



ISA OnTarget
Irwin Sportsmen's Association Newsletter

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FIVE LESSONS ON WHITETAILS TO REMEMBER BY Charles Alsheimer

For nearly six decades I've been a student of the whitetail. In my wildest dreams I never envisioned having a career in the outdoor field. You see, I've gone through a process of sorts in my relationship with the whitetail. When I was a young boy, all I wanted to do was get a glimpse of them. Then during my teenage years, the thrill of hunting whitetails was a big part of my life. As I climbed the hill of life and went from being a young man to a seasoned citizen, I've been blessed to have hunted and photographed them across North America. Along the way I've harvested more than 100 bucks, and taken more than a million photographs of whitetails, from the east coast to western Canada to South Texas. In short, I'd hate to think what my life would have been like without the white-tailed deer.

Through these experiences I've come to realize that no other animal can stack up to the whitetail when it comes to beauty, grace and compatibility with man. My relationship with the whitetail has given me an incredible education. As extensive as this education has been, one thing remains: I'll never know all there is to know about the white-tailed deer. But that said, there are some key things I've learned that have brought me both hunting and photography success.

No. 1: Their Nose Knows—Early in my career I'd learned enough about the whitetail's ability to smell to know that I had to take every precaution possible if I was going to consistently harvest mature bucks. But it wasn't until I began raising whitetails in the early 1990s that I really got schooled on how well they can smell. The south facing fence on our high-fenced enclosure was 425 yards from the nearest cover. Each fall when the rut heated up and we had a wind out of the south, our bucks would pace back and forth along the fence with their noses in the air, smelling the scent of estrous does in the woods more than 425 yards away. I live in snow country and have always been amazed how deer can find food buried under the snow during winter. So, once I saw that our bucks were able to smell other deer over 400 yards away, I decided to conduct a test to see how well deer can smell food under deep snow. To qualify, all tests were in areas of our enclosure where the deer were not regularly fed. The results were impressive because every deer had little problem finding apples and cobs of corn in snow depths up to a foot. But perhaps the most amazing thing we discovered from 25 years of raising whitetails was their ability to identify every other deer in their home core area by body odor. This was most apparent at fawning time. Each doe knew what her fawn smelled like and would not have anything to do with another doe's fawn(s). Bucks also know other bucks by body odor. When bucks fight, one always flees the scene after losing. On several occasions over the years, I've seen the buck that won the fight hunt down the loser hours later, not by the benefit of visual contact but by smell. It's an amazing thing to see. So deer don't need a visual to know a particular deer. Each deer's ID floats on the wind.

No. 2: No Two Deer are Alike—As with humans, no two whitetails are alike. Oh, they might look like other whitetails, but it ends there. Each has its own personality that allows it to survive — and yes, get killed. Five decades of hunting, photographing and raising deer has allowed me to see personality differences up close and personal. I learned a long time ago that not all bucks are sexually active during the rut, while others roam their home range throwing all caution to the wind. It's the latter that seldom graduate to 3½ years of age. Personality also determines a whitetail's fright/flight distance, as well as its level of aggressiveness. Some deer allow predators (man or beast) to get very close before becoming frightened and fleeing, while others will jump from their bed and run as soon as danger — visual or odor — is detected. Aggressive behavior is also personality driven. Both bucks and does can and often do blow a proverbial gasket. Though fighting among bucks is common in and around the rut, knock-down-drag-out fights can occur at any time, regardless of whether bucks have hard antlers. Antlerless or in-velvet bucks will rise on their hind legs and box. Skirmishes among does happen more often during fawning time when deer get too close to fawns, but as with bucks, can happen at any time. When it happens it is like a heavyweight boxing match.

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No. 3: They Never Forget—Animals are not known for their intellect, but I can offer that they are incredibly smart. Simply put, once they learn what danger looks and smells like they never forget it the rest of their lives. The reason so many yearling bucks make up the majority of each state's antlered buck harvest is that they haven't had enough time to learn how to survive. But once a whitetail makes it to 3½ years of age they are a totally different animal. By their third birthday they know every odor on the wind, not to mention the best places to avoid danger. A fascinating thing I learned about a whitetail's intelligence is how they are able to decipher danger by the way a person walks. In my case, our enclosure deer knew me by my gait so they never ran when I approached, regardless of the angle or location I came from. However, when a stranger approached they nearly always bolted and ran for cover at first sight.

