



Kip's Korner



2010 Rut

December 2010

Hunters anxiously anticipate arrival of the breeding season in their areas. The rut provides deer behavior and activity that can make even the most tenured whitetail hunter's heart race. With respect to breeding activity, 2010 was "business as usual" for some and anything but normal for others. (For a more detailed look at factors that drive the rut, see <http://dl.dropbox.com/u/4660874/Gotpercent20Rutpercent20-percent20WWpercent20Octoberpercent202010.pdf>). To analyze the relative timing and intensity of the 2010 rut I surveyed approximately 41,000 hunters in QDMA's database on November 24, 2010 and received responses from 4,557 (2 percent) by December 31, 2010. This was not a scientific study, but the data should provide a general index to what hunters across the whitetail's range experienced in 2010.

Respondents listed the state they hunted and provided data on the number of rubs and scrapes they saw, the amount of rut activity (chasing, fighting and breeding) they witnessed, and the timing of rut activity relative to past years. This survey was especially interesting in 2010 as some hunters follow a lunar-based rut timing predictor (the most notable of which being Charles Alsheimer's and Wayne Laroche's). Mr. Alsheimer and Mr. Laroche predicted the "peak of the chasing phase", or what most hunters refer to as the rut, would occur in late November in the North (Three weeks later than in 2009) with most breeding occurring in late November and early December. Aging fetuses from does harvested in winter and spring will identify the actual breeding dates for this fall, but while we're waiting for the official answer we'll use what a few thousand hunters saw as a preview.

I filtered the survey responses by region (see map below), and some interesting trends quickly became apparent. In the Midwest, two thirds (67 percent) of the respondents saw about the same number or more rubs and scrapes as they normally do while a third (33 percent) saw less. Half (51 percent) witnessed less rut activity this year and half (49 percent) saw about the same amount or more. Most interesting, half (51 percent) reported the timing of rut activity was about the same as normal while 27 percent said it was late.

In the Northeast 62 percent saw about the same number or more while 38 percent saw fewer rubs and scrapes. Over half (53 percent) saw less rut activity while 46 percent saw about the same amount or more, and half (50 percent) reported the timing was about the same as normal while 27 percent reported it was late. Comparatively, responses from these two regions nearly mirror each other. The amount of rut sign was the same or more than normal for the majority, the amount of rut activity was the same or more than normal for half of the respondents, and the timing of activity was normal for half of the respondents. About a quarter of the respondents from each region said the rut was late, and one in five reported the rut was early in their area.

Responses from the West were similar to the Midwest and Northeast except a slightly higher percentage reported a later rut. An error in the survey template did not allow Canada hunters to identify their province so all were grouped into one region (Canada). A higher percentage (55 percent) of Canada hunters reported seeing fewer rubs and scrapes than normal; their views were consistent with those from the Midwest, Northeast and West regarding the amount of rut activity; and half reported a normal rut timing while over a third (37 percent) said it was late.

The Southeast is the final region and their data is understandably different from other regions. Deer herds in some areas of this region do not rut until December, January or even February and my survey concluded on December 3. Depending on the question, 17 to 26 percent of the respondents answered the rut hadn't occurred in their area yet. For respondents whose rut had occurred, their responses were similar to other regions with respect to the amount of sign and activity observed as well as timing of the rut.

So, what's the consensus among hunters? The majority of hunters in the Midwest

and Northeast said the rut was on time and they saw the same number or more rubs and scrapes but less chasing, fighting and breeding. The majority of hunters in Canada said the rut was on time but they saw fewer rubs and scrapes as well as less chasing, fighting and breeding than they normally do. Collectively the majority of northern hunters experienced a typical year, but personal messages from numerous survey respondents showed individual seasons ran the gamut from "no rut sign at all in my area" to "strongest rut I've ever seen". My personal observations were I saw fewer rubs and scrapes and less rut activity than I normally do, and I'm fortunate to hunt a "tuned up" deer herd so an out-of-balance herd wasn't the culprit. I also felt the rut timing in my area was a little later than normal, but I'm in the minority with this impression. Many factors impact what we observe during the rut including the deer herd's adult sex ratio and age structure, density relative to the habitat's carrying capacity, weather, amount of hunting pressure, and likely other variables that we're not aware of or at least don't understand very well yet. Are lunar cycles responsible for cueing breeding in whitetails? The lunar-based model predicted the rut would be three weeks later in 2010 than 2009. Numerous scientific studies dispute this theory, as did the majority of respondents to my survey. This isn't to say that lunar cycles may not have some effect on deer behavior - just not on the actual timing of breeding. Fawns hitting the ground three weeks later than normal in 2011 would put them at a tremendous disadvantage.

The bottom line for northern hunters is it was a strange year for some and normal year for most. The bottom line for southern hunters is if you're from an area whose rut is yet to come, you're one of the most envied hunters in the country! Good luck during the rut.



Region	No. Responses	No. Rubs & Scrapes		Amount of Rut Activity		Rut Timing	
		Less	33%	Less	51%	Early	20%
Midwest	1,464	Same	46%	Same	32%	Same	51%
		More	21%	More	17%	Late	27%
		No rut yet	<1%	No rut yet	<1%	No rut yet	1%

Northeast	885	Less	38%	Less	53%	Early	21%
		Same	40%	Same	30%	Same	50%
		More	22%	More	16%	Late	27%
		No rut yet	<1%	No rut yet	1%	No rut yet	2%
West	398	Less	37%	Less	46%	Early	17%
		Same	41%	Same	32%	Same	44%
		More	17%	More	14%	Late	29%
		No rut yet	6%	No rut yet	8%	No rut yet	10%
Canada	61	Less	55%	Less	50%	Early	10%
		Same	28%	Same	35%	Same	50%
		More	17%	More	13%	Late	37%
		No rut yet	0%	No rut yet	2%	No rut yet	3%
Southeast	1,749	Less	34%	Less	40%	Early	13%
		Same	38%	Same	28%	Same	42%
		More	11%	More	11%	Late	20%
		No rut yet	17%	No rut yet	22%	No rut yet	26%

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