

# The Hybridisation of Red Deer and Sika Deer in Northern Ireland

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THE existence of extensive hybridisation between the exotic species, sika deer (*Cervus nippon* (Tamminck)) and the native species, red deer (*Cervus elaphus* (L)) is now an established phenomenon (Harrington, 1973).

Although red × sika hybrid deer were observed in 1896 at Colebrooke, Co. Fermanagh (Brooke, 1898), there has been until now no further information on the occurrence of hybrid deer there. On 6th February 1974 I observed a number of deer at Colebrooke (Grid Ref. H40 44) and concluded that two of them (one hind and her calf) were hybrids. This conclusion has recently been confirmed by the shooting of one red × sika hind at Colebrooke (Mr. C. S. Kilpatrick and Mr. J. A. W. Whiteside, pers. comm.). Observations of other hybrid deer have also been made recently at Killeter forest (Grid Ref. H08 82) Co. Tyrone (Mr. J. A. W. Whiteside, pers. comm.).

Conditions for hybridisation between sika deer and red deer are ideal in Northern Ireland: The present range of the red deer originating from the Co. Donegal population is now extensive as it stretches from the northern part of that county to southern Co. Fermanagh. At both Killeter and Colebrooke red deer and sika deer have been living together in recent years. It is also very likely that the sika deer of Northern Ireland are of a stock which was contaminated by red deer genes before their introduction to the area.

Just as the Co. Wicklow region has lost its red deer through incipient hybridisation with sika deer it would now seem that the red deer of North-western Ireland are likely to be lost in a similar way!

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## References

- Brooke, D., 1898: Hybrid red deer. *The Field*, 23rd July, 92-182.  
Harrington, R., 1973: Hybridisation among deer and its implications for conservation. *Irish For. J.* 30 (2), 64-78.