

TENNESSEE

Velvet

STORY BY CADE ANGLIN

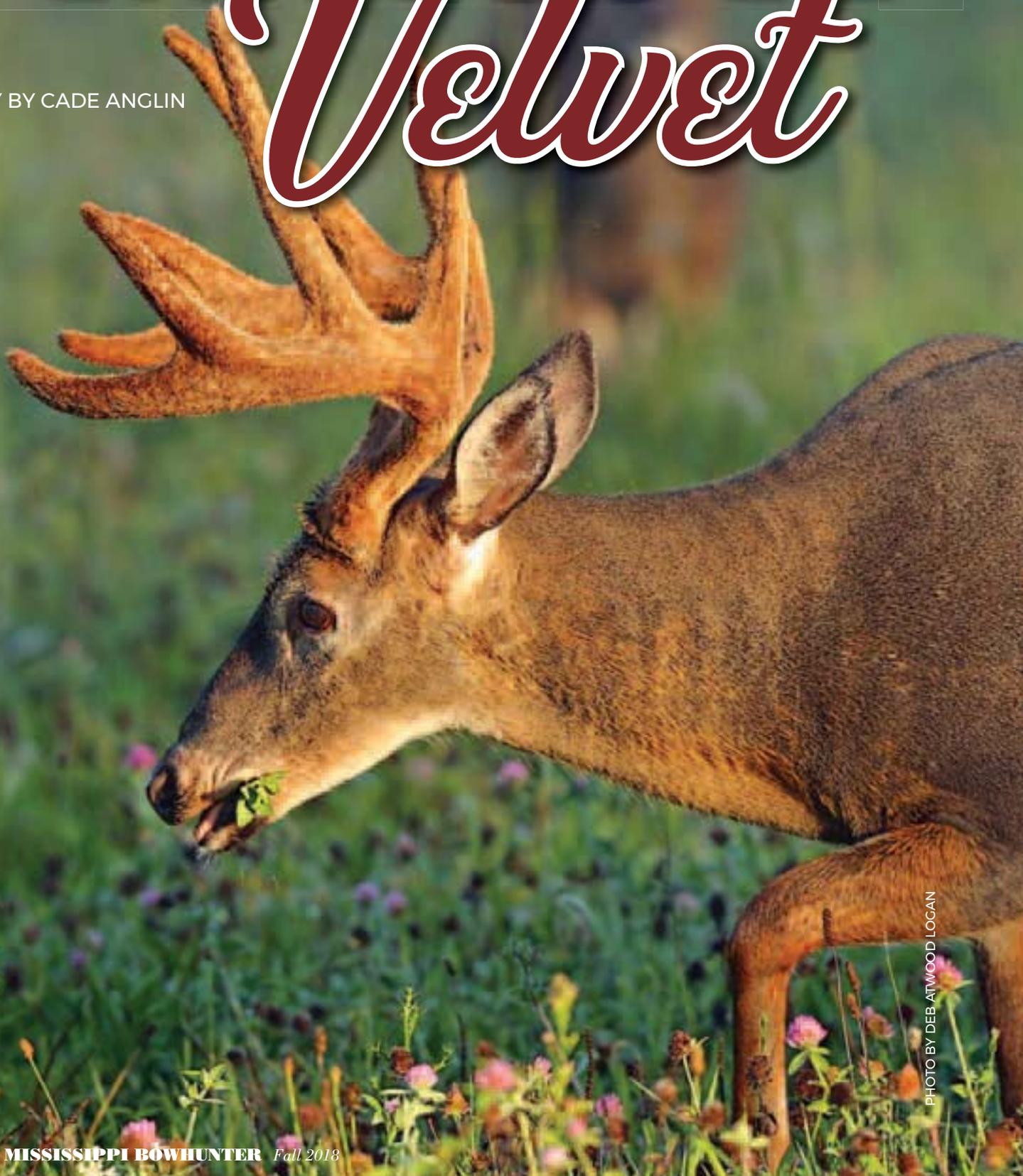


PHOTO BY DEB ATWOOD LOCAN

Tennessee Wildlife Resource Agency announced for the first time in history a 3-day early season velvet whitetail hunt starting in August 2018. This was an opportunity for hunters to try to harvest a whitetail buck in velvet, which in my case has never presented itself before! I was lucky enough to book one of these hunts with Elk River Outfitters, a well known outfitter in central Tennessee. Owner Scottie Layman only offered a small number of spots to previous clients or close friends, so as a previous client he offered one to me. Here is my unforgettable velvet hunt!

