



Business far from normal in these extraordinary times.

Photo: Dick Playfair



Richard Cooke, Chairman
Association of Deer Management Groups

As with every other aspect of life the Coronavirus pandemic has thrown the deer world into disarray and, at the point of writing, it is not yet clear to what extent stalking with guests and tenants will be possible this season. Furthermore, the impact on the venison market has been devastating but we are hopeful, despite a period of closure by some processors, that there will be a market, albeit at rather different values than in recent years.

Venison is more fully covered by Scottish Venison Association Chairman Bill Bewsher, and there is also comment from SQWV Chairman Jamie Stewart, later in this issue. ADMG has also contributed to the development of Scottish Government guidance on how to conduct tourism and outdoor activity safely with social distancing and this is now available on our [website](#). Guidance for forestry and other land uses was published in June.

The 2019 Deer Review has been carried well into 2020 and, with other pressing priorities for the Scottish Government, it may be some time yet before it is picked up again at Holyrood Committee level. It rests with a cautiously favourable report from SNH this time last year, followed in January by the very comprehensive Report of the Deer Working Group. While this is in many

respects commendable and useful it is strangely at odds with the SNH position. The DWG report takes a rather negative and backward-looking view of the deer sector and ADMG does have significant concerns about some of its recommendations which it has made clear in a detailed commentary to the Cabinet Secretary. We stand ready to continue with that dialogue once the Review is reopened.

It is regrettable that we had to postpone the AGM on 18 March due to the pandemic. At present it would appear that large public meetings will not be possible for quite some time, but it is still possible for ADMG to hold meetings on Zoom and, we will be holding a reinstated virtual AGM on 16 July. Hopefully we will again be able to have a normal physical AGM in the Spring of 2021. We have also lost our usual opportunities to get together at Scone and Moy. Despite all that, ADMG remains ready to help and support any DMGs if so requested. I am aware that a number of Groups are holding their meetings online and would be happy to attend any of those if you would like me to do so. In the meantime, we will keep you up to date through E-scope and can hopefully help through the current period of great uncertainty as the new season approaches.

The UK and Scottish Governments have provided a number of COVID-19 related support measures over recent months and these will make a difference to the survival prospects of many businesses of all sorts. The country sports sector as a whole was inexplicably left out of many of these measures which in my view is discriminatory.

Chairman's editorial - continued

It is true that persistent lobbying by the representative bodies, ADMG included, eventually resulted in the Pivotal Enterprise Resilience Fund being extended to estates and some, I fear relatively few, will have been able to utilise this or other schemes. However, our efforts to persuade the Scottish Government to extend the rates holiday for 2020 to stalking businesses has, I am afraid, been unsuccessful and we have now received a letter from the Finance Secretary to this effect. This too seems to me to be discriminatory and I sense the usual prejudice in political circles when it comes to so called "sporting estates" despite the fact that our economic contribution and provision of employment in the remoter parts of Scotland is now at least sometimes acknowledged at Government level.

On another subject I hear from time to time both from representatives of Forestry and Land Scotland and from some of our environmental NGO members that occasionally, in a few DMGs, their representatives can experience hostility from other Group members. I can only make the general comment that the effectiveness of DMGs depends on working together in an atmosphere of mutual respect among those with differing land management objectives. An "us and them" atmosphere is really counterproductive and potentially damaging to the effectiveness and credibility of DMGs. Collaborative deer management is not

possible in a divided DMG. We are all in this together! I don't doubt that DMG Chairs will be able to ensure that any such hostility does not manifest itself going forward.

In this issue of Scope, published online only on this occasion, you will find a summary of our very useful survey of Members' intentions in respect of culls and venison production in 2020, if the coming season is significantly affected by COVID-19, as seems likely. The venison industry faces a very uncertain future until the restaurant and food service sector which may see some limited re-opening at some point soon, is back to somewhere near normal. This is bound to be reflected in the capacity of the processors to take in the usual number of carcasses, as well as in the price. Thank you to all those producers, more than 100, who responded to the survey with comments and concerns.

My hope is that, despite the circumstances, all will commit to take their full target culls, as committed in DMG deer management plans. Reports are of a high calving rate this year and if we take the foot off the pedal on culls we will face a huge catching up exercise in 2021 and beyond. The SNH 2019 report acknowledged a reduction in the population, despite all the upward pressures.

As a sector we really cannot afford to slip back.

Right time for ADMG to stage upland deer management event at Scottish Parliament



Mairi Gougeon, Minister for Rural Affairs

ADMG staged an event at the Scottish Parliament during the first week in March hosted by Stewart Stevenson MSP and titled *Upland deer management. The voluntary approach: rising to the challenge*.

The event was held following publication of the SNH review of deer management in November 2019, and the report of the Scottish Government appointed Deer Working Group. A key objective of the event was to help to inform MSPs, officials and others about the significant progress made by Scotland's upland Deer Management Groups, and the objectives of ADMG going forward.

The gathering was attended by around 50 representatives of the sector including DMGs, SNH, Forestry and Land Scotland, and other organisations and NGOs (including the Woodland Trust representing Scottish Environment LINK) involved in upland deer management.

