Wildlife Express!

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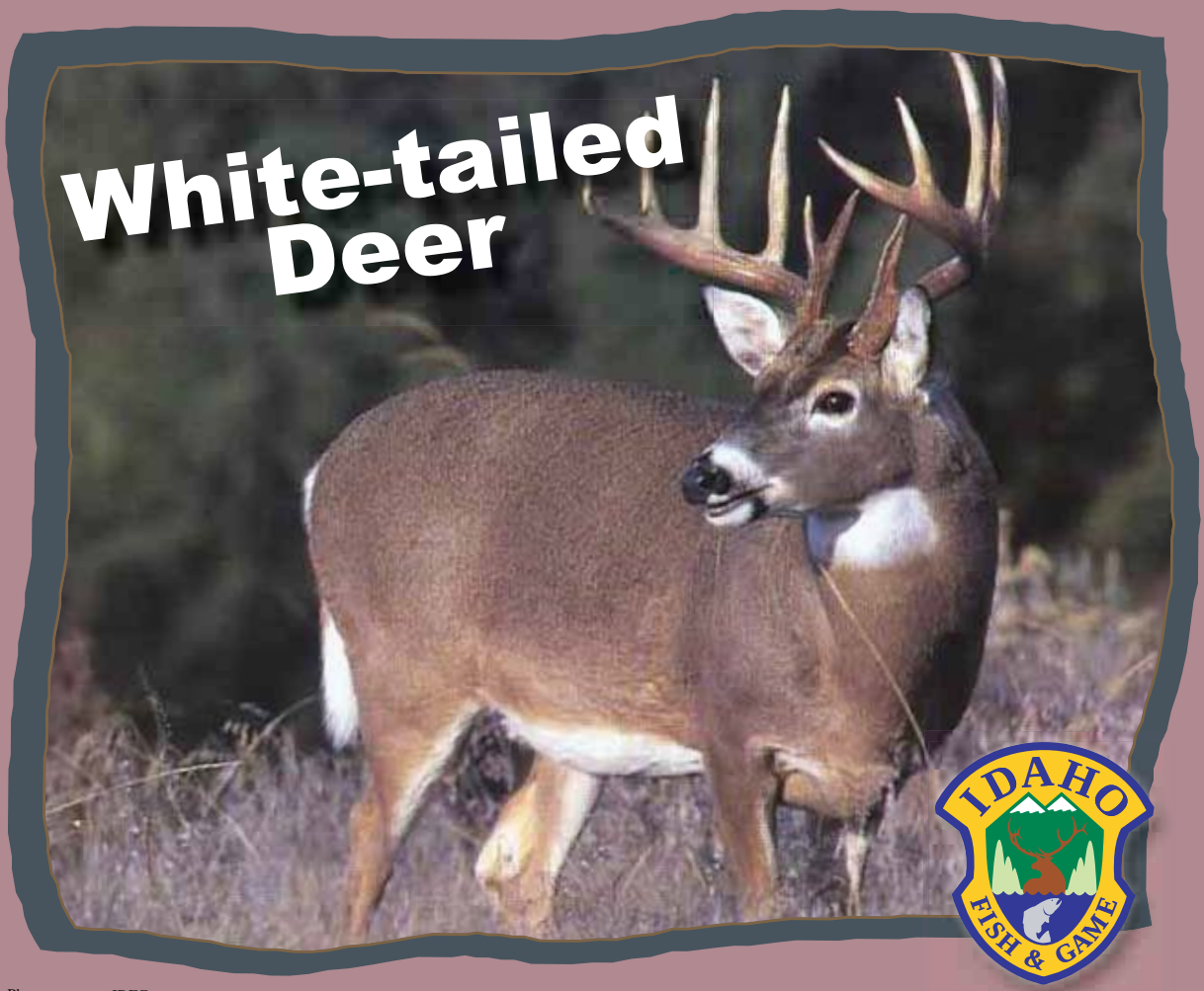
White-tailed Deer



Photos courtesy IDFG

Let's Talk About . . . White-tailed Deer

Have you ever seen a deer running away that looked like it was waving "good-bye" with a bright, white tail? That was a white-tailed deer. When they get startled, they raise their tails and wave them back and forth. The tail looks a bit like a white flag. This is how a white-tailed deer warns others that danger is near. The white tail may also help young deer follow their mothers in thick brush and tall grass.

