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Introduction

The Deer Initiative Ltd and Deer Initiative Partners organised and hosted a conference in Buxton in March 2003 entitled "The Future for Deer". This report contains the proceedings from the conference, in the form of talks, papers, or extended abstracts. Presentations given covered the wide range of aspects that deer are now affecting, including biodiversity, forestry, agriculture, their growing urban presence, a European perspective on wildlife management, training for stalkers, and issues surrounding the marketing of wild meats.

What was done

- Papers and abstracts produced by a variety of different people, covering a wide range of subjects involving deer, including:
- Papers and abstracts produced by a variety of different people, covering a wide range of subjects involving deer, including:
- Deer and biodiversity: papers include Biodiversity Action Plans, woodland birds
- Deer and economics: papers include the economic impacts of deer on forestry and timber, and on agricultural crops; and the economics of deer management
- Deer and people: papers on urban and urban fringe deer, and road traffic accidents
- Standards: deer stalking certificates; venison quality assurance and European Game Meat regulations.

The report also includes some information about the Deer Initiative, including the Deer Initiative Accord, and four advice notes concerning deer management. These notes are also available on the Deer Initiative's website, www.thedeerinitiative.co.uk

Results and conclusions

- In terms of biodiversity, deer can impact woodlands and species that rely on woodlands. Deer browsing affects regeneration of trees, the structure of the shrub layer and the ground flora, depending on species and intensity of browsing. The structure of the understorey and ground flora may affect dormice, birds and butterflies. Woodland monitoring has shown definite change in shrub cover and in regeneration. Studies have also shown that the structure has negatively impacted on woodland birds.

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- The evidence for economic impact of deer on forestry is hard to unravel because of the time difference between when the damage occurs and when the timber is harvested. However, a simple model using Sitka spruce on 45 year rotation suggests that it is not profitable to protect against deer using tree guards or fencing because of the relative costs of these options against the possible returns.
- On cereal crops, surveys were done to relay perceived damage (via questionnaires) against actual damage (from research). Assessments of actual damage by red deer in the Southwest show losses ranging from <1% to 12% in the most severely affected fields.
- For Road Traffic Accidents, there is no system for centrally gathering data involving wild animals. However, a survey commissioned by the Highways Agency estimated that the number is likely to be between 30,000 and 50,000 per year. In addition to being a safety hazard to road users, causing serious injury and occasionally mortality, this is a significant animal welfare issue, as deer are often mortally wounded but not killed outright. For more information on this project and an on-line reporting form for deer road traffic casualties, see www.deercollisions.co.uk

English Nature's viewpoint

English Nature is concerned that the population of wild deer is increasing and is having an adverse effect on biodiversity, including Sites of Special Scientific Interest. This report also reflects that deer may affect a range of other interests in addition to wildlife. English Nature supports the Deer Initiative's approach that deer should be managed at the landscape scale rather than on a site-by-site basis.

Selected references

PUTMAN, R. 1996. Deer management on NNRs: problems and practices. *English Nature Research Reports*, No. 173.

Further information

For the full report or other publications on this subject, please contact the Enquiry Service on 01733 455100/101/102 or email enquiries@english-nature.org.uk

For further information about the work of English Nature, please visit our website at: www.english-nature.org.uk