

## Deer Management Groups in a far better position now than previously to make rational evidence- based decisions



Photo: Laurie Campbell



Richard Cooke, Chairman  
Association of Deer Management Groups

**If anyone needed reminding that deer populations are subject to constant change the last year has exemplified**

**the broad range of factors which need to be taken into account in future cull planning – an exceptional red deer cull over 2017/18, the highest recorded at 75,306; above average mortality and below average recruitment following the late bitter winter; and in some areas a very arid summer as a result of which deer carried the poor condition of last spring into the autumn, leading to concerns about a low pregnancy rate and possibly above average mortalities if the 2018/19 winter is a tough one too. And, of course, the 2018 rut was exceptionally late and desultory, whatever the future implications of that may be.**

Added to that are the longer-term land management changes which have a bearing on wild deer populations across the Highlands - expanding woodlands, more land managed for conservation at lower deer densities, declining sheep numbers, more disturbance, and so on.

It is tempting perhaps to decide to cut right back on culls when we think the population has had a setback for any or all of the above reasons and that might well in the past have been the intuitive response to current circumstances. While certainly not wishing to teach any of our professional members, vastly more experienced than I, to suck eggs, my suggestion is that we now have the means, through our DMP population models, updated annually, to take a very systematic and evidence-based approach to setting cull targets and allocating them among DMG members.

Obviously, the other vital element is to count the deer regularly, ideally yearly, so that we have a good cross check on our population models and a basis for adjusting them.

Many external commentators on the red deer sector continue to focus on deer densities and overall numbers which is misleading. In monitoring the environmental impacts of deer, which we are increasingly able to do through the Habitat Impact Assessment (HIA) systems which the majority of DMGs now have in place, the distribution and ranging behaviour of deer is of more importance. As we all recognise, even at very low densities, in harsh conditions deer will make for shelter and feed and if that is to be found in unfenced regenerated woodland, that is where they will be on a snowy night and even relatively few deer can do a lot of damage in a short space of time.

We need to weigh the evidence in its entirety. Deer management may be more of an art than a science but we are in a far better position today than previously to make rational evidence-based decisions and, equally importantly, to be able to explain and justify them.

One final point. The environmental impact of deer is, as ever, critically important. However, as is recognised in legislation, economic and social values are equally so, but they are very difficult to quantify. I am pleased to report that ADMG and SNH are now working together to develop a methodology for evaluating the economic impact of deer management at DMG scale which, in due course, will allow DMGs to discuss rationally the effect of management change at landholding level on the broader interests of neighbours at DMG scale.

While I normally use this space to report on the year past, that summary is to be found in our new Annual Review, published with this issue of Scope. I will also be reporting fully at the AGM on 28 February 2019.



# DEER HEALTH PROJECT FINDS LOW LEVELS OF HARMFUL E. COLI O157 STRAIN IN WILD DEER IN SCOTLAND

Photo: Dick Playfair



Dick Playfair,  
Secretary, Scottish Venison Partnership

**A project undertaken by the Moredun Research Institute and the University of Edinburgh into harmful *E. coli* O157 bacteria in Scotland's wild deer has established that the bacteria has a low prevalence in deer of less than 0.3 per cent.**

Richard Cooke, Chairman, ADMG, said:

*"When we signed up to the project it was in part a leap of faith and we hoped that science would show that the occurrence of this bug in our wild deer species is low, and this has turned out to be the case. Whilst we cannot make comparisons with the level in livestock or other foods, or comment on the level of risk to human health, we can certainly take comfort from this result whilst at the same time encouraging all involved in the sector to continue to be vigilant and observe Best Practice at all times to keep incidence to an absolute minimum."*

The study, funded by the Scottish Government and Food Standards Scotland, was carried out following the outbreak of *E. coli* O157 infection in people linked to the consumption of venison products in 2015. The bacteria, which is shed in animal faeces, causes disease due to the production of Shiga toxin and is most severe in very young or elderly people. The research set out to determine what

the levels of *E. coli* O157 in wild deer in Scotland are and how these bacteria might be transferred to meat during the production of venison.

The research was based on the collection and testing of faecal samples from all species of wild deer in Scotland (red, roe, sika and fallow) and covered all of Scotland's regions where wild deer are present. Working with the Association of Deer Management Groups, Lowland Deer Network Scotland and Forest Enterprise Scotland, a total of 1087 samples were received of which *E. coli* O157 was found to be present in just three. Two positive samples came from red deer and one from a sika deer.

