

The National Park Service



Deer and People at Fire Island National Seashore



**How You can
Protect the Health
of Deer and
People**



Fire Island deer intermingle with people in nearly every conceivable way.

Deer walk the community boardwalks, find shelter under houses, invade gardens, and even beg for food on the beaches and in the campground and marinas. Several hundred deer live within the communities of the western end of Fire Island, and at densities much higher than in more natural environments.

Deer in the west end of the island live an entirely different sort of existence. Because of development, the habitat in the western end of the island has changed dramatically to an area containing many homes and many people. Deer and people are neighbors here. With neighbors, there are sometimes conflicts.

Do not feed or attempt to touch the deer or any wildlife. Instead, enjoy wildlife from a distance, with binoculars or a camera

How this protects people: Wildlife may become aggressive when pursuing food. Deer have been known to butt and injure people.

How this protects wildlife: Deer that are not used to people live a more natural life.

Garbage and Recyclables

Keep trash cans securely lidded. Use bungee cords or use a lidded, locked trashcan storage bin. Avoid using lids with pre-cut openings. (Hungry deer occasionally get their heads stuck in the holes!) If you visit designated carry-in/carry-out areas of the national seashore, keep garbage in sealed bags or containers and bring trash off the island for proper disposal.

How this protects people: Protecting your garbage from wildlife helps you keep your yard and public walkways clean and sanitary. By disposing of trash properly, you do your part to keep the environment clean and you do not draw rodents or gulls. (Rodents are major hosts of ticks that carry Lyme disease.)

How this protects wildlife: Human garbage is not deer's natural food.

Good Neighbors Coexisting with Wildlife



National Park Service Suggestions for Keeping Wildlife Wild

Plantings Native plants do better in Fire Island's sandy environment, and require less care and watering. Some exotic species, such as bamboo, are aggressive; they spread rapidly (even through fences and under walkways) and choke off native plants.

Shrubs such as highbush blueberry, shadblow, and pitch pine are commonly found on Fire Island and are not preferred food of deer.

How this protects people: You can protect the native plants in your environment, and at the same time discourage deer from entering your garden.

How this protects wildlife: Planting native species improves the quality of the natural environment. Plus, native plants use less water, encourage birds, and are less likely to be susceptible to disease.



Architectural Features **Latticework:** To prevent unwanted animals from entering the space under your house, attach latticework to pilings skirting the base of your house. **Fencing:** Many Fire Island communities have ordinances about fencing; please check with local officials. Fences tend to have a trapping effect on deer. If a deer is on a boardwalk and needs to get off to avoid people, tall fences prevent free movement. For this reason, the National Park Service discourages the use of fencing around island homes. If your community legally allows fencing, and you feel that you must erect a fence, use the least amount of fencing possible, and leave adequate space outside and underneath the fence for safe animal passage.

Swimming pools: Cover or drain pools when you are not going to be home.

How this protects people: Some people find that latticework or fencing beautifies their homes. Items stored under the home are hidden from view. Latticework also keeps deer and other wildlife from damaging your property.

How this protects wildlife: Properly designed latticework and fencing will prevent animals from getting stuck in people's yards or under houses. If fences are constructed with space underneath, small animals can pass underneath freely. Finally, deer occasionally fall into swimming pools, cannot get out, and drown.

Pets Do not leave pet food unattended outdoors. If your pet has finished eating, or you are not in the area, please store any remaining food. Keep your dog on a maximum 6' leash at all times.

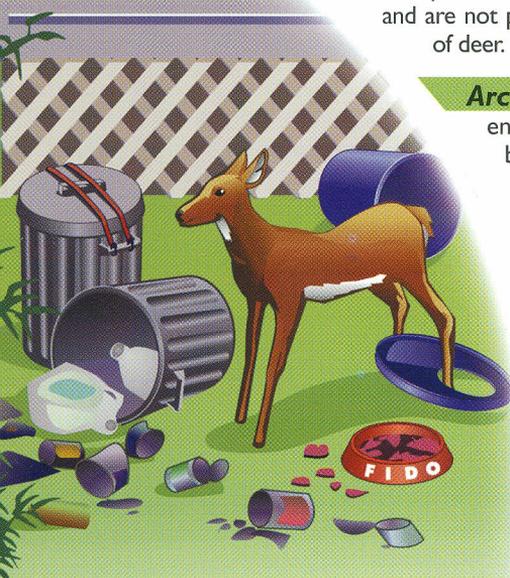
How this protects people: Large bucks have been known to defensively charge back at attacking dog, or injure people as they run away.

How this protects wildlife: Loose dogs frequently chase deer and other wildlife, possibly exposing the animals to harm as they flee at high speed.

Rodenticides Do not use rat poison outside your house. It is actually illegal to use rodenticides within Fire Island National Seashore.

How this protects people: Rodenticides are poisonous, and potentially pose risks to children and pets.

How this protects wildlife: Foraging deer or other non-targeted species may eat poison not intended for them. Be aware that poisoned animals may in turn be consumed by other animals that may then suffer illness or death. To control rodents, use safely placed mechanical traps.



The human behavior that most affects this neighborly relationship is the act of feeding deer. Most people who feed deer believe their actions help these beautiful animals, but in fact feeding creates an unnatural system that harms both deer and people.

