

**Minutes of the 3rd Annual General Meeting
of the Lowland Deer Network Scotland**

At: Westerwood Hotel, Cumbernauld
On: Sunday 22 February 2015

Present: Richard Cooke (RC), Chairman
Ron Smith (RS), Vice Chairman
Dick Playfair (DP), Secretary
John Bruce (JB), BDS
Donald Fraser (DF), SNH
Jim Govan (JG)
Jamie Hammond (JH), SNH
David Quarrell (DQ), SLDG
Rob Sharp (RS)
Alex Stoddart (AS), SACS
Ian Talboys (IT), Aberdeen City Council
Andrew Treadaway, (AT)
Anton Watson (AW), SNH

Apologies or not present:

David Bruce (DB), Commercial forestry
Angus Corby (AC), Transport Scotland
Ian Fergusson (IF), Forest Enterprise
Mike Flynn (MF), SSPCA
Donald Fraser (DF), SNH
David Fyffe (DF), SL&E
Alex Hogg (AH), SGA
Maggie Keegan (MK), SWT
Andy Mavin (AM) Police Scotland
Alex Paul (AP), (WLDG)
George Ritchie (GR), Banff & Buchan DG
Helen Sellars (HS), FCS
Peter Semple (PS), Inverclyde and Dunbartonshire DMG
Daye Tucker (DT), NFUS
Kenny Wilmitt (KW), BASC

Attending:

Linzi Seivwright, Caorann, speaker
Dennis McColgan, Clydesdale DG
Stephen Clark, Clydesdale DG
R Alasdair B Young, Clydesdale DG
Jim Paxton, WLDG
Ian Anderson, SLDG
Linda Mellor, speaker
Alan Kirk
David Ferguson, NLDMG
Derek Kneller, NLDMG
Brian Stevenson, NLDMG
Matthew Love, NLDMG
Hugh Hunter, NLDMG
Ian Wright, NLDMG
Ross Hunter, NLDMG
Gary MacHenry, Weatherall Foods Ltd
Rob McCuaig

Adam Forrest, SRUC
 Peter Keyser, Angus
 Robert Smith
 Mark Lazzeri, Falkland Estate, Fife
 Colin Johnston, FCS
 Ralph Ross
 Jim Matheson
 Maitland Rankin, Central SWS DMG
 Rupert Shaw MBE

Apologies:

Peter Wilkinson

1.	<p>Minutes of previous AGM held on 26 January 2014 The minutes of the 2nd LDNS AGM held on 26 January 2014 were proposed by John Bruce and seconded by Ian Talboys.</p>
2.	<p>Chairman's Report The Chairman gave his report, appended to these minutes.</p>
3.	<p>Financial report</p> <p>3.1 The LDNS audited accounts for 2013/14 were circulated. The accounts showed income for the year of £27,579 against expenditure of £23,556, £5605 brought forward from the previous year, and a net surplus for the year of just over £9,600.</p> <p>3.2 RC said that LDNS was being circumspect with regard to expenditure and keeping a small cushion within which to operate.</p> <p>3.3 The accounts were proposed by Daye Tucker, seconded by Peter Keyser.</p> <p>3.4 The financial statement for the current year to 22 February 2015 showed total income of £27,497, expenditure of £23,548 and an account balance going forward of £13,877.</p>
4.	<p>Election of Office Bearers</p> <p>4.1 <u>Election of Chairman</u> Ron Smith, LDNS Deputy Chairman, took the chair. As there were no others proposed to be elected as Chairman, Richard Cooke was re-elected as LDNS Chairman for a further two year period. Proposed by Jim Govan and seconded by Rob Sharp.</p> <p>4.2 <u>Election of Committee members</u> Peter Semple (IDDG), George Ritchie (B&BDG), Andrew Treadaway (East Region, South Scotland DG), and Alex Stoddart (SACS) were all proposed en bloc to join the Executive Committee, proposed by Richard Cooke, seconded by David Quarrell.</p>
5.	<p>SNH Report</p> <p>5.1 Jamie Hammond and Donald Fraser, from the SNH Wildlife Operation Unit in Inverness, jointly gave the SNH report and invited discussion.</p>

