

## When the going gets tough



Richard Cooke, Chairman  
Association of Deer Management Groups

**There can be no doubt that a lot of Deer Management Groups – in particular their Chairs, Secretaries and other office bearers - will be feeling under relentless pressure, what with the assessment process, the pressing need to get going on deer management planning, and now the Land Reform consultation.**

We had thought, after the recommendations of the RACCE Committee were published early in 2014 and accepted by the Minister that, with the DMG review flagged up for 2016, there would be a period to get our heads down and get on with it as indeed we all have been doing.

But deer are of course a political football – and inevitably they were dragged into the report of the Land Reform Review Group. Consequently, deer-related proposals were included in the Scottish Government's land reform consultation which closed on 10 February. Many members will have found the underlying intent of the proposed land reform measures extremely worrying with, for example, the size of landholdings coming into question, as if scale were more important than land use capability, and the proposal that land could be compulsorily purchased if an owner is judged to be a 'barrier to development' (where is the evidence for that assertion?) There will have been strong representation in response to these broader proposals from individuals and from organisations such as Scottish Land and Estates as well as ADMG on the aspects relating to deer.

We have had a constructive meeting with the new Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, Dr Aileen McLeod, and have used that opportunity to run over some of the anomalies – for example the huge



Garrogie. Photo: Glyn Satterley

difference in deer management across the deer range, from the central belt and urban fringes to the remotest and least productive peaks and expanses of the Highlands and Islands.

Hopefully we have demonstrated the shortcomings of a one-size-fits-all approach to deer management. We have highlighted the contradiction in potentially penalising through business rates a voluntary system that delivers a public service, sustainable deer management. And we have reported on the considerable progress made by DMGs over the last year. We have reiterated these points in our response to the consultation.

I do not doubt that the DMGs are up to the challenges that we face - although I do find the ongoing hostility implicit in the Land Reform proposals difficult to understand. In the meantime there is much to do.

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## Meeting with Minister encouraging and worthwhile says ADMG Chairman

**Richard Cooke, ADMG Chairman, met in January with Dr Aileen McLeod MSP, Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform at the Scottish Parliament. At that meeting she acknowledged the reported good progress that Deer Management Groups are making towards the planned 2016 review. However there are also a number of other measures contained in the current land reform consultation that may impact on the deer management sector in the interim.**

In a meeting lasting almost an hour, Richard Cooke rapidly ran over the background to and work of ADMG and in particular the current challenges for DMGs in their drive to increase effectiveness, not only in taking into account the management objectives of all Group members, but also the public interest which had introduced an additional aspect to deer management planning.

Richard Cooke said that the view that deer management under the voluntary system was unregulated was absolutely not the case, and cited the tight statutory framework under which it operates bound by the Deer Act and Wildlife and Natural Environment Act, and other Government policy, by the 20 year strategy document *Scotland's Wild Deer: A National Approach*, by the Code of Deer Management, and by Best Practice, not to mention the standards set within the industry.

He also explained that the system involved many different ownership types – public, private, charities, community bodies and NGOs, that it had evolved significantly over recent years, and that there were now some 46 upland DMGs.

The Minister did not dispute the benefits of a voluntary approach, in particular the advantage of flexibility when it comes to local management options to reflect local circumstances. The Joint Collaborative Deer Management Project, a joint exercise between ADMG and SNH, has seen 44 out of 45 DMGs self assessed and will enable the sector to demonstrate that it is moving steadily in the right direction when the 2016 review takes place. One outcome has been that most DMGs have found that they deliver more in terms of the public interest than they thought they did, and that revised Deer Management Plans would address this further.

Richard Cooke said that generally DMGs had accepted the need to move forward, and were intent on demonstrating greater effectiveness, although it was important to recognise that the process would be ongoing beyond 2016. Deer management has to be adaptive to changing circumstances and would need to continue to evolve accordingly, he said.

With specific regard to the Land Reform Consultation there were two main areas of direct relevance for the deer management sector, one being the proposal for increased powers for SNH and the need for clarification of what these would be (which is anticipated in the Bill); also the removal of the exemption from payment of business rates for stalking businesses.

Richard Cooke said he was genuinely puzzled by the apparent prejudice against wildlife management businesses which should tick many Scottish Government rural policy boxes in terms of sustainability, protecting the environment and supporting jobs and communities. Deer management is an important economic land use, and in some areas the only land use. He said that the scale of landholdings was often wrongly perceived as an issue whereas the size of estates mostly reflected the poor quality of the land and the few possible land use options; also that country sports are part of the tourism offer of Scotland and generate valuable revenue for the Scottish economy often outside the main tourism season.

With regard to business rates he said there is potential for unintended consequences - particularly the danger that rates would be a disincentive to maintaining the level of employment necessary for environmentally sustainable deer management. There was however potential for rating to be used as an incentive for active deer management planning and delivery if exemptions are maintained but are conditional for example on participation in a DMG with an effective Deer Management Plan – the carrot, not the stick.

Land reform, he said, requires a cost/benefit analysis approach to establish how current systems measure up in terms of fairness, social justice, environmental sustainability and economic prosperity and there should be objective analysis to establish whether the alternatives would deliver more or less benefits at more or less cost. Estates in general, he added, were in his experience anything but barriers to economic development.

