

*Pony and stag above An Lochain.*

*Photo: David Fergusson.*

*See article on The Great Atholl Stag Parties on page 10.*



**Tom Turnbull, Chairman**  
Association of Deer Management Groups

## Our message to Scottish Government - please listen to those tasked with delivering ambitious targets for biodiversity and climate change

The Scottish Government consultation on managing deer for climate and nature sets out how some of the recommendations from the Deer Working Group Report will be implemented, including the proposed introduction of an additional power for NatureScot to intervene. Deer Management Nature Restoration Orders (DMNROs) will, if introduced, have significant ramifications for deer managers and, whilst there is a lack of information within the consultation on how these might be applied, it is clear that habitat damage will no longer be the threshold for intervention and NatureScot would be able to intervene on the basis that habitat restoration or enhancement might be possible, two very subjective thresholds. Within the consultation there is little evidence to suggest on what scale these DMNROs might be implemented.

DMNROs would appear to pay no attention to a landowner's management intentions or the socio-

economic impacts of increased culls. The hope will be that deer reductions alone will see habitat restoration, which in some cases may be true, but in others the habitat response will be negligible or slow and the timeframes over which DMNROs might be implemented are unclear. My role on the steering group of the Common Ground Forum has brought into sharp focus the fears and concerns that deer managers have over threats to future employment if culls are taken too far. DMNROs will only add to the fears of those employed in deer management.

We are very aware at ADMG that there are some localised areas of the highlands where increased culls are required, and we have encouraged NatureScot to use their existing powers where necessary and have supported them in doing so. However, I believe that the introduction of DMNROs will enable interventions with a low evidence threshold and, whilst I am sure that the

# Chairman's editorial

Continued...

intention is not for these to be used across the highlands, surely the appropriate step would have been to consider the shortcomings of the existing methods of intervention, (sections 7 and 8) and to fine tune them to enable quick and decisive action where required? DMNROs will merely cloud the issue further.

Our discussions with NatureScot and Scottish Government have not allayed our fears over these proposed new powers and although we continue to hear promises of new deer management incentives, nothing is as yet forthcoming. Funding is a problem, and The Forestry Grant Scheme has seen a cut of £32 million or 41% for 2024-25, despite the stated intentions of Scottish Government to fight the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change. One of the four workstreams of the Strategic Deer Board was to consider deer management incentives but – and whilst we discuss new forms of legislation and regulation – there is little forthcoming on real support for deer managers.

We are all painfully aware of the fragile state of our venison sector and I was pleased to sign a letter for the first time alongside Scottish Environment LINK, penned by Scottish Venison requesting a subsidised venison price to help support deer managers both in the highlands and in the lowlands, who undertake deer management at a cost. Sadly, it would appear that this will not be taken forward by Scottish Government, albeit there is a pilot

scheme being implemented in the Cairngorms National Park.

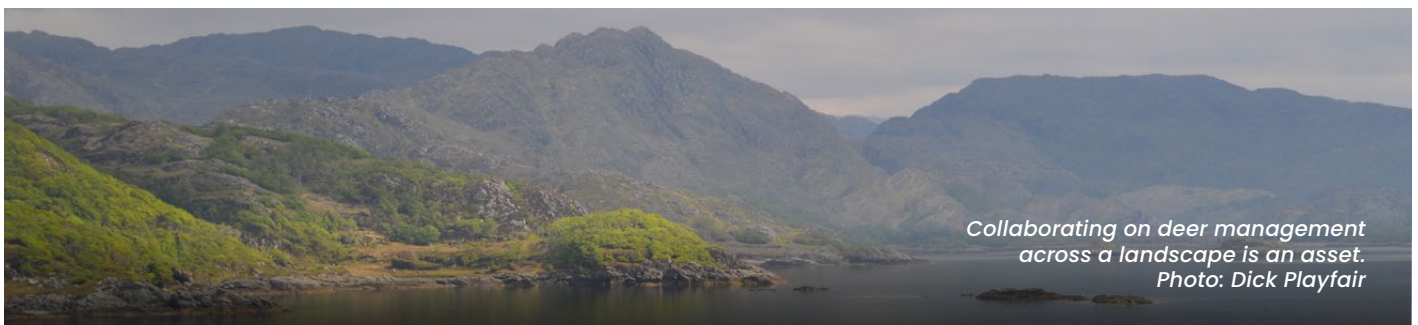
It is clear that the venison sector needs more support and the current levy that funds Scottish Venison is insufficient to provide venison with the marketing, promotion and assistance that it requires. At the AGM it is my intention to propose that ADMG supports Scottish Venison this year through a grant from its reserves, and next year we may look to increase subscriptions in order to support the continuing promotion of our venison interests. I understand that this will be another cost for ADMG members but without a better promoted venison sector we risk losing out in a competitive market place in which increased English culls and sustained higher culls in the highlands put added pressure on the sector. Subject to these new arrangements being agreed, Scottish Venison will suspend the present levy system by which it generates core funding and replace it with a much simpler arrangement that will spread the cost of promoting venison and growing the market more widely and equitably across producers and processors.

