

The British Deer Society



As the leading wild deer organisation in the UK, the British Deer Society works to enable the deer of the United Kingdom to exist and flourish in today's environment ensuring their future is secure for generations to come.

The British Deer Society:

- Runs courses and provides training to ensure that, whatever your interest in deer, you will receive the best quality training to develop your individual skills and knowledge.
- Undertakes and funds research projects ensuring that deer, their issues and their threats are scientifically explored and understood.
- Provides a team of technical experts that work to prime and influence governmental and public bodies to ensure that any legislation or regulation is practical and sensible and has deer welfare as its primary objective.
- Works to ensure that there is a sustainable, healthy population of deer in the UK that can exist in harmony with the environment and the people that live there, look after it, or visit it.

Membership

Over 6,000 members support our charitable remit to promote the welfare of British deer. It's easy to join and as a member you will also receive a copy of our journal, *Deer*, four times a year, as well as membership of a local branch with its social activities, range days, talks and demonstrations.

Join us online at www.bds.org.uk



Shop

You'll find a wide range of books, DVDs, and stalking essentials in our online shop as well as BDS clothing, seasonal gifts and cards.

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British Deer Society – the deer experts

There are six species of deer living freely in the British countryside. Each species has specific characteristics which make it well-suited for the variety of habitats found across the country and highly adaptable to environmental changes. A mixture of native and introduced species, they make a valuable contribution to Britain's biodiversity and are some of our most engaging British mammals.

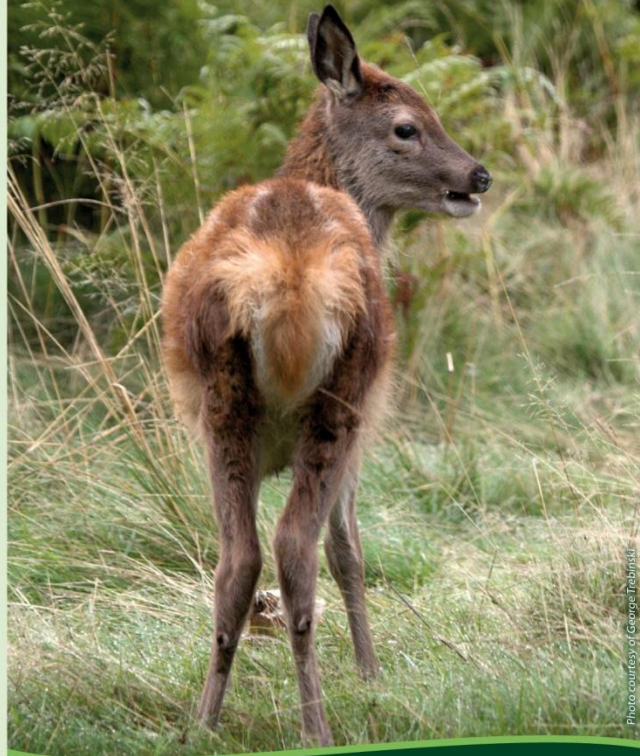


Photo courtesy of George Trebinski



Wild Deer of the UK

IDENTIFYING Red Deer *Cervus elaphus*



Photo courtesy of George Trebinski



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What you will see



Size

Red deer are Britain's largest land mammal. When fully grown males (stags) weigh between 90 to 190kg and stand at around 1.07 to 1.37m tall at the shoulder. Females (hinds) weigh 63 to 120kg and stand up to 1.07 – 1.22m at the shoulder. By comparison an average adult man in Britain stands at 1.77m high and weighs 79kg. Deer living in open upland habitats tend to be smaller than those living in more wooded lowland areas.

Coat

Red deer are a distinctive rusty red colour in summer turning to a brown winter coat. Adults are not spotted.

Rear

Red deer have a short tail and a pale rump patch with no particular distinguishing features.

Head

Red deer have a large head with wide spaced brown eyes. The stags' antlers are the species most distinguishing feature. They are highly branched and the branches increase with age with multiple points on each antler. The angle of the forward point from the main antler beam is about 90° (unlike the Sika). Antlers are cast during March/April and begin to regrow to be fully formed and clear of velvet in August/September.

What you'll hear



Vocalisation

The Red deer's most distinguishing call is made during the breeding season or 'rut' when stags roar and grunt loudly. Hinds bark when alarmed and communicate with their offspring with low moaning noises. Young use bleating noises and make a high-pitched squeal when they are alarmed.

Look out for



Tracks and Signs

Red deer hoof prints or 'slots' are unmistakably large and can be confused with sheep or goat marks.

Slots may be distorted with the gait of the animal and/or soft ground. A stag's front hoof may measure 8-9 cm in length.



Lifestyle



Feeding

Red deer are grazers like Fallow deer. They prefer grasses and dwarf shrubs associated with moorland such as heather but will eat woody plants and young shoots when food is scarce.

Social organisation

Red deer live in single sex groups in open habitats where there is protection in numbers and large herds can form. In more wooded areas the deer tend to be more solitary or mix with other mothers and calves; stags remain solitary except during the breeding season. Red deer are active throughout the day and night but are most likely to be active at dawn and dusk. They can often be seen 'lying up' or resting whilst digesting their food in the same way as cows and sheep. In Scotland deer use the open habitats of the hills during the day; descending to wooded areas at night.

Breeding

Stags take two years to be sexually mature but are unlikely to be successful at mating until they are at least five years old. Hinds usually produce their first single calf when they are two to four years old, following an eight month gestation period. They give birth between mid-March and mid-July. In harsher habitats such as on open hillsides, reproduction may only occur every other year.

The breeding season is in the autumn, from the end of September through to November. Hinds have home ranges and stags return to these to display and impress them. Stags compete with each other via an elaborate series of dominance displays involving posturing, vocalizations, and fighting. Serious injury and fatalities are possible with the most dominant stag securing exclusive mating rights to all the hinds in his harem.

Humans and Deer

Red deer management (stalking) is an important commercial business as well as ensuring that the populations remain in balance with their environment and remain healthy. In high densities Red deer can cause damage to forestry and agricultural crops. However they also produce good venison and they are farmed specifically for their meat in some places. Red deer are also kept as ornamental animals and are important in the maintenance of historic parkland landscapes.

Where you'll find them



Origins

There are indigenous populations of Red deer in Scotland, the Lake District and Exmoor. The species migrated to Britain from mainland Europe some 11,000 years ago and have been used as a source of food ever since.

Population & Distribution

Populations of wild Red deer retracted when our ancestors began turning woodland areas into fields to grow crops. But Red deer were also kept in deer parks and Royal forests where they were used for sport. The Victorians reintroduced additional Red deer, varying their gene pool by improving the stock with related deer species.

Red deer are now widely distributed throughout the British Isles with strongholds in the Scottish Highlands, Lake District, the New Forest, the south west and the east of England.



Distribution of Red deer in the UK

Habitat

Red deer are associated with a range of habitats from the iconic open hillside of the Highlands in Scotland to woodlands and forests. They also favour moorland such as on Exmoor or in the New Forest and even thrive in parkland.

