

Welcome



Richard Cooke, Chairman, ADMG

I expect that many of you will be reading this Newsletter at or following our AGM at Kingussie, and you will have heard my full annual report at that time. For those who did not attend the AGM, we will ensure that my report is circulated with E-Scope and is posted on the ADMG website so that you can catch up on everything that I have said. In addition to that I would like to draw your attention to a number of specific items.

I imagine most members will be aware of the report by the Mar Lodge Independent Review Panel for the National Trust for Scotland. It is available online at www.marlodgereview.org.uk. It contains much good sense and is of some relevance to all DMGs where reconciling potentially conflicting land management objectives is or could be an issue. NTS is to be commended for undertaking this exercise and putting the report in the public arena. We await hearing how the Trust intends to implement the recommendations with interest. ADMG and neighbouring stakeholders continue to work positively with NTS on the implementation of the Review Panel's report, and ADMG will be pleased to contribute its views should NTS elect to review its deer management policy.

The close public attention paid to the debate leading up to the Wildlife & Natural Environment (Scotland) Act

demonstrates how deer management in Scotland finds itself increasingly under the microscope. With long experience of often ill informed media criticism we might consider the extra attention unwelcome. However we should and must see it as an opportunity to communicate effectively. If the wider public are better informed about deer management and understand the commitment and the hard work it involves and the benefits it brings, that can only help us to do our job effectively.

With communication in mind I warmly commend the new educational initiative undertaken jointly between SNH and the Scottish Venison Partnership. The result of this is an excellent web based resource about deer and their management in Scotland. This is designed for use at both primary and secondary school level. I urge you to visit the site www.education.scottish-venison.info and to bring it to the attention of local educational authorities and individual teachers whenever you can.

Finally there are increasing reports of deer poaching, undoubtedly related to the increasing price of venison. ADMG fully supports the Scottish Gamekeepers Association in urging restaurant owners to check that the source of their venison is legitimate. We would also hope that SNH will increase the level of scrutiny of game processors' records. Quite apart from the criminality aspect of poaching, all the hard work of recent years in getting venison the recognition it deserves and promoting quality assurance could be put at risk when incorrectly handled venison finds its way on to the plate.

South Ross DMG thanks the Macpherson brothers

Ewen Macpherson (pictured left) has retired from his position of Chairman of the South Ross DMG with brother Gordon, (right) who was the Group's Treasurer, stepping down at the same time after many years of service.

To mark their retirement each was presented by Lord Aylesford with an original painting by Cathy Putman, a bottle of malt whisky, and Amazon gift vouchers. The presentation followed the last AGM of South Ross DMG in its former form, with its five sub Groups now becoming DMGs in their own right, and a liaison committee made up of the conveners of these five new Groups.

Richard Cooke, ADMG Chairman, said:
"So often the hard work, not to mention the unpaid hours, put in by those on the Groups goes unrecognised, and we all acknowledge the tremendous contribution made by both Ewen and Gordon to deer management in South Ross over the years."

ADMG welcomes contributed articles for its newsletters. Consequently the views expressed may not always be those of ADMG.



Deer in the political spotlight



Dick Playfair

The passing of the Wildlife & Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill, and much of it coming into force from 1 January this year has meant that deer have been very much in the political spotlight. The Code of Deer Management is also now in place, and the Deer (Close Seasons) (Scotland) Order 2011 has again fixed close seasons for deer as they were under the 1984 order.

It was appropriate that ADMG met with the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Stewart Stevenson MSP, to bring him up to speed with what was happening on the ground and to raise issues and aspects of importance. Both Richard Cooke, Chairman, and I attended the meeting on behalf of ADMG. The Minister was accompanied by officials from the Department.

The message we were keen to impress was that ADMG recognizes the importance of the W&NE Act in giving legislative recognition to the public interest in deer management, and that it applies to all groups and individuals involved in deer management in Scotland across the board.

Richard Cooke acknowledged that while the deer sector had made steady progress particularly in recent years, and in our view far more progress than it is being given credit for, there is still plenty of room for improvement. He said that ADMG will be energetic in demonstrating over the coming years that Government has made the right choice in supporting the voluntary principle and that it can deliver effective deer management through Groups or other systems, all of which require a collaborative approach.

ADMG raised concerns about Section 26 (competence and occupiers rights), and asked for assurance that the Association would be involved in SNH deliberations as to the conditions to be incorporated into the General License that will now be required to take deer out of season or when there is damage to crops or property. The Minister was also given a general resumé of deer management operations in Scotland, how the Group system had evolved, its advantages and its shortcomings.

He was also briefed on the situation regarding Scottish venison, and on the Lowland Deer Network Scotland.

On a more general note, feedback we have received from subsequent discussion with officials has reconfirmed that Government does want to see reasonable progress from DMGs with regard to 'putting their own houses in order', taking due notice of the new Code and recognising the importance of the public interest.

There is an expectation too on the Competence front that the sector will fully grasp the responsibilities that it has been given, albeit that the public interest in relation to Competence is restricted to matters relating to deer welfare, human safety and food safety as everything else is covered by the Code. We understand that that is recognised at Government level.