Away from the concerns of new regulations and a faltering venison sector there are positives. The Common Ground Forum goes from strength to strength and provides the sector with a platform to help find those areas where there is agreement. Included in these are venison, real incentives for deer management and the importance of the deer managers tasked with

delivering the all-important cull going forward. Unlike most of the UK, the Deer Management Groups are acutely aware of the deer numbers in their landscape, we endeavour to collaborate despite differing objectives and we have population models across the highlands aimed at reducing habitat damage. Collaborating on deer management across a landscape is an asset that should not be underestimated and is one that is understood by those on the ground whatever their management objectives.

At this period of change I would urge Scottish Government and NatureScot to listen to those tasked with delivering their ambitious targets for biodiversity and climate change and recognise the considerable distance that we have come in delivering deer management in the public interest. Take note of the need to support the industry. Work with us closely and use regulation only where appropriate and realistic. My message to Scottish Government is, please don't threaten the close working relationship that has delivered so much over 3 million hectares of the highlands in the last ten years.

I think that such radical change, if implemented as proposed, runs the risk of alienating deer managers within the current DMG structure, those who deliver so much of the annual cull. It cannot be overstated that their demotivation and disengagement would be counter-productive to progress. Is that a risk worth taking?



*Collaborating on deer management across a landscape is an asset.  
Photo: Dick Playfair*





Photo: Dick Playfair

## Aspects of Scottish Biodiversity Strategy consultation of concern

**ADMG fully supports the ambitious aims to improve biodiversity across Scotland and agrees that pace and scale in action is required to halt biodiversity loss by 2030 and to ensure biodiversity recovery by 2045.**

We also recognise that collaboration is key to effective landscape scale action and that many of the biodiversity actions outlined in the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy consultation will fall to our members to deliver. They are critical delivery partners for the Scottish Government, and we would encourage both government and its agencies to develop an integrated approach across all policy areas which enables and empowers them to continue to deliver 'nature positive' outcomes, and to provide adequate and effective support whilst limiting unnecessary bureaucracy and legislative burdens.

ADMG will endeavour to support our members through a considerable period of transition. However, we have significant reservations that with land managers being asked to fundamentally change their practices, the targets will not be achieved in such a short time frame – not due to a lack of willingness to change but from a lack of facilitation and incentives by Scottish Government. 2030 is fast approaching and we still have uncertainty surrounding the future for land reform, agricultural support, forestry grant schemes and biodiversity.

We believe there is a lack of acknowledgement as to why much of the work that would improve biodiversity has not been undertaken in the past, particularly as previous agricultural, forestry and other support schemes have been complicated, slow and prohibitive to biodiversity improvement.

Streamlining support and incentives are needed for land managers to undertake the positive work for biodiversity as outlined in the consultation but many view their livelihoods as threatened by the potential changes proposed including significant deer reductions. We think that not enough work has been done by Scottish Government to understand the views of deer managers who hear of 'just transition' but feel they are not being taken seriously. Scottish Government must demonstrate how it intends to support fragile rural economies as they adapt – this isn't just about securing jobs in deer management, but ensuring that deer managers have the skills, training and support to provide effective deer management in the future.

### **In terms of specific responses to aspects of the consultation we have said that:**

- On new deer legislation we are concerned that a one size fits all approach will not reflect the requirements of managing different deer species in vastly differing landscapes, nor provide the clarity or the flexibility that

deer management requires for collaborative deer management to be effective on a landscape scale.

- On a national deer management programme we welcome this outside the DMG areas but stress that an equitable approach is required for effective deer management across the entire deer range. This requires resourcing including support for the venison sector.
- On setting deer cull levels we have expressed our concern over the use of blanket range densities as often meaningless and misleading with major concerns over the 2 deer/sq km for 'priority woodland' without this being defined and without incentives being introduced.
- We welcome the fact that the consultation recognises the impacts of all herbivores, not just deer, and we support a more holistic approach to the management of grazing pressure.
- We also welcome a forest design approach that takes into account deer management in the future.

We stress that ADMG members are in a strong position to deliver on many of the actions in the consultation and are 'pivotal' to the Biodiversity Strategy's future success but that adequate future funding is required.

There is a lot more detail and our consultation response is available to read in full at [www.deer-management.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/ADMG-Biodiversity-Consultation-Response-Final.pdf](https://www.deer-management.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/ADMG-Biodiversity-Consultation-Response-Final.pdf)

## The presence of wolves leads to spatial differentiation in deer browsing pressure on forest regeneration

With the recent return of large carnivores to forest ecosystems in mainland Europe, an important issue for forest owners and managers is how large predators influence the behaviour of their natural prey and, consequently, cervid browsing pressure on forest regeneration. To investigate this issue, we analysed deer pressure on Scots pine and European beech plantations in northern Poland's ecosystems with and without permanent wolf populations.

