

CAIRNGORMS DEER ADVISORY GROUP

Minutes of meeting held Thursday 11th February 2010 Atholl Arms Hotel

Present

Simon Blackett, Will Boyd-Wallis (Minutes), John Bruce, Ewan Cameron, Richard Cooke, David Greer, Michael Hone (Chair), Iain Hope, George MacDonald, Colin Sheddon, Hamish Trench, Jamie Williamson.

1. Welcome and apologies

Apologies were received from:

Bruce Anderson, Dick Balharry, Alasdair Colquhoun, Willie Lamont, Patrick Thompson, Paul Timms, Sue Walker and Richard Wallace.

2. Minutes of the last meeting – 5th November 2009

Minutes of the last meeting are posted on the CNPA website.

3. Action points and Matters arising from last meeting

All action points accounted for and/or covered further below.

Sika

Iain Hope was thanked for forwarding Sika figures (below) obtained from statutory annual cull returns over a 5 year period (2004 – 2009). DCS has no systematic information on the numbers of surviving sika deer in the Cairngorms National Park area.

<i>Deer Management Group</i>	<i>Total Cull of Sika Deer (2004 - 2009)</i>	<i>Average Annual Cull of Sika Deer</i>
Cairngorms / Speyside	4	0.8
East Grampian	0	0
East Loch Ericht	0	0
Mid West Association of Highland Estates	118	23.6
Monadhliaths	3933	786.6
West Grampian - Tayside	17	3.4
Total	4072	814.4

This prompted a discussion on the need for further research work. The recent hybridisation research based on samples taken from deer east of the Spey was acknowledged, but it would be of interest to assess the level of hybridisation between red and sika deer in areas (such as the Monadhliath) where the two species are possibly interacting more readily.

WBW: Contact Josephine Pemberton to i) seek information on other work that may inform more about potential threat of hybridisation ii) assess costs for further research in the CNP west of the Spey iii) invite her to the next CDAG meeting.

Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill

Personal Correspondence between a CDAG member and DCS about the quality of background information relating to the WNE Bill had been circulated to all. The chair indicated this was not strictly CDAG business, but was of concern to a number of CDAG members. CDAG were informed that the Chief Executive of DCS had delivered a letter to the relevant CDAG member apologising for providing inaccurate information about safety records during deer culling in Scotland and that these had been rectified. The content of the letter was shared with CDAG members.

4. Deer Framework

WBW gave some background to the section of the framework entitled 'sustaining the deer resource' and welcomed comments. It was **agreed** that the draft set the right tone, but was perhaps a little too "effusive" about the important role of landowners and that it should be toned down a little.

It was emphasised that production of the Framework is not statutory, but it is important for guiding the next National Park plan and for building on the progress made by CDAG. Whilst CDAG has become a strong working group with good understanding between members, it was acknowledged that outside of CDAG it is still important to articulate clearly to wider audiences. The framework should not be influenced too much by current fashion but should have longevity.

Monitoring habitat as well as deer numbers is crucial to guiding deer management, whatever the landuse objective. CDAG is fairly confident that amongst deer managers today, there is much greater awareness of the need to consider habitat condition as the key factor guiding deer management. The value of photo-monitoring habitats was highlighted.

It was **agreed** that practical actions should be attached to the guiding principles in the 'sustaining the deer resource' section.

All: Send any further comments on the framework to WBW

5. Cairngorms Deer Count report

A deer count over East and West Grampians, coordinated by the Deer Commission for Scotland (DCS), took place in January. It was by all accounts a well handled, well supported and successful count. The only remaining areas to be counted are Rothiemurchus, Glenmore and Abernethy. Iain Hope has circulated provisional figures.

There were no big surprises; there are much the same number of deer as ten years ago in some places e.g. Glen Tilt, but noticeably fewer in others e.g. Glen Feshie. Aerial photos taken during the count were of high quality but allowed limited classification of stags, hind and calves. It was suggested that sample ground counts by estate staff could provide more detailed information on the hind/stag ratio and calving success.

It was noted that this winter has been particularly harsh and that more deer than usual will suffer its effects. DCS have issued a statement, in the interests of animal welfare and good environmental management, encouraging estates not to waver their planned culls – this was acknowledged by CDAG.

It was agreed that CDAG should encourage estates to make mortality assessments and to provide further classification of hind/stag ratios.

MH: Write to Secretaries of the Deer Management Groups encouraging monitoring of mortality and sex ratios to emboss the count data.

IH: Send final count figures to WBW for circulation to CDAG.

6. Joint Working update.

DCS, FCS and SNH are working with several owners connected to designated sites in drawing together Collaborative Upland Habitat Management Plans (CUHMP) aimed at delivering both private and public objectives.

Cairngorms Special Area of Conservation: Priority areas are Mar Lodge and Glen Feshie. In connection with Mar Lodge, Donald Fraser (DCS) is working with the estates and the agencies to agree an appropriate deer plan.

The Glen Feshie 'Section 7 Agreement' expires in May 2010. A new partnership agreement is being drawn up.

IH emphasised that the agencies wish to be as open as possible and urged CDAG members to contact him if they have any queries or concerns.

7. Mapping deer ranges and management objectives

Justin Irvine (Macaulay Land Use Research Institute) gave a presentation on GIS mapping tools being developed by Macaulay to assist agreements where there may be conflicting, side-by-side landuse objectives. "DeerMAP" provides an indication of where deer prefer to be, based on the availability of forage, shelter, etc and influenced by topography, disturbance etc. These "preference maps" combined with local knowledge of deer movements gave a fairly accurate picture (71%) when compared with actual count data. Combining maps of i) sensitive habitats, ii) grazing tolerance, iii) deer preference and iv) management objectives provides a useful means of highlighting key areas of concern, where attention may need to be focused. It was **agreed** that it would be useful to obtain maps of the National Park area showing these 4 characteristics.

WBW: Investigate costs of providing a combination of maps covering the CNP area to highlight the most sensitive areas.

8. CDAG revised Remit

MH outlined his suggestions for change to the CDAG remit relating to the appointment and term of the chair. It was **agreed** that:

- There should be no change to the overall function of CDAG
- CDAG should be free to agree additional members as and when required
- CDAG members will choose a chair, after wide soundings for a candidate have been made. This chair will serve a three year term, after which CDAG is free to re-elect for another three years or to seek an alternative candidate.
- From time to time CDAG may choose to appoint a vice chair, especially to run any sub group that may be needed.
- An effective CDAG will depend upon having good administrative support, which will arrange meetings, set agendas, arrange papers, take and circulate minutes. The CNPA will provide this. This will be in addition to CNPA's active membership of the Group.
- All CDAG minutes will be taken using the Chatham House rule.

WBW: Update CDAG remit.

9. AOCB.

The next meeting will take place at RSPB's Abernethy Reserve on 6th May 2010. Subsequent meetings will be held on 10th August and 11th November 2010.

CDAG, Thursday 11th February 2010

Summary of Action Points:

- WBW: Contact Josephine Pemberton to i) seek information on other work that may inform more about potential threat of hybridisation ii) assess costs for further research in the CNP west of the Spey iii) invite her to the next CDAG meeting.
- All: Send any further comments on the framework to WBW
- MH: Write to Secretaries of the Deer Management Groups encouraging monitoring of mortality and sex ratios to emboss the count data.
- IH: Send final count figures to WBW for circulation to CDAG.
- WBW: Investigate costs of providing a combination of maps covering the CNP area to highlight the most sensitive areas.
- WBW: Update CDAG remit.