Speaking afterwards Richard Cooke, Chairman, ADMG, said:

"This was exactly the right time to hold this event given where the upland deer sector is in terms of review, in being alert to the climate emergency announced last year by the First Minister and in promoting the positives to our membership going forward, and the measures that they can deliver. The remit of voluntary deer management in our uplands is changing, and has changed significantly in the last 20 years, but DMGs are now in most cases best placed in upland areas



to deliver the work on the ground to address the climate challenge – peatland restoration and woodland planting and regeneration for example - with many already doing so.

"I am grateful to Mairi Gougeon MSP, Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment, for taking the time to come and talk to us, and also to her MSP colleagues who attended for taking an interest. Thank you also to Stewart Stevenson MSP for his part in making this important event happen."

Rural Affairs Minister Mairi Gougeon said:

"There is no doubt that considerable progress has been made in Scotland with deer management plans, habitat assessment, training for recreational stalkers and protection of the public interest generally.

"We are all aware that more remains to be done to ensure that our natural environment is resilient. This event was a good opportunity to discuss the issues we face and how together we can help tackle climate change through nature-based solutions such as tree-planting and peatland restoration."

Ross Johnston, Deputy Director of Sustainable Development, SNH, who also spoke at the event, said that SNH recognised the value from progressive, collaborative approaches to managing deer and the benefits that the best performing DMGs could deliver for people and nature. Also, that SNH recognised the significant efforts made by DMGs in delivering improvements identified through the assessment process and that those SNH staff involved saw this on the whole as a positive and constructive exercise. Looking ahead he said:

"This is happening at a time when approaches to regional land use planning are being developed, post EU exit funding and future agricultural support is being considered, and when natural capital approaches are becoming more advanced.

"These are all potentially significant in how Scotland's land and deer are managed in the future. Deer managers should be alert and consider making the case for support for sustainable deer management as future funding schemes are being shaped."

Speaker notes from the event are available via the following links:

[Mairi Gougeon, Rural Affairs Minister](#)
[Richard Cooke, Chairman, ADMG](#)
[Ross Johnston, SNH](#)

Friends remembered

Robin Fleming (1932-2020) CBE DL

Robin Fleming of Blackmount who died peacefully at home in Oxfordshire on the 26 June cared deeply for Blackmount and all that it meant to those who lived and worked there.

Mr Robin, as he was affectionately known, chaired the Blackmount Deer Management Group for 30 years, from inception until Richard Schuster took over in 2010.

A full obituary will appear in the winter edition of Scope.

Louis Stewart (1929 – 2019) MBE

Louis Stewart, a founder employee of the former Red Deer Commission died on the 7 December 2019.

From Loubcroy, Strath Oykel his first job was under-stalker on the Castle Leod Estate, Strathpeffer and then on the Loch Eil Estate. He joined the Red Deer Commission in 1960 leading their team of stalkers. He was awarded an MBE for his work for deer in 1964 and in 1972 he received the Balfour-Browne Trophy.

He finally retired from the Red Deer Commission in 1992.

James (Jim) Payne (1932 – 2019)

Jim Payne who many knew with great affection for his long-time support for the West Sutherland Deer Management Group and for ADMG, died on 25 December 2019.

Born in New Zealand he came to the UK aged 16 and, following military service went into shipping. The purchase of Ardvar Estate in 1977 was followed by the founding of Ardvar Salmon in 1980, and from that time he played a prominent role in the Scottish salmon industry.

Margaret, his widow, has so far raised the wonderful sum of £435,000 for charity through her 'virtual' ascent of Suilven.

DEER WORKING GROUP REPORT

West Ross DMG Chairman writes to the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform

Photo: West Ross DMG



Randal Wilson

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

I write as Chair of the West Ross Deer Management Group (WRDMG) being prompted to do so by the report by the Deer Working Group which I feel greatly undervalues the important role of DMGs. West Ross DMG has 14 members and covers an area of 97,527 hectares bounded by the Garve to Gairloch and Garve to Ullapool roads to the south and north respectively, the west boundary being the coast from Gairloch to Loch Broom. WRDMG was formed in 1989. While most of our members are private owners managing the land for deer stalking, alongside farming, forestry, hydro, tourist accommodation etc we also have a number of environmental NGO members including The National Trust for Scotland, as well as land managed by Forestry and Land Scotland.

When I got involved in my local DMG ten years ago we talked about deer numbers and culls but with little scientific information to back decision making. The discussions were pretty narrow and nearly always specifically deer related. Since then we have grown in stature and breadth as a locally based voluntary collaborative organisation under the leadership of the Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG) and have developed and expanded on our common purpose and grown in capacity with an increasing depth of ability and knowledge in our ranks. We no longer talk only of specific deer related issues but of all types of land use and management and how they integrate with deer management.

As a sector, through ADMG, we have worked with SNH to move forward on deer management in a more informed and professional manner and we have all come out the other side with a much better understanding of what we are trying to achieve and why, and we work effectively with

many others to achieve those goals. Consequently we have become much more evidence based in how we deliver our collective and individual deer management objectives.

We are also contributing to Scottish Government climate change targets by encouraging members to look at the merits of planting woodland and at peat wetland restoration and carbon capture. We have planted 4,843 ha of Native Woodland between 1994 and 2013 and we have covered 800 ha of peat wetland restoration with the same again in the pre-planning stage.

WRDMG has just completed a group-wide mapping exercise, funded by Scottish Forestry, to identify areas suitable for planting so that woodland expansion can now be delivered by individual estates. We have identified 2,647 ha with high potential, and 2,861 ha with medium potential.

