



The White-tailed Deer



Classification Mammal (Ungulate)

Diet Crabapples, corn, various leaves, stems, grasses, buds, acorns, fruit, and other vegetation.

Habitat Open woods, farms, old fields, anywhere along rivers and other water sources.

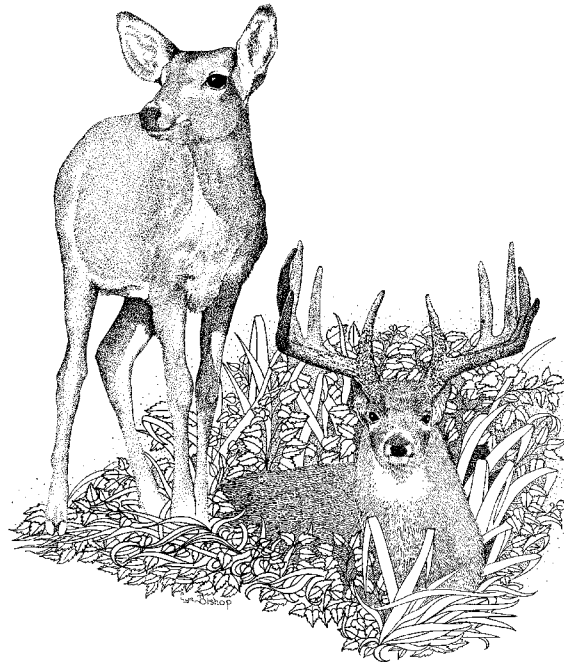
Size Length: 60-95 in.
Weight: 120-300 lbs.

Almost all of us have had experiences with white-tailed deer in Ohio. Today they are plentiful. They thrive in Ohio farm country, in our forests, our parks, and even in the suburbs.

But it was not very long ago that seeing a deer was a rare treat. Deer had been pushed out of our state as we settled the land and cut down most of the original forest for cropland. Much of what was once farmland in the hilly part of Ohio is becoming forest again. People discovered that the land was poor for crop farming and took jobs in the city. We also learned how to protect our wildlife from **poaching**, the illegal killing of wild animals. Today, wildlife officers strictly enforce laws that protect deer, but still let us have a hunting season that thousands enjoy.

While we may think of deer as forest animals, they thrive in mixed **habitat**. Trees of different ages, mixed with brushland and cropland are good deer habitat. Their favorite foods include wild fruit, young leaves and stems, acorns, and grains like corn.

Male deer, or **bucks**, grow antlers in early spring. At first they are covered with a downy skin. By fall the buck has rubbed off the itchy **velvet** and the antlers are smooth and shiny. **Does**, or female deer, usually do not have antlers. Antlers are used to push and shove other bucks as they compete for females. The strongest buck may mate with many females. Antlers fall off in winter when the mating season is over and are grown again the next year.



Fawns are born in the spring. In good deer habitat, does often have twins. Fawns can walk when they are only one or two hours old. They rest and stay hidden when they are not nursing. The newborn deer have spotted coats that help

them hide in tall grass and weeds. When they are about one month old they join the doe in search of food.

In the summer, the white-tailed deer's coat is a reddish tan; the winter coat is grayish tan. The large white tail or "flag" is often a signal of danger for other deer. This is what we see most often as the deer runs away.

Deer have large ears they can turn from side to side to help them hear if predators might be approaching. They also have a good sense of smell and keen eyesight. Unlike people, deer have eyes on the sides of their head and can see in almost every direction. Deer have long legs with powerful muscles. That is why they can run so fast. All these **adaptations** help the deer survive.

Most people who love the outdoors are always happy to see deer. But when there are too many deer in one area there are problems for the farmer, the forester, and for drivers on the road. Today we manage deer herd numbers with laws and hunting seasons that both help with problems when there are too many deer, and protect deer where there are too few.

With good management and habitat protection white-tailed deer will always be around to remind us that people and wildlife can share the land.