

The most common type of deer in Wollongong is the Rusa Deer (*Cervus timorensis*).



(Photo D Gibbins)

Also known to occur in our area is the Fallow Deer (*Cervus dama dama*)



(Photo R Bendall)

Deer Ecology

The majority of the wild deer in the Wollongong area are Rusa Deer (*Cervus timorensis*). These deer are very social and are usually found in groups of up to 40 animals. A study of the Rusa Deer in the Royal National Park in 2004 found deer to range from less than 1 km² to 8 km². The larger range was found to be associated with the winter months (Moriarty 2004). During the winter months the Rusa Deer breed. Dominant males occupy a greater range and force less dominant males into more marginal territory. Male deer also rub trees to remove the felt from their antlers and are sometimes seen to carry vegetation in their antlers. The study found deer centred their activity on cleared grassed areas flanked by forest, heath or woodland areas and that "the density of deer was highest in areas where larger cleared, grassed areas were present" (Moriarty 2004).

Reports to Council on deer behaviour indicate that deer come down from the Illawarra Escarpment at night, travel along riparian areas and nearby streets, grazing on gardens *en route*. In winter, some groups remain away from the Illawarra Escarpment and shelter in vegetated reserves or riparian areas during the day.

Are deer numbers increasing?

It is likely the population of deer in and around the Illawarra Escarpment has been increasing over time. In recent years, Council has received complaints from residents affected by deer in urban areas kilometres from the Illawarra Escarpment. Council has been advised that deer coming into urban areas are a result of population pressure from the large numbers of deer occurring in the Illawarra Escarpment. The suburbs of Figtree and Keiraville are known to be particularly affected by the presence of deer coming down from the Illawarra Escarpment.

Why are deer living in my suburb?

Council has been advised deer prefer not to occupy urban areas. This is due to stresses such as dogs, cars, lights, people and noise being common in urban areas. It is believed that the presence of deer in urban areas is a result of two factors; firstly, deer are seeking access to food which is available in urban gardens, and secondly, the territorial behaviour of dominant males during the 'rutting' season forces less dominant males away from the Illawarra Escarpment. In winter, these factors combine; the male begins the 'rut', pasture becomes less productive, native vegetation on the Illawarra Escarpment becomes less palatable, and deer seek alternative food sources such as grass and plants found in backyard gardens.

Are deer dangerous?

The deer found in Wollongong have not been known to be aggressive towards humans. This does not, however, mean deer are not potentially dangerous. Deer which feel threatened or cornered are capable of being dangerous to anyone who happens to get in their way. Deer can also cause a serious traffic hazard as they walk or run across roads, often in an unpredictable way, often at night. For these reasons, it is advised to **stay clear of deer** and contact the NSW Police on 000 if you believe deer are causing an immediate danger to safety.

Most suburbs of Wollongong are affected by deer. It is advised to exercise caution when driving at night or early in the morning in areas affected by deer, particularly when driving in the suburbs of Helensburgh, Keiraville, Figtree, Farmborough Heights, Mount Kembla and Kembla Grange.

Who is responsible?

Technically, the landowner is responsible for management of deer occurring on their land. In reality, deer occur on land owned or managed by individuals, corporations and public authorities and a single deer may be found across all of these tenures in a single day. The range of Rusa Deer herds has been found to extend from 1 km² to 8 km², well in excess of the extent of any single property in our area. It is this difficulty of managing an adaptable, mobile animal that has led to Council taking the approach of working with a number of government agencies and the community on a collective solution.

Are deer a pest?

In NSW, wild deer are considered a 'Game Animal' as defined by the *Game and Feral Animal Control Act 2002*. The impacts of wild deer on residents and the environment of our area led Council to declare deer a 'priority pest' under our [Vertebrate Pest Animal Management Policy](#). This does not change the legal status of deer, but it sends a clear message to landholders and government authorities about how Wollongong wants to manage deer.

What is Council doing?

Council has worked with the Pest Animal Advisory Group to look at what options are available for managing deer in our area. The most effective means of reducing deer impacts is through reduction in numbers through ground-based shooting. Where this method is most safe and effective is in cleared pasture in the foothills of the Illawarra Escarpment. The majority of this land is in private ownership.

It is not feasible for Council to directly manage a large-scale deer control program on private land. In preference to this option, Council is supporting the Cumberland Livestock Health and Pest Authority to implement the Northern Illawarra Wild Deer Management Program (NIWDMP). The NIWDMP involves using

professional contractors to cull deer and includes a range of measures to ensure that landowners can take on much of the future management of deer following the reduction of the current population to more manageable numbers. The Cumberland Livestock Health and Pest Authority is not undertaking the control itself, but is using its experience to manage professional pest management contractors. The program has been operational since May 2011 and is anticipated to continue until 2015.

At the same time, the Game Council NSW is undertaking an Ecological Deer Management Program (EDM) on participating private land. The EDM uses licensed recreational hunters to cull deer to levels nominated by the landowner. Council continues to work with these agencies through the Pest Animal Advisory Group.

Illegal hunting of deer

It is illegal to hunt deer without the appropriate licences and permissions. The hunting of deer is regulated by the Game Council NSW.

Unauthorised hunting of deer is an offence. Game Council NSW and Police conduct compliance operations within the Wollongong area targeting illegal hunting. If you see suspicious activity, or suspect illegal hunting, call 000 or 1800 333 000.

Where can I legally hunt deer?

For information on the legal hunting of deer, see the Game Council NSW website www.gamecouncil.nsw.gov.au or call (02) 6360 5111.

What can you do?

1. Report deer problems to Council. Contact Council on 4227 7111 and advise us on how many animals are affecting you and the nature of the impact. Council will record this information to help build a picture of the distribution and abundance of deer affecting residents across the Wollongong local government area.
2. If your property is affected by deer, and is suitable for deer control, contact the Cumberland Livestock Health and Pest Authority (02 4655 9165) or the Game Council NSW (02 6360 5111) about getting deer control underway on your property.
3. Stay clear of deer. Deer can be dangerous.
4. Where practical, fence property to discourage deer accessing property.
5. Drive carefully in areas where deer are occurring, particularly at night.

Reference

Moriarty, A. (2004) The liberation, distribution, abundance and management of wild deer in Australia. *Wildlife Research* 31:291–299.

Disclaimers

This information was believed to be correct at the date of publication.

This fact sheet is for general information purposes only and should not be relied upon as legal advice.