



Wildlife Journal

ITS FINALLY THAT TIME AGAIN! HUNTING SEASON IS HERE! Hopefully by now you have gotten the ole bow out of the closet and been practicing for the big day when all your anticipation can finally be realized with that first morning in the woods. Now comes the waiting over the trail that you are sure with every passing second will deliver that first deer of the season. You wait, and you wait, and you wait, and swat mosquitoes all morning. Then you hear that first crack of a leaf followed by the light foot steps that you know so well are the sound of an approaching deer. You begin to ready yourself for a shot if this deer meets the club standards for a legal deer. As the deer comes into view you can see an impressive set of antlers coming your way. Your heart begins to pound and your knees begin to shake. Wow! This is a nice buck, and on your first morning hunt he is so much more than you expected to see. But wait, the decision you are about to make is the most important part of game management: the harvest. Sure this buck meets

your club's standards for a shooter, but how old is he really?

In this issue of the Rayonier Wildlife Journal we will discuss managing the deer population through removal of mature deer and management of the developing age



This Photo courtesy of David Johnson

classes of bucks. In the words of Aldo Leopold, who is known as the father of wildlife conservation, "game can be restored by the creative use of the same tools which

have heretofore destroyed it - ax, plow, cow, fire, and gun." We use the other tools that are available to us throughout the year to prepare for the hunter's part of game management, which is the harvest. But to be sound game managers, we must educate ourselves on what and when we should harvest an animal.

Advertising Space Available

In an effort to help our clubs find members I would like to introduce the new advertising area. Clubs interested in finding members can now submit to me (contact info below) contact information which I will put in this space to assist you in finding new members. Please submit your requests early so that I can get them into the late December issue.

Please send me your feedback on the information contained in this journal to Jeremy.Tankersley@Rayonier.com

This is meant to be a service provided to you to add to the return on your recreational investment each year. Please send any suggestions for articles or subjects you would like to hear more about to me. I will research those topics and provide you with the information you need.

I would also like to invite any of you who are interested, to send in articles that you have written (please acknowledge sources) to appear in the journal. Also we would love to see your pictures of wildlife or things you are doing on your club to improve habitat.

In this issue

- It's That Time of Year Again!
- Identifying Age Classes in Bucks
- Doe Management
- Tree Stand Safety



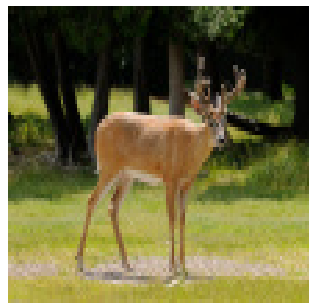
Identifying Age Classes in Bucks

In order to improve the quality of your deer herd, you should stop looking at antler size and start looking at some far more telling signs of age. You see, the genetic qualities of a deer may cause a buck to look much older than he actually is if you base your standards strictly on the number of points or spread as many clubs commonly do these days. The real age of a deer can be much more easily determined by looking at his body characteristics.

Think of a deer in terms of human development for just a moment. Now if you look at a teenage boy it is very easy to tell the difference between him and a fifty year old man. Why is that? Well it is because of certain characteristics we have learned over time to look for in determining the age of people because we see so many of them each day. What are those characteristics? Besides the easiest, which would be their faces, we would look at their neck, midsection, arms, legs, etc. This same technique that we use daily to age humans can be used on deer. We only need practice to become proficient. Let's discuss some examples of buck characteristics from the yearling buck with his first set of antlers to the mature brut that we all hope to harvest.

The yearling buck (1 ½ year old) often resembles a doe with antlers. The neck will be long and skinny with an obvious line at the joint with the shoulder that does not blend. The hips will be raised above the shoulders and the flanks will be thin. Legs appear long and thin. Yearling deer do not always have small antlers. It is entirely possible that a yearling can have 8 points or maybe more with an antler spread of 12 -13 inches.

Yearling bucks should never be harvested under any circumstance. People often talk about shooting "cull" bucks because they have knotty sets of antlers with 2 or 3 points. That is not responsible deer management, and in my opinion, is an excuse for not being patient and waiting on a more mature buck. Depending on nutrition available and time of birth, some bucks just don't demonstrate their potential as a yearling. Let them grow and you will soon be proud that you did!



This photo demonstrates a 1 1/2 year old buck with an exceptional set of antlers. Typically yearling bucks will not display antlers of this magnitude.