We are now looking at a similar project for peatland restoration on a group-wide basis.

We are also in our tenth year of the Fannich Hills SAC Management Agreement and last year, as a result of working collaboratively with four estates to reduce deer numbers to the target density, our habitat impact assessments have been re-assessed and the impacts fall overwhelmingly into the lower impact categories. As a result of achieving the Section 7 goals, we are in discussion with SNH as to the future management of the SAC and whether the Group may take back the management going forward. I would add that:

- Deer meetings now include a broader church of interests than ever before and encompass many different members from all types of land management and community led organisations.
- We have an up to date website to ensure that information is available on the DMG and that we have a contact point for enquiries.

- All our members are involved in habitat impact assessments so that we have a systematic basis for judging what is sustainable land and deer management.
- We inform the local Mountain Rescue of member availability to help in an emergency.
- We have Facebook pages that help inform the public of management activity on the hill.
- We inform the Fire Brigade (SFS) of what personnel and equipment we have and where, to help fight wildfires.
- We report on poaching activity and deer vehicle collisions to the Police.
- We hold barbecues and other community events and projects to help educate local families about deer management practices.
- Every estate has given details to the SNH hosted *Heading for the Scottish Hills* website to inform recreational visitors of when deer management takes place and where.
- Public benefit is very much to the fore in our Deer Management Plan demonstrating that we as an organisation can deliver public benefit through private management interests.

Although not perfect, Deer Management Groups are unique as they have the ability to bring together all land managers at a regional landscape scale across the Highlands and Islands, meeting regularly and discussing a broad range of topics of which deer management is just one. This must surely be the way ahead for the future and it is pleasing to see the Scottish Land Commission considering a more regional approach to

rural land use. We are in a position to continue to work with SNH to achieve both public and private land management objectives, with a reach that no other networks have.

The Deer Working Group review seems to have overlooked all of this. It basically sees little merit in DMGs, suggesting that other approaches would do equally well. It advocates more deer reductions based on an overall stocking density where we all surely know by now that a one-size-fits-all approach simply does not work when it comes to deer of different species in very different situations. The review also appears to deem the expertise, community, structure and reach built up over thirty years, as of little value. In short it comes across to me at least as being anti-deer with little recognition of the benefits they bring to Scotland.

I think that they have this very wrong and hope that the Scottish Government and ECCLR Committee will acknowledge the value of an established and increasingly effective management system, which was at least recognised by SNH in its 2019 review. SNH has built up a great deal of goodwill and partnership with ADMG over the years and would find life difficult without the coordination and leadership which ADMG brings.

We have the knowledge and expertise and have demonstrated our willingness and ability to adapt in fast changing circumstances and to accept our public accountability. My personal hope is that the Scottish Government will allow the deer sector to continue to build on its strengths and continue to deliver the benefits of working collaboratively. Progressive evolution is where we are; revolution we do not need.

Randal Wilson - Chair, West Ross DMG

What to do with the Black Wood?

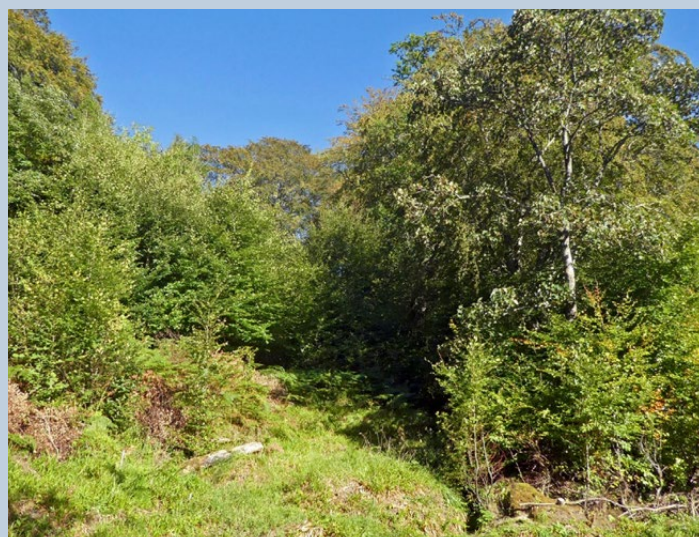
"If the designated sites system isn't working then we need a different approach" says Alastair Riddell of North Chesthill Estate writing in Scottish Forestry Magazine about his frustration at being unable to make improvements that would raise the status of Black Wood.

Black Wood extends to some 52 ha on the north and south sides of Glen Lyon with around 28 ha within North Chesthill Estate. The woods are part of the Glen Lyon Woods SSSI and are designated for their lichen interest and also as a wet woodland. The estate is wanting to develop plans to improve the wood which, according to SNH, is in "unfavourable, declining condition". So far, those attempts have gone nowhere. Now Alastair has written an article to highlight some of the issues involved and suggest improvements to a process that could benefit nature and biodiversity rather than stand in its way.

He says that if it cannot be agreed what to do with designated sites or funding for them cannot be prioritised then, perhaps, they should not be designated. It is frustrating that the wood is in poor condition but that there is no agreed or practical funded way to resolve that. "The best way arguably might be for the designation to be removed" he writes, "so that it can be managed like other woodland."

"A more flexible approach" he says, "will give better results for everyone including the public interest and the wood itself. After half a century of an approach that does not work, we need a different way."

