



# BOONE & CROCKETT WHITETAILS

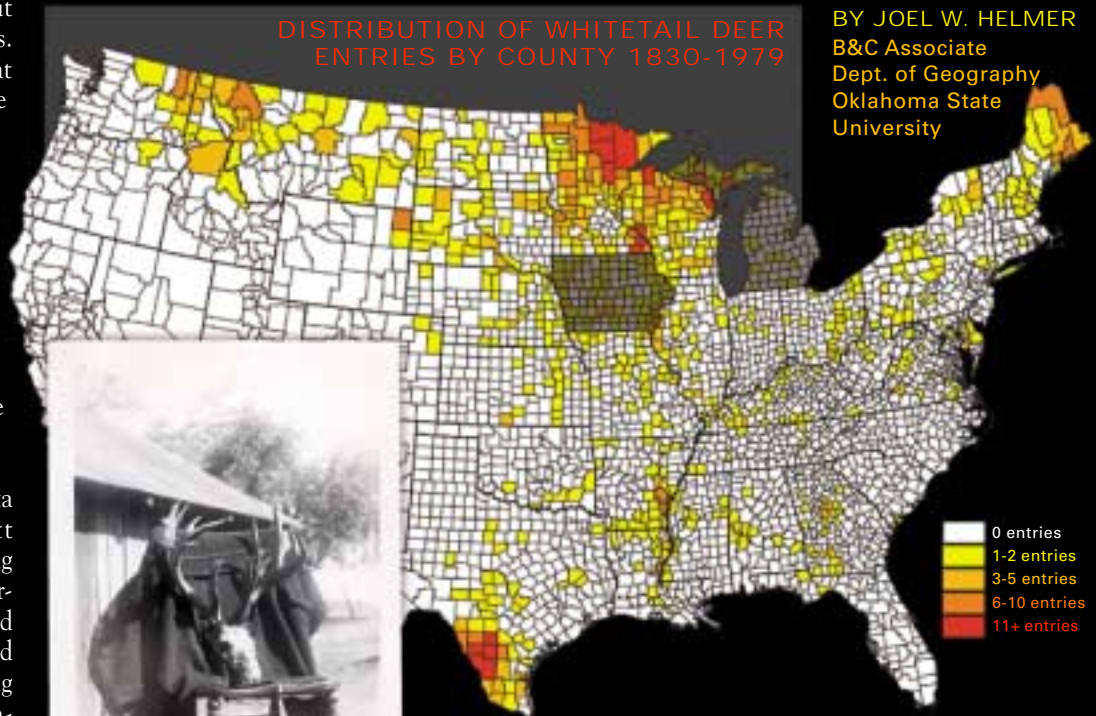
# A GEOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

As a deer hunter, I read a lot about where to hunt big whitetail bucks. Over the years I've noticed that most articles on that topic are vague. Statements like, "Iowa is a great state for huge bucks" are common. I wanted to know which counties are breaking records, and why some counties produce more big deer than others. I also needed maps, since they are more useful and informative than lists. Dissatisfied with what I read, I decided to see if I could do better.

The first step was record book data from the Boone and Crockett Club. Jack Reneau, Director of Big Game Records, provided the information I needed and explained how it was organized. I assembled 5,568 whitetail entries spanning the years 1830-2001 (only two entries were included from 2001, and only 120 from 2000). I successfully entered 5,439 entries into a Geographic Information System (GIS) that allowed me to produce a variety of maps and analyze the data. I did not include 129 entries lacking county-specific information on where the deer was taken. The information and maps shown here are based on the 5,439 deer entered into the GIS.

I had initially planned to produce one map showing the distribution of all the entries, but I noticed that the distribution of entries had changed over time. I decided to divide the records book into two time spans, 1830-1979 and 1980-2001. The former provides a historical account of deer herds in the United States, while the latter gives hunters an up-to-date map on which areas are currently producing numerous B&C entries.

DISTRIBUTION OF WHITETAIL DEER ENTRIES BY COUNTY 1830-1979



BY JOEL W. HELMER  
B&C Associate  
Dept. of Geography  
Oklahoma State  
University



The deer shown here in the black-and-white photo was taken in 1893 in Michigan. Historically, Michigan ranked fifth for the greatest number of whitetail deer entries. Since 1980, Michigan has fallen out of the top ten trophy producing states. On the other hand, Iowa ranked fourth historically,

second in current times, and is now the overall number one state producing trophy whitetails in the Boone and Crockett Club's records book. The buck pictured here was taken by Steve Philby in 1997 and scores 170-6/8 points.

