



Irish Deer Commission
irishdeercommission.ie

Exploring Ireland's Wild Deer for the Junior Education Cycle

Are there deer in your area?

Here are some common signs to look out for.

Deer leave many traces of their presence behind, the most common are slots or deer hoof-prints which you will find in soft ground. But also look out for deer droppings, deer pathways, deer hair snagged on wire fences, rutting scrapes and wallow holes.

Deer Footprints

Deer have cloven hooves, the hoof is divided into two parts called "cleaves", each of which leaves a clear impression in the ground. Deer "footprints" are called "slots" and come in different shapes & sizes depending on the species concerned. Deer slots can easily be confused with those of sheep and goats, but practice will help in making the correct identification.

Red Deer

Red deer slots are noticeably big, both in length and width. Guide forefoot size for a fully grown red deer stag: 8-9 centimetres (3½ inches) long, 6-7 centimetres (2½ inches) wide. For a fully grown red deer hind: 6-7 centimetres (2½ inches) long, 4-5 centimetres (1½ inches) wide. The red deer slot is characterised by a rounded outline at the back of each cleave, whilst at the front, the outer edges of each curve symmetrically towards the tip.

Fallow Deer

Fallow deer slots are slightly smaller than those of red deer, Guide size: fallow deer buck, 6.5-8 centimetres (3 inches) long; 4-5 centimetres (1½ inches) wide; fallow deer doe 5-6 centimetres (2 inches) long, 3-4 centimetres (1¼ inches) wide.

The shape left by each cleave often tends to be pointed at the front and round at the back. This will tell you what direction the deer is travelling.

Sika Deer

Sika deer slots are very similar to those of fallow deer, but are often slightly shorter and broader.

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Deer slots (footprints) in soft ground, note the direction the deer is moving!

"These footprints are
actual size"



Fallow / Sika slots are 6cm-8cm



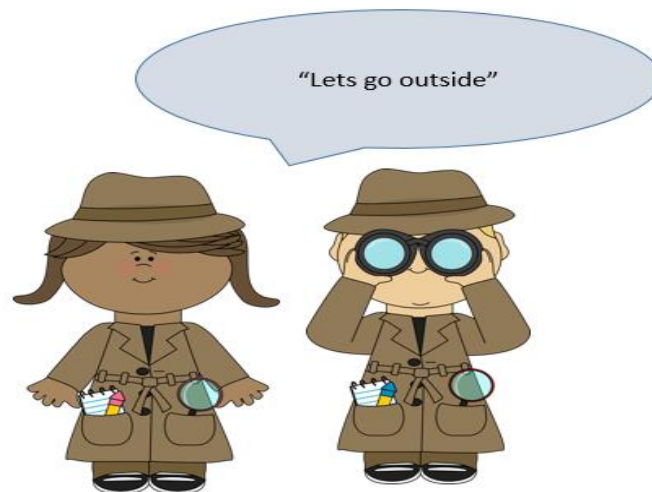
Red deer slots 8cm – 9cm long

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Deer tracks are easier to find in the snow. Can you tell what direction the deer is moving?



The study of animal droppings is not to everybody's liking, but droppings provide a useful indication that deer are present and may even help identify the species. Size is a crucial clue.

Fallow Deer: medium size droppings: 1-1.5 centimetres x .8-1.2 centimetres (½ inch x 1/3 inch); oval shape similar to those of red deer; black changing to brown.

Red Deer: large droppings: 2-2.5 centimetres x 1.3–1.8 centimetres (1 inch x ½ inch); initially black and shiny, gradually becoming duller and more dark brown; cylindrical/acorn-shaped, often pointed at one end, rounded or slightly concave at the other.

Sika Deer: medium size droppings: 1-1.5 centimetres x .8-1.2 centimetres (½ inch x 1/3 inch); glossy black pellet; one end flat, indented or rounded, the other pointed.

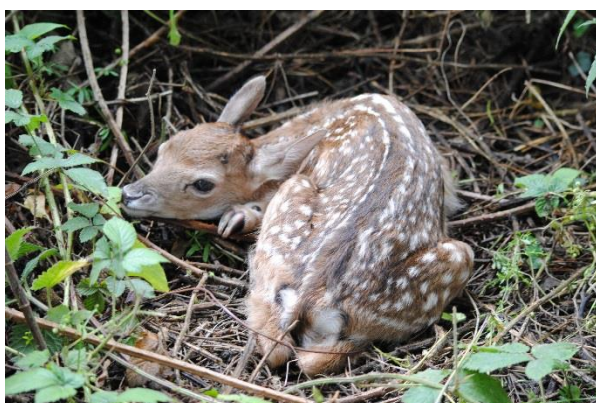
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“There’s deer here alright”

Lying up places or fawning areas



Calves and fawns are born during the month of June, if found they should never be handled. Their mothers will return to feed them. Flattened down grass is often an area where deer have been lying up.



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Stream crossings



Edges of streams are good places to look for deer slots. (Footprints)

Damage to trees "Trashing"



If you see damage to trees, look around for other signs to confirm it was caused by deer.

Browse lines

Deer do like to eat leaves and can reach up to 2 metres by standing on their hind legs.



Notice the absence of any low-lying branches, indicating the reach of browsing deer. Not to be confused with farm livestock browsing.

Deer hair snagged on fences

Study of wire fences in an area occupied by deer will reveal deer hair.

Cast antlers



Can you tell which antler belongs to which type of deer, Fallow or Red.?

Deer antlers fall off every year, growing bigger the following year. Cast antlers can occasionally be found, but the deer do often eat them to extract the calcium in the bone.

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Scrapes & Wallow holes



A patch of ground dug up by the deer during the “rut” or mating season is called a scrape or a wallow hole. Here we see a young sika stag making a scrape.



