

This time it really is for real



**Andrew Gordon, Vice Chairman,
Association of Deer Management Groups**

It's a familiar story, but please don't regard it this time as the same message being trotted out, which you can read, and then possibly

ignore under the pretext you have heard and seen it all before. This time you can't.

To put it bluntly, the deer sector again, and the voluntary principle which the majority of us stand for, is under scrutiny. It's under scrutiny at Scottish Parliament level; in some cases it is under scrutiny at local level. It is being examined by the media; it is a part of a much wider debate on land ownership as one of the privileges that comes with owning wild land. There are critics out there that don't like it – and their argument is given weight by the fact that in some cases the voluntary principle isn't working. That cannot be denied.

The RACCE Committee of the Scottish Parliament has given us a good opportunity to state our case, to fight our corner, to correct misinformation, to sell the benefits of those DMGs that do the job and do it well.

But regrettably the standard is perceived often (and unfairly) as that of the lowest common denominator, and Rob Gibson, who chairs the RACCE Committee, and is MSP for Caithness, Ross and Sutherland, clearly saw one example of breakdown as evidence that the whole sector was in disarray. The Committee that he chairs has now reported to the Minister, and some crystal clear recommendations have been made that cannot be ignored – by anyone.

We are fortunate in that we are working with Government Agencies, particularly in SNH and FES, that recognize how the current system functions and how it can be improved. That is why the DMG Benchmark is now being put out for consultation. This is the start of a process of self-examination by DMGs and the owners of the landholdings that make up their membership, and regrettably there is no opt-out. Ultimately we need to come up with a system that outlines the 'standard' that we expect a properly functioning DMG to achieve. We are being proactive; we have decided to do this ourselves as an organisation, voluntarily. We have chosen to jump before we are pushed – because the alternative, and it is the only alternative – is that it will be done to us. We need self-examination of DMGs and we need a way to assess them and monitor progress.

The draft Benchmark is a part of the joint collaborative deer management project with SNH. It will be out for consultation for three months, and then our final document will be launched in July, probably at Scone.

We have to move quickly. And we all, and by that I mean all DMGs and the members of those DMGs, have to get involved – however reluctant they might have been in the past to come to the table, or considered that the decision-making forum of their DMG had no part to play in determining their own management objectives. We have to demonstrate that we are making progress if we want to retain control of our own future affairs. We have no option.

Don't be lulled into thinking that those who have muddled by in the past can continue to do so. They can't. Don't think that a change to the Deer Act is out of the question. It isn't. And don't think that SNH won't use powers available to them to get reluctant DMGs to function properly. They can.

So, this is a wake up call – possibly for the final time. Get involved or lose that control to which you have become accustomed. And if you think this is too much, a step too far, and not achievable in your particular circumstance ADMG is here to help.

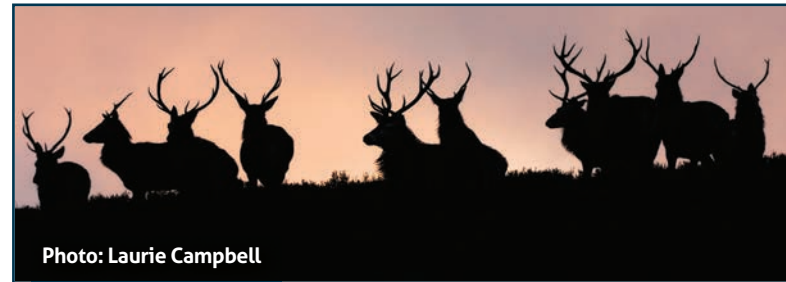


Photo: Laurie Campbell

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Scottish Parliament Rural Affairs Climate Change and Environment (RACCE) Committee Review of the Deer and the Natural Heritage

DMG members should all be aware of the intense interest in the RACCE Committee sessions that took place at the Scottish Parliament in Autumn 2013 when Richard Cooke, ADMG Chairman, responded to questions from the Committee on behalf of ADMG alongside representatives of the Scottish Gamekeepers Association and Scottish Land & Estates with the NGOs, RSPB, the John Muir Trust and the Scottish Wildlife Trust also giving evidence. At a second session the public bodies, SNH, FES, the Cairngorms National Park Authority, and Prof John Milne as an independent, also underwent the same question and answer process. Considerable written evidence was submitted. The ADMG evidence has been circulated and is on the website.

A great deal of material, both written and spoken, was produced from all quarters – evidence in itself that this is a matter of great importance to all upland deer managers and also for deer managers throughout the lowlands. It deserves close attention.

As background, and as was the case before the passing of the Wildlife & Natural Environment Act in 2011, strong representations have been made that the voluntary approach to deer management is not fit for purpose and that further regulation is required. The Committee has now sent its report to the Minister.

The Committee hearings did provide the opportunity for arguments in favour of the voluntary principle, as well as those in favour of more regulation, to be fully aired and examined in a balanced manner. The public bodies, SNH, Forest Enterprise Scotland and the Cairngorms National Park Authority have acknowledged progress made by many (but not all) DMGs across Scotland since the Code was introduced in 2012. ADMG has also been commended for the support it has given to DMGs in embracing changes that recognise the public interest in sustainable deer management.

It has also been well noted that the new legislation and the Code have not yet had sufficient time to be judged but that they will be reviewed within the next few years. However early progress will need to continue and be evident in respect of every DMG if the present voluntary basis of deer management is to be allowed to continue.

What ADMG has emphasised is that a 'one-size-fits-all' prescriptive regulatory framework for deer management would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to design and to implement to cover both upland and low ground and that if it were it would be bureaucratic and costly. It would not help in resolving conflicts that arise within individual DMGs about agreeing deer densities that suit all members and that meet economic and social as well as environmental objectives. The challenge therefore for the whole sector, all those who manage deer, including stalking estates, grouse moor managers, environmentalists with habitat improvement objectives, farmers, foresters, and others, is to work together in a reasonable and respectful way as set out in the ADMG Principles of Collaboration, which were commended in the Committee hearings.

