

AZ Deer December 2006

I managed to zip out for 4-days for one last shot (no pun intended, although prophetic) to fill my 2006 AZ deer tag this past weekend. After spending quite a bit of time stalking the elusive Coues in Jan I am convinced that sitting water provides the best opportunity, so I committed myself to sitting 4-days straight at a beautiful waterhole I discovered with Kirby on my last day hunting in Jan.

I arrived late Thursday after driving 8-hours and met up with my friend Tim from Phoenix, whom I had hunted with last Jan. While drifting off to sleep in camp I anticipated checking the waterhole out the next morning, opening day.

Ever since hiking 2.5-miles each way to and from the water on a closed road last year I had been scheming/daydreaming about how to get my Double Bull Blind to the area without a huge amount of effort. I decided to use my mountain bike as a pack mule, and with the aid of my trusty welder, rigged a trailer for the DB and theoretically to pack a deer out. Because the road included quite a bit of uphill, some of it extremely steep, I ended up pushing my bike for about 1/3 of the ride in, and made it in just under an hour. On subsequent days I left the blind and was able to ride up 3/4 or more in about 40-minutes up, 25-minutes back down to the truck. There was a lot of loose sand/gravel, so it was still quite a bit of work, but I felt it was easier than walking, especially the downhill on the way out in the evenings.



I arrived at the water about 9:00am opening morning and thankfully found it to be full...and spooked ~9-Coues deer off of it. All seemed to be does/fawns with the exception of one medium 3x3. After they trotted and wandered off I quickly went down and set up the blind with high hopes.



Because I wanted a fairly close shot at one of these little deer, I opted to set the blind near the water in the open. I figured that if it seemed to spook deer I'd brush it in more, but thought that a new pile of brush might be just as apt to spook them as the lone blind. It turned out that a couple of times the deer were nervous about the open shooting port (I didn't want to shoot through mesh as I've had bad results trying this before).



But in general the deer didn't seem to be overly spooked by the blind, and in fact I had several come in and water within 30-yards, so I never did brush it. The only thing I think I'll do in the future is add some black fabric above and below the open shooting port to make it look like the shadow of a tree rather than an oval hole.



When viewed in black & white, the blind blends in surprisingly well, with the exception of the open shooting port.

No exotic animals (cougars, etc.) but here are some of the critters that approached/drunk.



Western Bluebirds



Flicker, have to look up which species



A bird I have yet to look up in the book



Golden eagle swooped across the pond and sat in a tree for a while.



Doe approaching



Doe



Alerted doe - not sure what spooked her



Approaching doe

I got my shot the morning of day 2 when a small forkie and his bigger 3x brother came in with a doe. The came straight in and only presented a frontal drinking position, similar to the doe below (no picture of the bucks at water since I was preparing to shoot). I figured I could put an arrow between the shoulder blades at 30-yards. Unfortunately, I have had some recent tuning problems that reappeared, and that coupled with my nerves caused me to miss...



Typical drinking position



Small forkie buck - the little bro of the one I missed :(



Buck I missed on right after the shot (note stripe on rear quarter where my arrow sizzled his hair off. A little high, a little right. He got a scratch, but after jumping out to 56-yards, he resumed feeding and browsed his way uphill, a little wiser.

After the miss I compensated for my tuning problem and was back to dead on at 30-yards on my barrel cactus test subject. An hour later two nice 3xs approached and I anticipated another shot...



Best buck I saw, approaching the water, with a thirsty look.

As the two nice bucks approached rather quickly, I suddenly heard a splashing in the water and thought another deer had sneaked in from the other direction. Unfortunately, it was the nearby rancher's pack of 3-dogs wallowing and drinking (I crossed a ranch easement to access the waterhole). I considered a blunt to the ribs to get them out of there, but was worried I'd actually kill one of them. The dogs had come up the day before also and hung around for about 5-minutes before leaving, so I hoped that the deer were used to the dogs and would just wait until they left to come in. Alas, the dogs left in the direction toward the bucks and the rest is history...



Smaller of the 2 biggest bucks saying "adios, amigo"

The rest of my hunt involved some more deer coming to water, but no bucks until Monday morning when a very small spike came in early on. I initially only took photos, thinking I'd pass on him, but after he came to the water I decided that this was my last day and I'd try the shot. Unfortunately he presented the same frontal shot I had missed before and I was hesitant to take it. He and his mother drank for quite some time then suddenly wheeled around and left too quickly for me to shoot, so I lost my chance. The weather turned cold and windy and only one other doe and fawn (no antlers) came in prior to me leaving to drive home.



Small spike on right, just as his mom was leaving.

The only other "excitement" came on Sunday evening just before dark. I heard steps approaching and prepared for a deer, but as the noise grew louder I realized it must be people. Illegals from Mexico, to be exact. A group of about 12-15 illegals came around the corner at the south end of my waterhole. The lead one appeared to be holding a GPS (high tech, these days I guess). They immediately spotted the blind and stopped, but weren't sure if anybody was inside. I had borrowed a friend's pistol for safety while sleeping/camping, but left it in the truck. Now I wished I had brought it with me to the blind, and I suddenly felt very uncomfortable. I stuck an arrow out the window and waved it around and the group retreated back the way they came, so I quickly took down the blind, bundled it up and stashed it, hustled to my bike and headed for the truck. I packed Jason's pistol out to the blind for Monday's hunt. In past years I have glassed anywhere from 2-25 illegals per day, but this was the first time they had come to a waterhole while I was there. They typically avoid people because they don't want to get caught, and while spot & stalking it is very easy to stay out of their way, but being planted in a blind was very different. I will not sit a blind again without more protection than my bow provides.



Typical illegal trail. These are common throughout the desert, indicative of just how huge the problem is in the southwestern. Border patrol says that something like 3-5,000 people cross through the southern portion of AZ on a daily basis, and Border Patrol trucks can be seen constantly on all of the paved and dirt roads. Virtually every time I've driven on the highway I've seen at least one car pulled over with illegals being loaded into the back of a BP truck...



Although I didn't end up with a deer, at least while sitting in my blind I was able to read 3 of the Chronicles of Narnia and do 2 full Bible Studies as well as some extra Bible reading, so it was a nice way to relax away from the office!

The end