



# PREPARING FOR THE WHITETAIL REPRODUCTION SEASON

story by DR. JOHN DEDWYLDER

IT'S DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE THAT THE AI AND SEMEN COLLECTION SEASON IS ALMOST UPON US. WHAT EXACTLY DOES A BREEDER NEED TO DO TO PREPARE FOR THIS MOST IMPORTANT TIME OF THE YEAR? THE ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION IS FAR FROM SIMPLE.



round herd health program in place to achieve reproductive success. Remember that every deer operation is different and this requires that your herd health program be customized. My clients in Florida have different needs than my clients in Texas or central Mexico.

So, what is a herd health program? It is an organized plan of action, typically managed under the supervision of a veterinarian experienced with white-tail deer. This plan of action should be readily available to your team in a written form and include a list of recommended vaccinations, a deworming schedule, an anesthesia protocol and nutritional recommendations as well as resources for treating illness or injury. We all know that deer get sick or injured year-round and an experienced veterinarian can support your operation year-round by providing oversight of the medical, surgical and also the reproductive needs of your deer.

#### **Consistent and Superior Nutrition**

Nutrition provides the building blocks that deer require to reproduce. Consistent and superior nutrition is required for deer to reach the prime condition necessary for successful reproduction. Without consistent and superior nutrition, reproduction becomes secondary to survival. And, because so many changes occur when white-tail deer are captively bred, WE must take complete ownership of their sustenance. If we choose their nutrition incorrectly or change diets without discretion, rumen health is negatively affected and you know the rest of that story.

Rumen health is responsible for favorable body condition, antler development and reproduction among other things. Compromised rumen function can ruin a good deer and with regard to nutrition, occurs when ingredients in processed feeds fluctuate in quality or quantity or when feeding a diet that is formulated for a different species. A good source of fiber is also important to keep the rumen healthy. Many people use high-quality alfalfa for additional fiber as well as native browse like Live Oak or Hackberry. These supplemental options also have a calming effect on

**W**e should all realize that to have our deer ready for peak reproductive performance, the breeder must have a year-round strategy. This strategy should include, but isn't limited to; a complete herd health program, consistent and superior nutrition, proven genetics and adequate working facilities. You must also take the time to plan out the reproductive procedures and hire the best people for the job. If any of these major components are compromised, your reproductive success will be affected. Let's talk about each one of these factors separately. \$200 or so, and if you look around, even less. However, because wood was a living organism and all living things.

#### **Herd Health Program**

I think all of us would agree that if your deer are not healthy, they will not be reproductively sound. You must have a successful and complete year-

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your deer by satisfying their natural browsing habits.

The top producers of pelleted deer feed are committed to extensive and continued research of the nutritional needs of whitetails. These producers have a very good idea of what may help or harm the growth or development of your deer. These producers also have small ruminant nutritionists on staff to assist you or your veterinarian with making the best nutrition decisions for your deer. It is not difficult to find the feed companies within this exclusive group.

If all you do is look at the feed label, you will find that many pelleted feeds have the exact same ingredients and those ingredients, in many cases, are listed in the same order too. You wouldn't know they were different products until you checked the brand. So what is the difference and why might one cost more than the other? I have learned that there is a huge difference in the consistent quality of each ingredient. You have to look beyond the latest fads in the nutrition industry and the high dollar marketing of the food producers. Ask questions and get involved with other breeders and the feed companies themselves.

It is also important to provide treats with quality ingredients. Peanuts are always willingly accepted by deer, and when given to deer in their hull provide good fat, protein and fiber. I like using textured feed as a treat and Golden Nuggets are always a better choice than corn. You can minimize pneumonia from dust and allergic bronchitis by keep-

ing all food, including treats, off the ground.

I have saved the most important nutrient for last...fresh, clean water. Remember, your deer are made up of about 75% water. Poor quality or dirty water has a negative affect on the health on your deer. Keep those water troughs clean and have your water tested if you ever doubt its quality.

