

# West Lochaber Deer Management Group

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## WEST LOCHABER DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP Spring Meeting

**Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> May 2019**

**19.00 – 21.00hrs**

**Glenfinnan House Hotel, Glenfinnan**

### Minute

**Attendees:**

Alistair Gibson – (DMG Chairman) (ADMG rep),  
Glenfinnan  
Bruce Taylor – (DMG Secretary & Treasurer), Fassfern  
Steve Morris – WTS Loch Arkaig  
Alan Currie – Fassfern/Achdaliu  
Michael Rhoden - Fassfern/Achdaliu  
Harry Nicholson - Fassfern/Achdaliu  
Sandy Walker – representing Achnacarry S  
Andy Thompson - representing Achnacarry S  
Cathy Mayne – representing Ardnish

**Apologies:**

Pete MacLaren – Ranachan  
Alex MacDonald - Achnacarry south  
John Jackson – F&LS, Glen Loy and Gairloch forests  
Ian Leith – Glenfinnan  
Niall Rowantree - Ardnish

**Non- attendance:**

Mark & Sandra de Ferranti - Meoble,  
Mr James de Ferranti, Meoble  
Raymond Fraser – Meoble  
Robert Spence - Scamadale  
John MacDonald – West Highland Hunting -  
Scamadale  
James Coulston – Arisaig  
Paolo Berardelli - Glen Mamie  
Graham Nairn – Annat/Achanellan/Glen Fada  
Peter Stewart-Sandiman - Ardnish

No.	Summary	Action
1	<p><b>Apologies and Introductions</b> As recorded above.</p>	
2	<p><b>Members Reports.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) <b>2018/19 Hind Culls</b></li> <li>ii) <b>Condition Report</b></li> <li>iii) <b>Proposed Stag Cull</b></li> <li>iv)</li> </ul>	

Estate	Hinds			Calves	Stags (forestry)	Comments
	No.	Av Wt(kg)	Av Age			
Glenfinnan	40	50	5	10		2 roe does. Severe warble fly last summer. Fewer calves (eg<25%). Condition average; mortality low. No count carried out.
Forest Enterprise	3			0	15	1 roe doe
WTS Loch Arkaig						Concurrent rights but Achnacarry Sporting Lease from 2019
Glen Loy Forest						Achnacarry Sporting Lease
Ranachan	15			6		
Meoble	55			10		
Achdaliu	47			21		Poor condition at start of season but, unusually, improved towards end to be good.
Fassfern Forest	88			42	81	
Achnacarry South Hill	80			37 + 5 knobbers	3	4 Sika stags. Mortality v low (=2). Poor condition until end o season when good. Some carcasses left on hill due to emaciation.
Glen Loy (Nairn)	17			5		
Glen Mamie	20			4		
Ardnish	12	37		5		Count : 89s, 96h, 31 c, = >30% recruitment. Better condition than in 2018
Scamadale	12			7		+1 stag
Arisaig	42			12		15 hinds culled ex Glen Beasdale SSSI/SAC

Commentary : very late & cold Spring in 2018 followed by dry summer with low vegetation growth meant that no recovery of condition as winter came in. Relatively mild winter has saved a situation of potentially high mortality but fecundity will be reduced. Late & prolonged rut means late pregnancy – late births and small calves so higher calf mortality expected in addition to lower numbers.

High tick burdens and botfly/warble fly associate with woodland deer whereas hill deer can be free of most parasites including liver fluke.

### 3 Count Report

- No full count in current year.

## **4 Deer Management Plan – Update on progress**

4.1 **Actions Review** – circulated and uploaded to website.

### **4.2 Population Model & Assessment**

Population statistics and draft population models were circulated for discussion. Noted that there were no resident keepers from the West side of the DMG present and hind cull data therefore not collected at meeting from these Estates. West of DMG comprises more farms and crofts so currently occupied with lambing and other farming activity.

The recent SNH audit demonstrated that the DMG had improved its management significantly since the last audit in 2016. The main matters remaining to be progressed related to population monitoring and linking populations with the habitat impact work that has been completed over the past 2 years.

Population modelling will need a closer consideration of fertility/pregnancy rate, balance of stag v hind yield, mortality % and recruitment success. Currently the draft population model shows that the West of the DMG will have significant population growth unless there is a 4-fold increase in the hind cull. The East of the DMG may incur a population decline at current cull levels. The movement between West and East is considered to be minimal.

