

# ***Maryland's Whitetail Deer Hunting: Numbers in the Game***

*By E. W. Grimes, Director/President, Maryland State Chapter of the Quality Deer Management Association*



***A Series of Articles Written in an Effort to Share Concerns, Successes and Challenges that are Shaping the Future of Whitetail Deer Hunting in Maryland.***

## **Introduction**

The Maryland Quality Deer Management Association (MD QDMA) is launching this series in an effort to share what we have learned about the successes, concerns, threats and challenges that are shaping the future of whitetail deer hunting in Maryland by taking a look into past deer harvest trends and recognizing future projections. We dug into the numbers and percentages of several categories; *Antlered Buck Harvest, Age Structure of Buck Harvest and Antlerless Harvest by regions and by counties*. We looked at Management Strategies, Antlered Buck Management and Population Management on both private and public lands. We will be looking at whole picture state-wide and we will break our series into regions. While we do compare the data we have to some national data, our goal is to explain how it's affecting your hunting area. Sources and references include facts from QDMA's *Whitetail Report, Maryland's Annual Deer Report(s)*, QDM Co-op harvest data and collected views and opinions from Maryland deer hunters (deer managers).

## **Part: I - The North Central area of Region B.**

I have the most history in this area because I started hunting deer here at the ripe age of 13 in 1968. However, I'm only crunching the numbers of the past seven years. Region B in part, is Baltimore, Carroll, Frederick and Howard Counties.

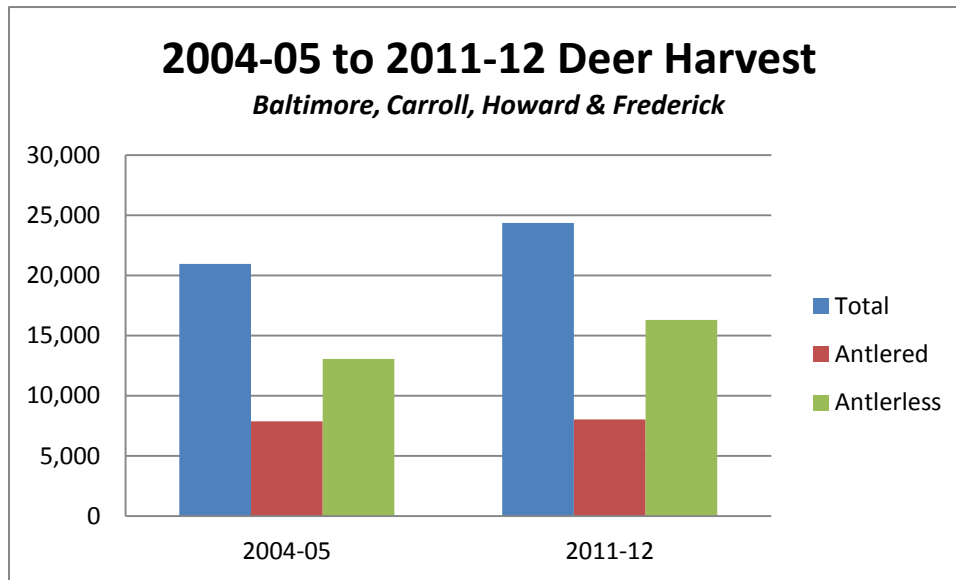
In the 2004-05 Hunting season the numbers recorded were:

- Baltimore County - Grand total of 5,663 deer checked in; 2,020 antlered and 3,643 antlerless.
- Carroll County - Grand total was 4,932; 2,014 antlered and 2,918 antlerless.
- Frederick County - Grand total was 7,492; 2,959 antlered and 4,533 antlerless.
- Howard County - Grand total was 2,858; 891 antlered and 1,967 antlerless.

In the 2004-05 season, these 4 Counties harvested a total of 20,945 deer checked-in, 7,884 (37.65%) antlered and 13,061 (62.35%) antlerless. That was then.

