

South West Ross Deer Management Group Stalkers Meeting

**New Kelso Lodge, Strathcarron
Friday, 1 March 2019**

Present

Shaun Macdonald	- <i>Chair / New Kelso</i>	Charlie Hill	- <i>Glen Mhor</i>
Tom Chetwynd	- <i>Secretary / Tullich</i>	David Abraham	- <i>Applecross</i>
Chris Mackenzie	- <i>Achnashellach</i>	Neil Morrison	- <i>Coulin</i>
Alison Hewitt	- <i>Kinlochdamph</i>	Mark Pattinson	- <i>Lohcarron</i>
Danny Mackie	- <i>Ledgowan</i>	Gillian Pattinson	- <i>Lohcarron</i>
Troels Bavnhoj	- <i>Strathconon</i>	Kurt Larson	- <i>Ardoch</i>

1.0 Welcome

The Chair welcomed all those present.

2.0 Apologies

Richard Munday	- <i>Kinloch</i>	Louise Gray	- <i>Bendamph</i>
Richard Curzon	- <i>Tullich</i>	Colin Murdoch	- <i>Reraig</i>
Hugh Tollemache	- <i>Ben Shieldaig</i>	Sinclair Coghill	- <i>SNH</i>

3.0 Deer Management Plan

3.1 2018-19 Season

TC provided a brief summary of the final cull data collected via the survey circulated on 12 February 2019 and reported that all members had now responded. The cull returns for the three sub-groups and the group as a whole as at 1 March 2019 were summarised at the meeting via the following table:

	Stags	Hinds	Calves	Total
East	69	72	37	178
Central	52	73	25	150
West	72	50	14	136
Total	193	195	76	464

NB: This table has been updated with new information received since the DMG meeting

Discussion followed with members referring to similar observations made over the course of the season, these including hard grazing conditions in summer 2018; late rut; odd deer behaviour; increase in warble early in the hind season; barren hinds early in the season and small foetus size later in the season.

TC then went to compare the 2018-19 cull with previous seasons culls and noted that the overall group cull was lowest for the last 7 years and it was generally felt that culls had been reduced following winter 2017-18.

3.3 Population Model

TC presented an updated version of the population model for the group which now included the actual cull figures for the 2018-19 season.

TC pointed out that the current population model shows that the estimated 2019 Spring Population for both stags and hinds is still broadly in line with the population counted at the last aerial count undertaken in Spring 2017, although the calf population may well be lower following the effects of winter 2017-18, as summarised in the table below:

Population Model - Comparison			Whole Group				
SNH Aerial Count v Current Estimate			Stags	Hinds	Calves	Total	Density
2017	SNH Aerial Count	Spring Population	1,279	2,033	885	4,197	7.5
2019	Current Estimate	Spring Population	1,229	2,003	407	3,639	6.5
		<i>Variance</i>	-50	-30	-478	-558	-1.0

It was agreed that the foot count to be undertaken by the group in Spring 2019 should help demonstrate how close the population model is to the actual population on the ground.

3.4 Spring Counts – 2019

It was agreed that a foot count would be during Spring 2019 and given that there are now three distinct sub-populations, arrangements for each sub-group could be left up to each group to agree. The count co-ordinators for each sub-group as follows:

- East – Neil Morrison
- Central – Tom Chetwynd
- West – Archie MacLellan

It was agreed that the focus for the Spring Count will be on numbers as well as recruitment and mortality and information collected from these counts will be fed back to the DMG **(Action Point: 1)**.

Discussion followed on counting methods and options for the future. It was recognised that the group has benefitted from helicopter counts undertaken by SNH to date and it is increasingly likely that any aerial count will have to be self-funded by the group in the future. There may be some limited assistance from SNH but this cannot be relied upon and there may be merit in organising a whole group aerial count every 5 – 7 years rather than relying on foot counts annually. It was agreed that this approach would be discussed in

more detail at the May meeting when the Spring Count data had been collated (**Action Point: 2**).

3.5 Habitat Monitoring

TC asked that all members who have collected HIA data should submit this to him by 31 March 2019 so that it can be analysed and included within the HIA Report which will be prepared for the May meeting (**Action Point: 3**).

Discussion followed on members views of HIA undertaken to date and whether further training was required. TC confirmed that a follow up training session for HIA would be held following the May meeting.

Ledgowan confirmed that they are continuing to use Macdonald et al whereas the majority of members are now using Best Practice Guidance or vantage point photographs.

3.6 Public Interest

TC reiterated the point that members are expected to deliver, where applicable, the 14 public interest action points in addition to effective deer management under the Deer Management Plan and that the DMG will be assessed on the delivery of these actions by SNH on 7 May 2019.

The Working Plan will include details of such actions and will be updated on an annual basis, will also capture details of economic activity and benefits and will be open to public scrutiny when finalised.

3.7 Training Requirements

TC stated that although the recent survey had encouragingly shown that some training had been undertaken in 2018, there were still members requiring training courses, particularly in first aid as well as quad and argo operations.

TC agreed to identify what was required and whether it was possible to hold a group-based training course in Summer 2019 with BASP mentioned as a possible first aid training provider (**Action Point: 4**).

4.0 Venison Update

Some members reported that they had had further carcasses rejected in 2018-19 for warble infestations, which although harmless to human health were an issue to venison processors when combined with emaciation.

Discussion followed on Scottish Quality Wild Venison (SQWV) and the low uptake within the group area. Currently only three members hold SQWV accreditation and whereas the some of the non-accredited members are interested in considering it, there was a general feeling that there needs to be a premium offered for accredited venison to incentivise estates to join and that becoming accredited may lead to an increase in paperwork.

Achnashellach confirmed that they now share their larder with Fionnaraich and Glen Mhor share their larder with both Tullich and Couldoran.

Discussion followed on the indicators and other factors members used to assessed to gauge the welfare of deer both at an individual animal and population level and it was felt that given that those present observe deer on a daily basis they instinctively know when a beast or group of deer are suffering or in poor condition and require culling.

5.0 AOCB

KL raised the matter of deer in Kishorn and reported that the issue had not reoccurred over the Winter. Mike Tweat had now erected a fence around his property and the Pattinsons were in ongoing discussions with the Mathiesons at Seafeld concerning gates in a mutual march fence.

TC confirmed that the date for the SNH Assessment had been confirmed as Tuesday 7 May 2019 (**Action Point: 5**).

6.0 Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed to hold the next meeting for SWRDMG at 10:00 on Friday 3 May 2019 at Lochcarron Village Hall.

7.0 Action List

Ref:	Detail	Action
1.0	Arrange foot counts through regional co-ordinators and supply count information to DMG by 30 April 2019.	All
2.0	Prepare paper outlining options for future deer counts for May meeting.	TC
3.0	Members to supply HIA data collected in previous seasons to DMG prior to May meeting	All
4.0	TC to investigate options for group-based training courses and report at May meeting.	Secretary
5.0	SNH Assessment – Tuesday 7 May	Chair / Secretary