

GUIDELINES FOR GREAT GLASSING

BY JIM HEFFELFINGER

I have always said that hunting is 100% luck, but there are things you can do to increase your chances of getting lucky. This has a way of irritating some skilled hunters, but the point is you have no control over, and cannot forecast, where your quarry will be each day. However, there are things you can do to greatly improve your chance of being in the right place at the right time.

“Glassing” is the act of searching for game with binoculars and then sneaking within range for a shot. This is also called “Spot and Stalk” for obvious reasons. Many people hunt with binoculars, but do not really glass for game. Glassing has become much more common in recent years as hunters learn how effective this method is. Carrying around a pair of binoculars all day and using them to get a better look at a deer only after you jump



him out his bed is not glassing. This latter method is what I strongly recommend if you have a deer tag in my unit before my hunt opens, because it will significantly reduce your chances of getting lucky.

Be prepared

In the Boy Scouts of America, the Scouting motto is "Be Prepared." In the hunting world, the motto for prepared hunters is "Be scouting." Scouting is so important to a successful hunt, and yet it is very difficult for many of us to get the time

are open to the public, what the turn-offs look like (especially in the dark), and how you will get to your pre-selected glassing locations. Access to public land can change from year to year or even month to month as private landowners lock gates where the access crosses their private land. Maps are an important part of your preparation. Even if you know the area and have been hunting it for years, a topographical map helps you plan where you will glass from and what areas you can cover. Having a couple different maps of your area is very helpful;



Successful encounters often depend on spotting your prey first.

to scout adequately. If you are able to spend a significant amount of time scouting before the season, you can locate bucks or concentrations of deer and start to understand their distribution and movement patterns. If you, like me, are not able to spend a lot of time in the field before the season, you should at least make one or two trips to the area you want to hunt. These trips allow you to find locations from which to glass, verify what roads

some maps have topography, others have a more accurate road system, and U.S. Forest Service maps have water tanks, road/trail numbers and land ownership patterns. Being prepared also means having all the equipment you will need to be successful. You can configure your day pack contents anyway you want, but standard items that should be in most packs include: sun screen, more water than you expect to drink, a least one knife, rope, at

least one flashlight, matches, and a plan to get the deer out (packframe, saw, game meat bags). Always tell someone where you will be hunting, exactly. If you keep a trigger lock on your rifle, don't leave the key at home (it's a long story).

Optics

Optics are more important to a serious hunter than even toilet paper. Obviously the better the quality of your optical equipment, the better you will be able to find deer. Generally, the more you pay the better they are, so find the best binoculars you can afford and then buy the next better pair. You will never be sorry you bought binoculars that are too good. However, I don't think the \$1,000 binoculars are ten times better than the \$100 pair so you have to choose your optics based on what you can afford. I can't afford to keep enough milk in the refrigerator for my four sons so I don't see a pair of 15x60 Zeiss, Swarovski, Docters, or Steiners in my immediate future. There has certainly been a trend in hunters owning some pretty high quality glass. Arizona biologist Dave Conrad says that during the deer season, there's more German glass in the mountains than you'd find on a Heineken truck! Spotting scopes are handy, because you can evaluate a deer you see at a distance and decide if it's a buck and if he's a large enough buck to pursue. This can save you a lot of time and energy by helping you decide whether to plan a stalk or let him walk. The disadvantage is that they are cumbersome to carry around. This is a

personal call depending on how well you want to see a deer before pursuing it.

Look on the Bright Side

When planning where you will glass from and what direction to cover, you need to consider the direction of the sun. You "always" want to have the sun to your back. Not only does this prevent you from



looking into the sun, but it assures that the deer will be. More importantly though is the fact that you will be looking at canyons and hill-sides illuminated brightly by the rising or setting sun behind you. Deer are many times more obvious when standing on a hill that is glowing in the sunlight. Study your maps before going in the field and have a few potential sites selected that will allow you to look to the west or northwest in the morning and east or northeast in the afternoon.

