

## Restructuring Deer Management Groups



Richard Cooke, Chairman, ADMG

In the process of writing or updating deer management plans some Deer Management Groups (DMGs) have been reviewing their extent and membership.

There is no doubt that as deer management becomes more complex to reflect an increasing range of objectives, a more local focus is appropriate. Many Groups were formed, as far back as the 1960s and 1970s in some cases, solely to protect stalking interests. Their extent often followed the count areas identified by the Red Deer Commission to cover the range of a particular deer population. Management at that big scale is still important but detailed management decision-making has been devolved increasingly to sub-area level at which counting, cull target fixing and management planning now occur in many cases.

Some DMGs have chosen to set up their sub-areas as new independent DMGs while others continue to retain an umbrella Group. Either approach is valid and the guiding principle should be that a Group or sub-group should continue to operate at deer population scale. However it is also important to maintain effective communications with neighbouring areas. That can be done either by an annual joint meeting, or by delegating a Group member to attend neighbouring DMG meetings.

While the restructuring of DMGs can increase the effectiveness of collaborative deer management and meet the requirements of the newly minted Code of Deer Management, there may be Groups that have considered subdividing to avoid difficult internal issues; perhaps because some members failed to co-operate with neighbours or to participate fully in the Group. This is not sensible and such problems will not go away as a result of redrawing boundaries. The challenge is to win over all land managers to the necessity of collaborating. It is really all about being a good neighbour, which is just common sense.

## In this issue:

**Page 2:** Robbie Kernahan, SNH, looks at changes to authorisations to shoot deer in the close season and at night.

**Page 3:** John Bruce, BDS, highlights steps that can be taken to reduce the risk of CWD coming into Britain and Europe from North America.

**Page 4 and 5:** A summary of the key points from the ADMG AGM plus new subscription rates effective from 1 July 2012.

**Pages 6 and 7:** Iain Thornber writes about the inspiration behind John Buchan's John Macnab and the wager of a young Lieutenant in the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders to kill a stag undetected.

**Page 8:** Snapshot of the Mid West Association of Highland Estates Deer Management Group.

**Page 9:** Colin McClean provides an update on competence and where the 'bar' has been set.

**Page 10:** Richard Cooke makes a thorough argument against reintroduction of the lynx as proposed by naturalist Chris Packham in the Sunday Times.

**Page 11:** An update on the state of play of the venison market and new steps being taken in Scotland to meet a continuing increase in demand.

**Page 12:** Capturing the spirit of the Scottish sporting estate – Dick Playfair reviews landscape and sporting photographer Glyn Satterley's new book.

*Bringing in the ponies, Reay Forest, Sutherland.  
Photo: Glyn Satterley*



# Changes to the provisions to shoot deer in the close season and at night under the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011



Robbie Kernahan,  
Head of Wildlife Operations, SNH

The Wildlife and Natural Environment Act has resulted in a number of significant changes to the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996 and one of the most important of these relates to close seasons and occupiers' rights. From the 1 April 2012 any deer culled out of season may only be culled under authorisation from SNH.

The right for the occupier to cull deer to prevent damage in season in enclosed woodland and on improved agricultural land remains, but the exemption to cull deer out of season has been removed.

SNH can now issue authorisations that can be general or specific in nature and as such, and in order for occupiers to prevent damage to their interests, we have issued a general authorisation which covers the period 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013. This will not however allow the culling of female deer of any species from 1 April to 31 August.

If authorised in writing by the occupier then the owner, owner's employees, the occupier's employees or any other person normally resident on the land can also carry out control under this general authorisation, without the need to be on the SNH Fit and Competent register. Anyone who does not fall into the classes of person above must be on the SNH Fit and Competent register.

The general authorisation is available to download from the SNH website, with paper copies available from SNH on request. Those operating under a general authorisation must have read and understood the terms and carry out any control in accordance with the specific conditions. Returns of deer culled under the general authorisation will be sought from annual cull returns and in time we hope through agricultural census forms.

The general authorisation provisions will be subject to regular review, but we are keen to ensure all possible steps should be taken to ensure that there is an effective dialogue between controllers, neighbours and the deer management group. It remains the case that anyone operating under an authorisation, general or specific, should be able to demonstrate that no other reasonable means of control would be adequate.

The proposed culling of any female deer during the period of 1 April to 31 August will require a specific authorisation for the property to be issued by SNH and we will assess these on a case by case basis. This will include conducting site visits and ensuring appropriate mitigation of welfare issues.

## Night shooting

Night shooting for public safety may now be authorised by SNH. This relates to the culling of deer to reduce or prevent impacts by deer on public safety and, as with other authorisations, SNH will require information supporting the need for such an authorisation. This is not a measure to allow shooting of deer at night where it is deemed unsafe to do so during daylight hours.

All authorisations issued by SNH include a series of conditions that must be complied with and failure to do so may lead to withdrawal of the authorisation.

