

LDNS keen to help and encourage



Richard Cooke, Chairman, LDNS

No one involved with deer in Scotland can have missed the current debate surrounding deer management and the increased pressure being placed on deer managers and Deer Management Groups (DMGs) to become more effective and more open and more transparent about what they do.

Nowhere was this more apparent than in the Rural Affairs, Environment and Climate Change (RACCE) Committee inquiry into Deer Management and the Environment last Autumn and in the response by Minister Paul Wheelhouse to the Committee's recommendations. The report of the Land Reform Review Group in May also contained a number of recommendations for deer management including the setting of culls by SNH and the reintroduction of sporting rates.

Low ground deer managers will of course be asking how this affects them. Most of the proposals to improve the system are clearly aimed at upland Deer Management Groups but some of those bringing forward proposals for radical change do not make the distinction between the very different management requirements of red deer and roe, or lowlands and the open

range, and the demands being placed on the upland red deer sector do not translate well to, for example, the M8 corridor. It is for this reason that LDNS will continue to make the point that a one-size-fits-all policy approach to deer management in Scotland is unworkable and would not be in the public interest.

Should low ground deer groups be expected to have a deer management plan, carry out annual counts and culls and so on as upland DMGs are urged to do? I would say not. They have a different purpose and value. Members come together to share experience and knowledge – like-minded people with a common interest in deer. Low ground deer groups bring a valuable element of coordination over an area even if full coverage of all landholdings is unlikely, and perhaps unnecessary.

There has been a commendable process and considerable progress in coming together and increasing collaboration in lowland deer management over the last few years, and it is extremely encouraging to see low ground DMGs organising events and new lowland DMGs forming. These Groups represent skilled practitioners, rightly proud of what they do, well qualified, competent, and keen to continually develop their skills and help others to do the same. We need more of them. However there is work to do beyond the dedicated deer fraternity. Much more buy-in is required from farmers and some other land managers, and many local authorities have yet to come to grips with their responsibility for deer management in terms of the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act and the Deer Code. These also apply to others, many of whom we have yet to reach, such as property developers and golf clubs and other recreational landowners.

There is still so much more to do, but progress is being made and LDNS is here to help and to encourage.

Photo: Laurie Campbell



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Delivering Public Interest from Deer Management

Donald Fraser, Scottish Natural Heritage

We believe that effective deer management can deliver a range of public interests. But if you were asked 'do you know what they are?' where would you go to find out?

There is a raft of dictionary definitions but, in essence, public interest can be described as something that is of general benefit to the public at large. The Deer strategy: Wild Deer a National Approach (WDNA) and the Code of Practice for Deer Management try and capture those aspects of the public interest as they relate to deer management and deer managers. The public interests outlined in these documents are derived from a variety of underlying Scottish Government policies and laws.

The current debate and discussion around deer management revolves around some key questions. What are these public interests? To what extent are they being delivered? Should we expect more? How is delivery of public interest measured and communicated?

SNH has been taking forward a piece of work which seeks to provide more clarity on 'what the ask is' of deer managers in delivering public interest. This piece of work outlines the main areas of public interest which deer managers might reasonably be expected to contribute towards delivering and more importantly the actions that they should consider implementing to deliver these. The process for implementing these actions, and measuring progress accordingly, will hopefully provide the openness and transparency required for a more informed debate on deer management in Scotland.

There is often a natural suspicion associated with the term 'public interest', in that it is often used to advocate one's own views or interests – in the public interest. This can lead to polarisation of views based on one individual's or organisation's strong belief that their view or interest has a higher or greater value than someone else's. Deer management is no different in this respect, and this work, which we will be discussing directly with practitioners locally soon, will hopefully provide the basis for an open and more objective analysis of the different aspects of Public Interest at a local, regional and national scale.

North Lanarkshire DMG DSC 1 event at Harburn Estate

Robert Speirs, Chairman, NLDMG

Our thanks to Mr Humphrey Spurway for his kind permission to hold our DSC 1 event at Dyke Foot on the Harburn Estate on 17 and 18 May 2014, and also to West Lothian DMG who assisted from the onset to deliver this two day event which was aimed at improving Competence standards across the central area.

Many thanks should go in particular to WLDMG chair Alex Paul who went the extra mile to ensure everything ran smoothly, and to Dean for making sure all were fed with some locally produced venison burgers and for the refreshments!

There were 11 candidates who attended from a variety of backgrounds and who had taken the time to embark upon raising their personal levels of Competence.

