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## DEER FACTS – WHITE-TAILED DEER

### About the deer . . .

White-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) are native to northern, central and southern America and consist of 38 subspecies. The breed is considered to be around 3½ million years old with credit to their successful survival being given to their incredible design. There was no need for them to evolve.

Next to elk, they are one of the most widely farmed species of deer in the US. Regrettably, they also have the unfortunate reputation of causing over 1.5 million vehicle collisions annually, costing over US\$1 billion per year (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration).

White-tailed deer are easily recognized by their reddish brown coats, which turn to a slightly duller grayish brown in autumn and winter, and the distinct white markings around the eyes and top of the nose. Then there is, of course, the famous tail. As the name suggests, it is much longer than the tail of the red deer and has a characteristic white underside, which is used to signal other deer of danger.

Males (bucks) can weigh anywhere from 60kg to 130kg with females (does) weighing in at 40kg to 90kg. They average around 1 metre at shoulder height. Their tails alone can grow as long as 36.5cm.

White-tailed deer are incredibly adaptable to their habitat and they prefer foraging on forest edges, rather than in continuous areas of mature forests. They also prefer mixed conifer-hardwood forests and shrublands where they feed on grasses, twigs, leaves, wild cherry seeds, acorns and beechnuts. More recently, they have also grown quite partial to open lawns, ornamental shrubs and succulent summer gardens found in suburban neighborhoods.

In the US, their breeding season runs from mid September through to late February with fawns being born late summer after a gestation period of 200 days. The first pregnancy of a doe usually results in a single fawn however twins are quite common as they mature. Triplets are not too uncommon either, depending on the availability of food. White-tailed deer have developed a “survival strategy” where, in very bad years, a doe will not breed at all, but in a good year she will produce 2-3 fawns.

As with most other deer species, only the bucks grow antlers, however it is believed that 1 in 10,000 does will also grow antlers. The number of points, length and thickness of the antlers depend on the age and genetics of the buck. With hunting stags forming a large part of the US deer industry, genetic improvements are critical.

### Deer Farming in the US

The American deer farming industry is a booming business. It generates over US\$ 3 billion for the US economy and employs tens of thousands of people in rural communities across the country. The average size of a deer farm nationally is less than 100 acres running an average of 82 deer. The total number of deer farms in 2006 was 7,828, with Pennsylvania and Texas home to around 1,000 farms each. The average farm size and number of animals run/farm was a little higher in these two states. Interestingly, there are approximately 1,600 Amish operations included in the national total. They believe that deer farming provides a more profitable enterprise on a small acreage than traditional farming enterprises.

According to *the Economic Impact of Pennsylvania's Deer Farms*, 72% of its farmers produce breeding stock, with only 16% farming for venison. Strangely enough, 13% of deer farmers in Pennsylvania are urine farmers.....Urine based scents were started in the 1940's by a New York trapper who started selling it for \$2 a bottle. Today, the urine business is estimated to be around \$18 million annually in the US and it is used by traditional hunters as well as bow hunters who need to get close to their prey.