



# DEER STALKING IN THE UK

A CODE OF PRACTICE

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This Code of Practice has been produced to provide an introductory guide to deer stalking. Those engaged in deer stalking should follow the guidance described in this code. You should show respect for the countryside, have due regard to health and safety, respect animal welfare and show consideration for others who may have little knowledge of deer management.

Reading the detailed guidance in the relevant Wild Deer Best Practice Guides is also recommended, as is achieving the Deer Stalking Certificate(s) awarded by Deer Management Qualifications (DMQ).

**High standards underpin public and political support for shooting, now and in the future.**

### THREE GOLDEN RULES APPLY:

1. Handle firearms safely at all times.
2. Always follow up on every shot taken at a deer, even if you think you have missed, to minimise the risk of a wounded animal not being humanely dispatched.
3. Ignorance of the law is no excuse. If in doubt, find out.

## 2. THE NEED FOR DEER MANAGEMENT

The lethal control (culling) of deer is necessary to protect habitats and their associated species, forestry and agricultural crops. Deer are prolific breeders and, if numbers are allowed to increase unchecked, may become prone to starvation, disease and increased risk of deer-vehicle collisions.

In some cases deer control may be undertaken as a recreational activity, but it should always take place as part of a deer management plan which considers both the welfare of the animals and the impact they may have. While the males of some species can legally be controlled throughout the winter months, the key to any effective deer management is prioritising the target cull of female animals.



Wherever appropriate, the management plan should involve close liaison and co-operation between neighbouring landowners and stalkers. Stalkers should respect the requirements of landowners, gamekeepers, foresters, farm managers, and any other stakeholders, and liaise with them prior to going stalking. Deer stalking may take place very early in the morning or late in the evening, so any actions that might disturb third parties should be avoided.

### 3. STALKING DEER

It is your responsibility to know, and understand, the laws and Best Practice guidance relating to deer stalking. In particular, you must be able to identify deer by species, sex and age class and to know when and where it is safe and legal to shoot.

#### Safety

- Positively identify your target.
- The rifle you are using is capable of killing over great distances and every shot taken must be safe.
- Always ensure that there is a solid backstop (that will catch any bullet fragments) behind the deer before taking the shot.
- Make sure that you have an uninterrupted view of the foreground.
- Always check that the line of shot is unobstructed.
- Shooting from a high seat may provide a safer backstop at shorter ranges as you are shooting downwards. Rifles must always be unloaded before climbing in and out of a high seat.
- Always check the bore of your rifle is clear of any obstruction before loading or if there is the slightest possibility that it has become fouled with mud or snow.
- Adopt a regular, safe routine for loading, carrying and unloading the rifle. If the rifle is to be carried loaded, do not load until you are about to commence stalking. Apply the safety catch and do not release it until you are about to take the shot.
- In some situations, the rifle may be carried 'underloaded' (i.e. with the bolt closed on an empty chamber, over a full magazine) while stalking, and a cartridge chambered only before the final approach to the deer.
- Always ensure that the rifle is pointing in a safe direction and be constantly aware of where your barrel is pointing.
- Always unload your rifle:
  - as soon as you have finished active stalking;
  - as soon as you have confirmed the deer is dead, and before processing the carcass;
  - before entering a house, other building, or vehicle;
  - before ascending/descending a high seat;
  - when crossing an obstacle;
  - when meeting third parties while stalking;
  - when handing it to another person.



If it is necessary to leave a rifle in a locked vehicle, ensure that it is out of sight. Always remove the bolt, and ammunition where practicable, and carry them with you.

It is advisable to carry your firearm certificate, or evidence of it, together with your written permission for the land on which you are stalking.

### **Zeroing the rifle**

To ensure safe and humane shooting, the rifle, scope and mounts must be correctly assembled, and you must check at regular intervals that your rifle is zeroed correctly, i.e. that the bullet is striking a selected point of aim at a chosen range, using the ammunition that you intend to stalk with.

You must practise and maintain your skill with the rifle, and check at regular intervals that your rifle is still zeroed correctly. The site at which you test your rifle must be safe, with clear sightlines and a backstop that will absorb all bullets, fragments and debris over a number of shots.

