

THE RECORDS KEEP FALLING

Can We Continue to Take Ever-Larger North American Trophies?

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BGC PROFESSIONAL MEMBER

The Boone and Crockett Club's 24th Big Game Awards Program (1998-2000) celebrated an unprecedented seven new World's Record trophies!

In our new decade, century, and millennium this seems almost impossible . . . and it's worth some careful study to look at how this can happen—and speculate as to whether or not the ultimate bar of trophy excellence can continue to escalate.

WORLD'S RECORDS ARE IMPORTANT

At this stage in my life I think you could classify me as a serious hunter. Fully 35 years have passed since I took my first big game animal, and I've been in the business of writing about hunting and related matters for more than 25 years now. For the past 15 of those years it has been my privilege to be a Professional Member of the Boone and Crockett Club. So both professionally and personally you could say that I have more than a passing interest in big game

World's Record Barren Ground Caribou

SCORE: 477 points
HUNTER: Daniel L. Dobbs
LOCATION: Iliamna Lake,
Alaska — 1999

World's Record Roosevelt's Elk

SCORE: 396-5/8 points
HUNTER: Karl W. Minor
LOCATION: Campbell River,
British Columbia — 1999

World's Record Non-typical Coues' Whitetail

SCORE: 186-1/8 points
HUNTER: Peter M. Chase
OWNER: W.B. Darnell
LOCATION: Hidalgo County, New Mexico — 1941



PHOTOS BY CLIFF WHITE



TOP: Daniel L. Dobbs and his wife, Julie, with his new World's Record barren ground caribou. This bull scores 477 points and has the highest score of any of the five species of caribou.

BOTTOM: Karl Minor accepts his Awards plaque for his new World's Record Roosevelt's elk from Randy Byers (Chair of the Club's Big Game Records Committee) at the 24th Awards Banquet in Springfield, Missouri. Karl's bull was taken near the Campbell River in British Columbia, in 1997.

PHOTOS BY JACK RENEAU

trophies and trophy hunting. Mind you, I don't really consider myself a trophy hunter; I much prefer the simple title of "hunter" without any qualifier. I don't go hunting with specific "all or nothing" intentions to take animals that will qualify for our *Records of North American Big Game*, and I have never gone so far as to imagine myself taking a new World's Record trophy.

While relatively few hunters have been blessed (or cursed) to have been as immersed in our sport as I have been, I think most of us deal with trophy hunting in much the same way as I do. I have little patience with obsession with records, because I think there are better reasons to be out in the woods. But I admire large horns, antlers, and skulls—and the animals that grew them . . . and I have never turned down a large animal in favor of a smaller one! So I follow the records books and our Big Game Awards Program system with more than a passing interest. Collectively, the three-year Awards intervals and our all-time records book serves as the yardstick for excellence, not necessarily a mark to strive for nor to try to beat, but the best means we have for determining exactly what constitutes a superlative trophy animal.

This does not suggest that an

animal that fails to meet Boone and Crockett's minimum score may not be a worthy trophy. First and foremost, and always and forever, a trophy is in the eye of the beholder, a memento of a fine moment. One's first big game animal—or one's first of any species—is a milestone event and should certainly be considered a great trophy. An animal taken after a hard hunt, a great stalk, or with a particularly difficult or well-executed shot—or in the company of good friends or family members—is certainly a trophy. Too, no records system is perfect; a very old animal is always a fine trophy in any sportsman's mind, but our measuring system is unable to qualitatively recognize an old animal with worn horns or "downhill" antlers. Still, our scoring system, adopted and copyrighted in 1950, provides the best available historical data on what, qualitatively and quantitatively, constitutes a large North American trophy.

Over the years the minimum scores have been revised, mostly upwards but occasionally downwards, and of course the "three-year books" based on the most recent Awards Program (and with lower minimums than the "all-time book") are relatively new. Constant since the maturing of our scoring system 50 years ago have been the World's Records: The ultimate mark of how big a North American trophy within a given category can possibly be.

