

Rut question weighed up

Could some farmer or research institution supply the results of weighing spikers from February through to the end of June to show the effects of the rut on weight gain (if any)?

I normally quit my spikers in Feb/March but if I have sufficient feed I would consider keeping some of them until winter.

I do not have scales but have kept close to 60 kg (carcase weight) average with straight Reds. If any spikers look as though they might kill below 50 kg they have been kept for a second winter.

AT INVERMAY we have weighed yearling stags over the first rut for several years. As a typical example, the results of a group of 1989 born Red X Red stags are described here.

The group of 74 had an average weight of 44 kg at weaning in mid-February, 1990. They were fed pasture through their first winter with an extra 1 kg of barley and 0.8 kg of lucerne per day, about 18 MJME.

By September 4, 1990, the average



If you have a question for this column, write to "Reader Cervus", P.O. Box 11092, Wellington and MAF Deer will supply the answers.

weight was 73 kg — a gain of 29 kg, or over the 203 days they grew at 142 g/day. In the first week of September, due to pressure of animal numbers on Invermay, these stags were taken to Southland for grazing.

For the period of September 5 to their next weighing on February 7, 1991, (155 days), they reached 107 kg, ie 34 kg growing at an average rate of 219 g/day. These animals remained in Southland over winter in 1991 where they were fed ad lib silage and some grass, and returned to Invermay in mid-July.

The average weight at July 30 was 111 kgs — a weight gain of just 4 kg, most of which probably occurred in February and early March, illustrat-

ing virtually no return in venison yield from the first six months of their second year. In fact in some years, yearling stags have lost weight between mid-March and the end of July.

However, there has been a small amount of research work done at Invermay looking at the effect of natural rut suppression on weight gain of yearling stags over their first rut. Sometimes the presence of older stags will suppress the rut and yearlings will gain weight over the rut and early winter.

However, the results of such work have been variable. The suppression of the rut has been a major feature of research at Massey University Deer Unit.

Planned management strategies to maximise growth potential in the first year can help minimise the problem of animals not reaching optimum slaughter weight by 15 months of age.

Recorded pairing of dams and fawns will identify hinds that consistently wean lighter fawns and these should be culled.

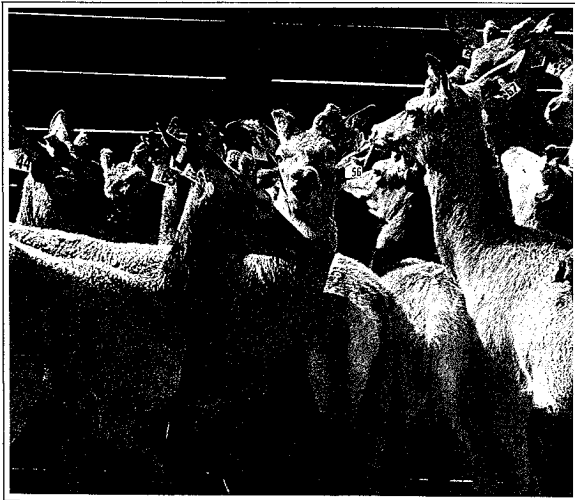
Planning the mating programme to introduce stags early, say March 20 (fawn November 9) to hind groups, with a percentage of the hinds synchronised to cycle earlier by hormone treatments, can 'tighten' group cycling by social facilitation resulting in more fawns born to the first cycle.

Removal of stags from mating groups by May 5 will ensure the last fawn is born by December 24. In our experience, fawns born after this date seldom perform well.

Post weaning, fawns can be separated by weight and a group of lighter weight fawns, preferentially fed and without the competition of their larger peers, can produce 5 to 10 kg of extra growth to the end of their first winter.

It seems there will always be some tail-enders, but these strategies will help minimise the impact of the problem and should produce a higher group average carcase weight.

John Patene
Deer farm manager
Invermay



The effect of the rut on spikers

In some years, Invermay spikers lost weight