

# Quality Deer Management

## Introduction

The aim of Quality Deer Management (QDM) is to promote a healthy deer population in balance with the habitat in which the deer reside. This usually equates to deer herds being kept at lower densities than under traditional management practices, thus reducing any potential damage caused by deer. QDM is total herd management involving the management of males, females, and fawns, habitat, hunters and hunting experiences. The reasons for adopting the principles of QDM vary between properties, and from hunter to hunter.

QDM originated in the United States in the 1980's and was the brainchild of Murphy Rae and Al Brothers. These people were concerned about the sustainable management of White-tail deer in Texas, and called their new management regime Quality Deer Management. Since those early days, QDM has been applied to other species of deer outside of the United States.

The core principles of QDM involve the voluntary restraint in the harvesting of young males, combined with an increased harvest of female (or antlerless) deer and good record keeping. A common misconception under QDM is that fewer deer will be harvested. Initially, the restraint in harvesting young, immature males will result in fewer males being taken whilst the harvest of antlerless deer will exceed the usual annual tally.

If hunting pressure is maintained, the reduction in deer density via increases in antlerless deer harvest (where necessary) and restraint in harvesting immature males should benefit the overall condition of the herd. Further benefits include increases in body weights, antler size and reproductive rates. Having mature males available for breeding will reduce the stress placed on immature males that may have had this important role in the past. A more defined breeding season (or rut) and hence tighter fawning period, a more balanced sex ratio and ultimately, a healthier herd are all positive outcomes of QDM.

## The Tasmanian experience

In Tasmania, many landowners adopt QDM with the aim of managing deer populations within the carry capacity of their properties or region. They also utilise the deer as a resource to encourage hunters to control other wildlife such as Bennett's wallaby, Tasmanian Pademelons (rufous wallaby) and Brushtail possum on the property, in return for deer hunting rights.

Many hunters encourage and adopt QDM with the objective of increasing antler size. QDM delivers larger males, but only when restraint on harvesting immature males occurs. This harvest restraint simply allows more males to reach maturity. When harvest restraint is coupled with a lowering of deer density, an improvement to habitat and increased food resources, the potential antler size is optimised. However, the ultimate antler size can vary greatly from region to region due to biological factors, land use, soil fertility, seasonal conditions and a myriad of other

factors. From both a landowner and hunter perspective, caution must be exercised to ensure that expectations are realistic and clearly communicated.

QDM is not for everyone and every situation. Even when small land parcels are well managed, if they are surrounded by heavily hunted areas QDM will sometimes fail. Poor hunter leadership is counter productive, because it can result in good intentions being abandoned and previous management practices being continued. Patience is a vital component of QDM. The period between implementation of QDM and noticeable results often differentiates between the committed and the half hearted. A plan may require the commitment of 5 years or more before the full benefits result. This time frame is often extended even further when landowners and hunters fail to harvest adequate numbers of antlerless deer, continue to harvest immature males and undermine the importance of good record keeping. Realistic expectations are vital and need to be set with the local deer herd in mind!

### **A successful case study**

#### **Is QDM for you?**

- Do you have enough acreage to manage the deer population on your land or the land where you hunt without being severely affected by hunting pressure on neighbouring properties? If not, will these neighbouring properties join you?
- Is the habitat on your property, or the property where you hunt good enough to produce and maintain an appropriate quota of deer at a healthy level?
- Do the deer hunting rules and regulations in your state allow you enough flexibility to manage your herd? Does your state have a deer management assistance program to encourage and help with sound deer management and facilitate adequate annual antlerless harvest quotas?
- Do you and your fellow hunters have realistic expectations regarding a quality deer management program?

If you answered yes to many of these questions then QDM may be for you.

If you would like to know more about QDM, or have any questions, please contact an Officer from the Game Management Unit or email [GameEnquiries@dpipwe.tas.gov.au](mailto:GameEnquiries@dpipwe.tas.gov.au)