What to do with the Black Wood, by Alastair Riddell, is published in Scottish Forestry, Spring 2020



Scotland's deer stalking sector will be hit hard if let stalking not possible this year



Dick Playfair,
Secretary, Scottish Venison Association

A survey undertaken in May by the Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG), Lowland Deer Network Scotland (LDNS) and the Scottish Venison Association (SVA) concluded that if there is no let stalking this year for stags, hinds, roe bucks or does then the 103 respondent businesses will lose in excess of £2,500,000.

The research was undertaken to establish what the financial loss would be to those letting upland and lowland stalking given restrictions on travel under COVID-19 regulations and physical distancing rules, and how this might affect 2020/21 cull plans. The survey also set out to establish how the loss of let stalking and potential changes to game dealer/processor arrangements, which will be subject to reduced capacity due to the inefficiencies created by distancing requirements, might affect volumes of venison going into the food chain. The survey's main conclusions were:

Loss of income from let stalking

- The total amount of income estimated at risk of loss to 103 respondents covering > 800,000 ha if there is no let stalking this season is in excess of £2.5M.
- However, if there is no or limited let stalking this season the deer cull plans of 57% of respondents (covering some 448,000 ha) would be unaffected.
- Similarly, 51% of respondents also said that the loss of all or part of their letting income would not affect the volume of venison they put into the food chain.

Changes to venison dealer/processor arrangements and venison supply chain

- 62% of respondents said however that if arrangements with their game dealer, including price, change they would adjust their planned cull.
- Only 25% of respondents (covering 197,000 ha) said that their cull would be unaffected by both loss of let stalking and by changes to game dealer/venison market arrangements.

In a separate multiple-choice question asking what respondents would do if current routes to market were affected (such as no or restricted carcase collections, significant changes to price etc) the following responses were given:

- 64 said that they would adjust their planned cull
- 62 said that they would explore other outlets and routes to market
- 15 said they would not be affected
- 14 said they would consider leaving carcasses on the hill



Richard Cooke, Chairman, the Association of Deer Management Groups, said:

"This survey gives us some very valuable insight into the potential impact on deer management businesses if there were to be no let stalking in the coming season due to the fallout from Covid-19.

"Our sample represents just under an estimated one third of the sector, so the total loss from no let stalking at all can be estimated at around £9,000,000 before any impact from downgraded venison sales is also taken into account. This is of course the worst-case scenario, full cancellation, and hopefully the impact will be less if the Scottish Government roadmap out of lockdown proceeds as hoped. However, there will undoubtedly be some effect due to cancelled bookings and the difficulties of organising Covid-safe stalking with guests. Whatever the degree, we must expect disruption and significant economic damage including potential job losses, both part time and seasonal, as survey respondents have flagged up. We must also recognise the loss to the wider rural economy from the income that this type of sporting tourism generates.

"As for venison, the processors have, as at the end of June, lost all their restaurant, food service and catering customers and may be sitting on unsold stock from last season. While these markets should recover in time it would be unrealistic to expect that in the short term and they are therefore facing a situation of reduced demand and extra cost due to the need to incorporate social distancing within their processing operations.

"Producers should be in touch with their dealer to ascertain how best to manage the supply so as to spread the load to reduce the usual seasonal peaks. The Scottish Venison Association, supported by ADMG, is developing a recovery plan for discussion with the Scottish Government and ADMG has been working with other bodies to advise Scottish Government in the provision of advice on how to conduct deer management and other outdoor activities with social distancing taken into account.

"ADMG's firm advice must be to take planned culls in full to avoid future problems with deer numbers but a high degree of cooperation with processors will be necessary to ensure that the venison supply chain can remain operable throughout the coming months."

The full results of the survey are now online including a summary of additional comments from respondents.



Map: James Hutton Institute

Carbon Sequestration in the hills and uplands of Scotland



Patrick Lambert,
Food and Agricultural Systems Ltd

A cursory glance at the Soil Maps of Scotland and the accompanying capability map (<https://soils.environment.gov.scot/>)

is a testament to the work put in by the Macaulay Institute in the mid 1960s and updated in the 1980s.

The key area on the maps is land capable of supporting improved grassland (Class 5.1 to 5.3) This area covers 1,405,700 ha or 18% of Scotland's land area. Typically, in the Highlands and Islands this land is often in river valleys, lower slopes, and on loch and seashores. It is also probably the key area of land that the Scottish Government and forestry industry is eyeing up to meet its target of 170,000 ha of new plantings by 2030.

But well managed permanent pasture and improved grazings can contribute significantly to reducing our carbon footprints when they are managed for the benefit of the wider environment as part of a closed loop. The key element to get these areas functioning and bringing the soil alive is managing the Ph. From my own work in looking at land for reseeding, and much of this is on land classes 3.2 to 4.2, 58% of soils were 5.9 or below.

We have sampled mineral soils on some west coast good gravel-based pastures at between 4.7 and 5.0 Ph. At these levels the only component of the pasture to be gaining ground are rushes and poor agrostis-festuca (bent grasses).

The use of limestone particularly on the 5.1 to 5.3 land has seen a continuous decline since the Agricultural Lime Scheme was removed in 1974 on our admission to the EEC. The scheme was brought into legislation in 1946 and over the next 28 years it made a huge contribution to the improvement in quality and productivity of upland pastures. It covered 60% of the cost of applying lime and went up to 70% in summer months to encourage use on hill land and wetter areas when vehicles could travel on the land. In 1959 Hansard reported the cost to the UK Exchequer was between £9m and £10m pounds per annum (£208m to £230m in 2020).

