do this, I spray the urines into scrapes, gradually increasing the amount of 'Doe in Heat' and 'Buck with Tarsal.' As the testosterone levels in the bucks increase, deer activity increases. Bucks are making and maintaining scrapes anticipating the estrus cycle of the does. I will repeat this: what I am actually doing is inserting a virtual whitetail buck and a doe into the deer woods that are progressing with the rut. This makes a buck curious, excited, and likely aggressive due to the fact that another buck is working his scrape line.

As November nears, signs of rutting activity increase. November arrives along with the rut. Testosterone levels in the bucks and estrogen levels in the does are reaching their peak. This is the time of year that I introduce pure 'Doe in Heat' and 'Buck with Tarsal.' Most breeding takes place in mid-November and continues into early December when breeding activity comes to an end. This phase of the rut requires a different technique because the bucks are no longer maintaining scrapes as they were in October. They are now in the chase phase. Buck dominancy has been established and does in the particular buck's core area have most likely been bred. Bucks will travel long distances during the day and evening hours searching for hot does. Bucks will travel 10 miles or more over the course of an evening making scrapes and hooking during their travels. The difference is that they rarely return to the area to maintain those scrapes if there are no hot does close by. The key here is to focus on travel areas and where does are feeding.

The next step is to give the buck what he wants: a virtual 'Doe in Heat.' I use drag rags while on my way to my set/stand. This creates a scent trail all the way to my stand. The longer the trail, the better. Any buck crossing will follow the trail to my stand location in an attempt to locate the doe. The goal is to paint the picture of a hot doe lying down. Remember: a mature buck may not come in like a schoolboy to the prom. They typically like to circle and confirm visually that what they smell is truly there. Mature animals respond differently than the young--just like humans.

Keep the following in mind as it is very important when dispersing scent. Always continue up-wind from your stand before hanging your drag rag or scent dispersal unit. Again, if you are 40 yards downwind from the scent and a buck locks up at 60 yards downwind, you have him at 20 yards. This is extremely tough to do during bow season. There is a tendency to sit right on top of the scent, but try and keep your distance.

As the rut progresses through November, I watch the does and patiently wait for the bucks to find them. I also start using a heated scent dispersal unit. Look at it this way: when you wake up at 4:00 in the morning, can you smell a cup of cold coffee? No, Sir! The smell of fresh hot coffee certainly gets your attention from across the room. In the same way. A heated scent dispersal unit will carry your scent for a long distance and keeps the scent at a temperature typical of the whitetail.

Remember that it is very important to paint that picture as well as possible while you set your trap. Understand the defense mechanisms of the whitetail. Understand its ears, eyes, and nose, and how to beat them. Understand the three phases of the rut and how they progress. And, most importantly, know how and when to insert your virtual whitetail into the deer woods. Put all of this information together, and you will increase your odds of success using scents.

Hunting season is the time of year that makes my blood boil. I love to be in the great North Woods, not chasing but attempting to beat an animal that can hear an acorn hit the forest floor 50 yards away, see the blink of an eye from 50 yards away, smell you a half a mile away, and reach speeds of 35 mph in three seconds through the thickest of woods. It's this kind of challenge that takes me deep into the swamps, thickets, and ridges where I know a buck will eventually visit looking for the girls. When he gets there, the trap will be set, and I and my virtual 'Doe in Heat' will be waiting.