

Upper Deeside and Donside Land Management Group

Annual Report

Year to 31 March 2024



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1. Introduction

1.1 Annual Report Background

This is the seventh 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) 2022 – 2027

<https://upperdeesidedonsidedmg.deer-management.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/UDD-LMG-Plan-2023-.pdf>

1.2 Meetings and Events

The Group met twice in 2023. Minutes are available on the LMG website

<https://upperdeesidedonsidedmg.deer-management.co.uk/>.

28 April 2023	LMG AGM and Hybrid DMG meeting.
9 November 2023	Hybrid DMG Meeting

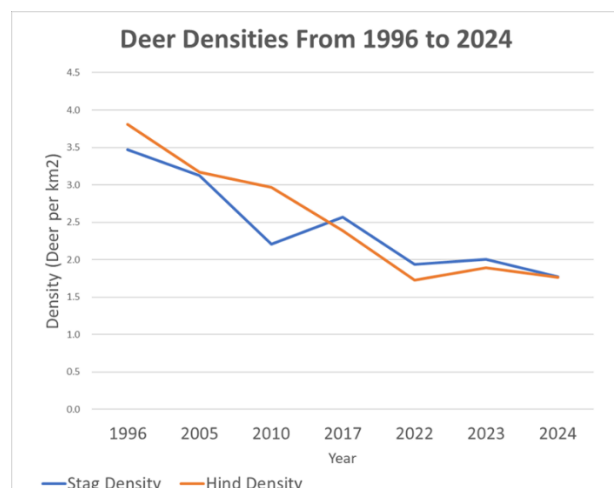


1.3 Key Deliverables of the plan

The following table sets the main actions from the new Deer Management Plan:

1a	<i>The Working Plan will be reviewed and updated annually. Management actions will be adjusted and agreed accordingly.</i>
2a	<i>Members will use information gathered on habitats and herbivore numbers to manage deer sustainably, agreeing and delivering cull targets.</i>
2b	<i>Foot counts of deer will be repeated annually. Count coordinators will ensure the count is conducted accurately and effectively.</i>
2c	<i>Group will continue to review deer movements within the LMG.</i>
3a	<i>LMG to organise annual CPD opportunities for LMG members.</i>
4a	<i>Members will aim to significantly increase the areas of restored peatland over the next 5 years and will provide regular updates on peatland restoration activity.</i>
5a	<i>Members will seek to create/regenerate new woodland, particularly focussing on areas which would benefit habitat connectivity.</i>
5b	<i>Members will identify opportunities for riparian woodland improvement and creation to support the recovery of Atlantic salmon and to promote river health.</i>
5c	<i>Members will provide annual updates on woodland activity.</i>
5d	<i>Members to carry out woodland monitoring to assess herbivore impacts.</i>
6a	<i>Members will continue to monitor herbivore impacts on key habitats and use the information to manage impacts to within acceptable ranges and for the benefit of wider ecosystem health.</i>
6b	<i>Members will work with NatureScot collaboratively to reduce negative herbivore impacts on designated sites and undertake management actions as required.</i>
6c	<i>Members will seek to implement management practices and actions to restore and enhance biodiversity throughout the LMG area.</i>
6d	<i>Members will follow all management Codes of Practice including Muirburn Code</i>
6e	<i>Members will actively seek opportunities to conserve and restore species and contribute to biodiversity restoration.</i>
7a	<i>Group will seek opportunities to promote deer management through training, educational or awareness raising events and social media.</i>
7b	<i>Members to identify, raise awareness and where possible minimise the local health and safety risks ie incidents of Deer Vehicle Collisions and Tick Awareness</i>
7c	<i>Members to promote responsible Access and the following of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.</i>
7d	<i>Members to raise awareness of CWD with Clients and Visitors from USA, Canada and Norway and undertake the appropriate Bio-Security protocols prior to their visit.</i>
7e	<i>Group to actively engage with local community through Community Council, newsletters and events and promote good news stories.</i>
7f	<i>Group to seek active engagement with Rural Land Use Partnership Scheme.</i>

Deer Densities from 1996 to 2024



Count Type	Year	Whole DMG Total (99,921 ha)						
		Stags	Hinds	Calves	Total	Stag Density	Hind Density	Density
Heli & Foot	1996	3,465	3,808	1,138	8,411	3.5	3.8	8.4
Heli & Foot	2005	3,120	3,168	992	7,280	3.1	3.2	7.3
Heli & Foot	2010	2,207	2,964	956	6,127	2.2	3.0	6.1
Heli & Foot	2017	2,566	2,389	866	5,821	2.6	2.4	5.8
Heli & Foot	2022	1,935	1,723	523	4,181	1.9	1.7	4.2
Heli & Foot	2023	2,004	1,888	540	4,432	2.0	1.9	4.4
Heli & Foot	2024	1,772	1,760	522	4,054	1.8	1.8	4.1

2. Summary of LMG Member Activities

2.1 Management Activities

The following table details some of the deer management activities undertaken from to March 2023 in the DMG area which contribute to delivering the local public interest identified in the Deer Management Plan.

