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SPORTS

Night hunting made easy

By Luke Clayton

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Each year about this time, my mind turns to making smoked salami in my Smokin Tex www.smokintex.com electric smoker. I have plenty of fresh venison in the freezer, thanks to my friend Terry Tate who just returned from the Hill Country where he used his big bore air rifle www.pbbairguns.com to harvest a good eating Axis buck. A month or so ago, I placed my order to Frisco Spices www.friscospices.com for enough of their German Salami seasoning and casings to make 25 pounds of salami.

My salami-making plan was coming together, with one exception; I have turned all the wild pork in my freezer into pulled pork BBQ. I was completely out of pork! But maybe that was a good thing; my efforts to restock the freezer and make ready for sausage making day fueled this week's column!

I'm often amused when I hear other hunters talk about how easy it is to harvest wild hogs. In more than forty years of hunting wild porkers, I've found them to be one of the most challenging of game animals to hunt. I like to stack the odds in my favor before I go out in quest of pork for my salami! This equates to monitoring trail cameras and timing my hunt so that the odds are stacked in my favor. Since the lion's share of the wild hogs I harvest are taken at night, it's important for me to watch the cameras and hunt on nights when the hogs are moving relatively early.

With plenty of acorns on the ground in the patch of woods where I do my hog hunting, the porkers have been plentiful but, as my trail cameras indicated, almost entirely nocturnal. Early last week, I noted that several "eater hogs" weighing between 80 and 140 pounds were hitting the feeder around 9:30 p.m. on a nightly basis. It was time to loose a little sleep and spend a few hours in the cool evening woods. Animal behavioral scientists have proven that swine, wild or domestic, are at the top end of the animal intelligence chart and although Texas is host to several million wild porkers, they are not always easy to hunt.

Let's recap this past week's hunt. Several products that I use make my night hog hunting much more productive and in many ways, easier. Since I live one mile from a strong population of wild hogs and love hunting and cooking them, I have developed a system that pays off in pork the majority of the time but, as the old adage goes, "It's hunting!"

With the need for fresh pork to make smoked salami and evidence that hogs were hitting my hunting area a couple hours after dark, I begin making plans for my hunt. First, I baited the area around my feeder with two products that hogs love to eat and can smell from a great distance, Hog Nut and Hog Trap.

Made by Insights Nutrition www.insightnutrition.com, these products are highly effective in pulling in roving hogs to an area. In my opinion, once wild hogs are hitting a corn feeder, they will keep coming back sometime during the night but the attractants greatly help in attracting hogs moving through the area. The Hog Nut is a dry attractant and the Hog Trap a very sweet, fruit flavored syrup. Two days before my hunt, I began baiting with these attractants and my trail camera evidenced several hogs coming to the bait that I had never seen before. It was time to round up all the necessities for a night time hog hunt!

I hunt from Snap Lock Hunting Blinds www.snaplockhuntingblinds.com and have one of these comfortable blinds set up in a remote patch of oaks. Before getting into my blind, I placed more bait about 25 yards from my stand and attached my Game Alert under the feeder, making sure the indicator light was facing my direction. I settled into the blind and, using my infra red spotter by Nite Site, began scanning the dark fall woods. All was quiet with the exception of a couple of owls that were visiting from nearby treetops.

A pack of coyotes opened up in the distant and then the night became still and quiet. I settled into the tranquility of the hunt. I enjoy some of my best "quiet time" while setting in a blind waiting for game to show up! I eased my 45 caliber big bore air rifle up to the blind's window, turned the Nite Site on just as a check and discovered I could easily identify and shoot any hog that might approach my baited area. Then I just relaxed, keeping my eye on the feeder and the Game Alert. The red light would come on when the hog's showed and alert me to get the rifle up and get ready to shoot.

Back in the woods, about a hundred yards or so downwind from the bait, I hear the sound of hogs. Porkers are highly vocal critters and I often hear them well before I see them. As soon as the hogs scented my bait, they made a beeline directly toward the feeder. I could hear them trotting through the dark woods. Then the sound stopped and I began wondering if the hogs had left my area. All was quiet for the next twenty minutes and I kept my eye on the Game Alert. One minute I was staring into the darkness, the next the indicator light came on the Game Alert. I eased the rifle into the window, flipping the switch on the Nite Site in the process. In the screen, I instantly spotted what appeared to be a 140 pound boar. I mistook the long guard hairs on its muzzle as tusk. The scopes crosshairs were crystal clear in the Nite Site's screen and I nudged the trigger on the air rifle. The hog ran about 40 yards and went down and I was pleased to discover that it was a fat sow weighing about 140 pounds; perfect for my salami making project!

I eased back into the stand and decided with all the hogs in the area I might just harvest another. Fresh thickly cut pork chops would be well received on upcoming deer hunts! In less than an hour, the red light came on again and I soon had a little boar that weighed just over 100 pounds was on the ground. My quest for sausage meat was complete, thanks to a little detective work before the hunt and some excellent gear that made night hunting much easier and productive!



Luke writes for several outdoor magazines and has been penning this weekly outdoor column for the past 26 years. Luke also hosts *Outdoors with Luke Clayton and Friends* on radio stations from Nebraska to Texas. Listen online at www.catfishradio.com. Luke's new book about hog hunting and cooking, *Kill to Grill*, is available through the web site.

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