

WHY NOT START A DEER FARM?



BLACK TAIL OR MULE DEER



VIRGINIA DEER

THE raising of deer for the market may be a feature of farm life in the future. "Why not?" asks the United States department of agriculture, which stands ready to give the needed advice to all who ask for it.

Surely it is more picturesque in sound than is the raising of sheep. And a venison carcass is worth three times as much as the carcass of a sheep and fattened at a fraction of the cost and care needed for the mutton carcass. This is the chance offered the deer farmer who may have the diversified woods and hills and streams and meadows which so appeal to the instincts of the timid creature.

It is nothing of moment that in the Chicago zoological gardens keeper, Dr. De Vry has shown with his deer that with any other animal breeding in the captivity of the park. In the last season seven fawns were born in the park pens, and not one of them lived to be 2 months old. Yet Mr. De Vry is one of the most optimistic of believers in the value of a deer farm which can be a farm, and not the mere dry pen that the Lincoln park quarters offer to the deer kind.

That the deer farm is practicable and practical in every sense has been proved on all sides, east and west. A short time ago H. E. Richardson of West Brookfield, Mass., visited Chicago with a proposition looking to the stocking of several possible pens in Lincoln park. Mr. Richardson had been superintendent of the schools in his home town, and several years ago he fenced in a tract of land near his home city and put a few pairs of game animals into the preserve. Long ago he gave up teaching and his business has become the little experiment which he took up as a mere diversion. In calling on Mr. De Vry he offered to sell to the park buffaloes, Rocky mountain elk, Virginia deer, Japanese Axis, and fallow deer, nyulghau and India antelope, Barbary sheep, wild boars, wild geese, ducks, and pheasants. But especially he had deer for sale, and in almost any numbers.

Raising Deer as a Hobby.

The late Judge Eaton at Ottawa, Ill., was the pioneer in breeding deer, and the hundred acres or more devoted to the purpose might have been highly profitable had not the judge made it distinctly a hobby and a pastime.

At Highland Park, Elgin, Lake Geneva, Oconomowoc, New Boston, and a score of other places in the central west men have taken up deer as pets and gradually as they have increased in numbers a reservation has had to be set aside for them until, as the creatures have continued to multiply, they have been sold off the farms to zoological gardens and occasionally given away. Recently C. C. Worthington at Delaware Water Gap was compelled to turn 1,000 deer from his eastern estate for the reason that they had overstocked the place.

There are instances enough to illustrate how easily and quickly the deer responds to domestic ways on the farm. As the creature becomes more and more nearly extinct in the great woods the prices of the deer carcasses in the markets have gone up and up. Ten years ago in Chicago the winter season in South Water street saw nearly every doorway ornamented with magnificent specimens of the Virginia deer from the north woods. Today virtually no deer are received in the market because of the rigid game laws of the states, and in consequence the lover of venison has been paying higher and higher prices and at the same time seeing the supply at any price approaching the end.

Require Little Attention from Breeder.

This is the opportunity of the breeder who will set aside a piece of land that may be good for no other purpose; who will fence it with mesh wire to keep deer from the tract more than to keep the deer inside; who will stock the preserve at a cost of \$50 to \$200, according to a conservative beginning, and who will leave the timid creatures as largely to themselves as may be.

This is the one great advantage of the deer farm over the sheep farm, for instance. The sheep require a great deal of care in a great many ways; the deer needs to be let alone when once he is placed in an inclosure, where he may depend upon the pasturage just as nature leaves it to his wild kind.

Ten acres of woodland would be worth while for a beginning. If it should have a fair amount of grass growing upon it and at the same time have an undergrowth of shrubbery of various edible kinds, just a little winter feeding to help the summer pasturage would make fifty deer a year a conservative output; a hundred a year would not be abnormally large where some hay and grain might help the foraging, and at comparatively small cost.

