

**MINUTES OF THE EAST GRAMPIAN DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP SUB AREA 1
MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 26th MARCH 2018
AT GLENISLA VILLAGE HALL
AT 9.30AM**

PRESENT: Dr Florian Kuhnle – In the Chair
Bruce Cooper – Vice Chairman
Deirdre Stewart – Secretary

Hector McLean, Balnaboth
Wayne Johnston, Glenshee
Kevin Peters, FES
Liam Donald, Glenshee
Bill Mearns, Tulchan
Rob Mearns, Lednathie/Balintore
Thom Wells, Clova
Brian Smith, Airlie
Shona Smith, SNH Corrie Fee
Ian Hope, SNH
Colin McLean, Deer Consultancy Services
Angus McNicol, Invercauld
Nick Gibb, Glenisla
Hugh Niven, Clova
Graham Slater, Auchavan
Graham Irvine, Clova

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Major J Gibb, Jason Williamson, Archie Bennett and James Davidson.

2 MINUTES FROM LAST MEETING OCTOBER 2017

Minutes have been circulated.

**3/4/5 SNH HELICOPTER COUNT JANUARY 2018/
HIND CULL/
POPULATION MODELLING/**

- Deirdre Stewart requested the Group count map from SNH.
- Comments and Discussion;
Nick Gibb raised the matter of inconsistency between the 2018 count, and previous counts, there being inconsistency in the global area counted. He therefore raised the matter that the data was not comparable.

Bruce Cooper replied that there certainly were corners where there were more deer, so be believed there were segments of the data which were comparable.

Nick Gibb reported that Jason Williamson had moved deer on to Glenisla and, that Jason openly admits this. There was also concern on the amount of deer on Auchavan during the count.

There was no double counting of deer. Movement of deer was discussed and Bill Mearns said that he was subject to deer moving on to Tulchan from Glenshee, but this was taken into account. Beyond discussion on deer movements at the time of the count, Bruce, Florian and Bill said that what is important is the Group total, and not necessarily area specific totals. We therefore need to consider this data in terms of population and recruitment.

Rob Mearns added that there had been 5 stalkers within the Harran plantation the day before the count, which had shifted deer out of there, on to the open hill.

Colin McLean explained that the helicopter count is considered the "gold standard" in counting methodology. He believes that we ought to use the 2018 data as information for management purposes. Colin believes that there are difficulties with the population model which we do not yet understand. He also suggested that because there is a percentage error in helicopter counting, this may account for the difference between the 2016 and 2018 figures. He added that population modelling is indicative, and we have to use this as a management tool.

Liam Donald added that there had been no movement from hinds into the Group area from that corner. Hector McLean asked about adjacent groups, and Colin McLean reported that the South Deeside North Angus count remains stable. They did do a foot count on the 5th March. Angus McNicol added that Callater was mainly a concentration of stags. So therefore we believe the boundary to the west and south-west are relatively stable boundaries with little incoming movement.

Nick added that calves represent about 30% of the total. Calving rates are believed to be around 60% but this does not account for the increase in deer. He added that the hinds are in very poor condition from what he had seen. He feels that we do not have reliable data in order to justify and increased hind cull. He added that we regretted his father was not present at today's meeting.

Bill Mearns added that he knew that hind numbers were increasing. He

says that Tulchan hinds are in good condition. They do feed but have fed less due to less deer on the ground this winter. No hinds were in such poor condition that they needed to be left on the hill/discarded. He added that there were definitely younger hinds coming in to calf. Tulchan were still shooting at today's date, and have found a greater increase in female calves present.

Angus McNicol asked was there anywhere else where there was an element of inward migration. Bruce said that more woodlands were offering access to deer for example the monument wood at Airlie, and Harran, which may mean that deer were here but not counted.

Colin McLean said that we have to react to the count figures from January 2018.

Ian Hope said that we must make best use of the information that we have as a Group. We have to use that information to our satisfaction in order to justify to ourselves that we are doing the right thing. It is also outwardly important to demonstrate this to others. The Group therefore needs to do population modelling. He added that we do need to make allowances within the model, such as reproductive rates varying year to year. If deer are in poor condition, then what are the contributing factors to this? Food source? Quality of the environment? Hector McLean asked about thermal imaging for counting. Ian Hope said they consider it unsuitable. Ian Hope did suggest dung counting. Nick Gibb suggested a summer count. Ian Hope reported that summer counts since 2008 showed numbers increasing in summer (last one carried out in 2013). Florian asked if SNH would support a summer count? Bruce said that there was no point in doing this we have to accept we have an increase in population. Bill Mearns mentioned looking to do a cull of hinds in October within the Caenlochan area. Ian Hope asked for cull data up until the helicopter count so that animals culled after the count could be discounted. Advice was given that we should be sexing all calves shot.

In summary, we culled 860 hinds as a Group and 335 calves, when target for hinds was 600.

Florian said that we need to shoot hinds when we can and where they are. Bruce called for some cross boundary culling in order to achieve this and doubling the cull. Colin again asked for cull data prior to the count and after the count plus mortality data plus recruitment information.

Bruce reiterated that it was hinds that needed the increase cull. Colin added that there are around 1000 more stags in the count. Nick raised the matter of shooting stags in the spring. Bruce sympathised with this matter, with stags on spring grass at this time.

