



The National Trust
for Scotland

DEER MANAGEMENT POLICY

July 2003

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Approved by NTS Council 4 July 2003

Introduction

This paper seeks to clarify the policy for the management of all wild deer on land owned by The National Trust for Scotland. The policy provides a framework for the Deer Management Code of Practice for use by property staff, and is formulated within the overall context of the Corporate Plan and Property Management Plans.

As Britain's largest native wild mammal, red deer are an iconic and important component of the Scottish fauna. The management of these and other species of deer is fundamental to controlling the development of semi-natural vegetation in most of the uplands of Scotland. It can have a major impact on rural economies and attracts close public attention from those concerned with both land management and animal welfare.

This policy aims to ensure that deer management is carried out consistently, with full justification and to the standards of best current practice.

Background

The management of deer in Scotland has been going through an important evolutionary process starting with the enactment of the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996 and the development by the Deer Commission for Scotland (DCS) of a long term vision.

Central to the DCS vision is the need to control deer populations at levels below those at which they damage natural ecosystems. Although responsibility for deer management lies with individual owners, all deer species are managed through the Deer Management Groups (DMGs) whereby neighbouring landowners work together to manage deer. This process stresses the importance of local management and caters for differing conditions in different parts of Scotland. It is a voluntary process, although DCS has a number of powers of intervention.

Policy Framework

The Corporate Plan

The Trust's Corporate Plan 1999 - 2004 is the basis for formulating this policy framework. The Plan summarises the Trust's statutory purposes as:

- To ensure the permanent conservation, through ownership or other means, of nationally important land, buildings and contents (in the case of lands, this includes the conservation of their natural aspect and animal and plant life)
- To enable people to visit and enjoy the Trust's properties, to see and experience them in ways that are consistent with their conservation

Conservation Principles

The Conservation Principles (2003) set out a framework under which all of the Trust's work should be carried out. They stress the need to manage properties on the basis of plans carefully formulated to protect identified features of significance.

Farmland Management Policy

The Farmland Management Policy (1999) applies to all farmland owned by the Trust, including hill farms where in-bye land and rough grazings are managed as a unit. It clarifies that farming practices should conserve and enhance the natural heritage of each holding, while maintaining rural employment and the viability of farm incomes.

Wild Land Policy

The Wild Land Policy complements the Unna Principles (see below) and states that the Trust will manage its properties so as to avoid reducing wild land quality. Deer stalking is seen as neutral to this objective, but the construction of roads and the use of mechanical transport, including helicopters, are recognised as detractors.

Grazing Working Party

This Working Party recommend in 1993 that “The Trust should take the lead in deer culling at all NTS properties where deer of any species regularly occur. The annual deer cull should relate to the property management objectives identified in the Management Plan. It should be decided, after consultation with the Deer Commission for Scotland, local Deer Management Groups and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) where appropriate”.

The Conditions and Views of Property Donors

In some cases, properties have come into the care of the Trust with specific views or conditions as part of the acquisition. The Trust should therefore abide by these wishes within the context of the its primary objectives. Relevant examples include:

- Percy Unna - Glencoe, Kintail and Ben Lawers
- The Brasher Trust - West Affric
- The Easter Charitable Trust - Mar Lodge Estate

The Unna Principles have been adopted to apply more widely to all mountainous properties. In the political context of the time (1937) stalking was seen as the principal threat to public access to the mountains. The Principles are now interpreted to mean that public access has higher priority and that deer are shot on mountain properties to prevent damage to the natural heritage or commercial crops. The Principles also discourage the construction of new paths and tracks, sentiments that have since been expanded in the Wild Land Policy.

Legislation

The management of deer is governed by the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996. This is a consolidated Act that provides the basic framework for the management of wild deer in Scotland. The Trust’s policy will work within this legislation as it is enacted. The Trust will also comply with other related legislation, such as the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996.

Discussion

Deer in Scotland fall into two categories:

- Native – red and roe
- Introductions – Sika and fallow

Muntjac and Chinese water deer are feral elsewhere in the United Kingdom and a number of other species, for example reindeer, are in private collections.

Sika deer hybridise with red deer and genetic studies indicate that there are few remaining populations of red deer on the mainland that do not show evidence of hybridisation. In the long term there is a serious danger that non-hybrid red deer will become extinct, and refugia have therefore been established on islands (Arran, Jura, Islay, Rum and the Outer Isles) to which it is illegal to introduce Sika deer. Where they can be excluded (eg Arran), it is therefore important for the Trust both to support this policy and to retain a genetically viable red deer population. Sika eradication on the mainland is unlikely to be successful but control may be justified in some circumstances to reduce inter-breeding with red deer.