Despite these low numbers, deer managers and processors are being urged to continue to do everything within their control, from the point of cull to the end product reaching the consumer, to minimise the risk of contamination.

Dr Tom McNeilly, Moredun Research Institute, who led the study, says:

*"This project established that prevalence of *E. coli* O157 in Scottish wild deer is low and suggests that deer are not a major reservoir of the bacteria. Nevertheless, as *E. coli* O157 was found in a small number of deer and the gene for the toxin was present in a number of other samples, care should be taken to ensure minimum contamination of the deer carcass during processing. We would like to thank the deer industry and Forest Enterprise Scotland who have been fantastically supportive of the project."*



Dr Jacqui McElhiney, Head of Food Protection, Science and Surveillance at Food Standards Scotland said:

*"We commissioned this piece of work alongside the Scottish Government in response to the 2015 E. coli O157 outbreak in order to improve our understanding of the risks of contamination of venison meat in Scotland. The results of this part of the survey show that the levels in deer faeces are low, but when E. coli O157 is found, it has the potential to cause severe disease if it is transferred onto the meat. The findings will support guidance that will help producers to prevent contamination."*

*"We would also like to remind consumers to ensure their venison is cooked thoroughly and that they follow good hygiene practices when handling raw meat to avoid the risks of food poisoning."*

Bill Bewsher, Chairman, the Scottish Venison Partnership, says:

*"This has been an important piece of work for Scotland's venison sector, given the new strategy for Scottish venison launched by Government in September and its increasing popularity."*

*"We continue to urge those who manage deer, and those who process venison, to take all necessary steps to ensure that the processed product reaches the market in the safest possible condition, with a reminder to consumers that proper cooking will eliminate any residual risk."*

Sector partners in the Scottish Deer Health Survey include the Association of Deer Management Groups, Lowland Deer Network Scotland, Scottish Venison Partnership and Scottish Quality Wild Venison.

## Interim report on the ADMG Survey of Stalking Rents – Red Deer



Helen MacIntyre  
Secretary, I&TDMG

At its AGM in March 2018 it was suggested that ADMG should repeat its previous survey of sporting rents that had last been undertaken in 2011. With the support of Knight Frank this work is now well underway. I have been commissioned to coordinate the survey and analyse the responses and an interim report is given below. The deadline for returns has been extended to end April 2019 and anyone considering completing the survey is encouraged to do so. The form is available at [www.deer-management.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Stalking-rents-survey.pdf](http://www.deer-management.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Stalking-rents-survey.pdf)

There are several DMGs from which no surveys have been received yet, including East Loch Ericht, Glenisla/ Glenshee, Strathconon, East Loch Shiel, East Ross, Gairloch, Glenartney and Glenmoriston.

So far, 46 completed surveys have been received. These cover a total stalking area of 1,210,125 acres (489,929 hectares).



Photo: Glyn Satterley

This is a summary of some of the key findings from the survey to date.

### Stags (43 responses)

Estates offering stalker with no ghillie charge an average of £478 per guest per day (ranging from £300 to £790). 33% of responses offered this service. The average from the 2011 survey was £377.

Estates offering stalker plus ghillie charge an average of £557 per guest per day (ranging from £400 to £1000). 58% of responses offered this service. The average from 2011 was £503.

Estates offering stalker plus 2 ghillies charge an average of £670 per guest per day (ranging from £540 to £864). 9% of responses offered this service.

The number of stags let ranges from 3 to 400 per year, with an average of 54 per respondent.

65% of respondents let by the stag, 20% let by the day and 41% let by the week.

### Hinds (37 responses)

Estates offering stalker with no ghillie charge an average of £272 per guest per day (ranging from £150 to £450). 57% of responses offered this service. The average from the 2011 survey was £180.

Estates offering stalker plus ghillie charge an average of £269 per guest per day (ranging from £200 to £385). 58% of responses offered this service. The average from 2011 was £207.

The number of hinds let ranges from 10 to 500 per year, with an average of 58 per respondent.

79% of respondents let by the day, 26% let by the week and 8% let by the hind.



