

# CREATURES OF THE CREATOR

## Part Nine: The Deer



Few would argue that the deer is one of the most beautiful and graceful animals of the woodlands. So quickly and quietly they are able to make their way through the forests and fields. Some feed them in their backyards while others hunt them. At dusk we watch so that we don't hit them with our cars. Everyone knows something about deer.

### Habitat

The deer is part of the family *cervidae* which also includes moose, elk, and caribou. The only places in the world where members of this family are not found natively are sub-Saharan Africa, Australia, and Antarctica. The roam open land, woods, swamps, and mountains. There are 44 species of *cervids*. Where we live, the white-tailed deer is the most often seen.

### Physical Characteristics

The white-tailed deer stands 3-3 ½ feet high at the shoulders. The most noticeable characteristic of deer are the antlers grown by the males. The antlers appear in the early spring covered in velvet (a sensitive layer of skin that delivers blood and nutrients to the growing antlers). Eventually, the velvet is worn off as the antlers grow. The antlers are made of bone and are then shed as early as December. One cannot necessarily tell how old a deer is by looking at the size of the antlers. The size and shape of the antlers are



determined mostly by diet and genetics. Typically, the better the diet, the larger the set of antlers. Healthy adult bucks can weigh as much as 250 pounds while adult does might weigh about 100 pounds less. During the summer, the animal's fur is reddish-brown or tan while in the winter it appears grayish-brown.

Deer eat a wide variety of food. They nibble the shoots or leaves of trees with their lower front teeth. Often farm crops become part of the deer's diet too. The white-tail will eat many kinds of grasses and clovers, acorns, or even that vegetable garden you are trying so hard to tend!

"Deer are ruminants and have a four-chambered stomach like cows. The first stomach chamber stores the food. The moistened food then returns to the mouth for further chewing, a process known as chewing the cud. The cud is then swallowed and is digested in the other stomach chambers"<sup>1</sup> Bacterial fermentation helps deer to digest their food.

### Life and Behavior

Spring – After a 240 day gestation, the fawns are born in June. A fawn can stand on its feet only 30 minutes after birth. The young are called *fawn* until 6 months of age. Up to a year old it is called a *daguet*. Afterwards, it is classified according to its antlers. The first time it grows them, it is called a "first head", next year it's a "second head", etc. Then comes the phase where it is named "ten body youngly" and ends spectacularly with the "great ten-body" or "royal"<sup>2</sup>



Summer – This is when the deer rest, eat, and store up reserves for the winter.

Autumn – Fall is the mating season. The bucks fight each

1 [http://web.extension.uiuc.edu/wildlife/directory\\_show.cfm?species=deer](http://web.extension.uiuc.edu/wildlife/directory_show.cfm?species=deer)

2 <http://cerfs.free.fr/english/printemps-e.htm>

other in pursuit of the does and to maintain their superiority over a herd. They don't usually fight to the death, but there can be injuries and sometimes the antlers of two males can get locked together and they will both die of exhaustion. The does are fertile for only a short time. This is a physically challenging time for the deer. They eat and rest little. At the end of this time, food sources are plentiful (acorns and nuts) so the deer can gather strength for the winter.

Winter – The deer slow down, quiet down, and try to survive until spring.

Deer generally group together in herds. A herd consists of an adult doe, her fawns, and her female offspring from the previous year. The bucks do not usually associate with the herds until mating season.

## Deer In the Bible

Several Bible passages make reference to the deer, especially to the fact that it is "fleet of foot."

**2 Samuel 22:34** For who is God besides the LORD? And who is the Rock except our God? <sup>33</sup> It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect. <sup>34</sup> He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me to stand on the heights.

- After David had escaped the hand of wicked King Saul, he offered a song of praise to God. That song is recorded in 2 Samuel 22. The Lord had enabled David to run away from his enemies the way a deer runs quickly through the forest.



- What are some of the ways God gives *us* deliverance from our enemies? How does He help us to run quickly away from trouble?

See how the Psalmist describes his longing for God:

**Psalm 42:1** As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. <sup>2</sup> My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?

- Do we ever take God for granted, failing to desire and seek Him as much as daily water and food?
- Under what circumstances are we driven to "thirst for God" like the deer thirsts for water? When we approach the cooling stream of God's mercy, does He drive us away? Why can we, sinners though we are, still long for Him and come to Him?

The deer is mentioned in a famous Old Testament prophecy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Isaiah 35:6** Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. <sup>6</sup> Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.

- Isaiah prophesied about the coming Christ. Can you think of examples where Jesus made the lame *leap like a deer*? Jesus, of course, came not just to give physical healing, but to give spiritual healing too. Whether or not we can leap like a deer, we can all jump for joy in our hearts knowing the Christ has redeemed us for all eternity!

## Selected Resources

<http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/accounts/information/Cervidae.html>  
<http://cerfs.free.fr/english/>  
<http://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/st-plains/nature/images/Deer-tpwd-sm.jpg>  
<http://www.facts-about.org.uk/animals-deer.htm>  
[http://web.extension.uiuc.edu/wildlife/directory\\_show.cfm?species=deer](http://web.extension.uiuc.edu/wildlife/directory_show.cfm?species=deer)