

# TPWD Says Deer Hunting Prospects Looking Good

AUSTIN, Texas -- Hunters hoping for a shot at a quality deer during the 2008-09 deer season will need to get off the bench and into the game, suggest state wildlife biologists, as current range conditions indicate increased availability of native food sources.

The general deer hunting season opens statewide Nov. 1. This change in deer feeding patterns could also have an impact on opportunity around feeders during the Special Youth Season weekend Oct. 25-26. The youth-only season is available to licensed hunters ages 16 and under.

"It could be one of those years when it's not in the favor of somebody who doesn't like to leave the corn feeder," said Mitch Lockwood, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department white-tailed deer program leader. "We're getting reports, mainly from the Hill Country, that indicate another good acorn crop and it looks similar to what we had three years ago when the acorns fell in three stages, which should spread the drop over an extended period."

Rainfall across much of the state in August helped quench parched country and recent rains have generated new plant growth biologists



say should improve deer body condition heading into the season.

"It is amazing how quickly these deer can recover," said Lockwood, alluding to drought conditions that extended across much of the state during the first half of the year. "We're not seeing the impacts from the drought we did 20 years ago, no major die-offs, thanks mostly to current wildlife management practices."

Of course, nature also has a way of taking care of its own.

During the 2007-08 deer season, Texas hunters killed about 512,800

whitetails, the lowest harvest in a decade and down more than 90,000 from the previous season.

Lockwood attributes much of the harvest decline to extremely good habitat conditions, which meant deer did not need to travel much for food and water.

"The thing to look for this season is carryover from last year because harvest was down quite a bit," he noted. "Harvest numbers and better age structure should be up this year, especially in those counties where we have antler restrictions."

Here's what TPWD biologists

around the state are saying about this year's prospects in their areas:

## South Texas

You could have asked any of the TPWD wildlife biologists in South Texas back in March to predict what the fall hunting season would be like and most, if not all, would have given a marginal to fair outlook.

"From the 2007 Labor Day Weekend through April 20, 2008 we received barely an inch of rain," said Jimmy Rutledge of the Carrizo Springs area. "While the entire South Texas region experienced this extended dry spell, the western portion was hardest hit by the drought."

The effects were felt well into mid spring as many species of brush with shallow root systems, such as granjeno and hogplum were lying dormant in need of relief. Conditions such as this do not bode well for antler development or fawn production in white-tailed deer. Looking at recent conditions, however, it would be difficult to see any signs of drought conditions from this past winter and early spring. Hurricane Dolly dumped excessive rainfall in the lower Rio Grande Valley and contributed to abundant rainfall across the rest of South Texas throughout August, adding to some

of the earlier rains that fell in July. Habitat has improved dramatically and will provide great benefits to many of the game species in South Texas.

Across the South Texas region consensus is white-tailed deer antler quality may be good despite the dry spring conditions.

Deer did not have to work hard to build up body reserve to support fawn rearing and antler development this summer.

Rutledge expects white-tailed fawn survival to be above average with the improved range conditions and abundant cover. Hunters may expect to find a good number of 1 1/2-year-old bucks as a result of a good fawn crop from 2007. Decent fawn crops from 2002 and 2004 should also result in a fair number older age class bucks in the 4 1/2 or 6 1/2-year-old categories.

Despite the fairly abundant food resources as a result of the summer rains, the recent dry spell will encourage deer to utilize corn feeders. Thus hunters might have good harvest success this season. However hunters should not discount alternative hunting strategies instead of the old standby corn feeder. Look for well used trails or

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