

It's Important That DMGs Recognise Their Commitments and Their Shortcomings



Richard Cooke, Chairman, ADMG

During the last year I have had the opportunity to visit many DMGs and attend their meetings, as has Finlay Clark, the ADMG Secretary.

If I think back ten years or so when I was in his job and doing the rounds of the DMGs then I should now be in a position to make comparisons as to how things have changed, or not.

In some instances they have. Deer management planning, annual counts and reporting are widely accepted as being the norm. Habitat assessments are becoming more widespread, and with the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act, both upland and lowland deer management sectors have been told in no uncertain terms what is expected if they wish to continue to conduct their business under the voluntary principle. I hope that we have all got that message and, that where improvements are required, we are well underway towards addressing them.

What is evident however is that many DMGs still face a tremendous challenge to find a mutually acceptable way forward, particularly where different landholdings may have widely divergent management objectives – deer, sporting tourism, grouse, conservation, forestry and commercial woodland and so on.

To this end, and in conjunction with SNH, we are holding a day-long seminar and workshop this Spring to provide advice to DMG Chairs and Secretaries on improving the functioning of their Groups, and to provide routes to finding compromise and managing conflict.

In addition however I believe it would benefit understanding within every DMG to have a set of guiding principles to which all their members sign up and that, in an ideal scenario, would feature at the front end of their deer management plan. In outline these could be as follows:

As Members of this DMG we:

- acknowledge what we have in common - namely a shared commitment to a sustainable and economically viable Scottish countryside.
- make a commitment to work together to achieve that.
- accept that we have a diversity of management objectives and that we respect each other's objectives.
- undertake to communicate openly with all relevant parties.
- commit to negotiate and, where necessary compromise, in order to accommodate the reasonable land management requirements of our neighbours.
- undertake that where there are areas of disagreement we will work to resolve these.

If these guiding principles, or similar, were both adopted and adhered to then that, in my view, would be a step forward for all concerned, a demonstration that DMGs do take their commitments seriously, and that they understand what collaboration means in practice.

What do you think?



Closing days of the stag season on Assynt. Photo: Glyn Satterley

The 2012 Stag Season Review will be published in April - don't miss it.

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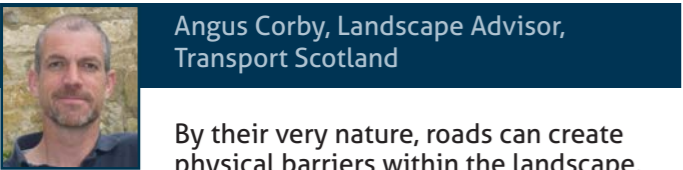
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By their very nature, roads can create physical barriers within the landscape, fragmenting habitats and severing feeding areas and movement corridors previously used by a variety of species, including deer. Whilst a robust planning system and high level of environmental assessment and design takes this into account for new road schemes – ensuring roads fit into the landscape and are as permeable as possible for relevant species – older roads can create formidable obstacles, representing a hazard for animals which, in turn, can affect the safety of road users, particularly where deer are concerned.

In 2011 the Scottish Government adopted new legislation which, amongst other things, placed greater focus on wild deer management. The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 (WANE Act) required Scottish Natural Heritage to develop a Code of Practice for Deer Management (the Code) which now applies to all land owners and managers of land where wild deer are found; including within the trunk road boundary.

The fundamental objective of the Code is to set out recommended action for sustainable deer management and to promote collaboration between neighbouring landowners/managers to ensure that any negative impacts of deer on the public interest are minimised, as far as practicable, whilst deer welfare is safeguarded. In order to reflect these requirements in the management of the trunk road estate, Transport Scotland has included the obligations of the Code within the new contracts for the Operating Companies which manage and maintain the network on its behalf.

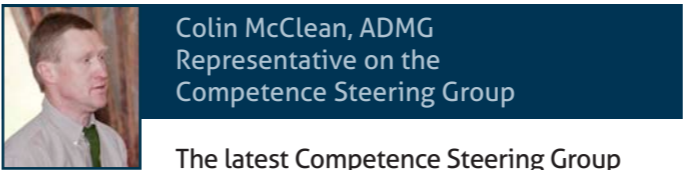
Each Operating Company will now be required to prepare an annual Deer Management Plan in accordance with the provisions of the Code.

The Plans will include:

- (i) **A strategy** – covering the general approach to managing deer across the Unit. This section will identify the general areas where wild deer may come into conflict with the road network and include good practice proposals for collaborating in deer management planning with adjacent landowners or other interested parties.
- (ii) **Part A** – a record of works undertaken and achievements made during the preceding year in respect of deer management. This may include the installation or maintenance of specific deer mitigation facilities; liaison with adjacent landowners or other interested parties; action to resolve incidents or reports received concerning deer accessing the Unit; and general comment on the effectiveness of current mitigation measures in place across the Unit.
- (iii) **Part B** – proposals and actions intended to be implemented during the following year in accordance with the deer management plan strategy. This may include areas and/or routes to be targeted for deer management; details of deer mitigation proposals and the likely actions involved; and proposals for future liaison and collaboration.

The first Deer Management Plans will come into effect on the North West and South West Units from April this year, with the North East and South East areas following once these contracts are awarded and commence on site (expected April 2014).

As this is a new contractual obligation it is anticipated that the Operating Companies will require a little time to get up to speed with the requirements of the Code and to prepare fully integrated Deer Management Plans. However, it is hoped that as the Plans develop they will help deliver more pro-active and effective deer management across the trunk road estate, ultimately benefitting both the welfare of the animals and the safety of road users.



