

JURA DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP

Note of the meeting of Sunday 26th August 2019 held in Tarbert Lodge.

Courtesy of The Viscount Astor.

Present: Donald Ewen Darroch (Secretary) - Inver Estate, Lord Astor – Tarbert Estate, Kate Johnson - Barnhill Estate, Andrew Fletcher - Ardlussa Estate, Scott Muir - Ruantallain Estate, Gordon Muir – Tarbert Estate

Welcome: Lord Astor welcomed everyone and said he was looking forward to hearing how the group were progressing.

Apologies: John Lithgow (Group Chairperson), Jamie Fletcher, Rob Fletcher, Ross Rozga, Craig Rozga, William MacDonald, Greg Coffey.

Draft Deer Management Plan Information Paper:

It was agreed by all that Linzi had done very well in the planning and preparation of the report which showed Jura was a good model for deer management.

Lord Astor asked if Linzi would be continuing to work for the group. The secretary said that was her contract now complete, but she would assist with operational queries and habitat management issues.

Estate Reports:

- a. Ardlussa have been investigating the possibility of tree planting to increase their woodland areas but are finding it frustrating as the demands of the grant terms do not suit the Jura terrain. Also noted the difficulties in getting planning for projects at the north of the island, often due to the restrictive quality of the main/public road.
- b. Housing. Discussion was held on the criticism of the estates for having empty houses or ruins. It was agreed by all that many such buildings require a considerable expenditure to bring them up to the required letting standards but most specially the new tenancy legalisation discourages landowners from renting properties. The properties may also be required for future staff. The group were reminded that Tarbert Estate had suggested the building of houses in Knockrome for sale and social housing but for a range of reasons that had never been allowed to progress. Lord Astor said that the present house plot sale in Knockrome was being delayed by the land court as a part of the land has to be decrofted. The croft shareholders have already agreed to the sale.
- c. It is also noted that deer, agriculture or other traditional land uses may not be the determining factor on how some estates are operated in the future. That stated it is accepted that there will still be deer stalking operations but perhaps not at the former levels or numbers.
- d. Discussion on why some stags on the west coast, in particular areas, seem to be stunted in body and antler size. Also very worn front teeth at middle age. Is it a genetic trait or a feed, nutrition cause?

Habitat Monitoring:

Linzi had come for several days to give further instruction on how to do habitat surveys and did so over several estates and ranges of vegetation. There is a question that the information as requested in the existing survey vegetation types is not suitable for Jura. Inver and Barnhill have completed a considerable number of the designated plots. That information has been passed to Linzi who has agreed to collated it and provide a report for the group and for SNH, so that a discussion on suitability of designated vegetation can be taken forward.

Discussion was undertaken on the need for the surveys, what benefit they actually were as they take up a considerable amount of time. There are those who feel they could be used to act against the group depending on interpretation. The secretary pointed out that they are a requirement of the Plan and as such all present agreed that they would be completed in 2020.

DMG Website:

All agreed that the web-site looked good and a considerable amount of work had gone into setting it up.

SNH Update:

The Chair and Secretary had a meeting with James Hammond and Andrew Kent of SNH on the 17th April. Their assessment of the operation of the group to date, was very high.

Lord Astor asked what we considered the SNH expectation was. As per the Management Plan some of the main requirements were already being done by the group before formalisation. Such as joint deer counts, cull records, winter mortalities and collaboration. The habitat survey is one of the main requirements, also the recording of deer vehicle collisions and the minutes of main meetings being placed in the public domain. There has been no indication at this time that SNH intend to try and force increased culls for deer on Jura but that may not be the same for goats which are considered a non-native species.

Craighouse Chill:

Each estate to assist with cleaning when depositing carcasses.

Access:

It is understood that several groups of walking parties and research groups would be operating on the north west coast in the next few weeks. It was noted as disappointing that official groups choose to undertake their visits during the stalking season as estate have a very limited time period to conduct culls in.

Observations:

It appears from visual observations that there are a lot less seals on the west coast both adults and pups. Several dead pups having been found in some of the west coast bays. Also noted the small number of sightings of Golden Eagles in comparison to past years. In some areas there is again an increase in heather beetle attacks. It is felt that some sways of heather are not recovering from the beetle attacks so there is an increasingly diminishing heather cover throughout the island.

Islay Deer Management Group:

Gordon and Scott Muir had been invited to attend their meeting. They reported it was very interesting and one of the issues discussed was there being less tick on deer since sheep had been put on the hill. The Jura stalkers were thanked for going over and helping with the Islay deer counts in the spring.

August meeting:

It was proposed that an attempt should be made to have a meeting in August 2020 when most owners were on the island. Also suggested that it would be interesting to have a range of antlers from each estate.

British Bryological Society

The above have requested permission from all the estates to record mosses and liverworts during the annual society summer field meeting, during the period 20th to 27th June 2020. There was a discussion on how information from such recording could be used or utilised to block or control land

usage in the future. However, it was felt that there was no reason for objections. If the estates not represented at this meeting were in agreement the group secretary would make a joint reply.

Scottish Land Commission:

At the request of the Jura Development Trust the Commission are having a public meeting on Thursday 5th September at 7pm in the Service Point.

Date of Next Meeting:

The constitution states that the two main meetings are held in April and November. The proposed date for the next meeting is the evening of 13th November but to be agreed.

Meeting closed.