The assessors, Paul Adkins and Andrew Treadaway of SRUC worked tirelessly to get all the candidates up to speed with a variety of comprehensive and thorough presentations, along with their own particular technique that reduced tension levels among the candidates significantly.

When the dust had settled on day two we had eight full passes and three part passes. Unfortunately, two fell short on the identification and one on the range requirements. However, from feedback received it is evident that candidates took away much more than just their certificates. This is very encouraging – however it should be remembered that DSC1 is the base level of Competence and we would encourage all deer managers and vocational stalkers to work towards the next level also.



Shooting test



Checking the targets. Photos: NLDMG

Urban Woodland Management in Aberdeen

Ian Talboys,
Countryside Officer, Aberdeen City Council

In recent years Aberdeen City Council has embarked on an ambitious programme of woodland creation and management projects. This has resulted in around 100ha of new mixed mainly native species woodland being planted since 2010. In addition many of the city's established woodlands have been going through a phase of active management with thinning and replanting work to promote the sustainability, safety and biodiversity of these woodlands.

To deliver this, a range of management tools have been used to achieve the overall outcomes.

Over the last 10-15 years the population of roe deer in Aberdeen and the surrounding area has been expanding rapidly. As a result of this it soon became apparent that if any of the young planted trees or naturally regenerating trees were to survive the deer browsing, the population of deer would need to be reduced. With the passing of the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2012 (WANE Act), requiring land managers to manage the population of wild deer on their land at sustainable levels, this gave the legislative support to what potentially could be a very contentious part of the overall woodland habitat management operations. Before any deer management started on Aberdeen City Council land, it was decided that it had to be undertaken in an open manner through Council committee reports and articles in the media. A major part of this was that deer management is a part of the normal woodland management operations as happens in most well managed woodlands. The welfare benefit for the overall deer population was highlighted, as well as it being essential for the long term survival of the woodland habitat.

Whilst there was some opposition to deer management being implemented from some groups and individuals, once the detail of the reasons why it was important to manage deer as a part of the overall habitat management operations was explained, then people could understand why it had to be carried out. As a responsible land manager Aberdeen City Council took the decision to undertake deer management to ensure the survival of the woodlands, to ensure the grant funding available could be maximised, and to comply with the requirements of the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act.

Undertaking deer management in very urban areas is a challenging operation. The stalker used has vast experience of working in the urban environment and is acutely aware of the need to undertake his task in a safe, secure and sensitive manner.

The benefits of managing the deer are now showing with significant natural regeneration in some of the woodlands, the very high establishment rate of the young trees in the new woodlands and the increasing health of the remaining deer population. The weights and general condition of the deer taken have been rising substantially over the years. At the start of the programme most of the deer were below the normal weight range for roe deer indicating their poor condition and the potential related welfare issues. The quality of the deer now being taken is generally much better.

Deer management is not a quick fix but needs to be seen as an ongoing long-term management tool just as other habitat management tools are.

Ian Talboys
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Abbotswell Woodland, Aberdeen

James Simpson - hunter gatherer



Dick Playfair

James (Jimmy) Simpson is a vet. Not just any vet, but a vet on a mission to find out more about diseases and abnormalities in deer, and a leading light in The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies Scottish Deer Project.

He didn't start out as a vet. That came after studying agriculture at Edinburgh University, farm management, and work for the Agriculture Research Council where he studied for an HNC in biology on day release and was admitted to the Royal (Dick) Vet as a mature student with his fees paid through the Andrew Carnegie Trust. In one way or another he has been attached to this prestigious centre of veterinary teaching and learning ever since, becoming Head of Small Animal Medicine and at the forefront in developing endoscopy for dogs and cats. He was 'awarded' a Winston Churchill Fellowship to study at an American university where he further developed his skills. Latterly he obtained a personal chair in canine medicine. However, in career terms he is a relatively new arrival to the deer world and to stalking. He says:

"I had always been a keen shot, right from school when I was in the CCF and the shooting club, and had access to some rough shooting and low ground stalking through a neighbour at Eddleston.

"But only in the last 10 years has the deer veterinary stuff really got going. That's when we realised there was a huge void in knowledge about diseases in wild deer, and that is why we set up the Scottish Deer Project with Anna Meredith, and Linda Morrison around 2009.



"Anna is a Professor of exotic medicine, and Linda a pathologist, so the project is run by a team with a range of skills and specialisms, and we are on a mission to gather as much information as we can about deer diseases and abnormalities."

