



The Meat

Hunters of

Old Hawaii



Molokai is more rural and less touristy than most of Hawaii, and resident hunters like Chase Pico are just fine with that.

THE
DEER
ISSUE

Molokai Island is overrun with axis deer, which are a nuisance for farmers and problematic for native flora and fauna. But their abundance also feeds families—and the local hunting culture

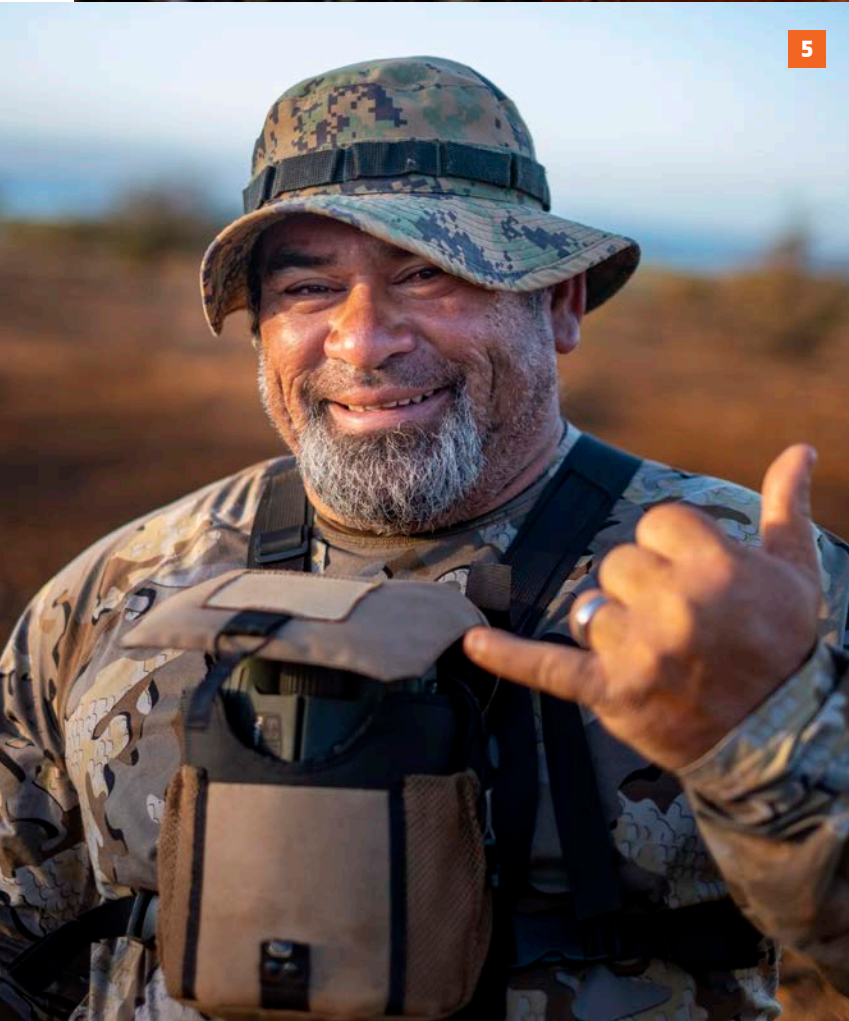
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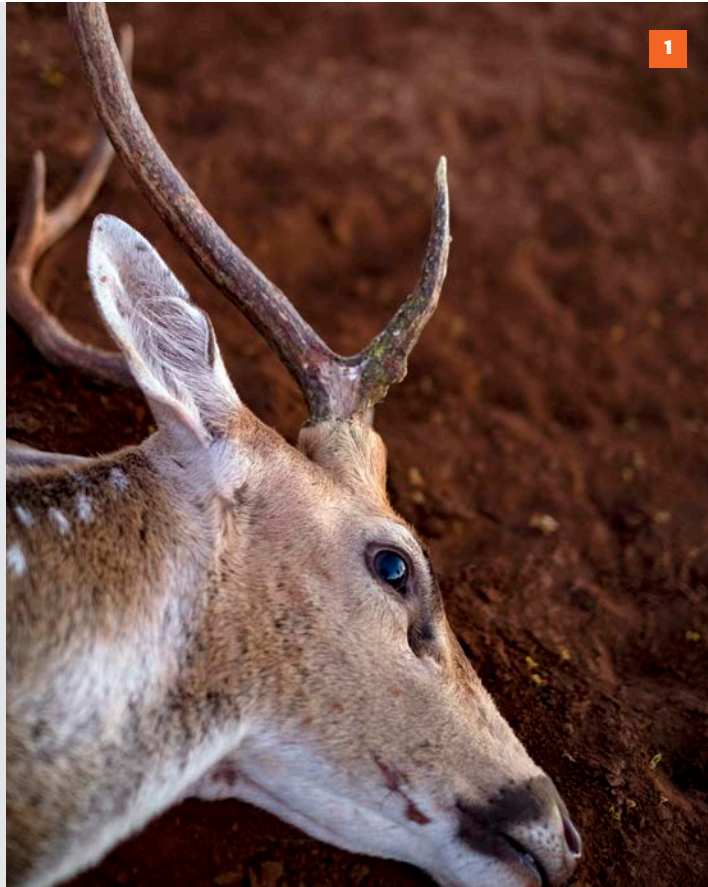
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1. Drought has hit Molokai hard in recent years, and it's likely to blame for the death of this particular young buck. 2. It's plain as dirt: The island has far exceeded its axis carrying capacity. Overbrowsed vegetation can't regenerate fast enough, especially in dry years. Without forage to anchor the soil, erosion is rampant. 3. Following his career as an MMA fighter on the mainland, 30-year-old Chase Pico (right) returned to Molokai, where he's learning to guide deer hunters. 4. Native to India, axis deer were introduced to Hawaii in the 1860s when Hong Kong presented eight animals to the Hawaiian king. Today, axis live on three islands. Though they're still considered a gift, locals also recognize they must be managed to conserve native species, agriculture, and livelihoods. 5. Guide Don-Anthony Gutierrez is a meat-hunting maniac. Thanks to a year-round season, he butchers deer—for himself, family, or clients—more days than not.