Today the cost of lime per tonne spread is in the region of £30/tonne depending on your haulage rate from the nearest quarry and at 5 tonnes/hectare applied to most upland grassland it is not a low input! When your levels have declined to a Ph of 5.0 on mineral soils you are looking at two applications over a couple of years to get back up to nearer 6.0 at which improved grasses and white clover can become the drivers of your pasture.

Once your soils are working for you again, your grasses will photosynthesise at an increased rate and produce higher quality forage and increased root activity in the soil which stores carbon as humus or organic matter. Deeper rooting species such as timothy, cocksfoot and tall and meadow fescue along with burnet and ribwort, and sheep's parsley will all help stabilise your soils and prevent erosion.

Unfortunately apart from Glensaugh Farm run by the James Hutton Institute and the Hill and Mountain Research Centre at Kirkton, Crianlarich there has been no research work done in the last 20 years on improving upland pasture because the work did not fit any of the research criteria that the Government deemed relevant to our current priorities or the objectives under the Common Agricultural Policy. The potential on upland soils to increase organic matter and sequester carbon is huge not just in peatland restoration but in making your better soil types more biologically active, growing better quality grass with increased D values that will produce more Kilo joules of energy for your deer as well as your sheep.

Land capable of supporting Improved Grassland (class 5.1 to class 5.3)

Land in this class has the potential for use as improved grassland. A range of different limitation types, either operating singly or in combination, can restrict the land capability to this class. These limitations include climate, slope, wetness, and often a heterogeneous pattern of conditions that render even occasional cultivation unsuitable. Land which has had this potential for improvement exploited is much more productive than land which remains in its unimproved state.



THE THREE-LEGGED STOOL

Photo: Victor Clements



Victor Clements

For those who have been paying attention recently, you will have noticed that the world around us may well have just changed in a very significant way. The very simplest of life forms, no more than a few strands of DNA, has effectively paralysed the entire planet for three months, and it happened very quickly. For many people, diaries have been scrubbed for most of the year. We don't know what will happen next, but this may be just the start of it, and it is already apparent that getting out of lockdown will be much harder than going in to it. When the threat has passed there is no doubt that many businesses and jobs will not have survived, many trading opportunities will be curtailed or lost, and if the world credit crisis in 2008 took ten years to rectify itself, then this may well be very similar. If all this does not cause you to pay attention, then what will?

When the lockdown began, food became everyone's priority. Nothing else mattered, except maybe toilet roll. The supply chain did deliver, at least in this country, but something we have long taken for granted suddenly began to look a lot less secure. The importance of agriculture and production in general has suddenly come to the fore, and the narrative we had before is suddenly no longer relevant, or at the very least, it needs to be significantly modified.

Before Coronavirus, climate change was allegedly the most serious threat to the world. Now we see that the age-old threats of disease and potentially hunger are still there as well. With some of the tensions that exist in the world, we cannot discount conflict either, especially if competition for resources intensifies. With a population of 7.7 billion people on earth, forecast to increase to 10 billion by 2050, climate change is only one of many threats that might get us if we are not careful, although many of these things are of course connected. If we were setting out to design a sustainable planet, we wouldn't put 10 billion people on it. The world is very heavily modified, and we have to try and find a work-around solution.

We are going to have more of these big international episodes to deal with in future, and we have to be resilient against them. Just thinking back over the last 20 years, we had a swine flu outbreak in 2009 which we managed to contain, the SARS and MERS outbreaks could have got away but didn't, we have had foot and mouth disease in 2001 and again in 2007. We have had at least two new major tick-borne diseases in livestock in Britain, and a number of new diseases that affect our native tree species. We had the credit crunch in 2008, and the oil price crash in 2014. We have had major international conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria in which we have been involved, and several others in which we have not. Who knows what we might need to have to deal with in the next 20 years?

The economy of rural Scotland has long been regarded as a three-legged stool, with social, environmental and economic concerns being given equal prominence, and this has provided us with a degree of stability. Individual estate properties have traditionally regarded sheep, deer and grouse or salmon as their individual three-legged stool. Others may have forestry, or some sort of diversification, but the general principle of not putting all your eggs in one basket still applies. Deer management has long been regarded in this way, and for the last ten years or so, the Scottish Government has accepted this rationale as well.

The current Deer Management Group assessment process is largely accepted because of the checks and balances it provides. In the last few years, the mood music has changed, and there is movement towards a view that environmental concerns trump the other two. The rationale for carbon management seems to dominate everything, but creating a leg that is longer than the others makes the stool unstable.

There is no doubt that our environment is important, and the current crisis has underlined this importance. Many of us have found our escape in the outdoors. For those locked away in inner cities, pictures and videos of the Scottish countryside have helped maintain their sanity. A walk in the country is something that millions of people have been dreaming about for months. Our environment is massively important, and if we did not know that before, then we certainly know it now.

However, we must not manage our environment in such a way that we cannot live in it ourselves. Production and employment are important. What this means in practice is that we have to acknowledge that we do live in a very heavily modified world. We can improve the condition of what we have got, and we can make ourselves resilient against future misfortune, but we cannot re-instate something that only existed when we were not here at all. For many, this is the environmental vision, but raising the bar so high that only a few can clear it is not going to work for very long.

