

## Lowland Deer Network Scotland

### COVID-19 Survey Report

In April 2021 the Lowland Deer Network Scotland (LDNS) launched a short, on-line survey to ask those who manage deer in lowland Scotland how the Covid-19 restrictions, that applied from March 2020 through much of 2020 and early 2021, had affected their ability to manage deer. This survey was sent directly to all who subscribed to LDNS and was also promoted by the membership organisations BASC, BDS and SACS.

The survey asked where the deer manager lived, where he or she managed deer in Scotland, how many deer (of each species and sex) were culled between April 2019 and March 2020 (the year before the COVID-19 restrictions) and between April 2020 and March 2021 (the year of COVID-19 restrictions). Comparison of the numbers of deer reported culled between years would give an indication of the impact of the restrictions (mainly on travel to Scotland, travel between local authority areas and travel within a local authority area). In addition, this would also give an indication of willingness to share cull data.

Deer managers were also asked to select from a list of factors that had affected their ability to manage deer in 2020/21, including "Lockdown restrictions affecting your own movements", "Reduced venison price" etc. Finally, they were asked to put forward suggestions for change to make deer management easier and more effective.

It is important to note that this survey was anonymous, the only personal information requested related to location of residence.

### Results

1. 117 responses were received through this survey. Unfortunately, 23 of the respondents only went as far providing information on where they lived and where they normally stalked. Consequently only 94 responses were further analysed.

The 23 respondents who provided only locational information could be regarded as those who were deterred from continuing when they were asked about numbers of deer culled. Therefore 80.4% of respondents appeared willing to share cull data.

2. **Group 1.** 21 respondents said that they lived outside Scotland and stalked in lowland Scotland. They stated that they stalked in 26 locations, these being:

Dumfries and Galloway	10
Borders	5
Highland	3
Argyll and Bute	3
Angus	2
Ayrshire	1
Lanarkshire	1
Perthshire	1

Those local authority areas closest to the English border (Dumfries and Galloway and the Borders) were the most commonly used by the respondents living outside Scotland.

3. **Group 2.** A further 17 respondents stated that they culled deer in a different local authority area to the one that they lived in.

These respondents lived in:

Lothian	8
Fife	2
Forth Valley	2
Dumbarton	2
Glasgow and Aberdeenshire	1 each.

They mostly culled deer in a neighbouring local authority area.

4. **Group 3.** Of the remaining respondents 56 culled deer in the same local authority area in which they lived. A number of them (13) also stated that they culled deer in other local authority areas.

The local authority areas where they lived and also culled deer were:

Lothian	9
Borders	7
Lanarkshire	6
Dumfries and Galloway	6
Fife	5
Perthshire	5
Aberdeenshire	4
Stirling	3
Highland	2
Ayrshire	2
Moray	2
Clackmannanshire	2
Dumbarton, Inverclyde and Angus	-1 each

5. Of the respondents that lived in England but managed deer in Scotland they reported culling the following numbers of deer in each of the two years in question:

**Group 1**

<u>Species</u>	<u>2019/20</u>	<u>2020/21</u>
Roe	624 (624)	176 (176)
Red	301 (275)	91 ( 85)
Fallow	124 ( 4)	0 ( 0)
Sika	87 ( 87)	6 ( 6)
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,136 (990)</b>	<b>273 (267)</b>

(The survey asked for actual numbers of deer culled up to 20 and there were then ranges for 21-50 and 51-100. Numbers allocated to the cull totals for those reporting each of these categories were 35 and 75 respectively, the mid-point for each range.)

(The second figure in each of the columns above related to a modified total that excluded one respondent. This respondent claimed that he or she lives in England, shot in Highland, and shot between 21-50 fallow bucks, 51-100 fallow does, 10 fallow calves and 26 red deer in 2019/20. This high number of fallow deer shot in Highland region is unlikely (given the restricted fallow deer distribution in the Highland region) and could be the number of fallow he or she culled in England. However, in 2020/21 he or she only culled 6 red deer stags.)

Using all the data (n=21) the 2020/21 total cull was **24.0%** of the previous year's cull.

Using the modified data (n=20) the 2020/21 total cull was **26.9%** of the previous year's cull.

6. Of the respondents who lived in one local authority area and shot deer in another local authority area they reported culling the following numbers of deer in each of the years in question:

**Group 2**

<u>Species</u>	<u>2019/20</u>	<u>2020/21</u>
Roe	381	147
Red	75	63
Fallow	80	82
Sika	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>537</b>	<b>293</b>

This indicates that for this group the 2020/21 total cull was **54.6%** of the previous year's cull.

