

white-tailed deer *Odocoileus virginianus*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Mammalia

Order: Artiodactyla

Family: Cervidae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

The white-tailed deer is a large mammal, weighing 100 to 300 pounds. Color varies seasonally. During the summer, the hair has a red tint, but during the fall and winter, it is gray-brown. The belly fur is white. The large tail has a white underside. Young white-tailed deer have white spots on their back. Males grow and shed antlers annually. There are no canine teeth on the upper jaw.

BEHAVIORS

The white-tailed deer may be found statewide in Illinois. It lives in wooded areas but may be seen feeding far from such locations. The white-tailed deer is an herbivore, feeding on fruits, grasses, grains, vines, mushrooms, nuts and the leaves and twigs of trees and shrubs. It chews its cud, that is, bringing up material that it had chewed once and swallowed to be chewed and swallowed again. When this animal is startled, it runs and flips up its tail to show the white side. The male's antlers are shed and replaced each year. There is a "velvet" covering over the antlers for nourishment and protection while they are growing. After the antlers are done growing in the fall, the deer will rub this "velvet" off on small trees. The white-tailed deer is active mostly at night and during the sunrise and sunset hours. The female and her offspring may stay together for several months. The male white-tailed deer is called a "buck," and the female is a "doe." A male will mate with several females. Mating occurs October through January. The gestation period is about seven months, and the doe usually produces two offspring. Young deer, fawns, are able to run just a few hours after birth. Males drop their antlers during February and March.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

bottomland forests; marshes; peatlands; swamps; wet prairies and fens

Woodland Habitats

bottomland forests; coniferous forests; southern Illinois lowlands; upland deciduous forests

Prairie and Edge Habitats

black soil prairie; dolomite prairie; edge; gravel prairie; hill prairie; sand prairie; shrub prairie

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