KIM HART

2010 Big Game Report

With the 2010 big game season just ahead, here's a look at last year's harvest

By: Jerry Shaw, big game biologist and Gary Keller, wildlife research technician

A regulation change in 2007 reducing the number of bucks a hunter can harvest in a season from three to two not only reflects the change in focus of many hunters in recent years, but also should pay dividends to both deer hunters and deer populations in the future.

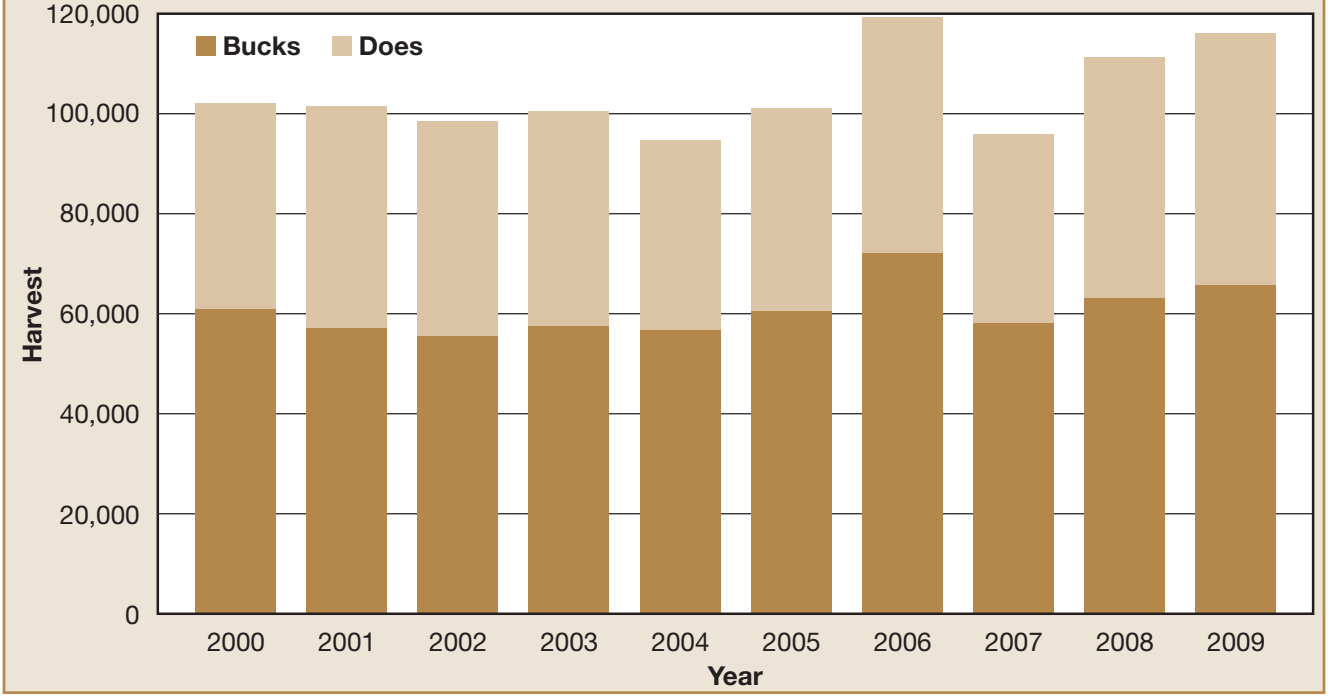
2009-2010 Deer Seasons

Last year's Big Game Report led out with the claim that Oklahoma hunters had set a new doe harvest record and a new archery season record. The same is true for this year!

Doe harvest has reached its all-time highest mark in state history. With all the hunting seasons combined, Oklahoma hunters harvested 50,420 female deer. This tally is over 2,000 more than the previous record set just last year. Just as in the 2008 season, Oklahoma archers set a new season harvest record. State bow-hunters checked in 19,887 deer, also roughly 2,000 more deer than the record harvest of one year ago.

While the total deer harvest for all seasons combined did not set a new record, it was close. Sportsmen and women checked a total of 116,175 deer in 2009 (see Tables 1 and 2 on pages 19 and 21). This was a slight increase (4.3 percent) over the 2008 harvest and only 3,174 deer shy of our all-time record set back in 2006. Figure 1 displays the annual deer harvest by sex for the past ten hunting seasons. Figure 2 shows how each season contributed to the total 2009 harvest.

Figure 1: 10 Year Harvest Trend

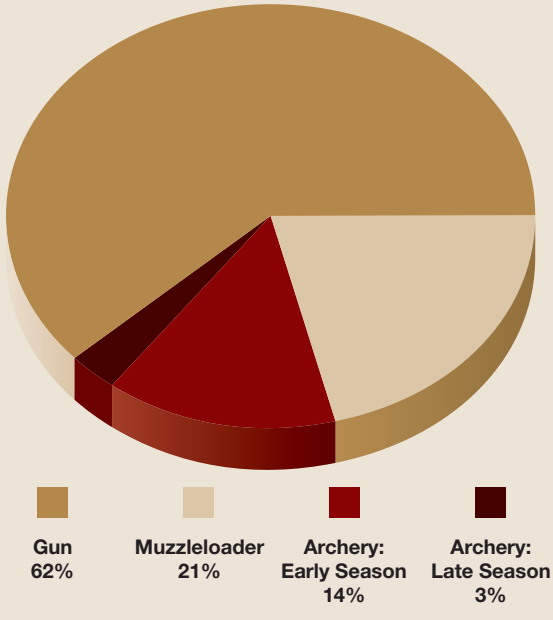


Big Game Quick Tips

When hunting in high visibility areas, scan the distance for movement as well as the immediate hunting area. You may spot deer a long way off before they ever get to you, or you may even observe consistent behavior from deer that helps you relocate your stand to a more effective location.

The 2009 deer seasons were ushered in with warm, fair weather during the early bow season. Deer forage was abundant and the deer were in excellent condition. The weather continued to hold through primitive and rifle seasons as well, with no significant weather events impacting hunter's abilities to be in the woods; at least until the snows began to fall in late December. The deep snows that covered much of the state around Christmas may have been enough to keep some hunters out of the woods, but fortunately, by that time of year most hunters had filled their tags and their freezers.

Figure 2: 2009 Deer Harvest by Season



There was some concern from hunters about the ability of the deer to cope with the deep snow (at least by Oklahoma standards), but the deer were able to easily find enough food to keep them warm and healthy.

While Oklahoma hunters are continuing to focus harvest pressure more and more on the female segment of the herd, buck harvest remained the largest portion of the harvest. Check station records show hunters took a total of 65,755 bucks last year. This buck harvest is nearly 6,500 less than the record buck harvest of 2006. As mentioned above, hunters checked in the largest number of does in state history with 50,420 does falling to hunters this past year.

Gun season continues to be the most popular of the deer seasons. Combining the regular gun season harvest with the youth-only and special holiday antlerless seasons, hunters using centerfire firearms were able to tag 71,701 deer in 2009. Hunters choosing to participate in the popular muzzleloading season added another 24,587 deer to the tally. Oklahoma archers continue to enjoy the longest of all our deer seasons, taking a record 19,887 deer.

Evaluating and comparing deer harvest by county is quite a bit like comparing apples to oranges. Factors such as the size of the county, the amount of suitable deer habitat, the amount of hunter access, and even the county's proximity to large population centers can all affect the number of deer that can be taken from each county. These and other differences help to keep certain counties on the list of top deer producers each year. This year was no different, with the top five counties from 2008 repeating their performance in the 2009 season. Table 1 (see page 19) is a breakdown of harvest data by county, season and sex. All deer taken from Wildlife Management Areas have been removed from the county totals and appear in Table 2 (see page 21).

Big Game Quick Tips

- In general, whitetail deer usually feed at dawn and dusk as they travel to and from their preferred bedding and loafing habitat.
- Deer often get much of their water through the foods they consume, but if it hasn't rained for several weeks, hunting near a permanent source of water can provide big rewards.
- Preferred bedding and loafing habitat often consists of areas with thick vegetative or woody cover.

The Wildlife Department and sportsmen have partnered up to improve the state's deer herd through increased antlerless deer hunting opportunities coupled by increased harvest of antlerless deer. Record high doe harvests have been recorded the last two seasons as hunters continue to take advantage of opportunities and see the value in harvesting antlerless deer.

From this data we can see that Osage Co. remained the top producing county, with 4,812 deer when all seasons are combined. Cherokee and Pittsburg counties continued their trend of alternating the number two and number three positions this year with Cherokee regaining the number two slot with a take of 3,867 deer. Pittsburg Co. rounded out the top three spots, with hunters checking 3,512 whitetails. The fourth through seventh slots remained unchanged from 2008, with Atoka Co. adding 2,836 deer, while 2,596 deer were checked in adjacent Pushmataha County. Sequoyah Co. and Creek Co. were very close behind, with 2,584 and 2,546 deer, respectively. Two counties not in the "top 10" last year, but making the grade this year are McCurtain Co. in the far southeast corner of the state and Craig Co. in the northeast. McCurtain Co. added 2,496 to the statewide total, with Craig Co. contributing an additional 2,211, barely squeaking by Delaware Co. (2,200) who completes the top 10.

Whitetail deer are the most popular big game animal in Oklahoma, but by no means are they the only one. Hunters in our state have the opportunity to harvest the whitetail's big eared relative, the mule deer. "Mulies," as they are sometimes called, are found in the short-grass prairie areas found along the western border of the state and on into the Panhandle. Regulations for mule deer and whitetail deer are the same with the exception that antlerless mule deer may not be taken during the youth rifle, regular rifle, or the special holiday seasons. The 2009 deer harvest contained 260 mule deer. Cimarron Co. is the perennial top mule deer producing county. This past season was no different, with 100 mule deer being checked from this county. Beaver Co. claimed the second most mulies with a harvest of 67. Forty-eight of these unique deer fell in Texas Co., with an additional 13 coming from Ellis County. Other western counties tallying mule deer included Harper (11), Woodward (9), Woods (4), Roger Mills (4), Harmon (3), and Major (1).

