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# Big Game Report

# By Mike Shaw, Wildlife Research Supervisor & Jerry Shaw, Wildlife Research Technician



JOHN FORD

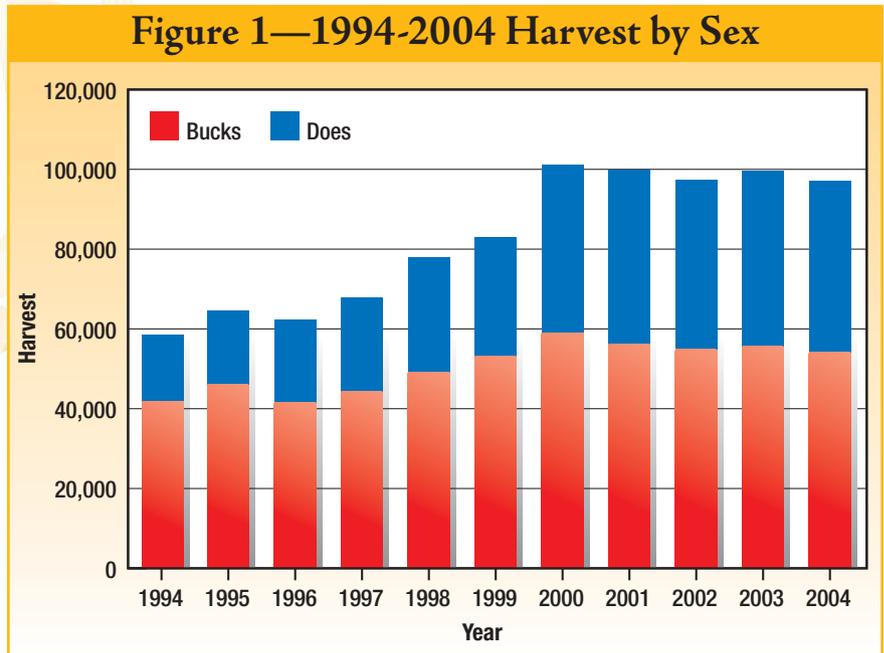
## 2004-05 DEER SEASONS

Hunters this past season harvested a total of 94,689 deer (Table 1). This tally fell 5,913 deer short of the 100,602 deer taken during the 2003 seasons. Figure 1 provides a graphical representation of the number of bucks and does harvested each year since 1994. Hunters took a total of 56,654 bucks during all seasons, within 1,000 bucks of last year's buck harvest. Nearly 5,000 fewer does were harvested as compared to 2003 with "Hunters in the Know" taking home 38,035 does in 2004.

Gun season again offered increased opportunities with the continuation of the 16-day gun season first offered in 2003. Total gun season harvest, including the special antlerless seasons and the youth season totaled 58,733. The nine-day muzzleloader season added an additional 21,317 deer to the total harvest. While gun and muzzleloader hunters took fewer deer as compared to last year, archers set a new harvest record with 14,639 deer taken. The previous high mark was set in 2002 when 14,278 deer were harvested with a bow.

Deer hunting remains one of Oklahoma's most popular outdoor activities with opportunities to hunt occurring in all 77 of our state's counties. While all of the counties are producing good numbers of deer, the top producing counties remain relatively the same from year to year. In fact, the top five counties were unchanged from their 2003 rankings. Excluding deer taken on wildlife management areas (WMAs), Osage County continues to top the list in terms of total deer harvested. This past year 4,248 deer were taken from within its boundaries. Cherokee County saw the next highest tally with 3,405 deer, followed by Pittsburg (2,759), Craig (2,286), Delaware (2,240) and Sequoyah (2,187) counties. Other counties in the top ten producers were Atoka (2,173), Creek (1,891), Major (1,880), and Mayes (1,798). In total, 38 counties had harvest totals in excess of 1,000 deer. Table 2 provides a detailed analysis of the 2004 harvest organized by county, season, and sex.

Mule deer continue to offer unique hunting opportunities in western Oklahoma. These deer make their homes in the



short-grass prairies and canyon country in the far northwest corner of the state and on into the panhandle. Hunters harvested 200 mule deer during the 2004 season, an increase from 144 taken in 2003. As was the case with the top counties for white-tail harvest, the top three counties for mule deer harvest remained unchanged from last year. Cimarron County continues to be the top mule deer producer with 77. The remaining two panhandle counties, Texas and Beaver, accounted for an additional 38 and 34 mule deer, respectively, more than double their 2003 harvest. Others counties taking over 10 "mulies" in the harvest were Ellis (14) and Harper (13). Harmon, Dewey, and Woodward counties all posted four mule deer into the books while Woods, Major, and Roger Mills added three each to the total. Hunters in Alfalfa County recorded two mule deer with one additional mulie coming from Greer County.

Overall, the statewide management goal continues to place emphasis on reducing harvest pressure on the young buck segment of the herd and increasing the harvest of does. The framework of 10 management zones remained in place for the fourth year, allowing for finer control over antlerless harvest. Antlerless hunting opportunity remains at all time high levels with all 77 counties offering some form of antlerless hunting. Antlerless days remained available during the muzzleloader and gun seasons. The spe-

cial antlerless season was again offered in December, and for the second time in as many years, an antlerless season was offered in mid-October for youths under 18 years of age. Hunters who participated in the special antlerless deer season were allowed a bag limit of one antlerless deer, which was designated as a "bonus deer" and did not count toward the hunter's statewide annual limit of six deer. Reasons for the antlerless regulations include balancing buck/doe ratios, localized population reduction, reducing harvest pressure on young bucks, minimizing agricultural damage, and increasing hunter time afield.



## Table 1 — 2004 County And Area Summary Of Deer Kills By Hunt Type

COUNTY	ARCH BUCKS	ARCH DOES	GUN BUCKS	GUN DOES	MUZZLELOADER BUCKS	MUZZLELOADER DOES	TOTAL BUCKS	TOTAL DOES	GRAND TOTAL
Adair	123	86	514	405	347	143	984	634	1,618
Alfalfa	118	121	607	552	146	155	871	828	1,699
Atoka	159	129	629	486	546	224	1,334	839	2,173
Beaver	19	10	303	166	40	25	362	201	563
Beckham	36	27	411	193	58	44	505	264	769
Blaine	55	52	369	249	79	65	503	366	869
Bryan	86	67	368	205	151	86	605	358	963
Caddo	133	119	739	419	184	94	1,056	632	1,688
Canadian	62	63	277	241	73	51	412	355	767
Carter	89	65	341	169	119	63	549	297	846
Cherokee	398	333	937	888	547	302	1,882	1,523	3,405
Choctaw	102	103	452	204	203	89	757	396	1,153
Cimarron	3	1	92	3	16	0	111	4	115
Cleveland	103	97	211	149	81	49	395	295	690
Coal	77	45	308	200	191	92	576	337	913
Comanche	39	26	176	125	65	31	280	182	462
Cotton	35	31	192	105	38	32	265	168	433
Craig	192	187	748	704	257	198	1,197	1,089	2,286
Creek	136	100	747	469	287	152	1,170	721	1,891
Custer	38	48	347	234	58	43	443	325	768
Delaware	216	165	712	624	341	182	1,269	971	2,240
Dewey	46	44	500	286	69	82	615	412	1,027
Ellis	37	39	548	299	70	52	655	390	1,045
Garfield	38	48	299	282	90	58	427	388	815
Garvin	46	29	234	115	104	42	384	186	570
Grady	48	58	356	236	93	56	497	350	847
Grant	90	88	534	548	135	130	759	766	1,525
Greer	20	31	316	195	54	65	390	291	681
Harmon	24	30	262	132	41	38	327	200	527
Harper	38	17	401	195	63	47	502	259	761
Haskell	138	102	387	289	334	128	859	519	1,378
Hughes	83	62	450	321	204	102	737	485	1,222
Jackson	45	50	302	160	42	37	389	247	636
Jefferson	24	18	175	73	35	18	234	109	343
Johnston	81	75	383	259	158	53	622	387	1,009
Kay	98	93	532	458	142	131	772	682	1,454
Kingfisher	58	71	329	321	95	55	482	447	929
Kiowa	26	30	224	120	33	44	283	194	477
Latimer	82	62	308	144	275	85	665	291	956
LeFlore	161	96	385	257	303	136	849	489	1,338
Lincoln	109	94	519	323	200	121	828	538	1,366
Logan	89	85	375	330	150	74	614	489	1,103
Love	42	54	202	146	81	34	325	234	559
Major	72	110	748	630	185	135	1,005	875	1,880
Marshall	49	41	194	132	58	41	301	214	515
Mayes	214	160	601	414	244	165	1,059	739	1,798
McClain	40	41	162	89	49	24	251	154	405
McCurtain	113	55	389	131	273	110	775	296	1,071
McIntosh	103	73	350	207	160	73	613	353	966
Murray	42	24	212	130	71	26	325	180	505
Muskogee	170	117	451	309	224	135	845	561	1,406
Noble	55	81	363	426	96	79	514	586	1,100
Nowata	126	119	608	446	181	131	915	696	1,611
Okfuskee	61	38	410	232	146	83	617	353	970
Oklahoma	119	93	172	97	45	23	336	213	549
Okmulgee	88	89	320	220	138	83	546	392	938
Osage	277	218	1,736	1,207	526	284	2,539	1,709	4,248
Ottawa	123	75	369	389	174	106	666	570	1,236
Pawnee	76	70	432	386	146	90	654	546	1,200
Payne	82	85	407	397	156	94	645	576	1,221
Pittsburgh	283	187	876	468	714	231	1,873	886	2,759
Pontotoc	109	72	339	211	179	68	627	351	978
Pottawatomie	103	79	405	204	172	82	680	365	1,045
Pushmataha	174	120	565	266	509	155	1,248	541	1,789
Roger Mills	38	27	690	391	90	97	818	515	1,333
Rogers	207	202	594	449	219	125	1,020	776	1,796
Seminole	95	62	288	157	126	79	509	298	807
Sequoyah	250	157	599	498	487	196	1,336	851	2,187
Stephens	73	43	332	152	97	34	502	229	731
Texas	20	13	183	31	30	0	233	44	277
Tillman	31	26	219	111	25	25	275	162	437
Tulsa	51	51	119	94	41	27	211	172	383
Wagoner	133	144	360	277	132	92	625	513	1,138
Washington	67	56	402	217	104	61	573	334	907
Washita	16	18	188	127	33	30	237	175	412
Woods	111	64	777	567	127	114	1,015	745	1,760
Woodward	77	77	782	599	141	117	1,000	793	1,793
<b>COUNTY SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>7,290</b>	<b>6,038</b>	<b>33,143</b>	<b>22,940</b>	<b>12,696</b>	<b>6,923</b>	<b>53,129</b>	<b>35,901</b>	<b>89,030</b>

