FEEDING AND TERRITORIAL BEHAVIOR OF RED DEER (*CERVUS ELAPHUS*) IN SUBMONTANE HABITATS

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate the feeding and territorial behavior of red deer (Cervus elaphus) in submontane habitats, integrating field observations with data from the specialized literature. The method involved reviewing relevant studies and analyzing information provided by hunting fund managers regarding seasonal movements, social structure, feeding patterns, and responses to anthropogenic disturbances. Results showed that feeding behavior is highly seasonal, with a preference for grasses and young shoots in summer and reliance on supplemental feeding during winter. Territoriality is most pronounced in males during the rutting period (September–October), with social structures varying seasonally: females form herds with calves, while males are solitary or move in small groups outside the rut. Abiotic factors such as snow cover, temperature, and wind, as well as biotic factors like food availability, strongly influence movement patterns and habitat use. Management practices, including controlled artificial feeding, habitat protection, and modern monitoring techniques (GPS tracking, camera traps, motion sensors), were found to mitigate anthropogenic pressures and preserve natural behavior. These findings highlight the importance of integrating ethological observations with habitat and management data to support sustainable conservation of red deer populations in submontane environments.

Key words: *red deer, territoriality, seasonal movements, submontane habitats*