

## Deer and Woodland Management

Until the mid 19th century deer were relatively scarce as wild animals in England. Gradually however, they have escaped from parks and large estates and become established in the wild. Besides our native red and roe deer, exotic species including fallow, muntjac, and sika deer also occur.

With a mix of woodlands and fields, the English landscape provides an ideal environment for deer. Deer are understandably regarded by many as one of the most enjoyable things to see in the countryside. Nonetheless, deer have an effect on their environment and these effects have increased as their populations have grown.

Deer browsing can kill seedlings and coppice stools, as well as adversely affect growth and timber. Deer can also deplete the under-storey with adverse consequences for some flora, insects, small mammals and songbirds. Deer have also become a major hazard for drivers, being involved in 30-50,000 traffic accidents annually, most of these in the home counties. They are now also known to play a part in the spread of diseases, such as Bovine TB and Lyme's disease, which can infect livestock or humans.



Roe Deer - (photo: Forestry Commission Picture Library)

Understandably, increasing emphasis is now being placed on the need to manage deer. Although fencing and tree guards can be used to protect small areas, reducing populations by culling is regarded as the most effective general approach. Good management however requires co-operation with neighbouring landowners, best achieved through deer groups, where local issues can be discussed and management efforts co-ordinated.

*Robin Gill, Forest Research*



Fallow Buck - New Forest National Park (photo: Forestry Commission Picture Library)

## Editorial

As you wander through the woods this autumn and winter your visit may be enhanced by the beautiful sight of deer. Indeed you are more likely to see them now than a few years ago as their populations are rising and their ranges are increasing. This issue of South East Woodland News focuses strongly on deer in woodlands.

Robin Gill has already set the scene as to why it is important to manage deer in woodlands. 'Signs of life' looks at the different types of deer we find in the South East and ways you can identify their presence - through deer tracks.

The 'How to' article explains ways to spot and assess deer damage, which can help you monitor the effectiveness of deer management. 'Ask the expert' also gives you tips on what to check when arranging for deer management on your land. To enjoy all aspects of deer management - we've also included a fine venison recipe.

Elsewhere we feature great examples of woodland archaeology in Kent. The Clowes Wood archaeological project have produced a guide to exploring woodland archeology, and you can now visit one of the oldest gunpowder production sites in the country, surrounded by woodland.

This is the first edition of SEWN which has gone fully electronic - please forward it to people you think would find it interesting. You can also find all back issues of South East Woodland News at:

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/sewn>

Many thanks to all the contributors to this issue: Robin Gill, Jamie Cordery, Alan Betts, Steve Carter and all who gave permission to use their images.

*Jane Hull, Editor*

## How to... Assess Deer Damage

Deer belong in woodlands and woodlands would be a poorer place without them. Whether you own a woodland, work or just walk in it you will be aware that deer are present because you will have seen them. Deer leave plenty of signs too, some more welcome than others! A “patchwork” effect is caused by grazing and browsing when deer numbers are held in balance with their woodland habitat. This brings with it a varied flora, both in species terms, and in woodland structure. In contrast, too many deer can diminish the ground flora, eventually destroy the shrub layer and leave “sticks in the sand”, maturing trees emerging from a bare woodland floor with no prospect of natural regeneration or replacement from planting without protection. In combination with a lack of light many of our woodlands are held in stasis while high deer populations use the woods as a base, eating what remains of anything below their browsing height and surviving largely on food from surrounding fields.



Deer browsing damage (photo: Forestry Commission Picture Library)

Of course whether deer are damaging a woodland depends on our own objectives for it. If deer are present in sufficient numbers to be having a significant impact you may see:

- Very few, if any, hardwood saplings above 50cm in height (look especially for Ash, Oak, Beech)
- Brambles on open areas which reach 1m high in summer but are reduced to a framework of bare stalks by March, in some places only wisps remain.
- Obvious signs of deer, a “hard” browseline even in high summer, lots of deer paths and dung. Coppice stools may resemble “hedgehogs” and together with other favoured plants may have most or all young stems browsed.
- A significant loss of flowers and leaves of flowering plants if Muntjac are dominant.