OLDER TROPHIES STILL WELCOMED

At the outset, in 1950, the Club's Records Committee was able to draw upon any and all North American trophies, both new entries and rescored entries from previous records books (that, in some cases, used different scoring criteria). This has meant that some long-standing World's Records were taken in the latter years of the 19th century and early in the 20th century. To this day there are no bars on the entering of older trophies, provided adequate documentation. However, trophies taken prior to 1887, the year the Club was founded, are considered on a case by case basis. During every single Awards Period great tro-

phies have surfaced that were seen hanging on a barn, or literally, viewed going down the road in the back of a pickup truck. In this most recent 24th Big Game Awards Program, Peter Chase's huge non-typical Coues' whitetail, taken back in 1941, finally reached its proper place as the ranking World's Record non-typical Coues' whitetail. This came about because of the insistence and persistence of W.B. Darnell, who first saw the buck on the wall of Chase's drugstore in Lordsburg, New Mexico, back in 1957!

MOST "UNBEATABLE" RECORDS AREN'T UNBEATABLE

Boone and Crockett's records books and scoring system have become better known over the years. This, coupled with an ever-growing "trophy consciousness" on the part of North American hunters, suggests that, over time, fewer and fewer "old trophies" will surface. At the same time, with increasing human populations and increased access into remote areas, hunting pressure (and trophy hunting pressure, not always the same thing) has increased significantly. With shrinking habitat, hunting opportunity has also declined considerably for many North American species. This, of course, is neither even nor universal. For instance, today there is less opportunity to hunt grizzly bear, polar bear, Stone's sheep, cougar, and mule deer than there was in 1950 . . . but there is more opportunity to hunt elk, whitetail deer, pronghorn, and muskox. Even with this give and take, and the tremendous successes of modern game management, many of us have come to consider at least some of the long-standing World's Record trophies as inviolable and unbeatable.

In my lifetime it was long considered that John Plute's Dark Canyon, Colorado typical Rocky Mountain elk, taken in 1899, would never be beaten. Similarly, many of us never believed that James Jordan's 1914 Wisconsin whitetail would ever be beaten as the World's Record typical rack. Of course we were wrong. Both of these great heads have been beaten in modern

times. And with increasing herds and greatly expanded opportunity to hunt both of these popular species, today I will be surprised if both of these World's Records aren't beaten multiple times in the next few decades. Another seemingly unbeatable World's Record has been Fred Weiller's Blind Canyon, Alberta bighorn, taken in 1911 . . . but even now, and just a wee bit late for the 24th Awards Program, it appears that this great, long-standing record has fallen.

NEW CATEGORIES

Of course, our scoring system continues to be a work-in-progress, especially with regard to the available categories. With current restrictions it is extremely unlikely that we will see new World's Records for bison, polar bear, jaguar, or Pacific Walrus taken by hunters (although it is always possible for older trophies and "pick-ups" to surface). At the same time, as hunting becomes available or knowledge increases, new categories have been added. In just the few decades that I have been a "record book watcher" I have seen categories added for non-typical American elk, Roosevelt's elk, Sitka blacktail deer, non-typical Coues' whitetail, and Central Canada barren ground caribou. The most recent addition is tule elk. Long a known and recognized subspecies, the smaller, multi-tined tule elk was not hutable for many years, but thanks to a superb job by California's Department of Fish and Game the tule elk is back, with both herd numbers and hunting opportunity increasing rapidly. Any time there is a new category it can be expected for the World's Record to change hands (or, rather, horns, antlers, or skulls) a few times, escalating upward as the category becomes known and we discover how big that particular animal can really become.

