

White-tailed Deer

Odocoileus virginianus



By the late 1930s, deer populations in many areas of the Pineywoods had disappeared, with remnant herds in a few remote bottomlands. Now, because of deer-stocking, enforcement of game laws and good habitat management on private lands, the population has rebounded.

Northern Pineywoods

White-tailed Deer

Odocoileus virginianus



APPEARANCE

Height: 32 inches to 36 inches (81.4 cm to 91.4 cm) at the shoulder

Weight: Females: 80 to 140 pounds (36 to 63 kg)

Males: 100 to 250 pounds (45.3 to 112.5 kg)

Distinguishing Characteristics

- Small to medium-sized deer; size somewhat dependent on availability of food
- Gray-brown with a reddish cast in the summer for both male and female
- Fawns have white spots on their backs and sides to help camouflage them.
- Underside of the tail is white.
- Four toes that are "fused" or modified into a hoof creating a two-toed hoof print

LIFE HISTORY

Range: Most of the United States, except in the Southwest, Alaska and Hawaii

Diet: Acorns, pecans, western persimmons, live oak twigs and leaves, yaupon, some types of grasses and various flowering plants

Predators: Coyotes, mountain lions, bobcats and uncontrolled dogs

Sexual maturity: About 2 years old

Mating season: September through December

Gestation: 6.5 to 7 months

Number of young: The first baby is usually a single fawn. After that, most does tend to have twins. About 60% of a deer's body growth takes place the first year of its life. Long bone growth is complete at about 3 years of age.

Life span: Average life span of males is about 6 years. Females live about 8 years. The record white-tailed deer was a doe in Georgia that lived 22 years.

HABITAT

White-tailed deer are found in the deep woods and river bottoms of East Texas, the live oak and cedar thickets of Central Texas, the brushy canyons of west and north-central Texas, and

the mesquite thickets and rangelands of South Texas. Deer require cover for safety from predators as well as open areas for browsing.

BEHAVIOR

White-tailed deer do not migrate, but will remain in an area about 1 square kilometer in size year round. When threatened, deer will often remain motionless or will quickly escape if necessary. Deer hold up their tails like a flag, showing the white underside when frightened. They are very quiet animals, except when bucks call to does during the mating season and when does call to their fawns.

NOW YOU KNOW!

- Male deer begin growing their first set of antlers at about one year of age. When antlers first appear in spring, they are covered with a soft fuzzy skin called velvet that protects the growing bone and is rubbed off by the deer when the growth is complete. They will grow a new set of antlers yearly. With proper nutrition, antlers will get larger each year until about 6 years of age.
- It is impossible to tell the age of deer by the size of their antlers or the number of their points.
- White-tailed deer are *ruminants* (have four stomachs) and can pass food from one stomach to the next to get the maximum nutritional benefit from everything they eat.
- White-tailed deer can make vertical leaps of up to 8.5 feet (2.6 m)

WHITE-TAILED DEER AND PEOPLE

White-tailed deer have adapted to living close to human development and at times create traffic hazards in suburban neighborhoods. Some people like to feed deer and watch them browse in their yards, while others see them as pests who eat their shrubbery and flowers. By allowing, encouraging and regulating hunting of white-tailed deer, we are able to minimize the overpopulation of deer thereby preventing thousands of animals from starving and reducing hazards to humans.

White-tailed deer are North American's most popular and abundant game animal. Many ranchers in Texas lease out land to hunters during deer hunting season. Hunting helps ranchers manage the deer population and adds income to their ranch operation.