



## ADMG - KNIGHT FRANK 2005 STAG SEASON REVIEW



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[john.coleman@knightfrank.com](mailto:john.coleman@knightfrank.com)  
[www.knightfrank.co.uk](http://www.knightfrank.co.uk)

# RED DEER REVIEW

**Mild weather meant that the rut was slow to develop and in some places the deer were in the best condition for years. Tony Jackson reports on the 2005 stag season.**

Many forests throughout Scotland report a rut that was slow to develop and very late, and on some forests good stags were still holding hinds at the end of October. On Black Corries forest, Argyll, for instance, the rut started on 2 October, but it was a week before good numbers of stags moved into the area. On a few forests, however, the rut began around 22 September, with most stags roaring by the end of that month. In Langwell and Braemore, Caithness, the first roar was heard on 12 September, but even there, overall, the rut was late. At Ardverikie the first stags had not broken out before 1 October, while some forests reported a very spasmodic rut. In contrast, however, the first roar at Kingie, Inverness-shire, was heard on 5 September and stalking was finished by 12 October. At Sannox, Arran, roaring was heard up to 26 November. On the same forest, a juvenile golden eagle was seen chasing a hind with a poor calf, and continued to swoop on the calf for 10 minutes.

Will Gallant, the tenant and stalker from North Laggan, reports that, in contrast to last year's stag season, 2005 was disastrous with atrocious weather and a very late rut, both conspiring to produce a dismal cull.

However, most forests note that the condition of stags was, on the whole, very good. Ronnie Hepburn, headstalker at Clunes (Atholl Estates), reports that the deer were in their best condition for many years and Tim Frost, headstalker at Boreland, Perthshire, states that his deer were in excellent condition, with kidneys covered in fat. However, Neil Morrison from Coulin, Wester Ross, states that his deer were lighter than in previous years due to a wet winter and early spring. His deer were fed throughout the winter, saving many from dying.

The weather was predominantly mild and dry in September, but October produced some heavy rains and mist, making stalking extremely difficult in some areas.

The winds tended to veer from the south and south-west on western forests, but in Aberdeenshire south-east winds with heavy rain made it one of the wettest seasons for years. At Black Mount, Argyll, it was wet throughout the season and the wind stayed mostly in the west, making it difficult to stalk certain areas.

Alastair Hunter, headstalker from Dalness, Argyll, notes that it was warmer and wetter than usual and that his deer emerged from a bad winter really struggling, with a higher mortality rate than usual among hinds and calves.

*Photo: Neil McIntyre*



Several forests noted an increase in disturbance from walkers. However, Eoin Smith, headstalker at Glen Tanar, Aberdeenshire, observes that more walkers and bikers are contacting the estate before arriving, something which is greatly appreciated. Tulchan also reports many hill walkers, though only one stalk was disturbed by them.

Mar reports that the continuing trend is to see more young stags, up to five years old, and mature stags with good heads, though there is a shortage of the mature, traditional type of stag.

At Glutt, Caithness, while stalking a stag holding a group of 15 hinds, four sea eagles appeared and began to circle the hinds, coming lower to the ground each time. The hinds, terrified, panicked and ran for more than a mile, finally bunching on the highest point of a hill, where they stayed till dark. At Achdaluie, Inverness-shire, a sea eagle landed on the horns of a shot stag. On the same forest a stag was seen covering a hind and was then itself mounted by another stag.



During late August, John Cameron, headstalker at Kingie, Inverness-shire, spotted a hermaphrodite amid a group of stags and hinds but his guest could not get a shot at it. However, on 12 October he saw it again in the same coire, when it was being chased by some bigger stags. It appeared to be trying to roar and was seen sniffing at hinds. Shot, the beast weighed 12st 12lb and had knobs like a hummel, a swollen neck and stag-like appearance, but had no pizzle or testicles, only female organs. It had an udder and a womb and the tusks were hind tusks. The age was estimated at seven.

On Auchlyne forest a stag was shot on 14 October, carrying a head with 15 points and weighing 15st 10lb. At Camusericht, Perthshire, an emaciated stag that had collapsed with one antler buried to the coronet in peat, and which was too weak to pull itself out, was shot. There was no obvious reason for its poor state. At Cluanie, East Quoch, a stag was shot with no testicles that was still in velvet on 6 October.

