

Does QDM Affect the Timing of the RUT?

Written by E.W. Grimes, Director of the Maryland State Chapter QDMA

There are always many views from deer hunters on the timing of the rut. Deer hunters target this time of the year as this is when those older class bucks get love sick and are most visible during daylight hours. This past season seemed to have most Deer hunters/Managers talking about this somewhat more than other years. Many hunters have stated that they haven't seen as much rutting action (the deer woods exploding with bucks chasing and breeding does) while others are seeing normal (same as years past) rutting action while most of the time these conversations lead to conclusions with the question "what do you think the reason is?" In this article we are going to take a look into a few of the possible reasons "why" rut action seems to vary from area to area.

There has been much research into when whitetail deer breed. Members of QDMA (Quality Deer Management Association) have an edge with Quality Whitetails the journal provides feature articles increasing their knowledge of whitetail deer and their habitat. We know that the length of daylight triggers the whitetail breeding season. As hunters/managers, we start looking for "rutting signs" rubs and scrapes signs bucks display leading up to the rut. Kip's Korner article "The Modern Deer Hunter" Kip's Korner (June 2007) written by Kip Adams, a Certified Wildlife Biologist and Northern Director of Education and Outreach for the Quality Deer Management Association (QDMA) describes today's hunters having a lot of useable tools for making decisions related to hunting and managing their deer.

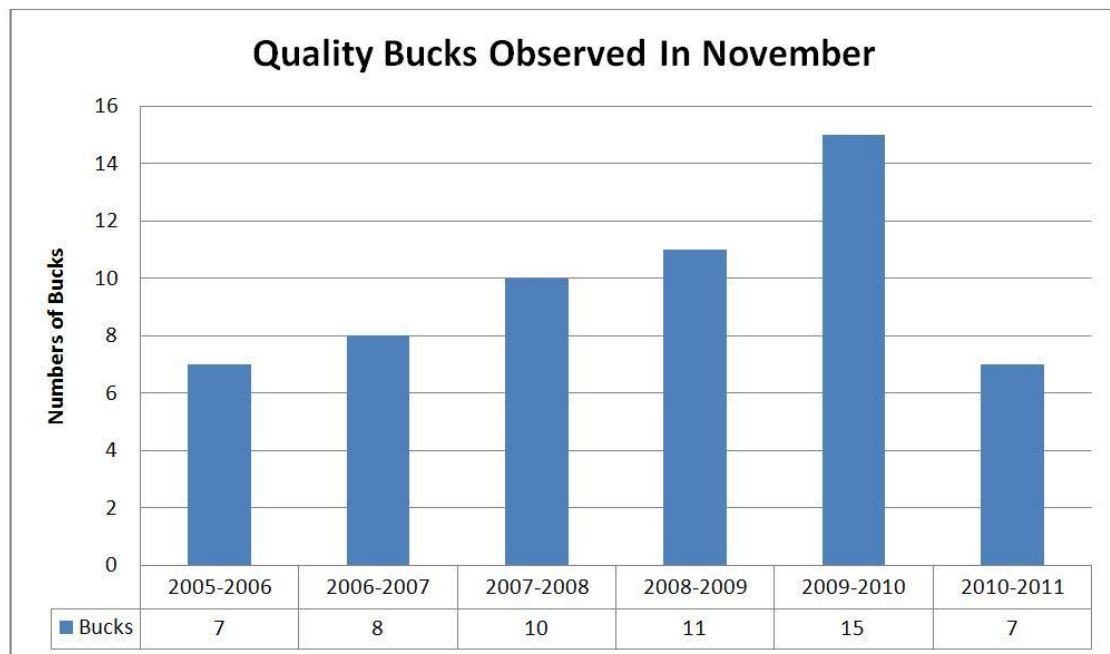


A look into "what the reasons and why rut action seems to vary and can QDM Management effect this timing?" Talking with QDMA members and other deer hunters, this statement comes up often "are we harvesting too many does". These are my views and how I come up with my conclusions.

