

Birse Parish Deer Management Group

**THE BIRSE PARISH
DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN
2019 - 2024**

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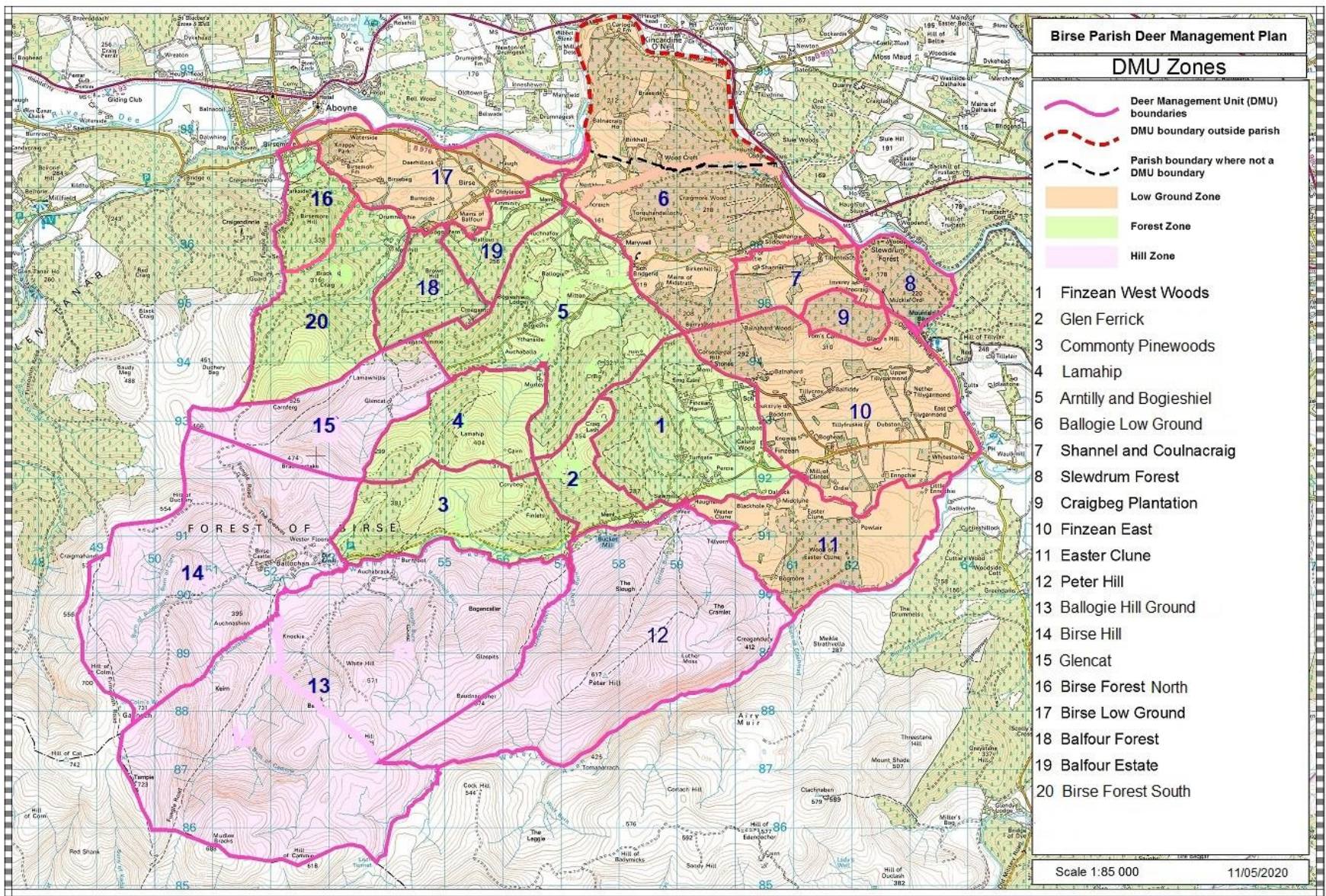
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INTRODUCTION

- 1 This Deer Management Plan has been produced by the Birse Parish Deer Management Group (BP DMG) and came into effect from November 2019.
- 2 The Birse Parish DMG covers an area of approximately 13,387 hectares or 33,000 acres on South Deeside in Aberdeenshire.
- 3 The membership of the Birse Parish DMG consists of all the land owners owning more than 100 ha in the DMG Area. The Group has six members:-
Ballogie Estate, Birse Estate, Birse Community Trust, Finzean Estate, Balfour Estate and the Shannel.¹
- 4 There are populations of both Scotland's native species of deer, red deer and roe deer, in the DMG Area. These are both naturally woodland species and most of the deer in the DMG Area live in the woodlands. Both species also occur on the open hill areas.
- 5 The DMG Area is a favourable environment for red and roe deer. Over the last 15 years, an average of 550 deer a year have been shot as part of managing the local deer populations. On average, the annual cull over the last ten years has consisted of 52% red deer and 48% roe deer.
- 6 The aim of the BP DMG is to promote the sustainable management of the native wild deer populations in the DMG Area.
- 7 This Plan provides the strategic background to the more detailed and focused discussions within the DMG each year, based on the Group's annual Deer Management Reports.

