

## White-tailed Deer

### Natural History

Arizona's other deer is a small subspecies of the white-tailed deer. These Coues (pronounced Cows) deer are most common in the state's southeastern mountains, but range northward to the edge of the Mogollon Rim, up into the White Mountains, and as far west as Sycamore Canyon in Unit 8. The statewide population is estimated at 82,000 post-hunt adults. Coues whitetails require areas of predictable summer precipitation and are most common in oak woodlands and on chaparral covered hillsides with oaks and pines. This species, while more resilient than mule deer to hunt pressure, is less tolerant of droughts and appears to be more affected by livestock grazing.

In contrast to the mule deer's branching antlers, the tines or points of a whitetail's antlers originate from a forward-curving main beam. Mature bucks generally have three to four tines per side. The coat color is grayish-brown salt-and-pepper with white underparts; the face is marked with white halos around the eyes and a white band across the muzzle. The most distinguishing characteristic of the whitetail, however, is a long, fluffy tail that is all white on the underside, gray to reddish-black on top, and often lifted upward as an alarm signal.

The Coues deer is much smaller than most of its eastern cousins. Bucks stand just over 30 inches at the shoulder and rarely weigh more than 100 pounds. Does average 65 pounds. The rutting season usually runs from December through February, and the fawn drop coincides with the new growth of forbs that results from the summer rains.

A doe's first pregnancy usually results in a single fawn; thereafter she may bear twins. White-tailed deer fawns may stay with their mothers for more than a year, and seeing two generations running together is not uncommon. Unlike mule deer, white-tailed deer rarely form herds, and most observations are of fewer than six animals.

When seen at a distance, white-tailed deer can often be distinguished from mule deer by their cautious, running gait and flagging white tail. Whitetails never use the stiff legged, bounding gait sometimes employed by mule deer. Habitat preferences also differ. In Arizona's southern mountain ranges, whitetails are generally found at higher elevations and in rougher country than are mule deer.

### Hunt History

The Coues white-tailed deer is perhaps Arizona's finest game animal. Wary, and expert at using cover, whitetails rarely offer the hunter a standing shot once jumped. Perhaps for this reason, the species has become increasingly important in the harvest. Although the statewide take has varied from 1,500 to more than 7,000 whitetails a year, depending on the vagaries of drought and fawn survival, the recent trend has been for this species to constitute an ever greater proportion of the statewide harvest. For example, whitetails comprised less than 15 percent of Arizona's deer harvest in 1961 but nearly 40 percent in 1998.

### Management Needs

## Research Needs

### White-tailed Deer Operational Approaches

Below are approaches for guiding the management of Arizona Game Species. In all the approaches listed below, annual harvest objectives were derived from past harvest estimates and recent habitat conditions. In all cases, these harvest objectives are well within the range of sustainable harvest.

1. Increase post-hunt population trends statewide (1.A.1-1.A.6).
2. Maintain annual harvest at 5,000 or greater (1.B.1-1.B.3, 1.B.6-1.B.7).
3. Provide recreational opportunity for 22,000 or more hunters per year (1.B.1-1.B.3).
4. Provide 100,000 hunter days or greater each year (1.B.1-1.B.3).
5. Maintain buck:doe ratios statewide according to hunt guidelines (1.A.1-1.A.6).
6. Manage hunt success statewide according to hunt guidelines (1.A.1-1.A.6, 1.B.1-1.B.3).
7. Use standardized surveys and population and hunt modeling to assist in permit recommendations (1.A.1-1.A.2).
8. Manage white-tailed deer independently of mule deer, to the extent practicable, and from a landscape perspective (1.A.1-1.A.6).
9. In Game Management Units managed under Alternative Deer Management, offer buck hunting opportunities that emphasize harvest of older age class animals, reduced hunter densities, and higher hunter success (1.A.1-1.A.6).
10. Coordinate with the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) to maintain or enhance habitat connectivity among deer herds. Also work with ADOT to determine the extent of vehicle-deer collisions and to identify possible mechanisms by which to reduce the incidence or severity of such collisions (1.A.1-1.A.6, 2.D.1-2.D.4).
11. Issue permits in consideration of hunter access, season structures, and demand rates for various weapon types (1.B.1-1.B.3, 2.A.1).
12. Coordinate with land management agencies, property owners, and lessees to mitigate land uses that are detrimental to white-tailed deer (1.A.1-1.A.6).
13. Manage and enhance habitats through partnerships with public agencies, property owners and lessees, and wildlife conservation organizations (1.A.1-1.A.6).

