

CWD: FACT OR FOLLY?

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The ideologists of deer management and research won't let the Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) craze die. And for good reason—it is an easy source of state and federal funding aimed at eliminating this phantom cervid killer. Year after year, money and labor are spent on testing deer (dead deer) and after 10 years, not a single positive has been found in Texas. When will it end?

There has never been a known case of a whitetail dying anywhere in the wild from CWD, and thousands of clinical tests have failed to show a single positive for CWD in Texas. Why? Because indications are that it is a "condition" rather than a disease, and is caused by environmental and genetic factors—factors, which do not occur in Texas. The condition is age related, and deer in captivity that have succumbed from the condition have been old. The average deer in the wild is less than 3 years old, and will die from some other cause, even if it develops the CWD condition.

Wildlife leaders in Wisconsin, the state that started the CWD hysteria 10 years ago, projected that the whitetail population in Wisconsin would be wiped out in 20 years by CWD. Today, 10 years later, the deer herd in Wisconsin is bigger and healthier than it has ever been, and trophy bucks are still being taken every year! More than \$34 million has been spent trying to find a phantom "disease" in Wisconsin deer that has less than 1 percent rate of occurrence and has proven not to be relevant to the health of the deer herd.

In 2002, after Wisconsin made such a fuss over CWD (and killed over 100,000 deer to find that less than 1 percent were affected), other state agencies jumped on the bandwagon like a

dog on a bone. By closing their borders to deer importation, and leveling rules on deer breeders, it gave state agencies more "turf" power over infringing groups. Texas readily joined other states by asking for more funding to study this "raging disease" which was sure to devastate the white-tailed deer in America.

After 10 years of searching, and thousands of clinical tests on deer, not a single positive for CWD has been found in Texas. There are at least three reasons for this: the condition is environmental, genetic, and age related. Apparently, Texas does not provide the environmental or genetic factors needed to produce the condition in Texas deer, and the average age of deer in Texas does not allow the condition to flourish. The only good thing coming from the closure of the Texas border to deer importation was the curtailment of deer movement into the state from outside sources. Texas does not need deer from outside the state, even for penned breeding purposes.

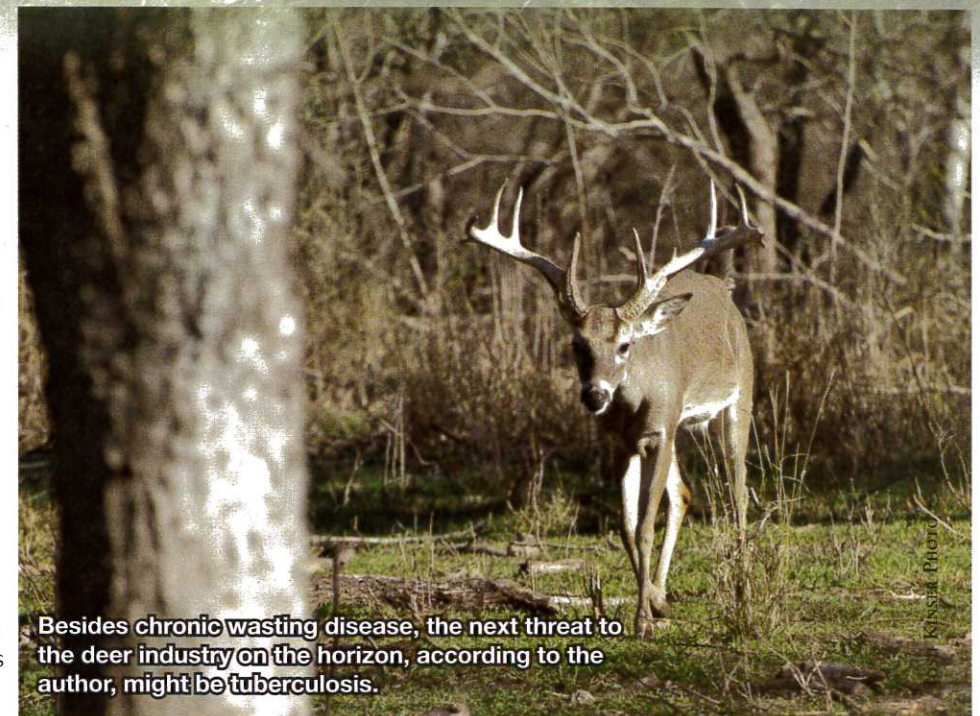
CWD is not a threat to humans, livestock, deer, or elk. However, it could pose a financial threat to hunting, deer breeding, and other wildlife related industries in Texas if it is ever found and the public reacts negatively to media hysteria as Wisconsin did in 2002. Bear in mind that any clinical sample can be reported as positive, negative, or questionable. A questionable sample, reported as positive by someone with an agenda, could spell havoc to deer hunting and the wildlife community in Texas. This happened in Wisconsin when a deer brain was tested by two different entities—one federal and one state. The federal response was negative, while the University of Wyoming state test (of the same brain) was positive. This, alone, shows how little the research