## Table 2 — 2004 County And Area Summary Of Deer Kills By Hunt Type

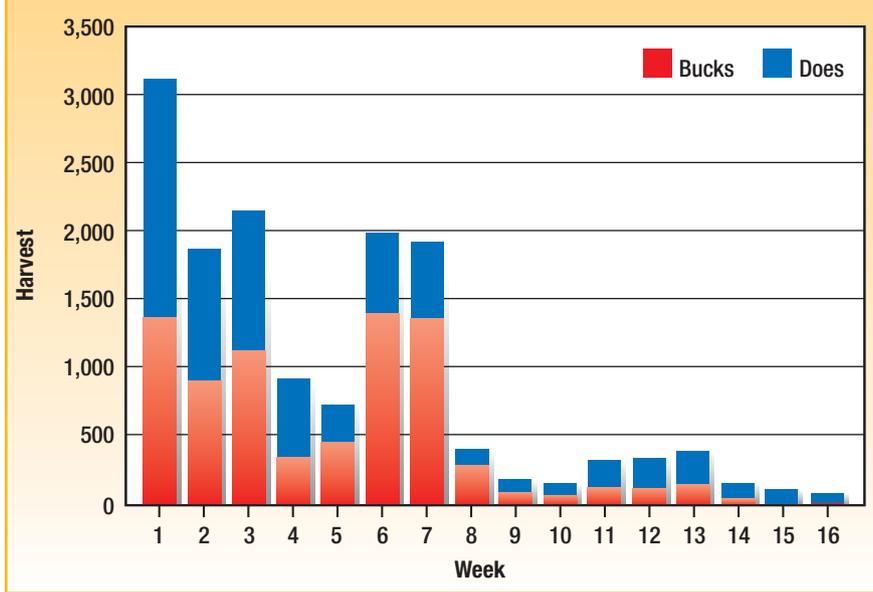
WMA	ARCH BUCKS	ARCH DOES	GUN BUCKS	GUN DOES	MUZZLELOADER BUCKS	MUZZLELOADER DOES	TOTAL BUCKS	TOTAL DOES	GRAND TOTAL
Altus-Lugert WMA	1	6	0	1	3	1	4	8	12
Atoka WMA	9	7	20	9	5	7	34	23	57
Beaver River WMA	3	2	30	3	11	0	44	5	49
Black Kettle WMA	11	16	128	53	27	14	166	83	249
Blue River WMA	3	1	0	0	0	0	3	1	4
Canton WMA	29	43	67	19	15	11	111	73	184
Cherokee GMA	4	3	42	26	20	7	66	36	102
Cherokee PHA	13	20	28	3	46	22	87	45	132
Chickasaw NRA	6	8	11	10	16	5	33	23	56
Cookson Hills WMA	22	11	16	24	9	5	47	40	87
Cooper WMA	2	3	23	2	5	0	30	5	35
Copan WMA	3	8	12	0	7	4	22	12	34
Deep Fork NWR	2	6	0	0	7	7	9	13	22
Deep Fork WMA	0	0	0	0	1	4	1	4	5
Ellis County WMA	0	1	26	2	6	1	32	4	36
Eufaula WMA	0	1	3	0	1	1	4	2	6
Fobb Bottom WMA	2	0	2	2	1	3	5	5	10
Fort Cobb SP	0	0	0	0	1	18	1	18	19
Fort Cobb WMA	13	14	11	10	0	2	24	26	50
Fort Gibson WMA	16	16	9	3	11	9	36	28	64
Fort Gibson WR	6	4	0	0	12	22	18	26	44
Fort Sill MR	45	17	80	57	44	36	169	110	279
Fort Supply WMA	8	12	22	10	7	1	37	23	60
Gruber WMA	22	16	44	5	45	41	111	62	173
Heyburn WMA	7	0	5	2	2	2	14	4	18
Hickory Creek WMA	0	3	20	11	6	1	26	15	41
Honobia Creek WMA	37	17	169	71	138	60	344	148	492
Hugo WMA	9	12	34	36	25	8	68	56	124
Hulah WMA	5	10	57	2	26	34	88	46	134
James Collins WMA	34	19	12	3	16	5	62	27	89
John Dahl WMA	0	0	1	0	1	0	2	0	2
Kaw WMA	12	14	39	40	18	12	69	66	135
Keystone WMA	6	13	13	4	8	9	27	26	53
Lexington WMA	9	8	30	12	13	1	52	21	73
Little River NWR	2	1	13	6	0	0	15	7	22
Little River SP	3	2	0	0	0	0	3	2	5
Love Valley WMA	1	1	17	5	6	0	24	6	30
Major County WMA	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
McAlester AAP	110	102	0	6	0	0	110	108	218
McCurtain Co. WA	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	2
McGee Creek WMA	4	6	5	3	9	4	18	13	31
Okmulgee GMA	0	0	12	13	0	0	12	13	25
Okmulgee PHA	0	1	1	0	1	0	2	1	3
Oologah WMA	8	7	35	41	11	19	54	67	121
Optima NWR	2	3	0	1	0	0	2	4	6
Optima WMA	3	1	12	0	1	0	16	1	17
Osage-Rock Creek WMA	0	0	7	2	4	1	11	3	14
Osage-W. Wall WMA	5	2	2	1	6	3	13	6	19
Ouachita WMA	64	32	138	74	118	52	320	158	478
Ouachita WMA McCurtain Unit	20	12	72	33	58	17	150	62	212
Packsaddle WMA	1	1	42	10	7	0	50	11	61
Pine Creek WMA	2	0	2	0	0	0	4	0	4
Pushmataha WMA	21	17	12	5	16	12	49	34	83
Salt Plains NWR	2	2	67	55	10	15	79	72	151
Sandy Sanders WMA	3	0	8	3	3	4	14	7	21
Sequoyah NWR	0	0	0	0	22	60	22	60	82
Skiatook WMA	2	0	9	6	4	2	15	8	23
Spavinaw GMA	32	31	26	24	10	12	68	67	135
Spavinaw PHA	3	1	0	3	3	2	6	6	12
Stringtown WMA	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3	3
Three Rivers WMA	76	38	243	102	228	61	547	201	748
Tishomingo NWR	0	1	4	7	0	0	4	8	12
Tishomingo WMA	2	7	1	0	1	0	4	7	11
Washita Arm WMA	1	1	1	1	0	0	2	2	4
Washita NWR	0	0	11	72	0	0	11	72	83
Waurika WMA	8	9	3	2	0	0	11	11	22
Webbers Falls WMA	0	1	1	3	1	0	1	4	5
Wichita Mountains NWR	0	1	34	20	0	0	34	21	55
Wister WMA	1	3	0	0	3	0	4	3	7
Yourman WMA	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	3
<b>WMA SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>716</b>	<b>595</b>	<b>1,731</b>	<b>919</b>	<b>1,078</b>	<b>620</b>	<b>3,525</b>	<b>2,134</b>	<b>5,659</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>8,006</b>	<b>6,633</b>	<b>34,874</b>	<b>23,859</b>	<b>13,774</b>	<b>7543</b>	<b>56,654</b>	<b>38,035</b>	<b>94,689</b>

