

2.7 DEER: Mule and Black-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus hemionus: ssp: columbianus, hemionus, sitkensis*)

Appearance and Size

Mule Deer have a reddish brown coat that changes from tawny brown in summer to dark or grizzled brown in winter. They have a dark brown forehead, a whitish face with a black muzzle, and a white throat patch. Their ears are large, about two-thirds the length of the head, with



(Photo: Ed Austin & Herb Jones, US National Park Service)

black borders and white hair on the inside. They have a large white rump patch with a narrow black-tipped tail. Each year male Mule Deer grow and shed a set of antlers. Their antlers have two main beams, each of which forks again into two beams (dichotomous branching). Mule Deer attain heights of 90 cm to 95 cm high at the shoulder. While most adult males, or bucks, weigh 68 kg to 113 kg, some may reach 180 kg. Females, or does, usually weigh between 50 kg to 75 kg. Blacktails are smaller than Mule Deer

and slightly darker in color, with a small rump patch and a tail that is dark brown or black for most of its length. Adult males in good condition weigh between 48 kg to 90 kg, while females weigh between 40 kg to 65 kg. Sitka blacktails tend to be smaller and darker than Columbia blacktails.

Life History

Deer are a very prolific species. Mating (rutting) occurs in late autumn, November and December. This is a time when bucks increase their displays of dominance and mature bucks engage in battles for females. Bucks are capable of breeding as yearlings, but older bucks do

most of the mating. After a six to seven month long gestation period, fawns are born from late May through June. While young does often only have one fawn, twin fawns are the rule, and triplets do occur. Does usually produce offspring throughout their lives. More than 90 percent of does produce fawns every year. Usually, 45 to 70 percent of fawns die, and few Black-tailed and Mule deer live more than eight to ten years.



(Photo: Condon, US National Park Service)



(Photo: BC Parks)



Abundance and Distribution

Except for the rut, most Black-tailed and Mule deer tend to travel alone or in small groups. Black-tailed Deer numbers vary greatly depending on habitat conditions, winter severity, and predators numbers. Deer have adapted to all climates. They inhabit every kind of ecological zone, from alpine to valley bottom, and from dense coastal rainforests to dry interior rangelands. (Map 2.7.1) Deer



(Photo: Ron Shade, US National Park Service)

population in recent decades has ranged between 150,000 and 300,000. Blacktails are abundant in southern areas where the climate is favourable such as Vancouver Island, the islands in Georgia Strait, and the Sechelt Peninsula. Their numbers decline northward along the mainland coast. About 150,000 black-tailed deer inhabit the coastal areas of B.C. Sitka blacktails were introduced into the Queen Charlotte Islands in the early 1900's and have flourished there. About 165,000 Mule Deer inhabit the interior of the province. While most prefer the dry valleys and plateaus of the southern interior, Mule Deer are common in the south-central interior. About 20,000 to 25,000 occupy northern ranges.

Text and map adapted from: British Columbia Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, 2000d.



Adapted from: McDougall (1997); and Sheldon and Hartson (1999).



(Photo: Tupper Ansel Blake, US Fish and Wildlife Service)

Characteristic Features



(Photos: Leonard Sielecki, BCMoT)



black-tailed deer



(Photos: Leonard Sielecki, BCMoT)



mule deer

Map 2.7.1

