



Deer

Native and Non-Native

Deer grazing in small groups in open fields, standing hesitantly with shining eyes on the side of the road at dusk, blending into the shadows right next to the trail: it is likely that you will see all this at Point Reyes National Seashore.

These animals belong to three different species of wild and reproducing deer that live within park boundaries. One of the species, the black-tailed deer, is native. The other two are highly successful “exotic” species of deer. Occasionally the three types of deer intermingle while they feed, but they do not interbreed.

The native **black-tailed deer**, a kind of mule deer, is the smallest of the three types of deer at Point Reyes. You can recognize them by their size and by their color, dark gray in winter and light gold in summer. Males have thick antlers with several branchings.



Black-tailed deer have a greater range at Point Reyes than do the exotic deer. They can be found throughout the entire 100 square miles of the park. Although they may be seen any time of day, evening

draws large numbers of deer to graze in open pastures where they are more visible.

The native black-tailed deer was the most important animal to the Coast Miwok, the Native Americans of the Point Reyes area. The deer meant food and clothing for the village. Antlers and bones were used for tools, and sinew for bow strings. Hooves were made into rattles which were used as musical instruments in spiritual ceremonies. No part of the deer was wasted.



If you think you have seen an albino deer, you probably were looking at a non-native **fallow deer**.

These animals are easily identified. They are fairly large, and the bucks have large, palmate antlers much like those of the moose.



Many fallow deer are white. Their color comes from centuries of selective breeding. The nobility in Europe traditionally kept semi-domesticated fallow deer in game parks, and bred

them to produce numerous coat colorations, including white, buff, charcoal with light underparts, and brown with white spots. The animals at Point Reyes are from English stock.

Fallow deer first came to Point Reyes between 1942 and 1954, when twenty-eight were purchased from the San Francisco Zoo by Dr. Millard Ottinger and brought to his private ranch at Point Reyes. The fallow deer here today are descendants of those imports.

Today their population is approximately five hundred. Fallow deer have spread south to Double Point and north to Tomales Point. They are common around Bear Valley Visitor Center.

The largest deer at Point Reyes is the **axis deer**, which is native to India and Sri Lanka. The visitor

can recognize their reddish color, and the thin, sparsely branched antlers.

Their reddish-brown coat is covered with white spots which are visible all year. A dark stripe runs the length of their backs and a white bib decorates their chests.



Mature bucks carry some of the largest antlers among deer, but their antlers have a fairly simple shape, forked once at the base and once more near the top.

This exotic deer has been introduced as a game animal to many private ranches across the United States. Dr. Millard Ottinger brought eight animals to his private ranch at Point Reyes in 1947 and 1948.

The current population of about two or three hundred are descendants of Ottinger's eight. They range from the Marshall Beach south to the lighthouse area.

