

Balquhider Deer Management Group
Minutes from Goat Sub-Group Meeting

LLTNPA HQ, Balloch

Wednesday 6th December

At 2pm

Present:

Estelle Gill (EG), Jimmy Irvine (JI), Nicola Colquhoun (NC), Fraser Lamont (FL), Falcon Frost (FF), Alasdair MacNair (AM), John Reid (JR)

Apologies:

Paul Bekier, Richard Eadington, Russell Lamont

Summary of designated sites:

EG gave us an update on the condition of the designated woods and the goat population therein. The population is centred about the Pollochro Woods SSSI (EG is the SNH contact), however there are also goats to the south in the Craigroyston SSSI and Rowardennan SSSI (Henry Lima is the SNH contact). The woods are in unfavourable declining condition with medium to high levels of herbivore impacts including high levels of ring barking and only young trees coming away in exclosures. The Woodland Profile and Herbivore Impact Assessment Survey in 2012 showed the herbivore impacts were too high and SNH asked the land managers for action.

And how land holdings can help to deliver that favourable condition:

FF said that sheep numbers were decreased on Glenfalloch 7-8 years ago and all domestic stock will be removed in the next year so that should help to reduce the pressure.

It is thought that the goats move out of the woodlands in May and on to the higher ground to avoid midges, so much of the damage to the woodlands is occurring in the winter months.

AM said that Comer were looking at setting up monitoring roundels to see if regeneration would occur, but EG said this was not necessary as we know the trees would re-grow without grazing pressure and would end up as a thicket which does not constitute a healthy woodland. Some grazing pressure is required for a healthy woodland, but at much lower levels than are currently being seen. AM told the group that the Comer fence is secure along the West Highland Way.

Goat Count and Population Model:

Paul Bekier had said previously that he felt the helicopter counts hugely under-counted the goats as they hunker down in vegetation and it is not an efficient way to count goats.

It was agreed that counting using thermal imagery was the most efficient method but this only gives a count of the ground that can be seen from the west side of Loch Lomond and doesn't allow any counting of the open hill behind the loch shores. Counters parked up off A82 looking across the loch. FF stated that he felt in the spring the majority of the population were in the wooded slopes on the Loch shore.

Below is a table with the Count data for goats.

Year	FES	Glenfalloch	RSPB Inversnaid	SNH count	Total
2012				90 ¹	90
2014		42	64		106
2015		83	24		107
2016		19	49		68
2017	113 ²	68	74		255 ³

1: This was a figure estimated by SNH based on SCM
2: Helicopter Count of the Great Trossachs Forest area (includes Katrine, Loch Ard and RSPB)
3: Much higher figure due to FES data

The population density in 2012 was approximately 23-29 goats per km².

Action: Kevin McCulloch to carry out thermal count with FF and FL in March.

Update on current and past management:

Glenfalloch and FES carry out lethal control of the goats on their ground. RSPB's policy is to explore alternative options to lethal vertebrate control which means that they need to find other methods of controlling the numbers of goats on their property.

In the past year, RSPB have tried immuno-contraception and live capture/ translocation (to a Goat Park in Dumfries & Galloway). There has been an unknown level of success on the immune-contraception, with no translocation taking place to date. Research was done to ensure the efficacy and the delivery of the immuno-contraception chemicals, however because the goat population was larger than expected the immune-contraception could not have the planned affect. RSPB stated that Immuno-contraception was the best method available to them at the time. RSPB is keen to explore other options, before they resort to lethal control. However, it is noted that lethal control is used within fenced areas.

During the immuno-contraceptive study that was carried out prior to darting, photos were taken to identify individuals and it appears there are a number of different phenotypes (probably about 5) that have cross bred throughout the area. The British Feral Goat Research Group believe that 30-50 goats are needed for genetic viability as they think that the Loch side population is a discreet population from the goats that can be found in the

Loch Ard Forest and around Aberfoyle, so the community has suggested that a population of 50 is left.

Monitoring is important and SNH has a baseline survey which was carried out in 2012. JI said that this could be repeated by SNH if the initial survey flagged up any concerns. However, SNH would promote that as with all other monitoring the emphasis is on the landowner/ manager to monitor habitats to ensure that management is suitable. Plans are being made to provide training opportunities for land managers in Woodland Habitat Impact Assessments in 2018, so this will help to monitor the condition of the woodlands.

Managing public perception is an important part of this issue and the numbers will be what the public see as being important especially when coming to promote a reduction in the population. However, the habitat monitoring is what will assist land managers in providing the evidence the need to deliver the changes required and provide information to those that oppose the goat cull.

