



BOONE AND CROCKETT MULE DEER

A GEOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

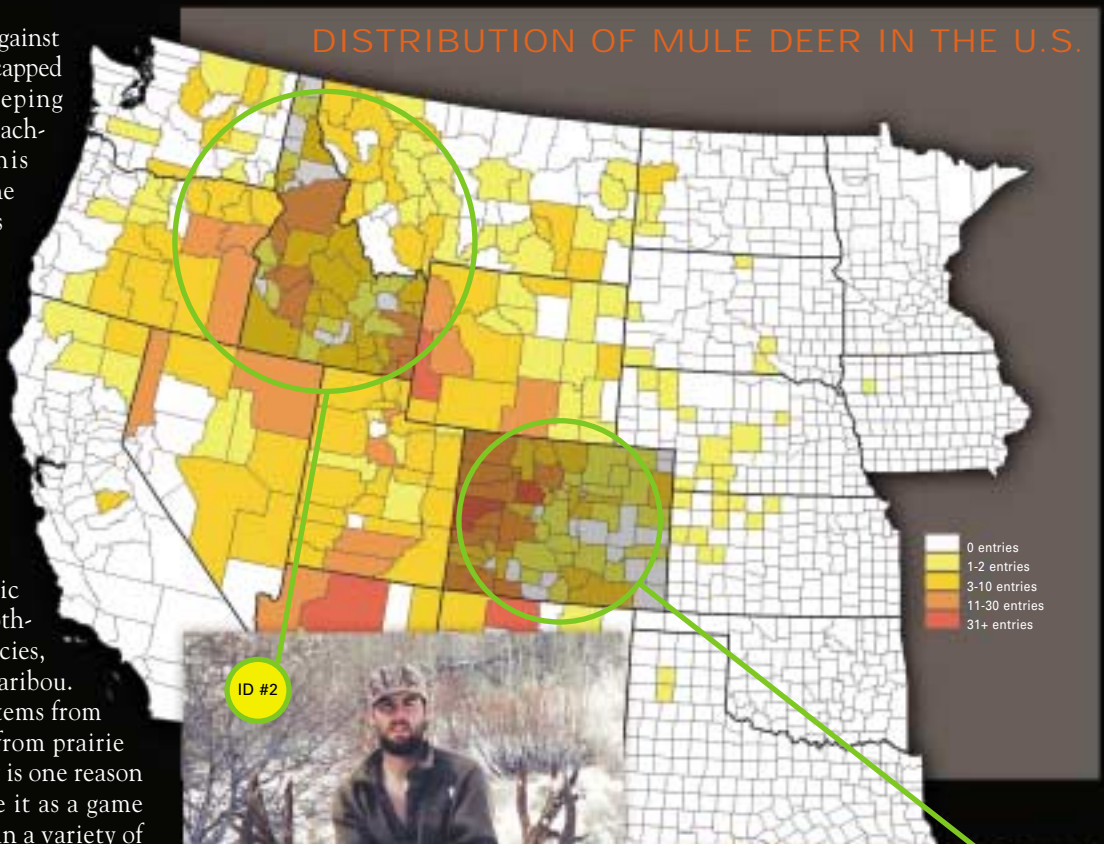
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A mule deer buck is poised against a backdrop of towering snowcapped mountains, wide rack sweeping past alert ears, forked tines reaching high into the air. This image is synonymous with the West, with wild spacious country where mule deer and other big game can be pursued in a great diversity of habitats. While mapping the Boone and Crockett Club records book entries for mule deer, I realized the amazing diversity of habitats where mule deer exist and thrive. They are indeed adaptable creatures, with a geographic range that is larger than all other North American deer species, including elk, moose, and caribou. This range includes ecosystems from deserts to rainforests, and from prairie to alpine. This adaptability is one reason why so many hunters value it as a game animal—it can be pursued in a variety of beautiful and challenging environments that add to the satisfaction of the chase.

