

Northern Deer Management Group

Minutes of the Meeting on Thursday 17th August 2023 at 2.30pm at Kildonan Hall

Present:

- Chair, Secretary, Treasurer:
- Representatives from: Achentoul, Armadale, Armadale Farm, Badanloch, Bighouse, Braehour, Backlass, Strathmore, Braemore, Fountain Forestry, Glutt, Langwell and Braemore, Latheronwheel West, Skelpick, Syre, Torrish
- ADMG, NatureScot, RSPB
- External Population Modelling Advisor

1. Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone and expressed, on behalf of NDMG, condolences to family and estate at Dunbeath. Apologies were recorded.

2. Approval of Minutes of Meeting on 5th May 2023 and Matters Arising

Minutes proposed, seconded and approved by all. There were no matters arising.

3. Chair's Address

After the Spring helicopter count by Nature Scot, there was some doubt at the May meeting as to the accuracy of the count. Our treasurer has commissioned the modelling for our group, (copies of which have been sent to you) and the consultant will present his findings which, together with NatureScot's report, should bring some clarity as to what we should be aiming for. It appears that the population may have increased by almost 4000 animals in the 10 years between counts. The proposed culls add up to around half of that, so in all likelihood we may all need to have another look at our cull projected culls for 2023/24. The model reduction plan shows that as a group our proposed culls fall short by 239 animals. At my estate we have applied for an out of season licence for shooting stags, so we certainly hope to go over our projected cull. I would like to continue to encourage everyone to keep up with Habitat Impact Assessments. I am sure another training day can be arranged if there are enough people wishing to take part. Please also let us know if you have recently had or are about to have an environmental assessment so we can amend our records. AECS grants are available, so these assessments should be considered as a worthwhile investment. I would like to thank our officers for their hard work and dedication to the group.

4. Treasurer's Report

Nothing to note. Invoices for 2023/4 to come out after the meeting based on last year's cull figures.

5. Culls & Counts 2023

- a) Re NatureScot data output – a member points out that it was difficult to relate the photos to the map. Suggests photos are numbered to correspond with number on map to make it easier to correlate. This was noted by NatureScot. There was some discussion about map areas and boundaries; It was reiterated that NatureScot are happy to work with any group members who need input or support re analysis.

- b) A privately commissioned research report "Commentary on the NDMG Population and cull data" was circulated to the group before the meeting along with relevant spreadsheet calculations. A member spoke for the group when he thanked the estate in question for commissioning and sharing this report. The consultant was invited to the meeting to present his findings, the key points being:
- Numbers are trending upwards in all deer Management Group areas.
 - The 2013 helicopter count was probably too low given that there were more forested areas at that time.
 - Population modelling only gives the gist of the situation and supporting data from habitat impact assessments would greatly enhance its accuracy.

The consultant's key recommendations to the group were:

- Increase cull figures for 2023/4 on the assumption that the deer population is high and trending upwards.
- Be more rigorous noting recruitment levels.
- A commitment to habitat impact assessment by all group members is required from now on.

6. Habitat Impact Assessments

This is essential for NDMG members to prove to the Scottish Government that the group has an effective working strategy backed up by data. The Secretary has contacted NatureScot for more details about training and funding, and these will be circulated to group members in due course.

7. Group Deer Management Plan

This may need to be refreshed. The committee will address this issue.

8. Fire Plan

No updates.

9. NatureScot Report

The NatureScot representative reported briefly on Scottish Government proposals, but these have yet to be legislated.

10. Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG) Report

The ADMG representative gave a condensed version of the ADMG report. This will be circulated in full shortly.

11. Any Other Competent Business

Nothing was raised.

12. Date of Next Meeting

A date of Thursday 9th May 2024 was set. The meeting will be held at 2.30pm at Kildonan Hall.