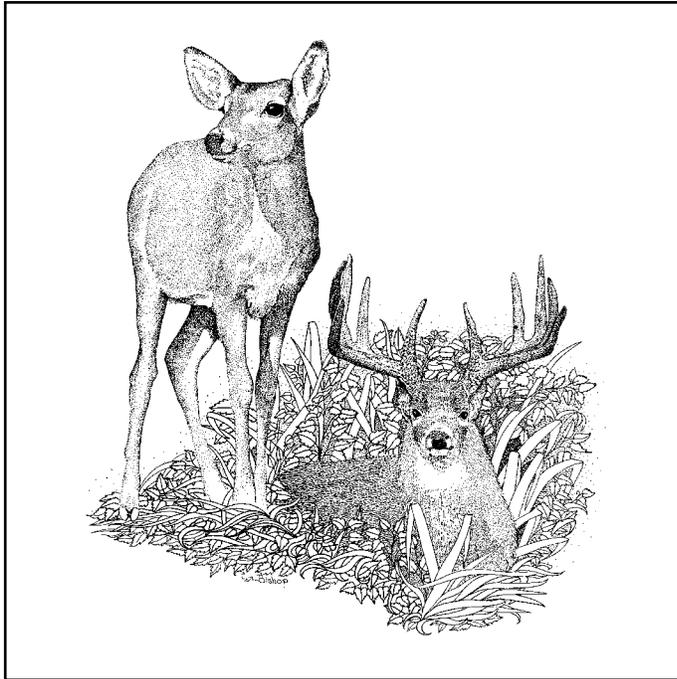


White-tailed Deer

Scientific Name: *Odocoileus virginianus*



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Introduction

The white-tailed deer, commonly referred to as the whitetail, is perhaps Ohio's best-known wildlife species. It is seen in the state's wildlife areas, parks, and nature preserves as well as in the backyards of rural and suburban residents. The state's only big game animal, it has provided table fare for generations of the state's inhabitants from Native Americans to thousands of sportsmen and women today. However, the white-tailed deer hasn't always been as abundant in the state as it is today. As a matter of fact, there was a period of time (1904 to 1923) when the deer was absent in the state. As Ohio was settled, habitat was eliminated and hunting was unregulated. By the early 1900s white-tailed deer were extremely rare in the state. Between the 1920s and 1930s, limited stocking combined with the natural movement of deer from neighboring states into Ohio, and the establishment and strict enforcement of hunting laws allowed the development of a herd that today occupies all 88 counties.

Description

The whitetail has two seasonal coats. The spring/summer coat is reddish tan, and relatively short, with a thin and wiry hair texture. The winter coat is more grayish or even bluish tan

with heavy, long guard hairs and a thick undercoat that provides excellent insulation. White patches are found around the eyes, on the throat, belly, tail (underside), and insides of the legs. When in flight, the large white tail or *flag*, flipped up in the air can be the easiest way to spot the deer.

Whitetails, especially in Ohio, are also well known for their antlers. The whitetail buck grows its first set of antlers when it is a year old. Each year, a buck's antlers begin growing in the early spring. The developing antler is covered with a thick velvety skin rich with blood vessels and nerves. Decreasing day length in the late summer and early fall triggers many physical changes in the buck, including termination of the blood supply to the antlers. The antlers begin to harden soon thereafter and by August or September, the velvet is shed as the buck rubs his antlers against trees and other solid objects in the fields and woods. The buck is left with a rack of hard polished antlers. In a sound environment--abundant and nutritious food and water--racks can grow to massive size. Deer in poor habitat will not only appear thin, but have small antlers as well. Unlike horns of cattle, antlers are not a permanent part of a male deer's body. In Ohio, bucks typically shed or drop their antlers in December and January, following the fall breeding season.

Habitat and Habits

Whitetails are active around the clock, but less so during daylight hours. Most often, white-tailed deer are on the move at dawn and dusk. This behavior can prove hazardous to humans during the breeding season in the fall. Commuters to and from work often encounter deer on the move at this time of year which can result in serious accidents. Drivers should pay special attention October through December when traveling through zones marked with deer crossing signs.

White-tailed deer are often admired for their graceful movement. People enjoy watching them run across a field or clear a fence or other barrier from a virtual standstill. Deer have been recorded leaping heights of as much as eight feet to clear a fence or barrier.

Whitetails are not very vocal, but scientists have identified at least 13 different sounds they make that are associated with various activities and behaviors.

Hearing, sight, and smell are well developed in the white-tailed deer as any hunter will verify. Individually these senses are impressive; in combination they go a long way in helping deer survive. Hearing is used to identify the presence of other animals, including human beings, nearby. Smell is also used for this purpose and to help the deer select food. The whitetail's eyes are set to the side of its head allowing it to see almost all the way around its body.

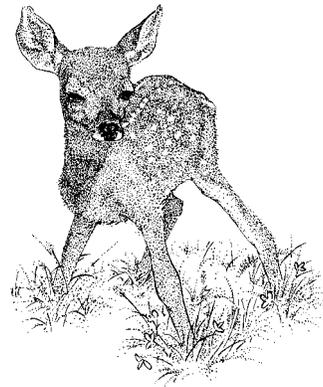
Whitetails prefer an area with diverse food and cover types, including mixed-aged timber stands. Ideal habitat will provide a mixture of forest, brushland, and cropland in blocks of one to two square miles.