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#### 1830-1979

The 1,489 entries mapped from this early period comprise 27% of 5,439 total entries. Thirty-nine states and 663 counties appear, the top three states — Minnesota (315), Wisconsin (194), and Texas (157) — accounting for 45% of all entries during the period. Montana, Arkansas, and South Dakota popped up in the top 10, while states currently hailed as big buck meccas, such as Ohio, Illinois, and Kansas, recorded relatively few entries.

The most productive county during this period was northern Minnesota's St. Louis (39), followed by south Texas' Webb (27), and Minnesota's Itasca (20). The top 10 counties during this period are in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Texas.

The distribution of entries from 1830-1979 reflects the history of whitetail deer in the United

States. During the late 1800s and early 1900s, whitetails were extremely rare in many states and had become extinct in some. Conversion of land for agriculture, deforestation, and unrestricted market hunting are some of the reasons for this decline. During this period, whitetails in agricultural states were especially vulnerable, as much of the land was cleared. Some deer herds did not return until recently. Ohio did not have a modern firearms season until 1943; and in Iowa's first modern deer season, in

1953, hunters took only 4,000 deer! Other states have similar histories, helping to explain the lack of entries during this time period. In contrast, whitetail deer survived in greater numbers in states with remote, forested areas. Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Maine are good examples — so too areas like south Texas, the Rocky Mountain Range, and the Mississippi Delta region. One interesting place is the Driftless Area of west-central Wisconsin and southeastern Minnesota. This region was not glaciated during the last ice age. Its landscape of forested hills provided food and cover, where deer survived and where they still grow big. Buffalo Wisconsin is in this region, and stands as the all-time most-productive county with 62 entries.

#### 1980-2001

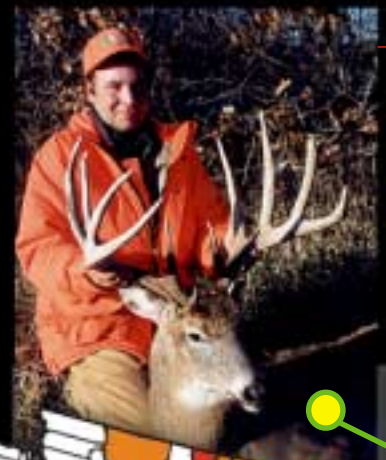
During the last two decades, the range and total population of the whitetail has expanded immensely, with managers now working to either stabilize deer populations or reduce them. With increasing numbers of deer came more interest in trophy-class deer. The 3,950 entries (74% of the record book total) come from 41 states and 1,254 counties. Incredibly, the years 1990-2001 account for 2,811 or 52% of the record book entries during this period.

Distribution has shifted to include the mid-western states, where deer herds are growing, aided by excellent habitat. The top 10 states are IL (509), IA (507), WI (395), MN (293), MO (244), KY (242), KS (235), OH (199), TX (159), and IN (138). The map shows the dominance of Mid-western states during the last 20

#### TOP TEN WHITETAIL STATES OF ALL-TIME

STATE	1830-2001	1830-1979	1980-2001
1. Iowa	615	108	507
2. Minnesota	608	315	293
3. Wisconsin	589	194	395
4. Illinois	552	43	509
5. Texas	316	157	159
6. Missouri	285	41	244
7. Kentucky	279	37	242
8. Kansas	255	20	235
9. Ohio	235	36	199
10. Michigan	155	55	100

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STATE KANSAS  
HUNTER Mark B. Steffen  
LOCATION Rice County  
YEAR 1996  
SCORE 160-2/8 (typical)

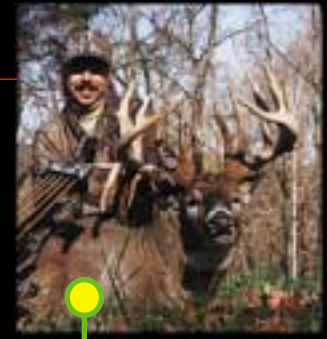


STATE IOWA  
HUNTER Ben R. Puttmann  
LOCATION Cherokee County  
YEAR 1998  
SCORE 170 (typical)



