



Fallow deer

Recreational hunting in Nelson/Marlborough

History and dispersal

At least 24 successful liberations of fallow deer were made in New Zealand between 1860 and 1910. Some were initially successful but populations later died out or merged with other herds. By the 1980s, 13 wild populations remained.

In 1864 two fallow does and a buck were brought over from England to Nelson. Early in 1865 they were released, but the buck was shot soon after.

In 1866 two bucks and four does from Sydney were taken to Aniseed Valley in a crate on a dray. Unfortunately the dray upset and at least two were killed, but even so by 1870 the Aniseed Valley herd had increased tremendously.

Liberations were made up to 1910 in Upper Takaka, Mt Arthur, Teal Valley and Whangamoā.

During the 1920s the Aniseed Valley herd extended its range and dispersed north-east along the Bryant Range towards the Pelorus River and in 1940 some merged with the Teal Valley herd. Others extended into Mt Richmond and the Marlborough Sounds.

The Upper Takaka herd combined with the Mt Arthur herd and they spread out through the Cobb, Matiri, Rolling River, Wangapeka and Clarke Rivers. Numbers peaked in the 1940s but declined soon after.

Current distribution and habits

Fallow deer are the second most widespread deer in New Zealand.

They have a restricted living area and tend to remain close to where they were born, travelling to feed but returning to their normal habitat or herd ground.

Fallow deer spend much of the day laying up in heavy cover and feed mainly at dawn and dusk.

They have readily adapted to beech forest and generally stay in areas of low altitude, inhabiting lower valley sides and river flats.

Fallow deer are agile and fast, being capable of speeds up to 65km per hour and able to clear obstacles over 2m high. They are extremely wary and have a well-developed sense of smell and excellent eyesight. When disturbed they will often travel only a few hundred metres before stopping or circling around behind the source of disturbance.

The Aniseed Valley herd has not changed its range in recent years and is mainly found in scrubby vegetation backing onto beech forest.

The Mt Arthur herd has been much restricted in range. Other populations have been appearing in recent years, presumed to be from farm escapes or illegal releases (eg. D'Urville Island).

Environmental impact

Fallow deer eat a wide range of native plant species. They have caused severe modification to vegetation, stripping understorey bare in some areas of the country. However, because they have mainly colonised areas close to the original points of liberation, they haven't assumed the levels of red deer.

In some parts of the country they have caused damage to plantings of exotic trees.

Hunting opportunities

Kahurangi National Park

Cobb Valley, Salisbury/Tablelands, Grecian, Deep Creek

Mt Richmond Forest Park

Hacket/Roding, also in the Pelorus Valley in the area between Roebuck, Middy, Rocks and Captains Huts

