



## 6 deer... 14 deer... 24 deer... 160 deer!

*By J. T. Fleegle*  
*PGC Wildlife Biologist*

EVER WAKE UP in the morning feeling just a bit off with a slight sniffle. You don't think much of it but by noon you are completely wiped out and your symptoms have exploded – a nose that runs like a sieve, an annoying cough, and a throat that feels like sandpaper. It's because that nasty rhinovirus is reproducing at a spectacular rate and your immune system has been left in the dust.

The white-tailed deer is a far cry from the annoying abiotic RNA strand that stalks our upper respiratory tract. But one parallel can be drawn – amazing reproductive potential. How can this be? Deer are large mammals, reproduce only one or two offspring once a year, and are long-lived (up to a decade or more even in the wild). Myth #7: White-tailed deer populations grow and expand slowly.

I'd like to tell you a story about six deer in Michigan on the George Reserve. In 1928, two buck and four does found themselves all alone on 1,146 acres behind an 11.5 foot deer-proof fence. While the soil was poor, the reserve boasted diverse topography and vegetation. The University of Michigan inherited the George Reserve in 1930. Being an institute of high learning, researchers decided to learn about those deer, in particular, population dynamics. In a drive count in 1933, a minimum of 160 deer were counted. Knowing that ALL the deer were not counted, it was estimated that more than 220 were likely living on the reserve. For those of you keeping score, that's 88 deer/square mile at the very least. Those six deer had been very busy. Surely this must be a fluke.

Not if it happens twice. In 1975, the population was reduced to 10 deer, by 1980, it had grown to 212. It is important to note that this population growth rate isn't the maximum. With no mortality and maximum reproductive rate, the population of 6 pioneer deer could have grown to more than 300, and, the gang of 10, even more.

A deer population on excellent range can double in two years. And poor range conditions don't slow down the growth by much, with a population still being able to nearly double in four years.

With this kind of reproductive potential and superior adaptability, the white-tailed deer will always be a fixture on the Pennsylvania landscape.

**By J. T. Fleegle**  
**PGC Wildlife Biologist**