Deer Management Groups are currently under scrutiny as never before and increasingly their effectiveness is likely to be judged against a number of criteria such as:

- Regular well attended meetings with representation of all land management interests and appropriate public agencies.
- An up to date and effective forward-looking Deer Management Plan based on a consensus between members.
- Application of the ADMG Principles of Collaboration between members.
- A commitment to act in accordance with the Code of Practice for Deer Management.
- Promotion of Best Practice to ensure deer welfare and public safety
- Co-ordinated practical actions including deer counts, habitat monitoring, cull setting and allocation.
- A commitment to Competence represented by DSC 1 and 2 and 'trained hunter' status for venison production.
- External communication arrangements to ensure that relevant interests, particularly local interests, are kept regularly informed about deer management in the DMG area and have an opportunity to comment on, for example, the Deer Management Plan.

What this means in summary is more collaboration, more communication and more compromise – as well as evidence of it.

The RACCE Committee reported to the Minister on Wednesday 5 February, and ADMG's response is printed opposite. However, and despite this outcome, there remains no doubt that deer management under the voluntary principle is also a target for attack in the wider and recurrent land reform debate. The voluntary principle remains regarded in certain quarters as a privilege and there are those with a far more hard line political agenda that would like to see that removed, regulation imposed and paid for by the sector (not the public purse) or, as the backstop position, sporting rates back on the agenda.



Red stag with hinds on Croick Estate.
Photo: James Hall

Wider land reform matters



Dick Playfair, Political Adviser to ADMG

Land reform is again very much back on the political agenda. The Land Reform Review Group appointed by the Scottish Government, had a shake-up of its membership last year and, under the Chair of Alison Elliot, now comprises Ian Cooke, Dr John Watt, Pip Tabor, and Robin Callander as a special advisor. This follows the departure of Prof James Hunter and Dr Sarah Skerratt last year around the time of the publication of the Group's initial report. This was felt to be a relatively anodyne document and possibly not hard-hitting enough by those wishing to see more radical recommendations. The Group is however due to report again in April this year and it will be interesting to see whether its proposals and recommendations have hardened.

There is also now the Inquiry by the House of Commons Select Committee on a comprehensive programme of land reform in Scotland. That committee launched its evidence gathering in September and came to Scotland in December to hear oral evidence. Its remit is of concern in that it revisits much of the ground covered by the Land Reform Scotland Act but clearly with the intention of taking this legislation much further. Within its self-established field of examination for example is land ownership in Scotland in general; subsidies and grants paid to estate owners and the benefits and disadvantages of the current system of land tenure; broadening community ownership; agricultural tenancy and the absolute right to buy, and land value taxation.

Latterly also Paul Wheelhouse MSP, Minister for Rural Affairs, the Environment and Climate Change, has entered the debate. He told David Miller of BBC Scotland in January:

"My party genuinely believes that there should be a fair distribution of land," and that "communities should have access to land to fulfil their aspirations." He added: "I think if we don't see a fairer distribution of land, then we in Parliament will have failed the people of Scotland."

That then is the background against which current developments on Scotland's system of deer management are unfolding – no one can disagree that there are a number of clear threats re-emerging and, as part of the wider system of land tenure in Scotland, the deer sector again has its challenges to face.

Photo: Laurie Campbell



Response to RACCE Committee Report to the Minister ADMG Media Statement 5 February



Richard Cooke, Chairman, ADMG

We are encouraged by the recommendations from the Committee to the Minister, and there is much in the report with which we agree, for example that the impacts of deer rather than numbers are most important, and that it is premature to undertake a review of the Code of Practice on Deer Management at this time.

We also agree with the recommendation that the voluntary deer management system must become more effective in terms of deer management planning, transparency and accountability.

Whilst there are many Deer Management Groups (DMGs) that are exemplary in what they do there are a number that, for one reason or another, do not attain the required level of performance. We know that there has to be improvement in certain quarters and, even before the inquiry began last Autumn, we had actively begun the process to effect this.

We have plans to bring those Groups that are not performing up to speed, to improve commitment to and delivery of deer management plans and to ensure that DMGs are more transparent and their communications enhanced where necessary. Our Deer Management Group 'Benchmark' will be launched for consultation at our AGM on 20 February, and this will lead to appropriate steps being taken where required.

We note the timeframe as laid down in the report for all DMGs to have Deer Management Plans in place by end 2016. This fits with our own thinking and we believe is a realistic deadline.

Overall, and as we said at the time, we consider the RACCE Committee inquiry to have been fair and even-handed. This outcome is evidence of that, and provides us with a range of areas going forward where we can demonstrate improvement. We will continue to work with Government and its Agencies to show that the voluntary system, with their appropriate support, can be entrusted to deliver.

Deer Management on the National Forest Estate



Bruce Sewell, Forest Management Officer, Forest Enterprise Scotland

The National Forest Estate is managed by Forest Enterprise Scotland, an agency of Forestry Commission Scotland and answerable

to Scottish Ministers, who are the owners of the Estate.

The National Forest Estate (NFE), extends to some 650,000 hectares of land - about 9% of Scotland's land area. Around 460,000 hectares is wooded and the remainder consists of open land and uplands managed for agriculture, nature conservation and recreation.

During Spring 2013 FES publically consulted on the future of deer management on the NFE, our current practices and future directions. A revised document, taking into account responses to the consultation will be published early in 2014, and through it FES will lay out the important role deer play on the National Forest Estate, and how we will work with stakeholders to manage them and their impacts.

In line with the Scottish Government's Land Use Strategy, FES has adopted an 'ecosystem' approach to deer management as a part of our wider management on the NFE. This approach is also shaped by Scotland's Wild Deer Strategy, the SNH Code of Practice on Deer Management and the Strategic Directions for the NFE.