The latest Competence Steering Group meeting was held in December to review progress. The conclusion was reasonably encouraging with BASC and BDS both seeing a 50 per cent increase in candidates passing Level 1 in 2012 as compared to 2011.

The Steering Group agreed the following action points:

There remains a strong feeling that many farmers and crofters who shoot deer legitimately will not have taken deer stalking qualifications. Competence applies to this sector too and we need to do more to spread the message through enhanced communication. In particular we intend to target the farmers through the relevant farming media and also the auction marts.

A report is to be produced showing the level of promotion for Competence so far by each of the promoting organisations to include numbers of leaflets handed out, number of shows attended with competence material etc.

Data is required on the number of members from Steering Group organisations that are qualified, or have become so in the last 12 months. This data is required to demonstrate how the core sector has developed in

its acceptance of competence ahead of the 2014 Review. Indicators from data-sets such as the Fit and Competent Register, game dealer records and elsewhere will be assessed by SNH.

A number of DMGs are to be selected as case studies. The purpose of this would be to establish for each DMG how many people shoot deer, and of these what percentage are qualified as competent to DSC 1 or equivalent, or higher.

SNH has set up a number of contracts to help structure the 2014 Review, one of these seeking to define welfare in terms of direct suffering as a result of those who shoot deer. The Steering Group will be allowed to comment on the output of these studies.

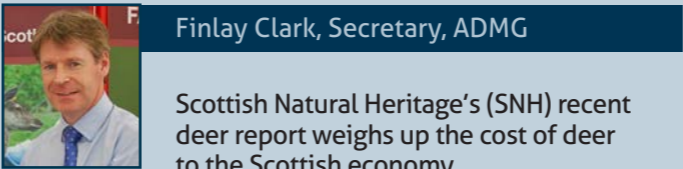
Further developments will be posted through SCOPE and E-SCOPE as well as the communications channels of other organisations as we move forward.

Coming events:

6 April: Level 1 Assessment Day, Harburn Estate, West Lothian.
More info: West Lothian Deer Management Group
alexanderpaul@blueyonder.co.uk

3 – 5 May: BDS DSC 1 Course, Comrie, Perthshire.
Contact: 01425 655434 or www.bds.org.uk

Failure to Agree About Managing Deer Could Prove Costly



On one hand, the management of the species as game generates income and employment in our rural outreaches, with deerstalking thought to generate more than £105 million a year. But on the other hand, deer damage forestry, cause road accidents and are increasingly establishing themselves in our towns and cities.

These polarities mean deer, and particularly red deer, divide the public and often cause serious disputes between neighbours. Arguments are raging in several areas as to whether there should be more or fewer deer, and, as a consequence, deer numbers are far higher in some areas of Scotland than in others.

Estate managers work hard to influence herbivore impact on their land, be it to encourage deer for stalking or to keep them away to protect woodland or allow grouse numbers to rise. Unfortunately, this means one estate may believe one or two deer per square kilometre is acceptable, while next door the landowner may strive to see 10 or 12 for each square kilometre.

As we all know, deer roam freely and nobody can tell them where they are welcome. The only solution is for various parties to engage in the local Deer Management Group that sets out and adheres to a plan. Of course, such action means there has to be discussion, compromise, negotiation and a willingness to find a solution. Deer Management Groups have made significant strides over the past ten years but there is much work to do.

The Scottish Government has chosen to leave deer control unregulated in the belief that, by establishing Deer Management Groups, landowners can do what's best for each area. However, if things do become irrevocably heated SNH can intervene.

We must see more effort to establish working Deer Management Groups in the immediate future. If not, the government may decide legislation is the only way forward, involving costly and unnecessary bureaucracy no-one in land management would welcome.

This article was first published in The Scotsman on 23 January 2013.



Fallow deer at the roadside.
Photo: Jochen Langbein



Deer management territory - the M8 corridor.
Photo: NLDMG

Tourism Group Helps Sporting Industry Promote Scotland to the World



Victoria Brooks, Scottish Country Sports Tourism Group

The Scottish Country Sports Tourism Group (SCSTG) was established in 2004 by the sporting industry and public agencies, such as VisitScotland and Scottish Enterprise. SCSTG works in close partnership with BASC Scotland and is based in their offices near Dunkeld in Perthshire. ADMG was a founder member.



The twin aims of the SCSTG are to widen the market for country sports in Scotland and to help 'providers' give their customers the best experience. Central to this the SCSTG developed a web portal www.countrysportscotland.com where sporting estates, shoots, fisheries and agents can advertise their sport directly to customers around the world. There is also a 'Sporting Offers' section where the canny buyer can pick up a fantastic bargain.

The website is designed for all markets, including the international client and the beginner; there is also a host of useful information covering travel, relevant legislation, seasons and a selection of sport-friendly accommodation. Excellent customer service is seen as a major factor for the success and sustainability of country sports in Scotland, whether that be shooting, stalking or angling. There are an increasing number of countries and competitors around the world capable of providing high quality sporting experiences, though few if any can match Scotland for its wide range of opportunity, scenery and tradition. A few years ago the SCSTG set up the 'Excellence in Country Sports Customer Care' course aimed at gamekeepers, ghillies and stalkers; this is now well established. Courses will take place throughout the country and Nicki Barnett, who has recently taken on the role of Customer Care Trainer says:

"I am very excited about working with the SCSTG in providing these courses. Customer care is such an important part of what we must offer nowadays in this increasingly global and information-savvy market. Our client expectations are getting higher and higher. The people we hope to attract on these courses are on the 'front line' in providing this service and our aim is to provide them with both the confidence and skills to meet these demands, and add value at every opportunity. With a mixture of course led materials, real life situations, discussions and learning from the experiences and knowledge of our peers, this will be an invaluable course for anyone involved in country sports."

