

Linzi Seivwright, ADMG Executive Committee

Talk to London meeting at Fishmongers Hall, 13 November 2023

Good evening everyone. You'll be relieved to hear that I am going to keep this brief as possible as we are about to go next door for a delicious dinner and I am sure you are looking forward to carrying on the conversation, prompted by the fantastic presentations you've seen and heard this evening. I also know many of you are embarking on similar exciting and ambitious projects yourselves, so there is going to be plenty to discuss!

But whilst we've been talking a lot this evening about salmon, deer, tree planting, peatlands – all of these things, the success of these and future projects and indeed the work of ADMG relies solely on one single, key component – **people**. People truly are at the heart of all of this.

As you are all acutely aware I am sure, we are entering into a period of change. As we have heard this evening the landscape (both political and geographical) is changing rapidly and the journey ahead is uncertain. There are so many sticks in the air right now with regards to changes in agricultural policies and subsidies, forestry and environmental grant schemes, land reform, biodiversity strategies and a new Environment Bill – we simply don't know how those sticks are going to land, which creates uncertainty for us all in rural sector.

We are all in the process of working out how navigate our way through this and trying to crystal ball gaze as to what some of these changes might mean for landownership in the future. For many landowners (and employees for that matter) - this uncertainty is frustrating and potentially a significant barrier to real progress being made. However, ADMG will continue to work where we can, to ensure that changes are as enabling as possible and to do what we can try to highlight and minimise potential unintended consequences where possible.

We have also heard this evening about the Common Ground Project and one of the perhaps most concerning things to emerge from this, is that there are many within the deer sector who, having been prompted to talk about this, see change as being done **to** them and not **with** them. There are those for whom uncertainty brings fear – fear of job losses, fear of a loss of identity and the possible loss of a traditional and cultural way of life in an already fragile rural landscape. And you heard a bit about this from David earlier. This is where ADMG and the CG Forum will be working to ensure we take as many people with us on this journey as possible.

That said, perhaps a slightly unexpected but potentially positive outcome from the Common Ground Project has been the emergence of the next generation of not just landowners, but of a cohort of young enthusiastic, passionate stalkers and deer managers who perhaps see the world through slightly different optics. They are much more environmentally aware and their lens is focused on seeing opportunities and deer management as the solution, not just the so called “problem”.

Having worked in this sector for twenty years now, I can certainly see a transformational change happening across so many areas of deer management. Tweed sits alongside technology, there are more women in the sector; younger generations use apps as well as telescopes. And a skilled, qualified workforce is developing where traditional wisdom is taught alongside Best Practice standards in habitat assessment, deer counting and population modelling.

I know that many of you have fantastic people working for you, so we want to ensure that more young people have the opportunity to expand their knowledge and experience, to broaden their horizons and to prepare the next generation of stalkers and land managers for the challenges and opportunities ahead.

This is something I feel personally very passionate about. Despite my academic career essentially my “training” for the job I do today started way back in my childhood. I grew up on Invermark Estate as the daughter of a stalker and was fascinated by deer and the world around me from an early age. Mostly I could be found traipsing behind my father asking endless questions or somewhere on the estate (my mother never knew where!) with my drawing pad and crayons trying to map it all. But it wasn't until some time later at a pivotal point early in my career that I was given an amazing opportunity that changed my life.

I was lucky enough to be awarded a Churchill Fellowship which took me to New Zealand for two months where I was able to meet and engage with some of most incredible and inspiring people. Not only did that opportunity give me the courage and ambition to complete a PhD in Ecology, it expanded my perspective in unimaginable ways.

Which brings me neatly on to my final point this evening which I'm afraid is going to be a shameless plug – so I apologise in advance!

Some of you will know of the book “Deer People” published by Tom's predecessor Richard Cooke last year. The intention behind the book was to capture a selective sample of the people behind red deer management in Scotland and the book comprises 24 biographical notes, as well as excellent portraits by Ian MacGillivray, and action photographs by Glyn Satterley. The book brings together a sample of the opinions of the individuals featured – from stalkers, owners, a forester, a government official, deer scientist, a crofter, a restaurateur, a game processor, and a rifle maker, all well-known figures in our deer world.

While not ostensibly political, the authors intended to gently make the point that behind the deer, their impacts, and densities etc, of which we perhaps hear too much, there are real dedicated hard working professional people with hopes and fears like the rest of us and who are the backbone of the communities where they work and live, and we have handed out a number of copies to relevant Scottish Government Ministers and MSPs.

The cost of producing the book was fully covered thanks to generous donations from the Fleming and Brown families of Black Mount and Kingie respectively and all the proceeds have therefore been used to set up a “Deer People fund”, administered by ADMG, which has a broadly educational purpose.

So next year we have arranged and will fund three three-month placements for young stalkers, post College and with some years working as stalkers, two in Wyoming and one in Namibia. Hopefully they will all have a life changing experience and we will expect them to share their new perspective with their peers on their return. We hope that this will go well and can be repeated or indeed expanded in future years. We would also like to be able to make a contribution to local schools' projects such as the venison-based project with primary and nursery schools in the Glen Urquhart area in which I have been involved and which potentially can be replicated.

The fund currently stands at £22,000 prior to making any outlays and we are conscious that, with ambitions for the project, this will not last long. It has been well received and the books are now all but sold out. 750 were printed and perhaps it should have been more as the costs of a reprint are prohibitive.

However, I have with me the few remaining books and if anyone here would like to buy one or to make a donation to what we believe is an important and worthy cause do please have a word with me or with Finlay later this evening.