



5 Must Follow Steps to Quality Whitetails

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In this day in age, each time we tune in to our favorite outdoor shows, we are consistently exposed to “professional hunters”, practicing Quality Deer Management on some of the greatest properties in the mid west and across the country. Shows detailing food plot planting, deer herd age structure and even how to purchase your dream hunting property, keep us coming back again and again. What is it that we are looking for? Some of us are just looking to pass the time on a Saturday afternoon while enjoying a half hour of one of our most favorite sports under the sun. Others of us have taken our passions to a new level and invested the time, effort and money it takes to turn our own desires into reality. In this short column, I hope to share with you some of the ideas that have helped me, and my very dedicated group of whitetail hunters to turn our dreams into reality, turning our dreams into quality whitetails.

For the past twenty years, I have been a diehard whitetail fanatic. For nearly fifteen of those years, I would have called myself a very average hunter, focused on harvesting my fair share of whitetails each year and every now and then getting a bit lucky on a good buck. It wasn't until a bow- hunting trip to Wisconsin, that I discovered the true value in developing a quality deer management program. On that trip during October 2004, I hunted on a piece of property that had been managed for nearly twenty-five years. During those five days on stand, I observed more deer activity than I had ever seen. I saw up close several bucks that I would have harvested in seconds had I been hunting here in Maryland and on the last day of my hunt, I harvested the largest buck of my career. My buck was a fully mature, five and a half year old eleven point. He sported five and six inch bases with his longest tine being nearly twelve inches. The buck field dressed at 194 pounds and had a gross Pope and Young score of 161 inches. Beginning immediately upon my return, my fellow hunting club members and I began our own QDM program. Four years later, we are experiencing success beyond our wildest dreams. Here are five steps we have focused on religiously to add to our success. These steps may be used on any level to help you start and grow your own QDM program right here in Maryland.



1. You Plan To Fail, if you Fail to Plan:

Having a plan for the building of your QDM program is perhaps the most important advice I can give. Along the way, you are likely to face many different challenges. Our



club has faced challenges around every corner. Getting members to agree with the plan set in place, keeping members interested in practicing management, determining minimum size standards and doe harvest goals, have all been challenges we have faced. The number one way we have combated each challenge has been to plan for these challenges before they ever occur. Much like a salesman who tries to overcome the objection of his client prior to the client making the objection, we have spent countless hours talking through each and every possible scenario and how to deal with each before it arises. Do yourself a favor, and put in the time to write down your plans for starting, running and growing your QDM program before you ever bring the idea up to your club members.

2. Create Goals and Write Them Down:

I have experienced in many parts of my life, that goals written down in the first person, present tense, singular, come true. Goals not put in writing are merely dreams with no deadlines. I can't say how important it is to invest the time in setting goals for the success of your QDM program. In year one of our QDM program, our main goal was as simple as beginning to protect yearling bucks. In the many years leading up to our program, our property had been a brown it's down type property. Just like the rest of the state, over seventy percent of the bucks we were harvesting were eighteen months old or younger. In year number four of our program, our goal was to harvest at least thirty does from our property and have a harvest ratio of four does to every buck harvested. In year four we did exactly that. Also in year four, zero bucks were harvested under the age of



three and a half and out of seven total bucks harvested; two scored over 120 inches and aged over four years old. Continually setting goals and re assessing those goals has been a key to our success. This year, in our fifth year, we will take our goals up a notch. My hope is that within the next three years, we will have a goal of only harvesting bucks ages four and a half and older and scoring at least 140 inches. This is all happening right here in the little state of Maryland.

3. Manage Hunters First and Deer Second:

I learned early on, that the most challenging aspect to our QDM program was not going to be managing the deer herd on our one thousand acre tract in Baltimore County. The biggest challenge we faced out of the gates was managing our group of hunters. When we started our QDM program four years ago, our hunting club consisted of eleven members, made up of mostly close friends and family. The problem from the get go, was that not everyone in our group saw the value in starting a QDM program. So many of our



hunters had been brought up in a time when hunting meant killing. It was not a good day unless you saw twenty deer during your sit and wound up dragging something out of the woods with your hands wrapped around a rack, regardless of the size. The first step in managing our hunters was to get the right hunters on the bus so to speak. We cut our membership from eleven to six. This was perhaps the most difficult thing I had to do. This meant asking close friends, brothers and uncles to step down as members of our club. In the long run, this was the only way. From that point forward, every decision that we made as it pertained to our program, was made on a club basis. We have always made sure that each club member has had a say in each and every decision that impacts the club.

4. He With The Information Holds The Keys:

In a successful QDM program, perhaps the most important technical thing you must do is keep records and collect data. Data will help you determine your success level, it will help you convince your members to work harder, it will help you convince your neighbors to join in your efforts and it will help you stay motivated when things are tough. From the very beginning, my club has consistently collected data on a regular basis. We started with simple task of asking each hunter to write down what they were seeing when on stand. This lead us to be able to determine how many deer we had using our property. The second step of data collection was to develop a data harvest record. In this record, we kept track of exactly how many deer we harvested. This started out simply by tracking does versus bucks and keeping a total. We increased the level of our data collection by looking at live body weights and eventually age deer by jaw bone collection. This data collection allowed us to see how many deer we were harvesting each year, how many of each sex and what the impact on age structure our QDM program was having. The last and perhaps most exciting aspect of our data collection, included the use of trail monitoring cameras. We started four years ago with just one camera. Now, entering year five of our program, we have eight trail cameras running on our property twenty four hours per day, seven days per week from June first until March first. We have compiled literally thousands of pictures, chronicling the success of our program. In just four short years, we have gone from every buck on our cameras being a yearling four or six point, to seeing more four and a half and five and a half year old bucks than we ever dreamed we would. This visible success has made it easier and easier for us to manage our team and begin to convince our neighbors to join in.





5. Patience and Persistence Will Lead You to Success:

The building of a high level QDM program may perhaps be one of the most challenging this many of us ever take on. With that said, it is likely to be one of the most rewarding things we ever do. The road to success in your QDM program will not be paved in ease and relaxation. In fact, the road will likely be paved with bumps, twist and turns, that may cause you to second guess your decision to harvest antler less deer, let young bucks



walk, scout year round and challenge your buddies to join you in your quest. Some days, you may choose to quit, but never forget why you chose this path in the first place. If you stay focused on your vision of creating a quality hunting, quality whitetails and quality memories, you are likely to find success. Stay patient and be persistent, and your dream of quality whitetails will become a reality.

