

Deer numbers about same as in 2008

By **MAT TAYLOR**
Special Contributor

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department personnel recently conducted spotlight deer surveys in Lampasas and surrounding counties. The surveys were carried out at night along specified 15-mile sections of county roads.

Derrick Wolters, TPWD wildlife biologist for Lampasas, Coryell and Bell counties, said preliminary data shows the deer population in Lampasas County to be about the same as last year, or about one deer per 10 to 20 acres. That translates to an estimated 25,000 deer in the county.

"The number of deer per acre can vary widely, depending upon habitat," Wolters said. "Ranches with good habitat will have a higher density of deer."

From his observations, Wolters said it also appears that antler development is about average. Despite dry conditions earlier in the year, he has observed several bucks with good antlers. Antler restrictions that have been in place several years are one reason mature bucks with larger antlers are evident in deer populations.

Hunters should have an opportunity to harvest a good buck this season that will provide a winter's supply of venison, he said.

Wolters said survey data also indicated a much higher fawn survival rate this year compared to last year. In 2008, the survival rate ranged from 20 to 60 percent in his three-county area. This year the rate varied from 30 to 90 percent.

After a dry spring and summer, Lampasas County has received some beneficial rains. Many areas of the county have recorded as much as nine inches this

fall. Wolters said the rains have resulted in a growth of grasses and forbs, which has yielded a good supply of native foods for deer. As a result, most deer will be in good body condition this hunting season.

Edwards Plateau (the Hill Country) ecological district leader Mike Krueger agreed that with the recent rains and a good acorn crop, deer should be in good body condition.

"In my travels across the region," he said, "it seems like there is a deer eating acorns under every live oak tree."

Both biologists said the hunting could be difficult due to the acorn crop and other native foods, as deer will not have to move around much to find quality forage. Hunting near feeders may not be as productive as it was last year, when conditions were extremely dry.

Krueger added that as the season progresses, more deer should be coming to feeders as the supply of acorns decreases. He also predicted deer antlers to be average this season, due to dry weather during the spring and summer.

Many hunters travel each year to South Texas in search of a trophy buck. From all accounts, it has been a rough year for whitetails in that region. Much of the area has experienced extreme drought. While recent rains will help improve range conditions, antler development probably will be below average, except for those ranches that feed a high-protein feed.

Other ecological regions -- the Piney Woods, Gulf Prairies, Post Oak Savannah, Blackland Prairies, Cross Timbers, Rolling Plains, High Plains and the Trans Pecos -- are entering the fall hunting season in prime condition, as most have received adequate rains during the year. That has provided an adequate food supply for deer and other game.

Mat Taylor is a Kempner native and retired Soil Conservation Service employee. An avid hunter and wildlife photographer, Taylor is a former staff writer for the Lampasas Dispatch Record.

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Antler development is expected to be about average this year, although wildlife biologists have observed bucks with good antlers during their deer surveys in the county.

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