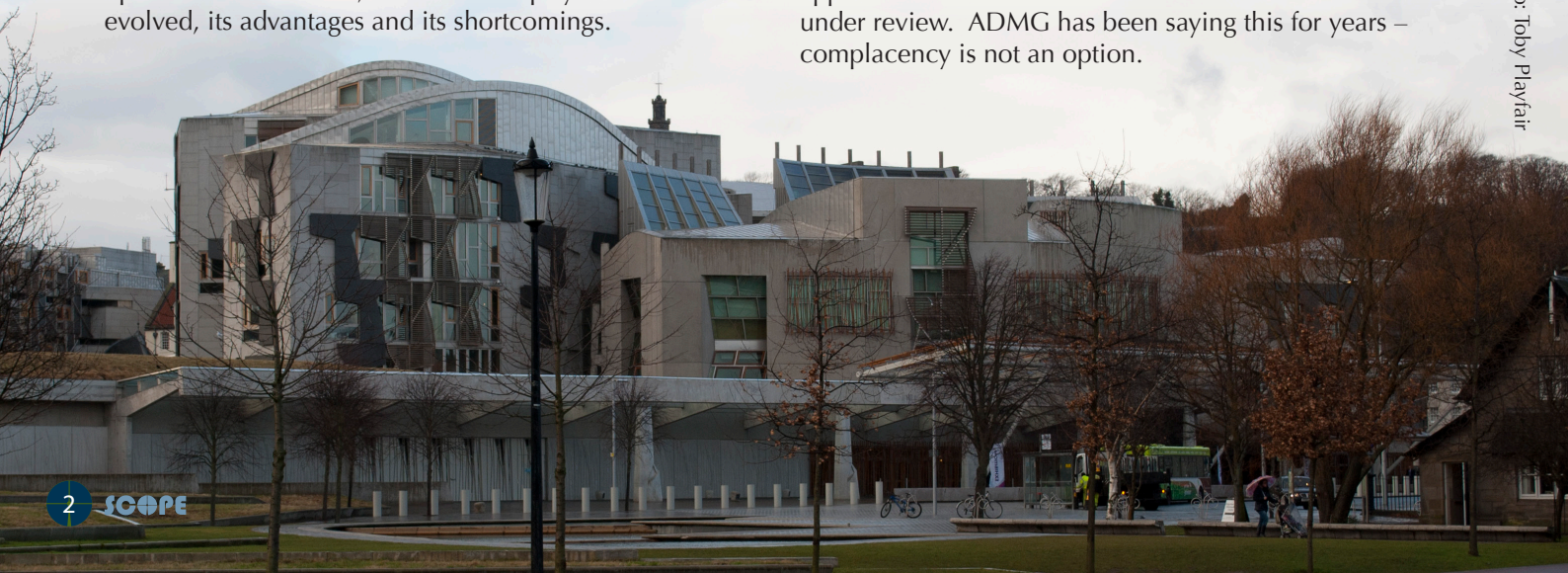
Section 26 is another issue, and we still have major concerns that there will be a two tier approach where a general license will be issued to farmers or crofters without any Competence requirement on their part, Competence after all being voluntary, whereas the professional and recreational/vocational stalking sectors, who are already well versed in best practice and skills development, will be under scrutiny as far as uptake of Competence is concerned.

Competence and Section 26 are still unfinished business in terms of what the final prescription will be, but the overriding message is that, as never before, the deer sector remains on probation – and there is a lot to prove if we are not to be faced with a more prescriptive approach from 2014 when various elements first come under review. ADMG has been saying this for years – complacency is not an option.



Kingairloch, Morvern.
Photo: Glyn Satterley

Photo: Toby Playfair



Deer Management Group Snapshot - Morvern DMG

The Morvern peninsula lies west of Loch Linnhe, and east of Mull. Bounded on three sides by the sea, Morvern extends to some 250 sq miles, and a height of 2800 ft.

Landholdings on the peninsula and within the Morvern Deer Management Group include Ardtornish, Carnoch, Drimnin, Inversanda, Kingairloch, Killundine, Kilmalieu, Kinlochteacuis, Laudale and Rahoy.

The natural boundary to the north is Glen Tarbert, stretching for six miles between Strontian and Inversanda.

The land on the peninsula mainly rises steeply from the shore. There is some forestry, both private and public, and what flat land there is is 'aggressively' farmed.

Morvern's deer population is stable and, with the sea on three sides, the geographical scope of the Deer Management Group is easily defined.

But what makes Morvern DMG a 'model' group? Keith Falconer, chairman of Morvern DMG explains:

"My family bought Laudale in 1998 and we became a member of what was a very friendly, open and professional DMG. This was all the more surprising due to the very diverse nature of the members ranging from traditional sporting estates to Government agencies such as FC and SNH. But it shows what as a excellent chairman my predecessor Angus Robertson had achieved.

"Best practice encouraged us to undertake a Habitat Survey and from this to prepare a Deer Management Plan. Although undertaken for the peninsula as a whole, this reconciled each individual interest with the overall plan by producing a plan for each individual landholder. After a tender process, Professor Rory Putman was selected to undertake the task.

"Despite the diverse nature of the members, every attempt is made to reach common ground. For example, apart from FC, and Kingairloch who process much of their own venison, the other members use Yorkshire Game. This gives us some influence with them."

The group meets twice yearly, once in the spring to review the annual count, and once after the stag season. At every meeting the Deer Management Plan is reviewed, and other general and specific issues are openly discussed.

The annual census of the open range deer population within our DMG area is coordinated by Kurt Larson of Kingairloch and involves participation of all estate stalkers and interested parties within the DMG. A detailed report is produced for review that relies on the data collected over the past 12 years, and addresses the relationship between cull levels and population. This, and anecdotal evidence (weather, mortality), is used to set cull guidelines for individual estates and the group as a whole.

Keith Falconer also says that the habits and habitat of deer on Morvern are changing.

"While our deer population has not declined overall, most estates are noticing that stags do not seem to be present in the traditional areas where they were once found and

a number of factors probably lie behind this. Two severe winters with heavily frozen ground have not just added to natural mortality, but have also pushed more deer into woodland through old, porous fencing where they go uncounted. Consequently we are seeing a population shift in some areas from the open hill into the woods.