In the past the SCSTG has worked with VisitScotland and accommodation providers to set up the Field Sports and Anglers Welcome Schemes. Advice is given to

accommodation providers on how to look after their sporting clients and on what facilities are needed to make their stay as comfortable as possible. Gun cabinets, drying rooms, rod storage and kennels are recommended. There are now over 180 members in both schemes.

The popular annual publication Shoot in Scotland was jointly set up by the SCSTG and Blaze Publishing four years ago. This is dedicated to shooting and stalking in Scotland and includes many features and news articles as well facts about Scotland, including generic tourist/travel information. The magazine is distributed to over 17,000 targeted individuals with free distribution to designated high-end establishments throughout Scotland and the rest of the UK, such as luxury hotels, clubs, country clubs and shooting estates.

The fresh breeze of market competition has given Scottish Country Sports a real shot of adrenaline. No longer is shooting in Scotland seen as the preserve of the few - SCSTG has been actively promoting participation, and helps ladies and beginners to take part, through training courses and taster courses advertised on the website www.countrysportscotland.com.



The SCSTG is also assertively marketing Scottish country sports, particularly in Europe, and an accolade for this work was recognition in 2012 on the website of VisitScotland that country sports feature alongside the tourism staples of golf, tartan and whisky.

This enthusiastic support from VisitScotland is also evidenced by the reward of Growth Funding to actively promote Scotland to the UK and European market as a world-class sporting destination. As part of the 2 year strategy the SCSTG will be exhibiting on behalf of Scotland at the Hohe Jagd & Fischerei in Salzburg in February (one of Europe's largest hunting and fishing expos) and at the CLA Game Fair this summer.

2013 is the Year of Natural Scotland – a celebration of Scotland's landscapes and wildlife. The year will be celebrated throughout Scotland with the aim of enhancing Scotland's reputation as a place of outstanding natural beauty and to get people out and about enjoying the Scottish countryside. Country sports have a big role to play and we hope the demand for sport in Scotland will be

higher than ever. The SCSTG is also currently developing a new website which will assist in making country sports even more accessible for all and this will be launched this spring. The SCSTG is now a recognised and established organisation in Scotland, and many sporting providers rely on the SCSTG and its work to assist in promoting Scotland as a world class sporting destination. Sarah Troughton, SCSTG Chair, says:

"It is a great benefit to work with public agencies and representatives from the industry such as BASC, ADMG and Scottish Land and Estates. This enables the Scottish Country Sports group to reach a wide range of country sports enthusiasts with an ever increasing variety of well managed sporting offers."

You can link up to the SCSTG on Facebook and Twitter and join our newsletter from the homepage of the website www.countrysportscotland.com



Invercauld and early snow. Photo: Glyn Satterley

Collaboration: There's no 'I' in Deer Management



Linzi Seivwright, Wildlife Management Officer, SNH

When it comes to managing a shared resource, collaboration is the name of the game. Whilst the benefits of collectively managing a shared deer population for the long-term have been recognised through the existence of Deer Management Groups for many years now, it is only relatively recently that the concept of sustainable deer management has become more formally recognised through the Code of Deer Management (implemented as part of Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011.

Whilst the Code quite clearly puts the onus for delivering Sustainable Deer Management (SDM) at the door of anyone who has deer on the land that they own or manage, the Code also sets out a requirement for individual landowners/occupiers to demonstrate that they have taken account of neighbouring and wider public interests. Undoubtedly membership of, and participation in a DMG is increasingly being recognised as the most effective way of demonstrating the willingness to collaborate. However, just merely attending a DMG is not necessarily enough, and there is increasing pressure through the Code, for members to actively participate and to contribute, not just through words but also through actions - to delivering SDM on the ground.

As a Government Agency, SNH recognises the potentially important role that SDM has in contributing positively to the outcomes of a broad spectrum of national strategies and in delivering site-specific public benefits, particularly when delivered at a landscape/deer population level. The spotlight is therefore firmly placed on the 'voluntary approach', and for DMGs to be able outwardly to demonstrate that the collective management of their population of deer is being carried out responsibly, sustainably, and in line with the Code.

By far the most effective way of demonstrating this will be through the development and implementation of a Deer

Management Plan not just for individual land owners, who have a recognised right to set out their own management objectives, but also through an overarching plan for the DMG. Through this wider plan, the DMG can agree not only terms of engagement between its members, but importantly, to carry out actions in order to demonstrate that the various elements of the Code (safeguarding of deer welfare, protection of the environment, supporting sustainable economic development and social well being) are being carried out collectively and collaboratively at the landscape/ deer population level.

The Wildlife Operations Unit of SNH very much supports this 'voluntary' approach and is committed to providing support to individual landowners and DMGs not only through dedicated area-based Wildlife Management Officers (WMOs), but also through the continued funding of a Collaborative Deer Management Officer (CDMO) post working in close partnership with ADMG.

Previously this role was carried out by Ron Rose however, this post has recently been taken over by me, albeit in a part-time capacity. Where the role of the WMOs will be to continue to provide on-the-ground advice and support to DMGs, for example, on the Deer Management Planning process, the role of the CDMO will be to continue to work in partnership with ADMG and individual DMGs but with a fresh emphasis on taking a more strategic approach to building capacity within Groups. Practically, it is hoped that this will be achieved through the provision of training and the development of guidance and analytical tools to aid the deer management planning process with the overall aim of strengthening the role and effectiveness of DMGs in delivering SDM.

