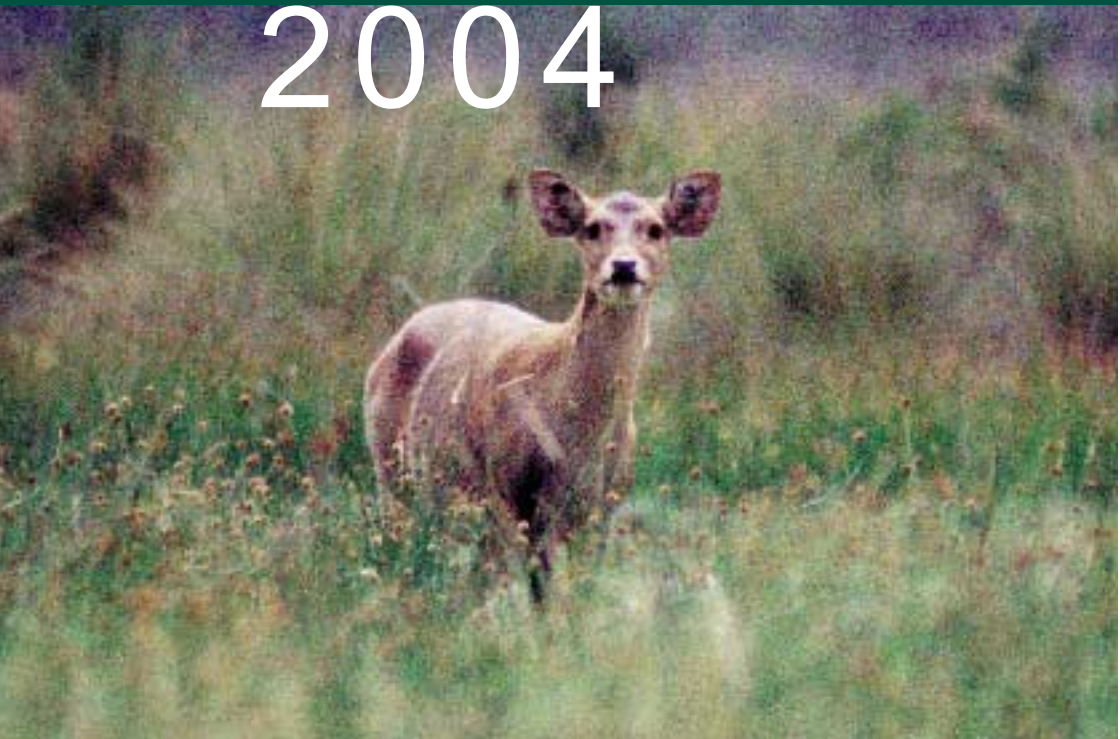


The production of this booklet  
was proudly funded by



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# A Guide to Hunting Hog Deer 2004



# Foreword

"A Guide to Hunting Hog Deer in Victoria" has been produced by the Game Management Unit for the benefit of hunters wishing to hunt Hog Deer in Victoria. This booklet will provide hunters from Victoria, interstate and overseas with the most accurate and up-to-date information relating to Hog Deer hunting and answer those questions most commonly asked. Whether you have hunted Hog Deer in the past or you intend to, please read through this booklet to ensure that you know and understand what your responsibilities are when hunting Hog Deer in Victoria.

The production cost of this booklet was covered by funds raised in the Blond Bay and Boole Poole balloted Hog Deer hunts and kindly provided by the Blond Bay Hog Deer Advisory Group. These balloted hunting opportunities are administered by the Advisory Group and monies raised are used for the conservation of Hog Deer in Victoria. For more information on these balloted hunts, see page 6.

## Hog Deer Hunters' Checklist

### ***Before Hunting***

- ☐ Make sure your Game Licence is current, renew if required
- ☐ Obtain a set of Hog Deer tags prior to hunting (see page 7)
- ☐ Read through **A Guide to Hunting Hog Deer in Victoria**
- ☐ Obtain permission to dismember, where appropriate (only in exceptional circumstances) (see page 8)

### ***While Hunting***

- ☐ Carry your Game Licence while in the field
- ☐ Carry both male and female Hog Deer tags while hunting (see page 8)
- ☐ If an animal is taken, immediately fix the appropriate Tag to the hind leg (see page 8)
- ☐ Inspect any hinds for presence of a foetus (if possible, take foetus to checking station) (see page 8)

### ***After Hunting***

- ☐ Take any harvested deer to checking station within 24 hours of taking an animal (see page 9)
- ☐ Call ahead to the checking station to inform them of your arrival (see page 9)
- ☐ Take your Game Licence with you to the checking station
- ☐ Do not remove any Hog Deer tags until after presentation at a checking station (see page 9)
- ☐ Return any unused tags and a completed Return Form by Registered Post within 28 days of the end of the season (see page 8)

***Good luck and safe hunting***

Published by: Department of Sustainability and Environment  
PO Box 500, East Melbourne 3002, Victoria, Australia  
© The State of Victoria, Department of Sustainability and Environment, February 2004  
ISSN 1442-1011

Website: [www.dse.vic.gov.au](http://www.dse.vic.gov.au)

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Cover Photograph by Simon Toop

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Photograph: Simon Toop

Photograph: David Young

## Introduction

"A Guide to Hunting Hog Deer in Victoria" has been produced by the Game Management Unit for the benefit of hunters wishing to hunt Hog Deer in Victoria. This booklet will provide hunters from Victoria, interstate and overseas with the most accurate and up-to-date information relating to Hog Deer hunting and answer those questions most commonly asked. Whether you have hunted Hog Deer in the past or you intend to, please read through this booklet to ensure that you know and understand what your responsibilities are when hunting Hog Deer in Victoria.

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## Management of Hog Deer in Victoria

Hog Deer *Axis porcinus* were first introduced into Victoria from Sri Lanka and India in 1865. Today, Hog Deer are distributed in isolated groups along the south-eastern coast of Victoria from the Tarwin River area to the Gippsland Lakes region. Major populations are found on: Wilson's Promontory and the off-shore islands of Corner Inlet; the Boole Poole Peninsula; and the southern shore of Lake Wellington, including Dowd Morass and Lake Coleman State Game Reserves, Lake Reeve and The Lakes National Park.

Hog Deer are one of the most actively managed game species in Victoria. A range of management activities are undertaken, including: A one month season in April; a bag limit restricted to one stag and one hind per hunter per season; a tagging system to minimise the incidence of illegally taken animals; and, the mandatory presentation of harvested animals at established checking stations.



