

# Balquhiddar Deer Management Group

## Minutes of the Group Meeting

7.00pm on Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> November 2020 by Zoom online

This meeting was held online due to Government restrictions on the movement of people to help reduce the spread of Covid-19.

### Present

Alcuin Arkotxa-MacKenzie (Chair) – Blaircreich (AAM)  
Quintin Lyle (Vice-Chair) – Craighuie (QL)  
Nicola Colquhoun (Treasurer) – Suie (NC)  
Helen MacIntyre (Secretary) (HM)  
Jimmy Irvine – NatureScot (JI)  
Estelle Gill – NatureScot (EG)  
Falcon Frost – Glenfalloch & ADMG rep (FF)  
David Lowes – Glenfalloch (DL)  
Tiff Douglas-Home – Glenfalloch (TDH)  
Nicki Cory-Wright – Glenfalloch (NCW)  
Alan Cory-Wright – Leskine Woods (ACW)  
Jack Wright – Leskine Woods (JW)  
Mike Luti – Auchleskine/Monachyle Beag (ML)

Paul Bekier – FLS (PB)  
Richard Eadington – FLS (RE)  
Douglas McDade – Glen Finglas WTS (DMcD)  
Hamish Thomson – Glen Finglas WTS (HT)  
Fraser Lamont – RSPB (FL)  
Emma Paterson – Suie (EP)  
Alan Sneddon – Monachyle Mhor (AS)  
Malcolm Walker – Scottish Water

### Apologies

Tom Turnbull – ADMG Rep (TT)  
Eddy Dixon – Dochart Woods  
Malcolm McNaughton – Inverlochlarig  
Juan Arkotxa – Muirlaggan

**1. Welcome & Apologies** – Alcuin welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies above.

**2. Approval of minutes of the meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2020 and matters arising**

At 5b second paragraph, it should be Auchlyne not Auchleskine. Approval of minutes was proposed by ML, seconded by AS. Minutes approved. **Action:** HM to correct minutes.

**3. Impacts of Covid-19**

Several members have had difficulties with guests having to cancel and with the venison price being so low. Monachyle Beag's owner is American so he could not come over and most guests had to cancel. HT said Glenfinglas managed to get a better price by switching game dealer to Simpsons Game, who have been good at picking up carcasses.

**4. Counts and culls**

**a) 2020 Stag cull** – FLS had a challenging season, with access to only half the North Katrine area. However, they have managed about 90% of what they had shot last year at this time. They are not seeing many deer on their ground. Blaircreich - most were shot within 100m of the forest edge this year, finding that deer didn't want to come out during the day. QL said deer weren't coming out till 4pm on Craighuie. ML noticed many more people out on the hills. FLS commented that they have been shooting more deer during the day, and the deer are more relaxed. Glen Finglas saw more people around but ended up having a good season. A peatland restoration project on Glen Finglas meant reduced access but it was easier after the project finished. Glenfalloch saw quite a few mature stags and a good rut. They shot one sika stag and also found a dead sika on the road at the Falls of Falloch. They had a good cull but didn't shoot many big stags because they had fewer guests. FL said there had been quite a few decent stags around.

**b) Hind cull targets** – Monachyle Beag will cull at least as many as proposed. Leskine Wood – will depend what comes out of the restock, estimate 20 hinds and 10 calves. Suie – will cull 5 hinds in the western end and whatever they can catch in the east for the farm, hopefully 30 hinds. Blaircreich – hope for 25 hinds. FLS –

target of 200 hinds for North Katrine. Glen Finglas – 65 hinds and 20+ calves. Glenfalloch – target remains the same, with 60-70% of it round the SSSI site. Muirlaggan – 4 hinds. RSPB – 20 hinds.

- c) **October count results** – Monachyle Beag had quite a high heli count in 2019 but the deer seemed to be on Craighuie for this count, perhaps moved by walkers. QL saw lots of deer coming out of the trees, and he used a drone for part of his count. AAM commented that the counts on North Katrine and Glen Finglas were low, reflecting the thoughts that deer overwinter on this land and hence why the helicopter count recorded more deer. It is useful to look at where the deer are at this time of year. JI said it was good that more people were out counting, but where are the missing deer that were counted in 2019? Glenogle, Edinchip and Ballimore didn't manage to count. There was a discussion on whether an October count is useful. It shows deer movements and locations at a different time of year, but some found it harder to count with no snow on the ground. HT commented that in switching to only October counts we would lose a long-standing data set.

