

**South West Ross Deer Management Group
Autumn Meeting 2025
New Kelso, Strathcarron
Monday 17 November 2025**

Present:

Present	Initials	Estate	Present	Initials	Estate
Shaun MacDonald	SM	<i>New Kelso (Chair)</i>	Colin Murdoch	CM	<i>Reraig</i>
Kurt Larson	KL	<i>Ardoch (Treasurer)</i>	Malcolm Turner	MT	<i>Glean Shildeag</i>
Archie MacLellan	AM	<i>Applecross</i>	Del Ross	DR	<i>Glean Shildeag</i>
Ian Sutherland	IS	<i>Applecross</i>	Danny Mackie	DM	<i>Ledgowan</i>
Charlie Hill	CH	<i>Glen Mhor</i>	Mark Adams	MA	<i>Kinlochdamph</i>
Louise Gray	LG	<i>Ben Damph</i>	Chris Mackenzie	CM	<i>Achnashellach</i>
Claire Hunter	CH	<i>Reraig</i>	Ben McKeown	BM	<i>NatureScot</i>
Alison Hewitt	AH	<i>Kinlochdamph</i>	Duncan Gray	DG	<i>Ben Damph</i>
Helen Mason	HM	<i>Glen Torridon P'ship</i>	Ryan	R	<i>Coulin</i>
Kevin Masson	KM	<i>Ledgowan</i>	Tom Chetwynd	TC	<i>Tullich (Facilitator)</i>
Richard Curzon	RC	<i>Tullich</i>			

1.0 Welcome

The Chair welcomed those present and said it was great to see some new faces around the table, introductions followed.

2.0 Apologies

Apologies	Estate	Apologies	Estate
Diana Thompson	<i>Lochcarron</i>	Kevin Masson	<i>Ledgowan</i>
Miles Thompson	<i>Lochcarron</i>	Russell Cooper	<i>FLS - Achnashallach</i>
Gillian Pattinson	<i>Lochcarron</i>	Ross MacMillan	<i>FLS - Achnashallach</i>
Troels Banvhoej	<i>Ledgowan</i>	Louise Gray	<i>Ben Damph</i>
Richard Curzon	<i>Tullich</i>	Nicholas Wills	<i>Achnashellach</i>

3.0 Minutes of Meetings

The Minutes of the Spring Meeting - 2025 held on Monday 16 June 2025 had not been circulated prior to the meeting and it was agreed that these would be approved at the Spring Meeting – 2026.

4.0 Matter Arising

There were no matters arising.

5.0 Chairs Report

SM suggested that the meeting progress straight to the Deer Management Plan.

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6.0 Deer Management Plan

6.1 Stag Culls – 2025 Season

TC thanked all members for submitting their cull data and reported that 190 stags had been culled across the group so far. However, data was still due from some members.

Discussion followed on observations across the season with reports that most were in good condition. SM reported that most culled on New Kelso were skinned for the deep freeze. Some members reported that's stags were still holding hinds well into November.

It was agreed that stag season records for the DMG would be maintained for the year to 31 March.

6.2 Proposed Hind Culls – 2025-26 season

TC noted that prior to the meeting members had indicated that they would be culling in the region of 380 hinds overall, which was very much in line with the 3-year average of 386 hinds and slightly over recruitment of 340 hinds per annum based on the estimated Spring 2025 population.

Discussion followed on proposed culls with some indicating that they would continue to shoot more hinds and some indicating that they would maintain their culls, leading to a revised proposed cull of approx. 400 hinds plus followers.

6.3 Population Model

TC noted that from the information provided the indications from the population model are that a good maintenance cull is being undertaken across the DMG. The model indicates that calving may have increased to an average of 36 – 38%, possibly more, across the DMG as a whole which lead to recruitment of 30 – 32% following mortality. Based on current actual and proposed culls this should lead to a maintained population of approximately 3,900 deer and a density of 7 deer/km².

BM confirmed that NS were comfortable with this assessment of the population and the density at 7 deer/km² but added that it would be interesting to see where the variations in density lay across the DMG. BM encouraged members to keep an eye on impacts.