Overall it was an encouraging meeting. Dr McLeod will clearly be giving these points her consideration, both in reflecting on what was discussed and as they are reiterated in the Association's submission to the land reform consultation. She acknowledged that progress made so far was encouraging although, as ADMG agrees, there is still much to do.



Richard Cooke with the minister, Dr Aileen McLeod

# The Land Reform Consultation – what's it got to do with me?



Dick Playfair  
Political Advisor to ADMG

**The Scottish Government's consultation on the Future of Land Reform in Scotland was published in December 2014. It's a concise**

**document extending to around 25 pages and, you may well ask as someone involved in the deer sector, what does it have to do with me?**

The closing date for comments on the consultation was 10 February, so if that date has passed you by then you have missed the boat for now, although the next step, by May this year, will be a draft Stage 1 Bill, and the issues it contains, including those relating to deer, will be widely aired and discussed.

This land reform consultation follows the final report of the Land Reform Review Group and 62 recommendations for Government. A number of these recommendations are already in process, whether through other draft legislation (such as the Community Empowerment Bill for example) or other parallel consultations and reviews, such as the Agricultural Holdings Legislation Review.

So, setting aside the various land reform proposals, what are the main issues in the consultation, and likely to come back in the Bill, in relation to deer? The two main areas cover the proposal for the removal of the exemption from business rates for shooting and deerstalking, and the giving of further powers to SNH.

The consultation document points out that exemption from business rates for "shootings" and "deer forests" has been in place since 1995 and that an entire revaluation programme would need to be undertaken taking into account "changes in the country sports market and the prevailing range of rates reliefs" which would include the small business rates relief scheme.

The consultation proposes that rates bills would be calculated and relief applications determined by local authorities, and shootings and deerstalking would be brought back in line with other ratepayers who help to fund local services - although not farming and forestry for example for which there is no suggestion that any exemption would be withdrawn.

There are a number of points to consider in relation to this proposal. For example, what constitutes a sporting or deer stalking business, and how that business is valued; that much of the cull is undertaken not for 'sport' but in the interests of management, in line with Government policy, and local DMG objectives; that this activity would require to be undertaken anyway whether the stalking was let or in-house; that country sports provide valuable income to rural areas at times removed from the main tourist seasons; and that there is increasing demand from the UK market for venison.

Many stalking businesses are likely to qualify for small business exemption status - but will still require a valuation. In addition any reintroduction of business rates in the



stalking sector may simply act as a disincentive to the provision of a country sports product (and all associated benefits that this brings), a deterrent to necessary conservation management actions, and ultimately a tax on jobs. This proposal therefore is not one to be taken lightly, with possible social, environmental, and economic impacts as unintended consequences.

The second area highlighted is additional powers for SNH. This is placed in the context of the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee enquiry into deer management in early 2014, at which time Parliament confirmed its continuing support for the voluntary approach, but that DMGs needed to make progress in developing and implementing deer management plans. The paper then states that "the end of 2016 would be a suitable juncture to consider progress and look to take action if the current voluntary system has not produced a step change in the delivery of effective deer management."

New powers for SNH, it says, would "not be intended as a replacement for the voluntary system of deer management, but as a backstop to be brought into play where the voluntary system was not delivering the public interest in certain areas", for example to ensure that SNH can require landowners to have in place detailed, sustainable deer management plans that protect the public interest – and that plans are fully carried out.

The replacement of 'voluntary' with 'statutory' would still be an option to Ministers depending on the outcome of the 2016 review.

We will need to wait for the Bill to see any detail of these additional powers. SNH already has powers under Section 7, and under Section 8 that have never been used, and the suggestion of further powers could provide SNH with greater opportunity and flexibility to take action. We should have a clearer idea in May.

# The DMG Assessment reviewed



Randal Wilson

*Randal Wilson, Chair of North Ross DMG and West Ross DMG looks back on the process in his Groups.*

**I have been involved with the creation and implementation of Deer Management Plans (DMPs) for both Groups of which I am Chair. Both plans are broadly similar and both have been kept reasonably simple by focusing on the core objectives of Deer Management like annual spring foot counts, cull records, Habitat Monitoring and annual recruitment for example.**

However, in order to have a degree of standardisation and to be able to measure the progress of around 50 different Deer Management Groups and Deer Management Plans, ADMG, in partnership with SNH, realised that, there needed to be some kind of assessment, not least to establish that DMPs are current, active and being used.

In terms of the assessment, we found many of the actions outlined in the ADMG Benchmark to be very relevant, both in moving deer management forward, and also delivering many public benefits.

Some of these are, of course, a benefit to us as land managers also - for example bringing the threat of lyme disease and chronic wasting disease to the attention of our membership and the wider public.

Groups are also being encouraged to improve existing native woodland condition and to expand woodland creation, whilst recognising its long term benefit as wintering habitat for many species, not just for deer.

Training is also an important part of deer management, and keeping deer managers up to date with Best Practice and Competence requirements is important. We have implemented a skills and competence list in both our DMPs so that we can demonstrate that all our stalkers have the required skills to carry out their duties in accordance with Best Practice.

