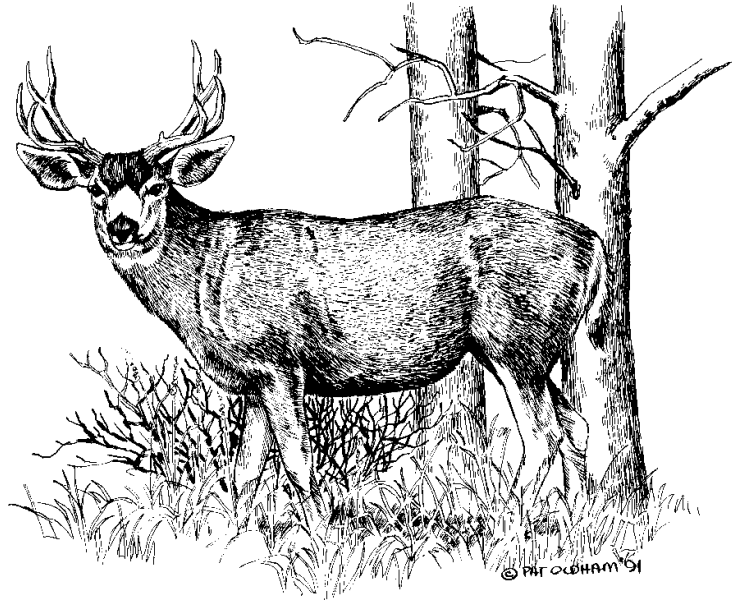


# LIVING WITH WILDLIFE:



## MULE DEER IN URBAN NEIGHBORHOODS

Mule deer are perhaps the most widely distributed and best known large mammal found in New Mexico. The state's mule deer population includes two subspecies. The Rocky Mountain mule deer inhabits the northern half of the state, while desert mule deer are most abundant in the southern half of the state.

Mule deer are very important game animals. The sale of hunting licenses generates money for management, protection and propagation of all protected wildlife in the state. In 1996-97, licensed hunters harvested approximately 15,000 deer. New Mexico's mule deer also provide economic and social benefits, such as wildlife viewing and photography.

### A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

We humans share New Mexico with mule deer. Although we don't live in the wild like they do, we compete with deer for many of the same resources, especially water and space. To survive, mule deer need the same raw materials we require.

Over the years, New Mexico's deer habitat has changed. Humans have encroached into deer habitat and are likely to continue doing so. The foothills of the Sandia Mountains are a prime example. Thousands of homes now occupy historically important deer-wintering areas. Displacement isn't the only problem. Agriculture, logging, road building, fire suppression, and mining are a few more examples of human activities that impact mule deer.

### MULE DEER FOOD HABITS

Mule deer are considered browsers, preferring the leaves, stems and buds of woody plants. Forbs (weeds and other herbaceous plants) also are a significant part of their diet. Like most species of wildlife, mule deer are opportunistic. If they have the chance, they will feed on agricultural crops: corn, soybeans, small grains, alfalfa, fruit trees and vegetables. Because of this, deer can cause economic hardship for individuals who earn their livelihood in agricultural industries.



Problems also can arise when mule deer feed in urban areas. The influx of humans into traditional deer habitat has led to conflicts within some communities.

Compounding the problem is the fact that people possess different values regarding deer and their presence in urban areas. For example, while one person may see mule deer only as pests damaging ornamental plants or shrubs, his neighbor might be feeding the deer, which attracts those “nuisance” animals to the neighborhood.

Other forms of human encroachment accentuate this problem. As more people seek open spaces for recreation, human encounters with mule deer occur more often. In most cases, those encounters rarely result in anything negative happening to the deer. Over time, individual populations of deer can lose their innate fear of people and become accustomed to feeding in urban environments.

### **RECOGNIZING DEER DAMAGE**

Before you spend time and money on the control and prevention of deer damage, it is important to determine if deer are really responsible. Other wildlife, such as rabbits and rodents, should be considered as possible culprits. Because deer do not possess upper incisors, their browsing often leaves a jagged or torn surface on twigs or stems. Most rodents leave a clean-cut surface on the vegetation they are eating.

Deer tracks are distinctive and the height at which deer browse often eliminates other wildlife with the exception of their close relative, elk. The size of elk tracks versus that of deer is a good method to discriminate between the two. Actually, observing deer “in the act” of feeding on your property is, of course, the best method to identify the cause. Deer are most active in the evening and early morning hours when neighborhoods are generally the most quiet.

### **METHODS FOR PREVENTION OF MULE DEER DAMAGE**

Private industry, and the professional wildlife managers of the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, developed several methods for dealing with nuisance urban deer herds.

