RED DEER IN A FARM SYSTEM

Fencing

Well planned and properly constructed deer fencing has a huge impact on the efficiency of deer handling. The long term benefits of ease of management from good fencing is realised with a reduction in time taken on fence maintenance, as well as reduced personnel time chasing deer around due to inadequate fencing. Deer fencing is inherently expensive to construct due to the quantity of materials that are used. Deer can be extremely hard on fences, and often cause damage to posts, gates and netting. This is mainly due to deer behaviours such as: pacing, fighting, rubbing of antlers/buttons, and attempted escape. If short-cuts are taken during initial construction then the on-going maintenance of substandard fencing can be substantial.
The normal height of deer fences is 1.9 to 2.0m for both internal fences, and boundary fences. Netting with a mesh size of either 150mm or 300mm seems to be an individual preference, however 150mm is more common on intensive farms, or fawning paddocks.

Adapted fences

A very common situation is for existing sheep and cattle fences to be adapted to hold deer. This can save on fencing costs, however you are constrained by existing fence location. In all situations the existing fence must be in good condition, this may require replacing or ramming loose posts, straining up wires, and re-stapling wires/netting.

Electric fences

Electric fencing is suitable to contain deer in paddocks. However, it should not be used to contain stags that have hard or velvet antler as entanglement in the electric wire can cause death. Deer should be moved quietly and calmly when shifted in and out of electrically fenced paddocks. Maintaining good power supply to electric fencing is vital if deer are to be properly trained to respect it and remain in the paddock where they are supposed to be. At least 4kV should be maintained in the system at all times for effective containment of deer.
To allow paddock subdivision to facilitate break feeding, temporary electric fences can be used. Flat electrified tape is the most commonly used product for containing deer effectively. This is because flat tape is more easily seen my the deer, and provides a better visual barrier. Temporary electric fences are unlikely to contain stags during mating time, or during the rut, or panicked animals.

Controlling post and fence damage

During the rut stags will rub their buttons against fence posts, trees or other objects. Fence posts can rapidly wear away, become weakened and break. Stags can also fight between themselves through fences when held in adjacent paddocks, this also causes substantial fence and post damage. The use of electrified outriggers can prevent stags from damaging fence posts and netting. A single plain electrified wire about 60cm up from the ground and held 25cm out from the fence is a good position for the outrigger wire. However, electrified outriggers should not be used in paddocks used for stags with hard or velvet antler (for reasons discussed above).

Gates and gateways

Commercially available deer gates are usually 1.8 metres high. Sheep and beef height gates can easily be adapted to deer height by welding galvanised water pipe to extend the frame height, and using mesh, or even deer netting for the inner panels.

Gateways between paddocks or into raceways can be configured in either a 'V', 'three' or 'four-way' configuration. Posts

The rule of thumb for post length is that at least one third of the post length should be below ground to ensure fence stability. The diameter of the posts chosen is dictated by the following factors: length of strain to be supported, type of deer, soil and fence type, and fence spacing. End assemblies are more a choice of the individual and come down to personal preference. Diagonal or horizontal boxed stays seem to be the most common.