

Red Deer

Cervus elaphus (Linnaeus, 1758)

Order: Artiodactyla

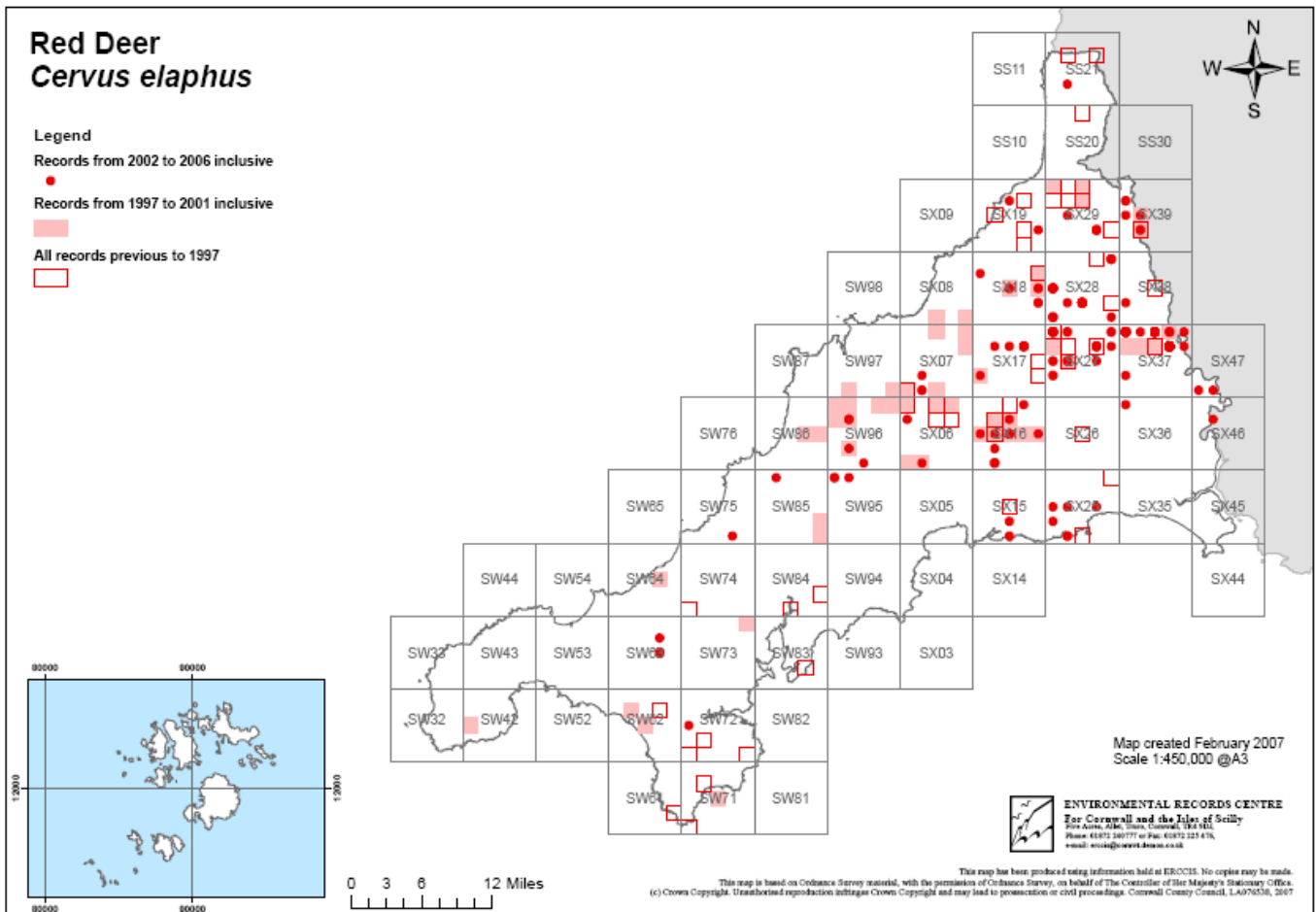
The UK's largest land animal, a stag can be 1.4 m at the shoulder and weigh up to 250Kg in European forests, although British animals are generally smaller and those found on the moors of Scotland are smaller still at about 100 Kg. The coat is reddish-brown in summer, turning grey-brown in winter with paler underparts. The rump is buff and there is a short, darker tail. Calves may have white flecks on their flanks. The head is large with large, mobile, ears. The adult male, or stag, develops a mane of long brown hair during the rut. Males bear antlers which are shed in late spring and re-grow each year, the size and complexity increasing as the animal ages. Red deer tracks, known as 'slots' are 8-9 cm long and 6-7 cm wide, the space between the sides being parallel. Deer use regular tracks across banks and through woodlands, often leaving clear prints where they have jumped down from a bank. Deer droppings can be confused with those of sheep or goats. The individual pellets are 20-25 mm cylinders 13-18mm thick, one end has a little point the other a dimple, and when fresh are shiny and black. In the summer they are often lumped together. When broken open they are green or brown. Stags may leave distinctive signs by damaging trees when removing velvet from their antlers



Generally red deer live in herds: females and young, and separate herds of adult males. During the breeding season, or rut, adult males are solitary. Herd size is dependent on habitat with larger herds of up to 100 animals in open country. During the rut from September to October males compete to mate with herds of females (hinds), bellowing, posturing and sparring. Calves (usually single) are born in June. Females stay with the mother's herd and reach sexual maturity in the third year. Males are mature at 4. Red deer can live to 20 years in good habitat.

Red deer prefer mature deciduous woodland but found in a variety of habitats including woodland edge, agricultural fields, parkland and moor. They feed mainly at dawn and dusk by browsing on shoots of young trees and shrubs. Large numbers of red deer may cause significant damage to commercial forestry through browsing and thrashing activity. Red deer also graze heather, grasses and sedges on open country, on farmland red deer will graze most agricultural crops.

Red deer have no natural predators in the UK. Calves often die in poor weather. Red deer are hunted for venison, to limit damage to crops and forestry, and for trophies. Deer are frequently involved in collisions with vehicles and up to 74,000 deer (of all species) are killed or injured every year in the UK.



Local distribution and key sites

The map shows that Red Deer are mainly found in the east of the county and are not widespread.

Number of records per date class

- 2002 to 2006 inclusive 209
- 1997 to 2001 inclusive 59
- All records previous to 1997 68
- Total 336**

Red deer are found across Europe and Asia from the Arctic Circle south to North Africa. In the UK they are found in Scotland and in discontinuous areas including the Pennines, Cumbria, Peak District, East Anglia and the South-West, a relic of a history of local extinction and reintroduction.

Widespread, and locally common. All deer are protected under the Deer Act, 1991, which defines close seasons and specifies the weapons which can be used to kill deer.

Survey Methods

- Field surveys for tracks and signs
- Traffic casualty monitoring
- Deer management returns
- Hunt returns

Did you know?

Deer have no upper teeth and so they leave a ragged edge to any browsed vegetation, in contrast to the clean cut left by rabbits. There is no evidence that lion dung or human hair will help keep deer out of your garden, despite popular claims.

Key references

- Web sites – The British Deer Society www.bds.org.uk
- The deer initiative www.thedeerinitiative.co.uk