Get High and Lay Low

When glassing you should climb as high as possible to get the best view. It is always tempting to convince yourself you can see a lot of

country and don't need to climb any higher, but for every 50 feet in elevation, more and more country down below opens up for your inspection. Climbing higher may make your stalk longer (back down to the bottom), but would you rather have a longer stalk after spotting a deer, or never see the deer in the first place. I think it was Shakespeare that said, "Tis better to have stalked and lost than to have

never stalked at all." It is very important, however, that you do not set up and glass from the crest of a hill or ridge where you will be silhouetted against the sky and easy to see. Always come down the slope enough that you have a solid background. Just because deer are seen at greater distances when glassing does not mean you can sit out in the open. Whenever possible you should set up in the shade of a tree, bush or other structure. This keeps you comfortable against the sun in warmer weather, but also makes you a lot less obvious. Regardless of temperature, shade keeps the sun from glinting off your optics or equipment. Blaze orange clothing is mandated in some states and is always a good idea. But, if

you are wearing orange for safety, break up your outline as much as allowed by law. Even if orange clothing is not required by law, consider wearing an orange vest and hat to your glassing locations and remove them when you glass. Part of laying low is to be quiet. Sound carries tremendous distances in open country and deer can discern normal from abnormal sounds in



their environment. If I can hear rolling rocks clattering across the canyon, you can bet deer can. If you make a significant noise while traveling between glassing points, sit tight and hidden to give deer a chance to lose interest and stop staring at the slope you're on.

Take your game sitting down

The old adage that a good hunter wears out the seat of their pants before the soles of their boots describes perfectly what glassing is all about. At least 90% of your time should be sitting down behind your optics. I talk to hunters every year who say they "walked and walked and walked" and saw no deer. I tell them the reason they didn't see any deer is because they "walked and

walked and walked." I usually find a glassing point that I can stay on all day. If you can see a large area from where you are glassing, there is no sense in moving. The deer will move at some point and staying put and waiting for them is the best strategy. Move around the hill and glass at different angles to cover even more ground, especially as the sun moves through the sky.

Come Early/Stay Late

Biologists call deer "crepuscular," which sounds like an insult, but it simply refers to their habit being most active in the early dawn and late dusk time periods. If you want to be successful you have to make sure you are active during those time periods too. I call the first hour after the sun breaks above the sky line the "Golden Hour." Not only because everything glows in the early golden light, but because this is when I see most of the deer in any given day.

You have to plan accordingly so you are in your glassing location before it gets light and you should be there until it is too late to initiate a stalk before dark. Even if it is too

late for a stalk, it's always interesting to stick around until dark to see if any previously hidden bucks suddenly appear out of thin air. Staying out all day takes a little more preparation and adds more attention to your comfort level. This is where a waterproof, padded seat is very important as is your posture while glassing. You have to be comfortable or you will start thinking about other, more comfortable places to be. Since you should be walking in and out in the dark, you may want to preset GPS coordinates (way-points) for the spots you want to glass from. This allows you to get to and from your glassing locations efficiently in the dark. Also, taking a midday nap does not make you a weenie. An hour or two of sleep during the midday when deer activity is low leaves you refreshed and sharper for the afternoon glassing period.

The more you glass, the more you see. There is a certain probability that you will see a deer for each



five-minute period you look through the binoculars. That probability is additive, which means as you accumulate more and more five-minute periods, your chances

of seeing deer will undoubtedly continue to increase.

Concentrate

Have you ever found yourself staring at an orange juice container just because it said "concentrate?" If so, you've got the makings of a good glasser. Cryptically-colored big game animals are not going to be standing out like a neon sign on the other side of the canyon. If you are not concentrating, you will miss deer right in the middle of your field of view. Remember the deer you glass up are not going to be



moving in many cases. Glass until your eyeballs feel like they are getting sucked into the binoculars. Ideally you will become one with the binoculars and forget you are looking through them. You know you are doing well when you feel like you are inside the binoculars looking out.

No Room for Random

Glassing does not entail looking around willy-nilly hoping to spot

something. Glassing efficiently and effectively means you search your visible area in a systematic way. A tripod is a must if you are serious. When I first saw people using binoculars mounted on a tripod I thought that was going a little overboard. Then I tried it. Yowzer, what difference that made! The tripod allows you to search the area systematically, while stabilizing the field of view. A stable background is important if you are trying to detect a subtle ear flick or tail wag. When glassing, start in the lower corner of your visible area and look through the binoculars at that point.

Study that full field of view until you are sure there are no deer in that view. You then pivot the binoculars on the tripod to scrutinize the next field of view right next to the one you just "cleared." When you get to the end of that bottom "row," you pivot the binoculars up one field of view and move them back in the opposite direction one field of view at a time. Do not sweep the binoculars from one side to the other, but instead move them frame by frame in a process of elimina-

tion. You want to eliminate each field of view one by one. Overlap each field slightly because the focus is clearer in the center of the field of view. When you concentrate on each small patch of deer habitat, you are not looking for a whole deer; you are looking for an ear or eye or tail. Once you locate one of those parts, the rest of the deer is going to be very near by. In the course of glassing deer habitat you will invariably encounter what I call DLO's, "Deer Like Objects." Sometimes you can't tell if it is a deer so you have to watch it for a while. Don't spend too much time watching a DLO if it is the prime time for deer to be active or you may be missing other deer walking around in plain view. Mark where the DLO is and continue glassing. Return to this object frequently to see if it has changed position. As the sun moves it often reveals DLOs as rocks or stumps. Sometimes, however, you return to a DLO and it's gone!

