



Red deer (stag)



Fallow deer (stag)



Red deer

Feral deer are a pest in Taranaki and the Taranaki Regional Council promotes the voluntary control of them to reduce the threat to agriculture and the environment.

To hunt or kill feral deer, you must have the prior consent of the appropriate land owner.

FERAL DEER IN NEW ZEALAND

Deer were introduced to New Zealand in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Deer numbers rapidly increased until the Government introduced deer cullers in the 1930s. Control by cullers continued until the 1960s, when helicopter recovery of wild venison became commercially viable and populations of wild deer were dramatically reduced.

With a decrease in commercial deer recovery in recent years, deer numbers are thought to be increasing again in some areas.

In Taranaki, feral deer were largely absent until the 1980s when herds became established by animals escaping from deer farms and from illegal liberation.

A permit from the Department of Conservation is required to farm deer.

DESCRIPTION

Feral deer are any deer living in the wild that are not being farmed. Escaped deer, with a registered eartag or brand, are not feral deer.

Feral deer are herbivorous, mainly social animals and are active mostly during the day.

Red, sika, sambar, rusa, fallow, wapiti and white-tailed deer species are declared pest animals in Taranaki. In the wild, only fallow deer are present in large numbers in Taranaki but there may be small herds of red deer. There is concern about unconfirmed reports of sika deer in north Taranaki, as they could be the most difficult to eliminate.

IMPACT ON AGRICULTURE

Feral deer are a serious threat to agriculture and the TB-free status of Taranaki.

If Bovine Tuberculosis (TB) became established in feral deer populations they could spread the disease to farm animals, or to other TB carriers such as possums and ferrets which could then transmit the disease to livestock. Once established, TB would be difficult to eradicate from feral deer populations and would be an ongoing threat to wildlife and farm animals.

One of the main risks of TB becoming established in the region is from deer being taken from areas where TB is endemic and liberated illegally in Taranaki.

IMPACT ON ECOLOGICAL VALUES

Any increase in the number of feral deer would have a major impact on Taranaki's unique natural ecosystems.

If not controlled, the deer population is likely to grow steadily, given the rich plant diversity and wide range of suitable habitat in the region. The deer will browse seedlings and shrubs, with a major impact on the structure of the forest.

In areas already populated by feral goats, the presence of feral deer will add to the impact on forests. And in areas where feral goats have been controlled, the impact of feral deer may reverse any improvements in the biodiversity of the area.

ANIMAL PEST MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

There is no rule requiring control of feral deer on a property but their voluntary control is promoted.

The distribution, release or sale of feral deer is banned. And you cannot hold feral deer on premises where animals are offered for sale.

For further advice or information about pest animal management contact:

TARANAKI REGIONAL COUNCIL
Pest Animal Management Section
Private bag 713, Stratford
Ph: 06 765 7127 or 0800 736 222
Fax: 06 765 5097 www.trc.govt.nz

SHOOTING TO CONTROL FERAL DEER

In recent years the co-operative efforts of landowners and professional and private hunters have reduced breeding populations in north and south Taranaki. However, feral deer are still present throughout Taranaki and reports of illegal liberations continue.

Ground hunting of feral deer, using any high power centre fire cartridge above .222 calibre, is recommended.

Hunters using indicator dogs and a suppressed or silenced rifle have the greatest success. Indicator dogs are particularly successful in locating deer in bush country.

At night, deer can be identified by the brilliant silvery green colour and large size of their eyes.

LIBERATION OF FERAL DEER

Pioneers were keen to establish deer stalking, which had been a privileged sport for English nobility since medieval times.

The first deer liberated in New Zealand were red deer, gifted from England and Scotland to kinsmen and friends in the new country. The Government was involved in liberating deer in the early 1900s.

Eight deer species quickly adapted to New Zealand conditions and built up to prolific populations.

The main liberations of deer in New Zealand were:

1851 - Red deer from England and Scotland.

1875 - Sambur deer from Sri Lanka

1876 - Fallow deer, from England.

1867 - Axis deer (now extinct in NZ) from India and Sri Lanka

1904 - Sika deer from Manchuria.

1907 - Rusa deer from New Caledonia.

1907 - Moose from Canada.

1909 - Wapiti (Elk) from North America.

1909 - Virginia (White tail) deer from North America.

Deer were initially protected by Acclimatisation Societies to allow their numbers to build up. In 1882 the Nelson Acclimatisation Society was the first to sell deer hunting licences to hunters eager to obtain trophy antlers.

By 1910 farmers were complaining that protected red deer were eating crops and pasture. By 1912 foresters were also alarmed at the rate red deer were multiplying and the damage that they were causing to vegetation in forests and mountain lands.