"In addition, deer broke into a large FC managed forest enclosure and were killed in large numbers. This caused considerable unhappiness, but I am glad to say that after some effort a better way forward was agreed which should prevent a repeat of this episode."

One method of countering the shift is to make the grazing on the open hill ground more attractive. This measure is included in the Laudale Deer Management Plan, and has seen the introduction of a fold of Highland cattle to break up and dung the ground, enriching the grazing as well as encouraging more insects and birdlife.

Some woodland has also been opened up specifically to provide shelter for deer and draw them away from breaking into commercial plantations.

Whilst individual estates place different priorities on the value of the deer and the stalking, the larger estates share a prime objective of actively improving the welfare and quality of the herd, with the consequent benefit of increasing the very valuable sporting income which provides security of employment. Laudale, for example, has embarked on a plan to create excellence of sport in the woodlands and, amongst other initiatives, to nurture the black game and red throated diver populations. Keith Falconer says:

"Most of the private estates are growing more aware of the income that tourism can offer them, whether it is for sport, wildlife watching, or our magnificent scenery. Camera stalking and guided walks are also becoming increasingly popular and provide much appreciated income."

Main issues:

- Porousness of old fencing protecting commercial and maturing woodland.
- Climate – wetter summers and colder winters
- Changing deer habits and habitats.

How are these issues being addressed?

- Repairs to forestry fencing where required on an ongoing basis
- Improving habitat on the open hill
- Opening up areas of woodland to provide 'free' shelter
- Feeding in more isolated areas
- Developing sporting opportunities in the woodlands.

Other areas where the DMG acts collectively as required:

- Game dealer negotiation
- Encouraging SQWV accreditation
- Tackling common issues like poaching (SNH funded poacher watch scheme).

Main actions:

- 2 DMG meetings per annum
- Annual deer count
- Annual review of Deer Management Plan
- Habitat assessment
- Setting of cull targets and reporting cull figures
- Collaborative approach to management, joint objectives (such as habitat improvement) and addressing local issues (such as poaching).

Developing better ways to demonstrate collaboration through SRDP



Victor Clements

The Forestry Commission Customer Representative Group considers that the scope of SRDP funding could be widened to more fully embrace collaborative projects including deer management.

Background

The Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) is currently under review with changes being planned for the next programme from 2013 onwards. There are many changes that could be made but, in forestry at least, there is a feeling that the worst of the initial problems have been ironed out, and evolution and not revolution is now required.

One of the most significant disappointments however in the current scheme is that it still fails miserably to promote collaborative projects, particularly those where the public benefit is high and the private gain to the applicant much less so. Many potentially worthwhile rural projects extend over a number of land ownership boundaries. Invasive species eradication, access improvements within a Deer Management Group, purchase of equipment that might help a river board within a particular catchment are some examples. At present, if owners wish to apply for SRDP funding for a joint project, all landowners within that area need to apply at the same time. The process is expensive and tedious, and landowners are almost always dissuaded from participating. Much is made of 'catchment scale' projects, but SRDP has singularly failed to deliver them. Very often, it deters them.

The problem

Imagine a catchment with maybe thirty owners, each requiring a few hundred pounds to control invasive species or put up co-ordinated access signage. The current system would require thirty applications, all many times the cost of the actual work. Unsurprisingly, this type of situation then usually goes unaddressed.

The answer?

A suggestion has been put forward by the Forestry Commission through their Customer Representative Group (CRG) that a new type of applicant should be eligible for SRDP: an organisation or membership group that applies on behalf of a group of owners or businesses. In the above example, a competent organisation would apply on behalf of all thirty owners.

One of their key suggested changes to SRDP is: to introduce a 4th category of applicant for making a single application on collaborative projects such as forest plans, deer management, rhododendron control, riparian woodlands and footpaths (this will need to be discussed with SGRPID as it raises fundamental IACS issues).

Looking forward

There are no details yet, but the advantages would be very considerable. A single application would make the administration easier for everyone. The applicant would need to be properly constituted, have a particular remit in the area concerned and be properly representative and accountable.

It would need to have the capacity to administer such a scheme, and be able to implement it fully. Mapping would still be necessary, and local buy-in demonstrated, but multiple applications and endless strings of FID numbers could be done away with. However this particular applicant would also be financially accountable for the funding including demonstrating that it is capable of delivering the work proposed and have the financial wherewithal to be accountable for any grant reclaims etc. This is not insurmountable but any prospective applicant of this type will need to have properly considered this aspect.

A major cultural change within officialdom would be required, most notably within SGRPID, who prefer their grant schemes to work in a more rigid way. For this reason, high-level support is required.

Relevance to Deer Management Groups

Most DMGs choose not to apply for public funding, but even among those who are happy in principle to do so, the current system dissuades them.

A number of issues could be addressed successfully, particularly where there is a clear public benefit, by having a more workable system in place:

- Co-ordinated access signage across a DMG
- Production of Deer Management Plans
- Training
- Joint larder provision
- Delivering additional capacity to protect or monitor designated sites
- Possibly to deliver additional secretarial or project management capacity

As well as providing a practical mechanism for the delivery of more collaborative projects, it makes sense for ADMG to be seen to be pro-active in lobbying for this also.

Such a change would undoubtedly throw down a challenge for many DMGs in establishing whether they could administer such schemes, but the level of communication and active participation required would strengthen the wider working within groups.

It is likely that a number of conservation NGOs would also back this approach, with the knowledge that many worthwhile projects could then move forward.

Getting started

If an appropriate project could be piloted within a Deer Management Group in 2012, this could then be used to inform future thinking.

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ADMG Stalking Benchmark Survey Analysis 2011 – Final Report

In association with The Scottish Country Sports Tourism Group

Sponsored by



Saffery Champness
CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS



Executive Summary

The aim of the first Stalking Benchmarking Survey for Scotland is to provide figures that will assist individual estates and deer forests determine what they could be charging for their let stalking.

