

BIRSE PARISH DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP

Record of Autumn Meeting on 27th October 2016

Members Present: Stuart Young and Robert Paterson (Birse Estate), Malcolm Nicol and Peter Littlejohn (Ballogie Estate), Andrew Farquharson, Alf Sorensen and Hedge Shand (Finzean Estate), Robin Callander, Doug Boyle and Jane Winton (BCT), Paul Chapman (BTCO), Christina MacGregor (Balfour Estate), James Stevenson (Shannel);

Others Present: Michael Bruce and Colin McClean (Glen Tanar Estate);

Apologies: George Ritchie (BCT), Iain Hope (SNH), Michael Skelly (FCS), Mike Thomson (RTS).

1. Introduction

Stuart Young (SY) welcomed all as Chair and noted the four apologies received.

2. Deer Management Report 2015-16

SY noted that BP DMG Deer Management Report 2015-16 had been agreed and is on the BCT website.

3. Current Deer Management

3.1 Red Deer

SY noted that the interim cull to 30th September of 80 red deer was on target for this stage of the year. It was reported, however, that there has been damage by red deer to barley in the northern half of the parish, both on Birsebeg and with deer moving across from the Balfour area to Balnacraig for a second year in September. It was noted that a group of 70-80 had been counted there, and a similar sized group seen in the Balfour area. The continued browsing pressure from red deer in the upper area of Balfour Forest was also noted. The number of red deer on the Finzean low ground was reported to be low, with small groups in the woodland areas and still around 100 or so hinds in the Aven, while a few deer had come across from Glen Dye in the lower Aven. AF said that Finzean Estate is unlikely to achieve its target red cull without culling some of the upper Aven deer, and that it has proved exceptionally difficult to manage that. It was noted that it had been a poor rut in the DMG area this year. CM reported on the position with red deer movement and numbers on Glen Tanar Estate and that the Estate is significantly increasing its culls of stags and hinds.

There was discussion of the difficulty of setting targets when the size of the resident red deer population is not known, nor the extent in-migration from surrounding areas. It was also noted that the extent and distances of deer movement may be more than thought, and that groups are potentially forming and reforming with greater frequency than can appear to be the case. It was recognised that the DMG has been making good progress with meeting its objectives so far, and that it is important to try to achieve this year's cull target. SY reported that he had encouraging discussions with proprietors in the area north of the Dee to Hill of Fare, about adopting a more coordinated approach to controlling the numbers of red deer there.

3.2 Roe Deer

It was noted that the DMG's interim roe cull total to 30th September of 149, represented good progress towards the DMG's agreed roe cull target for the year. It was reported that there still seemed to be significant numbers of roe in most areas, and the general increase in the local roe population was discussed. It was confirmed that the main estates anticipate meeting their roe cull targets.

3.3 Related Information

- (a) *Deer Fences*: The position with the Glen Dye Estate fence along the Aven was discussed. SY reported that he is currently in correspondence as Chair of the Group, to try to find out whether Glen Dye Estate or its Shooting Tenant plan to maintain the fence. It was noted that there is no new deer fencing currently planned in the DMG area.
- (b) *Deer/Vehicle Collisions (DVCs)*: It was noted that there had been two DVCs recently just north of Berrysloch (one red, one roe) and that there will potentially have been other DVCs involving roe. It was agreed, however, that there is not a particular location at present in the DMG area where DVCs are a specific issue.
- (c) *Deer Management Group Review*: It was noted that SNH is due soon to submit a report to the Scottish Government on the results of its DMG assessments and deer management more generally. While it was considered that the BP DMG potentially scored well in the assessment, the value of some of the questions and the approach of the assessments more generally were questioned. It was noted that the Scottish Government and Parliament are likely to pay further attention to standards of deer management in Scotland in the coming period, and that this will remain part of the wider context to the BP DMG's own performance in meeting its objectives.
- (d) *South Deeside and North Angus DMG*: MB described the boundaries and membership of this new DMG and invited any BP DMG member to attend the SDNA DMG's first full meeting in Glen Tanar on 28th October.
- (e) *Authorisations Review*: It was noted that SNH has recently published the results of a review of the system of out of season and night shooting authorisations. RC reported that one recommendation is to consider allowing the use of night sites to cull deer, as was discussed in the BP DMG previously.
- (e) *Other topics*: It was noted that the new system of sporting rates is due to start from April 2017, and that recording planned culls in cull returns may also be introduced from that date. It was noted that increasing attention is being paid to the use of non-lead ammunition to cull deer.

4 **Brief Updates on Other Species**

- 4.1 Red Grouse, Black Grouse and Capercaillie: It was noted that it had been a particularly poor year for grouse, with Finzean just having 3 walked days and Birse one driven day. It was considered that the reduction in numbers had potentially been due to the late snow. PC reported that his blackcock count numbers were down this year, but noted that this might be because he only goes out once. It was reported that no birds had been seen for the first time on the Finzean caper lek count, although a cock had been seen the next day in the same area, while there had been two cocks and two hens recorded at the Birse lek.
- 4.2 Raptors, Brown and Mountain Hares: It was agreed that the summary of raptor breeding in the Birse parish area that has been provided for a second year by the North East Scotland Raptor Study Group, is a very positive and helpful initiative. It was also agreed, however, that there is still a need to try to further improve the communication and cooperation between estate staff and the ornithologists monitoring raptor nests. It was noted that the local brown hare numbers have continued at similar levels and that white hares are numerous in the Forest of Birse, with Birse Estate considering a limited cull of white hares.
- 4.2 Other Species: It was noted that there are signs of water voles returning to the Forest of Birse as a result of the mink control programme and that BCT would be interested to hear of any sightings. It was confirmed that there have been no signs of mink or grey squirrels. The position with barn owls in the area was discussed, while it was noted that there are increasing reports of wild boar being shot on Deeside and Donside.

5. **Any Other Business**

- 5.1 East Grampian DMG: MB reported that the EGDMG is currently seeking views on what its future might be, now that its sub-areas are becoming separate DMGs. It was noted that continuing to coordinate the traditional pattern of open hill counts might be a role.