



Photo by Jeff Davis



**WHITETAILS
UNLIMITED**

DEER HUNTERS GUIDELINES

WTU'S DEER PROGRAM

DEVELOPING EDUCATIONAL & ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

White-Tailed Deer

A MANAGEMENT SUCCESS STORY!

The history of the deer population in North America is one of the greatest success stories in wildlife management. While many other big-game species have declined with the spread of industrial development and urbanization, the white-tailed deer has been able to adapt to its ever-changing environment. Today, the white-tailed deer is the most plentiful, widely distributed, and heavily hunted of all North American big-game animals.

The whitetail was just as important to European settlers as it was to Native Americans. It provided them with the necessities of life including food, clothing, and shelter. However, the settlers hunted deer with firearms and soon venison became a major item of trade.

The late 1800s were tragic years for the whitetail. At the turn of the century, because of major habitat destruction and unregulated market hunting, deer populations plummeted to an estimated low of 500,000 animals. During this same period, the general public was made aware of the scarcity of deer, largely due to the efforts of early conservationists. As a result, they insisted on habitat improvement programs, hiring of law enforcement officers, and putting stricter regulations on hunting. Despite that gloomy situation, wildlife officials estimate today's population of white-tailed deer to exceed 28 million. In fact, in many habitat areas, there are more deer today than when the first European settlers arrived.

The North American white-tailed deer ranges throughout the United States and in large parts of Canada and Mexico. There are thirty subspecies of white-tailed deer, but only sixteen of these subspecies can be found in the ranges of North America. The size and weight of an adult whitetail varies greatly from the very small Key deer of the Florida Keys



Photo by Ken Archer

to the largest subspecies of the northern woodland region.

The overall population of white-tailed deer has steadily increased in the United States. Because of its adaptability and widespread abundance, a primary threat to the whitetail is the loss of habitat. This condition is normally created because of competition for land uses and degradation of prime wildlife habitat. However, an overpopulation of deer can become a liability and have a significant negative impact on the species as well as other plant and animal communities. Excessive

numbers cause an increase in deer/vehicle collisions, disease, crop depredation, and destruction of habitat.

Many decades of research and management support regulated hunting as the most beneficial tool that wildlife managers have to control deer populations. Options routinely suggested as alternatives to regulated hunting are typically impractical and too costly to implement.

Regardless of where deer live, their beauty, alertness, and adaptability will always make them the most popular big-game animal in the United States.

development is hastened because of the richness of the mother's milk. In comparison to cow's milk, deer milk is richer and much more nutritious.

The average weight of a newborn fawn is between 5 and 8 pounds. Nature provides the newborn with a camouflage of white spots to protect it from predators. The quality of ground cover will determine actual fawn losses due to predation.

For bucks, antler development usually begins during the month of April or May, and by the month of August the antlers are fully grown.

Deer antlers are among the fastest growing tissues in the animal kingdom, growing as much as a half-inch per day during peak development. The development process can vary greatly, depending upon the health and nutrition of each deer.

Growing antlers are covered with a living tissue called velvet. During development, the deer's antlers are very delicate and extremely sensitive to the touch. This is also when most antler damage or breakage occurs.

Whitetails can reach speeds in excess of 35 miles per hour. They are also capable of clearing a vertical fence up to eight feet in height.

Deer are known as ruminants or cud chewers. They have a four-compartment stomach that allows them to take in food quickly and later regurgitate the food for final chewing and digestion.

FAST FACTS

Hunting & Whitetails

Deer hunters of all ages and skill levels can benefit from this information. Before preparing for the hunt, take some time to better understand your quarry. Studying the white-tailed deer can be fun and will give you the satisfaction of becoming a more knowledgeable, skillful, and responsible hunter. Responsible hunters today, as in the past, will continue to play an important role in determining the future of regulated hunting.

Approach the sport of deer hunting with the right attitude. Understand the reasons why you hunt and then concentrate entirely on the fulfillment and enjoyment hunting can bring into your life.

Whitetails have extraordinary senses. Their ability to smell is probably their greatest asset, but deer also have exceptionally keen hearing, and eyes that can spot the slightest movement.

The whitetail is considered a "browser" because it wanders, feeding on tender buds, twigs and leaves – but remains close to the woods for quick escape cover.

Most whitetails are born in late May or early June, depending upon geographic location. The normal gestation period of a whitetail is 200 days.

A mature doe will typically bear twins, which usually double in size during the first two weeks after birth. The fawn's



Bedded deer will usually remain motionless until they feel they have been spotted or are in immediate danger.

Photo by Kenny Bahr



Deer frequent local water sources during active feeding periods of early morning and late afternoon.

Photo by Michael Faw



Get to know the routes deer travel between bedding and feeding areas.

