



White-Tailed Deer
(*Odocoileus virginianus*)

Encounters with White-Tailed Deer:

- **Some 2,000 white-tailed deer** roam **Gatineau Park territory**.
- For great opportunities to **observe** this graceful animal, visit the **La Pêche and Philippe Lake sectors**, especially at daybreak or at twilight. White-tailed deer can also be seen in **fields and along Park roads**.
- When you are watching a deer, **remain very still**. The deer will have trouble spotting you and you will be **able to admire it longer**.
- **During the winter**, white-tailed deer gather in the **deer yards situated mainly along the Eardley Escarpment**. They always follow the same compacted snow trails to save energy and flee if the need arises.

Description

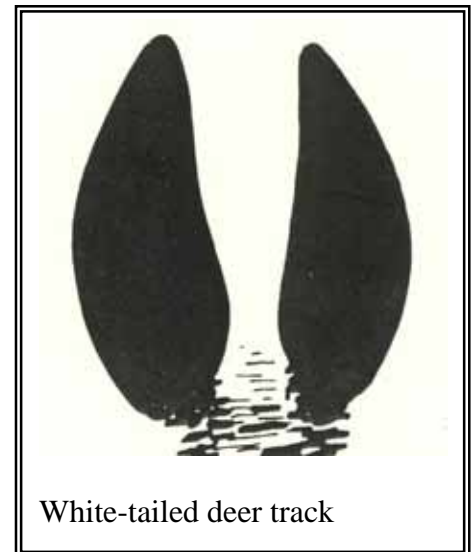
White-tailed deer live an average of six to eight years in a natural environment. The male weighs between 85 and 170 kg, and the female between 57 and 113 kg. From the tip of its nose to its tail, this deer measures a little less than two metres and its height at the shoulder is around one metre. Its coat is reddish-brown in summer and greyish-beige during the winter.

The deer has a highly developed sense of smell and very keen hearing. It also has excellent vision for recognizing moving objects but has difficulty seeing and recognizing a motionless object.

Habitat

White-tailed deer are partial to **bushy** fields, regrowth areas and the **thinnings** of deciduous and mixed forests **where low vegetation is abundant**.

The deer's territory varies between 20 and 150 hectares. It knows its range well and avoids moving away from it even when pursued by a predator. **During the winter, deer gather in sectors where snow cover is less heavy**. They **compact trails in the snow**, thus facilitating their movements. **These areas are known as deer yards**.



White-tailed deer track

Feeding and Behaviour

The deer is a ruminant that **feeds on a vast range of herbaceous plants, twigs and buds** of trees and shrubs, fruits and even mushrooms and blueberries.

Generally, **only the males have antlers**. Antler growth begins in April and continues throughout the summer. In the fall, their velvet covering dries and is shed, and the antlers themselves drop off at the end of the breeding season.

The rutting season lasts from mid-October to late December. During this period, the males fight each other to mate with the females. The young are born between May and June. They are able to stand upright just a few hours after birth, but remain hidden in the tall grasses for about one month. The mother visits frequently to nurse the young. **Fawns have no odour during the first week of life and are therefore difficult for predators to spot.**

The deer raises the alarm by lifting its tail which resembles a white flag floating in the breeze. It is a fleet runner that can reach a top speed of 60 km/h. Its **main predators** are humans, coyotes, wolves, black bears (fawn), lynx, cougars and stray dogs.

Management of the White-Tailed Deer Population in Gatineau Park

For a number of decades, **five types of studies have been used in Gatineau Park to monitor the evolution of the deer population:** deer yard inventories, population inventories, browse inventories (available food), monitoring of winter mortality and monitoring of winter conditions.

(A) Deer Yard Inventories

Aerial inventories help to **localize the wintering areas (deer yards)**. According to these inventories, the **Park's main deer yard** is located on the **Eardley Escarpment**, a cliff about 300 metres high that faces south-southwest. Here the deer benefit from a **warm, dry microclimate** that is unique to the region.

(B) Population Inventory by Droppings Count

Droppings counts were conducted during the winters of 1981, 1982 and 1990. **According to the last inventory, the Park population is estimated at 2,000 deer.**

(C) Browse Inventories and Carrying Capacity of the Environment

Browse inventories help to **identify the most available and important plant species** in the deer's winter diet. They also help to **evaluate the habitat quality and intensity of usage** by the deer. The number of deer the habitat can support is linked to the quantity of available food, that is, the carrying capacity of the environment.

The last browse inventory dates back to 1985. According to this inventory:

- The **main deer yard** situated on the Eardley Escarpment, **as well as the permanent secondary pockets**, are **productive**. Over 15,000 stems/hectare are available there to feed the deer population. .
- Furthermore, the **rate of browse usage** by the deer population is **close to the carrying capacity of the environment (optimal value of 50 per cent)** in the main deer yard.

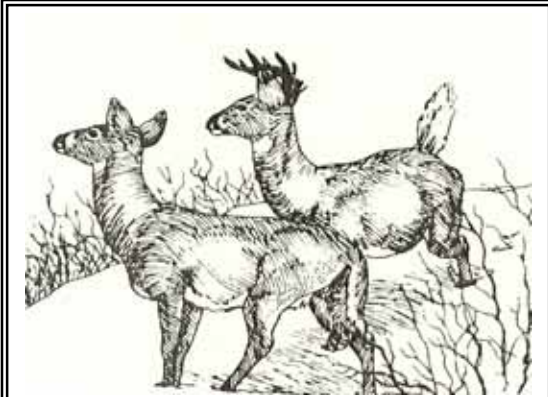
A new study on the carrying capacity of the environment will be conducted in 2005.

(D) Annual Monitoring of Winter Mortality and Snow Cover

Annual monitoring of deer carcasses on a pre-established route is used to analyse the winter mortality of the Park's white-tailed deer.

Monitoring the **snow cover** helps to track variations in ground snow cover to assess the severity of the winters and relate these conditions **to white-tailed deer mortality** during the cold season.

These **studies** provide **detailed knowledge of the population and the carrying capacity of the environment**, and enable us to **make informed decisions** in the event of a precarious situation.



Male and female white-tailed deer during the rutting period