

A Tale of Teeth

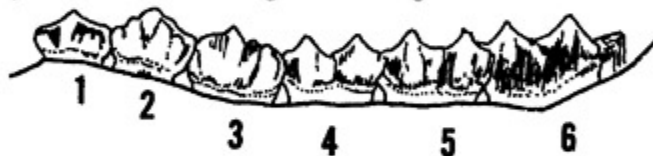
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Age of a deer is not determined by tooth replacement as it is in sheep and goats, but by wear on the jaw teeth. As a deer grows older, certain portions of its teeth are worn enough to show definite differences from the teeth of other age classes.

The following explanations are made only as an attempt to inform hunters of possibilities of determining approximate age categories of deer killed. The criteria for determining ages are simplified to be easily used by hunters in the field. Since there are so many other factors not covered here, for determining age classes, this text should not be used for technical purposes.

Deer are aged in fractions because they are born around July and are killed during the hunting season.



A deer has only six jaw teeth, although they appear to have many more. The teeth are broken into two distinct categories: the premolars, which are numbered 1, 2, and 3, and the molars, which are numbered 4, 5, and 6.



1 1/2 year old: (long yearling): The long yearling deer is the most easily recognized of all age classes. The first three jaw teeth are milk teeth, which will be replaced around two years of age. These are worn smooth as a long yearling, while the last three teeth remain sharp. The number 3 tooth has three cusps in the milk tooth stage, but only two cusps appear on the replaced tooth. Fawns in their first season will show little evidence of wear on their milk teeth.



2 1/2 year old: The first three jaw teeth have been replaced by permanent teeth and all molars are sharp. The dentine of the first molar (tooth 4) is as wide as the enamel which surrounds it.



3 1/2 year old: The dentine in the first & second molar (tooth 4 & 5) is now as wide or wider than the enamel which surrounds it, and this is not true of the third molar or tooth 6.



DENTINE

4 1/2 year old: The dentine of the first and second molars (teeth 4 and 5) is as wide or wider on both teeth, but the third molar only shows this in the first cusp.



DENTINE

5 1/2 year old: The dentine of all molars (teeth 4, 5, and 6) is now as wide or wider than the enamel surrounding it.



6 1/2 year old: The first molar (tooth 4) is worn smooth, but teeth 5 and 6 are not smooth.



7 1/2 year old: The first and second molars (teeth 4 and 5) are worn smooth, or tooth 5 may still have a small ridge left.



8 1/2 year old: All teeth worn smooth.

Older than 8 1/2 years: Unable to determine, because characteristic formations have been worn smooth.

Trying to adapt this method to deer in the field probably will bring some surprises. Deer that seem young will be old, and deer that seem old will be young. At any rate, using such aging method will make for a better understanding of some of the problems of deer. For example, if all hunters and landowners were to age each deer killed on their ranches, they would find that the "good" bucks killed some years are approximately the same age as the "bad" bucks killed in other years.