

White-tailed Deer



Dr. James Kroll presents white-tailed deer seminar to Tyler County forest landowners.

"Dr. Deer," a.k.a. Dr. James C. Kroll, presented a white-tailed deer seminar, Saturday, September 10, 2011 at the Tyler County Extension Office in Woodville. Dr. Kroll, co-star of North American Whitetail TV and a professor of forest wildlife and director of the Institute for White-tailed Deer Management and Research at Stephen F. Austin University in Nacogdoches, has spent over 35 years debunking popular misconceptions about America's favorite big game animal -- the white-tailed deer.

White-tailed deer bucks mature when they reach four and a half years old and breed for the next two years. They are observant and, by that time, have learned to alter their movement and activity patterns to avoid hunters. They become predominately nocturnal and establish secluded sanctuaries and staging areas where they reside until dark. When they do venture about, a mature buck will frequently be accompanied by a young buck. The young buck benefits from the tutelage of the mature buck, but may also provide cover for the mature buck by being the first to venture forward and potentially be caught in the hunters' cross-hairs. A hunter is not likely to see mature bucks from a hunting stand used year after year.

A hunter can locate mature bucks' travel corridors by locating their rubs. Rubs are identified on young sapling trees that have sections of bark removed by a buck rubbing his forehead and the base of his antlers on the trunk of the tree. Plotting a series of rubs will mark the buck's frequented trail.

Dr. Kroll has field tested numerous wildlife cameras and was dissatisfied with most of them. The only two that he currently recommends for observing deer are the Bushnell® Trophy Cam and the more expensive Reconyx® cameras.

The deer population will increase immediately after a tree farm is clear-cut because of the abundance of food that emerges when the tree canopy is removed. As the new seedlings grow, the deer population decreases until the trees are thinned, at which time the population will spike up again. To promote a healthy deer population, Dr. Kroll discourages the harvesting of yearling bucks and encourages the harvesting of older does.

Deer consume a ton of food each year and Dr. Kroll encourages landowners to plant 2% of their acreage in food plots. Each food plot acre will support three to five deer. The three winter plants recommended for our area are Buck Forage oats; Grouse or Tecomate® chicory; and red or white (not crimson) clover. When planted in combination, the three plants meet multiple nutritional needs and provide a balanced food source. Early to mid-September is the time to apply Roundup® herbicide to the designated plot area to remove grass and weeds. Leave the area idle for two to three weeks. Then fertilizer and lime, based on the results of mid-summer soil tests, should be disked into the soil. Winter food plot seeds should be planted the last week of September or the first week of October. Plant oat seeds 1 ½ to 2 inches deep. Plant chicory and clover seeds 1/8 inch deep. Protect a three foot square exclusion area inside the plot to provide a visual measure of the quality of the plants as compared to volume of foliage deer are eating outside the exclusion area. In mid-winter, apply ammonium nitrate to replenish nutrients in the soil. Fusilade® herbicide may be applied in the spring to kill grass growing in the food plot.

Native plants that deer browse include greenbriar vines, blackberries and honeysuckle. Honeysuckle survived the 2011 drought surprisingly well. To kill weeds, spray honeysuckle with an herbicide.

Providing corn and/or food pellets can improve the nutritional quality of a deer's diet and feeders are available in a variety of designs. Rotary feeders are good for dispensing corn, but are vulnerable to a variety of wildlife including hogs and raccoons. Feeders that dispense food through multiple ports that are the height of the deer are less vulnerable to other wildlife.

Providing nutrition and harvesting wisely will help improve the size and health of Tyler County's buck population.

For more information, Dr. James C. Kroll's books and videos are available at <http://forestry.sfasu.edu/outreach/dr.-kroll-books-videos-3.html>.

