



Deer Management in Scotland: Report to the Scottish Government from Scottish Natural Heritage 2016

Briefing Note from Lowland Deer Network Scotland (LDNS)

What is the Lowland Deer Network Scotland (LDNS)?

LDNS is a forum set up following a conference in November 2011 to draw together those with an interest in and responsibility for low ground deer management in Scotland, public and private sector, Agencies, NGOs, other organisations. Its formation built on discussions between ADMG and SNH where it was identified that there was a requirement to develop greater cohesion, direction and common principles for the low ground deer sector, and deliver benefit and progress through 'light touch' coordination.

The general objective of the Network is to promote a collaborative and coordinated approach to the management of all deer species present in the Scottish lowlands, and the welfare and sound management of wild deer and their habitat. In pursuing this objective the role of the Network (from its Constitution 2012) is defined as follows:

- To communicate with all individuals, organisations, business interest and public agencies, including local authorities, with a direct interest in the management of wild deer in the Scottish lowland areas.
- To provide leadership in bringing diverse interests together in the common purpose of deer management which meets both public and private objectives in terms of deer welfare, public safety, economic benefit, prevention of damage and food safety.
- To support Best Practice, promote competence in deer management and encourage training and continuing professional development.
- To provide external communication to improve public understanding of the purposes and needs of deer management and its contribution to the countryside and rural economy.
- To represent the interests of members to Government and its Agencies.

What area is covered by LDNS?

Essentially the low ground deer sector covers everything outside the upland deer range (where there may or may not be established DMG coverage). Low ground management is determined by the fact that roe deer is the main species (with some fallow, sika and red). The precise area defined as low ground is not quantified, although it is noted that the SNH Report states that 11 Lowland Deer Groups (LDGs) cover approx 24 per cent of the land area of Scotland (or c 19,200 km²).

How are LDGs different from DMGs?

Foremost, the difference lies in the fact that some members of LDGs are not owners of the land over which they control deer. It has been stated previously that the pattern of lowland landownership is vastly different from that in the uplands – smaller fragmented areas (albeit with a number of larger estates), farms, forestry and woodland, as well as land close to conurbations, development ground etc. Roe deer are a territorial, non-herding species (unlike red deer that herd and range across greater areas).

The SNH Report identifies three types of LDG:

- Commercial forestry – dominated by managed deer in private or public forestry.
- Stalker-led, usually within Local Authority boundaries although only giving partial cover within that area.
- Mixed, covering a range of landholdings with different objectives – trees, farming, prevention of deer damage etc.

LDGs are entirely voluntary. Their members have no duty to manage deer sustainably unless contracted to do so. Whilst most are governed by a constitution they have no legal standing and therefore no obligation to manage deer, unless committed to cull targets through contracts or permissions that they may have.

The standard of professionalism among LDG members is very high. As 'vocational' stalkers, they take training and Best Practice very seriously. They are often managing deer in sensitive environments, with high levels of public access, close to towns etc.

The scope of work of the voluntary LDGs is limited by what access they have to land where there are deer present. That accessibility can be constrained by availability of leases and permissions (for public and private contracts), Local Authority policy on deer management, proximity of sites to roads and housing etc is also a major constraint.

LDGs neither have nor require Deer Management Plans of the same type or level of detail as an upland plan.

In addition there is considerable deer management that takes place outside the scope of LDGs through sporting syndicates, individual stalkers, sporting lets, ranger services etc.

Why is lowland deer management important?

Cull numbers for roe deer are increasing (from 26,200 in 2001/02 to 38,600 in 2014/15). This is only the reported cull – the actual cull may be 2 x this figure.

Extensive deer habitat is being developed through the central belt (Central Scotland Green Network) and in other areas, often out of step with any deer management considerations.

Whilst many people like to see deer, higher numbers of deer vehicle collisions result from increasing traffic volumes; wildlife crime becomes more prevalent when deer are visible in greater numbers; higher deer numbers result in increased damage to crops, forestry, amenity woodland, and gardens.

However, optimum deer populations and density should be determined by their impacts rather than numbers. Lowland deer management should therefore be prescriptive – ie more intensive where “hot spots” (damage or public safety) demand higher culls.

Are more LDGs the answer?

Not necessarily. Where there is a will to form an LDG because a number of like-minded individuals wish to get together to practise deer management, then that may be a solution, and permit deer management planning over a wider scale and across a number of neighbouring landholdings, or landholdings in close proximity to each other.

Equally however the solution may lie in more farmers and landowners taking responsibility, individually or collectively, for sustainable deer management on their ground, carrying out that management themselves, or contracting it out, or offering deer management on another arranged basis. Local Authorities and other public bodies have a ‘duty’ to manage deer on their land under the Code.

