

South West Ross Deer Management Group
Spring Meeting 2025
Lohcarron Village Hall
Monday 16 June 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>
Mike Donegan	MD	<i>Applecross</i>	Chris Mackenzie	CM	<i>Achnashellach</i>
Neil Morrison	NM	<i>Coulin</i>	Tom Chetwynd	TC	<i>Tullich (Facilitator)</i>
Philippa Cliff	PC	<i>Coulin</i>	Ben McKeown	BM	<i>NatureScot</i>

1.0 Welcome

The Chair welcomed those present and said it was great to get everyone around the table again. He also paid tribute to Mark Pattinson as a long-standing member of the DMG and acknowledged all the hard work that both Mark and Gillian had put in to make it a success.

2.0 Apologies

Apologies	Estate	Apologies	Estate
Diana Thompson	<i>Lohcarron</i>	Kevin Masson	<i>Ledgowan</i>
Miles Thompson	<i>Lohcarron</i>	Russell Cooper	<i>FLS - Achnashallach</i>
Gillian Pattinson	<i>Lohcarron</i>	Ross MacMillan	<i>FLS - Achnashallach</i>
Troels Banvhoj	<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 -2024 (Thursday 13 June 2024) were circulated prior to the meeting. These were approved by MA and seconded by KL.

4.0 Matter Arising

There were no matters arising.

5.0 Chairs Report

SM, as Chair, gave a brief report and referred to the Carron fishery and the importance of science and collection of data so that it can be reported back to operators in the field. He emphasised that all should consider science and recorded data when talking about deer, biodiversity, habitat and grazing impacts.

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6.0 Deer Management Plan

6.1 Stag & Hind Culls – 2024 - 25 Season

TC thanked all members for submitting their cull data when requested, and he summarised the culls as follows:

	Stags	Hinds	Calves	Total
East	146	158	48	352
Central	89	104	27	220
West	111	206	62	379
Total	346	468	137	951

TC noted that this was the highest recorded cull for many years with more stags culled at the east end and more hinds culled at the west end of the DMG. He also noted cull data had been provided by Kinloch and Lochcarron Golf Course which all helped to maintain a good record. TC said that it was encouraging that there had been more of a focus on hinds with this year's cull exceeding recruitment, which should lead to a gradual reduction in the number of hinds.

Members generally acknowledged that they had increased the hind cull for a variety of factors, predominantly to support woodland expansion and AECS schemes and in response to numbers identified through estate level drone counts. It was noted that Sika were appearing in more of these counts, particularly in the East Sub-Group.

6.2 Foot Counts – Spring 2025

TC reported that Applecross, Coulin and Ledgowan had undertaken counts and had kindly shared their data with the group, which was all useful for maintaining the population model. He also mentioned that there is growing awareness of the variance between foot count and helicopter count data, with the latter consistently providing higher figures.

6.3 Population Model

TC reported that based on the population model which continues to be based on the 2017 helicopter count, densities are now standing at approximately 7.0 deer/km², ranging from 4.6/km² in the west and possibly up to 11.4/km² in the east. However, the estimated population in the east sub-group is lower if the 2019 foot count data collected by the sub-group members is used and, in this case, the density may be as low as 7 deer/km². It is recognised that there is continuing emigration from this area towards the north although it is difficult to quantify what this may be. The population model has shown 20% mortality for stags to try and account for this movement.

The count data provided indicates that the average recruitment for the group as a whole may now be in the region of 32%, which may have led to an estimated population of 4,000 - 4,400 deer across the DMG.

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Discussion followed on variations between count methods and the fact that population modelling is not a precise science but a useful guide to what may be present on the ground. TC went on to say that he felt numbers were up slightly with hinds increasing and stags probably remaining level. He stated that it was in the groups interest to avoid negative impacts and reduce the movement of deer from areas where they should be to areas where they are not wanted. It is still apparent from the population model that stags are continuing to move from areas with a stalking focus where they are bred and have held for a number of years to areas where they are culled to avoid impacts to woodland.

Discussion followed on material changes in land and habitat conditions, changes in management objectives, the effects of fencing and displacement of deer and increasing sika numbers across the DMG. TC drew attention to the stag : hind ratio which may now be 1 : 1.6, which may make stags more transient in their search for clean ground.

BM mentioned that there may be an opportunity to ground truth the population model with a helicopter count in Winter 2025-26 given the Gairloch Conservation Unit were looking into a count, subject to a 50% contribution from owners. He estimated that a count of SWRDMG would be in the region of £40,000 and that there was merit in co-ordinating a count with an adjoining DMG, especially if there was a shared population.