Cull Target Setting:

SNH would like a reduction cull to be carried out based on evidence, such as counts, culls and habitat monitoring. JI stated that based on the count info the cull that is currently being carried out is sufficient to maintain the population at current levels over the wider area, but that the current population is too high in places and causing the condition of the woodland to deteriorate.

Property	Reasons	Approximate Population Reduction
RSPB	Plan to translocation 50% of their population Spring Count = 74	30
Glenfalloch	Glenfalloch looking to cull 30-40 goats.	40
Comer	Have not culled any goats to date. But will look into what is required.	??
FES	National goat management policy recommends culling up to 50% of goats seen Spring Heli Count = 113	56
Total		126

Action: Communicate culls between the Sub-Group (RSPB/ GF/Comer/ FES) then update at June meeting giving information about the ongoing population reductions and improving condition of the SSSI.

Carcass Extraction and getting rid of carcasses is an issue. AM suggested that some be left on the hill for the eagles, JI stated that non-lead shot should be used if this is to happen. NC highlighted the public perception of leaving carcasses on the hill – previous negative press with JMT shows that this is not an issue that the BqDMG wishes to face. FF asked about the immuno-contraceptive drugs that could be left in the meat and whether there was any concern over this drug.

Action: EG to speak to Edinburgh Zoo and JI to investigate whether game dealers or venison markets could take more/some goat?

Other options that were suggested were: Kinncraig wildlife park, Argaty Red Kites, Jimmy Lambie – fox hounds.

The lack of legal seasons was brought up which could be seen as a welfare issue and also a public perception issue. However all land managers are following good animal welfare principles and carry out culling between October to early January. BqDMG members are not culling nannies after New Year.

EG said that the SNH Goat policy is to manage like deer, which is not to eradicate, but manage sustainably.

FL argued that they were a feral population and asked what was SNH's stance on a "feral" animal? SNH recognise that goats are a part of the natural heritage of Scotland but that as with other herbivores need managed. There are challenges with this but JI is confident that decisions based on evidence will ensure that land managers are in a strong position if questioned on decision making.

Collaboration:

This is an action for the DMG as we need to be seen to be delivering improvement of the condition of the SSSI – Glenfalloch doing this through lethal control and RSPB through translocation. FES provided information for the meeting and Comer attended the meeting so that we are showing collaboration. This shows that we are working together and that no one property is standing alone, they are being support by other members.

EG stated that the woodland has been unfavourable for a long time. JI added that there is concern over the timescales for current RSPB management techniques, with to date no solid plan on how suitable goat management will be put in place to deliver Favourable Condition. All agreed that various management tools may have some level of success but that experience shows that lethal control will be the main tool to delivering appropriate goat impacts long term.

FES has problems culling in Craigroyston woodlands due to extraction – boats are really the only option and it was suggested that other members could help out.

Action: The relevant parties were going to discuss this.

Communication – Comms strategy for wider info requests:

It was discussed that this has been a long term issue with some of the local community (Strathard Community Council and the British Feral Goat Research Group) and that a goat cull is a sensitive topic.

RSPB have a meeting in January to discuss what they next steps are and they understand that there is a definite need to reduce numbers and are committed to doing that. They told the group that they will be culling inside their deer fenced enclosures when necessary and have shot 3 this year. JI queried that why it is that RSPB can shoot deer but not the goats?

NC suggested that SNH should be taking a national stance on lethal control of vertebrates and discussing this at a higher level and not at the operational level. EG stated that we already have a policies on welfare in the Deer Code and the Best Practice Guides.

Action: Could Mike Luti speak to Mike Cantlay regarding this issue.

Action: NC to speak with Alasdair MacGugan about immuno-contraception policy? And clarify whether immuno-contraception is suitable for deer in UK.

Action: EG to discuss RSPB vertebrate control policy with Alistair MacGugan and SNH lead on liaising with RSPB. Decide whether there is a significant problem here and request discussions between RSPB and SNH if there is,

Action EG: check what SNH current position is on immunocontraceptive use and share with the group if available.

Developing a Comms strategy was discussed so that the BqDMG could have an agreed statement that could be shared. It will cover what it is we want to deliver, how we are going to doing it and why we are doing it.

Action: JI and FL to share comms strategies they have on file.

FF said he would take EG out stalking so she can understand how it is carried out.

AOB:

FL asked that Goats were not used on any LLTNPA publications or comms material.

Action: NC to email the LLTNPA Comms Department.

Date of Next Meeting:

Date of next meeting – May