



CALLING ALL MULIES

Bowhunters Have Called and Duped Whitetail Bucks for Generations, and This Tactic Can Work on Western Mulies Just as Much

BY ZACK WALTON



The author, with a nice Arizona mule deer he arrowed last season with the help of some calling. He used a fawn bleat to lure in the buck's does, and he followed.

After two hours, I was at last ahead of them. But it was almost dark. The wide 3x3 was still 200 yards away, and he was deeply involved with his does. At that point, I decided I had nothing to lose. I grunted a couple times in hopes of getting the buck's attention. No chance. He was distracted. However, one of the does stopped feeding and took a few steps in my direction. I quickly changed my strategy and figured if I could pull his

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does closer, the buck might unknowingly stumble into range. I pulled out a fawn bleat and began softly blowing on it.

This got the interest of a couple more does. I started another series—softly blowing four times in short intervals. The does began slinking towards me. Another set of calls. More interest. But darkness was closing faster than the deer. I decided to go for it. My next set was more intense as I tried to imitate a distressed fawn in



The Southwestern sky is beautiful during the wintertime deer rut.

the wash behind me. This pushed one doe over the edge and she began galloping toward me. Behind were the other does with the wide mulie right in the middle of the bunch.

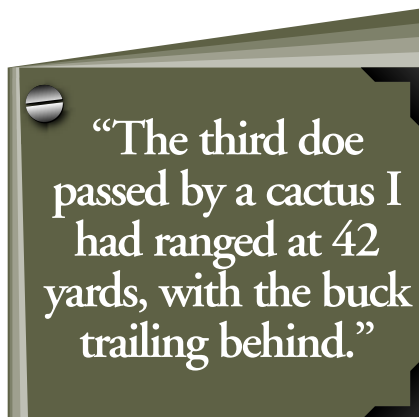
I was so amazed the plan was working that I was almost caught unprepared. The deer were closing so fast I was barely able to range some cacti. At 80 yards, the lead doe stopped to search for the source of the noise. With the call pointed behind me, I blew very softly. This pulled the doe quickly into range. The third doe had the buck trailing close behind.

I have spent the majority of my life bowhunting the Western states. This has meant chasing velvet-topped bachelor groups in the sweltering heat of late summer. The wild rut action of whitetail hunting videos, although entertaining, offered me little practical advice. And when I did hunt deer during the rut, I hunted mule deer in wide-open desert and didn't think whitetail tactics would apply.

A couple years ago, I hunted whitetails for the first time. After spending eight days in a central-Kansas tree, I learned the benefits of using calls on rut-crazed bucks. Although I was convinced calling tactics could be devastating on whitetails, I was skeptical of their effectiveness on Western bucks. About a year ago, I

finally put that theory to the test.

Shortly after my trip to Kansas, I got a chance to hunt rutting blacktails in my home state of California. It had taken me many years to draw the tag, and I wanted to use every tactic available to me to make the most of



the opportunity. By the end of my hunt, I had called in and passed several nice bucks with varying grunting and rattling approaches. That experience sold me on using calling techniques for all species of deer.

Like most years, I spent this past winter hunting the deserts of Arizona with my dad. It's wonderful to escape the fog of the Central Valley and enjoy the arid climate and liberal sunshine during the dead of winter. This year, I entered the trip with a wider arsenal of hunting tactics, not to mention a

much heavier pack. Rattling horns, grunt tubes, everything I had successfully used on other species of deer, filled my bursting pack.

The first couple days, I glassed up a few small bucks and even passed a forked-horn I walked up on at 36 yards. The mule deer were in full rut, and I wanted to see what bucks were roaming. I had yet to find a situation to try calling to a good buck. However, on the third evening, I was presented with an opportunity I could not pass.

Catching movement shortly after topping a ridge, I flopped to the ground and began to glass. The wide 3x3 appeared through my binos. He was about 130 yards away and not alone. Doe after doe popped its head over the next crest, each one feeding on a cactus as it strolled along. The buck was moving from female to female, diligently checking the aroma of each. When the entire group was accounted for, seven does, the three-point, and a small forked-horn were bouncing back and forth over the next edge. I was pinned down underneath a mesquite, awaiting the group's next move. After an hour, I counted as each doe fed up the draw. One, two, three...all seven disappeared. Neither of the bucks was in sight, but I knew they wouldn't leave their ladies. I backed down into the wash and ran 300 yards to try to get ahead of the group. As I peeked over the edge, no deer were in sight. I began scanning the cacti-choked terrain and finally found a doe 200 yards ahead. The deer had moved faster than I expected and I was still behind. I scooted back down into the wash and ran up the draw 300 more yards.