¹ the members named in the list are land management businesses acting for the owners, except for BCT which is both owner and manager.



PART ONE - LOCAL CONTEXT

1.1 Group Area

- 1 The BP DMG Area covers 13,387 ha or 33,000 acres on the south side of the River Dee, Aberdeenshire. (Map 1)
- 2 The DMG area consists very largely of the civil parish of Birse (12,773 ha). It also includes the small adjoining area of Carlogie (614 ha), which is a detached part of Aboyne parish on the south side of the Dee.
- 3 The DMG Area has three main types of land use.² These are:-
 - the area of predominantly open heather moorland in the south and west of the Area, mainly managed as grouse moor and covering around 40% of the Area;
 - the areas of self-sown native woodland and forestry plantations that cover around 35% of the Area;
 - the areas of farmland and rough grazings that cover around 25% of the Area.
- 4 These statistics reflect that the DMG Area is relatively well wooded. These woodlands include Scotland's most easterly surviving Native Caledonian Pinewood, Glen Ferrick and the Finlets, as well as other extensive areas of self-sown pine.
- 5 These pinewoods and other features, including Scotland's most easterly nesting golden eagles and capercaillie and most easterly hill over 2,000 feet (c.600 metres), reflect the essentially Highland character of the DMG Area's landscape and natural heritage.

1.2 Deer Management Group

- 1 The BP DMG is an independent DMG. It has an agreed Operating Framework that sets out the arrangements governing how the members will cooperate over local deer management.³ The Group also supports the Association of Deer Management Group's 'Principles of Collaboration' (2013).
- 2 In May 2019, the performance of the BP DMG was assessed by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) as part of its national assessment of DMGs. Points arising from that assessment are addressed in this Plan.

1.3 Deer Management Plan

- 1 The Group will make amendments to the Plan during its 5 year period, as and when that might be considered appropriate.
- 2 Key elements of implementing this Plan will include:
 - the deer management information collected from members each year;
 - the production of a report in April each year on deer management during the previous year and the plans for the year ahead;
 - a meeting of local deer managers each spring (April/May) to discuss the annual report and plans for the year ahead;

² see Birse Parish Habitat Map on BCT website <http://www.birsecommunitytrust.org.uk>

³ The BP DMG's Operating Framework is available as a separate document

- a meeting each autumn (October/November) to discuss local deer management , with the meeting involving local deer managers, local stalkers and other local land use interests, as well as representatives of SNH and the main land owners adjoining the BP DMG Area (Forestry Commission Scotland, Glen Tanar Estate, Glen Dye Estate).
- cooperation between local stalkers when that is helpful.

1.4 Deer Management Units

- 1 The BP DMG Area was divided into 22 Deer Management Units (DMUs) in the previous 2014-19 Deer Management Plan. However, in 2019, the number of DMUs was decreased to 20 to allow for better data recording.
- 2 These DMUs form the basic units of deer management in the DMG Area, with annual cull totals collated at the DMU level and cull targets also set at DMU level.
- 3 The DMU boundaries and names are shown on Map 1. The map also shows the three zones to which the DMUs are allocated for management purposes, depending on their character (low ground, forest, hill). The zones are discussed further in section 2.4.
- 4 The main members of the BP DMG are responsible for several DMUs each:-

Ballogie Estate	4 DMUs (nos. 4,5,6,13)	area = 5,020 ha
Finzean Estate	6 DMUs (nos. 1,2,9,10,11,12)	area = 3,978 ha
Birse Estate	5 DMUs (nos. 14,15,16,17,20)	area = 3,029 ha
Birse Community Trust	3 DMUs (nos. 3,8,18)	area = 941 ha
The Shannel	1 DMU (no. 7)	area = 226 ha
Balfour Estate	1 DMU (no. 19)	area = 193 ha
		<u>total area = 13,387 ha</u>
- 5 The BP DMG will further modify the number of DMUs in the DMG Area during the period of this Plan or subsequently, if that is considered helpful to improving local deer management.

1.5 Annual Information

- 1 During the period of this Plan, the information supplied by each member to the Group in April each year will include:
 - the number of red deer (stags / hinds / calves) and roe deer (bucks / does / kids), culled in each of the DMUs for which the member is responsible;
 - the total number of red deer (stags / others) and roe deer (bucks / others) culled in their DMUs under out of season authorisations and under night shooting authorisations from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH);
 - the number of stalkers that have contributed to their overall cull (with culls by sporting clients attributed to the accompanying stalker).
- 2 The main members with several DMUs will also supply the Group with:
 - interim cull totals (red / roe) to 30th September and 31st December each year;
 - the average clean carcase weights of the red deer (stags / hinds) and roe deer (bucks / does) culled in their DMUs.

