



fallow deer

Fallow deer are considered a naturalised species in Britain. Although there is no evidence of their occurrence in the Holocene, they were thought to have been introduced around 2,000 years ago. However, numerous records show their presence in Britain during earlier interglacials. Over the past few centuries their populations have fluctuated due to hunting pressures and habitat change, but they are now abundant across much of Britain, particularly across the south. They both graze and browse, and are found in a wide range of habitats, including woodlands, grasslands, and scrub mosaics.

Environmental Benefits



Grazer & Browser



Seed Dispersal



Increasing Soil Health



Carbon Sequestration



Rutting Behaviours

Fallow deer are categorised as intermediary feeders, helping maintain open meadows and prevents woodlands from becoming overly dense, benefiting plant diversity and habitat structure. This also suppresses dominant vegetation, creating a mosaic of open areas of woodland.

They are highly effective seed dispersers, transporting species of plant in their fur and droppings, contributing to plant diversity and the regeneration of degraded landscapes.

Trampling organic growth and the spread of droppings contributes to nutrient redistribution in both woodlands and grasslands, enriching soil health. This process also helps improve carbon sequestration and promotes plant growth.

Rutting behaviour that occurs in Autumn involves clashing antlers, tearing up soil and rubbing against trees. The disturbance caused from the rut promotes new growth and creates micro habitats for insects and small mammals.

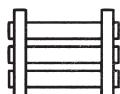
Managing Fallow Deer in a Rewilding Project

Key management considerations include:



Population Management

Ensure appropriate social structures for each species is observed and maintain appropriate densities based on the carrying capacity of the area.



Fencing

While allowing wild fallow deer to move in and out of nature recovery projects is optimal for achieving maximum ecological benefits, some sites have chosen to keep fallow deer within the boundary by erecting deer-height fencing. Fenced-in deer are usually still considered legally wild, depending on the size of the site.



Carcass Management

Wild deer are exempt from the 'Fallen Stock Rule', unless a disease is suspected, so their carcass can remain in situ to benefit other wildlife and return nutrients to the soil.



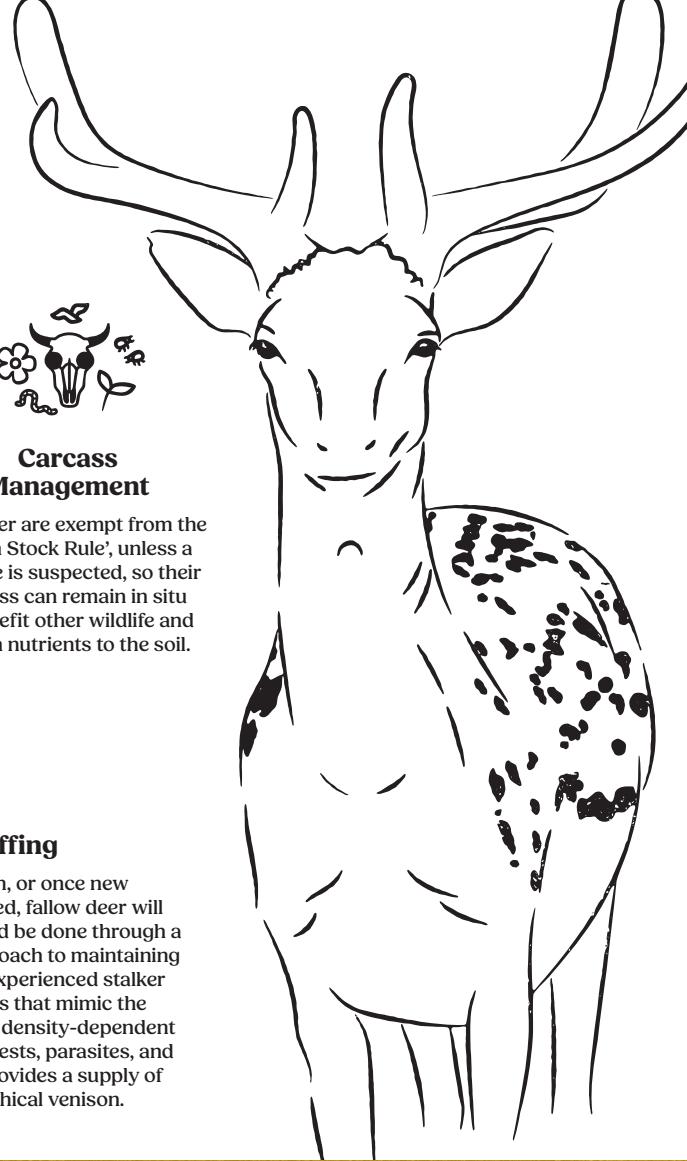
Public Safety / Ecotourism

Fallow deer rut in the autumn, and during this period their behaviour can be unpredictable. People should keep a safe distance and ensure dogs are under control. However, the rut is a spectacular sight and can offer valuable ecotourism opportunities when observed responsibly from a safe distance.



Dedicated Staffing

If numbers are already high, or once new populations become established, fallow deer will require management. This should be done through a dedicated, landscape-scale approach to maintaining healthy population levels. An experienced stalker can regulate numbers in ways that mimic the effects of natural predators and density-dependent pressures, such as starvation, pests, parasites, and disease. This approach also provides a supply of healthy, locally sourced, ethical venison.



Legal Restrictions

The introduction of fallow deer in Britain must comply with specific legal and regulatory requirements:



Wild Release Licence

Fallow deer are a wild resident species in England and do not require a licence from Natural England for release into the wild.



No Identification

Wild deer are not subject to identification requirements such as ear tagging or tattooing.



Protected By Law

Fallow deer are protected under the Deer Act 1991 from being taken, killed or injured in certain circumstances, as well as from particular capture methods.

A note on Diverse Herbivore Assemblages

Each herbivore has unique physical and behavioural traits that shape the environment in different ways and create habitats for a variety of species. Their combined impact supports a broader range of species and rewilding projects should therefore aim to introduce a variety of herbivore species where possible. Please refer to our other herbivore guides for more information.

The Large Herbivore Working Group (LHWG) is a UK-based network of experts formed in 2022 to support the restoration and introduction of large herbivores as part of nature-recovery efforts. It develops guidance, informs policy, and shares best practice across the sector. The LHWG is currently funded until 2027 and hosted by the Landscape Recovery team at The Wildlife Trusts.

Please note these species and nature recovery profiles produced by the LHWG are not legal advice and are intended to provide a high-level overview to support your understanding of considerations needed for large herbivore introductions and management for nature recovery initiatives in England.

Design and artwork by Lauren Hulbert.