

KENTUCKY'S

Five stories from an
exceptional year

Trophy Deer

THERE ARE MANY ways to gauge success. But by any measure, the 2012 deer season was certainly special for Devin Hull of Maysville, because he introduced his girlfriend from Ohio, Leslie Pfeffer, to the sport of whitetail hunting. She not only enjoyed the experience, but she also took her first deer – a doe.

“Last fall, she was really looking forward to deer season,” Hull said. “But this time, she wanted to wait for an opportunity to take a buck. Unfortunately, as the season got near, we discovered that between our two work schedules, there was only going to be one day that we could hunt together. With that in mind, plus her added expense of needing a non-resident license, I suggested she delay her second deer hunt outing until the following year (2014).”

For Pfeffer, waiting an additional year to go hunting wasn't an option. Regardless of the license cost and available hunt time, she wasn't about to pass up the 2013 deer season.

On Monday afternoon, following the opening weekend of gun season, the couple traveled to a farm in Mason County located along the north fork of the Licking River. Because of recent logging, much of the farm's wooded acreage was composed of thick second-growth timber and brush.

“I had hunted the farm briefly during the weekend and found numerous scrapes and rubs within a strip of big trees along the stream corridor,” Hull said. “Because of the concentration of buck sign and fairly open understory, I thought that particular location would be a good place for us to sit.”

Following a light snow earlier that morning, the weather had remained cold. After sitting and watching for about two hours, Pfeffer asked her boyfriend if they

could walk around to warm up.

“I usually don't like to move around that time of the evening,” Hull said. “But I thought it might not be a bad idea to climb the nearby hillside so we could overlook part of the river bottom. However, much to my dismay, on our way up the hill we jumped an exceptionally big buck.

“It was really frustrating to know we had just missed a chance at possibly encountering the big deer. After continuing on a little farther, I told Leslie that with less than an hour of daylight remaining, our best bet was to slowly ease back down the hill along one of the old logging roads.”

The hunters hadn't walked far when Hull spotted another buck heading up an adjacent hillside. He attempted to show the deer to his girlfriend, but she was already watching three does below them near the base of the hill.

“When I looked, a buck suddenly walked into view behind the does,” Hull said. “The deer were about 125 yards away, but even without binoculars I could see the buck had a big rack. The does quickly ran out of sight, but the buck turned broadside and stopped, looking back up the hill in our direction. I whispered to Leslie that he was only going to stand there a few seconds, she needed to shoot right now.”

For Pfeffer, the yardage wasn't really a problem. She had shot similar distances many times at the shooting range. However, this wasn't the range; she was nervous, excited and most importantly, her only op-

tion was to take the shot off hand with her Browning .270-caliber rifle.

“Although the gun wasn't extremely heavy,” Hull recalled, “I was afraid she wouldn't be able to steady herself long enough to make the shot. However, when she fired, I saw the buck's hind legs kick straight backward, which usually means a hit deer.”

After watching the buck run out of sight, Hull immediately headed down the hill. On the way, he made a quick call to his dad who lived nearby.

“With Leslie remaining on the hillside to keep me oriented, I reached the spot where the buck had been standing, but was unable to find any blood,” Hull said. “Within minutes, Dad arrived and the two of us headed off in the direction the deer ran. At that point, I was really beginning to wonder if the shot had connected. But luckily, after walking only about 75 yards we spotted the buck.

“The deer was lying with its big 10-point rack sticking partially up in the air. We didn't realize there were long drop tines on each beam until we lifted the deer's head. Once those tines came into view, we really freaked out. Both of us were yelling and carrying on like a couple of kids. When Leslie heard all the commotion, she hurried down the hill and joined in the celebration.”

One look at the buck's awesome rack and it's hardly surprising the hunters were so excited: 25-inch beams, a 20-inch inside spread and matching drop tines that measure over a foot in length. A final non-typical Boone and Crockett score of 185 3/8 places Pfeffer's first buck in the record book.

Fittingly, in March of this year, the couple made a commitment to permanently continue their deer hunting adventures by getting married. Leslie Pfeffer is now Leslie Hull.

