



Deer Me !

Living surrounded by the wilderness of Southern New Jersey as we do, it's not uncommon to hear, during the latter part of October, "Jeez, I'm seeing a heck of a lot more deer than usual." White-tailed deer tend to move around more at sunset and into the early morning. And when the deer begin the "rut" or mating season, their wanderlust becomes heightened. NJ Fish and Wildlife's studies show that a deer's home range can vary from 120 to 400 acres, but their core area is a mere 40-60 acres.

During rut males are rather single-minded, and tend to be less guarded as they are on the prowl for mating

opportunities. And when the males are searching, the females are moving too. Thus it is not uncommon to find them in your headlights more often than usual. Deer are social and travel in groups, so if one deer crosses, expect that others may follow. November is the height of mating season, and motorists are put at greater risk of automotive/deer collisions during that time. Being alert for deer and slowing down will increase your chances of avoiding an accident.

Depending on hunting zones and equipment, deer seasons begin in early September and end in late February. Traditionally, six-day shotgun season has the greatest concentration of hunters, and it takes place just after Thanksgiving. This is a time for drivers to be especially careful.

Male deer or bucks grow antlers beginning in April. The antlers begin as cartilage and ultimately are replaced by bone. They grow on the skull on the pedicel, and in fact they are one of the most rapidly growing tissues in mammals and can develop at a rate of $\frac{1}{4}$ inch per day (W. Matt Knox, Izaak Walton League). The antlers are covered with a thin skin called velvet, which begins to dry and peel off the bone when they are finished growing. Bucks rub their antlers against trees,

often removing the bark - especially from young trees. Although this removes the velvet they mark trees even when the velvet is gone. In fact 99% of "rubs" are made when no velvet is present. This delineates their territory much like a hiker blazing a trail. They often scrape the ground with their hooves and urinate below these scrapes, all adding to the message, "I live in this neck of the woods." Their antlers are the main dueling tools that males use during the rut as they spar to determine dominance. Hunters often mimic the sound of dueling by rattling two antlers together. Deer are social animals and will come to witness a good fight.

Deer will drop or "shed" their antlers by late winter. They differ from horns in that horns are retained by an animal, whereas antlers are true bone and are shed. They can provide calcium for mammals in the woods. In fact, trail cameras have captured squirrels, raccoons, mice, opossum, fox, coyotes, rabbit, woodchucks, chipmunks, beaver, otter and yes, deer, all chewing on antlers. In our yard squirrels managed to eat the large rack of an elk my husband had shot in Colorado!

So how do less-dominant males make out during mating season? Evidently, not at all badly, according to a number

of biological studies. White-tailed deer do not form harems like elk. Males evidently will court a doe (female) for as much as a day prior to her 24-36 hour estrous and then breed repeatedly during that time. So while other males are focusing on their chosen mate it offers opportunities for unpaired bucks to pursue different females. This is not to say deer are monogamous. Not all females are in estrous at the same time and fidelity is not an attribute of white-tailed deer. So once a female has completed her estrous the buck will likely move on, hoping to successfully father more offspring with other females.

NJ Fish and Wildlife reports the peak breeding season for deer to be from November 3-23 in Northern NJ and November 10-20 for southern deer. Younger females breed into December. A female will carry a fawn for about 200 days, so that most deer are born the last weeks of May and beginning weeks of June.

Safe travels!

New Jersey Fish and Wildlife offers the following tips for drivers:

- *If you see a deer, slow down and pay attention to possible sudden*

movement. If the deer is in the road and doesn't move, wait for the deer to pass and the road to clear. Do not try to maneuver around the deer.

- Pay attention to "Deer Crossing" signs. Slow down when traveling through areas known to have a high concentration of deer so you have ample time to stop if necessary.*
- If you are traveling after dark, use high beams when there is no oncoming traffic or vehicles ahead. High beams will be reflected by the eyes of deer on or near roads. If you see one deer, assume that others may be in the area. Deer typically move in family groups during this time of year and cross roads single-file.*
- Don't tailgate. Remember: The driver in front of you might have to stop suddenly to avoid hitting a deer.*
- Always wear a seatbelt, as required by law. Drive at a safe and sensible speed, accounting for weather, available lighting, traffic, curves and other road conditions.*
- If a collision appears inevitable, do not swerve to avoid impact. The deer may counter-maneuver suddenly. Brake appropriately and stay in your lane. Collisions are more likely to become fatal when a*

driver swerves to avoid a deer and instead collides with oncoming traffic or a fixed structure along the road.

- Report any deer-vehicle collision to a local law enforcement agency immediately.*
- Obey the state's hands-free device law or refrain from using cellular devices while driving.*

To learn more about white-tailed deer in Autumn:

<https://www.state.nj.us/dep/fgw/deerart.htm>