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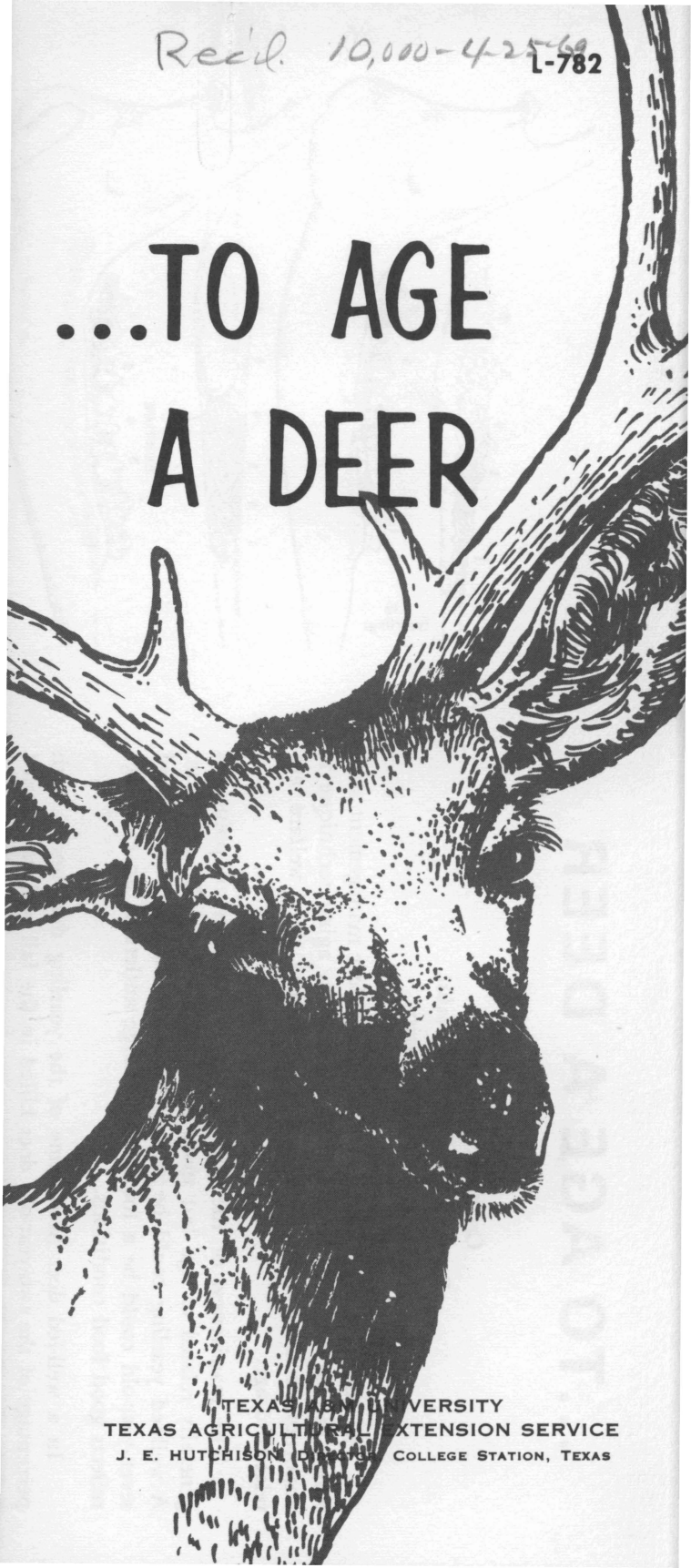
...TO AGE A DEER



TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
TEXAS AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE
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...TO AGE A DEER

CHARLES W. RAMSEY
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The ability to age a deer is an important deer management skill which can be acquired with a little effort. An aging technique is important because many things which measure deer welfare are related to age.

The massiveness of the antlers, not the number of points, is generally related to age but more strongly influenced by nutrition. A well-fed yearling could be an eight-point buck, but a poorly fed seven-year-old could be a four-point. Large antlers at an early age reflects good food conditions.

In a well-fed deer herd some of the yearling does and a high percentage of the two-year-old does killed in the fall will have raised a fawn the previous summer.

The age of a deer cannot be determined by tooth replacement as it can in sheep and goats, but can be determined by wear on the jaw teeth. As a deer grows older, certain portions of its teeth are worn enough to show definite differences from the teeth of other age classes.