Thanks but
NO
Thanks



Please **DON'T**
feed us



What we are doing...

The National Park Service, the Biological Resource Division of the United States Geological Survey, the Humane Society of the United States, and the communities of Fire Island have joined together in a cooperative effort to improve the quality of life for both people and wildlife on Fire Island National Seashore. Through this partnership, we are promoting public education about deer, while continuing a research project testing the effectiveness of deer immunocontraception (birth control) as a means of population control. This research involves darting approximately 200 does per year with a vaccine that prevents pregnancy. The National Park Service also has the responsibility to enforce the federal law prohibiting the feeding of wildlife.

All wildlife within the boundaries of Fire Island National Seashore is protected under the code of Federal Regulations: 36 cfr 2.2 (2).

"Feeding, touching, teasing, frightening or intentionally disturbing of wildlife nesting, breeding, or other activities" is Prohibited and Subject to Fine.

The goal of the National Park Service is to restore and preserve natural systems as much as possible- to keep wildlife wild. We hope to eliminate unnatural feeding of wildlife, reduce overabundant deer populations, minimize animal-human contacts, and prevent animals from becoming dependent upon humans. To better understand how human beings affect wildlife, take a "deer's eye view" of things commonly found in Fire Island and other suburban communities--fences, pets, garbage, and walkways. By thinking about how our belongings and behavior affect wild neighbors, we can attempt a more peaceful coexistence.

In addition, we will continue to use and research immunocontraception as a viable means of deer population control. The research involves using the technique of darting female deer with a vaccine called PZP (Porcine Zone Pellucida). The does are darted from a distance; once injected, they are incapable of becoming pregnant.

How You Can Help. You can support the program, and help promote a healthy, wild deer population, by following the guidelines in this brochure for coexisting with wildlife. You can also become a park volunteer to help with activities related to research or public education.

For more information, contact:

Superintendent, Fire Island National Seashore
120 Laurel Street, Patchogue, NY 11772
(631) 289-4810

Related Websites:

Fire Island National Seashore: www.nps.gov/fiis
U.S. Geological Survey: www.pwrc.nbs.gov
Humane Society of the U.S.: www.hsus.org/whatnew

Deer and Lyme Disease



Many people, reasonably, associate deer ticks with deer. However, the relationship between deer and Lyme disease is not clear to scientists. Lyme disease is a bacterial infection spread by the deer tick (*Ixodes scapularis*).

Fire Island, like the rest of Suffolk County, has a high incidence of Lyme-infected ticks that can pass the disease on to humans. However, deer are an incompetent host for the Lyme bacteria. A tick that takes a blood meal from a Lyme-infected deer does not obtain the bacteria from the deer. Most infected ticks get the bacteria by feeding on other animals, such as mice and birds.

Certainly the deer on Fire Island have lots of ticks on them from spring through fall, and some of these ticks carry the Lyme bacteria. Questing ticks (ticks seeking to attach to a host and feed) occur on shrubs and leaf litter, and are picked up by all animals (including deer). You should never touch any animal on Fire Island.

For more information about Lyme disease, contact the county health department or the national seashore.

Many beautiful deer live on Fire Island National Seashore

Newcomers to the island are surprised to see that deer within the communities of the western end of Fire Island seem to have no fear of human beings. Often, deer will stand and watch as groups of people approach them on the boardwalk.

Deer have a hold on our culture. To some people, the word "deer" inevitably brings up images from Walt Disney's classic film *Bambi*. To others, the word spurs memories of Thanksgiving time hunting seasons. In the last twenty years or so, many people have also come to think of deer as pests, "rats with hooves." Crowded out by human development, with no remaining natural wild predators, deer eat suburbanites' gardens and cause car accidents.

Fire Island National Seashore is a unit of the National Park System. Fire Island contains 17 communities, numerous natural areas, and abundant wildlife. The National Park Service is committed to preserving the natural features of the island.

The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

Keeping Wildlife Wild

Journey a bit further east on Fire Island, to the seven-mile stretch between Watch Hill and Smith Point: the Otis Pike Fire Island High Dune Wilderness area. Here, white-tailed deer behave differently than they do in the west. They run free and wild, much less affected by people. If you were to hike through the wilderness area, the



scrubby brush and marshland between the Great South Bay and the toe of the primary dunes, you would experience deer as wild animals. Here they are wary or afraid of people; they do not let you get within 100 feet or more.

Upon seeing you, the deer raise the white tails (for which they were named) as a signal of danger to other deer. Rather than seeing if you have any apples or cookies, they flee to the dunes for cover.

Feeding deer affects their distribution. Deer in the western part of Fire Island may never be as wild and wary as those living to the east, but if left to fend for themselves, they would spread out over a larger area to find the naturally available vegetation.

Feeding deer disrupts natural systems by changing deer behavior, local abundance, and distribution. The most significant change in deer behavior is that they lose their wariness of people. Viewing humans as food-providers, Fire Island deer walk on boardwalks, enter yards, fearlessly and aggressively begging food like pets. Sometimes, too, deer may behave aggressively toward people. The potential for deer to destroy human property or physically harm people is quite real. When people provide deer with readily available food, they need to spend less energy foraging. More energy is thus available for bearing and raising offspring; as a result, the population increases. So when people feed deer, they are actually contributing to an increase in the local abundance.



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