



Female white-tailed deer with fawn

Photo Courtesy of the Missouri Department of Conservation



Adult male white-tailed deer

Photo courtesy of the City of Dublin, Ohio

Cover photo:

Adult male white-tailed deer
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FORT SELDEN

HISTORIC SITE

WHITE-TAILED DEER



At about 250,000 square miles, the Chihuahuan Desert covers a large portion of North America from Northern Mexico through the Southwestern United States. It is home to around 1,000 different species of animals. Each of these animals have specific characteristics that help them survive in the desert environment.

In this brochure, learn about the white-tailed deer, one species found in the Chihuahuan Desert.

Physical Characteristics

White-tailed deer have a variety of fur colors from reddish-brown to grayish-brown. They have white fur that circles their nose as well as on their underside from their bellies to their legs. They get their name from the white fur that can also be found on the underside of their tails.

Male white-tailed deer have antlers that are in a constant state of shedding and regrowing every year.

Diet

White-tailed deer eat a variety of plants such as tree twigs, leaves, barks, shrubs, fruits, and most nuts. They also eat native desert plants such as the yucca, prickly pear cactus, and mesquite beans. They must eat 6-8 pounds of food per day!

Habitat

White-tailed deer can live almost anywhere, even close to cities! And though they prefer to live in wooded areas, they must find areas near water. Unlike many other desert animals, white-tailed deer can't get all their water from the plants they eat. They must also drink water from streams, rivers, and lakes.

Senses

These deer have a scent gland on all four feet which is used to communicate with other deer around them. This is particularly helpful as they depend mainly on smell to detect danger.

Predators

White-tailed deer, particularly the young, are preyed upon by bobcats, mountain lions, and coyotes.

Interesting Facts

- The name of this deer refers to the white underside of the tail, which shoots up when the animal is alarmed or running.

- The does take the protection of their young very seriously and make sure that they are safe from predators. So much so that when the doe goes foraging the fawn is left for as long as four hours and holds its feces and urine until their mother arrives. Then after the mother arrives, the fawn finally empties itself and the mother quickly ingests whatever was emptied. This is done to prevent predators finding any signs of a fawn being in the vicinity.

- Baby deer—known as fawn—are born with spotted fur and stay with their mothers for the first year of their lives.

- In the summer, a white-tailed deer's fur is reddish-brown while in the winter its fur changes to a grayish-brown. This is both to help the deer regulate its temperature and also as a means of camouflage. Its summer coat is thinner making it easier to cope with the heat. The gray hair is not only thicker helping the deer stay warmer in the colder months, but its muted colors help hide the animal.

- A set of antlers is made up of a number of different points, called "tines." The length and number of tines is

determined by nutrition, genetics, and age. While the antlers are growing back in the spring, they are covered in a fine tissue, called velvet. The velvet supplies blood to the antlers, allowing for development. After the antlers are fully grown, the deer will rub them against trees to remove the velvet layer.

- A "spiked" buck is a male deer lacking a branching set of antlers. Instead, "spiked" bucks have a pair of vertical spikes in place of antlers, usually no bigger than three inches. "Button" bucks are male deer with very small stubs at the base of where the young deer's antlers will soon grow but have not broken the skin yet. Sometimes, these antlerless bucks get mistaken for does.

- White-tail deer have a four chambered stomach, which allows them to digest extremely tough vegetation. They will eat quickly without chewing while feeding, and later they will cough their food up and chew it.

- White-tail bucks will use their antlers to fight with each other during the "rut" when they are competing for does. The sound of antlers clashing can attract does who are in heat.

- White-tail deer are the state animal of nine states: Arkansas, Illinois, Michigan, Mississippi, New Hampshire, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Wisconsin.

- The colors green, orange, and red appear to a deer as shades of gray, which explains why hunters are able to wear bright orange safety clothing.