An interim report was published in our previous newsletter. This report provides the final analysis.

Headlines

76 estates took part in the survey covering a total area in the region of 550,000 hectares (1,360,000 acres)

Stags

- The charge per stag/beat/day ranges from £240 - £600 (inc VAT).
- Estates providing stalker and ghillie charge an average £487 (inc VAT) per day
- Estates providing a stalker but no ghillie charge an average £444 (inc VAT)
- 42 per cent of respondents let by the stag only. 23 per cent let by the week
- The numbers of stags shot per respondent ranges from 5 – 310 giving an average of 46 stags let per estate per year.
- Half of respondents (50 per cent) recover stag carcasses by ATV. More recover carcasses by quad bike (12 per cent) than by pony (4 per cent). 32 per cent use a mix of methods to recover stag carcasses.

Hinds

- The charge per hind/beat/day ranges from £50 - £360 (inc VAT), or an average charge of £186 (inc VAT).
- Estates providing a stalker and ghillie (30 per cent) charge on average £204 (inc VAT).
- Estates providing a stalker only (64 per cent) charge on average £180 (inc VAT).
- The largest proportion (48 per cent) recover hind carcasses by ATV. 10 per cent use quad bike. Less than 2 per cent use a pony. 41 per cent use a mix of methods.

Accommodation

55 per cent of respondents let their stalking exclusive of accommodation.

Reimbursement for a blank day

67 per cent of respondents do not reimburse clients for an unsuccessful day.

Marketing

Repeat business is the most used method for letting stag stalking (89 per cent) with word of mouth rated second at 76 per cent.

Repeat business accounts for 81 per cent of let hinds with word of mouth accounting for 74 per cent in order of importance.

Provenance of guests

For stags, 42 per cent cite the 'rest of the UK' (ie not Scotland) as most important. 25 per cent rank Scotland as most important; 22 per cent rank Europe as most important, with 11 per cent for the 'rest of the world'.

For hinds, 'rest of the UK' ranks first at 44 per cent, followed by Scotland at 42 per cent, and Europe at 14 per cent. 'Rest of the world' fails to score.

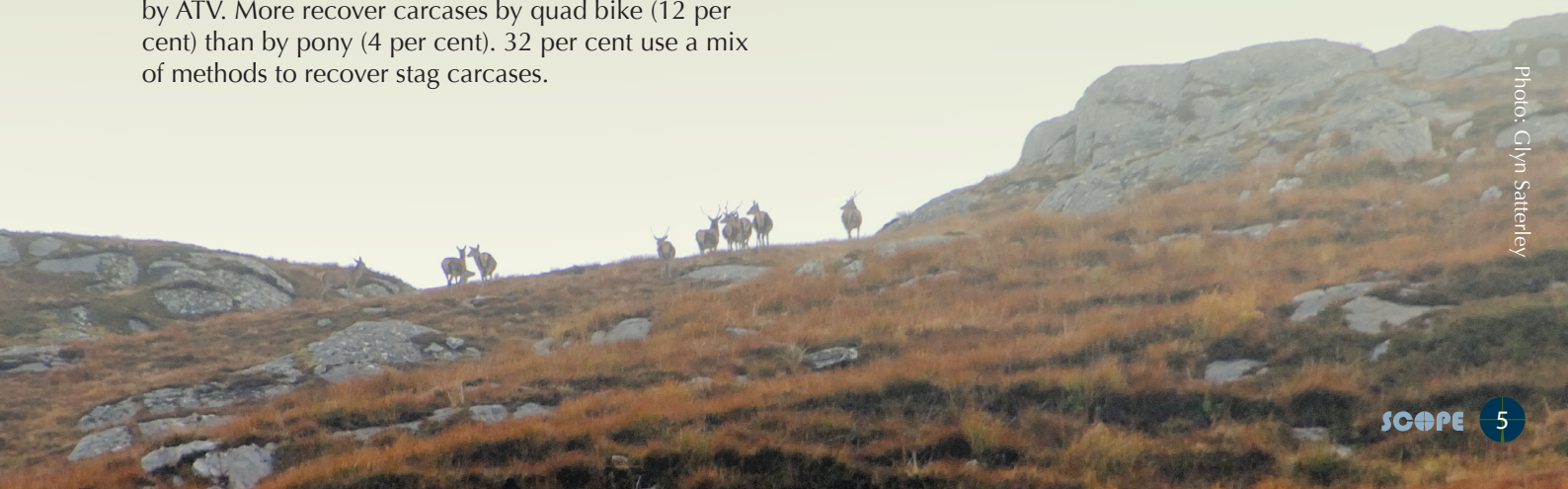


Photo: Glyn Satterley

Stalking Benchmark Survey Analysis 2011 - final report

The first Stalking Benchmark Survey provides figures that may help individual estates and deer forests determine what they should be charging for stalking by providing an analysis of what market rates currently are.

The survey covers red deer stags and hinds only.

This survey has been undertaken by ADMG in association with The Scottish Country Sports Tourism Group, and has been generously sponsored by Bidwells and Saffery Champness.

A total of 76 estates completed and returned the questionnaire, and their responses form the basis of this report. Some estates only let stags, some only let hinds, and some let stags and hinds. Not all respondents answered all of the questions. From the returns submitted the following data has been drawn.

1) How many sporting stags do you let per year?

Numbers ranged from 5 to 310, an average of 46 stags let per estate per year. 59% let between 20 and 50 stags per year, with only 6 estates letting more than 100 stags, and 15 estates letting less than 20 per year.

2) Do you let by the stag, day, week or other?

28 let by stag only (42%)
5 let by day only (8%)
15 let by week only (23%)
Rest let by combination of stags/week/day/other

3) How many hinds do you let per year?

