

Antler Growth and Development

By Laurie Seale

Over the past 20 years of deer farming, I have taken hundreds of pictures of bucks grown on my farm. I have often thought about writing an article on antler growth and including pictures of bucks to show various antler developments. Pictures can sometimes be more educational than words.

For this particular article, I also asked the W.O.W. membership to participate by sharing pictures of bucks taken on their farms. This is the kind of article that can and should be updated on a yearly basis. Perhaps more of you will contribute pictures of your bucks for future updates on this topic. I personally love to see how much some bucks can grow from one year to the next and I hope all of you enjoy it as well.

One thing I have learned over the years is that it is very hard to judge yearling bucks. Sometimes the smallest yearlings will develop into some of the biggest three or four year old bucks on your farm and sometimes they will be disappointing even at maturity. Sometimes the opposite is true. Sometimes the biggest yearlings will be disappointing at maturity. There have been some really great yearlings in the industry that have never really developed into the huge bucks we anticipated. Then there are the big typical yearlings we see advertised that become really non-typical at maturity, disappointing those who are breeding for big typicals. These are just some examples of why yearlings are so hard to judge.

Buying semen from yearling bucks can be a real gamble...sometimes you win and sometimes you lose. The price of semen on yearlings is usually less than semen from a mature buck that has proven his genetic pass down ability. Breeding with yearlings can also be a gamble. If you breed with a yearling and he develops into something great, you will be a year ahead with your breeding program. If they don't turn out, what do you do with their offspring? The resale value will not be very good.

One question I often get from new deer farmers and from the general public is what about yearling bucks with no brow tines? My response to them is not to worry about brow tines on yearlings. They will eventually grow brow tines in following years, although most times yearlings with small or no brow tines will usually grow small to average brow tines at maturity. On the other hand, yearlings with very good brow tines will almost always end up with huge brow tines at maturity.

One antler characteristic I have observed on bucks I have raised is width. Wide yearlings will most likely be wide at maturity. Another observation has been watching spike yearlings grow into trophy bucks. Sometimes spike yearlings are bucks born late the previous year and need an extra year to catch up to the other yearlings. 8-point yearlings can go either way...some will be trophies at maturity and others will be just average bucks.

One of the most important things to keep in mind with antler growth is that a buck must be in top physical condition during the antler-growing season in order to grow the most antler. If a buck is sick, injured or stressed in any way it will affect his antler growth for that season. Even simple things such as foot rot will stifle antler growth until the problem is corrected.

Mother Nature also plays a part in maximum antler growth. Sunshine and warm weather make the blood flow better, which will maximize the antler growth. A cold, cloudy spring will reduce the width of your bucks and reduce their final total inches.

For the most part, you can determine if a buck will develop into something special by age two. But even then some of them will fool you. Take a look at pictures of #45 red at age one, two and three. His antlers were less than average the first two years and then he blew up at age three. Some bucks just need a longer amount of time to mature. Breeding for early maturity is an important factor to keep in mind. The less time you have invested in feeding an animal, the more money you will put in your pocket. Earlier maturity also means fewer deaths because you can sell at a younger age before they become really aggressive during the breeding season.

If you have pictures from any of your bucks that show tremendous antler growth from year to year or any unique antler growth, please send them to me for future articles pertaining to antler growth and development.

SEE ANTLER GROWTH PHOTOS ON FOLLOWING PAGES...

Pictures courtesy
of Ron & Mary
Pierce, Pierce
Whitetail Farms



Lakota @ 1
An example of a late born fawn.



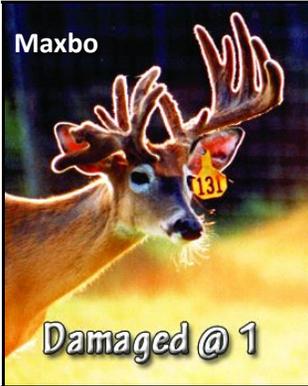
Lakota @ 2



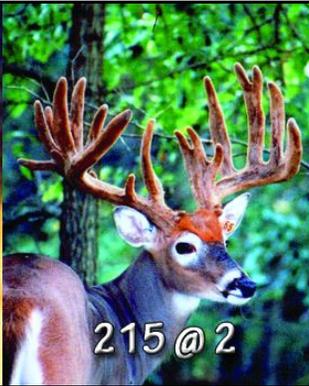
Matrix @ 1



Matrix @ 2
An example of
tremendous antler growth from age 1 to age 2.



Maxbo
Damaged @ 1



215 @ 2



269 @ 3



294 @ 4



306 @ 5



374 @ 6



356 @ 7



372 @ 8



409 @ 9



360 @ 10

Pictures courtesy of David McQuaig, Cougar Ridge Whitetails



1 yellow @ 1
An example of a wide yearling with short brow tines



1 yellow @ 2
Wide yearlings get wider with age

Pictures courtesy of Laurie Seale, Maple Hill Farms



Grand Torino @ 1
Yearling spike buck born late the previous year



Grand Torino @ 2



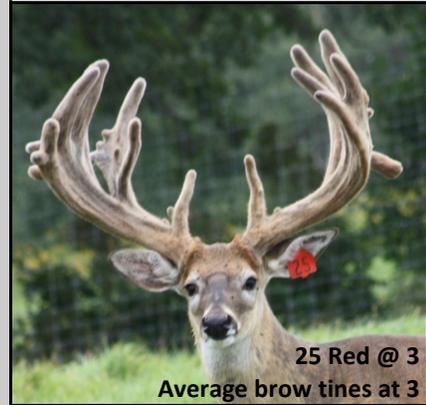
Grand Torino @ 3



25 Red @ 1
Another late born fawn



25 Red @ 2
Notice short brow tines at 1 & 2



25 Red @ 3
Average brow tines at 3



Rocket Explosion @ 1
Average frame yearling



Rocket Explosion @ 2



Rocket Explosion @ 3
An example of how a buck can gain tremendous inches in one year



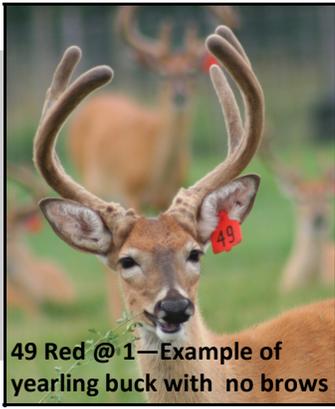
45 Red @ 1



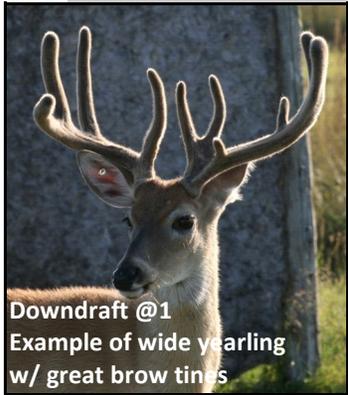
45 Red @ 2



45 Red @ 3
Official score 273"



Pictures courtesy of Laurie Seale, Maple Hill Farms



Pictures courtesy of Roger & Laurie Pietrowski, Independence Ranch

Pictures courtesy of Ray Hanson, Sunset View Whitetails

