



© istockphoto.com

FAST FACTS

NAME: White-tailed deer

SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Odocoileus virginianus*

AVERAGE WEIGHT: 68 to 141 kg (male), 41 to 96 kg (female)

AVERAGE HEIGHT: 68 to 114 cm

AVERAGE LIFESPAN: 6 to 14 years (in captivity)

DID YOU KNOW?

The white-tailed deer can make vertical leaps of over two and a half metres and horizontal leaps of nine metres – that's almost as long as a school bus.

PHYSIOLOGY

This deer is tan or reddish-brown in the summer and grayish-brown in the winter, with certain areas remaining white all year round. Fawns are spotted with brown tails and a white underside. When sensing danger, the deer raises its tail – this is called 'flagging.' Showing this large white patch on the underside of the tail signals an alarm to other deer and helps a fawn follow its mother to safety.

The deer is a great jumper and runner. It can reach speeds of up to 58 kilometres per hour.

Like a cow, the white-tailed deer's stomach has four compartments. This allows food to be processed more efficiently and means that the deer can feed on things that other mammals cannot process.

HABITAT/BEHAVIOUR

The white-tailed deer is the most common of all of North America's large mammals. It is also the most widely distributed.

The deer can be active at any time, but is typically nocturnal, which means it is mostly active at night. Its diet consists mostly of green plants, nuts, and in the winter, wood vegetation.

One unusual characteristic of the white-tailed deer is that the doe leaves her fawn unattended for hours at a time. The fawn has very little scent and its spotted coat provides natural camouflage, which keeps it safe from predators. The doe returns a few times a day to feed the fawn. Does and fawns usually stay together for about a year, sometimes two.

For most of the year, bucks and does stay in separate groups, but during the winter, larger groups of deer gather together. This helps to keep winter trails cleared and offers protection from predators.

RANGE

The white-tailed deer is the most widely distributed of North America's large mammals. It can be found as far south as the southern tip of North America, and as far north as Great Slave Lake in Northwest Territories, Canada. It also spreads as far east as Cape Breton Island in Nova Scotia to as far west as southern British Columbia.