*Photograph: Simon Toop*

# Hunting Hog Deer in Victoria

## **Who can hunt Hog Deer?**

To be eligible to hunt Hog Deer in Victoria, you must:

- be the holder of a current Victorian Game Licence allowing you to hunt deer; and
- obtain a set of Hog Deer Tags from the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) and have them in your possession while hunting.

Hunters wishing to hunt Hog Deer with a firearm must be the holder of a current Firearms Licence issued by the Victoria Police or any equivalent current interstate Firearms Licence.

## **Where can you hunt Hog Deer?**

One of the most frequently asked questions by Hog Deer hunters is “Where can I hunt?” Some areas can be easily determined due to distinct and easily recognisable boundaries (eg. roads), however, other areas can be difficult to determine and are only defined by physical features or lines on a map. Areas of public land may also be leased or licensed and, hunting is only allowed on some areas with the permission of the leasee or licensee.

Wherever possible, the Department and other land managers, like Parks Victoria, will do their best to assist you when trying to identify areas that are available to hunting. Hunters need to do some homework also. To help us help you, we recommend the following:

- Identify the general area that you wish to hunt
- Obtain a map of the area and narrow it down to areas likely to have game
- Talk to Park Rangers about the location of Park boundaries
- For Crown land, find out from the local DSE office whether the area is under licence or is leased. Some lessees do not allow hunting on leased lands.
- Consider the Firearms Safety Code and remember that even though an area may be open to hunting, the use of firearms may be prohibited under the **Firearms Act** for safety reasons.

Information on areas open to hunting can be found from a wide range of sources, including DSE publications and staff, the DSE Customer Service Centre, Parks Victoria, hunting organisations, parish plans, up to date maps, private land owners and Victoria Police.

Remember, **find out for yourself** and don't rely on others. If in doubt about the legality of hunting in a particular area, don't hunt there until you are sure. The consequences for hunting in a closed area could result in the loss of your Game Licence and Firearms Licence and the seizure and confiscation of your firearm, vehicle or other belongings. Avoid hunting close to boundaries and, above all, act responsibly and ensure that your actions will not put at risk yourself or the safety of others.

There are many land classifications throughout Victoria and, depending on the type, hunting for Hog Deer may or may not be permitted. The following table provides general information on where you may hunt. For more details of where you may hunt, see the information included below and call the nearest DSE Regional office or Parks Victoria for details, before you enter the field. Further information on the State Game Reserves where hunting of Hog Deer is permitted may also be obtained at the DSE Internet site at [www.dse.vic.gov.au](http://www.dse.vic.gov.au).

Hunters are advised to consult the local DSE Office or Parks Victoria for specific information about any restrictions that apply to the area they wish to hunt. Remember, many people use areas of public land for recreation and for their livelihood. Hunters should also remember to always seek and gain permission to hunt on areas of private land.

Hunters should never shoot on or across public roads or tracks or towards populated areas, including camping and picnic areas and walking tracks. At all times, hunters should be considerate, courteous and show the public that they are responsible and ethical recreational users.

DSE sell a map, “Lake Wellington Wetlands, Central Gippsland and the High Country”, which provides information on where you can legally hunt Hog Deer in Central Gippsland. This map is available for sale at most DSE offices in Gippsland or from the DSE Information Centre in Melbourne (see page 9 for details).

Land Classification	Hunting Permitted?
State forest and other unoccupied Crown land	Hog Deer may be hunted during the open season only.
State Game Reserves	Hog Deer may be hunted during the open season only on the following State Game Reserves: Lake Coleman; Dowd Morass; Jack Smith Lake; Ewing Morass; Clydebank Morass; Heart Morass.
Sanctuaries	Hog Deer may not be hunted at any time.
Forest Parks, Flora and Fauna Reserves and Nature Conservation Reserves.	Hunting of any type is not permitted at any time.
National Parks, State Parks, Coastal Parks, Wilderness Parks.	Generally, hunting of any type is not permitted at any time. However, Hog Deer may be hunted during the open season only in certain sections of the Gippsland Lakes Coastal Park and the Nooramunga Marine and Coastal Park. Hunters should check with the local DPI office or Parks Victoria before hunting.
Private	Hog Deer may be hunted during the open season, but only with the permission of the land owner/manager, lessee or licensee.
Leased Crown Land	Hog Deer (only during the open season) may be hunted, but only with the permission of the lessee.
Licensed Crown Land	Generally, Hog Deer (only during the open season) may be hunted at any time, unless the land is licensed under the <b>Land Act 1958</b> . If they are licensed under the Land Act, hunters must obtain the permission of the licensee.

### ***Balloted hunting opportunities***

Each year, the Blond Bay Hog Deer Advisory Group, together with DSE, conducts balloted hunts on two 2,000 hectare areas near Bairnsdale: Blond Bay State Game Reserve and Boole Poole Peninsula. The number of hunters selected to take part in the balloted hunts is determined by the number of animals that can be harvested from the area without threatening the sustainability of the local populations.

Hunters wishing to participate in these balloted hunts must complete an application form and provide a cheque or money order for \$10. The monies raised in the ballot are used to cover administration costs and for Hog Deer conservation and other projects, such as the production of this booklet. Application forms are available in many hunting publications or can be obtained from the address below. When completed, the application form, together with the application fee, should be sent to:

*Blond Bay Hog Deer Advisory Group  
7 Service Street  
BAIRNSDALE VIC 3875*

Applications open on 1 August and close on 30 November, each year. Successful hunters are announced in December and notified by mail.

Para Park Cooperative Game Reserve conducts a guided, balloted hunt for four junior hunters each year on lands managed by the Cooperative. To be eligible, hunters must be between the ages of 15 – 17 years at the time of the April season, have not hunted under the program previously and must hold a current Firearms Licence and Game Licence for deer. Entries open on 1 September each year, close on 30 November and are drawn in December. Entry forms can be found in a number of hunting publications or write to Junior Hog Deer Ballot, 6 Avon Road, Avonsleigh 3782.

### ***Season dates, bag limit and methods***

The table on page 7 provides details of the season, bag limits and legal hunting methods for hunting Hog Deer in Victoria.

