

## **Prior Antler Development as a Predictor of Future Antler Size**

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Trophy deer management often involves controlling numbers of both bucks and does. Because the objective of trophy deer management is to produce larger-antlered bucks, many wildlife managers wish to remove the portion of the buck population with the least potential for large antler size. This traditionally includes removing spike-antlered yearling bucks and smaller-antlered older individuals; however, there are little data available to support one culling system over another.

We present trends in antler development comparing gross Boone & Crockett score (GBC) of individuals captured early in life to the same individuals captured at a later date using data from the South Texas Buck Capture Project.

Data from bucks captured from 1998–2007 indicate 3% of spike-antlered yearling bucks scored >150 GBC, while 33% of fork-antlered yearlings scored >150 at 5.5+ years old. Of 3.5 year old deer with  $\leq 8$  points, only 8% scored >150 GBC, compared to 37% for those with 9 or more points. For 4.5 year old bucks with  $\leq 9$  points, 5% scored >150 GBC, whereas 24% of bucks with 10 or more points scored >150.

These criteria might be useful in trophy management of white-tailed deer where the manager can control harvest intensity and selection. Caution is advised for managers of properties where stakeholder interest is in harvesting more deer—not larger deer, or where deer densities or sex ratios do not require removal of bucks.

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