

BIRSE PARISH DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP

Record of Autumn Meeting on 30th October 2014

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

Others Present: Iain Hope (SNH), Colin McClean (Glen Tanar Estate), Willie Lamont (FCS), Mike Thomson (RTS);

Apologies: Ian Alcock (Shannel), Robert Paterson (Birse Estate), Hedge Shand (Finzean Estate), Duncan Cuthbertson (Ballogie Estate).

1. Introduction

MN welcomed all as Chair. Apologies were noted and no items raised for Any Other Business.

2. Birse Parish Deer Management Group

MN reported that the Group's Deer Management Report 2013-14 had been produced and discussed in May, that an Operating Framework for the Group had been agreed in June, and that the draft for Group's next Deer Management Plan is currently circulating for comment and due to be finalised in November. MN also outlined the current context to the assessment of DMGs by SNH and noted that RC is due to discuss the assessment criteria and process with IH on behalf of the Group after the meeting.

The lack of a DMG to the east of the Birse Parish DMG was discussed and it was agreed that it would be helpful if SNH and FCS take a lead in encouraging cooperation between the land managers in that area. It was also agreed that, given the build up in red deer north of the Dee and their movement across the Dee into the BP DMG area, it would be helpful if SNH engages with the land owners in that area to encourage improved culls.

3. Local Deer Management

3.1 Red Deer

It was noted that the Interim Cull totals to 30th September are broadly similar to 2013, that there was an active rut and that groups of more than 30 had not been seen recently. MN emphasised that the Group's main target is to control red deer numbers and it was confirmed that each Member plans to maintain or increase their red deer cull compared to 2013-14. MN referred to the 7 main areas identified in the Group's Deer Management Report 2013-14. Points noted in discussion included that:

(a) Ballogie Estate's fence along the Cattie had helped restricted red deer movement, but there are still c.25 in the Carlogie area that the Estate intends to clear. Fewer red deer are being seen on the Shannel, but deer are crossing the Dee downstream from the mouth of the Cattie and there is still a lot of activity in Slewdrum and Craigbeg. FCS have culled 2 stags in Blackhall since April and reckon there are few red deer there, with the damage to re-stock sites mainly being caused by roe (23 culled since April).

(b) There are still c.150 deer, mainly hinds, in Glen Aven. It is a key priority to reduce this number, but this is very difficult due to the terrain. It was agreed to have a coordinated operation, but recognised that this will only have limited impact. The practicality of trying to capture some of them in the Auchabrack deer catcher was discussed, including wider concerns about the regulations and other issues associated with the use of live capture.

(c) There has been some limited damage by groups of red deer to mature barley on Murley and on Drumneachie and Birsebeg. There may also have been damage to crops on Mains of Balfour. It was noted that the deer damage on farms in recent years has been to barley, rather than root and forage crops.

(d) The Balfour Forest cull is still relatively high due to ongoing red deer activity. Glen Tanar Estate plans to reduce the 30-40 hinds and calves resident on and around Craigendinnie Hill.

3.2 Sika Deer

There was discussion of the young Sika stag shot by PL near Bogieshiel on 16th October. It was noted that a Sika had been shot on Tillypronie around 2 months ago, one on Glenmuick Estate last year, and a young stag in FC's Inver woodland in 2006, while there is a record of a Sika at Cambus of May in the 1990s. It was also noted that a stag had been shot near Keith in 2000 and one in Clashindarroch Forest this month. It was agreed that IH will check and report on Aberdeenshire cull records for Sika, and that WL will report on whether the rumours of Sika hinds in Durriss Forest are true or not.

3.3 Roe Deer

MN recalled that, while the Group's first priority is to control red deer numbers, there is also a need to increase the roe cull locally. RC reported that the high roe culls in Balfour and Slewdrum Forests over the last two years, had started to allow existing natural regeneration to grow. It was confirmed that Members are aiming to maintain or increase their roe cull levels from 2013-14, agreed that there is a particular need for a good cull of does. CM reported that Glen Tanar is increasing its cull to 70 does and that this is probably still light.

3.4 Related Information

- (a) *Deer Fences*: It was reported that RC has given MN an initial list of existing deer fences and that this will be developed into a map. It was noted that there may be scope for additional strategic fences such as that along the Cattie.
- (b) *Deer Vehicle Collisions*: It was noted that, while no serious DVCs had been reported locally, there have been a number during the year, including a hind on the road between Slewdrum and Craigbeg. IH reported that SNH have a campaign to raise awareness of the risk of DVCs around the time the clocks change, as this is the peak season for DVCs. It was agreed that IH will supply a link to the website with maps showing DVCs.
- (c) *Night Sights*: There was discussion of the use of night sites and why their use for deer culling is still illegal under legislation from 30 years ago. IH reported that some consideration was being given to this by colleagues as part of reviewing topics. He also noted that, like any such topic, a range of factors and interests are involved.

4 **Brief Updates on Other Species**

- 4.1 Red Grouse, Black Grouse and Capercaillie: It was confirmed that it had been another good grouse season with 800+ brace on Ballogie, 400+ on Finzean and 315 on Birse. PC circulated a map of blackcock leks surveyed in the Peter Hill / lower Forest of Birse area and it was noted that numbers, while below 2012, were still good compared to earlier years. It was also noted that, while caper are still present, their numbers remain very low.
- 4.2 Crows, Foxes, Mink and Grey Squirrels: There was no particular points on crows or foxes. It was confirmed that no signs of mink had been seen. MN reported that a male grey squirrel had been found dead on the B993 near Northbrae Farm in September. It was noted that the nearest breeding population is apparently at Crathes.
- 4.3 Pine Martens, Badgers, Otters, Mountain Hares and Mountain Hares: It was noted that pine marten and badger numbers are still increasing, while there were no comments about otters. It was agreed that mountain hare numbers have continued to increase, while brown hare numbers have continued around the same, with possibly some increase in Finzean.
- 4.4 Raptor Species, Wildcats and Wild Boar: It was noted that there had been no local incidences involving raptors in the last year. It was confirmed that there had been no particular results from the wildcat camera trap project on the three main estates, other than the wild boar in Easter Clune Wood in the summer. It was reported that the boar had been seen just west of Finzean Sawmill in the last ten days.

5. **Any Other Business**

It was confirmed that there was no other business and everyone was thanked for attending.