During the 24th Awards Program there were two new World's Records recognized in relatively new categories. Roosevelt's elk were awarded their own category in 1980. Over the course of 20 years the World's Record has shifted upward as a result of older trophies

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World's Record Tule Elk

SCORE: 351 Points
HUNTER: Quentin Hughes
OWNER: Florence Sparks loaned to
B&C National Collection
LOCATION: Solano County, California — 1990

World's Record Mountain Caribou

SCORE: 453 Points
HUNTER: C. Candler Hunt
LOCATION: Prospector Mt.,
Yukon Territory — 1998

World's Record Grizzly Bear

SCORE: 27-5/16 Points
HUNTER: David F. Malzac
LOCATION: Toklat River,
Alaska — 1998

World's Record Rocky Mountain Goat

SCORE: 56-6/8 Points
HUNTERS: Gernot Wober and
Lawrence Michalchuk
OWNER: Gernot Wober
LOCATION: Bella Coola, British
Columbia — 1999



Continued on page 34

PHOTOS BY CLIFF WHITE



PRO SHOPS

First Award Cougar
Roy LePage ▲ 15-15/16



First Award Black Bear
Joseph E. Mindick ▲ 22-13/16



NEW WORLD'S RECORD
First Award Grizzly Bear
David F. Malzac ▲ 27-5/16



First Award Alaska Brown Bear
Michael L. Ward ▲ 30-3/16



First Award
American Elk - Typical
Jerry McKoen ▲ 425-3/8

NEW WORLD'S RECORD
First Award Tule Elk
Quentin Hughes ▲ 351



First Award
American Elk - Non-Typical
Alan D. Hamberlin ▲ 450-6/8



NEW WORLD'S RECORD
First Award Roosevelt's Elk
Karl Minor ▲ 396-5/8



First Award
Columbia Blacktail
Riley F. Bean ▲ 167



First Award
Mule Deer - Typical
Errol R. Raley ▲ 212-7/8



First Award
Mule Deer - Non-Typical
James G. Petersen ▲ 269-6/8



First Award
Sitka Blacktail
James F. Baichtal ▲ 121-6/8



First Award
Coues' Whitetail - Non-Typical
Bruce K. Kidman ▲ 148-4/8



First Award
Whitetail Deer - Typical
Keith S. Brossard ▲ 197-6/8



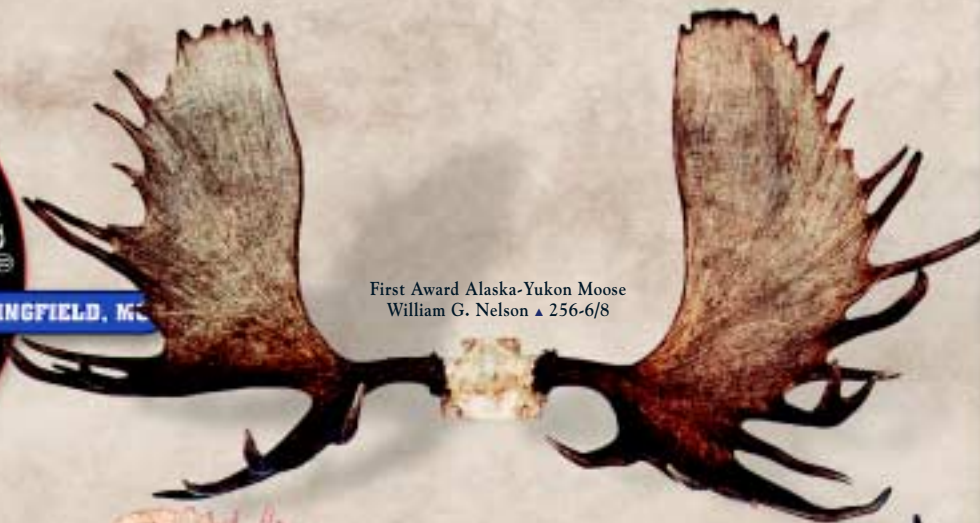
First Award
Whitetail Deer - Non-Typical
Randy J. Simonitch ▲ 266-1/8



First Award
Coues' Whitetail - Typical
Tommy T. Zienka ▲ 124-6/8

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First Award Alaska-Yukon Moose
William G. Nelson ▲ 256-6/8



