



# Wild Ways Well and Deer

Today's Wild Ways Well task is to go for a walk in your local greenspace and keep an eye out for deer... Remember to follow the guidelines on Social Distancing, stay 2m apart from other people and only walk in your local area – and remember to wash your hands!

You'll **Be Active** by carefully walking outdoors (observing social distancing) keeping your mind busy and occupying your time looking for signs of these elusive mammals. Deer are quite common, even in urban areas, but spotting them can be difficult.

We can **Connect** with deer by opening up our senses and empathising with the way they live their lives. Deer have many of the same needs as us – how do they find food, water and shelter in Cumbernauld? How do their senses compare to ours? Do they see the world in the same way we do?

We can **Keep Learning**, there are hundreds of web pages, book and tv programmes dedicated to deer. Deer have been part of human culture for thousands of years, we can learn what our ancestors thought of them and how we can live alongside them today.

Although they are secretive and hard to see Deer are actually all around us, and are vital to the ecosystem we all share but we rarely **Take Notice** and look very closely at them. It's amazing how much we miss out in nature when we just walk through without paying attention to what is around us.

We can **Give** by giving ourselves a break from the drama of the current events and focusing on the little things around us that give us pleasure and by sharing these with others, in person or online. We can give back by learning how we can live with deer, how we can help them by improving their habitat and changing our behaviours.





# Wild Ways Well



**BE ACTIVE** – Take part in health walks and practical outdoor activities. Explore your local paths, woods and greenspaces.

Spending time outdoors, amongst nature, makes people feel better about their lives.

The Wild Ways Well project encourages people suffering from, or at risk of, poor mental health to get outside for some daily exercise and experience nature.

**CONNECT** – Meet new people. Connect with the people, the wildlife and the nature that's all around us.



Remember to observe Social Distancing, stay 2m apart and only walk in your local area.

Whilst out amongst the trees, parks and reserves you have a chance to slow down, relax and take your attention away from current events.

**TAKE NOTICE** – Note the changing cycles of life. Use your senses. Listen to birds, smell the flowers, live in the moment.



This guide will help you to try out some environmental and conservation related activities designed to fit in with the internationally recognised Five Ways to Wellbeing mental health framework.



**LEARN** – Identify plants and wildlife, try new crafts, learn new skills. Discover things about nature and about yourself.







# Herd of Deer?

Deer are ruminant mammals, belonging to the family Cervidae. There are around 55 species of deer in the world (there is no agreement on exactly how many!). They all belong to one family but this can be split into two groups – Old World Deer and New World Deer. This refers to where the particular species evolved, but not to where they are found today.

The first deer in their modern form appeared in the fossil record about 25 million years ago in Europe. They were small but they had the distinctive antlers – and large canine teeth, a feature that most deer have now lost but which can still be seen on species like Muntjac.

The largest living species of deer is the Moose (*Alces alces*) which can stand 2m tall at the shoulder and weigh more than 800kg. The smallest is the Northern Pudu (*Pudu mephistophiles*) which is just 30cm tall and weighs only 3.5kg.

The most recently discovered deer species is the Truong Son Muntjac (*Muntiacus truongsonensis*) which was described in Vietnam in 1997 – though no photos were obtained until some blurry camera trap images in 2014.

The largest deer to ever live was probably the Irish Elk (*Megaloceros giganteus*). It was over 2m tall at the shoulder and carried enormous antlers which spread almost 4m from tip to tip.

Modern whales probably share a common ancestor with deer - a tiny deer like creature which (like modern chevrotain) probably dived underwater to escape when threatened.





# Super Senses

All deer have sophisticated senses, their side mounted eyes give them a field of view of around 310 degrees, meaning only a small area directly behind them cannot be seen (our own field of view is only 180 degrees). They probably can't see as clearly as we do and won't be as good at depth perception. Their colour vision is limited to blue and green. However the wild field of vision makes it very difficult to sneak up on them and they are highly sensitive to movement.

