



## Wildlife Window: Florida White-Tailed Deer. Native Herbivores Often Seen at Dawn and Dusk.

By Sue Remy, Ponds & Preserves Committee.

[Woodlands Word – Dec. 2022]

The month of December might conjure up images of Santa and Rudolph the Reindeer. However, since we do not live at the North Pole, we will explore Florida's White-tailed Deer, often seen in Rivendell at dawn and dusk. The common name refers to the tail of the deer - it is black/brown above and white below. White-tailed deer have good eyesight and hearing. Only male deer grow antlers, which are shed each year. They are also good swimmers and will use large streams and lakes to escape predators.

### Let's learn more about Florida White-Tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

[Photos: Bob Frank]

**Appearance:** White-tailed deer vary in size depending on their habitat. Adult male deer in southern Florida average 115 pounds. Females are smaller, averaging 90 pounds. This deer coloring is gray to russet brown with a white underside, and has large ears, a large tail, and long slender legs.

Throughout most of the year it is easy to tell males from females. The males, or bucks, have antlers, growing a new set every year. Antler growth begins in the spring. By summer, antlers are covered with a velvety tissue that dries up and peels off. The buck rubs the antlers against trees, which eventually removes the remaining velvet, leaving the antlers hard and smooth. Antlers are important features during the animal's breeding season when bucks will often fight to establish dominance. Antlers are shed in late winter or early spring after the breeding season ends.



**Habitat & Feeding:** White-tailed deer can be found throughout Florida from the panhandle to the keys. They prefer habitats with young, low-growing vegetation and edge that allow deer to easily feed and avoid predators. Deer are most active at dawn and dusk. They are primarily herbivore browsers, feeding on the leaves, shoots, flowers and fruits of trees, shrubs, and forbs. Occasionally, they may browse and damage planted shrubs, landscaping or cultivated crops.

**Behavior:** When deer are alarmed, the tails are held erect and waved back and forth like a white flag, signaling a warning to other deer. When they are nervous, deer will stomp a foot and snort, before running off.

**Fawn Facts:** It is important to avoid contact with fawns (a young deer). Although fawns are able to run and follow their mothers shortly after birth, they protect themselves from predators by hiding in tall vegetation. Fawns have no scent and during this time the female limits contact with her fawn, except to nurse, so that her scent will not attract predators and mark the fawn's hiding place. After a couple of weeks, the fawn begins to accompany the doe as she forages. The fawn's brown hair with white spots provides excellent camouflage. So, if you approach a fawn and it does not flee, please leave it alone – its mother is not far away. ([www.myfwc.com](http://www.myfwc.com))



**Your Actions Make a Difference!** Deer are also experiencing food shortages due to loss of vegetation, use of pesticides and degradation of habitat from urban development that challenge all of our wildlife friends. White-tailed deer are also common prey for panthers, bobcats and coyotes in the food chain. In Rivendell, deer are appreciated by hikers, wildlife photographers, and other outdoor enthusiasts. (White-tailed deer hunting is allowed & all state of Florida license, permits, rules and regulations do apply.) Working together to implement our healthy ponds and preserves management strategies will help keep our favorite wildlife habitats strong. Your continued support helps attract more of our wildlife friends!