7. Of the respondents who lived in one local authority area and culled deer in that same local authority area (and possibly other local authority areas) they culled the following numbers of deer in each of the years in question:

**Group 3**

<u>Species</u>	<u>2019/20</u>	<u>2020/21</u>
Roe	2,700	1,841
Red	460	400
Fallow	628	344
Sika	108	114
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,896</b>	<b>2,699</b>

This indicates that for this group the 2020/21 total cull was **69.3%** of the previous year's cull.

8. This survey has shown that of the 94 respondents who reported their culls of deer in lowland Scotland for 2019/20 and 2020/21 all three groups (those living outside of Scotland, those living in one local authority area and culling in another, and those living in and culling in the same local authority area) showed reduced culls in 2020/21.

<b>Group</b>	<b>Shot in 2019/20</b>	<b>Shot in 2020/21</b>	<b>%</b>
1. Stalkers living in England (21)	1,136	273	<b>24.0%</b>
1. Stalkers living in England (20)	990	267	<b>26.9%</b>
2. Stalkers living in one LA, culling in another (17)	537	293	<b>54.6%</b>
3. Stalkers living in same LA as culling (56)	3,896	2,699	<b>69.3%</b>

9. It was clear when looking at the cull returns that in some groups there were respondents who were culling considerably more deer than others. This was to be expected since the survey was open to all stalkers, whether they were employed or whether they were recreational.

In Group 1 two of the respondents fell into the category of “culling more than 100 deer in 2019/20”. They could be regarded as professional or semi-professional and were separated from the other (recreational) stalkers. This was because they could have justified travelling during lockdown by means of travelling “to their workplace”.

These two stalkers culled the following numbers of deer, the other/recreational stalkers culled the remainder.

### **Group 1**

#### **Professional stalkers (2)**

<b><u>Species</u></b>	<b><u>2019/20</u></b>	<b><u>2020/21</u></b>
Roe	243	79
Red	117	72
Fallow	-	-
Sika	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>151</b>

This indicates that the professional stalkers in Group 1 culled **41.9%** of the previous year's total.

## Group 1

### Recreational stalkers (18)

<u>Species</u>	<u>2019/20</u>	<u>2020/21</u>
Roe	381	97
Red	158	13
Fallow	4	0
Sika	87	6
Total	<b>630</b>	<b>116</b>

This indicates that the recreational stalkers in Group 1 culled **18.4%** of the previous year's total.

10. In Group 2 no respondents fell into the category of "culling more than 100 deer 2019/20".
11. In Group 3, 13 of the respondents fell into the category of "culling more than 100 deer in 2019/20". They could be regarded as professional or semi-professional and were separated from the other (recreational) stalkers. This was because they could have justified travelling during lockdown by means of travelling "to their workplace".

These 13 stalkers culled the following numbers of deer, the other/recreational stalkers culled the remainder.

## Group 3

### Professional stalkers (13)

<u>Species</u>	<u>2019/20</u>	<u>2020/21</u>
Roe	1,324	866
Red	364	355
Fallow	385	284
Sika	29	1
Total	<b>2,102</b>	<b>1,506</b>

This indicates that the professional stalkers in Group 3 culled **71.6%** of the previous year's total.

### **Recreational stalkers (43)**

<b><u>Species</u></b>	<b><u>2019/20</u></b>	<b><u>2020/21</u></b>
Roe	1,376	975
Red	96	45
Fallow	243	60
Sika	79	113
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,794</b>	<b>1,193</b>

This indicates that the recreational stalkers in Group 1 culled **66.5%** of the previous year's total.

12. Looking at all groups now analysed we see that the probable impact of Covid restrictions was as predicted i.e. those with the need to travel furthest had the greatest reduced cull (Group1) and those who could be regarded as "professional" had lowest reduced cull. Those respondents who lived in the same local authority area as they culled deer were least affected by the impact of Covid restrictions.

<b><u>Group</u></b>	<b><u>% of previous year's cull</u></b>
1. Live in England – recreational (18)	<b>18.4%</b>
1. Live in England – professional (2)	<b>41.9%</b>
2. Live in one LA and shoot in another (17)	<b>54.6%</b>
3. Live and cull in same LA – recreational (43)	<b>66.5%</b>
3. Live and cull in same LA – professional (13)	<b>71.6%</b>

13. Combining all of the responses but looking at the numbers of culled deer for each species allows us to see if there the reduced culling in 2020/21 was comparable for all species.

