

White-tailed Deer on Edisto Beach

General Description

The white-tailed deer found here on Edisto Beach are the southeastern white-tailed deer. A subspecies of the North American white-tailed, the deer found in the southern coastal regions of SC down to Florida are typically smaller in size and have thinner fur coats to better endure the hotter summer months. They get their name from the white fur under their tails that is flagged upward. This species is neither threatened or endangered.

They are crepuscular mammals meaning they are most active during dawn and dusk. They generally live approximately 10 years in the wild feeding on wild herbs, fruits, vines, grasses and agricultural crops but can survive on leaves and twigs. In the winter months when food is scarce, their main diet consists of acorns.

Breeding

Female deer, or does mature within their first year after birth and may even have a baby during that time. For older does it is common to have twins or even triplets. Male deer or bucks mature at about 18 months. Gestation is about 200 days, and around April to June, it is fairly common to see newborn deer here in Edisto. Newborn fawns have spotted fur to help them camouflage in broken sunlight, blending in with the woodland floor. It is common to spot a young fawn on its own, but it is important not to approach and touch, as it is not abandoned. The mother doe is probably nearby in search of food and will return to its fawn, rarely leaving them for more than an hour.

Breeding season, also known as the rut, is generally September to November but can vary from year to year. Bucks at this time become increasingly aggressive toward other males. They will chase and pursue a female for 5-6 days prior to mating, then eventually move onto another doe. Though usually solitary, bucks do not mind other bucks in the months after the rut and will join other groups of male bachelors.

Also in the winter months, deer will reform into larger herds with previous years' family members. Offspring typically go no further than 5-6 miles away from where they were born. Bucks will shed their antlers which then become a food source for other animals.

Piebald Deer

Interesting facts about the deer on Edisto: you may notice spotted or fully white—furred deer. These are not “albino” but are called “piebald” which is a genetic defect. They tend to be smaller, have an overbite, often malformed legs and a shorter life-span. Look for these deer on Edisto Beach!



Deer on the Beach

Also, it is not uncommon to see deer tracks along Edisto Beach. They will eat any of the plants growing in the dunes as well as seaweed and algae. They may also use the beach as a corridor between feeding locations. And although they prefer fresh water, they are able to drink salt water as their kidney is able to flush out excess salt. It is also not uncommon to see deer swimming in the ocean or in the marshes. Pregnant deer often swim to more remote islands to give birth. Deer will also swim out of fear to escape hunters. They can swim up to 10 miles and as fast as 15 miles per hour. They have very strong legs and are excellent swimmers. Their undercoat preserves body heat while their topcoat creates buoyancy, allowing them to conserve energy while swimming.



Concerns about the Deer

Concerns about deer here on Edisto include the population which is extremely large and growing in numbers. This is because they no longer have any natural predators in this area, which used to include cougars and red wolves (though alligators may take down a deer from time to time). This is a growing concern as our deer population is overeating many native species of fauna and thus allowing invasive species to increase, which in turn potentially changes the local natural ecosystem. The overpopulation also contributes to traffic accidents on our roads. In response to these concerns, as of February 2022, the town of Edisto Beach has banned feeding deer, and violations are subject to fines.

Although white-tailed deer generally are not a threatening species, it is advisable to maintain a safe distance as with any other wildlife.

Contacts

- For traffic accidents involving deer, please contact the local police department or traffic enforcement.
- For injured deer, please contact the SCDNR Project Manager at 803-734-3886.