

Inveraray & Tyndrum Deer Management Group

Minutes of the Meeting on Wednesday 9th November 2022 at 2pm at Glenfalloch Lodge, Ardlui

Present

Falcon Frost – Glenfalloch (Chair) (FF)
David Lowes – Glenfalloch (Vice Chair) (DL)
Helen MacIntyre (Secretary) (HM)
Peter Kelly – NatureScot (PK)
Dominic Hall – Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park
David Beaumont – Loch Lomond & Trossachs Countryside
Trust (DB)
Tom Turnbull – Strone & ADMG Rep (TT)
Tuggy Delap – Achadunan (TD)
Hugh Nicol – Argyll Estates (HN)
Tom Kirsop – Argyll Estates (TK)
Jayne Young – Argyll Estates (JY)
Andrew Nicol – Argyll Estates (AN)
Virginia Sumsion – Ardkinglas (VS)
Jason Ferguson – Ardkinglas (JF)
Alan Cory-Wright – Auchreoch/Strathfillan (ACW)
John Burton – Cononish (JB)
Allan Kirsop – Forestry and Land Scotland (AK)

Tom McLellan – Fyne Forestry (TM)
Alex Caraffi – Glenfalloch (AC)
Nicky Cory-Wright – Glenfalloch (NCW)
Adam McLean – Gresham House (Shira Forest) (AM)
John Duncan – Inveruglas (JD)
Ian Robinson – Scottish Woodlands (IR)
Rolf Thornqvist – Strathfillan (RT)
Colin Stark – Stuckendroin (CS)
Samuel Bristow – Tilhill (SB)

Apologies

Jimmy Irvine – NatureScot
Martin O’Keeffe – Blarghour
Tiffany Douglas-Home – Glenfalloch
David Sumsion – Ardkinglas
Diane Davidson-Kinghorn – Glencroe Farm
George MacPherson – Brackley
Fiona Roebuck – Scottish Woodlands

1. Welcome and apologies – FF thanked everyone for attending. See above for apologies.

2. Matters arising from minutes of meeting 20th April

FF is still to write a letter to Keppochan re payments for HIA work.

3. Chairman’s Report – Falcon Frost

Since the last group meeting we have had an executive committee meeting and discussed the recent game dealer issues. TK attended and told us about his experiences at Argyll Game. There is concern that collection problems might significantly impact our group’s hind cull this season.

FF attended the Scone Game Fair on the ADMG stand. It was very well attended and there were good discussions with policy makers.

FF has been involved in the Common Ground Project which has been looking at resolving conflicts in Deer management. They held a two-day residential event in August. He was surprised to learn that all different stakeholders in deer management felt misunderstood and undervalued. The project is continuing with zoom calls. One thing that came out of it was how people behave and speak to others at meetings can be a big problem. Thankfully it is not really an issue in our group.

Glenfalloch hosted Lorna Slater to talk about deer management. They have invited her to go for a day’s hind stalking and she has agreed.

4. Secretary and Treasurer Reports – HM

There are still some outstanding subscription payments and contributions to the group HIA project. **Action:** FF to draft letter to Keppochan.

The budget for subscription income for next year is based on similar culls this year to last year. However, this could change if continuing problems with venison dealer collections affect culls.

5. Venison collection issues

Many will be aware of venison collection problems, particularly at Argyll Game. Behind the scenes there is a lot of lobbying of the Scottish government by SVA and ADMG. The more information you can share with ADMG the better. 30% of stag culls coming in to dealers over a 3-4 week period is an issue for them. If people can shoot stags earlier in the season this will help reduce the problem by spreading out culls. TT said ADMG have asked all members from across the highlands for feedback on this so they can talk to the Scottish Government. There were problems in other areas, with Simpson Game having issues with vehicles breaking down and problems with ferries to Mull. The export market for rutting stags is not great, and there are issues with sending venison abroad post Brexit.

ACW described issues in Breadalbane DMG with Simpsons, but Highland Game were not having problems. However, Highland Game say they are still getting carcasses that are lead shot. FF said he has had a letter saying they will not take any lead shot carcasses from 1st January. Simpsons will be completely reviewing their suppliers since some have been aggressive and unpleasant to them. Highland are charging a fuel levy now.

FF said we don't know how many people in the area still don't have a larder and suitable facilities. Glenfalloch invested in their larder 17 years ago, others have also upgraded more recently. We need to invest, we can't just expect the government to sort it for us. JF asked how many of the deer culled are from recreational stalkers or places without larders, and what is the way forward if the government want people to reduce deer numbers? TT said there is some funding available for community larders, with one possibly going in at Glendaruel on Cowal. However, you need someone to keep an eye on the larder and make sure everything is done properly.

