

Quality deer management program emphasized by the University of Missouri extension
News

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During this year's deer season, landowners and hunters can work together to improve the quality of the deer herd in their area by collecting important information once deer are harvested. Gathering data about the herd is the crucial first step in the practice of "Quality Deer Management" (QDM), said Bob Pierce, University of Missouri Extension wildlife specialist.

"QDM is a strategy and philosophy that involves managing deer herds in a biologically sound manner within existing habitat conditions," Pierce said.

The white-tailed deer is one of Missouri's most valuable natural resources, contributing more than \$1 billion annually to the state economy and supporting thousands of jobs, according to Emily Flinn, private lands deer biologist with the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC).

Many people think QDM is mainly about shooting lots of does to produce a bigger population of bucks with big antlers, but that's not the case, says Pierce.

"The underlying goal of QDM is to promote a more balanced sex ratio and age structure within a particular deer herd, and to keep the herd's population from exceeding the biological carrying capacity of the habitat, as well as the cultural carrying capacity, or the numbers of deer that people are willing to tolerate," he said.

To do that, you need some information about the population density, sex ratio and age structure of the deer herd. "Having this type of information over several years can help landowners and hunting clubs make more informed decisions about harvesting deer in future seasons and implementing habitat management techniques" says Pierce.

To help landowners and hunters implement QDM programs on their property, MU Extension and MDC have developed a series of deer management guides that are available for free download at extension.missouri.edu/deer.

The series includes "Implementing Quality Deer Management on Your Property" (extension.missouri.edu/G9480) and several other guides that provide information and log sheets to help landowners and hunters collect useful information.

If QDM is a goal, landowners and hunters should agree to collect basic information about each deer harvested, Flinn said. This includes the sex, dressed weight and age (in most situations, you only need to determine if the deer is a fawn, yearling or adult).

You'll need to collect additional information for antlered bucks: The number of points (1 inch or longer), the inside spread (distance between antlers at their widest) and main beam length. The MU Extension guide "Estimating Deer Populations on Your Property: Harvest Data" (extension.missouri.edu/G9483) contains a log form that can be used to collect information from harvested deer.

For a comprehensive picture of the local deer population, you can supplement harvest data with information about other deer seen on the property, whether by direct observation or through photographic surveys using trail cameras equipped with motion sensors.

The MU Extension guide "Estimating Deer Populations on Your Property: Observational Data" (extension.missouri.edu/G9482) has detailed information on recording observational information and includes a blank log form that can be copied or printed.

Camera surveys are typically conducted pre- or post-season because baits or attractants are used to draw deer to the camera. The MU Extension guide "Estimating Deer Populations on Your Property: Camera Survey" (G9481) has more information on conducting camera surveys.

However, Flinn notes that use of baits or attractants such as salt or corn is now prohibited year-round in six counties in north-central Missouri because of concerns about chronic wasting disease. CWD has been found in 11 captive and five free-ranging deer in Linn and Macon counties. The CWD containment zone encompasses those two counties as well as the adjacent counties of Adair, Chariton, Sullivan and Randolph.

Because deer home ranges typically occupy hundreds of acres, some landowners and deer hunters have formed wildlife cooperatives, which enable members to carry out management goals that would be impossible for an individual property owner to accomplish. Co-op members share information, develop management goals, and establish agreed-upon harvest recommendations and habitat-management objectives. For more information, see MU Extension publication G9490, "Establishing a Wildlife Management Cooperative," is available at extension.missouri.edu/G9490.

All MU Extension guides in the deer management series are available at extension.missouri.edu/deer. Other guides in addition to those mentioned include:

G9479, Ecology and Management of White-tailed Deer in Missouri

G9484, Aging a Deer by Examining Its Jawbone

G9485, Techniques for Aging Live Deer

G9486, Antler Development in White-tailed Deer: Implications for Management

G9487, Nutritional Requirements of White-tailed Deer in Missouri

G9488, White-tailed Deer Population Dynamics in Missouri: Implications for Management

G9489, Potential Diseases and Parasites of White-tailed Deer in Missouri

G9491, Managing for White-tailed Deer in Missouri: Setting and Accomplishing Management Goals