The NFE is managed in accordance with international sustainable forest management standards. We promote opportunities for all to visit, enjoy, and learn – with about 9 million visits per year. We encourage local communities to get involved with the Estate and offer opportunities for communities to acquire Estate land. We work to conserve and enhance biological diversity, cultural heritage and, landscape quality. We manage the Estate to increase its value to the Scottish economy.

FES delivers these benefits largely through managing living ecosystems and careful stewardship of the NFE's natural heritage. This includes the protection and management of a wide range of habitats at the local and landscape scale including wetlands, riparian zones, rivers, lochs, raised bogs, marshland, upland moors, mountains, native woodland, conifer and broadleaved forests, crofting land and agricultural ground. In addition FES manages a large number of designated sites and aims to maintain or achieve favourable condition in these and across the wider NFE.



As part of our land management planning we are working with the Moorland Forum to explore how the NFE's open ground (one third of the Estate), can make an increased environmental, economic and social contribution towards the objectives of the Scottish Government's Land Use Strategy.

The replanting of land after felling is a significant part of FES's business and vital to retaining compliance with independent forest certification. The replanting programme is set to substantially increase from 4,800 ha per year in 2013/14 to 6,000 ha in 2015/16, in part due to the impacts of tree diseases such as Dothistroma which affects pine species and Phytophthora which affects larch species. Infected crops have to be felled swiftly and the land replanted with alternative species, many of which are very palatable to deer.

Alongside replanting FES undertakes the planting of around 500 to 1,000 ha of new woodland each year, and we manage several thousand hectares of continuous cover forests with associated natural regeneration of young trees. FES figures indicate that approximately 85 million planted trees, and natural regeneration will be at the vulnerable establishment stage (approximately between 0-5 years) at any given time.



From the above mix of land use and management regimes we provide ecosystem provisioning services such as the production of timber, farmed and wild food (such as venison), clean water, minerals and renewable energy (i.e. wind and hydro energy). We also deliver regulating services such as the sequestration of carbon in growing trees, flood mitigation, cleaning city air and encouraging pollinating insects. All this supports the basic natural cycles of water, nutrients and life.

Deer are keystone species and have the capacity to affect our delivery of ecosystem services across the NFE. At the right density deer are a valued part of the forest fauna, can help to maintain vegetation structure and plant diversity, and are an important attraction for visitors to the Estate. The four species of deer found on the NFE are roe, red, sika and fallow.

Although their contribution can be positive, deer impacts such as browsing and fraying of young trees/shrub layers, bark-stripping of thicket-stage and mature timber crops, grazing of ground vegetation and soil erosion can be serious and needs to be managed.

For successful establishment and good forest health, we look to contain damage to less than 10% of vulnerable trees. Where ground vegetation development and composition is important to meet conservation goals, we determine what level of herbivore impacts are appropriate and tolerable. We implement deer management plans to try and limit negative impacts. Whilst tree damage impacts vary across the NFE, between 2009 and 2012 FES estimated that annually between 15% and 20% of the leading shoots of young trees suffered some damage. Without deer management this figure would be significantly higher.

FES uses a combination of methods to control the impacts of deer, their numbers and their movement on the NFE. These methods

include culling, fencing and tree species choice to mitigate deer impacts, all which depend upon local circumstances.

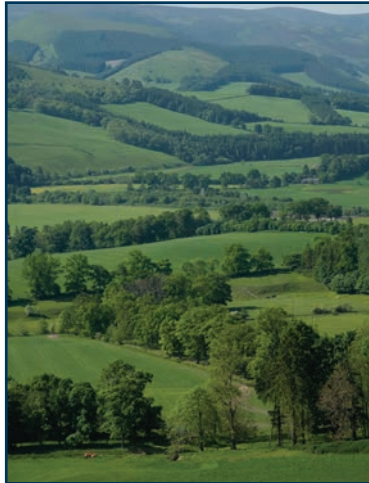
Culling is carried out by a FES Wildlife Ranger or by professional deer management contractors in areas which are remote or with difficult terrain, have high deer densities, a number of sensitive and vulnerable sites or high public usage. Culling in readily accessible areas with lower deer densities, fewer vulnerable sites and low public usage is often offered to competent recreational stalkers.

In some areas with high deer densities we accept that tree species diversification is not possible and plant less vulnerable tree species, particularly Sitka spruce, to reduce browsing impacts locally. However, increasing forest diversity is a priority for many of our wider land management objectives and as a response to environmental change such as climate change and tree diseases.

FES maintains around 2,250 kilometres of deer fencing, mostly perimeter fencing, to create a physical barrier to reduce the number of wild deer moving onto the NFE. During the five year period 2008/09 to 2012/13 FES invested an average of £952,000 per year on constructing, inspecting, maintaining, repairing and dismantling deer fences. Our policy is to prioritise funds largely towards perimeter deer fencing, particularly in the red deer range.

In order to protect the NFE's trees and natural heritage FES has an ongoing programme of culling. In 2012/13, 29,790 deer were culled. This figure represents around 30% of the Scottish national cull of 97,630. The FES cull breakdown was roe 14,260 (48%), red 11,850 (40%), sika 3,240 (11%), and fallow 430 (1%).

In 2012/13 FES activity represented 54% of Scotland's sika cull, 43% of the roe cull, 25% of the fallow cull and 21% of the red cull. Overall the FES cull density is 4.5 deer per km² per year across the NFE.



Of the 11,850 red deer culled on the NFE, 5,385 were stags, including stags culled outwith the traditional red deer range.