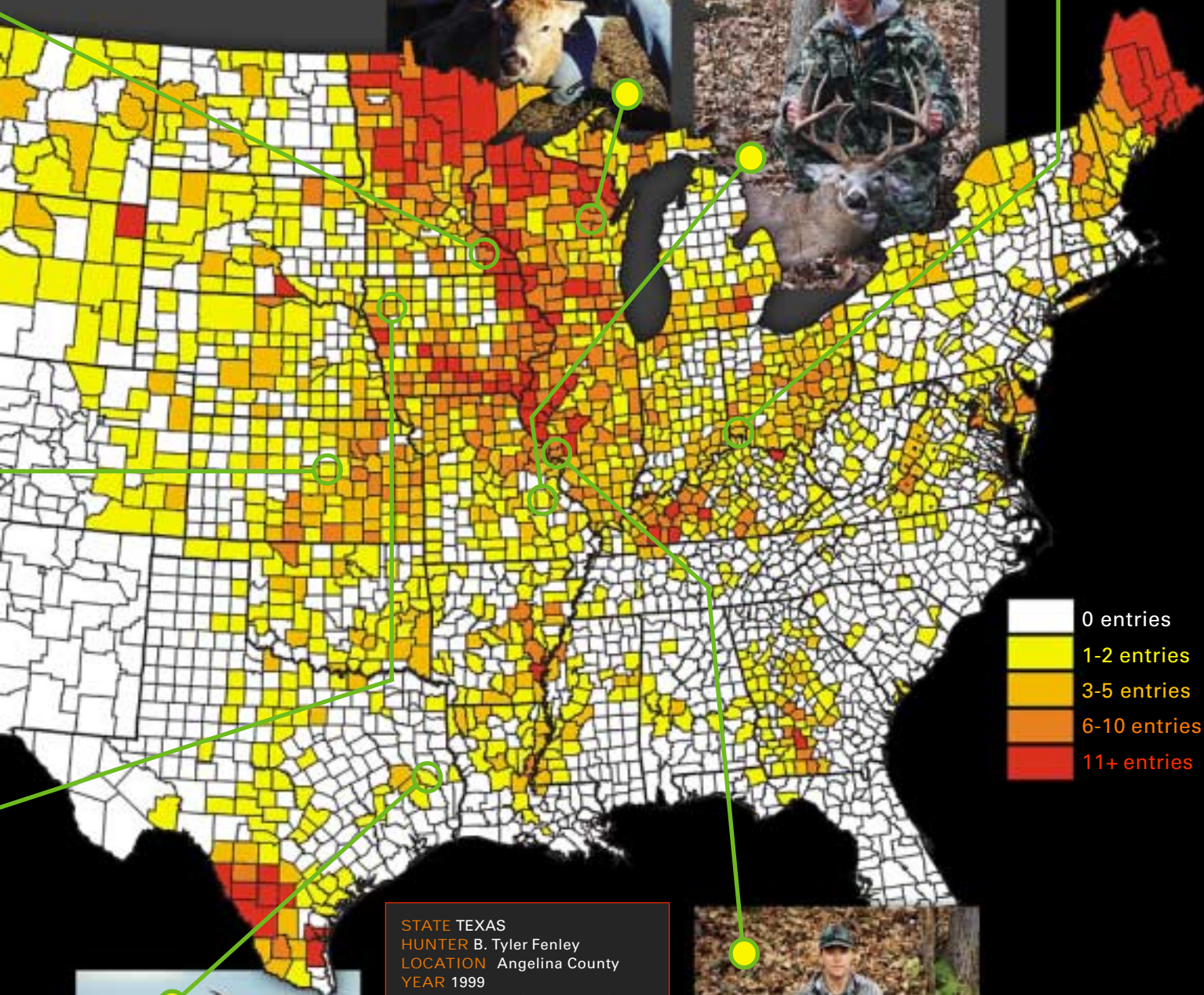
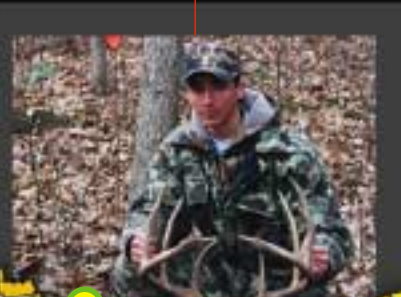
STATE MINNESOTA  
 HUNTER Thomas C. Kroening  
 LOCATION Olmstead County  
 YEAR 1998  
 SCORE 180-4/8 (typical)

STATE OHIO  
 HUNTER Mickey E. Lotz  
 LOCATION Hamilton County  
 YEAR 1995  
 SCORE 206-7/8 (non-typical)



STATE WISCONSIN  
 HUNTER Todd W. Davis  
 LOCATION Shawano County  
 YEAR 1999  
 SCORE 161-6/8 (typical)

STATE MISSOURI  
 HUNTER William M. Hazer  
 LOCATION Washington County  
 YEAR 1998  
 SCORE 170-2/8 (typical)



STATE TEXAS  
 HUNTER B. Tyler Fenley  
 LOCATION Angelina County  
 YEAR 1999  
 SCORE 198-6/8 (non-typical)



STATE ILLINOIS  
 HUNTER Walter L. Baker  
 LOCATION Jersey County  
 YEAR 1998  
 SCORE 216-3/8 (non-typical)

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years, especially the last decade. States and counties that yielded many entries during the previous period have, by and large, continued to produce; but they account for a smaller percentage of entries.

