

# Chinese Water Deer

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## Species Description

**Scientific name:** *Hydropotes inermis*

**AKA:** Water deer

**Native to:** East China and Korea

**Habitat:** Reed beds and woodlands

Chinese water deer were first kept by London Zoo in 1873. Wild populations have established in England due to escapes mostly from Woburn Abbey and Whipsnade in Bedfordshire, as well as deliberate releases. *Hydropotes inermis* is not present in Northern Ireland.

The Chinese water deer is a small, usually solitary, deer with a reddish - brown summer coat and paler winter coat. It has large rounded ears (usually held upright), beady black eyes and no antlers.

When running away, Chinese water deer often use a bounding gait in which legs are flung high in the air.

***Hydropotes inermis* is listed under Schedule 9 of The Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 and as such, it is an offence to release or allow this species to escape into the wild.**

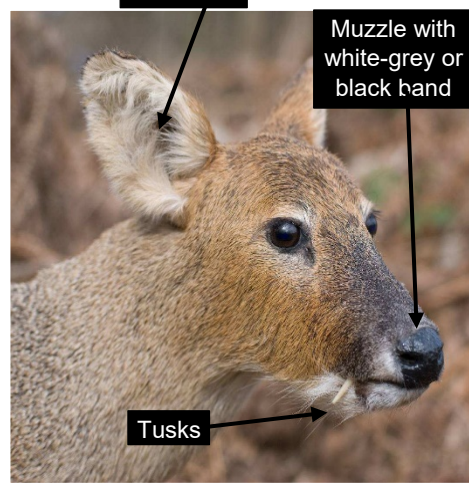


## Key ID Features



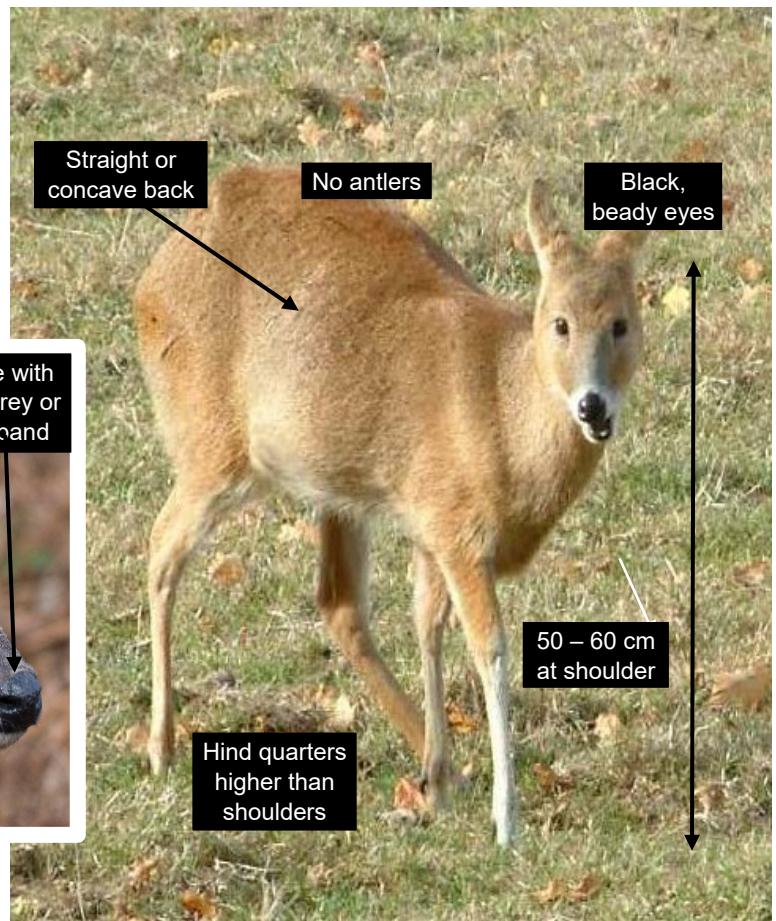
Rump indistinct,  
no white patch

Large ears  
held erect



Muzzle with  
white-grey or  
black band

Tusks



Straight or  
concave back

No antlers

Black,  
beady eyes

50 – 60 cm  
at shoulder

Hind quarters  
higher than  
shoulders

Report any sightings via; CEDaR Online Recording - <https://www2.habitas.org.uk/records/ISI>, iRecord app or Invasive Species Northern Ireland website - <http://invasivespeciesni.co.uk/report-sighting>

## Identification throughout the year

Summer coat: reddish-brown.

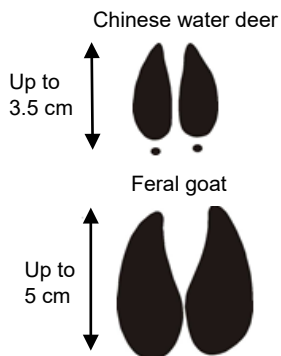
Winter coat: pale fawn to grey-brown.

Males make a whistling call during the rutting season (November - January)

## Field signs

Track are larger than Muntjac deer, and leave impressions of dew claws when running in soft mud or snow. Tracks similar in size and shape to feral goat and could also be confused with juvenile deer of other species.