Discussion followed on costs, contributions, comparisons between foot, drone and helicopter counts and it was agreed that TC should obtain quotes from NS for a helicopter count and BHWC for a drone count for consideration by members.

6.4 Habitat Monitoring

CM confirmed that HIA would be undertaken across Achnashellach North, Coulin, Applecross and Glean Shildeag confirmed they were also planning to undertake surveys.

6.5 Proposed Culls – 2025-26 Season

Members outlined their proposed culls for 2025-26, with most members aiming to maintain similar culls and some indicating that they would increase culls, particularly hinds and to meet changing objectives.

TC said that it was encouraging to see that members were focusing more on their hind numbers as these were probably critical in influencing the emigration of stags from the DMG area.

6.6 Public Interest

MT mentioned deer numbers in proximity to Tornapress Junction which are being monitored and SM mentioned the decline in deer seen on the A890 running through Ledgowan.

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6.7 Deer Management Plan – Review & Update

TC asked whether members were happy to continue to maintain the current deer management plan (prepared by Professor Putman for the period 2015 -2020) as the base plan subject to annual updates through the minutes.

SM said that the plan should be refreshed to show how much woodland has been created since 2015, where fences have been erected and lost and how culls have changed.

TC asked BM what NS would expect to see within a plan review and he outlined that these should include each estates current priorities and objectives, identification of designated sites and how the population will be maintained at an appropriate density through culls determined through both a population model and herbivore impact surveys. This could be captured within a summary document of 4 – 8 pages rather than a more lengthy version.

PC asked on timescales given a potential shift in focus land management objectives across the estate and discussion followed on a possible helicopter providing baseline data for the population model and what is due to come forward under the new deer act. It was agreed to progress the DMP review once the helicopter count data was to hand and when the detail of the new act was clear, with a view to completing it in Summer 2026.

7.0 Woodland Expansion & Peatland Restoration Schemes

MA confirmed that Kinlochdamph is looking at two new woodland schemes.

PC mentioned that Coulin may progress a large woodland creation scheme.

LG shared details of the Ben Damph woodland proposals prior to the meeting.

DM confirmed that Ledgowan are looking at a further PRS area

MT confirmed that a further woodland area is being planned for Couldoran for 2026.

SM asked that the DMP review captures as much as woodland related data and an estimate of the potential carbon capture and habitat and other benefits relating from these schemes rather than relying on modelling.

8.0 Glen Torridon Partnership

MT provided a brief update regarding proposals being taken forward by Colin, Ben Damph and the Woodland Trust and emphasised that deer management will be key. Training has been provided on HIA surveys and drone counting. There is a plan to include a small scale venison processing unit on one of the partner sites at some point and a scoping study is currently underway.

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Discussion followed on venison, its availability and potential as a high value food within the local economy. Discussion followed on quality assurance and how it is applied to venison processing.

9.0 Financial Report & Budget

KL reported that the bank account stood at £2,136 as at the end of March 2025, which was unchanged from June 2024. TC confirmed that invoices for the two-year period, 2023-24 and 2024-25 would be issued following the meeting to bring matters upto date.

TC also referred to the 2025-26 budget which showed the costs for the year ahead but did not include the cost of the DMP review. TC confirmed that he would provide an estimate for this to SM.

10.0 NatureScot Report

BM provided updates on the following:

- NS are working with JHI to review and update HIA methodology.
- Natural Environment Bill and the proposed powers to intervene.
- New register of authorised persons to shoot deer unaccompanied.

11.0 ADMG Report

TC provided an update on the following:

- ADMGs ongoing concern over certain aspects of the NE bill and how they are continuing to lobby to try and enable amendments to points of concern.
- ADMGs view that greater incentivisation rather than greater regulation.
- Scottish Venison Authorisation and Scottish Quality Wild Venison will be relaunching together later in 2025 with a view to providing greater promotion for venison.

A question was asked about whether the new register of authorised persons may be linked to firearms ownership.

12.0 AOCB

A question was asked about Loch Choire – BM confirmed that it was now a s.8 control scheme. TC provided a further update as facilitator of ESDMG and confirmed that where he has been involved with regulatory action under the current deer act, it has appeared to work well.

A question was asked about Councillors attending the meetings, TC confirmed that they are sometimes invited.

13.0 Date of Next Meeting

Confirmed for Monday 3 November 2025 at 10:00am at New Kelso.