

# *Scotland's Wild Deer: A National Approach*

## *Report for 2017/18*



*for our deer, land and people*

## FOREWORD

Welcome to the 7<sup>th</sup> Action Report for Scotland's Wild Deer: A National Approach (WDNA). WDNA is a collectively agreed, national vision for deer management. It aims to encourage private land owners and public bodies to work together across Scotland to balance the needs of the environment, local economies and people's health and well-being.

This Report highlights the achievements of the past year by a range of organisations involved in managing Scotland's land and wildlife. Key highlights include:

- Setting up the Deer Working Group and the Lowland Deer Panel in response to the commission from the Cabinet Secretary;
- Holding a Sharing Good Practice event on lowland deer management;
- Publishing deer research reports on red deer and sika hybridisation and population trends of deer in the uplands and in woodlands;
- Deer on your doorstep event held at Scottish parliament;
- Continued DSC1 and DSC2 to demonstrate competence.

WDNA recognises that considerable effort already goes into deer management. It also recognises that there are opportunities to do more.

This report has been compiled by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) on behalf of a wide range of contributing organisations (see Annex 1 for full list) and with support from the WDNA Steering Group (Forestry Commission Scotland, Forest Enterprise Scotland, Cairngorms National Park Authority, Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park Authority, Scottish Natural Heritage and Scottish Government).



### What is the Vision for Wild Deer in Scotland?

Scotland's Wild Deer: A National Approach (WDNA) is a collective vision for sustainable deer management in Scotland. It was developed and is delivered by both private and public bodies who share the same ambition that:

***'We manage wild deer to achieve the best combination of benefits for the economy, environment, people and communities for now and for future generations'***

Launched in 2008 and revised in 2015 WDNA includes a set of priorities for 2015 - 2020. WDNA sets common goals including sustaining jobs, providing opportunities for people to see deer, promoting venison and protecting vulnerable habitats including woodlands.

This Report demonstrates how a range of organisations contributed to these priorities in 2017/'18.

### What is the Purpose of the WDNA Action Plans & Reports?

The purpose of the WDNA Action Plans & Reports, which are published each year is to:

- Promote and encourage activity across the deer sector;
- Recognise actions from a wide range of private, public and community sectors and NGOs that contribute to the delivery of WDNA;
- Capture key ongoing organisational activities which contribute to the delivery of WDNA;
- Enable an assessment of what has and what hasn't been delivered and why.



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## Headlines for 2017/'18:

*In 2017/'18, 69 activities were carried out by 18 organisations. Of these 52 were achieved, 13 were carried over into 2018/19 and 4 were deferred/not achieved. Fourteen key achievements are summarised below along with a summary of those not achieved.*

### WDNA 2015-2020 Priorities

1. Collaboration & effective deer management planning & implementation
2. Healthy ecosystems
3. Lowland & urban deer
4. Economic & community development
5. Training & wild deer welfare



The figure above shows progress against planned actions across all the priorities in 2017/18.

A summary of progress with all actions delivered in 2017/18 is available as a separate appendix.

## Key Achievements in 2017/'18:

### 1. Sharing Good Practice event on lowland deer management

In April 2017 a Sharing Good Practice event was held on managing deer in urban and lowland environments. It was well attended by representatives from Local Authorities, Transport Scotland, Lowland Deer Network Scotland and many others with an involvement and in interest in deer management in the lowlands. Talks and workshops focused on how to raise awareness of the need for deer management, how to address Deer Vehicle Collisions and recognising that different approaches are needed to managing deer in urban areas.

### 2. Agreement on how to assess DMGs in the 2019 Assessment

During 2017 a number of priority criteria, and metrics for assessing delivery against these criteria, were refined in preparation for the assessment of Deer Management Groups (DMGs) in the spring of 2019. These criteria will help each DMG identify priority actions in their area. The need for the assessment was set out in a letter published by the Cabinet Secretary in June 2017. It followed on from the SNH review into Deer Management published in 2016, which concluded there had been progress with DMGs but further work was needed.

