

Species Fact Sheet: *Roe Deer (Capreolus capreolus)*



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Quick Facts

Recognition: Small deer, reddish brown in summer, grey in winter. Distinctive black moustache stripe, white chin. Appears tail-less with white/cream rump patch which is especially conspicuous when its hairs are puffed out when the deer is alarmed. Males have short antlers, erect with no more than three points.

Size: Average height at shoulder 60-75cm. Males slightly larger.

Weight: Adults 10—25kg

Life Span: The maximum age in the wild is 16 years, but most live 7 years.



Distribution & Habitat

Roe deer are widespread throughout Scotland and much of England, and in many areas they are abundant. They are increasing their range. They are spreading southwards from their Scottish refuge, and northwards and westwards from the reintroduced populations, but are not yet established in most of the Midlands and Kent. They have never occurred in Ireland. They are generally found in open mixed, coniferous or purely deciduous woodland, particularly at edges between woodland and open habitats. Roe deer feed throughout the 24 hours, but are most active at dusk and dawn.

General Ecology

Behaviour

Roe deer exist solitary or in small groups, with larger groups typically feeding together during the winter. At exceptionally high densities, herds of 15 or more roe deer can be seen in open fields during the spring and summer. Males are seasonally territorial, from March to August. Young females usually establish ranges close to their mothers; juvenile males are forced to disperse further afield.

Diet and Feeding

Their diet is varied and includes buds and leaves of deciduous trees and shrubs, bramble, rose, ivy, herbs, conifers, ferns, heather and grasses.

Reproduction

The breeding season, known as the rut, is from mid-July to the end of August. During this time males become very aggressive in defending their territories. They fight other males by locking antlers and pushing and twisting. Fighting may cause injuries and occasionally one or both may die.

Although the egg is fertilised at the time of mating it does not begin to develop inside the female's uterus until several months later, in early January. The roe deer is the only hoofed animal in which delayed implantation occurs. Females give birth, usually to twins, but sometimes to single kids or triplets, between mid-May and mid-June. The young suckle within a few hours of birth. They are regularly left alone, lying still amongst vegetation. Their coat, dappled for about the first six weeks, helps to camouflage them. If there are twins they are left separately.

Conservation Status

Roe deer have been hunted from prehistoric times. They became extinct in England, Wales and southern Scotland during the 18th century and populations were re-introduced to southern England (Dorset) and East Anglia in the 19th century. As they have become more abundant, they have been treated as "vermin" because of damage to forestry, agriculture and horticulture, and consequently numbers are controlled. Roe deer may now number as many as 500,000, and are increasing.

Since the 1970s there has been an increased interest in exploitation of roe as a game species and for meat. As a result they are now covered by various Acts of Parliament which impose close seasons (when deer may not be hunted), firearms restrictions and controls on poaching.