

Animals of the Chihuahuan Desert

White-Tailed Deer

Physical Characteristics

White-tailed deer have a variety of fur colors from reddish-brown to grayish-brown. They have white fur that circles their nose as well as on their underside from their bellies to their legs. They get their name due to the white fur that can also be found on the underside of their tails. Male white-tailed deer have antlers that are in a constant state of shedding and regrowing every year.



Diet

White-tailed deer eat a variety of plants such as tree twigs, leaves, barks, shrubs, fruits, and most nuts. They also eat native desert plants such as the yucca, prickly pear cactus, and mesquite beans. They must eat 6-8 pounds of food per day!

Habitat

White-tailed deer can live almost anywhere, even close to cities! And though they prefer to live in wooded areas, they must find areas near water. Unlike many other desert animals, white-tailed deer can't get all their water from the plants they eat. They must also drink water from streams, rivers, and lakes.

Senses

These deer have a scent gland on all four feet which is used to communicate with other deer around them. This is particularly helpful as they depend mainly on smell to detect danger.

Predators

White-tailed deer, particularly the young, are preyed upon by bobcats, mountain lions, and coyotes.

Interesting Facts

- The name of this deer refers to the white underside of the tail, which shoots up when the animal is alarmed or running.
- The does take the protection of their young very seriously and make sure that they are safe from predators. So much so that when the doe goes foraging the fawn is left for as long as four hours and holds its feces and urine until their mother arrives. Then after the mother arrives, the fawn finally empties itself and the mother quickly ingests whatever was emptied. This is done to prevent predators finding any signs of a fawn being in the vicinity.
- Baby deer—known as fawn—are born with spotted fur and stay with their mothers for the first year of their lives.
- In the summer, a white-tailed deer's fur is reddish-brown while in the winter its fur changes to a grayish-brown. This is both to help the deer regulate its heat and also as a means of camouflage. Its summer coat is thinner making it easier to cope with the heat. The gray hair is not only thicker helping the deer stay warmer in the colder months, but its muted colors help hide the animal.