

Sitka Black-tailed Deer



Dinner for a deer: Did you know deer swallow food and then spit it up to chew all over again? This is called ruminating. Deer, like many ungulates, have four-chambered stomachs. This digestive system allows deer to eat a lot of food quickly and then chew and digest it later when they are less exposed to danger from predators.

Deer are herbivores, which means they eat plants. They eat a wide variety of plant species but can't just eat anything. Deer depend on microscopic organisms in their stomachs to break down food. These microbes are specially adapted to a deer's natural diet. If a deer eats something outside its normal diet, it can become really sick. In fact, deer have died of starvation on a full stomach!

Skunk cabbage is one of the best high-energy foods for deer in spring. Because skunk cabbage is armed with sharp microscopic crystals, it's painful and dangerous for people to eat. But deer can digest it, and it provides a great source of protein. Deer also eat blueberry and huckleberry, but these are not as nutritious as bunchberry and five-leaf bramble. These forbs are evergreens that provide food for deer in the winter when other foods are not available. However, forbs grow low to the ground and are easily covered by snow. That's why old-growth forests are so important to deer in Alaska.

Old-growth forests have trees of different ages and heights. This creates layers of branches in the forest canopy, which block most of the winter's snow. Less snow on the ground means more food available to deer. Even when there is lots of snow, the ground beneath old-growth trees can be relatively snow-free, providing a great dining spot for deer!

Fun Deer Facts



Not everything is big in Alaska:

Sitka black-tailed deer are smaller than black-tailed deer found elsewhere. Adult deer range in size from 80 pounds (adult female or doe) to 120 pounds (adult male or buck). Their antlers are also relatively small compared to other antlered species.



A coat for each season: Deer have two coats. The summer coat is reddish and the hairs are solid. Surprisingly, there is more hair on the summer coat than the winter one. This extra hair protects against biting insects. A deer's winter coat is grey/brown and the hairs are hollow, providing increased insulation. It's like wearing a down jacket.

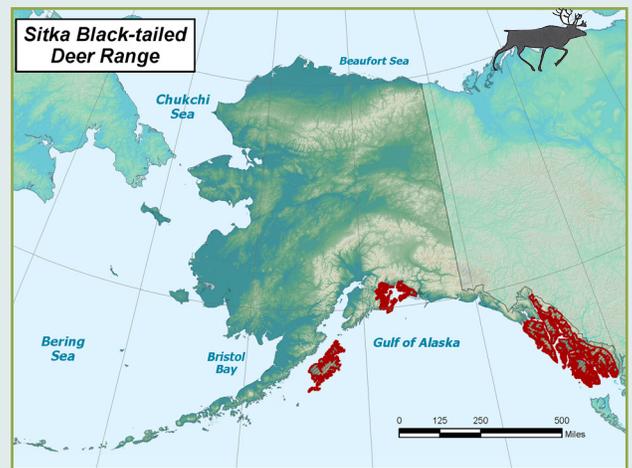


Baby Deer:

Fawns, or baby deer, are born in late spring. A doe giving birth the first time will usually have one fawn, and twins from then



on. When first born, fawns do not give off any smell, making it difficult for predators such as bears and wolves to find them. The spots on a fawn's coat provide additional protection. This camouflage resembles filtered sunlight and shadows on the forest floor.



The Sitka black-tailed deer is native to the wet coastal rainforests of Southeast Alaska and north-coastal British Columbia. Its range has been expanded by introductions and now populations exist near Yakutat, in Prince William Sound, and on Kodiak and Afognak islands.