



Jay Scott • Field Editor

Game Trails

Tracking Down Western Hunting Tactics

Coues' Deer Field Judging

As a hunter and outfitter, in my mind there's nothing more fun to hunt than big Coues' deer bucks. Coues' deer can be very exciting animals to hunt because of their wary nature and ghostlike qualities. I've been fortunate to have been involved in the harvesting of many record book bucks, both for myself and with other hunters. My hunting partner, Darr Colburn, of Colburn and Scott Outfitters, and I use two methods to field judge Coues' bucks: *Estimating Actual Measurements* and *Estimating Shortest Points*. Hopefully, these two methods will help your field judging for the upcoming fall season. Please review the different charts in this article to get a feel for the numbers we often use for certain bucks. These numbers are instrumental for quick field judging.

One of the things that has helped my field judging the most is actually measuring – with a tape – every antler I can get my hands on. This will do wonders for helping fine-tune your eye and put proper references to the numbers.

The minimum net scores to qualify for the All-time Boone and Crockett record book is 110" (*typical*) and 120" (*non-typical*). There is also a lower three-year Awards minimum of 100" (*typical*) and 105" (*non-typical*).

Estimating Actual Measurements

There are four aspects/categories that are important while field judging and trying to determine a buck's score. In order of importance they are: point length, main beam length, mass, and inside spread. Long points are mandatory in order for a buck to reach the record book and far out-distance any other factor. A buck most oftentimes also needs good main beams in order to score high. Mass is the third most important aspect of a buck's score, and then the inside spread is normally a minor factor. When looking for a buck that would qualify for the B&C record book, usually one or more category weakness can drop you below the required trophy book minimum.

I'm going to walk you through how we field judge and add up the actual measurements on a buck. For our example, let's assume we're looking at a buck between 110-115 inches. While field judging trophy bucks, the first thing I look for are the number and length of points. I make sure the buck has at least a G-1 (*eyeguard*), G-2 and G-3, plus main beam on each side (*a basic 4x4*). Almost all record

book bucks have at least this configuration. I quickly estimate and add the points on each side (*G-1, G-2, G-3, and G-4, if available*) from each side. I always like my score estimates to be on the low or conservative side. Keep in mind, when you get bucks that have G-4s and G-5s that are matching lengths your net score will be much nearer the gross score. Back to our example buck – his left side has a 3-inch G-1, 8-inch G-2, and 7-inch G-3 for a total of 18 inches of point length on the left side. Now add the right side, and for space and time limitations, let's assume the right side matches. So, we have 36 inches of total point length.

The next thing I do is judge the main beam length on each side. See the included chart to get the average main beam lengths I use in my model. For long main beams, they need to go away from the head out toward the end of the ears and then wrap back toward one another. Typically, beams that almost touch in the front are a very good sign of long main beams. Also, look for lots of space between the G-2 and G-3. Lots of space or distance along the beam means it's a longer main beam. A short main beam will not wrap around much or have much of a curved look to it. Make sure when trying to look for long wrap-around beams that the buck is not narrow in width. Sometimes they can wrap nicely but are narrow, so it can be deceiving. I look for main beams on record book deer to be at

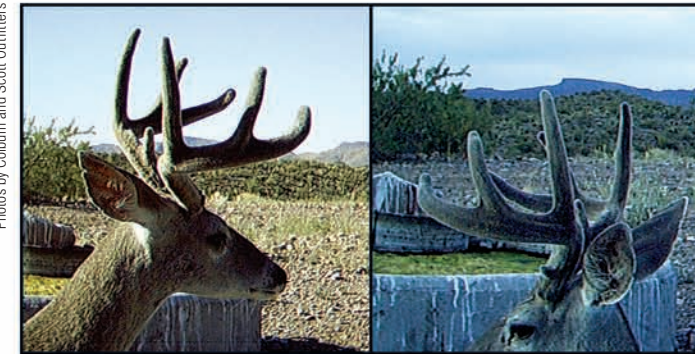


ESTIMATE ACTUAL MEASUREMENTS
 Left: G1 4 5/8 G2 5 4/8 G3 3 Main Beam 14 Mass 11 Total 38 1/8
 Right: G1 4 G2 5 4/8 G3 3 Main Beam 14 Mass 11 Total 37 4/8
 38 1/8 + 37 4/8 + 11 Inside Spread = 86 5/8 Gross