Season	Bag limit	Methods
<i>Opens</i> 30 minutes before sunrise on 1 April  <i>Closes</i> 30 minutes after sunset on 30 April	One male (stag) one female (hind).	<i>Centrefire rifle</i> Minimum calibre .243" (6.17 mm), minimum cartridge case length 2" (51 mm); minimum projectile weight 85 grains (5.51 grams)  <i>Muzzle-loading rifle</i> Minimum calibre .45" (11.45 mm); minimum projectile weight 133 grains (8.62 grams)  <i>Long bow / recurved bow</i> Minimum draw-weight of 22.5 kg; arrows must have a broad-head with a minimum weight of no less than 25 grams and a minimum of two sharpened cutting blades  <i>Compound bow</i> Peak weight of no less than 22.5 kg; arrows must have a broad-head with a minimum weight of no less than 25 grams and a minimum of two sharpened cutting blades  <i>Crossbow</i> Minimum draw-weight of no less than 36.6 kg; arrows must have a broad-head with a minimum weight of no less than 25 grams and a minimum of two sharpened cutting blades

Hunters drawn for the balloted hunts at Blond Bay and Boole Poole should note that, under authorisation from DSE, these hunts may be conducted outside normal season dates to achieve harvest and management goals. All hunters drawn in the ballot are informed of their specific hunt period. There may also be a restriction on the number (never more than one male and one female) or sex of the deer taken.

## Tag System

All hunters wishing to hunt Hog Deer must obtain a set of Hog Deer Tags before they go hunting. Hog Deer Tags are available two weeks prior to the start of the season and can be obtained in person from any of the following Department of Sustainability and Environment offices on weekdays during business hours:

<b>Bairnsdale</b>	7 Service Street 3875
<b>Box Hill</b>	30 Prospect Street 3128
<b>DSE/DPI</b>	8 Nicholson Street,
<b>Information Centre</b>	East Melbourne 3002
<b>Noojee</b>	McCarthy's Spur Road 3833
<b>Orbost</b>	171-173 Nicholson Street 3888
<b>Sale</b>	1 Lacey Street 3850
<b>Traralgon</b>	71 Hotham Street 3844
<b>Yarram</b>	310 Commercial Road 3971

<p><b>The use of spotlights or electronic devices to hunt Hog Deer is not permitted.</b></p> <p><b>Shotguns may not be used to hunt Hog Deer.</b></p> <p><b>The use of dogs to hunt Hog Deer is not permitted.</b></p>
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When you go to collect your set of Hog Deer Tags, make sure you have your current Game Licence (allowing you to hunt "Deer") with you, otherwise tags cannot be issued. For those hunters who live outside the Melbourne metropolitan area or the Gippsland Region, alternative arrangements can be made. For more information, please contact the Game Management Unit on (03) 9412 4885.

### ***Tags and harvested animals***

When hunting Hog Deer, you must carry your Hog Deer Tags with you in the field.

Whenever a deer is taken, you must immediately attach the correct sex-specific tag (tags marked "M" for male deer and tags marked "F" for female deer) to the rear leg of the animal. The tag must be inserted between the main bone of the leg and the main tendon, completely encircling the main bone. The tag must not be removed from the animal until the Hog Deer has been processed by a checking station.

Hog Deer Tags must not be sold, given away, lent or transferred to any other person. Tags must not be altered, defaced or reproduced in any way.

### ***Returning unused Hog Deer tags and the Return Form***

Within 28 days of the end of the season (28 May 2004), all hunters **must** return a completed Hog Deer Tag Return Form and any unused tags by **Registered Post** to the following address:

Hog Deer Open Season Co-ordinator  
Game Management Unit  
Department of Sustainability and Environment  
PO Box 500  
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

To assist you in returning any unused tags and the Return Form, a Registered Post Lodgment Document and a self-addressed envelope are provided in every Hog Deer Tag package.

Each year, a number of hunters are fined for failing to return unused tags and completed Return Forms. The maximum penalty for failure to submit a completed form and any unused Tags is \$1000. In addition, hunters may be ineligible to receive tags in the future.

The requirement to return any unused tags and the completed Return Form by Registered Post is designed to protect you in the event that they get lost or tampered with while in transit. When sent by Registered Post, the Post Office issues you with a receipt, which states the items that you are sending and the time and date that they were sent. Hunters should complete this receipt and retain it for their records and, if there are any problems and the Department fails to receive the tags or Return Form, the receipt may be used as proof that they were actually sent.

The information included on the Hog Deer Tag Return Forms is entered into a database, analysed and provides important information on: hunter effort; location and land type that deer are taken; and an index of abundance. It also gives hunters the opportunity to comment on the management of Hog Deer.

## **Dismemberment**

Hunters must not dismember (cut into pieces) Hog Deer or remove the head from the body, until after presentation at a checking station, unless you have been given written permission to do so. However, you may:

- cape an animal in the field, provided that the head is not removed from the body; and
- field-dress (gut) any animal.

Hunters with a valid reason for dismembering an animal may apply to DSE for written permission to do so. Permission must be obtained prior to entering the field and the authority should be carried with you. Permission may be granted from any of the DSE Gippsland Region Offices. For contact details, see page 9.

## **Foetuses**

The reproductive condition of Hog Deer hinds provides important information on the productivity and status of the Hog Deer population. The Department needs your assistance to gather data on the reproductive biology of the Hog Deer by checking for the presence of a foetus when field-dressing any hinds. If the hind is carrying a foetus, note the length and stage of development (eg. is the foetus haired etc.). If possible, collect the foetus and deliver it to the Checking Station

Operator so that measurements can be taken. This information will help to determine when the calf was conceived, a factor critical to the health and productivity of the population.

## Checking Stations

Checking stations have been established to gather biological information on the health and dynamics of Victoria's Hog Deer population. This information will be used to monitor and assist in the management of the species. Checking stations are operated by fully trained staff who handle all Hog Deer with the utmost of care. Since beginning in 1996, over 500 Hog Deer have been processed by mainland checking stations and there have been no reports of damage to either animals or capes.

### What happens at a checking station?

- Your name, address, date of birth and Game Licence Number are recorded.
- Date, time and location of take are noted.
- Shoulder height, length and girth are recorded, and antlers are measured.
- All stags are photographed.
- The reproductive condition of hinds is assessed.
- A jawbone is removed so the animal may be aged.

All information is recorded on a data sheet and a copy is provided to every hunter that brings an animal to a checking station. Each checking station data sheet has an individual number printed in red ink at the top right hand corner. This number can be used to identify your animal when results of the season's harvest are provided in next year's tag package.

