

# Mule Deer

By Dr. Vince Crichton

**S**amuel Hearne, in his diary entitled Journey to the Northern Ocean, references conversations he had with Indians in which they described "jumping deer" in southern Manitoba. There is little doubt they were referring to mule deer as whitetails had not yet emigrated back to the province. The aforementioned description is in reference to their jumping gait when running.

Following the invasion of whitetails about the turn of the century, mule deer, which were abundant, declined precipitously. The reasons for the decline are not precisely known, but a parasite carried by whitetail and commonly referred to as brainworm may have been one of the causative agents in those areas in which whitetails harboured the infection. It is not common west of the Red River Valley thus other potential reasons for the decline must be examined. Interspecific relationships may have occurred to the detriment of the mule deer and contributed to their decline. Increased agricultural activity with extensive land clearing and grazing on native pastures must also be considered as potential factors.

Externally, the most obvious features delineating mule deer from whitetails are the large ears which are about 25% larger than a whitetails and the white rump patch with the black tipped tail. The antlers are branched rather than the

single beam common in whitetails.

Small numbers of mule deer still occur in Manitoba and during each hunting season reports are confirmed of mule deer being shot. Does with fawns have been reported and confirmed in a variety of locales suggesting that breeding is occurring.

Does hybridization occur between mule deer and whitetails? Tissue samples from the central Interlake have confirmed that about one third of the deer present here and believed to be whitetails are in fact hybrids. Examination of some whitetail antlers reveals a bifurcation at the point on one or both where mule deer antlers branch, suggesting that in fact the animal may be a hybrid.

Extensive studies to clarify this discovery have not been conducted. In the past, it has been possible to shoot a mule deer during deer seasons and legally tag it with a whitetail tag. But since 1995, it has been illegal to shoot mule deer in Manitoba. This protects a few mule deer but, those other factors which caused this species to initially disappear will have to be mitigated before significant populations are returned to the province. The overall cumulative effect of a number of mitigative measures may turn the tide in favour of mule deer but the road is long and the hill steep.

## Typical Mule Deer *Odocoileus hemionus*

RANK	STATUS	SCORE	YEAR	OWNER'S NAME	FIRST NAME	ADDRESS	PROV.
1	B	189 6/8	1949	Bird	Dr. Ralph D.	Brandon	MB
2	B~P	186 4/8	1910	Porter	Don	Dauphin	MB
3	B	173 6/8	1931	Roberts	Peter	Miami	MB
4	B	167 4/8	1994	Oliver	D. Russell	Marquette	MB
5	B	161 5/8	1971	McMaster	Don	Winnipeg	MB
6	B~P	158 0/8	1978	Hayduk	Jerry	West St. Paul	MB
7	B	153 4/8	1971	Woztowiz	Stan	Portage la Prairie	MB
8	B	153 3/8	1970	Walker	Dave	Gimli	MB
9	B	150 1/8	1994	Kelemen	Philip A.	Langruth	MB
10	B	142 0/8	1977	Kotchorek	Gerald E.	Winnipeg	MB

## Non-Typical Mule Deer

RANK	STATUS	SCORE	YEAR	OWNER'S NAME	FIRST NAME	ADDRESS	PROV.
1	B	231 7/8	1907	Hawkins	Ken	Winnipeg	MB
2	P	206 6/8	1910	Ewasjuk	John	Onanole	MB
3	B~P	190 1/8	1910	Conservation	Manitoba	Grandview	MB
4	B~P	177 3/8	1995	Martinson	Kyle	The Pas	MB
5	B	168 5/8	1928	Jewsbury	James	Kindersley	MB