Angus Cameron, headstalker at Strathconon, Ross-shire, discovered a telescope on the west beat of the Strathconon forest during the stalking season. After spraying it with WD40 for several weeks, the first draw opened. The scope is a two-draw telescope by A. Ross of London, and had probably been lost on the hill for more than a century.

A heavy 14-pointer was shot by Angus Wilson on the Argyll Estates, Inveraray. Weighing in at 24st 3lb, this was by far the heaviest stag shot on this forest during the season. Another stag, a young one holding six hinds, was also shot on the same estate during the rut. This animal had suffered a bullet wound in the head, but was still in good enough condition to hold hinds.

## Aberdeenshire

Weather: Many forests experienced southerly or easterly winds throughout most of the season, with a few exceptions, though mild, heavy and persistent rain made conditions very unpleasant.

Forest	Owner	Headstalker	Tenant	Stags Shot	Av. Weight (st.lb)	Heaviest (st.lb)
Baddoch	Invercauld (Trust)	C Farrel	various	24	13st 4lb	14st 13lb
Baddoch	Invercauld (Trust)	P Fraser		25	13st 7lb	16st 10lb
Balogie	Nicol family	P Littlejohn		15	15st	17st
Callater	Invercauld (Trust)	M Falconer		54	13st 5lb	16st 6lb
Glen Callater	Invercauld	P Fraser		46	13st 8lb	16st 11lb
Glenmuick	Sir Andrew Walker Okeover	A Taylor		105	13st 4lb	17st
Glen Tanar	M A Bruce	E Smith		72	13st 10lb	22st
Corndavon	Invercauld	J Davidson		10	13st	16st 6lb
Homebeat	Invercauld	J Cruickshanks	D Pennell	127	13st 4lb	21st 2lb
Mar	M M Nicholson & others	I Campbell		59	13st 7lb	18st 9lb
Mar	M M Nicholson & others	I Campbell		60	13st 3lb	18st 8lb
Mar Lodge	National Trust of Scotland	S W Cumming	various	118	13st 11lb	19st 1lb

## Angus

Weather: Conditions were mostly dry with south-west winds, though the end of the season deteriorated and Invermark lost the last three days through mist.

Forest	Owner	Headstalker	Tenant	Stags Shot	Av. Weight (st.lb)	Heaviest (st.lb)
Glenisla/Glencally	Major J Gibb/A Bennett	J Williamson	various	227	13st	19st 4lb
Hunthill	H Keswick	D Wilson		107	12st 10lb	18st 10lb
Invermark	The Earl of Dalhousie	F Taylor	various	117	14st 3lb	18st 2lb
Rottal	D Ward	D Collins		57	12st 10lb	16st 9lb
Tulchan	Tulchan Forest Ltd	L Donald	Dr Kuhnle	250		18st

## Argyll

Weather: Though milder than usual, there was a great deal of rain in late September and early October, but very little frost and some strong winds.

Forest	Owner	Headstalker	Tenant	Stags Shot	Av. Weight (st.lb)	Heaviest (st.lb)
Ardfin	A Riley Smith	W MacDonald		63	14st 5lb	23st 4lb
Ardtalla	Sir John Mactaggart	C Sharp		32	15st 6lb	21st 3lb
Argyll Estates	The Duke of Argyll	T Kirsop		57	11st 2lb	24st 3lb
Black Corries	Count A De Spoelberch	A O'Connell		39	13st 5lb	16st
Black Mount	P Fleming	A MacDonald		85	14st 10lb	19st 8lb
Castles	D Reese	M Brown		5	13st	15st 7lb
Dalness	R J Fleming	A Hunter		14	14st 1lb	17st 3lb
Glen Etive	P Fleming	I Dingwall		22	15st 2lb	18st 7lb
Glenkinglass	R Schuster	A Ross		40	14st 10lb	19st
Glen Strae	R Schuster	M Brown		22	13st 4lb	17st 2lb

## Arran

Weather: Typical west-coast weather with days of sunshine mixed with showers and occasional heavy rain in September, but mostly dry in October.

