

# Deer



When we first moved to Plumpton in 1984 we would see roe deer occasionally, usually one or a pair, sometimes a doe and its kid. They are most likely to be seen in woodland, but come out into the open in the evening or early morning. Sometimes they come into gardens and make themselves unpopular by eating the roses, as one did in our garden at least once. These are quite small deer with rich brown fur and a more or less yellow-furred rump patch below the very short tail. The buck's antlers are short with short branches. This is probably the only deer species that survived the last ice-age here and all our other deer species, and even this species in the south, are the result of introductions or reintroductions.

We still see roe deer with about the same frequency, but at that time we hardly saw fallow deer outside managed herds in estates and some feral herds such as those in Ashdown Forest. In recent years fallow has become increasingly common and is now by far the most commonly seen deer, often going around in large groups and quite often out in the open in daylight. Until recently a place to see them regularly was the field to the north of the A272 as you approach Newick. Originally there seemed to be about six but this group grew to between 20 and 30; I haven't seen them there since the area became Reedens Meadows – a new open green space for Newick. Herds of up to 40 or more can sometimes be seen associated with woodland and fallow deer can be seen around the village, particularly at the top or bottom end of the parishes. Fallow deer can be identified with their white rump partly edged with black and with the longish tail having a black stripe down the centre. Around here their fur is generally a dark dingy brown, but sometimes you can see animals that are the more original sandy colour with white spots (to see large numbers of those go to somewhere like Petworth Park). The older male antlers can be large and are palmate (webbed between the tines).

Red deer are sometimes farmed in the area but these are often rather temporary enterprises (such as at Wakehurst and Ditchling, and there is currently a small herd at Clayton). They occasionally escape, but most escapees are rounded up pretty quickly. These are much bigger deer, with red brown fur with a somewhat yellowish rump (and a longer tail than roe deer). An old stag can have enormous branched, but not palmate, antlers.

Recently I was interested to add a fourth deer species to my local list: a Reeve's muntjac (or Chinese barking deer) in a wet woodland in Chailey. This is a very small species, which seems to have its front legs shorter than the rear legs, so it appears a bit stooped, generally darkish brown and with no well-defined rump patch. The distinct short tail is white underneath and often held up. The buck has facial scent glands for marking territory, and has small antlers a bit like roe deer. Unlike any of our other deer, muntjac have long canine teeth that protrude below the lip in males. Originally from China and Taiwan, it was released at the beginning of last century around Woburn, and probably with the help of a few other releases, it has

spread in some areas quite rapidly, in others more slowly. It can be active on and off all day, is not very secretive and likes blackberry bushes, and so can be easy to see. Around here it is well-recorded in the Wakehurst and Worth areas but there are very few records south of there. In our immediate area, in recent years several people have said they have seen them, but the only available records I can find are one record from near Markstakes Common, Chailey, very close to where I saw mine, and one further east from near Knowlands Wood (towards Barcombe). And last year one was rescued after walking into a coffee shop in the middle of Eastbourne! So keep an eye out for this little deer; do let me have any records and we should try to monitor its spread into this part of Sussex.

Also recorded in northern Sussex is Sika deer (very common in some other areas such as the wetlands of the Isle of Purbeck in Dorset), and a couple of records of Chinese water deer (spreading from releases in the fens of East Anglia and Cambridgeshire), but you will have to go to Scotland to see Reindeer, or bits of Bedfordshire or Northamptonshire to see Pere David's deer.

And perhaps I could add that also in Chailey, in a group of fields with alpacas and llamas, there is a very fine Bactrian camel, the two-humped species originating from Mongolia and neighbouring China. Although not a wild animal he is worth meeting.

Tony Hutson