

WEST KNOYDART DEER MANAGEMENT GROUP REPORT JUNE 2020

In place of a meeting, which was planned for 22 June at Barisdale, we are sending round an update of news to date in the current unusual circumstances.

At the present time, Scotland has only just relaxed the coronavirus lockdown measures to enter Phase 1, where outdoor work requiring travel, like deer management, can resume. Prior to this most deer work across Scotland has been stopped, either because of the travel restrictions or because staff have been furloughed. This will have significant implications for the deer population as a whole, but particularly roe numbers and deer in woodlands.

More importantly, from WKDMG's point of view, we have had no group-wide count. Again, this is pretty much a universal situation, though some people have been able to carry out mortality and recruitment counts through the spring, where they have been retained at work. The absence of a count in our situation is particularly tricky since we were hoping to match up the west and east group numbers with population models that integrate with each other, as per the paper written by Cathy and Linzi. This will now have to wait for another year.

In spite of the challenges of no count, we are only fractionally behind on our proposed cull. The expected cull from the model for the west group was 163 stags and 215 hinds. We will have missed that by 1.5% on hinds and calves. We are likely to be seeing a big calving this year, after last year's spectacular rut with hinds in really good condition, and a winter which has not been too harsh. On the west, conditions overwinter have probably been less favourable but this emerging picture of a population bulge is likely to be much more significant further east where the weather was better and deer have retained good condition throughout the winter. It seems likely that the cull targets for 2020/21 will be in the region of 150 stags and 250 hinds plus calves for the group as a whole. Please see the end of the report for the population model as it currently stands.

For the coming season, maintaining pressure on deer numbers to keep them in check may prove challenging too. Most estates are not expecting to see their overseas clients and many have cancelled them already. It is not completely certain whether UK-based clients will be able to participate either, given that social distancing is not easy in a stalking situation. In some situations, though thankfully not here, it may be that staff will be lost and culls just don't happen. This lack of action could have a drastic impact on deer numbers, with a significant increase, especially if the hind cull is low in 2020/21.

Pressure on the deer sector has never been higher than it has been in the past few years. There are at least some distractions now, taking a bit of the limelight away from deer management. However, the Review of Deer Management proposals remain in front of the Scottish Minister and significant changes may well still happen in the future. It is important that we do everything in our power to maintain our deer management work, carry it out efficiently and effectively, and ensure that numbers do not drift out of control.

A quick note on housekeeping. Kilchoan Estate has changed hands and while the new owner has not been able to travel up recently, for obvious reasons, it is hoped that he will soon will be. Camusrory said goodbye to Rob in April and have appointed a new estate and deer manager, David Fergusson, who starts in July. Jim and Ally have been furloughed for the time being.

SNH

The following response has come from Andrew McMaster in SNH (actually now Nature Scot) regarding the group and relevant issues. His boss has changed and is now Graeme Taylor, who has taken over from Chris Donald as Operations Manager, while Chris has moved to become Area Manager for South Highland.

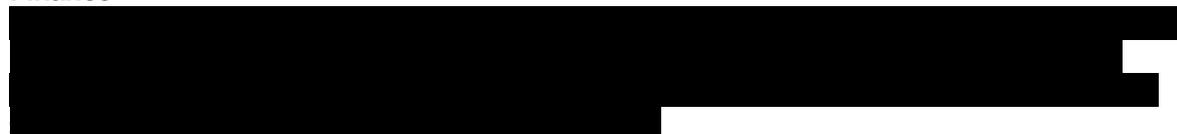
Deer control can now progress under phase 1 of the restart. Those wishing to restart should consider the following guidance for outdoor work- [Outdoor working guidance](#)

Results from the Rum research this year have shown that it's been a bumper year for calving, and whilst that's not necessarily a proxy for the whole of Scotland it will have relevance for Knoydart

We understand that owners will be concerned of the impact of potentially not having guests for stags and we understand that that this may mean that culling of stags is now a cost. We would be expecting that the stag cull is carried out as model or population models are adjusted with compensatory hind cull to deliver overall delivery of population targets.

As the group are aware the Heli-count program has been impacted by COVID-19. The Knoydart count remains a high priority I will do all I can to see it is delivered. Please can the group confirm ongoing financial support for the count as agreed previously?

Finance





Habitat Impact Assessment

Thanks to COVID-19 and associated restrictions/furlough, much HIA work has been missed along with the count. Fred at Barisdale has been extremely diligent and carried out some open ground plots and hopes to complete the woodland plots too. This is valuable since it can be added in to the existing framework of results and fill the gap from Barisdale, something which I will do in the coming weeks. Once I have done the mapping I will send round the results.

Population Model

With the 2019/20 culls, this is what our population model now looks like, endeavouring to achieve the densities properties aspire to and a roughly 50:50 male:female ratio.

	Stags	Hinds	Calves	Total
2019 Spring Population (Count)	1235	1464	421	3120
2019 Summer Population	1446	1675	502	3622
2019/20 Cull	163	212	89	464
2019 Mortality	29	33	30	93
2020 Spring Population	1254	1429	383	3066
2020 Summer Population	1445	1621	486	3552
2020/21 Cull	150	250	100	500
2020 Mortality	29	32	29	90
2021 Spring Population	1266	1338	357	2962
2021 Summer Population	1445	1517	455	3417
2021/22 Proposed Cull	160	160	65	385
2021 Mortality	29	30	27	87

2022 Spring Population	1256	1326	363	2945
2022 Summer Population	1437	1508	452	3397
2022/23 Proposed Cull	160	160	65	385
2022 Mortality	29	30	27	86
2023 Spring Population	1249	1318	360	2926
2023 Summer Population	1429	1498	449	3376
2023/24 Proposed Cull	160	160	65	385
2023 Mortality	29	30	27	85
2024 Spring Population	1240	1308	357	2905
2024 Spring Target Pop				2636