October 2022

SPRING CREEK OUTDOORS
WILDLIFE BIOLOGY

SPRING CREEK OUTDOORS

Fall Newsletter

Important Dates

Deer Season Dates:

General Season

North Zone

Nov. 5, 2022 - Jan1, 2023

South Zone

Nov. 5, 2022 - Jan. 15, 2023

MLDP

Harvest Option

Antlerless: Oct. 1. 2022, February 28, 2023

Bucks: Oct. 1. 2022- Nov. 4, 2022 (one unbranched antler), Nov. 5, 2022 - Feb. 28, 2022 (all bucks)

Conservation Option

Whitetail Deer: Oct. 1, 2022 - Feb. 28, 2023

Mule Deer: Oct. 1, 2022-Nov. 4, 2022 (antlerless and bucks may be taken via archery equipment). Nov. 5, 2022 - Jan. 29, 2023 (all deer may be taken via any legal method)

Dove Season:

-North: Sept. 1- Nov. 12
Dec. 18-Jan. 3

-Central: Sept. 1-Nov. 1
Dec. 18-Jan. 14

-South: Sept. 14-Nov. 1
Dec. 18-Jan. 23

Hunting Season Forecast 2022-23

The pastures are green and look pretty good right now but oh how much has changed this year. The drought arrived last September, roared through the fall and winter, and kicked in 2022 with a vengeance. February saw another brutal winter storm, very little moisture and spring never sprung. Summer heat arrived early and often and we suffered through perhaps one of the driest and hottest summers on record. But finally, August/September rains arrived and helped turn the tide and that brings us here today.

When baby wildlife hit the ground back in the spring and summer, it was hot, dry and lots of bare ground. Few insects, few seeds and even less cover was available, so baby "everythings" suffered because of it. So, production is down across the board this year and that even includes feral hogs! Surveys are still on-going but every ranch has lower numbers this year than in the recent past. This means we must adjust our hunting schemes accordingly to keep the populations healthy and productive and so let's get started with this year's forecast.

SPRING CREEK OUTDOORS
WILDLIFE BIOLOGY

Whitetail Deer: Central, west and south Texas all have a low fawn survival rate this year generally speaking. If you practice aggressive predator control and reliable supplemental feeding, you have more than your neighbors, but you are still down from the past few years, unless you use the DMP Permit. So identifying HOW LOW is very important because the harvest is controlled by the production. Get detailed with your surveys to identify the fawn survival rate before you finalize any hunting plans to be successful. Regardless of the low rate, harvest is still required to remove those animals not needed or wanted on the range. There will always be bucks that do not impress you or have traits you want to remove such as no brow tines, narrow spreads, few number of points, so work on those types this fall and leave the bucks you do like in the pasture for breeding. I would not recommend harvesting any yearling bucks this fall because they are struggling. Spike antlered bucks comprise 30-50% of the entire yearling cohort so harvesting spikes this year will remove the bulk of your entire cohort and we know those little guys are struggling with nutrition. I would be aggressive on the mature bucks with eight to nine or fewer mainframe points and leave the ten points alone this year. Hunt hard and cull deep starting in the middle age class but be very conservative on the high-quality bucks this year. Of the antlerless deer to select for harvest, start early by harvesting the oldest female you can find that does not have a fawn present. There is a need to lower the total densities on many ranches and removing the older does without fawns are easy to identify early in the season. Do not wait to harvest antlerless deer late this year because bucks will be shedding their antlers much earlier this year and it removes the chance of accidentally harvesting a buck fawn as well.

Turkey: Production has been down for the past three consecutive years. Overall turkey numbers are down so take it easy on the birds this year. They are struggling from the back-to-back February freezes and now the drought. With few insects and few seeds available, turkeys are having to really work hard just to make a quality living so you can expect to see many of them at your feeders this fall.

Quail: Covey counts are way down this year for the same reasons as turkey. Some adults are now pairing back up and fixing to nest again this late in the year. Success will be very low, but the little birds are thankfully tough and resilient. I recommend putting some milo or chicken scratch or even bird seed in your corn feeders this fall and winter to help give them and the turkeys some extra help this year. In far south Texas, particularly in

SPRING CREEK OUTDOORS
WILDLIFE BIOLOGY

the sand sheet country, quail numbers are solid, however, covey size is small. There should be plenty of birds for late-season hunts thanks to the abundant but late rains.