Forest	Owner	Headstalker	Tenant	Stags Shot	Av. Weight (st.lb)	Heaviest (st.lb)
Dougarie	S C Gibbs	D Wilcock		36	15st 4lb	18st 11lb
Sannox	C Fforde	J A McKinnon		95	15st 3lb	20st 1lb

## Inverness-shire

Weather: Very mixed reports. One forest, Achnacarry North, reported wet and windy days with 4in of rain on 13 September, whereas Arnisdale enjoyed mostly dry and warm weather. On the whole, most forests suffered from heavy rains during the second half of the season.

Forest	Owner	Headstalker	Tenant	Stags Shot	Av. Weight (st.lb)	Heaviest (st.lb)
Achdaliu West	West Highland Woodlands	A Currie		37	14st 1lb	18st 2lb
Achnacarry North	D A Cameron of Lochiel	A MacDonald	various	60	14st 2lb	17st 12lb
Ardverikie	Ardverikie Estate Ltd	D Langlands		146	13st 10lb	17st 2lb
Arnisdale	J Richmond-Watson	E Ballantyne		42	14st 1lb	19st 9lb
Ben Alder & Dalwhinnie	Agro Invest	I Crichton		51	14st	17st 7lb
Camusrory	R & P Crosthwaite-Eyre	V Stockwell		27	15st 9lb	19st 3lb
Coignafearn	Coignafearn Estate	S Dey	various	202	14st 10lb	18st 8lb
Culachy	Falconridge Holdings	S Bremner		44	13st 6lb	18st 3lb
Glenbanchor	Veco Ltd	J Grant		38	14st 1lb	17st 12lb
Glen Dessary	Sir Patrick Grant	I MacPhee		32	14st 7lb	19st 9lb
Glenfeshie	Glenfeshie Estate Ltd	D Taylor		120	12st 6lb	17st 2lb
Glenfinnan	I Leith	A H Gibson		30	13st 13lb	17st 12lb
Glen Quoich	D Gordon	L MacNally	various	50	15st	-
Glenshero & Sheramore	Alcan Highland Estates	B Hendry	various	152	12st 13lb	16st 9lb
Killiecholiade	Alcan Highland Estates	A Walker	various	50	13st 10lb	17st 8lb
Kingie	I & H Brown Ltd	J Cameron		31	15st 4lb	19st 2lb
Kinloch Hourn	H Birkbeck	D A Cameron		20	14st 5lb	17st 4lb
North Laggan	Forestry Commission	W Gallant	W Gallant	60	13st 3lb	18st 8lb

## Moray

Weather: Very warm with southerly and south-west winds, but extremely wet towards the end of the season.

Forest	Owner	Headstalker	Tenant	Stags Shot	Av. Weight (st.lb)	Heaviest (st.lb)
Glen Avon	Glen Avon Estate	C Gibson		206	15st 8lb	21st 1lb
Kinveachy	Reidhaven Trust	S Boulton	various	74	13st 13lb	17st 8lb

