



WHITE-TAILED DEER

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#003 Rangeland Wildlife Factsheet Series

Florida's Favorite Game Species



SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Odocoileus virginianus*

COMMON NAME AND TERMS: White-Tailed Deer, doe (adult female), buck (adult male), fawn (juvenile)

HABITAT: Most habitats, often along forest edges and gaps, in young forest stands, oak hammocks, grasslands, and agricultural pastures.

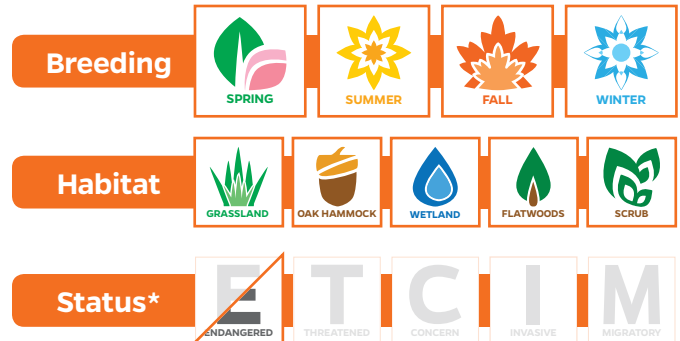
PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: Reddish-brown to grey-brown, white throat and nose band, underbelly and underside of tail white, large pointed ears, tall standing up to 6ft. Juveniles spotted. Adult males annually shed and grow antlers.

WEIGHT: Average adults males 125 lbs., average adult females 95 lbs.

DEMOGRAPHIC RATE: 200 day gestation, average of 1 fawn/year in Florida.

LIFESPAN: Average 4-6 years in hunted areas and up to 10 years in non-hunted areas. Captive deer have lived for 20 years.

DISPERSAL: Average annual home range of 1 mi² for females and 2.5 mi² for yearling and adult males. Greatest dispersal is in yearling males who can travel up to 6 miles from their natal areas.



*Florida Key Deer is an endangered sub species

Did You Know?

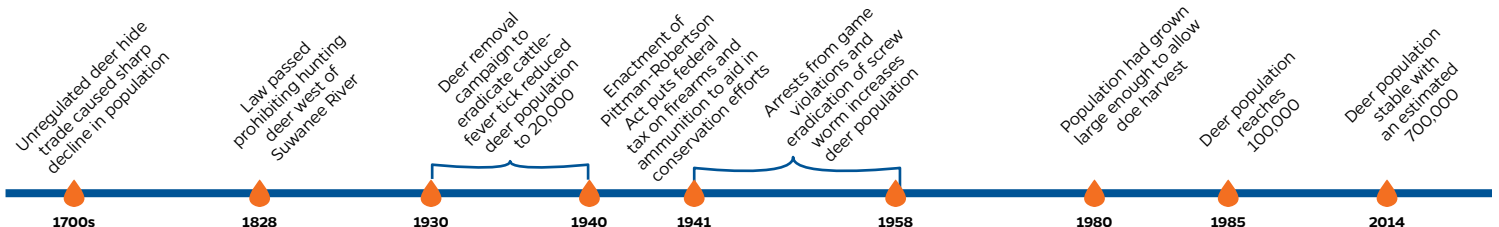
Antler growth is one of the fastest known types of mammalian tissue growth, growing up to ¼ inch per day.