Story and photos
by Bill Cooper



Last season, hunters in Kentucky took 54 bucks in 41 different counties that exceeded the minimum entry level of the Boone and Crockett Club. A similar number of impressive whitetails fell just a few inches below record book status; in short, another great season in the Bluegrass.

Unquestionably, there are memorable stories associated with the taking of every trophy buck. Following are five examples from the 2013 season.



Leslie Pfeffer
Mason County



Larry Mangin *Meade County*

LAST FALL, Larry Mangin experienced exactly how remarkably unpredictable that special moment of being in the right place at the right time can be.

Mangin grew up on a farm near the Ohio River, in the Big Bend area of Meade County. Mangin, who lives in Ekron, continues to hunt the land every year.

The 2013 gun season had a disappointing beginning for him. Mangin saw few deer and little evidence of rut activity. Things got worse when an ongoing back problem flared up during the second weekend of the season. It forced him to change his hunt plans.

“Once I realized it was not going to be possible for me to climb into my tree stand, I decided to return home and give my back some rest,” Mangin explained. “Needing to put some meat in the freezer, I knew there would be an opportunity to take a doe in one of the nearby fields.”

The hunter’s house and shop are located on a hill overlooking a soybean field; nearby is a smaller field of oats and alfalfa. After arriving home, Mangin napped for most of the afternoon. He arose to check for deer activity as the sun began sinking in the sky.

“I immediately spotted three does feeding in the field about 100 yards away,” he said. “Although my back felt somewhat better, I hesitated a few moments trying to decide if I wanted to take one of the deer that evening.”

With light fading quickly, Mangin suddenly detected movement in a distant woods line to his left. Within seconds, he spotted a large buck heading directly toward the does.

“Looking through the scope, I could tell that it was a big deer with a fairly high rack,” he remembered. “Basically, that was all I needed to see, and I squeezed the trigger.”

The shot dropped the big deer in its tracks. Mangin thought the buck had fallen into some brush because its head was completely off the ground, its nose sticking up in the air. He soon discovered the buck’s head was being propped up by its huge antlers.

“At that point, ‘shocked’ would not have adequately described my feelings,” he said. “I had never seen a shooter class buck in the field before, much less a record book deer.”

The buck’s massive 23-point rack has more than 70 inches of abnormal points, including several impressive drop tines. The official non-typical Boone and Crockett score stands at 215 4/8.



GROWING UP IN Jessamine County, bowhunter Jason Burkley always dreamed of one day taking a giant record book buck. That special moment came during the fall of 2008, when he arrowed a 15-pointer that scored 186 2/8 non-typical Boone and Crockett points.

“I felt truly blessed to have taken such a great whitetail,” Burkley said. “It was, without a doubt, the buck of a lifetime for a bowhunter. I never imagined being lucky enough to cross paths with another deer of that size, but in 2012, I began getting trail camera photos of a buck that strongly resembled my first deer.”

Unfortunately for Burkley, the big deer remained primarily in a nocturnal movement pattern for most of that season. He hoped the buck would still be around the next season. By mid-October of 2013, however, he had not gotten a single photo of the deer.

“During the last week of October, after finding a line of fresh scrapes and rubs along

the border of a cedar thicket and alfalfa field, I moved my trail camera to the site,” Burkley said. “When I checked the camera a few days later, I was elated to have a photo of the big buck from 2012.”

Over the following week, Burkley hunted the location whenever his work schedule permitted. He sighted the buck once, but it was too far away. After repositioning his stand, he hunted four straight days, seeing numerous other deer, but not the one he wanted.

“By day five, I was tired and feeling a little frustrated,” Burkley recalled. “It was a dark overcast afternoon and after climbing in the stand, a light rain began to fall. The continuing rain certainly didn’t help my spirits, but about five o’clock that all changed when I glanced toward the cedar thicket and saw the big whitetail heading in my direction.”

Trying to keep from shaking as the giant deer approached, Burkley waited until the shooting distance was less than 30 yards

before softly mouth-bleating to stop the buck. At the shot, the deer bolted straight ahead, running rapidly along the woods line, but went down after traveling approximately 100 yards.