FES and private sector stalkers are used to achieve the annual cull. The 50 FES Wildlife Rangers culled 15,540 (52%) in 2012/13, plus 30 contractors who culled 10,800 (36%), and 400 recreational stalkers who between them culled 3,450 (12%). Health and Safety is a priority for FES and efforts are focused on competence and training. Currently a strategy is being developed to increase the skills and the number of trainee/apprentice Wildlife Rangers working in FES. FES continues to look at opportunities for recreational stalking.

FES makes wide use of private resources and expertise in its deer management operations including contract and recreational stalkers, surveyors, fence contractors, plant hire, larder construction/ maintenance, waste uplift, helicopter hire (deer counts), and firearms dealers (inspections & repairs).

In order to protect against negative impacts throughout the year, FES utilise out of season and night shooting authorisations agreed with Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). Public safety, professional standards, deer welfare and venison quality are key aspects of our deer management operation. FES requires that all stalkers on the NFE have Deer Stalking Certificate 1 and 2 (or DSC 1 during a 12 month period training towards DSC 2).

In 2012/13 FES supplied 25,875 carcasses, that met the Scottish Quality Wild Venison (SQWV) standards, direct to the venison



Deer Management on the National Forest Estate (Continued)

industry or to the public, through local sales or direct to the game dealer. FES are currently assessing the potential to work with the sector for a venison deer park project on the NFE and are maximising the culling of stags early in the season to provide venison into the supply chain when the supply of venison to the industry is limited.

Central to FES's deer management work is collaboration with stakeholders. FES supports a number of collaborative deer initiatives, by contributing a total of £34,200 per year to the Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG), Scottish Quality Wild Venison Assurance Scheme (SQWV), and the Scottish Venison Partnership (SVP). FES collaborates and engages with a large number of Deer Management Groups (DMGs) and is active in working with the Lowland Deer Network Scotland (LDNS) and SNH to establish new groups in lowland Scotland.

FES recognises the principles of common interest, mutual respect for neighbour objectives and the need to minimise opportunities for conflict. FES is working to improve its advance communication of intentions and objectives such as proposed cull targets, deer fencing projects, increased restocking programmes which may affect open range stocks, and implementation of local Deer Management Plans. FES supports ADMG's intention to develop the DMG Benchmark or similar and ADMG/SNH's work to develop the Collaborative Deer Management Project 2014.

FES works closely with SNH and is represented on bodies such as the Executive Committee of the ADMG, the Deer Management Qualification Board, LDNS, SVP, SQWV, Deer Management Round

Table, the Wild Deer National Approach Steering Group and Scotland's Wild Deer Best Practice Steering Group.

FES continues to work to achieve evidence-based deer management, including the wise use of fencing and setting of cull targets. In aiming to deliver proactive rather than reactive deer management, FES is working to develop an increasingly consistent method of assessing deer density (which is closely correlated to deer damage impacts), across the NFE as a means of improving the targeting of our limited resources and the overall cull effort.

As the NFE increasingly has woodland close to urban areas, FES has been developing urban deer management skills by working closely with SNH and LDNS to raise the profile of this important topic. This work includes the use of thermal imaging equipment to count deer and timing our deer management activities to avoid busy periods of human activity in our urban woodlands.

Early in 2011 we agreed with ADMG a protocol for managing deer related emergency situations on the NFE, such as winter incursions of deer from neighbouring land when snow and ice affect the integrity of deer fences.

FES net expenditure on all aspects of deer management in 2012/13 was £5,244,000 (£1,492,000 of this spend was on deer fencing). Expenditure takes into account infrastructure such as deer larders, access tracks and deer glades, Wildlife Ranger equipment, planning, collaborative work, contributions to the deer initiatives, surveys, fencing and culling operations. Income from stalking activities and venison sales in 2012/13 was £1,800,000.



Substitution of roe for red one route to meet market demand



Dick Playfair, Secretary,
The Scottish Venison Partnership

Until possibly 10 years ago venison was regarded as something of a seasonal speciality for special occasions. But that has changed – sales are climbing steadily particularly in the retail sector and not enough venison, whether red or roe, wild or farmed, can be produced to meet the current UK market and export requirement.

And looking ahead, if Scotland (and elsewhere in the UK) is to produce enough venison to satisfy growing UK market demand then either we are going to have to change our taste and eat more roe, or more of what we eat will be coming from farms and parks. The push is on in Scotland to encourage more farmers to consider diversifying into deer.

Retail sales of venison in the UK rose from £32M in 2006 to £43M in 2009, and that growth continues, some reporting by as much as 25 per cent. The Co-op stocked venison for the first time in 2012, and last month it was reported that venison sales through Waitrose were up 92 per cent year on year.

The Scottish Venison Partnership, the body that represents Scottish venison producers, estimates that the UK market is somewhere under 4000 tonnes per annum. Scotland currently produces around 3500 tonnes of which the majority comes from wild red deer shot on the hill, with a sizeable proportion also from smaller roe deer – although much of the roe venison goes for export. Venison imports to the UK are probably in the region of 1200 tonnes per annum, from New Zealand, Poland and latterly from Spain. So around a third of the venison consumed in the UK is not domestically produced.

The challenge however for the venison sector is that the national red deer cull is declining. Five years ago around 65,000 red deer were culled, but that figure has now reduced to around 57,000.

What can be deduced also is that any future increase in market volume will need to be met either from imports or from product substitution i.e. of roe venison for red which is good news for low ground deer managers who should, with astute marketing and widening contacts, find expanding markets for the venison they produce.

A further source of supply will be Scotland's expanding deer farming and deer parks sector where a target has been set to produce 1000 additional tonnes of venison by 2020.

