



*The award-winning Common Ground Forum stalkers' event at Fealar Estate in 2024*



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

## Deer Management Groups can be proud of what they continue to achieve

**ADMG has been working hard on behalf of its members to ensure that their voices and concerns are heard as the Natural Environment Bill is discussed by the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee and as it progresses through the Parliamentary process. I gave evidence to the Committee on 30 April having previously participated earlier in the year as part of a Committee panel discussion, and we continue to liaise with the Committee and MSPs in respect of the Bill.**

As I have written before we do have some significant concerns around the Bill and in particular the use of restoration and enhancement as triggers for intervention by NatureScot. We have requested that NatureScot provides case studies, showing how this new trigger might be implemented as well as various scenarios as to how it applies in differing landscapes. It would be easy to have fears about the future, but I am inclined to consider instead some of the positives that we have seen develop over the last few years in deer management.

I believe we are already delivering much of what is being asked of us by Scottish Government. Considerable woodland creation is being undertaken and peatland restoration continues to be carried out all over the Highlands, we are collaborating, delivering culls and monitoring habitat.

Deer Management Groups are working hard to ensure that their members work together to deliver sustainable deer management with deer welfare to the fore. Despite a more diverse set of land management objectives DMGs are finding ways to continue to discuss deer management. The Common Ground Forum has continued to grow and has helped difficult discussions, but perhaps most importantly it has helped bring deer managers together.

The three stalkers' events at Glen Quoich, Fealar and Glenfalloch have been particularly helpful, allowing the upland stalkers' voices to be heard by MSPs and Civil Servants. The CGF Stalkers committee should be commended for all its hard work on these events. I would also like to encourage all DMGs to sign the Common Ground Accord and urge them to contact Helen MacIntyre who writes an article in this publication and is the new DMG Support Facilitator for ADMG.

We have held two meetings for DMG Chairs in the last year to discuss the challenges of enabling collaborative deer management and to provide ADMG with feedback on how we can better represent and support our members. We continue to support Scottish Venison which is gaining cross sector support from producers and some processors and continues to raise awareness for venison and represent the venison sector with some significant steps forward.

We have heard from members that they would like to see us more on the front foot when it comes to messaging, and with this in mind ADMG will be expanding its social media presence to Instagram and LinkedIn. We hope that this will enable us to get some more positive messaging across to our members on the work that we undertake for them and also to a wider audience to promote and educate about the

work that deer managers undertake in the public interest. There is so much positive work that is undertaken by DMGs and deer managers that goes unnoticed and we will be engaging with all our member Groups for their positive news and images which we can then promote far and wide.

Despite the discussions and debates that continue at Holyrood around the Natural Environment Bill, it remains

absolutely clear to me that we are a forward-thinking sector that has pioneered collaborative land management. We are delivering on targets for Scottish Government whilst not losing sight of the importance of the people and heritage within our deer management community. As a sector, deer managers and in particular Deer Management Groups can be very proud of what they continue to achieve.

## Land management organisations raise concerns over aspects of Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill

**Several organisations who are part of the Rural and Land Management Group (RELM) wrote to the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity in May expressing their concerns over certain aspects of the Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill.**

They highlighted the subjectivity and impractical nature of certain proposed legislative changes within the Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill saying that whilst initially relieved to see that the proposal for the new Deer Management Nature Restoration Orders (DMNROs) had been dropped, it appeared that this was in name only as DMNROs appeared to have been repurposed with little or no clarity on how state intervention for deer management might actually take place.

The letter said that there was little doubt as to the importance of deer management in delivering climate and biodiversity targets. However, what was proposed within the Bill threatened to undermine and demotivate a private deer sector that undertakes 80% of the cull at a financial loss and with little or no support or incentive from government. Also, that it cannot be in the public interest to punitively target those who are integral when it comes to delivery and support for the government’s aims and objectives for deer management, and more widely for climate change and biodiversity recovery and that there must be a balance between regulation and incentives.