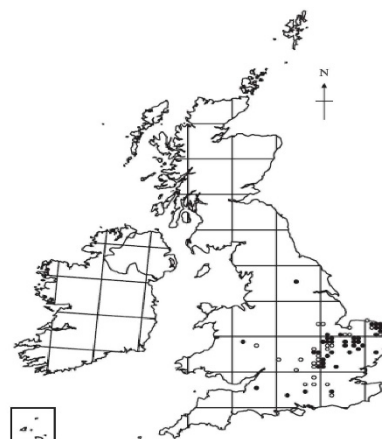
Droppings are dark brown or black, cylindrical, pointed at one end and rounded at the other.



## Distribution

Scattered distribution throughout southern England with strong-holds in Cambridgeshire and Norfolk.

Source: Alastair I. Ward, Mammal Review



## Similar Species

**Roe Deer**



No black bar on tail, white patch not clearly outlined in black

**Chinese Water Deer**



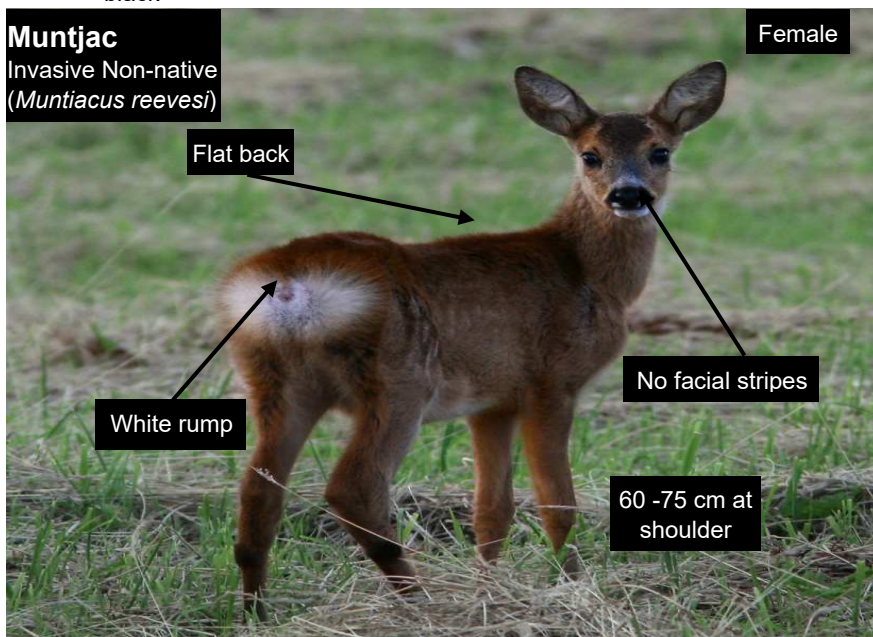
No white patch, short stumpy tail

**Muntjac Deer**

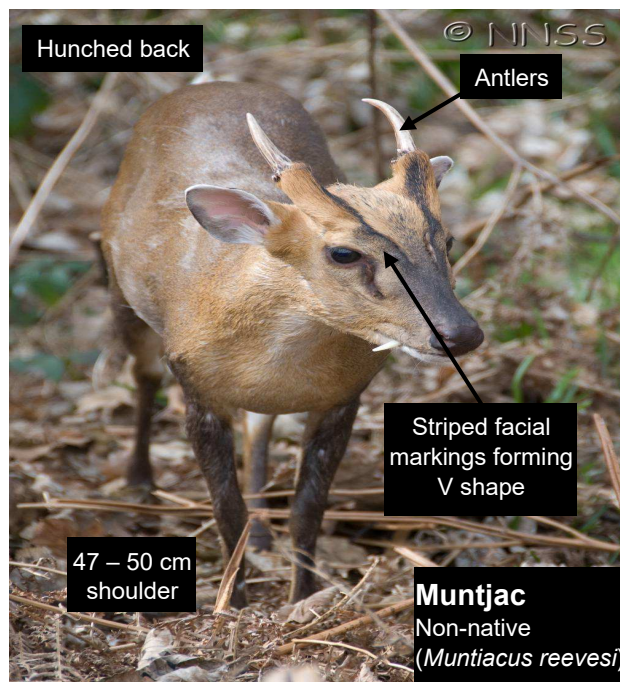


Dark rump, white underside to tail

**Muntjac**  
Invasive Non-native  
(*Muntiacus reevesi*)



Chinese water deer could be confused with Alsatian dogs due to their similar size and erect ears, especially when seen from a distance or within woodland understorey.



### References and further reading:

Cooke, A and Farrell, L (1998) "Chinese water deer." The Mammal Society and The British Deer Society  
Harris, S and Yalden, D W (eds) (2008) "Mammals of the British Isles." The Mammal Society  
Ward, A I (2005) "Expanding ranges of wild and feral deer in Great Britain" Mammal Review 35(2) 165-173  
Photos from: GBNNSS, Lindsay Farmer, Philip Ames, Taco Meeuwssen.

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Adapted for Northern Ireland  
Environment Agency 2020