

How to Tag a Buck on a Short Weekend Rut Hunt

by Scott Bestul

One of my favorite hunting spots is a four-hour drive from my home. I get there twice a season if I'm lucky, usually for a long weekend each time. And like most hunters in these circumstances, I plan at least one of my hunts for during the rut.

It's tough to pattern pre-rut homebody bucks from far away, but once those deer start roaming during the rut, intercepting a good buck can become a routine matter with the right plan. Try this Friday-through-Sunday rut-hunt itinerary:

FRIDAY

1 p.m. - Arrive in time to scout and set up for Saturday morning.

1 p.m. to 4 p.m. - Quickly check out two or three transition areas between likely bedding cover and feed, looking for well-used trails with fresh doe and fawn tracks. Pick the spot with the hottest sign, and hang a stand to waylay bucks checking on these family groups. Place it in fairly open cover to see and call to bucks that are passing out of range.

4 p.m. to dark - Glass feed fields until dusk, looking for doe-and-fawn family groups and/or bucks to determine where to place your ambush for Saturday afternoon.

Evening - Review the lay of the land in maps and aerial photos. Identify cover and terrain funnels specifically for Sunday's hunt.

SATURDAY

Predawn to 11 a.m. - Arrive at your morning stand about half an hour before sunrise. When shooting light breaks, grunt several times and wait. If there's no response, hit your rattling antlers hard to attract cruising bucks. Keep rattling every half hour or so, mixing in grunts and estrous doe bleats.

11 a.m. to 2 p.m. - Get down, grab a bite, then go prepare for Sunday's hunt. Speed-scout the funnels you previously located on the map, then hang a comfortable stand where two or more good travel corridors—fencelines, field corners, ridge ends, creek beds—intersect in the vicinity of both food and thick cover.

2 p.m. to dark - Hunt the afternoon. If yesterday's glassing paid off, bring along a climbing stand and set up in a staging area just off the field where you spotted deer. Otherwise, work from the funnel stand you erected for tomorrow. Either way, rattle and call aggressively.

SUNDAY

Predawn to noon - Sit the funnel stand, where roaming bucks might show at any time. On your way in, trail a drag rag (soaked with doe-in-heat scent) from a boot, freshening it every 75 yards or so. If you're hunting with a bow and the terrain is fairly open, stake a

doe decoy just upwind and hang the drag rag nearby. Then get into your perch and rattle and call every 20 minutes or so.

Noon to 2 p.m. - Take a break. Make sure there are no deer in sight, then stand up, stretch, and have a sandwich or snack. That done, sit back down and hunt another couple of hours. Mature rutting bucks are notorious for cruising corridors at midday, so stay sharp.

2 p.m. to 7 p.m. - Gather up everything and leave in time to say good night to the kids when you get back. Drive home. On the way, justify the money you'll spend getting that monster in the bed of your truck mounted.

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