What can you do? Do nothing if you are content with the situation continuing in the long term. Fence and protect individual plants for a short term effect. Engage in deer culling if you require a long term improvement without too many fences!

## Signs of Life - Deer recognition

All six species of deer that live wild in Britain can be found in the South East and in recent years have all been increasing their range. Apart from direct observation, the most convenient way to find out what species of deer inhabit your wood is to look for tracks. The six tracks shown here are all illustrated at half natural size - starting with our largest land mammal, the red deer and working down to the muntjac which can be so elusive that track identification may be the only way you’ll know you have them.

Red Deer - a true native, found in Hampshire and the wooded South Downs.



Sika Deer - Introduced from Japan in the 1860's . Small pockets in Hampshire & Kent.

Fallow Deer - Introduced by the Normans, now found throughout the region.



Roe deer - Native and common but still absent from most woods in Kent.

Chinese Water Deer - An escapee from Woburn now found in Buckinghamshire but with its main stronghold in East Anglia.



Muntjac Deer - also from China. Still absent from most of Kent and East Sussex but spreading fast.

Sourced from: Forestry Commission Practice Note “Managing Deer in the Countryside” (FCPN6)

## Success Story... Oare Gunpowder Works

Near Faversham in Kent is a nationally important site with one of the longest histories of gunpowder production in the country. Production ran from the late 17th century until the 1930s. It is surrounded by woodland with a history of coppice, which provided charcoal for the gunpowder manufacturing process. The woodland also acted as blast screens.

Gunpowder has played a leading role in our society since the 14th century - not only in battle, but also defence, in the construction industry and, through fireworks, in celebrations. It is said that Guy Fawkes used gunpowder from Faversham! The Gunpowder Works are now a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Since the works closed, nature has colonised the site across various habitats - including woodland, mill pond and reed bed.



*Coppice surrounding the testing range is once more under management (Photo: J Harding)*

In the past couple of years much work has occurred to preserve the works and make the site accessible to visitors, with a new visitors centre, guided walks and updated interpretation. As part of the project the woodland has been brought back into coppice management and it gives an opportunity to see how woods were managed for this industrial process. For further details see:

<http://www.gunpowderworks.co.uk>

If you can't get there in person there is a virtual tour on the Website!

### Exploring your woodlands history

Last edition we featured the Clowes Wood archaeological project. They have now published a book from their experience! This is a practical guide for those undertaking their own woodland archaeology projects. It covers the whole process including desk study, field investigation, reporting and management implications. It is based upon their experiences, which involved local community under the guidance of a professional landscape archaeologist. For a copy send an A4 stamped addressed envelope for 87p to: the Blean Initiative, Canterbury City Council, Military Road, Canterbury, CT1 1YW.

## Ask the Expert...

What should I check when arranging for a stalker to manage deer on my land?



Deer stalking, a lonely occupation involving much myth and magic, early/late hours, long periods of inactivity, the death of a beautiful animal.... who could blame a landowner for leaving deer stalking to the damn fool prepared to do it? But landowners have responsibilities, objectives for their land and, hopefully, a desire to do the right thing. I don't have a clue how my TV works but I do expect it to be safe and to do what it is supposed to. Of course not everyone wants a TV in their home, some landowners prefer not to cull deer. Other landowners are happy to claim that they have deer management in place when too often they are largely unaware of how their stalkers operate and are willing to accept excuses when the annual cull is annually not achieved or the promised benefits of reduced damage are not apparent. Landowners considering taking on a deer stalker for the first time often have no idea where to look or what to look for, here are some simple tips:

You, the landowner/occupier are in charge. It is your objectives that the stalker should be working towards and success should be auditable. A contract should stipulate correct procedures, desired targets and penalties for not achieving them. The individual(s) that you choose should ideally:

- Be known to you or come recommended by someone with direct experience of the stalker's practical ability.

