

Bradgate Park

Somewhere nearer home this month: Bradgate Park, just north of Leicester, was first enclosed as a deer park about 800 years ago and has a herd size of around 600 of which three-quarters are fallow deer and the remainder red deer. The first written reference to a deer park at Bradgate was in 1241.

The most important fact is that they are wild. They are not farmed, no vets attend, the only concession is that in hard winters they are given feed, otherwise they fend for themselves. The deer are allowed to roam all over the park and there is an area which is effectively a sanctuary for them where the public are not allowed.



Now is a very good time to visit as the rutting season is in full swing and will continue into early November. I went there myself recently and was enthralled by the sight of so many deer and I am sharing with you a few of the photos I took. The "boss" red stag was having quite a time both chasing the ladies and seeing off any rivals, with a lot of bellowing which is, in the main, a warning to keep away. It was possible to hear other stags making everyone aware of their presence.





The park itself is reminiscent of the Peak District as it has flat, hilly and also rocky parts, with forested areas, some really old oak trees and bracken areas in which the deer often hide. It also has the ruins of Bradgate House, which was the childhood home of Lady Jane Grey, Queen of England for just nine days in 1553. It is an example of one of the earliest brick-built country houses in England.

Two further buildings are the 18th century folly known as Old John at the top of a steep hill and the Leicestershire Yeomanry War Memorial which stands on the hill next to Old John. It commemorates the men of the Leicestershire Yeomanry who died in the Boer War and the two World Wars.

From a nature point of view the deer are the main reason to visit. The magnificent red deer, especially the stags, stand proud showing off their antlers. The Fallow Deer are smaller but no less impressive, the young ones frolicking with each other like Bambi.

If you are really lucky you may see males challenging for position, locking their antlers together and straining to obtain dominance as it is only the dominant ones that get to mate. During the season different males do achieve dominance as the one in charge gradually gets worn out from constantly fighting off other males and also from mating with his harem.



If you do intend to visit it really is best to try and avoid the weekends as it can get very busy. Don't forget to take your camera!

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