



Photos by David Campiche

Author David Campiche is frequently visited by a five-point buck he has named 'Santana.'

BACKYARD VISITS FROM 'SANTANA,' THE FIVE-POINT BUCK



BY DAVID CAMPICHE

The big buck slithered into the yard, resplendent in its natural forest gown. Its antlers were magnificent, a five-point buck with two new nubs covered in velvet. His oversized eyes shone with curiosity and luster. Dusk was upon us.

After three nights, I was able to feed it an apple, the fruit cut into quarters. My hand steady, I fed it bites, this historically, one of the most cautious of wild critters.

Me, sitting on the second step of our weathered cedar porch. He, denying his spry animal instincts and trusting this homo sapien. And then the magnificent animal was gone.

Winter came on, dark as the belly of a coffee pot.

I didn't see my new friend until early that next August. He had grown into the largest buck that I had ever seen. I called him Santana. He had survived the hunting season and was back with six points if you count the two velvety nubs, popping from his strong

forehead like new garden potatoes.

I made a clicking sound: Tchik, tchik, tchik, and whistled softly some classical prelude I couldn't begin to name. I swear, he remembered me.

His head twitched and Santana took two tentative steps on delicate horn-black hooves, each looking as if they had been recently shined and buffed for a high school dance.

I turned and cautiously moved into the house and picked from a pottery bowl, four red apples. He waited.

"Hey boy, hey." I cut a quarter slowly, cautiously, hoping not to spook him. He was resisting his deepest instinct, the desire to turn and flee.

"Hey, boy. You remember me, don't you?"

I threw a few quarters of the red delicious apple a yard or two in front of his hooves. Santana stepped forward, lowering his head. I threw another, closer this time. The buck now stood just a few feet from me, close enough to hear my breathing. I reached out my hand. "Here boy. Take the apple."

Santana extended his thick neck. His nose was soft and black. He opened his mouth and bared his teeth, ever so gently, took another slice of apple. And then another until the apples were gone. Then he meandered away. He was back the next night.

I fought the tug to chase him away, to render Santana safe from the hunters. Was he aware of those dangers that awaited him, not just during the hunting season but from poachers, from humans seeking the big prize: a stuffed head to hang on the wall of their study. Six points.

Will Santana come back? Come back tomorrow for the mature fruit? Come back this month or the next? Come back next year? Will he survive the wiles of the wild?

Santana the buck is back in the woods, bedding down. Dreaming of the rut. Summer will pass into fall. The apples are decaying. But something else is clicking in my mind, superstitious and haunting: "Tchik, tchik, tchik."