There is the long standing joke in Oklahoma that if you "don't like the weather" you should simply "wait a minute" and it will change. While our topography does not change as often as the weather, if you are not fond of the countryside where you are currently located, a short drive can find you in a vastly different habitat. Damp lowland areas in the far southeast give way to dense pine forests which in turn become oak/hickory cross-timbers, grass-mottled savannahs, rocky, oak timbered hills and valleys, tall-grass, mixed-

Table 1: 2009 County Summary of Deer Harvest by Hunt Type

County	Archery		Gun		Muzzleloader		Total Bucks	Total Does	Grand Total
	Bucks	Does	Bucks	Does	Bucks	Does			
Adair	122	136	563	549	310	180	995	865	1,860
Alfalfa	116	127	576	564	153	115	845	806	1,651
Atoka	252	291	858	682	527	226	1,637	1,199	2,836
Beaver	38	23	426	181	63	52	527	256	783
Beckham	98	72	571	364	79	88	748	524	1,272
Blaine	53	76	415	347	89	87	557	510	1,067
Bryan	115	143	434	370	156	88	705	601	1,306
Caddo	147	171	951	572	163	111	1,261	854	2,115
Canadian	60	87	310	252	82	62	452	401	853
Carter	104	67	457	296	147	84	708	447	1,155
Cherokee	368	453	1,031	1,034	625	356	2,024	1,843	3,867
Choctaw	144	198	548	298	284	175	976	671	1,647
Cimarron	11	1	143	5	12	–	166	6	172
Cleveland	141	148	264	211	130	90	535	449	984
Coal	120	142	429	464	258	130	807	736	1,543
Comanche	47	33	234	168	66	61	347	262	609
Cotton	20	28	152	142	39	32	211	202	413
Craig	145	205	763	715	201	182	1,109	1,102	2,211
Creek	218	275	827	721	251	254	1,296	1,250	2,546
Custer	46	45	409	262	53	59	508	366	874
Delaware	214	227	619	621	356	163	1,189	1,011	2,200
Dewey	57	63	581	395	71	97	709	555	1,264
Ellis	84	59	713	417	82	76	879	552	1,431
Garfield	61	74	373	383	90	74	524	531	1,055
Garvin	88	79	322	230	138	66	548	375	923
Grady	97	82	421	276	105	78	623	436	1,059
Grant	108	139	649	669	172	165	929	973	1,902
Greer	55	68	401	238	82	74	538	380	918
Harmon	76	62	354	256	26	58	456	376	832
Harper	42	26	473	292	69	44	584	362	946
Haskell	181	194	506	432	336	130	1,023	756	1,779
Hughes	161	112	701	510	298	120	1,160	742	1,902
Jackson	69	98	381	234	70	49	520	381	901
Jefferson	52	39	240	119	54	32	346	190	536
Johnston	124	125	521	443	142	89	787	657	1,444
Kay	90	103	507	463	138	119	735	685	1,420
Kingfisher	51	58	332	282	92	61	475	401	876
Kiowa	45	49	270	135	60	31	375	215	590
Latimer	126	82	445	217	353	131	924	430	1,354
LeFlore	188	140	537	330	479	208	1,204	678	1,882
Lincoln	132	147	691	509	176	146	999	802	1,801
Logan	118	141	449	395	134	117	701	653	1,354
Love	66	48	255	190	64	40	385	278	663
Major	85	106	724	507	139	106	948	719	1,667
Marshall	59	75	206	155	63	40	328	270	598
Mayes	221	204	629	534	340	190	1,190	928	2,118
McClain	47	58	186	148	54	38	287	244	531
McCurtain	250	178	843	392	592	241	1,685	811	2,496
McIntosh	99	98	344	243	184	93	627	434	1,061
Murray	52	61	251	148	67	30	370	239	609
Muskogee	167	207	529	434	293	185	989	826	1,815
Noble	62	107	409	523	104	89	575	719	1,294
Nowata	117	147	657	586	143	135	917	868	1,785
Okfuskee	104	93	409	263	162	103	675	459	1,134
Oklahoma	140	146	162	121	53	38	355	305	660
Okmulgee	91	116	372	296	167	91	630	503	1,133
Osage	334	336	1,897	1,440	412	393	2,643	2,169	4,812
Ottawa	112	118	380	389	182	128	674	635	1,309
Pawnee	79	114	423	372	116	99	618	585	1,203
Payne	99	90	423	389	117	114	639	593	1,232
Pittsburg	353	340	1,169	604	766	280	2,288	1,224	3,512
Pontotoc	150	139	504	368	210	87	864	594	1,458
Pottawatomie	118	108	485	372	188	119	791	599	1,390
Pushmataha	212	207	717	501	698	261	1,627	969	2,596
Roger Mills	82	68	893	666	97	126	1,072	860	1,932
Rogers	209	287	575	537	187	144	971	968	1,939
Seminole	77	104	391	320	162	98	630	522	1,152
Sequoyah	251	214	693	662	514	250	1,458	1,126	2,584
Stephens	142	132	463	274	121	66	726	472	1,198
Texas	28	11	199	46	29	–	256	57	313
Tillman	51	60	258	176	44	33	353	269	622
Tulsa	78	81	164	126	52	43	294	250	544
Wagoner	107	127	335	260	142	97	584	484	1,068
Washington	83	102	447	317	97	76	627	495	1,122
Washita	30	22	244	183	43	40	317	245	562
Woods	107	115	789	593	141	141	1,037	849	1,886
Woodward	145	154	878	562	127	115	1,150	831	1,981
SUBTOTAL	8,991	9,461	39,150	29,740	14,081	8,689	62,222	47,890	110,112

grass and short-grass prairies, arid mesa's, and all manner of variations in between. Along with these landscape changes are land-use changes that affect both deer and deer hunters. Just as different habitats can support differing numbers of deer, human land use, hunting pressure, and social attitudes, all affect the carrying capacity of an area.

While all this diversity makes Oklahoma a very unique place to hunt deer, it also greatly adds to the challenges of determining the best management strategy needed to properly manage our deer resource. What makes sense for the very populous deer herd in the northwest could prove devastating to the low density of deer in the Panhandle. Antlerless harvest strategies useful in the agricultural regions of the wheat-belt would not be acceptable in the southeast forests. To better manage deer across the state, a framework of 10 management zones are used to set seasons and bag limits.

Offering differing number of "doe days" in different management zones is one of the tools used to shape deer harvest strategies. All of the state is open for antlerless harvest the entire length of archery season. In addition to the archery doe harvest opportunities, most of the state is afforded very liberal antlerless hunting opportunities, with all of muzzleloader and rifle seasons being open. Far southeast Oklahoma continues offer moderate antlerless days with six "doe days" in muzzleloader season and three during the rifle season. The lower deer densities of the Panhandle prompt the most limited antlerless harvest strategy in the state, with no "doe days" during muzzleloader season and two days during rifle season.

Other antlerless opportunities came during the three-day youth only gun season held statewide in mid-October and the holiday antlerless season was open through the majority of the state, with the only closure of the season coming in management zones 1 and 10. Additionally, the Department encouraged antlerless harvest by allowing hunters who had not harvested an antlered deer during the muzzleloader or rifle seasons to utilize their unfilled antlered tags to take an antlerless deer on the final day of the season provided you were in a management zone open to antlerless hunting.

Just as the number and timing of antlerless days are used to help shape doe harvest, so too are the bag limits utilized with the management zones. Bag limits for antlerless deer are higher in zones 2, 7, and 8 due to their large expanses of agricultural fields and high deer densities. Statewide, hunters are allowed two antlerless deer in both muzzleloader and gun seasons, provided at least one of the antlerless deer are taken from one of the "doe rich" zones named above.

Hunters took full advantage of the antlerless opportunities available in 2009. A doe harvest of 50,420 was recorded, marking the second year in a row for breaking this record. Breaking that figure down by age, 42,872 were adult does and 7,548 were female fawns. An additional 2,627 button-bucks brings the entire antlerless harvest to 53,047. Button bucks are part of the antlerless bag limit as they do not possess the three-inch or longer antlers required to meet the "antlered deer" definition. While under ideal conditions the harvest of button bucks would be curtailed, this level of harvest is acceptable and somewhat expected, especially during the later portions of the gun season, and then again during the holiday antlerless season. Hunters often encounter these young bucks late in the year when their body size is approaching that of a young doe.

Doe harvest as a percentage of the total harvest has held steady for the past two years, even as the number of animals has increased. In 2008, 43.4 percent of the total harvest was female. This percentage remained unchanged in 2009.

The combined season limit for all deer archery, primitive, gun, and youth-only seasons was no more than six deer per individual. Of the six deer allowed, no more than two of them could be antlered bucks. Any deer taken by hunters participating in the special holiday antlerless seasons or deer taken through the Wildlife Department's controlled hunts program are considered "bonus deer" and did not count towards the hunter's limit of six deer.

Big Game Quick Tips

• Whitetail deer will, in general, be more active when the temperatures are not too warm. When the temperature reaches 60 degrees Fahrenheit, deer typically begin to become far less active. Similarly, when the temperatures are extremely cold, especially with cold gusty winds, deer will also slow down. Winds greater than 20 miles per hour will slow deer activity especially when the winds are continually shifting from different directions. Shifty winds can often make a deer feel uneasy or uncomfortable since it is more difficult to determine which direction they may be picking up threatening sounds and scents.

• Deer seem to favor a rising or falling barometer over a stationery one, and studies have shown that if the barometric pressure is steady, deer seem to favor a steady high barometer over a steady low barometer. Other variables will also influence deer activity including rain events and moon phases. Spending some time learning how these conditions affect deer activity may pay big rewards when choosing when and where to go after that trophy deer.

Archery Season

Archery hunting continues to grow in popularity in Oklahoma. The Department's annual Game Harvest Survey indicated that an estimated 88,089 bowhunters took to the woods in 2009, a number nearly 5,000 higher than just last year! This trend is likely to continue as equipment continues to evolve, making it easier than ever for a hunter to become proficient with this method of take. Additionally, the ability to shoot your hunting equipment in your backyard year-round holds great appeal to many who seek ways to stretch out their en-

(continued on page 26)

Table 2. 2009 Management Area Summary of Deer Harvest by Hunt Type

WMA	Archery		Gun		Muzzleloader		Total Bucks	Total Does	Grand Total
	Bucks	Does	Bucks	Does	Bucks	Does			
Altus–Lugert WMA	6	6	6	–	2	1	14	7	21
Atoka WMA	10	10	43	12	11	4	64	26	90
Beaver River WMA	2	3	43	6	13	9	58	18	76
Black Kettle WMA	35	40	252	158	68	90	355	288	643
Blue River WMA	1	2	2	–	–	–	3	2	5
Canton WMA	22	37	60	21	22	23	104	81	185
Cherokee GMA	1	4	25	19	18	7	44	30	74
Cherokee PHA	15	20	21	4	25	14	61	38	99
Chickasaw NRA	1	13	–	9	2	6	3	28	31
Chouteau WMA	–	–	1	–	–	2	1	2	3
Cookson Hills WMA	15	15	21	16	7	5	43	36	79
Cooper WMA	3	1	25	3	4	7	32	11	43
Copan WMA	12	30	39	10	11	14	62	54	116
Deep Fork NWR	4	7	–	1	13	24	17	32	49
Deep Fork WMA	3	3	1	1	3	3	7	7	14
Drummond Flat WMA	1	–	–	–	–	–	1	–	1
Ellis County WMA	6	1	34	–	7	6	47	7	54
Eufaula WMA	4	3	1	3	3	–	8	6	14
Fobb Bottom WMA	3	2	1	1	–	–	4	3	7
Fort Cobb SP	–	–	1	–	3	20	4	20	24
Fort Cobb WMA	9	10	9	3	–	–	18	13	31
Fort Gibson WMA	29	49	27	6	20	14	76	69	145
Fort Gibson WR	4	2	–	–	22	25	26	27	53
Fort Sill MR	28	38	67	36	38	34	133	108	241
Fort Supply WMA	12	11	27	2	12	7	51	20	71
Gruber WMA	5	7	13	2	17	5	35	14	49
Heyburn WMA	4	3	8	11	3	5	15	19	34
Hickory Creek WMA	1	4	7	6	10	9	18	19	37
Honobia Creek WMA	27	17	138	57	100	39	265	113	378
Hugo WMA	21	14	50	40	42	19	113	73	186
Hulah WMA	7	6	53	10	17	48	77	64	141
James Collins WMA	30	26	27	5	–	–	57	31	88
Kaw WMA	21	33	80	67	40	32	141	132	273
Keystone WMA	18	16	19	7	7	9	44	32	76
Lexington WMA	5	15	41	22	34	10	80	47	127
Little River SP	4	6	–	–	–	–	4	6	10
Love Valley WMA	–	–	10	3	4	3	14	6	20
McAlester AAP	103	125	3	11	–	–	106	136	242
McCurtain Co. WA	3	1	1	1	3	–	7	2	9
McGee Creek WMA	12	8	8	2	16	3	36	13	49
Mountain Park WMA	6	6	–	–	–	–	6	6	12
Okmulgee GMA	1	–	14	2	–	–	15	2	17
Okmulgee PHA	1	2	1	–	3	–	5	2	7
Oologah WMA	7	6	8	16	1	2	16	24	40
Optima NWR	1	3	–	–	–	–	1	3	4
Optima WMA	4	9	21	5	3	–	28	14	42
Osage–Rock Creek WMA	–	–	12	1	6	6	18	7	25
Osage–W. Wall WMA	5	2	2	–	–	–	7	2	9
Ouachita WMA	33	19	160	76	191	90	384	185	569
Ouachita McCurtain unit	2	3	4	1	5	2	11	6	17
Packsaddle WMA	3	3	43	5	4	19	50	27	77
Pine Creek WMA	4	2	3	4	4	1	11	7	18
Pushmataha WMA	9	7	25	11	6	1	40	19	59
Rita Blanca WMA	–	–	4	–	–	–	4	–	4
Robert S. Kerr WMA	–	–	–	–	1	–	1	–	1
Salt Plains NWR	2	2	44	70	6	18	52	90	142
Sandy Sanders WMA	6	2	6	5	6	–	18	7	25
Sequoyah NWR	–	–	–	1	–	–	–	1	1
Skiatook WMA	2	6	4	5	1	–	7	11	18
Spavinaw GMA	18	29	23	12	7	1	48	42	90
Spavinaw PHA	3	–	1	3	1	–	5	3	8
Stringtown WMA	–	1	1	–	–	–	1	1	2
Tenkiller WMA	1	2	–	–	–	–	1	2	3
Three Rivers WMA	60	58	212	150	200	95	472	303	775
Tishomingo NWR	–	–	9	17	–	7	9	24	33
Tishomingo WMA	2	3	4	4	1	2	7	9	16
Washita Arm WMA	1	1	1	–	–	2	2	3	5
Washita NWR	–	–	6	41	–	–	6	41	47
Waurika WMA	7	8	–	–	–	–	7	8	15
Wichita Mts NWR	–	–	18	17	–	–	18	17	35
Wister WMA	3	4	12	8	18	11	33	23	56
Yourman WMA	–	1	–	–	2	–	2	1	3
WMA SUBTOTAL	668	767	1,802	1,009	1,063	754	3,533	2,530	6,063
COUNTY SUBTOTAL	8,991	9,461	39,150	29,740	14,081	8,689	62,222	47,890	110,112
GRAND TOTAL	9,659	10,228	40,952	30,749	15,144	9,443	65,755	50,420	116,175

