

Species Fact Sheet: Reeves Muntjac (*Muntiacus reevesi*)



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Quick Facts

Recognition: A small, hump-backed deer (a bit larger than a fox), with a small tail and not as much of a white “target” as with sika or fallow deer. Ginger pelage with dark stripes on the face. Males have short slightly hooked antlers born on long pedicels, sloping strongly backwards, and long protruding canines.

Size: 77-91 cm; Tail length: 13-18 cm; Shoulder height 45-52 cm.

Weight: Males 12-17 kg; females 10-16 kg

Life Span: Up to 16 years for males in captivity and female >20 years. In the wild this tends to be 10 years for a male and 13 years for a female.



Distribution & Habitat

Reeves' muntjac are native to SE China, including Taiwan and Hainan. Introduced to Woburn Park, Bedfordshire, in 1894, it was deliberately released into surrounding woodlands from 1901 onwards. Releases, translocations and escapes from the 1930s onwards resulted in wide establishment in SE England, and it is still spreading. It is susceptible to severe winters, but its small size and preference for thick cover enables it to adapt to suburban habitats. In some parts of SE England it is very abundant, reaching 100/km² in prime habitat. Muntjac prefer deciduous woodland with a good understorey. Hedgerows, gardens, conifer plantations and railway embankments are also used, and in woods of conservation interest, they can do serious damage to important wild flowers (bluebells, primroses, oxslips, honeysuckle, orchids).

General Ecology

Behaviour

Bucks are territorial, marking prominent tree trunks and boughs with scent from glands on their forehead. Their territories overlap the home ranges of several does. Does are slightly more tolerant of each other, but maintain an exclusive core area. Muntjac do not form herds, but are seen either solitarily or in family groups of a doe with her kid. Oddly for a deer in Britain, but reflecting their subtropical homelands, muntjac breed all year round.

Diet and Feeding

They feed on shoots of shrubs, woodland herbs and garden plants, but bramble and raspberry are their most important foods.

Reproduction

The female has just one kid (rarely twins), after a gestation of 210 days. Kids are born throughout the year, and the doe has an immediate oestrus. She can therefore be almost continuously pregnant, and produces around 3 kids every 2 years. The young bucks start to develop antlers at around 25 weeks, whatever the month, and shed the velvet at 46-76 weeks. The first antlers are shed in late May (when the young buck may be anything from 52-112 weeks old) but then regularly each year at that time.

Conservation & Pest Control

Reeves' muntjac can be a serious pest in gardens, conservation woodlands and sometimes in forestry. Regular coppicing of deciduous woodland, either to produce a crop of firewood or for conservation of other plants and animals, can be severely compromised.

Because they breed all year, it is difficult to suggest a sensible humane culling season; and because they are so small, and often in suburban habitats, shooting is difficult. Bucks can be shot at any time, as can young does, before they have reached sexual maturity. In late pregnancy, when the previous kid should be independent, it may again be acceptable to shoot does. Muntjac are strong, and push through quite dense barriers and under fences. Strong wire fences will stop them, especially if dug into the ground at the foot. Many muntjac are killed in vehicle collisions. The venison is succulent.