Two characteristics were used to describe deer browsing patterns in plantations: distance from the forest edge (spatial pattern of browsing) and number of saplings browsed (browsing intensity). Beech saplings were more intensively browsed by deer compared to pine saplings. In a forest ecosystem not inhabited by wolves, spatial variation in browsing patterns on small-sized beech plantations was the same between the edge and the centre. In contrast, browsing pressure by deer was greater at the edges on large-sized pine plantations. The presence of wolves reduced deer browsing on beech and increased

browsing on pine saplings. In addition, deer foraging behaviour changed in large-sized pine plantations, and browsing pressure increased only in the central areas of the plantations. We assume that the presence of wolves in a forest landscape is an important factor that alters browsing pressure on the youngest stands and their spatial pattern, and that this may be a major factor in stand regeneration, especially in small forest patches.

To view the full report:

[www.nature.com/articles/s41598-023-44502-y](https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-023-44502-y)

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## Abrupt height growth setbacks show overbrowsing of tree saplings which can be reduced by raising deer harvest

Intensive ungulate browsing significantly impacts forests worldwide. However, it is usually not single browsing events that lead to sapling mortality, but the little-researched interactions of browsed saplings with their biotic and abiotic environment. (I) Our objective was to assess the impact of ungulate browsing on the growth of young saplings relative to other environmental factors by utilizing their height increment as a sensitive measure of vitality to indicate their status. (II) Furthermore, we aimed to identify factors affecting ungulate browsing at our study sites, assessed as browsing probabilities, and identify effective mitigation measures for browsing impact.

We analyzed an extensive sapling dataset of 248 wildlife exclosures, which were erected in 2016 in beech dominated forests across Germany and assessed annually until 2020. (I) Browsing probability and light availability were the most influential parameters for selectively browsed, admixed tree species (eg sycamore, maple). Height increment showed abrupt setbacks, which caused a permanent collapse of growth when browsing exceeded a certain level. However, light availability enhanced height increment. (II) An increase in deer harvest reduced the browsing probability of selectively browsed species considerably. We conclude that the growth-

inhibiting effect of ungulate browsing is a multifactorial phenomenon, which can be mitigated by silvicultural management and efficient hunting strategies.

To view the full report:

[www.nature.com/articles/s41598-023-38951-8](https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-023-38951-8)

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Panel session at the Scottish Venison Summit  
Photo: Dick Playfair

## Representatives from all across Scotland's venison sector hear plans for one of our most iconic and sustainable food products

**The Scottish Venison Summit took place on Monday 20 November 2024 at the Birnam Arts and Conference Centre, Perthshire.**

Under the title *Taking Stock* the summit attended by around 100 delegates from right across the venison supply chain – stalkers and producers, venison processors, deer farmers and trade customers – set out the challenges and opportunities facing the sector and plans to move it forward. The event was supported by the Association of Deer Management Groups.

One of Scotland's most iconic and sustainable foods, venison has like many other products been subject to a range of uncontrollable external influences over the last five years, not least Brexit, the pandemic, the cost of living crisis, rising costs and the climate emergency. Through a refreshed industry-led venison strategy those attending heard how the sector must rise to the challenge of converting output from an increased deer cull into healthy sustainable food, how growth in markets must be stimulated, and how the time has never been better for promoting the venison story.

The keynote address was given by Lorna Slater, Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity, the Scottish Government. She said:

*"Scottish venison is some of the finest in the world. Its quality and sustainability make it a product that remains highly sought after both at home and abroad."*

*"Recent legislative changes to help manage Scotland's spiralling deer numbers have provided this industry with a unique opportunity to get more venison into the shopping baskets of consumers."*

*"We will continue to work with the sector to ensure that businesses can take full advantage of this. I look forward to seeing the benefits of this ongoing collaboration, both for the industry as well as our environment."*

Other speakers included representatives from Scotland Food & Drink, John Forteith Consulting, SAOS, the Association of Deer Management Groups, Highland Game, the Country Food Trust, Trees for Life and Perthshire Game with the programme rounded off by Tim Maddams, self-acclaimed chef, venison ambassador and free-range foodie.