Black Bear Hunters Make History...19 Times

by Michael Bergin

Matthew Stewart of Prague harvested this black bear that field dressed 345 lbs. during Oklahoma's 2009 inaugural black bear hunting season. A total of 19 bears were harvested, of which Stewart's was the largest.

PHOTO COURTESY MATTHEW STEWART

It wasn't that long ago the idea of a black bear hunting season in Oklahoma seemed far-fetched, but last October sportsmen took to the woods for what would become not only the state's first modern black bear season, but a very successful one at that.

Nineteen bears were harvested toward the quota of 20 established by the Wildlife Department. Of the 10 male and nine female bears harvested, 16 were taken with archery equipment and three were taken by muzzleloader. Most of those bears field dressed well over 100 lbs., and one field dressed out to nearly 350 lbs. Additionally, wildlife biologists had the chance to examine every bear harvested, and all of them were considered in good to excellent condition and showed light tooth wear — indicators of good health and good habitat.

The season coincided with Oklahoma's deer archery and muzzleloader seasons, and sportsmen were required to call a designated hotline before going afield each day to determine whether the quota had been met and if the season was still open. A four-county area was open to bear hunting, including Latimer, LeFlore, Pushmataha and McCurtain counties.

Hunters were allowed to harvest bears over bait on private land, which could range from sweet treats to corn. Because bears are elusive and their behavior can be difficult to pattern, baiting is an effective way to hunt them.

The black bear season was established as part of an effort to address

How to Read 2009 Black Bear Harvest Profiles

We've gathered data on all 19 bears harvested during the 2009 inaugural Oklahoma black bear hunting season, from method of take (archery or muzzleloader) all the way down to whether or not each bear had a white blaze of fur on its chest. Though most of the compiled data is self-explanatory, the following are a few notes to help you as you learn about each bear.

- Five bears were harvested on opening day of archery season, kicking off the newest big game season with success. A total of 16 black bears were harvested using archery equipment, while three were harvested with muzzleloaders once the season opened.
- All 19 bears harvested were recorded as being in "excellent" or "good" condition by biologists who surveyed each bear in person. Condition of bears reflects the status of the surrounding habitat and is an indicator of good health.
- The weight shown for each bear may be either field dressed or live weight, depending on whether or not the bear had been field dressed before checked.
- The heaviest bear recorded weighed 345 lbs. before being field dressed.
- Bears harvested on public lands are depicted with red-colored profiles, and the name of the WMA on which it was harvested is provided.
- The "total length" measurement is taken by measuring from the tip of the nose to the end of tail.
- The "head length" measurement is taken by measuring from the base of the scull to the tip of the nose.
- The "ear length" measurement is taken by measuring from the scull to tip of the ear
- Use the scale on the bottom of this page as a measurement reference.

2009 Black Bear Harvest Profiles

Bear#1	
Harvest Date	10/1/09
Harvest Location	North of Nashoba
Method	Archery
Sex	Female
Age	5 years
Color Phase	Black
Chest Blaze Present	No
Condition of Bear	Excellent
Tooth Wear	Light
Weight	176 lbs.
Total Length	159 cm
Head Length	34 cm
Ear Length	13.5 cm
Neck Circumference	63 cm
Chest Circumference	100 cm
Height at Shoulder	23 cm
Front Pad Length	7 cm
Front Pad Width	9.5 cm
Hind Pad Length	13 cm
Hind Pad Width	10 cm

Bear #2	
Harvest Date	10/1/09
Harvest Location	S.W. of Summerfield
Method	Archery
Sex	Male
Age	Unknown
Color Phase	Black
Chest Blaze Present	Yes
Condition of Bear	Good
Tooth Wear	Light
Weight	87 lbs.
Total Length	94 cm
Head Length	27.9 cm
Ear Length	12.7 cm
Neck Circumference	43.2 cm
Chest Circumference	68.6 cm
Height at Shoulder	50.8 cm
Front Pad Length	5.1 cm
Front Pad Width	7.6 cm
Hind Pad Length	12.7 cm
Hind Pad Width	8.9 cm

Bear #3 — Harvested on Ouachita WMA!	
Harvest Date	10/1/09
Harvest Location	Lenox Ridge
Method	Archery
Sex	Male
Age	3 years
Color Phase	Black
Chest Blaze Present	No
Condition of Bear	Good
Tooth Wear	Light
Weight	132 lbs.
Total Length	160 cm
Head Length	35 cm
Ear Length	14 cm
Neck Circumference	51 cm
Chest Circumference	76 cm
Height at Shoulder	69 cm
Front Pad Length	6 cm
Front Pad Width	11 cm
Hind Pad Length	15 cm
Hind Pad Width	10 cm

Bear #4	
Harvest Date	10/1/09
Harvest Location	West of Big Cedar
Method	Archery
Sex	Male
Age	3 years
Color Phase	Black
Chest Blaze Present	No
Condition of Bear	Excellent
Tooth Wear	Light
Weight	170 lbs.
Total Length	170 cm
Head Length	36 cm
Ear Length	14.5 cm
Neck Circumference	55 cm
Chest Circumference	89 cm
Height at Shoulder	73 cm
Front Pad Length	6 cm
Front Pad Width	11 cm
Hind Pad Length	15 cm
Hind Pad Width	11 cm

Bear #5 — Harvested on Ouachita WMA!	
Harvest Date	10/1/09
Harvest Location	County Line Church
Method	Archery
Sex	Male
Age	2 years
Color Phase	Black
Chest Blaze Present	No
Condition of Bear	Excellent
Tooth Wear	Light
Weight	225 lbs.
Total Length	171 cm
Head Length	34 cm
Ear Length	13 cm
Neck Circumference	58 cm
Chest Circumference	95 cm
Height at Shoulder	62 cm
Front Pad Length	6.5 cm
Front Pad Width	10.5 cm
Hind Pad Length	16 cm
Hind Pad Width	9 cm

Bear #6	
Harvest Date	10/2/09
Harvest Location	South of Zafra
Method	Archery
Sex	Male
Age	1 year
Color Phase	Black
Chest Blaze Present	No
Condition of Bear	Excellent
Tooth Wear	Light
Weight	63 lbs.
Total Length	126 cm
Head Length	29 cm
Ear Length	11 cm
Neck Circumference	34 cm
Chest Circumference	63 cm
Height at Shoulder	54 cm
Front Pad Length	5 cm
Front Pad Width	8.5 cm
Hind Pad Length	12.5 cm
Hind Pad Width	8 cm

Bear #7	
Harvest Date	10/2/09
Harvest Location	North of Nashoba
Method	Archery
Sex	Female
Age	3 years
Color Phase	Black
Chest Blaze Present	Yes
Condition of Bear	Excellent
Tooth Wear	Light
Weight	216 lbs.
Total Length	157.5 cm
Head Length	35.6 cm
Ear Length	11.7 cm
Neck Circumference	59.9 cm
Chest Circumference	102.6 cm
Height at Shoulder	73.7 cm
Front Pad Length	11.4 cm
Front Pad Width	8.4 cm
Hind Pad Length	19.1 cm
Hind Pad Width	8.9 cm

Bear #8	
Harvest Date	10/3/09
Harvest Location	County Line Church
Method	Archery
Sex	Male
Age	1 year
Color Phase	Black
Chest Blaze Present	Yes
Condition of Bear	Excellent
Tooth Wear	Light
Weight	64 lbs.
Total Length	123 cm
Head Length	27.3 cm
Ear Length	12.8 cm
Neck Circumference	41.5 cm
Chest Circumference	77 cm
Height at Shoulder	47.7 cm
Front Pad Length	5.2 cm
Front Pad Width	9 cm
Hind Pad Length	12.6 cm
Hind Pad Width	8.7 cm

Bear #9	
Harvest Date	10/3/09
Harvest Location	North of Sardis Lake
Method	Archery
Sex	Male
Age	5 years
Color Phase	Black
Chest Blaze Present	Yes
Condition of Bear	Good
Tooth Wear	Light
Weight	228 lbs.
Total Length	176 cm
Head Length	36.5 cm
Ear Length	13 cm
Neck Circumference	61 cm
Chest Circumference	98.5 cm
Height at Shoulder	73 cm
Front Pad Length	5.5 cm
Front Pad Width	11 cm
Hind Pad Length	14 cm
Hind Pad Width	10 cm

Where Did Our Bears Come From, Anyway?

Black bears once ranged across the entire state of Oklahoma, but by the early 1900s, the species experienced drastically declining numbers as a result of factors like land use changes, unregulated hunting and habitat fragmentation.

Black bears bounced back in Oklahoma after Arkansas successfully reintroduced them into the Ouachita and Ozark Mountains in the 1950s-60s. This initial relocation of about 250 bears from northern Minnesota and Manitoba, Canada, grew to numbers in the thousands across Arkansas, southwest Missouri and eastern Oklahoma. The success of the reintroduction was so great that Arkansas renewed its bear season in 1980, followed by Oklahoma almost 30 years later.

