

West Lochaber Deer Management Group

AGENDA

The AGM of the WLDMG

Venue: **The Moorings Hotel, Banavie, Fort William**
or by Zoom

[Join Zoom Meeting](#)

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88618306059?pwd=dmlXTElCazluM0wxcldadkpNNkpxdz09>

Meeting ID: 886 1830 6059

Passcode: 465962

Friday 3rd December 2021 10.00am

1. Apologies and Introductions
2. Election of office bearers.
3. Wildlife Crime, Poaching, road traffic accidents - report from Scottish Police Authority
4. Minutes of the last AGM and any Matters Arising.
5. Members Reports.
 - i) 2021 Culls (Please bring returns or email figures in advance)
 - ii) Condition Report etc
 - iii) Proposed Hind and Stag Cull for 2021/22
6. Count planning 2022
7. Venison Markets
8. ADMG - Report and Discussion
9. Delivery of Public Interest Objectives in DMP
 - Population model update
 - Collaboration with neighbours – Network Rail fence.
 - Habitat monitoring progress and report by Cathy Mayne.
 - Delivery of Designated Features into Favourable Condition : Glen Beasdale SSSI surveys and rhody control plans.
 - Native Woodland protection and woodland expansion
 - Management of Non-native Invasive Species – Feral pigs
 - Public communication of DMG and deer management matters

10. NatureScot- Report and feedback from the Glen Beasdale habitat survey.
11. Deer Management Plan—review and update new Plan being prepared by Victor Clements
12. Administrative matters
13. Any other business
14. Date of next meeting

Appended is a letter in the Autumn edition of the British Deer Society Journal with content which may provide food for thought in regard to future deer management .

West Lochaber Deer Management Group

of July 27
arewood
across this
is through
growth of
fifty yards
it seemed

unconcerned about us as it moved
in parallel through the trees, even
stopping to check us out. Eventually it
moved away into cover, but firstly gave
me the chance to take these pictures.

Anne Hodgson
By email



one time and a small but increasing
number of roe deer – at present 10
strong. Muntjac we have only seen
fleetingly. Last shooting season we
were unable to cull because we could
not get rid of the carcasses except by
expensive incineration. The problem is
now exacerbated by the fact that lead
is being outlawed and we are finding it
difficult to locate any copper bullets.

We should take a lesson from the TB
epidemic. TB was under control at one
point when I started farming in the
1950s. Deer are now totally out of hand.
There are not enough stalkers, the
numbers will continue to rise and our
countryside will look the poorer. I think
avoiding the word Pest is dangerous to
the long term prospects of a beautiful
animal.

F G Sheard
High Hurstwood, Kent

Scotland's deer: informed debate required

Sir
BDS acknowledges that the Deer
Working Group's report which has
been largely adopted by the devolved
Scottish Government was 'certainly
needed'. However, comment in *Deer*
has focussed on a small number of the
recommendations which concern open
seasons and night shooting which are
repeatedly criticised in terms of 'deer
welfare'.

These proposals do require careful
understanding and skilled implementation
and the reports emphasise this. They are
not being advocated as routine practices
but as a means of ensuring sustainable
deer management in contexts where
traditional management fails to protect
stakeholders' interests in terms of wood-
land regeneration, crop protection,
biodiversity or carbon capture.

The UK has less woodland cover
than any other mainland European or
Scandinavian country despite a maritime
climate and geomorphology well suited
to upland afforestation. All the devolved
governments are committed to
increasing woodlands, carbon capture
and biodiversity. Mature woodlands
provide shelter and browsing and
greatly enhance the welfare of deer.
Herbivore impact, however, prevents a
sustainable age profile of tree growth
for the first few years.

Woodland regeneration and
agriculture receive large sums from
the public purse and this investment
requires to be protected by appropriate
deer management. Intensive culling
over the period necessary to afford
trees to grow has two effects. At a
local scale, it may increase the health
and fecundity of the remaining deer
so that initially culls barely keep up
with recruitment. On a landscape
scale, deer adapt to cull pressure. They
migrate to and from neighbouring
sanctuaries where cull activity is
less and become nocturnal in their
habits. For these reasons traditional
stalking within daylight hours and
current close seasons cannot protect
the new growth sufficiently. Despite
more than 30 years of hard work, Deer
Management Groups in Scotland have
failed to prevent herbivore impact in
many locations designated as of Special
Scientific or Scenic interest.