It is easy to forget that the management of deer is a complex business, and there is never a one size fits all approach - and I think this assessment process recognises that. There is enough flexibility within the assessment for all groups to demonstrate progress, without necessarily all ticking the same boxes.

WRDMG and NRDMG, having gone through the assessment process, have now identified areas and priorities where we can improve our DMPs to include some of the above aspects that we had not identified in our first drafting of the plans. This can only be of benefit to the whole process and support the voluntary principle under which we operate, as we can now, through this process, demonstrate that deer management is active, mobile and able to deliver many public benefits.

It has also made us all think 'outside the box' a little and give the whole deer management process more attention to detail - more than we have ever done before.



## Do you have a Deer Management Plan?

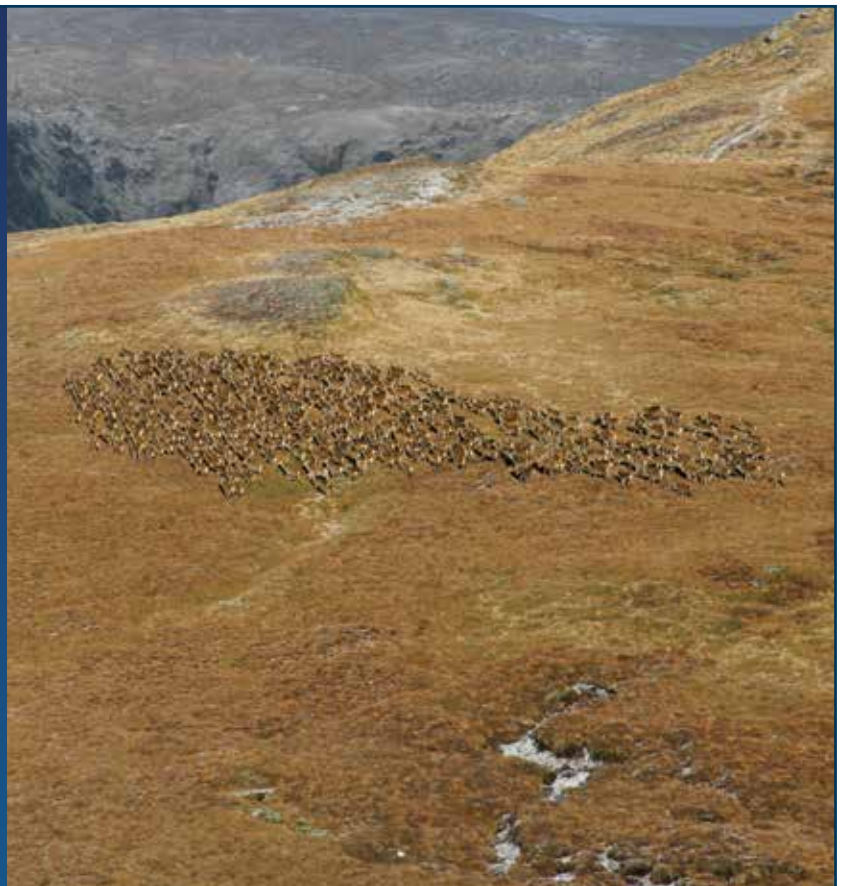
All Deer Management Groups must have a plan in place by the end of 2016. Co-ordinating everyone within a DMG to write and implement a plan can prove challenging.

We can help.



Contact Malcolm Taylor, Head of Rural Land Management, for more information on 01307 462 516 or at [malcolm.taylor@bellingham.co.uk](mailto:malcolm.taylor@bellingham.co.uk)

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# Deer management and the Public Interest - it's in your interest

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Dr Linzi Seivwright

**Since the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee (RACCE) Enquiry into deer management in 2013, you would be hard pushed not to have noticed that the political focus is now firmly on the 'Public Interest' associated with the management of one of the nation's most iconic species. It would be easy just to dismiss this as jargon but getting to grips with the Public Interest and what this means for you as a deer manager, really is in your interest.**

So what is the Public Interest? Wild deer are an important national asset and the recently revised Scottish Government Joint Agencies strategy *Scotland's Wild Deer: A National Approach* (WDNA) sets out quite clearly how deer contribute to the rural economy, are integral to our biodiversity and are enjoyed by people from all walks of life. This strategy is further translated into the Code of Practice on Deer Management (Deer Code) which defines the criteria for environmental, economic and social good practice when it comes to the practical sustainable management of deer on the ground. It is recognised that as a result of private management interests, deer management currently delivers, and potentially could contribute further to, a range of benefits to the people of Scotland. These benefits are also referred to as the 'Public Interest'.

