

An encouraging period for DMGs but still a great deal to do



**Richard Cooke, Chairman
Association of Deer Management Groups**

The six months since the Scottish Parliament RACCE Committee hearings and recommendations to the Minister have been busy to say the least.

We have been set a target of 2016 to demonstrate the effectiveness of Deer Management Groups under the voluntary principle and it is very pleasing to see so many Groups take this on board and rise to the challenge. The 16 Groups that reported at our December Regional Meeting in Inverness and the 19 that did so in Perth in April showed the commitment and energy to up the momentum for change.

ADMG's role is to support its members in this process and SNH, by its additional commitment of staff and support for deer management planning, has also shown its determination to get the best out of the system.

The joint ADMG/SNH Collaborative Deer Management Project comprises a number of elements including the DMG Benchmark, launched for member consultation at our AGM in February and now published in this issue; a self assessment system is being developed for DMGs to measure their progress against the Benchmark and SNH is working on a data management system for use by DMGs.

It is also most encouraging that the Scottish Government, in these straitened times, has made additional funds available to assist Deer Management Groups with deer management planning over the next two years and that funding should continue to be available to DMGs thereafter through the new



Barisdale. Photo: Glyn Satterley

SRDP following Richard Lochhead's statement in June. Our second Birnam Seminar in May was very well attended by DMG office bearers and has been commended by those attending. The job now is for individual DMGs to put the lessons learned into practice.

All in all it has been an encouraging period but there is a great deal to do at all levels. ADMG Executive Committee Members will be making themselves available to assist DMGs working closely with SNH Wildlife Management Officers and we will be offering direct support to those few DMGs that still have some distance to travel.

In this Issue:

- Page 2:** Politics and Land Reform:
Dick Playfair on the latest developments
- Page 3:** Wildfire Update,
Competence: Colin McClean
- Page 4:** Focus on Balquhiddier Deer Management Group:
Dick Playfair meets Falcon Frost

- Page 5-8:** DMG Benchmark
- Page 9:** The National Trust for Scotland, Mar Lodge and Deer Management: Pete Selman, NTS
- Page 10-11:** In the Footsteps of Diana the Huntress: Iain Thornber
- Page 12:** More Venison Producers Should Join the SQWV Assurance Scheme says Jonathan Whitehead



Dick Playfair
Political Advisor to ADMG

It's no wonder that deer forest owners and deer managers feel under pressure. Not a week goes by without deer making the headlines, everyone has an opinion, and more so than ever before deer are the public – and political – interest.

The Rural Affairs Climate Change and Environment (RACCE) Committee inquiry into deer and the environment last year, and the response to its report from Paul Wheelhouse, the Minister, were a useful opportunity for examination of the sector. A very similar process had not much earlier been conducted for the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill (now Act), but in reality RACCE was a useful health-check for the system and the voluntary principle.

In March this year the Scottish Affairs Committee at Westminster published its interim report with a view to seeking to collect more evidence later. The report, titled Towards a Comprehensive Land Reform Agenda for Scotland, while not focusing on deer per se (yet) drew a number of conclusions with regard to land ownership with recommendations for wholesale, radical changes to the current system.

Ian Davidson MP, Chair of the Committee, was direct in launching the report. He said:

"The evidence we have received to date suggests that public policy on inheritance tax, business property relief, agricultural property relief, non-domestic rates and similar financial measures contribute considerably to the preservation of inherited wealth in landed estates, and to driving up the price of land, which has become a speculative commodity as well as a productive asset.

"We are minded to propose an end to all tax exemptions, subsidies and cosy tax deals unless they can be shown to be in the public interest."

Then in May the Land Reform Review Group (LRRG) published its final report to the Scottish Government. Running to more than 230 pages with 62 recommendations, the report goes into detail on topics including community land ownership, changes to the current tax system, and ways towards a 'fairer distribution' of land ownership.

The report addresses deer and deer management in some detail, and makes a number of recommendations over and above those resulting from the RACCE Committee inquiry, most notably the setting of culls by SNH, and that landowners would have to apply to SNH for consent to cull deer. The report says:

"The Review Group considers that Scotland's populations of native red and roe deer are important national assets that should be sustainably managed in the public interest. The Group recommends that improvements should be made to the current statutory framework governing the hunting of deer in Scotland to ensure appropriate culls are carried out to adequately safeguard public interests."