Where will you find white-tailed deer in Idaho? Get out a map of Idaho and find the Salmon River. White-tailed deer are mostly found north of the Salmon River. They like woodlands, dense brush and marshy areas. They especially like the areas where different habitats meet, like the edges between meadows and forests. This is not a deer you are likely to find in the open desert. In southern Idaho, they may be found in riparian areas along some rivers. Riparian areas are the green areas along water where willows, grasses and trees grow.

White-tailed deer eat different plants at different times of the year. During the summer, they eat mostly grass and other soft plants. They might also cause problems by eating farmers' crops. In the winter, they eat mostly shrubs. Willow, dogwood, and chokecherry are some of the shrubs that they eat.

White-tailed deer are smaller than Idaho's other deer, the mule deer. Males, called bucks, average 200 pounds; females (does) average 125 pounds. The babies, called fawns, weigh between five and eight pounds when born in May or June. The female may have a single fawn or she may have twins. The fawns are kept hidden for the first week or two after being born. Their spotted, reddish-brown coat helps to hide the fawns while their mother is off eating. The mother doesn't want to eat near her fawns or a predator, like a coyote, might find them.

Coyotes eat more white-tailed deer than any other predator, but wolves, mountain lions, bobcats and black bears also eat white-tailed deer. White-tailed deer sure don't want to be dinner for other animals, so they have developed some wonderful things to protect themselves. They have very good hearing to detect an approaching predator. When a white-tailed deer hears danger, it makes a loud snort that sounds a bit like a whistle. This is the sound that means "be alert, danger coming!" They also have that wonderful white tail that waves like a white flag to also alert others that danger is near. If a white-tailed deer eats well and avoids predators, it may live to be 9 or 10 years old. Few white-tailed deer live past the age of 10.

In Idaho, there are about 200,000 white-tailed deer. Look and listen for white-tailed deer when exploring Idaho's northern regions. They are a sleek, graceful and beautiful animal.

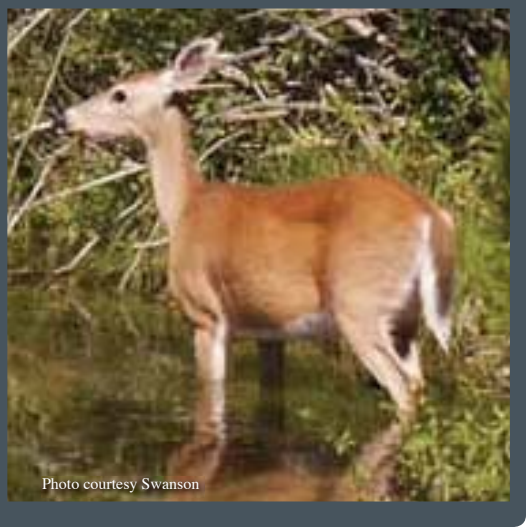


Photo courtesy Swanson

Hunting in Idaho!

Fall is hunting season in Idaho. Hunters head into the field to harvest a number of game animals including deer, elk, waterfowl, and upland game birds like chukar and grouse. Most hunters will tell you that they enjoy hunting because it gets them outside in beautiful country. They also enjoy seeing many kinds of wildlife. If they are lucky enough to harvest an animal, they also enjoy the added benefit of a freezer full of meat.

If you are 10 – 11 years old, you can hunt for upland birds and turkeys. Once you turn 12, you can also hunt for big game like deer and elk. You need to take a hunter education class before you can get your hunting license. Hunter education will teach you how to be a safe and responsible hunter.

