

**East Sutherland Deer Management Group  
Annual General Meeting**

**Kildonan Hall, Kildonan  
Friday, 9 September 2021**

**Present**

Sir Michael Wigan	- Chair / Borrobol	Robbie Rowantree	- Gordonbush
John McMorran	- Vice-Chair / Balnacoil	Martin Grant	- Kildonan
Brian Lyall	- Badanloch	Tom Chetwynd (TC)	- Secretary / Facilitator
James Urquhart	- Dunrobin	<b>Present via Zoom:</b>	
Andrew Mackay	- Dalnessie	Andrew Nicholson	- Clebrig
Martin Grant	- Kildonan	David Patterson	- NatureScot
John Macdonald	- Borrobol	Lorne MacNicol	- Tressady
Blair Colvin	- Kintradwell		

**Apologies**

Dr & Mrs Ryan	- Dalnessie	Robert Flett	- Crakaig
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**1.0 Welcome**

The Secretary welcomed those present to the AGM.

**2.0 Elections**

In the absence of any other nominations Sir Michael Wigan agreed to continue as Chair.

Having served a three year term, John McMorran stood down as Vice-Chair at the meeting.

The sole nomination for Vice-Chair, received prior to the meeting was for Andrew Mackay, Dalnessie, and with no other proposals received at the meeting he was duly elected, seconded by Brian Lyall.

The Chair thanked John McMorran for the experience he had provided to the group over his term as Vice-Chair and expressed how grateful the Group were for his involvement.

There were no nominations for Secretary / Facilitator so Tom Chetwynd offered to continue in that role, which was approved by The Chair and those present.

**3.0 Financial Report**

The Secretary confirmed that all subscriptions prior to 2019-20 had been brought up to date as at the beginning of 2021.

The Secretary confirmed that the invoices sent out in March 2021 for the two year period 2019-20 and 2020-21 had been paid in most cases with only two members still in arrears as at the date of the meeting.

It was also pointed out that there were two outstanding creditors as at the date of the meeting, being ADMG and Chetwynd Rural, both due to be paid post meeting from funds on account.

The Secretary confirmed that the bank arrangements were now with Virgin Money following their take over of Clydesdale Bank. A new mandate would be put in place for Andrew Mackay as Vice-Chair so that the account would continue to operate with two signatories.

The Secretary confirmed that the next subscription invoices for 2021-22 would be circulated this winter.

Discussion was held on membership of the DMG by forestry interests within the group area and the Secretary mentioned that there was a general reluctance from forestry management companies to join DMGs. He confirmed that FLS were still active members and subscribers to ESDMG and now paid their annual levy directly to ADMG.

An opinion was provided that given forestry interests were in receipt of public funds through management and restocking grants and particularly where forest certification was being applied for or in place, membership of the local DMG should be obligatory. The Secretary agreed to raise this matter with ADMG at the next Executive Meeting.

The Secretary presented the draft budget for 2021-22, including Secretarial fees, ADMG levy, website hosting fees, meeting costs and a Deer Management Plan review.

It was agreed that Kildonan Hall would be a suitable venue for future meetings in return for a contribution.

Discussion followed on the DMP Review, see item 6 on the Agenda.

## **4.0 Deer Management Plan**

### **4.1 Spring Count 2021**

The Secretary thanked all members for undertaking the Spring Count in March 2021. Details had been received from all members immediately following the count and were reported as follows:

Sub-Group	Red Deer Count - 2021						Est. Density deer/km2	Est. Recruit %
	Stags	Knobbers	Hinds	Calves	Unclass	Total		
NW Sub-Group:	1,104	86	1,547	614	0	3,351	8.7	39.7
SE Sub-Group:	2,360	140	2,903	1,227	0	6,630	11.6	42.3
E Sub-Group:	110	23	300	108	0	541	10.3	36.0
Total:	3,534	236	4,714	1,934	0	10,418	10.3	41.0

The point was raised that this spring count indicated that recruitment for the group as a whole was higher for 2020-21 than the estimated recruitment included within the population model and that this should lead to an increased cull, particularly of hinds.

The benefit of identifying knobbers separately was also discussed and the Secretary confirmed that they were added to stag numbers within the population model.

The Secretary pointed that out these count figures indicated a slight drop in stag numbers and slight increase in hind numbers when compared to the population model but the overall number of deer for the group as whole was within 100 deer.

The importance of wintering ground on each estate was also discussed and the fact that significant areas are being enclosed for new woodland schemes was recognised. Careful consideration would have to be given in future to deer densities in light of schemes, to avoid deer displacement and movements and negative impacts on remaining wintering ground.

The Secretary confirmed that over the last 2 years he had received instructions from the forestry agents preparing significant new native woodland schemes for both Kildonan and Loch Estate to prepare estate level deer management plans. These DMPs had taken into account the scale of the scheme, the possible implications particularly in terms of deer welfare and impacts to adjoining designated features and the plans in both cases had made recommendations for both compensatory culls and reduction culls as part of the respective scheme.

#### **4.2 Population Model**

The population model was discussed and the Secretary pointed out that both the population model and the spring count indicated a current density of 10.3 deer/km<sup>2</sup> against a target density of 9.6 deer/km<sup>2</sup> for Spring 2022 for the group as a whole.

Discussion followed on the importance of recording impacts as well as densities as an indication of group performance in deer management. It was also suggested that a record should be maintained on the number of designated sites being returned to favourable / maintained within the DMG as a result of members actions.

The Chair also suggested that members should each ask the NatureScot area officer for their understanding of survey results and interpretation of the data for both HIA and designated site surveys. RR suggested that greater sharing of survey results should be undertaken on social media to inform the wider public of deer management performance as this could be more meaningful than publication of density figures and spreadsheets.

