

WHITE TAILED DEER & MAN

History

- Deer are the key big game species in New York today and have been not just the 500 years since Europeans arrived but for millenia before for Native Americans here.
- In the 1700s & 1800s man moved t/o New York, eliminated predators like wolves and cougars and cut great swathes of forest for housing, farming, and lumber.
- This disturbance let new trees, shrubs, and grasses to grow for deer to eat and created thicker shrub woodlands with edge effect that deer prefer.
- Despite these favorable changes to the landscape, deer populations were devastated in New York by over-hunting especially in the late 1800s and early 1900s.
- Since the early 1900s, deer populations have steadily increased to their current levels as state hunting regulations have sustainably protected deer populations.

Deer & Nuisance Issues

- While deer do have significant value to us and to the environment, when there are too many deer in an area, they can also cause serious problems.
- The Hudson Valley has one of highest deer population densities in New York. All those deer bring issues like over-browsing, vehicle collisions, and ticks.
- Deer over-browsing strips forest understories of many young trees and shrubs that other native plant and animal species also depend on and reduces biodiversity.
- Over-browsing can also make forests less resilient and more susceptible to further disturbances such as the introduction of invasive species or disease.
- Deer vehicle collisions pose a serious safety risk to people. Tens of thousands of deer-vehicle collisions occur every year in New York State.
- It is recommended people always drive the speed limit, use their high beams on uncrowded roads at night, and be particularly alert when in high deer density areas.
- High density deer areas are also high density deer tick areas. Deer ticks (aka blacklegged ticks) can pose a risk to human health via harmful diseases like Lyme Disease.
- It is recommended that people who spend time outside in woods or tall grass always wear long pants, use insect repellent, and check themselves afterwards for ticks.

Harvesting: White-tailed deer are protected in New York as a big game species. Deer may be hunted in season per NYS Regulations. For more information on deer hunting, visit the NYSDEC website at: www.dec.ny.gov.

Mandatory Harvest Check: Deer taken at West Point in Regular Season must be processed by Natural Resources staff. All hunting is coordinated via and all harvests in any season are reported at : westpoint.isportsman.net

DISEASE

CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a fatal nervous system disease spread by prions, abnormal proteins in nervous, lymph, & digestive tissue of infected deer. Prions are shed via deer saliva, urine, and feces and can persist in the environment for years. CWD did occur in western NY in the 2000s but it was eradicated, making NY a rare state to do so.

Vectors: Deer species incl. white-tailed deer and moose. Other susceptible species incl. mule deer, elk, & caribou.

Symptoms: Late symptoms: emaciation, disorientation, loss of body functions, excessive thirst and finally, death.

Human health risk: unseen in humans. But: Do not eat any part of a sick deer or nervous, lymph, or GI tissue of any deer.

EPIZOOTIC HEMMORHAGIC DISEASE & BLUE-TONGUE DISEASE

Epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) and Blue-Tongue Disease (BTD) are two different vascular system diseases caused by separate viruses but both spread by biting flies called midges, esp. those called "no-see-ums". EHD was detected in NY in the mid to late 2000s and most recently reappeared in 2020 in our area. This disease usu. disappears with first frost of season when midges that spread it are killed.

Vectors: Deer species incl. white-tailed deer, mule deer, and pronghorn antelope as well as domestic cattle, sheep, goats.

Symptoms: high fever, swelling esp of face, mouth and tongue, or neck. Lack of coordination, wasting, shock, death.

Human health risk: unseen in humans, but again, people are advised never to eat any part of a sick deer.

