

What do Biologists and Their Studies Say About How to Age Deer and Other Mammals?

In the Journal of Wildlife Management 64(2):441-449 Kenneth Hamlin and 4 other wildlife professionals from the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks concluded (based on a study of 53 known age mule deer / 21 known age whitetail by eruption-wear and 108 known age mule deer / 74 known age whitetail by cementum annuli) **"The accuracy provided by the cementum annuli method is necessary to determine whether various physical and population parameters change significantly with age of the animal.... Ages assigned by eruption-wear criteria were not reliable for comparing physical measurements and population parameters by age among populations.... Accuracy for a sample of known-age mandibles aged by eruption-wear criteria was 62.3% for mule deer, 42.9% for whitetails, and 36% for elk". "The accuracy for individual biologists ranged from 54.7-71.7% for mule deer and 23.8-66.7% for whitetail deer" "This aging was done by 4 biologists from Montana and 2 from Washington considered to be experienced in aging deer used eruption-wear to age these mandibles...". Cementum annuli aging yielded a 92.6% accuracy rate for mule deer (with no error over 1 year), 85.1% accuracy rate for whitetails (only 2 in error over 1 year) and 97.3% accuracy rate for elk.**

Ken Gee, a wildlife biologist at the 2,947 acre Noble Foundation Wildlife Unit (NFWU) said at the conclusion of a study he did in 1996 **"These results indicate that this widely used technique (sic eruption-wear) is very inaccurate for classifying adult deer into specific year age-classes on the NFWU....(it)only allows us to confidently place deer into three age classes: fawn, yearling, and adult."** The study was done using "34 practicing, established, well respected deer biologists from the southeastern U.S. that commonly use the technique (sic eruption-wear)."

Sooooooooo.....Are you ready now to take the guessing out of aging your deer?