

# *Life & Times of the whitetail* **Biologist**



By J. T. Fleegle

## ***Deer Wrestling Wrap-up***

OKAY, SO WE DO get to do a little Animal Planet stuff after all. We catch deer. Every year from February through April, we gear up and head out to catch our quarry. The deer we catch are fitted with various paraphernalia: ear tags, radio collars, GPS collars and reward tags. The fittings a deer receives depend on the research project and its objectives. At minimum, a deer that has encountered a capture crew will sport a new set of ear tags.

It's not easy to catch a deer. First and foremost, deer are wild animals. Not even the deer that come into your yard to eat your roses like people. Deer move in silence, under the cover of darkness. They have a nose that can detect the slightest scent and a set of bionic ears that seem to hear the grass grow. Any hunter will tell you they are a formidable opponent. To catch one of these stealthy animals takes planning, patience and nerve.

We use three common methods to catch deer: drop nets, rock nets and Clover traps. Drop nets and rocket nets work as you would expect. Drop nets are suspended from poles and dropped on deer; rocket nets are attached to rockets and shot over deer. Clover traps have nothing to do with clover, however. In 1954, a box trap with a pipe frame covered by netting was designed by Melvin Clover, hence, the Clover trap. Trap set-up requires strength and strategy. The traps are heavy and awkward and require staking. In frozen, rocky ground this is a challenge. Careful consideration of deer movement, landscape, wind direction and weather are critical to selecting a successful trap site.

Vehicle repairs, landowner contacts, pre-baiting, trail camera monitoring, endless equipment maintenance, injuries, and ridiculously long hours are also required for deer trapping. Every year, we hire young, hardworking, fearless, technicians to help with this effort.

Hours go into the capture of each deer, but actual handling time is only minutes. There are many nights when the net is never dropped, the rockets never shot, nor the trapdoor ever sprung. But all those hours are worth it (personally and professionally) the minute you're confronted with a kicking, bawling 100-plus pound firecracker called a white-tailed deer.