Numbers ranged from 3 to 160, making an average of 37 hinds let per estate year. 18 estates let less than 20 hinds per year (33%), 14 estates let more than 50 hinds per year (26%), and 5 estates let more than 100 per year (9%).

4) Do you let by the hind, day, week or other?

4 let by the hind only (7.5%)
35 let by the day only (66%)
Rest let by a combination of all or 'other' (eg by the rifle).

5) How many days do you let stags in total?

Less than half of respondents let stags for more than 30 days. 54% of respondents let stags for less than 30 days, with the minimum given as 3 days. Only 6 respondents let stags for more than 100 days. These include some large estates with up to 5 beats.

6) How many days do you let hinds?

The range was between 3 and 50 days, making an average of 17 days. 61% of estates let hinds for less than 20 days.

7) Do you charge extra for a trophy?

A small number of respondents indicated that they do charge for a trophy, but the sample is too small to merit inclusion.

8) How many let stags do you expect to shoot per day?

Respondents expected to shoot between 1 and 4 stags per day, with 58% shooting only 1 stag per day, and only one estate shooting up to 4 (over more than 1 beat).

9) How many hinds do you expect to shoot per day?

All who gave a response to this question said roughly between 1 and 5 (plus calves).

10) What do you charge per stag/day and how do you present stag stalking?

A number of different permutations were given by respondents. The following shows the average charge per stag/beat/day.

Charges per beat/day range from £240 to £600 (inc VAT) per stag.

20 estates mostly use one stalker and charge between £300 to £525 (inc VAT) per day, an average of £444 (inc VAT).

33 estates mainly use stalker plus ghillie, and charge from £240 to £600 (inc VAT) - average £487 (inc VAT).

11 estates use stalker plus two ghillies and charge £400 - £500 (inc VAT).

11) How do you recover your stag carcasses mainly?

34 by ATV only (50%)
3 by pony only (4%)
8 by quad bike only (12%)
1 by dragging (1%)
22 by mix of above (32%)

12) How do you present hind stalking and what do you charge?

The overall charges range between £50 and £360 (inc VAT) per beat/day, an average of £186 (inc VAT).

37 estates (64%) use one stalker only, and charge from £50 to £360 (inc VAT) - average £180 (inc VAT).

30% use a stalker plus ghillie and charge £150 to £360 (inc VAT) - average £204 (inc VAT).

13) How do you recover hind carcasses mainly?

28 by ATV only (48%)
6 by quad bike only (10%)
1 by pony only (1%)
24 by mix of above (41%)

14) Do you let stalking inclusive of accommodation?

36 estates do not include accommodation (55%)
30 estates include accommodation (45%)

Some estates let packages for groups.

15) Do you reimburse clients for an unsuccessful stalk?

42 do not reimburse (67%)
20 do reimburse (between 30% and 100% of the charge)

Some said it depended on the circumstances (eg weather).
Some offer another day as reimbursement.

16) When does your stag season start and end?

The opening day, 1 July, is the earliest given start with most estates finishing on 20 October.

11 estates start sometime in July (17%)
28 start in August (42%)
22 in September (33%)
5 in October (8%)

17) When does your hind stalking start and end?

Earliest start is 21 October and latest finish is 15 February.
Most estates start in late October or early November. A couple only do a short season (a week or a month).

17 estates finish in December (30%)
13 finish in January (22%)
24 finish in February (42%)
3 finish before December (5%)

18a) How do you market your stag stalking?

Estates were invited to choose as many of the 6 options that were relevant.

Out of 66 estates:
59 said 'repeat business' (89%)
50 said 'word of mouth' (76%)
23 said 'advertising/websites' (35%)
29 said 'agents' (44%)
7 said 'Scottish Country Sports Tourism Group' (11%)
6 said 'ADMG stalking to let' (9%)

18b) How do you market your hind stalking?

Out of 54 estates:
44 said 'repeat business' (81%)
40 said 'word of mouth' (74%)
13 said 'advertising/websites' (24%)
6 said 'Scottish Country Sports Tourism Group' (11%)
2 said 'ADMG stalking to let' (less than 4%)

19) Where do your sporting guests come from?

Stags (out of 64 estates who answered this question)
27 estates ranked the 'rest of UK' first (42%)
16 estates ranked 'Scotland' first (25%)
14 estates ranked 'Europe' first (22%)
7 estates put 'rest of the world' first (11%)

Hinds (out of 50 estates who answered this question)
22 estates ranked 'rest of UK' first (44%)
21 estates ranked 'Scotland' first (42%)
7 estates ranked 'Europe' first (12%)
None ranked the 'rest of the world' first or second

20) Approx area of ground for stalking

Stalking areas ranged from 1,848 acres (748 hectares) to 111,200 acres (45,000 hectares)
Average = approx 23,000 acres or 9,300 hectares.

21) Additional comments

Around 20% of the estates mentioned problems with walkers (and to a lesser degree mountain bikers), with many stalking days being ruined by them.

Approximately 20% of estates alluded to neighbouring estates with different management objectives (forestry, deer reduction culls or grouse moor management), which have reduced deer numbers (especially mature stags) and stalking income.

The severe winter of 2009/2010 affected deer numbers.

It was suggested that a future survey might include information about 'tipping' and about roe deer.

New Code for deer management in Scotland

A new Scottish deer Code came into effect in January 2012, with a focus on cooperative and voluntary deer management across the country.

The Code, developed by Scottish Natural Heritage, is aimed at anyone involved in deer management, including lowland tenant farmers, recreational stalkers, crofters and upland deer managers.