Richard Cooke, Chairman, ADMG, comments:

"While we would have preferred all out of season culling to require an authorisation we accept that this would have created a major administrative burden for SNH; also that there are no welfare issues at individual animal level in respect of culling stags out of season, or young deer after weaning, but that it is important to provide protection for adult females to ensure the welfare of dependent young.

"It should be noted that this is an interim arrangement and subject to review at the end of the first year and we welcome that. We have concern that, at a time when the sector is being encouraged to embrace fitness and competence, and being judged on the level of uptake, this is not a condition of the General Licence. We do however acknowledge that, owing to the terms of the legislation, it is not within the power of SNH to provide for this."

Photo: Glyn Satterley





## Threat of CWD must be taken seriously



*John Bruce, a Director of The British Deer Society in Scotland, was inspired by Mark Dagliesh of The Moredun Institute, Penicuik, who is a TSE specialist and deer enthusiast; they jointly want to make people more aware of the severe threat that CWD is to deer of all species in Europe.*

Chronic wasting disease, or CWD as it is commonly called, is the most infectious disease of its kind having devastating effects on many populations of wild and farmed deer including red deer. Once a deer develops clinical signs of CWD it **always** results in the death of the animal and there are **no** treatments or vaccines available to control the disease.

At present, CWD is only found in North America and it is not known where the disease originally came from. However, despite extensive and expensive efforts to control the spread of CWD over the last 10 years it is now beyond control and has been diagnosed in many states of the US and two Canadian provinces.

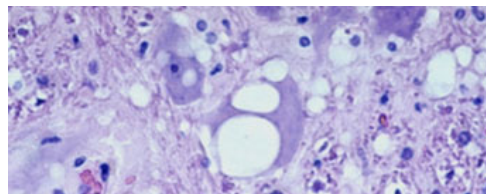
CWD belongs to the same family of diseases as scrapie, which affects sheep and goats, and 'mad cow disease' or BSE. This family of diseases collectively are known as 'transmissible spongiform encephalopathies' or 'TSE' for short. Chronic wasting disease is the most infectious disease of the TSE family and is the only one of its kind that circulates in wild animals. It only affects deer and there is no evidence that it can naturally infect or cause disease in any non-deer species such as occurs with BSE.

Despite extensive surveillance in Europe there have never been any reports of cases of naturally occurring BSE, or any TSE, in any species of deer, and therefore deer are considered resistant to naturally acquired BSE. Unfortunately the clinical signs of CWD are the same as those found in scientific studies in which red deer were experimentally infected by injecting them with BSE. This means that although we believe deer are resistant to naturally acquired BSE, if CWD became established in Europe we would be unable to tell the two diseases apart except by expensive laboratory tests. Testing would be necessary to protect the public from any chance, no matter how small or theoretical, of BSE infected venison entering the human food chain.

As BSE can infect people it is therefore vital that CWD is kept out of Europe. The introduction of CWD would result in devastating effects on our various deer populations and catastrophic consequences on the industries that rely on them. If CWD infected any deer in Europe, especially those in a wild population, the chances of being able to eradicate the disease would be very small.

Government legislation in the UK forbids the feeding of animal derived protein to ruminants and this includes all mammalian meat and bone meal, meat meal, bone meal, hoof meal, horn meal, greaves, poultry meal, poultry offal meal, feather meal plus gelatine from ruminants.

Further information on this legislation can be found at: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/farmanimal/diseases/atoz/bse/controls-eradication/feed-ban.htm>



*This brain tissue shows the holes associated with chronic wasting disease.*

### How can you help prevent entry of this devastating disease to Europe?

CWD is highly infectious and the infectious agent is highly resistant to both weather conditions and normal disinfectants. The prion is indestructible and will remain an active risk for hundreds of years. It is spread through body fluids, urine, dung and fluid particles in breath. Additionally it has been shown to stick to soil particles very efficiently. The only way to inactivate the infectious agent of CWD is to soak articles in a solution of bleach that has 20,000 parts per million of active chlorine for one hour or, alternatively, 2 molar sodium hydroxide. This treatment would obviously be highly detrimental to most clothing, footwear and hunting equipment.

- Hunters visiting Europe from North America and Europeans returning home from hunting trips to North America should not bring contaminated or potentially contaminated articles of clothing, footwear or other hunting equipment into Europe.
- Non-hunters visiting affected areas in North America should do likewise as their footwear, clothing and camping or fishing equipment etc could also become contaminated and introduce the disease to Europe.
- Meticulous cleaning of all adherent debris will significantly reduce the risk of introducing CWD to the UK.
- Hunters visiting the UK should be asked to bring only their own rifle rather than all their hunting equipment.
- Clothing and footwear for use in Europe should be bought in Europe and any that has been used in North America should remain there.
- Trophies brought back from North America should be soaked in bleach as stated above to ensure decontamination.

*For more information on CWD, including the latest situation on North America you can visit: [www.cwd-info.org](http://www.cwd-info.org), or for a summary go directly to: <http://www.cwd-info.org/index.php/fuseaction/about.overview>*

## AGM 2012 Report



Dick Playfair

More than 160 ADMG members, Associate members and guests attended the Annual General meeting that took place at the Duke of Gordon Hotel, Kingussie, on Thursday 23 February.