The buck’s massive 6x5 typical rack includes a 20-inch inside spread, 25-inch beams and four tines that exceed 9 inches. A final typical score of 172 1/8 adds Burkley’s name to the short list of bowhunters who have placed two bucks in the Boone and Crockett record book.

SARA FITZPATRICK BEGAN deer hunting with her dad in Lincoln County when she was in middle school. Fitzpatrick, now an elementary teacher in Shelby County, still returns home each fall to continue the tradition of hunting with her father, Mike Fitzpatrick.

“The October early muzzleloading season is my favorite time,” she said. “But last year there was very little deer activity that weekend, so I made a return trip for the opening of gun season.”

Before daybreak on opening morning, Mike Fitzpatrick dropped off his daughter at a new stand he had positioned along a power line right-of-way that bordered several cedar thickets. Before leaving he reminded her to stay alert because there was definitely a big buck in that area of the farm.

“It was cold that morning and I found out immediately I hadn’t worn enough clothes,” she noted. “By an hour after daylight it felt like I was freezing.”



Intent on getting coffee and a snack out of her bag, she glanced up to see a huge buck standing 65 yards away, staring in her direction. Fortunately, after several heart-pounding seconds, the deer continued walking in the open.

“At that time of the morning, the buck

was looking directly into the sun,” Fitzpatrick said. “I really believe that is the only reason he didn’t spot me.”

Slowly raising her rifle into shooting position, she quickly aimed and fired. The big deer spun completely around.

“My gun is a .257 Roberts,” she said. “Dad always told me to keep shooting as long as the deer was standing, so I shot the buck two more times before it disappeared into the cedars.”

After hearing the shots and receiving a call from his daughter, Mike Fitzpatrick arrived within minutes. Not surprisingly, having been hit by all three rounds, the buck had only made it a short distance from the right-of-way.

The symmetrical 10-point rack of Sara Fitzpatrick’s buck features 25-inch beams and 9-inch brow tines. A Boone and Crockett score of 172 3/8 ranks the buck as the biggest typical whitetail ever recorded for Lincoln County.





Keith Major *Hardin County*

KEITH MAJOR SPENT many fall days small game hunting as a youngster growing up in Michigan. However, he had only experienced one brief outing for deer. Major, an engineer with the U.S. Army's 19th Engineer Battalion, got his first real opportunity to try whitetail hunting when he transferred to Ft. Knox. There he could hunt designated areas on the base.

On opening morning, Major decided to watch a clearing bordered by small stands of hardwoods. However, the brush and undergrowth in the opening were higher than he realized. The only deer he saw

The size of the buck's 19-point rack only added to Major's excitement. With an impressive combination of tine length and antler mass, the deer's final non-typical Boone and Crockett score stands at 193 1/8. ■

were a couple of does and a small buck.

"After lunch, I moved about a mile to a small grassy area behind a berm on one of the old tank ranges," Major said. "There were numerous fresh tracks and trails around the location."

During the afternoon, he spotted several does and missed an opportunity to take a buck. Around 5 p.m., with only 30 minutes of shooting light remaining, Major decided it was time to leave. But he was curious about what was on the other side of the berm.

"When I walked up to the top, I immediately spotted a large buck feeding in a grassy opening approximately 200 yards away," he said. "Since the deer was only about 30 yards from the berm, I quickly stepped back and began hurrying in that direction along the backside of the dirt ridge. After reaching what I estimated to be the correct distance, I slowly began slipping toward the top of the berm."

Readying his Mossberg 12 gauge, a gun given to him at the age of 13 by his dad, Major peeked over the top of the berm. The buck was standing motionless 45 yards away, looking in his direction. Steadying himself, Major carefully aimed and squeezed the trigger.

"The instant I fired, the deer took off running and I thought I had missed," he said. "But after covering about 100 yards, I suddenly saw him begin to stumble and eventually go down. At that moment, knowing I had just taken my first buck, I was excited as a little schoolgirl."