Finally, the Scottish Government announced its Land Reform Bill for Scotland on 7 June. Launching the Bill in Skye Minister for the Environment Paul Wheelhouse said:

"The [Land Reform] Review Group's report was a major milestone in taking forward Scotland's land reform journey and I welcome its vision and the significant contribution the report makes to the debate in Scotland. Over the coming weeks and months the Scottish Government, Scottish Parliament and Scottish society will have time to consider the report.

"By bringing forward a Land Reform Bill, before the end of the current term of the Scottish Parliament, we will take forward the direction of travel laid out in the report. The Bill will be another significant step forward in ensuring our land is used in the public interest and to the benefit of the people of Scotland.

"My vision, and that of my colleagues, for Scotland is for a fairer, wider and more equitable, distribution of land across our nation, where communities and individuals have access to land and the Land Reform Bill will enable much of this to happen."

There has been very little time to draw breath. ADMG has been working hard through this period to bring the deer sector up to speed in defence of the voluntary principle, but will that be enough? Deer as ever remain a political football – embroiled in the wider land reform debate and that again is very much on the political agenda.



Deer management is very much back in the political spotlight.
Photo: Glyn Satterley.

Wildfire Latest

In March this year the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service appointed a Wildfire Project Manager to promote and ensure compliance with the Scottish Government's Wildfire Operational Guidance Manual; to develop a project plan that will improve response, fireground intelligence and prevention within the wildfire arena; improve collaboration with partners from the land management sector; and create a new development pathway to benefit firefighting, safety, and command at wildfire incidents.

The Wildfire Project Manager is Aberdeen-based Garry Burnett who will support the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Director of Service Delivery North, Assistant Chief Officer Robert Scott in his role as Chair of the Scottish Wildfire Forum.

Wildfires remain very much a problem. Climate change has seen warmer, wetter winters and higher spring and summer temperatures providing much improved conditions for wildfire – all that is required is a source of ignition and very quickly an out-of-control fire situation can ensue.

In 2012/13 there was a significant increase in wildfire activity across Scotland. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service operational cost in dealing with wildfires ran to around £250,000 with around 620 appliances mobilised and 2500 firefighters attending various incidents and fighting fires.

Garry Burnett, will be strongly focusing on the preventative message to all who live in, work in, or use the countryside for recreation. Cutting the number of wildfire incidents will both improve the natural environment and reduce what has become a significant burden on the firefighting resource. Above all it will benefit public safety.

The Project is split into four main phases:

- Response and resilience
- Prevention and protection
- Training and development
- Mapping and information.

It is the intention also of the Project Manager to improve engagement and liaison with both land managers and other close partners within the Wildfire Arena. Already there has been a great sense of collaboration

between members of the Scottish Wildfire Forum and a real enthusiasm to work together to improve the wildfire environment. The role of DMGs and their members is very important in terms of communicating fire risk, and control of wildfires where they occur on the ground.

Community Safety Minister Roseanna Cunningham commented: "Wildfires can have a truly devastating impact on communities, agriculture and environment across the country, and particularly the north of Scotland.

"The Wildfire Operational Guidance has provided Fire and Rescue Services with an invaluable source of information on how to tackle the behaviour, prevention and management of wildfire." Joint working between agencies and the training of officers to avoid and manage these incidents should also help protect communities, firefighters and our countryside from these dangerous and damaging fires."

Drew McFarlane-Slack, Highland Regional Manager for Scottish Land and Estates, said: "We value the opportunity to work in partnership with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service." "Together we can pool our resources and experience in a bid to reduce the number of wildfires in Scotland, which have a damaging effect on our environment and communities."

Information on wildfires is available on the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service website www.firescotland.gov.uk



Photo: Scottish Gamekeepers Association

Competence - Colin McClean

The issue of Competence arises from the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act. The Act challenged the deer sector to significantly increase uptake of deer stalking qualifications through our current voluntary system. The industry group on Competence subsequently determined that DSC1 or equivalent should be the Competence standard and the position was given Ministerial endorsement.