- 3 Members will report any non-native deer at the time they are seen. The Group's policy is to shoot non-native deer on sight, in circumstances where to do so is both legal and safe.⁴ Members will also report to the Group annually any particular episodes of serious damage by deer to agricultural crops or woodlands.
- 4 Members will also report to the Group annually, any deer / vehicle collisions of which they are aware. Members will record any deer found dead due to natural mortality or other causes, and report any significant findings to the Group.
- 5 The three main estates in the DMG Area (Ballogie, Birse and Finzean) plan to participate in the East Grampian Deer Management Group's annual spring count of red deer on the open hill.
- 6 The BP DMG will modify and develop the information which it collects annually, where that is considered helpful to improving local deer management.

PART TWO - AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

2.1. Sustainable Deer Management

- 1 The overall aim of the BP DMG is to achieve the sustainable management of the local populations of native wild red and roe deer in the DMG Area.
- 2 Sustainable management is defined as “*managing deer to achieve the best combination of benefits for the economy, environment, people and communities now and for future generations*”.⁴
- 3 As part of this, all DMG members will carry out deer management in accordance with the current and any subsequent versions of the Code of Practice on Deer Management, as first approved by the Scottish Parliament in 2011.
- 4 All members of the DMG will also follow the Best Practice Guides on deer management that are produced by SNH in partnership with other organisations.
- 5 Each member will ensure that their annual deer culls are carried out to the highest standards of public safety and animal welfare.
- 6 As part of this, each member will ensure that the stalkers they employ or use to control deer numbers, are qualified to at least Deer Stalking Certificate Level 1.
- 7 Each member will ensure that those involved in deer management on their land, receive appropriate training in deer management and related matters.

2.2 Deer Management Objectives

- 1 The DMG Area is a naturally favourable local environment for red and roe deer. This is due to its physical and climatic location, combined with the pattern of habitats provided by existing land uses. The Area has extensive forests and woodland and a large area of open hill, with relatively limited settlement and farmland.
- 2 The members of the DMG recognise that the management of the local populations of wild deer requires a sustained effort year to year, so that deer do not cause unacceptable damage locally to public and private interests. The scale of this wildlife management operation each year is reflected in the average annual cull of 550 deer a year in the DMG Area over the last 15 years.⁵ This is an average annual cull of 4.1 deer / 100 ha.
- 3 The overall objective of the BP DMG during this five year Plan is to manage the populations of red and roe deer in the DMG Area at densities that are fully integrated with other local land use interests, and in ways that match contemporary standards of best practice and optimise the benefits that sustainable deer management can deliver.
- 4 The members of the DMG will build on existing information to formulate a more focused approach to population assessments and develop a population model to guide future cull targets.

⁴ Code of Practice on Deer Management, as approved by the Scottish Parliament (December 2011)

⁵ 2004/05 - 2018/19: average cull 552 deer (52% red, 48% roe); see Table 1, page 13

- 5 Main objectives during the period of this Plan are to manage the local deer populations in the DMG Area to ensure that:
 - (a) there continues to be no damage by deer to nationally designated natural heritage sites;
 - (b) there is no significant damage by deer to other natural heritage interests, including the conservation and enhancement of local biodiversity;
 - (c) serious damage by deer to agricultural interests is an increasingly rare occurrence;⁶
 - (d) the current level of damage by deer to woodland and forestry interests is significantly reduced to a more acceptable level;
 - (e) the adverse impact of deer on grouse moor management is minimised;
 - (f) steps are taken to try to reduce the risk of local deer / vehicle collisions, if appropriate and effective steps are identified for any areas of high risk.
 - (g) there continues to be a supply of high quality venison produced each year from culling the local deer populations.

- 6 The Group recognises that an additional objective for Ballogie and Finzean Estates is, within the constraints of (a)-(g) above, to let a regular level of commercial stalking opportunities for stags and bucks.

- 7 The Group is keen to maintain and increase local employment and involvement in deer management, whether through stalking or in other ways, so that local deer management contributes as effectively as possible to the local economy.

- 8 Also, while each member of the Group has their own relationship with the local community, the Group as a whole is also committed to maintaining and developing a positive relationship with the local communities in Birse parish over local deer management. This will include providing the Birse Parish Liaison Group with a copy each year, of the DMG's annual Deer Management Report.

2.3 Land Use Interests

- 1 The extent to which red and roe deer are currently having damaging impacts on the land use interests in the DMG's objectives above, is considered below.
 - (a) Natural Heritage Sites

- 2 The DMG Area includes two types of sites with statutory conservation designations. These are the parts of the River Dee and Tributaries Special Area of Conservation (SAC) in the DMG Area and the three Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSI) within the Area: The Shannel, Quithel Wood and Potarch SSSIs.

