

OF THE OUTDOORS | GARY HOWEY

Shed Hunting Tips & Tricks

BY GARY HOWEY
Hartington, Neb.

As winter winds down, we're all ready for spring, it's something a lot of us have been waiting on for a long time, giving us the opportunity to get outside and enjoy some of the warmer weather.

As I mentioned on other 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 turkey sign, I'm also looking for deer sheds or "Shed Hunting" as it's known.

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

Bucks shed their head-gear-rack-antlers annually and if you can beat the rodents and other critters out there that chew on them to obtain 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 a deer's rack is made up of honey combed solid bone.

Pedicles, those knobby nubs protruding 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 off other bucks 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 loose their racks following the rut, when their hormone levels start to drop.

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 it's 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



PHOTO: DUSTIN LUTT

Mid February and March are great times to look for deer sheds.

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 in or near cattle feed lots, 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, causing them to drop to the ground.

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 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, that had 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 im-

possible 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 former tournament angler, fishing and hunting guide, the Producer/Host of the award winning Outdoorsmen Adventures television series which can be seen on Fox affiliates throughout the upper Midwest. He and Simon Fuller are the hosts of the Outdoor Adventures radio program on Classic Hits 106.3 and ESPN Sports Radio 1570. If you're looking for more outdoor information, it can be found at www.outdoorsmenadventures.com.

OUTDOORS DIGEST

Memorial Day Weekend

Reservations Open Feb. 23

PIERRE — People wanting to camp in South Dakota state parks on Memorial Day weekend may begin making reservations for that holiday period at 7 a.m. CST on Feb. 23, for Friday, May 24 arrivals.

"Memorial Day weekend is very busy in all the parks," said state Division of Parks and Recreation Director Doug Hofer. "Campers should plan ahead to reserve their favorite camping spots."

Hofer reminds campers who are reserving more than one campsite to call 1-800-710-2267. "For now, reservations for multiple campsites must be done over the phone, but online reservations for more than one site will be possible within the next month."

A three-night stay is required during holiday weekends at all parks except Custer State Park. Reservations for campsites in Custer State Park and for lodges in all state parks and recreation areas can be made one year in advance.

Reservations can be made 24 hours a day both online at www.campsd.com or by calling 1-800-710-2267. Campsites become available at 7 a.m. Central Time on the first day of the 90-day window. There is a \$7.70 per site non-refundable reservation fee, which does not apply to South Dakota residents.

People may sign up to receive text message reminders about reservation openings for holiday weekends. Text "SDGFP ROD" to 368638. Message and data rates may apply.

The full 90-day window calendar can be found online at www.gfp.sd.gov.

Bald Eagle Awareness

Week Feb. 18-23

PIERRE — Bald Eagle Awareness Days celebrates its 21st year of entertainment and education by emphasizing the need for conservation and appreciation of bald eagles and other birds of prey.

Gov. Dennis Daugaard has proclaimed February 18-23, 2013, as Bald Eagle Awareness Week in South Dakota. Interested persons will have three free events to choose from to learn more about birds of prey.

On Thursday, Feb. 21, The Outdoor Campus-East in Sioux Falls will have an open house at 6 p.m. CST, followed by a 7 p.m. program featuring live birds of prey presented by educators from The Raptor Center at the University of Minnesota.

The Outdoor Campus-West in Rapid City is hosting a "drop-in" day from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. MST on Saturday, Feb. 23. All ages can participate in hands-on stations featuring all things birds-of-prey. Black Hills Raptor Center will participate in the drop-in day and conduct a public presentation with live birds of prey at 1 p.m. MST.

Also on Saturday, Feb. 23, educators from The Raptor Center at the University of Minnesota will present programs featuring live birds of prey at the Pierre Ramkota in Theatre II, in conjunction with the KCCR Farm, Home and Sports Show. Pierre Ramkota programs begin at 10:30 a.m., 12:30 p.m. and 2 p.m. CST. Those programs will feature raptor arts-and-crafts for younger children.