### 3. Three deer research reports were published.

Two SNH commissioned reports were published. One on [Estimating national trends and regional differences in red deer density on open hill ground in Scotland](#) and one on [Trends in woodland deer abundance across Scotland 2001-2016](#). The report on open hill ground explains the overall trend in red deer density on open-hill ground in the Highlands and Islands, and regional variation, since censuses began in 1961. It aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of existing evidence on population status and trends. 'Trends in woodland deer abundance across Scotland 2001-2016' analyses National Forest Estate (NFE) monitoring data to summarise spatial and temporal trends in woodland deer densities across the NFE and provides further insights into national and regional trends. It aims to address Scotland's lack of contemporary estimates of wild deer abundance at a national scale. The preliminary findings of both of these reports were included in the SNH 2016 Review on Deer Management. A further report was published on research into hybridisation between red deer and Sika deer. A paper "Introgression of exotic *Cervus* (*nippon* and *canadensis*) into red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) populations in Scotland and the English Lake District" is available in the 'healthy ecosystems' section of the [on-line deer research resource](#).

### 4. Protected Features for Nature Conservation remained stable with some minor improvements between 2016 and 2017. The condition of designated nature conservation features with herbivore targets improved by 0.1%. These features were either brought into favourable condition, or a clear plan of action was established to do so or the herbivore targets were met. However, herbivores continue to be a major driver of unfavourable condition of natural features.

### 5. Lowland Deer on your Doorstep Event held at the Scottish Parliament

Linda Fabiani MSP supported by the Lowland Deer Network and SNH hosted a 'Deer on your doorstep' event at the Scottish Parliament in November 2017. The event

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was attended by the Cabinet Secretary Roseanna Cunningham and Graeme Dey, chair of the ECCLR committee.

### 6. Creation of the Deer Working Group and the Lowland Deer Panel

The Deer Working Group and the Lowland Deer Panel were set up in response to the Cabinet Secretary's letter replying to the ECCLR Committee's report on deer management. The Deer Working Group (DWG) is an independent working group appointed by Scottish Ministers. Its remit is to examine the current issues over the standards of deer management in Scotland and recommend changes to help resolve these issues in ways that safeguard public interest and promote the sustainable management of wild deer. The Lowland Deer Panel was commissioned by SNH in early 2018. Its purpose is to examine the complex issues relating to deer management in the Scottish lowlands. The work from both groups will contribute to the Scottish Government's ongoing review of deer management across Scotland.

### 7. Wild Deer Best Practice Demonstration Event for colleges

College students undertaking game keeping and deer management courses from across Scotland attended a Wild Deer Best Practice Demonstration Day in March at Creag Megaidh. The event was well attended with a variety of hands on sessions including larding, habitat impact assessments and firearms.



### 8. Wild Deer Best Practice support provided by the Deer Initiative

The Wild Deer Best Practice guides will be further developed and updated through the dedicated help and support of the Deer Initiative. This will provide much needed resources since SNH are no longer in a position to fund a project officer. It is hoped that this will rejuvenate support for and further development of Best Practice. The Best Practice Steering Group remains committed to ensuring Best Practice remains relevant, trusted and at the heart of the delivery of practical deer management on the ground.

### 9. Deer Management Training Events & Course

A number of open range days, Deer Stalking Certificate Level 1 and 2 courses were held across Scotland. British Deer Society (BDS) ran their advanced deer management course and the University of the Highlands and Islands ran a CPD award course on sustainable deer management.

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## 10. Food Safety videos and workshops

Videos on food handling skills were developed and promoted. Venison butchery workshops were held, teaching skills and techniques in safe and hygienic venison butchery and preparation.

**11. Habitat Impact Assessment Grants** were made available to all DMGs to support delivery of actions on habitat monitoring in the wider countryside as set out in group Deer Management Plans and roll out of training.

## 12. The Lowland Deer Pilot Project

The Lowland Deer Pilot focused on how to assess the public interests delivering in the lowlands and what data sets to use. This is a major piece of work and will continue into 2018. Its purpose is to understand how to assess deer management in the lowlands, including delivery of the Deer Code.

