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Urban Deer Count Report

FEBRUARY 2026

Background & Purpose

Over the years, urban deer have become a topic of discussion due to safety concerns with people, pets, and vehicles, their impacts to vegetation and the economic implications in managing their populations. The Town conducts annual deer counts to monitor their populations and demographics, which can assist the Town in the development and implementation of its Urban Deer Action Plan.

Methods

2015 to 2019

The first deer count in Okotoks was taken in 2015, and although no deer counts were taken in 2016 or 2017, they have been conducted annually since 2018. Different approaches were used initially to count the deer each year, including variations of the number of volunteers and census areas. In 2015, the Town utilized approximately 100 volunteers to walk the census areas identified in Town within a one-hour period on September 15 from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. and record sightings of does, bucks, and fawns.

In 2018, a new method was sought for the count because of the challenge to source large volunteer groups. Time of day and year remained consistent to support comparisons with the previous count data and to attract public participation. A free mobile app, NatureLynx, was utilized to record data online and have geotags with each recorded siting in 2018 and 2019. The Town invited the general public to engage and participate in the counts with Parks staff, and a communications plan was developed to promote deer count participation and a citizen survey through a variety of media. The selected one-hour count periods were Friday, September 14 from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. and Sunday, September 16 from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. and the two counts were averaged.

2020 to 2026

The method was refined slightly in 2020 by defining driving routes throughout the town, rather than walking in designated areas, allowing more ground to be covered with fewer people. Since 2020, the count has been, and will continue to be, conducted in a similar manner, taking place at dawn in February on a consistent date and time. This timing improves visibility, as male deer still have antlers, snow cover reduces foliage, and deer are more active at this time of day. It also helps ensure consistency when comparing results from previous counts. Counts conducted in September were typically lower due to the timing.

Deer are counted within the town's urban footprint, as well as along the edge of this footprint in adjacent agricultural areas. There is some potential for double counting with this method; however, the count is limited to one hour to reduce this risk, as deer are more likely to move over longer periods. Any potential double counting is identified by reviewing the location and timing of sightings in areas where driving and pathway routes overlap, and the total count is adjusted to remove duplicate reports. In 2026, four duplicate sightings were identified.

A total of 26 participants, including Town staff, Council members and volunteers, were assigned to 13 driving routes to maximize coverage and support consistent data collection.

NOTE: This deer count attempts to follow scientific methods but it is not statistically supported.

2026 Deer Count Results

The 2026 Annual Deer count took place on February 19, 2026. The total count was 120 deer, which is the lowest number counted since 2022.

120

Deer counted. 35 less deer were counted than in 2025, where the final # was **155.**

72

72 does were counted, compared to 33 fawns and 15 bucks.

Mule Deer was the only species identified.

