SCOPE
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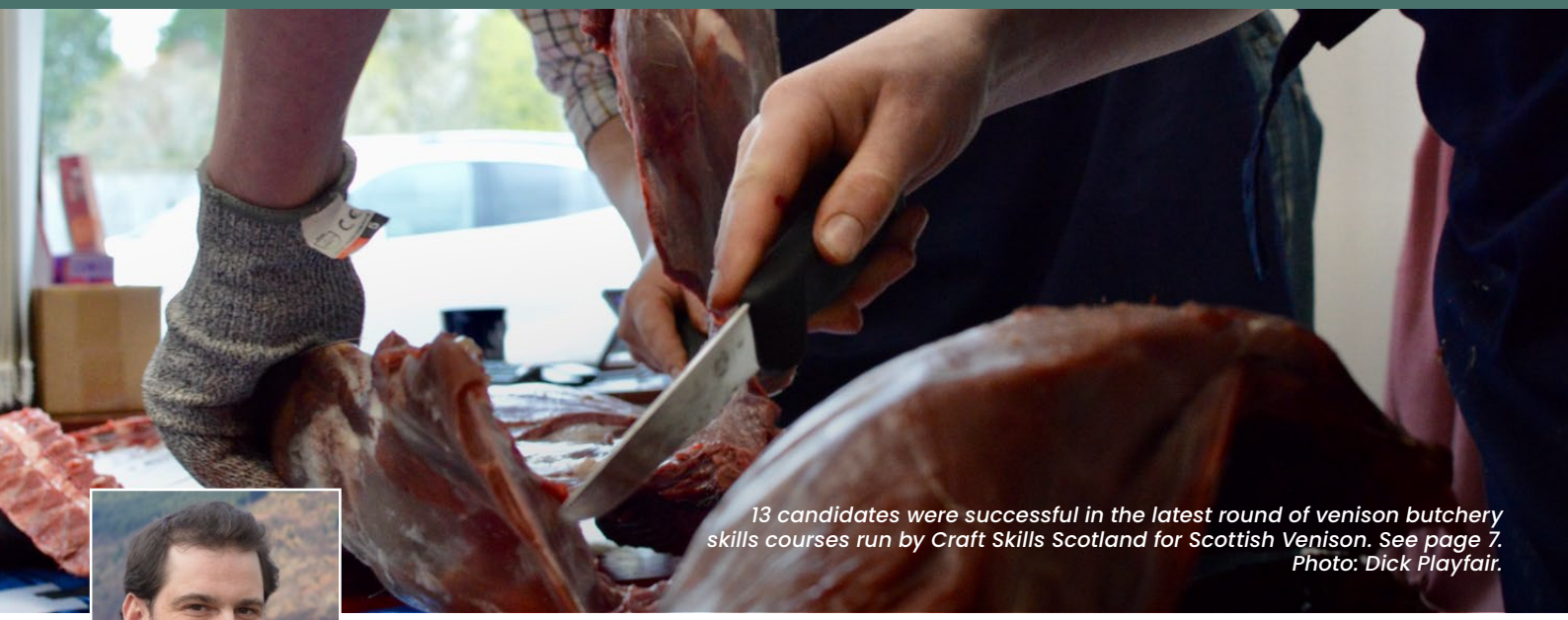
ADMG
ASSOCIATION OF
Deer Management Groups



13 candidates were successful in the latest round of venison butchery skills courses run by Craft Skills Scotland for Scottish Venison. See page 7. Photo: Dick Playfair.

Tom Turnbull, Chair
Association of Deer Management Groups

ADMG needs ongoing support of upland deer managers to continue to deliver

The past year has been both challenging and, at times, frustrating. The Natural Environment (Scotland) Act has occupied much of our organisation's time as we have strived to influence the decision-making process at Holyrood.

We can I think, however, take pride in our success in influencing many aspects of the Act. Despite the obstacles, we are encouraged that policymakers should now increasingly recognise and better understand the hard work done by deer managers, the significance of the venison sector, and the crucial role of collaboration in managing deer in the Highlands.

We now have a clearer idea of what the future holds, and there is no doubt that the Scottish Government will demand progress towards meeting its Scottish Biodiversity Strategy targets for 2030 and delivering the new National Deer Management and Venison Plan. If deer managers widely are perceived as not delivering, I am certain that, once again, the blame will fall upon us, so now is the time to ensure that deer management plans are up to date and that population models are being achieved. If we do this, I am hopeful that, when 2030 arrives, we will once again be able to prove our doubters wrong.

As an organisation, it is important that we regularly reflect on what we deliver on behalf of our members. I hope that, throughout the two years of debate in the run-up to the Natural Environment Act, it was clear that ADMG represented its broad membership effectively. The work of the Common Ground Forum was especially prominent, and we worked closely with others to influence the Bill - particularly on vital issues such as venison and support for deer managers.

We are committed to maintaining a strong working relationship with NatureScot to ensure our members are well represented both locally and nationally. Liaising and meeting regularly with NatureScot also enables us to have difficult conversations on our members' behalf when needed.

We provide direct support to individual DMGs when that is necessary and facilitate forums for DMGs to share their challenges through regular meetings for DMG representatives. These meetings, for chairs and secretaries, allow ideas to be exchanged and offer opportunities for direct feedback to ADMG centrally, ensuring our members are represented to the best of our abilities with both NatureScot and the Scottish Government, both to officials and Ministers.

Ongoing Support Continued...

In addition to promoting the work of all our member DMGs, we uphold high standards in deer management. Through our ongoing support of Best Practice Guidance and Scottish Quality Wild Venison, we strive to ensure deer management is conducted to the highest standards among our members, demonstrating our commitment to progress.

Over the next four years, ADMG will continue to represent and support its members, and I hope we can clearly demonstrate the value of membership to every DMG.

