



## **The deer in the Churchyard.**

**Read this extract. P 144 .The deer have just found this green space, a churchyard, in the heart of the city.**

It felt strange to be back in a living landscape that breathed as we breathed. We stepped with gentle care on the grass, lush and cool under our feet. It was fetlock deep and tickled our legs as it bent with the gentle breeze. One of the fawns did a little skip, dancing stiff-legged round his Mother, Mouse Ear. A green place, rich with brambles and bushes, overhung with willows.

Standing up everywhere were strange flat stones, lonely cliffs that towered over us. With straight edges and weird markings, the stones were clearly made by man, yet there was no feeling of threat. There was a huge tribe of them stretching all the way up the hill to the Stone-Tree with the golden Roe on its tip.

‘It’s a stone forest,’ whispered Brack, ‘with a Stone-Tree at its heart, just like the Duir.’

‘What does it mean?’ asked Rudd.

None of us knew.

‘Perhaps they are hiding places,’ said Siskin, stepping behind one.

‘Perhaps man wanted a forest so they made one,’ said Rudd.

‘Why not let a real forest grow?’

‘Man doesn’t let things grow,’ said Hawthorn.

The does were fascinated by the standing stones and began to wander, stretching their necks to look up at them. Redshank startled violently, sending the others swerving back.

‘I thought it was a man!’ said Redshank, staring at one very tall stone.

‘It is a man,’ said Brack, ‘but a stone one... Look, there’re more of them...’

‘Are they men?’ asked Sedge. ‘They’ve got huge wings as if they were birds...’

‘Hawthorn, have you ever seen anything like this?’ I said.

‘Sort of,’ said Hawthorn. ‘I’ve seen man-shapes in the middle of fields.’

‘I wonder why?’ mused Willow.

‘Who can say?’ said Hawthorn. ‘There is no way to walk with the thoughts of man.’

‘The stones don’t seem to be harmful,’ said Brack, sniffing the edges of one of them with delicately fluttering nostrils. ‘This one has lichen and moss growing on it.’

‘Then they cannot be evil,’ I said.

‘They are like Old Buck of the Stones,’ said Brack slowly. ‘They are the guardians of this place.’

## Skylar's Myths



**Rowan and Skylar have just met. She explained that she used to live by the sea. Read the extract. P163**

‘What is the sea?’ I asked. ‘Is it good grazing?’

‘Don’t you know *anything*? The sea is where the earth stops, except for the island. Look at this puddle, see how the ground stops where it meets the water? Well, it’s like that.’

‘So what’s the island?’

‘That stone in the puddle sticks up with the water all around it. That’s an island.’

‘So the sea is just water?’

‘No! Not like other water!’

‘What do you mean?’

She frowned.

‘Well, you can’t drink it.’

‘Why?’

‘It’s salt. Don’t you remember how Wargoth. tried to steal the sea?’

‘No...tell me.’

‘Wargoth wanted the power of the sea, so he took a giant leaf and scooped up the water to take to his territory beneath the earth. Roe chased him and they fought. Roe ripped the leaf and the water spilled out, but Wargoth wounded Roe with his double horns and a drop of Roe’s blood fell into the sea and so it tastes of salt.’

‘If it’s salt, it must be a dead place,’ I said.

Skylar flared up like a sunset.

‘The sea is the most alive, living thing that the Lord of the Skies ever created! It breathes and sighs and sings to itself. When the mighty Sea Warriors, Ballan-Wrasse and Megrim, clash beneath the waves their battle-din stirs the sea to anger. It tears the sky and makes great rolling cliffs. And always, the tide races in and out with its breathing.’

‘I want to see it.’

‘The sea is a long way, but I know a high place where you can catch the salt tang of it, and smell freedom.’

‘Will you take us there, Sky-Lar?’

## The Truth About Roe Deer?

How savvy are you? Take the challenge, see how you score!

1. A female roe deer can fight off a fox.

Agree  Disagree

2. Predators of roe deer will kill each other.

Agree  Disagree

3. Bucks [male deer] fight duels over territory.

Agree  Disagree

4. Roe deer all have different facial markings

Agree  Disagree

5. Roe deer shed their horns:

a) At the beginning of winter

b) At the end of winter

6. The biggest killer of Roe deer is:

a) Fox

b) Big cat

c) Being hit by a vehicle

d) Winter

7. Roe deer live:

a) Alone most of the time

b) In family groups

8. Roe deer are almost extinct in Britain:

Agree  Disagree

How savvy are you?  
You took the challenge, now see how you scored!