A full agenda included the Chairman's report, financial report, elections to the Executive Committee, and reports on a number of other relevant topics including PR and political, the Scottish Venison Partnership, the Deer in Scotland Education Zone, Competence, Heading For the Scottish Hills, and the Scottish Country Sports Tourism Group.

Further updates on a number of these areas are also contained in this current issue of SCOPE.

The meeting also received an update from Eileen Stuart of SNH and a presentation on map-based deer management planning from Mike Cottam, in his capacity as secretary of the Cairngorms and Strathspey Deer Management Group.

In his Chairman's address Richard Cooke talked of the new Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act, and the new Code of Deer Management. He said:

"The new Code is a document which we are unlikely to look at every day but its importance lies in setting out the principles of sustainable deer management and in identifying the public interest in how deer are managed. Strictly the public interest relates to economic and environmental impact, to deer welfare and to food safety, but it has a wider meaning in that deer matters generally continue to attract media attention."

*Full house. All AGM photos Peter Keyser*



He also referred to the continuation of the 'voluntary principle' in terms of deer management groups, planning and delivery, saying:

"The challenge for all of us over the next few years is to demonstrate that we can manage our wild deer in a way that meets both private and public objectives, on a voluntary basis, and in collaboration with neighbours and other relevant interests. Having witnessed discussions at DMG level over the last 12 months I am confident that the voluntary approach can be fit for purpose although there is some distance to go and we ignore the urgency of this at our peril. The aim must be for all DMGs to have the support and participation of all the landholdings in the area, to have functioning deer management plans and to be able to demonstrate sustainable deer management in practice.

He also referred to the just published Stalking Benchmarking Survey:

"Thank you to the 78 estates which participated in the Stalking Benchmarking Survey sponsored by Saffery Champness and Bidwells. For those who didn't provide information we will be happy to take additional data and add it to the analysis. What this does show is that, as we suspected, we are all over the place with our pricing of stalking of both stags and hinds and a more structured approach would be beneficial. This should take account of the different levels of service; for example surely stalking with ponies justifies a premium?

"I suspect that in many cases a higher price can be justified and in view of the fact that many report a general decline in the number of mature stags we need to take a quality rather than quantity approach in future, with pricing that recognises this in order to maintain income. We are considering how we can make further use of this information and whether we can present it in the form of a reference guide."



Finlay Clark



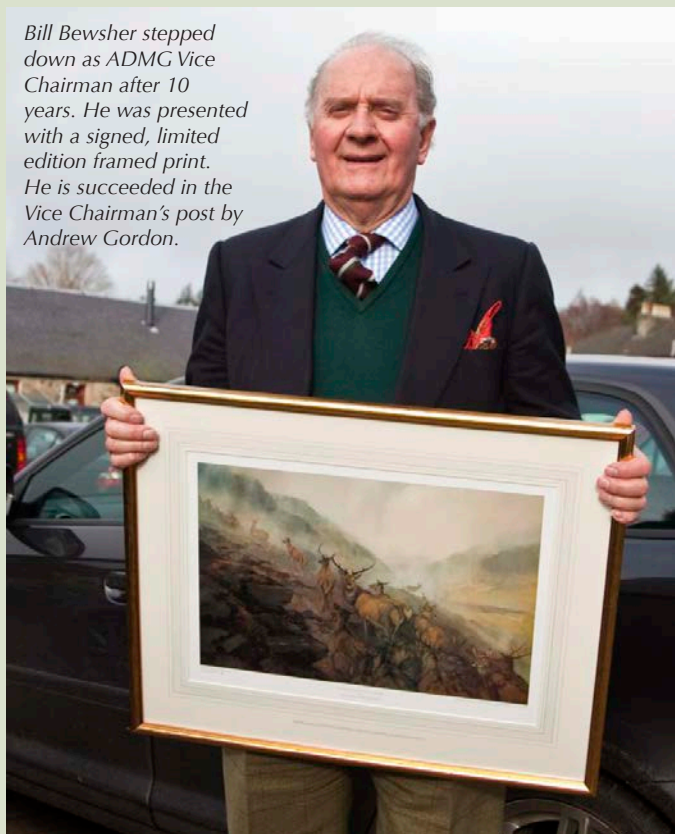
Mike Cottam



Also on the Agenda, Stephen Gibbs, Chairman of the Scottish Venison Working Group advised that 4 September would once again be Eat Scottish Venison Day as in previous years. He said that a hike in venison prices was welcome, but that Quality Assurance was an area vital for the sector to take seriously. He said that leading processors were playing their part, but there were still many smaller producers and processors who had yet to realize the importance of quality assurance, and that as venison continued to grow in popularity it was likely that non QA accredited producers would find it more difficult to sell their venison and would almost certainly be getting a lower price for it.

