



SCOTTISH
VENISON



Red Deer
(*Cervus elaphus*)

Key facts

Photo: Laurie Campbell

Key Red Deer Facts

Males are called stags / **Females** are called hinds

Adult Size

Stags: 107-137cm at shoulder.

Hinds: 107-122cm at shoulder.

Adult weight

Stags: 90-190kg

Hinds: 63-120kg

Status

Native to Britain.

Colour

Summer coat is reddish brown to brown, winter coat is brown to grey. No spots are present in adult coat.

Sounds

Stags roar and grunt during the rut. Hinds bark when alarmed and moo when searching for their young. Calves emit a high-pitched squeal when alarmed and may bleat to their mother.

Antlers

Only found on stags, a red deer's antlers are highly branched, and the number of branches increases with age - up to 16 points in wild animals.

Lifespan

Up to 18 years.

Habitat

They naturally occur in woodlands and forests but can adapt and are more frequently seen on the open moor and hills of upland Scotland.

Food and feed

Grazers of grasses, and dwarf shrubs eg heather and bilberry. Tree shoots are taken when other food is limited eg during winter.

Rut

The rut (the breeding season) begins at the end of September through to November. Stags move into the hind home range areas and compete with each other to mate with them. They try to intimidate each other with noisy grunting and roaring, walking alongside their rivals and also fighting each other.

Serious injury and death can result but fighting only occurs between stags of similar size that cannot assess dominance by any of the other means. The dominant stag then ensures exclusive mating with the hinds.

Gestation

8 months.

Young

In woodland populations hinds over a year old will give birth to a single calf between mid-May to mid-July each year. Hinds that live on the hills may not give birth until they reach 3 years old and then give birth only once every 2 or 3 years.

Number of young

Single calves, but exceptionally twins.

Social groups

In woodlands, red deer are largely solitary or occur as mother and calf groups. On open ground, larger, single sex groups assemble, only mixing during the rut and in the Highlands of Scotland large groups may persist for most of the year.

More natural history

Red deer are Britain's largest land-mammal – the deer that live on the open hill tend to be slightly smaller than those that live in woods and forests. They are widely distributed in Scotland living in woods, forest and plantations and on moors and hills.

Red deer migrated into Britain from Europe about 11,000 years ago. They were used extensively by Mesolithic man as a source of food, skins and tools (their bones and antlers). As the forests of England were cleared in favour of open fields, red deer numbers declined there, and Scotland became a species 'stronghold'.

At one time, red deer were protected in parks and "deer forests" (which often had no trees!) for royal hunting, but this protection was lost during the Mediaeval period causing a further decline in numbers in England. Combined with escapes from parks, red deer spread naturally to increase in the Highlands.

An increase in forest and woodland cover since the early 20th century has meant that red deer are now widely distributed across Britain and are expanding in range and number. In the last 20 or so years, ie since the millennium red deer numbers on the open range have stabilised and are reducing once again due to increased culling and more intensive management.

Red deer are active throughout the 24-hour period but make more use of open spaces during the hours of darkness in populations experiencing frequent disturbance. Peak times of activity are at dawn and dusk. In the Highlands red deer tend to use the open hill during the day and descend to lower ground during the night.

Grazing of tree shoots, agricultural crops and young trees puts red deer in conflict with farmers, foresters, and environmentalists seeking nature restoration. However, many landholdings particularly in Scotland's uplands gain necessary valuable revenue from recreational stalking (stalkers taking paying guests to hunt) and increasingly from venison. The meat from red deer has traditionally been the basis for the venison industry - tasty, sustainable and nature positive.

Red deer are also farmed for their venison, and some are kept as ornamental park species in the UK.

More information about red deer can be found on the British Deer Society website here:
bds.org.uk/information-advice/about-deer/deer-species/red-deer

More information about Scottish venison at scottish-venison.com

This project is supported by funding from the Scottish Government.