

OUTDOORSUPDATE

OF THE OUTDOORS:

'Shed Hunting': A Springtime Ritual

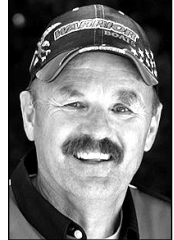
BY GARY HOWEY
Hartington, Neb.

Believe it or not, spring is here, finally the snow is disappearing and the weather's starting to warm.

It's something that a lot of us have been waiting on for a long time, giving us the opportunity to get outside and enjoy the spring weather.

As I mentioned in earlier columns, this is the time of the year when I do my pre-season scouting for turkey.

While I'm out there tromping around in the woods looking for some sign of that big Tom, I'm also looking for deer sheds or "Shed Hunting" as it's known.



Gary Howey

For those of you that haven't hunted sheds, they're the previous years antlers that the buck sheds or dropped after the rut.

Bucks shed their headgear/rack/antlers annually and if you can beat the rodents and other critters out there that chew on them

where they use them for a source of calcium, you'll have the opportunity to find a shed or two.

A buck's antler/rack is a lot different from cattle horns, which are hollow, as they're made up of honey combed solid bone.

Pedicles, those knobby nubs that protrude from the buck's skull, are where the new antler/rack grows and what supports the buck's rack.

When bucks start to grow their new racks/antlers, they're no more than bony growths covered with skin and hair (velvet). They grow incredibly fast in 3 to 4 months, making them the fastest growing living tissue there is.

These pedicles are a permanent part of the buck's forehead and the point where the antler breaks off of when the antler is shed.

Shed hunting in the spring is also an excellent way to determine if that big buck you hunted last year made it through the winter.

If you find his sheds, he's still around unless the winter did him in and you can start to put together a plan as to how you're going to hunt him this season.

After the rut, bucks no longer need their racks as they did during the rut when they were used to attract and impress the does and to fight other bucks that were trying to draw the females away from the harem.

It's a known fact that all of the bucks don't drop their racks at the same time. Some of them will begin to lose their racks following the rut, when their hormone levels start to drop.



Sheds that have been chewed are a pretty common sight as rodents chew on them to obtain calcium.

As a general rule deer in the upper Midwest will shed their antlers in February and March.

The amount of daylight in a day, the fluctuations in the deer's hormones, their diet and stress have a lot to do as to when a deer will drop their rack/antlers.

There are several reasons deer shed their antlers, one is to allow for regeneration, or re-growth, of new ones.

Others believe the reason they drop their antlers is it will be easier for them to make it through the winter, as winter, with its harsh conditions make it tough for a deer coming out of the rut to survive.

By shedding their antlers: it helps them to not only conserve energy but also to eliminate excess weight.

The entire shedding process will take two to three weeks to complete, while the re-growth will take the entire summer.

The first to drop their antlers are more than likely those bucks that chased hard during the rut, become fatigued from fighting and breeding during the rut.

If you don't have an area where you've found sheds in prior years, a good place to start looking for sheds would be to drive through the country, looking for those well-used deer trails that cross the roads.

I've found that heavily traveled trails, those that lead from heavily wooded areas, then cross the road into the deer's feeding areas to be a good starting point.

I'd say a good trail to start looking for sheds on would be one that resembled a hard packed cattle trail.

Once you've located a well-used trail,

get permission from the landowner to shed hunt on the ground and then formulate a plan.

The main spots I've found sheds were those near their bedding areas, along a route heading to an area where they're feeding and of course at their food sources.

You'll find more sheds in areas where the deer feed, as when a buck feeds, there's a lot of up and down head movement, which causes the antler to drop off.

Another reason that you'll find a good number of sheds near a food source is that they'll spend a lot of time there during the winter months.

During the winter, when other food sources are covered up, deer have a tendency to "Yard" up in large groups near a food supply.

These feeding areas can be corn/bean fields, near haystacks, grain piles and even open bins, as deer know these areas offer easy access to a food supply.

