

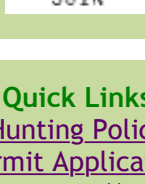


Hunting News

Grafton Land Trust

Preserving Grafton's open spaces since 1958

January 2015



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Got a cool photo from a recent hunting trip in Grafton? Send it to hunting@grafftonland.org and we'll publish it in the "Photo of the month" section of *Hunting News*.



We are a member supported organization that relies on you - *hunters* - as well as hikers, equestrians and other recreational users to manage our lands. Please [become a member](#) today!

Dear Hunter,

Double Sevens: A Tale of Two Bucks

Pre-season scouting is often the key to a successful deer season, but balancing the needs of work and family with one's desire to fill the freezer can be difficult. I had a particularly busy fall season, so I was forced to rely on historical knowledge gained from 11 years of hunting Grafton's woods. That, coupled with patience and a healthy dose of luck, lead to my most successful Massachusetts deer season yet. The following is a tale of two Grafton bucks.



A single 12-gauge Sabot slug sailed 70 yards to dispatch this 7-point buck as it walked quickly through a Grafton forest on December 13th. (Photo by Troy Gipps)

Saturday, December 13th was the kind of day deer hunters dream about. The temperature hovered just below freezing, there was absolutely no wind, and the warmth of the sun fell upon my face as dawn broke. I was hopeful, but as the first two hours of the morning ticked by my patience waned and the mental game that typifies deer hunting began. Doubt crept in. I had seen deer pass through the area many times in past years and had taken a button buck here last year, but a lack of pre-season scouting dulled my enthusiasm. It was the final day of shotgun deer season, so like many hunters, I was tempted to still hunt but instead decided to stand my ground. One of the big advantages of this spot was the field of view. I could see well over 80 yards in most directions. I visualized deer. I visualized the shot. I scanned the forest for movement ... then it happened! The scissoring motion of a deer's legs jumped into view. Then, a flash of antler. "Yes ... a deer ... a buck ... coming in from the left ... he's moving fast ... pick a lane ... yes, a shooting lane ... got to find a break in the trees." My Leupold FX-II 2.5x scope provided a great field of view. I tracked the deer with the crosshairs while allowing my eye to jump forward to find a shooting lane through the trees. "Yes, there ... looks to be about three feet wide. It's a long shot ... 70 ... maybe 80 yards ... focus, focus ... exhale, squeeze." The shot rang out and the buck bolted through the forest to my right and disappeared from view. Had the Sabot slug found its mark? It was a long shot, but time at the shooting range gave me confidence. I waited about 15 minutes, gathered my equipment, and counted 85 paces to the point of impact. A blind man could have followed the blood trail. It was a great shot; a double-lung. The 7-point buck traveled no more than 40 yards. I had filled my first tag.

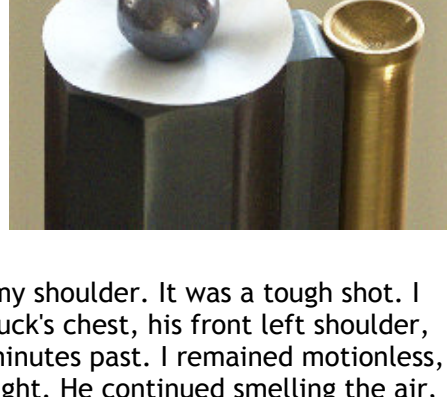
Swamp Buck

Primitive firearms season poses a unique set of challenges. Single shot muzzleloaders demand disciplined, accurate shooting and eight weeks of hunting pressure can change deer patterns significantly. Many mature bucks go strictly nocturnal and the absence of snow this season added to the challenge.



I slipped into a treestand well before first light on December 20th. The stand provided a commanding view of two large fields, but I knew my chances of success would lessen quickly as the morning marched on. At this time of year, very few deer are seen standing in fields during daylight hours. I hoped to catch one along the edge of a field on the way back to its bedding area. I sat until 10:30am, then decided to still hunt back to my truck ... knowing full well that walking with a muzzleloader was likely a recipe for failure. I walked along the edge of several fields, then came to a stone wall that overlooked a swamp. Something caught my eye: two white objects stood out from the cattails. I look closely and realized it was the inside of a white-tail's ears. Unfortunately, the deer had seen me first (which is never good news). It bounded twice in the direction of the forest. I had to act fast! I backtracked and ran at full speed along the edge of the field and entered the forest behind the deer. I took up a stand at the base of a tree and hoped for a shot. I sat for about 20 minutes, but saw nothing. I crept forward with the greatest of care and came to the edge of the swamp. A line of immature pine trees obscured my view, but also provided great concealment. I peered through the needles and carefully scanned the cattails. Where had the deer gone? Then, much to my surprise, my eyes picked up movement at less than 20 yards. At first it looked like a stick or cattail stem moving in the wind, but there was very little wind. I watched intently and realized it was the antler of a buck bedded down in the swamp! I have been hunting since I was a kid, but this was the first time I had ever snuck up on a buck in a bedding area. My heart began to pound. This was likely a great deer and I had only one shot. To add to the challenge, the buck was almost completely hidden in the cattails. "Patience ... patience," I reminded myself while slowing my heart rate with long slow breathes. I crept forward a few feet and slid my barrel through the limbs of a small pine tree. The buck stood up slowly, but he was not looking in my direction. Instead, he was looking off to my left, smelling the breeze, which was gently blowing towards me. I settled into a shooting position, and, judging from the position of his head and neck, settled my iron sights on his chest. I squeezed the trigger. CLICK ... nothing? A *misfire*! The nipple had flattened over time and was preventing the hammer from striking the cap properly. I re-cocked the hammer, which made three audible clicks. The buck listened intently to identify the direction of the noise. I again squeezed the trigger, hoping the first attempt had driven the cap down far enough to allow for ignition. A cloud of blackpowder obscured my view as a great boom rocked the swamp! The air cleared and standing before me was the buck. I HAD MISSED ... perhaps by mere inches! There was only one thing left to do ... *it seemed like an impossibility* ... I had to RELOAD.

