

EYE SEE

Did you ever hear the saying, “He has bedroom eyes”? Well, I’ve been told I have what they call bathroom eyes.... They look like crap.

My dad was a very good hunter. Before he died prematurely in an accident at the early age of 44 years, he displayed an unusual amount of woodsmanship skills, especially for a guy living most of his formative years in the city. I’ve since thought about this in detail. I’m not sure exactly where he gained his hunting knowledge as he tended to be a loner in the woods. No one in his family hunted at all as far as I know, which means he was likely self-taught.

You have to realize this was in the late 1940s and early ‘50s. I doubt there were such things as deer biologists and/or much literature on deer research compared to today. All available that I know of were the “big three” outdoor publications of Outdoor Life; Sports Afield and Field and Stream. And most of the articles in those were published stories of “me and Joe shooting a nice buck behind the barn”.

But dad was a “two-season hunter” before Fred promoted it. He shot a lemon wood longbow around the time brother Gene and I were in first grade. We also had a hunting camp on a farm in Dutchess County, New York. We spent literally EVERY weekend on the farm year around hunting and learning. Dad loved to share his knowledge freely with Gene and myself.

I distinctly remember when I was about ten years old him telling me, “If a deer is looking right at you, you can lift your weapon slowly (stress on slowly) straight up (vertical) and you might get away with it. But if you swing your weapon horizontally, left to right or right to left, you don’t have a chance. He’ll explode out of there.” I always remembered that.

I recall dad explaining this was nature, in that most of a deer’s predators came at them horizontally, such as coyotes, dogs, cats, lions, etc., unlike birds of prey that would come in vertically on small game.

I would just about bet the farm this was self-taught info. Today our deer biologists likely have all kinds of research papers on the subject. I’ll try not to make this scientific but I would like to touch on some biological facts that are important in our hunting encounters.

All eyes have rods and cones. Rods are better motion sensors, sensitive to light, but not that color sensitive. Cones are color sensitive. Deer have a much higher density of rods than cones in the retina. Rods are photoreceptors and more sensitive to light but are not as sensitive to color. Cones provide color sensitivity and high resolution vision. Additionally to this, a deer’s eyes also don’t have an ultraviolet filter, unlike humans. Therefore, some objects seem to “glow” in low-light conditions to a deer.

And we won’t even get into the subject of specific color spectrum sensitivity for deer. Let’s just say their sensitivity to certain colors tend to be mostly in low light conditions, which happens to be when deer are most active. Coincidence? I think not.

How many times have you read about watching for the shine of an eye; the horizontal line of a deer's back or belly; the white throat patch or the "V" of the tail? And how many times have we mentioned what you need to look for is MOTION? Watch for movement. I love to have deer feeding or bedded where I can watch their body language. Not only will they act as live decoys, they will detect other incoming deer way before I will.

Another hard fact most hunters never think about is the shape of the pupils. Did you ever think about the shape of the pupils on different species? Prey species tend to normally have horizontal pupils whereas ambush predators tend to have vertical pupils. Another coincidence? I again think not. It makes perfect sense for the prey species in order to better detect predation coming in laterally. That is exactly why dad said you could lift your weapon vertically and get away with it much more often than swinging on a buck that's on red alert. Dad didn't know the biological reasoning but he knew through hunter's instinct.

Just so you know, the high density of rods determine their motion detection. And with the placement of their eyes on the sides of their heads they are able to distinguish objects and movement 310 degrees around themselves without moving their heads. Be aware when drawing a bow on a deer walking by it's not a sure bet you won't get busted even if they're already quartering away.

How many times have you read predators eyes are on the front of their heads/faces, whereas prey species have their eyes on the side of their heads? Is nature not cool?

Critters will absolutely pick up on a hunter's eye contact. I never try to look them right in the eye. I always try to squint. Did you ever notice when looking at the pair of black/open windows on most pop-up hunting blinds the two giant black shooting holes in an otherwise perfectly camouflaged set-up will freak out game? It looks just like two giant predator eyes eyeballing them. Use shoot-through netting.

When stalking game, never look them right in the eye and walk straight at them. Trust me... they know you're up to no good. Instead, try to walk towards them at an angle so they get the feeling you don't see them and are just walking by. Watch them in your peripheral vision. It's just a good hunter's common sense.

How many times have you been on stand on a perfect, cold/frosty morning with almost no winds? You're not batting an eye. All you're doing is breathing. The sun comes up and every deer within sight will lock onto you. Why? Because the sun is shining on your cold/frosty breath. Not much you can

do other than double your facemask because breathing is a big thing in life. My point is, they picked up on the movement of drifting breath. It's a wonder we're ever able to actually kill one.

It's an interesting study between nature and human nature. Deer might not be able to distinguish some details with a lack of reasoning capabilities. They sometimes just see things "differently" ... quite often like our wives do. Now... I think... eye understand... I mean, I understand.

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