If they're feeding near bale piles, spend a little extra time checking these areas out as I've found a lot of sheds here as the bucks bang their rack against the bales when they're trying to pull hay from the bales.

Other good spots to look include trails following the bottom of ravines and places where the deer have to jump a fence.

While filming in Mississippi a few years back, my good friend Bubba Flanigan showed me how they hunt sheds in the south.

They leave feeders out year round for



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Good places to look for deer sheds would be feeding areas where deer yard up in large herds during the winter.

the deer and when it nears shed time, they attach a piece of chicken wire above the opening to the feeder and when the buck sticks his head into eat, the wire knocks the antler off.

On one feeder there were 19 sheds, the folks down south use this method to track the deer using their land, which made it through the season and to help manage their herd.

They use the sheds to decorate their homes and cabins, making decorative lights and other items that some folks sell in their gift shops.

Timing is everything when using this method as if it's attached too early, the buck might become entangled in the wire.

Hunting sheds is about like hunting mushrooms, as you need to take your time and walk through the fields and hills slowly.

Don't be in a big hurry when shed hunting as even a small amount of snow or leaves can cover a shed, making them impossible to see until you're right on top of them.

If they've been on the ground long, they'll have faded and will be dull gray color, making them particularly hard to see in sandy soils.

This is the time of the year, especially this year when folks just want to get outside and do something, shed hunting is a great opportunity for you to spend a little time in the hills and woods, enjoying the outdoors while looking for one of Mother Nature's most beautiful art forms.

Gary Howey, Hartington, Neb., is a syndicated weekly outdoor columnist and the producer/host of the *Outdoorsmen Adventures* television series. If you're looking for more outdoor information, videos and tips, check out www.outdoorsmenadventures.com.

OUTDOOR REPORT

Turkey Hunting Seminar Set For April 14 In Lincoln

LINCOLN, Neb. — A turkey hunting seminar is scheduled for April 14 at the Lincoln Izaak Walton League, according to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. The 6 p.m. event is open to the first 100 registrants.

Before the seminar, participants may pattern their shotgun and tune up their turkey calls from 4:30-6 p.m. They should bring their shotgun, at least five rounds of their favorite turkey load and their favorite turkey call.

Turkey hunting season begins March 25 for archers and youth archers.

To register, contact Heather Weihe at heather.weihe@nebraska.gov.

Youth Fishing Instructors Will Be Certified

LINCOLN, Neb. — Two additional workshops are scheduled for adults who want to be certified as volunteer youth fishing instructors for the Youth Fishing Program, according to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

The new workshops are set for April 10 at the Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium near Gretna and April 28 in Wayne.

Certified instructors will learn how to put on fishing programs, derbies and club activities for children and families. Instructors will have the use of free fishing tackle and educational resources at clinics. They also will have access to free camping at state parks when volunteering as a fishing host.

Andrea Faas, aquatic education specialist for the Commission, will share materials, resources, tips, group management skills, important fishing topics, and plans for leading youth fishing activities.

The following is the list of all upcoming youth fishing instructor certification workshops:

- April 10 — Gretna, 10 a.m.-noon, Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium
- April 27 — Broken Bow, 6-8 p.m., Chamber of Commerce building, 444 S. 8th Ave.
- April 28 — Wayne, 6-8 p.m., City Council Room, 306 Pearl St. Contact Faas at (402) 332-3901 to register.

Morel Mushrooms To Begin Appearing Soon

LINCOLN, Neb. — A spring ritual that many Nebraskans look forward to is fast-approaching morel mushroom hunting.

Morels begin to appear in mid-to-late-April. They are not only delicious to eat, they are easy to find. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission has a few simple pointers that may result in a bucketful in no time.

Go early and often; get out into the field when the lilacs and violets bloom.

Morels appear first in moist wooded river bottoms, then later (around Mothers Day) in hilly, forested areas.

Morels may be found just about anywhere, but around dead, dying and fallen trees are optimal places to begin a search.

Here are some key things to remember before embarking on a hunt:

Get landowner permission. Most landowners will grant permission for morel hunting, especially if they are offered a portion of the bounty.