One thing you can't miss when watching a roe deer is the constant movement of their ears. Their ears are independently mobile and can rotate almost 180 degrees allowing them to efficiently detect and locate sounds. They can hear the same range of sounds that we can – as well as some infrasonic (low frequency) sounds that we can't.

Their sense of smell may be as much as 1000 times more sensitive than our own. This has long been recognised. In 1848 John Sobieski and Charles wrote down a Gamekeeper's sage advice.

*"Above all things, let not the devil tempt you to trifle with a deer's nose. You may cross his sight; walk up to him in a grey coat; or, if standing against a tree or a rock near your own colour, wait till he walks up to you; but you cannot cover his nose, even at an incredible distance, but he will feel the tainted air.*

*Colours and forms may be deceptive or alike; there are grey, brown, and green rocks and stocks as well as men, and all these may be equivocal; but there is ONE scent of MAN, and that he never doubts or mistakes, that is filled with danger and terror; and one whiff of its poison at a mile off, and, whether feeding or lying, his head is instantly up – his nose to the wind –and in the next moment his broad antlers turn, his single is tossed in your face and he is away to the hill or the wood... Sometimes not to return for weeks or months."*







# Home Deer?

There are four species of deer considered resident in Scotland

**Red (*Cervus elaphus*);** Native; Common in North and South, absent from Central Belt. 1.3m tall; 190kg. Threatened by hybridisation with Sika. Primary diet is grasses and woody shrubs – including young trees.



Red Deer are woodland animals, the image of a herd moving across the barren moors and hills of the Scottish Highlands is an entirely artificial one. They live like that only because it makes them easier to hunt. The large numbers of deer maintained as shooting stocks also prevents tree growth and woodland expansion. This landscape puts a lot of stress on the animals and as a consequence Red Deer in Scotland tend to be smaller and less impressive than those found in England and elsewhere. Constant imports to maintain shooting stocks means there are few genetically distinct 'Scottish' red deer left.

In the middle ages they disappeared from most of the UK due to overhunting and loss of habitat, they were 'rescued' by the Norman invasion. These new rulers established a number of 'deer forests' where only the nobility were allowed to hunt.

They are currently under threat from hybridisation with non-native Sika deer, which could eventually lead to their extinction as a distinct species.





## Home Deer 2

Fallow (*Dama dama*); Non-Native; Patchy distribution (often nearby historic deer parks); 1m tall; 90kg. Considered an ornamental species, with impressive antlers and spotted coats. Introduced initially by the Romans – they disappeared after the fall of the Empire and were reintroduced in the 11th century. Their natural range is around the Mediterranean, some populations have established themselves in Scotland, often nearby historic deer parks where they escaped when it became less fashionable to own them. They come in a wide variety of colours from white to almost pure black.



Fallow deer

Sika (*Cervus nippon*); Non-Native; 1m tall; 70kg. Widespread across NW and Southern Scotland. Exceptionally high jumpers. Most wild British Sika may be descended from one stag and 3 hinds brought into Ireland in 1860. The British population is genetically linked to Japan. They are unrelated to Red deer but they can produce a fertile hybrid which is visually almost indistinguishable from a Red deer. This was done deliberately in the past as it often produces animals which have larger, more impressive antlers than pure Red deer – the resultant hybrids were known as ‘Park’ deer. Now that they are in the wild, this hybridisation could lead to the end of the native Red deer. They are incredible jumpers, able to clear 1.9m from a standing start. They also make incredible vocalisations which have been likened to whale song.

There may also be small populations of Muntjac and many Red/Sika hybrid (‘Park Deer’). There is a captive but ‘wild living’ herd of reindeer in the Cairngorms only in reindeer do males and females have antlers – and only female reindeer have antlers in December... Rudolf is a girl!







## Roe Deer (*Capreolus capreolus*)

Native; Common across Scotland though less so in the North and largely absent from the Islands; 75cm tall; 25kg; Eat a wide variety of plants, berries, tree buds and leaves.