Feral Hogs: Amazingly, hog numbers are also down this year, so you know the drought was a tough one. Sounder/litter size is less than half of what it normally is, so this is the year to make real headway on controlling their numbers. Trapping, shooting, aerial gunning is all recommended to make real progress this year. You can expect to see many hogs at the feeders this year but realize their overall numbers are down substantially so do your part and help keep those numbers low for as long as possible.

Exotics: Most exotic numbers are up, except for blackbuck antelope. Axis are rebounding nicely from the freezes and all populations are growing once more. Blackbuck are still struggling so take out any predator encountered this year in order to help them recover even faster. Most of the exotic species are great eating so once you finish harvesting the whitetail allotment this fall, take a few exotics home with you too because they are typically very good eating.

So, the weather patterns have made this a tougher year than normal. Animal numbers are down this year BUT we have much work still to be done. Surveys, fawn counts and targeted harvesting is required this year. Use your binoculars carefully, feeders won't be as popular during early season as compared to late and so it looks to be an active season despite the tough growing conditions earlier this year.

What Is Average

Nope, not a trick question. This is a serious question about the serious year of 2022. As you know, my company spends an enormous amount of time and effort conducting wildlife surveys each fall prior to hunting season to provide our clients with the best harvest recommendations possible to help them meet their goals and objectives. Notice I said "wildlife surveys" and not just deer surveys. While in the air over a ranch, we see everything, so we count it. We count quail, turkey, feral hogs, coyotes, bobcats, fox, dead cows, deer, and we check feeders, water

SPRING CREEK OUTDOORS
WILDLIFE BIOLOGY

sources, blind doors and windows and fences. We note brush work that has been done and that is needed. We check distribution of water, feed, travel corridors, bedding areas and how those intersperse. We check the livestock grazing system used and make recommendations if needed and we offer recommendations to simply make the ranch better.

We see lots and lots of different ranches—high fence, low fence, no fence, good deer herds, not as good deer herds, new management programs and old established programs. We work with brand new landowners and crusty old ones. We see what is working well and what is not working at all. And that brings me to the topic of this article. What is average this year?

The table for 2022 was set back in September of 2021 as the drought slowly snuck in, quietly, almost tip-toed into our lives and didn't make much noise doing it. One or two rains in November helped distract us and then the rains stopped almost entirely since that time up until September of this year. The hard winter of 2021, the spring and summer of 2022 were brutal and unforgiving and downright mean, nasty and rude.

As you have likely seen, ranches reacted and suffered much differently this year. We have seen the photos of a few large antlered bucks but we have also heard about deer die-offs, EHD and terrible fawn survival rates because of the weather events. So what is AVERAGE this year? Here are some facts our company has collected throughout the hill country this year for your use and enjoyment.

Acres per deer: Range 2 to 25. Average: 10
Adult sex ratio (does per buck): Range .75:1 to 3:1. Average 1.65:1
Fawn survival (fawns per doe): Range 2% to 68%. Average 28%
% yearling spike bucks of that age class: Range 10% to 55%. Average 25%
% mature bucks in the herd this year: Range 10% to 35%. Average 23%
% mature bucks with at least ten mainframe points: Range 0% to 85%. Average 45%
# of coyotes observed during helicopter survey: Range 0 to 10. Average 3
# of feral hogs observed during helicopter survey: Range 0 to 120. Average 12

Is your ranch below or above average this year? How can you improve if you find yourself behind the curve? What can be learned from being ahead of the curve? If you want to improve your property and improve the wildlife that reside on it, give us a call at Spring Creek Outdoors because this is what we do. We do ranch and wildlife improvement. We do it all

SPRING CREEK OUTDOORS
WILDLIFE BIOLOGY

from fin to feather, horn to antler and dirt to brush. Give us a call if you need to improve your property.

How Do Antlers Grow?