Activity Report 2023-2024	
Delnadamph	255ha of peatland restoration has been completed in the last two years: 124ha completed this year, 131ha site has been ongoing for 2 years and should be complete early summer 2024. Corgarff Picnic and Games held on Field at Castle Lodge annually in June. BTO bird survey report published in Scottish Birds December 2023.
Invercauld Estate (Home Beat, Corndavon, Baddoch, Micras and Gairnshiel	New natural regeneration is currently being measured. A figure will be available for the 2024/25 annual report . An extensive riparian restoration project was completed on the Rivers Clune, Baddoch and Callater, the majority of this within the UDD LMG area. This included the installation of 97 woody debris structures to create pools through natural eddying. A number of wader scrapes were also created. Over 1,000 'small square' riparian native woodland planted exclosures have also now been created between these rivers and on the River Gairn working with the River Dee Trust. Riparian restoration works were filmed for BBC Landward. Estate hosted Ballater Games and car parking for Braemar Gathering and a Coronation Bonfire was created with the Scouts at Braemar on 1 May 2024. Various public consultation events were held for a proposed housing development on the east side of Ballater. Five commercial units were built with four now let to local businesses and extensive refurbishment works undertaken to one of the local village halls in Braemar. Works were undertaken to various footbridges and looking after core paths. Predator control continued to be undertaken to benefit red and amber listed ground nesting birds and the deer and rabbit population controlled in three core woodland evolution zones to provide a balance between new woodland growth and sporting stalking. The Keiloch Car Park meter has been upgraded to take card payments and the Auchallater car park moved to a slightly new location to make way for a temporary new road bridge on the A93.
Mar	Peatland restoration - 78.1 hectares (third scheme) completed. Projects currently out to tender for 4th and 5th peatland restoration schemes

NTS Mar Lodge

Monitoring reports on woodland regeneration and herbivore impacts. Improvements found in the condition of woods at all altitudes, and herbivore impacts generally low across the estate.

Experimental work included ring-barking, seed-spreading, and unfenced native woodland planting.

Raptor monitoring: a boom in the vole population led to record numbers of hen harriers nesting on the site. We also worked (under licence) with our usual assortment of merlins and peregrines and helped the Scottish Raptor Study Group with their golden eagle monitoring. 2023 was also a great year for short-eared owls. White-tailed eagles nested successfully for a second year, raising two chicks.

Other bird surveys included wader surveys alongside the East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership, with good numbers of curlew, lapwing, redshank and snipe present on the Quoich Flats, and at least two pairs of ringed plover.

A further 80 ha of peatland restoration was completed with baseline invertebrate and bird monitoring completed, and an experimental project started looking at measuring the water table in restored and unrestored blanket bogs.

Montane willow restoration project continues with the planting of a further 3,992 willows in An Garbh Choire, boosting the populations of endangered downy willow and whortle-leaved willow found in that massive area. Monitoring shows that 98% of willows still alive two years after planting.

The ecology team also took part in intensive monitoring of dotterels, one of the UK's rarest breeding birds which is threatened by climate change. 2023 proved to be the best for several years for the species.

The number of known sites of twinflower has increased from three in 2013 to eight in 2023. An additional six populations have been translocated, meaning that twinflower can now be found in fourteen locations across the estate.

The estate has been working on Alpine blue sow-thistle, in partnership with Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh with plenty of flowers of this charismatic species seen, and work to understand the genetic health of Scottish populations underway.

Annual narrow-headed ant monitoring has helped work up a conservation plan for this rare species, which includes some habitat management.

The Trust's new Plan for Nature highlights that several of the Plan's key habitats and species are found at Mar Lodge, so this will help with our work in the pinewoods and on the high tops, and with species like small cow-wheat, hen harrier, and narrow-headed ant.

Finally, work continues on the innovative Knowledge Transfer Partnership project to develop a non-lethal, non-fenced deer deterrent for use in remote locations. This project, which has potential applications across Scotland, is being completed by James MacDonald in partnership with University of Highlands and Islands.

[The full Annual Report for Mar Lodge is available online.](#)