The rifle must be checked for zero after a hard knock or impact, after any unaccountable miss, when a new type of ammunition is used, or if the rifle has not been shot for a prolonged period. No one should continue stalking if rifle zero is in doubt.

While zeroing the rifle it may be beneficial to practise shooting at varying distance of both shorter than, and up to perhaps twice, your normal zero distance. If practising a very short-range humane dispatch shot, be aware that the bullet will generally strike lower than your point of aim and take great care to minimise the risk of 'splashback' of bullet fragments and other debris.

### **Aiming and spotting devices**

Thermal spotters are very useful for finding heat sources, but do not rely on that image alone as a reason to shoot. Binoculars or a telescope (if appropriate) should be the main means of identifying your quarry. DO NOT use any rifle aiming device for this purpose.

The legislation on the use of thermal and night vision rifle scopes varies between countries. In England, Wales and Scotland the use of a thermal imaging or night vision scope on your rifle to take deer during the day is not prohibited. In Northern Ireland, The Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, Section 12: 2 (d) (v), prohibits the use of thermal or night vision scopes for the shooting of red, fallow and sika deer. This goes for day or night use.

If you have been granted a licence by the relevant authority to shoot deer at night, it will be clearly specified what rifle aiming device is permitted.

### **Consideration for the deer**

Although deer are relatively large animals, the vital areas for humane and clean kills are small. No one should consider culling deer unless they can consistently shoot a group of three shots within a 10cm target at 100m.

A shot should only be taken at a range that will ensure a humane kill. Shots should never be taken at a moving or badly positioned deer, in poor visibility, through cover, or at any time when your aim is not steady. After taking a shot, always assume that you have hit the deer until you have proved otherwise by thorough searching. Always follow up and humanely dispatch a wounded deer, regardless of the time and effort involved. Be aware of the legal aspects should an injured deer cross a boundary.





### **Taking a shot**

Safety is paramount – never take a shot if there is the slightest doubt about safety.

Always identify your selected deer and ensure that no other animals can be wounded by your shot, either in front of or in a wide zone behind your target. Never fire at a deer unless you are absolutely sure that it is well within your capabilities.

The recommended shot is to the chest, as this is a larger vital area containing both the heart and lungs and a shot here will ensure a quick and humane kill.

The brain and spine are very small and mobile targets and for this reason head and neck shots should be avoided under normal stalking circumstances.

Under normal circumstances, you should not take a shot at a running deer (but see humane dispatch below). If in doubt over any shot, then do not fire.

**Do not shoot in very poor light, especially in the evenings.**

### **Follow-up**

Before the shot, mark the position of the deer by reference to some adjacent feature, such as a bush, tree or rock, and then, if the deer runs off into cover you know where to start the follow-up.

Immediately after the shot, load another round, apply the safety catch and then wait. You should learn to recognise the behaviour of deer shot in different parts of the body, as this may dictate how long you should wait before following up. In most circumstances you should wait at least five minutes.

You should then approach the spot where the deer was standing, mark it, and search for signs such as hair and blood. The signs at the 'strike' will give a good indication of whether

or where the deer is hit and how you should follow it up. Always follow any blood trail slowly, trying not to disturb it. If at any stage you see signs of or feel that the deer is lost and possibly mobile, it is best to mark the last sign found, leave the area rather than disturb it further, then return with a trained dog.

Stalkers should own or have access to a dog trained to locate dead or wounded deer but steady to other wildlife. Tracking organisations and individuals are available to assist (links to organisations that provide this service can be found on the BASC and BDS websites).

When following up, be prepared to shoot again, if necessary, as long as it is safe, but remember that at a close range the bullet will strike below the point of aim.

### **Humane dispatch**

A head shot is recommended for humane dispatch at very close range.

If the animal is static at longer ranges, take a chest shot but bear in mind the likely position of vital organs if the animal is lying down.

A shot at a moving deer may be acceptable when attempting to dispatch an already wounded animal but extreme care must be taken. If in doubt over any shot, then do not fire.

## **4. CARCASS HANDLING**

Venison is an excellent and healthy meat, and we should treat deer carcasses as food products throughout the whole process. All stalkers must be capable of removing all internal organs (gralloching) and inspecting a deer carcass. It is advisable to attend an appropriate training course or learn from an experienced stalker. Always maintain good hygiene standards when handling carcasses to reduce the risk of contamination.