Jimmy is also an accomplished stalker over both low ground and the hills. He has DMQ 1 and 2 and is on the SNH Fit and Competent register. He pays much credit to Argyllshire stalker David Bukowski for mentoring him through the learning period - if that ever stops.

Now retired from the University he splits his time between consultancy assisting with veterinary medicine, endoscopy work, the lecture circuit, deer management and stalking, and pursuing a passion for anything and everything about deer and deer health. He says:



Photo: Ian Jacobs

"Stalking each of our deer species requires different skills over different terrain, and each has its own wonderful magic, but often the thrill of the stalk is far more exciting than the shot itself."

He has also hunted in South Africa - a hugely different experience involving no crawling - and tracking wildebeest, impala and warthog. Jimmy tells of one day going out in known black rhino territory:

"You get a briefing at the start of the day," he says, "and you're told that when and if you see a black rhino, or rather it sees you, this is what you do. You stand still, and you look for the nearest tree, and then you climb."

"Well, it was mid morning, we were out looking for impala, there is a tremendous crashing and there, 15 metres away, is a black rhino. Much against my instinct I stood absolutely still and looked around - but there were no trees, only bushes and tall grass. It was an interesting stand-off and our guide started to bang a stick repeatedly on the branch of a bush - for what seemed like an age. Eventually the rhino trundled off. When I asked afterwards, the guide told me that the stick banging would encourage the rhino to do one of two things. Fortunately for us it made the right choice!"

But returning to Scotland, Jimmy has huge admiration for stalkers and the stalking fraternity. He says:

"Stalkers, in my experience, are very knowledgeable, interested, enthusiastic and open-minded. I think their input is grossly undervalued, as is their contribution overall to wildlife in Scotland. They have a huge knowledge base, some of which they have inherited, some learned at first hand.

"That breadth of knowledge is immense - and what I want to do with our deer project is to tap into that for evidence of disease and abnormalities, like freemartins, hermaphrodites, or roe with perruque heads. From these ideally we need photographs of the head, and the reproductive tract, ovaries or testes so that pathology can be carried out and the x/y chromosomes can be studied. We can then make blood sample comparisons between the normal and the abnormal."

Jimmy clearly loves working with deer and working with stalkers. Given time he would like to assemble this knowledge into a book as good reference for those approaching DSC1/DMQ 1, the benchmark for 'competence' in Scotland. But he also recognises that deer are a "significant economic driver". He says:

"Deer bring people to the countryside, and they keep people in the countryside. They are an important species for tourism, and that in itself is a vital reason to know more about them - and we have so much more to learn."

The Scottish Deer Project www.scottishdeerproject.co.uk

The aim of the project is to develop a database to provide as comprehensive and clear an insight as possible into the diseases present in wild deer in Scotland. Through articles and training programmes, the data collected will be available to those involved in deer management, and for the improved welfare of our deer. Those wishing to assist with the project should contact:

Professor J W Simpson or Professor Anna Meredith
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Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies
Easter Bush Campus
Midlothian
EH25 9RG

Tel: 0131 650 7650
Email: Anna.Meredith@ed.ac.uk or jsimpson@staffmail.ed.ac.uk



Photo: Ian Jacobs



Dogs suited for urban deer - and finding a lost deer

David Quarrell

Many types of dog can be used for finding wounded or lost deer but there are some that are more easily trained, and some are more suitable for the job in urban areas than others.

My preference is for hounds or gundog types, but I have also worked very successfully with small terriers. The choice is really up to the individual deer stalker/manager but keep away from running dog types such as lurchers as they are commonly associated with poaching and coursing and will bring unwanted attention.

It is advisable to have available at any time a fully trained and trusted tracking dog. The dog must be fully biddable and should be walked on a lead or line, even when accompanying you during a stalk. It is not acceptable that the dog might possibly run and chase a deer causing, for example, an RTA. If a member of the public approaches they will see a responsible person who keeps their dog under complete control – just what is expected of them. It is important to remember while you may have confidence in your dog's behaviour not every member of the public will like dogs.

It is important to make sure that, in the unfortunate event of a lost or wounded deer, the dog must still be on a lead or line. This will prevent a situation of a wounded deer being chased and brought down by the dog possibly in full view of members of the public should it not be 100 per cent reliable.