We have since put effort into persuading those who manage deer that, if they want to shoot deer on their own, they should be able to demonstrate Competence in deer welfare, firearms safety and food hygiene and they can do that by achieving DSC1.

The Government undertook to review Competence this year. SNH is undertaking this review, planning to start this year with an aim to report in 2015. It is therefore time for ADMG and all other partners in the Competence Working Group to review where they are and present what they and their respective memberships have achieved, and communicate this to SNH.

As an industry, we have made considerable efforts to communicate the Competence message and there is sound evidence that the professional deer management sector (eg estates, deer forests, FCS etc) are well qualified. There is also evidence that the recreational/vocational sector is equally well up to standard. However, there may not be the same uptake among farmers and crofters despite the Competence Steering Group having made strenuous efforts to communicate with those sectors. If they have not yet acted on the message time is running out and we may have

to accept that our influence is limited and that deer management is a relatively unimportant topic for them. We have however done our best.

The level of uptake of DSC 1 will probably be the most important measure of how effective the deer industry has been in improving levels of Competence and we are collecting all the data we can find from within different sectors and respective organisations.

For the Review itself we understand that SNH will consider: levels of Competence among persons who shoot deer in Scotland and the effect of such levels of Competence on deer welfare. Quantifying the effect of training on deer welfare is extremely tricky if not impossible as there is a lack of data on which to base proper judgment.

Deer welfare is currently about the welfare of deer during culling and generally refers to humane dispatch and the avoidance of orphaning. However since the Act was passed, scientific thinking on deer welfare has developed and it is likely in the future that we will have to consider the overall welfare of deer throughout their lives. We don't know the implications of this as yet but it will be a step forward that the sector should welcome. We all derive income, employment or pleasure from managing deer so their wider welfare should be a part of our considerations.

The Competence Working Group will continue to function through the review to input on developing thinking on deer welfare and to deal with any issues which arise from the review

Balquhiddier Deer Management Group In Focus

Deer Management Groups are in the spotlight in terms of effectiveness and transparency. Dick Playfair talked to Falcon Frost, Chairman of Balquhiddier Deer Management Group, to see how that Group is adapting to new demands and expectations.

Balquhiddier DMG was formed around 1988 but has seen dramatic change in the last six to seven years in terms of function and delivery. Now it has around 15 members including the Forestry Commission, RSPB, and Woodland Trust with the balance being made up of private owners, and just one or two that do not co-operate and attend meetings. The Group falls totally within Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park. Falcon Frost says:

“The Group is functioning well. Discussion at our meetings is healthy. Not everyone is always in agreement, but we are managing to find solutions and everyone has embraced the concept of collaboration.”

Falcon Frost, head stalker at Glenfalloch Estate has been Chairman of the Group for the last two years. Prior to that Malcolm MacNaughton (Inverlochlairig) chaired the Group for some 16 plus years. The Group boundaries are: Lochs Katrine / Arklet / Venachar in the south, Loch Lubnaig / A84 in the east, Glen Dochart / A85 in the North and Glen Falloch / A82 in the west.

Malcolm MacNaughton produced the Group’s first Deer Management Plan in 2011 with support and input from SNH. The Plan was updated in 2012, and contains the individual plans of 12 separate owners. It will be revised again this year. Falcon says:

“Everyone agrees cull targets and broadly speaking we have consensus about what we need to do and why. We don’t yet have our Group Constitution embedded in the Plan, but it will be. We also want the Plan to include all major events or changes that might affect the way the deer are managed – for example the FCS fencing at Loch Katrine, bracken control, and the impact of feral goats. The plan really is the backbone of what we do, and discussed at every meeting.”



Falcon Frost, Chairman,
Balquhiddier Deer Management Group.
Photo: Dick Playfair



Balquhiddier DMG territory at the headwaters of Loch Lomond. Photo: Falcon Frost

A helicopter count was undertaken in 2010 by DCS, and a partial helicopter count co-funded by FCS done since. Most recently a foot count was undertaken in March 2013, the results of which showed 768 stags, 1281 hinds and 494 calves on the open hill. The next foot count will be carried out in March 2015.