ESTIMATE SHORTEST POINTS
 G1 4 G2 5 4/8 G3 3 Main Beam 14 Mass 11 Total 37 4/8
 37 4/8 x 2 = 75 + 11 Inside Spread = 86 Net

Photos by Colburn and Scott Outfitters

Photos by Colburn and Scott Outfitters



ESTIMATE ACTUAL MEASUREMENTS
 Left: G1 2 G2 6 G3 4 Main Beam 15 Mass 11 7/8 Total 38 7/8
 Right: G1 2 G2 6 2/8 G3 3 4/8 Main Beam 15 Mass 11 7/8 Total 38 5/8
 38 7/8 + 38 5/8 + 14 Inside Spread = 91 4/8 Gross

ESTIMATE SHORTEST POINTS
 G1 2 G2 6 G3 3 4/8 Main Beam 15 Mass 11 7/8 Total 38 3/8
 38 3/8 x 2 = 76 6/8 + 14 Inside Spread = 90 6/8 Net

least 17 inches or more. For our example, the buck we are judging has 18-inch main beams on each side for a total of 36 inches. Now, add the point length total (*36 inches*) with the main beam total (*36 inches*), for a total of 72 inches.

Now it's time to look at the mass of the rack. There are four measurements per side that make up the total mass measurement. Again, I have some preset numbers that I plug into my model (*see chart*). Mass per side generally varies between 11-16 inches. On a 4x4 buck (*including eyeguards*), the mass is measured in four spots – between the burr and G-1; between G-1 and G-2; between G-2 and G-3; and then the halfway point between the G-3 and the tip of the main beam. When you have a 5x5, you take the fourth mass measurement between the G-3 and G-4. For our example, I then add my mass estimate of 13 per side, for a total of 26 inches, in with my other two totals of point length and main beams. So, 36+36+26 = 98 inches.

Formulas for Accurate Coues' Deer Field Judging

The following examples show you recipes for what an average representative in each class will have for measurements.

90" Class Buck

Point Length: 1 + 6 + 4 = 11 inches
 Main Beam: 15-16 inches
 Mass: 11-12 inches
 Inside Spread: 12 inches
 11 + 16 + 12 = 39 (one side) x 2 = 78 + 12 (spread) = 90 inches

100" Class Buck

Point Length: 2 + 7 + 6 = 15 inches
 Main Beam: 16-17 inches
 Mass: 12-13 inches
 Inside Spread: 13 inches
 15 + 16 + 12 = 43 (one side) x 2 = 86 + 13 (spread) = 99 inches



ESTIMATE ACTUAL MEASUREMENTS
 Left: G1 1 7/8 G2 4 G3 5 4/8 Extra Point 2 7/8 MB 14 Mass 13 Total 41 2/8
 Right: G1 4 3/8 G2 4 G3 4 Extra Point 3 MB 14 Mass 13 Total 42 3/8
 41 2/8 + 42 3/8 + 12 Inside Spread = 95 5/8 Gross

ESTIMATE SHORTEST POINTS
 G1 1 7/8 G2 4 G3 4 Extra Point 2 7/8 MB 14 Mass 13 Total 39 6/8
 39 6/8 x 2 = 79 4/8 + 12 Inside Spread = 91 4/8 Net

All I have to do now is add the inside spread credit to the number. Inside spread is usually easy to estimate, because I use the width of the ears to estimate it. The tip-to-tip width of a buck's ears can vary a little, but are usually between 15-16 inches. Most buck racks lie within the ears, so it's just a matter of estimating how much inside the ears each main beam lies. If it's one inch inside the ear on each side, then the spread is probably 13 inches (*15-inch ear width minus two inches = 13-inch inside spread*). Keep in mind that Coues' deer bucks are rarely outside their ears. So, for our example, after adding 13 to our 98, we find that our estimate of the buck is 111 B&C gross.

