Annual Statewide Hunt Forecast

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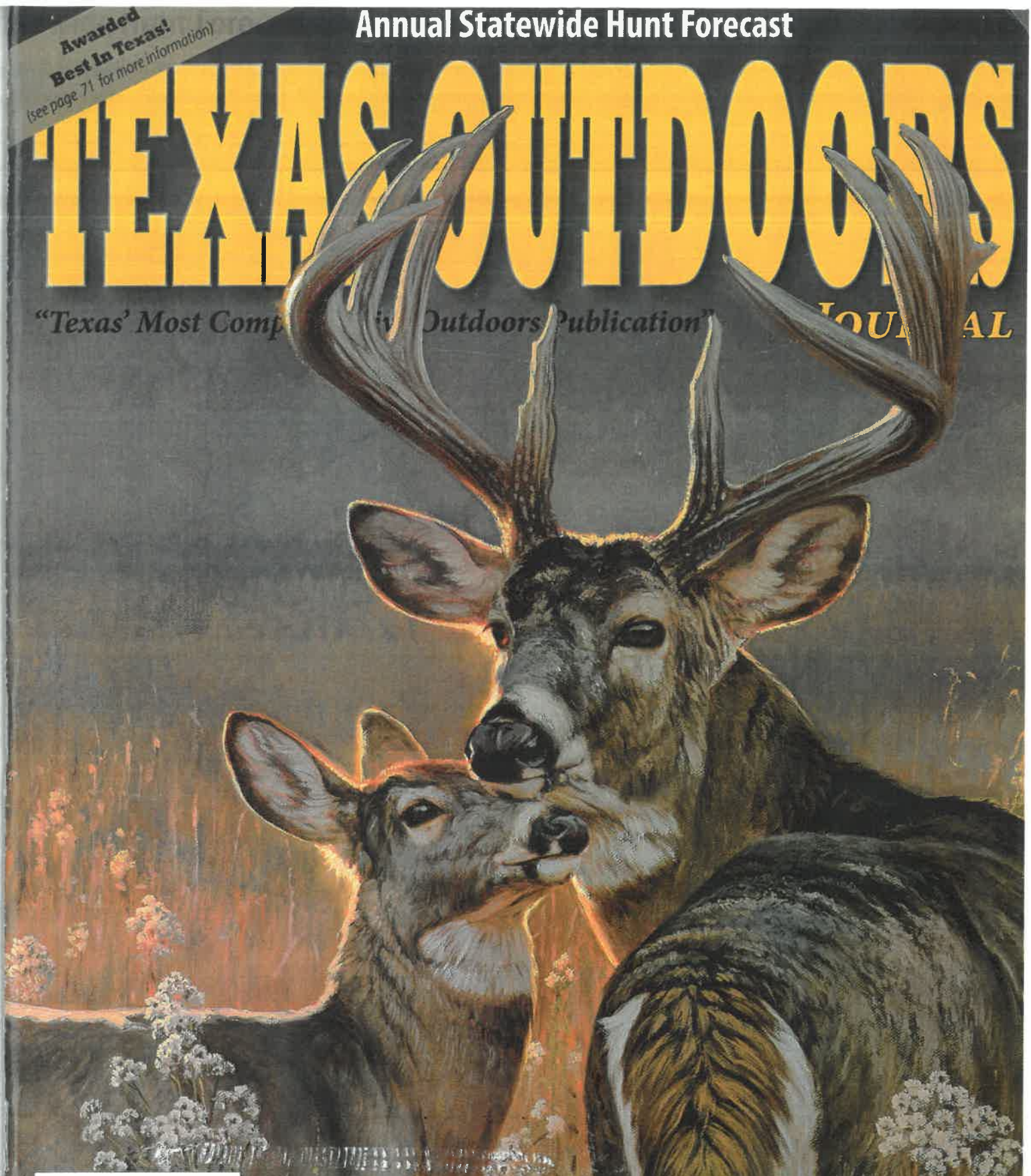

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Spicing Up Hunting Season | Great Start to Hunting Seasons

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A Great Start To Hunting Season

Nature runs in cycles. Where I have always hunted it seems like Thanksgiving is the rut kick-off date. However, that doesn't mean every buck in in the area got the notice nor have they all gone crazy over all of the doe being in estrus on that exact date.

