

DEER

Layman's Guide

ALTHOUGH they have been a part of the British countryside for a long time, deer still seem to be very much an unknown ecological quantity. There is clearly a need to learn more about their status as potential and actual pests, before conservationists and farmers or landowners come to blows over the necessity to reduce numbers. But in the meantime the British Deer Society has published five well illustrated booklets of basic facts to foster interest among the uncommitted (*Fallow Deer*, *Red Deer*, *Roe Deer*, *Sika Deer* and *Muntjac*, 4s each). The declared aim of the series, published to celebrate European Conservation Year, is to give the general reader a picture of a fluid and hopeful situation in which the enthusiastic amateur can help to elucidate the complex relationship developing between man and deer.



Mature male muntjac, from the booklet by Oliver Dansie.

One of the least known of the British deer is also one of the most successful; the muntjac (*Muntiacus* sp.) has prospered greatly since it was brought to Britain from south-east Asia in the nineteenth century—there are various versions of a story that the Duke of Bedford was responsible for their introduction when he brought them to Woburn Park. Although the smallest of British deer, the muntjac is now firmly established and continues to increase. Its success can be attributed partly to its lack of interest to trophy hunters out for antlers to hang on their walls, and partly to its failure to do significant forestry or agricultural damage, which tends to exclude it from control campaigns.

By contrast, other deer can do extensive damage, particularly during the pre-mating, rutting season when the stags are at their most excitable. While marking out their territories, male fallow (*Dama dama*) and red (*Cervus elaphus*) deer thrash young trees with their antlers so vigorously that many are quite battered. Sika deer (*Cervus nippon*), however, do less damage at this time, but their browsing and grazing activities may raise objections from foresters and farmers. Consequently, in some places control measures are

essential to prevent deer from reaching pest proportions. The British Deer Society gladly accepts this, and is concerned only that it should be done efficiently and no more often than necessary.

FOOD

Modern Methods Wanted

by our Botany Correspondent

TRADITIONAL agricultural practice has done much to damage the Jamaican pimento (*Pimenta officinalis*) industry, according to a report published by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries in Kingston (*Pimento, A Short Economic History* by D. W. Rodriguez). In spite of the great value of the spice-giving berries, exports of which earned Jamaica £1,514,851 in 1968, they are still harvested by men and boys who climb the trees and tear off twigs and branches which are dropped to waiting women and children underneath. All too frequently, Mr Rodriguez says, indiscriminate tearing of the brittle branches completely defoliates a tree. The resulting wounds are open to attack from insects and fungi, and some trees apparently even die from the shock of such harsh treatment. Other trees take three or four years to recover, so that there is always a sharp fluctuation in the annual production of berries.

In the sensible belief that healthier and more productive trees would be fostered by more gentle methods, for the past five years the Jamaican Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries has been running trials to evaluate the results of careful harvesting with clippers. Although clear cut conclusions are not yet possible, trees seem to be more robust and yields seem to be following a more even pattern. Eventually the trials are expected to provide a basis for the formulation of some sound orchard practices.

Pimento berries are gathered while still green, and after drying in the sun they are ready for marketing. At this stage approximately 5,840 of the now wizened black berries weigh one pound, and can be stored without deterioration for considerable periods—an important factor in their success as an export commodity. The estimated extent of pimento cultivation in Jamaica is now 35,000–45,000 acres, holding about 100 trees per acre. Only in Grenada has *Pimenta officinalis* thrived as in Jamaica, although it has been introduced to many other tropical areas. Furthermore, Jamaica is the only place known to have produced the berries continuously since the tree was identified by Spanish explorers early in the sixteenth century.

Exports of pimento from Jamaica began soon after its discovery, but seem to have gone only to Spain. The first recorded use in London was not until 1601, when a druggist named Garret used dried berries in the preparation of medicines. In 1737 exports were 146,600 pounds and in 1761 they were 1,062,000 pounds at 63s per 100 pounds. By 1770, in spite of severe drought and shortage of food, they were up to 2,089,700 pounds at 56s per 100 pounds. Prices were not recorded again until 1845, when they had declined to 13s per 100 pounds—exports were by then 7,181,200 pounds. In 1969 7,225,120 pounds of pimento left Jamaica at 586s per 100 pounds, destined for all parts of the world, but in large measure for the food industries of the USSR, Germany and the United States.