Even if you are not ready to hunt, you can go hunting with your parents, other family members or family friends. This is a great way to learn about hunting. You can help spot animals, carry equipment, and help with field dressing an animal that someone has harvested. Going out with other hunters will help you learn a lot about hunting. You will also learn a lot about wildlife. Tracking deer and elk can teach you a lot about their habitat, where they go, what they eat, and what they do. Trying to find grouse in a forest will give you a whole new look at the importance of camouflage. All your observation skills will be put to the test as you look for game animals. These things will help you be a better hunter when it is your turn to head into the field.

If you go hunting, make sure to wear warm clothing that you can layer if the temperature drops. Leave your tennis shoes at home and wear good boots to protect your feet. You should also wear a hunter orange hat and vest so you are visible to other nearby hunters. Bring binoculars to observe wildlife and a camera to take pictures of what you see. Going hunting will give you the chance to be outside in some of Idaho's beautiful wild places.

BE OUTSIDE

IDAHO CHILDREN IN NATURE

White-tails and Winter

I don't know about you, but I really don't enjoy standing outside when the snow is falling and the wind is howling and pelting snow against my face. Sometimes the snow feels like needles jabbing my skin! We risk death being outside in wild weather.

Wild weather also affects wild animals. Winter can be a hard time for animals. Cold temperatures and snow can make it difficult for animals to survive. They need to develop strategies to make it through the winter – white-tailed deer included.

One thing that affects the survival of white-tailed deer in the winter is the summer. Deer need to be good and fat when winter comes. They need a good summer habitat with lots of moist, rich grass and plants. A fat deer can make it through even the hardest winter. A skinny deer is almost sure to die.

During the winter, snow is the most important factor that affects white-tailed deer survival. Deep snow makes it difficult for deer to walk. The deeper the snow, the more energy a deer uses to get around. As little as two inches of snow can affect deer. They burn more energy from walking in the snow than they can get from eating winter foods. To avoid snow, white-tailed deer move down from the mountains to lower elevations – often below 3,000 feet where the snow is not as deep. They also use areas that face southeast and southwest. The sun hits these areas more, so snow melts faster and the deer get warmed-up by the sun. Some white-tailed deer also find shelter in thick forests. The dense tree branches offer protection from the snow, but there sometimes is a problem with a dense forest – less to eat. There are fewer shrubs and other plants in a dense forest. Sometimes deer end up eating Douglas-fir trees or western redcedar trees. The trees may fill the deer's stomachs, but there is little nutrition in the tree's needles. The best thing for a white-tailed deer is to find areas where there are dense forests next to more open areas where a wider variety of shrubs and other plants grow. Often it is a juggling act for a deer to find just the right mix of dense forests and open areas.

Next time you are warm and cozy in your house with a winter storm blowing outside, think of the deer and other wildlife. How do you think they are dealing with the weather?

The Deer Family

Throughout the world there are about 40 different species (kinds) of deer. They are found on every continent except Antarctica and Australia. Africa has only one native deer, the red deer.

Deer come in many sizes. The smallest deer in the world lives in the Andes Mountains. The pudu stands about one foot tall and weighs less than 20 pounds. The biggest deer in the world is the North American moose. A male moose can weigh nearly 90 times more than the pudu – about 1800 pounds!

One thing all deer have in common is that they are ungulates (UN-gyu-lits). All ungulates have hooves. They are also herbivores; they eat plants. Grasses, leaves and twigs are tough to eat. To help them digest plants, ungulates have stomachs divided into four different chambers or rooms. They nip off plants, but they don't chew their food much before swallowing it. The plants go into the first chamber of the stomach. It is full of bacteria and other organisms that help break down the plants. Later, deer spit up the food and chew it again. Have you ever heard of cows chewing their cud? They are chewing food regurgitated from their stomachs. Once chewed, the food is swallowed again and passes into the second and third parts of the stomach where water is taken out. The fourth chamber is the one that is most like your stomach. It absorbs the nutrients out of the food.