Comparing the same counties in the 2011-12 seasons, (the 2012-13 *Annual Deer Report* by Maryland DNR has not yet been released) we find a 24,366 total check-in harvest. This is an increase of 16.34% with an antlered deer increase of 2% and a 24.9% antlerless deer increase from 2004-05 to 2011-12.

Head spinning? Charts make it easier to see changes.



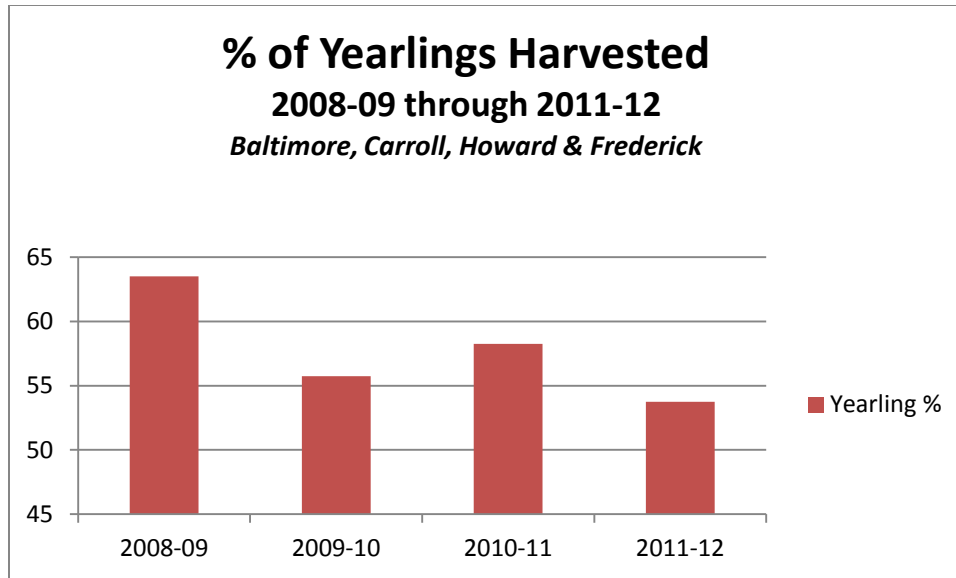
Here is the short version. The total harvest increased little over 15%. Antlered harvest stayed nearly the same while the antlerless harvest jumped up 25% in 7 hunting seasons.

**Yearling Bucks** - The percentage of yearling bucks in the antlered harvest in 2004-05 was 61.25%. In 2011-12, the yearling harvest dropped down to 53.75%. That's an 8.5% decrease in these counties.

The 2011 national percent of yearling bucks in the antlered harvest was 39%. The Maryland yearling harvest was 57% state-wide. Region B, in which these counties are part, (not including Washington County) the average was 52.8%.

If you add Washington's 76% yearling harvest, the state average is 53.9%. Without Washington County, this is 13.8% higher than the national average of yearling bucks harvested. With Washington County, that kicks up to 14.9% higher than the national average. At this rate, these counties should be near the national yearling percentage in about 10 years.





**Early harvest numbers in the 2012-13 season indicated an average 9.6% drop in the total harvest from the 2011-12 season (Antlered and Antlerless percentages nearly identical).** Yearling percentages are not released yet for these 4 counties. However, I don't expect any major changes in yearling percentages. Keep in mind, Maryland changed the ANTLERED (buck) harvest limits for the 2012-13 season.

*“The **bag limit for ANTLERED white-tailed deer** has been changed. The new bag limit is 3 antlered deer, 1 per weapon season, STATEWIDE (Deer Management Regions A and B). One bonus antlered deer may be taken during one weapon season in REGION B ONLY. A hunter must first purchase a Bonus Antlered Deer Stamp and take two antlerless deer during any combination of the weapon seasons in Region B before taking a bonus buck.”*

Because I still live, work and hunt (manage deer) in these counties, I talk with farmers, hunters and others. Word on the street tends to indicate that deer numbers are down where hunting is permitted. In areas that are limited or don't allow hunting, the numbers of deer are extremely high.

