

Hurricanes, disease and poaching reduced the Key deer population to less than eighty by 1949. Prior to the New World Screwworm epidemic and Hurricane Irma in 2017, there were about 1, 000 Key deer. On **September 30, 2016**, New World Screwworm was confirmed in the Key deer population on Big Pine Key. International, federal, state and local authorities worked with the Refuge and local volunteers to eradicate the Screwworm from the Lower Keys. Biologists estimated 135 (14%) Key deer died due to the disease. On **September 10, 2017**, Category 4 Hurricane Irma made landfall in the Lower Florida Keys causing 135 mph winds and eight feet of flooding on Big Pine Key and No Name Keys. At least 151 (16%) additional Key deer deaths occurred due to drowning, starvation, dehydration, and injury.

Needs of the Key Deer: Because of traditional year-round water sources, diverse plants, and large area, Big Pine Key and No Name Key provide home to 75% of the total Key deer population. Since water sources often dry up on many nearby islands, the Key deer's future is closely linked to land-use practices on Big Pine Key.

Space and habitat requirements go beyond just food and water, since the Key deer use different habitats daily as a part of their normal behavior. In addition, there are two periods each year of extensive movement and dispersal. One is the breeding season (September - December) and the other peaks in April and May when family units break up and pregnant does prepare for fawning. To discourage interbreeding and to enhance genetic variability, it is essential that opportunities for movement and dispersal are available, both on and off Big Pine Key. The historic range of the Key deer extended from Marathon to Key West. Habitat loss, sea level rise and de-listing by USFWS are all threats to the survival of the Key deer.



Human impact: Key deer have very few natural predators, but unfortunately, we humans fill that role all too well. Negative factors include:

- Habitat loss from development
- Road kills by vehicles
- Supplemental feeding by some humans which tame the deer, leading to congregations near roads and in residential areas, malnutrition and diseases
- Killings and mailings by free-roaming dogs
- Poaching and wanton killing

Realizing the negative impact of these factors, local land national wildlife organizations, working with state and federal agencies, have historically taken steps to try to preserve and protect the Key deer.

In 1967 Key deer were listed as an Endangered Species. Since 2017, the USFWS has been considering reducing the level of federal protection by de-listing or down-listing of the Key deer. Stringent rules and hard science have been overlooked thus far. Legal battles have ensured. Thanks to the support of the Sierra Club, the Center for Biological Diversity, and others, no formal legal action has yet been taken.

Survival of the Key deer in the wild is dependent upon preservation of sufficient habitat to ensure a viable population. Historically, land was purchased by governmental agencies and private conservation groups from willing sellers, hence about 70% of Key deer habitat is currently in public ownership. The need to protect the remaining upland habitat is exacerbated by the predicted sea level rise in the Florida Keys. By the year 2100, the Key deer's upland habitat will be reduced by about 11%. Damage by Hurricane Irma's flooding to the watering holes on Big Pine Key and No Name Key was extensive and is now also a threat to the long-term survival of the Key deer.

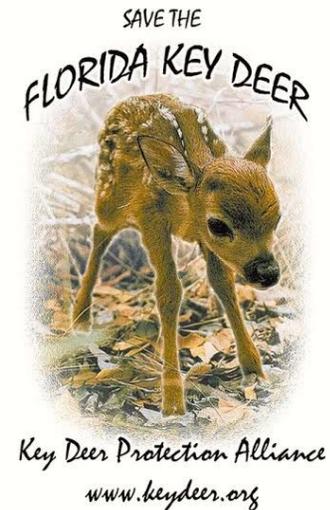
How you can help:

- Obey posted speed limits
- Do not feed the deer
- Keep dogs leashed or confined
- Urge elected officials and agencies to continue supporting current laws protecting the Key deer
- Volunteer at the National Key Deer Refuge and with environmental groups
- Remove exotic pest plants and plant native trees and shrubs
- Discourage development in critical greenbelt corridors



*Prepared by the Key Deer Protection Alliance
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nonprofit organization dedicated
to the protection of the Key deer.
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Printed: 2022



What are the Key deer? They are the smallest of all North American deer (*Odocoileus Virginianus clavier*), a subspecies of the white-tailed deer, found only on few islands of the lower Florida Keys. No bigger than a large dog, and adult doe stands about 24" at the shoulder, weighing about 60 pounds. Bucks are slightly taller and weigh about 80 pounds. At birth fawns weigh only two to five pounds.

Stranded by a rising sea level about 4,000 years ago, they evolved in a subtropical setting with vegetation of West India origin. Evolution produced a distinct, diminutive subspecies, well adapted to its island home.