Behind the scenes there is much happening to give Scotland a greater presence in the venison sector in the future. The Deer Farm and Park Demonstration Project will be launched in April and has received an injection of £95,000 funding through the Scottish Government and European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development Skills Development Scheme. The initiative by Scotland Food and Drink, SFQC, NFU Scotland and the Scottish Venison Partnership will over the course of the next two years provide 10 days of seminars, workshops, training and information exchange on two demonstration units – one a deer park, the other a deer farm. More information can be found at:

<http://deerfarmdemoproject.scottish-venison.info>

The Hutton Research Institute with Aberdeen University and the Scottish Venison Partnership is also undertaking a study to identify barriers preventing the expansion of deer farming in Scotland enabled by funding through Interface Food and Drink.

The SRDP Pillar 2 consultation, which closes on 28 February, also holds promise for those considering a deer farm or deer park enterprise as well as for collaborative projects through DMGs, and the Scottish Venison Partnership will be responding favourably to the opportunities that are emerging as the new schemes evolve.

As always, quality is increasingly important, and the drive is on to bring on board more SQWV accredited estate and deer forest producers and processors. It is notable that the Food Charter for both the 2014 Commonwealth Games and the 2014 Ryder Cup expresses that venison for these events will only be sourced from SQWV accredited producers - further evidence of the direction of travel and the growing importance of quality across the board.

The expansion of the venison market in the UK can be attributed to a number of factors, not least the level of publicity it receives on national and regional media – venison is frequently on Masterchef and on other mainstream cookery programmes, and venison recipes are featured regularly in the press without any prompting from the producers. Consumers have also had the benefit of trying products such as venison sausages, burgers and pies to introduce them to the meat, and there are excellent smoked venison products, venison chorizo and other specialities widely available.

And finally, congratulations to pioneering Venison ambassador Nichola Fletcher awarded an MBE in the New Year Honours List.

For more information about Scottish venison see the Scottish Venison Partnership website: www.scottish-venison.info

For more information about deer parks and deer farming contact the Venison Advisory Service (VAS) www.venisonadvisory.co.uk



Deer Larder, Croick Estate.
Photo: Jim Hall

Scottish Country Sports Tourism Group launches German language website

The Scottish Country Sports Tourism Group has launched a German language version of its hugely successful website to promote the country's unique shooting, stalking and fishing to hunters on the Continent.

SCSTG Project Coordinator, Victoria Brooks commented:

"Germany represents a large market of country sports enthusiasts keen to come to Scotland. There is easy access from some of the main German cities and we want to ensure that Scotland is seen as a key destination. Since its launch, visits to the site from Germany have increased by over 50 per cent.

The results are encouraging and proof that the demand is there, especially for deerstalking."

Editor of German Hunting magazine, Oliver Dorn said: "Scotland is one of my favourite destinations to hunt and shoot. It is good to see that a country-driven organisation supports its estates and agents by launching a German website."

For more information, visit: www.countrysportscotland.com/de and www.countrysportscotland.com



Robertson's Guide to Field Sports in Scotland

Richard Cooke writes:

With a foreword by the chef Albert Roux, Robertson's Guide pulls together many of the questions asked by tourists, novices and experts alike about shooting, stalking and fishing in Scotland.

'What are the origins of a Macnab, how old is a grilse and can you shoot game on a Sunday are only a few of them.

Sponsored by the Scottish Country Sports Tourism Group, the handy paperback is now used along with the SCSTG website to promote Scottish country sports at home and abroad.

It's an excellent and enjoyable read. Fully illustrated, price £10 from Amazon, country stores and www.alastairrobertson.co.uk"

The stag who shot the stalker

Iain Thornber

Mar Lodge Estate, near Braemar on Royal Deeside, which lies in the East Grampian Deer Management Group Area, has hunting associations going back over a thousand years. It was the largest and most important deer forest in medieval Scotland and popular with several of its kings who were attracted to it for the quality and quantity of the deer. The first owners, of whom there are records, were the Earls of Mar who are said to have held it from the time of King James IV who died at Flodden in 1513. In 1618 another Earl of Mar arranged a great hunt for his family and the neighbouring gentry. Scores of men and dogs drove hundreds of deer down from the surrounding hills into the Dee valley where, according to a contemporary account, "fourscore fat deere were slaine with gunnes, arrowes, durks and daggers, in the span of two hours."

In October 1850 the Duke of Leeds rented Mar Lodge from the new owner the Earl of Fife and invited Queen Victoria, the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) and Prince Albert to another large drive. A herd of three hundred deer passed within a short distance of the Royal party and although it was estimated over three thousand beasts were pushed into the glen that day, only two were shot.

The ballroom of the present Mar Lodge, now owned by the National Trust for Scotland, is lined with over three thousand stags' heads and sets of antlers collected on Mar over the centuries and is one of the wonders of the UK stalking world. If they could speak, each head would no doubt have an interesting story to tell - none more so than the stag that shot the man who stalked it!

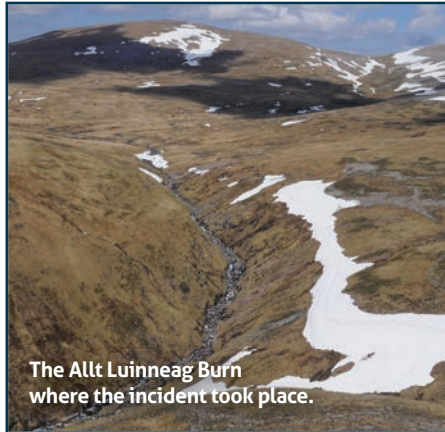
In 1866 Thomas Powell, a wealthy coal mine owner from Newport, Monmouthshire, rented Mar Lodge Estate from the Earl of Fife and following the custom of the day, employed his own stalkers, or foresters as they were called in Aberdeenshire in these days. His head forester was George Urquhart. Little is known about George's background. He was born at Canon Bridge on the 8th August 1836 to John Urquhart, wood sawyer, and Elspet Fraser and brought up in Strathglass near Inverness. George must have found his niche early in life as it was not long before he gained the reputation of being one of the finest hill-men around. He came to the attention of Horatio Ross, a godson of Nelson and one of the most celebrated sportsmen of the day. Ross too had rented Mar Lodge from the Fife family for a number of years previously and probably recommended him to Powell.