While overall doe harvest numbers were down from last year, hunters are still taking great advantage of Oklahoma's liberal doe harvest opportunities. A total of 38,035 does (40 percent of the total harvest) were taken during all deer seasons combined. This total is nearly 5,000 does fewer than were taken in 2003, and serves as a reminder that continued efforts must be made to promote adequate doe harvest levels.

## ARCHERY SEASON

Archery season continues to be very popular with Oklahoma hunters, and for good reasons. Bowhunters enjoy the longest deer hunting season in state history. For the second year in a row archery season began on October 1 and continued uninterrupted, until January 15th. In addition to generous season lengths,

**Figure 3—2004 Archery Harvest by Week (Includes Special Hunts)**



archers also enjoy the most liberal bag limits offered to deer hunters, with limits set at four deer total of which no more than two may be antlered bucks. The final 15 days of the season were restricted to antlerless only harvest. In addition to the 107-day season and liberal bag limits, are great improvements in equipment technology. All of these factors combined to help archers set a new bow season harvest record in 2004-05. Bowhunters tagged a total of 14,639 deer, bettering the previous record of 14,278 set in 2002.

In order to compare the data collected from this year to that of years past, the archery season was divided into two sessions. The first session was from October 1 through November 20, the opening day of rifle season. This first hunt period accounted for 88 percent of the total archery harvest in 2004-05. Information gathered in the annual Game Harvest Telephone Survey, combined with annual license sales information indicated that 81,083 hunters participated in the 2004-5 archery season, achieving an 18 percent success rate. A breakdown of the harvest by season, sex, county and wildlife management area is shown in Table 2. Figure 3 shows the number of bucks and does harvested during each week of the archery season.

## MUZZLELOADER SEASON

Muzzleloader season continues to be very popular with Oklahoma deer hunters. Data indicated 106,395 hunters ventured afield with muzzleloaders in 2004. Despite the warm, windy conditions that occurred over much of the state, 21,317 deer were harvested during the nine day season that opened October 23 and closed October 31. Hunters in possession of the appropriate tags were allowed one antlered and one antlerless deer. Figure 4 details the muzzleloader harvest by date. Success rates continue to be high with 20 percent of the muzzleloader hunters taking a deer home.

## GUN SEASON

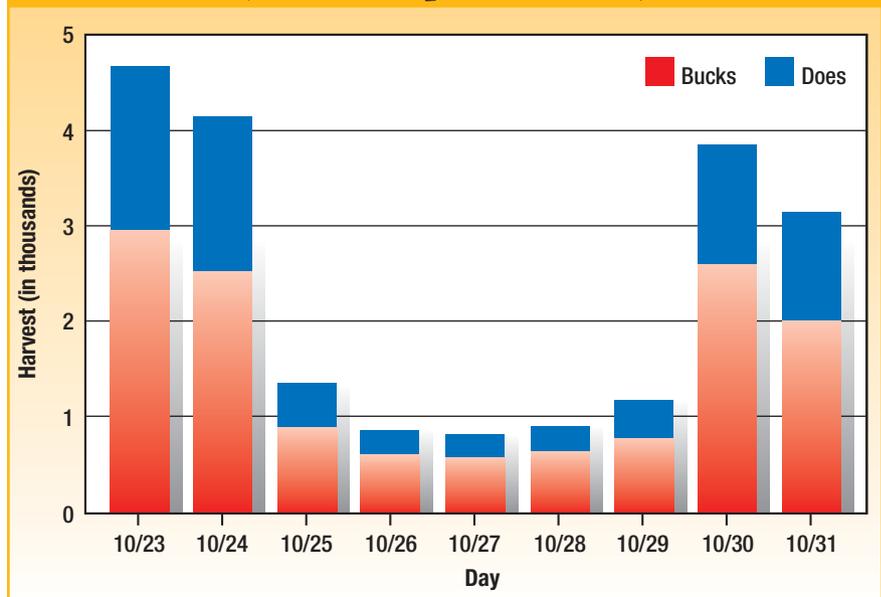
The 2004 deer gun season opened on November 20, and for the second year in a row, continued for 16 consecutive days, closing on December 5. The lengthened season was put in place in part to help lessen any negative effects of bad weather, and provide greater opportunity for hunters to be in the woods. A secondary objective was to decrease harvest pressure on the yearling buck segment of the herd by allowing hunters to be more selective in harvesting bucks. The change appears to be working. For the second consecutive year, the percentage of the adult bucks harvested was lower than it had been prior to lengthening the season. The "Data Collection and Analysis" portion of this report details other changes to the state's deer herd demographics.

An estimated 158,572 hunters took to the field at some point during the 2004 gun season. Hunters had a general bag limit of one antlered deer. However, antlerless deer were legal on certain dates in designated areas, giving a combined bag limit of one antlered and one antlerless deer with appropriate tags. The hunter success rate for rifle season was quite high with 37 percent of the hunters tagging a deer for a total gun harvest of 58,733 deer, slightly over 4,300 deer shy of last year's gun season total.

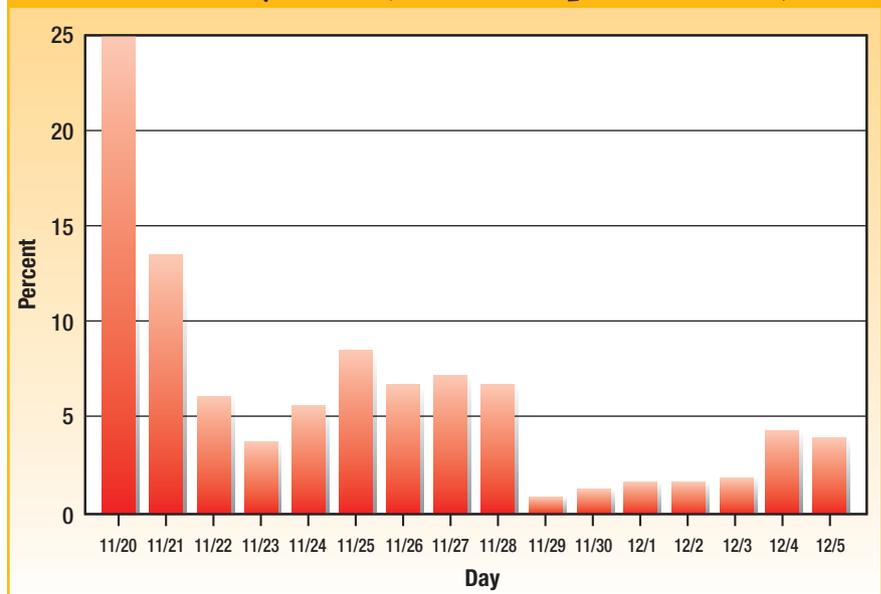
Even with the additional week of hunting opportunity, harvest patterns continue to show that the majority of the antlered buck harvest occurs during the opening weekend of the season. Hunters bagged 25 percent of the entire 16-day season's total on the first Saturday of the season. Sunday accounted for an additional 14 percent of the harvest for a total of 39 percent of the entire gun season harvest occurring the opening weekend of the season.