Roe deer are the species you are most likely to see in Cumbernauld. Surprisingly they are not much bigger than a large dog, though their stilt like legs and thick coats can sometimes make them look bigger. Their coat colour changes through the year, in Summer they can be bright red, but this will fade to slate grey in winter. They have a prominent white rump patch and the males (known as 'bucks') carry short antlers most of the year, shedding them in November and beginning regrowth in December. A full grown roe deer will have three points on his antlers.



Roe deer do not live in herds like some other species. Males live generally solitary lives, only seeking out others during the breeding season. They become extremely aggressive during the rut in late Summer and will pursue females, sometimes chasing them round trees causing a distinctive 'roe ring'. Females practice delayed implantation, although they breed in summer, the fertilised egg will not start to develop until January. The females will give birth, usually to two kids' in late May/early June. The youngsters will stay with the mother until the next generation are born the following year. The kids will often be left alone, hidden in amongst deep undergrowth.

Roe deer trust in their camouflage, often if you come across one in the woods it will instinctively freeze, hoping you won't see it. It will only move again once it is sure you have spotted it. They can also creep along very close to the ground and are surprisingly difficult to see.





# Deer and Woodland

The native Scottish species are woodland animals, they are most at home in open, broadleaf woodland. They especially like 'edges' where they can seek cover under the trees but emerge into clearings or meadows to graze.

They eat tree buds, leaves, woody shrubs, ferns, heather and grasses. A healthy population of deer is vital to the ecosystem of a woodland, helping to create a healthy woodland structure. They can also help to create and maintain woodland clearings and wildflower meadows.

Unfortunately people have removed all of the deer's natural predators so there is no check on their population growth. This leads to too many deer trying to survive in our woodlands. There are estimated to be 350,000 Roe deer in Scotland – double the number there were fifty years ago. They are forced to eat everything they can find, including wildflowers and, especially, young trees. This constant grazing damages older trees and prevents new trees growing, ultimately destroying woodlands and preventing their expansion. Roe deer will even adapt to eating toxic or sharp leaves like yew and holly.

Scientific studies have shown that large numbers of Roe deer living in a woodland reduce biodiversity significantly – the more deer there are, the fewer species and numbers of trees, plants, insects and birds. This can be seen on a vast scale across the Scottish Highlands – those heather covered moors should be forests were it not for the grazing pressure of deer (and sheep).

Large numbers of deer in a woodland in urban areas also leads to the spread of tick borne diseases like Lyme disease and an increase in road traffic collisions. Lastly, and importantly, the poor grazing leads to suffering for the animals themselves, they cannot find enough food so are constantly stressed and in poor physical condition. When winter comes a vast number simply die of starvation.

Many conservationists believe the best way to control these numbers would be to introduce a predator like Lynx.







# History and folklore

Our ancestors understood the balance of nature and the struggle to survive, one of their most important beliefs was in the the Cailleach Bheur, or the old hag of winter. She was a Celtic goddess who brought the winter to Scotland, she had many powers and abilities but one of her most important was as protector of both deer and wolves. She herds the deer together in the winter for protection. The Cailleach is fierce and unforgiving. She would search the land and cull anything too weak to survive the winter, but she did not do so out of malice or evil, she only takes what she must, what is necessary for the survival of all. Sometimes, at the end, in the depths of winter when a deer is starving on the hill and struggling futilely to survive, the last kindness she can give it is the embrace of the wolf pack.

Another ancient god was Cernunnos, the horned god. He was a god of plenty and of the hunt, our ancestors saw the deer as Kings of the forest and recognised how useful they were. As well as meat deer also provided sinew for ropes and threads, skins for warm winter coats, antlers for tools and weapons and more. Cernunnos represented this, but also recognised the majesty and power of a stag in full antler.