**All Hog Deer taken must be presented to a checking station within 24 hours of being harvested.** Hunters must telephone ahead to inform the Checking Station Operator of their impending arrival. This allows the operator time to prepare prior to your arrival, thereby reducing the time required to process an animal. When visiting a checking station, make sure that you take your Game Licence with you.

### Where are checking stations located?

For the 2004 Hog Deer season, three checking stations will be in operation and located at:

- Leongatha
- Golden Beach
- Bairnsdale

Hours of operation, contact telephone numbers and a location map of checking stations can be found on pages 10 and 11. Should you take a deer and are unable to present it to a checking station during the listed hours of operation, do not hesitate to call the Checking Station Operator to make alternative arrangements. Every effort will be made to provide you with the most flexible and efficient service possible so that you may meet your regulatory requirements.

## DSE Contacts

If you have any questions about the regulations or queries concerning Hog Deer hunting in Victoria, please contact the following DSE offices:

7 Service Street, **Bairnsdale** 3875  
(03) 5152 0400

30 Prospect Street, **Box Hill** 3128  
(03) 9296 4400

DSE Information Centre, 8 Nicholson Street,  
**East Melbourne** 3002 (03) 9637 8325

McCarthy's Spur Road, **Noojee** 3833  
(03) 5624 8100

171-173 Nicholson Street, **Orbost** 3888  
(03) 5161 1222

71 Hotham Street, **Traralgon** 3844  
(03) 5172 2111

310 Commercial Road, **Yarram** 3971  
(03) 5183 9100.

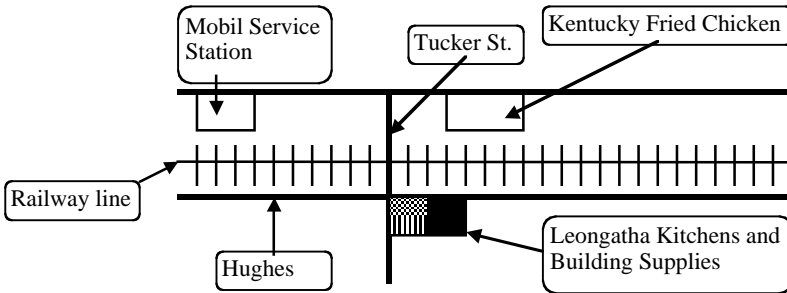
### Game Management Unit

PO Box 500, East Melbourne 3002  
Project Leader: Scott Lawrence, Ph. (03) 9412 4370

## LEONGATHA

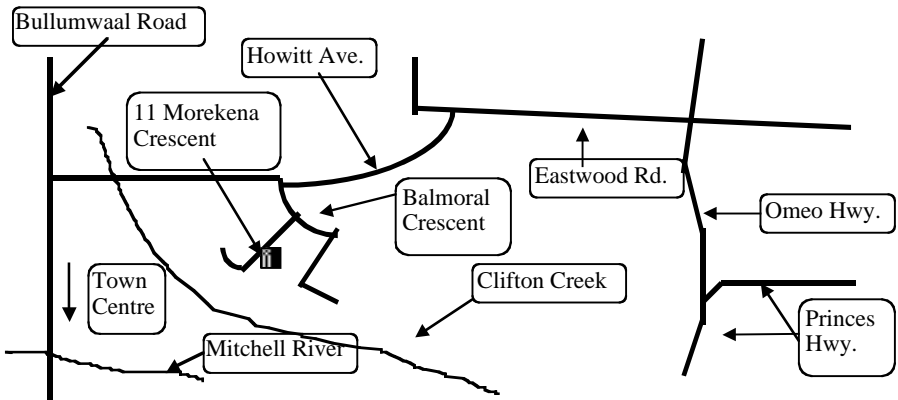
Operator: Geoff Cooper  
 Telephone: (03) 5662 3736 (AH) or 0408 623 738 OR:  
 If cannot you contact Geoff Cooper, contact Trevor Parks on:  
 (03) 5662 4011 (BH) (03) 5664 1238 (AH)  
 Address: Leongatha Kitchen and Building Supplies  
 25 Hughes Street, Leongatha  
 Hours of operation: By appointment only. 7 days a week, 8 am - 9 pm.

Note:  
 Directly behind  
 Kentucky Fried  
 Chicken store.



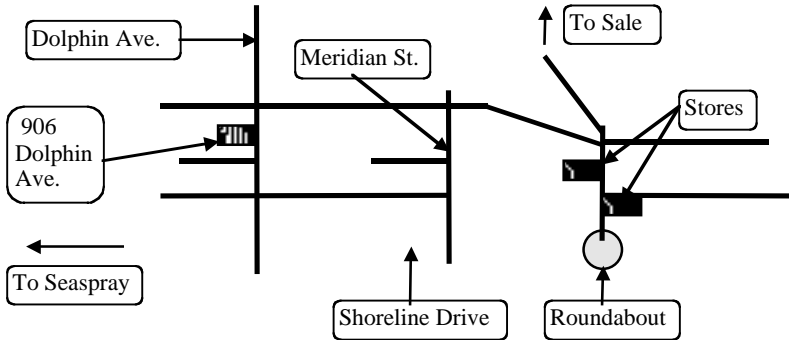
## BAIRNSDALE

Operator: David Young  
 Telephone: 0427 52 4941  
 Address: 11 Morekena Crescent, "Eastwood Estate", Bairnsdale.  
 Hours of operation: By appointment only. Weekdays before 8am, after 5pm. Weekends all hours.



## GOLDEN BEACH

Operator: Gregory Gilbert  
Telephone: (03) 5146 3217  
Address: 906 Dolphin Avenue, Golden Beach  
Hours of operation: By appointment only. Saturdays and Sundays 10 am - 9 pm, Monday pm, Tuesdays to Fridays 5 pm - 9 pm.



Photograph: Simon Toop

# Results of the 2003 Hog Deer Season

## Parks Victoria

Parks Victoria is responsible for the management of National, State, Regional and Metropolitan parks and other conservation areas, such as State Game Reserves. For information on hunting, camping and lighting fires in these areas, contact the Parks Victoria Information Centre on 13 19 63 or visit the Parkweb website at [www.parkweb.vic.gov.au](http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au)

The following information has been obtained from Hog Deer Tag Return Forms and Checking Station Data Sheets for the 2003 Hog Deer season in Victoria. This information provides hunters and managers with important data on the status and health of Victoria's Hog Deer population (the information presented includes Hog Deer taken on both the mainland and the privately owned Sunday Island).