Chart A: 2026 Ratio of Does, Dawns & Bucks

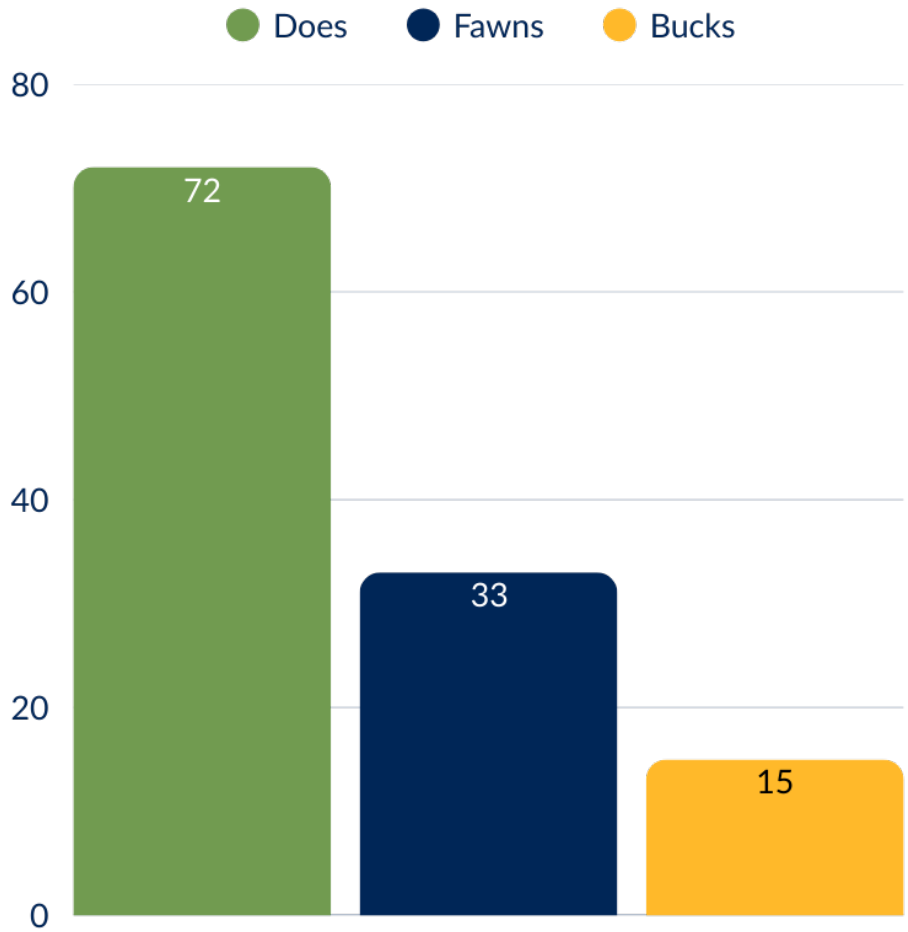