The top 50 counties are distributed in the following states: IA (17), IL (11), WI (6), KY (4), MN (4), TX (4), ME (2), MI (1), and MT (1). Twenty-eight of the top 50 counties come from Iowa and Illinois, which is why these states attract hunters. For some states, the last 20 years account for nearly all of their entries. For example, Kansas recorded 235 Awards Book entries during this period, and 255 All-time entries, while Kentucky had 242 and 279, respectively.

### 1830-2001

Mapping all 5,439 entries gave me a print similar to the 1980-2001 map, since the vast majority of trophies come from that period. Forty-two states and 1,443 counties produced entries, with most coming from the top 10 states: IA (615), MN (608), WI (589), IL (552), TX (316), MO (285), KY (279), KS (255), OH (235), and MI (155). These 10 states accounted for 3,880 entries, or 72% of the record book. The all-time best counties are Buffalo, WI, and St. Louis, MN with both recording 62 entries. The top 50 counties are distributed in the following states: IA (13), MN (12), WI (10), IL (8), TX (5), ME (1), and MT (1).

### TOP WHITETAIL COUNTIES SINCE 1980

COUNTY	1980-2001	1830-2001	1830-1979
1. Buffalo Co., WI	45	62	17
2. St. Louis Co., MN	23	62	39
2. Dimmit Co., TX	23	41	18
3. Pike Co., IL	22	24	2
4. Adams Co., IL	21	25	4
4. Fulton Co., IL	21	22	1
4. McHenry Co., IL	21	21	0
4. Allamakee Co., IA	21	25	4
4. Monona Co., IA	21	23	2
4. Webb Co., TX	21	48	27

### WHY DO SOME COUNTIES PRODUCE SO MANY ENTRIES?

Answering this question is difficult since so many natural and man-made factors come to bear. Still, the relationship between record book entries and river systems is plainly evident throughout the country, especially in heavily farmed states. For example, in Iowa the best deer counties are not the most heavily farmed, but tend to have a mixture of farmland and forest cover associated with river bottoms. Counties bordering the Missouri, Mississippi and Des Moines Rivers account for the majority of entries from Iowa. This pattern is evident in nearly all states, especially along the Mississippi, Ohio, and Missouri River systems.

The relationship between deer densities and number of entries is also interesting. States with high deer densities and long firearms seasons with liberal bag limits produce, on balance, fewer entries. States with lower deer densities, shorter gun seasons, and more restrictive buck harvests tend to produce more entries. A good comparison is between Ohio, which averages around 10 deer per square mile, and Mississippi, which averages more than 30.

Perhaps the most interesting pattern is the impact state management practices can have on entries. In Kansas, modern rifle season takes place after the rut, while in Oklahoma it generally falls during the peak of the rut. Also, the black powder season in Kansas is in mid-September, when the trees still wear leaves and temperatures are high. In contrast, Oklahoma's black powder season occurs in late October and early November, when temperatures are cool, bucks are starting to rut, and the leaves are falling. Since the majority of bucks killed are taken during gun seasons, timing those sea-

sons so bucks are less vulnerable gives the animals time to mature. Similar differences are apparent between seasons and the number of big-buck entries from Iowa and Missouri, Ohio and West Virginia, and Nebraska and Kansas.

The maps produced for this article give hunters an accurate picture of where B&C-class bucks are being taken. Though your odds are



STATE ILLINOIS  
 HUNTER James Kruczynski  
 LOCATION Pike County (3)  
 YEAR 1998  
 SCORE 198-7/8 (non-typical)

definitely higher in certain states and counties, the maps also show that entries come, literally, from all over. They have come from 1,443 different counties, half the counties in the forty-two states that have produced entries. So no matter where you hunt, there is always a "geographical chance" of bringing home a record book buck! ▲▲▲