- 3 The Group is not aware that deer are causing any significant damage to the special interests of any of these sites.

⁶ There are approx. 20 agricultural holdings in the DMG Area, including two estate farming enterprises and two farms that are entirely or mainly owner occupied, with the other holdings being tenanted or mainly tenanted farms

(b) Local Biodiversity

- 4 The Group is not aware that deer are causing significant damage to any of the open ground semi-natural habitats in the DMG Area, although it is recognised that deer may be having an impact on floristic diversity in some areas.
- 5 The most important semi-natural habitat type in the DMG Area is the Area's particularly extensive and diverse native woodland resources, including genuinely native woodlands, other self sown native woodlands and woodlands planted using native species. The woodlands cover over 4,000 ha and are a core component of the DMG Area's local biodiversity.
- 6 The important area of genuinely native woodlands in the DMG Area is the Glen Ferrick and Finlets Native Pinewood, which is Scotland's most easterly surviving area of relic Caledonian Pinewood.⁷ This pinewood is also part of the nearly continuous arc of pinewood relics and areas of self sown pine, that stretches across the DMG area between Newmill in the north-west and Glen Aven in the south-east.
- 7 There has been a significant expansion of self sown pine in this extensive pinewood area over the last 40 years or so. However, while Scots pine continue to naturally regenerate in parts of the area, browsing by red and roe deer is a major limit on the regeneration in many other parts. In addition, there is extremely limited natural regeneration of birch and other native broadleaves in these pinewood areas due to the browsing pressure from roe deer.
- 8 There is also a particular lack of native broadleaved regeneration due to deer at the remoter native relic burnside native woodlands in the Forest of Birse and Glen Aven.
- 9 Nearly all the areas of self-sown pinewood in the DMG Area are actively managed, in terms of being covered by Forestry Commission Scotland approved Forest Plans. Similarly, other than the remote burnside relics in the south-west of the Area, most of the native broadleaved woodland areas are either within a Forest Plan or else within the environment covered by them.
- 10 The management of the impacts of deer on native woodland is therefore covered as part of the wider consideration of forestry and deer management ((d) below).

(c) Agricultural Interests

- 11 Roe deer will cause some damage to agricultural crops in the DMG Area, but this is considered to be very limited. However, there have been several examples in recent years of red deer damaging mature barley crops.
- 12 The Group's policy is for members to respond immediately to any episode of serious damage being caused by red deer to agricultural crops, so far permitted to do so under statute. More generally, the Group will continue to try to reduce the numbers of red deer occurring in the north and east parts of the DMG Area where the cultivated farmland is concentrated.

⁷ Forestry Commission Scotland: Register of Caledonian Pinewoods

(d) Forestry Interests

- 13 While the four open hill DMUs cover 40% of the DMG Area, there are relatively few deer living on the open hill. In the remaining 60% of the DMG Area, there is over 50% tree cover and this creates a favourable forest environment for red and roe deer.⁸ Deer management in the DMG Area is therefore very largely about the management of deer in and around woodlands.
- 14 In the great majority of the approximately 4,000 ha woodland area, most of the browsing pressure results from deer. The level of deer browsing across the DMG Area means that, in most of the Area, it is currently difficult to naturally regenerate or re-plant areas without deer fencing. Deer fencing is expensive and also considered inappropriate in much of the area due to the population of capercaillie that still survives in the DMG Area.⁹
- 15 The economic importance locally of reducing the numbers of red and roe deer in the woodlands is continuing to increase. This is due to the growing need to re-stock areas, now the felling of areas has started to increase in the extensive post war commercial plantations. It is also due to the need to secure natural regeneration in the extensive area of self-sown pinewoods as part of Group members implementing their Forest Plans.
- 16 The Group's policy is to try to reduce the numbers of red and roe deer in Scots pine and other conifer woodlands in the DMG Area. The target is to reduce the deer pressure to a level that allows the natural regeneration of pine or other conifers in parts of the woodlands which are to be re-stocked or expanded, without undue serious damage by deer. The Group accepts that the establishment of areas of broadleaves other than the natural regeneration of birch, will require some form of physical protection.

(e) Grouse Moor Management

- 17 The four open hill DMUs in the south-west of the DMG Area and covering 40% of the Area, are largely managed for grouse shooting. There are relatively few red deer in these DMUs, compared to previous decades. The Group's policy is to maintain this position, while also carrying out a regular cull to limit roe deer numbers.
- 18 Both these policies carried out effectively, will support the natural regeneration of the relic burnside native woodlands in these DMUs.

(f) Deer / Vehicle Collisions

- 19 The Group does not have clear information on the number of deer / vehicle collisions in the DMG Area each year. However, roe deer are much more frequently involved in these collisions than red deer. It might be speculated that the number of collisions where the roe deer is killed or fatally wounded, could be around 10-15 a year. The total could also be higher than that.