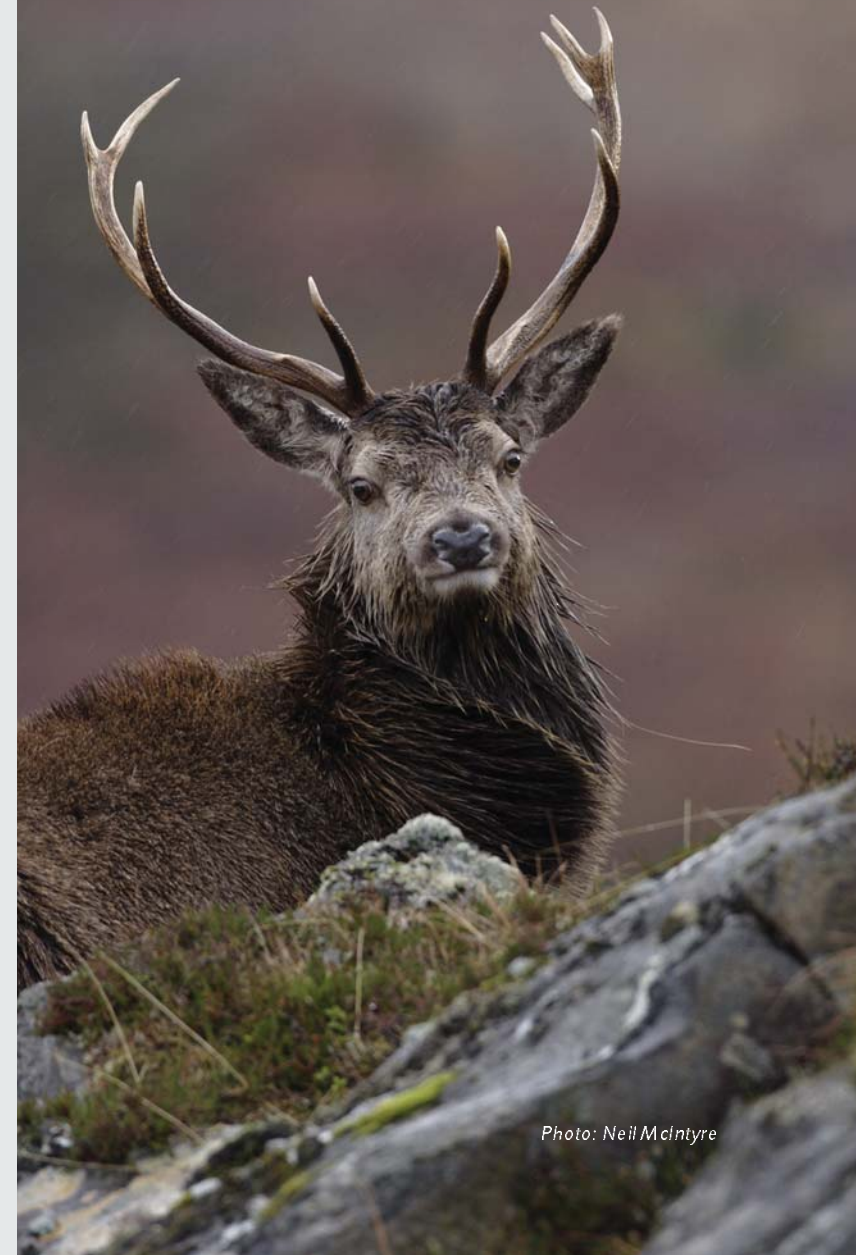


Photo: Neil McIntyre



Photo: Neil McIntyre

*“The continuing trend is to see more young stags, up to five years old, and mature stags with good heads.”*

## Perthshire

Weather: Many forests reported dry, mild conditions until mid-September. Then, from 12 September, rain and mist set in with a west wind and, generally, October was very wet.

Forest	Owner	Headstalker	Tenant	Stags Shot	Av. Weight (st.lb)	Heaviest (st.lb)
Duchally & Invercassley	Balnagown Castle Properties	D Clark	various	65	13st 9lb	18st 3lb
Atholl-Clunes	The Bruar Trust	R Hepburn	various	84	12st 12lb	19st 7lb
Auchlyne	Mrs E Paterson	G D Coyne	various	28	14st 3lb	16st 12lb
Boreland	A Stroyan	T Frost		68	13st 5lb	17st 8lb
Camusericht	Agro Investments	G MacDonald	various	57	14st	18st 1lb
Dalnacardoch	Dalnacardoch Estate Ltd	K Simpson	various	143	12st 5lb	17st 8lb
Dalnaspidal	Mrs J Adams	I Kennedy		57	13st 7lb	17st
Edradynate	M Campbell	A Cargill	A Cargill	16	8st 4lb	11st 2lb
Fealar	Spearman, Teacher & Mellor	W McLauchlan		91	13st 3lb	16st 1lb
Findynate	Viscountess Ridley	D Stirling		5	11st 7lb	14st
Glenartney	Baroness Willoughby	A Work		161	13st 4lb	17st 11lb
Glenshee	Invercauld Estate	G Kerk		135	14st 3lb	17st 2lb
Glenturret	Mr & Mrs Seldon	I MacPhee		5	13st	14st 9lb
Invergeldie	J Priestley, R Priestley & Mrs S. Thorne	A Rogerson		17	14st 10lb	19st 6lb
Lochs	Mrs B J Malim	W Mason		41	14st 4lb	18st 1lb
Meggernie	Mrs B J Malim	C Murphy		41	14st	18st 7lb
Remony	A & J Duncan Millar	A Hogg		24	13st 4lb	18st 12lb
Rhiedorrach	Invercauld Estate	G B Kerr		150	14st 7lb	17st 3lb
South Chesthill	Maj Gen Ramsay	D Pirie		46	14st	17st 1lb
Suie	Mrs J Bowser	G D Coyne	various	13	15st 6lb	17st 8lb
Tarvie	J Colman	J Todd	P Fetherston Godley	30	13st 2lb	16st 6lb

