BIRSE PARISH DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP

Record of Autumn Meeting on 7th November 2024

Members Present: Andrew Farquharson, Hedge Shand, Alf Sorensen (Finzean Estate), Robert Paterson, Yvonne Lyburn (Birse Estate), Abby Nicol, Peter Littlejohn, (Ballogie Estate), Toni Watt (BCT), Jim Stevenson (Shannel),

Others Present: Adam Smith (Glen Tanar), Tom Chetwynd (Glen Dye)

Apologies: Stuart Young (Birse Estate), George Ritchie, Toby Rider, Jane Winton (BTCo) Malcolm Nicol (Ballogie), Rachel Sedgwick (Glen Dye), Iain Hope (NatureScot), James Macpherson-Fletcher (Scottish Woodlands Glen Dye Moor),

1. Introduction

1.1 Andrew Farquharson (AF) welcomed all as Chair. Apologies were noted and items were noted for Any Other Business.

2 BP DMG Papers

It was noted that the previously agreed record of the BP DMG meeting on 9th November 2023 is available on BCT Website.

2.0 Matters Arising from 2023 Minutes

2.1 Fire maps – all estates need to update contact details for the fire maps, names and contact numbers to be sent to Toni Watt (TW) Action All

2.2 From 2023 - Fire Service possibility of getting on the ground training with the estate's keepers Alastair Griffiths to follow up. This didn't happen but would still be useful.

It was noted that an extra bit to the fire training has been added on by the government so new fire training / updating will be needed. Bright Sparks are offering training for a period of time before it moves to Lantra.

Birse estates undergoing crow and tunnel trapping training update – Yvonne Lyburn (YL) to check if fully booked or not and circulate any spaces available. Action YL

2.3 Deer Count – Peter Littlejohn (PL) to take on the role of co-ordinator for Birse Parish. Abby Nicol (AN) attending deer meeting at Balmoral will report back on discussions. PL to liaise with group. Action AN / PL

3.0 Current Deer Management

3.1 Red Deer

The DMG's interim cull to 20th October of 126 red deer was noted.

. Ballogie noted- there are a lot of red deer in the low ground, in fields. Appear to have come through from Shannel / Slidderybrae and stayed. Sept – 80-100 counted in Balnacraig area but seem to have subsequently disappeared.

Counted 50 in the barley fields. The worrying trend to note is that unusually more red deer have moved into the woodlands from the hill. In Ballogie case largely across from the Shannel as the cattie fence is down. This is in the process of being replaced. A

small group of hinds have stayed around Balnacraig area. Reds very rarely coming into a larger group but splintering into smaller numbers

The 180 in Balfour were not regularly coming over to Balnacraig. Agree in Balfour/Kimminity area but odd that not seen by BTCo stalkers.

This year heard the most stags ever roaring, 12-15 during the cold nights, not many stags on the hill, mainly singles, not groups. Approximately 50 hinds counted but mostly smaller groups.

Finzean – Stags mainly in the eastern areas, 40-45 hinds and 15 stags counted. Groups of 20 stags and 5 hinds on Peter Hill. Around Finzean low ground quieter, approx. 20 in West wood

Stags roaring- louder than usual and again heard more than usual.

Birse- Quietest year ever seen. Around 3 years ago, something happened, and numbers changed. This year was the earliest rut ever seen, 10-12 days earlier than usual and finished earlier. Some stags seem happy to hold small numbers of hinds. No complaints from farmers.

Still a big group of 180 counted in Balfour.

BTCo, unable to attend so notes added after meeting - *George Ritchie (GR) has no mention of the 180 red deer in Balfour, but Jane Winton (JW) knows about these as they frequent their top fields with neeps planted in them. JW thinks the 180 would be between both Balnacraig and Balfour but not really BTCo's Balfour more on Cochran's Balfour and Kinminity. They are difficult to shoot as there is so much public out walking at all times of the day and night. Sandy Mackie said his barley field next to JW's was very flattened and there was a large part of the field he never got any barley off because the deer had flattened it with travelling back and forth. Alistair Winton said combining the fields at Balnacraig wasn't easy as there was so much flattened.*

The rut was amazing this year, noisiest and longest heard in a while.

Shannel- very quiet, fewest deer seen for years, biggest number counted, a group of 16 hinds and calves. Rut approximately 10 days late and stopped early. Hinds not coming down until after dark and leaving early, not one mature stag seen during the rut, oldest was a 2 year-old although older ones heard.

3.2 <u>Roe Deer</u>

It was noted that the DMG's interim roe cull total to 20th October was 116.

Ballogie – numbers quite stable, struggling a bit to get the cull numbers. Not as much in the fields as seen before. Very little on the hill. Hard to see on BCT managed land.

With more reds coming into woodland areas the presence of roe is less. Ballogie numbers of roe are fewer than previous years and target may need to be adjusted.

Thermal counting agreed as necessary to establish roe numbers.

