

*Life & Times of the*

# Whitetail



## *New in town...*

**I**T'S AN EXCITING TIME: moving out, new things to experience, new places to see, new deer to meet. That's right, deer! Every year, thousands of young deer leave their mothers to seek their fortunes in the world.

For the first year of their life, deer live on their natal range, and learn from their mothers and other deer how to survive. But by the time they are a year old, things start to change. Right around the time does are about to give birth to new young, they give the cold shoulder to their other offspring. Young does usually take this in stride. Less than 20 percent of female yearlings disperse from their natal range.

Young bucks are another story. Seventy percent or more of yearling males may disperse from their natal range. This exodus is split between the spring, when their mothers drive them off, and the fall, when bigger, more experienced bucks are winning all the scraping, rubbing and sparring contests in the area.

These social pressures drive yearling bucks as far as 100 miles from their "home town." The average is about five miles. But when a yearling buck heads off, he is driven by some calling that only he can hear. Sometimes fate is kind and he finds a nice patch of forest in which to grow old. Other times, the harsh realities of the unknown world strike. Six-lane highways, cliffs, rivers, hunters and predators often interrupt or terminate these trips.

In Pennsylvania, dispersal for one buck ended abruptly when he fell off a cliff to his death.

Where a yearling buck will stop, nobody knows. But how far they go seems to be related to forest cover. Studies, including ones conducted in Pennsylvania, show that as forest cover decreases, dispersal distance increases, making that perfect patch of woods harder to find.

So, if you see young deer showing up in strange places in May or October, they may be new in town. □