Having a stomach with many chambers not only allows deer to eat tough plants, it also helps to keep them safe. Many animals are at risk when they eat. Predators are more likely to see a deer eating in a clearing than hiding under a tree, so deer eat quickly. They nip off plants, chew them just a little and then swallow them. Once their first stomach is full, deer find a place to rest and hide. Now the deer can fully chew and digest their food, without having to constantly look out for danger.

Members of the deer family in North America include elk, moose, caribou, mule deer and white-tailed deer. Wherever you live in North America, you are likely to be near at least one member of the deer family. Idaho, however, is lucky. We have all five species living in our state!

Photo courtesy Swanson

Time for Thanksgiving!

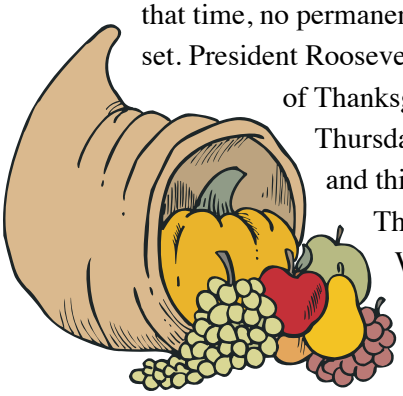
Thanksgiving's here! It's time to eat and stuff our stomachs with yummy food. Thanksgiving and Pilgrims seem to go together like bread and butter, but the Pilgrims never really held a Thanksgiving feast. Now, before you cancel dinner, read on and learn how our Thanksgiving came to be.

The Pilgrims did have a feast in 1621 after their first harvest of crops. This is the feast people often refer to as "The First Thanksgiving." This feast never happened again, and the Pilgrims would not have called it a "Thanksgiving." To the Pilgrims, a day of thanksgiving was a day of prayer and fasting, not eating!

The first harvest feast was held around the first of October and lasted three days! The pilgrims didn't have a building large enough to hold 140 people- 50 pilgrims and 90 Native Americans, so the feast was held outside.

Do you think the pilgrims and Native Americans ate the same foods we eat today? Some were the same. They ate white-tailed deer, fish, wild turkeys, ducks, geese and other birds. They also ate Indian corn, wheat and berries. Do you think they ate corn of the cob? No, corn on the cob was not eaten. Indian corn was only good for making cornmeal. What about ham or sweet potatoes? Nope, the Pilgrims didn't have pigs, and sweet potatoes hadn't been brought to New England yet. They did have cranberries, but they did not have sugar to make cranberry sauce. Do you think they ate pumpkin pie? Pilgrims did have pumpkins. They most likely made a pumpkin pudding sweetened with honey or maple syrup, but their pudding would not have had a crust.

The Pilgrim's feast was different from ours, but it became the model for our Thanksgiving of today. In 1863, Abraham Lincoln made the last Thursday in November a national holiday of Thanksgiving. Up to that time, no permanent holiday had been set. President Roosevelt changed the day of Thanksgiving to the fourth Thursday in November in 1941, and this is when we celebrate Thanksgiving today. Wow! Who would have thought all this could have evolved out of a harvest feast?



Awesome Antlers

Antlers grow on members of the deer family. They are bones that grow out of the animal's skull. An antler grows faster than any other kind of bone. It can grow up to one inch a day during the summer! Usually only the males grow antlers, but female caribou can grow antlers. There is even a species of deer where neither the male nor female grow antlers – the Chinese water deer.

Antlers are light and easily damaged until late summer. At this time, they are covered with a thin skin called velvet. Velvet is covered with fine, short hairs and contains thousands of blood vessels. The blood vessels carry calcium and minerals needed for building strong bones. If a white-tailed deer damages his antlers badly at this point, he could actually bleed to death! Deer don't do much as their antlers are growing; they stay hidden and are not aggressive. Once the antlers have grown, the blood vessels in the velvet close off. The velvet dries up and starts to fall off. By October or September, the velvet has been completely rubbed off, and the antlers are hard and polished - ready to show off for the females and intimidate younger males. Deer shed their antlers in early winter and then immediately begin to grow another set. Then the process starts all over again!

