



Briefing on out of season culling and animal welfare concerns

The purpose of this briefing is to provide you with information on the recent concerns raised about out of season deer culling by Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) and provide further context about animal welfare concerns raised as associated with this.

The LINK deer group members recognise that deer have a vital part to play in a balanced ecosystem. However, Scotland's deer numbers have for too long been severely out of balance due to the lack of natural predators and unsustainable management by large private estates who seek to maintain unnaturally high deer densities for sport shooting.

Heavy browsing by deer prevents woodland regeneration, causes damage to peatland both by browsing and trampling, and is one of the main threats to the biodiversity of Scotland's woodlands. Those managing land therefore have a responsibility to control deer and the fencing of areas alone is not a long-term solution. This has been highlighted in a set of recommendations from the independent [Deer Working Group](#) which reported to Government at the end of 2019. It outlines a suite of essential reforms to deer management "*...to support the successful implementation of the Scottish Government's climate change mitigation and adaptation measures...ensuring that Scotland has an effective system for the management of wild deer that safeguards public interests and promotes sustainable management of the deer.*"

FLS carry out a large proportion of the deer cull in Scotland, not least because of the failure of neighbouring private shooting estates to manage deer populations effectively. FLS's deer management is essential, evidence based and carried out to the highest standards, by well trained and managed staff and contractors.

Recent comments in the media that out of season culls are a new policy and a threat to animal welfare are unfounded. Carefully managed culling of female deer in September under general licence has been standard practice in Scotland for several years. Due to Covid-19 restrictions on culling earlier in the year there is an even greater need for safe, high welfare standard culling of female deer this September. Without it deer numbers and damage to their habitat will accelerate.

An open season for culling female red deer in September is standard practice in at least a dozen European countries. The general licence is widely used in Scotland and is administered by NatureScot (formerly known as SNH).

The LINK deer group urges you to consider this issue from the point of view of essential, sustainable deer management. This management is much needed to enhance Scotland's state of nature, meet woodland expansion targets, and to meet vital climate emergency targets. At the end of this year we are expecting the Scottish Government to respond to the set of recommendations from the Independent Deer Working Group; implementing these recommendations will deliver a real shift in deer management in Scotland and help our nature thrive once again. When that time comes we hope you will join LINK and others across Scotland in ensuring that the Government's response is robust and delivers a modernised deer management system fit for the 21st century, one that can build a brighter future for our natural environment and for our rural communities.



This response represents the collective view of the following LINK's members:

Members of the Deer Group:

- John Muir Trust
- National Trust for Scotland
- Ramblers Scotland
- RSPB Scotland
- Scottish Wildlife Trust
- Trees for Life
- Woodland Trust Scotland

And additional LINK members:

- Butterfly Conservation Scotland
- Cairngorms Campaign
- Froglife
- North East Mountain Trust
- Scottish Badgers
- Scottish Wildland Group

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