

Numbers look good for deer population

By **Kevin Bottrell**

*Colby Free Press
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The deer population in northwest Kansas looks good this year, said Lloyd Fox, big-game program coordinator for the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks.

Fox said the department is just starting its fall survey, but he was in Management Unit 1 – which includes Sherman, Thomas, Sheridan, Norton, Graham, Decatur, Rawlins and Cheyenne counties north of I-70 – in early October and saw more deer than last year.

Harvest numbers are holding strong, he said, and hunter interest is increasing in the unit.

“There’s lots of interest,” he said. “A lot of people want to hunt out there.”

The department’s 2010 Hunting Atlas lists western Kansas as the primary range for mule deer. Few, if any, are found east of Russell.

Western Kansas has a lower population of whitetail deer than the more heavily forested eastern areas. The atlas lists the area from Salina east and some south central areas as the primary range, with the western part of the state as “few to fair.” However, as more and more areas are turned into urban sprawl, more land becomes off-limits to hunters. In western Kansas, more landowners take advantage of private hunting agreements with the department.

IMB Outfitters, a guided hunting firm based in Missouri that specializes in deer, ranks Kansas deer hunting this year at an 8 out of 10.

The Wildlife and Parks gets high marks in its deer management efforts, even while dealing with a state budget crisis. In its 2010 whitetail report, the Quality Deer Management Association, a no-profit conservation group, rated Kansas deer management as the most successful in the Midwest.

“Kansas is well known for its big bucks, and now it can also be recognized as a state with an overall successful deer management program,” the report said.

Kansas led the other Midwest states in the percentage of bucks harvested that were 1 1/2 and bucks more than 3 1/2 years old. The report said that 90 percent of Kansas’ wildlife management units have met population goals and 10 percent have exceeded them, the highest

percentage in the country. Units 1 and 2 cover northwest Kansas.

The estimated harvest in 2008 was 41,462 antlered deer and 39,028 antlerless deer, both an increase of several thousand over 2007. Kansas is also reporting increases in hunting-licenses sales.

But despite promising numbers, western Kansas also has to deal with the increasing problem of Chronic Wasting Disease. In March of this year, the department announced that 10 deer in northwest Kansas had tested positive for the disease and another “presumptive positive” case was awaiting confirmation. The confirmed positives were deer killed by hunters in Sheridan, Rawlins, Graham, Logan and Thomas counties. The department said several other animals seen in Sheridan and Thomas counties were exhibiting symptoms. The presumptive positive case was found in Decatur County.

These cases represent an increase in the number of infected animals in Kansas. Until now, the disease has mostly affected Utah, New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, Wisconsin and Illinois as well as some areas in Canada. The first case in Kansas was discovered in Harper county in 2001, and cases have increased since.

The disease, which is similar to bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or mad cow disease, is fatal for deer. It causes small holes to develop in the brain. Symptoms include listlessness, decreased interaction with other animals, weight loss, walking in repetitive patterns and lack of response to humans.

Infected animals may not show symptoms for two years or more, but still can transmit the disease. According to the department, there is no evidence that the disease affects humans or can be transmitted to livestock, however several similar diseases do affect humans and the department advises hunters not to eat any meat from an infected animal.

Fox said all the department can do for now is monitor the disease. The department tests animals for the disease each year; 2,702 animals were tested last year, including elk, mule deer and whitetail deer.

Deer archery and early firearm seasons are active now. The regular firearm season begins Dec. 1.



A buck stops to take a long drink from a pond.

— File photo

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Deer cause accidents year round

About 1.6 million motor vehicle crashes are caused by deer each year, with the numbers spiking in October through December due to the mating season.

The Insurance Information Institute says these collisions make up over \$3.6 billion in vehicle damage per year, with each incident averaging \$3,000.

"It is essential that drivers stay focused and alert when driving in densely populated deer areas," said Jim Hanni, executive vice president of public and government affairs at the American Automobile Association.

Most damage from deer collisions occurs in the front or on the side of a car. If involved in a crash, agents encourage drivers to first call the police for help, then to make note of the date, time, street name and take pictures to help document the incident.

While driving this fall, keep the following tips in mind to stay safe on roadways:

- Scan the road and shoulders ahead of you. Looking ahead helps provide enough reaction time to avoid or lessen the impact of a collision. Remember that deer often move in groups, so where there is one, there usually are more.

- Use high-beam headlights if there is no on-coming traffic. Deer may be spotted in time to slow down, move over or beep to scare the deer away from the road.

- If a collision is unavoidable, press the brakes firmly and remain in your lane. Swerving to avoid a deer can often cause a more serious crash, making the driver lose control or even roll the car.

- Always wear a seat belt and keep awake, alert and sober.



Four does meandered through a corn field, after harvest, on the edge of Sappa Park. The park which is open for walk-in hunting and other outdoor activities is home to a variety of wildlife. — Photo by Kim Davis/The Oberlin Herald

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