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Advice Note: Organising a DMG Ground Count

Open range Deer Management Groups across Scotland now have, or are developing, Deer Management Plans that set out target deer populations which meet the individual and combined management objectives of all landholdings in a DMG. A basic requirement of deer management planning is to understand the shared deer population. SNH aerial counts will increasingly focus on designated sites rather than whole populations. That being the case an annual DMG ground foot count is the only realistic method of monitoring deer numbers and population trends on regular basis.

Most DMGs have carried out annual ground counts as a matter of routine over many years. However some are less successful than others. Reasons for count failure include:

- Weather conditions
- Lack of manpower
- Irregular counting
- Lack of full participation
- Lack of direction and organisation

This Advice Note is intended to set out some simple principles of successful deer counting which, if followed, should provide a basis for a succession of count results to an acceptable level of accuracy. It is accepted that counting wild deer populations is not an exact science and that accuracy will vary from year to year, not least because of variable weather and ground conditions. However, if a count is carried out consistently at the same time of year involving the same personnel operating to an established count pattern, possible inaccuracies are likely to be detected and factored in.

Conditions

Ideal count conditions in most cases are full snow cover across the whole count area and clear skies. However such conditions no longer occur on a regular annual basis and many ground counts are therefore likely to take place on 'black' ground where deer may be more widely distributed across their range. The count system must be sufficiently robust to achieve good results under black ground conditions.

Timing

The timing of deer counting, in late winter/early spring in most cases, can vary from Group to Group but in each case should, as far as possible, take place at the same time each year to ensure like for like comparison with previous count results.

Planning

Effective advance planning of a ground count is essential to a successful outcome and each DMG should appoint a designated count co-ordinator and, where appropriate, sub-area count leaders. Some weeks in advance of the proposed count date, the count team should meet to agree the count procedure as to timings, communication arrangements and reporting of results.

Contingency arrangements should also be agreed to ensure that, if count personnel are unavailable on the day there is a fall-back arrangement to ensure that no ground is missed. Where individual landholdings fail to count, for whatever

reason, the overall accuracy and value of the whole count may be destroyed and those who do participate are therefore let down. It is for the count co-ordinator to ensure that arrangements are in place to achieve full coverage under all circumstances.

Communication

Communication both before, during and after are an essential component of a successful ground count and there is no substitute for an advance meeting involving all count personnel with follow up by the count co-ordinator in respect of any absentees. This meeting will establish procedures which should provide for last minute communications to confirm the decision to proceed or, if the conditions are unsuitable, to set a new provisional date. During the count, radio communications are helpful in co-ordinating count movements and reporting deer presence and movements across boundaries. Some DMGs share a common radio network but it is accepted that this is not possible in all cases.

Method

Where there are sufficient personnel available, the common method of each landholding, taking responsibility for counting its own ground, but communicating where possible with neighbours, can provide a satisfactory result and acceptable levels of accuracy. Where some estates lack resident staff or there is an overall manpower shortage a 'line abreast' approach may be more effective. This involves all the count personnel within the DMG acting as a team and moving in line across the count area from one end of the DMG to the other. If necessary this approach can enable counting to be carried out over a longer period than a single day where geography allows an overnight pause without a likelihood of deer movement in or out of the area already counted. Recording the position of each group of deer by GPS, in a notebook, or marking a map is desirable.

Classification

Where large numbers of deer are to be counted it is acceptable to carry out unclassified counts. This may involve counting mature males separately and all other deer, hinds, calves and young males together as 'others'. Where this method is used to establish overall numbers, the population can be classified by follow up sample counts to establish average proportions of females, juveniles and young males and to assess sex ratio and recruitment across the whole population. These sample counts should be carried out within a few weeks of the main count but not necessarily on the same day on each landholding.

Results

On completion of the count, the count co-ordinator or sub area count leader will take responsibility for collating reports from all participants and presenting these in established spreadsheet format for early circulation to Group members. To increase the value of the spreadsheet it should include figures from the preceding count or series of counts for comparative purposes.

Note: See also Best Practice Guide
Population movement – Open Range Country

Scottish Venison: Moving Forward



Dick Playfair

25 per cent seems to be the quoted figure for the annual growth of the UK venison market, with the Olympics and Jubilee last year producing a spike in sales of 400 – 500 per cent over that period. Prince William's fondness for venison stew, according to the Daily Mail, may also have helped!

There remains concern that this continued increased demand, which cannot be met by UK wild or farmed venison producers, is opening up greater opportunities for imports, predominantly from New Zealand, Poland, Spain and elsewhere in Europe, often being highly competitive in price terms against UK product.

Stephen Gibbs, Chairman of the Scottish Venison Partnership, says:

"Particularly in the retail sector, price is a greater determinant than provenance. Venison is now on the shelves 12 months of the year, and the retail buyers have to source it from where they can. Where our wild venison scores heavily is in the restaurant and catering trade, particularly at the quality end where the Scottish cachet is valuable, and for further processed products. We also need to make greater inroads into the independent butchery sector, and plans are in hand to increase our exposure there this coming year continuing the work done in 2012."

Last year two events during Scottish Food Fortnight and immediately after Scottish Venison Day were staged in the Borders and Aberdeen specifically to reach butchers and give them more information about venison, coupled with the production of a new leaflet about venison and re-distribution of display material. These events, which featured butchery demonstrations of a red fore-quarter and roe rear-quarter by Bruce Brymer, were undertaken by ADMG and LDNS in conjunction with the Scottish Gamekeepers Association and the Scottish Federation of Meat Traders Association (SFMTA). Alex Hogg spoke for the SGA at the Borders event, and Peter Fraser in Aberdeen, and it is planned that there will be further evenings in the same vein later in 2013 in other locations in addition to a significant presence for venison at the Scottish Butchery Fair in Perth in May.

