



An identification guide to the  
**Deer**  
of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly

Celebrating Cornwall's Mammals - from dormice to dolphins!

## An identification Guide to the Deer of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly

### Contents

		Page
	Introduction	1
	Red Deer	2
	Fallow Deer	4
	Roe Deer	6
	Reeve's Muntjac Deer	8
	Droppings	10
	Deer slots	11
	Rump markings	12
	Further information	13
	Further reading	14

## Introduction

There are three species of Deer in Cornwall: Red Deer (*Cervus elaphus*), Fallow Deer (*Dama dama*) and Roe Deer (*Capreolus capreolus*). There have been reports of the occasional Reeve's Muntjac Deer (*Muntiacus reevesi*) in Cornwall but its true status in the County is unknown. There are no Deer on the Isles of Scilly.

Red Deer are the largest British land mammal, they are native to Britain having arrived after the last ice age. Fallow Deer were once native to Britain and were reintroduced into Deer parks in the Middle Ages. Roe Deer are native and their remains have been found in Britain dating back to the Interglacial period (400,000 BC). Reeve's Muntjac Deer are not native and were introduced from South East Asia in the early 20th century,

The purpose of this guide is to aid identification of the different Deer species found in Cornwall and to encourage their recording. The guide is divided into seven clearly illustrated sections describing characteristics and key identification features for each of the species plus other clues for identification: footprints (slots), rump markings and droppings.

A simple form is included with this guide to aid recording. All you have to do is record **what** Deer species you see, **where** and **when** you see them, and **who** you are. Whether you see a single Deer by the side of the road as you drive by or a whole herd grazing in a woodland glade, we would like to know!

Further copies of the recording form can be obtained from the Environmental Records Centre for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly (ERCCIS) or downloaded from our website [www.ercis.co.uk](http://www.ercis.co.uk). All completed forms should be sent to ERCCIS at the address below.

By recording where and when we see Deer in Cornwall we can further our knowledge of their population distributions, habitat preferences and specific threats. This vital information will help us work towards conserving them.

We hope *An identification guide to the Deer of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly* will inspire you to find, recognise and record Deer found throughout Cornwall.

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ERCCIS, Five Acres, Allet, TRURO, Cornwall, TR4 9DJ**

# Red Deer (*Cervus elaphus*)



**Adult:**  
**Head to body length:** 165 – 260cm  
**Shoulder - height:** 114 – 122cm

<b>Colour</b>	Short rich reddish-brown coat in summer. Dark brown coat in winter. Adults rarely have spots. Calf is born with spots, but loses these during its first moult (approximately two months after birth).
<b>Distinguishing features</b>	The largest of all British Deer. Buff-coloured rump patch. Short beige tail. Long face that becomes greyish with age. Large, mobile ears.
<b>Habitat</b>	Can be found in a variety of habitats but generally prefers mature woodland, where it feeds along woodland edge or adjacent grasslands. Also found on moorland, Deer parks and scrub.
<b>Food</b>	Diet varies with habitat. In woodland will browse shoots from shrubs, deciduous trees and conifer leaves. On moorland will graze on heather, grass, sedges and rushes.
<b>Antlers</b>	Branched, with up to 12 points, reaching a metre in length. Antler size does not correspond with age of stag. Grow in spring/summer, cast in winter.
<b>Activity</b>	Active through the day, but mainly at dawn and dusk. The calf usually lies low.
<b>Communication</b>	Males (stags) roar during rutting season (late September to October). Females (hinds) and calves make a high-pitched bleat, and when alarmed they make a barking sound. Males make loud warning bark if alarmed and grunt when bothered by flies.
<b>Social behaviour</b>	They are herd animals. Females and young live in herds led by a matriarch. Males are solitary and only join the herds during rutting season – late September to October/November. A single calf (occasionally twins) is born eight months after rut.