Deer in Ohio eat a wide variety of items; among them are: wild crabapple, corn, sumac, Japanese honeysuckle, grasses, greenbriar, clover, soybeans, jewelweed, acorns, dogwoods, and miscellaneous woody plants.

Reproduction and Care of the Young

Courtship activities among deer begin in mid-October. Bucks will chase does over a period of five or six days prior to mating. The buck will mate with a doe several times and remain with her for a few days keeping other males away. Eventually the two will separate and the male will go on to breed more does before the breeding or *rutting* period ends. The buck provides no assistance to the female in caring for the fawn(s). In good habitat, many fawn does will be bred their first fall and give birth to a single fawn the following spring when they are only a year old. Most adult does will have twins and occasionally triplets. Fawns are born quickly with the doe either standing or ly-

ing down. Does may return to the same place each year to give birth. When born, male fawns weigh between 4 and 14 pounds, and females 3-8 pounds. Fawns are born with their eyes open and they are able to walk within an hour or two. Fawns will nurse two or three times a day for the first few days after birth and then return to thick cover after each meal. At about one month the fawns begin to accompany their mother when she goes to eat. The family group of mother and fawns will stay together until the following spring. At that time, the doe will return to her favorite fawning territory, excluding all deer, including her fawns, from this preferred area. Her doe fawns will remain in the general area and rejoin her sometime mid- to late summer. They will remain in proximity of their mother their entire life. Buck fawns, in most cases, will leave their birth area in the spring and travel great distances to set up new home ranges. Those bucks that don't leave in the spring will be forced to do so in the fall, both by their mother and other related females.



Management Plans

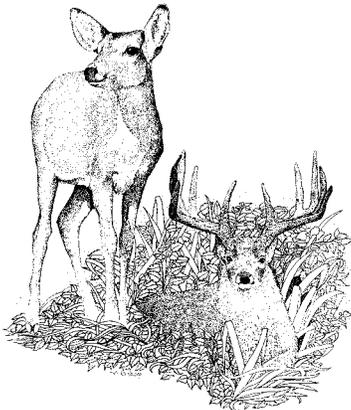
Whitetail deer are perhaps the most intensively managed wildlife species in the state. Deer are many things to many people. They may be viewed as superb game fare and a trophy by sportsmen and women, a prized addition to the landscape by the nature enthusiast, a threat to crops by the forester and farmer, or a road hazard for the motorist. Accommodating these diverse interests has been the responsibility of the ODNR Division of Wildlife since deer began returning to the state in 1923.

The Division's official deer management goal is to maintain county deer populations at a level that provides maximum recreational opportunity including hunting, viewing, and photography, while minimizing conflicts with agriculture, motor travel, and other human activities. Each year wildlife biologists evaluate deer herd population numbers and establish appropriate hunting season dates and bag limits for white-tailed deer.



Viewing Opportunities

You usually don't have to go far in Ohio to see a white-tailed deer. They are present in all 88 counties and are often seen along the road, in local parks, and sometimes your own backyard. Twenty-nine of Ohio's 80 Watchable Wildlife sites are recommended as places to see white-tailed deer. Among them are: Deer Creek, Killdeer Plains, Spencer Lake, Funk Bottoms, Killbuck Marsh, Salt Fork, Egypt Valley, and Waterloo wildlife areas; Paint Creek and Hueston Woods state parks; Mohican-Memorial, Hocking, and Shawnee state forests; and Fowler Woods and Tinkers Creek state nature preserves.



Do Something Wild!

The ODNR Division of Wildlife manages for wildlife diversity in the state. We attempt to create or conserve the habitats that will support as wide a variety of wildlife as possible. Many species like the white-tailed deer are hunted in the state, but many more are not. The Division has a special program to manage and research non-game species that is supported by the generous citizens of the state of Ohio. With money either donated through the state income tax checkoff, by the purchase of wildlife license plates, or direct contributions to the Endangered Species Special Account, the Division is able to purchase critical habitat that is essential to sustaining many species of wildlife and to implement special efforts like the reintroduction of the osprey and the trumpeter swan to the state.

Contributions to our Wildlife Diversity Program are accepted throughout the year. To make a donation, please send a check to: Endangered Species Special Account, ODNR Division of Wildlife, 2045 Morse Road, Bldg. G, Columbus, Ohio 43229-6693. All contributions, whether made on your income tax return or directly, are deductible.

At a Glance

Mating: Polygamous

Peak Breeding Activity: Early to mid-November; begins as early as mid-October and runs through mid-January

Gestation: 187-222 days; average 200 days

Young are Born: Mid-May through July; peak in late May through mid-June

Litter Size: 1 in first year; 2 and sometimes 3 in later years

Young Leave Parents: Weaned at 10-12 weeks

Number of Litters per Year: 1

Adult Weight: Males-130-300 pounds; females-90-210 pounds

Adult Body Length: 52-95 inches

Life Expectancy: Up to 15 years, but the average is 2 years for males and 3 years for females in the wild

Migration Pattern: Year-round resident; home range is 1/2 -2 square miles

Typical Foods: Include wild crabapple, corn, sumac leaves and stems, grasses, clover leaves, jewelweed leaves, acorns, and dogwood fruits and stems

Native to Ohio: Yes.



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