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## New Maryland State Record: King Of The Marsh

On a cold, rainy afternoon in November 2005, Billy Crutchfield sat in desperation until dark as he watched a monster buck that was bedded in high grass on the edge of a marsh. One year later, the buck did the same thing, only this time Billy was able to get a shot.

By Duncan Dobie

Billy Crutchfield of Bel Alton, Maryland, is no stranger to big bucks. Because he's a fireman, his schedule is very flexible, and over the years he's been able to dedicate a lot of time to his deer hunting pursuits. Billy hunts a number of farms in Charles County, Maryland. On Feb. 23, 2005, he was shed hunting on one of those farms when he found a large non-typical shed antler about 50 yards from a ladder stand that is known as the "river ladder." The stand is near a marsh close to the Potomac River.

Upon finding the shed, Billy immediately went to find his hunting partner, Paul Junior. After the two hunters examined the antler and talked about the trophy buck that had dropped it, Billy made a comment to his partner. "Someday someone is going to kill a big buck out of that stand," he said.

Billy had no way of knowing it at the time, but he would be the fortunate hunter to make that prediction come true two seasons hence in November 2006. And the buck in question would not simply be a "big" buck. It would turn out to be the highest-scoring whitetail ever taken by a hunter on the entire Eastern Seaboard.

### FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH A MARYLAND MONARCH

Nine months after finding the impressive shed antler, Billy couldn't wait to get into the woods during the opening week of Maryland's shotgun season.

"I remember the first Tuesday of the 2005 shotgun season like it was yesterday," Billy recalls. "On that morning, I made the 600-yard walk to the old ladder stand near the river in the predawn darkness. It was a cloudy day with rain expected, and I decided to sit there until about 8:30 a.m. because I had some work to take care of later that day.

"About 8:25 I checked the time on my cell phone and I turned to look behind me. There he was -- the biggest whitetail I'd ever laid eyes on -- about 125 yards away, walking in my direction. He had a massive rack. As my heart began to race faster and faster, he turned slightly and started going a different way than I had expected. Actually, he was now walking away from me. I didn't know it at the time, but he changed his direction because of the way the marsh was shaped.

"All of a sudden, he stopped at about 120 yards and bedded down in the 6-foot-tall marsh grass. He simply disappeared. At about 9 a.m. my hunting partner, who I always refer to as 'Junior,' called me from work to find out how I was doing. He couldn't believe it when I told him what had happened. Then it began to rain."

Billy stood like a statue in his ladder stand for the entire day in the driving rain, hoping that something good would happen.

"Every hour or two, the buck would stand up and shake off the water like a wet dog," Billy remembers. "He was so beautiful standing on the edge of the marsh with that incredible rack. He never knew I was there. I couldn't



Billy's buck caused a sensation last November as photos of it went all over the world on the Internet. And the Maryland monarch is quite sensational! With a score of 268 1/8 non-typical, it's the largest buck ever recorded on the entire Eastern Seaboard.

see him at all when he was bedded and the weather was so miserable that I thought about leaving several times. I was soaking wet, shivering and hungry. But then he would stand up again, give a quick glimpse around and immediately go back down.

"I kept thinking, 'I'm cold but I'm not going to freeze and I'm hungry but I'm not going to starve, and I can dry off and eat after dark. So I'm staying!'

"I talked to Junior several more times on the phone, and he couldn't believe that I was just sitting there without trying something. But what could I do? I wasn't about to take a risky shot through 6-foot reeds at that distance. I hoped that when the river's high tide started coming in that he would move and give me a shooting opportunity, but he didn't.

"I later learned that he was on the only high spot in the entire marsh and he just stayed put. When I climbed down just after dark, I had no idea if he was still there or if he had gotten up and moved off. By then it was too dark to tell. My last sighting that day had been at about 4 p.m."

### **DÉJÀ VU ONE YEAR LATER**

Billy hunted both Saturday and Sunday on opening weekend of the 2006 shotgun season without incident. In Maryland, it is legal to hunt the first Sunday during shotgun season. Billy also hunted the following Monday morning. He saw a number of deer but no shooters. On Monday afternoon he actually planned to hunt out of a portable climber, but he changed his mind at the last minute.

### **New Maryland State Record: King Of The Marsh**

So far during the young season, he had not hunted the river ladder stand at all, and now something clicked in his head. The river ladder beckoned. By 2 p.m. on Monday, Nov. 27, 2006, Billy was settling into the swivel seat of his Cabela's 16-foot tower ladder with the tidal marsh to his back.

"The sky was clear and I had a slight breeze coming off the river and hitting me in the face," Billy says. "I felt good about my chances that afternoon. I knew that deer sightings in this location would be fewer than in other places on the farm, but I was more interested in quality than quantity. Also, the only standing field of corn on the property was located right in front of me, and that was a big plus.

"At about 2:25 I turned around toward the marsh and could hardly believe my eyes. A huge whitetail buck with a rack beyond anything I had ever imagined was bedding down in the marsh. It was him, the buck from last year, the king of the marsh, and he was bedding within 100 yards of the same spot where I had watched him in the rain the season before.

"I immediately stood up and grabbed my Remington 870 12-gauge pump and tried to get him in the 4X scope. I was trying not to panic, but my heart was pounding and I couldn't find him because he was already down in the marsh grass. I knew he had looked big the year before, but now, after getting a much better look at his rack, I realized that he was an absolute monster!

"'Calm down,' I kept telling myself. 'He has no idea you are here and he's quietly bedded.'"

