



Age This – MISSOURI

Owner: Pat Cunningham, Brookfield, Mo. • **Location:** North-central Missouri

Date: September 24 (rut peaks in November)

Notes: 980 acres under QDM for 15 years in an agriculturally rich area.



KIP ADAMS • 4½ • “This is a beautiful middle-aged buck.

As I’ve stated with other *Age This* photos, pre-rut photos generally make bucks appear at least one year younger than they are. In this photo, the buck’s legs appear proportional to his body, his neck has some girth, and his stomach is still a little tight. These are characteristics of 3½. But in another month this buck’s neck will swell, he’ll have more overall body mass, and he’ll appear much larger. He’s actually 4½.”



ERICH LONG • 3½ • “What a good-looking animal. This

deer was a tough one because of the time of year he was photographed...pre-rut. This buck’s neck will explode in size as the rut approaches. But I still believe the size of his head, the full but not fat belly, and the fully-developed hindquarters indicate 3½. He’s still too ‘streamlined’ to be 4½, and though I always look at antlers last, I think this buck’s beam diameter is too big for 2½. What a quality animal at just 3½!”



JOE HAMILTON • 3½ • “In a little less than two months this

buck’s body will change in response to the seasonal flow of hormones. The shoulders and neck will enlarge to the point that he’ll appear tapered toward the hindquarters. This Missouri buck is one swollen neck away from having that classic buffalo shape of a 3½-year-old.”



DAVE EDWARDS • 4½ • “Because I usually focus on the neck

and chest first when aging, I instantly thought *young buck* when I saw the broadside shot of this deer looking at the camera. However, once I saw the other pictures and started looking closer, evidence started pointing toward a more mature buck. This buck has a relatively well-developed rump

and chest making his body take on the rectangular appearance of 4½. Taking the date of this picture in consideration (one month before the rut), his neck will significantly fill out more over the next few weeks giving him the solid neck and chest we typically see in 4½-year-olds. While antler characteristics certainly help in aging a deer (that’s why we use them in harvest restrictions), I normally use them only if needed as a tie-breaker. This buck’s main-beam length and spread suggests he is at least 3½. Although he is already a great buck with a typical 12-point rack, I might be inclined to protect him due to his potential – depending on the situation. With a 980-acre property, it is very likely you are sharing this deer with neighbors.”



JASON SNAVELY • 4½ • “Awesome buck! I couldn’t help

but focus my attention on the G5s. A 12-point typical whitetail is a sign of great herd and habitat management. At first I shied away from 4½ because I would expect his hindquarters to be heavier. However, he does have a deep chest, thick throat and a relatively smooth transition from neck to chest, especially for the time of year. His legs appear proportional to his body, as often seen at 4½. With six weeks until the peak of the rut he will most certainly bulk up, displaying more physical characteristics of 4½. Although Missouri can produce bucks of this caliber at 3½, I’m going to make my ultimate decision based on research into another aging characteristic: main-beam length. For a buck to throw ‘four up’ (the number of antler points rising from the main beam, excluding the brow tine) he most certainly has more than 22 inches of main beam. Statistically speaking, based on research from Mississippi State University, main beams of 20 inches or greater indicate 4½ and older. I like 4½.”



Age This – ALABAMA

Owner: Russell Harvey, Daphne, Ala. • **Location:** Southwest Alabama

Date: October 20 (rut peaks in January)

Notes: 40 acres in southwest Alabama. Surrounded by timberland with fair to poor quality habitat, some agriculture. Little to no QDM effort on surrounding lands.



KIP ADAMS • 2½ • “That’s quite a set of spikes! This young

buck’s legs appear long for his body, but he definitely has some musculature in his shoulders. The angle of the photo doesn’t allow us to see what his hindquarters have for mass, but I’ll bet they’re lean. His neck is slim, but his full stomach implies he’s older than his other body characteristics suggest. This

is not the best photo angle for aging, and the limited information makes it possible to argue 1½, 2½, and even 3½ for this deer. I'll estimate him at 2½ years. This emphasizes the importance of getting a broadside, head-up, well-lit photo when you need to be confident about your age estimate."



ERICH LONG • 3½ • "Those of us living in the

Midwest are really spoiled. While QDM is becoming more widespread here in Ohio, we almost never see bucks like this one because of the quality of the soils, habitat, and agriculture. With that being said, this deer, in my Yankee opinion, shows a full belly, and his front end appears heavier than his rear (although the angle of the deer to the camera may be creating an illusion). I believe this deer is 3½."



