



White-tailed Deer

Cerf de Virginie

Nipissing Ojibway: Waawaashkeshi

White tailed deer are year-round residents in Laurier Woods Conservation Area (LWCA). If you are lucky and unobtrusive you will see deer early in the morning or at dusk in Laurier Woods when it is not busy. In the summer you may see deer individually, while in the winter they tend to gather in small groups of 4-8 deer. If you do see them, please do not follow the deer off-trail and be sure your dogs are on leash at all times. Deer perceive dogs as wolves, which is their ancestral enemy, and even their barking can cause the deer to feel threatened and flee. Observe them at a distance, quietly, so as not to cause them to move away.

While we see white tailed deer frequently today in LWCA. and areas around North Bay, they are relatively recent arrivals. As urbanization and agriculture spread across Ontario two things happened: (1) the predators of deer, i.e. black bear, wolves and coyotes created a problem for people and were culled and (2) rural foliage, patches of forest, fields and brushy fields created by agricultural and urban development are ideal for deer. These factors have permitted deer to spread from their traditional range in the south all the way north of our city.

Deer seek areas with high conifer cover in the winter to avoid deep snow and colder weather. There are only a few areas of high conifer cover in LWCA. Please do not follow deer into these distinct areas during the winter as they could startle and run away using their limited energy-reserves. This stored energy is needed for warmth and nourishment during this critical time, and they conserve it by moving as little as possible. Loss of stored energy could increase their mortality and also reduce reproduction. Deer are timid and when startled they could flee. Also, do not introduce human food such as grain, fruit and vegetables into LWCA. Although your intentions are based on kindness, these foods can make deer sick and might attract enemies of the deer to their location.

If you look closely at the vegetation, you will see evidence of trails made by deer in LWCA. If you carefully examine the twigs of shrubs such as birch and dogwood you can tell if it has been browsed by deer as they leave a rough shredded when they browse while snowshoe hares for example leave a clear sharp cut to the twig.