Today black bears are thriving in Oklahoma and are an important part of our outdoor heritage and our state's wildlife diversity. Even though an Oklahoman may go an entire lifetime without seeing a bear in our state, just knowing they are there and that Oklahoma still has a few wild places that can sustain bear populations has value in itself. By hosting a hunting season, funds are generated through the sale of licenses and certain taxes on sporting goods that support the Wildlife Department and therefore black bear conservation efforts.

nuisance bears in southeast Oklahoma while providing a new opportunity for hunters. Leading up to the 2009 opener, biologists with the Wildlife Department had collected about 15 years worth of biological data and information on bears from responding to nuisance bear calls. Additionally, the Oklahoma Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit along with Oklahoma State University had conducted research projects for the Wildlife Department, and studies indicated that Oklahoma would be ideal for hosting a limited bear season.

Aside from the many benefits that the first black bear season offered Oklahoma — economic boosts, new opportunities for sportsmen, a chance

Bear # 10	
Harvest Date	10/3/09
Harvest Location	North of Eagletown
Method	Archery
Sex	Female
Age	4 years
Color Phase	Black
Chest Blaze Present	No
Condition of Bear	Excellent
Tooth Wear	Light
Weight	172 lbs.
Total Length	150 cm
Head Length	34 cm
Ear Length	12 cm
Neck Circumference	57 cm
Chest Circumference	95 cm
Height at Shoulder	64 cm
Front Pad Length	6 cm
Front Pad Width	9.5 cm
Hind Pad Length	13 cm
Hind Pad Width	9.5 cm

Bear #11	
Harvest Date	10/3/09
Harvest Location	West of CJ's Store
Method	Archery
Sex	Female
Age	2 years
Color Phase	Black
Chest Blaze Present	Yes
Condition of Bear	Excellent
Tooth Wear	Light
Weight	155 lbs.
Total Length	147 cm
Head Length	32 cm
Ear Length	11.5 cm
Neck Circumference	56 cm
Chest Circumference	94 cm
Height at Shoulder	61 cm
Front Pad Length	5.5 cm
Front Pad Width	9.5 cm
Hind Pad Length	13 cm
Hind Pad Width	9.5 cm

Bear #12	
Harvest Date	10/4/09
Harvest Location	East of Saddle Gap
Method	Archery
Sex	Male
Age	6 years
Color Phase	Black
Chest Blaze Present	No
Condition of Bear	Good
Tooth Wear	Light
Weight	345 lbs.
Total Length	187.9 cm
Head Length	38.1 cm
Ear Length	13.3 cm
Neck Circumference	NA
Chest Circumference	NA
Height at Shoulder	NA
Front Pad Length	8.2 cm
Front Pad Width	14 cm
Hind Pad Length	17.2 cm
Hind Pad Width	13.3 cm

Bear #14	
Harvest Date	10/8/09
Harvest Location	East of Big Cedar
Method	Archery
Sex	Female
Age	5 years
Color Phase	Black
Chest Blaze Present	No
Condition of Bear	Good
Tooth Wear	Light
Weight	285 lbs.
Total Length	165.1 cm
Head Length	30.5 cm
Ear Length	11.4 cm
Neck Circumference	58.4 cm
Chest Circumference	116.8 cm
Height at Shoulder	71.1 cm
Front Pad Length	5.7 cm
Front Pad Width	10.2 cm
Hind Pad Length	13.9 cm
Hind Pad Width	11.4 cm

Bear #15	
Harvest Date	10/10/09
Harvest Location	South of Blue Mountain
Method	Archery
Sex	Male
Age	2 years
Color Phase	Black
Chest Blaze Present	No
Condition of Bear	Excellent
Tooth Wear	Light
Weight	190 lbs.
Total Length	175 cm
Head Length	36.5 cm
Ear Length	12.5 cm
Neck Circumference	60 cm
Chest Circumference	102 cm
Height at Shoulder	65 cm
Front Pad Length	6 cm
Front Pad Width	11 cm
Hind Pad Length	16 cm
Hind Pad Width	10.5 cm

Bear #16	
Harvest Date	10/18/09
Harvest Location	South of Honobia Mountain
Method	Archery
Sex	Female
Age	1 year
Color Phase	Black
Chest Blaze Present	No
Condition of Bear	Excellent
Tooth Wear	Light
Weight	80 lbs.
Total Length	119.4 cm
Head Length	27.9 cm
Ear Length	11.4 cm
Neck Circumference	39.3 cm
Chest Circumference	58.4 cm
Height at Shoulder	51.4 cm
Front Pad Length	3.9 cm
Front Pad Width	8.9 cm
Hind Pad Length	12.2 cm
Hind Pad Width	7.6 cm

to be part of managing black bears, etc. — Oklahoma big game hunters proved they could succeed at hunting one of Oklahoma's most elusive wildlife species. And the good news is they get the chance to do it all again this year.

The 2010 black bear season will be the same as last year, with archery season opening Oct. 1 and, if the quota is not met beforehand, muzzleloader season opening Oct. 23 and running through Oct. 31. Regulations for bear season are compliant with the coinciding deer seasons and are available through the Wildlife Department's website at wildlifedepartment.com or through the Department's newest "Oklahoma Hunting Guide," available anywhere hunting licenses are sold.

So, You Want to Be a Bear Hunter?

Resident bear licenses are sold over the counter for $101 ($506 for nonresidents), and anyone with a valid hunting license or exemption can obtain a bear license and go hunting, but only Latimer, LeFlore, Pushmataha and McCurtain counties are open to bear hunting. However, hunting for a bear and actually locating one for a clean harvest can be two separate things. As in most big game hunting endeavors, scouting is considered key to bear hunting success. Baiting is allowed on private land and is an effective way to pinpoint otherwise difficult-to-pattern bear behavior. Thousands of acres of public land also are available in the region where hunters can find natural sources of food in their wild state, but they cannot bait bears using manmade bait stations on these public lands. Muscadines, which are a grapevine species that grow wild in the area, are a favorite for bears and usually attract wildlife in the fall. If you can find where they grow wild, you may have found a prime spot to hunt for black bears.

Start by securing a place to hunt, and modify your approach depending on observed bear sign such as scat, tracks and feeding evidence. Be well-practiced with your archery equipment and remember to call the black bear hotline ((888) 901-3256) or log on to wildlifedepartment.com before you go hunting to be sure the quota has not been met and the season is still open. If you harvest a black bear, you must contact one of the following Wildlife Department personnel, who will check your bear and issue you a carcass tag to be used when transporting the bear to its final destination.

Joe Hemphill,
Southeast Region Wildlife Supervisor
Phone: (580) 421-7226

Jeff Ford
Southeast Region Wildlife Biologist
Phone: (918) 527-9918

For complete regulations, consult the current "Oklahoma Hunting Guide."

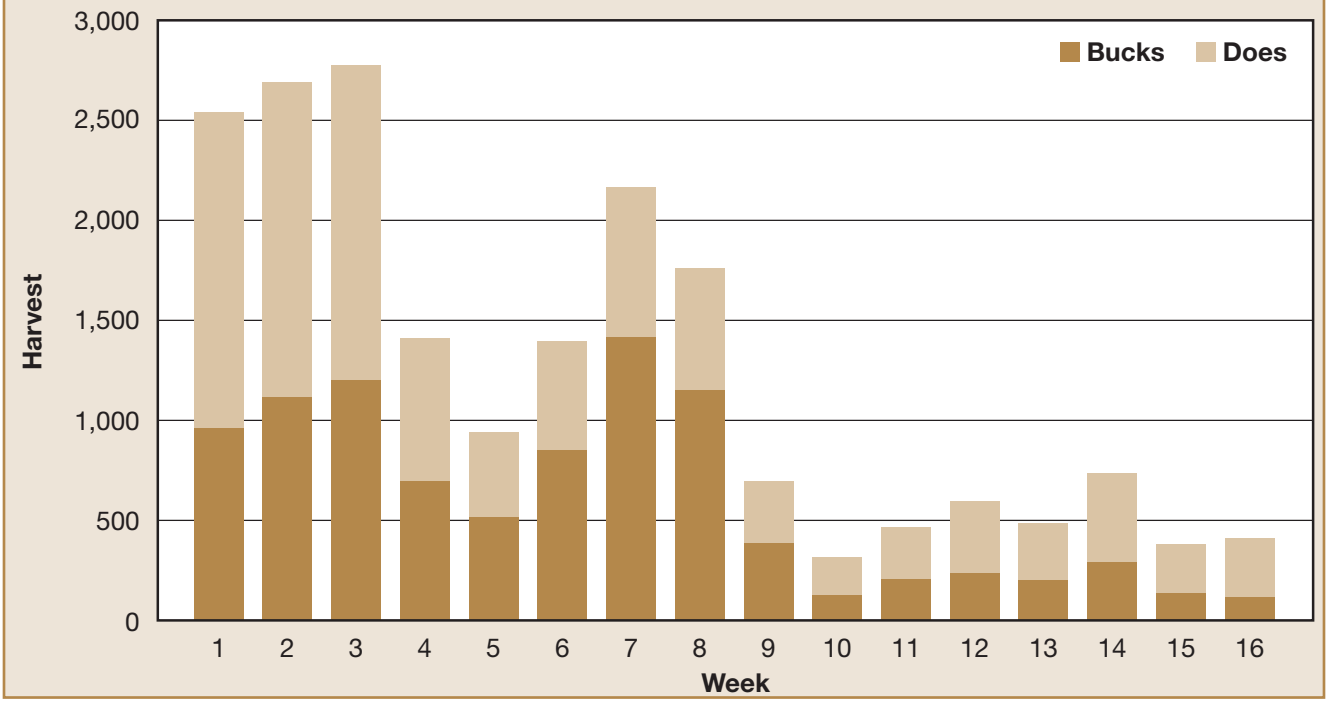
Bear #13	
Harvest Date	10/7/09
Harvest Location	NW end of Blackfort Wilderness
Method	Archery
Sex	Female
Age	1 year
Color Phase	Black
Chest Blaze Present	No
Condition of Bear	Good
Tooth Wear	Light
Weight	98 lbs.
Total Length	127
Head Length	31
Ear Length	12
Neck Circumference	43.2
Chest Circumference	7.6
Height at Shoulder	55.9
Front Pad Length	5.1
Front Pad Width	7.6
Hind Pad Length	11.5
Hind Pad Width	9.5

Bear #17 — Harvested on Ouachita WMA!	
Harvest Date	10/24/09
Harvest Location	Western Loop
Method	Muzzleloader
Sex	Female
Age	8 years
Color Phase	Black
Chest Blaze Present	Yes
Condition of Bear	Good
Tooth Wear	Light
Weight	150 lbs.
Total Length	145 cm
Head Length	29 cm
Ear Length	11 cm
Neck Circumference	55 cm
Chest Circumference	90 cm
Height at Shoulder	64 cm
Front Pad Length	5.5 cm
Front Pad Width	8.5 cm
Hind Pad Length	11.5 cm
Hind Pad Width	9 cm

Bear #18	
Harvest Date	10/31/09
Harvest Location	Holson Valley Road
Method	Muzzleloader
Sex	Female
Age	2 years
Color Phase	Black
Chest Blaze Present	No
Condition of Bear	Good
Tooth Wear	Light
Weight	175 lbs.
Total Length	147
Head Length	31
Ear Length	14
Neck Circumference	48.5
Chest Circumference	81.5
Height at Shoulder	66
Front Pad Length	6.5
Front Pad Width	12.7
Hind Pad Length	17
Hind Pad Width	11.5

Bear #19 — Harvested on Three Rivers WMA!	
Harvest Date	10/31/09
Harvest Location	Southwest of Bethel
Method	Muzzleloader
Sex	Male
Age	2 years
Color Phase	Black
Chest Blaze Present	No
Condition of Bear	Excellent
Tooth Wear	Light
Weight	182 lbs.
Total Length	156 cm
Head Length	35 cm
Ear Length	12 cm
Neck Circumference	59 cm
Chest Circumference	107 cm
Height at Shoulder	52 cm
Front Pad Length	5.5 cm
Front Pad Width	11 cm
Hind Pad Length	13.5 cm
Hind Pad Width	10 cm

