

MINUTES OF MEETING
EAST LOCH ERICHT DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP
SPRING MEETING
FRIDAY 19 MAY 2017
AT CRAIGANOUR LODGE

Attendance:

James Adamson (Secretary) Richard MacGregor (Corrievarkie) Nial Mackinlay (Auchleeks) Tom Dodd (Craiganoor) Kevin Peters (Forestry Commission Scotland) Alastair Lyon (North Drumochter) Duncan Fox (North Drumochter)	Kevin Simpson (Garbruach) Nial Robertson (Dunalastair) Iain Hope (SNH) Paul Swan (Talladh-a-Bheithe) Bob Pirie (Auchleeks) Johnathan Armitt (Dalnaspidal) Paul Wilson (Dalnaspidal)
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ACTION

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from;

Andy Chapman (Blairfettie), Robert Matthews (Blairfettie) Alasdair Findlay (Drumochter) Robert La Terriere (Dunalastair), Julian Clarke (Atholl), Ronnie Hepburn (Atholl), Craig Burnett (Corrievarkie & Dalnaspidal), Adrian van Well and Kees van Well (Talladh a Bheith), Donald Isles (Chairman Blair Atholl & Struan Community Council)

2. MATTERS ARISING OUT OF THE MEETING HELD ON 9th OCTOBER 2016

2.1 It was agreed that all matters arising would be taken in the coming agenda and the Minutes were adopted as a true record of the meeting.

3. REVIEW OF THE 2016/17 HIND CULL

The final in season hind cull figures were;

Estate	2016/17 Target	Achieved	Variance
Atholl (West of A9)	10	7	-3
Auchleeks	45	40	-5
Blairfettie	8	0	-8
Corrievarkie	20	19	-1
Craiganoor	65	44	-21
Dalnaspidal	100	85	-15
Dunalastair	35	30	-5
Garbruach	15	14	-1
North Drumochter	70	60	-10
FCS T-A-B	(not open range)		
Talladh-a-Bheithe	60	50	-10
Total	428 plus followers	349	-79

In addition 82 calves were shot.

The target hind cull based on the deer management plan is 475 hinds plus 143 followers. The achieved cull therefore represents a shortfall of 18% of hinds and 43% of calves.

There was discussion about the hind cull. It was generally accepted that the cull was appropriate to the number of deer seen during the winter. November and early December were characterised by very open weather and hind groups were not occupying traditional range. There was also a noticeable skittishness about deer, with nearly all stalkers reporting groups running to the first shot, meaning there generally only one or two beasts taken per stalk making staking efficiency lower than usual.

Auchleeks reported a good number of hinds, in good condition. Deer were flighty.

Corrievarkie reported a good number of hinds.

Craiganour had a lack of deer on the east side and hinds not in normal places. Average weight was up. Difficult season with a lot of days spent searching for hinds and some blank days.

Dunalastair reported a slow start, improving later in the season. Hinds flighty.

Garbruach reported normal levels of hinds.

North Drumochter reported normal number of hinds, weights up and very good condition.

T-A-B reported a slow start, improving later in the season.

FCS T-A-B Plantation – all fenced and fence in good condition. No evidence of hill deer so thinks most of cull (65 total) were resident woodland deer.

No winter mortality was reported by any member of the group.

There was general discussion about the low level of the cull versus plan targets. The Secretary pointed out that being effectively 16% behind the stag target, 18% the hind target and 40% the calf target at the end of year 1 of the new plan could be seen as failure to deliver. However the cull was consistent with the deer count (see section 5) and observations on the ground, so the key was not to become hung-up on the shortfall, but monitor to see if this was a one off or part of a trend towards lower numbers, which is of course a key objective of the plan. The Secretary reminded the group that it is very possible that the cull target numbers in the plan were simply too optimistic and would not be achievable if the population was as low as suspected.

All

The Secretary asked Iain Hope for the SNH perspective of being well under target. IH commented that the fact the group were aware and discussing the shortfall demonstrated active management of the situation. He said the difficulty in the hind cull raised some interesting questions itself;

- Are the deer more flighty because they are healthier/fitter?
- What is the ratio of hinds to calves in the cull v the recruitment count – are you shooting the right proportion of calves?
- What is the sex ratio of calves in the cull?

