

FARM FORESTRY SERIES NO. 9

DEER DAMAGE IN FARM FORESTRY



Deer



Sika hind browsing Sitka spruce

There are three deer species in Ireland. Red deer is native to Ireland. Sika deer and fallow deer have been introduced. While deer are present in all 32 counties, fallow deer are the most widespread. All three species are capable of inflicting serious damage to trees.



Sika deer



Fallow deer



Red Deer

Types of deer damage

Browsing involves the grazing of foliage of young trees. Conifers tend to be browsed in late winter, whereas broadleaves are mostly damaged during the summer. Browsing may lead to tree death, misshapen trees and delayed crop establishment.



Browsing damage: Note the “bushy” heads and damaged leading shoots of the ash trees in the foreground due to deer browsing.



Bark stripping is the gnawing of bark, which may result in stem breakage, death or infection and seriously reduces the quality of the timber. This damage normally occurs in the spring.

Bark stripping renders this ash tree useless for timber production.

Fraying damage to trees is caused when deer rub their antlers against the bark in order to remove the “velvet” from their antlers, or to mark territory. This usually occurs from July to October.



Fraying damage

Prevention and control

Species Selection

Most tree species (in particular broadleaves) are vulnerable to significant deer damage. However, Sitka spruce is the least susceptible to damage and is frequently planted as the main species in areas with high deer populations.

Plantation design

Deer management should be considered when planning the layout of a plantation. Leave open grassy areas within the forest as an alternative food source for deer and as vantage points for counting and culling. These deer glades should include a water source and partial shelter.

Trees such as Norway maple and birch may be planted at the edges of plantations, or in clearings to distract deer from the commercial crop.



Plantation design in areas of high deer populations should allow for open areas.



Deer fencing

Deer Fencing

Deer fencing is expensive and is most cost-effective on large, regular-shaped areas of high-risk crops. Effective fencing should be either flush with or pinned to the ground and should be 2 metres high. Rectangular wire mesh is recommended.

Access points must also be secured.



Tree guards may be an effective alternative for small areas.

Tree guards

Protecting individual trees with tree guards is expensive and is only cost effective for small areas of susceptible trees. Tree guards should be at least 1.5 to 1.8 metres in height.

Population control

Deer are a protected species in Ireland under the Wildlife Act 1976 and it is a serious offence to shoot them without a licence. Licences are granted by the National Parks and Wildlife Service and apply to specific time periods only. The selective culling of deer is the most effective means of population control. This should be carried out as part of an overall area management plan by competent licensed deerstalkers.

Further information is available from your Teagasc Forestry Adviser, the Forest Service and the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

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