As part of the Wildlife and Natural Environment (WANE) Bill passed by the Scottish Government, the deer Code sets out how those who have deer on their land can deliver sustainable deer management. The Code puts new responsibilities on land managers and helps to identify what they must, should or could do to manage deer.

Alastair MacGugan, SNH wildlife management manager, said:

“Wild deer are an important part of Scotland’s ecology, economy and culture. Deer are managed in certain parts

of Scotland to protect crops, trees and protected natural areas, as well as to reduce road accidents. Deer stalking also provides an important source of income to many fragile rural economies throughout Scotland. Balancing these different objectives is sometimes a challenge, so the aim of the Code is to provide guidance to land managers and their neighbours on how to co-operatively manage deer.”

The deer Code supports voluntary deer management, but also sets out when and how SNH may become involved. Previously, SNH authority was confined to taking action when deer were causing damage to the environment. This has now been widened to include powers to take action when deer welfare is involved, or when there is damage caused by deer to social and economic activities. SNH developed the Code with input from a range of organisations including, ADMG, SGA and others involved in the land management sector.

For more information see www.snh.gov.uk.

Upland Deer Management Groups



Ron Rose

The Code of Practice for Deer Management asserts that every landowner with wild deer on their ground has a ‘responsibility’ to support ‘appropriate and effective local collaboration’. Deer Management Groups exist to provide individuals with a means to that end.

To be effective in an upland situation DMGs need to:

1. Have representation from landholdings with improving performance towards a 100 per cent target of the whole Group area or Group cull.
2. Have a simple and effective Deer Management Plan (DMP). That plan should seek to:
 - Deliver the land use objectives of their members with specific targets eg numbers of sporting stags, maximum crop impacts, deer welfare, spread of non-native species, venison marketing, poaching, habitats, conservation targets etc.
 - Recognise/agree the key local public interests that can be impacted both positively and negatively by deer and their management eg designated sites, spread of non-native species, tourism, deer welfare, full time employment equivalents etc, and have specific targets such as, for example: ‘over the next five years designated sites described as unfavourable as a consequence of herbivore impacts will have deer management in place to ensure favourable/unfavourable recovering status’.
 - Agree on and maintain a relatively stable deer population capable of delivering the above.
 - Detail the way members will measure whether targets are being met individually, and how this information
3. will be collated, analysed and stored for DMG discussion and decision making eg winter foot counts, annual recruitment rate, mature hind body weight, Herbivore Impact Assessment (HIA), mature stags culled by clients/guests, B&B/lodge nights let, number of stalks spoiled by walkers/cyclists, deer vehicle collisions etc.
4. Detail how this will be reviewed as part of the DMG business process at meetings – the DMP should provide the framework and business content for DMG meetings.
5. Develop/fine-tune a simple population model based on local conditions to provide guidance to the Group’s cull target setting over the long term.
6. Have an effective way of picking up on any issues (at an early stage) from other sectors of the local community whose livelihoods can be affected by deer and their management.
7. Have a Group Constitution that:
 - Includes a section on DMG member’s duties/responsibilities e.g. Attend meetings regularly, provide information and support activities required for the working of the Group, advise members of any activity which will impact on the Group, commit to solve problems associated with differing objectives.
 - Recognises that the voluntary approach requires a commitment to making Group decisions through reaching consensus rather than through voting rights.
 - Includes a detailed process for dealing with conflict/disagreement resolution

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Preparing for Wildfires

Michael Bruce, Glen Tanar Estate
Chair, South Grampian Wildfire Group

Last Spring, in a short six day period between 30 April and 5 May, Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Services had to cope with 76 wildfires. Every single available firefighter and fire officer, some 1800 people, plus many estate staff and helicopters were deployed. As most of these firefighters were retained crews, businesses and other organisations suffered through their absence.

Even with this massive effort, over 10,000 hectares (25,000 acres) of land were burned, including conservation sites, forests, moorland and farmland. A number of fires were of landscape scale and exhibited dangerous extreme fire behaviour. Some remote fires, even ones bigger than 200 hectares (500 acres) were just left to burn; other fires burned assets because of the over-stretched resources. Damage was extensive and the fire suppression costs for both public and private sectors were substantial.

Although there has not been a major enquiry into the underlying causes of this rash of fires, some contributory factors are clear. Fires only stop when they are put out or they run out of fuel. To be able to put a fire out it needs to be within the suppression resources 'threshold of control' both in terms of fire intensity and the scale of the fire. These in turn are heavily influenced by the quantity, condition and continuity of the fuels burning.

In many parts of Scotland grazing has been reduced, especially marginal agricultural areas, or where landowners have been creating native woodlands, or where land has just been abandoned because it is uneconomic to manage. The consequence has been that grasses, heather, bracken and other vegetation has grown and in many places become thick and rank. In the spring these fuels are largely dead and can dry out very quickly in a dry warm spell. They are then ready to burn, over large areas.

If someone is careless, or there is malicious intent, and ignites these fuels, they will burn fiercely. As a rule of thumb, as fuel loads double, the rate of spread doubles and fire intensity quadruples. In other words the consequences are landscape scale, high intensity fires beyond our threshold of control.

The political, environmental, economic, social and technical contexts are difficult. To achieve a variety of policy goals, landowners will indirectly also increase the quantity of vegetation. Climate change scenarios indicate an increase in the occurrence of dry and warm spells.

Fire and Rescue Services are suffering significant budget cuts. The number of people working the land in remote areas is reducing. There are no new technical 'fixes' on the horizon.

In other words, fuel load hazards and fire risks are both increasing at the same time as our underlying resources available to control the fires are reducing. So how can we improve? What can we collectively do to protect our assets? Perhaps as land managers we need to look at how well we are organised, prepared and willing to work together to support each other.



