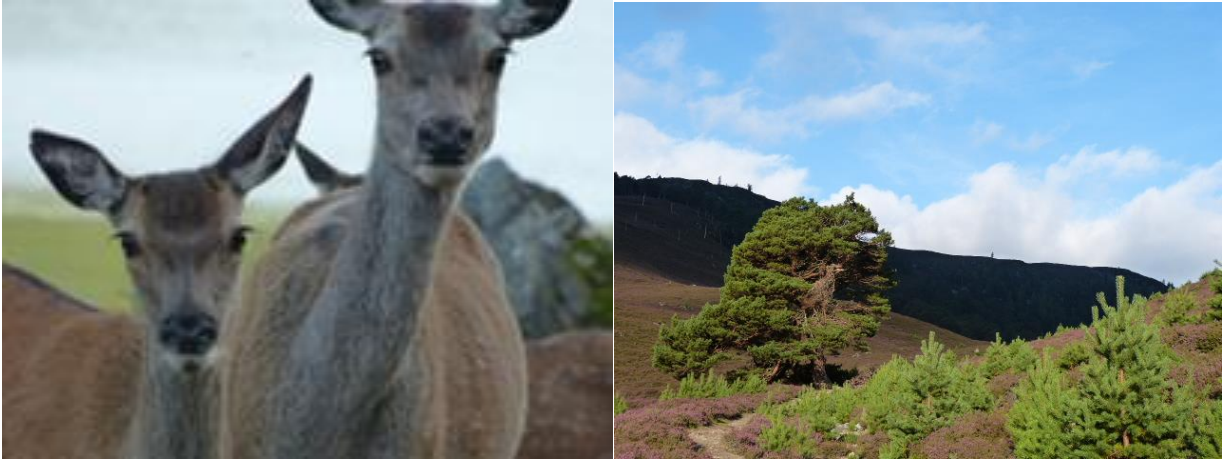


# Upper Deeside and Donside Deer Management Group

## Annual Report Year to 31 March 2020



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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Annual Report Background

This is the fourth annual report from the Upper Deeside and Donside Deer Management Group. The purpose of this report is to provide an overall summary of management activities undertaken and progress to date in the delivery of the Upper Deeside and Donside Deer Management Plan (DMP) (<http://eग्राम्पिान्दmg.deer-management.co.uk>)

## 1.2 Key Deliverables of the plan

The following table sets out progress being made with the main deliverables of the Group:

Action	Progress to 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2020
<b>Action 1:</b> To have implemented management to help Designated Sites to achieve Favourable/ Unfavourable Recovering management status	Collaborative deer management being implemented across the Group to reduce localised deer impacts on Designated sites. 9 features now in Favourable condition since start of plan.
<b>Action 2:</b> To use the Mar Lodge Section 7 review process, the Cross-DMG Working Group and the Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan (2017-22) (see Part 1 Section 1.3 for details) to review deer movements, review DMG boundaries and implement collaborative deer management to deliver the combined objectives of conservation and the sustainable harvest of deer at a landscape scale	Section 7 agreement concluded early due to ecological targets having been met. Group has expanded boundaries to the east and increased wider membership of the Group. Group continues to harvest deer sustainably whilst reducing impacts across the DMG area. NTS have implemented a new Management Plan.
<b>Action 3:</b> To have implemented DMG wide Habitat Monitoring of Heather Moorland and Blanket Bog to help inform future management	All properties with deer above 2 deer km <sup>2</sup> now have monitoring in place covering 82,250 ha (84% of Group area). Peatland Restoration has been completed or is being considered by 6 properties within the DMG area.
<b>Action 4:</b> To have conducted two full aerial counts of the population in Winter 2017 & 2020	Helicopter deer count of properties within SAC completed in winter 2018. A partial foot count in March 2020 and population modelling estimates the overall deer population across the DMG area to be between 3,950 and 4,030 deer. This represents an overall deer density of 4.0 - 4.1 deer per km <sup>2</sup> over the DMG area which is within the density recommended by the Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan (2017-22).
<b>Action 5:</b> To have secured additional Funding through ECAF to carry out a review of existing native woodland and explore opportunities for woodland expansion.	ECAF Funding ceased to become available. However, according to the Native Woodland Survey for Scotland <b>81%</b> of native woodlands within the group area are in good condition with regards to herbivore impacts.

## 2. Summary of events and DMG management activities

### 2.1. Meetings and Events

The Group has met twice in 2019 and undertaken the development of a new website which contains the Deer Management Plan, Annual Reports, Minutes of Meetings as well as contact information for the Group.