Three Unique Subspecies

The mule and whitetail deer are members of the genus called *Odocoileus*, which is actually one of 17 worldwide genera of the deer family, *Cervidae*. The mule deer group is generally divided into 11 subspecies, although some debate among biologists still remains over the classification of several of these as subspecies. The prototypical and most common is the Rocky Mountain mule deer (*O. h. hemionus*). The other two subspecies recognized in the Boone and

DISTRIBUTION OF MULE DEER IN THE U.S.



The top two states for recorded entries are Colorado (393 entries) and Idaho (237 entries). The typical buck to the right was taken by Lifetime Associate Mark Streissguth in Las Animas County, Colorado (190-5/8 points). Douglas W. Pittman took the non-typical buck above in Owhyee County, Idaho (246 points).



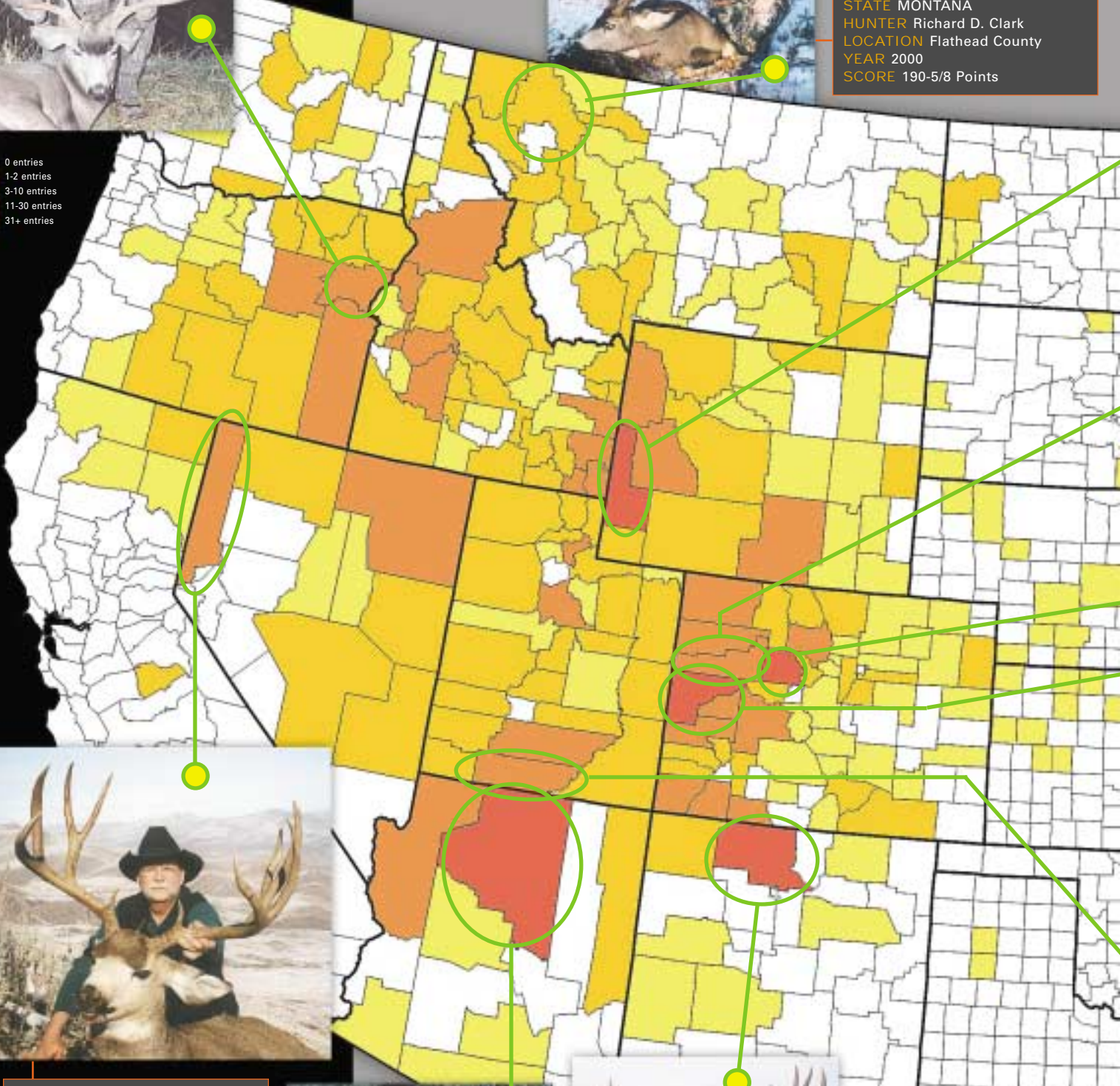


STATE OREGON
HUNTER Mike Raney
LOCATION Baker County
YEAR 1996
SCORE 190 Points



DISTRIBUTION OF MULE DEER ENTRIES BY COUNTY

STATE MONTANA
HUNTER Richard D. Clark
LOCATION Flathead County
YEAR 2000
SCORE 190-5/8 Points



STATE NEVADA
HUNTER Alton R. Parker
LOCATION Washoe County
YEAR 1998
SCORE 185-1/8 Points



STATE ARIZONA
HUNTER Seth A. Brunsvold
LOCATION Coconino County
YEAR 1998
SCORE 190-3/8 Points



STATE NEW MEXICO
HUNTER William J. Smith
LOCATION Rio Arriba County
YEAR 1998
SCORE 233-2/8 Points (non-typical)



STATE WYOMING
 HUNTER James M. Snowden
 LOCATION Lincoln County
 YEAR 2000
 SCORE 192-5/8 Points



STATE COLORADO
 HUNTER John W. Colliflower
 LOCATION Garfield County
 YEAR 2000
 SCORE 184-6/8 Points



STATE COLORADO
 HUNTER Mike Crites
