

## When is your Rut?

One of the most common and important questions that deer hunters ask is “When is the Rut?” This is the magical time when the Bucks (including older Bucks) are walking or running around in search of a receptive Doe. Even though this isn’t the whole definition of “rut” this activity is what most hunters are referring to when they refer to the rut. If you have not done so already please watch our video **“The Rut (A Deer Hunters Magical Time)”** to see what one of our goals is for our property. That goal is to create a situation where we have many of our Bucks (including older Bucks) moving around during daylight hours. We strive to have this activity not only during the rut but prior to and after the rut as well. We’re not talking about them moving all day every day. We’re talking about creating a situation where they will move around more than usual because of the dynamics of our deer population, our habitat and our self imposed hunting guidelines.

Like many of you we have scrapes and rubs that assist us with our hunting strategy but it’s all for nothing if the Buck isn’t moving around during daylight hours. How many of you have gotten a night picture of a big Buck or seen a huge scrape or rub made by a Buck but you never see that Buck during hunting hours. I’m sure many of you can relate to this. This is all part of the hunting experience and it makes the harvesting of this Buck even sweeter if you finally have the opportunity to take him.

So how was your rut this past season? Every year I hear some hunters say that they had a terrific rut and other hunters say they didn’t have a rut. The interesting thing is that even on the same property one hunter may say they didn’t have a rut and another hunter may say that it was a great rut. The one guy may have shot a big Buck and the other guy may not have seen a Buck. This is why it is so important to collect harvest and sightings information for all or most of the hunters on the property so you can collectively analyze the property as a whole and not just the experiences of one or two hunters. There was a season where my sightings were way down and I was beginning to think that our deer population had decreased as well as the rut was subdued. Once we looked at all of the harvests and sightings of our entire group it was obvious that I just had a bad season. I was just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

We have experienced fantastic rutting activity since 2009. During this same time frame we have heard many hunters within the same county that we are hunting say that there was a poor rut or no rut at all. Even some of our neighbors said their rut wasn’t very good. How can this be you ask! There can be many reasons for this and I will just point out a few of the reasons here:

1. These hunters weren’t in the woods when the Bucks were actually on the move.
2. The hunting pressure on the property has forced the Bucks into a completely nocturnal pattern.
3. The Doe to Buck ratio is so skewed that the Bucks don’t have to move around much to find a Doe.
4. The Buck population on the property is real low.

Now let’s get to the main purpose of this article which is “When is your Rut?” and is there a way for you to figure it out. Here’s a few ways that hunters use to determine when the rut is on their property.

1. Most state agencies provide information on when the rut is throughout the different areas of the state.
2. Longtime hunters from the area that you hunt can probably give you a good estimate on the timing of the rut based on their experiences.
3. If you keep track of your Buck harvests each season then you may see a pattern develop on when most of the Bucks are being harvested. Preferably this would include most or all of the hunters hunting your property.
4. If you keep track of your Buck sightings each season then you may see a pattern develop on when most of the Bucks are being seen. Preferably this would include most or all of the hunters hunting your property.

We relied on all four scenarios listed above in the order that they are listed. First we looked into the state estimates and asked other area hunters so we could guesstimate when our rut would be. As we accumulated our harvest information that soon replaced what we found from scenario 1 and 2. As we accumulated our sightings information we got a real good feel for the time frame that we had the most Buck movement. This was **the** most important thing that we did but what if we weren't in the woods while there was this rutting activity going on. Because of this we decided to take it one step further to prove when our Does were actually being bred. We field dress every one of our deer so it made sense that while we were doing this why not take a couple more minutes and if it was a Doe then pull the fetuses so we could age the fetuses to see when she was actually bred. We were pretty sure that most of our Does were being bred starting in the second week of November so we decided to start checking for fetuses from the middle of December to the end of hunting season. I felt that after about five or six weeks from being bred we should be able to find and get an accurate measurement of the fetus if the Doe was in fact bred. If you hunt an area where the breeding takes place in September then you could start looking for fetuses later in October. If you are not allowed to shoot any Does later in the year then pulling the fetus is not an option for you. You should then rely on your Buck sightings and/or harvests to determine the time of year when you are seeing the most Buck movement.

For those of you who can shoot Does later in the year you should start checking for fetuses so you can prove when that particular Doe was bred. It's really not that complicated. You simply need to buy a fetus measuring ruler. It is interesting to see the various breeding dates from season to season and to be able to identify a specific time frame when most of the actual breeding is being done. If you felt that there was no rut then this should certainly prove to you that there was a rut and you just weren't in the woods to witness it or it was all nocturnal activity. Even though the chart below allows us to see when the actual breeding is taking place, we rely more on our actual sightings of Bucks to dictate when is the best time for us to be hunting. But, the chart is still valuable so we can see if there are any fluctuations from the norm.