George Urquhart's death was featured in many newspapers around the world such as *The Penny Illustrated Paper* 1866

On Friday 5 October the party, comprising Urquhart and Powell with two other foresters, John Grant and Peter Macintyre, set

off up Glen Geusachan to stalk the face of Cairntoul, one of the highest hills in the Grampian range and to the north of the lodge. About two o'clock in the afternoon Powell shot at and wounded a stag which ran towards the boundary of the neighbouring Glenfeshie estate. Urquhart took the rifle, a double-barrelled, muzzle loader, from Powell and along with Grant, followed the stag in an attempt to head it off. He fired two shots and wounded it a second time. The stag, now weak with the loss of blood, turned and went downhill past Loch Stuirtaig before coming to rest in the bottom of the steep-sided Allt Luinneag Burn which eventually empties into the River Eidart.



The Allt Luinneag Burn where the incident took place.

Urquhart reloaded and caught up with the stag which he found was still alive. Realising that if he killed it where it was they would have difficulty retrieving the carcass so he tried to move it further downstream by prodding it with the butt of the rifle. The stag lashed out with its hind legs and struck one of the hammers which was in the cocked position. So hard was the blow it damaged the safety mechanism allowing the hammer to fall forward onto the percussion cap igniting the charge which, in turn, sent the heavy bullet into Urquhart's upper body. Without falling Urquhart said calmly, "I am shot." He then walked across the burn and collapsed against Grant who laid him gently on the bank of the burn and ran off in search of Powell and Macintyre.

As soon as he arrived on the scene, Powell sent Grant for assistance; the nearest house, however, was Geldie Lodge -

some eight miles away. For the first hour Urquhart was perfectly calm and was able to tell Powell and Macintyre what had happened. Gradually he grew weaker and died two and a half hours later - killed by the bullet he had intended for the stag whose blood now mingled with his own in the burn below on a spot still known locally as "The Dead Man's Corrie."

Help, in the form of several foresters with a pony, arrived about seven o'clock. By this time darkness had fallen and a heavy mist covered the broken ground. Progress was slow, and it was not until two in the morning that they reached the Geldie Lodge; Dr Marshall from Braemar, sixteen miles away, was waiting there with Dr Maclaren, a visiting physician. There was nothing they could do and when dawn came they helped carry George Urquhart's remains home to his unfortunate young wife, who had been waiting anxiously by the door of their cottage for news of her husband.

George Urquhart was buried in St Andrew's churchyard, Braemar the following Wednesday and lies under a handsome granite obelisk which was most likely paid for by either Powell or Lord Fife. His funeral was one of the largest seen in the district for many years. The unusual circumstances surrounding his tragic death and the fate of his sorrowing widow, pregnant with their first child, created such a wave of sympathy it was reported in many British, American and Australian newspapers. In due course a son was born and named after his father. Although young George remained in the Braemar area he did not become a stalker. He died unmarried in 1922.

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Author's note:

I am grateful to Mr Sandy Walker, head stalker of Killiechornate Estate, Spean Bridge and formerly of Glenfeshie, who first brought this incident to my notice.

I would like to hear from anyone who may have further information about this incident.



The Inscription on George Urquhart's stone.



Mar Lodge – the famous ballroom ceiling.

Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) Consultation update



Victor Clements

Context

The previous 2007-13 Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) was of very limited interest to deer managers in Scotland.

It was regarded as overly bureaucratic and difficult to access and, except for providing some support for controlling deer numbers in woodland areas, it proved to be largely irrelevant to the sector as a whole.

However, the Scottish Government certainly seems to have learned lessons from the previous scheme and has taken on board a number of suggestions for improvement. The direction of travel of this current process is extremely encouraging, and throws up all sorts of possibilities for public investment in deer management, both at a planning and implementation level. We need to pay attention to this.

ADMG will be strongly supporting the proposals that are coming forward, and seeking to influence the finer detail of how they might be delivered. There is a current focus on raising the capacity for effective deer management delivery in Scotland, and providing support to those who want to make their local DMGs work better. Members are encouraged to respond to this consultation in the little remaining time that there is to do so, to be aware of discussions on detail later in the year, and to consider if or how this might be applicable to them in their own circumstances.

There appear to be two main areas of interest, but with options in other areas as well.

The Big Items

1. The option will be made available for a suitable group to apply for funds on behalf of a number of owners. This was not possible under the previous scheme, and worked against collaborative projects. In addition to this, a facilitation pot of £10 million is being made available to help pull together applications for 'landscape scale' projects. This might effectively pay for someone to develop projects on behalf of a DMG. Put these two things together, and there are all sorts of options that might arise. Deer management is one of few activities that works at a genuine landscape scale. This therefore could be made for our sector.

2. A new advisory service is being aimed at farmers, foresters and other land managers. The detail/ emphasis of this is not given but, in the past, ADMG recommended the establishment of an arbitration service for dealing with conflict situations involving deer. There may well be a space for such a function within a multi-agency advice service. There are all sorts of other possibilities as well for "ensuring best practice and learning can be implemented on the ground." There is a £20 million fund for this.

Other Options

Under the proposed Agri-Environment-Climate Scheme, £15 million has been earmarked for 'peatland restoration'. This is a very significant amount of money. There is a grazing element to this so, clearly, this may be a means of producing up to date Deer Management Plans for some DMGs, paying for additional research or implementing agreed activities.