## 13. Deer Distribution Maps

Deer distribution maps for all four species of wild deer in Scotland were published by BDS in 2017. The maps cover the whole of the UK and provide an overview of deer presence. The data was collated through surveys conducted in 2016. The 2016 distribution maps build on earlier ones produced in 2011 and 2007 and include a comparison between these earlier results.

## 14. Chronic Wasting Disease

Awareness of Chronic Wasting Disease has been raised by BDS and others. Work has also been carried out to assess the risk to UK populations of deer. Chronic Wasting Disease is a highly infectious, persistent and fatal disease which has been devastating populations of wild and farmed deer in North America. Recently, CWD has also been diagnosed in reindeer and moose in Norway. Now the disease is present in Europe the risk of CWD entering the UK is likely to have increased. The risks associated with CWD will continue to be monitored in 2018/'19.

## Not Achieved/Deferred

The actions not achieved/deferred were: updating the Joint Agency Fencing Guidelines, reviewing guidance on distinguishing herbivore impacts, improving understanding of deer population dynamics in the lowlands and urban areas and training on conflict management tools. These have mostly been as a result of a lack of resources or prioritising other areas of related work. However related activities such as the Lowland Deer Project will be taken forward in 2018/'19.



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## ANNEX 1: LIST OF ACTION LEADERS AND CONTRIBUTORS

Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG)
British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC)
British Deer Society (BDS)
Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA)
Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS)
Forest Enterprise Scotland (FES)
Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust
John Muir Trust (JMT)
Lantra
Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority (LL&TNP)
Lowland Deer Network Scotland (LDNS)
Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCoS)
Ramblers Scotland
Royal Highland Education Trust (RHET)
Scottish Country Sports and Tourism Group (SCSTG)
Scottish Environment Link (Link)
Scottish Government (SG)
Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)
Scottish Venison Partnership (SVP)
Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT)
Transport Scotland
University of the Highlands & Islands (UHI)
Wild Deer Best Practice Steering Group (WDBPSG)
Wild Scotland

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## ANNEX 2: STRUCTURE OF WDNA

Vision	<p>By 2030 there will be widespread understanding and achievement of sustainable deer management so as to contribute to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A high quality, robust and adaptable environment.</li> <li>• Sustainable economic development</li> <li>• Social well-being</li> </ul> <p>Wild deer will be managed in an inclusive way with knowledge used to underpin all decisions</p>		
Principles	<p>Wild deer should be managed throughout their range in a way that -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• integrates deer management and other land-use objectives</li> <li>• uses collaboration to achieve the management objectives</li> <li>• uses a geographical scale and timescale best suited to achieving the management objectives</li> <li>• engages and communicates with all relevant interests</li> <li>• uses sound science and the best available evidence</li> <li>• promotes deer welfare</li> </ul>		
Outcomes	Management of all species of wild deer will contribute to:		
	A high quality, robust & adaptable environment	Sustainable economic development	Social well-being
Objectives	<p>a) Contribute to healthy ecosystems and conserve and enhance biodiversity in the wider countryside</p> <p>b) Secure the favourable condition status of Scotland's sites designated for nature</p> <p>c) Help tackle and adapt to the effects of climate change.</p> <p>d) Minimise further spread of non-native deer species in Scotland.</p> <p>e) Safeguard the welfare of all species of wild deer.</p> <p>f) Conserve and enhance the cultural and historic environment and the distinct identity, diverse character and special qualities of Scotland's landscapes</p>	<p>a) Increase the economic opportunities associated with wild deer</p> <p>b) Minimise economic costs attributable to wild deer</p> <p>c) Provide the skills and knowledge required to manage deer as an integral part of Scotland's natural resources</p> <p>d) Contribute to the social and economic development of communities</p>	<p>a) Contribute to a safe and healthy environment for people.</p> <p>b) Increase participation in management and enjoyment of wild deer.</p> <p>c) Manage the impacts of wild deer in and around communities.</p> <p>d) Promote venison as a healthy food.</p>
		<p><b>Contributing to all objectives</b></p> <p>a) Establish a shared, trusted and high quality knowledge base associated with wild deer to support local action</p> <p>b) Develop effective frameworks for sustainable deer management</p> <p>c) Raise awareness and understanding of wild deer and their management</p>	