The drive to interest more farmers, deer forests and estates in opportunities in deer farming continues and it is intended that a further demonstration day is planned on this topic by Scottish Land & Estates and others later in the year.

There is also a proposal for a visit for SGA members to an estate where a deer park has been established using wild deer to supplement farmed stock, including a presentation by the Venison Advisory Service.

Says Stephen Gibbs:

"This is a critical time for development of Scotland's deer farming business. I know that there are a number of farms and estates that are exploring the potential including the development of what could be the biggest deer farm in the UK. The target set is an additional 1000 tonnes of venison per annum from farmed or park deer by 2020. If we are to come anywhere close to that figure and to take advantage of the market conditions that prevail, then we need to get moving."

"A number of other related proposals are now also coming forward, such as the setting up of a new killing facility in Scotland for farmed deer, the establishment of one or several deer farm demonstration units, and the exploring of PGI status for Scottish venison. While all these ancillary proposals are in the early stages they are further proof that this sector is starting to take itself seriously."

Stephen Gibbs also says that following the recent debacle with horse and pork meat being found in beef burgers, quality assurance has never been so important.

"The Scottish Quality Wild Venison scheme, which is steadily attracting more members, guarantees as much as can be possible that carcasses leave the assured estate's larder in a condition fit for entry into the food chain. Checks and balances such as this are vital in ensuring the integrity and provenance of our wild venison product. I would urge those who are not yet in it to consider the benefits of this scheme."



Nichola Fletcher



Bruce Brymer



Deer Management Groups: Upland and Lowland Scotland

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Wild deer are to be found in almost all parts of Scotland, including urban areas.

Upland deer management group areas (ADMG members)

Other DMG areas

Lowland areas with partial cover by lowland deer management groups

This is a schematic only. Areas marked are approximate and a DMG may not cover the whole of the area shown.

* The South Ross DMG area has now divided into five separate groups: Kintail, Lochalsh, Glenmoriston, Glenstrathfarrair, and Strathconnon.

Not to scale.

For contact details for upland deer management groups:

ADMG, c/o Bidwells
t: 01397 702433
e: finlay.clark@bidwells.co.uk

For contacts for lowland deer management groups:

LDNS, c/o Dalhousie Estates Office
t: 01356 624566
e: dalhousieestates@btinternet.com

Any comment on the map can be forwarded either to ADMG or LDNS as above. Your input is welcome. Versions of this map will be included on both the ADMG and LDNS websites in the near future.



Dick Playfair

While it is tempting to do so, it would be easy for ADMG to become over-alarmist about the work of the Land Reform Review Group (LRRG), and its call for evidence to which ADMG has responded.

That response is only on the basis of what increased - and therefore one assumes more fragmented - land ownership would mean for the management of Scotland's deer.

The founding principles of any deer management group include the collaboration of different rural businesses, often with widely different objectives, working together. In some areas this works well. In others we know it is tested to the limit. And we know how hard it can be to attract the appropriate people into the same room, let alone have them sit down, discuss, and agree a way forward.

Never has this been more evident than with the challenges faced by ADMG's low ground counterpart, the Lowland Deer Network Scotland (LDNS) where landholdings are smaller, and land use is equally diverse (but with a far greater predominance of urban fringe thrown into the mix). But sustainable deer management is now, following the WANE Act, expected of all those who have deer on their land. Collaboration and cooperation are keystones to success, but how hard are they to come by given all the different interests involved?

So, in its most basic terms we can say, and have said, that further fragmentation of landownership will make what is already a significant challenge yet more challenging. That is regardless of any threat to property rights or to land values.

We have been here before. In the preamble to the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 the rural sector was faced with what appeared to be an inordinate amount of potential new legislation – the community right to buy, the crofting

community right to buy, and the access legislation. Viewed through a glass darkly, the potential erosion of property rights seemed considerable, particularly when bundled with agricultural holdings reform, and other arguably necessary and totally defensible changes to some fairly antiquated legislation.

So land reform came. Ultimately while access legislation has affected and continues to affect us we have broadly learned to live with it, and with the test of time neither of the 'rights to buy' have amounted to any significant shift in the balance.

Why was this? Either the law was ineffective, or actually the whole supposition that "we must have change because ..." is based on a false premise. Is it actually wanted across the board, or is it driven by a few ideologues both in and out of Government who wish to see change for whatever reason? One can perhaps understand, if not share, an SNP enthusiasm to produce something with more teeth in the distant wake of a Labour administration's effort that delivered little by way of radical change.

So, is this a re-invigorated attempt to do with greater effect what in many respects stuttered the previous time around, with the urban equation bolted on to give this more popular appeal?

That said, it is not for ADMG to argue the case for anything other than how land reform in whatever guise will affect the sustainable management of deer. And it is difficult to give a reasonable answer when the proposition is not yet on the table. There will be further opportunities to comment when the LRRG recommendations and any subsequent legislation emerges.

The LRRG is still at the early stages of a process that is sure to gather pace over the next 12 months towards its 2014 report and, as that happens, we will have a clearer idea of how these proposals may impact on the deer management sector.

What is certain is that, to some degree, they will.

An Appreciation:
Fred Taylor (1948 - 2012)

Born in the Glen, Glenesk, he spent virtually all his life there. After finishing school, as early as possible he worked as a grouse beater, ponyman, shepherd and fencer before joining his brother Ab as a beatkeeper/stalker at Invermark in 1971. One of my father's most difficult decisions was which brother to choose as head keeper in 1981 when Bert Osler retired.

