



“Exclusively From Planet Whitetail”

An Interview with Bill Winke

I was recently fortunate enough to have the opportunity to interview Realtree team member and founder of the web site, www.midwestwhitetail.com, Bill Winke. Bill is a professional photographer and outdoor writer by profession, who has taken his passion for the sport of Whitetail deer hunting to an entirely new level. Bill's website, www.midwestwhitetail.com was almost an instant success. Sparing no expense, the site is informative and very entertaining. Bill has written over two thousand articles for hunting publications and has hunted with Realtree founder Bill Jordan, team Realtree's David Blanton and host of the hit TV show "The Bone Collector," Michael Waddell. Bill lives in the great whitetail state of Iowa, with his wife and two children. Simply put, Bill is a kind and genuine guy. It is a pleasure for me to bring you this interview.

Dave Ziegler

Dave Ziegler (Founder of Planet Whitetail)

Bio:

Bill Winke has been writing full-time for hunting magazines for 13 years. He specializes in articles about hunting strategy, primarily whitetail deer. Bill has hunted deer in sixteen different states and three Canadian provinces. While hunting extensively in new settings each year, Bill has gained expertise in reading and interpreting topographical maps and aerial photos and deer sign.

Bill Winke has also played a leading role in the management of thousands of acres of land for improved deer hunting. These experiences have given Bill broad exposure to - and great appreciation for - the wonderful challenges that whitetails present. Bill earned a degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Iowa in 1986 and now lives on a farm in southern with his wife Pam, their seven-year old daughter named Jordan and their five-year old son named Andrew.



PW: At what age did you begin hunting whitetail deer and who is responsible for getting you involved in the sport?

BW: I started whitetail hunting when I was about 14. I got started from reading Edgar Rice Burroughs Tarzan books. I was always a hunter but that got me thinking about bow hunting (Tarzan killed a lot of stuff with a bow). I bought a bow (Bear Whitetail Hunter) with a summer worth of lawn mowing money and started to hunt deer with it. I was very ineffective. There weren't many deer in Iowa back then. Very few people shot deer. I only knew one person that had ever shot a deer with a bow back then. I think he had shot a small six pointer and we all thought he was the greatest woodsman to ever live. It wasn't until I got out of college in 1986 and moved to Michigan for a few years that I really got into deer hunting.

PW: How old were you when you took your first whitetail with a bow?

BW: I think I was 26 when I shot my first deer with a bow. It was actually a P & Y buck that I shot in Iowa. It was my second year of serious bow hunting. The first year I hunted Michigan and then the next year we moved to Iowa and I hunted there.

PW: What drove you to become involved in outdoor photography and writing? Is this your full time career, or do you have other career interest? How many articles have you had published?

BW: I got into writing for hunting magazines in 1992. I was working for an archery company (High Country Archery) after spending some time traveling with my wife (our extended honeymoon). I was an engineer by training and thought it would be fun to work for an outdoor company. I happened on Spencer Land while we were traveling and he offered my wife and I short-term jobs working for him in Tennessee. When I was there I met another employee named Greg Tinsley who left High Country to go back to Petersen's Publishing to edit the Petersen's Bow hunting magazine. After our stints at High Country ended, Pam and I moved to Michigan where I worked at a golf course that summer. Greg encouraged me to do a little writing for him. The first article was about shooting deer and I followed that with a few on tuning and technical aspects of archery. I had to decide if I was going to try to be a writer or go back into engineering. I was pretty shy so it was definitely a stretch to get into the writing business. But I decided I would give it a go - sink or swim, our ability to buy food depended directly on my ability sell articles. I got out of my comfort zone really fast. This is all I do: photography, writing, run the online hunting show Midwest Whitetail and we have some small amount of farm income. I have probably had 2,000 to 2,500 articles published in my career.

PW: If you did not live in Iowa, what state would you live in based on the quality of whitetail hunting in that state?

BW: I can work anywhere so I chose what was I thought was the area with the best deer hunting. Remember, I grew up in Iowa so it was not a big stretch for us to move here when we finally settled down. Iowa offers good clean rural living. I like that for raising kids. If not Iowa, I don't know where I would live, maybe IL or out west somewhere. There is good whitetail hunting in Idaho, for example. I can't see living anywhere but here, to be honest. I don't think we will ever move. The family loves it here.