They also raised concerns over provisions in the Bill which effectively discharge all responsibility to NatureScot to decide what new measures will mean in practice and that through a combination of inadequate criteria and bureaucratic appeal mechanisms, this undermines due process and damages stakeholder confidence. The following specific areas of concern were raised about the Bill:

- Section 13 (6ZB) reinvents the controversial DMNRO powers, granting NatureScot broad and subjective authority to intervene in deer management based on undefined nature restoration goals. It risks arbitrary enforcement, creates legal uncertainty and a lack of consideration to a just transition for deer managers. Further, the absence of clear baseline criteria appears to leave decision-making entirely to NatureScot officials, who are already often overstretched. There appears to be no automatic trigger with the new regulatory intervention powers and rather decisions are left to NatureScot’s discretion.
- Intervention will also be possible under Section 13 (6ZB) to contribute towards a relevant target, strategy or plan relating to the environment, climate change or biodiversity that applies in Scotland. This leaves deer managers in the dark as to how government targets and strategies may affect them and is tantamount to providing NatureScot with free rein to intervene.
- Section 15 shifts the balance of power in the control agreement process by removing the duty to consider the Code of Practice on Deer Management, redefining intervention grounds to include nature restoration, reversing the consultation process to give NatureScot greater control and making enforcement escalation mandatory rather than discretionary. The preparation /drafting of a control agreement is no longer a collaborative process with the relevant owners and occupiers, but instead sits with NatureScot, which is likely to give rise to a lack of consideration of impact of a transition in land use. It may also threaten pre-existing voluntary collaborative deer management structures relied upon by NatureScot to deliver deer management in the public interest.

- Section 16 Control Schemes removes the reference to the Code of Practice for Deer Management, which should always provide the guiding principles for sustainable deer management.

Furthermore, the application of a control scheme to the title of the land as opposed to the owner may potentially reduce the value of a property. RELM recommends a defined procedure for de-escalation in the event land changes hands to an owner or occupier willing and able to agree to deer management measures voluntarily.

- Much of what is contained within the Bill will revolve around the creation of a new Code of Practice on Deer Management. RELM urges that the creation of the Code is undertaken with input from deer management practitioners to ensure that the deer management

community is adequately represented, and also hopes that discussions around this start as soon as possible. In conclusion the letter stated that overall the Bill fails to provide reassurance and support to owners and occupiers of land and those employed in deer management.

The new triggers for intervention are subjective and unclear and threaten

collaborative deer management which is widely acknowledged to be working well in upland areas. There is currently little discussion around how deer managers will be helped to achieve important biodiversity and climate targets through incentives, and how the Scottish venison sector is supported whilst increased culls are being undertaken across the UK.



Photo: Dick Playfair



Ross Macleod, Head of Policy Scotland, Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust

## The Challenge of Change – handling human / species conflict resolution

**The Scottish Government’s climate change and biodiversity declarations in 2019 also reflected shifts in land use and management approaches across the country.**

The National Geographic recently described Scotland as ‘experiencing a zeitgeist moment for rewilding’ fuelled by a desire to expand woodland coverage and reintroduce species to assist rebuilding ecosystems to a more uncultivated state.

Yet change can also produce and exacerbate conflict without efforts to reduce or resolve the points of friction. This is not hard to find across the Scottish landscape at present – whether in relation to the rapid expansion of beavers and impacts on arable production, sea eagles preying on livestock, or proposals to restore lynx. A chief concern is that centuries-absent species may be reintroduced into completely altered social and rural economic frameworks since the last time they

were present. Volpe et al describe this as ‘bionovelty’ in September 2024’s Restoration Ecology’, observing that supporters need to undertake significant preparation to identify opportunities and pitfalls accurately.

This lies at the heart of human-species conflict resolution and is why GWCT is increasingly engaged in finding answers to difficult challenges. Where any reintroduction programmes are taken forward, we are clear that appropriate safety valves need to be considered from the outset, whether in the form of compensation, or flexible licensing. Building evidence is also essential to determine whether any change is better, different, or harmful.

With this information, it is feasible to undertake appropriate remedial action and GWCT is pressing for this ‘adaptive management’ approach as the Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill progresses.



Eurasian wolf. Credit AB Photography/istock

## Reintroducing wolves to Scottish Highlands could help address climate emergency

**Reintroducing wolves to the Scottish Highlands could lead to an expansion of native woodland which could take in and store one million tonnes of CO2 annually, according to a new study.**

A team of researchers led by the University of Leeds modelled the potential impact that wolves could have in four areas classified as Scottish Wild Land, where the eating of tree saplings by growing red deer populations is suppressing natural regeneration of trees and woodland. They used a predator–prey model to estimate that a reintroduction of wolves to areas in the Cairngorms, South-west Highlands, Central Highlands and North-west Highlands would lead to a total population of around 167 wolves – enough to reduce red deer populations to a level that would allow trees to regenerate naturally.

Control of red deer by wolves could lead to an expansion of native woodland that would take up – or sequester – one million tonnes of CO2 each year – equivalent to approximately 5% of the carbon removal target for UK woodlands that has been suggested by the UK’s Climate Change Committee as being necessary to reach net-zero by 2050. The researchers estimate that each wolf would lead to an annual carbon uptake capability of 6,080 tonnes of CO2, making each of the predators “worth” £154,000, using accepted current valuations of carbon.

