



CALVING IN RED DEER

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The first clue to the impending birth of a calf is the development of the udder by the mother. In adult hinds this may be up to 4 weeks before the event, whereas in first calvers this may be only 2 weeks before delivery. Within 48 hours of the birth the hind will often separate from the rest of the herd, become restless and begin to pace the fence line.

This fence walking probably represents the first stage of labour where the uterus begins to contract.

As labour advances she looks at her flank, strains for a while but will then graze for a time before continuing fence walking.



Normal calving can take 2 hours, however one hour is generally normal. The second stage of labour is when the membranes burst and the feet and head of the calf are in the pelvis. Calving should be complete within 45 minutes from this time - if not then assistance is required.

Normal delivery is similar to cattle with the front feet coming first and the head just behind the knees.



Note that the soles of the feet are pointing downwards. If the soles are pointing upwards then either the calf is coming backwards (breech birth) or the calf is upside down. A breech birth may not require assistance but an upside down calf will need help. The only way to tell the difference is to get the hind in and feel which way the calf is presented.

The long legs of the Red Deer calf means that the nose is not presented through the vulva until just after the knees are presented as shown in this photograph.

Once the nose is presented the remainder of the birth process is rapid. It is rare for the calf to "lock" at the hips as will occur in cattle. The hind will often lick the foetal fluids and may lie down for the final delivery.



Once delivered, the hind commences to lick the new-born calf dry, and the calf begins the bonding process to its mother. This takes about an hour and involves the calf crawling over the mother, the continued licking of the calf by the mother and the first drink of colostrum rich milk. This first drink may occur while the hind is still lying down recovering from the birth. The after-birth is expelled quickly (usually within 20 minutes). If it is still present after six hours assistance is required.

The after-birth is eaten by the hind. It is not known if this has any beneficial effect for the hind or whether it is simple good environmental house-keeping to prevent alerting predators to the presence of a new-born calf.

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Reference:

Haigh JC and Hudson RJ (1993). ***Farming Wapiti and Red Deer***. Missouri: Mosby. (Year Book).