But make no mistake. This is not just about understanding the concept. This is about the opportunity Deer Management Groups (DMGs) have been given as a result of the RACCE Enquiry to demonstrate through voluntary actions that they are capable of actually delivering sustainable deer management and maximising the Public Interest across the upland red deer range. The most obvious way for Groups to formally demonstrate this is through the development and implementation of a Deer Management Plan (DMP). Arguably, many DMGs have had Plans in place for some time and since well before the RACCE enquiry. However, the critical challenge for the deer sector is quite simply this: for all DMGs to show progress towards having demonstrably effective and environmentally responsible Plans in place by the end of 2016. An 'effective' Plan will be expected to demonstrate progress towards delivering the Public Interest relative to local circumstances while at the same time delivering the management objectives of all of its members. Planning should be a dynamic process based on setting objectives and targets, carrying out actions, monitoring and reviewing, and it is recognised that effective planning also requires Groups to function effectively. ADMG has therefore developed some guiding operating principles which are detailed in the ADMG Benchmark.

Through a commitment to support the voluntary principle of deer management and to help DMGs to better understand what is expected of an 'effective' Plan, Scottish Natural Heritage has identified 14 Public Interest Actions which are aimed specifically at managing red deer across the upland range. These Public Interest Actions are linked to the Deer

Code and to a number of areas of Scottish Government policy and have been grouped under the Environment, Economy, Social Well-being and Deer Welfare. Furthermore, in order to measure progress in 2016 and to help DMGs identify the local Public Interest relevant to a Group area, DMG Chairs and Secretaries working with SNH, have recently undertaken an assessment of what Public Interest is currently being delivered and what each group will be expected to contribute to.

Whilst it would be easy to see the assessment process as an imposition, to the contrary, DMGs have the chance to take an honest, self-critical look at how they operate and all that they do; to use the information to positive advantage to identify both strengths and weaknesses and to highlight opportunities. Ultimately these detailed assessments will enable Groups to update existing Plans or to develop new Plans that will address these Public Interest Actions and will meet the expectation of Government in 2016. A grant is currently available in the short-term to DMGs to the tune of 50% match funding up to £12,500 from SNH for the development of Plans. Details of the grant as well as a more detailed document on the Public Interest can be found on the SNH website at:

<http://www.snh.gov.uk/land-and-sea/managing-wildlife/>

As a Deer Management Group, there is no escaping that come 2016, it is likely that the quality of your Deer Management Plan will be under scrutiny. But this is about more than simply developing a Plan that "ticks the boxes" and then gathers dust on a shelf. The real proof of the pudding will be in what you as a Group have agreed and are actually delivering through the objectives and targets set out in your Plan. Collaboration is key as the delivery will involve everyone. The action now rests with every one of you to get actively involved in your Group and in the deer management planning process; to understand what is required and to provide the important information that the Plan will need. This is likely to be in the form of data gathered on an annual basis, relating to a range of things like habitat impacts, culls, population census, welfare, deer vehicle collisions. It will require you to be engaged, to look forwards and in some cases be prepared to negotiate or to compromise. DMGs will also be expected on the whole to be more open, transparent, inclusive and accountable with Deer Management Plans being publicly available.

There is no doubt, that this presents a great challenge for DMGs and indeed ADMG. However, despite the changing political climate and increased scrutiny, while the right to manage deer still remains firmly in your hands, now is the time to take action and demonstrate that despite an increasing diversity of ownership and management objectives within most Groups, through responsible, proactive planning and collaboration, the management of an important national asset is in good hands.

*Dr Linzi Seivwright is an Independent Deer Management Consultant*  
**www.caorann.com**  
**E: linzi@caorann.com**

# Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) 2015 Update

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Victor Clements

**The Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) is slowly taking shape, but it is going to be some time yet before everything is finalised. At the moment, the various farming support measures are more or less in place, and applications are being invited for Agri Environment measures. Information on forestry measures is now coming on line in dribs and drabs, and the new application system is moving closer to being operational. We are starting to see what might be possible, but the big caveat at the moment is that we are still awaiting EU approval in August on the detail, and systems to allow for capital payments will not be available until the end of the year.**

For Deer Management Groups, there are likely to be a number of measures in the new SRDP that will be of genuine interest, and allow them to take forward some of the actions identified during the assessment/ management planning process. It is very likely, for example, that SRDP will be able to pay a significant contribution of habitat monitoring costs, probably also being able to cover the costs of helicopter counts. A special facilitation fund is being set up to help pull the necessary information together. It should be possible to submit single applications to cover a number of properties. Help should be available for training, and organisations

involved with providing training should be able to access the fund as well. ADMG lobbied to have all these things in place.

The information provided confirms that habitat monitoring and helicopter counts will be paid on actual costs. Open range deer management payments of between £0.80 - £2.00 per hectare will be available to help with reduction culls, depending on how much of a reduction is actually required. Experience from the previous round of SRDP suggests that most estates/Groups will probably forego these latter type of payments, preferring to keep their own control over things and retaining flexibility. That will probably continue, but ready support for assisting Groups in providing their necessary functions will be viewed with a lot more interest.

At the moment, the advice must be just to let events unfold, and see what the detail looks like when it is finally all agreed and available. In the mean-time, Groups will have plenty of work to be getting on with, finalising their assessments and upgrading their current plans. It is this exercise that will help to inform, scope out and cost any work programme going forward, and we can then have a look to see whether SRDP 2 is capable of helping us to do that.

