

Animal Life

Deer in Ireland



Sika hinds (females)

Photo: © Malene Thyssen, www.mffoto.dk

The Sika Deer – *Cervus nippon nippon* – Fia Seapánach

The Sika deer is the smallest deer in Ireland and was brought here in 1860 from Japan. The males are called stags, females are hinds and the young are called calves. During the summer the deer is reddish-brown with pale spots along its flank and has a beige belly. In the winter the coat changes to a dark grey brown colour without spots and has a grey belly. A black line can be seen all year round extending from the head down to the tail. All sika deer have a white heart-shaped rump. The male is about 80cm high to the shoulder and the female has a height of 70cm. The stags V-shaped antlers fall off in April but a new pair begins to grow straight away. During the mating season (rutting) he can be heard calling out in loud whistles and squeaks. A single deep chestnut coloured calf is born covered in white spots. Sika deers can live for 18 years.



Red Deer with Stag, Hinds and Calves waiting for hay.

Photo: © Bob Cooke

The Red deer – *Cervus elaphus* – Fia rua

Red deer have been in Ireland for about 26,000 years. The males are known as stags, females as hinds and the young as calves. The stag is about 1.5 metres in height to the shoulder and the hind grows to about one metre. In the summer the deer's coat is a deep chestnut colour with cream underbelly which changes to brown in winter. It has a short tail and a beige or creamy coloured rump. The male has antlers, which are U-shaped when seen from the front. These are shed in the spring and a new set begins to grow straight away. During mating the male red deer gives out a huge roar, which can be heard from far away. Calves are born in early summer with a spotty coat. Red deer have been known to live for 15 years.



A buck (male) fallow in velvet.

Photo: © B.Navez - Valée des dames (Jura) - Centre - France - 10 AUG 2005

The European Fallow deer – *Dama dama dama* – Fia bui

The Fallow deer originally came from England in 1244. The males are called bucks, the female does and the young are fawns. The height of the male to the shoulder is about one metre and the female is about 85 cm. Fallow deer can vary from black, chestnut brown to ginger brown and sometimes have white spots. The rump is white with a black edge and has a long tail. The male has a set of broad flattened antlers, which he loses in the spring. Fallow bucks give out a barking grunt during the rut (mating time). In June the does give birth to a single fawn that has a spotty coat. Fallow deer can live for up to 18 years.

For more information visit the ENFO website: www.enfo.ie



Slimy Tale!

From February onwards look out for frog spawn near the surface of ponds and slow moving streams. The clumps of jelly each contain a black spot, which is the egg. This hatches into a tadpole with a long tail and feeds on the jelly and other things in the pond. For about the first month it lives at the bottom of the pond and breathes like a fish using its gills. First its hind legs begin to grow, followed by the front legs. Once its lungs form the frog gradually makes its way to the surface and the tail slowly disappears.

Spring Highlights!

As soon as the warm weather of spring arrives

the Peacock butterfly wakes up from its hibernation. It is one of the few butterflies that hibernate for the winter, one of the first to be seen in Spring and one of the few butterflies that live for almost a year. It is easy to identify by the four 'peacock eyes' on the upperside of its wings. These 'eyes' are used to frighten off predators. It can also give off a hissing sound if it is disturbed.



Rise and Shine!

Sketch: © Audrey Murphy