community knows about this malady.

The wholesale annihilation of over 70 whitetails in an East Texas breeder pen occurred in the fall of 2010. The deer owners could not prove that the deer herd was CWD-free because at least one of the deer had been brought in illegally from Arkansas. A Texas Parks and Wildlife Department team was sent to the breeder pens to kill all of the deer for testing. Only dead deer can be tested for CWD, and the entire herd was shot. Subsequent testing showed all of the deer to be negative for CWD. Who would have thought otherwise, because no positive tests have been found in Arkansas.

Well over 20,000 negative tests have been done on Texas whitetails, and the administrative excuse for testing more is getting a little thin. A new "dilemma" with whitetails is being proposed, as TPWD has issued a warning that tuberculosis (TB) may be the next crisis facing the Texas deer industry. Is it possible that the true objective for all of the supposed diseases in whitetails is actually a political disease? If so, would it be anything new?

Texas has an estimated whitetail population of 3.7 million. Of this number, some 2.25 million are female that produce one



Besides chronic wasting disease, the next threat to the deer industry on the horizon, according to the author, might be tuberculosis.

ages about 70 percent, recruitment into the deer herds is 35 percent, and hunter harvest is 12 percent. Any malady that affects less than 1 percent of a deer herd (no state has a higher rate of infection) is not worth talking about. Most states, including

and the Hill Country. Coyotes help to solve that problem in South Texas, but the Edwards Plateau is still short on doe harvest. But, some of us can remember when landowners in Texas opposed the legal hunting of does, even when die-offs

AFTER 10 YEARS OF SEARCHING, AND THOUSANDS OF CLINICAL TESTS ON DEER, NOT A SINGLE POSITIVE FOR CWD HAS BEEN FOUND IN TEXAS. THERE ARE AT LEAST THREE REASONS FOR THIS: THE CONDITION IS ENVIRONMENTAL, GENETIC, AND AGE RELATED. APPARENTLY, TEXAS DOES NOT PROVIDE THE ENVIRONMENTAL OR GENETIC FACTORS NEEDED TO PRODUCE THE CONDITION IN TEXAS DEER, AND THE AVERAGE AGE OF DEER IN TEXAS DOES NOT ALLOW THE CONDITION TO FLOURISH.

million fawns annually. Hunters take 560,000 deer each year, and the population of 3.7 million is static. Therefore, one could argue that 440,000 deer simply disappear from the landscape each year. Deer die annually from more causes than you can shake a stick at, and it may be a good thing, for otherwise, we would be up to our ears in deer! The point is that we have almost twice as many deer produced each year than we need for hunting, and any causative agent that decreases the population and is not a human factor, should be considered as a natural control.

In Texas, annual fawn production aver-

Texas, lose more deer than that on highways and in fences. Monies contributed to the states from hunters, including licenses and excise taxes on arms and ammunition should be spent on more important aspects of wildlife management.

In spite of all the hullabaloo over CWD and TB, and any future crisis that can be thought up, the Texas deer herds are doing well, and hunters are reaping the benefits of a deer population that manages to lose nearly a half-million deer each year from non-hunting causes. If there is any problem, it is a lack of adequate harvest to control deer numbers in South Texas

from malnutrition were occurring every dry year. The first doe permits were issued in the Texas Hill Country in 1957, and today, 46 percent of the state deer harvest is antlerless. So, we've come a long way with deer management during the last 54 years, in spite of the radical emphasis on deer diseases.

How many times have you heard the old adage: "technical genius can be found on any street corner, but common sense is scarce"? No truer statement could be made than that associated with the fanaticism about CWD. **W**