Eileen Stuart, in her SNH report, highlighted the findings of the latest SNH survey that had identified among the public that deer were again viewed as the most iconic species (70 per cent), with the golden eagle ranked second (at 30 per cent). In addition, deer were identified as the second most import species in terms of public concern (50 per cent) predominantly because they were hunted and killed. Eileen Stuart said that clearly this showed that there was a lot of work to do in explaining to the public how and why deer were managed, and that suggestions as to how this might be better communicated were welcome.

*Bill Bewsher stepped down as ADMG Vice Chairman after 10 years. He was presented with a signed, limited edition framed print. He is succeeded in the Vice Chairman's post by Andrew Gordon.*



## ADMG New Subscription Rates

(with effect from 1 July 2012)

**Stags: £3.00**

**Hind and calves: £1.50**

**All other species: £0.75**

Groups were asked to ensure that roe numbers were included in future declarations by DMGs to ADMG as well as on cull returns to SNH.

*The young contingent.*



*Eileen Stuart, SNH*



*Frank Spencer-Nairn*



*Victoria Brooks, Scottish Country Sports Tourism Group*

# The Real John Macnab

Iain Thornber

The expression 'John Macnab' is well known in the world of Scottish field sports. It is used when someone manages in one day to kill a red deer stag, catch a salmon and shoot a brace of grouse – although wild goats and other 'achievements' of a less notable nature are often substituted. However exciting these may be for today's participants they are a pale imitation of the original plot, first enacted in Inverness-shire more than a century ago, which became the source of the best known of all Highland deer stalking and salmon fishing novels.

It all began at a dinner held in Inverness in the summer of 1897 by the officers of the Militia Battalion of The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders when one of the company, Lt James Brander-Dunbar of Pitgaveny, near Elgin, announced somewhat provocatively, that as he had not been invited to stalk anywhere that year he would be reduced to poaching and laid a £20 bet (over £1,500 today) that he could kill a stag undetected on any forest in Scotland. A fellow officer, Captain James Scarlett, 4th Lord Abinger and owner of the 80,000 acre Inverlochy Forest in the Mid-West Association of Highland Estates DMG area near Fort William, immediately took up the challenge.

James Brander-Dunbar (1875-1969) was no ordinary mortal and became a legend in his own lifetime as a traveller, soldier, forester, sportsman and laird, and, of particular relevance to the tale of 'John Macnab', an inveterate deer poacher.

*John Buchan wearing estate tweed*



For his foray into Lochaber he enlisted the help of Col William MacDonald, a brother officer whose family owned the famous 'Dew of Ben Nevis' whisky distillery but, more importantly, lived at Keppoch House near Spean Bridge on the very boundary of Lord Abinger's estate. Brander-Dunbar's escapade almost failed before it began when Lady Middleton, wife of the owner of Applecross Estate, who knew of the challenge, recognised him getting off a train at Newtonmore and about to board the Fort William mail coach carrying an unusual piece of luggage. "What on earth are you doing with a golf-bag here?" she enquired. To which her friend replied, "Look at my patent long-shooter." On seeing a .303 rifle Lady Middleton said, "Oh, I know where you are going and I don't at all approve, but I hope you will be successful," and went on her way without telling anyone.

For two days Brander-Dunbar left Keppoch House at dawn crossing the River Spean in search of a stag on the Inverlochy Forest and although he managed to elude Lord Abinger's many stalkers and ghillies who were keeping a close watch for him, he was unsuccessful. On the third morning, however, when less than a mile into the forest he saw a heavy six-pointer with about half a dozen hinds ahead of him.



*Inverlochy Castle*

The stag caught sight of him, and in the poor light thought he was a rival and, as is often the case in these circumstances, then and now, came trotting towards him presenting an easy heart shot. No sooner had Brander-

Dunbar started to retrace his steps with the antlered head as proof of his success, than he saw two of Lord Abinger's stalkers coming straight towards him. Thanks to his fitness and hill-craft he managed to get out of their sight, quickly raced down the hill, waded the River Spean, still with the head, and from the safety of Keppoch, waved them goodbye!

According to one account he called at Inverlochy Castle later that afternoon to show off the head and collect his cheque for £20. Another tells of him leaving the whole carcass on the castle doorstep and bribing the chef to serve up the gralloch for his lordship's breakfast on a silver meat dish from which the cover was ceremoniously removed by the butler.

There the saga ended until 1925 when John Buchan (1st Baron Tweedsmuir), Scotland's best known soldier, diplomat, Governor General of Canada and an experienced and enthusiastic stalker with a love of the Highlands, heard about it. Thus the thrilling adventure story, 'John Macnab' was born. Buchan's version of events was not based at Inverlochy but on Ardtornish Estate on the Morvern Peninsula where he was a frequent stalking and fishing guest of the owner, Gerard Craig Sellar and his sister Mrs Rosalind Maitland.





*The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders Militia Battalion 1897*

In his gripping tale Buchan tells how three professional men in London – a lawyer (Sir Edward Leithen), a cabinet minister (Lord Lamancha) and a banker (John Palliser Yeats) seek to throw off boredom and enrich their lives by issuing a challenge to three Highland lairds under the composite pseudonym, 'John Macnab'. A salmon or a stag (note no grouse) would be poached from each, and the fish or carcass returned to its rightful owner within a certain time; if unsuccessful 'John Macnab' would forfeit £100, otherwise he would pay £50 to any named charity.