⁸ Based on the National Forest Inventory and Native Woodland Survey of Scotland, there are over 4,000 ha of woodland in this 7,800 ha part of the DMG Area.

⁹ In addition, creating enclosures in the Forest of Birse Commonty (over 3,750 ha) is against its constitution of different rights and interests

- 20 The north side of Corsedardar on the B976 is the place where red deer are most frequently reported crossing a public road. They also regularly cross the Shootings Greens road at Slewdrum. While red deer may be encountered at a range of other locations along the public roads in the DMG Area, there is a risk of hitting a roe deer along most of the lengths of the public roads in the Area.
- 21 The danger to vehicle occupants from a collision with a deer, tends to be greater on some of the faster lengths of the B976 and B993. However, the Group has no information on anyone suffering serious personal injury as a result of being in a deer / vehicle collision in DMG Area.
- 22 The Group is aiming to reduce the number of deer generally in the parts of the DMG Area with the main public roads. In addition, the Group will also implement appropriate and effective steps that might be identified to try to reduce the risk of a collision in specific locations. The only example of this to date is the annual cutting of the strip of bracken on the east side of the road north of Corsedardar. This is to improve the visibility of any deer approaching the road from that direction.
- 23 The Group recognises that another impact of roe deer that can directly affect some local residents, is damage to their gardens. There are over 300 detached households in the DMG Area and nearly all the gardens are accessible to roe deer.

(g) Venison

- 24 The management of the local deer populations in the DMG Area, provides a harvest of wild venison. It is estimated, for example, that very approximately 16 tonnes of wild venison (75% red, 25% roe) was produced from the DMG Area in 2013/14.
- 25 The sale of venison is the core income source from deer management and in some of the smaller DMUs, the culls are carried out by stalkers in exchange for keeping the carcase.
- 26 The three main estates each have their own game larders and these are inspected annually under Health Regulations. Ballogie and Finzean Estates are each accredited as producing Scottish Quality Wild Venison. Finzean Estate also sells a major proportion of the venison from its annual culls (c.80% in 2018/19) locally through Finzean Farmshop. The Group supports the local use of local venison, but the scope for more local use is constrained by Health Regulation requirements.
- 27 The Group aims to produce a sustainable supply of high quality wild venison from sustainably managed local deer populations.

2.4 Deer Management Zones

- 1 As part of implementing its objectives, the DMG divides the DMG Area and Deer Management Units into low ground, forest and open hill zones, to reflect the different deer management priorities in each of the three zones. There are:
 - 4 hill DMUs covering 5,665 ha (c.40% of the DMG area) and averaging c.1,130 ha each;
 - 9 forest DMUs covering 3,810 ha (c.30% of the DMG area) and averaging c.425 ha each;
 - 7 low ground DMUs covering 3,907 ha (c.30% of the DMG area) and averaging c.490 ha.

- 2 The DMG's aim is to keep the open hill zone very largely clear of red deer, while maintaining a regular cull of roe deer to limit their number in the zone. This aim supports both grouse management and natural regeneration in the surviving areas of native woodland in the open hill DMUs.
- 3 The Group also aims to keep the low ground zone very largely clear of red deer to protect the agricultural and forestry interests there, while having a high regular cull of roe deer to control the roe populations in this productive environment for roe.
- 4 The Group sees the forest zone as the core deer management zone with resident red deer as well as roe. In this zone, the Group's aim is to control the populations sufficiently to enable adequate re-stocking and natural regeneration of woodlands, without the use of deer fences, in the places where that is the management aim.
- 5 The average annual cull of red and roe deer in the DMG Area over the last 15 years has been nearly 550 deer a year, as shown in Table 1
6. In 2016/17 and 2017/18, the annual cull was over 600 deer. The distribution of these annual culls between the different Deer Management Zones, is shown in Table 2.
- 7 The Group considers, that the implementation of its aims and objectives will require the overall cull of red and roe deer in the DMG Area in each of the next three years, to continue to be over 500 deer a year.
- 8 The Group also considers that, as part of achieving that aim, the current cull levels in each of the three zones should be maintained and increased, particularly the forest zone.
- 9 The Group's continuing priority is to reduce the number of red deer in the DMG Area to a more manageable level, while also increasing the annual roe deer cull. The aim is that, as the red population is reduced, there will be a greater focus on managing the roe population more effectively.
- 10 The Group considers that the successful implementation of its policies for each deer species, will result in the number of roe deer culled each year being consistently higher than the number of red deer culled each year, as was the case for the first time in 2013/14.
- 11 The DMG's specific policies for the management of the red and roe deer populations over the next five years, are discussed in the next two parts of this Plan.