The three-legged stool is important because it is stable. If we lengthen one leg at the expense of the others, it will fall over. If we take two legs away, it will collapse. We can adjust the height of the stool, but only by keeping the legs in proportion. If we lengthen one, we must lengthen the others as well. If the ground below us is uneven, we can have a leg that is longer than the others to take account of this, but only within reason.

Single issue management of our countryside is not the narrative that we should be encouraging. Planting trees for carbon management purposes only is no different to the single objective sought by blanket planting sitka spruce to the exclusion of everything else in the past. If we want to plant trees we should do so for a mixture of production, conservation, amenity, biodiversity, public health and landscape reasons. That will be a lot more sustainable.

If we want to sustain more people and connect them with the land in Scotland, we can only do so by building up our social, economic and environmental capacity, protecting and strengthening all three. If environmental improvement involves an investment or an opportunity cost, then we need to know what that is so that we can plan around it or judge whether it is appropriate or not. If an economic opportunity involves an environmental cost, we need to know what that is too.

We need an ambitious but achievable vision, and if we want to take people with us, the social, economic and environmental strands need to be developed together, and deer management will have a core part to play in this.

As a model, the three-legged stool still has an important role. A better model has yet to be devised. The current crisis should remind us of that, because at the moment of greatest threat, it was where our food was going to come from that concerned us most.

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Victor Clements is a woodland advisor working in Highland Perthshire, secretary of the Breadalbane DMG, and a regular contributor to Scope magazine.

Amazing total raised for charity by Margaret Payne of Ardvar

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Margaret Payne, who first climbed Suilven as a teenager in 1944, has conquered the mountain one more time, or as good as, in her amazing fundraising effort to climb its 2,398 ft but this time up her staircase at home.

Margaret, widow of Jim Payne, a longstanding supporter of ADMG, took 73 days to climb the flights of stairs at her home at Ardvar, Sutherland 282 times, and in the process raised an astonishing £433,000 (so far!) for the NHS Together Charities, RNLI and the Highland Hospice.

Margaret said:

"I feel great now that that I have finally reached the top. It really has taken a long time – I can only manage so many flights of stairs a day – so I feel happy to have achieved my goal and that so much money has been raised as a result.

"I am also truly humbled by the generosity of everyone who has donated to these amazing causes, and I would like to thank them for all their heart-warming messages and donations. Their encouragement kept me motivated to climb on the days I felt tired. They really made all the difference and are the ones who deserve a clap."

Her original target was just £10,000 which she achieved within the first week. Her donations page remains open until the end of July. You can still **[donate via this link](#)**.



*Margaret celebrates having reached the summit of Suilven – virtually!
Photo montage: Nicky McArthur*

UK retail venison market increased in value by almost 11% during 2019 latest research shows

Photo: Dick Playfair



Dick Playfair,
Secretary, Scottish Venison Association

Detailed market research undertaken across the UK has indicated that the retail home venison market had grown, before the COVID crisis, in value, recording an increase of 10.9% through 2019.

The market research undertaken by Kantar and new attitudinal research by 56 Degree Insight for the Scottish Venison Association and SAOS and funded by the Scottish Government and First Venison has, for the first time, given an accurate snapshot of how the UK retail venison market is performing and of consumer views in Scotland and the rest of the UK towards buying and eating venison.

The Kantar research found that the UK retail venison market was worth £14.4m in 2019, with a total of 1,221 tonnes sold during 12 months. An additional two times that amount of venison is produced, the majority of it from Scotland's wild deer, which goes to market via other routes – catering, hotels and restaurants and foodservice; independent butchers, farmers markets and mail order; and for export, although the COVID-19 crisis has severely impacted in these areas so far this year.

Kantar's research drilled down into the UK grocery retail sector, establishing that sales of primary cuts were worth £7.1m (up by 43%) and burgers and grills some £5.2m. The retail market is dominated by two brands accounting for 59% of sales with Highland Game at #1 and Waitrose own label at #2. In terms of retailer share of venison Waitrose is in front with 33.2% of the market, Sainsbury's following with 13% and then Morrisons with 10.7%.

The attitudinal research undertaken by 56 Degree Insight examined who eats venison, when and why, and where they are buying it. Headline findings show that 49% of venison is bought from the supermarket; 26% from butchers; 14% from farm shops; and 9% from mail order. Venison shoppers are likely to be older and more affluent, with 13% of those eating venison living in Scotland, and that 30% of all venison is consumed by those aged 65 and over. Also 52% choose venison because of taste; 34% because of high quality; 24% because of health/nutritional qualities; 22% to try something different; and 19% because they can buy it locally. Venison is 5x more likely to be eaten as a treat and 2x more likely to be eaten for health reasons versus other red meat.

Bill Bewsher, Chairman of the Scottish Venison Association, said:

"For years we have lacked detailed information about the venison market and have needed to make certain assumptions based on news reports and other sources about it, how much is sold, and why people buy it. With this new research we are now much better informed, as well as having confirmation that there was healthy growth for venison across the retail sector – until the Covid-19 situation arose."

