

BUCKS AND ECHINOIDS: A HILL COUNTRY BONANZA 11/8-9/03

Saturday's predawn gloom provided inadequate cover for me to walk the area around my blind dispensing corn and alfalfa hay. Even though misty, overcast skies generally bring favorable deer hunting conditions, the obscured full moon still had these deer locked in a nocturnal activity pattern. Needless to say, several deer busted me as I made rounds.

Just as it was getting light around 6:30, a dark form ghosted through a narrow shooting lane I had cut through the treelimits 90 yards out. With binoculars glued to my face, I still had trouble discerning ears from antlers in the low light even as the deer entered the field ahead of me. Careful study revealed antlers, and I could have taken a shot, but this animal moved off nervously, and I generally like to size up the quarry rather than simply bagging "a buck" in the twilight. A couple of minutes later, a rapid succession of shots let me know that Macky had plenty of light to see this was a shooter, and he reduced the hefty 5 pointer to possession. Another shot soon after came from brother-in-law Aaron's .243, dispatching a doe with one shot to the head.

Things got slow for a while, actually I only saw a fawn over the next hour. Just as I was getting cabin fever, a wimpy little 5 point spike (I had to squint to see any points) made the scene, followed by a shooter buck across the fence. Too bad I didn't have a grunt call on me! Some words to my maker worked better than any man made call, and soon a doe popped out 100 yards away on my side of the fence, and this is a better lure than man can provide.

A pair of chocolate antlers swiveling in the brush prompted me to poke the old .45-70 lever gun out the window and fire up the camcorder. It was going on 8:30, near bedtime on the deer clock, so I had to make my move. When the gnarly 7 pointer stopped to sample a long strand of alfalfa hay, the 300 grain hollow point caught him low in the rear rib cage, exited the off armpit, then went in and out of the left foreleg. His death run was more of a long jump, and he never made it to the other side of the patch of oaks he was heading for.

My buck was no monster, a 7 pointer about 13 inches wide, but he broke the streak of silence from my blind. This had been the slowest season opener I could remember, but now I was seeing deer. Although my buck was chasing a doe, he was not yet smelling musky from hormones. His tasty contribution to my meat cache will be reduced to jerky this week.

Next stop: Bergheim. I took a detour on the way home at a roadcut ½ mile west of Bergheim on Hwy 46 and found quite an assemblage of echinoids at that locality. Yes, I was the camouflaged psycho climbing the Glen Rose strata in the rain, pick in hand, buck in the truck. See Figure 1 of the echinoid stash. I picked up a couple new species for my collection plus some better specimens of other

species. Now I've collected at least 10 urchin species from the local Lower Glen Rose strata.



Figure 1: Clockwise from 11:00 position: *Holectypus*, *Goniophorus*, Gastropod, next 5 specimens *Loriolia*, cool unidentified bivalve, Center: Unidentified *Tetragramma* or *Phymosoma*

Sunday morning's hunt did not contribute to the game pole, but it was intensely satisfying. My smile grew as the mist lifted and I noticed a deer silhouette just 30 yards from my blind. I stayed quiet and motionless, but some outside force tipped it off to my presence, and the alarm snorts lasted 5 minutes. Was there human scent on recently thrown alfalfa hay? Sausage biscuit scent from my hands? We'll never know. I can only say that deer were scarce for the first hour and a half of daylight.

The same fawn as Saturday came out on schedule at 8. Then at 8:30 five deer surrounded my lofty parapet in unison. 3 does indulged in the alfalfa hay while 2 large forkhorns eyed each other menacingly and ran does around in front of me. 2 more forkhorns popped out minutes later along with the stunted 5 point spike I've seen each outing. I saw 12 deer, half of them bucks, not a bad batting average. I opted to let them all walk. If I'm going to run my knife through a buck,

I want at least 6 points for my effort, preferably 8! I saw deer all the way up to 9 when I climbed down and walked the driveway.

The end of the driveway draws me each morning for one reason: axis deer. I like to spy on them across the road eating oats at the dairy. They can be watched from 400+ yards away, and they often look to be regrouping and moving toward the road by late morning. I aim to catch them in transit as they cross onto Elaine's property one day, and that will be a rough day for them, especially any yearling does or antlered bucks which dare reveal their flanks.

On this day I watched 2 groups of 7 or 8, and a bachelor group of spikes headed single file into the valley at a good clip. They appeared to be heading for the road. I slipped into a patch of oaks to welcome them to our ranch, but my little surprise party never came to fruition.

In a way I'm glad Mack and I didn't have to butcher deer that day. A lady in Comfort gave us 3 live turkeys to butcher, and that whole laborious effort was too ridiculous to print. We'll just say for now that a 40 LB turkey, a knife, and a main road through town should never set the scene. Enough said.