Pictish standing stones often contain depictions of deer – no one really knows what these stones were for, but they clearly had real significance for their creators

One of the most recognisable places in Scotland, the site of the Palace and Parliament is Holyrood and it is associated with a deer legend. In 1127 King David of Scotland was hunting a great white stag in the woods when he was thrown from his horse. As he was lying on the ground the stag appeared and charged, intending to gore him with its antlers. However before it could reach him a glowing cross appeared in the air (some say between the stag's antlers) and distracted it, allowing King David to escape. In thanks the King founded a monastery on the site – to be called Holy Rood (rood was a Scots word for cross). A very similar legend is told about other Kings and Saints across Europe – it must have been a common occurrence!





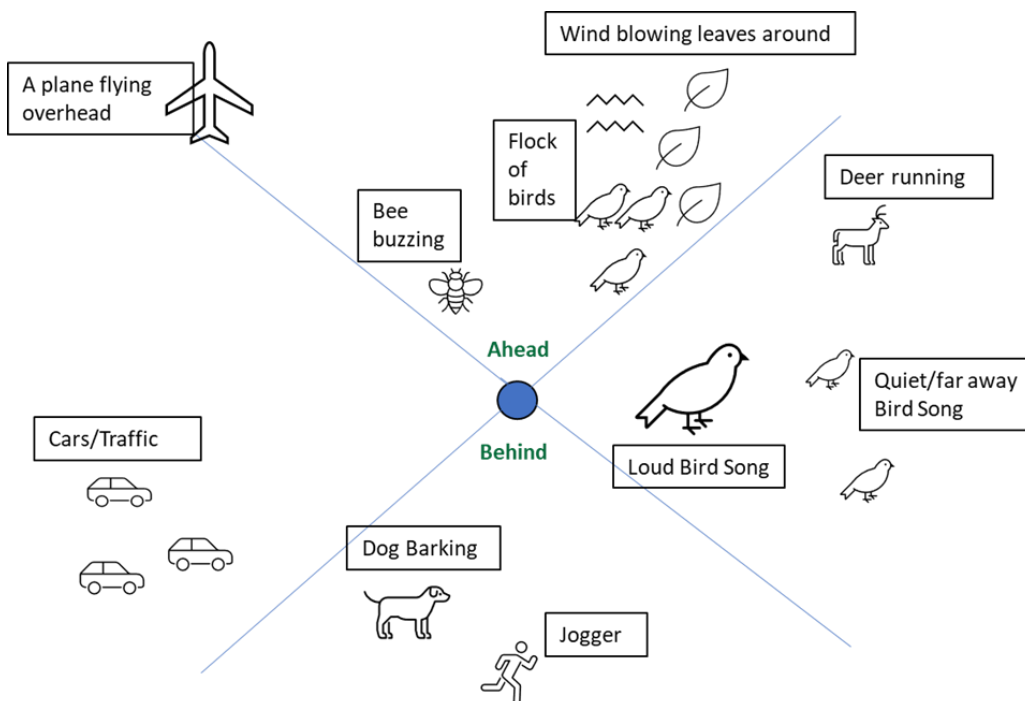
# Deer's Ears

Find a quiet spot to sit for a few minutes, close your eyes, open your ears listen like a deer! Draw a small circle in the middle of a blank sheet of paper and imagine this is your head viewed from above. Split the sheet into four to represent ahead, behind and to your sides.

Now mark on the paper all the sounds you hear and the direction they come from, showing where they come from in relation to you and how far away they are. You could draw pictures, write words, whatever you like (there's an example below).

Now try to use your deer senses... cup your hand behind your ears with the palm facing forward. How does this change what you can hear? Turn your hand around so it is in front of your ear with palm is facing backwards, how does this change things?

Spend some time listening to the forest come alive around you.







## Wildflowers to Spot this Week



**Meadow Crane's-bill (*Geranium pratense*)** A widespread and common flower in grassy meadows, it has blue flowers and leaves which turn deep red over summer. Its nectar rich flowers attract large numbers of bees – and it is also a favourite of gardeners. The name comes from the pointed beak like seed pods, it is also known in some places as blue basins or gypsy flower. In the language of flowers it was said to represent envy.