- Harvesting too many does effects rutting action? QDM properties across our state and some Maryland Counties have QDM program in place to reduce deer population in needed areas. With over 10 years of doe management in some of these areas, all the managers/hunters said the same; where doe numbers have been reduced "Rutting action has

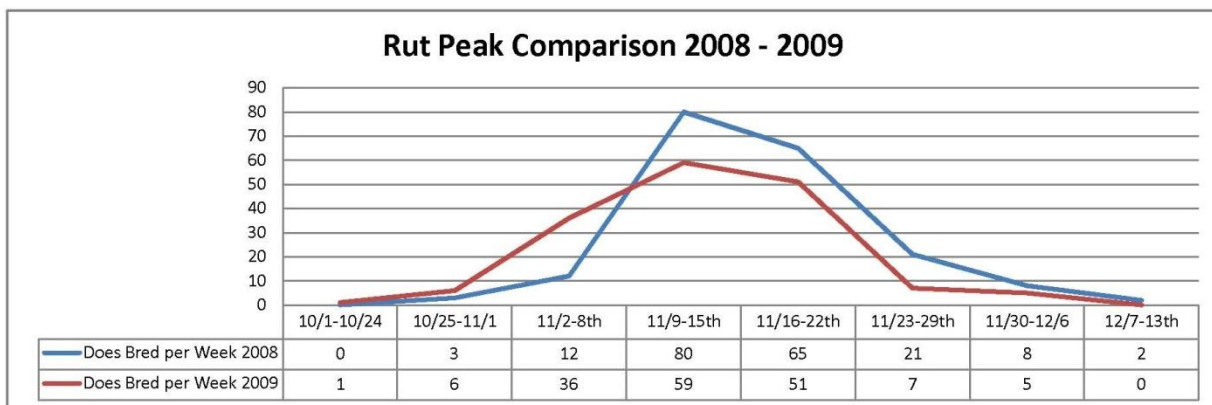
increased or hasn't changed" but many older class bucks have been seen with healthier head gear. As far as "timing of rut action" no change from year to year. It should be noted that less does are being breed in the second and third rut. No surprise here, knowing that length of daylight triggers breeding, and with more male deer in managed herds in these areas where does are targeted to harvest and young antlered bucks are protected. On private QDM managed lands targeting doe management for early or after breeding season will help in managing hunter pressure. Nanny Does are targeted for doe management and antlered deer are limited to age. Doe management is an important part of deer management and should NOT be overlooked.

- Hunter's Observations adversely will vary with the amount of time in the stand. Using my Property Deer Observation Log Book and Deer Harvest Log (available from the QDMA's Shed Product Store). Logging in over 300+ hours per year in the stand in 3 different counties for the past 5 years, I have recorded several Quality Bucks which are bucks that are 2.5 years or older using QDMA's 15" outside antler spread rule. Also I recorded some other bucks less than 15" and while most were yearlings; some 2.5 year olds were documented less than 15". Also Doe's, Fawns and Unknown were counted along with location, AM & PM hours in stand and other notes. The second and third weeks of November having the most sightings.



"Note: The difference in 2010-2011 was due to more stand time spent on one property instead of near equal time in the other areas as previous years."

- Deer Cameras or trail cameras have become a year round deer managers/hunters tool. Trail Camera location and set-up tips how to capturing more photos of mature bucks and much more. "Deer Camera's, The Science of Scouting" a NEW publication from QDMA has it all and a must have for deer camera users. I've been putting trails cameras to work ever since they have been around. When bucks start to rub and place scrapes relocating your camera to these locations can provide useable intelligence. Not only what bucks are in the area but most of the time overlooked does will start visiting scrapes more often as they go into estrous. As does start going into estrous, bucks that were visiting scrape tend to not visit as much and other never seen before bucks may start being seen. Making notes of this change can show a pattern and indicate the timing of rut activity.
- QDM Co-ops are by far the best way to collect and share information; forming QDM Cooperatives provide the opportunity to better share information while managing the density, age structure, sex ratio and distribution of your local deer herd. QDMA Branches and Co-ops take part in the Maryland State Chapters QDMA ongoing Fetus Study. Samples collected from across Maryland are providing local breeding information. Only 2 years of collecting is a good start, more years are needed to chart trends in rutting activities.

