

# Upper Deeside and Donside Land Management Group

## Annual Report Year to 31 March 2021



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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Annual Report Background

This is the fourth annual report from the Upper Deeside and Donside Land 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://egrampiandmg.deer-management.co.uk>)

## 1.2 Change of Group Name and Constitution

In November 2020, the Group agree to change the name of the Group from a Deer Management Group to a Land Management Group to reflect the broad range of interests and objectives represented across the membership.

The Group's objectives are to:

- Promote the sustainable management of deer in the UDDLMDG area in accordance with the UDDLMDG Deer Management Plan, Scottish Government strategy (Scotland's Wild Deer: A National Approach, 2008), the Code of Practice on Deer Management (2012), and in a manner that integrates different land-use objectives.
- Promote collaboration which supports the wider environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable management of land, flora and fauna within the Group area, achieving both private and public benefits, and where this is better enabled by co-operation between land management units.

## 1.3 Meetings and Events

Despite COVID the Group met three times virtually in 2020/2021. Minutes are available on the LMG website <https://upperdeesidedonsidedmg.deer-management.co.uk/>.

30 June 2020	Virtual DMG meeting.
19 November 2020	Virtual Autumn Meeting to agree changes to Group name.
17 March 2021	Virtual AGM and LMG Meeting. Constitution adopted.



### 1.3 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 2021
<p><b>Action 1:</b> To have implemented management to achieve Favourable/ Unfavourable Recovering management status on Designated Sites.</p>	<p>Collaborative deer management continues to be implemented across the Group to reduce localised deer impacts on Designated sites. 9 features now in Favourable condition since start of plan. Section 7 agreement concluded early due to ecological targets having been met.</p>
<p><b>Action 2:</b> To implement the actions of the Deer Management Plan (2016 to 2021) to deliver the combined objectives of conservation and the sustainable management of wildlife at a landscape scale</p>	<p>Despite COVID, the Group is on target to deliver all actions identified in the Deer Management Plan. All but two actions within the existing plan have been completed or actions are ongoing, with the exception of a collaborative count to be undertaken in 2021 and repeat habitat monitoring.</p>
<p><b>Action 3:</b> To have implemented DMG wide Habitat Monitoring of heather moorland and blanket bog to help inform future management</p>	<p>All properties with deer above 2 deer km<sup>2</sup> now have monitoring in place covering 82,250 ha (84% of Group area). Group have undertaken to complete repeat monitoring in 2021 of heather moorland and Blanket bog. Peatland Restoration has been completed or is being considered by 6 properties within the DMG area.</p>
<p><b>Action 4:</b> To have conducted two full aerial counts of the population in Winter 2017 &amp; 2020</p>	<p>Helicopter deer count of properties within SAC completed in winter 2018. A helicopter and foot count in March 2021 assessed the overall deer population to be 3,602 deer across the LMG area (and average density of 3.7 deer per km<sup>2</sup>). In 2020 population modelling estimated the overall deer population across the DMG area to be between 3,950 and 4,030 deer (4.1 deer per km<sup>2</sup>). These densities are within the density recommended by the Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan (2017-22).</p>
<p><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.</p>	<p>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.</p>



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

### 3.1 Management Activities

The following table details some of the deer management activities undertaken from April 2020 to March 2021 in the DMG area which contribute to delivering the local public interest identified in the Deer Management Plan.

Activity Report 2020-2021	
Allargue	Started discussions with CNPA to identify an area of degraded peat land suitable for restoration. Removed last stand of Forestry Commission trees.
Dinnet & West Tillypronie	Habitat Impact Assessment training completed in 2021 and will conduct HIA surveys in Spring 2022.
Mar	Peatland Restoration continuing.
Mar Lodge	Despite Covid lockdowns and resulting business challenges, Mar Lodge managed to complete our deer culls in full. Some other activity was curtailed, most notably our 5 year HIA work, which was delayed until 2021. Other monitoring work continued to a greater or lesser extent, which included some raptor monitoring (5 harrier nests in 2020.) Planning for Covid recovery and future projects progressed well, with intentions to deliver significant peatland restoration and woodland expansion projects in 2021.
Gairnshiel	Located in the East area of the LMG with limited deer numbers, controlled muirburn, vermin trapping and track maintenance were undertaken. Red and amber breeding pairs were counted and blackcock counts undertaken. Spring wader transect counts were also undertaken in the principal breeding areas along the River Gairn.
Micras	Located in the East Area of the LMG with limited deer numbers, blackcock counts were undertaken and capercaillie continued to lek in the woodland area. Further Scots pine natural regeneration has occurred along the woodland edge and into the Maim SAC. During 2020 the sporting policy was changed and the moor is no longer managed specifically for grouse. Farming and woodland management continues and some partridge and pheasant shooting is undertaken. Red and amber breeding bird surveys were again undertaken.
Glenavon	Helicopter count undertaken with neighbouring properties to south and west. Peatland restoration project being finalised.
Corndavon	Located in the East area of the LMG with limited deer numbers, routine track maintenance, heather management and vermin trapping were undertaken. Blackcock counts were undertaken along with red and amber bird species breeding pair counts. A number of wader scrapes were created and hare counts undertaken again using the SNH methodology. Representation was made at both Braemar and Ballater and Crathie Community Councils.
Homebeat	Stalking for sport and the management cull was undertaken and roe deer in the woodland area managed including some sporting stalking. Natural regeneration within the woodland zone continues to thrive alongside the sporting objective. Blanket bog habitat impact assessments were undertaken on the hill along with tree habitat impact assessments within the fenced woodland area. Management of heather habitat was undertaken along with track and path maintenance. Blackcock counts and red and amber bird species breeding pair counts were carried out, as well as hare counts using the SNH methodology. Representation was made at Braemar Community Council online meetings.
Baddoch	Stalking continued despite covid with appropriate systems in place. Also vermin control, managed muirburn, path and track maintenance. Work was undertaken to the young riparian planted woodlands in the lower part of the Baddoch Burn along with flood damage repairs to some of the riparian planting blocks in the Clunie valley. Blanket bog habitat impact assessments were undertaken to feed into the wider Group. Red and amber listed breeding bird pairs were counted and transects also counted specifically for waders. High numbers of voles were observed in spring and summer 2020 which boosted short-eared owl numbers particularly. Beating up of the Morrone native woodland was undertaken in spring 2021. Representation was provided at Braemar Community Council meetings.