Woodland habitat impact assessment awareness day on Flanders Moss.  
Photo: Dick Playfair

## DMGs getting to grips with Habitat Impact Assessments, available support and delivery



Dr Linzi Seivwright

**For those of us responsible for managing Scotland's wild deer herd, understanding and being able to assess the impacts that herbivores are having on the environment is a key piece in the jigsaw puzzle that is effective deer management. Building a clear picture of what is happening on the ground enables us both at an individual estate level and at a landscape scale to plan ahead and make informed decisions, adjusting and adapting our management where required.**

By their very nature, herbivores will have an impact on the environment of which they are a part. Grazing, browsing, trampling and even dunging are all natural events, and can be an important component in wider ecological processes. However, these impacts may not always be positive to the health of the environment or indeed to the health and welfare of the deer. The challenge for us, is to be able to assess these impacts, recognise when a potentially detrimental level of impact on the

environment is, or potentially could be occurring and, most importantly, implement action to address the issue.

Over the last year this is the task that has been embraced by DMGs and with 3.5 million hectares in the DMG range, this has been no mean feat. The first step involves identifying the extent and nature of the habitats to be assessed. For most, this will focus on dwarf-shrub heath habitats (heather is an important source of food for herbivores during winter) and peatlands which along with woodland, contribute to Scotland's ability to store carbon. For some Groups this may also include gathering information on designated habitat features and condition.

According to information gathered in the DMG Health Check, most Groups have successfully begun this process. However an area where many DMGs may require further support is in being able to quantify sustainable levels of grazing and trampling and to identify where different levels of grazing may be required. With few groups having scored well in this area in the health check, this is something that ADMG will seek to progress with SNH and DMGs through the provision of improved guidance.



Reassuringly, all Groups have either completed or started the process of establishing a baseline habitat assessment using the methodology set out in Best Practice Guidance. For some, this practice is not new and many properties have well established programmes of monitoring in place. For those starting out, and recognising that some support might be required, a one-off £1800 payment from SNH was made available to all Groups in 2018 to provide professional training and assistance with data analysis and mapping.

Maps are invaluable in this process, in helping us understand where and why impacts might be occurring. It is well understood that the activities of deer (and other free-grazing herbivores) are not distributed evenly across the landscape. The distribution and availability of key factors such as shelter, access to water and preferred vegetation will all influence where, when and how deer use the landscape. Distribution may also be influenced by other factors such as human activity through disturbance, live-stock grazing, winter-feeding or exclusion from preferred habitats.

This uneven pattern of distribution will naturally result in localised impacts and may have consequences (positive and negative), both for the deer population as a whole and the wider ecosystem. Without maps, data are arguably meaningless and all Groups are encouraged to collate,

present and share their information in this way in order to better understand their results.

The key to the success of habitat monitoring is in taking results, interpreting them and translating them into management actions. With spring being the ideal window for carrying out the assessments, many DMGs are now in the business of collating their hard-earned results from 2018 and producing maps and reports for discussion at meetings. How we choose to act upon this information in setting population targets and annual culls will be an important factor in assessing whether a Group should score green in the DMG assessment this spring.

The ability of effective, responsible deer management plans to adapt to continually changing circumstances requires decision making and actions based on good information gathered by those of us on the ground. By bringing all the pieces of the jigsaw together including information relating to deer health and welfare, population dynamics and the health of the land, we can build a more detailed picture of what is happening on the ground and the actions we need to take.

**Linzi Seivwright is founder of ecological consultancy Caorann and a member of the Executive Committee of ADMG**

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# FORESTRY GRANTS FOR NATIVE WOODLANDS

Photo: Forestry Commission Scotland



John Risby,  
Conservator Highlands & Islands,  
Forestry Commission Scotland

**The Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS) offers a range of grants to support the management and expansion of native woodlands in Scotland. Forestry Commission Scotland staff can provide advice and information to Deer Management Groups (DMGs) on the available grants. Those grants most likely to be of most interest are:**

## Forestry Co-operation Grant

DMGs can access grant support of up to £10,000 from the FGS Forestry Co-operation Fund to look at delivering objectives set out in their deer management plans for landscape scale collaborative management of native woodland. A Group member, or a third party can apply on behalf of the Group and a facilitator will need to be appointed (usually a forestry agent) to lead the project. At least two adjoining landowners are required, or for woodland creation projects a minimum of four landowners must participate; all owners within the project area (eg DMG) must be involved. The fund can be used to assess the condition of existing native woodlands and identify future management eg woodland regeneration, or to identify areas suitable for woodland creation. Funding supports feasibility and site survey work to produce and submit a project plan to FCS. Individual owners, crofters and tenants can then apply separately to the FGS for funding to deliver the actions identified in the project plan.

