

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Epping Forest and Commons	9 July 2012
Subject: Annual Report on Deer Management on the Epping Forest Buffer Land Estate	Public
Report of: The Superintendent of Epping Forest SEF 21/12	For Information

Summary

This report has been compiled in response to a request by your Committee for an annual report on progress with the implementation of the 1996 Deer Management Strategy in the Buffer Land estates surrounding Epping Forest. The strategy recommended a range of measures, including cooperation between landowners, including the City of London, to secure the gradual reduction of the overwintering wild Fallow deer population which ranges across the 6,500 acre area between Waltham-Epping-Nazeing from 513 head in 1996 to under 200 head by 2002. Such a reduction would limit damage to agricultural crops and woodland regeneration while minimising the incidence of Deer-Vehicle Collisions (DVCs) on local roads.

Over the 15 years/14 shooting seasons since the introduction of the strategy, the target Fallow deer population of 200 has not been achieved; however, observed deer numbers have been reduced by 36% to 328 in 2012. The number of recorded DVCs has not mirrored this decline remaining broadly constant since 2008, which suggests annual counts may be underestimating the overall size of the deer population.

A combination of factors including optimistic deer conservation objectives; uneven cooperation and data sharing between all landowners in the herd area and a failure to always cull to target has restricted the successful implementation of the 1996 Deer Management Strategy. A review of the Strategy through a proposed Woodland Grant Scheme application is currently underway and is expected to recommend to your Committee increased cull quotas for Fallow Deer does; conservation measures for Fallow Deer prickets and bucks; cull quotas for largely ignored Reeves' Muntjac deer populations and a renewed focus on cooperation between deer management groups in the wider Epping-River Lee-Nazeing-Harlow area under the auspices of the Deer Initiative.

Recommendations

- I recommend that this report be received.

