

ACLI Deer Management Policy

Background

The Deer Act 1996 requires all landowners of land where wild deer may be found to have a Deer Management Plan. This was amended by a Scottish Parliament Act of 2011 (Wildlife and Natural Environment Act 'WANE'), which includes a code of practice applicable to all landowners/custodians with a deer population.

If the Deer Management Plan does not adequately manage wild deer, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) can apply for a 'control order' to enforce sustainable deer numbers.

All major landowning charities in Scotland, i.e. Scottish Wildlife Trust, National Trust, RSPB, John Muir Trust and Woodland Trust, all have Deer Management Plans which include lethal culling. At least two of the charities have made representations to Scottish Government that SNH should make more use of control orders given the deleterious impact on biodiversity by excessive deer numbers.

The Arran Community Land Initiative as a landowner therefore has a legal responsibility to establish a policy consistent with the national guidelines and appropriately informed by scientific analysis and best practice. The word 'community' in our title in no way absolves us from these responsibilities.

Land Strategy/Objectives

ACLI is committed to managing the land under its ownership to the following ends:

- Provide an environment which supports its charitable aims of outdoor education and recreation;
- Improve the range of habitats upon its land and by so doing realise its ambition to enhance biodiversity;
- Make an active contribution to enhanced carbon capture by all measures available, with particular emphasis on the establishment and enhancement of native woodland;
- Increase safe access to our land by foot, cycle and horse.

ACLI Deer Management Policy

This policy covers the ACLI view on the management of deer on its land as well as in the context of our location on the Isle of Arran. This policy supports ACLI's vision for a healthy and resilient ecosystem, where wild deer can be part of a flourishing, ecologically functional living landscape. ACLI recognises that while light grazing by wild deer is generally beneficial to natural heritage, uncontrolled and excessive grazing by deer is currently one of the most significant threats to the health, natural functioning and connectivity of ecosystems not just within Arran but also across Scotland. In addition, ACLI recognise the risk of exposure to Lyme disease by crossing land used by deer and are aware of cases that have been the result of walking across ACLI land. We therefore, in the absence of 'apex predators, support deer management measures, which aim to stabilise deer numbers at ecologically acceptable and sustainable levels.

There is concern that deer fences not only impede deer, but also have a detrimental impact on other animals trying to move around habitats. There also is concern about increased bird strikes on deer fences. In many cases deer fences are seen as a temporary measure rather than permanent.

The code of practice emphasises the need for consultation with communities, working with other landowners and promotes voluntary deer management groups of landowners such as the North of Arran Deer Management Group (DMG).

ACLI understands that the North of Arran DMG has agreed to extend its remit to the whole Island. It would therefore appear constructive for ACLI to join the Arran DMG and become involved in the educational aspect surrounding the need for sustainable deer management.

Overgrazing

The impact of wild deer has a significant influence on the vegetation dynamics, composition and physical structure of many habitat types. The most significant of these include:-

- Suppression of tree and shrub regeneration
- Eradication of tall herb communities
- Conversion of moss heath and dwarf-shrub heath towards grassland composition
- Locally severe physical poaching of mires, fens and flushes
- Loss of species' diversity in the ground layer of many habitats including woodland and species rich grassland
- Increased rates of soil erosion, particularly on blanket mires
- Damage to trees from browsing and bark stripping
- Loss of woodland bird species through deer fence strikes
- Habitat compartmentalisation and fragmentation resulting from the erection of deer enclosures
- Increased runoff rates, decreased water quality and increased downstream flooding risk.

Many of these effects can be clearly seen on ACLI and adjacent land.

Deer control

The Deer Act 1996 and the subsequent WANE Act of 2011 make clear our responsibility to have a Deer Management Plan. ACLI understands that the subject of deer management can be an emotive one and is therefore committed to work with others in order that an appropriate evidence/science-based understanding of the relationship between deer ecology, environmental enhancement, carbon capture and considerations of human health will be communicated.

ACLI will undertake the following measures:

- Promote the appreciation and enjoyment of deer by the public, and their use in education.
- ACLI will endeavour to maintain deer populations at a level that promotes the natural functioning and health of the ecosystems of the landscape.
- ACLI will adopt an ecosystem-based approach and work proactively with neighbouring landowners and local communities to deliver effective deer management at the landscape scale.
- ACLI will make clear the risks associated with deer populations and Lyme disease to all visitors to our land.

References and Links

In compiling this policy ACLI have referenced a number of sources of large charitable land managers in Scotland. These include:-

- Scottish National Trust
- RSPB
- Scottish Wildlife Trust
- John Muir Trust
- Woodland Trust
- Scottish National Heritage as the public body given authority by the Scottish Parliament for managing wild deer policy under the Deer Act
- The Arran Deer Management Group.

FEEDBACK AND COMMENTS to arranacli@gmail.com

This [link](#) takes you to a 159 page SNH report on Deer Management.

<https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2017-09/Publication%202017%20-%20SNH%20Commissioned%20Report%20963%20-%20Meeting%20the%20challenge%20of%20wild%20deer%20research%20to%20support%20delivery%20of%20sustainable%20deer%20management%20in%20Scotland.pdf>

This [link](#) takes to a website which brings together research into wild Deer.

<http://www.deerscotland.info/>