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

**E: [Victor@nativewoods.co.uk](mailto:Victor@nativewoods.co.uk)**



Stags and hinds on Glen Tanar. Photo: Harry Scott

# Deer management 2015-2020 – what do we need to do?

Jessica Findlay

Jessica Findlay, Wildlife Management Team, SNH, gives an update on the review of Scotland's Wild Deer: A National Approach.

**'We manage wild deer to achieve the best combination of benefits for the economy, environment, people and communities for now and for future generations.'**

This is Scotland's vision for wild deer as set out in *Scotland's Wild Deer: A National Approach* (WDNA). Trite perhaps, but it is useful to stop and think carefully about its message. WDNA is about showing how practitioners as well as agencies are practically delivering. It is relevant at a national and local level and puts deer right at the heart of benefits to people, nature and the economy.

WDNA shows how the deer sector will work together to manage deer for the benefit of Scotland. It was developed by people involved with and interested in deer. It is relevant to all of Scotland and all species of wild deer, from red on the high mountain tops to roe in city gardens. It forms the basis for the Code of Practice on Deer Management, setting out guidance for deer management responsibilities and sits alongside the Wild Deer Best Practice Guides.

In 2014, WDNA underwent an extensive review. Much was going on at the same time. The RACCE committee enquiry towards the end of 2013 resulted in the deer sector needing to show how they were delivering the public interest. More recently we have had the launch of the Land Reform Consultation. This has changed the context of WDNA but hasn't changed its overall vision. WDNA provides continuity in times of change.

The 2014 Review involved many organisations including ADMG and LDNS. Healthy debates and discussions thrashed out the issues to identify common ground.

## What is in the new 2014 WDNA?

The 2014 WDNA focuses on the next 5 years, looking ahead to 2020. It puts the spotlight on working together, ensuring a healthy environment and understanding people's perceptions of deer and their management, especially in urban settings. Other agreed priorities include contributing to targets for Scotland's native woodland, developing a range of options for low ground and urban deer management planning and many more. These are very real challenges.

## What has been achieved so far?

Since the launch of WDNA in 2008, over 200 actions have been delivered by over 20 organisations, including ADMG and LDNS. Achievements include initiating an Eat Scottish Venison Day, looking after Scotland's protected natural heritage sites, publishing the Code of Practice on Deer Management, developing the capacity of Deer Management Groups and establishing the Lowland Deer Network Scotland.

## Who will deliver 2014 WDNA?

WDNA is a vision for deer but it is also a vision for people. Everyone with an interest in and involvement with deer and their management will help deliver WDNA. To date a mixture of public and private bodies have worked together to carry out actions. All of these are co-ordinated through the WDNA Action Plans. A plan is drawn up each year, based on the WDNA priorities and objectives, showing what will be done and by who for the year ahead and ideas for actions for the following two years. Work has just started on pulling together the 2015 WDNA Action Plan. This is an opportunity to show the work that is going on in the deer sector and for you all to engage and demonstrate how you are contributing to WDNA.



Spying: Glyn Satterley

## Focus on Inverary & Tyndrum Deer Management Group



Dick Playfair

*Dick Playfair meets Tom Turnbull, Group Chairman.*

**Tom Turnbull is quick to point out that the Inverary & Tyndrum DMG, which covers some 59,000Ha, is by no means a typical Deer Management Group. But then what Group is? What makes this one different is that almost a third of the Group's area is forestry. And that brings with it its own set of challenges. The Group extends from the south shore of Loch Awe in the west, to Tarbet in the east, up the A82 to Tyndrum and across to Inverary.**

The Group has some 23 members – private landholdings, SNH (Ben Lui NNR), the Forestry Commission, and a community member at Strathfillan. It lies part in and part out of the Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park who also now are represented at Group meetings.

"The main challenge with so much forestry" says Tom Turnbull, "is counting. Our count in 2013 gave a population of 869 stags, 1862 hinds and 822 calves, and we think we have a population that is broadly in balance, particularly given the number of sheep that are coming off the hill.

"A secondary forestry related concern however is that much of this is now due for felling with obligations to restock. The majority of mature timber has not been fenced, but the restocking will bring with it either a requirement for fencing or more rigorous deer control."

I&TDMG also has two areas on either side where there are no deer groups, the Cowal and Kintyre peninsulas, so although the Group may be delivering on its plan and have its own affairs in order what is happening in these neighbouring areas can and does impact.

How about the Assessment process? "This was time consuming", says Tom, "but reassuring to see a lot more green and amber on the page than red. Some parts we thought were a little distracting – for example the inclusion of carbon capture. I think it will be important to prioritise the outcomes and ensure that we are equipped to deliver on the aspects that are the most important."

"In the light of the Assessment we will be reviewing our Deer Management Plan, and particularly rewording it to demonstrate delivery of the public interest. We may contract this out or do it in house depending on whether financial support is available for this route."

Much of I&TDMG territory lies within easy striking distance of major populations and this brings with it its own set of issues, as well as the National Park acting as a magnet for access.

"We are not opposed to access in the slightest," says Tom. "Indeed, we positively welcome it. But it's a two way street – 99 per cent of people taking access are understanding and interested in what we do and how we manage the land,



Tom Turnbull, Chairman, I&TDMG

but a small number have complete disregard for this. Given that there are now possibly twice as many people heading for the hills as there were five years ago problems are also increasing.