Fred was known and respected by so many, both in his profession and in the wider world. So many people passed through Invermark as grouse beaters, ponymen, guns and stalkers in the Lodge and Fred earned the respect of them all. Wherever I go in the countryside people from all walks of life ask after him with genuine affection and until this last year I would say fine and you could see the fond memories of his company in their faces.

Fred was a true man of the hill. He was born to it and as a boy admitted to staring out of the classroom window and longing for the holidays. He had an enormous amount of knowledge, some learnt and much picked up by experience and he passed this on to others with typical quiet generosity.

Those who knew him will all have their memories. Mine is lying beside him in the heather looking at a herd of stags seeking out ones to shoot and ones that we could just admire.

The driving of grouse was also one of his great skills, he seemed to have a natural aptitude for it and made it look easy although this came from a lifetime's experience. His understanding of the ground in different winds and conditions was uncanny and his natural gift of command meant even on grouse days he never had to raise his voice. What more can I say but goodbye dear friend and jealous guardian of Invermark.

The sun went doon behind the hill,
The moor grew dim and stern;
And soon an utter darkness fell
O'er mountain rock and burn.

Jamie Dalhousie

It is hoped that a new event showing Working Highland Ponies will take place at the GWCT Scottish Game Fair for the first time this July.

If you are interested in entering one or more ponies for The Fred Taylor Memorial Trophy, supported by GWCT and ADMG, please contact:

Dick Playfair t: 0131 445 5570 e: richard@playfairwalker.com for more information and an application to be forwarded.



Heading home - Fred with Cassie

An Urbanite Finding a New Comfort Zone

Zoe Kemp, Operations Manager, SNH - Forth

Waking up at six a.m. is not an unusual start to my day, but the rest of the day was far from a usual work day. As I drove north from my comfortable lodgings in Bridge of Allan I watched the temperature drop steadily until minus 3 turned to minus 8. The sun had barely risen by the time I reached Glen Falloch Lodge, nestled on the lower slopes between Loch Lomond and Crianlarich.

I had been invited to meet David Lowes, a partner of Glen Falloch Estate, and two of his guests, for breakfast at the Lodge and a briefing for my first day of hind stalking. To put this into context, I have never been on a shoot of any kind, I am an ex-vegetarian (but only just) and at the SNH Wildlife Management course about ten years ago I steadfastly refused to touch, never mind hold, a rifle. I am also proudly urban, a keen hill walker and decidedly left of centre. So, you can imagine my slight surprise in finding myself in tweeds and shooting jacket (and all thanks to Kenny Taylor for ensuring I looked the part), being shown the various workings of a rifle.



Setting up the shot

The invitation came about on a site visit to the recently developed Allt Fionn Glenn hydroelectric power scheme. David said jovially “Well Zoe, when are you coming stalking?” and it transpired to be an invitation I found hard to decline. As an Operations Manager I mostly find myself indoors, in meetings, talking about the tools we use to manage the natural heritage. I am sure many would agree that I should get out more...

And so, that is how I found myself bouncing along in the front of a freezing Argocat, up the precipitous path that lies to the north of the stunning Ben Glas waterfall. As we topped the steepest section, the sun finally emerged above the hill and brought with it the most delicious winter warmth. Views north to Ben Oss and Ben Dubhchraig started to open out as the snow topped mountains revealed their majestic wintery wildness.

As instructed, we crept off in single file behind Falcon, the Glen Falloch stalker. Falcon has been at this game for twenty years and follows in his dad’s footsteps as an estate manager. His knowledge of local land management and of deer behaviour, ecology and needs is reputedly high on unbeatable.

As we set off with lowered voices we heard, a few hundred yards below us, a dog barking. Into our view came two walkers with two dogs taking the popular route up to Ben Chabhair. This gave me my first pause for thought. I have so often been that walker, taking responsible access, enjoying the peace and tranquility of the mountains with friends, chatting and laughing as we wend our breathless way up the mountainside. I now wonder how often I’ve been spied on by a hidden stalker who curses me under his breath as I scare the wary deer into further reaches of the mountain.

I asked David about his view of walkers – how many people use the path? Are there issues that concern the estate? He responded positively – a lot of people use the popular routes on both sides of the Glen. It’s not usually a problem. But, sometimes, when the weather is harsh and the deer are up above the snowline, there can be problems when they have to use limited energy reserves to escape unwitting walkers and climbers. Repeated disturbance can affect the condition of the deer and in extreme cases may be enough to compromise a beast in poor condition.

After about half an hour or so of walking slowly along the ridge, Falcon spotted our first group of red deer. There were four hinds with six calves close by, and we assumed other hinds out of sight. This presented a dilemma. Who was following whom? The calf would have to be shot if the mother was killed and he needed to be sure which was the right one.

I asked whether the followers were weaned yet and got a mixed response which seemed to be yes, probably, but it’s unlikely a calf would get through the winter without its mother.

It is worth noting Falcon’s behaviour at this time. He is a short man, stockily built. On the hill he moves with incredible speed, agility and grace while we slipped and tripped behind him trying to keep up. His years of daily excursions on the hill have equipped him well. He is constantly alert and, on spotting a group of deer, his movements change subtly to become more fluid. Think of a cat spotting a bird in the garden. As he eases himself onto the rise above the deer and sets up the shot, his movements are almost imperceptible.

His guest, John, a gentleman farmer in his late forties from an estate in Wiltshire, struggled to emulate the smooth movements and shuffled in much more human form onto the rise.

As we lay in the heather waiting for Falcon and John, I asked David about deer and estate management. They have increased their cull this year to fifty hinds to compensate for increases in fenced areas on neighbouring Forestry Commission land. What do they see as the purpose of deer management? Is it about selling stag shooting? Providing venison to the market? What contribution does deer management make to the Estate? His answers surprised me.

