

SPORTSDAY Outdoors

Deer age revealed in roots

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Wildlife Analytical Laboratories in Burnet, Texas, is one of two facilities in the nation that analyze the teeth of harvested deer to determine the animal's exact age. One of the cornerstones of modern white-tailed deer management is allowing bucks to reach full maturity before being taken by hunters.

The facility's founder, Henry Chidgey, said he started the business because he was interested in becoming a better deer manager. "I wanted to know the age of the deer I harvest on my place," Chidgey said.

Most deer hunters use molar wear as a means of aging dead deer. Studies on the jawbones of known-age deer have indicated that molar wear is about 40 percent accurate when an experienced biologist is making the estimate.

Chidgey uses a process called cementum annuli aging. By counting annual layers of cementum, a bony substance covering the root of a tooth, the age of any mammal may be precisely calculated. The Texas lab charges \$20 to determine the age of a deer, usually by examining the animal's two center incisors.

Information about the process is available at www.deerage.com.

Winter limits last through February at two Texas lakes: On March 1, crappie fishing regulations at Lake Fork and Lake O' the Pines change to statewide bag limits of 25 fish daily with a 10-inch minimum size. A cold-weather limit is now being enforced on those lakes, where crappie are commonly caught in water so deep during winter months that they seldom survive being reeled up from the depths.

The cold-weather limit is 25 fish daily, but there is no minimum size limit and anglers must keep every fish they catch and stop fishing when the limit is reached. The only other Texas lakes with special crappie limits are border lakes Texoma and Toledo Bend. Texas shares Texoma with Oklahoma and Toledo Bend with Louisiana.