"We suffer from tents being left behind, gates left open – or removed and burnt – fences being cut. The amount of litter is increasing; there are no roadside bins, and the Council won't litter pick for safety reasons. Our Group members do a lot of the tidying up and dealing with the consequences of irresponsible access and camping. But it is sometimes frustrating to be asked to 'deliver' the public interest when this is the result. It is also embarrassing for our foreign visitors to see our roadside verges and parts of our countryside in such deplorable condition. It would be encouraging to see Government take the lead on this."

Education of politicians is also an issue. "Many of our MSPs I'm sure have an ingrained stereotype of the landowner – but most estates would be loss making without inward investment; their component parts, deer management and stalking being one, provide our income, alongside farming, forestry and other enterprises. We are not 'sporting estates', and have to make the most of every asset we have and yet we are now looking at the prospect of a reintroduction of sporting rates.

"Politicians need to understand much more about how the countryside works, to get out and meet shepherds, stalkers and land managers. Of course the concept of 'sporting' may be difficult for some but it is part of a job that needs to be done, it's a process to produce healthy food, and pulling the trigger is just the full stop at the end of the sentence."

What needs to change?

"Deer are still regarded as vermin by some" says Tom. "That needs to change. Deer were voted Scotland's number one iconic species and yet in some quarters you would not believe that. As owners and managers we need to feel we are being listened to and not alienated by Government. We need more education of the public to instil greater respect for the countryside. And we could do with more stalkers in the Chairman's role in DMGs – in my view that too would make a difference, and a part of what is an evolving process."



# Wild Boar - Threat or Opportunity?



Lea McNally

*Lea McNally, Scottish Gamekeepers Association Committee.*

**To most members of the public the only encounter they are likely to have with a wild boar is when they visit a food fair or game fair with a food hall, where somewhere inside will be a stand selling wild boar produce. On the rear wall of the stand will be a mounted boar's head which certainly draws attention. Clever Marketing! Anyone who has had his garden or agricultural holding ravished by boar will steer well away and hopefully purchase some venison.**

Wild boar became extinct in Scotland 400 years ago due to lack of natural habitats. In recent years, we have reports of boar sightings in different areas in Scotland from the Borders through the Central Belt to the West Highlands, mainly attributed to 'escapes' from farms rearing boar for the food market. In some areas, boar have been introduced to break up poor quality ground with a view to eventually regenerating native trees. We have also seen boar, now, in the wild, from estates who hoped to capitalise on the prospect of a new sporting venture: i.e. boar hunting.

On the Continent, boar are either driven to rifles by beaters and dogs or shot from a high seat at a feed station. In Scotland they are shot at night, also at a feed station, using a lamp with a diffuser so as not to scare them, which is switched on when the boar alert the hunters as they push the feed source around. An alternative, again, depends on a feed station, when the boar are shot in the full moon.

In Germany, landowners let the stalking rights to a licensed stalker. For any crop damage attributed to boar, the stalking rights owner has to pay the landowner or tenant farmer compensation. In the event of a dispute over the total amount payable, an independent arbitrator is brought in. On the other



*Damage to ground by wild boar. Photo: SGA*

hand, in Sweden, where wild boar became established in the 1980s, there is no government compensation. Sweden's boar population is around 150,000 and is estimated to be increasing by 13 per cent annually. The Swedish University of Agriculture says at least 72,000 boar must be killed annually just for the population to maintain equilibrium. In Sweden, where boar are looked on as a sporting asset, a driven day with twelve guns will cost £5,500 per day.

On a visit to Sweden in 2012, the late Joe Watson, farming editor of the Press and Journal visited the village of Balsta, an area plagued by boar. Repair bills to gardens and public areas in Balsta that year had hit £18,780.

There is no level of compensation for damage by boar in Scotland. In this area of West Lochaber, we have seen re-seeded agricultural land damaged, marginal fields, with fifty per cent damage and gardens and lawns laid bare overnight. There is also evidence of boar killing lambs, a fact accepted by Defra. If they kill lambs, what other damage are they inflicting on ground nesting birds and fragile plants as they root around?

Mainly nocturnal and always on the move, they are extremely difficult to control using conventional methods. In this area, the most successful method has been heavy-duty cage traps. Our statutory bodies are maintaining a low profile on this at present. SNH has suggested a minimum calibre of .270 to be used to cull boar and to adhere to best practice - in other words, not to kill a sow with dependent piglets.

In September 2012, as reported in The Scotsman, a Scottish Government spokesman is quoted: "The non native species legislation also provides the Scottish Government and SNH with new powers to take action, if it is deemed desirable and practical to tackle an invasive species."

I firmly suspect that the Scottish Government has been too late in reacting to this problem. Boar numbers are greater than anyone knows and are now beyond control.



