

Living With Wildlife – White-tailed deer

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In the Ottawa area we are fortunate to be surrounded by substantial greenspace, and this means deer can be found in many parts of the city, whether you are in Bells Corners, Navan or West Carleton. Often thought of as a woodland animal, White-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) thrive in “edge” habitat. Edges occur when two different habitats meet such as croplands and woods. The deer found in and around a city have had to develop a greater tolerance for human activity, dogs and traffic.

Regardless of how many times most of us have seen a deer, we still get excited at the sight of this beautiful animal. By human standards, White-tailed deer are tremendous athletes, they are good swimmers, run at speeds of 35mph and jump as high as 8 ft.

Deer mate in the fall and after a gestation period of about 200 days, usually 1-2 fawns are born at the end of May or early June. The number of fawns born depends on the doe’s nutrition at the time of mating, so when conditions are good twins are common.

When born, fawns weigh about 6-7 lbs and although the young can stand soon after birth it is unsafe for them to travel with mom while she forages for food. Instead, mom stashes young (if there are twins she will stash them separately) until she returns. In an urban setting fawns can be stashed in the tall grass near a road or close to people’s homes. The young have very little scent, can be very still and have a spotted coat, all of which help them remain undetected by predators.

A young fawn arguably has the most innocent and endearing set of big eyes. So it is understandable that when people stumble upon one and there is no sign of mom, the natural reaction is to want to help it. But it is normal for mom not to be around, even for hours at a time. So if you find a fawn, it is best to leave it alone.

Occasionally fawns are orphaned, so if you see a dead adult nearby, or the fawn seems distressed, being very vocal and moving around a lot you may want to check on it throughout the day.

In the meantime, remember this is the height of the birthing season for wildlife. Do not take any action before first checking www.wildlifeinfo.ca for effective advice.