Photo by Linda Arndt



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A bedded deer would prefer to remain still. Often deer that see, smell, or hear you will remain motionless until they feel they've been spotted or are in immediate danger. When still-hunting, always be prepared for a deer to burst out, heading for nearby cover.

On cold, sunny days, when measurable snow is on the ground, look for deer on the leeward side of slopes and hills where the warm sun may be melting snow. Deer will often look for both protection and warmth during winter months.

An experienced hunter will not hesitate to hunt near a water source. Deer frequent watering areas during the active feeding periods of early morning and late afternoon.

Autumn and winter deer coats consist of hollow, kinky hair designed to insulate and reduce heat loss. For this reason, spotting deer beds in snow can be difficult because of shallow depressions and limited melting. Look for bedded deer on the edge of fields, under low hanging tree branches, and on higher hills overlooking lower terrain.

When disturbed, whitetails rarely run far, usually just out of sight. The next time you see the deer, you'll be better prepared for a good shot.

Most often, deer trails will run horizontally along the side of a hill. You can give yourself an advantage if you are able to post above known hillside trails, but below the crest of the hill to break up your silhouette.

Always be alert to other hunters in the surrounding area. Detecting movement is never reason enough to click off the safety of your gun or draw your bow. In heavily hunted areas, movement is often that of another hunter.

A high browse line on trees and brush signals a tough winter with a shortage of food. Very often, both the youngest and oldest of the deer herd will die in winter. This is Mother Nature's way of managing the deer population.

In a successful deer hunt, whether an animal is harvested or not, planning and preparation are the key ingredients.



Hunt near rubs (above) and scrapes. Scrapes are pawed-up areas of ground that smell of deer urine, and rubs are trees damaged by bucks who aggressively rub their antlers on the bark. Rubs are often found along a line of scrapes, and both are used to mark territory.

Photo by Joe Byers

PRESEASON PREPARATION

For a Successful Hunt

Deer hunting is relatively easy to explain, but in most instances, extremely difficult to carry out. A white-tailed deer is a true "survivor," using its eyes, ears, and nose to detect and avoid potential danger. The sense of smell is the most developed sense in the white-tailed deer, with hearing and sight following in very close order. It is interesting to observe just how the whitetail uses these senses in appraising danger. In order to overcome a deer's defense system, a hunter must fully develop his or her own outdoor abilities.

Preparation for the hunt should include target practice, physical conditioning, study and understanding of the whitetail, and prescouting. Prescouting is the pro-

cess involved in assessing the contour of the land in detail, the routes deer travel, and the selection of several good sites for your deer stand. Always remember when prescouting early in the fall, there are a number of variables to consider which alter a deer's feeding, bedding, and traveling habits. These variables include the weather, hunting pressure, and the breeding season, commonly known as the "rut." With these changes in mind, it will be easier to implement needed adjustments during the hunting season.

Once you've selected an area to hunt, it's time to get down to work. First, simply get out and walk the area. Search for tracks, droppings, bedding areas, scrapes, rubs, or any sign indicating deer are in the area; then observe local ridges, swamps,

fields, and waters associated with good whitetail areas. The number of hours you spend in the woods before the season will have a direct effect on your success on opening day.

A certain amount of luck is involved with hunting, but prescouting keeps the odds in favor of the prepared hunter. Listed next are some guidelines to follow during your preseason scouting activities.

PRESEASON SCOUTING

Pick several areas you feel are good habitat for deer. Make sure you ask permission to hunt if the land you have selected is privately owned. After gaining permission, take some time to scout the area and determine the key trails, feeding areas, bedding sites, and locations you intend to hunt.

Topographical maps, aerial photos, or a GPS unit with map graphics are often helpful for determining the lay-of-the-land. Studying the maps may show you good hunting locations prior to walking the property.

The first thing to search for are feeding areas. Ideal deer foods are low-growing shrubs, fruits and berries, brushy vegetation, and young tree growth that is within a deer's reach. Hunting near key deer foods in your area will greatly increase your odds of being successful.

The availability of water is something that should not be overlooked. White-tailed deer are not fond of traveling far for a drink of water. Normally the water source is in close proximity to their daily feeding areas.

Bedding areas are another important aspect to bear in mind. Deer use different bedding areas depending on the time of year. Deer beds can be distinguished by locating areas where grass, snow, or leaves are flattened in the shape of a deer.

Deer trails and escape routes are probably the most vital signs to look for during prescouting. Well-used trails normally link feeding areas to bedding locations. Identifying the deer trail used to travel

to a favored food source is often the key ingredient to a successful hunt.