HISTORY:

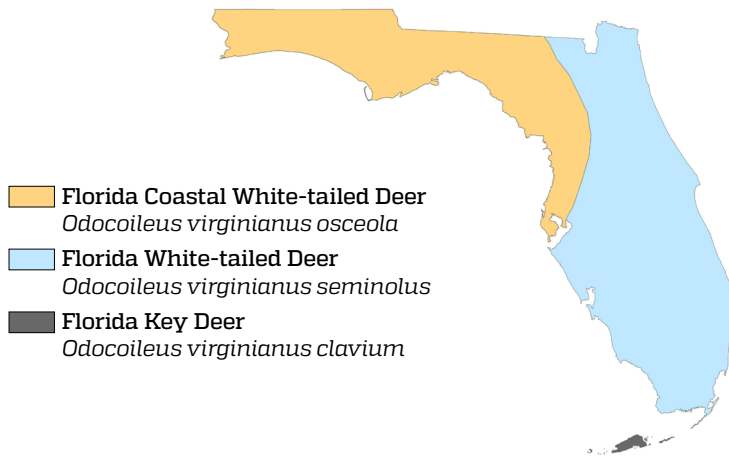
White-tailed deer are the most economically important game species in Florida. Deer in Florida have undergone major population

declines and increases. In the 1700s the unregulated deer hide trade and deer removal campaign caused historic populations to be reduced to 20,000. After the Pittman-Robertson Act and eradication of screw worm deer populations increased. Reintroduction of White-tailed deer by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) has also helped increase deer populations. By 1985, 100,000 individuals were recorded and today an estimated stable population of 700,000 exists.



DEER FAST FACTS

- Scientific genus means “hollow tooth”
- In Florida, deer consume about 3% of their body weight, ~4 lbs a day
- Crepuscular, meaning they are most active at dawn and dusk
- Deer hunting created 8,196 jobs and generated \$48 million dollars in state and local taxes in 2011



- Florida Coastal White-tailed Deer
Odocoileus virginianus osceola
- Florida White-tailed Deer
Odocoileus virginianus seminolus
- Florida Key Deer
Odocoileus virginianus clavium

DISTRIBUTION: There are 30 subspecies of white-tailed deer in the Americas, with three in Florida (see map). Species are taxonomically divided into “subspecies” when they are capable of breeding and producing fertile offspring, but do not interbreed in nature due to factors such as geographic isolation (as is the case with the Key Deer).

BIOLOGY AND BEHAVIOR: White-tailed deer are herbivores, with diets of leaves, twigs, stems, flowers, acorns, fruits, mushrooms, and aquatic plants. Similar to cattle, deer are ruminants with 4 stomachs and 65 feet of intestines to process their food. The nutrient-poor sandy soil of Florida can result in relatively low populations of deer but agricultural areas often provide high quality forage. Deer breeding season is commonly referred to as the “rut” and consists of three stages: the pre-rut, the rut, and the post-rut. Bucks typically spend one day with a female, and then move on to find another receptive doe. Male deer reach sexual maturity at 1.5 years and females first reproduce their 2nd year. Mortality is primarily due to hunting with over 120,000 deer hunted annually, but vehicle collision and sometimes disease can also be large factors.

Tracks and Scat



Pre-rut



Increasing day-length and testosterone trigger antler growth covered in “velvet.”

Rut



Bucks rub antlers to remove velvet and often spar to assert dominance. Doe go into estrous.

Post-rut



Antlers are shed and new antlers start growing soon after.

PHOTO BY: STEVE DEMARAIS, MSU

How You Can Help

- Develop a habitat management plan to maintain stable population levels
- Use food plots to supplement deer feed and attract deer to an area

KEY DEER IN FLORIDA: Key Deer are an endangered subspecies of white-tailed deer that only exist in the Florida Keys. Their ancestors are thought to have crossed to the keys via a land bridge during the Wisconsin Glaciation. Geographic isolation on islands led to local adaptation and key deer became the smallest subspecies in North American with males weighing a mere ~65lbs and females ~55lbs. Key deer have a high salt water tolerance, low birth rates, and are more solitary. Due to hunting and habitat loss, only 25 Key Deer existed in 1955. Conservation efforts including a complete hunting ban (1939) and the establishment of National Key Deer Refuge (1967) have since allowed Key Deer populations to reach 700-800 individuals. Continued habitat loss and degradation are still major risks to the population.



PHOTO BY: KRISTIN LAJEUNESSE

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