On small properties, managed under the QDM principles, we have already been engaged in (or have recently started) limiting adult doe harvest due to surrounding properties that are hunted, harvesting any deer (if it's brown, it's down). On larger tracts of QDM properties and co-ops, adult does are harvested as needed - some with use of Deer Management Permits (DMPs), sometimes referred to as “crop damage” permits. Fawns, young does, yearling and immature bucks are generally not harvested although some of these are occasionally taken.

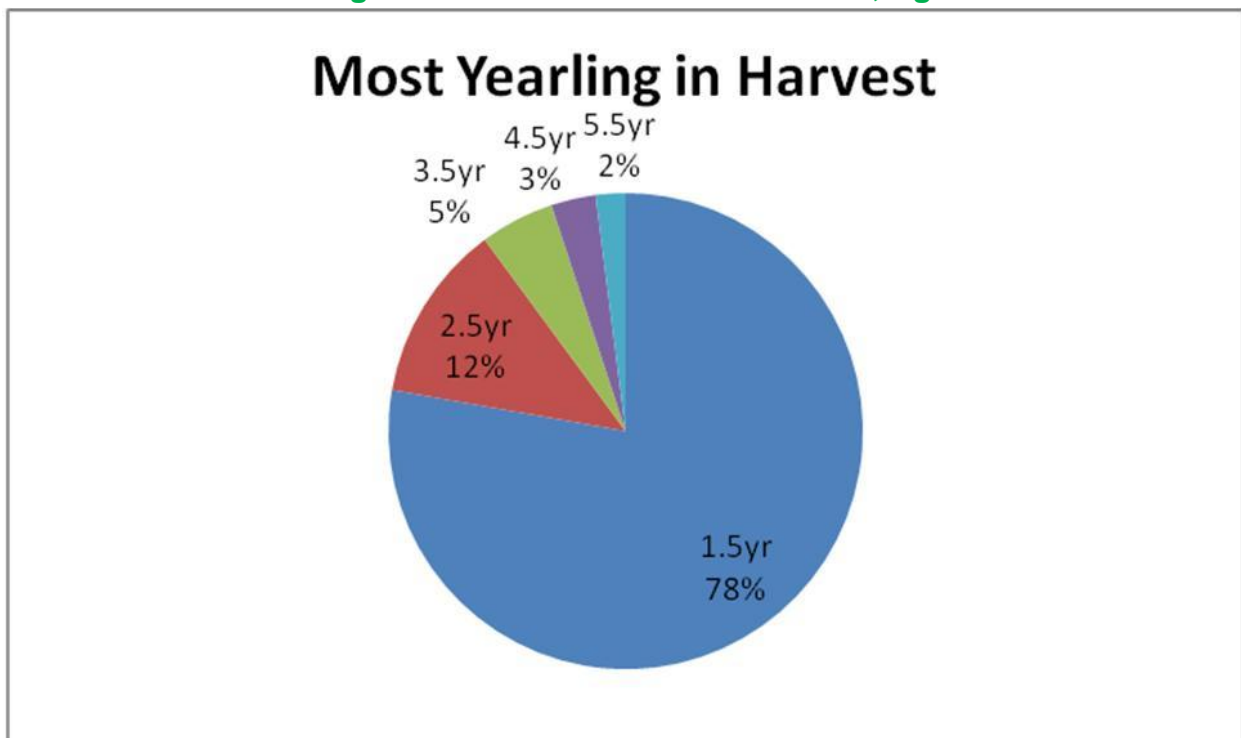
I'll be the first to say "It's not fair to compare QDM managed properties to public or private properties where deer are harvested as per the DNR regulations." The reason is simple: QDM has goals that are specific and have measureable results.