Ardnish population considered to be static at current cull levels, with any immigration/emigration from south via Resipole. Railway fence limits movement from North. A gender ratio of 1:1 is the ultimate aim at Ardnish and is achievable (eg Achnacarry North achieved 727 stags : 748 hinds in the past) although depends on ground as some estates will hold more hinds, necessary to attract stags in during the season. Other estates with more forage and shelter likely to hold larger numbers of stags.

### **4.3 Native Woodlands**

Cathy Mayne explained how woodland habitat impacts associated with deer can be measured via a basal epicormic shoot loss to the lowest 2m of stem. If above 2m, then fire most likely the limiting factor. Fire can cause 10 years of loss of regen growth and has had a major impact on Ardnish estate woodland recovery and planning of any future woodland schemes.

WTS at South Loch Arkaig noted to be investing over £4.5 million in restoring native woodlands via conifer removal plans, associated timber access infrastructure and native pinewood regeneration. WLDMG is collaborating with Moidart DMG on native woodland review that is being undertaken by that Group to highlight how much work has been done to date to protect and expand native woodlands.

### **4.4 Designated Sites**

Arisaig known to have increased cull in association with aim to reduce numbers near the Glen Beasdale SSSI/SAC as agreed with SNH.

At Glen Beasdale the Atlantic oakwood is already at full canopy in many areas and this will limit further regeneration unless thinning carried out. Past fencing of trial plots has led to rank growth that limits potential regeneration unless recruitment is already present or occurs immediately after enclosure. The oakwood was managed for charcoal production and this activity in itself would have favoured oakwood and protected existing stands as far back as the Iron Age but more recently in the 1700s-1800s. The current status as in Unfavourable Condition associates with invasive rhododendron, regular fire damage and seasonal herbivore browsing.

Network Rail meeting re railside fencing recorded elsewhere but noted that the 1.4m high fence intended, with a barb top wire, has been reduced on parts of the West section of the line to 1m to allow deer movement North-South. Recorded that there had been no prior consultation by Network Rail about the intended fence, or access requirements over land, which is disappointing if

	<p>not incompetent in the circumstances. The fence, as originally proposed, would have been particularly restrictive to movement from land lying below the railway, such as Glen Beasdale SSSI/SAC. Not known whether Network Rail need to give notification of deer fencing through the SSSI under Wildlife &amp; Countryside Act.</p>	
<b>5</b>	<p><b>Habitat Assessment Plans and Training</b></p> <p>The SNH Audit recognised that all the habitat data has been collected over the past 2 years and the results now need to be applied to deer population models and management. Cathy Mayne advised distinguishing between farming areas and open deer range as, on farms, the standard measure is via livestock units (LUs) and maintaining Good Agricultural &amp; Environmental Condition (GEAC). Under this measure, a stag = 0.4 LUs and a hind is 0.3 LUs. The Deer Act applies to the open hill only and then the impacts on blanket bog, dwarf shrub heath and native woodland habitats arising from herbivore management is important. Note that the browse assessment is of last season's growth only so past impacts of sheep can usually be discounted. Interpretation of the HIAs are however quite difficult and Cathy offered to assist where this was needed eg to identify between "normal", anomalies and genuine impact that needs addressed by deer population control. There will always be sweet spots that will never achieve low impact status.</p>	
<b>6</b>	<p><b>Correspondence &amp; Public Engagement</b></p> <p>SCOPE newsletter available</p>	
<b>7</b>	<p><b>Any other business</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fires have occurred from 11th April through to 22nd April but none are considered to have any link to the WCR steam train which commenced operations on 19th April with diesel locomotive providing power. Significant areas burnt around Glen Mamie and Beasdale, to be discussed at meeting with SNH proposed for 8th May.</li> <li>• Request that SNH audit outcome was uploaded onto the WLDMG website together with DMP Actions update.</li> <li>• Request for guidance on recruitment counting as not all members carry out this assessment but it provides essential information to the population models being developed. Contracting in assistance for the Spring recruitment count suggested to cover estates that do not currently collect this data but may be willing for outside support. The Ardnish data could be used, at least in the short term, to give information on recruitment to the West of the DMG area.</li> </ul>	
<b>10</b>	<p><b>Date of next meeting</b></p> <p>AGM will be held on Friday 6th December 2019</p>	