This is the first time that the potential impacts of a wolf reintroduction on woodland expansion and carbon storage in the UK have been assessed, and the researchers believe the results provide further evidence of the role large carnivores can play in delivering the nature-based solutions required to address the climate emergency.

Lead author Professor Dominick Spracklen of the University of Leeds’ School of Earth and Environment said: *“There is an increasing acknowledgement that the climate and biodiversity crises cannot be managed in isolation. We need to look at the potential role of natural processes such as the reintroduction of species to recover our degraded ecosystems and these in turn can deliver co-benefits for climate and nature recovery.”*

Wolves were eradicated from Scotland around 250 years ago, leaving red deer with no natural predators. The researchers recognise that the debate around the reintroduction of wolves to the Scottish Highlands will not be without controversy, particularly among livestock farmers and deer stalkers.

Lee Schofield, a co-author of the study as well as being a farmer and author of books on the subject, added: *“Our aim is to provide new information to inform ongoing and future discussions about the possibility of wolf reintroductions both in the UK and elsewhere.”*

*“We recognise that substantial and wide-ranging stakeholder and public engagement would clearly be essential before any wolf reintroduction could be considered. Human-wildlife conflicts involving carnivores are common and must be addressed through public policies that account for people’s attitudes for a reintroduction to be successful.”*

The results of the study were published in February 2025 in the Journal of Ecological Solutions and Evidence. [besjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/2688-8319.70016](https://besjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/2688-8319.70016)

## A continuous feast of bramble *Rubus fruticosus agg.* is a key cross-seasonal dietary resource for a fallow deer population

**A study of deer poo in North Wales could shed light on the conservation of woodlands in the UK.**

A team from Bangor University and the University of Reading conducted the study amid a growing concern that increasing deer populations are negatively impacting the health and regeneration of UK woodlands. However, according to findings published in the scientific journal *Ecological Solutions & Evidence* in February 2025 researchers discovered that the deer are eating large quantities of bramble, which could serve to reduce that plant’s growth and prevent it from outcompeting the saplings of vulnerable tree and shrub species.

Dr Amy Gresham, now based at the University of Reading after leading the work at Bangor University, said: *“The results of this study were surprising. We expected that fallow deer would primarily graze on the abundant grasses in the area’s livestock pasture, diversifying their diet over winter to browse on trees as they would need to compensate for lower food availability outside of the plant growing season.”*

*“In fact, we observed that the diversity of the diet narrowed over winter, with bramble being the most prominent food resource. “Bramble can protect saplings from deer by providing a spiny barrier to browsing, however bramble can also swamp saplings of tree and shrub species, and rare woodland flowers, that do not tolerate deep shade. Deer herbivory may in fact regulate bramble growth and prevent it from outcompeting saplings and other woodland plants.”*

*“If we can understand more about what deer are eating, we can design targeted management strategies to protect vulnerable tree and shrub species.”*

The researchers spent two years studying the diet of a fallow deer *Dama dama* population in the Elwy Valley in Denbighshire. The deer are causing concerns for biodiversity conservation, woodland regeneration and timber production.

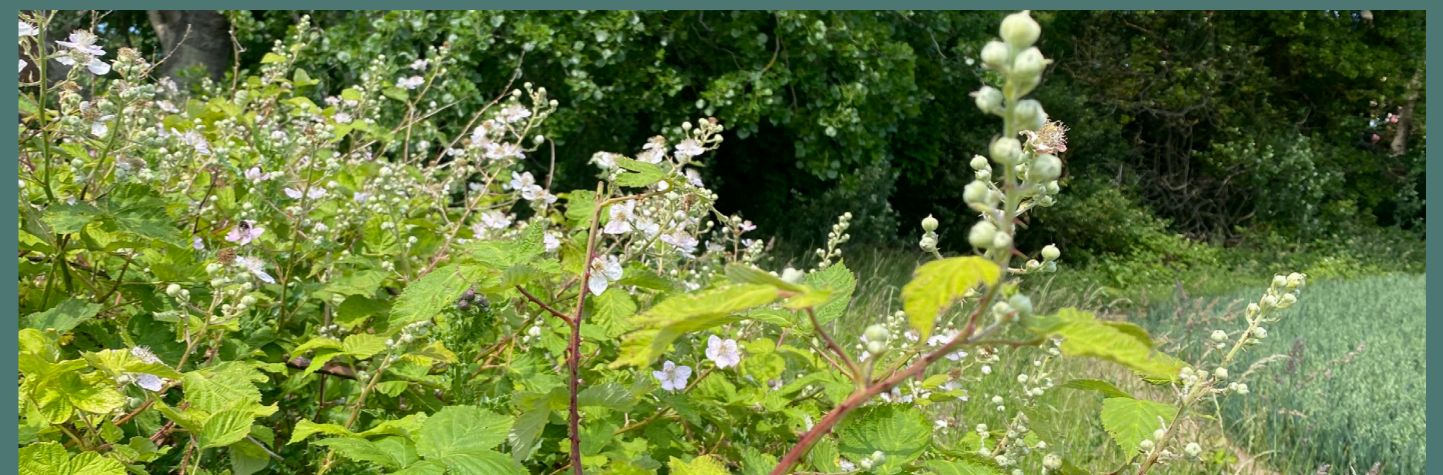
The research team, based in the Molecular Ecology & Evolution Laboratory at Bangor University, used a new technology – DNA metabarcoding – to sequence the plant DNA present in around 350 fallow deer poo samples. These were collected in three woodlands in the Elwy Valley area in spring, summer, autumn and winter between 2019 and 2021.

