



SCOTTISH
VENISON



Sika Deer
(*Cervus nippon*)

Key facts

Photo: Laurie Campbell

Key Sika Deer Facts

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

Adult Size

Stags - 70 to 95cm at shoulder. **Hinds** - 50 to 90cm at shoulder, so the Sika deer is smaller than a red deer, but larger than a roe deer.

Adult weight

Stags: 40-70 kg
Hinds: 30-45kg.

Status

Non-native; Sika deer were first introduced from the Far East into Britain in 1860.

Colour

Summer coat is reddish brown to yellow-brown, with a dark dorsal stripe and white spots. In winter, Sika deer appear to be dark grey to black, and their spots are faint or absent. They have very distinct white gland markings on their hind legs.

Sounds

Sika have a wide repertoire of calls. Stags groan, blow 'raspberries', yak-yak and give a high-pitched whistle during the rut or can scream. Hinds with calves whine, and calves reply with a bleat or squeak. When alarmed both sexes give a short, high-pitched bark.

Antlers

Only found on stags, a Sika deer's antlers are branched, similar to red deer but with a maximum of four points on each antler. The angle between brow tine and the main beam is always less than 90 degrees which is one of the ways of distinguishing Sika from red deer.

Lifespan

Up to 18 years.

Habitat

They live in coniferous woodlands and heaths on acid soils and are widespread and expanding their range in Scotland.

Food and feed

Sika deer are grazers of grasses and dwarf shrubs, especially heather. Coniferous tree shoots and tree bark may occasionally be taken in small quantities.

Rut

The rut (the breeding season) occurs from the end of September to November. Usually stags defend a rutting territory, much like fallow deer, but they may also switch to 'holding' a group of hinds if they assemble. Sometimes, Sika stags gather to form a lek, and compete with each other, or they may simply wander about the range in search of receptive hinds.

Gestation

7½ months.

Young

A single calf (rarely twins) is born during early May to late June.

Social groups

Sika are usually solitary animals for most of the year and only form small groups in winter. The different sexes occupy discrete geographic ranges and remain separated for most of the year, only coming together to mate.

More information

Sika deer were first introduced from the Far East into Britain in 1860. Several subspecies, including Chinese, Japanese, Formosan and Manchurian were introduced into deer parks but the only free-roaming form in Britain is the Japanese Sika. Sika are regarded as a serious pest in some areas where the damage that they cause can be considerable and their interbreeding with red deer to form hybrid species is of major concern.

Browsing of tree shoots and agricultural crops and bark stripping and bole scoring (gouging with the antlers) of plantation trees puts Sika in conflict with farmers, foresters and environmentalists seeking nature restoration due to damage. Estates gain income from stalking and increasingly from selling the venison. Some say that Sika venison is the most tasty of all the deer species in the UK.

More information about Sika deer can be found on the British Deer Society website here:

bds.org.uk/information-advice/about-deer/deer-species/sika-deer

More information about Scottish venison at **scottish-venison.com**

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