I reached for my kit: 90-grains of pre-measured powder, patch, then ball. I managed to pull the long ramrod out without detection. I pushed the ball and patch down the barrel, then struggled mightily to properly seat the cap on the flattened nipple. Miraculously, I completed the reloading process without spooking the buck. He stood in the cattails, facing me, as I slowly raised the muzzleloader to my shoulder. It was a tough shot. I could see the white patch on the buck's chest, his front left shoulder, and his left hind quarter. Several minutes past. I remained motionless, hoping he would turn more to his right. He continued smelling the air, then changed his position slightly. I had a second chance!



I pulled my Lyman Trade Rifle into my shoulder pocket, exhaled, and squeezed the trigger ... CLICK! *Another misfire*! I re-cocked the hammer (*click, click, click*), re-aimed, exhaled, and slowly squeezed the trigger. A cloud of black smoke followed the thunderous boom. I sat motionless. As the smoke cleared, I wondered if I had done the impossible ... was the buck down? I saw no further movement. I immediately reloaded, then gathered my equipment. I made my way through the cattails to where the buck had stood and I quickly located the blood trail. I followed it for less than 30 feet, where I found the big buck lying in the cattails. My second shot had found its mark! The .50 caliber ball struck eight inches behind the buck's left shoulder and dispatched him with great speed. I had harvested my first deer with a muzzleloader and my biggest Massachusetts whitetail to date. The 7-point swamp buck dressed out at 131lbs.



GLT Vice President and Hunting Program Coordinator Troy Gipps harvested this 131lb, 7-point buck in a Grafton swamp with a traditional .50 caliber "patch-and-ball" muzzleloader on December 20th. (Photo by Troy Gipps)

As I look back on the 2014 season, I am struck by a universal truth: *you never know what will happen when you head into the deer woods*.

See you in the field.

Troy Gipps
 Vice President & Hunting Program Coordinator
 Grafton Land Trust

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White-tailed deer in Grafton, MA



A herd of white-tailed deer in Grafton, MA on December 27th. Additional wildlife videos can be found on our [Vimeo](#) site. (Video by Troy Gipps)

Photo of the month



A cottontail rabbit taken with a 28 gauge shotgun at the Westboro Wildlife Management Area in Westboro, Massachusetts. (Photo by Troy Gipps)

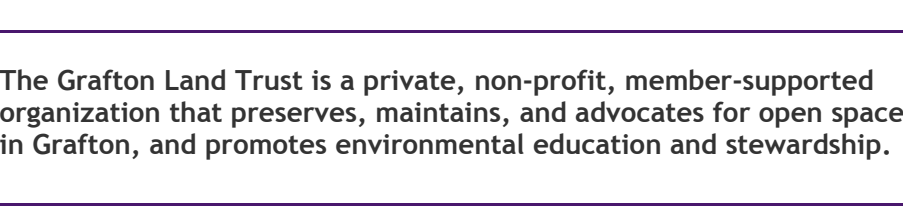
What's in season this month?

Cottontail Rabbit ... Jan. 1 - Feb. 28
 Coyote ... Jan. 1 - Mar. 7
 Fox (red or gray) ... Jan. 1 - Feb. 28
 Raccoon ... Jan. 1 - Jan. 31
 Opossum ... Jan. 1 - Jan. 31
 Canada Goose (Central) ... Jan. 19 - Feb. 14
 Crow ... Jan. 1 - Apr. 10 (Fri/Sat/Mondays only)
 Snapping Turtle ... Jan. 1 - Apr. 31



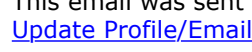
For complete waterfowl and migratory bird rules see the [2014-2015 Migratory Bird Regulations](#).

Open Season (year-round, except during shotgun season for deer; no daily or seasonal bag limit): English sparrow, flying squirrel, red squirrel, chipmunk, porcupine, skunk, starling, weasel, and woodchuck.



The Grafton Land Trust is a private, non-profit, member-supported organization that preserves, maintains, and advocates for open space in Grafton, and promotes environmental education and stewardship.

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