

Balquhiddar Deer Management Group

Minutes of the Group Meeting

7.00pm on Monday 15th November 2021 by Zoom online

Present

Alcuin Arkotxa-MacKenzie (Chair) – Blaircreich (AAM)
Nicola Colquhoun (Treasurer) – Suie (NC)
Helen MacIntyre (Secretary) (HM)
Estelle Gill – NatureScot (EG)
Falcon Frost – Glenfalloch & ADMG rep (FF)
Tiff Douglas-Home – Glenfalloch (TDH)
Alan Cory-Wright – Leskine Woods (ACW)
Mike Luti – Auchleskine/Monachyle Beag (ML)
Richard Eadington – FLS (RE)
Hamish Thomson – Glen Finglas WTS (HT)
Fraser Lamont – RSPB (FL)
Emma Paterson – Suie (EP)
Rupert Briggs – Monachyle Glen (RB)

Apologies

Jimmy Irvine – NatureScot
David Lowes – Glenfalloch
Paul Bekier – FLS
Douglas McDade – Glen Finglas WTS
Alan Sneddon – Monachyle Mhor
John Sinclair – Glenogle West
Malcolm McNaughton – Inverlochlarig
Quintin Lyle – Craigrue
Ian Dingwall – Suie
Rolf Thornqvist – Leskine Woods
Juan Arkotxa – Muirlaggan

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

2. Approval of minutes of the meeting on 21st April 2021 and matters arising

DL has submitted a comment in advance about venison marketing. He asks whether the conservation bodies have considered the point about marketing further, particularly whether the Woodland Trust at Glenfinglas has any plans now to do any marketing, and whether Fraser got any response from staff higher up in RSPB to whom he was going to mention it. DL thinks that effective venison marketing is fundamental to achieving cull goals, and he believes that any deer manager, whether eNGO, public body or private manager, has a responsibility to support this. The biodiversity emergency isn't going to solve itself without our collective efforts. With the Country Food Trust now interested in taking venison and distributing it to food banks etc. to alleviate food poverty, we have an ideal opportunity to improve understanding of the importance of venison to the nation. FL has had a lukewarm response from higher up at RSPB but will not give up on it. HT said the main issue is capacity. Glen Finglas are due a management plan review next year and he would like to add value to their meat production, but this will not happen soon but certainly in the future.

EG would like to clarify from the previous minutes her statement regarding the beavers, that although she hasn't seen any they are in the DMG area.

FL would like to amend the wording in the minutes regarding RSPB selling venison, to make it clear that they don't make a profit from it. They don't make money from selling venison, and there might be sensitivities with RSPB supporters.

Approval of the minutes was proposed by ML, seconded by NC. Minutes approved.

3. Counts and culls

a) 2021 stag cull

ML said they didn't have very many mature stags. On Suie, they didn't see the number of stags they wanted, and the rut was very late. Deer were in very good condition, but the weather wasn't great. FF said stags were in great condition, the rut was a bit stop-start. Glenfalloch was 5 down on their stag cull but will cull these

over the coming months. NC said Dochart Woods have been culling recently, so HM to send reminder for cull figures. HT said weren't seeing many deer about earlier in the season, and will probably get their full target later in the season. AAM said deer are not hanging around on the hill much, mostly out at dawn and dusk. He also heard them rutting after the season. RE said it was quite quiet through the rut. On Katrine they also only saw deer at dawn and dusk. FLS will complete their target. They still don't have vehicle access at one end of the loch.

b) Hind cull targets

We don't have FLS North Katrine figures yet. FF said their target is slightly lower than last year, and will be concentrated in SSSI areas. EP said they are not sure what they will cull on Suie as they are not seeing many deer, not like the numbers at the last helicopter count. They are not capturing deer for the farm this year, perhaps next year. ML would agree that deer numbers are down. AAM said they are not seeing big numbers up at Blaircreich, probably due to cull pressure on them over the past few years.

c) 2022 count

FF said it is really important we get a good count. There are no helicopter counts planned at NS yet. Most members are keen to do a foot count. FLS will do their best to get people to count if everyone is counting. EP offered Ian Dingwall to co-ordinate the count. The count date was set for Mon 21st February, but if the weather is not suitable then it will be moved to Mon 28th. We need a critical hectareage to make it worthwhile. The last foot count percentage coverage was quite low so we decided not to use the data. The 2017 foot count covered 72% of the area. In the past we have done counts, used the figures in population modelling and then it has not been used for setting culls anyway. The seasonal movement of the deer affects culls, counting deer in the Spring but then they are not there in the cull seasons. If people don't have confidence in the population model then they should count the deer on their ground so we have accurate figures to put into the model. FF thinks it's mostly the stags that move between the count and the cull season. AAM said this is the main reason that Balliemore left the group, because too many of their stags are shot out of season in their wintering grounds to the south. EG said Jimmy Irvine says the hind population in the north is rising. HT said they are seeing stags coming to them from Balliemore, but if you look at the helicopter count for Balliemore you can see the high numbers of hinds so the stags are being forced out. If Balliemore were to reduce their hinds that would help keep more stags and then WTS wouldn't have to cull so many. HT said they are managing for their own objectives, mainly growing trees and also repairing peatlands, so they need to manage deer numbers.

d) Population modelling – We cannot update the model until all culls are in.