There is to be a Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Fund, covering vocational training, demos, benchmarking,

information actions, workshops and the like. There are plenty of options here. One interesting inclusion is that this fund can be made available to public sector bodies. A very obvious project under this heading would be to bring greater resources forward for making *Heading for the Scottish Hills* work better. This has been restricted by lack of available funding in recent years to the frustration of many Deer Management Groups and this may provide an opportunity to rectify that. Additional funding may also help SNH in further development of its Best Practice guidelines. Such a fund could also pay for additional capacity or a field officer within ADMG, or help with administrative functions in some individual deer groups.



Stalker Mark Mackenzie and guest setting up the shot looking towards Loch Errochty, Dunalastair and Crossmount Estates, Perthshire. Photo: Robert de Sales La Terriere

Finally, there may well be support for helping to set up new deer farms by "supporting healthier eating through provision of healthier food choices for consumers", and monitor farms and similar types of initiatives could be supported.

The way the new SRDP is structured, there are all sorts of possibilities that we should be aware of. ADMG will be supporting the direction of travel, and keeping an eye on the detail to make sure that the schemes are useful in practice. Funds will be limited overall, but in a sector where owners are already used to working together on a large scale, deer managers should be in a position to benefit.

The Consultation

The SRDP Stage Two consultation process ends on 28 February. It is located online at:

www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/12/7550

Do please submit a reply if you can.

Victor Clements is a self employed woodland advisor, Secretary of the Breadalbane DMG, and a member of the Executive Committee of ADMG.



Rhuaridh Campbell spying on Cluanie Mosses, Cluanie, East Quoich looking west from Ben Loinne with Ben Nevis in the distance. Photo: Willie Fraser

A review of Scotland's Wild Deer: A National Approach

Why is it of relevance to me?



Alastair MacGugan,
Scottish Natural Heritage

It will not have escaped ADMG members' notice that deer and their management have been the subject of further Parliamentary scrutiny.

Some argued that a statutory approach was needed because voluntary deer management groups were not delivering for public interests. Is there however agreement on what should be delivered? What does public interest actually mean?

The answer to these two questions are in Scotland's Wild Deer: A National Approach (WDNA). WDNA sets out a 20 year strategic vision to guide deer management in the public and private sector. It was developed and is being delivered by a collaboration of private and public bodies and individuals. It was launched in 2008 by the Minister for Environment and is being delivered through a series of Action Plans.

If as deer managers we are all signed up to implementing sustainable deer management then WDNA is where the "what" is set out. WDNA is more than just about discussing deer impacts on conservation status. It encompasses how we use deer as a healthy food, as a means to generate income from tourism and what stance we should take about deer in and around towns. It is about deer as an important part of our culture whether through poetry, art or just being in their presence.

WDNA is the overarching view of what sustainable deer management looks like and concerns all in Scotland who have some form of interest in deer. The 'Deer Code' produced after changes to the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996 distils these interests down for those who have direct management responsibility for deer. The 'Deer Code' is therefore a subset of WDNA.

It is timely therefore that WDNA is now going through its first five year review. We all have the opportunity to better describe what it is we want deer management to deliver. Public agencies need to ensure clarity on what is expected from Deer Management Groups. Importantly public agencies also need to set out where, from a Government view point, the priorities for management lie.

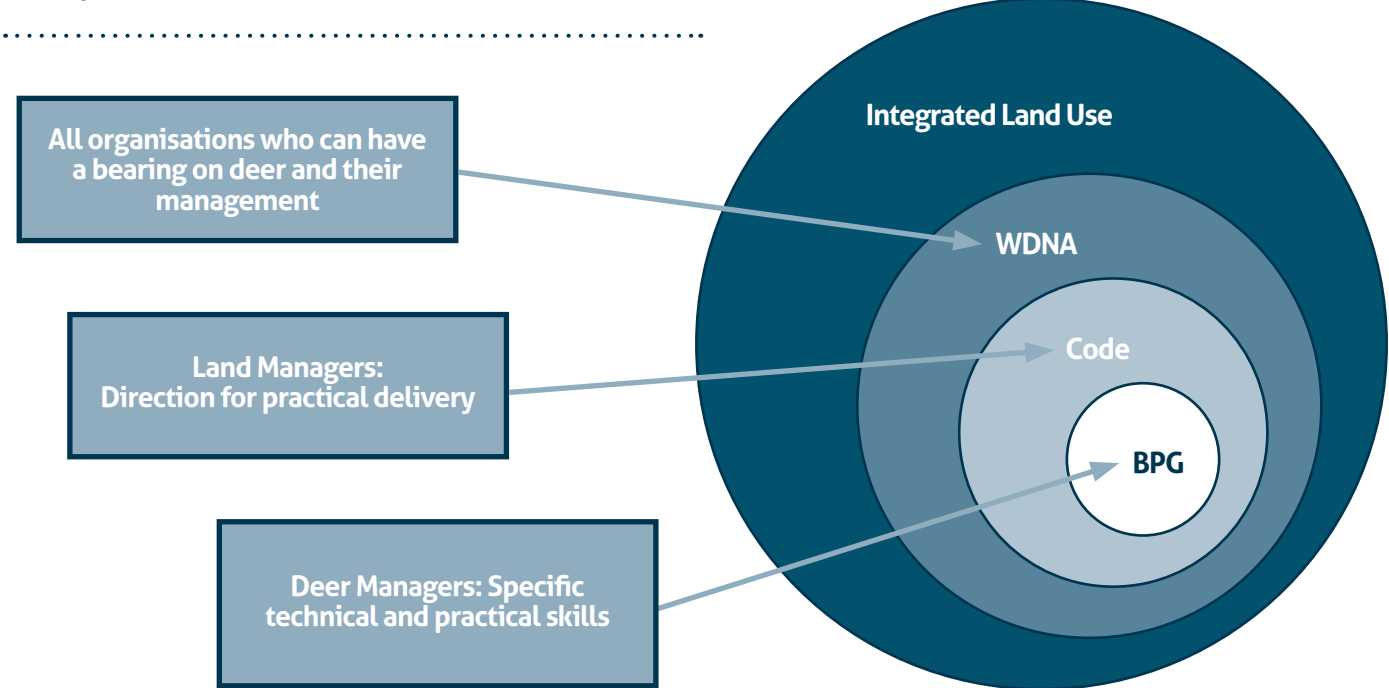
Undoubtedly ensuring favourable condition of important conservation sites, looking to reduce impacts across wider countryside habitats, ensuring a more inclusive approach to management planning, and implementing actions that help fight climate change will be up there. So too will be priorities relating to economic activity whether through sport, venison or tourism.

