

HUNT

The deer factory

BY PAUL TROUETTE

Mendocino County Black Tail Association

Anybody worth their salt in modern day deer management circles would concede that the term "Deer factory" is a by gone term for the northern remote mountains of California, called the B-Zones. In days of old these areas used to produce a robust harvest of Columbian Black Tailed

Bucks in Mendocino County alone in 1954, it is recorded, an astounding estimated 5,232 bucks were harvested. In 2016, 6,573 bucks total in all the 6 B-Zones combined. Most would say with sadness today "We remember the old days when we took our families to the winter ranges to see the 'Big Old Bucks' who made it through the season." Today, few bucks are seen. The sheer greater numbers of deer we would see have vanished largely in our public lands.

We reflect on the works and the cherished names of renown past deer biologists, Dale R. McCullough, Richard D. Taber, Raymond F. Dasmann, William Longhurst and A. Starker Leopold. Reading like a hall of fame roster for me, these authors created for us the most comprehensive, yet readable and detailed analysis of Black Tailed Deer management ever written.

I fear we have moved as a culture away from the simplicity and the proven model of management for the majestic blacktail deer. To a substandard political model, which has destroyed this resource in less than 40 years.

Perhaps, the truthful answer to the problem is "we the people" of the State of California have just lost the desire or passion for these creatures. Or Perhaps, we don't care anymore, or have been worn out by the machine of the complicated management practices of the new age.

Shakespeare, once penned, "what a country chooses to save, is what a country chooses to say about itself." We must ask ourselves this question? Are these creatures worth saving? I believe the answer is, yes. It certainly was for The Mendocino County Black Tail Association. Which is why we have fought long and hard for the name Black Tail.

So, to dive right in we say, "Where are all the deer?" In days gone by, deer were more relevant to the culture, and I mean the culture of the general population of Californians. They hunted, and they loved deer. What about the culture of the modern wildlife managers in 2018? Are deer important to you? We don't have a deer plan yet for the deer? The last plan was 1978-83.

In 2008, I was contacted by DFW wildlife program manager Craig Stowers. Craig asked me where I would consider it to be a good area, to conduct a good deer study, to find out what limiting factors could be suspect for the continued decline of blacktail deer in Mendocino County. I said to Craig, whom I consider one of the last premier Mohicans of Deer authorities, "Why don't we study the Mendocino National Forest?" It was suggested by scientists that Hopland Research Station should be considered. I said, "The forest would be a better study, that way we can provide the public with a real time analysis of what is going on in public lands, not a private site."

Thus, the Mendocino Deer Study was born. When all the smoke cleared from the study, we determined many interesting things in the environment of the Mendocino National Forest. I say, the environment of the Forest, because all deer management begins and ends with the exact eco system you are studying! What does that mean? It means you can't say there are no deer in one area and make that absolute statement about the whole state, when you haven't studied the whole state.

In a nutshell, without citing the numerous yet thorough 62 pages of the scientific analysis in whole, in the Mendocino National Forest study performed, we have a handful of reasons the deer have all but disappeared in comparison to the 1970's. I quote several key statements from paragraphs from the study.

"Our results show that deer in the Mendocino National Forest are currently declining in abundance. We found evidence that the decline is caused by high mortalities due to predation in all age classes."

“Predation was the primary cause of fawn mortality, and black bear predation was the largest single source of mortality. Mountain lion predation was the primary cause of mortality of adult females equal to or greater than 1 year old.”

Deer with larger amounts of forage within their identified home ranges were less likely to die of any cause, including predation.”

It really boils down to this. Deer are not as important or culturally relevant to most government managers above the worker bee pay grade. We all know why deer are gone. They can't eat fir trees, they don't eat noxious weeds, predators are given carte blanche access to them, logging is gone, fire suppression is very popular now in drought conditions, and the harvest success rate for the California hunter is 15.6%. The Mendocino Study proved everything we savvy conservation NGO's have been saying all along and we spent close to a million dollars to prove to ourselves we were right.

A decadent old growth habitat will kill all the early successional wildlife off given enough time. Unfettered predation is tantamount to the death sentence for deer. The lack of true wildlife management in our lands, is



FORMED IN 2005, the mission of the MCBA is to work towards improving the condition of the Columbian Black-tailed deer herds in the B-ZONES of Northern California. PHOTO COURTESY [HTTPS://MCBADEER.COM/](https://MCBADEER.COM/)

like going to the local Safeway store, buying a 40-year-old box of cornflakes, filling our stomachs, and dying at the same time of malnutrition. And then we exit the store (feeding grounds) to be robbed and killed by a predator in the parking lot. (outside the feeding grounds).

In the study, we determined that the available food quality for the deer in our public lands is old and non-nutritious in whole. Deer are in search daily for palatable nutritious food of which is in serious short supply. In their efforts to feed themselves they move about their

home ranges and beyond, so they are discovered more easily moving about by high densities of predators, thus our decline. Managing this problem is our challenge with federal and state regulatory agencies. The answer? Like always, is the sensible honest approach to the problem. Good science, coupled with common sense management, for the benefit of the public who pay for it. Which is why the California Rifle and pistol organization fights to promote these very things.

Our many thanks to Rick Travis and staff for their tireless efforts.

AVSCHUNT.COM

V
ANTELOPE VALLEY
SPORTSMAN'S CLUB

DOVE • PHEASANT • CHUKAR

Antelope Valley Sportsman's Club is your source for the finest Pheasant hunting for Los Angeles, CA & surrounding areas for memberships and day hunts.

UNDER NEW OWNERSHIP

“We are looking forward to this years hunting season and hoping to keep David's dream alive.” - Mike and Jamie

OPEN

for 2024/2025 hunting season

GUEST HUNTS AND MEMBERSHIPS AVAILABLE ONLINE OR BY PHONE

45408 630th St West., Lancaster, CA 93536

(661) 724-1291