

Life & Times of the

# Whitetail



## Congratulations, it's a deer!

**M**AY GREET'S US with the return of many joyful visions: scarlet tanagers that set the treetops ablaze, daffodils swaying in the breeze, does lumbering along with bellies as big as barrels. Well, that last one may be a joyful sight to us, but the doe might have a different opinion. After a long winter and 200 days, she is about to grace the world with a new life, or two, or maybe three — it's fawning season.

But these miracles will enter the world without baby showers, cigars or fanfare. In fact, it is just the opposite. Discretion and secrecy are top priority to any doe about to give birth. In preparation for the big event, a doe begins to avoid contact with members of her social group. If this is the first time she is giving birth, she will seek out a secluded birth site, usually outside of her core area. If she is an experienced mom, she will return to the same area every year to give birth. Labor lasts 12 or more hours. However, if disturbed, a deer may be able to stop the labor process — a definite plus for a prey species. After the little bundle(s)

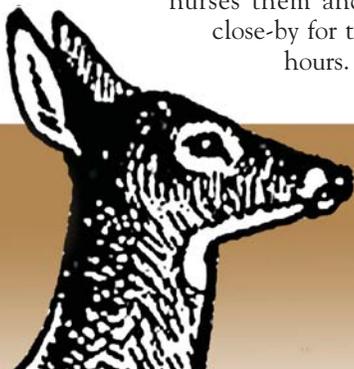
of joy arrive, mom licks them dry, nurses them and remains close-by for the first 24 hours. A doe and

her fawns share a bond that helps her to distinguish them from all the other ungulate bundles of joy being born.

Whether a doe has one fawn or more depends on age and nutrition. Most yearling does, if they conceive at all, give birth to a single fawn. Twins are common among adult does. Deer herds in balance with the area's forage have the highest reproductive rates. Overstocked ranges produce few fawns. In Pennsylvania, 80 percent of yearling does that become pregnant produce single fawns, while 74 percent of does three years old or older produce twins, and only 3 percent of adult does produce triplets.

Like any mother, a doe gets better at parenting over time. Research has shown that fawns of experienced does (four years old or older) have lower mortality rates than those of younger does.

Older does are more dominant and can stake out better areas for fawn rearing. Single parenting is a full-time job for does. Between nursing, grooming and hiding her fawns, the summer flies by and her white-spotted baby is soon all grown up. But she has little time to reminisce, May will be here soon enough and another baby will be on the way. 🦌



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