The research team identified the plants present in the poo and built a profile of the diet across seasons. They found that bramble *Rubus fruticosus agg.* was the deer’s main food throughout the year, making up 80% of the diet in the winter months. Broadleaf trees and shrubs became more prominent in the diet in the spring and summer, while conifer trees were found in very few samples.

Gresham, A., Pillay, K., Healey, J. R., Eichhorn, M. P., Ellison, A., Lowe, A., Cordes, L. S., Creer, S., & Shannon, G. (2025).

*A continuous feast of bramble: Rubus fruticosus agg. Is a key cross-seasonal dietary resource for a fallow deer population.*

*Ecological Solutions and Evidence*, 6(1), e70008. [doi.org/10.1002/2688-8319.70008](https://doi.org/10.1002/2688-8319.70008)





Scale casting of the infamous stag



Iain Thornber  
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## The most talked-about stag in Europe

**On the 25 August 1893, the sound of a rifle shot echoed round Coire nan Gall – a remote and wild place lying between Loch Quoich and Loch Nevis. The man who pulled the trigger was Michael Arthur Bass (1837–1909), 1st Baron Burton, and the stag he killed became more famous than Landseer’s ‘Monarch of the Glen’ – not because it had twenty points – but whether it was born in the Highlands or an English deer park.**

Lord Burton leased Glenquoich for 33 years from Donald Cameron of Lochiel from 1874 to 1905 and, in that period, 2,599 stags were killed, several by His Majesty King Edward VII who was Lord Burton’s guest in 1904 and again the following year.

The infamous stag was killed during an excursion Lord Burton made over the hill to Loch Nevis with his daughter Nellie (later Baroness Burton), James Baillie

of Dochfour (his future son-in-law), two other guests and two stalkers, James Henderson and his son Robert. There was no plan to stalk but James Henderson told his son to take a rifle ‘just in case’. Near the watershed they disturbed some sheep that ran off down into the corrie taking about 35 stags with them.

The stags stood for a moment and, to please his daughter, Lord Burton took a long down-hill shot at what appeared to be the best of them, little knowing just what he was firing at.

The body must have rolled a distance because Lord Burton and his party carried on their way leaving the stalkers to do the necessary. It was only in the evening, on returning home, that he learned of the magnificent trophy he had acquired.

The head was shown at the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1901 and later in Germany. It attracted great attention, and no one raised any doubt that it was a genuine pure-bred Scottish stag. That came two years after Lord Burton’s death when Frank Wallace (1881–1962), a Scottish based sporting artist, wrote in an article in *Country Life*, that there was more than a suspicion that it might not have been a true ‘Highlander’.

So began a furious exchange of letters. Lochiel, a member of The Deer Forest Commission, was the first to wade in. He reminded Wallace that Coire nan Gall was nowhere near a deer park, that the head was of an ordinary type of Highland stag and it was difficult to imagine how it could have been any other but one born and bred in Knoydart.

Unsure of himself now Wallace began quoting John Guille Millais (1865–1931) the naturalist, and gardener specialising in wildlife and flower portraiture, who wrote, in his *British Deer and their Horns* (1897), ‘the clumsy-looking tops [of Lord Burton’s twenty pointer] are not the least like those of a typical wild Highland head, but on the other hand, closely resemble the formation which is found in certain parks’.

In his *Mammals of Great Britain and Ireland* (1906) Millais went further by admitting that he had not included Lord Burton’s stag, because he did not believe it to be genuine.

