

Life & Times of the

Whitetail



Is the moon out tonight?

TYPE IN MOON and deer movement on any Internet search engine and watch the hits pile up. The same can be seen on any hunting website or message board. There are countless charts and tables correlating moon phase and position with deer feeding, daytime activity, nighttime activity, estrous cycles, breeding, even fawning. Humans have worshipped the moon. Remnants of a moon-based religion can even be seen in the Christian calendar. There, of course, is the sap moon, the planting moon, the hay moon, the harvest moon, and the hunter's moon that tells people the time of year they should tap maple trees for sugaring, plant crops, cut hay, harvest crops or hunt game. If human behavior is affected by it, then why wouldn't it affect more primal beings, like deer?

Because deer are a popular game species, figuring out where they are going to be and when is important to those pursuing these elusive animals. So what makes a deer tick, or in this case move from point A to point B? Deer are crepuscular, which means they are most active at dawn and dusk. This is well documented by casual observation and scientific research. The amount of movement is what varies. Does the moon play a role in the daily and monthly travels of the average doe? Do bucks turn an

eye to the night sky to check the phase of that most prominent heavenly body? By all accounts, the answer is no. Scientific research on this topic is sparse, but data that do exist show that movement and activity are not affected by the moon. GPS-collared bucks in Pennsylvania showed no change in movement between full and new moons. The same goes for bucks studied in Texas. In Maryland, moon phase was not a consistent indicator of buck movement or activity.

There are environmental, biological, and man-made factors that do influence deer activity and movements. Weather, temperature, food availability, time of rut, deer individuality, and hunt pressure all can play a role in where a deer goes and when. And they likely override any effect the moon might have. Someone once said that deer are driven by the need to feed and the need to breed. In other words, survival of the individual leads to the survival of the species — the goal of every creature. Our quest to explain deer movements based on one factor is an oversimplification of a complex process with countless numbers of variables.

To say that theories of the effects of the moon on deer movements are debatable is a gross understatement. However, calendars, charts and tables are produced and sold every year. Unfortunately, deer don't get a copy. □