Hunting near scrape and rub areas can be very productive during the rut. Active scrapes are bare, pawed-up areas that smell strongly of fresh deer urine. Bucks make scrapes and check them frequently in search of a receptive doe during the breeding season. Rubs on young trees are made by bucks to vent their aggression and mark territories. Rubs are often made along a scrape line and are part of the annual breeding ritual.

CLOTHING & EQUIPMENT

Whether you plan to hunt the northern hardwoods, swamps of the south, or the western plains, it is of utmost importance to choose the proper clothing and equipment to fit your needs. In doing so, you will add to the safety and pleasure of your whitetail hunt. When selecting your hunting outfit, keep in mind varying and sometimes adverse weather conditions. These conditions, depending upon geographic location,



Deer trails and escape routes are one of the most vital signs to look for during prescouting.

Photo by ©BillMARCHEL.com

may range from severe snowstorms and frigid cold, to heavy rains with warm temperatures. The smart hunter considers all possible weather conditions before making the final selection of outdoor gear. The following guidelines will aid you in determining the appropriate selection of your hunting clothing and equipment.

Most states require deer hunters to wear a certain percentage of blaze orange clothing. Before you purchase your hunting clothes, check your state regulations for compliance.

Camouflage clothing is used to break up the human figure and disguise hunter

movement. It offers greater benefits to the hunter who encounters deer at close range. Remember that deer are colorblind. Select a camouflage pattern that blends in well with the terrain you will be hunting.

Choosing clothes that ensure personal comfort will add to your hunting enjoyment. Always take into consideration comfort, scent-eliminating technology, moisture management, and silence. Quality clothing usually costs more, but is worth the investment.

The primary function of any outdoor clothing is to provide protection from the various elements that may be encoun-

tered. Warm weather hunts are generally easier to dress for as compared to cold weather hunting. There is no perfect cold weather clothing, but certain materials work better than others. Some of the more popular include fleece, polyester blends, wool, suede, and synthetics. The final selection will depend on your specific location and weather conditions.

When insulated underwear is needed, the best choice is double-sided fabric that wicks moisture away from your skin and circulates body heat. Silk and silk/wool blends are popular because they keep you warm, dry, and comfortable without weighing you down.

Hunters should layer their clothing to accommodate for changes in body temperature and weather conditions. Dressing in layers also allows the hunter to remove garments as the day warms.

A good hunting boot must be comfortable, provide adequate traction, and keep the foot the proper temperature under your hunting conditions. The most popular boots for cold weather are either leather or rubber when used in combination with a felt or padded liner. If you are trying to beat the cold, a combination of socks can improve your odds. Try cotton or polypropylene as the inner sock and wear a wool outer sock.

There are numerous hunting aids that are very important to carry in your day pack. They include flashlight, knife, dragging rope, matches, compass, gloves, and extra ammunition. Don't forget a map, GPS unit, and cell phone (for emergencies). For lengthy hunts, bring along food and drink.

There is no perfect cartridge or caliber of gun for deer hunting. The most important thing to do whether you hunt with a pistol, slug shotgun, rifle, muzzleloader, or bow is to target practice. Beginners should develop an ongoing marksmanship program. Know the effective range limitations of your weapon and don't exceed those limits.

Attractants and scent control products are popular with many of today's deer hunters. Once considered gimmicks, these products can improve a hunter's chance of seeing deer if used properly. Some of the more commonly used attractants include rattling antlers, grunt calls, assorted deer scents, and products to reduce human odor. The decision is yours, but giving it a try may offer you the chance to use some creative tactics to fill your tag.

Pop-up blinds, ladder and portable tree stands offer alternatives to traditional ground blinds. They are compact and light enough to be backpacked into remote hunting areas. Tree stands also provide a hunter with a better vantage point to view deer movement without being noticed. Before you purchase a portable tree stand, check out state and local laws that regulate their use. Remember that safety is a key factor when using an elevated platform. When using a tree stand always wear a safety harness.

OPENING DAY

Have a Safe Hunt

Opening day is finally here and you have been anticipating the challenge for months. It's time to test your prescouting, hunting area selection, marksmanship, and knowledge and understanding of the white-tailed deer. It's also the time when millions of sportsmen and women participate in one of the greatest outdoor sports...deer hunting.

HUNTING METHODS

Stand hunting is probably the easiest and most often selected method of deer hunting. In most cases it has a higher success ratio than other hunting techniques. The greatest attribute a stand hunter must have is patience. Typically, once a deer is in range of the hunter, it is at a great disadvantage because the animal is unaware of the hunter's presence. Most whitetail hunters simply post near a tree to break up their image. However, some hunters prefer to build elaborate blinds on the ground or choose to hunt from an elevated blind, where laws permit. Several important things to remember when stand hunting are clear shooting lanes, wind direction, and proper cover. Any hunter who prefers to hunt alone and is capable of sitting still should consider stand hunting as a simple and successful method.

