

When it is time

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The moon is full. Werewolves should be happy. It hangs low over the farmland, not yet covered by approaching clouds. Of course, there are clouds. The clouds are thick, full, about to burst again, still west of us. It is not time. Not yet. They have purged once.

Over the sloughs and bayous of southeastern Louisiana, they emptied out and washed the palmetto and cane clean. They refilled as they crossed Mississippi and now they hang low over Alabama, soon they will be filtering the moonlight, darkening the sky and waiting for it to be time. However, now, for a few more minutes, they know it is not time.

I see the tree. There is enough moonlight to allow me to make my way without a flashlight. I like that. I don't like the clouds, building, swelling, waiting for the time to dump their content on Macon County and most of Alabama. But it is not time. Not yet. Still, they come closer with each passing minute. I can see the silhouette of the stand.

I wipe the sweat from my eyes and make sure the bow is securely on the hook and the arrow correctly nocked, cock feather up. It is hot, muggy, the air thick with moisture. I can feel the atmospheric pressure building and I know that just before it is time, the wildlife will be moving. I am guessing they will move by me, hoping anyway. I wait for one particular animal. I saw him in late summer. I saw him again yesterday as he crossed a piece of open ground. I am guessing this morning, early, before it is time, he will cross back close to where I wait. An owl announces he is done for the night. A coyote agrees.

If you asked, I could not tell you why I made this guess, why I am where I am. Years of experience coupled with a gut feeling I reckon. Many, maybe most, would guess he would cross at the same place he did yesterday, just going a different direction. I am betting he will not. My money says he will cross back within 40-yards of where I sit, sweating, waiting for shooting light, listening to the music of insects humming and watching the clouds build.

It is just coming daylight. That is what my mentor, my uncle would have said. I can almost hear him. "Boy, look close. It is coming daylight. Watch dem oak trees and dat thicket behind them. He come from dere. He come from dat thicket. You watch close-close, you."

So I do. I sit 15-feet off the ground with a perfect left-hand shot at the water oaks and the thicket. It is 4-year, grown up clearcut. I do believe he will come from there because he went there yesterday and he was near it in the summer. I am betting the change in atmospheric pressure will have him moving early, feeding just before it is time.

Four-points and three-points. Both fat, both skittish, both wanting to feed. Neither the one I want. The three-point feeds almost under me. The clouds are lower now, heavy with rain, swollen as woman heavy with child. Their bellies begin to sag. It is almost time. However, not quite yet.

Three more, a spike and two six-points. They feed quickly and move on. A sound far back in the swamp. I don't know what it is. Perhaps I do not want to know what it is. It is that way at 7:05 on this October morning, opening day. The clouds build and the air becomes harder to breathe. Everything including me is skittish. I fight to sit motionless.

Another spike, doing the hokey-pokey and continuously looking back. I slowly slip the bow off the hook and fit three fingers of my right hand around the string. It could possibly be close to time. Breathe slowly and evenly. Move only when his head is down. Make a smooth draw and let the pin float into position. Watch the thicket.

I look at the bow again. The Easton 2216 is nestled perfectly. My eyes go back to the thicket and he comes. He is wider than I thought, maybe 19-inches and heavy, too. But he is also the most skittish. One step. Pause, look, listen. Lick the nose and smell. Another step. He steps into my shooting lane for a perfect, left-hand shot from a seated position. His head turns.

No thinking now. It is my time. The arrows slides smoothly back and anchors. The sight pin floats down and holds just under his spine. He is 33-yards, hold three-inches high with the only pin on the bow. Let your fingers relax and the arrow leaves as a surprise.

The three fletches appear for a second on his side, just behind his shoulder maybe a tad high but still deadly. He whirls and vanishes into the clearcut where all the rattlesnakes hide.

No time to wait. The clouds are getting impatient. Soon they must give birth and disgorge their load, washing away all sign. I climb down and step out of my harness. I move quickly to the arrow sticking in the ground.

The blood is plentiful, a steady trail of drops. I fight briars, keeping one eye peeled for snakes, the other watching the blood trail. The briars tear at my forearms, drawing bright red blood much like the trail I follow. He makes a hard right turn and for a minute, I lose the trail.

One sweep and I pick it up. He is heading back toward the timber, zigging and zagging now. I can tell he is weakening and staggering. I push hard against the briars, tearing clothing and flesh. I see an antler sticking above the wall of thorns.

Quickly I drag him 30- yards through the briars to the timber edge and collapse exhausted. I am just in time. I hear the rumble and in the distance, a jagged Z of lightening splits the swollen clouds. A fat drop hits my hat, another hits my back. I try to catch one on my tongue. I am soaked in sweat. But I guessed right. Once again, I guessed right. The wind sighs through the pines and oaks and a cloud bursts far out over the swamp.

It is time.

Our deer archery season opens this Saturday, September 22. The limit is three does per day and a total of three bucks per year, no more than one a day. Perhaps it will be your time.

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