Table 1: Total Culls of Red and Roe Deer in the BP DMG Area

	RED	ROE	Total Cull	Red : Roe %
2004-05	415	267	682	61 : 39
2005-06	340	245	585	58 : 42
2006-07	246	184	430	57 : 43
2007-08	191	133	324	59 : 41
2008-09	276	150	426	65 : 35
2009-10	260	212	472	55 : 45
2010-11	304	152	456	67 : 33
2011-12	226	171	397	57 : 43
2012-13	315	234	549	57 : 43
2013-14	248	347	595	42 : 58
2014-15	300	390	690	43 : 57
2015-16	320	458	778	41 : 59
2016-17	249	371	620	40 : 60
2017-18	314	377	691	45 : 55
2018-19	269	312	581	46 : 54
2004/05 - 2018/19	<i>Av. 285</i>	<i>Av.267</i>	<i>Av.552</i>	<i>Av. 52 : 48</i>

Table 2: Red and Roe Deer Culls by DMU Zone 2017-18 (figures in brackets = previous year, 2016-17)

DMU Zone	Area (ha)	Red	Cull/100ha	Roe	Cull/100ha	Total Cull	Cull / 100 ha
<i>Low Ground</i>	3,912	68 (73)	1.7 (1.9)	56 (164)	1.4 (4.2)	124 (237)	3.2 (6.1)
<i>Forest</i>	3,929	159 (133)	4.0 (3.4)	189 (152)	4.8 (3.9)	348 (285)	8.9 (7.3)
<i>Hill</i>	5,546	87 (43)	1.6 (0.8)	132 (55)	2.4 (1.0)	219 (98)	3.9 (1.8)
Totals	13,387	314 (249)	2.3 (1.9)	377 (371)	2.8 (2.8)	691 (620)	5.2 (4.6)

2.5 SNH Authorisations

- 1 Given the current deer pressure in the DMG Area, the Group considers that shooting male deer out of season and the use of night shooting will be essential if adequate culls are to be achieved.
- 2 The Group anticipates that the four main members of the Group will apply annually to SNH during the period of this Plan, for authorisations to shoot deer out of season and by night shooting.
- 3 The out of season authorisations will enable male red and roe deer to be shot on enclosed and unenclosed land at any time of year. Under the authorisations, there will a prohibition against shooting female red deer from 16th February to 1st September or later, and female roe deer from 1st April to 1st September or later.

Part Three - Deer Culls

3.1 Red Deer Population

- 1 Red deer occur throughout the DMG Area. Traditionally during the 20th century, most of the red deer were on the open hill. However, for the last 20 years or more, they have mainly been in the woodlands in the forest and low ground zones.
- 2 The density of red deer in these two zones is considered relatively high, as assessed empirically in terms of the large groups of 30 or more red deer that are seen from time to time, and the widespread signs of red deer in terms of damage to trees, tracks, dung and wallows.
- 3 The red deer population in the DMG Area can be considered relatively self-contained in terms of the boundaries of the Area. The northern boundary and most of the eastern boundary are the River Dee. The southern boundary has the Glen Dye Estate and Millburn Estate deer fences, while the western boundary has the Glen Tanar Estate deer fence down the west side of the Allt Dinnie.
- 4 However, the Group considers that there is also significant movement of red deer between the DMG Area and the surrounding areas.
- 5 There tends to be a movement of red deer from Glen Tanar into the DMG Area each year. While some of these return, the Group considers there is some net immigration into the Area from the west annually or most years.
- 6 There are also increasing reports of red deer crossing the Dee at Slewdrum and Carlogie. The Group considers this is also potentially now producing net immigration into the Area, resulting from the increases in red deer numbers in the Kincardine Estate and Sluie Estate woodlands north of the Dee. It might be considered that previously red deer have moved from the DMG Area to those woodlands.
- 7 Red deer also move between the DMG Area and Blackhall Forest to the east. The Group considers that previously there has been a net movement of red deer east from the DMG Area into Blackhall. The Group is now concerned that, with its

improved culls in that part of the Area and relatively modest red deer culls in Blackhall, there could be net inflow to the DMG Area.

- 8 The completion of the Glen Dye Estate deer fence in c.2010/11 and the changed management priorities on that Estate, have ended the large scale movements of red deer between Glen Dye and the south of the DMG area. However, the completion of the Glen Dye fence shut out a group of c.150-200 hinds which is now down to approximately 70, in the A'an valley. There are also currently some holes in the fence being used by red deer.
- 9 The DMG usually carries out an annual spring count of the open hill in the DMG Area, to coincide with the wider EGDMG count. The results for the last ten years are shown in Table 3.
- 10 A factor which suggests that open hill deer are moving into the woodlands in the DMG Area, is that many of the stags shot in the woodlands appear by their weight and character to be open hill deer.

