

Pennsylvania's Big Game Scoring Program

By Bob D'Angelo

Game News Senior Associate Editor

PGC Big Game Scoring Program Coordinator

PENNSYLVANIA'S Big Game Scoring Program is based on the Boone & Crockett Club's scoring program that was copyrighted by that organization in 1950. Established in 1887 by Theodore Roosevelt, the B&C Club was initially organized for the conservation of wildlife and natural resources on a national basis.

Early Boone & Crockett Club members wanted to devise an equitable, objective measurement system for the big game of North America, and record those game species that met the established minimums in a record book, *Records of North American Big Game*. All were experienced big game hunters with a strong interest in giving recognition to exceptional big game trophies. Once adopted, the system quickly became established as the universally accepted standard for measuring native North American big game.

The scoring system depends upon carefully taken measurements of the enduring trophy characteristics to arrive at a numerical final score that provides an instant ranking for all trophies of a category. By measuring only enduring characteristics (such as antlers, horns and skulls) rather than carcass weight, the measurements may be repeated at any later date to verify both the measurements and the resulting ranking in each category. The system places heavy emphasis on symmetry, penalizing those portions of the measured material that are non-symmetrical. This results in even, well-matched trophies scoring better and placing higher in the rankings than equally developed but mismatched trophies, a result that most people readily agree with and accept.

For those antlered trophies with unusual amounts of abnormal antler material, nontypical categories were developed to give them recognition, as they would be unduly penalized in the typical categories.

It is the policy of the Boone & Crockett Club to promote the guardianship and provident management of big game and associated wildlife in North America and to maintain the highest standards of fair chase and sportsmanship in all aspects of big game hunting, so that this resource of all the people may survive and prosper in its natural habitats. Consistent with this objective, the Club supports the use and enjoyment of our wildlife heritage to the fullest extent by this and future generations of mankind.

The Pennsylvania Game Commission and the Pennsylvania Outdoor Writer's Association started Pennsylvania's Big Game Scoring Program in 1965 to showcase the outstanding big game hunting opportunities available in this state. Since 1965, statewide scoring sessions have been held every three years or so until 2008, when a class of certified scorers trained by the Boone & Crockett Club in Pennsylvania ensured an adequate number of trained scorers throughout the state. Now, certified scorers can be found in all regions of the state, and make it easy for a hunter to find a scorer nearby.

Pennsylvania Game News – Volume 84 No. 3 March 2013

As mentioned earlier, Pennsylvania's Big Game Scoring Program mirrors the Boone & Crockett Club program, and the philosophy of why we maintain records is consistent with that Club, too. By the way, there are 74 whitetail deer entries from Pennsylvania listed in the Boone & Crockett Club listings.

Scoring and maintaining records of exceptional big game animals is important because it provides a means to compare the extraordinary whitetails, black bears and elk being taken in Pennsylvania, and a starting point to sort out why an animal attained its exceptional size. Often, these animals are the product of outstanding habitat and wildlife management practices. The Big Game Scoring Program also stresses hunter and conservation ethics, and is another tool that promotes recreational hunting and supports Pennsylvania's strong hunting heritage.

For years, the Game Commission has been posting the most recent Big Game Records Scoring Program "record book" on the agency's website, and will continue to do so, but in response to public requests, it has been put into a bound booklet with annual updates. The *Pennsylvania Big Game Records* book contains more than 3,600 entries in 10 categories: Typical Whitetail Deer Firearm, Typical Whitetail Deer Archery, Nontypical Whitetail Deer Firearm, Nontypical Whitetail Deer Archery, Black Bear Firearm, Black Bear Archery, Typical Elk Firearm, Typical Elk Archery, Nontypical Elk Firearm and Nontypical Elk Archery.

A few of the trophies taken in Pennsylvania's records were taken a hundred or more years ago. Many were taken decades ago. But many others have been taken in recent years, proving that the Keystone State is home to some truly outstanding white-tailed deer, black bears and even elk, which were added in 2001.

Pennsylvania Big Game Records, 2012, contains a wealth of information, including the minimum scores required for each big game category, some Boone & Crockett Club and Pope & Young Club information, a few photos, but most importantly, the listings. In each big game category the entry is ranked, the hunter is listed, and the county, year taken and the score are listed. The record book is not only interesting, but it can be used as a tool to identify where the "big ones" are being taken.

Hunters who follow Pennsylvania's Big Game Scoring Program will find it interesting that about 150 entries in all trophy categories were added to the listings in the 2012 record book. Among those new entries are the new number ones in the black bear and nontypical elk taken with firearms categories, and black bear archery category. In fact, the new record bear with a firearm taken in 2011 is not just the largest bear ever taken in Pennsylvania, it's the world's largest black bear taken by a hunter.

Where in Pennsylvania are the top counties for harvesting a trophy whitetail? Allegheny County in southwestern Pennsylvania is first overall, and also tops in the state for nontypical whitetails. Bradford, Westmoreland and Berks counties are also top producers of record book whitetails.

To enter a big game animal or for more information about the Game Commission's Big Game Records Program, contact Boone & Crockett Club certified scorer and coordinator of PA's program Bob D'Angelo at rdangelo@pa.gov or call the Game Commission Harrisburg Headquarters. The 2012 *Pennsylvania Big Game Records* book is available for \$4.72 plus \$1.25 shipping plus 6% sales tax (\$6.33). To order call 1-888-888-3459. The 2013 *PA Big Game Records* book will be available in October 2013.

Bob D'Angelo officially measures trophy big game animals by appointment any month except March, April and May. □