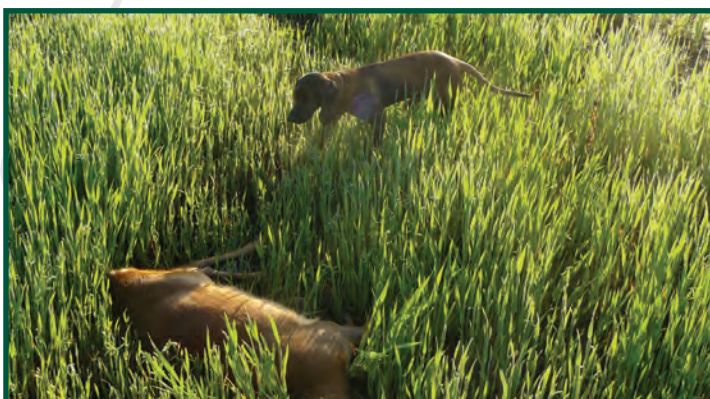
A dog that is off the lead can bring a swifter end to an injured deer by holding it until the stalker arrives but, as mentioned, they must be seen to be in full control of the situation at all times and this could be an upsetting sight to members of the public.

When stalking with a dog, on the final approach loose the lead and take your shot and this will avoid risk of an accident due to the dog moving and tightening the lead. This is also the case when the dog is finding a wounded deer. On the final approach, when ready to shoot the deer again, leave the dog in the 'sit' position and leave the lead on the ground. Once the shot has been taken in either of these situations find a place to which the dog can be tied while carrying on with the gralloch.

This article is an extract from **Controlling Urban Deer: 2012 Edition** and will be reviewed by UKSHA for any future update.



All photos: David Quarrell



Urban Deer Management Awareness Day

Over 50 attended the Urban Deer Management Awareness Day held at East Kilbride on Saturday 14 June. The event, organized and promoted by the South Lanarkshire Deer Group in conjunction with LDNS was devised to raise awareness of issues particularly relating to deer management around towns and on the urban fringe with a broad range of topics covered and an 'on farm' session in the afternoon.

The event was launched by local MSP Linda Fabiani, and the morning presentations were kicked off by Richard Cooke, Chairman of LDNS, who gave an introduction to the Network and the event. Andrew Treadaway from SRUC Barony Campus and a DMQ approved trainer, then spoke of the need for high standards in urban deer and peri urban management and why, the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act, and on urban deer species and habitats. Next up, vet James Simpson gave a fascinating talk about diseases in deer and what indicators and tell-tale signs stalkers and deer managers should look out for when they gralloch a carcass that might indicate that it is not fit for human consumption. He also spoke a little about the Scottish Deer Project recording abnormalities in our deer species and how and where to report them.

Professor Rory Putman spoke about the different methods and costs of deer control used on the urban fringe, including capture and translocation, contraception, and culling, with the most practical, cost effective and often the most humane method of control being the latter. Ben Harrower, Wildlife Ranger Manager, Forestry Commission Scotland, gave an illustrated talk showing the FCS approach to deer management in and around towns, and David Quarrell, Chair, SLDG, spoke briefly about urban deer management, interaction with the public, and countering negative perceptions.

The afternoon 'on farm' session gave the opportunity for target shooting, safety and use of high seats, and a butchery demonstration by Strathaven butcher Wallace Smith. The day also resulted in a donation for Epilepsy Scotland.

Dick Playfair, Secretary, LDNS, said:

"This was a good event – well organized and well attended, and the room could have been filled twice over in the morning if all applications had been able to be accepted. Credit must go to SLDG for their pulling it together and producing a comprehensive programme covering many of the aspects of relevance to deer management on the urban fringe. The event was attended by stalkers and deer managers from across Scotland and also from England who I am sure will have taken a number of very useful and helpful messages away from it.