Figure 3: 2009 Archery Harvest by Week (Includes Controlled Hunts)

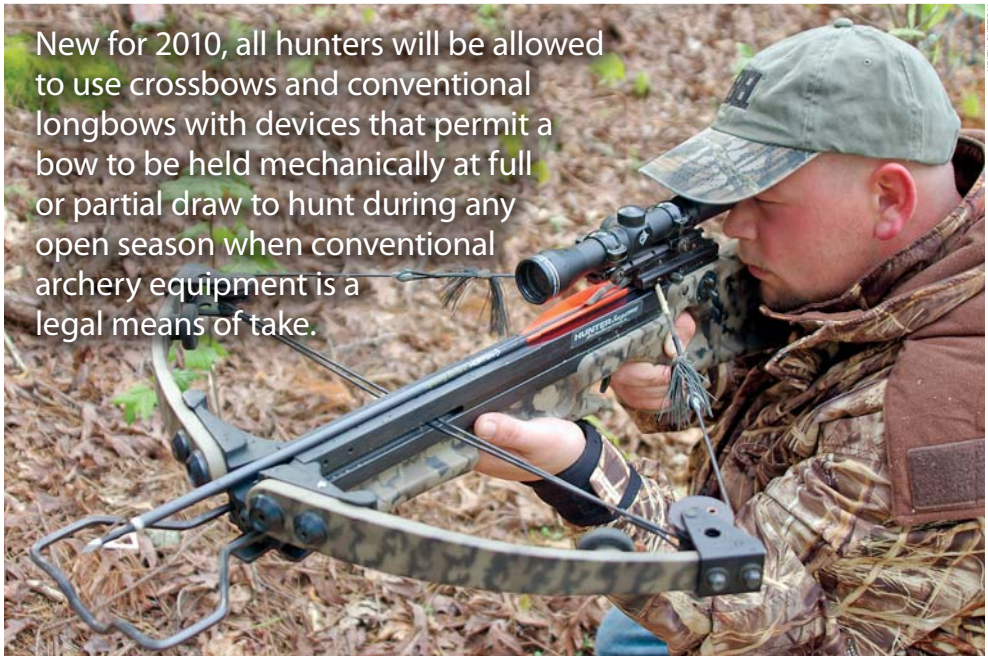


joyment of hunting season. Looking at the harvest compared to the estimated hunter numbers shows a success rate of 22.6 percent. While this is not a perfect accounting of success rate due to some hunters taking more than one deer with their bow, it does provide some measurement of accomplishment that can be compared from one year to the next.

Archery season opened Oct. 1 and continued uninterrupted through Jan. 15. In an effort to maintain consistency with when Oklahoma's archery season was split into two portions — one held before rifle season and then one after — the harvest data was again split into two intervals. The initial split ran from Oct. 1 to the beginning of rifle season on Nov. 21. This period saw the harvest of 16,579 deer, or 83.4 percent of the total archery harvest. The second split was designated as Nov. 22 through the end of the season Jan. 15. This "late season" added another 3,308 (16.6 percent) to the archery total. The bag limit remained unchanged from 2008, with archers allowed to take their full combined season limit of 6 deer (no more than two antlered) with archery equipment. The breakdown of the harvest by season, sex, county, and Wildlife Management Area are shown in Tables 1 & 2 (see pages 19 and 21). Figure 3 shows the number of bucks and does harvested during each week of the archery season.

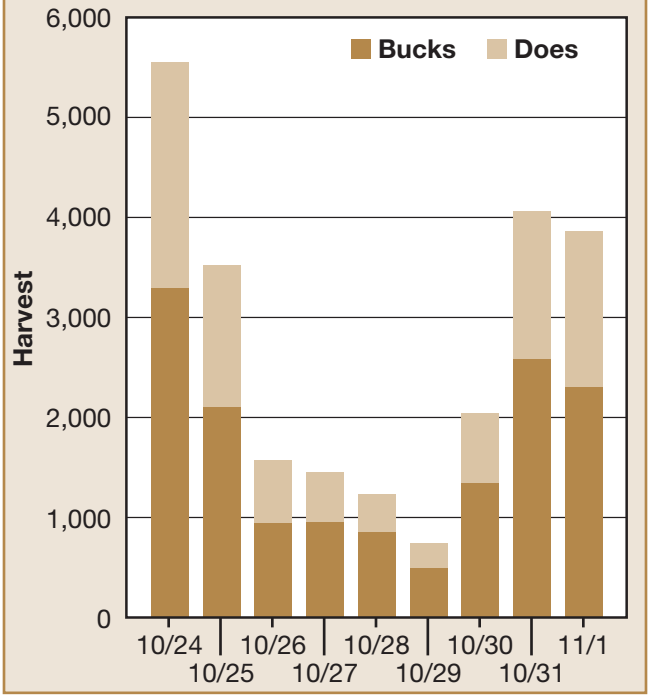
Muzzleloader Season

Muzzleloader season is a season of contrasts. In the same hunting party one can see a hand-built flintlock shooting lead balls, hand molded and carefully loaded



KEITH SUTTON

Figure 4: 2009 Primitive Harvest by Day (Includes Controlled Hunts)



from a fringed buckskin "possibles bag" and then turn to see another hunter shooting a stainless-steel-barreled, scoped rifle loaded with smokeless powder and pistol bullets sitting on top of a polymer sabot. While one hunter worries about keeping the powder "in the pan" dry, the other wonders if his kids have noticed that the battery powering his electronic ignition was pilfered from the television remote just hours before. No matter which end of the spectrum a muzzleloader hunter tends to gravitate toward, one thing remains constant, it is a fantastic time to be outdoors!

Late October sees as much contrast in the deer woods as can be seen in hunter's choice of muzzleloader. The season change from summer to winter is usually in full effect. The hot days of early archery season are giving way to crisp, even cold mornings. While some trees are still in their full summer greens, others have begun to show the deep reds, oranges, and yellows that mark the tree's preparations for the coming freeze. Even the deer are acting different. Gone are the lazy days of feeding in the relative cool of the night and napping in the limited relief of any available shade. Muzzleloader season often finds bucks traveling a scrape line, worrying does at every opportunity. Does are no longer closely watching over their male offspring. Instead, they are pushing these yearling bucks away to find their own home range in preparation for the impending breeding season.

All this deer activity combined with the changing landscape draws muzzleloader hunters to the woods each year. And 2009 was no different. Game Harvest Survey data estimates that 101,519 hunters participated in this season that opened October 24 and continued for nine days, closing on Nov 1. Statewide, these hunters managed to tag 24,587 deer, a 13 percent increase from last year. Comparing hunter participation with the number of deer checked found a success rate of 24.2 percent, up two percentage points from 2008. A change to the muzzleloader season bag limit might have been partially responsible for the harvest increase, as an additional antlerless deer was added to the season bag. Hunters could harvest one antlered and two antlerless deer, provided at least one of the antlerless deer were taken from management zones 2, 7, or 8. Figure 4 charts the muzzleloader harvest by day and sex.

Gun Season

Whether it is the visions of a hot grill covered with sizzling backstrap, the hope of a huge rack hanging above the fireplace, the excitement of a shared experience with a new hunter or any other motivation, each year thousands of Oklahoma men and women young and old alike put on their hunter orange and head to the deer woods. In fact, in 2009 nearly 200,000 hunters participated in some form of deer rifle season.

The youth-only season was the first deer gun season available in the state. Hunters under the age of 18 were given a three-day season that opened Oct. 16 and closed on Oct. 19. These young hunters were allowed a bag limit of two deer, one antlered and one antlerless. These deer did count toward the combined season limit of six deer, but were separate from the regular rifle season limit, allowing youth hunters the chance to hunt the regular rifle season as well. In total, an estimated 8,949 youth participated in this season.

November 21 marked the much-anticipated opener of the regular rifle season across the state. For the seventh consecutive year the season was 16 days long, closing on Dec. 6. The bag limit was three deer, only one of which could be antlered. Hunters taking more than one antlerless deer were required to harvest at least one of them from within management zone 2, or for the first

Big Game Quick Tips

• No hunter ed? Try an apprentice-designated hunting license. It's like a learner's permit for hunters that, like when learning to drive, allows amateurs to go hunting under the supervision of a qualified mentor hunter. Check out the current "Oklahoma Hunting Guide" or wildlifedepartment.com for details.

• If you've already passed a hunter education course, take a friend to earn their certification and sit in on the class with them. You might be reminded of some important safety tips, and you'll be showing your support for the Oklahoma hunter education program. Courses are free and listed online at wildlifedepartment.com.

RUSSELL GRAVES

Last year's inaugural antelope archery season saw 36 antelope taken. This year's second "over-the-counter" antelope archery season will run Sept. 13-26, 2010.

Figure 5: 2009 Percentage of Rifle Season Buck Harvest by Day

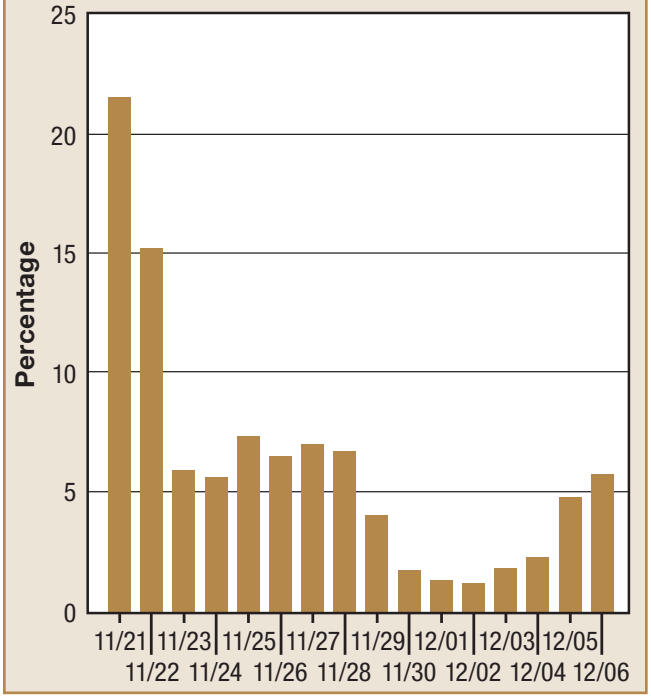
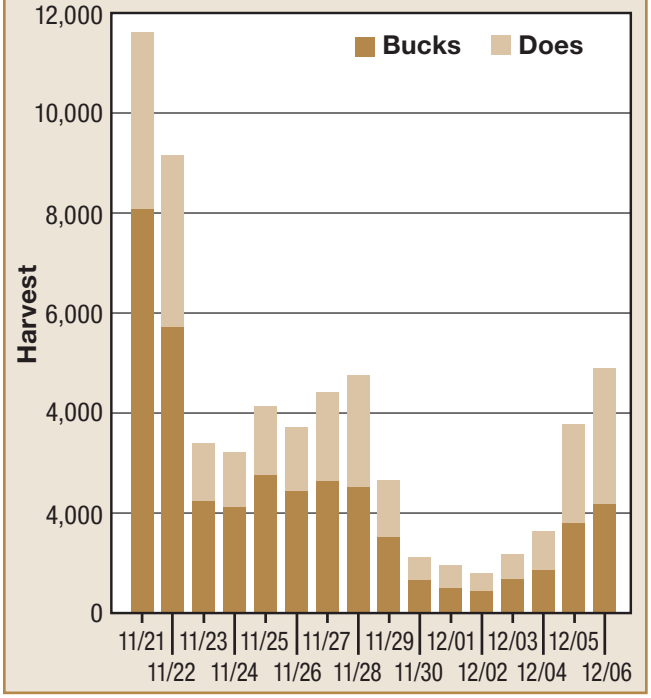


Figure 6: 2009 Gun Harvest by Day (Includes Controlled Hunts)



time, zones 7 or 8. All deer taken during this season would count towards the hunter's combined season limit of six deer.