Fools Rush In

They say good judgment comes from experience, and experience comes from, well...poor judgment. When a deer is seen, it takes good judgment to decide when to pursue quickly and when to wait. It is a difficult call and depends on what the deer is doing at the moment and what you think it will do in the next hour. I have had more deer put the slip on me because I was being too careful, but I have also blown stalks by rushing in. It depends on the situation and the terrain. Plan your

stalk carefully before moving from your location. Mark the animal's location exactly in reference to unique land features that you can find when you stalk close to where the animal is. Look at the wind direction, vegetative cover, and topography to decide how you can get within range without being detected. As you stalk towards the animal, relocate it frequently through binoculars to keep track of where it is. This helps you move efficiently to the animal, even if it is on the move. You, of course, want to stay hidden from view at all times. Find a small side canyon to follow towards the animal or a hill to stay behind – this keeps you hidden from view in what the Europeans call "dead ground."

The Three P's

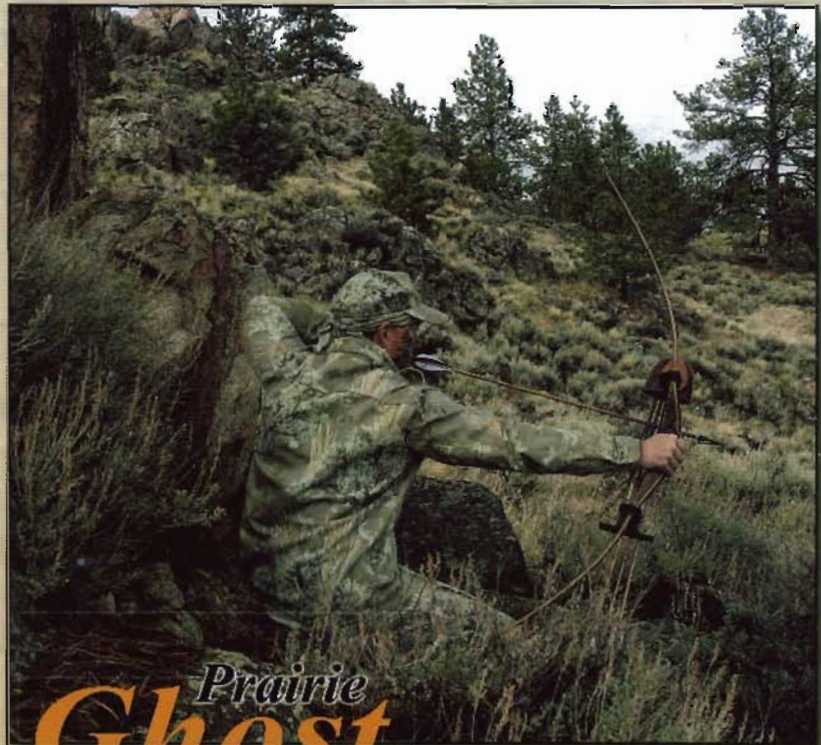
According to retired Arizona Game and Fish Department biologist Jerry Day, good glassing requires the "Three P's". Patience, Perseverance, and a Positive mental attitude. You must have the patience to glass an area you know is good and resist the temptation to move too frequently. Perseverance is hardest toward the end of a tough hunt. You need to maintain the tenacity to keep getting out there early and staying late. And lastly, having a positive mental attitude means you are constantly expecting to see an animal in the next field of view. If you don't really expect to see an animal, you probably won't. After several days of fruitless glassing I remember my Three P's and sometimes repeat it like a mantra over

and over to keep my spirits and concentration level high. As a hunter you are simply a predator, successful hunters remain hungry and focused like one. Thomas Jefferson once said, "I'm a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work the more I have of it." And so it is with hunting; working hard and preparing appropriately will allow you to turn luck into success.

Editors note: Jim Hefelfinger has worked as a Wildlife Biologist for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, University of Wisconsin, Mississippi State University, and in the private sector as Manager of Wildlife Operations of the Rio Paisano Ranch in South Texas. For the last 13 years he has worked for the AZG&FD as the Regional Game Specialist for southeastern Arizona. His book "Deer of the Southwest" is being published by Texas A&M University Press.



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