Daily harvest declined during the week but increased as the weekend neared, with 14 percent of the total harvest occurring during the second weekend. Harvest data indicate a greater percentage of the harvest occurred during the second week of the season than the previous year. The final seven days of gun season added an additional 5,372 bucks to the harvest, or 16 percent of the total. By comparison, the second week of the 2003 season accounted

**Figure 4—2004 Muzzleloader Harvest by Day (Includes Special Hunts)**



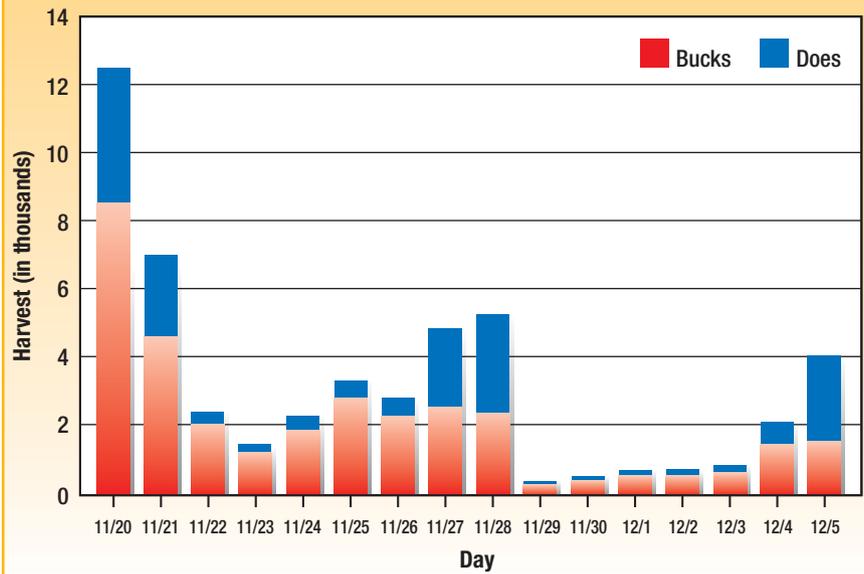
**Figure 5—2004 Percentage of Antlered Gun Buck Harvest by Date (Includes Special Hunts)**



for only 15 percent of the gun season harvest. Figure 5 depicts the adult buck harvest by day for the entire 16-day season. A breakdown of bucks and does harvested during the gun season is shown in Figure 6.

Hunters in the majority of the state were afforded a special antlerless season during the month of December. This additional opportunity continued to be popular with many hunters and has become a valuable tool in managing Oklahoma's deer population. These special seasons accounted for an additional 3,879 antlerless deer. Survey data indicates 43,728 hunters participated in these antlerless-only seasons. Respondents to the Wildlife Department's annual Game Harvest Survey indicated that of those hunters choosing to participate in this hunting

**Figure 6—2004 Gun Harvest by Day  
(Includes Special Hunts)**



JOHN FORD

# Q&A with Mike Shaw

*As the Wildlife Department's, Wildlife Research Supervisor for the Wildlife Department, Mike Shaw knows more about the state's deer herd than just about anyone. Here is a few common, and not so common, questions Shaw receives from deer hunters around the state. I hope you enjoy his answers as much as I did.*  
—Micah Holmes

**What has been the biggest change in the deer management over the past 20 years?**

White-tailed deer are the most studied big game animal in North America, and we are continually learning new things about deer. However, deer biology and the principles of management are pretty much the same today as they were 20 years ago. The biggest change in deer management has been people management. Because of our great success in restoring deer, hunters' desires have changed. There are so many more interests involved that today it has become more difficult to develop a program that takes everyone's wishes into consideration.

**What is the most important thing I can do for the future of deer hunting in the state?**

Let that little buck walk and harvest a doe.



*Mike Shaw (right) believes that the desires of landowners, hunters and other constituents are a critical piece of the deer management puzzle.*

**What do you think will be the biggest change in the next 20 years?**

Deer management will probably get more difficult for many of the reasons I mentioned above. However, I think the biggest challenge will be hunting access. If hunters are unable to find a place to hunt, they will gradually lose interest. Also, as the baby boomers age, it's inevitable that we will lose some of our deer hunters. Replacing those constituents through recruitment of young hunters will be critical to insure that wildlife agencies can continue their mission.

**What area of the state has seen the biggest increase in deer populations over the past two decades?**

The western half of the state has seen the biggest growth. This was the last area of the state to be restocked and it took longer for the herds to build up a breeding nucleus. Once deer populations reach a certain level, they tend to increase very rapidly until food, space, or other limiting factors act to suppress further growth.

**Several years ago, Chronic Wasting Disease in deer seemed to all over the news. Has it been found in the wild deer population in Oklahoma? Are we still looking for it?**

While the news reports have subsided, our focus on this disease has not. Thankfully, we have not found CWD in any of the free-ranging deer sampled in Oklahoma. The disease continues to surface in other states, with New York becoming the most recent to identify CWD positive deer. Oklahoma has an active surveillance program in cooperation with the USDA. The Department has tested over 4,200 hunter-harvested deer since 1999 and we plan to continue monitoring our herds for this disease.

**It never made sense to me why we should kill does. If we want to increase the population shouldn't we take more bucks and less does?**

During the early years of deer restoration when we were trying to build the herd that made perfect sense. However, we now have good numbers of deer throughout the state. In some areas we have too many, and our management focus has changed from attempting to increase the herd to stabilizing it at the present size in many



*Mule deer can be found across the Panhandle and in the northwest corner of the state.*

areas. Without an adequate harvest of female deer (the producing segment of the herd), deer numbers would continue to grow with drastic consequences to the habitat and the deer.

**Why is it that the deer in northwest Oklahoma always seem to weigh more than deer in southeast Oklahoma? Is there more food for the deer in the northwest part of the state?**

It's not a matter of more food, but the quality of the food available. To understand this you have to look at the difference in Oklahoma's soils. Soils in the northwest part of the state are deeper and more fertile than soils in eastern Oklahoma which are often shallow, rocky, and infertile. Agricultural crops, which provide plenty of nutrition, are also more abundant in the western part of the state.

**I've just been deer hunting one time and I didn't see a thing. I have been trying to read up on the sport, but do you have any advice for a rookie?**

That's simple. Don't believe everything you read, and spend as much time in the woods observing deer as you can. Nothing can substitute for lessons learned from actually scouting deer habitat.

**For the last two or three years we've had a 16 day deer gun season, how has the increase affected harvest?**

Well, we have certainly not seen the big increase that some predicted. When the Department extended the season, we thought that little if any harvest increase would result. More hunting days

offered doesn't necessarily translate to more hunter-days afield. So far, that has been borne out. We have not seen any wide fluctuations in the harvest. For the last five years, Oklahoma hunters have taken around 100,000 per year. While hunter opportunity has been spread out over a longer time, the average deer hunter is still spending approximately the same number of days afield.

**What is the status of mule deer in Oklahoma? Do you think the population will grow in coming years?**

Mule deer are restricted to western Oklahoma where they are locally plentiful. In some areas they inhabit the same range as whitetails, but most often they occupy slightly different habitats. In 2001, the regulations were changed to afford mule deer more protection and the harvest of antlerless mule deer was prohibited during the firearms seasons. Mule deer are not as productive as white-tailed deer and availability of good quality habitat is always going to be a limiting factor. As a result, I don't see the mule deer population enjoying the same phenomenal growth as our white-tailed deer herds did.

**Recently the Wildlife Department conducted an aerial pronghorn antelope study in Texas County – what did we find out from the survey?**

It had been several years since the area was flown and the survey confirmed that the population had increased. Antelope numbers are now at the point where we are considering expanding the antelope hunts to include Texas County.

**At the check station last year they asked if they could pull the lower jaw out of the buck I killed. I said sure, but I never did figure out exactly why they wanted it? Can you explain this to me?**

By examining the pattern and wear on teeth in the lower jaw, biologists can tell how old the deer is. This information gives us important clues related to how deer are faring with the habitat in the area. For example, information collected annually on weights, antler points, the percentage of spikes, and antler beam diameters are all indicators of the physical well-being of the herd. When deer numbers exceed the amount of quality forage available, these physical characteristics change for the worse. Age information can also give us a good idea of the hunting pressure on the herd. Herds, which suffer from chronic overpopulation, will generally have top-heavy age structures. Lots of animals in the older age classes can be a symptom of poor production and/or recruitment resulting from underharvest.

