



White-tailed deer facts

Deer are one of our most abundant animals. Here are some answers to the most frequently asked questions.

Q: How can I tell if a deer has been near?

A. Pellet-like droppings and browse lines where deer have eaten the vegetation down to ground level are indicators of deer activity. In the fall, you might see a deer rub, an abrasion along the base of a tree or shrub made by bucks (male deer). Bucks rub their antlers as a way of marking their territories and to remove the velvety covering on the antlers.

Q: Are there too many deer in Fairfax County?

A: Deer numbers have increased over the past century largely because of an abundance of food and the lack of natural predators (like wolves, bears, cougars, bobcats and human hunters). As development has increased, parkland provides cover and food during the day, while house lots with lawns and plants offer a nighttime buffet. Car accidents involving deer are on the rise. Deer ticks, small insect-like animals that can carry crippling diseases such as Lyme disease, have increased in number. Over-abundant deer eat too much forest vegetation, threatening other species that depend on healthy forests.

Q: What can be done about the deer population?

A: With over 12 million white-tailed deer in the US, relocating the deer is often not an option. Deer are too abundant everywhere so there is nowhere for them to go, and it causes stress for the deer. One solution for Fairfax County is managed hunting. Herd reduction through hunting or by expert sharpshooters (usually police) brought in for that purpose is effective, quick and controls deer populations.

Q: What can I do to help the deer stay healthy?

A: At home you can plant flowers, shrubs and trees that deer won't eat. Refrain from feeding them or providing salt licks; at certain times of the year this practice is illegal. For your own safety, don't ever approach a deer in the wild, they are powerful animals with sharp hooves. Pay careful attention when driving at dawn and dusk, which are the hardest times for humans to see deer and the time when deer are most active.

If not you, who? Small things.

◆ **Practice defensive driving.** Deer are most active at dawn and dusk and their activity increases during fall rutting (mating) season. Watch for the reflection of their eyes in your headlights or their silhouettes beside the road and be extra cautious in areas attractive to deer. Deer usually travel in small herds, so if one deer has crossed the road, expect others to follow. Slow down and blow your horn if a deer is in the road, but don't swerve or panic brake.

If not you who? Big things.

◆ **Volunteer to care for a future forest.** Find out about tree planting projects in your neighborhood and learn how to maintain them. Since one of the effects of deer is the destruction of young trees, humans can help by replanting trees. Young seedlings need about five years of care and maintenance (making sure the tree protectors stay on, replacing dead seedlings, etc.).

White-tailed deer . . .

- ◆ can reach speeds of up to 36 mph
- ◆ usually live between 5 and 10 years
- ◆ can weigh up to 330 pounds for bucks
- ◆ are very good swimmers
- ◆ have a four-chambered stomach, like a cow

Contributions to text by Sarah Gentry



Care, Educate, Inspire

Stewardship is about working together to care for the environmental and cultural resources of Fairfax County. People become stewards for different reasons. They may want to help ensure clean water and air. They may wish to share something with their children. They may be inspired by spiritual beliefs. Whatever prompts our commitment, it is easy to take an active role in stewardship. It can be a small and simple thing, or it can be much bigger. Either way, it all adds up to a Fairfax County that looks to its past with pride and to its future with confidence.

You can learn more about Fairfax County Stewardship, the Board of Supervisor's 20-year environmental vision and the Fairfax County Park Authority at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/stewardship



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