

What do you know about the rut?

On Youth Deer Day, Oct. 24 this year, I spoke with a hunter and his father at a local tagging station. The dad told me they'd seen a buck enter a field with his nose down, tracking a doe that had passed through just in front of him.

For years, friends and fellow hunters have told me that "the rut," the mating period that makes bucks throw caution to the wind and do things they wouldn't otherwise do — such as walk within rifle range while pre-occupied with a female — happens much later in the month.



JOHN HOLYOKE

For years, biologists have told me there's no particular instant the rut happens. Instead, the frequency of mating behavior can be better described on a bell-shaped curve, with very little going on early in the cycle and a peak taking place sometime during hunting season. Last week I spoke with Kyle Ravana, the deer biologist for the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, who explained that some level of breeding activity takes place much earlier — and later — than you might have thought.

"[The rut] is, for the most part, determined by photoperiod [or the amount of daylight]," Ravana said.

"Year in and year out, hunters talk about how they feel that the rut is occurring later and later, but according to the data we're getting, [the bulk of mating] is still occurring during that third week of November," he said.

Ravana said biologists aren't guessing; instead, they collect data that helps them pinpoint the peak of mating activity.

"To understand the rut, what we do is collect, annually, roadkill information," he said. "We go out and we collect fetuses from road-killed does. Based on the size of those fetuses, we can come up with an estimate of when the fetus was conceived. By and large, probably 90 percent of our samples conceive around that third week of November."

Of course, that leaves another 10 percent to account for. And it turns out that Maine deer hunters may actually witness breeding behavior at any time during the season — even during the early archery season.

"Going back to this roadkill data, we've had does that have conceived in early October," Ravana explained. "And some even as late as the first week of January. They span a huge length of time."

The lesson: Next time you tell your buddy you saw a buck trailing a doe on opening day and he insists there's no way the doe is interested in mating, you can tell him he might be wrong.

See Holyoke, Page C2



GABOR DEGRE | BDN

Ben Thibodeau, shown with daughters Mirabel (left), 5, and Zoe, 8, shows the deer he shot in Bucksport on the opening day of the hunting season. He said he did not hunt growing up and this is the first deer he shot since taking up the activity three years ago. Neal Page (below) of Palmyra poses with the 10-point buck he shot on Oct. 31. The buck weighed 282 pounds field dressed (but including the heart and liver).

Bringing in the big deer

Palmyra man bags 'monster' on Halloween

BY JOHN HOLYOKE
BDN STAFF

Neal Page spent Saturday morning the way he's spent many past opening days: He headed out the door onto the land behind his house and worked his way along a swamp, hoping for the best.

There are big deer in those woods, Page knows. Back in the 1980s, he bagged a buck — his largest to that point — that weighed 231 pounds.

So when he skirted the edge of the swamp on opening day of the 2015 deer season and heard the snap of twigs, he wasn't overly surprised.

"I look up and I could see something coming through the firs and hardwoods," the 64-year-old Page said. "I could see the tips of horns coming through, and I thought, 'Wow. That's a good one.'"

Page waited for the buck to make its next move, and eventually, it stopped behind a tree.

"Of course, they always stop behind stuff," he said.

Page said he already had a shot lined up, but wanted to make double-sure before he pulled the trigger.

"He's heading toward me at a teeny bit of a trot," he said. "I was leaning back against a tree and I had a bead on it, and I blatted: 'Bap! Bap! Bap!' Three times. The third time, he stopped and he kind of looked into the bog, because it echoed. When he stopped, bang, it was over."

Page's son-in-law, Mark McLain, was hunting nearby and heard the shot. He arrived a short time later and Page told him where to begin searching for the deer.

It didn't take long for McLain to find it.

"He said, 'There he is. He's a good one. He's



COURTESY OF NEAL PAGE

a monster!" Page said. That, he was.

Page said the deer, a 10-pointer, weighed in at 282 pounds, field-dressed (but including the heart and liver). The buck's neck measured 34 inches around.

After tagging the buck and taking it home to hang, Page quickly learned that he was a very, very popular man.

A steady stream of visitors — some of whom he'd never met — turned onto the gravel road he lives on, looking for "the monster."

Page met everyone with a smile, and told his story over and over again.

"About 9:30 Saturday night, finally people stopped coming," he said. "I didn't hold any-

See Deer, Page C4

1-Minute Hike: Patten Stream Preserve

Difficulty: Easy-moderate. If you hike around both loop trails, the hike is about 1.5 miles round trip and travels over hilly terrain that includes a few short, steep slopes.

