

## Still in velvet

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Usually about this time of year, I am asked, if I have ever killed a buck still in velvet. Of course, that refers to the soft covering on the antlers now readily visible. In fact, I have killed two, both quite small. That question is usually followed by, "Where is the best place to kill one?"

To answer that, you have to break it down into two categories. Do you want to kill a big one in relative comfort or do you want to just kill any buck and endure the biting insects. Let us go with big ones in relative comfort first.

I do not have to give that much thought. Manitoba! Not a doubt in my mind. For big bucks still in velvet, head for the Canadian prairie. In early September, along the Assiniboine River, I have seen some gagger bucks still wearing fur coats on their antlers. However, the timing must be right. The window between the opening of the season and the shedding of the velvet is narrow. Their season opens the last Monday in August. I'd think from then, through the first week of September, you have an excellent chance of killing a 125-inch or better buck in velvet.

Now here is another kicker. Of course, we are talking bowhunting; gun season will not be open. Even so, you will have to go through a licensed outfitter. There are plenty, just go online to find one or ask about one at [www.bowsite.com](http://www.bowsite.com). You will get plenty of replies. If you find the right outfitter, you may also have a chance for their beautiful fall bear. A few years ago, my good friend, Bob Shebaylo, killed a monster eight-point and a nice cinnamon bear the same week. Also that week, a day before Bob killed his, a Mike Garder from WI killed a 172-inch buck still in velvet.

As a rule, not carved in stone, the larger bucks will shed first. I have no idea why that is but it does seem to hold true. Once the velvet is shed, the antler growth is over and the testosterone is directed elsewhere. To complicate things, re the two bucks mentioned above, one was in velvet, the other, Shebaylo's eight-point, was not. So nothing is guaranteed. Manitoba offers much cooler temperatures and usually no insect problem. Mosquitoes can be brutal that time of year in the South. But up North, there is the travel and cost to consider.

Before you start looking for mossy-antlered deer, it is a good idea to have an idea of how to handle the antlers. The best method of preserving the velvet is to inject the antlers, just under the velvet, with formaldehyde. If you are not flying, it is not much of a problem. You can get it from your pharmacist. However, it is illegal to fly with formaldehyde. You can also freeze the entire rack or pack the antlers in salt. Check with your taxidermist and see what he recommends.

Kentucky is closer and less expensive than a trip to Canada and there is a chance for velvet there, as well. I wrote a story about a young girl from Hendersonville who killed a buck in velvet last year. The window is narrow there as well but if you have a place to go, you have a chance. Kentucky is producing some big bucks and the insects are not terrible. However, the heat can be brutal. Kentucky is a real consideration for hunters from this area. Deer Creek Lodge in Sebree is just 165-miles away and may offer a discount for an early season hunt.

The conditions are killer but South Carolina offers an opening date of August 15. That almost guarantees bucks in velvet. My experience with the deer in that state is limited but I have not seen many truly big bucks come out of SC still in velvet. I am sure there may be some killed every year, I just have not heard much about them. I do know about their heat and insects.

Deer or any animal in velvet makes a beautiful and interesting mount. I killed a better than average caribou in velvet and for some reason, did not have him mounted with the velvet on. I wish I had that to do over.

So, if you are interested in killing a buck in velvet that is how I would go about it.

By **JOHN L. SLOAN** / **This e-mail address is being protected from spambots. You need JavaScript enabled to view it**

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