

How to Visually Age Whitetail Bucks

Deer hunting season has begun! Alright hunters, who wants to be able to look at a buck and tell how old it is? There are ways to examine the jaw bones and wearing on the teeth but that is a blog for the future. For now, here is the step by steps on how to look at a deer in the field and tell pretty close how old it is.

The following information is courtesy of the QDMA and pictures are from University of Missouri Extension

1.5 Years Old:



At 1.5 years old, the legs seem to be long in relation to the rest of the body and there is little muscle definition in the chest. During the rut you should see light swelling in the neck. The antler spread will almost always be inside the ears when they are alert. Bucks at this age will have a thin waist and the skin will be tight on the face. There may be slight staining in their tarsal glands during the rut. The tarsal gland is a tuft of hair just inside the back knee.

2.5 Years Old:



At 2.5 years old, the legs still seem long for the body and they still have a sleek body and tight waste. There will be slightly more swelling in the neck during the rut and they will have more mass in the chest. The antlers are now at 25-50% of maximum growth potential and are as wide if not slightly past the spread of the ears. There will probably be moderate staining on the tarsal glands during the rut.

3.5 Years Old:



At 3.5 years of age, the buck now looks a lot different. It will now have a deep, heavy chest. There is more muscle mass in the shoulders but still a thin waist and not much mass in the back end. During the rut there will be a lot of swelling in the neck. The antlers are now 50-75% of full growth potential and you may start seeing drop tines. Antlers are generally as wide as or wider than the ears. There will now be a lot of staining in the tarsal glands.

4.5 Years Old:



At 4.5 years of age, the deer seems to be a whole new animal. The stomach, chest and neck are now fully developed

and the neck will get very large during the rut. The waist has now dropped down even with the chest and it will have a heavy front end. At this point, the legs now begin to look too small for the body due to the body filling in and developing down. The antlers are now at 75-90% of their full growth potential. There is now a lot of staining in the tarsal gland that may extend down below the gland.

5-7 Years old: Few bucks exceed 5 years of age in the wild



At 5 years of age the buck is now fully mature and is starting to get a pot belly and the waist is even with the chest. The body mass gives them a more rounded appearance and they can have the shape of a small cow. The tarsal glands are now heavily stained with the stains reaching far below the glands. There will be heavy swelling in the neck during the rut.

8.5 Years and Older: Very few free ranging bucks make it to this old

This is considered the post-mature age category. The buck is passed its prime and is regressing in body and antler. The skin becomes loose on the face and body and the shoulder and hip bones become pointed giving the buck an overall weathered appearance. The antlers may now gain abnormalities such as abnormal points or wavy/curvy tines.