

Feral deer

Cervus spp.

What does it look like?

There are three main species of deer present in the Wellington region: Red deer, Sika deer and Fallow deer.

Red deer are the largest of the three species, with a reddish-brown coat in summer that is greyish-brown in winter, occasionally with white spots around the spine. The tail is short and light red-brown.

Sika deer are one of the few deer species that do not lose their spots upon reaching maturity. Coat colour is red-brown in summer and brown in winter. The tail is long and white with a black stripe.

Fallow deer are the most variable of any deer species in New Zealand with four quite distinctive colour phases. The most common colour is a brown-black back with a paler grey-brown underside and neck. They may have spots sometimes. The tail is long, black and/or white.

Detailed information can be found in The Handbook of New Zealand Mammals by C.M King and D.M Forsyth.



Why is it a problem?

Deer species such as red, sika, and fallow deer are considered pests due to their browsing habits, which can damage native vegetation and disrupt habitats. Deer are selective browsers and target particular species preferentially, in both native and exotic forests. This can result in significant changes to forest composition and has effects on the fauna that rely on those plants.

Intensive browsing can destroy much of the forest understorey and strip bark from trees, impacting plant biodiversity. Stags thrashing and rubbing with their antlers also damage vegetation. These behaviours combined with soil trampling, compaction and wallowing contribute to soil erosion. Feral deer will damage restoration plantings, and in high numbers can damage feed crops and graze large amounts of pasture, thereby reducing agricultural production.

Feral deer are a known vector of Bovine Tb, a disease which threatens the agricultural industry.

In urban areas near bush, deer may enter properties, damaging gardens, and disturbing residents and domestic pets. Deer on private property can attract unwanted attention and hunting interest, encouraging trespass.

The Wild Animal Control (WAC) Act defines deer (including wapiti or moose) that are not held behind effective fences or otherwise constrained; are not identified in accordance with an animal identification device approved under the [National Animal Identification and Tracing Act 2012](#) or in accordance with an identification system approved under [section 50](#) of the Biosecurity Act 1993 and approved by the Director-General for the



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purposes of the WAC Act, as wild animals.

GW's Regional Pest Management Plan 2019-39 defines any deer which is not held behind effective fences or otherwise constrained, and identified in accordance with a recognised identification system, as feral.

Control Methods

Greater Wellington actively manages pest animals at selected sites, including deer, to protect native ecosystems and biodiversity.

This work is funded from GW programmes such as the Key Native Ecosystem (KNE) programme, Recloaking Papatūānuku, or from internal or external agencies and landowners under Site-led programmes in the Regional Pest Management Plan, often along with others species. We also have a large project underway soon in the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo water catchment area. Any work outside this needs to be funded on a cost recovery basis, for which GW have the skills in-house and also manage contractors in undertaking control activities.

A large part of KNE work is culling operations in regional parks with the aim of reducing populations of animals such as feral deer, goats, and pigs that degrade native ecosystems. Due to food safety regulations and the cost of recovering carcasses from remote environments, they are typically left to decompose on-site, and can not be provided to the public.

Public Involvement

We encourage community participation in pest control efforts. Joining local groups can be an effective way to contribute to the management of pest populations. Local Deerstalkers organisations run training and are sometimes asked to help control deer numbers on private land. Belonging to these types of clubs provides opportunities to get involved.

For those interested in hunting deer within the region, we regularly conduct hunting ballots for specific areas, such as the Wainuiomata Water Collection Area and East Harbour Regional Park.

You can also apply for a hunting permit at GW owned regional parks and KNE sites such as Akatarawa Forest, Kaitoke Regional Park, Hutt Catchment and Pakuratahi Forest, which we encourage as it helps efforts to keep numbers down. We publish 'hot spot' maps to inform permitted hunters about areas where our culling operations are continually controlling animals, and to identify the best areas for hunters to target.

The Department of Conservation (DOC) issues hunting permits for parts of the Remutaka Forest Park, Tararua Forest Park and Aorangi Forest Park.

Safety Precautions

During culling operations, safety is a priority. We provides guidelines to ensure public safety, including information on keeping pets safe in areas where pest control is underway.

In easily accessible areas, and culling areas close to houses or walking tracks, you might see signage warning of temporary closures or access restrictions. Please comply with signage requirements to allow effective control at these sites - loose dogs running amongst culling operations is a risk.

You may hear gun shots in these areas, if you are concerned for your safety please phone police, who can tell you whether GW are hunting in the area. While every effort is made to keep carcasses out of sight, there maybe a period of time during or immediately after culling operations while we are working to move all carcasses, when you may also come across carcasses in these areas.

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Crown owned land

DOC manage feral deer on DOC-managed conservation sites. DOC have also set up a Wild Animal Management National Coordination Group which includes a number of organisations and groups to prioritise and coordinate effective wild animal management.

Hutt City Council Land

Feral deer and pigs are damaging both the natural environment and residential areas in Lower Hutt, harming private property, disrupting gardens, and significantly impacting local ecosystems. They destroy native forests by feeding on vegetation, which hinders the regeneration of native plants and disturbs habitats crucial to indigenous wildlife.

GW were engaged to undertake control, as so much of the affected land is close to public walking tracks, parks and residential housing. Private properties extend up into the hills with no identifiable property boundaries. For these reasons, permitted hunting by the public is too high risk and complicated to manage, so culling is carried out under controlled conditions by GW staff and specialised contractors.

Hutt City Council is collecting information on feral deer to better understand the problem and to develop effective management strategies. Help Hutt City Council track feral deer presence and reduce their impact on our community and biodiversity - we encourage residents to report sightings of feral deer or pigs by completing the online survey (link below)

CAUTION: A VALID NEW ZEALAND GUN LICENSE IS REQUIRED UNDER NEW ZEALAND LAW FOR ANY USE OF FIRE ARMS

Related Links

GW Regional Pest Management Plan <https://www.gw.govt.nz/environment/pest-management/>

Wild Animal Control Act <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1977/0111/latest/DLM16623.html>

GW Key Native Ecosystem sites <https://gwrc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=2844233a5d9745bab939df9355f541a9>

KNE programme <https://www.gw.govt.nz/environment/our-natural-environment/our-unique-ecosystem-types/key-native-ecosystem-programme/>

Recloaking Papatuanuku <https://www.gw.govt.nz/assets/Documents/2023/06/433a1b0ed6/Recloaking-Papatuanuku-Technical-Restoration-Guide-Draft-V2-Edit-20230320.pdf>

GW hunting permit applications <https://www.gw.govt.nz/parks/permit-applications/>

DOC hunting permit applications <https://www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/things-to-do/hunting/permits-and-licences/hunting-permit/>

Report deer - Hutt City Council <https://www.huttcity.govt.nz/environment-and-sustainability/what-you-can-do/report-deer>

NZ Game Animal Council <https://nzgameanimalcouncil.org.nz/>

NZ Deerstalkers Association <https://www.deerstalkers.org.nz/>

Rules

Under Section 52 and 53 of the Biosecurity Act 1993 no person can sell, propagate, breed, distribute or otherwise spread any pest in a Pest Management Plan, or any unwanted organism. Not complying with Section 52 or 53 is an offence under the Act, and may result in penalties noted in Section 157(1).

Management Programme

Site-led