Main Report

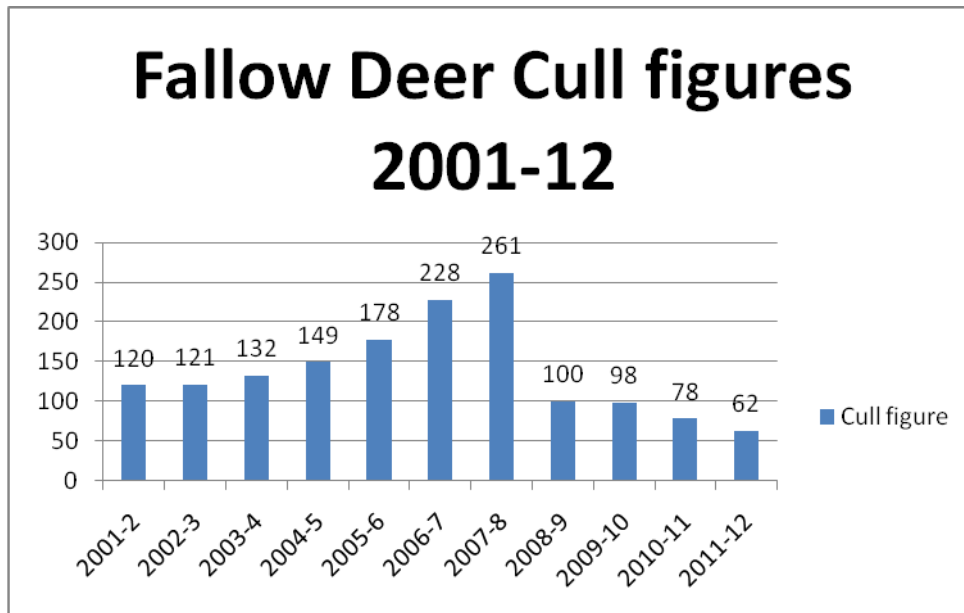
Background

1. There is a widespread scientific consensus that wild deer populations continue to increase in both number and geographic range throughout the UK. The two truly native deer species - Red Deer (*Cervus elaphus*) and Roe Deer (*Capreolus capreolus*) - are no longer present in Epping Forest and its associated Buffer Land. The 1,730 acres (700 hectares) of Buffer Land estate primarily consisting of Warlies Park; Woodredon and Copped Hall currently provide habitat for two non-native species of deer – the widely naturalised southern European Fallow deer (*Dama dama*) and the relatively recently introduced Reeves' Muntjac deer (*Muntiacus reevesi*) originating from China.
2. Since 1959 the Conservators have also maintained a 100 acre Deer Sanctuary at Theydon Bois for 150 to 200 Fallow Deer with a distinctive melanistic (dark) pelage or coat. The future management of the Sanctuary will form a separate future report to your Committee.
3. Deer numbers have fluctuated dramatically over the last century. Around 200 fallow deer were present in the Forest in 1900 with a further 50 in adjoining copses. Numbers in the Forest fell to 50 during the 1950s, whereas the 1990s saw a dramatic increase in the number of wild Fallow deer particularly on the Buffer Land Estates. Increasing deer populations caused significant damage through the browsing, grazing and trampling of both agricultural crops and woodland regeneration and have caused a growing number of Deer-Vehicle Collisions. A report entitled 'Conservation and Management of Deer in Epping Forest and its Buffer Land Estates' was submitted by specialist consultant Dr. Jochan Langbein in April 1996 advising the Conservators on how to respond to the growth in deer numbers,
4. Your Committee of 9th September 1996 approved a report on Deer Management (SEF 80/96) which proposed a deer management strategy which made recommendations in relation to reducing the number of deer killed on Forest roads and the control of deer numbers on the Buffer Lands.
5. From the report your Committee resolved that the Conservators :-
 - a. Pilot the introduction of deer warning reflectors on roadsides in the northern parishes.
 - b. Prepare a detailed proposal for the introduction of cattle and deer warning signs on Forest roads in partnership with local Highway Authorities.

- c. Initiate discussions with neighbouring landowners and tenants with the intention of establishing a Deer Management Group allowing a co-ordinated approach to deer management in a wider area.
6. The Epping Forest Management Plan Working Group also considered Dr. Langbein's report and adopted his proposals for the future management of deer in both the 1998 to 2003 and 2004 to 2010 Epping Forest Management Plans (Heritage – Deer Project 5 page 142)). The recommendations were also adopted for the Buffer Land Action Plan 1998 to 2003. As Deer have no natural predators, an annual cull of deer was proposed to secure a sustainable population of Fallow deer ranging in the predominantly agricultural 6,500 acre area of Waltham-Epping-Nazeing. Reinterpreting stable deer population densities advanced by Ueckermann and Hansen (1983) of 10 deer per 100 hectares, it was proposed that an average density of 28 deer per 100 hectares in the Buffer Land could be achieved by an annual cull target using autumn population figures of 35% of does and fawns and 30% of bucks. This annual cull target would fall to 20-25% once the deer population fell below 200 head.
7. As a result of your Committee's resolutions of September 1996, the Cobbins Brook Deer Management Group (CBDMG) was founded in 2001 following negotiations with ten adjoining estates, with the first coordinated annual cull commencing in the 2001/2 season. The CBDMG consisted of 7 stalkers and a number of Forest Keepers working in their own time. The CBDMG took responsibility for deer management on City of London Buffer Lands comprising 1,730 acres, together with a large area of approximately 1,800 acres of farm and woodland adjacent to the Buffer Land. This agreement extended the culling strategy outlined in Dr. Langbein's report to some 3,530 acres (54%) of the 6,500 acre Waltham-Epping-Nazeing area.
8. Following the close of the 2007/8 culling season in April 2008, the ten neighbouring land owners decided on a change of policy and sought more direct individual control on the management of deer on land adjacent to the Buffer Lands either undertaking the shooting themselves or using independently commissioned private stalkers.
9. From 2008/09 culling on the City of London Buffer Land estate was continued by three members of the CBDMG which includes a member of Epping Forest staff, on an annual basis licensed under the supervision of the Head Forest Keeper. *Pro rata* cull quotas continued to be based on Dr Langbein's recommendations, i.e. 109 deer for 2008/09. Between 2008 and 2012 the CBDMG were able to meet broad cull targets for both Fallow deer sexes set by the Head Keeper.