Deer play a major role in controlling the growth of natural habitats, especially woodland, and therefore their grazing affects not only the habitats themselves but also the development of the landscape.

In determining deer management objectives for properties, it is important that deer should not be considered in isolation, but in relation to other grazing animals (sheep, cattle, feral goats, mountain hares, rabbits, etc). They also fulfil an important role in a varied ecological landscape where an integrated land use plan may include a mix of woodland, moorland, farmland and other land uses.

Deer populations are increasing throughout much of Scotland, including most of the DMGs that include the Trust's upland properties. Control is therefore necessary not only to stabilise or reduce populations on Trust properties but also to contribute to management of the population across the wider DMG. The achievement of the Trust's own objectives will often involve co-operation with neighbouring estates.

The introduction of DMG Management Plans provides a framework at local level to inform the Trust in formulating Property Management Plans, and an opportunity for the Trust to advocate its own management objectives.

The Trust must ensure that all culling operations are fully justified in terms of conservation objectives and are carried out to the highest humane standards.

At Trust properties deer are currently managed by one or more of the following methods:

- Deer control is carried out by the Trust's own staff of rangers, stalkers or foresters – Kintail, Torridon, Glencoe, Crathes and Drum.
- Contract stalkers are employed by the Trust and work under close supervision – Kintail and Ben Lawers.
- By tenants operating with formal or informal agreements. This may involve the use of paying clients – Falls of Glomach, West Affric, Goatfell, Burg and House of Dun. The agreements may include details of maximum and minimum cull levels and sexes or age classes to be selected.
- By other interested parties under agreement – Ben Lomond (Forest Enterprise), Kintail (DCS).
- Recreational stalking is let by NTS to clients who are accompanied by the Trust's own stalkers – Mar Lodge Estate.

- NTS farming tenants may kill marauding deer.

Policy Statement

1. Native species of deer are a valuable component of the natural heritage and populations will be conserved at levels consistent with the conservation objectives for the property. In many cases this will involve reducing the populations.
2. The Trust will undertake a full assessment of each relevant Trust property to determine the status of the deer, the habitat and the aims and objectives for landscape, ecosystems and historic/archaeological remains. Where deer control is deemed necessary to achieve the required conservation objectives, this will be specified in the Property Management Plans or Property Statements.
3. The Trust's primary objective is conservation, followed by open access; no other policy or management objective must prejudice these in any way. Deer control will not impede public access.
4. Deer will be controlled in order to achieve landscape or nature conservation objectives, to prevent damage to crops, forestry or gardens and, occasionally, for reasons of road or public safety.
5. The decision on whether to control deer will always be taken on the basis of one of the objectives in paragraph 4, but the choice of method of control may be modified by social and economic considerations or the wishes of property donors.
6. The Trust will ensure that decisions to cull deer are fully justified in terms of wider conservation objectives, that the highest standards of humane treatment are maintained and that alternative methods of control are less suitable.
7. Where appropriate, the Property Management Plan will include a Deer Management Plan that will take into account the local DMG Plan and DCS advice. Implementation of the plan will be monitored by Trust staff.
8. All deer management should be under the control of Trust staff in accordance with the Deer Management Code of Practice.
9. Where other agreements, formal or informal, exist, the Trust will aim to re-negotiate the terms and conditions to achieve these standards.
10. Where deer are culled, the Trust will normally seek to maximise economic benefits by selling the venison.
11. The feeding of deer should not take place unless for conservation purposes.
12. There will be a presumption against using fences for deer management, although it is recognised that there will be a need for them in the short term at some sites except where this would compromise other over-riding conservation objectives.
13. There will be a presumption against the use of wheeled vehicles for extraction of venison from the open hill. However, in some circumstances, the use of all terrain vehicles will be permitted so long as the operator is sensitive to the terrain and ensures that there is no appreciable damage to the natural vegetation.

14. A recognised system of monitoring deer numbers and their impacts on each relevant property will be put in place, in close liaison with the DCS, DMGs, SNH and neighbouring landowners.
15. The Trust will maintain an active role in the local DMGs and will contribute to the development of deer management plans. Attempts should be made to reach agreement by consensus but, where this is not possible, the primary objectives of the Trust (for natural and cultural heritage, landscape and visitors) will not be compromised.
16. The Trust will maintain close contact with other agencies, such as DCS, SNH and the Scottish Executive with a view to influencing the development of deer policy throughout Scotland.
17. The Trust will manage all deer within the current deer legislation.
18. The Trust will promote the highest standards of conduct on all aspects of deer management through the implementation of a Code of Practice.
19. This policy and the Code of Practice will be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis.

Further Information

Additional information is available from:

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