4. Deer Management Plan

a) Member updates – land use, felling/restock, new planting

Muirlaggan have been felling and will be restocking so they will have to reduce hinds coming on to the land and will put up deer fences to keep them out. HM has circulated new planting plans at Inverlochlarig. ACW said there is a small block of restock in Leskine Forest and they are going through the plans for the next section of felling on that block. There is no point fencing it because it keeps getting cut. **Action:** ACW to send plans to HM.

b) Authorisations – ML asked for comments on culling in September, but we don't have the FLS culls in yet.

c) Sika sightings – Ewich has some sika, but this is just outside the group boundary.

d) Habitat Impact Assessments

Suie did HIAs this summer which showed all low impacts. EG said the tops of Ben More looked good – they had been affected by sheep grazing in the past. Glenfalloch did HIAs, mostly showing low to medium impacts, some high. ML said Monachyle Beag will be having an assessment next Spring/Summer. RE said FLS have done a lot of

HIAs this year. HT said Glen Finglas have always done their own monitoring, and this Spring they started doing upland HIA too.

5. Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG) Report - FF

There has not been much progress on implementing the Deer Working Group report recommendations yet.

Lead-shot game will no longer be accepted by most game dealers from July 2022. This has been driven by the market. Glenfalloch have used 99% of their bullets as copper. They are mostly fine, but sometimes the bullet can ricochet and come out at a strange angle.

ADMG have held several online meetings.

ADMG have written to Minister for Environment and Land Reform, Mairi McAllan to request a meeting with her, and also with Lorna Slater the Green MSP and Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity.

The Scottish Venison Association has received over £160k of funding over the last couple of years. Some game dealers are getting 40p/kg premium for SQWV. Glenfalloch is currently getting £1.50 from Highland Game and Blaircreich is getting £1.50 from Hubertus Game.

ADMG want to hear about any access issues during stalking, and any good experiences of access. Glenfalloch are getting lots of emails asking about stalking. AAM is seeing many more mountain bikers in remote areas, maybe because of e-bikes giving greater access. Glenfalloch said they are seeing this too.

ADMG are part of a common ground project on conflict resolution in deer management. A report is due and will be shared when available.

ADMG have asked JHI to investigate the carbon footprint of deer.

ADMG are looking into the use of Deormap, a mapping database that will enable us to map the impact of management decisions on deer populations and their movements.

ADMG is supporting the Country Food Trust in giving out venison to those in need.

ADMG's stance on September culling is that they urge culling within season wherever possible.

Richard Cooke has stepped down as Chair and is now Vice Chair.

6. NatureScot report (EG)

A report for all DMGs has been circulated separately.

AAM asked if the upper target density of 10 deer per square kilometre is an orthorectified square km (i.e. removing elevation changes to flatten the square). EG will check.

AECS funding schemes will be available next year, which would include HIAs on any SSSIs within a deer range.

ACW explained that Breadalbane DMG are having trials in December of military drone technology which can identify hinds and calves, and the DMG have contributed financially to this. They hope to do a presentation on the results next year.

ML asked EG if you require owner permission to fly a drone across someone's ground. EG said she is not sure,

but if it is not for recreational use then you might need permission. FL said you would need permission if you are standing on someone's property to fly a drone. New drones have aircraft avoidance tech so that negates the 500m limit on how far your drone can be from the operator.

7. National Park report (NC)

The Park can offer direct peatland restoration funding so you don't need to go through Peatland Action. They have just recruited a new staff member to help their peatland officer.

There is a pot of money to help fund any surveys needed before applying for woodland grants.

HIA training could be available, but they don't want to duplicate what NatureScot is offering.

8. Any Other Business

Balquhiddier, Lochearnhead & Strathgryre Community Council have asked if someone would like to come to one of their meetings and give a short presentation on our work and current issues. Please contact Helen MacIntyre if interested.

We had hoped that James Hand from FLS would join the meeting to talk about planting plans in North Katrine but unfortunately he couldn't make it. NC has had a meeting with James and the plans are still very much in draft form. There is quite substantial planting on the plans, so she assumes they will have to fence that and there will be a knock-on effect on deer in the south of the group. **Action:** HM to ask JH for an update for the group.

9. Date of Next Group Meeting

28th April at Balquhiddier or Lochearnhead hall. **Action:** HM to book hall.