

Species Fact Sheet: Chinese Water Deer (*Hydropotos inermis*)



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Quick Facts

Recognition: Small, compact deer, pale fawn with large rounded ears and conspicuous button-black eyes. The males (bucks) have no antlers, but have long tusk-like canines. Slightly taller, and much paler than muntjac and lacks the hump-backed look. Appears more like a diminutive roe deer.

Size: 82-106 cm; Tail length: 2.5-9 cm; Shoulder height 42-65 cm.

Weight: Males 12-18.5 kg; females 14-17.4 kg.

Life Span: Known to live at least six years.



Distribution & Habitat

The Chinese water deer is native to E China (Yangtze flood plain) and Korea. Introduced to Woburn Park, Bedfordshire, in 1896, and Whipsnade Zoo in 1929-30. Deliberately released into surrounding woodlands from 1901 onwards but there have been numerous releases, translocations and escapes. First reported in the wild, Buckinghamshire 1945. It has a limited range in East Anglia and adjacent counties, and is still spreading. However, it has not reached as wide a range or abundance as Reeves' muntjac. Some colonies seem to have died out, and also seems to have been displaced in some places by muntjac.

Water deer seem to prefer wetlands adjoining woodland and fen, though they often range onto nearby farmland. They are most evident in the Norfolk Broads and in the coastal wetlands. A feral, uncontained, population in the grounds of Whipsnade inhabits parkland and dry woodland, with no wetland available.

General Ecology

Behaviour

Bucks and does are territorial, marking twigs with scent from the prominent preorbital gland. Dung piles around the territory boundary also seem to be markers. Water deer do not form herds, but are seen either solitarily or in family groups of a doe with her kids. Loose groups may come together on favoured feeding areas.

Diet and Feeding

They feed mostly around dawn and dusk, on weeds, grasses, herbs and some browse. Although they often feed in arable fields, they seem to be eating weeds rather than crops.

Reproduction

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The rut is in December, when males fight viciously with their tusks; most bear scars. The female often has twins, sometimes up to 4 kids, after a gestation of 160- 210 days. Kids are born in May-June, and although they are weaned in about 3 months, remain with their mother into winter. They then disperse, but mortality at this time is high, and although they become sexually mature, young seem to have difficulty maintaining a territory.

Pest Control

Chinese water deer have not, so far, posed the problems that are caused by muntjac. Densities are typically much lower (at around 10/km²) and the habitats they occupy are less sensitive to browsing damage. Road mortality seems to be important, and some are shot.