

Behaviour of male farmed fallow deer during the antler rubbing period

Summary

In deer farming, the period of antler ossification and rubbing of the velvet, together with the associated changes in the behaviour of male fallow deer and red deer, is very important. It is also significant how the stags react to the presence of humans (staff and visitors) during this time. Research on these questions was carried out in 2018 on the deer farm of the Research Station of the Institute of Parasitology of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Kosewo Górne. Three groups of European fallow deer were observed, differing in the numbers of animals of each sex and of different ages, as well as in the frequency of contact with people. The behaviour of the animals was found to change when they began to rub off their velvet. Stags beginning this process became agitated and usually stayed away from the rest of the group. Antagonistic behaviour between males was observed to increase during this time. Changes in the daily activity of stags throughout the observation period depended on the time of day, and thus indirectly on weather conditions, mainly air temperature. The observations indicate that the behaviour of male fallow deer during the velvet shedding period does not pose a direct threat to visitors or staff on the farm, but increased caution is required, and these animals should not be lured with feed.

KEY WORDS: deer farming, antler, fallow deer, *Dama dama*