Ballimore say they do not have any mature stags on their ground anymore. Glen Finglas and North Katrine can see many more deer on Ballimore, to the extent it has turned into a bit of a sanctuary. Numbers on Glen Finglas have changed on a weekly basis, with the rut starting earlier on Ballimore and then moving over into Glen Finglas. There can be big difference from day to day for the count. HT commented that having seen high hind numbers on Ballimore, research on Rum implies this would push stags off the ground. DMcD said there is daily movement of deer from Ballimore during day and going back at night.

- d) **Population modelling** – JI has updated the group population model with the latest culls and targets. It predicts that the overall number of open range deer is gradually falling. However, there is a split, with the population in the North rising due to culls being lower than annual recruitment, but in the South numbers are falling due to higher culls.

Total proposed hind culls are 429 but only 69 in the north and 360 for the south. AS said he can shoot more on Monachyle Mhor if the deer are there. QL suggested Auchleskine could take more, but ML said if he shoots any near the road he gets complaints. PB asked if Suie plan to cull any deer if they don't capture enough for the farm. NC said it depends on when they come down during the open season. AAM said if we add what Edinchip and Glenogle culled last year then total would be 100 for the north. FF pointed out that from the count of over 1000 in the north a cull of 100 is not really enough. ML said on small hill farms like his and Craighuie when they cull it just pushes the deer between properties. We need the bigger estates to cull more. QL said Malcolm is only planning to cull in plantation areas on Inverlochlarig, not on the open hill.

*Edit: Malcolm has since stated that while plantations are the top priority he will be culling on the open hill and on agricultural land as required.* It was suggested the group receives monthly deer updates from everyone. **Action:** HM to collect monthly culls.

QL asked about venison markets and imports. JI said game dealers are still taking deer just now. He understands that New Zealand deer are going to Asia and the US, not the UK. AS said Highland Game have put all stags into cold storage and haven't sold them yet. UK exports have declined. Waitrose and M&S will no longer bring in New Zealand product as of this spring. UK domestic consumption is up 7% this year with retail prices down 2.7%. However, it doesn't reflect the drastic decrease in price paid by game dealers.

## 5. Deer Management Plan – Actions

- a) **Member updates** – Members should keep the group updated with changes in land use, felling/restock, new planting etc. Suie have now planted 56 acres of native woodland and fenced it. Muirlaggan have felled a few hectares and will fell a few more this year. FLS still do not have access to half of North Katrine but hope to have access soon. Glenfalloch submitted woodland scoping plan to group and will notify when confirmed.

- b) **Authorisations** – FLS have night shooting and OOS authorisations. Night shooting has not happened yet apart from contractors. ML stated concern about the welfare of small calves orphaned by culling hinds in September if the calves were hidden from sight. ML asked if game dealers take small carcasses, and PB confirmed Highland Game don't have a minimum weight limit. FLS follow best practice to make sure there are no welfare impacts. RE said they have supplied all OOS figures to HM. PB said there are currently no contractors working in the DMG, but they may use some later in the year. He is happy to share information with the group. *Edit: FLS may do night shooting if needed.*
- c) **Sika sightings** – Glenfalloch have culled one and seen one. AAM culled a hybrid and kept a sample for JI. FLS had some in Ewich last year, and it seems there are a few in that Tyndrum corner. Ewich is now managed by Tilhill.
- d) **Habitat impact assessments** – Suie did HIAs in 2018 and should have done them this year but will do them next year. ML has a contractor doing his, and will make sure they do it next year. Alcuin did some earlier in the year, with results showing pretty stable impacts. PB said they will send their results to EG. HT said Glen Finglas do their own monitoring including upland monitoring through AECS, and would be interested in some training. NC said either the Park or NatureScot might be able to provide training. Edinchip did ask for training in the past but it wasn't at the right time. AS is also interested in training. FF said there are training videos online. Glenfalloch have just had their HIA results through for this year.

