

Roe Deer

Capreolus capreolus (Linnaeus, 1758) Order: Artiodactyla

Goat-sized deer usually seen alone or in small family groups. Sandy red-brown coat in the summer which turns grey-brown in the winter. White rump (shaped like an inverted heart in females, but more kidney-shaped in males) with a short white tail. The nose is black with a white chin patch. Adult males, or bucks, have short antlers of up to 25 cm with no more than three points which are shed each winter.

The deer's tracks, or slots, are up to 45 mm long and 30 mm wide and are sharply pointed, compared to those of sheep or goats. Droppings are 10-14 mm long and 7-10 mm wide with the characteristic deer shape – pointed at one end and rounded at the other. They may be individual or in large clumps and closely resemble those of sheep.

During the rutting season the bucks mark territories by fraying young trees with their antlers. They may also wear circular or figure-of-eight tracks while chasing does at these mating sites.



Roe deer mate earlier than other deer in Britain – in July and August. They are unusual in that the fertilised egg is not implanted in the uterus for 3 months and the calves, or kids, are born in May or June. Twins are common. The kids can walk within an hour but usually remain hidden in undergrowth for the first week of their lives. The female, or doe, with her young may then rejoin the buck and stay as a family group until the young are driven away in the winter. Roe deer may live for up to 16 years but bucks rarely survive more than 5 years and does 7 years.

Roe deer prefer open woodland but may be seen in open fields when high densities are present. Roe deer browse on deciduous trees and shrubs in the summer, heather, ivy and acorns and conifers in the winter. Roe will also enter arable fields to graze on agricultural crops and weeds.

Foxes, and eagles where present, will kill young roe deer. Many are killed each year in collision with vehicles and many die in harsh winters. Hunting for meat and to control forestry and agricultural losses also removes large numbers each year.