How to get there: The preserve parking area is located on Warren Lane in Surry. This road is marked with a sign that reads "Warren Lane," but it is often unmarked on maps — on Google Maps, it's labeled as Meadow Lane.

Surry Village is located on Route 172 between Blue Hill and Ellsworth. Warren Lane is on the outskirts of the village, to the east, right beside the post office. Drive about 0.3 mile down Warren Lane, passing two houses, a side road and an outbuilding, and the preserve parking area will be on your left marked with a Blue Hill Heritage Trust sign. The kiosk visible from the parking lot marks the trailhead.



AISLINN SARNACKI

Watch the video
bangordailynews.com

Information: The 41-acre Patten Stream Preserve in Surry offers a 1.5-mile hike on woodland paths beside the rushing waters of Patten Stream, which winds around giant boulders and fallen trees on its way to Patten Bay. The trails of the preserve form two loops and travel through a beautiful forest of tall red oaks, stands of white birches, maples and clumps of evergreens.

Owned and maintained by the Blue Hill Heritage Trust, the preserve is open year-round during daylight hours. The trust asks that visitors stay on marked trails, clean up after themselves and keep dogs on leash. Fires are prohibited, and the trails are for foot traffic only.

Hunting is permitted on this property, so visitors are asked to wear blaze orange clothing that can be seen from all sides, especially during archery and firearm deer seasons, from Oct. 1 to Dec. 12.

From the preserve parking area, which accommodates about three vehicles, a kiosk near the edge of the woods marks the trailhead. The display includes a detailed trail map, preserve guidelines, information about ticks, a notice to wear blaze orange and a trail register. Visitors are asked to sign in and leave comments about their experiences at the preserve.

From the kiosk, a blue-blazed trail leads into the woods and downhill to the South Loop, which is marked with a sign. The loop can be walked in either direction. If you walk it counterclockwise — turning left at the intersection — you will soon reach the edge of Patten Stream, which moves quite swiftly in that area. The loop trail follows the edge of the stream for a while before turning back into the woods, where it meets the Connector Trail, which leads to the North Loop.

A letterbox nailed to a tree is located by this intersection. It's no secret, as it's marked on the map at the preserve trailhead. Letterboxes are a part of an outdoor game that is much like geocaching. Each letterbox contains a waterproof container that holds a special rubber stamp, an ink pad and a notebook. People who play the game will stamp the box's notebook with a personal stamp, then use the box's stamp to mark their own personal logbook. The general goal is to collect stamps from letterboxes from different locations, having many memorable adventures along the way.

The Connector Trail is short and soon leads to the North Loop, which is a bit longer than the South Loop and travels over more difficult terrain, including a few wooden bridges, small hills and rocky areas. Similar to the South Loop, the North Loop's west side follows along the edge of Patten Stream, then turns east and loops

See Hike, Page C2

Teens to Trails extending its reach

Program supports 100 Maine student outing clubs

BY AISLINN SARNACKI
BDN STAFF

Under the evergreens of Seawall Campground in Acadia National Park, more than 70 students and advisers gathered from nine high schools throughout Maine on Columbus Day weekend for the annual Teens to Trails Acadia Rendezvous. The event was an opportunity for outing club members to mingle, learn from each other and explore the park.

"The park service opened up the entire campground just for us. It had just closed for the season," said Carol Leone, who, with her husband Bob Leone, founded of Teens to Trails in 2006.

Teens to Trails — known as T3, for short — is a Maine-based non-profit organization dedicated to giving teens more opportunities to get active outdoors. Over the past nine years, it has supported more than 100 Maine high school outing clubs through programming, resources and more than



COURTESY OF TEENS TO TRAILS

A group of students attending the annual Teens to Trails Acadia Fall Rendezvous on Columbus Day weekend pause to take in a view while hiking in Acadia National Park on Mount Desert Island. Students from nine Maine high school outing clubs gathered for the event.

\$50,000 in grants.

This year, high schools receiving grants through the T3 Grants-to-Clubs Program will be announced sometime in November, Carol Leone said. These grants help outing clubs purchase or rent outdoor equipment, as well

as pay for trip transportation and admission fees to outdoor destinations.

"Being active outdoors is something healthy that they'll be able to do all of their lives — it just becomes a habit," Carol Leone said. "If that's missing from your life,

you've lost your roots."

The students at Acadia Rendezvous hailed from high schools in Cape Elizabeth, Cheverus, Cony, Mt. Ararat, Mount Desert Island, Nokomis, South Portland, Wiscasset and Yarmouth. For many of

See Teens, Page C4