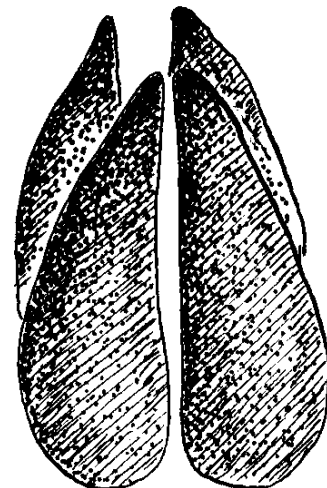
A number of commercial repellents can be effective, although they work best when reapplied periodically and after rain or snow showers. Repellents may be found at most feed supply stores, or distributors can be located through a quick search of the Internet. Key words to help you search the Internet are “wildlife control” or “wildlife management.”

Scare devices often are used to address nuisance deer problems. A number of commercially available products employ motion-sensors that emit amplified, ultrasonic bursts of sound when activated. Manufacturers say the frequency is inaudible to humans, but stressful for deer. Most of these devices are designed to reset themselves after the deer have moved out of the area. These products are relatively new on the market. Department personnel have not yet tested their effectiveness, but they look promising.

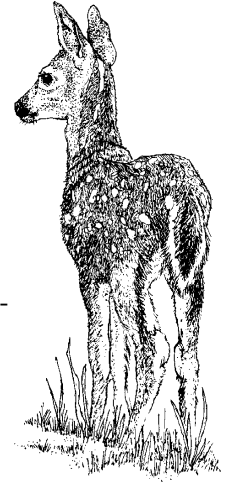
Many plants are resistant to deer browsing and should be selected where possible. Though some plants are resistant to damage, they can be less effective depending on the availability of natural browse. Local nurseries should be able to provide you with a list of plants and reference books that will help you in your selection. It is recommended that native plant species be selected wherever possible. These plants will be better adapted to local conditions than their exotic counterparts.

More traditional scare devices are available through the department. Included in this arsenal are Zon-guns, crackershells, flagging and M-80's (which are attached to a length of fuse-rope timed to

### **MULE DEER TRACK**



explode at various intervals). Zon-guns are propane-powered cannons designed to emit a loud “bang” at preset intervals. A new generation of Zon-gun now available is activated via remote control. M-80’s and crackershells must be used carefully because they can present a potential fire hazard. Colorful flagging, draped across trails used by deer, presents a visual deterrent and should be used in conjunction with scare devices and repellents.



Trapping and relocating deer are often suggested as a way to deal with nuisance deer. Relocating deer, however, can be costly, labor intensive and physically hazardous to the deer and those handling them. There are numerous methods used by the Department of Game and Fish to trap deer. The overall site characteristics and general nature of the problem dictates the best method for trapping deer. Another drawback with relocating deer relates to their survival rate. In the past, relocated deer have been monitored and the results indicate that most do not survive in their new environment past the first year. As with any alternative, the cost vs. the benefits must be weighed prior to a project of this nature.

Another method to control deer problems is through regulated sport hunting. For reasons obvious, especially in urban neighborhoods, hunting is prohibited by local ordinances. Hunting is a valuable management tool. When designing hunting regulations, many factors, including the number of nuisance deer complaints are taken into consideration. In some cases, sport hunting is an effective tool for addressing this problem and in others it has proven to be ineffective.

Of all the techniques discussed, the best way to prevent deer from browsing on your property is to fence them out. There are a number of fence designs that have been proven both effective and humane. For most situations, installing one or two strands of electrified high-tensile wire on top of an existing fence is the simplest and most cost-effective design. To be most effective, the top wire should be placed at least 68 inches above ground. Be sure to eliminate any gaps greater than 8 inches between the existing fence and the top wire. Attach pieces of aluminum foil baited with peanut butter to the wire strands. Deer are attracted to the peanut butter. After making nose-to-fence contact, the deer learn to avoid fenced areas. In places where fencing is impractical, wrapping individual plants and shrubs with sections of square-mesh woven wire prevents the foraging on individual plants.

### WHO DO YOU CALL?

The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish is responsible for managing, conserving and protecting most of the wildlife within the state. Your concerns about wildlife are our concerns as well.

If you wish to report a wildlife problem or simply wish to speak to one of our staff, please contact the Department of Game and Fish. Office hours are Monday through Friday, 8-5pm, as listed below. If it is an after-hours emergency, contact the New Mexico State Police, or your local Sheriff’s Department.

**Northwest Area Office**  
3841 Midway Place NE  
Albuquerque, NM 87109  
(505) 222-4700  
FAX: (505) 222-4720

**Santa Fe Main Office**  
#1 Wildlife Way  
Santa Fe, NM 87507  
(505) 476-8000  
FAX: (505) 476-8116

**Northeast Area Office**  
215 York Canyon Road  
Raton, NM 87740  
(505) 445-2311  
FAX: (505) 445-5651

**Southwest Area Office**  
2715 Northrise Dr.  
Las Cruces, NM 88011  
(505) 532-2100  
FAX: (505) 532-2119

**Southeast Area Office**  
1912 W. Second St.  
Roswell, NM 88201  
(505) 624-6135  
FAX: (505) 624-6136



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