

News from the Watershed  
By: Corine Burgess

### White tailed deer

Many years ago, white tailed deer were nearly exterminated in much of the Northwest and Midwest. Today they are more plentiful than ever due to hunting restrictions and a decline in the number of their predators. They survive in the big woods of northern Maine to the deep saw grass and hammock swamps of Florida. They thrive in mixed farmlands, brushy areas and timber, and can survive the desolate cactus and thornbrush deserts of southern Texas and Mexico. They are as versatile as they are beautiful.

The antlers are one conspicuous feature that distinguishes the buck from the doe. Every year the buck sheds his antlers and grows a new pair, usually in April or May. The nourishment for these antlers comes from a velvety covering of skin and blood vessels. Antler growth and number of "points" is determined by the quality and quantity of food. It has nothing to do with the buck's age. The only way to tell the age of a deer is by the wear of its teeth. Generally by September, the antlers are fully grown, the velvet dies back and peels off. The buck aids in the process by rubbing his antlers against trees.

Bucks and does group separately throughout the year and only get together during mating season. Some bucks mate with only one doe, but most go from one to another. When the doe is ready to give birth, she leaves her group and goes off by herself. Young does begin to reproduce at a year and a half. The first time they give birth, almost without exception, it is to one fawn. Afterwards, in years to follow, the doe may produce twins and sometimes triplets – depending on the abundance and quality of food.

About a month after the birthing is over, the doe rejoins her group, which usually consists of herself, a yearling and two fawns. Mother usually keeps the fawn hidden for the first month, where the fawn rarely moves more than 30 feet from its birthplace. Mother never strays far from her baby. Once this month interval ends, the fawn begins to travel with its mother. They generally stay where food is abundant and cover is good. The young deer stays with its mother for about one year then joins its own group.

White tailed deer don't travel too far in their lifetime. Their range is about two to three square miles. They are reluctant to leave their area because of their lack of knowledge of surrounding territory.

All deer are vegetarians. They browse and live on a diet of twigs, shrubs, fungi, acorns, grass, herbs and fruits. They have four stomachs. Deer eat fast; once they swallow, the food goes to the first chamber, then the second where it is broken down into cud. Later when sheltered and rested, they bring up the cud, which is then transferred to the other two chambers where it is digested.

Usually white tailed deer are shy and skittish; their defense being a snorting sound when alarmed. Often they will stamp their hooves to alert nearby deer of danger. When frightened, the animal will almost always run. They are swift and can travel 35-40 mph, jump 30 feet horizontally and 8 ½ feet vertically. If allowed to live out their natural lives, they can survive for up to 16 ½ years in the wild. They are excellent swimmers and graceful runners.

Today the white tailed deer are more numerous than they were prior to European settlement because their natural enemies such as the panther, wolves and mountain lions are so scarce and they can survive in most plant communities.

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