The final chance to pursue deer with a rifle occurred during the holiday antlerless seasons. These seasons, held in eight of the state's 10 management zones, were intended to increase the harvest of antlerless deer. (Only zones 1 and 10 are excluded.) Held around the Christmas holiday to take advantage of many hunters having time away from work, this antlerless-only season had an estimated 32,746 participants hunting during one or both of the available weekends. The first weekend of this season was Dec. 18-20. Hunters were lucky to get out and tag a deer that initial weekend as record heavy snows blanketed much of the state the second weekend of the season (December 25-27). The 2009 holiday season saw 3,500 fewer participants than in 2008, very likely many hunters electing to stay at home pouring over their pile of Christmas loot rather than fighting their way through snow drifts to get to their hunting area. A total of 4,041 deer were recorded in the check station books for this season.

All totaled, the youth-only, holiday antlerless, and regular rifle season saw 194,968 participants according to Game Harvest Survey data. These hunters combined to tag 71,701 deer, equating to a success rate of 36.8 percent.

Opening weekend traditionally sees the highest deer harvest of the rifle season. This year was no different as 22 percent of the total rifle season harvest occurred opening day and another 16 percent was added the following day. Combined, the opening weekend accounted for 38 percent of the rifle harvest. The harvest tally remained steady during the remaining first week of the season but dropped off the second week, with only 19 percent of the rifle season harvest coming during the last seven days. Figure 5 details the adult buck harvest by day for the entire 16-day rifle season. A graphical representation of the number of bucks and does killed during rifle season is shown in Figure 6.

Antelope Hunts

Just as private lands elk hunting opportunity increased in 2009, so did the chance to pursue antelope within Oklahoma's borders. The first ever archery antelope season was held last year. Taking place in parts of Texas Co. and Cimarron Co. in the short grass mesa country of the Panhandle, this inaugural season saw the harvest of 25 males and 11 females.

Other antelope hunting was restricted to those drawing a permit through the Department's controlled hunts program. This past year 200 doe-only and 65 either-sex permits were made available. An additional limited number of permits were made available to landowners in the area. In total, 105 male and 128 female pronghorns were tagged by Oklahoma hunters in 2009.

Elk Hunts

Each year thousands of Oklahomans log on to the Department's website and place their names in contention for one of the coveted elk controlled hunt permits. The

(continued on page 32)

A Season for Memo


KAYSE TAYLOR

The author stops for a photo while celebrating one youth's first deer.

"Just try to calm down – take a deep breath. Can you see the deer in the scope? Keep your finger off the trigger until you're ready to shoot. Take your time. Wait till it turns broadside. Be still. Okay, there. Are you steady? Go ahead, shoot… shoot!"

I don't care how many times I've been in that situation, it never gets old. Being part of when a new young hunter takes his or her first deer is one of my greatest thrills in all of the outdoors. Honestly, my nervous last-minute ramblings and instructions probably hurt more than help. I still get so worked up.

I've been blessed to hunt with dozens of first-time youth deer hunters over the years and I can clearly remember each face after they've pulled the trigger. There's the "battle cry screams of joy"; your "breakdown in tears of relief"; your "wide-eyed, jaw-dropped look of disbelief"; and my favorite, the "glowing smile of accomplishment."

I've stowed away each precious face in my trophy case of memories.

It certainly wasn't necessary for the Wildlife Department to create a special youth-only deer gun season in 2003. And it wasn't necessary for the agency to create a reduced-price youth deer license. After all, I took my first deer during the regular gun season on a full-price deer tag, and so have many others. That should be good enough, right? Wrong!

According to Jerry Shaw, big game biologist for the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, the agency's motives were two-fold, both pure as the driven snow.

The youth season was created to provide a quality hunting experience for youth in hopes that they'll stick with it the rest of their lives."

And if license sales are any indication, the special season is doing its job. The first actual youth deer license was established in 1995 at a cost of $14.75. However, there was not a separate youth deer season until several years later, in 2003. Youth deer gun license sales were relatively static between 1995 and 2003, with only 7,000 to 10,000 licenses sold each year. But the very year the youth deer season was created, the agency saw a huge jump in youth antlerless deer gun license sales. And since then, license sales have continued to climb each year. In 2009, nearly 20,000 youth deer gun licenses were sold.

The second motive for establishing a youth-only deer season was to use the additional hunting opportunity to help increase the percentage of antlerless harvest statewide. In addition, youth can also harvest a buck during the youth deer gun season.

"The most effective method we have


WRAY PAINE

This season, make some time to take a youngster hunting during the youth deer gun season slated for Oct. 15-17, 2010.

By Todd Craighead

as wildlife managers to control and manipulate deer herd populations statewide is through hunter harvest," Shaw said. "We continually 'tweak' the system by setting specific regulations in place to achieve specific results."

Shaw goes on to say that increasing antlerless harvest helps accomplish two things — it's the quickest way to reduce population numbers in areas where we have too many deer; and by creating more competition between the bucks for does during the breeding season, it eventually results in bigger bucks.

"From a herd management perspective, the youth deer gun season helps to accomplish both goals," Shaw said.

I could rattle off plenty more numbers to support or justify the youth deer gun season, but the truth is that nothing outweighs that look on a new hunter's face. Take the opportunity this year to introduce a young person to the exciting and enriching life beyond the pavement. Yes, you'll be able to sleep at night knowing you're doing your part to pass on the hunting heritage to the next generation, but a young person will only take his or her first deer once. Wouldn't it be cool to forever be an integral part of that memory?

—Todd Craighead is an information and education specialist for the Wildlife Department and host of Outdoor Oklahoma TV.

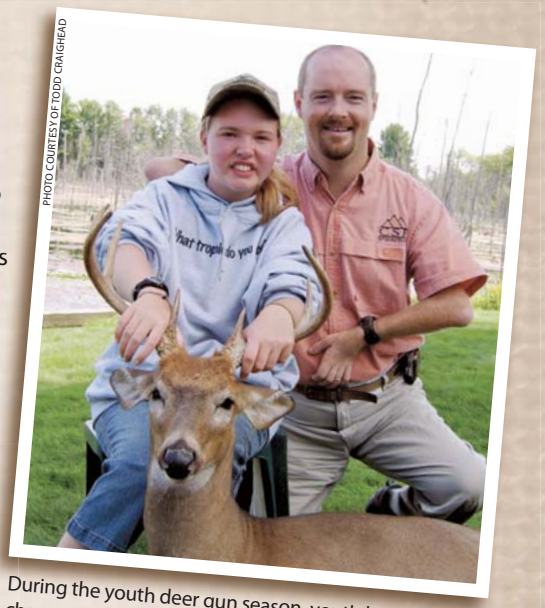


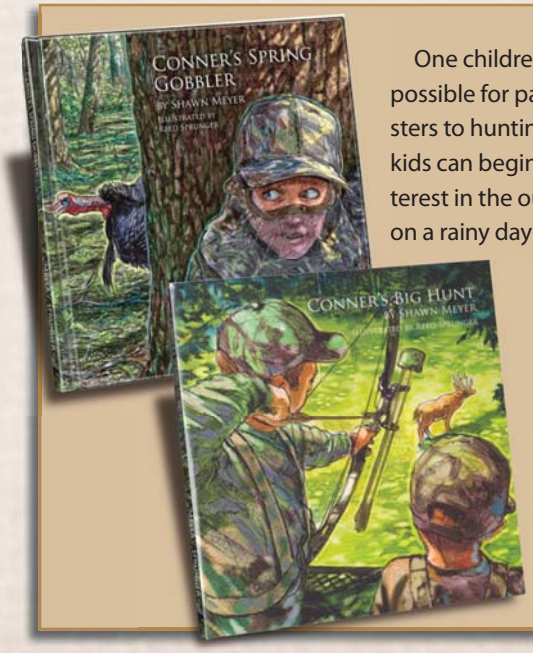
PHOTO COURTESY OF TODD CRAIGHEAD

During the youth deer gun season, youth have the chance to harvest both a buck and a doe.


TODD CRAIGHEAD


TODD CRAIGHEAD

Youth are full of excitement and self-expression, and helping bring out those qualities through the sport of hunting can have a positive lasting impact, not to mention short-term excitement.



One children's book author is making it possible for parents to introduce youngsters to hunting through reading — so kids can begin developing a healthy interest in the outdoors even when at home on a rainy day or before bedtime.

A full-time youth pastor in Indiana, Shawn Meyer was inspired to write children's books about hunting when he discovered there was nothing available age appropriate to read to his own kids. His first book, Conner's Big Hunt, was written for the purpose of entertaining kids as well as encouraging parents to hunt with their children. It intentionally challenges parents and children alike to respect landowners and to remember that there are more important things than hunting. For other helpful resources and to order Shawn's books, visit www.huntwithakid.com. The site offers ordering information for Meyer's illustrated books as well as other resources, such as Meyers' 12 tips to introducing youth to hunting, book samples, discussion questions to go along with the stories told in Meyer's books and more.

(continued from page 29)

popularity of the program is so great that once a hunter is successful in drawing a permit, he or she is barred from ever participating again. While more permits were available this past year, it was still a very, very lucky hunter who had his name drawn.

Three hundred and twenty-four permits were drawn for the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge located just outside of Lawton in southwest Oklahoma. A total of 258 cow only permits were drawn, along with an additional 66 either sex permits. Of those drawn for a cow only hunt, 225 arrived at the hunt site, taking home 165 elk. The hunters with an "either sex" permit turned out in greater proportion, with 62 hunters actually participating in the hunt. Their success was also in greater proportion than the cow only hunters, taking home 56 bulls and 1 cow.

Two Wildlife Management Areas also provided limited elk hunting opportunities. One either sex permit was offered at the Pushmataha WMA and one was drawn for the Cookson Hills WMA. Both permits were filled with hunters taking fine elk.

Oklahoma again offered a private lands elk season in the area surrounding the Wichita Mountains NWR. This hunt is designed to take advantage of the elk that have moved off the Refuge and have taken up residence in the surrounding counties. As this herd expands, it continues to put pressure on local agricultural producers both with foraging loss and with fence damage caused by these large animals. In an effort to reduce this damage and to allow Oklahoma hunters an additional hunting opportunity, elk hunting was again available to persons obtaining written landowner permission in Caddo, Comanche, and Kiowa counties. To better manage these elk, they were divided into two zones with different season dates and bag limit restrictions. The Granite Hills/West zone was located west of State Highway 115. The bag limit for this zone was established at one elk of either sex. On the opposite side of the highway, hunters were allowed two elk (one of which must have been antlerless) in the Slick Hills/East zone. Season dates were also different for the two zones.

Northeast Oklahoma also allowed elk hunting opportunities in Adair, Cherokee, Delaware, Mayes, Muskogee, and Sequoyah counties. The seasons ran concurrent with the established deer seasons and had a one-elk bag limit.

The combined season elk limit was set at two elk for all elk zones combined. In total, 62 elk were taken from private land in 2009.

Limited hunting also occurred on the Ft. Sill military base. Hunters there bagged an additional 30 elk (15 bulls and 15 cows), bringing the state-wide total to 318 in 2009.