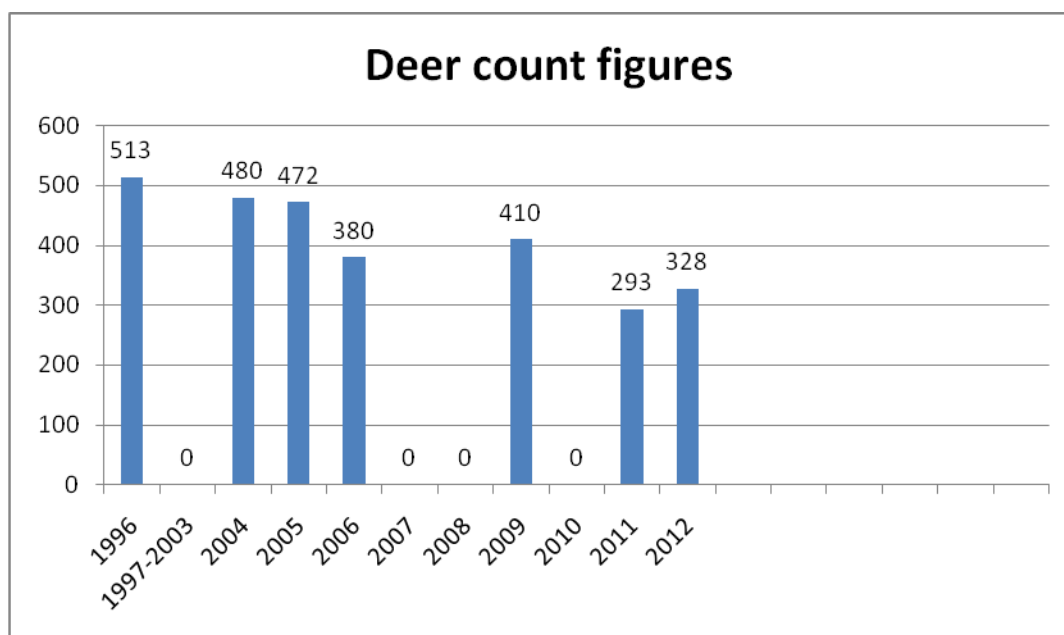
10. Attempts were made in 2008/09 to form a new deer management group and to obtain deer cull figures from all neighbouring landowners and stalkers but co-operation has not been forthcoming. Annual cull figures shown in Table 1 below reflect this change as the figures for 2008-9 through to 2011-12 show cull figures on the Buffer Lands only, continuous requests for data from other sources having not been successful.

Table 1



11. To assist with the management of deer and with the setting of annual cull figures line deer counts have been undertaken in the spring, usually early March, across several years since 1996. The data obtained from the deer counts and from further reviews by Dr Langbein in 2007 and 2009 have shown that the deer population has declined, but not to the extent envisaged by the 1996 Strategy. Figures are shown in Table 2 below. It should be noted that while visual deer line counts are a valuable assessment method for deer numbers they will leave a variable and unknown proportion of animals uncounted, especially in the case of the smaller and more secretive Reeves' Muntjac Deer.

Table 2



0 indicates that no count took place that year(s)

12. The Highway Authority has erected threshold Deer Warning Hazard signs on roads around Epping Forest. A four year trial of roadside deer reflectors which project light from vehicle headlights into adjacent Forest to dissuade deer from crossing highways was not deemed to be sufficiently effective, especially as roadside verge mowing regularly misaligned or damaged large numbers of reflectors. Trials are currently underway at Lower Forest, Epping on verge margin clearance designed to improve the visibility of crossing deer.
13. Deer Vehicle Collision (DVC) incidents are monitored by the Deer Initiative, a broad partnership of statutory, voluntary and private organisations seeking to sustainably manage wild deer and Essex County Council as the Highways Authority. DVCs both provide a valuable insight in to the risks posed to motorists and can provide qualified confirmation of overall local deer populations. DVCs between 2002 and 2007 showed a steady decline in numbers both for Essex and the Epping Forest area. Between 2003 and 2005, 26 DVCs were recorded in the area of the Forest. Since 2008, the number has increased and has remained relatively constant, averaging 64 DVCs annually, which suggests annual counts may be underestimating the overall size of the deer population.

Current Position

14. Officers are currently reviewing how successful the 1996 Deer Management Strategy recommendations have been in meeting the strategy's key objectives. Officers are also reconsidering the objectives and future

measures of success. The review is being considered alongside proposals for an application for funding under the “English Woodland Grant Scheme” (EWGS) to bring woodlands in the Buffer land into appropriate management. An application for grants under EWGS requires a deer management plan to be agreed and implemented. This deer management plan which would be developed in conjunction with the Deer Initiative would be based on surveys of the damage being done to trees and vegetation within the woodlands on the Buffer Lands.