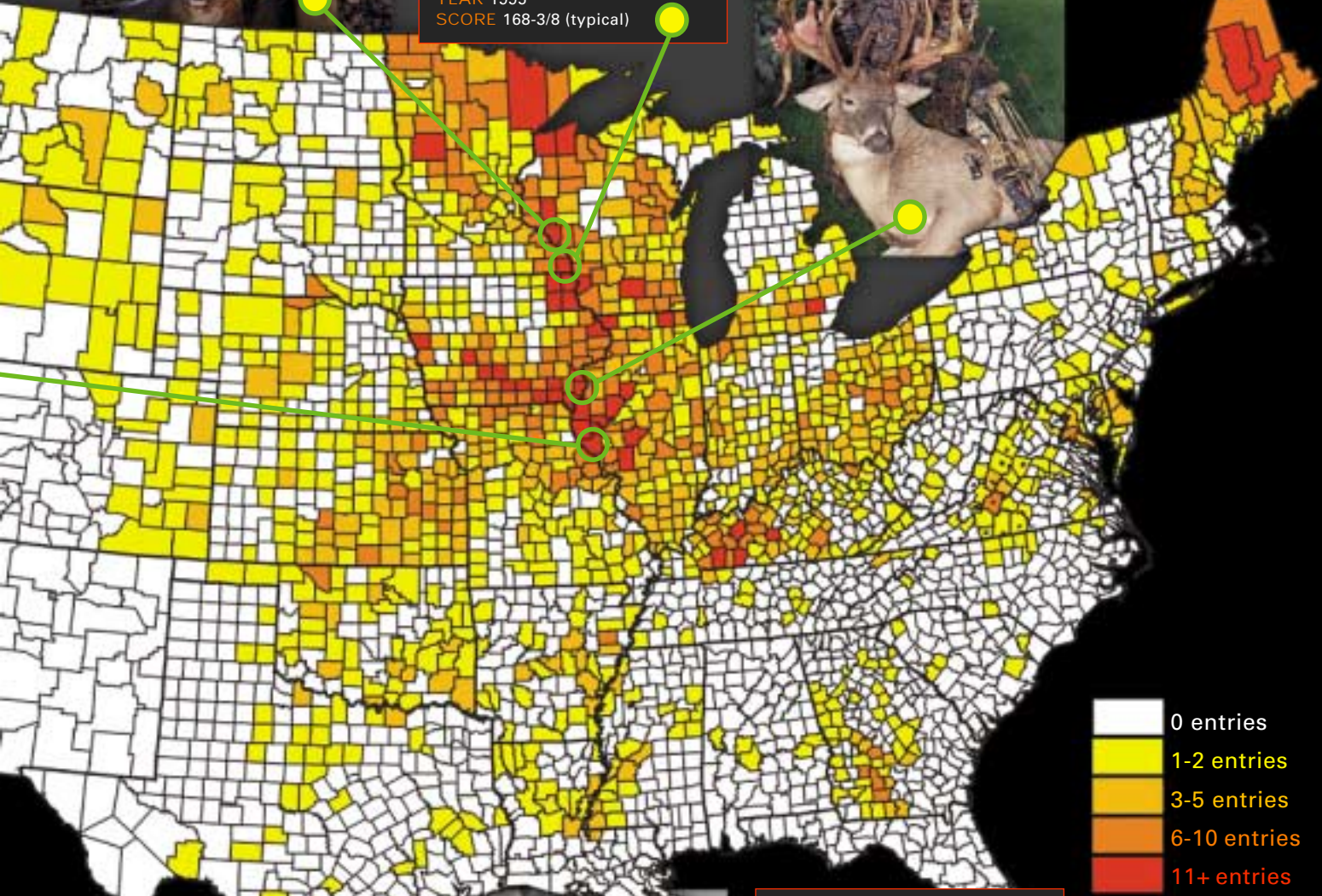
STATE WISCONSIN  
HUNTER Ronald J. Jilot  
LOCATION Buffalo County (1)  
YEAR 1997  
SCORE 203-5/8 (non-typical)



STATE IOWA  
HUNTER Craig R. Belknap  
LOCATION Des Moines County (12)  
YEAR 1998  
SCORE 198-5/8 (non-typical)



STATE MINNESOTA  
HUNTER Bruce C. Norton  
LOCATION Houston County (11)  
YEAR 1995  
SCORE 168-3/8 (typical)



STATE TEXAS  
HUNTER Floyd Burr  
LOCATION Dimmitt County (2)  
YEAR 1949  
SCORE 166 (typical)

Historically Dimmitt County has been a top producer. It currently ranks second (tie) and 3rd overall since 1830.

STATE TEXAS  
HUNTER Joe E. Coleman  
LOCATION Dimmitt County (2)  
YEAR 1998  
SCORE 170-4/8 (typical)