Hunters and outdoorsmen have long had a preoccupation with antlers, especially big ones and strange ones. We spend a great deal of time and energy thinking about them, trying to grow them bigger, hunting for them, and displaying them. Antlers are an integral part of Texas hunting culture, and the center of a broad and lucrative industry. Few people actually know the details about how and why antlers grow, and how truly unique they are in the animal kingdom. Antlers are made of bone, and are in fact the fastest growing mammal bone in the world. A complete set takes only 128 days to complete and can weigh several pounds apiece. A side-effect of this quick growth is that most bucks develop some degree of seasonal osteoporosis due to their body leaching minerals (mostly calcium and phosphorus) from other bones throughout their bodies. Shedding and re-growing such an energetically and nutritionally expensive set of weapons every year requires deer to have their characteristically selective and nutritious browsing diet.

Why do some bucks have bigger antlers than others? Antler growth is genetically based and environmentally influenced. In other words, good nutrition will allow a buck to grow his biggest potential antlers, but genes dictate how big they can get and how they will look. For example, mature buck that has 8 mainframe points will tend to stay a mainframe 8 point even if his nutrition is drastically improved, but the overall size of his antlers may increase dramatically. Variations in environmental factors like rainfall and temperature can affect the plants that deer feed on, and therefore the total nutrition that that deer receives. Or another example, the son of a mature 10-point buck will more than likely be a 10-point as well when he is fully mature. The genetics of the doe also have an impact on the offspring, but these are harder to determine since bucks represent their genetics on their head, but does genetics are more discreet.

When antlers are growing, they are covered by a thin, vascular layer of a unique type of skin called velvet. Velvet transports blood, nutrients, and oxygen to the antlers as they grow and grows along with them. When the antler is fully formed, the bone “dies” and the velvet dries and is scraped off by the buck to make ready for the rut. While the antlers are growing this velvet is very delicate and can be easily injured, leading to unique shapes and growth patterns in the finished antler. Bruising on fenceposts or tree branches, thorns, ticks bites, and infections can cause all sorts of ripples, grooves, curves, and lumps in the final product.

SPRING CREEK OUTDOORS
WILDLIFE BIOLOGY

One interesting phenomenon in antlers is called “contralateral symmetry”, where an injury to the right side of a buck’s body causes deformations to his left antler or vice versa. A broken bone or an infected wound on one half of the body can cause a stunted or misshapen antler on the opposite antler. This occurrence is not well understood, but it is well documented.
Illness and fever can also affect antler growth. The famous “cactus bucks” are thought to be a result of the buck contracting a fever while in velvet, which can affect testosterone production, and which in turn affects the growth of velvet-covered antlers.
So what can the individual hunter or landowner do raise and harvest deer with bigger antlers? Here are some harvest and management strategies that can help in improving the quality of your herd’s trophies over the long run.
-Nutrition: A buck’s antler growth is entirely secondary to the maintenance and growth of his body, so ensuring that deer have plenty of quality nutrition is paramount. Inadequate or low-quality browse, insufficient water, heat stress, or stress from overcrowding or human interaction can all negatively impact a buck’s antler growth. Consistent and good-quality supplemental food and water are an excellent aid for keeping deer well-nourished, but they are no substitute for a healthy and productive habitat. They are just what the name suggests; supplemental.
-Age: Numerous studies have shown that the vast majority of bucks will produce the biggest set of antlers of their life at the ages of 6 ½ or 7 ½ years old. A handsome 4-year-old 10-point may be tempting on opening morning, but he has certainly not reached his fullest potential. Let him go, and hold out for an old-timer.
-Density: harvesting an adequate number of deer each season and keeping the population below the carrying capacity of the habitat ensures that there is plenty of browse, water, and space for the individuals that are left. Most ranches can support either a lot of deer or big deer, but not both. Remember to harvest does as well as bucks, which leads to the next point.
-Sex ratio: The rut is an incredibly stressful and injurious experience for bucks to go through. They spend the rut fighting, travelling, generally making unwise choices, and practicing very little self-care. Maintaining a tight ratio between the numbers of does and bucks allows all of the does to get bred early in the rut, thereby minimizing the duration of the rut. A wide sex ratio extends the rut sometimes for months, and causes a cascade of ill side effects such as increased buck mortality, lengthened fawning season, lower fawn survival rates, and stress-induced antler stunting. A tighter sex ratio also leads to a more enjoyable and exciting hunting experience due to healthier and bigger bucks, more competitive fighting, and more enthusiastic rutting activity.

SPRING CREEK OUTDOORS
WILDLIFE BIOLOGY

October 2022

What to Harvest this Season?

