



Red deer

Recreational hunting in Nelson/Marlborough

History and dispersal

Red deer were first released by settlers in New Zealand in 1851. One of the principle reasons was to recreate the sporting conditions of "home".

A restricted shooting season of two months was imposed and the population increased rapidly with very high numbers building up.

Landowners complained of the extensive damage the animals were causing to crops, plantations and pasture and began to shoot the deer on their properties. Acclimatisation Societies imposed heavy fines and prohibited the use of dogs to disperse them. Finally in 1930 protection was completely removed.

At first the red deer stayed around river flats and clearings, but by 1925 they had moved in greater numbers into alpine and upper forested areas.

In the late 1950s the commercial venison industry began in New Zealand and this had great impact on deer populations. Helicopter hunting virtually eliminated all deer from high country above timberline and those that survived in adjacent forests are now concentrated in areas furthest from main forest margins.

Current distribution and habits

Red deer are the most widespread and numerous of introduced game mammals in the country. They are widely distributed throughout forested areas and open high country. They thrive particularly where forest, scrub and grassland lie in close proximity.

During winter they usually remain in forest cover moving in spring to the forest edge and into the open to feed. If undisturbed they remain in the general area of forest edge, moving between forests, scrub and grassland.

In Nelson they are generally to be found in tussock valleys with dense beech forest rising to scrub belt and open tussock tops. In Marlborough they tend to live in tussock and scrub gullies with remnants of beech forest.

Environmental impact

As early as 1900, reports acknowledged deer were severely depleting forest vegetation. Heavy browsing and grazing completely destroyed some vegetation species and composition and structure was in many cases completely changed.

Deer drastically deplete palatable understorey herb species and many shrub and small subcanopy tree species. They also browse seedlings and saplings of main canopy beech species and induce change from forest to scrub or grass.

Hunting opportunities

Kahurangi National Park

The best hunting is in the Cobb Valley, Peel/Lockett Ranges, Waingaro River, Boulder Lake and Shakespeare Flat in the Aorere Valley. Good hunting can also be found in the Owen, Matiri, Baton, Pearse, Mt Arthur and Salsbury/Tablelands areas, but better further back in the Leslie/Karamea and Roaring Lion catchments.

Mt Richmond Forest Park

Hacket, Wairoa and Bryant Range.

Nelson Lakes National Park

Head of the Matakaitiki, and Sabine Rivers, as well as Speargrass.

Marlborough Sounds

Low numbers throughout, but good hunting on D'Urville Island.

Marlborough

Throughout Kaikoura and Marlborough, including Ferny Gair and Branch/Leatham.

