



From October onwards, the Wicklow Mountains uplands will resound with the echo of the eerie calls of the deer stags as they announce the mating season. This year, 2020, the stags have already been whistling for a couple of weeks.

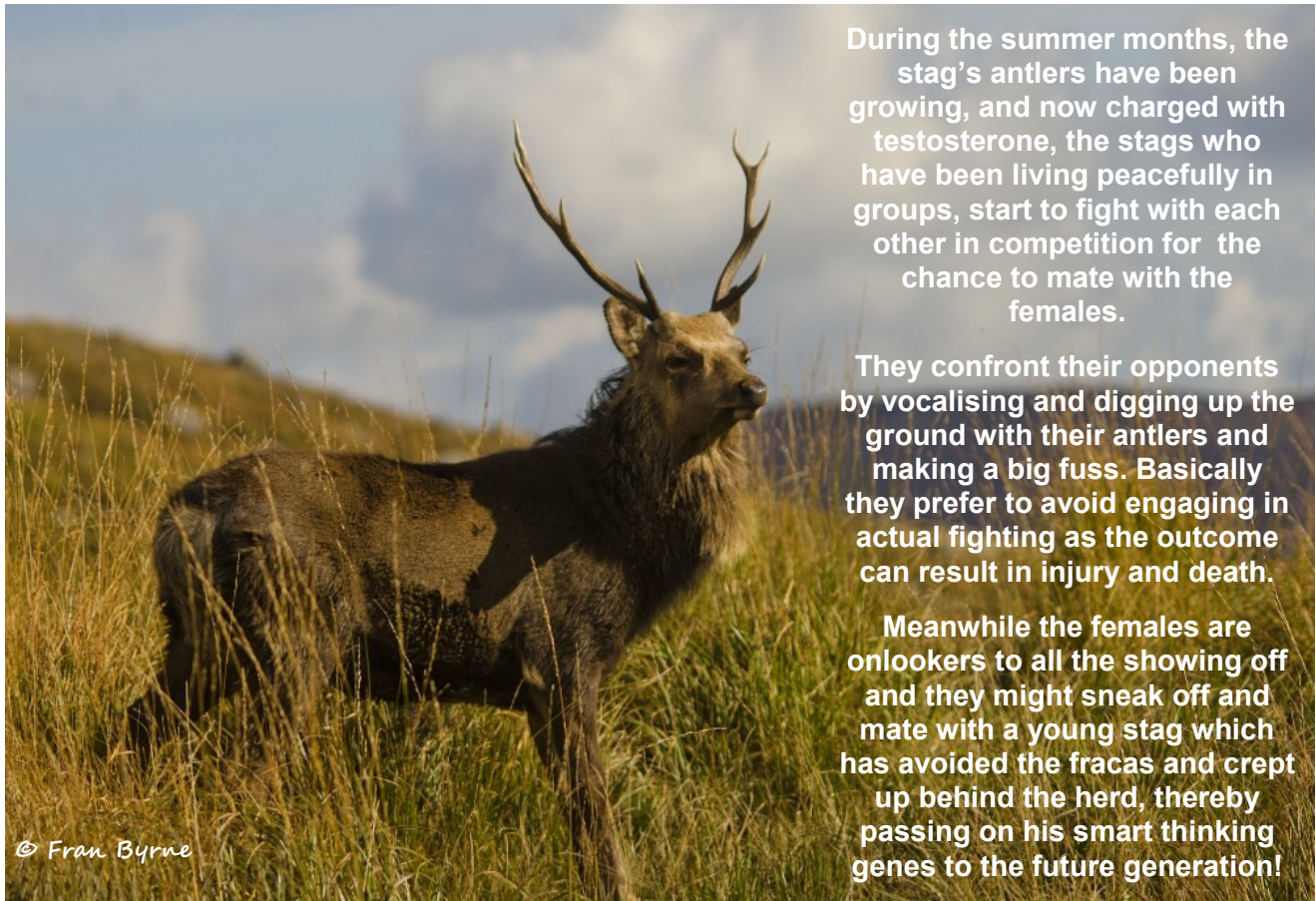
The onset of autumn and shorter daylight hours signals the mating season of various hoofed, herd mammals such as deer, sheep and goats. The females come into oestrus and are receptive to the attentions of the males. A process of natural selection takes place, with the females getting mated by the strongest males, thereby resulting in vigorous offspring, which are born when there is plenty of new growth to support lactation.

In Wicklow, the wild deer herds are composed of hybridised Red and Japanese Sika deer. Their calls differ between the high pitched, long whistles of the Sika and the deep, thundering roars of the Reds and sometimes variations of both.



**Páirc Náisiúnta Shléibhte Chill Mhantáin**  
**Wicklow Mountains National Park**





© Fran Byrne

During the summer months, the stag's antlers have been growing, and now charged with testosterone, the stags who have been living peacefully in groups, start to fight with each other in competition for the chance to mate with the females.

They confront their opponents by vocalising and digging up the ground with their antlers and making a big fuss. Basically they prefer to avoid engaging in actual fighting as the outcome can result in injury and death.

Meanwhile the females are onlookers to all the showing off and they might sneak off and mate with a young stag which has avoided the fracas and crept up behind the herd, thereby passing on his smart thinking genes to the future generation!

Most years, the Education Staff of Wicklow Mountains National Park organise a '**Rut Watch**' for the public to view this spectacular event through spotting scopes from a safe distance. However, as we know, it is an unusual year, and we cannot gather in large groups in the same way.

Another issue is that during the Lockdown, many wild animals including deer, became less wary of humans and are being seen in areas they would normally avoid. With the increases in proximity that are occurring, it is very important to remember that at this time of year, stags can become unpredictable and may even become aggressive to humans who approach too near them.

This year poses an extra risk to the safety of both you and the stags. Please do not attempt to feed them (or any other wild animal for that matter) as it may habituate them to getting close to humans. There can be serious consequences to both you and the stags as a result of feeding or getting too close to a magnificent stag for that perfect Christmas card photograph!

Nobody wants anyone in the Wicklow Mountains National Park to be injured by a stag, so remember to give them plenty of room. Use binoculars or high magnification long lenses on your cameras and **Stay Safe** in more ways than one!



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*Sika-type  
stags are  
identified by  
the frowns on  
their faces!*



A good trail from which you can observe the Rut is the White Route. Again, with the varied challenges of 2020, we are asking you to continue to observe the one-way system in place on this trail. You may not be aware that dogs can sometimes be injured by stags and they can also cause distress to deer so they are better to be left at home

. W.M.N.P. Education Guides are available daily in the Information Office near the Upper Lake and they will be happy to answer your questions about the deer and other wildlife. You might also want to check out our official Facebook page which will post any updates you may need to know.

The Rut is a magnificent spectacle every year that brings with it, the essence of untamed wilderness and great views of Ireland's largest wild mammals to our walks in the Wicklow Hills.

*Who is watching who?*



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