

Deer in the East of England



thedeer
initiative



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Wild deer are beautiful creatures and a natural component of Britain's native wildlife. In recent decades, deer have spread throughout many parts of the East of England, and they are now well established in the region.

They are shy and elusive, but the careful and observant visitor to the countryside may often see them, especially early in the morning and at dusk, when they are most active.

Woodlands are the best places to see deer in East Anglia, but some species are widely established in the countryside and may be spotted feeding in the open or alongside hedges or other natural cover.

Land managers want to see a sustainable deer population in the East of England, but recognise that they can be very destructive to trees, crops and important natural habitats if they are present in large numbers.



Coppice regrowth can be seriously affected by deer damage



Why do we need to manage them?

The natural predators of deer, such as the wolf and lynx, are no longer present in Britain, so the only natural check on population growth is habitat, climate and food supply.

If there are too many deer in an area, then they can cause serious damage to crops, timber and natural ecosystems, while if populations increase beyond the ability of the habitat to sustain them, then the health of the deer themselves will be affected.

What effect do deer have upon the natural environment?

Deer are beautiful creatures which many people enjoy having around. In moderate numbers they have a positive benefit upon the environment.

However, when present in substantial numbers, deer can do serious damage by grazing or browsing agricultural crops and nibbling the tender shoots of growing timber, including the many new trees and hedges which have recently been planted on East Anglian farms.

Deer damage is especially significant in the region's ancient woodlands, where rare natural flora such as the oxlip and early purple orchid are very vulnerable and where coppice regrowth may be seriously affected.

Elimination of ground and lower vegetation has an impact on breeding birds. Insects may decline and tree seedlings cannot develop into the next crop of new trees. Farms growing high value vegetable crops such as carrots and parsnips are also targeted by deer and may sustain costly damage.



Oxlip showing damage caused by deer browsing

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Which species are present?

Five out of the six UK species of deer are found in the East of England.



RED DEER

Height: Up to 1.2m at shoulder.

Description: Large russet-brown animals. The red stag with his branching antlers is unmistakable.

Breeding: One calf produced during the first half of June each year.

Origin: Red deer are native to

Great Britain but became extinct over most of England in the later Middle Ages. Following reintroductions and increased woodland cover they have now re-established in many areas of lowland England.

Diet: Grass, herbs, farm crops, shrubs and trees.

Habits: Herds may be found in larger woodlands throughout the region, from where they range widely across farmland. The eerie roar of the stag may be heard in woodlands during the autumn rutting season.

FALLOW DEER

Height: Up to 1m at shoulder.

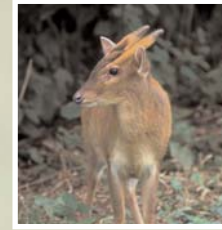
Description: Large and varying in colour from very pale to black. The fallow buck has flattened or 'palmate' antlers.

Breeding: One fawn produced during May-June each year.

Origin: Introduced by the Normans to parks and estates in the 11th century, from where they have escaped into the wild.

Diet: Grass, crops, herbs, shrubs and acorns.

Habits: Found in groups or herds, often sheltering in woods and feeding out on fields. Can cause significant localised damage to farm crops, woodland shrubs and ground flora.



MUNTJAC DEER

Height: Up to 45cm at shoulder.

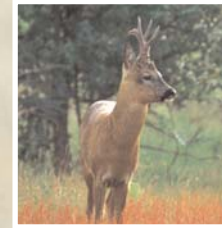
Description: Very small – the size of a large dog – and reddish brown. Tail held erect when alarmed.

Breeding: Can breed all year round, producing 1-2 fawns each year.

Origin: Introduced to Woburn Abbey in Bedfordshire from China in the 19th century and then escaped or were deliberately released.

Diet: Bramble, herbs, nuts and fruits, coppice shoots, flowers.

Habits: Solitary animals, preferring dense woodland cover. Often feeds in gardens. Damages trees, farm crops, woodland shrubs and ground flora.



ROE DEER

Height: Up to 75cm at shoulder.

Description: Medium sized, chestnut brown in summer and grey in winter. The white rump is very visible when alarmed.

Breeding: One or two fawns produced in late May.

Origin: Roe deer are native to Great Britain, but disappeared from most of England by about 1700. They were reintroduced in the 19th century and have spread throughout much of East Anglia.

Diet: Bramble, herbs, nuts and fruits, coppice shoots, flowers.

Habits: Solitary throughout the spring and summer, they may nevertheless be seen feeding in small groups during winter. May cause damage to farm crops, especially roots, woodland flora and garden plants.

CHINESE WATER DEER

Height: Up to 50cm at shoulder.

Description: Small, pale ginger colour with rounded ears. Neither sex has antlers.

Breeding: One or two fawns are normally produced in May or June, but litters of up to six are not unknown.

Origin: Introduced to Britain from China in 1870, escaped from Woburn Park, Bedfordshire and became established in parts of the East Midlands and East Anglia.

Diet: Grass, herbs and wetland sedges.

Habits: Solitary throughout most of the year, and may be found in wet woodlands and reed beds, especially in the Broads and Fens.



If you want to see deer

**Visit the countryside early in the morning or at dusk.
Woodlands are the best places to see deer.**

Walk quietly and unobtrusively and keep your dog on a lead at all times, especially in early summer when young deer are born. A good pair of binoculars is very useful.

Deer have a very good sense of smell and are alert to human scent, so try to walk into the wind to avoid alerting them to your presence. Never touch any new born deer which you may find – its mother will not be far away.

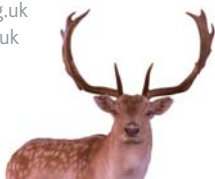
**Always keep to public footpaths or other rights of way,
or to woodlands where public access is permitted.
Please respect any signs which may indicate that deer
management is in progress.**

**This leaflet has been produced by the East of
England Deer Forum with the support of:**

- Anglian Woodland Project
- British Association for Shooting and Conservation
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- Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
- English Nature
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- Forestry Commission
- National Farmers Union
- National Trust
- RSPCA
- Royal Forestry Society
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- Thames Chase Community
- The Verderers
- The Wildlife Trusts
- The Woodland Trust

FURTHER INFORMATION AND CONTACTS:

www.thedeerinitiative.co.uk
www.forestry.gov.uk
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