Carcasses should be gralloched as soon as possible after shooting. The gralloch and any other waste should be disposed of responsibly and appropriately – well away from watercourses or public paths where dogs or people may come across it.

After gralloching, the carcass should be transported hygienically to a cool, dry, fly-proof store, and chilled to between 1 and 7°C within a reasonable period of time.

Any waste brought back to or generated within a larder must be disposed of by legal means.

If the carcass is to be taken to an approved game handling establishment (AGHE), then you, or someone who was present when the deer was shot and inspected, must have a recognised game meat hygiene certificate, and a written declaration will have to be completed for each carcass. You should also be registered with your local authority as a food business. For further information, please see the Wild Game Guide produced by the Food Standards Agency/Food Standards Scotland.

## 5. QUARRY SPECIES AND SEASONS

Statutory open seasons (all dates inclusive)

Species/sex	England and Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland
<b>Red</b>			
Stag	Aug 1 – Apr 30	**	Aug 1 – Apr 30
Hind	Nov 1 – Mar 31	Oct 21 – Feb 15	Nov 1 – Mar 31
<b>Fallow</b>			
Buck	Aug 1 – Apr 30	**	Aug 1 – Apr 30
Doe	Nov 1 – Mar 31	Oct 21 – Feb 15	Nov 1 – Mar 31
<b>Sika</b>			
Stag	Aug 1 – Apr 30	**	Aug 1 – Apr 30
Hind	Nov 1 – Mar 31	Oct 21 – Feb 15	Nov 1 – Mar 31
<b>Roe</b>			
Buck	Apr 1 – Oct 31	**	n/a
Doe	Nov 1 – Mar 31	Oct 21 – Mar 31	n/a
<b>Red/sika hybrids</b>			
Stag	Aug 1 – Apr 30	**	Aug 1 – Apr 30
Hind	Nov 1 – Mar 31	Oct 21 – Feb 15	Nov 1 – Mar 31
<b>Chinese water deer</b> (only found in England)			
Buck	Nov 1 – Mar 31	n/a	n/a
Doe	Nov 1 – Mar 31	n/a	n/a
<b>Muntjac*</b>			
	All year round		
* There is no statutory close season for muntjac. However, it is recommended that when culling female muntjac, immature or heavily pregnant does are selected to avoid leaving dependent young.			
** There is no statutory close season for male deer of any species in Scotland.			

## 6. LEGISLATION

The law regarding the killing and taking of deer differs throughout the UK. In both Scotland and Northern Ireland the legislation is different from that governing England and Wales.

In summary, the following are some of the more important provisions, but this is NOT to be taken as a complete or authoritative statement of the law.

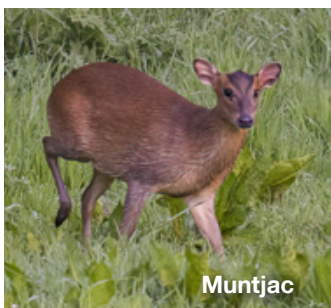


Under the relevant deer legislation, you must NOT:

- use anything except legal firearms and ammunition to kill deer;
- shoot deer out of season unless authorised to do so;
- shoot at night (one hour after sunset to one hour before sunrise), except under licence;
- shoot from a moving vehicle, or use a vehicle to drive deer (vehicle includes aircraft);
- sell venison in Northern Ireland, except to a licensed game dealer;
- sell venison in Scotland, except to a licensed venison dealer.

There are some limited exceptions to some of the above points which enable occupiers, and authorised persons, to protect their crops and to enable anyone to carry out humane dispatch of an animal to prevent suffering.

### The six deer species found wild in the UK



## Firearms and ammunition

You must only use a rifle and ammunition which are legal for the species of deer being shot. In addition to compliance with the law, you should be guided by knowledge, experience and personal preference in your choice of a rifle and ammunition. The legal requirements are laid down in the respective deer legislation.