I want to preface my story by telling how an eye injury almost took all of the vision from one of my eyes. My right eye is my dominant eye and also my aiming eye for shooting my bow. I was now facing the reality that bowhunting was no longer in my future, and crossbow bound. I missed the first of two archery seasons for the first time in twenty years. Sadly, my bow sat under a pile of hunting clothes for the last couple of years. Luckily, the doctors at UAB Eye Hospital fitted me with a special kind of contact that gave me 85 percent of my vision back! However, I was still unsure if I could shoot a bow accurately so I planned on hunting the velvet hunt with my crossbow. But something told me to take my bow anyway.

As soon as I arrived in camp, I saw some other hunters practicing so I said to myself "let's see what I can do." I pulled the dusty Obsession Archery bow from my case and grabbed a couple of arrows and got ready to shoot, not knowing if I could hit the target! I got set up at 20 yards and drew back and surprisingly hit

exactly where I was aiming! I told the guys there I hadn't shot this bow in over two years and I looked over at them and their surprised expressions said it all! I grabbed another arrow, drew back and released it. I couldn't believe it actually hit my first arrow! I knew for certain I was back in the game! I pulled my arrows from the target and went back to the line and shot a third time. Bullseye! At this point, the hunters were shaking their heads and calling me a liar! Honestly I said "I'm dead serious guys, this is blowing my mind!" Well I needed to see if my other yardages were right so I stepped back to 30 yards. I aimed at the bullseye, released, and I watched as the arrow went into the back of the previous arrow still in target which is referred to as a "robin hood." That's all I needed to see. I thought to myself. "I am back. I am confident. I am ready." I still shot several more times and made sure before I hit the woods the next day.

The first afternoon, I slipped into my lock on stand on the edge of some hardwoods and a corn field around 3:00 pm. The heat was pretty bad! I have never hunted in 90 degree weather before back home in Mississippi. I took an extra set of clothes in my back pack and changed into a fresh set of camo after I cooled down a little. At 6:15 pm, I caught movement to my right about 20 yards from me. It was a doe. She fed along the edge of the oaks and the corn so I watched her feed in front of me for about 10 minutes. She was upwind of me so I figured I was going to keep hunting undetected. Suddenly, movement caught my eye and I saw a giant velvet horned monarch following the same trail the doe took. To say my heart was

not prepared for such an encounter on the first afternoon hunt was an understatement, as I'm pretty sure he heard my heart pounding through my chest! I slowly came to my feet (and my senses), grabbed my bow, and clicked my release onto my string. The buck was at 20 steps and all I needed was two steps and he would be in my shooting lane. All of a sudden, the doe in front of me spooked and ran away. I know she didn't see me as I was being as still as I could. The wind must have shifted and she caught my scent. The buck went on full alert. I told myself "its opening day and he is not pressured so he will calm down, come in and I would get a shot." Boy was I wrong! Doing what mature bucks do, he slowly took two steps back and slipped back down the trail he came in on. I could have collapsed after the adrenaline wore off and the let down set in. I made the decision to get down and back out for the evening. He would be back tomorrow.

The second afternoon, I got back in the same stand at the same time and waited... I started seeing a few does come out and then a small six point. Then wouldn't you know it, here comes that doe from the day before that ruined my hunt, walking down the same trail! I recognized her from the hair patterns of her summer coat and winter coat growing in patches. "Deja vu!" I got my bow and stood up just knowing the big buck was coming in behind her. Well, he obviously learned from yesterday's encounter that it wasn't safe for him in the daylight because he never showed up. As the full moon was starting to brighten up the dark sky, I slipped back out and headed to the truck.

The final afternoon of the 3-day

hunt, I decided to try a different stand located on the side of a mountain in a transition point between the bedding area and the corn fields. I climbed in the stand about 3:00 pm and the waiting game began. After thirty minutes of sitting in the direct sunlight, I couldn't stand it anymore. I had to have some relief. I climbed down and sat in the shade of a nearby cedar tree until the stand was in the shade which was around 5:15 pm. Now, back in the stand, I started ranging spots and figuring out my plan depending on which way the deer would come by. I was listening to the birds chirping and the slight breeze had the weeds moving which made my heart skip a beat every time! At 6:30 pm, something to my right caught my eye and I looked over to see a tall velvet rack coming my way! He was directly downwind so I knew this probably wouldn't last

long. I had sprayed Nose Jammer before I climbed into the stand so I prayed it would do its job. The buck kept walking towards me... closer... and closer!!! He passed under a low hanging limb so I drew my bow and waited on a shot. The buck started walking again and then stopped suddenly. Now was my time to shine! I aimed my pin at the base of his neck and chest and released. I heard the arrow hit and he bolted off like a rocket. I saw my arrow sticking out as he ran away. I was unsure about the shot honestly so I waited a while to get down. After about 30 minutes, I climbed down and started checking a blood trail. I found a few drops here and there and then started finding more and more! I still felt like he needed time. I waited anxiously until dark and began my search. Slowly, I followed the blood to the wood line and found a place where the buck

stopped and blood was everywhere. "Amazing!" As I continued, I could tell I was going to find him. Just 20 yards further, I saw what every hunter just can't wait to see... a white belly!!! There he was... MY VELVET BUCK. I sat there and just thought about how blessed I was to harvest such a beautiful buck on my first ever velvet hunt. I couldn't believe how much I have overcome and how great it felt to be a bowhunter again. We got my buck back to camp for pictures and high fives, then took him to the taxidermist.