Transparency and the public interest has raised concern among some of the Group members. Falcon says:

“The deer sector historically operated behind closed doors but that has had to change. For example we don’t just cull the sick, old and injured but are culling perfectly healthy animals as well to keep populations in check and the public want to know why.

“We are engaging with the Community Councils. Minutes of our meetings will go to Lochearnhead, Balquhiddier, Callander and the Trossachs Community Councils and they are welcome to attend future meetings if they wish.

“We also want to be forward thinking in terms of communications and countering what could turn into negative publicity before it happens. We welcome visits from MSPs and others, and we are looking for greater engagement with Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park.”

In conclusion Falcon says that the Group can already tick a lot of boxes; it regards Habitat Impact Assessment as a useful tool in terms of measuring deer and other impacts but could do more of it with funding. In terms of competence, a high percentage within the Group have DSC 1 and many are working towards DSC 2, and what were a number of disparate members with separate interests are now working well together – albeit not without some lively discussion. Falcon says:

“Our next tasks are to update the Deer Management Plan, to deliver in terms of transparency and the Public Interest, to use the data that we collect more effectively, to become even more professional in our approach, and to bring the very few that remain outside the Group to the table. If we can do that then I think we can stand up well to future scrutiny.”

The DMG Benchmark sets out the criteria whereby a Deer Management Group or Sub-Group can assess and demonstrate its effectiveness in relation to the Code of Practice on Deer Management to meet a range of management objectives and deliver the public interest.

The application of the Benchmark criteria will vary to reflect the circumstances of individual DMGs. The Benchmark is not intended as an absolute standard but all DMGs should use it as a measure of progress towards sustainable collaborative deer management.

Deer Management Groups are voluntary bodies and The DMG Benchmark is therefore issued as guidance with the strong recommendation of the Association of Deer Management Groups.

Membership

- All property owners within a deer range should be members of a DMG, including private and public land owners; also, where possible, agricultural occupiers, foresters, crofters and others on adjoining land where deer may be present. In some cases this may extend to householders with private gardens.

Meetings

- DMGs should meet regularly. Two formal meetings per year is the norm but more frequent interaction between members, between meetings, should be encouraged.
- For effective collaborative management to take place it is important that all DMG Members should attend every meeting or be represented by someone authorised to make appropriate decisions on their behalf.
- In addition to landholding Members, including public sector owners, public agencies such as SNH and Forestry Commission Scotland should be in attendance and other relevant authorities such as Police Scotland may be invited to attend DMG meetings.
- Meetings should operate to an agenda and be accurately minuted. Attendees should be encouraged to participate and agreed actions and decisions should be recorded.

Constitution

- All DMGs should have a Constitution which defines the area of the Group, sets out its purpose, its operating principles, membership and procedures, in addition to providing for appointing office bearers, voting, raising subscriptions and maintaining financial records

Code of Practice on Deer Management

The SNH Code is now the foundation document for sustainable deer management. It asserts both the private interest and the public interest in deer management and defines sustainable deer management in economic, environmental and social terms.

- The Code should be endorsed by all DMGs and referenced in both the Constitution and Deer Management Plan of every Group. The terms of the Code should be delivered through the Group Deer Management Plan.
-
-

Deer Management Planning

- All DMGs should have an up to date, effective and forward looking Deer Management Plan (DMP).
- The DMP should record all the land management objectives within the DMG area.
- The DMP should identify the public interest aspects of deer management.
- The DMP should include a list of actions that deliver the collective objectives of DMG Members as well as public interest objectives. These actions should be updated annually.
- It is important that all DMG Members should play a full part in the planning process and in the implementation of agreed actions.
- The DMP may identify potential conflicts and how they can be prevented or addressed to ensure an equitable approach to the shared deer population.
- Relevant local interests should be consulted on new DMPs and advised of any changes as they come forward.
- DMPs should be publicly available.

Deer Management Plans can be commissioned using external specialists or can be prepared by DMG Members. In some cases grants may be obtainable. Wild Deer Best Practice (WDBP) provides guidance on deer management planning

ADMG Principles of Collaboration

The Principles www.deer-management.co.uk/aboutus/publications have been devised by the Association of Deer Management Groups to assist DMGs in reaching a consensus on deer management matters and in working together in a neighbourly and collaborative manner which recognises and respects the equal legitimacy of all deer management objectives which comply with the Code. ADMG can assist DMGs in negotiation and mediation processes where necessary to reach consensus.