6.4 Habitat Monitoring – Summer 2025

CM confirmed HIA had been undertaken across Achnashellach with low to moderate returns.

IS confirmed that HIA results from Applecross showed lower impacts than previously.

MT confirmed that WHIA had been undertaken in Gleann Shildeag. The 2024 survey showed high impacts and the 2025 results showed a slight decrease on this, possibly reflecting increased culling.

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LG mentioned that surveys on Ben Damph showed high impacts within some of the woodland areas. MT said that this was part of the GTP programme undertaken by an external contractor covering some of the gaps within the partnership area.

6.5 Proposed Count – Spring 2026

With the last helicopter count having been undertaken in Spring 2017, TC approached both Ben Harrower Wildlife Consultancy and NatureScot for a proposal for undertaking a further count of the whole DMG, as set out in the paper circulated prior to the meeting.

Discussion followed on the helicopter, drone and foot count options outlined within the paper, their effectiveness and the apportionment of associated costs for each option. It was also recognised that GCU may be undertaking a helicopter count in Winter 2025-26 and that this may provide better data. BM mentioned that the DMG is a low priority area for NS but that it was recognised that a count would be beneficial alongside GCU. He also confirmed that a count of the group should take 4 helicopter days

Everyone present recognised that counting was important for the operation of the group, and it was agreed that a validation of the 2017 count was required. It was also recognised that drones now produce better data for woodland areas whereas helicopters are still more effective over larger areas of open range.

TC undertook to circulate a survey following the meeting to all members to gauge support for a helicopter count and a contribution based on the apportionment of costs of flying time.

6.6 Public Interest

DG raised the use of electric mountain bikes on hill tracks and paths and BM mentioned that they have the same rights of access as a normal mountain bike. Discussion followed on the cost of repairing paths, who should be responsible for these costs and countering negative comments from the public in connection with perceived lack of maintenance by landowners following increased public usage. SM asked NS to provide an update on how maintenance costs could be covered at the June 2026 meeting.

6.7 Deer Management Plan

TC reported that he would provide a proposal for the review / update of the DMP discussed at the Spring 2025 meeting at the next meeting.

7.0 Woodland Expansion & Peatland Restorations Schemes

KM reported that there is an active PRS on Ledgowan of 460ha adjacent to Coulin.

MT & LG mentioned their schemes which had been raised previously.

TC asked that all members share details of completed and proposed schemes during the update of the DMP in 2026.

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8.0 Glen Torridon Partnership

MT provided an update including the venison scoping project, the extension of community stalking involvement and the provision of training as part of a National Heritage Lottery which should lead to funding in May 2026. There are now 7 local drone pilots trained to undertake surveys and WT are now undertaking collaborative stalking within GTP area.

Discussion followed on the processing of venison by estates for the local community with AM referring to the venture at Applecross involving a local butcher, their commercial kitchen and estate venison. The uptake has not been as strong as hoped with few carcasses utilised so far.

9.0 Financial Report & Budget

KL reported that most members had paid the subscriptions and that all group expenditure had been settled to date. He also confirmed that the group bank account is now managed online. A summary of the income and expenditure for 2025-26 will be provided at the Spring 2026 meeting.

TC reported that the ADMG levy invoice for the current year had been received and that this could be recharged out to members before 30 June 2026, the financial year end for ADMG. It was agreed that this could be recharged to members now.

10.0 NatureScot Report

BM provided an update including:

- Natural Environment Bill, including the debate on the Deer Code, definition of the public interest and how that may be applied at a landscape scale.
- Criteria for intervention under s.6ZB under the proposed Act
- Extension of rights to take deer ie crofters and agricultural tenants under the register.

11.0 ADMG Report

TC provided an update on the following:

- ADMGs ongoing focus on the NE bill and their concern over the extension of rights to take deer to include crofters and tenants on the open hill as well as improved inbye areas.
- AGM will be held on Wednesday 25 March 2026 in Inverness
- Common Ground Open Day at Reay Forest, which was attended by Danny Mackie.

12.0 AOCB

CH asked whether he could circulate an email for contact details through the DMG

13.0 Date of Next Meeting

Confirmed for Tuesday 16 June 2026 at 10:00am, venue to be confirmed.