

Upper Deeside and Donside Land Management Group

Annual Report

Year to 31 March 2025



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1. Introduction

1.1 Annual Report Background

This is the eighth 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 2024. Minutes are available on the LMG website

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

5 th April 2024	LMG AGM and Hybrid DMG meeting.
14 th November 2024	Hybrid DMG Meeting

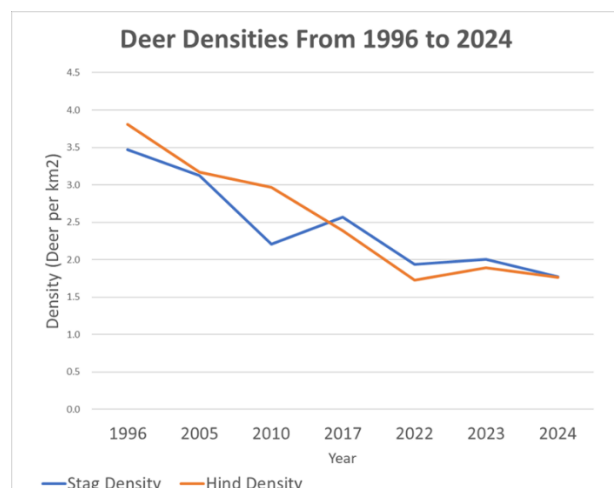


1.3 Key Deliverables of the plan

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 2024-2025	
Allargue	Completed 12 ha peatland restoration project. Re-stocked 15 ha of Forestry. Education opportunities provided. Wildfire Plan in place.
Dinnet Moor	Activities relating to moorland management undertaken throughout the year.
Dinnet	Dinnet Estate along with Ballogie and Glen Tanar hosted 120 S3 students from Aboyne Academy on 3 Forestry Days which included discussions on deer management in Forestry. Advice provided to visitors about ticks and risks of lyme disease. Education opportunities provided. Wildfire Plan in place.
Glenavon	Continued Grouse Moor management. Some riparian plantations in progress.
Invercauld Estate (Home Beat, Corndavon, Baddoch, Micras and Gairnshiel	Over the past twelve months deer management has continued with a sustainable cull being taken to balance economic and environmental interests, managing habitats taking into account HIA results. Hill activities included fox and crow control, spring trapping of mustelidae and muirburn to encourage the natural regeneration of heather and associated flora. HIA was undertaken on some hill beats (DSH) and in naturally regenerating woodland zones and restocked forestry coups. A clearfell site was fenced and restocked (Scots pine) and a clearfell undertaken in the Home Beat woodlands where a trial commenced on restocking by natural regeneration. Two new woodland natural regeneration schemes were commenced with Forestry Scotland. A Peatland Action project was undertaken along with research into other future projects. Additional activity included public access management, fishery management, provision of caravan park facilities, building improvement works, facilitation of and assistance with research and communication with the wider local community through Facebook posts and articles in local the community newsletter and magazine. Advice provided to visitors about ticks and risks of lyme disease. Education opportunities provided. Wildfire Plan in place.

Mar	Active management of the red deer herd was continued throughout the year in accordance with Estate policy, where red deer are regarded as an asset to the environment, as opposed to vermin to be eradicated at all cost. Despite a cold wet summer, the deer did well due to plentiful growth of ground vegetation, and carcass weights were well up. Continued improvement in stag heads was reported, and many favourable comments were received from members of the public about seeing red deer on their walks. Advice provided to visitors about ticks and risks of lyme disease. Wildfire Plan in place.
NTS Mar Lodge	The restoration of the estate's Caledonian pinewoods has been a cornerstone of our work with nature at Mar Lodge. Monitoring work this year found that from 1999 to 2024 there was a 1428.3% increase in seedlings recorded above vegetation height, and that the average density of regeneration across the transects increased from 303.8 stems/ha in 2011 to 682.2 stems/ha in 2024 (+124.6%). 2024 saw the introduction of tailored biodiversity monitoring, taking in over 300 individual species ranging from Golden Eagles to tiny money spiders, and nineteen vegetation communities from Caledonian pinewoods to montane snowbeds, early results indicate that our woodlands are particularly biodiverse, but that the open moorlands and mountains are also home to scores of species of high conservation value. Our montane willow restoration project continues. This year, a further 4,500 willows were planted in Coire Sputan Dearg. In 2024 we restored a further 61.5 ha of peatlands, bringing the total area of peatland restored since 2021 to 460 hectares. We also installed 53 large woody structures (in this case non-native conifers that we wanted rid of) in the river, to create areas of slower flowing water, deeper, cooler pools, and to increase the amount of nutrients in the river. Advice provided to visitors about ticks and risks of lyme disease. Education opportunities provided. Wildfire Plan in place (comprehensive revision in 2025). <u>The full Annual Report for Mar Lodge for 2023 is available online.</u>