Table 3: Open Hill Spring Counts in Birse Parish*

Year	Birse Estate		Ballogie Estate		Finzean Estate		Parish Totals		
	stags	others	stags	others	stags	others	stags	others	totals
2003	35	16	20	20	10	127	121	163	284
2004	72	15	0	11	39	231	111	257	368
2005	0	2	0	18	0	186	11	658	669
2006	38	41	19	120	10	152	67	313	380
2007	22	13	10	22	0	8	32	43	75
2008	17	0	19	32	0	7	36	39	75
2009	3	5	12	35	3	5	18	45	63
2010	-	-	9	43	-	-	-	-	-
2011	-	-	0	77	-	-	-	-	-
2012	-	-	0	13	-	-	-	-	-
2013	<i>No count due to snow</i>								-
2014	23	41	39	52	6	41	68	134	202
2015	20	2	2	6	24	89	46	97	143
2016	-	-	13	6	11	125	24	131	155

* The level of the 2014 count may have been influenced by fox hounds going through the Finzean Estate woods the day before.

3.2 Red Deer Culls

- 1 The average annual cull of red deer in the DMG Area has been at a similar level for at least the last 20 years. In the 9 years, 1995/6-2003/04, the average cull was 264 red deer a year in a more or less 1:1 sex ration (52% stags; 48% hinds).
- 2 During the last 15 years, as shown in Table 4, the average annual cull was 285 red deer a year in a more less 1:1 sex ration (52% stags; 48% hinds).¹⁰
- 3 The cull average for the last 5 years of the 15 year period, was slightly higher than the first 10 years. It also shows more stags than hinds now being culled (57% stags, 43% hinds).

¹⁰ The average annual cull in the previous 9 years (1995/6 to 2003/04) was 264 (52% stags; 48% hinds)

- 4 The apparent consistency of the average cull level disguises the degree to which the levels of the culls have fluctuated and changed in different parts of the DMG Area during the years with changing circumstances.
- 5 The agreed aim within the DMG Area over the last 15 years has been to reduce the number of red deer in the DMG Area. However, the Group considers that there has been no discernible and sustained reduction in the overall red deer population in the Area so far.
- 6 The Group's policy is therefore to maintain and increase the current level of the Group's annual red deer cull, with a particular focus on key areas. The Group's Deer Management Report 2013/14 highlights seven such areas.
- 7 As part of setting annual cull levels, each of the four main members of the Group have Forest Plans which contain Deer Management Plans and cull targets. Ballogie Estate is currently undertaking a 10 year review of its Forest Plan, while Birse Estate's Forest Plan is awaiting approval by FCS. Finzean Estate and BCT have relatively recently approved Forest Plans.
- 8 Two estates take part of their annual red culls with paying clients. On Ballogie, the current expectation is around 10 stags a year and on Finzean, around 15 stags.

Table 4 BP DMG Red Deer Cull Totals

	Stags	Hinds+	Total
2004/05	173	242	415
2005/06	156	184	340
2006/07	114	132	246
2007/08	129	62	191
2008/09	172	104	276
2009/10	121	139	260
2010/11	99	205	304
2011/12	112	114	226
2012/13	183	132	315
2013/14	124	124	248
2014/15	143	147	300
2015/16	213	107	320
2016/17	146	103	249
2017/18	179	135	314
2018/19	146	123	269

- 9 While there has been no apparent reduction in the local red deer population in the DMG Area, the Group also does not consider that the overall numbers of red deer have necessarily increased to any significant extent over recent years. However, at

this stage, the Group is not clear on the degree to which the annual recruitment to maintain an average cull of round 270 for many years, comes from deer within the Area or is in part, the result of an annual net in-migration each year.

- 10 The Group hopes that this position will become clearer, as the Group both improves the coverage of the cull across the DMG Area and increases the overall Group cull.
- 11 The Group aims to manage a reduced red deer population, with few red deer in the open hill DMUs, red deer relatively infrequent in the low ground areas and most of the red deer in the forest zone, where they will be in smaller groups than currently and with reduced tree damage and other signs of red deer..

3.3 Roe Deer Population

- 1 Roe deer occur throughout the DMG Area, which provides a favourable environment for them. The low ground has a relatively intimate mix of woodland and farmland and there is the substantial forest zone across the DMG Area, while much the hill zone is relatively low lying (less than 450 ms) and fertile.
- 2 There is no accurate information available on the densities of roe deer in Birse parish. However, research in comparable areas suggests that average densities of roe on the open hill might range between c.5-10 roe per 100 ha, while in the forest and low ground zones the density might be c.10-20 roe per 100 ha. Using these density figures and the extents of the different zones, it might be speculated that there is a population of 1,000 - 2,000 roe deer in the parish.
- 3 The population of roe in the DMG Area is a local natural asset. However, as described in section 2.3, there are a number of adverse impacts of varying significance that result from the current size of the roe deer population.
- 4 The Group considers that the current relatively low average weights for bucks (c.13.5 kg) and does (c.11.5 kg) is one reflection of a relatively high population density of roe in the DMG Area.

