

## Mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*)



### **Taxonomy:**

Family Cervidae. Nine subspecies are recognized. The regional race is *Odocoileus hemionus hemionus*.

### **Description:**

Distinguished from the wapiti (elk) by its smaller size, more uniform coloration, and branching pattern of the main antler beam.

Total length: 1.2–1.7 m; Tail: 120-220 mm; Weight: 30-120 kg.



### **Distribution:**

From SE Alaska south through much of western Canada, the western half of the continental US, and into central Mexico and the Baja peninsula. Common throughout the Wasatch Front.

### **Ecology and diet:**

Mule deer occur in a variety of habitats across a broad elevation range. They are most active during the morning and evening, moving between open feeding sites and protected areas with cover. Seasonally, they move from high elevation habitat during the growing season to low elevation winter range. They are mainly browsers, preferring young shoots, buds, and fruit of

trees and shrubs, but also consuming a variety of herbaceous plants. Regionally, both deer and mountain lions (their principal predators) have increased historically, perhaps due to habitat changes accompanying livestock grazing and logging.

### **Life History:**

During the breeding season (October-November), males compete for access to estrus females which they guard and defend against rivals. Following a gestation period of about 7 months, females bear 1 or 2 fawns in early summer. The rate of twinning increases with the age and condition of the doe. Fawns are weaned at around 4 months. Both sexes may reach sexual maturity as yearlings. Individuals may live as long as 20 years.

**References:** Anderson & Wallmo 1984; Berger & Wehausen 1991; Zeveloff 1988.