



YOU LOOKIN at Me?

In late summer, whitetail bucks remove velvet from their antlers by rubbing them on bushes and small trees. Once their antlers have "hardened off," bucks will challenge each other in ritualized wrestling matches called "sparring."

Unlike rams who charge each other in headlong rushes, bucks will carefully intertwine their antlers first, then begin to push and shove to determine who is stronger.

If antlers come apart, the bucks will often pause, re-align their antlers, and begin anew in an almost courteous fashion.

When does are in heat, sparring becomes much more serious. Aggressive activity increases as mature bucks fend off any would-be competitors. A subordinate buck will usually turn away. If he does not, fights can be intense, involving great strength and neck twisting. Given enough force, this twisting will sometimes result in a broken antler tine.

Antlers can be played out slightly by the two bucks pushing against each other, only to spring back when one or both deer relaxes and releases the tension.



LIKE FALLING LEAVES, SPARRING FOR DOMINANCE IS A CLASSIC SIGN OF CHANGING SEASONS IN THE GREAT NORTHEAST.

By Dave Nelson

Occasionally this results in the antlers locking together, which can doom both bucks to exhaustion and inability to eat or drink, and eventual death.

If you happen upon two or more whitetail bucks occupying the same field or patch of ground after Labor Day, watch closely. Consider yourself lucky if you ever witness whitetail bucks challenging each other in this time-tested manner to determine social hierarchy.

Dave Nelson is editor of *Conservationist*.

TINE AFTER TIME

BY MIKE RAYKOVICZ

Last fall during archery season, I was lucky enough to take a nice buck on my friend Jonathan's farm in Owego. When I got the deer, my hunting partner Dave remarked that it would have been a nice rack if two of the tines weren't broken off. Although he was right, I hesitated to admit it. I thought it was a pretty fair rack, even with the missing tines.

Nine months later, Dave asked me to help clear some blown down trees blocking a few of the woods roads on Jonathan's farm. We worked for about two hours, clearing away the tops of hemlocks and other blow downs. At one point, I went ahead and waited for him to come along with the tractor. When Dave arrived and stepped down from the tractor, he spotted a piece of broken antler on the ground.

"Look at this," he said. "I've never found a broken antler tine before. Have you?"

On a hunch, I asked him if I could take it home to see if it was from the buck I got last fall.

Believe it or not, it was a perfect match. What makes it more amazing is that we found the tine about a quarter mile from where I bagged the deer. It's a bazillion to one shot. Chances are, the buck was walking down the logging road and encountered another buck. They fought and he lost the tine.

Truth be told, I think the rack does look better with the tine attached. But don't tell Dave.

Mike Raykovicz has enjoyed Southern Tier outings for a long time. He enjoys them even more frequently these days, now that he's retired from the Owego Free Academy.

Mike Raykovicz