The Scottish Wildfire Forum was created in 2004 after a similar outbreak of wildfires in 2003. This organisation brings together all the public and private sector interests to focus on the wildfire threat. The forum has made progress developing a strategy and action plan but has no separate budget to implement its recommendations.

One key recommendation from the forum is for local fire groups to be established, either as stand-alone groups or by bringing the subject into the work of existing groups such as moorland groups or Deer Management Groups. Your support is needed to achieve this.

To see what the level of interest among these groups was in taking on wildfire issues, Scottish Land & Estates, with the support of the ADMG, conducted a survey among DMGs. The results were very positive. 96% of respondents were willing to work with the Fire and Rescue Services and neighbours to discuss and address the issues.

Further information and suggestions on how to tackle the issue can be found on the Scottish Wildfire Forum website www.scottishwildfireforum.org.uk in the Wildfire Groups section.

Wildfire Survey

During December 2011 a survey was issued to DMGs across Scotland to establish if there is a desire to develop Wildfire Groups within their DMG. The response received was very positive and there is certainly enthusiasm from DMGs to develop this further and to address issues identified.

An Information Sheet is now available for members wishing to learn more about wildfire prevention and the role played by Wildfire Groups in tackling wildfire in Scotland.

Scottish Land & Estates will be taking this forward during 2012 and encourages members who would like to be involved to contact:
drew.mcfarlaneslack@scottishlandandestates.co.uk

Balmoral the venue for 2011 Autumn Wild Deer Best Practice Event



Mike Cottam

The 10th Wild Deer Best Practice Demonstration Event took place at Balmoral Castle, Deeside last October.

The two day event attended by more than 180 stalkers, deer managers and practitioners took the theme Developing Skills and Adding Value, and was structured differently from previous events with longer session times to allow more in-depth involvement of participants and a greater transfer of skills from instructors. Over 80 participants had not previously attended a Demonstration Event.

There were five main sessions covering lardering, deer populations, habitat impact assessments, ballistics and bullet performance, and practical rifle skills. Day three was reserved for colleges, with over 70 students attending as well as 100 plus primary school children from the Deeside area. The event also linked into the Deeside Venison Festival, with a cookery demonstration by Nichola Fletcher.

The Lardering module covered carcase inspection, basic hygiene, the effects of shooting, lardering and butchery processes on venison's eating quality, practical butchery, and a taste test – young v old, bruised v unbruised, cooked well v overcooked.

The deer population assessment and cull planning, and the habitat impact assessment and deer management plan development modules were practical.

Ballistics and bullet performance sessions were conducted by Callum Ferguson of Precision Rifle Services and Jim Govan. Topics covered down-range accuracy, terminal ballistics, bullet design and factors influencing controlled expansion, balance between penetration and tissue destruction, bullet design for specific target species, non-lead alternatives, and visual confirmation with ballistic gelatine and ballistic soap.

A final session on practical rifle skills covered improving accuracy at normal range; a collaborative exercise with multiple shooting opportunities for candidates interspersed by instruction in shooting techniques; theory, coaching and mutual assessment in pairs, and the opportunity for general discussion.

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Photo: Pete Moore

Lowland Deer Network Scotland launched at Cardrona

A full house of 180 attended the first lowland deer management conference at Cardrona last November representing the whole deer management and land ownership spectrum, and both public and private sectors, including recreational and professional stalkers, landowners, farmers, forestry companies, countryside rangers, Government, its agencies and rural organisations.

One aim of the event was to assess the need for a Lowland Deer Network in Scotland (LDNS) and its remit, and to raise awareness of the countrywide duty of sustainable deer management following the passing of the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act in Scotland.

Speakers included Stewart Stevenson MSP, Minister for Environment; Andrew Thin, Chairman, Scottish Natural Heritage; Robbie Kernahan, Wildlife Operations Unit Manager, Scottish Natural Heritage; Jonnie Hall, Head of Policy and Regions, NFUS; and Dr Bob McIntosh, Director, Forestry Commission Scotland.

A case study on low ground deer management was presented by Robert Speirs and Derek Kneller of the North Lanarkshire DMG. The event was chaired by Richard Cooke, Chairman, ADMG.

Stewart Stevenson, Minister for Environment, said:

"I welcome this initiative which looks at how deer management structures can be adapted for the lowlands."

Further details about LDNS can be obtained from the Estate Office, Dalhousie Estates, Brechin, Angus DD6 6SG
t: 01356 624566
e: dalhousieestates@btinternet.com
www.deer-management.co.uk/ldns/



Photo: Ian Jacobs

Rural Scotland must capitalise on the commercial opportunities of a buoyant venison market



Dick Playfair

Foremost among the activities of the Scottish Venison Partnership has been Scottish Venison Day with the 4 September 2011 used to fly the flag for Scottish venison principally with and through the media. Last year our message was that if this product maintains the momentum and popularity it has achieved over the last five years at the same rate then we will be facing a significant shortage. This can only result in a greater vacuum in the market and an 'open door' for other producers, from New Zealand and elsewhere in Europe, to make up the shortfall.

Sales of venison across the whole UK were reported by Mintel to have risen from £32M in 2006 to £43M in 2009, an increase of 34 per cent. More recently Mintel has predicted that total game sales in the UK in 2011 will top £84M. One major national retailer has reported that its game sales in the last 6 months of 2011 rose by 100 per cent, while another reported that its venison sales were up by a staggering 340 per cent in 2011 against 2010.

The biggest obstacle towards growing the market further is lack of supply. The major game dealers/processors, the Scottish Venison Partnership, and other marketing operations such as Game To Eat have promoted venison as a healthy product, and celebrity chefs continue to give venison valuable airtime. Recently venison once again featured on the BBC's Saturday Kitchen fronted by James Martin.

