

WOODS 'N WATER™

SEPTEMBER 2026

49TH YEAR

2ND ISSUE

\$4.50

BUCK

OF THE

YEAR

EDITION

**#4 All-Time
Non-Typical
Taken in Leon**

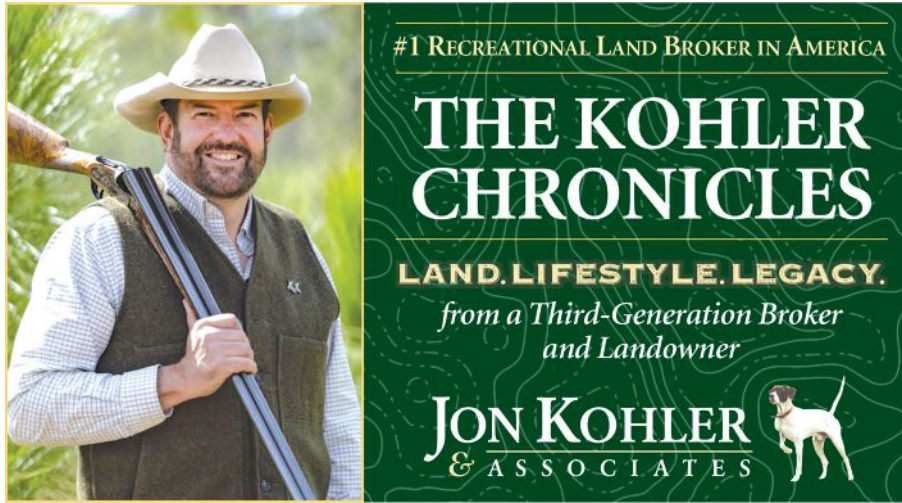
**Bagging a
Trophy Buck**

**Cracking the
Grouper Code**

**Fishing
Reports**

**Real Estate
Listings**





The buck stops here...but it all started with Grandma

by Jon Kohler

Like me, and many of you, most of the clients I broker land to spend a lot of time and effort giving their growing bucks the most protein they can. They want to harvest the same kind of “top 10” deer celebrated in this issue that we all do.

They plant it, feed it and burn habitat to make it. Surprisingly, it takes at least a year of feeding protein before one can really see a difference. There are a lot of complexities and wrong information about nutrition.

It reminds me of when I was 19, and I thought it would be a clever idea to add a raw egg or two to a protein shake. But never would I consider grandma's health as a factor to how much muscle I could grow!

In college, I read articles in North America Whitetail written by my future friend David Morris. I remember first reading about food plots, my first spark that I had a chance to grow a big buck and getting one of the first Baker climbing deer stands for Christmas. I had nowhere to hunt deer or plant my food plots, but I dreamed big.

In all these years, my passion for learning has never slowed. My favorite part is what we know today about nutrition and genetics and how we can predictably raise bucks with enormous antlers. What I didn't know is that one of the biggest predictors is based on grandma more than almost anything. This is the stuff I find fascinating.

Mississippi State's Deer Lab caught pregnant does out of different parts of that state – the rich Delta and the Lower Coastal Plain. In Florida, that's essentially the difference between northern Mad-

ison County above the Cody Escarpment and the Flatwoods of Taylor County.

The lab penned all the fawns and fed every one of them exactly the same. I thought this study was heading toward what I already knew – that it takes a year of high-quality feed before you begin to see a difference. It's more complex than that. Much more.

The first generation gained seven inches of antler. That's all. Same feed, same pen, same everything.

The second generation gained 28 inches of antler, and stood shoulder to shoulder with Delta bucks. Think of a Taylor County deer matching north Madison County's best! How?

They call it epigenetics. The genes were never broken. They had been switched off generations back, on the mother's side. Something in a doe that had lived hard tells her fawn not to grow as big as he could, because this country won't feed him. And it takes two generations of good living through the does before that switch comes back on.

Which means those of us who manage habitat, plant food plots and feed protein ought to be looking at taking good care of grandma as the key ingredient. Don't get me wrong – a growing buck needs high-protein feed. But it's the feed his grandma got that can help determine whether he has the chance to look like he came out of Madison County or Taylor County.

Wherever they're from, most folks are like me and enjoy the challenge of growing them to whatever their full potential may be. That gives us all the more incentive to plant perennial peanut, use prescribed fire and feed protein all year.



FIRST BUCK! - Jon Kohler guided his niece to this fine 8-point buck last hunting season at Lick Skillet.

So, enjoy this issue. These 10 bucks are the finest Florida-produced last year – and according to MSU's deer lab, thanks in large part to their grandmas. Perhaps the question we ought to be asking these hunters now is who those grandmas were and what kind of habitat they had.

Tell me about grandma!

The Book of Daniel said that in the last days, knowledge would increase. If

that's the case, I'm going to take that extra knowledge with me to the deer woods. Thank the good Lord for the country He made and for letting us learn how to steward over it.

Research cited: Michel, E., S. Demarais, B. Strickland, et al. 2017. "The Role of Genetics and Nutrition in Deer Management." Mississippi State University Extension Service Publication 3013.

Hyatt's Game Preserve



**We Offer Quail Hunting At It's Finest!
Planted and Natural Habitat.**

Chukar and Pheasant Are Available.

Half & Whole Day Hunts • No License Required
Dogs are Furnished, but Yours are Welcome
Licensed Hunting Preserve • Snack Provided

352-429-2830 • Groveland, FL

1825 Bay Lake Loop • 30 Miles W. of Orlando

Bhyatt1825@aol.com • www.hyattsgamepreserve.com