TT has met with NatureScot twice and talked to the Strategic Deer Board and has made them all aware of the situation in this area of the country. We should be out marketing our products better. SVA have a miniscule budget. TK said we need to be very careful about the quality of venison. No one will want to eat a rutted stag, but guests want to shoot them during the rut. We need to be more honest with the public on where their venison comes from. Some beasts shot will be old, ill etc. but the majority are healthy beasts, otherwise you wouldn't be managing your population properly. TK said there are more regulations to get venison in to dog food than in to human consumption. He spoke to one producer who said he needed the whole carcass including the pluck.

PK asked if there is a model from other areas where some sell stalking earlier in the season for a different price. TT said it might be that we move to a price for the day out and then additions depending on what is shot.

FF said there is more of a deer problem in England and when they start culling more then there will be an impact on venison dealers across the country. TK said bird flu has had an impact as many farms have culled birds early and filled up the dealers' larders.

SB said there might be funding through Scottish Forestry Grants. FF asked if private forestry have facilities we could use. SB said no, they don't have any, it would be up to their private clients. HN said we should consider whether we need a processing larder on the west coast.

Variability of sizes of wild deer can be an issue for dealers and consumers/restaurants as they want consistent products. DL said there are marketing/PR issues and we need to let clients know that the market is changing. SQWV is an important label.

TK said he is not taking deer in now. JF moved from Highland Game to Argyll Game but has had to go back to Highland Game. TK and KC met with Highland Game last year and had discussions about upgrading the larder but they decided to try other dealers to improve the competition in the market. FF said if Tom's larder isn't open then possibly up to 40% of our DMG's hind cull might not be able to happen, approx. 200-300 deer.

6. Culls

- a) **Results of stag cull 2022** – FF said their stags were in great condition. SB said Tilhill have seen a reduction in culls, with people not coming up to recreational stalk as much and concerns about getting rid of the venison. JF had a few cancellations this year due to financial circumstances. TT said he has seen red kites on the grallochs. SB has seen some too, and FF has seen juveniles and pairs in the last few years.
- b) **Proposed hind cull for 2022/23** – We are still on track according to our open range population model to get down to 1400 hinds. We need to update it with the latest cull targets – please get your figures in as soon as possible. If anyone is having problems with hind culls please let FF know so we can see whether we can help. TK doesn't know if he will reopen, needing a cast iron guarantee from dealers first that they will pick up.
- c) **Sika deer** – FF has shot some, with others starting to see more around. JF said he first saw a sika stag on Ardkinglas 30 years ago and has only shot around 10 since then, and only ever seen one hind. There are some in Ewich forest.
- d) **Future count plans** – A date of 6/7 March was set, with backup of 13/14 March. FF & TK to co-ordinate. PK suggested maybe getting a drone up on the day of the count for specific areas. AK said FLS got a contractor in to use night vision and thermal imaging to do a count in Glen Orchy forestry. It worked really well, and they saw roughly the same number of deer as they were expecting. It was interesting how few deer were seen on restocks. SB said Tilhill are going to start using drones at night to look at deer numbers in forestry.
- e) **Population model** – Remember this only includes open hill deer. HN suggested we put approx. figures for forestry hind cull targets in the group table using last year's cull figures. **Action:** HM to update and circulate.

7. Deer Management Plan Priorities

- a) **Latest updates** – We should put out a questionnaire to members to update their information. **Action:** New secretary.
- b) **Priorities from Working Plan** –
 - HIA** – Was done this year by Ardkinglas, Strathfillan & Auchreoch, Argyll Estates. **Action:** Please send data for this to HM as soon as possible.
 - Native Woodland HIA** – Although some have attended NW HIALite training, we are still waiting for Best Practice guidance on what methods to use.

8. ADMG report – Tom Turnbull

We are still under pressure to reduce deer numbers. The Strategic Deer Board (SDB) are overseeing implementation of the Deer Working Group recommendations. ADMG have been making sure that SDB know that we rely on voluntary participation, and if they push too hard they risk people walking away from collaborative management. It would be good to get recognition of the good work that has been done, and the reduction in deer numbers across the highlands since 2000.

The AGM will be held on 22nd March. There will also be Spring workshops – on thermal drones, peatland, riparian woodland.