 LOCATION Eagle County
 YEAR 1996
 SCORE 231-1/8 Points (non-typical)



STATE COLORADO
 HUNTER Mathew M. Gilson
 LOCATION Mesa County
 YEAR 1998
 SCORE 228-2/8 Points (non-typical)

STATE UTAH
 HUNTER Gilbert T. Adams
 LOCATION Kane County
 YEAR 1993
 SCORE 199-6/8 Points



TOP TEN MULE DEER COUNTIES	
1. Rio Arriba County, New Mexico	81 entries
2. Eagle County, Colorado	57 entries
3. Coconino County, Arizona	42 entries
4. Lincoln County, Wyoming	39 entries
5. Mesa County, Colorado	38 entries
6. Garfield County, Colorado	30 entries
7. Elko County, Nevada	25 entries
7. Gunnison County, Colorado	25 entries
8. Kane County, Utah	24 entries
9. Delta County, Colorado	23 entries
10. Bonneville County, Idaho	21 entries
10. Monroe County, Colorado	21 entries

Crockett Club's records books are the Columbia (*O. h. columbianus*) and Sitka (*O. h. sitkensis*) blacktail deer.

The two blacktail subspecies are sometimes referred to as "species in the making" since they may eventually evolve into separate species. This process has slowed since blacktails have been expanding their range and interbreeding with other subspecies. The variations between subspecies of mule deer are mainly the result of geographic isolation. When populations are isolated they tend to evolve with specific traits that are adaptations to their environment. By mapping the Boone and Crockett records book entries for these subspecies, we can see their respective ranges that help to explain these unique characteristics. Realize that this article only includes entries from the United States, since Canadian entries do not include county information, which makes accurate mapping difficult.

