



Kansas' First Deer Season

By BILL PEABODY

It all started just a few years ago. Kansas, the last of the states to have a deer season began to make preparations for the inevitable. In 1956 it was estimated that there were 3,000 deer in the Sunflower State, and by 1965 this small population had mushroomed to an incredible 30,000 plus animals. If we add to this the fawn crop of last spring, it can be conservatively stated that there were at least 35,000 deer in "Midway U. S. A." last fall and

more than 22,000 in the management units open to firearms hunting. Deer management in Kansas has been tempered with the experiences of other states and is based on a basic knowledge of the animal and its interaction with Kansas habitat.

The Beginning

If any one man deserves credit for getting the ball rolling, it is Leland M. Queal. Lee came to work for the commission in 1963.

A professional biologist, he took charge of the deer project and began planning, evaluating and initiating surveys to find out "WHAT, WHERE, WHY and HOW MANY?" Some of you may remember Lee from his story "Our Kansas Deer" which appeared in the Winter 1964 issue of KANSAS FISH AND GAME. He set course for a deer season in 1965, but left the state in May to take a job in Michigan and was not present when the first arrow was



drawn and the crack of a rifle echoed the presence of a deer hunter in the next draw.

Objective

In terms of the commission's objectives in establishing a season, all were met with unqualified success. *This didn't just happen—it was planned.* The 1965 deer season was the first step in the initiation of control measures to maintain a fast growing deer population within the economic limit tolerable to landowners and to provide some relief in the deer-car accident rate. Last year, a total of 562 deer were killed on Kansas highways as compared to 456 animals in 1964. In all, 696

known mortalities occurred. Just how significant is this? If we add together the archery deer kill (160) and the firearms harvest (1,340), we get a total 1965 legal harvest of 1,500 deer. This, by the way, represents only about 4 percent of the total deer population in the state. Nonhunting mortalities amounted to 46 percent of the season's harvest. This is a considerable loss in terms of potential hunter recreation, vehicle damage and personal injury, and wasted venison.

The season also provided recreation well within the limits of our deer resource. It *did not* provide the control that will become neces-

sary in the future. It did provide, however, the first step toward reaching that goal. Successful hunters were required to take their deer to a check station. At the stations, commission personnel went about the business of determining the sex and age of each deer, taking weights, determining hunter success, distribution and hunting pressure. In addition, blood samples of usable quality were collected from almost 800 animals as were over 200 reproductive tracts from antlerless deer. You might ask, just how is all of this information collected at the check stations being used? Until last year, the commission's knowledge of the sex



Game Protector Clyde Ukele, Norton, displays rack of deer taken during firearms deer season. The deer is being weighed at a check station.

and age structure of our deer herd was based largely on surveys conducted by biologists and state game protectors. We did not know what Kansas deer weighed, although road kills and estimates told us that most of our deer were fine physical specimens. We did not know if our deer were carriers or reservoirs of dreaded livestock diseases. When testing is completed by the Diagnostic Laboratory, Kansas State University, we will have the answer.

We know that Kansas deer are reproducing at a high rate, but just what is the rate of reproduction? By examining the female reproductive tracts turned in at the stations by cooperating hunters, we can tell how many fawns are being produced each year by various age

classes of does. If, as we suspect, many of our fawns are breeders when they are only six to eight months old, this will tell us that our deer population has the potential for tremendous growth. This information, when used in conjunction with yearly population trend data, hunter success, distribution, and hunting pressure information in the various management units, will enable the game division to make realistic season recommendations without endangering the future of this valuable wildlife resource, while at the same time providing maximum hunter recreation.

What Kind of Seasons

Actually, there were four seasons in one. A liberal 46-day archery season that began in October en-

couraged 1,220 bow hunters to take their chances in bagging a deer. And wouldn't you know it, two of these modern-day Robin Hoods bagged a pair of the largest white-tails taken in the state. Al Weaver of Wichita brought down a buck that field dressed at 300 pounds. Al, using a 72-pound bow, got his trophy on the Arkansas river several miles south of the city. Hugo Prell, a resident of Bremen in northwest Marshall county, bagged a buck that tipped the scales at 241 pounds. Archers killed 160 deer during the season for an overall hunter success of 13 percent. This is pretty fair shooting when one considers that many inexperienced newcomers were in the field after the buckskin for the first time. But, more important than the number



Archery deer hunting is difficult and the hunter must blend with the surroundings. Here an archer uses a tree stand.

of deer taken was the tremendous amount of recreation that the season provided for those who took the time to scout the woods looking for deer and deer sign and then, wait patiently in a blind for that "big one" to come by. As predicted by Queal when he prepared the 1965 recommendations, the highway deer kill in "65" far exceeded the legal harvest by archers.