- The Principles of Collaboration should be incorporated into all DMG Constitutions and Deer Management Plans.

See Appendix.

Best Practice

The Best Practice Guides (WDBP) represent in detailed form the collective knowledge, wisdom and experience of deer managers as to how to carry out all practical tasks safely so as to ensure their own safety, public safety, deer welfare and food safety.

- All deer management should be carried out in accordance with Best Practice.
- All Deer Management Plans should reference and follow WDBP which will continue to evolve.

Data and evidence gathering - counts, culls and habitat monitoring

Deer management decision making should be based on evidence which is collated in the DMP and updated regularly. Data gathered by DMGs will include deer count data, culls, and reproductive information from larder records and recruitment counts; in addition regular habitat impact assessments (HIA) should be carried out and resultant information be gathered and collated in a consistent manner. Other relevant data may relate to deer/vehicle collisions, deer welfare etc. DMGs should have access to and should use evidence gathered by Government bodies and research organisations. DMGs should make Group data publicly available through the DMP.

Deer counts

- Accurate deer counting forms the basis of population modelling.
- As publicly funded aerial counts are now exceptional, DMGs should aim to carry out a regular well planned coordinated foot count of the whole open range deer population. The norm is to count annually.
- Sample counts should also be carried out systematically so that the population can be accurately categorised and adjusted for post count losses.
- Recruitment and mortality counts are also essential for population modelling.
- Where there are insufficient personnel to carry out a full foot count, assistance may be secured from a neighbouring DMG or elsewhere.
- Other census methods may be required in some circumstances, e.g. dung counting in woodland or other concealing habitats or on adjoining open ground.

Culls

Population modelling will determine the age and sex structure of the deer population and the required culls of male and female deer.

- All DMGs should agree a target deer population or density which meets the collective requirements of Members without detriment to the public interest.
- The cull should be apportioned among Members to deliver the objectives of the DMP and individual management objectives while maintaining the agreed target population and favourable environmental condition.
- The Group cull target should be reviewed and, if necessary, adjusted annually.

Habitat Monitoring

The welfare and condition of wild deer is dependent on the availability of food and shelter throughout the year, particularly over the winter months and in the spring. Good environmental condition is of public as well as of private value. Habitat monitoring is intended to confirm that grazing offtake is at a level where habitat condition is either maintained or improved. Habitat Impact Assessment training is available.

- DMGs should carry out habitat monitoring. Habitat Impact Assessments (HIA) measure progress towards agreed habitat condition targets on both designated sites and the wider deer range.
- HIAs should be carried out on a systematic and regular basis. A three year cycle is the norm but many find annual monitoring useful.
- Data is required on other herbivores present and their impact on the habitat.

DMPs should include a section on habitat monitoring methods and procedures and record annual results so as to measure change and record trends.

Competence

The deer sector is self regulating in terms of training and competence. 'Competence' has been defined as Deer Stalking Certificate (DSC) 1 or equivalent qualification. A Fit and Competent Register is administered by SNH and registration is required for deer managers or contractors who may need to carry out work under Statutory Authorisation. DSC 2 is generally required for inclusion on the Competence Register.

- It is recommended that in addition to DSC 1 deer managers should also attain DSC 2 or equivalent.
- Deer managers supplying venison for public consumption are required to certify carcasses as fit for human consumption to demonstrate due diligence. "Trained Hunter" status is required for carcass certification.

Training

- All DMGs should have a training policy and incorporate it in the DMP.
- All DMG Members or those acting on their behalf should undergo the necessary training to demonstrate Competence.
- The training policy should promote and record continuing professional development through Best Practice Guidance.
- The training policy should also cover health and safety, including lone working, as well as relevant specialist training relating to firearms and other equipment, vehicles and machinery.
- Employers within the DMG should ensure that employed deer management staff receive relevant training.