Rocky Mountain Mule Deer

The Rocky Mountain mule deer has the largest range of any of the subspecies of mule deer in North America. It is the largest, heaviest, darkest in coloration, and its range extends the furthest north. Its antlers tend to have more irregularities than blacktails, resulting in far more non-typical entries. The records book contains a total of 1,754 entries, with 319 not containing county information, resulting in 1,435 being mapped. Of the 319 not mapped, 297 were entered prior to 1980. The 1,435 mapped entries span the years 1870-2002, and include 938 typicals and 497 non-typicals. The World's Record typical was shot in 1972 in Dolores County, Colorado, and scored 226-4/8 points while the World's Record non-typical was shot in 1926 at Chip Lake, Alberta, and scored 355-2/8.

Mapping the records book entries illustrates the immense range of the mule deer, with seventeen different states having entries. The map also shows an interesting core verse periphery pattern. The core area stretches from northern Arizona and New Mexico, through eastern Nevada, Utah, western Colorado, and Wyoming, across southern Idaho and into eastern Oregon. As you move outward from this core area the number of entries

STATE CALIFORNIA
HUNTER Arnold E. Dado
LOCATION Humboldt County
YEAR 1993
SCORE 143-4/8 Points



STATE OREGON
HUNTER Ken Wilson
LOCATION Jackson County
YEAR 2000
SCORE 153-5/8 Points



STATE CALIFORNIA
HUNTER Glenn A. Zane
LOCATION Mendocino County
YEAR 1998
SCORE 138-3/8 Points



declines. If you rank the top ten states, Colorado is number one with 393 entries followed by Idaho (237), Utah (184), Wyoming (135), Oregon (110), New Mexico (94), Montana (74), Arizona (71), Nevada (64), and Washington (25). The remaining seven states (Nebraska, Kansas, California, North Dakota, South Dakota, Texas, Iowa) have a combined total of 48 entries. Iowa has mule deer? The lone Iowa entry came from Cherokee County and

was shot in 1900, reminding us that the historic range of mule deer extended far into the Great Plains.

Counties included in the distribution total 247, although 120 of these include only one or two entries of Rocky Mountain mule deer. The 37 counties with 11 or more entries account for 55 percent of the records book. The top ten counties is led by New Mexico's Rio Arriba with an amazing 87 entries followed by: Eagle, Colorado (57), Coconino, Arizona (42), Lincoln, Wyoming (39), Mesa, Colorado (38), Garfield, Colorado (30), Elko, Nevada, and Gunnison, Colorado (25), Kane, Utah (24), Delta, Colorado (23), Bonneville, Idaho, and Montrose, Colorado (21). The records book also includes some areas other than counties that have high numbers of entries. Northern New Mexico's Jicarilla Apache Reservation has 15 entries, while Arizona's Kaibab National Forest has 23 and the North Kaibab National Forest has 9.

DISTRIBUTION OF COLUMBIA BLACKTAIL DEER ENTRIES BY COUNTY



STATE CALIFORNIA
HUNTER H. James Tonkin, Jr.
LOCATION Trinity County
YEAR 1995
SCORE 140-6/8 Points

TOP FIVE COLUMBIA BLACKTAIL COUNTIES

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------|
| 1. Trinity County, California | 140 entries |
| 2. Mendocino County, California | 137 entries |
| 3. Jackson County, Oregon | 71 entries |
| 4. Humboldt County, California | 57 entries |
| 5. Siskiyou County, California | 52 entries |



STATE CALIFORNIA
HUNTER Daniel M. Geisinger
LOCATION Napa County
YEAR 2000
SCORE 135-5/8 Points

STATE CALIFORNIA
HUNTER Daniel R. Caughey III
LOCATION San Mateo County
YEAR 1998
SCORE 132-7/8 Points



Columbia Blacktail Deer

The Columbia blacktail deer is found in portions of California, Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia. The Columbia blacktail is generally smaller than the prototypical mule deer with a somewhat redder coat, shorter ears, and its trademark black tail. Columbia blacktails are commonly associated with the coastal rainforest of the Pacific Northwest, but also thrive in the dry chaparral environment farther inland. The range of the Columbia and Rocky Mountain mule deer overlap and interbreeding occurs along this



border. When interbreeding occurs the resulting hybrid has a distinct black streak down the center of its tail. A complete list of Columbia blacktail/mule deer boundaries is included in *Measuring and Scoring North American Big Game Trophies*.