- Be trained to and follow, at the very least, the Deer Stalking Certificate level 1 standard, preferably level 2 and/or be able to show evidence of some substantial experience.

- Be local and/or prepared to spend many winter hours stalking.

- Be insured.
- Not be fixated on male deer and prepared to take on an agreed minimum female cull, accepting penalties if this is not achieved. There will be other issues such as access, equipment, larder facilities, ownership of venison, sub-letting, annual reports/deer plans that need to be discussed, now... where's that remote control.

Jamie Cordery, South East Deer Liaison Officer, the Deer Initiative. For more information see <http://www.thedeerinitiative.co.uk>

## Food from the Forest - Enjoying Venison:

Steve Carter, Wildlife Ranger from the Chilterns Beat, Forestry Commission shares his favourite venison recipe:

6 venison chops/steaks	200g mushrooms
100g butter	parsley
cooking oil	500 ml tomato sauce
1 large onion	300ml white wine
juice of 1 lemon	

Trim and season meat. Melt the butter in a large deep pan and add a little oil. Add the meat and fry quickly. When the chops are cooked, remove and put in a serving dish. Drain off three-quarters of the fat, and add chopped onions, mushrooms and parsley. Fry for 2 minutes, moisten with the tomato sauce and white wine. Boil for 5 minutes and add the lemon juice. Pour the sauce over the chops and serve. Serves 6.

For more recipes see -

<http://www.thedeerinitiative.co.uk/html/venison.htm>

## Good reading

Looking for some reading matter as the nights draw in? Steve Carter, Wildlife Ranger and Heather Francis, Recreation Ranger, from the Chilterns Beat, Forestry Commission recommend good books on deer....

Lawton, J (2001) [A field guide to Deer of Britain](http://www.deerstudy.com). The Deer Study and Resource Centre, Trentham Gardens, Trentham, Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire, ST4 8AX. <http://www.deerstudy.com>

Prior, R (1994) [Trees and Deer - How to Cope with Deer in Forest, Field and Garden](#). ISBN - 1853104329

Gill, R. (2000). [The impact of deer on woodland biodiversity](#) (PDF-127K). Forestry Commission Information Note 36, Forestry Commission, Edinburgh.

Mayle, B. A. (1999). [Managing deer in the countryside](#) (PDF-7874K). Forestry Commission Practice Note 6, Forestry Commission, Edinburgh.

Mayle, B.A. (1999). [How many deer?](#) A guide to estimating deer population size, Forestry Commission Field Guide, Forestry Commission, Edinburgh

[The Deer Initiative Best Practice Guides](#) can be downloaded from <http://www.thedeerinitiative.co.uk/html/downloads.htm>

These are being updated and succinctly cover a wide range of topics including legislation, impacts of deer and dealing with carcasses.

## Grants for Woodland Management

### England Woodland Grant Scheme

The Woodland Creation Grant application period for 2007-08 has closed. All other grants are open for business at present. For more information visit: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/ewgs>. Deer management can be supported as part of the Woodland Management Grant and the Woodland Improvement Grant. The South East England Prospectus can be found at <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-6PTEDU#southeastengland>

### BBC Breathing Places

The BBC's Breathing Places project has funding for creating, maintaining or enhancing woodlands and other wildlife havens. You need to be part of a constituted group with a bank account with 2 signatories. Closing date 13th December 2006. See

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/breathingplaces>

[http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/prog\\_breathingplaces](http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/prog_breathingplaces)

**Deer Initiative South East** - The Deer Initiative has some funds to help stimulate effective deer management in Priority areas - the Bernwood near Oxford and Leith Hill in Surrey. If you are in one of these areas you will be contacted soon.

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This edition of South East Woodland News was brought to you by the Forestry Commission and the following counties, unitary authorities and Woodland Initiatives of the South East Region.



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