Ben Harrower (l) and Robert Sharp discuss high seats



Linda Fabiani MSP gets proceedings underway



Wallace Smith – butchery skills



Paul Adkins introduces the afternoon session



Richard Cooke – LDNS Chairman

LDNS Area

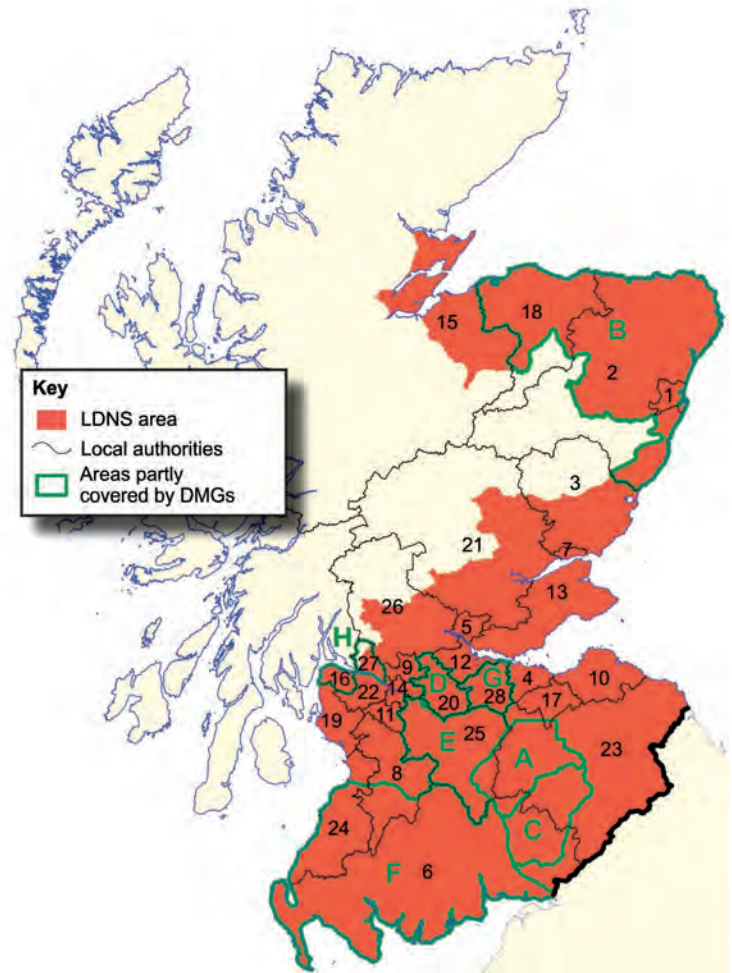
Areas partly covered by DMGs

A - Borders
B - Buchan & District
C - Eskdalemuir
D - North Lanarkshire

E - South Lanarkshire
F - South West Scotland
G - West Lothian
H - Inverclyde and
West Dunbartonshire

Local Authorities

1 - Aberdeen City	15 - Highland
2 - Aberdeenshire	16 - Inverclyde
3 - Angus	17 - Midlothian
4 - City of Edinburgh	18 - Moray
5 - Clackmannanshire	19 - North Ayrshire
6 - Dumfries & Galloway	20 - North Lanarkshire
7 - Dundee City	21 - Perth & Kinross
8 - East Ayrshire	22 - Renfrewshire
9 - East Dunbartonshire	23 - Scottish Borders
10 - East Lothian	24 - South Ayrshire
11 - East Renfrewshire	25 - South Lanarkshire
12 - Falkirk	26 - Stirling
13 - Fife	27 - West Dunbartonshire
14 - Glasgow City	28 - West Lothian



LDNS AGM at Westerwood Hotel, Cumbernauld

The second AGM of the Lowland Deer Network Scotland was held on Sunday 26 January at the Westerwood Hotel, Cumbernauld. This was a well attended event and brought those who came up to speed with the progress of the Network, changes to subscription rates, and also to hear a number of guest speakers.

Richard Cooke, in his Chairman's review of the year, reported on the work that had been undertaken, funding, and the status of lowland deer management groups. He reiterated the objectives of LDNS – leadership, communication, competence, public understanding, and representation – and gave examples of where these had been achieved during the year.

He also outlined the work programme for 2014 that included the encouragement of the establishment of more DMGs and local initiatives, increased interaction with Local Authorities, urban deer awareness days, and the trialling of local campaigns to engage with the public.

Regarding new subscriptions it was agreed that the new rate would reduce to £10 per annum for

individual membership, with £25 for DMGs, Local Authorities and organisations.

Guest speakers included Ben Harrower, Wildlife Ranger Manager, Forestry Commission Scotland (Lowland) who gave an enlightening talk on Deer in and Around Towns, and Professor James Simpson RDVS of the University of Edinburgh whose talk was titled Diseases in Scottish Wild Deer: what do we know? The final presentation was made by Chris Dalton of South Ayrshire Stalking who stood in for Peter Carr, Editor, Sporting Rifle at late notice.

Richard Cooke, LDNS Chairman, said:

“We were encouraged by attendance at the event and it provided a good opportunity for us to discuss developments on the deer management front with both LDNS members and non members, particularly given that the Rural Affairs Climate Change and Environment Committee inquiry into deer management and the environment had just concluded, although we did not at this point know how the Minister would respond to its findings.”



Ben Harrower of FCS



A good turnout on the day

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