

Deer Aging Validates Management Decisions

By Bob Coine -- February 16, 2007 Oregon, IL.

In the Building Whitetail Paradise DVD Series, we portray all aspects of Quality Deer Management, in an informative and entertaining fashion. Habitat improvements, food plots, hunting plots and improvements to naturally occurring food sources are all important components of our content.

Careful attention to habitat is extremely important to maintain a healthy and thriving resident deer herd. Without addressing the three absolutes for all wildlife, food, cover and water, you will not have a chance to hold deer and other wildlife consistently on your property.

We all realize how time consuming habitat work can be, but the rewards are certainly worth the effort! The ability to manage a resident deer herd, affords you the opportunity to enjoy world class hunting on your hunting area! With proper management, it is amazing how quickly average deer hunting land can improve to become first rate.

Typically in only three seasons you will see results. But each successive year thereafter, will bring with it astonishing results, provided hunter management decisions are accurate. What decisions are to be made? With each and every hunting trip afield, you and your hunting partners have an opportunity to improve your deer herd's buck to doe ratio, and your herd age structure.

Why is this important? Because it is good stewardship and ecologically sound, and also will provide incredible opportunities at a byproduct of QDM, fully mature bucks!

Herd management will include an emphasis on heavy doe harvest where appropriate. There are a very few areas where doe harvest is inappropriate due to varying circumstances such as winterkill, heavy snow, and the associated lack of food in deer yards.

By and large this is not an issue in the vast majority of the locales the Whitetail calls home. We simply have too many deer in many areas, with imbalanced sex ratios and age structures, especially within the buck segment of the herd. By concentrating on doe harvest, while allowing young bucks to live, we will gain a balance within the herd, and a much more natural herd.

QDM is a very flexible practice as far as buck harvest is concerned. One, which is based upon your individual goals.

You may choose to allow yearling bucks to live in order to produce more 2 year old bucks for the following year. If this increases your enjoyment of the hunting experience, you are getting a taste of QDM. As the years pass, you may choose to raise that standard until you no longer tag a buck until he is 4 ½ years of age or even older. It is your choice based solely upon your desires!

Can the average deer hunter identify exact ages of bucks from a treestand? It isn't necessary to be exact, but we can come very close in our aging estimate if we educate ourselves to the specific body characteristics of antlered bucks through 5 1/2 years of age. Antlers themselves are not the best choice for aging decisions.

The following chart will assist you in field aging. For a "live" lesson on field aging bucks from a treestand, see Volume 3 of Building Whitetail Paradise at www.heartlandillinois.com.

Whitetail Deer Hunter's
Buck Maturity Chart

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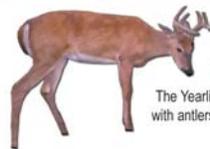
Estimating the age of a live Whitetail Buck is one of the most critical decisions a hunter/manager makes prior to harvest. This chart provides one more tool a serious deer hunter can utilize in their quest to make good management decisions. For the average hunter a buck at least 4 1/2 years old is considered a mature, quality deer. Body characteristics, rather than antler size, are a better indicator of maturity in Whitetail bucks.

DVD Series
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Buck Fawn

The Buck Fawn differs from a doe fawn in several identifiable ways. The doe fawn has a rounded forehead, the buck fawn has a flatter forehead. The buck fawn also has "buttons" or developing antlers.

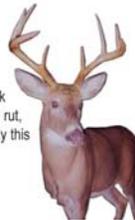


**Yearling
(1 1/2 year old buck)**

The Yearling buck basically looks like a doe with antlers. It has a slender neck and a thin body structure.

2 1/2 year old Buck

The 2 1/2 year old Buck begins to show early signs of maturity. His neck becomes slightly enlarged during the rut, although his belly is still trim. Typically this age of buck has very little mass in his antlers.



3 1/2 year old Buck

The 3 1/2 year old Buck's body will be measurably deeper than a 2 1/2 year old. His neck muscles become enlarged immediately prior to the rut. His antlers become thicker at this age.



4 1/2 year old Buck

At age 4 1/2 years of age, the Buck takes on the look of a prime "stud bull". His fully muscled neck meets a deep chest, he has a full deep belly. For the average hunter this Buck meets the definition of a mature animal, ready for harvest.



