

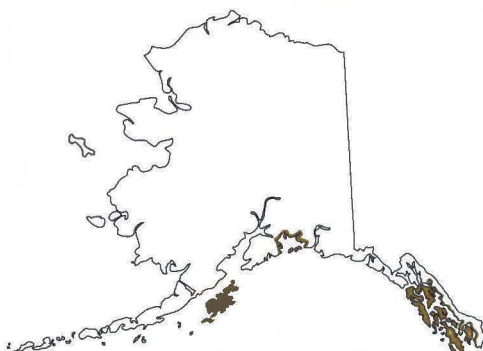
DEER

in Alaska



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Description



 *Deer Habitat*

The Sitka black-tailed deer is a small, stocky, and short-faced member of the mule deer group. It has a reddish-brown coat in summer and a dark brownish-gray coat in winter. The average weight of adults in the early fall is about 80 pounds for does and 120 pounds for bucks. Fawns weigh 6 to 8 pounds at birth and stand about 12 inches tall. As adults, they will stand 2.5 to 3 feet tall at the shoulders. Their antlers are red-brown with typical black-tailed branching. Normal adult antler development is three points (including the eyeguard) on each side. The average life span of Sitka black-tailed deer is about 10 years, but a few are known to have lived at least 15 years.

Biologists estimate that there are between 350,000 and 400,000 Sitka black-tailed deer in Alaska.

Habitat



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The Sitka black-tailed deer is native to the wet coastal rain forests of Southeast Alaska and northern coastal British Columbia. Its range has been expanded by transplants, and populations now exist near Yakutat, in Prince William Sound, and on Kodiak and Afognak islands.

Human Use



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Deer are an important source of lean, nutritious meat for many Alaskans, particularly in the southeastern part of the state. An adult deer provides about 50 pounds of meat, enough to feed an average family for more than a month.



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Summer and early fall are periods of active foraging as deer accumulate fat reserves which will help them through the winter and early spring.

Life History

The breeding season (rut) for deer peaks in November. Does breed during their second year and continue producing fawns annually until they are 10 to 12 years old. Prime age does typically produce two fawns annually. Fawns are born in late spring. Summer and early fall are periods of active foraging as deer accumulate fat reserves which help them through the winter and early spring.

During the winter, deer congregate in low-elevation, old-growth forests. The forests provide excellent winter habitat because the high branches of large trees intercept snow but still allow enough light to filter down to support the growth of plants eaten by deer.

As the snow melts in spring, deer move to higher elevations and rebuild some of the fat reserves lost during winter. They generally feed on leafy vegetation and shrubs during summer and green herbs and the fine twigs of blueberry bushes during the winter. When snow is not deep, deer eat bunchberry and trailing bramble. During periods of deep snow, they eat shrubs and trees, such as blueberry, red cedar and hemlock, and arboreal lichens.

Deer populations in Alaska fluctuate considerably with the severity of the winters. During long, hard winters many deer die of starvation. They are also preyed upon by wolves, black bears and brown bears.

Research

State biologists monitor the health of Alaska's deer populations by conducting surveys in different parts of the state each year. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game also conducts research on the biology of Sitka black-tails. Studies have focused on the habitat and nutritional requirements of deer, reproduction, and predator/prey relationships. Current research is assessing how the size, shape and spacing of clearcuts affect deer populations.

Throughout most of the range of Sitka black-tailed deer, hunting has little effect on deer numbers. Bag limits vary from complete closures to six deer of either sex, depending on the local abundance of deer. Winter mortality from starvation can greatly reduce deer numbers, with declines of 50% or more in some years.

Conservation

The most serious problem facing deer in Southeast Alaska is the loss of important winter habitat (old growth forest) due to clearcut logging. In many areas throughout Southeast Alaska, clearcut logging is allowed every 90-125 years. Although clearcuts less than 15 years old provide forage for deer during snow free periods, forage is often unavailable in these open areas during the winter. More importantly, spruce and hemlock trees reseed clearcuts and, in time, shade out most plant life below, leaving very poor habitat for deer—a condition that persists 100 years or longer. Such second growth areas will experience a significant decline in deer numbers. However, if the forest is allowed to return to an old-growth state, deer will eventually return in good numbers.

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Fawns are born in late spring and retain their spotted coats through the summer.

Dollars for Wildlife

Each year, hunters pay a 10 to 11% federal excise tax on the purchase of firearms, ammunition and archery equipment. These funds are distributed to the states for wildlife conservation programs. Since this system was created in 1937, Alaska has received more than \$108 million in revenue from the tax on hunting equipment. This critical source of funding, called the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Program, provides roughly half of the state's wildlife management budget, including about \$250,000 a year for deer research and management. In addition, all proceeds from the sale of hunting and trapping licenses support research and management programs. License and tag sales generate more than \$5 million annually.

This brochure was produced by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Wildlife Conservation.



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