Estimating Shortest Points

There is another way to quickly field judge a buck and it's one that we use when time is of the essence. It's a simple method where we start by estimating the shortest points. Compare each G-1 and

110" Class Buck

Point Length: 3 + 8 + 7 = 18 inches
 Main Beam: 17 inches
 Mass: 13 inches
 Inside Spread: 14 inches
 18 + 17 + 13 = 48 (one side) x 2 = 96 + 14 (spread) = 110 inches

115-120" Class Buck

Points 4 + 8 + 8 = 20 inches
 Main Beam: 18-19 inches
 Mass: 14-15 inches
 Inside Spread: 14-16 inches
 20 + 18 + 13 = 52 (one side) x 2 = 104 + 14 (spread) = 118 inches

125"+ Class Buck

Points 4 + 8 + 8 = 20 inches
 Main Beam: 19-20 inches
 Mass: 16 inches
 Inside Spread: 16 inches
 20 + 19 + 16 = 55 (one side) x 2 = 110 + 16 (spread) = 126 inches

Photos by Steven Ward

Photos by Colburn and Scott Outfitters



ESTIMATE ACTUAL MEASUREMENTS
 Left: G1 3 G2 5 G3 9 G4 8 Main Beam 17 Mass 14 Total 56
 Right: G1 3 G2 8 G3 9 Main Beam 17 Mass 14 Total 51
 56 + 51 + 14 Inside Spread = 121 + 7 Extra = 128 Gross

A good example of when you have a buck that doesn't match side to side. Estimate Shortest Points can't be used. In this case the buck has a G4 on the left but not on the right. Estimating actual measurements is the only way to go.

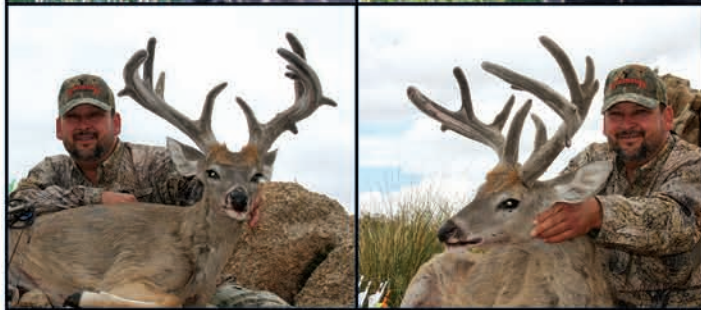


ACTUAL B&C MEASUREMENTS
 Left: 3 5/8, 5 4/8, 7 7/8 Extra 12 4/8
 Main Beam 17 5/8 Mass 13 5/8
 Left Total: 60 6/8

Right: 3 7/8, 7 3/8, 8 6/8 Extra 7 1/8
 Main Beam 17 4/8 Mass 13 7/8
 Right Total: 58 4/8

Inside Spread 14 1/8

60 6/8 + 58 4/8 + 14 1/8 =
 133 3/8 Official B&C Gross



ESTIMATE ACTUAL MEASUREMENTS – LIVE VELVET PHOTOS ON AUG. 1ST
 Left: G1 4 G2 6 G3 0 Main Beam 19 Mass 17 Abnormals 10 Total 56
 Right: G1 6 G2 4 G3 4 Main Beam 19 Mass 17 Abnormals 1 Total 51
 56 + 51 + 15 Inside Spread = 122 Gross

ACTUAL SCI MEASUREMENTS – HARVESTED ON AUG. 19TH
 Left: 4 5/8, 6 3/8, 8 MB 20 2/8 Mass 18 7/8 Abnormals 6 2/8 Total 64 3/8
 Right: 6 1/8, 5 2/8, 5 4/8 MB 21 Mass 17 7/8 Abnormals 1 1/8 Total 56 7/8
 64 3/8 + 56 7/8 + 15 6/8 Inside Spread = 137 Official SCI Gross

Photos by Steven Ward

Anatomical References

- Front corner of eye to tip of nose: 6.0-6.25"
- "V" in bottom of ear to tip of ear: 6.0-6.5"
- Ear width when deer is looking at you relaxed: 15.0-16.0"
- Ear width (tip to tip) when deer is looking at you alert: 14.0-14.5"
- Top of ear to bottom of ear: 3.25"
- Tip of nose to back of neck in straight line: 10"

add only the shortest one, then continue on for each shortest point and shortest beam. Next, throw in an estimate of mass for one side, and total that one side's estimate. Double it to account for the other side and then add in the estimated inside spread. This method gives you the quickest way to estimate the buck's net score.

