

South West Ross Deer Management Group spring Meeting Friday 30th May 2014, 10.30am at Coulin

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Present:

Richard Curzon, Sean MacDonald, Tom Chetwynd, Mark Pattinson, Gillian Pattinson, Richard Munday, Neil Morrison, Simon Stewart, Mary Gibson, Sinclair Coghill, Russell Cooper, Kirsteen Currie, Philip Smith

Apologies:

Mark and Alison Raeside, Chris Mackenzie, Archie Mclellan, Richard Wills, Mark Adams, Hugh Tollemache, Kurt Larson, Tom Wills, Andrew Cope

Minutes of previous meeting:

Accepted.

Matters Arising:

ADMG Website

The SW Ross DMG does not yet feature on the website as there have been a number of alterations to estate marches in recent years. The Chairman asked members to confirm the boundaries of their estates for the DMG map which would then be incorporated in the website.

Finance:

The Treasurer, Mark Pattinson, explained that the finances of the group were in a healthy state. The Chairman reported that he had managed to obtain a contribution of £1,000 for the group from the organisers of the Mountain Marathon.

Spring Deer Count Figures

It was agreed that members would share their figures with the secretary who will circulate them. There has been a large increase in population in the south of the area. It was suggested that this was due to changes which have taken place at Glenmore.

Coulin Estate report a decline in stag numbers, possibly due to the late coming of the grass and the weather at the start of the year. They reported that they are finding few dead stags, but an increase in dead hinds and calves. They have seen large groups of hinds, but very few calves.

Sean Mac Donald reported that with the considerable effort that New Kelso has put in to improve their habitat the quality and quantity of the stages has greatly increased.

SNH report that they are still holding a lot of deer in their woodland area at Beinn Eighe, despite shooting hard.

Cull returns

Members were reminded to complete a cull return to the secretary as soon as details are available.

ADMG AGM

The meeting was well attended and it was noted that there was a significant political aspect to the meeting. It was also noted that DMGs must be seen to be performing well and show constructive working between estates.

The Treasurer attended the chairman's meeting which took place in May. He noted that there are large changes afoot in the sector. He also noted that non-attendance at meetings could potentially have a negative impact on the group as a whole.

It was suggested that all estates will be expected to have someone who has a level 2 qualification in deer management in place. In the case of smaller estates without a full time stalker, a person with level 2 qualifications might be required to lead stalking parties or otherwise carry out deer control. It was reiterated that level 2 is not a requirement at present.

The benchmark for deer management is a document which raises many questions and shows what the expectations are for estates. Members are encouraged to familiarise themselves with this document.

It was noted that the final draft of the benchmark will be launched at the Scone Game Fair on the 4th July. It was agreed that we can discuss this benchmark at the next meeting.

Deer Management Plan

It was noted that the Group Plan will become out of date at the end of the year. The chairman has liaised with Finlay Clark, who noted that an update can be provided to the original plan as an alternative to a full report. Victor Clements has been suggested as a possible person to carry out this update. The chairman will also investigate the possibility of Professor Rory Putman returning to the area to do this work.

SNH have obtained money from the Scottish Government in order to help with the funding of a new DMP.

Signage

MacSigns in Inverness can provide a label to put over the old signs which can update the details. It will cost £55 per sign. It was asked if this was a cost the SWRDMG could meet, however, it was agreed that each estate will pay for this cost themselves.

The question of disturbance to deer stalking by walkers was raised. The meeting noted that there have been very few instances. It was noted that many people are now researching areas before they

visit and would appreciate information on stalking etc before they arrive, for example, on a website. It was noted that in other areas people are requesting access via email, which is of great use to the stalker. It was agreed that each individual estate should compile their own signs, incorporating the correct wording, which is given in the code of practice. Each estate can take their sign to MacSigns in Inverness for the update to be applied. It was suggested that signs are only placed in areas where there is a signal for a mobile telephone.

Cull figures

It was noted that this is a statutory requirement. It was asked if it would be possible to keep cull records confidential. The meeting was reminded that this information is a statutory requirement and that confidentiality was not an option.

Habitat monitoring

Sinclair Coghill who has succeeded Graeme Taylor as SNH Wildlife Officer suggested that habitat monitoring would be an idea to consider for the SWRDMG area. Training can be offered on this and it was argued that this can greatly enrich the information which DMP can be based upon. It was noted that there is a strong possibility that habitat monitoring will become mandatory.

It was reiterated that habitat impact assessments are suggested in the best practice guidance. Sinclair and Nikki Dayton run an effective course, which all those who have an interest in deer are encouraged to take up. It was noted that the course can be run for around a maximum of 20 people. The course is designed to ensure that the environmental outcomes are meeting the management plans.

It was suggested that this could be very helpful for estates as they can use the skills gained from this course to gain a much better understanding of their habitats. It was agreed that a habitat monitoring training day would take place within the group, aimed at stalkers. It was suggested that April, May and June are the best months to do this. Estates should liaise with Sinclair at SNH to organise this event.

It was suggested that we have a look at the Glen Elg or the West Ross plans to see examples of other deer management plans.

The Chairmanship

The Chairman noted that there would be an election for a new chairman at the end of the next meeting.

Date of the next meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would be held on Tuesday 30th September 2014 at 10.30am at Coulin.

AOCB

All estates are asked to provide their cull returns to the secretary and to SNH by the end of April.

It was also suggested that if we would like people to gain their level 2 in deer management it may be an idea to have a collective training day, this can be discussed at the AGM in September.