



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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FEW SURVIVORS OF SMALL, UNIQUE DEER LIVE IN FLORIDA KEYS

A small nucleus of the most unique deer in the United States is today hanging on to a precarious existence in a group of subtropical keys between Key West and the mainland of Florida, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service reports. Big Pine Key, No-Name Key and others in the vicinity comprise the present range of the diminutive key deer.

Close to extinction, 30 or 40 of the small deer -- all that remain of a once large population -- show unusual ruggedness and tenacity of life as they swim from island to island in search of fresh water and continuously elude year-round illegal hunters, who burn off the keys to concentrate the deer and run them to exhaustion with dogs.

The scattered but indignant human residents of the few keys which constitute the remaining habitat of the attractive little deer attribute most of the frequent fires on their keys to illegal hunters from the mainland, Key West and even from Cuba, who come to the islands to engage in the "sport". Many of the illegal hunters, it is reported, also put dogs ashore on the keys, and then wait in boats for the exhausted deer to enter the water in an effort to escape.

The key deer appear to be a diminutive form of the well known white-tailed deer -- which also occupy some of the keys. Many naturalists, however, believe the key deer to be a unique species. The average adult key deer measures about 38 inches from nose to tail, 26 to 29 inches tall, and weighs about 50 pounds.

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