

Deer season in Stephens County Oklahoma is a major occurrence for any resident outdoorsman. Young or old, October 1 is circled on everyone's calendar. However, the preparation begins months early with food plots being planted, tree stands being placed in a favorite honey hole, and trail cameras being set up to monitor promising areas. The story of this particular deer began a couple of years earlier. While I was off at college my father, Stanley Combs, had become friends with Gary Strong and Brent Finely at work. Gary was managing 240 acres owned by his father-in-law, part of which my dad leased for his cattle operation. Approximately 100 acres was set aside for hunting. Beginning with one small food plot, the effort steadily grew to several acres of alfalfa, corn, wheat, oats, and winter peas by the fall of 2005 that took a combined effort from Gary, Brent, Dad, my brother Rusty and myself. Usually only one or two of us would hunt the property at any given time, and there was a standing agreement that everyone would do their part to manage the deer herd. Small bucks were passed on numerous occasions in hopes of their survival to maturity.

In 2003 Gary purchased a digital game camera, and started getting pictures of some good young bucks and a few nice 2.5 year old deer. Soon pictures appeared of a tall 6 pointer that had white fronts on his hocks. The buck was sandy in color and appeared to have an abnormally short snout. Gary had a chance to kill him one morning in 2003 with a bow but as he drew he hit a tree limb and was busted. He would have been a good Oklahoma 1st archery buck. Gary could have shot him with a gun a week later and let him pass. In 2004 we got a picture of the buck on the alfalfa late in the night. By this time the buck had grown to be a big wide 9 pointer with a 3 inch unicorn growing out of the middle of his head. Brent thinks he saw him while bow hunting in November but the buck was too far away for a shot. Needless to say he lived to grow another year.

In September 2005 the game camera was placed on the alfalfa field in hopes of catching an early season glimpse of some nice bucks in the area. The group was shocked by a picture of a 15 point buck that had a 5" unicorn coming out of his head. Four more pictures of him surfaced from Sept 30th to Oct 8th. Speculations about his score ranged from 160" to 180" with the consensus being that he was around 170" BC non-typical! We all considered this a great trophy deer in any state. The pictures were passed back and forth on email with a different hunter's name electronically written on his side as evidence of the friendly competition we are always in.

As bow season ramped up, the buck remained nocturnal. We hunted several mornings and evenings but never saw him. Brent harvested a nice 5 ½ year old deer opening morning of primitive firearm season that had an 18" inside spread and scored roughly 110" B&C. Gary was hunting on the 4 acre green plot the same morning and saw a smaller buck and a bunch of does, but not the "Big Boy".

4 days later Gary and I were going hunting after work and Gary told me he would sit across the creek on the green fields if he went. Well, Gary could not make it out that night, but I had decided to give it a shot. A cold front passed through the area the previous weekend and produced a couple of beautiful and chilly days of hunting. However, our whole group was a little discouraged by the warm weather that had moved in after the front. The deer were not moving much, and the deer we were seeing were all does and yearlings.

I arrived at the farm at 4:45 and quickly said a prayer for a safe and successful hunt as I was taught and always do before heading into the woods. Of course I prayed for a big

buck, not having the slightest idea what was about to unfold! The wind was out of the southeast so I sat in a ladder stand on the west side of the food plot. Twin yearlings walked out before I was seated and milled around for over an hour. About 6:15 I began hearing something about 200 yards south in the grass and timber. I was convinced that it had to be a wild hog after listening to it crash through the dried grass and brush making more noise than a person could have possibly made walking through the same mess. At about 6:40 six does and yearlings stepped onto the field straight east of my position at about 100 yards. As I watched the does I caught movement out of the corner of my eye to the south. The crashing noise turned into a big buck headed right for the does. I new he was big but had no binoculars or scope. I had already decided that if a shot presented itself I was going to take it.

The deer came to about 100 yards turned around down wind from the does and stopped. I realized that I may not get a better chance so I placed the sight on his front shoulder and squeezed the trigger. When the smoke cleared I could see the buck headed northeast into the timber. I had heard the impact of the bullet and the buck was clearly hit as he crashed through the thick brush and out of sight. I called my wife to tell her the exciting news and then my brother to come help recover the monster. Once I calmed down enough to climb out of the stand, I walked over to where the buck was standing to find an excellent blood trail. Not wanting to push the buck I went to meet my brother at the gate. After about an hour we returned to the trail and located the buck 70 yards inside the timber. It was the Unicorn!

The buck has 17" inside spread, 23" main beams and almost 40" of mass. Gross green score of 165 1/8", a unique trophy at the least and a buck and blessing of a life time for any hunter. We were all excited that one of us had the chance to harvest this unique trophy. This is not the end of the story for this hunting haven, but a testimony to good management and hard work and a promise of even bigger bucks in the near future.

Chad Combs
Gary Strong