1. A female roe deer can fight off a fox.

**Agree?** Well done!

It seems a bit unlikely, doesn't it, but there are plenty of examples of female roe deer fighting off a fox attacking a fawn.

**Writer's tip:** this nugget of information was the starting point for *Rowan, Leader of the Deer Kin*. Research can be a good starting point for your own writing.

2. Predators of roe deer will kill each other.

**Agree?** Well done, you! Top predators, like a wolf or a big cat, will clear an area of smaller predators so that they keep all the game for themselves. Cunning, eh? If you've read the book you will know that how important this idea was to me.

**Writer's tip:** the more you research, the more ideas you will find!

3. Bucks [male deer] fight duels over territory.

**Agree?** You're on a roll! Roe deer bucks engage in long duels which have a lot of ritual steps before the fight. Serious injuries can happen so they go through a lot of challenges first and often the weaker buck will give way. There's a big fight between two characters, Sirrah Tor and Twayblade in my book, and I based this on videos of bucks fighting.

4. Roe deer all have different facial markings

**Agree?** What a star! Yes, they have very strong facial markings and everyone is different! This is another thing that makes them so fascinating!

5. Roe deer shed their horns:

**At the beginning of winter!** Well done, if that was your answer! This is different to red deer who shed their horns at the end of winter.

6. The biggest killer of Roe deer is:

**d] Winter.** Well done if this was your answer! Lots of people don't realise how tough this season is for wildlife. Many roe deer sadly die of starvation in the winter. In the book, Rowan and his Kin have to face the challenges of the 'worst of the Fang-claws', a particularly bad winter. This plays a crucial and surprising role in the ending of the book...

7. Roe deer live:

**a] Alone most of the time**

**b] In family groups**

Bonus question! Both are right! Roe deer do live in family groups but they do wander on their own sometimes, especially in the spring. They also hide a great deal and lots of people believe that they are on their own because the rest of the family are so well hidden!

**Writer's tip:** it's difficult to write about a character who is alone all the time. There's no one to argue with, or fall in love with. Characters need other characters!

8. Roe deer are almost extinct in Britain:

**Disagree!** Did you get this one right? Well done! It's good news for roe deer. We think they came to Britain during the Ice Age, but then they were hunted almost to the point of extinction, but today they are widespread in Britain and even do well in our cities! In my book, Rowan and his clan find sanctuary at one point in the story in a churchyard in the heart of a city and this is not unusual.

Thank you for doing the questionnaire! I hope you enjoyed it!

*Sarah Green*

# Some facts About Roe Deer

## **Roe Deer**

Roe deer are very common in Britain and I see them quite often grazing in the fields when I'm on the train between Evesham and Oxford. I became interested and many of the facts I discovered led to key moments in the story, so although this a work of fiction it is rooted in the actual behaviour and history of Roe deer.

**Top tip for your own writing:** research can give you material to fuel your imagination.

## **Willow's fight with the fox. Could this really happen?**

Yes. There are eyewitness accounts of female roe deer fighting off predators in just this way. So would she leave her fawns alone? Yes, roe deer fawns are hidden from predators. Their mothers will leave them in order to feed.

## **Are there panthers [big black cats] roaming free in Britain?**

That's a big question and the answer is we don't know for sure. There are lots of sightings for creatures such as the 'Beast of Bodmin' but no definitive proof. However, I have a close friend who saw such a cat in a field near Red Marley on the edge of the Forest of Dean and that inspired me to write about One, the big black cat in the story.

## **Would a big cat kill a fox?**

It is quite common for large predators such as big cats to clear out lesser predators to reduce the competition for food. This has been well researched in countries where they live. It gave me a fantastic opportunity to give One some truly villainous scheming.

## **Roe deer fights.**

These are well-documented. Roe deer bucks will fight for the right to mate with the females. Injuries can happen. I watched a video of two bucks fighting before I wrote the account of the battle between Sirrah Tor and Twayblade and it does have the feel of medieval jousting with a strong sense of ritual. This is why I had Hawthorn teach Rowan and his friends the 'rules' of battle.