### Tags issued

Seven hundred and thirty-five pairs of Hog Deer tags were issued for the 2003 season. This indicated a 21% increase on the number of tag pairs (607) issued in

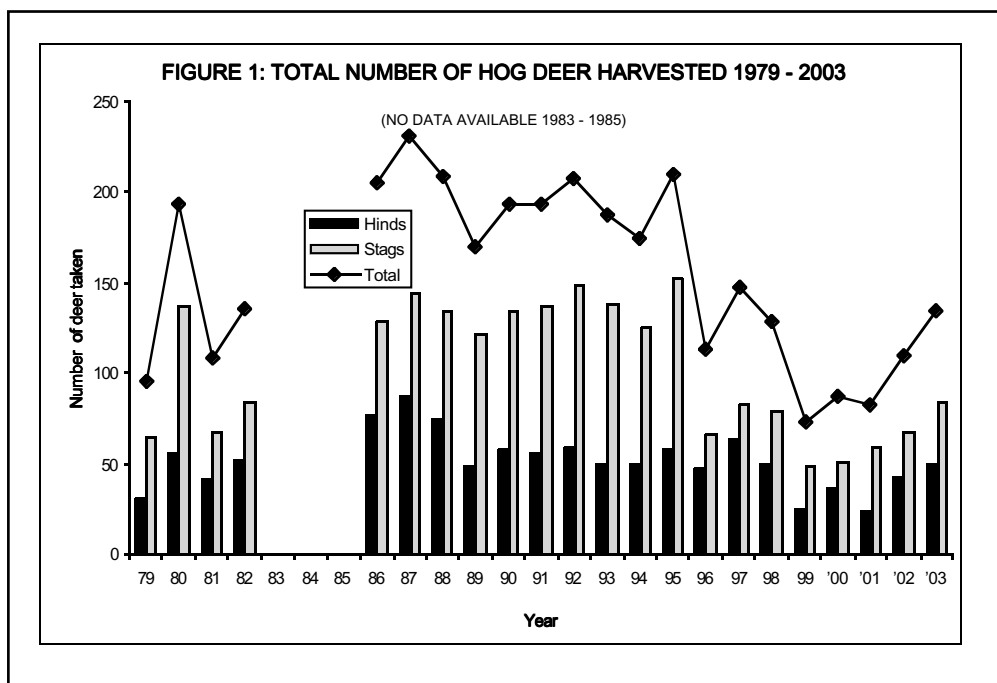
2002. The majority (93.7%) of the tag pairs issued in 2003, were provided to hunters residing in Victoria. Hunters from New South Wales constituted the second largest user group (3.8%) and the remaining tags were issued to hunters from the various states and territories throughout Australia and several hunters from the USA.

### Hog Deer harvest

The total number of Hog Deer harvested since 1979 can be seen in Figure 1. One hundred and thirty four animals were harvested in 2003, comprising 84 stags (63%) and 50 hinds (37%). This demonstrated a 22% increase on the number of animals harvested in 2002 (110) and was the highest harvest recorded since 1998.

Fifty-four (64%) of the total number of stags taken were hunted on the mainland. Thirty (36%) were taken on Sunday Island. Of the mainland stags, 29 (54%) were taken from public land and 25 (46%) from private land.

In 2003, an equal number of hinds were harvested on both mainland and Sunday Island. Twenty-five (50%) of the 50 hinds that were harvested, came from Sunday



Island and 25 (50%) were taken on the mainland. Of the mainland hinds, 16 (64%) were taken from public land and 9 (36%) from private land.

**Active hunters and hunter success**

For the 2003 Hog Deer Season, 580 (79%) of the 735 hunters issued with tags actively hunted Hog Deer and, of these, 115 (20%) were successful. Nineteen (17%) of those hunters who took an animal filled their bag (ie. one stag and one hind), 65 (57%) successful hunters took a stag only and 31 (26%) took a hind only.

**Observation index**

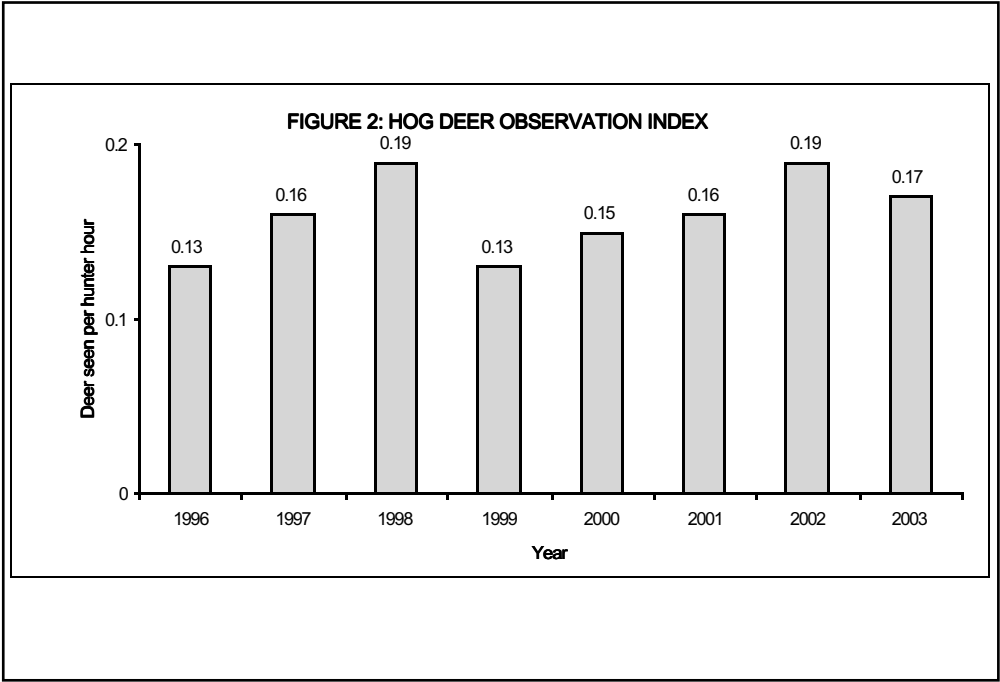
One method of monitoring changes in an animal population is to calculate an observation index, based on the number of animals seen per observer hour. For Hog Deer, the data gathered can provide information on trends in numbers, the ratio of stags to hinds and the ratio of calves to hinds. In this instance, an observation index was calculated from the information provided by hunters on the Hog Deer Tag Return Form, which records the number of hours hunted and the number of animals (stags, hinds and calves) seen (see Figure 2).