	<p>5.2 The report highlighted the activity of the RACCE Committee. This was primarily focused currently on the upland deer range, although there were current challenges and more to come over the low ground too. Delivery of the 'public interest' has become a key feature.</p> <p>5.3 Communications was another area of priority, and there was a need for LDNS to communicate with the public better and more extensively about the requirement for deer management.</p> <p>5.4 There was a question over the need to be more transparent over the granting of licenses, and also that some NGOs also needed to be 'held to account' for their lack of deer management. Also there was no point being proactive in one area if on the next property no action was being taken.</p> <p>5.5 Richard Cooke commented that having a representative of LINK on the Committee might help to change this.</p> <p>5.6 It was raised that deer 'in vast numbers' were being killed by charities like JMT. RC said the argument was often about fencing, and not just restricted to charities but to private landholdings also. The best solution was for these organisations and individuals to be involved with DMGs as cooperation with neighbours is important. The SNH Authorisations Review could also help – not just in terms of environmental but also economic damage. In following up, the questioner said that where an owner wished to protect habitat then they had to take steps to prevent deer coming into it.</p> <p>5.7 Donald Fraser said that social and economic analysis was also required to trigger intervention. RC agreed that it was not just about the environment but also jobs and people.</p> <p>5.8 It was remarked that parts of Sutherland were starting to look 'more like Canada or Siberia' with more trees now than any time since the ice age, and where huge reduction culls had taken place without consultation.</p> <p>5.9 RC said that many of the answers lay in effective deer management planning and collaboration.</p>
6.	<p>Linzi Seivwright – Caorann Consultants</p> <p>6.1 Linzi Seivwright gave a presentation on changes to deer management in the Uplands and through the DMG areas at the behest of the Scottish Parliament RACCE enquiry, to make deer management more effective.</p> <p>6.2 Her presentation highlighted that DMGs were required to have better and effective deer management plans in place by 2016 that delivered the 'public interest'. There were now 14 public interest actions that every DMG is required to address. She said that much was not new; although the approach to deer management planning for many would be much more rigorous in terms of setting targets, collecting information etc.</p>

	<p>6.3 The majority of DMGs had been assessed and knew where they had to do more work. The process has not been unduly stressful for all Groups, and has been designed to help them become more effective.</p> <p>6.4 She said was that there was a risk that the lowlands thought they were immune from similar intervention, but the spotlight will move so both LDNS and LDGs need to be proactive, get mechanisms in place, and be seen to be managing their deer effectively and sustainably.</p> <p>6.5 It was increasingly recognized that there wasn't a 'one size fits all approach' so this was a good opportunity for new ideas.</p> <p>6.6 She said that although LDGs were different they may have to adapt, require simple deer management plans, set local population targets and so on.</p> <p>6.7 RC thanked Linzi and said that LDNS had to work closely with SNH in thinking about wildlife management in general over the low ground, and in the uplands, and that the move should be towards a far broader species management approach (whether beaver, or deer, or birds of prey – and people).</p> <p>6.8 It was remarked that the forestry companies should be more proactive in educating people about deer and deer issues.</p> <p>6.9 It was noted that the RHET events provided a good educational start point and that 250 school children aged between 6 and 12 had been engaged by RHET in the year on topics covering food, deer ecology and the field to plate story.</p>
7.	<p>Linda Mellor presentation A visual presentation followed by Linda Mellor on her work as a sporting photographer.</p>
8.	<p>Dates of future meetings and AOB Dates for future LDNS Executive Committee meetings through 2015 were set for 15 April, 15 July, 14 October and 16 December.</p> <p>With no further business the meeting was closed.</p>

Lowland Deer Network Scotland AGM 2014/15 Chairman's Report

We have had a good solid year in the Lowland Deer Network with steady progress on many fronts. In particular it is most encouraging to see new Groups being formed, one in East Dunbartonshire and, effectively, three in the South West of Scotland replacing the old South West Scotland Deer Management Group which had ground to a halt simply because it covered too big an area to operate effectively, the largest DMG anywhere in Scotland. All of these three new Groups, although still in their formative stages are well led and I am optimistic that they will make good progress. It is also pleasing to see that they intend to continue to have a joint meeting once a year to share experiences.

During the year LDNS has drafted a pro forma Lowland Deer Group Constitution as a guide for Deer Groups as to how to structure and organise themselves. This is available on the LDNS website.

Incidentally you will hear me refer to 'Lowland Deer Groups' (LDGs for short). Some of the existing Groups call themselves Deer Groups, some DMGs, but I think it is important to differentiate between a DMG of the Highlands, where deer management situations are entirely different and the lowland deer groups. This has been a particularly important point to make to Government who, up till now, have been inclined to assume that deer management is the same everywhere throughout Scotland. There is world of difference between how collaborative management takes place in Lanarkshire or Banff and Buchan and in the DMGs of the Highlands and if the Government was to conclude, as some are advising, that a fully regulated system is required, they would find it extremely difficult to find a system which would work in all situations. A one-size-fits-all approach is to be avoided if at all possible and the last thing we want is for LDGs to be judged by criteria designed for open range DMGs.

Dick Playfair and I met the new Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, as she is now called, Dr Aileen McLeod, a few weeks ago. Aileen McLeod is a South of Scotland MSP representing a lowland rural constituency and although she is new to deer management she had been well briefed in advance, both by LDNS and her officials, and she was complimentary about what has been done within the deer sector as a whole to increase the level of collaboration.

As you will know the current focus is very much on the Highland DMGs and over the last two months they have all undergone a process of Assessment to set a baseline for their operational effectiveness using the ADMG Benchmark published last year and also identifying to what extent they deliver public benefit and how this could be improved in future. You will also know that there is to be Review by the Scottish Government in 2016 at which the Highland DMGs will be reassessed by SNH and expected to show good progress. The pressure is on and the DMGs have responded well. I only describe this process because, although I said a few moments ago that lowland deer groups are different in almost every way, there is little doubt that, in due course, the attention of Scottish Government, through SNH, will shift toward lowland deer management and there will be an expectation that they

conform to some general standard and engage in deer management planning appropriate to different circumstances. We are only just beginning to think about what form this might take and discuss it with SNH. The blueprint Constitution that I mentioned earlier is the first stage in this process. In summary what is expected of all those engaged in deer management, whether organised groups or individuals, is to demonstrate that they operate collaboratively taking other land uses into account. They will need to be able to show that they act to prevent environmental and economic damage and to reduce public safety risks, particularly from road traffic accidents, ie that they operate 'in the public interest'.

