



White-Tailed Deer

Odocoileus virginianus

No animal is as recognizable as the white-tailed deer. Whether a mature buck with splendid antlers, a graceful doe or a spotted fawn running with its mother, the white-tailed deer is one of the most popular of animals.

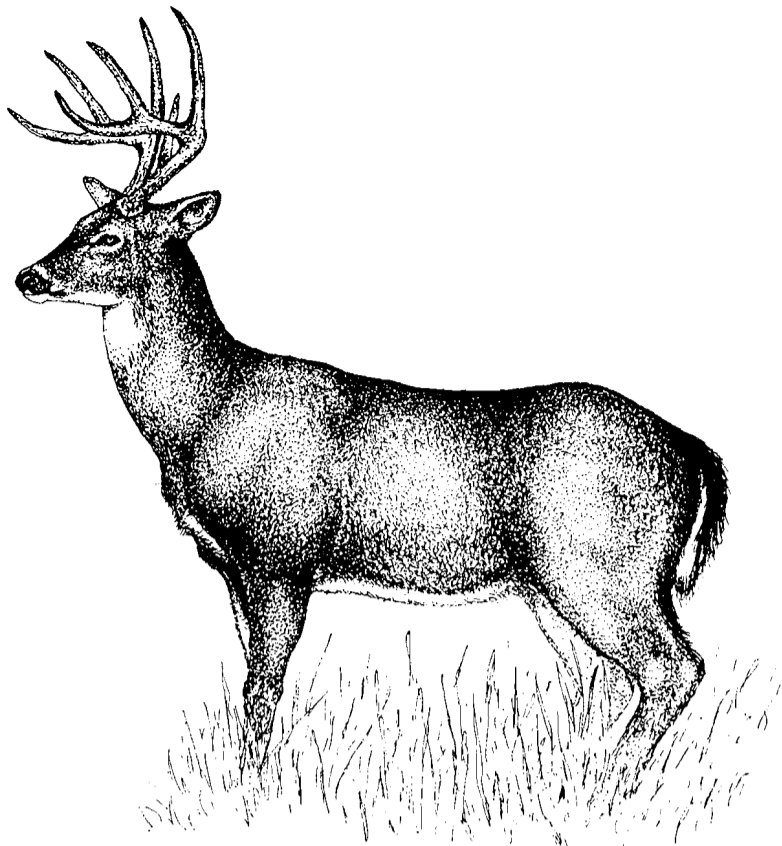
There are four species of deer in North America: the mule deer, white-tailed deer, elk and moose. The white-tailed deer is the only species now present in North Carolina.

History and Status

The white-tailed deer population in North Carolina has made a dramatic turnaround. Deer were plentiful when European settlers first arrived, but the animals were hunted extensively for meat and hide with no idea of conservation or management. Within 100 years deer were threatened with extinction in North Carolina, as well as in the entire United States. Through sound game management, deer populations today are at an all-time high and their numbers are continuing to increase. Today there are approximately 650,000 deer in North Carolina.

Description

A deer's coat is usually a tannish brown, or some shade of brown, ranging almost to gray. It usually has a white patch on its neck and large prominent ears. Its eyes are circled with white and a white band rings the muzzle. The belly is white, with white running down the inside of the legs. The tail, about 9 to 11 inches long, is mostly brown,



although the underside is all white. The hooves have two toes covered with a hard fingernail-like material, and another toe called the dew claw appears about 3 inches high on the back of each leg.

Buck deer grow antlers, not horns. Antelopes grow horns, as do buffalo and goats. They are permanent parts of a skull while buck deer drop their antlers each year. Antlers range in size from little knobs that do not protrude from the skin, to larger "racks" that branch out to a variety and number of points. An average mature buck has eight or 10 points. Antler size depends on the age of the buck, its nutrition and its genetic constitution.