Richard Cooke, Chairman, the Scottish Venison Association, said:

*"We have a new twelve-point strategy to take the sector forward, including supply chain and market development, enhanced skills and training, developing quality assurance, and responding to the climate emergency. As well as shifting volume and encouraging supply through the major processors we want to be able to process more product locally and to meet and grow the demands of local markets in Scotland as well as stimulating market growth further afield, particularly in London and SE England."*

*"Our summit brought the whole sector together, and the messages from it need to be broadcast far afield. Venison is one of the most sustainable proteins available – if not the most sustainable. Its 'harvest' as the result of actions taken to manage our deer numbers across all of Scotland – including beyond the red deer open range where deer densities are on average already below the 10 per sq km target – will enhance biodiversity and combat climate change. We have such a good story to tell."*

*"We hope that the summit and our new industry-led strategy in partnership with all involved in the production, processing and supply of venison will re-set the dial and give us the focus we need to move this great product forward."*

Both the new Scottish Venison strategy and presentations from the 2023 Scottish Venison Summit are available here [www.scottish-venison.info/what-is-the-scottish-venison-association/](http://www.scottish-venison.info/what-is-the-scottish-venison-association/)





*The walk back with a carcass in the roe sack  
Photo: Dick Playfair*



**Richard Cooke**, Chair, Scottish Venison

## Raising the bar for venison

**We have become all too accustomed to selling our venison for less than it costs to produce. A BASC project in 2023 calculated the cost of producing a kg of red deer wild venison at £2.58, while producers typically receive between £1.50 and £2.00, even with the benefit of a bonus for quality assurance. It doesn't make commercial sense and such a situation would not be tolerated in a farming context but managing our wild deer is a necessity and venison sales, along with any income from the letting of stalking in some cases, makes an essential contribution to the associated employment and other costs.**

The Scottish Government is pressing for an increase of 50,000 in the national wild deer cull across Scotland, all species. If that can be achieved there is no certainty that the market for venison can absorb

that extra supply. However, at Scottish Venison, with all that venison has going for it as compared with other red meats in flavoursome healthy eating, we are convinced that there is potential to grow the market over the coming years, and, by stimulating demand, to raise the producer price.

The Scottish Venison Association, now operating under the name 'Scottish Venison', has to date raised its funding by way of a levy collected from some producers by deduction at the processor. However only two processors participate in this arrangement and the consequence is that only a smallish proportion of producers contribute to the cost of promoting their product. The average levy income to Scottish Venison, along with some additional contributions, for example from the

deer farmers, currently comes to around £25,000 per annum which is insufficient even to adequately cover the Association's administrative costs let alone run a much needed annual promotional campaign, although the Scottish Venison website is a useful promotional platform and we usually manage to run some online and PR activity around our annual Scottish Venison Day on 4 September.

We have also had the benefit of considerable project funding from Scottish Government secured with the ongoing support and assistance of SAOS (the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society), the agency charged with promoting cooperation across the rural sector. This funding commenced during the period when Fergus Ewing was Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, an enthusiastic



supporter, and overall Scottish Venison has received in excess of £180,000 in Government project funding since 2018. This included the cost for the strategy document *Beyond the Glen* in 2018, now followed up in 2023 with *Revisiting Beyond the Glen* which SVA has self-funded, both papers being available on the Scottish Venison website. We have also been able to fund much needed and ongoing market research and some one-off online promotional activity which was beneficial, particularly as lockdown came to an end, but sporadic campaigning has limited long term benefit and indeed the market has marginally reduced, despite increased take up by multiple retailers/discounters, and producer prices have yet to recover to pre-Covid level.

In short, at Scottish Venison, we know we could and should do better and our revised strategy will deliver much more, subject to funding. Over the last year we have merged with Scottish Quality Wild Venison and restructured the Scottish Venison Board, setting up a number of specialist sub groups on marketing and promotion, quality assurance, education and training, and local projects and supply chains. The organogram for the rejuvenated Board is on our website showing the names of those who have generously agreed to commit their time and expertise. As Scottish Venison Chair I am delighted with this reset which brings new blood into what was already a strong Board. There is a demonstrable can-do attitude which is now translating into

development and action which is really encouraging.

Alongside this restructuring, if we are to achieve steady growth in the market for venison, we MUST resolve the matter of funding described above. At last year's ADMG AGM we had a full discussion of the importance of venison. A number of members spoke out in favour of increasing producer payments to Scottish Venison and, when the Chairman asked for a show of hands in support, there was a forest of arms. With this encouragement ADMG and Scottish Venison have worked together on how best to achieve a model where more producers contribute to growing the venison market and have come up with a proposal for the ADMG AGM at Inverness on 13 March.

Broadly the intention is to suspend the venison levy paid direct to Scottish Venison, good news surely for those who have paid in the past, and in its place ADMG would make an annual grant to Scottish Venison, at a level which will significantly increase investment in promotional activity. How that is to be funded is for Tom Turnbull as ADMG Chairman to propose.