Hunters are faced with this dilemma each time a group of deer present themselves this fall. This article is to help you answer this question based on conditions stemming from the historic 2022 drought and the results of many, many hours spent in a helicopter counting deer this year.

If you have not, or will not, conduct any type of meaningful surveys on your ranch/lease this year, know that this year is entirely different from the last decade. Deer struggled hard during the spring and summer drought, some localized die-offs occurred, and things are different. Do not assume things are the same as last year and I strongly recommend that you do not keep harvesting deer at the same historic rate or using the same criteria. For low fenced, unmanaged properties, here are my recommendations for this year:

Yearling bucks: Unless your protein feeders never went empty and you hauled water or was lucky enough to have reliable water throughout the entire property this summer, do not harvest any yearling bucks this fall. Half or more of your yearling age class are spikes this year and they struggled all summer long just to survive, and many did not. Do not remove half or more of your yearling bucks by shooting spikes this year.

Two and three year old bucks: These young bucks suffered the most of all of the buck herd. They were not able to hang out with their mothers, were isolated into small bachelor groups and were dominated by the older bucks all summer so they had little to no access to quality habitat or opportunities at the feeder. This age class antler development went backwards substantially so make sure you know what you are looking at and be very conservative. Perhaps harvest those bucks missing one or both brow tines or with frames you don't like, but know they struggled all summer long and are nowhere near their potential this year.

Four year old bucks: This age class is not overly abundant this year due to the low fawn survival rate of 2018, but they are out there. If these are the oldest bucks on your ranch, they might surprise you. This cohort of bucks are either very good or not very good, meaning their true genetics are showing this year. Harvest those bucks with less than ten mainframe points and go very lightly on trophy class harvest with those having ten or more points. We need to save some quality seed stock for the future and some of the top end four-year-olds are pretty shiny this year.

SPRING CREEK OUTDOORS
WILDLIFE BIOLOGY

Five years and older bucks: As with the four-year-olds, this is an easy age to cull. If they impress you with his rack, don't take him out. We need more quality breeders than ever before now so leave the good ones and take out the ones that do not impress you.
All of the bucks are struggling this year, even the good ones. So can you image how good a good one will be next year if we receive decent and timely rains? Do your part to help the local herd and leave the good bucks this year and take out the trash.
OK, meat hunters, here goes. Do not shoot, for any reason, an immature buck that does not fit in the age criteria listed above and make up the sad and ridiculous story about needing meat to fill the freezer. You will have passed multiple older does to select for that one buck, so I don't buy it at all. If you really and truly need just meat, I can't think of a single reason why you have to shoot a buck to do it. Instead, select the oldest doe in front of you without a fawn present this year. You may need to harvest two does to fill the freezer this year because body condition is down, and we need to get the extra mouths off of the range until more favorable rains return.
Again, I know this doesn't apply across the board to everyone, but I hope you realize benefits of proper deer management during times of stress. By harvesting the biggest buck in the woods and doing nothing about controlling the does, you are NOT managing the population—except in a negative way. Do your part to improve the herd and the habitat and make the correct decisions this fall.

To Cull or Not to Cull?

Culling is referred to the selective removal of animals with undesirable traits to prevent them from breeding in hopes of improving the genetics likelihood of producing a desired outcome. Or more simply put—take out the ones you don't like while leaving the ones that you do. Pretty simple, pretty straight forward and pretty effective under some conditions.
Some recent research has indicated culling does not work in some deer herds. Of course, the small print is hard to read on those studies and some is not even available, along with the parameters, criteria and methods used to carry it out and tabulate the data. So does it really work or not?
If culling doesn't work in deer herds, why do you suppose millions of acres are now high fenced? If culling doesn't work so well, do you think literally thousands of landowners, perhaps millions of deer hunters, and several hundred biologists are just wrong? And if you think they are wrong, why do you suppose they continue to do it year after year and more and more high fences are put up and biologists' and helicopter pilots' schedules are now booked up to a year in advance?

