



# roe deer

Roe deer are widespread across Europe, both the numbers and range of roe deer in Britain fell dramatically between the 17th and early 20th century due to excessive hunting. Introductions from Europe helped recover the species, and it has since seen an increase in its number and spread across Britain. Their ecological flexibility, ability to survive in a variety of habitats and undoubted nativeness make them a likely herbivore species to be present in nature recovery initiatives.

## Environmental Benefits



### Browsers

Roe deer are predominantly browsers, often targeting young trees and shrubs, which leads to dynamic shifts in forest species communities. This feeding behaviour also prevents the domination of a single plant and creates open areas where light can reach the understorey vegetation.



### Vegetation Diversity

Open patches of woodland act as microhabitats that benefit other fauna such as butterflies, reptiles and small mammals, and increased diversity of vegetation provides habitats for birds, other invertebrates and fungi.



### Seed Dispersal

They are highly effective seed dispersers, transporting many species of plants in their coat, hooves and droppings, contributing to plant diversity and habitat regeneration.



### Nutrient Cycling

Roe deer aid ecosystem processes like nutrient cycling. This is aided through trampling organic matter into the ground, promoting healthy plant growth and carbon storage.



### Rutting Behaviors

Rutting behaviour that occurs in summer 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 Roe Deer in a Rewilding Project

Key management considerations include:



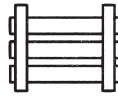
## Carcass Management

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.



## Dedicated Staffing

If numbers are already high, or once new populations become established, roe 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.



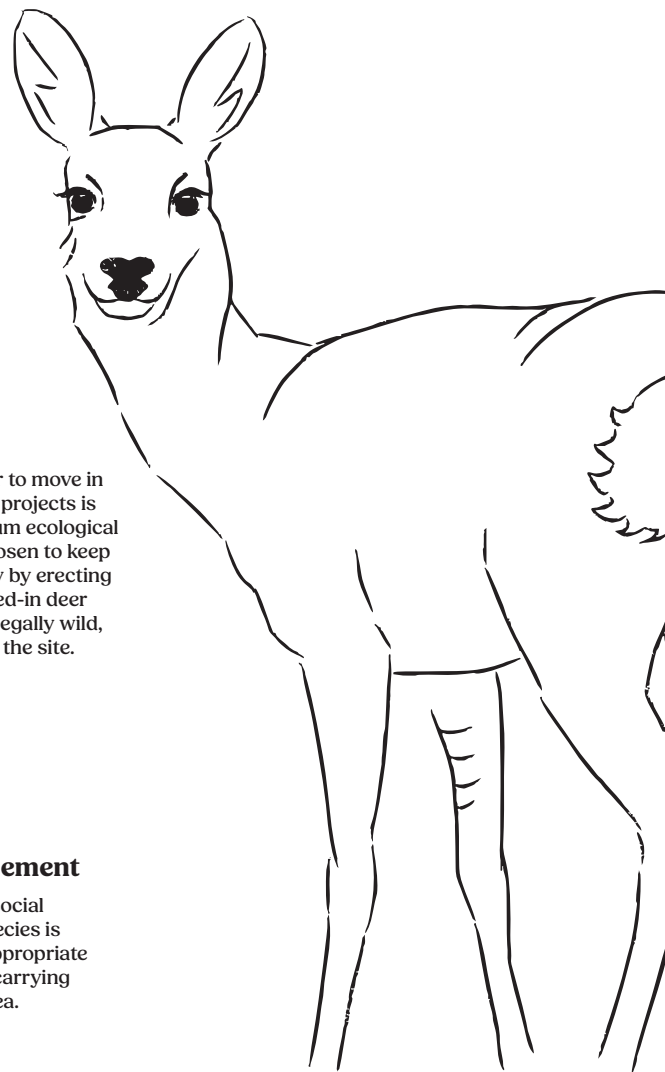
## Fencing

While allowing wild roe deer to move in and out of nature recovery projects is optimal for achieving maximum ecological benefits, some sites have chosen to keep roe 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.



## Population Management

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



## Legal Restrictions

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



### Wild Release Licence

Roe deer are a resident native species which does 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

Roe 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.