While there have been some small changes in the yearling harvest percentage over 7 years with hunters practicing *voluntary* QDM efforts, liberal antlerless bag limits have stabilized deer populations where hunting is permitted. If voluntary yearling harvest percentages were in the mid-40s, then there would be no need to request any changes to the current regulations. Many hunters have helped by harvesting more does resulting in reduced population growth. However, many hunters are still holding out to shoot any buck. In some areas, regulations that include antler restrictions would have measureable results in protecting yearling bucks from harvest while increasing the harvest of more does to control population growth.

Let's face it; we all prefer to harvest antlered deer and the larger the antlers (the older the buck, the larger the antlers) the better. Knowing there are older bucks available to hunt, the more time will be spent hunting. To promote the growth of these older class bucks within the overall population, then does (female deer, not just antlerless deer) need to be harvested to balance the buck-to-doe ratio.

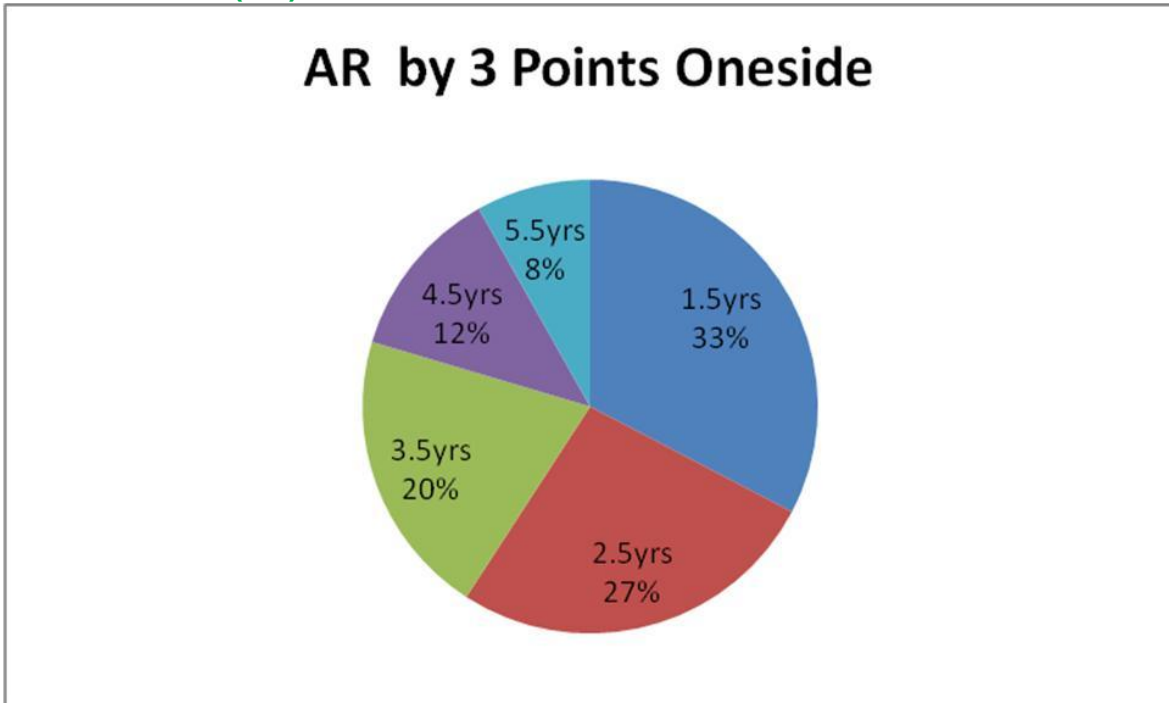
Would hunters spend more time afield and resources hunting in an area where most bucks are harvested as yearlings?

