

# Landscape and Nature for All



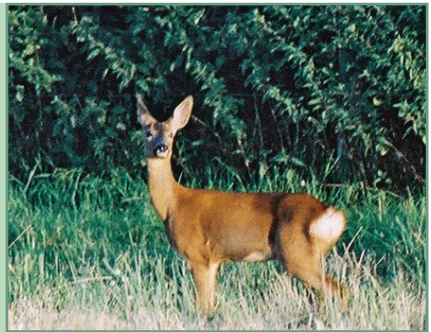
## Wild Deer in the Kent Downs AONB

### Deer Species

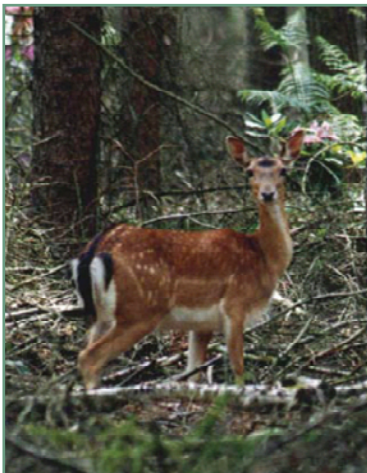
Although there are six main species of deer in the UK, apart from escapes from parks, Kent has been free of wild deer until comparatively recently. That is changing quickly now and both Fallow deer and Roe deer are spreading East. Muntjac deer are seen occasionally and have almost certainly been deliberately released. There are occasional sightings of both Sika and Red deer.

**Roe deer** are native to mainland Britain but became extinct in the south of England by the 17th century. Re-introductions in the 19th century have allowed them to re-colonise, with Kent at the extreme eastern edge of their range in the South.

Roe deer are relatively small deer, around 75cm at the shoulder and weighing 18-36kg. They are a territorial species, usually seen in small numbers and are considered to be relatively straightforward to manage.



Roe Deer



Fallow Deer

**Fallow deer** are an introduced species, probably by the Romans, but certainly by the Normans. They were once restricted largely to deer parks but many escapes have led to wild populations, some of which have been in Kent. The Fallow population in West and East Sussex is expanding and it is likely that there will soon be a continuous population along the South Downs across the Weald, into the Kent Downs, and eventually to the Kent coast.

Fallow are larger than Roe, standing 70-90cm at the shoulder and weighing 40-90kg. Fallow are a herding species which may roam over large areas. They are sometimes seen in very large groups and managing their numbers can sometimes be difficult.

## Why manage deer?

In reasonable numbers deer are important and positive element of our countryside. It is one of the highlights of a visit to the countryside to catch a glimpse of these shy creatures.

But deer are prolific breeders. In the South of England, most adult females will produce young every year for most of their lifetime. Roe deer often produce twins and may breed for 8 or more years, Fallow have a single fawn over a breeding life of perhaps 12 or more years. Many deer populations will increase in number by 20-30 percent per year and population density can easily get to the point where the health of individual deer is affected and damage to human interests become intolerable.

### There are a number of ways in which deer at high density can have negative impacts:

- damage to forestry, agriculture and other crops.
- negative impacts on the biodiversity of natural habitats, especially woodlands and the birds and butterflies associated with them.
- deer vehicle collisions (DVCs) involving injured deer and people.
- lots of visible deer encourage poaching, which may involve inhumane methods of killing and/or illegal sale of poor quality venison.
- the risk of disease being transmitted to and from domestic stock and to humans.
- the risk that the deer themselves may not reach their best condition or be more prone to disease.



Road Traffic Accident

It is preferable therefore, that deer numbers are controlled in such a way that deer herd health and welfare is assured, and that their impacts are acceptable to as many people as possible. Currently the only effective way that this can be done is by culling with a rifle.

Venison, one of the products of culling, is a natural lean meat that is increasingly in demand.



High Deer numbers - loss of woodland structure



Low Deer numbers - dense woodland structure

## Achieving a cull

Cull targets should be set annually. The cull should be sufficient to meet landowners objectives with regard to deer impacts, it might also take into account the desired productivity of the deer herd from the point of view of venison or sporting interests.

If deer numbers are too high a “reduction cull” will be required to bring them down to a suitable level, a “maintenance” cull will be required thereafter. The key to controlling deer numbers is to cull sufficient female deer, culling male deer often has very little effect on overall population numbers.

A conscientious stalker will accept their responsibility to keep deer numbers at reasonable levels. These days there is extensive training available to deer stalkers as well as theory and practical qualifications. Well trained and experienced deer stalkers learn how to safely and humanely, identify and cull deer, and deal hygienically with the carcass within strict guidelines.

The Deer Initiative Best practice guides contain advice on cull planning and how landowners can set up a contract with stalkers.

## Deer and the Kent Downs

Many of the woodlands and other habitats in the Kent downs have been free of the effects of the grazing and browsing of deer for many hundreds of years. This has led to a range of habitats which differ from many parts of the country. It seems inevitable that deer will continue to colonise Kent and that if these habitats are not to be changed markedly as a result, the deer will need to be carefully managed. There is a unique opportunity in Kent to keep deer numbers below the very high levels that they have reached in so many other parts of the country and to prevent significant, long term damage.



Muntjac Deer



Coppice stool browsed by deer

## Further information on deer

[www.thedeerinitiative.co.uk](http://www.thedeerinitiative.co.uk): Tel 0870 774 3677

Advice on deer management and Deer Best Practice guides

[www.forestry.gov.uk](http://www.forestry.gov.uk): Tel 01673 842644

Grant aid for deer management within the EWGS grant schemes

[www.english-nature.org.uk](http://www.english-nature.org.uk): Tel 01531 638500

Wildlife Regulations and Licensing, designated sites and Stewardship schemes

[www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk): Tel 08459 33 55 77

Disease and wider rural advice

[www.deercollisions.co.uk](http://www.deercollisions.co.uk): Tel 01842 890798

Information on deer traffic collisions

[www.bds.org.uk](http://www.bds.org.uk): Tel 01425 655434

Deer welfare and advice

[www.basc.org.uk](http://www.basc.org.uk): Tel 01889 565050

Advice on all aspects of shooting sports

The Deer Initiative

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Wrexham

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[www.woodlandadvice.org.uk](http://www.woodlandadvice.org.uk)