After poking back out of the wash, I tucked into a mesquite and starting calling. It all happened so fast, and before I knew it, the deer were right on top of me. Since I had set up on the peak of the ridge, the does had filed past me to look into the cut behind. The third doe passed by a cactus I had ranged at 42 yards, with the buck trailing behind. I drew my bow. He turned and started walking directly away.

When he turned and quartered away, I guessed his range, settled the

Although I love hunting mule deer in Arizona, I never head down there without a javelina tag. These little critters were made for bowhunting and are a blast to chase. At age 10, they were the first big-game animal I hunted, and I have had a ton of fun hunting these pint-sized pigs with huge personalities.

These critters are also susceptible to calling techniques; I have seen many pigs smacked with arrows after being called in close. My dad has been calling to javelina for years, and has been very successful at it. Dad really enjoys calling to javelina because, most of the time, boars will respond to the call, and



when they come barreling in, they come very close. This helps dad have close shots at big boars. And he has killed many good-size pigs over the years with this technique.

This past January, dad decided to still-hunt an area for javelina that always produces pigs. Since it is very flat, thick country, it makes it impossible to try to glass the tiny animals. Rocks and gravel litter the desert floor, making approaches noisy. All these factors make bringing the javelina to you a smarter option.

After working through the area for 500 yards with no sign, dad came across some chewed-up cacti. He sneaked another 500 yards before hearing a pig "woof." Figuring the pigs had heard him walking in the noisy

gravel, dad took off his boots and moved forward in just his socks—brave for the middle of the desert.

When he got closer, dad called out a "woof" to the pigs. When he got an answer, about 50 yards away, dad started squealing at the group. It's not really a squeal. It sounds more like Donald Duck imitating a goat. That may sound absurd, but it works amazingly at bringing javelina in close. And it worked again this time. Charging to within 15 yards, the javelina was met with a perfectly placed arrow from dad's bow.

If you can't imagine duplicating the sound dad uses to call in javelina, don't worry. It is as hard to try to explain how the call sounds as it is to replicate it. However, there are other options. There are manufactured calls you can purchase that are designed for calling to javelina. You can also use a predator call, as I have successfully used in the past.

A couple years ago, a group of five javelina slipped ahead of me into a tight canyon. I was afraid to follow them because the wind would take my scent directly into their hiding spot (as poor as a javelina's eyesight is, it more than makes up for it with its nose.) Instead of trailing and surely spooking them, I set up outside the entrance and began softly blowing in short intervals on a predator call. After a short time, a pig popped its head out. Then another...and another. All five javelina strolled back down the trail, and I was ready when the lead pig stopped at 25 yards.

Late-season hunts are a great time to get out and chase different species. Just because you are in a different environment or hunting different species, don't forget the tactics you have used to bring that buck in on a string in the whitetail woods. They can still work; you just might have to put a little twist on them. —Z.W.

pin, and squeezed the trigger. I misjudged the yardage, thinking the buck had gone farther than he actually had. The arrow hit high and immediately dropped the buck. I ran up with a quick follow-up shot. I had never been so pumped while hunting mule deer. It was the first time I had ever called in one of those deer and I was in a little disbelief that

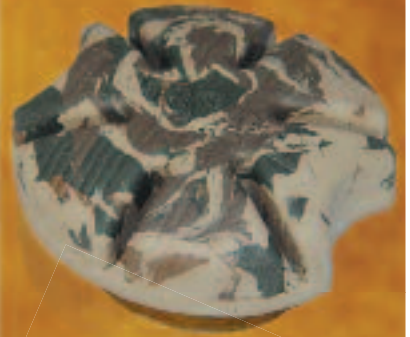
it worked so well. I may have found a new way to bowhunt one of my favorite animals!

Author's note: *The author is an avid bowhunter from Modesto, California. He is a pro staffer for G5 Outdoors, Spot-Hogg, and B-Stinger. When not bowhunting, he spends time with wife, Anne, and their dog, Mazy. ←*

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