The number of animals observed per hunter hour in 2003 was 0.17, an 11% decrease from the previous season in 2002 (0.19).

**Sex ratio**

It is important for many wildlife populations, including Hog Deer, to have a balanced sex ratio of males to females. For a deer population to produce quality animals, it is important that both sexes are harvested at similar levels, even though a harvest slightly biased towards stags may be acceptable and should not affect population productivity and quality. Selectively harvesting for one sex in preference to another (ie. stags over hinds) may upset the natural sex ratio of 1:1 and have implications for the health and productivity of local Hog Deer populations.

The percentage of stags to hinds taken from 1979 to 2003 is shown in Figure 3. In 2003, the ratio of stags to hinds taken increased (1.7) compared to 2002 where the ratio was approximately 1.6. These results indicate a harvest composition biased towards stags. However, the impact of this imbalance on the overall population is unknown.



**Hog Deer Age Classes**

It is important to age Hog Deer, in order to determine the age structure of the harvested population. Vital statistics, such as body weight, antler measurements, foetal counts and lactation rates have little meaning unless linked to age class. By determining the age of those animals harvested during the season, critical data to assess the current condition of the population may be gathered and strategies for future management of the Hog Deer population may be developed.

Figure 4 shows the number of hinds harvested in each age group from 2002 and 2003. For 2003, approximately 33% of the harvest of hinds consisted of animals up to 1.5 years. This result was not unexpected as younger animals can occur in greater numbers in the population and are considered to be relatively inexperienced in predator avoidance, making them more vulnerable to hunting.

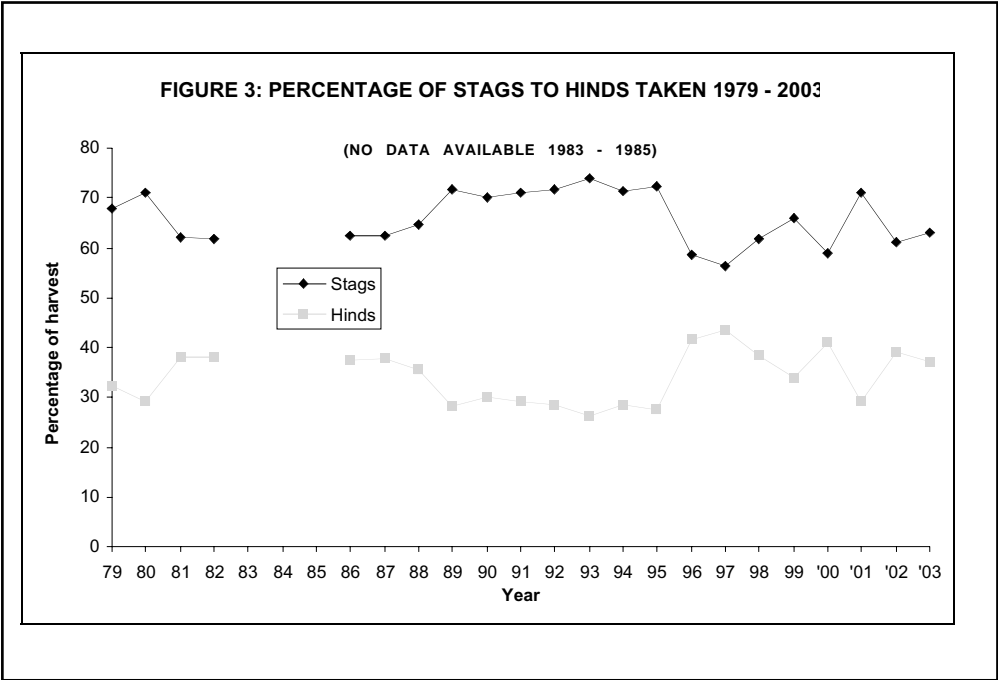
In 2003, there was a decrease in the number of hinds harvested in the 6.5+ year old age class (8 hinds in 2003 cf 14 in 2002). However, the number of hinds harvested in the 6.5+ year old age class was considered to be high as there are generally fewer older animals

in a population due to causes of natural mortality and mature animals are considered to have more experience avoiding hunters.

Figure 5 shows the number of stags harvested in each age class in 2002 and 2003. In 2003, a total of 84 stags were harvested, ranging in age from 0.5 to 6.5 years or older. The number of harvested stags exhibited great fluctuations among age classes. Only 2 stags were hunted from the age class 0.5 compare to 21 in the 1.5 age class. Again, this result is not unexpected as younger animals can occur in greater numbers in the population and are considered to be relatively inexperienced in predator avoidance, making them more vulnerable to hunting. Interestingly, a large number of stags were harvested in the 3.5 and 4.5 age class compared to the previous year.

**Weight**

Body weight is a good indicator of the health of the individuals as well as the population, particularly the weight of calves and first year animals because they have not had the time to fully develop and are more sensitive to fluctuations in the availability and quality



of food. In general, animals with an adequate food supply grow larger, produce more young, are more vigorous and healthy, produce better trophies and are more resistant to many forms of mortality than those affected by malnutrition. By comparing the variation in average weight data collected over a number of years and assessing the impact of environmental conditions on population sizes, the overall health of a population may be determined.

Figure 6 shows the average dressed weight of hinds in each age group harvested from 2002 and 2003, compared to the long-term average dressed weight recorded since the inception of checking stations in 1996. In 2003, the minimum dressed body weight was 13 kilograms for a 0.5 year old hind taken from Sunday Island and the maximum dressed body weight was 27.8 kilograms for an animal taken near Dowds Morass. With the exception of the 0.5 and 5.5 age classes, the average dressed weights of hinds for the 2003 season were lower than those for the 2002 season