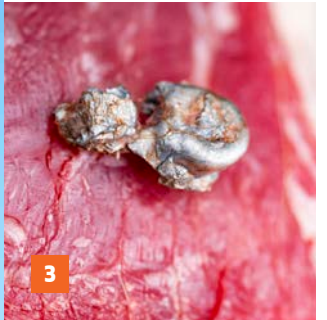
1. This buck was taken later in the rut, which stretches from April to July on Molokai. **2.** The author watches for deer at dawn. Each morning, big herds of pressured deer trot from the lowlands to bed in the safety of the hills. **3.** A Nosler AccuBond recovered at the skinning shed. **4.** Brooks Hansen cooks breakfast on a Camp Chef Woodwind smoker, which makes already tender axis venison even tastier. **5.** While meat hunting is ubiquitous among locals and visiting hunters, Go Hawaii Outfitters operator Koa Manaba appreciates the challenge of hunting mature bucks and guiding mainlanders, like the author, to them. **6.** Ku Keanini may guide rifle hunters, but he's a bowhunting evangelist who loves trying to talk them into picking up a bow. Here, he glasses a part of the island that gets more rain and is therefore more resilient to deer. **7.** Making quick work of a buck during the heat of the day.



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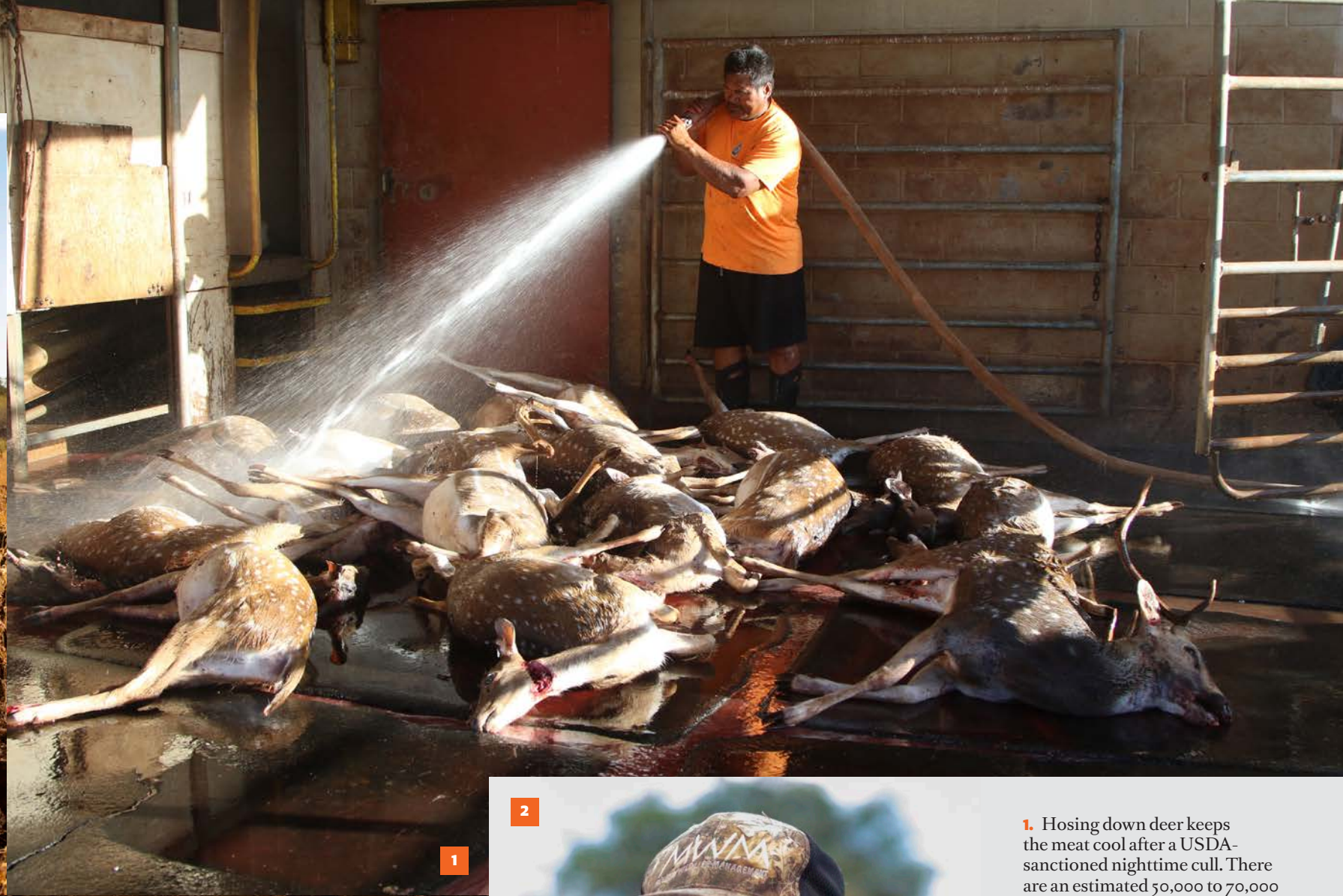
