

The Withey System

Guide Notes for the

Conformation of a Sika Skull & Antlers

Background

The concept of this Sika head conformation system was first presented back in the mid nineties to an audience of the Hawkes Bay branch executive and competition judges.

Introduction

The system is based on the attribution of a set number of points for a heads' typical Sikine characteristics. Any non-typical attributes effectively become penalties by not being awarded points for the abnormality. Through the recognition of a combination of the heads conforming attributes, it ensures that no solitary non-typical feature alone can eliminate it from the Sika competition, but rather a collection of non-conforming features discerns the outcome. The system opens the way for the application of a consistent and defensible standard; enabling competition judges a method that is repeatable and accountable.

Skull Length

The skull length of 13 ½" is measured from the lambdoidal ridge at the back of the skull to the front of the premaxilla bones at the tip of the nose.

The skull length measurement is considered to be a significant indicator for the identification of mixed genetics. Measurements below 13 ½" in length are typically very sikine in character. Once over the 13 ½" mark other character influences and antler conformation anomalies become more common. These discrepancies become increasingly noticeable as the skull length increases.

2 points are awarded for skulls that are 13 ½" or less. NO points can be awarded for any skulls with marginally oversize length or that have a damaged lambdoidal ridge or broken nasal bones; unless it is obvious that the skull would not have exceeded the 13 ½" mark.

Skull Sutures

The skull suture criterion is a visual assessment of the shape of the junction between the frontal and the parietofrontal sutures. This junction lies between the pedicles of the stags antlers. Typically a sikine skull will display a 'T' shaped junction, but variations in the length of the 'T' cross bar and the fusion of the sutures in older animals may make this discernment challenging. If in doubt points should not be awarded in this section.

Brow Tines

The angulation of the brow tines must be sloping upwards and outwards from the line of the main beam if the head is held in a natural position. Both tines must be angulated correctly to attain a point in this section.

A distinguishable separation (gap) between the coronet and the base of the brow tine must be present. A good indicator of this is the shape of the coronet which should be round if a separation is present or distorted into an oval if there is no gap.

Both sides of the antler must conform to award the point.

Trez Tines

When the antler is viewed from the side-on position, the angulation of the trez tine should appear to be inline with the main beam, almost as if it were a continuation of the beams natural sweep and curve. The curvature and flow from the main beam into the trez tine is the critical factor and deviations and abrupt angle changes will not be awarded a point in this section. Both sides must be correct to attain the point.

The location of the trez tine along the main beam is considered sikine when it occurs at or above the halfway point of the beam. Measurements should be taken from the base of the coronet to the DS point of the trez, then from the main crotch of the tops down to the DS point. Both tines must be at or above halfway to be awarded the point.

Top Tines

Typically sikine 'tops' face almost dead square to the front, so that when the head is viewed from the side it is difficult to identify the inner tine as it is shadowed by the outer. Some very slight turning inward or outward may be acceptable if the 'tops' look right in their overall shape. Both sets must be correct to be awarded the point.

The outer tops in Sika are typically longer than the inner ones. This configuration is conducive with the outers being an extension and continuation of the main beam toward its termination. To gain a point in this section both the outer tines must be longer than the inners, even if only by a fraction. Care must be taken to focus on the main inner & outer tops when additional inner off tines are present.

Sikine Reinforcing Ridging, Texture & Colouration

The presence of sikine ridging on an antler is a key characteristic identifying the presence of Sika genetics. The ridging usually starts on top of the brow tine and runs up the front of the main beam toward the trez tine, although terminating at a range of differing heights. The sikine ridging strengthens the antler by distorting the shape of the beam and tines into a tear dropped cross sectional shape.

Signs of reasonable reinforcement ridging must be present on both sides to award the point in this section.

Sikine type antlers have a different texture and stain colour than other deer species. The antlers of Sika have a deeply grooved vein line running most of the way up the back of the beam and a rough pearling patterning is quite unique to the species. (The pearling is only present where it cannot be worn down by rubbing, therefore, antlers taken early in the season will have a lot more pearling present than heads taken later on.)

The staining on a set of Sika antlers is typically of a lighter colour than other species. This colour variance maybe due to the Sikas' predilection for certain plant types and the density of its antler bone or it may be caused by the presence of an oily residue being left behind from the waxy nature of the animal's velvet.

To award the point the overall appearance of the antlers' texture (pearling & lining) and the colour of the staining must look correct.