

Advice for watching deer in parks

Watching deer exhibit natural behaviour is a wonderful and rewarding experience. Autumn is the rutting season for many deer species, and you may be considering visiting a local park to see the action for yourself. Before you do, take a moment to consider the safety of yourself and everyone with you.

Deer are wild animals and those that live in parks are no exceptions. Unlike truly wild deer, which will avoid humans wherever possible, park deer are used to human presence and will tolerate it, so it may be tempting to get too close in search of a photograph or a special encounter.

Please don't!

Rutting stags in particular are often pumped up with testosterone, and you could be putting yourself at risk. There have been a number of cases where visitors to parks have suffered injuries which might have been avoided, so here are some simple suggestions to help you enjoy watching the deer without interfering with the rut or placing yourself in potential danger:

- Keep your distance! Do not approach any deer to within closer than 50m, and stay at least 100m from rutting deer.
- Be inconspicuous – use binoculars for close up viewing.
- Pay special attention to any signs put up by the park authorities and follow their advice.
- If there are a large number of people present, do not surround the deer as it may make them nervous. Always leave them an open line of retreat if they need it.
- Take special care not to intrude on rutting male deer (particularly red stags or fallow bucks) which may be fighting, roaring, displaying or otherwise defending their hinds. They may see you as another intruder who needs to be repelled.
- If you have a dog, it is best to leave it at home when the park deer are rutting or at times when recently born calves may be present, usually during the spring and early summer. If you have your dog with you, keep it on a lead and under close control.
- In the unlikely event that you are threatened or attacked, try to put a barrier such a vehicle or substantial tree between yourself and the deer. If you can, climb a tree to get out of reach. If you have a dog with you, let it run free – it will be more capable of escaping when unrestrained, and may actually be the reason that the deer has become agitated in the first place.
- If a deer starts walking parallel to you and glancing at you out of the corner of its eye (see picture), it is a sign that it may be considering you as a threat - **move away immediately**.
- If you find a deer advancing towards you or acting in a threatening manner, **do not shout or wave at it**. Back off slowly if possible; the deer may be satisfied that you have left its personal zone. Do not run, though, as this may trigger the animal into chasing you. Do not roll into a ball where you are; this may increase the risk of attack.

Under normal circumstances all deer will try to avoid human proximity. Follow these simple guidelines and you will be able to enjoy watching them in safety.