**Common Toadflax (*Linaria vulgaris*)**– Sometimes called 'wild snapdragons' a common name for them in the past was 'butter and eggs' after the colours, pale yellow flowers with orange centres (the orange centre is a 'honey guide' for bees. The name toadflax is supposedly from the resemblance of the flowers to little toads! Look for the long yellow spur below the flower. Found on open grassy places, often on stony waste ground and road verges. Walking around toadflax 3 times is said to undo any magical spell!



**Foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*)**– Tall spikes with up to eighty pinky purple bell shaped flowers. It is a biennial plant, with the flowers only appearing in the second year. Each plant is capable of dropping up to one million seeds! Every part of the plant is poisonous and can be deadly, it is used in modern medicine to treat heart conditions. The name comes from the idea that fairies provided the flowers to foxes, when wearing them the foxes could walk silently! The coloured spots on the flowers were said to be the handprints of fairies.



# Look (and listen) Out For Deer

Spotting wildflowers is a great activity that anyone can try – and its almost as easy from your window or doorstep as it is on a walk! See how many of these things you can spot this week.

- |  |                          |       |
|--|--------------------------|-------|
| • A roe deer in woodland                         | <input type="checkbox"/> |       |
| • A roe deer in the open                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2pts  |
| • A roe deer that hasn't seen you                | <input type="checkbox"/> | 5pts  |
| • A tree that has been nibble by a deer          | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1pts  |
| • A deer footprint                               | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2pts  |
| • A deer bed                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | 5pts  |
| • A roe deer kid                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 10pts |
| • Hear a deer                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | 5pts  |
| • Hear a wild animal while listening like a deer | <input type="checkbox"/> | 5pts  |
| • Foxglove                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1pts  |
| • Meadow Cranes-bill                             | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2pts  |
| • Common Toadflax                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2pts  |

Total \_\_\_\_\_







## Links

Go further with your Wild Ways Well activity by trying these links once you come home

**Cumbernauld Living Landscape** [www.cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk](http://www.cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk)

**Wild Ways Well** [www.cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk/project/wild-ways-well](http://www.cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk/project/wild-ways-well)

**Activities** [www.cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk/get-involved/activities/](http://www.cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk/get-involved/activities/)

**Facebook** [www.facebook.com/CumbernauldLivingLandscape](http://www.facebook.com/CumbernauldLivingLandscape)

**Twitter** [www.twitter.com/wildcumbernauld](http://www.twitter.com/wildcumbernauld)

**The Conservation Volunteers** [www.tcv.org.uk/scotland](http://www.tcv.org.uk/scotland)

**The Scottish Wildlife Trust** [www.scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk](http://www.scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk)

**SamH** [www.samh.org.uk](http://www.samh.org.uk)

**NHS Five Ways Well** [www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/mental-wellbeing/five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing](http://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/mental-wellbeing/five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing)

**MIND coronavirus and your wellbeing** [www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing)

**Lanarkshire Green Health Partnership** [www.elament.org.uk/media/2229/19-ways-to-stay-connected-2.pdf](http://www.elament.org.uk/media/2229/19-ways-to-stay-connected-2.pdf)

**British Deer Society** [www.bds.org.uk/index.php/advice-education/species](http://www.bds.org.uk/index.php/advice-education/species)

**SNH Deer** [www.nature.scot/plants-animals-and-fungi/mammals/land-mammals/deer](http://www.nature.scot/plants-animals-and-fungi/mammals/land-mammals/deer)

**Mammal Society** [www.mammal.org.uk](http://www.mammal.org.uk)

**Deer and the Wolf Folklore** [www.youtube.com/watch?v=mScY0e55gB8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mScY0e55gB8)



[cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk](http://cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk)