activity by scraping and rubbing in early January in anticipation of the rut. By mid-January, bucks move around more frequently as they begin actively searching for the first receptive females.

"Just prior to does coming into heat, bucks become more susceptible to hunting because they are looking for those first does to come into heat," Cook explained. "Bucks are scraping, rubbing and checking scrapes. When does first come into heat is a good time to hunt scrapes."

When does become ready to breed, bucks go crazy looking for receptive females. Bucks forget about practically everything except mating. Once they find a receptive female, they stick with her. They eat very little and fight with other bucks for the right to mate with that female. When more does come into heat, bucks don’t need to search as much to find one.

Black Warrior WMA, the largest wildlife management area in the state, covers 91,263 acres of Lawrence and Winston counties. The property sits within the boundaries of the 181,230-acre Bankhead National Forest. That area typically produces some of the biggest whitetails each year. Other good WMAs include Choccolocco, Oakmullgee and Sam R. Murphy.

“South of Montgomery, Barbour and Lowndes WMAs are probably the best places to hunt deer,” Cook recommended. “Geneva State Forest is another good area. Portland Landing and Cedar Creek Special Opportunity Areas are good places for deer, but they are not typical public hunting areas. People must register to hunt SOAs so they have limited hunting pressure. Little River State Forest, Blackwater and Fred T. Stimpson SOAs are also good for deer.”

Flooding for the past few years also knocked back the delta feral hog population, for a while. The dry spell gave them a reprieve. Highly prolific hogs can quickly repopulate any property with good habitat.

“The delta hog population is too good!” Knight exclaimed. “They didn’t all die out during the floods. I’ve seen more pigs throughout the summer of 2023 than I’ve seen for the past three years. When the water level went down, it gave hogs plenty of time to rebound. I took nearly 100 pigs out of the delta in one month of trapping during the summer; but that didn’t even put a dent in the population. That just left more food for the rest of them.”

Sportsmen who like to hunt new places can consult the rut map at www.outdooralabama.com to find the best times to hunt specific sections of Alabama.