I never put a measuring tape on him or put him on the scale. None of those things mattered. He was mine and he meant everything to me. I fulfilled my dream of having a trophy buck in full velvet on my wall to admire for years to come!

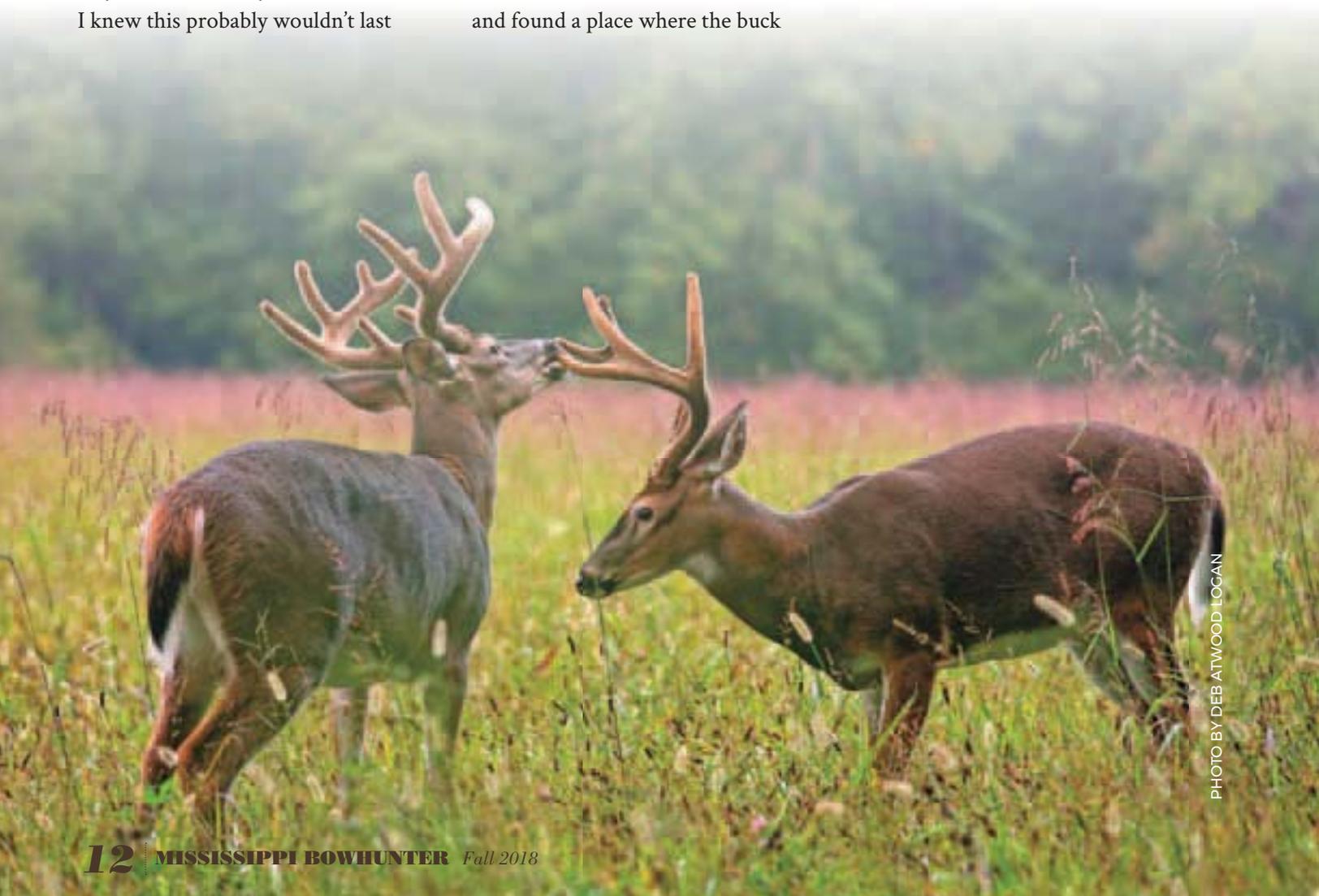


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