Data Collection and Analysis

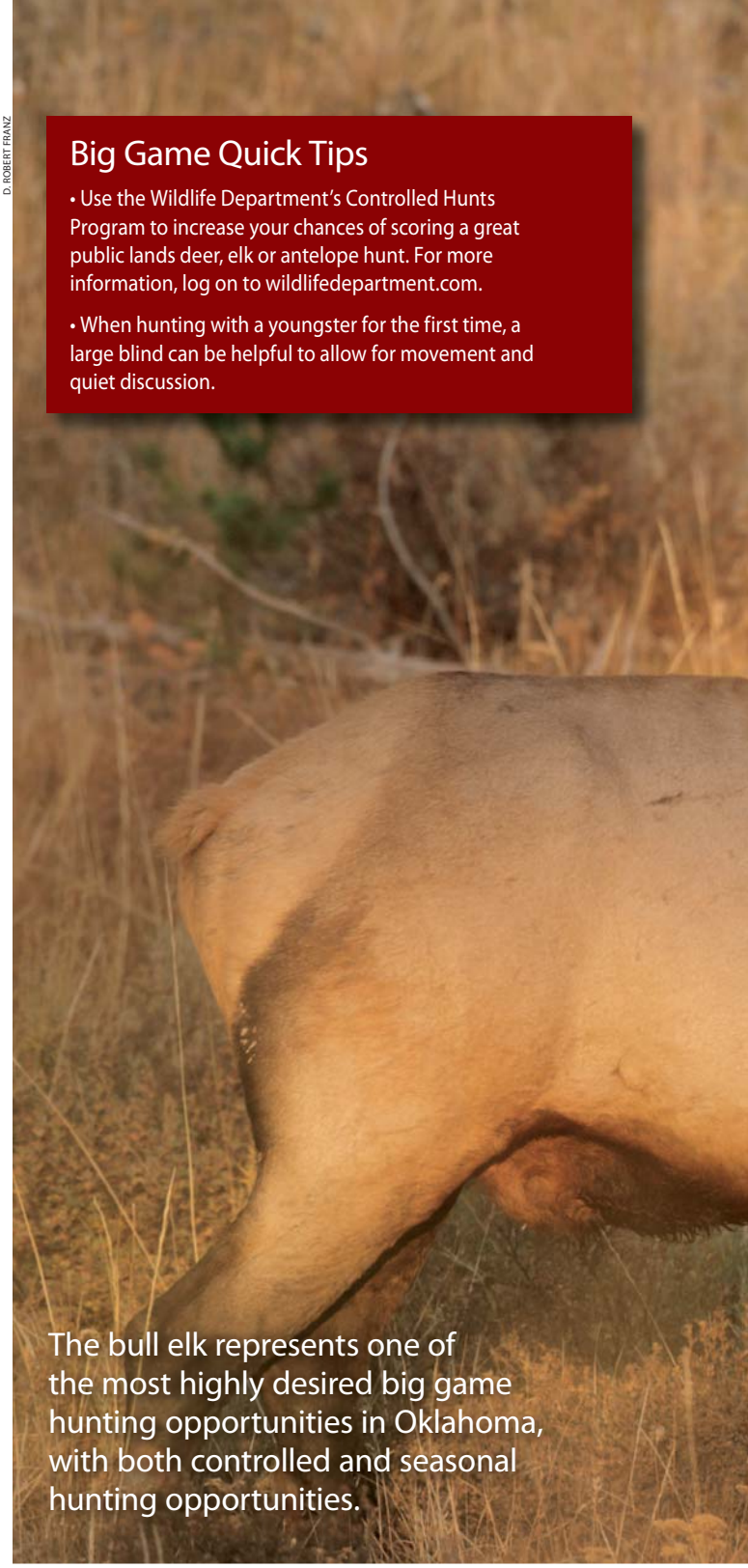
Travel around our state much at all and you might be amazed at the great diversity of our landscape. As mentioned before, our state is home to several differing habitat types with each one requiring slightly different techniques to best manage the deer that make that habitat home.

Although information collected at the county level is often of interest to sportsmen, biologists are more concerned with tabulation and analysis of deer harvests in small areas called Deer Kill Location Units or "DKL's" and aggregations of these DKL's known as "Harvest

D. ROBERT FRANZ

Big Game Quick Tips

- Use the Wildlife Department's Controlled Hunts Program to increase your chances of scoring a great public lands deer, elk or antelope hunt. For more information, log on to wildlifedepartment.com.
- When hunting with a youngster for the first time, a large blind can be helpful to allow for movement and quiet discussion.

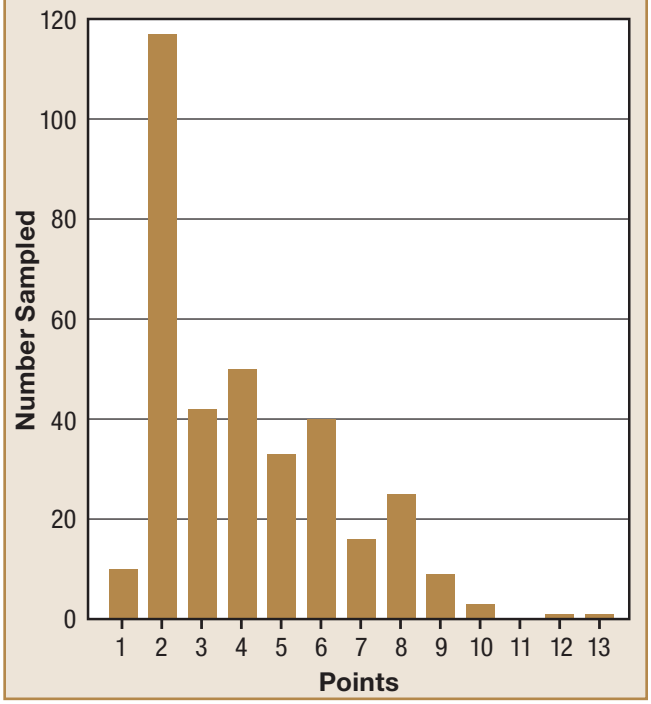


The bull elk represents one of the most highly desired big game hunting opportunities in Oklahoma, with both controlled and seasonal hunting opportunities.

Units" (Figure 8, page 35). 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 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 (those that are 1.5 years old) 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 347

Figure 7: 2009 Year Buck Antler Points



yearling bucks examined in 2009, 51.2 percent had four or more points (Figure 7, page 34). Differences in biological potential, range condition, and deer density are reflected in Table 5. Data collected at deer check stations in 2009 continued to show the relationship between habitat conditions and the physical condition of the deer in our state. The Harvest Units in the northwest quadrant of our state (Units 1-5) are typified by deeper, more fertile soils and an abundance of agricultural activity. As a result, we typically see heavier, better nourished deer from this area when compared to other, lower quality habitats around the state. In contrast, Harvest Units 9 and 10 exhibit rocky, shallow soils that support more closed canopy forest than agriculture. With this reduction in the quality of habitat comes a reduction in deer body size and antler growth, as shown in Table 5.

Each year for the past few decades, natural resources students are hired from selected state universities to collect deer jaws at different check stations across the state. Together with data collected from cooperators enrolled in the Department's Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP), and deer harvested on Wildlife Management Areas, the student-pulled jaws provide the herd age structure data that is needed for informed management decisions.

During the 2009 season, 3,695 individual jaws were removed and analyzed using the tooth wear and eruption method to determine the age of the deer at the time it was harvested. This sample size is slightly over three percent of the total number of deer harvested. This valuable data, collected at check stations across the state, is shown in Table 4 and Figures 9 & 10 (see page 36). The ages given in these figures are divided into half-year increments. While this might seem odd, if you remember that fawns are born in the spring, the first opportunity they have at being harvested is roughly six months later. If that fawn survives its first hunting season, at the end of the next hunting season it would be 1½ years old, and so on until the deer is harvested or is removed from the population by natural mortality.

As deer hunters continue to enjoy high success rates, many hunters have changed their goal from simply harvesting a legal buck to attempting to redirect their focus to taking older, more mature males. This change in direction is beneficial not only in terms of the production of larger antlered deer, but more importantly, it helps en-

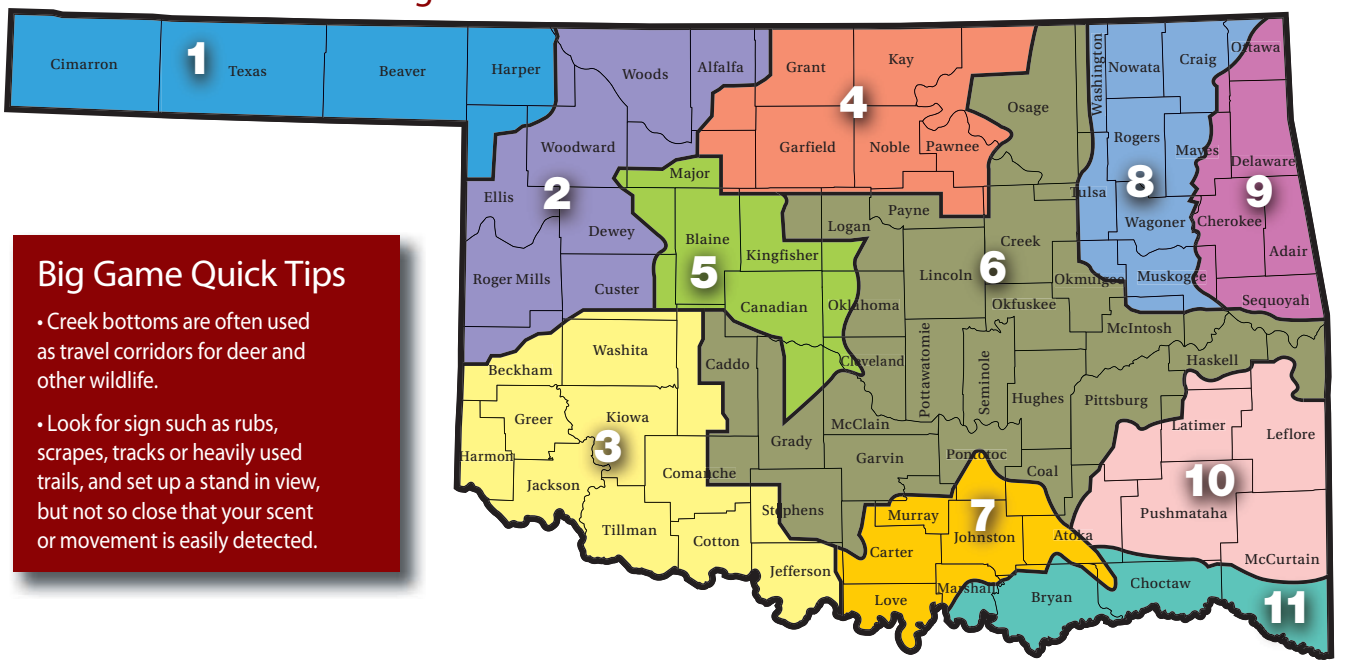
Table 3: 2009 Statewide Frequency Distribution of Yearling Buck Antler Points

Number of Points	Number of Deer Sampled	Percent
1	10	3
2	117	33
3	42	12
4	50	14
5	33	9
6	40	11
7	16	5
8	25	7
9	9	3
10	3	1
12	1	1
13	1	1

Table 4: 2009 Statewide Distribution of Adult Deer Ages

Deer Age	Bucks		Does	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1.5	357	30	539	25
2.5	319	26	486	22
3.5	284	23	482	22
4.5	141	12	286	13
5.5	59	5	207	10
6.5	20	1	62	3
7.5	6	1	34	1
8.5	2	1	37	2
9.5	1	1	13	1
10.5	—	—	3	1

Figure 8: Oklahoma Deer Harvest Units



Big Game Quick Tips

- Creek bottoms are often used as travel corridors for deer and other wildlife.
- Look for sign such as rubs, scrapes, tracks or heavily used trails, and set up a stand in view, but not so close that your scent or movement is easily detected.

sure the long-term health and stability of our state's deer herd. The reduction of the antlered deer limit from three to two, coupled with increased awareness on the part of our hunters as to the problems associated with high yearling buck harvest, is continuing to pay dividends. Check station data collected in 2009 shows Oklahoma hunters made good improvement in their effort to increase the number of bucks allowed to reach the older age classes. This past year, yearling bucks accounted for 30 percent of the total antlered harvest. That figure is four percent higher than the number of yearling bucks harvested in 2008 but is six percent lower than 2007 levels. This trend of emphasizing the harvest of older aged bucks, along with adequate antlerless harvest will help bring buck:doe ratios into a more natural and healthy balance and facilitate healthy herds and excellent hunting for the future.