It's very important to add the measurements in the same order every time: **points, main beam, mass, double that number and**



ESTIMATE ACTUAL MEASUREMENTS
 Left: G1 3 G2 9 G3 4 Main Beam 21 Mass 15 Extras 2 Total 54
 Right: G1 2 G2 9 G3 6 Main Beam 20 Mass 15 Extras 11 Total 63
 54 + 63 + 17 Inside Spread = 134 Gross

ESTIMATE SHORTEST POINTS
 G1 2 G2 9 G3 4 Main Beam 20 Mass 15 Total 50
 50 x 2 = 100 + 17 Inside Spread = 117 + 13 Extras = 130 Net

BUCK WAS FOUND DEAD
ACTUAL B&C MEASUREMENTS
 Left: 3 3/8, 9 7/8, 4 Extra 2 7/8
 Main Beam 22 4/8 Mass 15 6/8
 Left Total: 58 3/8

Right: 2 6/8, 9 6/8, 5 4/8 Extra 12 6/8
 Main Beam 20 7/8 Mass 16
 Right Total: 67 5/8

Inside Spread 17 4/8

58 3/8 + 67 5/8 + 17 4/8 =
 143 4/8 Official B&C Gross

Photos by Colburn and Scott Outfitters

then add spread. Once you do it several times in that order, it becomes habit. If you and your hunting partners use the same method in the same order, then it becomes easy to communicate and field judge while glassing a buck when together. I can spout out measurements to my hunting partner and he knows exactly which order we are in and we can both come up with a quick estimate.

Keep in mind, this method won't work well if you have a buck that is not symmetrical, such as a 3x4 or 4x5. In that case, you must use the *Estimating Actual Measurements* method.

Parting Thoughts

I hope these two methods will be as helpful for you as they have been for us over the years. Field judging is just that, and it often happens way faster than you'd like. Just get it in your mind to look for long points, lots of points, wrap-around main beams, heavy mass, and width, in that order. If you find those variables then you are looking at a hog!

While field judging animals is fun, remember there is a lot more to a hunt than score. Let the experiences of the hunt determine if it's a success, not the size of the trophy.

Editor's Note:

Follow more of Jay's adventures at www.JayScottOutdoors.com.

Random Thoughts

- Point length is the most important aspect of a buck's score.
- Main beam length is the second most important aspect.
- In smaller bucks (under 100"), main beam actually is the highest percentage of score.
- G-2s are rarely 9 inches or longer.
- Inside spread rarely exceeds 17 inches.
- Main beams rarely exceed 20 inches.
- Bucks without eyeguards rarely make 110".
- A 110" buck usually has no weakness.
- If a point or main beam looks short, then it probably is.
- Look for main beams that wrap around and come close together in front, but make sure it's not a narrow buck. Look for a wide buck with wrapping beams.
- When the buck is facing broadside, look for lots of space between the points. This often indicates long main beams.
- If points carry lots of mass, they will look shorter than they are.
- Extra points and kickers really help gross score.
- 5x5 bucks (including eyeguards) are rare, but usually score well.
- Generally, 110"+ bucks will have a pot belly and appear to have a bigger body than smaller bucks.
- The top 10 typical B&C bucks had an average main beam length of 20 inches. Conversely, 10 bucks just making the minimum of 110" had an average main beam length of 17-6/8".
- The top 10 non-typical B&C bucks had an average main beam length of 18-5/8 inches. Conversely, 10 bucks just making the minimum of 120" had an average main beam length of 17-7/8".
- The widest inside spread recorded is 21 inches.

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