As we move towards 2030, we must work together to deliver sustainable, collaborative deer management, with deer welfare at the heart of every decision. With the Natural Environment (Scotland) Act now in place, discussions underway on a new Code of Practice for Deer Management, and the Scottish Government required to deliver a new National Deer Management and Venison Plan, your support for ADMG is more important than ever as, with it, we can continue to represent Highland deer managers as strongly and effectively as possible.

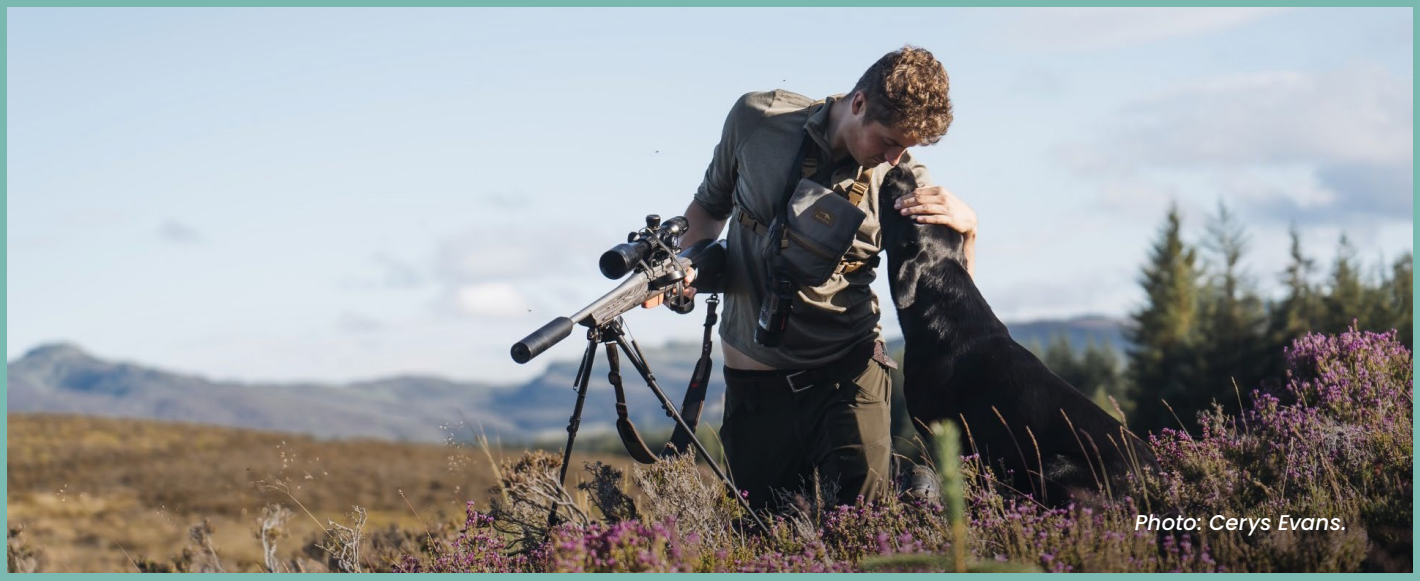
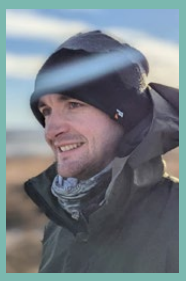


Photo: Cerys Evans.



Callum Leavey-Wilson, *Institute of Geography, School of GeoSciences, University of Edinburgh*

Views from the hill: deer stalkers' perspectives on land-use change in the Scottish Highlands

As part of addressing climate change and biodiversity loss, there are significant changes being made to the way people use land around the world. In the Scottish Highlands, one of the main land-use changes underway concerns deer management. The Scottish Government argues that to support woodland and peatland recovery as part of their climate and nature goals, the environmental impacts of deer need to be reduced.

However, the views of professional deer hunters (or 'stalkers' in Scotland), are poorly understood, even though stalking has existed for over 200 years. Moreover, changes to deer management will impact stalkers most as they are the people responsible for delivering them.

The aim of our paper was to address this knowledge gap, through interviewing stalkers about what they thought of current changes to deer management and land use in the Highlands. We then applied a conceptual framework to our interview data to help make sense of the stalkers' responses.

Overall, we found that stalkers have a wide range of perspectives, with some very fearful of and hostile to current changes, whilst others saw a positive vision for deer management and land use in the Scottish Highlands. The main message from our research is that we need to seek out and listen to the voices of the individuals doing the hard work on the ground, which very often get lost in the noise of national policy debates. Only then can we find common ground on contentious environmental issues and build a better future for people and nature.

Abstract

1. Land-use and wildlife management are changing globally as part of efforts to address contemporary environmental challenges. In the Scottish Highlands, the hunting - or 'stalking' - of deer has entered a period of considerable flux primarily because of national policy changes to mitigate climate change and biodiversity loss. However, professional deer stalkers, who manage deer, other wildlife and land across vast areas of Scotland, have received scant research attention, with their views poorly understood as a result.

2. Via an in-depth qualitative study based on unprecedented access to stalkers, through the lead author's involvement in an environmental mediation process focused on deer management, we apply the Values-Rules-Knowledge framework to explore how stalkers are responding to and influencing this changing context.

3. We find that there is significant heterogeneity in perspectives amongst stalkers, with some highly resistant to and fearful of current and forthcoming changes, whilst others have more welcoming and adaptive attitudes.

4. We also identify interactions and overlaps between and amongst the changing values, rules and knowledge of stalkers and stalking, which is increasingly influencing stalkers' work in the Highlands.

5. We therefore show how the Values-Rules-Knowledge framework can be used to identify linkages that are both enabling and constraining of change between values, rules and knowledge in a particular context and, in doing so, reconfirm the utility of the framework.

