

One of the founding partners of North American Whitetail shares his thoughts on the magazine's amazing history and on some of the profound contributions NAW has made to the whitetail industry.

By David Morris (reprinted from North American Whitetail, September 22, 2010)

I don't remember exactly who called me back in 1981. It may have been Danny Allen or perhaps Dr. Carroll Mann, both of whom were principles in the Wake County Wildlife Club in Raleigh, North Carolina. They had just come up with the idea of a "deer show" and wanted to know if I would join Dr. James Kroll, Fred Bear and a fellow named Dick Idol as a speaker at the first annual "Dixie Deer Classic," one of the very first such events of its kind.



At the time, I was co-owner/editor of Game & Fish Publications, publishers of several state and regional hunting and fishing magazines, including one in the Carolinas. I was also owner/manager of Burnt Pine Plantation in Middle Georgia. But more than that, I was a deer nut, so I eagerly accepted the invitation, little realizing that doing so would be the first step in the birth of a new magazine that would lead the way in the coming whitetail revolution.

This 1983 article in NAW's third issue features the author posed with an outstanding 12-pointer from South Texas. At the time, South Texas was just coming into its own as a "fabled land teeming with trophy whitetails." The cover of that same July-August 1983 issue also featured NAW co-founder Steve Vaughn with an equally impressive South Texas trophy.

Danny Allen picked me up at the airport, and upon arrival at the show, I found the place electric with excitement and abuzz with talk of whitetails. As I walked around the show, it didn't take long for my eyes to be opened to just how many like-minded deer nuts were actually out there. I was amazed that so many deer hunters shared my passion for big bucks. Over the next two days, I was immersed in whitetail mania the likes of which I had never experienced. And it didn't end when the show hours wound down.

A GATHERING OF FANATICS

It was inevitable that by the end of the first day, the "nuttiest" of the deer nuts had found one another and begun to gather together. When the show doors closed, several whitetail addicts, including me, continued our discussions over dinner and libations. Included among that group were George Cooper, Dr. Carroll Mann, Carson Smith, Dr. James C. Kroll, Danny Allen and a new acquaintance I had already decided was the nuttiest of all the deer nuts there — Raleigh native Dick Idol.

Dick was obsessed with big whitetails. True, nearly everybody at our little gathering was a professed big-buck hunter, but our "big" was relative to where we hunted, meaning for us Southerners "nice 8- or 10-pointers." But Dick's definition of big was not based on the limits of local perspective — his "big" meant the biggest in the world! And he had just acquired

something that changed all of our perspectives of big whitetails — the famous Fred Goodwin Collection of photos and racks of strange, unusual and giant whitetails, the first ever great collection of monster whitetail paraphernalia unlike anything ever before assembled.

Even though Dick had only a small part of the collection at the show, what he had was sufficient to open up a whole new world of giant whitetails for us all . . . and send my mind racing down a path that would eventually lead to the premier deer-only magazine on the continent for the next 25 years, North American Whitetail.

AN IDEA IS BORN

Because I was a magazine man, it was the photos Dick brought with him, mostly from Fred's collection but some from various other sources Dick had ferreted out, that really enthralled me. I was so amazed and awed by the astounding array of photos depicting big and sometimes bizarre bucks, as well as nostalgic camp and hunting scenes, that I couldn't help but think others likewise would be amazed . . . perhaps sufficiently to pay money to delve into this realm of big whitetails. (By the way, one of the photos Dick had at the show was of the now-famous "Hole In The Horn" Buck with the inscription "Kent, Ohio." From that picture, we eventually tracked down that buck and brought what many still consider the greatest non-typical of all time to the attention of the whitetail world.)

With the idea of a big-deer magazine rolling around in my mind, I returned to our magazine offices in Marietta, Georgia, anxious to share what I had experienced and seen with my partners — Steve Vaughn, Chuck Larsen and Chip Gerry. But I wasn't depending on just words to convince them of the salability of big bucks and the "other worldly" realm of giant whitetails out there just waiting to be revealed to an evermore eager hunting market. Before leaving the show, I had shared my developing idea of publishing some sort of deer-only magazine with Dick and convinced him to let me take back a few dozen photos to help convince my partners that monster bucks would wow the market and would sell!

When we sat down and I began to describe the deer fever at the Dixie Deer Classic and the throngs of people who had gathered to share in their common love of the sport, there were plenty of nods of agreement and comments acknowledging the undeniable allure of deer hunting, especially big-deer hunting.

