

Roe Deer

Scientific classification	
Kingdom:	Animalia
Phylum:	Chordata
Class:	Mammalia
Order:	Artiodactyla
Family:	Cervidae
Subfamily:	Odocoileinae
Genus:	Capreolus
Species:	C. capreolus
Binomial name	Capreolus capreolus (Linnaeus, 1758)

The European Roe Deer (*Capreolus capreolus*) is a deer species of Europe, Asia Minor, and Caspian coastal regions. There is a separate species known as the Siberian Roe Deer (*Capreolus pygargus*) that is found from the Ural Mountains to as far east as China and Siberia. The two species meet at the Caucasus Mountains, with the European species occupying the southern flank of the mountain ranges and adjacent Asia Minor and the Siberian species occupying the northern flank of the mountain ranges. Within Europe, the European Roe Deer occurs in most areas, with the exception of northernmost Scandinavia (north of Narvik) and some of the islands, notably Iceland, Ireland, and the Mediterranean Sea islands; in the Mediterranean region it is largely confined to mountainous regions, and is absent or rare at low levels.

Etymology

English roe is from Old English *raha*, from Proto-Germanic **raikhon*, cognate to Old Norse *ra*, German *Reh*. The word is attested in the 5th century Caistor-by-Norwich astragalus inscription as *raihan*. Ultimately perhaps from a PIE root **rei-* "streaked, spotted."

Physical appearance

The Roe Deer is a relatively small deer, with a body length of 95-135 cm (3.1 - 4.4 ft), a shoulder height of 65-75 cm (2.1 - 2.5 ft), and a weight of 15-30 kg (33-66 lb). It has rather short, erect antlers and a reddish body with a grey face. Its hide is golden red in summer, darkening to brown or even black in winter, with lighter undersides and a white rump patch; the tail is very short (2-3 cm, or 0.8 - 1.2 in), and barely visible. Only the males have antlers. The first and second set of antlers are unbranched and short (5-12 cm, or 2 - 4.7 in), while older bucks in good conditions develop antlers up to 20-25 cm (8-10 in) long with two or three, rarely even four, points. When the male's antlers begin to regrow, they are covered in a thin layer of velvet-like fur which disappears later on after the hair's blood supply is lost. Males may speed up

the process by rubbing their antlers on trees, so that their antlers are hard and stiff for the duels during the mating season. Unlike most cervids, roe deer begin regrowing antlers almost immediately after they are shed.

Habitat and diet

The Roe Deer is primarily crepuscular, or primarily active during the twilight, very quick and graceful, lives in woods although it may venture into grasslands and sparse forests. It feeds mainly on grass, leaves, berries and young shoots. It particularly likes very young, tender grass with a high moisture content, i.e., grass that has received rain the day before. Roe deer will not generally venture into a field that has had or has livestock (sheep, cattle) in it because the livestock make the grass unclean. A pioneer species commonly associated with biotic communities at an early stage of succession, during the Neolithic period in Europe the Roe Deer was abundant, taking advantage of areas of forest or woodland cleared by Neolithic farmers (Boyle, 2006).

Behaviour and life cycle

The Roe Deer attains a maximum life span (in the wild) of ten years. When alarmed, it will bark a sound much like a dog and flash out its white rump patch. Rump patches differ between the sexes, with the white rump patches heart-shaped on females and kidney-shaped on males. Males may also bark, make a low grunting noise or make a high pitched wolf-like whine when attracting mates during the breeding season, often luring multiple does into their territory. The Roe Deer spends most of its life alone, preferring to live solitary except when mating during the breeding season.

Reproduction

The polygamous Roe Deer males clash over territory in early summer and mate in early fall. During courtship, when the males chase the females, they often flatten the underbrush leaving behind areas of the forest in the shape of a figure eight called 'roe rings'. Males may also use their antlers to shovel around fallen foliage and dirt as a way of attracting a mate. Roebucks enter rutting inappetence during the July and August breeding season. Females are monoestrous and after delayed implantation usually give birth the following June, after a ten-month gestation period, typically to two spotted fawns of opposite sexes. The fawns remain hidden in long grass from predators until they are ready to join the rest of the herd; they are suckled by their mother several times a day for around three months. Roe deer adults will often abandon their young if they sense or smell that an animal or human has been near it. Young female roe deer can begin to reproduce when they are around 16 months old.

In Popular Culture

The world famous deer Bambi (the eponymous character of the books *Bambi, A Life in the Woods*, and its sequel *Bambi's Children*, by Felix Salten) is originally a roe deer. It was only when the story was adapted into the animated

Ente di Gestione delle Aree Protette della Valle Sesia

feature film Bambi, by the Walt Disney Studios, was Bambi changed to a white-tailed deer. This change was made due to the white-tail being a more familiar species to the mainstream U.S. viewers. Consequently, the setting was also changed to a North American wilderness.