**What have we learned from the radio-collared elk studies in the Wichita Mountains?**

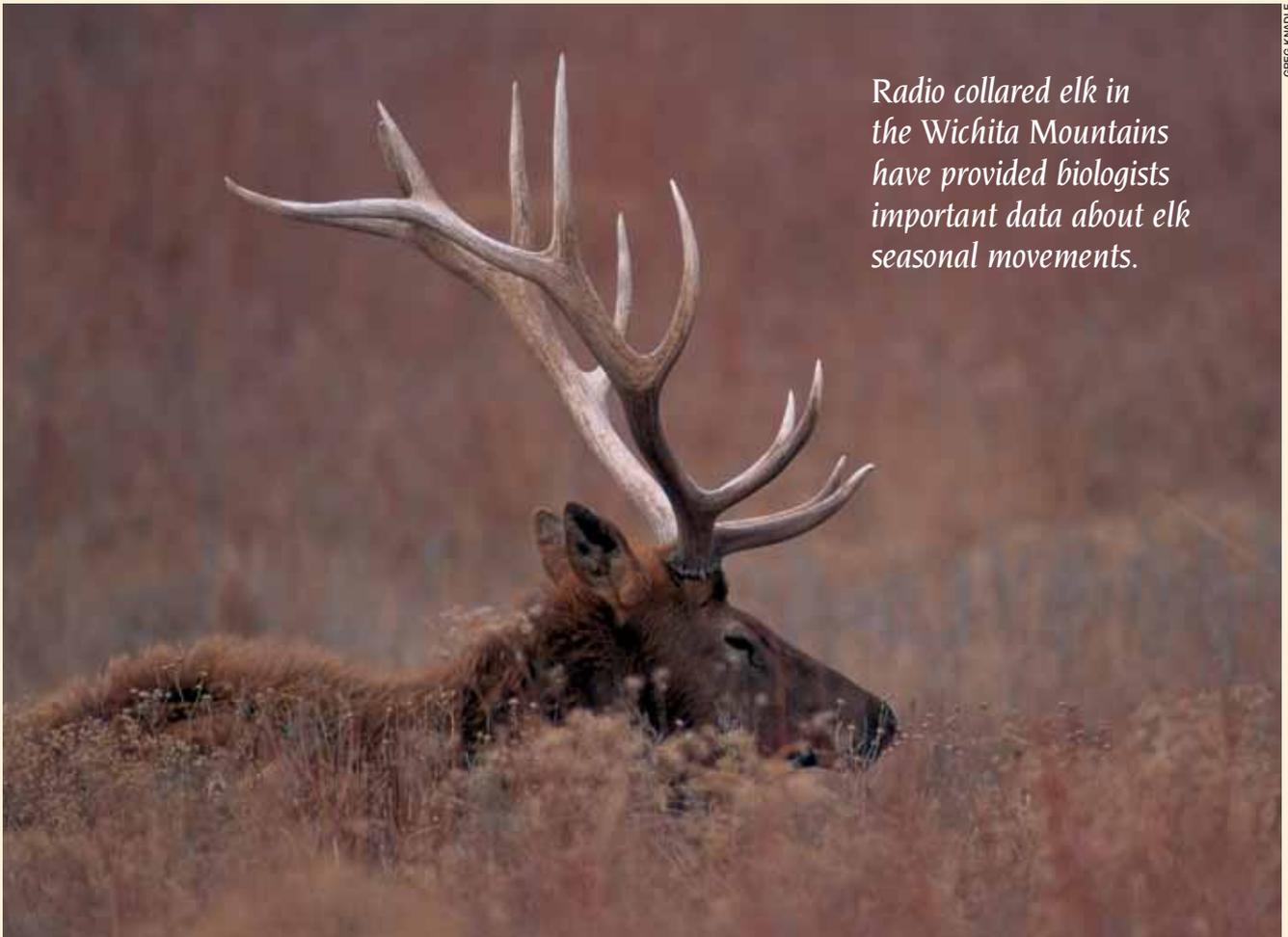
This is an ongoing study that is scheduled to be completed in 2006, so the final report isn't available yet. However, radio-tracking data gathered thus far has provided good information

on the seasonal movements of the animals and their habitat preferences. Additionally, aerial surveys have provided more accurate population estimates, which will be valuable for future management decisions.

**Every year, me and my buddies get in a "discussion" about whether we should shoot spike bucks. I say let 'em go and let 'em grow. My buddy says you might as well harvest it now, because it will never grow into a big deer. What do you think?**

That's a difficult question to answer, and biologists often don't agree with each other on this topic. As a general rule, on good range, spike-antlered yearlings are most likely late-born fawns. They just don't have an adequate amount of time nutritionally to produce anything more than spikes. That doesn't mean that these yearlings are inferior to their branch-antlered cohorts. Research has shown that these bucks will produce very respectable antlers in succeeding years. Age and nutrition are the keys when it comes to producing big racks.

*As Mike Shaw said, no matter how much you read about deer hunting, there is no substitute for time spent in the woods. So take advantage of Oklahoma's generous deer seasons and healthy deer populations and don't forget to introduce someone new to the sport this year —Micah Holmes*



*Radio collared elk in the Wichita Mountains have provided biologists important data about elk seasonal movements.*

GREG KIMBLE

## ELK HUNTS

Limited elk hunting opportunities continued to be highly sought after by hunters. Opportunities to participate in this "hunt of a lifetime" were increased in 2004. A total of 266 permits were available for three separate hunt locations through the Wildlife Department's controlled hunts drawing process. Cookson Hills WMA had one cow permit available while the Pushmataha WMA offered one bull permit. Both participants were successful in filling their permits.

The Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge increased the number of permits available to 72 bull tags and 192 cow tags. Participation in these hunts continues to be high with only 18 cow hunters and one bull hunter failing to arrive at the hunt. Eighty-seven per-

cent of the bull hunters were successful and 62 percent of the cow hunters bagged their quarry.

Additional elk hunting opportunities were available for hunters on private lands in Caddo, Comanche, and Kiowa counties after securing written landowner permission and presenting this to officials at the Wildlife Department's Lawton office. The seasons remained a split 10-day archery hunt followed by a 4 days of rifle hunting. Fifty-six elk were taken during the private lands hunts. An additional 35 were harvested on Fort Sill Military Reservation yielding a total elk harvest of 263 animals for 2004.

## ANTELOPE HUNTS

Antelope populations continue to thrive in Cimarron County and hunting opportunities were available for

individuals who were fortunate to draw a permit through the controlled hunts program. Fifty buck and 50 doe permits were issued through public drawing and an additional 25 either-sex permits were made available to area landowners. Sixty-six hunters participated in the hunts taking 61 antelope (38 bucks and 23 does). Landowner permits yielded another 21 bucks and one doe.

## DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Oklahoma's landscape is more varied than that of many other states. Perhaps only Texas is comparable in terms of the variety and diversity of deer habitat available within its borders. A deer hunter's choices could include the cypress swamps of the far southeastern coastal plain, mixed hardwood-pine forests of the Ouachita Mountains, expansive tall grass prairies in



PAUL MOORE

An elk hunt in the Wichita Mountains is a dream opportunity for many Oklahomans. Wildlife Department personnel spend time with the hunters before the hunt helping them to learn the lay of the land and giving them the best chance of success possible.

the northeast counties, wheat and alfalfa fields in the northwest, the mesa country of the panhandle, mesquite scrub of the southwest, or the extensive post oak-blackjack cross timbers which dominates the central interior of the state.

In addition to influencing the tactics and techniques a hunter must use in pursuing Oklahoma white-tailed and mule deer, these major differences in habitat exert an overwhelming influence on the number of deer the land can support as well as the physical characteristics of the animals themselves.

Although information collected at the county level is often useful to sportsmen, biologists are more concerned with tabulation and analysis of deer kills in small areas called Deer Kill Location Units or "DKLs" and aggregations of these DKLs known as "Harvest Units" (Figure 8). Harvest units are regions that, by virtue of similar habitat and herd conditions, lend themselves to being managed as separate units with specific management objectives. Harvest units with similar habitats have the inherent capability of supporting deer

**Table 3 — Physical Characteristics of Yearling and Adult Deer by Harvest Unit (Includes WMA Statistics)**

Harvest Unit	Yearling Bucks			Adult Bucks		Adult Does	
	Weight (*)	Antler Points	Percent Spikes	Weight (n)	Ave. Age	Weight (n)	Ave. Age
1	113 (20)**	6.9	--	137 (47)	2.7	96 (52)	2.9
2	107 (26)	5.4	15.4	131 (89)	3.4	94 (188)	3.7
3	116 (7)	5.4	14.3	139 (42)	3.1	95 (77)	3.1
4	105 (103)	4.8	15.5	125 (249)	2.5	94 (170)	2.8
5	102 (22)	4.6	9.1	116 (39)	2.2	90 (61)	3.1
6	92 (215)	5.0	17.7	106 (474)	2.4	86 (315)	3.4
7	85 (76)	5.0	10.5	105 (204)	2.6	84 (278)	3.2
8	95 (74)	4.7	17.6	110 (180)	2.3	85 (289)	3.0
9	82 (198)	4.0	32.8	97 (465)	2.4	76 (331)	3.4
10	84 (99)	4.9	19.2	100 (251)	2.7	80 (215)	3.4
11	89 (25)	5.5	12	105 (49)	2.1	83 (52)	2.8

\* All weights hog-dressed      \*\* Sample sizes in parentheses

populations of similar qualities and densities. Trends in weight and antler characteristics can be examined to determine which units are most likely to produce the density or quality of animals desired.