When I began to tell them about the new world of big-buck hunting that existed beyond our own regional experience, they were intrigued and excited. I could see the wheels beginning to turn. Then I produced the pictures. Two days later, Steve Vaughn and I were on an airplane headed to Dick Idol's home in Seeley Lake, Montana, having decamped Raleigh in favor of western Montana because of, you guessed it, the region's big bucks.

A WHITETAIL SHRINE

Dick's home was a virtual big-buck museum, with a magical air. Our first day in Montana was spent gawking at the mounts, racks and photos of the outlandish bucks Dick had accumulated. It didn't take us long to know for certain that such dream bucks would have the same appeal to the rest of the country's serious hunters as they did to us, even if most of us hunters were unlikely to ever even see such a buck in the wild, let alone shoot one for ourselves. Still, as with beautiful

but unattainable women, we certainly like to look and dream, perhaps in the hope than someday, just maybe . . .

Steve and I cut our deal for exclusive publishing rights to Dick's photos and stories and left Montana making plans to publish some sort of magazine for serious whitetail hunters centered around trophy bucks. What we had not yet decided was whether this new publication was going to be an ongoing periodical published several times a year or an "annual type" publication printed once or twice each year during peak season. We just weren't sure if the interest in trophy whitetails was sufficient to support an ongoing magazine devoted entirely to whitetails.

With that concern in mind, we hedged our bets. We assembled the first issue and put it on the newsstands in the fall of 1982, without a date or edition designation. If it sold well, we had another edition in the hopper and were prepared to make the magazine a regular periodical. If it didn't sell well, we would let the first magazine stand alone as a special publication or an annual.

The answer came very quickly as the magazines flew from the racks. We hastily completed the second installment and got it to the newsstand with date and edition designation (February 1983). And thus North American Whitetail magazine was born!

WHERE HAS THE TIME GONE?

Now, 25 years later, I can only shake my head at the doubt we had about whether the market was large enough to support a deer-only magazine about big whitetails. The answer, of course, is a resounding "Yes!" — far beyond anything we could have imagined. Today, countless deer magazines adorn the newsstand racks, and whitetail hunting has emerged as the largest hunting interest in the world. It supports the U.S. hunting industry almost single-handedly.

Nobody could have predicted the explosion that has taken place in the whitetail world during the last 25 years. Where the once familiar cosmopolitan whitetail was practically taken for granted, it's now revered by countless hunters and considered to be "the greatest game animal on earth." Certainly, it is the most popular and most plentiful big game animal on earth. No other animal on the planet has the following that whitetails have . . . not even close! Nor is there any other big game animal anywhere that can rival its numbers — some 20 million strong at this writing.

And I don't know of any other animal that inspires so many to such passion as does the whitetail, especially big, mature bucks. Dick Idol said something to me at that first Dixie Deer Classic that rings true today for not only me but also for countless other hunters. "You may hunt all the other great game animals of the world once or twice, and you'll love the experience, but once you've hunted big whitetails, it's them that you'll keep coming back to again and again."

REACHING NEW PLATEAUS

What has been the reason for this meteoric rise in the whitetail's popularity? Several things. One is the fact that whitetail populations have grown and spread into virtually every available niche over the last 25 years. Whitetails are everywhere — from city suburbs to the wild, remote places, from the tip of Florida to the forests of New Brunswick, and from Mexico to the vast wilderness of northern Canada . . . and everywhere in between.

But it's more than just the numbers and ready access to whitetails that have carried them to new heights in popularity. In fact, there was a time when the numbers themselves, along with indiscriminate and excessive buck harvests, threatened to take some of the luster off the sport. Overcrowding and, in many cases, excessive buck pressure stood to curb the enthusiasm of increasingly experienced and quality-conscious hunters.

You see, deer hunters as a group have evolved in their experience and their expectations. First, to just kill a deer was enough. Size didn't really matter. Next, with a buck or two down, the goal was to run up an impressive tally. Then, with more experience and success, the priority became to take bucks using different techniques and equipment — archery, rifle, muzzleloader, etc. Then, with enough bucks under the belt, the emphasis shifted to quality. This is when overcrowding and over-harvest of bucks became an obstacle to be overcome for the more serious and experienced hunters who set the pace in the industry.