Examining the head ‘in the flesh’ he told his readers that he found it to be an old worn beast suffering from decline with horns only weighing about a pound or two and were not such as would be carried by a Highland stag in its prime.

He concluded that ‘the lessees and owners of Highland forests are without doubt perfectly right in introducing fresh blood from the south, but these stags, if not confined, wander off into the forests and become perfectly wild and the stalkers, to please their masters, never say a word when they are shot’.

Allan Gordon Cameron, author of *The Wild Red Deer of Scotland* (1923) and a keen stalker who lived near Connel outside Oban and should have been more cautious, joined the fray and began tying himself in knots about which English park the twenty-pointer might have come from, and when.

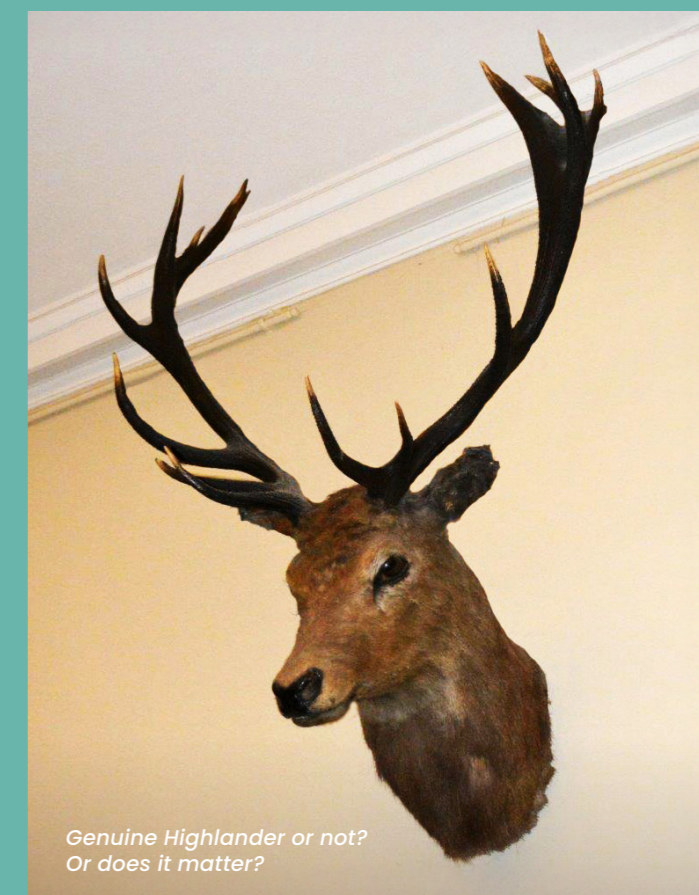
But neither James Henderson, who was the head stalker during the greater part of Lord Burton’s tenancy, nor George Malcolm, who had been the factor throughout, were having any of it.

Meticulous records had been kept and although some stags had been imported from three different English parks, they could account for all of them. Moreover, their ears were marked with a particular cut to prevent them being shot if they got out of the purpose-built deer park. No such mark can be seen on the head today.

The long correspondence was brought to a close by George Malcolm in April 1913, when he wrote that Lord Burton had never doubted the purity of the twenty-tined stag’s descent and, as no man was ever more sensitive and scrupulous than he about fictitious claims or unfounded assertions, there was little more to be said.

When Nellie Bass married James Baillie of Dochfour in 1894 the people of Glengarry and Glenquoich presented them with an exquisitely scaled model in Scottish silver of the much-discussed stag they had witnessed being killed the previous year.

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Genuine Highlander or not?  
Or does it matter?



Helen MacIntyre, DMG Support Facilitator, ADMG

## Helping DMGs to manage conflict

**ADMG is a leading organisation within the Common Ground Forum and has created a new role to deliver actions that have been identified to help DMGs improve how they function – by dealing with conflict, developing leadership and skills, and supporting groups that need it. Having been the CGF Project Manager over the last 18 months, I moved into this role in June 25.**

Most DMGs experience conflicts at some point, whether due to differing objectives of neighbouring landowners, reluctance of landholdings to attend meetings or take part in deer counts, or even conflict with agencies delivering government policies. How easy it is to resolve these issues depends on both the complexity of the situation itself and the abilities and resource of the people involved. It can be tricky to know how to handle a conflict, but there are professionals who can support and guide those involved, giving them the tools to better understand and address these situations. Some DMGs have involved consultants who can help them address conflicts, but others may be unsure how to deal with conflict when it arises.

