

# Sydney's First Deer

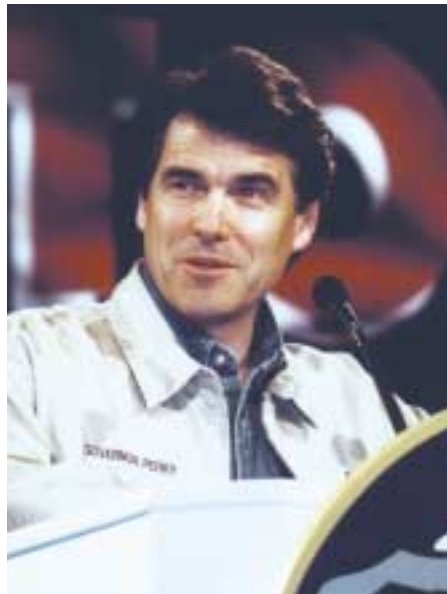
by Governor Rick Perry, State of Texas

The morning broke clear and hot, even by South Texas standards, but a gentle breeze out of the west made it a tolerable morning. Not the kind of day that gives you that almost knowing feeling of seeing the “Muy Grande,” but still, it was South Texas; I was out of the city, the stars were bright, the air was clean. Life was indeed good!

Meeting on a Webb County ranch that was beginning to get a major reputation for growing monster bucks, we were there to discuss policy issues and the future of Texas. Sitting around the beautiful Lodge at Covenant Ranch and overlooking the 400-acre lake, some of the problems of late Twentieth Century Texas seemed a long way off. What didn't seem a long way off was the next morning and the chance to bag the buck of a lifetime.

The blind I was assigned to was only a mile and a half from the headquarters and I was in the blind a good 20 minutes before sunup with the five senderos corned and ready for what the day had in store . . . I thought!

As daylight broke, the senderos began to show the product of five years of intensive deer management. Big-bodied, healthy doe and 8- and 10-point young bucks started to fill my field of vision. Only one problem. I'd left my Swarovski 8x56 binoculars in the room and had only the 3.5x10 Leopold on my Sako 7mm to view this extraordinary sight. Around 7:45 a.m., a big doe started into the western sendero and, by her erratic movement, I suspected that she was being pushed by a buck. Right on cue the big fellow broke into the open and he had a huge set of antlers that immediately got all of my attention. He looked like a young buck judging by his body size but my what a rack — at least 20 inches inside and a solid 10-point rack. Throwing the Sako up, I got a glimpse of the antlers that brought me to the realization that this one was a legit trophy. Both brow tines were split and had to be at least six inches in length. They say that we all get our 15 seconds of fame and that's about all that this fellow allowed me before he pushed the subject of



**Governor Rick Perry**

his interest into the brush and was only to be seen as a flicker or two before he was gone.

The small size of his body and the fact that he gave me only that short few seconds to make a decision were on my mind for the rest of the morning as I watched many fine young bucks and doe feed in and around the 15-foot-tall blind. My, my. I would have given about anything to have had my binoculars and 30 more seconds to have aged him properly, but I look at it as a great gift just to have seen him for that short duration and thought that by next year what an incredible specimen this guy would be. I figured him to be two or maybe three years old just by his body size. By 9:30 a.m., I was back at the lodge sharing my thoughts about the issues facing Texas this coming year and about this great young buck that was hopefully spreading his genes throughout the Covenant Ranch herd.

After two or three hours of policy discussion with the members of the Public Policy Foundation board, I decided that a post lunch look at the morning's blind was in order. I walked out with my binoculars and other pertinent hunting gear, into a very warm

(85+degrees) and windy (W. at 15K) south Texas landscape. I might as well have stayed at the lodge and continued the policy discussions as with the heat and the wind, there was not one movement, except for a Mexican Eagle or two that continued to drift in the breezy skies looking for that one small critter that might make a deadly mistake. At least I brought some good reading material to fill in the void. Not long into a vivid story of trophy hunting in some exotic place, a familiar, faint sound could be heard drifting over the South Texas savannah becoming louder by the second . . . Daddy! Daddy! And with that excited greeting, I looked up to the sight of my baby daughter Sydney bumping down the ranch trail, riding in the back of the ranch foreman's pickup. Unbeknownst to me, she'd finagled a ride to the ranch with a friend.

Now, Sydney is 10 years old and thinks that she ought to have been deer hunting for at least the last two or three years. Wearing me out about the fact that she hadn't been afforded the opportunity that her brother Griffin has had. Her problem was that she was just not big enough to get around any of the deer rifles that we owned. Well, that was fixed with the borrowing of an open-sighted AR-15 that she had been practicing with for the last six months and was very proficient inside of 100–125 yards. Begging like a pro, I knew in short order that I was not going to have but one answer, and that was the evening hunt was going to be her first!