Angus McNicol said that, reporting from the ADMG AGM, that Section 7 Agreements are to be reviewed, so we ought to try to be ahead of the game. This is especially so in the light of the habitat assessment work to be done on the Caenlochan reserve in the spring time. Bill asked when would be earliest that you could shoot hinds and advice was given 1st September. The advice provided on deer welfare and culling, combining veterinary, prefers the culling of hinds in calf. This is an SNH policy, and the priority is not for venison quality. Ian Hope was asked if SNH would be willing to help with an increased cull. He said undoubtedly, both with advice and practically. He felt the best way to avoid further regulation was to request help.

If doubling the hind cull did result in a reduced deer count, then we could begin to assume that it is recruitment that is a contributing factor to increased population. Bruce Cooper said that it is achievable within the season, and that out of season authorisations may not be necessary. Nick expressed concern over culling hefted hinds. Bruce reiterated that the only way to do this effectively was to involve cross border/collaborative culling. Hector McLean asked about where sanctuaries were within the Group for deer. These were identified as Scottish Water ground at Glenhead/Glendamp, Harran plantation, Auchavan and Clova. Bill suggested that the stalkers meet to discuss a collaborative effort.

On the matter of Clova, Hugh Niven asked about road access/FC. Ian Hope offered assistance if access is needed for deer control to reduce damage to habitat. Thom Wells said that the numbers counted on Clova were not resident. Hector McLean claimed that the deer were 'just vermin', and was countered by Mr Niven. Colin McLean was therefore asked to conduct population modelling on behalf of the Group.

(Hugh Niven then took early leave from the meeting).

Ian Hope then asked about the geographic scale of the area being analysed. Was it out instruction to model the Caenlochan count area or the East Grampian Count Area? Wayne Johnston claimed that we need to double or treble the cull. Bruce said we certainly have to double the cull.

OUT OF SEASON AUTHORISATIONS

The following Group members were identified as using an out of season authorisation at the end of the hind season in 2018. There were Tulchan, SNH Corrie, Glenshee and Glenprosen/Balnaboth/Scottish Water.

6. DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN – ACTION POINTS

A report was gathered upon winter mortality as follows:

Estate	Numbers Reported
Clova	15 of mixed hinds, stags, calves and likelihood of finding more when snow melts.
Glenshee	
SNH Corrie Fee	2 stags, likelihood of more to come.
Tulchan	0
Balintore	0
Auchavan	4 hind calves
Forestry Commission	2 hinds
Glenprosen	1 dead roe calf on the Scottish Water ground. Bruce mentioned likely to be quite a serious mortality in roe from this winter.
Glenisla	6 red deer and also a high mortality on roe.

ADMG

Angus McNicol reported from his attendance at the ADMG AGM, that mock reassessments were being offered free of charge prior to the Group assessment by SNH in 2019. It was agreed that the Group should opt to be reassessed this way during 2018. (Update; Interest in this exercise has been registered with ADMG by the Secretary)

7. HABITAT IMPACT ASSESSMENT WORK

The Caenlochan reserve will be surveyed by SNH in 2019. Ian Hope reported that tenders were being gathered for this exercise to be commissioned by SNH. Plot data for habitat work on Group Members Estates was requested from SNH, and has since been provided. Deirdre Stewart called for a commitment from Group Members to conduct Habitat Impact Assessment work and offered to do mapping and plotting of results.

Ian Hope reported that the SAC for Caenlochan and Glencallater was to be surveyed. This will involve the herbivore impact assessment from 2015 being updated, site condition monitoring and a deer population assessment likely on dung counting. The contract for this work has been tendered and likely to be awarded in April. Survey work to commence thereafter.

8. SECTION 7 CONTROL GROUP MEETING

It is anticipated that a Control Group Meeting be held in late spring. It was noted that Denise Reid is unfortunately off work on long term leave. We need to bare in mind that the Section 7 Control Agreement ends in 2019. Questions may be raised at that time as to its success, and the contributing factors.

9. ACCOUNTS/BUDGET

9.1 Deirdre Stewart explained that it was possible for the Group to apply for SNH funding for habitat assessment work, to be completed by the end of March 2018. SNH have accepted that due to winter conditions, and snow cover that this work has not been possible within that timeframe, but has made a commitment to the funding for the Group of £1800. This is required to be invoiced prior to 31st March. Deirdre Stewart to action. (Update; this has been secured)

9.2 Secretary Fees. Deirdre Stewart explained that her work with the Group was ongoing, but had offered to map and plot all habitat assessment work. Deirdre was asked to provide a quotation for this work in addition to existing fee.

9.3 Website. (Update – ADMG have now provided upon their own website, a separate web page for East Grampian Deer Management Group Sub Area 1. This is hosted annually by ADMG at the cost of £120 which has been accounted for within the Group budget. The Deer Management Plan and ongoing papers can now be uploaded specifically to this page. Secretary to take this forward).

9.4 Subscriptions to ADMG. Subscriptions to ADMG were previously handled by Bell Ingram in Forfar on behalf of the umbrella group for the East Grampians. This role has now been devolved to the sub groups. Deirdre Stewart has been in touch with ADMG in order to provide the necessary data for subscriptions to be issued. Group Members can therefore expect to receive bills for the 2017/2018 subscription.

10. SCOTTISH WATER GLENHEAD/GLENDAMPH

Offer of sporting lease was made to Glenprosen Estate but this matter is not yet concluded. Early access for purchases of deer control were permitted, in conjunction with out of season authorisation on the ground.