First Award Pronghorn
Sam Barry ▲ 92-6/8



First Award Muskox
M.R. James ▲ 126-2/8



First Award Canada Moose
Thomas E. Farmer ▲ 219-6/8



First Award Wyoming Moose
Mary A. Isbell ▲ 185-5/8



NEW WORLD'S RECORD
First Award Rocky Mountain Goat
Gernot Wober and Lawrence
Michalchuk ▲ 56-6/8



First Award Central Canada
Barren Ground Caribou
Daniel J. Gartner ▲ 407



NEW WORLD'S RECORD
First Award Mountain Caribou
C. Candler Hunt ▲ 453



First Award Desert Sheep
George R. Harms ▲ 178-6/8



First Award Quebec-
Labrador Caribou
Curt M. Coleman ▲ 415-7/8



First Award Woodland Caribou
Thomas D. Lund ▲ 351-2/8



NEW WORLD'S RECORD
First Award Barren Ground Caribou
Daniel L. Dobbs ▲ 477



TOP: Genrot Wober and David F. Malzac display their new World's Records (Rocky Mountain goat and grizzly bear, respectively) after the 24th Awards Banquet. Both hunters gave extraordinary efforts on their hunts.

BOTTOM: C. Candler Hunt stands next to his new World's Record mountain caribou that was on display for the Club's 24th Big Game Awards Exhibit at Bass Pro Shops. The bull scores 453 points and was taken on a combination hunt for Dall's sheep in Yukon Territory.

PHOTOS BY JACK RENEAU

coming to light and being recognized, and new hunter-taken trophies. In 1997, near Campbell River, British Columbia, on Vancouver Island, Karl W. Minor, Sr., took a huge bull that, at 396-5/8, scores more than eight B&C points above the previous World's Record. Opportunity to hunt Roosevelt's elk, especially in quality management situations, is limited, so it's impossible to speculate whether Minor's record will stand in Awards Periods to come—but it's a spectacular bull, scoring higher than many of us thought possible for Roosevelt's elk.

The 24th Big Game Awards Program marks the first time a tule elk has been recognized as a World's Record within this category. Taken by Quentin Hughes on Grizzly Island, California, in 1990, this huge bull has nine points on each side and scores 351 B&C points. The tule elk happens to be the variety of elk that we have where I live, and I know a little bit about them. As a new category, I won't be surprised if Hughes' great bull is beaten in years to come—especially with tule elk hunting continuing to expand. But his is a very big bull for this compact-racked, multi-tined elk, and his new World's Record sets an excellent mark for the Awards Periods that lie ahead.

It is an unlikely achievement for any given hunter in any given

category to ever take an animal that is crowned as a new World's Record. The odds are clearly better when a new category is established, and a given hunter's odds are also better when the hunting opportunities are sharply limited. The tule elk is a great example on both counts—brand new category and a limited number of permits. The advantage is greatly reduced with Roosevelt's elk; the category has been in place for 20 years, and this elk is hunted from northern California to British Columbia—but the best places for trophy Roosevelt are clearly northern California and Vancouver Island, where permits are sharply limited. Those who obtain the permits have exceptional odds for great trophies. This was borne out in the 24th Awards, which recognized three Roosevelt's elk: Minor's World's Record and two great bulls from northern California.

HARD HUNTING AND GOOD FORTUNE

There are a number of North American animals that are plentiful and are readily hunted, but are not subjected to exceptional or unusual management practices where they occur. This is a subjective judgment, but I put the caribou, moose, and blacktails in this group. Certainly, within any given category, there are some places that consistently produce bigger trophies than other areas. In these cases, it seems to me to be largely a matter of genetics and minerals, rather than exceptional management and limited hunting opportunity. Clearly there is effective management, because despite tremendous demand there remains very good hunting opportunity. However, it's difficult to pick a spot on the map that might give exceptional odds for a potential World's Record of any of the caribou or moose, or for a Columbia or Sitka blacktail.

