



Persian Fallow Deer



Scientific Classification

Kingdom:	Animalia	Family:	Cervidae
Phylum:	Chordata	Sub-Family:	Cervinae
Class:	Mammalia	Genus:	Dama
Order:	Artiodactyla	Species:	D. Dama

Sub-species: Dama dama Mesopotamica

Description

This species formerly occurred in Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and eastern Turkey. It was thought to be extinct by the 1940s, but a small population of 25 animals was rediscovered in Iran during the 1950s. Persian Fallow Deer are nearly extinct in the wild today, inhabiting only small habitats in Iran and Israel. They are bred in zoos and parks in Iran, Israel and Germany. As of 2008, the total population in Iran (including captive and re-introduced animals) was approximately 400 although some were hybrids. In Israel, they have been gradually and successfully reintroduced since 1996, from a breeding center at the Tisch Family Zoological Gardens in Jerusalem, into the wild at two sites in Israel. In Israel there were approximately 200 individuals in the north of the country (Nahal Kziv area) by 2005 and today this is the world's largest stable wild group. In addition, a wild group of around 45 individuals now exists in the south of the country (Nahal Soreq area). Captive populations also exist in Israel - 65 individuals at the Tisch Family Zoological Gardens in Jerusalem and around 150 in the Hai Bar Carmel Mountain Reserve in central Israel. The species is included on CITES Appendix I (as *Dama dama mesopotamica*).

Threats and Conservation Actions

This species has experienced numerous threats which have led to its long decline and near extinction. Habitat destruction of native woodlands have contributed to its population decline. Approximately 10%



of their former range still exists for habitation in the present day. Since the Persian fallow deer is a primary consumer in its ecosystem, it is negatively affected by the destruction of the habitat that supports the primary producers on which it feeds. The decline of the Persian fallow deer's habitat is also likely to have contributed to increased pressure from predators due to the loss of dense areas that can be used as a refuge from predators as has been noted in similar deer species. However, the primary predation pressure on the Persian fallow deer over the last century has been human poaching. Interspecific competition with domestic livestock, including cattle, has also further reduced the amount of food available to the deer. Due to these factors, the overall population of the Persian fallow deer suffers from the effects of small population size, notably inbreeding. Genetic variation is a major concern because inbreeding can cause further loss of genetic variation, an effect known as inbreeding depression. For Persian fallow deer, there is little genetic variation for the entire species because all the animals that currently exist were bred from a relatively small surviving group; genetic studies have shown that the individuals alive today are similar in 95% of their genes.

Due to the rarity of this species, little information exists on their behavior and social structure in the wild; therefore, there is a great need for continued research to gain a better understanding of their natural behaviors and characteristics; and to provide more reliable ecological data for reintroduction planning.

In tandem, the Tisch Family Zoological Gardens in Jerusalem conducts wide-ranging and varied education initiatives aimed at engaging the local community to increase awareness of critical changes that need to be made at the local level for the conservation of the Persian Fallow Deer in the wild. This knowledge empowers future decision makers to take steps towards the conservation of Persian Fallow Deer and their habitat. This Tisch Family Zoological Gardens has also invested considerable resources in publicizing this conservation program in the local press to raise the awareness of the local community and to request their assistance in reporting sightings of the animals.

Habitat

The Persian Fallow Deer occupies a range of woodlands, such as tamarisk, oak and pistachio. The wild population utilizes riparian forest thickets.

Reproduction

The rut is during August and early September, and calving at the end of March to early April, following a gestation period of approximately 229 days.