Today in Chicago an ordinary selling price for an ordinary deer for park purposes is \$15; for a good specimen one might get \$25. In the South Water street markets a deer becomes another proposition, however; he is a dead carcass, suggestive of the table of the epicure; he is larger than anything dreamed of in the ordinary zoological garden, and he finds his way into the Chicago markets under the strictest of supervision, coming almost wholly from the Wisconsin north woods, where, before a nonresident is allowed to go in search of the animal he must invest \$25 in a license, with privilege to bring only two deer out of the state when his hunt is over. Under these conditions a Wisconsin deer in South Water street ranges in price from \$22 for the average doe to \$35 for the average buck.

There are the white-tailed Virginia deer, of the variety that has done best in captivity. Coming from the north woods, the does weigh from 100 to 125 pounds, while the bucks will weigh from 150 pounds to 200 and 225 pounds. At an average of 110 pounds for the doe and 175 pounds for the buck the prices are from 15 to 20 cents a pound.

In the confined sections of a city park this Virginia deer hardly attains a weight of 100 pounds; in the preserves where he has been given room and food and something of the wild atmosphere of the woods he takes on flesh and size and the flavor that marks the creature that has browsed in the great woods. In every respect the venison saddle of such a domestic creature has the flavor that delights epicures—that gamy something that no animal of the barnyard ever carries in roast, or chop, or steak.

Cost Is Chiefly for Wire Fencing.

For stocking a deer farm the size of it is the only gauge of cost. The wire mesh fence is the chief investment, and in proportion to the size of the tract inclosed the acreage

average decreases rapidly. For instance, it costs only a little more to fence twenty acres than it costs to fence five acres, and only a little more to fence eighty acres than it costs to fence forty.

In stocking such a farm the range of prices is from \$10 to \$25 for a good grade of Virginia deer. Each doe should bear twin fawns each year, though not infrequently the twins are followed by a single fawn at a birth. Within one year a buck fawn is marketable, though there is a profit in keeping him to his full growth at 2 years old.

When once the deer inclosure is made dog tight the work of the deer farmer may be said to be over. The chief protection demanded for the creature is a dark, sheltering place for the summer in which the animals may escape from the troublesome flies. Not even this is necessary if there be enough undergrowth to enable the deer to brush the insects off. In the winter the creature forages as long as the natural food is sufficient, pawing the snow away from the grass and feeding on the tips of shrubs. The deer is a delicate feeder, wholly unlike the sheep, and he will lie out in almost any weather, even when confined in a small pen. In Lincoln park zoo they seldom go into the shelter of the animal house, but will lie in the shelter of the fence and sometimes be snowed under head and ears by morning.

The fence for a preserve need not be over six feet high, as the deer has no disposition to jump either a wire or wooden inclosure. No looking after is needed as long as food may be had; when it is scarce hay is a standard food, and almost any of the vegetables, such as beets, carrots, turnips, and the like, may be fed. Oats are not good for the reason that the grain, fed whole, makes trouble in the digestive tract; when crushed it is safe. Corn as a fattening grain is excellent.

Does for Breeding Always in Demand.

The deer, whether in his native state or in inclosures, seems to produce more males than females in their families, so much so that while bucks may be bought almost anywhere from preserves, the does for breeding purposes are always in demand. Only one disease has been recognized as especially menacing to the deer. It is something akin to humpy jaw in the cow kind, first showing as a lump under the animal's jaw, and later seeming to loosen the teeth and cause decay in the jawbones. The experience in the park has been that it is a contagious disease, and when the last of it was rooted out a few years ago the herd seems to have been rid of it.