*Photo: Laurie Campbell*

# The White Hind of Coireach a Ba, Blackmount

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Iain Thornber

**Most stalking stories are about killing deer but that of the white hind of Coireach a Ba is exceptional in that it describes a King's attempt to relocate a hind from the wilds of Argyll to southern England.**

White deer have for thousands of years and in many cultures been revered and regarded as symbols of royalty, purity and good fortune. In the legend of King Arthur the white stag is the creature that can never be caught. This though did not deter King James the Sixth of Scotland and First of England, from sending his head forester from his royal residence, Theobalds Palace, twelve miles north of London, to one of the wildest regions of Scotland when he heard there was a white hind for the taking.

King James, known as the 'wisest fool in Christendom', was a keen hunter but he also had an interest in the supernatural which he looked on as a branch of theology. He may have simply wanted a white hind as a novelty for his deer park but more likely he aspired to owning one for its mythical status.

Although James left Scotland in 1603 to rule his united kingdom from England, he remained in close touch with its affairs through John, Earl of Mar, Lord Treasurer of Scotland. It was Mar who first told him of seeing a pure white hind in Coireach a Ba on the edge of Rannoch Moor while hunting there as a guest of Sir Duncan Campbell of Glenorchy in the early autumn of 1621. Letters between Mar, Sir Duncan and the King have survived and it is from these we know of the scheme to capture her. Sir Duncan, it so happens, was on familiar terms with King James having sent his son, Prince Henry of Wales, a pair of live golden eagles, receiving a valuable stallion in return.

On the 13 January 1622 the King wrote to Lord Mar saying: 'We have sent this bearer our servant John Scandaver for apprehending and transporting hither that white hind whereof ye yourself gave us first notice; and therefore require

you to cause provide, either at Edinburgh, or any other town next to the place where he is to employ his travails, such things as he shall think requisite for taking or transporting the said hind. And because the country whither our said servant is to go to is wild and waste it is requisite that ye write to Glenorchy [Sir Duncan Campbell] as we have done to cause our said servant to be furnished with company and all things necessary. And herein expecting your careful diligence, we bid you farewell'.

King James was not wrong when he described the white hind's haunt as being 'wild and waste'. Rannoch Moor is about fifty square miles of water, rock and bog and one of the bleakest places in Scotland, especially in winter. In nearly every other Highland glen there are signs of habitation, but not here where the red deer, golden eagle, raven and peregrine, have since time immemorial more or less had the place to themselves.

Robert Louis Stevenson, in his well-known novel 'Kidnapped', says of Rannoch Moor, 'a wearier looking desert a man never saw'. Another traveller later wrote, 'pray imagine the Moor of Rannoch, for who can describe it?'

Coireach a Ba lies within the Black Mount Deer Management Group Area. It is situated on the southwest corner of the moor and is a large amphitheatre containing a number of small corries often full of mist and strange winds making stalking in them a challenging prospect. The literal translation of the Gaelic place-name is 'the corries of the cattle' although in ancient local folklore the 'cows' of Coireach a Ba were said to be fairy deer.

And so it was to this awesome and remote place King James dispatched his forester to search out and capture alive, an individual animal. Why he did so in the dead of winter when there was every likelihood of snow on the ground and why his courtiers, who should have known better, did not suggest waiting until the spring, we will never know, but one does not argue with monarchs.

Rannoch Moor

## The White Hind of Coireach a Ba, Blackmount (continued)

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John Scandaver, who was reputed to be skilled in the art of catching wild deer, arrived in Edinburgh about 6 February along with two assistants anxious to be off on their mission. The hunt was on!

Accompanied by Robert Campbell, Sir Duncan's son and some of his men, the party made their way north across moors and over steep hill-passes to Achallader Castle which Sir Duncan had built some twenty years earlier on the edge of Rannoch Moor near Loch Tulla. By this time Scandaver carried a telescope, then called a 'transparent', that Lord Mar, keen to indulge the King's whim, had given him on loan. As portable telescopes were invented only a few years earlier by Johann Lippershay, a German-Dutch spectacle-maker, this must surely be one of the first references to their use for stalking deer.

On the morning of 22 February, the three Englishmen with Robert Campbell in the lead, followed by a number of his men, started off for Coireach a Ba in the knowledge that the white hind had been spotted in one of its corries the day before. As there were no roads or tracks they had to walk. Eventually the treacherous terrain, the snow fields and the dismal surroundings brought 'auld' Mr Scandaver to his knees among the rocks saying, 'he could go no further.

Stumbling across Rannoch Moor with the wind and the rain in his face the King's forester, who had probably never been in the Highlands before, must have realised what an impossible situation he had got himself into and that there was little or no hope of achieving his goal. If nothing else though he was able to confirm to his royal master that the white hind did exist. Sir Duncan Campbell in a letter to Lord Mar afterwards narrated; 'The other twa Englishmen that were with him [Scandaver] passed forward with Robert and the foresters a mile up the hill, and there they saw the white hind with her

company to the number of five or six score of deer, and sae they came back both tired and wearied. The twa Englishmen that saw the hind declares that she was as white as ane white sheep, and might easily ken her afar off by the rest of the deer'.

How Robert Campbell managed to get the Englishmen back to Achallader Castle is not recorded but when they finally returned they were evidently well looked after. 'As to their entertainment', continued Sir Duncan, 'they got the best that could be gotten this time of year in the country, for they wanted not wine and aquavitae (whisky) as I doubt not they will declare themselves'.