Against this backdrop of increasing sales, the red deer cull is static, so we cannot expect additional volume to come from wild red stock. There is however the opportunity for some substitution of roe, and growing the market for roe venison, much of which currently goes for export.

But the conundrum remains – even with imports accounting for one third of venison needed to cover the shortfall faced by the major processors, further significant growth in the market cannot be met with Scottish venison because we are already operating beyond capacity.

The Scottish Venison Partnership recently commissioned new desktop research from John Fletcher and Alan Sneddon, the title of which was 'Increasing Scottish Venison production: a proposal for pilot husbandry projects'.

That research, coupled with market data, and calculations to assess what additional volume is required to meet market shortfall, points unequivocally towards the farmed deer sector as that where growth needs to be encouraged. Scotland's deer forests and estates will have a major part to play in this, whether through setting up their own deer farming operations as is already happening, or the supply of breeding stock from the wild.

Scotland's 25 commercial deer farms currently produce less than 2 per cent of our venison outturn, and it is estimated that we need up to 400 more farms to produce a further 1000 tonnes of venison per annum just to stand still in market terms. The main conclusions of the Fletcher/Sneddon study are that:

- If demand continues to grow as many predict, against a static or falling supply, there will be an increasing shortfall in domestically produced venison.
- The only opportunity for dramatically increasing venison supply lies with deer farming for which Scotland is well suited, and that it is in Scotland's national interest to encourage the development of new deer farms.
- New deer farms benefit from single farm payment meaning that new entrants to deer farming with existing entitlements are in a favourable position.
- Work already undertaken clearly indicates the economic viability of deer farming.

The recommendations contained in that report are that:

- Several demonstration farms of different sizes and on different types of terrain are required so that hard evidence can be gathered and used to encourage others to enter the industry.
- A 'task force' should be set up, including the Scottish Venison Partnership, to produce a 'road map for growth' for the Scottish venison sector.
- Some forecasting of how the UK venison market over the next 10 years will develop is also required.

For more information contact:

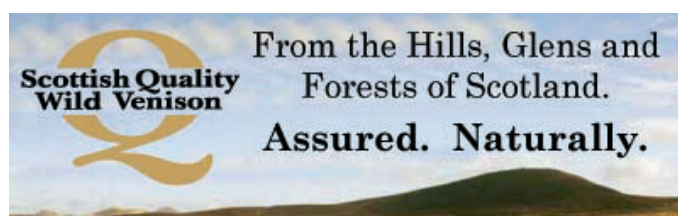
Dick Playfair

t: 0131 445 5570

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Photo: Jacqueline O'Donnell, The Sisters



Scottish Quality Wild Venison Assurance – why you should consider it



Stephen Gibbs, Chairman, SQWV

There are many reasons why you might cull deer on your property. These can include the sporting aspect, maintaining the environment and habitat on your land, and helping manage a healthy population of deer.

However there is one factor you will almost all have in common which is that you are supplying venison into the human food chain, and whether your annual cull is large or small there is a responsibility to ensure that your venison reaches the consumer in the best possible condition.

You will be aware that demand for venison is increasing year on year and this has been reflected in increasing prices paid for carcasses. No one will argue against the fact that greater demand and better prices can only be a good thing, and long may it continue. So what better way to provide processors, retailers and consumers with confidence about the quality of your venison than by belonging to the Scottish Quality Wild Venison Assurance Scheme?

Scottish Quality Wild Venison exists to maintain, develop and promote Quality Assurance Standards throughout the whole venison Industry.

Members of the scheme can choose whether to attach tags with a quality assured logo to their carcasses demonstrating that they meet independently verified quality standards. Processors can use the logo on packaging as a means of reassuring consumers that they meet SQWV quality standards.

There are two sections to the scheme. The Stalking and Carcase Handling Assurance Scheme covers all the stages between wild deer being shot through to the storage of skin-on carcasses that have been gralloched and are awaiting collection by the game dealer or processor.

Where larders are being used for the skinning of game and cutting of carcasses into meat, these can join the SQWV Primary Processor Scheme. Game dealers or game processing plants are also assured under the Primary Processor Scheme.

The scheme is owned by Scottish Quality Wild Venison Ltd. SQWV's board members have a wide range of experience of the wild venison industry and their knowledge and experience is vital when establishing the required assurance measures for an industry now widely credited with upholding the highest production standards.

SQWV is a dynamic scheme, with standards that will alter in response to consumer, trade and legislative concerns and requirements. Standards are reviewed annually and members will be kept fully informed of any changes in the standards and conditions that may affect them. Although the Scheme is owned by Scottish Quality Wild Venison Ltd, the assessment of the businesses applying for 'assured status' has been contracted out to Scottish Food Quality Certification, qualified independent inspectors.

Members of the Stalking and Carcase Handling Scheme are inspected at intervals between 12 and 18 months. Members of the Primary Processing Scheme are seen between 6 and 18 months.

Stalking and Carcase Handling Scheme membership fees are set to reflect the size of the annual cull as follows:

Handling Fees	
No. of Carcasses	Cost
1 – 25	£50.00 + VAT
26 – 50	£75.00 + VAT
51 – 100	£100.00 + VAT
101 – 200	£242.00 + VAT
201 – 500	£289.00 + VAT
501 – 1000	£340.00 + VAT
1001+	£371.00 + VAT

For Primary Processor members there is an annual membership fee of £130.00 + VAT plus up to 2 inspections per year at £370.00 + VAT. The annual fee plus the first inspection fee are due on application (£500 + VAT)

A new applicant can have a pre-assessment visit for a fee of £60, which will be deducted from the first year's membership fee on joining the scheme.

*For further information about the schemes please contact the scheme manager Jonathan Whitehead
t: 0131 335 6657
e: jonathan.whitehead@sfdc.co.uk or*