

BOW HUNTING THE GRAY GHOST

*Paul Navarre
Ft. Collins Colorado
CBA Board of Directors
Member of the CBA, NBA, KBA and now the ABA.*



Traveling out of state to bow hunt is always a neat adventure, especially when the temperatures can be 10 degrees at home in Colorado but 60-70 degrees at your hunting destination. Packing my sun tan lotion for a hunting trip is usually not something I do, but when heading south to Arizona to hunt January rutting Coues whitetail deer, it's a must.

This would be my fourth trip in five years and I was excited to try out a new hunting spot that had been recommended by a friend in Arizona and also by another Colorado hunter. After five days of hunting, I realized that this new area, being very open with limited cover, was more suited for long range rifle shooting. Sure, I spotted deer and four good bucks, but getting to within "archery close" range would be a real challenge so I decided to head farther south to a location where I had harvested a fork horned buck three years prior.

When hunting any big game species and looking for that "honey hole," I always include in the search, good cover, food and water nearby. I have taken eight different big game species in Colorado with bow and arrow, so I felt I had the knowledge and experience to locate a good hunting spot. I remembered what a fellow bow hunter had told me, "Paul, stay away from the wide open deer areas where the rifle hunters can shoot long ranges and you will have more bow hunting opportunities and see more deer in the thicker cover." I knew the exact area.

The next afternoon I watched a small three point buck following a doe along a stream bottom a mile upstream from my tent camp. I remained there the rest of the day but no other deer were observed. There was good deer sign along the streambed where the two adjacent hillsides joined. The vegetation was thicker with scattered cottonwood and mesquite trees plus other clumps of thorn brush. I had to be careful not to kneel on any cactus spines.

Early the next morning, I was hidden in a make shift blind where I knelt in silence, my bow leaning against a tree within arms reach. Deer started to filter through just after first light. Later, a three-point buck made a tempting target as he stopped twenty yards away, unaware of my presence, but he was just a little larger than the buck I had killed on my first trip when seeking these gray ghosts of the arid south. I would wait to see what other quality bucks were in the area.

Don't look at the antlers! That is the advice given by veteran bow hunters, but I could not help myself. All I could make out was "bone" and this buck was following a doe just thirty yards away through the thicker brush ahead of me. She went through an opening, my bow was drawn, and as the buck stepped forward, I released the arrow. I missed and shot right over him, misjudging the range. This lost opportunity had taken place so quickly that I hardly had time to feel dejected. I quickly reached for my buck call and gave out three quick buck grunts, hoping he might believe another buck was in the area and causing the commotion. Later I saw him following the same doe out of the stream bottom and up into the surrounding brush covered hillsides.

The warming sun was now high overhead and I had changed my position by crawling up forty yards closer to two does, one bedded and one feeding away. At noon it happened; the large antlered buck returned and quickly spotted the two does only thirty yards from me. The bedded doe was forced up by the buck but did not care for his persistent advances and she quickly left the area. The other doe saw me move and was on alert as the buck came up behind her. I crossed my fingers that she would not bust out and take the buck with her but luck was with me as she spun around when he touched her flank. The buck was broadside and unaware of my presence! A half second later the arrow reached its target and within four seconds the buck had reversed itself and disappeared back in the direction it had come.

The shot was a little high and I had noticed the broadhead and 12 inches of the shaft were sticking out the opposite side of the buck. When I could not find any blood for tracking, I relied on existing trails and good old dead reckoning. I found him lying in a shallow depression one hundred twenty five yards from where I had shot him. And yes, all of the blood had stayed in the chest and lung cavity. I was pleased with my tracking skills but even more pleased with this great Arizona Coues whitetail buck, A.K.A, the "Gray Ghost."

January deer hunting, warmer temperatures, tent camping on public land during a self guided deer hunt; life is good, and I really appreciated the opportunity.