A minority of landowning interests
appear to lack the will or capacity
to implement sustainable cull levels
which means that their neighbours

have to take up the slack. This results in
divisive and acrimonious polarisation
within the DMG. When this occurs, those
stakeholders who cull more intensively
are, in my opinion, criticised unfairly.

I also feel that such criticism is
hypocritical and short sighted, especially
when it invokes 'animal welfare'. Deer
welfare is immeasurably improved by
access to mature woodland for shelter
and browsing. This resource can be
achieved by 5 to 15 years reduction and
maintenance cull. The result is a better
quality of life, less winter mortality and,
in discrete populations, larger, healthier
animals. Winter mortality has been
particularly bad in my area this year and
the sight of emaciated animals facing a
slow death in a cold wet spring is, in my
view, a clear indication of the need for an
extended open season. I also find some
who object to extending the stag season
in Scotland disingenuous, particularly if
those objectors live in England where the
stag season extends through the winter!
Approximately 18% of Scottish uplands

are managed for grouse shooting. On
many of these estates, deer have been
exterminated and hares also intensively
culled. Field sports organisations do
not invoke language like 'pests' and
'massacre' to describe the activities of
grouse moor managers towards deer so
why do they use such emotive language to
describe deer management in the forestry,
agriculture and environmental sectors?

Not all upland areas are suited to tree
cover and blanket bog is a better carbon
sink. Well-drained valleys on the other
hand benefit from riparian woodland
shading and nurturing highland rivers
which are nurseries for Atlantic salmon. It
has always seemed to me to be anomalous
that many highland glens are treeless
and estates which experience dwindling
salmon runs prefer an abundance of deer
to mitigating the effects of climate change
on their fisheries.

Some prominent public figures who
proclaim their Green credentials own large
parts of Scotland where they fail to deliver
as much as they could in terms of carbon

capture, biodiversity and regeneration.
They seem to feel that a Victorian tradition
of deer monoculture overrides any
climatic, environmental or contemporary
national priorities.

Rural employment is frequently cited
as a rationale for maintaining traditional
deer management practices. Since I
became involved in stalking in the 1960s,
the number of deer has doubled and the
number of full-time stalkers decreased.
Their homes are now more profitably used
as holiday lets. Many stalkers are now
self-employed or work for contractors, but
may not find accommodation locally.

BDS publishes much authoritative
research but it has not published the
research which shows that traditional field
sports are the least economic aspect of
highland estates. Costs exceed revenue
and revenue is only 7.7% of average
highland estate income.¹ Other uses of
land provide more economic benefit and
employment to local communities.² In
my opinion, we need more professional
stalkers to manage deer and also for their
unique skillset which can provide a variety
of services to a green economy based
on education, recreational tourism and
landscape restoration.

We are led to believe that there is a
demand for recreational stalking which is
constrained by limited access to ground.
The UK has one of the least democratic
hunting cultures in the world and access is
limited and expensive. As a result, we have
relatively few 'hunters' and their mean
age is in the late 50s and 60s. This does
not bode well for establishing a hunting
culture which has the capacity to reduce
and maintain the current deer population
at the sustainable level which will deliver
the national objectives of carbon capture
and species diversity.

I would welcome an open, honest,
informed debate on all these issues
within the pages of *Deer* in future. Until
this happens, I fear that the current arid,
divisive, tribal conflict will fail to progress
the welfare interests of wild deer which
we profess to support and the interests of
the wider stalking community.

G R Simpson
By Email

REFERENCES

- 1 April 2014. Hindle R, Thomson S, Skerratt J, McMoran R & O'neil P. An Economic Assessment for Scottish Land & Estates Economic Contribution of Estates in Scotland. Commissioned by Scottish Land and Estates.
- 2 November 2002. Higgins P, Wightman A, MacMillan D. Sporting Estates and Recreational Land use in the Highlands of Scotland. Economic and Social Research Council Project paper

