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Where Are The Whitetail Deer?

By David Selman, Tracker-Outdoors.com

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Where Did The Deer Go?, Early Season Thoughts..You have worked all spring and summer keeping your feeders filled, building new deer stands or fixing old ones, planting food plots and planning hunting strategies for your first fall hunt. Each time you checked your feeders, food plots or game trails, you were encouraged by new deer sign, fresh tracks, rubs, scrapes and other signs that deer continue to use the area. But, now that archery or early gun season opening day are here, you're not seeing the deer you expected to see and now you may be asking yourself, "where are the deer?" or, "what did I do wrong?" When this happens, and believe me it happens to all of us, there are several factors to keep in mind. Let's discuss a few. First, most of us observe deer patterns over the spring and summer and work to draw deer into our areas using any number of tactics including feeders, food plots, salt licks and other game getting techniques. While all of these are good strategies, many of us forget that deer also require a good source of water. By late summer and early fall, water sources can "dry up" leaving few locations for deer and other wildlife to get that life sustaining fluid. If your hunting area that has shown good promise all summer long suddenly stops showing deer activity and deer sighting are down, it may be that the deer are seeking a water source. If you believe this is the case, try to locate a creek bed, small pond or any other water source, no matter how small. Chances are that if you find water, you will find fresh deer signs. Even if a creek appears to be dried up, search up and down the creek bed for any remaining pools of water and look for deer signs. Once you find water and fresh deer sign, consider using a portable deer stand to set up on this location for early season success. Second, regardless of how much corn and feed supplement is around your feeder or how well your food plot has grown, deer, especially mature bucks, prefer the natural forage of the woods and field edges. If your deer feeders and food plots are not located near natural food sources, you may be waiting until natural food sources run low before deer seek your feeders and food plots more actively. If your man made food sources are not drawing in deer and other wildlife, it may be because natural food

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sources such as acorns or other mast crops have the attention and your stand is not in the path of the natural sources. Your choices are to either wait for the natural food sources to dwindle and for deer to return to your feeders and food plots, or, you the hunter will have to become mobile and hunt the natural food supply using portable stands. With this in mind, you will also want to choose future permanent stand locations that are close to natural food sources when possible. Another good strategy is to place your stands between natural food sources, between food and water sources or between food or water sources and deer bedding areas.

Another factor that can reduce deer traffic to your permanent stand locations, feeders and food plots is human traffic. By late summer, it is important that your trips to stand locations be limited and that when you do visit these locations, it is important to reduce human scent left behind. If you are visiting your stands and feeders just to check for fresh deer sign, stop. Trust your stand location choices, fill your feeders and work the food plots early enough that your presence is no longer required long before season opens and it is time to hunt. Repeated trips will inevitably leave behind human scent and prevent deer from visiting. Your best chances of a successful deer hunting stand are those less visited by you the hunter. If you do visit your stand locations before your early season hunts, take care to use quality scent elimination products and strategies. It is a good idea to use different routes to and from your hunting areas before during and after hunting season. The point is that you don't want a human scent trail caused by repeated visits to your stands. Changes to the environment near your hunting area

can also play a part in changing the frequency that deer visit a stand location. These factors may include timber logging, field plowing, construction or another hunter creating a new stand location too close to your existing one. For example, we have two deer hunting stands that are close to a paper company property line. About a month before deer season, the paper company decided to cut timber on the adjacent land. Before the timber started falling, these stands always showed good deer sign. When the timber cutting started, even though it was about 100 yards away, the deer traffic to these stands was greatly reduced. In this case, we also learned that the logging would stop just before gun deer season opened. So we chose to leave the stands in place and hunt other stand locations until the deer return to this area.

For successful deer hunts, my bet is on the hunter who adjusts to both natural and man made conditions, uses sound judgment when choosing stand locations and makes the necessary adjustments as the environment changes with the season.

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Aging Whitetail Deer At Various Stages

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Aging a Yearling Deer Yearling deer can be easily aged by examining the third tooth back on either side

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of the jaw. This tooth is called the third premolar. If this tooth has three cusps, the deer is 1 1/2 years old. If the third premolar has only two cusps, the deer is 1 year and seven months old or older.

75% of deer harvested in the U.S. are yearling deer.

Telling the Age of a Whitetail Buck

In December of 1998, the Field and Stream magazine had an article that I found interesting about a method for aging deer in the field. Here is my short version;

The twisting and turning of a deer's ears results in permanent creases in the hair and skin around the base of the ears. Deer 2 1/2 years or younger seldom have ear creases. But by 3 1/2 years the hair has thickened and taken on at least one crease. A two crease deer is a mature animal and is usually between 5 1/2 to 6 1/2 years old. If a deer has three creases at the base of the ears, it is likely about 7 1/2 years old give or take a year. If a deer has 4 ear creases, it is likely more than 8 years old.

Also, as a deer ages, hair thickens in the ear slot. Finally, an older deer's ears tend to be more curled in and tired in appearance while a younger deer's ears will be flatter and more alert in appearance.

Telling the age of a deer with the ears method is most accurate on well conditioned animals.

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