No. 4: Large Antlers Don't Necessarily Make a King—There is a great quote that says, "Attitude determines one's altitude." Though it refers to humans, it can also apply to white-tailed bucks because the largest antlered buck is not always the most dominant buck in the herd. Every fall I'm contacted by hunters who are frustrated over the fact that many of the bucks they watched throughout the summer have disappeared by October. In every case they want to know what happened. When velvet is peeled, the stage is set for bucks to determine who will have bragging (or breeding) rights in the immediate area. Though big antlers can play a role in determining dominance, they can't come close to the role attitude plays. Most bachelor groups stay intact throughout the month of September in the North. During this time each buck feels the others out by sparring, all the while testing each other in an attempt to see who's going to be in charge come November. Throughout this time, aggressive vocalizations, threat walking and sparring rule the day. In most cases hierarchy is determined by mid-October, with one or two of the bucks becoming the bullies. This process causes the other bucks that made up the bachelor group to disperse and search for a location where they can be king. The downside for many hunters and landowner/managers is that bucks with much smaller antlers (but bigger attitudes) often run larger antlered bucks out of the area. A lesson for all is that it is nearly impossible to stockpile mature bucks because once a buck reaches 2½ most are driven to be the dominant buck in their home area. What usually happens is that an older buck (3½+ years old) becomes the dominant buck, with younger bucks sticking around in hopes of getting a chance to do some of the breeding. Then, when the rut is over, those bucks that dispersed during early October and survived hunting season return to their original home range and reform the bachelor group they were a part of during the previous summer.

No. 5: Keep 'em Home—Much has been written over the past five years about the size of a buck's home
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Samuel Petrill, age 76, passed away peacefully at home in Jeannette, Pennsylvania, on Friday, April 16, 2021. Sam was born in Jeannette, Pennsylvania, to the late Domenick and Lucille Petrill. Sam was an active alumnus of Jeannette School District, and proud Steelers fan. He retired from Elliott Company after close to 30 years of service in 2004. Sam and his wife of 45 years, Suzanne (Wester) Petrill were active participants in the social and religious communities of Jeannette.

Sam will long be remembered for his love of nature. There are generations of sportsmen in and around Westmoreland County that can trace their love of nature and respect for its resources back to Sam. He was a long-time member of local sportsman's clubs, holding various offices at the Irwin Sportsman's Association. For his leadership role to the county league and his long-term interest and devotion to the conservation of the public's natural resources, Sam was named to the Westmoreland County Sportsmen's League's Hall of Fame in 1994. He was particularly known for his savvy in finding the right end of a snapping turtle stuck in a muddy riverbank. In recent years, when physical challenges made traveling the countryside by foot too difficult, you could still find Sam sitting on a bucket at Twin Lakes enjoying the sights and sounds of fellow sportsmen. Those who knew Sam also remember his passion for knowledge, love of a good debate, and his joy in beating you in a game of Scrabble. Not often did a week pass that he didn't read an article that inspired him to put his thoughts to paper and contribute thought-provoking content to our local community and sporting papers' editorial columns. His children often talk of their memories of family card games around the table with country music on the radio. Long will the stories be told of the first time each child or grandchild beat him at a game of scrabble or card game. In all of that glorious life, he was most proud of the "arrows in his quiver," as he lovingly referred to his children and grandchildren. Sam is survived by six children (Samuel Bibbee, Lana Gerger, Roberta (Sittig) Serbin and husband Edward, Daniel Petrill and wife Brandy, Rebecca (Sittig) Florey and husband Patrick, Shelby (Sittig) Berry) and six grandchildren (Tulip Serbin, Jacob Berry, Anthony Berry, Mollie Serbin, Hannah Florey, and Jack Florey). They will all now strive to follow his example: leave the world better than you found it.

Friends were received 4 to 7pm Tuesday April 20th in the John V. Graziano Funeral Home Inc., 228 North 2nd St. Jeannette. Friends were welcomed to join the family for Sam's funeral service to be held 11:00am Wednesday, April 21, in the First Baptist Church, 131 North 2nd St. Jeannette. Interment followed in the Jeannette Memorial Park, Penn Twp. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in Sam's name to the Jeannette Salvation Army, 1100 Clay Ave. Extension, Jeannette PA, 15644.

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range during autumn months. Those who hunt vast Northern wilderness regions believe mature bucks can and do cover miles of unbroken wilderness during the rut. Hunters in farm country and urban settings believe it is much smaller. Then there is telemetry research conducted over the past few years that suggests bucks typically have a home range of less than 1,500 acres during autumn. In truth there is no way to be specific when it comes to knowing the amount of ground a buck covers when autumn's frosty mornings arrive. This is due to a host of factors.