## Ross-Shire & Isle of Lewis

Weather: Most forests reported a very wet September with some improvement in October and the last two weeks were dry. Applecross noted strong winds and torrential rain with thick mist until 3 October. Many forests reported warmer than usual conditions.

Forest	Owner	Headstalker	Tenant	Stags Shot	Av. Weight (st.lb)	Heaviest (st.lb)
Achnashellach	Major T Wills	C Mackenzie		22	14st 1lb	17st 7lb
Applecross	Applecross Trust	D Abraham	Deer Management Consultants	43	14st	21st 4lb
Cluanie	C J Siva-Jothy	C & R Campbell		38	14st 5lb	18st 12lb
Coulin	P Smith	N Morrison	various		14st	16st 6lb
Dundonnell	Sir Tim Rice	A MacDonald	various	30		19st 4lb
Eilanreach	Lord Dulverton	A Mackenzie		39	14st 5lb	17st 5lb
Eishken	N Oppenheim	C Macrae	various	62	12st 7lb	15st 10lb
Fannich	W J van Dedem	R Matheson		34	14st 3lb	17st 8lb
Glen Shiel	Burton Property Trust	C Campbell	C Campbell	40	13st	17st 4lb
Inverbroom	M Lorimer	A Cameron		40	14st 7lb	17st 6lb
Kildermorie	I A Duncan	D Russell		43	13st 3lb	15st 9lb
Kinlochluichart	Lochluichart Estate North	J Logie		55	13st 6lb	18st 13lb
Lochcarron & Tullich	Mr & Mrs Pattinson	C Proctor		32	12st 13lb	17st 6lb
Strathconnon	Kirkbi Estates	A Cameron	various	176	12st 4lb	21st 13lb
Strathvaich	Straithvaich Partners	I W McK Bennett		84	13st 6lb	17st 2lb



## Sutherland

Weather: A very mixed bag with one forest, Ardvar, reporting constant rain while another, Achentoul, noted mild and almost too warm weather with little rain. Mild weather seemed to predominate.

Forest	Owner	Headstalker	Tenant	Stags Shot	Av. Weight (st.lb)	Heaviest (st.lb)
Achentoul	Sir John Nutting	A Ross			14st 6lb	18st 10lb
Ardvar	J G & Mrs M Payne	M Ross		15	14st	16st 2lb
Corriemulzie & Loubcroy	Corriemulzie Estate Trust	D Snody	various	77	14st 7lb	18st 1lb
Dalnessie	Ericht Farming Co	A Mackay	various	26	15st 1lb	18st 7lb
Duchally & Invercassley	Balnagown Castle	D Clark	various	65	13st 9lb	18st 3lb
Glencassley	n/a	M White		52	14st 3lb	19st 1lb
Kildonan	Mrs M E A Clay	A Grant		76	12st 12lb	17st 12lb
Merkland	Trustees of Merkland Estate	A Walker		56	15st 1lb	17st 6lb
Reay	4th Duke of Westminster's Settlement Trust	S R Hubbert		184	13st 12lb	18st 5lb

Stags crossing the River Spey. Photo: Neil McIntyre



# Lea MacNally - Stalking in the Blood

## Dick Playfair

Lea MacNally, head stalker at Glenquoich, has enjoyed a life on the hill for as long as he remembers. Taken out in an orange box in an army back-pack by his father, stalker on Culachy, Fort Augustus, Lea has worked at Glenquoich for 38 years first as a ghillie, then under stalker, and has now been head stalker for around 25 years.

