

Support British deer with BDS

The British Deer Society (BDS) invites you to join our mission, guided by our commitment to ethics/welfare, science/research, and education/training. Together, we strive to ensure the well-being and fair treatment of British deer.

Who we are:

As a community of deer enthusiasts, the BDS is united in our mission to safeguard the welfare of deer, influencing policies and practices with decades of expertise and modern advancements in science and technology.

What we do:

Through research, education, and advocacy, we address critical issues like deer welfare, environmental impact, and sustainable deer management.

Why support us:

Support the BDS to ensure a UK where deer thrive in harmony with their environment. Your contribution will fund research that improves our understanding of deer in a changing world, provide education so more people can appreciate these amazing creatures, and support welfare initiatives to keep them thriving.

How to support us:

- **Membership:** Join our community and add your voice, speaking up for deer and staying informed with our quarterly magazine as well as regular news and updates from the Society, and connecting with fellow deer enthusiasts in your area.
- **Donations:** Every donation gift makes a significant impact on our efforts to speak up for deer.
- **Spread the word:** Follow us on social media @BritishDeerSociety and be an advocate for deer welfare and responsible deer management.

Join the BDS in preserving British deer and their habitats. Embrace our commitment – where passion meets purpose, and wildlife flourishes.



Discover Britain's diverse deer

Six deer species freely roam the British countryside, thriving in diverse habitats. Native and introduced, these adaptable creatures contribute significantly to Britain's biodiversity, embodying the essence of our captivating natural heritage.



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Visit www.bds.org.uk or scan the code to learn more about red deer.

WILD DEER OF THE UK

Identifying RED DEER *Cervus elaphus*



the british deer society Together for Deer

www.bds.org.uk

What to look for

Size

Red deer are Britain's largest land mammal. When fully grown males (stags) can weigh between 90 and 250kg and stand at around 1.07 to 1.37m tall at the shoulder. Females (hinds) weigh 63 to 120kg and stand up to 1.00 – 1.22m at the shoulder.

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 dark brown or grey 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 between late March and May and begin to regrow to be fully formed and clear of velvet by late August/September.

Listen out for

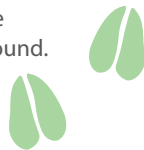
Vocalisation

The red deer's most distinctive calls are made during the breeding season or 'rut' when stags roar and grunt loudly. Both sexes bark when alarmed, and hinds communicate with their offspring with low whickering noises. Young make bleating sounds and utter a high-pitched squeal when they are alarmed.

Look out for

Tracks and signs

Red deer hoof prints or 'slots' are unmistakably large but might be confused with sheep or goat prints. 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 primarily 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 tend to live in single sex groups. In open habitats, where higher numbers can offer better protection, large herds can form. In more wooded areas the deer tend to be more solitary or mix with other mothers and calves; stags may remain solitary except during the breeding season. Red deer are active throughout the day and night but are usually more so at dawn and dusk.

They can often be seen 'lying up' or resting whilst ruminating 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 become sexually mature but under normal circumstances 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 usually give birth between late May and 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, vocalisations, and fighting. Serious injury and fatalities are possible, with the most dominant stag rounding up and defending a number of hinds to secure exclusive mating rights.

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 provide excellent venison and 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 to find them

Origins

There are indigenous populations of red deer in many parts of the UK. The species migrated to Britain from mainland Europe some 11,000 years ago and have been used as a source of food by humans ever since.

Population & distribution

Populations of wild red deer retracted when our ancestors began turning woodland areas into fields to grow crops. Red deer were also kept in deer parks and Royal forests, however, where they provided both sport and food. The Victorians reintroduced additional red deer, adding to the gene pool in places by importing new bloodlines and related deer species for breeding purposes. Red deer are now widely distributed throughout the British Isles with particular strongholds in the Scottish Highlands, the Lake District, the New Forest, and the east and southwest of England.

Habitat

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

Seasonal activity

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Antlers cast												
Antlers re-growing												
Winter coat												
Summer coat												
Rut												
Calf born												



Photo: Tim Brayford