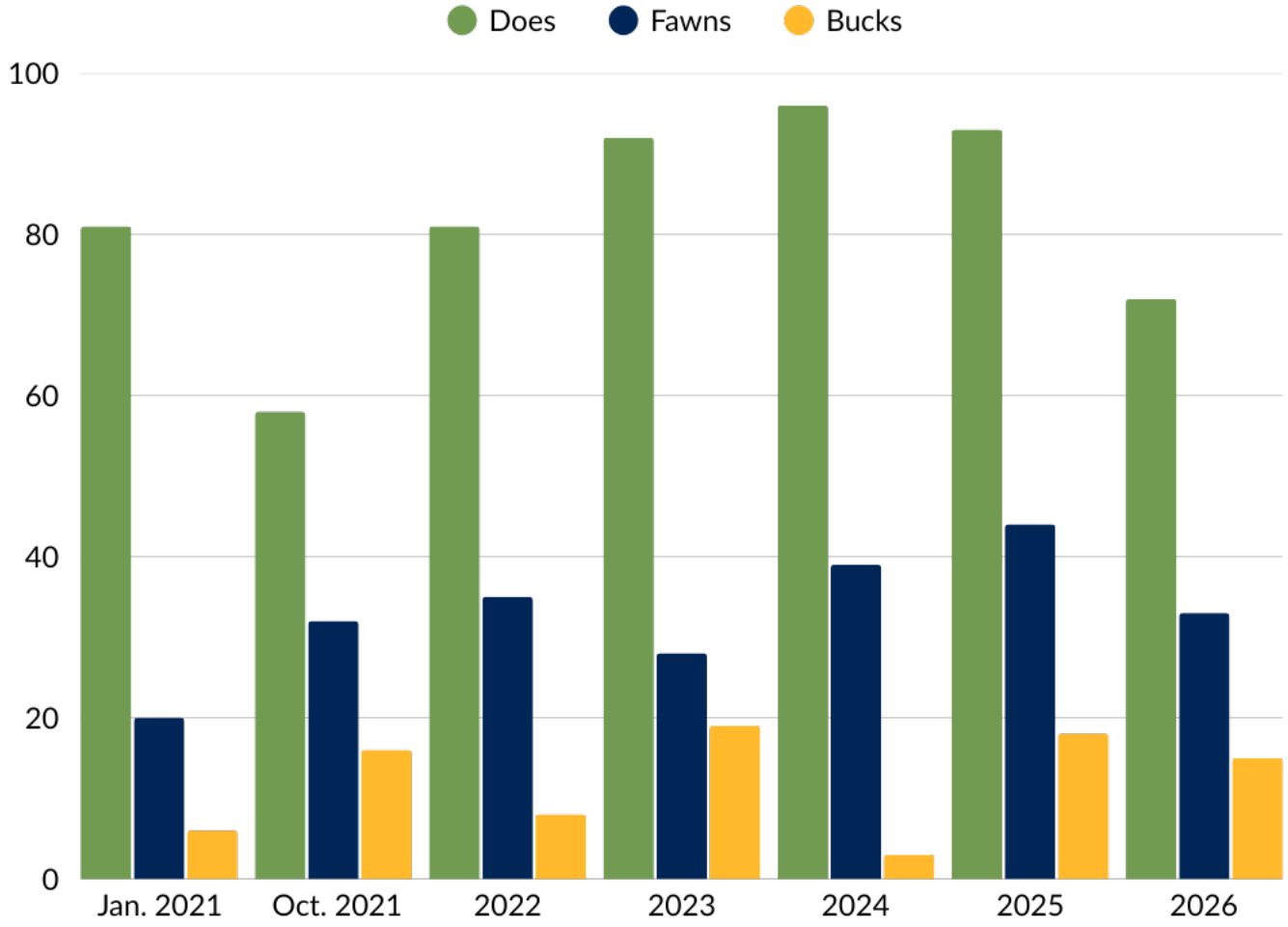
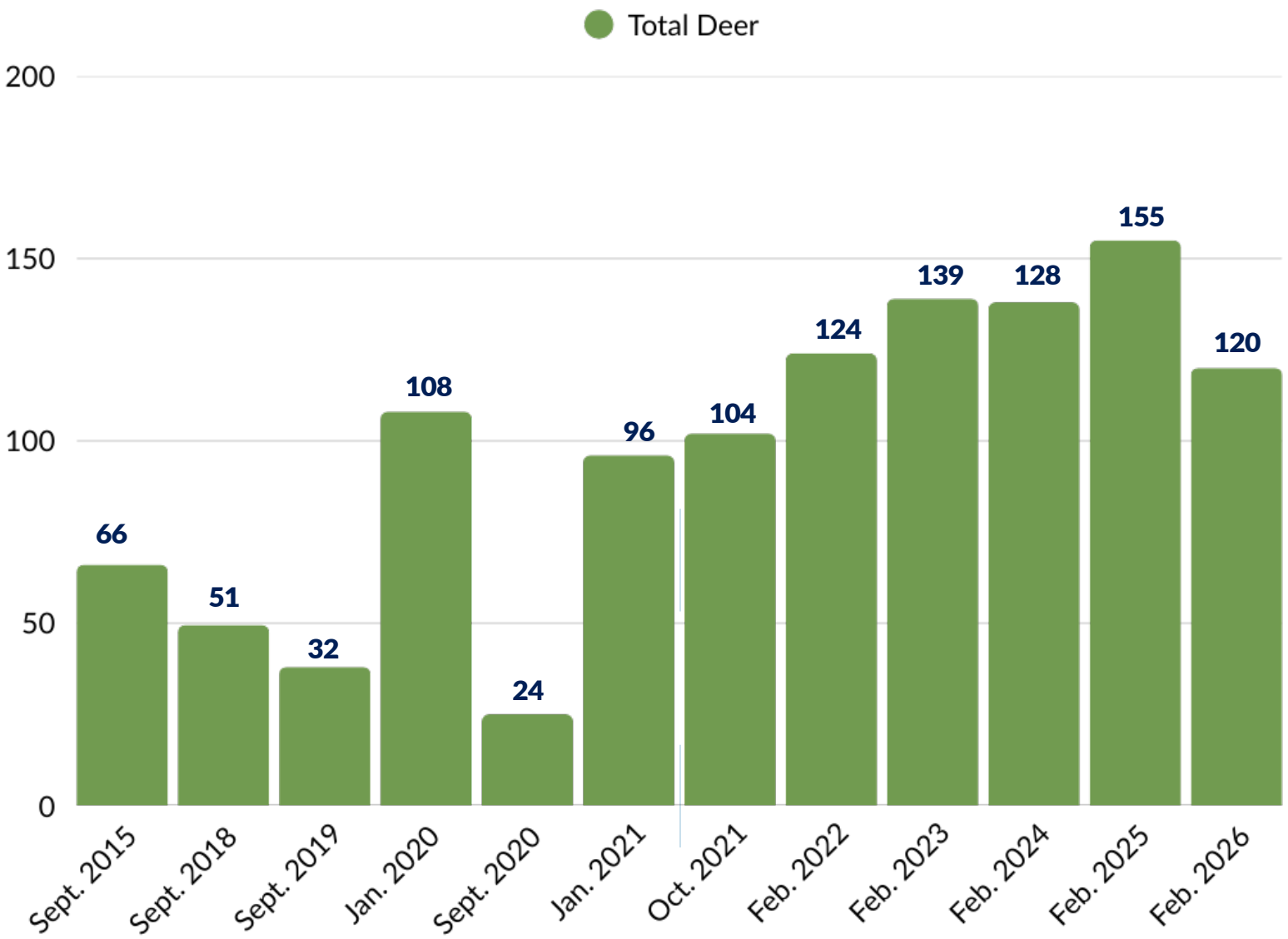


