

APSG meeting 01/11/2018

Present: Michael Ross, Mark Turner, Romany Garnett, Fiona Saywell, Cathy Mayne, Cameron Kennedy, Holly Deary (SNH), Ray Mackay (chair), Steve Heaton, Don O'Driscoll (vice-chair), Jorine van Delft (secretary), William MacLeod.

Apologies: Andy Hibbert, Robbie MacKenzie

1. Stag numbers

Comments

It was a very strange rut. Hinds were spotted without stags and stags without hinds. RM ads that he observed two stags roaring in the same field.

KM ads that this has been reported in other places as well. Questions raised by this are what condition will the hinds be in and what does this mean for the recruitment number this spring.

	Target	Actual
ACT	43	46 (+1 sika)
JMT/Quinag	28	28
Ardvar	18 (15 agreed)	15
Kylesku	2	8
Brackloch/Middle Inver	4	6
Little Assynt	5	5
Lagg	5	5
Assynt Lodge	6	5
Lochinver/Vestey	6	7
Oldany	4	3
		1 with broken leg
Total =	121	129 + 1 sika + 1 injured = 131

2. Habitat Assessment Monitoring: Cathy Mayne

Cathy will provide the group with training, information and practical support to make sure that by spring all estates should be able to start with the habitat impact assessment. If you would like more information or support from Cathy please get in touch with her at cathy@mountainenvironmentservices.com. Please contact Cathy at any stage. She is here to help so please make use of her!

Training will start with instructions on how to use GPS. (scheduled for the 6th of December). After the hind season estates will be given training packages to go out and do it in the field.

HD: This assessment is user friendly and should give a good insight on what is happening on the ground. I will forward the generated plots again. Please keep in mind that the land use cover layer as used by SNH is quite broad so part of the training will be to see if the plots are actually right for the habitat that is being assessed. The generated plots might not actually be in the right location.

FS: The data collected will be mapped and this will allow it to be used in future situations as a reference.

Kirstie McLeod, secretary WSDMG, will be trained in data assessment.

CM: The data can be overlaid with count data or any other spatial information for relevant use allowing for

creating a good overall picture.

HD: You can look at the impact data and see what the impact is on the ground and use this to determine cull numbers.

CM: It can help in trying to capture what underpins the health of the deer population. The impact is determined by the population density in relation to the habitat quality.

CM: Over time the assessment will show the herbivore impact and this shows if the density is too high or too low.

HD: Some areas might have higher impact than others. Density is relatively arbitrary. The impact assessment gives a better view of what is going on on the ground.

Deer densities can vary in accordance with appropriateness and this could influence cull numbers.

CM: In case of debate with SNH you will have data and thus will have evidence of what is happening on the ground. Anecdotal evidence is not acceptable as proof but with the impact assessment you have empirical evidence to support your objective. The data can be used to show where the deer impact actually is.

HD: The movement of deer becomes less important if you can see where the impact actually is.

CM: The wider picture of the overall impact gives you the option to be cleverer with cull targets.

FS: The assessments will have to be completed by April 2019, this is a national target.

RM: As a group we are committed to do this.

3. Ardvar designation meeting

Michael Ross, Ray MacKay, Don O'Driscoll, Holly Deary attended a meeting chaired by Dave MacKay (SNH) regarding the designation of the Ardvar Woodlands. Agreement has been reached on how to proceed. Rich Worrall and Ben Averis will start with looking at the existing paperwork. A site visit is planned for May.

4. DMP health check

Holly Deary, Ray MacKay and Victor Clements met to discuss the DMP health check summary. We have now ended up in the middle of the list rather than at the bottom. Key weaknesses of the plan have been sent in by Victor. Ray Mackay will send the relevant documents to the group.

The timescale for the reassessment is April 2019. This does not give us a lot of time so the advice is to focus on 'quick wins'. The steering group is advised to stay on top of this. They are also advised to look focussing on the public interest points since these are not yet developed.

Members of the steering group are: Fiona Saywell, Jorine van Delft, Romany Garnett, Don O'Driscoll. Michael Ross, Robbie MacKenzie and Holly Deary. If people would like to join the steering group please contact Jorine.

HD: Please make sure that you lose momentum. It is easy to do so when office bearers change.

RM: Would like to mention that the Assynt crofters have started taking people out photo stalking this summer. People have been taken out on three separate occasions by Joe Land. This was a great success and ACT will use Joe's services again in future.

Steering group meeting to be arranged for the end of November. (proposed for 5 December 2pm).

5. Chair position

RM has enquired with several people if they are interested in taking over as chair.

Mark Turner is unfortunately unable to take over this position

MC is already interim chair for another deer management group

Possible candidate would be Joe Land: He is already known by several members. He has worked with Don O'Driscoll, has worked with ACT as well as with CcWT.

Fiona Saywell is also proposed as the new chair. This is unanimously accepted by the group members but is dependent on CcWT as they would be paying for her time. (not yet resolved)

6. Proposed hind cull

See attached document for numbers

To reduce the density to 7 in the next 4 years a cull is necessary of 220 hinds plus 80 calves for each of the years. In the current proposed hind numbers an increased mortality rate is taken into account for year 1 leading to the total figures for the 2019 hind cull to be 185 hinds and 70 calves.

For the same consideration to be taken into account next year this needs to be backed up by the hia data.

HD: This is a significant drop from the originally proposed 220 hinds.

RM: Are there any problems with the proposed numbers?

MR: The hind numbers are low at Ardvar. There seem to be lots of stags but there is a lack of hinds.

Proposed number is too high but 15-20 hinds should be doable.

MT: Oldanay would like to cull 8 hinds instead of 6.

HD: It is important that the cull is targeted on the areas where the impact is highest.

No further objections made in regards to the proposed hind cull numbers by members during this meeting.

	Hinds	Calves
ACT	64	25
Quinag/JMT	42	16
Kylesku	3	1
Ardvar	27*	10
Loch Assynt Lodge	9	4
Little Assynt	8	3
Middle Inver/Brackloch	6	2
Lochinver/Vestey	9	4
Lagg	8	3
Oldany	8	2
Total =	184	70

(*Agreed to try for 15-20 hinds)

7. A.O.B

HD: Is there any update on fencing in regards to ACT?

RM: No updates yet.

FS: What was the result of the meeting between chairs regarding deer movement?

RM: Views regarding movement are very mixed. No consensus was reached during this meeting so the discussion is to be taken forward.

FS: Regarding the minutes from the previous meeting, it mentions "SNH has contracted out the habitat monitoring for APSG this year". Would like to confirm with Holly that SNH is only doing the habitat monitoring for the Ardvar Woodlands. Holly confirms this to the group. Minutes to be changed to: "SNH has contracted out the habitat monitoring for the Ardvar woodlands for this year".