

Who *is* that Mystery Native Animal?

If you guessed deer, you are right! The deer that live in this area are **Black-tailed deer**. Let's learn more about these beautiful and graceful animals!

Black-tailed deer are found from central California to Alaska. Columbian black-tailed deer (*Odocoileus hemionus columbianus*) and Sitka black-tailed deer (*Odocoileus hemionus sitkensis*) are subspecies of mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*). They're smaller and darker than mule deer and white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*). The deer that live in our area are the Columbian black-tailed deer.

Physical Characteristics

Black-tailed deer are reddish-brown in summer and brownish-gray during winter. Their large ears move independently. The deers' broad tails are completely black or dark brown on top, and white underneath. They raise their tails to expose the white underside when they're frightened. Bucks have dark brown antlers that are symmetrical and branching. Columbian black-tailed deer have stocky bodies and long, slim legs. Does weigh up to 130 pounds, and bucks can weigh 200 pounds.

Antlers

Black-tailed bucks have antlers, females don't. Male fawns begin growing antler buttons at 6 to 8 months old. These become full-size antlers in four to five years. Their antlers develop under a layer of skin called velvet. The velvet dries up and peels off once the antlers have fully developed. Shed annually, between December and March, antlers wind up on the forest floor, providing a source of calcium for other animals. New antlers appear between April and August. They become bigger and have more branches each year.



This beautiful photo was taken at TreeSong on the Winter Solstice several years ago. This young buck is just beginning his antler adventures! (Thank you, Brad Smith.)

Habitat

Black-tailed deer live in forested mountains and foothills of the Pacific coast. The climate is mild, having cool temperatures and abundant rainfall. Black-tailed deer typically spend their entire lives in areas that measure less than 3 square miles. They don't migrate, but mountain-dwellers often seek lower elevations during winter. Columbian black-tailed deer are seen from California to British Columbia; Sitka black-tailed deer live in Alaska.

Diet

Black-tailed deer are browsers and feed along tree-line edges, where they can disappear into the forest if they're threatened. Ruminants, they have four stomachs. Barely chewed food is swallowed, then regurgitated and re-chewed. The food passes through three additional stomachs before entering the intestine. In spring, the deer prefer new plant growth and herbaceous plants. They feast on acorns, berries, fungi,

grasses, lichen, nuts, ferns (deer, bracken, lady), shrubs and woody growth from summer through winter. They'll even eat poison oak!

Reproduction

Black-tailed deer mate from November through December. Sparring to establish dominance is common among bucks. Does prefer bucks with large, heavy antlers.



Fawns arrive in May or early June. Twin births are common, but a young doe may give birth to a single fawn. Triplets can also occur. Fawns weigh 6.0 to 8.8 lbs. and have no scent for the first week or so. This enables the mother to leave the fawn hidden while she goes off to browse. The fawn's white spots help keep them safe as well by providing camouflage. Bucks don't participate in

raising the fawns, instead forming bachelor groups for the summer. Does and their fawns form small family groups, led by the oldest mother. Males fawns leave the family group when they reach maturity, at about 18 months old. Females are ready to be mothers when they are 2 years old.

More Interesting Facts

Black-tailed deer are active at dusk and dawn. During the day, they rest in thickets near streams of water. They migrate from higher altitudes where they spend the summer to lower elevations during the winter.

Deer communicate with the aid of scent and pheromones from several glands located on the lower legs. The metatarsal (outside of lower leg) produces an alarm scent, the tarsal (inside of hock) serves for mutual recognition and the interdigital (between the toes) leaves a scent trail when deer travel. Deer have excellent sight and smell. Their

large ears can move independently of each other and pick up any unusual sounds that may signal danger.

The lifespan of black-tailed deer is 9-10 years in the wild; 17-20 years in captivity.

Known predators are coyotes, mountain lions and humans.

Here's a black-tailed deer video you might enjoy watching:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6-JhQzgy9Yw>

Resources:

Kidsanimalfacts.com

Black-tailed Deer Facts by By Karen Mihaylo

Wikipedia

www.coniferousforest.com