Texas is so big and spread out at times it almost seems like you are hunting weatherwise in a different continent. It varies so much from one region to the next.

What if things aren't happening yet as the season begins to unfold? With an abundance of native and exotic species available focus on another game specie or sex of deer. There's free ranging black buck, axis deer, scimitar oryx, hogs everywhere, as well as aoudads to mention a few. The optimistic approach is if things aren't working out with your original plan you have innumerable options available.

If you plan on shooting a cull buck later in the season, shoot him now. It's not going to mess up your chance to shoot Muy Grande with plenty of time for game and area to settle down.

I can think of three logical reasons to shoot a cull buck or surplus doe early.

PHOTOS BY TOM CLAYCOMB III

Two choices of animals that are more and more frequently seen free ranging and on game ranches in Texas — axis deer and blackbuck antelope.

You save valuable winter feed for the rest of the herd. It keeps inferior bucks from passing on their substandard genes.

Plus, a buck shot early is fat and much better eating. It hasn't been running day, and night chasing does. A young buck shot early will be the best tasting venison you have ever tasted. Doe on the other hand probably haven't cycled back into estrus yet.

Hunting axis deer is the Texas version of elk hunting. A good spot/stalk hunt rivals a Colorado elk hunt.

If you planned on shooting a few does the end of season why not shoot one or two now? Granted there are advantages/disadvantages in shooting does early in the season. Let's talk about a few.

The downside, if there is one about shooting does early is you might want all the does possible around your feeders when the rut hits. That way there are numerous does in heat around your feeders and drawing in bucks.

The upside to shooting does early is it leaves more winter feed for the rest of the herd. If you're going to shoot her anyway, why not do it earlier and leave more forage for the rest of the herd?

If things indeed are slow, why not shoot a few hogs to shove in the freezer to later add to your deer when you make sausage? Some people think eating wild

hogs are nasty. Not so at all. You'll regularly eat domestic hogs raised on a hog farm that lives and wallows in fresh pig poop all day long. At least a wild hog is free-ranging and offers real organic meat.

Yes, some of the big old boars can be rank but I've eaten boars up to 350 pounds that were fine. It is easy to discern when you're processing your hog. Slice off a thin slice of the sirloin. Run into the kitchen and fry up your sample. If it reeks or taste horrible, don't save the hog.

This way you have your hog meat ready when you get your deer. I'm not going to get into making sausage. That is a whole article in and of itself and I've written about it numerous times. It is too easy to make excellent sausage with all of the blends available on the market. I just ate some recently made with Hi Mountain seasoning blends. So, take a few hogs whenever you have the chance and save the meat.

For exotics — who knows how many free-range or game ranch opportunities we have. I'm not sure I can even identify half of the species that walked past me the last few decades. Let's start with axis deer.

I love hunting spotted deer. To begin, they have the most beautiful hides in the world. As I'm typing this article I looked behind me at a beautiful hide Conroe Taxidermy tanned for me. That's the only bad deal about shooting an axis, you feel like it's a sin if you don't save every hide.

To my knowledge, June through August is the hot month for the axis deer rut but breeding can occur year-round. If you can't afford to go on a Colorado elk hunt, no biggee. Just go on a Texas axis deer hunt. It is almost the same with Hill Country terrain that looks like mini-mountains. I love hunting axis deer in the rut.

Get out in the woods before daylight. When things are rolling you may hear bucks roar or barking in three different spots at once. How exciting! Which one do you go after? It is just like elk hunting during the rut other than a bull bugle while the buck bark.

You'll have to stalk close as possible and to get a shot. My first axis hunt was with the Umarex .50 caliber airgun Hammer. It was a magical hunt and I fell in love with hunting axis deer immediately and now go every chance I get.

Instead of being stuck in a blind you're out on their turf stalking them. You'll need to play the wind, wear scent blockers/ covers and wear good camo. You've got to be on top of your game. Hunting axis deer is so challenging and fun so if the whitetails aren't cooperating, go after their Indian/Nepal cousins.

Something that will increase the challenge and liven up your hunt is to change what you hunt with. An Umarex Air Sabre is fun and effective.