To help support DMGs with conflict, ADMG has held two workshops for chairs and facilitators which have included sessions on group dynamics and conflict resolution. These sessions have been led by experienced civic mediators from Centre for Good Relations as part of their work for the Common Ground Forum.

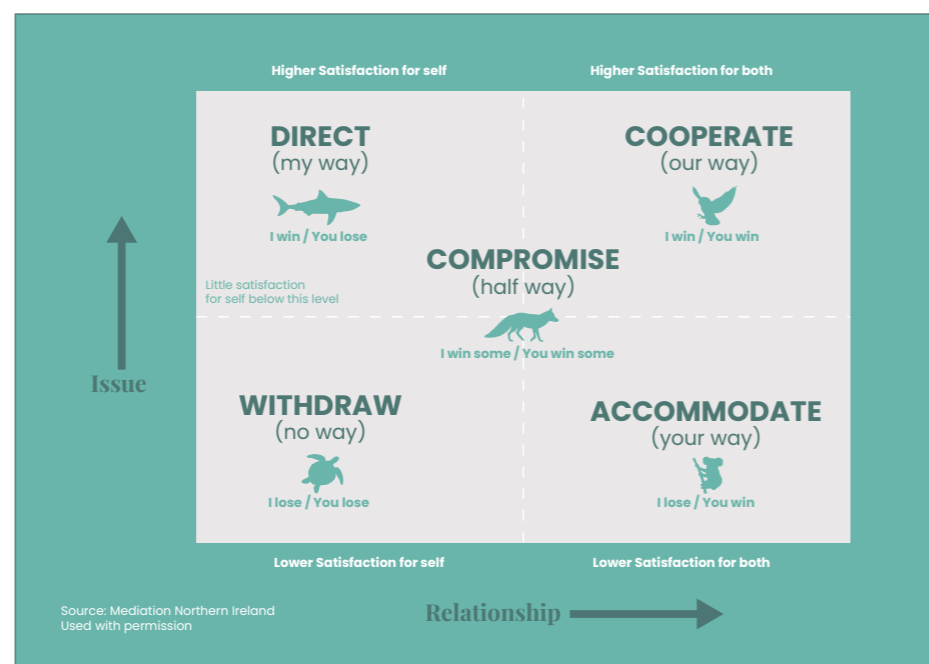
Topics covered at the workshops included: *Ways of Working* – the value of establishing a working agreement; *Group Conversational Roles* – the different actions that

take place in a meeting: *Move, Follow, Oppose, and Bystand*, that influence the direction and outcome of conversations; and *Approaches to Conflict*.

This last method looks at how, over time, people establish preferred styles for addressing conflict based on the level of focus and attention they place on either the issue or the relationship. Depending on this focus they will adapt one of 5 styles: Direct (The Shark), Accommodate (The Koala), Withdraw (The Turtle), Compromise (The Fox), and Cooperate (The Owl) (see diagram).

Each style has its merits and will have a different impact on how the conflict situation is addressed, and how well relationships can be maintained.

Participants had the opportunity to explore their respective styles based on their own experiences and contexts and to consider the benefits/challenges of trying different conflict styles in future.



ADMG has worked with Forestry and Land Scotland to develop a DMG protocol. This document aims to assist deer groups in reaching consensus and to highlight protocols for conflict resolution. It incorporates Our Common Ground Accord, a set of principles on respectful behaviour, developed by people from across the upland deer sector.

All DMGs are encouraged to work in the spirit of the Accord, incorporating it into their constitutions and management plans.

So far, two DMGs have become signatories to the Accord, demonstrating their commitment to its principles, and joining a long list of organisations from across the upland deer sector who have also signed. ADMG is encouraging other DMGs to do so – just email [info@thecommongroundforum.scot](mailto:info@thecommongroundforum.scot) if you are interested.

Alternatively, to receive regular updates from the Forum and have the opportunity to take part in activities, you can join the Forum. Visit [thecommongroundforum.scot](http://thecommongroundforum.scot) for more information.

For anyone interested in taking part in future DMG workshops, or that feels their DMG could benefit from particular support, please get in touch by emailing Helen at [ADMGScotland@gmail.com](mailto:ADMGScotland@gmail.com).



John Forteith, Chair, SQWV

## Scottish Quality Wild Venison (SQWV): review, refresh, relaunch

**Over the last few months, SQWV has been busy working on reshaping SQWV for the future. We have conducted a review of the 'producer scheme', to ensure it is up to date, and we have refreshed it to make it easier to follow.**

We have also changed our scheme provider to FIA (Food Integrity Assurance, a standalone subsidiary of SAOS) and are now active in the relaunch phase, with presentations at various industry events, and the introduction of industry forums. We have created a cross-industry 'Technical Advisory Committee' to oversee the continuous development of the scheme, ensuring it is kept up to date and is 'practical' in its application without undermining its integrity.