Chart B: Total Number of Does, Fawns & Bucks by Year



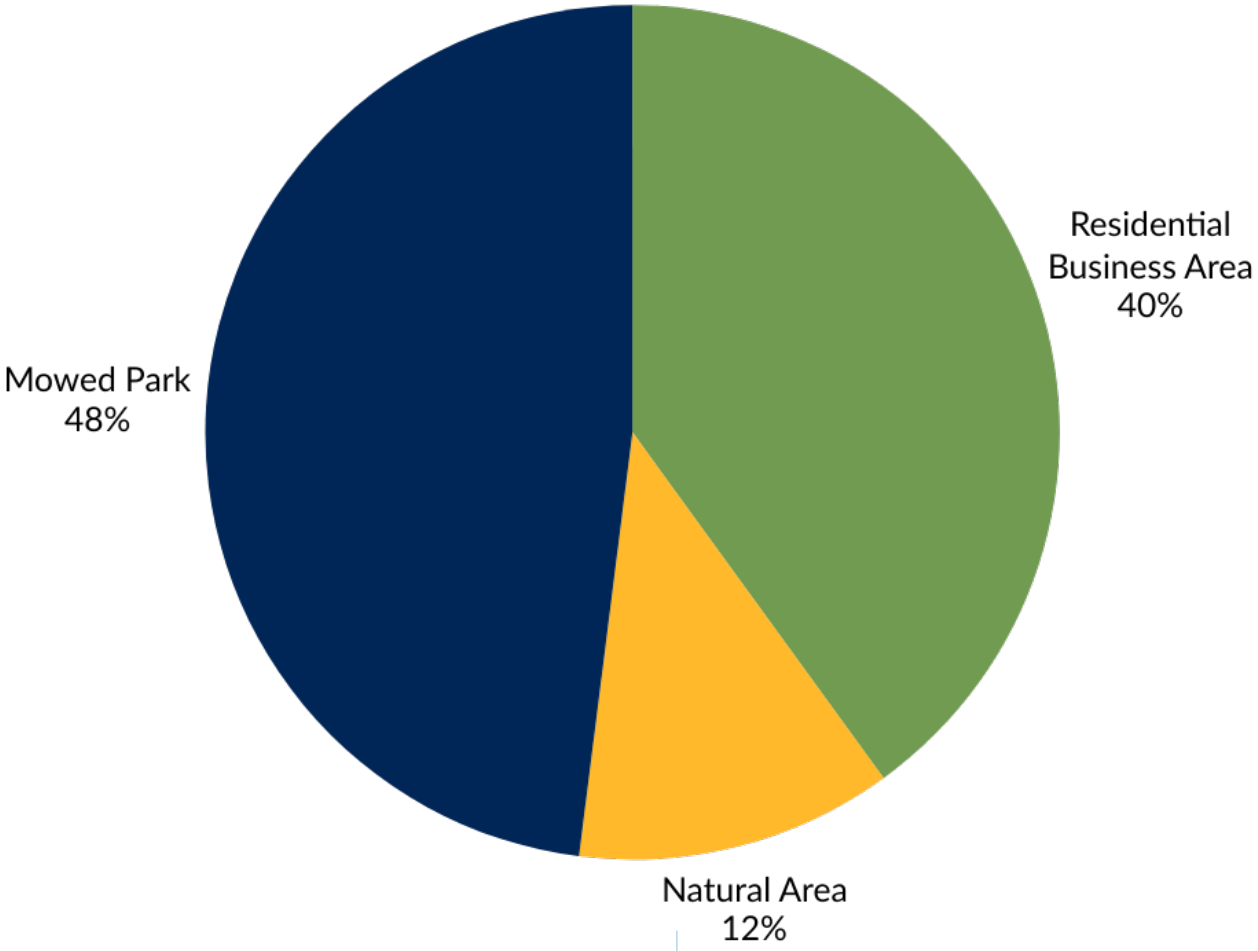
Ratio of Does, Fawns & Bucks : The ratio of does to fawns and bucks (Chart A) normally fluctuates between counts. However, results show a that the ratio from 2025 (60% does, 28% fawns and 13% bucks) is essentially the same as 2026. The total numbers of does, fawns and bucks by year is summarized in Chart B.