A Red stag standing in a wallow hole.

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Identifying the type of deer in your area

Red Deer

Red deer are our largest and the only native species to Ireland. The Red deer has a rich red coloured coat, darkening down to a greyish brown in winter. A mature stag carries a large set of antlers. A fully-grown Red stag can stand 120cm (48") high at the shoulder and can weigh anything up to 240kg.



Red deer antlers are branching, they can have 12 or 14 points. Killarney, Co. Kerry

Red Deer: A male is called a Stag

A Female is called a Hind

A new-born is called a Calf

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Japanese Sika



Japanese Sika Stag. (above left) the Stag is in his summer coat and above right the stag has changed into his winter coat. The change is referred to as moulting, which happens in the spring and autumn.

Sika deer originated from the Japanese Islands in north eastern Asia and were introduced to Ireland in 1860. The sika coat is light brown with spots in the summer, but changes to grey browns and almost black in winter. Sika are a small deer with stags measuring up to 80 cm at the shoulder and weighting between 50-60kg. Like Red deer, Sika have pointed or spike like antlers.

Sika Deer: A male is called a Stag

A Female is called a Hind

A new-born is called a Calf

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Fallow Deer



Fallow Bucks in summer coats, note the palmated “flattened” antler (above right)
Fallow can be seen quite easily in the Phoenix Park in Dublin

This is the only Irish species of deer where the bucks have palmated (broad flattened) antlers. The coat coloration is quite variable including Black, White, Brown, and Yellowish etc. Common Fallow are light brown with white spots in summer and turns grey and darkens in the winter. Fallow deer are an average size deer, between the Sika and the Red. With adult bucks weighing about 80kg.

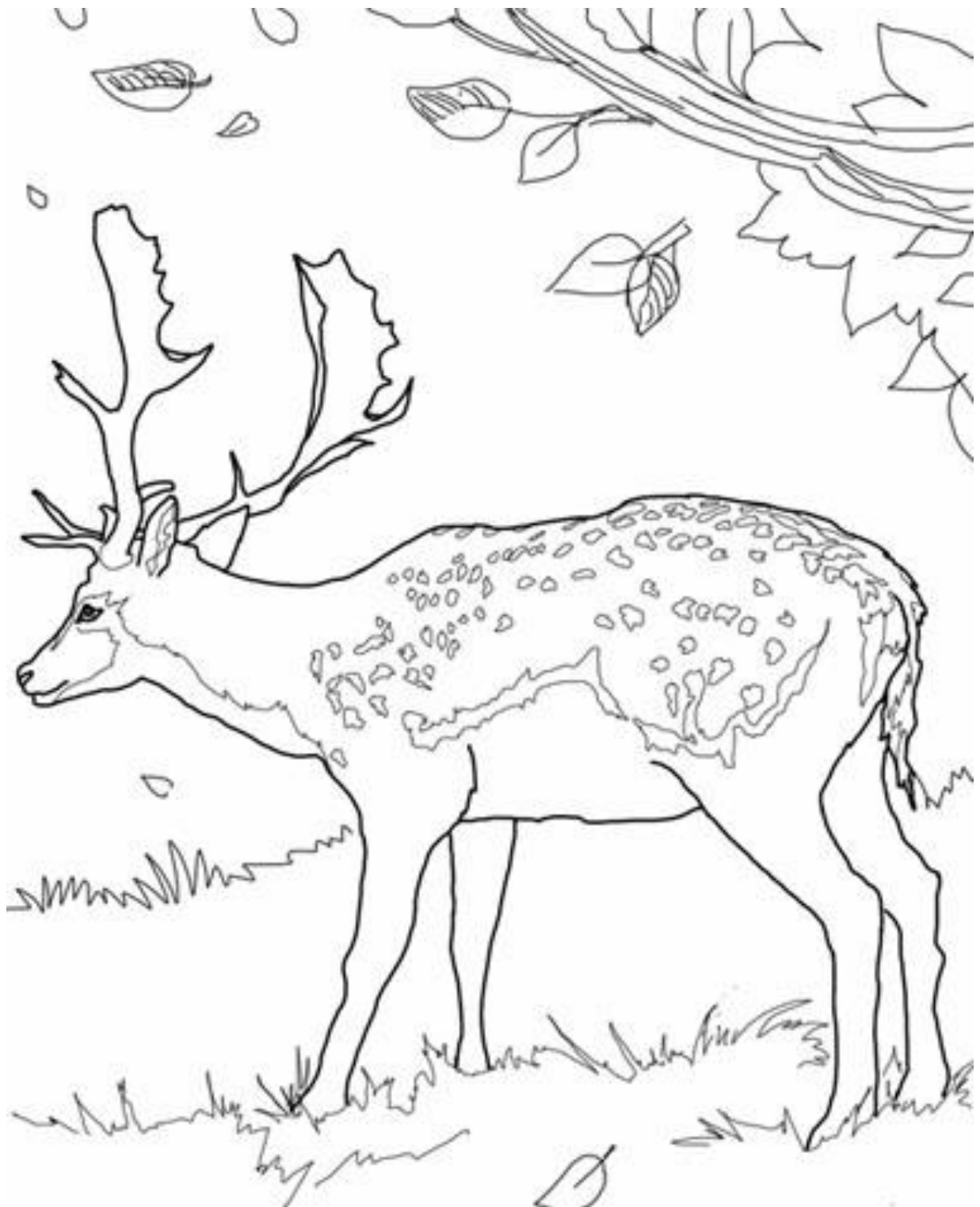
Fallow Deer: A male is called a Buck

A Female is called a Doe

A new-born is called a Fawn

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Fallow Buck

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Red Deer