Deer are not long-distance runners, but they can run up to 35 or 40 miles per hour. They also are excellent swimmers and strong jumpers. To protect themselves, deer rely mainly on their strong sense of smell, in addition to their keen eyesight and good hearing. Deer

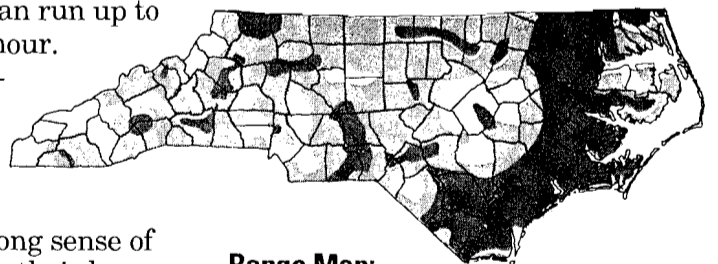
feed mostly in the early morning and twilight, but they will also get up to feed at about any other time of the day.

The white-tailed deer is a herbivorous animal. It will eat many green-leaved succulent plants, the tender new growths of stems, and fruits. One of their most important food sources is acorns.

Habitat and Habits

Deer are so adaptable they are found in almost any type of habitat. They like creek and river bottoms, oak ridges, pine forests, farmlands or about any other type of habitat that offers food and cover. They adapt well to suburban sprawl.

In autumn, deer fatten up for



Range Map:

High ■ Moderate □ Low

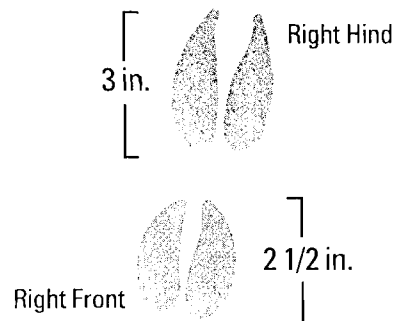
the breeding season, or "rut." During mid-October and into November, the bucks establish hierarchies among themselves leading up to mating with the does. A buck rubs its antlers on trees and limbs, scrapes depressions in the ground and deposits scent to let other deer know its territory. After the breeding season, bucks and does socialize less and the bucks become secretive again. Around the middle of January and early February, the bucks' antlers drop and in April and May they begin to grow again. The fawns are born in May or June.

Range and Distribution

In the United States white-tailed deer are found in all of the 48 contiguous states. Every county in North Carolina has deer, although they are distributed unevenly, with very large numbers in the Coastal Plain and fewer deer in the Piedmont and Mountains.

People Interaction

White-tailed deer are often seen at night feeding in fields or on the side of the road. Deer are also the most popular game animal in the state. In North Carolina, both the deer population and the annual harvest by hunters continue to rise. When properly managed, hunting does not hurt deer populations and is actually a helpful management tool for keeping deer from becoming overpopulated. Before European settlers arrived, deer populations were controlled by year-round hunting by Native Americans and large predators like cougars and wolves. Without some control, deer populations grow larger than their habitat can support, causing mass starvation and disease in deer herds, as well as crop depredation and overgrazing of habitat.



References

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Credits

Written by Chris Hartigan and Scott Osborne.
 Illustrated by J.T. Newman.
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WILD Facts

WHITE-TAILED DEER

Classification

Class: Mammalia
 Order: Artiodactyla

Average Size

Length: about 3 feet
 Height: about 36 inches at the shoulder
 Weight: buck 100-200+ lbs.,
 doe 80-160 lbs.

Food

Green leaves, grasses, farm crops

Breeding

Male: buck. Female: doe.
 Promiscuous; males mate with several females. Mating occurs in autumn. Females breed every year. Gestation period is 196 days.

Young

Fawns: litter size of 1-3 fawns. Weaned at 4 months. Stay with does for first year, then yearling bucks leave. Yearling does may stay and form family units, although most yearling does give birth.

Life Expectancy

In the wild, 5-6 years for bucks and 7-10 years for does. Oldest deer known was a 22-year-old, pen-raised buck. Age is determined by examining teeth in the lower jaw bone.