



Managing Wild Deer in the High Weald

Why are deer so important in the High Weald?

The High Weald has a long association with wild deer. The native species of red and roe deer have been resident since the end of the last Ice Age and non-native species such as fallow were imported to stock deer parks for hunting and food, leaving a cultural legacy which can be seen in the landscape today. Wild deer are impressive to look at, loved by many, and can be of benefit to the environment in some circumstances. Unfortunately, the extinction of their natural predators (bears, wolves and lynx) by humans means that there is no natural control of their numbers. Deer thrive in the High Weald's landscape mosaic of small fields, woodlands and hedgerows. The increase in food sources, such as autumn-sown crops, and milder winter temperatures, mean that deer pressure on woodlands has become extreme in some areas.

What problems are caused by excessive numbers of deer?

The high level of deer pressure in woodlands is particularly associated with fallow deer, a herding species that practices indiscriminate browsing of both crops and woodland habitats and is thought to be a major contributor to the decline in numbers of insects and birds such as nightingales.

In addition to the pressure on the environment, the increasing numbers of deer create substantial hazards for car drivers and the transmission of bovine tuberculosis by deer may occur where deer densities are high.

Without natural predators, how do we manage deer numbers and impact?

We have a duty of care for the environment and a responsibility to help people understand the reasons why deer management plays an integral part in preserving biodiversity, protecting trees and sustaining farm crop yields. Control of deer numbers by culling can be a sensitive subject. Managing deer in the High Weald does not call for eradication. Deer are an incredibly important part of the landscape in terms of history, amenity, recreation and economy. As land managers or stewards of the land, it is essential to understand that deer are a resource that has to be managed effectively and respectfully.

To manage deer effectively in the High Weald requires a joined-up approach. Deer are often stalked and shot on the basis of individual property boundaries. Sometimes the communication between landowner, land manager and deer stalker is minimal. As deer are transient and do not stay within land boundaries, deer management is only effective if there is active communication across ownerships between all those involved.

What types of deer are we dealing with?

Of the six species of wild deer in Britain, red and roe deer are native and fallow deer are now considered naturalised. Roe deer are present throughout the High Weald although numbers are lower than average due to competitive pressure from fallow deer. Muntjac are abundant in certain areas, particularly in dense rhododendron cover, and there are significant pockets of red deer and sika. Muntjac pose a serious threat to woodland diversity and should be managed accordingly, although fallow deer at lower population levels are considered non-detrimental if management is continuous.

What actions are being taken to promote sensitive management of deer?

The High Weald AONB Partnership, in conjunction with the Woodland Trust, is bringing landowners and deer stalkers together to form local deer management groups. Through these groups, we aim to facilitate the sharing of knowledge regarding deer in the area and to provide information on best practice, local deer issues, and rural crime issues. Where there is consensus to coordinate deer management via a deer management group, landowners and deer managers can agree to support each other with common land management objectives such as controlling deer numbers to support woodland diversity. In addition to sharing knowledge, shared resources are also being promoted e.g. use of chillers, ladders and thermal cameras.

How do I get started on understanding the deer situation on my land and managing the deer?

If you are a landowner or land tenant who would like to contribute to the sensitive management of the landscape and ecology, the resources below are available to help you get started in deer management or to act as a check for your current activities.

- **Deer Management Frequently Asked Questions** covering topics such as deer stalking safety, communication and management of stalkers.
- A **Deer Stalking Licence Agreement Template** and guidance on how to use it; **Deer Stalking Licence Agreement Guidance**.
- An example of the information needed to manage a deer cull, in the form of **Cull Data Record Template** and guidance on how to complete it: **Cull Data Record Guidance**.
- A **Generic Risk Assessment Guidance and Template** that can be used by a landowner to assess the basic risks associated with having deer stalking on their land.
- A **Site-Specific Risk Assessment Template** including guidance on how to complete it: **Site-Specific Risk Assessment Guidance**.
- Links to the Deer Initiative guidance on assessing deer impact on woodland <http://www.thedeerinitiative.co.uk/monitoring/activity-and-impact.php>

If you would like to discuss how to obtain the services of a deer stalker, or to co-ordinate deer management with your neighbours, please contact us at info@highweald.org 01424 723011