LIMIT DEER DISEASE. Feeding deer causes high deer densities which spreads deer disease. **NEVER FEED DEER.**

BASIC WILDLIFE SAFETY REVIEW

Do these things to keep people and animals safe:

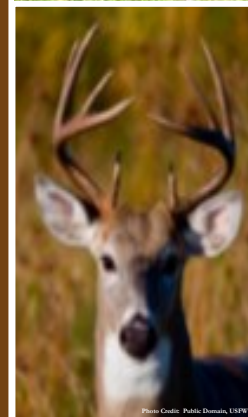
- **NEVER FEED WILDLIFE** - Nuisance animal issues often begin over food. Feeding wild animals is illegal.
- **KEEP YOUR DISTANCE** - Never approach or corner wildlife. Risks incl. disease, attack. Enjoy them from afar.
- **REPORT ANIMAL ISSUES** - call a wildlife responder if human or animal well-being is a concern.

REPORTING DEER ISSUES

Know when and what to report and who to contact

- **WHEN TO REPORT:** Call right away If you see a deer: 1) being fed or baited 2) is injured, sick, or acting oddly, 3) dead but not a roadkill 4) has been harvested illegally.
- **WHAT TO REPORT:** Please report 1) when & 2) where deer issue happened, 3) what the deer did 4) where deer is now (if known), 5) your name and phone number.
- **CONTACT:** West Point Game Wardens via the Military Police Sgt's Desk at: 845-938-3333 (anytime); Natural Resources: at (646) 208-9431(M-F 0745-1630)

WHITE TAILED DEER ON THE WEST POINT MILITARY RESERVATION



West Point Natural Resources Section (NRS)
Bldg 667A Ruger Road
USAG—West Point, NY 10996
www.westpoint.isportsman.net

WHITE-TAILED DEER AT WEST POINT

White-tailed deer are one of the quintessential wildlife species in New York state, one of its most important species, and certainly one of its most contentious. Deer are simultaneously admired for their grace and beauty, treasured by hunters as game, viewed as a nuisance for their overconsumption of crops, landscape plants and over-browsing in natural areas and are even regarded with respect to public health issues for their contributions to vehicle accidents and prevalence of tick-borne diseases. This brochure seeks to inform readers about white tailed deer and some issues related to them.

While we hope it informs and prepares readers, this brochure is by no means a comprehensive guide. For more, visit the NYSDEC website: www.dec.ny.gov.



WHITE TAILED DEER

(*Odocoileus virginianus*)

Description

- White-tailed deer are one of the largest animals in our area. Older, mature deer can measure 3-4 ft tall (at shoulder), 4-5 ft long, and weigh 100-200+ lbs.
- They have a red-brown coat in the spring/summer, which turns grey-brown in the fall/winter. Older deer will tend to have more grey in coat.
- Fawns have red-brown coats that are white spotted, and act as a camouflage by helping breaking up their silhouette.

Deer Antlers

- Antlers, bony structures that grow off the heads of male deer (bucks) are their most distinguishing feature and are often prized by hunters
- Female deer (does) do not grow antlers. Buck fawns called button bucks do not sport full antler rack but will sport antler bumps or "buttons".
- As bucks age, antlers grow in points (the maximum is usu. 8, less commonly 10-12 in our area) and size, until the age 4-6. After this, antlers decline.
- Bucks shed their antlers after the fall/early winter mating season and regrow new antlers every year. Their antlers reach full size by late summer or fall.

Ecology & Range

- White-tailed deer live throughout North America from N. Canada, t/o most of the US, Mexico and Central America, and into South America.
- Deer are found in a variety of habitats including forests, fields, farmlands, and in suburban woodland areas. They prefer habitat with thick interior cover and edges.
- White-tailed deer normally have small home ranges well under a square mile. They are known for using the same paths and trails repeatedly.
- Deer, on average, usually only live 2-3 years in the wild, with survival to age 5-6 being the usual maximum in our area. Older deer have been reported but are uncommon.
- White-tailed deer are normally most active at dawn/dusk as well as at night but they are also commonly seen during the day.
- White-tailed deer are semi-social animals, living both solitarily, as well as in herds. Doe-and-fawn-family units can sometimes link up to form larger herds.
- Adult bucks are much more solitary, but may form small, temporary groups in the summer. These break up prior to the fall mating season when bucks become territorial.
- Deer mating season usu. takes place from October to December in NY. Fawns, 1-2 per doe, are then born from April to June and stay 1-2 years /w their mother.
- Deer communicate mostly via scent-marking. They have more than a half dozen scent glands, incl. those on their legs and hooves they use to mark territory, attract mates.