In six management units where it was desirable to stabilize population levels in order to control increasing crop damage and highway deer kills more adequately, or where hunting was more difficult due to local habitat conditions, both antlered and antlerless deer were legal targets throughout the season. Instead of increasing the harvest of deer as this type of season is intended to do, hunters bagged fewer deer in the eastern part of the state where these regulations were in effect than in the north central and northwestern units. And, the eastern areas are where the bulk of Kansas' white-tailed deer population is found. The commission issued 1,281 permits in the "any deer" areas and hunters took home 296 deer for a hunter success of 23 percent. This figure is less than half

of the statewide accidental deer kill for 1965. This lower hunter success can be explained in terms of the species of deer hunted (whitetail), more difficult habitat to hunt in, general accessibility, difficulty hunters experienced in finding a place to hunt, and inexperience on the part of many.

The white-tailed deer is by nature a more secretive animal than his cousin the black-tail or mule deer. "Mr. Whitetail" is just not as easy to bag as the more open ranging, less wary "muley." Hunters experienced difficulty in finding this elusive creature of the wooded streams, valleys and upland timber. And when they did see him, all many saw was his white "flag" mocking them as he bounded off gracefully out of gun range through the thickets. Or maybe he just outsmarted them by staying put or circling around behind.

Throughout eastern Kansas there was concern over the type of firearm that would be used to hunt deer. Time and time again, facts and figures from the National Rifle Association and statistics from surrounding states were offered in evidence that the rifle was a safer weapon than the shotgun. And it

didn't matter what weapon was used, it was the person behind the trigger that counted. Hunters had the choice of using either rifles or shotguns at the option of the landowner on whose land they would hunt. Over 98 percent of the successful hunters (1,318) preferred to use rifles to bag their deer. Only 22 deer were taken with shotguns. Still, fear of the high-powered rifle prompted some landowners to close their land to hunting. The excellent sportsmanship, caution, and attitude displayed by Kansas deer hunters in 1965 should pave the way for another accident free year in 1966, and who knows, it may open more land to hunting now that Kansas residents have been assured that deer hunting under a limited permit system can be safe as well as enjoyable.

The third type of season authorized the harvest of antlerless deer on the last day to previously unsuccessful hunters. This type of regulation was initiated to exert some control over the population, but certainly *cannot* be used as a stabilizing measure. Three management units offered antlerless deer hunting on the last day and 1,698 permits were issued. Hunters harvested 612 deer for a hunter success of 36 percent.

Wisely, in selecting the type of season for the northwestern management units (High Plains and Smoky Hill), Queal chose "bucks only" hunting because the deer population was composed primarily of mule deer which are much easier to hunt than whitetails and the more open nature of the habitat allows almost unlimited hunter access to the deer herds. In addition, there were some areas where it was considered desirable to allow the population to grow unchecked. It has been proven many times that under "bucks only" regulations it is virtually impossible to remove any more than about 10 percent of the total deer population. "Bucks only" hunting was authorized in three units and 946 hunters bagged 431 deer for a 46 percent hunter suc-

cess. This very good success in the extreme western units is not indicative of a high deer population, but reflects the habits of the species hunted (mule deer), the method used in hunting, and accessibility as related to habitat. It pleases me to add that hunter-landowner relations were excellent—in fact, some landowners actually took the time to show hunters where the deer were.

Results of Seasons

Looking back, the firearms deer season went just about the way it was expected to go. All of the 4,575 permits authorized by the commission were not issued, but still there were approximately 3,925 hunters afield. Permits were issued on a drawing basis with 4,264 applications being received. You might ask then, since the number of applications did not exceed the quota of permits available, why didn't everyone get a permit? The answer is straight and simple. As long as it is advantageous to control the number of hunters in a given area, and more applications to hunt there are received than there are permits available, some persons will be eliminated in the drawing or offered a choice to hunt in other units where the quota of permits has not been filled.