Animal Hide & Seek

Sometimes sticks walk, leaves hop and rocks slither. Of course, these things really can't hop or crawl, but sometimes it sure looks like they're moving. Often when we are seeing a rock slither or crawl, it's actually an animal.

Camouflage (KAM-e-flazh) means to blend in with your surroundings and hide. It is a type of disguise. Camouflage may be a certain color, pattern of colors, or a special shape that fools the eye. Camouflage may help an animal to hide, help a hunter to sneak up on its prey, or both.

Many animals change their colors with the seasons. Animals that change color to match their background are using cryptic (KRIP-tik) coloration. This is what weasels and snowshoe hares do. When snow starts to fall, their coats gradually turn white to match the snow. White-tailed deer also change colors with the seasons. During the winter, white-tailed deer have a grayish-brown coat. This coat helps the deer blend in with dead grass and the muted colors of the forest. In the summer, their coats turn a tan to reddish-brown color.

Animals may even change colors and patterns throughout their lives. Deer fawns are born with tan coats that have white spots. The spots match the sun and shade that dapple the tall grasses where the fawns hide. As long as the fawns do not move, predators will have a difficult time seeing them. As deer fawns grow older and can run faster to escape danger, the spots fade away.

Do you think zebras are camouflaged? They are not camouflaged for our eyes. Their black and white stripes stick out against the grasses of Africa, but that is not true for lions' eyes. Lions have a difficult time seeing some colors. Grasses and trees look like shades of gray, so the zebras' stripes help them to blend into the tall grasses. This helps the zebras avoid becoming a lion's meal. Whether hunter or hunted, camouflage helps animals to survive.


Bighorn Sheep


Bison


Mtn. Goat

Humongous Horns

Bison, pronghorn, mountain goats and bighorn sheep have horns. Horns are a bit different than antlers. Horns have two parts, a boney middle and an outer sheath. The inside part is bone that is attached to the skull. The outside of the horn, the sheath, is a covering made of a tough fiber-like material called keratin. Your fingernails and hair also contain keratin. What purpose does the sheath serve? It protects what's underneath!

Both males and females may grow horns. Horns are permanent. In most cases, they continue to grow throughout an animal's life.

Pronghorns are an exception to this rule. A pronghorn will shed and re-grow its sheath each year.

If you take a close look at most horns, you may see rings or segments. Counting the segments may give you an idea of an animal's age. Bighorn sheep, for example, grow their first set of horns by six months and their second horn segment by 18 months. For males, count the horn segments and minus one. This is his age. In older females, their horns may not grow every year, so their horns may only tell you their minimum age. Who knew you could learn so much just from a horn!


Pronghorn

Which Deer?

Idaho has two different kinds of deer – white-tailed deer and mule deer. You need to be able to tell these two deer apart, especially if your family hunts. The way to tell them apart is as easy as a **STARE** – **s**tartled **m**ovement, **t**ail, **a**ntlers, **r**ump, and **e**ars.