High fences are a public declaration that you and your neighbor have different goals and objectives. That is a fact and not subject to much debate. One landowner wants to produce

SPRING CREEK OUTDOORS
WILDLIFE BIOLOGY

something that is not easily or readily available and so additional control is needed to best manage the investment of time, energy, expense and results—business 101 stuff here, nothing new at all. High fenced deer ranches also bring a premium on the real estate market these days, especially compared to low fenced properties. Supply and demand, business 101. So we know unquestionably that culling behind a high fence yields results or it wouldn't be so popular or in such high demand, so that ship has long since sailed.

But research has shown that culling won't alter the genetics of low fenced deer herds and I sort of disagree. Remember the small print stuff? If you culled bucks only and only bucks, I would agree with the results that you may not live long enough to see measurable results. But if your acreage is large enough, or your neighbors participate too in a cooperative arrangement, AND you cull both sexes, then results have proven research wrong. Culling means BOTH sexes, not exclusively bucks. You must manage the other 50% of the genetics or you will never get anywhere doing things with half effort.

I have both high and low fenced client ranches, in Mexico and in Texas, that cull every single black feral hog they ever find yet leave the spotted or colored ones alone. After a few years, it is rare to find a solid black hog on their property. Regarding deer, I have many low fenced ranches on both sides of the Rio Grande that cull hard on both sexes and raise far above average animals. Culling is about intensity, time and desired results. For example, if your deer herd is comprised primarily of typical eight point bucks and your goals are to raise typical twelve point frames with drop tines, well, you might want to look at another piece of property. But if you want to go from eight points to ten points or create longer brow tines or even wider spreads, then you CAN get there if you are willing to make the required sacrifices over time. It is not easy, it is not quick but I am here to testify to you that it can be done under some circumstances and it has been done many times before.

So don't give up, don't give in and don't get down. You CAN create a better deer herd by shooting with and without a tall fence. It just takes time.

What Happens to Deer in a Drought?

As you have no-doubt noticed by now, 2022 has been an especially hard year for the Texas hill country. At the time of this writing, the US Drought Monitor lists the entirety of central Texas as either in "D3- extreme drought" or "D4- exceptional drought" conditions. In most places, this dry spell is subjecting habitat to conditions rivaling those during the infamous 2011 drought that wreaked havoc across the state. We at Spring Creek Outdoors are commonly asked during these seasons about what happens to wildlife during a drought, and what a land manager can do to help them. Here are some of the effects that the conditions have on your animals, and some guidelines for how to mitigate them as

much as possible.

The most immediate consequence of reduced rainfall is that plants reduce or completely halt new growth. Prolonged dry spells will cause plants to go dormant or even die, depriving deer and other animals of quality food, valuable cover, and moisture. Deer are browsers, meaning they feed primarily on the leaves and fruits of woody plants and the soft shoots of forbs. In periods of reduced rainfall forbs and browse are much less available, so deer must resort to eating less palatable and less nutritious foods. This lack of nutrition causes reduced body and antler size in bucks, because developing a robust set of antlers requires a surplus of dietary nutrients. In does, malnutrition results in them having fewer fawns, smaller fawns, and a degradation in their own body condition. Growing a fetus requires a lot of nutrition, and if conditions are poor enough a doe's body will abort the fetus in order to conserve resources. So in a Spring or early Summer drought, does that were successfully bred in the previous rut may never give birth at all. If they do give birth though, the lack of quality forage leads to reduced fawn birth weight, reduced milk production, and increased predation of fawns. For the first several weeks of life, a fawn must stay hidden in order to survive. Drought, especially when combined with overgrazing, results in reduced ground cover and makes fawns much more susceptible to predation. In severe cases of a too-low birthrate, too many predators, and too little ground cover, a property may not produce a single surviving fawn in a season. Many ranches had very few or no mature bucks in 2016-2018 because few or none survived infancy in 2011!

So, what to do about it? Consistent supplemental food and water are two obvious answers, but what exactly does this mean? Corn is an attractant, not a supplemental food because it offers very little actual nutrition to deer. Quality pelleted protein feed, cottonseed, soybeans, and minerals are all useful supplements that can help get your deer through rough seasons. Consistency is key, both in keeping the feeders full and consistently providing the same type of feed so as not to disturb deer's sensitive rumens and cause illness. Switching up the type or brand of feed, or even abruptly switching 20% protein for 16% protein feed can cause an upset to the digestive tract, resulting in severe diarrhea and dehydration.