The forthcoming Land Reform Bill is the big topic for the first half of 2015. A pre-legislation consultation was launched in November and closed earlier this month. While again it is more directed at the larger highland estates it does include a couple of measures relating to deer management in general. Firstly there is a proposal to reintroduce sporting rates so called and, while this will mainly affect the estates, it remains to be seen how it will be applied at the farm and local plantation level. The local authority assessors, whose job it will be to value sporting rights, may take the view that smaller landholdings have a sporting interest. If sporting rates are applicable at this scale they will of course be another expense for a sector that struggles to cover its costs. We have therefore argued that reintroduction of sporting rates, certainly in the context of deer management, would be counterproductive and a disincentive to people doing what we are encouraging them to do ie get together to manage deer in a structured collaborative way. It is not too strong to say that it would work against the objectives of LDNS – to promote collaboration in deer management.

The Land Reform Bill, when published shortly is also likely to include additional measures for SNH to intervene in deer management where they think it is not being carried out properly. The details of those additional powers, over and above those already contained in the 1996 Deer Act, remain to be seen but indications are that there will be a power for SNH to put rifles on the ground to carry out what they consider to be necessary culls and to charge those deemed to be failing to meet their deer management responsibilities with any costs of intervention.

So land reform for the moment is very much on the agenda but there is a lot we do not yet know about it and it is a case of watch this space. LDNS has submitted a response to the Consultation which can be found on the website.

The LDNS Committee has met half a dozen times during the year to deal with ongoing matters including those that I have just mentioned. We will continue to do so in 2015 and, of particular note on our list of things to do, we will continue to work with SNH to encourage the participation of the local authorities, some of which have still not grasped that they have a responsibility to manage deer on their land. This is not an easy subject for local Councils as the recent media furore about proposed reduction culls around Perth and earlier similar issues in Aberdeen demonstrate.

We also therefore need to develop ways to engage with the general public who have a wide range of different attitudes to deer. It is extraordinary how anything to do with deer provokes extreme public reaction. With that in mind

there is an educational element to an initiative that we have christened *Deer on your Doorstep*. We will be running a pilot this year in Edinburgh to hold a local meeting for community members and relevant interests including local councillors and the local media. This will be intended to explain the presence of deer, their basic biology and behaviour and their potential impacts. It will also be to encourage people in that area to reflect on the presence of deer and to engage with their local Councillors if they have views as to whether there are too many or too few and whether they are a good thing or a bad thing. It should be interesting and my thanks to Dick Playfair for organising it in his own local area where he has a good knowledge of the organisations and individuals who should be involved.

Another point for 2015 is the statutory process under which SNH grants Authorisations to control deer out of season or at night. Some in both the lowlands and highlands have questioned whether these powers have been implemented correctly and have challenged SNH on this. SNH has agreed to review the Authorisations procedure to reflect change in circumstances and LDNS will set up a subgroup to input to the review panel which will be set up shortly.

At our meeting with the Minister I particularly made the point that the large number of committed individuals who are involved in deer management either professionally or vocationally as a personal interest are an important resource when it comes to co-ordinated deer management across Scotland. It also sits neatly with the Scottish Government land reform thinking that individuals should have opportunities to become involved in deer management. Indeed it may be possible for some of the public bodies to reduce the cost of deer management by utilising people living in particular localities rather than using employed staff or contractors. However this cannot result in a free-for-all and must be properly structured and Forest Enterprise for example has clear parameters and criteria for assessing the ability of individuals or organisations to manage deer on the National Forest Estate. We have had preliminary discussions with Forest Enterprise about how guidance might be made available for those with an interest in Forestry Commission contracts or leases as to how to offer their services. I am sure we all agree that the standards and criteria need to be rigorous and ensure that those involved are 'competent' and qualified to DSC 1 as a minimum, but preferably 2. We will continue to explore with Forest Enterprise how to make the most of local skills. We will also hope to start similar discussions with some of the major forestry companies that are now represented on the Executive Committee by David Bruce of UPM Tilhill was to have been one of our speakers later this afternoon.

So I have gone on for long enough and I hope have conveyed an impression of the ongoing work of the Lowland Deer Network at a time of positive change and development. LDNS has an important role to play in bringing all interests together and you might be surprised to see the number of different interests represented around the Committee table when we meet. In 2014 we have added representation from the environmental NGOs which is important as they own many designated sites across lowland Scotland where deer are present and in some cases in numbers which may cause damage.

Let me finish by thanking all those members of the Executive Committee who give up their time to participate. Many are present this afternoon. Let me particularly thank Dick Playfair, Secretary to the Lowland Deer Network, who does a great deal of work on its behalf, holds things together and keeps our programme of work moving forward.

DRAFT