The point was raised that if NatureScot adopted a standard density of 10 deer/km<sup>2</sup> would there actually be a need to continue with HIA monitoring if a population was comfortably under this level.

### 4.3 Proposed Culls

Proposed cull numbers provided by members either before or during the meeting were as follows:

Estate	Proposed Culls 2021 - 22	
	Stags	Hinds
Dalchork	35	
Altnahara	4	15
Clebrig	25	60
Loch Choire (North)		
Loch Choire (South)		
Dalnessie	30	35
Ben Armine	25	30
Badanloch	20	90
Syre	0	0
<b>NW Sub-Group:</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>230</b>
<b>Target Culls</b>	<b>275</b>	<b>550</b>
<b>Difference</b>	<b>-136</b>	<b>-320</b>
Borrobol	60	100
Kildonan	80	150
Balnacoil	45	80
Dalreavoch	30	45
Tressady	45	135
Dunrobin	35	80
Gordonbush	40	100
Kintradwell	25	60
Morvich	15	20
<b>SE Sub-Group:</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>770</b>
<b>Target Culls</b>	<b>425</b>	<b>650</b>
<b>Difference</b>	<b>-50</b>	<b>120</b>
West Garty		
Crackaig	20	40
Torrish	10	40
Gartymore		
<b>SE Sub-Group:</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Target Culls</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>150</b>
<b>Difference</b>	<b>-20</b>	<b>-70</b>
<b>Whole Group</b>	<b>544</b>	<b>1,080</b>
<b>Target Culls</b>	<b>750</b>	<b>1,350</b>
<b>Difference</b>	<b>-206</b>	<b>-270</b>

The Secretary suggested that members should focus on hinds given that counted stags were probably consistent with the population model whereas hinds were increasing in number.

#### **4.4 Habitat Impact Assessments (HIA)**

Kildonan, Gordonbush, Clebrig and Dalnessie confirmed that they had undertaken HIA in Summer 2021 with Kildonan providing their data at the meeting.

#### **4.5 Spring Count 2022**

It was agreed to hold a further Spring Count in 2022, date in March to be confirmed post New Year.

The Secretary pointed out that thermal imagers, if available, can be very useful on daylight counts.

### **5.0 Deer Management Plan – Review & Update**

A quotation had been supplied by Victor Clements as author of the DMP for the period 2016-2020 group prior to the meeting. It was proposed that the DMG should go out to tender for the review & update and suitable potential DMP contractors should be identified with a good understanding of impacts on peatlands, given their significance in ESDMG.

The Secretary suggested that there may be sense in leaving any review and update until such time as the Deer Working Group report was clearer. It was agreed that the review and update would be discussed further at the Spring 2022 meeting.

NatureScot agreed to provide a list of contractors with suitable experience in preparing and reviewing DMPs.

The Chair raised the point that given the increase in new woodland cover within ESDMG consideration should be given to undertaking an assessment of the amount and quality of land being taken out of the deer range to determine what is left for deer utilisation.

It was generally agreed that deer densities in future will need to be more carefully assessed and will need to take in to account all ground that is deer fenced, particularly where it is wintering ground, to avoid impacts on both the herd and the environment once they have been excluded.

### **6.0 Woodland Expansion Schemes**

The Chair had previously proposed that a review of new woodland schemes implemented across Scotland be undertaken.

A plan showing afforestation schemes undertaken between 1958 and 2018 was circulated prior to the meeting, this including Dalchork and Rosal which were previously sheep grazings prior to 1957. It was pointed out that further schemes have been undertaken since 2018 and further schemes are in planning for 2022-23.

The importance of deer management planning in light of proposed new woodland schemes was discussed and the Secretary asked that any members considering new schemes should continue to inform the DMG at any early stage. Discussion also followed on both deer and feral pig management in future years, once the woodland fences become porous.

As discussed earlier in the meeting, the group are very aware that new schemes should avoid displacing deer and causing impacts on adjoining, unfenced land and that both compensatory and reduction culls are likely to be required in such cases.

### **7.0 NatureScot Report**

No report was available.

## **8.0 ADMG Report**

The Secretary reported that Tom Turnbull is now Chair of ADMG with Richard Cooke as Vice-Chair.

ADMG are looking at the future role of ADMGs and the future of the assessment process.

Venison prices have increased slightly from 2020-21 prices, particularly for SQWV accredited.

The use of lead-free ammunition will be required by most of the major venison dealers from July 2022. Approximately 50% of the members present confirmed that they were now lead free. It was pointed out that care was needed in terms of good backstops and different reactions displayed by to shot deer.

The ADMG Regional Meeting will be held at Kingsmill Hotel on Wednesday 24 November 2022.

The Secretary mentioned that all members should receive ADMG's E-Scope magazine via email.

## **9.0 AOCB**

RR raised the matter that many reports quote an estimated population of in excess of 1 million deer in Scotland with c.400,000 on the open range. He felt that ADMG should challenge these figures given that they are unsubstantiated and may lead to policy decisions based on misleading estimates.

Andrew Nicholson raised the matter of muirburn by email prior to the meeting, given that Clebrig are keen to continue burning to keep the hill fresh and to prevent the deer from being too static. A number of members present confirmed that they continued to undertake muirburn within ESDMG. RR reported that he was aware of a consultant who had helped an estate gain approval to undertake muirburn on a SSSI.

Concern was aired by some neighbours to Loch Choire over the departure of Neil Mackay and lack of communication over plans to manage the deer, particularly given the good progress made in connection with Ben Klibreck SSSI over the last 4 – 5 years.

## **10. Date of Next Meeting**

It was agreed to hold the next meeting on Friday 25 February 2022 at 2pm at Kildonan Hall.