It is an exceptional and noteworthy achievement when any World's Record is taken, requiring at an absolute minimum for the hunter to seize an opportunity and take advantage of it. But with these animals it is almost impossible to predict who might be so fortunate among the many hunters who pursue these species . . . or where such

an event might take place. In the 24th Awards there were no new World's Records for moose or black-tail (Sitka or Columbia) . . . but there were new World's Records in two of the five caribou categories.

Interestingly, neither fortunate hunter was in caribou country primarily to hunt caribou. In September 1998, Georgian C. Candler Hunt was on a combination sheep/caribou hunt in Yukon Territory with outfitter Tim Mervin. Sheep was his primary objective; caribou were an afterthought . . . a darned good afterthought, as it turned out. After harvesting his Dall's ram Mervin and guide Jake Gunson worked their way back to the airstrip, hunting caribou along the way. They saw very few caribou—but they saw the right caribou, and Hunt took a wonderful bull that edged by just one point the World's Record that has stood since 1976.

A year later, in September 1999, West Virginian Daniel L. Dobbs was in outfitter Chris Goll's country in the northern part of the Alaskan Peninsula, his primary goal to take a big Alaska brown bear. He was successful in taking his bear very early in the hunt . . . but it wasn't the big bear he was hoping for. So he and assistant guide Mark Freshwaters spiked out for caribou, with Dan Dobbs vowing to "make up for it with a big caribou."

Yes, he did. On the fourth day Freshwaters glassed a bull with unbelievable antlers at a distance of about a mile. They scrambled to cut him off, and Dan Dobbs took a magnificent bull that was not only the new World's Record barren ground caribou, but at 477 points, nearly 10 points larger than the former World's Record. Dobbs' bull is now the largest caribou among any of the five categories recognized by Boone and Crockett.

Then there are some World's Records that many of us consider unbeatable, at least in the near future. This may be because of the incredible size of the current record, diminishing hunting opportunity, changing population dynamics, current management practice—or, more likely, a combination of all four. For instance, it seems extremely unlikely that L.S. Chadwick's World's Record Stone's

sheep will ever be beaten. Not only is the Chadwick Ram, taken in 1936, unbelievably huge; there is now much more hunting pressure in the limited Stone's sheep range, and far fewer rams live to full maturity than was the case in Chadwick's day. Doug Burris' Worlds Record mule deer, ranking as such since 1972, is another example of a "seemingly unbeatable" record. Not only are mule deer in decline in much of the West, but management for quantity over quality has greatly reduced the opportunity for outsized trophies. And, then there's the World's Record desert sheep, taken by a native American in 1940. Its size is huge, and although there are more desert sheep now than just a couple of decades ago, hunting opportunity is very limited.

However, in the world of trophy hunting one must never say "never." The 24th Big Game Awards Program did not see any new World's Record Stone's sheep, mule deer, or desert bighorns, and maybe no future awards period ever will. But two other "unbeatable" records fell during the 24th Big Game Awards Program, and these must make one wonder whether any World's Record is truly unbeatable.

A WORLD'S RECORD GRIZZLY BEAR

On page 42 of this issue you will see the full (and altogether fabulous) story of the taking of this mighty bear. In my mind this bear must rank as one of the all-time greatest North American trophies. It did not receive the Club's highest honor, the Sagamore Hill Award, so the question "why" is begged. I was not part of those deliberations, so can only speculate, but typically when the Sagamore Hill Award is given the hunt as well as the trophy is being recognized. The hunt for this great bear was a wonderful adventure, but the bear was taken during the course of a moose hunt, not a specific hunt for this great bear. No matter; at 27-5/16, David F. Malzac's grizzly bear, taken on Alaska's Toklat River in September 1998, is now the new World's Record grizzly bear, beating by 3/16-inch of skull measurement the record that has stood since 1970.