6. Overall, the paper sheds light on a very significant but previously poorly understood group of people in Scotland and informs knowledge more broadly around the impacts of changes in land-use policy on traditional forms of land management as well as traditional land users

Callum Leavey-Wilson, Janet A Fisher, Sam Staddon.
First published 14 March 2026
The full research paper is available here:
besjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/pan3.70277

Planting on Ben Lawers. Photo: National Trust for Scotland.

Lowering deer densities can help restore Scotland's lost Highland mountain woodlands, new research shows

A six-year long Stirling-led study looked at the impact of deer management on mountain woodland

Lost mountain woodlands in the Scottish Highlands will return if deer densities are reduced, according to new University of Stirling research.

A six-year study, led by PhD researcher Sarah Watts of the University's Faculty of Natural Sciences, looked at the impact of deer management on mountain woodland.

Mountain woodland provides a range of benefits including slope stabilisation, protection from extreme events such as landslides and rockfalls, and a reduction in downstream flooding.

The study, which was supported by Forest Research, focused on dwarf birch, an upland species that, in Britain, is largely confined to blanket bogs - areas not normally associated with trees. Elsewhere in Europe it can be found across a much broader range of locations including grasslands, heaths, and mountain woodlands.

With red deer densities above three per km², the research found dwarf birch planted in grassland and heath habitats suffered increased mortality linked to substantially more browsing - where deer feed on woody vegetation such as leaves, twigs, and buds. In contrast, the trees in blanket bogs were browsed less and experienced far higher survival rates.

Restoration

However, at lower deer densities, without the pressure of overgrazing, dwarf birch survival was similar across all three habitats - with some growth measurements better in the grass and heath than in bogs.

Lead author Sarah Watts now hopes that the study's findings will help to restore lost woodlands in Scottish mountains - and shape future woodland creation strategies. She said:

"These findings show that blanket bog is a refuge where populations of dwarf birch have escaped overgrazing, rather than providing the ideal conditions for planting and restoration action.

"This means that Scotland's lost mountain woodlands can return more widely if deer densities are reduced.

"Instead of being an unspoilt wilderness, the Highlands have been influenced by people for thousands of years. Scotland has some of the highest deer densities in Europe, due to management for sport shooting and the removal of top predators such as wolves and lynx.

"National deer density targets are currently set at 10 per km² across open range areas of the Highlands, but numbers vary locally from below one to over 64 per km². These figures are too high for the restoration of sensitive upland habitats such as woodlands and scrub.

"Deer are an essential, celebrated part of our natural and cultural heritage. But action to address this imbalance would promote more sustainable, healthy deer populations, facilitate the recovery of other iconic woodland habitats, such as Caledonian Pinewoods and Atlantic Rainforests, and boost the general condition and diversity of our uplands."

The research involved a six-year long high-altitude tree planting experiment repeated at three upland sites in the Scottish Highlands that are managed for nature restoration: Ben Lawers National Nature Reserve (National Trust for Scotland), Corrour Estate, and Glen Finglas (Woodland Trust Scotland).

In total 750 Dwarf Birch trees were planted in three different habitat types: blanket bog, upland grassland and heathland, and in different grazing management treatments ranging from total exclusion of large herbivores, to low deer densities (between 1-3 per km²), and higher deer densities of seven per km².

Study co-author Dr Nadia Barsoum, Senior Biodiversity Scientist at Forest Research, explained:

"Our native shrub and tree species have evolved and adapted to specific environmental conditions over millennia, making many of them specialist survivors able to thrive where other species cannot. Uniquely placed then are these species to deliver ecological and ecosystem benefits in these contexts like no other. Giving 'space for nature' in the case of dwarf birch has a tangible remedy as this study demonstrates.

"Deer management will allow this native tree species to escape the confines of their final refugia and reclaim large areas of the Highland uplands, bringing back all the evolved benefits that have been lost."

Refugia are areas that enable species to survive long-term during large-scale environmental changes, while refuges are places offering short-term protection from more immediate threats.

Measurements of survival, browsing and growth were recorded twice a year at each site, amounting to over 40,000 individual measurements, all made by Watts during her PhD studies.

Photo: Sarah Watts, University of Stirling.

Thinking outside the bog

Ms Watts added:

"Tree planting is best targeted in suitable habitats when seed sources for natural regeneration are lacking. However, it is necessary to address the original causes of habitat loss, particularly overgrazing, with landscape-scale management for a lower density red deer population (below three per km²) being key to facilitating the recovery of mountain woodland. We therefore need to increase rural employment and promote the value of jobs such as deer stalking for supporting nature recovery.

"Dwarf birch regenerates particularly well in heathlands without the pressure of overgrazing, but such mountain woodlands are exceptionally rare in our Highland landscapes shaped by centuries of land-use and grazing management. These habitat mosaics are not typically recognised in protected areas or conservation policy.

"Our research illustrates the value of an outside the box, or in the case of dwarf birch, thinking outside the bog, approach to conservation management - encouraging us to work outside of habitat refugia, small tree planting projects constrained within fences, and static vegetation categorisations which omit mountain woodland mosaics.

"Reviving mountain woodland mosaics will tackle biodiversity loss and help mitigate climate change impacts on a national scale."

The study was published in the journal Forest Ecology and Management in January 2026 and is available to read here: **sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0378112725009387?via%3Dihub**

Work was funded by the University of Stirling, Woodland Trust Scotland, Corrour Estate, Scottish Forestry Trust, Macaulay Development Trust, National Trust for Scotland, Forest Research, and Future Woodlands Scotland.

European Lynx.
Photo: Colourbox/Volodymyr Burdiak.

The lynx effect: how the smell of predators could help forest restoration

Just the smell of predators, like lynx, is enough to reduce deer browsing, finds new research

New research finds that the mere smell of predators, like lynx, is enough to make deer more cautious and spend less time browsing on tree saplings, offering a potential tool for forest recovery.

