



WILDLIFE NOTES

Coues' White-tailed Deer

Coues' white-tailed deer, commonly called whitetails, often throw up their tails and display a snowy, white underside. Hence their name describes what most people see: fleeing whitetails. Coues' whitetails in New Mexico are smaller than mule deer and have a delicate appearance.

The Coues' white-tailed deer is the smaller of the two subspecies of whitetails found in New Mexico. In fact, the Coues' whitetail is smaller than any other deer in the United States except the Florida Keys' white-tailed deer.

An average Coues' white-tailed buck weighs only 80 to 100 pounds and stands only 30 to 32 inches high at the shoulder. In contrast, a Maine white-tailed buck stands

40 inches at the shoulder, while in Texas a buck is about 36 inches at the shoulder. A Coues' white-tailed doe weighs approximately 60 to 80 pounds and stands 24 to 26 inches at the shoulder. At birth, fawns weigh only three to six pounds and are only 10 to 12 inches tall. Fawns are born with white spots but begin to lose their spots when 30 to 40 days old.

They have a distinctive white 'halo' around the eyes and muzzle. Most whitetails are slate gray in color. However, in late summer they may appear reddish brown, especially around the top of the tail. Typical whitetail antlers are formed by each individual tine (point) branching off the main beam, unlike mule deer antlers, whose tines often branch or fork from another tine. The main beam on each side curves inward and may even touch at the tips, giving the appearance of a crown of antlers. Does do not have antlers.

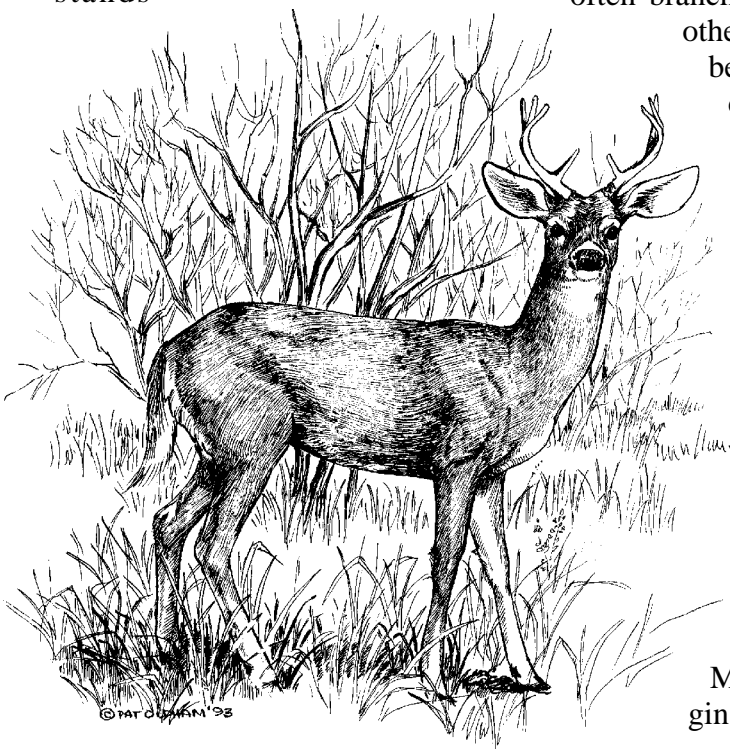
At one year of age, bucks may have one to three points on each side, but spikes are more common. Most bucks shed their antlers in April or May. New antlers begin to grow immedi-

ately after the old antlers are lost. Brown epidermis called velvet covers the growing antlers. Velvet allows nutrients to be carried throughout the rapidly developing antlers. Generally in late September through early October antlers stop growing and the bucks rub the velvet off on sapling trees and shrubs.

The rut or breeding season for whitetails is in the winter. The deer may mate from November to February, but the peak breeding is in December and January. Fawns are born 190 to 210 days after conception, July through September. Most fawns are born in August.

Coues' white-tailed deer are primarily found in the southwest portion of New Mexico. Whitetails occur between 2,500 and 10,000 feet in elevation. This wide range in elevation encompasses a wide variety of habitats. Chihuahuan desert shrubs and grasslands, oak woodlands, mountain pine forests and leafy forests along streams can contain whitetails. Oak woodlands, commonly found between 4,000 to 6,000 feet in elevation, harbor the greatest number of Coues' whitetails.

Whitetails, like most deer, are browsers, primarily eating shrubs and trees. They also eat forbs (weeds) when in season. Whitetails will eat hundreds of different kinds of plants. Buckwheat, velvet-pod mimosa, false mesquite, mountain mahogany, and wait-a-minute bush are common shrubs eaten. They also eat leaves and fruits from mes-



quite, junipers, oaks, grasses and cacti.

Coues' whitetails fall prey to many predators. Coyotes, bobcats and mountain lions kill these deer, especially fawns or weaker, older deer. Dogs may also kill whitetails. Bears take an occasional deer and golden eagles have been known to kill fawns, although it is not common.

The little whitetails are known to have small home ranges. Coues' bucks have an average home range of four square miles, but spend the majority of their life in a core area of only 1.7 square miles. The does have an

average home range of two square miles, but spend most of their time in a core area of only 0.7 square miles. Thus one may see the same Coues' whitetail deer over and over again if one returns to the same area.

Whitetails are polygamous; a buck will breed many does to produce fawns. This behavior pattern means fewer bucks than does can be present in the population and the does will still be bred. The whitetail population can increase even though the bucks are hunted.

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