

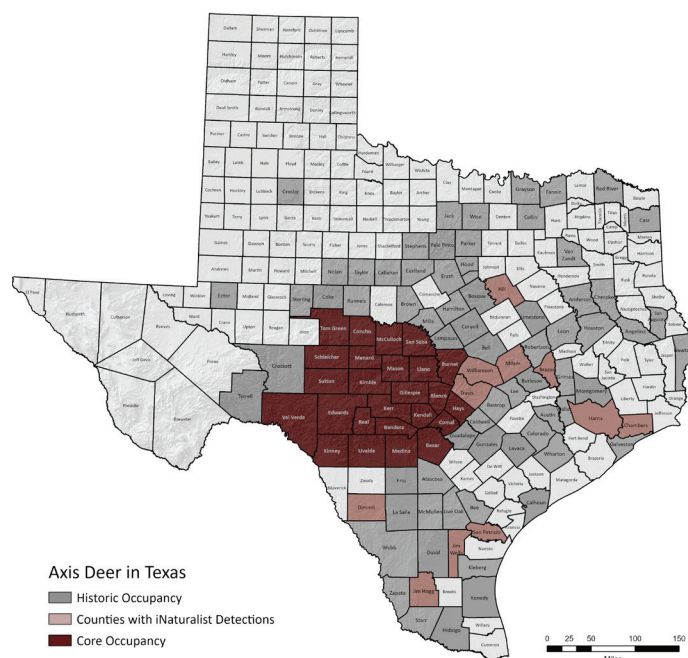
Axis Deer / Chital (*Axis axis*)

Nick Boysen, Sarah Cox, Leanne Pollock, Sidney Sánchez, John David Taylor, Kevin L. Skow, Stephen L. Webb

Axis deer, also known as chital, are native to India and classified as a species of Least Concern by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. They may be the most abundant and widespread exotic species in Texas where they were first introduced in 1932. Early introductions were on high-fenced game ranches, but many free-ranging populations now roam through the Edwards Plateau and the northern South Texas Plains ecoregions.

Description

Axis are a medium-sized deer (larger than white-tailed deer in many areas) ranging in weight from 145 to 250 pounds (average = 160 pounds) for males and 95–145 pounds for females (average = 100 pounds). Axis have a chestnut-colored (reddish-brown) coat with white spots throughout and a black stripe down the back. They belong to the Family Cervidae, so the species is dimorphic, meaning the sexes can be differentiated by the antlers, which only occur in males. Antler lengths on large, trophy males range from 36 to 41 inches.



Distribution and county occupancy of axis deer (chital) based on historic and iNaturalist records. Counties in dark grey and maroon are part of the historic and current distribution. The core area of occupancy is depicted in maroon, and counties with new iNaturalist records, that were not part of the historic distribution, are shaded light red. Other counties may have axis populations but are not reported in public sources, especially for counties bordering the core occupied area.



Habitat and Diet

This species is classified primarily as a grazer where they forage on grasses year-round. However, axis have a broad diet, consisting of browse, mast, and forbs, which is dependent on environmental conditions and forage availability. As a grazer, they select grassland near water and woody brush or trees, which are used for security cover or shade. Their general habitat also can be described as savanna-like, being open grassland interspersed with trees or shrubs. In the Edwards Plateau, axis use canyons and draws dominated by oak and cedar trees. Axis prefer milder climates because the species can suffer damage to growing antlers and heavy population losses during extreme winters. They also will drink free-standing water daily, especially during hot weather.

Reproduction

The breeding season can occur year-round, but in Texas, it typically occurs from mid-May to August, peaking in June and July. Males reach sexual maturity at 14.5 months whereas females are sexually mature at 12 months. Females can have 1–3 offspring, but average 1 fawn per year. The gestation period is 210–238 days, so most fawns are born between January and March.

Behavior

Axis are placid except at high population density, when in close confinement, or when males have hardened antlers during rut.



They are social, so herds range from a few individuals to 40–70, but may be as large as 100. However, average group size ranges from 5 to 15, mostly consisting of females and their offspring. Axis form home ranges, covering 1,200–1,900 acres.

Management Considerations

Axis deer can affect and compete with native wildlife species, especially white-tailed deer because the two species use similar habitat characteristics. Axis compete directly with white-tailed deer for forage, especially during times of drought; axis eat browse, mast, and forbs like white-tailed deer, but can thrive on grass whereas white-tailed deer cannot. Axis deer can form large herds, so they can displace white-tailed deer from preferred habitats or at supplemental feed sites because they exert greater dominance. Axis also cause damage to rangelands and riparian areas through overuse.

Hunting Exotics in Texas

Most exotic wildlife species were introduced in Texas to provide additional hunting opportunities. Axis are classified as an exotic animal, which is any animal that is not indigenous to Texas. In Texas, there are no closed seasons for hunting exotics, but a valid hunting license is required. Please review Texas Parks and Wildlife Department regulations for complete information.



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Nick Boysen, Sarah Cox, Leanne Pollock, Sidney Sánchez, John David Taylor | Department of Rangeland, Wildlife, and Fisheries Management, Texas A&M University
Kevin L. Skow, Stephen L. Webb | stephen.webb@ag.tamu.edu | Texas A&M Natural Resources Institute

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