6. **Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG) Report.** – Given by Falcon Frost. See separate report.

#### 7. **NatureScot Report – Jimmy Irvine**

See also separate report from JI.

Please let NatureScot know if you are having public access issues. They are attempting to tackle these issues with PR campaigns.

EG will chat with JI and NC about formal HIA training, but she is happy to come out and help people informally.

ML asked about the thermal imaging trials. JI said they are still ongoing this winter. NatureScot and FLS are doing the culling under special dispensation. NatureScot have shot 2 deer at night so far. Any change in legislation will probably take years to happen. Consultations will be part of the process.

#### 8. **National Park report – Nicola Colquhoun**

The Park have a budget for training for upland and woodland HIAs. Woodland training will be in March, upland in Apr/May.

Some peatland work has been done on Glen Finglas and they are looking at some peatland work on Glenfalloch. Government funding now comes directly to the National Park, speeding up the process. Members should talk to NC if interested in peatland restoration.

They are still running a tree planting scheme grant this year, a fairly small pot of money for agroforestry, riparian planting etc. **Action:** HM to pass on information to members.

Alcuin asked what the Park rangers are doing driving up and down the glen. NC said they are doing tree planting up Balquhidder glen and will also be doing patrols for camping. They would be happy to help with conservation projects if members have any suggestions.

## 9. Accounts – Nicola Colquhoun, Treasurer

The ADMG subscription is slightly lower than budgeted. The secretarial fees and expenses will also be slightly lower this year since there are no travel costs or hall costs due to coronavirus.

## 10. Any Other Business

- a) Non-lead ammunition. Malcolm McNaughton was unable to attend the meeting but has asked about lead vs copper bullets. JW uses non-lead TTSX 110 grade, has culled many deer with them and they do the job. QL has heard some are seeing deer running after being shot with non-lead. FF said 308 non-toxic RWS are working really well too. Copper can work well too, but it depends on the rifle. FLS have been using non-toxic ammo for over a year now, and had varying reports. Smaller, faster 270 rounds seem to be more successful. JI said for 270 copper ammo there is a wide selection, but below 270 there are reduced options. The DWG report recommended looking at under 100 grain bullet copper ammunition to see if that makes any difference. JI assumes a trial will take place in the future. Glen Finglas are using 130 grain 270 which seem to work well.
- b) HM has had a request from a student for count and cull data. WTS and FLS are happy for data to be shared.
- c) There was a poaching incident at Auchleskine last month. Any info please get in touch with PC Diamond.
- d) ML asked FLS if they have a licence for predator control. PB said they have a fox control policy and look to protect vulnerable species where appropriate. Someone shot some foxes illegally earlier in the year on North Katrine. FLS are still investigating it and have some photos to look through.
- e) A young sea eagle has been seen on Glenfalloch, Auchlyne and Monachyle Mhor. It ate the side and shoulder off a hind FF had shot. PB said they have had a lot of raven damage of shot beasts this year.
- f) Count plans for next year – It was decided there would be no foot count. Members are encouraged to do a recruitment count in April for their own use (count a few groups of deer and calculate what percentage of hinds have calves). The group will continue to use the 2019 helicopter count for population modelling.
- g) Updating the Deer Management Plan (DMP) – There was a discussion about what the group should be doing to update the Plan. AMM thinks many members make their own decisions on culls and don't consult the Plan. There is difficulty within the group of reconciling deer management priorities within land management objectives.

HM has been keeping the deer statistics in the Plan updated but needs some input from members to keep their landholding information correct. The action points will also need updating. ML said he is happy to help have a word with the estates that don't currently get involved.

JI explained that the DMP is how the group provides the public with information, which is important at a time when there is significant focus on the land management industry to be delivering in the public interest. He says there is no need to look outside the group for help updating the plan as we have the expertise and interest within the group. An executive committee could help with updating the plan and with dealing with any other relevant issues in between group meetings. FF, HT and NC all volunteered to help update the Plan. Overall, the members present want the working plan to be reviewed and updated. **Action:** re-establish the executive committee to help with updating the Plan and addressing other DMG business.

## 11. Date of Next Group Meeting – 7pm on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2021, Balquhidder Village Hall (coronavirus restrictions permitting)