

# Balquhiddy Deer Management Group

## Minutes of the Group Meeting

7.00pm on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> April 2021 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)  
Nicola Colquhoun (Treasurer) – Suie (NC)  
Helen MacIntyre (Secretary) (HM)  
Jimmy Irvine – NatureScot (JI)  
Paul Roberts – NatureScot (PR)  
Estelle Gill – NatureScot (EG)  
Falcon Frost – Glenfalloch & ADMG rep (FF)  
David Lowes – Glenfalloch (DL)  
Tiff Douglas-Home – Glenfalloch (TDH)  
Alan Cory-Wright – Leskine Woods (ACW)  
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)  
Rupert Briggs – Monachyle Glen (RB)

### Apologies

Alan Sneddon – Monachyle Mhor  
John Sinclair – Glenogle West  
Malcolm McNaughton – Inverlochlarig  
Juan Arkotxa – Muirlaggan  
PC Heather Campbell

**1. Welcome & Apologies** – Alcuin welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies above. The replacement for Will Diamond, PC Heather Campbell, was invited but she is not yet in post. She is keen to come to the next meeting. NC suggested we could invite her to the first 15 minutes to discuss anything and then she can leave.

**2. Approval of minutes of the meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2020 and matters arising**  
No matters arising. Approval of minutes was proposed by DL, seconded by ML. Minutes approved.

**3. Accounts for 2020-21**  
Report circulated separately. NC requests people pay their subs before April to help with the accounts. Some subs are outstanding and are included in next year's budget. Secretarial fees were lower than budgeted due to no travel. This coming year, we have budgeted for increased secretarial costs to allow a deer management plan update.

There is around £7000 in the bank. The group should decide what to do with the surplus. AAM has talked to the Park about match funding for HIA work. **Action:** Discuss surplus at next group meeting.

### 4. Population data

#### a) Review of 2020-21 culls and mortality

Some members had reduced culls due to coronavirus restrictions. Mortality was reported by 5 members: 44 natural mortality, of which 28 were calves. Additionally, 3 DVCs reported. AAM said we are slowly bringing additional properties on board. It is great to have Rupert from Monachyle Glen here. PB explained that North Katrine started culling late in the year and didn't see so many deer until the hard winter came in. There are not so many resident deer, but they shot what they could. Glenfalloch are happy with their cull and have not seen many dead deer. NC said some of the calves captured on Suie were skinny. AAM said they saw skinny calves on Blaircreich too. HT said WTS had no natural mortality.

HT asked why woodland and open range hind culls are grouped together. AAM explained that most of the woodland fences are porous. Glen Finglas request that their woodland cull is removed from the comparison

of actual and target culls. ML said there is movement between Monachyle Beag and Monachyle Wood. NC reviewed all the deer fences across the group a few years ago. It was suggested we should look at this again. FL would count anything inside the fence as shot in woodland, but would count that towards the target. FF agrees it is not easy deciding what areas of woodland should and shouldn't be included. HT said deer fences should be maintained or removed if not safe. Woodland Trust are hoping to remove deer fences eventually. **Action:** HM to review fencing – send map for people to mark on fences that are deer proof. JI said we don't want to make things too complicated. No deer fence is 100% deer-proof. For the population model, those properties that were not counted in the 2019 helicopter count are not included in the model.

It was discussed whether the headings on the table are wrong since we have some enclosed woodland and some more open. **Action:** HM to change them to 'open range' and 'enclosed woodland'.

FL asked JI about whether population modelling is still to be used or should we be looking more at HIAs for assessing populations. JI said DWG recommendations focus on what BqDMG are doing already, with both population modelling and HIA intertwined.

#### b) Population modelling and proposed 2021-22 culls

Property (north)	2021 proposed stag cull
Auchleskine	2
Craigruie	12
Dochart Woods	
Edinchip	
FLS Balquhidder	
FLS Crianlarich	
Glen Clotha Forest	
Glenogle & Leskine	10
Leskine Forest	
Monachyle Beag	8
Monachyle Glen	10
Monachyle Mhor	15
Suie	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>

Property (south)	2021 proposed stag cull
Ballimore	
Ballimore Woods	
Blaircreich	20
FLS Achray North	
FLS North Katrine	80
FLS Strathyre West	
Glen Finglas	55
Glenfalloch (East)	20
Immeroin	
Inverlochlarig	20
Muirlaggan	14
RSPB Inversnaid	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>219</b>

JI explained that the population model is based on the 2019 count and latest culls. It is a guide to show the group where the deer population is heading and how it might react to the culls that are being taken. The mortality assumption may need adjusted this year. Overall, it is suggesting that group wide the population of hinds should be coming down, but we will need to compare this with future counts.

In terms of objectives for the group, there are two different stories if you look at north and south separately. For the south, hind culls are higher and numbers are coming down, as per some members' objectives. For the north, it shows a potential increase in hind population.

ML said he believes there are grounds that can take more than 10 deer per sq km, such as where they shelter, including Monachyle Glen and Monachyle Beag. AAM said if HIAs can show that your ground can take those numbers of deer then that is fine. JI said the population model contains objectives from the DMP which are 5 years old, so these will need reviewing. **Action:** to review hind targets at the next meeting.

### **c) Out of season and night authorisations**

FLS have OOS in place and will apply for night shooting. WTS will apply for OOS on open hill (hinds & stags).

Thermal trials – JI explained that due to covid issues the trial is still ongoing, and will still be doing trials this winter. ML asked if there is going to be a consultation after trial, and JI said yes he believes so.

