



# YYC Young Citizen Scientists

## BIOFACT WEBPAGE



**Common Name:** White-tailed deer

**Scientific Name:** *Odocoileus virginianus*

The white-tailed deer is one of the most widely distributed and numerous large animals in North America. This species can be found from Cape Breton in Nova Scotia all the way to central British Columbia. During the summer months, white-tailed deer try to find forested or bushy areas abundant with food such as grasslands, wetlands, or suburban land. During the winter, they seek food abundant “deer yards” which are areas that are sheltered to provide protection from storms and deep snow. This can be difficult some years depending on the weather, food availability, population numbers, and competition between individuals. Within these habitats they feed on woody plants, grasses, herbs, berries, buds, acorns, and mushrooms. This species acts as a herbivore meaning they feed on vegetation within their habitats. By eating the seeds of plants, they disperse the seeds across the land through their feces allowing the plants to grow elsewhere. They also act as a food source for larger predators such as wolves, cougars, bobcats, and coyotes.



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### Unique qualities:

- Although the doe (female deer) leaves her fawn unattended for long periods of time, they rarely abandon their offspring. The fawn coat is adapted to be camouflaged and be completely scentless. If you spot a fawn alone, the best thing to do is to leave it alone!
- Before winter hits, the deer build up fat reserves by eating as much as they can and their fur coats become thicker to prepare for colder temperatures
- Bucks (male deer) necks swell before the mating season, called a rut, to prepare for potential battles with other rival males for breeding. The swelling is caused by the change in hormones related to the rut.
- This species reproduces very quickly! They are capable of double their population size during a good year
- We can tell the difference between white-tailed deer and mule deer by looking at their tails! Mule deer have a dark tip, whereas the white-tailed deer do not

### Human actions that enhance or threaten their existence:

These species are not currently endangered. The creation of "edge" habitat, such as forest edges after deforestation, provides ideal habitat for white-tailed deer. Furthermore, this opportunistic species has been able to successfully adapt to agricultural and urban settings. When populations are in high numbers, their opportunistic diets can become a problem to ecosystem health. For instance, the grazing of some types of grasses within a forest ecosystem could provide more species for other invasive species to take over.



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