The story of how they stalked a stag, and took a salmon is one of the most exciting and satisfactory sporting accounts ever written which explains why 'John Macnab' has sold almost 200,000 copies since it was first published eighty-six years ago.

The wild red deer and the Atlantic salmon have largely gone now from John Buchan's stamping ground – swept aside to make way for woodlice, butterflies and hydro electric schemes. Yet now and again a few of stags can still be heard sending his primeval call over the Sitka spruce trees. Will a new James Brander-Dunbar appear again one day to take up the challenge of a real 'John Macnab' or has political correctness laid his ghost to rest forever?

*Iain Thornber*

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*Taking the shot. Photo: Iain Thornber*





## Deer Management Group Snapshot – Mid West Association of Highland Estates

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The Mid West Association of Highland Estates Deer Management Group (MWA) straddles land from Dalwhinnie in the North down the A82 to Spean Bridge and onwards to Fort William and Kinlochleven, and east along the shores of the Black Water Reservoir and Rannoch Station and Loch Rannoch. The Group is bounded on the East by Loch Ericht.

The Mid West extends to some 91,500 Ha over major land holdings including Ardverikie, Ben Alder, Camusericht, Corrour, Cruach, Dunan, Forestry Commission Scotland, John Muir Trust and Rio Tinto Alcan. The MWA contains some of the highest and most rugged mountains in the UK, dominated in the West by the steep sided massifs of the Mamores and Nevis Range with gentler hills to the south. The eastern parts include the high mountain ground of Ben Alder, Aonach Beag and Beinn a' Chlachair. MWA witnesses some of the most extreme weather conditions in the UK with the western part of the group 'enjoying' well over 100 inches of rainfall annually.

The MWA also contains two very large Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), the Ben Alder and Aonach Mor SAC and the Ben Nevis SAC, both of which have multiple qualifying features, and almost all of which require different grazing pressures to ensure that 'favourable condition' is maintained. At present some of the qualifying features in both SACs are either in 'unfavourable' condition or 'unfavourable improving' condition. Ben Alder SAC already has an agreement negotiated and in place for management, and the owner of the Ben Nevis SAC is currently engaged with SNH to develop management plans to move the sites into favourable condition. This is however a challenging process.

The MWA is moving towards the end of a 5 year plan prepared by Professor Rory Putman and has taken the decision to write its new deer management plan internally. The support of Iain Hope of SNH and Ron Rose, formerly of SNH, has been crucial to the MWA having the confidence to develop and deliver 'the group's own Deer Management Plan'. Hamish McCorquodale, Chairman of MWA said:

"Perhaps the most encouraging aspect of the drafting process so far is how much thought owners, managers and stalkers have given to the objectives of neighbouring properties when considering their own needs and aspirations. I think the group has shown real maturity when looking at sensitive issues involving competing objectives."

MWA group secretary Finlay Clark said:

"By using a map based approach we have quickly identified those areas where tensions may arise, for example, a number of properties within the group are looking to maintain densities in the region of 0 - 3 deer/sq km to promote natural regeneration of woodland whilst others wish to maintain density above 10 deer/sq km and ensure viable stalking businesses.

"When those areas sit adjacent to each other with no physical barrier then compromise and discussion is required. There have been very few areas of real tension within the group and this reflects the general understanding within the membership that it is very difficult to achieve specific objectives without the general buy-in and support of immediate neighbours when you are dealing with a common resource."

Going forward, Chairman Hamish McCorquodale believes the major challenges will surround getting the SACs back into 'favourable condition', principally because of the different management regimes required by the different qualifying features. He thinks that one of the real challenges facing rural land managers and SNH is in determining where and when the quest to deliver 'favourable condition' status over extensive sites starts to compromise objectives relating to employment, economy and environment. This is a debate that does require to be opened up.

Most properties within the group undertake habitat monitoring over at least some part of the ownership. The group has traditionally met annually, albeit the recent Deer Management Planning process has necessitated more frequent meetings, all of which have been attended by SNH.

The MWA DMG is looking forward to finalising its Deer Management Plan and would be happy to share its experience of producing a DMP written by the members with other DMGs if they feel that that might be helpful.

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## Time to prove your deer stalking competence



Colin McClean,  
ADMG representative to the Deer  
Sector Competence Working Group

The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 has challenged the deer sector to significantly increase uptake of deer stalking qualifications. This follows representation at all levels during the consultation process that a voluntary system developed by the sector for the sector would be the best approach. The then Minister's position was that anyone intending to shoot deer should be competent to do so, or be in the close company of somebody with that proven competence.

In response to this, a Deer Sector Competence Working Group was established and, following extensive deliberations and a study of the available options, this working group has agreed that the existing National Occupational Standard (NOS) and the existing current Deer Stalking Certificate 1 or equivalent qualifications would be valid demonstrations of competence in terms of the Act.