## Woodland Creation Grant

Grants of up to £3,600/ha are available for the planting of new native woodlands within a target area, such as upland areas within much of the Highland region. In addition,

where deer fencing is required this can be supported at a rate of £6.80/m with a high cost deer fence of £9.90/m available over much of Highland. Care needs to be taken when considering ground for planting to identify and address any constraints eg deep peat, and to ensure that the site is capable of establishing woodland to the standard required under FGS. Early contact with a professional forester and your local Forestry Commission Scotland Conservancy is recommended to discuss potential sites.

## Natural Regeneration Establishment

FGS can provide grant support of £300/ha for establishing new natural regeneration, with an expectation of a minimum stocking density of 400 trees/ha at year five. Fencing and deer management grants are available in conjunction with this funding to encourage and protect emerging regeneration.

## Woodland Improvement Grants and Sustainable Management of Forests

To support the management of existing woodlands the Forestry Grant Scheme offers a range of Woodland Improvement Grants to fund capital spend on activities to improve the condition of woodlands and annual management grants of £25/ha to support the costs of deer management and monitoring in native woodland.

FGS is a competitive grant scheme and there is high demand for funding in 2019. Applications will be assessed and scored by your local Forestry Commission Scotland team and early dialogue with your local Conservancy is recommended to establish funding availability.

Details of all the grants and how to contact your local Forestry Commission Scotland Conservancy office can be found at [www.scotland.forestry.gov.uk/supporting/grants-and-regulations/forestry-grants](http://www.scotland.forestry.gov.uk/supporting/grants-and-regulations/forestry-grants)

# Lowland Deer Panel

**Peter Watson, Chairman of the Lowland Deer Panel, gave a report to the Deer Management Round Table in November 2018. The Panel is due to report soon but at the time of Scope going to press that had not yet happened:**

The following extract is from the DMRT minute and Peter Watson's presentation where he first outlined the remit of the Panel. He said that there were several key questions the Panel had been asked to consider and on which to provide advice:

- Do lowland deer managers need to collaborate to achieve sustainable deer management?
- If so, at what scale does this need to take place, and what is the most efficient and effective approach?
- What knowledge and information are needed to support this process and to determine whether the public interest is being met?
- What are the practical implications of public perceptions of deer and deer management in the lowlands?
- What further action could SNH take in the context of the existing legislative and policy framework?

He said that the Panel had set out to collect evidence but much of the information that had come back was subjective and opinion based. The online survey had received 160 responses including individual stalkers and environmental NGOs.

The Panel had still to finalise its report, conclusions and recommendations but that these would be focused around the questions posed. Wider issues which did not necessarily relate to the scope of the task had been raised and the Panel would reference these in its report.

The following points in relation to lowland deer and the work of the Panel were raised at DMRT.

- There was concern regarding the very limited nature of the responses especially from Local Authorities and individual lowland deer managers.
- There was surprise at the lack of concern reported to the Panel from the agriculture sector, particularly that of roe deer impacts on crops, and that the agricultural sector's concerns seemed to be limited to herds of marauding (red) deer.
- Members also thought that there was a jump in requirements between DSC1 and DSC2 that had negatively impacted on the numbers progressing to DSC2.

## 2017/18 deer cull numbers a record

**Data released by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) in November 2018 indicates that a record cull was achieved across all deer species for the year 2017/18.**

The cull for red deer was 75,306 (+23% on 2016/17), roe 43,140 (+1%), sika 7,761 (+24%) and fallow 3,093 (+35%). The previous highest red deer cull was 71,500 in 1998/99.

