



(Photo: BC Parks)

2.7 DEER: White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus: ssp: dacotensis, ochrourus*)

Appearance and Size

White-tailed Deer have a coat mostly reddish brown in summer but which changes to grey or greyish-brown in winter, with a contrasting white hairy covering on the belly, inside of the legs, underside of the tail, around the eyes, and on the chin and throat. The most striking feature of this deer, and the source of its name, is its triangular foot-long tail. On top, the tail is brown with a prominent white fringe, but the underside is snowy white. Whitetail bucks have distinctive antlers that fall off and grow back every year. Each antler has a main beam that rises from the top of the head, curves slightly backward, then turns out and forward over the face. Each main beam holds one to several unbranched tines, or points. Male fawns have no visible antlers, but yearlings may have either a single spike or antlers with four to eight tines. Older bucks always have several tines. Mature, White-tailed Deer stand about 90 cm tall at the shoulder. Adult males, or bucks typically weigh 68 kg to 102 kg. Adult females, or does weigh 45 kg to 73 kg. Weights vary considerably depending on age, the season, and the condition of the range.



(Photo: Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources)



(Stock Photo)

Life History

Mating (rutting) occurs in the Fall, peaking in November when most does come into heat. During the rut, bucks travel incessantly. Most breeding involves yearlings and older animals. The gestation period for White-tailed Deer is about six to seven months. After the gestation period, does drive off their young of the previous year and give birth to new fawns. Most fawns are born in late May or June. Twin births are common, but single births and triple births are not uncommon. While some whitetails live more than 20 years, few survive more than ten. Most bucks in hunted herds are less than four years old.



(Photo: Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources)

Abundance and Distribution

In good years, White-tailed Deer numbers may exceed 65,000 in British Columbia. Whitetails are at the far northern edge of their vast North American range and many of them die during severe winters here.

However, they come back in increasing numbers if several mild winters occur in a row. This pattern is most pronounced in the Peace River region. The White-tailed Deer does not occur everywhere in British Columbia. (Map 2.7.2) They are most abundant along valley bottoms in the Kootenay and Okanagan regions, particularly near the US border. In the North, they are most numerous along the Peace River and the lower reaches of tributaries like the Halfway, Beatton, Moberly, Pine, and Kiskatinaw Rivers. For most of the year, valley bottoms are the main habitat for White-tailed Deer in British Columbia. In the East Kootenay area, deer find winter range on south- to southwest-facing slopes and on fans and terraces where shrub stands have developed after wildfires, logging, or land-clearing for agriculture. The distribution of Whitetailed Deer is largely governed by climate, particularly snow depth.



(Photo: Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources)

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



Adapted from: McDougall (1997); Shomon (1969) and Sheldon and Hartson (1999).



(Photo: Leonard Sielecki, BCMoT)

Characteristic Features



(Photo: Leonard Sielecki, BCMoT)



(Photo: Leonard Sielecki, BCMoT)

Map 2.7.2