I have included our fetus information below so you can see what information we cumulate. These were just the Does that we shot later in the season when we started pulling the fetuses. For those of you that are interested in when the actual breeding is taking place on your property then start checking your Does for fetuses. There are some articles on the internet covering how to remove the fetuses and how to use the measuring tool. If you can do this then you will establish a time frame of when the Does on your property are being bred instead of just guessing.

## Doe Breeding Dates

Season	Hunter	Age of Doe	Doe Weight	Breeding Date	# Fetuses
2010	Lee	3 1/2	155 lbs	11/12/10	
	GPH	2 1/2	126 lbs	11/13/10	
	Lee	2 1/2	117 lbs	11/11/10	
	GPH	9 1/2	141 lbs	11/20/10	
2011	GPH	3 1/2	125 lbs	11/13/11	
	Ryan	4 1/2	131 lbs	11/12/11	
	Ryan	3 1/2	136 lbs	No Fetus	
	Lee	2 1/2	126 lbs	11/18/11	
	Ryan	5 1/2	146 lbs	11/15/11	
	RK	4 1/2	110 lbs	11/05/11	
2012	Ryan	3 1/2	137 lbs	11/07/12	
	Lee	3 1/2	130 lbs	11/12/12	
	Lee	3 1/2	114 lbs	11/13/12	
	RK	2 1/2	125 lbs	No Fetus	
	Ryan	1 1/2	115 lbs	11/14/12	
	Pat	2 1/2	108 lbs	11/11/12	
	Pat	4 1/2	132 lbs	11/14/12	
	GPH	2 1/2	130 lbs	11/12/12	
2013	Lee	2 1/2	129 lbs	11/12/13	2
	GPH	6 1/2	135 lbs	11/09/13	2
	Pat	2 1/2	118 lbs	11/18/13	2
	Pat	4 1/2	127 lbs	11/17/13	1
	Lee	2 1/2	104 lbs	11/14/13	1
	GPH	2 1/2	127 lbs	11/16/13	2
	RK	2 1/2	139 lbs	11/14/13	1
	GPH	1 1/2	109 lbs	No Fetus	0
	GPH	2 1/2	119 lbs	11/20/13	2
2014	Ryan	7 1/2	118 lbs	11/02/14	1
	Lee	2 1/2	114 lbs	11/18/14	2
	RK	10 1/2	120 lbs	No Fetus	0
	GPH	1 1/2	116 lbs	No Fetus	0
	GPH	3 1/2	134 lbs	11/02/14	1
	GPH	3 1/2	112 lbs	11/18/14	2
2015	GPH	2 1/2	125 lbs	No Fetus	0
	GPH	3 1/2	136 lbs	11/06/15	3
	Pat	3 1/2	124 lbs	11/12/15	2
	Pat	2 1/2	123 lbs	11/11/15	2
	Lee	2 1/2	117 lbs	11/06/15	2
	GPH	1 1/2	113 lbs	11/06/15	1
	GPH	3 1/2	136 lbs	11/14/15	1
	Pat	3 1/2	110 lbs	11/20/15	2
	Pat	2 1/2	136 lbs	11/16/15	2
	Pat	12 1/2	120 lbs	No Fetus	0
	RK	4 1/2	115 lbs	11/17/15	2

Many of you may think that this is more trouble than it's worth but if you have any questions about when the rut is on your property, a little extra work just might provide you with a better insight into when your rut actually is. If you're field dressing your deer anyway and it's later in the year then why not take a couple more minutes and see if you can find a fetus and then measure it. I sit in a tree stand for 5 or 6 hours on one morning hunt so I have no problem spending an extra couple of minutes gathering this reproductive information. After I started doing this a few years ago our other hunters watched me do this and now we are all comfortable in removing and aging the fetuses. We have one guy that is not comfortable using the measuring tool so we are all willing to jump in and help. It's cool hearing my fellow hunters tell me the breeding date of the Doe that they shot. It's this kind of interest that makes our whole group appreciate the effort that we all put into the monitoring and managing of our deer population.

In summary, whether you are unsure of when your rut is or even if you are confident when your rut is why not spend a couple more minutes when you field dress your Doe to find and age the fetuses. You just might find the reason why your Buck sightings went up or went down or occurred at a different time this season. We had one season before I started writing down the breeding dates where we had a Doe that was bred on 10/31 which explained to us why we had some unusual early season Buck movement.