Diet

- White-tailed deer are herbivorous, either grazing on grasses and herbs or browsing trees and shrubs. They often eat wildflowers and fallen acorns and nuts as well.
- Deer, like cattle, sheep and some other animals - are ruminants. Ruminants have unique digestive system and way of gaining nutrients from food called rumination.
- In rumination, deer chew and partially digest their food by allowing it to ferment in a foregut. Deer then regurgitate this semi-digested food (cud), re-chew, and fully digest it.

Senses & Physical Abilities

- Deer eyesight is much more finely attuned to detecting movement and seeing in low light conditions than human eyesight is but their color vision is also more limited.
- Deer are capable of distinguishing blues, greens & yellows but cannot distinguish red. This is beneficial for hunters since safety orange is not easily seen by deer.
- Deer also have good hearing, however their most impressive sense is their sense of smell which they use to detect both other deer and potential predators.
- Deer are extremely fast and agile, capable of running at speeds of over 30 miles an hour through woods and leaping fences and natural barriers like downed trees.

Q&A: DEER FAQs - FAWNS, ELK, MOOSE

Q: I saw a fawn alone. Its mother was nowhere around. Should I help it? A: No. A doe will often leave her fawn in an area while she goes off to feed. The doe is probably close by and will soon return for her fawn. Do not move the fawn.

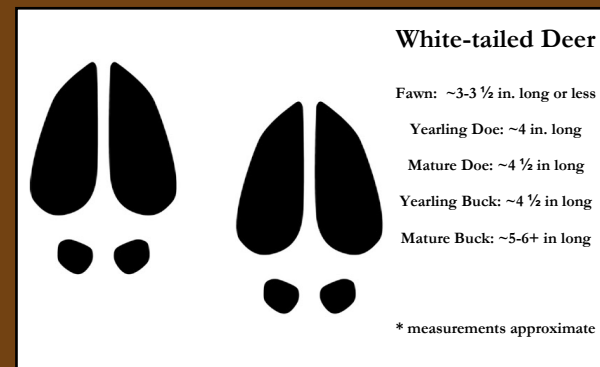
Q: Do deer make vocal sounds like other animals? A: Yes. If alarmed adult deer snort and fawns bleat loudly. Bucks grunt in mating season. Does will also grunt to their fawns.

Q: Are there mule deer here? A: No. Mule deer only live out west in the U.S. Some western states have both species but white-tailed deer are the only deer species in New York.

Q: Are there elk here? A: No. There are no elk here or anywhere else in the state today. Elk were once native to New York but disappeared long ago.

Q: Are there moose here? A: No. Moose are native to NY but are not found at West Point or anywhere in the Hudson Valley. They are only found in more remote areas upstate.

KNOW YOUR TRACKS



Deer Antlers (cont)

- Antlers differ from horns found in sheep and cattle in that antlers are bony and regrow annually. Horns are permanent structures of bone and keratin.
- Male deer use antlers in mating to attract females and as weapons with which to fighter other males for territory, mating opportunities.
- Antlers are one of the fastest growing animal structures and grow covered in highly vascularized "velvet" tissue. This velvet falls off by early autumn.

Deer Teeth - A Key to Aging

- By looking at tooth replacement and tooth wear in the premolars and molars of lower jaws, harvested deer can be aged into year-and-a-half classes
- A fawn (~½ y/o) won't have their 3rd or maybe even 2nd molars. A 1 ½ y/o deer will still have its baby or unfurly erupted adult 3rd premolars and 3rd molars.
- A 2 ½ y/o deer will have erupted 3rd molars /w wear on its molars, premolars. From 3 ½ years on, deer age is parsed by wear on premolars, molars.