Deer management for Glen Falloch Estate is about management of a quality herd – the average weight of the hinds has increased as the numbers have reduced – and good land management. They are proud of their Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and the wild landscapes they consider themselves the guardians of. Deer management activities contribute about five percent to the estate finance, apparently less than it costs to manage the herd.

Meanwhile, the first shot, taken by John, hit home; the silencer on the rifle meaning that only a deep thud was audible from our seat about twenty metres away. By the time we reached the hind, the other deer had scarpered and she was clearly dead. I had been a little scared to approach, fearing that she may still be alive. Falcon got to work, cutting a vein in the neck to release the blood and ‘gralloching’ the carcass to remove the stomach. As he did so, he explained how he inspected the spleen to look for disease, and similarly the glandular nodes on the stomach. He looks for signs of anthrax, tuberculosis and foot and mouth.

The shot was accurate and my fears of a half-live beast were unfounded, though not completely according to Falcon – even the very best shot will make a mistake at some point and have to follow up. The bullet had entered the shoulder, taken off the top of the heart and exited through her opposite ribs. She was dead before hitting the ground.

The hind was a yearling, so last year’s calf. She was small for her age and not in great condition. Falcon felt it was good to have taken her – she may not have made it through the winter. Her face was pretty, her coat thick and warm. I felt a pang of sadness, but no stronger feeling, at this taking of a life. I was surprised at myself. I eat venison – the only meat I eat with any regularity - and am keen on management of a sustainable food resource. But, I had expected a stronger emotional reaction.

As we moved round the hill, the view had opened up to keep Ben Oss to the north but now with Ben Venue opposite to the west and Loch Lomond reaching south to our left. While we had lunch Falcon reflected on his frustration at the day. The sun split the cloudless sky, the wind was so low that torn grass fell almost vertically and it was so silent you could hear a pin drop.

Of course, while this provided a spectacular day for a hill walk, it was not ideal stalking conditions. The deer were wary. They could hear us moving about on the hillside. We were too visible as well; being down-wind of them meant that we were in direct sunlight. We continued heading south, tracking a group of deer round to above the top end of Loch Lomond. All this way, Falcon was dragging the hind behind him and would accept no help from his guests. I can believe his boast-less claim that he can drag two hinds or a large stag across this terrain, so this hind was really not much of a burden. On a good day he may have to drag four hinds in two trips across the hill.

Occasionally, he would drop the hind and leave us hiding behind some crags while he sped gracefully round the hillside looking for a clear shot. After a second shot by John resulted in a clean miss, we headed down hill and into the top side of the woods. A buzzard circled behind us, above our lunch spot, we assume in search of the gralloched innards.

Into the top of the woods opposite Ardlui Marina, we left the hind and traversed across the hill following a couple of roe deer. Falcon kept his eye up the hill and we realised he had spotted a large group of red deer that were feeding in the improved pastures above the loch and on the slopes above us. Finally we were signaled to stop below the brow of a small hillock. I sat waiting, watching the sun setting behind Ben Venue, the light starting to fade on Loch Lomond. There was something primal about what we were doing: it had honesty and some kind of clarity I had not experienced before. I felt at ease with what was happening, despite the loss of life it entailed. It felt real in some very basic sense of hunting and gathering food.

Finally, the shot was set up and a second hind was taken. This was a much older beast, about seven or eight years old. The rest of the group moved off across the hill. As we watched Falcon deal with the carcass we could see about eighty deer in two

groups moving up the hillsides above us; silhouettes on the skyline in the light of the setting sun.



The gralloch

The hinds were dragged down the hillside and loaded into a boat to take us across the loch and then by Land Rover back to the Lodge. The last activity was to prepare the carcasses for collection by the game dealer. I’ll leave out the more gory details of this process, but it was fascinating and reassuring to watch such professionalism and attention to hygienic detail. The meat can end up on a supermarket shelf and spot inspections can be undertaken at any time. No short cuts were taken and as Falcon deftly wielded his cleaned, sharpened knives, I had the distinct impression that this wasn’t just for show. Falcon is registered to undertake certain inspections of the carcass and certify it fit for human consumption. So, the buck really does stop with him.

In discussion later with a neighbour of the estate, as she tucked into a supermarket pork sausage, she asked whether I didn’t find it a bit inhumane, all this shooting (her husband shoots, but it’s not her thing). I was able, hand on heart, to say that even as a minimalist meat eater, I would be returning home in the belief that eating hill venison is entirely humane and something I will proudly support.

David’s niece asked if I thought I would ever shoot. Well, not without a lot of practice on a non-living target. But, if this experience has taught me anything, I will never say never...

And the lessons I learned? I feel more credible with estate managers. I understand more about the business they are in and how deer fit into upland estate management. Of course, there are many drivers for deer management, some of which we find harder to support when it leads estates and land-owners to want high deer numbers.

Glen Falloch is a very open estate. We’ve had positive working relationships with them in dealing with their hydro schemes, SSSIs and Scottish Rural Development Programme proposals. They are very positive about working with agencies and in trying to find positive solutions. I understand that the Estate is run as a business. But, I do firmly believe they have the quality of the land, and the benefits it provides, to both themselves and wider society, at heart.

Scotland's Rural College: A New Name but a Strong Heritage

Ken Rundle, SRUC

SRUC may be a new and unfamiliar set of initials, but the basic elements of Scotland's Rural College and its commitment to rural industries and communities remains as strong as ever, including those involved in wildlife management.