A glance at the kill figures tells us that there was quite a bit of hunter selectivity. Bucks accounted for 80 percent (1,073) of the total harvest even though antlerless deer were legal in six management units throughout the season and in another three units on the last day. As is evidenced by the increase in the kill on December 15, unsuccessful hunters not bagging a buck early in the season probably waited until the last day to take a doe. This is not surprising—with an unharvested population containing many old patriarchs with trophy antlers—who wouldn't want to wait for a big rack to come by.

Commission personnel determined the age of deer by tooth replacement and relative wear. Some hunters may have wondered why the station attendant removed the lower jaw with his consent. This was done so that a more detailed examination could be made at a later date and would also tell us how well our own men were trained in the deer aging technique. As was expected, a large proportion of the harvest was made up of old deer. In fact, 55 percent of the deer bagged were 2½ years old and older. Thirty-two percent were yearlings (1½ years) and 13 percent were fawns (½-year class). In 1966

it is expected that the proportion of older deer in the harvest will be reduced, but those of you that may think that all the "big ones" are gone, just get out into the "deer country" and take a look for yourselves. While it is true that as Kansas continues to hunt deer each year the number of older deer bagged will decrease, there will always be the challenge of finding that "Ole Granddaddy" to mount and hang over the fireplace or in a den.

Frequently we have been asked, what do Kansas deer weigh? For the first time we can give accurate "no-guess" answers. Field dressed weights were obtained on 1,213 whitetails and mule deer. Surprising as it may seem, whitetails weighed more than the "muleys" except in the fawn and 3½-year-plus classes. Without exception, antlerless white-tailed deer weighed from 9 to 60 pounds less than bucks. In mule deer, does averaged from 9 to 73 pounds less than antlered deer. Mule deer does appear to be slightly heavier than antlerless whitetails, although the small sample size for mule deer weights does not permit us to make a more refined statement. Average weights for whitetails and mule deer are

(Continued on page 11)

Average Weights of Deer in Kansas

Age class	WHITETAILED		MULE DEER	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
½.....	(77) 75.4*	(59) 66.7	(7) 76.4	(10) 67.7
1½.....	(174) 123.6	(55) 92.9	(132) 114.6	(12) 101.7
2½.....	(118) 153.2	(42) 108.6	(98) 146.7	(9) 111.9
3½.....	(82) 173.3	(16) 119.4	(99) 170.0	(5) 123.0
3½ plus.....	(91) 178.3	(19) 118.1	(106) 179.6	(2) 107.0

* (No.) = sample size. Average field dressed weights in pounds.



Larry Mull, Pratt assists game biologist Bill Hlavachick, Hays and Federal Aid Coordinator Oliver Gasswint, Pratt in leg-banding one of the wild turkeys. (Pratt Tribune photo by Don Wright.)

Deer Season

(Continued from page 7)

given in the table below. The largest deer harvested during the firearms season was a whitetail buck that hog-dressed out at 235 pounds.

As one might expect, the bulk of

the deer harvest occurred on opening weekend with 710 animals being bagged. This represents 53 percent of the total statewide kill. A total of 375 deer were taken on December 15, the last day of the season, and amounted to 28 percent (375) of the harvest. This increase

in deer bagged can be explained by the fact that three management units offered a previously unsuccessful hunter antlerless deer on the last day. Also, as was mentioned earlier, quite a number of hunters in "any deer" areas waiting for a buck earlier in the season, took a doe on the last day to fill their permit. Although not bringing home a trophy buck might have been disappointing to some, hunters taking antlerless deer probably had better quality venison to set on the table than those that bagged a buck that had just been in rut or was still in the rutting condition.

Approximately 90 tons of hog-dressed venison was harvested this past season. Like good livestock management, the harvest of surplus deer on a sustained yield basis will provide Kansas hunters with many hours of recreation, and we hope for many, pleasant eating.

Comparison

Just how well did the general resident fare as compared to the landowner-tenant in bagging a deer? Our statistics show that those hunters living on rural land came out slightly ahead of the general resident. Thirty-five percent of the landowners were successful whereas 31 percent of the general residents filled their permit. This could be expected, because persons living on rural land would have a better opportunity to see and locate deer, and certainly most would have no difficulty in finding a place to hunt.

From start to finish, Kansas' first deer season provided hunters with many thrills and unforgettable moments. The four types of seasons mentioned: (1) Archery, (2) "Any deer," (3) Antlerless deer on one or more days, and (4) "Bucks only," will form the deer management framework in "Midway U. S. A." Based on yearly population trend surveys, results of the previous hunting season, and common sense, each deer season can be as good, if not better, than the last.