This voluntary, sector-led approach will be subject to a review by SNH in 2014 and, if uptake of it is viewed as unsatisfactory, the Scottish Government may then revert to imposing a statutory system to its own standards and competence levels.

It is important therefore that all who intend to shoot deer now should be able to demonstrate competence at least to the minimum level, and with aspirations to achieve a higher standard if they wish.

In responding to an update on progress by the Group, Stewart Stevenson, Minister for Environment and Climate Change, wrote:

"I recognise that in opting for this level of qualification, and requiring a simulated safety stalk rather than a witnessed stalk, you are seeking to strike a balance between increasing standards and controlling costs. I also believe an important aspect here is to encourage the broadest possible uptake of this training. The Group's decision will make it possible to increase training capacity quickly, in order to cope with any significant increase in demand, and so ensure that it is possible to train a substantial number of candidates in a short period of time.

"Clearly you are setting a minimum standard, which is not intended to limit stalkers, who will be free to take up further training if they so wish. I also recognise that this issue, including the practical element, is something the deer sector may wish to revisit in time."

Richard Cooke, ADMG Chairman, commented:

"The Group has purposely kept this process as simple as possible whilst recognising that demonstrable uptake of this minimum standard must be achieved. We also recognise that many practitioners have already achieved competence levels above the minimum standard. The message in short however is that if you wish to shoot deer unsupervised in Scotland either for sport, or to protect a forest or nature reserve, or to protect crops on your croft or farm, then competence affects you, you cannot duck this issue, and you should look to achieving the standard that has been set down by the Group.

"The deer sector has until 2014 to increase uptake of deer stalking qualifications significantly. If we cannot do that, we risk a compulsory test being imposed by Government.

"To demonstrate competence to the required level is simple, and if this applies to you then you should contact one of the appropriate training organisations such as BASC Scotland ([www.basc.org.uk](http://www.basc.org.uk)) or BDS ([www.bds.org.uk](http://www.bds.org.uk)) to take this forward."

*Target practice, Benmore, Mull. Photo: Glyn Satterley*





## Chris Packham lynx proposition well wide of the mark



Richard Cooke, Chairman, ADMG

***On 13 May The Sunday Times carried an article titled 'Lynx effect will get rid of the old deer.'***

***Not only was the article misleading in its proposition that the re-introduction of the lynx would be a natural way of keeping the deer population (which it purported to be exploding) in check, but failed completely to consider the impact that such a retrograde step might have on domestic livestock.***

***The Sunday Times printed an abbreviated response from ADMG to the article on 22 May. For the benefit of readers of SCOPE here is my response in full.***

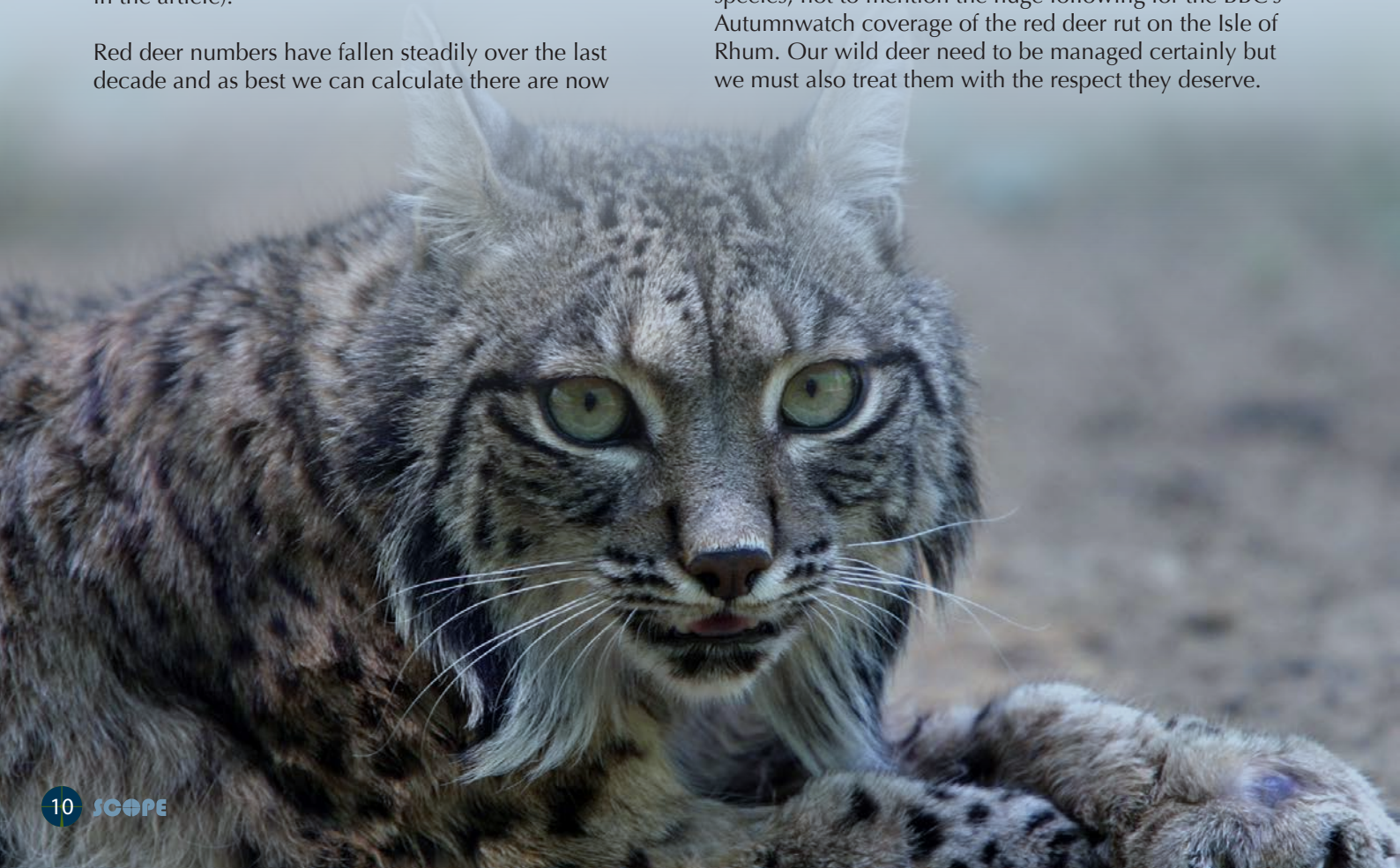
Chris Packham cannot often be faulted for his wonderful Springwatch programmes but he is very wide of the mark on the deer situation in Scotland. The current population, all species, Red, Roe, Fallow and Sika, is thought to be in the order of 1 million (not 2 million as stated) and the annual cull as reported to SNH, but allowing for some under reporting, is around 120,000 (not 350,000 as stated in the article).