Venison Marketing

The supply of venison of the highest standard into the food chain should be a prerequisite for a DMG and its members. Membership of the Scottish Quality Wild Venison scheme is recommended by ADMG, as is collaborative marketing where appropriate.

Communications

The Code directs that DMGs should operate in an open and transparent manner.

- DMGs should include a Communications Policy in their DMP. External communication should be directed at parties not directly involved but with an interest in deer management including individuals, local bodies such as community councils, local authorities, local media and other specialist interests.
- An annual communication programme suitable to local circumstances is advised. This might include a DMG website or a page on www.deer-management.co.uk, an annual Newsletter, annual open meeting, or attending local meetings by invitation.
- A Deer Management Plan should be accessible and local consultation during its development is advised.

Appendix:

ADMG Principles of Collaboration

We:

- Acknowledge what we have in common – a shared commitment to a sustainable and economically viable Scottish countryside.
- Make a commitment to work together to achieve and maintain that.
- Accept that we have a diversity of management objectives and respect each other's objectives.
- Undertake to communicate openly with all relevant parties.
- Commit to negotiate and, where necessary, to compromise in order to accommodate the reasonable land management requirements of neighbours.
- Where there are areas of disagreement we undertake to work together to resolve them.

Collaboration is essential to meet the standards set by the Code of Practice for Deer Management.

The National Trust for Scotland, Mar Lodge Estate and Deer Management



Pete Selman MBE,
Director of Strategic Development,
The National Trust for Scotland

ADMG invited me to address its AGM this year and that was good, because the National Trust for Scotland is going through a period of transition and this was an opportunity to reflect on that. Specifically, in terms of deer management, change could not be more evident than at Mar Lodge, where considerable progress has been made.

Mar Lodge Estate was acquired for the Nation in 1995 and NTS has sought to maintain an appropriate balance between the three objectives of delivering conservation (including regeneration), access and enjoyment, and field sports. The balancing act is difficult but NTS, through continual examination, learning and adaptation, has moved forward. NTS is not unique in terms of balancing local and national public interest, but it also has responsibilities to its members and funders.

The Trust is not anti-fencing and is deploying it at Mar Lodge as part of a balanced management regime with a new strategic fence completed in November 2012. There is evidence that it's doing its job given the fall in the number of deer within the natural regeneration zone that it protects. Our zero tolerance approach within this zone is therefore less in demand, but at the same time deer numbers on the wider moorland are holding up.

Regeneration is working, and accelerating across the estate, and we began further scarification trials last year with 4 different types of intervention across a 50 ha area.

Deer numbers within the actual regeneration zone are around 0.2 deer/km². The Section 7 agreement has a target estate population of around 1650 and this was stable through 2011/12 but numbers have crept up to around 2300 despite an increased cull in 2013. Ironically this is possibly due in part to the new fence, increased recruitment rates, and also deer moving in from estates to the south.

Following negotiation with SNH and neighbouring landowners through the East and West Grampian Deer Management Groups we agreed an increased cull last year, but our concern is that this has only prevented a further increase in population rather than bringing it back to where it should be. A further increased cull may be necessary in 2014.

Importantly, what this also demonstrates is that it is impossible to manage deer at estate scale – even one as large as Mar Lodge – and that effective partnership working through DMGs has to be a part of the overall solution.

Field sports are also an important part of our business. Stag stalking with guests resulted in 87 and 85 stags shot over the last two years. We have waiting lists for stalking (and grouse shooting) and we are meeting our objectives for sporting management, also promoting field sports alongside our holiday accommodation and conservation information. BBC Winterwatch worked extremely well for us, and for the wider Braemar economy. We derived from it directly a 63 per cent increase in holiday website traffic and a huge upsurge in wedding enquiries for the Lodge. It was a great exercise in community spirit and community engagement from which all will derive the benefits.



Photo: National Trust for Scotland

Finally, in terms of the broader approach to deer management, the Trust favours the 'voluntary principle' on the basis that deer management becomes dangerous if defined by quotas that may not be flexible enough to reflect local circumstances that can change due to weather, for example, and other dynamics. The environmental sector is however not so out of step with private landowners and Scottish Environment LINK members have respect for ADMG, its current leadership and approach.