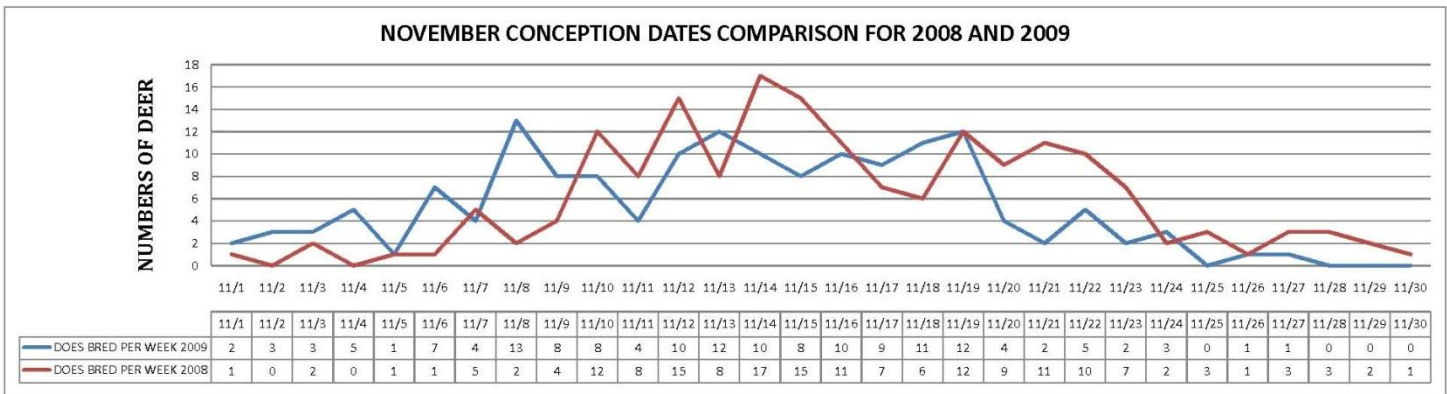


Conclusion;

Does QDM management have any effect on the timing of the rut? We know of several research projects have shown that QDM programs can affect the timing by drastically "tightening" the breeding period and even shifting it a little earlier in the year. This is most likely caused by a more balanced sex ratio so more does are being bred in their first estrous, and a more balanced age

structure with older bucks start showing breeding behaviors much sooner than younger bucks. These factors have been seen more in southern herds. As QDM management expands in our area, with more bucks in older age classes, hunters are more likely to see more bucks looking for hot does. My observations documented as the effect of QDM management progressed (Reference Observation Chart above) quality bucks were seen more. Because of the explosion of QDMA memberships and members reading articles in Quality Whitetails (by monthly journal of QDMA) I would expect to hear more conversation about rutting activities more deer hunters are paying more attention to their deer in the areas they hunt/manage and logging more time in the stand.

When is the best time to be in the deer's woods? As for me "anytime" I can get out there I will. When looking at the "by the week" average chart from 2008 and 2009 fetus study, this gives an average yearly peak of breeding, however when we looked at November "by the day" we have a little different picture.



This chart concludes that does were being bred throughout the entire month of November. What this information tells me is "how we can possibly know when a doe from a particular area will go in to estrous?" If we put it all together we can improve our chances with averages by the week and by observation collections. Along with putting on my lucky QDMA hat and getting in the deer's woods as much as possible has worked for me.

Hunt hard in November and hunt safe.

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