

## **BIRSE PARISH DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP**

### **Record of Autumn Meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2015**

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

*Others Present:* Jane Winton (Tenant Farmers), Iain Hope (SNH), Colin McClean (Glen Tanar Estate), Michael Skelly (FCS), Mike Thomson (RTS);

*Apologies:* George Ritchie (BCT).

#### **1. Introduction**

Malcolm Nicol (MN) welcomed all as Chair. Apologies and one item for AOB were noted. It was noted that the Record of last year's meeting had been agreed. It was agreed that the Record of the previous year's meeting will in future be circulated with the Agenda for the current meeting, and also be included in the Agenda to note that the Record has been agreed.

#### **2. Deer Management Report 2014-15**

MN confirmed that the BP DMG Deer Management Report 2014-15 had been agreed by the four main DMG members in June 2015. It was noted that the BP DMG had been assessed by SNH last autumn as part of SNH's wider assessment of DMGs. IH reported that the results of the assessments had been recently published on the SNH website and that, while the report uses aggregated statistics in pie charts, the BP DMG had scored very highly. He apologised that the EGDMG sub-area 3 boundaries were shown on the report map, rather than the BP DMG area. He also added that SNH considers the Group's annual deer report to be exactly the type of report that the Scottish Government would like to see more DMGs produce. RC confirmed that the BP DMG had been marked as 'green' in all the assessment criteria except for two topics, with the DMG marked as amber on firstly, the scope to have a clearer DMG training policy and secondly, the need to give consideration to using indirect populations assessment methods, such as dung count surveys (3.3(c) below).

#### **3. Current Deer Management**

##### **3.1 Red Deer**

It was noted that there has been damage to barley at a range of locations in the northern half of the parish, with the damage more serious in some areas than others. It was reported that hinds and calves were the main problem in the Birse area, while there were larger groups including up to 50-60 red deer in the Balfour to Balnacraig area. It was also reported that the movement of these deer has been damaging fences and dykes. The number of red deer on the Finzean low ground was, in contrast, considered to be the lowest for 25 years. It was noted that the DMG's interim red deer cull total of 106 to 30<sup>th</sup> September was higher than in the previous two seasons. It was also noted that there had been a poor rut in the DMG area, in contrast to the good rut in Glen Tanar. It was confirmed that the Group has agreed target culls, but noted that the level of the cull on Finzean Estate could be influenced by how successful it is with operations to try to reduce the number of red deer in the Aven. CM reported that Glen Tanar is significantly increasing its cull of hinds in its forest area. MS commented that he could not say yet whether FES would be increasing its cull in Blackhall, following the recommendation in the recent Strath Caulaidh dung survey report there. The value of monitoring the impacts of red deer was noted. In considering the position with red deer north of Dee on Sluie Estate and other properties, SY agreed to take the initiative in trying

to encourage the proprietors in that area to adopt a more coordinated and effective approach to controlling the numbers of red deer there.

### 3.2 Roe Deer

MN noted that, while the Group's first priority is to control red deer numbers, there is also the need to control the roe deer, when the local environment for roe deer is continuing to improve and mild winters are also contributing to the numbers of roe locally. It was noted that the DMG's interim roe cull total of 147 to 30<sup>th</sup> September represented good progress towards the DMG's agreed roe cull target for the year.

### 3.3 Related Information

- (a) *Deer Fences*: It was noted that MN is due to produce a map showing deer fences within the DMG area and along its boundaries, with comment on their condition.
- (b) *Deer/Vehicle Collisions (DVCs)*: It was noted that while red and roe are seen crossing local roads, the DMG is not aware of any particular DVCs during the year. It was suggested that the DMG might consider contacting the police locally in advance of the next autumn meeting.
- (c) *Deer Management Grants*: MT outlined the nature of the new deer management grants that are now available through the SRDP. It was noted that the scope and requirements to qualify for the grants are more restrictive than previously, in terms of surveys and target deer densities. RC reported on the deer dung count survey of Blackhall and Slewdrum by Strath Caulaidh Ltd (SCL) earlier in the year. He noted that SLC had also helpfully produced a proposal for a BP DMG area wide deer dung survey, so that the DMG could see what would be involved. This had been discussed at the DMG's spring meeting.
- (d) *Sporting Rates*: It was noted that it is still unclear how the re-introduction of sporting rates will be implemented and how this might affect local deer management. IH confirmed that it is the Scottish Government's intention that good deer management should not be adversely affected by the re-introduction.
- (e) *Calves / Kids*: RC reported that Strath Caulaidh had noted the relatively low proportions of calves / kids in the BP DMG culls totals, and suggested that this might be a topic to consider.

## 4 **Brief Updates on Other Species**

- 4.1 Red Grouse, Black Grouse and Capercaillie: It was noted that it had been another good grouse season with approximated 850 brace on Ballogie, 400 on Finzean and 360 on Birse, which still has a shoot to go. PC reported that his annual survey of local blackcock leks had shown good numbers again, while shifting leks and the lack of coverage in the Forest of Birse south of Balloch, meant not all the leks were seen. PC also reported on his annual caper lek count with HS and the additional birds seen subsequently by HS, giving a total of four cocks, while RP reported one cock in the Birse area. It was noted that the total with the hens seen, was an improvement on recent years.
- 4.2 Crows, Foxes, Mink and Grey Squirrels: It was noted that there was nothing in particular to report about fox and crow numbers, and also that no mink or grey squirrels had been seen.
- 4.3 Brown Hares, Mountain Hares and Raptor Species: It was noted that, while brown hare numbers seemed slightly up, there are currently large numbers of mountain hares and the estates are considering culling them. It was noted that a 3 year study has recently been started by the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, to provide better information on mountain hare populations. It was confirmed that Alastair Pout's summary of the raptor breeding locally in 2015 had been circulated locally and was a positive initiative, reflecting improving communication locally. It was 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.

## 5. **Any Other Business**

- 5.1 Venison: AF reported that the recent cases of E.coli resulting from retailed venison, have had a significant impact in reducing the demand for venison and that Highland Game have reduced the price they are paying for carcasses as a result. It was noted that Ballogie Estate also use

Highland Game, that the price reduction had been back dated to the beginning of October, and that this is unhelpful at the time when the estates are starting to carry out most of their cull.