The following criteria for determining ages are somewhat simplified for ease of use, but you should be able to determine within one year the age category of the deer examined.

A deer has only six jaw teeth, although they appear to have many more. The teeth are broken into two distinct categories: The premolars, which are numbered 1, 2, and 3, and the molars which are numbered 4, 5, and 6.

Deer are aged in fractions because they are born around July and are killed during the hunting season.

1½ year old (yearling): The yearling deer is the most easily recognized of all age classes. The first three jaw teeth are milk teeth, which will be replaced around two years of age. These are worn smooth as a yearling while the last three teeth remain sharp. The number 3 tooth has three cusps in the milk tooth stage, but only two cusps appear on the replaced tooth.

2½ year old: The first three jaw teeth have been replaced by permanent teeth and all molars are sharp. The dentine of the first molar (tooth 4) is not as wide as the enamel which surrounds it.

3½ year old: The dentine in the first molar (tooth 4) is now as wide or wider than the enamel which surrounds it, and this is not true of the second molar or tooth 5.

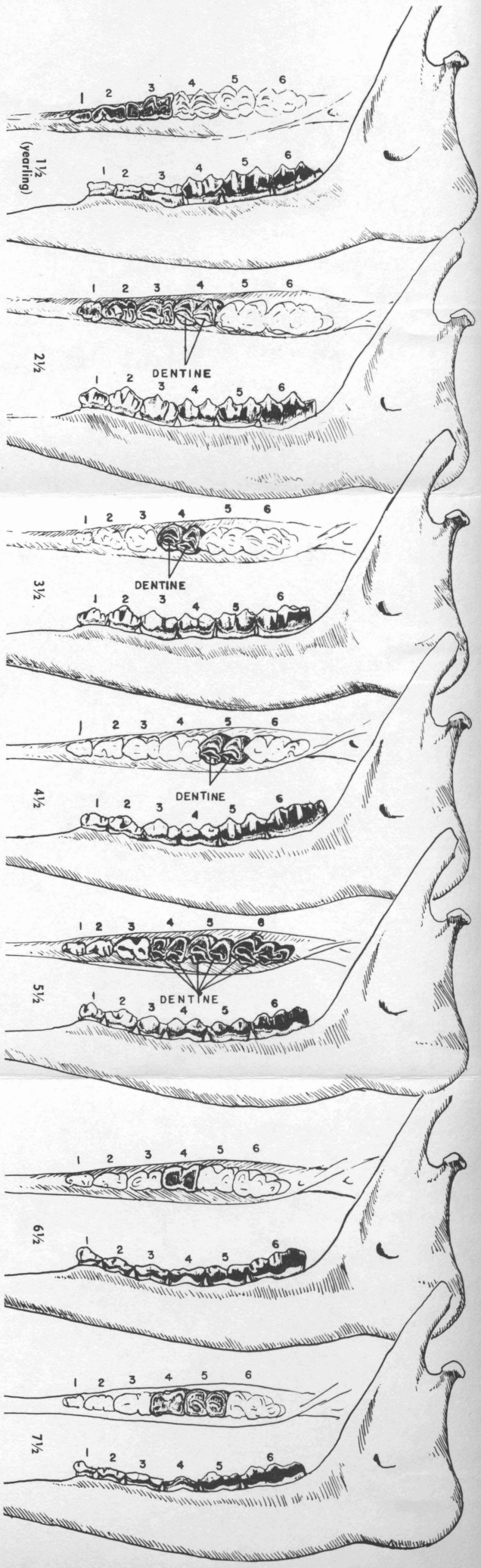
4½ year old: The dentine of the first and second molars (teeth 4 and 5) is as wide or wider on both teeth than the enamel which surrounds it, but not in tooth 6.

5½ year old: The dentine of all molars (teeth 4, 5, and 6) is now as wide or wider than the enamel surrounding it.

6½ year old: The first molar (tooth 4) is worn smooth but teeth 5 and 6 are not smooth.

7½ year old: The first and second molars (teeth 4 and 5) are worn smooth or tooth 5 may still have a small ridge left.

8½ year old: All molar teeth are worn smooth (teeth 4, 5, and 6), but tooth 6 may still have a small ridge left.



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