### **Skylar has a silver coat, is that possible?**

Yes. Roe deer usually have chestnut coats which look almost grey in the winter, but white deer have been photographed. Skylar is ashamed of her coat because it stands out so much.

### **Facial marking and horns.**

Roe deer have strong facial markings, which vary slightly. They shed their horns in the autumn and grow them again in the spring. This saves Rowan from a fight, because Twayblade is losing his horns. Older bucks can sometimes look as though their horns have slipped forward and their foreheads can look wrinkled with age. This helped me give Hawthorn a distinctive look. Do roe deer ever have double points to their horns, like Twayblade? I made this up, simply because of his name. I searched books on flora and fauna to find names for my deer. Twayblade is a plant name and it seemed perfect for the character.

### **Starvation:**

Could roe deer really be in danger of dying of starvation? Absolutely. Research places winter starvation at the top of the list of the things that kill roe deer. Road traffic is the second biggest killer and predators come a long way down on the list. However, roe deer fawns are vulnerable and can be killed by predators. Rowan and Brack are right to be scared of the fox.

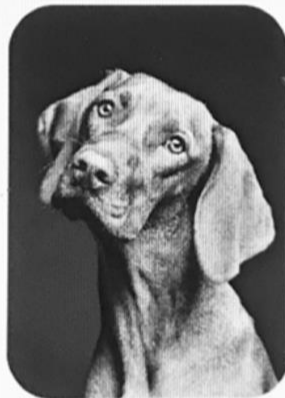
### **Do roe deer live in groups or alone?**

Opinion is divided. Much research states that they wander alone, but some studies state that they live in family groups. I chose to use the second opinion as it was so much more interesting to have a family situation to write about. This also made me think about why opinion is divided and it seems to me that it's because roe deer are very shy and rely on being hidden to survive in the world of men. This led me to give Rowan and the others a great faith in being Still, a near-religious state where they feel one with the earth.

### **Can roe deer swim?**

Yes, they are strong swimmers and also like to live near water. This helped me solve a key question in the story: where could Rowan take his clan to be safe? Skylar's island was the perfect answer.

What kind of tracker are you? Can you match these animals with their tracks?







A



B



C



D

E



G



F



H



# The Answers!

How well did you do?

Fox = E



Dog = A



Similar? The fox is a bit narrower.



Badger = F



Squirrel = B



Look for five toes! Of course, the

squirrel's are smaller than the badgers.



## Sheep=D



Sheep prints are rounded than the roe deer. Other deer look similar but vary in sizes: roughly:  
Roe: 5 cm x 4 cm;  
Red deer: 9cm x 7cm; Fallow: 7x 5cm

## Roe Deer= H



## Panther=C



## Cat= G

These two are very similar! Just a difference in size!  
The panther's print can be 4 cm across.



Notice no claws; they are retracted (drawn in).



## **The Settings**

### **May Hill.**

A landmark hill on the edge of the Forest of Dean. This is where Willow hides her twin fawns, Rowan and Brack.

### **The Forest of Dean**

I was born in the Forest of Dean, and this is where Sirrah Tor brings his clan in search of new territory. The track where the deer stand and see the Father Oak for the first time is Blaise Bailey, a lookout point in the forest. There are some magnificent oaks and the River Severn can be seen from Blaise Bailey.

### **Severn Tunnel Junction.**

I needed my roe to reach Dartmoor and later the sea but how to get them across the wide expanse of the river Severn? Then it occurred to me that the railway crosses beneath the river through the Severn Tunnel. The tunnel goes down and climbs steeply, and there are concrete ditches running alongside the tracks. I am not aware of any evidence that deer or any other creatures have travelled the length of the tunnel but this is a work of fiction.

### **Bristol.**

The man-hive is Bristol. I am not aware of any such abandoned churchyard in Bristol but deer have been seen in city churchyards. For example, some years ago roe deer were filmed living peacefully in a churchyard in the heart of Glasgow.

### **Glastonbury.**

The nut grove is somewhere near Glastonbury but not on the tor itself. There are deer farms in Somerset and other areas of the West Country.

### **Dartmoor.**

The strange woodland that Rowan finds himself in when he finds Skylar, is an ancient area of Dartmoor and of course, the tors are out on the open moorland.

### **Looe Island**

Skylar's island is based on Looe Island which lies parallel with the coast. It's heavily wooded and looks mysterious and fascinating. It is not visible from Dartmoor but I have used my imagination again!