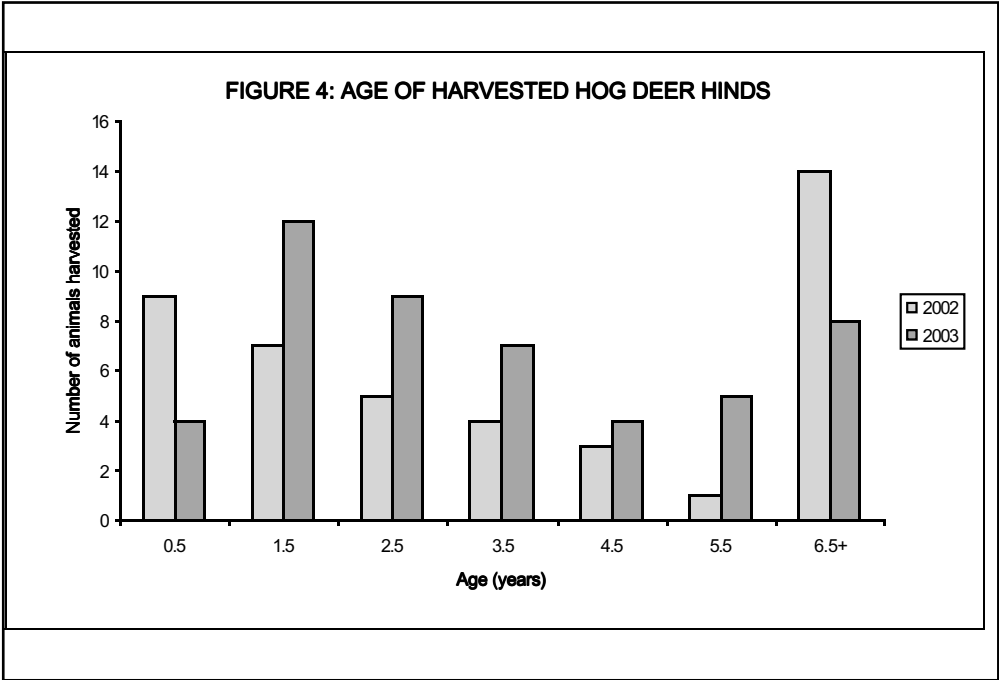
Figure 7 shows the average dressed weights of stags in each age group harvested during the 2002 and 2003 seasons. The minimum dressed body weight recorded

was 5 kilograms for a 0.5 year old stag taken from Sunday Island and the maximum dressed body weight was 53 kilograms for a 5.5 year old stag which was taken near Stratford. With the exception of the 2.5 and 5.5 year old age classes, the average dressed weights of stags taken in the 2003 season were smaller than those in 2002.

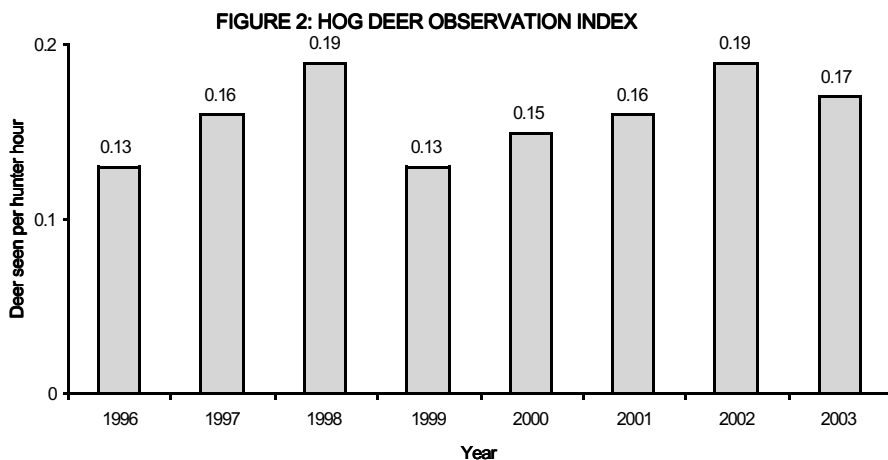
**Reproductive status**

Although breeding in Hog Deer can occur at any time throughout the year, in Victoria, there is a definite peak in mating activity in December and January. The breeding/birthing cycle of Hog Deer primarily occurs during spring when tall grasses and other concealing cover protects newly born calves and hinds from predation and there is available forage to meet the energetic requirements of lactating hinds and rapidly developing calves.

The reproductive success of a population is considered one of the most important indicators of habitat quality, population size and age structure. A high number of animals in reproductive condition suggests that an adequate number of adult, sexually active stags are







present in the population to service most hinds. It also suggests that habitat quality is sufficient to sustain good body condition during the mating, gestation and calving periods. In addition to other environmental conditions and the presence of predators, lower reproductive rates suggest that fewer sexually experienced mature stags are present in the population or that habitat quality is poor, prohibiting breeding.

All hinds presented to checking stations were examined for signs of lactation and hunters were asked if they observed the presence of a foetus while field dressing or if they saw any young at foot.

In 2003, 71% (32) of all Hog Deer hinds capable of breeding (ie. hinds approximately 12 months of age and older) were considered to be in reproductive condition at the time of harvest (see Figure 8). This was an 8% decline in the number of hinds in reproductive condition from the previous year (79%).

### **Antlers**

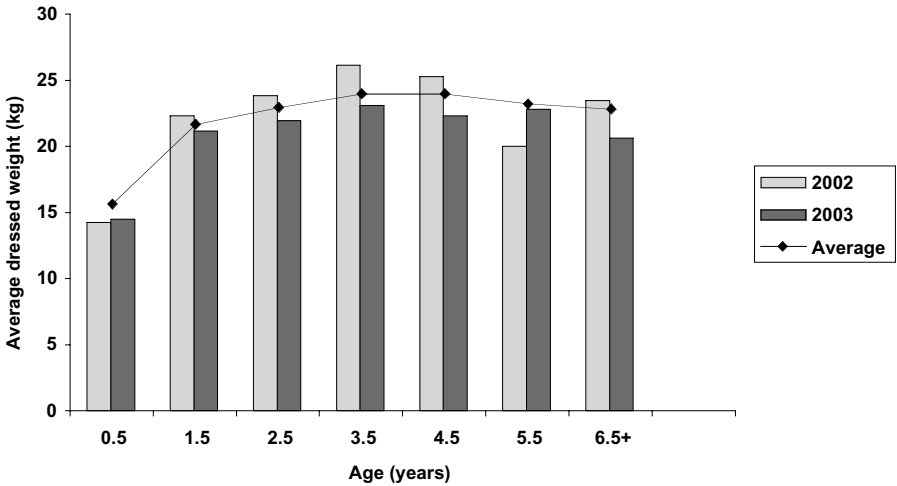
Antler development depends on one or more of a number of factors, including: age; nutrition; timing of the calving season; social ranking; and genetics. The

belief that poor quality antlers are due to genetically inferior stock is generally incorrect. Many poor antlers are the result of poor nutrition and malformed heads are most likely caused by damage to antlers while in velvet. Stags with poor antlers one year will most likely develop typical antlers the next year if the quality and quantity of food resources improves.