The LDG that follows the upland DMG model is not a solution for the low ground context in our view.

What else does LDNS do?

LDNS has to inform and convince the public that deer management is appropriate, and necessary – there is a communications exercise from schools upwards and outwards to a public audience.

LDNS can promote knowledge transfer across its membership – engaging both public and private sector together, providing advice, resolution and guidance (see 2016/17 activity programme at Appendix 1).

LDNS can act as a catalyst in the delivery of training and Best Practice. Culling deer demands a high level of training. Stalkers are operating over ground often shared with the public and have deer welfare as a major consideration also. Low ground deer management carries an implicit commitment from that individual in terms of expertise, knowledge and absolute consideration of the surroundings and circumstances in which he or she is undertaking that management activity.

Appendix 1

LDNS Events Programme – financial year 2016 – 2017

Date	Event	Area
<i>Year to date</i>		
30.04 – 02.05	Bennachie Centre, Aberdeen (Deer on your Doorstep display)	NE Scotland
June	Walk and Talk event, Caddonfoot	Borders
June	RSPB Bird Fair, Musselburgh (Deer on your Doorstep display)	E Lothian
01.07 – 03.07	Scottish Game Fair (Deer on your Doorstep display)	Perthshire
31.07 – 01.08	Turriff Show (Deer on your Doorstep display)	NE Scotland
09.08 -10.08	Wild about A'deen (Deer on your Doorstep display)	NE Scotland
30.09	Scent Hounds event - Dalkeith	Midlothian, Borders
02.10	Shot site and scent hounds event, Strathdon	NE Scotland
21.10 – 30.10	Tweed Valley Forest Festival (Deer on your Doorstep display)	Borders
05.11	First Aid course, Straiton	SW Scotland
<i>Proposed to March 2017</i>		
	Walk and Talk event (joint with NFUS)	SW Scotland
	Urban deer management course?	S Lanarkshire
	Deer management, traffic and RTA event	E Lothian
	RTA body shop survey	E Lothian, Midlothian
	Meeting of Minds – Greenspace theme?	S Lanarkshire



DEER ON YOUR DOORSTEP



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DEER ON YOUR DOORSTEP

WHY ARE WE SEEING MORE DEER IN AND AROUND TOWNS?

Deer populations are flourishing on the edges of our town and cities.

Deer numbers are increasing because of habitat creation, green networks and tree planting.

Deer like cultivated and other ground close to towns, development and abandoned industrial sites, leisure areas such as golf courses and parks, and woodland.

Deer are increasingly making their way into towns and cities, into allotments and gardens, and coming into contact with the public.

Deer are a valuable part of Scotland's natural heritage. People like to see deer - but not always.

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DEER ON YOUR DOORSTEP

WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY ARE WILD DEER?

Deer belong to no one. The Code for Deer Management says that deer are the responsibility of the person who owns the ground on which they live.

Local Authorities and other public bodies have a 'duty' to manage the deer on their ground 'sustainably'. Private landowners have a responsibility to manage deer on their ground.

If not managed properly deer numbers can increase. This could give rise to issues in relation to deer and undermine their status as one of our iconic species.

The Minister for the Environment has the final responsibility for how Scotland's deer are managed. Legislation such as the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act sets out the rules in conjunction with the Deer Code. Delivery of deer policy is overseen by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH).

Scotland's Wild Deer – A National Approach is the Scottish Government's 20 year vision for deer management. It says: "We manage wild deer to achieve the best combination of benefits for the economy, environment, people and communities for now and for future generations."

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DEER ON YOUR DOORSTEP

DEER IN AND AROUND OUR TOWNS AND CITIES – RISKS AND REWARDS

RISKS

Increasing deer numbers can result in:

- More road traffic accidents (RTAs) involving deer.
- Damage to crops, trees and gardens – both on private land and on public spaces.
- More wildlife crime – coursing, poaching, illegal snaring and animal cruelty.
- Dogs chase deer.
- Possible spread of disease, ticks, lyme disease...

**CAN YOU THINK
OF MORE RISKS?**

REWARDS

- A healthy, well-managed deer population is an asset for neighbourhoods and communities to take pride in.
- People enjoy seeing deer – provided they are not likely to cause an accident or are not causing damage.
- Deer managed properly, culled discreetly by suitably qualified deer managers, stalkers and gamekeepers, provide venison that goes into the human food chain.
- Deer provide an educational resource.
- Healthy deer are a biodiversity indicator.

**CAN YOU THINK
OF MORE REWARDS?**

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Forestry Commission Scotland
Coimisean na Coilltearachd Alba





DEER ON YOUR DOORSTEP

SPREADING THE WORD
ABOUT DEER IN AND
CLOSE TO BUILT
UP AREAS

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