Back at the lodge for the afternoon hunt, she was all excited and ready to get out to the blind and get started. I asked Joe Lee to accompany us and to bring his video camera so he could possibly get a few seconds of one of the big bucks that I had seen that morning. Arriving at the blind at 4:00 p.m., we got set up and started watching the senderos. Almost on cue, a doe moved out into the northern strip and started to feed, while some 25 yards past her and 175 yards from our position came the big buck that I had seen that morning.

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# Sydney

With my Swarovski's in hand it was obvious that this fellow was a dandy and it took Joe Lee only a short perusal to age him at five. A quick lesson on aging was given to Sydney and to her humble father about the loss of weight during the long rut season, the skin actually hanging from the brisket area, the squinted eyes, the rounded nose. Yes, this was the type of mature buck that few of us ever get to see, much less twice in one day. Two or three minutes he stayed in the open area feeding and watching the doe. As he moved off into the brush Sydney and I talked about what a great deer he was and how fortunate we were to get to

look at him for that length of time and that he was just too far out for her to take a shot with the .223 round.

Thinking that they were gone for the day, we chatted about our good luck and were stunned when the two of them reappeared in the western sendero in approximately 10 minutes. This time both were around 125 yards out and seemed to be very interested in feeding. Other doe appeared about this same time and a nice 8-point buck eased into the opening 25 to 30 yards behind the mature buck. Sensing the competition, the older buck went to work to run this young intruder away from this darling. This surely would be the end of our trophy deer watching as the short fight moved them both into heavy cover. But the doe was not in the least bit interested in the hormonal show and continued with her feeding. Big boy was back in a couple of minutes and both were near the magical 100-yard distance that I had told Sydney that she was cleared to shoot from.

Each time the buck had turned sideways, Sydney had put the sight on his shoulder and talked me through how she would take her first buck. I thought it would be good practice and the eight to ten minutes of looking at this grand animal was going to be our reward for this trip. BUT, they kept inching closer until finally, the buck crossed into the previously mentioned zone and I told Sydney that if he turned sideways that she was cleared to fire. I



*Sensing the competition, the older buck went to work to run this young intruder away from this darling.*

## Sydney Perry's first hunt is successful.

think I heard Joe Lee take a short, quick gasp and swallow hard. The vision of a 10-year-old girl shooting her first buck with an open sight .223 I'm sure had Joe puckered up. Looking for a gut-shot trophy for two days while trying to explain to the boss how this was allowed to happen, I'm sure crossed his mind. Had he seen her only days before smoothly punching holes in the targets at 100 yards, putting them all in an eight-inch circle would have been a comfort at this precise moment. As if taking directions, the Webb County dandy came within 75 paces and turned broadside. The crack of the assault rifle announced that Sydney was indeed ready for the big moment. The buck fell like he'd been hit by a freight train. Two kicks and then complete stillness. We stayed quite in the blind for another five minutes with my Sako out the opening just in case. It was for naught . . . this shot was swift and sure.

Joe Lee climbed down from the blind and proceeded to the downed buck and set up his position with the sun behind him and the camera toward the blind with this great trophy between him and his excited hunting partners. As Sydney and I started down from the blind and toward my daughter's first deer, it was an exhilarating moment. Probably more for dad than daughter. Approaching the downed specimen, it became apparent just how good this fellow was . . . a fraction less than 20 inches inside and good mass throughout his 12

points. The forked 7-inch brow tines made it even more impressive and a two inch kicker on the G-1 made it a lucky 13 points.

Back at the lodge, after the necessary celebration and pats on the back, we had the chance to view the video and that's when it became so apparent what an extraordinary amount of footage we had taken. Obviously, the footage of Sydney's lethal shot was shown over and over. But there was also 20 minutes worth of tape of some incredible bucks that we really hadn't taken the time to notice, watching the big buck so closely.

One bit of tape showed four mature bucks, one 6-pointer, two 10-pointers and Sydney's buck, all in the same sendero with at least five doe and their offspring. Having watched the management of the Covenant Ranch progress for over five years, this 20-minute video showed what intense whitetail management and good genetics can do in a relatively short period of time.

Today, Sydney waits patiently for the mount to arrive so she can invite all her friends over and show them the one that got away, and came back, and came back and came back.

Me, I just wait for the moment for some unsuspecting friend or new acquaintance to make a reference to Texas wildlife, hunting, fishing or you name it and my hand slowly moves to the inside breast pocket of my jacket for the picture of my daughter's first deer.