There is much common ground, common objectives and shared principles, and, whilst responsible deer management is favoured by all, committees and inquiries encourage the expression of different opinions. Progress lies in taking the initiative, finding that common ground and demonstrating the benefits that can be delivered through effective collaboration - and Mar Lodge Estate is a genuine example of that in reality.

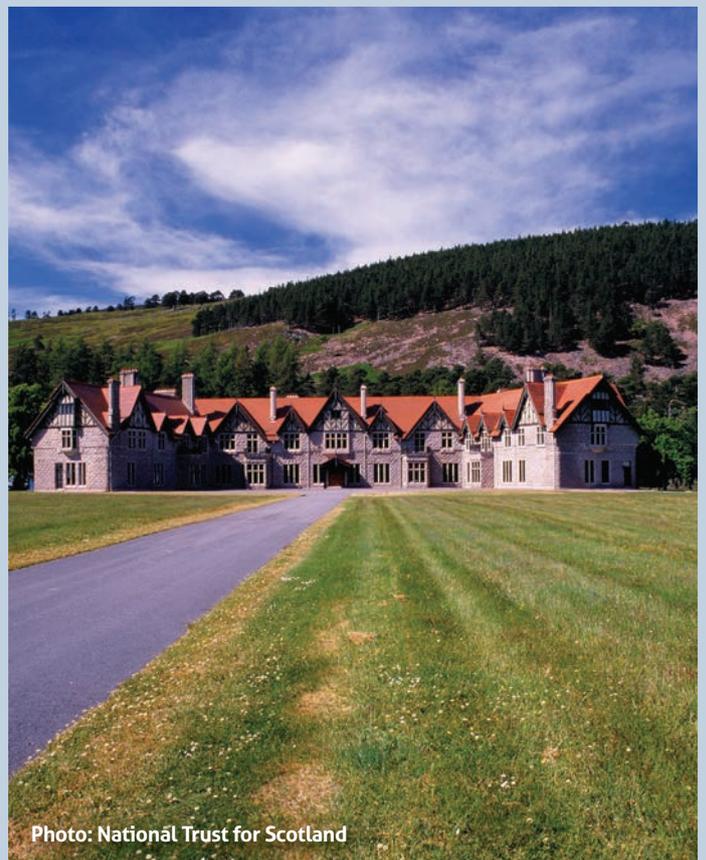


Photo: National Trust for Scotland

In the Footsteps of Diana the Huntress

Iain Thornber

It is a well known fact that women are better at catching heavier and larger numbers of salmon than men. One of the explanations put forward about their phenomenal success with fish, is their pheromones. Because the biggest salmon are cock fish they are said to be attracted to woman's pheromones, which transmit themselves to the water through lures and lines. Could the same apply to stags, especially during the rut, even although they are generally shot from downwind without any physical contact with the 'rifle'? It might explain why some women have killed so many of them down through the ages.

It all began with Diana the Huntress. In Roman mythology Diana was associated with wild beasts and woodland, and having the power to talk to and control animals. Although her name was eventually supplanted by Hubert, eldest son of the Duke of Aquitaine, who was declared patron saint of hunting and, interestingly enough, of butchers as well, her legacy survived and she re-emerged as the Goddess of the Chase in 14th century Renaissance Europe. Anne Boleyn, one of King Henry's many wives, was a skilled archer. Her decapitated head would eventually lie in an elmwood box in which arrows were once stored. European women of noble birth were taught to ride and hunt from childhood. During the Baroque period marriages were plotted and arranged at extravagant hunting pageants in the forests in order to expand royal dynasties. One of the earliest



A Lapp woodcut from 1555 showing a man and woman hunting on skis with bows and hounds

weapons, the bow and arrow, was used to kill deer. A rare woodcut from a work published in 1555 shows a Lapp woman and her husband on skis, each holding a composite bow fitted with an arrow, their hunting dog at their side and the startled quarry, running above them. Hunting remains popular in Finland where, despite its small population, there are at least 10,000 women registered as hunters.