Group hunting has gained popularity among certain sportsmen and women who enjoy the company of other hunters. This type of hunting is especially popular when hunting pressure alters the normal movement of deer in the area. A good combination is two or three hunters who divide the tactics of a solo hunter. When you properly combine their efforts, it can become a very efficient method of moving whitetails. An excellent way is to alternately stillhunt while the other hunters watch from a suitable vantage point. If the joint efforts are carried out properly, it just may offer one of the hunters an excellent shooting opportunity.

Stillhunting is an enjoyable way of hunting during periods of the day when whitetails reduce their movement to a

minimum. The stillhunter walks slowly and quietly, occasionally pausing to search the area for an unattentive deer. Rain, mist, wind, and snow can offer the stillhunter some golden opportunities, because Mother Nature has a unique way of breaking down the deer's defense system. The hunter's primary goal is to locate an animal before it detects him and flees the area. Once a deer is located, a stillhunter is generally presented with a good shot. Stillhunting is a method that very few hunters ever master because of the challenge. If you are seasoned and ready to accept the challenge, stillhunting may be a way to outsmart the elusive whitetail.

Regardless of the technique selected, you must always hunt in an ethical and responsible manner. In time, the high standards you set for yourself today will add to the enjoyment of your total hunting experience.

Future opportunities to engage in the sport of deer hunting will depend upon your actions. The more a hunter learns about the wilderness around him, the more he will be prepared to enjoy the day outdoors. No true hunter measures his/her success by the number of deer harvested. The real measure of success is in the knowledge that your time was well spent enjoying the great outdoors. If you are one of the lucky to harvest a whitetail, there are still several steps left to complete your successful hunt. Every hunter should know the simple process of how to field dress an animal. The process is easy to learn by reading one of the many step-by-step instructions readily available from numerous sources. The final step in handling your deer is having it processed and wrapped for the freezer. After that, it's time to cook, eat, and enjoy. 🦌

DEER HUNTER'S CHECKLIST

Regardless of the type of hunting you do, it's a good idea to make a checklist of the items that you may need. When making your final list, always plan for the unexpected!

- HUNTING LICENSE/TAG
- HUNTING CLOTHING
- BOOTS/LINERS
- HAT/GLOVES
- GUN/AMMUNITION
- BOW/ARROWS
- TREE STAND/BLIND
- SAFETY HARNESS
- COMPASS
- MAPS
- GPS UNIT
- CELL PHONE
- BINOCULARS
- RANGEFINDER
- KNIFE
- DEER ATTRACTANTS
- ROPE
- MATCHES/LIGHTER
- FLASHLIGHT
- BATTERIES
- CAMERA
- FIRST AID KIT
- EYEGLASSES/SUNGLASSES
- GUN CLEANING KIT
- PORTABLE RADIO
- ALARM CLOCK
- COOLER/ICE
- FOOD/DRINK
- MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS



Photo by Michael Faw

IT'S TIME TO HUNT,
SO HAVE A SAFE AND
MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE!

10 Commandments OF FIREARM SAFETY

**HANDLE ALL FIREARMS AS IF
THEY WERE LOADED**

1 A firearm offers no guarantee that it is unloaded. Therefore, always treat each firearm with respect.

**NEVER PULL THE TRIGGER UNLESS
YOU ARE SURE OF YOUR TARGET**

2 Always be positive of your target and what is behind it prior to pulling the trigger.

**WATCH WHERE YOU POINT
YOUR FIREARM'S MUZZLE**

3 Control the direction of your firearm's muzzle at all times by pointing it in a safe direction.

**MAKE SURE THE AMMUNITION
MATCHES THE FIREARM**

4 Double check your ammunition to make sure it matches the gauge or caliber of the firearm.

**ALWAYS MAKE SURE THE BARREL
IS FREE OF OBSTRUCTIONS**

5 Before loading, check for obstructions in the barrel.

**NEVER TAKE CHANCES WITH
A LOADED FIREARM**

6 Unload your firearm before attempting to cross over any fence, obstacle, or hazardous terrain.

**DON'T RELY ON YOUR
FIREARM'S SAFETY**

7 Because a safety is a mechanical device, it could fail at any time. Always remember to place the safety back on immediately after the shot.

**STORE FIREARMS AND
AMMUNITION IN A SAFE PLACE**

8 Store firearms and ammunition separate from one another and out of the reach of children.

**NEVER LOAD A FIREARM UNLESS
YOU ARE READY TO USE IT**

9 Don't load your firearm until you are ready to hunt - and unload as soon as you are finished.

**NEVER MIX ALCOHOL
AND AMMUNITION**

10 Alcohol and drugs impair judgement; never consume either before or during hunting or target practice.