It was agreed that most of this data was held and could be supplied to the secretary for analysis. Please could this be returned along with the ADMG cull returns (attached).

All

4. **DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN**

Delivery

The Secretary reiterated the importance of delivering the plan and there was discussion about the recently published Report on Deer Management in Scotland that had painted a mixed picture on delivery around the country. It was agreed that it was important to demonstrate clear monitoring of both the deer population and the habitat, as ultimately the current plan is about balancing numbers and the environment whilst maintaining a degree of sporting use – if there are lower numbers and we are meeting the broad objectives then this is a success.

IH said that ELEDMG had been selected as part of the rotational count programme for helicopter counting in 2018, probably in March. This was welcomed as a good benchmark to the ground counts (see section 5 below).

The Secretary reiterated that monitoring habitat was another key element of the plan and that he had reservations about groups doing their own monitoring on the basis that; (a) stalkers didn't have the necessary skills, (b) that even if with training the infrequent nature of undertaking assessments would lead to inconsistency and the ability for results to be challenged and (c) there were plenty of other jobs to do already. The Secretary proposed third party monitoring by recognised experts like the James Hutton Institute would be the best idea, but that the current 10 year proposal in the plan was probably too long. It was proposed the frequency be increased to every 5 years and that an additional annual levy be charged to build up a fund, spreading the costs. IH agreed this was a good idea and said SNH would support a 5 year interval. Secretary to seek 5 yearly cost from JHI.

Sec.

The Secretary asked for recruitment count data from each estate. TD reported 31% and BP 32%, but agreed to do a couple more counts.

All.

Post Meeting Note: Following the meeting three more sets of data were supplied giving an average recruitment figure of 31%.

5. DEER COUNT

The foot count was held on 25th February following snowfall, but ground conditions were patchy at lower levels.

A pre-count meeting was held on 16th February and all agreed this had been beneficial.

The count was mainly to establish total numbers so included a high proportion of unclassified animals. The count was 4,023 head which is 21% lower than the previous counted. There was a round the room discussion about the count and most were generally happy that they found the deer they had apart from Craiganour, where the large group of stags on the West Road (that had been counted already several times) could not be found, and were not picked up on T-A-B or Corrievarkie. It was agreed these deer would have been about somewhere (as they were seen again after the count) so an additional 300 stags was added to the Craiganour count. The adjusted figures are;

Stags	1,165
Hinds	165
Calves	48
Unclassified	2,193
Total	4,323 (12% below last count)

This represents a winter deer density of 14.6/km².

Although it is impossible to assess the accuracy of the count a winter population of 4,300 would exceed the objective in the deer management plan to reach a stable winter population of 4,700 by 2022. It is unlikely the population is as low as the count suggests, but even allowing for a 10% sensitivity would mean a population near to the DMP target.

6. 2017 STAG CULL TARGETS

The target stag cull based on the deer management plan is 335. Due to the low number of stags currently being seen and the low cull achieved in 2016 the property level figures were agreed as;

Estate	2017 Target
Atholl (West of A9)	10
Auchleeks	30
Blairfettie	6
Corrievarkie	25
Craiganour	60
Dalnaspidal	30
Dunalastair	25
Garbruach	5
North Drumochter	40
FCS T-A-B	(not open range)

Talladh-a-Bheithe	45
Total	276

This is 18% below the plan but sensible based on the recent count. It was agreed if a higher number of stags turned up then additional could be shot.

There was discussion about the age profile of stags and consensus was mature stags (6-10 years) were currently at relatively low levels. It was agreed that young stags should not be routinely killed simply to make up numbers as this would effect the ability for the proportion of mature stags to improve.

7. SNH/ADMG UPDATE

- 7.1 Nial Mackinlay asked a question about sporting rates. There was some discussion and Jonathan Armit্ত kindly circulated a paper from a meeting with the Assessor's Office (attached).
- 7.2 IH confirmed ELEDMG had been selected for a helicopter count in 2018, probably in March.

8. AOCB

None tabled.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Sunday 15th October, 10.30 am. Location TBC, probably Craiganour.

Distribution;
ELEDMG Members
Iain Hope, SNH
ADMG
Community Council
Website
File