

CELEBRITY PROFILE:

CHIPPER JONES

Here's the skinny on the Major League Baseball Hall of Fame star's deer hunting lifestyle.

■ by Darron McDougal

Darron McDougal: Tell me about your first whitetail. How old were you?
Chipper Jones: "I was probably 9 or 10 years old. At the time, my dad and I belonged to a 7,000-acre dog-hunting club in central Florida. We had about 15 Walker hounds at one point or another. We tore up some Chevys and Fords chasing after little bucks back in those days. Anyway, my dad had a spike pegged down on an evening feeding pattern. We set up along the edge of a spruce pond and waited for him to come out. When he did, I shot him with my .22 Mag. from about 85 to 90 yards. It might seem insignificant to some folks, but it'll always be special to me."



■ Baseball hall-of-famer Chipper Jones has a passion for big whitetails.



■ Food plots are a central component to Chipper Jones' management strategy and deer hunting pursuits.



■ The author's oldest son was deeply immersed in every experience during his first year at deer camp and couldn't wait to help drag his uncle's buck out of the woods.

DM: Did you find much time to hunt during your baseball career?

CJ: "The regular baseball season usually finished sometime in October, so baseball and hunting season created a win-win situation for me. Winning games during the post-season meant we could chase the World Series. If we lost and our season ended, then I could go chase deer."

Hunting was always a good release because baseball starts in February and goes clear into October. That's a long time to be playing baseball and grinding away. Regardless if we won or lost, one of the best things to do after baseball season was to charge my batteries. The best way to do that was to climb 25 feet up a tree and wait for a big whitetail to walk by."

DM: How did Major League Bowhunter come to be?

CJ: "My partner, Matt Duff, and I were part of Buck Commander for a while. It was a blast. We had so much fun with some great folks. After about five years, Duff and I felt a strong pull

■ Matt Duff, left, and Chipper Jones just finished producing their 13th season of Major League Bowhunter.



to create a show based on the concept of learning and teaching. In other words, we don't know it all. We kill big

bucks, yes, but we also make mistakes. We miss shots. We blow deer out of an area occasionally. We want our success-

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es and failures to become learning opportunities for us and our viewers.

“Our motto is, ‘Never stop learning.’ Whether we succeed or fail, we want to learn, and we want our viewers to learn right alongside us. We apply what we got right or wrong to the very next hunt. We just finished up with Season 13, and our viewers still like what we’re doing.”

DM: What is your favorite state and species to hunt, and why?

CJ: “I’m a whitetail guy. I love trying to get in the back pockets of some huge bucks in the Midwest. It’s not easy to do. They get to be 5, 6 or 7 years old for a reason. Adding a cameraman to the mix doubles the scent and movement. All of those aspects present me with a challenge, and I love a challenge.

“The good Lord blesses us to follow the rut. Once it starts, we’re in Oklahoma, Kansas and Nebraska. We’ll hit Iowa and Missouri. Oftentimes, we’ll end the season in Kentucky and Mississippi. Getting to hunt the rut basically from Halloween through December across multiple locations is as good as it gets.

“If I had to settle on one location, though, I personally love Iowa the most. There’s no telling what might come out of a cedar or plum thicket. It could be a mature 150-inch 8-pointer, or it could be a 200-inch nontypical. For me, it’s all about the thrill of the unknown.”

DM: You obviously have a lot of great memories from the whitetail woods, but what is the most special to you?

CJ: “I’ve been fortunate enough to kill numerous big deer in my life. But the most special times are when my wife and kids get out there. My wife, Taylor, has been part of the TV show for several years. I see the sparkle in her eye. Killing a 140- or 150-inch buck might be business as usual for me because I hunt so often, but for her, it’s a very special occasion. Seeing her excitement is awesome. My kids are also just eaten up with bowhunting. They love it. It’s really rewarding to be a part of passing hunting on to my family.”

DM: What are your favorite tactics for bowhunting whitetails?

CJ: “There’s nothing like the time of the year when bucks are coming to the antlers. I love rattling in whitetails because there are different situations in which it can work. Blind rattling and crashing the antlers together is exciting because you don’t know what might wander in. There are also instances when a buck is out of range and can be coaxed in with rattling. In that moment, it takes a lot of experience to be able to read the animal and put your thumb on the pulse of how he’s feeling so that you can pitch the right intensity of rattling his way.”

DM: Why do you use Whitetail Institute products?

CJ: “Feed and seed are central components to most of our whitetail hunting. We have to use products that we feel will cause a buck to overlook his instincts and walk into a food plot or visit a feeding area. Whitetail Institute’s products haven’t failed us.”



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