

*The wapiti-red hybrid stag in the foreground makes the normal-sized red stag at his rump look runty.*



## The Canadian "Waps"

THE TWENTY-THREE wapiti imported by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries from Elk Island, National Park, Alberta, were shifted to the Invermay Research Station in early June after two months' quarantine on Somes Island.

At Invermay the wapiti were housed in covered yards over winter because during quarantine the animals had grown fine-haired summer coats and shed their thick winter coats. Housing the wapiti indoors overcame the problem of wind-chill which wapiti in summer coats would suffer in the paddock and reduced their energy requirements for maintenance to increase their winter growth rates.

During the winter the wapiti have slowly grown winter coats, but the hair length is shorter than normal.

Adaptation by the Canadian wapiti to the changed seasons of the southern hemisphere is of considerable interest, particularly with regard to breeding next March/April. Essentially the wapiti were shifted last April from a mid-spring environment in Canada, to a mid-autumn environment in New Zealand.

After arrival in New Zealand in early April, the spiker bulls shed their hard antler stumps within a fortnight, and

**This report on the Canadian wapiti imported by MAF and now established at Invermay, was prepared for 'The Deer Farmer' by Dr Geoff Moore, who accompanied the shipment from Canada and spent some time in that country during the preparations for the transshipment.**

growth of velvet antler then occurred. Initially the growth rate of antler was normal, but later it slowed and was arrested.

When the velvet antlers were removed after about 50 days' of growth, they measured only about 5 to 15 inches. These stunted velvet antlers appeared to be hardening prematurely, and were similar to some of the stunted regrowth

which occurs in stags after velvetting. The yearling males grew spikes which had not hardened by early August.

Rutting behaviour was displayed in June by some of the bulls imported by Alpine Helicopters, but not by the two-year bulls at Invermay.

The changes in coat and antler cycle in the two-year-old bulls, and display of rutting behaviour, indicate a shifting backwards in the North American cycle of these imported wapiti.

In late July the weights of the 14-month-old males and females averaged 170 kg and 150 kg respectively. The 26-month-old males weighed 210 kg and the females 180 kg.

In 1982 the imported females will be mated to the imported bulls. A group of 20 adult red hinds will also be mated to the imported bulls, to investigate possible mating or calving problems with cross-breeding.

Studies investigating the use of New Zealand wapiti-type bulls of Fiordland extraction as heavyweight sires in red deer farming, are continuing at Invermay. In the longer-term it is hoped that the relative merits of imported wapiti and the New Zealand-type wapiti, can be evaluated in cross-breeding trials with red deer hinds on farms.