

Upper Deeside and Donside Land Management Group

Annual Report

Year to 31 March 2026



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1. Introduction

1.1 Annual Report Background

This is the ninth 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 2025. Minutes are available on the LMG website

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

25 th April 2025	LMG AGM and Hybrid DMG meeting.
16 th December 2025	Hybrid DMG Meeting

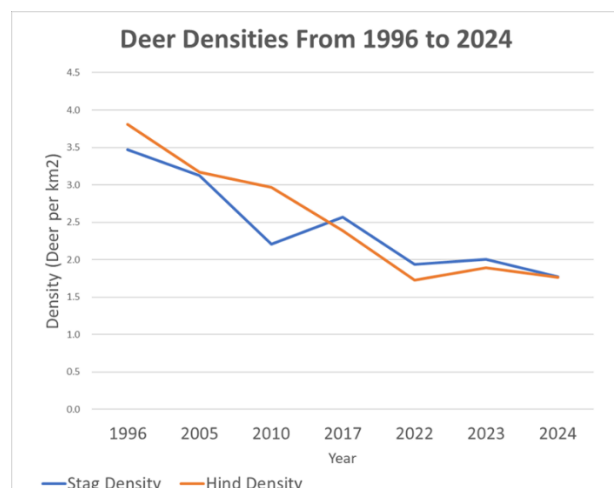


1.3 Key Deliverables of the plan

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 2025-2026	
Allargue	Education opportunities provided. Wildfire Plan in place.
Dinnet Moor	
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. Glenavon working with the Spey catchment Initiative on Riparian woodland on the river Avon, pending approval from Nature Scot and CNPA with being in a SSSI.
Invercauld Estate (Home Beat, Corndavon, Baddoch, Micras and Gairnshiel)	Invercauld completed last year a process commenced in 2017 recording emerging new woodland through new natural regeneration - the total recorded was 843 hectares (2,082 acres) within the UDD LMG part of Invercauld Estate. Hosted parking for both Ballater Games and Braemar Gathering; land rover tours with various local operators; Scottish orienteering 6 day challenge; various location events for TV and advertising; Grampian Moorland Group and BASC 'Learn on the Land' event for Aberdeenshire schools. Ongoing moorland conservation management including fox, crow and mustelidae control and muirburn, two major house renovations now let to local people; staff helped out with a number of wildfires in the summer; a clearfell of mature Scots Pine near the Inver was undertaken providing high grade timber for a north-east business; management of the Dee and other

	fisheries; provision of Braemar Caravan Park and planning consent obtained to provide a further 18 hardstandings and 6 lodges; provision of various commercial facilities including shops and pub in Braemar; assisting with various research projects and public engagement with local communities via Facebook, Instagram and the local journals the Braemar Buzzard and Ballater Eagle. Advice provided to visitors about ticks and risks of lyme disease. Education opportunities provided. Wildfire Plan in place.
Mar	CNPA funding has allowed the deer fencing off of one aspen regen area. Tenant farmer has gained funding from CNPA and Woodland Trust to plant hedges. Advice provided to visitors about ticks and risks of lyme disease. Wildfire Plan in place.
NTS Mar Lodge	A full repeat habitat condition assessment survey was carried out between June 19 and July 21 2025 for Mar Lodge Estate. Current trampling and grazing impacts were surveyed in 355 ¼ km² sample plots for four upland habitat types; dwarf shrub heath, blanket bog, wind-clipped heath and grassland. The presence of herbivores and natural tree regeneration was also recorded for each plot. • Dwarf-shrub heath was recorded in 318 sample plots. 91% had Light impacts and 9% had Light-Moderate impacts. Higher impacts were not recorded. • Blanket bog was found in 226 plots. 86% had Light impacts and 14% had Light-Moderate impacts. No Moderate, Moderate-Heavy or Heavy impacts were recorded. • Grassland was recorded in 153 plots. 84% had Light impacts 15% had Light-Moderate impacts and 1% had Moderate impacts. No higher impacts were recorded. • Wind-clipped heath was recorded in 83 plots. 87% had Light impacts, 13% had Light-Heavy impacts and none had Heavy impacts. Signs of deer were found in 96% (341 plots) and signs of grouse in 94% (334 plots) of all plots. Hare evidence was seen in 13% (45 plots) and sheep in 9% (32 plots) of plots.

Natural tree regeneration was present in 48% (169 plots) of the survey plots. Pine was most widespread and was found in 31% of plots (11 plots), rowan was found in 32% (112 plots), willow in 38% (134 plots), birch in 29% (102 plots), juniper in 25% (88 plots), broom in 7% (24 plots), larch in 5% (19 plots), alder in 2% (8 plots) and aspen in 3% (9 plots) of all survey plots.

Advice provided to visitors about ticks and risks of lyme disease.

Education opportunities provided.

Wildfire Plan in place (comprehensive revision in 2025).