

JURA DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP

Minute of the meeting of Monday 15th November 2021 held in Feolin Ferry House Study Centre.

Present: John Lithgow (Chairperson) - Inver Estate, Donald Ewen Darroch (Secretary) - Inver Estate, Ross Rozga - Forest Estate, Rob Fletcher - Barnhill Estate, William MacDonald - Ardfin Estate, Ewan MacInnes - Ardlussa Estate, Andrew Fletcher - Ardlussa Estate, Craig Rozga - Ruantallain Estate, Gordon Muir – Tarbert Estate, Scott Muir-Ardfin Estate, Kyle MacDonald – Tarbert Estate

Welcome: The chair welcomed everyone.

Apologies: Jamie Hammond and Andrew Kent – NatureScot, Sgt Stirling – Police Scotland, Jenni Minto MSP.

Minutes of 4TH November 2019:

These had been circulated by email in 2019 and were deemed as accepted.

Deer Management Plan Information Paper:

No need to update at this time.

Deer Management Plan Group Operation Paper:

No updates needed to the operation paper.

Estate Reports:

- a. Stag cull. In the 2021/22 season 262 animals were taken which is similar to last season. The 20/21 season was Stags 265, hinds 335, calves 53. Total of 655
- b. Proposed hind cull. Most estates will be taking a similar number to last year, dependent on animal condition and weather. Barnhill and Inver intend to have a slight increase.
- c. Observed deer health. Stags were in good condition. Hinds on the west coast are not as fat as expected. Question was asked if the rut was getting later. It appears to differ between estates. Comment about the number of small/late calves which may indicate a later or longer rutting period. Over the winter there appears to be more incidence of deer digging in bracken areas. It is assumed this is for Bluebell bulbs. A noticeable increase in the number of stags with 'pin teeth' which are now appearing throughout most of the island. Members to find out if such a phenomenon is occurring elsewhere.
- d. DVCs. One report of a cyclist being knocked of his bike by a charging stag in the dark.
- e. Out of season authorisations. None.

Habitat Monitoring:

No designated plots surveyed during 2020. The group note that NatureScot consider Habitat Impact Assessments as a priority for DMG's if they are to be considered as operating efficiently. As previously it was questioned by some members the justification and validity of these surveys in a Jura context. Would regular photographs of the designated plots not be more consistent in showing any changes? Await suggestions and comment from NatureScot going forward.

During the period Ardfin have undertaken an extensive peat land survey. Ardlussa have undertaken various woodland, peat land and ecological surveys. Ruantallain a peat land survey and Inver an Ancient Woodland Assessment.

General comment that heather seemed to be in better condition this year. Perhaps because of the dry weather early in the year?

Some members felt there is a decrease in Hare numbers, but others commented that this may be, because the island hares are becoming more nocturnal for some reason. A predation issue?

Training:

If numbers permit there may be a chain saw course and ATV training in 2022. Also, an interest for DSC courses for new members and/or employees.

DMG Website:

Apart from updating minutes there appears to be no reason to alter the content. Over the past year a few enquiries on deer issues have come via the web page.

NatureScot Update:

The 'NatureScot - Key messages to DMG's and Deer Groups (Updated: October 2021)' had been circulated to members. The content noted, specifically regarding future recommendations, habitat monitoring and non-lead ammunition.

There was much discussion about the recommendation of 10 deer per km². Jura has always had a higher density at an average of 14 per km. What are the long-term implications for the island herd? Does the Scottish Government intend to enforce this recommendation on groups?

Finance & Division of Costs:

No costs at this time.

Any Other Business:

Invasive Species. There is no report yet on the DNA sample taken from the suspect Sika stag killed at the north end of the island in the spring.

The spread of Ragwort is noticeable. Some estates are trying to control this by the use of sheep and spraying. It is unclear how the spread along the public roadside can be contained.

Japanese Knotweed is a growing issue around Craighouse, Forest and Corran. The control of this damaging plant is a requirement but is not a straightforward issue due to the many stakeholders who will need to be involved. Perhaps NatureScot can assist?

Scottish Land Commission Land Rights and Responsibilities Consultation opened on the 5th November and closes on the 21st January 2022. The secretary to provide a link to members so that they can respond if they so wish.

Scotland – The Big Picture. The secretary to provide members with a link as a point of interest regarding rewilding projects.

Craighouse chill. The large chill is faulty and needs significant repair. Some estates had carcasses condemned due to issues with the faulty unit. Discussion on its repair or possible replacement elsewhere. Perhaps all estates should have their own chills with game dealers expected to collect at the estate. The point was made that all estates should stay together as a group when dealing with game dealers. A long-term solution is required, especially for the estates at the north. Overall collection by Highland Game this season has been successful despite the various ferry issues.

Non-lead ammunition. Currently members do not have enough information to comment on the required effectiveness of alternatives. It is noted that NatureScot and BASC are involved in ongoing studies on suitable ammunition for deer species. As there is no legal enforcement yet it is questionable why game dealers are being supported in forcing stalkers/estates to use a specific type of ammunition.

Venison. The market price is disastrously low. It is unclear why the price to the producers bears no resemblance to the price taken from the consumer in the shop. There was general comment that perhaps DMG's should be getting more encouragement to focus on venison use and local markets.

At this point John Lithgow presented Donald Ewen Darroch with The Royal Highland & Agricultural Society of Scotland Certificate for Long Service. Awarded for long and approved service of 50 years with the Lithgow family, Inver Estate.

Date of Next Meeting:

Date to be agreed after the New Year.

The Chair thanked members for attending and closed the meeting.