In a field experiment conducted in the forests of south-eastern Germany, researchers from the University of Freiburg added lynx and wolf urine and scat to plots of tree saplings and then monitored how wild deer responded.

They found that plots with the scent of predators, particularly lynx, had less browsing damage to young trees than control plots, and that deer visited predator-scented plots less and spent less time foraging when they were there.

Over-browsing by deer is a major threat to forest regeneration, damaging biodiversity and causing economic losses for the forestry sector. Mitigating browsing damage usually involves substantial human effort and financial resources.

Walter Di Nicola, one of the lead researchers, said:

"At a time when debates around large carnivore conservation often focus on conflicts, our study highlights the benefits these species bring to landscapes. The presence of carnivores, even just their scent, could help reduce the ecological and economic problems associated with browsing from overabundant deer populations."

The research, published in January 2026 in the Journal of Applied Ecology, was conducted in forests where both lynx and wolves have been reintroduced. But the researchers say they would expect similar effects in countries like the UK where these predators have long been absent.

Walter Di Nicola said: *"In the UK we would expect similar but probably weaker effects. Deer still have some innate fear of predators, even if those predators have been absent for generations. Where predators return, we expect these responses – and their ecological benefits – to become stronger over time."*

The researchers call for conservation strategies that promote large carnivores in forests as a natural, low-intervention solution to over-browsing.

The study highlights the benefits predators bring to landscapes.

To test the effects of large carnivore smells on deer behaviour, the researchers set up experimental plots at 11 locations around the forests. Each location comprised of four plots marked with the scent of wolf, lynx, cow and water (as a control). In each plot, 30 saplings were planted.

The researchers regularly monitored the saplings to assess browsing damage and used camera traps to record red and roe deer behaviour, such as how long and how frequently they visited each plot.

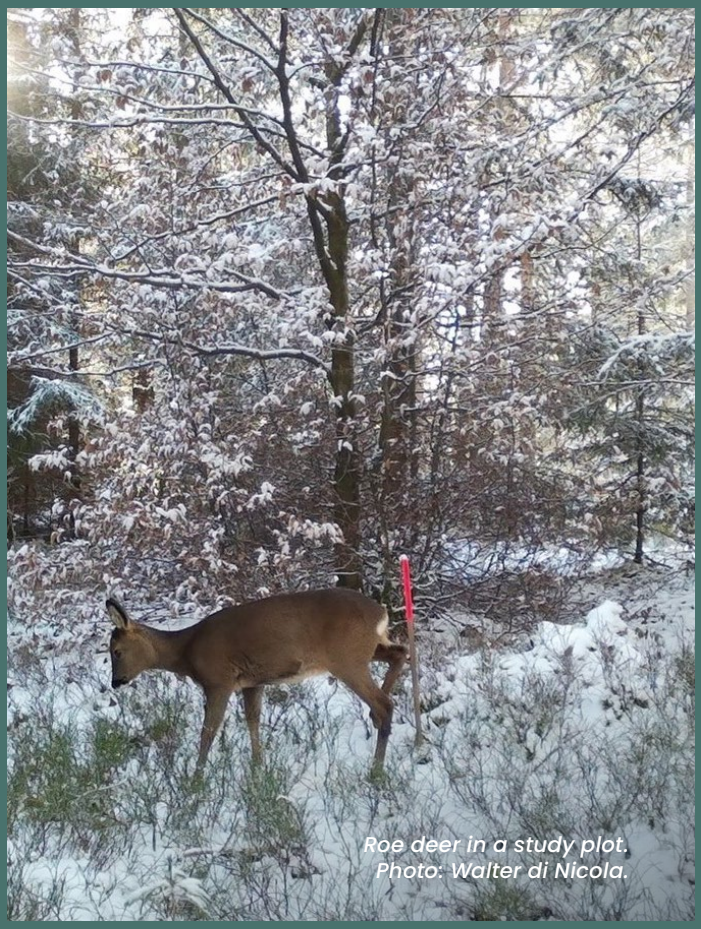
The researchers found that there was a stronger response to the smell of lynx compared to wolf. They believe this could be due to the ambush hunting strategies of lynx, which tend to stalk their prey from close distances, meaning deer might perceive lynx scent cues as more of a threat.

They also point out that wolves were establishing themselves in the area at the time of the experiment, and the deer had much more experience of the threat of lynx.

The researchers caution that their experiment cannot fully replicate the complexity of natural-predator prey interactions. In their setup they used concentrated predator scents, which were easier for deer to detect than in natural conditions. In the wild, real predator cues are more scattered and unpredictable.

Suzanne T. S. van Beeck Calkoen and Walter Di Nicola contributed equally as joint first co-authors. Dries P. J. Kuijper and Marco Heurich contributed equally to this work as senior scientists.

The full research can be read here:
besjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1365-2664.70267



Roe deer in a study plot. Photo: Walter di Nicola.

Venison butchery

In April Scottish Venison staged two venison butchery courses delivered by Craft Skills Scotland at the Strathdearn Hub, Tomatin and at the HQ of Scottish Craft Butchers in Perth. 13 successful candidates attended the one-day long course which focussed on breaking down a deer carcase into its main constituent joints and cuts, and then adding value to mince, and producing burgers and venison sausages.

Whilst there is no date fixed for follow-up courses Scottish Venison is currently assembling a mailing list of those who might be interested in the future. If you would like to receive more information about the venison butchery course delivered by Craft Skills Scotland contact **mail@scottish-venison.com**

The courses were supported by funding from the Scottish Government.

Perth candidates and instructors/assessors. Photo: Dick Playfair.

Sunart vegetation.
Photo: Victor Clements.

Victor Clements

The Sunart Rainforest Cull Incentivisation Scheme

Introduction and context

Managing deer is obviously central to successful management and regeneration of woodlands, but the economics of making this work can be very difficult.