Scottish Venison, along with ADMG and Scottish Environment LINK, submitted a joint proposal to Scottish Government that, at a time when a major increase in the annual cull is sought in the public interest to address the climate and biodiversity emergencies, a venison incentive subsidy should be introduced. It is

known that the Strategic Deer Board has been considering incentives and we believe that a venison subsidy would address this, being available to all deer managers at least for the cull of females and juveniles. Indeed, the proposal was initially well received but it quickly became apparent that funds are not available to meet an annual cost estimated at between £3m – 5m. Instead we understand that consideration is being given to testing the subsidy approach by way of one or more pilot schemes. This could be supported if we could be confident that on completion of the pilot a national scheme could be rolled out within a year or two, but one has to be sceptical as to whether public funding availability is likely to improve in current economic circumstances. In the meantime, a fortunate few in the pilot area may benefit, but the rest of us will apparently be expected to increase our cull at a net cost to ourselves as producers.

So, for now, although Scottish Venison will continue to seek Scottish Government support for campaigns for promotion and other project funding we will be considerably constrained if we must rely only on what the sector itself can raise, even under the new arrangement between ADMG and Scottish Venison referred to above.

We all know that Scottish wild venison has great potential. You see it on every TV cookery programme. But to do it justice we must all make a contribution alongside our continuing efforts to seek support from Government.



Tagging a carcass in an FLS larder  
Photo: FLS



Dick Playfair, Scottish Venison

## Estimating the carbon footprint of Scotland's wild venison sector is complex but measures can be deployed to reduce it

**Scottish Venison commissioned SAC Consulting to produce a report on The Carbon Footprint of Scottish Wild Venison, early in 2023.**

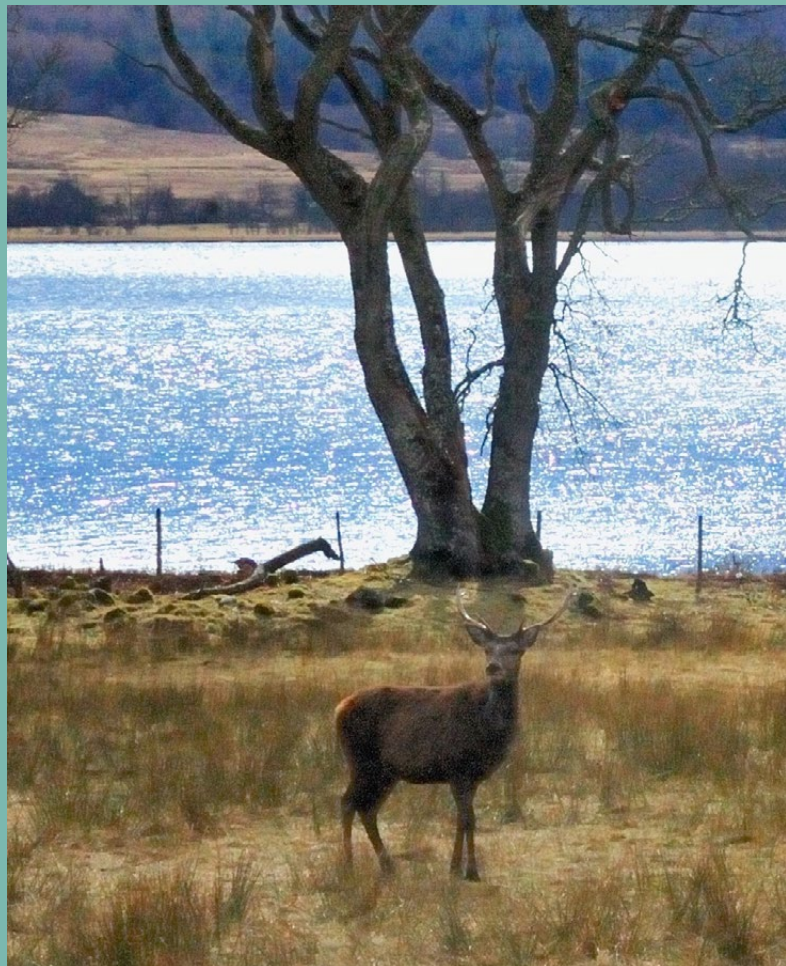
It has been funded by NatureScot, the Association of Deer Management Groups, Scottish Venison, and members of Scottish Environment LINK which demonstrates the commitment from across the sector to take responsibility and better understand the relationship of wild deer, carbon and methane, and venison production.

The report follows the Statement of Intent launched by Scottish Venison in July 2022 to investigate and make suggestions to address where possible, the carbon footprint of wild deer and its venison in Scotland. This report builds on the 2009 report *Life Cycle Assessment of Scottish Wild Venison* undertaken by Natural Capital Ltd.

The new report focuses on the direct primary emissions of deer; the emissions created through the collection, processing and distribution of deer carcasses, and the meat; and the indirect emissions that arise across the supply chain involved with wild venison production. It also covers wider carbon opportunities associated with deer population control, such as improved tree establishment, and reduced peatland degradation in a qualitative context.

The report assesses the carbon footprint from when deer are born, up to the point the product leaves the processor and is ready to cook and in this 'cradle to gate' analysis, the report finds, that the greatest single factor affecting the sector's carbon footprint is the amount of methane produced by deer. When venison from wild deer is considered in isolation and methane is not taken into account, the report identifies an exceptionally low emissions figure.