From Edinburgh Scandaver and Lord Mar sent reports to James. Far from being displeased at the result, the King's secretary told Mar, 'His Majesty is well pleased with you for the care you have had in all things concerning this business of taking this deer. Their reports, he said, had convinced the King of the difficulty of carrying out his wishes. He accordingly had ordered that the hind should be left alone for the present, especially since she might be in calf. He would think of some other plan the following year.

On the 24th of July 1622 the King, having heard what Scandaver had to say when he returned to Theobalds, wrote to Sir Duncan Campbell thanking him warmly for his willing assistance not only for his 'earnest endeavours' but for his 'special care and good entertainment of Scandaver himself, which it hath given him occasion to speak of, so we give you most hearty thanks'. In return Sir Duncan sent him a live capercailzie instead.

E: [iain.thornber@btinternet.com](mailto:iain.thornber@btinternet.com)

## Native Woodland Survey of Scotland should provide useful benchmark for deer managers to measure 'public interest' success

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Dick Playfair

**Much has been said at various meetings and in the media regarding the Native Woodlands Survey of Scotland undertaken by Forestry Commission Scotland and analysis of this study with particular reference to deer.**

The Native Woodlands Survey of Scotland (NWSS) is a comprehensive study of native woodland based on surveys over several years. Published in 2014 it concluded that:

- The total area of native woods in Scotland was 319,000 ha (788,270 acres) equating to 4 per cent of the total land area of Scotland, and 22.6 percent of its total woodland cover.
- Over the last 40 years some 14 per cent of ancient woodlands have been lost, most of this in open, unenclosed upland areas.
- Natural regeneration is currently below the level needed to sustain active native woodland ecosystems.

Only 46 per cent of native woods are in satisfactory ecological condition. On a comparable basis, 54 per cent of native woodland designated sites as at June 2014 are in favourable condition (excluding recovering sites), a decrease of 5 per cent since 2010.

Deer impact through grazing and browsing, but the main degradation occurs when impacts of deer are too great for too long – preventing regeneration or planting, or diminishing the understory to species of inferior biodiversity such as grasses and mosses.

Herbivore browsing and grazing was cited as the biggest, most widespread current impact on the condition of native woods, and the NWSS showed that the most widespread herbivores present were deer. Whilst its methodology has subsequently been questioned, the study concluded that "at least 33 per cent of all native woodlands are in unsatisfactory condition due to herbivore impacts, and over most of this area (72 per cent) the presence of deer (as opposed to livestock, hares or rabbits) was recorded."

## Native Woodland Survey of Scotland should provide useful benchmark for deer managers to measure 'public interest' success (continued)

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There was therefore a presumption that because deer were present they were responsible for the damage. Indeed, where no other source of damage could be confirmed then damage was attributed to deer.

Whatever the survey shows, its results do form a benchmark for assessing future damage by deer. However whilst approximately half of the woods fall in upland DMG areas, the remainder falls in lowland and agricultural areas where there is far less structured deer management control (outside of lowland deer group areas), and consequently a number of new challenges are apparent.

For non-designated native woods the target is to restore at least 15 per cent of degraded ecosystems by 2020, and the "Delivering Favourable Condition" programme aims to bring 80 per cent of all designated sites into favourable status by 2016. That figure currently stands at around 64 per cent.

There are clearly defined paths for improving designated sites such as guidance and support through SRDP with regulatory action as a last resort. For non-designated sites it is hoped that owners will be encouraged by support from the new SRDP and acceptance of actions in the new WDNA which sets a target of "ensuring 60 per cent of Scotland's native woodland is in satisfactory condition by 2020" to include designated and non-designated woodland. For deer managers, improvement in the condition of native woods ticks the box as a 'public interest' goal. There are a number

of issues for further consideration, for example improving the effectiveness of deer management where lowland deer groups (LDGs) provide only limited cover and there is a job here for the Lowland Deer Network. Also, reconsideration may need to be given to deer fencing in order to enable woodland creation and regeneration in areas of high deer impact, and provision will be given in the SRDP for this.

There is admission that the NWSS itself has limitations – for instance its definition of woodland excluded small low density woodland areas, and did not always marry with previous estimates and definitions. SNH is also revisiting how woodland condition is assessed, and how it can better take into account other ecosystem changes – for example current tree health and disease concerns. Further consideration is also being given to allocation of off-take between species, taking into account not just overall grazing impacts, but also the variation of grazing across different species, and whether positive biodiversity benefits can be achieved through a less polarized approach.

The NWSS is undoubtedly a very thorough piece of work. Whilst it will prove useful in setting baselines and determining targets over areas where the DMG system operates it will be far more challenging to implement similar programmes in low ground areas where deer management is far more fragmented and where there is acknowledged to be an increasing population of roe deer partly because of new habitat creation - including new woodland.



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The Association of Deer Management Groups, c/o Bidwells, Carn Dearg House, North Road, Fort William PH33 6PP  
Tel: 01397 702433 | Email: [finlay.clark@bidwells.co.uk](mailto:finlay.clark@bidwells.co.uk) | [www.deer-management.co.uk](http://www.deer-management.co.uk)