JOE HAMILTON • 1½ •

"During my fledgling years in coastal North Carolina, my dream buck was a 'cowhorn' with 14-inch beams and strong curvature. In my opinion, and that of my hunting buddies, it took more cunning to harvest a cowhorn than a normal spike or a dinky 'peghorn' (a spike with antlers shorter than 3 inches). Though we thought of them as different categories of bucks, they had one thing in common: They were all *yearlings*. As a wildlife biologist, I learned to regard the percent of yearling bucks with two points as a barometer of herd health and birth-dates. Nutritionally stressed deer herds produce a higher percentage of 2-point yearlings, and late-born yearlings tend to have smaller antlers than older cohorts. The buck in the photo is from an area of poor habitat and a late rut. This combination not only affects yearling antler development but can carry over to the next age class. However, I can still count on one hand the number of 2½-year-old or older bucks, *out of hundreds of bucks I have examined in my career*, that only had two points. Due to the angle of the buck and his close proximity to the camera, I think his body looks larger than it actually is. This buck would have been on my wish list 50 years ago – an old-timey cowhorn, even though he is just a yearling."



DAVE EDWARDS • 3½ • "So this is the ol' cowhorn spike

everybody keeps talking about! In our experience conducting camera surveys across the country, we see a lot of spikes in areas like Alabama that have a late rut and consequently a late fawning season. However, 'cowhorn spikes' like this buck are uncommon. Most spike bucks are simply yearling deer. While this is not a great picture to age the buck, we can see enough to know he is not a yearling. Based on what I can see, I suspect he is at least 3½, possibly older."



JASON SNAVELY • 1½ • "Not much to say here. Thin neck.

Looks like a doe with spikes. Under QDM, this buck would have a few years to enjoy healthy habitat and build body mass for future ruts."



Age This – MICHIGAN

Owner: Ken Kozminski

Location: Southern Michigan

Date: October 29 (rut peaks in mid-November)

Notes: 100 acres in a heavy agricultural area with 25 acres of commercial crops in rotation, plus

13 food plots. Diverse habitat types, including river bottom. Practicing QDM four years. A few surrounding lands are practicing QDM, but most are not.



KIP ADAMS • 2½ •

"This buck has characteristics of two age classes. His front legs appear proportional to his body, and he has some musculature in his shoulders. These characteristics suggest 3½. However, his neck only has a little swelling, his hind legs appear long for his body, his stomach is tight, his hind-quarters are lean, and he has an overall sleek appearance.

This appears to be an exceptional 2½-year-old. Given that 2½-year-olds have only reached an estimated 25 to 50 percent of their antler potential, this buck could be a whopper in a couple of years."

Continued.

AGE THIS!



ERICH LONG • 2½ • “You can tell that this property and the surrounding region is in great shape to produce a deer of this quality at such an early age. This buck has a straight back, a flat, tight belly, and a neck that is thinner than a 3½-year-old would have – even with the rut close at hand. His front and rear ends are matched – one solid animal throughout. Kudos from an Ohioan to the state up north!”



JOE HAMILTON • 2½ • “This Michigan buck, photographed at the onset of the rut, is a representative of the white-tail’s largest subspecies and resides on a well-managed property with a four-year history of QDM. The body is sleek, the legs appear long in proportion to the body, tarsal staining is confined to the hock, and the neck is relatively slim. All things considered, this buck is 2½ years old.”



DAVE EDWARDS • 3½ • “Being a Southerner, I always use caution when aging Yankee deer due to their larger body size. It seems I generally age them a year older than my northern counterparts. In the South, I would call this deer 4½. He has a solid neck that blends into his chest, solid rectangular body, and long beams. However, this buck does not appear to have the body weight I would expect for 4½ in Michigan. For this reason, and the fact that his legs look fairly long – meaning his body is not fully developed – I will yield to caution and stick with 3½.”



JASON SNAVELY • 2½ • “Sounds like this deer has it all from a habitat standpoint. He’s a northern deer, so we can expect a relatively larger body than his southern

Panelist:	Kip	Erich	Joe	Dave	Jason
Missouri buck:	4½	3½	3½	4½	4½
Alabama buck:	2½	3½	1½	3½	1½
Michigan buck:	2½	2½	2½	3½	2½

cohorts. This buck is thin in the waist, taut in the back, and long-legged. He is fast approaching the rut, so I’m sure his body is showing every bit of his age. Because of his relatively thin neck on the cusp of the rut, lack of stomach/chest girth, and his thin hindquarters, I’m willing to say this buck is only 2½, but I won’t be surprised if one or more of my panelist pals push him to 3½. Nor would I invest much energy arguing that estimate. I hope the QDM practitioners who helped produce him get a crack at him next year! Based on my personal experience owning and managing similar-sized tracts of land in states with high hunter densities, this is the most challenging buck to protect. Good luck!”

Panelists: Erich Long of Ohio with The Management Advantage consulting team, Jason Snavely of Droptine Wildlife Consulting in Pennsylvania, Dave Edwards of Westervelt Wildlife Services in Alabama, and QDMA’s Education & Outreach Directors, Kip Adams of Pennsylvania and Joe Hamilton of South Carolina.



Challenge Our Panelists! Do you have a photo of a buck that is tough to age? Let our panelists make the call. Send digital images to Lthomas@qdma.com (Do *not* compress file size. Send images at full resolution). Send print photographs to QDMA, Attn: Age This Buck, P.O. Box 160, Bogart, GA, 30622. Include daytime contact information, date/location of photo and other notes. Only submissions chosen for print will be reviewed by the panelists.

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