Yearling bucks are especially good barometers of a herd's physical condition. Their high vulnerability to harvest usually insures a large sample to examine, and these deer have the burden of growing their first set of antlers when body growth is not complete. This makes them

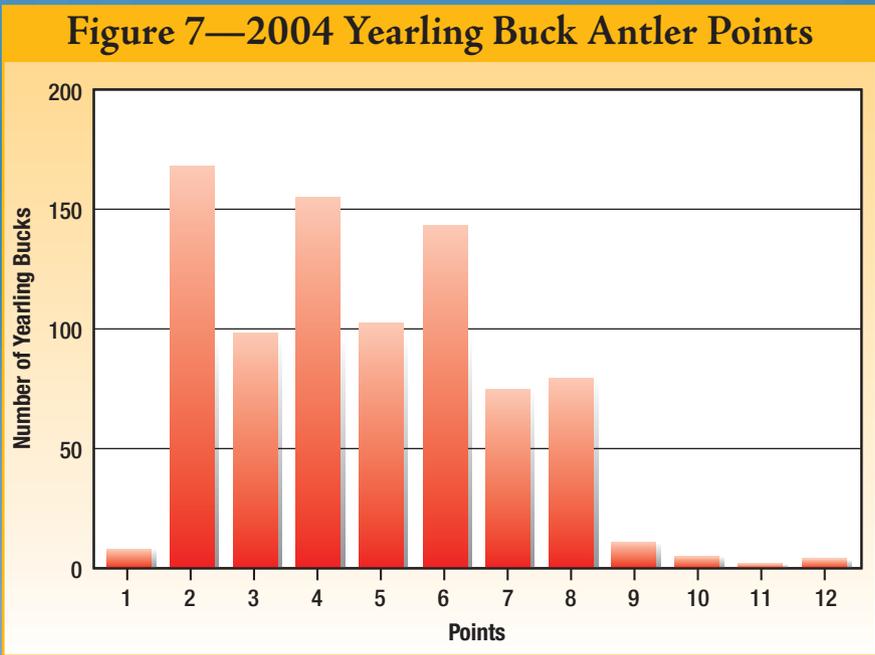
especially sensitive to prevailing range conditions. When yearlings have well-developed antlers with many points and large beam diameters, the herd can be considered healthy. Of the 856 yearling bucks examined in 2004, 68 percent had four or more points (Figure 7). Differences in biological potential, range condition, and deer density are reflected in Table 3. The trend of certain harvest units producing larger and better-nourished deer continued in 2004. Deep, fertile soils and



*Antelope populations continue to thrive in the Panhandle. Last year hunters harvested 83 antelope.*

an abundance of agricultural crops upon which deer can feed characterize units in western Oklahoma. As a result, the deer from units 1-5 continue a trend of heavier yearlings with slightly better antler development than other units. In contrast to the fertile soils and quality nutrition available in units 1-5, harvest units 9 and 10 typically have shallow, rocky soils and an abundance of closed canopy forest, limiting the amount of forage available to the deer. As a result, these units produce yearlings with lighter weights, smaller antlers, and a greater percentage of spikes than the western units.

As hunter success rates increase, more and more hunters are beginning to shift their focus to selecting for quality or trophy bucks. While many different factors influence deer antler development, one of the most important is buck age. Older bucks will typically have larger racks than younger bucks if the amount and quality of forage are equal. Additionally, age data from the doe segment of the herd can provide much needed information about herd status and hunting pressure. For these



reasons, natural resources students are hired from selected state universities to collect deer jaws at selected deer check stations throughout the state. Together with data collected from cooperators enrolled in the Department's Deer Management

Assistance Program (DMAP), and deer harvested on WMAs, jaws collected by students provide the age structure data that is needed for herd management.

During the 2004 seasons, 5 percent of the deer harvested had one side of their



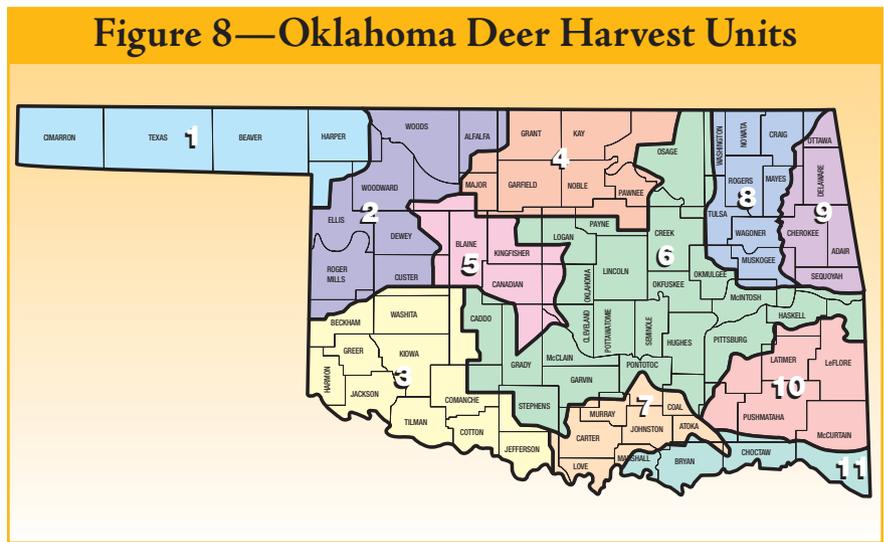
lower jaw removed. Biologists looked at tooth wear to calculate how old the deer were. In total, 4,953 deer jaws were collected and analyzed statewide. The statewide distribution of adult deer ages is shown in the figures 9 and 10.

An earlier section of this report mentioned that one of the desired goals of the lengthened season was reducing the number of young bucks harvested. Data continues to show that this is occurring, as the percentage of the harvest consisting of yearling bucks (last year's male fawns, now approx. 1.5 years old) continues to be below 2002 levels, the last season before additional days were added. With additional opportunity to spend time in the tree stand, some hunters are apparently more willing to pass on harvesting the first legal buck they encounter, hoping to find a larger, more mature deer later in the season. While progress continues to be slow, results of this practice will continue a desirable trend towards improved buck age structures and a better-balanced sex ratio.

## WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS

The demands placed on the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife's Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) continue to grow. Over 95 percent of Oklahoma's land area is under private ownership. Approximately 3 percent of the state, or roughly 1.6 million acres, is owned or managed by the Department. With such limited lands and the great demand for public hunting access, deer herds on many WMAs are managed with hunter access gained through a drawing process for permits, commonly referred to as "controlled hunts." Some benefits of the controlled hunts process are protection from over-harvest, control over which sex of deer may be harvested, improved deer quality and herd health, and a safer, higher quality hunt for the participants.

During the 2004 deer seasons, 21 WMAs were managed partially or completely through the controlled hunt drawing process. Lands not managed by the Department but made accessible via cooperative agree-



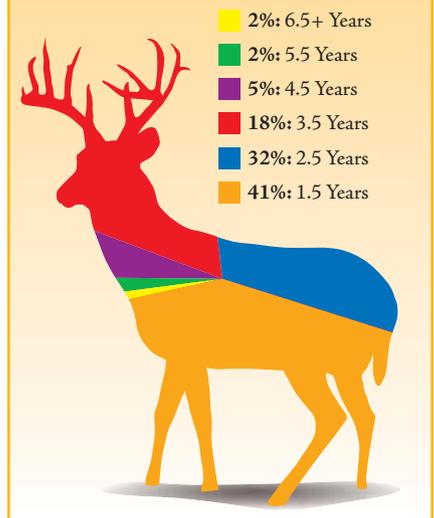
ments administered under the controlled hunts process were the Corps of Engineers lands at Waurika Lake, Copan, Hugo, Oologah, Tenkiller, Ft. Gibson, Keystone, and Texoma. The Wichita Mountains, Deep Fork, Salt Plains, Little River, Tishomingo, and Sequoyah National Wildlife Refuges, McAlester Army Ammunition Plant, and Ft. Cobb and Walnut Creek State Parks also allowed hunter access to successful controlled hunt applicants. There were 129 different big game hunts offered through the ODWC controlled hunts program in 2004. Many additional WMA's were open to deer hunters under regulations that were the same as the statewide seasons.