### Current Management – Harvested Antlered Deer, Age Structure



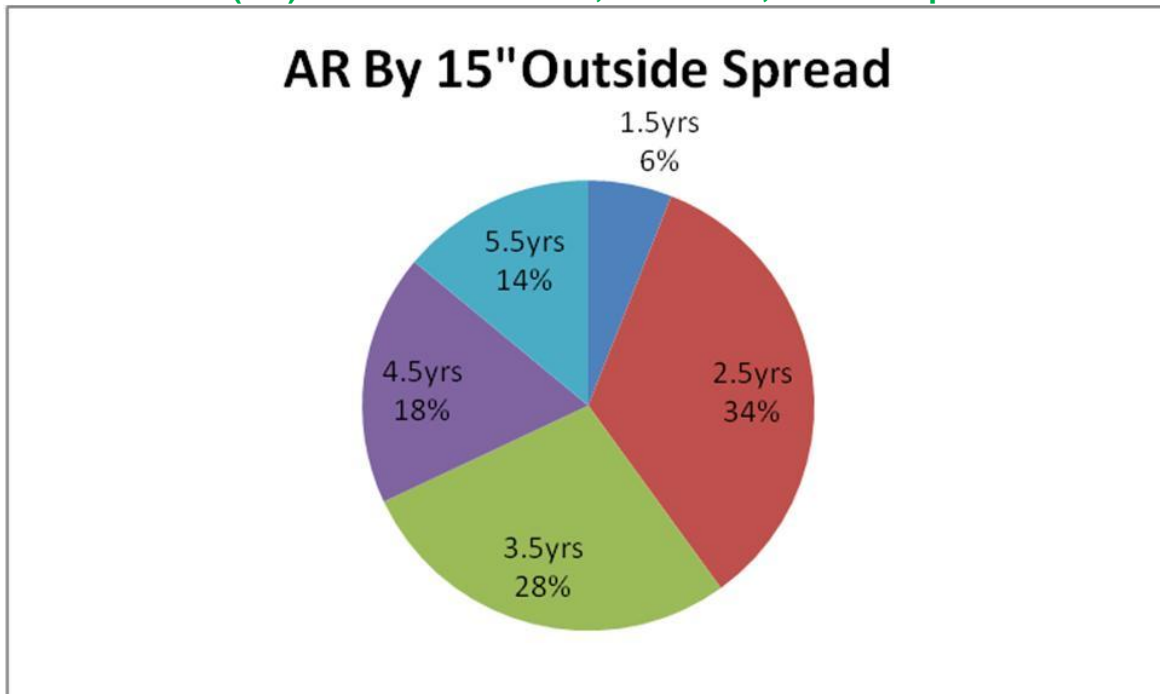
Or an area where there are older bucks available...

**Projected Potential Age Structure of Harvested Bucks with  
(AR) Antler Restrictions - 3 Points on One Side**



Or even better yet...

**Potential Age Structure of Harvested bucks with  
(AR) Antler Restrictions; 15-Inches, Outside Spread**



The effort is well worth the time to foster the use of regulated hunting for deer population management while maximizing recreational opportunities to manage the deer for the future!



It's my opinion that the full "quality deer management" model will accomplish the needed measurable results and ensure the future of a healthy whitetail deer population and our hunting heritage. Make no mistake it is NOT "Quality Deer Management" when any and all deer are harvested. Balancing the deer herd with habitat, balancing the adult sex ratio and age structure of bucks and does by protecting yearling bucks while harvesting mature female deer as needed to control the population is QDM. **Hunter recruitment and enthusiasm will continue to suffer if hunters are encouraged to harvest more deer without managing antlered deer for the future. Hunters are needed to manage the deer, regulations are necessary to keep hunters involved and enthusiastic in their roles as managers. The chance to harvest a mature buck is what keeps hunters in the field for more days.**

**Part II of this series will be Region A.**

**Part III, the Eastern Shore Counties.**

**Part VI, Southern Maryland.**

Respectfully,

Handwritten signature of E. W. Grimes

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Quality Deer Management Association