

'Same-day' cervids

A way of comparing two year old stags' velvet yields

by Peter Fennessy, Neville Jopson and Adam Whaanga,
MAF Technology, Invermay Agricultural Centre

VELVET ANTLER from two year old Red stags is cut at various stages. In some cases mobs of stags are all cut together — and hence there is a range in the stage of maturity of antlers.

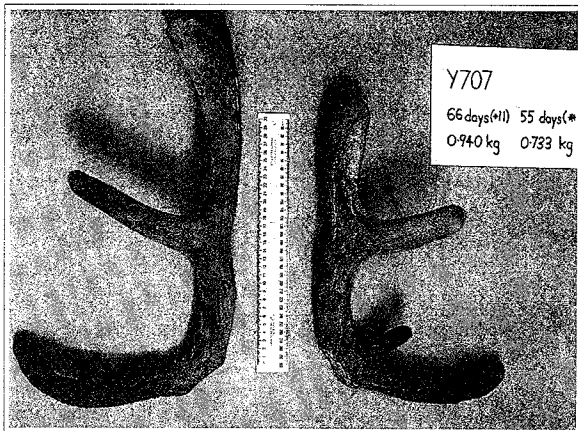
This range in maturity makes it difficult to use velvet weight to evaluate the potential value of these stags. Thus it is hard to evaluate the progeny of different sires or to select potential breeding or velveting stags or those for slaughter.

Last year at Invermay, we ran a small trial to calculate adjustment factors for the different stages of growth — that is, based on the days from casting to harvest.

We recorded casting date of the hard antler buttons for 27 two year old stags, and then 55 days later we harvested one of each animal's antlers. The other antler was harvested between 40 and 70 days after casting. The velvet was removed while stags were in a crush, and under local anaesthetic.

After harvest, the velvet antler pairs were weighed and photographed and the data analysed (by linear regression) to compare the relative weights for the 55-day and the other antler.

On the basis of these results it is possible to standardise all velvet antler weights from two year old Red stags to the same number of days by re-



Pairs of velvet antlers, cut at different stages from two year old Red stags

The Invermay research now allows a proper comparison, by way of velvet weight, of stags' potential value

coding the casting date, the harvest day and yield.

The conversion factors to a 55-day or 65-day standard are given in Table 1. A 40-day antler is about half (0.51) the weight of a 65-day antler; therefore to convert the antler weight, you simply divide the actual velvet yield by the appropriate day factor from the table.

For example, a stag cut 1.10 kg at 45 days; if it had been left to 65 days its yield would be expected to be $1.10/0.61 = 1.80$ kg. If it had been cut at 47 days, the appropriate adjustment factor would have been 0.65 so that the yield would be expected to be $1.10/0.65 = 1.69$ kg.

Recording casting dates is not too difficult even with a large mob. If mobs are run in at weekly intervals to get them used to the yards, then those stags which have cast in the previous week can be separated off and run in a separate mob.

For more accurate recording of casting dates within such a separate mob, the casting date can be estimated by recording those stags which are well healed (obviously they cast early in the week), those which still have scabs (mid-week casters) and those which have just cast (fresh wounds). This effectively breaks the week into two to three day periods.

This simple system means that the potential of two year old stags can be more easily assessed. □

Table 1

Adjustment factors for converting two year old velvet antler yields to a standardised period of growth (days from casting to harvest)

Actual growth period-days from casting to harvest	Adjustment factor for standardised growth period of	
	55 days	65 days
35	0.51	0.41
40	0.63	0.51
45	0.76	0.61
50	0.88	0.71
55	1.00	0.80
60	1.12	0.90
65	1.24	1.00
70	1.37	1.10