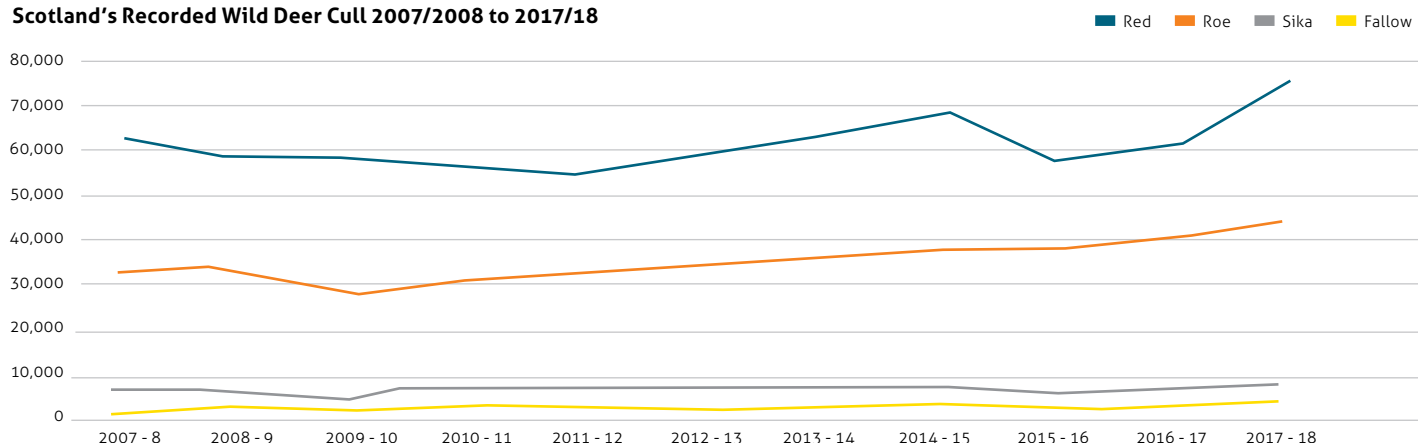
Richard Cooke, Chairman, ADMG, says:

*"Although deer managers have been heavily criticised in some quarters over many years, including in the Scottish Parliament, collaborative deer management has continued to evolve. Current deer management plans, developed under the voluntary principle, are increasingly capable of*

*identifying and maintaining wild deer populations that are environmentally sustainable and compatible with a full range of private and public interests.*

*"It should be noted however that such a heavy cull for red deer is unlikely to be repeated in the foreseeable future. A higher level of winter mortality was also recorded during the 2017/18 hard winter and the following dry summer resulted in deer going into this winter in poor condition. We are cautioning therefore against an assumption that higher cull levels will necessarily continue. Target culls are set to reflect the circumstances and vary from year to year to ensure that our wild red deer population remains healthy and sustainable."*

Scotland's Recorded Wild Deer Cull 2007/2008 to 2017/18



Source: Scottish Natural Heritage, November 2018





Looking south to Ben Lomond.  
Photo: Dick Playfair

## A letter from David Lowes, Managing Partner, Glenfalloch Estate



Anyone knowledgeable about rural Scotland and its wild deer populations would probably concede that the first years of the twenty-first century have been marked by high expectations, unrealised ambitions and strong disappointment... at least for some.

By the turn of the century there was a growing, vociferous and well-funded lobby focused on attacking what seemed to be a soft and easy target. As habitat conservation and biodiversity became ever more totems of the 'public interest' so deer were coming to be identified as the number one villain in the piece; a vermin species, which was demonstrably out of control and poised to render the countryside of Scotland a biological wilderness.

At the same time, it is true that few deer managers, whatever their specific interests (sporting, control, food production or a mixture of all of these), were more than vaguely aware of the gathering storm, particularly as it might affect the way in which they managed deer. What research or understanding about this iconic species and its interactions with the environment there was was sporadic and not well organised.

Granted the Deer Stalking Certificate scheme had been introduced some time before, but take up, even of DSC 1, was limited at best and many practitioners had got along fine without anyone telling them what to do or how to do it. Granted also that there were many whose knowledge and expertise was extensive and well developed and could see some of the threats. But most preferred business as usual.

Add to this the political tide of land reform, which culminated in the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, and it was clear that many parts of rural Scotland could expect significant challenges. For many, the prospects were enticing.

However, they reckoned without the resilience and willingness to defend and promote the deer sector, and these have been very positive and successful hallmarks of the last few years as ADMG rose to the challenge, grasped the nettle and engaged with the issues and with the many detractors wherever they emerged.