They are introducing health checks, hopefully in the spring, to get feedback from DMGs on what they need help or support with.

DeerMap project – This will help to predict deer movements if pressures are put on them.

The Common Ground project is ongoing for the next year. A two day workshop in Stirling went well and there are more environmental organisations approaching ADMG now.

ADMG responded to the Scottish Government biodiversity consultation. They commented that it mentions deer many times and sheep not once.

Land reform consultation – ADMG encourage all members to contribute to this. It will potentially mean the fragmentation of land.

ADMG have commissioned an investigation into the carbon footprint of venison. We need to understand this better as an industry and can hopefully then compare this with beef and lamb.

ADMG are looking into new community larders.

ADMG have met with some ministers. Lorna Slater, Green MSP, is keen to promote venison. They also met Mairi McAllan and Ariane Burgess. ACW commented that two Scottish health boards that were using venison have now withdrawn it following a complaint from PETA.

ADMG have had discussions with the National Access Forum.

9. NatureScot report – PK

The use of night sights and remote sensing trials have concluded and they are waiting to hear back from the Scottish Government.

NS were discussing last week how they are going to engage with DMGs. They are starting to get more resources. He feels that there will be more focus in areas where there is more of an issue, and there will be less time to help with areas like ITDMG where we are doing well. In terms of what NS want to see from groups, this will not change, i.e. habitat monitoring, group cull setting and population modelling.

HM said we would hope to still have representation from NS at group meetings since NS have a landholding within the group. PK confirmed they would. They don't have a long-term management plan for Ben Lui so they will need to consult with the group on this.

TT said DMGs with over 10 deer per sq km are likely to get more focus from NS. This can be frustrating because a helicopter count is only a snapshot of one day. PK said this is true so people should make sure to do habitat monitoring too.

HN said there are now beavers and boar (at Strachur) in the group area. PK said he would expect the beavers to continue to spread.

ACW said in Breadalbane DMG they map their HIA and it shows substantial anomalies when compared to the grazing and population numbers in these areas. He wonders how NS are going to help groups understand the data if there are not enough resources. FF said what was mentioned at the Common Ground project was that everyone has lots of data but not the skills to map it all.

10. Strathfillan Development Trust plans

Dave Beaumont from Loch Lomond & Trossachs Countryside Trust talked about a new landscape project in the National Park, covering an area from the great Trossachs up through Glenfalloch, with the key objective of 'Restoration of natural habitats'. The Trust has been around for 7-8 yrs and was formed to take advantage of funding opportunities that LLTNP were not eligible for as a statutory body. They have done work on Walk in the Park, active transport, active travel, other small-scale projects.

They have applied to the Nature Fund for funding of a development phase of 6 months, including thermal drone training, HIAs and mapping, deer counts. They will have staff to do this, including a project officer and trust director. They are looking at setting up tree nurseries at Glenfalloch and Auchessan to locally produce trees for planting, including rarer species such as wild crab apples and aspen. They see an opportunity here as enablers, facilitators, and want us to tell them what they could help with. They are starting with the designated sites and going from there. They should get a decision on funding on 21st November, and hope the delivery phase will be 2023-2026. The gold mine will also give a small amount of funding over the next 8 years to the project.

CS said they are trying to improve the designated site on Stuckendroin and have reduced sheep and deer numbers, but they need to put up a fence and NS don't have money to contribute to this. DB said once they look at the details and work out what the priorities are then they can see where they can help. In terms of how they can help our DMG, they hope to be able to take some of the burden from the group in terms of dealing with data, mapping etc. in the short term.

DL asked if they can extend the boundary. DB said he understands that deer obviously won't respect the project boundary so it makes sense to consider the wider population. DH explained that this is a landscape scale project looking at designated sites, but they will obviously need to look at a wider area than these. He is developing the nature strategy of the Park. There are other areas with projects going on in the Park. Even if you are outside the area, they are still interested in hearing from people on how it ties in.

11. Any Other Business

DL said it sounds like we have a lot of challenges, but what we have been discussing this afternoon, and how informed and interested everyone is, has been a fantastic transition from 15 years ago in the DMG. Well done to all, and thanks to TT for his work as Chair of ADMG, for contributions that really make a difference.

The group secretary is stepping down. Helen, was presented with a thank you gift of flowers and a painting of stalking ponies and was thanked for all her work for the group over the past 8 years. She thanked everyone for their support and said she had really enjoyed working with them all.

12. Date of Next Meeting – 10am on Wed 26th April 2023 at Strone – site visit followed by meeting.