"I left school at 17 and went to work for the Gordon family – and I've been with them ever since."

It is fabulous ground at Glenquoich, bordered to the north by the Cluanie Ridge, and the south by Loch Quoich. This is typical west coast stalking country - steep and rocky. Lea says that a fit person could do six Munros here in a day but you would have to be going some. With scarcely a scrap of heather, this is not grouse country. The odd ptarmigan, but for wildlife, this is the ground of the red deer and golden eagle. And deer are a valuable resource for the estate. Lea says:

"There's a lot of talk these days about deer being reduced to the status of vermin, and stalkers and gamekeepers have rightly become passionate about this. That's because, in my case for instance, I've spent almost my whole life looking after the deer herd, keeping it in as peak condition as possible, and flourishing. Our job is the stalking, but its also looking after the herd.

"That may mean that I don't produce a stag for every tenant. But many of the guests who have been coming to Glenquoich don't expect that. They appreciate what we are trying to do; the balance we are trying to achieve. Many have been coming for years and they know how the estate runs.

"So to think of deer reduced to what some would call vermin is offensive to many of us in this job."

Lea draws a clear distinction between gamekeepers and stalkers. He is a stalker born, bred and trained. Not a gamekeeper.

While he takes pride in the condition of the deer he also regards the stalking, particularly on his type of ground, as requiring immense skill and expertise.

One of his most memorable and challenging days was stalking a switch (a stag with antlers with no 'points') that he had spied the day before, and wanted to take out. The stalk involved climbing from the bottom of a corrie upwards in and out of mist, with the shot being taken within 100 metres.

Lea is first to admit however that because he is killing deer almost every day of the season, and on the hill just about every day in his life, a lot of his memories have tended to run together.

"The best time for me" he says, "is in September. That is stalking at its most exciting here, with clear blue skies and a pleasant temperature. The stags are still together on the steep high ground, and need to be stalked from above, and the terrain ensures that Glenquoich's stalking guests need to be pretty fit."

While Lea remembers the days when there was very little mechanisation, and ponies did much of the work, ATV's now take the carcasses out, "but we still have to drag them to the bottom of the glen first" he adds.

Venison too has had its image problems, and still does. "It's great meat," he says, "in so many ways - but not all the time. Not just lack of regulation but also common sense on the part of some has given venison a bad name.

"Run stags in October for instance" he says, "should not end up on the dinner table or the menu as venison. That's just going to give people a bad experience. We need to be selective in what is destined for the market if venison is to achieve and maintain the status it deserves."

And Lea should know. Not only does he take great pride in his larder work to ensure that what he supplies to the gamedealer is in peak condition, but has also had his face

on venison products marketed to many who have never even ventured near the Highlands. "Having my face on packs of venison meat balls is just one of the highlights of my career" he says!

Not every hour is devoted to deer though. Lea also manages a hill farm with a suckler cow herd for his employer, and he has his own small sheep flock with which he has some success locally.

"I've never stalked anywhere else - not even in Scotland." I wouldn't mind seeing how they manage their deer in New Zealand, or in eastern Europe, but really I'm happiest on my own patch.

And Lea's own patch is benefiting from that commitment in other ways. The estate has an initiative to maintain the old stalking paths - which are now used, he reckons, about 10 per cent by stalkers and 90 per cent by hill walkers. With volunteer support for the last three years, Lea has led what he calls the 'chain gang' to repair one path that climbs over 3000 ft. "It's good because hill walkers and mountaineers come and help - they feel that this allows them to put something back, and SNH Fort William has also given its support." It's an ongoing project, and something he intends to keep working on.

"There have been a lot of changes" he says. "Not just with mechanisation, but 20 and 30 years ago there was less pressure environmentally and from walkers. Now we have more rules, more regulations, but from our point of view you mustn't forget what's at the heart of it, the deer.

"There will always be a future for stalking. Deer are as indigenous to Scotland as the Scots Pine. We are in danger of getting obsessed with trees when there is plenty of space for both. But things are changing. 'Live capture', for instance - that's a complete anomaly. The minute 'live capture' is introduced, if it is, there are likely to be major problems. A lot of stalkers are going to be very uncomfortable with that.