Here is a snapshot of some of the activities SQWV has been working on since January 2025, on behalf of its members and the wider industry:

- A new website has been launched: [www.sqwv.co.uk](http://www.sqwv.co.uk).

- A new email address has been created so you can reach SQWV directly [info@sqwv.co.uk](mailto:info@sqwv.co.uk).
- We created a Stalkers Forum to explore the use of non-lead ammunition.
- We took part in the Common Ground Forum stalkers event panel discussion on venison, including the use of non-lead ammunition.
- We presented SQWV updates at both the BASC Gamekeepers Day and at the ADMG AGM in Inverness.
- We have created a collaboration with SWA (Scottish Wholesale Association) and featured prominently at their prestigious industry awards and their annual conference.
- We have created a regular Processor Forum to design a 'processor scheme' to include all sizes, from microprocessors to large processors. This will aid the SQWV standard to be marketed wider, creating new supply chains, and bolstering existing ones.

SQWV is a critical factor in building a resilient and valued venison industry, enabling a widening of supply chain options, and building buyer confidence. The buyer and consumer of today, when making buying choices, looks for assurances that the product they are buying is safe and of a consistent quality.

The only way they can do this with confidence is through referencing a Quality Assurance scheme that is independently verified. As it tackles the immediate challenges of increased harvesting and processing of venison by c50% the industry needs to quickly build that confidence and open those doors to buyers, building on existing relationships and creating new ones.

It also needs to protect itself from 'grey market' and 'black market' activities, as these two elements suppress growth opportunities and undermine confidence in wild venison. We should embrace a mindset that leans heavily towards being a 'food producer', rather than a 'land manager', when dealing with carcasses entering the food chain.

As a result of recent activities, SQWV has seen membership grow by 6.5% since January 2025. With c150 members approved to date. We look to actively encourage more producers to become approved members, and we are here, with our new partners FIA, to help.

You can review the Producer Scheme online by visiting our new website [www.sqwv.co.uk](http://www.sqwv.co.uk) or contact us at [info@sqwv.co.uk](mailto:info@sqwv.co.uk).



Carcasses in the deer larder. Photo: James Hall

# Deer larder project to deliver 360-degree benefits addressing agricultural and social challenges in and around Cairngorms National Park

An innovative project led by the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) and two farming families is addressing damage to farms and fragile habitats caused by deer. The project will benefit food banks and schools through regular donations of prepared protein-rich wild venison, will foster a local, low food miles market for venison and create training opportunities and rural jobs.

The project, part of the Cairngorms 2030 programme supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, also aims to inspire land managers and groups in other parts of rural Scotland and beyond, to solve critical land management challenges whilst simultaneously benefitting local communities and businesses.

Sandy Bremner, Convener at the Cairngorms National Park Authority, said: *“This is an exciting project that will help farmers tackle a long-running problem, support the wider community, and preserve fragile habitats. There’s great potential for it to be rolled out further, and we are already looking at other areas that would benefit.”*

Mike Cottam, project lead at the Cairngorms National Park Authority, said: *“This a truly collaborative approach to solving rural challenges, which came to life thanks to the West Grampian Deer Management Group together with the drive and expertise of the farming families involved. It has deeply considered the needs and skills of those involved and it is off to a flying start.”*

The two farms involved, Glenkilrie near Blairgowrie and Knockbarry near Pitlochry, were awarded a grant to purchase and manage the deer larders, from which deer culled in and around the National Park will be butchered. A significant proportion of the venison processed – including lean and easy to cook mince, meatballs, burgers, and sausages – will be donated to food banks, local schools, and community kitchens.



Students from Grantown Grammar use venison from the larders. Photo: CNPA

Importantly, to ensure the project becomes financially self-sustaining, venison from the larders will be sold to local retail outlets, hotels, and restaurants through already established routes to market forged by the farming businesses involved.

Helen Stewart’s family has been farming Knockbarry Farm near Pitlochry for over 400 years. Mrs Stewart, project partner, has established a social enterprise called Fair Feast to facilitate substantial and consistent venison donations. By March this year Fair Feast had already donated quarter of a tonne in venison products to the local community and is on track to deliver four tonnes annually.