Over the years, my son and I have been fortunate to harvest some very nice bucks on our farm. Not all have been what you would call homebodies. Three of our best were strangers because we never saw them before the day of our encounter. In each case we later learned their home range was over 2½ air miles from our farm (thanks to trail cameras and personal observations). However, for the most part our success in harvesting mature bucks has come from learning what it takes to keep them from wandering very far.

During the fall of 1990, a group of local landowners and I embarked on a journey to have better deer on our properties. Success didn't come overnight but thanks to trial and error the knowledge we've acquired over the past 26 years has made it possible to hunt older class bucks. The key to our success hasn't come from advancement in technologies or equipment, it has come from knowing how to hold deer on our properties throughout the year. The bottom line is that every white-tailed buck's mission in life is to survive and breed. That's it, just two things, but these are very important things. For a buck to meet these goals he must have great cover, great food and a healthy, vibrant doe population. If any of the three are missing the buck will walk until he finds a location that meets his needs. I realize this sounds pretty simplistic, but I'm amazed at the number of landowners/hunters who fail to address the three. So the formula is pretty simple: Cover + food + does = better hunting.

So, there you have it, five of the best lessons from thousands I've learned during my near 60-year love affair with the whitetail that has allowed me to be the hunter I am. Thanks in part to the whitetail, my life has been special. Along the way I've learned much about nature and life from pursuing them. And one of my greatest blessings has been the chance to share what I've learned with you.

The late Charles Alsheimer was a deer behavior expert, writer and photographer from western New York.

Welcome New Members

Enjoy your membership and our fellowship

ISA Info

- Gate open if anyone is on property...Gate closed & locked if you are the last one to leave. If you unlock the clubhouse, make sure it is locked if you are the last one out.
- See our calendar on the webpage for activity dates and times.

MORE ON TURKEYS

Turkeys are intelligent wild animals that are wary of humans. Their keen eyesight makes up for their lack of smell and they can detect even the slightest amount of movement, so hunting them is challenging. We encourage you to learn all you can before hitting the woods to begin your turkey hunting adventures – a safe and successful hunt depends on it. There are two wild turkey species, the Ocellated turkey of Central America and the North American wild turkey. Easterns are the most widely distributed subspecies east of the Mississippi River. They are also the most abundant. They can be found in 38 states and numerous Canadian provinces. They are characterized by chestnut-brown tips on their tail feathers and white and black bars on their wings. Adult males or toms weigh 18-30 pounds while females or hens typically weigh in around 8 to 12 pounds. Eastern toms have what is considered the strongest gobbles of all subspecies. They also tend to have the longest beards of all the subspecies.

It is important to learn how to distinguish between adult toms and younger jakes, as well as knowing the difference between male and female turkeys. It sounds simple, but when you are out hunting, the differences may be less noticeable, especially from a distance.

Adult male turkeys are typically larger in size and more colorful than their female counterparts, with colors of red, white and blue being noticeable on their head and neck. A male turkey's feathers



also will be closer to black and have a more vibrant sheen, while a hen turkey will generally be more brown in appearance. Do not assume a bird is a male if it has a beard – about 10 percent of hens also can have beards.

The gobble is a loud, rapid gurgling sound made by male turkeys. The gobble is one of the principal vocalizations of the male wild turkey and is used primarily during the spring (mating season) to let hens know he is in the area. Hunters must be cautious using a gobble, on public or private land, as it may attract fellow hunters to your position. It can also be a double-edged sword. A gobble may draw a dominant tom to you looking for a fight or you might drive away less dominant birds that want to avoid a beating. It is often used as a call of last resort. However, it can also be used effectively late in the evening when trying to get a tom to gobble on the roost.

The cluck consists of one or more short, staccato notes. The plain cluck often includes two or three single note clucks. It's generally used by one bird to get the attention of another. It's a good call to reassure an approaching gobbler that a hen is waiting for him. This is a great call while trying to encourage a gobbler to come into range if he starts to hang up. It can also be used while birds are still on the roost to subtly let a gobbler know you are there.

While all adult male turkeys gobble, and all hens cluck and yelp, each turkey truly has a voice of its own. Each cluck, purr or cut has different inflections particular to each bird. Listen to and learn sounds of the wild turkey. You will surely up your outdoor skills if you can properly identify wild turkey calls in the field and mimic them on your next hunt.

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Please comply with the following: Only one tree stand on ISA property will be permitted by ISA members. The stand must be tagged with weather proof labels with name, address, and phone number. Any untagged stand or non-member who has tree stands on the ISA property must remove them by June 30, 2021. After this date, they will be removed by ISA members and sold as is. All monies will be donated to our building funds. Questions should be directed to Kevin Kennelty at 724-640-0726 or kevinrk1220@gmail.com.

******* 2021 ISA OFFICERS *******

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