

Deer and Tobihino

About 1,300 wild deer live in Nara Park. The deer are revered because they are messengers of Takemikazuchi no Mikoto, the god of thunder and one of the four principal deities of Kasuga Taisha Shrine. It is said that in the early Nara period (710–784) this deity, which is worshipped at Kashima Jingu Shrine in Ibaraki Prefecture near Tokyo, descended on Mt. Mikasa riding a white deer.

Deer have been revered in Nara for over 1,250 years, and the deer have mostly lost their fear of people. Many of the deer will bow at you, in the hope of receiving the special crackers that visitors can purchase in the park. Each June and July, the deer give birth to spotted fawns that can be seen following their mothers around the grounds of Kasuga Taisha Shrine and Nara Park.

Many plants and trees at Kasuga Taisha Shrine have fences to prevent the deer from eating them.

Periodically a horn is used to summon all the deer to the Tobihino, the lawns near Kasuga Taisha Shrine, an event called Shika Yose, literally “Deer Gathering.”