Chart C: Previous & Current Year's Deer Counts Results



Population Descrease: The total number of deer counted is 35 less than 2025 (CHART C). There seems to be a noticeable decrease in the deer population from recent years; however, it is too soon to say the population appears to be decreasing unless we are consistently counting less deer for a minimum three-year period. It is expected that there will be a percentage of deer that are not counted because it is difficult to cover every area of town within a 1-hour period. Therefore, some deer go unseen. Temperature may have been a factor in the lower number of deer counted. It was -28 C the day of the count so many deer were likely bedded down longer than they normally would have if the weather was milder. Feedback from our volunteers seem to support this as people returned saying that most of the deer counted in 2026 were bedded down.

Chart D: 2026 Deer Sighting Locations



Residential areas and manicured parks were the major areas deer were located in the 2026 count (CHART D). Results were similar in recent years. Natural areas were the third highest area occupied. More deer in residential areas and parks during dawn may suggest these areas are a good food source, as this is when deer tend to feed more actively. This data varies from previous year's fall counts, where the majority of deer were sited in the natural areas. This could reflect the time-of-day previous counts were done. Deer may be more likely to be bedded down in natural areas during the day, which is when our fall counts took place in previous years.

The distribution of sighting in the town show quite a large area in the Okotoks business park void of deer sightings. Sheep River and Westridge show the heaviest numbers, which may be due to the proximity of agricultural and acreage land immediately west of town limits.

Discussions & Recomendations

As discussed by the Urban Deer Task Force members who have expertise in wildlife, deer are more active at dawn and dusk; therefore, it was decided that a count at these times would be beneficial and future counts should replicate this for data comparability. Consider the following recommendations for future counts to help establish deer population data that is comparable.

Complete a winter count annually in February for comparisons from previous years.

Complete the counts at dawn when deer are more active and staff are available during normal working hours.

13 routes are used to try and cover the most ground.

Since 2020, we have been conducting counts in the winter to try and get a better representation of the population within town limits. Total deer count numbers showed that they were relatively the same for a total count, and the differences do not seem significant. Therefore, according to our methods, deer numbers appear to be reasonably stable and not showing a significant increase or decrease.

Distribution Map of Sitings