The two and a half (2 ½) year old buck is often hard to distinguish and really takes a trained eye looking at some key characteristics to identify. Aside from the fact that this age group will just be generally larger than the yearling there are



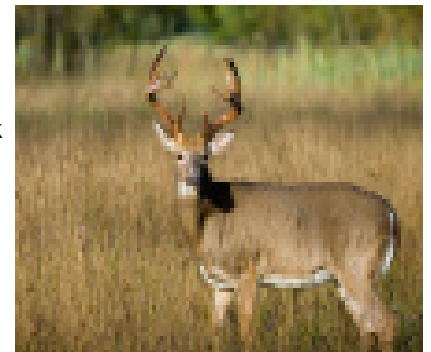
This photo demonstrates the obvious line between the neck and shoulders, and high flanks that are common with 2 1/2 year old bucks. This photo courtesy of David Johnson.

only a couple of things that should stick out to you. The first difference is the waist and flanks. This age group will have a more full flank than a yearling and the hips will not be quite as elevated in relation to the shoulder as with the yearling. The neck and head will be larger, but not always all that different from the yearling.

Antlers in the 2 ½ year age class can be pretty impressive. Nutrition levels and genetic quality begin to dictate the size and shape of the antlers, but still because of the massive amount of energy required for structural growth of the young buck's body; antlers are nowhere near their potential. In fact, a Mississippi State University study concluded that a buck may only demonstrate 60% of his antler potential at 2 ½

years old. Just as an example, say that you harvest a buck scoring 100 inches on the Boone and Crocket scoring system and then determine that the buck is only 2 ½ years old. That buck at full maturity, which is about 6 ½ years old, could score as high as 165 inches. Wouldn't it be worth the wait to harvest a 165 inch buck? That is what you potentially forgo when you harvest immature bucks!

At three and a half (3 ½) and four and a half (4 ½) years of age bucks reach maturity. They are easily recognizable because their bodies look very sleek and muscular. The neck blends with the shoulders fairly well and there is very little distinction at the point where the shoulders begin that is noticeable. The chest appears much deeper and more heavily muscled than with immature bucks. The back is flat and the midsection of the buck is generally pretty square. The hind quarters are also in line with the back. Lastly, the buck's legs will appear proportional to the body.



This photo demonstrates the sleek physical characteristics common in mature 3 1/2 to 4 1/2 year old bucks.

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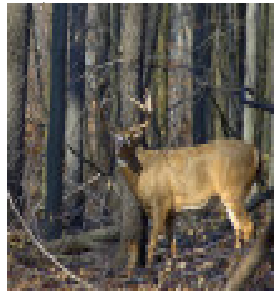


Identifying Age Classes in Bucks (continued from pg. 2)

Bucks in this age class will generally have very impressive antlers, and are hard to pass up when the opportunity is presented to any hunter. It is understandable that a club will want to take some deer out of the mature age class to ensure hunters are successful and happy. However, taking deer from this age class should be done in moderation. A good plan might be to allow every hunter in the club to take one of their three legal bucks (three antlered bucks, one with at least 4 1" points on one side, is the legal limit in Alabama) from the mature age class. The two remaining bucks should then be taken from the middle aged or older classes.

At five and a half (5 1/2) to six and a half (6 1/2) bucks reach middle age and are easily distinguishable as the true giants we all dream of harvesting. They are barrel chested and there is virtually no line between the neck and shoulders. The back is slightly swayed and the belly sags giving the midsection a more round than square appearance. The legs appear short under the weight of the large body. The skin may slightly sag around the face and appear loose along the neck in these deer.

This is the age class of open fire! You will know one of these bucks instantly when you see him and you won't have to consider whether or not he is a shooter. Most of these deer will have antlers at least in the 120 inch class, and some will be Boone and Crockett record book type deer



This photo of a 5 1/2 year old buck demonstrates the lack of transition from neck to shoulders and under arching back and belly that is common in this age group.

(minimum of 160 inches). If you are willing to pass up the smaller bucks this age class will become more and more common on the property that you hunt.

The senior age class, which contains those deer that have been too smart for all of us hunters out there, is really any deer seven and a half (7 1/2) or older. Senior age class bucks even further demonstrate a round appearance in the midsection because of their swaying back and sagging bellies. Their neck is smaller than middle aged bucks and muscle tone is lost forming a body that looks similar to the 2 1/2 year old bucks discussed earlier. There is one obvious difference in the two age classes.

That is that gravity has taken affect on these deer and the skin sags noticeably in this age class around the head and neck.

Senior deer generally have declining antlers in the wild unless nutrition is readily available, such as in areas where supplemental feeding is practiced. For hunters with a trained eye (those who can determine whether a deer is 2 1/2 or 8 1/2) this age class should be targeted for removal from the population as they are not common breeders and do compete with developing younger bucks for food sources.

