

# MANAGEMENT OF DEER AND CATTLE ON THE ARANSAS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, TEXAS<sup>1</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

The Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, consisting of 47,325 acres, is located near Austwell on the Black Jack Peninsula. The presence of many deer there has resulted from almost total protection from hunting and some reintroduction during a period of 16 years. Previously there was only a small remnant of the original population. Problems are arising from the presence of cattle, but they have not reached the critical stage of similar dual-use areas of concern on some western ranges.

*History of Deer Population.*—A good many deer occupied this sparsely populated region until about the middle of the nineteenth century. Allen (1894) quotes a Captain Bailey who said that thousands of deer died here from "blacktongue" in 1857 or 1858. Deer were rare on the peninsula in the early nineties but were "quite numerous on Saint Joseph Island, where they are protected by Messrs. Wood and Allyn, who own the island and use it as a cattle and sheep ranch" (Allen, 1894). The northern part of Saint Joseph Island lies less than two miles off the southeastern part of the Black Jack Peninsula, separated by the shallow waters of San Antonio Bay. Possibly, as deer were removed from the mainland, others emi-

grated to the peninsula from the nearby protected islands.

Between 1913 and 1928, deer were not plentiful in the area, although by careful hunting one could secure venison at any time. The local residents did not utilize deer to any extent as the meat of domestic cattle and hogs was better. This fact may have been a contributing factor in the survival of deer in the relatively small but brushy areas in this region.

In 1919 Leroy G. Denman of the San Antonio Loan and Trust Company took over the management of the ranch on Black Jack Peninsula. He reported few deer and many hunters between 1919 and 1924. In 1924, a seven foot wire fence with locked gates was installed, and every effort was made to keep out hunters. Denman then introduced deer into the area as follows:

1925-1926: Five or six "Texas deer," caught by friends of Mr. Denman.

1933: Twenty-six deer caught in southern Texas, shipped to the Kansas City Zoo, and then sold by the zoo to Mr. Denman.

1935: One "Virginia white-tailed buck" from Georgia.

In addition, Mr. Denman states that between 1927 and 1937 from 8 to 12 pet deer, caught as fawns by friends, were released on the ranch. Fifty mule deer from Colorado and numerous fallow deer from England were also introduced with slight success.

This brief history of the herd can be

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