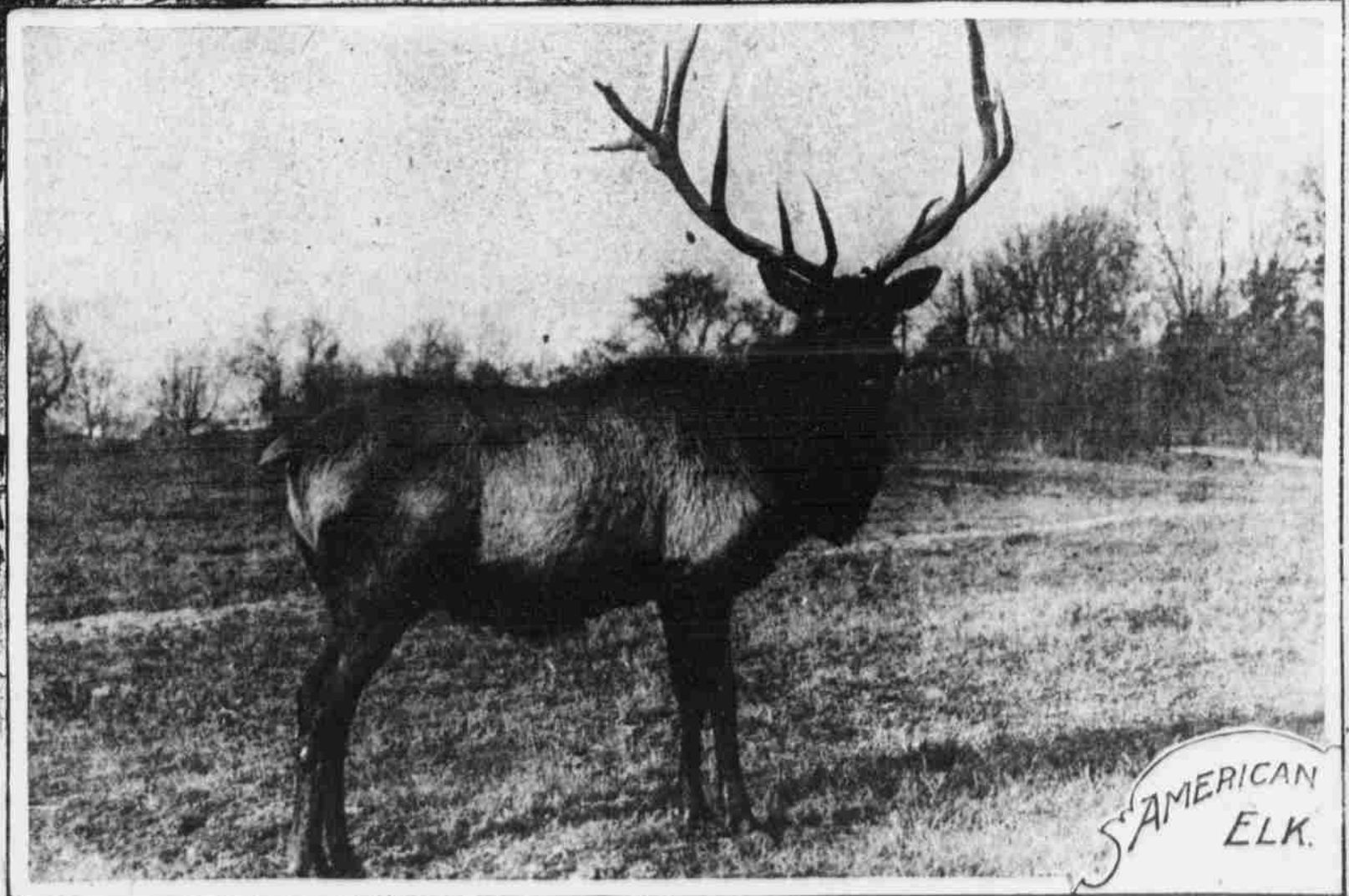
In the experience of hunters the deer does better in an inclosure than it does in the wild when the stress of a hard winter comes. In the Adirondacks men have counted dozens of deer, dead from the deep snows and the intense cold. In such sections of the country as tend to deer culture, no such exigencies of climate exist.



RED DEER



FALLOW DEER



AMERICAN ELK