

Pre-Rut Trail Camera Tactics



Right now the big question is “when are the does going to come into estrus and when will the bucks start actively pursuing them”? I wish I had the answers. Honestly, there are too many variables involved to spew out a definitive response. However, what I can tell you is that if you get aggressive with your trail camera placement you just might find the answers for yourself. Here are some thoughts to consider when using your trail camera (for example: [MOULTRIE M 1100I GAME CAMERA](#)) to hunt down a pre-rut buck.

Learn To Be Mobile

Forget about your preconceived plans because they are on the fringe of being thrown out of the window. Bucks are starting to move during times they weren't previously moving and showing up in places they weren't previously showing up in. But that's a good thing. The only problem is when we hold onto our slow, early season way of thinking. Right now the bucks have something else on their minds other than food and that is causing them to move more. You should be ready to move too.

Move your trail cameras to find those scrapes that are actually being used more than once. Move your cameras to find those rub lines that are being used by the size of buck that makes your heart pound. Then move your stand accordingly. Move, move, move.

Increase Trail Camera Checking Frequency

Any other time of the year it is best to visit trail cameras sparingly. However, as a bucks testosterone levels increase so does his daylight activity. The only way you are going to know exactly when this begins to happen is by checking your trail cameras.

Now, that doesn't mean you should check them every day. But, you should at least increase your checking frequency to maybe twice a week. This will allow you to stay on top of changing buck activity and help decide if it is the time to burn through a few vacation days. But, make no mistake, this will all come at a cost.

And remember, check your cameras often but don't announce your presence by doing so.

You see, no matter how hard you try you are going to impact your hunting area. How negatively you impact it will depend largely on how much effort you put into trying to fly under the whitetail radar. This includes things like the time of day you check your cameras and how much odor you leave behind in the process.

Obviously, checking trail cameras just after first light and just prior to sunset will likely result in bumping deer as you move in and out of the area. So, try to avoid those time slots if at all possible. And, even though it doesn't guarantee you won't run into a deer or two, replacing SD cards during midday hours is a much better option. Still, keep in mind that the further along the pre-rut goes the greater your chances are of seeing a buck anytime of the day.

Create Your Own Pre Rut Hotspots

The pre-rut is the perfect time to doctor existing scrapes and rubs or simply make your own. By introducing an "intruder" into the area other bucks might be more apt to visit a scrape or rub that they had previously made during daylight hours. Still, no matter what type of scrape you are monitoring, just be sure not to place your trail camera right on top of it. By moving your camera back just a little bit you give the buck room to do his thing without noticing your camera hanging nearby.

A good option is to set your camera up so that you can monitor trails running into or out of the area. That way you can better understand the direction the buck is coming from or the direction

he is going. Both can lead to more clues about his behavior and ultimately the right place to hang your treestand.

Don't Forget The Does

During the pre-rut it is easy to forget what the bucks really want...a hot doe. This is mostly due to the fact that bucks are leaving behind more evidence of their whereabouts than any other time of year. Using that evidence and hanging treestands accordingly is a good tactic. Just don't lose focus of the big picture.

Sooner or later, no matter where a buck scrapes or rubs, he is going to track down a hot doe. Knowing where the does in your area like to bed, feed and travel in between could ultimately lead to a filled tag; especially if said buck has eluded you up to this point.

Therefore, it only makes sense to include doe monitoring in your pre-rut trail camera schemes. It might not be as exciting as hanging your camera over a hot scrape or rub line but like I said, eventually the bucks will find you. But only if you know exactly what the does in your area are doing. Use your trail camera to gather that info.

Trail Camera Options

In a perfect world all of my cameras would be cellular so that I could check them from the comfort of my home. If your area has good cell phone reception then this might be an option to seriously consider. If not, you have to do it the old fashion way.

Also, when dealing with mature bucks I opt for the "no-flash" style cameras. Until it is proven that a white flash doesn't spook deer I will stick with no flash at all. Why take the chance of spooking the buck of your life when most "no-flash" cameras are reasonably priced and are increasingly becoming the norm.

Setting cameras up a little further back from trails or even elevating them are both good options. Bucks are starting to become more aggressive and showing themselves during daylight more often. This only means that their sense of awareness is heightened. With that comes a nose and eyes that will sense every little change in their environment. As if they weren't already. So, plan and operate accordingly.

Conclusion

The pre-rut is a great time to locate that buck that has been a ghost all year and put a bullet or an arrow in him. Trail cameras can help you do that. But only if you are cautious about where you place them, when you check them and the scent you leave behind. Concentrate on those three areas and you could very well be reaping the reward in a few short weeks. Best of luck.