While only 3 percent of the state is Department managed public lands, these areas produced 6 percent (5,659 deer) of the total statewide harvest. Of the deer harvested on WMAs, 38 percent were female. Table 2 presents a harvest breakdown for each area by season and sex.

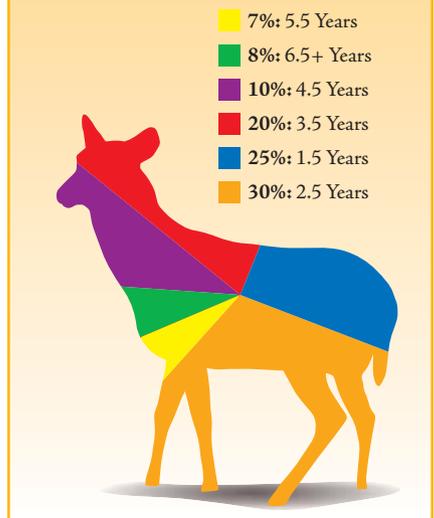
## TROPHY DEER

The classification of "trophy" can be used to describe many deer. A hunter's first archery deer, a large doe taken by a young hunter, a buck taken after a half-day stalk...all would be true trophies to the hunters involved! In addition to those personal trophy deer, the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation has an official recognition program to recognize the many large-racked bucks taken in our state.

### Figure 9—2004 Adult Buck Age Distribution



### Figure 10—2004 Adult Doe Age Distribution



The Cy Curtis Trophy Award Program was established in 1975 in honor of the man most responsible for restoring white-tailed deer throughout the state. In an effort to boost the state's deer herd, Curtis was instrumental in the establishment and management of the trap and transplant efforts which laid the groundwork for the deer hunting that

Oklahomans enjoy today.

To qualify for a Cy Curtis Award, the buck must be measured by an Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation employee or an official measurer of the Boone and Crockett or Pope and Young program. The Boone and Crockett system of measurement is used to judge the antlers. All deer legally harvested within

Oklahoma from 1972 to the present are eligible. The minimum score for entry into the typical white-tailed deer category is 135 points and non-typical deer must score at least 150 points to be eligible. Minimum entry score for a typical mule deer is 155. Non-typical mule deer must score at least 185 points.

During the 2004-05 scoring period, 246 deer met the requirements for entry into Oklahoma's trophy listing. As of June 2005, a total of 3,943 white-tailed and mule deer have been recorded in the Cy Curtis record book. Pushmataha County continues to lead the state with 192 typical white-tailed deer recorded. Pittsburg County is second with 155 bucks listed. Other top counties in the typical category include Woods, Osage, and Hughes with 140, 131, and 103 respectively. Looking at the number of non-typical white-tailed deer, Hughes County continues to lead with 34 entries. Pushmataha and Pittsburg counties share second place with 30 entries each. One of the deer added to the non-typical ranks was a Hughes County buck certified as a new Cy Curtis record. The deer was taken by a hunter from Newalla and scores 240 3/8.

The top five Cy Curtis deer from each category are listed below. For a complete listing of all the Cy Curtis award recipients, pick up a copy of the current Cy Curtis Awards Record Book, available from the ODWC Information and Education Division.

## Cy Curtis Trophy Awards Program

### TYPICAL WHITE-TAILED DEER (135 MINIMUM)

Score	County of Harvest	Antler Points Left	Inside Right	Method of Spread	Harvest
185 6/8	Bryan	8	8	20 7/8	Archery
181 6/8	Jackson	8	7	18 5/8	Gun
179 6/8	Oklahoma	8	8	16 7/8	Archery
179 2/8	Blaine	6	6	19 4/8	Gun
177 7/8	Harper	6	5	18 5/8	Archery

### NON-TYPICAL WHITE-TAILED DEER (150 MINIMUM)

Score	County of Harvest	Antler Points Left	Inside Right	Method of Spread	Harvest
240 3/8	Hughes	19	10	17 4/8	Gun
238 7/8	Wagoner	18	20	16 4/8	Gun
238 2/8	Delaware	16	19	18 0/8	Muzzleloader
232 6/8	Alfalfa	12	11	20 2/8	Gun
229 7/8	Pittsburg	17	13	17 1/8	Muzzleloader

### TYPICAL MULE DEER (155 MINIMUM)

Score	County of Harvest	Antler Points Left	Inside Right	Method of Spread	Harvest
180 1/8	Cimarron	5	5	24 1/8	Gun
178 6/8	Texas	5	5	23 6/8	Muzzleloader
178 4/8	Beaver	5	5	24 6/8	Gun
71 4/8	Texas	5	5	23 6/8	Gun
70 5/8	Cimarron	4	5	24 1/8	Gun

### NON-TYPICAL MULE DEER (185 MINIMUM)

Score	County of Harvest	Antler Points Left	Inside Right	Method of Spread	Harvest
15 0/8	Woodward	9	7	24 1/8	Gun
13 4/8	Woods	10	9	22 2/8	Gun
97 7/8	Cimarron	11	10	19 4/8	Gun
89 0/8	Cimarron	8	6	20 1/8	Gun

## Boone & Crockett Typical White-Tailed Deer (160) Minimum

Hunter	Hometown	County of Harvest	Antler Points	Inside Spread	Score
F. Bullard	Erick	Beckham	5-5	23 6/8	170 3/8
T. Peckham-Lavier	Hominy	Osage	6-7	17 0/8	165 6/8
J. Kuhnemund	Lahoma	Garfield	6-7	17 6/8	165 5/8
J. Spears	Fletcher	Woodward	6-5	18 5/8	163 1/8
D. Taylor	Blackwell	Kay	6-8	19 1/8	163 0/8
J. Knox	Grove	Ottawa	7-7	18 2/5	160 2/8

## BOONE AND CROCKETT AWARDS

A number of deer measured during the last scoring period scored well above the Cy Curtis minimum. Eleven bucks qualified for Boone & Crockett ranking, nearly double the number submitted last year. Information on these deer is presented in the following tables.

## Boone & Crockett Non-Typical White-Tailed Deer (185) Minimum

Hunter	Hometown	County of Harvest	Antler Points	Inside Spread	Score
D. Lambert	Newalla	Hughes	10-19	17 4/8	240 3/8
B. Burton	Waynoka	Woods	13-14	17 7/8	215 3/8
D. Townsend	Oklahoma City	Lincoln	15-11	20 2/8	212 4/8
M. Rector	Atoka	Atoka	10-9	15 5/8	187 6/8
J. Hudson	Midwest City	McCurtain	8-9	17 3/8	186 4/8

**A new, 31-point, record non-typical whitetail is pending. See the next issue for more information.**

# QUALITY DEER

Although the definition of a “quality deer” is somewhat subjective, and there are many bucks taken each year that would qualify for this category in some sense, it seems fitting that

some of the exceptional deer taken during the past season should be recognized. The following table lists 131 deer taken during the 2004 season that reached or exceeded the 200-pound mark.