**Bob Coine,
Host of Building
Whitetail Paradise**

The 4 1/2 year old deer in this photo is a piebald deer signified by the white hair patch where normally brown hair would grow.

The Building Whitetail Paradise DVD Series is produced for the serious sportsmen interested in advancing their knowledge of the whitetail deer, habitat and nutrition.

All illustrations are 100% wild deer living in Whitetail Paradise. Age is an estimate upon body characteristics.

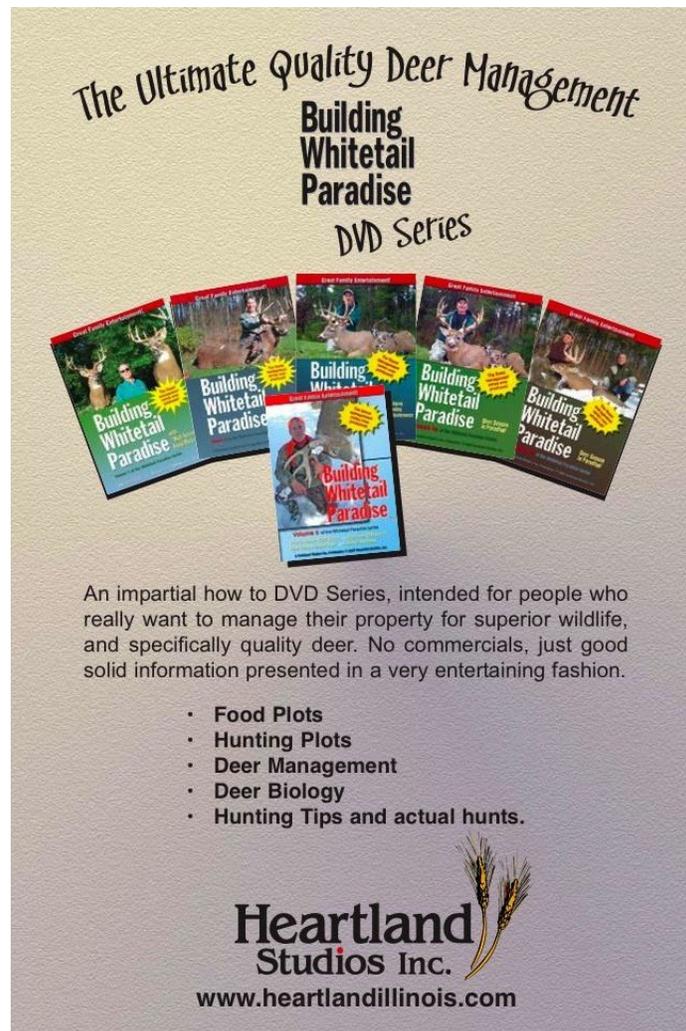
Here in Whitetail Paradise, we validate our harvest decisions with cementum annuli analysis utilizing Wildlife Analytical Labs tooth aging service. We have found that our treestand aging estimates are actually more accurate than our State Biologists estimates according to tooth wear!

During our firearm season we must take our deer to a check station, at which time biologists estimate age based upon an assessment of a deer's jawbone. This method is called tooth wear and replacement. We have found that at age 4 ½ years and older (our target group) tooth wear estimates by biologists have been incorrect, and off as much as 2 years!

By having a cementum annuli analysis done, we can more accurately validate our harvest, and thereby also further educate ourselves for future harvest decisions.

Small land holdings, managed correctly, will positively impact the resident deer herd. By joining forces with adjoining land managers in either formal, or informal QDM coops, you can magnify the impact over a wider area. I encourage you to consider speaking with your neighbors, *you just may find they too would really like to enhance their time afield as well!*

Please visit www.HeartlandIllinois.com to learn more about Building Whitetail Paradise.



The Ultimate Quality Deer Management
**Building
Whitetail
Paradise**
DVD Series

An impartial how to DVD Series, intended for people who really want to manage their property for superior wildlife, and specifically quality deer. No commercials, just good solid information presented in a very entertaining fashion.

- Food Plots
- Hunting Plots
- Deer Management
- Deer Biology
- Hunting Tips and actual hunts.

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