

**1. Present and apologies.**

John Jackson (FLS), Ian Collier (FCS), Steve Fox (Carnoch), Peter Lawson (Kinlochteacuis), Hugh Raven (Ardtornish), Ross Mackay (Ardtornish), Richard Cooke (ADMG), Kevin Masson (Kingairloch), Michelle Henley (Scottish Wildlife Trust), Andrew McMaster (NatureScot), John MacDonald (Drimnin/Kingairloch), Andy Jackson (Carna).

Apologies: Derek Lewis, Michael Skelly, Angus Robertson, Neil Roberts, Gaetan Hannecart, Alasdair Firth, Harvey Phillips (Inversanda).

Chairman's comments.

The chair welcomed the new owners of Kingairloch, the Hannecart family, and Kevin Musson attending as their representative; and informed the meeting about the departure of our secretary Cathy Mayne. The group sent her its thanks and best wishes.

**2. Minutes of last meeting.**

The minutes of the meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2021 were approved as a correct record, proposed by Steve Fox, seconded by Ross MacKay.

**3. Secretariat**

Various possible candidates were suggested, including Bruce Taylor, Dr Linzi Seivwright, Helen MacIntyre. It was agreed it would be helpful if we could get the same person also to do our Habitat Impact Assessment work, though this may not be possible. For the latter Victor Clements, Alistair Headley, Tom Edwards, and Kate Proctor at Highland Ecology were mentioned. Peter L and Steve F will take this forward and explore costs.

**4. Update on accounts**

Hugh R updated the meeting, saying that due to inaccessible records from 2020, the 2020/21 accounts had yet to be completed. PL suggested that accounts covering two years be prepared (20/21, and 21/22), which was proposed Steve Fox, seconded Ross MacKay.

**5. Habitat monitoring**

With Cathy's departure we shall miss a year, which is unfortunate but not problematic. A new woodland monitoring technique is under development – WHIA lite, as it were – which we shall trial in future. The priority is to find the right contractor for the group.

**6. Open range cull report and open range target cull for 2022.**

Members reported the 2021/22 cull as follows by open range sub-group:

**West subgroup**

Target population. 315s. 300h. 100c. 10304ha. Target density 6.9/100ha  
Proposed cull. 46s. 110(21-22)/90(22-23)/85/80/75

SWT	2s.	15h.	6c
Kinlochteacuis	12s.	11h.	3c
Ardtornish W	8s.	55h.	21c
Laudale W	26s.	33h.	18c
<b>SUB TOTAL</b>	<b>48s</b>	<b>114h.</b>	<b>48c</b>

Glencripesdale	19s.	13h.	6c
SNH GLENCRIP.	30.	20.	14
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>49s</b>	<b>33h.</b>	<b>20c</b>

Conclusion: the stag and hind cull collaborating members exceeded target by less than 5%, though NatureScot's cull was 300% of historic value. Rory Putman has been consulted and is not concerned.

### North-east subgroup

Target population 370s 324h. 110c 7043ha. Target density 11.4/100ha  
Proposed culls 58s. 110(21-22)/80(22-23)/80/80/80

Kingairloch N	27s.	58h.	20c
Carnoch	17s.	31h.	13c
Laudale E	17s.	30h.	12c
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>61s.</b>	<b>119h.</b>	<b>45c</b>

Conclusion: stag cull exceeded by 5%, hind cull by 9%. Rory Putman is not concerned.

### South-east subgroup

Target population 400s. 370 h. 125c. 15088ha. Target density 5.93/100ha  
Proposed culls 55s. 150h(21-22)/ 140(22-23)/ 130(23-24) /110(24-25) 100(25-26)

Kingairloch S	22s.	27h.	16c
Ardtornish SE	21+5s.	105h.	47c
Glensanda	10s.	25h.	8c
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>58s.</b>	<b>157h.</b>	<b>71c</b>

Conclusion: stag cull exceeded by 5%, hind cull by 5%, i.e. successful delivery of the cull.

Glencripesdale Estate reported a cull of 19 stags, 13 hinds and 6 calves.

NatureScot Glencripesdale increased the stag cull, which was 30 (vs 10 as the long-term cull target), 20 hinds, 14 calves; the hope is that this is not too detrimental to the model, as that area was not integral to the model in any event. There were heavy levels of browsing and bark stripping, so the cull was increased within the enclosure. The plan after the sale to the RSPB is that the fence will be made deer-proof. No poaching and no DVCs.

Steve Fox, Carnoch, reported carcass condition good at start and declining during season. No poaching concerns, no DVCs, some heather beetle impact (though less bad than 2019), expectation is that stag cull remain the same this year. Designated sites not an issue.

Kevin Masson and John MacDonald, Kingairloch, reported condition poor to begin with and didn't deteriorate. Expectation that the cull this year will be much as last year. No poaching and no DVCs. No designated sites on Kingairloch.

Ardtornish reported one DVC and no poaching. The stag cull will be similar this year. On designated sites, the hind cull target was met in or adjacent to all five designated sites. Ardtornish has no particular habitat change plans to impact the coming season.

Glensanda saw a nil hind cull in 2020 due to covid, 28 hinds and 8 calves were counted this March, condition deteriorated as the season progressed. No DVCs or poaching.