Always go with a partner and be sure to wear blaze orange to be seen.

A morel hunt is an excellent way to introduce children to nature by providing fresh air and physical exercise.

Beyond BOW Fly-Fishing Workshop Scheduled

LINCOLN, Neb. — Women are invited to develop fly-fishing skills at a Beyond Becoming an Outdoors-Woman workshop May 7-9 near Long Pine, according to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

Instruction will focus on fly-fishing equipment, rod set-up, knot tying, reading the water, and casting. Participants will test their skills on Long Pine Creek and the Keller Park State Recreation Area ponds.

Contact Julia Plugge at julia.plugge@nebraska.gov or (402) 471-6009 to register. The registration deadline is April 30.

TROPHY SPOTLIGHT



LEFT: Kordell Munkvold, 10 of Menno shot his first deer on Jan. 30.

ABOVE: Jacob Vaith, 11 of Menno shot his first deer on Sept. 21, 2009.

New Place To Hunt Thanks To SDGFP, DU Partnership

WOONSOCKET — Ducks Unlimited restored a premier property near Woonsocket and has sold the land to the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Department. The property will provide essential waterfowl breeding and migration habitat and will be open to public hunting this fall.

"With the encouragement of several enthusiastic DU volunteers in the area, DU partnered with the South Dakota Game Fish and Parks to make sure the property remained accessible by the public," said Jim Ringelman DU director of conservation programs for South Dakota. "DU supports the waterfowl hunting heritage of South Dakota and values partnerships like the one with SDGFP that make it possible to increase public hunting opportunities."

This property is a particularly good

example of how the Wetland Reserve Program can work to restore wetlands and bring waterfowl habitat back to life. The WRP isn't as popular as the Conservation Reserve Program in the Prairie Pothole Region, but it is important as in this case where 390 of the 400 acres on the property were enrolled in the program. DU restored six wetlands, seeded 100 acres of former cropland to grass and got the noxious weeds under control. The restored to waterfowl habitat will benefit the ducks and provide significant hunting opportunities.

"Projects like this are exactly why it great to be a Ducks Unlimited member in South Dakota," said Don Aarstad S.D. volunteer state chairman for DU. "The investments DU makes in South Dakota provides quality habitat not only for waterfowl but

also for pheasants, deer and a host of other species."

"In the PPR we lose one percent of our grasslands annually and we continue to lose wetlands as they are drained and destroyed," said Paul Coughlin habitat program administrator with S.D. Game, Fish Parks. "The Woonsocket property is now a premier waterfowl habitat area that will make a lot of ducks and area duck hunters happy."

In addition to the restored wetlands and grassland, DU protected 257 acres of existing grassland on the property, removed interior fences and restored the terrain to a more natural condition.

Ducks Unlimited is the world's largest non-profit organization dedicated to conserving North America's continually disappearing waterfowl habitats.

South Dakota Archery Antelope Hunters Report Success In '09

PIERRE — One of South Dakota's first fall hunts is archery antelope, and through surveys from the 2009 season submitted by hunters, the state Game, Fish and Parks Department begins planning the 2010 seasons.

"Each year, our agency follows up the different hunting seasons with surveys to determine harvest and other season-related

information," said Corey Huxoll, GFP harvest survey coordinator. "The surveys are a vital part of our work and a direct contribution that hunters make to the management of wildlife in South Dakota."

About 2,400 archery antelope licenses were issued in 2009. Hunters had a 16 percent success rate, taking 516 bucks and 189

does. Overall harvest was down from the previous two years. Details of the survey report may be found on the GFP Web site at www.sdgame.com/Wildlife/hunting/Harvest/Projections.htm

The 2010 archery antelope season will be proposed by the GFP Commission at its April meeting and finalized at the May meeting. The application process

for the 2010 season will open in mid-summer.

"We are now in the process of surveying several different seasons," Huxoll said. "We appreciate the dedication of hunters to our wildlife resource and look forward to gathering the data they provide through this survey process."



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