

A Brief History of Deer in Australia

By Steve Hall

The first deer to arrive in Australia after European settlement were probably Chital, they possibly arrived in Sydney from Ceylon (Sri Lanka) sometime in the 1790's or early 1800's. In 1813 there was 400 chital at Paramatta. Some escaped to establish early herds around Sydney, and some were sent to other areas. There were Chital in Tasmania in 1829, these appear not to have survived. Chital now have established populations in Queensland, NSW and South Australia.



some areas currently.

From these early importations onwards, deer were a favourite import of Landed Gentlemen and Acclimatisation Societies. Around 20 species of deer were imported and released at various times over the next 100 years or so. Of these only 6 species have established viable populations that have survived in the wild. These are Red, Rusa, Fallow, Chital, Sambar and Hog Deer. Some of the species that were released but didn't survive are Whitetail, Roe, Chinese Water, Sika, Barasingha, Philippine, Elk, Mule, Bawean, Musk, Reindeer, Eld's, Muntjac and Mouse deer. Of note is a population of Sika that survived into the 1940's or 50's in southern NSW. There are also rumours of wapiti (elk) or wapiti/ red cross in

Red Deer were possibly first introduced to Tasmania in the 1830's. The base for most Red Deer herds came from deer gifted to the states of Victoria and Queensland in the 1860's by Queen Victoria. Subsequent importations of Red Deer during the 1870's helped get the herds established. There are now free range herds of Red deer in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia

Fallow deer were first imported to Tasmania in the 1830's. The Tasmanian herd formed the base of herds on the mainland and subsequent importations from England and Europe over the years have bolstered the genetics of the original fallow herds. There are now herds of Fallow in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia.

Rusa are believed to have been first brought to Australia in 1868 from Java. They were first released in Victoria around 1890, these have since died out or been absorbed into the Sambar gene pool. In New South Wales they are believed to have been released or escaped sometime around the late 1870's. There is a small population of a 2nd sub species of Rusa on some islands in the Torres Strait. They were released in 1912 on Thursday Island and have since moved to other nearby Islands. This second sub species have always been referred to as Moluccan Rusa but new research (Grant 2016) suggests that they may be Muna Rusa. Time and DNA will one day reveal the truth. Rusa now have established herds in Queensland, NSW and South Australia.





Sambar (Samba) were brought to Australia in 1861 from Sri Lanka. They were released into the wilds of Victoria at Mt Sugarloaf in 1862. After this release there has been several more releases in other areas of Victoria and a single release in the Northern Territory. Several of the other species of deer that have not persisted in the wild were closely related to Sambar and have more than likely been absorbed into the gene pool of the current sambar population. Rusa and Sambar are

also closely related and can produce hybrid crossbreds often referred to as Rubar. There are now populations of Sambar well established in Victoria, NSW, South Australia and Northern Territory.

Hog Deer are the smallest of the introduced deer species. Currently under threat in their home range of South East Asia, Australia is the only population outside their native habitat and may be the last stronghold of these little deer. They first came to Australia in 1858 and 12 were released at Wilsons Promontory in 1866. Further releases occurred in later years in and helped establish a viable population. Hog deer are the only species of deer in Australia that have a well-managed game management plan and ballot system for hunting on public land. Hog Deer now have established population mainly in coastal areas of Victoria and NSW.



There are now over 200,000 feral deer of the 6 surviving species in 218 populations around Australia. Each species has its own habits and antler growth patterns. If you are hunting deer make yourself familiar with the species, you are pursuing.

Depending on the state, deer are either a managed Game Animal with a regulated season or a declared pest. In Tasmania they are considered as game animals with a regulated season on public land. In Victoria and NSW, they are classed as game with no regulated seasons, in all other states they are considered feral or declared pests with no season or management. In Victoria, Tasmania and NSW you must hold a Game Licence (R-Licence in NSW) to hunt deer on public or private land

Like feral goats' landholders consider deer either a resource or a pest which competes with livestock for grass and water. Always check with the landholder what they consider their deer, like goats some landholders don't want their deer herds wiped out, always check first.

Deer tend to be most active early in the morning or late afternoon and into the night. They lay up in the bush during the middle of the day. Hunting very early in the morning or the last ¾ hour before sunset achieves the best results when pursuing deer. If hunting pressure becomes too great deer will become completely nocturnal, only venturing out after dark and retreating before first light.

Each state of Australia has different rules and regulations for each deer species. In NSW and Victoria deer are classified as game animals and have rules and regulations regarding hunting them. In QLD, ALL deer species are classed as a pest and landholder are supposed to take measures to destroy them. Make yourself familiar with the rules and regulation regarding deer hunting for the state you are planning to hunt in.

Each state has different rules and regulations for minimum legal calibres. The minimum recommended calibre in NSW and legal calibre in Victoria for Hog Deer and Fallow Deer is .243 Win. and for Red Deer and Sambar Deer .270 Win. Queensland has no calibre restrictions or guidelines.

The GHAA have access to Chital, Red deer and Fallow deer on our club properties.

References for this article

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