



# Cole's First Hunting Season

As told by **COLE ECKHARDT**

Even though I had been hunting with my Dad for a long time, he told me that I could not shoot my first deer until I was six. I was so excited when I turned six on January 3, 2010. The summer of 2010, I got to shoot my first real gun, a .22. Then in September, I got to shoot a .223. My first four shots were awesome. They were all really close to the bull's-eye! My Dad said they grouped less than three inches at 75 yards, but I don't know what that means.

AFTER SHOOTING THE .223, my Dad decided to let me try to hunt a doe during the opening weekend of hunting season at Big Rack Ranch in College Station, Texas. I was so excited to finally shoot my first deer! My Dad took my brother and me out to make a brush blind to prepare for the hunt. My Dad said the brush blind was a tradition; it was exactly what his Dad had done with him for his first hunt. We got hay bales, logs, limbs and weeds to sit behind. When everything was perfect, we went home to wait for the hunt. It seemed to take forever but finally, it was time to go hunting!

At about five o'clock, we all headed out for the blind. My brother and I were whispering and my Dad told us we should stop talking so we wouldn't scare off the deer. Not long after that the deer started coming out. There were five or six does, and my Dad showed me which one I could shoot. I was nervous and my dad helped me steady the gun. I found the doe in my scope and waited for her to turn broadside to shoot. Finally, she turned and I squeezed the trigger. It was a perfect shot! She ran off in the brush and after a few minutes we went looking for her. I saw a skinny line of blood and followed it. Then I saw my deer! She was lying in the brush not far from where I shot her. We loaded her up and took her to show my Mom. I was so proud I shot my first deer!

A few weeks later, my dad and I went hunting again and he let me try to shoot another doe. Even though I was nervous, I made another good shot and harvested my second doe. My dad decided that after two shots and two does on the ground it might be time to try for a buck. I was so excited! My parents had told me that I was only going to be able to shoot a doe this hunting season, and now I was actually going to get to shoot my first buck!

My dad decided I should shoot my first buck at my Oma's ranch in Fredericksburg, Texas. On Thanksgiving weekend we drove to Fredericksburg to eat lunch and visit with Oma. After Thanksgiving lunch my Dad and I set up a small brush blind with hay bales and a camouflage tarp. A cold front had blown in that afternoon and it was so cold that day! We were both shivering! After the blind was ready we went inside until it was time to go hunting. Oma told me there had been a big eight-point that she had seen several times in her front pasture. About 4:30, my Dad and I got set up in the blind. Finally, the deer started to come in. There were several does and one buck. I set the gun on the hay bale and looked through the scope. It seemed like I had to wait forever for him to turn, but when he did I pulled the trigger! He dropped right in his tracks. I had been shivering so much that my shot was off target and I hit him in the neck. Everyone came outside to look at my first buck! Dad took tons of pictures with me and my brother Charlie.

In December, my Dad told me we were taking a family trip to Bella Vista Ranch for New Year's. I was so excited! My dad said I could probably shoot a management buck if the right one came out. We left on December 30, 2010. It seemed like it took forever to make the 300 mile drive from College Station to Bella Vista. We arrived at the ranch really late, almost midnight!

The next morning I couldn't wait to go hunting! My Dad and I got up at 5:00 a.m. and got dressed to go. When we walked outside it was so foggy! The fog was so thick we could barely see. We got in the truck and drove to the deer blind. My dad knew of an old buck that needed to be shot and said there were a few pictures of him at the Two-Way stand. As we drove up to the sendero there were already two nice bucks eating. We hurried inside the blind and got settled.

It took forever to be able to see anything in the thick fog. As the sun came up, I told my dad there was a nice buck at the feeder. He kept ignoring me saying the deer should come from a different direction. After a few minutes my dad looked at the buck and said, "Where did he come from?" I said, "I've been trying to tell you!" My dad said that he'd never seen that buck before but was sure he was a definite shooter. I got the gun out and found the buck in my sites. It seemed like hours until the buck turned broadside. The fog kept drifting in and out and it made it hard to see him sometimes. Finally, the buck turned broadside and I put the crosshairs of the .223 on his shoulder and pulled the trigger.



He jumped up and kicked his back legs out and ran into some thick, thorny brush. We gave him a couple minutes and decided to go look for him. When we found the place in the sendero where I shot him there wasn't any blood. We looked and looked and still couldn't find anything. We started to search some trails near where he was standing. We were just about to go back and get our tracking dog when I thought a cactus was a deer's belly. My dad said, "No but look over there! My buck was lying right there dead! We had to go get some help to drag him out, and then we drove to the lodge to show everyone. They all congratulated me and later we watched the video my Dad took of the hunt.

Later that afternoon my Dad and I went out again. He said we needed to harvest a few does. When we got to the

blind there were deer everywhere. There were also some javelinas. As soon as the truck drove away, a javelina came back out. Dad said I could shoot him. I was excited because I didn't think I would get to shoot a javelina too. I got my gun and found the javelina. Once all the deer moved out of the way, I was able to shoot. I shot him within the first five minutes of sitting in the blind. By the time it was dark, my dad shot four does and I shot one doe too! Then we loaded everything up and went to the skinning shed. There were a lot of deer that needed to be cleaned before we could go eat New Year's Eve dinner. So my dad got right to work!

My very first hunting season was awesome! I got to shoot two bucks, three does and a javelina! I can't wait for next hunting season!" •

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