During wet seasons deer can metabolize much of their needed water from the browse that they eat, but during dry seasons they may have to drink several times throughout the day. Lactating mothers especially have a high need for water, and rarely stray very far from reliable watering holes. Poor distribution of water can prevent deer from fully utilizing all the space and resources available to them, because they must stay near water. As a rule of thumb, one water source per square mile (640 acres) is a bare minimum to support a healthy deer population. A water source doesn't have to be large to support wildlife, but it must be consistent. Rainwater

SPRING CREEK OUTDOORS
WILDLIFE BIOLOGY

guzzlers, small troughs, drip-pipes, and small springs or seeps can make an enormous difference for wildlife.
A common mistake that is made during dry hunting seasons is to reduce the harvest of deer, for fear of removing too many and harming the population. In reality however, since there are fewer resources to go around, reducing the number of mouths to feed accordingly will result in a healthier ecosystem and deer population. A limited amount of food and water will be of much more use concentrated in 10 deer, than it will be when divided between 20 deer. Aggressively harvesting unproductive does and old or poor-quality bucks is good practice on any year, but during a drought it's essential to maintain the health of the entire deer herd. Just like a rancher will sell off cows to protect his pasture from damage, a wildlife manager must reduce the number of animals that are competing for resources.

Pond Planning for Next Year

With the heat of the summer behind us, the focus usually shifts to doves and deer. Game cameras, feeders, surveys and food plots are all on our mind. Wildlife management is all about planning for the future, and fisheries management is no different. If we plan ahead for next year, we can save time, money and effort.

If you haven't been blessed by the recent rains, now is the time to think about cleaning out or deepening your pond. Not only will this hold more water when the rains do come, but removing the muck and silt from the bottom will affect water quality and overall pond health as well. The buildup of organic material at the bottom of ponds contributes to increased vegetation loads in ponds, which can be detrimental to fishing, as well as the safety of fish overall. This is also a good time to consider building a dock if your water levels are low.

Another thing to address in the fall is cattails. A small amount of these in a pond can be beneficial for small fish to hide from predators, and as nesting cover for waterfowl species, but cattails can quickly get out of control. In just a few years' time cattails can cover all areas of a pond that are less than three feet deep, which can be a lot of the pond if the water level falls throughout the year. Fortunately, if you catch the problem early cattails are fairly easy to treat. If you are already using heavy equipment to clean the pond, consider digging the shallow areas down to at least

three feet to remove any cattail rhizomes (essentially the underground horizontal growth that contributes to the fast spreading of the plant), and to prevent the plants from getting reestablished. If you are not using equipment, the next best solution is herbicides. There are several aquatic herbicides labeled for the treatment of cattails, but the most readily found is glyphosate. A simple mixture of glyphosate and a nonionic surfactant sprayed in the late summer and early fall is very effective as the plants are storing nutrients for the winter at this time and readily uptake the herbicide.

If your pond is in good shape in regards to water levels and plant life, you also might consider culling some predators, either bass, catfish or both. Healthy ponds rarely run out of predators, it's the food base that typically struggles to keep up. The number of fish to be removed will vary from pond to pond, but is typically ten to twenty-five pounds per acre. If your bass all look skinny, keep more. If your bass all look fat, keep fewer, and be sure to keep the skinny looking fish if possible. Once you have removed some predators, adding more baitfish will jump start the pond for next year and doing so in the fall boosts their survival rate as predators feed less aggressively during the winter. Adding bluegill and redear sunfish this fall will allow the baitfish to gain some size and be ready to breed next spring. If you have specific questions about your pond, give us a shout and we'll be happy to give you more advice.

Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease

With the current state of the world, mentioning a disease can get a wide range of reactions. Some people immediately cringe and some roll their eyes. Misinformation runs rampant at times, so this article aims to clear up a few things with a disease that effects deer.

Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease, or EHD, often gets mixed up with Chronic Wasting Disease in conversation but the two diseases are quite different. EHD is fairly common in the south, and tends to spike every few years, much like Anthrax does in Southwest Texas. Typically referred to broadly as Hemorrhagic Disease, this covers EHD and blue tongue (BT), which are very similar in symptoms. These diseases are spread by the bite of a small flying insect called a midge. These midges are smaller than house flies and mosquitos, and concentrate around water. The midge lays its eggs in mud, which is the main reason why we see higher mortality

SPRING CREEK OUTDOORS
WILDLIFE BIOLOGY

from this disease in times of drought. When water is plentiful across the landscape animals are not forced to concentrate and compete for resources.