Scottish Wildlife Trust – thanks to Peter L the cull was 2 stags 15 hinds 6 calves. No poaching. Next year similar cull to this year. Close monitoring will be required this year if, as planned, Ardtornish's Doire nam Mairt DNM plantation is felled.

Forestry and Land Scotland reported a red deer cull of 93 stags, 32 hinds, 10 calves (down considerably from the previous year) plus 18 roe bucks and 23 does. Part of the cull was contracted out, e.g. at Barr, and the contractor shot fewer deer there than Torquil had in prior years. In designated sites there was no change. Peatland restoration projects may arise, and as soon as an area is felled, the peat probes come in to check the depth – which often precludes replanting, with planting now restricted on over 40cm of peat depth.

Isle of Carna – normally two beasts a year, and in 2021 they had a big influx swimming across from Rahoy, Oronsay and FLS land. They arranged a night licence in Feb/March and culled 8 in total, 2 stags, 3 hinds, 2 calves and a roe. Browsing impact was significant. They still have more deer than they would wish, but it's too late to cull this season.

Drimnin. 14 hinds, 5 calves, ave. weight 38kg, condition was average at best. No poaching, no DVCs, proposed stag cull 10-15. There was no report on designated sites. Drimnin woodlands – 4 stags, 18 hinds, 8 calves.

Other woodlands – Rhemore 11 hinds and 6 calves, Achnasaul 3 hinds, Carnacaillache 4 hinds, 3 calves, 2 stags. Some taken under night authorisation, some out of season.

Killundine – 21 hinds, 9 calves, no DVCs, no poaching, re designated sites a potential fence along the gorge and SSSI woodland above the road, if approved, would control deer density. A peatland survey is in preparation; a new staff-member starting imminently.

Carnacaillache is now owned by a forest partnership between Derek Lewis and David Campbell, they don't see much point joining the DMG as it's all commercial woodland, and once the permitter fence is renewed they plan to keep numbers close to zero.

## **7. Training and Certification updates**

Reports confirmed that where refreshers and updates were required they were undertaken. The main change in the group is at Kingairloch, with a change of personnel; Kevin Masson is DMQ 1 and 2-qualified, and they plan to get a stalker for three weeks at the same level. It was agreed that e.g. First Aid and ATV training could be offered across the group; Ardtornish can offer spare places when they arise on the training for its team members.

## **8. Agency updates**

NatureScot update, including update on designated sites. Andrew said he would follow up with a written update for circulation. He reported the ScotGov pledge on the Scottish biodiversity strategy, arresting loss by 2030 and restoring past losses by 2045. Deer working group recommendations will be delivered through the same programme. The Wild Deer National Approach recommendations will likely be implemented when they have been

considered by the NatureScot board. 10 deer/kmSq has been agreed as a maximum density. Morvern is under this level already, and HIA is underway – so already compliant.

He reported the Finding Common Ground project on sustainable deer management, a civic mediation project to deconflict deer management.

Andrew plans to attend the next MDMG meeting with more specific information and commended the group for proceeding well.

Richard Cooke, ADMG.

The AGM in March was recorded in full and available on ADMG website. RC highlighted the presentation from Nick Halfhide on the Scot Gov position and NatureScot's role in it, heavily focused on climate and biodiversity, emphasising the necessity of fewer deer. ADMG challenges the one-size-fits-all approach, as conditions are so variable: impacts with densities also vary enormously. CNPA want densities of 5-8, which disregards impact and other herbivores. Wildland are instead considering occupancy, which is more related to impact. ADMG think that new measures are required, taking into consideration a wider range of factors. A greenhouse gas project is examining the climate impact of deer.

New legislation will be introduced (covering 92 of the Deer Working Group's 99 recommendations) in 2023, with a new Deer Act. The possibility of Deer measures going into a Natural Environment Bill would be an alternative to a Deer Bill, though less satisfactory in ADMG's view as it may compound rather than clarify existing anomalies in Deer law. ADMG advocate the voluntary approach to cull targets. ADMG chair Tom Turnbull will be presenting to the Access Forum, and would appreciate feedback from DMGs about impacts of access.

Re venison, Richard now chairs the Scottish Venison Association. Quality assurance has seen a serious blip in inspections, but the independent assessors have been sacked and new quality assurance inspectors, SAI Global, appointed.

Forestry Commission Scotland's Ian Collier updated the meeting on a revised (upward) planting target, and FCS is also still funding improved management of existing woodlands.

## **9. Game dealers & non-lead ammunition**

Some MDMG members use Highland Game and some Ardgay. Members should keep an eye on carcass rejection for Warble. Kingairloch may use Simpson Game.

On ammunition, the Association of Game Handling Establishments say its members will not take lead-shot beasts from this July onwards, as driven by the market. Ardtornish has been using non-lead exclusively (on .270), and noticed some difference in impacts, but were now satisfied with its efficacy. Kingairloch is only using copper, and prefer it to lead also on a .270. FLS found issues with compatibility with some firearms. Carnoch also uses copper, though it's not universally available. The group is moving towards lead-free, subject to availability – though guests may be difficult to persuade.

## **10. Any other business.**

Kevin said that the Hannecarts are keen to meet neighbours, will be here in the summer and will be hospitable. Their interests are in balanced management, and doing right by the estate. The larder will be reinstated, involving converting a listed building.

**Future meeting** dates: Tuesday 1/11/22 and Tuesday 11/4/23.