STATE ALASKA
HUNTER Scott D. Newman
LOCATION Mitkof Island
YEAR 1998
SCORE 102-3/8 Points



LOCATION OF SITKA BLACKTAIL DEER IN ALASKA



The antlers of the Columbia blacktail are known for symmetry and the tendency to lack brow tines. (Editor's note: The non-typical category for Columbia blacktail is a new category as of 2002). The minimum score for Awards entry is 125 typical and 155 non-typical, while the minimum for All-time listing is 135 typical and 155 non-typical. The pending World's Record non-typical scores 187 points and was shot in Douglas County, Oregon, in 1967, while the World's Record typical scored 182-2/8 and was shot in Lewis County, Washington, in 1953.

The records book contains 1,035 entries spanning the years 1896-2001. Only 28 of these did not contain county information so 1,007 entries are represented on the map and in the accompanying statistics. The records book contains entries from three states: California (501), Oregon (327), and Washington (179). A total of 53 counties are included, although the 23 counties having at least 11 entries account for 86 percent of the records book. The ten best counties include: Trinity, California (140), Mendicino, California (137), Jackson, Oregon (71), Humboldt, California (57), Siskiyou, California (52), Lewis, Washington (43), Clackamas, Oregon (40), Linn, Oregon (33), Lane, Oregon (30), Josephine, Oregon, and Pierce, Washington (28).

Sitka Blacktail Deer

The Sitka blacktail deer is native to the islands of southeast Alaska, known collectively as the Alexander Archipelago, and a thin strip of mainland Alaska that borders British Columbia. The Coastal Mountains act as a barrier to dispersion to the east while extreme sub-arctic temperatures limit expansion north of Juneau. Transplanting programs, beginning in 1917, expanded this natural range with populations now existing near Yakutat, in Prince William Sound, and on Kodiak and Afognak Islands.

The Sitka blacktail is smaller on average than the Columbia blacktail. This seems to refute the biological law called Bergman's Rule, which states that the further north or south a species' geographic



range is from the equator the larger its body mass, thus decreasing heat loss. Then why is the Sitka smaller than the Columbia? The ocean moderates southeast Alaska's temperature, so larger body size is not needed. The other factor is the limited food supply available to Sitka blacktails, especially during the winter when heavy snows force them to lower elevations along the beaches. Therefore, food limitations and moderate climate explain the relatively small body size of the Sitka.

The records book contains 152 Sitka entries, with all of these in the typical category (Editor's note: The non-typical category for Sitka blacktail is a new category as of 2002). Sitka antlers are similar in shape to mule deer although darker with a tendency toward mass instead of length. The minimum score for Awards listing is 100 points, while 108 points is the minimum for All-time listing. The World's Record Sitka scored 133 and was shot in Jaskatla, British Columbia, in 1970. The records book contains 46 Awards entries and 106 All-time entries. The ear-



STATE ALASKA
HUNTER Justin T. Dubay
LOCATION Uganik Bay
YEAR 2001
SCORE 102-2/8 Points



STATE ALASKA
HUNTER Terry L. Wingert
LOCATION Olga Bay
YEAR 1994
SCORE 115-6/8 Points

liest entry was from 1964, with the rest coming since 1980.

Kodiak Island, known for its huge brown bears, is the top location for records book Sitka blacktails. Ninety entries, or 59 percent of the records book, come from Kodiak, along with two from nearby Afognak Island. Prince of Wales Island in extreme southeast Alaska accounts for 29 entries, while 22 come from an assortment of islands in the Alexander Archipelago. I could not determine the location of nine entries.

Hopefully this article provides you with a better understanding and appreciation for mule deer and blacktails. Mapping the Boone and Crockett records book not only indicates the areas with trophy potential, it educates us on the history, range, and adaptability of this great big-game animal. ■