The early Victorians looked on women who hunted as 'not quite nice'. Lady Mildred Boynton, one of the contributors to a famous book, *Ladies in the Field* (1894) stated it well when she wrote: 'A few years ago, a 'shooting lady' was almost as rare as the Great Auk; if here and there one member of the sex, more venturesome than her fellows, were bold enough to take to the gun in preference to the knitting needle, she was looked upon as most eccentric and fast, and underwent much adverse criticism'. Lady Boynton urged the novice lady shooter to go straight to Mr Purdey in London for her firearm. She also suggested that the rifle should be fitted



A 16th century depiction of Diana the Huntress sculpted by Jean Goujon now in the Louvre Museum, Paris

with an India-rubber butt plate to avoid a bruised shoulder and arm which, 'if you happen to be going to a ball, does not perhaps add to your beauty'. Today it helps to appear in the Sunday Times Rich List before heading off to be fitted for a Purdey!

The primeval Highland landscape provided the backdrop to many forays among the stags by the early huntresses. Queen Victoria, although not a stalker herself, left vivid descriptions of accompanying Prince Albert to the hill in *Leaves from the Journal of our Life in the Highlands*. Her passion for the mountains helped cultivate an environment that would produce a special breed of highly adventurous and bloodthirsty women. The first was Alma, wife of the seventh Earl of Breadalbane, who owned several huge sporting estates, including the 100,000 acre Black Mount on



Lady Breadalbane and stalkers spying on Blackmount

Rannoch Moor. Here she indulged her passion for shooting which reached its zenith on 30 September 1897 when, dressed in a heavy, full length, tweed coat, she killed six stags with six bullets. Her memoirs, *The High Tops of Blackmount*, became a famous classic and recounts her many years deer stalking in the Scottish Highlands.

Hard on the heels of Lady Breadalbane came Mrs Philip Fleming who, on Blackmount Forest, killed her 600th stag at the beginning of the 1968 season. By the time it had ended she added a further twenty-three to her total. When Mrs Fleming finally gave up stalking in 1985, aged 84 years, she had accounted for 930 stags.



What the modern day lady stalker is wearing. Selena Barr dressed for stalking on Craiganour Estate Photo: Tweed Media

Other ladies who continued to shoot stags in old age and who have since 'gone to the hill' for ever were; Mrs Jessie Tyser of Gordonbush, Sutherland who died in 1978 at the age of 85 and Irene, Marquesa de Torrehermosa, who owned Achanalt Estate in Ross-shire. The doyenne of them all though was Mrs Patricia Strutt of Kingairloch whom I had the pleasure of stalking with for the last 25 years of her life. She shot her first stag at Kingairloch in 1930 when she was 19 and her last shortly before her death in 2000. At the age of 80 she sold her 'Granny Bonds' and with the proceeds bought a custom built. 25-06 rifle made for her by David Lloyd, the renowned Nottinghamshire gunsmith.

A superb markswoman and extremely quick, Mrs Strutt killed around 2,000 deer over open-sights, a record broken only by Anne, the 86 year old Duchess d'Uzes of France who died in 1933 having shot slightly more in her life time. On one occasion when she was 84, Patricia Strutt shot in the neck within five seconds, two stags which were lying down 250 yards away. She lived for the 20 September of every year. It was her birthday and also 'The Day of the Roaring', when the rut begins - that recurring period of sexual excitement and reproductive activity among the stags. "Not nearly so romantic now that I can't hear them roaring", she often used to say to me when deafness came!

iain.thornber@btinternet.com



Mrs Patricia Strutt at Glensanda September 1992 (aged 82) with a fine, old eight pointer stag shot in the neck at 150 yards



New man at helm of SCSTG

The SCSTG is extremely pleased to welcome Andrew Grainger to the post of Project Coordinator replacing Victoria Brooks who moves to a new career and who can take considerable credit for the success that SCSTG has become today.

A keen shot and fly fisher, Andrew comes from a small business and human resource management background. He comments:

"I am delighted to have taken up this post which I see as both challenging and rewarding. Drawing on my own my passion for country sports I hope to encourage the involvement of others in Scottish country sports. I look forward to meeting everyone, both current and prospective, providers, advertisers and agents when the opportunity arises.

Please feel free to contact Andrew by email: andrew.grainger@scstgscotland.com or tel: **01350 723226**

