

# White-tailed Deer

 **The National Park Service Organic Act, 1916**

The Organic Act of 1916 is an important law to park managers because it established and governs the National Park Service:

*“... The service thus established shall promote and regulate the use of the federal areas known as national parks, monuments and reservations hereinafter specified by such means and measures as conform to the fundamental purpose of the said parks, monuments and reservations, which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”*

 **Background**

Cuyahoga Valley National Park has its own law established in 1974 that spells out its mission. The CVNP law prohibits public hunting on park-owned land. Other landowners within the Cuyahoga Valley allow deer hunting to protect natural habitats within various metro parks or agriculture crops on private farms. Different laws and policies apply to different landowners.

Ohio's whitetails, as white-tailed deer are sometimes called, are perhaps the state's best-known wildlife species. The deer are seen in state wildlife areas, parks and nature preserves, as well as in backyards and running across roads. Whitetails have commonly been used by hunters for food and have not always been as abundant as they are today. There was a period of time (1904-1923) when deer hunting was not regulated and the deer were extremely rare. In the 1920s and 1930s, some deer were introduced into the area. Also, deer came into Ohio from neighboring states. Today there are deer in all 88 counties of Ohio.

 **Description**

Whitetails have two seasonal coats. The spring/summer coat is reddish-tan and short-haired. The winter coat is more grayish, with heavy, long hairs for insulation. White patches are found around the eyes and on the throat, belly, tail and inside of the legs. The deer are especially known for their antlers.

The buck grows its first set of antlers when it is a year old. Each year the antlers begin growing in the early spring. They are covered with a thick, velvety skin that contains nerves and blood vessels. In the fall the blood supply to the antlers ends and the buck rubs them against trees and rocks. The result is a shiny, hard antler. In a sound environment, antlers grow to a massive size. Deer in poor habitat not only appear thin, but also have smaller antlers. In Ohio, bucks shed their antlers in December and January following the fall breeding season.

Adult males weigh between 130-300 pounds and females weigh between 90-210 pounds.

## Habitat and Habits

One reason why the deer population in Ohio has increased is that their preferred habitat has increased. As Ohio land developed, mature forest and extensive wetlands were replaced by today's mix of forest fragments, old fields, suburban lawns and agricultural fields.

Whitetails are most active at night, but they're busy at all times of day. They are not very vocal, but scientists have found that they make about 13 different sounds. Hearing, sight and smell are well developed. These senses go a long way in helping deer survive. Hearing and smell help them determine when other species are around. Smell helps them find food. Being a prey species, their eyes are on the sides of their heads, which allows them to see almost all the way around their body. They flash their white tail to signal danger.

Whitetails like a lot of different foods. Their diet varies throughout the year, depending on what is most abundant. They eat leafy plants, wild fruits, vegetables and some woody plants.

In CVNP, browsing deer have had a major impact on plant diversity, altering the forest ecosystem. The national park has fewer native tree seedlings, shrubs and wildflowers than scientists would expect in a healthy ecosystem.

## Reproduction and Care of the Young

Courtships begin in mid-October. Bucks will chase the does for five or six days before mating and then stay with her for a few days afterward, keeping other males away. Then the male will move on and breed with other does. Does are pregnant for about 200 days. In the spring, does give birth to a single fawn the first time they give birth. After that, most adults have twins and occasionally triplets. Does often return to the same place every year to give birth. Fawns are born with their eyes open and can walk within an hour or two. They nurse two or three times a day. The mother and fawn stay together until the following spring. Young does stay in the general area of their mothers, but young bucks disperse from where they were born in search of mates. Most Ohio deer-vehicle accidents occur from October to December, as morning and evening commuters encounter deer on the move during the mating season.

## Management Plans

White-tailed deer are perhaps the most managed wildlife species in the state. Deer are many things to many people. They are game fare and trophies to hunters, a prized addition to the land by some nature enthusiasts, a threat to crops by farmers and a road hazard to motorists. To better understand CVNP's deer management issues, read the handout *Too Many Deer?*

*Ohio deer information is adapted from ODNR Division of Wildlife: Life History Notes White-tailed Deer. Publication 101 (R503)*