



# FALLOW DEER

**Classification:** Phylum Chordata, Class Mammalia, Order Artiodactyla, Family Cervidae  
**Dama dama**

Native to the Mediterranean region of Europe and Asia Minor, fallow deer are the most widely kept of the world's deer and have been introduced to all inhabited continents. Fallow deer were introduced to British parks and forests by the Normans in the eleventh century. Being both decorative and providing a much needed food source, they were introduced into the estates of the nobility. The fallow deer, unlike other species of deer, have several color varieties ranging from black, through shades of brown with white spots, to all white. Their winter coat is much darker and thicker than their summer coat.

There are 2 living subspecies of fallow deer:  
Dama dama dama- European fallow deer  
Dama dama mesopotamica-Persian fallow deer

**Status:** The Persian fallow deer is classified as Endangered, but other subspecies are not considered to be threatened.

**Habitat:** Fallow deer can be found in a variety of habitats but have a preference for deciduous and mixed woodland with open patches for grazing.

**Range:** Fallow deer are native to the Mediterranean region of Europe and from Turkey to Iran, but they have been introduced to 38 countries.

**Height:** 40 inches at shoulder

**Length :** 51 inches-62 inches

**Weight:** Males 170 pounds; Females 90 pounds

**Lifespan:** 11-16 years

**Diet in the wild:** They are grazers, feeding on grasses, herbs, berries, acorns and bark.

Fallow deer will stand on their hind legs to reach food or browse higher up when conditions are hard. Like most deer they seem to get their water requirements from the foods they eat or from dew and are rarely seen drinking. They can be seen eating at all times of day, however, the main feeding usually takes place around dawn and the late afternoon or evening. They like to feed in arable fields on root crops such as carrots, and potatoes.

## Special Features:

- Prized for their ornamental value in deer parks, male fallow have distinctive palmated (flattened) antlers. They are cast and regrown each year.
- Beginning with "spike" antlers in their first year and until they are 3-4 years old the male fallow deer have only a few simple points.
- Bucks grow their antlers over the spring and summer when food is available to provide the required nutrients for antler development.
- The antlers, fully formed and clean of the velvet covering which they grow, are an impressive sight at the time of mating season.
- Fallow deer do much of their feeding in open, grassy areas but require tree cover and undergrowth for shelter and winter food.
- The most common variety of fallow deer has a spotted chestnut coat, a white rump patch and a fairly long tail. A mature buck has a very prominent Adam's apple and an obvious brush of hair under its belly.

A larger, brighter species of fallow deer found in Iran and northern Africa can be partially tamed.



### **Social Organization and Behavior:**

- Fallow deer commonly gather in herds of 4-5, but in good feeding areas, groupings of 70-100 may gather.
- The bucks and does live apart until mating season.
- They range over large areas and spend only a short time in one area.
- The fallow deer can cause a great deal of damage feeding on buds, leaves, and stripping the bark from trees.
- Fallow deer often stand motionless and are not seen until a movement of the flicking of the ear gives away its presence.
- In the open, however, the large number of eyes and ears in a group makes them a difficult animal to approach.
- When alarmed the fallow deer will sometimes move off in a distinctive manner known as pronging or stotting. In this all four feet are brought together and leave the ground simultaneously as the animal bounds away.

### **Breeding and Care of Young:**

- Females reach sexual maturity at 16 months and can bear fawns by 2 years of age. Bucks mature sexually at 14 months but rarely compete successfully in rutting until several years later.
- Rutting may begin in mid-September and continue into November but the peak breeding activity takes place in October. During rut, bucks mark off and defend a small area, known as a “stand,” from which other rutting males are excluded. Females and young remain within male territories and as each doe comes into heat, she is followed until mating is accomplished.
- While in rut the buck emits a deep groaning belch.
- After the rut, males gradually cease defending their territories and form “bachelor groups,” while females and young remain segregated from males in their own groups.
- The gestation period is approximately 7 1/2 months, with most fawning occurring from late May through June.
- Generally, only a single fawn is born, although twins are not uncommon. At birth the fawn weighs approximately 10 lbs. During the first few days of life the fawn lies concealed in undergrowth, its only protection being the camouflage coloring of the coat and the absence of any scent to betray it to predators. At this time the mother returns to the fawn every four hours to feed it.
- As soon as a fawn is strong enough it is seen bouncing and running with its mother. The fawn is weaned at 7-9 months of age.
- The doe will communicate with her fawn and other members of the doe group with a variety of squeaks and bleats throughout the year.