<b><u>Species</u></b>	<b><u>Culled 2019/20</u></b>	<b><u>Culled 2020/21</u></b>	<b><u>% of 2019/20 cull</u></b>
Roe	3,705	2,164	<b>58.4%</b>
Red	810	548	<b>67.75%</b>
Fallow	712	426	<b>59.8%</b>
<u>Sika</u>	<u>196</u>	<u>121</u>	<b><u>61.7%</u></b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,423</b>	<b>3,259</b>	<b>60.1%</b>

There did not appear to be any significant difference between the species for a reduction in culling.

14. The 6<sup>th</sup> questions asked respondents to tick a box to state whether any of the following reasons had affected culling in the past 12 months. 92 responses were received, which indicates that two stalkers may not have been affected by any restrictions. Both of these stalkers lived and culled in the same local authority areas – Fife and Highland – and both culled comparable numbers in each year. The order of these choices is now hierarchical, and not as appeared in the survey.

<u>Answer choices</u>	<u>Responses</u>	
Lockdown restrictions affecting your own movements	73	79.4%
Increased presence of walkers, dog walkers, cyclists etc.	64	69.6%
Reduced venison price	37	40.2%
Lack of access to venison dealers	27	29.4%
Lack of demand from retail outlets (i.e. restaurants, butchers)	19	20.6%
Other (please specify)	18	19.5%
Lack of access to chiller facility	7	7.6%
Increased demand for local supply	4	4.4%
Poor condition of deer in 2021 and natural mortality	2	2.1%
Decreased presence of walkers, dog walkers, cyclists etc.	0	0%

It is clear that the reasons given for cull levels to have fallen during the COVID-19 affected year (2020/21) were both restrictions on movement (travel) – almost 80% - and the increased presence of walkers etc. – 70%. No stalkers reported any benefit from a decreased presence of walkers and very few were affected by an increased demand for venison nor the earlier anecdotal reports of deer being in poor condition in 2021, and high natural mortality.

Reduced venison price, lack of access to dealers and a lack of local demand for venison probably played a part as well. The actual comments that were made were:

### **Group 1 – those who live outwith Scotland**

#### **Restrictions**

“Take covid out of the equation and there would not be a problem.”

“Make wildlife (deer) control a reasonable reason to visit Scotland during the restrictions.”  
“Recognition that travel from England to Scotland for deer management is essential. That stalkers can share accommodation as workers could.”  
“Just lift travel restrictions.”  
“Had lockdown restrictions not been in place increased presence of walkers etc, lack of demand and price would have affected my culling activity.”

### Venison

“Increase demand in local venison. Improve the logistics to the market and remove the cartel like structure that exists between game dealers.”  
“More larders that stalkers can use.”  
“A realistic price for venison from game dealers.”  
“Local chiller drop-off facilities for dealer collection.”

### General

“Replacing the politicians with those that understand the fundamental need for good and proper animal management.”  
“Promote venison more - encourage more young people to come into the stalking industry give more access to public land i.e. have a tag system on Forestry Commission land.”  
“More education of people living in or close to countryside areas (walkers, townsfolk moved to area) who see deer management as cruel or harming the natural balance.”  
“More public awareness of deer management and the benefit of this.”  
“Keep cull contractors away.”  
“Extend stag season for red deer.”

## **Group 2 – those who live in one local authority area and stalk in another**

### Restrictions

“Was able to arrange a Service Agreement of employment - permitting travel outside of my region - in February 2021 otherwise the numbers would be much lower for the 20/21 cull data.”  
“Landowners shielding. Suffered long covid.”  
“My ability to stalk has only been limited by travel restrictions, not wanting to break lockdown has totally removed my ability to stalk due to the location of my permission. If deemed an essential activity I would possibly have continued to stalk but as a recreational stalker I felt the need to "do my bit" and adhere closely to lockdown rules.”

### Venison

“Access to working game dealers.”  
“Real drive for venison as a sustainable, environmentally friendly and healthy option for any cook to use domestic and professional.”

### General

“Allow individual stalking.”  
“Stick to the seasons and do a good job no night / thermals shooting. We are stalkers not abattoir workers.”



“Weather in January also impacted - unable to access properties due to snow. Activities by the public at dawn and dusk, especially by dog walkers’ impact on stalking activities. People walking by torchlight, especially at dawn are a menace. Some commercial dog walkers think they can go anywhere and do anything. The lack of access to rifle ranges on which to practice is also a significant issue. This is especially important just now as many stalkers transition to non-lead ammunition.”

“Local councils to allow deer management on their land instead of prohibiting it.”