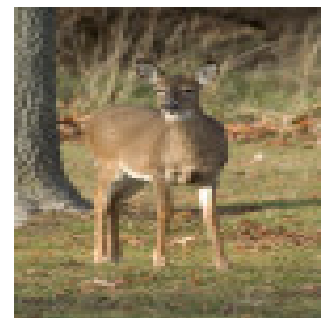
Doe Management



This photo demonstrates the extended facial rounded belly, longer neck, and face common in adult does.

As we manage the buck population on a tract, we also need to manage the does. Fortunately this is much more simple than aging the bucks. We only need to recognize two age classes to be successful doe managers. Those two age classes are the immature and mature. Our target for removal is the mature age class. The reason for this distinction is that too many folks accidentally kill a buck fawn (1/2 year old) by mistaking it for a doe. To keep this from happening you should just avoid shooting immature does completely. Many areas have tried to accomplish this by applying weight standards for a legal doe. That is generally helpful, but you can look for characteristics similar to those we discussed earlier with the bucks to discern the two age classes.

Immature does are fairly easy to recognize based on their behavior and body characteristics. A young doe will commonly be fairly unaware of the dangers that may be present around them. They do not take the time or have the patience that an older doe will have for stopping and checking the wind and listening for possible approaching danger. They may appear playful if other deer are present. Young does may also present opportunities to a hunter when older does are staying back checking things out before coming through an area. This is a good reason to always be wary of shooting the first doe that you see. A younger doe will typically be thinner through the belly, have a smaller and more square head with shorter ears. Older does have long snouts with larger ears, more rectangular shaped bodies, and more proportionate legs.



This photo shows the short flattened head of a buck fawn.

Making the distinction between a mature and immature doe is an important one for any quality deer manager. Harvesting mature does in moderation, and avoiding harvest of buck fawns, can benefit the quality of the deer population on your RLU.



Tree Stand Safety

I just wanted to remind everyone of some brief safety tips for using a tree stand this hunting season. I know I have been as guilty as anyone in the past of not putting safety first while climbing and using a tree stand, but this is a fairly dangerous activity and you should always take the proper precautions. In fact, one in three hunting related accidents involves someone hunting from a tree stand. Below is a brief list that I found on the Maryland DNR webpage that I think is very thorough and helpful to us as we start gearing up for the season:

- Never carry equipment with you while climbing. Use a haul line to raise or lower your gear. Make sure guns are unloaded and broadheads are covered prior to raising or lowering firearms or bows with a haul line.
- Since most accidents occur when hunters are climbing up or down a tree, always use a climbing belt. Always use a safety belt or harness when hunting from elevated tree stands. Study manufacturer's recommendations before using any equipment. Never use a rope to replace a safety belt.
- Check permanent tree stands every year before hunting from them, and replace any worn or weak lumber.
- Read, understand and follow the factory recommended practices and procedures when installing commercial stands. Inspect portable stands for loose nuts and bolts each time they are used.
- Choose only healthy, living trees when using climbing devices. Rough-barked trees such as oak are best. Do not use a tree that is rotten or has dead limbs.

- Never put all your weight on a single branch. Keep at least one hand and one foot on a secure place when reaching for the next hold.
- Climb higher than the stand and step down onto it. Climbing up onto it can dislodge it.
- Wear boots with non-skid soles, because steps or platforms can be slippery in rain, sleet or snow.
- Tell a dependable person where you're hunting and when you plan on returning. Map your whereabouts and leave a note at camp, at home or in your car so that you can be found.
- Don't fall asleep. This is a common cause of accidents. If you get drowsy, move your arms rapidly until you feel alert.
- Never wear a ring in any climbing situation. Rings can catch on tree limbs and equipment.
- As a precautionary measure, remove all logs, upturned and cutoff saplings, rocks and other obstructions on the ground below the tree stand.
- Use updated equipment. When used properly, newer tree stand equipment is solid, safe and secure. Older models of safety belts offer some protection, but newer safety harnesses offer more protection.
- Carry a whistle to call for help and carry a first aid kit, flashlight and cellular telephone in a fanny pack.

This list taken from:

<http://www.dnr.state.md.us/nrp/education/ts.html>

The Wrap Up

Hunting season is upon us and I would like to wish all of you the best of luck for a successful and happy season. There is still time to set aside areas for food plots and camping with prior approval. If there is anything that I can do to help you add value to your "recreational license unit" please call or email me and we can discuss your request.

