

Outdoors

Rattling the horns

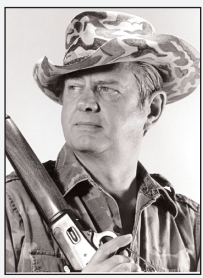
No, I don't mean the kind that makes you jump if you hear it in the grass around your feet; I mean the kind that makes big whitetail bucks run up to you and shake their racks at you.

Rattling antlers, in other words. With about 35 years experience in this method of hunting, it isn't surprising that I've some fairly firm opinions about how, when and where to do it. There may be a few hunters around who've rattled-up more bucks than I (Bob Ramsey, out at Hunt, is one) but not many.

First, some basic rules. Never, ever, rattle on public land, or even near the boundaries of private pastures. There are "hunters" out there that have only to hear the horns and glimpse a movement in the brush to start shooting. Second, always set up so that you have a good view downwind. I say it again: you will take most of your bucks on the downwind side. It took me years to learn this simple lesson, and here you are, getting it for free in the local newspaper.

These are the two most important lessons about rattling. No. 3 is to plan and execute your approach to a rattling stand so as not to be

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John Wootters

seen, heard, or smelled by deer in the vicinity. Always approach upwind and never skyline yourself.

Next, assuming you executed No. 3 successfully, begin your rattling sequence with just a few subdued clicks instead of a great honking clash of the horns. You'll be surprised at how often you can get a buck in your face within seconds if you can get close without spooking him and start your routine softly.

As to technique, I have little advice to offer, mainly because it really doesn't matter much. Real bucks have no script for their fight, and every battle sounds different. Several different rattling "dialects" are popular, and they all seem to work about equally well. I tend to follow the border school of loud aggressive rattling with lots of sidebar sound effects —

grunts, thrashing brush, stamping the earth — but I really have no particular pattern to my rattling performance. I sort of let the deer tell me by their responses how they want the horns rattled that day. As with any kind of game calling, however, it's easy to get carried away and overdo it, so I try to hold each sequence to about 30 or 40 seconds.

The most productive antler-rattling tactic is a two-man deal, one shooter and one rattler. The rattler sets up about 50 yards upwind from the shooter, and bucks that try to circle the source of the sounds often all but run over the shooter. It goes without saying, of course, that you have to know and trust your partner in this enterprise.

Most serious horn rattlers prefer to use real antlers, although there's no doubt the various man-made rattlers on the market will call bucks.

Most of us have tried every conceivable potion, oil, and magic liquid imaginable to preserve the good sound of a favorite pair of horns. None work as well as simply keeping the antlers in a stable environment (such as an air-conditioned house) year-round.

Hanging them up in a hot



Photo by John Wootters

Horn-rattling calls for both cover and concealment, plus full camouflage, especially including the face and hands.

garage between seasons is the worst thing you can do to them, and the second worst is soaking rattles in water. They do sound good for a while, but the more you soak the more you have to soak them, until they need to be soaked every night before use the next morning. Then they literally rot from the

inside out.

Good rattles — which are a rare and precious possession, and maybe a little magic, deserve better than that.

John Wootters is a semi-retired outdoors writer with more than 30 years experience. He was editor of Peterson's hunting magazine and author of the monthly

column "Buck Sense" and has written the all-time best selling book on deer hunting, "Hunting Trophy deer." He has served on the Board of Directors of the National Rifle Association, and written for "Shooting Times," "Rifle," "Handloader," "Guns & Ammo" and Peterson's "Hunting."

SOLUNAR/LUNAR TIMES

Hunt, Texas

Longitude 99.20 Latitude 30.04

Hunting and Fishing time tables for the avid sports-person

2003	SPORTING TIMES				LUNAR TIMES				
	A. M.		P. M.		Sunrise	Sunset	Moonrise	Moon Up	Moon Down
November	Minor	Major	Minor	Major	Sunrise	Sunset	Moonrise	Moon Up	Moon Down
21 Fri	2:32	8:44	2:57	9:10	7:06	5:38	4:23a	10:19a	10:45p
22 Sat >	3:18	9:32	3:46	9:59	7:07	5:38	5:33a	11:13a	11:42p
23 Sun N	4:11	10:26	4:41	10:56	7:08	5:38	6:46a	12:11p	----->
24 Mon N	5:11	11:27	5:43	11:59	7:09	5:37	8:01a	1:14p	12:42a>
25 Tue >	6:18	12:02	6:51	12:34	7:09	5:37	9:14a	2:19p	1:47a
26 Wed >	7:29	1:12	8:01	1:45	7:10	5:37	10:21a	3:24p	2:52a
27 Thu	8:39	2:23	9:09	2:54	7:11	5:37	11:19a	4:26p	3:56a

Major=2 hours/Minor=1 hour Accurate within 1 minute
 F = Full Moon N = New Moon Q = Quarter > = Peak activity
 Tip: When water temp hits 55 the bass will congregate at remaining weedbeds

Lines marked < > indicate best fishing at sunrise or sunset!
 Solunar Services, Inc. <http://www.solunar.com>

Ground feeding has benefits

Stephen, I have a running debate with the barn that boards my horses, and I would like your input in the matter. The problem is that they feed the hay to the horses on the ground; but I would much rather have them install hay feeders. I am hoping that a word in your column will get them to come around to my way of thinking.

As much as I appreciate your vote of confidence in the power of my opinion, I am afraid that I will be siding with the barn on this issue. You see, I am firm believer in feeding hay to horses from the ground.

The only benefits that I can see to wall mounted hay feeders are in the issues of sanitation and cost savings as they do cut down on the waste if they are mounted above the horses feed trough and they can keep your horse from having to eat in the vicinity of his own mess.

But if your barn is willing to take the extra time and expense to do what is necessary when ground-feeding hay then you are all better off for it.

The extra time comes with the need to keep the stalls a little cleaner and the expense

Horse Bits



Stephen Daugherty

can be traced back to the additional waste that occurs when hay is fed on the stall floor.

As for the benefits of ground feeding, there are quite a few, but for today I will focus on the most important.

It is a more natural way for a horse to eat; being grazing animals by nature they have developed, from an evolutionary stand point, into an animal that is dependent on having their heads down in order to enjoy good health. With ground-fed horses, you will see fewer colds since the sinuses tend to drain more thoroughly and stay clearer. You will also notice cleaner eyes without the build up of "crusties" being such a problem since tear ducts drain more often.

The second reason for feeding your horse his or her hay from the stall floor is that

it tends to promote a more flexible and well-developed animal.

If you notice the huge amount of time that your horse will spend with his head down in the grazing position while eating the hay, you can see that it puts a wonderfully constant stretch over his entire top line, thus keeping the back, neck and loin muscles supple and relaxed.

Since this is almost the exact thing that you try to get a horse to do when you are riding them, you can see how hours of this consequential stretching in the stall can directly affect the success of your daily training.

This probably was not the answer that you were looking for, but maybe it will help to solve the "great debate" and bring all those involved some peace of mind. Thanks for the question and we'll talk again next week.

A lifelong student of the horse, Stephen Daugherty has trained and instructed professionally since the age of 18 and admittedly still learns every day. He lives and works in the Kerrville area and is available for personal consulting, training or instructing. He can be reached by e-mail at stephenwd@hotmail.com

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