



# NATURE



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**THIRTEEN's *Nature* Draws Back the Curtain on  
*The Private Life of Deer*  
Wednesday, May 8, 2013 on PBS**

*The documentary reveals how whitetails make themselves right at home in the suburbs*

Whitetailed deer seem to be always around us, whether they're grazing alongside our roadways, feasting on plants in our backyards or darting into the woods, though these "neighbors" do like to protect their privacy. But if it seems as though we are seeing more whitetails these days, there's a good reason. Just a century ago, there were less than a million deer in North America. Today, there are nearly 30 million.

How these wild deer interact with one another and how they adapt to living in a suburban environment is demonstrated in ***NATURE's The Private Life of Deer***, [airing Wednesday, May 8 at 8 p.m. \(ET\) on PBS \(check local listings\)](#). After broadcast, the program will stream at [pbs.org/nature](http://pbs.org/nature).

While other species may be negatively impacted by human development, it is just the opposite for the whitetails. "We as humans have created pretty much the perfect habitat for

deer,” explains Cornell University’s Jay Boulanger. “These are areas that have a wide diversity of plants that deer can eat, versus, say, a rural forest.” Whitetail need to consume up to seven pounds of food daily and will eat practically anything, which frustrates backyard gardeners. Fences aren’t much of a deterrent as these nimble creatures can jump over eight foot obstacles.

To document the daily behaviors of their four-legged neighbors, a number of residents in Cayuga Heights, NY were given cameras by the filmmakers. These homeowners in central New York captured footage of whitetails bedded down in backyards after eating. But while it appeared they were just resting, the deer were actually digesting. As their coloring provides the perfect camouflage, they also like to hide in a thicket of branches to digest in private.

Whitetailed deer are creatures of the dawn and dusk, most active during the early morning or late afternoon when they’re feeding, a behavior known as being crepuscular. It’s during these shadowy hours when their sensitive vision works best. All these deer can usually make out is movement, making them nearly blind by human standards, though their hearing and sense of smell are quite acute. Light shining in their eyes actually overwhelms their visual cortex and locks down their brains for a short period of time, freezing them in their tracks, which explains the famed “deer in the headlights” effect.

Footage from cameras a researcher placed on wild deer showed more social interaction than was expected. The deer sniff each other when they meet to determine age, sexual status and family group, and groom each other not just to remove parasites, but also to reinforce social bonds. An especially surprising discovery was conflicts between females, the same type of antagonistic behavior displayed between males especially during breeding season.

Isolated on islands in the Florida Keys, adorable and endangered Key deer, described as whitetails in miniature, adapted to their habitat by getting smaller. They are a favorite of the locals who feed them, though their kindness also puts the deer at risk of being hit by vehicles in residential neighborhoods.

But the rarest of whitetails is notable for its color, not its size. Sightings of legendary white ghost deer – albinos – have enthralled those who have caught a glimpse. These exceptional deer truly live a private life in the northern Wisconsin woods.

**Nature** is a production of THIRTEEN in association with WNET for PBS. For **Nature**, Fred Kaufman is executive producer. **The Private Life of Deer** is a Pangolin Pictures and THIRTEEN production in co-production with Terra Mater Factual Studios in association with WNET.

**Nature** pioneered a television genre that is now widely emulated in the broadcast industry. Throughout its history, **Nature** has brought the natural world to millions of viewers. The series has been consistently among the most-watched primetime series on public television.

**Nature** has won almost 700 honors from the television industry, the international wildlife film communities, and environmental organizations including 11 Emmys, three Peabodys and the first award given to a television program by the Sierra Club. The series received two of wildlife film industry's highest honors: the Christopher Parsons Outstanding Achievement Award given by the Wildscreen Festival and the Grand Teton Award given by the Jackson Hole Wildlife Film Festival. Recently, **Nature's** executive producer, Fred Kaufman, received the Lifetime Achievement Award for Media by the 2012 International Wildlife Film Festival.

[PBS.org/nature](http://PBS.org/nature) is the award-winning web companion to **Nature** featuring streaming episodes, filmmaker interviews, teacher's guides, and more.

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#### **About WNET**

In 2013, WNET is celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of THIRTEEN, New York's flagship public media provider. As the parent company of [THIRTEEN](#) and [WLIW21](#) and operator of [NJTV](#), WNET brings quality arts, education and public affairs programming to over 5 million viewers each week. WNET produces and presents such acclaimed PBS series as [Nature](#), [Great Performances](#), [American Masters](#), [Need to Know](#), [Charlie Rose](#) and a range of documentaries, children's programs, and local news and cultural offerings available on air and online. Pioneers in educational programming, WNET has created such groundbreaking series as [Get the Math](#), [Oh Noah!](#) and [Cyberchase](#) and provides tools for educators that bring compelling content to life in the classroom and at home. WNET highlights the tri-state's unique culture and diverse communities through [NYC-ARTS](#), [Reel 13](#), [NJ Today](#) and [MetroFocus](#), the multi-platform news magazine focusing on the New York region. WNET is also a leader in connecting with viewers on emerging platforms, including the [THIRTEEN Explore iPad App](#) where users can stream PBS content for free.