

# Cassie's First Buck

By **Brad Rucks**, Cassie's father

Photos by the Author

“Cassie, he's right there,” I whispered as a giant buck stood downwind trying to figure out where we were.

Sometimes, things aren't meant to happen, and this was definitely one of those cases. We were hunting Wisconsin's 2007 youth deer season Oct. 6 and 7. The weather was unseasonably hot, and my expectations were fairly low. We had been in the double ladder stand for a couple of hours when I thought I heard antlers hitting brush, but my view was obstructed, so I asked Cassie if she could see the deer.

“I see a doe,” she replied. Just minutes later, I turned

around to see a beautiful 4-year-old 8-pointer step out only 40 yards behind us — directly downwind. I immediately had Cassie stand up and turn around, and I handed her the gun. After the gun was in her hands, she asked, “Where is he?”

“Right by the birch tree,” I whispered.

Of course, there were 50 birch trees around us, so she didn't know where to look. A moment later, Cassie said she could see the body but not the antlers. I told her they were two feet over his head and that she should have been able to see them. Then I figured it out — she was looking at another deer.

Without moving her body, I told her to retrace our entrance to the stand. All of a sudden, I felt her shaking uncontrollably.

“I see him, he's huge,” she said.

Unfortunately, the buck saw her at about the same time and bounded away.

“Dad, I think he was bigger than your big 8-pointer,” Cassie said after the big bruiser left.

She was right. That deer would easily approach the 150-inch mark as an 8-pointer. What a start to the youth season. However, by the end of the weekend, we had come close to a couple of 2-year-old bucks, but



Cassie's buck was caught by a camera in late October.



both deer slid through our fingers. I told her not to worry. We still had the regular gun season ahead of us. I'm sure it seemed like an eternity to Cassie, but the big day finally arrived. The weather for Wisconsin's opener was slightly overcast and fairly warm — not the best conditions for deer hunting. I wasn't worried, however, because that summer, I had planted extra food plots around our tower blind. By widening my trails, we made a 10-foot food-plot strip that connected all of my plots.

The Imperial No-Plow I planted was doing great, and deer were pounding it. The tower blind sat directly over an Imperial Clover Plot. About 150 yards to the west was 1.5 acres of Imperial Winter-Greens, and to the north was an acre of Pure Attraction. My confidence was proven correct. Soon after first light, deer were surrounding our stand. Again, however, lady luck didn't shine on us. A beautiful 2 1/2-year-old came bounding out of the woods chasing a doe. We grunted him to a stop, but his body angle was poor, and Cassie didn't shoot. Something spooked him, and he started to trot back toward the woods. I grunted to stop him, only to spook him worse, as he bolted into the woods. In a somber voice she said, "Why does it always work on TV?" I assured her that it doesn't. Glassing the fields around us, I immediately recognized a buck headed our way. He was the "Pond 9," a solid 120-class 3-year-old buck of which I had several pictures from my no-flash camera. I nicknamed the buck Pond 9 because every time we saw him or got a picture of him, he was by a pond on our property. Within minutes, he had closed the distance to less than 100 yards. I slid the northern window open and told Cassie to get ready, because the deer was going to enter the Imperial Clover patch and then head north on the same trail we had just seen a doe use.

I'll be darned if that deer didn't make a fool out of me, too. He entered the plot right where I said, but instead of heading north, he went south. We needed to switch positions, and as I opened the window, Cassie slid the gun into position. Before I could focus the camera on the deer again, she shot. To be honest, I had no clue if she had hit or missed him. The buck just started

to lumber away. I told her to reload, but she was so excited that she couldn't get the gun open. So I put the camera down, grabbed the gun, reloaded it and handed it back to her. "Cassie, where did he go?" I asked.

"I don't know, Dad, I was watching you," she replied.

I had my other two children, Jordan and Noah, in the blind, too, and I asked them where he went. No one had kept an eye on the buck. He was down or in a tall clump of grass 100 yards away. After several minutes, I looked at Cassie and said, "I think you got him." She immediately started bouncing up and down. Of course, those words were barely out of my mouth when I looked up and saw a buck coming out of the tall grass onto the oak ridge next to us. I grabbed the glasses but never could get a good look. It was definitely a 9-pointer, but was it the same buck? One of us had to get out of the tower blind to check. So I sent Cassie out, and told her to check the first trail out of the Imperial Clover. If she didn't spot blood, I told her she should walk down and check the next trail down the path. She did exactly what I said, but when she hit the first trail, she didn't see a thing. I got the sick feeling in my stomach that we had somehow managed to foul things up.

I put the camera on the tripod and told my 9-year-old, Jordan, to keep the camera on Cassie, because I was going to see if I could find some blood with her. The next thing I knew, Jordan and Noah were saying that Cassie was jumping up and down. I ran to the window, and there she was, jumping up and down right where I had last seen the buck before reloading the gun. We joined her at the deer, and it was truly one of the happiest moments of my hunting career. Cassie had made a perfect shot, and somehow in the excitement, she had missed the blood all over the first trail. After turning around to head back to the blind, she found the blood and only went 20 yards from that spot to find the deer. I still have not watched the footage. I'm hoping it's good enough to air on the Deer & Deer Hunting show this fall on Versus. If not, I know I got great footage of her shooting her second deer, a mature doe headed to a Winter-Greens field.

That day will live in my memory forever.



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