

Roe deer



Roe deer are a small, elegant and attractive species with the male standing at only 65 -70cm (2 feet 4 inches) to its shoulder and weighing up to twenty-five kilograms maximum. During summer, the adult coat is reddish brown; this is moulted in the autumn and replaced by a much thicker, grey winter coat. Males are known as bucks and females does, young roe deer are referred to as fawns or kids. A doe can be distinguished from a buck by an anal cushion of white fur known as the tush. Bucks are devoid of tails, but can be identified by their antlers, which have a maximum of three branched points or tines. Bucks tend to be mostly solitary, while does will often be accompanied by fawns for much of the year and may even form small groups in winter. The mosaic of small fields in west Dorset, strewn with thick hedges and copses provides the perfect habitat for their needs.

Roe deer are browsers, feeding on the leaves and shoots of deciduous trees and shrubs, as well as grassland vegetation. They have a bad reputation amongst gardeners due to their liking for roses! Their activities tend to be crepuscular and nocturnal, but when undisturbed, may be seen out in the open at any time of day. Roe bucks defend a territory of up to ten hectares against other males. Females are not territorial, but occupy home ranges, often overlapping with other does.

For much of the year, roe deer are fairly quiet, apart from during the rutting season, which occurs in high summer, peaking at around the beginning of August. At this time, females attract the attention of males with rhythmic, high-pitched squeaking calls. The rut is usually centred around a bush or young tree, the so-called 'rutting ring'. The ground around the ring is typically heavily worn and scented. Fawns are

born the following year at the end of May to early June. A couple of weeks prior to birth, the doe chases away the previous years kids.

345 words

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