“Estates and Forestry companies stopping all recreational stalking. If NatureScot want more deer culled then they should insist that recreational stalking is taken seriously and made an essential service so culls can be maintained.”

### **Group 3 – those who live and stalk in one local authority area**

#### Restrictions

“Job demands (NHS).”

“Cross border access. To treat me a professional in covid rather than a hobby stalker as I don't get paid to shoot deer but do it as a free service and get rid of border restrictions.”

“My personal circumstances have changed and have had more time to stalk, but with movement restrictions, I have only undertaken deer control in young woodland. I have not undertaken recreational stalking on the other 3 properties I manage.”

“Better advice/guidance on essential travel etc.”

#### Venison

“Purely a recreational stalker, processed some deer for family and friends, game dealer stopped taking in game so I had to cut back on numbers. Need venison market to take off again before I will shoot an increase in numbers.”

“Most of the deer I take is for family and friends.”

“Local outlets and chillers.”

“Reduced demand for venison and ability to dispose of excess venison is an ongoing problem. A government led procurement option would ensure that adequate numbers of deer are culled.”

“More game dealers. Better venison prices. Reduction in tree planting.”

“Venison price increase.”

“Assist retailers to make venison more acceptable to the British public.”

“Better network of game dealers to take harvested deer.”

“Easier and better facilities to move deer on to dealers.”

“Having venison processors nearby who would butcher the deer and give it back to me.”

“Currently converting my garage into a larder, cutting room and registration with local council as a food business.”

“With the restaurants being closed game dealers were finding it difficult to sell venison with the knock-on effect that they were not so willing to take carcasses.”

“Locally sited and collaborative lardering facilities. Adjacent landowners being alive to the need for collaborative management of deer and jointly contributing to basic facilities for lardering.”

“A stable network of venison dealers - there a distinct lack of same in lowland Scotland.”

“Covid did restrict a particular outlet when it was closed with Covid in staff, less interference by the public when legitimate culling taking place.”

“Improved access to more local venison dealers and outlets. Greater consumption of roe venison within ordinary homes in Scotland.”

“Dealers not taking carcasses meant unable to shoot as many deer as usual when no outlet. Ensure local collection/larder and market price for carcasses.”

“Venison prices were poor and the market closed for a time but I kept going to achieve the cull.”

“Market venison as a green healthy alternative to the mass market. Assist with local venison partnerships. Provide guidance on regs and marketing to small scale producers.”

“Chiller required for food storage as deliveries infrequent and can't get to shops. Get another chiller of my own.”

“Lack of retail demand created need to establish sales direct to the public. Access to collective larder facilities.”

### General

“Forestry Enterprise being honest and actually allowing recreational stalkers with DMQ1 and 2 the ability to help with deer management instead of blocking applications with all sorts of paperwork.”

“Allow trained hunter access to public land thus reducing costs to the public purse and increasing public awareness. Stop all target mass culls like what was executed on the Flanders Moss. Seems, in my view at least, to have dispersed the deer over a wider area.”

“Reduced public access.”

“Stop shooting deer in the proposed extended season.”

“Remove right to roam in designated areas when there is a national major incident.”

“Continue to ensure that night shooting requires a licence and specific approval, otherwise we could be left with a serious night poaching problem.”

“A better understanding by the public who want to walk in the country of the importance of balancing roe numbers. I shoot for the pot on private land to keep a balance of numbers. More public roaming has made roe deer stalking more difficult.”

“Increase in poaching during lockdown. All of my permissions are through local farms and others in my personal network, and a lot of these ground are bordered by large forestry blocks. The price of stalking leases and the closed market for forestry leases makes it difficult to obtain good stalking grounds locally at a reasonable price.”

“DVC 4 bucks, 5 does, 6 juveniles. Loose dog 1 buck. Post lockdown DVC significant increase on Class A road.”

“Reduce costs of red and sika deer stalking as I cannot afford bought days at today's prices. Being able to commit to a proper culling practice with neighbours, which seems to work OK in Highlands but less well in lowlands where there are more people involved and with a broader mix of experience, incentive and approachability. Making public more aware of their interference. Right to roam is a great policy but the lack of knowledge or education about deer management from most is disappointing.”

“The use of night vision scopes as some areas are almost impossible to manage due to people walking their dogs from day light to dusk.”

“Out of season for all males and extended seasons for females.”

“SOAC needs revisited and a media campaign to emphasise that it is not a right to roam but a right of responsibility access taking.”

“Local authority access.”

**Colin Shedden**  
**26<sup>th</sup> May 2021**