

A BUCK OF A DIFFERENT CALIBER

I have long held a fascination with photographing big whitetail bucks. Matter of fact, I've made a career of it! This past fall, the opportunity of a lifetime presented itself and I was privileged to photograph what might turn out to be the greatest whitetail buck of all time. Known as ".30.30" this giant whitetail had an unofficial Boone and Crockett net non-typical score of 301-2/8 points in 1996. The score is unofficial for a number of reasons; the buck is still alive and he is a captive "brood buck" kept under high fence conditions. Both will disqualify him from the record book.

However, the antlers of .30.30 are phenomenal to say the least. There is nothing about this buck that is small. Every antler dimension is as good as they get. For instance, main beam measurements are 31-2/8 and 31-6/8. Only four bucks in the record book have ever exceeded this with both beams. Outside spread is 39-6/8, never before seen in a whitetail buck. Inside spread is 30 inches, circumference measurements total 50-4/8 and the G2's are 16 inches and 15-6/8 inches. The eight point main frame nets 211-4/8, and asymmetry deductions total an amazingly low 3-2/8 inches. When the Boone and Crockett scoring system was developed for whitetail deer, it was .30.30 they surely had in mind as a potential World's Record.

Much is written about whitetail antler development and the research on this topic will continue for years to come. We know a buck needs at least three things to grow huge antlers in the wild. Good nutrition, age and superior antler genetics must be present in order to consistently produce big whitetail bucks. Some studies have shown environment also plays a key role in antler development as well. With these known facts in mind, Larry Barger and Dr. Jim Bevins, the owners of this fabulous buck have set out to "maximize the genetic potential" of .30.30 in 1997. I have been privileged to see the results of their efforts to date (June 28th) and it is surely one of the greatest sights a man will ever see. We are not going to spill the beans on all this yet, however, here are a few improvements that are noteworthy. Inside spread has increased dramatically, from 30

inches in 1996 to an unbelievable 38 inches to date. The outside spread should break 40 inches. The other aspects of the antlers are not fully developed but lets just say we are expecting increases in other parts of the antlers along this same line including several drop tines. Can .30.30 exceed the current World's Record? We'll know this in early September but for now we can only speculate and it looks promising!

If it does occur, what role did age, nutrition, genetics and environment play. Here are a few details. The buck is eight years old, prime of life for captive bucks. If this had been a wild buck, he probably would be on the downside, however, the feed and feeding habits of brood bucks do not cause the tooth wear we see in the wild and they are able to grow even larger racks as they mature. Bottom line, he is at his peak age this year.

Nutrition is as good as it gets and that is as much as we can say on this issue for the time being. He is on a special diet and feeding regime that is "more concentrated" than normally would be found in the wild. Feeding conditions are manipulated to match even the weather conditions such as heat and moisture. Much of the gain in antler growth will most likely be attributed to this factor.

Genetics are the unknown in this case. We know for a fact that .30.30 is not the result of an intensively managed project to produce a super buck (though claims to this effect are surfacing daily). The buck is most likely a pure strain Pennsylvania whitetail and to be honest, no one really knows his background for a fact. It appears to be a secret where only Mother Nature knows the answer for sure.

The final piece of the puzzle is the environment; and what a fine environment it is. The Whitetail Genetic Research Institute (501/673-0230), in Stuttgart, Arkansas, is home to numerous monster whitetail bucks. The institute may have the finest brood group in the country. There are no small brood bucks in the operation, with the bottom line being 200 B&C points before you breed. But the discerning factor here is

the care given to their animals. Though it is difficult to pamper a big 300 pound whitetail buck in hard antler, they get about as much attention as an animal can get. The health of .30.30 is the number one concern of every person at the Institute and his health has never been better. The buck was not healthy in 1996 and had an infection that required surgery to clear up. It is felt that his present good health combined with a very positive environment, will greatly contribute to the buck's antler development in 1997.

The Institute is not a hunting preserve and security is extremely tight. This is not a place where the public can just drop in. Caring for the 250 plus whitetails in residence is a time consuming daylight to dark task. Contact with the Institute should be for people who are seriously interested in breeding white-tails only. It is an expensive proposition to say the least with some animals valued in the six figure range. The faint of heart should avoid the area.

Stay tuned for more on this great whitetail in the Fall of 1997.

30.30

By George Barnett
Photo by Author