Opinions differ as to whether methane emissions from wild animals should be considered in greenhouse gas calculations. An accurate comparison therefore, of the



carbon footprint of wild venison with other red meats is extremely difficult and this report does not attempt to do this. The report identifies that 89% of emissions in the venison process come from the methane produced from deer themselves.

### The report assesses:

- The emissions of all deer in all habitats and includes direct emissions from the animals themselves, the majority of which is methane produced from their digestive system. However, it does not assess indirect impacts from tree browsing damage, or peatland erosion.
- The footprint of estates and businesses managing deer (electricity and heating to maintain buildings and staff, fencing, transport of carcasses, refrigeration of the larder, disposal of waste etc)
- The footprint of transportation to the processor
- The footprint associated with the processing of the carcass into retail products

There are opportunities to address and reduce the remaining 11% of emissions that come from the estate/primary producer and processor. Such actions might include changing vehicle use and type, seeking renewable sources of electricity, and actions that can be taken at estate level including woodland planting and peatland restoration, referred to as 'insetting'.





Separating the business of deer management/ venison production from other estate functions and management which require electricity and vehicle use, is complex.

A reduction in deer numbers to produce venison also reduces the methane emissions from the wild herd overall.

**The report clearly identifies the 'green credentials' of venison and there are a number of key take-aways:**

- Any reduction in the deer population will only improve the carbon credentials of Scottish venison.
- Accurate comparison between the carbon footprints of wild venison and domestic livestock is extremely difficult
- The relationship between deer and degraded habitats is clear and the recovery of these habitats to improve biodiversity, and in some cases halt the release of carbon, is necessary to address climate change. However, deer are a part of that biodiversity and this report informs the sustainable management of the species.
- The hunting of deer provides a natural and sustainable source of protein. Where venison can be sourced and distributed locally, people can feel more connected to food and to the land.

This report estimates that the current Scottish wild deer herd produces around 110,000 – 130,000 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub> equivalents per year.

These figures obviously correlate with the size of the herd and the level of management undertaken. The headline figure of ~23 tCO<sub>2</sub>e/tCW (tonnes CO<sub>2</sub> equivalents per tonne of carcass weight) produced in this study, includes methane emission, an inevitable consequence of having a grazing animal/ungulate wild in our countryside.

If methane emissions are removed from the calculations this results in a red meat product with a carbon footprint of about 2.5tCO<sub>2</sub>e/tCW which is extremely low in the context of food production.

The SAC Consulting report is an important piece of work that fills a knowledge gap for those making decisions about our countryside, environment and climate change, that provides information that buyers of venison products need to know, and that the interested consumer we hope will want to know.

The SAC Consulting report is available at:  
<https://tinyurl.com/mpvm7n36>





**Iain Thornber**  
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## The great Atholl stag parties

Our ancestors certainly knew how to throw a good party – none more so than John Stewart, 3rd Earl of Atholl who arranged a huge deer drive in 1530 in celebration of a visit to Perthshire by King James V, his mother Margaret Tudor, and Pope Clement VII's Italian ambassador. Not only did the earl, who was only 23 at the time, employ an army of men to surround and push hundreds of deer towards the waiting sovereign and his court lying in wait behind butts and rocks, he built a 'palace' to accommodate them. No miserly 'bring your own bottle' nonsense in those days!

The drive, or tinchel – a word taken from Gaelic meaning a circuit – took place in the corries around Glen Tilt, 12 miles above Blair Atholl. There, on a flat piece of ground on the east bank of An Lochainn, a tributary of the River Tilt, the earl erected a structure which today we might call a 'flatpack' but rather more sumptuous than B&Q's best.