# Fallow Deer (*Dama dama*)



**Adult:**

**Head to body length:**

130 – 170cm

**Shoulder - height:**

85 – 110cm



<b>Colour</b>	Colour can range from fawn to black, although the majority are chestnut brown in summer with many white spots. Winter coat is grey and has less spots.
<b>Distinguishing features</b>	Relatively long tail with vertical black stripe. Tail is constantly flicked. Jerky, jumping movement when alarmed (known as 'pronking'). Nervous, indecisive movements. Groups usually move in single file.
<b>Habitat</b>	The most common British Deer, found in parklands and estates. Prefers open woodland with glades but is also found in various habitats such as mature deciduous and coniferous woodland with dense undergrowth or open areas.
<b>Food</b>	Includes grass, rushes, young leaves on trees, acorns, beech mast, berries, crops, most fruit, particularly windfall apples, and bark off trees in winter.
<b>Antlers</b>	Upper antlers are broad and flattened in the older bucks. Cast April-May, regrow immediately.
<b>Activity</b>	Normally feed in the early morning or at dusk and lie up to ruminate during the day. Diurnal if undisturbed.
<b>Communication</b>	Females (doe) and fawns bleat and give a short bark when alarmed. Males (buck) make a deep belching groan during rutting season (October to November), the sound of which can be heard over a large distance.
<b>Social behaviour</b>	They are not territorial and have overlapping ranges. Herds of females with young and herds of males generally graze separately, except during the rut – October to November, however some mixed sex herds remain together throughout the year.  The fawn is born eight months after the rut.

# Roe Deer (*Capreolus capreolus*)



**Adult:**

**Head to body length:**

95 – 135cm

**Shoulder - height:**

63 – 67cm

<b>Colour</b>	Sandy to red-brown in summer. Greyish brown to black in winter. Fawn/kid is brownish-black with longitudinal rows of white spots along back and flanks. Spots fade around six weeks of age.
<b>Distinguishing features</b>	Distinctive black nose and moustache. White chin. Large, mobile ears. Large, slanting eyes. Short tail (2 – 4cm long) only visible when raised for defecating. Cream/white rump marking – individual variation. Females (doe) have a tuft of hair between back legs.
<b>Habitat</b>	Woodland, particularly with glades and field edges. They rest in dense scrub and woodland of conifer thickets or shrubs.
<b>Food</b>	Roe are highly selective eaters and will pick the most nutritious parts of bramble, grasses, roses, young fern fronds, herbs, conifers, young leaves on deciduous trees, beech mast, fungi, acorns, heather, cereals and broad-leaved weeds on agricultural land.
<b>Antlers</b>	Small branches with a maximum of three points. Tines point forward and backwards and are less than 25cm long. Grown in winter, cast October to January.
<b>Activity</b>	Mostly during dawn and dusk, but are more diurnal in May to August.
<b>Communication</b>	Both sexes bark when alarmed. The male (buck) grunts and gives rough short barks and the female (doe) makes a high pitched cry during the rut (July/August). The female makes a high-pitched 'peep-peep' sound to the kid. The kid gives a shrill bleat resembling a lamb.
<b>Social behaviour</b>	Mostly seen as individuals or in small family groups. Bucks are solitary, except during the rut. They are strongly territorial in nature. Kids are born ten months after the rut due to the ability to delay a pregnancy, although once gestation begins it lasts for five months.

# Reeve's Muntjac Deer (*Muntiacus reevesi*)



**Adult:**

**Head to body length:**

90 – 100cm

**Shoulder - height:**

45 – 52cm

<b>Colour</b>	Summer coat is glossy chestnut-red above, buff underneath. Winter coat is dark brown/grey with white undersides.
<b>Distinguishing features</b>	Smallest Deer in Britain. Upper canine form small tusks (about 2cm) which are visible on males (buck). The buck has V-shaped facial markings, and the doe has a diamond-shaped mark on the forehead. Both sexes have a hunched appearance and run with the head held low.
<b>Habitat</b>	Varies, from dense woodland and scrub to agricultural land.
<b>Food</b>	Includes bramble, new shoots of ash and hazel, ivy, berries, acorns, fungi, beech mast and chestnuts. Will eat the bulbs of woodland ground flora such as bluebells, and in suburban areas they also eat garden plants. On agricultural land they eat peas, beans, parsley and cabbages.
<b>Antlers</b>	Small, 6 - 8cm long, with single backward pointing spikes. Cast May to July.
<b>Activity</b>	Generally active through 24 hour period.
<b>Communication</b>	Known as the 'barking Deer' because both buck and doe (female) make a loud and repetitive raucous bark. They make a click sound when alarmed and will squeak and scream if very frightened. The fawn bleats like a lamb.
<b>Social behaviour</b>	They are secretive in nature. Mostly solitary, but can live in pairs. They do not have a regular rutting season as they are able to mate throughout the year. Fawns are born after a seven month gestation period.

