

Lochalsh Deer Management Group
Meeting 2nd November, 2023 at Attadale

Present: Joanna Macpherson (chair), Ewen Macpherson, Alec Cormack, Thomas Watson, Councillor Biz Campbell, Russell Cooper, Linzi Sievwright, Andrew Slaughter, Megan Rowland, Nicola Williamson, Catriona MacRae

Apologies: Willie Fraser, Chris Russell, Donald MacKenzie, Nicholas Wills

Joanna opened the meeting by welcoming everyone.

Minutes of Last Meeting

Joanna mentioned Russell had tweaked the previous minutes and she has distributed the amended Minutes to all parties. They did not in fact need to be tweaked and it was agreed that Russell had misunderstood.

Chairmans Report

Joanna distributed the attached ADMG Autumn Update 2023 leaflet and encouraged all to read over this very informative document which covers following topics:-

1. Key Changes to Secondary Legislation
2. Scottish Biodiversity Action Plan Consultation
3. Environment Bill
4. Common Ground Forum
5. Heading to the Scottish Hills
6. ADMG Programme Ahead
7. Scottish Venison

A copy is attached to these minutes. Section 2 covers the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Action Plan Consultation. There is a link at the end of this section for individual deer managers and Deer Management Groups to respond if they wish. Linzi pointed out there is a lack of clarity here and queries whether it fits in with plans for the 30/30 project. She does however think ADMG are heading in the right direction. The Government are working with skewed figures of much higher deer populations of around 1 million deer when in fact there are around 250,000 and there is a need to change the narrative. Andrew asked why the Government are not being challenged on this. Linzi advised the Government are focused on groups sitting above the 10 deer per KM². The Govt. need to re-address the focus to the lowlands where deer number are high. There need to be an equitable approach. Southwest Ross Group are on the right trajectory and are not coming to the attention of Nature Scotland

Update on Deer Management Plan

Linzi has provided an updated Deer population Model which is attached to these minutes.

Andrew is concerned that the NTS are shooting stags that are completely spent which are not part of their herd, some of which are Inverinate feeders along with other neighbouring Estates' returning to home. This will not reduce their number and it is not good for the food chain. It was generally

agreed that space should be created for stags as stag behaviour will not change. Stags cannot get to good ground because of the Woodland Schemes.

It is understood that NTS need to reduce numbers and that they did not start shooting stags until September. However, they are not going to decrease their own stag numbers by shooting stags belonging to other Estates. Linzi agreed she would speak to Willie Fraser on this matter.

Nicola asked why stags are fed when they will be culled anyway? Also, where the stag number comes from, is it based on the ground or is it a business model? Linzi agreed this is exactly the conversation we should be having.

Joanna or Andrew agreed they will try and attend the next Affric meeting and Linzi will provide figures from Strathfarrar for comparison. Strathconon are aiming for 7 deer per KM² as there is a huge Woodland Scheme at Fairburn.

Linzi's message is to keep the pressure on and not take the foot of the pedal.

Nature Scot Report

Megan Rowland, newly appointed Wildlife Management Officer introduced herself. Most of the information she wanted to convey is contained within the ADMG Autumn Update 2023 leaflet. She added that liaison between groups should be better going forward, and she intends to get out on the ground rather than being office based.

Deer Counts are being done in North Ross. Discussion was had about the different methods for counting such as drone counting, thermal imaging, satellite imagery and an AI system. Thomas concerned that false numbers from counts are a problem. Linzi said that drones are being quite successful.

FLS Report

No issue with fences or forestry at the moment.

All is good in Strome. Linzi confirmed numbers stable at Glenmoriston. It would be useful if numbers were reduced at Corrielaire.

Joanna has received communication from Nicholas Wills that due to high ground at Achnashellach any tree planting is difficult.

Venison Sales

Thomas strongly believes there should be more incentive to use non toxic ammunition and that better prices should be paid. There is no bonus for using the non-toxic bullets which are more expensive to buy. At the moment any lead shot beasts must be labelled LB. Simpsons pay £0.10 less for Lead shot.

Nicola advised that J & B Game Dealers are offering £1.35 per kilo for hinds.

Ewen said Attadale had had a successful season with 63 stags killed with 63 shots, so it is clear that the right non-toxic ammunition can do a great job.

Treasurer's Report

Alec told the group that the numbers have been processed and the ADMG fee for each estate is still based on the traditional 5 year average. Invoices would be sent out soon.

NB All invoices have now been sent out.

AOB

Joanna has received correspondence from Nicholas Wills about an estate in Perth which currently has 23 deer per KM² who are challenging Nature Scotland proposals on the grounds that deer are far more beneficial to the Estate and economy. Linzi said this is unlikely to be successful and that a huge spotlight will be shone on this type of Estate, and they will be hit hard when the legislation is passed. She assured the group that most groups are on the correct trajectory and are committed to reduce numbers.

The group agree that more incentives should be given to Estates who try different ways to make money such as selling packages where people could come and learn and experience the whole process of bringing venison to the table from stalking to butchering. While none of the Estates in the LDMG group operate commercially as such, Attadale does well with venison sales. More needs to be done to get the public eating venison.

There was some discussion about the wild boar that are in areas bordering the LDMG Estates. Russell reported that 34 were spotted in one night near Drumnadrochit. FLS are culling boar but are currently waiting on guidance regarding shooting.

Nicola told the group that she is currently working on a project where some deer will be tranquillised, tagged and collared to monitor feed habits, mortality and movement. Some funding has been approved for this and more has been applied for. Tags cost £1000 each and hopefully 10 – 20 deer can be tagged. The information gained from this would be very interesting and useful.

Nicola asked about HIA Assessments and Andrew confirmed upland Inverinate Estate has been completed. Nicola offered training and Thomas is looking at possible dates for this. These assessments should be done every three years. Linzi offered to look at data.

Next Meeting

After hinds – Mid March 2024