"With these data however, and in terms of the venison recovery plan, processors and other intermediaries can now go to the market with confidence and talk to buyers armed with evidence and hard fact. Venison is performing far better than red meat in general and that is very good news for the wild sector, for deer farmers, and for those who have diversified into deer farming. We are keen to maintain this momentum if we can once the current constraints of the Covid-19 crisis and uncertainties surrounding Brexit have passed."

An infographic has been produced showing the **main findings of the research.**

SQWV – maintaining the standard despite COVID-19



Jamie Stewart, Chairman,
Scottish Quality Wild Venison

It hardly feels like a month since I took up residence in the chairman's seat for SQWV, I looked at the calendar recently and realised it has been nearly two years - but what a two years!

Following on from the *E-Coli 0157* driven Food Standards Scotland (FSS) review of the sector, we were involved also with the Moredun Institute's research into the health of our wild deer populations which established, it was good to hear, that the bacteria has a low prevalence in our wild deer of less than 0.3 per cent. The final publication of that review however is still to happen, delayed no doubt by the Covid crisis also.

What stage 1 of the Moredun work confirmed however, and what we hoped we already knew, is that venison is a premium food, renowned for its quality, provenance and health credentials, and its reputation continues to rise in both domestic and international markets.

This was the view promoted by the Rural Affairs and Natural Environment Minister Mairi Gougeon when she launched the first ever strategy for Scottish venison *Beyond the Glen* in September 2018, bringing together wild and farmed deer interests and setting out key areas for growth across the sector towards Scotland Food and Drink's overarching strategy for our food sector *Ambition 2030*.

A period of "deer management politics" then followed with the SNH and Scottish Government Deer Working Group reviews into lowland and open range deer management, the latter, as you will already appreciate, giving us 99 recommendations for change. It was timely that ADMG was able to host its parliamentary reception in response earlier this year under the banner *Upland deer management. The voluntary approach: rising to the challenge*.

The formation of Scottish Quality Wild Venison (SQWV Ltd) in 2002 has been of benefit to all involved in deer management since that time in maintaining, developing and promoting Quality Assurance standards throughout the wild venison sector.

Providence and process are key elements to the success of our wild venison, and in these challenging times, that much remains the same.

ADMG and the Scottish Venison Association have been involved at length with the Scottish Government as it plots its 'route map' through the crisis. Significant efforts have been made in the development of a sectoral recovery plan being discussed with the Scottish Government and ADMG



Photo: Dick Playfair

is working with other bodies to feed into and support Scottish Government advice on how to conduct deer management and other outdoor activities with physical distancing taken into account.

By the time this is published, I am certain that Scotland's First Minister will have made the right decisions to stimulate the much-needed economic recovery including the opening up of restaurants and other food outlets - albeit this may be partial - and in doing so driving the need for our quality assured product.

In preparation for our return to a relative normality, producers have been advised to contact their dealer to ascertain how best to manage the supply so as to spread the load associated with the seasonal peaks in culling.

The restrictions on usual business practices have posed tough challenges for all of us but, little by little, we move towards an acceptable level of normality, whatever that means. SQWV has been monitoring the situation closely and understands the issues affecting people in rural communities. We took the precautions the Government had advised and asked our assessment team to work from home where possible.

We are aware that some scheme members were due to have a physical inspection from our assessment team but that a face-to-face visit may not have been an appropriate or necessary action to take at that time. We have therefore committed to members that, subject to any previous non-conformances having been satisfactorily completed, SQWV approval and status will be extended until such time as we can safely make a physical assessment of their premises and process.

In the meantime, the SQWV Technical Advisory Group has updated our standards to reflect changes within food safety. I will be writing to all members informing them of the changes and to schedule visits, where appropriate, for continued Quality Assurance certification as the lockdown eases.



Photo: Dick Playfair

Scottish Venison Association (SVA) Report



Bill Bewsher, Chairman,
Scottish Venison Association

Due to the COVID-19 crisis the SVA postponed its annual general meeting for this year but I circulated the following report to our Executive Committee in May.

SVA and the venison sector finds itself in a precarious position. COVID-19 trading restrictions have completely taken a major market out of commission (restaurants, pubs, food-service, hospitality, events) which has put processors under immense pressure. Physical distancing in the workplace also means that the capacity at processors is or will be limited when production resumes.

There have also been changes in the retail market. Initial panic buying has, in line with the rest of the red meat sector, seen premium products forced off shelf in favour of mainstream lines.

We know that decisions were taken by some processors to suspend carcass collection until such time as it has been safe to resume. Seasonality has at least meant that only the roe buck cull and some out of season control culling under license has up until July been affected. Some processors and agents have resumed collections whilst others advise that they will be back, but at reduced capacity, in the next couple of months.

In consequence, processors have been using up stock from storage, in some cases downgrading premium cuts for use in processed product. There has been some move towards mail order and 'buy and collect'. The impact on the export trade is not yet fully understood but will be further complicated by Brexit and potential tariffs if a no-deal scenario should be the eventual outcome.

SVA has undertaken a short poll of established processors, and other key players who buy venison for onward sale to gauge their opinion. Regrettably some did not respond to give us the fullest picture, despite a reminder, but there is no doubt that this part of the sector is under extreme pressure.

In order to streamline representation SVA works on behalf of producers, processors and the farmed venison sector, and for private and public interests.

What therefore has SVA been doing during the COVID-19 crisis in terms of representation and working for Scottish Venison?