Bald Eagle Awareness Days activities will also feature presentations on Friday, Feb. 22 for students in Madison. Winners of the Bald Eagle Awareness Days Bookmark Art Contest will be announced and winning entries displayed at the Ramkota Inn on Feb. 23.

Lancers

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5.20 ERA) and Josh Cleveland (2-1, 3.20 ERA). Nelson started four games, but could be considered for the closer role vacated by the graduation of MMC all-time saves leader Jason Schmidt. Cleveland made two starts last year, but appeared mostly in long relief.

"We've got to figure out what to do with Derrick, conference rotation or close. We've got 25 games (before GPAC play) to figure that out," Bernatow said. "The question with Cleveland is, do we keep him in long relief or do we make him a conference starter."

One bullpen staple whose role is established is senior Josh Homme (1-1, 7.36 ERA). The left-handed specialist comes into his senior season with 40 career appearances, just 13 away from matching the Lancers' career record in that category.

Junior Brian Bartlett (0-3, 5.70 ERA), who got a key start in the Lancers' GPAC Tourney run, and newcomers Taylor Klapperich (Rapid City), Ben Elliot (Southwestern, Ore., CC) and Bryton Carlson (Itasca CC) will all be expected to compete for innings.

"If we keep our pitching staff healthy, we'll have an opportunity to be in games."

The emergence of Nelson, who led the GPAC with a .405 batting average, helped the Lancer offense a year ago.

"Derrick blew up last year," Bernatow said. "He led the team in hitting, led the league in hitting. He plays sound defense and has good legs — he gives us an extra spark on the basepaths."

Nelson (1 HR, 20 RBI, 11 SB), who earned all-GPAC honors at third base a year ago, moves back to his natural position of short-stop, filling the gap left by Schmidt's graduation. Also back in the infield is junior Jared Miller (.371, 2 HR, 45 RBI), who earned second-team all-GPAC honors.

"I'm intrigued to see the type of season that Nelson and Miller will have," Bernatow said.

Miles CC transfer Michael O'Connell is a frontrunner to claim the open third base spot. Sam Sparen, who redshirted a year ago, will get a shot to play second base as a senior.

"O'Connell was an all-conference player at Miles. He batted cleanup there, and he will bat in the middle of our order," Bernatow said. "Sam was a good player out of Itasca. With Mike Johnson (IF/DH) finally being healthy last year, it made sense for him to redshirt."

Sophomores Ryan Buck (6 runs) and Riley Stack (9 runs), who saw time as courtesy runners a year ago, could also be in the infield mix, as could freshman Alex Mueller (Yankton).

Senior Kyler Pekarek (.200, 6 RBI) returns behind the plate, with sophomore Nick Sehr, a converted infielder, and transfer Julian Cutolo (McCook CC) also potentially in the Lancers' two-catcher rotation.

"Kyler does a pretty good job of working with the pitchers, working with the other catchers. He's starting to throw better," Bernatow said. "Nick Sehr has a natural catcher's throwing motion, and in our conference you have to be able to be able to throw out runners. Julian swings the bat well, and will probably get a lot of bats as the DH."

Godsil (.302, 23 RBI), who earned honorable mention all-

GPAC honors, and sophomore Zac Hollenback return to anchor right and center field.

"Godsil is a three-year starter who has a good arm and has done a good job at the plate," Bernatow said. "Hollenback does a good job of patrolling the outfield."

Carlson, Nik Davis and Tyler Edler could put themselves in the outfield mix, as could Cody Ulmer and Derek Blumenstock.

"Carlson looks like he can win the third starting spot but, if you look at our outfield in past years, we usually use four guys out there on a regular basis," Bernatow said. "With Carlson pitching, we may be extending that to five."

The Lancers open the season Monday, facing NCAA Division I North Dakota in consecutive doubleheaders at the Metrodome in Minneapolis. MMC will also face Division I South Dakota State later in the season.

"It's an exciting challenge," Homme said. "It will show us what we need to work on, and how good we can be."

You can follow James D. Cim-burek on Twitter at twitter.com/aceman904

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