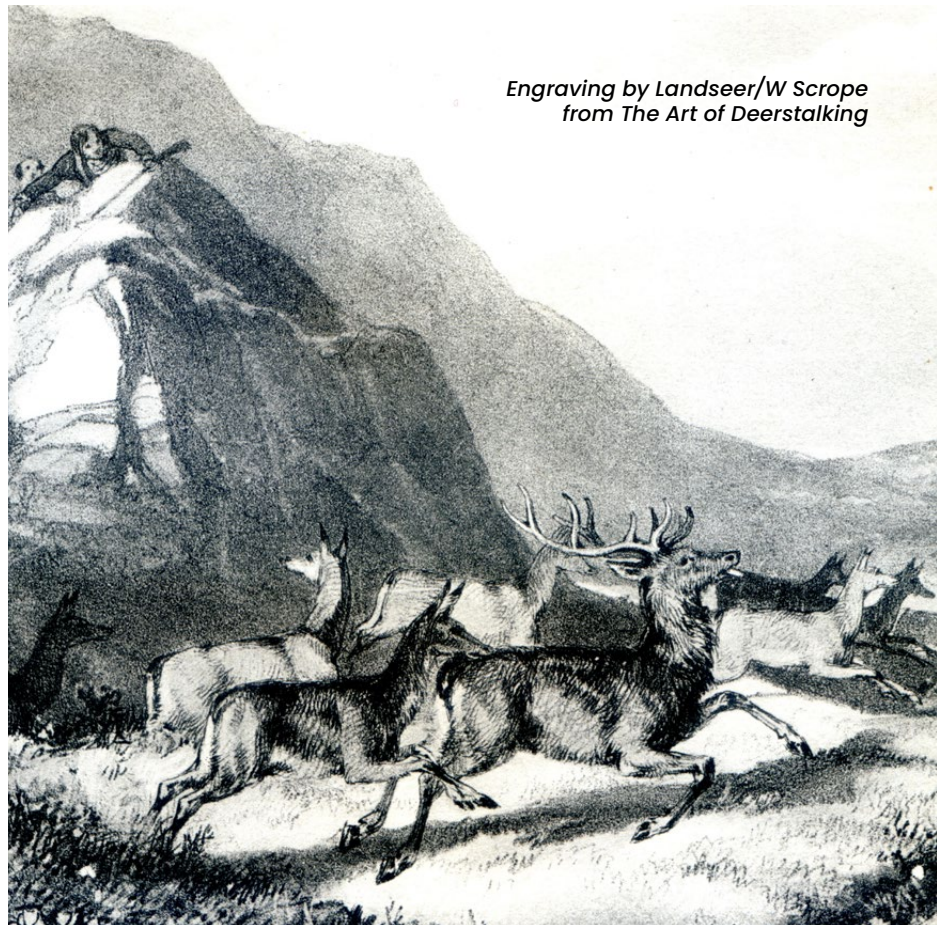
Of the tinchel we know very little other than the outcome at the end of three days was six hundred stags and hinds, roe deer of both sexes, wolves, foxes and wildcats. It probably followed the usual pattern starting days or even weeks before. It would have moved slowly at first so as not to panic the deer and make them break back through the line. The actual battue, however, would have been a noisy affair with a good deal of shouting and playing of bagpipes on the final push. What the chronicler Robert Lindsay of Pitscottie failed to record about the blood-bath, he made up for in his description of the quantity and quality of the domestic arrangements. His account is unique on a number of counts and worth quoting in full.

*'...the earl of Athole hearing of the King's coming made great provision for him in all things pertaining to a prince; that he was well served and eased with all things necessary to*

*his estate, as he had been in his own palace of Edinburgh. For I heard say this noble earl gart (caused) make a curious palace to the King, to his mother, and to the ambassador, where they were so honourably eased and lodged, as they had been in England, France, Italy, or Spain, concerning the time, and equivalent for their hunting and pastime; which was builded in the midst of a fair meadow, a fair palace of green timber, wind (wound or bound) with green birks (birch trees) that were green both under and above, which was fashioned in four quarters, and in every quarter and nutre thereof a great round, as it had been a block-house which was lofted and geisted (pertaining to a beam) the space of three-house heights (three stories high); the floors laid with green scharrets (turfs) and*

*spreats (rushes), medwarts (meadow-sweet) and flowers, that no man knew whereon he zeid (sat) but as he had been in a garden.'*

*'Further, there were two great rounds in ilk (each) side of the gate, and a great portcullies of tree(s) falling down with the manner of a barrace (barrier, an outwork) with a drawbridge, and a great stank (ditch or moat) of sixteen feet deep, and thirty feet of breadth; and also the palace within was hung with fine tapestry, and arrasses (hanging screens) of silk, and lighted with fine glass windows in all airths (points of the compass): that this palace was so pleasantly decord (decorated) with all necessities pertaining to a prince, as it had been in his own palace-royal at home. Further,*



Engraving by Landseer/W Scrope  
from *The Art of Deerstalking*



this earl gart make such provision for the king, and his mother, and the ambassador, that they had all manner of meats, drinks and delicates, that were to be gotten at that time in all Scotland, either in burgh or land; that is to say, all kind of drink, as ale, beer, wine, both white and claret, malvasy (Malvazia, a group of wine grape varieties grown historically in the Mediterranean region, Balearic Islands, Canary Islands and the island of Madeira), muskadel (muscatel) hippocras (a drink made from wine mixed with sugar and spices, usually including cinnamon, and possibly heated), and aquavitea (whisky):'

'Further there was of meats, wheat bread, main bread and gingerbread; with fleshes, beef, mutton, lamb, veal, venison, goose, grice (young wild-boar), capon (a castrated cockerel), coney (rabbit), cran (crane), swan, partridge, plover, duck, drake, brisset cock (turkey) and pawnies (peacock), blackcock, muirfowl (grouse) and capercaillies. And also, the stanks (ditches or moats) that were round about the palace were full of all delicate fish, as salmonds (salmon), trouts, pearches (perch), pikes, eels, and all other kinds of delicate fish that could be gotten in fresh water, and all ready for the banquet; syne were there proper stewards, cunning baxters (bakers) excellent cooks and pottengars (cooks who prepared herbs) with confections and drugs for their desert. And the halls and chambers were prepared with costly bedding, vessels, and napry (tablecloths and napkins), according for a king; so that he wanted none of his orders more than he had been at home in his own palace. The king (who was 18 at the time) remained in this wilderness at the hunting the space of three days and three nights and his company, as I have shown. I heard men say it cost the Earl of Athole every day in expenses a thousand pounds.'