Mule Deer

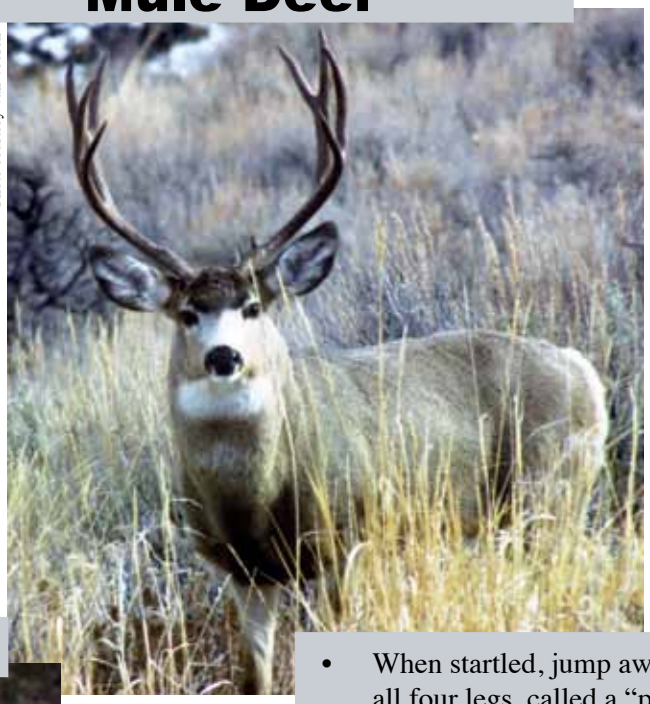


Photo courtesy Van Vooren

- When startled, jump away on all four legs, called a "pronk"
- Skinny, white tail with black tip
- Antlers branch equally, separate beams fork into two tines forming a "V"
- White rump
- Large mule-like ears

White-Tailed Deer

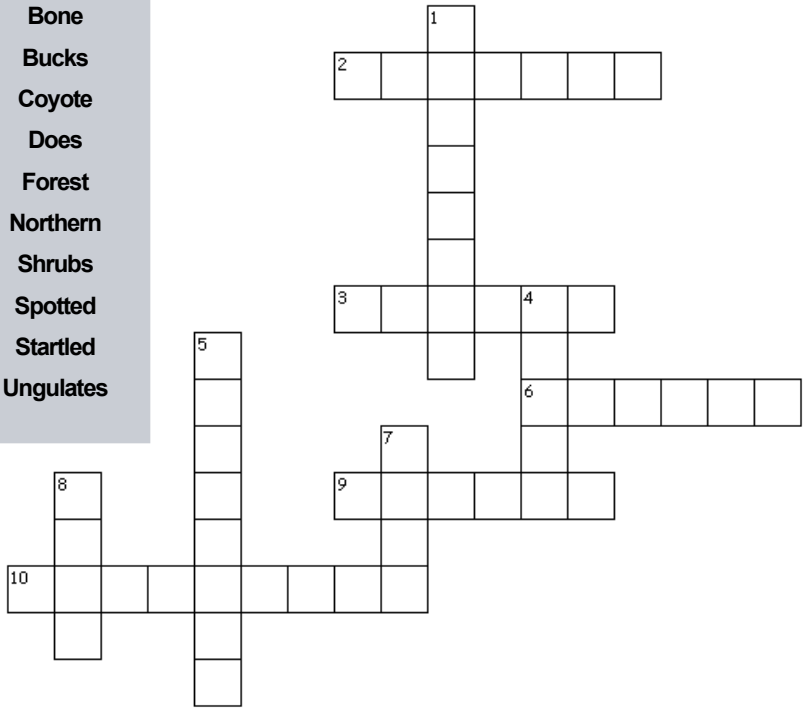
Photo courtesy IDFG

- When startled, raise tail and show white "flag"
- Flat, brown tail with white fringe and white underside
- Antlers have tines all coming from large main beam
- Brown rump
- Small ears

White-tailed Deer Crossword

Words

Bone
Bucks
Coyote
Does
Forest
Northern
Shrubs
Spotted
Startled
Ungulates



Across

2. A fawn's _____ coat helps it to hide from predators.
3. During the winter, white-tailed deer mostly eat _____.
6. This is a predator that likes to eat white-tailed deer.
9. White-tailed deer like to live in a _____ with open areas.
10. White-tailed deer are _____; animals that have hooves.

Down

1. White-tailed deer are more common in the _____ part of Idaho.
4. Male deer are called _____.
5. When _____, white-tailed deer raise their tails and wave them back and forth.
7. Female deer are called_____.
8. Antlers are made of _____.

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