County	Season	Dressed Weight	Points		Species
			Left	Right	
Beaver	Gun	200	6	6	Mule Deer
Custer	Muzzleloader	200	5	5	Whitetail Deer
Beckham	Muzzleloader	200	4	4	Whitetail Deer
Beckham	Gun	200	7	6	Whitetail Deer
Beckham	Gun	200	6	6	Whitetail Deer
Kingfisher	Archery	200	8	7	Whitetail Deer
Cimarron	Muzzleloader	200	5	5	Mule Deer
Cimarron	Gun	200	5	5	Mule Deer
Texas	Gun	200	4	4	Mule Deer
Alfalfa	Gun	200	5	6	Whitetail Deer
Custer	Gun	200	4	4	Whitetail Deer
Custer	Gun	200	5	5	Whitetail Deer
Custer	Gun	200	5	5	Whitetail Deer
Ellis	Gun	200	4	4	Mule Deer
Major	Muzzleloader	200	5	6	Whitetail Deer
Grant	Gun	200	6	5	Whitetail Deer
Grant	Gun	200	4	5	Whitetail Deer
Grant	Gun	200	5	6	Whitetail Deer
Grant	Muzzleloader	200	7	8	Whitetail Deer
Grant	Muzzleloader	200	4	5	Whitetail Deer
Grant	Gun	200	6	5	Whitetail Deer
Alfalfa	Gun	200	5	5	Whitetail Deer
Beaver	Muzzleloader	200	5	5	Whitetail Deer
Ellis	Muzzleloader	200	4	4	Whitetail Deer
Harper	Archery	200	5	5	Whitetail Deer
Beaver	Gun	200	9	10	Whitetail Deer
Beaver	Gun	200	5	5	Mule Deer
Harper	Gun	200	8	8	Whitetail Deer
Beaver	Gun	200	5	5	Whitetail Deer
Harper	Gun	200	5	4	Whitetail Deer
Harper	Gun	200	5	4	Whitetail Deer
Harper	Gun	200	4	4	Mule Deer
Kay	Muzzleloader	200	6	5	Whitetail Deer
Kay	Gun	200	5	6	Whitetail Deer
Grant	Muzzleloader	200	5	5	Whitetail Deer
Kay	Gun	200	6	5	Whitetail Deer
Beckham	Gun	200	4	4	Whitetail Deer
Kiowa	Gun	200	4	4	Whitetail Deer
Kiowa	Gun	200	4	3	Whitetail Deer
Logan	Muzzleloader	200	5	5	Whitetail Deer
Major	Archery	200	4	3	Whitetail Deer
Noble	Gun	200	4	5	Whitetail Deer
Osage	Gun	200	7	9	Whitetail Deer
Ottawa	Gun	200	8	4	Whitetail Deer
Roger Mills	Gun	200	6	5	Whitetail Deer
Texas	Muzzleloader	200	5	5	Whitetail Deer
Texas	Gun	200	4	4	Mule Deer
Cimarron	Gun	200	5	4	Whitetail Deer
Woods	Archery	200	7	6	Whitetail Deer
Woods	Muzzleloader	200	5	5	Whitetail Deer
Woods	Muzzleloader	200	4	5	Whitetail Deer
Woods	Muzzleloader	200	4	5	Whitetail Deer
Woodward	Muzzleloader	200	4	4	Whitetail Deer
Woodward	Gun	200	4	7	Whitetail Deer
Beaver	Muzzleloader	200	4	4	Whitetail Deer
Harper	Gun	200	5	5	Whitetail Deer
Ellis	Gun	200	6	5	Whitetail Deer
Harper	Gun	200	8	8	Whitetail Deer
Blaine	Archery	200	8	10	Whitetail Deer
Cimarron	Gun	200	5	5	Mule Deer
Cimarron	Muzzleloader	201	5	6	Whitetail Deer
Woods	Gun	202	6	5	Whitetail Deer
Harmon	Muzzleloader	202	6	5	Whitetail Deer
Kay	Gun	202	5	4	Whitetail Deer
Kingfisher	Gun	202	6	6	Whitetail Deer

County	Season	Dressed Weight	Points		Species
			Left	Right	
Woods	Gun	202	6	5	Whitetail Deer
Major	Muzzleloader	202	4	5	Whitetail Deer
Jackson	Gun	203	4	5	Whitetail Deer
Alfalfa	Gun	204	6	7	Whitetail Deer
Alfalfa	Gun	204	11	8	Whitetail Deer
Kay	Muzzleloader	205	3	4	Whitetail Deer
Ellis	Muzzleloader	205	4	5	Whitetail Deer
Garfield	Muzzleloader	205	5	6	Whitetail Deer
Grant	Archery	205	5	5	Whitetail Deer
Harper	Muzzleloader	205	5	5	Whitetail Deer
Harper	Gun	205	6	5	Whitetail Deer
Beaver	Gun	205	4	4	Whitetail Deer
Major	Gun	205	5	4	Whitetail Deer
Woods	Muzzleloader	205	4	4	Whitetail Deer
Beaver	Muzzleloader	205	4	6	Mule Deer
Grant	Muzzleloader	205	4	4	Whitetail Deer
Harmon	Archery	208	5	5	Whitetail Deer
Alfalfa	Archery	210	5	4	Whitetail Deer
Cimarron	Gun	210	4	5	Mule Deer
Ellis	Gun	210	4	4	Whitetail Deer
Ellis	Muzzleloader	210	6	5	Whitetail Deer
Alfalfa	Muzzleloader	210	5	4	Whitetail Deer
Harper	Muzzleloader	210	6	4	Whitetail Deer
Beaver	Archery	210	9	9	Whitetail Deer
Harper	Archery	210	5	5	Whitetail Deer
Kay	Gun	210	6	5	Whitetail Deer
Leflore	Gun	210	4	5	Whitetail Deer
Roger Mills	Muzzleloader	210	4	4	Whitetail Deer
Texas	Gun	210	6	4	Whitetail Deer
Woods	Gun	210	5	5	Whitetail Deer
Woodward	Gun	210	7	8	Whitetail Deer
Beckham	Muzzleloader	210	4	4	Whitetail Deer
Harper	Gun	210	5	5	Whitetail Deer
Logan	Muzzleloader	211	4	4	Whitetail Deer
Grant	Archery	214	5	6	Whitetail Deer
Craig	Archery	214	5	5	Whitetail Deer
Kay	Gun	215	5	4	Whitetail Deer
Ottawa	Gun	215	4	4	Whitetail Deer
Pawnee	Muzzleloader	215	12	10	Whitetail Deer
Woods	Gun	218	4	4	Whitetail Deer
Beaver	Archery	220	4	4	Whitetail Deer
Beckham	Gun	220	6	6	Whitetail Deer
Cimarron	Gun	220	4	5	Mule Deer
Custer	Gun	220	4	4	Whitetail Deer
Gran	Gun	220	5	6	Whitetail Deer
Grant	Muzzleloader	220	5	5	Whitetail Deer
Harper	Gun	220	5	5	Whitetail Deer
Roger Mills	Muzzleloader	220	5	5	Whitetail Deer
Jackson	Gun	220	4	5	Whitetail Deer
Jackson	Gun	222	9	6	Whitetail Deer
Dewey	Gun	225	7	4	Whitetail Deer
Grant	Archery	225	4	4	Whitetail Deer
Alfalfa	Muzzleloader	225	4	4	Whitetail Deer
Harper	Gun	225	6	5	Whitetail Deer
Grant	Gun	227	5	5	Whitetail Deer
Alfalfa	Muzzleloader	230	8	6	Whitetail Deer
Custer	Gun	230	8	8	Whitetail Deer
Beaver	Gun	230	6	5	Whitetail Deer
Harper	Gun	230	4	4	Whitetail Deer
Rogers	Muzzleloader	230	6	4	Whitetail Deer
Beaver	Gun	235	6	5	Whitetail Deer
Harper	Gun	240	5	5	Whitetail Deer
Texas	Muzzleloader	240	4	4	Mule Deer
Harper	Gun	245	5	5	Whitetail Deer
Beaver	Muzzleloader	250	6	7	Whitetail Deer

## CONCLUSIONS

The 2003 Big Game Report concluded by mentioning that continued diligence must be paid to reducing the number of young bucks in the harvest, improving buck/doe ratios, managing deer numbers in relation to societal needs, and instilling a hunting tradition in a new generation of hunters. Looking back on that list and analyzing the data from this past season, it would appear that we are taking strides to make those goals a reality.

Notable achievements from 2004 include a new archery season harvest record, continued trend of reducing the percentage of yearling bucks in the total harvest, a corresponding improvement in the adult buck age structure, improving buck/doe ratios, and a new non-typical Cy Curtis record.

While the overall statewide harvest total was down slightly from last year, such fluctuations are to be expected from year to year as variables such as wind, rain, temperature, forage availability, rut timing and duration, and a host of other factors all influence deer movement and hunter success. The good news is that the statewide deer population is doing well, both in terms of numbers and animal health. Hunters continue to enjoy long seasons and generous bag limits. As hunters continue to understand and implement management practices such as doe harvest and selective buck harvest, our deer herd, and therefore our deer hunting, will continue to improve! 🍂