### Proven Genetics

What exactly are proven genetics? Read on because my explanation may not be what you are thinking. I think it is very important to select proven genetic producers to develop your foundational herd. To me, proven means more than just the consistent external expression of the typical characteristics such as antlers. It also means the consistent internal expression of characteristics within these same animals. Breeding for certain internal genetic characteristics such as healthy, calm and reproductively sound deer will influence your success as a breeder. It also ensures that the external genetic expression can occur. If you do not breed for these characteristics, your deer will not be able to express the antlers or conformation you desire.

Whitetails with good internal genetics can handle the stress of captive reproduction much better than crazy deer with poor genetic immunity. The does with good characteristics will produce healthy, superior fawns and more of them too. Bucks will produce more semen and will be able

## TOP REASONS FOR REPRODUCTIVE SUCCESS OR FAILURE

High conception rates can be achieved because...	Low conception rates can be expected because...
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Your deer are in great body condition as a result of a year-round herd health program and good nutrition.</li> <li>2. Your deer are calm and settled.</li> <li>3. Your deer have been raised on your ranch.</li> <li>4. Your deer are well adjusted to being handled in your facilities.</li> <li>5. Your AI event is organized, properly staffed &amp; quiet.</li> <li>6. Your AI team is experienced with anesthesia, proper sterile techniques and modern technology.</li> <li>7. Your deer are anesthetized correctly, supplied with oxygen and monitored by people experienced in whitetail anesthesia.</li> <li>8. Your deer semen is evaluated microscopically prior to insemination and issues of viability are brought to your attention so that you can make informed decisions.</li> <li>9. Your deer have a moderate amount of internal abdominal fat.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Your deer are in poor body condition and their immune systems are compromised by on-going illness.</li> <li>2. Your deer are easily excitable and injuries are common.</li> <li>3. Your deer have been acquired recently or have not been on site for at least three months.</li> <li>4. Your deer are not familiar with your facilities or you have inadequate facilities.</li> <li>5. Your AI event is poorly organized, understaffed and noisy.</li> <li>6. Your AI team is inexperienced with deer and/or the deer industry.</li> <li>7. Your deer are insufficiently anesthetized and their vital systems are not supported during the AI procedure.</li> <li>8. Your deer semen was not assessed by a qualified person prior to insemination or the semen used is of poor quality.</li> <li>9. Your deer have little or no internal abdominal fat.</li> </ol>

to handle the severe stress of the rut successfully year after year. Selecting for superior external and internal genetic characteristics from outside and within your herd is critical to the success of your operation.

#### **Working Facilities That Work**

The regular use and quality of your working facilities can directly affect the reproductive success of your operation. The facilities must be functional and familiar to you and your deer to reduce stress for both of you. If your facilities are used only for reproductive procedures, you and your deer will be stressed when the big day comes. If your goal is to have reproductive success within your herd and healthy animals afterwards, expose your deer to the facilities throughout the year. Entice your deer to use and explore these facilities with their favorite treats. Practice, then practice some more. Have some training days or rehearsals with the staff members involved with your reproduction program. Practice really does make perfect or as close to perfect as you can get with deer!

#### **Your AI and Semen Collection Team**

It's important to consider the skill, experience and professionalism of those you hire to work on your deer. If you had to go to the hospital for anesthesia and surgery, would you want first-year residents or the doctors that have been doc-

toring awhile? You would likely choose the most skilled and most experienced. Your deer are valuable and the decision for them should be made in the same way. Your AI conception rates will be positively affected by having a team committed to all aspects of whitetail reproduction.

Anesthesia is one of the many aspects of AI and semen collection that can and needs to be fine-tuned by a veterinarian experienced with whitetail anesthesia. This is especially true of post-rut collections. The drugs and their dosages should be decided upon after a vet has evaluated the temperament, age, genetic line of the deer and the type of facilities. It's the safest thing for your deer. Once anesthetized deer should be supplied with oxygen, inhalant anesthesia if needed and monitored by a veterinarian and a team of trained people. Do you really know what to do if things go badly?

It is very important to make sure that the equipment being used by your AI team is modern and maintained. Also make sure that they are using proper, clean surgical techniques. There is a direct correlation between fewer post-op infections and deaths and the more cleanly and quickly insemination occurs.

*In closing, I hope that this article has enlightened some people and also explained some of the lesser thought about aspects of whitetail reproduction. I wish you the best of luck with your 2011 reproduction program! •*

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