

Northern Deer Management Group

Minutes of the Meeting on Thursday 27th August 2020, at 2.30pm by online Zoom call

Present: Chair - Howard Palmer (HP) (Latheronwheel West), Treasurer - Anson MacAuslan (AM) (Langwell & Braemore), Secretary – Helen MacIntyre (HM), Holly Deary (HD) & Debbie Skinner (DS) – NatureScot, Tom Chetwynd (TC) – ADMG, representatives from: Achentoul, RSPB, Shurrery, Suisgill.

Apologies:, FLS, Badanloch, Dunbeath & Glutt, Strathmore, Braehour & Backlass, SGRPID, SSE Strathy North & South, Number One Holding.

Chairman's Welcome

Howard Palmer welcomed everyone and thanked them for coming.

1. Apologies – as above

2. Matters arising from Minutes of Meetings on 22nd August 2019 and 7th May 2020

We were approached by a crofter having problems with deer on communal grazing, but have not heard back from him so are assuming that the estate concerned has dealt with the problem.

Highland Game have sent out a letter update regarding venison. Venison prices in the area are around £1.10-£1.20. Dealers do not want to be inundated in October so are asking for culls to be spread across September and October where possible. Forestry operations are commencing next week, which will add to the number of carcasses needing to be picked up. Make sure to keep in contact with your game dealer regarding this. **Action:** HM to email members to ask if they anticipate not meeting their cull targets.

ADMG have produced guidance on Covid-19 precautions for country sports (<http://www.deer-management.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Country-Sports-Framework-020720-Final.pdf>). TC reports that UK stalkers visiting the highlands are finding the regulations fairly easy to follow.

High calving rates, up to 60%, have been seen across some northern DMGs. **Action:** HM to ask members for calving rates.

3. Election of Office Bearers

Howard Palmer has offered to continue as Chair for another year. Anson is to remain as treasurer and Helen to remain as secretary. HP said thank you for all the work done this year.

4. Treasurer's Report – Anson MacAuslan

Subscriptions at the new rate were sent out in August. ADMG subscriptions are delayed until at least October. There is money still owed as a contribution towards the DMP.

5. Culls and counts

a) Planned 2021 counts –

One member commented that their count this year was unusually high, and weather conditions pushed lots of deer onto his ground – giving a much higher density. HP suggested he use HIA data to show impacts on the ground. HD pointed out that deer move around and so density information needs to be considered across a larger area.

SNH (now called NatureScot) are looking for contributions from DMGs towards the costs of helicopter counts. HP commented that the group are not likely to be interested in contributing any significant amount. HD said there are other higher priority counts this coming year so it is unlikely that Northern will be included. HP feels that the foot count is pretty reliable. HD said that HIA data is also crucial to go with the count data. The foot count will be carried out as usual, on Mon 1st March 2021 for most sub-groups, and in mid-Feb for West Sub-Group 1.

b) Proposed hind/calf culls for 2020/21

Targets are higher than last year's culls for all sub-groups (Total 1268 hind target vs 952 hinds culled). It is hoped that members can maintain those numbers despite a reduced venison price.

c) Population modelling

The calving rate is predicted to be higher this year – rates of 50-60% are used in the population models. TC suggested looking at a population model for the whole of the group, to see if it balances or if we have deer coming in or out of the group's borders. **Action:** HM to draw up group population model.

One group member has been aiming to reduce deer numbers for many years. However, despite major efforts in the past two years to cull more deer, the population doesn't seem to have reduced. Either the count is not accurate, or there is immigration of deer. Concerns were raised on whether cull levels were too high on some estates considering the count figures. HP asked about research into deer tagging to identify movements. HD said there is some but it can take years for the data to come through. It does appear that there is significant movement of deer up in the North of Scotland.

6. Group Deer Management Plan – Priority Actions

The actions the group will concentrate on are:

- 1 – Completing the Working Plan** – We need to add HIA and population modelling and cull target information.
- 2 – Population modelling and group population targets**
- 3 – Habitat impact assessments**

7. Habitat Impact Assessments

NatureScot (SNH) have generated 60 random HIA plots per estate. You don't need to monitor this many, but can choose some with blanket bog and some with dwarf shrub heath in them. ADMG has some YouTube videos on HIA methods (<http://www.deer-management.co.uk/general-info/tutorials/>). HD pointed out that Northern DMG are quite far behind most other groups with HIA. **Action:** HM to send out plots and monitoring methods information to members not yet doing HIA and ask if this is enough for them to start doing HIA.

8. Any Other Competent Business

NatureScot (SNH) is already working with ADMG on some of the recommendations in the DWG report. They also await the Scottish Government's response to the report.

Mountain hares – NatureScot (SNH) are working through what the new legislation means in terms of licencing shooting. The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust looking to extend hare monitoring to the northern DMGs. It was commented that there are very few hares in Northern DMG and none have been shot for years.

Two members notified the group that they have out of season and night shooting licences.

9. Date of Next Meeting – Thursday 18th March 2021. Venue TBC. An earlier date than the usual May meeting was chosen to allow early discussions about HIA monitoring, which would mostly be finished by May.