

have stopped producing entirely are almost nonexistent. Furthermore, when barren does are found, it is almost always a result of some physiological malfunction rather than age. Obviously, there is a limit to the age at which does remain productive, but very few individuals reach such an advanced age. The effect of these few individuals is essentially insignificant to the productivity of the population.

Inbreeding is another factor which concerns people involved in deer management. Inbreeding does occur in wild deer populations, but is not a problem as it is in domestic livestock. Inbreeding in most wild deer populations is probably of little consequence, since the number of animals in a herd is usually sufficiently large to avoid close inbreeding.

Proper management of deer herds is accomplished by regulating harvests to keep deer populations in balance with their food supplies and manipulating habitats through various land management practices to make an area more favorable to deer. Another factor which must be considered, however, is the compatibility of deer populations with commercial agriculture, forestry and other interests. Problems often arise when adjoining landowners have different interests and objectives. It should be an objective of deer management to annually produce, harvest and utilize an optimum crop of healthy animals consistent with other uses of the land.

### Record Keeping

A detailed and accurate record-keeping effort is necessary for a successful deer management program. Records should be kept of the date and sex of each deer harvested and biological data on age, weight, antler development and productivity. Data from the yearling (1½ year) age class provides the most reliable indicator of a deer herd's health. Accurate determination of age is essential to obtaining good records. A mandible (lower jawbone) should be removed and properly labeled from each animal harvested. Labeled jawbones and the records of biological data kept throughout the season should be given to a wildlife biologist for aging and date analysis. South Carolina Department of Natural Resources provides assistance for landowners who are interested in developing a record-keeping program for harvested deer.

Knowledge of trends in annual harvests and biological condition, along with data from parasite burdens, spotlight counts and browse utilization surveys provide biologists and land managers with a sound basis for future harvest recommendations. This approach will assure maintenance of quality habitats and a healthy well-managed deer herd.

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