

Scent-Free Tactics

with Bob Robb

There is no doubt about it. Bear hunters must be extremely conscious of both their silhouette and their scent when sitting in stands over bait. Failure to guard against being seen or smelled is a guarantee of a week of endless frustration.

The common myth is that bears have poor eyesight, so you do not need to be worried about being seen. Balderdash. Most baits are hunted by bowhunters at close range, and at these distances bears can and will see you if you are careless. If they see you, they usually melt back into the forest, never to be seen again.

The solution here is simple: Keep movement on stand to a minimum. Black bears, and especially mature boars, are very cautious when they approach a bait site, especially one that has been used a lot during that season. They hold back in the shadows, watching, smelling and listening for trouble. Doing the hully-gully in a tree stand, making noise like shuffling your feet, ripping the zippers of your pack open and shut, banging metal or coughing are excellent ways to go bearless.

Smell No Evil

Nonetheless, even if you have done everything you can to keep a bear from seeing you perched nearby, you must never, ever forget that black bears live in a world of smell. Their noses are extremely keen, and they use them to find food and to avoid danger. You must minimize human odor at the bait site for consistent success.

Once I get my bait built and stand hung, I try and wear rubber gloves when baiting. I do not want to leave an inordinate amount of my smell around the bait. I also wear either knee-high rubber boots or a pair of standard hunting boots featuring the Gore-Tex Scent-Lok membrane, a breathable membrane that blocks 100% of my human odor.

Just as importantly, I spray myself down with an odor-eliminating spray before walking in, and make sure I wear the same outerwear I will wear on stand. Why? Because while I am trying to reduce the amount of human odor around the bait, I know I cannot possibly eliminate it all. When a bear smells a human at my bait, I want him to smell me, and associate my smell

How To Not Get Busted On A Bait Stand



with food. If I have a friend who will be hunting my bait, I get a piece of his clothing and bring it with me to hang near the bait. I also make sure I hang a clean rag in a tree near the bait and spray it with the brand of mosquito repellent I use. In many areas during the spring, sitting over a bait without any bug dope on is about as smart as sitting in a cave full of vampire bats. Again, I want the bear to associate this smell with food.

What if you are on a guided hunting trip, where a guide or outfitter has done all the baiting? In this case, I want the same guide who has been setting the bait out all season to be the one to keep feeding my bait station if at all possible. As the season unfolds, a bear will soon associate the smell of this person with food, greatly minimizing its skittishness when a human walks to and from the barrel. I ask them to please hang a rag soaked with whatever bug dope they recommend at the bait site as they begin baiting it, and this is the same brand I will use when hunting. The idea here is twofold, try and minimize human odor the bear is not used to and does not associate with food while letting him smell the baiter, knowing he will associate this smell with food and not be alarmed by it.

Taking it to the next level, remove all the smelly lubricants from your bow or firearm. Wash your slings, wristwatch band, daypack and other odor



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traps in unscented soap with a healthy scoop of baking soda added for good measure. Store everything in a scent-free plastic bag or tub, putting it on just before entering the woods.

Does this work? I think it helps tremendously. Many times I have been able to set up a bait station, sit on stand and observe bears every shift. Then I will have a friend go and sit there, and they see nothing.



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Cagey Bruins

Problem bears, big boars that have grown especially wary around bait sites, will often circle a bait site before committing themselves to the set-up. If they see your silhouette perched above the brush line, or get a whiff of your stinky carcass they may just wander off never to be seen again.

What can you do? First, discover the trail the bear is using to scent-check your set-up, and set up a second stand downwind of that trail. To be sure, his trail will be faint, but a big bear will leave pad impressions even in wet moss. Get down on your hands and knees if need be, and examine the ground carefully.

Next, pick an entrance route to your new stand that the bear is not likely to cross. You may have to circle along the edge of a thick swamp or through brush so thick even the mosquitoes and black flies have trouble navigating their way. You may even need to chop a trail, quietly of course, to this new stand late in the morning or early in the afternoon when the bait site is most likely dormant.

Now, as you lie in ambush some distance from the bait, wait for the bruiser to circle your stand. You may actually hear him break branches as he checks the area for danger, but rest assured his eyes will be on the bait and the adjacent trees. He will not be looking for you along his scent trail, and more importantly, he will not smell you, either.

Thus the key to bagging a trophy black bear is to set up your stands, then hunt out of them, as if you were hunting the wariest whitetail buck. Just like when hunting a mature buck, if an old boar is your goal, take nothing for granted. Your chances for success will increase exponentially. 🐾