The reason I rate this as such

a wonderful achievement is two-fold. First, the grizzly bear is unquestionably one of the world's great game animals. Although it's another subjective judgment, a really big grizzly bear is, to my mind, North America's greatest trophy. Second, and more significant for this particular discussion, opportunity to hunt grizzly bears (not necessarily bear numbers) is diminishing rapidly. The current Top Ten in the all-time records book lists fully four bears taken since 1990, so clearly the giants still walk—but a new World's Record grizzly bear is really something!

SAGAMORE HILL GOAT

The Club's highest honor, the Sagamore Hill Award, did go to Gernot Wober recognizing his efforts in taking a Rocky Mountain goat that ties the 1949 World's Record at 56-6/8 points. Wober and his hunting partner, Lawrence Michalchuk, backpacked into tough country near Bella Coola, British Columbia, initially spotting several goats but not quite what they were looking for.

For reasons I have never quite understood goat hunting doesn't have quite the mystique of sheep hunting—but it's actually a more difficult undertaking. Goats often live in much more difficult country than sheep, and judging their trophy quality is a great deal more difficult. Rocky Mountain goats are short-horned creatures, so a relatively small amount of horn separates a huge trophy from an average head—this compounded even more by the fact that nannies carry similar horns that are often longer, but less massive, than a billy goat's headgear. Goats do tend to be highly visible, but the difficulty lies in knowing what you're looking at, getting close enough for a shot, and recovering your game. It isn't unusual to glass goats that simply cannot be reached by human beings or, if they can be taken, could not be safely recovered.

Wober and Michalchuk found themselves in exactly this situation. They glassed a goat that they were certain was huge . . . but it was at the base of some cliffs they couldn't negotiate from their present location. They talked about this goat for two

more days, then retraced their steps, lightened their loads, and went in from a different angle. They fought devil's club and slide alder for hours—and in the late afternoon, after Michalchuk's bow stalk failed, Gernot Wober shot the huge old billy.

The presentation of the Sagamore Hill Award to Wober reflects the dogged determination of him and his partner in taking this particular animal, as well as the quality of the trophy itself. As a hunting achievement the taking of a new World's Record Rocky Mountain goat is extremely significant.

I commented to George Betas that "there are Rocky Mountain goats dying of old age across much of their range." This is true. Rocky Mountain goats live among some of the roughest, steepest, most dangerous terrain in North America, and unlike many North American species, many Rocky Mountain goats live out their lives without ever seeing a human being. Especially in many northern sheep ranges they are underhunted, so the potential for great trophies is very good for hunters like Gernot Wober and Lawrence Michalchuk, who penetrate the tough stuff and look for big ones.

Their accomplishment is even more spectacular when you take a look at the current all-time standings. The 11th edition of *Records of North American Big Game* reflects a three-way tie for seventh place and a five-way tie for tenth place. So, in effect, the "Top Ten" actually represents 14 superlative goats. Of these 14, only four (sixth place, one tie for seventh place, and two ties for tenth place) were taken as recently as the 1990s. The rest of the 14 were taken between 1933 and 1979. So while I believe there are big goats dying of old age even as I write these lines, very few hunters in recent years have sought these big, old goats successfully! The goat that the team of Wober and Michalchuk tied was taken clear back in 1949—another seemingly "unbeatable" record that was indeed equaled! ▲▲▲

The complete list of Awards given follows. Note that awards are generally in direct relationship to the final score, but not always. The Place Awards and Honorable Mention are intended to recognize hunter-taken trophies, while Certificates of Merit are generally available for "pick ups," trophies of unknown origin, bison from the lower 48 states, and trophies owned by someone other than the hunter.

The scores shown will determine where these trophies will be listed in *Boone and Crockett Club's 24th Big Game Awards*, available in September 2001, as well as the next edition (12th) of the all-time records book, expected in 2005. To approximate the rank, compare the score with the appropriate category in the 11th Edition of, *Records of North American Big Game* (1999).