April 2019	DMG Spring Meeting.
September 2019	An Assessment of Upper Deeside and Donside DMG carried out by Scottish Natural Heritage (now NatureScot) scored 100% green against all 101 criteria. A copy of the <a href="#">Assessing Progress in Deer Management – Report to Scottish Government from Scottish Natural Heritage September 2019</a> can be found on the NatureScot website.
November 2019	DMG Autumn Meeting followed by a Community Meeting at Castleton Hall, Braemar.

## 3. Socio Economics of the DMG

### 3.1 Cost of Deer Management

Deer management plays a key role in delivering the environmental objectives of the Group. An economic survey was undertaken of Group members in 2019 to collate information relating to the socioeconomics of undertaking deer control across the Group area. The cost of maintaining deer numbers at a target density of 4.3 deer per km<sup>2</sup> across the DMG area (983 km<sup>2</sup>), excluding RSPB and Forestry and Land Scotland who manage deer in the Group area as part of a wider management block, were estimated to be in the region of **£975,000** per annum. This represents a cost of around £10 per ha.

### 3.2 Economic Benefits of Deer Management

Deer management supports 36 full-time equivalent jobs within the DMG area and produces around **60,000 tonnes** of venison. For almost half of the properties within the DMG area, the commercial harvesting of deer is also an important source of revenue. As well as providing a direct income to those properties, stalking visitors to the area generate over **300 bed-nights** locally as well as supporting local business in Braemar, Ballater and further afield. It is estimated that the value of stalking to the local economy is around **£350,000** annually.

## 4. Summary of activities undertaken by individual DMG Members

### 4.1 Management Activities

The following table details some of the deer management activities undertaken from April 2019 to March 2020 in the DMG area which contribute to delivering the local public interest identified in the Deer Management Plan.

Activity Report 2019-2020	
Mar	Peatland Restoration: Hag blocking and reprofiling work has been successful. Additional peatland restoration work suspended due to funding being withdrawn.
Mar Lodge	Continued expansion of native woodland. Project underway to protect and reinforce populations of rare montane willows. 7 hen harrier nests monitored with 15+ chicks fledged, golden eagles, peregrines and merlin all bred successfully. Full sporting programme completed successfully with a wide range of guests from UK/Europe/N. America. 3 year KTP project underway in conjunction with UHI researching deer deterrents (alternatives to fencing).
Gairnshiel & Micras	A 53 ha peatland restoration project was completed on the North side of the River Gairn under the Peatland Action programme. Few red deer are present in this unit due to the deer fence which divides the DMG. Management of regenerating trees along the periphery of the unit was combined with moorland conservation activity. A survey of pairs of red and amber breeding bird species was undertaken in the late spring/early summer 2019. A breeding wader survey was undertaken as part of the final year of a BTO project. Hare counts were undertaken for the second year using the SNH methodology. A muirburn plan was prepared and controlled muirburn undertaken.
Glenavon	Managing and maintaining deer population at a density which supports habitat improvement and grouse moor management. Visually assessing the habitat, with formal HIA planned for 2020. Progressing peatland projects through the planning stages.
Corndavon	This unit is to the east of the deer fence dividing the DMG in two. There is a small population of red deer resident. Additional woody debris was installed in the River Gairn by the River Dee Trust along with additional riparian tree planting. A survey of pairs of red and amber breeding bird species was undertaken in the late spring/early summer 2019. A breeding wader survey was undertaken as part of the final year of a BTO project. Hare counts were undertaken for the second year using the SNH methodology. A muirburn plan was prepared and controlled muirburn undertaken.
Homebeat	169 ha of Peatland already restored. Activities included management of habitats and both wild and domesticated herbivores to maintain a sustainable balance. Young planted woodland and natural regeneration were undertaken in synergy with sporting stalking within a large enclosed part of the unit. A new system of woodland impact assessment commenced to inform wild herbivore management. A survey of pairs of red and amber breeding bird species was undertaken in the late spring/early summer 2019. Hare counts were undertaken for the second year using the SNH methodology. A muirburn plan was prepared and controlled muirburn undertaken. A tender process was undertaken for further peatland restoration work but this did not result in a satisfactory response so unfortunately this work was not able to proceed.
Baddoch	Management of this unit combines red deer management with management of other herbivores. The results of a HIA on dry shrub heath resulted in a policy restricting the number of summer grazing sheep on the holding. A survey of pairs of red and amber breeding bird species was undertaken in the late spring/early summer 2019. A breeding wader survey was undertaken as part of the final year of a BTO project. Hare counts were undertaken for the second year using the SNH methodology. A muirburn plan was prepared and controlled muirburn undertaken.