

# Unusual Velvet Buck Marks Hunter's Birthday

By James Stanford

**I**t was Thanksgiving morning 2006, and I was hunting my land in Mississippi. I was in a ladder stand behind my house, where I had cleared some trees along a small ditch and planted Imperial No-Plow. Four fence lines come together there.

I had hunted the stand earlier in the season but never saw anything. But there were some signs of a small buck in the area. I had gotten into the stand about 15 to 20 minutes before sunrise. It was pretty cool, with a good frost on the ground. At about 6:45 a.m., I heard two shots from a distant property. The hunt was on. After I heard the shots, I was confident it would be a good morning.

After about 30 minutes, two does trotted through the field from the direction of the shots. When they reached my fence line, they stopped and looked around for a while. They crawled through the fence, passed under my stand and followed the sand ditch back toward the road and the front of the property. After about 15 to 20 minutes, I heard something in front of me, but I couldn't see anything because of trees on the fence row.

Soon, a good-looking buck stepped out. I noticed the deer had a good rack and looked mature, but I was concentrating on making the shot because he was about to walk behind some trees. When I had a clear

shot, I took it. The buck ran about 10 yards and fell by an old oak tree. I sat there for about five minutes to make sure he was down, and then climbed down and walked toward the deer. The closer I got, I noticed the body was large, but I could not really see any antlers. Still, I knew I had shot a good-racked buck.

When I got close enough to see how big the deer was, I almost passed out. I started shaking and getting excited like a child in a toy store. It was a monster — maybe not to other people, but it's by far the biggest buck I've taken or even dreamed of. It was a 12-pointer, and the reason I couldn't see its antlers easily when I pulled the trigger was because it was still in full velvet, and the antlers blended with the tree branches. It was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen.

To make the day even better, it was my 30th birthday. The deer represented the best birthday present a hunter or outdoorsmen could dream of. I called my girlfriend to bring my truck to where I was and see if she could help me put the deer in the truck. After she got there, I noticed a truck in the field behind the property. I waved and flagged the driver down to see if he had shot earlier. He said he was checking cows and that people on the other side of them were hunting, so it probably was them.

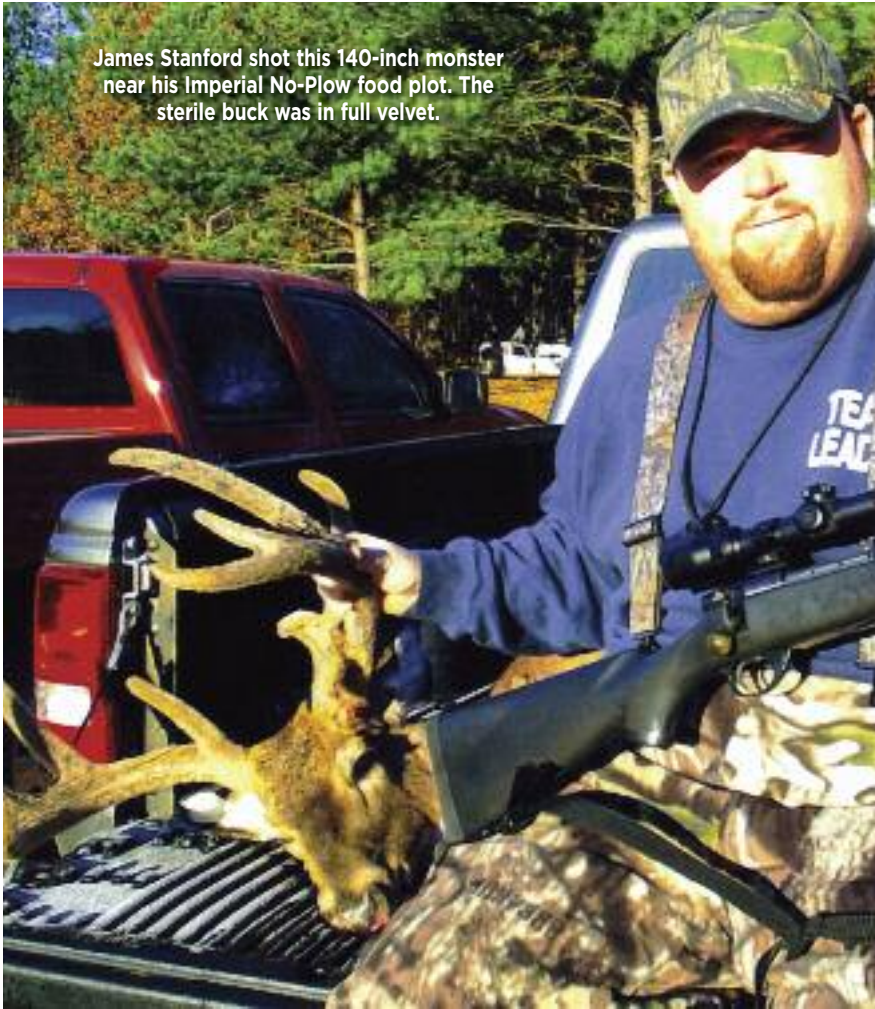
I told him about my exciting morning, and he came over the fence to see what I had shot. I think he was in shock as much as I was. He had said that area was known for good-sized bucks, but he had never seen anything like my deer.