I've never hunted blackbucks but have seen plenty over the years. They too are a beautiful animal when they daintily prance out. My brother-in-law loves hunting for them. I'm still trying to schedule a hunt for them. Blackbuck is just another option if things aren't happening for whitetails.

Another great option are fallow deer. I had a great hunt on my cousin's ranch a few years ago. I was hunting with a .45-70 Henry's lever action. I've never mounted a scope on a lever action but started doing so on that hunt. I was able to stalk in close enough and get a nice fat doe.

Something takes the pressure off of a trophy hunter if he is not successful in the regular hunting season, is an exotic like this nilgai cow to fill the freezer with excellent quality meat.

It doesn't hurt to reduce the coyote population. They're death on fawns and birthing does.

What if the deer are still not rutting, why not try your luck at an orbuck. I don't know of any free ranging orbuck so you'll probably have to hunt a game ranch to get one. They are a huge, beautiful animal. One orbuck will probably fill your meat freezer and feed the family for the winter. This paragraph also applies to Bill Olson's favorite eating exotic-Nilgai.

Another free-ranging or game ranch exotic is Aoudad. I've seen quite a few aoudads on high fence ranches. I would love to do an aoudad hunt somewhere like in the Big Bend country or the Palo Duro Canyon are in the Panhandle. How cool would that be?

Even though they're from the dry Northern mountain country in Africa I'd feel like I was hunting them on their turf. I'd feel like I was hunting something close to big horn sheep.

Picking up archery hunting will add to your hunting challenge.

Since you'd be out West hunting them in cowboy country with my Henry's lever action .45-70? I've tried to get a hunt lined up a few times but haven't been able to make it happen yet. I've got to figure out a way to make this hunt happen.

OK, I don't want to be a hater but, don't forget, whitetails are the kings of Texas. I love the opportunity to hunt all of the free ranging exotics as much as anyone else but deep down, being raised on hunting whitetails only as a kid I somewhat fear whitetails are being run out of their own country.

As a kid, the only exotic game I ever even heard of was on the YO ranch. We hunted on a ranch down by Tarpley. An old German rancher got mad America went to war with Germany and put a high fence around his ranch and went into seclusion. That ranch and the YO ranch were the only two high fenced ranches I ever heard of back in about 1960. With that said, don't feel bad about thinning out the free ranging exotics. It'll help keep whitetails as the king.

If things have momentarily gone awry on your big buck plans don't panic, you're in Texas. There are countless side opportunities, many of which I haven't even discussed.

I like to shoot trophy animals as much as anyone but if all you do is trophy hunt, prepare to endure some long dry boring spells. Myself, I love hunting and the hunt. I love processing my own game and eating what I've harvested.

Recently my wife Katy and I picked over 55 pounds of tomatoes and made salsa until nearly 11:00 pm. We're set for the year on salsa. We are into the do-it-yourself side of hunting, processing and side dishes.

I just picked seven bags of apples and am going to pick six or seven more. We'll make a winters worth of applesauce plus freeze some apples to make apple crisp for the rest of the year.

We've got a bit of fish in the freezer. Now I'm just waiting for hunting season to fill up the freezer with wild game. I'll have to make 30-60 pounds of sausage and then the Claycomb family will be set. I love getting our winters worth of food on my own outdoors instead of at a store.

If you set too rigid of standards

If the deer hunting is slow, you can switch over to turkey hunting in many areas in Texas.

and all you do is trophy whitetail hunt PERIOD! I think you're missing out on what hunting is all about. Fellowship, supplying food for your family, helping with the management of the game herds and getting outdoors enjoying God's creations.

Let's close on one more angle. Something that might make doe hunting more fun/challenging/palatable is to hunt with something other than your finely tune high powered rifle. Try something a little more challenging. Try an open-sight Henry's lever action, or an airgun like the Umarex .50 caliber Hammer, or an Umarex Air Sabre which shoots arrows. A compound or recurve bow are two more options. I've hunted big game with all of them. It's more challenging and you feel like you've accomplished something even if you just shoot a doe with one of the "primitive" tools.

So, I encourage you to get out this season and plan on having a fun season-no matter where you end up hunting, what you hunt or hunt with. TOJ

When it is all said and done, at the end of the season, if you get a big whitetail buck, you're the king.