Finzean – bucks hard to find, had a hard season due to the weather / east winds – pockets of deer on the low ground.

Birse – Seem to have plenty of roe. Hill nearly devoid of roe, loose about 80% each time we have heavy snows. Woods still affected by mountain bike disturbance. No complaints from farmers.

Shannel – Only about 6 roe deer seen at any one time.

Totals for red and roe so far seem to be about on target.

3.3 Other Estates Deer Reports

Glen Tanar - 79 stags, 39 on the hill, average age 9 years, and 40 in the forest average age 3 years.

Rut in the forest was earlier and finished 3 weeks before the end of the season. The rut on the hill then started but only during cold spells.

East side of estate very low on hinds, 10 maximum.

West side few hinds to a maximum of 100 counted in a whole day, groups of 5 or 6 with a stag, numbers down again on what there used to be. Before the rut the east side of the estate had good numbers of stags but then the numbers just dropped.

Hinds - west side of the estate guest stalking, 5 so far. Forest hinds, 27 so far and 9 calves, not big numbers again, just small groups.

Hinds are not in good condition, should have more fat than they do.

Roe Deer – numbers are good, seeing more roe where red numbers are low.

Glen Dye – 4 years ago, Glen Dye changed focus to woodland. Approximately 600 red and 400 roe were shot over last 4 years. Now mostly into maintenance culls, mostly at night.

Approximately 150 deer / year shot mainly on restock sites.

Fence between NE corner of the estate and the bridge put in 3 years ago, strategic to limit red deer movement from Fetteresso Forest to the east. Noticed east west movement mostly. Trying to keep the north end of the estate as free from deer as possible. (Any holes in the fence please report to Rachel Sedgwick at Glen Dye in the first instance)

Glen Dye Moor – Deer management plan was mainly prepared from the March 2022 Nature Scot deer count. Quite a lot of red deer around at the moment, but they do move around. A reduction cull on the moor itself is starting this winter.

Focus on trees / peatland restoration, no grouse management at each site.

The deer management meeting was in August, contact Tom if you would like to see a copy of the paperwork from the meeting.

Roe – hit roe hard in 2021, about 300 culled which really reduced the numbers, but still get 40 a year so maybe roe move more than we realise. Still getting mature roe, 3 plus years.

3.4

Related information

Deer Fence at Glen Tanar is not currently progressing due to difficulties in getting authorisation from NatureScot and the Cairngorms National Park Authority.

Deer vehicle collisions – Glen Tanar roe collisions are far less than last year which was a bad year for roe collisions.

Red grouse, numbers are so low that doubt was expressed as to whether they could recover.
Numbers dropped in 1988 but recovered, now there is a very high tick burden.

Capercaillie – Glen Tanar reported sightings of hens in the last few weeks but concerned that capercaillie cock hasn't been seen lately. Caper droppings have been seen in areas where they have not been seen for 20 years.

Diversionary feeding for capercaillie was discussed and Glen Tanar estate took part this year.

4.0 AOB

4.1 Finzean Masts update
Woodend mast building has started and should be operational by the new
year. For emergency services and EE and should cover an increased part of the Forest of Birse.
Forest of Birse mast seems to have been dropped as no one has heard any more about it.

4.2 Birse Parish Deer Management Plan
BP deer management plan runs out in November 2024, Andrew Farquharson (AF) is updating it with help from the group. It was agreed that these discussions are an important record of monitoring how the culls are working, and it is important that everyone attends. To accommodate BTCo who carry out deer culls as volunteers and work elsewhere full time, it was requested that the timing of the meetings was discussed. An evening meeting would suit BTCo better.
Glen Dye discussed their deer management plan and the use of thermal counting and dung counts.

4.3 Fire
Wildfire in the Forest of Birse. The last wildfire was in 2012. It was agreed that a meeting and possible dummy run should be held in the next time of high fire risk, spring 2025, to refresh roles and expectations. Action All

Addendum
From Abby Nicol (AN) added after meeting

I went to the SDNA deer meeting- they plan to hold the hill count on the 17th of Feb. Weather permitting. Peter to liaise with Gary Coutts of Balmoral. All felt important for

BPDMG to hold their count on the same day. They will no longer wait for snow to hold the count.

Population modelling used to determine the red cull targets each year based on annual count. Percentage rates set for mortality rates, calving rates, recruitment rates and ratio of stag to hind used. I propose a point on pop modelling to be added to our future meetings.

Woodland populations based on observations, new woodland damage and numbers counted grazing in deer parks

Fire Training
From Michael Bruce (MB)
The situation is:

- There is only one course, the Muirburn Foundation Practitioner Training course
- It is owned by SFRS
- It is a course approved, certificated and quality assured by Lantra Awards
- The only training provider, approved by SFRS, is Bright Spark https://www.brightsparkburningtechniques.co.uk/

SGWG will be putting our AGM date for Feb 2025 before Christmas.

Next meeting Date – 6th November 2025, 2pm

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