He went back to his truck to get a camera to take a picture of it. He noticed the deer was still in full velvet and said it was probably sterile, mentioning something about how such deer don't shed their antlers or velvet.

**Thanks to the continuing growth of the Internet, the start of a new hunting-related website might not seem like big news. However, one new website seems to be making all the right early moves: Talk Hunting (www.talkhunting.com). Talk Hunting is a free forum where hunters from all across the world can gather to discuss tips, tactics, gear, and virtually anything hunting-related in an atmosphere where posted content is monitored to ensure that it is appropriate for the whole family – especially young hunters who are the future of our hunting way of life. What separates Talk Hunting from other outdoor sites is that its registered members can participate in weekly, monthly or quarterly drawings to win prizes that hunters really want! Examples include Mathews bows, Knight rifles, Scent-Lok suits, turkey and deer decoys, food-plot seed, magazine subscriptions, and other high quality products. Be one of the first to sign up, and you'll have a chance to enter in the site's next drawing.**

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James Stanford shot this 140-inch monster near his Imperial No-Plow food plot. The sterile buck was in full velvet.

We also noticed that the deer's front left hoof was injured. One of the hooves was deformed and bent upward.

I called to wake up my roommate so he could help me load it in the back of my truck. We are both good-sized fellows, but we had a difficult time hoisting the deer. My girlfriend also had to help. The deer almost took up the entire truck bed.

I took the deer across the road to my parents' house to show them my birthday present. Just like the rest of us, they were amazed by the size of the deer and its unusual velvet rack.

When we hung the deer to field dress it, I noticed it did not have testicles. I guess the gentleman was right about the deer being sterile. The next day, I carried the deer to a local processor. When I got there, everyone gathered around my truck in amazement. No one could believe what they were seeing. People were taking pictures of it and calling friends to tell them about it. That made me feel so proud, and it was an awesome feeling — what many hunters dream of. The processors said they had worked with deer for 15-plus years but had never seen anything like it.

A buddy knew of another hunter who had killed a deer in full velvet and taken it to Johnny Hataway of Hataway's Taxidermy Inc. I called Hataway and told him what I had, and he said he would be glad to mount the deer and would love to see it. I carried it to him, and just like everyone else, he was in awe. And this man had some awesome deer and other mounts in his shop.

When he reacted like that, I knew I had a one-of-a-kind buck of a lifetime.

Johnny also pointed out the deer's injured leg and said it likely affected the deer's antler growth. I had also read in a magazine about a buck that had a leg injury, and its antlers started webbing from that. Johnny also showed me the deer had double white spots on its chest, and the back of its ears were solid black. He said he had never seen black ears on a whitetail before. Later that night, Johnny left a message on my phone, saying he had gross-scored the deer at 148 inches. It was about a 3-1/2-year-old deer.

My dad got me into deer hunting almost 15 years ago. We have been hunting many times, and I have shot many deer — but nothing this big or special. My dad had a big 10-pointer on his wall, and now I can say I have a wall-hanger as well.

I realize how lucky I am to have taken this once-in-a-lifetime trophy. It will be difficult to top this one. I also want to thank the Lord for our beautiful environment and the game we're able to hunt and enjoy.

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