Species	Min bullet weight	Calibre	Min muzzle energy
<b>Red, fallow and sika</b>			
England/Wales	n/a	Not less than .240 inches	1,700 foot pounds
Scotland	80 grains	n/a	1,750 foot pounds (min muzzle velocity of 2,450 feet per second)
Northern Ireland	100 grains	Not less than .236 inches	1,700 foot pounds
<b>Roe</b>			
England/Wales	n/a	Not less than .240 inches	1,700 foot pounds
Scotland	50 grains	n/a	1,000 foot pounds (min muzzle velocity of 2,450 feet per second)
N Ireland	100 grains	Not less than .236 inches	1,700 foot pounds
<b>Muntjac and Chinese water deer</b>			
England/Wales	50 grains	Not less than .220 inches	1,000 foot pounds
Scotland	80 grains	n/a	1,750 foot pounds (min muzzle velocity of 2,450 feet per second)
Northern Ireland	50 grains	Not less than .220 inches	1,000 foot pounds
It must be stressed that all these figures are the minimum legal requirement. For all deer stalking the bullet must be of a type designed to expand/deform on impact.			

## 7. OTHER EQUIPMENT AND AIDS

A responsible stalker should always have:

- a telescope or binoculars;
- a knife of appropriate design – with finger guard, an impervious handle and sheath;
- sterile gloves or hand sanitiser to ensure hygienic carcass handling;
- sufficient ammunition for stalking and any necessary further dispatch;

- a hand or head torch, if stalking in the evening, to look for hair or blood signs and to assist with safe gralloching and extraction;
- a means of extracting the carcass hygienically;
- a bipod or sticks of an appropriate design to aid standing, sitting, kneeling and prone shots;
- means of communication for emergency contact;
- a first aid kit.



## 8. TRAINING

You should aim to gain knowledge and experience both in the practice of stalking and in the ecology of deer. This can be gained either through recognised training courses, the guidance of an experienced stalker or, ideally, a combination of both. You can demonstrate a level of competence through attainment of the DMQ Deer Stalking Certificates 1 and 2 available from BASC and the BDS amongst other training organisations.

BASC and the BDS provide a wide variety of training related to deer and firearms use. Consult our websites for further information.

## 9. INSURANCE

It is strongly advisable to have adequate legal liability (third party) insurance when stalking. This is often a condition of stalking permissions. Membership of BASC and the BDS currently offers various insurance options. Contact the individual organisation for further details.

## 10. FURTHER INFORMATION

All who manage deer should conduct themselves according to the law and observe the highest standards of safety, ethics and courtesy, while showing full respect for the deer and a practical interest in wildlife conservation and the countryside.

**This code of practice was produced jointly by the British Association for Shooting and Conservation and the British Deer Society.**

The British Association for Shooting and Conservation  
Head Office, Marford Mill, Rossett, Wrexham LL12 0HL –  
Tel: 01244 573 000 – [basc.org.uk](http://basc.org.uk)

The British Deer Society  
The Walled Garden, Burgate Manor, Fordingbridge,  
Hampshire SP6 1EF – Tel: 01425 655 434 – [bds.org.uk](http://bds.org.uk)

**Further information can be found at:**  
**Deer Management Qualifications – [dmq.org.uk](http://dmq.org.uk)**

**NatureScot for Scottish Best Practice –**  
**[bestpracticeguides.org.uk](http://bestpracticeguides.org.uk)**

**The Deer Initiative Partnership for England & Wales Best Practice – [thedeerinitiative.co.uk/best\\_practice](http://thedeerinitiative.co.uk/best_practice)**

**Food Standards Agency –**  
**[food.gov.uk/business-guidance/wild-game-guidance](http://food.gov.uk/business-guidance/wild-game-guidance)**

**Food Standards Scotland –**  
**[foodstandards.gov.scot/business-and-industry/safety-and-regulation/approval-of-meat-plants/meat-products](http://foodstandards.gov.scot/business-and-industry/safety-and-regulation/approval-of-meat-plants/meat-products)**

**UK Deer Track & Recovery – UKDTR – [ukdtr.co.uk](http://ukdtr.co.uk)**

**BASC is the largest representative body for sporting shooting, with specialist deer management and firearms teams.**

**BDS is the foremost national deer charity which promotes management best practice, education and research.**