# Droppings

Most are short and spherical in shape, usually pointed at one end. They are usually black in colour and shiny when fresh, turning a dark brown/black over time.

Actual size

## Red Deer: ►

20 – 25mm long and 13 – 18mm wide. Acorn shaped, often pointed at one end and rounded or a hollow at the other. Black in colour. Can be deposited in groups or as a 'string' if the Deer is moving. Summer droppings are usually clumped together.



## ▼ Reeve's Muntjac Deer:

10 - 13mm x 5 - 11mm. Black, rounded or cylindrical. Sometimes pointed at one or both ends. Usually scatter when hit the ground.



## ▲ Roe Deer:

18mm long, 14mm wide. Shiny black, cylindrical pellets. Pointed at one end. It is normal for Deer to defecate whilst walking and droppings can be found along Deer tracks.

## Fallow Deer: ▼

15 - 16mm long and 8 - 12mm wide. Black, shiny, cylindrical pellets. One end pointed the other indented. Deposited in piles.



## ▲ Sheep



# Deer slots

Generally, compared to cattle, goat and sheep tracks, deer slots are narrower, cleaves taper to a point, the heels are rounded and never well defined.

Actual size



◀ **Fallow:**  
Approximately  
60mm long.



▲ **Red:**  
80 - 90mm long. Outer edge of each hoof  
curves towards tip. Size of prints is larger when  
Deer is running due to hooves splaying out.



▲ **Roe:**  
45mm long. Small, narrow  
pointed hoof shape.

**Reeve's Muntjac:** ▶  
Small, 25 mm long.  
Outer toe sometimes  
longer than inner toe,  
with tip slightly curving  
over tip of inner toe.



◀ **Sheep**



# Rump patches



## **Red:**

Buff coloured rump, extending above tail. Not outlined with black. Tail length 12 - 20cm (including hair)



## **Fallow:**

White heart-shaped rump patch ringed with black. Tail tip hangs 5cm below rump patch. Tail length 16 - 19cm.



## **Reeve's Muntjac:**

Prominent white underside to tail. Tail length approx. 15cm.



## **Roe:**

White to buff patch, heart-shaped in females, kidney-shaped in males. Tail length 2 - 4cm.

## Further information

### **Cornwall Wildlife Trust**

Five Acres, Allet, Truro, TR4 9DJ

Tel: 01872 273939

Web-site: [www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk](http://www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk)

### **Deer-UK**

Web-site: [www.deer-uk.com](http://www.deer-uk.com)

### **Forestry Commission**

Silvan House,

231 Corstorphine Road,

Edinburgh, EH12 7AT

Tel: 0131 334 0303

Web-site: [www.forestry.gov.uk](http://www.forestry.gov.uk)

### **The British Deer Society**

Fordingbridge, Hampshire. SP6 1EF.

Tel: 01425 655434

Web-site: [www.bds.org.uk](http://www.bds.org.uk)

### **The Deer Initiative (South West Region)**

PO Box 67, Exeter, EX6 8WT

Tel: 01626 891364

Web-site: [www.thedeerinitiative.co.uk](http://www.thedeerinitiative.co.uk)

### **The Game Conservancy Trust**

Fordingbridge, Hampshire, SP6 1EF

Tel: 01425 652381

Web-site: [www.gct.org.uk](http://www.gct.org.uk)

### **The Mammal Society**

2B, Inworth Street, London, SW11 3EP

Tel: 0207 3502200

Web-site: [www.mammal.org.uk](http://www.mammal.org.uk)

### **Mammals Trust UK**

15 Cloisters House, 8 Battersea Park Rd, London, SW8 4BG

Tel: 0207 498 5262,

Web-site: [www.mtuk.org](http://www.mtuk.org)



## Further reading

### **A Field Guide to Deer of Britain (2001)**

Jeanette Lawton, The Deer Study and Resource Centre.

### **A Guide to British mammal tracks and signs (2001)**

S. Bullion, Field Studies Council.

### **Animal Tracks and Signs (2001)**

P. Bang, and P. Dahlstrom, Oxford.

### **Collins Field Guide to Mammals (1993)**

D. Macdonald, and P. Barrett, Collins, London.

### **How to Find and Identify Mammals (2003)**

G. Sargent and P. Morris, The Mammal Society.

### **Mammal Detective (2002)**

R. Strachan, Whittet Books



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