

JURA DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP

Minute of the meeting of Wednesday 9th November 2022 held at Inver Lodge.

Present: John Lithgow (Chairperson) - Inver Estate, Donald Ewen Darroch (Secretary) - Inver Estate, Rob Fletcher - Barnhill Estate, William MacDonald - Ardfin Estate, Andrew Fletcher - Ardlussa Estate, Craig Rozga - Ruantallain Estate, Gordon Muir – Tarbert Estate, Scott Muir-Ardfin Estate, Kyle MacDonald – Tarbert Estate, Graham Hayes- Inver Estate, Jamie Hammond – NatureScot

Welcome: The chair welcomed everyone.

Apologies: Ross Rozga - Forest Estate, Ewan MacInnes - Ardlussa Estate, Sgt Maginnis – Police Scotland, Rhowan Rozga – Ardmensish Croft, Jenni Minto MSP.

Minutes of 15th November 2021:

These had been circulated by email in 2021 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 2022/23 season 283 animals were taken which is slightly up on last season. The 21/22 season was Stags 274, hinds 387, calves 60. Total of 721 which was up 66 on the previous season.
- b. Proposed hind cull. Ardfin may reduce the cull slightly but most estates will be taking a similar number to last year, dependent on animal condition and weather.
- c. Observed deer health. Stags were in good condition including during the rut. The period of the rut was not very clearly defined. Reason unknown. Comment about the number of small/late calves which may indicate a later or longer rutting period. There are still more incidence of deer digging in bracken areas. It is/was assumed this is for Bluebell bulbs, but it is also suggested that it may be for bracken roots. A further increase in the number of stags with 'pin teeth' which are now appearing throughout most of the island. Comment had been sought from leading deer vets and ecologists who expressed the opinion that inbreeding could be a likely cause. Determining such would entail a lengthy and expensive research programme. Members doubt if inbreeding is the cause as it would have been obvious island wide a long time ago.
- d. DVCs. None reported.
- e. Out of season authorisations. None.

Habitat Monitoring:

Inver Estate had resurveyed some of the designated plots in the spring of 2022. No other plots surveyed. 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, but it appears that these require to be completed.

Ardlussa Estate had recently hosted a Peatland restoration event.
General comment that ticks appeared to be more prevalent this year.

Training:

No courses planned at this time.

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:

Jamie Hammond gave an overview of varied items NatureScot is involved in. These include the possible changes to the male and female deer seasons, changes to firearms use and other legislative matters on deer management as covered within the Strategic Deer Board. Other aspects of their workload which is not directly related to deer but can/will affect land management are the issues relating to changes in agricultural support schemes, new biodiversity targets and land reform recommendations.

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? The group had heard anecdotally that when public funding was being sought from other government agencies there was an indication that the 10 d/km² would have to be achieved. If broadly used that could have significant long-term implications.

Jamie indicated that he thought the Jura group were implementing a sound deer management plan and did not foresee any enforcement actions by NatureScot at this time based on their current density figures. He encouraged the group to keep collaborating and collating and sharing data to inform local decision making and highlighted the continued value of undertaking HIA. He also encouraged estates to keep exploring options where they could make positive contributions to habitat improvements, woodland creation and conservation and enhancements of peatland interests.

Finance & Division of Costs:

Inver Estate are covering the low cost of the web site. No other 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 of 2021. Assumption is that it managed to swim from the mainland

Japanese Knotweed is a growing issue around Craighouse, Forest and Corran. Ragwort throughout the island. The control of these damaging plants is a requirement but is not a straightforward issue due to the many stakeholders who will need to be involved along with the complications of spraying.

Scottish Land Commission. Some of the proposals in the Scottish Governments Land Reform Bill may have implications for most of the Jura estates.

Craighouse chill. There have been issues with the chill over the season which needs significant repair. There had been a suggestion that the Jura Development Trust (community) could purchase the chill or build a new one. It was felt that there would need to be a considerable amount of discussion and planning before going down that route. A long-term solution is required for the island's venison, but it requires some thought and consideration of the various options. In the short term a suitable contractor to be sought to look at possible repairs to the existing unit.

Overall collection by Highland Game this season has been reasonably successful despite the various significant ferry issues. The group had made a formal complaint about the issues regarding the lack of capacity on the CalMac ferries. There were apparently collection issues on the mainland as well. Highland Game had provided a copy of ferry bookings, but it is not overly clear what days are actually booked.

Non-lead ammunition. The existing game dealer collecting from Jura have said that they will no longer accept carcasses shot with lead ammunition after the end of the year. It is noted that currently this is not a legal requirement. Generally, some stalkers feel that the new copper ammunition does not have the proper killing capacity.

Venison. The market price is still low. It is unclear why the price to the producers bears no resemblance to the price taken from the consumer in the shop. Members are aware that Jura has a very valuable product in venison but any island wide action to utilise this would have to be substantive. Within Scotland there are ongoing trials of local community chills-processing units. It is understood that some of these have proved to be 'challenging' at the present time.

Association of Deer Management Groups. A copy of the Autumn 2022 update had been received. To be passed to members for information. Jura Deer Management Group are not members of the ADMG.

Estates. Some members said that they feel there is now a very negative view on the island about deer, deer management and the estates generally. There was a discussion as to whether this is due to lack of knowledge of working estates or simply just an anti-estate, landowner sentiment. Ardlussa Estate had previously hosted an open farm day which was very successful. It was suggested that perhaps there should be a similar event from the deer stalking perspective. Further planning required.

Date of Next Meeting:

Date to be agreed for May 2023.

The Chair thanked members for attending and closed the meeting.