

# BUCK OF A LIFETIME

**On the morning of November 26, 2022, I awoke with excitement. My younger brother Kody had taken his first Coues' deer on opening morning the day prior. It was an impressive 93-inch buck, and I was ready for what the day had in store. A close friend of my dad's had been scouting for Coues' deer a little over a mile away from us the day Kody harvested his buck. Dad's friend had glassed up a really big buck. Dad and I knew we had a great chance at taking this buck because my dad and grandfather have been hunting this area on and off for more than 34 years and had also killed some great bucks there.**

Leading up to our late November deer hunt, we spent a lot of time after my dad's Arizona bull elk hunt getting ready for our upcoming hunts. Kody and I had junior javelina tags, which we filled in October and November. While hunting javelina, we glassed some good shooter bucks and made a plan for our deer hunt that was quickly approaching.

On the day of the hunt, we arrived at our hunting destination, and thankfully, no one was parked where we normally do. We could see headlights in the distance, but we were not concerned. The game was on to find the

buck we had a photo of. Not too far in the distance were my grandfather and his hunting partner, who both played a huge part in the success of my big game portfolio. We quickly started glassing from the truck before hiking onto a ridge that we wanted to be on. While working our way in, we spooked a couple of does. After about 20 minutes of hiking and getting poked by mesquite trees, cactus, and nasty cat's claw, we were finally glassing for the buck.

As the sun crept over the horizon, we saw a few does. Suddenly we picked up a 90-inch buck pushing a doe. We continued glassing when I heard my dad say, "I found a good buck, guys." I did not know if this was the buck we had a photo of, but Dad was excited, so I knew it was a shooter buck. We discussed a game plan and started our stalk. We would stop about every 50 to 75 yards to check and verify he was still around. We found a solid 100-inch buck at 630 yards along the way, directly between us and the buck we were after. Dad had taken his eyes off his binoculars and pointed to where the buck was. When he looked back up again to locate him, he was gone. The Coues' deer was living up to its nickname of "the grey ghost."

We shifted back to our original plan and were

quickly closing the distance. As we rounded the edge of the ridge, a buck jumped out of its bed to the left of us about 60 yards away. My brother and I softly yelled at Dad. "Dad! Dad! There's a buck! Dad! Buck!" When he turned around and saw the buck trotting away, he knew it was a good buck. I got into the prone position with my Remington 7mm-08 and located the buck in my scope at 335 yards going up the ridge we had just hiked down. It would not stop long enough for me to take an ethical shot. The buck reached the skyline, and I heard, "Stop! Stop! Stop! It's getting too close to the top of the ridge. Let him go. Don't shoot."

With my heart pumping, we quickly discussed that the 100-inch buck we had seen earlier had moved slightly and bedded in the short time our eyes were off him. We all looked at each other and then turned to find our buck still on the mountain ridge. By now, he was hanging about three feet below the skyline. We maneuvered ourselves to the top of a little knoll to find a perfect spot to shoot prone. I got the bipod and rifle into position while Dad ranged the buck at 485 yards. Since we had nowhere else to go to get a closer shot, it was all or nothing.

Dad watched through his binoculars as the buck



walked just below and parallel to the skyline. We feared he might top over soon and were waiting patiently for the perfect opportunity for him to drop down to get a safe shot. The buck decided to turn away from us, and over the ridge he went. We talked for a few minutes, summing up the scenarios that had just played out over the last hour or so. Dad returned behind his binoculars to search the ridgeline, wondering if he might pop back over our way. Not very long after my dad put his binoculars up to his eyes, my brother and I heard, "I see the tips of his horns walking back the opposite way he went."

## MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

All youth hunters 16 years old or younger, who have a trophy accepted in our 32nd Awards (2022-2024) will receive an invitation to our Generation Next banquet, which will be held in the summer of 2025.

WE HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE!

I got back down on my stomach and behind my rifle, trying to search for the buck in my scope. I kept hearing Dad ask me if I could see him, and I finally found the buck. He was proceeding back over the ridge in full view, and I had the mountain as the perfect backdrop. "Whenever you're ready, squeeze the trigger," he said. I positioned my finger on the trigger just like I'd practiced. Then I slowly squeezed the trigger on the spot I picked out on his shoulder. I waited for the surprise, and "BOOM." I looked up at Dad to find his reaction. I waited a few seconds. "Well, did I get him?" He slowly turned to me, shaking, and said with a big smile, "You damn sure did. You got him. Congratulations!" I received a huge hug, knowing I had just killed my second Coues' deer, and anxiously wondered how good this buck really was.

After a few minutes of gathering our emotions, we developed a game plan for approaching the buck. We marked the spot from where I shot and pushed our way up the mountain. Time seemed to take forever as the mesquite trees and cat's claw slowed us down from our destination. We were around 20 yards from where we had seen the buck go down. Dad put me in front of him as we were closing the distance. I saw the buck lying on the ground just beyond some brush. I turned to Dad with my face in awe. It was the biggest buck I had ever seen, dead or alive. "You did it. That's the big buck we have the photo of. You killed it!" Dad said. Hugs and congratulations were never-ending. My

dad knew this was the big buck the whole time but didn't want me to get excited or nervous before the job was done.

As we returned to the truck, I realized this was my second Coues' deer and my biggest buck ever. Dad said it would take a lot of work to top it. I was blessed to shoot a buck of this caliber, but more importantly, I harvested a buck bigger than Dad's biggest buck—and had a wonderful hunt with family and friends, making it even more special. ■



RILEY WITH HER "GREY GHOST."

