Unlike the last few years when floods persisted in the Mobile-Tensaw Delta, drier conditions prevailed from late spring through fall, giving deer and other animals plentiful food.

“When the swamp dries, more vegetation grows in areas that were originally underwater,” explained Jared Knight, Alabama Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division wildlife biologist in Spanish Fort. “Deer can find different food sources.”

In December, deer hunters need to focus on food. In such a hardwood bottomland, deer primarily eat acorns in the fall. Above all, they love white oak acorns, but will eat other types as the season progresses. In late December and January, deer switch to eating more red oak acorns. These acorns last later into winter because they have higher tannin contents so they stay edible longer.

“White oak acorns start to sprout much sooner than red oak acorns, but should stay throughout December,” Knight advised. “Overcup acorns were abundant this year. It’s a moderate year for swamp chestnuts. Down into the swamp, deer focus on any kind of a woody browse or a little greenbrier on occasion.”

The swamp provides deer with a varied diet, but later in the season, food becomes more scarce. As the winter progresses, deer will eat practically anything including swamp privet and yaupon. Deer consume the leaves and buds off any limbs with green matter that fall to the ground.

“The best chance for finding deer in December is getting close to the food sources,” suggested Chris Cook, the top state deer biologist. “Keying in on what deer are eating is vitally important in late fall. Browse makes up the biggest part of a deer’s diet throughout the year. Acorns and browse are the two main food sources that deer eat later in the season. Look for woody vines and other woody plants that still have foliage on them.”

Higher ground grows more vegetation. In late season, concentrate on hunting any ridges running through the swampy lower delta. Barring any major weather event, the northern part of the delta should produce some good deer this season.

“A lot of deer hang out near the powerline,” Knight observed. “I’ve seen pictures of some nice bucks shot in that area, but many people hunt around there, especially archers. The Perdido River Wildlife Management Area is going through a big overhaul. It has some clear-cuts that are starting to grow up with deer food. That property has a lot of deer and quite a few good bucks.”

The rut begins later in South Alabama than the rest of the state. Some of the best hunting occurs during the last four weeks of the season.

“In December, deer in South Alabama are a little away from the rut and still in eating mode,” Cook commented. “Hunting starts improving around Christmas. Everything changes in January. South of Highway 80, the rut peaks from about January 21 until February 14. That’s when the bulk of does come into heat.”

Everyone wants to hunt the rut, but just before the rut begins often provides the best opportunity to bag a monster buck. Bucks start their pre-rut...