



By J.T. Fleegle  
PGC Wildlife Biologist

## ***The Truth is Out There***

I FIND ALL WILDLIFE fascinating. I am even fascinated by the squirrel that visits my birdfeeder — although, not quite as fascinated as the dog. The fascination with regard to white-tailed deer transcends those of us in the field of wildlife biology. Even those far removed from the outdoors seem to know some fact about the white-tailed deer. I use the term “fact” very loosely. As sometimes the facts get a little sketchy. But to coin a phrase from my favorite ‘90s sci-fi show, *The X-Files*, “The truth is out there.”

To take a more philosophical view, science is the search for truth. Theories are born and die daily in the scientific community. Sometimes theories that have been supported for decades succumb to death. And this is okay. After all, we are searching for the truth. But theories don’t always die easily. Some people cling to them like that last bit of barbeque sauce that you just can’t seem to get off your hands.

For example, there is a belief that dominant bucks do all the breeding. Though this is a decades-old theory of whitetail breeding ecology, new research has placed this theory on the scrap heap.

Other various falsehoods transform into facts through simple conversation. A plausible explanation for an observed event gets repeated again and again and, all of a sudden, that’s the way it is. Or, the coup de grace, it is seen in print. In that case, it must be true. To borrow yet another phrase from the cult classic, “I want to believe.” Some of us may be skeptical, but most of us are eager to believe obscure and sometimes outlandish reports.

One of my favorites is the theory that the Game Commission is receiving “kick backs” from the insurance and timber industries. This is interesting, considering evaporating funding has been an issue for this and numerous other state wildlife agencies for decades.

The conspiracy theorists will tell you to “trust no one,” including me. And on some level I concur. Investigate these topics for yourself. Be a critical thinker. Ask questions. Be a scientist. Search for the truth. But remember, sometimes the answers aren’t always what you might expect. So that is where we are headed for the next year in this *Game News* feature. We are going to bust some myths and lay waste to some tired old legends.