The hours of work at the Environment Climate Change and Land Reform Committee hearings, the painstaking development of research and the improvement in the standards of DMGs themselves all are down to ADMG and its hardworking (and tiny) group of personnel. Thanks to their groundwork and patient engagement with all sides of the argument, when SNH produced their report to Ministers in October 2016, it became quickly evident that the report was, whilst a weighty tome, a poorly researched effort full of unsubstantiated and often contradictory claims about deer numbers and/or impacts.

The development of Habitat Impact Assessments, Best Practice Guidance on anything from meat hygiene to deer welfare, the Scottish Quality Wild Venison initiative and intensive and wide-ranging research on any number of other topics (to name but a few elements) have provided the foundations of the current state of affairs. There are almost 50 DMGs covering almost the entire upland deer range and significant progress is also being made in lowland areas. Almost all of these are well organised, focused and competent in their vital mission of providing effective deer management at a local level.

What has been achieved is impressive by any measure. What was the point? I have tried to show that, without the firm guidance, support and encouragement provided by the ADMG, the deer sector would have been hopelessly ill-equipped to counter the aspirations of the well-funded and numerous organisations that have a different vision for deer (and indeed land) management in Scotland.

There remain many challenges and the hard work will have to continue. However, deer managers now have a fighting chance to continue to control their own destiny to the long-term benefit of the deer and their habitats. ADMG deserves the greatest applause for all its work as do the DMGs that have followed ADMG's lead.

Elsewhere in this edition readers will find details of how they can support the work of ADMG. If you or the landholding you represent are a member of a DMG then you are already doing your bit. If you personally are not directly involved in your local DMG, then please consider joining as an Associate or Corporate member. That way you can play a part in protecting the future of deer in Scotland.

*David Lowes*  
January 2019

## Use of lead-free ammunition on the National Forest Estate in Scotland



**Ian Fergusson, Deer Management Officer,  
Forest Enterprise Scotland**

Forest Enterprise Scotland (FES) does not set government policy on the use of ammunition. However, FES aspires to implement Best Practice on the National Forest Estate (NFE) and to be an exemplar of sustainable forest management.

There is evidence that the use of lead bullets can result in lead contamination of animal carcasses. In the 2017/18 financial year, FES put approximately 850,000 kilograms of venison into the human food chain. Concern over food contamination is therefore a main driver for changing to lead-free ammunition.

Spent lead ammunition also poses a significant health risk to wildlife, such as wildfowl and raptors. Concern over harm to wildlife is therefore an additional driver for changing to lead-free ammunition.

Where FES has control of the activity, the type of ammunition used on the NFE is an operational decision for FES. The choice of ammunition is based on its effectiveness and on environmental considerations, with due consideration for all applicable legislation and government policy.

FES continues to trial lead-free bullets for deer and feral pig and effective lead-free ammunition has now been identified for the majority of calibres used by our Wildlife Ranger team.

FES Wildlife Rangers account for around 31% of the deer shot on the NFE. By 1 April 2019 all deer and feral pigs culled by FES Wildlife Rangers will be by lead-free ammunition, except in the small minority of cases (<5%) where suitable lead-free ammunition is not available. Our aim is to reach 100% of our deer and feral pigs culled by non-lead ammunition as soon as possible. This will be dictated by the speed with which the ammunition market develops to provide suitable non-lead ammunition for all relevant calibres.

FES contractors account for around 60% of the deer shot on the NFE of which just under half are currently using non-lead ammunition. By 1 December 2022, all FES contractors will be using lead-free ammunition for shooting deer and feral pigs. This will be achieved in a phased way, whereby all contract renewals will stipulate the use of lead-free ammunition.

This progressive change will mean that by April 2019 around two thirds of all ammunition used will be lead-free, and by the end of 2022, all deer and feral pigs entering FES larders for processing will have been shot by non-lead ammunition.

A small proportion (approx 9%) of the deer shot on the NFE is covered by lease or permission arrangements. On an ongoing basis, opportunities will be actively sought and taken to change lease conditions to stipulate that only lead-free ammunition can be used to shoot deer and feral pigs.

By 2023, all permissions will use non-lead ammunition. This will be achieved in a phased way similar to contracts.