Recognising this, in 2024-25, NatureScot introduced a trial deer cull incentivisation scheme, paying £70/head for numbers of hinds and calves (or does/kids) above a baseline cull level. The areas concerned were the Cairngorms National Park focused on red deer, an area of Central Scotland focused on roe deer, and the south side of Loch Ness focused on sika deer.

The outcome was mixed. In 2025-26, these schemes have been repeated, with a higher price of £100 per animal. The Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park introduced a scheme as well. These trial areas are well-known and we will get a review in due course.

Less well known is the situation in the Sunart area to the west of Fort William, where a successful application to the Rainforest Restoration Fund for oak woodland restoration included a sum of money that could be used for its own bespoke cull incentive scheme. The purpose of this article is to set out how this scheme worked, and why it should be held up as a project that should be able to inform the deer/ woodland debate at a national level. It is particularly relevant because all the properties involved are small and medium sized, including crofted land and community ownership, and the situation is therefore more representative of the country as a whole.

The Sunart Rainforest Area

The project area covers the area of SSSI and SAC designated oak woodland lying along Loch Sunart, between Strontian and Salen. There are multiple small to medium sized properties, with private owners, and crofting and community tenure, as well as woods managed by Forestry & Land Scotland.

By 2026, deer numbers in the wider Sunart area were counted by drone to be just over 10 per sq km, too high for oak regeneration. Some retrospective population modelling over an area which included adjacent FLS managed plantations suggested the population might be higher, possibly 13 - 17 deer per sq km. Woodland HIA in the oak woods suggested this could well be right.

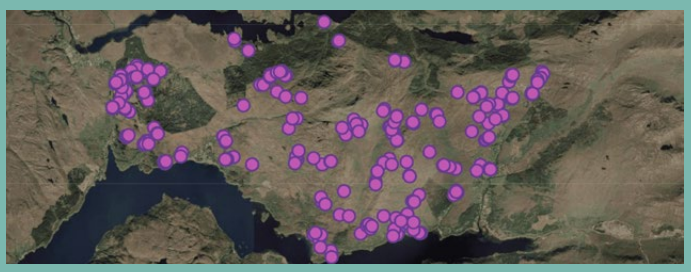
Any new attempt to restore the oak woodland had to address the grazing pressure and NatureScot was unwilling to fund repair or maintenance of the fence. Some owners felt it was not practical either. We looked at a deer control solution over a wider area.

NatureScot did not specify the terms and conditions of an incentive scheme in Sunart, but the aim was to incentivise and verify additional deer management activity.

The actual Sunart Rainforest area was 8,000 ha. However, it was considered that an additional area of land, largely occupied by FLS, would have a material impact on the outcomes.

Terms and conditions

- The scheme was open to anyone who had legal authority to shoot deer within the project area. Public land was largely excluded.
- Hinds and red deer calves were the main target of the scheme
- The money paid out was £150 per head for red deer and £100 per head for roe deer, above a 5-year average cull for each property/controller.
- The £150 is significantly more than other incentive schemes, but it is in line with contractor rates on the west coast in similar terrain.
- Data was verified by Epicollect5, which was very easy and intuitive for people to use.
- The budget was £40,000. A proportion of which was subject to VAT.
- In summary, the incentivised cull was almost five times that of the previous average.
- As can be seen from the image below, culls were well distributed throughout the project area.



In total, 837 animals were culled within the overall area, split 50:50 between FLS and the incentivised properties. Most of these animals were red deer. The incentivised properties increased their deer cull from 131 to 424 over their 5-year average. The cull of hinds and calves was just under five times the previous average.

Importantly, despite the much higher cull on adjacent ground, FLS was able to maintain its numbers, with a modest increase.

Our analysis of the deer population in Sunart, based on incomplete evidence, suggested that an annual cull of 300 - 350 stags and 300 - 350 hinds would be required to reduce the population over three years. So, although the overall cull was a bit below the high end of this range, the outcome has been a good one, and these culls must surely now be reducing the population. What is needed now are funds to repeat the exercise and keep it going for ten years or so.

This is a summary version of a longer article which will appear in the summer edition of the Scottish Forestry journal.

The Sunart Rainforest Deer Management Plan, and the various deliberations around that, can be found at this link:

sunartcommunitycompany.co.uk/sunart-rainforest/sunart-rainforest-deer-management-plan

2025-26 Season Summary	Stags	Hinds	Calves	Roe	Total
Total Incentivized Cull - Minus FLS	106	203	99	16	424
FLS (All)	184	137	79	13	413
Total	290	340	178	29	837
Previous Non-incentivized Cull - Minus FLS	65	48	14	4	131
FLS 5 Year Average	181	113	64	20	378
Total	246	161	78	24	509
Difference (5 Year Average)	44	179	100	5	328
Suggested Target	350	350	140		
Difference	-60	-10	38		-32

Victor Clements is a woodland and deer advisor living and working in Highland Perthshire. As part of The Native Woods Co-operative (Scotland) Ltd, he has supported the Sunart Community Company in developing a deer management plan to help take forward their restoration objectives in the oak woodlands, hopefully with benefits for the adjacent National Forest Estate land as well.

Euan Palmer was the project co-ordinator, and supported those using the cull incentive trial and Epicollect. Victor presented a case study of the research at the Forest Research x RSFS event on 11 June on Deer Management and Crop Protection.

The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or positions of any organisation, employer, or institution.

Alan McDonnell, *Head of Nature Restoration, Trees for Life*

A craving for connection, East - West Wild

Moving to landscape-scale with nature and people

"Ok, how are we supposed to do that then?" Two of us had just decided that the nature charity we worked for was failing. Failing slowly perhaps, but inevitably. Our ambition to see nature shape more of the Scottish Highlands and create opportunity for those who live there was lofty, but the realisation that we would have to change how we'd always worked was, while a little liberating, mostly daunting.