"We've known for years about deer numbers, and that there are too many hinds in some places. Deer are so resilient - you take more out and more fill their place. But its no surprise, when we're told we have a warmer climate, and better breeding conditions, so they are bound to be more prolific.

"But we have to stay civilised in how we go about management."

Wise words from someone who is virtually 'hefted' to the ground on which he works.

"Stalking is my life," says Lea "but I certainly don't regret that I've left it too late to do anything else!"



Photo: Ewen Weatherspoon



## SCOTTISH ESTATES – 2005/2006

Angus Cheape FRICS, Knight Frank

At any given time there are only very few individuals in the market actively seeking an amenity estate in Scotland. This has always been a very small market and it is always worth bearing in mind that a great deal of the country has never been offered for sale, at least in living memory. 2005 was not an exciting year and indeed comparatively few estates of consequence have changed hands since the Millennium.

Sporting Estates as we understand them in the modern world are very much a creation of the Victorian era as the large number of ramshackle 19th century shooting lodges bears ample witness. Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort established a fashion in the 1840s which was able to prosper on account of improved communications as the railways crept northwards, and huge private fortunes based on the fruits of the industrial revolution and Britain's enormous mercantile interests around the world. Few people are aware that deer forests in particular were worth a great deal more in 1860 than in 2005!

There are valid comparisons between the heyday of Victorian prosperity and the present time. It may, for example, be fair to suggest that there is a greater concentration of private wealth in the British Isles than at any time since 1914. This is very evident in the property market at the top end in particular and large sums of new money have been lavished on amenity estates in recent years. Similarly many country houses built at a time when domestic staff were readily available have been returned to private occupation after several generations of alternative use, often as country house hotels or preparatory schools. Alongside all this we have seen a steady appreciation in values since the mid 1990s.

Generally agents still use a rule of thumb by which values are applied on the basis of what sporting land will produce rather than on a price per acre or mile of river. Stags command in the region of £35,000-£40,000, salmon on

prime beats around £3,000-£10,000 (there are many variables) and driven grouse in the region of £3,000-£4,000 (per brace). These figures are, it is fair to say, only genuine when applied to immediate five or ten year averages and justifying potential on the basis of historic figures, particularly in the case of grouse, can be very misleading.

It will be interesting to watch what is happening in Angus where several grouse moors have been fenced as a means of encouraging regeneration and the restoration of grouse stocks. Both red deer and roe deer are in this context regarded as an inconvenience rather than a coveted sporting quarry. Perhaps grouse enthusiasts should occasionally pause to consider that until driving became fashionable in the 1880s, there were very few grouse anywhere in Scotland. Charles St John, in his *Wild Sports and Natural History of the Highlands*, bears this out in his vivid description of the country before the hills were intensively managed for grouse.

Happily, despite the vast sums spent on research of one kind or another, there remains an element of mystery about grouse, salmon and even red deer. How often has the refrain 'shortage of mature stags' or 'late rut this season' been sounded off by estate owners and sporting tenants yet the stags are still there and calving in the hills happens at the same time year in year out. Those who would see the red deer herd in Scotland reduced to a fraction of its present size often ignore great local differences and the situation on much of the West Coast remains entirely different from that which applies in, for example, the Grampians and the Angus Glens. Who knows what the scene may be ten years hence but it is a fair bet that a progressive reduction in the number of hill sheep and possibly an increase in intensive heather management for grouse will lead to a still sharper divide between east and west, and the need for sensible co-operation between sponsors of bio-diversity and stalking enthusiasts will be greater than ever. Meantime it seems to me that enlightened and intelligent private ownership offers the best possible hope for a secure future in the hills.

Angus Cheape is based in Knight Frank's Edinburgh Office and can be contacted on 07974 357795

*“Enlightened and intelligent private ownership offers the best possible hope for a secure future in the hills”*







Photo: Glyn Satterley





*Review produced by:*

**The Association of Deer Management Groups  
Dalhousie Estates Office  
Brechtin  
Angus DD9 6SG**

Tel: 01356 624566 Fax: 01356 623725  
Email: [dalhousieestates@btinternet.com](mailto:dalhousieestates@btinternet.com)  
[www.deer-management.co.uk](http://www.deer-management.co.uk)

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