



CASTRATION OF MALE DEER

By Associate Professor Tony English

Fallow deer are the only species of farmed deer commonly castrated in Australia.

Hand raised male deer are always DANGEROUS unless they are castrated before puberty. Any hand raised buck that is not castrated eventually becomes aggressive, and has the potential to very seriously injure or even kill people - and other animals. If you cannot have him castrated pre-puberty you should not take the risk of keeping him. Please take this warning very seriously.

When to Castrate

If you castrate a fawn pre-puberty he will not grow antlers and he should not become aggressive. In other words, he must be castrated before he develops antler pedicles, which is probably best done no later than 4-7 months of age (when the antler pedicles can first be felt as small bumps under the skin). The testes should have descended by about 6 months, unless he has a problem.

Fighting behaviour in groups of entire yearling fallow deer (spikers) can cause significant loss due to deaths and injury.

Deer over six months of age must be castrated by a veterinarian using analgesia and possibly sedation. Make certain deer are vaccinated against tetanus before being castrated. Even very tame castrates do occasionally become a problem, so you will need to watch them

Older Deer

Any hand raised buck eventually becomes aggressive, and has the potential to very seriously injure or even kill people and other animals. There is no guarantee that castration will change his behaviour - once acquired the aggression often does not go away.

How to Castrate

Use a rubber Elastrator ring, and make sure that both testes are below the ring. You MUST vaccinate for tetanus (2 doses of 5-in-1 4-6 weeks apart, with the second at the time of castration. Alternatively, you can give 1500units of tetanus antitoxin SC at the time of castration.

It is a simple procedure really. . There is little apparent discomfort and local anaesthesia should not be required.

The deer is usually held in a sitting position by one operator whilst another applies the elastrator ring. The most dangerous potential problem is tetanus - he must be protected

He will be feeling some discomfort for a few days which might affect his appetite a little. Certainly within about 5 days I would expect that he will be eating normally. Otherwise you should only worry if his scrotum becomes gangrenous (swollen, blue/black and cold to the touch), or swollen and hot. But don't be alarmed - such problems are very uncommon.

Castration and Velvet Production

You should castrate the fawns as soon as the testicles can be felt in the scrotum. This will prevent any pedicle formation and hence any abnormal "velvet" production. Castration of deer PRIOR to the development of the pedicle prevents the development of the pedicle and therefore no antlers ever grow.

Castration of older animals in velvet prevents fraying and the antlers are NEVER cast.

Castration when in hard antler (perruque animals) causes the antlers to be cast in 1 to 2 weeks and in the subsequent year they are renewed but remain in permanent velvet. They grow slightly each year. The continuously growing soft antlers are certainly unsightly, and are often a welfare problem - they can be broken, become infected etc. If you do plan to retain this animal, all you can do is have a veterinarian surgically trim the antlers as often as seems necessary, using appropriate analgesia/anaesthesia.

FAQs – Are There Alternatives?

Can I avoid castration by keeping him in an isolated field or pen him during the rutt?

I truly believe that no matter what arrangements you make to isolate him from people the risk is just too great. Can you be 100% sure that a third party could not ever possibly enter his enclosure without your knowledge or permission? You could be responsible for someone's death – truly. Will you never be tempted to take the risk yourself - "he would not hurt me". Yes he would. Neither can you rely on his aggression subsiding after the rut - it often does not do so. Have him castrated now and look after him for life.

Can a young hand-raised deer be returned to the wild without being castrated?

The real issue is whether this deer has lost his fear of man through being hand raised. If so he will always have the potential to turn very nasty when you least expect it, and someone is liable to get hurt. There are never any absolute guarantees in matters like this, but I do urge you to take seriously that he has the potential to injure or even kill somebody if you are not very careful.

Can a young hand-raised deer be returned to the wild after being castrated?

It is difficult to give you a precise answer because every situation and every animal is different. If the fawn is already very tame and imprinted on humans then you can expect that to drive his behaviour if you try to turn him loose. You would expect him to stay around the area that he is familiar with, and he may not integrate with any wild deer that may be about. He will not flee from human so will be more vulnerable to hunters, and he may become aggressive too. But not for certain.

Alternatively you could try to find a safe environment like a deer farm or deer-park where he is more likely to go well.