

Hill Country is largest deer producer

By MAT TAYLOR
Special Contributor

The Edwards Plateau ecological region, also known as the Hill Country, supports the largest white-tailed deer population in the state and nation. The region also has one of the highest deer harvests each year, and this is reflected in the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's estimated 2008-09 whitetail harvest.

The Hill Country-Edwards Plateau wildlife district is comprised of 25 counties in Central Texas. Lampasas and the surrounding counties of Burnet, Bell, Coryell and San Saba are included in the district. The district also includes counties west to Crockett County.

Data show that during the 2008-09 hunting season, 174,127 hunters in the region harvested 225,901 white-tailed deer. Hunters spent an average of eight days hunting during the season, and each successful hunter averaged 1.3 deer, the highest success ratio in any ecological region in the state.

Hunter success in the Edwards Plateau region was 72 percent, also the highest of any region. The South Texas Plains was a close second, with hunter success at 68 percent.

TPWD divides the state into 10 eco-

Special hunting dates offered

A special hunting season for white-tailed deer gives youth an extra two weeks to bag an animal.

The youth-only season is Jan. 4-17.

Young hunters also benefitted this year from a one-week early start to deer hunting. Oct. 31 and Nov. 1 were youth-only dates.

In addition, a special late general season in Lampasas County is available for all hunters. From Jan. 4-17, spike bucks and antlerless deer only may be harvested.

Youth below age nine must be within normal hearing distance of a licensed hunter who is at least 17 and who has passed hunter education or is exempt (born before Sept. 2, 1971).

Youth ages nine through 16 must be "accompanied," as defined above, or must have completed a hunter education course, which costs \$15.

Hunters age 17 and older who were born on or after Sept. 2, 1971 must complete a hunter education course successfully. Otherwise, they must purchase a hunter education deferral and be accompanied. A deferral, which costs \$10, allows a hunter to delay the completion of hunter education for up to one year.

A deferral may be obtained only once and is valid only until the end of the current license year.

logical regions. In addition to the Edwards Plateau are the Pineywoods, Gulf Prairies, Post Oak Savannah, Blackland Prairies, Cross Timbers, South Texas Plains, Rolling Plains, High Plains and the Trans Pecos.

The second-highest deer harvest region was the South Texas Plains with a harvest of 118,497. The third- and fourth-highest

regions were the Rolling Plains with 78,713 deer harvested, followed by the Cross Timbers with 74,121.

As expected, the lowest white-tailed deer harvests were in the High Plains with 2,026 and the Trans Pecos with only 640. These two regions, however, have a huntable population of mule deer and pronghorn antelope.

Across the entire state, 661,291 hunters harvested 625,655 white-tailed deer. This is an increase of 82,427 hunters and 112,803 deer killed over the 2007-08 season. Although there was a slight decrease in the number of hunters and the deer harvested in the Edwards Plateau, other regions such as the Rolling Plains and Cross Timbers saw the number of hunters and deer harvested increase by about 50 percent.

The large increase in the deer kill probably can be attributed to the increase of deer populations in other parts of the state. Historically, most hunters traveled to the Hill Country for deer. Even though the Hill Country remains the largest producer of deer, it seems more and more hunters now are able to hunt nearer their home.

Statewide TPWD data shows 56 percent of the deer killed were bucks and 44 percent does. In the Hill Country, the ratio was almost 50-50, with 112,064 bucks taken and 113,837 does.

TPWD no longer keeps harvest data for individual counties but with a regional kill of 9.5 deer per 1,000 acres, it can be estimated that approximately 4,500 hunters harvested 3,400 deer in Lampasas County. With current populations, the 2009-10 season should equal or exceed the 2008-09 harvest.

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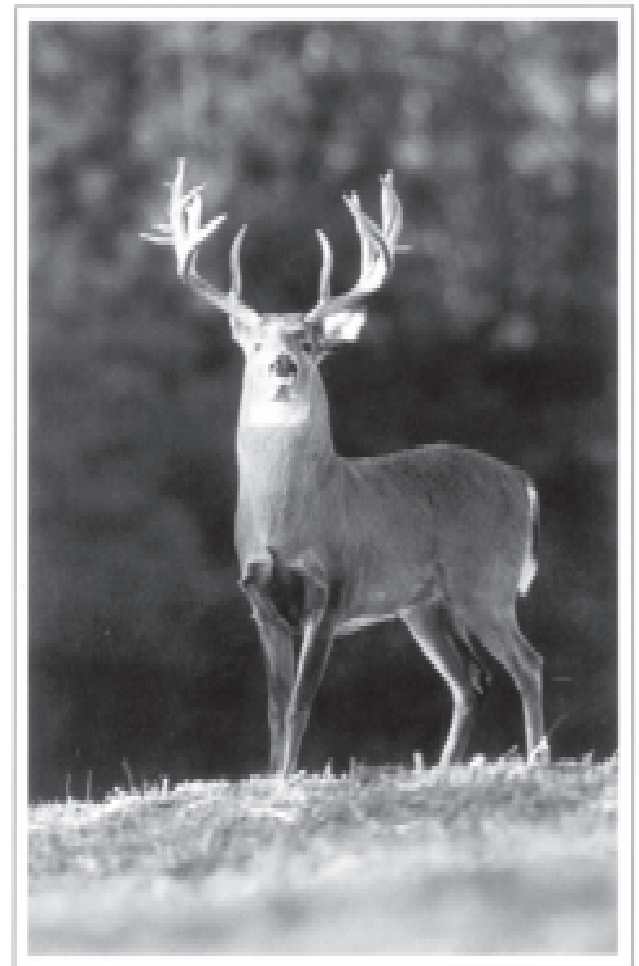
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