This of course was Scots pounds which were worth a lot less than those south of the Border. Using the latest Bank of England inflation calculator and the relevant exchange rate, this equates to over a total of half a



Two ponies with stags above Loch Loch, near the site of the old palace.  
Photo: David Fergusson

million pounds. It is a staggering sum but remember where the event took place, the building costs, transporting materials, hire of labour and ponies and probably feeding at least three to four hundred people, horses and hounds. Lindsay of Pitscottie recorded; 'The ambassador of the pope seeing this great banquet and triumph which was made in a wilderness where there was no town nearer by twenty miles (Scottish, not English miles), thought it a great marvel that such a thing could be in Scotland considering how bleak and barren it was thought by other countries, and that there should be such honesty and policy in it, and especially in the Highlands where there was but wood and wilderness.'

There was, however, one sum the earl was spared, and that was the demolition of the palace as it was deliberately destroyed by fire immediately after the Royal Party left for Dunkeld, causing the ambassador to say to King James, "I marvel, sir, that you should thole your fair place to be burnt that your Grace hath been so well lodged in." The king answered, "It is the use of our Highlandmen, though they be never so well lodged, to burn their lodgings when they depart."

In return for his lavish hospitality and for promoting royal rule in Perthshire, King James granted the Earl of Atholl in 1536 a free barony of the lands of nearby Glenloch. Both died six years later.

Atholl Estate is one of the oldest and finest deer forests in Scotland. From early records and local place names, we know there were deer in Atholl from time immemorial. William Scrope, in his famous book, 'The Art of Deer Stalking', gives a vivid account of the forest as it was in 1839: 'The celebrated forest of Atholl comprehends a vast tract of moor and mountain, extending, by hillman's computation, from the NE point joining Aberdeenshire, to the SW point joining Gaig (Gaick) Forest, about 40 miles in length. The extreme breadth from the top of Skarsach (An Sgarsoch 3,300 feet) N side of Tarff to Craig Urrard cannot be less than 18 miles. It measures 135,451 acres' (slightly less than 212 sq miles). Little wonder it was the favourite haunt of royalty whenever they were in the locality. Malcolm III, King of Scotland from 1058 to 1093, nicknamed 'Canmore', frequently hunted there and many places in the forest are named after him, such as the King's Cairn and the King's Seat.



Mule deer on Paint Creek Ranch, Wyoming.  
Photo: Linzi Seivwright

## ADMG 'Deer People' Fund

### Overseas Work Placement Scheme

**The ADMG 'Deer People' Fund has been set up with the proceeds of sale of the 2022 publication of the book *Deer People*. The fund has an educational purpose and as a first project is setting up a scheme to provide a small number of overseas work experience placements in 2023/24.**

This scheme is directed at professional deer managers working in Scotland with an interest in experiencing wildlife management practices outside the UK. Applicants with a conservation interest may also be considered. An application can be made by completing the form at the link below and returning to the address given. Selected applicants will be expected to attend an interview with the ADMG Fund supervisors and to provide personal and employment references.

A successful applicant will be paired with a placement provider in North America or Africa and will spend approximately three months under the provider's direction and guidance. The Fund will provide a grant to cover travel and associated costs up to a provisional limit of £2,000. Successful candidates will be expected to make their own travel arrangements and to have them approved by the ADMG Fund supervisors.

Candidates are likely to have a background in deer management including a relevant qualification to NC/HNC or equivalent level, to hold DSC Level 2, and to have perhaps 5 years post qualification employment or self-employed experience of deer management. It is hoped that a candidate's employer will be willing to release him/her for a period of three months and placement timing will take account of seasonal work requirements.

Candidates will be expected to make their own arrangements in respect of personal insurance and ADMG will have no liability in respect of any risks associated with the Scheme.

Candidates will be expected to share their experiences on their return for the benefit of other practitioners. This will be by individual arrangement but could, for example, be in the form of a report, presentation at an ADMG event, an article in Scope magazine or a published video diary.

The support of the owners of Blackmount Estate and of Kingie Estate as sponsors of 'Deer People' is gratefully acknowledged.

Application form:  
<https://shorturl.at/aKX04>

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