ADMG along with the other organisations with an interest in deer are also setting out their priorities and these will be brought together and agreed. The reviewed WDNA will then be published in the summer of this year. ADMG is a key partner in this review process and you are encouraged to feed into ADMG's thinking.

Words in a fine looking document will not however be enough to assure Parliament nor the people of Scotland that deer are being managed sustainably. It will require a demonstration that action is being implemented and that the priorities as described through the refreshed WDNA are being worked towards.

The WDNA Action Plan will therefore take on a higher profile. The actions will be agreed annually by all bodies having a direct interest in deer management, whether public or private. DMGs will be a core element of this Action Plan over the next few years. Supporting the ADMG Executive in fulfilling the actions signed up to will help demonstrate how DMGs individually implement the 'Deer Code'. It may well however provide the best defence against future Parliamentary scrutiny of the voluntary approach to deer management.

Relationship between Best Practice Guidance (BPG), WDNA, Deer Code and Wild Deer



Climate Change - it's not going away!



Alastair MacGugan,
Scottish Natural Heritage

"Climate change is one of the most serious threats which we in Scotland face. Rising temperatures, drier summers, wetter winters, sea-level rise, and an increased risk of flooding, will all affect our lives. There is a global need to take action to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions which are responsible, but changes in climate will not be completely eliminated by these actions. We need also to find ways of adapting to the effects of climate change." So said the Environment Minister when he introduced SNH's policy and action on Climate Change in 2009.

These words have translated into legislation that binds public bodies to effect real change. Land managers are also being asked to ensure that actions paid for through public money such as elements of the SRDP will contribute to climate change targets.

All very good, but what can I do as a deer manager stuck in the gale blasted wilds of Scotland? Well, Scotland has a rich and important means through our soils and woodland of sucking up and storing carbon so that it no longer contributes to climate change. The carbon stored in organic soils (notably peat) in Scotland is equivalent to over 180 years of greenhouse gas emissions from Scotland at current emission rates.

CWD - vigilance is called for

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a highly infectious disease affecting parts of North America that is having a devastating effect on populations of wild and farmed deer.

As our knowledge of CWD grows so any potential spread of the disease into Europe and the UK by whatever means is increasingly alarming and means that deer managers and stalkers here must require the strictest biosecurity measures from visitors to the UK who may come from, or have visited, an affected area in the USA or Canada.

CWD is caused by a prion and belongs to the same group of diseases as scrapie and BSE. CWD has resulted in the death of every known infected deer; there are currently no vaccines or treatments available to control it; and efforts to control the spread of it in North America have so far failed.

The prion is transmitted in deer body fluids and body parts - urine, faeces, saliva, central nervous system tissues and meat. It can remain infectious for up to 10 years when bound to soil, for several years on stainless steel, and it defies normal farm disinfection processes.

Surveillance carried out in several European countries has so far failed to find evidence of CWD present. However, should it find its way into wild deer populations in Europe (remember Ash Dieback Disease) it would have major consequences, not least the death of large numbers of deer, restrictions on the sale of venison and the movement of live deer, and restrictions on stalking and deer management activities.

Thinking about how to reduce deer impacts on peatland and woodland must become part of the deer management planning process. Yes, the exact interactions of deer and peatland are complicated but there is no debate that certainly at lower altitudes, trampling by a high density of deer causes peat to be exposed. This not only prevents new carbon from being soaked up but releases previously stored carbon. If we didn't manage deer then the impact would be much greater, but deer managers can do more to protect and enhance these important carbon stores.

It's not all about deer being the 'baddy in climate change. Venison production provides a relatively low carbon footprint when compared to other sources of protein. Venison has a 38% lower carbon footprint than beef and 49% lower than lamb. As we centralise venison processing and look to distribute further afield this difference narrows. Developing and sustaining local markets not only helps to ensure money is retained in the local area but it also helps battle against climate change.

So climate change is not going away and increasingly deer managers will need to address how they can contribute to climate change targets. Practically this means looking to ensure low to medium impacts on peatlands and woodlands. It also mean simple practical things such as more fuel efficient vehicles, better insulated larders and chills, encouraging renewable sources of energy to run the chill and perhaps only one collection van going up the glen, not two!!! Little steps...

One likely route of possible transmission into the UK or Europe is from contaminated clothing or equipment – a particular risk being from hunters, stalkers or other tourists who may have visited where CWD is present.

Please note the following guidelines and encourage others to do likewise:

If visiting the UK, USA or Canada as a countryside user:

- Consider whether you need to take clothing or equipment with you and bringing it back. Clothing and equipment bought or borrowed, used and then left in North America poses no risk to our deer populations.
- If bringing clothing, equipment or footwear back to the UK make sure that is scrupulously clean of all contamination – soil, blood, faeces etc. This will reduce the risk although it will not eliminate it.
- Do not bring any trophies or body parts back to the UK.

If organising or hosting visitors from North America:

- Make sure that they are aware of their responsibilities – you can direct them to the full CWD briefing note that is on the ADMG as well as other UK deer sector websites.
- Check their kit for cleanliness – it is unlikely that this check will have been carried out at UK Border Control.
- Don't assume that they will be aware either of the disease or its risks.

Taking these simple steps will help to minimize the potential spread of this harmful disease into the UK.

Newsletter produced by

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