Red deer numbers have fallen steadily over the last decade and as best we can calculate there are now

around 400,000 with an annual cull of 60,000 to 70,000. Roe numbers on the other hand are on the increase in response to the new habitats created by the environmental measures in the Scottish Rural Development Programme and other excellent initiatives such as the Central Scotland Green Network. Certainly deer, particularly Roe, feature more frequently in road traffic accidents and it is to address that situation and promote a coordinated approach to management that the Lowland Deer Network Scotland was set up last year, bringing together individual hunters, all the relevant organisations, farmers and foresters, Local Authorities and Government Agencies.

As for the lynx, reintroductions are a nice romantic idea but the unintended consequences may come back to haunt us, as for example with the unlicensed release of beavers in Tayside. Lynx would certainly take some deer but they would also find sheep terribly tempting and might find the last surviving capercaillie hard to resist. Deer do have a natural predator, man, (foxes and golden eagles also take a few calves) and the system represented by the deer management groups may have its shortcomings but it is the basis of a highly skilled network of deer managers which, in the red deer range, is maintaining a sustainable level of population, contributing to tourism and producing an excellent food product, venison, for which demand now exceeds supply. As for the lowlands, well, we are on the case.

Can we please see past the out of date anti deer propaganda and get the facts straight? Deer are an important part of our natural heritage and are valued as such by the Scottish public, as shown by a recent SNH survey that rated them as Scotland's most iconic species, not to mention the huge following for the BBC's Autumnwatch coverage of the red deer rut on the Isle of Rhum. Our wild deer need to be managed certainly but we must also treat them with the respect they deserve.





## Figures show that demand for venison continues to grow



Dick Playfair

A new group, The Scottish Venison Strategy Group, has been established to increase venison production in Scotland. Chaired by Scotland Food & Drink, and encompassing key stakeholders, the group is producing a 'roadmap' to ensure growing demand for venison from consumers in the UK is met from Scottish sources.

Retail sales of venison across the whole UK rose from £32M in 2006 to £43M in 2009, an increase of over 34 per cent, and figures just available show that the UK market continues to grow. Marks & Spencer sold three times as much venison in 2011 as in 2010, Sainsbury's reported sales of its 'own brand' venison had almost doubled year on year, and some other suppliers reported sales up by 50 per cent. Waitrose and Asda say their sales were up by a third, and this month the Co-op is stocking venison for the first time.

Just 50 tonnes of the 3500 tonnes of Scottish venison production comes from farms with the bulk coming from the annual wild cull numbers. However, with cull numbers dropping in recent years, imports of venison from New Zealand, Poland and elsewhere in Europe have increased. The sector roadmap is being developed by a Scotland Food & Drink led Task Group including the Scottish Venison Partnership, Scottish Land & Estates, NFU Scotland, SAOS, SAC and the James Hutton Institute.

The new Scottish Venison Strategy Group aims to grow production of Scottish farmed venison, reduce reliance on imports and demonstrate the role that venison can play within sustainable rural development. It is estimated that an additional 1200 tonnes (25,000 farmed deer) per annum will be required to meet demand.