### **DON'T MESS THIS THING UP!**

"I leaned my gun on the handrail and tried to retrieve my Bushnell rangefinder from inside my backpack. Believe me, that was not an easy task because my whole body was shaking with excitement and anticipation. I could see his body and I tried to get a reading, but nothing happened after I pushed the button.

"'Come on. Work please,' I pleaded. 'Finally I ranged a clump of brush next to him and got 97 yards.

"'He's in range and that's a start,' I thought. 'Maybe I can shoot him in his bed.'"

"He appeared to be broadside to me with his rack to the right, but I couldn't really be sure. My mind was trying to play tricks on me and attempting a shot was out of the question. Fifteen minutes went by, and my cell phone started vibrating. It was Junior. He was hunting on a different farm and he had just seen six does. With a broken voice, I whispered, 'Dude, I've got the biggest buck I've ever seen in my life bedded right behind me.'"

“Shoot him!’ Junior quickly replied.

“I can’t,’ I whispered. ‘He’s bedded down and I don’t have a shot.’

“Can I do anything to help?’ Junior asked.

“No,’ I answered. ‘I’ll call you back in a while.’

“Junior called again at 3:30. ‘Did you get him?’ he asked.

“No, he’s still bedded down.’

“Why don’t you try to grunt and make him stand up?’ Junior asked.

“No, I don’t want to mess this thing up,’ I said. ‘I’ve got plenty of daylight and I’m going to wait him out. If nothing happens, I’ll try grunting as a last resort at last light.’

“Good luck!’ Junior said. ‘Stay calm. You’re the man!’

“Thanks, brother,’ I said. ‘I’ll call you when something happens -- either good or bad.’”

### **ANOTHER BUCK IN THE MIX**

At precisely 3:45 p.m., Billy looked past the bedded giant and saw a second buck with a large white rack. He immediately got his scope on the deer. The buck was an outstanding 8-pointer with long G-2s and at least a 20-inch spread.

“He was definitely a shooter on any day except this day,” Billy says.

Billy watched the big 8-pointer walk toward some woods that bordered the marsh. The deer went out of sight. Suddenly a little voice told Billy to get ready. Something big was about to happen. He looked toward the bedded giant, and the buck was still bedded down. But as Billy watched, the king of the marsh suddenly stood up!

New Maryland State Record: King Of The Marsh

With heart-pounding excitement, Billy prepared for the shot. The buck started quartering away.

“There was a patch of 6-foot-high marsh grass right in front of him,” Billy says. “It was obvious that he was heading in the direction the other buck had gone. I thought, ‘If I can get a slug in his rib cage, I’m good. If he gets to that grass he’s gone.’

“Since he was behind me, I got a steady rest against the tree and placed the cross hairs toward the back of his rib cage. Then I said a short prayer, clicked the safety off and squeezed the trigger. The buck lunged forward, and I quickly pumped my shotgun and fired a second shot in desperation. As the deer disappeared, I remembered something my father had told me on one of our first hunting trips a long time ago: ‘Usually your first shot is always your best shot and after that you’re just making noise,’ he had stated. He was right!”

From the time the second buck disappeared to the time Billy actually fired, only a few seconds had elapsed. Billy had been watching the deer for a mere hour and 15 minutes, but it seemed like a lifetime.

“I called Junior to tell him I had taken a shot,” Billy says.

“Did you get him?’ Junior asked me.

“I don’t know,’ I answered. ‘I’m shaking so bad I don’t know if I can climb down out of my stand. He’s huge! I’m going to go look for him.’

“Finally I climbed down, carrying only my shotgun. I left everything else in the stand. While making the long half-mile walk around to where he had gone, I began to second-guess myself. Had I made a good shot? I kept trying to assure myself that, yes, I had, indeed, made a good shot!

## MARYLAND'S BEST BUCK EVER

Billy had to work his way around the marsh through very thick brush.

"It was without a doubt the longest walk of my life," Billy said. "As I neared the area where I knew he should be, the bull briars got very nasty. And then, as I got to the woods on the edge of the marsh, there he was. He had only run about 35 to 40 yards from where I had shot him. As I approached I couldn't believe my eyes. I had killed some nice deer in my life and I had seen some nice bucks, but this buck was beyond anything I could have imagined. I could hardly dial the phone as I tried to call Junior.

"Did you get him?' Junior asked.

"Yes. I'm looking at him. He's huge!"

"How many points?"

"I'm not sure. He's got points going everywhere!"

Billy's buck became an overnight sensation and Billy became an overnight celebrity. Maryland officials knew immediately that it was a new state record. The 28-point rack was green-scored by Maryland DNR deputy chief Bob Beyer at 268 5/8 inches, fully 40 inches higher than John Poole's former state-record giant, taken in Montgomery County in 1987.

After the 60-day drying period, Billy drove all the way to Georgia to have the world-class rack officially scored by well-known B&C measurer Bill Cooper in Tifton. The official tally was 268 1/8, only 4/8 inch shy of Bob Beyer's green score.

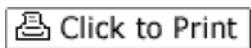
"For a rack that size, it was a measurer's dream -- very clean and very symmetrical," Bill Cooper noted. "That's unusual for a deer with many non-typical points. Basically the rack is a main-frame 5x5 with 9 abnormal points on each side. The longest tine was 15 4/8 inches. It's definitely one of the most impressive racks I've ever scored!"

Have the excitement and celebrity of shooting the largest buck ever recorded on the entire Eastern Seaboard changed Billy Crutchfield? Not really. Billy would like to use his newfound fame to take some deserving youngsters on dream hunts. It's his way of giving back.

"A long time ago my dad told me to always try to do what's right and something good would happen," Billy said. "I've always done my best to follow his advice in both my hunting career and my everyday life, and look what happened!"

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