Wildlife Management Areas

Survey data continues to show that hunting access remains an issue of great importance to Oklahoma hunters. Lacking private property access, these hunters rely on our public lands to provide them a place to hunt. While many states enjoy a wealth of public land, that is not the case in Oklahoma. Ninety-five percent of Oklahoma's land area is under private control. Approximately three percent of the state, or roughly 1.6 million acres, is owned or managed by the Wildlife Department. These Department managed lands, called Wildlife Management Areas, or WMAs for

Table 5: Physical Characteristics of Yearling and Adult Deer by Harvest Unit, 2009 (Includes WMA Statistics)

Harvest Unit	Yearling Bucks				Adult Bucks			Adult Does		
	Average Weight	Antler Points	Percent Spikes	Sample Size	Average Weight	Average Age	Sample Size	Average Weight	Average Age	Sample Size
1	—	—	—	0	162	4.6	18	99	3.2	34
2	108	5	33.3	3	141	3.8	46	90	4	158
3	112	7.5	0	3	144	3.5	42	98	3.5	78
4	109	4.3	0	7	149	3.3	42	100	3.2	168
5	97	5.6	15.8	19	119	2.6	49	95	2.8	55
6	90	4.3	28.6	84	111	2.7	238	87	3.5	329
7	96	4.9	30.4	23	122	3.1	104	86	3.2	360
8	97	5.2	13.5	52	112	2.4	117	84	3	139
9	75	3.2	60.3	78	96	2.6	236	76	3.4	273
10	80	3.8	43.5	69	105	3.2	246	80	3.5	412
11	84	4.4	21.1	19	107	2.8	51	81	3.1	143

Figure 9: 2009 Adult Buck Age Distribution (in Years)

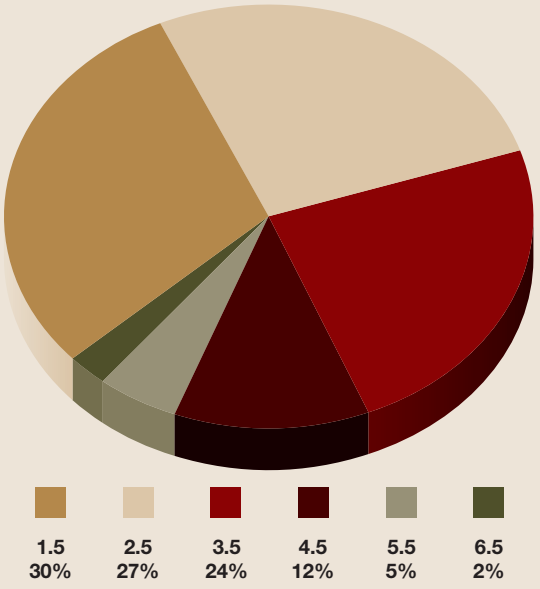
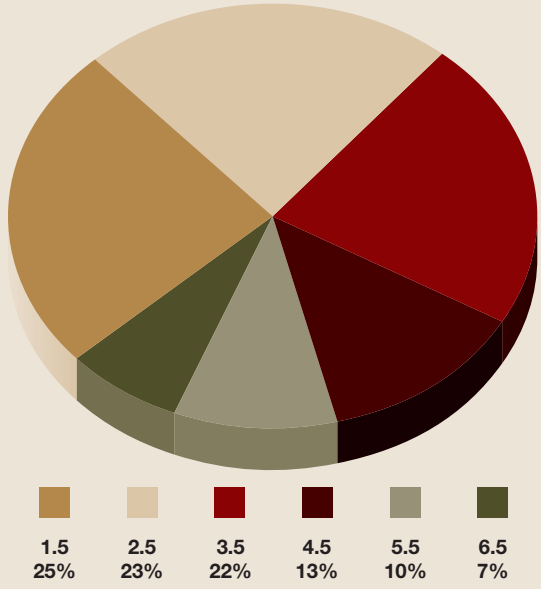


Figure 10: 2009 Adult Doe Age Distribution (in Years)



New Field Tagging Requirements for 2010

Carry a pen on you while hunting so you can quickly fill out your deer license upon harvesting your animal. Additionally, carrying a pre-made carcass tag saves time as well. A laminated business card with a string, lanyard or wire attached works well. Remember to include on your carcass tag your name, hunting license number and the date and time of harvest.

short, are located across the state, with a concerted effort being made to add more land as it becomes available. With such limited space and the ever-growing need for public-access hunting, deer herds on Department WMAs can easily be over-pressured. In addition to concerns over herd health, hunter safety and hunt quality can become an issue as more hunters attempt to utilize the limited public areas. In addition to land acquisition, the Department actively seeks to partner with other public agencies, whether state, federal or private, to provide hunter access to lands those agencies control.

In addition to trying to purchase additional properties and finding new partners, another technique to manage access to the limited land resource, comes in the form of the computerized permit draw process, commonly referred to as "controlled hunts." In addition to opening properties that would otherwise remain closed, some additional benefits of the controlled hunts program 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 2009 deer seasons, access to 16 WMAs was managed partially or completely via the drawing process. Lands not managed by the Department but made accessible via cooperative agreements administered under the controlled hunts process were the Corps of Engineers lands at Waurika Lake, Hugo, Oologah, Ft. Gibson, Keystone, Tenkiller, and Texoma. The Wichita Mountains, Deep Fork, Salt Plains, Washita, Little River, Tishomingo, and Sequoyah National Wildlife Refuges, the McAlester Army Ammunition Plant, and the Ft. Cobb, Sequoyah and Walnut Creek State Parks also allowed hunter access to successful controlled hunt applicants. Additionally, the USDA Grazing Lands Research Laboratory, Four Canyon Preserve (owned by the Nature Conservancy), and selected private lands in Texas and Cimarron counties allowed hunter access through agreements with the Wildlife Department. There were 133 different big game hunts offered through the controlled hunts program in 2009. Many additional WMAs were open to deer hunters under regulations that were the same as the statewide seasons.

Department managed lands might account for only 3 percent of the state's land mass, but they were responsible for producing 5.2 percent of the harvest. A total of 6,063 deer came from WMAs, with 41.7 percent being females. Table 2 (see page 21) presents a harvest summary for each area by season and sex.

Trophy Deer

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation has its own trophy recognition program designed to offer official recognition to hunters fortunate enough to harvest a large-antlered deer from within our borders. The

Cy Curtis Trophy Award Program was established in 1975 in honor of the man most responsible for re-establishing whitetail deer throughout the state. Many Oklahoma hunters are unaware of the dire state of our deer herds in the not so distant past. In the early 1900s the total statewide whitetail deer population was estimated to be fewer than 500 animals. Cy Curtis was the spearhead for the "trap and transplant" effort that moved deer from populated areas to those with suitable habitat, but lacked deer. His efforts laid the groundwork for the deer hunting that Oklahomans enjoy today.

To qualify for a Cy Curtis Award, the buck must be measured by a Wildlife Department employee or an official measurer of the Boone and Crockett or Pope and Young programs. 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 whitetail 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.

At the end of the recording period in June, at total of 296 deer had been added to the Cy Curtis record book. Looking at the individual categories making up that tally, 89 non-typical and 205 typical whitetail deer were placed in the current awards book. Two deer were added to the "open" category. The top three new entries for the typical and non-typical whitetail deer are shown in the tables below.

Typical Whitetail deer

Hunter Name	Hometown	Antler Points	Net Score	County of Kill
Justin Thomas	Stillwell	7x7	170 1/8	Adair
Ronald White	Fairland	5x6	160 3/8	Ottawa
Cody Dugger	Hollis	7x6	160 2/8	Harmon

Non-typical Whitetail deer

Hunter Name	Hometown	Antler Points	Net Score	County of Kill
ShaneDockrey	Shawnee	11x21	215 5/8	Pottawatomie
Jason Black	Ardmore	7x11	204 0/8	Garvin
BryceDunigan	Stonewall	11x14	198 3/8	Johnston

Conclusions

The 2008 Big Game Report concluded with the statement that "this is an incredible time to be a deer hunter in our great state." That statement continues to be true! Our deer herd continues to be healthy, the habitat is in great condition, and our hunters have more opportunities to pursue their sport than ever before. The Department is actively adding new Wildlife Management Areas to increase hunter access. An online system has been established to help streamline the collection of data on harvested deer, elk and turkeys. Elk and antelope hunting opportunities have expanded. Antlerless bag limits have increased for rifle and muzzleloader seasons. Just one of these changes would be reason for a hunter to be excited!

Hunters continue to take full advantage of the expanding opportunities, checking in the second highest number of deer in Oklahoma history. A total of 116,175 deer were checked last year, roughly 5,000 more than hunters tagged in 2008, and only 3,000 shy of the all time deer harvest record set in 2006. Archers did their part by collecting 19,887 deer and setting a new record in the process.

In addition to the record bowhunting harvest, hunters broke the one-year old record for the highest total doe harvest. Combining all of the deer seasons, hunters tagged a total of 50,420 female deer, 4 percent higher than the 2008 record. This new record amounted to 43.4 percent of the total harvest for the year. Increased harvest of the doe segment of the herd will help to balance sex ratios, lower the chance of localized over-population, reduce incidences of crop depredation, and reduce the potential for deer/vehicle collisions. The harvest of does also reduces the pressure on the buck segment of the herd that might be taken in an effort to fill the freezer, thereby improving the likelihood of producing mature males. In total, Oklahoma hunters continue to take the steps needed to ensure our deer hunting success continues in future years.

As each year goes by it becomes more difficult to describe the success of the Oklahoma deer herd and our hunters. There are only so many ways to say that we have set some type of new record without sounding redundant! This year's archery and doe harvest records offered no reprieve from this dilemma. With continued diligence in maintaining adequate doe harvest, improving efforts to allow younger bucks to fully mature, and a pro-active management plan designed to improve hunter access and opportunity, this problem of how to describe success might continue for years to come!

Big Game Quick Tips

• Studies have shown that although no significant difference occurs in nutrition between white oak and red oak acorns, whitetail deer prefer to consume acorns from the white oak group over the black or red oak group. Studies have also shown that deer will consume approximately 1.5 to 2 pounds of acorns per day per 100 pounds of body weight where acorns are available.

• Let the wind be your friend. Oftentimes setting up two stands in the same area — one to the north and one to the south of where you expect to see deer — enables you to choose the stand that best fits the wind and weather conditions on a given day. If the wind is out of the south, choose the northern stand, and visa versa, so your scent drifts away from the sensitive nostrils of an otherwise unsuspecting deer.