# Busy times on the venison front



Dick Playfair,  
Secretary, Scottish Venison Partnership

**2018 was a challenging, but busy and exciting year for Scottish venison, beginning with the summit called by the Cabinet Secretary Fergus Ewing to start preliminary discussions on a more formalised strategy for Scottish venison and also the intervention of Food Standards Scotland (FSS) to warn that we must all do everything we can to ensure that any health risks associated with venison, across the whole process from cull to consumer, are minimised.**

The Scottish Venison Partnership has been kept busy on both scores whilst at the same time keeping the prospect of the award of PGI (protected geographical indicator) status for Scottish Wild Venison moving forward. The PGI application has been submitted, has been subject of a first consultation promoted by the Scottish Government and Defra, has had a little more work done in the light of that consultation to its technical specification and is now poised to be submitted to Europe for round two.

The question has been asked of course what happens if we are out of Europe, but there are non-EU products that have been awarded PGI and, in any event, the UK will have its own protected food name scheme, so all the work that has been done to date will not be in vain.

FSS laid down some unequivocal challenges to the sector at two sessions at Battleby, one for processors and one for a wider audience, and SVP in response has undertaken a number of initiatives to raise both the issues of concern and promote highest standards. For example, SVP in partnership with SQWV and SNH produced three films, available on YouTube under the Best Practice banner, on the gralloch on the hill, essential larder work and field dressing a roe buck, and over the last 10 months these have been viewed 1920, 3070 and 3265 times respectively.

The films were also promoted through a campaign that ran in specialist publications in the autumn (Gun Trade News, Sporting Rifle, Countryman's Weekly and Shooting Scotland) and also supported by BASC and the SGA in their publications. This campaign again was partnered by SQWV and SNH.

SVP has also worked up with FES and SQWV guidance titled Understanding Carcase Contamination which is available on the ADMG website. There is also a meat hygiene refresher module for deer managers in development which is due to be rolled out early in 2019.

The venison strategy for Scotland, Beyond the Glen, has been a major piece of work coordinated by SAOS, with the strategy being written by an expert group drawn from across all aspects of the sector – upland, lowland, processors and deer farming as well as the relevant Government agencies. The resulting document covers a wish list for the sector with its main areas of focus being:

- To establish an Industry Leadership Group, and a central organisation to co-ordinate market research, advice and the strategy going forward.
- To improve and establish new supply chains.
- To enhance the existing quality assurance schemes.
- To build and strengthen skills for future growth.
- To support deer farming.
- To establish a pilot for local chill/larder facilities to maintain wild carcass quality and establish new routes to local markets.
- To develop a communications campaign and engage with education in schools.
- To build on existing high standards of husbandry and R & D, including a new test for TB.
- To invest in new product development, market knowledge, and a specialist to identify new opportunities.

An immediate action is that SVP is re-structuring to become the producer and processor-led organisation that takes forward the strategy, a change that will take place at its AGM in April, and at which time the new Industry Leadership Group will be formed. Meanwhile SVP will take forward those aspects of the strategy that it can using its existing funds, such as training, whilst the Scottish Government determines what funding can be made available to support this and those other sector strategies that are being put in place at this time.

Finally, SVP has been one of the partners engaged in the Moredun Research Institute/Edinburgh University Deer Health Project, funded by the Scottish Government and Food Standards Scotland and which has been very well supported by the deer management sector. A full report on the project to date is on page 2. It goes without saying that whilst being pleased that prevalence of *E. coli* O157 in wild deer would appear from this study to be very low it is still present and, going forward, stalkers and deer managers should do all within their powers to ensure that this risk is kept to an absolute minimum.



*At the launch of the venison strategy (l to r), Bob Prentice, Downfield Farms; Marie Gougeon, Minister for rural affairs; Bill Bewsher, Scottish Venison Partnership. Photo: Ian Jacobs*





Photo: Dick Playfair

## Scottish Quality Wild Venison – changes and progress

Scottish Quality Wild Venison (SQWV) has made great inroads in 2018. Its producer membership now numbers 162 (124 private and 38 forestry members/larders) and 5 processor members.

There have been changes behind the scenes with Acoura Certification, the company that manages the scheme, being acquired by Lloyd's Registers Group in 2017. Jamie Stewart was also appointed as Chairman of SQWV in autumn 2018 succeeding Leo Barclay who continues as Vice-Chairman. There have also been changes to the SQWV inspection team which currently comprises John Morison, Gordon Stewart, and Rupert Shaw who is newly appointed in SW Scotland.

