

**DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN
BEN NEVIS ESTATE
2023-2025**

1. Rationale

The Trust recognises that:

- Native deer species are an integral part of the natural heritage,
- Deer management can bring environmental, social and economic benefits,
- At inappropriate population levels, deer impacts can damage habitat condition and suppress natural processes.

Deer populations will be manipulated through culling:

- To achieve the Trust's charitable objective to "Demonstrate exemplary management of wild places",
- In line with industry Best Practice Guidance,
- Not impeding public access at any time.

2. Audit

2.1 Geology, soils, habitats and species

See Management Plan

2.2 Designations, biodiversity priorities, habitat conditions

See Management Plan

2.3 Livestock

The property has regular incursions of small numbers of stock from the sheep tenancies surrounding the estate.

2.4 Employment and Income

Deer management is currently carried out under contract by Drummourie Deer Management (DDM) on behalf of the Trust. There is no sport stalking on site.

2.5 Community

Currently DDM offer opportunities to members of the local community to assist in culling activity as a volunteer in return for experience and venison. Only contractors and authorised individuals are permitted to use firearms. In the medium-term the Trust is committed to exploring the potential to train members of the local community to establish a local deer control group.

2.6 Deer population estimates and cull figures

The following count data is available for the property. The 2011, 2017 and 2021 counts were helicopter counts across the DMG range. The other counts were carried out on foot by Trust staff.

Year	Stags	Hinds	Calves	Total	km ²
2006	Unclassified	Unclassified	Unclassified	120	6.6
2007	11	Unclassified	Unclassified	117	6.5
2008	8	Unclassified	Unclassified	102	5.6
2011	6	38	14	58	3.2
2017	20	77	35	132	7.3
November 2020	Unclassified	Unclassified	Unclassified	142	7.9
March 2021	Unclassified	Unclassified	Unclassified	76	4.2
2021	9	60	17	86	4.8
September 2022	Unclassified	Unclassified	Unclassified	105	5.8

Year	Stags	Hinds	Calves	Total
2006-7	No cull	No cull	No cull	No cull

2007-8	6	18	8	32
2008-9	7	14	4	25
2009-10	8	6	2	16
2010-11	19	59	24	103
2011-12	10	19	3	32
2012-13	3	20	4	27
2013-14	11	18	4	33
2014-15	11	23	4	38
2015-16	3	18	7	28
2016-17	9	4	0	13
2017-18	11	21	8	40
2018-19	8	16	9	33
2019-20	13	22	3	38
2020-21	21	63	37	121
2021-22	28	65	40	133

3. Objectives, targets and constraints

3.1 Habitat

To manipulate the deer population through culling to enable:

- All habitats (designated and non-designated features) to be in or move towards favourable condition,
- Natural habitat processes (such as woodland regeneration) to continue or to start,
- Populations of priority species to be maintained or enhanced.

3.2 Deer population and cull

A specific target deer density has **not** been set. Instead, culls will be adjusted in line with monitoring information to achieve the above objectives. Culling will be carried out across the entire site to allow nature to repair itself. . Purely as a **guide** it is anticipated that a minimum annual cull of around 100 (20 stags + 80 hinds and associated calves) will be required for 2023, however our habitat monitoring and on the ground observations will form the main evidence for the number of deer culled.

3.3 Employment and income

Current annual levels of employment and income are expected to be maintained.

3.4 Constraints and mitigation

It is recognised that the habitat, natural process and priority species population objectives set out above may be constrained by external uncontrollable factors such as weather, fire etc. Livestock grazing outwith the control of the property may also impact on objectives and where possible the Trust will seek to reduce impacts through negotiation with livestock managers. Wider deer management by neighbours may also impact on both the habitat objectives and the cull required. Where possible the Trust will seek to negotiate or influence neighbours who manage deer within the range to meet objectives.

Both night shooting and out of season authorisations may be used on the Ben Nevis estate to maximise cull efficiency.

Due to the difficulty of extracting carcasses from the site and for the benefit of other wildlife, a number of carcasses are left on the hill. Of these carcasses left on the hill, the majority are butchered with the stalker taking the meat for domestic consumption. As a result, venison income through a game dealer is variable. This approach has been minuted and approved by neighbouring landowners within the Ben Nevis SAC Steering Group and Mid-West Deer Management Group. Nature Scot have issued a statement in favour of this approach to ensure that deer control is carried out in more inaccessible areas of the estate which are within the SAC.

3.5 Innovation

The Trust will continue to look at new technologies to control and monitor deer, including thermal drone imagery/satellite technology to replace foot/helicopter counts.

4. Monitoring

4.1 Habitats and species

A programme of habitat and species monitoring is in place on the property. Annual habitat impact monitoring following Best Practice Guidance and using Woodland toolkit methodology is carried out. Site Condition Monitoring and Habitat Impact Assessments are carried out every six years by Nature Scot (both carried out in May / June). These results will be used to inform cull targets for the year. As of 2022, 9 notified habitats are in unfavourable condition with the recent addition of the Caledonian forest and western acidic oak woodlands features. Both features will be high priority for management intervention.

4.2 Deer and livestock numbers

While the key measures are habitat impact and condition, information on deer numbers may be used to adjust cull targets. Where possible, JMT will participate in good quality annual range wide counts. JMT will regularly monitor and record deer and livestock numbers on the property. Deer cull data will also be recorded. Regular communication between Trust and local tenants to encourage removal of sheep will continue.

The Trust will continue to publish its deer management plans and cull information online to ensure transparency.

5. Review

Habitat, count and cull data will be reviewed annually with the plan adjusted accordingly. A review of the whole plan will take place in 2026.