In October last year Barony, Elmwood and Oatridge Colleges merged with SAC (Scottish Agricultural College) bringing together three respected further education providers and Scotland's leading rural Higher Education Institution. SRUC now combines internationally renowned Research and Consultancy activity with an integrated education programme offering practical training from a strictly local level right through to undergraduate and research degree qualifications recognised worldwide.

It means SRUC's Barony, Elmwood and Oatridge "Campuses" will still be enrolling students as usual, while Riverside (Ayr), Craibstone (Aberdeen) and Edinburgh continue to recruit new entrants to degree courses. With the new arrangement in its early stages there is much still to do, but there is some excitement amongst teaching staff about the potential of Scotland's Rural College to improve the range of courses and choices available to students at all levels.

Already students following a degree course in Countryside Management at Ayr have taken the opportunity to co-operate with a forestry skills course delivered at Barony and other ideas are in the pipeline. Even SAC Consulting, a division of Scotland's Rural College is becoming more involved in estate management.

Meanwhile it is business as usual for those with an interest in gamekeeping, deer management and fishing. From their south of Scotland heartlands both Elmwood and Barony campuses continue to contribute to the wider Scottish provision. Applicants are welcome for the National Certificate and Higher National Certificate courses in Gamekeeping and Wildlife Management offered by Elmwood. Shorter courses from ATV, Meat Hygiene (large and small game) and Pest Control remain popular, either as elements of other courses or stand-alone.

Elmwood and Barony are involved with Deer Management training, supporting DMQ levels 1 and 2 in various ways.

For example Barony is home to a commercial red deer farm and has delivered courses on farmed deer in addition to Deer Stalking. It also acts as an Assessment Centre for a range of clients across the UK and runs assessment days for several Deer Management Groups in the central belt. They have several Assessors in England who run peripatetic assessments on behalf of Barony campus for the Deer Initiative and Training organisations.

Another, less well known aspect of Barony activity is the fish farm with a distance learning course on Sport Fishery Operations. It covers fish capture and fish population assessment, habitat assessment, water ecology, fishery maintenance and hatchery operations. They have maintained a close working relationship with the Angling Development Board of Scotland, developing qualifications for 14 - 16 year olds, and providing facilities for Angling Coach training.

Links with schools are important to SRUC and Elmwood is proud of the short gamekeeping curriculum designed for local secondary schools.

They have been successfully delivering gamekeeping courses at Elmwood for almost twenty years now, and Course leader Jim Goodland is proud of the way they have designed the content and delivery of each award. In light of the recent reports of the success newly qualified youngsters

are having in getting jobs, what they are doing obviously suits the needs of the students, and the gamekeeping sector.

"The course is designed to give students experience of both upland and lowland working, so they gain experience in all aspects of the industry," says Jim. "Continual development with the integration of practical skills and underpinning knowledge ensures that students learn and develop a diverse range of skills. They learn best practice, gain work experience and an understanding of legislation that enhances their employability. It helps them gain entry to their desired career choice."

As ever the popularity and attraction of these courses reflects on the number of applicants. Last academic intake saw 70+ applicants for the NC course alone, with the three-year average being very similar. Geographically the nucleus of applicants comes from Fife, Tayside, the central belt, and Perthshire, although there are applicants and students from Western Isles, Yorkshire, and Wales.

More information: www.sruc.ac.uk



Final year NC Gamekeeping students during a shoot at Cantyhall in Fife, one of the estates managed for the owners.

North Highland College

The North Highland College (NHC) was founded in 1959 as Thurso Technical College.

Over the past decade, the College curriculum has evolved into that of a true tertiary institution serving the needs of the North Highland area, with campuses in Dornoch, Alness and Thurso. NHC is proud to offer courses at all levels of the Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework and is committed to the provision of high quality programmes on a sustainable basis.

Currently, the College enrolls in excess of eight thousand students annually and is a partner of the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI), a unique partnership of fifteen colleges and research institutions across the Highlands and Islands.

Gamekeeping Courses at NHC:

NHC runs three courses in gamekeeping and wildlife management:

- Modern Apprenticeship (MA) in Gamekeeping SVQ Level 2
- National Certificate (NC) Gamekeeping
- Higher National Certificate (HNC) Gamekeeping with Wildlife Management.

All three courses operate by giving the trainees/students a placement on a sporting estate and they attend NHC Thurso for short blocks of study.

The main aim of the MA training programme is to introduce apprentices to the many skills required by the modern day gamekeeper. Apprentices learn the daily routine of a sporting estate and safe working practices in a remote rural environment. Apprentices are employed status and come to College for off the job training and assessment.

Throughout the NC course there is a strong bias towards practical 'hands on' training. This includes high ground estates with deer stalking, grouse shooting, and fishing on the famous northern salmon rivers, and low ground estates with pheasant, partridge and wildfowl shooting.

The HNC builds on the skills gained at NC level, with emphasis on the management of game and wildlife, particularly deer and grouse, and their habitats. The practical resources available to the apprentices/students while on placement or at the college are very good and this enhances each student's learning experience.

NHC currently has a lease arrangement with Sandside Estate with its wide range of learning of environments capable of supporting the needs and aspirations of its apprentices/students. The services and opportunities for learning there include: hill and woodland stalking ground; deer larder; pheasant shoot; flight pond for ducks; public rights of way and areas for recreation; fishing; and a wide range of habitats ranging from woodland, farmland, blanket bog, dry heath, sea and coast. Similar resources are available on the other sporting estates through the College's extensive network.

NHC has been at the forefront in developing programmes for gamekeeping and stalking, has built up a range of expertise within the college and developed excellent relationships with estates, estate keepers and specialists such as Forestry Commission Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage.

More information: www.northhighland.ac.uk



Hands-on training at NHC