



Urban Wildlife Issues
Wildlife Rescue column by Nicky Fried
as appearing in the *Burnaby NOW*

Injured black-tailed deer reunited with mother

I am a great fan of “feel good” stories. I realize that they don't sell newspapers but I believe that we need them to focus us on what is really important in life.

I have a good news story from the Wildlife Rescue Association of BC (WRA) that reminded me of how strong family bonds are.

Last month a biologist, who lives on Bowen Island, found a young Pacific Black-tailed deer that had been clipped by a car. She brought him in to us. He was about eight months old, born in the spring of 2005 and was already as tall a German Shepherd dog

Deer are difficult patients. One of their key defenses is their nervous, alert nature. It works against them when they are in captivity and often they will literally die of fright. This particular animal was somewhat familiar with humans and even though he would not let us close to him, he was curious about us. This made treatment a lot easier and we were able to have him out of care within a week.

The biologist who brought him in, returned him to the area where she had found him. Shortly thereafter she observed him reunited with his mother. A happy story we can relate to.

Wildlife rehabilitators are often criticized because our focus is on the care of individual animals. We are told that there is not much evidence that the animals we treat and release go back into the wild and reproduce. This does not mean to say that this doesn't happen – we're just lacking the evidence.

Animal populations are important, but so are the individual lives of animals. We made a significant difference in the lives of two Black-tailed deer. Being a mother myself I can only imagine the joy that doe must have felt on being reunited with her offspring.

The Pacific Black-tailed deer is a sub species of the Mule deer, a long-time resident of our region. Mule Deer get their name from their large ears that move constantly and independently of each other. Black-Tailed Deer have black markings on their tails. The Black-tailed deer is smaller than the Mule but shares many of its characteristics.

These deer favour mixed wooded and open, logged or fire burned land, although they will also live in swamps, deep forest or on mountains. Their long legs are perfectly

suited for traveling at speed through rugged woodland terrain. They are also excellent swimmers and can be seen occasionally swimming to west coast islands.

The female gives birth once a year in the spring, usually one or two fawns. Fawns can walk almost immediately and follow behind their mother. When the young are born, they have spots for camouflage and lack scent. This is an especially important for hiding from black bears and cougars. They spend a lot of time curled up on the forest floor, sleeping.

Incidentally the reason deer love the fresh new shoots in your garden is because these plants contain so much nitrogen. Nitrogen is critical to maintain a community of bacteria in the deer's rumen, their first stomach, which allows them to process all kinds of food. Without these bacteria, the deer will die, and several have been recorded dying from malnutrition with a full stomach because they couldn't digest what was in there.

If you want to keep your garden safe from deer, a high wooden fence (at least eight feet) is the best solution. One can also protect trees with a chain link fence. Plant borders of hedges that taste unpleasant to deer - visit your local nursery for advice. "Irish Spring" soap is another great deterrent when strung around the perimeter of the yard; the deer hate the smell. Please don't use bird netting around plants, as deer can get caught in it and injure their legs.

Happy New Year. I hope 2006 will be filled with many good news stories for you, your families, friends and the animals that share your neighbourhoods.