Sika Deer, *Cervus nippon*

**Overview**

Short description of *Cervus nippon*, Sika Deer

Sika deer are similar to red deer but smaller. Sika deer are mainly reddish- or yellowish-brown, with a dark dorsal stripe (in summer surrounded by white spotting). There is a large, white, heart-shaped patch, edged with black, on the rear end and a thin, dark line down the white tail.

Description of *Cervus nippon*, Sika Deer status in GB

Sika deer are widespread and their distribution is expanding in Scotland. There are a few well-separated areas across England where sika are common but they are currently absent from Wales. The GB population was estimated to have increased to 26,600 by 2004.

Habitat summary: *Cervus nippon*, Sika Deer

Sika deer occupy a broad range of habitats in GB, including mature broad-leaved woodland, heathland and bog, marshland, saltmarsh and offshore islands.

**Overview table**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environment:</th>
<th>Terrestrial</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Species status:</td>
<td>Non-Native</td>
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<tr>
<td>Native range:</td>
<td>Fujian, Guangdong, Jiangsu, Shandong, Shanghai, Zhejiang, Hokkaido, Honshu, Kyushu, Shikoku, Primorye</td>
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<td>Functional type:</td>
<td>Herbivore</td>
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<td>Status in England:</td>
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<td>Status in Scotland:</td>
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<td>Status in Wales:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Location of first record:</td>
<td>Waddesden Park</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date of first record:</td>
<td>1874</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Invasion history: *Cervus nippon*, Sika Deer**

Origin

The native range lies in eastern Asia, from south-eastern Siberia to eastern China, Japan, Taiwan and southwards through Manchuria and Korea.

First Record

The introduction of Sika deer to an estate at Tulliallan in Fife in around 1870 may have been the first in GB, and was followed by many similar introductions in England, Wales and Scotland over subsequent decades.

Pathway and Method

Sika deer were first brought to London Zoo in 1860 and became popular as an ornamental animal for deer parks on large estates. Many deer subsequently escaped
or wandered from deer parks and some were deliberately introduced into the wild.

**Species Status**

Sika deer have become firmly established in many areas of GB and are increasing and spreading their range. They have a similar status in Ireland, where introductions began in 1860. Other introduced populations exist in several areas of western Europe, in New Zealand and in several states of the USA.

**Ecology & Habitat: Cervus nippon, Sika Deer**

**Dispersal Mechanisms**

Sika generally show relatively small movements between summer and winter. In a continuous optimal habitat, sika show a steady expansion in range, estimated in GB at 3–5 km per year. In areas with fragmented habitats, dispersal is characterised by long periods of no movements, followed by a sudden and rapid eruption from the source. Young males disperse before females.

**Reproduction**

Rutting season in Europe is September–November. Reproductive rates are extremely high: conception rate is 80–90% and adult pregnancy rate 85–100%. Gestation is 210–246 days and calves (one, occasionally two) are born in May–June. Most hinds breed successfully for the first time as yearlings.

**Known Predators/Herbivores**

A high neonatal mortality (survival rate in December 40–50%) is largely due, in Europe, to predation of calves by red foxes.

**Resistant Stages**

None known.

**Habitat Occupied in GB**

Sika deer occupy a broad range of habitats in GB, including mature broad-leaved woodland, heathland and bog, marshland, saltmarsh, and offshore islands.

**Distribution: Cervus nippon, Sika Deer**

Sika deer have been introduced into many areas of the world: New Zealand, South Africa, Morocco, Australia, Papua New Guinea, North America. In Europe feral populations are present in GB, Ireland, Denmark, France, Austria, Switzerland, Poland, the Czech Republic and Russia. In many European countries Sika deer are increasing and expanding in distribution (e.g. by 5.3% per year in mainland GB during 1972–2002).

**Impacts: Cervus nippon, Sika Deer**

**Environmental Impact**

Sika deer cause tree damage due to ring barking (especially in hard winters), browsing, trampling and antler rubbing, erosion due to creation of trails, and degradation of water quality in creeks and streams. Mature trees may suffer additional damage through bole-scoring (characteristic of this species). In open heathland and wetland, sika deer can cause significant change in vegetation structure and species composition of both plants and animals. Hybrids with the native, congeneric red deer are fertile, and further hybridisation or back-crossing to either parental type is threatening the genetic integrity of both red deer and sika deer.

**Health and Social Impact**

In Eastern Europe, sika deer are a vector of an Asiatic blood-sucking gastro-intestinal nematode *Asworthius sidemi*, which affects bison, roe deer, red deer and potentially farm livestock. Both bovine and avian TB have been recorded in captive and wild sika populations. Sika deer are responsible for a number of road traffic accidents.

**Economic Impact**

Sika deer are a serious forest pest, causing significant damage to broad-leaved and conifer plantations.

**References & Links: Cervus nippon, Sika Deer**

**Identification**


Biology, ecology, spread, vectors


Management and impact


Putman, R.J. & Hunt, E.J. (1994) Patterns of hybridisation and introgression between red and sika deer in different populations of the North of Scotland and Argyll. Deer, 9, 104–110.


General