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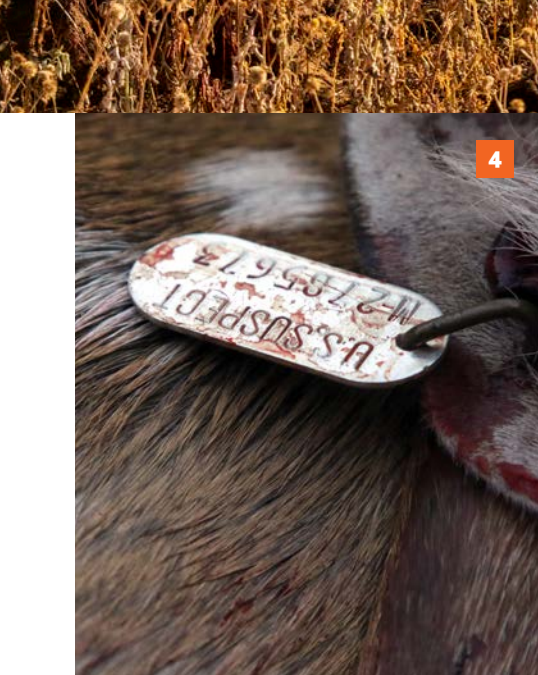
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1. Hosing down deer keeps the meat cool after a USDA-sanctioned nighttime cull. There are an estimated 50,000 to 70,000 nonnative axis deer on Molokai. At the low end, that's 200 deer per square mile. They provide venison for the island's 7,500 residents, and a surplus for sale to the public. 2. Desmond Manaba is the sharpshooter behind these culls, and he's turning an ecological dilemma into a business opportunity. Manaba founded Go Hawaii Outfitters (now run by his son Koa) and Molokai Wildlife Management to help farmers and ranchers control deer while bringing venison to market. 3. The new Model 21 Nosler in 6.5 PRC, topped with the Leupold VX-3HD 4.5-14x40. 4. During culls, a USDA inspector attaches an ear tag to each deer upon recovery. 5. Despite an abundance of axis deer, year-round pressure from hunters, poachers, and land managers keeps hunts plenty challenging for mainlanders. 🌲🌲🌲

▶ To learn more about Manaba's market operation, listen to our podcast episode here.