

White-tailed Deer

General

White tailed deer are the most abundant of all North American big game animals. These phantoms of the woodlands can be found from Canada's extreme north to the southernmost regions of Texas. Deriving their name from the white underside of their tail, a white tail deer will "flash" its tail as a warning signal to other deer in the vicinity. A signal that no hunter wants to see, because it means you've been busted.

The female (*doe*) usually weighs between 90 and 130 pounds (50 to 60 kg), but some weigh in excess of 130 pounds (60 kg). The deer's coat is a reddish-brown in the spring and summer, and turns to a grey-brown throughout the fall and winter. The bucks shed their antlers around February, and begin growing them back in the early spring.

Habitat

White tailed deer can be found in a wide variety of habitat ranging from forest to open fields. One sure place to watch is riparian habitat, or the fringes of wetlands, lakes, and rivers. In the north, look for stands of conifers with easy access to water. White tails often travel the same trails so if you find a well used trail look for fresh sign and scout out a location that affords good visibility of the trail while allowing you to remain hidden.

Of the 16 sub species of white tailed deer found in North America, only three are found in Canada. The northern white tail ranges from Western Ontario to Nova Scotia while the Dakota white tail ranges from the Ontario / Manitoba border westward to the foothills of the Rockies. Then there is the small pocket of Tawny deer located in Southeastern British Columbia.

Feeding

During the spring and summer the white-tailed deer's diet consists of leafy material from a variety of woody plants, grasses, herbs, and broad leafed plants. It also includes such delicacies as fiddleheads, mushrooms, and blueberries.

When summer's bounty disappears, the deer must depend largely on the twigs and buds that are within their reach. Acorns are a favorite autumn food for white-tailed deer living in eastern Canada, and in Western Canada grain piles left in fields attract white-tailed deer throughout the autumn and winter. Apples and other fall fruits are also a favorite autumn food of whitetails so don't overlook that abandoned fruit orchard. But after the snow flies they start to browse on twigs, branches, or even cedar boughs. If you have ever eaten venison from a deer that was browsing on cedar you're sure to remember the distinctive flavor.

Breeding

The peak of the rut occurs sometime around the last two weeks of November in most of Canada, although it can occur a bit earlier or later in various regions of the country.

Does usually give birth to one or two fawns sometime around the end of may to the first part of June, but it is not uncommon to see birthing take place well into the summer months.

Hunting Considerations

White tailed deer tend to be crepuscular, meaning that they are most active in the hours around dusk and dawn. However, they can be found on the move throughout the day, so don't limit your hunting activities to dawn and dusk. Many deer are taken at times when most hunters are lounging in camp.

Deer have keen senses of hearing, smell, and sight. Whether you are bow hunting from a tree stand or hunting the perimeter of marshlands with a rifle, understanding the art of stealth is a real asset.

Concerns to Hunters

Every hunter should be very concerned about the spread of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). CWD belongs to a group of neurodegenerative disorders called transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs). It is closely related to "mad cow disease".

Most cases of CWD are diagnosed during a postmortem that examines the brain and lymphoid tissue. In some parts of Canada there are programs in place that encourage hunters to save the heads of their harvest and turn them in to wildlife officials for analysis. This has been proven to be the most significant means of tracking the disease.

Many studies and reports have been compiled by provincial government biologists and non government organizations alike. For more information on the potential impact of CWD on deer hunting in North America contact your Provincial Ministry of Natural Resources, or Department of Fish and Wildlife.