We had to seek relationships with people we weren't used to talking to, people with different priorities for the land than us. Looking back now, it feels odd to remember how precipitous that cliff face looked. We were a small, earnest outfit that placed value in action rather than words. 'They' were from the world of the sporting estate, people who we either knew little or not at all. Conversations up until then had, usually gently, sometimes forcefully, danced around seemingly conflicting and strongly held values. The sense of a divide, of opposing tribes, was palpable. Were we seriously going to try and bridge that?

However, we knew that everyone was, and still is, facing big challenges - social, environmental, economic. For us, the need was, and still is, for big answers. A dynamo-brained Trustee agreed and duly handed us a map with a big red oval on it - a massive 2,000 km2 roughly centred on Glen Affric and taking in or touching on five Deer Management Groups - Affric & Kintail, Glen Strathfarrar, Glenmoriston, Lochalsh and Glenelg. He called it East-West Wild and it was to reach out and make connections, both biological and human, so that nature and communities in the landscape could thrive, not just alongside, but because of each other.

The vision is of an economy with nature at its core, sustainably producing food, materials and locally made goods that cycle income back into the communities that produce them. With nature bringing diversity back to the landscape, it doesn't just become richer for wildlife, it also broadens opportunity for entrepreneurship, for people. With the right human collaborations, we propose that together we can secure and build on the land-based jobs that support local economies today. Deer stalking, farming, fishing, timber growing, artisanal foods, not least venison, and nature tourism can all be part of a wider story of regeneration. But before that, and despite the uncertainty of the times we live in, new relationships need to form to provide the foundations for sustainable change on the land.

For East-West Wild, the key changes needed are in deer management. If you're reading this, you are probably all too aware of the heat in this subject. Managing, usually reducing, deer populations to levels where natural habitats can restore themselves without threatening jobs based on deer populations is a perceived dilemma that has dogged this debate for decades now. While we believe in a future where these highly skilled jobs are inextricable from a regenerating landscape and a resilient rural economy, for others such talk can come over as facile, an implicit attack on their livelihoods, the traditions they hold dear, their very way of life.

We looked beyond the deer world for advice and turned to a psychologist. Paul helped us see where we could find common ground on both sides of the debate and how to invite people onto that ground, particularly those whose scepticism is balanced by positive curiosity. We asked stakeholders from the big red oval to day-long gatherings to ask if they would be interested in being part of a shared journey. We weren't sure what to expect, but the discussions revealed an active interest from all sides in a future based on collaboration instead of conflict.

"We wanted to join Affric Highlands because we appreciate this is an initiative working towards a better, more collaborative future for the landscape. The team are looking at what's here and what should be here, and how everyone can work together to enhance nature – not just for the benefit of nature itself but local communities too."

Joanna Macpherson, Attadale Estate

Photo: James Shooter, Rewilding Europe.

There was an understandable wariness about what it would mean in practice. It is all very well agreeing to high minded statements about getting along with each other, but what would change on the ground and would that be beneficial? For estates, would joining East-West Wild mean giving up control over land, over deer? For communities, is it yet another wave of change that brings disruption without benefit?

East-West Wild has now grown up and into an independent organisation called Affric Highlands. To date, an impressive twenty-one estates, covering over 81,000 hectares have joined the partnership. Part of the Rewilding Europe network, the initiative employs 10 people in the area to provide advice and help on identifying the potential for nature restoration in detail on estates, on fostering nature-based business potential and on offering support to communities to grow their influence and benefit from what happens. The aim is to allow each to find their own path towards the shared vision of a landscape where nature, communities and livelihoods prosper together.

Joanna Macpherson, who runs Attadale Estate on behalf of her family, took an early interest.

"We wanted to join Affric Highlands because we appreciate this is an initiative working towards a better, more collaborative future for the landscape. The team are looking at what's here and what should be here, and how everyone can work together to enhance nature – not just for the benefit of nature itself, but local communities too. I think other estates will be interested in joining Affric Highlands because this bigger picture approach is the best way forward. We have to work together to make the most of what we have here."

Scottish policy and legislation on land use is in flux. The familiar questions around deer management continue to be contested. The biggest tests of change still lie ahead of the Affric Highlands partnership. However, some small, but significant steps have already been taken. For example, a groundbreaking deer-tracking project is providing new insights into how deer move around the landscape, prompting collective conversations where previously there was silent resentment. That alone is a sign of the potential of a human ecosystem. Whatever gains and losses come with the changes ahead, it feels like the better the connections between us, the stronger we will be.

Photo: Dick Playfair - Guests gathered at the launch event.

Tom Chetwynd (front row, left) and Linzi Seivwright, proprietors of the new business, flank Alasdair Laing of Logie Estate where Findhorn Venison is located.

Findhorn Venison open for business

27 May saw the official launch of Findhorn Venison, the third local venison processing project supported through the Scottish Government/Scotland Food & Drink Covid Recovery Fund. The other two local venison processing initiatives supported by this scheme are the Barwhillanty Estate larder in south west Scotland, and Forest Field & Glen in Appin, Argyllshire. Findhorn Venison also received funding from Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE).

The project which has been four years in planning and delivery and is situated on Logie Estate has the potential to expand from a starting volume of 90 carcasses to more than 400 carcasses over the course of future years. Carcase supply is currently from the local Moray area and from two west coast estates. Tom and Linzi, the proprietors and the brains behind the project are supported by a part-time butcher and a trainee butchery assistant.

Sales are initially locally focused through farmers markets, local retail, restaurants and catering, community organisations and working closely with Macbeth's Butchers in Forres. The new facility also provides a collection hub in the region for national game dealer/processors. The business has also made the facility available to the Findhorn Watershed Initiative with the provision of its chill and contract butchery.