3.4 Roe Deer Cull

- 1 The Group recognises that the annual culls of roe deer in the DMG Area during the last 15 years (Table 5), have been far from sufficient to limit the population of roe.

Table 5 BP DMG Roe Deer Cull Totals

	Bucks	Does+	Total
2004/05	64	203	267
2005/06	78	167	245
2006/07	60	124	184
2007/08	54	79	133
2008/09	56	94	150
2009/10	91	121	212
2010/11	69	83	152
2011/12	78	93	171
2012/13	95	139	234
2013/14	178	169	347
2014/15	149	241	390
2015/16	154	304	458
2016/17	159	212	371
2017/18	202	175	377
2018/19	167	145	312

- 2 The higher cull total in 2013/14 was due to the increased culls in DMUs 8 and 18. 142 roe deer were shot in these two forest DMUs, which cover a total of 408 ha. The cull rates in the two DMUs was 32.1 roe deer / 100 ha and 36.7 roe / 100 ha.
- 3 These high cull rates in DMUs on east and west sides of the DMG Area, reflect the numbers of roe around and that they will move into any space created by a significantly increased cull. However, in parts of DMU 18 where the cull average roe cull over the last two years has been 30 roe / 100 ha, there has also been a conspicuous 'release' of existing natural regeneration of larch, Scots pine and birch.
- 4 The four main members of the Group have roe cull targets as part of their respective Forests Plans. Two members take part of their roe cull with paying clients. On Ballogie Estate, the current expectation is around 30 bucks a year and on Finzean Estate, around 15 bucks a year.
- 5 The Group's aim has been and continues to be to increase the level of the roe deer across the DMG's DMUs generally, while individual members can increase the intensity of their roe cull in particular areas where that is required to protect forestry or other interests.
- 6 Table 2 on page 14 above, shows that the average roe cull per DMU increased in the forest and hill Deer Management Zones in 2017/18, compared to 2016/17. The low ground DMU average went from 4.2 to 1.4 roe / 100 ha, the forest zone from 3.9 to 4.8 and the hill zone from 1.0 to 2.4.

- 7 The Group does not anticipate a significant inflow of roe into the DMG Area, as the Group increases the roe cull. The River Dee and hill boundaries of the Area are more formidable obstacles to roe than red deer, while consistent annual roe deer culls are carried out in the forests to the east and west of the DMG Area.
- 8 The Group recognises that, if the level of cull does start to reduce the density of roe in parts of the Area, there is likely to be a 'reproductive response' in terms of more productive breeding. More generally, it might be considered that the local environment is also improving gradually for roe deer with, for example, the increasing understory development in the maturing plantations and the predicted continued reduction in the average number of the days of snow cover in the Area each year. If the red deer population is reduced as planned, this would also favour the roe population.
- 9 The Group aspires to a situation where, with fewer roe deer locally, the Group has a much clearer understanding of the pattern and structure of the roe population in the Area and is managing this under a regular cull that is producing heavier roe deer and quality sporting opportunities.

3.5 Cull Effort

- 1 The Group is agreed that the populations of red and roe deer in the DMG Area, should be reduced to more managed levels to protect other interests.
- 2 The straightforward requirement to achieve this, is to shoot more deer. The Group considers that, as part of achieving that, there should be at least a basic level of cull in all the DMUs across the DMG Area. The Group plans to continue recent improvements in this direction, reducing the risk that the effort in some DMUs is unduly undermined by little or no culling in another DMU.
- 3 The Group also recognises that the local culling effort needs to be sustained year to year, with past fluctuations in the DMG annual cull totals generally reflecting the varying effort that was put into the culls, rather than necessarily the number of deer it might have been appropriate to cull.
- 4 The challenge for each Group member is to have the capacity to carry out an adequate cull each year in the DMU or DMUs for which they are responsible. While this requires one or more qualified stalkers, whether employees or others, it also requires the stalkers to spend a sufficient amount of time stalking. Enough stalker outings need to take place to reach a target.
- 5 The four main members of the Group also receive or are due to receive, significant grants for deer control from Forestry Commission Scotland as part of implementing their approved Forest Plans. In addition, while generally less than 20% of the Group cull is carried out with paying clients, this commercial stalking contributes to the deer management income of the two estates involved.
- 6 The Group's planned deer culls are intended to reduce the costs of deer damage to local land use interests, and so improve the economics of deer management. While the Group aims to manage a smaller red deer population requiring a regular cull of less than 200 deer a year, it is anticipated that income from deer culling will be maintained or improved by a higher ongoing and sustainable culls of roe deer.

- 7 Roe deer are much easier and quicker than red deer to extract and process, while their venison also has a higher price. There is also particular potential in the DMG Area for roe trophy heads and associated commercial stalking fees. The Group anticipates that the annual roe deer cull will become a much more important part of local deer management, than has previously been the case.
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