15. The consultants engaged to put together the EWGS and the Deer Management Plan proposals have been asked to assess the deer control, not just in terms of deer numbers, but in terms of the measurable impact on woodland vegetation. The consultant’s field assessments indicate that the current level of deer, and deer distribution, are causing a high level of damage to woodlands. In particular, the condition of the ancient semi-natural woodlands requires that new cull targets for both Fallow deer and Reeves Muntjac deer need to be set at a much higher level than in the past. It is also recognised that the deer populations range more freely beyond the 1996 assessment area and consideration should be given to coordination over a wider Epping-River Lee-Nazeing-Harlow area under the auspices of the Deer Initiative.
16. The initial findings by consultants are that there is a much higher level of damage to woodlands than at first thought by both Fallow and Muntjac deer and that cull targets should be set much higher than in the past. The development of the new deer management plan is being treated as a matter of the highest priority with a view to it being approved and implemented before the start of the culling season (August 2012) as far as is possible with a report to Committee on 8th September, following a Committee site visit. The plan will also contain details of a proposed scheme to be led by the Deer Initiative to form a new wide ranging deer management group comprised of landowners and stalkers from the area surrounding both the Forest and the Buffer Land.
17. Over the past 5 years very low numbers of mature male Fallow deer have been recorded which probably indicates an over emphasis on culling immature Fallow deer males since 2006/7 and perhaps the excessive culling of mature male fallow Deer.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

18. The effective management of deer populations on the Buffer Land estate supports ‘The City Together Strategy: The Heart of a World Class City’ 2008-14 under the following theme:
 - protects, promotes and enhances our environment.

Implications

Financial Implications

19. The venison industry is a product of deer management and recreational stalking. Reflecting continuing low demand amongst UK consumers, currently venison prices are low and stand in real terms, at about 50% of the price in 1980, although prices have tentatively improved recently. The sale of venison therefore tends to only defray some of the costs of deer management, rather than to provide a positive cost incentive for active management.
20. Deer culling is a surprisingly labour-intensive activity. It is estimated that deer control activity can be estimated at 0.5 staff days per deer. Taking an average cull figure of 84.5 deer based on the past 4 seasons, this equates to 42 staff-days or over 2 months of staff time which would cost £4,750. Other costs would include the provision of rifles, ammunition, specialist clothing, high seats, training and game larder facilities. These costs compare to carcass sales at an average carcass weight 30kgs, with a five year average value of £1.80 per kilo, giving a potential income of £4,563
21. Currently, four licensed stalkers carry out the cull and in return for the carcasses of any deer culled which becomes the property of the stalker. The culling of deer on the Buffer Lands is therefore currently carried out at no cost to the Conservators.

Risk Implications

22. All of the licensed stalkers are fully qualified and hold all necessary firearms and food hygiene certificates to legally carry out the cull. They all have suitable insurance cover to indemnify the City of London and produce annual risk assessments covering all tasks involved with culling the deer.
23. The Stalkers provide all their own equipment and are obliged to follow policies laid down by the Head Forest Keeper in respect of numbers of deer culled, times/days when stalking is permitted, areas allocated to each stalker and records to be kept.

Legal Implications

24. Under section 4 of the Epping Forest Act 1878, Deer on Forest Land are considered to be the property of the Conservators 'to be preserved as objects of ornament in the Forest'. Outside the Forest, Deer are wild animals, or *ferae naturae* under common law, and are not owned by anyone. In England and Wales, the landowner has the right to kill or take game on his or her land. The landowner may also extend authority, known as

‘permission’, to other people without restriction provided they observe the law in terms of close seasons.

Conclusion

25. In the absence of natural predators, the culling of deer on the Buffer Lands is a necessity that benefits the overall health of deer populations, together with the economic viability of agricultural crops and grasslands. Critically for Forest Land and the Buffer Land woodlands, deer populations need to be managed at levels which allow sufficient levels of woodland regeneration through the growth of satisfactory numbers of young tree seedlings, understorey plants and shrub species. The continuing high level of DVCs also gives cause for concern and a structured reduction in deer population densities should see a corresponding reduction in deer numbers.
26. A combination of various factors including optimistic deer conservation objectives; uneven cooperation and data sharing between all landowners in the herd area; the failure to count deer populations on Forest land and a reluctance to always cull to target has restricted the successful implementation of the 1996 Deer Management Strategy. Combining the future management of the woodlands and the deer, particularly through the closer coordination and control of culling operations will be beneficial to all concerned and will help maintain this important area in the years ahead.

Background Papers:

Deer Management SEF 80/96

Ueckermann and Hansen ‘Der DamWild’ (The Fallow Deer) (1983)

Conservation and Management of Deer in Epping Forest and its Buffer Land Estates. Dr J Langbein (April 1996) (2007) & (2009)

Epping Forest Management Plan 1998/2003 & 2004/ 2010

Epping Forest Buffer Land Action Plan 1998/2003

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