The Scottish Government funding stream that has supported the venture has a number of objectives, the main ones being to:

- Demonstrate how each initiative would contribute to adding value to wild venison processing and sales of local produce in Scotland.
- Demonstrate collective benefit to the supply chain.
- Be based and delivered in Scotland.
- Align with the Scotland Food & Drink Partnership's Recovery Plan and specifically demonstrate how they would contribute to sector recovery at a regional level.
- Demonstrate legacy, with a plan for continuity and growth.

Reasons for the delay in the development were principally down to planning resulting in a change of site in 2025 to Logie Estate. In addition, rising costs over the period demanded a rethink on infrastructure and equipment with the main unit ultimately being acquired second hand.

The intention is for other enterprises that wish to go down a similar route to these three pilots to have access to them on request as a source of information and support. Indeed, the three projects, all with different approaches, have learned from each other as they have moved forward.

Tom Chetwynd of Findhorn Venison said:

"We are delighted to reach this milestone in bringing a taste of nature to our local community in Moray. We are extremely grateful to Scotland Food and Drink for their funding via SAOS and to HIE also, to Scottish Venison for providing support throughout the process and to all those who have helped make our Findhorn Venison dream a reality."

Dick Playfair, Scottish Venison, said:

"Opening up local supply chains is an important part of the Scottish Venison strategy, since a bottleneck in the past has been availability of local chills and processors who can access local markets with minimal food miles, but also act as collection points for the larger venison processing businesses. We wish Findhorn Venison every success - they will be an important part of that growing network in making locally produced venison more readily available."

Financial support for infrastructure improvement and equipment for venison processing is available for similar enterprises situated in lowland areas, with an annual grant scheme also available for major projects across Scotland, the Food and Drink Processing Scheme (now closed for 2026), and Regional Food Fund grants. The local enterprise company may also be able to help through one of its initiatives.

Leigh Hauge

Deer People placement in Wyoming

In February 2026, with the help and support of the ADMG Deer People Fund, I set off from the Scottish Highlands to Cheyenne, Wyoming. The aim of the trip was to shadow Wyoming Wildlife Federation's (WWF) Government Affairs Director, Jess Johnson. WWF was founded in 1937 and is the oldest and largest hunters' advocacy and conservation organisation in the state of Wyoming. WWF's mission is to support hunters, anglers, and conservationists through policy, education, advocacy, and habitat projects. It is Jess's role within WWF to provide direction on policies and future objectives at local, state, and federal government levels. My goal while in Cheyenne was to better understand how political engagement from hunters, anglers, and conservationists can impact decisions made now and for future generations.

The Wyoming state legislative session for 2026 took place from 9 February to 6 March. This session provides an opportunity for new legislation to be introduced, either by citizens, NGOs, or corporations. Legislation brought forward this year that was of particular interest to WWF included transferable landowner hunting tags, Wildland Fire Module (WFM) funding, clarification around hunting access, and protecting public lands for all users. This required tracking all relevant updates to proposed legislation, from introduction and first reading to amendments, committee discussions, and voting in both House and Senate chambers.

My first week was made busier by 'Camo at the Capitol,' an event designed to encourage political engagement among the hunters and anglers of Wyoming. It is important to understand the role that public lands play in Wyoming. With over 30 million acres available to hunters and other recreational users, it is easy to see why there is such concern about the future direction of public land management. I also travelled to Lander and the surrounding area during my stay, which provided context for some of the legislation being discussed in the Capitol building back in Cheyenne.

During this time in Lander, I experienced some of the history and culture of the American West while observing iconic game species of Wyoming. I also witnessed the fragile rural economies in the area and the impact that hunting, fishing, and conservation have throughout the state. I discussed predator reintroduction in both America and potential reintroductions in Scotland with large carnivore biologist Ryan Kindermann. I then returned to Cheyenne for the ceremonial signing of the successful bills from this year's legislative session and celebrated the passage of Joint Resolution SJ009, "Keeping Public Lands Protected and Decisions Local."

Reflecting on my time in Wyoming, I was surprised by the collaboration between environmental NGOs and hunting and fishing groups on issues that concern them. While acknowledging that there were differences between these groups, these were set aside to collaborate on the bigger issues. I was also impressed with the proactive approach the Wyoming State Forestry Division took to wildfire management. The funding commitment of over $5 million for hazardous fuel mitigation spoke volumes about Wyoming's dedication to addressing what will likely become annual wildfire events. One thing that particularly left an impression was the number of hunters and anglers willing to engage in the political process. Hunting is seen as an integral part of Wyoming culture, both practised and preserved for future generations.

For the full version of Leigh Hauge's Wyoming report see: **deer-management.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/Wyoming-report-full-and-final.-RPW.pdf**

Photo: James Harrod.

Victor Clements

The bald (white or blaze) faced red deer of Breadalbane and South Perthshire

In spring 1976, Heiner Hatlapa was driving north through England, heading for the Scottish Highlands. He was a man on a mission. He had come across from Germany to try and source a bald or white faced/ blaze red deer for his wildlife park at Eekholt at Schleswig-Holstein near Hamburg. He had been to Woburn and a number of other English deer parks to look at their animals and their detailed records, but none of his leads had come to anything. It seemed that the last recorded animal south of the border had been killed by a falling branch in a lightning storm in 1963.

However, it appeared that the animals were still in evidence on the Remony Estate on the south shore of Loch Tay in Perthshire, near to the village of Kenmore. This was his destination now, and with him he had a horse trailer, nets, a tranquilizer gun and fishing equipment. He was working with G Kenneth Whitehead, who had made the introduction with Remony, and deer vet and farmer John Fletcher was to try and dart an animal.

Photo: Walter Mahnert, Donnie Broad and Dr John Fletcher.

Once there, three days were spent searching a large area trying to locate and capture one of the animals, but without success. Getting within 20 – 30 metres to dart a deer in that type of landscape was more or less impossible. On the last day, the Remony head keeper Angus Hogg suggested that the most practical way of securing a white faced deer would be to try and catch a calf shortly after it was born. He had experience of doing this for a range of other projects and research studies.