I wrote to the Cabinet Secretary Fergus Ewing on 15 April to report on the research undertaken by Kantar and 56 Degree Insight. I hope that you have all seen that research which was funded by the Scottish Government through SAOS (Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society). If not, there is a short write up about it in this newsletter and it is available on the website.

My letter to the Cabinet Secretary also gave me the opportunity to raise the prospect of the sector being plunged into crisis due to the pandemic. I wrote:

"Our industry is now treading water, much of it in lockdown, and whilst processors are doing what they can to supply retail through stock holdings, any supply to the food service, restaurant, catering and hotel sectors has completely stalled. Likewise, exports are in the same situation."

"It would be remiss of me on behalf of the Scottish Venison Association and the wider Scottish venison sector, wild and farmed, not to ask for some central support towards a recovery campaign once restrictions on movement are lifted and we start to return to normal. I am hoping that this might be by when the red stag season starts again in July, although that may be optimistic."

"I know that others in the livestock sector are already forming a queue for funds. Whilst venison is small by comparison every business is precious and we must do as much as possible to ensure their survival if we want to build on the momentum that this latest research clearly shows that we have in our favour."

Whilst we did not receive anything other than a formal acknowledgment from the Cabinet Secretary we have been following up this initial approach with his Department and the Scottish Government Food and Drink Division, and a number of meetings with Government officials have now taken place. We also have the Scottish Venison Strategy to consider and the impact that this crisis will have on its progress, coupled with the lack of funds to take forward some of its major ambitions.

Dick Playfair for SVA and Amanda Brown for SAOS are in touch virtually on a daily basis. They have been working flat out in gathering information to make our case.

VENISON UPDATE

A survey (now concluded) was undertaken by SVA with ADMG and LDNS to gauge the intentions of deer managers/stalkers for the coming red stag season in the light of changes to both (1) stalking lets, and (2) the venison market. More than 100 responses were received to this.

In addition, frequent meetings have taken place online with the Scottish Government, Scotland Food and Drink, and others either called by us or at which the venison sector has been represented. These followed on from an intensive series of online sessions with Kantar and 56 Degree Insight to tie up the venison research by the end of the SVA's financial year (31 March).

This research undertaken with ADMG and LDNS will give a very good indication of the intention of those managing the cull and their response to COVID-19 and will tell us what proportion of the cull might be held back, what impact this might have on carcass numbers going into the food chain, and what other routes to market might be explored.

We have now put in a bid for funds to support a recovery programme. We are fortunate that the Kantar work tells us where money will be best spent (London and SE England, and Scotland) and, if we can secure some funding, we would use this firstly to reach consumers to encourage demand for venison, both premium and processed. This would also give additional weight to conversations that processors and others are having with buyers to keep venison products prominent on the shelf.

SVA can only promote generic Scottish venison. We cannot favour individual processors or brands, so our message, if funding allows, will be a broad one, but will build on the benefits and positives highlighted by the research which has been timely and gives us a credible platform on which to move forward. In terms of timing any campaign would be for the back end of the year, October through to February 2021.

In addition, we have had further discussion with SNH and Scottish Craft Butchers/SFMTA regarding promotion to local markets, producing clear guidance for both ends of the supply chain - stalkers and local butchers - to enable venison to be supplied legally and safely through local outlets, in addition to promotion of mail order, home deliveries and 'farm gate' sales.

Scotland Food and Drink has launched a new supportlocal.scot directory that it is promoting, and we will also push the Scottish Venison website as a 'go-to information source' for where to obtain venison.

From a money perspective at the end of May we had just under £9,000 at the bank and there remains some income outstanding from the 2019/20 hind levy. Helpfully, a sum has also been pledged by First Venison on behalf of the farmed deer sector, for which we are grateful, and this has been invoiced.

The contribution to SVA from Forestry & Land Scotland (FLS) remains for the present as it has been for previous years and SVA is especially grateful for their ongoing support, particularly at this time of extreme pressure on all aspects of the venison supply chain.



Photo: James Hall

At this point it is perhaps worth reminding all members of the deer industry that it is the producers mainly (those who actually shoot the deer) who fund the SVA through the agreed 2p per kilo levy. Processors currently do not contribute to SVA funds, nor do some of the others involved in the sector although we do of course take their interests into account when representing the venison industry as a whole. Should the coming stag and hind culls be affected by the COVID-19 crisis then SVA income from the 2020/21 levies could reduce.

SVA has been in a relatively sound financial position to date due to prudent management but has in the last period been fast using up its reserves. At one point recently it looked like we would be unlikely to survive beyond this autumn but I doubt very much whether members of the deer/venison industry would have allowed that to happen.

Unfortunately, SVA is not in a position to apply for any of the Government support or loan schemes, being neither incorporated or a formal partnership, nor can it go into debt. SAOS has given the SVA tremendous support through Amanda Brown which has increased our capacity significantly and we are especially grateful for that. Currently the only person on the SVA executive who is paid is our consultant (who also provides the secretarial backing) and our arrangement with him covers just two days per month. In the present crisis he is working well in excess of that with a plethora of meetings, reports, data analysis, and developing our COVID-19 recovery strategy. If funds did come close to exhaustion it would be unrealistic to expect this arrangement to continue.

I appreciate that that does not all make comfortable reading for members of the industry but I hope, as we return slowly to normal, that the worst might now be behind us.

Newsletter produced by

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