SQWV has offered a free pre-assessment inspection as part of the drive to raise standards outside the scheme, with 55 requests for inspection being received and 50 completed to date, and a number of these subsequently joining SQWV. This has been a useful and highly successful exercise in carrying the QA message beyond the scope of SQWV's

immediate membership and, with other projects in which SQWV has been engaged in the last 18 months such as the venison food safety films and its supporting specialist media advertising campaign, is further evidence that the sector takes food safety and high standards extremely seriously.

Looking ahead, SQWV is developing a separate accreditation scheme for single stalkers putting smaller numbers of carcasses into the food chain and it is intended that a pilot for this will be available soon. Existing producer and processor standards that were updated in the light of FSS engagement in the venison sector will continue to be reviewed and updated on an ongoing basis. The make-up of the SQWV Board will also be reviewed and whether additional representation is required for the low ground. Jamie Stewart has also been preparing a new meat hygiene refresher initiative which will be rolled out early in 2019.

## Simon Pepper - Remembered

Everyone in the deer world was shocked by the news of the sudden death of Simon Pepper last year.

As former Scottish Director of WWF Simon was a highly respected figure in the conservation and academic worlds. He served two terms on the DCS Board and was sometimes a critic of the deer sector, but always fair and balanced. Still very active in his retirement he took up the role of Chair of the Deer Working Group set up by Cabinet

Secretary Roseanna Cunningham in 2017 and it is a great shame that he did not live to see its task concluded this spring.

I knew Simon over many years and had great respect for his wisdom and enjoyed his company. His death is a considerable loss to the countryside of Scotland.

*Richard Cooke*

# WHAT DOES ADMG OFFER ITS MEMBERSHIP?



Tom Turnbull,  
Vice Chairman, ADMG

**ADMG provides a range of benefits to its members, from representation in the Scottish Parliament and liaison with NGOs,**

**to media communication and continued support for individual DMGs.**

All DMGs will have a range of land management objectives, and ADMG can aid evidence-based discussion and achieve Group consensus that can then be put into a working Deer Management Plan. ADMG has helped members and their consultants in the creation of their DMPs and these can now be viewed online or accessed by links on the ADMG website.

ADMG has supported members through the ongoing SNH assessment process, with assistance including many hours of work liaising with SNH to clarify what is required from its member Groups by Scottish Government. In preparation ADMG has provided members with pre-assessment health checks to highlight areas where improvement may be required and several workshops with SNH.

We hope that this has made Groups very aware of the challenges facing the deer sector in the 2019 review.

We have seen the creation of new DMGs in several locations in the red deer range, six new DMGs have been established and ADMG has been helping with this. ADMG has participated in and implemented or supported a number of research areas including the latest 2018/19 survey of sporting rents and the Deer Health Survey. ADMG continues to provide advice to its members on Habitat Impact Assessment and other vital tools for deer management whilst also working closely with SNH on their provision of the updated Best Practice Guidance for the industry.

Membership of ADMG gives members valuable advice but most importantly a platform that they might not have as an individual deer manager, or an isolated regional group. The importance of having one body that speaks for collaborative deer management cannot be underestimated. Put simply, ADMG offers its members a voice and representation at all levels particularly now at a time when the pressure is on Groups not just to deliver but to be seen to be doing so.

## Range of membership options available for ADMG

### DMG membership

DMG membership of ADMG is available for established deer management groups who wish to benefit from the range of services, advice and representation that ADMG offers. ADMG can also assist new and candidate Groups in becoming established, and the early-stage process towards taking on all responsibilities of a fully functioning Group.

### Corporate membership

This is available for organisations and businesses not directly involved in deer management but which have an interest in the sector through contract work, supply of products, services, systems, or information, and wish to keep in touch with

developments in the wild deer sector in Scotland.  
**Cost of Corporate membership is £100.00.**

### Associate Membership

This is available for individuals and vocational stalkers who wish to keep in contact with ADMG, receive its newsletters, publications and updates, and attend the ADMG AGM and other events. **Cost of Associate membership is £25.00**

Those interested in membership should contact the ADMG Secretary [finlay.clark@bidwells.co.uk](mailto:finlay.clark@bidwells.co.uk) in the first instance.

As a member you consent to us holding any data you provide, in accordance with the terms of our Privacy Policy as laid out on our website [www.deer-management.co.uk](http://www.deer-management.co.uk)

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