The average antler length (combined average of left and right antlers) of stags from each age group taken from 2002 and 2003, compared to the long-term average since 1996 can be seen in Figure 9. Data collected since 1996 show that antler length increases rapidly with age until 2.5 years after which the increase in antler size is more gradual.

The average antler length of the 1.5, 2.5 and 3.5 year old age classes in 2003, was slightly greater than that recorded in the 2002 season. In contrast, the average antler length for stags of 4.5 and 6.5+ years was less than that recorded in 2002 while antlers length of stags aged 5.5 were similar in both years. The stag with the greatest average antler length was a 5.5 year old stag taken on public land at Boole Poole Peninsula which

**FIGURE 6: AVERAGE WEIGHT OF HARVESTED HINDS**

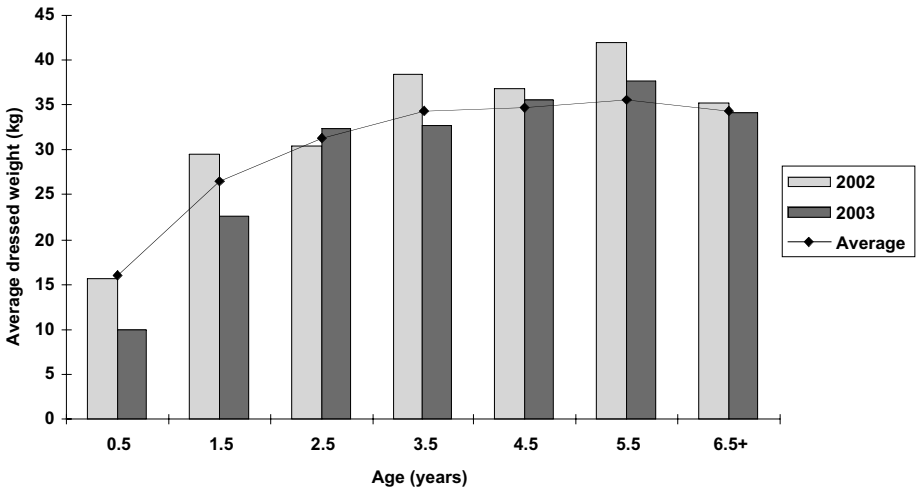


measured an average length of 43.25 cm (44 cm left, 42.5 cm right), or approximately 17.3 inches.

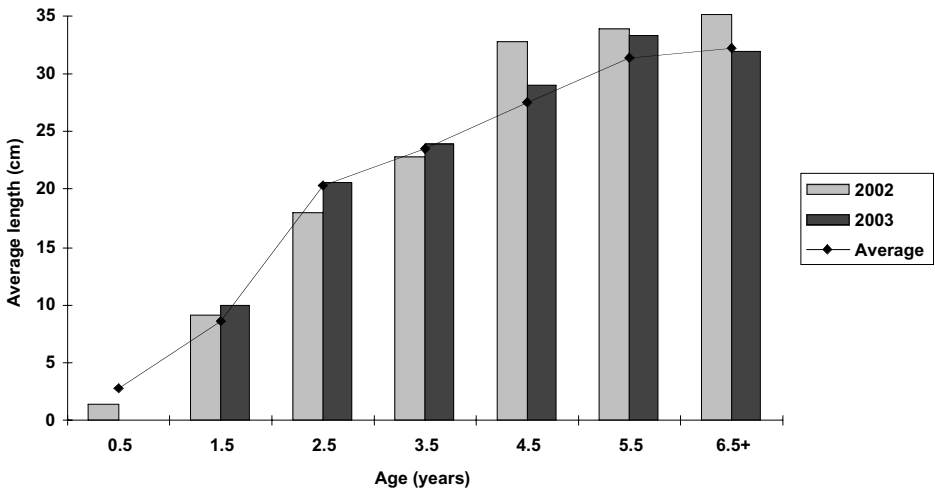
### ***Conclusion***

Information collected at checking stations in 2003 provided some positive signs for the Victorian Hog Deer population, with the highest harvest level since 1998. (134 animals harvested in 2003 cf 110 in 2002, 83 in 2001, 87 in 2000 73 in 1999 and 128 in 1998). The number of hinds in reproductive condition also remained relatively high (71%), following on from a relatively high percentage 2002.

**FIGURE 7: AVERAGE WEIGHT OF HARVESTED STAGS**

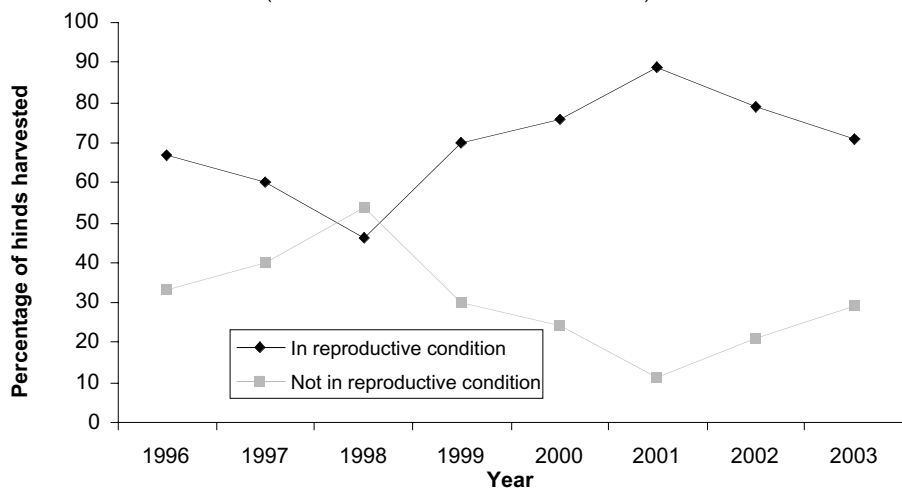


**FIGURE 9: AVERAGE ANTLER LENGTH FOR EACH AGE CLASS OF HARVESTED STAGS**



**FIGURE 8: HINDS IN REPRODUCTIVE CONDITION FOR 1996 - 2002**

(MAINLAND AND SUNDAY ISLAND DATA)



*Photograph: David Young*