Initial steps identified as part of the Roadmap include commissioning research to develop understanding of the current and future markets and consumer perception, and the setting up of monitor farm units to help encourage new entrants to the sector and demonstrate successes. Additionally, an extensive communications plan will be developed in order to demonstrate to potential producers the benefits and funding opportunities.

James Withers, Scotland Food & Drink Chief Executive said:

"The maths here is easy. Scotland isn't producing enough venison. Wild deer cull numbers are falling whilst demand for Scottish venison is increasing. The only way to meet that demand, without increasing our reliance on imports,

is to ensure that production rises. We want to encourage livestock farmers and other land managers to consider this business opportunity. The farm gate returns are very good for deer, but there are barriers to consider, such as processing capacity and fencing costs.

"The sustainability of our food and drink industry, and our rural areas, is crucial to industry development and I believe venison has a significant part to play. The Scotland Food & Drink Industry Strategy is built on premium, provenance and health and venison captures all three of these attributes."



Photo: John Fletcher, Reediehill

Stephen Gibbs, Chairman, the Scottish Venison Partnership, said:

"Increasing farmed venison production is the only viable solution. It will take time, commitment and support, but it is the only way. We know that the UK market is exceptionally buoyant, and we know that our game dealers are anxious to source more home produced quality product while continuing to import as market growth continues. That demand, in my view, is not going to go away."

NFUS Scotland Policy Manager Penny Johnston said:

"On-farm diversification into venison production will be a viable option for a number of Scottish producers. It is accepted that there would be some significant start-up investment needed, not least in terms of fencing, but there is an opportunity here for some to diversify into a growing industry with exciting market prospects.

"Deer farming may sit well with many established livestock businesses, and for any producer looking for a new challenge the future demand for Scottish venison suggests that this would merit closer consideration."

Richard Lochhead, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, also added his encouragement to the initiative. He said:

"We need to increase our venison production by a third to keep up with demand. Our venison is another high quality and delicious product that is increasingly desired by consumers at home and abroad."

*For more information on diversification into deer farming contact:*

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*Tel: 0131 445 5570*

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## Capturing the spirit of the Scottish sporting estate

A review by Dick Playfair



Going to the Hill, Life on Scottish Sporting Estates, the latest and much awaited offering from acclaimed sporting and landscape photographer Glyn Satterley, is a delightful book.

In setting the scene in his Author's foreword, Glyn acknowledges the privileges he has been granted in the course of his photographic career in being allowed into people's homes and lives - people at the centre of the cultural tradition, the sporting estate.

And that is what this book is all about. Not sport, although therein lies a common thread, but people – those who work on the hills, the lochs and rivers, the foreshore, and Glyn's encounters with them, the nuggets they expose, the yarns they spin.

Packed with characters, the book draws from a 20 year span of Glyn's career spending time with guns, beaters, stalkers, ghillies, boatmen, netmen, and capturing on film at the outset (but now digitally) the many aspects of their day.

It's not a who's who of the great and good, although certainly some of them do feature, and many more would aspire to be in the next volume, if there is to be another. It's more a pictorial and anecdotal account of a way of life, a social history of the last 20 years, all set against the backdrop of scenery that arguably cannot be bettered

anywhere in the world - and weather that could be, but without which a certain atmosphere would be lacking from many of the shots.

Every picture is evidence that Glyn has been there and seen that at first hand. On several outings I have been with him 'yomping' up inclines like someone half his age behind a young stalker, or traversing death-defying drops with a camera on trusty monopod for additional support like a mountain goat on three legs. He's been soaked through and frozen solid, but lived for his pictures to tell the tale.

The book's foreword by Michael Wigan is a fabulous essay on the social climate and the changes that have come to bear on the land where Glyn has captured these images – land reform, access, community ownership, micro-management, fluctuating fortunes in grouse numbers, the decline (and fall) of a number of grand Victorian lodges, the arrival of wind turbines. Michael's words are an appetiser to the main course of Glyn's pictures and their sub-texts, sharpening the appetite, but leaving you wanting more. He concludes with this gem: "His [Glyn's] book, definitive of its subject, constitutes a peepshow of the leisure activities which occur in a land of fabled beauty." Who could express that better?

Devoid of colour, everything is in black and white fittingly from the opening shot of Donnie McKay's funeral cortege in 2005. Donnie, a former keeper was the inspiration for Glyn's previous book *The Highland Game*.

In this modern era of E-Books and Kindles, traditional publishing itself may be at risk, and this book has been made possible with the support of a number of 'sponsors' who certainly merit a reprise in this review – Goldsmith & Co, Ronald and Erica Munro Ferguson, Novar Estate; Tim Radford, Benmore, Isle of Mull; Iain and Janet Wotherspoon, Glenlyon; Arthur Irving, St John, New Brunswick, Canada; and Glencalvie Estate, Sutherland.

*Going to the Hill, Life on Scottish Sporting Estates* is published by Quiller Publishing and is available from [www.countrybooksdirect.com](http://www.countrybooksdirect.com) price £16.99

*At the hinds, Borrobol, Sutherland.  
Photo: Glyn Satterley*



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