Even with the recent rains we have been blessed with there is still significant loss across the hill country this year. From the helicopter we are seeing losses varying from minimal up to 25 percent. Once infected symptoms generally show up within a week, these include loss of appetite, lethargy, fever which pushes them to water, swelling forward of the shoulders and loss of fear. Before hunting season starts, we get pictures every week of deer floating in ponds or dead on the shore, and EHD is often the culprit.

EHD is not always fatal, some deer do manage to survive it. Hoof shedding or deformation is common, as is antler deformities in bucks. Scaring on the roof of the mouth is also a known sign of a deer that made it through the illness.

EHD is not transmissible to humans, either from the midges or from consuming deer that have been infected. The best way to minimize the effects of this disease on your property is to spread out water in times of drought, ideally in the form of water troughs instead of pumping water on the ground creating more mud. If you have questions about EHD or other wildlife diseases, we would be glad to talk to you about your specific situation.

Deer Warts

Deer warts, or more technically referred to a cutaneous fibromas, are not uncommon in Texas whitetails. In fact, I see multiple impacted deer throughout all regions of the state during my fall travels. I get countless phone calls and photos sent to me about them from concerned hunters so here are the facts about “deer warts” that you need to know:

• The dark, hairless tumors attach only to the skin and do not affect the meat so you can safely consume the meat without fear.
• The wart is actually caused by a papilloma virus and can be spread from deer to deer by either physical contact or even biting insects.
• It will not spread to humans and this particular virus is different than the ones you see on domestic livestock. Deer cannot spread it to livestock or livestock spread it to deer.
• Usually the warts are found in the front half of the body (head, neck, shoulders) but they can also be located on lower legs and rump on rare occasion.
• As the warts grow, they may fall off or be knocked off by the brush. The attached location may bleed temporarily but will quickly heal and hair will once again be replaced. I have pulled many tumors off of both live and dead deer with a twist and a tug so try it next time you have the opportunity.
• Does, fawns and yearlings tend to have more fibromas because of increased physical contact and interactions but they may occur on either sex and on any aged deer.
• Sometimes the fibromas remain on the deer year around and sometimes they do not.

SPRING CREEK OUTDOORS
WILDLIFE BIOLOGY

Some hunters elect to harvest a deer with fibromas in hopes of preventing it from spreading throughout the herd. The jury is still out as to whether this actually works or not so I would exercise caution to this approach. The fibroma cycle does appear to ebb and flow in certain herds so I would not recommend harvesting them for that sole reason. Again, the meat is unaffected so if you harvest a deer with "warts", proceed to the skinning rack and process the carcass as usual.

Special Permit Deadlines and Reminders

Trap, Transport and Process Permit (TTP)- TTP applications must be submitted thirty (30) days prior to planned activities and capture may occur anytime between October 1 and March 31.

Trap, Transport, and Transplant Permit (TTT)- As of today, the TTT Permit is still unable to be used due to concerns about the spread of Chronic Wasting Disease. Until such time that the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission and TPWD Wildlife Division Leadership can come to an agreement as to how to reactivate the permit in a way that is deemed safe by Staff and acceptable to landowners, it will remain off the table as a habitat and population management tool for landowners. We will keep you updated on changes to this in future newsletters.

NOTE
As many of you that utilize the above permits are aware, there are deadlines beyond what is set by TPWD that must be adhered to for these captures to take place when they involve helicopters. We book helicopter surveys, DMP captures and other dates with helicopters up to 1 YEAR AHEAD OF TIME. If you have plans or need for a helicopter contact us as soon as you can for the best odds of securing one of the few remaining dates we have left available.

LET US HEAR FROM YOU!

As always, you can reach us through the contact form on our newly updated website and at our office phone number, (325) 623-5464. With 3 biologists on staff now, there is also a better chance of catching us on the road.

Macy Ledbetter lives in San Saba and can be reached at (361) 449-6376
Matt Nuernberg lives in Poth and can be reached at (210) 324-8904
Wade Ledbetter lives in Mason and can be reached at (361) 449-6702