PW: If you could pick one day per year to be in your tree stand, what day would that be?

BW: That's easy, November 7. Year in and year out, November 7 is the best.

PW: What was the score of your largest whitetail to date? Do you have a favorite Whitetail harvest?

BW: My biggest is a 191 gross typical 6 X 5 from eastern Colorado. It was a late season bow kill that I took in 2000. It was a mule deer hunt that switched to whitetail hunt after we spotted this buck. I shot him the day after we first saw him. It is a long story that I won't go into here, but there was a lot of strategy and luck involved in this hunt. Many things had to fall perfectly into place. Amazingly they all did. I shot the buck almost beneath my low tree stand as he turned to wheel away. He had run up under the stand and would have continued had he not seen my hat lying on the ground where I dropped it earlier. Like I said, lots of luck. He turned to bolt and I hit him hard. I knew it was lethal but didn't know exactly what all I had hit, so I decided to wait to go after him. I had lost part of the meat from a big mule deer to coyotes the year before when I left it out all night so I decided to wait up all night and listen for the coyotes. It was below zero. We took turns waiting outside the truck until the coyotes fired up at about midnight. We ran over to where they were yapping and pushed them off the buck. Pretty exciting stuff. It is one of the few bucks I have ever shot that got bigger when I saw it on the ground instead of shrinking.

PW: As an avid manager of whitetail deer, how many acres do you manage?

BW: We own 1,000 acres and have 200 acres that adjoin it leased. It is not the perfect neighborhood, but pretty good. Most years we shoot mature bucks, but not always big ones.

PW: If you had your choice, would you hunt with a firearm or archery equipment?

BW: I'm a bow hunter at heart.

PW: How did you become involved with the folks at Realtree?

BW: Early in my writing career, Realtree invited me to go on hunts with them. It was a PR effort on their part. It was how Bill Jordan chose to get the word out about his patterns. I hunted with David Blanton and Michael Waddell before those guys were nearly as famous as they are today. It was just a lot of fun in those camps. Realtree always ran very good camps that were a lot of fun. We all became friends and Bill hunted at our farm four years from 2002 through 2005. He shot three bucks. I think he had a tag for 2006 but didn't make it in to hunt. I don't work for Realtree or anything like that. I do work for them but I am an independent. It is just a friendship thing that sometimes includes business.

PW: How long did you work before building and launching your website, midwestwhitetail.com?

BW: We came out with the show in August of 2008. It was only playing on Realtree.com. Eventually it also migrated to their whitetail site: <http://whitetail.realtree.com>. I was having my own site built at the same time. It was supposed to launch first of October but it got pushed back to early December. Quite a bit of work went into it, but the bulk of the work is actually involved in producing the semi-live hunting shows that air days (sometimes hours) after the hunts occur.

PW: I have noticed that the pro team for Midwest Whitetail is made up of a good number of young guys. How important is it to you to involve youngsters in the sport of deer hunting?

BW: I just like young people. They have a lot of energy, but obviously, they are the future. I wasn't being so noble as to try to include them because I wanted to do them a favor. They had the energy so I bought a few cameras and we were off and running. Obviously we all need to do as much as we can to get young people involved in the outdoors. Both of our kids hunt: Andrew age 8 has shot five deer and two turkeys and our daughter Jordan age 10 has shot five deer.

PW: Being a professional in the sport, what one piece of guidance would you offer to someone who dreams of some day making a living hunting whitetails or being involved in the industry in some capacity?

BW: I could write a book about this. It is the one question I get asked more than any other. The best advice I can offer is to get as much education as possible in your natural area of aptitude. Then get experience in the workforce. Next look for jobs in the hunting industry where you can apply that skill and experience. Once in the door start to look for exactly what you want to do. It is rare for someone to just jump into this business and make a place for themselves without paying their dues. I know it doesn't sound too exciting, but that is what it takes. You have to have valuable skills to get a job in the hunting industry just like you do in any other industry.