Happily, two things came to the rescue. The first, and lesser of the two, was that hunters began to travel far and wide in search of bigger whitetails. More than any other publication, North American Whitetail led the way in opening up new territories and featuring the great trophy whitetail hotspots of North America. Mexico, South Texas, Montana, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Iowa, Illinois, Kansas and other trophy destinations became a standard part of the whitetail nomenclature. A huge industry grew out of this search for giant bucks.

And to this day, every fall sees a huge migration of hunters to the great trophy whitetail lands of the continent. Also to this day, a preponderance of them depend on North American Whitetail to keep them informed and updated on the old standbys and to point the way to the latest “best last places.”

THE LEADER IN THE FIELD

The second, and by far the most important and enduring of the two factors that rescued our sport from poor quality animals and the subsequent threat of waning interest, was the great hope of hunting: deer management. Happily, the whitetail is one of the most manageable species on earth — it can be managed intensively, even in close association with man and on small tracts, with remarkable cause-and-effect results . . . without ever losing its wildness, challenge and intrigue.

And in management, North American Whitetail once again led the way, not just in encouraging management and reporting on management strategies and techniques, but also in actually conducting the research and playing a key role in developing the food plot management strategies now sweeping the nation. Food plots and nutritional management have changed everything we thought we knew about whitetail management, especially on small tracts.

At Steve Vaughn's Fort Perry Plantation in Georgia, North American Whitetail conducted a 12-year research study that pioneered food plot management and nutrition. This study was done in conjunction with Dr. James C. Kroll and Stephen F. Austin University. And while our study was going on in Georgia, Dr. Gary Schwarz was independently developing almost the exact food plot strategies on his Tecomate Ranch in South Texas, under the scientific oversight of the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Institute.

The landmark research done and the management strategies developed on Fort Perry Plantation and Tecomate Ranch opened up a new frontier of game management. Ultimately it allowed managers to grow more and bigger bucks and hold them closer to home than most ever thought possible. Today, the food plot management strategy developed on those two properties has changed the face of deer management forever. North American Whitetail was an integral part of this process, and the magazine led the way in reporting it.

Because of sound management, today is the “good old days” of trophy whitetail hunting. Furthermore, as management becomes more widespread, I believe even better times lie ahead. And the great thing about management is that it involves the managers/landowners (and their families) in the sport and land stewardship far beyond just the hunting season. Management and related activities become year-round endeavors, often for the whole family.

Everyone involved becomes more knowledgeable and appreciative of the land and its wildlife. And the payoff management success brings encourages more people to buy and manage their own land, and this obviously promotes better land and wildlife stewardship. It also makes small and heretofore nonproductive tracts more valuable, thereby encouraging their preservation as game lands instead of, say, shopping centers. All in all, management stands as the great hope for wildlife in the years ahead. North American Whitetail has contributed significantly to the development of management strategies that will take us into this bright future. The magazine has also played a key role in helping to disseminate this knowledge to an eager and evermore involved and capable whitetail hunting community!

Finally, I want to mention one more thing North American Whitetail has given to the whitetail world over the last 25 years. It’s what I am most proud of — the people of Whitetail magazine. Some have worked behind the scenes while others have become household names to many serious whitetail hunters. These people have contributed so much to the sport of deer hunting. There are far too many to name them all, but I must mention a few who “grew up” with Whitetail magazine and made their mark through its pages.

People like Steve Vaughn, Chuck Larsen, Dick Idol, Gordon Whittington, Duncan Dobie, Dr. James C. Kroll, Ken Dunwoody, Aaron Pass, Mike Biggs, Leonard Lee Rue, III, Greg Miller, Curt Helmick, Gene Wensel, Dr. Charles T. Arnold — these and many others contributed greatly to the magazine and to the whitetail community in general. They helped mold it into what it is today. Indisputably, whitetail hunting now drives and financially underpins the U.S. hunting market and has risen to the heights of becoming the greatest hunting sport on earth!

Nothing else even comes close. And the people of Whitetail, those mentioned and many others, are the people who made North American Whitetail the continent’s “Premier Deer Hunting Magazine” for the last 25 years. Perhaps those named, and others who come after them, will continue to do so for the next 25 years as well!

Read more:

http://www.northamericanwhitetail.com/2010/09/22/weirdwhitetails_naw_1207_02/#ixzz2dGwl7a7g