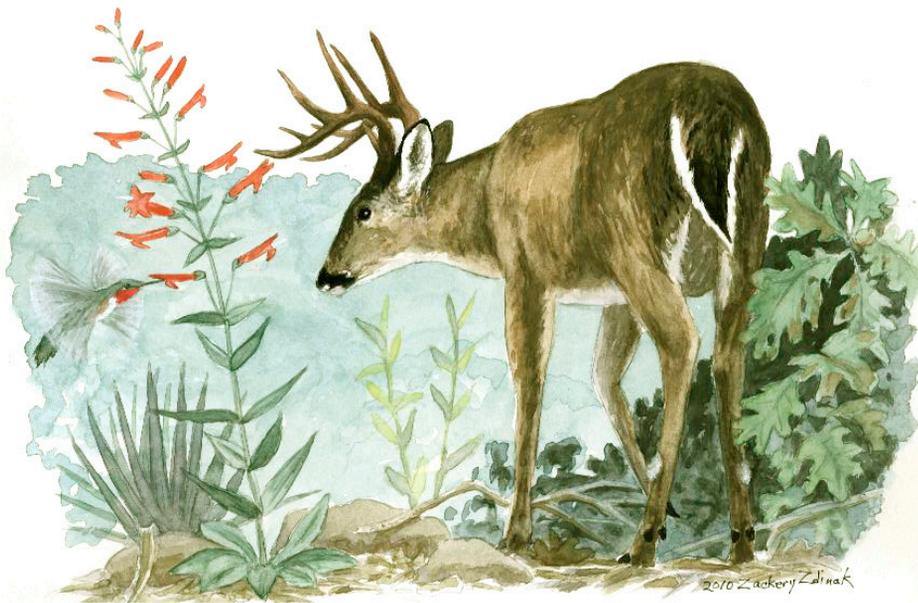


Coues' White-tailed Deer

ILLUSTRATION BY ZACKERY ZDINAK



SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Odocoileus virginianus couesi*. The genus name *Odocoileus* is derived from the Greek words *odous*, which means “tooth,” and *koilos*, which means “hollow.” This is a reference to the hollow teeth of deer. The species name *virginianus* is a Latinism meaning “from Virginia,” for the region where the type specimen was collected for naming. The subspecies *couesi* is in reference to naturalist Elliot Coues, who described this species in great detail in 1875. The common name “Coues” often is mispronounced “cooz,” but it is properly pronounced “cows.”

These deer do not live in large herds, but tend to remain in small groups or as individual animals.

DESCRIPTION: The Coues' white-tailed deer is a smaller subspecies of the white-tails of the eastern United States. Coues' whitetails stand 28–32 inches high at the shoulder and measure about 56 inches

from head to tail. A large, mature male can weigh up to 125 pounds and mature females weigh up to 80 pounds, but the average weight is less.

The deer's coat is grayish in winter and closer to mahogany in summer. When fleeing perceived danger, whitetail deer display the prominent, bright white outside edge and underside of their broad, triangular, flag-shaped tail (hence their common name). White hair encircles the eyes and muzzle. Fawns are born with white spots across their back, which disappear after a couple of months. The antlers of a mature male Coues' whitetail buck differ from those of a mule deer in that they have one main beam that curves forward and individual tines that branch off the main beam. Coues' whitetails are extremely wary.

DISTRIBUTION: In Arizona, Coues' whitetails can be found from the White Mountains west along the Mogollon Rim to central Arizona, and in suitable habitats in southeastern and southcentral Arizona. Their range also enters southwestern New Mexico and northern Mexico.

HABITAT: Occupying a wide variety of habitats at elevations of 3,000–10,000 feet, Coues' whitetails show preference for the lower third of that range. Habitat types include upper Sonoran desertscrub, oak-juniper woodland, chaparral, ponderosa pine and mixed-conifer forest. Reliable water sources are necessities within their habitats.

BIOLOGY: These deer do not live in large herds, but tend to remain in small groups or as individual animals. The breeding season, or “rut,” occurs in December and January. Polygamous bucks continually search for receptive does and will challenge other males for access to females. Does give birth to twin fawns in late July and August.

Only males of this species produce antlers. Bucks cast their antlers in late spring and immediately begin to grow a new set, which are fully formed by early October.

Whitetail deer are browsers: They prefer forbs, but also consume shrubs, mast, cacti fruits and grasses.

STATUS: The overall population of Coues' whitetails has declined during the past 20 years, but this has not been nearly as steep as the declines seen in mule deer. At present, the population is stable. This is a hunted species with a relatively stable harvest.

MANAGEMENT NEEDS: The extended drought has been the biggest factor affecting the habitats on which these deer rely. Other factors include human encroachment and climate change. The challenge is to protect, preserve and enhance existing critical habitats, so that when precipitation returns to normal levels, this species will flourish and expand in number and range. 🦌

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