### **d) Assessing woodland populations**

EG has sent HM recent assessment information from woodland HIAs of some of the designated sites within the group, which we can use to update the group Plan. They show higher impacts than the open range does, which are enough to prevent tree regeneration. AAM asked if this includes beaver damage, as there is some at Edinchip. EG said she hasn't seen any.

## **5. Habitat Impact Assessments**

Plans for HIAs this year were discussed. Suie, Glenfalloch and Monachyle Beag will all be doing HIAs this year. DL suggested we should compare the population model and the HIA data to see if they correlate.

PR explained that Heather, a student working with NatureScot, is pulling together data on woodland condition within the group as part of the Loch Lomond Woods project, which is looking at protected sites and the areas in between. They are taking a landscape-scale approach, setting designated sites within the wider habitat. Data collection is from NS and potentially DMGs and others on woodland condition and pressures from deer, sheep and goats. They are also looking at some open ground. In addition, they are gathering ecosystem services data, such as recreation, venison production, let stalking and how it contributes to local economy. A report and map will be produced. Heather is half way through the year-long project.

## **6. Deer Management Plan updates**

The executive committee discussed this at their meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> April. It was decided that HM would look at the Plan and update relevant sections, requesting information from members where required.

## **7. Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG) Report - FF**

The SG response to the DWG recommendations recognises the hard work of DMGs. Some people are very disappointed with the response. FF is not as unhappy as he thought he would be.

Key issues include:

- a. ending the closed stag season;
- b. end use of lead bullets – in England the game dealers are to be taking only non-toxic shot meat from 1st July 2022;
- c. potential statutory cull returns;
- d. publicly accessible national cull database – some not happy about this;
- e. DMG assessments to end, which some are happy with, but we shouldn't just sit back as SG will likely look again to see how we are doing;
- f. looking at other structures for collaboration, and also looking at individuals;
- g. 10 deer per sq km max on the open range - if you can demonstrate your habitats are in good condition then you don't need to worry;
- h. counting to be less important, but FF doesn't agree with this;
- i. cull approval system.

ADMG are going to work through these points, but NatureScot don't know any details yet anyway.

Green recovery is driving the development of carbon credits market.

Venison marketing - £50k was given by SG, and it had to be spent by end of March although we were still in lockdown so it wasn't ideal timing. The venison price is not going to get better soon since there is still plenty of

stock in cold storage.

Fyne Game is closing and he recommends you make arrangements soon. AAM has talked to Kirsty at Highland Game, and they need to know how many deer they will be collecting so they can order enough lorries.

Trophy exports to the EU – new regulations mean you have to complete forms and get items certified by a vet.  
**Action:** HM to send round link to BASC guidance.

There are HIA videos on the ADMG website if you need a refresher.

SWARD software is being revisited by ADMG for deer managers to input HIA and deer data etc.

The ADMG AGM will be held on 23rd June, either at Drumossie Hotel Inverness or by Zoom.

#### **8. NatureScot report (JI) and Scottish Government response to Deer Working Group recommendations**

Jl said FF covered the main issues. It is very early days, and NS are considering how to do what SG are asking for. There is a significant amount of work required for across the whole of Scotland, whether new collaborative groups, cull database etc. Tidying up the legislation will be helpful. There are a lot of internal discussions about the resources needed for this. PR said he can't see any other way of managing deer than DMGs. NS haven't had a response to their 2019 report yet. Jl assumes this will come once the new SG is in place.

Deer count trials have been looking at lower carbon alternatives to helicopters: UAV drones and satellites. Satellites can also look at habitat conditions. It is still early days in the trial. UAV drones are military grade and can be flown up to around 4 miles away, compared to 500m for a normal drone.

Venison – most of the marketing has been targeted in the South of England, where much of the market is. Jl said we all have a role to play in promotion. He would like to see a joint approach from NGOs. DL said we all have a responsibility to promote the role of this local, organic, sustainable source of meat. Some conservation bodies who cull are not supporting this and are avoiding the conversation with their members. Without the venison market what would happen to the habitats in Scotland? HT sees an opportunity at Glen Finglas rather than the wider WTS, and would like to look into this but not in the immediate future. There are obviously sensitivities within the conservation sector. FL thinks there is a reluctance at RSPB to show that they are making money from venison, but he agrees that the demand for venison is vital for habitat protection and he will mention it to staff higher up at RSPB. ML agrees with DL – the charities tend to keep away from the idea that they kill things, but they need to be transparent and tell the truth.

ML is not very encouraged by the recommendations and asked if there is any chance of statutory controls. Jl said yes NS would have the right to impose culls, but the legislation is already there for that. ML is totally against any statutory controls being imposed on any DMGs. He is also against out of season and night shooting on open ground, apart from in exceptional circumstances. He believes we need to have deer welfare and health as our top priorities.

AAM asked if the proposed fit and competent register would mean a move to a more European system. FF said there is already a register for OOS authorisations. Jl said it is still to be decided. It could be that the register would mean people on it could shoot on their own or take a guest along with them, to ensure good welfare and venison suitable for consumption. The Deer Welfare Committee have also responded to the DWG report. **Action:** Jl to send link to this to HM for circulation.

## **9. Any Other Business**

- a) Sika – Glenfalloch did not see any sika during hind season but saw a sika at Ewich a few weeks ago. They make a strange whistle sound.
- b) HM reminded members to make sure they update their stalking information on the Heading for the Scottish Hills website.
- c) ML said they have some badger-faced deer, some pure white too, and they have an agreement with neighbours to leave them alone.

**10. Date of Next Group Meeting** – 7pm on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2021. Venue TBC.