She said: *“We experienced agricultural damage from an extremely high deer density (47 per square kilometres, almost five times over the recommended maximum) on the farm. We wanted to find an ethical and sustainable way to reduce deer numbers. By developing Fair Feast, we found a way to reduce environmental damage and provide a new permanent supply of lean nutritional protein for those in food insecurity.”*

*“With the support of the Cairngorms National Park Authority and The National Lottery Heritage Fund we have setup an on-site deer larder and butchery. We now have a full-time master butcher working to produce venison sausages, burgers, mince, meatballs, and stew. Fair Feast is financially self-sufficient as we sell the tenderloin steaks to finance the butchering and donation process. The tagline is ‘sales matched in food bank donations’, so the public know that by buying Fair Feast they can power social change in their local community.”*

Glenkilrie Farm has been owned by the Houstoun family for 67 years. Andrew farms in partnership with his father David and mother Morag.



Project partners (l to r) Lauren and Andrew Houstoun, Glenkilrie Larder, and Mike Cottam, CNPA. Photo: CNPA

Lauren Houstoun, owner of Glenkilrie Larder, said: *“This project is such a fantastic initiative set out by the National Park, allowing our business to utilise the wild red deer, adding value for everyone involved.”*

*“Populations of deer herds are rising and agricultural damage increasing and in turn these fantastic animals are starting to be viewed as pests. We are thrilled to be able to put a positive spin on the situation and show what a valuable commodity the deer really are. We are focused on creating a strong network to allow schools across Scotland access to this delicious, high protein, low fat meat.”*

*“We’re currently donating the venison for use in home economics classes*

*and ultimately hope it can be used on school menus in future. We are working with Developing the Young Workforce to provide all the venison required for their Hill to Grill Workshops, as well as individual schools. The positive response to this project to date is so exciting and we cannot wait to see the benefit this will have for school children across the country.*

*“Last year we opened Glenkilrie Larder Cook School at the farm. We plan to not only donate meat to schools but will also invite school groups to learn all about deer and how to cook this fantastic meat. We are passionate in our efforts to make sure children know where their food comes from.”*



Dr David Watts. The Rowett Institute

## Research into wild venison as high-value food product

Researchers at the Rowett Institute and SRUC are about to start an investigation into the prospects for wild venison as a high-value (or premium) food product. This work, which is funded by the Scottish Government's Rural and Environmental Science and Analytical Services division, is part of a larger research project into the costs and opportunities for Scottish products with higher value status.

Previous research suggested that there is economic value when producing foods with higher value status. However, the extent to which Scottish premium food products generate economic value for producers remains unclear. In addition, the regulatory environment has become more complex since the UK left the EU.

The researchers' work on wild venison will be in three parts. The first will aim at quantifying trade-offs between price premiums and production costs. This will use

consumption data from Kantar WorldPanel and production cost data from the venison sector. If anyone has production costs data that they might be willing to make available to inform this analysis, please contact Professor Cesar Revoredo-Giha at SRUC: **Cesar.Revoredo@sruc.ac.uk**

The second part of the research will involve interviewing people working in and with Scotland's deer management and venison sectors. The researchers want to understand participants' perceptions of: different inputs and their relative importance; trading relationships; the pros and cons of quality and assurance schemes (e.g. SQWV, BQWV); the policy environment; networking bodies and events; and the opportunities for and risks facing the sector.

Data from the interviews will be used to inform an online workshop which will create a risk matrix and risk/opportunity scenarios for the

sector. If anyone would like further information about this work, or thinks that they might like to be interviewed, please contact Dr Ruth Slater at the Rowett Institute: **r.slater@abdn.ac.uk**

Thirdly, the research will examine consumers' willingness to pay for high quality wild venison products. Using a list of product characteristics, which will be compiled in consultation with the venison sector, it will survey a representative sample of about 2,000 UK adults, about half of whom will be resident in Scotland.

Participants will take part in an economic choice experiment, from which the researchers will be able to determine the likely premium that consumers are willing to pay for wild venison with specific characteristics (e.g. SQWV and/or BQWV accredited, organic).

If anyone has particular characteristics that they think could form part of the choice experiment, or would be interested in exploring broader consumption-related topics – such as knowledge and perceptions of wild venison – please contact Dr Faical Akaichi at SRUC: **Faical.Akaichi@sruc.ac.uk**

The aim of this investigation is to produce evidence, which will result in guidance to help the venison sector. Thus, from each of the three parts, the researchers will publish a summary of their findings to provide practical guidance for people working with and in the venison sector.



Diced Knorydart venison. Photo: Knorydart Wild Venison [www.knorydart.org/knorydart-wild-venison](http://www.knorydart.org/knorydart-wild-venison)

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