Reassured that this was the best way forward, Heiner then returned to Germany, and had more or less forgotten about it when, in June, he received a telegram which said very simply “we got it.”

Angus had been sitting out looking for foxes with his under-keeper Nick Boulton. It was peak calving season, and he noticed a hind moving to a hidden calf. When the calf got up, he briefly caught sight of what he thought was a white face. They waited until the hind had moved away again, before moving to the

Blaze deer.
Photo: BH Wildlife Consultancy.

place where the calf was hiding. The hind was a normal colour. The calf was quickly caught and was exactly what they were looking for, a white faced stag calf, maybe just a few hours old. A dog lead was fixed around its neck to secure it. It was part carried and part walked a mile back to the Landrover, taking to the two men straight away. Its navel was dry, and it had obviously suckled, so it was perfect for lifting.

It was kept for six weeks or so until it was big enough to be transported in a box back to Germany, and this gave time for the various permissions etc to be given at that time. Nick Boulton, now living in Australia, remembers feeding the calf. Angus Hogg remembers it residing in his potato patch, and always immediately coming to him as he approached. It was now completely imprinted on to its new family. Angus now lives in Aberfeldy with his wife, and both remember the story very well.

Moving forward to the present day, in 2025, Ben Harrower of BH Wildlife Consultancy was conducting a landscape scale drone count of the area which included the Eekholt Park in Germany, and he came across a group of these bald faced deer.

What were these animals? Where did they come from, where are they today and what significance or relevance, if any, do they have?

Ben volunteered to 'join the dots' and the result was a series of presentations in the Balquhidder village hall on 2 April 2026, the 50th anniversary of Heiner Hatlapa going to Remony. The evening was organised by the Balquhidder Deer Management Group, with around 40 people attending. Some were deer stalkers, but many were simply local residents and hill walkers who knew about the animals. The presentations were made by Dr John Fletcher, well known deer vet and deer farmer from Reediehill, Fife, Walter Mahnert who is the grandson-in-law of Heiner Hatlapa and current owner/manager of the Eekholt Park, and Donnie Broad, manager of Pitcastle and Glenlochay Estates in Highland Perthshire.

The purpose of an article that I have written and which is available in full on the ADMG website (see link below) is to try and build on the meeting and discussions which took place, to raise the profile of the animals, and to elicit some further feedback on their current distribution.

Looking at these animals from both a Scottish, English and German perspective is very instructive, with each of these countries having their own partial understanding of what these animals are and where they came from. 'Joining the dots' is a good term to use.

My approach is not scientific, and a detailed understanding of the genetics is beyond my ability – rather I am trying to tell the story and to prompt curiosity and interest in others.

Thank you to Ben Harrower, Mike Luti, Walter Mahnert, John Fletcher, Donnie Broad, Alan Sneddon, Hamish Thomson of Woodland Trust Scotland who chaired the Balquhidder meeting, Angus Hogg and the many people who have recently contributed their thoughts to our understanding of bald/ blaze/ white faced red deer in Scotland, England and in Germany.

My full article is available here:
deer-management.co.uk/the-bald-white-or-blaze-faced-red-deer-of-breadalbane-and-south-perthshire/

Victor Clements is a native woodland and deer advisor working in Highland Perthshire. All of those mentioned in the previous paragraph contributed material and research used in this article.

Bald faced hinds at Eekholt.
Photo: Walter Mahnert.

Sir Patrick Grant, *Glen Dessary Estate*

A Game Changer for Deer Counting at Glen Dessary Estate

Thermal Drone Counting by Aerometrics

Glen Dessary Estate has a long history of deer counting, having relied on both traditional foot counts and helicopter surveys over the years. Each method has brought its own challenges, and the search for a more reliable and efficient solution has now been answered through thermal drone technology provided by Aerometrics.

Helicopter counting, while effective in ideal conditions, is prohibitively expensive and highly vulnerable to the weather. On one particular occasion, a costly helicopter survey had to be abandoned mid-count due to changing conditions, resulting in a frustrating and expensive dysfunctional outcome. Foot counts, meanwhile, require large teams of experienced participants to be assembled at short notice whenever a suitable weather window appears. Coordinating such an effort across remote Highland terrain is no small task and, even when successful, identifying stags, hinds and calves accurately at distance from the ground can still prove difficult.

Thermal drone counting has been a genuine game changer for the estate.

Glen Dessary presents a demanding environment, with steep terrain, remote corries and the notoriously unpredictable weather of Scotland's west coast. Despite this, the Aerometrics survey required only an experienced operator working alongside the estate keeper using an Argo to access remote areas of the estate quickly and efficiently.

The technology itself has proven remarkably capable. Once groups of deer are detected using thermal imaging, the drone can switch seamlessly to optical zoom, allowing clear identification of individual animals from considerable distances. The ability to combine thermal detection with high powered optical zoom provides a level of speed and accuracy that traditional methods struggle to achieve.

Conditions during the survey included mist, reduced visibility and periods of rain that would have made a conventional foot count difficult to complete effectively. Thanks to the weather resistant design of the drone, the survey was able to continue operating safely and efficiently throughout changing conditions, allowing large areas of the estate to be covered consistently during the operation.

The survey also revealed unexpected sightings across the estate, including foxes and wild boar, species that would likely have gone undetected using alternative counting methods. Survey data can be reviewed almost immediately after flight, making population mapping and long term monitoring far more straightforward and accessible for estate management.

The results at Glen Dessary differed significantly from previous foot counts, underlining the advantages of thermal aerial surveying in challenging terrain.

For estates dealing with difficult access, large land areas and unpredictable weather, thermal drone deer counting is rapidly becoming an invaluable tool for modern wildlife management.

Find out more at:
aerometrics.co.uk/deer or contact **will@aerometrics.co.uk**

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